

Cardigan Castle : Rescue and Regeneration

by

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This paper outlines the heritage regeneration project at Cardigan Castle which will rescue a site at the heart of Cardigan and of particular significance to the history of Wales. It explores the special interest of the medieval castle, sets out the project development process and demonstrates how public investment in heritage can be repaid through the economic, social and educational benefits that can follow.

Cardigan Castle is prominently and strategically sited at the lowest bridging point on the River Teifi in west Wales (Fig. 1). It is an iconic medieval site within the town of Cardigan and is central to the historic development of the area, and indeed, of Wales as a whole. The castle has important cultural associations as in 1176 it hosted the very first Welsh eisteddfod. The site was acquired in a state of severe dereliction by Ceredigion County Council in 2003 and is in the process of being transferred to Cadwgan Building Preservation Trust. In the meantime a major regeneration project is well under way to renovate the castle's site and buildings, guided by The Prince's Regeneration Trust (hereafter PRT). The outline plan for new uses includes a Welsh Language and Learning Centre and a visitor destination to the historic site, as well as the generation of income through the creation of holiday cottages, business and craft units and a café/restaurant. The Heritage Lottery Fund has supported the project throughout, with one of the highest awards ever given to a project in Wales. Support of various kinds has also come from many sources, particularly Cadw, the Architectural Heritage Fund, the Welsh Government and the European Regional Development Fund.

The site encompasses the remains of Cardigan Castle, a Scheduled Ancient Monument, and the various listed buildings and structures that have been constructed within, and adjacent to, its original curtain walls (Fig. 2). The principal building is the grade II* Castle Green House dating from the early 19th century, and is associated with the laying out of the Regency Gardens. These are included on the Cadw/ICOMOS Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in Wales.² The flora and fauna of the site includes many rare trees and protected species and the cellar of the one remaining medieval tower is the roost for the rare greater horseshoe bat.

The significance therefore encompasses a medieval site, altered, raised and overlain by later buildings of various phases, a designed garden with some specimen trees, protected species and evocative historic associations. The site is in the heart of the Cardigan Conservation Area and had fallen into such extreme disrepair that local

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Fig. 1

Cardigan Castle, the southern walls from across the River Teifi.

Photograph, author 2010

people had despaired of it ever being rescued. It is heartening to see the way so many individuals and agencies have got behind this project and at the time of writing there is now great optimism that the physical revival of Cardigan Castle is about to bear fruit.

MEDIEVAL HISTORY

Cardigan Castle has a long and complex history. Early records refer to a castle having been established in 1093 but it is uncertain whether this was on the present castle site or at the site known as Old Castle Farm. It was then rebuilt in 1110 by Gilbert Fitz Richard, earl of Clare, and excavations by Dyfed Archaeological Trust concluded the boundary of the existing castle site had been achieved by 1136, when the town of Cardigan was first recorded.³ Rhys ap Gruffudd, prince of Deheubarth, captured the castle in 1164 and rebuilt it in stone in 1171. He is regarded as one of the most important Welsh historic figures and rulers of pre-conquest Wales. In 1154 he submitted to King Henry II, accepting the title, the Lord Rhys and the role of the king's justiciar.

The 'Chronicle of the Princes' (originally written in Welsh as *Brut y Tywysogion*)⁴ recounts that the Lord Rhys held a great court in Cardigan Castle in 1176, and arranged two kinds of contest one for bards and poets, and the other for harpists, crowthers, pipers and other musicians. He had two chairs for the winners who also received lavish gifts. This gathering became known as the first eisteddfod and as such it has a very significant place in the history of Wales. An eisteddfod literally means a chairing

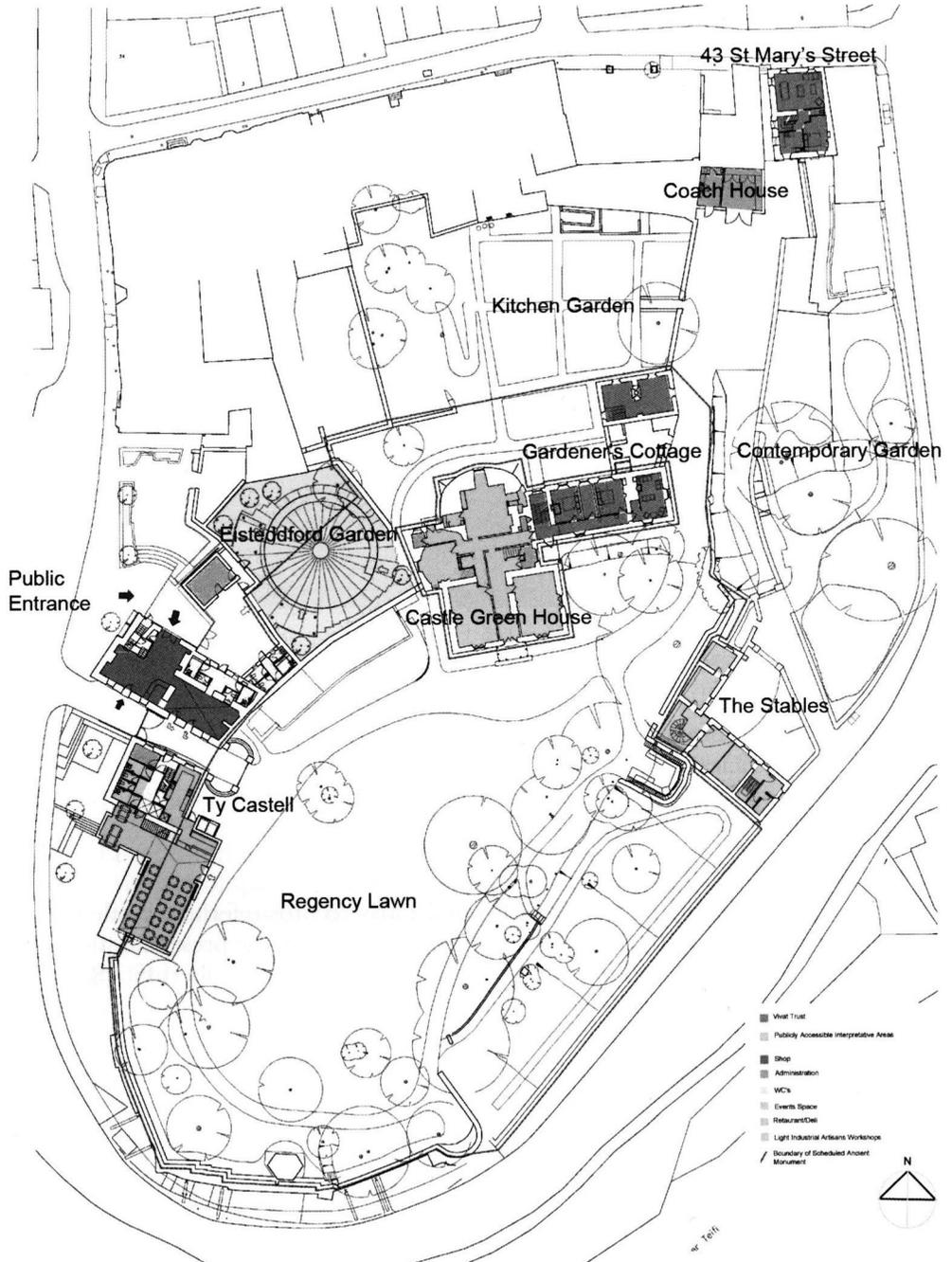


Fig. 2
 Cardigan Castle, site plan as proposed.
 © Purcell Miller Tritton



Fig. 3

John Speed's Map of Cardigan Town (1610),
detail of the Castle.

Courtesy of Dyfed Archaeological Trust

place.⁵ The 19th-century revival of the whole eisteddfod tradition by Iolo Morgannwg and his Gorsedd of Bards created an artistic genre in itself, carving exquisite chairs to be presented to competition winners each year. There are local eisteddfodau throughout Wales and the annual National Eisteddfod alternates between north Wales and south Wales.

The Lord Rhys died in 1197 and the castle changed hands many times, being critically sited between the Anglo-Normans to the south and the Welsh to the north. In 1240 it was captured by Walter Marshal, son of the prolific castle builder, William Marshal. King Henry III regained direct control in 1241 and refortified it at royal expense, including the construction of a new keep and, later, the town walls in 1261.

Cardigan became the administrative hub of the new county of Cardiganshire in 1271. By 1279 it was a key royal base for King Edward I's campaigns against the Welsh and indeed it remained allied to the English crown for the rest of the medieval period. The medieval fabric that survives today, principally part of the curtain wall and the round north tower embedded into the Regency house, dates from c.1250. Despite the royal interest in the castle, by 1343 the curtain wall was already collapsing and by 1610 the north tower is shown in Speed's map as being ruinous (Fig 3).

The current state of knowledge of the medieval site is summed up in a report by Cambria Archaeology:⁶ 'The layout of the earth and timber 12th-century castle remains obscure, although it is likely to have sat in the gardens in front of Castle Green house. This castle was rebuilt in stone in the 1170s, and repair, rebuilding and improvements were added periodically until a major period of rebuilding in the mid-13th century. Archaeological work has revealed something of this 13th-century stone castle, the boundary to which ran along the cliff-top. The cliff itself is now obscured by the high walls that were built around the site in the 19th century but there remains evidence of some of the medieval towers that projected outwards at the base of the cliff. Remains of a castle gateway or bailey entrance have been revealed underneath the Green Street cottages but evidence for some other buildings that would have stood within the castle ward has remained elusive. It is possible an outer bailey of the castle also extended to the north, up to the line of St Mary's Street.'

THE CIVIL WAR AND AFTER

During the Civil War the Castle was damaged by Parliamentary forces. By 1713 it is recorded that Lewis Price, mayor, carried out landscaping works to create a bowling green – hence the later name of the house. The prints of 1741 and 1762 by Samuel and Nathaniel Buck show some buildings to the east of the tower but the first mention of

a substantial residence does not occur until 1799. On his travels in Wales in 1802 Sir Richard Colt Hoare commented: 'I returned to Cardigan by land, but how different is the appearance of the castle on the land side! It might almost be passed by unnoticed; whereas by water it forms the grandest and most pleasing ruin in South Wales, and cannot fail to leave a lasting impression on the recollection of every traveller who visits it'.⁷ An engraving of 1804 shows the castle from the water at about this time (Fig. 4).

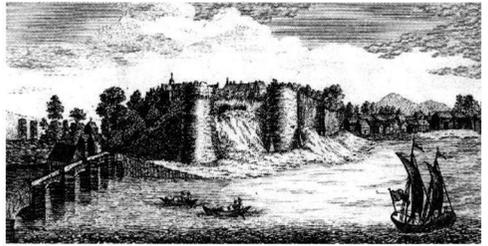


Fig. 4
Cardigan Castle, from the south in 1804
(engraving by Metcalfe, 1804)
Courtesy of Dyfed Archaeological Trust

Sir Samuel Rush Meyrick, the distinguished collector and antiquarian, noted in 1808 that 'the castle and the ground contained within its outer walls (called Castle-Green)... now belongs to John Bowen Esq who is erecting a house on the site of the keep, the dungeons now serving as his cellars'.⁸ John Bowen, who was a local attorney, incorporated part of the north tower and is believed to have levelled the site by filling in the ditch and raising the ground within the former keep. In 1828, the then owner, Arthur Jones, solicitor and high sheriff of Cardiganshire, added the Regency front to the dwelling that we now know as Castle Green House and constructed the stables. In 1833 Samuel Lewis referred to it as 'a handsome modern villa'.⁹ At some time between 1834 and 1836, the castle was acquired by David Davies and it remained in the Davies family until 1924. Eventually in 1940 it was sold to Mr and Mrs Wood and their daughter, Barbara, who introduced a multitude of cats (Fig. 5). During the Second World War the east wing of the house was requisitioned and was never reoccupied afterwards. The rest of the house became uninhabitable and, in 1984, it was declared unfit for human occupation, but Barbara Wood stoically continued to live on site, latterly in a succession of caravans. Floorboards were lifted to fuel the fires and the whole place was overtaken by vegetation. Following a survey by Ove Arup the castle walls were shored up with steel buttresses in the 1970s, but despite this, a part of the south-west curtain wall collapsed in 1984. By early this century Castle Green House was shrouded in scaffolding (Fig. 6), and in 2009 Miss Wood died in a local nursing home, aged ninety-one.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS

Over the last twenty years a significant amount of research has been carried out and any ground works, trenches or archaeological surveys have been well recorded. Nevertheless plenty of the castle site still remains to be investigated. Cambria Archaeology (now Dyfed Archaeological Trust) had a good opportunity for archaeological investigation following the acquisition of the Green Street cottages by the County Council. The rear yards were excavated and as well as confirming the line of the defensive ditch they also revealed structural evidence of the west side of the castle and perhaps a gatehouse. The excavation showed a wall projecting into the ditch which was clearly part of the outer defensive circuit of the castle.



Fig. 5

Miss Wood and the cats in Castle Green House, c. 1980
Courtesy of Cadwgan Building Preservation Trust



Fig. 6

Cardigan Castle, Castle Green House
scaffolded.

Photograph, author c. 2008

In 2010 two exploratory trenches were cut by Dyfed Archaeological Trust, one near the site of the former fernery and the other, outside the current castle walls below Ty Castell (Fig. 7). These trenches were opened up during the Castle Exhibition Week in September and volunteers were able to work alongside the archaeologists on site. The Trust also carried out a watching brief during the borehole investigations to prepare a methodology for the emergency works on the castle walls adjacent to the stables.

The proposals for the repair, replacement and sustainable re-use of all parts of the site present archaeological challenges and it is anticipated that each stage of the project will involve evaluation trenching, building recording, targeted trenching and research and investigation. Some of this work is suitable for involving volunteers from the local community.



Fig. 7

Cardigan Castle, archaeological investigations in 2010 on the site of the former Fernery, near the main entrance. The early 19th-century gateposts relate to Castle Green House; the building behind is Ty Castell.

Photograph, Dyfed Archaeological Trust

THE HISTORIC BUILDINGS

The brief account that follows is based on a full survey of all the historic buildings, their condition and proposed repairs carried out in 2007 by Niall Phillips Architects.¹⁰ Detailed schedules of condition and repair were produced, including photographic evidence and a detailed description of the site, illustrating some areas that can no longer be accessed due to the dangerous and deteriorating nature of the main house, site and other buildings.¹¹

Castle Green House is a two-storey, stuccoed villa completed in 1827, listed grade II*, of three bays with a hipped roof. It was designed by David Evans, an architect from the village of Eglwysrwrw in Pembrokeshire, a few miles south of Cardigan. It was a remodelling and enlargement for Arthur Jones of a house begun by John Bowen, probably about 1808. We know that Bowen leased Castle House in 1799 but it is believed that this dwelling was demolished early in the 19th century for the construction of the new Regency house. Bowen landscaped the site by filling in the castle ditch and raising the level of the ground all around. He incorporated the medieval north tower into his new house, but the ground level changes meant that what appears now to be the base of the tower is in fact its second stage. The main façade of the 1820s, with its deep eaves and trellis porch suggests some knowledge of the work of John Nash, who practised in Carmarthen in the late 18th century and designed several villas in the region, such as that at Llanerchaeron, Ceredigion (c.1793-5).¹² Castle Green House has some echoes of Nash's 'box villas' but there is no evidence that he was involved in any way in this house. In 1832 sales particulars described it as 'a capital modern mansion' (Fig. 8). The main



Fig. 8

Cardigan Castle, Castle Green House, the main façade, 2004.

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Fig. 9

Cardigan Castle, Castle Green House, the staircase and Gothic window.

Photograph, author 2010



Fig. 10
Cardigan Castle, the Gardener's Cottage.
Photograph, author 2010

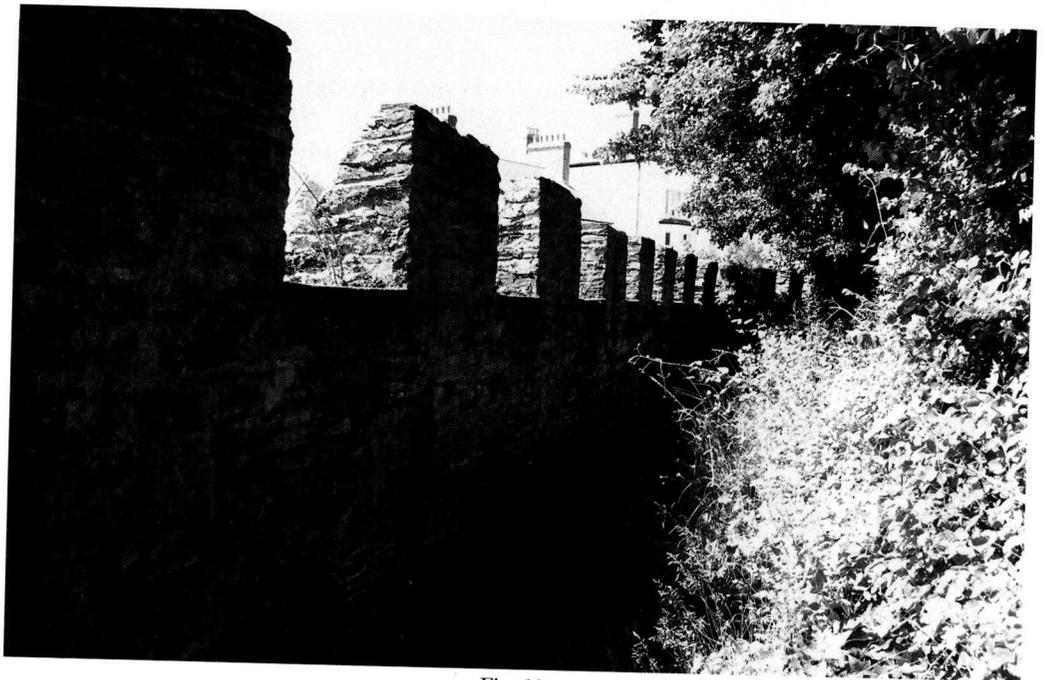


Fig. 11
Cardigan Castle, the wall-walk with 19th-century crenellations.
Photograph, author 2010

block is symmetrical with the main public rooms opening off a central corridor which leads to an especially fine cantilevered staircase lit by a picturesque gothick, small-pane sash window with intersecting glazing bars (Fig. 9). There is a simple classical elegance to the proportions and detailing throughout the building.

Other post-medieval buildings at Cardigan Castle include the gardener's cottage (Fig. 10) and the dairy beside the walled kitchen garden, once planted with fruit trees. Below the main castle site are the stables and beyond the main entrance are the Green Street cottages and Ty Castell, which at the outset of the project was in separate ownership as a fish and chip shop. The property at 43 St Mary Street, backing onto the castle grounds to the north-east, has also been acquired and retains a relatively unaltered 19th-century interior.

Much evidence survives of the original planting as does the layout of the 19th-century grounds with formal drive and gated entrances, one off Bridge Street and the other off The Strand, where the boundary walls have mock crenellations to perpetuate the impression of a castle (Fig. 11). The ward of the medieval castle was laid out as an ornamental garden in the 19th century, adapting the curtain wall to create a designed walk with view points. There are trees and shrubs of significance, including the enormous Turkey oak and some variegated hollies and yew. Along the wall walk is also a Second World War pillbox. To the west of the house are the remains of a glasshouse and to the far side of the main entrance once lay the fernery.

PLANNING FOR RESCUE FROM DERELICTION

Ceredigion County Council purchased the site in 2003, the year that it featured in the *Restoration* series on BBC television. Together with Cadwgan Building Preservation Trust, formed in 2000, the Council started a series of consultations to identify a viable and sustainable new use. In 2005 PRT was invited to facilitate a planning day, which gathered together all potential stakeholders to brainstorm the route forward; followed in 2006 by a visit by HRH The Prince of Wales and HRH The Duchess of Cornwall. Momentum was gathering and the County Council asked Cadwgan to carry out an options appraisal and Niall Phillips (now part of Purcell Miller Tritton Architects) was invited to lead this work.

The cost of this complex project, adapting to the site's diverse range of significance, increased to almost £10m and it was clear that funding would be a major challenge. The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) was approached at an early stage, with the successful outcome that a First Round pass was awarded in 2009, securing £295,000 towards the detailed development and planning work. The HLF has steadfastly supported the project throughout, culminating in the award of £4.7m in 2011, which was one of the highest awards ever given to a project in Wales. Similarly Cadw has been a key driver and supporter and its grant for the repair of the castle walls became an early symbol to the outside world that something positive was at last really happening at the castle.¹³ Further support came early on from The Architectural Heritage Fund who provided not only the funding for the Options Appraisal but also the loan for Cadwgan to acquire Ty Castell when it came onto the market in 2008. Welsh Government ministers, in particular Elin Jones, Leighton Andrews and Huw Lewis, have lent their support to the project at the

highest level in the Assembly, and this has enabled the project to be successful in securing a further £4.29million from the European Regional Development Fund, through the Welsh European Funding Office. At the time of writing we are optimistic the balance will come from the Community Asset Transfer Fund, a partnership fund between the Welsh Government and the Big Lottery.

The scheme as now proposed, and for which Planning, Listed Building and Scheduled Monument Consents have been granted, is for a mix of uses. The PRT believes that with projects like this it is essential that the uses are first and foremost of benefit to local people and that it is not just focused on bringing in visitors. Those who do visit Cardigan in the future will arrive through a redesigned Brioude Gardens into a new visitor centre within Green Street Cottages and from there into the castle grounds where there will be events and activities and a chance to see the interior of Castle Green House. Here the principal rooms, dining room to the south and drawing room to the north, will be returned as near as possible to their original Regency character using the evidence of surviving detail. Similarly the kitchen to the rear will be presented as it might have looked originally. The fine staircase will be repaired and a lift will also need to be installed. Upstairs will be the rooms for the Welsh Language and Learning Centre which is a key element of the project, having already successfully begun classes in Ty Castell.



Fig. 12

Cardigan Castle, the Eisteddfod stone and temporary steel shoring of the castle walls.

Photograph, author 2010

These rooms will also be available for hire for other purposes and the apsidal room to the rear, within the north tower, allows for a 70-seater conference space. The north wing, formerly the service wing, will become a holiday cottage, as will the gardener's cottage and No. 43 St Mary Street. The stables will house workshops for traditional skills and small craft units. In the grounds, the croquet lawn to the west of the house will be an area dedicated to events such as weddings, and will include an inflatable marquee. From the river bridge to the south, the most striking evidence of change will be the removal of the unsightly buttresses, following stabilisation of the castle wall. To the west side, straddling the curtain wall to the west of Ty Castell, and with views out across the river, will be a new restaurant of consciously contemporary design; yet, in its timber-decked seating area oversailing the wall, it makes a reference back to the hoardings on the battlements of medieval castles.

The economic benefit to the town will be the creation of an estimated nineteen jobs as well as the construction jobs during the building phases. Visitor numbers to Cardigan will grow, which will in turn increase spend within the town, and the project has enormous potential for sustainable regeneration through heritage. At the time of writing, following completion of the very lengthy OJEU (Official Journal of the European Union) advertising process, required by European law, Cadwgan has just appointed Purcell Miller Tritton as its lead consultant for the implementation of the entire project and the appointment of a project director will follow. Repair of the castle walls and all other archaeological elements of the project will be within the first phase of work to start early in 2012. The moment when the walls are strengthened sufficiently to allow the removal of the first of the unsightly buttresses will be a momentous day for Cardigan (Fig. 12).

HERITAGE REGENERATION

Many people wonder why it all takes so long, why it costs so much money and whether it is all worth it. Indeed the path through options appraisals, business plans, conservation management plans, funding applications, planning consents and so on does seem interminable, and in the case of Cardigan it hardly seems credible that soon a visit there will be to discuss actual works in progress. In these economically challenging times we need to stick to our guns, confident that a good project will eventually be delivered and will in time pay for itself. On the question of whether it is all worth it, there are projects across the United Kingdom where the benefits of re-used historic buildings speak for themselves. For example, amongst PRT projects, at Sowerby Bridge Wharf in Yorkshire, a group of listed canal-side buildings has been brought back into use creating about 300 new jobs; or at Conway Mill in Belfast, a flax mill close to the most troubled part of that city has been reoccupied by community groups and offices.¹⁴

One example that well illustrates the potential of regeneration through heritage is Harvey's Foundry in Hayle, a former industrial town in Cornwall, where extensive data has been gathered to show why these projects are worthwhile to more than just historic building enthusiasts. With the aim of providing evidence to the Treasury of the economic sense of heritage regeneration, PRT monitored a range of issues between August 2003 and August 2010. The bare statistics are that 7333 sq.m. of historic buildings have so far

been regenerated, 743sq.m. of new build created, and forty-six business units installed. In the time the project has been running, thirteen of the businesses have expanded and 112 people are now employed on site; as well as the thirty-two jobs created during the construction works and the training in traditional building skills.

The key point is that it is not just the evident benefit in terms of preservation and enhancement of the historic environment and sustainable improvement of the social and economic well-being of local people, but it is that in the long run all this pays for itself. In the period under review, using the government's own figures, the contribution to the public purse was just over £3m.¹⁵ On top of this are business rates, estimated at over £150,000. Another relevant yardstick in these climate-change conscious times is an estimated saving of 860,006kg of carbon by regenerating Harvey's Foundry using traditional materials as opposed to clearing the site and rebuilding from scratch.¹⁶

All this tells us that taking the long view, Harvey's Foundry has, over about eight years, largely paid back the investment made by the taxpayer. Rescue and adaptive reuse of historic buildings therefore can work, and though Cardigan Castle is a more costly project, there is no reason why the same outcome cannot eventually be achieved (Fig. 13).

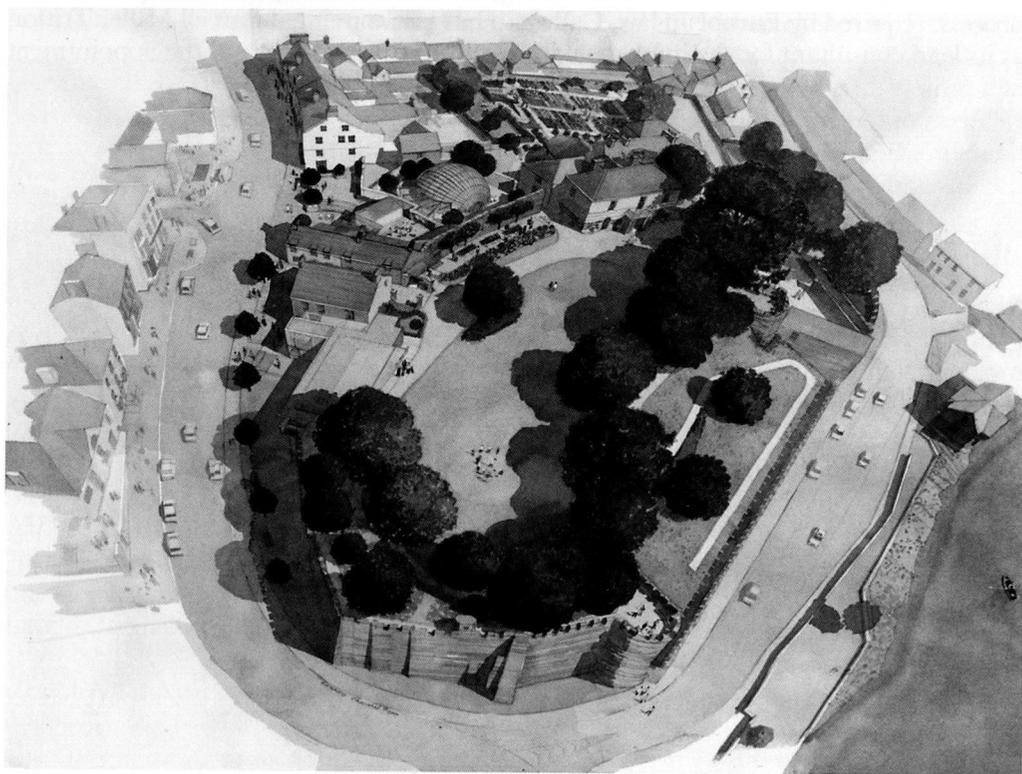


Fig. 13

Cardigan Castle, an artist's impression of the completed project.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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NOTES

- 1 This paper is based upon the Conservation Management Plan written for the Round Two Heritage Lottery Fund application.
- 2 Cadw/ICOMOS, *Register of Landscapes, Parks and Gardens of Historic Interest in Wales: Part 1: Parks and Gardens* (2007)
- 3 Dyfed Archaeological Trust, 'Cardigan Castle: An Archaeological and Historical Survey' (unpublished report for Cadwgan Building Preservation Trust, 2009)
- 4 T. Jones ed., *The Chronicle of the Princes*, vol.1 (Cardiff, 1952); vol.2 (Cardiff, 1955); vol.3 (Cardiff, 1971)
- 5 'Eistedd' is Welsh for chair and 'fod' is a mutated 'bod' meaning place.
- 6 P. Poucher, N. Ludlow, and R. Edgar, *Aberteifi – Cardigan: 900 Mlynedd o Hanes Yng Nghartref Yr Eisteddfod – 900 Years of History at the Home of the Eisteddfod* (Gomer Press, 2009).
- 7 M. W. Thompson ed., *The Journeys of Sir Richard Colt Hoare through Wales and England 1793-1810* (Stroud, 1982), entry for Monday 5 July 1802.
- 8 S. Meyrick, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Cardiganshire* (1808).
- 9 S. Lewis, *A Topographical Dictionary of Wales*, vol.I (London, 1833).
- 10 Purcell Miller Tritton, 'Cardigan Castle: Schedule of Condition', 2 volumes, unpublished report for Ceredigion County Council (October 2007). Niall Phillips Architects has become part of Purcell Miller Tritton.
- 11 These substantial documents have been appended to the HLF submission.
- 12 Illustrated in T. Lloyd *et al*, *Carmarthenshire and Ceredigion*, Buildings of Wales (New Haven and London, 2006), pl.60.
- 13 In total, so far the ancient monument and historic building grants from Cadw have amounted to £460,000.
- 14 Conway Mill won a 2011 Regeneration and Renewal award for the best use of a heritage building in a regeneration project. For more information on projects, go to the PRT website www.princes-regeneration.org
- 15 Taking median annual earnings in Hayle and calculating national insurance and income tax contributions, multiplied by the number of people working at Harvey's in this period.
- 16 Also included in the calculation is the estimated reduction in travel for people who can now work locally without needing to drive long distances.