

**CARDIGAN CASTLE: New era for historic site as castle finally opens its gates to the public**

# Celebrations as £12m Cardigan Castle project opens to public

THIS week marks one of the most exciting and important dates in Cardigan's recent history.

After years of campaigning and planning, and four years of hard graft on site, Cardigan Castle will finally open its doors to the public today, Wednesday.

It is a chance to finally see the results of the £12m restoration project which began in 2011, and has led to the creation of a modern heritage attraction designed to meet the needs of visitors today on the 900-year-old site.

Steeped in Welsh history, Cardigan Castle is among a handful of remaining stone castles built by Welsh princes and has strong links to well-known figures in Welsh medieval history.

Dating back to the 11th century, the Castle was the location of a festival hosted by Prince of Deheubarth Lord Rhys ap Gruffudd in 1176, an event that has become known as the first Eisteddfod in Wales.

The importance of the site cannot be underestimated.

In his foreword to the Castle in Crisis book, published by the Western Telegraph's sister newspaper the Tivy-side Advertiser as part of a lengthy campaign backing the fight to save the site, castle historian Glen Johnson said: "If it wasn't for the castle there would have been no Cardigan. It is as simple as that."

"As the castle's fortunes have blossomed, the town has prospered. The decline of the

castle has led to a decline of the town. The two are inextricably linked. Forever."

It has taken many years of hard work to get to where Cardigan Castle is today.

The opening is 12 years to the day that the historic site came into public ownership.

The purchase was made possible thanks to regeneration funding following the closure of the Dewhirst factory and downscaling of jobs at QinetiQ in Aberporth.

It followed an 18-month campaign in the Tivy-Side Advertiser as local people joined the fight to bring the castle into public ownership.

The keys were finally handed over in 2003.

But there was much hard work to do.

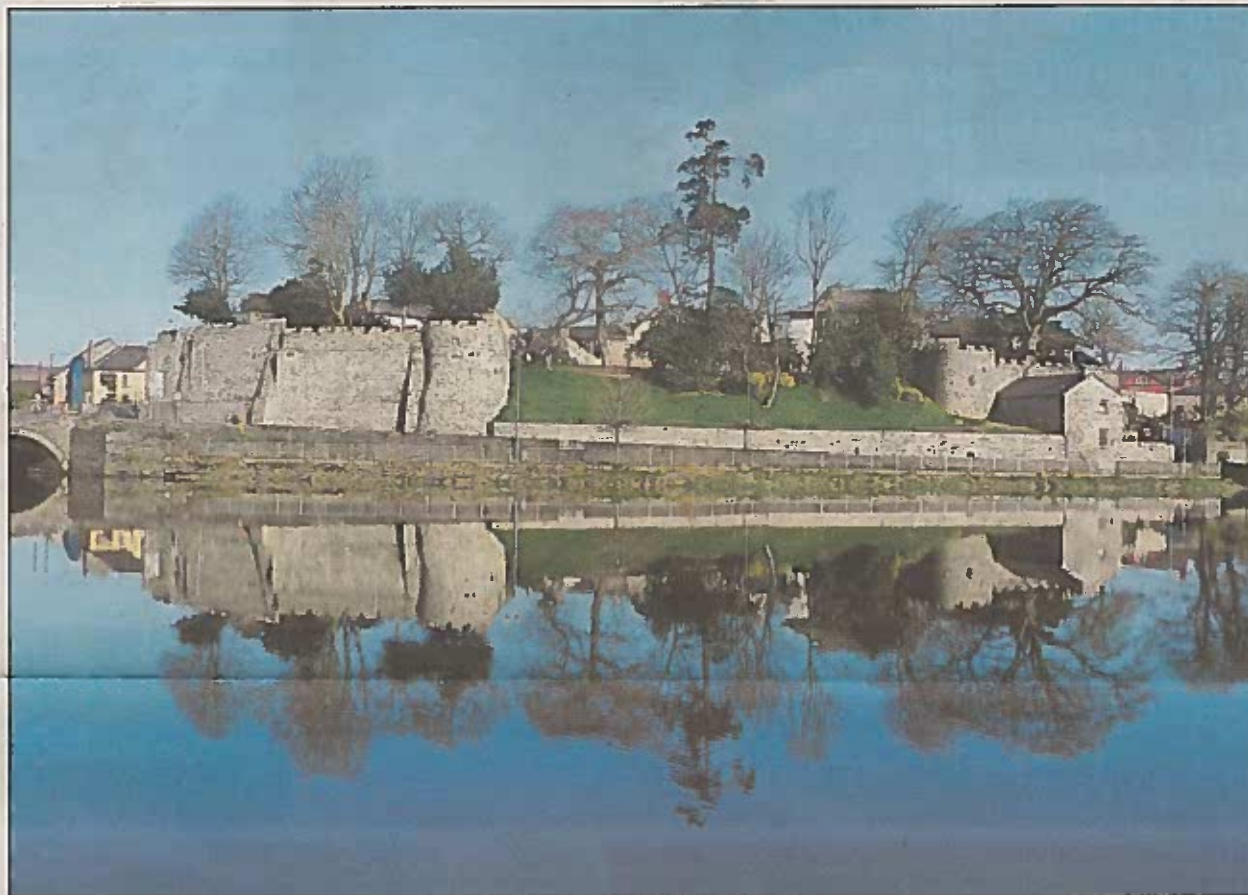
In 2005 Cadwgan Trust, set up four years earlier to buy the threatened Green Street Villas next door, threw its hat into the ring to get £50,000 for a feasibility study into the castle's future.

Royal visitors Prince Charles and the Duchess of Cornwall gave the scheme a boost when they visited in 2006.

In 2007 the county council agreed to work in partnership with Cadwgan to secure the funding to restore the site and the work began in earnest.

A separate sister Cardigan Castle BPT trust was set up to buy nearby Ty Castell - securing the entrance to the castle site.

Now after more than a decade of lobbying and fundraising, led by the Cadw-



Cardigan Castle has undergone a major redevelopment and tidy up in the last four years and will finally open its gates to visitors this week. PICTURE: Western Telegraph

gan Building Preservation Trust and its devoted volunteers, the site has been transformed from a derelict building into a high-end heritage attraction, plus luxury accommodation, restaurant and wedding and events venue.

The redevelopment of the site has included the recreation of the paths and lawns of the Regency gardens, fitting of a floor-to-ceiling glass restaurant with panoramic views over the River Teifi and the restoration of the whalebone arch - a 'must have' feature for early 19th century gardens.

It is hoped that the Castle will become one of west Wales' top tourist destinations, aiming to attract at least 33,000 visitors in the first year and bringing significant economic benefit to Cardigan and the wider area.

Inside the grounds visitors can enjoy the splendour of the Georgian mansion and find out more about the people who lived on the site and how it became the birthplace of the Eisteddfod as well as explore the medieval walls and castle remains.

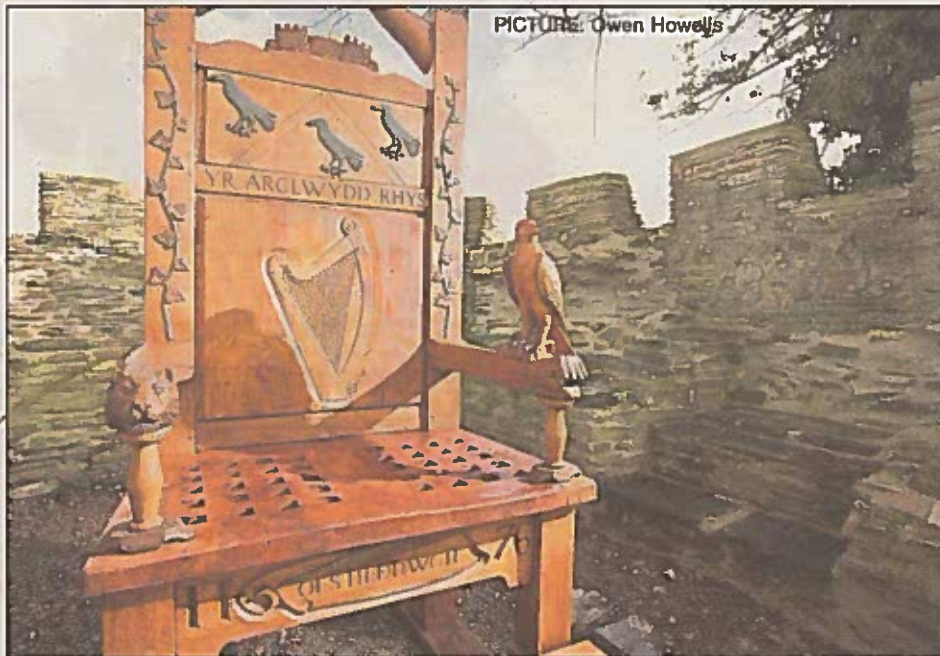
The castle is also offering education, wedding and venue hire, as well as a shop and the restaurant 1176 - named after the year the first Eisteddfod was held by Rhys ap Gruffudd (Lord Rhys) at his newly completed castle.

The castle will be open daily from 10am-4pm. Entry is

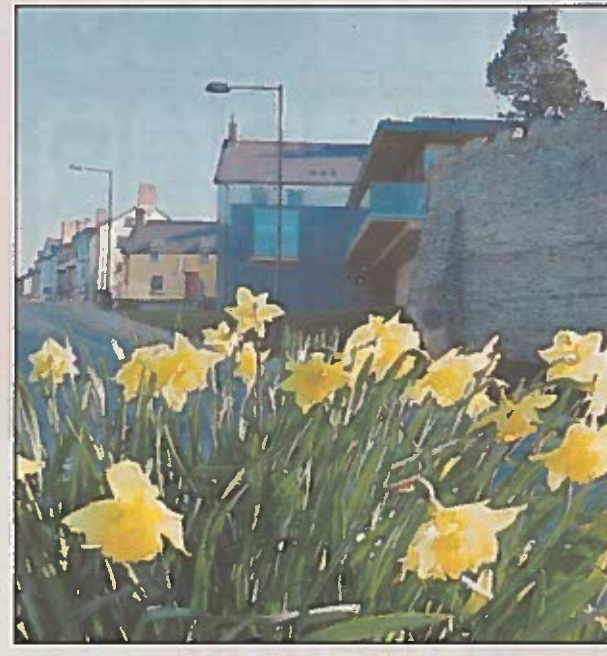
£5.50 (gift aid)/£5 for adults, or £4.40/£4 children. Annual passes are also available at £20 allowing unlimited access between 10am and 4pm (excluding major events). A season pass (May to August) will be available for £10. Group tours and school

visits can also be arranged - see the website for more information.

For more information visit [www.cardigancastle.com](http://www.cardigancastle.com), find Cardigan Castle on Facebook or follow updates via Twitter.



Taking pride of place atop the East Town is this 9ft sculptural representation of the Eisteddfod chair



The project includes an impressive glass fronted restaurant, 1176, named after the year the first Eisteddfod was held