

“Restoration Man” launches English Country Crafts report

The first major study of the rural crafts sector for 80 years is launched on Wednesday 17 November 2004 by Griff Rhys Jones, star of BBC 2's 'Restoration'. Crafts in the English Countryside: Towards a Future draws on the knowledge and expertise of many leading authorities on the traditional rural crafts.

Griff Rhys Jones said: "Everything we enjoy in our countryside has been created by craftsmen, from laid hedges to thatched roofs to drystone walls, and this study brings together history, technique and anecdote in one excellent volume. It will be a boon to anyone with an interest in the countryside and craftsmanship."

Margaret Clark, director of the Countryside Agency said: "This study fills an important gap in our knowledge about the scale and nature of the crafts which are so important to the English countryside. Social and economic change has transformed rural communities and economies and, with them, the role of traditional crafts. Many ancient crafts have been lost or barely survive. However, the survey shows that the picture is by no means all gloom. The study highlights a growing interest in the crafts, often by those choosing new lifestyles and moving to the countryside to set up a crafts' business.

"Since the revival of the 1980s, a number of crafts have successfully adapted and responded to new markets. With support and advice, they have the potential to contribute more to rural economies and enhancing the countryside. Crafts in the English Countryside provides the all-important detail on which to base future policies and help."

Professor Ted Collins, author of the report said: "The crafts sector appears to be in a better state of health than we thought at the start of the study. Whilst this is encouraging, there are problems that need tackling. Some of the smaller crafts could disappear within a generation - they need identifying and recording for posterity.

"Another problem is the lack of appropriate training for the crafts sector. New initiatives, and new ways of delivering training, are urgently needed if rural crafts are to realise their full potential, or indeed to survive. This calls for investment, commitment and most of all, imagination."

Crafts surveyed include: saddlery, farriery, blacksmithing, mill-wrighting, gardening, basketry, and the woodland crafts, such as bodging, pole-lathe turnery, besom and hurdle making. A major section examines the skilled crafts needed for restoring traditional homes and country features, such as pargetting, thatching, earth-walling, timber framing and stone masonry.

Crafts in the English Countryside: Towards a Future is edited by Professor Ted Collins, a leading rural and agricultural historian and former Director of the Rural History Centre at the University of Reading. The project has been jointly funded by The Countryside Agency, The Duke of Cornwall's Benevolent Fund, The Ernest Cook Trust, The Headley Trust, HRH The Prince of Wales's Charitable Foundation and the University of Reading.

The website www.craftsintheenglishcountryside.gov.uk contains a summary of the book and statistical appendices relating to the survey.

Newsletters

At the AGM on the 23rd November 2004 it was agreed that the quarterly newsletter would be provided free to Corporate and the old Construction Group Members, but there would be a £25.00 annual charge for other members. Over page is the last Newsletter that was published in October 2004. Future copies will not be published in Countryside Building. If you are not a Corporate or Construction Group Member, but would like future copies please fill in the form sent out with the EGM papers and return it to the Secretary. Copies are not available to non-members.