

Based on your visit, consider how the museum promotes public understanding of the archaeological record.

The National Roman Legion Museum (NRLM) is in Caerleon on the site of a former Roman legionary base. This base was known as Isca Augusta¹, and the ruins feature an amphitheatre, which could seat up to 6,000², baths, or *natatio*³, and barracks. Built in the late 1st Century CE it could host a full legion of soldiers⁴. The town name of Caerleon is derived from its history, with the Welsh *caer* meaning ‘fortification,’ and Latin *leon* for ‘legion,’ giving the town the name *Fortress of the Legion*⁵. According to the NRLM, the present amphitheatre is the most complete in Britain, and the barracks the only such remains on view in Europe⁶. The museum itself is separate from the amphitheatre and baths, which are jointly run between Amgueddfa Cymru, a charity hosting seven national museums and a collections centre in Wales⁷, and Cadw, the Welsh Government’s historic environment service⁸. It was established within the ruins of the fortress in 1850 for the Caerleon Antiquarian Association⁹ and incorporated timbers from the then recently scrapped HMS Collingwood, which had been launched in Pembroke in 1841¹⁰. The museum is dedicated to the theme of Roman artefacts from Caerleon and is an early example of such a museum¹¹. What was established in 1850 was demolished in 1981 and rebuilt in steel to give what stands today¹².

What a visitor first sees on the website for the NRLM is an image of a man and young boy in Roman armour, and a button to donate to Amgueddfa Cymru¹³. Under this are booking options, a map, and opening hours. Scrolling down, there are events at the museum, features of the museum, and blogs and articles from across Amgueddfa Cymru. At the top of the website is a taskbar with the options to Plan Your Visit, Highlights, What’s On, and Learn. Plan Your Visit contains ticket booking, opening hours, contact information, accessibility, and information about the site, including a map¹⁴. It also states that to visit the fortress and baths a visitor must visit the Cadw website. One of the sections explains that there are no refreshments available at the museum, but that there is a museum shop. The Highlights section contains brief

¹(Caerleon (Isca Silurum) Roman Fortress - Roman Britain, 2022)

² (Caerleon Roman Amphitheatre | Cadw, 2023)

³ (Caerleon Roman Baths | Cadw, 2023)

⁴ (Caerleon (Isca Silurum) Roman Fortress - Roman Britain, 2022)

⁵ (Guest & Gardner, 2025, pp. 3)

⁶ (Roman Ruins, 2025)

⁷ (About Us, n.d.)

⁸ (What We Do | Cadw, n.d.)

⁹ (Ashlar Doric Portico at the Roman Legionary Museum - Full Report for Listed Buildings, 1951)

¹⁰ (Previous HMS COLLINGWOODs – HMS Collingwood Officers’ Association, 2025)

¹¹ (Ashlar Doric Portico at the Roman Legionary Museum - Full Report for Listed Buildings, 1951)

¹² (Ashlar Doric Portico at the Roman Legionary Museum - Full Report for Listed Buildings, 1951)

¹³ (<https://museum.wales/roman/>)

¹⁴ (<https://museum.wales/roman/visit/>)

information regarding the exhibitions, the site, and of Caerleon¹⁵, each with a link to additional information. What's On serves to display events and exhibitions with dates, times, costs, and suitability for visitors¹⁶. The Learn section contains more information on booking and accessibility, but for large groups¹⁷. It also houses activities and workshops accessible at the museum and online, aimed towards schools. At the very bottom are links for more information on Amgueddfa Cymru, all the museums within the charity, contact information, and corporate information. Within this is a link to collections and research, which redirects to the collections for all of Amgueddfa Cymru and includes objects at all its museums and sites¹⁸.



Figure 1. Screenshot of the Amgueddfa Cymru website links.

To explore how the museum promotes a public understanding of the archaeological record, the Highlights, Learning, and Collections will be explored further. First, the definition of the 'archaeological record' is a debated topic. For the purposes of this report, the three meanings given by Gavin Lucas in *Understanding the Archaeological Record* will be used, and includes: material culture, remains or traces of a past material environment, and something encountered and constructed in the present¹⁹. The first link on the Highlights section of the NRLM website directs the visitor to a page on Exhibitions and Artefacts²⁰, which fall under the archaeological record as per the above definition. It briefly summarises two objects and two collections within the museum and provides a link to a virtual tour. Additionally, it introduces the reconstructed barracks found on site. Notably, there is no link to a specific part of the collection on this page, only the general link to all Amgueddfa Cymru's collections at the very bottom of the webpage. The Roman Ruins link directs to a new page that discusses the surrounding ruins in Caerleon, while the Roman pottery link directs to the current page.

¹⁵ (<https://museum.wales/roman/about/>)

¹⁶ (<https://museum.wales/roman/whatson/>)

¹⁷ (<https://museum.wales/learn/schools/visit-our-museums/roman/>)

¹⁸ (<https://museum.wales/collections/>)

¹⁹ (Lucas, 2012, pp. 9-10)

²⁰ (<https://museum.wales/roman/exhibitions-and-artefacts/>)

The virtual tour begins in the entrance to the museum providing a view into the museum and shop²¹. A visitor can click on circles around the museum to move into a new area for observation. To the left of the entrance is the Usk Gallery viewpoint one, and display cases can be clicked on to receive more information. Within this additional information, each object is clearly numbered and listed individually with a link to the object within the collection's website. Each side of the display case is photographed and observable, a helpful addition as the nature of the virtual tour means a visitor cannot move freely throughout the museum and must move to specific locations. Unfortunately, because of this, not all the interpretation around the museum on the walls is able to be read. There is another viewpoint within the Usk Gallery, and five viewpoints within the Main Gallery. Not all items on display are given information within the virtual tour. Most information points appear on collections within display cases. As a result, interpretation of items without virtual information can be difficult to read and their collection numbers hard to attain, if one wished to view these objects within the collection.

The Learn section of the website features workshops that happen within the museum²². Such workshops include discussions on weapons and armour, and medicine. Using what is on the website, these workshops appear to aim to promote understanding of the Roman period and Roman life in Caerleon through the use of fun activities. The virtual workshops are not for the NRLM specifically and instead focus on all sites across Amgueddfa Cymru and Welsh history. The section also has learning resources available, likely for schools. One such resource is on Roman medicine and contains an interactive section and an eBook²³. The learning section appears to revolve primarily around schools and school age children - one of the featured articles discusses what one can expect from a school trip to the NRLM and information on how one can be booked, and another gives information on accessibility for groups. Additionally, most of the images from around the website include groups of children. There is a link on this page to 360-degree tours of the museum.

²¹ (<https://museum.wales/ext/caerleon-panorama/>)

²² (<https://museum.wales/learn/schools/visit-our-museums/roman/>)

²³ (<https://museum.wales/learn/activity/570/Roman-Medicine/>)



Figure 2. Screenshot of the medicine activity from the NRLM website

This link does not redirect to the virtual tour as the one discussed above, instead to a 360-degree view of the barracks, museum, and gardens²⁴. The museum view does not contain any information points but contains more movement points for the visitor to click on. As a result, it is easier to see the interpretation boards around the museum and the inside of the display cases without needing any further provided images as done within the virtual tour. However, accessing the collection from this point is not as straight forward as with the virtual tour. There are no information points to contain links to the specific objects within the collection and the labels for the objects within the display case contain the name of the objects and a brief description, but no item number one might use to refer to the collection. The garden and barracks views contain information points. While these points may contain images of items from the collection, they do not contain links to the collection like the virtual tour of the museum.

The collections website fits with what might be expected of a national museums' website. A user can search the collections using the search bar, read about different categories of material contained within the collection, or look at featured material²⁵. Searches can be done with keywords, item numbers, or locations. This can be further specified after an initial search is made with additional categories. Each object has a brief description, an item number, information about its find such as the site, grid reference, and date, and measurements.

²⁴ (<https://museum.wales/learning/activity/600/Explore-National-Roman-Museum-in-360/>)

²⁵ (<https://museum.wales/collections/>)

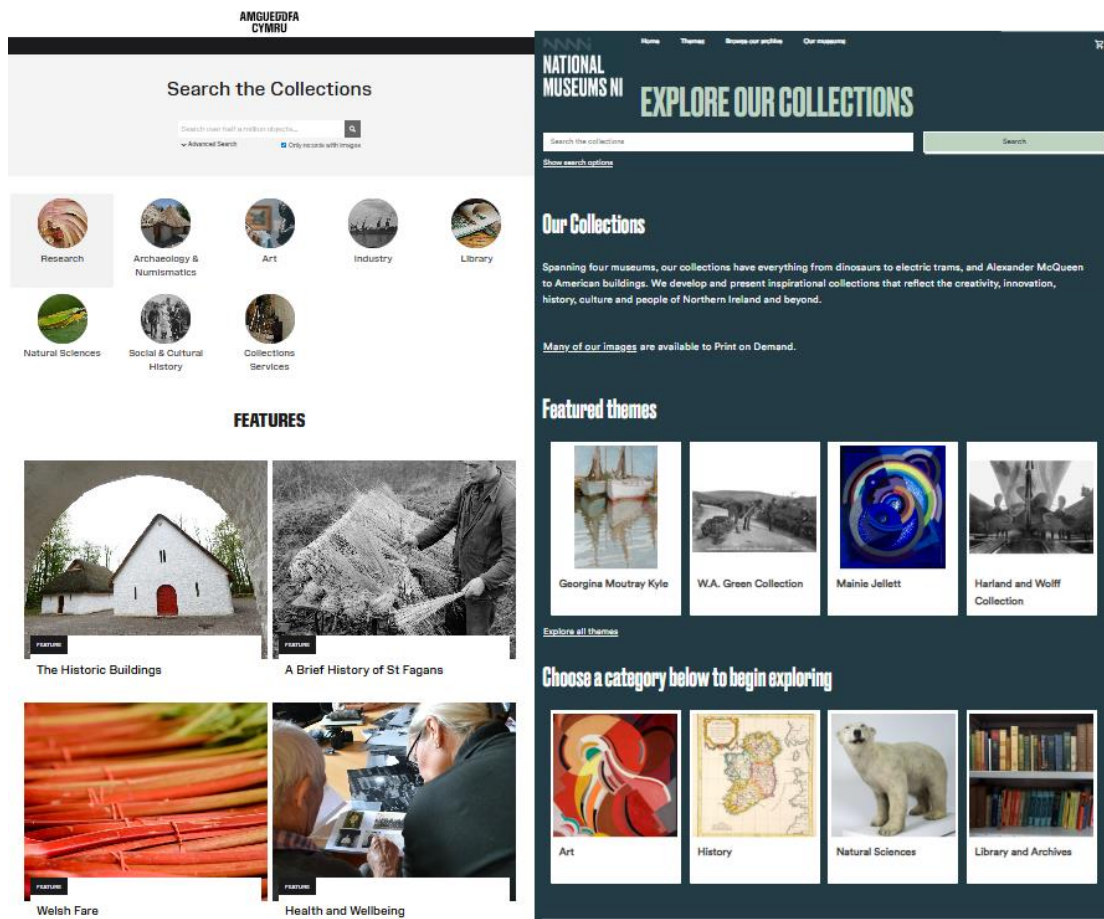


Figure 3, Figure 4. Screenshot of the Amgueddfa Cymru and National Museums NI collections websites.

The understanding that could be gathered about the archaeological record from this museum relies heavily on the first definition of the record, that being material culture²⁶. As with most museums, the objects pulled from the ground are the forefront of the experience within the museum. However, this museum has an additional focus on the context of the objects. The recreation of the barracks is not archaeological but could promote understanding of material and contexts as it provides visitors with a visual and physical understanding of how objects were used. The same goes for the gardens, where the plants within represent those brought by the Romans to Britain, and therefore reflect living in Roman Caerleon. The most obvious connection the museum possesses to the archaeological record is through the collections. Through the virtual tour, the museum encourages the visitor to engage with the collection of the NRLM by providing links to objects within the collection as the visitor encounters them on the tour. A visitor may then decide to engage further with the collection website and explore it for themselves. Overall, this could be improved by including information about objects outside of display cases so that a visitor may find them easier within the

²⁶ (Lucas, 2012, pp. 9)

collection. Additionally, item numbers could be added to physical objects to make finding them within the collection easier.

The museum does not explicitly discuss the archaeological record. Using the search bar on the NRLM website to search for the term brings up events from the Events & Exhibitions section. This shows two separate talks at the National Museum Cardiff regarding a behind-the-scenes on portable antiquities and archaeological illustration²⁷. The talk on archaeological illustration can be considered to fulfil the third definition of the archaeological record, as given by Lucas²⁸, as it discusses illustrations used to document, record, organise, and understand findings²⁹. This, however, cannot be accessed by visitors physically in the museum, and is not accessible online. Despite not explicitly discussing the record, the museum still encourages an indirect understanding of it. The museum itself is easily accessible physically, and objects are displayed in well-lit cases. The virtual tour covers most material within the museum and provides useful information on the material and is easy to find and access on the website. As a result, visitors are encouraged to engage with the material aspect of the archaeological record. The website and by extension Amgueddfa Cymru do provide the ability to gain an understanding of the record part of the archaeological record.

The museum, and the wider charity, could further promote an understanding of the record by including a page on what the record is, give examples of what is contained within it, and, following the children's workshop theme of the NRLM, have a workshop where visitors learn how material within the culture is documented and interpreted. Activities within this could include a guided tour of the museum, drawing objects and creating labels for them, and using objects within collections to come up with exhibitions. This covers the material aspect of the archaeological record, as well as fieldwork through a way the museum already partakes in. The most difficult aspect of the definition to cover is the second, in that it includes an amount of archaeological theory³⁰. Such theories may be better introduced to teenagers and adults who have a preexisting understanding of the record, though they may not realise it. The NRLM specifically may not be the best vehicle for this as most of its learning experience is geared towards children, though Amgueddfa Cymru could host a talk for teenagers and adults with an interest in archaeological theory.

The National Roman Legion Museum in Caerleon has a well thought out and executed website featuring virtual tours, workshops, and museum collections. While not directly stated by the museum, each of these components engages visitors with the archaeological record and therefore furthers their understanding of what may be

²⁷ (<https://museum.wales/search/?q=archaeological+record>)

²⁸ (Lucas, 2012, pp. 10)

²⁹ (<https://museum.wales/cardiff/whatson/12836/Behind-the-Scenes-Archaeological-Illustration-at-National-Museum-Cardiff/>)

³⁰ (Lucas, 2012, pp.10)

contained within it. Though there is room for improvement, the museum has already exceeded what might be expected from a museum of its physical size, and adequately fulfils what is expected from a National Museum.

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Figure 1. National Museum Wales. (n.d). [Screenshot of the *Amgueddfa Cymru website links*]. Retrieved January 16th, 2025. <https://museum.wales/roman/>

Figure 2. National Museum Wales. (n.d). [Screenshot of the *medicine activity from the National Roman Legion Museum website*]. Retrieved January 16th, 2025. <https://museum.wales/learn/activity/570/Roman-Medicine/>

Figure 3. National Museum Wales. (n.d). [Screenshot of the *Amgueddfa Cymru collections website*]. Retrieved January 16th, 2025. <https://museum.wales/collections/>

Figure 4. National Museums Northern Ireland. (2022). [*Screenshot of the National Museums Northern Ireland collections website*]. Retrieved January 16th, 2025.

<https://collections.nationalmuseumsni.org/home>

National Roman Legion Museum links in order of use

<https://museum.wales/roman/>

<https://museum.wales/roman/visit/>

<https://museum.wales/roman/about/>

<https://museum.wales/roman/whatson/>

<https://museum.wales/learn/schools/visit-our-museums/roman/>

<https://museum.wales/collections/>

<https://museum.wales/roman/exhibitions-and-artefacts/>

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<https://museum.wales/learning/activity/600/Explore-National-Roman-Museum-in-360/>

<https://museum.wales/search/?q=archaeological+record>

<https://museum.wales/cardiff/whatson/12836/Behind-the-Scenes-Archaeological-Illustration-at-National-Museum-Cardiff/>