



Penmaenmawr Museum INTERPRETATION PLAN

PART ONE: INTRODUCTION

1. Introduction

This Interpretive Plan has been put together by consultants at Headland Design for Penmaenmawr Museum to support their application to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). It should be read in association with the Activity Plan and Business Plan for the project.

This report has been developed with lots of input from the trustees and following consultation with target audience groups and the museum volunteers.

Penmaenmawr Museum's project focuses on the relocation of the Museum to a building in the centre of Penmaenmawr that is fit-for-purpose to protect and display the collection and archive. The museum has already moved into a new building, which was last used as a youth club by Conwy Council and which was the former Post Office building. This has provided better facilities for collections storage and management and more space for exhibitions. The HLF project will provide new interpretation and a programme of activities that will ensure that the museum is well used and is a key destination for visitors to North Wales as well as an important local community resource.

"Penmaenmawr Museum will transform from an add-on or accidental destination, to a must-visit destination that is pivotal in tourism growth and industrial heritage learning provision."



2. Penmaenmawr Museum

Penmaenmawr Museum was founded by Conwy County Council in 2002. Six years later the Historical Society took over management of the museum. The museum is managed by an executive management committee of six people comprising the four trustee board members and two additional members.

The museum was originally located in a workman's cottage, known as 4 New York Cottage. The small cottage would have housed quarry workers and they were called New York Cottages when someone commented that there would be no workers as they had all gone to find their fortune in New York.

The museum moved into a new building in June 2017. This was originally the Post Office and was refurbished by the council to be used as a youth club. The displays from the old museum have been moved into the new space with the addition of a new TV monitor that shows historic films and a digital presentation based on old photographs that illustrate how the area has changed. This year the museum has already had 7-800 visitors (compared to 300 per year in the cottage building). There is no admission charge to the museum. About half of the visitors are visiting the area and the other half are local people from Penmaenmawr and Conwy.

The trust have a programme of talks that take place in the museum or other venues (depending on numbers). At the last talk 87 people came along.

The museum's mission is:

Penmaenmawr Museum exists to promote, preserve, and celebrate the heritage of Penmaenmawr and its surrounding areas. The Museum conserves and interprets evidence of Penmaenmawr's past for the educational, social and economic benefit of our wider communities. Penmaenmawr Museum works in partnership with organisations to foster a dynamic and innovative approach to the conservation, education and enjoyment of Penmaenmawr's past.



3. Heritage resources

Penmaenmawr Museum has a collection of over 400 objects. The collections have a strong emphasis on Neolithic axe heads and flints, Bronze and Iron Age artefacts and objects related to the quarrying industry of the 19th and 20th centuries and the seaside resort of Penmaenmawr.



The prehistoric objects include a hammerstone used in making the stone axe heads, flakes and unfinished axe-heads as well as the axe-heads themselves. One axe-head is

displayed with a modern wooden shaft to show how they would have been used.

In addition to the museum collections the museum interprets the heritage that is found in the landscape around Penmaenmawr. This includes the standing stones known as the Moelfre Stone Circle and the remains of Braich y Dinas one of the largest known Iron Age hillforts in Europe. The remains of the hillfort completely disappeared during extensive quarrying activity by the Darbishire family.



There is a Bronze Age socketed spearhead and a bronze fibula used as a cloak fastener. The museum's photograph collection includes important images that show the remains of the Iron Age settlement that was destroyed by the quarrying. There are also remains of tracks and round houses in the landscape that show how the area was used.

Objects and photographs illustrate the quarrying and tourism heritage of the 19th and 20th centuries. There are a number of items relating to the W E Gladstone and the Devonshire Family. This includes crockery from the houses where Gladstone stayed and commemorative plates and mugs that show the man himself.

Quarrying items include examples of stone setts made at the quarry and a blocker's hammer and a sett hammer which would have been used in one of



the quarries. There is also a blacksmith's hammer that would have been used to give the sett hammer a sharp edge. Communicating in the noisy quarries was a challenge and the museum collection includes a bugle, a bell and a large hooter all used to notify workers before explosions.

Social history objects include a bed pan and inhaler for people suffering from bronchitis and a flat iron.

4. Themes and stories

The name Penmaenmawr means the Head of the Great Stone and the overarching theme is the stone and the landscape from which it was quarried. Following from this there are four main themes:

1. Prehistory – information and artefacts from Neolithic to Bronze Age Penmaenmawr
2. Legends and place names
3. Quarrying
4. Victorian Penmaenmawr – the social history of the seaside resort, the industry and the transport links that enabled the activity.



Pre-history

The hills above Penmaenmawr have many prehistoric remains. Stone was quarried from Graiglwyd for making stone axes. It is recorded as one of the largest Neolithic stone axe factories in the UK. These axes were exported all over the UK and have been found in the archaeological record. There is a stone circle, Meini Hirion. The prehistoric trackway, Bwlch y Ddeufaen, was used in prehistoric times, links to the Roman road and was used by later drovers moving sheep.

The main Roman road runs to the south of Penmaenmawr. An archaeological assessment report of 1974 states that two Roman coin hoards were found during quarrying work during the 1800s, although it's not clear where the coins are today.

Legends

Legends often explain anomalies of the landscape or particular features. The legend of Llys Helig supposes that Conwy Bay was once dry land owned by the wicked prince Helig and it was flooded as a punishment. The story of the three women of Moelfre who broke the Sabbath to winnow their corn explains the existence of the standing stones above Moelfre. The creation of the pass known as Bwlch Y Ddeufaen



(the pass of two stones) and the large heap of stones known as Barcodliad Y Gawres (the giantess' apronful) are described in the legend of the giant and his wife who grew weary walking to Mona.

Modern legends include the story of Violet Gordon Charlesworth who in 1909 faked her own death at Penmaenbach to avoid paying huge debts. It was eventually proved that she had not died in the crash and after a national police hunt she was caught in Oban and imprisoned. After her release she disappeared without trace. The site of the accident is known as Violet's Leap.



Quarrying

The industrial quarrying of igneous rock called diorite began in the area in 1830 with the opening of the Penmaen Quarry and the Graiglwyd and Old quarries which were amalgamated in 1888. The stone was used to begin with for setts and paving stones. These were originally shaped with hand tools.

From 1881 crushing mills were installed to crush the rock that was used for train ballast. In 1911 the quarries were owned by the Penmaenmawr & Welsh Granite Co. As the industry expanded workers and their families came from all over north Wales to work in the industry. Small cottages were built in the town and at Llanfairfechan to accommodate them. The quarried stone was moved downhill using self-acting inclines to the 3ft gauge tramway which linked to jetties where the stone was loaded onto boats. In the early 1900s over 1,000 men were working the quarries and it is estimated that they removed over 500,000 tons of stone from the quarries at Graiglwyd and Penmaen.

A Victorian seaside resort

Penmaenmawr became a popular seaside resort. It had excellent sandy beaches with a beautiful mountain backdrop.

During the mid 1800s the new A5 toll road and the Chester to Holyhead Railway brought more tourists to the town as well as making it easier to move the quarried stone. Prime Minister Gladstone was a regular visitor to the town and his patronage brought more visitors. He first visited in 1855, over the next 14 years he visited 11 times with his family. He bathed daily and walked up the hills behind the town. He often stayed with his fellow liberal Samuel Derbyshire, a quarry owner and squire of Pedyffryn Hall. The villas and houses built for the tourists can still be seen today.

The beaches were divided into areas for ladies and those for gentlemen, with a separate section for nuns! It wasn't until 1891 that mixed bathing was permitted on the beaches. Wheeled huts allowed people to get changed in privacy and could then be wheeled close to the sea for easy access for bathing. In the 20th century a wide promenade with shelters and static beach huts were provided for families coming by train. By the late 1970s the main road through the town was congested with tourists and quarry waggons as well as lorries travelling to Holyhead. The new A55 solved the traffic problems but reduced the width of the promenade.

The town centre developed during the 1800s, in some cases shops were added to houses. The Cambrian Building is a Victorian shopping arcade with a glass roof, that was restored in 2009 through a Townscape Heritage project.



5. Target audiences

The museum is already well established and has an existing audience, this includes people who live locally (in Penmaenmawr and Conwy) and people who are travelling through North Wales. People come to use the resource and research room, to see the exhibitions and for events and talks. Historical societies visit as groups and academic researchers come to use the collections and local expertise.

This project will create opportunities for new audiences who will be able to engage through the new facilities, exhibitions and activities. These were identified in the first round application as:

- Local residents
- Visitors to Penmaenmawr (family groups, empty-nesters, young professionals, outdoor explorers)
- People living in Conwy
- Visitors to (the new) Conwy Culture Centre
- People who are classed as 'minority groups' such as disabled people, BME groups
- Conwy school and Youth Service groups
- Industrial Academics / Researchers
- Local business owners

During a workshop the trustees discussed people who would be interested in visiting the museum and their motivation or interest in doing so:

- Tourists – who are interested in the wider context and local history of the area. They may not know much about the prehistory or quarrying heritage.
- Local people – are likely to know about the quarrying heritage and may have some knowledge of the town's Victorian history. They will be interested in changing displays that have personal stories and in depth information.
- School groups – will be interested in the local history and how the area has changed to link to the school curriculum.
- Young people – who would be involved through the Young Ambassadors Scheme
- Specialists with an interest in the archaeology or Gladstone – they may have particular knowledge but may not know about other aspects of the history.
- Families - who will be engaged through activities such as interactive exhibits, puzzles and dressing up.

6. Consultation and community engagement

Prior to the first round application and during the development stage of the project the museum team have carried out consultation to help understand what people would like to see in the museum.

A Survey Monkey survey was sent out to people through the Heritage and History of Wales group. This includes people with a general interest in the history of Wales but who have not visited the museum before. 60 people responded. Almost 75% of those who responded live in the UK with 10% from the USA. Respondents were asked to identify the three best museums they have visited. Responses were varied, with 12 people listing the British Museum – which has a wide ranging collection, well curated displays and good explanations. Comments alongside the list provide helpful insights into what makes a good museum experience. This includes spacious and informative displays, an experience that helps visitors understand what life was like for miners (Black Country Museum), costumed interpreters (at the Black Country Museum), great local history with lots of interactive opportunities and three people listed Carmarthen Museum which they described as different, quirky, with an identifiable history. Others commented on the personal link provided through costume, the importance of original objects and varied displays that told the local and national story. Multi-sensory displays such as those at Yorkvik were mentioned and the range of objects found in museums. Four people listed the National Museum of Cardiff (because of its great collections of objects and art) and nine people the Natural History Museum that has incredible collections and a beautiful building, which is part of the visitor experience. Smaller museums such as Wrexham, Weardale Museum and the Potteries Museum were recognised as having enthusiastic volunteers, good exhibitions and a focus on the local story.

The respondents were asked about which aspects of the history at Penmaenmawr they would find most interesting. The results show that all the subjects have some appeal and that the range of themes is important in order to provide something that will appeal to everyone. The most popular theme was local legends, followed by the quarrying history and social history, and the perils of travelling through Penmaenmawr, this was followed by Roman roads, the coming of the railway and tales of local saints and churches.

The respondents were asked about what needs to be in place in the newly designed museum to make sure visitors have a great experience and encourage them to return. 13 people said interactive exhibits that were appealing for children, 12 that excellent interpretation that provided variety, was vivid and clear and 11 people good advertising and promotion. This was followed by a warm and friendly welcome, changing displays, a coffee shop (with local produce), knowledgeable staff and accurate interpretation underpinned by thorough research, activities for children, browsing material, equal access for all and a well-lit space that is bright and spacious. Two people commented on the importance of a gift shop and facilities.





The final question asked for any advice that the respondents would give to the museum. There were a number of comments that were made by more than one respondent this included: proper marketing and keeping a high profile (4 people), thinking big and different and interactive exhibits/ activities (3 people) a place to eat, look at other museums, focus on excellent interpretation, don't bombard the visitor too much, space to see things, strong digital interpretation (although someone else said not too much digital) and good accessibility. These comments were all made by 2 people each. Other comments that were made by individuals that resonate with the views of the trustees are: something striking as the centre-piece, get feedback as you go along, not rows of glass cases, changing exhibitions, don't try to tell all the stories – focus down, use local voices in audio and video, offer sensory experiences, have an emphasis on normal people and everyday life. Other advice included deal with broken tech swiftly and be yourselves and quirky!

The consultation continued as the designs were developed. The consultants met with volunteers and members of the public at the Volunteer Christmas event and discussed the design proposals. The comments were very positive. People liked the design of the central structure and the style of the graphics. They felt that the timeline was important. They liked that the design of the café would reference the Post Office.

People commented that the text was not very legible in the proposed colour scheme. This was reviewed and has been adjusted to ensure that text will be easy to read. One of the images used in the visuals shows an axe that is from the lakes district not Penmaenmawr, this was amended. Also on the visuals the stone circle was wrongly labelled as a druid circle. Moving the central unit to create a flexible space is a really good idea and an interactive map is useful to inform visitors about the wider context and show the landscape that is described in the narrative.

People also commented on the content of the current exhibition which is informative and interesting. It will be important to retain this level of expertise.



7. Challenges and opportunities

New space

This project is fantastic opportunity to create a new museum in the new building. It provides a larger space and opportunity to provide equal access to the whole museum.

Interesting spaces and quick visits

The new displays will build on the current exhibition and create appealing and interesting displays that make good use of a range of interpretive media. Most of the interpretation will be in the main gallery. This space will need to be carefully designed to ensure that it appears to be a worthwhile visit, with enough to occupy visitors.

Limited collection

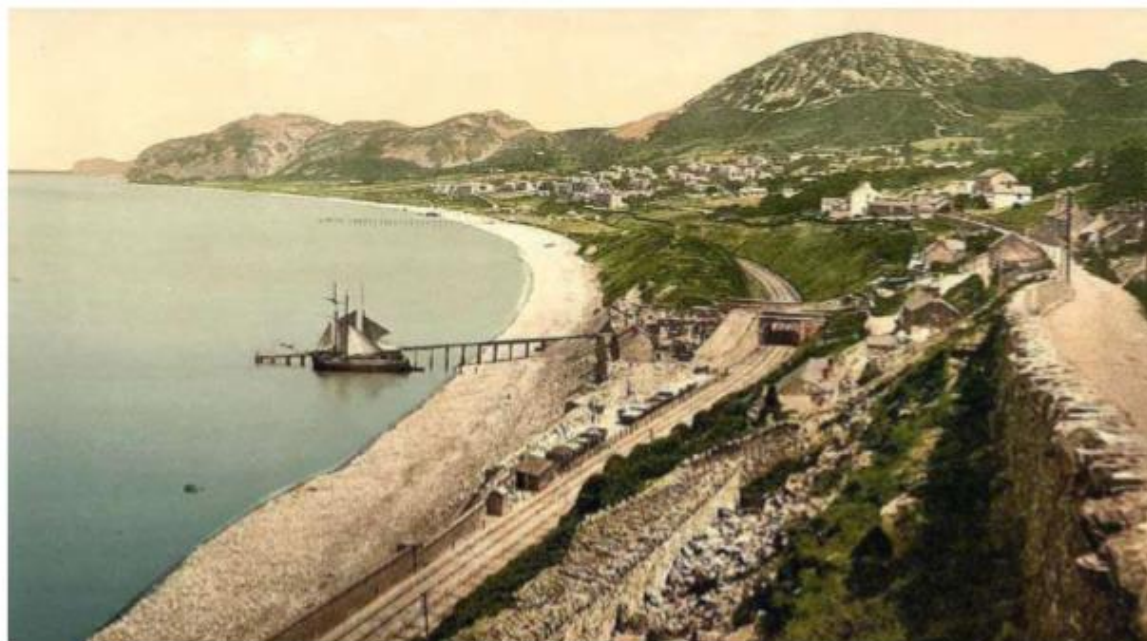
The museum collection includes some important archaeological material and unique objects that tell the story of the social and industrial heritage of Penmaenmawr. However the objects are not immediately striking and are interesting because of their significance rather than aesthetics. It will be important to explain the significance of the objects and to create appealing displays.

Coming back for more

It will be important to encourage repeat visits. This could be to attend events or activities or to spend time looking at aspects in more depth or for research. Changing content within the displays that provide further information on aspects of the history will also encourage repeat visits. The guided walks and trails give access to a wider story and more of the heritage. These will be well promoted in the museum.

Layers of information

The museum has a strong track record of attracting both local visitors and tourists. It is important that the content of the exhibition considers both and provides a wider context for visitors to the area and a depth of information for local people who may know quite a bit of the history already. Personal stories could be used to bring the history to life and to add further depth.



8. Development of the interpretive approach and principles

The principle for the design conceived for the first round application was a timeline around the main exhibition space with objects alongside this and a central unit with further graphics and showcases.



In the first round HLF application the plan included a let-able flat on the first floor. This has proved not possible so the first floor will be accessible to public. The group plan to secure additional funding to create a multi-sensory space that will show film and use other sensory media to help tell the story of Penmaenmawr for people with sensory disabilities. This will be on the first floor (accessible by the lift) alongside a volunteer resource room. The collections store and office will be on the second floor.

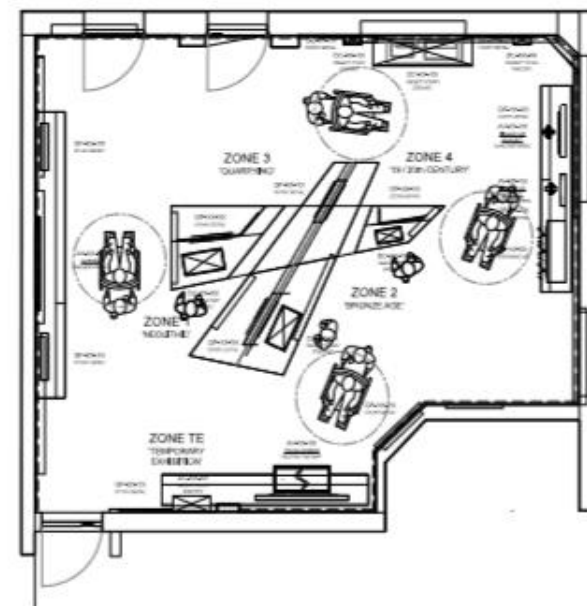
The tea room will provide a good welcome and will be a comfortable place to meet and will reference the building's Post Office history, this might include graphics / photos on the wall. It will be used for reminiscence activities. There is an old PO bicycle in collection.

The project group discussed some principles for the interpretation:

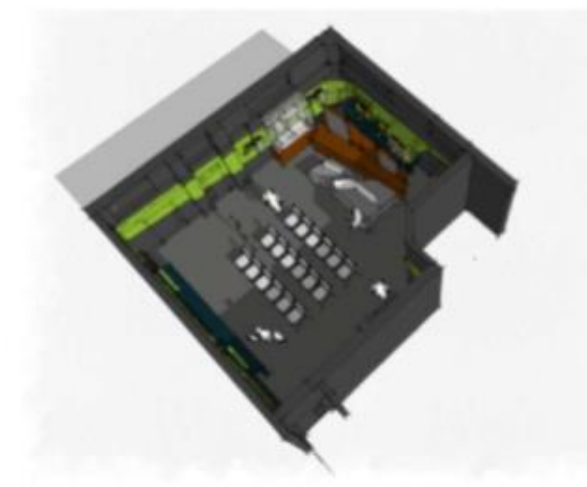
- Changing content displays are very important.
- Warm and friendly
- Re-use aspects from the previous displays
- View into the museum but elements that are waiting to be hidden.
- The timeline should start outside the room to draw people into the exhibition
- The dressing up is popular and could make use of the current Victorian children collection
- Storage will be important and could be built into the displays

The trustee group provided further ideas and guiding principles for the interpretation. This was based on things that they have seen in other museums and aspects that worked well in the new museum. These have been developed into a series of guiding principles, described below.

The information needs to be presented in a variety of ways, not just panels on the wall. Digital displays provide access to lots of information and an introductory film will provide a good introduction to the visit.



Seating in the space is important and there needs to be seats for people to watch the film. Equal and proper access around the space is crucial.



The displays should be multi-sensory and include personal stories and experiences. The narrative and interpretation will be linked to the landscape and encourage people to get out and to explore the area around Penmaenmawr. Information about the guided walks will help people to discover more about the heritage.



The visitor experience will begin in the café, with interpretation in spaces leading to the main gallery. The design of the café will reference the building's use as a Post Office and will include the Post Office bicycle. The museum has established a successful changing exhibition programme and there will be elements of the interpretation that can easily be changed.

The new showcases will include some that are museum standard and can provide a controlled environment for sensitive and loaned objects. Other showcases will be acrylic cases which are a cheaper option but provide some protection and security. Some objects have been identified as suitable for handling and will be on open display.

The consultant team have developed the designs and created a central unit that reflects the shape of a the Neolithic axe. This structure will help to divide the space and ensure that the interpretation will be discovered as visitors move into the space.

The central unit is easily moved to provide a large space for events. The timeline follows around the outside of the space and the design. All Interpretation will be bi-lingual, with easy to read accessible text.

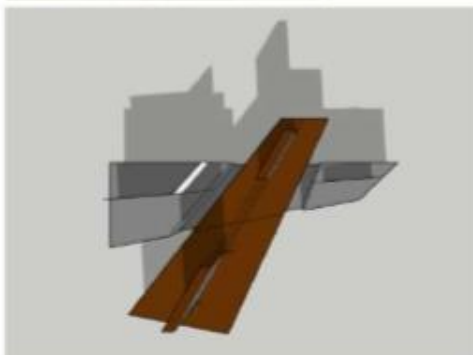


PART THREE: INTERPRETIVE PROPOSALS

9. Interpretive proposals

FFURF YR ARDDANGOSFA

Yn byrdolwyd flurf yr arddangosfa gan y pennau bwyell Neolithig sy'n rhan o'r casgliad. Mae'r enw Penmaenmawr yn cyfeirio at y pentir sylweddol lle gadeiodd gwahanol bobloedd eu hŏl ar y tir ar hyd yr oesoedd. Ar hyn o bryd, rydym yn ffafrio'r syniad o greu llinell amser o gampas yr arddangosfa wedi'i seilio ar haenau'r creigiâu.



SPATIAL RATIONALE

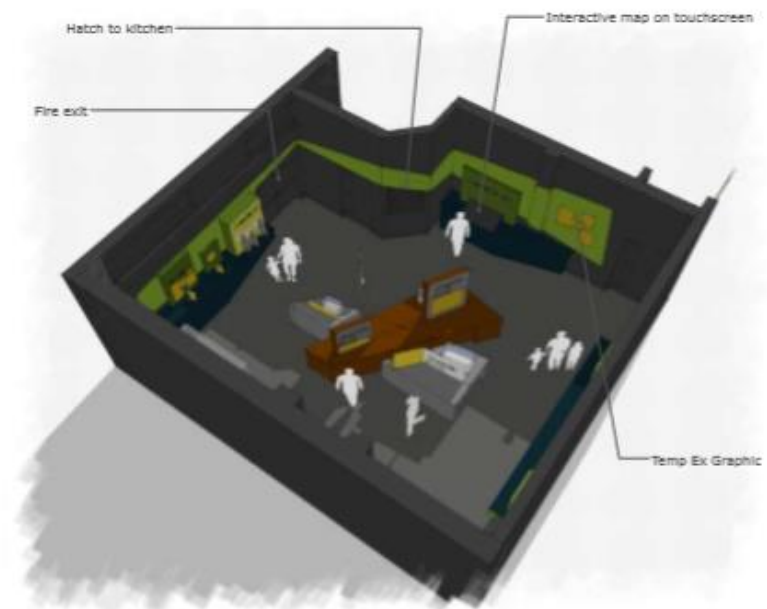
The overall design for the exhibition has taken inspiration from the Neolithic Axe Heads within the collection. Penmaenmawr's etymology is 'Great Headland of Stone', where numerous peoples thought out the ages have left their mark on the landscape. The idea of using 'Strata' to inform the creation of the timeline around the exhibition resonates with us.



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- Large flatscreen for exhibition archive images and presentation talks
- Interactive Penmaenmawr map - large touchscreen
- Oral history listening points
- Interpretive graphic wall panels
- Mobile display units with graphics, acrylic showcases
- Children's dressing up unit
- Ino, exhibition grade showcase.



VIEW FROM ENTRANCE

