

Using one of the establishments visited how easy is it to gain a sense of what constitutes Welsh culture?

In the village of St Fagans, Cardiff, you will find *St Fagans National History Museum*, an open-air museum which sits on the twenty-acre grounds of a late sixteenth-century Elizabethan castle, donated to National Museums Wales by the Earl of Plymouth in 1946. The Museum contains an assortment of buildings from across the country, and from different periods of history. Thirty-six years prior to its opening at St Fagans, the Museum's concept, dedicated to Welsh Life, was already underway through a 'Bygones' collection of folk material exhibited at the National Museum in Cardiff first in 1913 and then 1926 and the subsequent establishment of a Department of Folk Culture and Industries there in 1936' (Mason, 2004: 20).

Throughout its history, *St Fagans* has had several names from which a lot can be taken about its role in representing Welsh culture. Originally being named the *Welsh Folk Museum*; then later in 1995 the *Museum of Welsh Life* when the Museum began representing Wales's industrial heritage after receiving criticisms for 'its perceived rural, folk bias' (Mason, 2007: 32); and presently, it is *St Fagans National History Museum*. The transition from *Folk* to *Life* into *National* is interesting. As times change, so too do connotations of words, and while the word *Folk* means "people", its present connotations are somewhat derogatory, i.e. "peasant culture", stemming from a line of appreciation historically manifest by the upper-classes' romanticism of the lives of those poorer (Starr: 1999: 301). Its reformed name, therefore, offered a more balanced title of the culture of the Welsh peoples. The final name, on the other-hand, lacks personhood; it is primarily interested in its association as a branch of *NMW* as opposed to what it is about as a museum: Welsh life and culture. And yet, due to its importance to the Welsh and their culture, the name of the Museum in Welsh has not changed from its original: *Amgueddfa Werin Cymru* (see image 1 below).

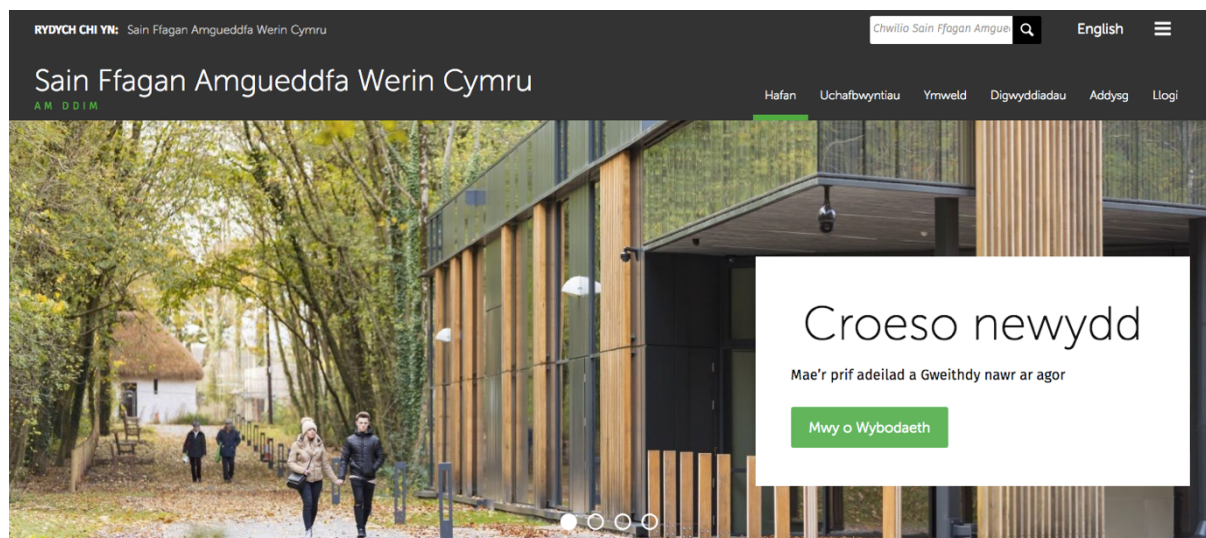


Image 1: Screenshot of St Fagans Welsh website, <https://amgueddfa.cymru/sainffagan/>, retrieved 23/3/2018.

One of the main difficulties facing *St Fagans* is level of authenticity. While the interior of the buildings are styled authentically, furnished as they were during their time of use, when one exits a building, this context is lost. An English example: the *Piermaster's House* in Liverpool is furnished as was in the War; sits in its original location, amongst the historic buildings of the Albert Dock, which, although the dock is used in a modern context, retains its historical exterior. Unlike the *Piermaster's House*, the buildings of *St Fagans* are plucked from their original location and put into the grounds of an Elizabethan castle; further

to this, the buildings of *St Fagans* are not “plucked” in their entirety, but are instead, piece-by-piece to be rebuilt onsite. Preserving the buildings *in situ* would reduce this problem faced by the Museum’s approach to preserving the buildings, of which all, including those still of their original material, are recreations; reconstructions. This added sense of inauthenticity somewhat materialises Welsh culture, that it is something easily replicated; something which can be picked up and transported; that it contains some level of malleability which renders *St Fagans* an injustice to the portrayal of Welsh culture. This is a very dark reflection to have on my experience of *St Fagans*, as it was one of an insightful nature of Welsh culture. Granted, it was an experience which did not follow any path of chronology or geography through the country, as I will below explain.

The lack of context of the buildings can make immersion difficult, creating a fragmented experience of Welsh culture. On entering a building, one can immerse themselves as one would in any other stately home or living history museum. This can be done best in buildings which can be fully explored such as the *Llainfadyn Cottage* (No.14); albeit a small-spaced interior, simply adding to the experience. This is unlike *St Mary’s School* (No.40), in which only a squared off area in the classroom doorway is accessible. This creates a very static space, leaving little impression of *living* in the building, other than a working stove and



Image 2: Photography by Venita Roylance, November 2002, <http://www.jlb2011.co.uk/walespic/archive/050123-3.htm>, retrieved 20/3/2018.



Image 3: Detail of writing on chalkboard, own image.

ticking of a clock; the tables were bare of textbooks or stationary (see image 2). Similarly, the chalkboard, free of anything that one would find on a classroom chalkboard, instead had written on it details about the building (see image 3), which, while useful, holds no more information than what is on the board outside. At sacrifice of creating an animated space, it instead creates a hollow space.

Adding to this, the school’s location within the Museum is very contextually isolated, something found also with some of the other buildings and their location within the Museum. For example, the *Tudor Trader’s House* (No.31), a 16th century building from the South Wales, Pembrokeshire, is placed next to a 19th century *Gorse Mill* (No.30) from the North Wales, Denbighshire: opposite ends of the country with three centuries between their dates of construction. Their location within the Museum gives the impression that these two buildings are historically contextually related (see map 1). Certainly, as there are other buildings in close proximity to one another in the Museum which are historically contextually related, or at least where historical context between such buildings can be inferred (see table 2). A clear example being *Kennixton Farmhouse* (No.6), *Kennixton Farm Buildings* (No.7) and the

Circular Pigsty (No.8), (table 2, grouping 1). The Farmhouse's buildings were donated and reconstructed 50 years after the Farmhouse's construction at *St Fagans* ("Kennixton Farmhouse", *NMW*). The *Circular Pigsty*, however, comes from a different place, but still within the county of Glamorgan, and was originally built 50 years after the final construction works on the Farmhouse and buildings. The context between these three buildings within the museum, is clear for they are situated together, on their own, secluded corner of island 1 (see map 2). This is similar for other buildings in close proximity to one another, and from my recordings and analysis, this is usually centred around their original location, original use, and/or era. Take the below example from table 2, grouping 8:

Grouping Number:	Building numbers:	Location within Museum:	Original location(s):	Use:	Era:	Context:
8	17, 18, 19	island 5, corner 1; entrance to industrial <i>highstreet</i>	Ceredigion; Ceredigion; Carmarthenshire, respectively	semi-luxury shopping	late-19 th -20 th century	original location (19 is on the Ceredigion/Carmarthen border); use; era

The above collection of shops meet on a corner in the Museum, it is the main corner leading to or from what I have labelled the *industrial highstreet*, that is, the section of the Museum which contains the saddlemaker and blacksmith, etc – in which visitors can witness 'the arts and crafts', the 'life and culture of a nation', and key component to founder Iorwerth Peate (Peate, 1964: 5). This area of the museum shows the turn of the 20th century, the shift from the heavy industrial age to one in which people were able to partake in semi-luxurious spending: contrast the *Bakery* (No.17) with that of the *Communal Bread Oven* (No.43) dating two centuries before on the *industrial highstreet*.

Interpretation of the Museum's layout is much left to the visitor. For example, *St Fagans* houses two churches from different time periods: *St Teilo's Church* (No.35), 12th century Medieval church, and *Pen-Rhiw Chapel*, 18th century Unitarian chapel (No.49). Dixey explains, 'neither of these buildings is interpreted to allow insight into the Christian belief and socio-political systems that brought them into being', thus are missing an intrinsic part of their construction, history and existence (Dixey, 2012: 139). Their location within the Museum brings no visible ties, the *Unitarian chapel* being near the entrance, *St Teilo's Chapel* on the east boundary of the Museum. It is left to the visitor to make their own comparisons.

Language and use of language is highly important to culture, something which the Museum interprets and presents well (see Pitchford, 2008: 149; Dicks, 2000, 78-102), with Welsh offered to the public in bilingual signs, maps, and also in books produced the Museum, laid out on tables inside the *Oakdale Workmen's Institute* (No.24). As a method of engagement, a glossary is provided of a page's key words in a box below the Welsh text (see image 4); beneficial also to local visitors were the Welsh language is 'much less likely [to be spoken] in the capital and the rest of the South' compared to North and West Wales (Pitchford, 2008: 149). Thus enters the debate as to which area of Wales is more "Welsh", that of the rural North and West, or that of the more Anglicised, Industrialised South. *St Fagans* attempts to bring these two sides of the same coin together, housing industrial buildings from the West and North as well as rural buildings from the South, from which comparisons can be made (for example, see groupings 1, 9 and 17 in table 2). An important side-note, the Museum does not add Welsh to historic signs where they were otherwise not

originally written in Welsh (eg. inside the *Institute* (No.43) and on the *Tollhouse* (No.16), see image 5). Keeping with authenticity, they are not falsely “creating Welshness”.



Image 4: Book on the table of the Oakdale Workmen's Institute (No.24). Welsh text on the left-hand page, English on the right; glossary of keywords beneath the Welsh text with a quote by someone of the Institute under the English. My own image.

To compare briefly to the *National Museum Wales, Cardiff*, one notes that, while being a national museum, it is rather a universal museum, with international collections of art and much of its natural history belonging largely to the British Isles as a whole. It is what one would expect from a museum, with its neo-classical architecture, an open, high-ceiling atrium, whose stairwells lead off to its many galleries and exhibits. It is little different to any other national or world museum, nationally or internationally (see Watson & Sawyer, 2011: 955). *St Fagans*, however, is about Welsh culture, and Welsh culture alone, yet it is not set in the centre of the capital, but instead a village outside of the city centre. Peter Lord recognised this as degrading or hiding away Welsh heritage, certainly as the original collection had been moved from the central museum to *St Fagans* (Lord, 1992). On the other hand, its location at *St Fagans* could be interpreted as being a more realistic experience of Wales, for the capitals of countries have not the same presence as elsewhere in the country; they lack an integral part of the country's culture, capitals being often more international than national. This is why the location at *St Fagans* can be regarded as being contextually better suited to representing Welsh life, as well as the initial aims of wanting to ‘complete a picture of the Welsh past as is possible, to create a “Wales in miniature”’ (National Museum Wales, 1946: 6).

Construction work was currently underway during my visit (No.25 and No.26) (see image 6), and while this did add to contextual disturbance, it did not ruin the sense of culture at the Museum. However, as museum curator Dr Elizabeth Walker explained, the *Vulcan Hotel* (No.26) faced much protest by locals at being deconstructed and removed from its



Image 5: Sign on the Tollhouse (No.16). My own image.

original site (per. comm., 26/2/2018), thus demonstrating *St Fagans* as a removal of culture. *St Fagans* role, however, is to preserve Welsh culture from neglect and disuse as was happening to the building *in situ*. It does therefore not ruin a sense of culture for it is a creating of culture. It also allows an experience of Welsh life at present by which local construction workers are onsite recreating some of their own heritage – it becomes in itself a literal living history museum. Their contribution, captured in their work of the reconstruction and in the memories created by the visitors; in their photographs and videos, creating their own “Bygones” and no doubt encouraging their return to experience more of the Welsh culture that was currently under construction during their initial visit.



Image 5: Construction work of the Vulcan, image taken through the top window of the Workmen's Institute. My own image.

The collection at *St Fagans* holds array of different buildings, which at first appear to lack context or relation to one another in a direct sense, but at each area within the Museum you get an impression of the types of architecture built by the Welsh peoples from across the country from which you can make comparison from one county to another, such as *Hendre'r-ywydd Uchaf Farmhouse* (No.12) and *Y Garreg Fawr Farmhouse* (No.38), both built in the first half of the 16th century but from different counties; from one century to another, such as the 18th century *Terraced Houses* (No.44) which sit around the corner from the post-War *Pre-fabs* (No.45), both from Glamorgan. It allows the visitor to judge whether these styles and trends were holistic or specific to a particular area, and from this examine culture of these peoples throughout history, all in one setting. The Museum is not attempting to capture one, key time period, but instead Wales throughout history. This is both its drawback and asset as has been discussed, for the main difficulty with the *St Fagans* project is that it is an *ad hoc* arrangement of buildings as and when they arrive, thus arrangement of the buildings into a narrative is a somewhat impossible feat, certainly as a specific narrative would have to be chosen: chronologically; geographically; technological advancements etc. *St Fagans* has no chosen narrative, other than a collection of historic buildings from across Wales, each of which tell their own story of their role in Welsh culture: ‘Wales is a singular noun but a plural experience’ (Smith, 1984: 1).

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Appendices:

Table 1:						
Map number:	Name (Welsh):	Name (English):	Original location before transferal to St Fagans:	Original construction date:	Main centuries of use:	Reconstruction- public opening at <i>St Fagans</i> :
6	Ffermdy Kennixton	Kennixton Farmhouse	Llangynydd, Gower, Glamorgan	1610, 1680 & c.1750	17 th -18 th century	1952-1955
7	Adeiladau Fferm Kennixton	Kennixton Farm Buildings	Llangynydd, Gower, Glamorgan	1610, 1680 & c.1750	17 th -18 th century	2000s
8	Twlc Mochyn	Circular Pigsty	Rhydfelen, Pontypridd, Rhondda Cynon Taff, Glamorgan	c.1800	18 th - early 19 th century	1976-1977
9	Melin Bompren	Water Mill	Cross Inn, New Quay, Ceredigion	1853	19 th century	1970-1977
10 & 11	Ffermdy Llwyn-yr-eos	Llwyn yr eos Farmhouse	Plymouth Estate, St Fagans, Cardiff, Glamorgan	c.1850	19 th -20 th centuries	N/A open to public 1981
12	Ffermdy Hendre'r-ywydd Uchaf	Hendre'r-ywydd Uchaf Farmhouse	Llangynhafel, Clwyd, (Denbighshire)	1508	16 th century	1956-1962
13	Bwlthyn Nantwallter	Nantwallter Cottage	Taliaris, Camarthenshire	c.1770	18 th century	1990-1993
14	Bwlthyn Llainfadyn	Llainfadyn Cottage	Llainfadyn, Rhostryfan, Gwynedd	1762	mid-18 th to 19 th century	1956-1962
15	Beudy cae Adda	Cow Byre	Waunfawr, Caernarfon, Gwynedd	c.18 th or 19 th century	18 th -19 th century	2002-2004
16	Tolldy	Tollhouse	Penparcau, Aberystwyth, Ceredigion	1771	18 th -19 th century	1962-1968

17	Popty Derwen	Derwen Bakery	12 Thespian Street, Aberystwyth, Ceredigion	1900	early-to- mid 20 th century	1987
18	Siop y Teiliwr	Tailor's Workshop	Cross Inn, Ceredigion	1896 & 1920s	late-19 th - mid-20 th century	1988-1992
19	Swyddfa Bost Blaenwaun	Blaenwaun Post Office	Blaen-waun, Whitland, Carmarthenshire	1936	mid-20 th century	1992-1993
20	Talwyn	Cockpit	Hawk & Buckle Inn, Denbigh, Clwyd, (Denbighshire)	late 17 th century	17 th -c.mid- 19 th century	1965-1970
21	Siop Gwalia	Gwalia Stores	Commesial Street, Ogmore Vale, Glamorgan	1880	19 th -20 th century	1988
22	Pisty	Historical urinal	Llanwrtyd Wells, Powys (Radnorshire)	late 19 th century	19 th -20 th century	1978-2010
23	Cofeb Ryfel Trecelyn	Newbridge War Memorial	Caetwmpyn Park, Newbirdge, Monmouthshire	1936	20 th -21 st century	1995-1996
24	Sefydliad y Gweithwyr Oakdale	Oakdale Workman's Institute	Oakdale, Gwent, Monmouthshire	1916	20 th century	1989-1995
25	Swyddfa Heddlu Ffynnon Taf	Taff's Well Police Station	Taff's Well, Cardiff, Glamorgan	1894	late-19 th - 20 th century	2011-
26	Tafarn y Vulcan	Vulcan Public House	Adamsdown, Cardiff, Glamorgan	1853	19 th -20 th century	2012-
27	Odyn	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
28	Melin Lif	Saw Mill	Ty'n Rhos, Llanddewi Brefi, Ceredigion	1868/1892	19 th -20 th century	1987-1997
29	Tanerdy	Tannery	Rhayder, Powys, (Radnorshire)	Late 18 th century	18 th -19 th century	1962-1968

30	Melin Eithin	Grose Mill	Deheufryn, Dolwen, Clwyd, (Denbighshire)	c.1845	19 th -mid- 20 th century	1979-1983
31	Tŷ Masnachwr Tuduraidd	Tudor Trader's House	Quay Street, Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire	16 th century	16 th century	1983-2010
32	N/A					
33	Bryn Eryr – Tai Crwn Ies yr Haearn	Bryn Eryr Iron Age Roundhouse	Based on archaeological excavation in Bryn Eryr, Anglesey	c.2,000 years ago	N/A	Open to public 2016
34	Llys Llwelyn – ar y gweill	Llys Llwelyn Medieval Hall	Based on archaeological excavation in Rhosyr, Anglesey	c.1200	N/A	2014-*
35	Eglwys Sant Teilo	St Teilo's Chapel	Llanielo, Tal-y-bont, Glamorgan	12 th century	12 th – 19 th century	1984/5-2007
36	Ffermdy Y Garreg Fawr	Y Garreg Fawr Farmhouse	Waunfawr, Gwynedd (Caernarfonshire)	1544	16 th -17 th century	1976-1982
37	N/A					
38	Sgubor Handre-wen	Hendre-wen Barn	Hendre Wen, Llanrwst, Gwynedd (Caernarfonshire)	c.1600	17 th -19 th + century	1972/1977- 1982
39	Gweithdy'r Clocswir	Clog Maker's Workshop	Ysgeifiog, Carnhedryn, Pembrokeshire	c.1910**	20 th century	c.2011
40	Ysgol Maestir	Maestir School	Maestir, Lampeter, Ceredigion	1880	late-19 th - early-20 th century	1981-1984
41	Gweithdy'r Cyfrwywr	Saddle Maker's Workshop	Penpitch, San Cler, Carmarthenshire	1926	20 th century	1985-1986
42	Efail Llawr-y-glyn	Llawr-y-glyn Smithy	Llawr-y-glyn, Trefiglwyys, Powys (Montgomeryshire)	late-18 th century	late-18 th - mid-20 th century	1970-1972

43	Popty Georgetown	Georgetown Communal Bread Oven	Poplar Place, Georgetown, Merthyr-Tydfil, Glamorgan	c.1800	19 th century	1987
44	Tai Teras Rhyd-y-car	Rhyd-y-car Terrace Houses	Merthyr-Tydfil, Glamorgan	1795	18 th -20 th century	1982/1983.
45	Prefab	Pre-fab	Llandinam Crescent, Gabalfa, Cardiff, Glamorgan	1947	mid-20 th century	1998-2001
46	Ffermdy Cilewent	Cilewent Farmhouse	Claerwen Vallet, Powys (Radnorshire)	1470 & 1734	15 th -18 th /20 th century	1959
47	Tŷ Gwair Maentwrog	Maentwrog Hayshed	Maentwrog, Gwynedd (Merionethshire)	c.1870	19 th -20 th century	1976-1977
48	Ffermdy Abernodwydd	Abernodwydd Farmhouse	Llangadfan, Powys (Montgomeryshire)	1678 & 1708	17 th -18 th century	1951
49	Capel Pen-rhiw	Pen-rhiw Chapel	Dre-fach Felindre, Carmarthenshire	1777	18 th -19 th century	1953-1956
50	Sgubor Stryd Lydan	Stryd Lydan Barn	Llanerch Banna, Penley, Clwyd (Flintshire)	c.1550	16 th -17 th + century	1950-1951
51	Melin Wlân Esgair Moel	Esgair Moel Woollen Mill	Llanwrtyd Wells, Powys (Breconshire)	1760	18 th -20 th century	1949-1952
52	N/A					
53	Hafdy	Summer House	St Fagans Castle, St Fagans, Cardiff	c.1880	19 th -20 th century	1987-1988
54	Colomendy	Dovecote	St Fagans Castle, St Fagans, Cardiff	18 th century	18 th -20 th century	N/A open to public 1946

All information from the *St Fagans* website unless otherwise stated: <https://museum.wales/stfagans/>, accessed: 20-25/3/2018.

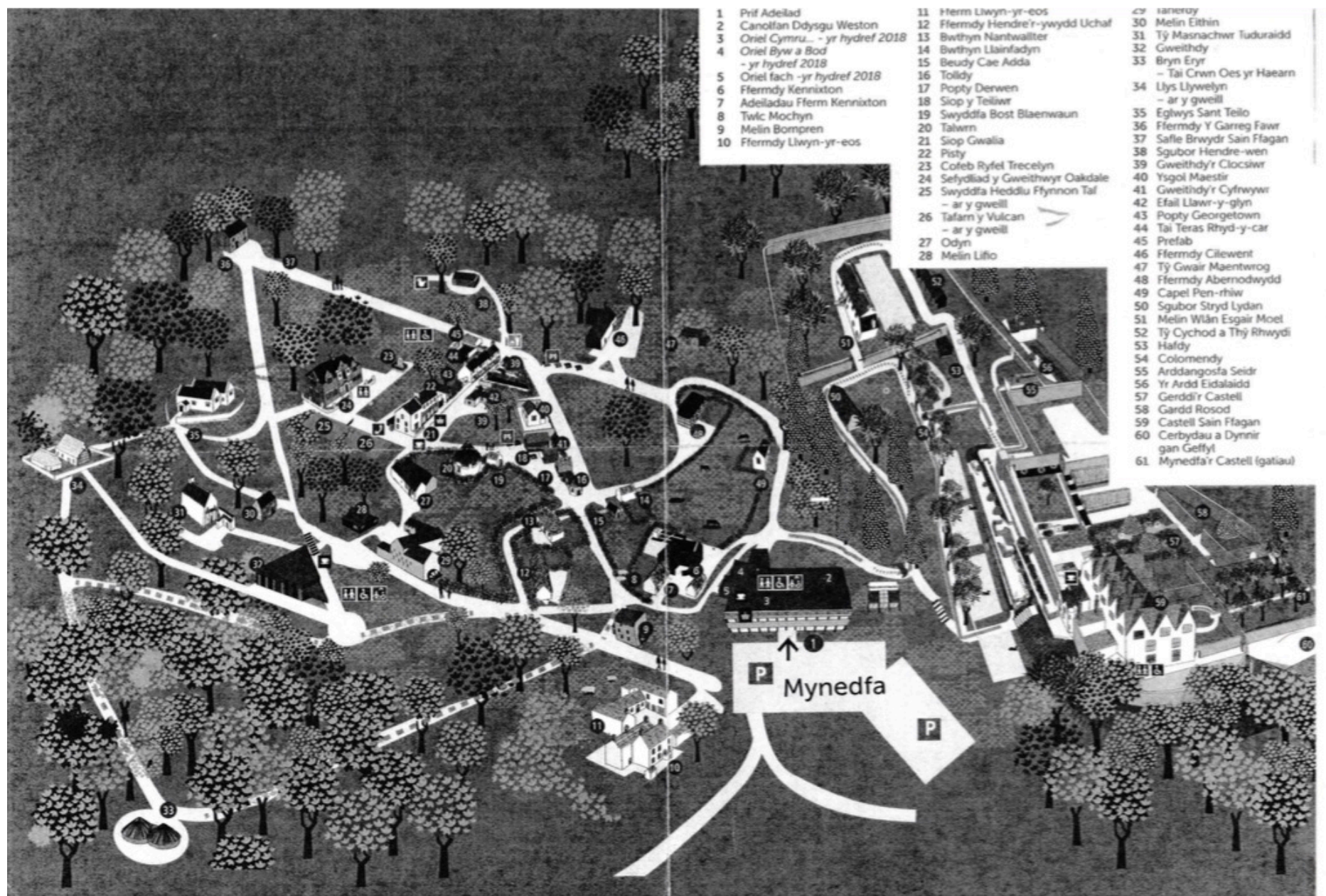
* “Llys Rhosyr medieval court to be rebuilt at St Fagans”, 25th, Sep, 2014, *BBC News*: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-29340014>, accessed: 21/3/2018.

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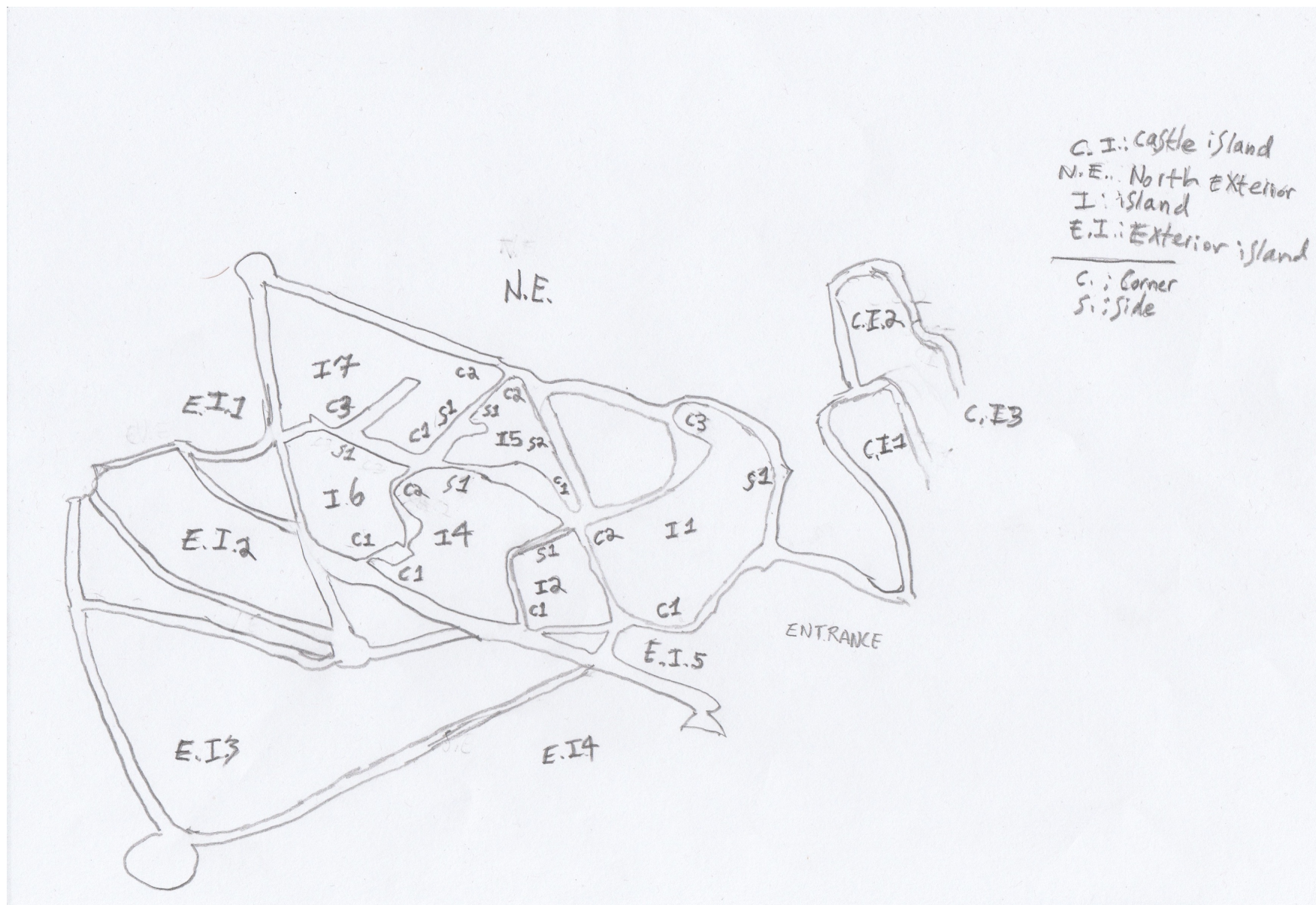
Table 2:						
	Contextual grouping (based on buildings within close proximity to one another: see maps one and two):					
Grouping Number:	Building numbers:	Location within Museum:	Original location(s):	Use:	Era:	Context:
1	6, 7, 8	near entrance; island 1, corner 1	Glamorgan	agricultural living	17 th -19 th century	original location; use; era
2	10, 11	near entrance/carpark; exterior island 4	Glamorgan, specifically the Plymouth Estate, St Fagans	agricultural living	19 th -20 th century	original location; use; era
3	12, 13	island 2, corner 1; side 1	Denbighshire and Carmarthenshire, respectively	agricultural living	16 th and 18 th century, respectively	use
4	14, 15	a crossway; island 1, corner 2	Gwynedd	agricultural living	18-19 th century	original location; use; era
5						All are farmhouses/cottages of similar nature
6	16	island 5, corner1	Ceredigion	agricultural/trade/industry	18 th -19 th century	Connecting feature between the rural and trade/industry areas of the museum
7	40	island 5, side 2	Ceredigion	education	late-19 th - early-20 th century	Same original location as above

8	17, 18, 19	island 5, corner 1; entrance to industrial <i>highstreet</i>	Ceredigion; Ceredigion; Carmarthenshire, respectively	semi-luxury shopping	late-19 th - 20 th century	original location (19 is on the Ceredigion/Carmarthen border); use; era
9	41, 39, 42	island 5, side 1	Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire and Montgomeryshire, respectively	shopping areas; work and industry	19 th -20 th century	use; era
10	21, 22, 43, 44	island 7, corner 1; side 1	Glamorgan except 22: Radnorshire	shopping; sub- urban/industrial living	18 th -20 th century	original location; use; era can tell the story of those living in the terraced house who have the shops but also had to cook bread communally
11	44, 45	island 7, corner 2	Glamorgan	housing pre- and post-war; comparison	18 th -20 th ; mid-20 th century, respectively	original location; use
12	23, 24	island 7, corner 3	Monmouthshire	urban living, post-War	20 th century	original location; use; era
13	25, 26	island 6, side 1	Glamorgan	urban living, pre-to-post- War	19 th -20 th century	original location; use; era
14	36, 38	crossway of exterior island 1 and north exterior	Caernarfonshire;	agricultural living	constructed 1544 and c.1600, respectively	original location; use
15	34, 35	exterior island 1	Anglesey; Glamorgan, respectively	congregation/gathering; (worship (35))	12 th century; 12 th -19 th century, respectively	partially use; beginning era.

16	33, 34	exterior island 3; exterior island 1	Anglesey	gathering; living; settlement – experimental archaeology	c.2,000 years ago; c.1200 AD, respectively	(modern) use: experimental archaeology.
17	(27), 28, 29, 30	island six, corner 1; island 4, corner 1; corner 2; exterior island 2	Ceredigion; Radnorshire; Denbighshire; respectively	industry	18 th -20 th century	use; era
18	30, 31	exterior island 2	Denbighshire; Pembrokeshire, respectively	trade and living	16 th century; 19 th -20 th century	N/A
19	20	island 4, side 1	Denbighshire	entertainment	17 th -19 th century	N/A
20	9, 29	exterior island five; island 4, corner 1	Ceredigion; Radnorshire, respectively	industry	19 th century	use; use of a water mill; era
21	46, 48	island 1, corner 3; north exterior	Radnorshire; Montgomeryshire, respectively	agricultural living	15 th -18 th and 17 th -18 th centuries, respectively	use
22	49	island 1, side 1	Carmarthenshire	congregation/gathering and worship	18 th -19 th century	N/A
23	50	castle exterior 1	Flintshire	agricultural living	16 th -17 th + century	N/A
24	51	castle exterior 2	Breconshire	industry	18 th -20 th century	N/A
25	53, 54	castle exterior 3	Glamorgan, specifically the Plymouth Estate, St Fagans	seasonal housing; agriculture	18 th -20 th century	location; era



Map 1: Map provided by NMW on my visit to St Fagans.



Map 2: whereby: C.I. is Castle Island; N.E. is North Exterior; I is Island; E.I. is Exterior Island; C. is Corner; S is Side. My own work.