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# Y Mag



Hello and welcome!

In this edition we see how Rhondda Heritage Park Museums is making the most of funding to develop a digital exhibition. We also have our first instalment of 'Meet the Team' – a series where we will have an interview with members of Welsh Government or Amgueddfa Cymru for you to get to know. Plus more.

There is lots to offer in Wales and even more to be learned from one another.

## What's New

- New Digital Exhibition at Rhondda Heritage Park Museum
- 'Meet the Team' - Eleri Wyn Evans, Head of Learning, Amgueddfa Cymru
- Exhibition Celebrates Newtown's Sporting Past – Newtown Textile Museum
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# New Digital Exhibition at Rhondda Heritage Park Museum



Exhibition space before development. ©RCTCBC Heritage Service

In 2023, the Rhondda Heritage Park Museum was awarded £135,000 from the Welsh Government Culture Division Capital Transformation Fund to develop an interactive and accessible permanent exhibition.

The capital work transformed an underused and outdated space into a digital interactive exhibition.

Before the project, the space on the ground floor was themed to represent different 19<sup>th</sup> century shops; a butchers, a cobblers and a printing press company.

While this area was dressed appropriately and aesthetically pleasing, there was little opportunity for historic content, interpretation, and objects to be displayed, adapted, or developed over time. We also found that the permanent exhibition (Black Gold) located in the upstairs gallery, which told the story of the Rhondda coal industry, was being underused by visitors.

The aim of this project was to both relocate the Black Gold exhibition, increasing footfall, and creating an interactive and accessible space. This was achieved in three ways:

- The room completely reconfigured. The internal walls were removed and the space that encompassed the three separate replica shop areas to create one large exhibition room. Moving from a linear design to an experience based on circulation has increased engagement. We now have more objects on display and each object has a greater connection with our interpretation.
- Digital touch screens and TVs were installed to display the Black Gold exhibition content. Using digital equipment and interactive software allows greater opportunity for exhibition content and objects to be accessed and changed over time. The digital content can be updated quickly, compared to the previous process of designing exhibition content for printed Perspex boards.
- The exhibition interpretation was made more accessible; different types of content for different audiences (video content, interactive timelines and maps, images of objects from the collection, interactive games, and quizzes). Similarly, all text is available in five different languages, and audio content includes British sign language interpretation.

There have been many benefits to the preservation of and engagement in the collection:

- Improved narrative of the collection. Through developing the space and design of the exhibition we can highlight greater links to the objects in the collection. As the exhibition discusses the Rhondda Coal Rush and the Rhondda miners involvement in the Spanish Civil War, these topics are brought to life on the interactive screens but also in the display cases. There has been a 50% increase of objects on display compared to the previous Black Gold exhibition space.
- The digital tablets and screens have allowed us to share digitised versions of our collection objects. There are over 300 digitised objects throughout the exhibition interpretation which have not been displayed before. This not only increases public engagement in our collection, but allows us an alternative format to share objects that may be more difficult to display due to being fragile or sensitive to light / temperature. Thus, there is a greater balance of access and preservation. Oral history interviews have become an important element of our collection, recording people's stories and memories informs future generations and brings life to physical objects. The digital equipment throughout the exhibition has allowed us to share these oral history recordings to supplement the interpretation and objects on display.

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New exhibition area. ©RCTCBC Heritage Service

# Meet the Team - Eleri Wyn Evans, Head of Learning, Amgueddfa Cymru

## *What does your role entail?*

I have been the Head of Learning at Amgueddfa Cymru since 2017, drawing on over 25 years of experience in various roles within the department. My journey began as an Art Education Officer, tasked with creating and implementing a schools programme focused on our Art collection. From those early days, our learning initiatives have evolved significantly. Today, we offer a hybrid learning programme for schools, families, and adults, and recently expanded to include activities for individuals living with and affected by dementia.

I collaborate with external stakeholders to identify needs and ensure our programmes are relevant and impactful. This collaboration shapes our annual work plan and contributes to comprehensive reports and case studies. I am dedicated to supporting my team and enjoy working with other museum departments such as curatorial, fundraising and visitor experience to develop exciting initiatives.

## *How did you get into the sector?*

Before joining Amgueddfa Cymru, I taught art at a Welsh medium secondary school, passionately advocating for the educational power of museums, galleries, and other cultural spaces. I believed these venues could ignite a passion for learning and help students develop new knowledge and skills. I created resources and organised visits to National Museum Cardiff, where my students and I spent days drawing, collecting ideas, and taking notes. These experiences highlighted the

immense potential of learning outside the classroom.

When the Art Education Officer role opened up, I eagerly applied, inspired by my time in the galleries with my students. The hands-on experiences I gained during those visits played a crucial role in my successful transition from teaching to the museum sector, providing me with a wealth of knowledge to share and build upon.

## *Words of advice for those just starting out or who want to get into the sector?*

If you're aspiring to join the museum learning sector, know that there are many pathways to get there—teaching, volunteering, community engagement, and visitor experience, to name a few. We're always on the lookout for people who are passionate about how museum learning can transform lives across diverse groups and individuals. Being a fantastic communicator, creative, resourceful, and inclusive are all essential traits.

To get started, seek out opportunities that allow you to develop and showcase these skills. Volunteering, internships, freelance work, or roles in related fields can all provide valuable experience. Importantly, learn to recognise how skills from different sectors can transfer to and enrich a museum setting. The key is to immerse yourself in experiences that build your expertise and demonstrate your passion. Your unique journey and diverse background can become your greatest asset in the museum world.

## ***What do you think is the most exciting development in the Welsh sector or what are your hopes and ambitions for the sector in Wales?***

Museums in Wales are uniquely positioned to support the new curriculum for Wales, which emphasises enriching experiences for learners, the concept of "cynefin", and inclusivity, including the mandatory inclusion of Black, Asian, and minority ethnic histories. This is a thrilling development that allows museums to become even more integral to education, fostering a deeper connection between students and their heritage.

Additionally, the ongoing advancements in digital technology are incredibly exciting. By blending real, virtual, and digital experiences, we can reach learners across the whole of Wales, breaking down geographical barriers and making our collections and programmes accessible to everyone.

Lastly, the expanding role of museums and galleries in social prescribing is profoundly promising. By collaborating with the health sector, museums can deliver impactful health and wellbeing initiatives, demonstrating the power of cultural institutions to improve lives beyond traditional educational roles.

My hope for the sector is to continue evolving as a vital, inclusive, and innovative resource for all of Wales, enriching education, embracing digital advancements, and contributing significantly to community wellbeing.

## ***Your earliest memory of visiting a museum or gallery?***

Most of my childhood holidays were spent touring the UK in a small caravan, exploring historical buildings and locations. While my sister and I sometimes longed for endless beach days, these trips are some of my happiest memories. One visit to St Fagans stands out: stepping into the Llainfadyn Cottage, I learned it once stood near our home in north Wales. This revelation sparked my imagination, connecting my present to a tangible past. I was fascinated by how the cottage had been meticulously relocated, brick by brick, from north Wales, and this connection to history ignited a lifelong passion

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# Exhibition Celebrates Newtown's Sporting Past – Newtown Textile Museum

Edward Gittins was a big man. He needed to be. He was a blacksmith by trade, a hard, physically demanding occupation. His stature and his thick, bushy black beard marked him out from the crowd. He had started his working life as a 14-year-old apprentice in his uncle's smithy, next to the Cross Keys Inn in Bwlch-y-Cibau, Montgomeryshire, but by the late 1870s he was in Newtown, his own master.

Edward had arrived in Newtown, just at the time when football was really taking off in the town. Young workers were taking advantage of the Saturday half-day holiday introduced in Britain in 1850, to form football teams. The town's first football team, Newtown FC, had been formed in 1875, rivalling the Wrexham and Cefn Druids in the industrial north east as the earliest clubs to be formed in Wales.

But Edward wanted his own team. In 1876, he formed The White Stars from his drinking pals in the Greyhound Inn in High Street. They were a motley bunch of labourers, bricklayers and flannel workers. Unable to afford a team strip, they contented themselves with a white star of varying design sewn on to any shirt they could find, to distinguish themselves from the opposition.

In 1877, a new competition was announced: the Welsh Challenge Cup of the North Wales Football Association. In 1878,

Wrexham won the inaugural contest. It was Edward's dream to lift the trophy and bring it back to Newtown. Remarkably, in April the following year, he achieved just that, when the White Stars defeated Wrexham 1-0 at Oswestry. The win was made even sweeter as the Stars had defeated their bitter rivals, Newtown FC, in the semi final. It was another three months before Edward actually got his hands on the trophy. It was presented to him, along with a special inscribed certificate, amidst great celebrations at the Public Rooms in Newtown in July 1879.

Sixteen years later, in April 1895, the fixture was repeated at Welshpool. This time it was Newtown FC facing the men from Wrexham. Newtown were captained by Edward Pryce-Jones, the Cambridge educated son of mail-order pioneer Sir Pryce Pryce-Jones.



Winners certificate, Welsh Challenge Cup 1879. The certificate can be seen in the White Stars Team photo.  
©Newtown Textile Museum

The team included another son, Albert, as well as workers from Pryce-Jones's Royal Welsh Warehouse, Newtown's principal employer. Despite, the fixture being played only twelve miles away, not all the Newtown fans could attend the match. Nevertheless, news on its progress was conveyed back by a series of telegrams. They were sent by Mr E. B. Rowlands of the Sun Inn to his wife and his expectant customers and, no doubt, from there relayed to other licensed establishments in the town.

Three of the telegrams have survived, graphically revealing the ebb and flow of the match as Newtown finally triumphed 3-2 with only ten men, becoming the town's second team to carry off the cup.

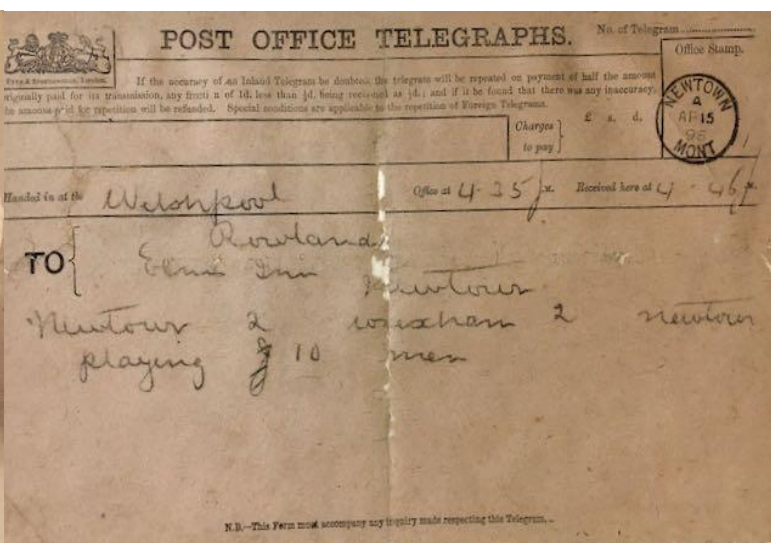
Both the White Stars' certificate and the telegrams now form part of our collection. Alas, we do not have the magnificent FAW trophy! Nevertheless they are reminders of a period which saw a remarkable flowering of sport and popular entertainment in Newtown, much of it promoted by the Pryce-Jones family. The Company's Royal Welsh Warehouse Sport and Recreation Society sponsored football, cricket, bowls, tennis, cycling and hockey clubs as well as musical and dramatic productions. It was also responsible for organising the annual Sports and Musical Festival, which drew in crowds of more than 10,000 spectators as well as competitors from across Wales and the adjoining counties of England. It is no exaggeration to claim that, in the half century before World War One, Newtown grew into one of Wales's most important sporting and cultural centres and this is now being celebrated in our current temporary exhibition.

'Sports & Leisure: 1850-1914' runs until the end of September and you can find out more by visiting our web site at [www.newtowntextilemuseum.co.uk](http://www.newtowntextilemuseum.co.uk).

John Evans – Curator - [curator@newtowntextilemuseum.co.uk](mailto:curator@newtowntextilemuseum.co.uk)



Newtown White Stars winners of the Welsh Challenge Cup, 1879. ©Newtown Textile Museum



One of three surviving telegrams charting the progress of the 1875 Welsh Cup Final. ©Newtown Textile Museum

# Mamluk Tunic Returns to Display at the Egypt Centre

After two years of treatment at Cardiff University's conservation lab, a Mamluk tunic has gone back on display at Swansea University's Egypt Centre.

The tunic is one object from the portion of the Wellcome Collection housed at the Egypt Centre. The tunic was purchased by Sir Henry Wellcome at auction in 1906, where it was described as embroidered Coptic linen. However, the panelled construction of the garment does not match any "Coptic" labelled garments in other major museum collections. There are more similarities in construction with Mamluk Period tunics dating from 1250–1517 CE.

The tunic is constructed of thirteen linen panels decorated with blue, pink, burgundy, and yellow silk designs. The colourful patterns are woven between the individual fibres of the linen cloth, creating identical patterns on both the outside and inside of the tunic. Before treatment, there were large areas of loss across the back of the shoulders and neckline, vertical tears on the front and back of the garment, large stains, and dark, brittle tidelines. The tunic was heavily creased, having been stored flat for many years, and showed signs of possible previous machine washing.

For treatment, the Egypt Centre requested the tunic be stabilized and mounted onto a mannequin for display.

It was decided that wet cleaning the tunic would be the most effective way to lessen the creasing and realign the weave of the linen. It was essential that the creasing was minimised as much as possible before attaching the stabilizing fabric, otherwise the folds would become more brittle, and breakable, over time.



©The Egypt Centre



©The Egypt Centre



Before cleaning began, fragments of the tunic that had already become detached were tested with Fourier Transform Infrared spectroscopy to determine the source of the staining. There was very little surface dirt on the tunic, suggesting that it had most likely been cleaned since its excavation.

After the tunic was wet cleaned and dried, the stabilization panel was installed. Silk-crepeline was used for the panel, as it is lightweight yet sturdy, and its transparency does not distract from the appearance of the tunic. The panel was stitched in place using conservation grade thread; the superfine thread size allowed stitches to pass through the weave of the linen without splitting the linen fibres. Very fine entomological pins and beading needles were used during the process to minimise the size of stitching and pinning holes.

To mount the tunic, a shop mannequin was padded out to give the illusion of a body under the garment. A custom-made calico lining was also created to add volume to the tunic and to protect the hem from the base of the display case.

The tunic is now on permanent display in the Egypt Centre's House of Life gallery, exhibited alongside other textiles from Egyptian history. Further information about the tunic can be found through the Egypt Centre's online catalogue at <https://egyptcentre.abasetcollections.com/Objects/Details/2522>.

By Deirdre Ellis and Jessica Morgan, Cardiff University



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