

# Opening time



**Open Doors Days this year will be taking place throughout September. Jo Coles offers an insight into the way this popular programme is developing.**

OPEN DOORS IS THE LARGEST annual free celebration of architecture and heritage in Wales. The programme gives the public free access to many new and exciting aspects of the built heritage. It draws new and

returning visitors to Wales, at the same time as we who live here get a chance to discover the history on our doorsteps.

Supported by Cadw, the Assembly Government's historic environment service, and organised by the Civic Trust for Wales, Open Doors Days enable visitors to discover Wales's special buildings and places, past and present, the opportunity to connect with the hidden heritage, and renew a sense of place and civic pride.

It's the largest volunteer event in the heritage sector,

**above** the Barber Surgeon at Denbigh Castle

**below** discovering Ruthin

and has a proven track record in encouraging community participation in the discovery and interpretation of our shared past. Taking part gives us all the chance to contribute to making better places and communities; the impact can be social and economic as much as cultural.

Open Doors is part of European Heritage Days; Wales is amongst forty-eight countries taking part every September. Our new logo, supporting advertising, marketing and insurance schemes can meet the needs of venues large and small in encouraging visitors and neighbours to take a fresh look at the seemingly familiar, or encounter aspects of the past that are being freshly revealed.

Whether you are a local authority, a charitable trust, a company, or an individual owner, Open Doors presents



an opportunity to showcase all that's best in our shared heritage.

Private houses, behind the scenes visits to museums and public buildings, archaeological sites, churches and chapels, guided walks and talks, and exciting new structures are all part of the mix. There's always scope for innovation: we'd love to hear your ideas for events and activities in this and future years.

In 2009, we're expanding the programme to cover activities throughout September. Events will usually be on weekends, but sites can take part at any time of the month – for the whole of September if you like! You can plan to welcome small, pre-booked groups for guided tours, or open your doors wide for unlimited access. We can advise you on what's best for your event.

We aim to have a taster of the programme, linked to other promotion, online by the end of May. We want to have the whole 2009 programme available by 1 August. We'd like registration forms, if possible, by 1 June.

We can offer you a wide range of posters, badges and banners to promote your event and build the Open Doors identity.

**Find out more at**  
[www.civictrustwales.org/ehd](http://www.civictrustwales.org/ehd)

**Derek Jones, who pioneered the event in Ruthin, invites civic societies and other voluntary groups to join the mission behind Open Doors Days**

IT'S APRIL. TIME TO BE planning this year's Open Doors project. If you haven't done this before, then just think of the possibilities: Open Doors can be a showcase for so much that civic societies and heritage groups stand for.

Open Doors Days invites people to look at a building, or explore a town.

It's a chance to feel the texture of an historic house, or church, courthouse or workplace; to walk around its rooms and discover their former uses, while thinking about the building's present and future.

Look round your city, town, or village.

There will be plenty of buildings you wish you could get rid of – from tower blocks to decrepit shopping parades.

But look twice: behind that shop façade there may well be medieval half-timbered rooms, which those who use the shop regularly fail to notice. Or there may be an interesting history – such and such a shop may have been successively a milliner's, a jeweller, a barber, a fishmonger (or a fish and chip shop), a pub, a betting shop.

Local people are fascinated by the history of shops, and you may well know of a local historian who has studied their ownership over the centuries, who is willing to take them on a conducted tour. I guarantee that once such a tour has started, the pied piper effect will come into play, (and there are many other themed tours that can be devised, almost certain to be popular).

It's not just the obvious sites – that are candidates for Open Doors – although it's a great opportunity for some paying at-



**above** St Margaret's Church, Roath, Cardiff **below** the Georgian interior of Bayvil church, near Nevern, Pembrokeshire

tractions to open free and show an unfamiliar face to visitors. Open Doors has a lot to offer the cathedral, the castle or the County Hall.

Imagination is key. We are in the same world here as the Open University, which offers courses to many who would not ordinarily dream of enrolling for a more conventional uni-

versity course. And, even more significantly, we are making a contribution to the idea of the open society, where all points of view are welcome, and we all have an interest in breaking down the barriers between individual people and institutions.

There are many more possibilities to Open Doors than are

immediately apparent – follow some of them up (newspaper offices? the industrial estate? a local college? the new micro brewery?) and you may find your own organisation transformed, and, even more importantly, that your fellow citizens are looking at your village, town or city with entirely fresh eyes.