

an atlas of the welsh dresser

[these short excerpts are taken from Jane Rendell, 'The Welsh Dresser: An Atlas', Brandon La Belle (ed.), *Surface Tension*, (2003).]

the welsh dresser

A dresser is a sideboard or table in a kitchen on which food can be prepared: or a table in a dining room or hall from which dishes are served. It is a kind of sideboard that is surmounted by shelves for storing and displaying dishes, plates, kitchen utensils, etc.

The Welsh dresser was constructed in the 1830's and has been in the family at least five generations. It has four legs, three drawers and three shelves full of jugs. The Welsh Dresser lived in the dining room. I remember the room. It was in Aunty Ray's house in Cwmgors, a small mining village near the Black Mountains in South Wales. The dining room was one of two rooms that faced the street. Both were immaculate, seldom used, always cold. The Welsh dresser stood facing the window, obscured from the street by a layer of net curtain. It was a difficult thing, hung with gorgeous antique jugs that I never saw used. Every time a coal lorry passed by on the road outside they rattled.

[...]

lustre jugs

Lustre: the quality or condition of shining by reflected light: a sheen or gloss; an iridescent metallic decorative surface on ceramics; the glaze used to produce this. A thin dress-fabric with a fine cotton (formerly also silk or mohair) warp and worsted weft, and a glossy surface, any fabric with a sheen or gloss. To make attractive be or become lustrous.

The Welsh dresser stood there gleaming through my childhood, through Christmas dinners and Sunday lunches, through rice puddings, cherry corona, beetroot chutney, faggots and chips. As things fade into the distance, they seem to gain a glossy sheen. The fairy lights on the Christmas tree are always twinkling. My mother's hair is always shining. Nostalgia polishes the past so that we can see ourselves in the surface.

[...]

will

will: the action of willing or deciding to do something.

intention, intent, determination, purpose.

a psychological drive, a deliberate or fixed desire or intention.

purport or substance of a legal document.

a person's formal declaration as to the disposal of his or her property after death having or intended to have legal force and usually made in writing, to be signed and witnessed, the document in which this declaration of intention is expressed.

This Welsh dresser tells the story of my mother's family. It has moved from a farm, down the road to a Victorian stone village house, and today to my mother's house in Cambridge. My mother doesn't own it yet. Its rightful owner lies in hospital in South Wales with her heart failing, drifting between life and death. Her property has already been handed on. The Welsh dresser is a traveller, it has had many homes. From mother to eldest daughter, the Welsh dresser travels between women. My aunt never married, so the Welsh dresser went to her eldest niece. One day tradition has it that the Welsh dresser will be mine.

