

Walking In the Footsteps of the past

A Footstep on the path of life moulds itself into the groundwork of history.

It sets itself as a moment in time, a breath, a gasp, a hug, a life.

It is not a singular Footstep,

It is the Footstep of all those that came before,

And all those that will come after.

It is the footstep of a welsh mother, holding her child in a bundle of cloth,

Tightly protected from the cold of the Earth.

It is the Footstep of a Norman man, doing as he is told by his king,

Seizing control from the welsh mother.

It is the Footstep of a medieval monk, quietly walking to mass,

And praying to his lord for the summer to come.

It is the Footstep of a local child, sneaking into the castle,

And stealing a brick for his little sister.

It is the Footstep of an archaeologist, discovering the Footsteps of those before,

And documenting their lives for others.

It is the Footstep of a student, studying the Footsteps of the people before them,

Watching in wonder at the lives they had lived.

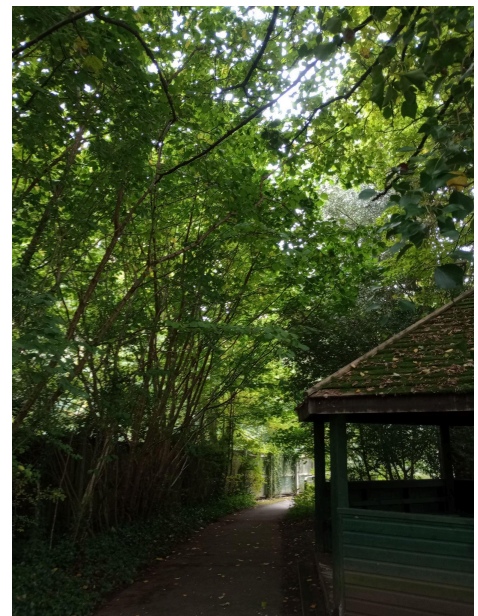
It is a Footstep, but it is also a life.

St. Fagans was an experience that I will never forget. Being able to walk through the footsteps of those that had come before me. During my time at St. Fagans, I could feel the hauntings of the past generations that inhabited the area and the buildings, and it inspired me to write a piece of poetry; something that I believe the past generations would have also written and enjoyed. It is a poem that I believe and that I hope captures the feeling that everyone who walks the pathways of St. Fagans also feel. The human connection that is passed on between the generations and the sense of community that can be gained from experiencing what those that came before us also carried with them.



Being able to walk through the Iron Age Roundhouses and experience the lives of those from the past, see the fires that they would have cooked their food on, see the places where they would have sat and spoken with their families and friends. It was a glimpse into their lives, and I am honoured to have been given the chance to experience it.

The walk through the nature of the land, where the trees and flora had been preserved added to the overall feeling that St. Fagans was a bundle of moments in time that had been cut off from the rest of the world. The trees carried the history and the memories of all the people that had passed through the wood, whether they were from centuries ago or from merely weeks ago; also taking in the past of the land.





A true place to take in the history and the feeling of St. Fagans is the gardens of the grand castle; where you can look out and take in the views of the lakes and islands in one direction and the towering grandeur of the castle in the other. You can sit and imagine the lives of those who had lived there, what their names, ideologies and personalities were. Who their friends were, who they trusted, who they didn't. It is the perfect place to think about the people who created and forged the world that we live in today.

The shops of St. Fagans also hold the memory and history of a time long ago and yet still in recent memory. The pub tells of people meeting with friends, the place for local gossip and information sharing, a place where you discuss the current events of your area. The sweet shop, where the children would have rushed to after school to see what new sweet treat is on offer. The shops of a place tell the stories of the people that lived and thrived in the area.¹



Yet, these buildings were transported from another area, they tell the stories of people who did not live there, they are microcosms of a much wider society that no longer exists and have been displaced from their natural area. It is merely a glimpse into their lives, but is it really the big picture? I don't think it is. It is a small slice of life that is romanticised and fabricated to appeal to the public image that St. Fagans has presented Wales as being.

¹ Museum Wales, *The Vulcan Hotel*, (Photograph). 2024
 <https://museum.wales/stfagans/buildings/the_vulcan_pub/> [accessed 7 October 2024].



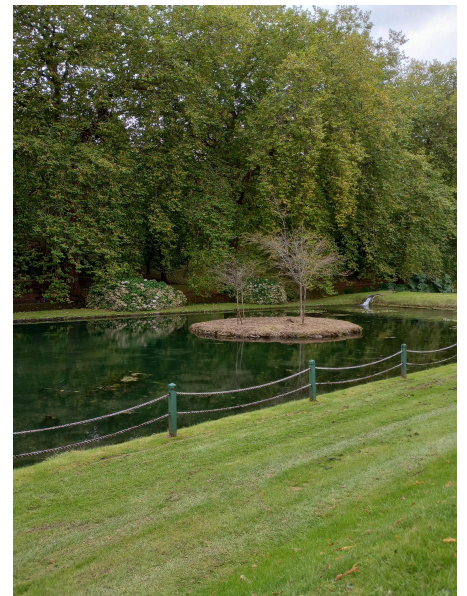
The only place that doesn't have the feeling of past people walking alongside you, is the galleries.

It shows the history of Wales from a very dry place, it presents it through facts instead of feeling. It is separate from the rest of St.

Fagans both physically and emotionally.

While it does present the past in its own way, through the artefacts and information given to you, it feels separate to the more interactive parts of St. Fagans that are also included.

However, while I might be able to feel the people of the past walking along side me while I walk the paths between the castle and the roundhouses. It was still undeniable that the view of Wales that was being presented was a sanitised and mild version of the history of Wales. The people who I walked beside as phantom ghosts of the past, originally walked many miles away. They lived lives in places that I have never been and perhaps never will.



Yet, their spirits and lives have been moved in order for me to walk amongst them, for me to witness the shattered remains of their histories and the malformed memories of them that were shared throughout the generations. The social aspects of the buildings can not be moved, the physical buildings can be, but the feeling of a building can not be truly captured through a sanitised version of a transported place.

² Science Museum Group Journal, *A Museum By The People For The People? A Review Of St Fagans National Museum Of History's New Galleries* (Photograph). 2020
 <<https://journal.sciencemuseum.ac.uk/article/st-fagans-national-museum/#keywords>> [accessed 7 October 2024]