

Taking a fresh look at local museums over Easter

Lord Elis-Thomas, visiting the vibrant Amgueddfa Ceredigion Museum in Aberystwyth, hailed the role local museums play in both their local communities and in supporting tourism.

Local museums are being increasingly imaginative in what they offer to visitors. This year, through Welsh Government funding, and working in partnership with the Kids in Museums and Get it Loud organisations, Amgueddfa Ceredigion has added cutting edge music gigs to its impressive range of activities. The acclaimed singer Gwenno entertained around 180 people in the atmospheric museum, once a music hall and cinema.

The sell-out matinee gig is the third this year by high-calibre performers in Welsh museums and libraries, following successful performances in Swansea and Bargoed. Gwenno has received rave reviews in the music press for her first album – Y Dydd Olaf, which won the Welsh Music Prize in 2015, and new album Le Kov.

The Museum, which completed a major refurbishment in 2016, now runs a popular and diverse events programme – including film showings, yoga classes, talks, workshops and even sleepovers for younger visitors. It recently hosted Radio 4's popular Any Questions programme. The Museum is also home to the Ceredigion Heritage Youth Panel, where people aged 16 to 25 can get involved in learning more about and promoting their local heritage, as well as a Young Archaeologist's Club. Members of the panel have had the chance to learn new skills in digital marketing and event production through getting involved in the Gwenno gig, and will be making a short documentary film of the event.

The Minister, speaking after the event, said

“Local museums really do offer so much to visitors and local communities alike. Amgueddfa Ceredigion is a shining example of a dynamic local museum which attracts people of all ages through the doors. Live gigs are another terrific way to attract new audiences.”

Sarah Morton, Sustainability Officer at Amgueddfa Ceredigion said:

‘Working with Get it Loud and Kids in Museums has been very rewarding. Apart from the prestige of hosting Gwenno during the day, the support Get it Loud has shown towards the members of our Ceredigion Youth Heritage Panel has been invaluable. Its so exciting to see the museum come alive and to connect with a totally different audience.’

Alison Bowyer, Executive Director of Kids in Museums, said:

“Kids in Museums and Get It Loud in Libraries have been delighted to partner for Gigs in Museums. It’s been fantastic to make some noise about the amazing things on offer in Welsh museums, showcase the vibrant Welsh music scene and bring new audiences into museums and libraries. Overall we’ve been thrilled by the response to the gigs and we look forward to continuing to support live music in Welsh museums and libraries in the future.”

[Welsh Innovation showcased at Smithsonian, New York](#)

The two products by E2L have been designed to maintain mental engagement, self-worth and dignity for people with dementia, helping them to recognise and retain the use of everyday objects. Both have been extensively tested among people with dementia in the UK.

They are part of a collection of 70 innovative designs from around the world developed in the last decade that assist with daily routines which are part of the Access+Ability exhibition.

E2L, who are recognised as an Ambassador for Innovation, received support from the Welsh Government’s Overseas Business Development Grant to visit new territory in New York, Florida and Mexico. As a result the two products were selected by the curators of the exhibition.

The products highlighted are the Simple Music Player which can improve cognizance and lucidity and is easy to use. The Placemat for Dementia is a non-slip table setting mat for people with dementia, allowing them to carry out this daily task.

The company specialises in product design to meet healthcare needs which have often been identified to them by carers and health professionals that add to the quality of life of the patient and are easy and familiar to use.

Lyndon Owen CEO of E2L said:

“We are very proud to have been curated into this exhibition designed to showcase products that genuinely assist dementia sufferers and their families. Our product is also available in the museum shop and is a practical example of the type of product engineering E2L undertakes.”

Economy Secretary Ken Skates said:

“It’s great to see these innovative products, designed and produced in Wales, on show at this prestigious exhibition in New York. I’m pleased the Welsh Government is able to assist the company with raising the profile of their products overseas as they bring real benefits to people with dementia.”

Quality Assurance Scheme to have increased focus on the visitor experience

Visit Wales will soon begin to roll out revised Quality Assurance guidelines – ensuring that Quality Assurance Schemes remain relevant and informative as well as supporting businesses and consumers in a globally changing and competitive marketplace. The revised guidelines follow a review undertaken by the national tourism organisations of Wales, England, Scotland & Northern Ireland and the AA. The review was called for due to changing trends for both businesses and visitors – with greater use of user-generated content; online booking engines and consumer review scoring systems as well as the greater diversity of accommodation now on offer.

Following customer and industry feedback, the revised schemes will see more emphasis on the quality of experience with less emphasis on the provision of facilities. The roll-out of the new criteria for the serviced and self-catering sectors will begin in April 2018 with the aim of increasing participation in the various schemes.

As part of the shift in the Quality Assurance approach, Visit Wales will phase-in new signs and materials to enable businesses to showcase their quality star-rating to guests. The suite of new materials, which have been updated to reflect the award-winning Cymru Wales brand style, include new starred plaques; contemporary certificates; and digital badges and logos. Businesses do not need to request the new materials – they will be issued and introduced over the summer; and customers are advised to look out for the Draig Goch logo on hotels, B&Bs, guest and bunk-houses when they book, as a trusted mark of quality.

In visiting the Lake Vyrnwy Hotel today [Monday 26 March] the Tourism Minister said:

“Quality is integral to the future success of tourism in Wales –

and one way of ensuring we meet with customer expectations and demand in addition to helping the industry strive to be the best they possibly can – is through our Quality Assurance scheme. Although it was acknowledged at a UK level that the schemes needed to change, it was also the consensus across all national tourism organisations that offering an independent assessment of facilities and services is still important. Our grading schemes are about confidence – confidence in what we have to offer, confidence in how we are offering it and confidence that those who visit Wales will experience a high quality, memorable experience.

“I’m delighted to be in mid Wales today – at the beginning of what will hopefully be a busy Easter for the industry. The impression I’ve had over the last few months is of an industry full of commitment and enthusiasm and I believe that by working in partnership we can build on the success we have achieved in recent years. I’ve also recently met with the chairs of the four Regional Tourism Fora, and I’m confident that this structure works for the future development and marketing of tourism. I’ve had the opportunity today to reassure colleagues in mid Wales that I have no intention of changing this structure. I wish the industry a busy and prosperous Easter.”

Anthony Rosser UKHospitality Cymru said:

“This revised scheme further recognises the world class visitor experience the Hospitality industry delivers across the whole of Wales and a project that works towards the maintenance of these standards is to be welcomed, the emphasis being to better reflect the guest experience as opposed to the rigid, physical aspects of a business.

“Any Scheme that aims to provide more support for the industry to improve and develop is also to be welcomed as continued investment in our businesses is vital to attracting visitors and maintaining and building market share in the face of ever increasing competition in the UK and abroad.”

Adrian Barsby, Wales Tourism Alliance Chair said:

“Given the seismic changes we have seen over the last ten years to the way our customers research and book their holidays or short breaks, we welcome this much awaited review and enhancement of the Quality Assurance scheme. Increased emphasis on the experience as opposed to the material facilities is in line with today’s customer expectations. Whilst we all recognise the customer is increasingly relying on previous visitors reviews online, these do not give the same assurance as the expertise provided by a dedicated Visit Wales tourism professional. The QA scheme is there to provide that

additional baseline re-assurance to the prospective customer that they are making the right choice. We look forward to the benefits it will undoubtedly bring.”

£56m programme to strengthen Wales’ flood and coastal defences

The Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management programme has been prioritised according to risk, considering factors such as the likelihood and impact of a flood, previous events, the number of properties to benefit and the wider benefits of the scheme.

For the construction phase alone, the schemes planned for 2018–19 are expected to benefit over 6,500 properties.

Local authorities and Natural Resources Wales will receive funding to deliver flood risk management schemes to protect people, properties and businesses.

Many of the schemes will also deliver wider benefits including habitat improvements, recreational benefits and reducing risk to infrastructure.

The funding will be used to complete the construction of new and existing projects, as well as scoping and designing future schemes. The new programme was developed in collaboration with representatives from Welsh Government, Natural Resources Wales (NRW), Welsh Local Government Association, local authorities, Dŵr Cymru/Welsh Water and the Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE).

Among the major new schemes to commence are:

- Machynys flood defences in Llanelli
- Leckwith in Cardiff
- Tidal works to the River Cadoxton
- Llansannan and Mochdre in Conwy
- Llanberis in Gwynedd
- Llanmaes in the Vale of Glamorgan
- Parc yr Onnen in Aberystwyth
- Llyn Tegid Reservoir works, Gwynedd

The Welsh Government also announced last week plans for a new Wales Coastal Monitoring Centre, to inform decisions on coastal adaptation and potential schemes on a national basis.

Over the life of this Assembly term, the Welsh Government plans to allocate £151 million of capital investment for NRW and local authorities’ flood risk activities. Together with the Coastal Risk Management Programme, this results

in a potential investment of over £263 million in flood and coastal schemes over the life of this Government.

The Minister said:

“Flooding can have a devastating impact on the lives of those affected. This funding of £56m further demonstrates our commitment to reduce risk and build resilience to flooding and coastal erosion.

“We are investing in new schemes and major maintenance right across Wales. I have also protected NRW’s budget for flood risk management activities next financial year, as well as funding a new Wales Coastal Monitoring Centre which will improve our understanding of coastal processes and inform better decision making.

“I’m pleased to announce this ambitious programme, which will support communities and areas right across Wales who are most at risk from flooding and coastal erosion.”

[Finance Secretary visits Basque Country to explore the region’s innovations in tax policy and economic and infrastructure planning](#)

The Basque Government has a reputation for its innovative approach to progressive taxation, economic development and trade, social, transport and infrastructure planning including its minimum income scheme and investment in public transport infrastructure.

The Cabinet Secretary will meet Pedro Azpiazu, the Basque Minister for Treasury and Economy, Arantxa Tapia, the Minister for Economic Development and Competitiveness and Beatriz Artolazabal, Minister for Employment and Social Policies. He will also visit the Port of Bilbao and see the high-speed railway which serves the region.

Over the past decade Wales’ relationship with the Basque Country has steadily grown with joint activity between the regions at both government-level – through joint co-operation in European networks – and at an institutional level.

The Basque Government recently published its revised international strategy,

Estrategia Basque Country 2018-20, which includes Wales as one of 5 priority regions for the Basque Country in Europe.

Professor Drakeford said:

“Wales and the Basque Country already enjoy, and benefit from, co-operation across a broad range of areas.

“With the introduction of our new taxes in April and our work to develop new taxes, the visit provides a useful opportunity to share good practice and learn from the Basque Country’s progressive ideas on tax policy and administration, social policies and its investment programmes to improve public services and infrastructure. It also provides an opportunity to discuss the region’s strategic relationship with the Spanish Government in relation to budgetary matters.

“The visit to the high-speed railway will also help inform our planning for the South Wales Metro.

“We are keen to strengthen ties with the Basque Country and I look forward to exploring how we build on, and deepen, co-operation between our 2 regions.”