

PERSONAL REFLECTION ON ST.FAGANS

St Fagan's, the National Museum of History, was a place I had visited as a child and failed to understand its significance. Visiting the museum in adulthood was a revealing experience for how much I had missed about Welsh history, and an opportunity to find the parts of it that I personally resonated with and that evoked curiosities and feelings. Being at university to fulfil my passion in philosophy and my inquisitive, ruminative nature, meant that I approached this trip with my own perspective, or as Wittgenstein might have said, my 'unser brille'. Before this most recent visit, I was unsure about the impact it may have on myself. As a Welsh history museum, I questioned prior whether I would gain much from it; whether it would nourish or provoke my personal allure for religion, philosophy and ethics. To my pleasant surprise, I was wrong.

My immediate attraction to the museum, was that it defied stereotypes of static exhibitions and artefacts encased behind glass. I could interact and envisage the buildings in their first form. I first realised this when I encountered Maestir School. The perfect preservation and restitution of the institution meant I could picture its original home and impact in a small countryside during the Victorian era; a philanthropic community and something so significant for agricultural families. As a philosophy student I reflected on the philosophies surrounding education and its elements of essentialism, progressivism and pragmatism. Particularly I thought of the work of John Locke: '*Some Thoughts Concerning Education*'. He promoted a holistic education, that forms the core skills, but also self-interests and moral virtue. A revolutionary man which linked my mind to the revolutionary impact this very school must have had, as it would have encouraged structure, modernisation, welfare and education that was non-subject to class or wealth.



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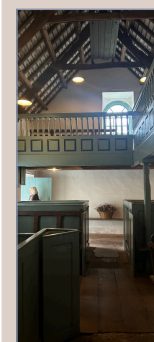
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The trip opened my eyes to the diversity of people interested in Welsh history, and made me appreciate my own background and culture as something special and worth knowing about. From American accents, to people who were speaking Eastern Asian languages, I realised the intrigue was so far reaching. I particularly appreciated the layout of the museum, how it was all out in the open, dotted in and around nature. Every stretch of walk between each building gave me time to think and reflect. I felt that this made it a unique museum experience, where you don't feel rushed or watched. I felt free to spend as much time as I wanted in each space, and surrounded by nature I felt enabled through the scenery to think about things meaningfully.

I was instantly drawn to the Pen-rhiw Chapel, captivated by its simplicity and humble as opposed to grandiose appearance. As a student of religion, the Chapel itself instituted my thoughts on worship. It was interesting to see that an aspect of the Unitarian beliefs, that Churches should remain minimalistic and that there is no required catechism or prescription of set beliefs, aligned with my own. This drew me in further to its history, and from asking people around me, I discovered that the Chapel was a converted barn. I loved the symbolic meaning and innovation of the nonconformists in 1777 to utilise a barn, the birthplace of Jesus, as their place of spiritual reflection.



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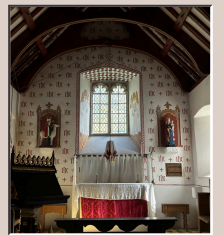
The medieval Church, St Teilo's, was fascinating in so many different ways, and for me personally, offered its own input and insights into multiple philosophical themes. In a more obvious way, the Church spurred contemplations on the philosophy of religion. I thought about the philosophy of secularism and its relation to St Teilo's, in both its historical and original context as well as its modern reconstruction. I considered how this place was once central to people's lives, a place where they didn't just worship God, but learnt social customs, etiquette, legislation and the concept of an identity as a wider community, not just as individuals. This was what brought on my musing of secularism, as where it stands now in St Fagan's, it no longer serves this purpose or teaches these things. Instead, for me, I thought it had become a mere artefact, that didn't live out any of these important things anymore. This reminded me of Habermas, a contemporary philosopher, whose debate on religion in the public sphere is proven, from my perspective, by St Teilo's. I thought about his work *'Between Naturalism and Religion'* where I remembered his thoughts on the value that exists in religion and its views, but that they require evolution, into secular language to be understood by people from all walks of life. Reflective of Habermas' philosophy, St Teilo's evolved from the focal authoritative, morally guiding institution into a secular framework, appreciated for its value in historical and cultural contexts, but with a modern reinterpretation that accommodates a pluralistic world. Therefore, visiting the Church reconstructed at St Fagan's inspired me to consider how religion shapes modern communities today.



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St Teilo's Church provided a lot of personal reflection for me. Aside from what initially crossed my mind, I was also aware and thinking about beauty and its role in religion, and the philosophy of aesthetics. This was prompted by the abundance of colourful wallpaintings of Biblical scenes and the architecture of the Church. In specific, I reflected on Plato's views on aesthetic philosophy. I remembered that in his dialogues, he believed that beauty is a reflection of the divine realm and that through our aesthetic experiences, we can gain transcendent spiritual wisdom. St Teilo's medieval paintings and iconography stood out to me as examples of what Plato would see as embodying the divine. I truly felt this myself when reflecting on his philosophy, and it almost brought his views, which I had known before, to life for me. I felt the art inspire awe in myself, which was what led me down the path of reflecting on aesthetic philosophy.

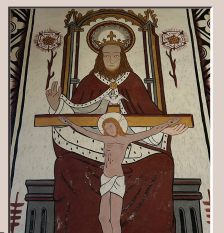
On the same note, the murals and decorations of St Teilo's led me to reflect on Kant, and his philosophy on aesthetic judgement and the notion of the sublime. When I saw that every inch of each wall was covered in a different and vivid Biblical depiction, as a person of faith, I felt a sense of being overwhelmed. This reminded me of Kant's concept of the 'sublime', a feeling that comes with experience of something overwhelming and when someone is unable to understand its significance. Again, the trip to St Fagan's, and the Church itself, lead me to understand at a new level, some of the philosophical concepts I had merely known about and understood academically beforehand.



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On a final note, I feel a sense of gratitude toward St Fagan's and the opportunity it gave me to link so many areas of my personal interests and academic studies. I didn't expect to be provoked intellectually and emotionally by so many aspects of the museum before visiting and I feel an obligation to pursue more experiences that are similar, and more of Welsh history, with the realisation that there are so many insights available into the world I personally immerse in, of philosophy and religion.

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PHOTOGRAPH REFERENCES:

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- 2) Morris, S. Earl of Plymouth's Castle. (October 17th, 2025). St Fagan's National Museum of History. Cardiff.
- 3) Morris, S. Gardens of St. Fagan's Castle. (October 17th, 2025). St Fagan's National Museum of History. Cardiff.
- 4) Morris, S. Gardens of St. Fagan's Castle. (October 17th, 2025). St Fagan's National Museum of History. Cardiff.
- 5) Morris, S. St Fagan's Castle Pond. (October 17th, 2025). St Fagan's National Museum of History. Cardiff.
- 6) Morris, S. Interior of Pen-rhiw Chapel. (October 17th, 2025). St Fagan's National Museum of History. Cardiff.
- 7) Morris, S. Window inside of Pen-rhiw Chapel. (October 17th, 2025). St Fagan's National Museum of History. Cardiff.
- 8) Morris, S. The Pen-rhiw Chapel. (October 17th, 2025). St Fagan's National Museum of History. Cardiff.
- 9) Morris, S. St Teilo's Church grounds. (October 17th, 2025). St Fagan's National Museum of History. Cardiff.
- 10) Morris, S. Exterior of St Teilo's Church. (October 17th, 2025). St Fagan's National Museum of History. Cardiff.
- 11) Morris, S. `Alter inside of St Teilo's Church. (October 17th, 2025). St Fagan's National Museum of History. Cardiff.
- 12) Morris, S. Biblical Art and Murals inside of St Teilo's Church. (October 17th, 2025). St Fagan's National Museum of History. Cardiff.
- 13) Morris, S. Biblical Art and Murals inside of St Teilo's Church. (October 17th, 2025). St Fagan's National Museum of History. Cardiff.
- 14) Morris, S. St Fagan's Elizabethan Manor House. (October 17th, 2025). St Fagan's National Museum of History. Cardiff.