

Neath College students help restore Craig Gwladus' historic smithy

Seventeen students from Neath College have been invited to work on a remarkable restoration project, breathing new life into an old smithy at Craig Gwladus Country Park.

The work has taken place over a 10-day onsite placement organised by Swansea University and Craig Gwladus Park Manager, Lisa Kirman, and funded by CITB as part of the South West Wales Onsite Hub programme coordinated by us, here at Cyfle Building Skills. Over the ten days, the students have been granted a rare opportunity to engage with traditional materials, while working on a project of significant historical and archaeological importance, under the guidance of experts in their fields.

Eight of the Neath College students are pursuing a Construction Level 1 Multi-trade qualification, while the remaining nine are working towards a Foundation in Construction Bricklaying/ Construction Civils. Through this placement, all the students have gained invaluable experience in heritage restoration and traditional skills – a rare opportunity which will undoubtedly enhance their future career prospects upon completion of their qualifications. There is also the wider aim that by including students on such projects it will go some way to help fill the skills gap regarding restoration of historic buildings and monuments.

Leading the historic recovery and reconstruction efforts at Craig Gwladus is Dr. Alex Langlands from Swansea University's Centre for Heritage Research and Training. Langlands first extended the invitation for the students to help at the site as a unique learning experience, and generously shared his knowledge of the site's history with the students before they commenced work.

In advance of the placement, Archaeology Wales undertook an assessment of the site, and Thom Alun Kinghorn-Evans from the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) has been engaged to work on the restoration of the park's historic buildings. Throughout the students' placement, he has provided expert guidance on the use of traditional materials and methods, including the application of lime mortar. The students have also been accompanied and supervised by Ieuan Humphreys, Neath College's Bricklaying Instructor and former Cyfle Building Skills apprentice, along with Jamie Piper, Centre Manager of Maesteg Construction Centre of Excellence.

Although the structures are not officially listed, the involvement of SPAB, an organisation dedicated to preserving historic structures, underscores the commitment to carrying out the restoration sympathetically and in accordance with the advice provided by CADW – the Welsh Government's historic environment service.



To ensure the safety and success of the project, all 17 students were equipped with the necessary personal protective equipment (PPE) and toolkits, with the costs covered by the South West Wales Onsite Hub programme funded by CITB. Additionally, the students received Low Carbon Training from Cyfle's Training Coordinator, Shaun Williams, prior to commencing their 10-day placement.

The old smithy is just one of several remnants of the area's rich industrial heritage that are being uncovered at Craig Gwladus Country Park. The site also features remains of an old engine house and bridge believed to have been constructed in the 1870's, when the site was developed as Gelliiau Colliery.

This heritage work aligns with the wider transformation of the park, spearheaded by Lisa Kirman, Craig Gwladus Project Manager, Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council and funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and Research Wales Innovation Fund. Craig Gwladus Country Park, renowned for its dense woodlands, captivating rock formations, diverse wildlife habitats, and coal-mining legacy, is interconnected by a network of scenic footpaths. The restored structures will further enhance the experience for visitors to the park, members of the local community, and those interested in the area's industrial past.



Dr. Alex Langlands, Swansea University's Centre for Heritage Research and Training, said: "The region has a substantial number of historic buildings on the 'at risk' register and by working with young people locally, we can begin to develop the next generation of home-grown talent to upskill in traditional heritage construction skills, providing our historic buildings with a sustainable future."

Councillor Jeremy Hurley, Neath Port Talbot Council's Cabinet Member for Climate Change & Economic Growth, said: "We are thrilled to host the students and provide a real-life opportunity for them to conserve the historic smithy at Craig Gwladus Country Park. This project is part of our broader efforts to transform the park and preserve its rich heritage that has been enabled through generous funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund. The exciting collaboration we have developed with Swansea University, Neath College and SPAB is producing tangible results that are making a real difference to people and place."

Thom Alun Kinghorn-Evans from SPAB, added: "It has been a privilege to work with the students from Neath College on this heritage restoration project. By utilising traditional materials and methods, we are ensuring that the historic smithy retains its authentic character. It is heartening to witness the next generation embrace these valuable skills and contribute to the preservation of our built heritage."

Jamie Piper, Centre Manager of Maesteg Construction Centre of Excellence, commented: "The students have demonstrated tremendous dedication and enthusiasm throughout this project. Working on the restoration of the old smithy at Craig Gwladus Country Park has provided them with invaluable hands-on experience in heritage and restoration work. It has been a pleasure guiding them through this journey and witnessing their growth as skilled tradespeople."

Bluestone Builders apprentice wins prestigious FMB award

Jordan Gay, a construction apprentice with Cyfle Building Skills and supported by Bluestone Builders, has been named as the Federation of Master Builders (FMB) Cymru Apprentice of the Year 2023. The prestigious ceremony was held at the Cardiff Marriott Hotel on Friday, May 5, 2023, and was sponsored by the Development Bank of Wales.

Jordan's journey towards his nomination began when he applied for a pre-apprenticeship carpentry and joinery course at Pembrokeshire College. His eagerness to learn and develop, coupled with his wide range of experience, helped him progress and attain a distinction at each relevant level. Jordan has worked tirelessly throughout his apprenticeship, and both his employers at Bluestone Builders and us, here at Cyfle Building Skills, know his win is well deserved.

The FMB Cymru Master Builder Awards celebrate the achievements of Master Builders across Wales. The finalists from Wales will go on to compete at the British national ceremony in September 2023. Jordan's win also gives him a chance to win a brand-new Isuzu D-max Utah pick-up truck, courtesy of the headline sponsor Isuzu.

Jordan is understandably thrilled to have won this prestigious award,



saying: "I am overjoyed and humbled to have won the FMB Cymru Apprentice of the Year Award. This is a great recognition of all the hard work I've put into my apprenticeship and the support I've received from my employer and training provider. I am grateful for this opportunity and excited for what the future holds for me in the construction industry."

The Master Builders Federation is dedicated to promoting excellence in construction and building services. The annual awards ceremony recognises the hard work and dedication of apprentices and construction professionals alike.

To congratulate Jordan on his impressive achievement, we presented

him with some tools to help him in his future career in the construction industry. We also wish him all the best for the national final.



Successful Mr and Mrs Night raises funds for the Jac Lewis Foundation



Ammanford Cricket Club came alive on Friday, May 12th, as the Jac Lewis Foundation hosted a memorable charity Mr and Mrs Night. The event not only brought together members of the community but also raised over £2,500 to support the vital work of the Jac Lewis Foundation.

The evening was filled with laughter, entertainment, and the crowning of the new Mr and Mrs Champions 2023: Rhys Fisher, our Lead Training Coordinator, and his beautiful fiancé Gemma Wyper.

Rhys and Gemma were worthy winners on the night. Their sense of fun, enthusiasm and commitment to the cause embodied the spirit of the event, and they proved to know each other very well! Everyone at the event was delighted with their well-deserved victory.

The Mr and Mrs game was the highlight of the charity night. Based on the classic television show format, the game tests how well partners know each other by asking a series of fun and revealing questions. It brought couples together for a light-hearted and entertaining competition, and not only provided many laughs but also showcased the couples' strong bonds.

Rhys said: "We are honoured to be crowned the Mr and Mrs Champions 2023 and to have had the opportunity to participate in this fantastic event. It was not only a fun experience but also a meaningful way to support the Jac Lewis Foundation and their vital work in our community."

Gemma said: "The Mr and Mrs game was great fun, and we are thrilled to have contributed to such a worthy cause. We really commend and appreciate the Jac Lewis Foundation for their dedication to mental health support, and we hope the charity night inspires others to join in making a positive impact."

Here at Cyfle, we congratulate Rhys and Gemma on their win, and agree wholeheartedly with their sentiments regarding the Jac Lewis Foundation.

Tai Tarian and Joyners help provides hands-on experience

Thanks to a successful partnership between Tai Tarian, contractors Joyners PA Cymru, and us here at Cyfle, two Neath College students, Oliver Jones and Dylan Morgan, are well on their way to becoming apprenticeship-ready after completing training on Tai Tarian's Green Void properties.

The training was organised through our Onsite Hub and funded by the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB). As part of the training program, Oliver and Dylan gained invaluable hands-on, real-life experience and each received their own brand-new toolbox.

Speaking about his training, Oliver explained how he found the experience extremely valuable and fun:

"We've mainly been skimming the walls in this property; it's been really enjoyable."

Dylan similarly enjoyed the opportunity to learn new skills, stating:

"I got to do some meshing in the outside walls, some dashing – I wasn't the best, but they let me do it – and some beading. After that, we came here and we skimmed a lot of walls, including some cupboards, some tight places, but we got it done."



The property they worked on is part of the Optimised RetroFit (ORP) Green Voids program. This programme tests a new approach to decarbonising Welsh homes, based on the recommendations of the Jofeh Report, published in July 2019.

It takes a whole house approach to decarbonising existing homes, and is far more sophisticated than previous schemes because it takes into account the materials that homes are made from, the way they are heated and store energy, and the way energy is supplied to them.

Along with the work done by the two students, Tai Tarian's Void team explained that they had also carried out decarbonisation works,

including insulating floors, external walls insulation, improving the loft insulation, and installing ventilation for the property.

Rob Newell, Contracts Director with Joyners PA Cymru Limited, who works with Tai Tarian on delivering carbon-neutral green void properties, said:

"Moving forward, we're looking at engaging with Cyfle and Tai Tarian to create more training places for future apprentices."

Through this partnership, Tai Tarian, Joyners, and Cyfle have successfully provided hands-on training to young people, preparing them for future apprenticeships and careers in the construction industry.

Case Study: Warwick Allkin – Turning his life around

Warwick Allkin, 34, from the Ammanford/Llanelli area, had been unemployed for several years before he got the chance to participate in the South West Wales Onsite Hub programme which is funded by the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB). The scheme gave him the opportunity to gain practical onsite construction experience, which he hoped would lead to employment. Prior to this, Warwick had been struggling with the loss of a family member to suicide and had become disengaged with work.

During his time on the programme, Warwick was placed with T.A.D Builders in Llanelli at their Caegar site. Despite facing challenging weather conditions, with constant heavy rainfall throughout his 10-day placement, Warwick worked as a groundworker carrying out duties outdoors without ever making excuses or taking a day off.

Warwick's hard work and dedication paid off and his placement with T.A.D Builders proved to be a great success. As a result, he was offered a job as a General Operative with the company following his placement. His main duties now include opening and closing the site, general cleaning, and ensuring the barriers are secure for pedestrian walkways. Warwick has since expressed a keen interest in upskilling and progressing within the industry. Specifically, he would like to learn to drive excavators and dumpers, with the ultimate goal of becoming a machine operative.

When asked about his experience, Warwick shared that he was attracted to the construction industry because

of the possibility of a job at the end of the placement. He heard about the opportunity through the job centre/Hub and was interested in gaining practical onsite experience. During his placement, Warwick learned specific skills such as working in a team environment and communicating with a variety of stakeholders, including T.A.D's management and the other tradespeople and staff working at the site.

Warwick credits Anthony, a T.A.D Groundworker who he was paired up with during his placement, for helping him pursue a job opportunity with the site manager Josh Kinnear. Anthony's help and guidance has continued while working for T.A.D, and Warwick is very grateful for the opportunity to have gained employment. He has also thanked Cyfle Training Coordinator, Charlotte Griffiths, for helping to provide the Onsite Hub placement which has made such a significant difference to his life – providing him with a job that pays and enables him to participate in more social activities.

Speaking about Warwick's success, Charlotte Griffiths said: "Warwick doesn't drive, and in order to get to site he had to walk to a pick-up point each morning to get his lift, which meant leaving his house at 7am. During his 10 days on site, the weather was torrential, and being a groundworker meant that his duties were outside; however, he never made excuses or called in sick. I'm really proud that he's gained employment following his placement, this was the opportunity that he needed to turn his life around."

Warwick's success story demonstrates the potential of apprenticeships and practical onsite experience in helping



individuals like him radically change their lives. Warwick's perseverance and dedication, along with the support and guidance of T.A.D Builders, has helped him achieve his goals and gain meaningful employment. As such, Warwick highly recommends practical onsite experience as a route into the industry for others.

Josh Kinnear, Site Manager, T.A.D

Builders, said: "We're delighted to welcome Warwick as part of our team at T.A.D Builders. The Onsite Hub programme has provided an excellent opportunity for him to gain practical experience and develop his skills in the construction industry. Warwick's positive attitude and willingness to learn have been admirable, and we're looking forward to seeing him progress within the company."

Special thanks to all our Partners:



For a full list of our Shared Apprenticeship and South West Wales Onsite Hub Companies visit:

www.cyflebuilding.co.uk/cyfle-building/shared-apprenticeship-and-south-west-wales-onsite-hub-companies

Cyfle Building Skills wins Outstanding Achievement Award at CEW Awards 2023



We are overwhelmed to have achieved remarkable success at the recent Constructing Excellence in Wales (CEW) Awards 2023, where we were honoured with an Outstanding Achievement Award and shortlisted in two highly-competitive categories – all as we celebrate our ten-year anniversary.

The prestigious event took place at the Celtic Manor Resort in Newport on Friday, 16 June, to celebrate the remarkable achievements and contributions of organisations within the construction industry in Wales. The CEW awards ceremony brought together industry leaders, professionals, and stakeholders to celebrate the exceptional achievements and advancements that have shaped the construction landscape.

Our Outstanding Achievement Award highlights our dedication to excellence, innovation, and our commitment to advancing the industry over the past decade. In addition to this great honour, we were also shortlisted for the Integration & Collaborative Working Award, and the People Development Award.

The Integration & Collaborative Working Award nomination, including our Shared Apprenticeship Scheme, Low Carbon Training, Onsite Hub programme and Training Groups,

reflects our commitment to fostering collaboration and effective integration across the construction sector. By working closely with our industry partners, we have demonstrated our ability to facilitate seamless collaboration, resulting in improved project outcomes and industry advancements.

The CITB funded South West Wales Regional On-Site Hub Work Experience Project was nominated for the People Development Award for its success in providing valuable work experience for people interested in a career in the construction industry, to learn and develop their skills in a construction related role.

Anthony Rees, our Managing Director, said: "We are incredibly proud to receive this amazing accolade at the prestigious CEW Awards, as well as being shortlisted in two additional categories. It is a testament to the hard work and dedication of our team over the past ten years, and also to the contributions of our industry partners. The Outstanding Achievement Award recognises our commitment to collaboration, innovation, and investing in the development of individuals within the construction sector. We are committed to continuing these efforts to shape the future of the industry locally, and provide sustainable employment opportunities for people across South and West Wales."



Apprentices honoured and £3K funds raised at SBCSG Apprentice Awards 2023



Apprentices were honoured at the third annual Swansea Bay Construction Support Group Apprentice Awards, which also raised more than £3,000 for a local charity, Hands Up for Down's.

The SBCSG Apprentice 2023 Awards ceremony took place on 22 June at the Swansea.com Stadium, to support and recognise the achievements of new entrants, apprentices and talent within the construction industry in the South Wales region.

The ceremony, hosted by Swansea legend Kev Johns, was also part of an overall objective to promote the construction industry and showcase the benefits of considering construction as a career path.

This year's event saw awards presented to nominated apprentices from SBCSG member companies - including two which were placed by us, here at Cyfle.



Awards were also given to the Best overall Trade Apprentice and Best overall Technical Apprentice – won this year by Ryan Gibbons from Swansea Council and Daryl Borsden from John Weaver Construction, respectively.

The awards ceremony was sponsored by Linc Cymru, Alpha Safety Training and PCR Global, along with trophy sponsor, City & Guilds, and hospitality sponsor, The Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB). The event also featured a raffle and auction that raised £3,000 for the charity Hands Up for Down's.

The charity helps support families, parents, carers and children with Down Syndrome through advice and support, and as a group ensures that children living with Down Syndrome are given access to services they need.

Anthony Thomas, chairman of the Swansea Bay Construction Support Group, said: "The evening was once again a fantastic success – bringing promising young talent together to be recognised for their hard work and dedication. The Swansea Bay Construction Support Group Awards has allowed us to not only reward the hard work of the apprentices who work for our members but has also allowed us to spread awareness of the opportunities available to young individuals within construction, and the benefits of choosing this industry. It is the icing on the cake that we have also been able to raise a significant amount of money on the night for such a wonderful local charity."



The two Cyfle-placed apprentices were Kian Hughes, apprentice bricklayer placed with Vaughan Construction (pictured above), and Keaton Davies a technical apprentice placed with ASW Property Services (pictured below).



For more information on the Cyfle Shared Apprentice Scheme, contact us at: info@swrsa.co.uk | 01554 748181 | www.cyflebuilding.co.uk