

Contents

The Arts and the regeneration of Liverpool.....	2
Beddgelert: how the Welsh art of storytelling boosted the tourism industry	4
Award-winning local artist commissioned to work on Slate Quay regeneration.....	5
Caernarfon rushlight holders: back in production soon?	7
Caernarfon theatre company revives classic comedy.....	8
The regeneration of Cardiff Bay	9
Celebrating the arts in Caernarfon with Gwyl Arall	11
Ideas: People: Places – improving Wales with the help of the arts	13
King Arthur: still taking care of Wales, after a millennium and a half!	15
Mae Gen i Go': first recordings published.....	17
Recap: STAMP, the arts, and the changing face of Caernarfon.....	19
Remembrance poppies attract thousands of visitors	21
The ancient Welsh art of Storytelling	23
Canolfan Soar and the regeneration of Merthyr Tydfil	25

The Arts and the regeneration of Liverpool

Built initially as a revolutionary docking system in the 19th century, Albert Dock in Liverpool has a lot of historic 'firsts' under its belt. But its transformation in the past 30 years is what really puts it, and Liverpool, on the UK's Arts map.

--

At 1.25 million square feet, Liverpool's Albert Dock was an ambitious project when it was first conceived. Taking five years to build, construction started in 1841 before Prince Albert officially opened Albert Dock in July 1846.

Several 'firsts', in maritime and engineering terms, can be claimed by Albert Dock.

At a time when most warehouses proved a massive fire risk, Albert Dock was revolutionary in that it was built as an enclosed, non-combustible warehouse docking system – the world's first.

Another first was its combination of building materials: in Britain, Albert Dock was the first structure to be made entirely of cast iron, stone and brick.

Further, by 1848 Albert Dock boasted the world's first hydraulic warehouse hoists.

Despite all this, within half a century of its construction Albert Dock was obsolete. It had been built to accommodate large sailing ships, but by the 20th century this type of ship was barely in use for transporting cargo, and so Albert Dock fell into disuse before suffering extensive damage during the second world war. It finally closed in 1972.

Ten years later, a subsidiary company of the Dock's owner started putting together plans to renovate the silted-up dock and the derelict warehouses. Building work was begun in 1983 and the first phase opened to the public in 1984. Albert Dock as it is today was officially opened by the Prince of Wales in 1988.

It's almost 30 years since the new Albert Dock was opened, and in that time it's become home to a number of Arts-related organisations of many types.

The Tate Liverpool gallery and museum opened in 1988 with a major refurbishment in 1998 adding more gallery space. Further building work in 2007 provided improvements to the foyer and cafe.

The ITV morning magazine show, This Morning, was broadcast from a studio inside Albert Dock from 1988, famously putting weatherman Fred Talbot on a floating map of Britain every day for his forecasts.

In 1990 Britain's only Beatles-themed visitor attraction, The Beatles Story Museum, opened at Albert Dock.

But Albert Dock is just one part of a massive regeneration scheme in Liverpool that has seen the city's fortunes, as well as its physical appearance, change for the better.

From a city that was in such a bad way in 1981 that a "managed decline" was proposed in the aftermath of the Toxteth riots, Liverpool has blossomed into a world-famous centre of the Arts – even being named a European Capital of Culture in 2008.

The University of Liverpool now has a dedicated School of the Arts, which brings together five existing disciplines and is deeply engaged with the city's culture, arts and heritage scene.

The award-winning Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, formed in 1840, is the UK's oldest continuing professional symphony orchestra and the Liverpool Philharmonic Hall is one of the UK's top arts and entertainment venues.

National Museums Liverpool curates a vast number of collections at several venues, including the International Slavery Museum, the Museum of Liverpool and the Merseyside Maritime Museum, as well as the Walker and Lady Lever art galleries.

And as for Albert Dock itself? In addition to being Liverpool's top tourist attraction, with over four million visitors a year it's also (excluding London) the UK's most visited multi-use attraction.

In just a few short decades, Liverpool's fortunes have improved drastically. A cosmopolitan, beautiful and culturally-rich city has risen from the ashes of war, poverty and social turmoil, putting an excellent case for the importance of role of the Arts in urban regeneration.

Beddgelert: how the Welsh art of storytelling boosted the tourism industry

If you've lived in Caernarfon for any amount of time, you're sure to be aware of the 'ancient' tale of Gelert, the dog 'buried' at Beddgelert who was killed in error by his master, Llywelyn ab Iorwerth.

But what you may not know is that the story was made up – or at least, rewritten – by the 18th century landlord of the village pub, to help increase tourism to the village.

According to the tale Gelert was left guarding Llywelyn's baby son while the prince was out hunting. On his return, Llywelyn found the baby's cradle overturned and the dog's face covered in blood. He put two and two together and decided the dog must have killed the baby. Distraught, he slew the hound, only to then discover the baby unharmed beneath the crib, and the bloodied body of a wolf dead in the corner. Gelert was given a hero's burial and the headstone on the grave tells of his bravery.

In fact, versions of this story appear all over the world, in a number of different languages, and they're older than the Beddgelert story. The oldest known version of the tale comes from India, where it's a mongoose killing a snake rather than a dog killing a wolf. In the Persian version it's a cat, while in Malaysia the hero is a tame bear and the villain a wild tiger. In France and other Western European countries, more often than not the hero of the piece is a dog, and that's the version that was adopted in Beddgelert.

The genius behind the Welsh version of the legend was one David Pritchard, who in 1793 was proprietor of the Royal Goat Inn. He took a local tale of a dog called Cilhart, who was buried at Beddgelert, and merged it with the traditional 'hero dog' story, making up the name 'Gelert' as he went along. He and the other villagers created the engraved slate slabs that commemorate the dog's bravery, and passed them off as ancient.

As a strategy for boosting tourism, we can only assume that it worked, as Beddgelert is today an extremely popular location for tourists and a highly desirable place to live, to boot – one only has to look at the property prices in the village to see what we mean!

In a similar vein is the full name of the Anglesey village of Llanfairpwll; again, fabricated by local businesses to boost tourism, a strategy which has helped to bring goodness knows how many tourists to the village over the years.

King Arthur, too, has his part to play; as we explored in our recent blog post, the Celtic warlord's legendary connections with the Snowdonia region have helped to keep tourism numbers up in the area, aided to some degree by the imminent release of the new Hollywood blockbuster movie about Arthur's adventures.

So, if you have an old family story about Caernarfon, or the surrounding area, we'd love to hear it – and make sure you tell visitors to the town if you get a chance, because storytelling is an art that we Welsh do particularly well and there's nothing quite like a ripping yarn when it comes to fostering 'sense of place' and keeping the visitors coming!

Award-winning local artist commissioned to work on Slate Quay regeneration

An award-winning Caernarfon artist has been appointed to influence the design teams working on the regeneration of Slate Quay and the Welsh Highland Railway.

Bedwyr Williams, an internationally renowned artist who lives in Caernarfon, will work primarily on the design of pathways from the new railway station to the Gefail yr Ynys site, and from Gefail yr Ynys to Caernarfon Castle.

“The idea is to get an artist influencing the routes around Caernarfon in an original, non-naïf way,” he explains. “Perhaps we’ll embed artworks in pathways; put a few bits of art along the road, maybe.”

Bedwyr’s appointment is a logical one, given his passion for the arts in Wales and, more specifically, in Caernarfon.

“I’m working closely with CARN [a collective of local artists and makers] and I’m looking forward to creating a legacy for them,” he says. “As an international artist who also lives and works in Caernarfon, my feeling is that visual arts get short shrift in the town behind things like music and poetry.”

He continues: “Being an artist in Caernarfon should be viable. It’s a beautiful part of the country, but we only respond to poetry and song – and I’m against the idea that Wales should be a non-visual place.”

“Caernarfon is a sarky, witty place... it’s small but it should be a striving scene, and art should be a part of it,” he says. “I want to try to energise the art scene locally. Artists are used to make things ‘look nice’ – in town centres they’ll put up a statue which has no legacy, it’s just a landmark. I want to see what’s possible to help them have a rolling programme of exhibitions in the next 6-12 months.”

Bedwyr feels that there aren’t enough good exhibition spaces in Caernarfon at the moment, and bemoans the fact that visual artists are reduced to exhibiting in libraries.

He also feels that expectations of visual artists are very different to those we have of poets and musicians. Asked about artists leading art and craft workshops for children during school holidays, Bedwyr says “it happens a lot. It makes artists ‘useful’ – keeping other people’s kids amused – but you wouldn’t ask a band to do that!”

Bedwyr says that visual arts “have to be for the whole community – but how many people go to hear poets? All arts should be **available** for everyone, as well as being **for** everyone. In Caernarfon, visual arts are missing. Visual artists are having to elbow a space at the cultural table, but I’m against the idea that Wales should be a non-visual place.”

The impact on local young artists is especially felt: “Our young people are going off to uni to study art, but when they come back there’s only libraries to exhibit in,” Bedwyr says. “I want to help artists to show their work in a way that’s more inventive. Perhaps find empty spaces for video projections, put on small arts events without the constraints of an arts centre... do it for **artists** and bring it into the community.”

Bedwyr feels that “there tends to be a conservative idea of what art should be. But visual arts in the UK is a heaving cultural sector, and I want to involve Caernarfon in that.”

Art is a unifying force, though. “At the Eisteddfod, the arts and crafts pavilion is always very popular. English and Welsh speakers come together in a way that music doesn’t achieve.”

If you’d like to know more about the redevelopment of Slate Quay, visit http://www.caernarfonharbour.org.uk/town_e.htm

Caernarfon rushlight holders: back in production soon?

In the days before gaslight and electricity, one of the cheapest forms of lighting was rushlights, held in special iron holders. Each region had its own style: could Caernarvonshire's rushlight holders be back in production soon?

--

Long before electricity or even gaslight were common forms of lighting in the homes of everyday folk, the rushlight was a cheap way to light rooms.

Less expensive than candles, rushlights were made by coating the dried inner core of the rush plant in grease or fat. These lights were then held – typically at a 45-degree angle, for the most amount of light – in a rushlight holder made of iron.

And this is where the story gets interesting, as far as Caernarfon is concerned.

Different regions tended to produce their own unique style of rushlight holder. These holders were made by blacksmiths and varied in design from one place to the next.

Several different styles of rushlight holder have been associated with the Caernarvonshire area.

One style had a tripod base with arrow-shaped feet. The stem and arm were twisted bars of iron which had a rolled socket. The jaws of the clip holding the light were rectangular with a medium rivet, and the holder stood at around 9 inches high.

Another style had a varnished walnut or fruitwood base, a fast twistwork stem, part twistwork arm and pointed jaws, and stood at over 13 inches high.

In other towns and regions, styles could include circular wooden bases, rectangular decorated slate bases, coiled counterweights and varying amounts of decoration.

After disappearing from common use for many years, could the Caernarvonshire rushlight holder be about to make a comeback – albeit as a decorative, rather than a practical, item?

Perhaps so. A local man, Elfyn Owen, is hoping to spearhead a revival with the help of Brunswick Ironworks at Gefail yr Ynys, Slate Quay, Caernarfon.

Mr Owen's father and grandfather were blacksmiths at Llanwddyn and although he's not a smith himself, he has a lifelong passion for the craft.

After conducting a lot of research into the history and styles of rushlight holders and discovering that Caernarvonshire's pieces had very distinctive designs, Mr Owen now hopes that these unusual pieces can be brought back into production, with a view to offering them for sale as unique souvenirs.

Discussions are currently underway, so although we don't know for certain when, or even if, the rushlight holders will go into production any time soon, we recommend watching this space!

Caernarfon theatre company revives classic comedy

Caernarfon-based Theatr Bara Caws is behind the revival of a classic comedy series from the 1970s and 80s, currently touring Wales.

--

Local theatre group Theatr Bara Caws have been touring *Raslas Bach a Mawr!* since 18th November, which saw the popular classic slapstick comedy show brought up to date after a break of 27 years.

The show, which originally aired on BBC Wales in the 1970s before moving to S4C in 1982, has been described as “Wales’ answer to Laurel and Hardy”. Originally starring Wynford Ellis Owen and Mici Plwm, the modern version stars Llŷr Evans as Syr Wynff ap Concord y Bos and Iwan Charles as Plwmsan y Twmffat Twp.

After the show ended in 1989, over 15,000 people signed a petition asking for its return. At its peak it was one of Wales’ most popular television shows, so its return (albeit to stage instead of screen) will be welcomed by those who remember it fondly.

Raslas Bach a Mawr! has just finished a short stint at the Aberystwyth Arts Centre. The tour continues in Cardiff and South Wales for a few weeks, before returning north to Pontio, Bangor, for three days in mid-December.

But the tour launched in Theatr Bara Caws’ home town of Caernarfon, at Galeri, where it was well-received during its four-day stint which began on 18th November.

Galeri, which opened in 2005, is a social enterprise which holds over 450 events each year, selling some 50-70,000 tickets annually.

Employing over 50 staff, Galeri is among just 6% of businesses in Gwynedd with more than 25 employees – meaning its contribution to the local economy is in excess of £2 for every £1 spent there. An independent study in 2010 found that Galeri contributed nearly £2.5m per year to Gwynedd and Anglesey’s economies.

Galeri is more than an arts centre; the building provides office space to other local companies too. There are twelve in residence at the moment, which between them employ more than 80 people.

The building is also home to Sbarc, an arts project for children and young people which provides drama lessons as well as ‘rock school’ tuition, including drums, bass, electric guitar and vocals.

Galeri is set to provide even more excitement for the local area from 2018. Early 2017 sees the beginning of a construction project to extend Galeri to house a two-screen cinema which will show movies as they are released. This is expected to open in 2018.

Bara Caws, a community theatre company which has been operating for almost 40 years, stages at least three productions a year. The recipient of several Theatre Awards, Bara Caws is a registered charity which is funded primarily through grants from Arts Council Wales and Gwynedd, Môn and Conwy Councils.

For more information about *Raslas Bach a Mawr!* visit theatrbaracaws.com.

The regeneration of Cardiff Bay

We've recently written about STAMP's involvement in regenerating Caernarfon through the arts. Previously we've written about similar schemes in Liverpool and Merthyr Tudful. In this article, we're looking at the regeneration of Cardiff Bay.

--

In the 1830s the rapid growth of trade in iron and coal in South Wales highlighted the need for better docks, so several were built in Cardiff. After a while, the dockland area of Butetown grew in population, and sailors from many overseas nations made their home in what was to become known as Tiger Bay. It's estimated that people of some 50 different nationalities settled there.

Within half a century Cardiff was the biggest town in Wales, with a port that handled more coal than any other in the world.

But demand for coal decreased after WWII, and by the 1960s there were virtually no coal exports leaving Cardiff's docks. With the closure of East Moors Steelworks in 1978 – and the accompanying loss of over 3,000 jobs – it was only a matter of a couple of years before Cardiff Bay had transformed from a bustling international centre of trade to little more than a 'neglected wasteland of derelict docks and mudflats' ([link to cardiffharbour.com](http://cardiffharbour.com))

With above average unemployment and social exclusion among its ills, Cardiff's docklands area had seen a total reversal in its fortunes.

But before long the area was to see more big change, this time for the better. In April 1987 the Cardiff Bay Development Corporation was established, as part of the UK government's Urban Development Programme which aimed to breathe new life into some of the UK's most deprived inner-city areas.

By the end of March 2000, the Corporation was formally wound up after fulfilling its mission to improve the area. Its achievements included 16,750 new jobs, 4,800 new housing units, 695,000 square metres of non-residential developments, 79 hectares of new open space created and a further 327 hectares of land reclaimed, and 42 kilometres of roads either built or upgraded.

Today, Cardiff Bay is unrecognisable from the wasteland that was left behind after the last war. A thriving part of Wales' capital city, Cardiff Bay has reinvented itself as a popular place to spend days out, as well as a great place to live and work. There are many attractions and activities for visitors, including:

- Cardiff Bay Barrage – a wonderful place to walk or ride a bike, with amazing views over Cardiff Bay and the River Severn. There's also a children's play area, a skate park and an outdoor gym
- The Enormous Crocodile bench – a tribute to the author Roald Dahl
- Cardiff International White Water – a white water adventure centre which is part of Cardiff's International Sports Village. The centre offers a great choice of activities including white water rafting and stand up paddleboarding
- Butetown History and Arts Centre, where visitors can learn about the history of migrants and minorities in Wales
- Cardiff Bay Wetland Reserve, which supports a diverse range of plant and animal species and offers a viewing area that extends over the water

- The world's only Welsh-themed carousel, which features wonderful dragon chariots as well as the usual horses and organ music
- The Wales Millennium Centre – the home of Welsh performing arts and one of the UK's top cultural attractions

While the usage of Cardiff Bay has changed completely in the time since it was built, when it comes to the fortunes of the area we can't help thinking that the former Tiger Bay's favourite daughter, Dame Shirley Bassey, might say it's like a little bit of history repeating. And while Caernarfon's regeneration is on a much smaller scale than Cardiff Bay's, we're hopeful that we'll see a similar improvement to our town's fortunes, both cultural and economic.

Celebrating the arts in Caernarfon with Gwyl Arall

Gwyl Arall is a festival of the arts held in several venues around Caernarfon every summer. We spoke to co-founder Nici Beech to find out more.

--

Gwyl Arall was inspired by the Laugharne Festival which Nici had visited in 2008 with her friend Llinos. Impressed that organisers had utilised Laugharne's existing buildings rather than having to organise marquees, portaloos and other infrastructure, Nici and Llinos returned from the festival feeling inspired to organise their own in Caernarfon. After talking to Eirian James of Palas Print the first Gwyl Arall happened just six weeks later.

Organising a festival must be challenging, we suggest. Does it get any easier with experience?

"I think our enthusiasm carried us along and it was easy enough to do the first one! Without a doubt we have all learnt loads over the last nine years. Having new people join in with the planning stage keeps it fresh, as does working with great partners. Money is probably the biggest headache - we aim to be self-sufficient and don't have regular funding - but we are grateful to local sponsors for their consistent support, and hope we will make it to our 10th anniversary next year."

Since 2008 the festival has grown considerably. "[It] has evolved organically according to who pitches in with ideas and who is keen to work in partnership," Nici explains. "For example, we worked with Cadw and had an Arts Council grant in 2015, and had two days of events in the castle as well as the more regular venues."

Every year is different. "One year we had an open air stage outside the Anglesey Arms with help from BBC Horizons, Gwyl Caernarfon and other local sponsors," Nici says. "We've had a full film showing schedule and also no films at all. It really does vary!"

The flexible nature of the organising team – this year it's a team of eleven – means the festival's programme varies each year. Events have included musical performances, film screenings, plays, art exhibitions, book readings, quizzes, workshops, DJ sets and folk dancing.

This year's programme is no exception; it includes poetry readings, walking tours, a busking competition and a chance to hear more about a venture whose name was inspired by the festival. "Llety Arall is the project which is setting up a cooperatively-owned hostel which will let visitors experience the heritage, culture and language of Caernarfon," Nici explains. "The session in the festival will provide an update and an opportunity to get involved."

What are Nici's favourite moments from past years?

"Personally, I really enjoyed working on the updating of the Melltith ar y Nyth rock opera, from which songs were performed by an array of talented musicians and singers in the castle in 2015," she says, "and some of the early Noson 4a6 evenings in the Market Hall had a great atmosphere."

And favourite performers?

"Cate le Bon and Meilir Jones' impromptu duet in the Market Hall was amazing one year, and we were so lucky to have Howard Marks here."

Nici will be performing herself this year – cooking recipes from her book, *Cegin*. “On the Thursday night, I’m going to be cooking for the people who come to see Richard Wyn Jones discuss the election at Palas Print, but won’t have time to do any more unfortunately!”

Gwyl Arall takes place from 6-9 July. For more information visit www.gwylarall.com.

Ideas: People: Places – improving Wales with the help of the arts

In previous articles we've looked at how the arts is being used as a catalyst for positive change in a variety of areas around the UK, including Merthyr Tydfil, Liverpool, Cardiff and of course Caernarfon, where STAMP continues to work with Arts Council Wales and other agencies on arts-based regeneration projects.

In this article we look at how Arts Council Wales, through its Ideas: People: Places (<http://www.arts.wales/arts-in-wales/ideas-people-places>) initiative, is helping three other parts of Wales to do the same.

Rhondda Cynon Taf

A community regeneration project in the Rhondda, called "It's Art But It's Not", (<https://itsartbutitsnot.wordpress.com/about/>) operates in the villages of Penygraig, Trebanog and Porth.

This three-year partnership brings together a large social landlord, Trivallis, with Valleys Kids and Artes Mundi and together they're putting art at the heart of community regeneration.

Local artists and communities have worked together to develop public art which helps community members to explore their surroundings creatively and appreciate their local area's assets and identity, while also providing physical improvements to the towns.

Haverfordwest

'Confluence' is a collaboration between several agencies in Haverfordwest, with the aim of spending ten years transforming it into a vibrant and distinctive market town that's reconnected with its river.

In time, the collaborators hope that Haverfordwest will become a leading light in arts-led regeneration of small Welsh towns.

The project also includes 'The Lab' (<http://thelabhaverfordwest.org/>) which combines artist residencies and commissions with a variety of other experimental and creative projects, bringing together the arts, urban design, planning and regeneration.

Confluence and The Lab aim to address some of Haverfordwest's problems, which have included a move to online and out of town shopping, high business rates, lack of investment and interest in the arts, and people feeling disempowered.

Llandudno

Caernarfon isn't the only North Wales Town to benefit from Ideas: People: Places – our neighbour Llandudno is also receiving funding through the initiative to put toward 'regeneration through the arts' projects.

Culture Action Llandudno (Call) (<http://www.cultureactionllandudno.co.uk/>) is a social enterprise with culture-led regeneration at its core. Through its 'Lost Spaces' project, Call is reimagining and revitalising disused and derelict buildings, plots of waste land and unloved estates.

Working with artists and communities, Call seek to do something original and exciting to help Llandudno make its mark as a leading North Wales cultural destination, attracting cultural tourism and boosting the local economy.

Here at STAMP we're very excited to see the arts playing such an important role in the physical, social and economic regeneration of so many Welsh towns and villages. Seeing the creative ideas evolving and shaping other parts of Wales is very encouraging, given the plans and ideas we're working on for Caernarfon.

If you'd like to know more about how STAMP is working to improve Caernarfon with arts-led projects, please take a look at our recent 'recap' blog post.

King Arthur: still taking care of Wales, after a millennium and a half!

With 2017 designated the 'Year of Legends' by Visit Wales, the timing couldn't have been better for the release of a new movie about King Arthur, partly filmed in Snowdonia.

Storytelling is an ancient Welsh art, and stories about King Arthur are among the oldest we tell in this part of the world.

Guy Richie's movie, *King Arthur: Legend of the Sword*, was filmed in Snowdonia in 2015. Scenes were shot in several locations, including Tryfan and Beddgelert. Due for release in May 2017, this version of the Arthur story sees him running the back streets of Londinium with his crew, unaware of his lineage.

It's quite fitting that the movie was filmed in Snowdonia, as the region makes many claims where Arthur is concerned.

Snowdon itself is the setting for one of the best-known local Arthurian tales. Arthur is said to have killed a giant, Ritta, on the slopes of the mountain after the giant threatened to add the king's beard to his collection.

And a cave on nearby peak Y Lliwedd is said to be the resting place of Arthur's knights, who will awake from their slumber when Arthur rises to save Wales in her hour of greatest need. Arthur himself, so the legend goes, lies under a cairn at Bwlch y Saethau, on the spot where he was killed in battle.

The legends don't always tie up, though: does Arthur lie under that cairn or is he at Avalon, where his battered but still-living body was said to have been taken by boat for healing? Bardsey is one of several locations with a claim to be that mythical isle, and it's also said that Merlin dwells in a glass tower on Bardsey, awaiting the resurrection of his king. Arthur's ship is also said to have sunk in Bardsey Sound, which one could argue strengthens Bardsey's claim somewhat!

At least two of Snowdonia's lakes – Llyn Llydaw and Llyn Ogwen - are supposed to be home to the Lady of the Lake, and the lake into which Arthur's sword Excalibur was thrown. Of course it can't be both of them, so which was it?

Venture into southern Snowdonia and you may see the hoofprint of Arthur's horse in a stone near Llyn Barfog, where he'd battled against a monster.

And the cromlech at Cefnamlwch, Pen Llŷn, was apparently formed when Arthur threw the capstone from the top of Garn Fadawn.

Such was Arthur's popularity in Wales during the medieval period, and such was the strength of the Welsh people's faith that he would rise to save Wales when she needed him most, Edward I made a great show of reburying the so-called 'skeletons of Arthur and Guinevere' at Glastonbury Abbey, where they'd been 'discovered' by monks a couple of generations earlier (probably at the behest of Edward's great-grandfather Henry II, who'd had his own disputes with the Welsh). This was quite clearly an act of propaganda, designed to crush the spirit of those Welsh who believed the 'once and future king' would rise again. Whether or not Arthur existed, he was beloved enough by Wales for such a trick to be effective.

There are so many tales of Arthur, his life, his deeds and his companions that are set in our local area, it's difficult to make sense of them all. Magical though his friend Merlin was, even he would have struggled to put Arthur in so many places at the same time!

But no matter how much truth there is to these tales – or how little, as the case may be – one thing is clear: the Welsh tradition of storytelling is just as popular today as it's ever been, and if that brings more attention to our local area from film producers and the fans that flock to visit the locations used in these movies, then this strengthens our local economy so it's something from which we can all benefit.

So long live Arthur, we say, and may he continue to look after Welsh interests for many generations to come!

Mae Gen i Go': first recordings published

The Mae Gen i Go' project is underway, and the first recordings of people's memories of Caernarfon are now available to listen to online.

--

A project to record Caernarfon residents' memories of the town – “Mae Gen i Go” – has been launched after months of planning, and the first audio recordings have been published online.

The project is curated by STAMP, an Arts Council Wales-funded organisation which brings together the arts with the regeneration of Caernarfon, and GISDA, which provides support and opportunities to the area's young people.

The recordings were made by volunteers who were trained to interview Caernarfon's residents of all ages by actor and theatre practitioner Iwan Brioc earlier this year.

The recollections published so far – which at present are only available in Welsh – show the diversity of the personalities that live in the town.

Participants were asked about the sensory triggers – sights, sounds, smells, feelings and tastes – around Caernarfon that bring back memories of the town. These memories can be recent or from long ago.

One participant, Emyr Parry, recalled being at school with teachers who were mostly very kind. However, his Latin teacher was difficult to connect with and had no interest in Mr Parry because he was 'thick'. The teacher was also a barrister, and Mr Parry recalls that one day he had a free afternoon from school so he went along to court to watch proceedings from the gallery. There was his teacher, in her capacity as a barrister, being treated quite rudely by the judge. But Mr Parry didn't feel sorry for her at all; rather, he was delighted that she was getting a taste of her own medicine after treating him so badly in school.

Another interviewee, Tomos Williams, remembered tasting a tuna sandwich for the first time, at Baps Gwyn. And an elderly lady named Nora recalled an old bakery on Snowdon street where the baker's apron had turned white with all the flour, and the wonderful smell of the bread every time she walked past.

Daf Owain, meanwhile, told the story of a nanny goat from the barracks, overlooked from his bathroom window at Victoria Road, which went to every Wales rugby match.

Later this year these recordings will be connected to QR codes, which will be placed around the town at the locations being remembered in the recordings. Passers-by will be able to scan the QR codes with their smartphones and hear the participants' memories. During the course of the project more QR codes will be created as more memories are collected, and eventually this will lead to a network of memories around the town.

Filmmaker Eilir Pierce will be filming the entire project and releasing the material as a series of short films for the internet, to promote the project. It's also hoped that the films will be projected on some of Caernarfon's buildings on three consecutive Saturday evenings in the run-up to the final performance of the project, which is being described as a 'sensory labyrinth'.

To listen to the recordings published so far, visit <http://www.stamp.cymru/cy/newyddion/> where the memories are being published as individual news stories.

Recap: STAMP, the arts, and the changing face of Caernarfon

Almost a year and a half into STAMP being established, we recap on the purpose of the project and how it fits into the wider scheme of improvements to Caernarfon.

STAMP is part of the Caernarfon Waterfront and Town Centre Regeneration Initiative – an ambitious and innovative programme of projects which collectively aim to reinforce the town's vibrancy and distinctiveness, providing opportunities to its residents and visitors by working with Caernarfon's existing unique assets. The outcome we're aiming for is to reinforce Caernarfon's standing as North Wales' leading cultural destination.

The initiative is led by Gwynedd Council, and it brings together multiple agencies including Cadw, Arts Council for Wales, Antur Waunfawr, Gisda, the Ffestiniog and Welsh Highland Railways, the Caernarfon Harbour Trust and Galeri Caernarfon.

Funding for the initiative was secured in November 2014, when Gwynedd Council received £1m from the Welsh Government's Vibrant and Viable Places Tackling Poverty Fund.

STAMP's role within the initiative is to bring about a greater 'sense of place' and promote community ownership of local spaces, through the arts and through meaningful involvement, participation and dialogue with local people. We aim to enrich Caernarfon's regeneration by commissioning and providing artistic content, which is being done through several STAMP projects:

Gefail yr Ynys

Having opened up the old forge on the Island Site on Caernarfon's waterfront, STAMP is working with artists and metalworkers to provide training courses in various aspects of metalworking. The Island Site is being redeveloped to create studio and retail space for artists and makers.

Tre'r Cofis Shops

The Tre'r Cofis Shops Project created over 100 miniature artworks tracing the history of shops in Caernarfon. The project was led by artist Luned Rhys Parri, who worked with the community, photographer Dewi Glyn and local historian Emrys Llewelyn.

Mae gen i Go'

Mae gen i Go' is an exciting and ambitious project which leads residents and visitors on sensory journeys around Caernarfon. Gisda interviewed people from Caernarfon and asked them about the sights, sounds, smells, tastes and feelings that they associate with different parts of the town. At the places mentioned by interviewees there will be QR codes, and when scanned by a smartphone the codes will make the phone play a recording of the interview.

Castell/Castell02

Working with local artists, STAMP organises weekends of art exhibitions at Caernarfon Castle during the Caernarfon Food Festival. The exhibitions include performances, sculptures and multi-media works, all responding to the castle's unique location and history and celebrating its architecture.

CARN

CARN is a collective of local artists, led by prominent international artist and Caernarfon resident Bedwyr Williams. CARN is involved in many artistic projects in the town, and part of their work will be to promote the arts in the Caernarfon area and its members will create artworks of different types throughout the town.

If you'd like to know more about STAMP's work, please connect with us through any of our social media accounts or join our mailing list – you'll find links to all of these at the bottom of the home page of this website.

Remembrance poppies attract thousands of visitors

The “Weeping Window” ceramic poppies sculpture, first displayed at the Tower of London in 2014 to mark the centenary of the Great War, is currently on display at Caernarfon Castle.

--

A poignant sculpture on display at Caernarfon Castle has attracted thousands of visitors to the town in recent weeks, providing an excellent example of art contributing towards regeneration and tourism in towns like Caernarfon.

“The Poppies: Weeping Window” display from the “Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red” installation opened on 11th October and will remain at Caernarfon Castle until 20th November.

Weeping Window sees thousands of handmade ceramic poppies cascading from a high window at the castle, pooling on the ground below. Seen from a distance, it looks as though blood is trickling down the side of the castle; a poignant tribute to the victims of the First World War, in which there were some 38 million casualties. This figure is made up of 17 million deaths and 20 million wounded – one of history’s deadliest conflicts and rather deserving of its alternative moniker, ‘The Great War’.

The poppies sculpture, along with its sister sculpture, “Wave”, was created by artist Paul Cummins and designer Tom Piper. The two sculptures are being displayed around the country as part of the 14-18 NOW programme, which seeks to prompt a new dialogue around the legacy of WWI all over the UK.

The sculptures first appeared at the Tower of London’s 2014 installation “Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red”. While on display at the Tower of London the sculptures were surrounded in stages by the ceramic poppies, each individually planted by volunteers in remembrance of a fallen WWI soldier. Over five million people visited the poppies during their time at the Tower of London.

We have long associated the poppy with remembrance and the Great War, thanks to the poem ‘*In Flanders Fields*’ by John McCree. Written in 1915, the poem was inspired by McCree’s attendance at his friend and fellow soldier’s funeral.

*In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.*

*We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.*

*Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.*

Since the First World War, we have become accustomed to seeing the poppy used in commemoration of lives lost or destroyed by war, thanks to its many decades of use as a symbol of remembrance by the Royal British Legion in its annual Poppy Appeal, which raises money to provide support and assistance to servicemen and women.

The Weeping Window sculpture can be visited for free, including free entry to the castle, on presentation of tickets that are available from caernarfonpoppies.eventbrite.co.uk.

The ancient Welsh art of Storytelling

Storytelling is an ancient tradition in Wales, and an art at which we're quite adept!

In the days before reading and writing were widely-held skills, the art of storytelling was a valuable one. Not only was it a way to keep history alive (although stories would have been altered considerably over many years of telling); but it was a way to share news before we had newspapers.

In this part of Wales we have some interesting tales that we're still familiar with today. In Caernarfon in particular, there are two old legends that most of us have heard in one form or another. Both are related to the castle.

In the first, a castle at what is now Caernarfon was seen in a dream by a Roman emperor, Magnus Maximus (known locally as Macsen Wledig). He sent men out to search the world for the castle in his dream, and eventually it was found – and in it, the beautiful maiden who had also featured in the dream. Macsen married her and became king of the Britons. His wife, Elen (Anglicised to Helen) ordered the construction of roads all over Wales, and it is from her that we get the ancient road, Sarn Helen.

When Edward I built Caernarfon Castle, it is said that his design was inspired by the dream of Macsen Wledig as well as being a nod to the walls of Constantinople.

The other Caernarfon Castle-related story concerns the birth of Edward's son, Edward of Caernarfon, crowned Prince of Wales in 1301. The legend says that knowing the Welsh would not accept any English-speaking Prince of Wales who had not been born in Wales, Edward put a clever 'spin' on things by making sure that his son was born in the castle. With French being the language of court and polite society at that time, and English being spoken only by commoners, clearly the child would be unlikely to ever grow up speaking English and thus the wishes of the local people could be said to have been granted.

These are just two stories of Caernarfon that have been passed down through the centuries – there are a good many more.

A little afield but still local, Snowdonia is subject of an unfathomable number of myths and legends. The 12th century chronicler, Giraldus Cambrensis (Gerald of Wales) recounted some curious local legends from the area in his book *The Journey Through Wales*.

In the first, he says that local people describe a lake in the mountains which contains a floating island which moves about, "often driven to the opposite side by the force of the winds". He says that shepherds are "amazed to see the flocks which are feeding there carried off to distant parts of the lake".

In the second, a story of another nearby lake, he says there are "three different kinds of fish, eels, trout and perch, and all of them have only one eye, the right one being there but not the left."

And in the third, he tells of an eagle which on every fifth feast-day perches on a specific stone, "hoping to satiate its hunger with the bodies of dead men, for on that day it thinks that war will break out. The stone on which it takes its stand has a hole pierced nearly through it, for it is there that the eagle cleans and sharpens its beak."

Do you know any ancient stories about Caernarfon that were passed down through your family but which might not be commonly known? If so we'd love to hear them – please get in touch if you'd like to share!

Canolfan Soar and the regeneration of Merthyr Tydfil

In its heyday Merthyr Tydfil was the biggest town in Wales. At its lowest point it was hit by economic turmoil and high unemployment. But the area's fortunes have improved in recent years after investment in the Arts and the Welsh language through Canolfan Soar, a Welsh language centre which is bringing many social and economic benefits to the area.

--

In 2011 the former Zoar Chapel in Merthyr Tydfil reopened its doors as Canolfan Soar, a Welsh language centre which provides a variety of opportunities to the people of Merthyr Tydfil through the Arts, culture and heritage.

By 2015, when a specialist research firm was hired to assess the economic and cultural impact of Canolfan Soar on both the local and wider community, it became clear that the initiative was providing many benefits – both economic and social.

Canolfan Soar is home to a community theatre – Theatr Soar – as well as a Welsh language centre. There's a cafe, rooms to hire for meetings and training, and office accommodation which local businesses can rent. There's also a Cylch Meithrin for young children.

Several Welsh language organisations which serve the community of Merthyr Tydfil are also housed at Canolfan Soar, including Menter Iaith Merthyr Tudful, Urdd Gobaith Cymru and Cymraeg i Oedolion.

The research company's report was published in mid-2015 and makes interesting reading.

The research firm analysed a wide range of data, including audience numbers, expenditure on goods, services and staff, details of any further investment that had been attracted, and details of all revenue generated.

When all the data had been analysed, it was clear that the Canolfan has had a very impressive impact on not only the local community in Merthyr Tydfil, but also for South Wales as a whole.

During 2014:

- Canolfan Soar generated up to £608,537 for the local economy
- Across the South Wales economy, the economic impact generated by Canolfan Soar was as much as £1.3m
- The £173,000 in grants received by Canolfan Soar generated a gross economic impact of as much as £331,170 within Merthyr Tydfil, and up to £709,810 across South Wales
- Every £1 of income received by Canolfan Soar is worth up to £1.91 within Merthyr Tydfil and as much as £4.10 within the wider South Wales economy.

The centre has also brought many social benefits to Merthyr Tydfil.

For example, thanks to providing affordable accommodation for local businesses, Canolfan Soar and its tenants make a positive impact on the local community by employing local people and purchasing from local suppliers.

Integrating with other local regeneration schemes, Canolfan Soar's development means local people have a place to meet, learn, socialise and engage with education and the arts.

In this respect, Canolfan Soar is encouraging people back into the town centre, as well as strengthening the position of the Welsh language in an area where the language was in a state of decline for a century (68.4% of the population were Welsh speakers at the 1891 census, compared to 8.9% in 2011).

Canolfan Soar's mission has always been "to contribute to the regeneration of Merthyr town centre, by providing a place for people to meet, learn, socialise and engage with education and the arts. Its activities aim to raise confidence, increase self esteem and broaden horizons through the arts and education while contributing to local economic development."

It would seem that Canolfan Soar is not only meeting its objectives, but is far exceeding them by providing so many economic and social benefits to what has for many years been considered one of the most economically disadvantaged parts of the UK.

Could the forthcoming Slate Quay development provide similar benefits to Caernarfon and North Wales? This remains to be seen, but we're confident that any impact the development has on the area will be very positive indeed.