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Wild West Builders are no Cowboys

Aug 21 2004
The Western Mail



I RECENTLY discovered that Jesse and Frank James, the cowboy brothers and notorious outlaws, had a Pembrokeshire grandfather. William James emigrated to the US in the 18th Century.

It is hardly surprising that the James family originally came from West Wales. At that time, north Pembrokeshire and south Ceredigion had the highest concentration of the James surname in the world.

David Gray, the builder and the three Hedley brothers working for him come from deepest north Pembrokeshire but they have sworn on oath, over their identical Orange mobiles, that they have no James ancestry. I believe them; they are incredibly hard working and are very polite and respectful. They make me feel like the visiting Lady of Meurig Manor when I mosey on down to make my weekly progress visits.

There has been a whole lot of digging going on. The floors have been taken up and all the original salvageable tiles retained.

The farmhouse has been built on a rocky outcrop and the floor has had to be dug down at least a foot. This has all been done by hand and it has proved hard work. In fact, it looks as if my ancestors started the job at one end of the house but gave it up when the rock became particularly difficult to dig.

The interior of the house now resembles a barn. They have stripped off all the internal plaster and the stonework underneath has started to reveal some secrets about the history of the house. My ancestors were obviously into recycling. There was a shortage of building stone in Carmarthenshire and it looks as if the original slate roof was used as building material to raise the height of the walls when the late 19th Century kitchen extension was built. We are almost sure that the roof was raised at the same time.

Waitrose

Smile.

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WALES vs Sunday



By pure coincidence, the grandson of the last tenant has been doing some work at Cefnmeurig and he thinks he remembers a date stone at the gable end, which is covered with ivy at present. I would guess that the date marks the building of the extension and the raising of the roof.

Behind the Rayburn in the kitchen, there was a false partition. I had always hoped that we would discover a bread oven behind the partition but to my delight, there was in fact two ovens hidden there. They will eventually be put back into their original position but their baking days are over.

The outside scaffolding will be going up shortly and the exterior render removed. We are hoping to repair the sash windows rather than replace them. This will be an important factor in our aim to retain the original character of the building.

I seem to be having a very good run with builders at the moment. Another group of men has just finished the refurbishment of our Tenby apartment. The men, lead by Andy Bradshaw the interior designer, have transformed the apartment into modern, luxury holiday accommodation with a definite Welsh style.

Apparently, there is a competition called "Builders from Heaven" run by Jewsons, which is an attempt to counter programmes such as "Rogue Traders" and "Builders from Hell". If things carry on as well as they have started, I may well be making two sets of nominations.

I hope this will make up for the fact that I have not told David Gray and his men that I have Pembrokeshire James genes in my blood. It could be that I am the one related to cowboys and outlaws.

According to legend, Jesse James was a mild-mannered, law-abiding individual and only turned outlaw after the railroad builders let him down.

You have been warned but for the moment, I ain't interferin' with something that ain't botherin' me none.

Contact Anne Owen Taylor on 029 2089 9280 or info@visitwestwales.com Website: www.visitwestwales.com. Follow the day-to-day progress of Cefnmeurig's restoration on the weblog: <http://visitwestwales.blogs.com>

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