Food festival’s new exhibition to shed light on building heritage crisis

Monday 13 October, 2014

One of the UK's biggest food festivals will showcase traditional building skills later this month, just days after a new report highlighted the rate of historic building restoration works is slowing.

Conwy Feast food festival (October 25 and 26), held within one of the best-preserved medieval walled towns in Europe, has added a new exhibition of traditional craftspeople and conservationists to its food, drink and arts programme.

'Hiraeth' will celebrate the link between traditional skills and art, and act as a signpost for people looking to learn crafts or employ workers.

Among the exhibitors is Ned Scharer, a member of Westminster Abbey's Cosmati Pavement restoration team who along with wife Sophie runs the Natural Building Centre in North Wales.

The event's timing could not be better. Earlier this month (October 8) Welsh heritage body CADW released an updated Listed Buildings at Risk Register, revealing a five per cent increase in the number properties becoming empty, while the risk of buildings being completely lost has risen by 10 per cent.

> Sophie, an exhibition co-organiser, said: "While Hiraeth will showcase the artistry of traditional skills and crafts, it will also highlight how these skills are needed if we are not to lose our built heritage.
>
> "Using traditional recipes has enjoyed a revival thanks to food festivals and greater awareness generally. In a setting as historic as Conwy's there is no reason why we cannot do the same for traditional craft and construction techniques."

The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, another exhibitor, claims one in 5 British buildings is constructed from lime, which allows older buildings to move and breathe, unlike modern materials.

> A spokesman said: "Current interest in old buildings and traditional repair techniques has prompted increasing numbers of homeowners to look for contractors who can plaster, point and render using lime, but very few builders have the skills to satisfy this growing market.
>
> "There has never been a more appropriate time to find out more and hopefully Conwy Feast will enable people to get the right advice about their buildings from the right people."

Conwy Feast food festival attracts up to 25,000 people annually and heralds the start of the mussel fishing season on the River Conwy.

As well as featuring more than 150 producers, arts and live music, a spectacular show of fireworks, fire juggling and dancing will celebrate the centenary of Dylan Thomas's birth.

More details can be found at www.conwyfeast.com

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