

Report of the Connected Communities Exchange event, 'Connecting Communities to the Heritage of the Swansea Valley' 25th June 2015.

Introduction

On the 25 June a Connected Communities Exchange event was held on the site of the Hafod-Morfa Copperworks. It was attended by a variety of people, all of whom have a significant personal or professional interest in community and local history and engagement, and people who have a specific emotional attachment to the Swansea Valley and the Hafod-Morfa site.

The aim of the day was to hear from as many of these people as possible. The core rationale behind holding such an event was that all the varied ideas, experiences, areas of expertise, and points of view could not only be celebrated, but could also be digested and built upon. Professor Huw Bowen opened the day with remarks to this effect, noting how crucial it is that history sites which are about the community, and for the community, should have an agenda that is driven by the community.

The main activities throughout this day-long event were various small group workshops where participants discussed ideas on a number of topics, which are outlined below. Hundreds of post-it notes with many suggestions were placed on tables and maps at these workshops, and ideas were grouped loosely into themes and categories.

It is hoped that the agenda set by the community will inform the research behind all kinds of projects undertaken by a range of stakeholders and add value by encouraging connectivity of themes and locations. We hope that outcomes may include original new research, educational resources, on-line archives, digital interpretation projects, creative performances and artworks. Whilst Swansea University hopes to use the information to guide the future development and interpretation of the Hafod-Morfa Copperworks site, it is also hoped that this information will be of use to other stakeholders working in the Swansea Valley specifically and further afield.

With this in mind, the report suggests future areas of research, grouped into definable and distinguishable themes, which proved popular with those who attended the event. It also outlines suggestions for future research at the Hafod-Morfa site. It outlines what sorts of outputs and outcomes will come from this kind of research, and it also suggests ways in which this research can be used to connect with a wider range of people in an innovative and inspiring way and contribute to the future development of the Hafod-Morfa site.

Overview of the day

Participants brought a wide range of skills, talent and experience to the day. Some were already engaged in community research projects, others were not but all had an interest and valuable perspectives. The following features stood out:

- Currently, people are putting in a lot of work storing material in archives. Archivists are trying to make sure that records can be accessed easily, and located successfully by anyone who wants to use them.
- Particular attention is being paid to oral history, both in terms of collecting it and storing it. People are working with the very admirable motive that today's events should be recorded because they will soon be a fascinating history.
- Several participants talked about the work they are doing with maps, including projects which involve overlaying various images onto others to get a broader perspective of things like topography and historical change.
- People are acting in supporting roles at projects sites like the Hafod-Morfa Copperworks. They are passing on their own information and experiences.
- People's research almost always has a family or local community aspect to it.

Six workshops were held throughout the day:

- Ben Reynolds (Trilein) and Iam Smith (National Waterfront Museum) led a workshop exploring how community research groups and agencies can develop links between them.
- Eirwen Hopkins (The CHOICE Project) led a workshop exploring how creativity can engage new audiences and build community
- Dr Liam Betsworth led a workshop exploring the potential for digital technologies to interpret new aspects of the site in interesting ways and attract new audiences in doing so.
- Sam Blaxland and Kate Spiller led a session exploring research themes.
- Matthew Small (SU) and Sandra Emmannuel (CCS) led a session on mapping heritage sites in the Swansea Valley
- Stuart Griffin led a session exploring research and interpretation ideas focussed on or around the Hafod-Morfa Copperworks site.

Most of the outcomes of these workshops are aggregated into the following sections but specific outcomes are listed below.

Dr Liam Betsworth's workshop identified the following:

- The site could be further promoted through DVDs sent particularly to schools.
- Social media could and should be utilised more. Particularly in the case of something like Facebook, links can be shared to a variety of other 'pages' of interest, and information about the site and the project can disseminate quickly from there.
- The collection of oral testimonies is vital

- The following suggestions were made about projects and ideas for technology related attractions and means of making the site more accessible:
- Sensory elements are important – ways of showing visitors what the site would have smelled and sounded like.
- How can 3D hologram technology be utilised to demonstrate, for example, what the buildings in their previous state looked like? Could these be motion triggered?
- Use of heat and vibration to make certain parts of the site feel more real.
- Touch panels so people can feel the shape and texture of materials.
- Several comments made the point that whilst all of the above will add something to the site, there is no substitute for a walking tour guide.

Matthew Small and Sandra Emmanuel's workshop;

This was a very practical session which identified many new sites to add to the mapping started by the CCS GIS team. There was a strong desire for digitisation to get the maps updated and online. CCS are currently working on this and hope to complete a pilot website with heritage maps for the Clydach area in due course.

There was a strong desire to use stories such as coal to link the sites together.

Innovative methods such as interactive bike rides were suggested for use in gyms or in the open.

Eirwen Hopkins workshop covered the following;

Eirwen outlined a project to celebrate heritage through a series of projects with groups, each generating a creative piece of work to weave into an annual performance and event which would attract and engage new audiences.

It was noted that there are arts projects going on already and that it would be important to work with these. Links were also proposed to schools. It was stressed that it was important to celebrate the idea of struggle as well as pride.

Participants emphasised the importance of music is a binding force and identified drama, performance, training, education, modern technologies, apps, digital storytelling as important.

People were keen on an events space on the site, a social space on the river and a place for dialogue.

More specific examples for events were also explored including a Drive in cinema, rowing events and races, craft activities including traditional crafts, Gardening projects, Soundscapes, music festivals, and large scale lighting and Son et Lumiere.

Emerging Themes for research

In the remaining workshops conducted throughout the day, regarding priorities and themes for future research, suggestions were specifically, and sometimes loosely, grouped into definable themes. Whilst this material has in some cases been subsequently organised into these themes, it reflects as accurately as possible people's ideas, concerns, and areas of interest on the day:

Key theme 1 –The environment: ecology, and the human and natural landscape.

Ideas within this subject area were particularly popular. People linked their fondness for the natural environment and green spaces to the site's past and its future development. There was very much an understanding that the Industrial Revolution created widespread and irrevocable changes to the landscape to provide sites for extraction, manufacturing, transport, housing and administration, and today's landscape reflects the transformation of an agricultural landscape to an industrial one and still has an impact upon how many people in Wales live and work. With this in mind, suggestions for future areas of research included:

- The deliberate attempts to regenerate the Lower Swansea Valley beginning in the 1960s. This was an extensive project which marked a very deliberate and significant change in the appearance of the physical landscape. It was also a move that removed many of the physical signs of Swansea's extensive industrial past.
- There is considerable interest in celebrating the physical heritage that remains of Swansea Valley's proud past, connecting up the isolated features using maps and trails and reclaiming and promoting the post-industrial identity of the whole valley.
- People regularly referred to the term 'sustainable' when discussing future projects associated with the human and natural landscape.
- The future potential for a photographic history of the area and the landscape, including many of the old surviving images of the site and the Valley contrasted with what it looks like now.
- More attention on the river – in the context of its historic role in the movement of materials and goods, but also as a place now where one can study the ecology of the area, and its various flora and fauna. Could there be nature trails to and from the site which allow people to learn about both of these elements? One contributor wrote: 'The riverside is an environmental attraction as well as [a] cultural heritage spot'.
- Research and monitoring of wildlife on the site, given the unique natural habitats that some of the industrial sites provide. A number of rare species have been recorded.

Key theme 2 – People and the community: Identity, achievement, social change, and migration

Much of what was said about the industrialisation of the surrounding area is based on people's pride that Swansea was a birthplace of innovation. There is consequently a natural tendency to hold Swansea's reputation in very high esteem in the local community. It was felt that this should be at the foundation of celebrating the history of the site. As well as this, entrepreneurs and working people in Wales, and particularly those working in the copperworks, exploited every opportunity to increase their wealth, education and social position from the achievements of the Industrial Revolution. Commercial achievements of entrepreneurs in Wales brought prosperity and opulence to many. However it also brought poverty and deprivation to others. As a hub of employment, the Copperworks also initiated a significant change in the make-up of the surrounding society, with immigrants moving into the area from outside of Wales, and some native Welsh people emigrating because of work. People were interested in the following kinds of research areas:

- More research and readily available information on the origin of street and place names in the surrounding area. This would grab the attention of local people particularly, and would offer them explanations and to a local history and sense of identity which they may not have been aware of.
- The Landore Social Club is an underused asset. Old workers from the site belong to the club and making the project belong to them too is not only the right thing to do, but it may well provide a further insight into the work/life balance of the industry.
- The cultural and ethnic roots of copper need greater attention (more on this below).
- The site could be used as a location for events like local Eisteddfods, as well as arts festivals based on the specific subject of the Hafod-Morfa works. This is connected to the project's own identity.
- Chinese immigration and communities.
- Bangladeshi immigration and communities.
- West country/Cornish immigration and integration.
- The social life of workers and their families
- Faith in the Valley; How Christianity has declined and the faith demographic has changed.
- The Welsh and English Language

Key theme 3 – People and industry: Human struggle, disability and disaster

People were drawn to this because of a personal interest in their own family's history, because of work they had done on graveyard and war memorial surveys, and mental health projects in the Lower Swansea Valley. The copperworks could be a treasure trove of information and story-telling opportunities. The physical and mental health of its workers is

an area of particular interest. People are also intrigued by the nature of labour relations and how workers communicated on site. Suggested areas of research were:

- Projects stemming from Local Health Boards, and records of industrial incidents to highlight injuries and fatalities at the copperworks.
- What happened to those who were left behind when family members left home for long periods of time, e.g. the Cape Horners on long voyages.
- The role that the company play in matters of on-site industrial accidents and incidents.
- The sorts of injuries which happened on site. (People always seem interested in the gory elements of the past).
- Pollution and the long-term health problems of workers.
- Labour relations on the site and specifically the dynamics of the 1843 strike.

Key theme 4 – Swansea, Copper and the World: movement of goods, and industrial processes

This was an area where a great deal of interest was expressed. As mentioned above, Swansea was, after all, the hub of the World's copper supply. Its role in the smelting and transportation of copper put it at the very heart of the World's first globalised industry. There was undoubtedly a real sense of pride amongst participants about Swansea's leading role in the industrial revolution. The town was part of the seminal moments in Welsh history, where inventions were made or technologies were embraced that took industry to new and highly productive levels. People suggested the research focus on:

- The River. Its significance came up regularly as both a transportation method of both the past (in industrial terms) and the future (in tourism terms). The community boat, therefore, is extremely important for the site. Visitors get a different perspective on buildings and processes from the river'.
- The interaction of copper and coal up and down the valley and beyond.
- Swansea's significant place in World history – it could be made even more of that the copper industry was at the heart of a global industrial empire.
- The potential significance of the temperance movement.
- Using census and memoir material to tell a better story about carriers and bargeman associated with the works.
- 'Joined up thinking!': lots of projects and ideas on this theme already exist, and various people are working on them. Research should not be conducted in isolation.

The attention given to each of these themes was roughly equal, with people prioritising certain aspects within categories over others. It is with this material and these suggestions in mind, that the following research questions, mechanisms and projects are framed.

Suggestions for future research and interpretation projects at the Hafod-Morfa site

The following suggestions for future research and interpretation at and around the Hafod Morfa Copperworks site draws on the feedback from the event as summarised above and is informed by the following considerations, many of which were also proposed by participants;

- Research should inform interpretation on the site.
- Projects need to engage new audiences in research and interpretation projects.
- Projects need to have relevance to people's lives today so inspire interest in the past.
- Interpretation projects need a structure, rationale or narrative that enables them to be brought to life on the site, either through characters, trails, stories and an objective for participants to achieve.
- Projects needs to focus on areas where community involvement can add something new to the body of existing knowledge

It is expected that research will contribute to the following outcomes

- A greater body of historical evidence, including family history, oral histories, photographs and artefacts
- The development of a range of architectural features to be woven into the fabric of the buildings
- A series of performances to be woven into 2 spectacular events in years 1 and 3 of the project
- A series of performative technologies or digital interpretation features to enhance the visitor experience.

Suggested projects include:

1. Oral History

There is an urgent need to conduct an oral history project with as many people who used to work on the site as possible - and as soon as possible. People can be invited to share their experiences and their history and this in turn can be used in films, displays, written research, and – perhaps most significantly – in spoken stories similar to the ones that already exist on the site. The final result of the project will also be a vibrant new historical archive with many rich sources. Such a project is all about making the history speak, literally, with as many authentic local voices as possible.

- Fund an oral history project, training up volunteers from groups, schools and the university to take histories. Publicise this thoroughly throughout Swansea and further afield.
- Specifically we need to link to the network of old worker on the site through a series of reunion style events at the Landore Social Club.

- Promote intergenerational work so that younger generations learn from older generations.

Specific research questions:

How did the site operate in its later years of operation? - What kind of processes were involved in the smelting of copper at the Hafod site? (questions to be directed at ex workers from the site)

What kind of health problems and industrial related accidents occurred at the Copperworks?

2. Family History

There is a great deal of local and family history associated with the Hafod-Morfa Copperworks and the surrounding area. We know that this is an area of great interest to people. Many visitors and volunteers report family connections to the copper industry and the Hafod-Morfa site specifically but we do not know how many and we have not recorded many case studies. Crowdsourcing information from various people about their family histories may provide new answers to many of the broad research questions outlined above, such as ‘who was involved in the copper industry?’; ‘What kind of journeys did they make?’; ‘Did anyone suffer any sorts of injuries?’. By exploring family history in more detail, there will be a much better opportunity to understand social change, immigration, and movement in and around Trevillian. There is strong interest in family history and it would be an effective means of involving more people in the site. The Local Studies Section at Swansea’s Central Library has extended an invitation to link to their family history workshops exploring familial links to the industry. Specific questions could sharpen the focus of family research and be interesting to many people. The results of such workshops would feed into wider research aims. Archives often contain the kinds of records and figure sheets that don’t get remembered in families, or stored in houses. Therefore, a combination of local family stories and archival material should, in theory, compliment one another to produce some fascinating examples of history.

Specific research questions:

In what ways did the surrounding urban landscape develop as a result of the copper industry? (town planning, street names, building names etc).

How did the movements of people in and out of the Lower Swansea Valley change the nature of society and community of the area?

What kind of health problems and industrial related accidents occurred at the copperworks?

3. Research and Interpret specific events in time

There is scope to focus on particular historical events and moments in time which illuminate some of the significant and important themes of this particular industrial heritage site, which

would also offer an opportunity to undertake focused projects for particular groups in the community and to use cutting edge performative technologies (see below for fuller explanation) to provide an immersive and interactive experience for visitors. This will involve undertaking research using many of the intensive research methods outlined above, but it will also involve various other skills and interpretive methods in order to bring such ideas to fruition. One particular event is the 1843 industrial strike, which allows for a discussion of various important subject matters such as labour and class relations, economic hardship, as well as societal and economic change. Intercultural groups could focus on issues surrounding migration. There is also scope for disability groups to focus on issues pertinent to them. These ideas can be conveyed through the means of storytelling, songs, plays, sculpture or model making, or any other medium that might engage and interest school groups and as many members of the community as possible.

Specific research questions:

What impact did this site have on people's lives?

What kind of health problems and industrial related accidents occurred at the site?

What were labour relations like on the site and how did they change over time?

4. Mapping the site's buildings, transport links and processes

It is abundantly clear that what remains at the site of the Hafod-Morfa Copperworks is a tiny vestige of what was once here. Whilst some work has been done to bring the site back to life (see the model in the Museum Collections Centre and the animation created by the Royal Commission), many questions remain and there is a considerable body of knowledge that is not yet documented.

Much of the discussion around the maps of the site referred to lost physical features and people explored ways to bring them back. There is a need to capture ex workers memories of the site and to piece together missing details and processes from archaeological reports, new excavations, photographs and more.

There is significant potential for bring some of the site's processes back to life through workshops, interactive and performative digital technologies and for this a more comprehensive body of knowledge needs to be compiled.

Specific research questions

What did buildings look like? What were they used for?

What kind of processes were involved in the smelting of copper at the Hafod-MORfa Copperworks site?

5. Celebrate the Swansea Valley Heritage as a whole

The site, and indeed the entire Valley, would benefit from being 'linked' together by refreshed and revamped 'heritage trails', which could be thematic in order to have some sense of coherence. This would involve an extensive mapping project tied in with creative and artistic elements in order to 'brand' these routes. Further research into the interaction of copper and coal in the valley could present an interesting and engaging way to make the connections between communities and theme trails up and down the valley. For example there could be 'Coal trails' and 'Copper trails' on foot by bike, and or by river.

It is proposed that the Hafod-Morfa Copperworks site be used as a gateway to the heritage of the valley as a whole.

Specific research questions:

How did coal and copper interact?

What were the transport routes and whose coal was used where?

How did this inform the movement of people?

6. Provide a mechanism for existing history groups to research areas of interest to them which help to tell the story of the Hafod-Morfa Copperworks within the valley.

Given the experience and autonomy of so many groups, and the previous successes of the Connected Communities Project, it is important to provide maximum autonomy to groups to research what is interesting to them through the provision of small grants for further research.

A number of groups and individuals attained significant skills and experience from the Connected Communities Project and the project itself pioneered an effective and well-received template for community research. We will seek to build on the networks, skills and experience of groups in the Swansea Valley. The Connected Communities project will continue to provide a platform and network for further community collaborations and activities and will seek to make small pots of funding available accordingly.

The HLF funding will focus on the Hafod-Morfa Copperworks site so projects supported with these funds would need to support the development and interpretation of the site, in line with the themes identified in this report. A set of criteria would be developed to provide guidance for applications and inform selection.

7. Engage new and harder to reach audiences through creative projects

The site offers considerable opportunity for inspiring creativity and hosting events of various kinds. A creative project is proposed to engage people in celebrating their heritage through a series of projects with established groups, each generating a creative piece of work to weave into an annual performance and event which would attract and engage new audiences.

Groups would consist of older persons groups, ex workers, friends groups, youth groups, schools, cultural and faith groups and we would strive to engage the hardest to reach groups and bring groups together to create new insights. Particularly, we will develop inter-generational and inter-cultural projects.

The focus of this work will be on the connections, senses, emotions, attachments and aversions that people have to different aspects of the site and its development. It will celebrate the site and what it means to people now and in the past and understand how the unique place connects us all together.

Creative activities and outputs could involve the following.

- Films and oral histories of ex workers talking about the site and sharing memories
- Creative writing/digital storytelling: to enable community members to write their own plays, website contributions, stories and poetry.
- Deep mapping techniques which evoke the sense of “place” over time by celebrating different voices, information, impressions, and perspectives and producing a new multimedia representation of the site and what it means to people.
- Making and sculpture: to develop visual and practical skills to allow the building of objects that will contribute to the interpretation of the heritage e.g. lanterns, stage sets, public art sculptures, mosaics.
- Song-writing: to enable, particularly but not exclusively, young, people to record their feelings and those of others creatively and movingly, about their heritage.
- Phone app instruction: to teach simple programming skills, and allow community members, again often young people, to create apps that will help to interpret the heritage
- Dance work: to engage particularly male community members, in different styles of dance (e.g. stomp, street dance) to allow innovative interpretation of heritage ideas. Also building bridges with ethnic minority groups e.g. Bangra, Welsh folk dance.
- And more.

8. Link to the University to create a series of cutting edge digital interpretation outputs

The approach to developing new forms of digital interpretation, based on research completed by Swansea University Computer Science Department and Dr Liam Betsworth specifically into performative technologies underpins all of the above.

The digital has the potential to bring the site back to life, to introduce the sensory experience, and to provide unique attractions for visitors. It would be informed by community research and enlist the support of community researchers in trialling and ensuring usability.