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Course: Photography in the Arts

Module: Experimental Strategies (M5X01707)

Assignment: Site Specific

Lecturer: Sian Addicott, Ryan Moule, and Paul Duerinckx

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Rationale

The castle is an architectural feature that has stood for thousands of years within Swansea. It was originally built as a fortress of great tactical importance initially constructed of wood but later built of stone and conveys remnants of Swansea middle age past. Throughout its existence the castle has been through numerous wars and has developed with the city's progress into modern culture. In doing so it has become intrinsic to Swansea's society, within time the public have embraced the castle as integral to Swansea's historical cultural identity. Although, it has had had a recent transformation into public space, it is deconstructing day by day, and has left a piece of medieval history in the shadows.

The castle was significant due to being one of the surviving architectural buildings remaining from the Three-Night Blitz in 1941 which destroyed many aspects of Swansea. The Group show focusing on the significance of the Blitz looking at images from the archives and incorporating liquid light, a form of processing photographic imagery using liquid chemicals within the darkroom. Taking portraits of those that were affected by the Blitz and making a collage of the individuals who were lost during the event, we are also incorporating steel into the work taking reference from its industrial heritage. We are shining a light onto one aspect of Swansea's history and creating something significant and meaningful to the public.

A Summary of the Research.

Swansea Castle stands on a clifftop, where the river Tawe originally flowed, the position was strategic which commanded the lowest crossing of the river, the main east-west route in south Wales. Swansea Castle's history was a turbulent one: it has suffered during many Welsh battles and conquered by royalty throughout the centuries.

It was established by Henry de Beaumont, the first Earl of Warwick, as the seat of administration of the marcher lordship of Gower, which Henry I bestowed upon him in about 1106. This first castle was assembled out of timber, and nothing remained upon the grounds. After being attacked by the Welsh in 1217, the castle was rebuilt in stone for a structural purpose. To the south-west of this small castle, known as the 'Old Castle', lives a large rectangular outer bailey which was later walled within the stone in the 13th century.

During the late 14th century, Edward I deprived Wales of any military importance. At this time the castle developed as an administrative centre, however, it is uncertain of whether the possession of the castle was awarded to Owain Glyndwr within the 15th century. The castle's final activities within the 18th and 19th century included being used as a newspaper office, a market, a drill hall, a town hall, and a prison.

Information about the 'Site'

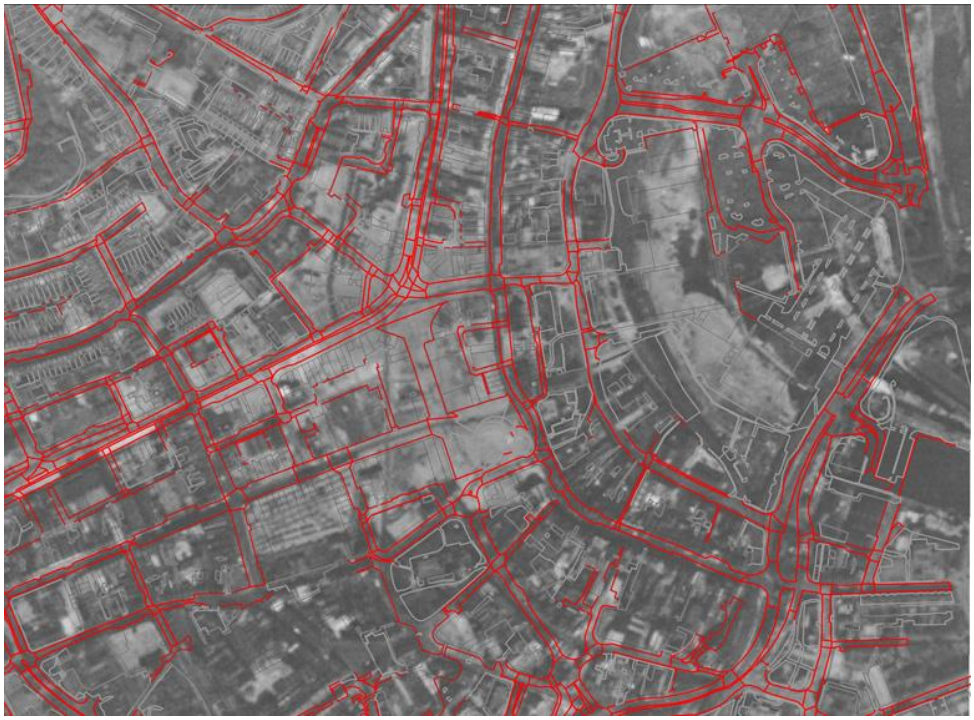


Figure 1: The Aerial Photograph

The Aerial Photograph (Fig. 1) shows the areas which were destroyed during the Three Nights' Blitz of February 1941. The red lines represent the modern streets, whereas the grey lines symbolize the contemporary buildings. The destruction of Swansea resulted in the loss of several historical architectural features; the post-war rebuilding was the creation of new street patterns which add to the challenging aspect of medieval Swansea.

Figure 2: Swansea Castle, 1930

Figure 3: Photograph of Castle Lane

There is no photographer for photograph of Castle Lane (Fig. 3) which depicts Castle Lane and Swansea Castle in 1904, however, the image is owned by Swansea Museum. This image is a representation of how history has influenced society, as you can see within the image, to the left of the castle a clock sits on the tower, and as you can see from the image below, the South tower is left empty.

Figure 4: Castle Tower: Present-Day.

Referring to figure 3, I wanted to show how history has played a significant aspect within Swansea's society, incorporating personal research into Swansea Museum's online archives I

discovered images before the devastating effects of the Three Night Blitz, a time of reflection and reminiscing the past with the future. I viewed these photographs as reminders, sources of contemporary space as time moves forward history is fading into shadows.

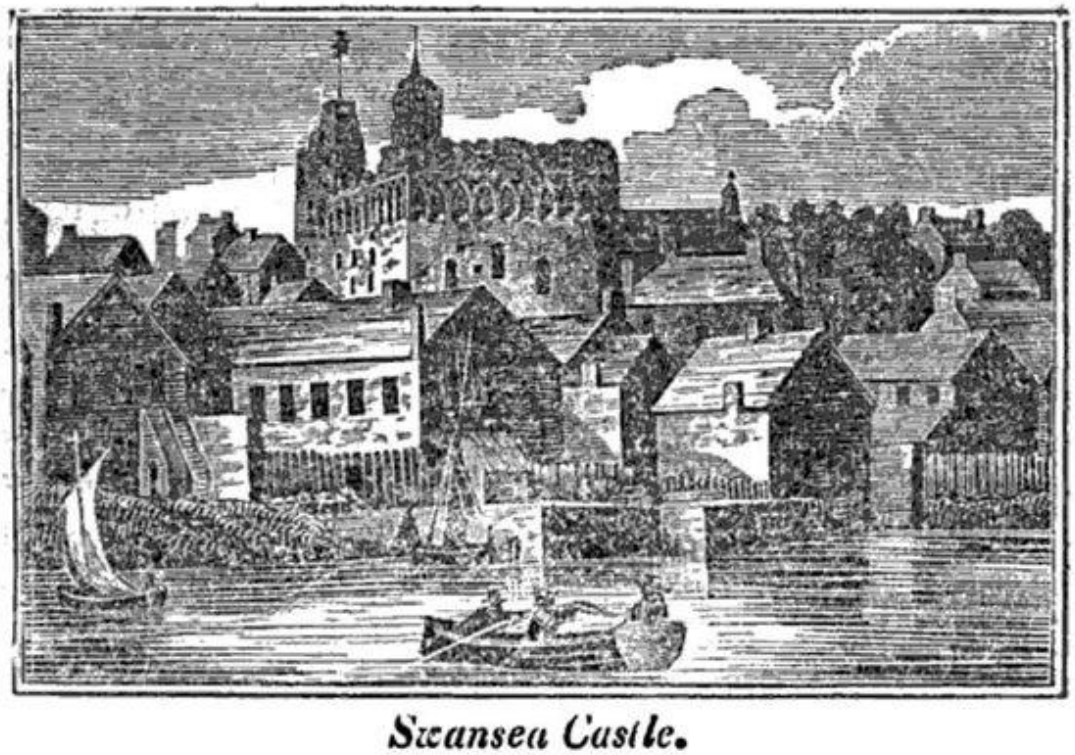


Figure 5: An illustration of Swansea Castle from the New Swansea Guide.

Artist research that has informed your body of work…

As a response to developing a concept, I decided to gather collective research on artists who have used traditional methods of photographic printing to reveal aesethics textures discovered when using unfamiliar chemicals. I referred to the physical effect of The Blitz, and how Thurston Howes, a documentary artist has inspired my individual process throughout my artist research in relation to shrapnel. The structure of his liquid light work has inspired me to use the shrapnel images I developed at the start of this project, reproducing the purpose by increasing the size and focusing the context onto memory and the impact of destruction.

Figure 6: Liquid Light – Emulsion Painting.

When it came to the aspect of artist research, we came together as a group to research various artists/photographers who have incorporated elements of history, time, and text. We

found that the research was limited within these keywords. An artist Christian Boltanski *'The Reserve of Dead Swiss'* (1990) has created an installation of forty-two photographic portraits, men, women and children of varying ages, each is framed and placed on a shelf against a wall. Electric lamps are placed bent down to direct the light onto their facial features, this piece empowers the aspect of memory and unmasks an emotional depth within his body of work. In relation to our site-specific exhibition, we consider his concept to have significant relation in the use of text and presenting within a preferred space and for the audience to connect with on a psychological level.

Figure 7: The Reserve of Dead Swiss.

Techniques developed to produce your body of work…

To secure the site of the castle I spoke to Cadw Welsh Heritage, a Welsh Government organisation for tourism and culture providing care and protection for all historic buildings across Wales. As a group we met with Ryan Evans, the Coordinator for Tourism, Heritage, and Sports. My next step was to contact Swansea City Council to secure permission for the castle grounds as Cadw are the caretakers of the Castle, and Swansea City Council control the grounds.

From: Sophie Pemberton <smai0451@gmail.com>
Sent: 13 October 2021 14:17
To: Sales <Sales@swansea.gov.uk>
Subject: Swansea Castle.

CAUTION: External email - Do not click links/open attachments unless you recognise the sender and know the content is safe

Hi Karen,

I was wondering if you could help me?

I am a second year student at Swansea College of Arts, and we are doing a group project where we are to create an exhibition.

We would like to host it at Swansea Castle, however, I have contacted CADW, and I was told that they take care of the castle itself, but Swansea Council is who I should speak to about the grounds around the castle.

The exhibition is based around the history of Swansea, more specifically the Three Night's Blitz, and we were hoping to use projection to reflect onto the castle itself, and to then have our photographs displayed with extras for the historical purpose.

We have little time to do this as the exhibition is to be during the week of the 15th - 19th of November this year, and it has to run for 24 hours.

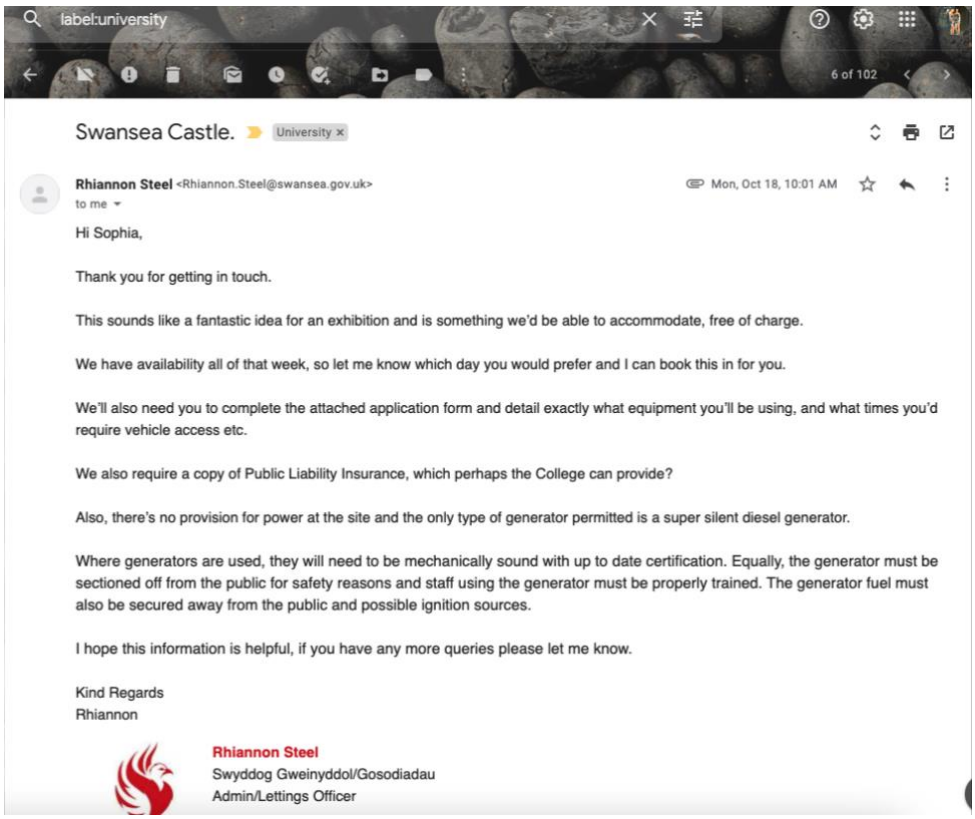
I was wondering if it is possible to meet up to talk about this in more detail? Or speak on the phone? Mobile is 07723609216

Yours Sincerely,

Sophie-Mai Pemberton

Figure 8: Screenshot of E-mail sent to Sales Department of Swansea City Council.

Regarding the castle, we had permission to use the gates and bars, however, we could not attach anything to the interior structure of the building as it would cause damage to its current state. After continuous phone calls to Swansea City Council's ongoing departments, I eventually received the correct information and contacted Rhiannon Steel, the Admin and Letting Officer for Swansea City Council. Rhiannon was more than happy to hear our concepts and ideas for bringing a day of historical reflection to the public of Swansea and was also delighted to allow us access to the grounds. After the meeting arranged with Rhiannon to see the site and discuss the particulars of the installation and our intentions of what the public would see, she was more than happy to contact the department to discuss the control of the lights used within the castle grounds.



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Swansea Castle. University ×

Rhiannon Steel <Rhiannon.Steel@swansea.gov.uk> Mon, Oct 18, 10:01 AM
to me

Hi Sophia,

Thank you for getting in touch.

This sounds like a fantastic idea for an exhibition and is something we'd be able to accommodate, free of charge.

We have availability all of that week, so let me know which day you would prefer and I can book this in for you.

We'll also need you to complete the attached application form and detail exactly what equipment you'll be using, and what times you'd require vehicle access etc.

We also require a copy of Public Liability Insurance, which perhaps the College can provide?

Also, there's no provision for power at the site and the only type of generator permitted is a super silent diesel generator.

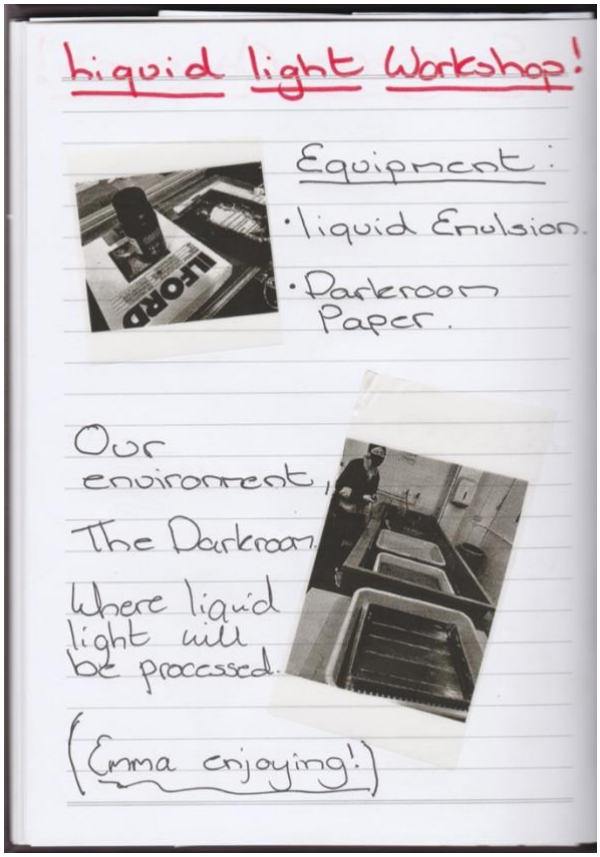
Where generators are used, they will need to be mechanically sound with up to date certification. Equally, the generator must be sectioned off from the public for safety reasons and staff using the generator must be properly trained. The generator fuel must also be secured away from the public and possible ignition sources.

I hope this information is helpful, if you have any more queries please let me know.

Kind Regards
Rhiannon

Rhiannon Steel
Swyddog Gweinyddol/Gosodiadau
Admin/Lettings Officer

Figure 9: Screenshot of Response from Rhiannon Steel from Swansea City Council.



Following the communication with the Council regarding the lighting, as individuals we looked at both analogue and digital formats of photography before coming together collaboratively to use the traditional methods of printing photographs. As we progressed through this group work, and with various tutorials we came together to discuss the possibility of working with Liquid Light Emulsion, a technique in which a solid mixture when heated in warm water becomes liquid, this is then taken into the darkroom to be coated, and once dried exposed with your chosen imagery.

The process of printing our images onto the coated liquid light is a familiar development, acetate sheets, a plastic material known as cellulose is used for reflecting photographs onto photographic paper. Working with new processing like liquid light has certainly had challenges such as the experimentation with watercolour plain paper and adding texture by pressing it against the castle walls. Intriguingly we were concerned about the dirt from the

walls effecting the chemicals of the liquid light, however, after testing out one sheet, we discovered that it does not cause any harm to the process.

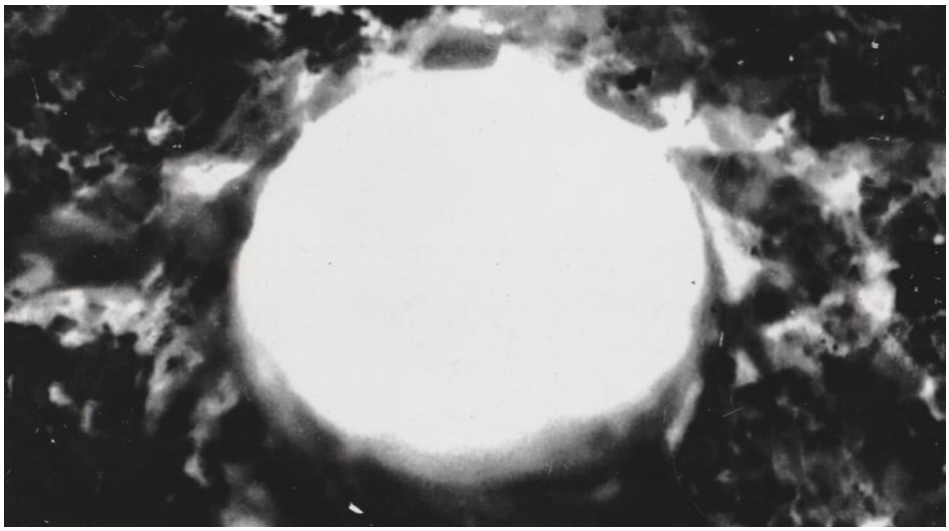


Figure 10: Shrapnel – Old Police Station.

Once we were satisfied with our work within liquid light, we then drew our attention onto the steel. We decided to speak to one of our technicians within the department and were told to see Daniel Butler an expert within Surface Textiles, Metal and Ceramics, who would be able to provide us the help of engraving onto our choice of steel. As a group we did not consider the detail within the outline, such as the style, typography, and choice of text, as guidance for text we used reference from '*The Swansea Wartime Diary of Laurie Latchford, 1940-41'* (2010), provided at Swansea Library. We were drawn to this text due to it being the only kept diary from that period which added a personal aesthetic connection to the exhibition.

"If you have tears, prepare to shed them now."

(The Swansea Wartime Diary of Laurie Latchford, 1940-41. 2010. p. 247)

"They will not be back in my lifetime. For me Swansea is dead."

(The Swansea Wartime Diary of Laurie Latchford, 1940-41. 2010. p. 265)

After our visit, a group member who was familiar with Adobe Illustrator, used this software to contrast the text in the format needed, to move forward with the development and despite the lack of time we were determined to see the project through. As a group, we were very happy with the results of the metal steel, the text was clear and precise, the font was exactly as formatted, and the impact of fingerprints left on the steel added that extra aesthetic context to the work.

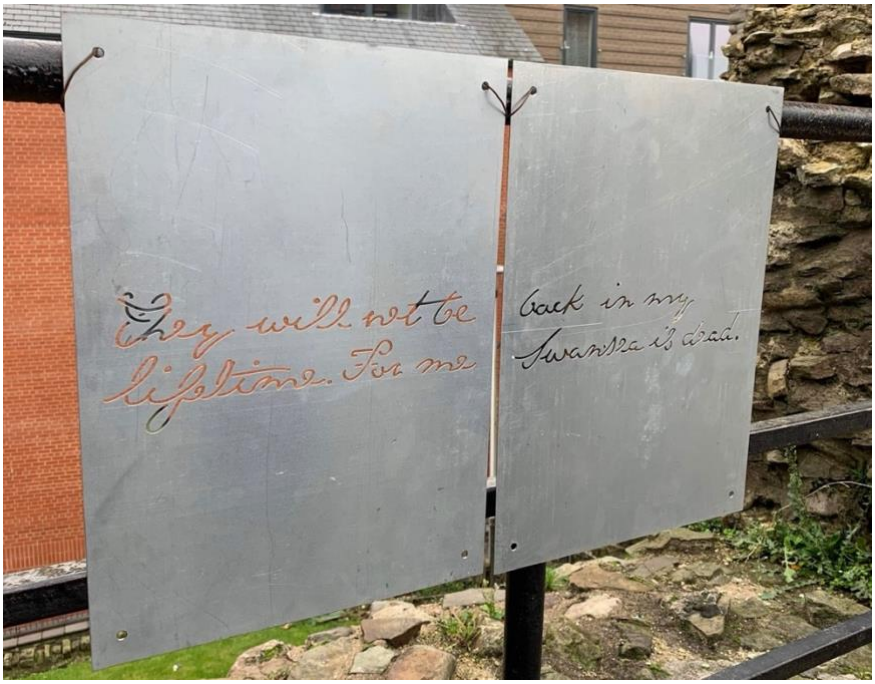


Figure 11: Dry Run: Steel.

With only just a week before the exhibition, as a group we were concerned with our chosen theme for this event. Our original title was *'Deconstructing Time'*, however, having time to think of our intent for the work we are producing, we came to a conclusion that the current title did not fit into our group criteria. After extensive research, we discovered that 230 lives were lost during the tragic events of the Three Nights' Blitz, it was then we decided to contextualise our new theme with a symbolic context.

At this time, we thought of having the castle lights turn on at 2:30pm, although when they turn on, they will appear with a red reflection onto the castle, creating that impact of importance and emotional beauty and the concept of how memory is established within the art of photography, as stated within David Bate's, *The Memory of Photography* (2010), he refers to Roland Barthes's *Camera Lucida* (1980):

"This point is important because Barthes's concept of the punctum is related to Proust: Barthes's punctum is like Proust's 'involuntary memory'. Whereas the studium is akin to voluntary memory (public or cultural associations can be consciously recalled), the punctum is an involuntary response to a photograph."

(Bates, D (2010). *The Memory of Photography.* p.254)

As a group we then made an executive decision to use an old red bed sheet to drape over the castle gates, as a reference to the work of Jeanne Claude and Christo's, *Wrapped Reichstag, Berlin* (1971), in the summer of 1995 a two week project commenced on the historical building of Berlin's Reichstag, the building was wrapped using 100,00 square metres of fabric

and an aluminium surface, this was assisted by German manufacturers who produced polypropylene material for the weights and bright blue ropes to keep everything in place. After extensive research into this piece of artistry, it is then we decided to change the theme to *'230'*.

Figure 12: Wrapped Reichstag, Berlin 1971-95.

Through the course of two days, testing the installation. As a group we came together to discuss visuals of display, one of our group members drew a sketch of the castle grounds for us to visualise possibilities. We had great anxiety about the steel and what we were going to

use to secure it to the castle gates. Despite the lack of accessibility, we took it upon ourselves to use the resource we have available at the university.

Daniel Butler, who processed the steel, gave us an insightful tip on wire, and how we can incorporate it within our exhibition, the wire given to us is made from copper, this was significant of the castle's history as it was once used as a copper processing works. As a group we were relieved with the knowledge and advice given to us, and how time consuming it was going to be, having to gather various materials to find the one with both aspects.

During my spare time I personally took it upon myself to print off multiple posters made by one of our group members, around my local village, and the popular local shopping centres, arcades, and food stalls across Swansea city centre.

Figure 13: 230 Swansea Castle Exhibition Poster.

We also had an interesting encounter with a food vendor, Dinky Donuts Swansea, one of the group members asked politely if we could advertise our exhibition poster within his stall, he was more than happy to be apart of this event and was curious to know the reason behind this exhibition. I've discovered that being part of a group will often indicate conversations with those who show a particular interest in the meaning and organisation, and I must say that has been challenging as I do not communicate as effectively. As we left, he parted us with a gift.

Figure 14: Dinky Donuts Advertisement.

As it came to the outcome of the installation, we were hesitant about the environment of the site, when I first contacted Swansea Council to arrange access, I spoke about the cleansing of

the grounds. I was reassured that it would be taken care of as the Department for Cleansing come at 5am every morning to clean up any unwanted rubbish.

As the weeks went by, my concern grew stronger as the deadline was approaching and constant phone calls were made to resolve the matter, our visit to the castle was none other than a shock as there was a traffic sign, broke glass bottle, coat hangers spread across the grounds, litter thrown within the gates, and beer cans/bottles placed within the apertures of the castle. I was not going to lose my temper; I was simply going to pursue with another phone call to Rhiannon to explain the situation and ask if there was an immediate way this could be resolved.

As we made our final preparations, the day of the exhibition had arrived, anticipations were high, and I was more concerned about the condition of the site and whether the objects, and broken glass had been cleaned. As a group we met at the site around 12 o'clock in the afternoon with the gathered materials and supplies we needed to assemble our display. To make our installation time simpler, we devised a schedule to keep track of our progress.

Firstly, we took the red bed sheets and hung them over the two gates on the far side of the castle and secured them both with string in case of wind gusts. We then took one of our two collages to display onto the middle gate, this collage features liquid light images of archival imagery from Swansea Archives, one of our group member's grandfathers grew up during the event of the Blitz, he also features on the audio given to the public with a barcode using their phone to scan and as they walk around the exhibition it creates the concept of special interaction.

Figure 15: Castle Exhibition Installation.

Figure 16: 1st Collage Displayed on the Middle Gate.

Moving forward with time, we then proceeded with installing the second collage featuring our individual images of topics we researched into depth, for example: this collages features images of '*Shrapnel',* a connection to each individual holes within the walls of historical landmarks, Castle Street, and The Old Police Station, now known as The Alex Building part of University of Wales Trinity Saint Davids, the images were taken as close-ups with a telephoto lens and converted onto acetate paper to print onto the coated liquid light paper. Included within are lost imagery kept within the archives of Swansea, as a group we were honoured to be given permission to use a copy of the only surviving image during the time of the first bombing, it had to be included.

Figure 17: 2nd Collage for Castle Gate.

With only half an hour left until opening, we only had two items to display. When assembling the collages, we had three images left, these images were printed at a clear quality, we decided to display individually. Therefore, we proceeded with starting from the smallest to largest to rectify the aspect of capturing significant moments from history, including an image of a gasmask belonging to our group member's grandfather.

Figure 18: Archive and Gasmask Imagery.

This gentleman has played a big part in making this exhibition come to life, and because he could not make the event, we have chosen to honour his part and those whose lives were lost by displaying battery operated candles within the pigeon holes of the castle, at 5 o'clock in the evening the lights will then be switched on automatically due to winter seasoning it now gets dark around 5pm.

Figure 19: Candles at Night.

Time was up, it was time to open the exhibition for the public, as the event began, we took it upon ourselves to draw the people from the streets in hope that they will have a taste for a historical tale. However, as the night progressed, and as the curators we were interacting with the public whilst taking them on a tour of the work and sharing our progress and intent behind the show.

I could not have been prouder of what we have achieved as a group, and what an interesting and challenging experience it has been for us all. Myself, as an individual with many difficulties in understanding others, I have found this project to be intellectually and mentally challenging. Reflecting onto our exhibition, there are many things I would have done differently, such as the lights, if I was an individual curator, I would have taken the sacrifice of purchasing the use of the lights if it is an important aspect to have to create a meaningful impact then it should be included.

In terms of the collages, I would have expanded them by creating more imagery with the liquid light and adding to cover both gates till no bars are visible, and importantly take more pride into contextualising thought into our motivation behind the theme. For example, the focus could be developed significantly on the survivors, finding them, allowing them to share their stories to create portraiture of the individuals and if willing reflect on the community's relationship to history, possibly allowing the public to share their own memories of the war, the blitz, or even significant events of Swansea.

Figure 20: Swansea Castle at Night.

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Figures:

Figure 1: Swansea Museum (1941). *The Aerial Photograph.* [Photography] *City Witness.* Available at: https://www.medievalswansea.ac.uk/en/blog/aerial-photograph-of-swansea-1949/index.html (Accessed 1 Nov. 2021)

Figure 2: Colquhoun, A. (1930). *Swansea Castle and Ben Evans Store before the "Three Nights Blitz."* [Photography] *People's Collection Wales.* Available at: https://www.peoplescollection.wales/items/25545 (Accessed 2 Nov. 2021)

Figure 3: Swansea Museum (1904). *Castle Lane and Swansea Castle 1904.* [Photography] *People's Collection Wales.* Available at: https://www.peoplescollection.wales/items/19369 (Accessed 2 Nov. 2021)

Figure 4: Pemberton, S (2021). *Castle Tower: Present-Day*. [Photography] Swansea Castle.

Figure 5: British Library. (1823). *An illustration of Swansea Castle from the New Swansea Guide.* [Photography] *Wales Online.* Available at: https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/bathing-billiards-bay-like-naples-19263169 (Accessed 3 Nov. 2021)

Figure 6: Howes, T (2018). *Liquid Light – Emulsion Painting.* [Photography] *Thurston Howes Photography.* Available at:

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Figure 7: Boltanski, C (1990). *The Reserve of Dead Swiss.* [Photography] *Tate.* Available at: https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/boltanski-the-reserve-of-dead-swiss-t06605 (Accessed 5 Nov. 2021)

Figure 8: Pemberton, S (2021). *Screenshot of E-mail sent to Sales Department of Swansea City Council.* [Screenshot]. Personal Google Mail Account.

Figure 9: Pemberton, S (2021). *Screenshot of Response from Rhiannon Steel from Swansea City Council.* [Screenshot] Personal Google Mail Account.

Figure 10: Pemberton, S (2021). *Old Police Station Scar*. [Photography] Inverted Acetate Paper.

Figure 11: Edwards, F. (2021). *Dry Run: Steel.* [Photography]. Swansea.

Figure 12: Claude, J., and Christo (1995). *Wrapped Reichstag, Berlin 1971-95.* [Photography] *Tate.* Available at: https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/christo-905/lost-art-christo-and-jeanne-claude (Accessed 6 Nov. 2021)

Figure 13: Jones, R. (2021). *230 Swansea Castle Exhibition Poster.* [Illustration] Adobe.

Figure 14: Jones, R. (2021). *Dinky Donuts Advertisement.* [Photography] Swansea City Centre.

Figure 15: Edwards, F. (2021). *Castle Exhibition Installation.* [Photography]. Swansea Castle.

Figure 16: Pemberton, S. (2021). *1st Collage Displayed on the Middle Gate.* [Photography] Swansea Castle.

Figure 17: Pemberton, S. (2021). *2nd Collage for Castle Gate.* [Photography]. Swansea Castle.

Figure 18: Pemberton, S. (2021). *Archive and Gasmask Imagery.* [Photography] Swansea Castle.

Figure 19: Pemberton, S. (2021). *Candles at Night.* [Photography] Swansea Castle.

Figure 20: Pemberton, S. (2021). *Swansea Castle at Night.* [Photography] Swansea Castle.