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Landscapes of Faith



What are the projects aims?

The landscape of South Wales is teeming with stories, legends, sites, history and lives reflecting a diverse and rich heritage of faith from:

- pre-history
- the Roman occupation
- the age of the Celtic Saints
- the medieval period
- the rise of non-conformism
- the great world faith traditions that have come to modern Wales

Landscapes of Faith brings to life the 2013 Welsh Government Faith Tourism Action Plan for Wales:

- conducting a community treasure hunt to discover and celebrate the landscapes of faith for communities and visitors championing the vast

- riches of history, heritage, stories, communities and the offer and welcome today.
- Delivering an online digital map with the outstanding offers of the landscapes of faith in South Wales
- Demonstrating that a community facilitation led approach can produce great marketing stories and connect the visitor offers with real communities, real people, real enthusiasm and real welcomes.

How were these aims achieved?

We invited communities, heritage sites, schools and the many different faith traditions to get involved in a community treasure hunt to explore their local treasures in Wales'

landscape of faith – then in June 2021 the project took to the road, **making four exciting festival journeys across South Wales, with 30 days of non-stop discovery and community celebration.**

Now that the Covid-19 emergency is coming to an end and people are more confident to come together again, and travel and host each other – we're preparing to:

- complete the project with a celebratory gathering of people from the many communities that took part
- launch at that gathering an exhibition of photographs of the Landscapes of Faith in South Wales taken for the project by international award-winning photographer [Kiran Ridley](#).

- launch the Landscapes of Faith online map with 12 major offers in the landscapes of faith, with dozens of smaller offers connecting communities, places and offers in the landscape

Who was involved?

Community in Tregaron & Strata Florida Trust; The ancient church of St David at Llanddewi Brefi; The town of Llandovery; Community at Dyfynnog; Peace Mala – Wales' world peace mission; Community at Port Talbot; Margam Abbey; Village of Laleston; Town of Llantwit Major; St Illtud's Church; Villages and schools of Onllwyn and Banwen; Community of Penrhys; Community at Porth; Community and town of Merthyr Tydfil; Town of Pontypridd; Community in the Lynfi and Ogmore Valleys; Community in Hay-on-Wye; Community of Llangors; Town of Brecon; Communities in Bristol; Town of Caldicot; Community in Abergavenny; Community in Pontypool; The town of Caerleon; Community in Newport; Muslim Council of Wales; Ty Krishna; Muslim Council of Wales; Community and schools in Fairwater, Cardiff; Community in Whitchurch, Cardiff; Town of Penarth; Community, town and schools in Barry

With partnerships including: Merthyr Borough Council; Onllwyn Community Council; Run Wales; Vale of Glamorgan

Council; The New Room, Bristol

Commissioning work from:

- [Kizzy Crawford](#) – leading Welsh singer/songwriter
- [Bragod](#) – international Welsh music duo
- [Kiran Ridley](#) – award winning international photographer

Where did you go for help and advice?

We scoped and delivered the project with help and advice from:

- CADW
- RCAHMW
- Peace Mala
- Muslim Council of Wales
- The Diocese of Llandaff
- The Methodist Church
- Onllwyn Community Council
- The Hindu Council of Wales

What has been the greatest achievement so far?

Ha! What a great question....

The greatest achievement so far has been the many communities coming together to make a [30 day festival in June 2021](#) celebrating and exploring the landscapes of faith in South Wales. It was an extraordinary coming together – every day for a whole month we made journeys, discovered places, heard stories, and ran festival events.

- We created a community carnival to re-stage the

- [kidnapping of St Patrick](#) with a troop of real Roman soldiers and the village rugby club in Banwen.
- Leading Welsh singing sensation Kizzy Crawford has written a new song (to be launched with the new digital map) celebrating Tydfil, the young woman who's martyrdom names the famous town of Merthyr Tydfil
- With [RunWales](#) we created a women's fun run through the beautiful Vale of Merthyr and created a special celebration ceramic medal of the town's Tydfil Celtic cross.
- First Minister of Wales Mark Drakeford attended a [community Zoom event](#) in lockdown celebrating the village of Banwen's beautiful claim to be the birthplace of St Patrick and remembering across Wales all victims of human trafficking.
- Barry school children told the story of the Celtic saint Barruc, who gives his name to the town, and in a community re-enactment on the beach at Barry Island they pulled out of the sea a wonderful 2 metre salmon
- We held a festival day in Caerleon with two full-sized crucifixion crosses in the town marking Wales's earliest Christian

- martyrs, Julius and Aaron
- The Landscapes of faith inspired the creation of a new cultural venture in Llantwit Major, the home of Britain's earliest centre of learning in the 6th century. [The New Library](#), opened during the festival will help develop the visitor offer to the town and unpack the heritage of the Celtic Christian traditions for community and churches.
- Landscapes of Faith project commissioned [music and performance](#) from the Welsh artists Bragod and the music and performance featured centrally in the work nominated and exhibited for this year's Turner Prize – Britain's most famous modern art award
- The festival activity list goes on and on....

And the biggest challenge?

Aaarggghh!!!! The biggest challenge was the Covid-19 pandemic and the international health, economic and cultural emergencies that have developed from it.

The project was devised as a piece of community facilitation, taking place with real conversations, with real people, in real places, to foster excitement and discovery of what local landscapes of faith hold for both locals and visitors.

We'd planned six months of community facilitation in the spring summer and autumn of 2020. This activity fell victim to the pandemic, lockdowns, legal restrictions, cultural anxiety and losses of public confidence.

We continued working by phone and online, expanding our community conversations, and were able to launch and deliver the 30 day touring Landscapes of Faith Festival through the whole of June 2021, making four stunning journeys, meeting with communities across South Wales and uncovering a fabulous offering of visitor treasures and community welcomes.

Any tips for those setting up a similar project?

This sort of project vision and person-centred facilitation really works when you are looking for marketing narratives that connect to real communities. We've said hello, enquired, listened and explored first – and then begun to shape the offer afterwards. And really lovely things, new things with great potential and reach, have emerged as a result.

Anyone working in faith heritage, either from the faith organisation side - churches, mosques, synagogues and temples - or from the statutory body side - Cadw, The Royal Commission, Museums, local authorities and Visit Wales – can take heart that the general public and communities warm very much to conversations

about the landscapes of faith, and the faith heritage stories in their area, and the offer for visitors.

We found that churches in general lacked cultural confidence in their heritage and wider social contexts, and much of the community energy in the project came from community members and local organisations outside churches. This is tremendously heartening for those wanting to make further developments in faith tourism. We noted that people across the culture have a significant hunger for interfaith comings together which share and offer hospitality.

The Christian churches and other faith organisation we have engaged with and who did become involved in the project are doing pioneering and fabulous work. They are real beacons of inspiration and hope to the communities and to society.

What's next for your project?

Covid-19 restrictions are now lifting and public confidence for travel and coming together is returning. We'll now be bringing people together to:

- Launch of the new branded website with the new digital map of all the offers uncovered
- Launch an exhibition of photographs of the Landscape of Faith by international award winning photographer

- Kiran Ridley.

