



Assignment feedback form

(to be completed by marker)

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Module Code: AHAN7030
Module title: Exhibiting the Past:
Museums, Collections & Heritage

PORTFOLIO - PROPOSAL - PART 2.1

Student number:

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For completion by marker:

Comments:

Marker's signature:

Date:

Provisional mark:

NB. All marks are provisional until confirmed by the final examination board.

The Location

Cardigan Castle: the historic heart of Cardigan. Although it has an historic house as its main focus, the whole site is the star as it contains remnants of Cardigan's history from the 12th century right up to the present day; from the remains of Lord Rhys' castle, via Georgian Castle Green House and a WW2 pillbox to a 21st century restaurant (Johnson 2015). It is a perfect example of ongoing life, meaning and identity - but as acknowledged aspects of an entire site, rather than merely a collection (Samuel & Alberti 2005:565). And the planned exhibitions will be a natural extension of that idea.

The idea and Rationale

My idea is to create an annual exhibition at Cardigan Castle, the first to be held in Spring, 2020. These exhibitions will be based not on the history of the castle, but on the town of Cardigan, particularly in relation to its people. The history of living memory of current residents, their families and recent ancestors. This increase in flexibility will extend the character of the castle and its function out into the wider community, making it a more social and cultural, as well as historical, centre of the community (Alexander 1996:14-15).

The rationale is various and includes benefits for both the castle and the people of Cardigan. For the castle, it will be engaging with the local community in a new way. For the community, the sharing of their memories together will build and sustain personal connections and, through the exhibition process, some may also become active participants in curating and displaying their own history, within the castle. Both adults and children will be encouraged to get involved in what the castle is doing. As a result of both the development process and the exhibition itself, I also anticipate many more local people will come through the gates as visitors. This event will be an excellent opportunity to encourage local people to think more about their own history, along with their family's history and their links to Cardigan over the years; for them to realise that they are part of a continuum of history, connecting people, town and castle. This ties in neatly with Ambrose and Paine's thoughts around the cultural and social benefits of museums, along with the economic knock-on effects to the wider community (2006:9-10). It also fits with Jenkins' ideas on making it real and authentic, rather than revenue-driven 'heritage for the tourists' (2009:1-5).

My idea encourages the castle to actively create the feeling of connection and ownership beyond just the staff and volunteers, as well as supporting learning and building the confidence of the participants. At the same time, it will also be preparing the wider community, particularly the next generation, to continue to be involved with the castle going forward. The long-term objective is to create a strong relationship between castle and residents, making mutual involvement a normal part of life. While the long-term aim is for that relationship to foster both community-driven exhibitions and events, and to prepare the coming generation to take up the challenge of supporting, volunteering and working for the castle, thus securing its future survival.

How it will work

My plan is that there will be a 'Cardigan Memories' exhibition each year, held at the castle. A theme, or a particular subject, will be selected each autumn - the first by me, but subsequent ones by the wider working group created by this year's project. The idea will then be promoted to local people via articles in the local press and on social media, and by making direct contact with local people, groups (W.I., local history groups, etc.), organisations and schools, in order for them to come up with items, photographs and stories (written and spoken, if possible). The idea being that they will lend them to the Castle for display in the exhibition. I will also ask for volunteers from those groups to participate in the curation of the exhibition and/or any other events we may organise around it. The exhibition detail will be planned and put together over the winter, as items come into the castle, with all the design and display elements being decided upon during that time.

The exhibition will be open to the public in the early spring, for at least a month, to give everyone time to come and see it. I intend, also, that it will be accompanied by related, participatory events in the castle grounds and maybe also in the town, but these ideas will be discussed during the development process, with the groups and organisations who participate before a final plan is made.

The items collected could include personal or family treasures, heirlooms, collections, photographs, artwork, even re-created items that can't be sourced (perhaps as part of a school, or other project) along with accompanying narratives, which could involve audio or video interviews with the people who carry the memories.. Perhaps we could even get written stories and put them together in a folder for people to read through - or maybe even publish an e-book online, if there is enough interest. This is something that will come out of the discussions with the groups and individuals who engage with the project.

It is anticipated that these activities will be managed by a small group of volunteers, working alongside the castle historian, under the auspices of the CEO and trustees. Sourcing volunteers should not be too onerous as there are a number of very keen volunteers, including myself, already involved with the Castle, who will likely be very interested in taking the initiative forward. But any extra volunteers will be drawn from the participating community, and I hope that at least some of them will also want to be directly involved in planning and executing other events around the exhibition, as well as helping with curation - and hopefully showing people around on the main launch day, alongside existing volunteer tour guides.

First exhibition

The first exhibition will focus on Cardigan Hospital. The original building used to be Cardigan Priory. It was rebuilt by John Nash in the 18th century as a private residence and eventually, with add-ons and alterations, became Cardigan Cottage Hospital 100 years ago next year (<http://www.glen->

johnson.co.uk/cardigan-priory-hospital/). Its services have been allowed to run down over a number of years, thanks to the local health board, who promised to build a new hospital to replace it. However, they now intend to build a health centre instead, on a different site, and that is now in progress. The hospital will be closed down once the new build is completed and commissioned. At which point the hospital site will go up for sale - and calls for a multi-storey carpark or a housing estate have already emerged. I don't believe that the hospital should be allowed to just disappear like that, with no acknowledgement, particularly during its centenary year.. There are so many memories of the hospital in the community - from medical and healthcare staff to patients, carers and relatives. So the hospital seems the obvious first choice for an exhibition, and hopefully for other events as well, to celebrate the life of the hospital and the people who made it what it was.

Budget

Fundraising is always a fraught issue for charities, my aim is to do it all without the need for extra funds. There will be no staff costs, as the project will be staffed by volunteers. Existing display cases and boards should hopefully be enough, but in case there may be a few odds and ends to pay for, I will make an application to Cardigan Tesco for the project to be included in their local fundraising initiative, where customers vote for local charities. This normally produces a few hundred pounds for participating charities, which should be more than enough for our needs.

Venue and set-up

The venue for the exhibition would be one room of Castle Green House, the main building on the Castle site. We may extend to two rooms if the volume of items makes it necessary.

For the hospital exhibition, part of the display will include the history of the site and building, the narrative and photographs for which will be provided and curated by the castle historian, Glen Johnson. This part of the exhibition will be displayed on existing boards in the same manner, and with the same corporate colours, as the current interpretive information on the castle's history. It is also anticipated that he will deliver talks on the history of the hospital during the time of the exhibition, something he does regularly to coincide with events and exhibitions, along with training and supporting volunteer guides, something also recommended by Ambrose & Paine (2006:89-90).

However, nothing beyond the historical display and talks can be planned at this stage, because the heart of the idea is community participation, so the aim is for the rest of the display, its curation and interpretation to be worked up during the winter - and it will, of course, depend on what we are able to obtain, along with the views and ideas of the working group.

I am hoping to present the narrative as a timeline, but we will have to work with what we get - which will define the overall theme, whether it is time, people, hospital functions, etc. And, while my aim is for a professional

overview to the curation and interpretation, the more real and human the recent hospital-related history is, the better - even if some of it is presented in crayon... Flow of narrative and approachability of content are key, along with the personal connections. Again, this echoes the ideas of Ambrose and Paine with respect to interpretation and making it interesting and accessible to the public (2006: 78-80). However, as a consequence of this approach, considerations around design, labels, colours, cases and other display-related issues cannot be addressed until the shared items and information are in and the working group decides how to proceed.

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<http://www.glen-johnson.co.uk/cardigan-priory-hospital/>