

**REPORT OF VISITOR SERVICES MANAGER NORTH PEMBROKESHIRE**

---

**SUBJECT: CASTELL HENLLYS**

**PURPOSE OF REPORT**

To update members on current operations at Castell Henllys, recent developments, future plans and partner projects.



## **Introduction**

Castell Henllys is an established visitor centre and heritage site near Newport in North Pembrokeshire where the experience promises to take the visitor back in time and immerse the senses in Iron Age life. It is the only reconstructed Iron Age village in the UK where the roundhouses and granary has been built on the site of the original post holes. The hill-fort has also become one of the most prominent images of Welsh prehistory.

Castell Henllys is one of the most extensively excavated and studied Iron Age hill fort in the UK and has contributed significantly to the understanding of Iron Age society in West Wales. The excavation of the site was undertaken over a period of 26 years by Harold Mytum, University of York (now University of Liverpool).

Castell Henllys began its life as a heritage and visitor attraction in 1980, when the site was bought by the entrepreneur Hugh Foster, one of the co-founders of the London Dungeon. Under Hugh Foster the first re-constructed houses were built using archaeological and ethnographical evidence coupled with the principles of mechanics.

In the 1991 Hugh Foster sadly passed away and the site came under the ownership and management of Pembrokeshire Coast National Park. The park utilizes the site to help people to understand and enjoy the rich natural and cultural heritage of the National Park and highlight the special qualities of its character and traditions through the interpretation of Castell Henllys to visitors, students and school children.

Castell Henllys has an established and a highly successful school's program. The education program guarantees a hands-on learning experience in the Iron Age where the children learn about the hillfort and the daily lives of its occupants by participating in activities and listening to stories. The activities on offer to the schools include grinding grain, making bread, basket making, wattle and daubing, weaving and 'warrior-training' where they get their face painted with 'woad'.

Although the roundhouses are the main attraction, Castell Henllys is also home to a Visitor Centre, which includes a shop and café and interactive exhibitions. The site also includes a children's play area, a barefoot trail, a replica of the Holgar Bronze Age boat and prehistoric breeds of livestock. Dogs are welcome on site as long as they are on a lead.

## **The Team**

Currently the Castell Henllys team consists of 5 year round staff, 4 seasonal staff (April- end of October) and 4 casual staff.

The 30 acre site also benefits from the support of the North Area Warden Team which is managed by Geraint Harris – Dylan Evans (warden) is assigned to the site and is instrumental in ensuring that the site is maintained to a very high standard.

The staff run events and activities talks, guided tours and work with a number of partners both internal and external to promote the site and the National Park. With recent developments and alterations this programme will be enhanced and extended as we move forward.

## **THE VILLAGE**

2018 saw the completion of the re-building of the cookhouse. The frame of the house was constructed in-house by the North warden team including Dylan Evans the Castell Henllys warden; the wattle and daubing were undertaken by the Castell Henllys staff, the community archaeologists and a variety of voluntary groups and the thatching was undertaken by Jonathan Botterell. The house was officially opened on the 21<sup>st</sup> of June by the Welsh antiquarian and archaeologist Rhys Mwyn. All of those involved in the re-building were invited back to the opening to celebrate and have a BBQ.

This year also saw the de-construction of the Earthwatch and its excavation. Harold Mytum and a team from the University of Liverpool as well as a team from Dyfed Archaeological Trust under James Meek led a 2 week excavation of the Earthwatch roundhouse back in the first two weeks of July last year. The work highlighted once again the human impact on the earth (plastic) in the last 30 years and has currently been published in British Archaeology (please e-mail [delung@pembrokeshirecoast.org.uk](mailto:delung@pembrokeshirecoast.org.uk) if you wish to have a copy).

The reconstruction of these houses has impacted the maximum number of school children we could have on site at a time. When all roundhouses were functional we could accept schools of up to 100 school children. In the last two years, we have had to cap the numbers at 70.

## **CAFÉ OFFER**

Ysgubor café Castell Henllys has been leased to Wendy Edwards since 01.04.15, an extended license period was awarded in October 2017 taking the current agreement to 31.10.19. Trading figures to date have shown a positive trend and the Café continues to be awarded Visit Wales Quality Café Accolade.

The rationale for extending the licence through to Nov 2019 was to establish a longer trading history for the café prior to the franchisee being re offered to the open market during the latter part of 2019 and using the period between Nov 2017 & Nov 2019 to help and encourage current leaseholder to build her café brand and offer. A lean to store has recently been completed in order to add to the storage space available for development of the café offer.

A recurring problem throughout the café 's trading history has been the inadequate highway signage on the main road, efforts have been made to address this issue with the Wales trunk road agency but their quoted charges for providing the required

signage remain prohibitive. As a result, the absence of adequate signage on the highway is going to remain an ongoing unresolved problem.

## **PANT GLAS**

Pant Glas is an extended farmhouse which since the development of the new visitor centre now provides “back of house” services on site (Managers Office, staff room, changing rooms, storage, toilets etc.)

The first floor comprises of a self-contained flat which vacant possession was gained in 2015, alterations have been completed recently on the flat to provide office space, meeting room, changing room and there is a bathroom. Downstairs the space that was associated with the flat has been altered to provide storage and a small staff room, the main floor area of the building will now become a meeting room / exhibition space.

The issue regarding connectivity has been resolved with the site now having fibre optic broadband and corporate wi-fi in pantglas. One of the rooms on the first floor of Pantglas is now a effective hot-desking room for PCNPA staff.

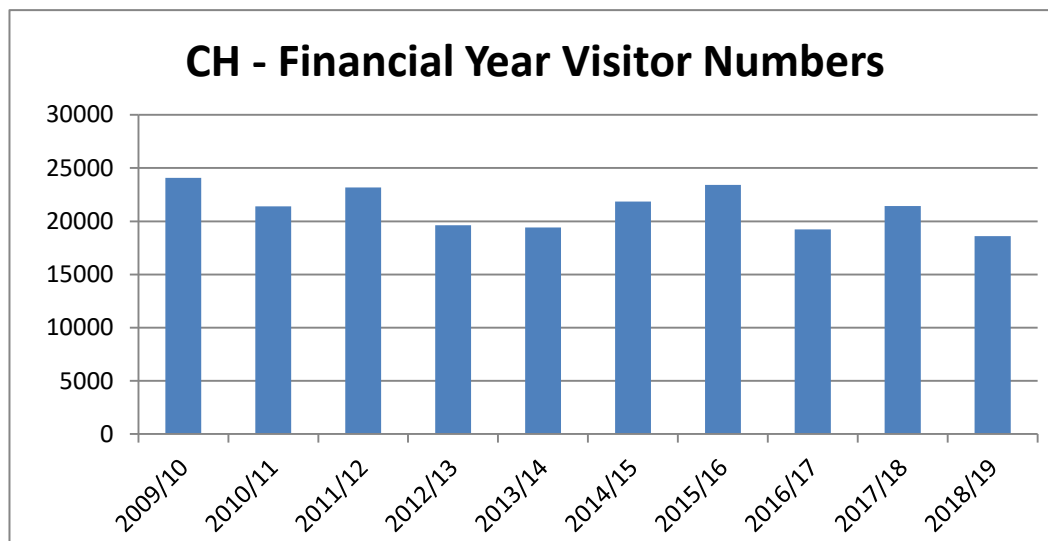
## **Y BWTHYN**

Situated on the periphery of the site and reached by a rough track - the Bwthyn was converted in the 90's to support the main archaeological dig on site, it includes shower and kitchen facilities; it is currently used as storage for the site, although it has potential for other uses.

## **BEE HIVES**

Working with a local beekeeper the site hosts 10 hives as well as an observation hive in Pantglas, which have performed well in 2017 and 2018; honey produced will eventually be sold in the onsite shop. The ecological benefit of bees is well known and the danger to the species well documented, we have been advised to get involved in the accreditation process for Bee Friendly (a Welsh government initiative). We hosted Bee Awareness workshops (Honey Bee Fun) in 2018 of which 38 people participated.

## Visitor Numbers



It is clear to see that there was a drop in visitor numbers in 2018/19, however it is similar to the drop experienced in 2016/17. It is interesting to note that these drops occurred during the period of instability regarding the management of the site. In 2016/17 Rhonwen Owen was covering Carew, Castell Henllys and Newport before retiring. Jenn Jones then took over as manager but of Newport, Oriel y Parc and Castell Henllys before leaving in July 2018. In these periods these managers were stretched over these various sites. It is the hope that having a dedicated manager at Castell Henllys will ensure stability and improve visitor numbers and income.

In addition, as we are an outdoor site the weather also does impact the visitor figures. Last year the summer was extremely hot and sunny which drew people to the beach and to the coast path. The site fares better in overcast or drizzly weather as visitors look for something to do instead of the beach.

If we compare the visitor numbers of 2017 with other attractions in the North, you can see that we are doing relatively well for the area.

**Table 1 Data taken from Visit Wales Visitor Attractions survey 2017**

Visitor Attraction	Visitor Numbers 2017/18
Castell Henllys	21, 428
Dyfed Shire Horse Farm	10,000
Cardigan Bay Marine wildlife	18, 635
Cardigan Castle	30,000 (estimate)
Cilgerran Castle	17,385

## Income

<b>Financial Year*</b>	<b>2015/16</b>	<b>2016/17</b>	<b>2017/18</b>	<b>2018/19</b>
Castell Henllys - Merchandise Income	47644.97	39179.26	42196.2	35621.6
Castell Henllys - Admissions Income	71763.75	56952.45	77596.96	64104.5
Castell Henllys - A & E Income	Data not on Ffynnon - Finance should be able to provide you with this data	Data not on Ffynnon - Finance should be able to provide you with this data	5793.36	5084.32
Castell Henllys - School Income	Data not on Ffynnon - Finance should be able to provide you with this data	Data not on Ffynnon - Finance should be able to provide you with this data	13066.64	15085.8
Castell Henllys - Other Income	Data not on Ffynnon - Finance should be able to provide you with this data	Data not on Ffynnon - Finance should be able to provide you with this data	218.77	520.87
Castell Henllys - Café Rental Income	Data not on Ffynnon - Finance should be able to provide you with this data	Data not on Ffynnon - Finance should be able to provide you with this data	4541.5	5276

Although last year saw a decrease in our merchandise and admissions income and a small drop in activities and events income, we did see an increase in the school, other and café income.

One possible reason for this decrease in visitor numbers (which would also affect the activities and merchandise figures) is the fact that last Year was Visit Wales Year of the Sea. Although an attempt was made by the site to incorporate this theme into activities and events, the site just did not suit the theme and would have found it difficult to compete with other events in coastal/ tidal areas. The Year of Legends of the previous year proved to be much better suited to the site and is reflected in the figures.

It is our aim to try and increase visitor numbers and our income through partnership working with other attractions in the North, build on our existing events and activities offer (especially for the shoulder season) and explore new ways of marketing the site.

### Education

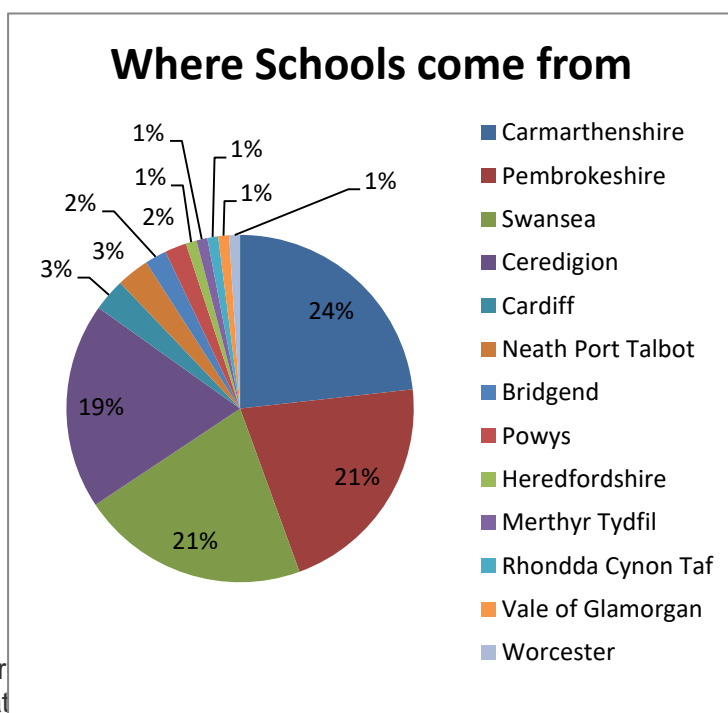
The Castell Henllys Educational Programme for Schools is a four times winner of the prestigious “Sandford Award for Heritage Education”

The dedicated team, chosen not only for their teaching skills but also for their acting abilities, their enthusiasm and passion for history, deliver our education programme through role play and activities.

The programme, concentrates on daily life in the Iron Age and is aimed at Key Stage 2 pupils, and is closely linked to the National Curriculum and to the archaeological evidence from the extensive excavations of the site. Pupils will have the opportunity to experience first-hand the austere and precarious life of a pre-historic village. Recently, a Roman experience was offered to schools and last year 3 schools decided to have a Roman experience as opposed to the Iron Age experience.

### Daily life in the Iron Age School Sessions 2018/19

- 100 sessions in 2018/19 to 82 schools and one home education group. Of these 10 schools had 2 sessions and one school had 3 sessions.
- 4012 participants across these sessions in 2018/19 this compares to 4405 participants across 115 sessions in 2017/18.
- School sessions for Daily Life in the Iron Age in 2018/19 came mainly from schools based in Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire, Swansea and Ceredigion.



Pembr  
Operat

### Castell Henllys Private Guided Tours

- Throughout 2018 we provide a number of private Guided Tours to various groups including Welsh learner groups, Merched y Wawr, WI and university groups. We also provided tours to tour companies such as Backroad tours and Cambrian Tours. 10 private guided tours were delivered to Cambrian Tours in 2018/19.

### Public Events and Activities Programme and Community Engagement

- 5519 people attended public event and activities held at Castell Henllys in 2018/19.
- The table below outlines attendance at different events held at Castell Henllys during 2018/19 with the most popular events at the top of the table.

Public Events	# Participants
Experience the Iron Age	1389
Roman Day	1288
Fighting and Feasting	1037
Legio VIII Augusta Roman Living History	538
Celtic Celebrations	260
Pirates and Princes	202
Wizards and Witches	178
Woodland Magic	176
Evening Talks and Cultural Events	162
Easter Fun Day	64
Discovery Day	55
Honey Bee Fun	38
Dragons and Daffodils	37
Samhain - Haunted Henllys	34
An Evening of Celtic Myths and Legends	19
Bow Making Workshop	14
Wildlife Gardening Workshop	10
The Great Raft Race	10
Scary Fairy Fun	4
Bronze Axe Workshop	2
Harpoon and Fish Trap Workshop	2
Total	5519



## Community Groups and Volunteering

- 4 Daily Life in the Iron Age sessions were delivered to community groups in 2018/19 including 2 scout groups.
- In 2018/19 working with the Authority's community archaeologist volunteers /social action participants including participants from Clynyfw Care Farm, Pembrokeshire College and Plas Dwbl College were involved in decorating the interior of the new roundhouse. This involved 9 volunteer days and 31 social action days.



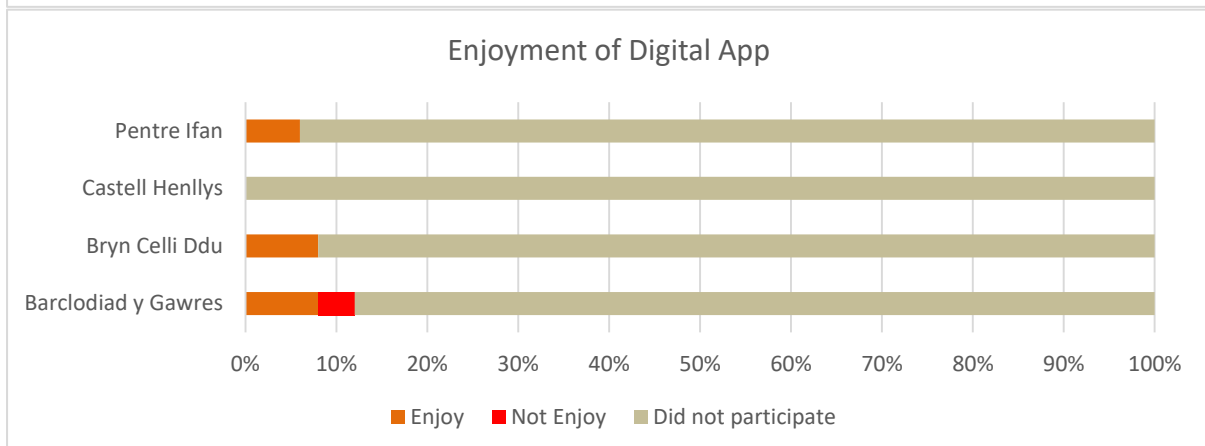
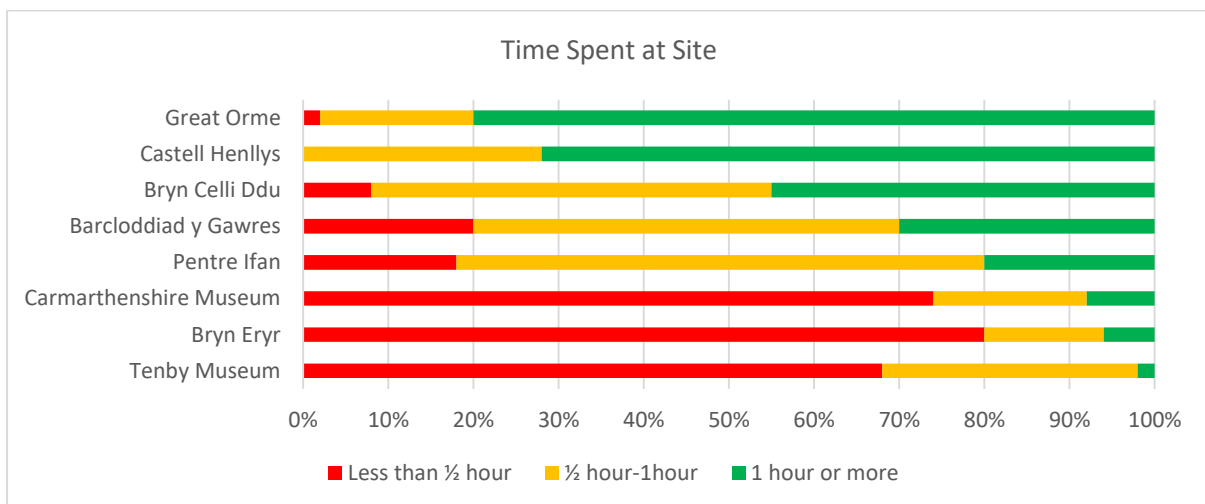
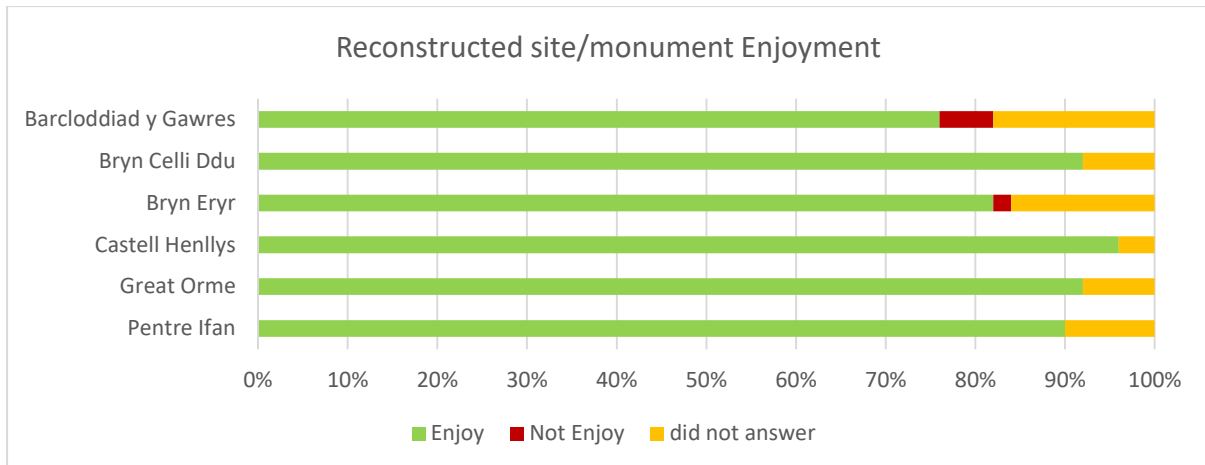
- 4.5 volunteer days contributed by volunteer leaders in relation to assisting with Events and Activities held at Castell Henllys in 2018/19/

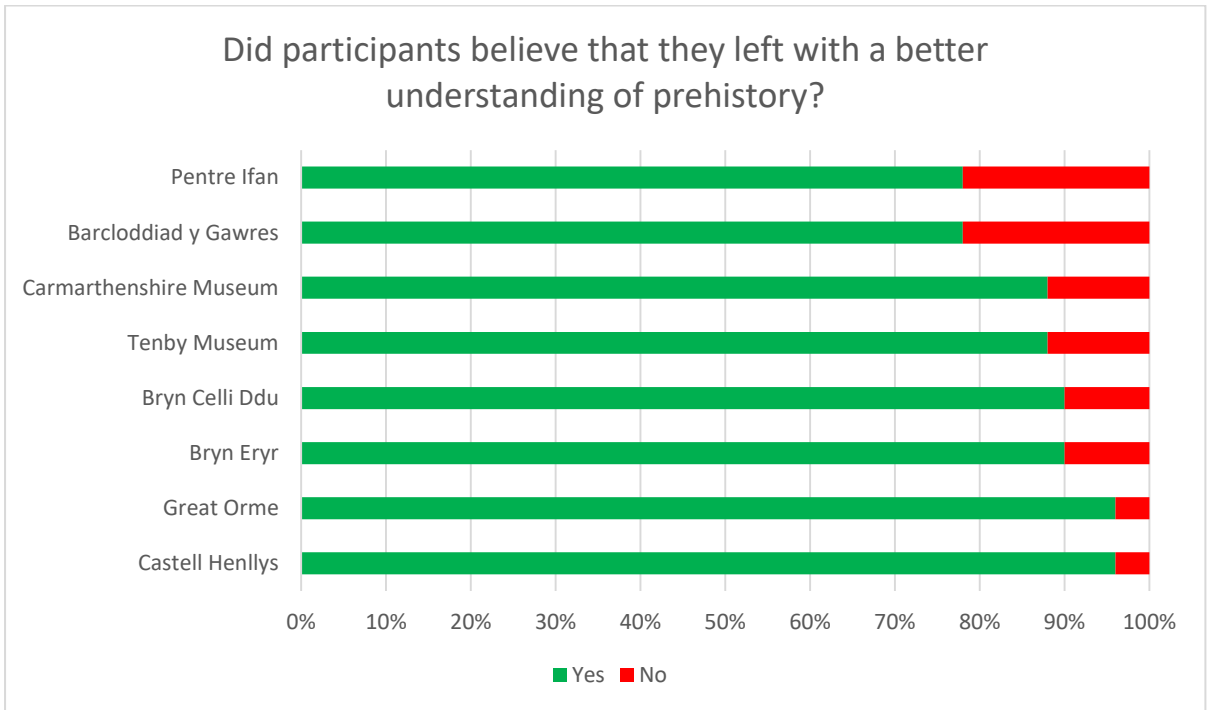
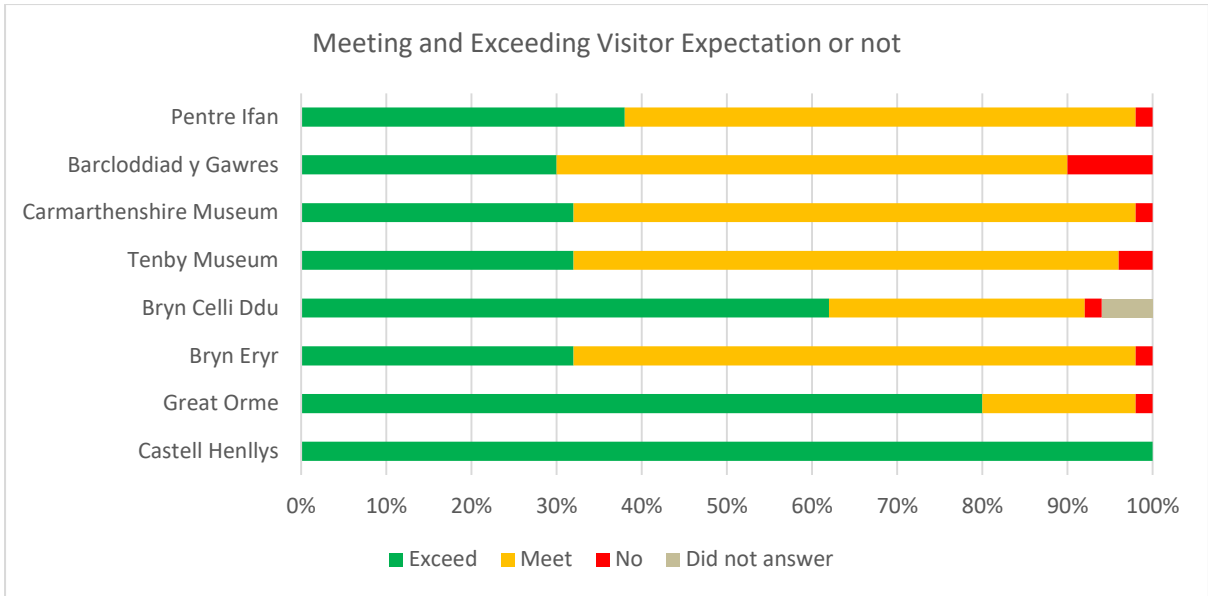
Volunteers were key in the excavation of the round house working with Dyfed Archaeology Trust and also in the daubing of the house under the guidance of our own community archaeologist.

The site has a strong relationship with Plas Dwbl <http://www.rmt.org/plasdwb/> and welcomes students on site on a regular basis (once a week) to assist with relevant tasks; we also work closely with Clynyfw <http://www.clynfyw.co.uk/> in developing and supporting their clients.

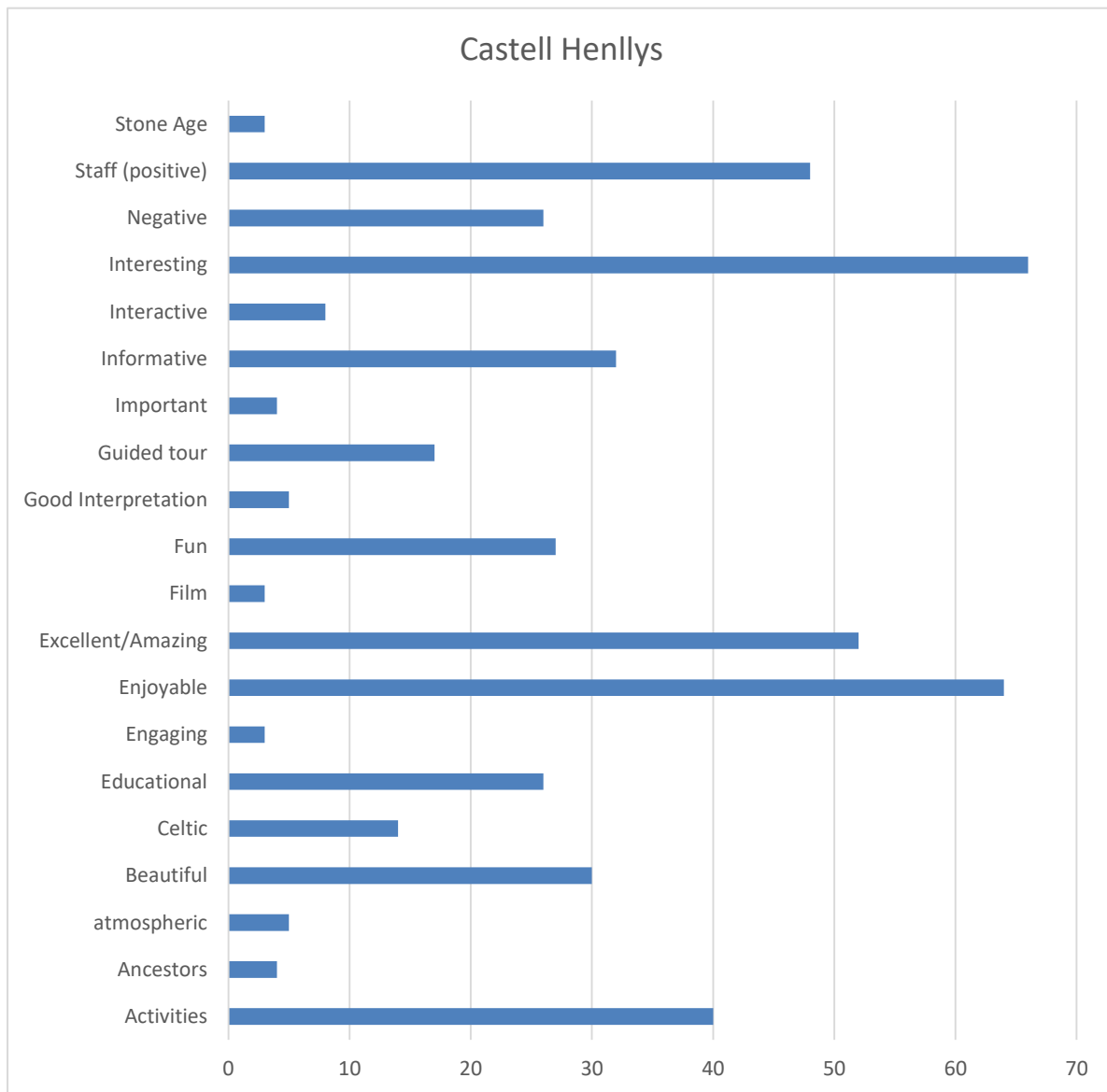
## Comparison of Castell Henllys with other Prehistoric sites in Wales (Data taken from the manager's PhD thesis)

The data below shows a comparison of the data collected from visitor surveys (50 participants at each site) from a number of case study sites across Wales in 2014-2016.





## TripAdvisor Feedback



**Graph showing the distribution of vocabulary used by reviewers (n=165) to describe their experience and opinion of Castell Henllys (data from TripAdvisor 2016e)**

Most of the comments were extremely positive with most of the reviews describing the site as enjoyable, excellent/ amazing and interesting. There were also many positive comments regarding the activities and the costumed staff.

In addition, the success of the site is demonstrated in the many of the reviews stating that they (the reviewers) have visited the site repeatedly over the years and share their memories of each experience. For example, Tony M (2015) writes: *'...this is an important place, my second visit, the first many years ago, and in the interim I have become a teacher and know of no other place that offers a way to transport children quite literally back in time.'* This also highlights how teachers see Castell Henllys as

a successful form of teaching their pupils about the Iron Age due to the tangible and immersive form of presentation

However, there were some complaints such as Childsey (2015) who reviewed the site as '*A little overdone...was a little disappointing as it was light on historical detail and is a possible representation*' and Steveliddle (2015) who described the site as '*A bunch of recreated huts*'. On the other end of the spectrum, a few reviewers wished for a more 'Disney' experience with even more activities and facilities. This clearly demonstrates the issue that reconstructed sites face in balancing the authenticity of what is presented with the expectation of the visitor in terms of their visitor experience.

## The Future

- Develop Castell Henllys as the go to prehistoric attraction in Wales- attracting schools/ re-enactors/ experimental archaeologists/ tourists and locals.
- Develop site as a place for people to develop Welsh language skills and learn about Welsh/ Celtic culture and traditions.
- Develop site as an example of sustainable living and building
- Encourage on site biodiversity and educate the public about its importance.
- Work with local attractions and businesses to tackle seasonality in the North.
- Develop staff skills and morale so that they want to stay in the job but also help younger staff members develop their future careers.

In short, the aim is to develop Castell Henllys as a leading tourist and local attraction/venue that educates the public about prehistory, sustainable living, biodiversity, Welsh language and culture and be seen as a main contributor to the local economy and culture through partnership working with local businesses, charities and organisations.