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An Analysis of Country Houses Interpretation in Wales

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An Analysis of Country House Interpretation in Wales

Matthew Rowland

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Bangor University

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Y WERIN
CRONFA DREFTADAETH
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ABSTRACT

A comprehensive study of Welsh country house interpretation has not previously been undertaken. Much of what has been written regarding Welsh country house interpretation focuses on specific aspects of a property that are presented in interpretation, for example the servants at Erddig Hall, rather than interpretation practice itself.

This research is underpinned by the question 'to what extent is the interpretation of country houses in Wales effective?' As part of this assessment, the research understands who creates interpretation at country houses in Wales, what it is based on, and who it is created for.

The thesis presents qualitative and quantitative data resulting from an online analysis of social media and websites, a survey of 306 respondents, and interviews conducted with 20 leading practitioners or custodians of country houses in Wales. It identifies the uses for and shortcomings of interpretation online and on-site. Furthermore, the thesis outlines what people want from a country house visit, assessing interpretation content, as well as the limitations, challenges, and opportunities in analysing interpretation methods.

The role and relevance of the Welsh country house has shifted considerably over the last century. Yet, the relationship between relevance, significance, interpretation, and the country house are critical to their futures. Through interpretation, past and present significance can be communicated to audiences to maintain or create relevance, which, in turn, can generate audiences to ensure their preservation. This was threatened during the coronavirus pandemic, and interpretation during the pandemic is discussed in this thesis.

"Authentic of what?" is a question posed in this thesis. Country houses are often multi-period in their architecture and design, and across their histories typically housed multiple generations of families or different families. Consequently, this thesis discusses

whether authentic interpretation can exist at all when there is so much to be represented. The prioritisation and navigation of multiple narratives and time periods in interpretation is discussed in relation to this issue.

Stemming from the research presented, it is recommended that an overarching interpretation toolkit is developed that should be made available to country house practitioners and custodians to aid those who may not have the experience or expertise required to create effective interpretation. This toolkit could be partially informed by a report of social media and website use and output to aid practitioners and custodians with their online objectives through interpretation. The marketing of sites through interpretation represents a core focus in this thesis. Furthermore, it is advised that practitioners and custodians of country houses in Wales have access to site-specific repositories of information that can be drawn upon to create accurate, engaging interpretation. These are necessary owing to the frequency of inaccuracies or embellishments that this research encountered.

The interpretation of country houses in Wales is changing out of a necessity for change and a desire for change, outlined in this research, moving toward honest and holistic interpretation which moves beyond the traditional focus on the lineage of male owners associated with particular sites, their political and military accomplishments, and the architectural and art history of the houses. Country houses in Wales were significant, are significant, and will be significant for many generations to come. Interpretation has a substantial role to play in communicating this significance.

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DECLARATION

'I hereby declare that this thesis is the results of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. All other sources are acknowledged by bibliographic references. This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree unless, as agreed by the University, for approved dual awards.

I confirm that I am submitting this work with the agreement of my Supervisor(s).'

'Yr wyf drwy hyn yn datgan mai canlyniad fy ymchwil fy hun yw'r thesis hwn, ac eithrio lle nodir yn wahanol. Caiff ffynonellau eraill eu cydnabod gan droednodiadau yn rhoi cyfeiriadau eglur. Nid yw sylwedd y gwaith hwn wedi cael ei dderbyn o'r blaen ar gyfer unrhyw radd, ac nid yw'n cael ei gyflwyno ar yr un pryd mewn ymgeisiaeth am unrhyw radd oni bai ei fod, fel y cytunwyd gan y Brifysgol, am gymwysterau deuol cymeradwy.

Rwy'n cadarnhau fy mod yn cyflwyno'r gwaith hwn gyda chytundeb fy Ngoruchwyliwr (Goruchwylwyr)

INTRODUCTION

Country houses and estates in Wales have the potential to play a significant role in telling the story of local, national and global histories. On a local level, their significance was rooted in providing employment for local people in a variety of capacities, whilst providing the landowner with a tangible powerhouse where their wealth, power, and social status was on display for all to view. Their significance surpassed a local sphere, expanding nationally and globally for some through their business dealings, often exporting materials overseas, and becoming consumers of goods from around the world, culturally enhancing their houses through art, books, sculptures, and property décor. Welsh country houses and estates affected the lives of many people, not limited exclusively to Wales, but around the world through the trade of items, materials, and people. Therefore, the stories these sites stand to tell are important, varied, and, significantly, relatable to many people of different backgrounds now and in the future.

The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales (RCAHMW) (Coflein, 2013) identified 213 country houses located in Wales, although offers no definition of the term, so the figure serves only as a general guide for the purpose of this work. However, this figure seems low and is not a true representation, even when the scores of demolished country houses are taken into account. It is subject to scrutiny in relation to its accuracy due to the nature of defining a country house, and there being terms such as manor, farmhouse, and mansion which properties could be described as, possibly collectively able to swell the number of country houses beyond the cited figure of 213. For comparison, the Scottish Civic Trust (2010) identified 1,604 listed country houses in Scotland, and Historic England (2023) estimated that there are 3,739 listed country houses in England (appendix 1). Mark Baker (2016) building on the work of Thomas Lloyd (1986) compiled a list of 390 Welsh country houses that have been lost over time, highlighting the need to preserve remaining buildings and communicate their significance to the public. Baker's list was compiled following the template of the original list of lost country houses in England compiled by Matthew Beckett, which

identified 1,998 as being demolished, severely reduced in size, or ruined (Beckett, 2019). Alastair Disley (2016) compiled a similar list which recognises 530 lost country houses in Scotland. Baker's (2016) work attributed a reason for loss to just 182 of the 390 lost houses. Of the 182, the leading reason for loss was that the property became surplus to requirements. In some cases, there are multiple reasons for the loss of a country house, and when these reasons are separated out into their own categories, the leading reason for loss is that the house was destroyed by fire, with 21 of the buildings being lost as a result. Evidently, country houses are lost for numerous reasons, and this thesis discusses how interpretation can be used to share the significance of them with the public, thus creating relevance to mitigate further losses and to maintain and preserve them. The preservation of these buildings is often synonymous with the preservation of an area's local history, or aspects of it. Where appropriate, country houses can be used to share stories of locally significant history as well as dissect national and global issues through relevant, connected topics or themes using an extent of effective interpretation.

People are able to visit thirteen houses and gardens under the protection of the National Trust (2023, p.374) in Wales. They are: Powis Castle, Penrhyn Castle, Erddig Hall, Chirk Castle, Plas Newydd, Dinefwr Park, Tredegar House, Llanerchaeron, Dyffryn Gardens, Bodysgallen Hall, Plas yn Rhiw, Bodnant Garden, and Colby Woodland Gardens. There are eighty-three Historic House member properties in Wales (Historic Houses, 2022, pp.31-44). Some of these open to the public on an open day basis, with HMRC guidance mandating that country houses "should be conserved and protected for the benefit of the public" and that "owners should be encouraged to retain and care for [country houses] and display [them]" (HMRC, 2022). This is especially applicable to houses in receipt of conditional exemption from inheritance tax. Cadw, the Welsh Government's historic environment service, is directly responsible for the preservation of few Welsh country houses – none of which are in North Wales. The Gowers Report of 1950 recommended that country houses remain privately owned where possible and concluded that further support should be offered to owners, including grants, advice, and tax concessions. Only in cases where owners could not maintain a property should takeover by the National Trust be considered. State rescue was a last resort (Cowell, 2020).

However, in North Wales, examples of country houses falling into disrepair with no known takeover offers from the National Trust or Cadw include Kinmel Hall, Baron Hill, Glynllifon, and Nannau. It is therefore remarkable that the national heritage body for Wales has seemingly not sought additional country houses to maintain and add to the sites that they directly care for, especially when so many have already been lost, and many lie in ruin with their condition deteriorating. There are plenty of privately-owned properties not affiliated to an organisation such as Historic Houses which remain residential for the owners alone, and there are others throughout Wales which have been converted into hotels, with Historic UK's (2019) accommodation guide presenting over thirty results for historic hotels in Wales, with many of them being former country houses. However, some of these listings highlight a significant difference in historic houses in Wales, and in particular how they are marketed and portrayed. In the last century, the terms 'manor house', 'mansion', and 'country house' have largely been used interchangeably, and the Welsh term '*plas*' or '*plasty*' is also used. In some cases, such as Dolbelydr (Landmark Trust, 2022a) and Llwyn Celyn (Landmark Trust, 2022b) – both owned by the Landmark Trust – former gentry *plastai* exist which transitioned into farmhouses over the course of their existence. The differences within the definition of a country house highlight some of the complexities involved in this research and identify why it has been important to ensure that this research incorporates a variety of property types.

The extent of public access to country houses and estates affects the nature of the interpretation offered at those sites. For example, there is less need and desire for physical on-site interpretation at a property which primarily operates as a family residence. There are examples of Welsh country houses that are not at all accessible to the public. On occasion, this is out of necessity due to the instability of a building leading to safety concerns, for example at Baron Hill in Beaumaris, where the house has been uninhabited since the 1920s (British Listed Buildings, 2005). In this scenario, any form of interpretation of the country house is difficult to achieve on-site if it is structurally unsafe, and in the specific case of Baron Hill, there is no roof over the building. Conversely, visiting the ruins of Gwrych Castle is actively promoted, although in a safe and controlled manner. Safety concerns are not the

sole reasons for little to no access to a country house, and this is exemplified at Hawarden Castle, where the Gladstone family own and occupy the country house itself, with access to the estate being limited to individuals who are granted permission, or with sections of the estate being opened for open days, for example the old castle, but never the house itself (Hawarden Estate Farm Shop, 2019). There is also public access granted to some land surrounding the Hawarden Estate Farm Shop. Properties, such as Brynkinalt in Chirk, hold open days of the building and gardens for an admission fee including a tour conducted by a family member (Brynkinalt, 2019; Historic Houses, 2019). Country houses which are full-time tourist attractions, such as the National Trust owned Erddig Hall, enable access throughout the building and its associated grounds, consequently enabling wider interpretation. Clearly, the extent of physical access to country houses has a direct impact on how they can be interpreted, heavily influencing the accessibility of the history and heritage of the site. Country houses which are unsafe to access pose some of the greatest challenges, because often they will consist of a crumbling shell of the building, with little resemblance to the building when it was occupied. Without spending large sums of money to safeguard a building, it renders the heritage and history at these sites physically inaccessible. However, access can be granted in other forms. In the case of sites where there is limited access permitted on private property, for instance at Hawarden, where there is access to the farm shop, park and village pub on a daily basis, but the house is permanently off limits to the public, there may be scope for the heritage and history to be interpreted in some form elsewhere. Where sites hold open days of the country houses itself, there is clearly access to the heritage and history of the site, often in the form of guided tours. At country houses such as Erddig which is operated as a full-time tourist attraction, the primary focus is accessibility to the heritage and history of the property and estate. In addition to this, access can be granted through online interpretation, or even through books.

Without opening to the public as full-time attractions, country houses, with the exception of those that are derelict and not in a state of upkeep, must generate their income from elsewhere. Charging admission for open days is evidently one method of doing this. To operate a financially sustainable country house, many properties

seek to either host activities and events, or to operate under a wholly different business model, for example as a hotel, restaurant or wedding venue.

One such activity is the use of country estates as game shooting venues. Often, shooting venues on country estate land is advertised in conjunction with a country house hotel, such as at Plas Dinam (2019) which offers “private accommodation and fantastic shooting”. It is uncommon for country houses to offer shooting as the sole selling point of their property and land, with Bettws Hall, one of the U.K.’s largest shooting operations and owners of Bettws Hall House, offering a dining package to shooters and non-shooters alike, encouraging non-shooters to join the shooting group in the name of “camaraderie” (Bettws Hall, 2019). In 2019, a ban on pheasant shooting enacted by the Welsh Government came into effect, prohibiting pheasant shooting on public land in Wales. Resulting from the ban, all pheasant shooting must take place on private property, such as an estate, which could be viewed as having positive implications for estates and country houses if more people want to use their facilities. However, if birds from private estates settle on public land, ‘beaters’ – people who flush out the birds to a desired location – will be unable to move them back to the private estates under the ban (Bodkin, 2018). The heritage and history of the practice of using country houses and estates for the purpose of shooting is both, accessible and inaccessible. It is accessible due to the fact that the tradition of shooting game is a continuing practice deeply embedded in the social and cultural histories of many country houses and estates. Shooting, therefore, is an example of an intangible heritage as defined by the ICOMOS Quebec Declaration on the Preservation of Spirit of Place (ICOMOS, 2008, p.2) as it is a continuation of tradition. However, it is inaccessible because people who travel to a country estate with the purpose of their visit being to shoot, although they may be aware of the heritage of shooting, they are not necessarily informed or involved about the shooting heritage and history of a particular site, which could add to the experience. There is also much contemporary public opposition to the practice of shooting for pleasure or sport. In response to public campaigns, the Welsh Government announced in 2021 that the shooting of grouse and game birds for sport does not have their support (Wild Moors, 2021). Evidently, shooting alone may not be an

economically viable use for country houses and their estates, resulting in alternatives being explored.

Historic UK (2019), a history and heritage accommodation guide, lists over 30 historic hotels in Wales, many of which are converted country houses. However, the list is selective and there are most likely scores of omissions. It does not attempt to list every historic hotel in Wales, but in being selective, it highlights that there are a large number of country houses that have been transformed into hotels in Wales. For many hotels, the heritage and history of the property which they operate is not a priority beyond marketing the business as a historic hotel. Therefore, whilst the heritage and history of the country house is often physically accessible, the extent of interpretation can be inadequate, sometimes limited to a single tokenistic webpage written without requisite knowledge. This thesis discusses and identifies the extent to which interpretation can be used in marketing, whilst providing recommendations on how this can be achieved based on extensive research. It has already been mentioned that country house hotels are often operated alongside another venture, with the example being given as a shooting venue on the surrounding estate. Visiting gardens is another strand of ensuring financial stability, and some sites open the garden to the public and not the house, for example in the case of Bodnant. Country houses with their grand architectural and landscaped surroundings provide exceptional venues for events, such as weddings. Hosting these events can raise issues for the interpretation of the heritage and history of a building, because if a property has a history steeped in slavery or the exploitation of workers, although these are important aspects of the history, it may be deemed inappropriate to be interpreted at a wedding venue and would require careful consideration. Furthermore, interpretation is unlikely to be a priority for prospective wedding parties. In relation to this, this thesis explores the significance of the setting of the country house. Popular wedding planning website, Bridebook (2019), identifies around one-hundred wedding venues in Wales which match their criteria of being a country house. Most also offer hotel accommodation, dining, spa, and conference facilities, and some offer shooting facilities.

During the coronavirus pandemic, income streams such as hotel accommodation or admission tickets for different functions of country houses were not possible owing to government implemented national lockdowns. This period posed one of the most substantial threats in recent decades to the maintenance, operation, and viability of many country houses throughout Wales. As a result of the pandemic, the National Trust expected to lose up to £200 million and proposed 1,200 job redundancies as well as stopping or deferring £124 million of projects (National Trust, 2020a) to ensure the future sustainability of the Trust. In actuality, the Trust made 514 compulsory redundancies and accepted 782 voluntary redundancies (National Trust, 2020b). The effects of the coronavirus pandemic on the National Trust highlights the negative impacts that organisations suffered during this time. Since the Office for National Statistics began taking datasets from the Labour Force Survey in 1996, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) unemployment rate (Appendix 2) in Wales was at its lowest in September 2020 before a sharp rise in unemployment between December 2020 and June 2021 (StatsWales, 2022), before the end of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (a percentage of employee wages covered by the government if they could not work due to the pandemic, often referred to as 'furlough') in the U.K. in September 2021 (gov.uk, 2022). Consequently, interpretation of many of these properties in its ordinary forms was not possible owing to the closure of country houses as well as the furloughing of staff.

In addition to the coronavirus pandemic, this research was carried out during a socially and politically turbulent period during which the interpretation of histories in the U.K. was a newsworthy matter. Black Lives Matter protests in the U.K. brought discussions regarding the representation and interpretation of historic colonialists to the forefront of public discourse. Protests took place in the form of marches, but also in the damaging of colonialist statues as in the case of Edward Colston in Bristol and the creation of numerous online petitions to change the names of buildings, for example of Gladstone's Library in Hawarden, Wales which attracted 118 signatures (Lamb, 2020). Conversely, a petition of the opposing view attracted 5,313 signatures (Marshall, 2020) underlining the public nature of the discussions on the subject. Consequently, the interpretation of country houses was also discussed more publicly than previously, with the National Trust releasing a commissioned report into

colonialist and transatlantic slave trade connections at the properties the Trust cares for (Fowler et al, 2020), and the Welsh Government undertaking an audit of the historic monuments, buildings and street names in Wales with historic slave trade and British Empire associations (Drakeford, 2020).

In Wales, country houses operating as full-time visitor attractions are firmly in the minority, with most being privately owned, many still as private residences and many as commercial ventures such as hotels. Privately owned properties include those inhabited by the ancestral family, for example Mostyn Hall, or privately owned by a recent purchaser, for example Hafodunos Hall. The historical contents of a property under ancestral private ownership often remain in situ providing opportunities for interpretation should access be permitted. However, there may be challenges in presenting accurate, holistic narratives regarding ancestors. Recently purchased houses may lack historical contents, and this thesis identifies to what extent historic collections are considered important to a person's visit. Some properties are ruins, with only the shell of the building remaining. Each type of use presents its own challenges in terms of preservation and interpretation – challenges which were exacerbated by the pandemic and the social climate of 2020, as discussed in this thesis.

The research presented in this thesis is necessary because previously, an in-depth academic study of the interpretation of Welsh country houses has not been undertaken, despite their undoubted importance in the shaping of modern Wales, as outlined in the literature review. Existing literature has a tendency to focus on interpretation content, rather than interpretation methods or the value of interpretation in the Welsh country house context. A body of work comprising of opinion and in-depth knowledge of leading Welsh country house custodians and practitioners on matters related to the interpretation of Welsh country houses did not exist in any form until the research and writing of this thesis. This research is valuable because it furthers the understanding of why country houses are or are not interpreted, and if they are, the reasons behind the selected methods of interpretation. Furthermore, it is the first instance that any attempt has been made to understand people's reasons for visiting Welsh country houses, what they want to

see from Welsh country houses in the future, the relationship between a person's identity and the Welsh country house, and the relationship between marketing and interpretation in the context of the country house in Wales.

To achieve all of this, the thesis presents, in the first instance, a literature review considering relevant texts and identifying research gaps that this thesis seeks to address. The research methodology is then introduced. Following this, the thesis is divided into three main analytical chapters. The first of the three presents an analysis of online Welsh country house interpretation. It presents collated data and the findings of assessing websites and social media accounts which relate to Welsh country houses. These houses are of a variety of different types, with varied audiences and contemporary functions. This type of analysis has not previously been undertaken in relation to Welsh country houses. An analysis of an online survey hosted online which received 306 responses in Welsh and in English is presented in the second of the three analytical chapters. It presents the findings and shares the views and opinions of the participants which can inform the future interpretation of Welsh country houses. The third and final analytical chapter considers the results of twenty interviews conducted with leading custodians and practitioners of Welsh country houses. The interviews are discussed in relation to broader themes relative to the interpretation of Welsh country houses, drawing heavily from quotes of the interviewees. In the conclusion of this thesis, all three analytical chapters are drawn upon and discussed, with the overall thesis findings and recommendations presented.

The recommendations of this thesis can help ensure that Welsh country houses play a significant role in telling the story of Wales's history, whilst ensuring that they themselves are considered to be significant and relevant for future generations. The value of this is discussed throughout the thesis.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter discusses the existing academic literature as well as sector-specific guidance, reports and policy documents relating to the interpretation of Welsh country houses. Much of what has been written regarding the interpretation of landed estates focuses specifically on the content of interpretation. A prime example of this would be the body of literature surrounding the servants at Erddig Hall, Wrexham (Lethbridge, 2013, pp.123-124; Walker, 1996, pp.296-306, Waterson, 1980;). Themes relevant to the identification of effective interpretation practices are discussed in this chapter, such as past and present significance of Welsh country houses. Furthermore, academic writing relating to the marketing of historic sites is discussed to enable an effective analysis of promotional material produced for different types of Welsh country house analysed in this work. This is especially valuable owing to the close relationship between marketing and interpretation. Until this thesis, there has not been a dedicated body of academic work focusing on the interpretation of Welsh country houses. It is worthwhile to distinguish the interpretation of Welsh country houses from English country houses because part of the policy landscape relating to current country house functions and the relationships between country houses and the identity of people may differ in Wales to England. Although Welsh country houses and their owners formed part of a wider British aristocratic culture, and shared many characteristics with their counterparts in England, they are also important for understanding the distinctive history and culture of Wales. Their role and influence in Welsh and local history should be reflected in their interpretation. Additionally, interpretation of visitor attractions in Wales naturally differs to visitor attractions in England because in Wales interpretation must be bilingual. Therefore, for interpretation which is text-based, there is usually twice as much text and consequently less space to interpret.

The literature review chapter is structured through the identification of research themes pertinent to this project. Firstly, what qualifies as a Welsh country house must be defined for the purpose of this work. Defining a country house is an issue complicated in the mid-nineteenth century as large houses were constructed for the recreation and entertainment of families or business associates (Wilson and Mackley,

2000, p.8). However, Wilson and Mackley define a country house as a building partnered with a larger estate used to financially prosper, used by the owners to affirm their status and often to provide a stake in country affairs (Wilson and Mackley, 2000, pp.8-9), a definition further accepted by Williamson (Williamson, 2003, pp.1-3). A country house estate often comprised of a variety of outbuildings which indicate the complex nature of many estate enterprises. Additionally, they often incorporated designed gardens and parkland, a major farm complex, and a large team of servants and staff with defined roles. There were rooms and buildings within and outside of the house which related to their roles – country houses were major centres of employment. Furthermore, the wider family-owned landscape was split into multiple tenant farms, woodland, and/or industrial works, with the country house often the largest and most prominent building in the locality. The Country houses of Wales, or '*plastai*', were shaped by the identities of their owners, with many houses being used to visually and materially display their Welshness. However, their identities were also conditioned by their social, cultural, and political contexts – by the people who lived and worked on the estates. Country houses cannot be separated from their location and cannot therefore be separated from Wales. They are also distinguishable from country houses elsewhere resulting from their common representations of identity and genealogy. In his thesis, Baker (2016a, p.166) wrote that the Welsh gentry "defined themselves by blood, rather than wealth." They are also distinguishable in some cases architecturally, through the establishment and development of the unit system, which Hemp and Gresham (1942, p.98) described as:

[...] an arrangement in a group of several small houses, each complete in itself, in place of the single large house which might be expected to result from addition or rebuilding. The houses are usually more or less contemporary and mostly date to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. A marked feature is the lack of direct communication between units, although in some cases they have been connected in later times by additional buildings or awkwardly contrived passageways.

Vaughan (1988, p.81) wrote that gentry families in Wales wanted to imitate their Irish and English counterparts, resulting in the alteration and expansion of their homes at great expense, often incorporating the older houses built as part of the unit system into the newer site. Welsh country houses also appear to be partially defined by the status of their owners: '*yr uchelwyr*' or the gentry. Wales's '*plastai*' are seen to have been functioning monuments to wealth and stature, with their owners exerting their influence on a local, national, and global level (Jenkins, 1992, pp.325-327). The country houses were viewed as power houses within regional society, situated at the heart of local, rural economies shaping surrounding communities for centuries (Davies, 1974, pp. 186-189; Girouard, 1978, pp.1-12). However, following the decline of the gentry from the early twentieth century, most of these concepts are considered to be outdated, and the country house in the eyes of many has become obsolete, or a burden to owners (Strong, Binney and Harris, 1974). They were built for a different society, in different times. Many were destroyed or abandoned over the course of the twentieth century. Today, many of Wales's surviving country houses remain privately owned, although some function as wedding venues, restaurants, or others, and some have been passed over to organisations such as the National Trust who have a mandate to maintain them for the benefit of current and future generations.

Significance

Christopher Christie's work on the topic of British country houses in the eighteenth century succinctly summarises their historic significance, stating that "they were a major expression of artistic, political and economic endeavour" (Christie, 2000, p.4). Christie's summary of their significance neglects the social aspect of their significance. Simon Gikandi wrote that in the eighteenth century, people perceived country houses as symbols of social standing. The imposing architecture of the country house mirrored the social hierarchy, with both, the physical structure of the building and the aristocracy towering over the surrounding land and all within it (Cooper, 2002, pp.295-296). Gikandi continued to write that the interior of the country house could simultaneously display or conceal luxuries acquired through colonial enterprises. He begins to consider if this was why "nabobs" and West Indian planters frequently adopted Palladianism as an architectural style for the construction of their buildings, externally representing control, yet being extravagant internally (Gikandi, 2011, p.135). Considering internal luxuries, country house owners collected objects such as art, sculptures and furniture as well as establishing libraries. In Wales, cosmopolitan country house libraries would have incorporated numerous Welsh-language texts and manuscripts (Evans, 2022, pp.35-42). Together, Christie and Gikandi begin to highlight broad topics of country house historic significance, which this chapter now expands upon.

Economic endeavour is the first topic to be explored. Christopher Christie wrote a chapter on the topic of economics and the country house. He observed that much of the financial income generated for the owners of country houses in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries resulted from agricultural activities carried out on their estates (Christie, 2000, pp.4-25). Howell confirms this was especially true in Wales with landowners letting land to tenants who managed estate farms on the behalf of the landowner, with it being very rare that landowners themselves farmed their estates (Howell, 2016, pp.42-47). However, most landed estates retained a 'home farm' and continued to directly farm demesne lands sometimes into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Agrarian improvements enabled landowners to extract more money from the land from the 1770s, (Christie, 2000, p.5). Specifically referring to Wales, Christie used the Faenol/Vaynol estate to exemplify the "progressive"

management of land, where most tenants held their land by annual lease by 1800 (Christie, 2000, p.7). The turn to tenancy changed how estates were managed, with landowners seeking tenants to rent their land, thus turning a profit (Girouard, 1978, p.2). Preceding this, the 1780s were pivotal for the slate industry in northwest Wales, whilst lead mines such as Minera mine in northeast Wales became more prominent in the mid-nineteenth century (Wrexham Heritage, 2022). By 1793 when war between England and France broke out, Wales was contributing around 26,000 tons annually to a British total of 45,000 (Gwyn, 2015, p.30) The Earl of Uxbridge received £2,000 per annum in royalties for copper under his estates, and the Pennant family partially used money derived from their slate quarries to fund the build of Penrhyn Castle, with local landowners trying to follow Richard Pennant's lead (Christie, 2000, pp.8-9). The family were able to use the quarries coupled with the size of the estate to control local politics. As many as eighty known liberal quarry workers were dismissed with no reason given around the late nineteenth century (Jones, 1981, pp.50-51), the implication being that they were deemed to be a threat to the family's local control. Earlier, between 1541 and his death in 1580, Piers Mostyn of Talacre purchased lands in ten Flintshire manors, nine of which lay within Northerly locations with near-surface outcrops of coal with easy access to the sea (Lloyd-Gruffydd, 1996, pp.53-57) demonstrating Christie's claim that landowners were considerable investors in mining (Christie, 2000, p.8) and exploitation of mineral resources. Franklin expands upon this, claiming that many landowners involved with coal or iron often had railway interests, or industrial interests such as engineering, shipping, or forms of mining (Franklin, 1981, p.28). These industrial activities often took place on the estate, with mineral exploitation forming part of the function of an estate. However, it is apparent that landowners did not solely profit from their estates, but from sources further afield. One of the most lucrative sources of income was the result of trade, particularly in the eighteenth century when the aristocracy were supported by companies such as the East India Company (Finn and Smith, 2018, p.3), providing much wealth for families from non-agrarian sources. Many of such companies were involved in the slave trade with wealthy British landowners 'owning' vast numbers of slaves and sugar plantations to contribute to their wealth, enabling them to expand their estates, country houses, or collections

(Gwyn, 2011, p.81). The nearby English cities of Liverpool and Bristol were pivotal to the transatlantic slave economy, incorporating landed hinterlands which extended into north and south Wales respectively. Clearly, estates surrounding country houses were used for social, political and economic power, but landowners sought to further increase their income by other means externally through establishing careers often in law, the military, or the church.

Exploiting external sources of income became increasingly necessary as a result of an agricultural depression in the late nineteenth century. The result being the fall of rents and land values, and the erosion of confidence in land as a security (Franklin, 1981, p.30). In Wales, this heightened calls for Land Reform and led to a Royal Commission on Land to interrogate the ways in which landowners traditionally managed their estates. Richard John noted that it is estimated that 1116 country houses in Britain were demolished between 1875-1975 as a result of the agricultural depression, alongside two world wars, and extortionate taxation rates (John, 2010, p.112). Analysing the context in Wales, John Davies wrote:

The *Estates Gazette* estimated that between 1918 and 1922, a quarter of the land of England changed hands. Some doubt has been expressed concerning the magnitude of the figure, but, if it appears excessive for England, there is reason to believe that it may be conservative for Wales. (Davies, 1974, p.193)

This underlines that the breakup and demise of landed estates in England and Wales took place at different rates. In the period of 1875-1975, the world became more connected to technological advancements in communication such as the telegraph and the wireless, and in transport such as the steamship and aeroplane. Additionally, there were significant shifts politically and socially, as increased democracy in Britain stripped away the political function of landowners and the introduction (Vaughan, 1988) of county councils supplanted the local office-holding functions of the gentry. These changes exacerbated the agricultural depression, as there was a sudden expansion of unprecedented American billionaires between 1870 and World War One. Individuals such as Henry Ford, and Rockefeller made vast amounts of money from avenues which were not agricultural. As Cannadine stated, "the leviathans of wealth were no longer British" (Cannadine, 1990, pp.90-91). During the inter-war

years, many landed estates were no longer economically viable due to tax rate, a struggling agricultural economy and death duties (Cannadine, 1990, pp.92-98).

Country houses were not only used to build upon the wealth of a landowner. They were also political statements by the gentry and aristocratic owners. Mark Girouard states that "people did not live in country houses unless they either possessed power, or, by setting up in a country house, were making a bid to possess it" (Girouard, 1978, p.2). Whilst the land that they owned did bring income, it also brought with it political support and obligation, as a landowner could more successfully influence his tenants to vote for him or his preferred candidate. The money raised from rent could be utilised by paying people to vote favourably, or by maintaining his estate so that people felt inclined to be connected to its landowners wishes (Girouard, 1978, p.2). Landowners were expected to contribute to local government, serving as Justices of the Peace, Sheriffs, Lieutenants, and be responsible for local militia. Whilst the foundation of their power was in the country, they also sought to expand their power and connections through spending time in London due to the increasing power of the court and central government and the cultural scene in London. Some landowning families owned London townhouses, and some treated their Welsh properties as country retreats for hunting or other activities. Landowners must be seen to have had a presence on a local level in the country, and to neglect this would have jeopardised their overall political standing (Girouard, 1978, pp.5-7).

Clearly there was significant crossover between the economic significance of a country house and ways in which they were historically significant. As well as seeking to establish political power, the country house was a physical social symbol in the landscape, a reminder to the working class and other parts of society, including rival or neighbouring landowners, of who was in charge. Jill Franklin exemplified this point stating that they are "monuments to an extinct social order", referring to "house patrons of such wealth and privilege" that will not be seen again (Franklin, 1981, p.1). Referring to the elite culture described by Franklin, Peter Mandler wrote that there is a tendency to treat elite culture as something separate from other social cultures, when elite culture itself is formed by government, popular

attitudes, prejudices, and internal elite culture (Mandler, 1999, p.2). However, it is easy to treat elite culture separately due to the stark differences between the elite and other classes. Barczewski (2014, pp.2-3) highlighted this by demonstrating that by the eighteenth century, some country house owners of the elite class were opening their buildings to tourists of all classes, enabling them to display the architecture of their building and their collections they had established within them, often as a result of colonialism or travel, offering people the opportunity to see exotic objects and ways of life they would not otherwise have the opportunity to see. Stobart (2017, p.3) wrote that "the eighteenth-century country house was a well-established focus for travel and the destination for many journeys." Railways in the nineteenth century provided people with an affordable method of visiting country houses (Barczewski, 2014, pp.2-3). Dana Arnold summarised some of the motivations that landowners held for allowing the public to view the country houses by stating that "the landed estates of the elite helped engender the illusion of inclusion into an exclusionary society that bound together different classes through a feeling of unity" (Arnold, 2005, p.2). Arnold believed that this was achieved by the elite through the appreciation of people for architecture and designed landscapes. People appeared to believe that by viewing a building and its surroundings they were connected to the creators, therefore being unified with the elite.

To an extent, the social endeavour overlaps the artistic endeavour. The artistic endeavour is undoubtedly born out of a combination of the previous three endeavours discussed. However, it is still worthy of being identified as its own form of country house significance due in large part to the collection of works of art, and the architectural significance of the buildings themselves. It was not only art that landowners collected and consumed, as Stobart and Rothery highlight, it was a wide variety of luxury items that the elite collected "to make a very public statement of the wealth, taste, and connoisseurship of the owner" (Stobart and Rothery, 2016, p.24). Furthermore, they introduced the notion of 'defensive consumption' whereby the elite purchase luxury items to assert their wealth and "define their status as different from and more meaningful than the newly wealthy urban elites" (Stobart and Rothery, 2016, p.24). Many of these extravagant collections built up by the elite landowners were a direct consequence of their involvement in the slave trade. Both,

Penrhyn Castle and Powis Castle are examples of this. Whilst the collections themselves may be significant, it is important not to overlook the significance of their background steeped in colonialism and slavery. Dresser and Hann raised this issue, stating that “collections of art and furniture, though so often represented as being a world away from slavery interests, were in fact related and need to be understood as such” (Dresser and Hann, 2013, p.14). The collection of items which were either funded through slavery or sourced from ‘exotic’ places within the British Empire turned country houses into symbols of the Empire. Stobart and Rothery demonstrate this, claiming that country houses without a direct link to the imperial project were still considered by many to be physical representations of Empire (Stobart and Rothery, 2016, p.73). Therefore, country houses hold historic significance partially because they are seen as being intrinsically linked to colonial ambitions. Whilst it was possible to physically display this within a country house, it was rarely possible to achieve externally in the architecture. However, it is conceivable that during the planning of country houses, some were designed with intimidation (Gikandi, 2011, p.135) in mind to assert their authority over the locality, and to remind people who was in charge. Harbinson wrote on this subject, identifying architecture which is politically influenced using “buildings as a means of intimidation and control” (Harbinson, 1998, p.122). Country houses which feature towers in their architectural make-up, he believed, are “a serious form of intimidation” (Harbinson, 1998, p.123). In Wales, there are multiple country houses which incorporate towers into their architecture such as Penrhyn Castle, Margam Castle, Gwrych Castle and Bodelwyddan Castle. Although these properties could have been constructed in this manner due to a wealthy owner’s desire to own such a building, or a preference for neo-gothic or neo-norman architectural styles, part of the motivation behind that could have been intimidation, but more likely power or authority. This could have been one of the many forms of maintaining social hierarchies and its associated cultures of obligation, defence, authority, and respect. As Myers (2013, p.85) noted, there was a history of English landowners being oppressive and frustrating their tenants. Conversely, more modest country houses of more traditional Welsh architectural design such as Gwydir Castle do not appear intimidating, but instead perhaps communicated messages about the owner’s status, authority, heritage,

legitimacy, leadership, power, and wealth. Rather than trying to intimidate local Welsh people, English or Scottish owners who inherited their Welsh estates sought to express their legitimacy of ownership through establishing local connections, sometimes through the Welsh language as Jenkins wrote: "even a new English lord of a Glamorgan estate felt a duty to learn the Welsh language" (Jenkins, 1983, p.206).

Quintessence of Englishness

Peter Mandler wrote that the country houses of England “are the quintessence of Englishness: they epitomize the English love of domesticity, of the countryside, of hierarchy, continuity and tradition. Their aristocratic owners have built them up lovingly over centuries and kept them intact in times of adversity to bequeath to future generations this unique embodiment of the English character” (Mandler, 1999, p.1). Laurajane Smith substantiated Mandler by stating that “they are an emblem of English ‘civilisation’ and of ‘modernity’” (Smith, 2006, p.117). Country houses are commonly perceived as English. For Welsh country houses, this is problematic in terms of their interpretation and perception, highlighting them as bastions of Englishness in Wales and stripping the sites of their Welsh identity. Christie wrote of how the Welsh landscape was altered by English influences:

In Wales, all the bishops were sons of English noble families, staunchly Hanoverian and cosmopolitan in their tastes. Elegant rectories of well-to-do Anglo-Welsh clergy adorned the countryside. By the early nineteenth century, elegant Gothic and Tudor style houses of the gentry and clergy adorned the countryside, which itself stimulated an interest in the Picturesque. (Christie, 2000, p.16).

Here, he leads us to consider the impact of English wealth upon the Welsh cultural and physical landscape. Before giving this further consideration, English influences on the Welsh landscape before the advent of the country house should be considered. Perhaps the most notable architectural English interventions in Wales which forever changed the Welsh landscape came in the form of the castles constructed by order of Edward I following his thirteenth-century conquest of Gwynedd. The purpose of their construction was predominantly defence not only against foreign conquerors, but also Welsh conspirators (Butler, 2010, pp.29-32). A Cadw draft management plan draws upon previous academic study claiming that castles were not simply defensive, but also seats of government, symbols of power, and a method of disseminating English influence in Wales (Cadw, 2016a, p.10). The document continued to refer to Arnold Joseph Taylor’s work, claiming that Caernarfon Castle is an enduring symbol of Edward I’s conquest and settlement of

North Wales imbued with imperial iconography which connected him and his empire with ancient Rome and its emperors (Cadw, 2016a, p.34). Furthermore, the plan indicates that whilst castles are admired for their grandeur and architecture, they are also symbolic of oppression and alienation (Cadw, 2016a, p.41). Welsh country houses and the Edwardian castles of Wales differ in that the castles were explicitly built with conquest, colonisation, and oppression as the primary objective. Fundamentally they operated differently, and most Welsh country houses served as hubs of Welsh culture and identity rather than centres that actively tried to suppress it. However, there can be a public perception that country houses also represent oppressors owing to the class of people who owned them. Research undertaken by Philip Jenkins indicates that wealthy English people were not only constructing country houses in Wales, but also inheriting them. He argues that a new gentry was formed by descendants of English squires and lords marrying heiresses of the old *uchelwyr*, thus acquiring an estate and country house upon the death of the landowner (Jenkins, 1984, pp.37-38). Therefore, it is evident that many country houses in Wales may not be considered as Welsh, due to their English roots. Consequently, they could be deemed irrelevant to Wales by many in the modern world.

Relevance

The reasons previously marked out as why country houses were historically significant largely render them irrelevant to modern society, due to their outdated nature. This was highlighted by a Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) exhibition entitled 'The Destruction of The Country House', which opened in 1974. Ruth Adams (2013, pp.1) noted that the exhibition made people aware that country houses were under threat, and if they were to be lost, it would be a loss of English national history, culture, and identity. Country houses were deemed so irrelevant in the twentieth century, that the National Trust themselves, who today are so strongly associated with the preservation of country houses, were not interested in them until a change of law in 1937 allowed the Trust to obtain ownership whilst allowing former owners to remain as tenants (Adams, 2013, p.3). Due to their apparent irrelevance, many were demolished as they were considered to have no future, the land could be better used, and their materials were valuable. In England alone, Giles Worsley estimated in 2002 that at least 1,200 houses had been demolished in the twentieth century which is 500 more than listed in the 'Destruction of the Country House' exhibition catalogue, and Worsley still considered 1,200 to be an undoubted underestimation (Worsley, 2002, pp.23-24). The most up to date English research into lost country houses has been undertaken by Matthew Beckett, who has identified a total of 1,998 lost country houses (Beckett, 2018). In Wales, Mark Baker's research has identified 390 country houses which have either been demolished or severely reduced in size (Baker, 2016b). Ultimately, their perceived irrelevance is evident in their dramatic disappearance from the British landscape. Conversely, some properties in Wales have been purchased and are being restored, for example Gwydir Castle (Corbett, 2005) and Gwrych Castle. Ruth Adams described the V&A exhibition as "a pivotal moment in the history of country house preservation and heritage politics" (Adams, 2013, p.13). Country houses were no longer an exclusive interest of the elite, the owners, or art historians, but the public had decided because of the exhibition that country houses represent characteristics and history which should be preserved (Beckett, 2014). Therefore, country houses in the twenty-first century are considered by many to be relevant because of the characteristics and history that they represent. However, country houses whilst

relevant enough to no longer be demolished at pace, are still considered irrelevant by many of the British population despite most surviving country houses being listed buildings and therefore receiving official confirmation that they are significant and should therefore be preserved. Listing was introduced by the Town and Country Planning Act 1947, but today in Wales listed buildings are recognised through the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. It is the responsibility for Welsh Ministers to compile the list, but Cadw recommend which buildings should be listed and therefore recognised officially for their heritage or architectural significance (Cadw, 2023). Information compiled as part of a listing entry can provide a good starting point for interpretation.

Smith identifies country house visiting as being a socially exclusionary pastime undertaken only by the middle class and rarely by the working class (Smith, 2006, p.125). Country houses are buildings where the working class and ethnic minorities continue to feel unwelcome. In 2022, Broneirion, formerly used as a training and activity centre, closed partially due to “low numbers of members using the facility” (Martin, 2022). For country houses to become more relevant, they must begin to attempt to reach out to a more diverse range of visitors. This is very much a current issue and an ongoing process at some sites, with the National Trust publishing their first commitment to inclusion and diversity in July 2020, referring to their motto “for everyone, for ever” (National Trust, 2021a).

Country houses are beginning to hold relevance to people for a wider variety of reasons than ever before, and the media have played an active part in the resurgence. Country houses are used fairly regularly as film sets due to their typical country setting, grand architecture, and extravagant interiors. On the Visit Wales website, there is a list of some Welsh film locations for people to browse so that they can find out more information (Visit Wales, 2018). Most of these are not country houses, indicating that filming adds relevance to a place, especially if the film or television program is popular. In England, Highclere Castle is a standout example of a country house which has benefitted from filming. The popular television show ‘Downton Abbey’ was filmed at Highclere, resulting in a tourism boom for the site funding a programme of rolling building repairs for the site,

safeguarding the building for the next generation (Brown, 2015). It is evident that there is a public interest in visiting film locations for either, and there are examples of this such as at Highclere Castle creating newfound relevance for sites which were previously struggling to operate in a manner conducive to economic sustainability and therefore the preservation of the country house. Oliver Cox described it as 'the Downton boom', and highlighted that whilst it is largely a positive that Downton Abbey has enticed an exponential rise of visitor numbers not just to Highclere Castle, but to country houses generally, it has provided academics and heritage professionals alike with the issue of how to capture and convert the enthusiasm and passion of a visitor for Downton Abbey's shorthand history into interest in the longhand history of a country house (Cox, 2015, pp.113-115). On this subject, this thesis explores the impacts of I'm a Celebrity at Gwrych Castle.

Filming can fit within the bracket of 'popular culture' when considering a method of creating relevance for country houses. Music can play a similar role. In 2018, Damon Albarn, formerly of the British Britpop band Blur, recorded a song at Penrhyn Castle (BBC, 2019a). Twenty-three years prior to this, Blur had recorded a song entitled 'Country House' which was nominated for a Brit Award for both, best British single and best British video, thus demonstrating how music can create relevance for country houses in terms of popular culture. Welsh country houses and their attached estates have been used to host music festivals, such as Faenol Festival on the Faenol estate in the early 2000s (Visit Caernarfon, 2010). There is a long heritage of sport and the country house, particularly in relation to shooting, hunting, and horses, but more recently there are numerous examples of sporting events being held at country houses. For example, Parkrun held at Penrhyn castle every week (Parkrun, 2018) as well as other estates, a cycle festival held at Erddig (WalesOnline, 2011), and a stage of Wales Rally GB held at Chirk Castle on multiple occasions (National Trust, 2015a). Furthermore, when the Football Association of Wales unveiled Ryan Giggs as the manager of the men's national team, they did so at Hensol Castle. Therefore, country houses in the 21st century are fostering new links with people and creating relevance by hosting a wide variety of large events and activities, thus adapting from their original purpose when they were first built.

Country houses have not only adapted in the sense of hosting different events within their grounds, but in some cases, the building has been adapted to remain relevant for modern uses and audiences. Some have been either completely or partially redeveloped as hotels, restaurants, care homes, schools, museums, galleries, conference centres, wedding venues, and other uses. The adaptive reuse of buildings is a term which only recently came into being. Wong (2016, p.30) initially outlined the broad definition of adaptive reuse as “the reuse of pre-existing structures for new purposes”. Wong defined adaptive reuse as:

transforming an unused or underused building into one that serves a new use, the practice of adaptive reuse is rich and varied and its importance includes not only the reuse of existing structures but also the reuse of materials, transformative interventions, continuation of cultural phenomena through built infrastructure, connections across the fabric of time and space and preservation of memory – all of which result in densely woven narratives of the built environment with adaptive reuse as their tool. (Wong, 2016. pp.30-32).

Wong’s definition can be applied to country houses in multiple ways. Firstly, there have been many country houses which have been left either unused or underused due to their sheer size and the financial costs involved in their daily operation. For example, Kinmel Hall (Milan, 2021), Glynllifon (Hughes, 2021) and Pool Parc (Hughes, 2018). However, their size and complexity also make for high demolition costs, although this usually is not possible owing to their listing statuses, as well as an abundance of waste material in need of disposal, which Ijla and Broström noted in relation to historic buildings more generally (2015, p.53). The tension is often between preservation and identifying a viable business model which allows for preservation, incorporating links between heritage, sustainability, and innovation. Therefore, it is often legally, financially, and economically unfeasible to demolish country houses, particularly if it is possible to adapt the existing structure so that it is functional, because an adaptive reuse proposal would be preferred to demolition proposals due to the different costs involved. Transformative interventions can often take place within the walls of a country house when wealthy individuals purchase

one with the intention of converting it into something else, such as a hotel or a restaurant. However, planning permissions are often seen as an obstacle to transformative interventions. The act of somebody stepping in to purchase a property is the intervention, with the transformation being the change of use from a residential building to something else. In Wales specifically, there are multiple examples of country houses being adapted to be used as hotels such as Soughton Hall, Bodelwyddan Castle, and Chateau Rhianfa. Furthermore, country houses represent the continuation of cultural phenomena referred to by Wong. Laurajane Smith refers to this as 'collective memory' and writes on the topic in detail referring to the work of Halbwachs, Wertsch and Klein. Smith draws upon these and others to distinguish collective memory from authorised heritage and history, to define collective memory as memories socially constructed in the present, legitimised collectively, and passed on through commemorative events using landmarks to retrieve the memories (Smith, 2006, pp.59-64). Samuel (1994, p.6) wrote that memory does not necessarily refer to one fixed point in time but can mythicise indistinct periods of time as "good old days" to a group of people. Due to the size of country houses, they represent physical landmarks which can assist with the retrieval of memory, therefore becoming the subject of locally held collective memory. Unlike demolition, adaptive reuse allows a collective memory to continue because the physical landmark remains in the landscape, thus enabling a property to continue to be viewed as relevant.

Whilst adaptive reuse can provide Welsh Country Houses with a new lease of life, it is not a strategy which necessarily safeguards the future of a building. Specifically related to country houses, they are large structures, often with listed status in part due to the historically significant nature of their architecture. The collective memory in the locality of how a building appears within a landscape can impact upon whether or not external changes which alter the authenticity of a building are authorised (Historic England, 2016, p.12). Adaptive reuse can cost more than demolishing a building and constructing a new one. Depending on the condition of the country house, planning applications, the sourcing of authentic building materials and techniques can all prove financially costly (Hein and Houck, 2008, p.115), which is part of the reason several Welsh country houses are left neglected by their

owners. Neglected properties could be seen as irrelevant by people locally, with there potentially being better uses of the land that they occupy. However, some are clearly in the public interest but are neglected by the owners, for example Plas Nannau, where people alerted the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings to its deteriorating condition (SPAB, 2021).

If people are unable to physically access a building, it is more difficult for them to connect or engage with it. This can provide a further obstruction when considering the relevance of country houses – if they are not accessible, they are more likely to be deemed irrelevant to the general public. The nature of the geographic location of country houses often brings about access challenges due to their rural location, lack of public transport connections, sometimes positioned at the top of a hill, and the buildings often require visitors to climb stairs to access other floors, with no alternative such as a lift which cannot be installed due to the listing status of the building. Therefore, if people are unable to reach the building, or if they are able to access it but can only partially view it, country houses could realistically be deemed as irrelevant to many, or at least difficult to engage with which could lead to irrelevance. However, country houses and heritage more widely have been linked through academic research with having positive impacts upon those who suffer from a wide variety of medical conditions, such as cancer, diabetes, heart disease, dementia, and other ailments. Much research indicates that the collections of art and objects within museums and heritage sites have tangible health benefits, with some doctors in Canada being able to prescribe a museum visit to patients, waiving the admission price in a year-long trial (Grant, 2018; BBC, 2018). Green spaces and parkland are also beneficial to the health and wellbeing of people (Engemann et al., 2019; NHS, 2021; Kennett, 2021), which country houses usually provide through gardens or wider estate grounds. A report published by the Royal Society for Public Health (RSPH, 2013, p.71) referred to a quote provided by Len Bayliss, stating “Museums contribute to this feeling of identity and community through their artefacts, archives, exhibitions, documenting of history and heritage, research and educational roles. In doing so their social, cultural and economic impact helps to add value and enrich human experience”. Country houses and their estates are able to replicate museums in this context, with other reports arriving at the same conclusion

as Bayliss, echoing the aforementioned Canadian initiative, adding that close engagement with historic collections, art, or ideas in the presence of others can improve people's mental and physical health (Museum's Association, 2013, p.6; Dodd and Jones, 2014, p.43). Therefore, the research not only highlights part of the significance of visiting and protecting country houses, but also the importance of country houses maintaining collections to sustain their relevance.

The significance of many country houses over time has altered. For some properties, especially those in the occupation of ancestral owners and retaining business interests associated with a surrounding estate, the change might be less dramatic. However, most house owners are having to innovate and especially for houses no longer in the occupation of ancestral owners and detracted from a historical estate, the historical significance of the country house is now largely irrelevant. Therefore, they have required a shift towards a new significance of the country house, rendering them relevant once again. Even for some owners whose families have held a property for generations, it has been necessary for them to diversify their income streams through hosting weddings or activities thus altering the significance of a site without necessarily totally changing it, for example in the cases of Gyrn Castle and Hawarden Castle. Here, we see the difference between the significance and relevance of the country house. The significance is the reason why it was historically important and/or is the reason why it is now important. The relevance is how it is important to people, if at all, rather than being considered important. In order for country houses to remain relevant, they must be interpreted appropriately.

Interpretation Practice

Interpretation practice is a broad term which can refer to any element of the interpretation or presentation of a site. Interpretation is a process of communication which develops meanings, relationships and understanding, rather than reciting facts or figures (Keirle, 2002, p.172). Academic discussions related to heritage interpretation often refer to the seminal work of Freeman Tilden. His six principles of interpretation have been simplified and outlined below:

- 1) Interpretation must be relatable for it to communicate with its audience effectively
- 2) Interpretation is not information. Interpretation is revelation based upon information
- 3) Interpretation is an art combining many arts, regardless of what is being interpreted
- 4) Interpretation should be provocative, not instructive
- 5) Interpretation should be whole, and should communicate with all of a person rather than one particular phase
- 6) Interpretation targeting children should not be simplified adult interpretation, but should follow a different approach (Tilden, 1977, p.9).

Although the first edition was published in 1957, many continue to see his six principles of interpretation as a key to effective heritage practice. The principles encourage the development of relevant and meaningful interpretation. Tilden developed his principles to present fundamental philosophy and interpret natural heritage (Thistle, 2011, p.88). However, they have been applied by many cultural heritage sites globally because they encourage inspiration alongside education, not education alone, i.e., an emotional connection as discussed by Uzzell and Ballantyne (1998, pp.154-164). Visitors are therefore more likely to benefit from heritage sites which adopt Tilden's work to foster meaningful interpretation. The owners of many privately owned properties in Wales are unlikely to take such a strategic approach to

interpretation, which is more likely informed by personal experience and family tradition. Whilst Tilden's work is strong, two of the six principles could easily be misconstrued owing to their steeping in philosophy. The third principle describing interpretation as 'an art combining many arts' is particularly vague, and, all things considered, not helpful when interpreting a site. In his original principles as opposed to the simplified version above, Tilden states in his third principle that "any art is in some degree teachable" (Tilden, 1977, p.9). He appears to indicate that his justification for specifically including this principle is to educate people in the art which is being interpreted, or to inspire them to involve themselves in an art they had not previously considered being involved with. Therefore, there is significant overlap between this principle and the other five principles. It is unnecessary to include it as a standalone principle. Furthermore, the fifth principle is vague taken at face value, possibly in part due to the philosophical nature of its origin. It overlaps with the first principle considerably which states that interpretation should be relatable. The fifth principle declares interpretation should not tell part of a story to one phase of a person, but all of a story to all of a person. Other principles outline the educational benefits to interpretation, and to educate, the implementation of accurate interpretation is fundamental.

It is evident from the six principles that Tilden prioritised education. Staiff argues that many heritage interpretation definitions have focused on education and bear the imprint of Tilden's work (Staiff, 2016, p.18). Staiff takes this a step further by relating Tilden's work with Laurajane Smith's 'Uses of Heritage' nearly fifty years later, by saying that:

Today, the distinctions between natural and cultural heritage(s) and tangible and intangible heritage(s) have blurred (Smith 2006) and furthered the momentum towards a heritage interpretation consensus discourse. (Staiff, 2016, p.19).

The heritage interpretation consensus discourse he is referring to is that the experts in heritage interpretation are no longer just people with an expertise in a particular field, but educators, communicators, and designers. He believes that the focus on

education in heritage interpretation is now restrictive, and that it is time to take a different approach. In relation to Tilden's work, Staiff goes on to show his desire for provocation as opposed to instruction from interpretation by highlighting examples of heritage sites he has visited. The third anecdote discusses his visit to two museums in Thailand: the National Museum, and the Siam Discovery Museum. The former he considered to be object-dense, interpretation dense and serious-minded, and a very instructive experience. The latter was object light, interpretation rich and intensely evocative multi-media which was provocative and memorable. His experience at the Siam Discovery Museum is where he believes the future of heritage interpretation lies (Staiff, 2016, pp.21-24). Thistle, in his review of Tilden's work, highlights his agreement with Staiff in that provocation is one of the most important principles (Thistle, 2011, p.89), indicating that he believes the future of heritage interpretation lies in something similar to the approach of Siam Discovery Museum. However, museums are very different spaces to country houses in that there is often more that can be changed to cater for a multimedia experience in a museum – a building which in many cases was built to house objects and exhibitions – as opposed to a country house which comprises of a historical setting and interior unable to be heavily adapted to the experience of a curated multimedia exhibition. Therefore, there are challenges for country houses when seeking to change, develop, and ultimately modernise their interpretation. When anything is exhibited or interpreted in a space, an important aspect of interpretation practice to ensure that the space is utilised to its maximum potential.

A key concept relating to the interpretation of space is space syntax. Although it is traditionally an architectural concept, Monti and Keene (2016) apply it to evaluating, analysing, and creating exhibitions. It is the concept of assessing visitor movement patterns within a given space, whilst considering the significance of the space itself to maximise how an area is used or presented. Visitor movement patterns can be mapped, allowing exhibition planners and designers to make informed decisions on placement of exhibits or queuing systems (Monti and Keene, 2016, p.32). This is an area of research that Bill Hillier and Kali Tzortzi (2011, pp.282-301) discuss, adding that space syntax can also be used to consider how a particular area can make a difference to how a gallery works as a social space, and how people interact

in the space. How a space is used for interpretive purposes specifically in country houses has altered since the turn of the twenty-first century.

Particularly in recent years the National Trust's interpretation strategy has seen a move away from country houses being presented as 'treasure houses'. The traditional focus of the country house as a treasure house was on the historic, male, owners, and the art and architecture. Properties were seen as being alike a treasure chest with the contents all being valuable or noteworthy. Instead, National Trust operated country houses are now presented increasingly as 'story houses'. They are more open to wider historical narratives and spheres connected to the country house which might not initially be immediately obvious to the visitor. Story houses are buildings which tell stories about their pasts, of the families who occupied them, of local, national, and global histories – the East India at Home project was particularly good at this, offering a range of country house case studies for people to engage with online, including a study of the Aberglasney estate (Rees, 2014). Country houses have been viewed as treasure houses since the twentieth century, with the National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C. curating an exhibition lasting short of one year compiled exclusively of valuable objects collected by country house owners, entitled 'The Treasure Houses of Britain' (Jackson-Stops, 1985, pp.10-13). The move from treasure house to story house is evident in changing interpretation methods at country houses resulting from technological innovations facilitating an increased audience desire for interactive interpretation. Furthermore, it reflects a shift in the historiography of the country house from an exclusive focus on art and architectural history to social, cultural, economic, and histories pioneered by Girouard (1978). Costumed interpreters, actors, and dramatists were commonly employed to create a wider range of interpretive strategies and to engage with visitors (Hems, 2006, p.2). However, this raised criticism regarding several key heritage interpretation issues, namely authenticity, Disneyfication, and commodification (Smith, 2006, p.195).

Research undertaken by Smith (2009) suggested that country house visitors find security and comfort from the well-kept and carefully controlled appearance of a country house and its surroundings, and they feel that this is an 'authentic' country house visit. To country house visitors, their experience is authentic because it helps

reaffirm their own personal sense of self and identity. However, 'authenticity' is a problematic term in relation to the country house. Country houses existed through different periods and fashions, with different technologies, under different phases of ownership – they were almost continually in a state of flux. To be authentic to just one would be inauthentic to others. Smith identifies that most visitors are middle class, who are more likely to feel comfortable at a country house. A truly authentic experience at a country house would be complex and multifaceted, embracing the exploration of their brutal history of slavery, the exploitation of servant and estate workers, and the British Empire all through interpretation. However, this would have the potential to shatter the feeling of comfort which Smith's research indicates is something highly valued by visitors, and there are serious challenges involved in interpreting this history at country houses which have been transformed into wedding venues or hotels (i.e. places for enjoyable experiences). Even for visitor attractions, Smith (2009, pp.39-43) referred to an example of Harewood House marking the 1807 Act to abolish British involvement in the slave trade which was met with widespread indifference by their visitors, who actively disliked their comfortable values being threatened. Indeed, there are examples in the past of negative reactions to thematic strands even from within the National Trust, such as when volunteers refused to wear LGBT lanyards at Felbrigg Hall in Norfolk in celebration of the last lord to occupy the property, who was gay. Some volunteers had conflicting personal views, and so refused, with over 240 National Trust members wishing to revoke their membership believing that the charity was being excessively politically correct (Pasha-Robinson, 2017). If staff and custodians of country houses cannot create a visitor experience that is perceived as an authentic representation of a site's history by visitors, and visitors and staff or volunteers feel threatened to the extent that they do not want to engage with a visitor experience, the staff or custodians could be accused of Disneyfying the country house.

Disneyfication is a term that is commonly used in a negative manner as a result of someone believing something to be inauthentic, dramatized and commercialised. Specifically related to heritage, it is seen as a process incorporating the sweeping standardisation and homogenisation of historic properties. In this way, local representations and realities can be ignored and alienated in favour of an

economically driven approach appealing to tourists from afar (Khirfan, 2016, p.7). This includes the idea of a generic National Trust experience with all of the charity's unique properties bearing the same hallmarks of a property and garden open to explore, often with the working areas such as the kitchen towards the end of the visit, before passing through the shop and café on the way out. For many country houses, Disneyfication has saved them from decline (Sandbrook, 2012, p.92) but has been the topic of public discussion over whether it is an appropriate avenue for the National Trust to explore when considering the interpretation of their properties. The debate resulted in people rejecting the claim that bringing history to life to make country houses appeal to a wider audience did not equate to the dumbing down of history, or "intellectual slumming", as cultural commentator Stephen Bayley described it (Howie and Sawyer, 2010; The Heritage Alliance, 2010, p.6). Marty Sklar, the former Principal Creative Executive at Disney Parks and Resorts, wrote about the differing levels of detail that Disney aim for when designing new attractions:

Detail level one is when you are standing out in the countryside and see the church steeple sticking up above the trees. Detail level two is when you enter town and are looking down the street. You can see the street, the median, the parkway strips, sidewalks, and trees. Detail level three is when you are standing on the sidewalk looking at one of the houses. You can see the character of the house, walls, roof, windows, trim, and doors. Detail level four is when you have actually walked up to the front door, grabbed the door knocker, see its detail, finish, and feel its temperature and weight as you knock on the door... most architects are pretty good at getting to level three, but here at Disney we must always get to the detail level four so we can maintain our immersive environments that our stories create. (Sklar, 2015, p.192-193)

Here, Sklar highlighted in detail that rather than dumbing down, Disney staff have been attempting to create the perfect visitor experience that visitors would be able to identify as an unmistakably 'Disney' experience, just as National Trust staff have been attempting to create a 'National Trust' experience. Whilst Disneyfication may not represent the dumbing down of history, it does signal the commodification of

heritage. A generic National Trust experience in Wales is problematic, particularly if the generic is based on English heritage significance and therefore stifling individuality of site-specific histories and marginalising the Welsh heritage of Welsh country houses.

Robert Hewison (1987, pp.98-99) identified a 'heritage industry' which not only sanitised heritage but commodified heritage. Peter Howard (2003, p.144) writing nearly twenty years later recognised heritage as a "product in the market-place" and identified six different groups of people with competing interests in the heritage market. They are owners, outsiders, insiders, governments, academics, and the media (Howard, 2003, p.104). He indicates that owners have complex motivations for owning historic buildings such as country houses and this is certainly the case in Wales, with owners having intangible motives such as personal or familial links as well as emotional connections of owners to heritage – incorporating a building or a collection. Whilst heritage can be held for this reason alone, it is more commonly one of multiple motivations. Howard makes a case for financial benefit as a motivation of ownership being a clear reason for private ownership of properties, as increasing public access brings significant cost due to wear and tear, maintenance, and security. Furthermore, there are costs related to administration, health and safety in a building that's open to the public, staff and associated training, toilet provision, carpark space and more. However, private ownership can clash with the academics and the insiders, because the owners may want to save costs on repairs and alterations, they may not match the original feature which in the eyes of academics and insiders would render them inauthentic (Howard, 2003, pp.107-108). The insiders, in Howard's view, can pose the greatest issues to professional heritage managers as they tend to be a vocal group of amateurs with an unpredictable agenda and a possessive attitude towards the heritage item or site. In most cases, these people are local to the heritage which forms a backdrop to their everyday existence, although an owner can also be an insider. They can be impervious to the authorised heritage discourse that a site is trying to communicate to its audience (Howard, 2003, pp.113-115) although this could be the result of properties tailoring their visit towards tourists as opposed to local audiences (Khirfan, 2016, p.7). Insiders are inherently opposed to the commodification of 'their' heritage but whilst

they are not opposed to the conservation of buildings, their motivations for the conservation may be different from the other groups (Howard, 2003, p.119). In many privately owned Welsh country houses, owners produce interpretation which inadvertently or intentionally often prioritises their family history and presents it in a positive light. Academics, as Howard points out, are not commonly separated as a stakeholder group. However, they are partially responsible for the way in which heritage is commodified. In researching the significance of a site, academics have over time identified what constitutes as heritage, what is worth conserving, and the reasons behind conservation. In the past, there has been a tendency to package these reasons into interpretation, resulting in single-faceted interpretation (Howard, 2003, p.140). Finally, the media can assist and influence the commodification of heritage in the twenty-first century due to the way it has evolved in recent decades. The media no longer consists of newspapers or other traditional outlets alone but can also include filming for television, cinema, (Howard, 2003, pp.142-143) and social media. Demonstrating this, American television company HBO used Penrhyn Castle, owned by the National Trust, as a filmset in 2018 (National Trust, 2018).

It is evident that heritage generally is being commodified by a variety of people, because as Prideaux (2003, p.3) states, "the ability to sustain a site when its original purpose ... that is no longer of importance, has changed may depend on alternative uses that include some form of commodification to ensure viability". Prideaux's observations are true of country houses specifically. However, the commodification of a country house is not necessarily negative, although the commodification of heritage traditionally has negative connotations as exemplified by Robert Hewison, who attributed heritage commodification and manufacture, and the formation of a heritage industry as a product of social failure (Hewison, 1987, p.9). Embracing commodification has enabled and encouraged more people to engage with the past (Baillie, Chatzoglou and Taha, 2010, p.52) and as such is a valid interpretation technique to create relevance for a country house. To an extent, commodification of heritage is today seen as beneficial on the condition that, as Prideaux notes, "if it is the vehicle for preservation of a site or place that would otherwise be lost to redevelopment" (Prideaux, 2003, p.4) and consequently destroyed. However, it is possible for heritage to be commodified to a point that is excessive. The tipping

point where heritage begins to be excessively commodified appears to be the point at which there is a lack of authenticity. Bunten (2008, p.383) highlights this in her research discussing the cruise industry and Native American tourism, specifically in the city of Sitka, Alaska. She writes that “although meeting “authentic Alaskans” is high on the priority lists of most people visiting the state, the average tourist is unlikely to encounter Native culture unmediated by tourism” (Bunten, 2008, p.383). Thus, tourists are not receiving the authentic experience they believe that they are, but an experience curated by local tourist businesses, therefore commodifying it excessively to turn a profit. In relation to country houses, excessive commodification is a criticism which has been aimed towards multiple properties in the past as they have attempted to do something to alter their stagnant, traditional interpretation. Often, the criticism relates to the employment of actors, or volunteers as actors, to bring areas of a property to life. Responding to a blog post written by Ben Cowell – the former Regional Director for the National Trust in the East of England – on the topic of country house interpretation, Barker commented stating that he found re-enactors at Dunham Massey during the largely well-received ‘Sanctuary from the Trenches’ exhibition to be “artificial” (Barker, 2015). Therefore, there could be the perception that utilising actors is inauthentic in country houses, thus rendering them an excessive commodification to be avoided in the eyes of some visitors when heritage practitioners are considering how to interpret a space.

The identification of the heritage industry and the commodification of heritage leads this work to discuss the existing literature regarding the marketing of the country house, and heritage in general.

Marketing

To ensure that country house heritage is not seen as being excessively commodified, careful marketing is necessary. Firstly, it is important to define what marketing relates to in the context of Welsh country houses, and how that relates to their interpretation. Silk (2006, p.3) identified marketing as "the process via which a firm creates value for its chosen customers. Value is created by meeting customer needs. Thus, a firm must define itself not by the product it sells, but by the customer benefit provided." In the case of Welsh country houses, the properties themselves are the equivalent to a firm, and the value being created is often an authentic experience for tourists. Between Welsh country houses, there are significant differences when it comes to marketing. Particularly because large organisations such as the National Trust employ marketing staff or teams at sites, rather than privately owned properties that most commonly do not, and rarely have professional marketing background. Furthermore, the marketing of sites country houses is determined by the intended audience, which is dependant upon the function of the business. Philip Kohl (2004, pp.299-301) stated that heritage marketing is "mushrooming" economically and politically resulting from an exponential growth of global tourism. He questions if tourists should simply be dismissed as "alienated people seeking authenticity". Drawing on his personal experience, he believes through visiting places he has not seen before he is educating himself through first-hand experiences. Kohl continues to conclude that "marketing heritage is not necessarily a suspect activity. The context and the manner in which it is pursued are all-important". In discussing work undertaken by Rowan, Gero, Gable, and Handler, Kohl (2004, pp.296-297) identifies the quest for authenticity as unproblematic in heritage interpretation and marketing, but rather identifies the simplification of authenticity as an issue. Therefore, when assessing marketing materials produced by staff or custodians of Welsh country houses, the extent and depth of authenticity should be considered. This should also be considered when assessing different forms of marketing, for example marketing on social media and websites.

Chhabra (2010, pp.8-10) identified six predominant philosophies of marketing: Product and manufacturing, selling, marketing, relationship, tribal marketing, and societal marketing. The first five philosophies can be placed on a scale with

transactional focus at one end and a community emphasis at the other. The product and manufacturing philosophy operates under the assumption that if something is built, visitors or customers will utilise the services available. It is common where demand is in excess of supply, but clearly is not relevant to country houses which are pre-built structures, unless there is a change of house from a residential property to a more commercial use, for example, as a hotel. Selling philosophy is the aim of selling as much as possible with little consideration to customer service or long-term relationships with customers. Whilst there is generally a requirement to sell something in country houses, whether that is an admission ticket, a guest room, or visitor experience, there is also the tendency to attempt to build relationships through selling memberships in the case of National Trust properties. Marketing philosophy centres around the notion that adapting and changing to the needs of the customer or visitor is paramount to success. If country houses were not to do this, they would continue to sit as "monuments to an extinct social order" (Franklin, 1981, p.1) and consequently be deemed as irrelevant. Chhabra continued to describe relationship philosophy as offering promises to customers or visitors and fulfilling them to achieve customer retention, and she highlighted hotel chains as being exemplar of this philosophy. Therefore, it may be a relevant marketing philosophy for some staff and custodians of Welsh country houses. The tribal marketing philosophy accounts for shared experiences amongst customers or visitors in times of "severe dissolution and extreme individualism" (Chhabra, 2010, p.8) using marketing to fill the void between individuals and to form community. Tribal marketing may not be a wholly appropriate philosophy for staff or custodians of country houses to adopt in all cases, but the final philosophy – societal marketing – may be. It requires responsible marketing to customers and visitors to deliver effective and efficient products. In terms of a country house, the product could vary from hotel spa days to the interpretation of a visitor site. The philosophy seeks long-term benefits for the community and society. Overall, country houses can generally be seen to adopt a philosophy which internally operates under a marketing philosophy, but externally shows itself as a societal marketing philosophy. Internally, there must be a focus on generating financial profit to preserve and maintain a site. As part of this, there is a need to 'market' significance to policy makers and grant

fundraising, relating country houses to wider aspects such as tourism, culture, wellbeing, sustainability, or others to obtain grant funding or other benefits. Outwardly, it is beneficial for customers and visitors to receive long term societal benefits. Moth (2017) proved that the National Trust adopts a combination of these two philosophies with analysis of the Trust's usage of neuroscience. Through surveys undertaken at National Trust sites, they learnt that people want functional messages upon their arrival giving directions to facilities they require. Therefore, deploying membership recruiters at welcome centres would be less effective because visitors are not ready to consider joining, and conservation messaging would go unnoticed because visitors have not had the opportunity to explore why it is necessary. Once they have moved into the property to explore and discover messaging relating to conservation and the Trust's values, they can use more emotional messaging towards the end of a typical visitor route to reinforce connections, more as part of a societal marketing philosophy approach. Moth (2017), continued to write that simple messaging proved more effective based on research undertaken utilising brain monitoring, eye tracking, and physical response testing to assess visitor response to different messages and designs. Simple messaging allows the brain to process messages easier, which can have more of a positive impact on people's judgements.

Moth's writing highlights the idea that marketing can not only be found in traditional methods such as leaflets, guidebooks, signs, and advertising externally. Marketing can also be the interpretation around a property itself, for example different forms of interpretation that a visitor consumes, as it can support a message that an organisation or an individual property want their visitors to receive clearly. For many tourists and heritage site visitors, their visit begins online, and this should be the starting point of marketing a site, providing the appropriate messaging, and orientating visitors in the first instance. Websites should be clear, have necessary information such as geographic location and facilities available, and be user-friendly. Furthermore, social media can be a first point of contact for some visitors, and so sites should come across as clear and approachable to build rapport with visitors to foster positive experiences (McCormick, 2016, pp.113-115).

For marketing to be successful, a site must have an accurate picture of their target market, or who the target audience is and what appeals to them, whilst striving to find methods of reaching out to others to expand their audience and therefore their market. For the staff and custodians of Welsh country houses, the use of the Welsh language is important in this context. The language that is used can dictate who staff and custodians believe the marketing to be for. For example, Welsh-language marketing would be more suitable for dissemination amongst local audiences rather than to encourage tourists from England or elsewhere outside of Wales to visit. The Welsh language can also be used to align with the heritage of the site and reinforce the 'Welshness' of a place to visitors. Pierre Bourdieu (1984, p.170) wrote about the notion of '*habitus*'. Whilst a relatively ambiguous concept, it essentially refers to a person's social conditioning during their upbringing which has consequently been responsible for upholding the class system, varying beliefs among people within the different classes, and their behaviours – including language and identity. For example, this chapter has already reflected that visiting a country house is a pastime of the middle class and above, and this is a behaviour that has continued through generations because they feel a sense of belonging to grand country houses, unlike the working class. Interpretation can be used to reinforce habitus, but effective interpretation can be used to cut through habitus to reach new audiences through appealing to people with different backgrounds by connecting with them.

Policy

Where possible and appropriate, marketing should be underlined by stringent marketing policy, and actions taken by the staff or custodians of country houses relating to any area of interpretation or otherwise should refer to policies and guidelines outlined by a variety of people who are involved in the operation and maintenance of a country house. These policies and guidelines can be established by world heritage bodies, the U.K. or Welsh government, national heritage bodies, and the site itself. In many heritage organisations, marketing and interpretation are two separate departments or tasks with different skillsets and priorities, sometimes resulting in an apparent lack of knowledge or mistakes and inaccuracies.

World heritage bodies have set the precedent for heritage legislation on national and local levels around the world. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization commonly known as UNESCO “seeks to build peace through international cooperation in Education, the Sciences and Culture” (UNESCO, 2019a). In 1994, the World Heritage Committee began to formulate a World Heritage List to reflect the world’s cultural and natural diversity of outstanding universal value (UNESCO, 2019b). The list continues to be added to, subject to matching the selection criteria, therefore highlighting UNESCO’s belief that cultural heritage, tangible and intangible, is of critical importance to future generations. As a result, UNESCO have produced documents which contain recommendations for heritage sites as well as policy documents for heritage sites to follow which cover a wide variety of topics relevant to their operation and interpretation. One of the latest additions to the World Heritage Site list is the Slate Landscape of Northwest Wales, with Penrhyn Castle included within the geographic listing area. Luke Potter, Assistant Director of Operations in North Wales for National Trust Cymru stated:

We have important stories at Penrhyn of slate as well as sugar, and slavery. [...] We have already benefitted greatly from being part of the development of the nomination and really see the importance of working together to tell this important story (National Trust, 2022).

This underlines the transition of National Trust country houses from treasure houses to story houses.

The International Council on Monuments and Sites, commonly known as ICOMOS, have also formulated policies and documents surrounding the interpretation of heritage sites as part of their conservation and protection. In 1994, ICOMOS released the Nara Document on Authenticity (ICOMOS, 1994) which stated that “the protection and enhancement of cultural and heritage diversity in our world should be actively promoted as an essential aspect of human development” (ICOMOS, 1994, p.46). The interpretation of heritage sites is critical to achieving this, and central to this in accordance with the Nara Document, is authenticity resulting from credible, truthful sources (ICOMOS, 1994, pp.46-47). In 2008, ICOMOS continued to build upon previous documents with the creation of the ICOMOS Charter for the Interpretation and Presentation of Cultural Heritage Sites (ICOMOS, 2008a). The charter consists of seven principles relating specifically to different aspects of the interpretation of heritage sites. The first principle describes the necessity for physical and intellectual access to heritage through effective interpretation and presentation. The document continues to build on the Nara Document in the second principle, outlining the need to use reliable sources when creating interpretation. The third principle states that the interpretation of a site should relate to their wider social, cultural, historical, and natural contexts and settings, ensuring that no singular narrative is presented. The fourth principle again builds on the Nara Document, encouraging sites to respect the authenticity of the contexts and settings outlined in principle three. The Interpretation Charter then switches the focus to sustainability of the site, not only financially and environmentally, but also socially and culturally ensuring its authentic preservation in the future. The document continues on to the sixth principle, highlighting the necessity for an inclusive process to create interpretation with heritage professionals, associated communities, and stakeholders. Finally, the seventh principle underlines the need to continue to research into the history of a site and aspects surrounding it, to train professionals and volunteers in methods pertaining to the preservation of a site, and to evaluate interpretation regularly to assess its suitability (ICOMOS, 2008a, pp.7-14). There is an extent of overlap between these principles and Tilden’s principles discussed earlier in this thesis. For example, both sets of principles state that interpretation should be holistic, rather than limited to one narrative. However, Tilden’s principles are more

focused on education, whereas the ICOMOS charter is much broader and reflects being written much more recently. ICOMOS have continued to develop their guidance on managing heritage sites, updating the Burra Charter in 2013. Although the charter focuses specifically on the conservation of heritage sites, it refers to interpretation as a key element of conservation. Similarly to the Interpretation Charter, the Burra Charter insists on stakeholders at all levels participating in the management of the site. The charter states that change to a heritage site may be necessary to retain cultural significance, but it should never reduce cultural significance. Therefore, appropriate interpretation is crucial so not to reduce cultural significance. Whilst the Interpretation Charter stated that one narrative must not be prioritised, the Burra Charter states that this would be acceptable on the condition that the narrative presented is of much greater cultural significance than the unpresented narrative. Thus, this can help staff or custodians of country houses understand how to prioritise narratives in interpretation if they believe that to be necessary. The Burra Charter identifies reconstruction as a method of conservation and interpretation, which the previously assessed charters do not. Reconstruction is only a viable method where there has been significant damage or alteration, and only where there is sufficient evidence to reconstruct accurately. Reconstruction should be clear or made clear through additional interpretation. Furthermore, the Charter states that interpretation should explain cultural significance which is not obvious and should appropriately enhance understanding and engagement. Reconstruction can also include not only the physical reconstruction of building fabric, but also the reconstruction of practices adding to the cultural significance of a site. Much of the Burra Charter focuses on change, reconstruction, and addition, highlighting that the cultural significance of a site should not be lost due to avoidable changes or alterations (ICOMOS, 2013, pp.5-9). Whilst the Burra Charter is not applicable to Wales, it does provide additional global context for important and relevant heritage policy, with the basis of it being steeped in honesty and holistic interpretation.

In Wales and the U.K., there is legislation specifically designed to minimise changes and alterations that can be carried out on buildings that can harm their cultural significance in the form of listed building status (Historic Environment (Wales) Act,

2016, pp.25-42). Most remaining large Welsh country houses operate under a listing status. Listing a building marks and celebrates its special architectural and historic interest, whilst bringing it under the consideration of the planning system to ensure its protection during new developments in the locality. Older buildings with few surviving of their kind often lead to the building being listed. Country houses tend to be listed due to their architectural or historical characteristics. There are three listing categories. Grade I is the highest category of listing for buildings of exceptional interest, for example Penrhyn Castle, Faenol, and Glynllifon. The next grade is Grade II* status, deemed to be particularly important for example Pas Penmynydd and Chateau Rhianfa. The lowest grade of the listing system is Grade II, and Broneirion is an example of this (Cadw, 2019; Historic England, 2019a; Historic Wales, 2019). By listing a building, any changes an owner wants to make must be approved by their local authority (Historic England, 2019b). Beyond the listing status, there is little in terms of government policy which influences the interpretation of a building, although the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales (RCAHMW) contributes to this through research into historic buildings and archaeology (RCAHMW, 2022). However, guidelines and best practice is outlined by several national heritage bodies.

In association with Cadw, the Welsh government produced the Pan-Wales Heritage Interpretation Plan document (2012). The document aimed to improve the interpretation of Welsh history and heritage to benefit communities, especially families to culturally engage children (Welsh Government and Cadw, 2012, p.7). The pan-Wales approach divided numerous stories into different categories with each category having their own interpretation plan, except for the 'Rise of the Welsh Gentry' category, which was not developed. There were twelve categories, including Castles of Edward I, Artistic Responses to the Landscape, and Wales: First Industrial Nation (Cadw, 2016b). Notably, country houses do not have an interpretation plan under the pan-Wales approach, and do not feature under any of the twelve. Therefore, interpretation of country houses may not have been a priority for the Welsh Government, or that Cadw and the Welsh Government cannot influence the interpretation of Welsh country houses if they do not own them – Cadw manage few country houses as defined for this work (Cadw, 2016c). However, it is useful to

assess the Pan-Wales Heritage Interpretation Plan because it can begin to indicate best heritage interpretation practice, as well as practices widely adopted at Cadw sites. Owing to the fact that Cadw is the historic environment service specifically of the Welsh Government, the organisation is able to set broad aims based on Welsh identity. The pan-Wales approach exemplifies this in aiming to enhance local and national pride of their heritage assets, positively reinforce Wales's image, and make Wales more competitive within the global tourism market (Welsh Government and Cadw, 2012, p.5).

Evidently, the government does not directly have a large amount of influence in terms of interpretation policy beyond the listing of buildings. Heritage bodies such as Cadw are tasked with interpreting historic sites if they are under their management. Therefore, it is necessary to analyse policy pertaining to the interpretation of country houses which has been drawn up by an organisation who are responsible for the management of many country houses not only in Wales, but around the U.K. In the minds of many, the National Trust is synonymous with the country house.

The National Trust aim to create "experiences that move, teach and inspire" evidenced by many of the operational documents they have created, and embedded in their general management strategy looking to the future (National Trust, 2015b, p.8), thus creating and maintaining the generic National Trust experience felt and shared by so many visitors around the U.K. In doing so, the National Trust are looking to raise their interpretation standards across the sites which they manage, whilst improving their outdoor experiences for all ages and needs. Furthermore, they are aiming to innovate the experiences people are having and explore the cultural heritage of the places they manage through events and exhibitions (National Trust, 2015b, p.8). Therefore, the National Trust intend to improve and modernise the interpretation of their sites moving forward. However, these interpretation aims are incredibly broad and offer nothing specifically regarding how to interpret a site under National Trust management. The same document is more specific later, indicating how changes to interpretation can be made. Major changes at the most visited places will be invested in to transform how stories are told of why the site was important historically, and why it continues to be important. The previous reference

to an increased number of events and exhibitions was expanded upon, with them specifically to be used to provoke people to think differently about history, identity, and the world in the present. Furthermore, the document provided examples of how outdoor spaces could be used in the future, for potential family cycle trails being the one which would be most pertinent to country houses and their often-large estates. Finally, the National Trust encourages properties to be bold and innovative in their development to reveal something new with each visit. Although these aims remain far from specific, they are vague out of necessity. The National Trust manages many sites around the U.K., all of which are different due to their geographic locations and their individual histories and ownerships. As a result, it is neither possible nor feasible to maximise the potential of each individual property if they were to set stringent, blanket interpretation guidelines for all sites to adhere to because they are all so different. Therefore, the National Trust must produce vague documents to encourage the sites themselves to create their own independent interpretation policies adhering to National Trust beliefs such as creating experiences which move, teach, and inspire as well as revealing their 'spirit of place'. The National Trust have adopted the spirit of place principle as defined by the ICOMOS Quebec Declaration on the Preservation of Spirit of Place (ICOMOS, 2008b, p.2) as follows:

Spirit of place is defined as the tangible (buildings, sites, landscapes, routes, objects) and the intangible elements (memories, narratives, written documents, rituals, festivals, traditional knowledge, values, textures, colours, odours, etc.), that is to say the physical and spiritual elements that give meaning, value, emotion and mystery to place.

As a result, the National Trust does not separate tangible cultural heritage from intangible cultural heritage, but rather considers them together when interpreting their sites. Documents have been produced in which the National Trust set out broad interpretation strategies, and the spirit of place forms a major part of these documents. Their interpretation standards are set out in the 'Everything Speaks: Seven Principles of Interpretation' document. The document aims at heritage professionals involved in the management of a National Trust site. It walks the reader through what a standard National Trust visit should comprise of, beginning

with creating the desired first impression, ensuring that visitors are clear about why they have visited and where things are. Spirit of place is specifically referred to in the second principle. Interpretation should refer to spirit of place, accepting that sites do not have singular narratives, and that significance and relevance informing the spirit of place can be personal interests or hobbies of visiting individuals. The overriding spirit of place should be understood by staff members at a site and shared, so that it is successfully expressed to all those who visit using the resources available. To make a success of the spirit of place, there must be several layers of interpretation appealing to different ages, different types of learner, and people with drastically differing interests. Therefore, creating connections with visitors is imperative. The fourth principle reinforces the notion that every detail is important, and that there is no detail too small. Importantly, there is an emphasis on not needing to give every visitor everything a site has to offer in one visit, but to hold back so that visitors may be more inclined to visit again – something expanded upon in the sixth principle. Continuing in a similar vein, the fifth principle states that interpretation and interventions should only do enough to enhance an experience, rather than do any more than necessary. Finally, the seventh principle encourages sites to surprise people without fearing being scholarly, emotional, technical, or profound, whilst maintaining the authenticity of a property (National Trust, 2013, pp.3-14). The document echoes the four levels of detail referred to by Marty Sklar (2015, pp.192-193) that Disney aim for when creating new attractions, to the extent that it refers to National Trust interpretation necessary to transform a place from a “dusty shell of a building into something wonderful” as what Disney would call “fairy dust” (National Trust, 2013, p.14). Whilst the ‘Everything Speaks’ document does add specificity to interpretation policy and encourages sites under National Trust management to consider general interpretation themes, it cannot be much more specific without compromising the individual requirements of a site.

Evidently, the interpretation of individual sites is subject to a wide variety of policies and advice at different levels, but the most effective are those which are designed and developed by the staff and custodians of individual properties themselves due to the differing specific needs of unique sites.

METHODOLOGY

The following chapter identifies how original evidence has been collected and analysed for the purpose of this thesis – to understand to what extent Welsh country house interpretation is effective. Moreover, it outlines the significance of this evidence within the fields of heritage, tourism, and disciplines within the Welsh context. Furthermore, the overriding structure of the thesis is introduced, with reference to case studies.

Collection

To successfully interrogate and explore the topic of the interpretation of Welsh country houses, a range of evidence has been collected through interviews, primary documents, statistics, and surveys. Interviews were selected as a method of data collection to best understand the perspectives of experts in the field enabling them to elaborate on responses and discuss key points at length, whilst surveys were selected to best understand the perspectives of the visiting public whilst establishing datasets to draw conclusions from. Where interviews and surveys have been undertaken, the widest variety possible of interviewees and respondents have been sought due to the contested nature of interpretation. To ensure a more rounded study subject to less bias, people of different backgrounds and staff who are employed in a variety of roles, perhaps with different priorities, have partaken in this study. In seeking multiple participants, the research has sought and revealed multiple realities, as opposed to revealing one singular, objective reality (Guest et al, 2013, p.6). Furthermore, the objective to seek multiple realities has ensured the construction of a larger and more diverse dataset for analysis. In line with Turner III's (2010) research, interviewees were met safely, ensuring that they did not feel uncomfortable sharing information (Turner III, 2010, p.757) with assistance offered where necessary and appropriate. All interviewees were initially contacted via their email addresses, informing them about the thesis and the nature of research before a meeting was requested. All reasonable steps to minimise the risks involved in this research have been undertaken. Before commencing any interview, all participants were provided with an information sheet and a consent form (Appendix 7) where they were able to request anonymity if they desired. However, the project has benefited from being able to identify individuals due to the site-specific nature of research, and no interviewee requested anonymity. Furthermore, it was made clear that all participants could opt out of the study or refuse to answer any question at any point. In line with the latest General Data Protection Regulation standards, the research methods have been approved by the Ethics Officer for the School of History, Philosophy and Social Sciences at Bangor University. Obtaining informed consent and necessary permissions is an obligation for researchers, with studies being dynamic, continuous, and reflexive processes according to the American

Anthropological Association Ethics Blog (AAA Web Admin, 2012). The research process for this thesis has taken up to four years, including a writing up period. It has therefore been imperative that the process has remained as dynamic as possible, with all participants as informed as possible to provide the best results. This has been particularly necessary in light of the coronavirus pandemic, referred to in further detail in the 'Interview Analysis' chapter. The interviews were semi-structured and consisted of at least ten questions (Appendix 3) being drawn up for interviewees dependent upon the function of the property they represented, with follow-up questions being asked to provoke further discussion. Due to the interviewer's level of proficiency speaking Welsh, interviews have been carried out in English. However, in recognising that every step should have been taken to enable the research to reach as many people as possible, translation of the surveys into Welsh was undertaken to enhance the accessibility of the study. Critical to the success of a semi-structured interview strategy is the knowledge of the interviewer regarding the topics of discussion as outlined by Rabionet (2011, p.564). In this case, the knowledge of the interviewer was extensive due to having researched and written the literature review of this thesis in advance. Furthermore, developments in the field of study were considered through further reading and the attendance of conferences including 'Reading the Country House' at Manchester Metropolitan University in 2018, Association for Heritage Interpretation and Association of Independent Museums conferences regarding interpretation, 'Digital Past 2020' organised by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales, 'Space for Cultural Heritage' organised by the European Space Agency, and annual Institute for the Study of Welsh Estates research symposiums.

Primary sources have also been consulted. To assess different methods of interpretation, websites representing Welsh country houses were viewed with an analytical focus on website content presented in the 'Visiting Virtually' chapter of this thesis. The websites have been viewed on a desktop PC. Whilst there may be aesthetic differences on other platforms (for example on a smartphone), the content should remain the same. An analysis of social media posts has also been carried out as part of the 'Visiting Virtually' chapter to better assess the marketing strategies, identify common themes, and highlight differences. Specifically, Facebook,

Instagram, and Twitter have been used to collect data. These platforms have been chosen in part due to their popularity among staff and custodians of Welsh country houses, as well as there being differences between how platforms are used and received by the public. These platforms can be used to deliver any marketing strategies clearly and effectively. Through assessment of the social media profiles associated with a country house site, one can begin to learn what the curators of that site might prioritise in practice. As McCormick indicates, social media can be a first point of visitor contact (McCormick, 2016, pp.113-115). It can therefore provide invaluable insight into marketing strategies and other aspects of the operation of a site. Furthermore, online marketing can be considered as an initial glimpse into the interpretation of a site. Few Welsh country houses which are in a ruinous condition have associated social media accounts owing to their physical condition which usually prevents people living in or visiting such a property. An exception to this are sites that are being actively renovated, such as Gwrych Castle (Gwrych Castle, 2019), which is used extensively as a case study in this research. Country houses in private ownership may not have associated websites or social media profiles, but businesses and initiatives connected to the estate might have social media profiles and websites which have been assessed. A prime example of this is Hawarden Castle, which is not open to the public as a visitor attraction and does not have a social media profile. Instead, there are social media accounts related to its estate and enterprises which include a farm shop (Hawarden Estate Farm Shop, 2019b), and this is also assessed as part of the 'Visiting Virtually' chapter. However, for full-time heritage attractions and commercial ventures, the online profile of a site has proved invaluable in forming analysis of their operation.

Significant portions of this thesis draw upon original data collected specifically for the purposes of this research. Primary sources such as interpretation guidance documents have been consulted to enable a thorough assessment of country house interpretation in Wales. The totality of the different forms of primary sources drawn upon highlights best practice and can be used to inform future interpretation practice at a variety of heritage sites, including Welsh country houses.

Original data, both quantitative and qualitative, has been collected via interviews and surveys. In the past, Laurajane Smith (2006, pp.122-161) has completed similar primary research of this nature specifically with country houses situated in England. Her research aimed to explore what visiting country houses means to people, and what the message and meaning that her chosen country houses delivered through interpretation. To achieve meaningful results, Smith interviewed 454 visitors at six houses in 2004. The surveys that she designed consisted of thirteen open-ended questions which prompted visitors "to explore the types of 'identity work' that visitors undertook by and during their visits." Responses were read, and common themes identified for analysis (Smith, 2006, p.127). The original intention of this research was to collect survey data in a similar manner to Smith – on-site at selected country houses with the expressed permission of staff or custodians. The coronavirus pandemic rendered it necessary for an alternative method of data collection to be sought. Consequently, an online survey was designed (Appendix 4) and disseminated online via social media and through the e-mailing lists of historical societies and local groups seeking respondents, always with the permission of the necessary person(s). There were 306 respondents in total. Based on the method of dissemination, it is likely that the survey attracted people who had an extent of interest in this area. The questions posed as part of the surveys were a mixture of open-ended and closed questions to gather a range of useful data for analysis, and in the case of closed questions, datasets that can be clearly compared. All questions were posed to a group of MA students at Bangor University as part of a pilot study, with the session concluding with feedback from the students regarding any issues they faced when trialling the questions that had been posed to them. This feedback was invaluable in producing the final survey and ensured that it was as user-friendly as possible.

The survey responses formed the basis of open-ended interviews, with a chapter dedicated to the analysis of them in this thesis. The interviews were also affected by the coronavirus pandemic, with them taking place online rather than in person and on-site. They have provided a valuable source of understanding the interpretation of Welsh country houses from the people who are either tasked with or responsible for making interpretation-related decisions at a wide variety of sites.

A key challenge faced particularly by survey data collection during this research process has been the attempt to gather and include the views of people who do not visit country houses. There was some success to this end through sharing the survey widely online, with demonstrable engagement from people who made it clear that they had no interest in visiting country houses. For the purposes of this research, their feedback was useful in assessing the importance of interpretation at Welsh country houses.

Analysis

Once the collection phase of the research process had been completed, the collected data was analysed. To gain the most meaningful results from the collected data, different analysis techniques have been used. A narrative analysis approach has been adopted to assess interview data. The interviews aimed to provide this study with information regarding site-specific interpretation decisions, inspiration, challenges, processes, and legislation. Interviewees were able to provide information from different perspectives and experiences, ensuring that insights were unique. Narrative analysis is a multidisciplinary approach to both data collection and analysis. It aims to understand how and why people were involved in an event, as well as how and why events occurred as they did (Earthy and Cronin, 2008, p.424). It allows the researcher to understand the contingent, the local and the particular in regard to the context of conversation (Schwandt, 1997, p.125). For the purpose of this thesis, this approach is applicable in that the contingent refers to country houses in general, the local refers to the different functions of country house, and the particular refers to the specific individual interviewed within the localised country house. Collectively, this approach can identify similarities and highlight differences between differing country house functions and their interpretation methods. The narrative analysis approach allows for and encourages multiple layers of interview assessment. The research has benefitted from this because interviews were more reflective, interpretive, and critical, which aids assessment (Wiles et al, 2005, p.92). Furthermore, narrative analysis has also been used to assess the usage of social media by country houses, to identify how the function and ownership status of a country house affects its output online and therefore its marketing strategies. Consequently, differing social media practices could be compared.

To assess some data, a qualitative content analysis approach has been adopted. This is a method for describing the meaning of qualitative material in a systematic way. Qualitative content analysis is carried out by a researcher who brings together their perceptions of the material with their own individual background. Meaning does not automatically exist upon the creation of data, it is constructed by those who interpret information. Meaning can be standardised by those who interpret information in instances which require little interpretation. This means that basic

information is given a standardised, wholly accepted definition or understanding by those who interpret it. Qualitative content analysis is a good method to use to analyse such sources, and more complex sources requiring a deeper level of interpretation can benefit greatly from this analysis technique. In circumstances when meaning is less obvious and less standardised, for example in assessing survey results in the survey analysis chapter of this thesis, qualitative content analysis is used to examine information in more detail in a manner which requires some degree of interpretation (Schreier, 2012, p.2). Using this approach, it has been possible to identify trends in data.

Significance

The collection and analysis of the data in this research is significant and of interest to a wide variety of stakeholders with interests not limited to the interpretation of country houses. It is also of interest to those who are involved in ensuring their futures in a world where the literature review of this thesis highlighted that some believe that country houses are having to adapt and innovate to remain relevant in the modern world. The significance of this research is therefore not only academic, but also broadly professional. The professional stakeholders may include but not be limited to local and national tourism agencies, owners of properties in a residential form of private ownership, owners of properties in a ruinous form of private ownership, owners or employees of properties operated as a commercial venture, national heritage organisations such as Historic Houses or the National Trust, and wider government bodies or services, including Cadw. In producing a comprehensive analysis of current interpretation practice, the research identifies omissions and opportunities in current practice which can be improved upon in the future. With there being such wide-ranging, mounting threats to the many varied futures of country houses across Wales, this research comes at a crucial moment in the history of these properties.

There are three prominent, contemporary examples which highlight some of the threats to Welsh country houses. Firstly, the financial difficulties at Bodelwyddan Castle resulting in public access to the museum-operated part of the castle and the surrounding park no longer being possible (Bodelwyddan Castle and Park, 2019) coupled with the loss of the relationship with the National Gallery exemplifies the financial frailty of the Welsh country house. Seemingly, the most viable future for Bodelwyddan is to develop and expand the existing hotel enterprise on the site, with the sale brochure indicating that the property would be suitable for a “variety of uses, subject to planning approval” (Lambert Smith Hampton, 2019, p.7). However, the brochure also states that the current lease “does not allow for the property to be used as a hotel or holiday centre” (Lambert Smith Hampton, 2019, p.6) and it is unclear whether this would impinge on future planning applications. Bodelwyddan is a prime example of a property with an uncertain future as a result of financial turmoil. Secondly, Broneirion closed in 2022. Most recently, it was used by

Girlguiding Cymru as a training and activity centre as well as their headquarters and offices. However, low member numbers and a decline in member numbers coupled with the impact of the coronavirus pandemic and increasing financial costs rendered it impossible for the venture to continue at Broneirion (Martin, 2022). This example underlines the extent of the challenge that country house owners and custodians face in Wales. Thirdly, the example of Gwydir Castle highlights a different issue faced by these properties. The focus of significant media attention in recent years (BBC, 2019b), Gwydir faces the increasing threat of climate change as a result of landscape management alterations locally, with flooding of the basement and gardens causing thousands of pounds worth of damage. In addition to this, the owner claimed that the water was “inches” from threatening the house above basement level (BBC, 2019b). Despite regular volunteering days constructing sandbag defences in key locations (@JudyCorbett, 2019), Gwydir Castle highlights the fact that the issues faced by country houses are diverse, but all pose serious threats to the building fabric and their subsequent futures.

Academically, the research is significant because it expands the existing literature on the topic of the interpretation of country houses in general and the Welsh context of country houses in particular. Furthermore, this thesis is significant because it explores broader, multidisciplinary themes such as marketing and wider heritage issues with a multitude of applications. It has widespread relevance to many different forms of heritage site beyond the country house. One of the considerable achievements of this research has been to understand the many and varied reasons that people visit country houses, and what they are interested in seeing or doing when they visit. It places substantial emphasis on the honest, holistic interpretation of country houses without embellishment or exaggeration. The research identifies the different functions of a country house in Wales in modern society, and the roles that they play in their search to establish contemporary relevance and develop future significance to safeguard their futures and to protect their histories.

Structure

Beyond this chapter, the thesis is divided into three main sections assessing the results of the three forms of data collection, with the conclusion drawing them together to discuss key findings. The three analytical chapters of this thesis comprise an online analysis of websites and social media associated with Welsh country houses, an analysis of the online survey results, and an analysis of the interviews conducted. Within each chapter, there is a discussion of dataset findings and conclusions. Throughout the thesis, particularly in the survey analysis, graphs, tables, and diagrams created by the researcher have been used to illustrate and visualise some of the research findings.

VISITING VIRTUALLY: AN ANALYSIS OF WEBSITE AND SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT PRODUCED BY STAFF AND CUSTODIANS REPRESENTING COUNTRY HOUSES IN WALES

In this chapter, websites and social media platforms are considered as a first form of interpretation that a country house in Wales can deliver to prospective visitors to their physical sites. The chapter analyses content produced by people representing Welsh country houses on websites and on social media. This is achieved through a comprehensive analysis of website layout and social media engagement figures, presented visually through a number of graphs, tables, and images. Neither Welsh country houses nor heritage sites in Wales more broadly have previously been subject to this form of analysis. Therefore, this chapter identifies the online presence and significance of Welsh country houses specifically in relation to interpretation. Furthermore, it is argued that interpretation is undervalued as a method of online engagement. Instead, interpretation is either used sparingly, or used as a tool of commercialising Welsh country houses to sell something.

Many Welsh country houses have an online presence in the form of websites and social media accounts. For many people, this online content provides the first form of site-specific country house interpretation they encounter (Crown and Hudson, 2018; McCormick, 2016, pp.113-115; Morton, 2018, pp.2-4). For the purposes of this chapter, they will be considered and analysed as such to effectively assess the interpretation of country houses in all of their forms and uses. Online content can be consumed and engaged with by a person before, during, and after their physical visit to a country house site. In some instances, online content can inspire and encourage a person to physically visit a site, or to create an attachment to a site. In some instances, especially in specific cases of Welsh country houses currently used as hotels, interpretation is often found exclusively online in the form of a website. Figure 1 is a diagram that underlines the general potential of social media. It identifies six possible usages or applications of social media and websites. The capacity to encourage engagement, discovery, and exploration has obvious resonance with the objectives of the cultural heritage sector overall and with the

business models of Welsh country houses irrespective of their function. These possible usages of websites and social media tie in with some of the interpretation principles referred to in the literature review of this thesis. For example, 'engage', 'discover', and 'explore' can all relate to Tilden's principle of provocation rather than recital. They are perhaps more closely aligned to the ICOMOS interpretation principles. Firstly, 'use' – ensuring that people can use features built into websites or social media pages is the digital equivalent of ensuring that people have physical and intellectual access to a site so are able to engage with it as mentioned in the ICOMOS principles. Furthermore, the ICOMOS principles refer to engaging with wider contexts that surround a site so that visitors firstly can engage with interpretation that is meaningful, but also so that they may discover new things about the local area – both of these are referred to in figure 1. This chapter analyses the websites and social media profiles of country houses in

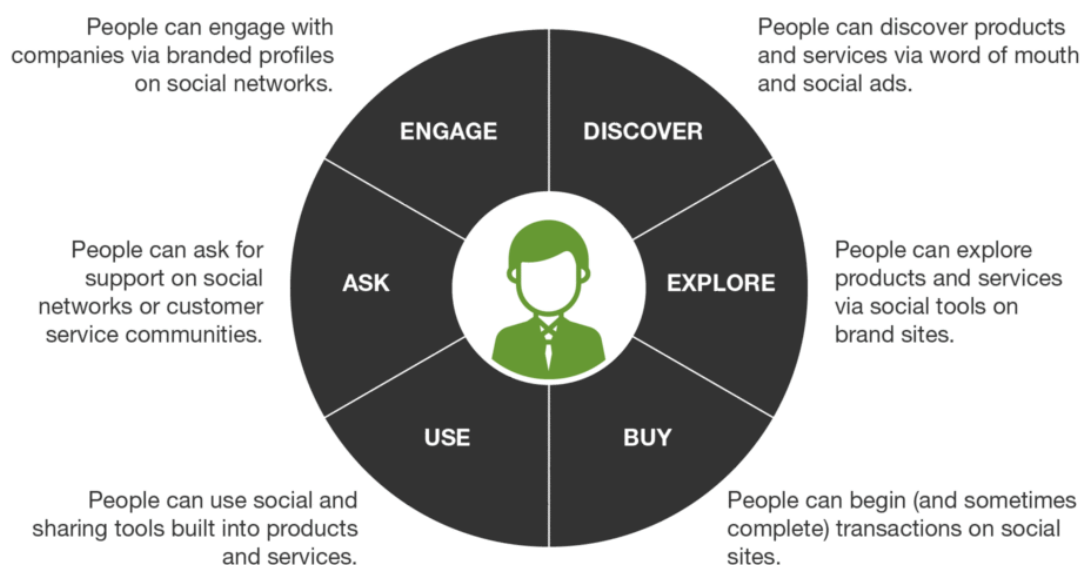


Figure 1: Diagram identifying the possible usages of websites and social media. (Liu, 2020a)

Wales against the criteria in figure 1. Relative to this diagram, interpretation can be considered as a tool that enables people to engage with a business or physical site, discover a wide variety of products, and explore this variety through online content. Furthermore, social media can link to websites for the purchasing of event tickets and products, can be used to share and interact with a site, and can also be used to ask specific questions. The objective of the online content created by custodians of country houses is often to market or to upsell a site to a specific audience rather

than to interpret the site outright. However, some interpretation is frequently used in the marketing of a country house, irrespective of its function(s). This use of interpretation in marketing is often not necessarily based on historical fact or academic research. The reasons for this are unclear, but it indicates that some country house owners or custodians are either unaware of the existence of relevant historical material and information which could be disseminated online, lack the skills to do so, or actively choose not to share such material, possibly because it is difficult for them to access, or it does not fit with how they wish to present their site. Therefore, this work identifies a further scope for collaboration between country house owners and custodians with academics researching various subjects pertaining to country houses and estates. The bounds between marketing and interpretation can be fluid, and the differing extents, nature, and quality of interpretation in marketing are explored in this work. The National Lottery Heritage Fund guidance on interpretation states that audience research is required so that interpretation can be designed to meet their needs and thus create successful interpretation. The guidance is applicable to social media also, because to be successful, social media content must appeal to the target audience, which is site-dependant. Moreover, National Lottery Heritage Fund guidance highlights clear objectives as a necessary aspect of the planning process to ensure the successful implementation of interpretation (National Lottery Heritage Fund, 2013, p.6). The same objectives should be visible in posts on social media if it is to be used effectively. The Museums Association (2020) offers a wide range of relevant heritage-specific social media best practice guides to assist with creating successful content online. The Association of Independent Museums (AIM) also offers a series of success guides aimed at assisting museum and heritage site staff with a variety of issues that they may face relating to governance, collections, leadership, trustees, and other issues. One such guide relates to visitor experience and includes relevant guidance on effectively utilising social media. It echoes the National Lottery Heritage Fund guidance referring to audience research, highlighting that the internet and social media in particular is now a rich store of visitor feedback that costs nothing financially to access, and this should be invaluable to heritage sites and museums alike (Wallace, 2017, p.4). For country houses that operate as visitor attractions or

businesses with any form of public interaction, clearly there is value in this. The Scottish Heritage Social Media Group (2020) offers advice on a wide-ranging subject matter related to social media, including understanding social media insights and engagement, and good practice regarding content creation. The advice is applicable to heritage sites irrespective of their location, in part due to the transcendent nature of social media to reach global audiences. One of the guides available includes tips on how to engage 'fan' groups of television shows or films to widen a social media audience and, in turn, develop a potential physical visitor audience and demographic (Scottish Heritage Social Media Group, 2017). This guide is especially relevant to many Welsh country houses, as filming for a wide variety of television shows and films has taken place at a wide variety of sites. There is further guidance available to Welsh country house custodians pertaining to social media and websites dependant on their status of ownership. The National Trust has its own social media policies, summarised by Alex Higgs (2014) and used later in this work to assess content. Meanwhile, Historic Houses also has a social media guide (Bossick, 2015). Comparing Higgs with Bossick, it is clear that the Historic Houses guide is far more detailed and informative than the National Trust guide. However, the guides are quite similar in the methods they suggest for success on social media. Both guides encourage the use of images or videos to capture people's attention, as well as advising that social media content should not be overly text heavy. Furthermore, both guides encourage appropriate engagement with related or allied accounts, whilst maintaining a consistent, professional tone. The key differences between the guides lies in their detail. The Historic Houses guide explores search engine optimisation, mobile-enabled websites, Google Analytics, Google Adwords and how to create accounts and use the full potential of social media websites, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, and Hootsuite (Bossick, 2015; Higgs, 2014). As an in-depth guide to using social media, perhaps to a country house owner or custodian who is unfamiliar with how best to use social media, Bossick's guide is particularly useful. However, although Higgs's guide is brief, it refers to social media techniques that country house owners and custodians can benefit from. Together, the guides offer a strong foundation to analyse social media posts made by country house owners and custodians. Many Welsh country houses are privately owned. If

the owners maintain a social media presence, they may create content themselves rather than employ a professional with technical expertise to do so. These guidelines are all conceived for and targeted at heritage sites. Welsh country houses operate within a variety of sectors depending on their primary functions (e.g., hotel, gallery, restaurant, heritage site), and the guidance that they seek to follow may depend entirely on how they view their sector. Staff of country houses that are operated as hotels may be more inclined to follow guidance written for hotels, rather than heritage sites. Whilst guidance in this form does exist, it is not publicly available in an equivalent form to the heritage guidance discussed above, in that there is minimal policy documentation produced by a national organisation or large hotel corporation that has been published for public viewing. However, the Intercontinental Hotels Group incorporating Intercontinental Hotels and Resorts, Crowne Plaza hotels and resorts, hotel Indigo, Holiday Inn and other hotel companies, published a code of conduct outlining their requirements for social media publication and external communication. The code of conduct states that Intercontinental Hotels Group's "social media activity is coordinated at a global, regional and brand level to ensure consistency and accuracy." (Intercontinental Hotels Group, 2017, p.14). This indicates that there are documents at global, regional and brand level within the organisation for staff to follow to ensure effective social media use. Hotels operated independently of larger chain organisations, such as Plas Nanteos in Aberystwyth, perhaps do not have this level of policy document, or an employee has created one based on guidance elsewhere, or previous professional experience. The hotel at Bodelwyddan Castle operated as part of the Warner Leisure Hotels organisation does not have a similar policy document in the public domain, but it is probable that there is one used privately to ensure consistency in the public messaging of the business at all levels. Irrespective of function, the owners and custodians of country houses need to recognise and engage more closely with cultural heritage specific guidance, and this can only be achieved through engagement between multiple stakeholders, including country house owners and custodians, heritage bodies, local councils, and communities and the repositories of historical information and knowledge.

The social media analysis was conducted during a period when the coronavirus had a wide-ranging impact upon Wales, the U.K., (National Trust, 2020c; Visit Britain, 2020) and globally. Data was predominantly collected in April 2020. All National Trust sites in Wales were closed to the public and houses operating as hotels, restaurants and wedding venues were also seriously impacted. This had an influence on the form of social media content created about Welsh country houses during this time, and so it has been helpful to analyse part of this period to assess the responses to Wales becoming an essentially virtual country as a result of the spread of coronavirus and the consequent lockdowns. The analysis also includes periods when social media activity would be considered to be more normal, namely December 2019 and July 2019 – two critical times for businesses due to larger visitor numbers. Custodians of Welsh country houses that operate as a visitor site – whether on a full-time basis, at set times, sporadically throughout the year, or as a hotel or venue, usually have websites for potential visitors to find information or book tickets. They often also have social media platforms to publicise events or activities, and to reach out to their audiences. The websites and social media accounts representing country houses selected for this analysis have been chosen as they represent a variety of ownership statuses, house types, business models, and functions with active online presences across a small geographic area. They are: Chirk Castle, Erddig Hall, Penrhyn Castle, Plas Newydd, Hafodunos Hall, Gwrych Castle, Plas Teg, Bodrhyddan Hall, Gwydir Castle, Bodelwyddan Castle, Gregynog Hall, Hawarden Estate Farm Shop, and The Good Life Experience (Appendix 5).

Statistical Overview

The National Trust cares for multiple country houses across North Wales. Chirk Castle, Erddig, Penrhyn Castle, and Plas Newydd each have a social media presence on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Instagram was used the least of the platforms with some accounts not featuring any posts across the period(s) of analysis. This is discussed in further detail later in this work. All social media accounts are managed by the staff at individual properties, in line with National Trust guidance (Higgs, 2014). These staff members tend either to be dedicated social media managers or marketing professionals. Ordinarily these staff have relevant qualifications or significant experience in the marketing of sites, or they have experience of messaging and reaching their target audiences. Additionally, the National Trust maintains regional social media accounts (e.g., @southeastNT – a Twitter account for areas in the Southeast of England), an account for Wales (@NTWales on Twitter), accounts for the main organisation itself, as well as accounts across different themes at different sites across their network, such as libraries and archaeology. Figure 2 provides an overview of the social media profiles and activities related to these sites. Unfortunately, it is not possible to ascertain the number of total posts on Facebook. However, the number of posts on Facebook within a specific time period can be counted up and directly compared with the number of Twitter posts. Looking at Figures 2 and 3, there are a number of inferences that can be drawn from the outset. The closer the geographic location of the country house is to the English border, the higher the number of 'likes' on Facebook are. That is not to say that geographic proximity to the English border influences online popularity, because online popularity transcends geographic borders, but properties along the border have a larger physical potential audience base, with the cities of Wrexham, Chester, Liverpool, Manchester, and Birmingham all being within reasonable driving distance. Furthermore, there are many factors which influence the extent of following and reach that a social media account has, including the frequency, content, and timing of posts, as well as the engagement with social media users. The trend does not follow suit in terms of Twitter followers, but the two sites closer to the English border both have more followers than their Western Wales counterparts. According to the most recent annual visitor figures posted by Visit

Wales for 2018, the most visited country house listed in Figures 2 and 3 was Erddig which was visited by 172,948 people. Chirk Castle was visited by 171,943 people – just 1,005 fewer than Erddig. By comparison, Penrhyn Castle received 118,833 visitors, and 151,714 people visited Plas Newydd (Visit Wales, 2020, p.55-60). The two sites with the larger number of visitors have the largest online following, and it is possible that larger visitor numbers have translated to a larger online following, as there appears to be direct correlation between online following and on-site visits. The number of ‘check-ins’ that people have made at Penrhyn Castle on Facebook are significantly fewer than the three other National Trust sites. Whilst there is no obvious reason for this – especially when Penrhyn Castle has more Facebook ‘likes’ than Plas Newydd which has received over 8,000 more ‘check-ins’ than Penrhyn Castle – it could simply be due to poor phone signal, or perhaps there is another reason people do not share that they are visiting. On Twitter, it is clear that posting more frequently equates to a larger number of followers. However, the two National Trust country houses in North Wales with the largest social media followings do not post bilingually across any of their accounts. This may be due to their geographic location being situated nearer the English border. Furthermore, bilingual posting is not mentioned in any guidance that has been analysed for the purpose of this research. It is therefore possible that they consider their Welsh identity to be less of a priority as compared to staff at Penrhyn Castle and Plas Newydd. Staff at Plas Newydd and Penrhyn Castle both post bilingually and in doing so post identical content twice – once in Welsh and once in English, thus highlighting a key difference between National Trust social media accounts despite all representing the same organisation. In posting bilingually, staff at both Plas Newydd and Penrhyn Castle consistently choose to translate the Welsh posts into English posts, resulting in the same content being posted in two languages. Posts to social media made by staff members at these National Trust sites do not seek to post different content in different languages targeted at a specific language-oriented audience. Consequently, it would be expected that staff at Plas Newydd and Penrhyn Castle would post on social media far more frequently. Instead, accounts related to Erddig and Chirk Castle either must have been present on Twitter for a longer period, or they simply post more frequently.

There are few ruined Welsh country houses that are open to visitors of any kind in a safe, legal manner. One such property which also has a presence on social media channels is Gwrych Castle. Despite being a ruined building and therefore offering a different type of visitor experience to other country houses, Gwrych

	Facebook 'likes'	Facebook Check-Ins	Twitter followers	Twitter posts	Bilingual?
Chirk Castle	13,985	57,457	5,818	6,948	No
Erddig	12,483	18,124	5,227	7,033	No
Penrhyn Castle	5390	1753	4025	2982	Yes
Plas Newydd	4688	9153	4380	3178	Yes

Figure 2: Statistics regarding the social media following of National Trust properties as of 14/04/2020.

	Facebook 'likes'	Facebook Check-Ins	Twitter followers	Twitter posts	Bilingual?
Hafodunos Hall	1,747	201*	N/A	N/A	No
Gwrych Castle	15,784	9,547	1,336	4,417	No

Figure 3: Statistics regarding Gwrych Castle's social media following as of 14/04/2020, before the site was announced as the filming location for ITV's 'I'm a Celebrity'.

*: Data taken from an unofficial Facebook page automatically generated due to public interest.

Castle has a strong social media following as exemplified by Figure 3. When compared with Figure 2, it is to the credit of the Gwrych Castle Preservation Trust that they have built such a large following on Facebook. They have more 'likes' than

all four National Trust properties – more than three times the number of Plas Newydd. Furthermore, they have received more Facebook 'Check-Ins' than both Penrhyn Castle and Plas Newydd. Considering the National Trust sites most likely employ specialist social media and marketing staff, this heightens the achievement of the Gwrych Castle Preservation Trust and reflects poorly on the National Trust social media techniques and online engagement. Gwrych Castle's social media accounts tend to frequently create posts grounded in historical information and site-specific content stemming from the research of Dr Mark Baker – the founder of Gwrych Castle Preservation Trust. Consequently, Gwrych Castle's interpretation through the use of social media has more historical depth and detail, resulting in a larger, more engaged online audience. This indicates that National Trust and other property staff or custodians should choose to either base a larger portion of social media posts on academic research and knowledge relating to the site, or allow staff members (e.g. curators) with in-depth, relevant, engaging knowledge of a site and its collections to post on their social media channels. Despite posting more on Twitter than Plas Newydd and Penrhyn Castle staff, Gwrych Castle custodians do not have as many followers as either. Therefore, it is clear that Gwrych Castle's following on Facebook is larger than on Twitter and the content analysis later in this work seeks to understand why. Gwrych Castle custodians do not post bilingually on a regular basis, but some posts do feature shorter bilingual messages as opposed to the entire post being in both languages. Despite not posting bilingually, the social media posts convey a strong message of the site's local and Welsh identity through its history and local connections.

Hafodunos Hall is currently in a state of ruin and, like Gwrych Castle, is in the process of being renovated. However, the purpose of renovation differs between the two country houses. Hafodunos Hall was purchased with the intention of renovating it to become the private residence of the owner (Devine, 2010). As a result, there is less need to develop a virtual audience who would be potential physical visitors to the property. This is reflected in the social media channels operated by Hafodunos Hall's owner, in that they do not utilise a Twitter account, and the Facebook account associated with the site is listed as a 'community' rather than a landmark or historical place – as Gwrych is. Despite this, the official Facebook page has gained

1,747 'likes', underlining the interest of the general public. The page is not bilingual but considering that the purpose of it is not necessarily to reach as many people as possible, bilingual posts are not as necessary in this case.

Gwydir Castle, Plas Teg and Bodrhyddan Hall are three country houses that currently serve as the private residences of their owners. Additionally, the owners of each attempt to use the sites to bring in financial income linked to the buildings themselves through a variety of events and activities, such as car shows, guided tours, paranormal evenings, and weddings. These highlight the wide variety of events and activities that Welsh country houses host, demonstrated by just three properties. Consequently, all are open to the public in some form, albeit on a limited basis. In this regard, they are representative of most Welsh country houses, in that they are private residences with some form of limited public access. Each building has a presence online across different social media platforms.

	Facebook 'likes'	Facebook Check- Ins	Twitter followers	Twitter posts	Bilingual?
Plas Teg	5,948	1,683	535	462	No
Bodrhyddan Hall	2,640	1,565	241	201	No
Gwydir Castle	3,149	102	4,090	2,331	No

Figure 4: Statistics concerning Plas Teg, Bodrhyddan Hall and Gwydir Castle on social media as of 14/04/2020.

The statistics in Figure 4 show Plas Teg and Bodrhyddan Hall as being more closely aligned to Hafodunos Hall than any property assessed thus far in this work. Both properties appear to place relatively little emphasis on Twitter – similarly to Hafodunos Hall not maintaining a Twitter presence. There is a Twitter account for Bodrhyddan Hall, but the account only shares links to posts they have made on Facebook. Meanwhile, whilst they do both generate more of a following on Facebook, it is not as large as any of the full-time heritage attractions that have been assessed. Gwydir Castle's owners evidently place more emphasis on Twitter than the other two in Figure 4, owing to having nearly 2,000 more Twitter posts than either of them and having a far larger following. None of the accounts post

bilingually across their social media, possibly because the properties are privately owned and likely do not employ people to operate the businesses. Therefore, if the owners do not speak Welsh, they would not necessarily have the capacity to post bilingually on social media, whereas full-time heritage attractions can hire someone who is bilingual. Furthermore, the person who is managing the social media accounts of a country house and their background has implications on the type of content that is being created for social media, as well as the quality and extent of accurate, engaging, and informative content. Specifically, there would be the potential for owners who have inherited a country house from a family line intending to interpret the family story that they have been told, regardless of whether or not academic research either supports or falsifies the basis for this interpretation and, consequently, social media posts and other online material, such as websites. There would be the potential in these instances for embellishment of interpretation with factual origins to reflect an owner or the family of an owner in a more positive light. Undoubtedly, these instances are problematic and entirely unnecessary due to the factual, original significance of the country house, wider estate and influence on a wider geographic area, as well as connections to often renowned individuals of high societal standing.

Figure 5 highlights the differences in social media following between properties that operate as commercial entities. Firstly, the social media following attributed to Bodelwyddan Castle is not representative of the site itself, but of a portfolio of fourteen property hotels managed by Warner Leisure Hotels. This accounts for its far superior social media following on Facebook, and inevitably affects how Bodelwyddan Castle is interpreted in that the social media representation is not site-specific and therefore not reflective of Bodelwyddan Castle's geographic location. However, the Twitter following compared with others assessed in this work is comparatively low despite covering the combined fourteen sites, and despite posting over 4,000 times. It is especially low considering the large Facebook following, and when considering the content posted on different social media platforms. Compared with assessed properties such as Penrhyn Castle, the number of Facebook 'check-ins' seems high. However, owing to the number in the table including fourteen different sites and the vast difference between Facebook 'likes' and 'check-ins', it is likely that

the number for Bodelwyddan Castle is far lower than this, and more comparable to other such sites. The Hawarden Estate Farm Shop is a commercial arm of Hawarden Estate. The country house is not open to the public, but the grounds, including the medieval castle ruins, are occasionally accessible throughout the year, and the farm shop social media accounts are a way of disseminating this information. The accounts are not used to promote or disseminate information or research related to the country house itself but are linked to the commercial activities of the estate. Prior to the impacts of the 'I'm a Celebrity' filming at Gwrych Castle, discussed later in this chapter, Twitter accounts related to the Hawarden Estate had the largest Twitter followings of any site assessed in this analysis, and the Facebook following is similarly high. Furthermore, the farm shop has one of the highest numbers of Twitter posts, highlighting that it has a more regular online presence than other properties. Being a farm shop and having the estate host the annual 'Good Life Experience' festival, it is possible that Hawarden Estate's social media channels reach a more diverse range of people and so have a larger following as a result. However, there are separate social media accounts specifically for the festival, which have a similar following to the farm shop – as shown in Figure 5 – indicating a possible crossover in following. The 'Good Life Experience' most likely has a low number of Facebook 'check-ins' due to its seasonal nature. Gregynog Hall has a comparatively small following. Operating as a conference, event, and wedding venue with accommodation and an on-site café, it also hosts a wide variety of activities but has a much smaller following on Facebook and Twitter than Hawarden Estate's social media channels. None of the social media accounts assessed in Figure 5 post bilingually – only in English. This implies that staff, owners, or custodians of these sites either do not see posting to social media bilingually as something that is necessary, or advantageous or perhaps more likely, the people who post to social media accounts do not speak Welsh, or simply do not have the time to do so if posting to social media forms a small part of their wider role.

	Facebook 'likes'	Facebook Check-Ins	Twitter followers	Twitter posts	Bilingual?
Bodelwyddan Castle*	40,532	8,758	3,006	4,483	No
Gregynog Hall	2,094	3,620	1,592	2,902	No
Hawarden Estate Farm Shop	7,630	8,510	7,026	6,637	No
The Good Life Experience	7,784	401	7,448	11,100	No

Figure 5: Statistics regarding country houses operating commercially as of 14/04/2020.

*: Bodelwyddan Castle no longer has its own social media since the closure of the country house as a visitor attraction in 2019. These figures are taken from Warner Leisure Hotels social media accounts, who operate the hotel at the site.

Websites

In addition to each National Trust property having its own social media channels, they are all incorporated into the National Trust's corporate website which provides the primary gateway for accessing information about every National Trust site in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland. Consequently, each country house website listing conforms to the same structure. The National Trust do not offer a translation into Welsh for the entire website, but the pages for each country house located in Wales are available to be viewed in Welsh. To assess the structure of National Trust managed country house website listings as a form of interpretation, the National Trust's 'Everything Speaks: Seven Working Principles for Interpretation' (National Trust, 2015) document has been used. The document is not an exhaustive or detailed piece of work outlining specific methods of interpreting sites. Rather, it is a document that highlights overarching themes synonymous with creating and curating 'the National Trust experience'. The document cannot be much more specific without addressing the individual requirements of a site, as mentioned in the literature review of this work. 'The National Trust experience' is one that is universally recognised despite the Trust only operating in England, Wales and Northern Ireland – the National Trust for Scotland is entirely separate. It is not an experience that is limited to physical visits, and the uniform structure and branding of the website enables people to feel that they are receiving a virtual National Trust experience when they are seeking information regarding a potential future or repeat physical visit.

As entries relating to each country house follow the same structure on the National Trust's website, they have been assessed together unless specific differences have been identified. Furthermore, the websites have been assessed around the same time period of April 2019. The first principle of the National Trust's 'Everything Speaks' document refers to creating the correct first impression representative of the experience that they want to curate. All four National Trust-operated country houses assessed for the purpose of this work create their first virtual impressions on their websites utilising a series of large, landscape-orientated images to introduce the online visitor to their site, immediately giving them an approximation of what they can expect from their visit. One image is viewed at a time, using arrows to scroll

through the images. The image does not change after an elapsed period – the image can only be changed by the viewer. Therefore, the first image used is especially important when considering curating a first impression and the online interpretation of a site, because the visitor may not choose to view all of the available images. For the Erddig and Chirk Castle pages, three images are provided for visitors, whilst there are four available for the Plas Newydd page and five for Penrhyn Castle. The nature of the images themselves enable visitors to make inferences about what they can expect from their prospective visit to the site. Erddig and Chirk Castle achieve this best with their first images which are both distant shots that display the apparent size of their houses, immediately giving the visitor the impression that there would be plenty to see and do if they were to visit physically – including both the houses and their grounds. The Penrhyn Castle page displays a more artistic image of the Keep. Whilst it does not accurately portray the vast size of the building or its grounds, it does give visitors the indication that this is an architecturally exceptional country house. The opening image of the Plas Newydd page sets the property apart in that it highlights its geographic location overlooking the Menai Strait. All three of Erddig's images feature the house and, to an extent, the gardens and grounds. Chirk Castle's only image featuring the house itself is the first image – the one that all visitors to the website are guaranteed to see. The other two images are of the surrounding grounds, highlighting how remote Chirk Castle is as well as the apparent expanse of the grounds. Plas Newydd's opening image is also the only image to feature the house itself. In doing so, the outdoor settings of both properties are being promoted as much as, if not more than, the houses themselves. The National Trust has been criticised by multiple journalists writing for some well-read British newspapers, such as *The Telegraph*. The criticism partially focused on a document that suggested the National Trust were to focus on outdoor assets and consequently move away from the country house offer long associated with the organisation (Duffield, 2020; Sanders, 2020). The visual promotion on the National Trust website of outdoor settings rather than the houses themselves perhaps supports this criticism. However, the National Trust Director-general, Hilary McGrady, wrote "the most damaging inference in the press coverage is that we are intentionally stepping away from our built heritage. I refute this. [...] If anything, I

am trying to reverse the decline in the proportion of people visiting the houses in our care.” (McGrady, 2020). This research concludes that the selection and display of appropriate online images can form part of the strategy for interpreting the historical significance and wide-ranging impacts of these properties, in line with objectives to draw visitors into the country house experience.

Two of the remaining three images on Plas Newydd’s National Trust website highlight the plants and wildlife that visitors may encounter should they visit physically, whilst the fourth picture is the only image across all four country houses which is related specifically to the house’s collections. The image is of replica archived documents displayed in Lady Anglesey’s bedroom. It is significant that this is the only collections related image because it implies that either this is not a priority in terms of site interpretation, or that National Trust staff do not believe that people want to visit primarily to see their collections, but that other reasons to visit are more popular – such as the gardens, landscapes, and being outdoors. The remaining four images on the Penrhyn Castle page show the building in the background with the parkland in the foreground, thus highlighting the size of the grounds as well as the outstanding architectural nature of the site. This is a theme continued in another image, which showcases the intricate carvings of the grand staircase. The Penrhyn Castle page is the only one to include an image from within the building and, significantly, is also the only page to have an image featuring people. One image displays a person with their dogs in the grounds, demonstrating the site can be enjoyed in a variety of ways, with another image showing two children exploring lily ponds – indicating that this is a site that can be enjoyed and appreciated by people of all ages. Above the large images, the name of the site is presented in a large font against a contrasting background colour. Chirk Castle and Erddig are named as such. However, Penrhyn Castle is named as “Penrhyn Castle and Gardens” whilst Plas Newydd is listed as “Plas Newydd House and Gardens”. This makes it clear to potential visitors that there is a garden on-site that visitors are able to see and enjoy at these sites, and perhaps this is a priority for the two sites individually. Chirk Castle and Erddig do not make this quite so obvious; despite having green spaces and gardens as part of their offer, visitors need to delve deeper into the website to locate this information. It is possible that this fails to match the

first principle of creating the correct first impression in that both sites instil a small amount of ambiguity in this manner.

The images of each property visible to the online visitor appears to depend on the language in which the visitor selects to view the website in. Viewing Chirk Castle's website in Welsh leads to four images being available to view, as opposed to three. The fourth principle in the 'Everything Speaks' booklet encourages sites to consider every detail regardless of how small it may be (National Trust, 2013, pp.8-11). This degree of attention to detail should transfer to National Trust websites. However, the difference between images on the English websites and the Welsh websites is surprising. Whilst the Plas Newydd and Erddig pages both provide the same images for the English and Welsh versions, the Penrhyn Castle page provides just two images on the Welsh website as opposed to the five on the English page. It highlights inconsistencies between the English and Welsh pages. The two images featured in Welsh are both of the building itself. Welsh-speaking people are most likely to travel from within the local area. Therefore, the two images of the dogs being walked and the children playing on the English version of the website would undoubtedly be more relevant on the Welsh website. It is particularly surprising that one of the country houses that has bilingual posts on social media is the site that has the most apparent differences between the English and Welsh versions of its website.

The Erddig page clarifies the initial ambiguity related to their garden by mentioning it in a short summary below the large images which attempts to capture the essence of a visit to Erddig. The pages for all four properties provide a maximum of two short sentences which encapsulate the site – interpretation in a nutshell. Each summary makes use of creative language that is evocative, almost poetic, potentially stirring thoughts of a romanticised notion of the past. The Chirk Castle page does this with the phrase "magnificent medieval fortress" whilst the Plas Newydd page uses "enchanted mansion and gardens". Once again, the gardens at Plas Newydd are highlighted in the description, whilst the Chirk Castle page neglects to mention theirs. The description on Penrhyn Castle's page incorporates the phrase "fantasy castle", which undoubtedly heightens intrigue amongst online visitors, whereas

Erddig is described as “much-loved”. Therefore, all four properties are described using some form of strong, positive language in their brief descriptions to create a strong first impression as alluded to in the ‘Everything Speaks’ document. Another principle is to create a strong sense of ‘Spirit of Place’. Each property has its own ‘Spirit of Place’ document which are constructed by employees at each site and outlined in private documents. Presumably, website and social media outputs are based on these documents. The National Trust identifies the ‘Spirit of Place’ as the “essence of a property, the one thing we want every visitor to understand and take away with them” (National Trust, 2013, p.5). This research recommends that more of the contents from the site-specific Spirit of Place documents should be made available as part of online interpretation. The nature of the descriptions on the websites for all four sites attempts to create a strong sense of ‘Spirit of Place’ before the visitor has physically been to the site, so that already the National Trust is seeking to establish what the visitor should be taking away with them from their physical visit. This is a method of identifying the priorities of a site in terms of their interpretation. Within the descriptions, Chirk Castle is the only site that explicitly mentions a connection to Wales, stating that the fortress was “of the Welsh Marches”. Amongst the other three, the only reference to being in Wales or Welsh is found in Plas Newydd’s description, which cites “spectacular views of Snowdonia”. Neither the Penrhyn Castle nor Erddig pages refer to Wales in this section. Upon viewing the page in Welsh using the option provided by the National Trust, all of the descriptions disappear. This further exemplifies a difference in interpretive detail between the English and Welsh language versions on the National Trust website, in that some content is not provided in Welsh. Whilst this – along with the image discrepancies – are small differences, the fourth principle of ensuring that every detail matters is clearly adhered to more strongly in the English-language versions. Furthermore, the ‘Spirit of Place’ is outlined from the beginning in English, but this is not the case in Welsh.

The discrepancies between English and Welsh online content continue into the National Trust’s ‘More about this place’ section of each website. Once again, the Chirk Castle page provides more options in Welsh than in English, with eight options available to provide more information to online visitors regarding their prospective

physical visit. By comparison, there are just three options available in English. The reason behind this could be that some of the Welsh links provided that are not available in English appear to be more orientated towards group or school visits. Perhaps Chirk Castle receives more school visits from Welsh-language schools – or perhaps staff are seeking to increase their visits from schools in Wales. Similarly with groups, they may be aiming to increase group visits from Welsh-speaking organisations. However, it would be beneficial for this information to be more readily available in both languages. Whilst not to the same scale as Chirk Castle, the Penrhyn Castle page also offers more options in Welsh than English – four in Welsh and three in English. In Welsh, there is a ‘things to do and see’ section which is not available in English, highlighting that Penrhyn Castle staff provide different content in English and in Welsh. The extra section includes information regarding current and upcoming events and activities – many of them focussed on local communities and identifying different methods of interpreting the varied and connected histories of Penrhyn Castle. Sixth and seventh in the ‘Everything Speaks’ booklet concern encouraging repeat visits and stretching and surprising people (National Trust, 2013, pp.13-14). The extra section of the website in Welsh pertains to both of these in that people who live locally to the site are more likely to be able to visit on multiple occasions. Therefore, having an events and activities section of the website delivered in a medium that appeals to them is more likely to reach them and more likely to increase repeat visits. Also, this approach helps to construct a Welsh identity for the country houses that the National Trust can use to market the sites to prospective visitors. Furthermore, it could be surprising to many that National Trust staff discuss the interpretation of Penrhyn Castle so openly and actively invite participation to transform its future. Conversely, Erddig’s and Plas Newydd’s pages both offer less content in the Welsh language than they each do in English. The Plas Newydd page offers three English options and two in Welsh, with the ‘our work’ section being the omission. In English, this section is one that, at the time of writing, raises awareness that people can make a donation towards the recreation of a dining room carpet that has been retired. There is no mention of this on the Welsh website whatsoever. Perhaps staff at Plas Newydd believe that the Welsh-speaking people who are likely to live locally are less likely to be inclined to donate to such a

cause. However, it is likely that this has simply not been translated. The Erddig page offers four English options and three in Welsh. As with Plas Newydd, it is the 'our work' section that does not feature on the Welsh version. In English, this section also features an opportunity to ask for a donation as with Plas Newydd, but also highlights the size of Erddig's collection – the second largest in the whole of the National Trust – and raises awareness of associated curatorial and conservation work being done with it (National Trust, 2020d). It is possible that staff at Erddig have decided that asking for donations towards the upkeep of the building online is something more appropriately directed towards English-speaking visitors and tourists rather than Welsh-speaking people who are more likely to live locally. Similar to Plas Newydd, it is also possible that this is a section of the website that has simply not been translated into Welsh. However, it would be valuable for Welsh-speaking people to have access to information regarding Erddig's work with their extensive collections in their own language. This research has underlined that the Welsh and English online materials for National Trust managed Welsh country houses do not match, and to provide online material that is effective and created to the best standards, this must be addressed, or content should be appropriately tailored to different identified audiences.

There are two sections in this area of each country house's National Trust website that most sites have in common in Welsh and in English. More information is available regarding the history, and the art and collections at each property online. The implication here is that these are topics that the National Trust insist are covered by every property as a minimum on their websites. The Chirk Castle, Erddig, and Plas Newydd pages all offer the same historical information in English and in Welsh – there do not appear to be any differences. Conversely, Penrhyn Castle staff present different histories depending on the language selected. In both languages, staff highlight how the funds were acquired to construct such a vast building and estate. In English, the focus is on the slave trade and the slate quarries in equal measure, shown in Image 1. In Welsh, however, the focus of information is solely on the slate quarries. A large image of quarry workers is used to grab the attention of the visitor, and a brightly coloured background attracts the visitor to the text written in the foreground encouraging them to learn more about the Penrhyn Quarry Strike,

which when translated, describes it as “the longest industrial dispute in British history”. The language used here exudes a sense of historical significance and national importance. However, in the Welsh language history section of Penrhyn

Sugar and slate



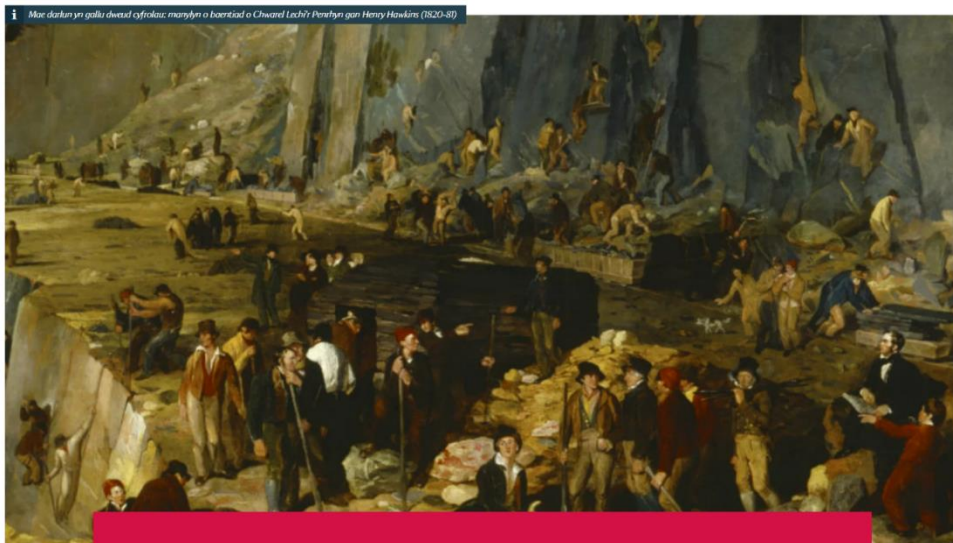
**Penrhyn Castle
and the
transatlantic**

Behind the formidable architecture, Victorian grandeur and fine interiors, present day Penrhyn Castle's foundations were built on a dark history. One of exploitation, Jamaican sugar fortunes and the

**Penrhyn Castle
and the Great
Penrhyn Quarry**

Learn more about the history of the Great Strike of Penrhyn 1900-03, the longest running industrial dispute in British history.

Image 1: A screenshot of part of the English-language Penrhyn Castle website (08/04/2020).



Penrhyn Castle and Garden
Gwynedd

**Castell Penrhyn a Streic Fawr
Chwarel y Penrhyn, 1900-03**

Cowch ddysgu mwy am hanes Streic Fawr Chwarel y Penrhyn
1900-03, yr anghydfod diwydiannol hiraf yn hanes Prydain.

Dysgwch Fwy

Image 2: A screenshot of part of the Welsh Penrhyn Castle website (08/04/2020).

Castle's website, the site's connection to the slave trade is not mentioned at all. Evidently, Penrhyn Castle staff appear to have identified different audiences and interests between Welsh-speaking visitors and English-speaking visitors. The reasoning behind this is complex. In part, it is possible that Welsh-speaking visitors live more locally to Penrhyn Castle than English-speaking visitors, and they may have more personal connections to the quarry strikes. Therefore, it is appropriate for the website to focus on issues that are more relevant to them in their language. However, Welsh-speaking visitors are also English-speaking visitors, therefore it is difficult to distinguish between the two. Another possible explanation is that the National Trust is attempting to culturally align country houses situated in Wales with more local values to create a Welsh identity that previously lacked in interpretation. However, the slave trade forms a significant part of the history of Penrhyn Castle and Wales and does not feature on the Welsh-language website. Furthermore, it is not referred to in the 'a brief history of Penrhyn Castle' (National Trust, 2020e) section if the visitor was to click through to that page. Although this page refers to the ownership and foundation of the building itself, it seems as though this would be an obvious section to acknowledge a significant historical background – perhaps with a link to a more detailed page regarding the slave trade involvement, which is already available in English (National Trust, 2020f). In identifying and separating two different audiences online, assuming they have done so, and this is not an oversight, Penrhyn Castle staff have sought to achieve the third principle of the 'Everything Speaks' (National Trust, 2013, pp.6-7) document. The principle encourages sites to ensure their visit appeals on different levels, and two steps it refers to are to "catch the eye" and to "make a connection". In using the brightly coloured background and

More about this place

Save to My places

History



Get involved



Art and collections




Share:    

Image 3: A screenshot of Chirk Castle's further information in English (08/04/2020).

the large image, Penrhyn Castle is catching the eye of the visitor, whilst using the medium of Welsh language to make a connection with the visitor. In terms of the 'Spirit of Place' of the site, it indicates that the origins of the building are of considerable importance to the interpretation of the site and a physical visit should reflect that to a Welsh-speaking visitor. The Penrhyn Castle, Chirk Castle, Plas Newydd, and Erddig pages all have the 'history' section in Welsh and in English. The only one of the four not to have an 'art and

Mwy am y lle hwn

 Save to My places

Pethau i'w gwneud a'u gweld	↓	Digwyddiadau	↓	Hanes	↓	Bwyta a siopa	↓
Cymryd rhan	↓	Grwpiau	↓	Dysgu	↓	Lleoedd i aros	↓

Share:    

Image 4: A screenshot of Chirk Castle's further information in Welsh (08/04/2020).

collections' section in either language is Chirk Castle, which only has it in English. As noted earlier in this work, Chirk Castle has many more options for Welsh-speakers to select, but art and collections is not one of those. With it being an option for other country houses in Welsh on their websites, and for Chirk Castle to have so many options on their Welsh language website, it seems misguided for this section to be omitted. It indicates that National Trust staff at Chirk Castle have identified their Welsh-speaking visitors as people who are interested in information regarding group visits and events but not the collections. However, whilst a link to navigate to the page does not appear in this list, the art and collections section is located at the bottom of the page. Therefore, access is still permitted to Welsh-speakers, but there is no form of easy-access navigation to locate it. It is only available after scrolling through all of the information that the menu has already introduced to the online visitor. Considering the 'Everything Speaks' document, the difference in menus between English and Welsh highlights a neglect in the differing levels of detail referred to in the fourth principle (National Trust, 2013, pp.8-11). To successfully

obtain the level of detail referred to in the booklet, there should not be such a large difference between the content in both languages, whether intentional or not.

Owing to its intended future use as a private residence, Hafodunos Hall does not currently have a website. However, Gwrych Castle is a ruined property that does have a website. It is easily navigable using the menu at the top of the page. The menu offers an insight into the activities Gwrych Castle can offer its visitors physically, including standard visits, weddings, educational visits, and special events with a section of the website devoted to each of these options for the online visitor to find out more. The menu also offers the online visitor more options available through the website only, such as 'about us', 'news', 'support us', 'shop', and 'contact us' sections. The home page is largely visual for simplicity and clarity – it offers the online visitor the opportunity to find what they require easily through the menu. Interpretation can be directional – encouraging the visitor to follow a certain path or route around a visitor site. Ensuring that the website is clearly signposted enabling the visitor the opportunity to find what they are looking for easily creates the positive first impression that the National Trust's 'Everything Speaks' booklet seeks. The large image of Gwrych Castle, taken from above, situated below the menu highlights the scale of the task at hand, before a note encouraging people to visit the site. A link to the 'support us' section underlines the need for funding whilst the scale of the task is still fresh in the minds of visitors. Below, different tabs appear for visitors to offer their support in different ways. One advertises upcoming events that people can read more about, and another highlights castle news stories such as available jobs or opening hour changes. Below these, the vision for "a vibrant and sustainable future for Gwrych Castle" (Gwrych Castle, 2020) is outlined. In this section of the website, there is a document available for visitors to view outlining a ten year and twenty-five-year plan (Gwrych Castle, 2018). Therefore, there are multiple levels of interpretation available for online visitors to engage with, ranging from a basic level of informing people what the overall plan is – to preserve Gwrych Castle – to a more in-depth level of presenting the 'case for support' document for those who are interested in knowing more about the project. Finally, the homepage presents social media details and details such as opening times and contact details. The website gives the impression that Gwrych Castle's priorities lie in

raising funds due to the numerous methods mentioned on the homepage, such as weddings, ghost hunts, an online shop, and multiple mentions of garnering support. Furthermore, it is made clear that the funds are being raised to support the preservation and long-term sustainability of the building, with the 'about us' section (Gwyrch Castle, 2020b) being used as a detailed form of interpreting the site.

There are two websites associated with Bodelwyddan Castle. One has been compiled by or for the Bodelwyddan Castle and Park Charitable Trust but serves only to explain that public access is no longer possible, with links to a donation page and all related social media pages removed (Bodelwyddan Castle, 2020). Remaining, is the website operated by Warner Leisure Hotels. There is a section of the website dedicated to Bodelwyddan Castle, as well as a section on visiting North Wales more broadly. None of the website is available bilingually but as an accommodation site, the target audience is more likely to be situated outside of Wales. However, creating Welsh-language interpretation and online content can create a stronger sense of identity for a site that is steeped in Welsh history in the historic local impacts due to the lead mined locally (Coward, 2019), and national impacts of Sir William Williams – former MP and Speaker of the House of Commons (Halliday, 2004) – purchasing the property. Warner Leisure does not offer any historical information regarding the site or any background beyond the property being “an extraordinary Victorian castle near Snowdonia” (Warner Leisure Hotels, 2020). It is located a minimum of 25 miles from Snowdonia National Park, rendering this brief statement incorrect. Consequently, interpretation plays no part in the marketing of this country house to prospective visitors. This research recommends that Warner Leisure Hotels staff take advantage of the historical, cultural, and geographical setting within which their hotel complex is situated, and seek to interpret the historical, architectural, and other significance of the site to engage their audiences and visitors with the significance not only of Bodelwyddan Castle, but of local and Welsh history more broadly. Seemingly, the setting of the hotel as part of the castle complex is the only historical information worth highlighting. This is evidenced on the website in Warner Leisure’s description of the hotel being “set within the grounds of a romantic castle” and “modern comfort within the Victorian estate of this Welsh castle” (Warner Leisure Hotels, 2020). The website does note that the museum within the castle itself is closed to visitors.

Considering the Warner Leisure Hotels website as a form of interpretation, it fails to consider Bodelwyddan Castle as anything other than an aesthetic asset that increases the appeal of their accommodation to potential visitors. Furthermore, Bodelwyddan Castle is incorporated into a wider portfolio Warner Leisure Hotels have created of their English properties – something that the National Trust have also done on their website, but with more detail regarding the individual histories of the buildings and Welsh-language pages available. There are therefore multiple instances of Welsh country houses being subsumed within English-orientated interpretation, or non-interpretation.

Similarly to Warner Leisure, The Good Life Experience website also uses the setting of the country house to sell a separate product. The website is dedicated to informing potential physical visitors to the festival of the festival itself, with the aim being to sell tickets. The website itself is incredibly aesthetically pleasing and there is a lot of information regarding numerous topics to navigate easily. The home page (Image 5) is used to highlight the activities involved in the festival and identifies key selling points. These points should be considered as a summary of what the festival organisers want to underline to their potential festival attendees, stating why it is worth purchasing a ticket. Towards the top left of the image, Hawarden Castle is artistically interpreted with the caption “40 talks from inspirational experts in Hawarden Castle” (The Good Life Experience, 2020a). It appears here that the setting of the castle itself is presented as a draw for people to pay to access the festival and the speakers, rather than the building itself. This is reinforced further down the same page in that a photograph of the building is placed immediately above a large heading entitled ‘book your tickets’ (Image 6). The Good Life Experience website offers a little more information than the Warner Leisure Hotels website regarding the country house itself, although this is still extremely limited and basic in the context of the site’s long and multifaceted history. It outlines where the festival is going to be situated initially mentioning Hawarden Old Castle as a “13th century fortification constructed to defend the North Wales coast to the West” (The Good Life Experience, 2020b). That is the full extent of information available regarding the old castle, before moving on to provide the following information regarding the country house:



Image 5: A screenshot of The Good Life Experience website, using the setting of Hawarden Castle as a selling point (16/04/2020).



BOOK YOUR TICKETS

Image 6: A screenshot of The Good Life Experience website, using the setting of Hawarden Castle as a selling point (16/04/2020).

The heart of the Estate today is the 18th Century Hawarden Castle, once home to former British Prime Minister William Ewart Gladstone, having previously belonged to the family of his wife, Catherine Glynne. Today Hawarden Castle is home to the Gladstone family. (The Good Life Experience, 2020b).

Clearly, it is a brief snapshot of the history of the property, encapsulating previous owners, current owners, and the age of the building. It is evident that the purpose of this page is not to inform people regarding the history of the property, but to create a setting for the online visitor to encourage them into purchasing a festival ticket to join the event.

The Hawarden Estate Farm Shop website offers a similar style and level of interpretation, in that it is not the main purpose of the website but is used as a method of introducing aspects of their commercial activity. Once again, the country house and its assumed heritage provides a setting for other activity rather than being the predominant focus of the commercial venture. The property is not being promoted by staff at either The Good Life Experience or Hawarden Estate Farm Shop, but these case studies contextualise interpretation related to country houses in that it is not used to its full potential. Evidencing this is the section of the website regarding the walled garden. The information regarding the walled garden is as below:

Back in the 18th Century, Hawarden Castle's Walled Garden was the sole producer of fruit and vegetables for the then Prime Minister, Sir William Gladstone's family and all who lived on the Estate. Now, Xanthe Gladstone is on a mission to transform the garden to the thriving centre of growing it once was. (Hawarden Estate Farm Shop, 2020a).

Here, they again identify a period and an owner before continuing the connection into modern times, using it to focus the online visitor's attention to work being carried out today. However, it is factually incorrect, as William Gladstone was not born until 1809 – the beginning of the nineteenth century. (Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, 2011). There is little else on the website in terms of interpreting

the history of the country house or its surrounding estate. There is a page dedicated to the Old Castle, but rather than offer any historical interpretation, it informs the online visitor of when they can visit and how (Hawarden Estate Farm Shop, 2020b). Furthermore, there is a section of the 'also from us' (Hawarden Estate Farm Shop, 2020c) page which provides brief information regarding the Glynne Arms public house which the family also operate, but this does not refer to the country house to any extent. Whilst there is more information on the website designed specifically for the Glynne Arms, this primarily relates to the establishment and history of the public house rather than the country house or estate (Glynne Arms, 2020).

Gregynog Hall's website reinforces the trend of using the country house as part of a commercial environment for the sale of products. The homepage features a large image of the country house and the well-kept gardens. Below, there is a link referring to its "romantic location" (Gregynog Hall, 2020) which, when clicked, provides information regarding weddings at the country house (Gregynog Hall, 2020b). The usage of 'romantic' here is similar to Warner Leisure Hotels' utilisation of the word, in that both sites are creating a setting to sell a product that they are offering – in Gregynog Hall's case, that their property is available as a wedding venue. However, unlike Warner Leisure Hotels, and in much more detail than the Hawarden Castle website, custodians of Gregynog Hall offer detailed interpretation of the site's history online whilst continuing to connect its past to its present, as well as its vision for the future. It is an example of best practice regarding the interpretation of Welsh country houses online. Among all the commercially centred sites that have been identified, a theme has emerged of connecting their modern activities to the past, and Gregynog Hall exemplifies this. The 'About us' (Gregynog Hall, 2020c) section refers to the site being mentioned by poets of the Welsh princes in the twelfth century, before immediately turning attentions to the challenges faced in the twenty-first century. In making this connection, sites are using their pasts to enhance and add value to the product that they are trying to sell currently. Gregynog Hall extends this by sharing their vision for the future, which is:

To act as a learning and educational centre, emphasising the arts, whilst respecting the history of the house, its inhabitants, the landscape and the

environment, through courses, events, conferences and distance learning for people of all ages and abilities. (Gregynog Hall, 2020c).

Gregynog Hall's future vision explicitly identifies respect for the history of the house, its inhabitants, and the surround environment as being a critical element of the future, something which Hawarden Estate staff only allude to, and Warner Leisure Hotels staff do not refer to at all. When considering site interpretation through visiting the websites of these properties, Gregynog Hall is by far the most comprehensive of the three. Including the vision for the future as part of this interpretation indicates that interpretation regarding the historical significance of the site has a relevance into the present and future. However, from the online material available, Hawarden Estate staff only interpret the past to sell products, with Warner Leisure Hotels staff doing likewise but with less emphasis on historical details and more emphasis on the aesthetic nature of Bodelwyddan Castle itself.

As custodians of these historically significant properties in Wales, it is incumbent that owners provide appropriate interpretation not only on-site, but digitally, and there are significant benefits for them in doing so. Currently, digital interpretation of Welsh country houses appears to be of a low quality and underdeveloped with notable exceptions that have been detailed in this work. The extent to which a site interprets its history could be entirely dependent on the audience it is seeking to reach out to. In the case of Warner Leisure Hotels, their audience is perhaps more likely to enjoy the novelty of staying in a castle rather than being interested in learning about the history of Bodelwyddan specifically. However, these two strands are interrelated. This research recommends that people should be able to stay at the hotel situated at Bodelwyddan Castle and during their visit, have the opportunity to learn about the history of the property and its significance, if that is something they are interested in. Heritage and the engagement with it can enrich the experience of a place, and therefore contribute positively to a person's visit. In advance of their visit, or whilst considering whether or not to book their stay, there should be ample opportunity for prospective guests to access accurate, informative, well-researched interpretation to learn about the history and significance of Bodelwyddan Castle. Access to heritage is valuable. In 2005, Simon Thurley, then CEO of English Heritage, conceptualised 'the

heritage cycle'. He believed that by understanding the historic environment, people would value it. By valuing it, they will want to care for it. By caring for it, they will help others to enjoy it, and from enjoying it results a thirst to understand it – thus completing the cycle (May, 2019). For the heritage cycle to begin, people must first be able to access heritage. Once they have access to it, they can enjoy and value it, which undoubtedly enriches their experience of travel and it is evident that interpretation has a major role to play in this. Similar to Bodelwyddan Castle, Hawarden Estate Farm Shop and the Good Life Experience are attempting to attract audiences for reasons beyond their potential interest in the history of Hawarden Castle. However, whilst it may not be problematic for country houses with more commercial motivations to use their historic brand to drive sales, there is an argument that they should simultaneously seek to interpret their history beyond hollow soundbites. The literature review of this work indicates why these sites are critical to the understanding of multiple historical narratives, yet many remaining Welsh country houses lack deep interpretation and instead tend to be presented through their aesthetic qualities. Evidently, high quality, accessible cultural heritage interpretation is not achieved universally online at all country houses.

Bilingualism Online

Whilst Figures 2-5 identify that staff or custodians of just two of the sites assessed in this work post to social media bilingually, the Figures do not identify the extent of bilingualism. The Figures present posts made by staff at Penrhyn Castle and Plas Newydd as bilingual as they are the only two sites that post everything to social media in English and Welsh. However, another form of bilingualism exists within the sites assessed that the Figures do not expand upon. This is an admixture of English and Welsh used together. It is a simplistic form of bilingualism that is not intended to communicate entire messages, unlike staff at Penrhyn Castle and Plas Newydd



Image 7: A screenshot taken from Gwrych Castle's Twitter account using the Welsh for 'thank you' and Welsh flag emojis, creating a sense of Welsh identity (18/01/2021).

who translate everything. Rather, these gestures to Welsh culture and language assist with the creation of a Welsh identity for a country house. Image 7 shows an example of the Welsh 'Diolch yn fawr' ('thank you') being incorporated into the post from Gwrych Castle, where it features with emojis of the Welsh flag and the evidently Welsh placename of 'Gwrych'. It is a post on Twitter that is written entirely in English, except for the final words. Posted in November 2020, it is outside of the periods of analysis in this work but would fit into the category of a commercial/fundraising themed post. It was posted during the time that the site was hosting the filming of 'I'm a Celebrity: Get me out of here', when there appeared to be an intentional effort on social media by representatives of Gwrych Castle to create a Welsh identity, discussed in more detail later in this work. Figures 2-5 remain accurate in that they provide a clear picture that most country house staff or custodians in Wales simply do not post to social media bilingually to any extent.

There are many reasons why social media posts produced for Welsh country houses should engage with and make use of the Welsh language. Firstly, using the Welsh language encourages visitors and prospective visitors to think of a country house in Wales as Welsh, when it is evident from the literature review of this thesis that country houses appear to be considered more as English, rather than Welsh. Alongside references to Welsh and local history, culture, and tradition, using the Welsh language online can create a sense of identity for a country house in Wales, which can subsequently be used to market the property as a visitor attraction or something else, such as a hotel. In a Welsh Government study, three-quarters of interviewees believed that the use of Welsh should be expanded in tourism (Welsh Government, 2020d, p.75) underlining the importance of the Welsh language. The Welsh Government are also attempting to reach one million Welsh speakers in Wales by 2050 and see heritage as having a part to play in this ambition through increasing the use of Welsh in the workplace, socially, and in services that people use (Welsh Government, 2017, pp.47-55). Furthermore, the Welsh language is an intrinsic part of country house heritage across all parts of Wales. It is known that Welsh-language poetry was performed at Welsh country houses across the late medieval and early modern periods, and there is an abundance of Welsh-language manuscripts

associated with the owners of country houses, which form the core of Wales's literary heritage (Huws, 2000; Harper, 2007).

There are, however, valid arguments against posting online bilingually as well as on-site bilingual interpretation. Firstly, it is costly. This is for several reasons. If custodians or staff members do not speak Welsh, there would usually be a cost involved in hiring or commissioning someone to undertake translation. If staff or custodians can translate English into Welsh themselves, producing content bilingually would take up to twice as much time as producing it in English alone, with many custodians and staff members of Welsh country houses perhaps feeling that their time would be better spent working on something else. Finally, translating everything into Welsh presents design challenges for staff members and custodians of Welsh country houses. Up to twice as much text can create website pages or social media posts that are text-heavy to the extent that their audiences perhaps do not want to read the text in the first place. This can result in unsuccessful interpretation and messaging online because it is least likely to engage with audiences, and therefore does not engage prospective visitors.

Ultimately, whether bilingual interpretation and online content should be created is dependent upon several factors. The nature of the site in terms of whether it is a full-time visitor attraction, a private residence or other is important as it dictates whether it is necessary or beneficial for a site to do so. A private residence, for example, would perhaps have less of an inclination to create a sense of Welsh identity if the owners are not seeking to market the property in any way. However, if a property is to be accurately interpreted even on an open day or other sporadic basis, the incorporation of references related to its Welsh connections is necessary. A hotel or wedding venue owner may see this as advantageous to have to appeal to their audiences. The resources available to the staff or custodians of a country house in Wales would also dictate the extent to which bilingual content or interpretation is created. Staff or custodians with limited resources in terms of finances, the number of staff, or simply time, would have a significantly reduced capacity to be able to create bilingual online content or interpretation. This research argues that staff or custodians of Welsh country houses should seek to engage with

and promote the Welsh language for the reasons outlined above, even if this does not go as far as complete bilingualism but instead engages in the minimal gesture exemplified by Gwrych Castle. The construction or articulation of a Welsh identity for country houses should also go beyond the Welsh language. Their 'Welshness' resides in their history, culture, heraldry, genealogy, landscape, and surrounding communities or settings as much as in the language.

July 2019 Analysis

The month of July has been chosen as a focus of analysis due to it being a month where many British and Welsh visitor attractions and events would either be held or would be advertised as upcoming due to the better weather and children being on school holidays thus increasing potential visitor numbers or ticket sales. Furthermore, social media is seasonal. In 2018, ComScore published research identifying July 2017 as the month where 'travel' was identified as the most popular content category by total minutes of category consumed in the U.K. digitally, as shown by Image 8. Therefore, with many Welsh country houses relying on the travel industry to operate as viable businesses, analysing the content of social media posts in July 2019 enables an understanding of the type of events and activities that Welsh country houses are involved in.

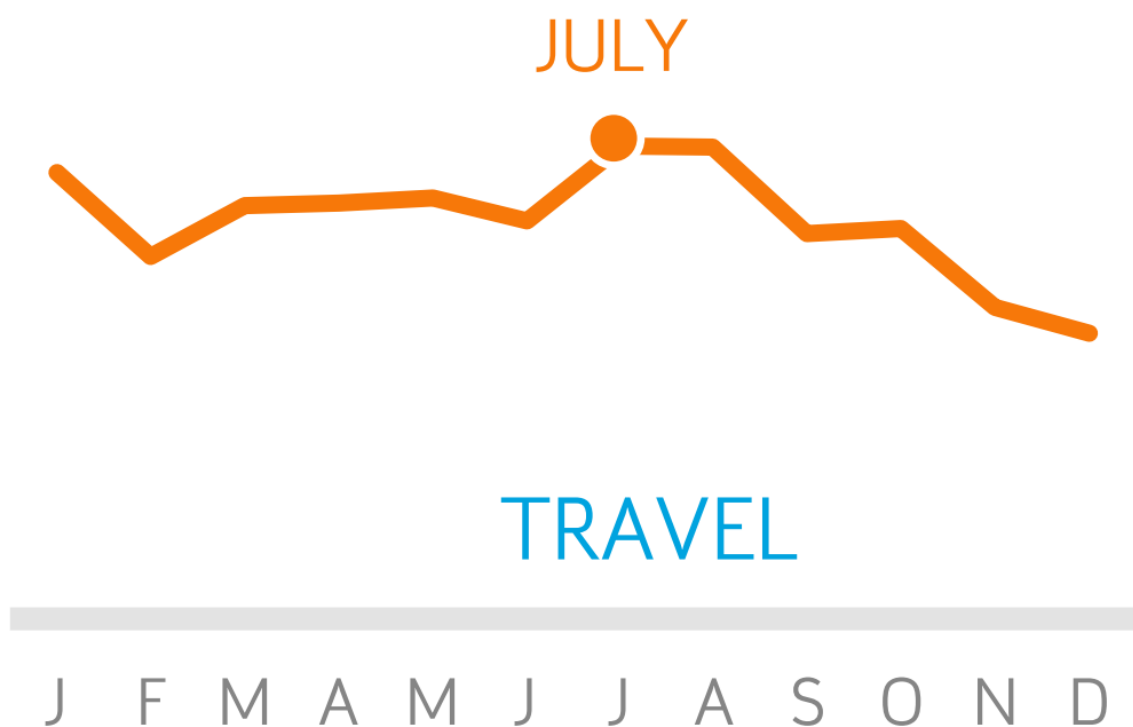


Image 8: Travel is the most popular category of digital content in July 2017, according to this screenshot graph (ComScore, 2018, p.26).

Analysing Twitter data for July 2019, it is immediately evident that there are differences between National Trust use of social media, and further differences between National Trust properties and properties of alternative ownership. Figure 6 identifies the different types of Twitter posts – original posts made by a user and

'retweets' – posts made by other Twitter users shared by a user with no additional comment. Figure 6 shows that staff at different sites place different emphasis on original posts and shared posts from others. Firstly, there are differences within the National Trust. The Chirk Castle account made one initial post, whilst 'retweeting' 41 other posts in July 2019. Comparatively, accounts representing Erddig, Penrhyn Castle, and Plas Newydd are all shown to strike a balance between the two. Erddig and Plas Newydd accounts are shown to be the most active National Trust users of Twitter from the four National Trust properties assessed. Penrhyn Castle and Plas Newydd's figures are misrepresented by the graph, in that one half (with the exception of one Plas Newydd post) of all posts to Twitter are in English and the other in Welsh, though the content itself remains the same. Considering this, Figure 6 highlights that of the National Trust properties assessed, Erddig posts more than any other property. Therefore, National Trust social media guidance is possibly being ignored by staff at three properties, being interpreted differently by them, or they are under resourced. A National Trust social media guide indicates that content should be posted regularly to maximise the effectiveness of using social media: "make sure you post regular content" (Higgs, 2014). Evidently, this is not achieved by the four National Trust property accounts on Twitter. Furthermore, it is evident from Figure 6 that posting on Instagram is not something that regularly took place in July 2019 for these accounts. Plas Newydd staff posted the most of the four sites with nine posts in July, with Erddig staff the only other National Trust account to post on Instagram in this period. The low figures for Welsh National Trust properties on Instagram are perhaps most surprising due to the visual nature of the platform and the undoubted visually appealing nature of these sites. Figure 6 highlights that there is different emphasis placed on different platforms between National Trust sites. Staff at Chirk Castle posted 22 times to Facebook but only posted once to Twitter excluding 'retweets', highlights messaging inconsistencies within the National Trust between sites. Consequently, posting in this manner does not lend itself to creating engaging, informative, interpretative posts on social media.

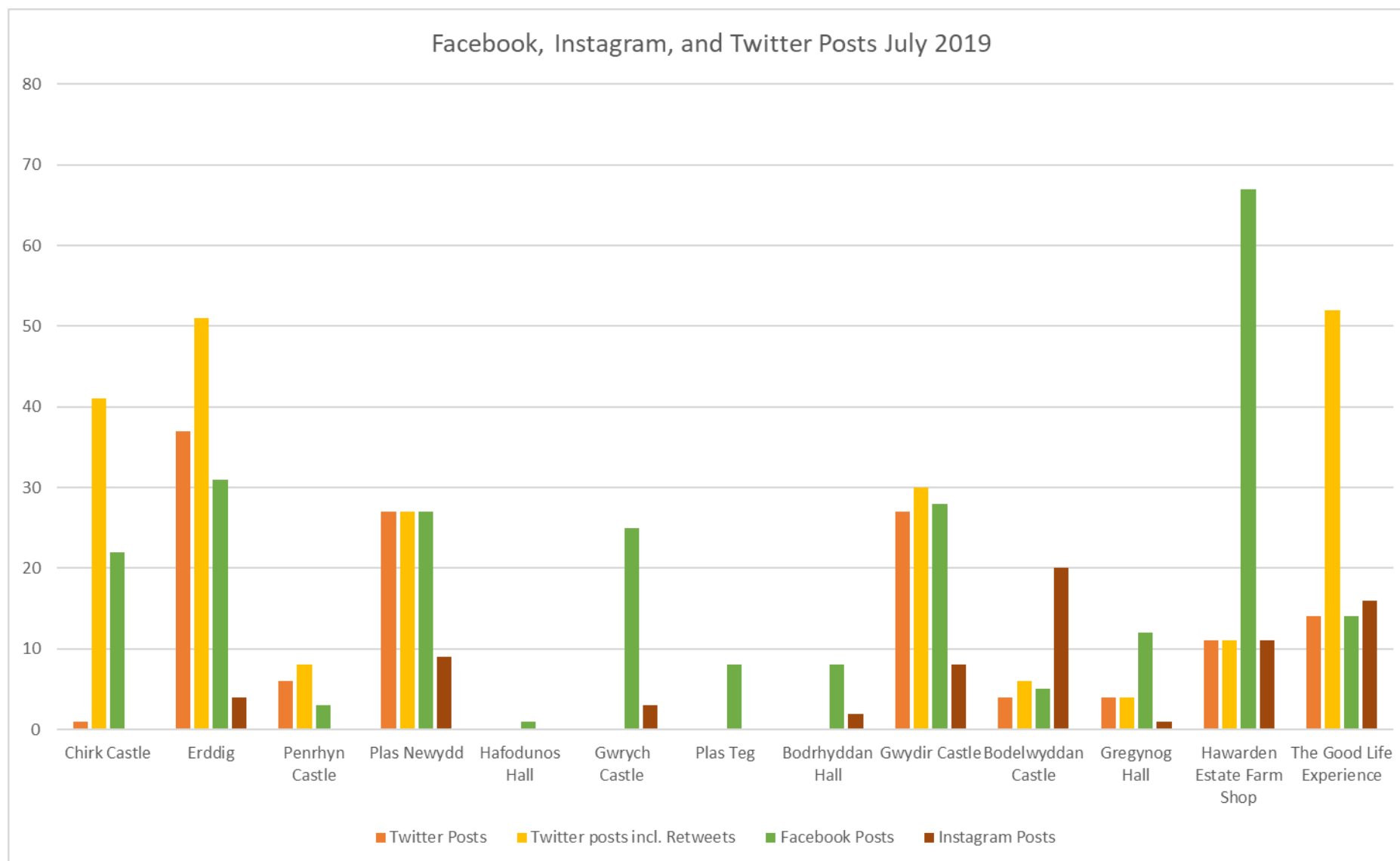


Figure 6: The number of Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter posts for each country house account made in July 2019.

The owners of Hafodunos Hall do not maintain a Twitter account. Twitter accounts exist for Gwrych Castle, Plas Teg, and Bodrhyddan Hall but did not post in July 2019. Of the sites remaining in Figure 6, the owners and staff of Gwydir Castle and The Good Life Experience are the two who have posted the most. The owners of Gwydir Castle have chosen to post lots of original content. Staff at the Good Life Experience posted more 'retweets' than any site assessed in this period. As properties that are maintained as private properties with occasional visits, the owners or custodians of Plas Teg and Bodrhyddan Hall operated largely in the same manner in July 2019 – posting nothing at all on Twitter, but eight times on Facebook. People representing Gregynog Hall were most active on Facebook in this period, whilst the owners of Gwydir Castle operated entirely differently, with a similarly high social media output on Facebook as well as Twitter. Figure 6 shows that staff at Bodelwyddan Castle are the only staff or custodians to post most frequently to Instagram, whilst most sites do not post regularly on Instagram in July 2019 – with the owners of Hafodunos Hall and Plas Teg not maintaining a profile on Instagram at all. From Figure 6, the final assessment to make is that Hawarden Estate Farm Shop and The Good Life Experience are both related to the Hawarden Estate. However, their social media practices for July 2019 appear entirely different. Staff at Hawarden Estate Farm Shop posted 67 times on Facebook, and just 11 original posts on Twitter and Instagram. Comparatively, staff at The Good Life Experience focused on 'retweets' – 52 in total compared with 14 posts on Twitter and Facebook respectively, in addition to a further 16 on Instagram – the second highest of all sites assessed in this period. The data in Figure 6 highlights that there is a wide variety in frequency of posting to social media in the accounts assessed that represent Welsh country houses online. Evidently, there are some similarities, but there is no uniformity which indicates that there is no guidance written for staff or custodians of Welsh country houses when it comes to online representation of the properties that they are responsible for. This could be addressed by a relevant body, such as Historic Houses or Cadw.

Figure 6 provides insight into the frequency of posts across different social media platforms, which is helpful in understanding which social media channels staff and custodians of different Welsh country houses deem the most relevant and functional for their specific needs. Figure 7 analyses the total engagement across all social

media platforms for the sites assessed in this work. The total engagement data has been calculated by taking the number of comments, 'likes', shares or 'retweets', adding them together for each post, and dividing the engagement figure by the number of posts, thus calculating the average engagement per post with Figure 7 presenting the data by platform. Together, Figures 6 and 7 offer insight into a range of social media strategies and successes. Figure 7 shows that with three exceptions, people interacted more with Facebook posts than posts on other platforms in the period of July 2019. The larger number of engagements with Facebook posts justifies staff and custodians at sites such as Gregynog Hall, Gwrych Castle, and Bodrhyddan Hall taking a more focussed approach to social media as demonstrated in Figure 6, in that their posts are largely made on Facebook. Whilst increased engagement is not the only reason for this, it contributes towards decisions to post something to Facebook, but not to other social media channels. One of the three exceptions of people engaging more with Facebook posts than posts on other social media channels is Hawarden Estate Farm Shop. Figure 6 shows staff posting the most on Facebook – over double the number of posts made by Erddig staff, who posted the second most frequently on Facebook. This data highlights that posting frequently on social media does not equate to social media success, and consequently, does not automatically equate to successful means of engagement or interpretation. It is the content of the message which matters the most in terms of engagement and interpretation. Plas Teg and Bodrhyddan Hall owners or custodians exacerbate this point in that neither posted especially frequently on Facebook in July 2019, however, they both receive high average engagement figures. The National Trust social media channels receive comparatively low average engagement figures, whilst the owners of Gwydir Castle and Gwrych Castle both appear to be very successful in what they post if success is to be measured in terms of engaging their audiences. To understand why, the content of the posts being made must be assessed.

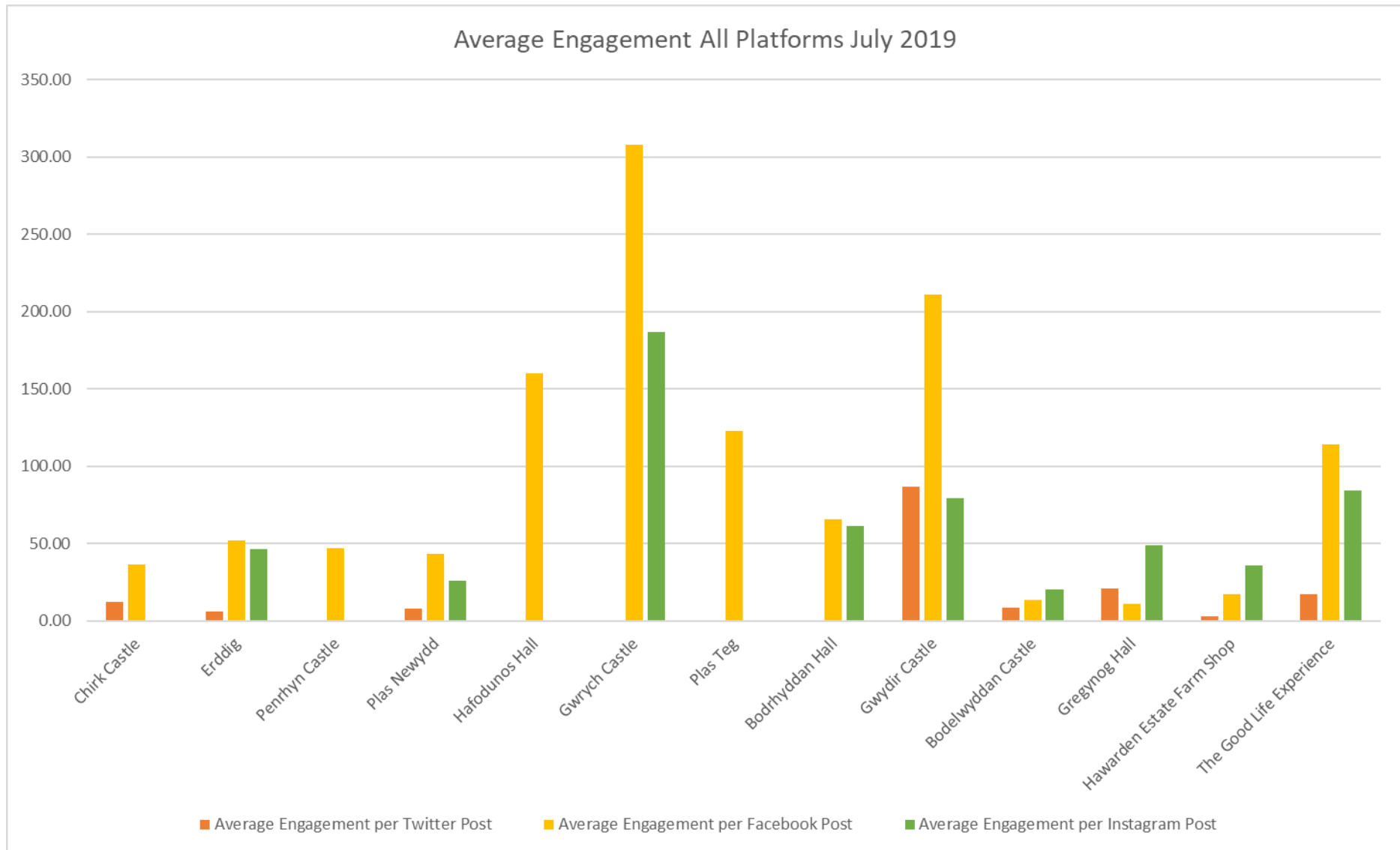


Figure 7: Average engagement per post across Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter in July 2019.

Firstly, the most popular social media posts for different sites must be assessed to understand what it is that their audiences enjoy, and therefore engage with the most. Furthermore, it is important to understand the extent of a site's maximum

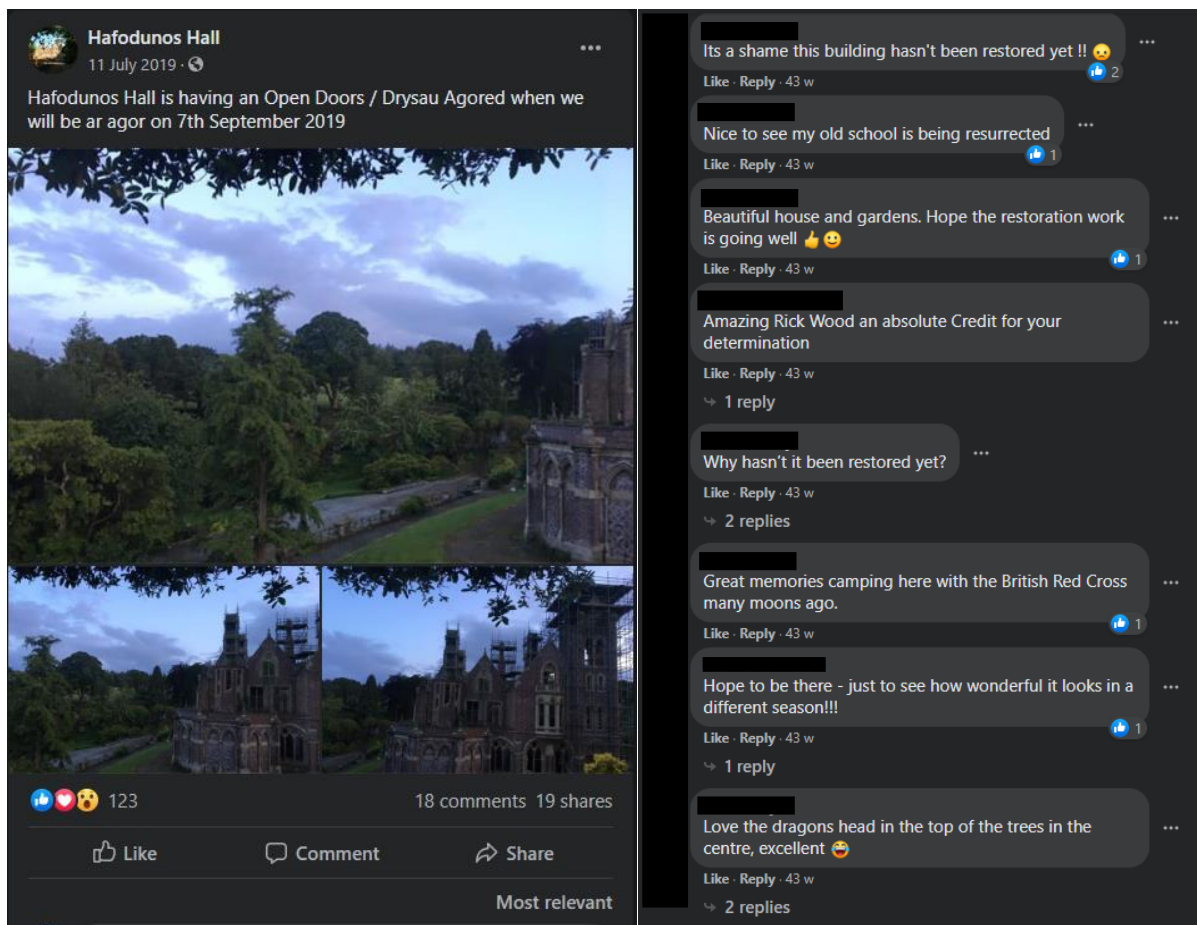


Image 9: The single post made on Facebook by Hafodunos Hall's owner in July 2019 (12/05/2020).

engagement for the period of July 2019 relative to their current number of followers, to provide an assessment of what proportion of a site's followers engages with its posts. As shown in Figure 6 and Image 9, the owner of Hafodunos Hall made just one post in total across all social media in July 2019 – on Facebook. Figure 7 shows that the single post received the third highest average engagement figure, indicating that it was a popular one. The post refers to an open day that was upcoming and was shared 19 times, with 18 comments, and 123 'likes'. Some of the comments on the post are pictured (Image 9), with most focussing on the restoration effort – demonstrating a public interest in the future of the property. The number of shares indicates that there is also an interest in visiting the site to physically see how the restoration efforts are progressing.

A Thematic Breakdown of Most Popular Social Media Posts in July 2019

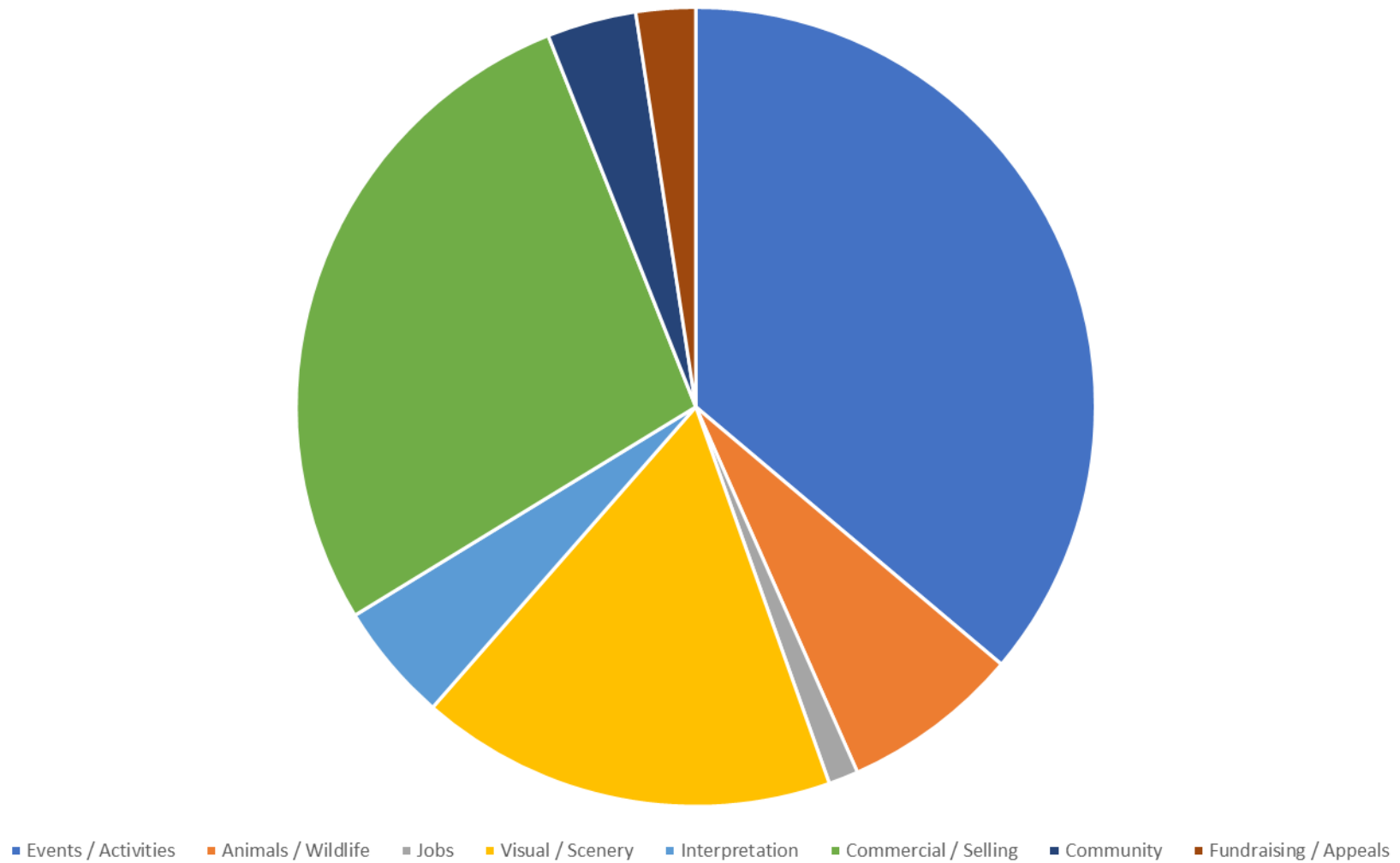


Figure 8: The most popular social media posts made by sites presented thematically for July 2019.

Whilst the owner of Hafodunos Hall evidently does not post as regularly as other custodians assessed in this work, the public interest in the property would justify using this interest online through social media to interpret the site to engage the public. The owner of Hafodunos Hall appears to indicate that there is a desire to do this in hosting open days, but perhaps lacks the time or knowledge of how to engage the audience that Image 9 identifies. The post made by Hafodunos Hall's owner regarding an open day is the only post about an open day that is the most popular in terms of comments, 'likes', or shares. The most popular posts in these terms can be split up into different themes. The themes are shown in Figure 8. Some posts fall into two themes as opposed to one. Where this is the case, both themes have been counted to accurately represent their purpose, and to gain an understanding of what it is that is considered as the most engaging content in July 2019. Figure 8 shows clearly that the most common topic of the most popular posts across all social media channels in July 2019 was events or activities. These posts often advertise an upcoming exhibition, an open day, or something that is taking place on a certain date that would not ordinarily occur in the daily operation of a country house in Wales. Social media is an excellent method of advertising events, often at little to no expense to the site hosting the event unless they employ a professional specifically to post on social media – as in the case of many National Trust sites – or if they pay to advertise posts on social media to extend their audience and increase the possibility of larger numbers of people visiting. Furthermore, events and activities are “a vital and reliable source of income and adds value to the organisations’ other fundraising activities” (Herbst and Norton, 2012, p.297) which can be vital towards covering maintenance costs and upkeep, alongside the award of grants. Therefore, it is unsurprising that Welsh country house custodians are choosing to post on theme. Such posts may prove to be the most popular posts made on social media channels because audiences are provided with different and varied reasons to visit at a future date. Custodians of Bodrhyddan Hall demonstrate this with a post regarding an upcoming car show (Image 10), which prompted people in the comments to begin showing the vehicles they would be exhibiting, with others tagging people they know to make them aware of the upcoming event so that they could consider

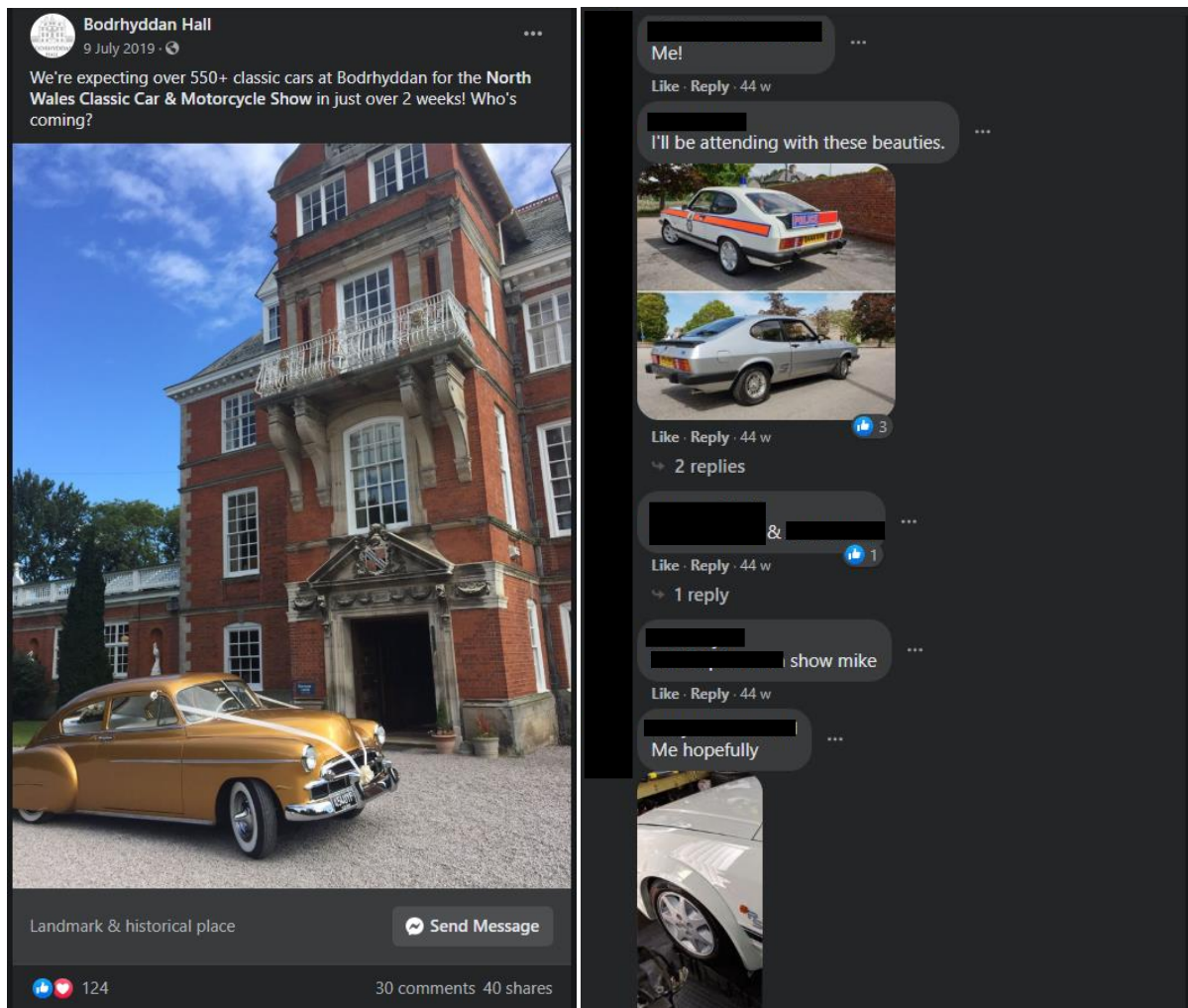


Image 10: A screenshot of custodians of Bodrhyddan Hall posting about an upcoming event on Facebook (14/05/2020).

attending. One of the most popular Facebook posts by Plas Teg’s custodians in July 2019 evidences this point further, showing most people sharing the content with friends to make them aware of tickets being sold for an upcoming event. With the aim of events and activities often to bring in extra financial income, it is unsurprising that country house staff and custodians in Wales are also using social media to make posts which are of a commercial nature or aimed at selling something. It is particularly unsurprising when some Welsh country houses operate predominantly as commercial sites. For example, some of the most engaged posts on Gregynog Hall’s social media accounts (Image 12) from July 2019 mentions the opening times of the café, thus encouraging people to visit and spend their money, subsequently supporting Gregynog Hall with the costs of operation. The comment on Twitter asking about the café highlights that there is an interest from followers

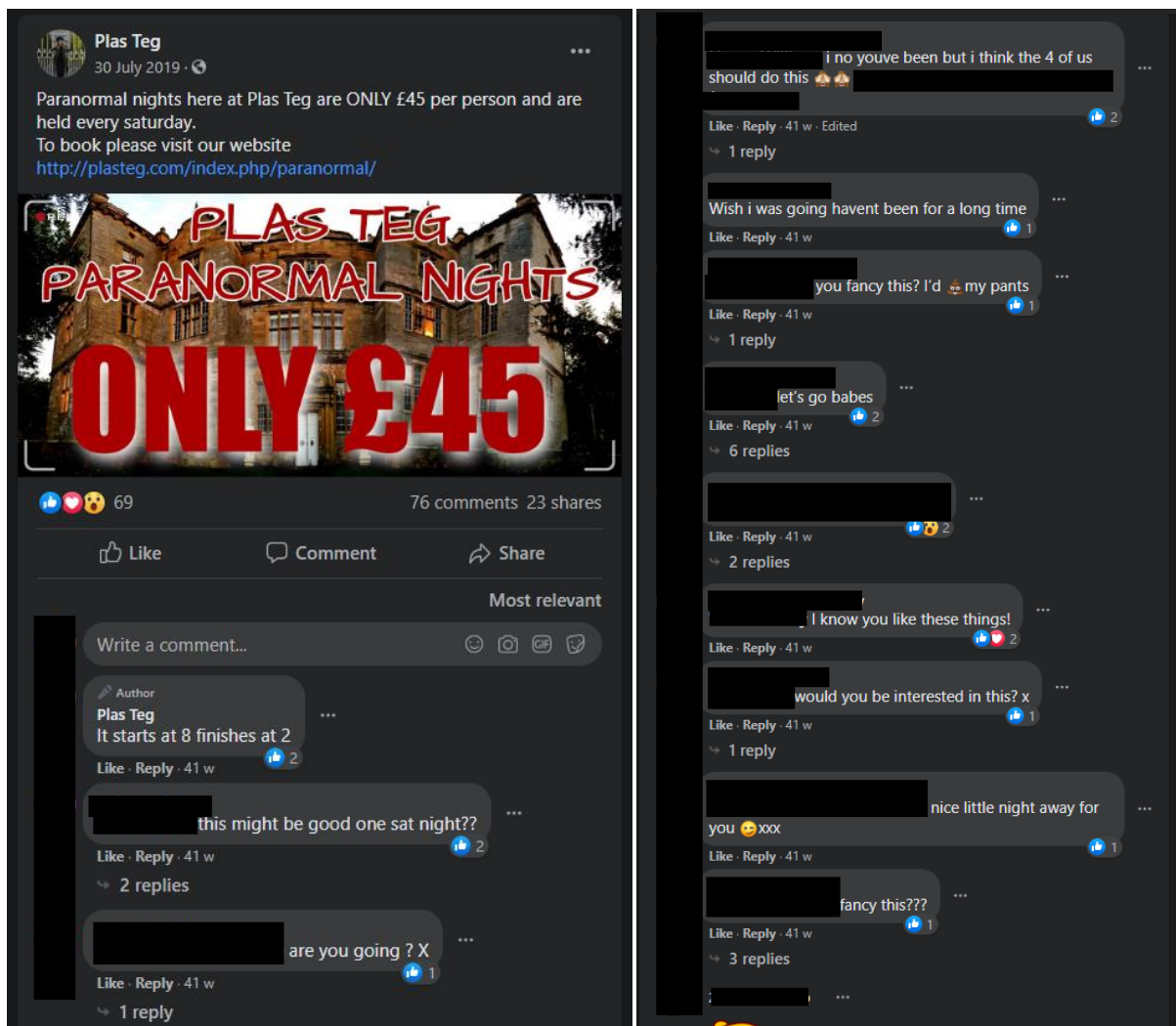


Image 11: A screenshot of Plas Teg custodians posting about an upcoming event on Facebook (14/05/2020).

in commercially themed posts. Representatives of Gregynog Hall have ensured to make reference to the commercial topic of the café within a post that also fits in to the events or activities theme, thus offering a reason for people to visit the grounds and encouraging them to spend money in the café whilst they do so. The three posts pictured are dated from the 26th of July, 29th of July, and the 11th of July respectively, indicating that this is a technique used across Gregynog Hall's social media platforms consistently. As all three posts are some of the site's most engaged, it shows that it is a technique that their audience responds to. In terms of events held at Gregynog Hall, the site's website encapsulates the type of event that are usually held at Gregynog Hall:

Our vision will be to; to act as a learning and educational centre,

emphasising the arts, whilst respecting the history of the house, its inhabitants, the landscape and the environment, through courses, events, conferences and distance learning, for people of all ages and abilities. (Gregynog Hall, 2021).

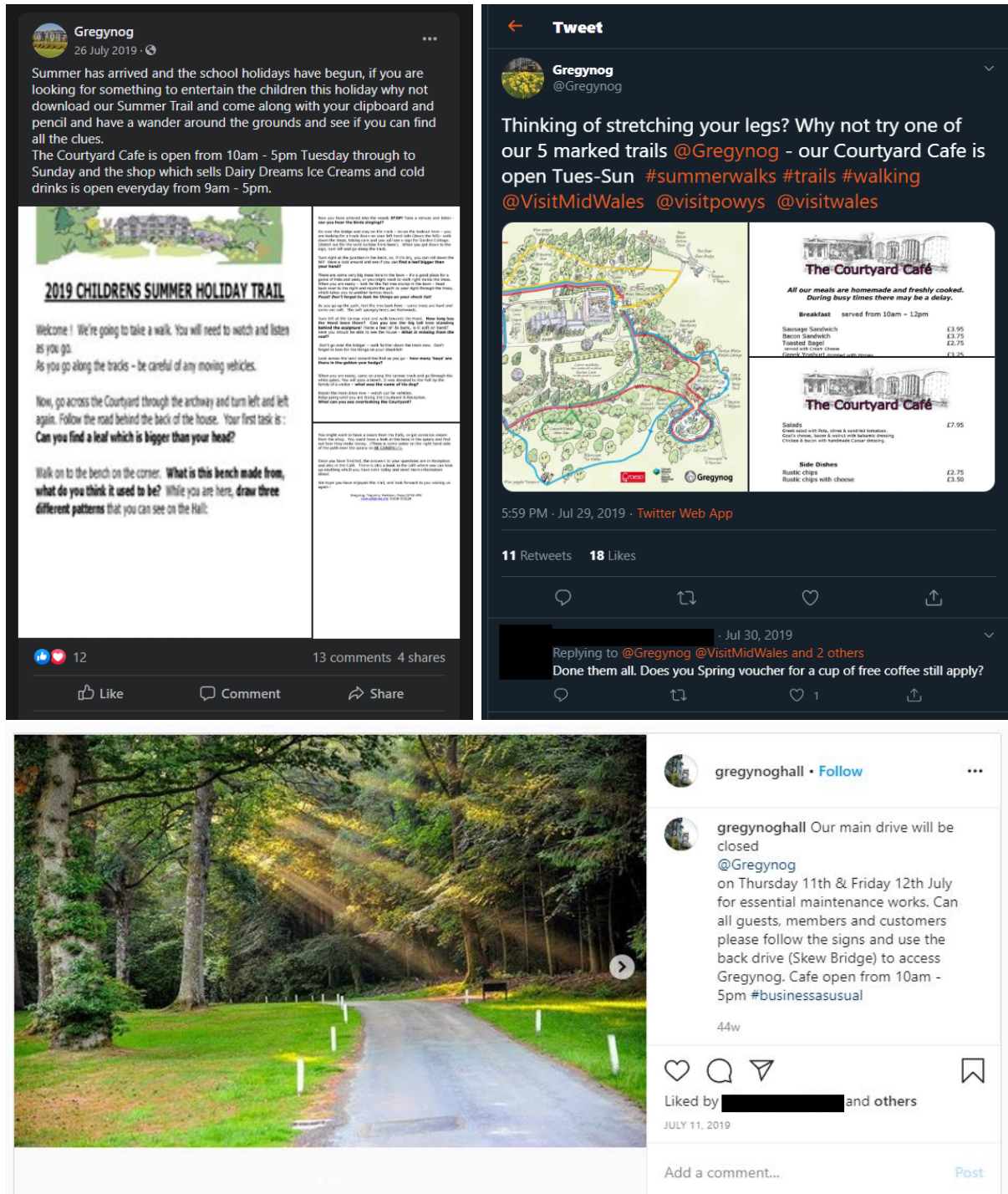


Image 12: A screenshot of Gregynog Hall representatives posting to Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram (14/05/2020).

Events at Gregynog Hall form part of this vision, which recognises and uses the historical character of the property and surrounding gardens and grounds. Paranormal nights at Plas Teg and car shows at Bodrhyddan Hall are devoid of such an attachment to the properties and their historical backgrounds. However, this is not to say that such events should not be hosted at Welsh country houses. The question as to why they are hosted must be raised, and if the interpretation of these sites was either created in the first place or created to a better standard, there would be opportunities for more relevant events to be held that engage people with the history and significance of the properties. Using interpretation as a tool to link these events with the past, thus engaging the public with the significance and history of both properties would have been possible with few changes to the events themselves at little to no financial cost. Bodrhyddan Hall's car show could have been linked to transport more generally or visitors to the house. The post shown in Image 10 could have had one sentence added referring to modes of transport or notable visitors who have visited the property in the past. Plas Teg's paranormal evening shown in Image 11 could have been linked more closely to the history of the house if the post instead read as follows:

Paranormal nights here are only £45 per person and are held every Saturday. Maybe you'll meet former owner and MP, Sir John Trevor? To book please visit the website: <https://plasteg.com/>

Such a statement would more closely align the event with the history of the property, whilst identifying a former owner as an MP thus indicating that the property is of national significance. If linked to the website, there could be further information regarding the history of the building available for those interested. This method could provide a basic level of interpretation creating more relevant and engaging events as well as online content, thus involving people with the significance of the site.

Figure 8 distinguishes between commercial or sales-based social media posts and fundraising or appeals. Whilst Gregynog Hall representatives have demonstrated an example of a post that is more commercially inclined, Gwrych Castle is the only country house in Wales in July 2019 to have a post themed under fundraising or

appeals. The post exemplifies why the average engagement per post figures of Gwrych Castle's custodians are far greater than social media accounts for other properties in Figure 7. Evidently, this particular post received a lot of engagement

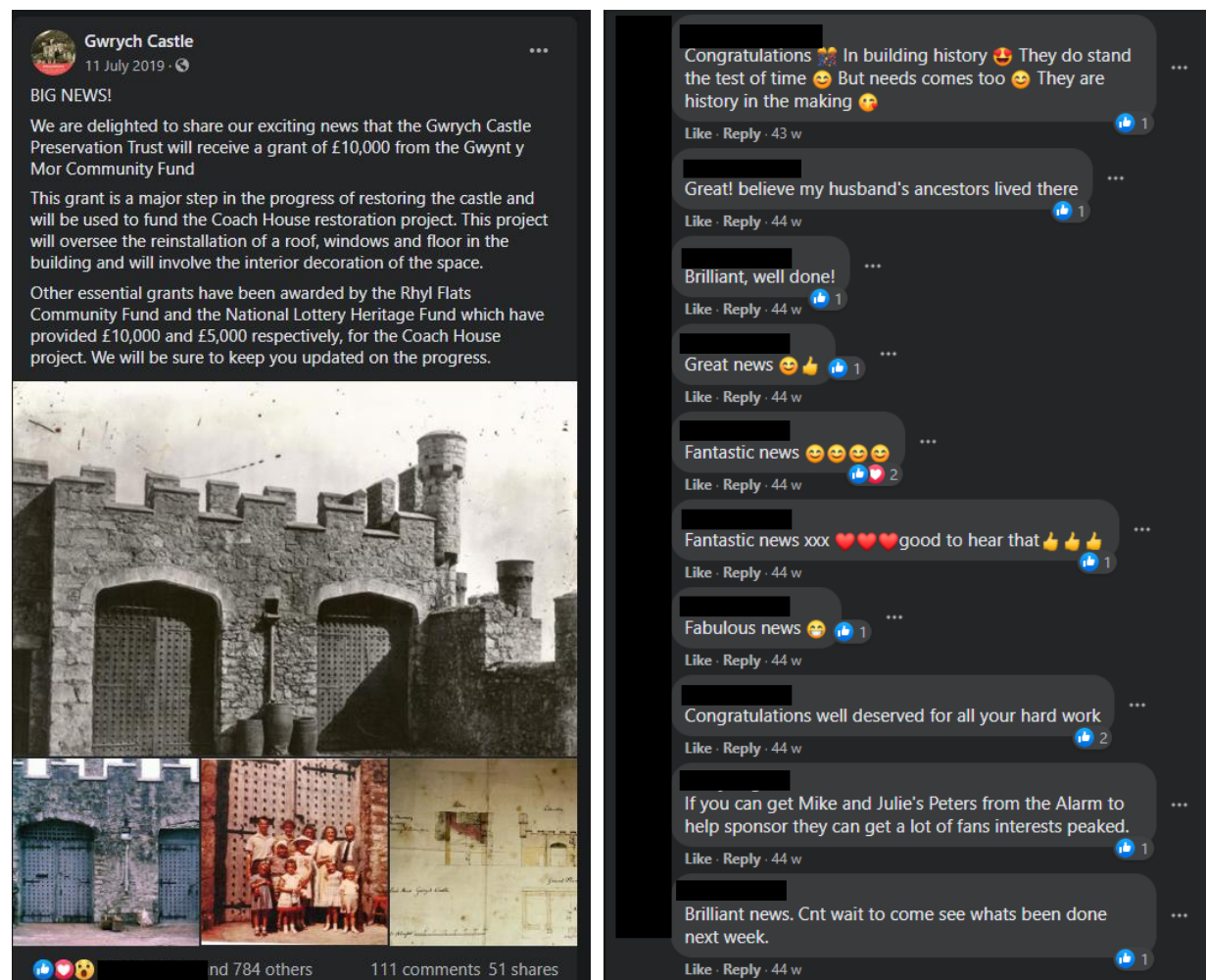


Image 13: A screenshot of a post made by Gwrych Castle custodians categorised as a fundraising post (14/05/2020).

from followers, in the form of many 'likes', comments, and shares. This example of a fundraising themed post draws attention to the Gwrych Castle Preservation Trust raising a total of £25,000 in grants to carry out a restoration project. Simultaneously, social media posts such as these draw attention to the work required, the cost involved in completing such work, and, through the medium of images, stresses the historical connection and significance behind proceeding with the restoration. The post does not attempt to offer a form of historical interpretation, and the purpose of the post is not to do so. As Figure 8 shows, this is rarely the case for Welsh country houses. Instead, in July 2019, they appear to seek to maximise their financial

income, either through the advertisement of upcoming events or activities, but also through posts in relation to fundraising. If this was the priority for Gwrych Castle and others, improved interpretation could be deployed to provide background information to prospective visitors and actual visitors at a country house explaining why their money is necessary, what it is going towards, and why exactly that matters. This would underline the impacts that Welsh country houses had historically, whilst simultaneously highlighting the need for funds. Utilising interpretation effectively in this manner could also provide the opportunity to raise funds whilst engaging with an audience who actively want to assist and participate, perhaps through volunteering, once they understand or are more engaged with the significance of the property to the modern day local community. Image 13 shows that representatives of Gwrych Castle have used historic images pertaining to the fundraising project that they discuss, but fail to explain what the Coach House was used for, which will not be clear to all of their readers. In this type of social media post, it would be beneficial to link to a section of Gwrych Castle's website where more information is available for those who would like it regarding the history and the project, where it could be updated with modern day progress regarding the renovation project, and also providing social media users with the opportunity to explore sections of Gwrych Castle's website, providing more potential opportunities for people to become more involved with fundraising activities in some capacity.

Interpretation, as shown in Figure 8, does not appear to be a priority for country house staff or custodians in Wales in their usage of social media. Of the most popular social media posts assessed in July 2019, just 5% of them were on the theme of interpretation. The 5% is made up of just two posts made by Bodelwyddan Castle staff, and one post made by staff on behalf of The Good Life Experience, which had the highest number of likes and shares per Facebook post in July 2019. The two posts made regarding interpretation attributed to Bodelwyddan Castle are made by staff responsible for the Warner Leisure Hotels Twitter account, and do not interpret Bodelwyddan Castle itself, but rather attempt to draw attention to their properties collectively, highlighting their historical nature to sell them to their audience. Although for the purposes of this research the post has been classed as a piece of historical interpretation, it offers the most basic, simplistic form of

interpretation which fails to adequately inform the audience about what it is they are looking at in the attached image, as exemplified by Image 14. Furthermore, Image 14 highlights how staff at Warner Leisure Hotels use a method of interpretation to link the hotels that they operate to the history of the country houses themselves. The Facebook post made by The Good Life Experience staff adopts a similar



Image 14: A screenshot of a post categorised as interpretation made by Warner Leisure Hotels staff, although the aim appears to be to highlight a historical link in order to sell their hotel rooms (24/06/2020).

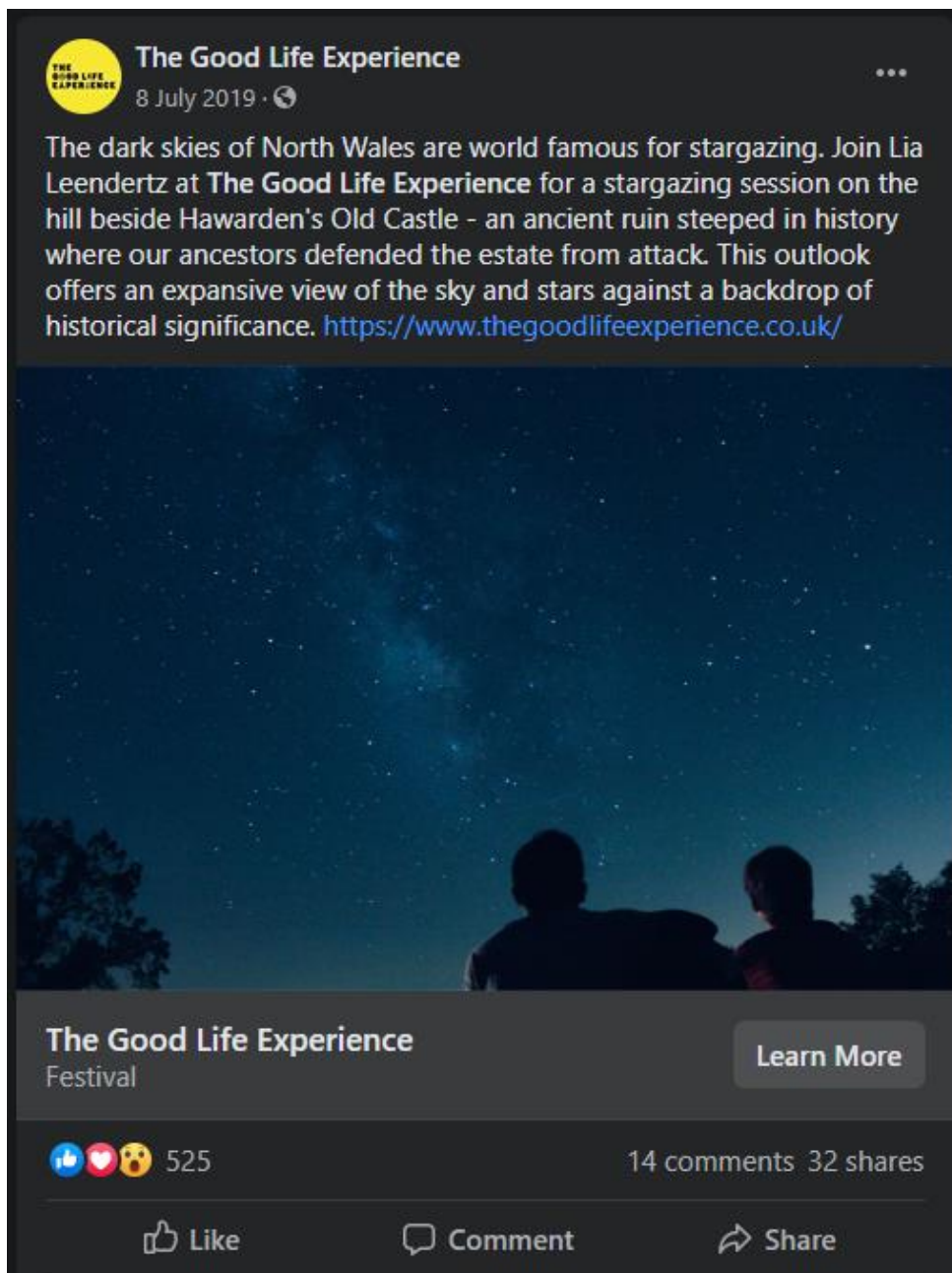


Image 15: A screenshot of a post made by The Good Life Experience staff, using the historic setting of Hawarden Old Castle to sell festival tickets (16/04/2020).

approach. It advertises an event, but in referring to Hawarden Old Castle as “an ancient ruin steeped in history where our ancestors defended the estate from attack”, it also uses interpretation as a tool of creating an image of a historic setting to sell a modern product. In this case, the product is a stargazing event in the grounds of a country house that the public do not ordinarily have access to. Again, as with the post made by staff at Warner Leisure Hotels, staff at The Good Life

Experience offer a very basic form of interpretation. It does not consist of facts, names, dates, or research which the literature review of this thesis identified as being necessary to crafting successful interpretation. At best, it romanticises the past as well as the location to use it to sell the event. Clearly, there is room for drastic improvement in interpretation and evidently there are advantages of this that this research has discussed.



Image 16: A screenshot of an animals/wildlife themed post made by Plas Newydd staff (01/06/2020).

The remaining popular social media posts from July 2019 are categorised by animals/wildlife, jobs, and community. The jobs category relates to a post made by



Image 17: A screenshot of a visual/scenery categorised post made by the owners of Gwydir Castle (01/06/2020).

Gwrych Castle custodians advertising a job on their social media pages, with its popularity largely being down to people 'tagging' their friends or relatives making them aware that there is a job to be applied for. The animals/wildlife category could have been incorporated into the visual/scenery category. However, there appeared to be differences between the content of these two classifications of posts. The differences are highlighted between a post made on Facebook by Gwydir Castle's owners and a post made on Facebook by National Trust staff at Plas Newydd – both in July 2019. The post made by Gwydir Castle's owner is classified as a visual post and encourages people to visit via the caption related to the picture, inviting people to "come and enjoy" whilst also citing the opening hours. Evidently, the aim of the post is to encourage people to visit physically by sharing aesthetically pleasing images of the country house, whereas the post made by staff at Plas Newydd appears to be aiming to gain a larger virtual following, resulting in a larger audience to share upcoming events with. Whilst this appears to be the motivation behind all of the animal-based posts in July 2019, posts classified as being visual have different motivations, hence the requirement to distinguish between the two.

Finally, the community category referred to in Figure 8 accounts for one of the lowest proportions of posts at just 4% for July 2019. The 4% consists of a total of three posts – one made by staff at Erddig, and two made by the owners of Gwydir Castle. The post made by Erddig staff encourages community involvement through asking followers and local people to help knit squares for a community project supporting local homeless people at Christmas. It was the most shared Facebook post of July 2019 for the Erddig account, and in benefitting the community, also had the potential to increase its following on its social media channels locally. Therefore, posts and projects themselves such as these present an opportunity for country houses to involve themselves in their local communities, encouraging people to become involved through physically visiting the site or other means, such as interacting virtually with posts, or volunteering in the future. However, with just three posts of this nature in total during July 2019, it is evident that this was not a priority for country house staff or custodians in Wales in this period, and that undoubtedly, the priority was to advertise events or to sell a product. Furthermore,

meaningful interpretation beyond the most simplistic level was not achieved by any site assessed in this work in July 2019 on social media.

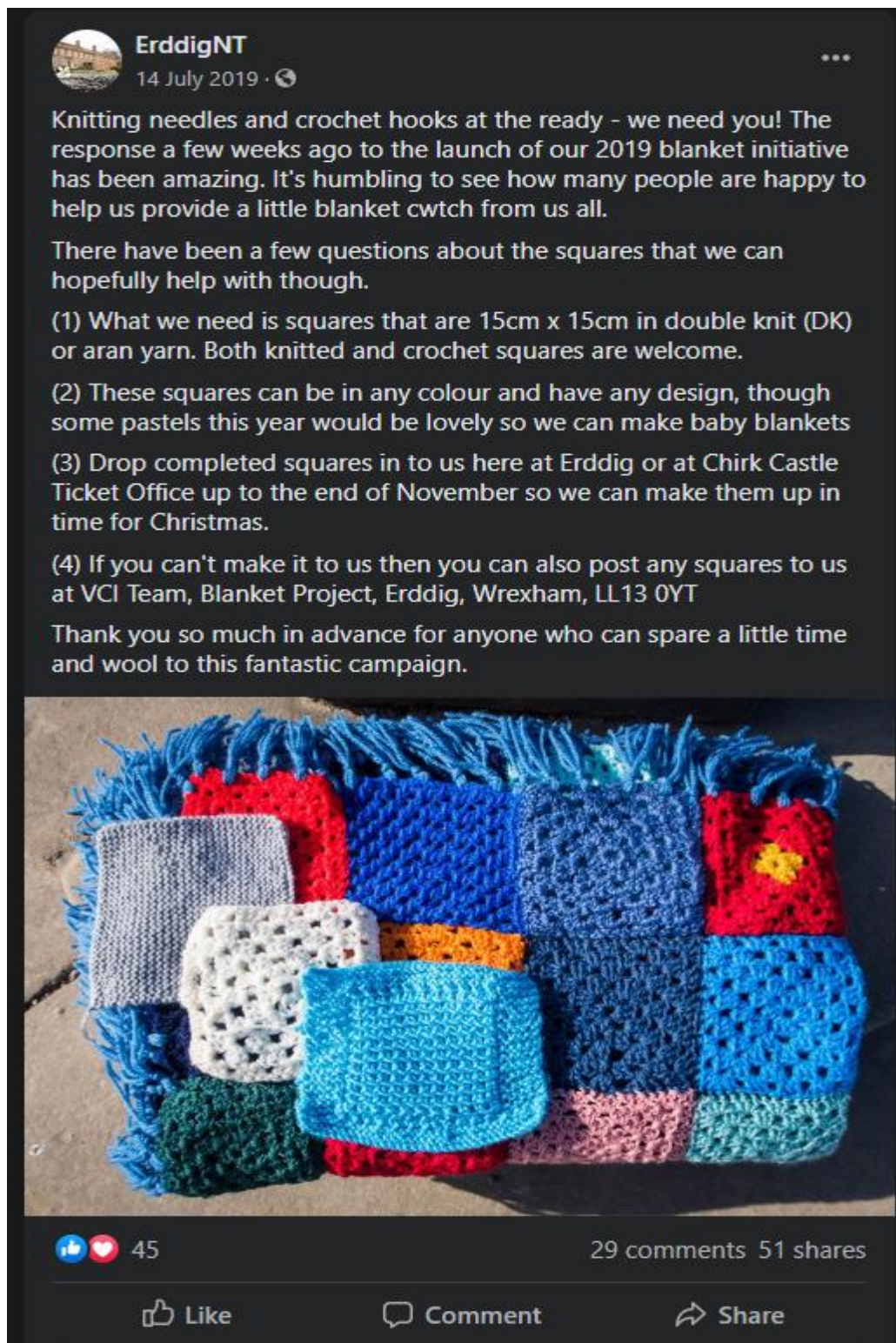


Image 18: A screenshot of a community categorised post made by staff at Erddig (02/06/2020).

December 2019 Analysis

December has been chosen because sites tend to hold Christmas-themed events and the period provides an opportunity for them to theme social media content and adopt a different messaging style. Analysis of this period enables understanding of events which take place over the Christmas period, as well as any changes in messaging priorities compared to the July 2019 analysis.

Between July 2019 and December 2019, there are both, clear similarities and marked differences in the number of posts made on behalf of a specific country house in Wales. These are reflected in Figure 9 which identifies inconsistencies in the approaches of staff members or custodians of country houses to the creation of online content. As with July 2019, it is apparent that whilst Twitter is frequently used by many sites, most original content posted to social media is made on Facebook. This is highlighted by staff or custodians at Gwrych Castle, Plas Teg, Gregynog Hall, and Hawarden Estate Farm Shop all choosing to make either a large proportion of their posts on Facebook, or all their posts on Facebook in both periods assessed. In addition to this, staff at Hawarden Estate Farm Shop posted at least 61 more times on Facebook than any other social media platform. Although the owners or custodians of Hafodunos Hall and Bodrhyddan Hall did not post regularly in July 2019, neither posted to any form of social media in December 2019. Furthermore, the number of Facebook posts made by Plas Teg custodians were halved from eight in July 2019, to 4 in December 2019. This indicates that staff members or custodians at these properties do not see engaging with people online as a priority. Consequently, this limits the potential for effective interpretation to be posted to engage meaningfully with their respective audiences. The number of Facebook posts made by Plas Newydd's account in December 2019 were also lower comparative to the number of posts they made on Twitter. Of all sites analysed, only staff at Plas Newydd and custodians of Gwrych Castle posted more across all platforms in December 2019 than in July 2019. Staff at The Good Life Experience posted dramatically less in December 2019 than in July 2019, most likely due to the festival taking place in the summer, therefore there was little to share with their followers across their platforms in December. Staff at the National Trust properties continued to post at a similar rate as in July 2019, with Penrhyn Castle staff once again posting

far less than staff at other National Trust operated Welsh country houses. Evidently, despite Chirk Castle, Erddig, Penrhyn Castle and Plas Newydd being operated under the same umbrella organisation, there are different approaches to posting on social media within the organisation and, alongside other Figures, Figure 9 demonstrates this.

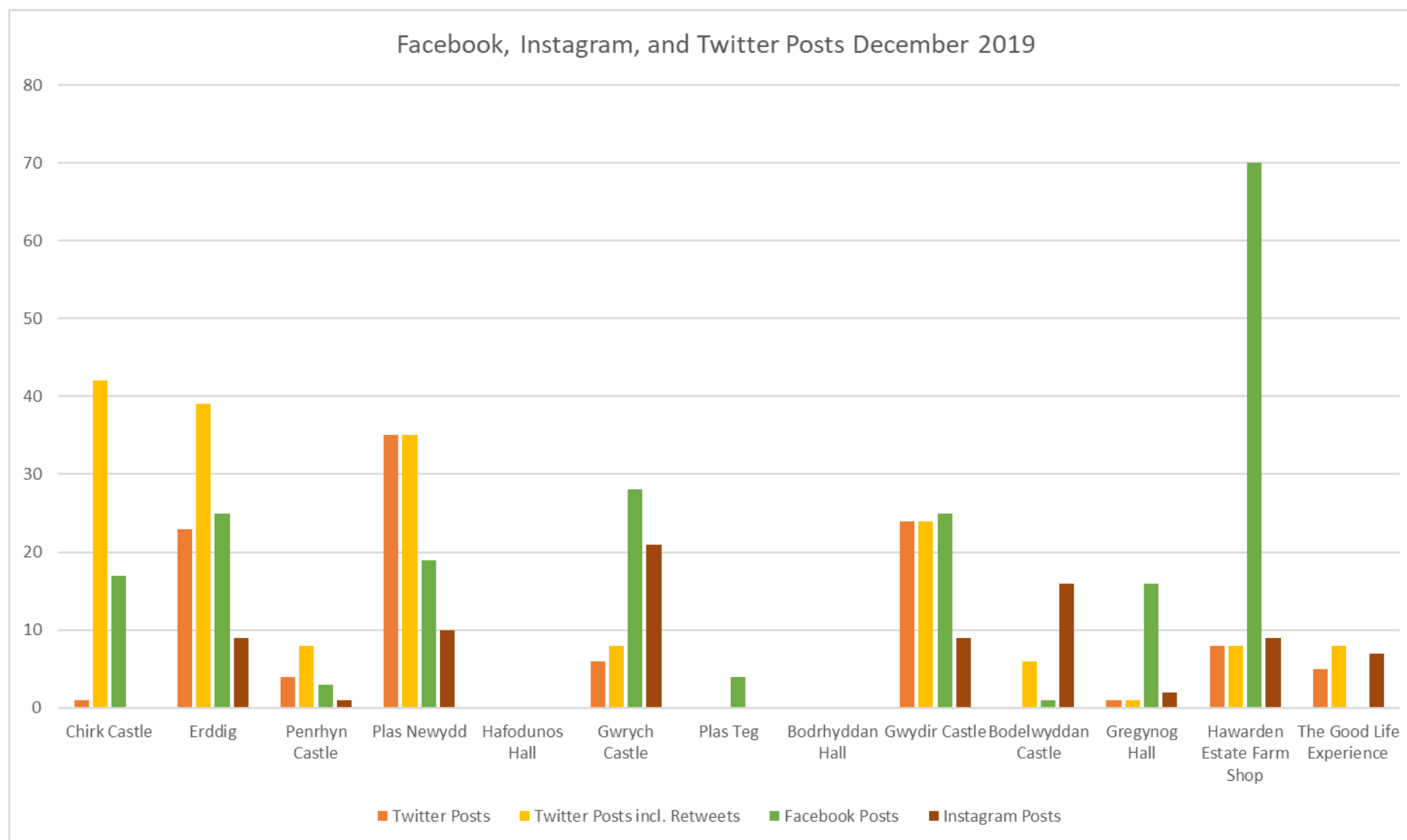


Figure 9: The number of Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter posts for each country house account made in December 2019.

As with Figure 6, Figure 9 highlights the different emphasis placed by staff and custodians at Welsh country houses on different platforms within their social media strategies. Clearly, Facebook is the preferred platform of many site staff or custodians for their original content, whilst Twitter is heavily used to share content of users which may hold relevance to a specific site, for example relating to an event being held. There will be a variety of reasons for this. Firstly, Facebook is more popular. In 2017, Twitter received 330 million monthly users compared to Facebook's 2 billion (Carter, 2018). Furthermore, c. 80% of the U.K. public's time on social networks was spent on Facebook, with Twitter receiving less than 5%, and less than both Instagram and Snapchat (ComScore, 2018, p.37). As a platform, Twitter is more reactionary to popular trends and live events, whereas Facebook appeals to more people from different generations with the number of over 75s on Facebook nearly doubling between 2016 and 2017 (Furness, 2017), possibly due to it being used more to engage with family and friends as well as keeping up to date with preferred brands and places (Carter, 2018). The difference between the two popular platforms underlines the trends identified in July 2019 and December 2019, in that Facebook is the preferred platform, most likely to reach wider audiences and to reach out to people from across different generations, whilst making use of the 'retweet' feature on Twitter to post in a more reactionary fashion, thus engaging with their audience in an alternative manner.

Between July 2019 and December 2019, there are some marked differences between the average engagement figures, visualised by Figures 7 and 10. Firstly, due to the custodians of Hafodunos Hall and Bodrhyddan Hall not posting during December 2019, they do not register any average engagement figures. In the case of Bodrhyddan Hall, this is owed to the site usually being closed to the public during winter. Staff at the National Trust properties generally received higher average engagement figures in December 2019. However, the average engagement received by staff at Penrhyn Castle on Facebook reduced by more than 50%, and the average engagement received by staff at Plas Newydd dropped a small amount on Twitter and Facebook. For this to happen during a time of year where traditionally events at country houses are popular and visitor numbers rise, underlines a failure to engage with their audiences effectively. Image 19 further highlights this. It shows the most

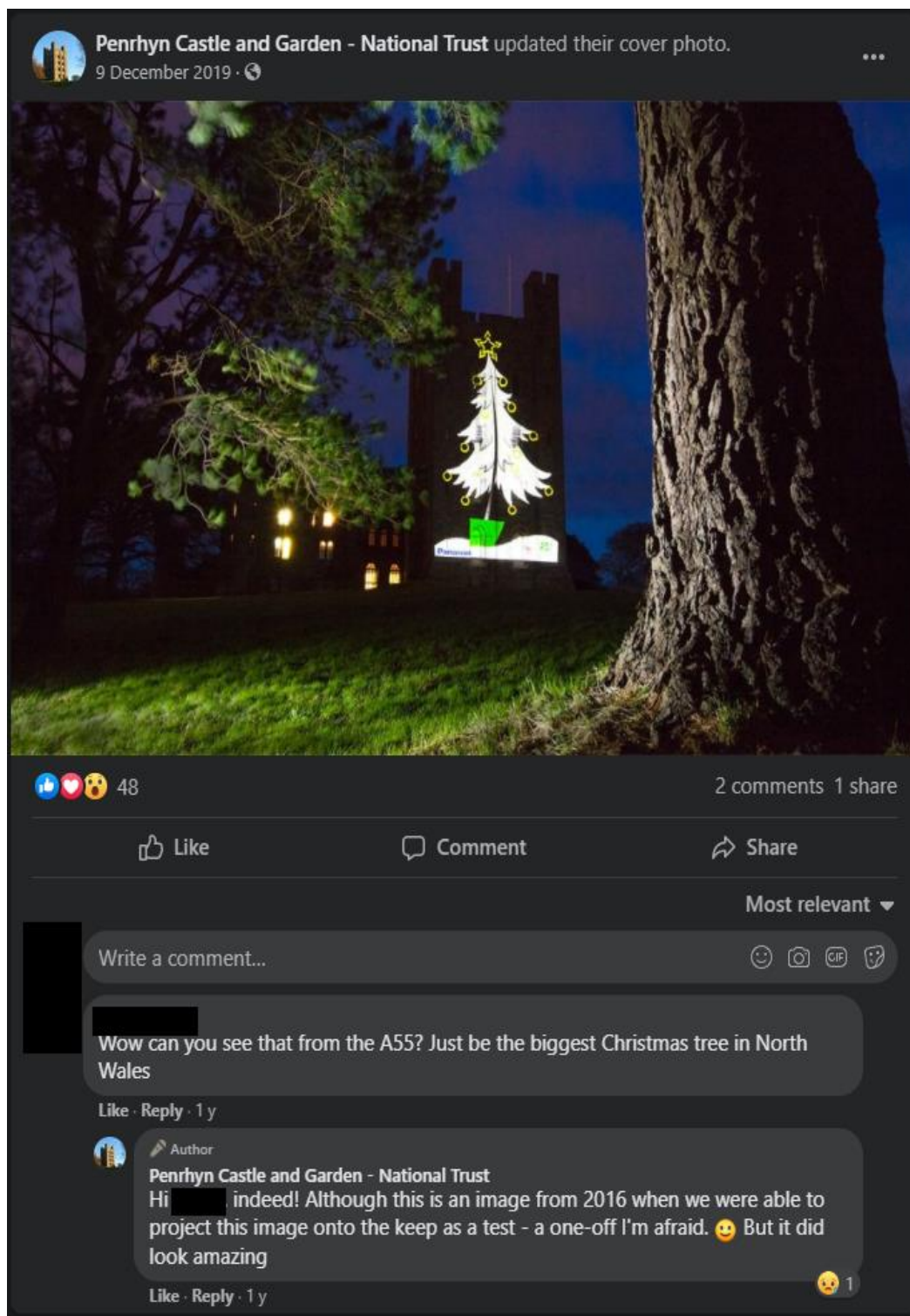


Image 19: A screenshot of staff at Penrhyn Castle updating the Facebook account's cover photo. (03/02/2021).

liked and commented on post that Penrhyn Castle staff posted to Facebook in December 2019. It was an image that was posted as the account's new cover image

with no caption, thus failing to attempt to engage with the audience in any way beyond visually. Consequently, there was just one comment on the image. A member of staff responded to the comment informing the commenter that the image posted is three years old, and there would not be an opportunity to see the content of the image in person. It is not necessary that every post to social media is based on a recent event – this is exemplified by the social media research this work has carried out during the coronavirus pandemic later in this chapter. However, it is necessary for posts to be made with context to effectively engage a site's audience, whilst providing opportunities to interpret the significance and history of a site. On other platforms for the two sites, the average engagement increased. Figures 9 and 10, compared with Figures 6 and 7, highlight that whilst custodians of Gwrych Castle posted more in December 2019 than in July 2019, the average engagement figures for Facebook and Instagram were lower in December 2019 than in July 2019. Custodians of Plas Teg posted half as much in December 2019 than in July 2019, posting just four times. The custodians of Plas Teg received a higher average engagement figure in December 2019 than July 2019. The data associated with Gwrych Castle and Plas Teg underlines that they are privately owned with no dedicated social media staff during these periods of time, leading to inconsistencies in their approaches to social media. Across all platforms, the owners of Gwydir Castle received the highest engagement averages from a similar number of posts between the two months, as well as a higher engagement average than July 2019. This indicates that although there may not be a written social media strategy in place, there is clearly a level of consistency to the method of posting. Also of note from Figures 9 and 10, staff at Bodelwyddan Castle did not post on Twitter but their average engagement for Facebook rose dramatically in December 2019. The reason for this is that there was just one post made to the Facebook account associated with Bodelwyddan Castle. The post did not offer interpretation of the site, nor did it offer information pertinent to visitors. It shared images from an evening meal hosted for staff, naming a staff member as employee of the year. Consequently, the comments made on the post were to congratulate the employee of the year. Whilst celebrating the efforts and achievements of staff members publicly on social media is appropriate, it is bad practice for this to be the only post made in December 2019.

Clearly, there is further scope to interpret the site and engage Bodelwyddan Castle's online audience, especially when there is clearly an audience who are willingly seeking to engage through commenting with posts. Using interpretation as a tool through social media to market the hotel through engaging the audience with the significance and history of the property is something that would assist staff at Bodelwyddan Castle in reaching out to new audiences and therefore prospective guests. Finally, despite both Hawarden Estate Farm Shop and The Good Life Experience relating to the Hawarden Estate, social media for each was operated differently in December 2019. The difference being that although there are clear reasons to post regularly and attempt to engage with an audience on Facebook, after an apparent success indicated by Figure 7 for The Good Life Experience Facebook account, they have not attempted to continue with this engagement in December on Facebook and have instead chosen to post on Instagram and Twitter.

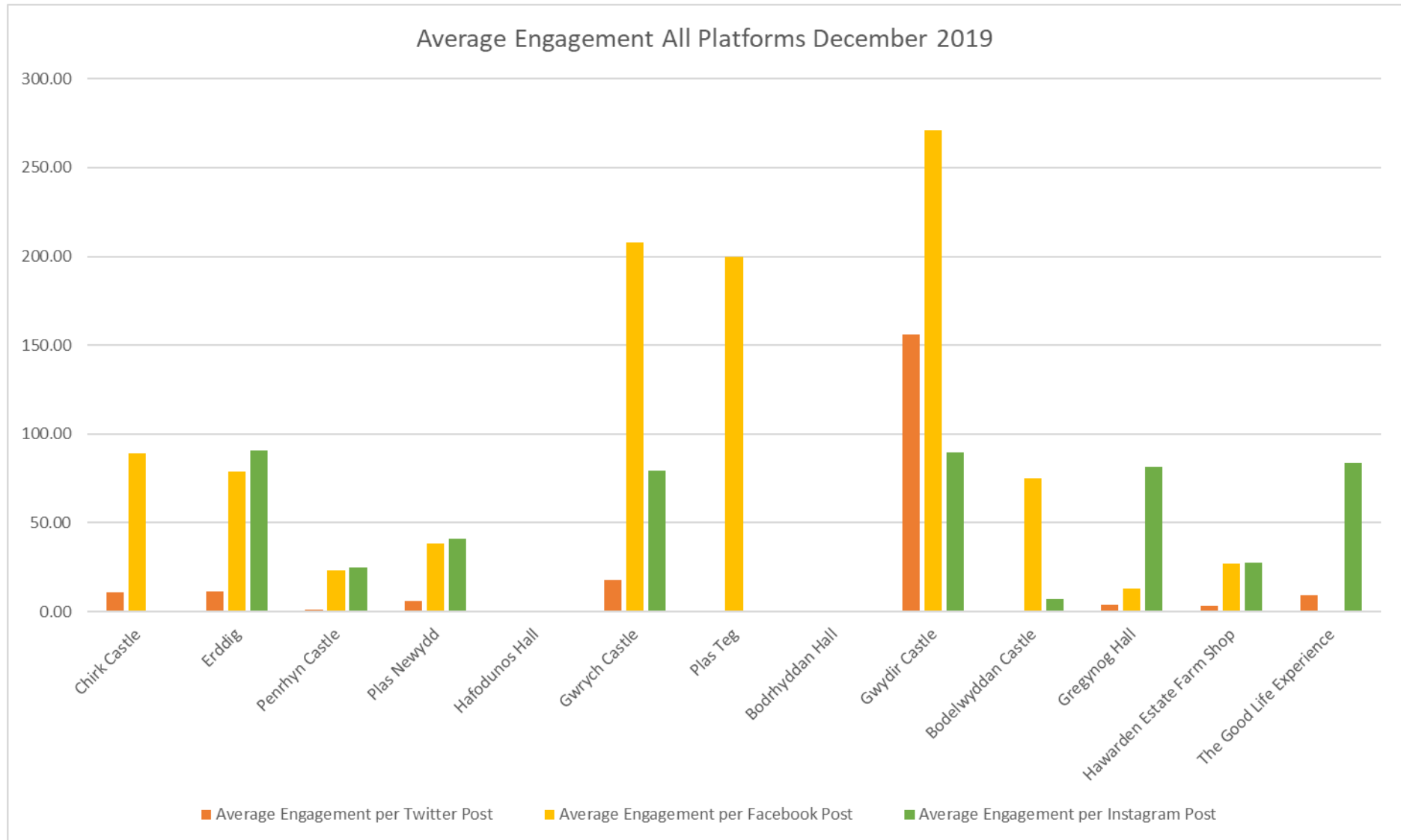


Figure 10: Average engagement per post across Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter in December 2019.

Ultimately, there are trends which evidently have continued between July 2019 and December 2019. These have been identified in the social media post numbers and average engagement figures. There are further trends which continued from July 2019 to December 2019, as demonstrated when comparing Figure 8 with Figure 11. The Figures categorise posts thematically, and it is clear that the themes which are posted about the least in July 2019 continue to be posted about the least in December 2019. These themes are fundraising/appeals, interpretation, and jobs. The events/activities and visual/scenery categories continue to account for a large number of posts. Considering that posts categorised as interpretation feature so little in both periods, and posts categorised as events/activities feature so prominently, it appears that staff and custodians of Welsh country houses view their positions online as to advertise. This is juxtaposed with their desired objective to inform and educate their visitors. Between Figures 8 and 11, other categories of post have remained at a similar level, with the exception of posts categorised as commercial/selling posts, which were lower. However, in both July 2019 and December 2019, social media channels related to the Hawarden Estate (Hawarden Estate Farm Shop and The Good Life Experience) recorded the highest number of posts that are categorised as commercial/selling posts, identifying a consistency despite the overall difference between the time periods. Image 20 is an example of a commercial post made by staff at Hawarden Estate Farm Shop in December 2019, which seeks to gauge interest in purchasing fruit and vegetables for Christmas. The post was one of the most popular made on Facebook by staff at Hawarden Estate Farm Shop in December 2019, indicating that there was interest from their audience in this category of post. It also indicates that if staff or custodians seek engagement online, it will materialise. This could translate into physical visits. Owing to the Hawarden Estate Farm Shop's primary function being to sell produce, it is unsurprising that a commercially themed post was popular, and it forms part of the reason that many of their followers do follow. Another post made to the account shared a Hawarden Old Castle open day, as seen in Image 21, and was the most liked post on Facebook for the Hawarden Estate Farm Shop Facebook account in December 2019, indicating that their followers hold an interest in visiting the historical site, and want to know about it. Perhaps people also follow the account for

updates regarding open days. Evidently, there is interest in the interpretation of the past, and the websites section of this work identifies staff at Hawarden Estate Farm Shop showing a willingness to attempt to do so, although in a simplistic and factually inaccurate manner. This, together with one of the most engaged posts made to the Hawarden Estate Farm Shop Facebook account being on the topic of heritage, indicates that there is a willingness to provide interpretation and also a demand for interpretation. For it to be effective, it must be accurate, engaging, and consistent. The research carried out in this work can substantially aid staff and custodians of Welsh country houses to achieve this.

A Thematic Breakdown of Most Popular Social Media Posts in December 2019

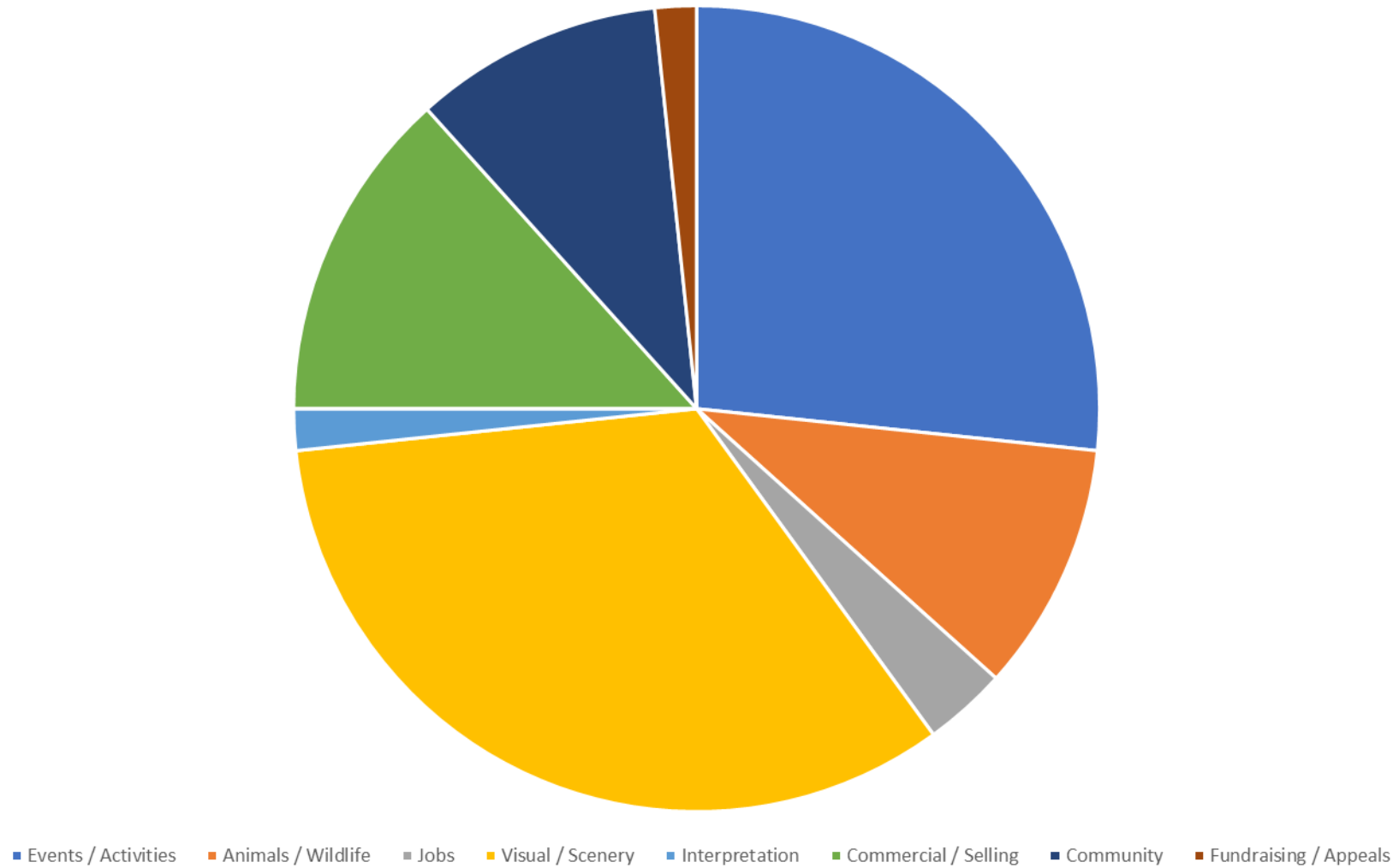


Figure 11: The most popular social media posts made by site staff or custodians presented thematically for December 2019.

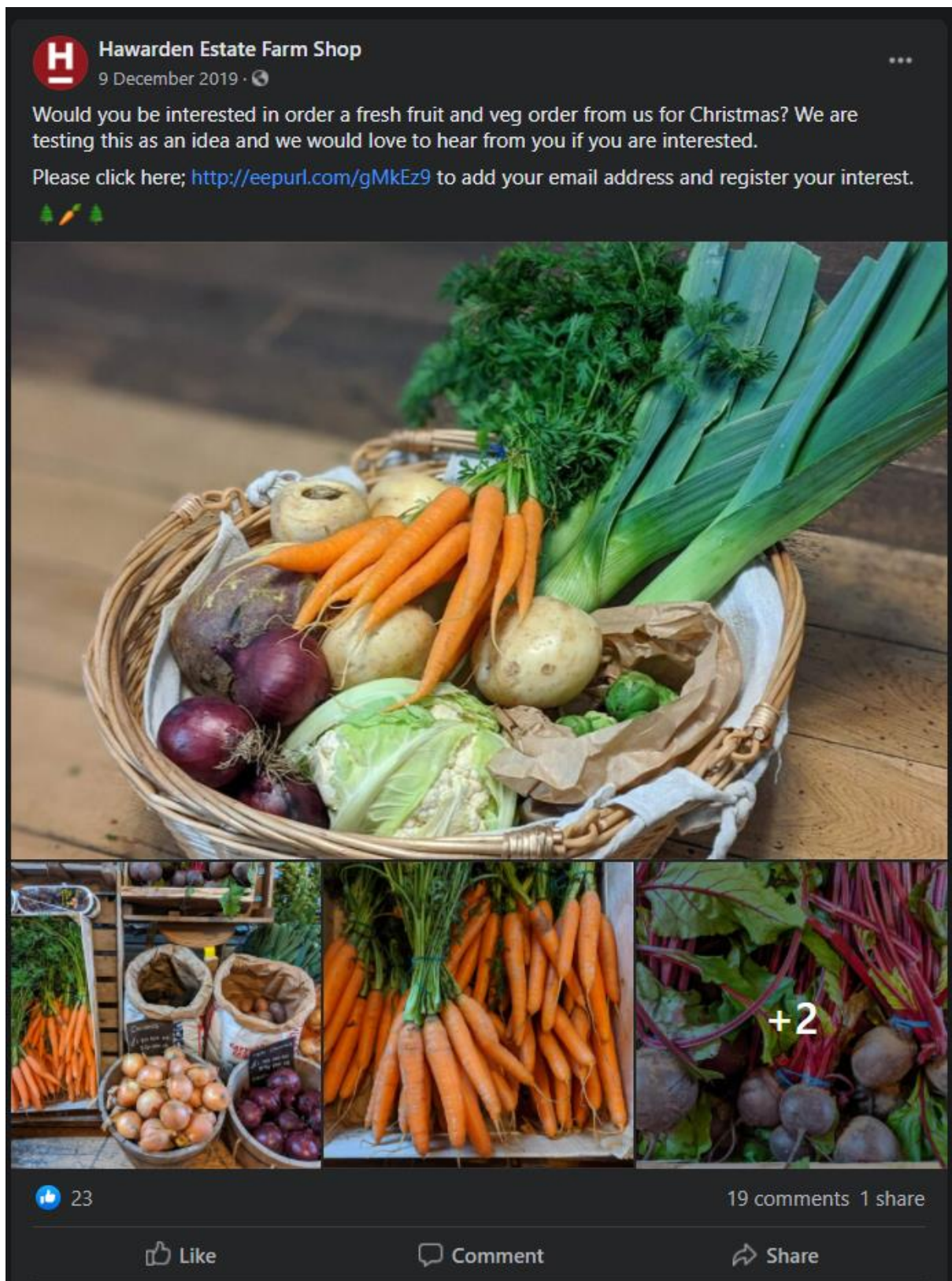



Image 20: A screenshot of Hawarden Estate Farm Shop staff posting to gauge interest in selling produce (14/09/2020).

14



SUNDAY, 14 JUNE 2020 FROM 10:00 UTC+01-14:00 UTC+01

Postponed; Hawarden Old Castle Open Day

Hawarden Estate Farm Shop

AboutDiscussion

☆ Interested

🕒 Going

Details

👤

2.1K people responded

🕒

Sunday, 14 June 2020 from 10:00 UTC+01-14:00 UTC+01

📍

Hawarden Estate Farm Shop

🌐

Public · Hosted by Hawarden Estate Farm Shop and The Glynne Arms

Hawarden Old Castle is open to the public just four times a year. This is perfect family day out with an opportunity to explore the castle ruins and take in the beautiful view of the Cheshire Planes from the top. A donation taken at the gate will go towards a local charity.


You can access the Hawarden Old Castle via Hawarden Estate Farm Shop or through the big blue gates in Hawarden Village, directly opposite The Glynne Arms. The route to the Old Castle will be signposted, please stick to the path at all times. Please note step up the Old Castle are steep and can be slippery.

Old Castle Open day dates for 2020 are;

- Sunday 15th March
- Sunday 17th May
- Sunday 14th June
- Sunday 9th August

Please note our new opening times for 2020 are 10am - 3pm.

Adults cost £3, 2 children are free with additional children at £3. Toddlers are free. Dogs on leads are welcome. [See less](#)



Hawarden Estate Farm Shop

Chester Road, Hawarden

Delicious ingredients. It's that simple.

Go with friends

82

WENT

2K

INTERESTED

[See all](#)

Image 21: A screenshot of staff at Hawarden Estate Farm Shop advertising an open day of Hawarden Old Castle, with over 2,000 people interested (14/09/2020).

Coronavirus 2020 Analysis

Social media posts from July 2019 and December 2019 have been thematically categorised to assess the motivations for using social media in the Welsh country house sector. Most posts were designed to entice and encourage people to visit, to purchase something, or to partake in an event. This research has highlighted that there are different techniques to doing this, in showcasing architectural or landscaped grandeur, hosting events, supporting the local community, or selling high quality produce.

The coronavirus pandemic began to affect the United Kingdom in February and March of 2020. Hogan and Quan-Haase (2010, p.313) wrote that “social media tend to refer to and reflect the offline world”. During the pandemic, this was evident when considering Welsh country houses and the posts that staff and custodians were making in comparison to the posts analysed for the periods of July 2019 and December 2019. Comparing Figures 6, 9, and 12, it is evident that the coronavirus pandemic altered the regularity of posting on social media for Welsh country houses. Firstly, the number of posts made by staff at National Trust properties decreased across all platforms, with each site posting a message to the effect of the example shown by Erddig’s Twitter account in Image 22. “The majority” (National Trust, 2020g) of National Trust staff were furloughed, accounting for social media accounts not being monitored or updated. Custodians of Gregynog Hall posted less overall, but more on all platforms except Facebook than in December 2019. However, this only amounts to around 3 posts per platform during April 2020 compared to 16 that were made to Facebook in December 2019. This highlights further inconsistencies in posting to social media, and also identifies social media as something that for custodians of some Welsh country houses is utilised on a more ad hoc basis, rather than as a strategic tool for effectively engaging an audience with the significance and history of a property through interpretation. The remaining properties saw an overall rise in post frequency, with accounts for Bodelwyddan Castle and The Good Life Experience recording the largest increases in post numbers.



NationalTrust Erddig
@ErddigNT



Erddig is closed to help restrict the spread of coronavirus.

During the closure this page will not be monitored. We'll be continuing to share nature, beauty and history, and are on hand to help with questions at [@NTWales](#).



4:35 PM · Apr 7, 2020 · Twitter Web App

1 Retweet 10 Likes



Image 22: A screenshot of a post on Erddig's Twitter account regarding its closure (15/09/2020).

Lockdown measures rendered travel and in-person events unfeasible during this period, so it is surprising that these social media accounts which are intrinsically linked to the travel and event sectors recorded a rise in their frequency of posts. Rather, it would be expected that social media activity would be limited owing to the possible furlough of staff and cancellation of events or closure of sites, demonstrated by Image 22. Custodians of Gwrych Castle and Gwydir Castle also posted more frequently across all social media platforms. It is possible that those who post to the social media accounts had more time to do so without in-person events to organise or operate. Beyond the sites assessed in this work, other owners of private

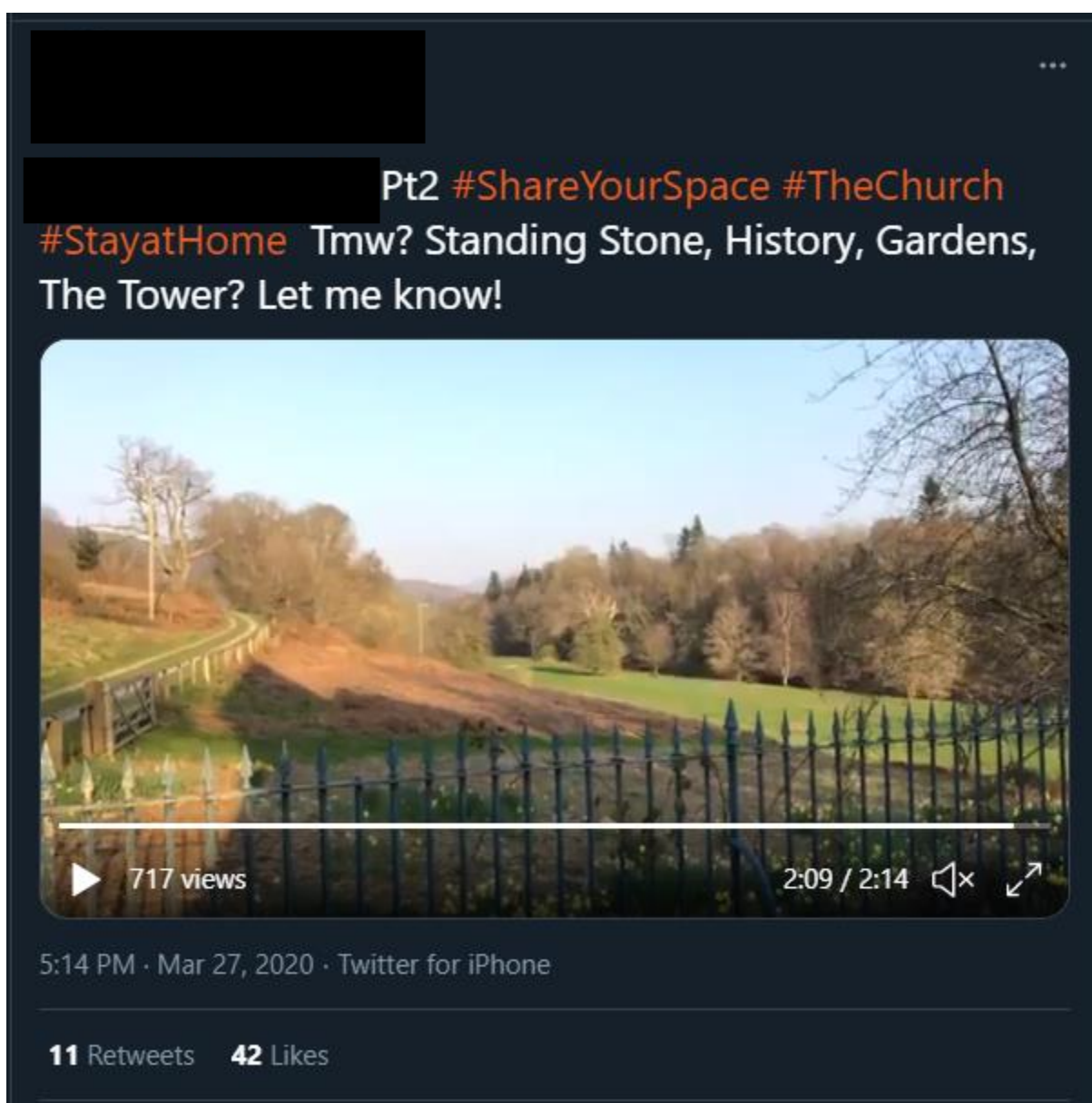


Image 23: An owner of a private estate posting a video on Twitter engaging with their audience regarding their estate (04/02/2021).

estates chose to interpret their properties or wider estates on social media with their new-found free time. One private owner of an estate in South Wales, historically the location of a country house before its 20th century demolition, posted a series of videos to Twitter explaining what different areas of the estate were historically (Images 23 and 24). The videos were engaging because the owner asked his followers to tell him what they wanted to see and find out more about. Being videos, the posts were visual which further engages the audience. Between Images 23 and 24, it is evident that the videos engaged people because Image 23 shows one of



Image 24: The same owner as in image 23 posting another video to Twitter five days later, with 4200 views more than one of the first videos they posted (04/02/2021).

the first videos posted received 717 views, whilst Image 24 shows a video posted five days later which received over 4900 views. Furthermore, from the same number of 'retweets', the number of likes over doubled from 42 shown in Image 23 to 99 shown in Image 24. Together, this highlights how interpretation can grow an audience on social media whilst effectively engaging viewers with the history and significance of a site. Clearly, the coronavirus pandemic caused a variety of responses in terms of the number of posts made by social media accounts related to Welsh country houses.

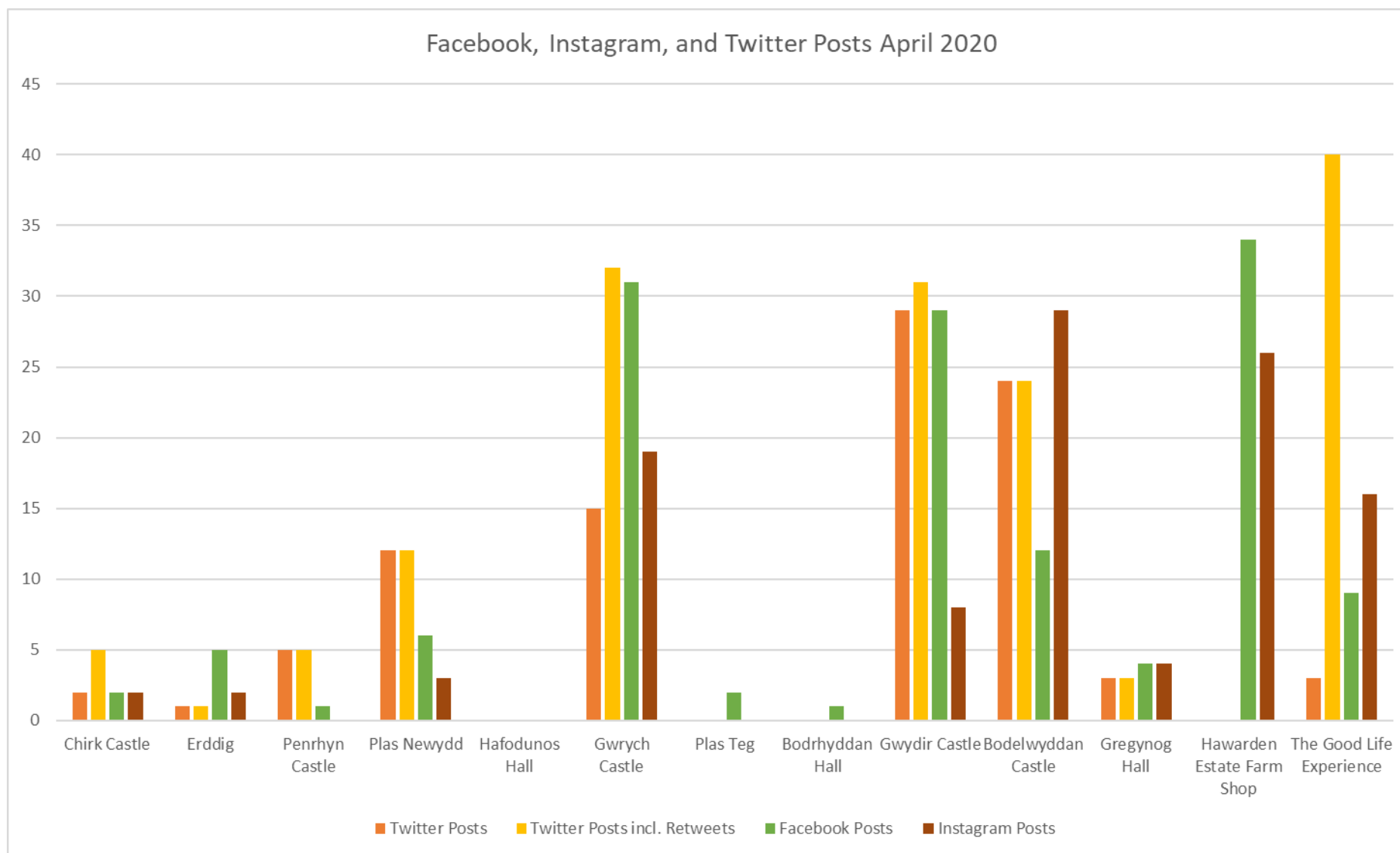


Figure 12: The number of Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter posts for each country house account made in April 2020.

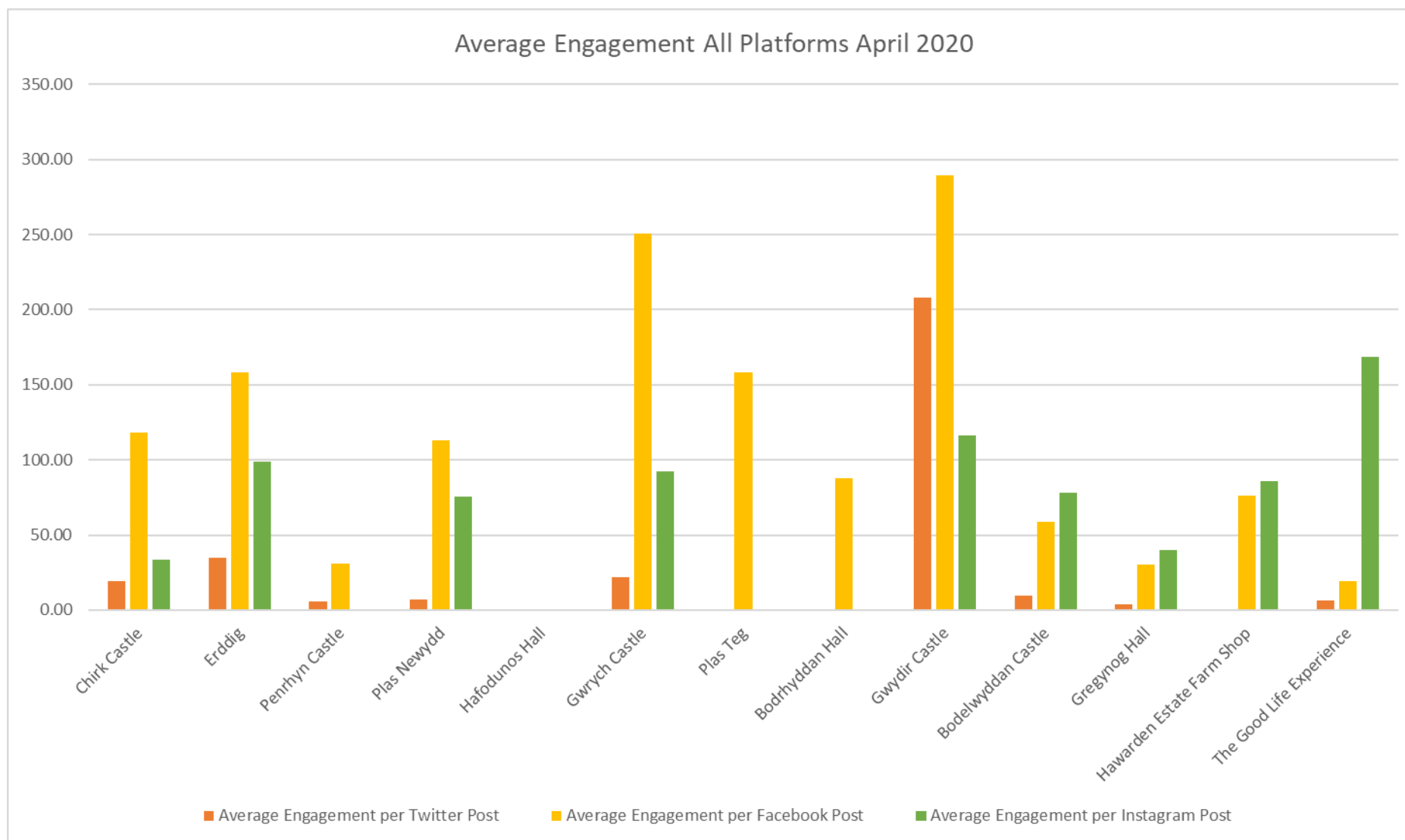


Figure 13: Average engagement per post across Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter in April 2020.

The average engagement per post shown in Figure 13 and compared to Figure 10 highlights a continuation of a trend, despite the pandemic. Average engagement is consistently higher per post on Facebook, than it is on other platforms except in the cases of social media accounts for Bodelwyddan Castle, Gregynog Hall, Hawarden Estate Farm Shop, and most notably, The Good Life Experience. Staff at Hawarden Estate Farm Shop and The Good Life Experience both gain most of their engagement figures on Instagram, rather than Facebook, and both of these figures were far higher than in December 2019. The rise in average engagement figures could be explained by the lockdown resulting from the coronavirus pandemic, with many people unable to leave their homes thus increasing their time spent on social media, allowing them to further engage with online content (Arens, 2020; Liu, 2020b). Furthermore, this could explain a slight rise in post numbers on social media accounts from staff and custodians of Welsh country houses from those which did not furlough staff who monitor the social media channels. Considering this, Figure 14 shows the differences in follower numbers from before lockdown and after. There are some notable differences. Firstly, Bodelwyddan Castle's social media accounts are not represented in Figure 14 due to a dramatic fall in followers recorded on Twitter and Facebook. On Twitter, the account lost 37,444 of the 40,532 followers it previously had. On Facebook, the account lost 1,895 of the 3,006 followers it previously had. On Instagram, the account gained 627 followers. There are few possible explanations for such dramatic differences in follower numbers, with the most likely being that staff at Warner Leisure Hotels have previously paid for vast numbers of accounts to follow them to increase their reach. Over time, it is possible that these accounts have been removed from social media websites, possibly explaining such an immediate vast drop. There are few examples of Welsh country houses recording a loss of followers on any social media platform, although social media accounts for Hawarden Estate Farm Shop, Gregynog Hall, and The Good Life Experience all recorded substantial follower losses on Twitter. Staff and custodians of Chirk Castle, Plas Teg, and Bodrhyddan Hall recorded small follower losses on Twitter. All Welsh country houses assessed for the purpose of this research recorded rises in their Instagram account followings, with accounts for Bodelwyddan Castle, Gwrych Castle, Hawarden Estate Farm Shop and The Good Life Experience recording

especially large rises, all above 600 new followers. In April 2020, Figure 12 shows that accounts related to these four sites posted the most on Instagram in this period, and so it is unsurprising that they gained the most followers as a result. Figure 14 underlines the findings of this research that Facebook is the social media website that Welsh country houses have the most success in engaging with people, showing that except for Bodelwyddan Castle's accounts, every site received an increase in follower numbers by the time the lockdown had ended. Custodians of Gwrych Castle received the largest increase in followers on Facebook. The data indicates that posting more frequently on social media at this time when people were online more than usual led to an increased following to engage with.

Figure 15 identifies the themes that provided the most popular posts across social media for the selected Welsh country houses. Compared with Figures 8 and 11,



Image 25: A screenshot of The Good Life Experience staff posting on Instagram regarding a previous festival, rather than an upcoming festival (18/09/2020).

Figure 15 breaks the most popular posts down thematically using an extra theme as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. The extra theme is closure/cancellation. It reflects a drastic narrative change from the ordinary social media objectives outlined by this work. Figure 15 highlights the extent of the narrative change, showing that many of the most popular posts made on social media by country house staff or custodians in Wales were on the topic of closure/cancellation in April 2020. Previously, posts categorised by events/activities were some of the most popular. Whilst this remained more popular than categories such as jobs and interpretation, there was a notable decline in April 2020. Many of these posts, exemplified by a post made to The Good Life Experience's Instagram account (Image 25), whilst on the topic of events/activities refer to events held previously, using their platform to remind people of events that could take place in the future. 0% of the most popular posts for April 2020 were categorised as interpretation. In a period where engagement with social media has been shown to have risen in many of these case studies, and in a period when the heritage sector needed to turn to digital interpretation (Cary, 2020; Mirashrafi, 2020), this underlines a failure on the behalf of Welsh country houses to engage audiences in the histories and significance of their properties, in the context of a new significant threat to their futures. However, Figure 15 highlights that country house staff or custodians in Wales continued to successfully engage their online audiences with posts on social media of a visual or scenic nature. As the screenshot from Plas Newydd's Instagram account (Image 26) shows, overlap between the visual/scenic and closure/cancellation categories was not uncommon. In this case, showcasing a tulip display at the property whilst encouraging viewers to "enjoy [...] from the comfort of your own home". Along with previous periods assessed, other categories are in the minority of most popular posts made in April 2020.

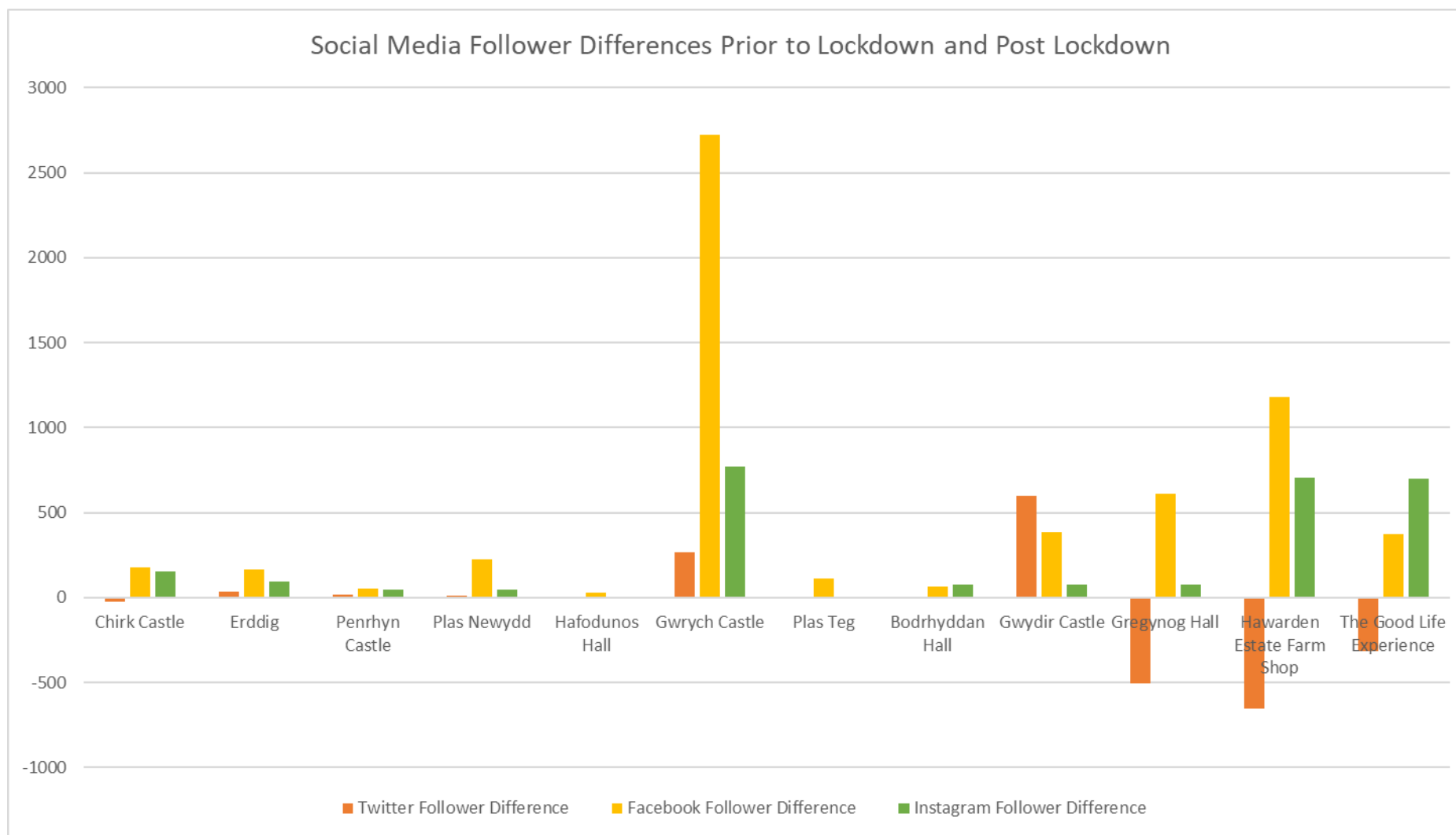


Figure 14: Difference in follower numbers by platform for country house accounts in Wales prior to coronavirus lockdown and after (excludes Bodelwyddan Castle).

A Thematic Breakdown of Most Popular Social Media Posts in April 2020

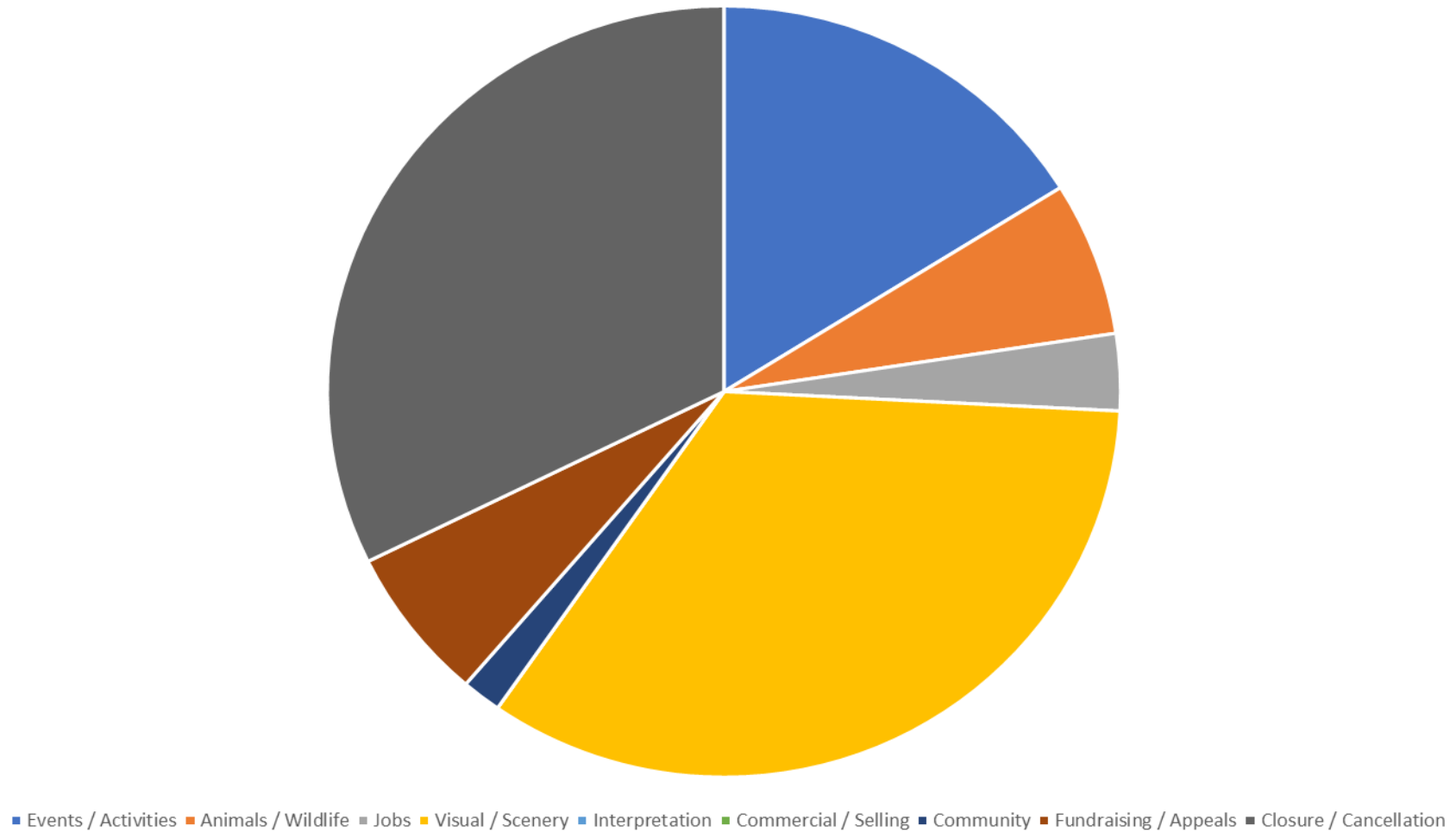


Figure 15: The most popular social media posts made by site staff or custodians presented thematically for April 2020.



Image 26: A screenshot of Plas Newydd staff posting under the category of visual/scenery whilst encouraging people to enjoy from home rather than physically visiting (18/09/2020).

A Case Study of Gwrych Castle: The Effects of Popular Culture on Social Media and the Advantages of Interpretation

Situated near Abergele, Gwrych Castle is a country house that has become a ruin as consequence partially of vandalism, and partially of neglectful previous ownership. It was sold by an American absentee owner in 2006 to Clayton Hotels. Work began to update the building with plans to convert it into a luxury hotel, but Clayton Hotels entered into receivership and work consequently halted. The site was purchased by a property developer, but the planning permission expired in 2018. As a result, the building was offered for sale by auction, and the Gwrych Castle Preservation Trust – a registered charity – were able to purchase the building to preserve “the historical, architectural and constructional heritage that may exist in and around Gwrych Castle” (Charity Commission for England and Wales, 2022). Gwrych Castle Preservation Trust has also set out aims and objectives. These are:

- To preserve the castle and estate on a long-term sustainable basis with extensive public opening
- To find sustainable and sympathetic uses for the castle and estate
- To raise funds for restoration and other essential works (Gwrych Castle, 2021).

In 2020, staff on behalf of British television channel ITV were seeking an alternative filming location for popular television series ‘I’m a Celebrity... Get me out of here!’ due to the global coronavirus pandemic limiting travel to the usual filming location in Australia. Gwrych Castle was chosen as the new filming location, with the site immediately becoming connected to the television show, and a widespread interest taking hold of the property on social media. This research is able to track the effects that the filming had on the country house in terms of the social media accounts related to the site, as well as the techniques and content posted online.

Figure 16 charts the impact that the filming of ‘I’m a Celebrity... Get me out of here!’ had on the following of accounts related to Gwrych Castle. Evidently, there was a consistently large growth in following across all social media platforms linked to Gwrych Castle. The largest increase in following occurred on Facebook, with nearly 60,000 new ‘likes’ on the platform. Furthermore, there were over 16,000 new

followers on Instagram, and over 5,000 new followers on Twitter. This indicates that the interest generated in the property by the reality television show was significant. Consequently, there was an extensive increase in the potential engagement that representatives of Gwrych Castle could begin to take advantage of through their use of social media. To do so in line with the Gwrych Castle Preservation Trust's aims and objectives, the content posted across social media accounts associated with Gwrych Castle needed to effectively communicate the significance of the site whilst engaging their new audience appropriately.

Gwrych Castle			
	Twitter Followers	Facebook Likes	Instagram Followers
April 2020	1603	18506	2899
January 2021	8277	76886	19200

Figure 16: A comparison of Gwrych Castle's social media following before and after hosting 'I'm a Celebrity... Get me out of here!'

In the periods analysed in this work, representatives of Gwrych Castle have been identified as having posted more on the topic of fundraising than other sites assessed in this work. During and after the filming of 'I'm a Celebrity', this not only continued, but appeared to become more frequent owing to an increase in posts across social media channels. The increase in posting would have been aimed at increasing their following across Gwrych Castle's social media platforms, whilst also attempting to take full advantage of the millions of viewers watching on ITV and trying to convert it into successful fundraising. Image 27 shows a screenshot taken from the Twitter account for Gwrych Castle in January 2021. It is a similar post to others made on the account since 'I'm a Celebrity' was hosted, evidenced in Image 28. Both posts begin by stating why the Gwrych Preservation Trust requires donations, before going on to post the link to a gofundme webpage for viewers to donate. Both posts also use eye-catching images of the property to catch the attention of the viewer, to encourage them to click through to the webpage and to donate. More significantly, this is a further example of the use and importance of

imagery in interpretation, underlined by the National Trust examples earlier in this work. The fundraising or commercial themed posts that were made to Gwrych Castle's social media accounts were not limited to sharing a link to the gofundme website, as Images 29, 30 and 31 show. Images 29 and 31 again show eye-catching images of the property to catch the attention of the viewer. The post in Image 29 encourages people to purchase annual passes. The post in Image 31 encourages people to take part in a raffle to win the opportunity to receive a behind the scenes tour of the 'I'm a Celebrity' film set and the building itself. Image 30 shows a post that does not use an image of the property itself. Instead, it features merchandise that the post is trying to sell by attaching a link to Gwrych Castle's online shop. The screenshots highlight the diversity in Gwrych Castle's commercial offer resulting from the property featuring as a filming destination for 'I'm a Celebrity'. Furthermore, the screenshots highlight a subtle attempt by representatives of Gwrych Castle to align the property with a Welsh identity. Most posts made to the Gwrych Castle Twitter account feature a Welsh flag emoji, leaving their audience with no doubt about where the property is situated, thus positioning it as a Welsh country house. As already established in this work, representatives of Gwrych Castle do not frequently post to social media accounts bilingually, but clearly wish to attempt to reinforce the site's Welsh identity through the use of emojis and the inclusion of Welsh such as 'diolch yn fawr' – although misspelt in image 27. Whilst Images 29, 30, and 31 all show screenshots of methods that representatives of Gwrych Castle are trying to raise money from the involvement with 'I'm a Celebrity', the methods are different. The annual passes being sold in Image 29 and the merchandise being sold in Image 28 do not have a clear link to the television show. However, with the social media accounts related to Gwrych Castle all receiving large increases resulting from the filming, the audience that these items are being advertised to through postings to social media has evidently grown, which would lead to a potential increase in sales opportunities online. Image 31, however, shows representatives of Gwrych Castle marketing and advertising the film set as well as the property itself. This appears to seek to engage people with the modern, temporary use of the site as a film set rather than the history and significance of the property. I'm a Celebrity has itself become a core theme in the site's history owing to its impact, and therefore its

interpretation. There is nothing wrong with this – it fits into the aims and objectives, specifically “to raise funds for restoration and other essential works” (Gwrych Castle, 2021). Furthermore, when the tour is taken by visitors, it provides an opportunity for the tour guide to deliver a tour pointing out details that were used in the filming of ‘I’m a Celebrity’ whilst continually linking them back to the existing property and the history of it, thus engaging their audience appropriately.



Gwrych Castle
@GwrychTrust

...

Our goal for 2021 is to bring services back to Gwrych Castle for the first time since 1980's but we need your help.

Though services do not immediately sound romantic, this is a major step to bring the castle back to life once again!

Dioch yn Fawr 🏰 🏴󠁧󠁢󠁥󠁮󠁧󠁿

gofundme.com/gwrych-castle



👤 ITV Wales Press and 7 others

10:24 AM · Jan 2, 2021 from Abergele, Wales · Twitter for iPhone

23 Retweets **58** Likes

Image 27: A representative of Gwrych Castle posting a link to the gofundme website on Twitter (22/01/2021).



Gwrych Castle
@GwrychTrust

...

Help us turn off the generators & turn on the services for the first time in 40 years!

The arrival of I'm A Celebrity has helped with urgent repair works however Phase 1 of the project is set to cost £10million so we need your help 🏴󠁧󠁢󠁥󠁮󠁧󠁿 #ThisMorning

gofundme.com/gwrych-castle



12:09 PM · Nov 19, 2020 from Abergele, Wales · Twitter for iPhone

37 Retweets **5** Quote Tweets **112** Likes

Image 28: A post on Gwrych Castle's Twitter account from November 2020 linking to the gofundme website (22/01/2021).



Gwrych Castle
@GwrychTrust

...

Did you have an annual pass for Christmas? If so, you will soon be able to enjoy views like this 🏰 🏴󠁧󠁢󠁥󠁮󠁧󠁿

We plan to reopen in Spring this year. Become an annual pass holder from just £10 by clicking the link below!

gwrychcastle.co.uk/product/annual...



1:23 PM · Jan 3, 2021 from Abergele, Wales · Twitter for iPhone

4 Retweets **1** Quote Tweet **43** Likes

Image 29: A representative of Gwrych Castle posting regarding the availability of an annual pass (22/01/2021).



Gwrych Castle
@GwrychTrust

...

The temperatures may have dropped, but thankfully we have our cosy hoodies to keep us warm! We have t-shirt & hoodie bundles available on our website for £30



Click on the link below to purchase your **#GwrychCastle** merchandise!

gwrychcastle.co.uk/product/gwrych...



1:21 PM · Jan 16, 2021 from Abergele, Wales · Twitter for iPhone

2 Retweets **15** Likes

Image 30: A representative of Gwrych Castle posting to Twitter regarding the availability of themed merchandise (22/01/2021).



Gwrych Castle
@GwrychTrust

...

A once in a lifetime opportunity to be the first to explore the **#ImACelebrity** set & behind the scenes access to the castle for the whole family!

Also included is cream tea at the castle & an annual family pass for up to five people. See more below 📱

facebook.com/donate/1046000...



👤 ITV Wales Press and 9 others

3:52 PM · Jan 4, 2021 from Abergele, Wales · Twitter for iPhone

19 Retweets **1** Quote Tweet **53** Likes

Image 31: A representative of Gwrych Castle posting to Twitter regarding a tour of the 'I'm a Celebrity' set and castle (22/01/2021).

representatives of Gwrych Castle to engage more actively with their audience online. Images 32, 33, and 34 show different methods that were used at the time that 'I'm a Celebrity' was being broadcast in the U.K. on ITV. Image 32 shows a screenshot of a post made to the Gwrych Castle Facebook account, which includes multiple pictures of a cake baked and decorated by a local cake decorator in the shape of Gwrych Castle, alongside British celebrities Ant and Dec. The post highlights how Gwrych Castle representatives supported local businesses through providing opportunities to them as a consequence of the filming. The site was positioned in its local and community context, thus resurrecting its former role as a driver of local economic activity. The post highlights two different ways in which representatives of Gwrych Castle sought to engage with their audience. Firstly, it underlines the engagement with local businesses, creating partnerships that could lead to future opportunities in hosting events, advertising events, or gaining other support and assistance. The post does this through using Gwrych Castle's significant following to highlight the involvement of a local business, therefore advertising the business to a wider audience than they may be known to. Furthermore, the post encourages other local businesses who assisted with 'I'm a Celebrity' to get in touch so that they could potentially be the focus of another post on social media. Engaging with local businesses and publicly advocating them in this way is something that is not done on social media accounts representing Welsh country houses in the periods assessed but could be a valuable method of creating helpful local links for future projects and events. Furthermore, doing so reinforces the idea of the country house as integral to locality and to place, as they historically would have been. Image 33 is a screenshot of a representative of Gwrych Castle posting images of the decline of the property partially resulting from vandalism. The images engage people in interpretation of the past emotively. The post identifies the three images as photographs of the same part of the building taken in 1985, 1995, and 1996. The photographs visually chart the decline of Gwrych Castle over time with the post drawing attention to dramatic differences in the fabric of the building being identified between 1995 and 1996. The stark differences between the photographs shared on the Facebook account engage with people emotively, highlighting the plight of Gwrych Castle partially resulting

from the vandalism, whilst going on to share a link to the gofundme website so that people could go and donate having seen how their money could assist.

Whilst Image 33 highlights the deterioration in condition of the fabric of the building over time to encourage people to donate, Images 34 and 35 use interpretation and the historical background of the site to try to raise money. Image 34 is a screenshot that shows a post made to Gwrych Castle's Facebook account which included an old photograph of the property, as well as a photograph of a person driving a car. The written content of the post identifies this person as Robert Davies, the chauffeur to the countess c. 1907. The post then goes on to share a link to the gofundme page, encouraging people to donate to 'bring [...] history back' to the property. The post indicates that those who are creating content for the social media accounts related to Gwrych Castle have access to historical research that has been conducted into the property and individuals associated with it. Based on this research, the post engages Gwrych Castle's growing audience with information regarding individuals who worked at the site. Significantly, the post also states where he lived, articulating the idea that local people – a community – was attached to the castle. It had a vibrant social and cultural life which could be resurrected. However, the interpretation in this post is brief. It offers nothing in terms of interpretation beyond the name of the person, his job title, and the year of the photograph. There is the opportunity in posts such as these to expand the detail of the post without posting an overwhelming amount of information. For example, the duties of a chauffeur during this time, further biographical details of Robert Davies, or some brief details of a trip that the countess had taken could have been beneficial in this post for further engaging Gwrych Castle's audience with the history of the property. Conversely, the interpretation offered in this post is more substantial than many social media posts assessed in this work. Gwrych Castle custodians clearly identify that there is an opportunity to utilise interpretative social media posts effectively. Image 35 shows a more engaging post created by representatives of Gwrych Castle than Image 34 and like Image 34, is also seemingly created based on research. The written content of the post begins by asking readers the question "have you ever wondered what Gwrych means?" intending to capture the attention of their audience and encouraging them to read on. The post then informs the reader about the

origins of the word 'Gwrych' before continuing to highlight examples of related symbolism to the origins that featured in the stained-glass windows at the property. The name of the site is used to reinforce the Welsh identity of the place. There are pictures incorporated into the post related to the definition offered, including images of the property and heraldic symbols. The written content of the post continues to link to an article on Wikipedia with more information, as well as the gofundme website. In terms of interpretation practice and potential on social media, this post is one of the best examples that has been assessed as part of this research. There are multiple reasons for this. Firstly, it engages with readers through a question, seeking to capture attention. The images attached to the post seek to draw people in visually. Therefore, there are multiple methods employed in this post that engage people and encourage them to read on. There are three levels of interpretation in this post. Firstly, the initial question and images capture the attention of readers. Secondly, the direct translation of 'Gwrych' in the written content provides readers with the reason they continued to read on. Thirdly, there is more information provided for those who are interested beyond the basic level of interpretation and wish to know and understand more about the origins of the word, all whilst linking it directly to the fabric of the building through original stained-glass windows. By linking to a Wikipedia article, readers can learn more. Image 35 also shows Welsh flag emojis showing consistency between representatives of Gwrych Castle posting to Facebook and Twitter to create a clear Welsh identity for the property online.

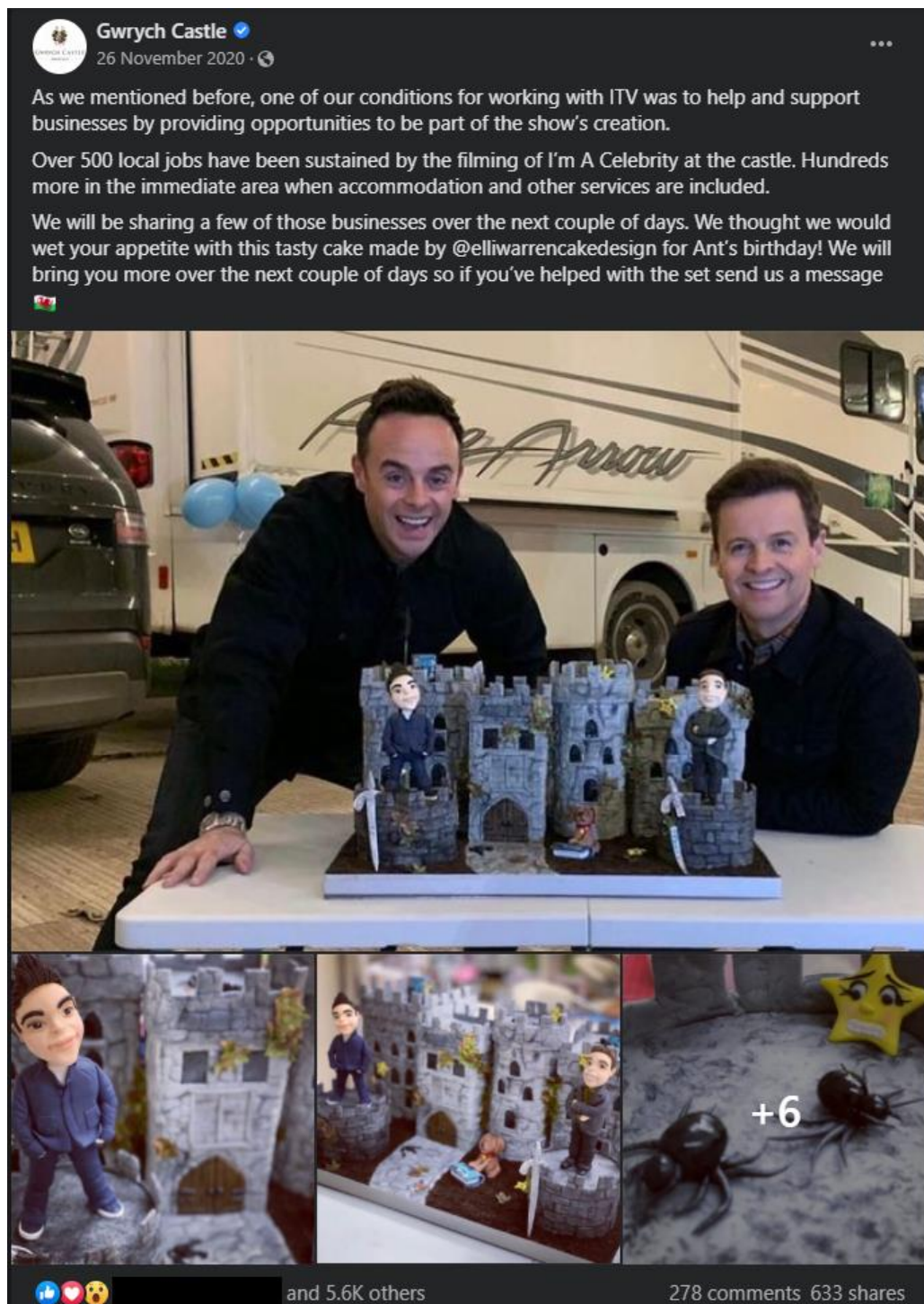


Image 32: A post made to the Facebook account of Gwrych Castle highlighting engagement with local businesses during the filming of 'I'm a Celebrity' (27/01/2021).

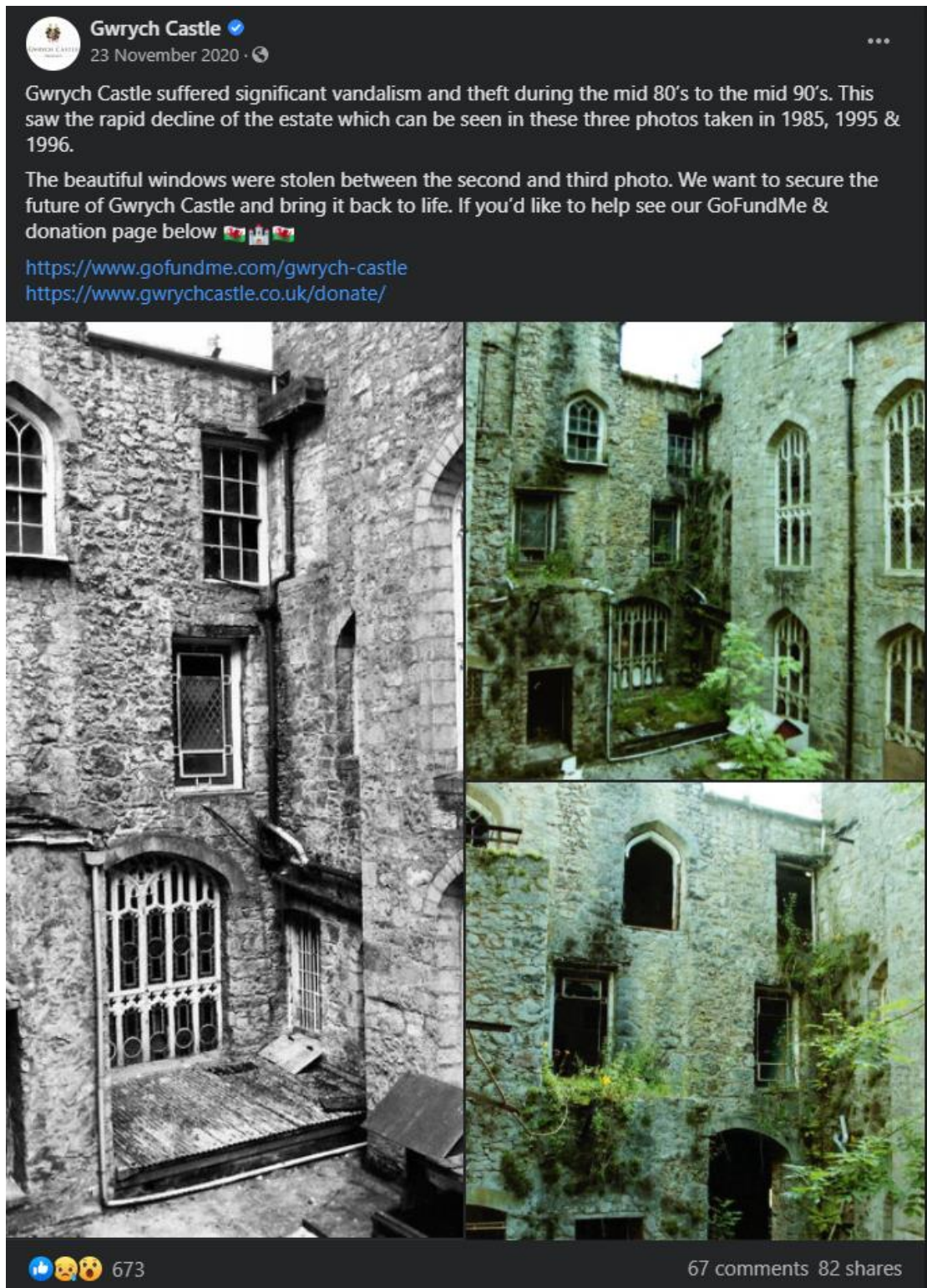


Image 33: A screenshot of a post to Gwrych Castle's Facebook page which engages with viewers emotively (27/01/2021).



Image 34: A screenshot of a post made to Gwrych Castle's Facebook account sharing two photographs (27/01/2021).

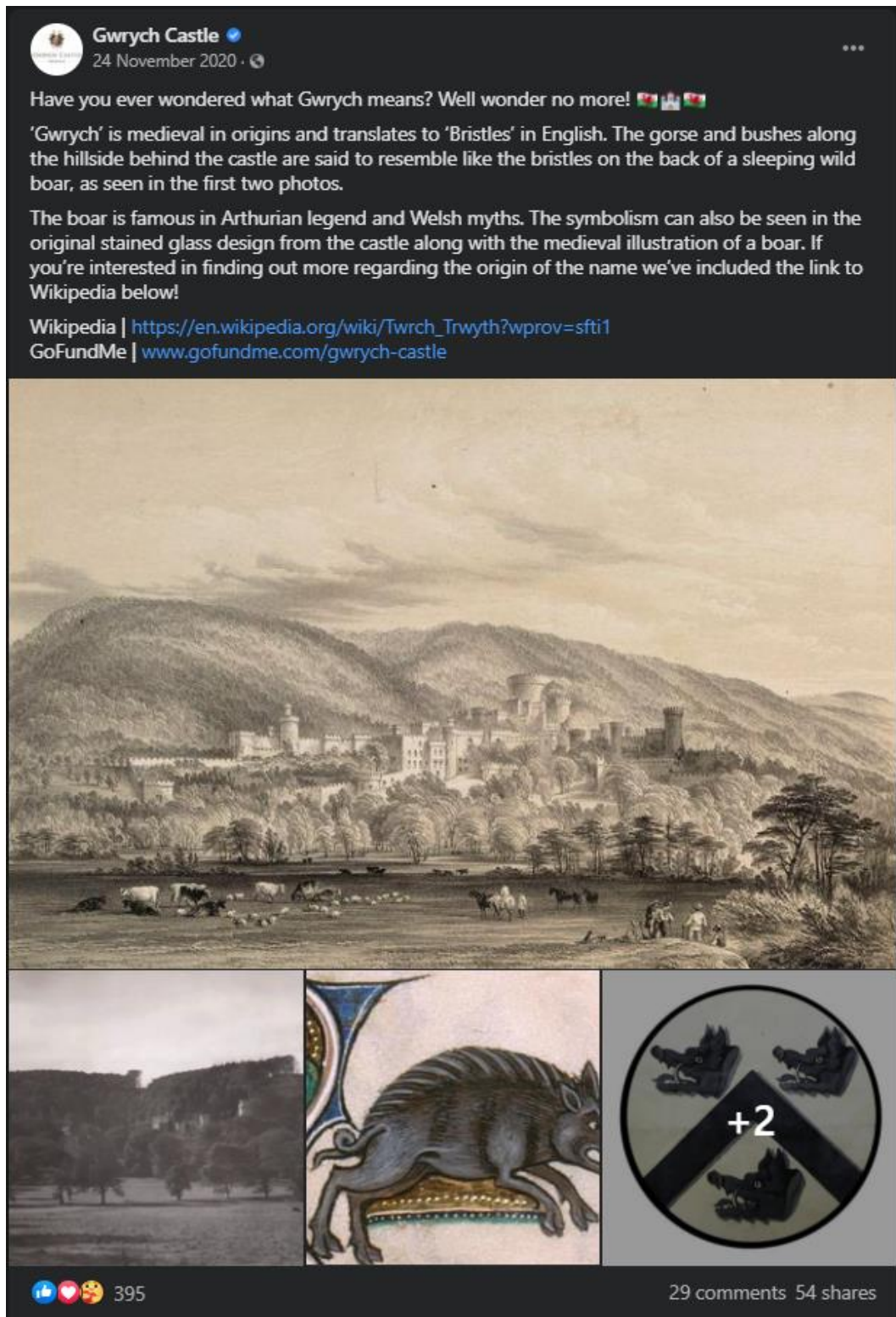


Image 35: A screenshot of a post made to the Facebook account of Gwrych Castle highlighting good practice of interpretation online (27/01/2021).

The filming of 'I'm a Celebrity' at Gwrych Castle during the coronavirus pandemic appears to have created something of a legacy for the property, judging by the online reaction. The number of followers gained by all official social media accounts associated with Gwrych Castle during the time that 'I'm a Celebrity' was filmed and aired on television rose exponentially when compared to the follower numbers of the social media accounts before the news was announced. The rise in following across social media accounts presented an opportunity to representatives of Gwrych Castle to decide how best they could make the most of this opportunity. Evidently, a balance has been struck in the posts created by representatives of Gwrych Castle based upon the objectives set out for the property. The objectives balance raising financial support with sympathetic uses of the property and the surrounding grounds. Online, the 'I'm a Celebrity' filming created a new impetus for representatives of Gwrych Castle to interpret the site to its new, broader audience through identifying the significance of the property and engaging with people, whilst also raising funds to support the future of the site. Further research over a longer period is necessary to understand the full extent that the 'I'm a Celebrity' filming has had on the property in terms of physical visitors to the site. In terms of financial revenue, the accounts and annual return documents available to the public owing to the Trust's registered charity status begin to outline the financial impact of 'I'm a Celebrity'. At the end of 2016, the Trust had received £1,972 in membership fees, which although down from £2,459 at the end of 2015 (Smith, 2016, p.8) had risen to £4,017 in 2019 (Smith, 2019, p.14). At the end of 2020, despite only being open for 5 months (Smith, 2020, p.5) due to lockdowns and filming, membership fee income had risen to £11,841 (Smith, 2020, p.13). Evidently, membership fees nearly tripled during this period, and 'I'm a Celebrity' may have significantly affected this. A comparative study in the future would be useful in understanding the lasting impacts of 'I'm a Celebrity' on Gwrych Castle, beyond pushing the rescue of the site "years ahead" (Smith, 2020, p.2) and the immediate apparent increase in membership fees.

Conclusion

Evidently, staff and custodians of Welsh country houses have different priorities relative to the needs of their business and these are reflected through the use of social media between sites. Whilst there are similarities between sites which are operated under the same organisation, for example the National Trust, there are still inconsistencies in how their social media channels are operated. This indicates that whilst there may be umbrella guidelines in place to encourage a consistent National Trust style and practice online, the differences in practice between properties are still marked. Bilingual posts, frequency of posts, and the themes of posts all evidence this. Beyond the National Trust properties assessed in this work, there are examples where guidelines have likely been followed, owing to a consistent style of post which appears to be more regulated, as demonstrated by staff at Warner Leisure Hotels, who operate a hotel at Bodelwyddan Castle. Many of the properties assessed are privately owned and accounts associated with them appear to post in a less regulated manner on an ad hoc basis. This comprehensive study of Welsh country houses on social media has highlighted that online, properties generally do not prioritise interpretation and consistently favour posting to advertise upcoming events or activities. The setting and visual appearance of the country house in Wales is frequently used to sell items, tickets for events or hotel rooms, with connections to the past being predominantly ignored and when referred to, either exaggerated or falsified. Examples of this in this work include staff or custodians of Bodrhyddan Hall, Plas Teg, and Hawarden Estate Farm Shop selling tickets for a car show, selling tickets for paranormal evenings, and selling produce respectively. It is not the purpose of this work, neither the conclusion nor recommendation that these events should not be held. Rather, it is recommended that the marketing of these events be grounded in proven historical ties to properties, with these links being effectively interpreted and communicated to engage different and new audiences in the history and significance of Welsh country houses. This can be easily achieved if research is carried out with a view to storytelling and interpretation, which could then be presented to prospective visitors, visitors, and online followers in ways that encourages people to act in a certain way. For example, creating interpretation that grounds paranormal evenings in factual events and characters, thus engaging a new

audience in the history of the building with the significance of the country house and the wider estate. There is no need to embellish the past to sell products when there is already an abundance of existing significant historical events and characters linked to all Welsh country houses, they simply require research and effective interpretation for staff and custodians of Welsh country houses to benefit from them. The benefits of doing so could include engaging new audiences, encouraging repeat visits (Pan et al, p.594), and the subsequent financial benefits of achieving this engagement through increasing ticket sales, produce sales, or paying visitor numbers either to a property or to an event or other property connection, such as gardens. A further benefit could be highlighting local and Welsh connections to build a local support base and an engaged community. Irrespective of the current function of a property, good interpretation should be in place owing to the historical significance of these sites, and many would benefit significantly from better interpretation. In considering social media as a first form of interpretation that visitors encounter, many Welsh country houses fall short of an appropriate, effective standard of interpretation. A report into the usage of social media by staff and custodians of Welsh country houses would be useful to understand the purpose of their social media accounts and websites. Furthermore, it would provide practical guidance in effectively utilising social media and websites. Such a report could feed into the creation of part of a broader interpretation toolkit exclusively relevant to Welsh country houses. This part of the toolkit could effectively develop the online presence of staff and custodians of Welsh country houses resulting from a grounding in academic research, and the influence that successful, engaging interpretation online can have. The toolkit could provide examples of best practice interpretation online and subsequently, the results of it. This toolkit would provide staff and custodians at Welsh country houses with valuable assistance if it is created in a manner that is accessible to them, but currently does not exist in any form.

The coronavirus pandemic undoubtedly altered how Welsh country houses were represented on social media. Firstly, National Trust staff responsible for managing social media channels were furloughed, leading to a drastic decrease in social media posts at National Trust sites. Although the pandemic led to increased engagement with social media posts due to more people spending longer online, staff and

custodians of Welsh country houses failed to capitalise on this in engaging their audiences with the significance or histories of their properties through meaningful interpretation. This is evidenced by Figure 15 highlighting 0% of the most popular posts made in April 2020 across all social media platforms made by all sites assessed in this work were categorised as interpretive posts. Furthermore, in underlining that a minority of the most popular posts made across all periods assessed in this research were interpretive, it is clear that people are not engaging with the history or significance of Welsh country houses through social media. There is a lack of interpretive content being posted by staff and custodians to begin with, and when interpretive content is being posted it is simply underdeveloped and ineffective as a method of engagement. Encouraging physical visitations and underlining historical significance through engaging with potential audiences online is likely to be critical to the safeguarding of the futures of Welsh country houses. Any assistance that can be offered to country house staff or custodians through an interpretation toolkit would be valuable.

WELSH COUNTRY HOUSE INTERPRETATION ACCORDING TO PUBLIC OPINION

This chapter considers the results of an online research survey (Appendix 4) with a total of 306 respondents comprising responses in English and Welsh from across Wales and beyond. The survey was designed to gain insights into topics such as the public perception of Welsh country houses, their significance, their position in relation to Welsh identity, and the future of Welsh country houses. The responses have provided a significant dataset to aid understanding of what Welsh country houses mean to people today, and to understand what people would like Welsh country houses to be in the future, and how people see the future of the country house in Wales. The structure of this chapter closely follows the structure of the survey itself, beginning with analysis of the participants, before continuing to analyse their responses on their country house visits, and finally discussing Welsh country houses in relation to identity.

Contextualising the Survey

The questions that form the survey were designed through a combination of research into what makes a country house visit, the cultural and heritage significance of these sites, their current perceived societal status, and how all of this relates to people today. The survey was trialled with a group of MA students at Bangor University who provided responses to an initial draft of the survey. Their responses provided valuable feedback which refined the final survey that was published bilingually online. It was important that the survey was available bilingually in line with Bangor University's Welsh language policy and to underline that the research was focused on the Welsh context. The survey was hosted online by Jisc Online Surveys (Appendix 4) and promoted online. The link to the survey was shared to the researcher's personal Twitter account and shared 41 times. Consequently, this Tweet was seen 19,775 times on Twitter resulting in responses from a geographically diverse demographic. To ensure that survey responses were obtained from across Wales, the survey was directly shared with historical societies such as the Cambrian Archaeological Association, and the Powys Family History Society. It was also shared by the custodians of some country houses, such as Gwydir Castle. Consequently, the places that the survey was shared most likely created a sample of people who had an active interest in the history of Wales and the portrayal of it. The survey was active online between the 25th of March 2020 and the 18th of June 2020. This was unprecedented period in the United Kingdom – where this research was geographically based – for several reasons. Firstly, the coronavirus pandemic resulted in the first lockdown measures legally coming into force on the 26th of March 2020 – the day after the survey became active online. As a result, there was an increased potential for a larger number of responses to the survey, owing to more people being at home and online with many unable to work. A form of national enforced lockdown – across Wales and the U.K. – continued beyond the 18th of June 2020 (Haddon, Sasse, and Tetlow, 2021, p.4; Welsh Government, 2020a; Welsh Government, 2020b) when the survey was closed. The lockdown restrictions also closed Welsh country houses that would ordinarily be open to visitors or customers. For example, weddings were not possible, and the number of wedding guests was later limited, thus closing many wedding venues.

Additionally, cafes and restaurants closed, having significant repercussions for Welsh country houses operating within the hospitality sector. Country houses operating as full-time visitor attractions were closed for most of the time the survey was active.

The coronavirus pandemic was not the only unforeseeable event that impacted the results of this survey. The death of George Floyd on the 25th of May 2020 in Minneapolis in the United States of America sparked global conversations on themes such as police brutality, racial injustice, and inequality. Although the Black Lives Matter movement began in 2013, the nature of Floyd's death sparked widespread international support and recognition for the movement, with protests in the U.K. beginning to take place in late May (BBC, 2020). Consequently, conversations about British historical involvement in slavery and colonialism, decolonising British heritage, and equality were brought to the forefront of public discourse, including in relation to country houses. During the Black Lives Matter protests, the statue of Edward Colston in Bristol, England, was toppled and pushed into Bristol Harbour. The statue was erected in 1895 and Grade II listed in 1977 because "the statue is of particular historical interest, the subject being Edward Colston, Bristol's most famous philanthropist, now also noted for his involvement in the slave trade" (Historic England, 2021). The statue's modern history highlights the importance of good, representative interpretation. In February 2018, Bristol City Council agreed that a second plaque should be placed on the statue acknowledging Colston's identity as a slave trader, along with the existing plaque that hails Colston as "...one of the most virtuous and wise sons of..." Bristol. Consequently, the complexities of interpretation were being discussed more publicly during this time. The reaction to slave trade legacies represented in statues and built heritage was not limited to Bristol. Around the U.K., there were statues removed and petitions launched to rename buildings, such as Gladstone's Library in Hawarden (Lamb, 2020). Also in Wales, projects have since been launched to address the Clive Collection at Powis Castle (Elliott and Green, 2021) and a portrait of Picton at the National Museum of Wales (Amgueddfa Cymru, 2021). As a result of the survey being active during this period, some responses reflect the social landscape, resulting in some thought-provoking themes and ideas that can be used to inform the futures of Welsh country houses, and to draw conclusions from this research.

Participant Information

Prior to asking respondents their opinions on matters relating to Welsh country houses, the survey requested some information about each respondent. The survey was available in English and Welsh. 273 of the 306 responses received were in English, with the remaining 33 being in Welsh. Figure 17 shows the age of all respondents, regardless of the language in which they responded. Responses from people under the age of 18 were not sought. Most respondents fall into the age brackets of 41-60 and 61-80. Possible reasons for this include these age brackets being applicable to those who may have retired, and therefore have more time to complete surveys. It could indicate that these are the age brackets that are most interested in Welsh country houses and can therefore inform decisions by identifying an aspect of the demographic of their target audiences, or it could indicate the age bracket most associated with the organisations who shared the survey. The survey identifies responses from people in the 18-30 age bracket were the third highest. This indicates that there is an interest in Welsh country houses among younger people. Although they do not form the majority of the survey responses, it shows that younger people can be meaningfully engaged in discussions surrounding country houses, and this potential bodes well for their futures. The age bracket with the lowest number of responses was over 81, most likely due to this group being less likely to be technically equipped to complete an online survey, and less likely to be reached owing to the survey being shared exclusively online due to the coronavirus pandemic. The second least popular age bracket was 31-40, perhaps due to this group being more likely to work full time, and therefore less likely to have the time to respond. Figure 18 identifies the location of respondents by country. Although most respondents were located across Wales with a significant number from England, the broad variety of respondent locations across the world underlines significant interest in Welsh country houses not only in Wales, but internationally. Multiple respondents who listed a country outside of the U.K. stated that they had previously lived in Wales. Respondents located in Wales were spread across the country, as shown by Figure 19. Responses are split almost evenly between North and South Wales if the North-South divide is drawn where Ceredigion borders Gwynedd, enabling the research to be more representative of views across

the whole of Wales. However, the post-industrial South Wales valleys are not generally well represented. This could reflect the Bangor 'hub' of the research network, or the profile of the country houses in these areas.

The final aspect of participant information that the survey sought to gather was regarding participant gender. Figure 20 shows that whilst the options respondents could choose from consisted of male, female, non-binary, or prefer not to say, most participants identified as female. Two people selected prefer not to say, and no one chose to select non-binary. Across broad spheres of research, studies have shown that those who identify as female tend to be more likely to respond to surveys (Becker et al, 2014, p.12; W.G. Smith, 2008, p.9). Figure 20 highlights that this appears to be the case in this research, with 62.09% of respondents identifying as female, and 37.25% of respondents identifying as male. The results in Figures 17-20 provide a background to the survey analysis that continues in this chapter. This section has provided an understanding not only of who has responded to the survey, which further contextualises the results and analysis, but also who a country house in Wales is for, who is interested in them, and perhaps whose requirements staff and custodians should be catering for.

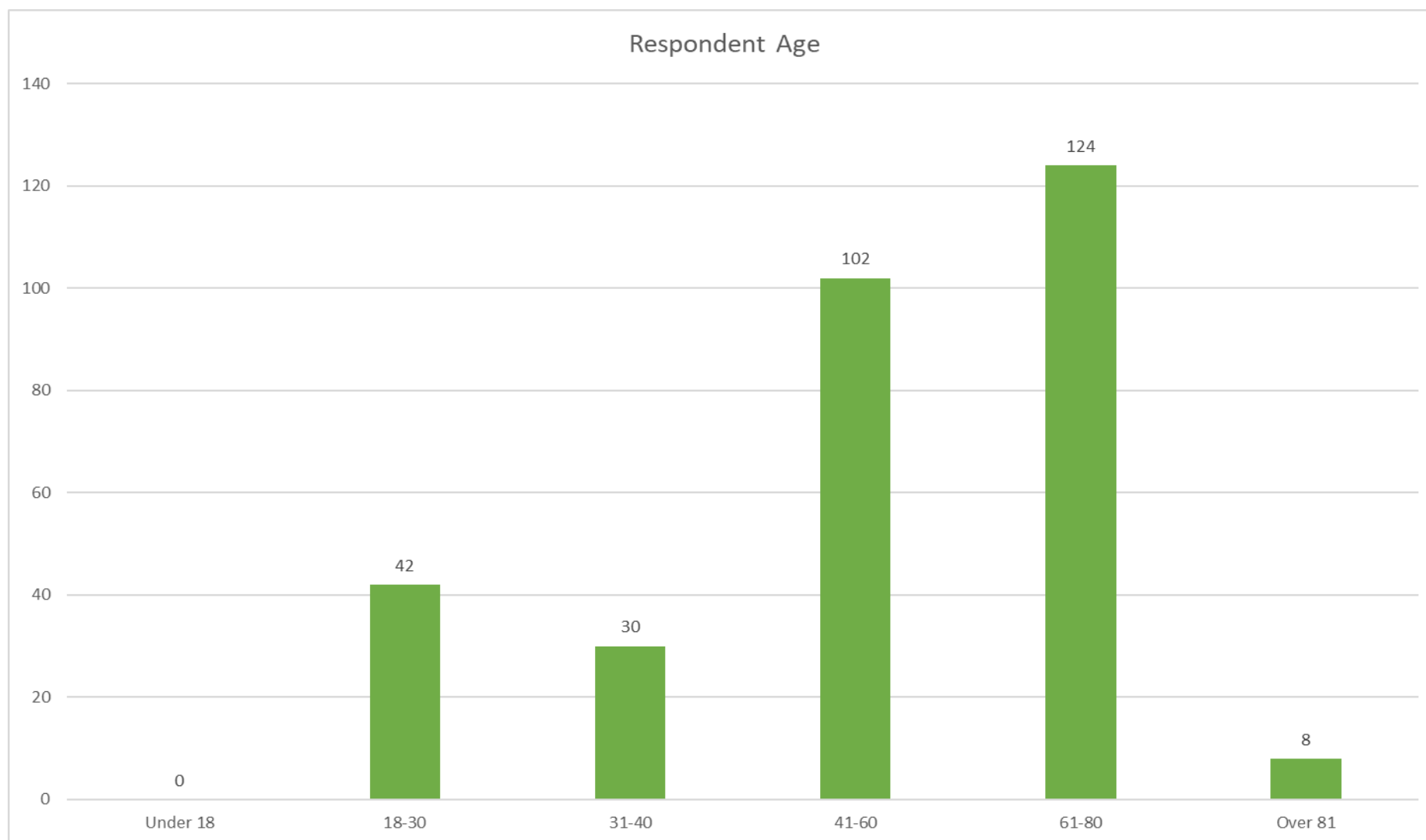


Figure 17: The age of all survey respondents.

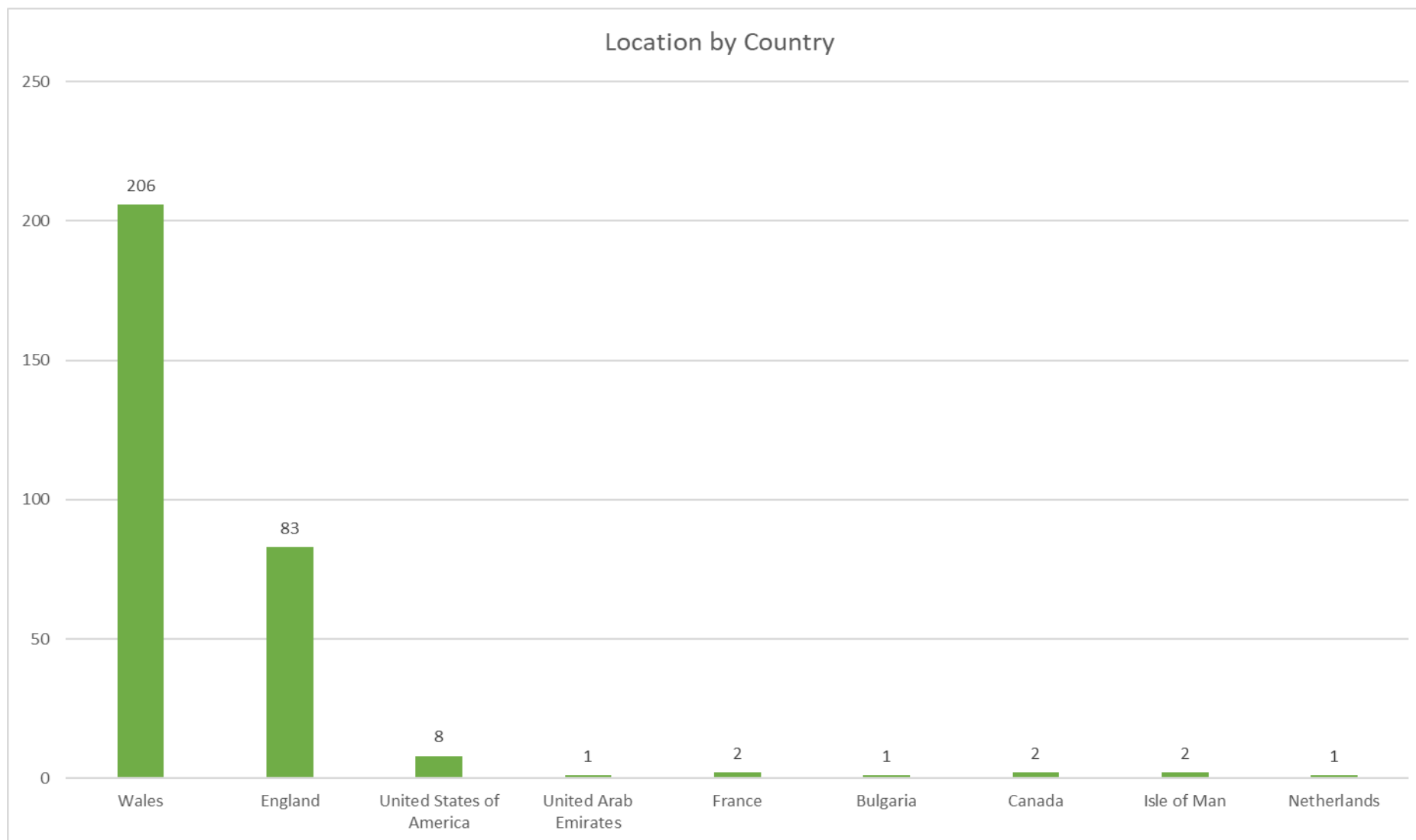


Figure 18: The location of respondents by country.

Location by Unitary Local Authority

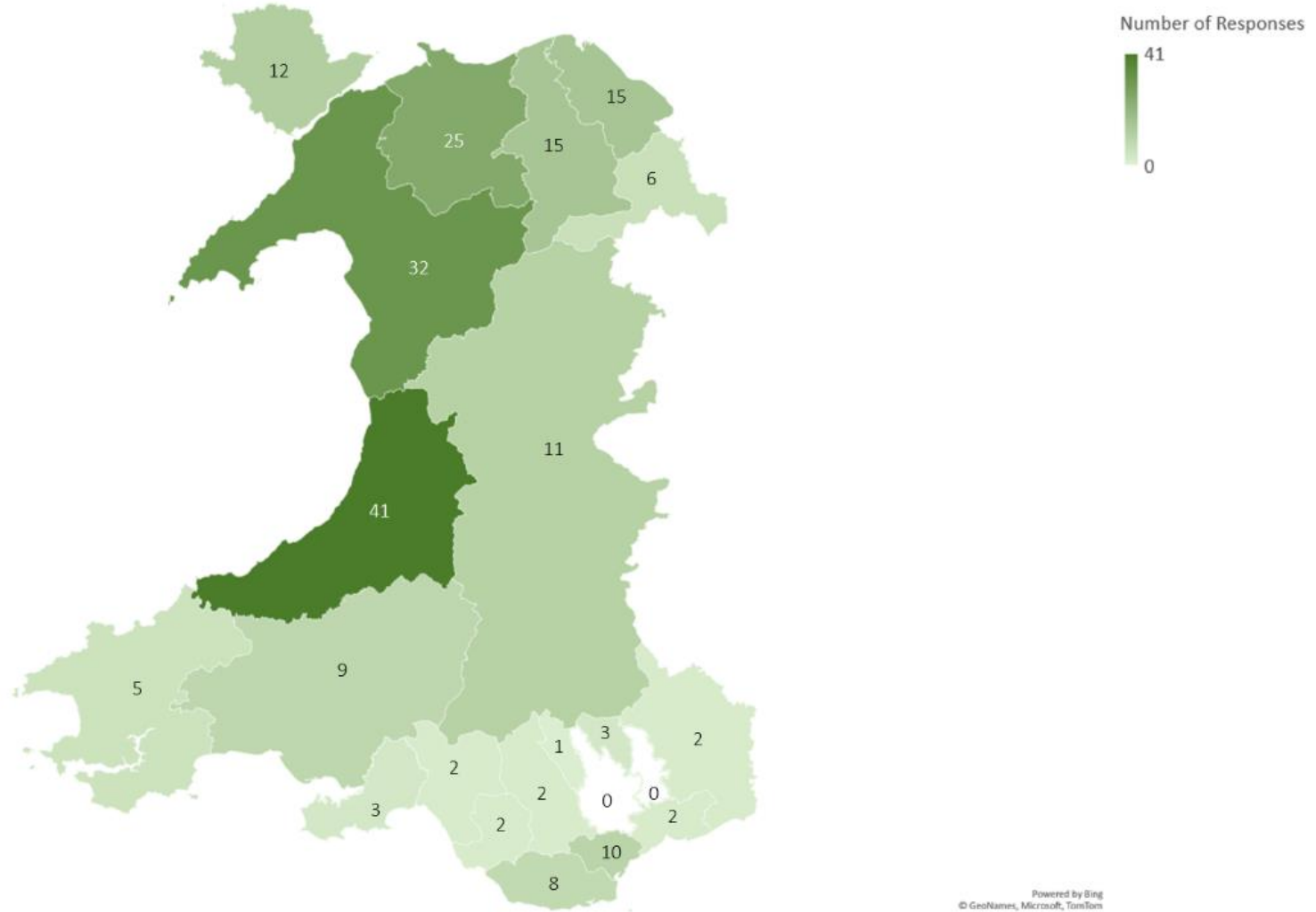


Figure 19: The location of respondents by unitary local authority in Wales.

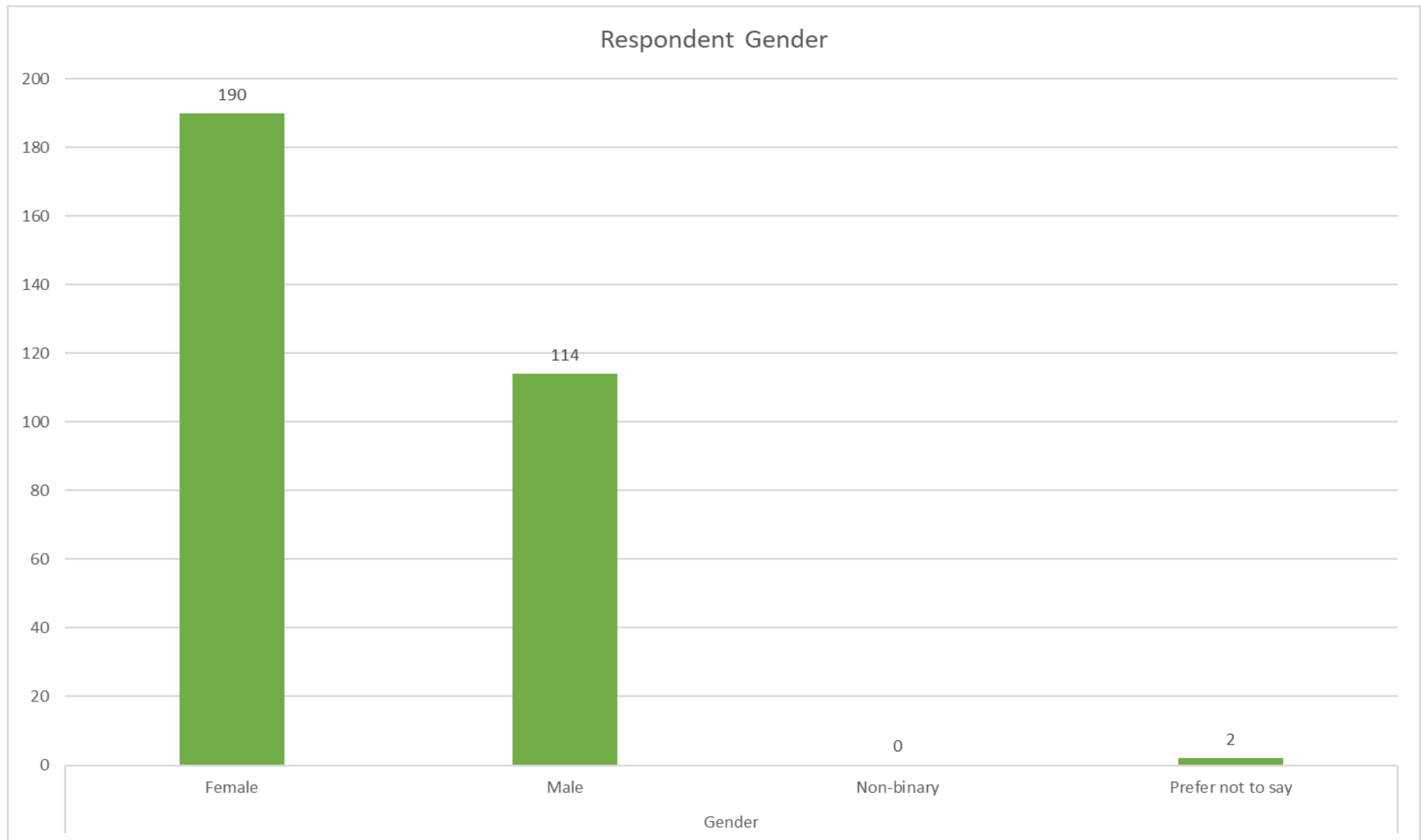


Figure 20: The selected gender of respondents.

Visiting a Country House in Wales According to Public Opinion

The survey encouraged respondents to consider previous visits they have made to a country house. In doing so, it was able to gather feedback from the public about their visits, or lack thereof. Figure 21 shows that a significant majority of respondents do enjoy visiting country houses. Considering the interpretation of Welsh country houses, this is significant, as it indicates that most visitors can be engaged with because they enjoy being there. Furthermore, it underlines the value of country houses as visitor attractions and the public desire for this. It demonstrates that they are a valued part of the cultural and economic landscapes of Wales, and there is public interest in their future. There are a variety of reasons for people to visit Welsh country houses which could account for the large number of respondents who do enjoy visiting country houses – a variety of reasons to visit would result in more people from different backgrounds with diverse interests being able to connect and engage with country houses in ways that are meaningful and interesting to them. The variety of reasons that respondents provided for visiting country houses is shown in Figure 22. The most popular reason for people was to visit a country house, i.e., to experience being at a country house as a particular cultural environment. The second most popular reason to visit was the garden or the grounds, and thirdly, to visit the café. Other reasons to visit included living there, tree planting, a paranormal evening, hunting, and singing at a craft fair. Figure 22 highlights a diversity in country house functions. It indicates that over time, many country houses have adapted in their functions. They have diversified to appeal to a broad range of markets rather than to stand simply as residences of the gentry or aristocratic class and as monuments to political or regional power and monetary wealth; or 'powerhouses'. However, Figure 22 also shows that many country houses still serve one of their initial purposes of showcasing wealth and culture through architecture and the landscaping of grounds and gardens, as people continue to seek to visit Welsh country houses for these purposes. Figure 22 is contextualised by Figure 23 in highlighting the number of country houses that respondents had visited in the twelve-month period up to the date of their survey response. Most respondents had visited either between one and three country houses, or zero. Although Figure 23 shows that most respondents had not visited more than three

different country houses in a twelve-month period, it does not account for the possibility of repeat visits. Figure 24 shows that of the 212 respondents who had visited more than one country house in Wales in the past 12 months, 110 respondents had not revisited the same country house, and 102 respondents had. Evidently, Welsh country houses are offering people reasons to return and visit again. This question was asked because National Trust staff aim to create experiences at National Trust sites that provide visitors with reasons to return, as exemplified in the 'Everything Speaks' document by the sixth principle: "Are there reasons to return?" (National Trust, 2013, p.13). The reasons that respondents offered for not visiting the same country house multiple times were varied. Figure 25 shows that there were three reasons in particular that respondents noted. The most common reason was time. Multiple respondents mentioned that they struggled to balance the time demands of their jobs with spending time as a family and visiting the same country house, although something that they wanted to do, was not feasible with their time constraints, especially if significant travel would be involved. Other reasons that respondents provided for not re-visiting the same property were similar, for example "other priorities" and "life is too short", both indicate that these could be time-based reasons in that their time is best spent elsewhere. Time constraints being the predominant reason respondents listed as being one of the reasons that they did not re-visit the same property indicate that there is little that staff and custodians of country houses can do for these people to encourage an increase in repeat visits because they are unable to alter the lifestyles of visitors. However, through events, variety in a property's visitor offer, and a changing programme of activities, staff and custodians can create reasons for people to be encouraged to re-visit and to spend their time at country houses, tying together the need to see family and friends with the desire to re-visit country houses. Figure 25 indicates that a small number of respondents identified a lack of artefact or exhibition changes and a lack of engaging presentation of history as reasons why they had not re-visited the same country house. Furthermore, four respondents stated that they felt there was no reason to go again, one replied saying re-visiting would be boring after recently visiting, and another responded saying that they did not want to in a short timeframe. These

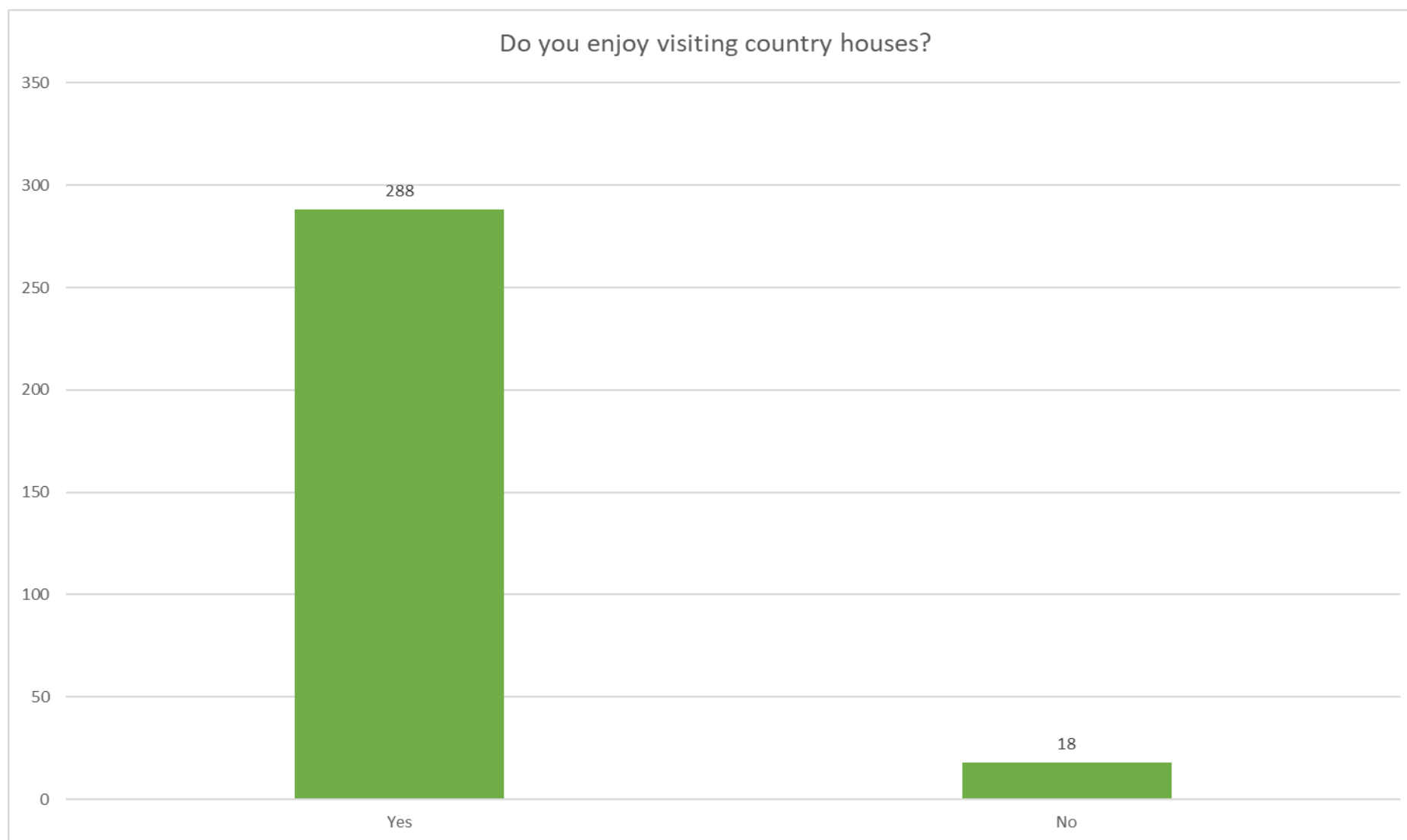


Figure 21: The majority of respondents do enjoy visiting country houses.

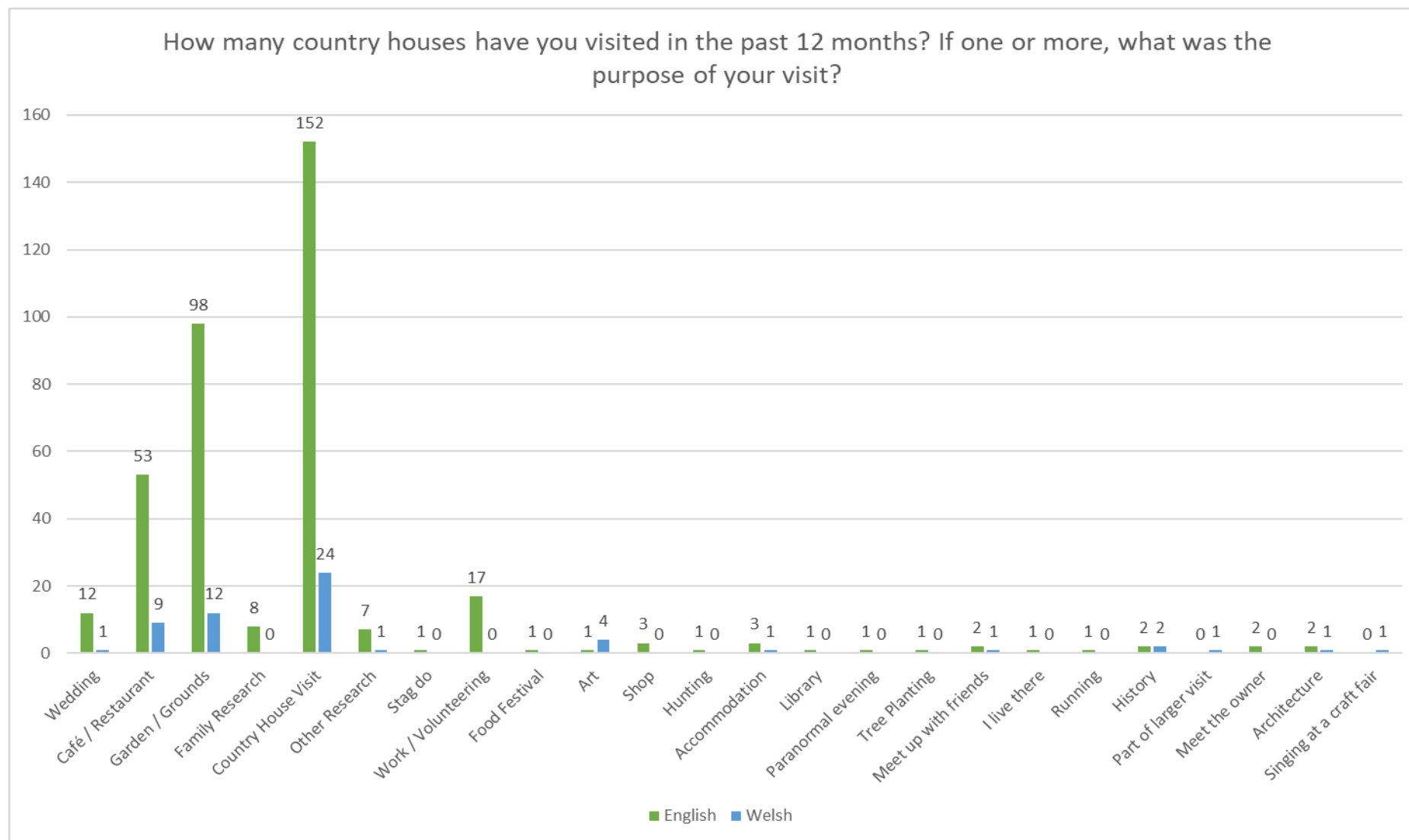


Figure 22: The variety of reasons people gave for visiting a country house in the previous 12 months.

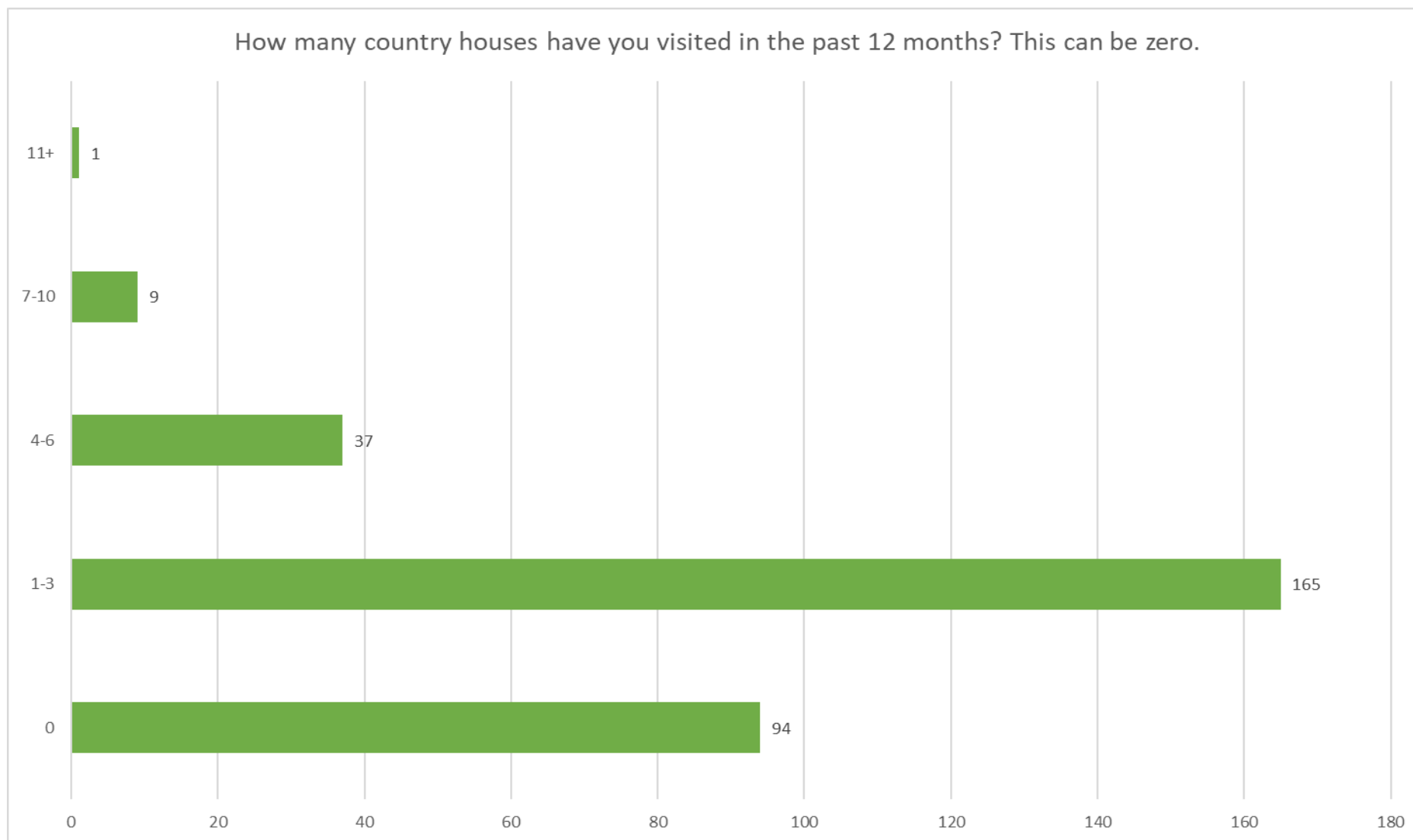


Figure 23: The number of country houses visited by respondents in the twelve months prior to responding.

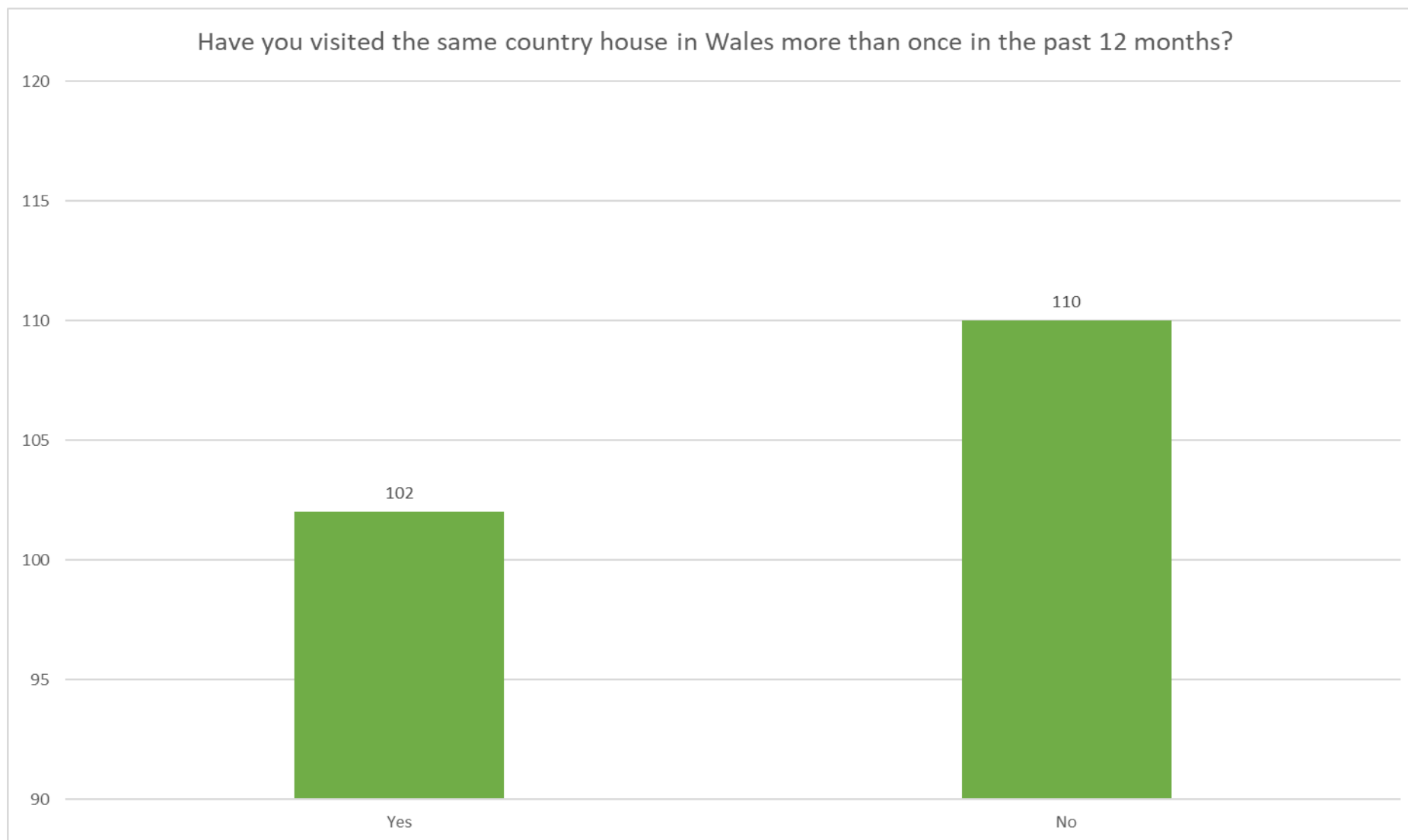


Figure 24: A graph showing repeat visits among respondents.

three reasons collectively underline the previous argument – that the number of repeat visitors that staff and custodians at any country house may attract is incumbent on a changing programme of events and there being different reasons for people to visit to ensure that one visit is not enough, as others in Figure 25 state. The National Trust's 'Everything Speaks: Seven working principles for interpretation' (National Trust, 2013, pp.13-14) booklet allows for this in two of the seven principles. Firstly, the sixth principle asks, "are there reasons to return?" encouraging National Trust staff to keep "regularly updating and refreshing what you present" through sticking to the overarching Spirit of Place principle, often changing the interpretation of their sites on a seasonal basis to reflect changes not only in nature through different plants behaving in different ways in the gardens and grounds of country houses, but also in the seasonal demographic shifts in visitor cohorts. Welsh government statistics assessing tourism in Wales between 2017 and 2019 show that the monthly volume of tourism day visits taken in Wales peaked in August for the years of 2017, 2018, and 2019. The quietest month in all three years was January (Welsh Government, 2020c, p.9). Due to the lengthier school holidays, there is an increase in families who visit at Christmas and in the summer. Spring and particularly Autumn visitors are more frequently made up of older demographics looking to travel outside of the busy school holiday periods. Therefore, interpretation at country houses in the Spring and Autumn may be less often designed for children, whereas interpretation during the summer and Christmas holidays might have a range of options of activities, exhibitions, and events that are aimed towards families to encourage them to return in that period, as the National Trust's sixth working principle for interpretation encourages. The seventh working principle asks, "are we stretching and surprising people?" In trying to ensure that all visitors with different backgrounds and levels of expertise are surprised by something and can connect with an element of a country house or a story associated with it, this principle also seeks to offer a reason for visitors to return by attempting to create an impactful experience that visitors want to repeat or want to experience with someone else, as exemplified by one respondent who had visited a country house to show it to her accompanying Argentinian friend. Collectively, the National Trust's sixth and seventh working principles for interpretation underline the significance of high quality,

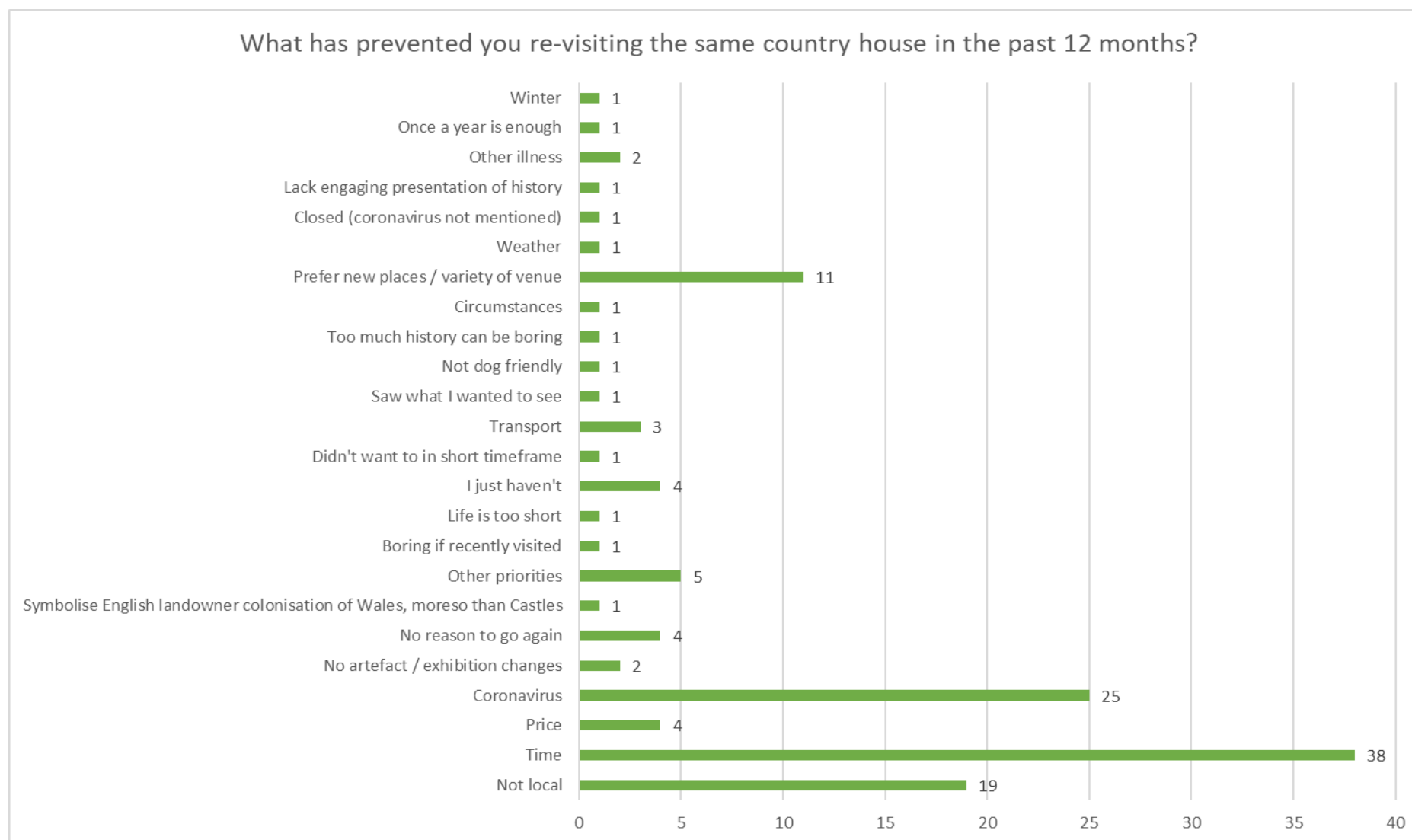


Figure 25: The wide variety of reasons highlighted by respondents for not re-visiting the same country house.

informative interpretation not only in communicating the historic significances of Welsh country houses, but also in making them financially sustainable by appealing to visitors in different ways. However, although these principles exist, they do not ensure repeat visits at National Trust sites. One respondent who enjoys visiting country houses to further his understanding of history had visited Penrhyn Castle but did not re-visit citing a “lack [of] engaging presentation of history”. Being a National Trust managed property, the staff at Penrhyn Castle have the ‘Everything Speaks’ booklet available to them for guidance, but this respondent evidently feels that he was not stretched or surprised and that there were no reasons for him personally to return. Later in his responses, he stated that digital interpretation and experiences such as virtual reality, audio, and film as well as information about everyday lives of house and estate employees are the most important aspects of his country house visits. He considered events and activities such as tours or workshops as being one of the least important aspects of his visits. When asked what he would like to see from country houses in the future, he stated that he wanted to see “more interactive displays/staff”. Collectively, this indicates that he enjoys digital interpretation methods which are often more costly and time-consuming for staff and custodians to design, implement and maintain. Furthermore, they can be intrusive, disrupting the “authentic” experience that many visitors seek when they visit a country house. These responses show that whilst staff and custodians of Welsh country houses can put in place strategies to encourage repeat visits, not every visitor will become a repeat visitor owing to the variety and numerous reasons that respondents to this survey have provided for not doing so.

The next most common reason respondents provided for not repeat visiting a country house was the coronavirus and associated lockdowns. This is perhaps surprising because the survey was open for responses between the 25th of March 2020 and the 18th of June 2020 suggesting a willingness to revisit but an enforced inability to do so. However, whilst lockdowns across the U.K. were in effect for much of this period, those who responded to the survey in April would have been subject to lockdown restrictions for, at most, one month of the previous twelve. Respondents who undertook the survey in June would have been subject to lockdown restrictions for a maximum of three months of the previous twelve

months. Therefore, lockdowns accounted for a relatively small portion of the period in question yet featured as one of the main reasons in the responses as why they did not re-visit a particular country house in Wales. Undoubtedly, coronavirus and associated lockdowns provided a barrier to potential visitors of country houses in that visiting was not feasible due to closures, vulnerable people had to shield, and there were enforced travel restrictions. However, it is possible that although lockdown would certainly have been the primary reason at the time for not re-visiting, it would not have been the reason in the nine months prior to this period, and there must have been other reasons that are perhaps listed in Figure 25.

The third most common reason that people stated as being the primary reason they did not re-visit the same country house was that they do not live locally to the property that they visited. This reflects the diverse nature of respondent location shown in Figures 2 and 3. For example, the respondents visiting from outside of Wales or the U.K. would be unlikely to re-visit a country house if they had initially visited as part of a holiday or a trip to visit family and friends. Likewise, respondents located in England, particularly border counties such as Cheshire, may have travelled to a country house in Wales for the day, and therefore less likely to repeat their visit if a longer journey is involved to do so. Transport was referred to three times within the total 306 responses. Transport issues are different to not living locally in that a person can live locally to a country house but still have difficulty in accessing it if they do not have access to a car. This is due to the often rural and isolated nature of Welsh country houses making it challenging for people to access the property if they do not drive. There may be public bus routes near to the entrance of the surrounding grounds, but rarely to the house itself. These responses, although in the minority, raise important questions regarding the physical accessibility of Welsh country houses. There are a wide variety of possible barriers that people face when they are considering a visit to a country house. Figure 25 highlights some of these. Finding solutions to these barriers is, in some cases, simply unfeasible. For example, the weather was the reason that one respondent did not re-visit the same property. From the perspective of staff or custodians of Welsh country houses, there is nothing they can do to alter this beyond providing shaded or sheltered areas beyond the country house for visitors. Some National Trust operated sites such as Penrhyn

Castle close if the wind speed is particularly high due to the increased possibility of falling trees or branches in the grounds, thus possibly disrupting a planned return visit. Another stated that winter had prevented them from returning to a country house. Many country houses such as Bodrhyddan Hall (2023) open only on a seasonal basis and are closed for the winter months, perhaps explaining why winter prevented a return visit. There are a variety of reasons that staff and custodians of Welsh country houses choose to open their properties or grounds on a seasonal basis. Some choose not to open their properties regularly, or at all, instead offering occasional open days either of the grounds or the house itself including the Gladstone family at Hawarden Castle, who permit occasional access to the Old Castle situated within the grounds. Several properties open on an open day basis as part of Historic Houses 'Invitation to View' events (Historic Houses, 2023), or Cadw's 'Open Doors' events (Cadw, 2022). Some National Trust properties are only opened seasonally to ensure that properties and collections receive the appropriate attention to their conservation and maintenance needs. Plas Cadnant and others open seasonally because the gardens are the primary reason that people visit, and the flowers do not bloom in winter. This also reflects the seasonality of Welsh tourism, with summer being particularly busy and November to January, except Christmas, being very quiet (Welsh Government, 2020c, p.9).

Another physical barrier that respondents referred to was illness other than coronavirus, either illness that they themselves were suffering from or that family members were suffering from, and they were offering them care and support. This underlines that there are barriers to visiting country houses and re-visiting properties that staff and custodians are unable to remove. Moreover, 11 respondents stated that they prefer to visit new places rather than re-visit sites they have been to before. Clearly, this is a personal preference that may not be easily changed. It emphasises that offering multiple reasons for people to visit again and altering the offering where possible to provide new reasons to visit, are valuable methods of encouraging repeat visits. The remaining responses were referred to by few respondents but are nevertheless no less significant in contributing to the understanding of public perception of the country house. One response offers an

interesting insight into public perception of Welsh country houses. Shortened in Figure 25 to better visualise the data, the original full response read:

Nid ydynt yn perthyn i fy hunaniaith Gymreig i ac yn hytrach yn rhan o feddiannu Cymru gan dirfeddiannwyr a bonedd Lloegr. felly i mi maent yn arwydd o'n gwladychu gan genedl arall, yn fwy felly na'r cestyll am ryw reswm od. *(they do not belong to my Welsh identity and are rather a part of the occupation of Wales by English landowners and gentry. Therefore to me they signify our colonisation by another nation, more so than the castles for some strange reason.)*

In later responses questions, this person clarified that they had visited Penrhyn Castle for a meeting. The response does not divulge why they chose not to re-visit Penrhyn Castle because they may not have visited initially without the meeting. However, it shows that Welsh country houses occupy complex positions in relation to the identities of people. The respondent indicates that for some people, country houses can be challenging sites for them personally. Many country houses were either built or inherited by families who identified very strongly as being Welsh and, in some cases, promoted Welsh lineage and heritage to enhance their social standing. Despite this, the respondent states that they see country houses as being symbols of English colonisation in Wales and more so than the castles of Edward I that were built as symbols of oppression and conquest. This indicates a possible lack of understanding regarding the historical identities of Welsh country houses – something that could be addressed with effective interpretation at sites. It is also possible that this sentiment has been established because of country houses standing as symbols of active political and social power far more recently than the largely ruinous medieval castles of Edward I. Moreover, it meshes with two of the most profound and often competing strands in the political character of Wales. Firstly, labour politics, with its opposition to social and economic hierarchy and perceived exploitation and struggle of working-class communities. Secondly, Welsh nationalism, which defines Wales in opposition to England and Englishness. Overall, Figure 25 identifies a range of reasons why people have not re-visited the same

country house in a 12-month period, whilst beginning to introduce complex feelings and understanding of issues related to the country house in Wales and identity.

Figure 26 shows that the reasons people did not visit a country house in Wales at all are similar to the reasons that people did not re-visit displayed in Figure 25. There are, however, marked differences between Figures 25 and 26. Firstly, although a lack of time is still considered to be a popular reason for respondents not visiting Welsh country houses, it is no longer considered to be the most significant factor. Figure 26 shows that most respondents stated that not living locally to a country house in Wales was the main reason they did not visit. One respondent who lives in America stated that although they do not live locally and therefore did not visit a country house in Wales, they “visit Gwydir Castle each day on Facebook”. This highlights the value of social media and an online presence for staff and custodians of country houses in creating a positive, engaging ‘virtual’ visitor experience. Furthermore, it underlines the significance of the research presented in the previous chapter of this thesis outlining the benefits of an effective online presence. Some respondents expanded upon this, stating that due to not living locally, they did not have the time to travel and the cost of doing so was too expensive in their circumstances. In many cases, there was not a sole reason that respondents did not visit a country house in Wales, there were multiple, hence the variety. Coronavirus and associated lockdowns were mentioned by multiple respondents as well as not living locally because lockdowns and closures had cancelled their travel plans. Beyond the responses highlighted across Figures 25 and 26, there are reasons that people have provided. One respondent stated “I feel them to be the mausoleums of repressive and exploitative oligarchs” expressing their antagonism towards the social class of person who built and owned these properties. Along with them being referred to as symbols of English colonisation in Wales in Figure 25, these two responses demonstrate that the reasons that people do not visit country houses are varied and can be complex. This illustrates that country houses impinge on people’s sense of identity in both positive and negative ways. To some, country houses act as monuments or symbols to something that they disagree with – in this case colonialism and the aristocratic social class. Figure 26 identifies reasons that people have not visited a country house in the 12 months prior to their response. One

respondent stated that the reason they did not visit a country house in the 12 months prior to their response was because he “wasn’t aware of their existence”. It is not clear if he was unaware of their existence throughout Wales, or if he was unaware of where his nearest country houses are that are open to be visited. He stated that he is “interested in the history of Wales” and that with better advertising, he could be encouraged to visit. He proceeded to explain his earlier assertion: “Location! Finding new ones to visit for recreation is hard” hence indicating that better advertising, or the successful application of a marketing strategy can put country houses on the map for these respondents.

Collectively, the responses presented in Figures 25 and 26 identify reasons that people either choose not to visit Welsh country houses or choose not to revisit them. The coronavirus and associated lockdowns highlight the unique context within which this research was undertaken and was a common response. However, other responses offer more general insights into why people do not visit or revisit Welsh country houses. Some reasons relate to the individual personal situations of respondents, such as illness, other priorities or circumstances. Others are specific, complex reasons which relate to an individual’s identity and their perceptions of country houses, and the reasons for their existence. These perceptions can create boundaries that are difficult for country house staff and custodians to overcome. However, the responses suggest that a varied programme of relevant and meaningful events and interpretation can begin to engage people in discussing these boundaries. The purpose of these engagements should not be to deny or justify aspects of country house histories that are controversial such as colonialism and the slave trade, but to acknowledge them and to address them whilst educating visitors about them and perhaps also opening a dialogue with visitors along such themes. Other boundaries were also listed by respondents, such as the physical barrier of geographical distance from their house to a country house in Wales, or because they have limited physical mobility and if they do not have access to a car, the rural setting of country houses makes it difficult to visit. Economical boundaries such as the cost of visiting, which is not limited to the cost of admission but also the cost of travel as well as the cost of accommodation, provide a substantial barrier. To an extent, this reinforces the view of a country house being built by and for

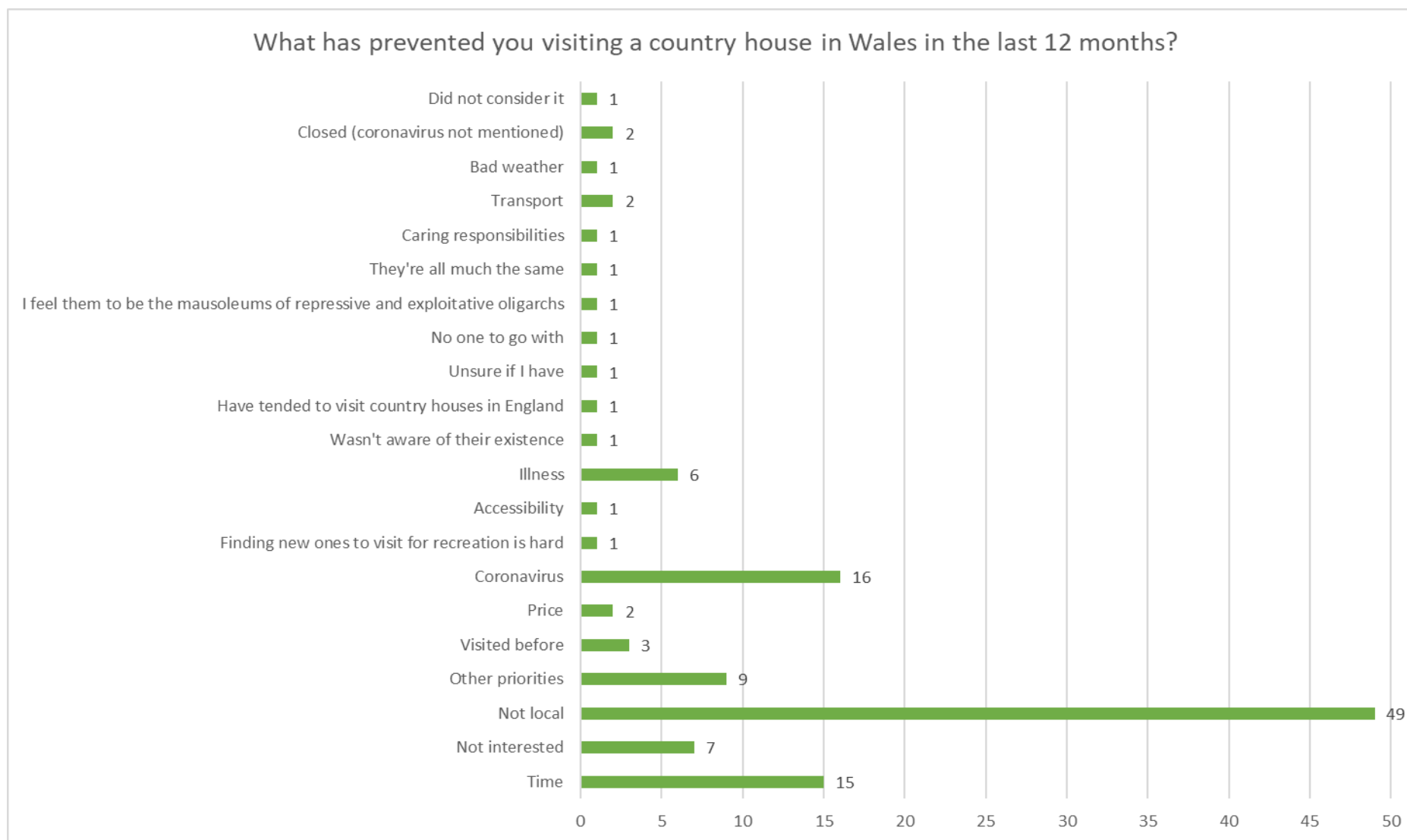


Figure 26: The reasons respondents gave for not visiting a country house in Wales in the previous 12 months.

wealthy people. Whilst the context surrounding these properties has shifted over time, they are often still only accessible to those who can afford entry. In hindsight, this survey did not specifically ask about the pay barrier and any impacts of it.

The survey sought to identify reasons that would have encouraged respondents to visit a country house if they had stated that they had not done so. Figure 27 presents these responses and again, highlights a diversity of answers. The most common response was in support of a variety of events. This is an umbrella term used to combine responses that people gave, for example concerts, cinema screenings, festivals, historic re-enactments, craft and skill displays, and market days. It underlines the suggestion from previous responses that people will visit and re-visit country houses if there are new and different reasons for people to do so that appeal to different audiences. Country house interpretation and visitor experience cannot be static, nor should they be viewed as indivisible. The two are connected, or should be, to provide a visitor with a more engaging, worthwhile experience. Furthermore, these responses indicate that some country house visitors are not interested in the properties themselves or their associated histories if they are visiting for other purposes. To some, contemporary offerings identified in this work as part of the 'Visiting Virtually' chapter such as ghost tours devalue the significance of country houses and are seen to be insensitive to their histories and therefore should not be pursued. However, country houses have been at the forefront of exploring new technologies such as different methods of heating or lighting. Their owners were usually incredibly wealthy, with desires to explore the latest fashions, trends, and technologies. Country houses were cultural hubs – centres of exploring the latest political thought, literature, music, and art for centuries. Furthermore, they were often used as settings to entertain guests. These buildings were never static and always adapted to the demands and fashion of the time. Therefore, it is not far-fetched for different, new events such as ghost tours to be hosted to reach new audiences, with the primary aim being to raise an income to maintain and preserve the property and surrounding grounds. However, ensuring that events or activities are relevant either to a particular associated history of a country house or a contemporary value encourages visitors to engage with that history or value, and may lead to gaining their support through a future repeat visit

or other means, such as a membership. The second most popular response shown in Figure 27, having been asked if anything could have encouraged them to visit a country house, is 'no'. Some people are not interested in country houses, and there is nothing that staff or custodians could do to encourage them to visit. Whilst the feedback from these 13 people is valuable in considering how country houses are interpreted by some members of the public, it is evident that they form a minority in the sample size of this survey. People who have no interest in any aspect of a country house in Wales are not the target audience that staff or custodians should be spending time and money on trying to reach, when this survey has identified so many interests and passions that people want to explore at Welsh country houses which can be used to interpret sites to and for a variety of audiences. Several of the other answers provided by the respondents refer to the focus of country house interpretation and the delivery of country house interpretation. For example, some considered the focus by responding that they wanted to see interpretation of themes such as "acknowledge and discuss slavery/colonialism", "more information", "below the stairs interpretation" among others. Respondents also considered the delivery of interpretation, stating that they wanted to have themes interpreted to them through these mediums: "exhibition", "behind the scenes", "more interactive and relatable to wider audiences", "self-guided trails/maps for adults showing highlights". Similar responses listed in Figure 27 refer to country house interpretation and that the improvement of it, a variation of it, or more of it would encourage them to visit a country house. This highlights two key points. Firstly, that high quality interpretation can encourage a greater number of visitors and is considered important by people. Secondly, interpretation can be delivered in numerous ways such as exhibitions, behind the scenes tours, collection displays, audio guides, and other methods. Different methods of delivery can engage visitors with the multitude of subjects which historically converged on a country house dissecting varied topics such as slavery and colonialism, country house employees such as servants, and others beyond those mentioned by the respondents shown in Figure 27. Together, these points combine to illustrate the importance of interpretation at country houses in Wales and the role that it can play in engaging audiences and safeguarding their futures. Interpretation can achieve this through meaningful on-site visitor

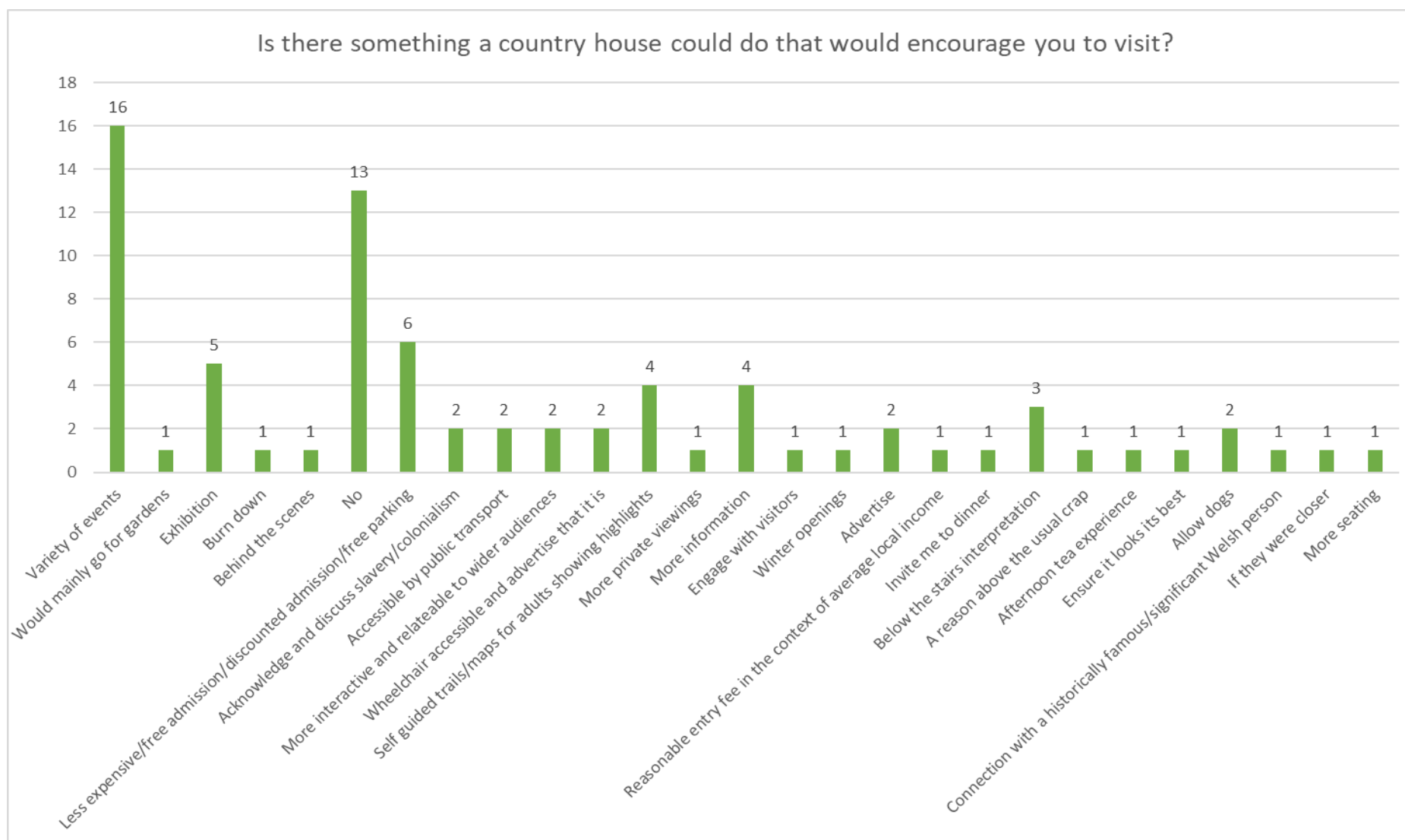


Figure 27: Suggestions made by respondents of potential country house offerings that would encourage them to visit.

engagement, education, provocation as mentioned by Freeman Tilden (1977) in his pivotal interpretation work and more recently demonstrated at National Trust properties through an interim report to engage with the legacies of colonialism, the slave trade, and empire (Fowler et al, 2020).

Figure 27 also emphasises some of the boundaries listed by respondents in Figure 26. The most common of these was the financial cost, either of admission to a country house or of parking charges associated with visiting. Some of these respondents offered solutions to this boundary, which included degrees of lowering the cost through free parking, reduced admission, or free admission. These responses indicate a lack of awareness of schemes such as Heritage Open Days (Heritage Open Days, 2020) or Cadw Open Doors (Cadw, 2021) where free or discounted admission is available on set days at selected Welsh country houses annually. It is likely unsustainable for owners and custodians of Welsh country houses to offer discounted or free admission all year owing to the vast maintenance and repair costs accrued by large, old buildings which admission fees help to cover. For example, Invitation to View days for Brynkinalt cost £18 (Brynkinalt, 2023) whilst Mostyn Hall charge £5 per person with net proceeds going to local charity (Mostyn Hall, 2022). On the 29th of July 2020 a press release was published to the National Trust website stating that the charity was expected to lose up to £200 million in 2020 “as a result of the pandemic” due to “almost every aspect of its income” being affected (National Trust, 2020h). The press release also highlighted that £124 million of projects had either stopped or been deferred. Collectively, these figures illustrate the necessity for National Trust operated properties to generate income to recover from the pandemic. Consequently, it is most likely unfeasible in the current climate from a financial perspective for more frequent free or discounted admission than is already offered through existing schemes such as Cadw Open Doors and Heritage Open Days. Furthermore, there is often free access to country house grounds, for example at Erddig and Chirk Castle. Schemes such as these which scrap admission fees increase visitor numbers at sites on the dates that they are held due to the removal of the financial barrier to access. This has been proven at sites in the past such as museums sponsored by the U.K. Government’s Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) enabling them to open with no admission fee, which

“undoubtedly led to significant increases in visits” (Cowell, 2007, p.222). With more people entering, a higher commercial income would be expected for example in a shop or café. In 2003, IPSOS MORI produced a report which found that 47% of respondents who had visited museums and galleries stated, “they will spend more on different aspects of their trip to a museum or gallery than they would have done when they had to pay for admission” (Martin, 2003, p.8). However, it is not guaranteed that these schemes would increase the normal paying visitor numbers enough for the commercial income to make up for the lost admission fee income without a similar sponsorship to that of the DCMS and several museums, many of which are based in London. The ability to host regular discounted or free admission days at sites is dependent on the extent to which sites require the additional income from charging admission fees to paying visitors, and as demonstrated through underlining the National Trust pandemic losses and requirement to recover, many sites cannot afford not to charge admission fees.

The survey also sought to establish people’s attitudes towards the histories, current status, and potential future use and significance of Welsh country houses. Figure 28 underlines the historical influence that people believe Welsh country houses to have exerted. In total, seven people responded that Welsh country houses have had no influence on any matters. This is a firm minority of respondents. Most respondents believed that Welsh country houses had influenced local affairs and played their part in Welsh history. Furthermore, around two thirds of respondents believed that Welsh country houses had been influential in British history and one third of respondents believed that country houses exerted an influence in global history. Figure 28 shows that fewer respondents believed that country houses had exerted influence beyond the local, particularly in global spheres. Figure 28 could also identify the extent to which interpretation at Welsh country houses has been successful, suggesting that interpretation has succeeded in informing visitors about historic local significance and involvement. However, when discussing global matters that Welsh country houses have links to, for example Empire, colonialism, and the slave trade, interpretation has not made the same impression on people, therefore they do not believe that Welsh country houses have influenced any aspect of history globally. Consequently, Figure 28 identifies an area of interpretation that Welsh country

houses can target for improvement. Achieving this public understanding of global country house connections and significance in Wales is important because it can contribute towards ensuring that these properties are significant into the future. Figure 29 shows that 289 of all 306 respondents consider Welsh country houses to have an important role to play in the future of Wales, whilst 17 do not. This highlights an opportunity presented to house owners and custodians around Wales to ensure that the buildings, collections, and grounds are used effectively to play the role that they have the potential to fulfil in the future. Respondents had the opportunity to explain why they chose their responses shown in Figure 29. A common response from those who believed that country houses do not have an important role to play in the present and the future of Wales believed that Welsh country houses have no bearing on Wales's future because they are left over from a time that has passed, representing social systems no longer in existence. These responses present what is a commonly held yet narrow view of everything a country house has been and is, which could be addressed with effective interpretation. It implies that country houses were lived in and are not currently when most in Wales are privately owned. Additionally, it does not acknowledge that country houses were and are large employers. Although now staff are often employed in teams such as marketing, events, admissions, retail, food and beverage and other teams rather than footmen and servants or maids. One of the 17 respondents in Figure 29 stated that industrial and town histories render the histories of country houses irrelevant to most of the Welsh population. The owners of Welsh country houses also owned significant land that formed their estates, often renting out land and buildings to local tenants. Many landowners also owned local industries and some built towns so that their employees could live closer to their places of work. Consequently, many were intricately connected to the historical development of urban centres across Wales. Welsh country houses are not important today or into the future at the expense of industrial or town histories but are important together with these and aspects of history which, ultimately formulate the identity of people and place in the past, and in future generations. One respondent stated:

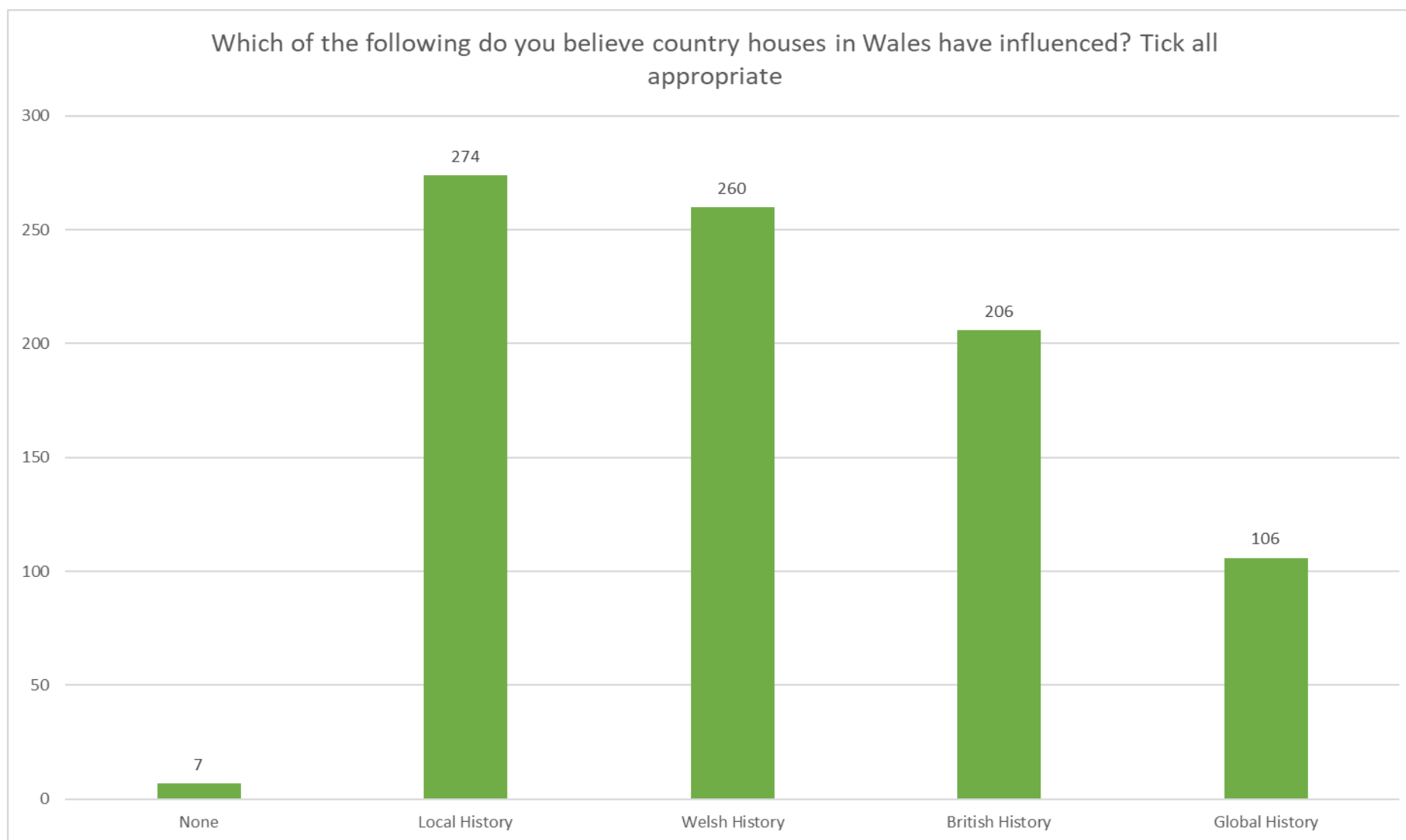


Figure 28: The perceived extent of influence held by a country house in their histories by respondents.

I do not want them completely written out of the script but their often-sanitised accounts of their function and place in Welsh life and history should tell the truth.

This statement indicates that this respondent would believe Welsh country houses to have an important role to play in the future with more accurate interpretation of their historic functions and roles in society. Many of the responses given by people explaining why they believe Welsh country houses do not have an important role to play in the future underline why effective interpretation of country houses is necessary. There appear to be common misconceptions about what the people who owned country houses did, why they were built, and how they have impacted upon society and culture. These misconceptions can be addressed with effective interpretation to ensure that they do play an important role in the future. This interpretation needs to accurately outline historical influence and significance, rather than presenting an embellished celebratory view, in a way which connects with the social and cultural history of Wales. Other responses to this question reflected opinions of the respondents. Some believed that Welsh country houses do have a role to play in tourism or educating people about architecture and the historical class system, but do not see these as important aspects of life. This point also relates to others made by a minority applying the historic significance of country houses to their current and future roles. One respondent stated that they do not believe Welsh country houses to have an important role in Wales's present or future because the "wealth and architecture of these houses are at odds with current Wales being one of the poorest countries of the 28 in the European Union". Wales received £375 million annually under former EU arrangements aimed at helping poor regions (BBC, 2021). The respondent's understanding of Wales being financially poor relative to the rest of Europe is important. The reputations of country houses as extravagant, wealthy bases for the upper classes do not align with their understanding of Wales. This has materialised politically with Wales voting Labour for over a century. Moreover, it underlines the role of interpretation at Welsh country houses in that it can be used to connect with audiences of different backgrounds and doing so would ensure that country houses do play an important role beyond tourism and education in the future. It is true to say, as some respondents did, that country houses were

built for and by the wealthy: the gentry or aristocracy. However, large parts of country houses were built for working-class people – in some cases entire wings of country houses were purpose-built for servants to work and live in. More significantly, the estates associated with these places connected them intricately with virtually all parts of wider society. Clearly, there are significant links between country houses and working-class people, families, and communities that can be used in property interpretation to connect with people of varying backgrounds. National Trust operated Erddig provides an example of this, presenting insights into servant life through portraits, poems, and access to areas such as the kitchen and stables. (Waterson, 1980). A final common response to the question considered in Figure 29 was that people did not consider them to have important roles to play as the question was worded but could see how Welsh country houses could be used to educate visitors about architecture, how the gentry and aristocracy used to live during certain points through history, as well as the historic class system. These respondents simply did not view these as important aspects of society. It is and it can be the role of interpretation at these sites to make the connection between these aspects of society and the identity of a person to establish these

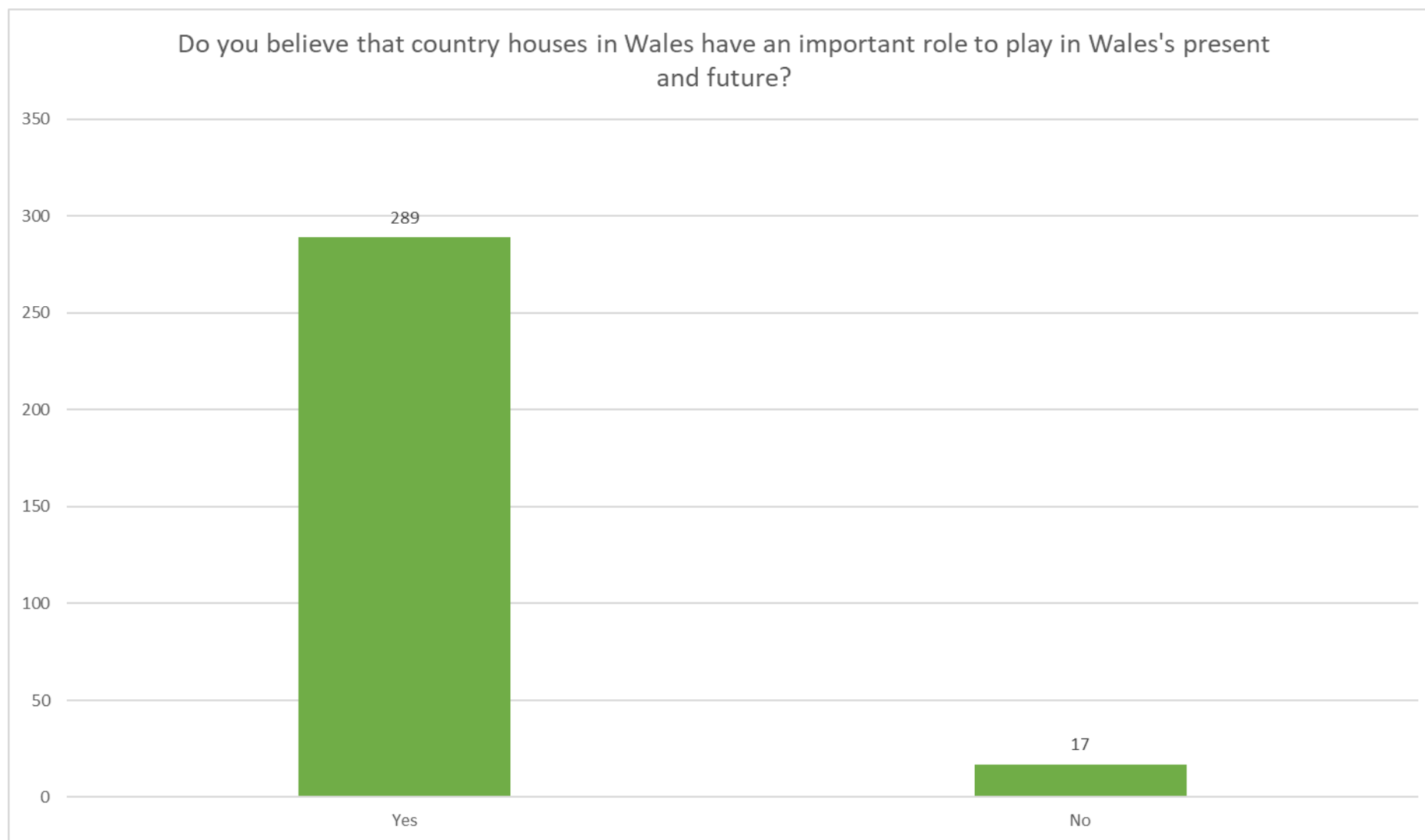


Figure 29: A majority of respondents believe that country houses in Wales have and will have an important role to play now and in the future.

properties as sites that do have important roles to play in the future for these respondents who currently do not see the value in them. Interpretation should move beyond the traditional 'Treasure House' image based on the landowning family, architecture, and art, to embrace the multitude of narratives attached to the country house. These include but are not limited to farming, mining, politics, popular protest, forestry, and literature.

The survey continued by asking people whether or not their opinions towards country houses or their country house visiting habits had been influenced to any extent by any form of popular culture. The popularity of television shows such as *Downton Abbey* being credited for a 'Downton Boom' (Cox, 2015, pp.112-119) in country house visitor numbers were also considered to have an effect on country house interpretation, with Cox's concluding paragraph in his review article considering the effects of *Downton Abbey* and popular culture on curatorial culture considering this to be a cause for concern:

This drive towards diversification could be interpreted as a threat to the core purpose of the country house as traditionally understood in academic and curatorial circles. If the visitor is no longer inspired by great art, architecture, and the real histories of the estate, then what marks out a country house visit from a visit to an amusement park? (Cox, 2015, p.119)

Despite the identification of a 'Downton Boom', Figure 30 shows that the majority of respondents believe that they have not been influenced by any aspect of popular culture. Of the 117 respondents who believed that they had been influenced by popular culture, 32 of them specifically named *Downton Abbey* as one of the influences. This indicates an assumption made by respondents that *Downton Abbey*, set in England, represents experiences at Welsh country houses. A majority of 85 people listed other books, films, television shows, groups on Facebook and a variety of other influences. Although *Downton Abbey* was the most commonly named in the responses, it forms a small part of the overall responses. However, the second most common response was *Pride and Prejudice*, which was referred to 12 times. Figure 31 shows the most popular forms of popular culture that the respondents referred to in the survey. It underlines that people's feelings and country house

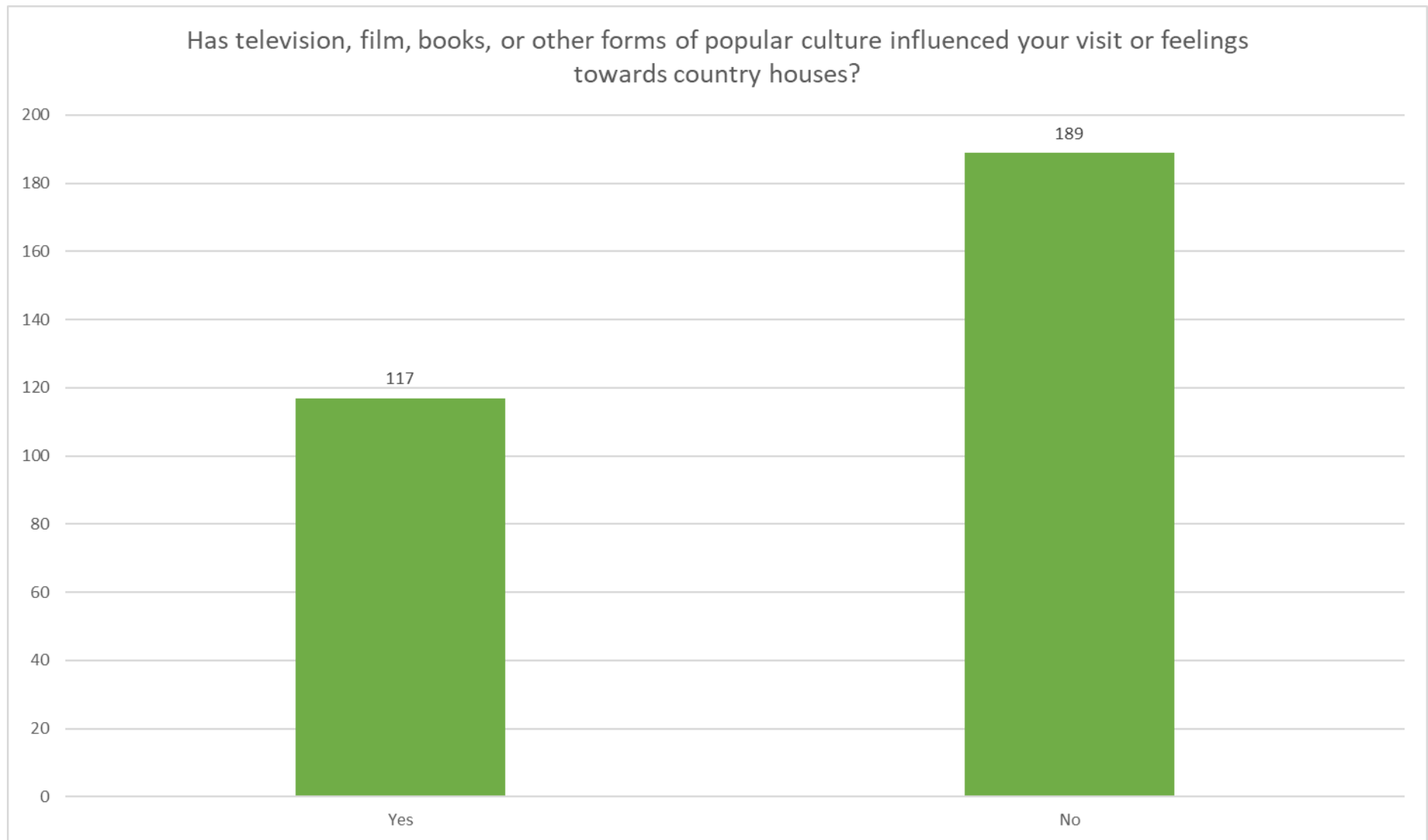
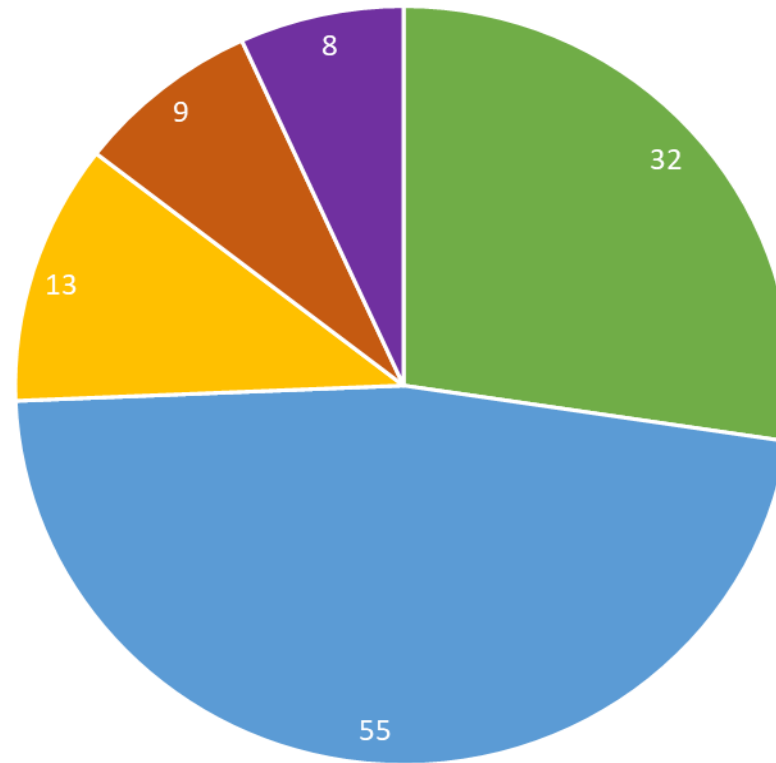


Figure 30: The majority of respondents believe their opinions towards country houses have not been influenced by popular culture.

Most popular forms of popular culture influences on respondents' country house visits or feelings



■ Downton Abbey ■ Other ■ Pride & Prejudice ■ Castles in the Air ■ Jane Austen

Figure 31: Charting the 'Downton Boom' in Wales.

visits are influenced by a broad scope of popular culture, and that Downton Abbey is by far the most dominant form that people have been captivated by highlighting that there was a 'Downton Boom' beyond visitor numbers rising. It is important to note that this data was captured before 'I'm a Celebrity' was filmed at Gwrych Castle, and before 'Lady Chatterley's Lover' was set at Brynkinalt. It is logical for the interest in Downton Abbey to be reflected where relevant and appropriate at associated sites to entice people to visit, therefore raising monetary income and subsequently being able to fund maintenance costs and improvements whilst attempting to engage visitors in aspects of the building's history or significance. Whilst Downton Abbey was filmed at Highclere Castle in Hampshire, England, there are numerous examples of country houses being used for filming or as the setting for a book, for example 'Watchmen' was filmed partially at Penrhyn Castle in 2019, 'I'm a Celebrity: Get me out of here' being filmed at Gwrych Castle in 2020 and 2021, and Judy Corbett's book entitled 'Castles in the Air', which features in Figure 31, written on the subject of the acquisition and restoration of Gwydir Castle. Since the filming of 'I'm a Celebrity' at Gwrych Castle, the show has featured prominently in the physical and online interpretation of the site, through paid behind the scenes tours and other experiences after 14.3 million viewers tuned in to the series launch (ITV, 2020). Comparatively, the final episode of Downton Abbey received around 7 million viewers (Szalai, 2015), and Watchmen has received around 7 million views per episode (Porter, 2019). Downton Abbey is a regular feature of interpretation at Highclere Castle, but Watchmen has not yet featured in the interpretation at Penrhyn Castle. Evidently, Cox feels that presenting popular culture at country houses as interpretation turns the country house into an amusement park. He consequently believes this to be damaging to the traditionally understood core purposes of a country house, and the masking of the 'real' site history. Popular culture does not have to be interpreted at country houses at the expense of art, architecture, or estate histories; it is not a binary choice. This discussion further highlights how multi-layered interpretation can be used to connect with and engage different audiences on a variety of topics, spanning popular culture and how it relates to the country house historically. Figure 30 shows that the overarching crux of interpretation at country houses need not reflect an aspect of popular culture.

This is supported by Figure 27, where no respondents specifically identified the presentation of popular culture in interpretation as something that would encourage them to visit a country house. Instead, they identified a variety of events and exhibitions that could be used to interpret the spaces and collections of country houses in new and different ways. Of the 189 respondents in Figure 30 who stated that they believed their feelings towards country houses or their country house visiting habits had not been influenced by popular culture, Figure 32 shows that a small majority of these had still engaged with popular culture relating to country houses through watching films or television shows, reading books, or other media. Therefore, whilst they may not have been influenced, they still hold an interest that they want to engage with in their own time and through different mediums. This underlines the importance of interpretation, to ensure that it is effective in telling stories and underlining their significance to harness this evident interest.

The survey continued to explore visiting a country house through attempting to understand what respondents believed to be the most important aspects of their visit – things that they would ordinarily look for and things that would make them want to visit a country house. The intention behind this question was to ascertain how important respondents believed interpretation to be, with the hope being that they could rank twelve options in order of most to least importance. The options included different themes of interpretation as well as other aspects of a standard 21st century country house visit, such as the gardens, shop, café, and collections. Using Jisc Online Surveys to design, host, publish the survey, and collect data was not a user-friendly method of collecting data using this style of ranked question. For the respondents, the layout was confusing, and it was not clear what the question was trying to achieve. From a design standpoint, it was not possible to ensure that users selected a response for each of the twelve options without making this section of the survey less user-friendly. Consequently, rather than having a dataset of 306 to draw upon, the dataset varies between 294 responses and 304 for each option because respondents were ranking each of the twelve choices from most to least important, with one being the most important and twelve being the

Have you watched or read anything related to country houses?

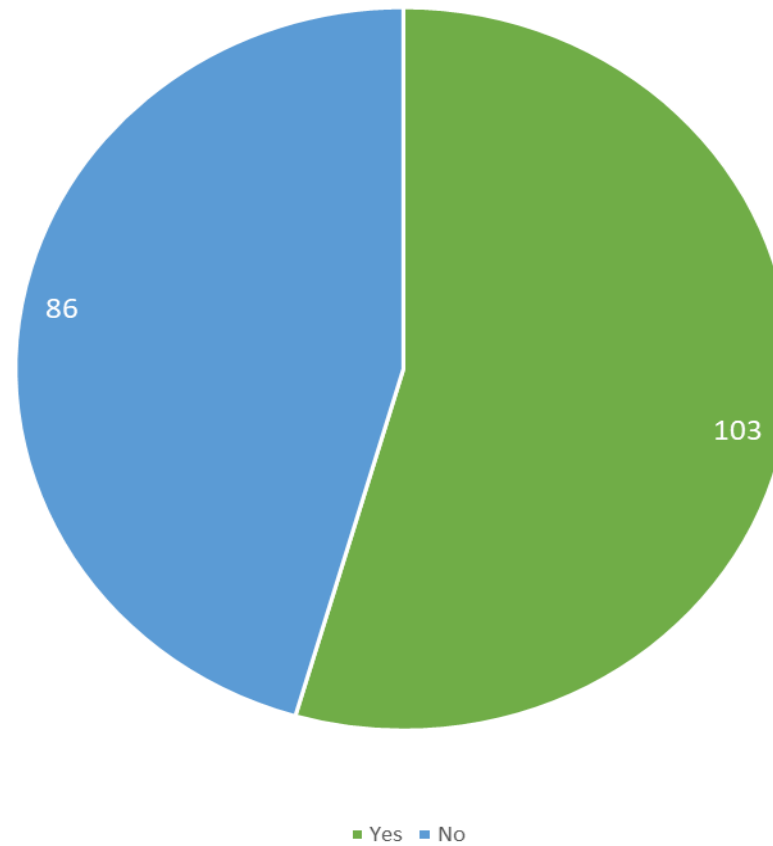


Figure 32: Of the respondents who believed they had not been influenced by popular culture; a small majority had still engaged with it.

least important. Rather than selecting them in order from one to twelve, respondents could select all twelve options as the most important, or not select any at all. The design and accessibility issues of this section of the survey are reflected in the analysis, in that it is not possible to clearly identify a simple chronologically ordered twelve from most to least important. It could be done based on the number of respondents who selected each option as the most important of the twelve, but to do so would not reflect options that may not have been voted as the most important but were consistently selected towards the top end of the scale. Figure 33 shows that it has been possible to visualise the data resulting from the choices of the respondents. 'Most Important' represents values 1-3, 'Quite Important' represents values 4-6, 'A Little Important' represents values 7-9, and 'Least Important' represents values 10-12. The graph shows that many respondents considered multiple aspects of their prospective country house visits to be the most important. However, four of the twelve categories received over 200 people believing them to be most important. These are 'information about past and present house owners', followed closely by 'information about house and estate employees (servants)' as well as 'gardens' and 'architectural information'. With the exception of gardens which would have been designed alongside a country house and altered, updated, and maintained over time, all of these would form modern subjects of interpretation at country houses. This further demonstrates that when people visit country houses, they not only look specifically for interpretation particularly on the themes of servants, owners, and architecture, but this is something which actually encourages them to visit – heritage interpretation is central to the visitor experience, rather than an add on. Figure 33 shows that the largest number of respondents who selected 'quite important' did so regarding events and activities, which are often used as a method of delivering interpretation. This indicates that people want to see and engage with events and activities, but the overarching interpretation themes and content at a country house is more important. 'Conservation information' also scores highly in Figure 33, further showing that interpretation is a key feature of a country house visit. These results are also applicable to country houses that operate as hotels, restaurants, or other functions, and therefore present opportunities to develop interpretation as part of business development. Figure 33 shows that 'digital

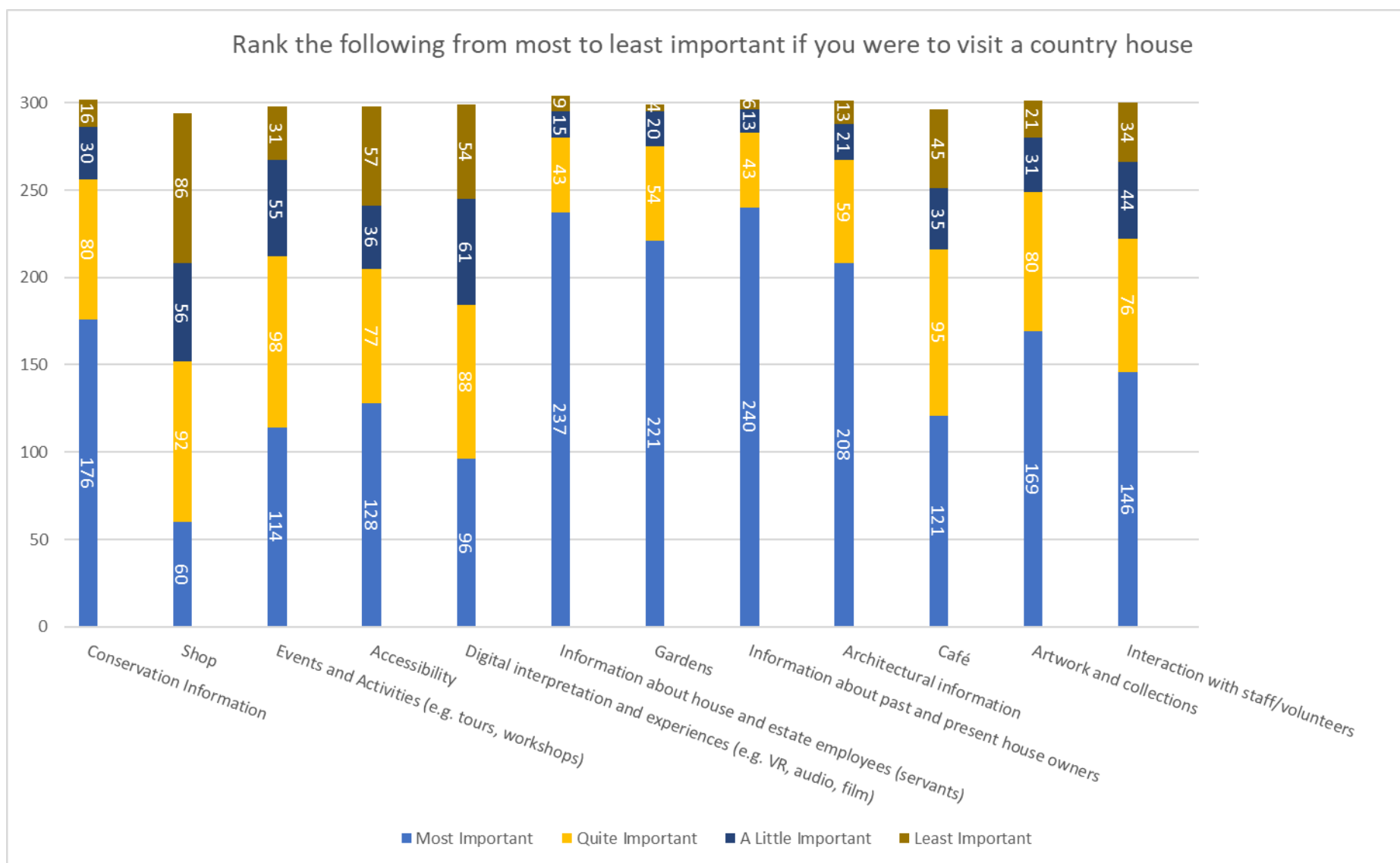


Figure 33: Respondents tended to view interpretive elements of visiting a country house as the most important to them.

interpretation and experiences (e.g. VR, audio, film)' scores much lower than any other interpretation-based option. Interpretation does not need to be expensive or complex to appeal to visitors. It can be cost-effective and accurately introduce a range of topics in an engaging manner for it to be valuable. The digital interpretation option is the third most popular selection in the 'least important' range, further indicating that digital interpretation is not a necessity for people when they are looking to visit a country house. The least important aspect of visiting a country house as identified by respondents in Figure 33 is a shop. At country houses, shops can be important because they offer another method of generating income that can support the financial requirements of the property and estate for maintenance and preservation. However, they are not important to visitors relative to other aspects of a country house visit. Despite this, they are a necessity for many country houses to generate additional income to the extent that some sites such as Gwrych Castle have opened online shops to make the most of commercial opportunities, especially when the coronavirus pandemic closed country houses and consequently their attached shops to visitors. Figure 33 was also possibly influenced by the context that the survey sat within, in that gardens scored especially highly, receiving the lowest 'least important' score of any option. The survey was carried out during periods of lockdown as a direct result of the coronavirus pandemic. Gardens, parks, and wider estate grounds were some of the first recreational spaces to reopen to the public in the United Kingdom, perhaps placing a larger importance on open outdoor spaces for people. The survey was also conducted in spring and early summer, a time of year where gardens tend to be in bloom and therefore open, as many are seasonal to visit, so perhaps more in the thoughts of respondents as a result. Evidently, all respondents identified country house gardens to be important aspects of their prospective visits, along with interpretation of information pertaining to servants and owners. Interpretation of a country house does not need to be about the property or its collections but can incorporate other elements such as gardens. Figure 33 can aid country house owners and custodians in structuring their visitor offer. For example, the respondents were less interested in conservation or architecture information than they were about information related to people, and less interested again in artwork and collections. This is a significant finding, highlighting a shift in country

house interpretation from 'treasure house' – a building used to display collections, to 'story house' – a site used to deliver interpretation and tell stories relating to people and places. Often, these stories relate to individuals which this research shows connect and engage with visitors. Figure 33 indicates that respondents would be more interested in collections being used to express narratives that relate to people, rather than presenting them as treasures in their own right to be admired. Previously, the National Trust has trialled removing objects at properties in its care in favour of telling the stories of people. In 2015, then National Trust Director General Dame Helen Ghosh stated that there was "so much stuff" (Hope, 2015) in country houses which was simply distracting and overwhelming for visitors who were not able to fully appreciate standout pieces, thus reducing their overall impressions of their visit. As a result of this experimental approach, there was criticism levelled at the National Trust suggesting that removing objects in this temporary interpretation trial was 'dumbing down' the visiting experience. Ben Cowell, then in the position of Regional Director for the National Trust in the East of England, wrote that "there can be no progress in the field of country house interpretation unless we are open-minded to the possibility of experiment" (Barker, 2015). The stories of artwork collections and the stories of individuals or families are not interpretive themes that need to be mutually exclusive. This research has identified that there is a desire for narratives that relate to people, but an appetite for information related to artwork and collections remains. Artwork and collections in country houses can be used to achieve both, through constructing narratives about people with collections.

Accessibility was considered by 57 respondents to be the least important aspect of their prospective country house visit – the second least important aspect after the shop. To these 57 people, rather than suggesting that accessibility is not an important aspect of visiting a country house, it perhaps suggests that these respondents do not have physical access needs that they personally need to consider when they visit a country house. Ensuring that country houses are accessible as possible to as many people as possible is a critical aspect of securing their futures, with which the 128 people who believed accessibility to be one of the most important aspects of their prospective visits must agree.

The largest surprise that Figure 33 presents is the importance that respondents placed on the presence of a café at a country house. Most respondents identified a café at a country house as at least 'quite important' if not 'most important' as part of any prospective visit. This indicates that a café, or a similar space is a key part of the country house offer. Ultimately, Figure 33 reflects the reasons why people visit country houses and reflects their visiting habits. People visit country houses expecting differing extents of interpretation on a variety of topics but are particularly interested in stories relating to people – possibly because these are stories they might more easily connect with on a personal, individual level. This further underlines a shift toward exploring people-centred narratives and histories, and away from traditional architectural or art histories. They believe that art and collections held at country houses add something important to their visit, and that a walk around the gardens is among the most significant reasons to visit country houses. Before they leave, they visit the café, to reflect on everything they have seen whilst visiting, but also for refreshment. Country houses are often situated in isolated locations with little alternative provision for refreshment locally. Therefore, with little competition, country houses can offer a facility for refreshment and create what is seen as a 'country house experience'. This is the country house visit as identified by the respondents, of which interpretation indisputably plays a significant role.

Once respondents had completed the ranked question in the survey, they were provided with an opportunity to make comments on the choices they had made and asked if there was anything else that was not mentioned that they consider to be especially important when they visit a country house. Of the total 306 respondents, 166 chose to utilise this function, offering an incredible variety of insights. A vast amount of these responses directly referred to the interpretation of country houses, either on the topic of interpretation techniques or content. Despite it being the most selected option as the 'least important', accessibility featured often in these responses, with one respondent stating:

At present I don't need physical accessibility accommodated, but I look for it for other people and with an awareness that we don't know what will happen

in our futures. Emotional accessibility is more important to me, and I look for emotional accessibility for children. Much interpretation in country houses is not emotionally or learning-accessible for children and I feel more thought and money could be invested in this area.

Several respondents made similar comments regarding physical accessibility and communicating that they were aware that although they do not currently have access requirements, they may do in the future for themselves or for someone else. The rest of the respondent's comment was particularly interesting as they had made the connection between interpretation and accessibility without being prompted. The respondent discusses other boundaries to visiting, absorbing, and enjoying a country house beyond the physical boundaries that present challenges to visitors such as staircases and no alternative method of accessing upper levels. Ensuring that interpretation is as accessible as possible to different demographics such as different age groups as this respondent identifies is critical to achieving an inclusive visit for as many people as possible. Another respondent stated "my wife is blind and braille guides help her hugely" – another accessible method of interpretation that can help visitors make the most of their country house visit. Furthermore, on the topic of accessibility and interpretation, the provision of ample, clean, and well signposted toilets was another common comment among respondents. This also relates to interpretation because signs are interpretive in their design, placement, and content. Instructional signage need only be brief to aid clarity, but to place them throughout a property could detract from the property itself, so a map provided to visitors upon entry can be a useful tool for visitors to find their way. Several respondents alluded to this, one stated:

The importance of allowing the house/garden to be its own experience without being over interpreted is often overlooked. One must have access to (discreet) interpretive information, without having it thrust at us to the detriment of our visit.

Enabling the house to "be its own experience" relates to one of the National Trust's seven key principles of interpretation. Namely, "Can the place speak for itself?" (National Trust, 2013, p.12) In some areas of country houses, visitors need to be left

to experience the house, to interact with the house and allow the property to speak to them, with interpretation filling in the gaps elsewhere. Another respondent stated:

Carefully considered communication that does not interfere with the atmosphere, people want to sense what a place was like in history, put themselves there.

This echoes the previous respondent, but specifically states that sometimes communication or interpretation can be an interference when trying to understand and interact with a property. This identifies a difference between visiting a country house and visiting a museum, people see country houses as places to be experienced as well as visited. The respondent refers to an “atmosphere” and wanting to “sense” the site, again referring to the notion that historic buildings can speak for themselves in places, but elsewhere interpretation can be used sensitively to help visitors make the most of their visit. The placing of interpretation such as labels, panels, digital installations, or others can detract from an ‘authentic’, immersive experience for many visitors. Another respondent touched upon this theme whilst providing their thoughts on digital interpretation:

For me country houses often give the impression of being a bit outdated in how they appeal to their audience. I feel a higher emphasis on digital interpretation would help, but the balance must be struck so as not to lose the character of a property in wires and screens.

Again, this respondent identifies “the character of a property”, the intangible feel of a place and how physical interpretation can interfere with this experience. They also state their belief that country house interpretation is often outdated and at many sites requires modernisation to help staff or custodians of country houses engage with their audiences more successfully. Whilst they think that digital interpretation can achieve this, they are aware that “wires and screens” could also spoil a visit through interfering with the authenticity of a property. In this section of the survey, several other respondents called for the updating of interpretation of country houses, but rather than updating the techniques of interpretation, many respondents focused on the content:

In-depth information needed, for example when I visited one house the colonial ties weren't mentioned.

The interpretation should be honest, and research should be ongoing as we learn more about the history of houses and communities before 1800.

Social histories of estate work and workers of particular interest and should go beyond role description to family histories and generational relationships (or otherwise) with the estates.

Yr hanes sydd bwsica', yn enwedig y berthynas rhwng y perchnogion a'r gymdeithas o'u cwmpas. (*It is the history that matters, especially the relationship between the owners and the society around them.*)

Among this section of responses, there were a variety discussing interpretation content, what the respondents would like to see more of, and what they would like to see less of. The three quotes above identify several themes that people would like to see interpreted at country houses when they visit. The scope and variety of themes that the responses to this question highlighted only serves to underline the multifaceted historic significance of Welsh country houses across numerous aspects of society, at local, national, and global levels. The first quote states that colonial ties were not mentioned at a country house that they had visited. They did not mention which house so it is not possible to say how relevant exploring colonial ties would have been at the house that they visited, but clearly it is an aspect of history that they want to see acknowledged and discussed in interpretation at country houses where it is relevant to do so. Many country houses around Wales have global connections, if not through colonialism or transatlantic slavery, then often through objects that originated from a different country, or through a person associated with a property being involved militarily on foreign soil. Respondents such as the second of the three quoted also called for "honesty" in interpretation, perhaps in acknowledging histories that are challenging, do not reflect positively on the historic owners of the property, or disrupt established assumptions. They also demonstrated a desire for interpretation to be based on academic research which should continue to further our understanding of house and community histories which can then be

interpreted at properties. This underlines the importance of research centred on the country house such as The Oxford Research Centre in the Humanities in collaboration – a collaboration between Oxford University and the National Trust (TORCH, 2023), and the importance of dedicated research centres such as the Institute for the Study of Welsh Estates (ISWE, 2023). The third quote reflects the popular desire as shown in Figure 33 for interpretation to explore the lives of estate workers and the work that they undertook. This respondent particularly wanted to see more detail beyond knowing the name of the person and their job title, but also the nature and extent of any relationships they may have had with the estate owners, perhaps such as did multiple generations of one family work at an estate for different generations of estate owners? Clearly, this information would go beyond the often-simplified information provided in the interpretation of estate workers. At Chatsworth, a database has been compiled with the help of University of Sheffield PhD students to establish information about servants and includes details about the duties that individuals undertook (Chatsworth, 2023). This database could provide a foundation to deliver more extensive interpretation at Chatsworth, and similar databases elsewhere would provide valuable repositories of information that could be built upon. A Welsh-language response conveyed a similar view that it is the interpretation of history and relationships between people that matters to them when they visit country houses. However, rather than the relationship between estate workers and estate owners, they believe that the relationship between estate and house owners and the surrounding society is most important when they visit country houses. This further clarifies the position presented in Figure 33, that visitors are interested in the histories of people, beyond the male owners of the house, their collections, and the architecture of the building. Other respondents also called for research being involved in interpretation:

Scholarship. Politically correct displays and general dumbing-down are big negatives.

Clearly, this respondent wants to see academic work feeding into interpretation at Welsh country houses. The National Trust has been doing this online through the 'Trusted Source' project resulting from a Knowledge Transfer Partnership which

began in 2016. It presents easy to understand articles written by academics and curatorial experts on issues relating to the histories of National Trust properties (National Trust, 2018). It is important that this scholarship is presented on-site at country houses as part of the visitor experience, as this respondent suggests. There is a gap between academic scholarship and heritage interpretation. Expertise should be made use of to create grounded, rigorous, and engaging interpretation, rather than academic analysis being copied into interpretation. However, in describing “politically correct displays” as a “big negative” they do not appear to want that research to be used in a way that is inclusive to those from different backgrounds who might otherwise feel excluded from country houses or to those with access requirements. Whilst this is disappointing to read, it shows that interpretation can be used as Freeman Tilden wrote to provoke people and to challenge them, rather than telling them what they want to hear or to reinforce their opinions and beliefs. In creating inclusive interpretation, on different themes that appeal to more diverse audiences, country houses can become spaces that tell significant stories on a much wider variety of topics than how the gentry or aristocracy lived, the architectural style of the houses they built and treasures they housed within. The number of respondents to this survey who stated that they want to see social histories interpreted and that boundaries to accessing them should be removed as much as possible indicates there is a significant desire for inclusive interpretation, and “politically correct displays”. This comment could also be about grounding interpretation in historical reality rather than attributing contemporary values to historic events. The respondent also describes “dumbing-down” as a “big negative”. This is an accusation that is frequently levelled at the National Trust in particular for experimenting with methods of interpretation, again often to make their properties more inclusive and enjoyable for people from a wide variety of backgrounds to visit. Some perceive “dumbing-down” as the simplification of complex histories and the eradication of nuance in interpretation. It is considered best practice by staff and custodians at many museums, galleries, and heritage sites to frame interpretation language at school age ability (Leeds Museums and Galleries, 2017). Experimental methods of interpretation often result from visitor feedback or other research such as the “scholarship” that this respondent stated that they want to see at country

houses. Without attempting to use different interpretation methods, staff and custodians of country houses will not make progress in interpreting the country house to the best of their abilities using the resources available to them. Interpretation experimentation is necessary to progress interpretation and to ensure that it is as effective as it can be.

In considering other aspects of country houses visits, one respondent stated:

No hagiography in explanatory texts and especially from guides and staff.

This statement raises an important point not only on the content but on the purpose of interpretation: in particular the lives, identities, interests, and influences of former owners. Interpretation can not only be used to inform visitors, but also to encourage them into thinking a particular way or into believing one particular narrative or opinion. On occasion, this is influenced by who the interpretation is created or presented by. For example, the extent and focus of interpretation at properties that rely on volunteer guides as the primary form of on-site interpretation will often be dictated by the volunteer's interests or favourite stories. If a property remains privately owned, has been passed down through several generations of the same family, and the current owner hosts open days throughout the year, there would be an increased possibility that any tours of the property that the owner leads would speak of the family and its history, often in glowing terms, with embellished details, personal anecdotes and an emphasis on familial achievements. This can occur consciously and unconsciously. Consciously, through a self-serving desire to elevate the importance, achievements, and character of one's family. Subconsciously, by retelling stories over generations naturally adding embellishments through a desire to connect with a tour audience or through a fondness of the family being spoken of. This is often the case in the interpretation of portraits: images to present sitters in their best light which can frame how their lives are presented. The quoted respondent identifies that this can be an issue in interpretation and shows a desire for accuracy and objectivity, particularly in the portrayal of people who exercised power over others. Finally, one respondent summed up the overall findings of Figure 33, commenting that:

I want to know about the social history of the house and its relation to its local community in the past. I'm not particularly interested in audio-visual or AVR experiences. A café is more important to me than a shop but the most important thing for me is good interpretation.

Their response demonstrates that when people visit country houses, irrespective of function, they often visit looking for histories of people and stories that they can perhaps connect with on some level. Furthermore, country houses can act as hubs that narrate local, national, and global histories. The medium that the stories are communicated through does not necessarily matter, as long as it is accessible, clear, accurate, engaging, researched, and trusted. A country house visit can include more functional aspects such as a café, restaurant, or a shop, but the most important part of visiting a country house according to the respondents of this survey is its interpretation.

Seeking to understand what visitors were taking away from their country house visits, the survey posed the question "if you have visited a country house at any time before, in Wales or elsewhere, what were your main impressions of your visit?" The question aimed to understand if interpretation at country houses had been successful in leaving an overriding impression with visitors, or if their impressions of country houses were created by other aspects of the properties. Once again, the responses were incredibly varied, and many discussed interpretation:

There can be a natural and historical focus on past landowners and their achievements, but where estate workers are featured, they are often anonymously featured as examples of roles, without being accorded the dignity of names or their own family histories and/or achievements; even if generation after generation of agricultural labourers. This gives the sense that visitors may 'cherry pick' (aspirational or desirable, but remote and dissociated) pasts.

Here, the respondent directly deals with interpretation content, stating that their main impressions of a country house visit are frequently orientated towards the focus on past landowners and their achievements, rather than the other individuals

and communities associated with or influenced by the house and estate. In many cases, this can be due to there being far more readily accessible information related to landowners than there is on estate workers, for example. This is especially the case if descendants of former owners are leading guided tours or producing the interpretation content. Traditional country house interpretation has tended to focus on the lives of successive male owners of the property. However, the respondent highlights an opinion shown elsewhere in the survey results, that prospective visitors want to learn about wider narratives attached to the country house and estate, in this instance the people who lived and worked within these spheres. This again underlines the importance of academic research to provide the knowledge and understanding which can be converted into multi-layered interpretation. The respondent continues that without thorough and effective interpretation of estate and house workers, visitors may be inclined to learn about aspirational but dissociated pasts, rather than absorbing stories of the working-class realities for many families. There is a range of historical lived experience which can be articulated through country house interpretation that is not limited to the experiences of the gentry and aristocracy. This response does not identify if or why it is, in their opinion, problematic that aspirational but dissociated pasts are interpreted. It is assumed that it is problematic because interpretation should be rounded to present “whole” histories, rather than aspects of history which guide visitors towards a limited narrative.

Alternatively, a country house visit to many people could equate to a form of escapism, with several responses to this particular question likening a country house to a doorway to another time and place:

Always wonderful. Going through the door is entry to another, past world. It is a chance to escape the noisy, digital world in which we live now. The gardens enable you to engage with history and nature at the same time.

The link between extent of interpretation and contemporary function is worth exploring. For example, a National Trust operated property which aims to inform visitors about the historical significance of the place needs to present multiform pasts in interpretation to interpret a property accurately and effectively and connect

with diverse audiences. A country house now operated as a hotel may not see interpretation as a priority, especially as they serve to function as sites of geographical escapism for their clientele. In these cases, the structure, atmosphere, experience, aesthetics, and setting of a country house is considered more important. Visitors do not expect interpretation. However, function should not matter. Staff or custodians of country houses should seek to interpret their properties, and this can have tangible benefits, for example in terms of marketing. To provide escapism, luxury, and comfort, any interpretation might tend to focus on the aspirational but dissociated pasts that the respondent mentioned to create the atmosphere of escapism around the site, rather than whole and accurate interpretation that these survey results have identified a clear appetite for. Other respondents chose to reflect on the quality of the interpretation:

Very pretty places. Serious atmosphere and perhaps a slightly outdated feel in their interpretation methods which perhaps doesn't often justify the price of admission.

Again, this respondent has identified an "atmosphere" at the site that they visited – something that featured regularly throughout the survey results. The respondent then continued to refer to "a slightly outdated feel in their interpretation methods" indicating that they value regularly updated interpretation at country houses – this could refer to content, method, or both. However, modern interpretation is not necessarily good interpretation. Older interpretation can continue to be effective, useful interpretation if it is appropriately maintained and reviewed periodically to assess its effectiveness among visitors. This response continues to say that the older interpretation "perhaps doesn't often justify the price of admission", suggesting that firstly, the quality of interpretation available at country houses they have visited is so significant to them that it should be reflected in the cost of admission to the property. Here, the respondent has raised an interesting point that no other respondent referred to, that they consider the admission cost to not only reflect value for money in terms of access to the property and often surrounding gardens, grounds, and facilities, but also the interpretation. Another respondent mentioned money in another regard:

Professionally managed, there to make money from the public.

With no mention by this respondent of what the money might be for resulting from public spending at country houses, it is not clear if they believe that country houses now exist to further the interests of individuals, or if they believe that they need to make money to cover the costs of maintenance. The response also demonstrates that their experience of country houses as being managed professionally perhaps by an organisation such as the National Trust, indicates a lack of awareness amongst the public that most Welsh country houses are privately owned, rather than professionally managed. Interpretation can be used to address this if country houses that are private residences are opened to the public through well-publicised open days. Another respondent commented:

Sometimes the interpretation is not too good. Most often if the house is in private hands and not always open to the public.

Country houses in private ownership usually do not contain interpretation boards, signage, or other permanent methods of interpreting a country house owing to them being private residences where the building functions to serve as a comfortable and functional living space, and not a visitor attraction. Therefore, visits to private residences on open days usually through guided tours will not afford the visitor the standard of interpretation boards, facilities, maps, or other interpretive materials that visitor attractions ordinarily have in place for their visitors to draw upon and make the most of their experience. One respondent commented on this:

Difficult to balance the needs of a family home and a tourist attraction.

However, some interpretation methods offer minimal intrusion in that they do not have to interfere with day-to-day living at a country house. An example of this is online interpretation, which the previous chapter of this thesis focused on. The most obvious method of achieving this is through property and/or grounds tours. Visually and structurally, very little needs to change throughout the areas of the property that the tour is taking place. Consequently, tours are often the most effective and convenient method for a private residence to be interpreted to the visiting public when they are open to visit. Tours at a private residence are often led by the

property owners, or occasionally volunteers who tend to have a good relationship with the owners. A respondents' comment in an earlier question regarding hagiography from volunteers is particularly relevant when considering the interpretation of private residences, with there often being an extent of inevitable bias or celebratory reverence associated with the resident family from the guide, particularly relating to family history. This can affect the nature and quality of the interpretation offered via the tour. More significantly, key historical narratives can be excluded by guides, particularly if there are challenging topics to discuss in association with the site's history. Many of the responses to this question discussed the role of the volunteer or the guide, with the majority being comments regarding the role that they play. However, some comments identified this relationship between the visitor and the volunteer or guide as an awkward one:

I find interacting with the volunteers somewhat awkward though they are always very knowledgeable when I make the effort.

The respondent identifies that different people prefer to explore country houses in different ways, and for them, it appears that this is a fluid process that does not remain the same every time that they visit a country house. Sometimes they want to speak to volunteers, on other occasions they wish to be left to explore and discover despite knowing that any volunteers on hand would be knowledgeable and able to add to their experience. This emphasises how important it is that different levels and types of interpretation are available for people so that everyone who visits has a method of engaging with the property and aspects of its history. Some visitors enjoy conversations and exchanges with volunteers, and expressed so in their response:

I like having plenty of information to read. I prefer a tour guide, or someone stationed in each room to listen to rather than headphone sets. It's nice to see the passion of the people who work there and listen to their own theories and opinions.

Others have had negative experiences with volunteers which has reduced the overall enjoyment of their visits, perhaps indicating that they would prefer, during future country house visits, not to have interactions with volunteers:

These have nearly always been pleasant experience though at times bossy and overzealous volunteers have lessened the enjoyment of the visit.

Penrhyn Castle had quite an impact, but the volunteers were ill informed.

Evidently, people visit country houses with different ideas on how they should receive or absorb information through a variety of interpretation methods suited to their own personal preferences – ranging from simple immersion in the country house 'atmosphere' to direct provision of information. Staff or custodians of country houses that can incorporate multiple layers and forms of interpretation to reach visitors with preferences for different methods is undoubtedly advantageous to a positive visitor experience. However, some visitors believe that certain styles of interpretation are inappropriate. Often, this is the case if it is a more modern approach which is not in keeping with a visitor's pre-conceived ideas of what a country house is, what it is for, how it came to be, and who it was or is for. This is especially the case when the method of interpretation does not fit in with how they want to engage and interact with a country house. This was reflected in the responses to this question, by two respondents in particular:

Some are now being 'dumbed down' and being made 'politically correct'. We cannot simply brush away history.

The pernicious influence of Down-turn Abbey has turned many of these places into disingenuous theme parks.

These two comments focus on the rigorous presentation of historical information, with tension regarding the method of interpretation which they believe detract from the content. Instead of seeing different methods of interpretation as something that is positive and helpful in appealing to different audiences to preserve the properties and help them to remain relevant in the 21st century, they choose to view these methods as attacks on history itself, rather than a deeper exploration and understanding of it, presented to new audiences in new ways. Other respondents believed that interpretation at country houses that they had visited needed to explore new topics:

Very focused on the rich white man. Limited intersectionality and lack of focus of lives of staff (unless in relation to kitchens?)

Country houses and the U.K. were sites which were often framed by patrilineal, patriarchal, and paternalistic values. Therefore, there is a natural inclination to interpret the stories of "rich white men". Providing background to the history of country house owners provides history to the country house itself, and consequently offers a natural starting point for staff or custodians who are creating interpretation. This survey has identified that this is not problematic because a significant majority of respondents want to see the story of the owners told at country houses. However, the history of country houses extends far beyond lineages of male owners, and this should be reflected in interpretation. For example, interpretation should incorporate the lives and experiences of women, including as landowners. Respondents have also identified that they want to see stories regarding staff and estate communities, and this respondent states that there often only tends to be interpretation of staff located in kitchen areas. To create successful interpretation, it is best to draw a connection between what the visitor can see, and the story being presented to them. Therefore, it is logical that interpretation related to staff is interpreted in areas where staff would have been present. Often, this is in kitchen areas as many other areas such as stable blocks or servant quarters have been repurposed at some point during the histories of country houses to serve as offices or other functional areas such as toilets, cafés, shops, or storage. This provides an opportunity for interpretation to reach out beyond the house, and to embrace the wider estate. In stating that country house interpretation presents "limited intersectionality", the respondent is expressing their desire to see more interpretation at country houses that is more diverse, along themes of race, class, and gender as opposed to the well-trodden interpretive path of country house owners and their relationships with wider society i.e., their impacts, influences, and engagements. These themes should also be explored in interpretation alongside the more traditional topics to better present a more rounded picture of the influence of a country house, what they were, who they were for, and how they interacted with a wide variety of people of different demographics. Other respondents made similar comments:

Usually [...] they never have enough information about the servants. The stories/information is usually male-centric (women are chiefly referred to in a decorative context as wives and mothers). Ignoring the servants also ignores many women's stories that are tied up with these places. There isn't always much to do that would involve children, and sometimes many adult visitors aren't able to get engaged with the place or the history.

Once again, this expresses a desire for staff and custodians at country houses to interpret social and community histories at country houses. This respondent explains that not portraying servant histories at country houses results in the loss of many women's stories that are intrinsically connected to sites. Much of their response relates to the distinct lack of interpretation of women's histories at country houses, which links into the previous respondent's comment regarding intersectionality and their wish for a more layered interpretation. Clearly, there are many underexplored interpretive themes in existing and past country house interpretation which can be addressed moving forwards, and there is a clear desire to see this happen (National Trust, 2018; National Trust 2021).

Regarding how to achieve more diverse, representative, and intersectional interpretation at country houses, consideration must be given to authenticity respective to each individual property, according to some respondents:

Authenticity even if it means looking at a ruin, some places I've visited have been wrecked by modernism, e.g., Hampton Court.

Authenticity in interpretation is an incredibly complex topic, especially in relation to country houses which are often multi-period owing to their vast histories. Country houses in private ownership that continue to act as residences require many modern comforts to function as a modern dwelling. Therefore, modernisation has been necessary as all houses are inevitably and gradually updated over time. Visitor attractions are often also updated and overhauled in places to cater to visitors through the installation of facilities or offices to enable enjoyable visitor experiences. These are often modern through necessity, to provide comfort and safety for the visitor and to enable staff or custodians to work effectively for the benefit of the

property and the visitor. The term 'authentic' is a problematic one, in that it somewhat simplifies the question "authentic to what?" when many country houses are multi-period. For a property to look and feel authentic to any singular period – to fix a space in time – can render it spurious, fake, or even selective by interpreting just one period of a country house's history, consequently ignoring others that are often equally important. For staff and custodians of country houses responsible for interpreting them now and in the future, this remains a significant challenge.

Considering the futures of country houses, the survey posed the question "is there anything you would like to see country houses do or be in the future?". This was another question where respondents were not restricted to multiple choice answers and could engage with the question however they saw fit. Some chose to simply respond with "no" or similar, indicating that they either wanted country houses to continue as they are or that they did not have any ideas on the matter. However, most respondents had their own ideas of what they want to see from country houses in the future, with some explicitly stating that they wanted to see "more of the same". Other responses were incredibly diverse, as respondents chose to deal with different aspects of country houses which in itself highlights the variety in people's interests in country houses, and therefore the variety and wide-ranging scope in the significance of country houses which is not only limited to the past but extends into the future. This reflects the earlier discussion in this thesis regarding relevance, that the reasons people find country houses relevant today may be different to historic reasons. Many of the responses related to interpretation, but some responses related to identity and the country house. The first of these stated:

Greater emphasis on heritage significance (including Welsh-language heritage).

The comment relates to identity because they see the country house as an appropriate and suitable venue to explore the Welsh language and its heritage. Of course, this aspect relates to the interpretation of country houses in that this is one of many aspects that respondents have touched upon that can be achieved through interpretation. Other respondents chose to discuss the knowledge that underpins

interpretation at country houses. One respondent demonstrated knowledge of a prominent ongoing research project:

The benefits of the Colonial Countryside project should be built on and expanded. Institutions like the RCAHMW should also work to expand and enrich the information available on resources like Coflein to enable greater access, interpretation and understanding of country houses in Wales, particularly those not in public or NT ownership.

A child-led heritage project led by Prof. Corinne Fowler at the University of Leicester in partnership with the National Heritage Lottery Fund, Arts Council England, and the National Trust, Colonial Countryside is a project exploring the African, Caribbean, and Indian connections at eleven National Trust properties (National Trust, 2021b). Coflein is the National Monuments Record for Wales managed by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales. It is a free online resource which catalogues archaeological sites, historic buildings, and industrial and maritime heritage in Wales. People can access Coflein online and can use it to search for digitised entries providing details most commonly on the architectural features, as well as images, related entries, and a list of associated archived material. Working towards applying or including the findings of valuable research projects such as the Colonial Countryside project into interpretation would increase the quality and scope of interpretation – something that this research has shown to be desired by visitors. Through expanding upon the existing resource that Coflein provides, staff or custodians at country houses not under public or National Trust ownership can use freely available information provided on Coflein to inform and direct interpretation decisions and to further their own knowledge and understanding to ensure that any interpretation offered in any capacity is accurate. Another respondent identified the need for interpretation to be underpinned by academic research:

Publicly accessible with research findings available on what happened there, and why; and how, why, and when built. Collections transferred to publicly accessible places, exhibitions etc.

This respondent appears to be passionate regarding public access to country houses and academic research, emphasising that they want to see research findings available to visitors. The best way to achieve this is through interpretation that presents research findings in an accessible and engaging manner to visitors. Their point regarding collections is one that was not made by other respondents. Collections held in country houses that act as visitor attractions are publicly accessible places that frequently hold exhibitions of some form. Some objects will inevitably be held in storage for a variety of reasons such as for conservation, due to them not fitting an overall interpretation theme, or because of interpretation decisions to present a room or other objects in the way that staff or custodians believe to be the most effective. This is also the case for museum collections and underlines the importance of collections to interpretation as well as the importance of moving away from filling a space with objects in a 'treasure house' manner to moving toward a 'story house' – ensuring that collections can be used to interpret a place. Other publicly accessible spaces may not have the correct conditions or staffing capabilities and expertise to safeguard and maintain collections at an alternative site to the site of ownership. At country houses that serve predominantly as private residences, there is a line of distinction drawn between a historic collection and a family's belongings. A historic collection is usually passed down through generations before often being donated, sometimes in lieu of inheritance tax, with the intention of objects being used in displays for public benefit. A family's belongings are usually more personal and private, with owners not wanting the public to view them out of security or privacy concerns and simply because they are their belongings. Private residences can often act as important repositories of historical collections, and sometimes can be viewed via open days.

Links between country houses and colonial aspects of their histories continued to be mentioned throughout these results by a number of respondents, with one directly referring to the contemporary Black Lives Matter movement, and others calling for more honest and representative interpretation:

I think, especially in the context of Black Lives Matter, that there should be more explicit information about where the money for many of these houses came from, maybe in collaboration with e.g., the Liverpool Slavery Museum.

More openness about the source of their wealth, e.g., colonial connections.

Explore their context re. empire, wealth, and colonialism. Get better at explaining, clearly, why they're important.

More inclusive and more honest about where their wealth came from. Also, I'd like to see more information about the lives of the women who lived in the houses.

More honest about Britain's – and Wales's colonial past.

Improve their interpretation of their involvement in empire and upholding of social barriers. Improve their involvement with BAME communities as audiences/visitors are still predominantly white.

The number of responses along this theme suggests that country house interpretation should address it. Firstly, throughout the survey and demonstrated by these responses, many respondents used their opportunity to partake in this research by calling for "honesty" or "openness" in interpretation. Honesty, truth, and accuracy should make up the foundations of good interpretation, alongside high-quality, impartial research to present as complete a story as possible to audiences. These six responses all particularly relate to interpretation, highlighting the significance of it, both, in terms of the audiences that country houses can connect with and relate to, but also in the role of interpretation as a crucial method of acknowledging historic injustices and informing visitors of context and events that individuals and communities can learn from to create a better future. One of these six respondents stated that they believe that interpretation can be used to increase the diversity of country house audiences, through representation and involvement with BAME communities. Another of these six respondents also stated that they wanted to see more representation in interpretation, but of women. Both respondents raise important points in that staff and custodians of country houses should seek to increase representation of different genders, races, and backgrounds

at Welsh country houses, not only to diversify audiences, but to further underline the varied and extent of significance that country houses remain symbolic of. One of the six respondents identified the need for interpretation to improve by stating that it must “get better at explaining, clearly, why they’re important”. This is a simple statement, yet it is significant because they seem to be identifying that to explain through interpretation is not enough. Interpretation must have clarity to successfully connect with its intended audience, without using obscure or technical language, or an incomprehensible amount of information. If the intended audience is unlikely to understand what is being communicated, the interpretation will fail. Furthermore, if an overwhelming amount of information or an unsuitable use of language hides or detracts from the overriding message that the interpretation is attempting to communicate, the interpretation will also fail. Here, there is a tension between the need to achieve clarity and the desire for multi-layered interpretation which requires large amounts of information with appropriate context. Specifically in Wales, there is an added technical complication through the need to present interpretation bilingually, and therefore for written interpretation, half of the physical space is available. Evidently, effective interpretation requires balance, and this is where different interpretation methods can be useful.

This section of the survey also prompted opposing opinions from some respondents on two topics in particular, namely hunting and re-enactment. There were several responses which specifically referred to re-enactment, or that were related to the topic, with a selection of them presented below:

I don't like them being turned into amusement parks. If they are used for other things [such as] private dwellings, conference centres, museums, libraries etc. [...these] are good uses.

Re-enactment. Bring to life some of the most colourful characters from the family esp[ecially] if they achieved fame or notoriety in their lifetimes.

More historical re-enactors and costumed interpreters.

I like it when they stay true to the history, not fond of gimmicks although re-enactments can be very good especially for young visitors.

Remain authentic.

To provide experiences which have not been dumbed down in any way.

Have more re-enactments of what life was like there at a particular point in time. But to also see it from the point of view of the local population who would have lived nearby at the time.

More entertaining for younger audiences.

Collectively, these comments present multiple themes in relation to re-enactment for discussion. Firstly, based on these responses, re-enactment is a method of interpretation that is mostly positively viewed. The responses that appear to be more critical of re-enactment as a method of interpretation are subtle. For example, one respondent refers to country houses being “turned into amusement parks” whilst another yearns for “experiences which have not been dumbed down”. The first of these describes the alleged ‘Disneyfication’ of country house interpretation – an attempt by staff and custodians of country houses to appeal to wider audiences by altering how visitors experience country houses and their histories. This has been an accusation (Daily Mail, 2010; Howie and Sawyer, 2010) levelled towards properties that feature re-enactment as a method of interpretation to create the visitor experience, similar to Disney theme parks that feature employees dressed as Disney characters to engage with visitors. ‘Disneyfying’ country houses relates to a comment made by a different respondent – an additional mention of country houses being “dumbed down”. Although this comment does not specifically refer to re-enactment, it is often a criticism of it, with the perception being that re-enactment cannot accurately or adequately portray to a visitor in-depth expertise that other methods of interpretation, such as information panels, room guides, or guidebooks, traditionally convey. There are certainly cases where re-enactment can be dramatised or inaccurate. However, as one respondent states, “re-enactments can be very good”. This is an acknowledgment from the respondent that whilst some re-enactments can be of poor quality, there are others that are an excellent method of interpretation. In 2015, Dunham Massey was nominated by Art Fund U.K. as a Museum of the Year finalist (ArtFundUK, 2015) after employing actors to create

theatrical scenes around the property to interpret the conversion of Dunham Massey into Stamford Military Hospital during World War One. The actors did not directly engage with visitors, and the stories portrayed by the actors were based on the staff and patients who lived and worked at Dunham Massey. This method of re-enactment appeared to be a success, as Katie Taylor, the House and Collections Manager at Dunham Massey at the time, stated to the BBC that Dunham Massey's visitor numbers "trebled" (BBC, 2015) the year the actors were brought in to interpret the property, indicating that it enticed dramatically more people than normal to visit Dunham Massey. This would suggest that the respondent who stated that they would like to see country houses be "more entertaining for younger audiences" is joined by many other people in their thinking. Several other respondents made similar comments. Perhaps now it is not enough for country houses to educate, or to simply present themselves for people to make their own decisions on what they do or do not like, but they also need to entertain to appeal to wide audiences. It is incumbent on staff and custodians at country houses to aim for interpretation that is engaging, is based on a solid academic foundation of research, is accurate, and is engaging for visitors without being intimidating or off-putting for more traditional audiences. Realistically, there are significant challenges and restrictions to achieving this on a site-to-site basis, but this is the 'Gold Standard' of interpretation. It reflects an admixture of the different interpretation principles assessed in the literature review of this thesis, considering the audiences, accuracy, and objectives of the interpretation. Mark O'Neill wrote that there is a widely held belief that "storytelling is a key feature of human nature and therefore critical for communication in all domains, from therapy to politics" that has resulted "in a shift in museums from 'knowledge to narrative', and attempts to inspire engagement and empathy with the stories of individuals" (O'Neill, 2021, p.11). Based on the survey results and the expressed wishes of respondents, many visitors to heritage sites want to be engaged with, but rather than shifting from knowledge to narrative, this research strongly suggests that narrative should be supported by knowledge in any interpretive attempts to engage audiences. In doing so, interpretation can play a significant role in the future of country houses through engaging with young people – something that respondents also commented on. Speaking at the Museums

Association conference in 2021, Mark O'Neill identified why this is important, demonstrated by the CEO of an immersive museum app designed for children on social media:

Mark O'Neill makes an excellent point in his provocation – museum-visiting is learnt in the family setting and children can be a driver for a change. What's needed are the practices that get children inspired to create experiences of their own for their families (Kravchenko, 2021).

Appealing to families can be important for staff and custodians of country houses also, in that they can engage different generations in a variety of aspects of country house histories. Engaging children in the interpretation of country houses does not necessarily need to be through children receiving interpretation as a visitor. Children can also be engaged with interpretation by creating it in collaboration with country house staff or custodians. An example of this took place in 2021 in the form of the "What a world" exhibition at Penrhyn Castle. The exhibition displayed children's poetic responses to Penrhyn Castle's colonial links, displaying objects from the property's collections with a poem written by children, therefore co-creating an exhibition with National Trust staff. In the years preceding this exhibition, the staff at Penrhyn Castle sought to co-create other exhibitions and installations with local community groups, such as 'Slate or State' which also involved local schools as well as a local community choir. Nina Simon wrote that "co-creative projects allow cultural institutions to form partnerships that are responsive to the needs and interests of their audiences" (Simon, 2010, p.279). In the case of Penrhyn Castle, the needs and interests of the staff are to acknowledge historic transatlantic and local injustices of past owners with regards to sugar plantations in Jamaica, and local quarry workers. This is necessary to forge for Penrhyn Castle a future of significance in acting as a building that can serve as much more than a monument to the elite, but as a tool to teach, inspire, and engage people when interpreting difficult topics and complex issues on local, national, and global significance. Using co-creation as a method to do so is integral to establishing local partnerships that can create and enable long-term relevance for the site.

One survey response simply stated that they want country houses to “remain authentic”. Re-enactment can be authentic if, as in the case of Dunham Massey in 2015, it is based on facts and historic events with accurate costumes creating authentic visual experiences for visitors, and dialogue used to interpret significant events or histories. In doing so, visitors can leave having experienced something that, to many, may be more memorable than a more traditional visit. Authenticity can also refer to furnishings and décor which add to and can create a visitor’s experience of a site. Two respondents chose to use this part of the survey to comment on an element of country houses and their surrounding estates that is not directly related to interpretation:

True to their heritage. Many were set up as sporting estates but organisations like the National Trust are running scared of the Animal Rights lobby and banning such activities on the land associated with the great estates they now own. This is contrary to how the estate was meant to operate.

I don’t like hunting or shooting of animals, so it makes me sad when country houses, such as Scone Palace in Scotland, charge expensive admission fees and talk about their wonderful conservation projects, but at the same time they advertise that their land is available to hire out for hunting/shooting days. Disgraceful. I don’t want to pay money to support the killing of innocent animals.

These were the only two comments related to hunting that arose in the survey, and they are polar opposites in opinion. The first of the two comments is clearly a pro-hunt response that can add to the discussion on authenticity. The respondent starts their comment by stating that they would like country houses to remain “true to their heritage”. The respondent sees hunting as an activity which is “true to” the heritage of country houses, and therefore an authentic activity. Whilst this is indisputable, it does not necessarily render it an acceptable or ethical twenty-first century practice. Ideas towards activities change and have changed over time. Country houses and surrounding estates have changed to reflect the changing world around them, and that is not necessarily to the detriment of country houses or their estates in the eyes of twenty-first century audiences. The second comment is

evidently anti-hunting and provides a Scottish example of a site that offered land for hire for hunting days, which they believe to be “disgraceful”. Although this is not directly related to interpretation, they appear to suggest that the hunting days advertisement detracted from their visit to Scone Palace where they learnt about “wonderful conservation projects” through an unspecified means of interpretation. One of the respondent’s main takeaways from their visit appears to have been that land is available for hunting days, rather than any key messages within any interpretation on-site regarding specific histories or narratives. This shows how important it is for staff and custodians of country houses to be mindful of what they want their overall interpretive messages to be, and how they are going to communicate them effectively.

Authenticity is a topic that has arisen because of the responses to this survey on multiple occasions. The next question asked the respondents directly if they felt that a country house in private ownership provided a more authentic country house experience than other statuses of ownership or management. Respondents were once again able to make their own comments, and the responses were illuminating in their breadth of opinion, with a small majority of respondents believing that country houses in private ownership are no more authentic than properties in other forms of ownership, as shown in Figure 34. Responses that quantify the ‘other’ category refers to 91 respondents who stated that they were unsure, had not visited a country house before so could not comment, or were not aware of the difference between country houses in private ownership and country houses in other forms of ownership. Some respondents also stated that their answer would be dependent upon who the private owner is, how present the owner is during their visit, and the extent to which the owner is willing to share, as seen here:

Possibly. A lot depends on how the historic features and information are presented. The private owner may or may not be willing to share information. The public ones are obviously aimed at a wide range of visitors of all backgrounds, offering 'a good day out'. The private ones are more likely to be sought out by individuals and local history groups.

For this respondent, authenticity is gauged by the interpretation of a country house when they visit, further underlining the significance of interpretation in the country house setting. This is one of several responses indicating that the extent of authenticity of a country house visit is dependent on something, which have been counted towards the total of 91 'other' responses shown in Figure 34. Other responses that quantify the total of 91 include comments from respondents who chose to question what authenticity is, or other aspects of a country house that create authentic experiences such as the collections:

Maintaining the link between the house and its contents/collections is more important for authenticity.

The history of the country house is complex and contains more than merely their history as a domestic residence. Those in private ownership have a particular history to tell, which is important, but those that have passed into public ownership or taken on another use, for example after the First World War, have their own, important histories to tell which are in no way less 'authentic'.

I'm not searching for an authentic experience - I want to learn about their history and I want them to play their part in a more diverse culture.

You see[m] to imply a posh 'Country House' as authentic, when its a charade, a vision of a lifestyle of less than 1% of the Welsh population while the lives and challenges of 99% of Welsh people before 1900 is overlooked. When they are inhabited by posh families, or there is still a living heritage link, it's even worse as the power is still there and this challenges telling the history honestly for fear of upsetting the gentry!

Define an 'authentic country house experience': There is great variation and the question could be taken to presuppose what an 'authentic country house experience' is; perhaps along the historical lines discussed above? I would prefer to consider whether they give better experiences of houses and their estates as economic units.

Authentic of what? Kicking the under maid down the stairs because she objects to being sexually fondled?

Clearly, the final response is dramatic and emotive, but the respondent's initial question "authentic of what?" is pertinent and encapsulates much of what other respondents discussed in their comments. Another respondent stated that there is "great variation" between country houses, and they are entirely correct. Consequently, an authentic country house experience can vary between site owing to their differences. An authentic country house experience at one property could be a very different experience to that at another country house elsewhere. Authenticity is relative and site-specific, rather than overarching and all-encompassing. This underlines the importance of site-specific interpretation and not conforming to notions of a generic 'country house experience'. The second respondent commented that the histories of country houses vary between properties, and the history of a country house in private ownership will have a different story than one that is now owned, for example, by the National Trust. To them, authenticity is not affected by the ownership status. Another respondent challenged the idea that country houses can be authentic at all, arguing that they cannot be authentic when they are not relatable to most of the Welsh population because they are not realistically attainable. They continued to state that if they are privately owned, they are perhaps less likely to provide interpretation that challenges past events or criticises the current owner's ancestors due to the familial connection. Their comment highlights the number and breadth of complex issues that are not limited to the confines of history but can be present discussions that further illustrate the current significance of Welsh country houses, as well as their significant histories. Others stated that they were not looking for an authentic experience, authenticity was secondary to their learning and the properties remaining active. However, for country houses to achieve this, authenticity can create experiences that visitors can learn from during their visit and education need not be at the expense of authenticity. A minority of English-language respondents passed comments such as these discussed relative to other respondents who commented that private ownership either does or does not create a more authentic country house experience. 15 Welsh-language respondents made similar comments, and 15 Welsh-

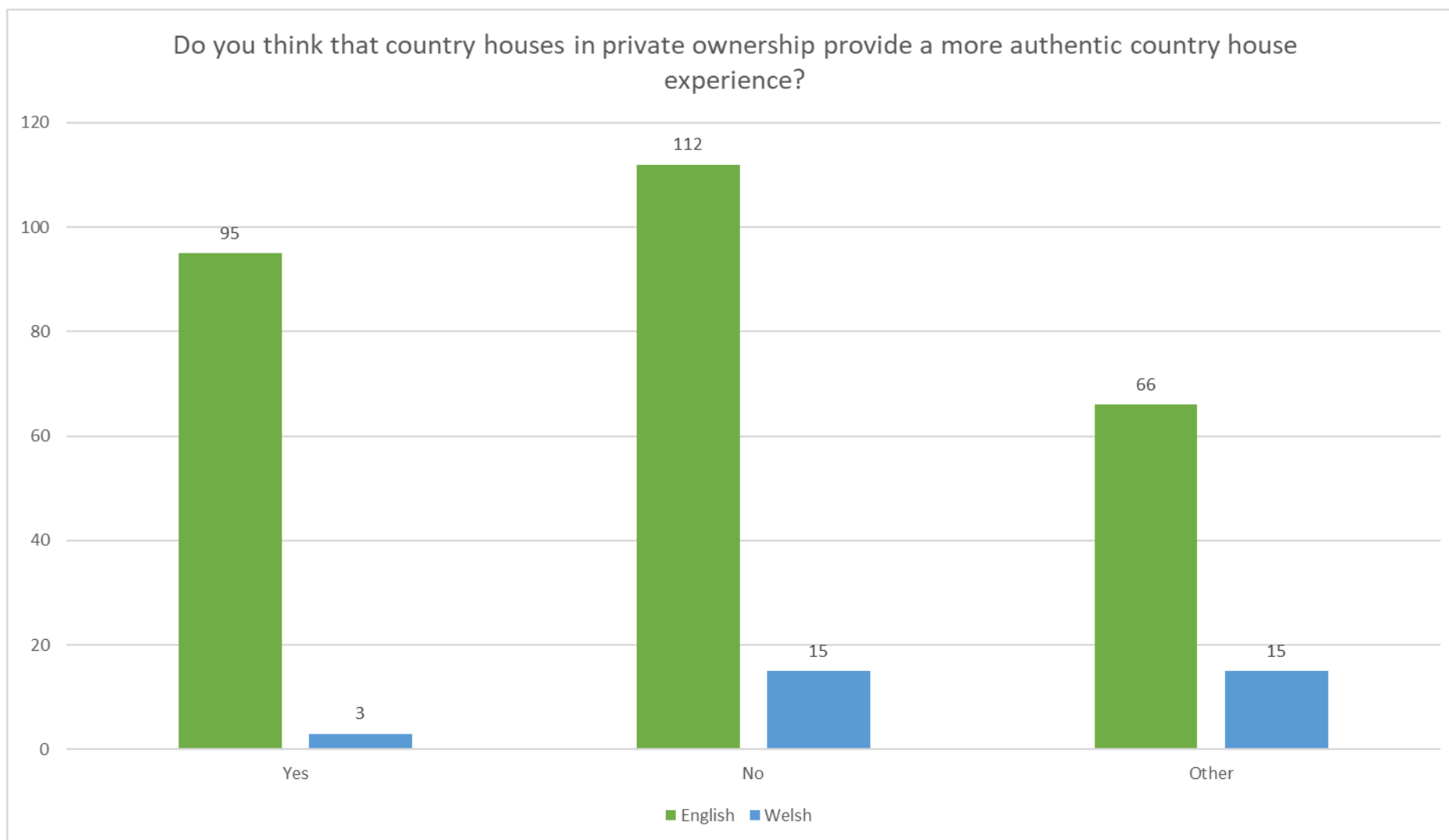


Figure 34: A small majority of respondents do not believe that a country house experience is more authentic in private ownership than a different ownership status.

language respondents stated that they did not believe that private ownership creates a more authentic country house experience, with just three believing that it does. The majority of the 15 Welsh-language responses who commented “no” did not comment further to explain why they believed that to be the case. However, two respondents stated:

Na. Pam fyddde nhw? *(No. Why would they?)*

Dim o angenrheidrwydd - ond mae'n amlwg bod perchnogaeth gan gorff fel elusen yn help i ddenu gwirfoddolwyr. *(Not necessarily - but it is clear that ownership by a body such as a charity helps to attract volunteers.)*

The first respondent questioning why country houses being in private ownership would lead to a more authentic visitor experience indicates that it appears to be a straightforward answer for them. The second respondent indicates that country houses that are not owned privately may find it easier to attract volunteers to assist the operation and management of the site. They did not state if this would provide a more authentic experience for them, but in referring to it, it is clearly a priority for them. Other respondents justified their selections to a greater extent:

Not really. Restaurants, hotels etc tend to focus on the fashion of the time rather than a decor sympathetic to the house.

No, as all the houses had a family at one point. Also, more general everyday areas such as kitchens are available in trust ownership.

No. I think this is a gigantic cliché. It depends on the nature and competence of both institutional and private owners. Either can be authentic or awful.

These three chosen responses highlight a breadth in respondent thought. The first identifies that country houses in private ownership do not feel authentic if they have been extensively modernised to suit their current function, either as a home or as a venue such as a hotel, where comfort is paramount and of primary concern to the owners. Authentic historic features may not be suitable for the current purpose or may be viewed as unfashionable and so do not feature in the twenty-first century country house to make a home or a business more appealing to the twenty-first

century person. Another respondent commented that more areas may be available to visit in a country house not in private ownership, such as kitchens. Whilst there may be truth to this, there are areas of National Trust properties that have been converted into office or storage spaces since they have entered National Trust ownership. Therefore, there are many areas of country houses under National Trust ownership that are not possible to view by the public. However, this respondent and others feel that being able to see the kitchens, perhaps due to a working space offering some variety to a country house visit creates a more authentic experience. The third chosen respondent believes that ultimately, authentic experiences at country houses are created by competent people with the inclination to do so. They also believe that "either can be authentic or awful", indicating that they believe an authentic experience at a country house to be a positive one in juxtaposing authenticity with an "awful" country house experience. One of the 98 respondents who believed that privately owned country houses do provide a more authentic country house experience stated in their response that they are "more authentic maybe but not better" thus identifying that authenticity is not a guarantee of quality, perhaps because authenticity is an incredibly vague and complex concept in relation to country houses.

The 98 respondents who believed that private ownership does create a more authentic country house experience also referred to a variety of reasons why they held their opinions:

Yes, depending on whether the requirements of modern living is not detrimental to the building. I love Brynkinalt Hall for this very reason which a beautiful family home - they have got it just right.

I think those in private ownership is a good thing, if we could visit every country house currently, I think people would get bored of them in the future, so having those in private ownership to later become public in the future is a good thing to keep a country houses authenticity and keep people wanting to visit them in the future.

Yes, it has a sense of being lived in, for example my visit to all private country houses the houses felt very welcoming and had a warmth to it whereas places like NT often have a cold, unused feel to them, lacking life.

Usually, the atmosphere of a house loved and lived in is powerful. Curated houses have their own special approach but are a snapshot, a house in stasis.

Yes, but usually this means restricted visiting and/or very pricey admission prices etc but is also good to see them in their 'homes'. If they are the tour guides then it can give an exceptional insight into the family, the house, and the challenges that they face in maintaining their estate etc.

The first response in this selection shows an example of an answer which is dependent upon a condition that the respondent has given. In this case, they believe that privately owned country houses do feel more authentic as long as they have not been excessively modernised – something that other respondents feel has made privately owned country houses feel less authentic. Clearly, many respondents believe that authenticity is created through preserving a snapshot of history in the interpretation or presentation of the building, which is how National Trust staff often interpret their properties. Other respondents stated that this approach makes country houses feel museum-like and “in stasis” rather than being lived in and therefore creating a more comfortable atmosphere for a visitor, perhaps making them feel more as though they are visiting and not viewing. There is a significant distinction to be made between visiting and viewing. Visiting is a process which can be more engaging and even participatory (Rahaman, p.212), where interpretation is provoking, stirring, or even conversing with a person whereas viewing is not a reciprocal process. It could be argued that viewing is the result of failed interpretation, where a person can look but not engage and fail to absorb anything that the interpretation is designed to encourage them to consider or to feel. This is where interpretive methods discussed in this work such as re-enactment can assist in removing a feeling of stasis, or “a cold, unused feel to them, lacking life” as another respondent stated. Other responses believe that owners leading guided tours can offer additional insight into their “family, the house and the challenges that they face in maintaining their estate”. Therefore, the personal stories and reflections

of the owner are something that this respondent believes to create authenticity in a country house visit that perhaps country houses without private ownership cannot replicate to the same extent. Finally, one respondent commented that country houses in private ownership retain their authenticity for longer but appear to believe that private ownership of country houses will eventually come to an end and in doing so people will be able to visit a greater variety of country houses in the future which will maintain an appetite for people to visit them. Owing to the number of country houses in private ownership that are already possible to visit either on a full-time attraction basis or through open days, this comment is demonstrably false because it is already possible to visit so many of such architectural and historical variety.

Related to this point, the next question sought to understand what extent of access people believed they should be entitled to at a country house in private ownership. Figure 35 shows that a firm majority of respondents believe that they should have access to country house grounds, gardens, and partial house access on an open day basis throughout any given year. This perhaps suggests that people see country houses as part of local or national cultural heritage. Respondents were able to choose multiple responses to allow for access to gardens, grounds, and an extent of house access of the respondents' choosing. Just 20 people of all 306 respondents believed that they should have access to all of a country house in private ownership all year, whilst 39 people believed that they should have no access to any aspect of a country house in private ownership at all – nearly double the amount that believe they should. The extent of access granted to the public by private owners is ultimately the decision of the owner, unless a condition of tax exemption, regardless of the function of the property. There are many reasons why private owners do not allow regular access to their country houses, with one of these being security and privacy concerns associated with allowing unknown people into their homes. These concerns are of course valid and enabling public access to land or property should only be done in a safe and secure manner. However, this research shows that there is clearly an appetite for access to country houses in private ownership. With 39 of the 306 total respondents selecting 'no access', that indicates that the remaining 267 respondents selected an extent of access should be provided to country houses in

private ownership, with some of these selecting multiple levels of access. Open days offer a compromise for many private owners of country houses in that they can share their properties should they wish – on their own terms – with a public who clearly have an interest in visiting, as demonstrated by Figure 35. Schemes such as Cadw's Open Doors and Invitation to View offer an avenue with expert assistance to achieve this successfully and safely.

Figures 36 and 37 show the responses to two different questions that were both designed to identify how much emphasis the respondents place on the preservation of country houses. Most respondents stated that they do enjoy visiting ruined, neglected, or abandoned structures, shown in Figure 35. However, Figure 36 shows that a minority of respondents would be more inclined to visit a country house in a ruinous state, as opposed to one in a more complete condition. This highlights a strong preference among respondents for country houses to be preserved as functioning buildings. Figure 36 also shows that a large number of respondents were undecided as to whether they would be more or less inclined to visit a country house in ruins. These 142 people were not asked to justify their selection, but it is possible that many respondents have not visited a ruined country house previously and so did not feel they could make a firm decision, or as in responses to other questions, they feel that their answer would be site-specific or dependent on other factors. Many of the respondents who selected "no" justified their selection with one of the below reasons:

Both are interesting for different reasons. I like being able to walk around and see the artwork in a country house that's intact. However, old ruins have their own charm as well.

No, because they have had no renovation to preserve them or make them look like they did back then, so it is harder to gauge what they were like in their prime.

I consider it better to see the house as it is today, usually set up in some parts as it was some time ago - where the property is habitable as it is easier 'to see' rather than be left to one's imagination.

Ultimately, they are a monument to the failure to preserve, cherish and sustain. The waste of talent, the destruction of the evidence of the artisan's skill, the lost opportunities to create meaningful and valuable local destinations are tragic.

Many of the respondents referred to a desire to view artwork and collections in country houses, and that visiting a ruin usually indicates a lack of any collections to view. Therefore, their preference would be to visit a country house which is not a ruin. The first respondent quoted above was one of many respondents who made similar comments to "old ruins have their own charm as well", highlighting that many of the respondents who answered "no" also enjoy visiting ruined country houses. Other respondents made comments pertinent to interpretation, in that visiting ruined country houses makes it more difficult for the visitor to visualise how the house would have been when it was being utilised as a home. It is far easier to interpret a country house that is more complete with a collection to interpret and display than a country house that is a ruin, which presents safety and accessibility challenges as noted by a small number of respondents. As other respondents noted, complete buildings also tend to be more appealing to visit in Britain owing to the unpredictable weather and therefore the capability to support facilities such as toilets and a café. However, interpretation methods are becoming more advanced and there are now more options that can be used to interpret ruined buildings using technologies such as Augmented Reality and Virtual Reality because of widespread access to mobile phones and their growing capabilities. For these technologies to be used at ruined sites however, they require funding which is often not provided for sites that are neglected. Where funding is provided or raised for ruined country houses such as Gwrych Castle, the aim is not to interpret the current

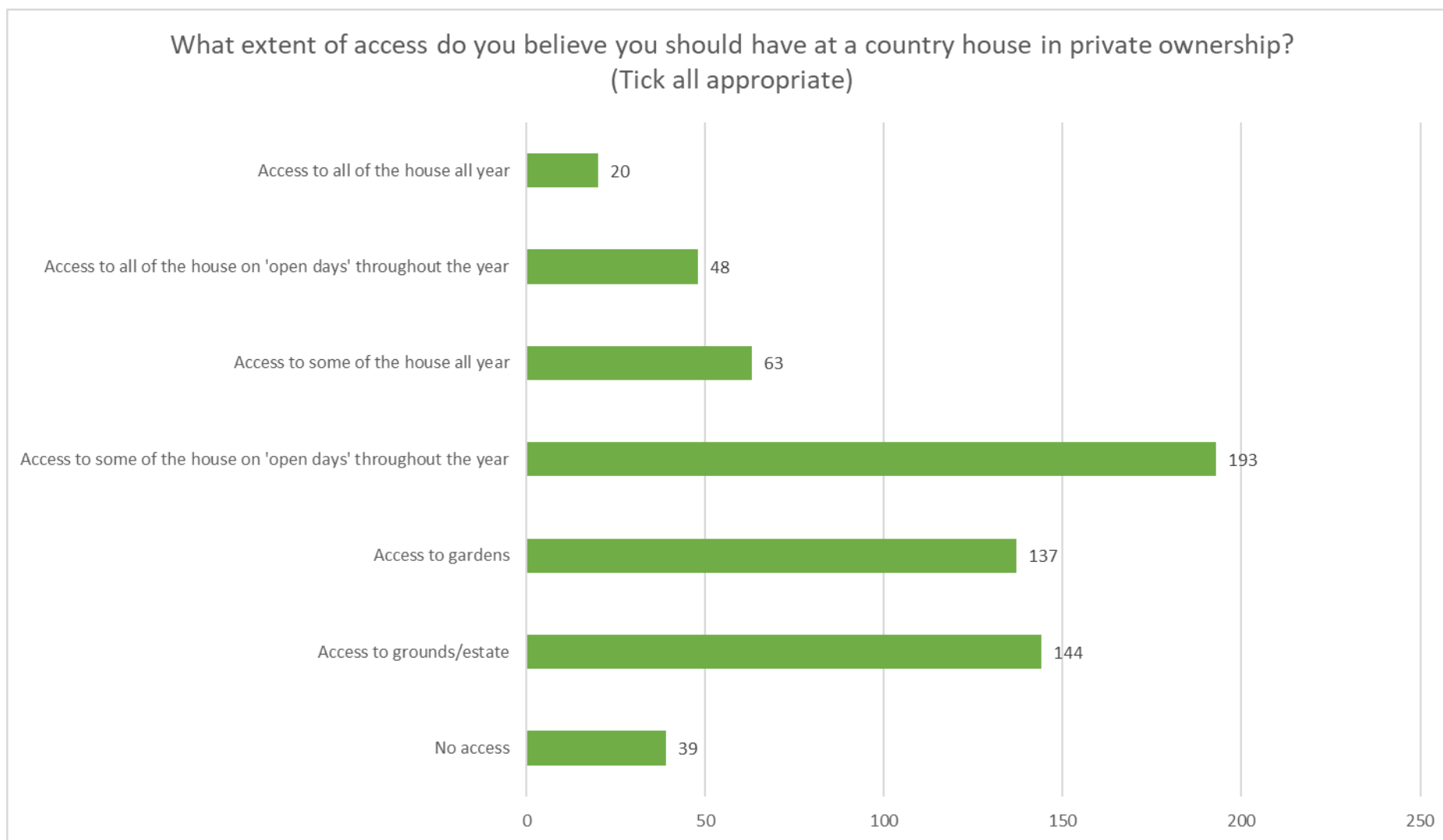


Figure 35: A firm majority of respondents believe they should have gardens, grounds, and partial house access on open days to country houses in private ownership.

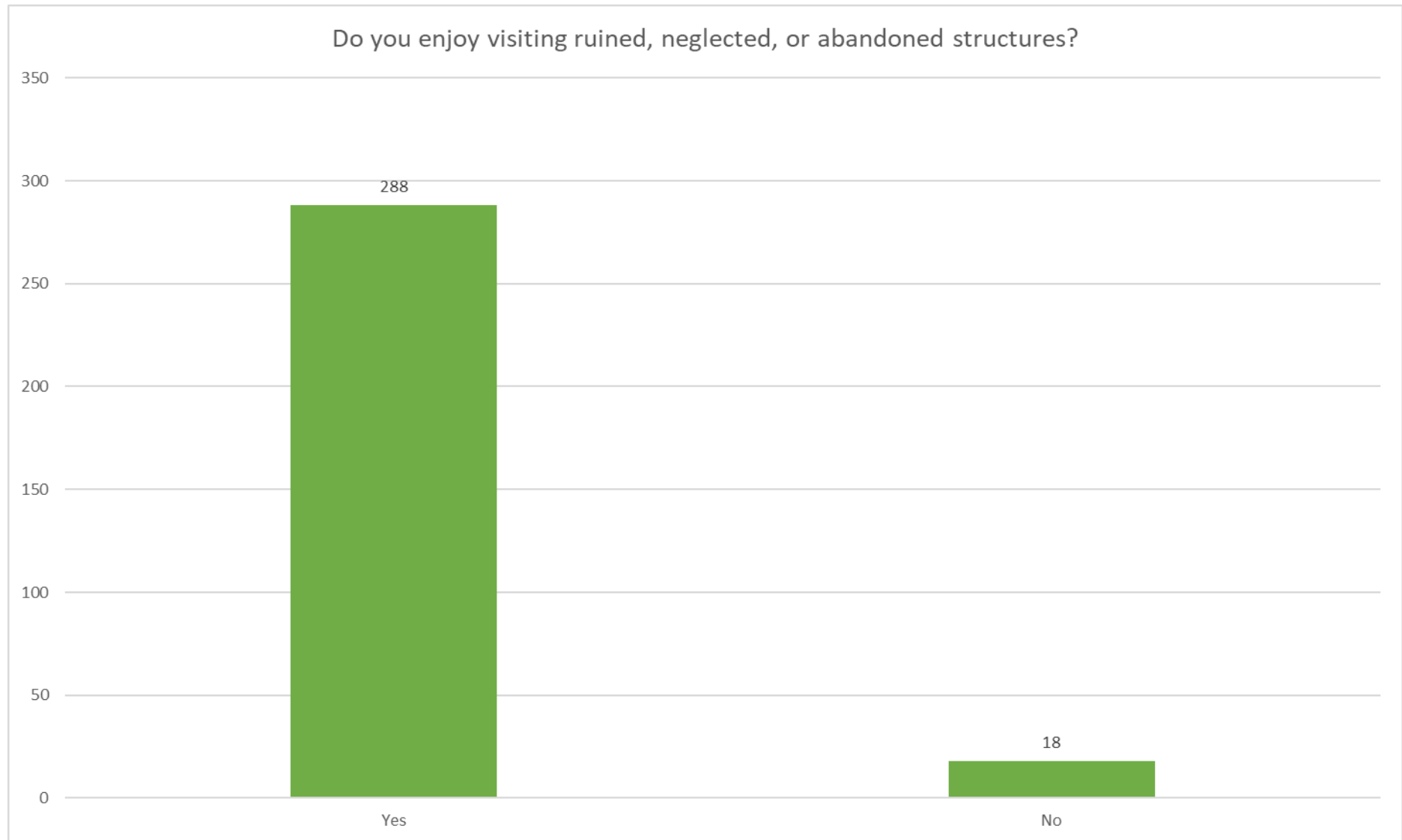


Figure 36: A small minority of respondents do not enjoy visiting ruins.

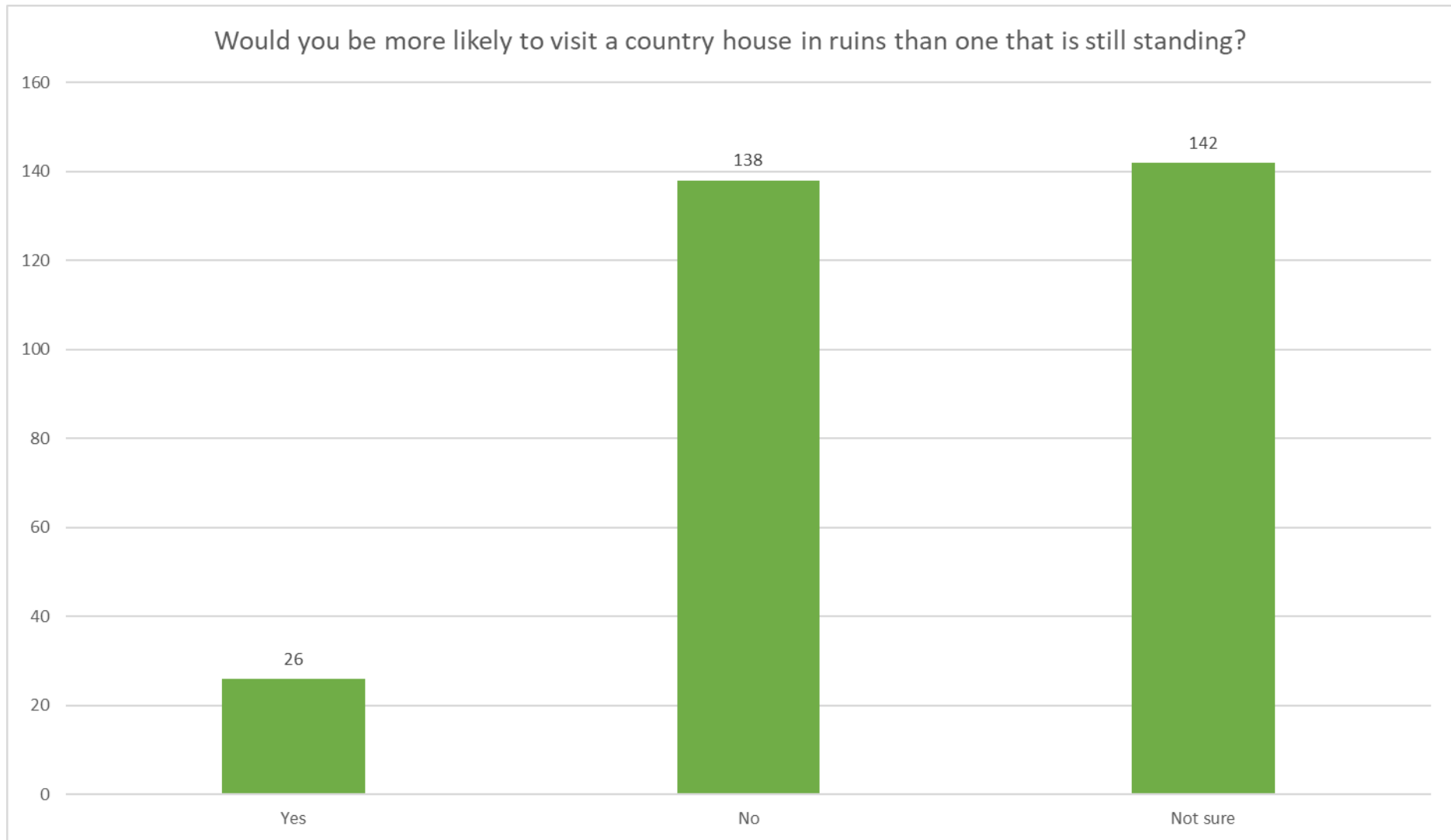


Figure 37: A minority of respondents would be more likely to visit a country house in ruins than one which is more structurally complete.

state of the building, but to carry out at least a partial restoration and then offer a full programme of interpretation on-site (Gwrych Castle, 2021). This would create a more recognised visitor attraction than a typical ruin would offer, and this is what people have identified that they would like to see as part of their survey responses in this research. One respondent commented that ruins are “monuments to the failure to preserve, cherish and sustain”. It is a comment that resonates with this research because considering country houses in any form as a monument has been discussed in relation to Jill Franklin’s comment considering country houses as “monuments to an extinct social order” (Franklin, 1981, p.1). In Franklin’s view, country houses are monuments to overwhelming capitalistic success in their existence, but this respondent indicates that whilst they might have been built as a result of capitalistic success and gain, if they become ruins structurally, they serve as monuments to contemporary failure, rather than historic success. These juxtaposing views along the same theme of country houses as monuments creates a story that could be used to interpret a ruin, because a building becoming a ruin can be a significant aspect of a site’s history, as in the case of Marks Hall in Essex, where a research project sought to use archaeological discoveries and academic research to interpret the original appearance of the site (Marks Hall Mansion Essex History, 2012; Raven, 2015). This underlines that the history of a country house does not end when the family or families associated with the property departs. The story of a country house continues regardless of whether it is privately owned, owned by an organisation such as the National Trust, a ruin, or still complete, and these can all be factored into interpretation decisions if deemed to be appropriate on a site-by-site basis. This extends to the interpretation of current day functions – their histories continue to be built upon.

Although the respondents who would be more likely to visit a ruined country house were in the minority, some of the provided justifications related to the symbolism of the country house:

I think I’d rather visit a ruined Penrhyn Castle than the building as it is, celebrating the greed and cruelty of past family members and their blatant

disregard of quarry workers and the hundreds/thousands (no one knows how many) of enslaved African Workers who died on their plantations in Jamaica.

They better symbolise the downfall of the upper classes.

These two respondents particularly referred to symbolism. The first, specifically mentioning Penrhyn Castle and describing it as a “celebration of greed” states that they would prefer to visit it if it was a ruin because, to them, it stands to represent the greed and mistreatment of people both, at local quarries and at sugar plantations in Jamaica. The second quoted respondent would prefer to visit ruined country houses because they better symbolise the fall of the social order that Jill Franklin refers to in her work, and this respondent sees that as something that ruined country houses can celebrate, rather than condemning contemporary failed preservation. Other respondents provided different reasons for preferring ruined country houses:

Not always but replica interiors are often disappointing and give a theatrical/Disneyesque experience. A ruin is often purer in architecture than looking at restoration.

I think in some ways they are more interesting, and there is more freedom to explore the site.

Disneyfication and authenticity are themes that are again raised by a respondent in this survey, stating that they prefer to visit ruins because they appear to be more authentic or “pure”, rejecting some replicas as “Disneyesque” and not creating the authentic experience that they appear to desire. One respondent mentions “freedom”, stating that visitors are more able to explore ruins. Whilst this is often true depending on structural concerns, there is less freedom to explore country houses that are not in a ruinous state because there are often collections being preserved using ropes or barriers to prevent visitors walking on valuable carpets or getting too close to objects to preserve them. Therefore, there is less of an opportunity for a visitor to feel as though they are exploring a preserved country house, and there can be one-way systems in place which further inhibit the feeling of exploration that visitors can feel at ruined country houses, with less restrictions on

where visitors can and cannot go in certain rooms or the order that they choose to explore a site.

This research has, for the first time, begun to substantially identify the visiting habits of people to Welsh country houses. It has identified some of their preferences, priorities, and presented a significant body of public opinion that can be used to support and inform future research as well as future decision-making relative to Welsh country houses and their interpretation.

The Country House in Wales and Identity According to Public Opinion

The survey also sought to understand the relationship between Welsh identity and Welsh country houses. To do so, the figures and analysis following Figure 38 shows responses from the small majority of respondents shown in Figure 38 who identified themselves as Welsh. This includes both English-language respondents and Welsh-language respondents which forms a sample size of 159 from the total 306 respondents. Firstly, the survey asked respondents if they believed that more should be done at Welsh country houses to promote Welsh. Most respondents believed that more should be done, and those who selected 'yes' were asked to justify their selection. Some respondents commented along historical themes, whilst others stated that Welsh is the language of Wales:

Trwy gydol y deunawfed ganrif a'r pedwerydd ganrif ar bymtheg, roedd gweithwyr y stadau hyn (a'r tenantiaid) yn Gymry Cymraeg. Ni ddylid anwybyddu eu cyfraniad.

(Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the workers on these estates (and the tenants) were Welsh speakers. Their contribution should not be ignored.)

Gan ei fod yn bwysig. Cymraeg ydy iaith Cymru nid Saesneg.

(Because it is important. Welsh is the language of Wales, not English.)

Mae'n bwysig ein bod yn defnyddio'n hiaith ym mhob agwedd o'n bywyd, - ac i ymwelwyr sylweddoli nad rhan o Loegr yw Cymru.

(It is important that we use our language in every aspect of our life, - and for visitors to realise that Wales is not part of England.)

Ni yng Nghymru ac fe fyddaf rhan fwyaf o'r gweision yn Gymry Cymraeg.

(We are in Wales and most of the servants would be Welsh speakers.)

Mae'n siwr bod y plasdai hyn wedi cyflogi morwynion a gweision Cymraeh eu hiaith, ac wedi cyfrannu at warchod yr iaith yn y cymunedau , e.e rhoi gwaith I bobl lleol a'u cadw yn eu cymunedau.

(These mansions must have employed Welsh-speaking maids and servants, and contributed to protecting the language in the communities, e.g., providing employment to local people and keeping them in their communities.)

Mae llawer o blastai yng NGhymru yn enwedig rhai yng ngofal yr Ymddiriedaeth Genedlaethol yn Seisnig eu naws a'llawer o'r tywysyddion yn uniaith Saesneg.

(Many mansions in Wales, especially those in the care of the National Trust are English in nature and many of the guides are monoglot English speakers.)

Evidently, judging by responses such as the final quoted response, it is not enough that National Trust properties present bilingual signage, social media posts, and websites. Staff and volunteers that people speak to during their visit also represent and create an image of a country house in the mind of a visitor, and if they speak Welsh, they can portray an impression of a Welsh identity. For many respondents the answer to this question was as simple as Welsh country houses are in Wales, and so the Welsh language should be used on-site. Other respondents made similar comments but rather than basing their comments around present day language policy objectives, they focussed on country houses at points in history where they all would have been lived in with Welsh being the language of local communities and therefore also most likely the language of staff and tenants on country house estates. Some respondents stated that it was important that country houses use the Welsh language as far as possible so that visitors who are not from Wales leave with an understanding that Wales is not a part of England. Only one respondent who undertook the survey in Welsh selected “no”, indicating that people who more regularly use the Welsh language believe that country houses should do more to promote the Welsh language. The English-language respondents who selected “no” provided their justifications, with one commenting that language can be political:

This can be highly political and sensitive; owners need to be apolitical.

This is an opposing view to more simplistic comments justifying “yes” responses seeing the use of the Welsh language as a given owing to the geographic location of

sites being in Wales, rather than viewing language as a political tool. Other respondents who selected “no” also referred to the history of country houses and their original purposes:

Many Welsh houses are Anglo-Welsh. Information should be available in Welsh, but language was not the purpose of most of these buildings. Bryn Bella might have had more to do with Italian for instance. Its beauty is the Palladian architecture.

Country Houses built mainly by people with ambitions of promotion in the English Aristocracy. There would be an unwanted Irony in promoting Cymraeg.

Seems to conflict with original purpose - most were places of English oppression.

These comments raise several topics of discussion. Firstly, the respondents are judging country houses in the twenty-first century based on what is, for many country houses, a historic function. There are many events and activities that are now undertaken at country houses that originally would not have taken place, such as ghost hunts and filming for television programmes. The function of many properties has shifted dramatically since they were originally built as homes for wealthy families. Therefore, the Welsh language need not be excluded from Welsh country houses based on a past function during a time of different societal norms. The other topic to discuss that these responses raise is the idea of Welsh country houses not being Welsh but being English country houses located in Wales. This is an important distinction to draw, and it's clear from these responses that some people do view country houses as symbols of English oppression in Wales. However, Figure 40 shows that most people view country houses as at least reasonably important to Welsh identity. If country houses in Wales were viewed as symbols of English oppression in Wales by a significant majority, this would be unlikely to be the case. Figure 40 also shows that English-language respondents largely considered

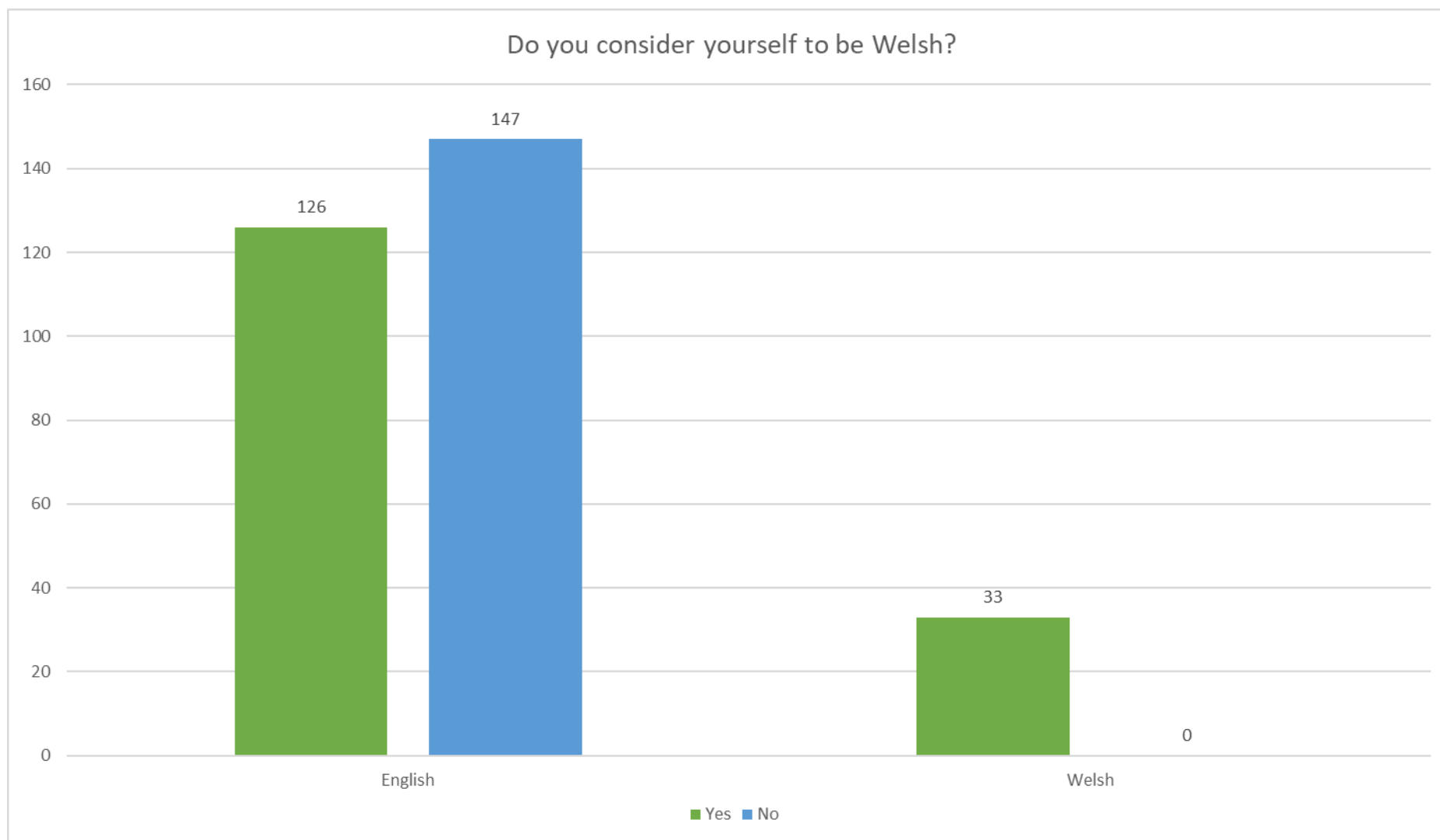


Figure 38: All Welsh-language respondents considered themselves to be Welsh, forming a small majority of all respondents who consider themselves to be Welsh.

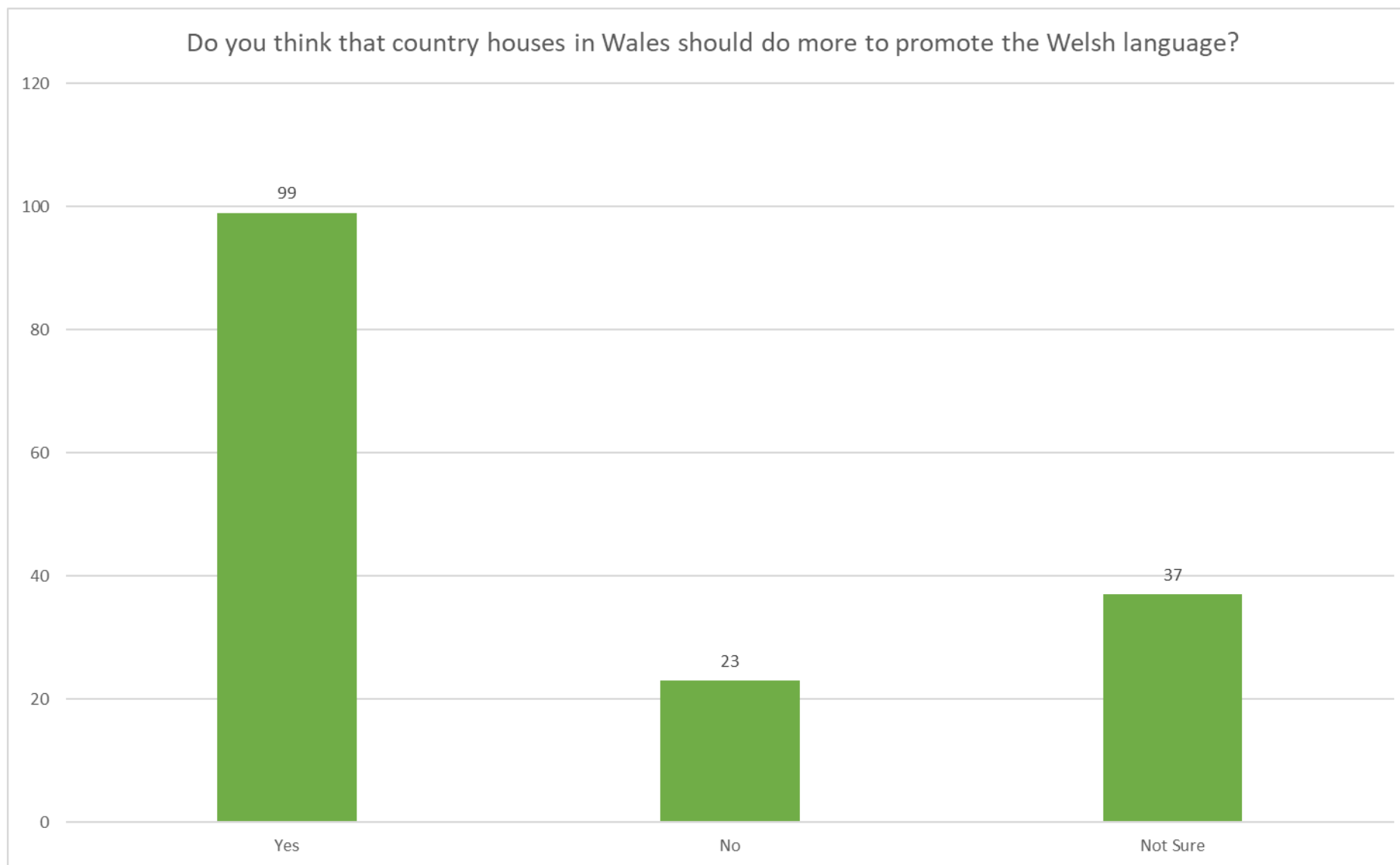


Figure 39: A majority of respondents believed that country houses in Wales should do more to promote the Welsh language.

Welsh country houses to be 'very important' to Welsh identity, whereas Welsh-language respondents seemed to consider country houses to be 'important' rather than 'very important' by a small majority. Respondents provided various justifications for their selections:

Each local area will have 'the big house' which will hold a mine of knowledge and will in some way be connected to the local community. Everyone will have been impacted by employment and industry with a Welsh heritage.

In my grandparents' time they were the biggest employers in rural areas & most of my ancestors either worked in them or rented their farms from them & my parents told me lots of stories of those days when they were children & remember when it was like Downton Abbey everywhere. Those times have gone but are still an important part of our history & heritage.

They are part of our present, past and future and therefore of our culture and identity.

Again, the country houses are a touchstone of Welsh culture and the past. They also could promote the tourist industry in Wales.

Well, they should be, but back to the need for honesty in the telling of Welsh history.

Love them or hate them they are undeniably talismanic of the cultural, economic, and political history of Wales. Contemporary interpretations of them should convey the fact that they could simultaneously represent 'oppression' and 'progression' in social structures and opportunities.

They're more English/British than Welsh.

Part of our history.

The last quoted response is a simplistic statement but is one that was popular among respondents in explaining why they believed that country houses are important parts of Welsh identity. Other responses were far more detailed, such as the first and second quoted responses which identify a family connection to estates in the case of the second response, and an awareness of how estates and country

houses have impacted upon “everyone [...] with a Welsh heritage” in the case of the first response. Both of these respondents establish connections between people’s identity of the past and people’s identity in the present through country houses being pillars in local communities for the employment of local people. Many respondents made similar comments, with others making connections between their own ancestors and country houses, stating that they remain a part of their identity today as a result. Country houses today can remain large employers owing to their differing functions. Therefore, it is possible that as they have continued to employ people, they will continue to feature as a part of the identity of people. Some respondents alluded to this, with one quoted stating that country houses “are part of our present, past and future” whilst another went on to comment that “they also could promote the tourist industry in Wales”. In doing so, the respondent offers a method that they can continue to be linked to identity. Other respondents observed that the interpretation of them is crucial to ensuring that country houses are important to Welsh identity in the future through honest acknowledgement of the past. In commenting on interpretation, one respondent stated that they should stand to “represent ‘oppression’ and ‘progression’ in social structures and opportunities”. This reflects their oppressive nature in their grandeur, size, architecture, and the power that they symbolise whilst recognising the role of the country house as a progressor in technology, local community development, infrastructure, and economies. Some respondents in justifying why they believed that country houses are not important to Welsh identity stated that they are more British or English than Welsh. Another series of questions in the survey sought to deal with this notion more directly. Figure 41 shows the selections made by respondents when asked which of the structures they believed to be most ‘Welsh’. Country Houses were selected by a minority of respondents, with the majority choosing either castles or chapels. A firm majority of Welsh-language respondents selected chapels over any other option, and not one Welsh-language respondent chose country houses. A relatively small number of Welsh-language respondents selected castles as the most Welsh structure, whilst most English-language respondents chose castles. The responses appear to highlight a significant difference between Welsh-language responses and English-language responses despite all

respondents in this section identifying themselves as Welsh. This study has already highlighted a comment made by a respondent early in the survey who stated that “[country houses] signify our colonisation by another nation, more so than the castles for some strange reason”. The sentiment expressed here is repeated in the justifications of other Welsh-language respondents for their selections shown in Figure 41:

Cestyll Edwardaidd yn bennaf sydd yn yr ardal hon. Fawr o Gymreictod yn perthyn I rheini. Chwareli a chapel ar y llaw arall yn werinol ac yn aml yn gyfangwbl Gymraeg a Chymreig.

(Castles in this area are predominantly Edwardian. These were hardly Welsh in nature. Quarries and chapels on the other hand were vernacular and often wholly Welsh.)

Adeiladwyd y rhan fwyaf o gestyll i gadw'r Cymry 'i lawr'; roedd llawer o blastai a safleoedd diwydiannol yn eiddo i Saeson.

(Most castles were built to keep the Welsh 'down'; many mansions and industrial sites were owned by English people.)

Both respondents selected chapels as the most ‘Welsh’ as shown in Figure 41, as did the respondent who compared country houses to castles earlier in the survey. The comparison drawn by some respondents between castles and country houses are interesting and as so many respondents have commented on throughout the survey, can be drawn upon in the interpretation of country houses through the representation and acknowledgement of oppression and progression. English-language responses also referred to castles and country houses:

Some castles and country houses can and perhaps should be regarded as cultural impositions.

Welsh castles are in ruin and unfortunately do not hold as much attention as the large Edward I structures. Country houses are found throughout Britain and Ireland, so whilst their stories are unique, I don't see them as particularly Welsh. The same could be said for industrial sites, particularly in comparison

to the Northeast of England. Of course, chapels are found across the U.K., however their stories are often uniquely Welsh, their language is mostly Welsh, their influence on community groups, structures and layout prevails, and some of them maintain an influence to this day, good or bad.

Native Welsh built more chapels than castles or country houses. They also helped keep communities and language alive.

Castles represent the struggle to remain independent and are a clear reminder that we are not just a part of England.

Castles built by English. The industrial heritage of mining quarrying etc is very specific to Wales.

Probably Wales is most known for its castles, the sheer amount of castles that Wales has whether in full amount or in ruins. The fact that Wales has the most castles in Europe by a square mile is impressive and shows this.

Castles were built by both sides, and are largely ruins, but the country houses support living, breathing Welshness.

Castles are intrinsically Welsh to me, and I have visited many during my childhood. They feel like they are deeply rooted in to our past and how we see ourselves.

These English-language responses referring to castles and country houses show a difference in opinion among respondents, in that some see castles in Wales as Welsh, whilst others see castles in Wales as English and consequently, clear symbols of oppression. It is important to note that numerous castles in Wales were either constructed by or are associated with native princes of Wales. Some respondents drew a distinction between Welsh castles in Wales and English castles in Wales, and this appeared to be a justification for some behind either selecting castles or selecting chapels or industrial sites. Perhaps because castles have stood in many cases for

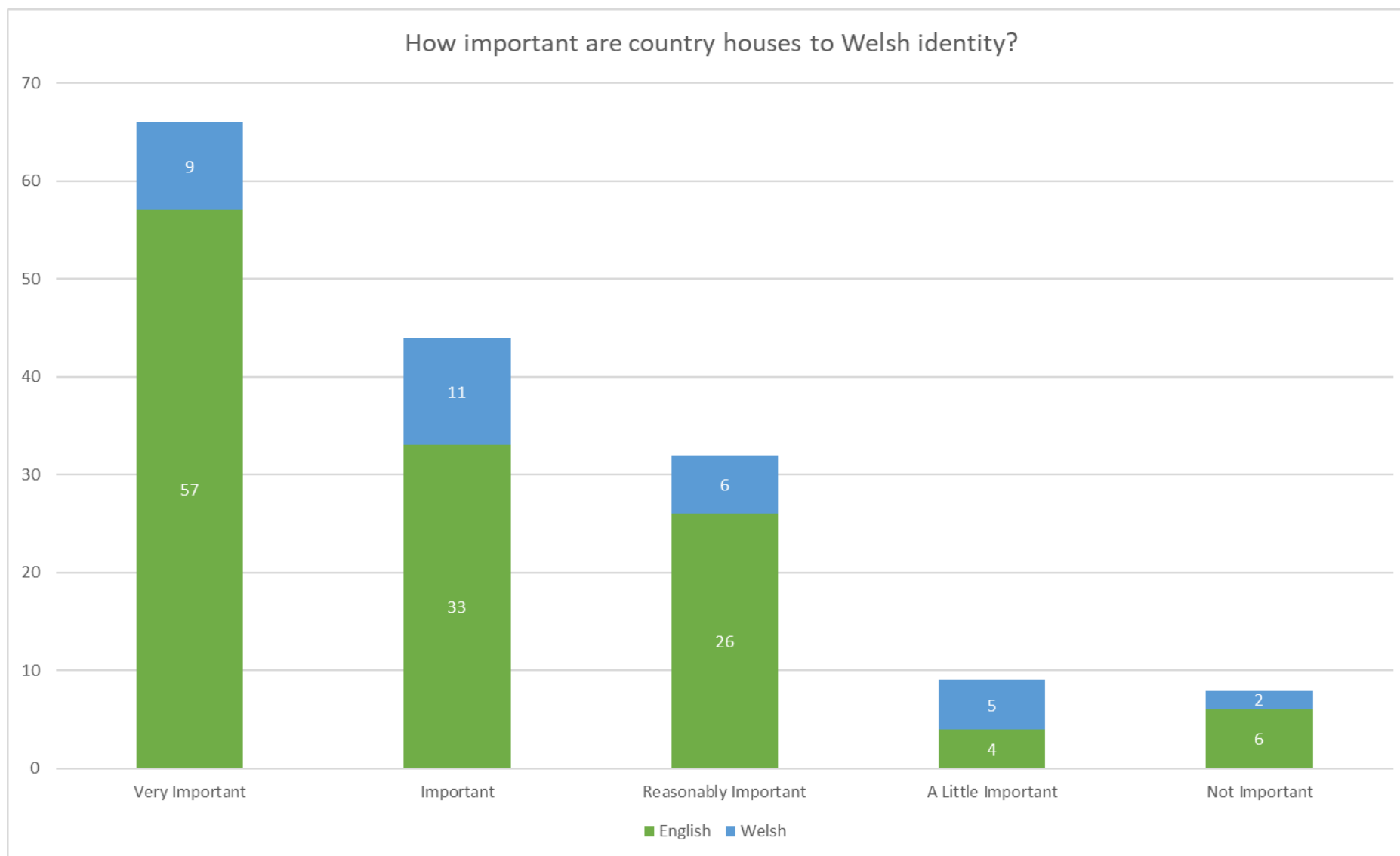


Figure 40: A majority of respondents believed that country houses are important to Welsh identity.

centuries longer than country houses, castles are now most commonly seen as tourist attractions rather than symbols of oppression, and the number of them located in Wales is now more significant to people than the origin of their builder, or their original purpose. Therefore, the age of a site does not determine the significance of it relative to a person's identity. Over time, it appears that structures remain a part of a person's identity, but how people relate to them changes as generations of families lose direct connections to sites, or the manner that people engage with sites changes. For example, one of the quoted respondents stated, "castles are intrinsically Welsh to me, and I have visited many during my childhood". Interpretation has a significant role to play at country houses in the future in engaging people and therefore forging connections between country houses and the identity of people for generations to come. Despite not being chosen as the most 'Welsh' structure of those given in Figure 41, Figure 42 shows that just 5 respondents who identified themselves as Welsh do not believe that country houses are an important part of the history, heritage, and culture of Wales. Therefore, there is an overwhelming majority of respondents who believe that country houses are important to these aspects of Wales. With effective interpretation, they can continue to be important in the future. Interpretation should seek to articulate the Welsh identities of Welsh country houses, alongside their local, national, and global narratives.

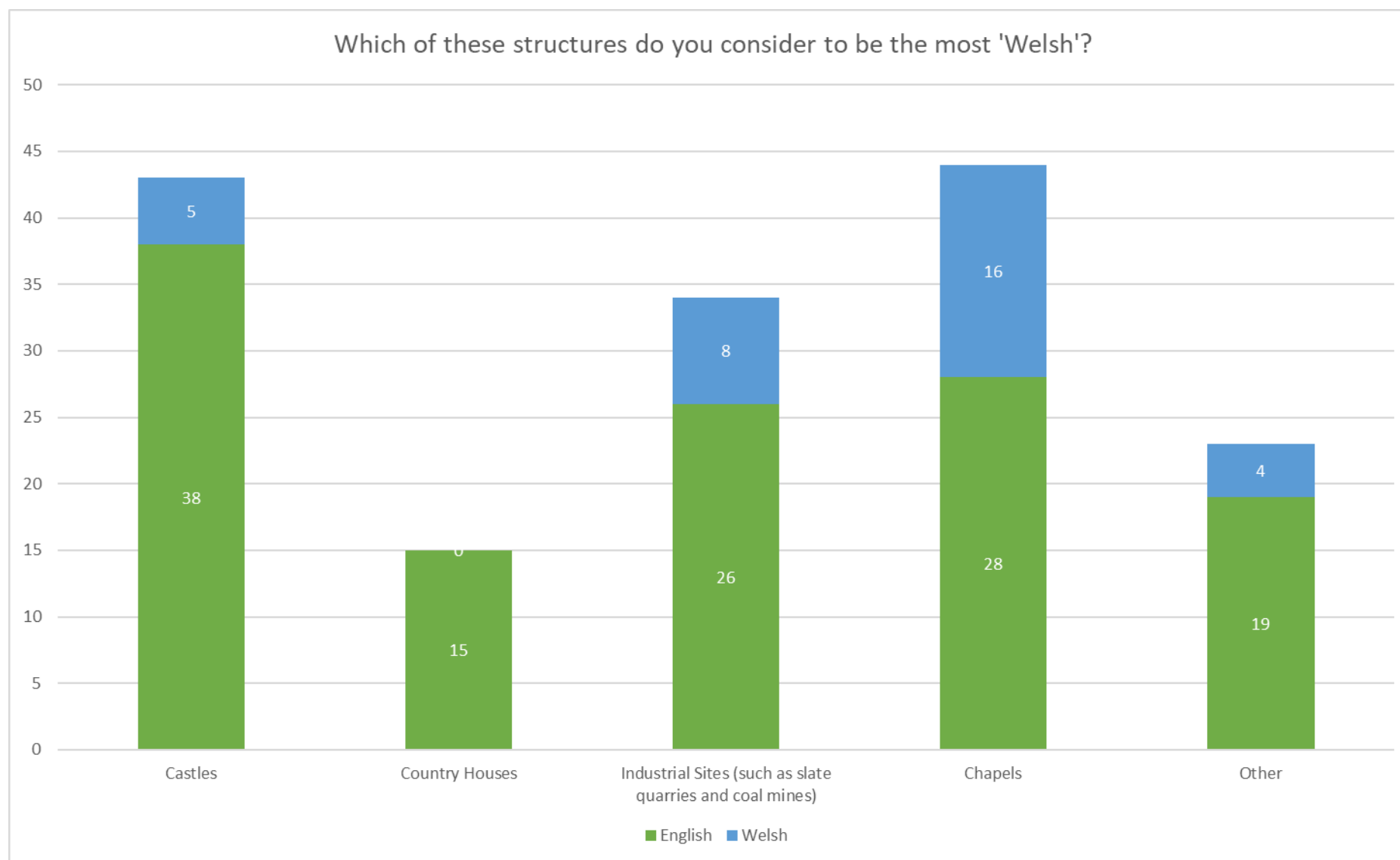


Figure 41: A minority of respondents believe that country houses are the most 'Welsh' of those represented in the graph.

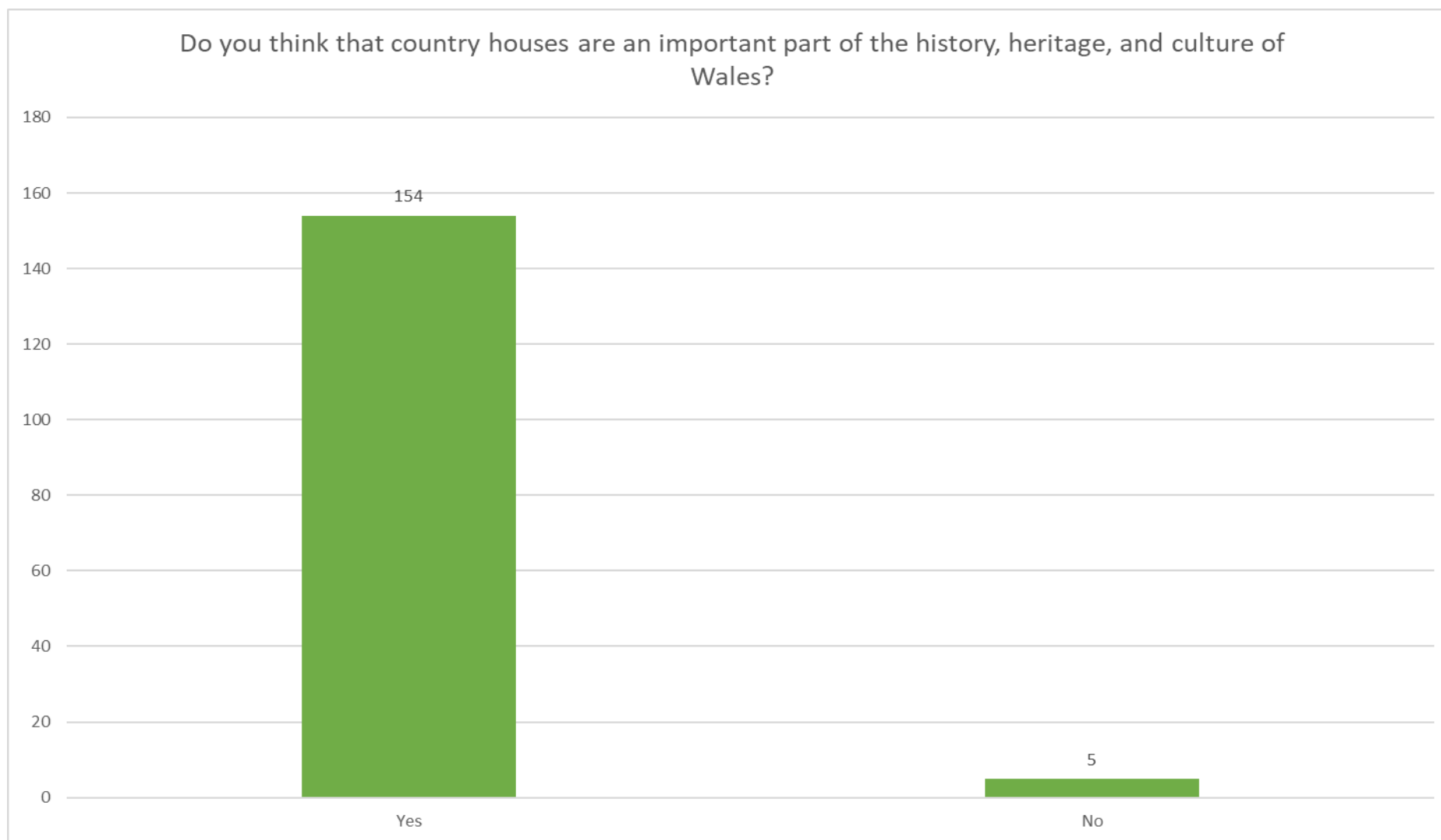


Figure 42: A significant majority of respondents believe that country houses are an important part of the history, heritage, and culture of Wales.

Conclusion

The survey has provided significant insight into a wide range of topics related to the interpretation of country houses from the 306 respondents, many of whom were based in Wales or identified themselves as Welsh. Results have shown that there is a desire for acknowledgement in the interpretation of country houses to present full, complete, unbiased stories, and for this to be achieved through high-quality interpretation based on competent research, regardless of their present-day function. The creation of accurate, holistic interpretation is something that the literature review of this work identified as best practice through the assessment of different principles of interpretation. Interpretation needs to interpret themes including the family, architecture, and collections but extends beyond these and into social and cultural factors. Furthermore, interpretation needs to move away from a polarised view of history painting people and events as 'good' or 'bad' when they were often multi-layered and far more complex. Whilst most respondents perceive Welsh country houses to have been historically significant locally, less respondents view country houses as historically significant nationally, and fewer again view them as historically significant globally. Many Welsh country houses were historically significant globally to an extent, and interpretation can be used to emphasise this to audiences at sites. The literature review considered relevance as well as significance, and this chapter has shown how the relevance of the country house has changed and in relation to this, the advantages of appealing to different audiences through interpretation. Interpretation can be used to encourage first-time visits and repeat visits through a changing programme of events, as this research has found that this is what encourages people to do so, whilst people are dissuaded from visiting or re-visiting often due to personal reasons such as their location or a lack of available time to visit. Such a changing programme of events can be used to interpret different themes or aspects of country houses, for example underrepresented histories that respondents made it clear that they wanted to see and that the literature review of this thesis identified as subjects that are beginning to more commonly be explored in the study of country houses. There is a significant desire to view country houses in private ownership, mostly through open days throughout a given year, but the fact that they are privately owned is not necessarily a factor

that inspires people to visit. When properties in private ownership are opened to the public, interpretation can help them communicate their historic, current, and potential future significance to audiences, maintaining or creating community links in doing so which can be crucial to the preservation of a country house. Furthermore, Welsh country houses regardless of their function or ownership status can and should be used to promote the Welsh language to further establish community links. Some Welsh should always feature in the interpretation of Welsh country houses to create an inherent and undoubted sentiment of 'Welshness' so that visitors leave knowing that they have visited a Welsh country house, as opposed to an English country house in Wales. In addition to this, respondents believed that the Welsh language was a key part of the histories of country houses and the identities of the people who worked in them and should continue to form a key part of a visit to one today and in the future as it continues to form a key part of people's identities today. The use of the Welsh language in country houses underlines just one of several ways in which country houses relate to the identities of people discussed in this chapter. Finally, it is evident from this research that Welsh country houses remain substantially significant and can continue to be in the future with the help of effective interpretation that is honest, accurate, and engages audiences with relevant subject matter through a varied programme of events.

WELSH COUNTRY HOUSE INTERPRETATION ACCORDING TO CUSTODIANS AND PRACTITIONERS

This chapter reflects upon a series of interviews conducted by the researcher with 20 staff members and custodians of Welsh country houses. Interviewees were carefully chosen as they represented both a broad selection of property function in Wales and a broad selection of roles in relation to the property or aspect of interpretation that they were interviewed about. Their individual backgrounds ranging from private owners to volunteers to curators provide broader insights and valuable information to better understand the interpretation of country houses in Wales. The interviews were semi-structured, with a number of questions prepared in advance that all interviewees were asked (appendix 3) on the themes of significance and relevance, interpretation, and identity. Other questions were asked of interviewees based upon their answers, to gain further insight or to establish more details. The interview themes were identified and developed as a direct result of the survey design process, using the same themes and structure as the survey. Interviews were chosen as the method of gathering data for staff and custodians as opposed to surveys so that interviewees would have more freedom to express themselves on a wide variety of aspects along the aforementioned themes. It was important to speak to them to gain first hand insight into the practicalities of operating a country house – practical knowledge and experience from people in positions who can make a difference in terms of future interpretation practice. Surveys limit the subject matter that can be explored, which is useful for a large data sample to compare responses, but interviews are a better method for exploring a wide range of topics relevant to specific themes, with more opportunities for interviewees to provide examples, explanations, and more details. This chapter is structured based on the three themes of the interview questions, with comments made by interviewees compared and discussed in relation to the interpretation of Welsh country houses. A list of participating interviewees is available to view in the appendices of this work (appendix 6).

Contextualising the Interviews

The interviews were held between March and June 2021. Interviewees were identified by the researcher to understand interpretation in a variety of current country house functions. The 20 interviewees (appendix 6) consist of country house owners, interpretation specialists, curators, house managers, current and former directors, and trustees. They spoke about their involvement with country houses that operate as full-time heritage attractions, hotels, private homes, and as other functions, thus underlining a distinctive element of this research – looking across the country house sector in Wales and understanding them as they are today. Collectively, they provide an abundant pool of knowledge, expertise, and opinions relevant to the interpretation of country houses and the wider issues that are pertinent to the circumstances of each individual interviewee and the property they represent. Owing to the coronavirus pandemic, interviews were held online and recorded for analysis. The pandemic was referred to by most interviewees underlining its impact on the numerous sectors that Welsh country houses now operate within, as well as highlighting the period in which the interviews were carried out. During this period, some country houses operating as visitor attractions, hotels, or wedding venues were not open to the public. Consequently, interviewees spoke about the challenges that the pandemic had forced them to handle in their roles, and the concerns that they had. This reflected the unique time that the interviews were taking place and adds further value to the study.

The Significance and Relevance of the Country House in Wales

After introducing the research to interviewees and understanding more about their own roles and backgrounds, the first section of the interviews aimed to understand the significance and relevance of Welsh country houses according to the people who worked at, owned, or lived in them. This section not only considered the historic significance of Welsh country houses, but also contemporary significance, and how significance and relevance has changed over time in the opinions of the interviewees. These subjects were introduced to the interviewees by first considering the functions of their properties, and the type of activities that take place. The interviewees identified a wide range of activities and functions such as self-catered accommodation, weddings, open days, farm shops, festivals, full-time visitor attractions that offer exhibitions and tours, farming, and filming. After discussing the activities that take place in the Hawarden Estate (such as the farm shop and a festival named the Good Life Experience), Sir Charles Gladstone was asked if he believed that the operation of a country house has had to change over time, or if it was an active choice made by his family. He believed that country houses and their estates have had to change over time to survive, but also because he is personally interested in change:

I think there's an element of change needed. [...] My interests are all kind of things that are happening now. I'm interested in popular culture, in retail restaurants. We have a pop-up in the village as well. I think that I feel personally that we are bound to change. I mean, I think that we need to remain relevant in order to press ahead in order to survive.

Claudia Howard resides at Gyrn Castle which is owned by her father. She stated that their main sources of income are two tenant farmers and rental property. Asked if the operation of a country house had changed over time when considering that their main income sources were still derived from the estate, Howard made the point that whilst that is the case, in her opinion things have still changed:

My granny lived here as Lady Bates and she was a lady who would not work, obviously never worked in her life. She was a wife, a mother, and she would entertain, she would organise events and my grandfather was master of the

hunt. [...] Their incomes came off the estate and they spent their money in the estate and lived in a family. Whereas all of us work, and we all work off site in other jobs and we don't take any income from the estate, so none of us children take any income from the estate. [...] The way we earn our money hasn't changed, but the way we live within the estate and the fact that we all need to earn extra to make sure that we can continue to run it [has changed].

Here, Howard indicates that estates have had to change because the world surrounding them has changed. She raised the point that it is now commonplace for women to have jobs and careers, and that owners of country houses such as Gyrn Castle must work to gain the necessary income to run the property and maintain it adequately. Although many country house owners historically had careers in the law, church, military or politics, the example of Lady Bates and her lifestyle provides a stark contrast to Howard's contemporary situation. Jon Hignett, the Visitor Operations and Experience Manager at Chirk Castle, operated by the National Trust, believed that there had been change at Chirk Castle too, but that Chirk Castle has a history of change:

Yes, definitely. The 13th century was highly different to significance through the years, so it's gone from medieval fortress [...] to a centre of administration, [...] then through different Kings it was handed to different people as a reward. [...Now] some people see it as a great place to walk the dogs. Some people see it as a place to take the kids to entertain them. Some people come here every week and do Nordic walking. Lots of different things to different people.

In identifying the regular changes which country houses experienced historically, Hignett also identified the extent to which Chirk Castle has changed over time through stating what Chirk Castle was historically for and what it is commonly used for today, identifying a significant change. Lord Mostyn, owner of Mostyn Hall stated that the country house offer has had to change over time to make money to maintain the house:

Over the last hundred years, estates have fallen by the wayside whether it's decreasing rental income or a family that weren't careful with their money. We've been lucky on our estate because the last 150 years we have faced bankruptcy a few times but thankfully we've managed to pull through every time. The reason I say this is how are they going to be financially in the future? Where's their income going to come from? I guess there will be some estates in the next hundred years that will be financially fine. I guess more and more will have to turn to giving tours or hosting weddings or stuff for TV. [...] A lot of people all over the world love Downton Abbey. [...] The appeal will always be there because in other parts of the world, they don't have these sorts of ancestral homes.

All interviewees believed that country houses have changed, with the most common reasons for doing so being either to remain or become relevant, or to raise vital income to sustain a property. Lord Mostyn briefly referred to popular culture in introducing Downton Abbey to the discussion. Asked if he would consider filming at Mostyn Hall, he stated:

We have considered it. We did do some filming for Japanese TV over the last couple of years, but it was solely to do with tours. [...] I think the reason I would be reticent to go down the TV route is security, because sure we can do tours but it's still a home, it is a private residence. [...] The only reason I agreed to the Japanese TV was to showcase the hall because we needed to get it out there in Japan.

Other interviewees, such as Claudia Howard, were much more open to filming:

Everyone's dream is to be the next Highclere, right? [...] The competition is so high, and I think it's just about who you know, so I've started to try and pull out a few threads through my advertising connections and so for example, we very nearly got picked to be part of ITV 'I'm a Celeb'. [...] It would have been really good income to be honest for a short period of time, [...] this isn't £2,000 weddings, these are professionals who come in and pay you £10,000 for the week to take the whole venue. [...] If we were offered a sort of

'Escape to the Chateau' type TV programme which we had to be on, I'm not sure we would take it because we're not very public facing. We don't want fame or to be too well known, but I would like the house and the heritage to get some exposure so that we could get more work.

Amongst the interviewees there was clearly an awareness that popular culture such as filming for television or films can change the contemporary significance and relevance of a property, thus helping to sustain the property. However, Howard opines that doing so can come with risks, such as unwanted publicity and attention to add to Lord Mostyn's concerns regarding security. Speaking about the impact of 'I'm a Celebrity' at Gwrych Castle, Mark Baker, Director of Gwrych Castle Preservation Trust, underlined the positive impacts that filming can have not only for a country house, but for its surrounding locality:

[There were] cash injections for what would have been the first phase of the Lottery Heritage Fund package, paid for by ITV, so they probably spent not far off £1 million. [...] It was a great opportunity to safeguard the building. We appointed conservation architects and conservation builders to work alongside all of these regulatory bodies to ensure that the works are being carried out to a high quality, but also enabled the building to be able to be accessed by the celebrities. For us it moved the [restoration] project forward massively. [...] We were told that we were at the centre, so the golf course was booked out, a crew of 500 coming up needed accommodating for August to January, security, set designers... so in terms of economic impact, you know you're probably looking at millions that have gone into the local economy and then you've got the knock-on effects from being exposed to the public every night for two or three weeks.

Evidently in this particular case the financial benefits of filming at Gwrych Castle were significant, and these are the benefits that Howard was also referring to. Speaking about the effects of popular culture and relevance in a country house setting, Baker continued:

You have got to trust the opportunities, because if we didn't get 'I'm a Celebrity', it would have gone somewhere else. [...] It will always be part of the interpretation.

Here, Baker refers to the filming of 'I'm a Celebrity' as part of the history of Gwrych Castle that could be presented as part of future interpretation at the property. The filming is not something that has taken place after the history of the site has been written, it is part of it and the history of the site continues to be expanded upon. Baker was not asked if he believes that Gwrych Castle is more relevant for hosting 'I'm a Celebrity', but perhaps relevance can only be created for a place if it is being thought about. The vast audience numbers that tuned in to 'I'm a Celebrity' clearly boosted the public profile of the site, as the online analysis of this thesis demonstrated, ensuring that the property was suddenly receiving its largest audience in its history. Taya Drake, the National Trust's Collections and House Manager at Plas Newydd referred to a "Downton Abbey effect" when discussing the relevance of Plas Newydd, but also spoke about how relevance can depend upon the political climate of a current time period:

The political climate changes and what matters to people in the political climate will change and therefore different aspects of the country house will be explored or be more relevant or less relevant. So yes, absolutely. [...] but they do change [the reasons that country houses are relevant to people].

Drake draws attention to aspects of the wider world that can influence interpretation beyond popular culture, and shows that relevance and significance, past and present, are both closely linked to the contemporary interpretation of Welsh country houses. The impact of the Black Lives Matter movement on interpretation and discussed in the survey analysis of this thesis is an example of this. Asked if Penrhyn Castle is more relevant or significant as a result of discussions surrounding historic slavery and colonialism, Eleanor Harding, Assistant Curator at Penrhyn Castle, stated:

Once you start to look into the whole history of any place, it's always relevant. There's always something of relevance in it. It'll always be

significant, and the reason why some places don't feel significant or relevant is because often they're leaving out big aspects of their story. [...] Racialised violence, I think, really came to the fore in the last year, but was it irrelevant before? No, it certainly wasn't. [...] It looks more relevant to people who don't feel that relevance from day to day normally, but actually Penrhyn for the past ten years or much longer for the past seventy years, could have been working with and speaking to communities for whom that history is directly relevant [to] every single day. That's what makes relevance, isn't it? When an aspect of the story is significant in your life. As the owners, I think it's on us to reach out to audiences [...] to offer something useful, and then you've got relevance.

Harding directly related relevance and significance to interpretation in this section of the interview. In stating that ignoring key aspects of a property's story in country house interpretation, Harding underlines one of the key arguments of this thesis, that interpretation can and should be deployed to create significance and relevance for visitors. Interpretation can achieve this by connecting a place with people through important stories that need telling to maintain relevance and significance which this chapter has already established is necessary to raise funds to maintain country houses. Peter Welford, the co-owner of Gwydir Castle summarised the overriding sentiment of the interviewees and their thoughts on relevance:

They have a different relevance. Now obviously they're not centres of power. They are centres of education and learning and inspiration. [...] They're not centres of politics, power, and control.

Country houses are relevant in the 21st century, but their relevance has changed from the period they were political hubs at the centre of their communities and centres for administering surrounding landed estates. This work has identified numerous methods that country houses try to use to either create relevance or sustain it, and interpretation can be used as a method to achieve this. Relevance and significance are two different factors, and the historic significance of a country house varies between properties and their estates. The significance of a country house is something which should be presented in any form of interpretation, but the

extent to which it is presented is dictated by the understanding of significance by the person who is creating or delivering the interpretation. Lord Mostyn did not see Mostyn Hall as representative of a national or international influence:

The main one is locally, [...] it's really the estate, I wouldn't say the building. In hiring people from the local community for x, y, z on the estate and things like being charitable. The influences are so broad it's really difficult to know where to start. Internationally, I don't think there's really been any impact, maybe the only international aspect are these Japanese tours. I don't think we've had any national impact. But definitely local.

Gladstone understood that his property had a historical global influence, but now in his opinion it has been reduced to a local extent, regardless of the property and estate's historical global influence:

William Gladstone undoubtedly globally. [...He] was, I believe one of the most famous men in the world in the Victorian age [...] so that absolutely massive global impact at the time, I would like to think that some of his legacy is still existing in politics and maybe even in our approaches to family too, to the way we conduct ourselves with people. I think beyond that, actually, very little, pretty insignificant. [...] It's just a local thing now, and I don't think that beyond that period, the last 100 years, I think we've just been doing our stuff for better or worse. [...] I think our only influence is local.

In his opinion, the extent of influence can broaden or lessen over time. Gladstone also referred to his hope that his ancestor, William Gladstone, still holds a political legacy. However, he did not specifically refer to a national extent of influence that his property or estate currently exerts, only a local influence through the Hawarden Farm Shop and the Good Life Experience. Considering the extent of Gwrych Castle's influence, Mark baker described it as a "pyramid", with local influence at the bottom of the pyramid gradually increasing to global at the top, indicating that the most influence Gwrych Castle exerted was local, and the further away from Gwrych Castle the lesser the extent of influence becomes:

The biggest impact is local, of course. It's a pyramid. There's local, regional, and then I think [...] it's got national recognition, national profiles with different events going on in its history. Then on occasion, it's kind of been out there internationally. [...] The rise of the internet has attracted more people, if you search for 'derelict castle' it is one of the top ones that comes up. So, it's kind of got this impact, and 'I'm a Celebrity' as well but the history comes first.

Referring to the internet and the filming of 'I'm a Celebrity', Baker showed how different Welsh country houses are now and that the reasons for people to visit them are the most diverse that they have ever been. He also indicates that the internet enables people from beyond a local sphere around Gwrych Castle to visit and engage with the property more readily, highlighting how important it is for staff and custodians of country houses to try and not only have an online presence in the first place, but also to curate that presence as far as possible. Doing so enables prospective visitors to access up to date, accurate information which can then translate into visits, where interpretation can be used effectively to translate a visit into a meaningful connection with a country house that can, through the generation of income, go towards maintaining a property. Mary Oldham, a Librarian, and researcher at Gregynog Hall, identified the extent of influence as undoubtedly national and global to an extent:

National definitely, global up to a point. Half of the principal academics of Wales now and in the government have known Gregynog as part of their university education. [...] If you go through the visitors' books for the 1920s and 30s [...] half the great names of Welsh education are all in the visitors' books, so it was a big centre. [...] There was always a very international element to the conferences that met at Gregynog. [...] We had international student conferences and, you know, the visitors' books again, I've got people from all over the world in them. Not every week, but often enough for it to be quite clear that this was an important element of the philosophy of the house.

Oldham referred to Gregynog Hall in its historic function as a conference centre, rather than its historic function as a gentry residence. Gregynog Hall continues to

operate as a conference centre, continuing to hold the national and global influences that Oldham referred to in the interview. Michael Tree also spoke of the global influence that some country houses represent to many people:

Younger sons of estates going out into the Empire to try and make their way in the world. That's how [some country houses] were built – of money made out [in the Empire].

Tree underlined the global connections that many country houses exerted or represented to varying extents, referring to how they may have been funded. Lord Langford, owner of Bodrhyddan Hall, did not see his property as having exerted a global influence, but appeared to consider this question politically:

I certainly wouldn't say global, no. Largely I would think local or regional influence. Although we did have one of the daughters of the house who was also the heiress married Ellis Young who became the Member of Parliament for the Wrexham area in the 1760s and 70s. Other than that, I don't think we have any great political firebrands to our name, no.

Evidently, among the interviewees there was a mix of opinions on the extent of country house influence, historically and contemporarily. Clearly, the interviewees believed that country houses were influential often at least to a local, regional, and national extent, but queried the global extent. The survey analysis chapter of this thesis showed that this 'pyramid' effect, as Mark Baker described it, with country houses being viewed as influential to a local extent and less so at every level up to the maximum extent of global influence is the perception of country houses held by the public, shown in Figure 43, as well as by the interviewees. This could identify a connection between the interviewees as people who, in their various roles as staff and custodians of Welsh country houses, control the interpretation of sites. If interpretation reflects their respective beliefs regarding the extent of influence that a country house exerted, the survey respondents are more likely to think the same. Therefore, it is incumbent on staff and custodians of country houses to understand the extent of the significance of the properties and histories that they represent so

that interpretation that is created is accurate, because it can influence the perceptions of the public.

Interviewees were also asked about their views on the public perceptions of country houses, and whether or not they thought that the public perceptions had changed over time. Claudia Howard stated:

It's not positive public perception. Certainly not if it's privately owned and privately held like us. So, if you're more of a Cliveden or somewhere that's really open to the public and you've got cafés and gardens, and you can get around their artefacts, I think you're more well-loved as a national monument. [...] but if you're privately owned and closed, I think you're just considered quite negatively.

Howard believed that Gyrn Castle being a private country house rather than one that is open to the public as a visitor attraction is viewed negatively by the general public because they do not have access to it, and that that is one of the key aspects of a country house being perceived positively by the public rather than being viewed negatively. Howard continued:

There's a view [...] that we're a standing example of the inequalities that were in the past [...] so I think the public perception is quite negative. [...] I think now, you know, all the barriers and boundaries are being challenged across society, which I think is really positive. But it certainly means for someone like me I'm considered really negatively, and I found it in my own workplace. [...] I often get challenged on, you know, 'why do you even have to work?' [...] You've got to think about how you change for the future and make sure that you're giving more people opportunities and sharing things more.

Howard stated that the public perception of her as a private owner is negative as a result of past inequalities. These negative perceptions that Howard believes the public hold could be addressed through an extent of access and appropriate, engaging interpretation to inform people about the challenges of operating a country house today. This is something that she alluded to by stating that they need to think about future change and opportunities. Sir Charles Gladstone also owns a country

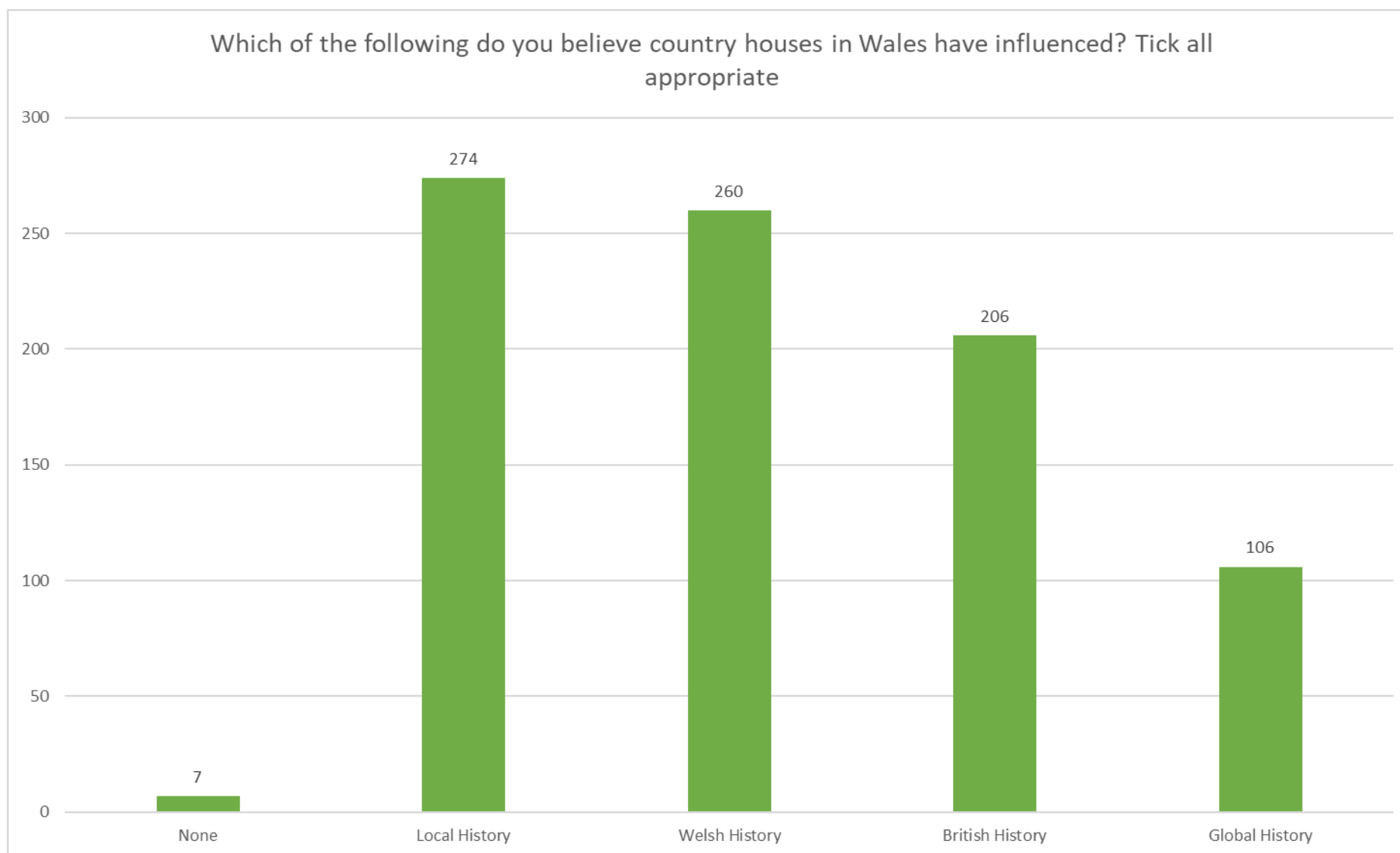


Figure 43: The perceived extent of influence held by a country house in their histories by respondents.

house which is not open to the public, but his views are different to Howard's:

Yes, they've definitely changed over time. I suspect that the way that people look at these things has altered, but I think there are two types of conceptions. There are pre-conceptions and then there are their post-conceptions. [...] the pre-conceived notion is 'you live in a big house, you must be really rich, you're probably a bit of a [expletive]' from one set of society. From the other set of society, 'you live in a big house, seem like a nice bloke, what a lovely house, how amazing that we have this history in our village'. I would say in our case we are, you know, on the whole, lucky to have the majority of people feeling proud of the connection particularly to William Gladstone. [...] then to move on to the post-conception. I think when people come to the Good Life [Experience] or they come to work for us or to one of our shops or businesses or whatever they find something that is much more open minded and respectful of the people, of *who* they are and not *what* they are. [...] Undoubtedly, whether we like it or not, we have a bigger profile because we live in that big house, and everyone locally knows something about that big house. [...] There are many, many people that are in our immediate community and a lot of those have some relationship to the wider estate. I mean, I don't know how many, but thousands of people have a relationship.

Gladstone's response to this question was detailed and differs to Howard's in that he believes that the perception of his family and his property differs between sections of society, as well as depending on how well people who have perceptions know him personally. He believes that most people locally most likely view him, his estate, and the work that he does positively and are proud of the connection to former Prime Minister William Gladstone. Furthermore, he believes that thousands of people have a relationship to the wider estate. This will not only contribute towards their perceptions of the estate and the property, but also towards people's views regarding the significance and relevance of the country house. Effective use of interpretation can help to either form or change the perceptions that Gladstone spoke about through relating the historical significance of the estate to the present

significance that Gladstone has been striving to create, therefore underlining the continued significance of the estate to the local community over a long period. Richard Cuthbertson, owner of Plas Penmynydd and chair of the Discovering Old Welsh Houses group, chose to speak about the public perception of country houses in relation to the possibility and opportunity of visiting them now, compared to in the past:

I think they have changed considerably. Clearly the class system has always been very important in Britain's history. [...] The restrictions imposed upon you by being a member of a particular class probably got to its height in, I don't know, 1900 or something like that. [...] People in classes] beneath the aristocrats [...] desired the respect and veneration that [...] aristocrats might have had. [...] People now think, and quite rightly so, they can visit a country house, National Trust property, and they can get all the enjoyment of being the local Squire or the local Lord, or even a Duke or a Prince without any of the problems. [...] That feeling has come along, in my view, through the 1960s and 70s because huge amounts of freedom were given to people. [...] It wasn't just the freedom to express themselves, [...] it was actually the freedom of suddenly seeing how other people live by visiting their houses and by understanding more about that history.

Cuthbertson shared his belief that the public perception of country houses has changed relatively recently owing to the extent of access that people were afforded to these properties. It is now more common for people to be able to visit country houses for pleasure. Resulting from changes in property functions and cultural shifts in the wider world, Cuthbertson believed that public perceptions of country houses have changed considerably, and that interpretation can advance the freedoms of individuals through learning about the past. Helen Papworth, a former trustee of the Bodelwyddan Castle Trust also considered access:

I think the annoying thing about Bodelwyddan Castle is that the hotel that would take it is actually an adult-only hotel, unlike a youth hostel, which would have been a great use for it.

Papworth identified that some hotels do not allow family bookings and therefore although they are accessible to some, they remain exclusive. In considering communicating the significance and relevance of country houses to different audiences and demographics, the people who are able to access the communication or interpretation should always be considered. This relates back to the online analysis of this thesis and also the different interpretation principles assessed in the literature review – that all interpretation must consider the audience that it is being created for.

Evidently, these interviewees believe that the significance and relevance of country houses, in many cases, has changed over time. For some, this change has been an active decision to fund maintenance costs. For others, this has not been a choice, but necessary. The interview analysis has identified a widely held view of custodians and practitioners that properties exerted influence on a 'pyramid' basis, with the predominant influence exerted locally, and a smaller influence exerted globally. This mirrors the survey analysis, indicating that this message is communicated through interpretation. It is therefore critical that interpretation is accurate, as it can influence public perception. Interviewees were asked about perception and agreed that it can be negative unless they engage with people.

Interpretation Methods

The interpretation of Welsh country houses was discussed in-depth with all interviewees in relation to the property that they own or work at, or in relation to their current or past occupation. Numerous approaches to interpretation were identified, each presenting their own benefits and challenges that are navigated by the interviewees. Speaking about the interpretation aims for Chirk Castle, Jon Hignett stated:

There's lots of threads, lots of narratives that are woven into one visit. You can't tell everything to everybody, but it's nice if you have a hint of them and then if they want to find out more, they can do.

Hignett referred to the interpretation approach at Chirk Castle being to not focus on one story, but to present different stories in different places, therefore not presenting or prioritising one particular narrative at the expense of another but presenting multi-layered interpretation. In doing so, the interpretation at Chirk Castle can appeal to visitors with different interests and reflects the complexity and longevity of the site's history. The interpretation can therefore encourage a larger number of people to visit to engage with different elements of the site's significance through interpretation. Hignett stated that for visitors who wanted to learn or discover more on a particular topic, seasonal staff stand in specific areas during peak times of the year where they are visible and can answer questions, such as "where is the toilet, or can you tell me about this tower?". The employment of seasonal staff creates an additional, interactive layer of interpretation at Chirk Castle that builds upon interpretation boards, the guidebook, or other forms of interpretation. To further heighten this as an interpretive experience, some of the seasonal staff dress up in period-appropriate clothing, which can prompt questions from visitors and engage them in a more visual and interactive manner adding another interpretive layer to Chirk Castle. However, the approach taken by Chirk Castle staff is not a universal National Trust approach. Eleanor Harding stated:

The National Trust as a body also recognises that every place is different, and so the [Spirit of Place] guidelines are more like processes, techniques for reaching the right thing [interpretation method(s)] for your place.

Seasonal staff dressed up in period-appropriate costumes are not employed at Penrhyn Castle, highlighting that despite being operated by the same organisation, interpretation methods differ between National Trust properties. In recent years, staff at Penrhyn Castle have chosen to host a number of temporary exhibitions to interpret stories associated with the property. Harding explained why this was:

There is a kind of National Trust overall curatorial strategy, which is to [...] not have lots of text, not have lots of interventions, not turn it into a museum visit, but try to retain the sense of a house, of a lived-in space. That might be changing. [...] Instead, trying to offer a bit more context and support to people who come in who might want to understand more about it, or who might want to have a hook that gives them something that allows them to find the relevance of this place for them, rather than just showing lots of stuff.

The National Trust's overarching curatorial strategy aimed at ensuring visitors can experience a country house as opposed to reading about a country house prevents text-heavy interpretation because the National Trust's strategy is to present a country house as a country house, rather than a museum. This underlines a role of interpretation, to create the impressions that a visitor takes away with them. Furthermore, this aligns with one of Tilden's interpretation principles – to provoke people through interpretation to ensure that interpretation leaves an impression. Later in her explanation, Harding stated that neglecting to acknowledge the 70-year affiliation between Penrhyn Castle and the National Trust is dishonest:

[...] We also have a presence and just pretending that the National Trust hasn't been there for the last 70 years [...] to me is quite dishonest. I think that explains why temporary exhibitions are often the way that we go because nobody wants to be responsible for putting in permanent stuff. [...] The idea of working with artists enables us to bring in other lenses to look at things. You could be cynical and say that that is in order so that we don't have to nail our colours to the mast. Other people can say stuff and we can be a platform for that. [...] I don't think it is necessarily a positive thing to always have the National Trust saying, well, this is what we think about it. It's

good that we're bringing in other people to share their own perspectives on a place. But it does also sometimes mean that we are able to dodge making interpretive and curatorial choices. [...] Instead, interventions are creative. [...] If you do it creatively, it's thought that it enables people to engage in more evocative ways I suppose and turned into less of a museum experience. I think it can work really, really, really well. Some people just don't connect with that stuff, and I suppose that's the nature of art, isn't it? [...] And it's not about liking, it's also responding.

This echoes Baker's point that the modern use of a country house continues to build upon and form the history of a site. Harding also stated that the overall National Trust curatorial strategy might be changing to offer more context and support to visitors through interpretation so that they might take more away from their visit. She also referred to a "hook" that people can use to relate the significance and relevance of Penrhyn Castle to their own lives. In interpretation, a "hook" is something that draws a visitor in by being interesting to them or attention-grabbing and can then be built upon to provide more information about an object or a subject. Offering more information to visitors through interpretation could result in visitors building a greater understanding and appreciation of the significance of country houses. Additionally, this approach could also outline the impact and significance of the National Trust and other present-day custodians on the properties that they maintain, therefore acknowledging their often decades-long involvement. As Harding pointed out, Penrhyn Castle has been under National Trust management for 70 years. She believed this to be one reason there is no permanent interpretation at the site – after 70 years, no member of staff wants to be responsible for making such a radical interpretation change at the site or saying to visitors 'this is the story of Penrhyn Castle'. Perhaps this is especially the case when there are so many stories associated with Penrhyn Castle that could be told but are not immediately apparent from the building or the objects within it and the traditional forms of interpretation produced by the National Trust. For example, it is difficult to tell stories such as the Jamaican plantations and slave ownership, or the treatment of striking quarry workers by the owners of the Penrhyn estate without visitors being able to physically see the plantations, quarries, or objects from either. Hosting

temporary exhibitions enables sites to tell removed stories that are not necessarily otherwise apparent to a visitor but are no less significant than other stories. Temporary exhibitions also allow, as Harding pointed out, other voices to tell stories rather than the National Trust's voice. This approach enables opinions and comments from people in the local community to form the basis of interpretation, but also artists, creative practitioners, and academics. At the time of writing, the most recent temporary exhibition entitled "What a World/Beth yn y Byd" consisted of a selection of objects and poems written by local schoolchildren on the topic of colonialism and the connection between Penrhyn Castle and slavery in Jamaica. It is a creative, co-produced method of interpretation that has been able to grow community links which can create relevance for Penrhyn Castle in the local community, consequently offering a new reason for people to visit the site. Harding stated that creative methods of interpretation enable visitors to engage with interpretation in more evocative ways. Rather than reading an interpretation board and learning, visitors might be moved, saddened, or frustrated by an artistic expression or derive enjoyment, fun, or pleasure from the same. If visitors feel an extent of emotional connection to a place or a person through interpretation, they might remember that connection or experience and be drawn back to future temporary means of interpretation as a result. As Hignett mentioned, interpretation cannot communicate everything to everyone, and not every method of interpretation will connect to every visitor. However, more visitors will take more away from their individual country house visits if different types of interpretation, relating to different themes and subjects, is available to them. According to the National Trust's Taya Drake, Collections and House Manager at Plas Newydd, the interpretation approaches taken at Plas Newydd differ to those taken at Chirk Castle and Penrhyn Castle:

We have this wonderful country house story, it was the family home of the Marquess of Anglesey, we have the collection, we have stories, we have photographs. That's been quite static for quite a long time. The resourcing project gave us the opportunity to change that to tell a different story. [...] So that was the first change for us because we were going to stop interpreting the country home and the family home and we were going to interpret actually a

reservicing project, which would be very different. [It is] really, really interesting here because the amount of archival evidence from the last servicing in the 1930s is huge. That was quite exciting, to be able to get different designs out and letters between the Marquess and [Rex] Whistler about what he's going to paint on the wall, etc. So it's really, really cool and it enabled us to do a few kind of trials and tests of creative ways of working so we had to play around with audio-visual equipment and just see what worked in the space [...] so that project was supposed to be ongoing now but because of covid obviously everything was paused and therefore we can't open with the planned estate experience because we can't interpret the project because it's not happening at the moment. [...] So, we'll continue to be in a continual state of flux as it were as we move forward and during that time, we're going to be planning the future of Plas Newydd. So actually, is the country house story and the family home story the only story that we want to tell? Or actually do we want to explore some of the other stories that we have? And how do we do that? And actually, can we continue with the pace of change going forward? Not necessarily again like every year or every two years. But you know, could we plan to continually highlight different things in our collection or change our interpretation and move into different themes perhaps, or different items in the collection but which inspire different stories. [...] So, it will be a lot of change. There has been a lot of change and I think there will be a lot of change as we go forward.

Drake indicated that until recently, the interpretation at Plas Newydd had not changed, describing it as "static". However, a project aimed at updating services at Plas Newydd offered the opportunity to Plas Newydd staff to tell a different story, using a vast amount of archival material from the last similar project that took place in the 1930s. Drake mentioned that the project enabled staff to test different creative methods of interpreting Plas Newydd that they had not had the opportunity to test previously. This is similar to staff at Penrhyn Castle interpreting the property through a creative means of interpretation to engage with their audiences in new ways. The coronavirus 'paused' the project, but the pause enabled staff to consider the future of Plas Newydd's interpretation, and the stories that they want to tell in the future with an emphasis on looking beyond the story of the family. Drake also

stated that staff were considering changing the interpretation at Plas Newydd more regularly than it had been changed previously. Doing so would create more reasons for people to visit and re-visit Plas Newydd, which could create more opportunities to re-enforce the significance of Plas Newydd. Consequently, that could create relevance for the site in the future. Relative to interpretation, change was mentioned often by Drake. Some change was planned such as the reservicing project, some change has been enforced by the pandemic. For example, how Plas Newydd was interpreted to visitors whilst the reservicing project was halted. The process of change that Plas Newydd has undertaken since early 2020 has shown staff that they could change the interpretation of the site more frequently to explore other stories. This is something that other sites have been doing on a more regular basis regardless of the effects of the pandemic. Iwan Hughes, Assistant Director at Plas Glyn y Weddw, stated that the interpretation changes regularly there:

We've got a loyal base in the local community, [...] lots of people from the local area visit regularly, but people from all over North Wales and beyond visit regularly as well and support us. [...]Exhibitions change] every 6 to 8 weeks. It's always something different to see here, people return to see specific exhibitions. When the weather is terrible there's a nice café here, there's something to see. When the weather is nice, you can sit out in the garden and enjoy the view, you can walk through the woodland paths that we've got here, so there's plenty to do here.

Hughes demonstrated the advantages of changing exhibitions regularly in a country house setting, as well as the advantages of having multiple reasons for people to visit. Changing exhibitions can help to build a local audience of repeat visitors through offering reasons for people to return. Primarily operating as an art gallery through a Charitable Trust, Plas Glyn y Weddw is set up to achieve this and, according to Hughes, does so. The café and gardens also offer different reasons for people to visit and re-visit ensuring that Plas Glyn y Weddw can be relevant to the local community and by attracting local people to visit regularly, can raise necessary funds to spend on property and grounds maintenance. For country houses in private ownership, these extents of visitor offerings and site interpretation are not always

feasible due to financial, staff, and time requirements necessary to operate in such a manner. Many country houses also remain as homes, therefore there is no desire or need to deliver a rolling program of exhibitions or other touristic activities. Gwydir Castle is a privately owned country house that is open to the public but offers minimal interpretation through traditional means such as interpretation boards, instead choosing to allow visitors to engage with the property using their senses to experience the place. Peter Welford, co-owner of Gwydir Castle, explained:

We get lovely comments in the visitors book [...] which is that there is a special quality to the atmosphere, a frequency. It isn't overrun, there isn't that mission that you often get at, for example, the National Trust where it has to be all things for all people and not just a beautiful house set in beautiful gardens set in beautiful parks. Actually, that is not enough. It has to be an adventure playground. It has to be a tearoom and all of that add-on stuff. It's a very difficult balance. [...] It's getting the balance between entertainment, education, and evocation. I think evocation is very important to us. [...] You can have a lot of information or just enough information and it's getting that balance right. In literature they talk about show, not tell. And what we're trying to do is show and let people discover on their own at their own pace rather than thrust it down their neck. [...] We don't overmarket or over-present, the signs are quite discreet, so we get people who come typically because they want to come. I love that quality about it. We also don't populate every room with volunteers or 'security guards' as some people rather rudely call them, we allow people to wander through at their own pace. We operate on the basis of trust. We ask them to respect that it's a private house and if there's a closed door, please respect that and otherwise there's one rope up, perhaps two ropes but mostly you can just waft around, there's no particular direction you go around in, you do all of that yourself. I love the idea of that – being able to explore and have a sense of your own ownership almost in that moment of the house rather than just being herded round, being observed all the time. That very much takes away the experience. [...] The sensory experience of this house is something that we are trying to invoke which I think is important. There's a particular smell to what I call the

building odour – B.O., the historical layering of candle wax with smoke and old dog and tapestries and old polished furniture. Factored in the experience at the same time is a particular experience of sight [...] it's very different at different times of day. [...] And finally, the sound. When you're walking through, every door has a creak. Every step, every stair has a different voice, and all of that is lost if you clap on a kind of virtual experience audio thing. It's just lost as music and an actor speaking over the top and you're missing all of that nuance and experience. [...] I want the smells, the sounds, and the sights, and all of those sensory experiences to become their own symphony of experience because after all that is what you're getting when you authentically take to the past.

The fifth principle of the National Trust's 'Everything Speaks' booklet is "Can the place speak for itself?" (National Trust, 2013, p.12). Welford spoke passionately about Gwydir Castle having its own voice and about their visitors leaving positive feedback regarding their experiences. He also believed that the minimalistic approach to interpretation taken at Gwydir Castle is a reason people want to visit. Welford wants people to experience Gwydir Castle through smells, sounds, and sights rather than interpretation boards, audio tours, or other interpretive means. He believed that whilst balance between education, entertainment, and evocation is critical to presenting a country house to the public, the focus of Gwydir Castle is on evocation. Welford wanted people to be stirred by Gwydir Castle and to feel its history, believing that the minimalistic approach is the best method to achieve this by enabling discovery and rejecting interpretive elements used elsewhere that would affect a visitor's experience, such as volunteer room guides or ropes which can both influence visitor routes and entirely change how a visitor interacts with a given space. Welford's presentation of Gwydir in this manner is almost to create an experience which challenges the National Trust offer. Later in the interview, Welford spoke further on how visitors interact with spaces:

If you go into a room and there's someone in the room watching you, that experience will override it. It's just going to, because the power or the frequency of the person is inevitably going to kill off the very, very subtle

residual frequencies of the place and the room and it takes quite a strong person to be able to block that out.

In these circumstances, the advantages of placing a volunteer in a room need to be weighed against the advantages of allowing visitors to experience the space with no additional interference, and this can include interpretation which can also be seen as 'interfering' with an experience. Hignett referred to advantages of strategically placing staff or volunteers at Chirk Castle to help direct visitors and interpret the site. Clearly, there are situations where volunteers are invaluable operationally through the safeguarding of rooms, objects, and visitors, as well as offering an additional layer of interpretation. There are also circumstances where it is better to allow visitors to experience an area without the external influence of people and other interpretation installations affecting how they interact with a space. Welford was also critical of the 'National Trust experience':

[...] it's something I've talked to a lot of country house owners about, including Simon Jenkins who's a friend who used to run the National Trust. He conceded it was a great problem that when you go into a National Trust house nowadays it's evolved into an experience, into a brand, it's starting to homogenise so rather than going to a particular place for its frequency, you get the product and it's very commercial, it's very marketed.

Welford believed that properties operated by the National Trust have become too focussed on ensuring that they provide the 'National Trust experience' at the expense of the individuality of country houses under the organisation's management. Whilst there are cafés, shops, and other facilities available at most National Trust operated country houses, this research has identified differences in interpretation approaches between three major National Trust properties in North Wales. The interpretation differences between the three cater to the stories and histories of each property, and this is to be commended.

These methods of interpretation all describe people visiting country houses and experiencing a site, whether through the minimalistic interpretation methods at Gwydir Castle, or the more assisted methods of the National Trust with room guides,

ropes, interpretation boards and other signage. Custodians or staff at other properties utilise different methods that further restricts the possibility of “the sensory experience” of a country house, as Welford described it. Events and activities provide an opportunity for staff or custodians of country houses to raise money to cover the costs of maintenance or repairs. This is displayed nowhere better than at Gwrych Castle where, in recent years, a variety of different events have been hosted to raise funds and to engage people. One such event which continues to be held on a regular basis is a ghost tour or ‘hunt’ of the property, which Mark Baker spoke about:

I think the problem that you have with ghost stories is that they are incredibly subjective, and there’s a reliance on the honesty and the truth of the person telling you the story. [...] There is a lot of interest in the area, and it’s quite low impact as well – people sitting in the dark. It’s quite a passive way of creating income but also it gets into other sectors, and different demographics that you wouldn’t necessarily get into being like a National Trust house. The demographic is a lot younger, and they often go there just to kind of scare themselves, but they are passively learning about the place and absorbing things [...for example] when they’re trying to communicate with the countess they ask about that story. It comes out in really interesting ways, that narrative.

Ghost tours, which are held in the evenings, do not require large, intrusive installations that might interfere with the day-to-day operation of Gwrych Castle. Furthermore, they appeal to a different demographic than that of a typical country house visit, for example a self-guided visitor to a National Trust property. In doing so, ghost tours are able to reach different audiences and inform different people about the significance and connected histories and pasts of Gwrych Castle but in a more “passive” manner, as Baker describes. However, the purpose of ghost tours is often not to present interpretation to the public, but to entertain, or simply raise funds. Therefore, the stories told as part of ghost tours are often not accurate and likely feature embellishments, exaggerations, or inventions. Baker described them as “subjective”, with a total dependence on the person telling the story to be honest

and true to reality and history. Ghost tours can be used to communicate different aspects of a house's history and should present an opportunity to owners or custodians to engage different audiences in compelling stories of a property and its history and significance, as well as the stories of individuals.

Tours are a common form of interpretation at country houses, regardless of their ownership status and function. Staff and custodians at country houses around Wales offer the opportunity for visitors to join a tour, either on a near daily basis as a full-time visitor attraction, or on a more infrequent basis if they are privately owned, for example Mostyn Hall. Lord Mostyn described three different types of tours at Mostyn Hall:

First, we open 28 days a year to the general public. [...] The second sort of tours are private tours which are either via arrangement with me or a member of estate staff. Usually these are charities who get in contact with us. Usually, I do a lunch at the hall, and I do a tour of the hall and then we follow it up with a tour of the gardens. [...] What normally happens is we do it for free because they're a charity. [...] The third one is completely unique, as far as I'm aware no one does it in the U.K. Because I lived in Japan for a year or so I have some connections and I speak Japanese and I do tours for Japanese tourists, but that's only started in the last couple of years. [...] What would happen is a couple of times in the summer, literally there's a bus load of Japanese tourists [who] come and I would offer the exact same thing – a tour of the hall, lunch, a tour of the garden... but I have to do it because I speak Japanese. [...] In terms of charging money, so with the first one, 28 days a year we charge £5 per person but we give the money to charity and then the second one as I said was charities. [...] The Japanese tours [...] we do charge them but the money that we make goes to charity.

The first of the three tours appear to be open days where Mostyn Hall is open to the public to visit. The other two follow the same structure of a tour of the hall, a lunch, and a tour of the gardens. All three have one thing in common which differs to the ghost tours at Gwrych Castle, which is that the purpose is clearly not to raise funds other than as charitable donations. Lord Mostyn was asked what the purpose of

hosting three types of tours at Mostyn Hall was, as it was clear that it was not financially motivated:

We've got a magnificent hall with an amazing history [...] and we want to open up because we wanted other people to enjoy the history and the beauty of the place, so that's really where it all started. [...] People can enjoy and sample history in their own area. [...] It's also to breathe life into the place because there's lots going on anyway with the staff and all, but it kind of gives it a *raison d'être*. Up until 2014ish there weren't really any events going on and now that there are events going on, it's great for everyone because it's just like an extra dimension to the place and we all enjoy it, and it's fun! Giving tours is fun! Maybe there's a bit of vanity there when you show people around your own house, and you go "here's my great-great-granddad and such and such happened" and people are genuinely interested it's just nice to share that. I think a lot of places do these tours for financial reasons because you know it's probably the main source of income but for us it's different, thankfully.

Lord Mostyn described how opening Mostyn Hall to the public for tours has created a new purpose for the property, and in doing so makes it more relevant for the local community because it can be a place for them to enjoy, appreciate, and perhaps feel connected to. He also stated that leading tours is something that he enjoys. Asked if more than being enjoyable and adding a further sense of purpose to the operation of the property, whether he felt a responsibility to share the history of Mostyn Hall, he stated:

[...] The local community, sometimes they come up for a tour and it means a lot to them because they have a particular link or whatever. In that regard there is responsibility because it's the history of the place and the place is so great that I feel that responsibility to show it. I think everyone from different estates thinks differently. Some people probably see their estates as just a home to live in, but I think there is a responsibility.

The responsibility that Lord Mostyn feels to share his country house, and its history, with visitors through tours offers a further insight into why he feels it important to offer three different types of tours to visitors for no financial gain. Other country house owners also expressed their feelings of responsibility to share their property, including Lord Langford, owner of Bodrhyddan Hall:

Yes, I do [feel a responsibility to share Bodrhyddan Hall or the grounds with the public]. I think the reason that I do is because it has been going on for all of my life. It would actually seem rather strange not to do it now. I mean, last summer really was quite weird just not having anybody around us.

Once again, money did not appear to be the primary factor behind opening to the public. In fact, not opening to the public would seem strange to Lord Langford because he grew up in the property with it being opened to visitors and it appears to be important to him to continue opening Bodrhyddan Hall to visitors – this appears to be an embedded part of the house's identity. Opening to visitors "on Tuesdays and Thursdays (between 14:00-17:00 from June to September when the gardens are fully in bloom" (Bodrhyddan Hall, 2022), the gardens are clearly considered a significant aspect of a visit to Bodrhyddan Hall. The website indicates that there are tours available of the property and the gardens, including an audio guide narrated by Lord Langford and the Head Gardener. Garden tours add a further method of interpretation of Welsh country houses and underline the scope and diversity of tours that can be created and offered at different properties, catering to a range of interests, demographics, and weaving in narratives and information from a broad range of disciplines and backgrounds, underlining the need for further research into different aspects of country houses that can form the basis of interpretation.

Glynis Shaw, a trustee of the Welsh Historic Gardens Trust which aims to promote interest and enjoyment in Welsh parks and gardens as well as champion the restoration and conservation of them (Welsh Historic Gardens Trust, 2023), explained how members access historic gardens, and associated interpretation:

We arrange visits for members, and we do get to visit properties that are perhaps difficult to visit for organisations like the National Garden Scheme

because some properties are quite small, they find it very hard to have an open day where they don't know the numbers or parking requirements or the catering requirements, and all of those things can make public access quite difficult. [...] Some of the visits we arrange aren't really an open day. [...They are] visits for members that are pre-booked. We know who is coming and how many. If the garden was smaller or there was no parking, we might have to limit numbers and it's done a first come first serve [basis]. [...] Sometimes people are free to wander, sometimes it involves a tour of the garden, sometimes a tour of the house and garden. [...] It depends on the property and the owner and the facilities.

Shaw underlined some of the challenges and difficulties that owners and custodians of country houses face when considering opening a country house to the public. In doing so, she emphasised the importance of on-site facilities such as parking, toilets, and a café when a site is situated rurally, as Welsh country houses often are. Shaw also made a distinction between open days, visits, and tours. Lord Mostyn did not make this distinction, with open days at Mostyn Hall consisting of tours – visitors cannot wander around without a guide. Shaw viewed tours as an activity which took place during a visit or an open day, and a visit is a pre-booked activity or series of activities as she described. Whereas an open day is not pre-booked by a person or a group of people.

Open days offer a flexible method of interpretation for country house custodians and staff. They enable custodians to share their properties for public benefit, providing a setting for enjoyment, education, and an opportunity to engage and create links with a local community on terms that are flexible and perhaps more suitable for the custodians. Richard Cuthbertson, owner of Plas Penmynydd explained:

[The open days are] there because of the historic interest in the house. People have always wandered down the driveway and said, "is it okay if I just look around the house and take a few photographs?" So, I was always aware of the historic interest. [...] We make quite a lot of money which we give to charities. Every penny that I charge for admission is given to a charity. [...] It's not difficult to get £1000 or something like that, which is a real sum that

makes a difference to these organisations. [...] I feel quite a weight of responsibility to share what I own on the basis of, I do own the house. My name is on the deeds etc. But I am one of many, many owners over a huge period of time and in fact the way I tend to think about it is I'm a caretaker. [...] Most of the time it's an enjoyable experience for me too, because I learn a lot because I get people who know a lot more about the history of the Tudors etc. come here and talk to me. [...] There are moments before they come when I spent hours cleaning up and trying to make it look presentable [where I think] "I'm never going to do this again", but afterwards I always think "that was great" [...] and you think you made a contribution to the locality and into that community of knowledge that I subscribe myself to.

Evidently, to host open days at country houses in private ownership such as Plas Penmynydd, there is a significant amount of practical preparation required to ensure the site is able to receive large numbers or groups of visitors. Cuthbertson identified three different reasons for wanting, as a country house owner, to host open days. He made clear that like Lord Mostyn, it is not financially motivated, other than to donate to charities. Cuthbertson also underlined that hosting open days at his property is an excellent method of contributing to the local community, not only through fundraising for local charities, but through "contributing" to and expanding local knowledge through open days of local history and past connections. This is a significant point, as it is something that country houses in all of their current functions and statuses of ownership can achieve – even if they are private homes that open on an open day basis throughout the year, such as Plas Penmynydd. Country houses can act as focal points for exploring local history, identity and sense of place, which, critically, can help to build relevance and significance. Gyrn Castle is, at the time of writing, usually only possible to access if booked as a wedding venue, and although owned by her father, is residence to Claudia Howard. Howard explained that her family tend not to open Gyrn Castle to the public owing to security concerns:

The reason I say "no" [to people who ask if they can visit Gyrn Castle] at the moment is security. [...] We've had quite a lot of people [...] coming onto the

grounds and drinking down by the lakes. [...] You can't just walk past and now you can't just come up and have a look. Now you can't just come into the house whenever you fancy, and they don't understand it. It's a private home. [...] Some people are just real nosey parkers. My Dad's an extremely private man. Very, very private and he particularly doesn't like people walking around, nosing around, seeing what's going on. If we could open it at specific times or days and have a kind of agreed system which we've discussed and we're thinking about doing that – that would be great.

Howard describes how open days could offer a compromise for Gyrn Castle in the future between her family's desire for privacy, and the public's evident desire to visit and find out about the place. Despite the potential for a large number of people on-site, open days can allay security concerns because owners or custodians of country houses can prepare the property, as Cuthbertson described, for people to enter the building and to explore unsupervised or supervised as part of a tour to further allay security concerns. Through offering open days, the public can look to when it is possible to visit Gyrn Castle, which could hopefully reduce the number of speculative uninvited visitors. Clearly, there are a great number of advantages for custodians and owners of country houses to host open days at the property for public visitation, as there also are for the public. These benefits include enabling local communities to explore local history, identity, and sense of place, and extend to building significance and relevance for a country house.

There are a number of different methods that are used by staff and custodians of country houses to interpret sites and collections to the public on a basis which is suitable and most convenient to the function of the property. Some methods are less physically intrusive than others, the least intrusive being the use of social media and websites as discussed in the online analysis chapter of this thesis, online tours, podcasts, blogs, or guide books. Furthermore, a tour during an open day is less intrusive to a private house than a series of signs and interpretation boards, let alone digital interpretation installations. The methods used at a country house depends on its function as well as the knowledge and capacity of owners or custodians and the financial input available. Sometimes, a range of different

methods can be used at the same site to communicate to or engage with different audiences and demographics and reinforce key messages.

Interpretation Content

Interpretation in all its forms needs to be researched, written or designed and, in some cases, performed by someone, or multiple people and shared. The person who researches, writes, designs, or delivers interpretation is incredibly important to the process, as they can determine why it is being created, its purpose, and who it is created for – these aspects significantly impact the content of interpretation and how it is written and delivered. Mark Baker explained that the interpretation of Gwrych Castle is outsourced to a heritage interpretation consultancy named Headland Design Associates in Chester:

We have got a really good interpretation team. What I've always tried to do is from the first book being published in 1999 through to the latest one in 2018, is to kind of bring the place to life and to kind of give it the recognition that it ought to have. [...] So, the interpretation team are from a company called Headlands, they're quite famous for doing lots of sites and they are based in Chester. They're all fairly local, but they know the area, they know the Castle and they're really lovely to work with. So, they developed an outline interpretation plan, which I can probably share with you. We've been starting to pepper that into the public domain, so you can see screenshots from the different interpretation elements that we're proposing, lots of kind of like audio-visual stuff that really transports people and [...the] vision for the place is for it to be quite immersive, and you do feel like you're stepping back in time. It's what I really like about places like Bodysgallen which is the country house hotel that you go to, and you literally step back in time. You can be there in 1910 or 20. You get a bit confused because it's so authentic and the atmosphere is so lovely and that's something that we're trying to achieve with the Castle.

Outsourcing interpretation to consultancy firms is not uncommon in certain sectors such as community heritage projects and especially National Lottery Heritage Fund projects. It is uncommon in the country house sector, but enables interpretation to be designed and created by an independent team of experts to the brief of a client – in this case the trustees of Gwrych Preservation Trust. Clearly, Baker with the help of

staff at Headland Design Associates has given much thought to the interpretation methods that will be used at Gwrych Castle when the interpretation plan is implemented. Baker described his admiration for Bodysgallen and in doing so, spoke of authenticity – something that has been referred to throughout this thesis. Evidently, Baker's aim is to "freeze" Gwrych Castle in different points in time to tell the story of the site's history in an authentic and immersive manner, using the expertise of Headland Design Associates to achieve his vision. Custodians of other Welsh country houses keep their interpretation research, writing and design in-house. This enables interpretation changes to be made on a more regular basis. For example, at National Trust properties such as Chirk Castle, staff are able to use a variety of interpretation methods and can change interpretation to tell different stories or to reflect conservation needs of objects and the property, as Jon Hignett explained:

We have volunteer room guides in most of the rooms when the place is open. We have room books, which is usually two or three room books in each room, and that's so you could, if you want to go a bit more in-depth, you can pick up the room book and generally it's got information about the room. [...] If items are particularly relevant, or if something is changed or there's conservation work going on, [we] will usually produce a big board and put it in a room on an easel so people can go in and have a look and find out what's different or what's changing. Sometimes they'll be audio-visual elements, so we've got a couple of videos. [...] Some [...] rooms are dressed, so there's medieval weapons, helmets, that kind of thing, and we just dress the space. We might put fake food in. We might put bits and pieces of information in, so you get a visual sense of when you cross the threshold into that room. It's like, "oh, I've stepped back in time" and it's more emotive. It's more of a feeling rather than giving people facts and figures. So, we try to play around with it a little bit and we'd like to sort of play around with it a little bit more as well. That's one of the things that we're developing or hoping to develop in the future is to be just a little bit more open to moving things around a bit more often and changing the visit up.

Here, Hignett provided a detailed breakdown of some of the ways in which Chirk Castle is interpreted to the public and outlined the importance of offering different methods of interpretation to visitors to create a more engaging experience. Hignett also described how staff can alter or “play” with interpretation to change the visitor experience at Chirk and ensure that it does not become stagnant. This shows how interpretation can be changed, updated, or altered more frequently if interpretation is an in-house responsibility for staff or custodians at country houses. Other country house owners or custodians may not be able to finance the employment of a team of curators, researchers, or other interpretation or heritage experts to create interpretation, and so it can be designed by people who do not have the necessary expertise, as Edmund Bailey, owner of Cors y Gedol Hall discussed:

What I maintain is if the person who wrote the history for us, and I have to say I left it to my nephew and a friend of his to do so, if they wrote the history more accurately, I think it would be just as interesting if not more interesting.

The background of the person or people researching, writing, designing or creating interpretation is therefore important because it can dictate the extent of interpretation accuracy and the content itself. The person who delivers interpretation, if a person is required to deliver it or perform it, can also influence the interpretation itself. For example, tours of country houses in private ownership can frequently be led by the property owner, for instance in the case of Mostyn Hall, where tours are frequently led by Lord Mostyn:

Usually, I do a lunch at the hall, and I do a tour of the hall and then we follow it up with a tour of the gardens [with] our head gardener. That’s what the tour would consist of. We normally have a cap of no more than 16 people.

In scenarios where owners of country houses lead tours, they are more likely to be hagiographic or subject to bias – consciously to portray themselves or their ancestors as people of significance or great social standing, but also unconsciously through retelling stories perhaps of their ancestors that they may not have reason to question or dispute. This possibility underlines why it is important for the designers

of any form of interpretation to use reputable sources, or to involve academic research.

Interpretation can be formed based upon a wide range of information and sources. Anecdotes passed verbally from generation to generation remain good sources that can be used in interpretation because they are often personable stories that engage with people and connect with audiences, but the accuracy of them should be checked as far as possible. Kevin Mason, former Director of Bodelwyddan Castle Trust discussed the sources that were used to create interpretation at the site:

Unfortunately, while the girl's school was there, they managed to burn down a building which contained all of the archives for the estate, which didn't help. But there were a number of personal recollections, recollections of life at the early school, for instance. [...] By piecing together bits and pieces of the architecture, for instance and looking at various episodes of extensions, you could work out an approximate sort of history, the chronology throughout the building. I think it was mainly taken from those journals from the second Baronet, which proved to be a very useful source of information.

In his interview, Mason identified that whilst personal recollections or anecdotes were used to form interpretation at Bodelwyddan Castle, they were used in conjunction with other archival sources such as surviving journal entries. Family and estate archives, now usually held at county record officers, university libraries or the National Library of Wales provide a fantastic evidence base to inform country house interpretation. Speaking about Plas Glyn y Weddw's interpretation, Iwan Hughes stressed that interpretation was designed based on research of archives and records:

To be honest with you, it's John Dilwyn Williams who [...] was the Chairman of the Friends organisation but there were changes to the Friends organisation recently. The Friends organisation has come to an end and it's the main charity that's taken over the Friends but John is still a board member, he works for the Gwynedd archives as an education officer [...] so it's from a very reliable source from information in the archives. He's carried

out extensive research into the history of the family and he also has been giving lectures on the Madryn family. So, it's all from documented sources.

Clearly, at Plas Glyn y Weddw, staff place great emphasis on archival research when creating interpretation, often conducted by a knowledgeable individual both in terms of research processes through his professional role at Gwynedd archives, and also in his personal knowledge of histories associated with the property. Using archival material and historical research to inform interpretation is an example of best interpretive practice. Speaking about the sources of interpretation at Chirk Castle, Hignett stated that guidebooks previously published by the National Trust have been a useful source of information, and checked a guidebook he had to hand during the interview to ascertain where the information Chirk Castle staff have been using in interpretation had come from:

A lot of the information that we have is prior to my time here. I don't know the name of the person that did the research, but I think it's mentioned in the back of the guidebook, I'll check now. The text for the guidebook says it was by a lady named Susie Stubbs. I don't know who Susie is, [...] but yes, it is a note from her in the back. It doesn't say in particular who she is, it's just an acknowledgement of where she's found it, so: "Writing about a castle home and estate as rich and complex as Chirk Castle is no easy task only possible thanks to the wealth of research that already exists, notably the previous guidebooks, Chirk Castle estate records held at the National Library of Wales, the Art Fund, Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historic Monuments of Wales, and Jeffrey L. Thomas' 'Welsh Castles of Edward I'.

Hignett went on to discuss how online interpretation was created:

I was responsible for working with the website team and we set the new website up so a lot of the information on there I had a hand in writing, a lot of it comes directly from previous [sources], so old guidebooks or previous information that we've got here just expanded slightly on what is in the guidebook. So, it's a fairly well trodden narrative. Basics of Chirk Castle are fairly well established, but it's the detail, particularly for the first 300 years

prior to the Myddleton family coming here – that's the detail that we are a bit lacking on the Myddleton family.

Interestingly, among other sources, Stubbs referred to previous guidebooks published by the National Trust, with Stubbs's guidebook later being used as the basis for online interpretation. This raises questions surrounding how much of Stubbs's guidebook featured in previous editions of Chirk Castle guidebooks, to what extent was that accurate, who wrote them, and for what purposes? Buzinde (2010, p.222) summarised why the answers to these questions are important in a journal article on the topic of plantation guidebooks:

[...] Guidebooks enact a crucial role in selectively constructing knowledge about particular tourism destinations (Bhattacharyya, 1997; Jack & Phipps, 2003; Lew, 1991; Zillinger, 2006) and they provide readers with information necessary in (re)articulating cultural identities and worldviews. This is attained through narrativistic processes that aim to 'define, describe, delimit and circumscribe' a given place, people or past (Kress, 1985, p. 28).

Whilst guidebooks are good sources to quickly establish facts surrounding events or people, such as the year of an event or a birth date, using guidebooks to form interpretation would likely only result in interpreting topics, events, and people that guidebook authors have engaged with previously, thus underlining the selective nature of guidebooks. Comparably, interpretation can also be selective through the omission of themes, events, individuals, or groups of people depending on the cultural identities and worldviews of the person(s) who design, create, or present interpretation. Therefore, the sources used to create interpretation can influence the interpretation itself, as can the individual(s) who design, create, or present it.

The sources used can also dictate the focus of interpretation at any given site. Hignett continued in his interview to discuss how the focus of interpretation at Chirk Castle can be decided by the visitor through their interests and their willingness to learn more, because there is not one singular focus at the site:

There's lots of threads, lots of narratives that are woven into one visit. You can't tell everything to everybody, but it's nice if you have a hint of them and then if they want to find out more, they can do.

Here, Hignett showed that the focus of interpretation at Chirk Castle could be changed or developed, owing to the different "threads" or "narratives", associated with the site and its history that can be explored through interpretation. Furthermore, Hignett identified that sites can have multiple stories that staff or custodians believe to be important to share with visitors. David Penberthy, Cadw's Head of Interpretation, discussed how staff employed by Cadw approach decisions about which story or stories they tell through interpretation at a site:

We do interpretive planning. So, within Cadw itself or we employ interpretation experts, and we delve into the history of the sites. We delve into the current and potential audiences, we look at the constraints within the site or the 'who, why, what, where, when?' sort of mantra of interpretive planning and then from that we decide what we want to say. I mean, we've done a huge thing with this Pan Wales interpretation plan. We tried to look at heritage across Wales and tried to pick out unique and interesting stories on a site-by-site basis and non-repetitive. So, you could talk about the Princes Gwynedd in a number of places, but there are certain elements of the Princes [of Gwynedd], stories that are better told at certain sites than others.

Asked whether Cadw staff sometimes need to prioritise one narrative over others and what the process is to establish the interpretation narrative, Penberthy responded:

The story is what is the most significant story of that site. What makes you stand out. That's the priority. We don't prioritise because of an audience; we prioritise because of the story.

Between these two quotes from Penberthy's interview along the theme of Cadw's approach to interpretation content, it was apparent that there was a significant similarity to the National Trust's broad approach to interpretation at its sites through the Spirit of Place concept. Specifically, identifying the most significant story at any

given site to offer different visitor experiences at different sites that engage audiences with a variety of stories, thus creating reasons to visit a range of sites rather than going to one. Through interpreting stories that set sites apart from others, the National Trust and Cadw's approach to interpretation has identified a pillar of establishing interpretation at any site: Interpretation must capture the significance of any given site and distinguish it from other sites in the minds of visitors. This is necessary to establish a reason to visit and can be used in the marketing of a site online or in other materials to appeal to visitors.

Selling the Country House: Interpretation as Marketing

On multiple occasions whilst being interviewed, Welford described how at Gwydir Castle, they try not to overmarket the site, partially in response to his belief that National Trust properties are overmarketed and too commercial. David Penberthy, Cadw's head of interpretation, when asked if he believed there to be any crossover between interpretation and marketing stated:

God, yeah! Interpretation is part of the product, isn't it? People come to visit Caernarfon because of the castle, they don't come for the interpretation, but the interpretation supports the visit and makes it, helps it become memorable and helps them have a better understanding of the castle. If you think about this strategy that we did a few years ago, by looking at the unique stories of individual places, you can build itineraries. [...] I think there's a great tie [...] between marketing and interpretation.

Penberthy saw interpretation as something that can inform and influence marketing decisions that consequently result in influencing visits by improving them, and through using interpretation in the marketing of sites. This places significant emphasis on interpretation at Welsh country houses. Interpretation is not only a method of communicating significance or relevance through storytelling at sites, but interpretation is also a valuable tool for reaching audiences through the marketing of sites. Frequently, marketing can be based on interpretation, which focuses on stories that make a site special or unique. The unique stories associated with a country house formulate marketable unique selling points. These can be used by staff or custodians to generate offers that can encourage people to visit. Penberthy described this further using the example of coal mining heritage sites:

There's a lot of mines left and there's a lot of mining heritage sites. But what do you talk about at the site, digging coal out of the ground? Because if everybody did that, you only need to visit one site. It's a bit of marketing and it's a bit of knowing your audience. It's unique, it's trying to attract people because you're in a competitive marketplace. Everybody's competing for people's leisure time and the money they might want to spend in the visitor centre on souvenirs and all this other stuff. So, we need to make yourself a

little bit different. Stand out. Give people something to talk about, that's interesting, and make yourself different from the next mine down the road.

Stories and events that form interpretation and marketing are inherently linked. Penberthy believed that in underlining the stories and events that make a place unique, sites can benefit from people wanting to visit and wanting to invest in their story through spending money in a shop or a café, for example. This further demonstrates the value of effective and accurate site-specific interpretation. Asked if he considered that Hawarden Castle had an impact on the marketing of his businesses, Gladstone stated that he had deliberately chosen not to use his private home in the marketing of the Hawarden Estate Farm Shop, but had chosen to use it in the marketing of the Good Life Experience:

With the festival I think a little bit. With the farm shop I don't think at all. [...] I'm not into that kind of stately home farm shop vibe so we didn't call it Hawarden Castle farm shop. [...] I wanted it to be more of a more contemporary offer with more of its own character. With the festival yes to an extent. [...] We have had events in the house to try to sort of open it up and make it more approachable and more meritocratic. I've never liked the idea of the sort of stately home as a backdrop. Whilst I'm sure that there are marvellous classical music concerts with fireworks outside stately homes, and people love those, they're very well done. That's just not what I wanted to do with it. [...] So, we have used it in the marketing for that [the Good Life Experience]. I'm not convinced it's been terribly successful in that regard, because I think actually our crowd couldn't give a monkeys about all that kind of stuff. They just want to have an interesting festival with good speakers and good music and performers. I think to an extent, marketing a stately home is marketing to quite a different crowd to our crowd would be my hunch.

Here, Gladstone discusses subtle yet significant aspects of the marketing of two of his businesses that sustain his estate and, consequently, the maintenance of Hawarden Castle. In choosing to name his farm shop 'Hawarden Estate Farm Shop' rather than 'Hawarden Castle Farm Shop', the emphasis of the business shifts from being linked specifically to his private home, to being linked to his estate and the

wider community. Image 36 shows that the farm shop staff use the estate in the marketing of the business online in stating that they sell produce farmed on the land around them, but there is no reference to Hawarden Castle itself. The property however has been used multiple times in the marketing of the Good Life Experience, but Gladstone had doubts about whether that was effective, believing that people would have gone to the festival regardless because it was the substance of the festival events that they were interested in, rather than the setting of the country house. Gladstone's perceptions of festival attendees not being interested in the country house caricatures the country house visitor. Regardless of this, the property continues to be used in marketing for the, at the time of writing, upcoming Autumn 2022 events, as shown in Image 37. Although the focus of the festival itself is undoubtedly the speakers, music, and performers, the setting of Hawarden Castle adds to the selling of the setting and offers another reason for people to consider purchasing tickets.

Effective or not, it is evident that the setting of country houses is used to sell events in marketing campaigns by staff and custodians. Other interviewees identified that it is not only the setting that is used to sell a visit to a country house, or an event held at a country house, but also people or stories associated with the history of a country house. Edmund Bailey, the owner of Cors y Gedol Hall discussed this in relation to the advertising of Cors y Gedol as self-catered accommodation:

I think it [the history of Cors y Gedol] has been exaggerated somewhere in the advertising, which is rather embarrassing, [...] about Henry VII's stay in there. That must have been in a previous property or before the house was developed. I think the house was modernised in 1570, and of course you are going back 100 years prior to that when Henry VII came to the actual property. [...] Most people that come to a property like that they want to come and experience the Downton Abbey theme [...] I think they like that experience as opposed to wanting to have the exact history of the place. No doubt some people do, but not everybody. [...] What I maintain is if the person who wrote the history for us, and I have to say I left it to my nephew and a friend of his to do so, if they wrote the history more accurately, I think

it would be just as interesting if not more interesting. [...] I would rather see that than the exaggerations out there for the sake of creating a better or more attractive property for letting.

Here, Bailey refers to exaggerations used in the marketing of his property to sell it to prospective holidaymakers. Beyond this quote, he also referred to incorrect dates and other incorrect information that was also being used for the same purpose. Some of this incorrect information such as implying that Owain Glyndŵr, who died in c.1416 (L.B. Smith, 2008) was somehow connected to Cors y Gedol Hall, where the earliest part was built in 1576 (Coflein, 2009) is displayed not on the website of Cors y Gedol Hall, but on a separate website where prospective holidaymakers can book their stays:

The library would whisper of the clandestine plans of the revolutionary Owain Glyndwr and the secret staircases leading down to the servants quarters would blush with stories of flirtatious encounters. (Dioni, 2022).

This short paragraph underlines the point made by Bailey, that there are exaggerations and embellishments in relation to the history of Cors y Gedol Hall for the purposes of advertisement and it is entirely unnecessary. It demonstrates the use of history in marketing, but a history that lacks credibility and accuracy. It is a false representation of historical significance, which is problematic. The quote also relates to Bailey's suggestion that prospective visitors want a "Downton Abbey theme", and to try and sell this, the quote romanticises "flirtatious encounters" of servants and alludes to "secret staircases" to create an illusion, or a fantasy setting using emotive language that people might respond to. Embellishments and exaggerations are not only used to sell events, activities, or other aspects of country houses to people, but they are used by staff at other local attractions or accommodation sites to sell their separate offers. For example, Cors y Gedol is referred to on the website of nearby Shell Island which is open to day visitors and overnight campers:

In the 1640's, King Charles I, while fleeing from the Roundheads, stayed at Cors y Gedol Hall in Dryffryn Adudwy [Dryffryn Ardudwy] before escaping to

France. Although only conjective [conjecture], it could certainly be believed, that he left from the shores of Shell Island, via the connecting tunnel to the house on the Island. The old farmhouse is believed to be haunted, and the ghost of a young female has been seen on many occasions. (Shell Island, 2022).

The website does not state that the property is inaccessible to visit by the public. Bailey also referred to these exaggerations:

There's an old legend of a tunnel [...] between Cors y Gedol and Shell Island. [...] Knowing the landscape around here, I know that's absolute nonsense. People ask about the tunnels and where did they go? Of course, there aren't any tunnels there. The ground is far too hard for tunnels, it's pre-Cambrian granite. [...] It's an exaggeration that has been put in as well as the fact that the place is haunted supposedly. I wouldn't have that on the information.

The inclusion of these clearly disputable stories on the Shell Island website indicates that the presence of a historic house nearby continues to add significance to a local area and create additional reasons for prospective visitors to travel. For many prospective visitors, embellishments, exaggerations, and the romanticism of events such as these shown in relation to Cors y Gedol Hall are entirely believable. Through engaging with images, emotive language, and embellishments, prospective visitors can create an image of fantasy and escapism which entices them to spend their time and money. However, staff and custodians do not need to embellish or exaggerate the histories and stories of their properties. The absence of rigorous research-informed interpretation content creates a vacuum in which myth, legend, embellishment, and invention can emerge and grow. This detracts from the actual historical significance of place. Bailey underlined his desire to move away from exaggerations several times in relation to Cors y Gedol. Country houses have enough intrigue, history, and connections to significant individuals or stories to not need to invent or exaggerate. Should staff or custodians find themselves short of interesting interpretive stories that could be used to sell an event or something else at a

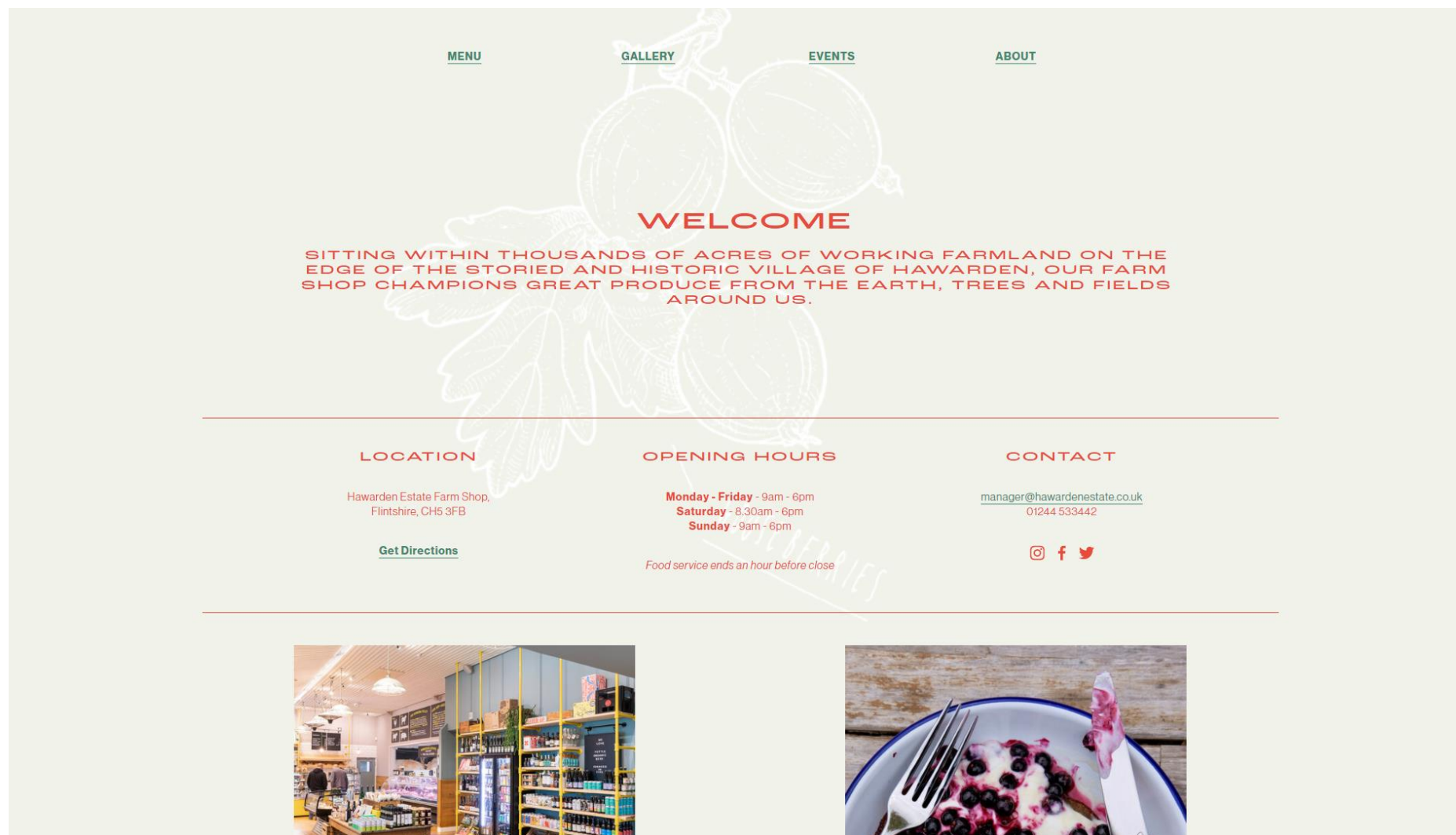


Image 36: A screenshot of the Hawarden Estate Farm Shop website, taken 14/01/2022.

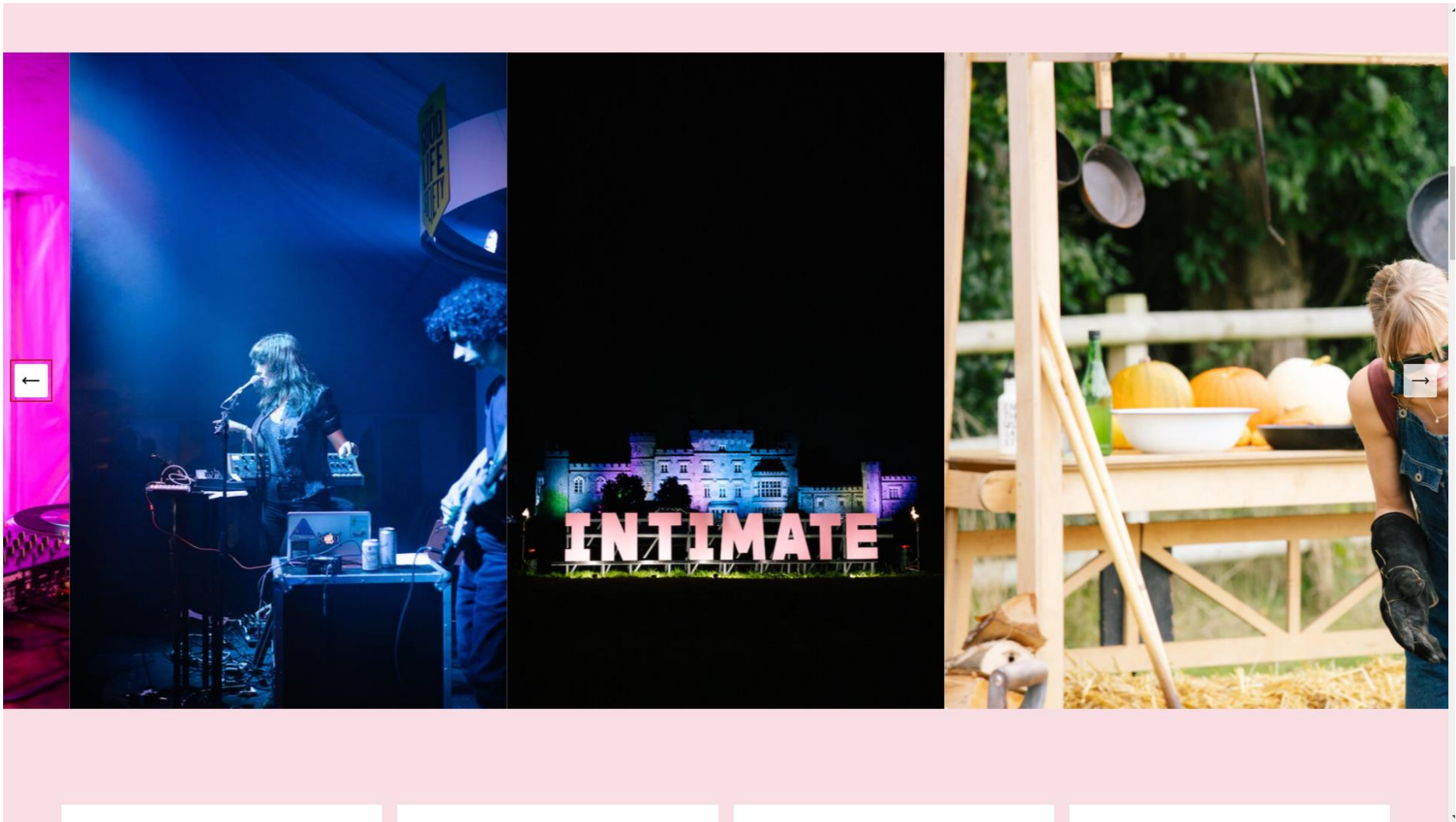


Image 37: A screenshot of the Good Life Experience website advertising tickets for Autumn 2022, taken 14/01/2022.

country house, they should be implored to research and discover the true, existing histories and stories that can be communicated, rather than generating false, new ones. Furthermore, there is a lot of existing research and information that could be drawn upon which could be used to underpin basic, accurate interpretation. For more substantial narratives, owners and custodians should be encouraged to collaborate with appropriate research organisations such as the Institute for the Study of Welsh Estates (ISWE, 2023) or researchers.

There are logical reasons behind the embellishments and exaggerations that Bailey identified related to his property, as Lord Mostyn was able to explain when discussing how he ensures that guided tours that he delivers are engaging for his audiences:

In my experience, if you say to someone “that flag is from 1640” they’ll go “oh okay, whatever”, but if you say “we’ve got a handkerchief with the blood of [King] Charles I on it” [...] obviously they love that and that’s a highlight of the tour, so I try and talk about that. I love history and I love dates, but a lot of people don’t. A lot of people would rather see a handkerchief with a King’s blood on it than a painting. [...] I’ve seen people years after a tour, and they’ve asked if “you still have that handkerchief?”

Country house visitors evidently enjoy stories and connections to significant historical figures. In stating that, in his opinion, visitors would rather see the handkerchief with the blood of King Charles I than a painting, Lord Mostyn anecdotally furthers the assertion made in the survey analysis of this research that country houses should see a shift in their interpretation from treasure houses to story houses. Therefore, it is clear why staff or custodians may want to manufacture stories or connections to significant historical figures as Bailey identified. Connections can create stories that engage visitors and are memorable, as further demonstrated anecdotally by Lord Mostyn through past visitors asking him years after a tour if he still owns the handkerchief, rather than particular paintings or other objects. Through creating experiences that engage with visitors and are memorable, interpretation can inform visitors that country houses are significant and have significant roles to play in their futures.

Identity and the Welsh Country House

Through the interviews, this research has sought to begin to understand the connections between Welsh identity, Welsh country houses, and interpretation. This research has focussed on sites that are in Wales. The language used at each individual site and online is important when considering how people engage with interpretation, and by extension a site. Drake, Harding, and Hignett; the National Trust staff working at Plas Newydd, Penrhyn Castle, and Chirk Castle respectively, spoke about how the Welsh language is an important part of interpretation at their sites. Each of them identified different reasons for this. Firstly, Taya Drake discussed some aspects of bilingualism at Plas Newydd:

Everything [is bilingual...] it's really, really important. [...] Usually, you have your Welsh language first on your panel and then your English. The only time that we wouldn't do everything bilingually is if we were potentially reproducing something from the collection that was only written in English [...] because that's the collection item, rather than a piece of interpretation. [...] We would do bilingual if we were doing an audio experience, but we do that in slightly different ways. In the past, for example, we had a wonderful film on the 8th Marquess. [...] He was walking around [...] and speaking English, but we made sure that we had [Welsh] subtitles. [...] For other types of audio, we've done things slightly differently. For example, we had people speaking about their experience in the flood here, so we had two people who spoke in English and two people who were first language Welsh, so they were recorded in their first language. [...] We had a transcript available in both languages so that they [visitors] could hear, or they can experience the other one that maybe they weren't able to understand.

Drake explained that Welsh and English languages have equality of status with regards to textual interpretation at Plas Newydd, and where the interpretation differs that she offered examples of, there would ordinarily be subtitles for those who cannot understand. Consequently, every visitor to Plas Newydd engages with Welsh to an

extent, whether through seeing it but not understanding, or engaging in the interpretation through the Welsh language. This is valuable, even if a visitor cannot understand it, because it helps to identify the property as a Welsh site and part of Wales. Eleanor Harding highlighted that visitors can be local, and this makes it important for the Welsh language to be represented at Penrhyn Castle:

Absolutely, yes. It's [bilingualism] extremely important. Recognising that, firstly, we're in a first language Welsh dominated area and that we want to be a part of continuing to support that. Recognising the relationship between the Castle and the Welsh language, [...] the way that Penrhyn is intertwined with its wider Estates, which is intertwined with the culture and the traditions of [the] wider area. [...] It's just indivisible. I suppose also, we want to be a place where the local community of people can come and be themselves, and if you can't speak the language that you speak at home when you visit a place that is 5 minutes from your home, then there's clearly a massive disconnect. I would say now, certainly maybe all of the senior staff, or the majority of the senior staff in Penrhyn speak Welsh and most of the staff are either Welsh speakers or Welsh learners. I think with the volunteer body that's slightly different and that's something that takes time to change, and it is something that we're actively pursuing.

Harding's thoughts on Welsh language interpretation at Penrhyn Castle echo Drake's at Plas Newydd in that it is considered to be important at both sites. Harding focused on the relationship between Welsh language, Penrhyn Castle, and the locality in her response. Perhaps this is owing to the complex position that Penrhyn Castle occupies in the identities of local people, with many family connections to the 20th century quarry strikes remaining in the area. Harding's observations that Penrhyn Castle and the Welsh language are both, historically and currently "indivisible" and that there is "a massive disconnect" if close to home, someone cannot use the language that they speak at home, are both powerful. Furthermore, they indicate that the language used in interpretation can be used to acknowledge the histories of a site and to connect with

local audiences. This is especially important in the case of Penrhyn Castle, where parts of the local community have long felt disassociated from the site owing to aspects of its history such as the quarry strikes. To address what Harding describes as a “disconnect”, she underlines that it is important that staff and volunteers can speak Welsh to communicate with local people in their language. Whilst many staff can speak Welsh, it is not the case with volunteers at the site – many of whom will be carrying out important public-facing interpretation roles through interactions with visitors. Jon Hignett of Chirk Castle explained that whilst interpretation at Chirk Castle also needs to be bilingual, there are no Welsh speaking staff:

It's a bit of a tricky one at Chirk because we don't have any Welsh speakers on staff, but our policy is Welsh language first. So, the Welsh language goes first, but then there's equal weighting in terms of size and font and that kind of thing for both languages. So, everything that we have on site should be bilingual. If it's something that we're having to do in a rush, it doesn't always work out like that, and it has happened in the past, or it is still happening. I should probably say, but it shouldn't be that sometimes the English is put up and then not translated. I think that's happened a bit recently because we used to have a dedicated translator which we don't currently have. So, things have slipped a little bit on those things, but the policy is Welsh language first and then equal weighting in both languages and anything that we're displaying should have both languages on it. Interpretation we tend to have translated, so if you walk around the site and you find interpretation of the castle it will always be in both languages with the Welsh first, but emergency signs or things that are really short-term posters. Sometimes they are just done in English, just because we don't have the translation at the moment. So, the Welsh identity is really strong and particularly the Borderland Welsh identity.

Across the three National Trust properties, it is clear that bilingual interpretation is important to the staff, even at Chirk Castle where there are no Welsh-speaking employees. This indicates that it is important to produce Welsh interpretation because

the representation of the Welsh language at Welsh country houses is important to Welsh speakers. In addition to this, it also presents Welsh identity through interpretation. Hignett stated that “the Welsh identity is really strong” at Chirk as a direct consequence of interpretation being offered in Welsh. Language is not the only marker of Welsh identity, but the use of the Welsh language in textual interpretation provides routes for interpreting other Welsh narratives associated with these sites, for example the translation of the bible at Chirk Castle, the ‘Tribes Room’ at Erddig, and the Eisteddfod items at Penrhyn Castle. Hignett added to Drake’s comments on methods of interpretation specifically in relation to language by stating that interpretation in English and Welsh needed to have equal weighting in font size for interpretation panels, so that one language is not considered to be more important or necessary than the other. These examples underline that National Trust staff in Wales need to produce interpretation in Welsh where possible. The extent of Welsh used in interpretation is somewhat dependent upon the amount of text-based interpretation used at a site. As already discussed in this chapter, many country house staff or custodians choose not to use a great deal of text-based interpretation on-site so not to interfere with the experience of a site. Therefore, unless the Welsh language is presented through other means, for example spoken by volunteers or through audio-visual interpretation displays, Welsh-language interpretation will not be prominent. National Trust sites are staffed full-time and operate as full-time visitor attractions, allowing them to invest time and money in different methods of interpretation. Other sites, such as Gregynog Hall, operate differently. Robert Meyrick, a Gregynog Hall trustee, indicated that staff and custodians of Welsh country houses need to present bilingual interpretation because it is the law to do so:

I think it obviously takes a much greater significance, but also, it’s the law, so it has to in terms of our bilingual policies etc. But you know, Montgomeryshire is not that Welsh speaking an area. [...] You will never find the staff there speaking Welsh. They’re all locals, they’ve all come in from the local villages and whatever but it’s not a Welsh speaking part of Wales, and on the other hand you know

they do have lots of Welsh language courses and conferences that take place there.

Referring to the law and bilingualism, Meyrick was correct that the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure (2011) included section 4: "Promoting and facilitating use of Welsh and treating Welsh no less favourably than English" (Welsh Assembly Government, 2011). This is a result of the Welsh Government adopting the policy to aim for one million Welsh speakers by 2030 (Welsh Government, 2017, pp.47-55). Consequently, staff and custodians of Welsh country houses cannot prioritise English language interpretation at the expense of Welsh. Although this is the case, Meyrick continued in his response to state that Welsh language events take place at Gregynog Hall despite few of the staff being able to speak Welsh owing to the linguistic tendencies of the local area. Therefore, Welsh language events and bilingual signage ensures that Welsh is used at Gregynog Hall thus emboldening Welsh identity at the site. Welsh country houses that are private residences and therefore not open to the public on a full-time basis do not legally need to promote or facilitate the use of the Welsh language to the same extent. For example, Lord Mostyn when asked if he places much emphasis on the Welsh language at Mostyn Hall replied:

We don't at all, I can't speak it at all. There isn't really any focus on the Welsh language. I wouldn't say it's deliberate. When I think back to giving the tours... I'm trying to think if there's a part where I say "this is Welsh" now that I think about it, I don't think I say- so we talk about [...] the Eisteddfod. My family was connected with the Eisteddfod in the 16th century and that's the only time I really talk about the actively Welsh connection. I can't think of any other, it is a Welsh house, but I think that's the only time we talk about the Welsh connection. [...] It's interesting, I've never even thought about it. That's funny, in all these years I've never really thought about it. We are actually very proud of our Welsh roots. It's only the Eisteddfod, that's the only time.

Prior to this question and response, Lord Mostyn was asked if he would describe Mostyn Hall as Welsh:

I would describe it as Welsh, there's no doubt about that. [...] I consider myself Welsh.

These two responses are directly connected. Firstly, when stating that Mostyn Hall is undoubtedly a Welsh property, Lord Mostyn related his own sense of national identity to the property by stating that he also considers himself to be Welsh. In his response regarding Welsh language, Lord Mostyn stated that despite considering himself to be Welsh, he does not speak Welsh. Evidently, he realised during the interview that whilst he considers himself to be Welsh and considers Mostyn Hall to be Welsh, neither of these things are communicated to Mostyn Hall visitors through his tours. The exception to this is part of the tour which linked the Mostyn family to the Eisteddfod tradition in the 16th century, which is an historic connection rather than one that would be as present as Lord Mostyn's personal feelings regarding his own identity, or the lack of use of Welsh language on-site. It is possible that visitors may leave Mostyn Hall believing that the Welsh identity of the site is something which is historic, rather than current. If there is no representation of the Welsh language at a country house in Wales, and visitors are not able to make connections between a site or an individual and Wales, then it is less likely that visitors will consider Welsh country houses to be significant in local and national affairs. However, Mostyn Hall is a private residence. Therefore, the site is not orientated towards visitors with signage and does not need to be for it to be a home.

Asked if he would consider Hawarden Castle to be a Welsh property, Charles Gladstone responded:

I know it's geographically in Wales, [...] I think we're Welsh, but I think the local identity is kind of Welsh-English. I think people are as connected to Chester, Liverpool, certainly possibly Manchester around us as they are to Wales. I think that's just my feeling, I regard [myself] very much as Welsh because I feel proud of Wales, but I also have a real nationalism.

Gladstone's answer underlined some of the complexities of identity, in that it is something that an individual experiences. Furthermore, he began by stating that Hawarden Castle is physically situated in Wales, but continued by discussing the identities of local people, implying that their feelings of identity are projected onto the Hawarden Estate. Gladstone was asked if there is an emphasis placed on Welsh language at Hawarden Farm Shop and the Good Life Experience:

We should be, but it's something that we are conscious of, and we feel we should be better at [representing the Welsh language].

At the time of the interview, Gladstone indicated that the Welsh language was important to him and that he knew representing it in the public-facing aspect of his estate was also important, but as yet, had not been achieved. He was asked if he believed that the Welsh language helped market products:

Yes, I do and of course that's the irony. We try to stock mainly products from within 30 miles as much as possible, so we are doing as much as we can for Welsh products, but we should probably be doing a bit more for Welsh language.

Gladstone again stated that he could do more for the Welsh language on his estate, but also indicated that doing so would benefit product sales. The reason for this is that the Welsh language can emphasise that a product is local – a major selling point for environmental reasons. David Penberthy also spoke about using the Welsh language at Cadw sites but rather than to set a product apart from others, to set Wales apart from England:

Everything's bilingual, has been since 1985, I think. [...] The language is supposed to be equal status, but Welsh always appears first. So, if you come from England or America or wherever you have to see two languages and it's the Welsh language you see first, and it sets us apart culturally and reaffirms our identity as a separate nation within the United Kingdom. [...] Back in the day it used to be about Irish hospitality and there was all this stuff going on that you will never get an Irish welcome. I think it was a similar sort of thing within

Wales, you know, this Welsh welcome. We're different from England, and they're different in Scotland and so I just think it works. We even use a font now that is designed to showcase the Welsh language. These digraphs with double d's and double l's and all this sort of stuff and that's carried through from Visit Wales through our stuff as well, so it's to emphasise that 'Welshness' I suppose.

Penberthy underlined that the use of the Welsh language in interpretation and signage is important to reaffirm 'Welshness' and strengthen feelings of Welsh identity. To achieve this, a new font was designed for Cadw and Visit Wales to use that would ensure the Welsh language was clear when presented via signs and interpretation. Furthermore, he reinforced the belief of this research that using Welsh in interpretation sets Welsh country houses apart culturally and can help to underline an aspect of them that renders them significant. After establishing that she believes Gyrn Castle to be Welsh in the 21st century despite considering it historically to be a "hybrid" English-Welsh building after being built by an Englishman, Claudia Howard did not believe that a perceived 'Welshness' helps market the site:

If I'm honest, it's just people who want a pretty castle. [...] I get quite a few local inquiries, so people who [...] have got this historical or local connection, but that's a five-mile radius. Everyone outside of that, they don't really care. We get a lot of people coming from Liverpool or from Chester [...] and I think particularly in this part of the Northwest, the Wales, England bit is all quite blended together. [...] I'd say we're a sort of pseudo-English part. [...] Unfortunately, I do think there's something in a Welsh castle, and an Irish castle being a bit fairy-tale and magical – it's a bit Disney.

Evidently, Howard believes that the aesthetics of Gyrn Castle are enough to market the site as a wedding venue and agreed with Gladstone that the identity of Northeast Wales is a coalesce of different Northwest English areas and Northeast Wales. However, that is not to say that the Welsh language does not still play an important role at Gyrn Castle when a wedding is taking place:

I speak no Welsh [...] but being Welsh and having Welsh heritage is very important to us and all of our staff speak fluent Welsh, so if it's someone that's got more of a Welsh connection or it's something they're very passionate about I make sure I bring one of the others along and they can speak in Welsh and support me. [...] I think it's really important to have a team here who speak Welsh and are Welsh and to support Welsh people.

Clearly, although the Welsh language may not be used in the marketing of Gyrn Castle, it is still a significant aspect of the site's identity and operation as a wedding venue.

Miranda Dechazal owns Heartsheath Hall and spoke about how country houses have influenced her identity as a result of growing up living in one:

I think it [growing up in a country house] has to be part of the story of why I got interested in history in the first place. My friends lived in old houses as well. So [I was] just curious. You know, I think I have always had that interest in history. I mean not everyone who is in the world of country houses is interested in history. [...] I think it has changed the way I see the country. So, when I'm driving around the countryside, I can recognise when a wall is an estate wall and I'm like "where's the big house?"

In the case of historic buildings such as country houses, identity is a cyclical process. The identities of individuals lead to architectural styles being introduced, objects collected, and events hosted, which in turn influence the identities of people a generation later. Along with other external influences, their identities alter the identity of a site, and the process continues. This is a reason why Welsh country houses are significant in the modern era and can be significant into the future: they can inspire and encourage generations to enter areas of research or acquire other specialist skills that are displayed during a visit to a country house and can spark interest and curiosity.

Collectively, these discussions regarding identity and the country house suggest that identity is fluid across different sites, dependant on factors such as their location, language, and the identities of owners and local people. All of these can be drawn upon

in interpretation to connect and engage with local audiences whilst conveying the local significance of a site to audiences from further afield. The survey analysis chapter of this thesis underlined that most respondents believed that the Welsh language should form a significant part of a visit to a country house in Wales, and that country houses should do more to actively promote and support the Welsh language. The Welsh language should have a presence in Welsh country houses, not only for this reason, but also because it helps to give them a significance as part of Wales whilst not undoing or at the expense of any local, national, or global connections. Furthermore, Welsh identity does not solely consist of the Welsh language, but it can be used as a significant foundation to highlight other site-specific Welsh narratives.

Conclusion

The interviews with country house staff and custodians have contributed significantly to the understanding of multiple aspects related to the interpretation of Welsh country houses. Firstly, there are differences in the significance and relevance of country houses historically and contemporarily according to some interviewees. Gladstone commented “I think that we need to remain relevant in order to press ahead in order to survive”, underlining that he believes that the operation of an estate has had to change over time to ensure its sustainability. The operation of Gyrn Castle has not changed in that, according to Howard, much income that funds the upkeep of the estate is taken from tenant rent. What has changed, in her view, is that she and other family members have taken on other jobs to continue to maintain the property and to keep it as their private residence. However, they have needed to diversify their offer to achieve this through hosting weddings at the site, thus indicating that Gladstone was correct that country houses must be made relevant to survive.

Creating relevance at sites can be achieved through numerous interpretation methods. These methods vary on a site-by-site basis, and include temporary exhibitions such as art installations, and other methods such as room guides or information panels. Furthermore, they can include online methods, with the benefits of these discussed in the online analysis chapter of this thesis. It is critical that staff and custodians at country houses utilise different methods to engage different people who learn in different ways and appreciate different things. An information panel to one person can be equally as valuable as a temporary artistic intervention to another person. In addition to this, a changing programme of events throughout a year can encourage repeat visits and also reach different audiences. Harding believed that creative means of interpretation have more of an effect on people than information panels, and perhaps create reasons to return, which provides more opportunities for country house staff or custodians to underline the significance of their sites to the public, and in turn creates contemporary relevance.

Both Harding and Baker spoke about the present uses of Welsh country houses building upon their historic purposes to function as homes, in the cases of sites which are now visitor attractions. This shift, for some sites according to Harding and Baker, has furthered their respective contemporary significance and relevance. The post-residential functions and uses of country houses can, in addition, provide interpretation content at some sites. Staff and custodians can weave in the story of National Trust, private ownership, or other ownership into the history of a site, building and continuing their respective existing histories whilst telling the stories of them to their visitors.

The content of interpretation that is presented at sites is influenced by the person or people who research, write, design, or perform interpretation – and this is lacking at most sites, as evidenced by this research. Bailey stated that his nephew and a friend of his wrote inaccurate and exaggerated historical information which is available to guests at Cors y Gedol. Bailey believed this to be unnecessary, neither adding anything to a country house visit or stay, nor helping to encourage additional visits or guests. Here, there is a crossover between interpretation and marketing which Penberthy discussed, stating that “interpretation is part of the product” and “I think there’s a great tie [...] between marketing and interpretation”. Several country house owners such as Gladstone stated that they have used interpretation in the marketing of events at their properties or estates, further demonstrating the linkage made by Penberthy.

When discussing both marketing and interpretation, language was considered by the majority of interviewees to be a significant aspect of each – even if owners do not personally speak Welsh themselves in the cases of Lord Mostyn and Claudia Howard. Meyrick indicated that there are legal and political pressures for sites to help promote the Welsh language. However, this can be challenging at private properties which open on an open day or pre-arranged tour basis such as Mostyn Hall. Despite there being little Welsh language presence at Mostyn Hall, Lord Mostyn stated “I would describe it [Mostyn Hall] as Welsh, there’s no doubt about that”. Therefore, whilst the inclusion of the Welsh language in interpretation can cement or establish notions of identity for a visitor, there are also other methods of achieving this. Dechazal identified that being

around country houses from a young age had most likely shaped her career. Identity and the country house is, therefore, a cyclical process. The identity of an individual can influence a country house, and a country house can later influence an individual. The identity of a country house is not only determined by the owner of it. There are other people who have a sense of 'ownership' of these places because it speaks to their own personal identity. This can be both positive and negative and is no less significant. Interpretation of country houses is integral to this process, enabling people to learn about and engage with sites that can influence them to maintain or learn more about their histories which have been critical in the development of many aspects of Wales.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This thesis has, for the first time, considered the reasons, methods, and impacts of country house interpretation in Wales. An analysis of existing literature on the themes of significance, relevance, Englishness, interpretation practice, marketing, and policy provided a foundation to engage with a plethora of issues affecting interpretation, including Welshness and the country house, the benefits of different methods of interpretation, the quality and extent of interpretation at Welsh country houses, and shifts in the significance and relevance of the country house in Wales. The study has comprised of an in-depth analysis of online social media accounts and websites related to Welsh country houses. This was undertaken to examine online engagement and the nature and extent of interpretation, particularly at a time when visiting country houses was not possible due to the covid-19 pandemic. In addition, a survey was conducted with 306 respondents across Wales and beyond which has established an understanding of people's views related to interpretation, relevance, significance, identity and the country house. Furthermore, interviews were conducted with twenty members of staff or custodians of Welsh country houses along the same themes as the survey. Overall, the study comprises public opinion, in-depth views and contributions from experts and custodians, as well as analysis of interpretive outputs that encourage people to engage with Welsh country houses on-site and online.

Significance, Relevance, and Interpretation

The literature review of this thesis identified that this study was required to begin to address significant academic gaps in the study of Welsh country houses from a heritage perspective. The literature review highlighted that the relevance of the country house has shifted over time. This thesis has shown that the relationship between significance, relevance, and interpretation is a complex one yet critical to the collective and individual futures of Welsh country houses. Country houses were historically important and relevant in multiple spheres of life. The literature review featured this brief synopsis of their significance from Christie (2000, p.4): "they were a major expression of artistic, political and economic endeavour". Included in this research are consistent and repeated views from the public via the survey and from leading country house practitioners and custodians via the interviews that the endeavours referred to by Christie, as well as the additional social endeavour identified by other scholars including Franklin (1991) and Mandler (1999), must all feature in the interpretation of country houses. This is necessary to tell a full, representative story of a country house that reflects the various spheres of influence they exerted across virtually all aspects of life, stretching from local to national and global contexts. Many of these are no longer relevant. Welsh country houses are not current political powerhouses or central pillars of the economy, nor are they necessarily meeting places of the higher echelons of society. They have changed dramatically in the past century. Many country houses are now relevant to a variety of users, audiences, and communities in other ways, and these more recent functions and identities do not devalue their historic or current significance. Instead, interviews with Baker and Harding identified that the significant

histories of country houses continue to be developed regardless of whether their functions have altered since their initial construction. These alternative uses of country houses for example as visitor attractions, wedding venues, or festival sites can be weaved into the interpretation of their respective histories, adding to the stories that are told on-site or online because they continue to set an individual country house apart from another. Their histories together with their current functions contribute to their respective unique selling points which are important to underline and emphasise at each site, as stated by Penberthy when interviewed to encourage people to visit different sites for different reasons. People require a reason to visit a site, and often need another reason to visit the same site again. The interpretation of significance and relevance at Welsh country houses can provide reasons to visit to attract and engage visitors, audiences, communities, or customers dependant on the site function. Furthermore, a changing programme of events can provide different reasons to visit, thus encouraging repeat visits should this be the objective for the staff or custodians of a respective site. Private owners of country houses may not want to attract larger visitor numbers, but this does not detract from the value and need for interpretation owing to the heritage significance of Welsh country houses, which could be delivered appropriately online – this research has demonstrated both a hunger for interpretation, and that interpretation can adequately be delivered online but rarely is.

Evidently, many country houses have changed. They have altered from initially operating as powerhouses of their gentry or aristocratic owners, to treasure houses where staff or custodians would showcase artistic and architectural splendour, to

becoming the story houses that many operate as today through offering interpretation on a wide range of historical themes and issues. However, currently, the stories that are told are often not holistic in encapsulating the extent of influence of a specific site and the individuals connected with it. Most interpretation remains skewed towards the political and military achievements of male owners of the house and the older treasure house themes of art and architectural history. The research presented in this thesis encourages a move towards the multi-layered story house approach to interpretation to represent the broad histories of Welsh country houses more accurately. These include influence in local, national, and global matters and individualistic histories including underrepresented histories in country houses, for example in relation to women's histories, rural life, industrial history and the lives of the communities who lived in and around the country house. The survey analysis of this thesis underlined a strong desire from the public to understand these histories through a holistic representation of more comprehensive country house histories. People want to engage with more history, more stories, and consequently, more interpretation. Moreover, interpretation can be used to convey the message to visitors that although the relevance of the country house has altered, they are no less relevant. Through holistic interpretation, country houses can today be significant and relevant sites of understanding, explanation, expression, and inspiration to their many visitors, irrespective of their function. This is demonstrated by most respondents presented in the survey analysis stating that they believe that Welsh country houses are significant, and by interviewees such as Sir Charles Gladstone and

Lord Mostyn stating that country houses have had to change from their initial purpose upon their construction.

There is a lack of understanding of the extent of significance of Welsh country houses, highlighted by the survey results included in this thesis. Interpretation appears to have succeeded in heightening public awareness of the scope of the influence exerted by country houses in local spheres to an extent, with two thirds of survey respondents believing them to be locally influential. However, the survey analysis showed that fewer respondents believed that country houses had exerted influence to the wider extents – particularly globally. This was echoed by some staff and custodians of country houses in the interview analysis of this thesis, including Lords Langford and Mostyn. Charles Gladstone observed that whilst his estate had exerted a global influence historically it has now scaled back to a local one. Therefore, Gladstone indicated that significance and relevance are not static or set in any one period. They fluctuate over time and continue to change as the history of a country house is built upon, with some periods of time being more significant or relevant than others. Lord Mostyn stated that whilst Mostyn Hall, in his opinion, was not influential to a global extent, perhaps it is currently at its most influential globally through the current links with Japanese tourism. This underlines that country houses can be relevant in the modern world, and that they can be so through engaging people with history and heritage. Historically, country houses had differing extents of influence depending on the site. Some were undoubtedly global, for example the links between Penrhyn Castle, the export of Welsh slate and significant involvement with slave labour and sugar plantations in Jamaica, whilst others

were more national, for example the acquisition of Gregynog Hall by the Davies sisters in 1920 for it to become the headquarters of an enterprise to bring art, music, and creative skills to the people of Wales (Gregynog Hall, 2023). Communicating this to visitors is entirely dependent on the quality of interpretation offered both, at a site and online, as well as the knowledge of the person(s) researching, creating or delivering it. Often, interpretation on-site is centred around sharing stories with visitors. However, the social media analysis chapter of this thesis argued that interpretation is undervalued as a method of online engagement. Alternatively, it is either used sparingly or as a tool of commercialising Welsh country houses with the objective being to sell something.

Interpretation as a Marketing Tool

Using interpretation as a commercial tool to sell something is not necessarily problematic. However, it can become problematic through enticing people to pay for something using inaccurate or exaggerated information as identified by this thesis. There are no reasonable justifications for these. Inaccuracies or exaggerations lessen an offer rather than develop it. Interviewees such as Bailey and Harding as well as many survey respondents were vocal about the need for honesty in interpretation without exaggeration, and this is relevant when considering the marketing of country houses. Cadw's head of interpretation, Penberthy, strongly believed that marketing and interpretation are closely linked. This research believes his assertion to be correct because interpretation can underline the unique selling points of a given site and consequently influence its marketing. The National Trust have adopted the 'Spirit of Place' concept when staff design interpretation at National Trust sites, asking themselves "does the spirit shine through?". This considers what the unique selling points of each specific site is, and how it is best packaged and presented to the public both, to encourage them to visit and in order for them to get the most out of their visit. Evidently, the marketing value of interpretation is high and there should be great emphasis and importance allocated to the interpretation of Welsh country houses on-site and online. The social media and website analysis of this thesis showed that too often, as well as sometimes being inaccurate, interpretation is tokenistic, vague, or romanticised to sell. Furthermore, it does not always read as being site-specific as a result of the vagueness of the interpretation, thus furthering the generic country house experience. This is linked to the spirit of place or unique selling points of country

houses, in that it would be beneficial not only in the selling or marketing of a site to set it apart from others via interpretation, but it can also educate and entertain. Interpretation being used to sell can become problematic when it is written by someone without the requisite expertise or understanding of a country house's former or current significance. The research contained within this thesis recommends that site-specific repositories of knowledge are developed in collaboration with researchers or research bodies such as local history societies or the Institute for the Study of Welsh Estates. These repositories could include information from the Historic Environment Record (Coflein) and a site's listing status (Cadw) as well as research related to individuals with connections to the site, amongst other information. Most country houses have an estate archive, usually deposited in an archive. The records and information within these archives are potentially a substantial asset for the development of country house interpretation. In addition to this, they could draw upon people's experiences and knowledge. Some survey results indicated that people visited country houses because they had personal connections to them, for example an ancestor who worked at a site. These are people who on occasion have first or second-hand information and knowledge regarding the operation or workings of a site which, if considered to be accurate and reasonable based on other existing sources, could be valuable. For many custodians and staff members of Welsh country houses, obtaining this knowledge should be considered time sensitive as country houses continue to shift from powerhouses to story houses. These repositories would offer invaluable sources of accurate, relevant information. Staff and custodians could draw upon them to use in

their interpretation based on academic research and facts, rather than the idea or concept of a romanticised contemporary country house experience. Consequently, the repositories could address an evident lack of expertise and ground interpretation in a sense of place and individualism as opposed to creating a universal country house experience. Staff and custodians of Welsh country houses should strive for accuracy and honesty in their interpretation, regardless of its purpose. Furthermore, individuality of histories, architectural styles, and people should be celebrated where appropriate to distinguish country houses from each other and to appeal to prospective visitors in what Penberthy rightly and accurately described as a competitive leisure market. People now have a multitude of methods to spend their leisure time. Many of these are cheaper or more physically or mentally accessible than visiting a country house. Therefore, staff and custodians should endeavour to appeal to potential visitors through using interpretation for marketing, but ensuring that it is accurate, holistic, engaging and not exaggerated or embellished in any way.

Interpretation Methods

As demonstrated by the survey analysis chapter, interpretation plays a role in encouraging people to visit country houses. Some respondents identified that they were interested in particular methods of interpretation, and some stated that they found some methods to be particularly off-putting. This was also discussed in the interview analysis section of the thesis, particularly in relation to volunteers. It is very common for sites – often those which are National Trust operated – to enlist the help of volunteers in certain rooms of a country house with the partial purpose of interacting and engaging with visitors, but also to safeguard furnishings and objects. In the interview analysis, Welford spoke about the minimalistic approach to interpretation taken at Gwydir Castle, with no volunteers and little text-based interpretation. Visitors are encouraged to experience the property for themselves before being able to ask questions of the owners if they want to. Welford believed that in placing a volunteer in a room to engage with visitors, the interaction with the volunteer becomes the overriding visitor experience rather than any interaction between a visitor and the historical environment. A visitor walking into a room or a space and being aware that they are being watched by a volunteer changes how they interact with a space, regardless of whether they have an interaction with the volunteer or not. Welford perceives this to be a negative not only at Gwydir Castle where volunteer help is not enlisted in this manner, but at other properties where it is. As a visitor, he simply wants to look at, sense, absorb, and engage with what he wants to in any given space, rather than volunteers drawing his attention to something that they might be fond of. This was echoed by some respondents in the survey analysis of this thesis. However, some

stated that they look for these interactions when they visit properties and enjoy drawing upon the knowledge of a volunteer to make the most of their time at a site. The literature review of this thesis identified that close engagement with historic collections, art, or ideas in the presence of other people can improve people's mental and physical health (Museum's Association, 2013, p.6; Dodd and Jones, 2014, p.43). Undoubtedly, volunteering is a method of regularly engaging closely with collections and other people thus being beneficial to the mental and physical health of volunteers. Considering this, along with the fact that some visitors enjoy interactions with volunteers for their knowledge whilst others would prefer to be left alone to experience a site and draw their own conclusions, perhaps the role of the country house volunteer requires a reassessment on a site-by-site basis. At some sites, it might still be necessary to enlist the help of volunteers in certain areas. For example, this could be for insurance purposes, or if there is a confusing area that visitors may need assistance with. At other sites, it might now be more appropriate for volunteers to take a more active role in the background of researching and creating interpretation rather than the delivery of it. They could research specific aspects of the history of a site which could add to the repository of information that this research has recommended be established and could consequently be used in future interpretation.

Country house volunteers represent just one of many methods of interpretation. Different layers of interpretation were discussed in the literature review specifically in relation to the Spirit of Place principle adopted by the National Trust, identifying that there is a need for different types of interpretation at each site and online to engage

different types of learners and people of different interests and backgrounds. This was reflected in the survey analysis, with different respondents identifying that they prefer different methods of interpretation. People look for different things when they visit country houses and engage more with some types of interpretation than others. The survey analysis demonstrated that visitors want to engage with different types of interpretation at country houses – as long as it is not to the detriment of a space and does not override it, as discussed in relation to volunteers. Other methods of interpretation can also be intrusive and interrupt engagements between visitors and a space, and sometimes this is intentional. For example, artistic interventions at country houses on a temporary, exhibition basis are often intrusive in that they totally alter a space, or the experience of it for a visitor. However, speaking in relation to temporary exhibitions at Penrhyn Castle in the interview analysis, Harding stated that artistic interventions:

[...] enable people to engage in more evocative ways I suppose and turned into less of a museum experience. [...] Some people just don't connect with that stuff, and I suppose that's the nature of art, isn't it? [...] And it's not about liking, it's also responding.

If visitors are able to engage with information in a more evocative way, it is a more memorable experience for many that could potentially lead to repeat visits in the future. Some people prefer the "museum experience" that Harding referred to, favouring interpretation panels or guidebooks rather than something evocative. Harding's inference that interpretation does not need to be liked to be successful relates to

Tilden's pivotal interpretation work referred to in the literature review, that interpretation should aim to provoke. Interpretation that provokes a response from a visitor is often successful interpretation because the visitor has thought about the message and actively considered how that relates to them and what their response to it is as a result. A more evocative method of interpretation is most likely to illicit such a response but is not suitable everywhere. Evocative methods such as artistic interventions can be costly and intrusive, which for a privately owned country house could obstruct their introduction. The most suitable methods of interpretation chosen by staff or custodians of country houses clearly depends on the function of the property. Properties which continue to serve primarily as full-time residences would not and do not seek to host text-based information panels, artistic interventions, or other means of evocative interpretation because the property is not primarily a visitor attraction. If they do open to visitors on a part-time basis, such means of interpretation are intrusive and therefore not necessarily conducive comfortably living in the house. This is one of the reasons why private owners who choose to open their properties on an open day basis do so through guided tours, with the reason being that several referred to as part of the interview analysis – that they feel a responsibility to do so and not out of a financial necessity to do so. Through opening country houses to visitors at particular times of year or for particular occasions, they can as Cuthbertson observed in the interview analysis, contribute to the local knowledge of visitors and the interpretation of them can demonstrate to people that they are and were significant. The method chosen to achieve this is important and influences how people engage with the content of the

interpretation. This thesis argues that effective, engaging, accurate, and holistic interpretation is of great value. Online interpretation methods such as websites, blogs, social media accounts, and podcasts are incredibly valuable particularly to private owners because they do not interfere with the on-site experience of living at the house. Yet, they can serve to highlight historical significance, potentially in a very rich, accessible, and engaging fashion.

Interpretation Content

The content of interpretation is critical. The content, in conjunction with the method of delivery, is responsible for the message that visitors take away. It was evident in the survey analysis of this work that some people seek to visit country houses specifically to engage with interpretation content along particular themes, including underrepresented people, groups, or histories. Importantly, the survey analysis demonstrated that underrepresented interpretation content need not be presented to visitors at the expense of other aspects of country house significance or relevance. Rather, underrepresented themes should be presented as part of a holistic approach to interpretation presenting multiple narratives from across the broad spectrum of country house significance and relevance. Furthermore, the survey analysis identified a strong desire among respondents for honest and accurate interpretation, particularly of underrepresented themes at country houses such as involvement in the slave trade and colonialism, women's history, and the history of the working class. Too often in the past, interpretation has been inaccurate, embellished, skewed towards the perspective of the owner, or has omitted individuals or groups of people to portray a person or a family in a positive light, and has not been embedded in rigorous research. Country houses have a clear role to play in the accurate telling of important stories about the site, but also of broader relevance to local and Welsh history, across many themes and time periods. In doing so through interpretation, country houses will continue to have significant futures building on their significant pasts.

For staff and custodians of country houses, the content of interpretation should be site-specific, contextualised by national or global events where necessary and relevant. Interpretation presents an opportunity to staff and custodians to tell visitors why a particular site matters; why it is significant; why it is listed; why it should be preserved and enjoyed into the future. In the interview analysis, Penberthy discussed how it is necessary for staff and custodians at sites to ensure that interpretation is site-specific, using the example of Cadw-managed coal mine heritage sites:

There's a lot of mines left and there's a lot of mining heritage sites. But what do you talk about at the site, digging coal out of the ground? Because if everybody did that, you only need to visit one site.

Through creating site-specific interpretation, people have a reason to visit because the interpretation is presenting topics, individuals, and stories that cannot be presented, in the same way, elsewhere. The histories related to country houses and estates in Wales are unique selling points and should be highlighted through a unique package of interpretation that nowhere else can offer so as to create a distinctive visitor experience. Ideally, the content of interpretation should not remain static. Changing elements of interpretation ensures that there are reasons for visitors to return, and allows for the exploration and presentation of different themes and stories connected to the site, adding new layers of heritage significance. This is discussed throughout the thesis in relation to the National Trust's spirit of place concept and particularly in the survey analysis chapter when considering why people choose to re-visit sites. Some respondents to the research survey conducted as part of this work stated that they did

not return to a site that they had visited because there was no reason to do so or nothing had changed, with many choosing to visit elsewhere to experience something different. This further underlines the importance of interpretation, in that people would re-visit the same place to see it interpreted in a different way, or to engage with different themes through interpretation. The fact that people not only visit country houses to see them, but that they visit country houses to learn and engage with the interpretation of them and are encouraged to visit because of interpretation is a significant finding of this research. Considerable time, effort, and money should be invested where possible by staff and custodians of Welsh country houses to ensure that interpretation is, firstly present, and then accurate, reliable, holistic, and engaging.

The online analysis chapter of websites and social media found that generally, online interpretation of Welsh country houses is largely non-existent. Where it is present, it is usually inadequate. Inaccuracies and irrelevancies are too frequent across websites and on social media, posts that offer any interpretation even for marketing purposes are largely uncommon. Staff and custodians of country houses appear to have a tendency of using the setting of a country house as the main selling point when advertising events, activities, and hotel rooms or other services rather than any meaningful interpretation or engagement with the significance and relevance of a site and its history. There are clear benefits to offering interpretation on-site for visitors irrespective of the function and ownership model of the country house, and offering interpretation online should be considered as a natural extension of this to underline a site's individuality. Online interpretation is not at all invasive and the survey analysis of this

thesis showed that there is substantial public interest for interpretation. In doing so, offering some online interpretation can encourage people to visit through engaging wider audiences with the significance and relevance of a site, both historically and contemporarily. Furthermore, online interpretation can publicly highlight heritage significance, even for houses not usually publicly accessible. The online analysis highlighted the varied use of Welsh country houses today and it is not the recommendation of this research to change any of these uses – not all can operate sustainably as full-time heritage attractions. However, where possible and appropriate, it is recommended that interpretation is used including at sites which primarily operate as hotels, restaurants, wedding venues, galleries, schools, and private houses. Interpretation can link events to historic events, pursuits, individuals, or associated histories on a site-specific basis to engage different and new audiences in the history and significance of Welsh country houses. For example, Christmas events at most country houses can be connected to how Christmas would have been celebrated at the same site at a different point in time.

The clear lack of online interpretation available related to the sites assessed as part of this research further underlines the apparent lack of expertise at Welsh country houses in this field. This claim is furthered by the inaccuracies and exaggerations in existing online interpretation. Welsh country houses, collectively and individually, require further research from a range of disciplinary perspectives to fuel high-quality interpretation. Considering social media and websites as prominent and the first forms of interpretation that visitors encounter, the online presence of many Welsh country houses is a

juxtaposition to the perceived aims of the physical sites, which are to entertain, educate, attract, and inform visitors.

A report into the usage of social media by staff and custodians of Welsh country houses would be useful to understand the purpose of their social media accounts and websites. Consequently, staff and custodians could be helped to effectively utilise social media and websites to achieve their objectives, helping to address the apparent lack of expertise. This could outline what appropriate and engaging interpretation content looks like on-site and online. The findings from such a report could feed into an overarching interpretation toolkit which could be made available by an organisation such as Cadw or Historic Houses to assist country house staff and custodians in interpreting their sites. Currently, this does not exist in any form specific to Wales or the U.K. In America, a similar toolkit was developed during the timeframe of this research for Historic House Museums after recognising that “increasingly the variety of experiences offered to visitors aren’t of interest, feel static and don’t relate to current issues” (Loshaw, 2020, p.4). Further support was made available as part of this through webinars and workshops which could also be developed to support staff and custodians of Welsh country houses. In Europe, the Heritage Efficient through Relevant IT use (HERIT) project aimed to “[boost] the digital education readiness of the private owners of historic houses” in response to the covid-19 pandemic (European Historic Houses, 2023).

Rather than adopting the American toolkit, it would be necessary to create one that is specific to Wales owing to there being aspects of Welsh country houses that are

different to the Historic House Museums of America. For example, the audiences might be different, the history is different, and people may expect different things from their visits to an American Historic House and a country house in Wales. A purpose of the toolkit should be to connect Welsh country houses into broader understandings of the history of Wales. Furthermore, interpretation must be bilingual in Wales. Therefore, a toolkit should contain advice on how to create, present, and share effective bilingual interpretation. It was found through the interview analysis that whilst bilingual interpretation is a legal requirement in that the English language cannot receive favourable treatment over Welsh, where there is interpretation available at privately owned country houses, there is little available in Welsh. Interpretation panels on-site at National Trust sites are always available in Welsh and English with the Welsh appearing first, but in the online analysis it was found that different information was available in Welsh to the information available in English at Penrhyn Castle. Furthermore, there tends to be little text-based interpretation at National Trust sites, therefore limiting the amount of Welsh interpretation. Bilingual interpretation is important not only because the survey analysis identified that people believe country houses to be places where the Welsh language should be promoted, but also because it can convey the message of Welsh identity and help to differentiate a Welsh country house from a country house elsewhere. As Penberthy identified in the interview analysis chapter, the Welsh language can set Welsh sites apart from others, adding to their significance and unique selling points. However, the Welsh language only forms part of Welsh identity, and can

be used as a foundation to communicate other aspects of identity, whether online or on-site.

Online, numerous examples were found of the country house setting being used to sell something rather than any site-specific interpretation that might set apart one country house from another. Often, the idea of being inside or close to a country house was being sold rather than a visit to a specific country house to engage with a specific aspect of its heritage. The interview analysis indicated that some staff and custodians believed that whilst the setting of a country house is often used to sell things, it is unclear to them whether it is effective, with some believing that associated historical narratives also attract people to visit and it is ultimately dependent on the interests of the individual as to what encourages them to visit. This further underlines the necessity for staff and custodians to explore different themes on a changing basis in on-site and online interpretation to attract different audiences, as referred to in the survey analysis of this thesis.

“Authentic of what?”: Authenticity as Problematic in Interpretation

The survey analysis discussed authenticity in detail, owing to it arising in several responses and the survey asking respondents whether they believed country houses in private ownership provide a more authentic country house experience. Throughout the survey, some respondents stated that they were looking for an authentic country house experience when they visit. An authentic country house experience at a site which is open to visitors cannot exist for the visitor. They cannot live there, and they are not treated as country house guests would traditionally have been treated. Furthermore, some country houses have existed for centuries and have undoubtedly changed in their appearance, structure, arrangement, contents and function during their existence as a result of new technologies being developed, changing fashions, the acquisition of new material items, and changing fortunes of the owners amongst other reasons. Furthermore, these places have always been experienced differently by different people, over generations: the perspectives and experiences of the owner and kitchen maid would have been very different. To freeze a room in one period from a property's long and storied past is inauthentic. Staff and custodians of country houses cannot easily represent multiple periods of time in one room at the same time. Therefore, country houses can be somewhat authentic to an extent to a single period but cannot be fully authentic. Responding to the survey question regarding authenticity, one respondent replied “authentic of what? Kicking the under maid down the stairs because she objects to being sexually fondled?” This response was highlighted in the survey analysis as being an emotive one, but the question “authentic of what?” is pertinent and encapsulated much of the thinking from respondents in relation to the notion of

authenticity in country house visits. Moreover, this links closely with the need for holistic and accurate interpretation rather than interpretation that is celebratory regarding the property owners. Furthermore, the response identifies that a contemporary authentic visit to a country house is difficult to achieve because the attitudes of people and societal norms have also changed over the period that any country house in Wales has existed. The research presented in this thesis suggests that what people are looking for when they visit country houses is not necessarily authenticity, but escapism. This could also explain why some vocal critics (Pyman, 2022) of National Trust approaches to interpretation do not want to see underrepresented histories interpreted at sites, even if they offer a more authentic visit through presenting the holistic story of a site – as many respondents presented in the survey analysis called for. They want country houses to be idyllic settings for escapism rather than dealing with important realities that some of them represent and were associated with. Country houses can be both: idyllic settings for people to enjoy and escape to whilst simultaneously dealing with challenging topics where appropriate through interpretation. A respondent also stated that there is “great variation” between country houses. They are correct. Consequently, an authentic country house experience at one property could be a very different experience to that at another country house. Authenticity is relative and site-specific, rather than overarching and all-encompassing. The histories of country houses vary between properties, and the history of a country house in private ownership will have a different story than one that is now owned, for example, by the National Trust such as Penrhyn Castle, which has been

under the custodianship of the National Trust for over seventy years. However, in the interpretation of country houses under National Trust management, the story of the National Trust's involvement is often ignored as Harding pointed out in the interview analysis. Harding stated: "We [the National Trust] also have a presence and just pretending that the National Trust hasn't been there for the last 70 years [...] to me is quite dishonest." Ignoring the current state of ownership in interpretation, particularly if it has been the same owner for a period of decades, as at Penrhyn Castle, is inauthentic and does not represent a holistic approach to interpretation. This is because a significant aspect of the property's history is omitted from its interpretation. Speaking about Gwrych Castle, Baker pointed out that the modern uses of country houses build upon their existing histories, and all contribute to their individual stories that can be interpreted. Therefore, all country houses were and are different owing to the differences in ownership, associated individuals, architectural styles, geographical and cultural setting, spheres of influence and other aspects. Consequently, there is no single correct method of interpreting a country house. Interpretation must be site-specific. In relation to this, there cannot be a truly authentic country house visit owing to the differences between them and the fact that they have rarely been static. Gladstone referred to this in the interview analysis of this thesis, stating that Hawarden estate had exerted an historic global influence, but it has now scaled back to a local influence thus underlining that country houses and their connected estates change, and have changed. It is not possible to create authentic interpretation of something which has

changed considerably several times, because only one period can authentically be interpreted in one place.

With it being possible to only interpret one period in a space as authentically as possible, staff and custodians must decide what is going to be interpreted in a space, and how that fits with the overall site interpretation. Perhaps thematic interpretation over chronological interpretation is more suitable when considering authenticity, or perceived authenticity. For staff and custodians at some country houses or heritage sites, this occasionally requires prioritising one story over another. Penberthy spoke about this in the interview analysis:

The story is what is the most significant story of that site. What makes you stand out. That's the priority. We don't prioritise because of an audience; we prioritise because of the story.

Penberthy emphasised the need for interpretation to be site-specific and the need to interpret the most important story as opposed to one which might bring in a specific audience demographic or perhaps a larger number of people. Asked how Cadw staff choose what is interpreted at a site, Penberthy explained:

We do interpretive planning. So, within Cadw itself or we employ interpretation experts, and we delve into the history of the sites. We delve into the current and potential audiences, we look at the constraints within the site or the 'who, why, what, where, when?' sort of mantra of interpretive planning and then from that we decide what we want to say.

This type of planning is crucial in the development of all interpretation at a site and could significantly benefit from the repositories of information that this research is recommending be developed. Furthermore, it could benefit from the toolkit that this research also recommends in that the toolkit can identify what an interpretation plan should consider for those who require assistance with developing one if they deem it necessary and appropriate for their site, including for houses with different functions. However, at many sites – particularly country houses which were so significant in many different aspects of life – there are multiple important stories. In the interview analysis, Hignett spoke of the interpretation approach taken by the National Trust at Chirk Castle:

There's lots of threads, lots of narratives that are woven into one visit. You can't tell everything to everybody, but it's nice if you have a hint of them and then if they want to find out more, they can do.

Rather than focussing on one story throughout a site, different stories can be interpreted to visitors in different areas or on an evolving basis. Doing so creates interpretation that is more holistic, which is what the interview analysis suggested that prospective country house visitors want to see and engage with. Relating this point to the discussion regarding authenticity and interpretation, perhaps it is better to create holistic interpretation rather than aim for something which is authentic when, as this research has shown, authentic interpretation can only be achieved to a very limited extent.

“Part of our present, past and future”: The Country House in Wales and Identity

Country houses impinge on people’s sense of identity in both positive and negative ways. The survey analysis chapter in this thesis illustrated that some people see country houses as symbols to things that they disagree with, such as colonialism and the aristocratic social class. For some of these people, this part of their identity affects their visiting habits, in that they choose not to visit country houses because they disagree with the pre-conditions required for their existence. Several respondents demonstrated how complex the relationship between country houses and Welsh identity is, as one stated:

Nid ydynt yn perthyn i fy hunaniaith Gymreig i ac yn hytrach yn rhan o feddiannu Cymru gan dirfeddiannwyr a bonedd Lloegr. felly i mi maent yn arwydd o'n gwladychu gan genedl arall, yn fwy felly na'r cestyll am ryw reswm od. *(They do not belong to my Welsh identity and are rather a part of the occupation of Wales by English landowners and gentry. Therefore, to me they signify our colonisation by another nation, more so than the castles for some strange reason.)*

Evidently, identity can form a boundary for some people to visiting a country house which is difficult for staff and custodians of country houses to overcome. However, the survey analysis suggested that a varied programme of events that engages with honest interpretation of holistic country house histories can begin to engage people in discussing the boundaries that they may have which form parts of their identities. The relationship between Welsh country houses and the identities of people can also be

positive. Most respondents in the survey analysis stated that they believe country houses to be important to Welsh identity, with justifications including:

They are part of our present, past and future and therefore of our culture and identity.

Again, the country houses are a touchstone of Welsh culture and the past. They also could promote the tourist industry in Wales.

Love them or hate them they are undeniably talismanic of the cultural, economic, and political history of Wales. Contemporary interpretations of them should convey the fact that they could simultaneously represent 'oppression' and 'progression' in social structures and opportunities.

These responses, and others shared in the survey analysis of this thesis underline the importance that many feel country houses have in understanding Wales and its history. The interview analysis chapter also discussed identity, but largely in relation to the Welsh language – a key element of 'Welshness'. Penberthy described how a new font was created for Cadw and Visit Wales to use to showcase the Welsh language clearly and effectively in signs and interpretation. Furthermore, he believed Welsh language interpretation to be important in reaffirming the 'Welshness' of sites. National Trust staff all highlighted the importance of using the Welsh language on-site, both in written interpretation and, where possible, in spoken interpretation. This is more difficult for custodians of private country houses that open on an open day basis or for functions due to a lack of staff provision or lack of written interpretation, but interviewees such as

Howard and Mostyn still considered the Welsh language to be very important. Despite the importance that interviewees and survey respondents allocated to the Welsh language, the analysis of social media and website content showed that overall, accounts representing country houses online rarely offered Welsh content. This needs to be addressed, particularly at sites which offer an extent of access to the public. The survey analysis chapter discussed why this is important, with some respondents simply stating that Welsh should be used in Wales. Others stated that Welsh would have been spoken by country house staff and should continue to be represented to safeguard the identity of a place, as well as those who engage with it. The use of the Welsh language helps to connect a site to Wales and its history. Furthermore, it can be important for engaging with the local community and is an important way of showcasing Wales to visitors from afar.

Coronavirus and Interpreting the Country House

The coronavirus pandemic had a significant impact on the interpretation and operation of Welsh country houses, as well as this research. Dependent on their function, many properties had to close or cease their ordinary operations such as open days or tours of private residences. Consequently, staff and custodians tasked with maintaining these historic sites lost access to significant income streams which in some cases resulted in job losses. Most methods that country houses were being interpreted to the public were no longer possible because of national lockdowns, with the hosting of events and visiting country houses no longer possible. As a direct result of the pandemic, this research incorporated the website and social media analysis because that was the only viable method to interpret country houses to the public for an extended period. The extent of country house interpretation available online during this time was limited. This was partially due to staff redundancies and furlough, with the online analysis highlighting social media posts made by staff via National Trust accounts stating that accounts would not be monitored. However, it was also due to the minimal importance assigned to country house interpretation online as this research has shown. The pandemic led to increased engagement from audiences with social media posts owing to people spending longer online, because they were unable to do other things. Despite this, the research presented in this thesis identifies that staff and custodians failed to engage their audiences with the significance or relevance of properties through meaningful interpretation online. It was found that during April 2020 for online accounts analysed that represent Welsh country houses, none of the most engaging posts were categorised as interpretive. Therefore, there appeared to be a lack of emphasis placed

on the interpretation of country houses online, an indifference to engaging with interpretation online, or both. As people visit country houses for a wide variety of reasons as ascertained in the survey analysis of this thesis, it is evident that people hold an interest in country houses. Consequently, there must have been a lack of emphasis on interpreting country houses online during this period, rather than a lack of interest in engaging with them online. This research has highlighted that people want to engage with more interpretation, and online methods would have provided and would still provide a valuable method of delivering this. An interpretation toolkit featuring a section regarding online interpretation would be beneficial for staff and custodians to engage people more effectively with the historical and contemporary significance and relevance of country houses. This research considered online platforms including websites and social media as the first form of interpretation that a prospective visitor often engages with. During this period, it was the only form of interpretation that a prospective visitor could engage with. One respondent in the survey analysis commented that they live in America, but “visit Gwydir Castle each day on Facebook.” This response highlighted the value of using online platforms to engage with people not only in the timeframe of the pandemic, but all the time.

The pandemic also affected the interpretation of some Welsh country houses on-site as well as online once they were able to re-open to the public. In the interview analysis, Drake spoke about how the interpretation of Plas Newydd was going to be changed to interpret a major reservicing project that was due to commence at the site. Due to the pandemic, the entire reservicing project was paused. Consequently, so was its

interpretation. However, it showed National Trust staff at Plas Newydd that they were able to consider different interpretation content to the traditional country house and family home stories that Drake stated were previously the foci of interpretation, as well as different interpretation methods. Across the survey analysis and interview analysis, this thesis has identified that the ability to change interpretation at a site is important because it can offer new reasons for people to visit for the first time or to return, through engaging with different audiences or giving existing audiences a purpose to repeat their visit. A method of achieving this would be to have a constant core message, which can then be augmented with different themes and narratives on a rolling basis.

The responses presented in the survey analysis were heavily influenced by the pandemic, owing to the survey being carried out during periods of lockdown. Outdoor spaces such as gardens, parks, and estate grounds were some of the first recreational spaces to open when lockdown restrictions began to lift. This was perhaps reflected in the importance respondents allocated to outdoor spaces, with nearly all respondents identifying gardens as important aspects of their prospective country house visits. The survey analysis set out what people believe to be important and not important when they visit country houses, and these can be used by staff and custodians of country houses when structuring their country house offer for prospective visitors. Considering visiting habits, the coronavirus and associated lockdowns were listed by respondents as the second most popular reason that they did not visit or re-visit a country house in the

previous twelve months. This begins to identify some of the impacts that the pandemic inflicted upon the operation of Welsh country houses.

The impacts of the pandemic upon country houses and their interpretation were not the intended focus of this research. However, it was a period which threatened the futures of many country house businesses across Wales due to the total loss of primary income streams. Therefore, it would have been remiss of this thesis to not begin to set out the impacts of the pandemic particularly upon the interpretation of Welsh country houses. Further research focused on the impacts of the pandemic on Welsh country houses would be valuable to understand the impacts upon them and their respective recoveries.

Research Recommendations: A Summary

There are several valuable recommendations that stem from the vast amounts of data and research collected, analysed, and presented in this thesis. They have been highlighted in the thesis and across this concluding chapter, and staff and custodians of country houses could benefit from them.

To summarise, the development of an overarching interpretation toolkit by an organisation such as Cadw or Historic Houses to be made available to country house staff and custodians would provide a valuable asset. Such a toolkit is necessary to develop the interpretation of Welsh country houses to help bring it up to a suitable standard. Interpretation can bring benefits to the staff, owners, and custodians of country houses in different functions across Wales. These include larger visitor numbers through repeat visitors and engaging new audiences, financial benefits as a result of more visitors or customers through primary or secondary spend, an increased understanding of the significance and relevance of Welsh country houses which can lead to a greater enthusiasm for preservation and support, and building a local support base through an engaged community from highlighting local and Welsh connections. The toolkit could be drawn upon during the research design, creation and presentation of new interpretation for those who do not currently have the experience or expertise required to do so. This toolkit should incorporate many aspects of this research. Specifically, it could introduce country house staff and custodians to interpretive planning so that they can make informed decisions on what to interpret and how to interpret it. The toolkit could advise country house staff and custodians on different

methods of interpretation that they perhaps had not previously considered, for example social media which can be a free-to-use interpretation method that this research has found is often overlooked and underused by staff and custodians of Welsh country houses. Furthermore, the toolkit could set out pros and cons of different methods before outlining the relationship between interpretation content and method. For example, content that might be well-received during a tour may be different to content that might be well-received online. Numerous findings of this research including people's desire for honest, holistic interpretation and the links between people, identity and the country house in Wales can be used to inform such an overarching interpretation toolkit. The toolkit should be specific to Wales, dealing with aspects that affect the interpretation of Welsh country houses owing to Wales's distinctive history and to aspects of interpretation such as bilingualism that do not necessarily need to be taken into consideration elsewhere. An overarching interpretation toolkit would strongly suggest that staff and custodians of Welsh country houses consider how they can appeal to the same audiences in different ways to attract repeat visits – different aspects of this research have also discussed this matter. Furthermore, the report could include, and this research recommends that interpretation is site-specific and not vague or generic to ensure that the significance and relevance of a site is effectively communicated to its audiences. In this respect, the house becomes an important local asset for articulating the significance and character of place.

To enable staff and custodians of Welsh country houses to create and share site-specific interpretation regardless of their backgrounds and levels of experience in doing

so, site-specific repositories of information should be created. One repository per site featuring listing status information, Historic Environment Record information, information regarding archived material or extracts from archived material, relevant research and other information would form a valuable resource that could form the basis of interpretation or a changing programme of events for staff and custodians of country houses, even if they do not have the requisite knowledge to do so themselves. This research has identified that there appears to be a lack of research and understanding regarding site significance, history, and relevance resulting in inaccuracies or vague embellishments. Furthermore, the thesis identified some cases of staff or custodians appearing to be unsure of how best to share the knowledge that they do have. Site-specific repositories would begin to resolve deficiencies in knowledge offering an accurate starting point, whilst the overarching interpretation toolkit would address the uncertainty as to how to share knowledge through interpretation.

A report carried out into the usage of social media by country house staff and custodians would be useful to understand the purpose of their accounts and websites, as well as what their respective aims are of using social media and websites, including their intended audiences. The research presented in the online analysis of this thesis has not been previously attempted and offers a starting point that could be expanded upon. The report could then feed into the overarching interpretation toolkit to help country house staff and custodians achieve their online objectives through interpretation where possible and appropriate.

Further research should also be conducted into the full extent of impacts of coronavirus on Welsh country houses. Whilst it was not the intention of this research from the outset to assess coronavirus impacts, the unpredictable nature of the pandemic and the wide-ranging consequences of it led to it being unavoidable. The research presented in this thesis identified that the coronavirus pandemic significantly altered visiting habits through enforced national lockdowns and changed the primary method that people could engage with country house interpretation from on-site interpretation to online interpretation, which was usually non-existent or sub-par. Further research charting the full extent of the impacts of coronavirus on country houses including economic challenges and the extent of assistance in the form of grants or other means, and the short-term and medium-term recovery processes would be valuable. Through further research, more could be understood about a period that presented one of the largest threats to the futures of country houses in recent years, as well as the consequent lessons learned across the different sectors which staff and custodians consider themselves to belong to.

The research presented in this thesis has, for the first time, analysed country house interpretation in Wales. There are numerous aspects of this work that could be developed further related to a wide variety of subject areas. It is evident that the interpretation of these sites is changing out of a necessity and desire for change, moving towards honest and holistic interpretation of sites. Welsh country houses were significant, are significant, and will be significant for many generations to come.

Interpretation has a substantial role to play in this, and it is incumbent on staff and custodians of country houses to ensure that interpretation reflects this significance.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Number of Country Houses in England

Defining a country house is complex. Consequently, this presents a challenge in presenting an accurate number of them. The figure of 3,739 presented for England is the number of listed buildings in England presented by Historic England and described as such in each individual listing status. This appears as an 'Asset Type' in the National Heritage List for England.

Appendix 2: The ILO unemployment definition

The ILO unemployment rate is defined as: “those who are out of work and want a job, have actively sought work in the last 4 weeks and are available to start work in the next two weeks; plus those who are out of work, have found a job and are waiting to start in the next 2 weeks, and is a more encompassing measure of unemployment than the claimant count.” (StatsWales, 2022).

Appendix 3: Interview questions prepared in advance of interviews

Intro

- What is your role?
 - o What does it entail?
- How long have you been doing it for?
- What sort of activities take place at the property? Open days? Events?
 - o What's the main purpose behind that?

Significance/Relevance

- Differences between current activities and historical activities – what do you think the reasons are for this?
- What does that say about the significance or relevance of country houses today?
- Do you think the public perceptions of the significance or relevance of country houses today have changed over time?
- Which of the following do you believe country houses in Wales have influenced?
Local history, Welsh history, British history, Global history
- Has popular culture influenced any aspect of your country house? Filming / books etc?

Interpretation

- What are the main objectives for your property?
- Do you attempt to interpret the property at all?
 - o How?
 - o What is it based on? Family stories? Objects? Documents? Research?
 - Whose research?
- Is there a focus of your interpretation throughout the property?
- Do you try and interpret the property online?
 - o How?
- How do you know if your interpretation is effective?

Identity

- How much emphasis do you place on Welsh language?
 - o Why?
- Have you tried to create a sense of identity for the property?
 - o What is the identity you are aiming for?
 - o Why?

Guidelines

- Are there any social media guidelines that you follow?
- Are there interpretation guidelines that you follow?
- Are there any other guidelines from the government or other bodies that you follow?

Function Specific

- What extent of access do members of the public have to your property?
 - o What are the reasons for this? Do you feel that some level of public access is important?
 - Why?
- What are the key threats to the future of your property?
- What are the opportunities?
- Do you feel a responsibility to inform people of the historical significance of your property?

Appendix 4: Information sheet and survey questions (English version and Welsh versions)

The information and survey below were both available bilingually via this link:
<https://bangor.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/phd-research-public-views-on-country-houses-in-wales>

The following questionnaire is your opportunity to have your say on how important you think country houses are in the 21st century, what their significance to Welsh identity is, and what you want for the futures of the hundreds remaining. Built by the upper classes and often attached to a wider estate, they exist today in different forms: wedding venues, private residences, visitor attractions, and ruins. The number, variety, and severity of challenges is increasing for country houses. Now is a critical moment in their histories for you to influence their futures.

The questionnaire should take you around 10 – 15 minutes. Feel free to include as much information and opinion that you feel is relevant.

Your answers will remain anonymous. Data collected will be password protected and stored for five years. By proceeding, you consent to this data being included in subsequent analysis. This is a voluntary process. You can withdraw your consent at any time by not completing the survey.

The survey is being conducted by Matthew Rowland of Bangor University and the Institute for the Study of Welsh Estates (ISWE) for his PhD research under the

supervision of Dr Shaun Evans and Dr Karen Pollock. If you wish to contact them regarding this research, you can use the following e-mail addresses.

Matthew Rowland: hiu233@bangor.ac.uk

Dr Shaun Evans: shaun.evans@bangor.ac.uk

Dr Karen Pollock: k.pollock@bangor.ac.uk

Would you like to participate in Welsh or English?

Part 1/3: About You

- Gender: Male, Female, Non-binary, prefer not to say **(Circle one)**
- Age: 18-30, 31-40, 41-60, 61-80, Above 81 **(Circle one)**
- Which county (e.g. Flintshire, Yorkshire) do you live in? **(Please state)**

Part 2/3: Your visit

- Do you enjoy visiting country houses? Yes / no **(Circle one)**
 - o Why / why not? **(One or two sentences)**
- How many country houses **in Wales** have you visited in the past 12 months?
This can be zero. **(Please state)**
 - o **One or more** (if zero, skip to "zero"):
 - **Please list** any you have visited.
 - What was the purpose of your visit? Wedding, restaurant, café, gardens, family research, country house visit, other **(Circle all appropriate. If other, please state)**
 - Have you visited the same country house **in Wales** more than once in the past 12 months? Yes / no **(Circle one)**
 - **If yes:** Which one(s), and why? **(Please state)**
 - **If no:** What has prevented you going back? **(Please state)**
 - Did you see Welsh language signage or marketing (leaflets, guidebooks, menus, etc.) at the country houses you have visited?
Yes / No / Not Sure **(Circle one)**
 - **If yes:** What did you see, and where? **(Please list as many as you can)**

- **Zero:**
 - If you have not visited any in the past 12 months, why not?
(Please state as many reasons as you feel necessary)
 - Is there something a country house could do that would encourage you to visit? (Think of your hobbies, things you're curious about)
(One or two sentences)
- Which of the following do you believe country houses in Wales have influenced? None, Local history, Welsh history, British history, Global history **(Circle all appropriate)**
- Do you believe that country houses in Wales have an important role to play in Wales' present and future? Yes / No **(Circle one)**
 - Why / why not? **(One or two sentences)**
- Has television, film, books, or other forms of popular culture influenced your visit or feelings towards country houses? Yes / no **(Circle one)**
 - **If yes:** How? **(One or two sentences – please include titles of anything you have watched or read)**
 - **If no:** Have you watched or read anything related to country houses, but it has not affected your feelings towards them? Yes / no **(Circle one and please list titles)**

- Rank the following 1-12 in terms of how important you think they are to you if you were to visit a country house **(1 being the most important, enter the number on the lines below)**

___ Conservation information

___ Shop

___ Events and Activities (e.g. tours, workshops, family, activities)

___ Accessibility

___ Digital interpretation and experiences (e.g. virtual reality, audio, film)

___ Information about everyday lives of house and estate employees (servants)

___ Gardens

___ Information about past and present house owners

___ Architectural information

___ Cafe

___ Artwork and collections

___ Interaction with staff / volunteers

- Do you have any comments regarding your priority order, or is there anything else you look for that you consider especially important to you during your visit?
(One or two sentences)

- If you have visited a country house **at any time** before, in Wales or elsewhere, what are your main impressions of your visit? **(One or two sentences)**

- Is there anything you would like to see country houses do or be in the future?
(One or two sentences)
- Do you think that country houses in private ownership provide a more authentic country house experience? **(One or two sentences)**
- What extent of access do you believe you should have at a country house in private ownership? No access, access to grounds/estate, access to gardens, access to some of the house on 'open days' throughout the year, access to some of the house all year, access to all of the house on 'open days' throughout the year, access to all of the house all year **(Circle all appropriate, if other, please state)**
- Do you enjoy visiting ruined, neglected, or abandoned structures? (For example, ruined monasteries or castles, abandoned houses) Yes / no.
 - o Why / why not?
- Would you be more likely to visit a country house in ruins than one that is still standing? Yes / no / don't know
 - o Why / why not?

Part 3/3: Identity

- Do you consider yourself to be Welsh? Yes / no **(Circle one)**
- Do you think that country houses in Wales should do more to promote the Welsh language? Yes / No / Not Sure **(Circle one)**
 - o Why / why not? **(One or two sentences)**
- How important are country houses to Welsh identity? **(Circle one)**

Very Important – Important – Reasonably Important – A Little Important – Not Important

- Why? **(One or two sentences)**

- Do you think that country houses are an important part of the history, heritage, and culture of Wales? Yes / no **(Circle one)**
 - Why / why not? **(One or two sentences)**

- Which of these structures do you consider to be the most 'Welsh': Castles, Country Houses, Industrial Sites (such as slate quarries and coal mines), Chapels, or other **(Circle one, if other, please state)**
 - Why? **(One or two sentences)**

Information sheet and survey questions (Welsh version)

The information and survey below were both available bilingually via this link:
<https://bangor.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/phd-research-public-views-on-country-houses-in-wales>

Mae'r holiadur canlynol yn gyfle i chi ddweud eich dweud ar ba mor bwysig yn eich barn chi yw plastai yn yr unfed ganrif ar hugain, beth yw eu harwyddocâd i hunaniaeth Gymreig, a'r hyn rydych chi ei eisiau ar gyfer dyfodol y cannoedd sy'n weddill. Wedi'u hadeiladu gan y bonedd ac yn aml ynghlwm wrth ystâd ehangach, maent yn bodoli heddiw mewn gwahanol ffurfiau: lleoliadau priodasau, cartrefi preifat, atyniadau i ymwelwyr, ac adfeilion. Mae nifer, amrywiaeth a difrifoldeb yr heriau yn cynyddu ar gyfer plastai. Mae nawr yn foment dyngedfennol yn eu hanesion i chi ddylanwadu ar eu dyfodol.

Dylai'r holiadur gymryd oddeutu 10 - 15 munud o'ch amser. Mae croeso i chi gynnwys cymaint o wybodaeth a barn y teimlwch sy'n berthnasol.

Bydd eich atebion yn aros yn ddienw. Bydd y data a gesglir yn cael ei ddiogelu â chyfrinair a'i storio am bum mlynedd. Trwy symud ymlaen, rydych yn cydsynio i'r data hwn gael ei gynnwys mewn dadansoddiad dilynol. Gallwch dynnu'ch caniatâd yn ôl ar unrhyw adeg trwy beidio â llenwi'r holiadur.

Gwneir yr arolwg gan Matthew Rowland o Brifysgol Bangor a'r Sefydliad Ymchwil Ystadau Cymru (ISWE) ar gyfer ei ymchwil PhD dan oruchwyliaeth Dr Shaun Evans a Dr Karen Pollock. Os ydych am gysylltu â nhw ynghylch yr ymchwil hon, gallwch ddefnyddio'r cyfeiriadau e-bost canlynol.

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Hoffech chi gymryd rhan yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg?

Rhan 1/3: Amdanoch chi

- Gender: Gwryw, Benyw, Anneuaidd (non-binary), Mae'n well gen i beidio â dweud **(Rhowch gylch am un)**
- Oedran: 18-30, 31-40, 41-60, 61-80, 81 neu hŷn **(Rhowch gylch am un)**
- Ym mha sir ydych chi'n byw? (e.e. Sir y Fflint, Swydd Efrog) **(Rhowch fanylion)**

Rhan 2/3: Eich ymweliad

- Ydych chi'n mwynhau ymweld â phlastai? Ydw / nac ydw **(Rhowch gylch am un)**
 - o Pam / pam ddim? **(Brawddeg neu ddwy)**
- Sawl plasty **yng Nghymru** ydych chi wedi ymweld ag ef yn ystod y 12 mis diwethaf? Gall hyn fod yn sero. **(Nodwch)**
 - o **Un neu fwy** (os yw'n sero, ewch i "sero"):
 - **Rhestrwch** unrhyw rai rydych chi wedi ymweld â nhw.
 - Beth oedd pwrpas eich ymweliad? Priodas, bwyty, caffi, gerddi, ymchwil teulu, ymweliad â phlasty, arall **(Rhowch gylch o amgylch pob un sy'n briodol. Os 'arall', rhowch fanylion)**
 - Ydych chi wedi ymweld â'r un plasty **yng Nghymru** fwy nag unwaith yn ystod y 12 mis diwethaf? Ydw / nac ydw **(Rhowch gylch am un)**
 - **Os ydynt:** Pa un/Pa rai, a pham? **(Rhowch fanylion)**
 - **Os nad ydynt:** Beth sydd wedi eich atal rhag mynd yn ôl? **(Rhowch fanylion)**

- A welsoch chi arwyddion neu ddeunydd marchnata Cymraeg (taflenni, arweinlyfrau, bwydlenni, ac ati) yn y plastai rydych chi wedi ymweld â nhw? Ydw / Nac ydw / Ddim yn siŵr **(Rhowch gylch am un)**
- **Os gwnaethoch chi:** Beth welsoch chi, a ble? **(Rhestrwch gynifer ag y gallwch)**
- **Sero:**
 - Os nad ydych chi wedi ymweld ag unrhyw un yn ystod y 12 mis diwethaf, pam ddim? **(Nodwch gynifer o resymau ag y teimlwch sy'n angenrheidiol)**
 - A oes rhywbeth y gallai plasty ei wneud a fyddai'n eich annog i ymweld? (Meddyliwch am eich hobiau, pethau rydych chi'n chwilfrydig yn eu cylch) **(Brawddeg neu ddwy)**
- Pa rai o'r canlynol ydych chi'n credu y mae plastai yng Nghymru wedi dylanwadu arnynt? Dim, hanes lleol, hanes Cymru, hanes Prydain, hanes byd-eang **(Rhowch gylch o amgylch pob un sy'n briodol)**
- Ydych chi'n credu bod gan blastai yng Nghymru ran bwysig i'w chwarae yng Nghymru heddiw a'r dyfodol? Ydw / Nac ydw **(Rhowch gylch am un)**
 - Pam / pam ddim? **(Brawddeg neu ddwy)**
- A yw teledu, ffilm, llyfrau, neu fathau eraill o ddiwylliant poblogaidd wedi dylanwadu ar eich ymweliad neu'ch teimladau tuag at blastai? Ydi / nac ydi **(Rhowch gylch am un)**

- **Os gwnaethoch chi:** Sut? (**Brawddeg neu ddwy - cofiwch gynnwys teitlau unrhyw beth rydych chi wedi'i wyllo neu ei ddarllen**)
- **Os nad ydynt:** A ydych chi wedi gwylio neu ddarllen unrhyw beth sy'n gysylltiedig â phlastai, ond nad ydyw chi wedi effeithio ar eich teimladau tuag atynt? Do / naddo (**Rhowch gylch o amgylch un a rhestrwch deitlau os gwelwch yn dda**)

- Rhowch sgôr o 1-12 i'r canlynol o ran pa mor bwysig ydych chi'n meddwl ydyn nhw i chi pe byddech chi'n ymweld â phlasty (**1 yw'r pwysicaf, rhowch y rhif ar y llinellau isod**)

___ Gwybodaeth gadwraeth

___ Siop

___ Digwyddiadau a Gweithgareddau (e.e. teithiau, gweithdai, teulu, gweithgareddau)

___ Hygyrchedd

___ Profiadau a dehongliad digidol (e.e. rhithrealiti, sain, ffilm)

___ Gwybodaeth am fywydau beunyddiol gweithwyr y tŷ a'r ystâd (gweision)

___ Gerddi

___ Gwybodaeth am berchnogion y tai yn y gorffennol a'r presennol

___ Gwybodaeth bensaernïol

___ Caffi

___ Gwaith celf a chasgliadau

___ Rhyngweithio â staff / gwirfoddolwyr

- A oes gennych unrhyw sylwadau ynglŷn â'ch trefn blaenoriaeth, neu a oes unrhyw beth arall yr ydych yn edrych amdano sy'n arbennig o bwysig i chi yn ystod eich ymweliad? **(Brawddeg neu ddwy)**

- Os ydych wedi ymweld â plasty **unrhyw bryd** o'r blaen, yng Nghymru neu rywle arall, beth yw eich prif argraffiadau o'ch ymweliad? **(Brawddeg neu ddwy)**

- A oes unrhyw beth yr hoffech chi weld plastai yn ei wneud neu'r hoffech iddynt fod yn y dyfodol? **(Brawddeg neu ddwy)**

- Ydych chi'n meddwl bod plastai mewn perchnogaeth breifat yn darparu profiad plasty mwy dilys? **(Brawddeg neu ddwy)**

- I ba raddau ydych yn credu y dylech gael mynediad i blasty sydd mewn perchenogaeth breifat? Dim mynediad, mynediad i'r tir/ystâd, mynediad i'r gerddi, mynediad i rywfaint o'r tŷ ar 'ddiwrnodau agored' trwy gydol y flwyddyn, mynediad i rywfaint o'r tŷ trwy'r flwyddyn, mynediad i'r tŷ i gyd ar 'ddiwrnodau agored' trwy gydol y blwyddyn, mynediad i'r tŷ i gyd trwy'r flwyddyn **(Rhowch gylch o amgylch pob un sy'n briodol, os 'arall', rhowch fanylion)**

- Ydych chi'n mwynhau ymweld ag adfeilion, adeiladau sydd wedi mynd â'u pen iddynt neu rai segur? (Er enghraifft, mynachlogydd neu gestyll adfeiliedig, tai segur) Ydw / nac ydw.
 - Pam / pam ddim?

- A fydddech chi'n fwy tebygol o ymweld â phlasty sy'n adfail nag un sy'n dal i sefyll? Byddwn / Na fyddwn / Ddim yn gwybod

- Pam / pam ddim?

Rhan 3/3: Hunaniaeth

- Ydych chi'n ystyried eich hun yn Gymro/Cymraes? Ydw / nac ydw **(Rhowch gylch am un)**
- Ydych chi'n meddwl y dylai plastai yng Nghymru wneud mwy i hyrwyddo'r Gymraeg? Ydw / Nac ydw / Ddim yn siŵr **(Rhowch gylch am un)**
 - Pam / pam ddim? **(Brawddeg neu ddwy)**
- Pa mor bwysig yw plastai i hunaniaeth Gymreig? **(rhowch gylch am un)**
Pwysig Iawn - Pwysig - Eithaf Pwysig - Ychydig yn Bwysig - Ddim yn Bwysig
 - Pam? **(Brawddeg neu ddwy)**
- Ydych chi'n meddwl bod plastai yn rhan bwysig o hanes, treftadaeth a diwylliant Cymru? Ydw / nac ydw **(Rhowch gylch am un)**
 - Pam / pam ddim? **(Brawddeg neu ddwy)**
- Pa rai o'r canlynol yn eich barn chi yw'r rhai mwyaf 'Cymreig'? Cestyll, Plastai, Safleoedd Diwydiannol (megis chwareli llechi a phyllau glo), Capeli, neu eraill **(Rhowch gylch o amgylch un, os arall, rhowch fanylion)**
 - Pam? **(Brawddeg neu ddwy)**

Ymadroddion eraill i'w cyfieithu:

- Ticiwch bob un sy'n briodol
- Ticiwch bob un sy'n berthnasol
- Diolch i chi am lenwi'r holiadur hwn, mae eich cyfraniad yn amhrisiadwy i'm hymchwil

Appendix 5: List of assessed country houses in Wales complete with links to their websites, and social media platforms. Specifically, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram accounts.

The most recent date of the websites and platforms being accessed has been included.

Country House Name	Website	Facebook	Twitter	Instagram	Date Accessed
Chirk Castle	https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/chirk-castle	https://www.facebook.com/ChirkCastleNT	https://twitter.com/ChirkCastleNT	https://www.instagram.com/chirkcastlent/?hl=en	14/04/2020
Erddig	https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/erddig	https://www.facebook.com/ErddigNT	https://twitter.com/ErddigNT	https://www.instagram.com/nt_erddig/?hl=en	14/04/2020
Penrhyn Castle	https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/penrhyn-castle	https://www.facebook.com/NTPenrhynCastle	https://twitter.com/NTPenrhynCastle	https://www.instagram.com/ntpenrhyncastle/?hl=en	14/04/2020
Plas Newydd	https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/plas-newydd-house-and-garden	https://www.facebook.com/NTPlasNewydd	https://twitter.com/NTPlasNewydd	https://www.instagram.com/ntplasnewydd/?hl=en	14/04/2020
Hafodunos Hall	N/A	https://www.facebook.com/HafodunosHall	N/A	N/A	14/04/2020

		book.com/hafodunosshall			
Gwrych Castle	https://www.gwrychcastle.co.uk/	https://www.facebook.com/gwrychcastle	https://twitter.com/GwrychTrust	https://www.instagram.com/gwrychcastle/?hl=en	14/04/2020
Plas Teg	https://plasteg.com/	https://www.facebook.com/plasteg	https://twitter.com/Plas_Teg	N/A	14/04/2020
Bodrhyddan Hall	https://www.bodrhyddan.co.uk/	https://www.facebook.com/bodrhuddan	https://twitter.com/Bodrhyddan	https://www.instagram.com/bodrhuddan/?hl=en	14/04/2020
Gwydir Castle	http://www.gwydircastle.co.uk/	https://www.facebook.com/GwydirCastle	https://twitter.com/JudyCorbett	https://www.instagram.com/gwydircastle/?hl=en	14/04/2020
Bodelwyddan Castle (Charitable Trust)	https://bodelwyddan-castle.co.uk/	N/A (deleted after closure)	N/A (deleted after closure)	https://www.instagram.com/bodelwyddancastle/?hl=en (private since closure)	14/04/2020
Bodelwyddan Castle (Warner Leisure Hotels)	https://www.warnerleisurehotels.co.uk/hotels/bodelw	https://www.facebook.com/Warnerhotels	https://twitter.com/warnerhotels	https://www.instagram.com/warnerleisurehotels/?hl=en	14/04/2020

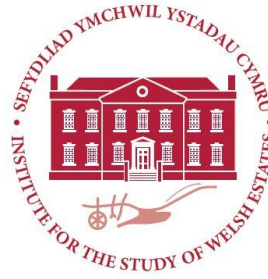
	yddan-castle-hotel	// https://www.facebook.com/bodchnw		en	
Gregynog Hall	http://www.gregynog.org/	https://www.facebook.com/Gregynog	https://twitter.com/Gregynog	https://www.instagram.com/gregynoghall/?hl=en	14/04/2020
Hawarden Estate Farm Shop	https://www.hawardenestate.co.uk/	https://www.facebook.com/HawardenEstateFarmShop	https://twitter.com/HawardenEstate	https://www.instagram.com/hawardenestateexperience/?hl=en	14/04/2020
The Good Life Experience	https://www.thegoodlifeexperience.co.uk/	https://www.facebook.com/thegoodlifeexperience	https://twitter.com/TheGoodLifeExperience	https://www.instagram.com/goodlifeexperience/?hl=en	14/04/2020

Appendix 6: A list of participating interviewees, their roles, and the name of the associated property or organisation

Name	Role	Property or organisation	Date of Interview
Edmund Bailey	Owner	Cors y Gedol Hall	26/03/2021
Mark Baker	Director	Gwrych Castle Preservation Trust	25/03/2021
Richard Cuthbertson	Owner & Chair	Plas Penmynydd & Discovering Old Welsh Houses	01/03/2021
Miranda Dechazal	Owner	Hartsheath Hall	28/06/2021
Taya Drake	Collections and House Manager	Plas Newydd	16/06/2021
Charles Gladstone	Owner	Hawarden Estate	12/03/2021
Eleanor Harding	Assistant Curator	Penrhyn Castle	12/04/2021
Jon Hignett	Visitor Operations and Experience Manager	Chirk Castle	25/05/2021
Claudia Howard	Owner's Daughter	Gyrn Castle	16/03/2021
Iwan Hughes	Assistant Director	Plas Glyn y Weddw	04/05/2021
Lord Langford	Owner	Bodrhyddan Hall	15/06/2021
Kevin Mason	Former Trust Director	Bodelwyddan Castle	30/03/2021
Robert Meyrick	Trustee	Gregynog Hall	19/04/2021
Lord Mostyn	Owner	Mostyn Hall	24/03/2021

Name	Role	Property or organisation	Date of Interview
Mary Oldham	Librarian	Gregynog Hall	01/04/2021
Helen Papworth	Former Trust Director	Bodelwyddan Castle	31/03/2021
David Penberthy	Head of Interpretation	Cadw	17/06/2021
Glynis Shaw	Trustee	Welsh Historic Gardens Trust	11/05/2021
Michael Tree	Board Member & Former Chair	Institute for the Study of Welsh Estates, Welsh Historic Gardens Trust	20/04/2021
Peter Welford	Owner	Gwydir Castle	18/06/2021

Appendix 7: Interviewee information sheet and consent form



Bangor University's 'Code of Practice for the Assurance of Academic
Quality and Standards of Research Programmes' (Code 03)
<https://www.bangor.ac.uk/ar/main/regulations/home.htm>

COLLEGE OF ARTS, HUMANITIES AND BUSINESS

Participant Consent Form

Researcher's name: **Matthew Rowland**

The researcher named above has briefed me to my satisfaction on the research for which I have volunteered. I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the research at any point.

I agree to having the interview audio-recorded.

Name of Participant:

Signature of participant:

Date:

Public Views on Country Houses in Wales

Matthew Rowland of Bangor University and the Institute for the Study of Welsh Estates (ISWE) is conducting this interview for his PhD research under the supervision of Dr Shaun Evans and Dr Karen Pollock.

This interview is your opportunity to have your say on how important you think country houses are in the 21st century, what their significance to Welsh identity is, and what you want for the futures of the hundreds remaining. Built by the upper classes and often attached to a wider estate, they exist today in different forms: wedding venues, private residences, visitor attractions, and ruins. The number, variety, and severity of challenges is increasing for country houses. Now is a critical moment in their histories for you to influence their futures.

The interview will be conducted virtually, and audio recorded. The audio files and transcripts will be password protected and stored for five years. Your responses will be used in subsequent analysis. You can withdraw your consent at any time by contacting Matthew, or a member of his supervision team. If you wish to remain anonymous, you must specifically request this in writing.

If you wish to contact Matthew, or his supervision team with questions, or another matter regarding this research, you can use the following e-mail addresses:

Matthew Rowland: hiu233@bangor.ac.uk

Dr Shaun Evans: shaun.evans@bangor.ac.uk

Dr Karen Pollock: k.pollock@bangor.ac.uk



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