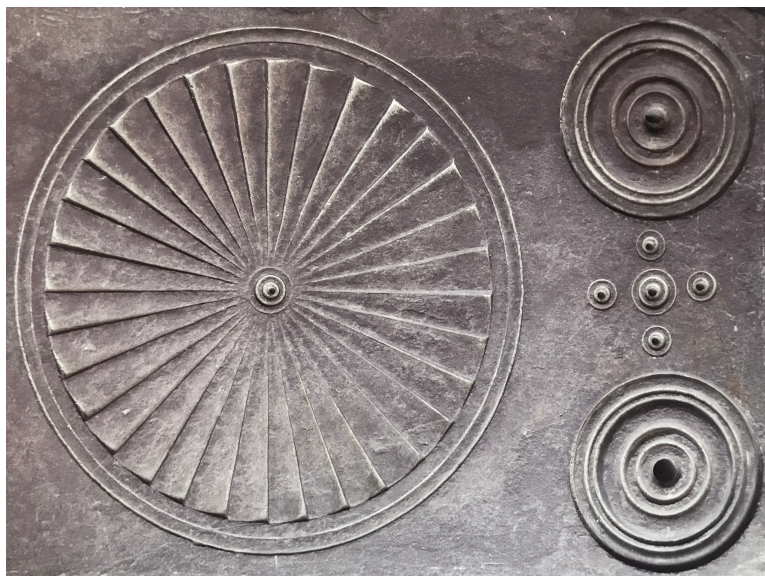


PATRICK JEFFERSON



CARVED SLATE FIREPLACE MANTEL

Wales *circa* 1820-45.

Height 6 $\frac{1}{4}$ " (15.4 cm)

Width 62 $\frac{1}{4}$ " (157.8 cm)

Depth $\frac{5}{8}$ " (1.55 cm)

Of horizontal form to be mounted over a fireplace, the stone of a soft, violet-grey hue, carved with a central tavern clock, roundels, fanned circle motifs, vases with branches, and nesting doves; minor chips and losses.

The Ogwen Valley, stretching from Capel Curig to the Menai Strait by Bangor, has a long and fascinating past. The Penrhyn estate, centred by the mighty Penrhyn slate quarry – at one stage the largest in the world – exerted an influence which extended over a massive landholding and embraced all aspects of society, from industry, politics, culture and religion, through to agriculture and farming. Indeed, the slate landscape of north-west Wales, recently made an Unesco world heritage site, is said to have “roofed the 19th century world”.

However, the lives and experiences of those thousands of individuals who lived and worked on the estate remain largely untold. Slate carvings made by the quarrymen of Dyffryn Ogwen are now recognised as a unique form of folk art. A number of these enigmatic panels (*silff ben tan o lechen*) found, or originating from, Dyffryn Ogwen date from between 1823 and 1843. Others of similar style bear no date, although the use of the same design motifs suggests that they were carved during the same period, rather than earlier, as large slabs of slate were not available in quantity until the early 1820s. Although there is no formal record of training given to quarrymen, they were clearly instrumental in designing the patterns and devising their own purpose-made tools. Working slate was particularly difficult, as the stone splinters easily, so these carvings reveal immense skill and patience unknown outside the immediate area.

This exceptional example is a microcosm of life in the valley in the first half of the nineteenth century, depicting a fascinating vignette of Celtic-influenced geometric and concentric patterns, as well as local plants, birds, and everyday objects which the quarrymen knew and valued. Until relatively recently little was known about these slates until a local historian, Gwenno Caffell, wrote a book about those he had found, *Llechi Cerfiedig Dyffryn Ogwen / The Carved Slates of Dyffryn Ogwen* (Cardiff, 1983). This was followed by an exhibition in 2010 at the Gwynedd Museum, Bangor, reflecting increasing appreciation for this short-lived genre of lapidary art.

£7,500



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4