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| Institution: University of Wales Trinity Saint David | | |
| Unit of Assessment: 31 | | |
| Title of case study: The Strata Florida Centre: heritage and economic regeneration | | |
| Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2000-2020 | | |
| Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit: | | |
| Name(s): | Role(s) (e.g. job title): | Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: |
| Professor David Austin | Professor of Archaeology | Oct 76 - Jun 16 Nov 18 - current |
| Professor Janet Burton | Professor of Medieval History | Oct 19 - current |
| Dr Jemma Bezant | Lecturer in Archaeology / Post-Doctoral Researcher | Jun 09 - Sept 12 Feb 19 - current |
| Dr Paul Stoker | Researcher | Feb 19 - current |
| Paul Everson | Researcher | Feb 19 - current |
| Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014-2020 | | |
| Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N | | |
| <p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Strata Florida, a former Cistercian Abbey with great spiritual presence, is a major religious site of great antiquity. A twenty-year project of research based at the historic monument has fed into a sustainable programme of conservation and economic regeneration in the Tregaron Ward of West Wales, a region of well-documented rural deprivation. The heritage development has been carried out by the Strata Florida Trust (spun off from the research programme) which has safeguarded the future of five historic buildings to create the Strata Florida Centre as an active business. The research has enhanced the spiritual meaning of Strata Florida as a sacred location, and raised the local, regional, national and international awareness of the importance and potential of Strata Florida's iconic place in the nation's history and culture. This has been further endorsed by the project being adopted as a site of world importance by the World Monuments Fund in 2016. The project has drawn down over £2 million of inward investment since 2014, contributing an estimated £4.42m GVA to regional development to one of the poorest regions in Europe. The work is therefore delivering on four impact areas: heritage conservation; heritage interpretation and development; community engagement; and economic regeneration.</p> | | |
| <p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Strata Florida (Abaty Ystrad Fflur), a former Cistercian Abbey and scheduled monument under Cadw guardianship, has long been an iconic site for Welsh historical identity, based on its role in nation building and production of early Welsh-language texts. Using the methodologies and discourses of archaeology, history and cultural studies an ongoing programme or research has been undertaken since 1999 investigating its long-term history and heritage up to the present day. When the research began, the known site was small and its time-period limited to the Middle Ages (i), and few other monastic sites and landscapes in Europe have been studied in such detail and in such a sustained manner with continuing programmes of field research built into its objectives. Likewise, only a few other major medieval sites in the UK have linked long-term and sustainable research formally and structurally to heritage development. Little research for example has been conducted on the meaning of monastic landscapes, their antecedents and successors, beyond the economic. Our focus therefore looks additionally at the emotional, social and sacred (metaphysical) aspects of their narratives. Based on this programme of research, in 2018 UWTSU researchers, Prof Austin (as P.I.), Prof Janet Burton (Co-I), Prof Ann Parry Owen (Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies) and Prof Emilia Jamrozak (University of Leeds Medieval Institute) were awarded a major grant of £926,212 from the AHRC on the subject of 'the sacred landscapes of medieval monasteries', the methodologies for which were essentially comparative (Strata Florida for Wales with the Abbey Cwm-hir Trust and Lincolnshire), multi-disciplinary (archaeology, history and architectural and literary studies) and theorised (focussing on cultural meaning).</p> | | |

Key research outcomes.

Research dating back to 2000 has now shown the ambition of the foundation: at over 120 acres, it is one of the largest known in Europe, most surviving as high-quality archaeology, a long-term resource to sustain future research there as a cornerstone of economic activity (iii). We now know also that the Cistercians built on an earlier monastery in a landscape sacred for 4000 years (ii, iii). We have also generated extensive data for creating a regional narrative of landscape development, environmental change and cultural interaction with the natural world (ii, iv, vi, ix). Since 1999, and the first publications in 2002, the underpinning programme of historical research, archaeological field programmes of survey and excavation on the Abbey and related monastic estate have: identified the extent and layout of the Abbey precincts (iii, vii); undertaken analysis of settlement changes up to the present day (iv, vi, ix); conducted landscape and environmental reconstruction over 4000 years (iv); undertaken analysis of material culture and wider connections (xi); established narratives of community history in partnership with local people (www.strataflorida.org.uk); contextualised Strata Florida within the European monastic experience (v); completed analysis of post-Dissolution transformation through gentry agency and undertaken consideration of the place of Strata Florida in Welsh history (v); and undertaken comparative analysis of Abbey Cwm-hir in Powys and a monastic landscape in Lincolnshire (viii). This is underpinning the development of the site and its historic landscapes and environments as a major centre for visitors and long-term education, including research. It also enables engagement with other conservation bodies and national strategies for sustainable environments and economies.

UKRI Landscape Decisions Programme

The importance of the research and its impact programme is evidenced as the AHRC funded project is a constituent project in the UKRI Landscape Decisions Programme, a network of 59 interrelated research projects with teams working across multiple disciplines in institutions across the UK. All the teams share the goal of delivering better, evidence-based decisions within UK landscapes through research collaboration with policy, business, and land management partners to work towards a decision-making framework that will inform how land is used. Working in the New Thinking and Communities Strand, the Sacred Landscapes Project has examined the concept of social and perceptual meanings which have cohered around the places created for religious and sacred periods and the world they inhabited over long periods of time. Its chosen methodologies began with the reconstruction of past landscapes at key temporal points to plot the dynamics of physical change and the development of human practice within them. This is being done for three specific landscapes associated with Cistercian and other medieval monasteries: Strata Florida and Abbey Cwm-hir in central Wales; and seven monasteries along the western edge of the Lincolnshire Limewoods. The research has conducted comparisons between lowland and highland landscapes, between pre-state and state polities and their institutions, and between English and Welsh perceptions in the context of colonialization and European superstructures in order to explore differences in landscape perception and use beyond the simply economic and into long-term embedded understandings of land and its role in identity and self-worth.

3. References to the research

- i. Austin, D. 2013 'The archaeology of monasteries in Wales and the Strata Florida Project', in Burton, J & Stober, K. (eds) *Monastic Wales, New Approaches*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 3-20
- ii. Bezant, J. 2013 'The medieval grants to Strata Florida Abbey: mapping the agency of lordship', in Burton, J & Stober, K. (eds) *Monastic Wales, New Approaches*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 73-88
- iii. Austin, D. 2018, 'Strata Florida: a former Welsh Cistercian Abbey and its future', in Kerr, J., Jamroziak, E. & Stober, K. *Monastic Life in the Medieval British Isles*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 53-68
- iv. Austin, D. 2019, 'Y Filltir Sgwâr: mapping the history of local land in a Welsh heartland', in Comeau, R. & Seaman (eds), A. *Living off the Land: Agriculture in Wales c. 400 to 1500 AD*, Oxford: Windgather Press, 112-29

- v. Burton, J. 2019 'Authority and conflict at the Cistercian abbey of Strata Florida', *Welsh Historical Review*, 29.3, 377-407
- vi. Austin, D. and Bezant, J. 2019, 'The medieval landscapes of Cardiganshire', in *The Cardiganshire County History*, volume 2: the Middle Ages Austin, D. 2013 'An aura of *hiraeth*: Strata Florida', in Bowen, H.V. *Buildings and Places in Welsh History*, Llandydsul: Gomer, 51-58
- vii. Everson, P. & Stocker, D. 2020 'Saucepans and saints? The sacred and the mundane in forest landscapes', *Landscapes*, 19.1 (2018), 25-42 ISSN 1446 2035
- viii. Austin, D. 2016, 'Reconstructing the upland landscapes of medieval Wales', *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, 165, 1-20
- ix. Austin, D., Evans, R., Huckin, P. & Jones, C. 2019, *Ysbryd Ystrad Fflur*, Tregaron: Gwasg Gwynfil

Research grants

- x. AHRC. The sacred landscapes of medieval monasteries: an inter-disciplinary study of meaning embedded in space and production (AH/R005842/1). 2018-2021 £926,212
- xi. European Council: Rural Development Programme, 2011-2014. *Heritage Landscape* £177,136
- xii. Leverhulme Foundation. Post-Doctoral Fellowship. 2011-12. £25,000
- xiii. World Monuments Fund. 2018. Post-doc placement from Yale University. £8000
- xiv. European Science Foundation Exploratory Workshop, *Monasteries in the Shadow of Empire*, £19,000

Heritage Grants (as detailed in Part 3). 2006 – 2013. £252k. 2014 -2020. £1.2m

4. Details of the impact

The Strata Florida Project commenced in 2006, building on research undertaken at UWTSO by the Project director, Prof. Austin, which identified that there was the potential for the development of a high-quality and multi-period narrative which could underpin major impact through heritage development (see Consultants' reports). The long-term research and business plan set the objectives of establishing a new entity, the Strata Florida Centre, which since 2016 has delivered impacts in four interdependent programmes of work: **1)** heritage conservation, not only for the historic archeology of the Abbey and its historic environment, but also primarily, for the purchase and conservation of Mynachlog Fawr, comprising an at-risk group of redundant historic buildings, including a gentry house (grade II*) which began life in the later 12th century as the Abbey's refectory and four outbuildings (grade II) immediately adjacent to the historic monument itself. The historic buildings, now purchased and undergoing a programme of preservation / restoration are developing facilities and resources for: **2)** economic regeneration, **3)** heritage interpretation and development, and **4)** community engagement. While these outcomes been developed over the whole life of the related projects, the impacts detailed below related to those which have occurred since August 2013, subsequent to which saw the launch of the heritage project with a clear and sustainable strategic programme.

Mynachlog Fawr and the Strata Florida Trust.

In 2006, in order to acquire and conserve Mynachlog Fawr, Prof. Austin established, under his chairmanship, the Strata Florida Trust as a charitable company (number: 1117469) legally independent of the University, although its Board of Trustees has strongly reflected the close working relationship between the two who have worked closely to deliver the work programmes. This work has focused on using the underpinning research to establish the national historic importance of the site with national and international heritage agencies, government bodies and charities, thereby establishing the case for investment in the site. In this respect the Strata Florida Trust has, since 2014, established partnerships and/or the support of the following research funders, heritage bodies and administrative authorities: AHRC (2018), Cadw (the Welsh Government's historic environment service), the World Monument Fund (2016), Ceredigion County Council / Welsh Government (2018), the Princes Foundation (2018), National Heritage Lottery Fund (2020), Cambrian Heritage Regeneration Trust / Ashley Family Foundation (2015), the Allchurches Trust (2019) and private benefactors (2016). The support of

these bodies has secured over £2m in capital and revenue funding enabling the Trust to acquire Mynachlog Fawr in 2016 and commence conservation of the buildings. Support has included private benefactor £308,000 for acquisition of the buildings (2016), £160,000 from the Rural Communities Development Fund (Ceredigion County Council) and matched funding for restoration and conversion of the Beudy (2018), at total of £178,000 from the World Monuments Fund and Heritage Lottery Fund for the Ty Pair conservation and conversion (2020), £70,000 from the Laura Ashley Family Foundation / Cambrian Heritage Regeneration Trust for purchase, conservation and Trust cost (2015, 2020), £155,000 from the Princes Foundation for additional support for Beudy Project, a third Options Appraisal report and Business Plan, conservation Management Plan add Condition and Buildings Surveys (2018-19). Further support of £75,000 has been secured from the European Union and Ceredigion County Council LEADER programme for a Community Engagement Officer, and from the Allchurches Trust (£177,000) for 3-years funding for an Archaeology Summer School. Other donations of £20,000 were secured for events in 2017.

Heritage conservation.

While the overarching heritage and economic imperatives for this support and funding are for the furtherment of research, teaching, training, cultural performance and regional development through tourism, the immediate and urgent objective was to save the buildings, in particular the grade II* gentry house as part of the historic monument itself, from further deterioration (surveys undertaken during 2008 and 2012, funded with £64,000 from Architectural Heritage Fund; Ceredigion County Council; Welsh Government and the Princes Regeneration Trust had identified that all the buildings were severely at risk). Work with consultants was therefore undertaken during 2018-19 to create a programme of conservation, including both Fabric and Condition Surveys and a Conservation Management Plan. While all the buildings have now been stabilised and protected from immediate further decay, restoration of one of the buildings (Y Beudy) was completed in 2019 for use as an office, meeting, exhibition and research space. Further support, funding and business planning was secured for the further development of the site during 2020 as set out below, with work on the second Grade II listed building (Tŷ Pair) commencing in Sept 2020 with the grants from the World Monuments Fund (the first project they have ever supported in Wales) and Heritage Lottery Fund. The Trust will be conserving and repairing the building to create a free-to-enter space telling the story of the farm through the “Mynachlog Fawr in 30 objects” exhibition. Featuring a variety of objects and documents from the farmhouse and farm buildings, it will provide the opportunity for visitors of all ages to discover and engage with the social history of the house and community. While the full launch of the Strata Florida centre is not planned prior to 2023 (and has been delayed by the Covid 19 pandemic), the centre will form the base for Heritage Skills Training and other related training delivered with a range of external groups from primary to post-graduate level. However, the business planning and support required to see the launch of the centre has been established as of 2020, with strategic partnerships in place for the heritage interpretation and development with the National Library of Wales, the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales and the Prince’s Foundation, and full working relations with Cadw, the National Museum of Wales, Ceredigion County Council, the Strata Florida Community Council and a number of community organisations and individuals. To this end, the three remaining buildings will be restored and put to use over the next two to three years as museum, residential and public events venue.

Economic Regeneration

As noted, the work to date has secured the future of five historically important buildings and enhanced the spiritual meaning of Strata Florida as a sacred location, it has also raised the local, regional and Welsh national, as well as international, awareness of the importance and potential of Strata Florida’s iconic place in the nation’s history and culture. This has been further endorsed by the whole project being adopted as a site of world importance by the World Monuments Fund while Cadw has now recognised the site as one of the ten most important historic monuments in Wales. While these are important in their own right, the creation of the centre where this will be celebrated and converted into sustainable economic activity has, since 2016, had important economic benefits for Ceredigion, which ranks as one of the most deprived

areas in the UK, and indeed Europe. As detailed in Eurostat figures, West Wales has been classified as a struggling region defined as areas with a GDP per head of the population worth 75% or less of the EU average. Since 2014, the Strata Florida Trust has used the research to engage with public agencies involved in the regional development of tourism and infrastructure, and is included in the Mid Wales Regional Plan for Targeted Regeneration (in consideration).

Likewise the Centre's business plan identifies 11 areas of income generation feeding into the local and regional economy including extensive use, as policy, of local providers, including conservation builders, local professional craftsmen with heritage skills, tourism and hospitality businesses shops, transport firms and other business outlets and implementation of commercial activities including an annual archaeological field school (AFS), and the appointment in 2019 of three members of staff. While the majority of the investment and economic impact since 2016 has been based on the heritage conservation, commercial and heritage activities have commenced with the AFS (3 seasons initially, with £177,000 from the Allchurches Trust and commercial income, but intended as an on-going programme). This is based on training and qualification for a next generation of field archaeologists needed for major infrastructure projects like HS2 in Britain for which there is a short-fall. Analysis by Cebr, undertaken for Historic England (*The heritage sector in England and its impact on the economy A report for Historic England*, October 2018), which is based on ONS' national accounting framework, suggest that for every £1 of GVA generated by the heritage sector, an additional £1.21 of GVA is supported in the wider economy through indirect and induced multiplier impacts of the sector. Indirect impacts are generated in the supply chains supporting the heritage sector, whilst induced impacts are generated when the direct and indirect (supply chain) employees spend their earnings on domestic goods and services. Using this model, the £2m direct investment into Ceredigion has contributed an estimated GVA of £4.42m to regional development.

Community Engagement

A central strategy of the Trust's work, upon which much finance, support has been based, is the importance of work with the local community, through outreach work, partnerships with local schools and support for local heritage sites and assets. In this respect, heritage-led regeneration initiatives undertaken have used the heritage assets to help stimulate wider environmental, economic and community regeneration. The AFS for example also works closely with Operation Nightingale, Breaking Ground Heritage and others on making it accessible for military rehabilitation, disability and disadvantage clients, providing an important contribution to well-being. To ensure these benefits are maximised, the project has appointed a Community Officer (2019-21, in the first instance) and has undertaken extensive and ongoing engagement with local and regional communities through open days, events, personal and other interaction, such as the creation of a Community Liaison Group. The project has also worked closely with local primary schoolchildren and their teachers through 'the Abbey School', raising their awareness of their own history and heritage, promoted awareness of the new narratives and the site's heritage value through over 100 lectures and major public events on site, including the creative arts (about two-thirds in the current REF period). It has produced public access material including web-site, hard print, guided tours and other activities, all helping to build interest and engagement in the overall objectives, and made regular appearance in national media (including Times and Guardian and several television programmes and news items).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

1. Strata Florida Trust, Chairman.
2. Ceredigion County Council, CEO.
3. Prince's Foundation, Director of Projects.
4. World Monuments Fund UK, CEO.
5. Community Liaison Group Chairman.
6. Strata Florida/Ystrad Fflur, Conservation Management Plan. Issue 03 – September 2019
7. Strata Florida Options Appraisal & Outline Business Plan
8. Strata Florida Trust. <https://www.stratafloridatrust.org/>
9. WMF. <https://wmf.org.uk/?s=strata+florida>