



FACTsheet 22

Captured by a Master: David Cox

Over a period of about five years in the mid-19th century, scenes of 'everyday life' in Penmaenmawr were captured by one of Britain's most famous landscape painters, David Cox. Cox was born in Birmingham in 1783. His mother was the daughter of a farmer and miller, and his father was a blacksmith. At the age of 15 he was apprenticed to a snuffbox artist. From there he went on to paint scenery for theatres.

Cox first visited North Wales in 1805 and he started exhibiting at the Royal Academy in the same year. Over the course of the next 30 years he made a living as a drawing master whilst regularly exhibiting and selling his watercolours. He moved to Harborne in 1841 and there he established a routine of working in watercolour in the mornings and oils in the afternoons.



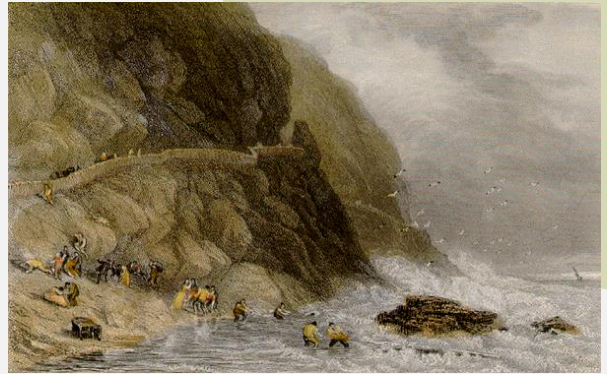
He became an integral figure in the Artists' Colony movement in North Wales from 1844 and he would make annual trips to Betws-y-coed. It was here that Cox painted one of his most famous works entitled 'The Welsh Funeral', showing a crowd of mainly women, walking towards St Michael's Church to attend a service.



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Cox suffered a stroke in 1853 that would temporarily paralyse him and permanently damage his eyesight and memory. By 1857, his eyesight had further deteriorated, and he gradually became more frail. He died in 1859.

Cox captured scenes in North Wales that are valuable to us as social historians. Perhaps the influence of his parents' 'working class' backgrounds led him to a fascination for the 'ordinary'. His paintings often depict people sitting and chatting, working, or travelling, going about their daily business.



For us in Penmaenmawr, the painting of people clambering up the cliff towards the pass is possibly the most well known. Cox's other paintings of the area include a depiction of women working in a hayfield, a beach scene and a sketch of two people talking on the side of a track.

Cox's works are held in various museums and galleries around the world, including Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, the Louvre, the British Museum, Tate Gallery and the V&A. We don't have any of his work at Penmaenmawr Museum, unfortunately!

His scenes have helped us construct narratives about Penmaenmawr's history and give us a greater understanding of what life was like here over 160 years ago.

