



Museums Change Lives *Wales*

“Culture plays a central role in Wales, through heritage, language, landscape and traditions. Traditionally, museums are spaces where people gather to enjoy an exhibition, activity or workshop, but they can also be catalysts for positive change in society, inspiring engagement, debate and reflection.

Increasingly, museums are supporting active participation from users, serving as dynamic community hubs that bring together different viewpoints. They support collective understanding, providing opportunities for users to contribute, challenge and reflect.

Our collections tell stories in a uniquely engaging way. It is a privilege to use them not just to educate or to entertain but also to make a positive difference in people’s lives, whether that be tackling racism, supporting people living with dementia and their carers, instilling pride in our communities, or giving a voice to marginalised groups. Museums are increasingly places of joy and reflection, of challenge and understanding.

These case studies provide a snapshot of the wonderful work going on across Wales. We hope that they provide inspiration to others in helping to create more equitable places to live and work.”

Foreword

Rachael Rogers, *Vice-president,*
Museums Association Board and *Museums*
and Arts Manager, MonLife Heritage Museums

Inspiring Museums to Change Lives

Enhancing health and wellbeing

- Museums enhance our quality of life and help improve our mental and physical health.
- Museums work in partnership with communities and health and wellbeing organisations to support the wellbeing of a diverse range of people.
- Participation in the work of the museum promotes wellbeing and self-confidence and broadens the knowledge and horizons of participants, the museum and the wider public.
- Museums recognise health inequalities and strive to overcome them by working with specialist health organisations and a wide range of people and communities.
- Museums support the wellbeing of everyone who works in and with them including staff, freelancers and volunteers.
- Museums recognise that they are not safe places for everyone and take measures to minimise harm in displays, programming and interpretation.

01

Creating better and more equitable places to live and work

- Museums help us to value the places where we live, work and visit.
- Museums work together with communities to raise awareness of the climate crisis and to protect the environment.
- Museums help to create a sense of belonging and empowerment by engaging with communities and encouraging active public participation in decision-making.
- Museums use engagement, learning and collections to generate understanding within and between different groups in society and work to actively tackle racism, ableism and discrimination.
- Museums work in equal partnerships with community groups, charities and other organisations to create civic spaces that are open and accessible to all.

02

Inspiring engagement, debate and reflection

- Museums work with the public as active and creative participants – using collections as a starting point for exchanging opinions, experiences, ideas and knowledge.
- Museums help us to understand and negotiate the complex world around us, encouraging us to reflect and take action on contemporary challenges such as racism, discrimination, poverty and the climate crisis.
- Museums work with community partners to research collections, to challenge assumptions, foster debate and motivate people to contribute to positive change in the world. They are not neutral spaces.
- Museums inspire learning and creativity for all and work actively to ensure that a wide range of people can access these opportunities at any stage in life.

03

Enhancing health and wellbeing

Men’s Shed
*Bailey Hill Scheduled
Ancient Monument*

*A unique, heritage-based
Men’s Shed that uses traditional
Welsh craft skills to bring
men together for friendship,
support and learning.*



The Men’s Shed initiative is about bringing like-minded men together, sharing skills, experiences, worries, concerns and having fun.

The Bailey Hill Men’s Shed in Mold, Flintshire has been running since 2023 and is unique in being heritage-based, situated completely outdoors in the earthworks of a motte and bailey castle. We use the wood from trees on the site and keep alive traditional Welsh skills such as stick-chair making.

The Shed is open to all men from 18 to 90+, dependent only on whether mobility levels allow them to access the medieval ditch where it is located.

The importance of heritage skills linked to the museum collection lies at the very heart of our activities. The “shedders” meet weekly. Those attending first make a wooden maul (hammer), followed by a three-legged draw-horse vice bench before moving onto a Welsh stick chair. The men use traditional hand tools and long-established techniques, all facilitated by a skilled tutor.

In feedback, 100% of our participants highlighted the friendship, support and camaraderie associated with attending the sessions, alongside the learning of new skills. The men have all noted increased self-esteem, purpose, and emotional resilience. The Shed has created a strong support network, helping to reduce feelings of isolation and promoting conversations. For some, it is their only reason to leave the house.

Our success has brought its own challenges. The Shed is currently wholly reliant on external funding. Very few of the members want to leave, which has resulted in a long, static waiting list. There is growing demand for a Shed for women. We are also regularly approached to take short-term placements of young people.

Solutions include trialling shorter, four-to six-month sessions for both men and women with intergenerational opportunities allowing more people to participate. We also aim to help the existing shedders become less funding reliant and create a sustainable future.

To find out more, please watch our video: [In their own words – Reflections on The Bailey Hill Project.](#)

“I heard about the Men’s Shed a couple of weeks after it started. My wife had passed away not long before and I found a lot of our friends were actually her friends and there was a link broken; so I found a link through meeting other chaps in the Men’s Shed and it was a revelation.”

Roy, Men’s Shed participant

Collections,
Conversation
and Creativity
MonLife Heritage

A range of programmes that use museum collections to support the wellbeing of people living with dementia and their carers.

MonLife Heritage offers a range of reminiscence and creative activities across Monmouthshire, from facilitated outreach programmes to reminiscence boxes for loans to care homes and other settings.

At the core of programming for older adults, and people living with dementia and their carers, is a focus on wellbeing. The service uses traditional social history objects for reminiscence and historic replicas based on our museum collections, offering opportunities for conversation and inspiration for creative activity.

Partnership-working is central to delivery. The museum service works with the National Exercise Referral Scheme, funded by the Aneurin Bevan University Health Board, to offer 12-week programmes of gentle exercise followed by object-handling and creative activity for people living with dementia and their carers. In partnership with Cadw, the Welsh Government’s historic environment service, we also deliver a weekly session in Caerwent Roman town.

With funding from the Museums Federation Cymru, we recently developed themed Memory Boxes that can be borrowed from the county’s libraries.



Containing a range of handling objects, object information and conversation prompts, they facilitate reminiscence activity at home for people unable to join regular programmes.

Responses to evaluation from outreach programme participants indicate a variety of benefits related to wellbeing:

“Due to being smaller groups – helped to rebuild confidence.”

“Very relaxing, fun, and educational.”

“It has helped me a lot.”

“Meeting new people and getting out.”

“Something to look forward to.”

Building on this experience of working with people living with dementia in the community, MonLife Heritage will be developing a new dementia-friendly gallery in Chepstow Museum from 2026-28, funded by the Welsh Government and Museums Federation Cymru.

We will undertake consultation with people living with dementia and their carers to inform object selection and ensure a person-centred approach in the gallery.



Create: Community Champions
Torfaen Museum and
Inside Out Cymru

A participatory arts programme for adults facing barriers to positive wellbeing.

Torfaen Museum and Inside Out Cymru worked with Building Resilient Communities (BRC) Torfaen to deliver Create: Community Champions.



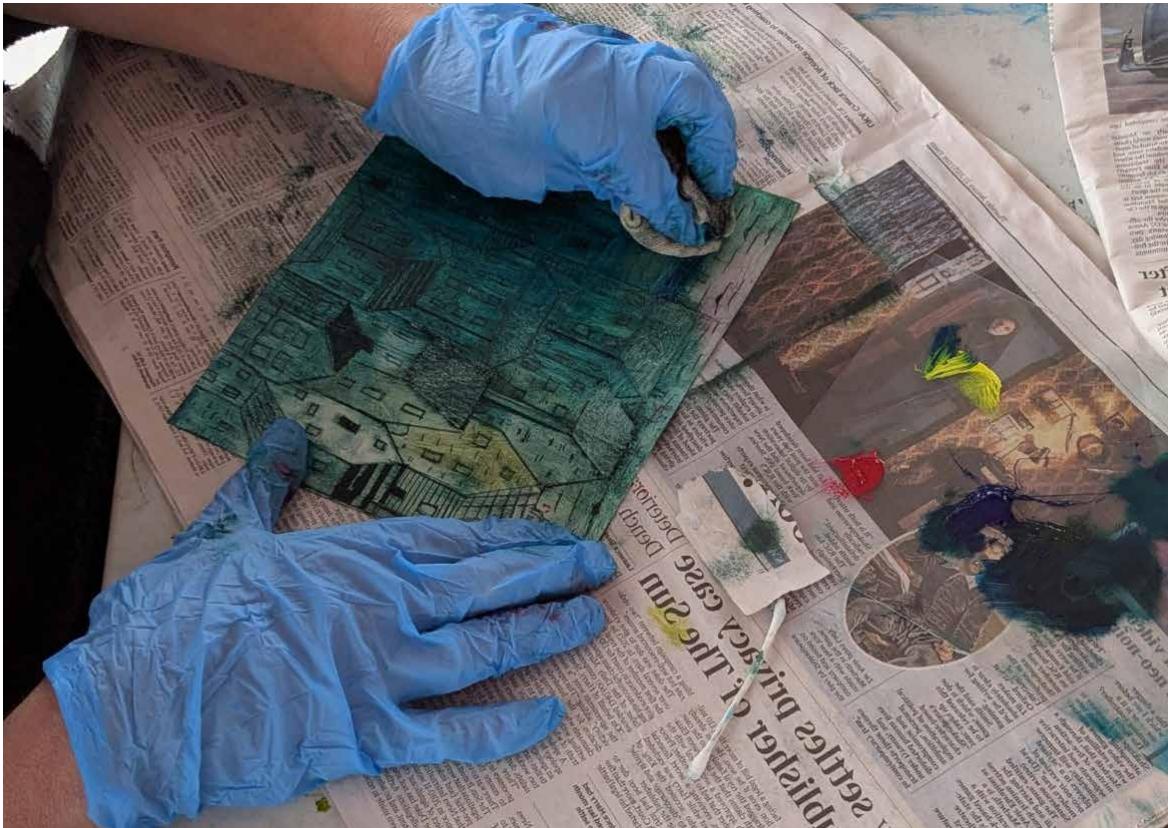
Funded by the National Lottery Community Fund Wales, this 48-week participatory arts programme supported adults facing barriers to positive wellbeing such as social isolation, unsupported neurodivergence, and physical health conditions through printmaking, ceramics and craft workshops in the museum.

Participants developed skills in creative problem-solving, decision-making and resilience, while meeting like-minded people and learning more about their community. Participants were encouraged and supported to progress towards volunteering and leadership opportunities.

The project was co-designed with BRC Torfaen support workers and service-users, who informed artforms and delivery formats. Professional artists Bill Chambers, Rhian Anderson and Nathan Sheen facilitated two-hour sessions that were low-pressure and adaptable, where participants could learn at their own pace.

Activities were adapted to meet individual access needs and interests. Exhibitions and celebrations provided an opportunity to showcase achievements and connect participants with each other, loved ones and wider community organisations.

Across the project, there were 523 attendances from 28 individuals. Evaluation found that 100% of respondents enjoyed taking part, with 70% feeling more connected to others, and 60% feeling more confident, describing the sessions as motivating and inclusive.



Beyond these wellbeing outcomes, three participants progressed into Community Arts Champion roles, leading on their own peer-led craft groups, paid creative work or community leadership roles.

Create: Community Champions demonstrated the value of co-produced, place-based creative programmes that engage the community in their history and their present, building confidence and reducing isolation.

Important recommendations include ensuring responsiveness, maintaining close partnerships and prioritising consistency.

“I enjoyed trying all the new things I learned and saw and getting to do something just for me. I enjoyed being able to get messy, having somewhere to go and to be with people who like the same things as me.”

Programme participant

*Creating better
and more equitable
places to live
and work*

Trysori'r Geiriau –
Treasure the Words
Your Voice Advocacy
and the Dylan
Thomas Centre

A partnership project in Swansea that uses collections to improve representation of learning-disabled people in the museum.

Your Voice Advocacy (YVA) is a member-led organisation run by and for people with learning disabilities. The Dylan Thomas Centre (DTC), run by Swansea Council, operates the Love the Words exhibition and engagement programme. Together, we were awarded an Esmée Fairbairn Communities and Collections Fund (EFCCF) grant by the Museums Association in 2025 for Trysori'r Geiriau – Treasure the Words.

The project developed through our long-term collaboration. YVA highlighted how people with learning disabilities don't get the same opportunities within culture and museums as non-learning disabled people, either as visitors or within the workforce. As visitors, many may find the style and content of written information a barrier. In the UK workforce, people with learning disabilities are hugely underrepresented; many leave school without qualifications, meaning most museum jobs are out of their reach.

People with learning disabilities have skills and experience that museums are missing out on. As a partnership, we felt there was a way to address some of these inequalities. Members of the advocacy group were involved in all stages of our collaboratively made application to the EFCCF, including initial conversations with the funder prior to making a full application.

The project tackles barriers to engagement with the museum's literature-based collection, and shares Dylan's love of words, their sound and meaning. We've created paid roles at the DTC for adults with learning disabilities, supported by new posts at YVA and the DTC.

We have rethought and co-designed recruitment procedures to give fair access to placements. The placements will create better access to collections through translating interpretation into Easy Read text, and participants will learn photography skills to update and improve collection images.

Although only part-way through our project, we've already seen many benefits. Placements will create a portfolio of experience, and the increased confidence from gaining paid work will help participants explore future opportunities. The resources produced will benefit all visitors. We'll also work with organisations who don't utilise Easy Read, but have expressed an interest as audiences and collaborators.



Unlocking the living gateway to Wales’s slate story
National Slate Museum

How the National Slate Museum is putting the voice of local communities at the heart of its multimillion-pound redevelopment project.

In November 2024, the National Slate Museum in Llanberis, North Wales, closed its doors to begin an ambitious multimillion-pound redevelopment project supported by National Lottery Heritage Fund, the UK Government via Gwynedd Council, the Welsh Government and other funders.

Some 13,000 objects have been temporarily relocated to allow for conservation and access improvements and the creation of new visitor facilities. Our aim is to create a world-class gateway to the Slate Landscapes of Northwest Wales, a Unesco World Heritage Site.

Determined to involve communities in shaping the redevelopment, we have taken the museum beyond the walls, establishing temporary locations at Caernarfon, Llanberis and Penrhyn Castle, as well as a new open-access collections store near Bangor. These are anchor points for a conversation with the wider community on the stories we tell, the objects that resonate, and new perspectives.

We are working together with our communities to build a living museum experience. Our new characters, Margaret the Matron and Gwen the Maid, were co-developed with local schools.



Margaret reveals the harsh realities of quarry life, while Gwen explores the strain of serving a quarry owner while her family suffers. These characters, and others, will form a core part of the museum experience when we reopen.

Volunteers are working with us in many ways, such as researching marginalised and hidden histories of the industry or working on the restoration of our much-loved locomotive, Una.

There are many other projects, such as Cyffwrdd (meaning “to touch”), where we’re using a newly developed sensory collection to engage with people living with dementia, and a hospital-based creative wellbeing and memory project.

The legacy of this engagement work will weave community narratives into all aspects of the visitor experience, creating a museum that is not only an international beacon for Wales but also of its community and for its community.

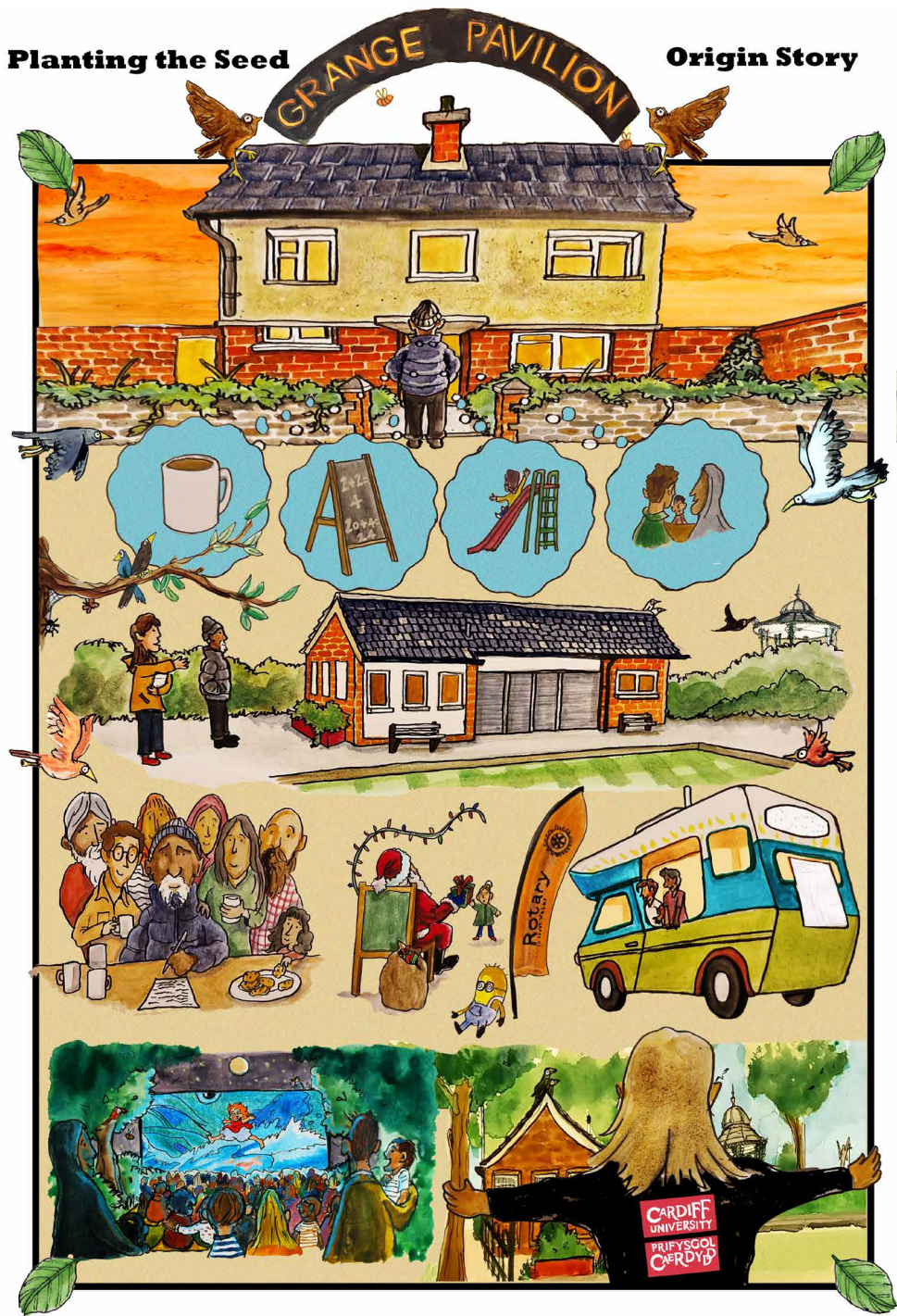
Voices of Grangetown Museum of Cardiff



An engagement project that empowers young people to collect diverse oral histories from their own communities.

Voices of Grangetown began when we were introduced to an inspiring group of young people at Grange Pavilion Youth Forum. They told us what they liked and disliked about museums, and how they thought the Museum of Cardiff could better serve their community. The project empowered the young people to collect stories relevant and meaningful to them. The outcome was a unique collection of community-produced oral histories, exploring one of the most diverse communities within Wales.

We worked closely with the young people to develop a framework to deliver the project, with every decision being led by the Youth Forum. In practice, this meant fortnightly meetings at Grange Pavilion, where we worked in partnership to share skills such as collecting oral history and developing an exhibition. Then the young people developed themes to collect stories that documented the role of their community in their lives. The Youth Forum also chose to commission artists, including illustrators and photographers, to help visualise the oral histories.



An outcome of the project was preserving of the stories, making the collections of the Museum of Cardiff more representative of the communities we serve. Public-facing outcomes included an exhibition curated by the Youth Forum at the museum, and an event highlighting the project held at Grange Pavilion.

The main learning from the project was the importance of co-design, creating space and opportunity for the group to be the key decision-makers, something we have taken forward and embedded into our co-production practice.



We were delighted when one of the participants applied for a front-of-house position. They are now a valued member of the museum team.

Voices of Grangetown was funded by the Association of Independent Museums in support of the Welsh Government's Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan.

Inspiring
engagement,
debate and
reflection

Bridging Cultures *Cyfarthfa Castle Museum and Art Gallery*

A collections-scoping project that embedded anti-racist practice through collaboration.

Bridging Cultures was developed as a continuation of Time for Tea, a project that was supported by the Welsh Government's collections-scoping initiative to identify colonial collections held within Welsh museums.

Following a successful application to the Welsh Government for a capital grant, that project focused on supporting the delivery of the [Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan](#) (ARWAP).

Our aim for Bridging Cultures was to maintain the momentum gained from delivering Time for Tea. The team were keen to see positive ARWAP objectives embedded into Cyfarthfa Castle Museum and Art Gallery's permanent galleries rather than treating it as a standalone project.

To achieve this, we strengthened our partnership with the Indian Heritage Centre UK, formed during the initial Time for Tea project. As part of Bridging Cultures, the artist Daniel Trivedy was commissioned to create a contemporary response to objects from and linked to India within the collection.

Collaboration was central to the project – from the outset, partners were given genuine ownership and curatorial input, ensuring their perspectives shaped both the narrative and display.

Together, we explored the journey of tea from India to Wales, examining the environmental and social impacts of tea cultivation, as well as drawing parallels between tea tokens and the truck shop tokens used within South Wales' industrial communities – this naturally complemented other key exhibitions within Cyfarthfa, but allowed a light to be shone onto some of the realities of empire.

Throughout this process, with the [Indian Heritage Centre](#), we reviewed the collection and identified relevant objects, or in some cases reidentified those that had been mislabelled. Together we were able to highlight objects that should not be displayed due to cultural concerns and considerations such as religious beliefs, and document them as such in the historic record.

Community engagement formed a key part of the project. Working with local schools and community groups, we delivered Indian dance, wellbeing and cultural workshops alongside opportunities for conversation over tea and samosas.



These activities supported the Curriculum for Wales by encouraging learning across the humanities and expressive arts, while promoting ethical citizenship and cultural understanding.

The project resulted in a permanent gallery display that captures the journey from Time for Tea to Bridging Cultures, creating a lasting legacy for visitors and communities. One of the most significant lessons learned was the value of sharing authority and creating space for communities to shape how their stories are represented.

The display now serves as a visible commitment to ongoing decolonisation work, supported by a world map highlighting the global origins of colonial-era collections and holding the museum accountable for continuing this important work.

Perspective(s)
*Arts Council of Wales
and Amgueddfa Cymru*



*Transforming how Wales’s visual
arts and heritage sector represents
cultural and ethnic diversity.*

Perspective(s) was a collaboration between the Arts Council of Wales and Amgueddfa Cymru aimed at transforming how the visual arts and heritage sector represents the cultural and ethnic diversity of society in Wales. The programme supported the Welsh Government’s Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan by developing more inclusive historical narratives and celebrating cultural diversity.

Creative professionals from culturally and ethnically diverse backgrounds collaborated with Amgueddfa Cymru’s seven museums and visual arts organisations. Acting as critical friends, they explored, questioned and challenged existing practices within those organisations. They also engaged with diverse communities to discover untold perspectives and stories, helping to inform their work and bring about progressive change at an organisational and sector level.

With partnership and co-production at its core, the initiative led to a series of public events and eight wider public programmes, 18 co-produced exhibitions, creative interventions and displays reaching approximately 350,000 people across Wales.

Communities were able to access previously marginalised collections, and creative professionals developed new skills, confidence and opportunities.



Additionally, organisational staff developed greater confidence, knowledge and capability to work in more inclusive, equitable and anti-racist ways.

Insights from Perspective(s) are being used to develop a more inclusive, equitable and representative visual arts and heritage sector. The programme has strengthened relationships with diverse communities, created new opportunities for culturally and ethnically diverse artists, and embedded anti-racist principles within our programming, interpretation and decision-making.

More-equitable approaches to commissioning, participation and engagement are shaping future practice, while new knowledge created by communities and creative professionals is being embedded into collections management.

“I have gained experience and confidence in working with museum archives.”

“[The project] enabled me to experiment with form and audience interaction in ways I had not previously explored.”

Project participants

The Women's Peace Petition: Project Centenary Partnership led by Academi Heddwch Cymru

A nationwide project to promote peace-making in communities across Wales and beyond.

Between 2023-24, [Academi Heddwch Cymru](#) (Wales's national peace institute) led and managed a major project partnership entitled Hawlio Heddwch that worked to commemorate the centenary of the [Women's Peace Petition 1923-24](#).

The project partnership, which was supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, was made up of various groups and national organisations such as the Welsh Centre for International Affairs (now known as Cymru Global), Women's Archive Wales, the Smithsonian Institution in the US, Heddwch Nain Mam-gu, the National Library of Wales, Amgueddfa Cymru - Museum Wales, and more.

Between 1923 and 1924, 390,296 women from Wales – around a third of the country's female population at the time – signed an appeal to the women of the United States of America calling for world peace following the horrors of World War I.

The Hawlio Heddwch project worked to remember, celebrate and realise the dreams of the remarkable female peace ambassadors from one hundred years ago, utilising the petition's legacy to promote peace-making today in communities across Wales and internationally.

This included the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, USA, gifting the original petition and oak chest to the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth; engaging in outreach talks, workshops, conferences; transcribing creative responses to the story; and uncovering hidden histories – ancestral, community, national and international.

Participants discovered ancestors and individuals from their own communities who had been involved, and played a part in preserving a generation of Welsh women's stories – some of which are now archived on the [People's Collection Wales website](#). The independent evaluation of the project showed that 91% of the 48 people interviewed had developed their understanding of women's history in Wales.

[Educational resources and tools](#) have been created and are being used in primary and secondary schools to introduce this example of Wales's peace heritage to a new generation of children and young people, and to inspire them to find out more and to take action for peace themselves.

This previously hidden history now brings to life the vision of Welsh women whose legacy aspired to be “the proud heritage of a warless world”.

It has thus inspired the creation of the Rhwydwaith Gwireddu Network, a space for people motivated by the Welsh Women's Peace Petition to come together to work towards a vision of Wales as a Nation of Peace.

Other states that follow the Nation of Peace model, such as Norway, Sweden and Switzerland, see peace as something that evolves as part of a national dialogue, and its hallmark is the manner in which they conduct their relationships, internally and on the international stage.

Becoming a Nation of Peace would have a positive impact on how Wales governs itself as a devolved nation with diverse communities and interests, which would in turn stimulate discussions on peaceful communities and cohesion.

Not only would becoming a Nation of Peace be of intrinsic value, but, above all, promoting and championing peace has a value in its own right.

Watch our film encapsulating the spirit of the project: [Byd Heb Ryfel / A Warless World - YouTube](#)



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