

Open Doors
Drysau Agored



2009

Opening doors

Tips for organisers of Open Doors events

 European Heritage Days
Dyddiau Treftadaeth Ewropeaidd

access
interpretation
education
publicity
marketing



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Introduction

This online handbook is an updated version of the advice we have provided to Open Doors organisers on interpretation and management issues. It draws on our own experience and on that of the UK partners who work with us to deliver the wider programme of which Open Doors is a part – European Heritage Days.

It is an important aspect of the ethos of the programme that a pro-active approach is taken to interpretation. Particularly if a site is usually open, an Open Doors event should present a different experience to an everyday visit.

It's also important that organisers understand the importance of working with their local media. We will inform all national, regional and local outlets and broadcast-

ers; and we will place a series of national press advertisements. We cannot, however, manage the publicity for over two hundred events.

It's therefore essential that organisers produce their own publicity material and contact local newspapers and broadcasters with tailored stories.

In this way our joint efforts should ensure as much exposure as possible for Open Doors events.

Finally, this handbook is a work in progress. We'd like to hear from you about your experiences, so that we can pass on good ideas to others!

Scotland *Doors Open Days* (Scottish Civic Trust): <http://www.doorsopendays.org.uk/>

England *Heritage Open Days* (English Heritage): <http://www.heritageopendays.org.uk>

Northern Ireland *European Heritage Days* not yet online for 2009

UK and Ireland web links: www.heritagedays.net

Access and disability issues

Open Doors events are open to all without discrimination. The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 aims to reduce discrimination against the disabled. Public service providers are under a requirement to ensure that the service they provide is accessible to the disabled and is not lower in standard or on worse terms. Most public buildings taking part in Open Doors will already be aware of this need and have taken, or will be taking, steps to ensure compliance.

This does not mean that someone opening a private house to the public for one or two days as part of the event has to undertake alterations to their property.

However, we do need you to think through any issues and opportunities that may apply to your event and to consider how you might help people with different disabilities to enjoy themselves.

For example, what level of wheelchair access is available? If there will be problems for the physically disabled please tell us so that we can mention this in our literature. You should also make any difficulties clear in your own publicity. Please allow guide dogs to accompany the sight im-

paired. If possible, make arrangements for disabled parking.

You are under no obligation to provide toilet facilities but if you can make provision for disabled toilet access, then do so.

There may be ways in which you can help those with sensory disabilities understand more easily the site they are visiting. Give some thought therefore to how you might provide aids to interpretation for those with a sight or a hearing impairment.

We recognise the public spirit underlying your participation in Open Doors. We do not expect you to go to unreasonable lengths or costs to facilitate interpretation or access. There may well be some sites where it is impossible to make special access provision. This should not stop you taking part as long as it's clear to potential visitors that this is the case.

But please give some thought to how you could help as many people as possible to take part in and enjoy your event.

Interpretation and education

SOME BASIC PRINCIPLES

- Information is not interpretation. Interpretation includes information but goes beyond it. Interpretation is revelation based on information.
- Keep your interpretation simple and where possible, fun.
- If trying to attract school groups, liaise with the school or teacher to get a sense of what pupils want and need.
- Interpretation is about people. Consider how you can best communicate the ideas and themes associated with your site to the people who might visit.

Participation in Open Doors means that all events should incorporate a way of interpreting the building or site to visitors. After all, you want other people, whether members of your community or others to appreciate and take pride in a place you love. Interpretation does not mean a significant cost outlay. At a simple level, interpretation can be offered through a guide, a leaflet, an exhibition, or a display board.. Simple and cheap is often best, and will be the only reasonable option for many organisers. Some, however, will want to try something more sophisticated, and may incorporate ancillary activities that contribute to visitor understanding and enjoyment. ALL MATERIAL SHOULD CARRY THE OPEN DOORS LOGO SO THAT IT IS INSTANTLY RECOGNISABLE AS BEING PART OF THE EUROPEAN HERITAGE DAYS PROGRAMME IN WALES.

Whatever strategy you choose, bear in mind the points that follow.

SIMPLE AND FUN

The objective of interpretation is to communicate to the visitor the significance of a place or an object so that through understanding it better sh/e can appreciate more readily their heritage and environment, and be encouraged to take a positive attitude to conservation. Use language that everyone understands, including children. Try to provoke interest rather than be didactic. Simple and fun is better than detailed and boring.

Try to tailor what you offer to the kind of visitor you are likely to get and to their probable expectations. Will people who live locally have different interests to those who have come from a distance? Teachers know that people learn best through active experience. They remember what they hear and read less well than what they see and do and discover for themselves. Asking people questions may be more stimulating than simply telling them something! And be ready to respond to your visitors' questions — local history and architectural heritage captivate a wide but often uninformed audience.

ENGAGING CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

There are some specific opportunities to interest children and young people as well as adults. You may be lucky enough to promote a European aspect to your event. If you have a twin town, for instance, find out what's going on there! You might be able to swap publicity material, photographic exhibitions, even exploit internet or web cam links. If you are involving local schools in Open Doors events, this kind of activity might be

especially rewarding; they may well have well-established links that you could exploit.

You might want to introduce your visitors to particular themes or points of interest and focus your information and activities on these, for example

- architectural history, style, detail, language
- function and form
- use of materials
- fixtures and decoration
- family history
- important events
- local historical documents
- comparisons with other local buildings or sites
- conservation and preservation
- risks to the heritage
- the relationship between your site and its context, for instance the local history and geography of your community, landscape and economy, social history and building history.

If you anticipate or are encouraging a significant number of younger visitors, you could get them actively involved in interpreting your site by organising a photographic, modelling, sketching or essay-writing competition. Children can find out a lot by analysing a building, its details, materials and spaces graphically. This would also be a good way to create a publicity opportunity for your event.

IDEAS FOR YOU

Based on these insights here are some specific suggestions to supplement the obvious such as leaflets, and displays.

- **Audio guides** are relatively simple to prepare using mp3 players and a simple recording facility.
- **Computer-based displays** there is a use for Powerpoint© beyond the sales report! This software can be used to provide a simple repeating display on a laptop or desktop. It can be used creatively as the basis of an interactive activity. Presentations can be published to CD/DVD and given/sold to visitors. You can also burn collections of photographs and guides to disk.
- **Tactile opportunities** Hands-on activities which involve holding, feeling, describing –

even tasting – objects can really engage kids and grown-ups. Period food can be fun (and nutritious). Puzzles and quizzes can be built around objects. Link such ideas to drawing and modelling.

- **Quizzes and puzzles** based on an exploration of your site can be linked to worksheets which invite visitors of all ages to observe and think about what they see. Children especially can be stimulated through opportunities to describe and compare, draw, photograph and make notes.

Storytelling is especially fun for younger children. They also enjoy face-painting. Think about providing activity tables with pens, paints, paper, plasticine, etc.

OPEN DOORS AND THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM

Teachers, especially primary teachers, may be able to make use of your event to contribute to the curriculum in their schools. A visit to a historic or even a modern building offers plenty of opportunity both for subject specific and cross-curricular work. We offer a few ideas here which should help you if you are setting out to involve schools formally in your event.

Remember, though, that Open Doors days come at the very start of the school year. Teachers are often just getting to know their classes. Moreover, you will need to open your site on a weekday if you aim to attract school visits. But your event can be a trigger for a relationship with a local school or schools that develops over the year, in which your site becomes a fully thought through curriculum resource. Here are some very basic thoughts about the relevance of sites old and new to learning. Remember, too, that in Wales there is the very specific opportunity for a teacher to make use of a site in the context of the Curriculum Cymreig, which can help pupils to:

- understand and celebrate the distinctive quality of living and learning in Wales in the twenty-first century
- identify their own sense of Welshness
- feel a heightened sense of belonging to their local community and country.

It can also help to foster in pupils an understand-

ing of an outward-looking and international Wales

English is about communication, orally, through writing, and through building listening skills.

A teacher may want to involve a class in group discussion about what they have seen, in writing activities, such as short stories or descriptive work.

They may want to introduce students to new vocabulary, to organise research exercises, or stimulate children to make oral presentations about their visit and what they have seen and found out.

Buildings give lots of opportunities, too, to build and develop number and geometry skills. They can be measured and planned; they contain interesting shapes and forms; individual features can be counted and drawn; the volume and area of different spaces can be studied and compared, and related to past and present use.

Scientific understanding can be developed through observing and learning about properties of materials, natural and man-made, or by thinking about a building's relationship to and impact on its environment, and the needs of the people who use it. Comparing several buildings in this way can be especially interesting. Engineering aspects, such as the way a building works in terms of its structural elements, and the forces of tension and compression that are at work within the structure could also be relevant.

If a teacher wants to focus on geography or history, any building offers a great deal of potential. A visit to a building can be exploited through map work, and recording through drawing and photography. Building location, siting, form, function and use (past and present) can be studied and related to the social patterns and history of the locality. Types of building can be compared locally, or by getting children to think about how buildings of the same type may differ from one country to another. Why would particular types of materials have been chosen by its builders? Where would they have come from? What factors would have influenced these choices? How and why have buildings changed? What can be found out, through the study of documents or visual sources, about a building over the years?

Teachers could involve children in making comparisons between old and new buildings. They have opportunities, too, to introduce children to elements of architectural history, style and detail. This is a rich resource through which to address curriculum orders for art and design, through

sketching, photography, modelling and other media; studying craft traditions and techniques; or analysing issues such as space, form and context. Needless to say, investigating a building is a fantastic opportunity for a cross-curricular project.

RESOURCES

English Heritage, who manage European Heritage Days in England, publish useful Teacher's pack for those who wish to build visits to Heritage Days sites into their schemes of work. There is a useful and imaginative section on how a school itself can become an exhibition and performance space for a Heritage Days event and thereby reach out to its community. The England Organiser's guide is also useful.

<http://www.heritageopendays.org.uk/education/resources/teachers-pack/>

Engaging places is a website supporting learning through buildings and places.

<http://www.engagingplaces.org.uk/home>

Resources explaining and developing the ***Curriculum Cymreig*** are online at:

<http://accac.org.uk/eng/content.php?mID=271>

Publicity and marketing

SOME BASIC PRINCIPLES

- Take some time to consider how you are going to publicise Open Doors at your site.
- Don't assume just because you've got some great idea for your Open Doors event that the press will come knocking on your door asking for a story. You need to go to them!
- Make it easy for the local press. Write a press release!
- Develop a story on which members of the press can latch on to. Is there a local character who can offer a unique insight to your property? Are you opening up a part of the building not normally on show? Is there something new or newly restored that you want to publicise? Does your site have a USP (unique selling point)? If so, what is it, and how can you maximise its potential?
- Reflect on how Open Doors went. Is there any mileage in offering a follow-up story to local press to say what happened, how it went or something else coming up at your site?
- Don't underestimate the value of good word of mouth publicity to get the message across about your Open Doors event, locally. Tell everyone you know and ask them to do the same.

Judging how many visitors to expect is very tricky. The number you attract will be influenced by the nature of your event and the kind of property involved. But it will also be influenced by the quality of the publicity that you generate. Some properties will interest connoisseurs, and visitor numbers may be quite small; others have the potential to attract much larger numbers, especially if there are ancillary activities or attractions for families. A well-advertised and interesting church

could attract several hundred visitors over the weekend. A small historic home might get half a dozen – but these are likely to be extremely keen. The Civic Trust for Wales will issue several press releases in August and September which will give information on the open doors programme. They will go to a long list of newspapers and other media outlets. We will also buy advertising space in the Welsh national press, and distribute posters and programmes to libraries, tourism information points, and the sites that are taking part. We will undertake a series of approaches to raise recognition of the open doors logo and ethos. The UK-wide coverage of Heritage Days also ensures strong interest from national daily and Sunday newspapers.

WORKING WITH THE PRESS

Getting the local press involved is up to you! While we will do all we can to ensure that Visit Wales, the Welsh press and media have full information about the programme for Wales, you must consider how you promote your event(s) locally. *Remember that you are responsible for this. You are much better placed to ensure this is done effectively than we are!* Our experience, and that of our Heritage Days partners, is that good local coverage is obtained when organisers get involved and send out their own press releases, rather than just rely on our own. The biggest reason for sites failing to attract visitors is poor local marketing. Local newspapers are ideal for making sure that the full details of your event are publicised.

The obvious way to get information into a newspaper (and don't forget the free sheets, they're

hungry for copy to pad out the advertising) is a press release. Our model (below) may be helpful but will need to be tailored to your activity and its special features. Don't forget to include the Open Doors logo on your press release which will identify your event as taking part in a national and international programme.

You will benefit if you ring up editors or newsrooms to tell them a release is coming. It can be helpful to offer a picture to illustrate a story, but even better if you can sell a photo opportunity! If you send in a press release and get no response, follow it up with a telephone call. Personal contact of this kind helps to ensure full and accurate reporting. Moreover, well-targeted publicity promotes not only your event but also recognition of your organisation.

Try the same technique with local radio stations; don't wait for them to come to you. And if you're really daring, try getting hold of the editors for the morning and afternoon shows on Radio Wales and see if you can get mentioned on-air.

TARGETING VISITORS

There are other ways to target visitors — whether from within your community or further afield. Contact local schools and organisations, such as the WI. Advertise in places such as leisure centres and libraries, even in your neighbourhood shops and supermarkets. Other good places include chemists and doctors' surgeries. Ask permission to put your material up.

Our posters will help you get your message across. They are designed for you to place the details of your event(s) in the space provided. You can also make your own posters but please remember to add the following endorsement: "Open Doors Days, supported by Cadw — Welsh Historic Monuments and organised by the Civic Trust for Wales" and display the Open Doors logo. If you have a web site, place information on it and include a link to our web pages at www.civictrust-wales.org and to the UK gateway site for European Heritage Days at www.heritagedays.net.

MODEL PRESS RELEASE

This should be on your headed paper, A4 size; give it a snappy title...

Opening doors in Llareggub

Llareggub/our attraction is featured prominently in this year's Open Doors days, which take place on weekends every September as part of European Heritage Days.

Our organisation invites everyone, local people and visitors, to discover our attraction's name.

Open Doors days give everyone the chance to explore historic buildings and sites free of charge — especially those not normally open to the general public. Our organisation has joined in and will not be making an entry charge to see our attraction, which will be open on [dates/times]...

European Heritage Days are an initiative of the Council of Europe. The event is co-ordinated by the Civic Trust for Wales whose partners organise parallel events in England and Scotland. The initiative was launched in 1991 and last year over 20 million people visited participating sites in Europe.

Describe your attraction in detail. What will visitors be able to see? Are there any linked events? What information will they be given? By guides? In writing? In an exhibition?

Describe any special features of your event: Refreshments? Craft displays?

Says AB (spokesperson/chair of our society/organisation), "I'm delighted that our organisation has been able to open our attraction to the public in this way.

This is a really special opportunity to see a part of Llareggub's hidden heritage."

Our attraction will be open to the public at the following times... insert details. Mention any special issues (difficult disabled access, for example).

Over 200 properties will be open across Wales during the Open Doors weekends, amongst many others in the British Isles and thousands across Europe. Full information can be found on the Internet at www.civictrustwales.org or www.heritagedays.net.

Editors :

For further information contact your contact name(s) on your telephone number.

For further information about Open Doors/European Heritage Days in Wales contact Matthew Griffiths or Jo Coles of the Civic Trust for Wales on 029 20 343336 (24 hour answering machine) .
Online : www.civictrustwales.org or www.heritagedays.net.

A successful event

SOME BASIC PRINCIPLES

- Think about how you can make your Open Doors event different. Consider different options for interpretation – a trail, a guided tour, activities, a performance, handling objects, storytelling, art and craft activities etc.
- If you've taken part in Open Doors before reflect on what you did, what went well and what wasn't so successful. If you have any feedback from before, consider that. If people are expecting you to open your clock tower, for example, then give them what they want! But remember, you might be able to give them something else in addition.
- Remember, heritage is about people. Consider who might come to your Open Doors. Does your venue particularly lend itself to family groups, schools or specialist interest groups. If so, take some time to think how they are best served.

POINTS TO CONSIDER

Pre-booking For some properties, for example small houses, or sites where there will be timed guided tours but visitors will not be allowed to walk around unaccompanied, you may want to organise a pre-booking system. A telephone number for bookings can be given to the Civic Trust for inclusion in the printed and online programme. Make sure it also features in your local publicity.

Providing visitor information You will need to give some thought to how you are going to inter-

pret your site or event. Visitors should be offered information that helps them understand the place they are visiting. There is a separate advice note on this topic, but at a minimum this can be done orally by someone who knows the site well.

Consider access and insurance issues Please consult our advice on access. Owners/occupiers of sites should notify their insurers that the property is taking part in Open Doors. All sites will be insured under the scheme organised by the Trust, with extensive public liability and employee/volunteer cover. Full details of this cover will be available separately online.

Risk assessment We strongly recommend doing a risk assessment of your property or planned activities. The aim is to identify risks and to take suitable and sufficient measures to minimise the likelihood of any harm or damage occurring. Examining and preventing risk is sensible. It may take up some of your time during the preparatory stages, but it may also spare you a lot of worry later on. For example, look for physical features or objects that could cause accidents or represent a hazard to the unwary, the young, the mobility impaired, and so on. Evaluate the extent of the risk these may represent and consider whether existing precautions are enough or whether additional mitigation measures are sensible.

In addition make sure there is a First Aid kit and a phone on site; that you operate a strict non-smoking policy; and that emergency escape routes are safe and effective for all.

Guides and stewards Consider designating volunteer helpers as guides and stewards. Stewards

concentrate on security and safety. They can help organise a queue; they can be asked to record visitor numbers; they should know how to evacuate the building in the unlikely event of an emergency.

Signage and parking Some visitors will be unfamiliar with your area. You can help them by providing a poster or roadside board to indicate your property (but check with the council's planning department if you are thinking of putting up signs on the public highway!). If you are providing parking please note that our insurance does not cover damage to parked cars. See our information on branding for further guidance.

Fundraising Open Doors events are a great way of raising cash for your organisation. But remember that (except in very special circumstances) entry must be free to visitors. You can place a donations box at an appropriate point and seek voluntary donations to help you with your costs or to help fund a specific cause. You can also sell merchandise such as postcards and publications. Providing refreshments is an excellent means of fundraising, but be careful about your investment in food and drink if you have not run this kind of event before and are unsure about numbers.

Recording visitors It is a good idea to keep a visitors' book so that people can record their impressions of your event. This can be very helpful in planning for future years. We would like to know reactions to your event as well! Please try also to record numbers (at least in round figures). We will send you a feedback form that will help us to assess the event across Wales and also give you the

chance to comment on the support we have given you.

Cancelling events Please make every effort to meet your commitment to participate. However, you may at the last moment have to change or cancel your arrangements. If you have previously contacted the media then tell them what has happened. If you have taken pre-bookings, contact those who have booked. If there is time, and you tell us of changed arrangements, we will include this information in our stop press distributions. Be aware that this is a very uncertain way of getting the news over, however! In the event of a cancellation you will ease the disappointment for visitors who turn up by having a representative at the site itself who can tell them of opportunities to visit other sites in the area. A personal touch of this kind will be appreciated.

Health and safety Have a basic medical kit available and keep a phone available in case of emergency. Consider the provision of signs and barriers if any areas of your site could be hazardous. Record accidents in a special book.

Theft Be sensible and make sure valuable items are locked away. You can use stewards for security as well as guides and you are within your rights to ban picture-taking if you think this could be a risk.