



Grass Roots Heritage Project

The First Year – Summary Report



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The ABC Grass Roots Heritage Project was funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Brecon Beacons Trust, the Community Foundation in Wales, the Quaker Housing Trust, and the Pilgrim Trust.

Adfer Ban a Chwm (ABC) is a building preservation trust whose aim is to restore pre-1919 derelict vernacular buildings within South Wales to high conservation and environmental standards, finding sustainable end uses appropriate to each individual building, and supporting local communities in appreciating and realising their intrinsic value.

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Grass Roots Heritage Project – The First Year - summary report

This summary reports on the first year of ABC's *Grass Roots Heritage Project* including the community events and workshops, and a summary of the results of ABC's *Historic Landscape Mapping Programme*. Further detail can be found in the full reports. ABC are grateful for the support of our funders. The *Grass Roots Heritage* community events were funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), the Brecon Beacons Trust and the Community Foundation in Wales. Funding was also received from the Quaker Housing Trust and the Pilgrim Trust who supported the *Historic Landscape Mapping Programme* and executive director post respectively.

The Community Events

ABC have now completed all five scheduled community events which were part of the first year of the *Grass Roots Heritage Project*. These events and workshops were planned and organised by ABC's project officers Nell Hellier and Helena Burke. ABC's landscape archaeologist Helen Whitear (who devised and ran ABC's *Historic Landscape Mapping Programme*) organised and ran the community building recording event. Additional staff were drawn from Dyfed Archaeological Trust (DAT) who also gave in kind support, and were project partners for the first element of ABC's *Historic Landscape Mapping Programme*.

Event 1 – A Celebration of Historic Myddfai. 18th March 2017

An all-day 'drop-in' event at Myddfai Community Hall officially launched ABC's *Grass Roots Heritage Project*. The day was held to encourage local people and others from further afield to get involved with the ABC project, and promote other ABC activities and upcoming events that people could get involved with as part of the wider *Grass Roots Heritage Project*. The event aimed to engage the local community in collecting information relating to the history of the Myddfai area, particularly local buildings and their associated history. It also aimed to help people to understand and appreciate their old buildings: how to look after them, and the importance of recording information and knowledge associated with those that are now abandoned before they are lost completely.

In the publicity for the event, people were invited to bring along photographs and stories to share, to help others learn about how life has changed in the area. Material brought in by local people included poems written by the local head teacher, a hand written Welsh sermon from October 1929 and Census reports collated from ancestry research in the Myddfai area.

Staff from Dyfed Archaeological Trust (DAT) were on hand with digital and paper historic maps to provide practical demonstrations, and allow visitors an opportunity to find their home on historic maps and spot the differences in the landscape, buildings and place-names. Short talks were given on the local Historic Environment Record (HER held and maintained by DAT), and how people can access this resource and contribute to it. DAT also brought information on other archaeological work in the local area relevant to the *ABC Grass Roots Heritage Project*, including material on the Black Mountain lime industry project.

Visitors joined ABC's landscape archaeologist (accompanied by DAT's HER Manager) on a guided walk through Myddfai village and the surrounding area. The walk was linked in to ABC's *Historic Landscape Mapping Programme* which recorded abandoned and derelict buildings in Myddfai Community and the wider western (Carmarthenshire) area of Brecon Beacons National Park. The walk started from Myddfai Community Hall, visiting Myddfai Church and Capel Bethania, and the site of abandoned buildings that were once homes. The group were given a landscape history of the area with reference to visible historic landscape features. The walk also took in many historic buildings that are still homes for local people.



Visitors with ABC's landscape archaeologist and HER Manager on the guided walk through Myddfai village and the surrounding area.

Two talks were delivered on old buildings and how best to care for them by ABC's project officer and Tywi Centre manager. The talks included information on how to deal with damp and drafts in old buildings, shared best-practice tips on how to make old homes cosier, and covered repair and maintenance of old buildings, providing a useful maintenance checklist.

Throughout the day informal entertainment was provided by the 'Storyteller Tree', a group who bring stories based on local characters and places to life for people of all ages.

The day was designed so that people could drop in for an hour as and when it suited them. The number of people attending the day was lower than anticipated, possibly because it fell within lambing season and also unfortunately coincided with a major Rugby International 'Super Saturday'. However, many who attended made valuable contributions to the project, and everyone enjoyed an entertaining day, and left with a real flavour of the vibrant heritage of Myddfai, its old buildings and the surrounding area. Most who attended stayed for the entire day and signed up for future events.

Event 2 – School Workshops 26th April & 24th May 2017

In April and May 2017 ABC ran two School Workshops. On Wednesday 26th April, ABC visited Llangadog Primary School to deliver the session to 38 Key Stage 2 pupils. The workshop was repeated on 24th May 2017 for 22 children from Llandovery College Preparatory School.

The format for these workshops was designed, planned and delivered in conjunction with DAT's Community Archaeologist, a qualified teacher with longstanding experience in delivering heritage education to primary school children. The workshops aimed to deliver engaging, interactive and informative sessions that would encourage children to think about buildings: how they were built, why they were built, materials used in the building and the importance of buildings to the history and heritage of an area.

A key feature of this part of the project was to give the children an opportunity to build their own house. ABC commissioned the design of cardboard, 'flat-packed' houses, which the children could cut out and build into 3D houses. A range of building materials (including brick, random rubble, dressed stone, ashlar, whitewash, thatch, slate, and stone) were printed in colour for the children to use to decorate the exterior of their houses, together with a range of different styles of traditional windows and doors.



Children had an opportunity to build their own houses!

The 'house building' exercise proved very valuable in engaging the children - talking to the children as they made their choices about which materials to use and which windows would suit their house, it was clear that they were developing stories around their buildings. The children were also able to take their houses home to discuss with their families. Besides successfully engaging the children in learning about old buildings, the ABC School Workshops resulted in the production of replicable high quality teaching resources, including practical materials and a comprehensive lesson plan that are available to ABC and others for future work with children about old buildings and their historical importance. Teachers commented that the workshop fitted well with curriculum themes and suggested that it could be further developed to link time lines in history with buildings.

Event 3 – Community Building Recording Day 29th April 2017

On Saturday 29th April 2017, a building recording day was run by the ABC landscape archaeologist, assisted by two staff archaeologists from DAT. Safety, site surveying and recording equipment were kindly loaned for the event by project partners and supporters, DAT.

The aim of the building recording day was to provide an opportunity for community volunteers to learn how to survey, record and understand old buildings archaeologically, whilst promoting health and safety best practice when working in and around derelict and abandoned buildings. It aimed to raise awareness of the historical significance and cultural importance of abandoned and derelict vernacular buildings and their value as repositories of social information about the local community.

A number of buildings identified during ABC's *Historic Landscape Mapping Programme* were shortlisted as being suitable for access and training for a group of 10 volunteers. The local community in Llanddeusant were particularly helpful to ABC and with their assistance, access for building recording was negotiated with the owner of Llanerch-goch and the owner of Tyle Bach (both derelict vernacular buildings within Llanddeusant Community). The owners kindly gave permission for ABC to undertake building recording training with community volunteers.

The day began at 9.30am at the Tywi Centre in Llandeilo, with an indoor introduction to vernacular buildings and recording techniques, and site health and safety presented by ABC and DAT archaeologists. Nine community volunteers attended, and everyone was provided with an information pack for the day containing site details, copies of historic maps of the sites to be visited, general information about traditional and vernacular buildings and ABC's building recording pro-forma.



ABC volunteers undertaking a site sketch plan and filling out building recording sheets (far group) at Tyle-bach farmstead

The group proceeded to Llanddeusant, where the local Youth Hostel provided a base and use of facilities for the day. During a morning and afternoon session divided between the two sites, the volunteers were given introductory talks about the specific site, and then were split into groups of three, each led by a professional archaeologist. The groups were rotated so that each group got to experience two different aspects of building recording including undertaking the production of measured sketch plans, looking at the structural development of a building within its landscape context and writing site descriptions, and learning how to create comprehensive photographic records of a site. Throughout the day, the importance of the landscape context of the building, and the less tangible aspects of a buildings history (such as oral traditions) were stressed. There was also plenty of discussion about the innate environmental qualities of traditional buildings, the importance of understanding their fabric and development, and how this approach is relevant to those which are still in use as well as those which have been abandoned.

The group returned to Llanddeusant Youth Hostel for lunch break and hot drinks, and at the end of the day enjoyed much needed and delicious food at Myddfai Community Café while reviewing the day, and what had been learnt. ABC thanked the volunteers, whose clear enthusiasm and interest for the subject made the building recording day a great pleasure, and the staff members from DAT whose understanding and commitment made the day so successful. The subsequent feedback from volunteers was extremely positive, and demonstrated a genuine interest in more of this type of event.



ABC volunteers learning about site development at Llanerch-goch farmstead

Community Event 4 – Old House Clinic 20th May 2017

On Saturday 20th May, ABC delivered an Old House Clinic to local owners of old buildings in the Myddfai Area. The aim of the clinic was to inspire and educate people about looking after their old buildings.

The format of the day was delivery of a presentation in Myddfai Community Hall by The Lime Company of West Wales (TLC), followed by visits to four properties owned by participants, and a review of photographs of a fifth. Cliff Blundell from TLC reviewed the problems that each of the owners was having with their houses and suggested repairs and maintenance to each. All participants travelled as a group in a minibus so could take advantage of time with TLC and each other to share ideas and ask questions.

Participants gathered at 10am in Myddfai Community Hall and following introductions and a discussion about what each participant hoped to gain from the day, Cliff Blundell delivered a presentation about the importance of looking after our built heritage and how we could all contribute. The presentation was interactive with participants being encouraged to question and contribute throughout.

Following the presentation, the group travelled in the minibus to the first property. They returned to the Village Hall for lunch, undertook a walking tour of the village and then travelled further afield, again in the minibus, to review the final two properties. Activities concluded at 5:00pm



ABC Old House Clinic participants with Cliff Blundell of TLC

All participants reported that they learnt an enormous amount, concluding that the day had been inspiring and informative, and that the course had changed their views for the better on traditional buildings. In feedback participants stated that they would use the knowledge in the future and pass information on to friends and family.

Event 5 - Photographic Exhibition: Dereliction 17 – 22 June 2017

On Saturday 17th June 2017, ABC launched the photographic exhibition *Dereliction* at the Tywi Centre, Dinefwr, Farm, Llandeilo. The exhibition was opened by Tom Lloyd, author of *Lost Houses of Wales*, and the Pevsner Guide to The Buildings of Wales: Carmarthenshire and Ceredigion.

The aim of the exhibition was to draw attention to the great number of historically significant derelict buildings across the region, and the cultural loss that their decline, without recognition or record represents. The exhibition also showcased work carried out during ABC's *Grass Roots Heritage Project*.

All those who had participated or helped with the Grass Roots Heritage project in any way were invited to the launch. After Tom Lloyd officially opened the event and selected the most outstanding photo of the exhibition, along with 3 highly commended photos, Nigel Clubb, HLF Committee Member, and Joanie Speers, Chair of the Adfer Ban a Chwm Board of Trustees also spoke. Nell Hellier, ABC's project officer, highlighted the displays which illustrated the series of *Grass Roots Heritage* events which had been delivered during the project, and guided visitors to the exhibition. Guests enjoyed an afternoon cream tea.



Guests and speakers at ABC's photographic exhibition held at the Tywi Centre in Llandeilo

108 photographic entries were received from 9 different entrants with photographs of 29 separate buildings from across South West Wales. There were 4 entrants in the under 16 category, 3 buildings in the Brecon Beacons National Park category, but the majority were in the open category. A full catalogue has been made of the photos entered, their location and the class and name of the photographer (see full report).



The winning photo

Selected by Tom Lloyd was No. 57, Bancyrhodin taken by 15 year old Steffan Thomas.

An exhibition of the *Historic Landscape Mapping Programme* and the four *Grass Roots Heritage Workshops* was held alongside the photographs. This included the report of the Celebrating Historic Myddfai event, photographs of the Old House Clinic event, details of ABC's mapping programme and building recording, and photos and records of buildings recorded at the Community Building Recording event. Also on display were photographs of the School Workshops. 40 of the model houses made with the school children were on display in the photography exhibition space and the materials to make the model houses were made available for visitors to the *Dereliction* exhibition to make their own.

Below are some of the comments from the visitors' book at the exhibition.

"Sad to see so many abandoned buildings with a rich history – would be good to restore some of them . . . Great photographs"

"Very interesting – some people don't realise what they have!"

"Excellent display – a great pity some of these are now beyond renovation. Well done for recording these as part of our valued heritage"

"Great sadness here – each abandoned dwelling has its story – but no stories!"

“The standard of photography is reassuringly high from young photographers. It would be good to know something of the technicalities: camera/film, digital or mobile phone.

“The hanging deserves note and credit. I very much enjoyed the presentation.”

Those that saw the exhibition were moved, however, the number of visitors was lower than had been hoped. It was also disappointing that the numbers of contributors to the exhibition was only 9, although the number and quality of photographs submitted was considered to be very good. All of those that did contribute were engaged in the project, and particularly those that entered in the under 16 category were enthused by their involvement.

Suggestions were made about other venues which might be interested in hosting the exhibition, and a request was made to have a talk about the exhibition. Both of these activities are beyond the scope of the current project but do however demonstrate the inspiration which the subject area engenders.



ABC's project officers preparing the photographic exhibition

ABC's Historic Landscape Mapping Programme 2016 - 2017

This brief summary covers some results and conclusions of ABC's *Historic Landscape Mapping Programme*, which underpinned the first year of ABC's *Grass Roots Heritage Project*. This was a 'landscape-scale' study of abandoned, derelict traditional and vernacular buildings in the Western (Carmarthenshire) area of the Brecon Beacons National Park (BBNP). It aimed to provide the necessary information to enable ABC to identify potential building/s to work on with the local community, and to demonstrate the number of abandoned and derelict buildings within the study area. For more details see the full report.

An initial desk-based assessment was carried out, where historic and modern Ordnance Survey (OS) maps were compared to generate a locational map of buildings which were in use at the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries and are now abandoned, followed by site visits to a selection of buildings identified during the desk-based phase.

Part of ABC's *Historic Landscape Mapping Programme* was a partnership project with DAT who were funded by Cadw to map all *extant* (in use) traditional (pre 1915) buildings within the study area.

During the programme 281 sites of abandoned or derelict homesteads were identified by ABC, of which only 54 had existing records, resulting in the creation of 227 brand new records of derelict and abandoned buildings, and sites of buildings which were occupied at the close of the 19th century, within the study area. The evidence gathered shows the level of rural depopulation in Wales during the 20th century, and demonstrates very clearly that rural communities were considerably larger during the late 19th and early 20th centuries than they are now.

The abandoned buildings identified tell of life in the recent past, and many evidence a strong thread of continuity which stretches back through Welsh history. They are a valuable, but often misunderstood, rapidly disappearing and under-represented resource for understanding Wales' cultural past. But they are about more than history.

Those which have remained in an unmodified state can inform on appropriate treatment of the ones which survive and are still occupied or in use. The homes represented by the 'lumps and bumps' forgotten in fields and by the roadside also have direct relevance to the very modern need for sustainability in building materials and practice. These buildings were not designed beyond the basic needs of day to day existence, but their use of locally derived, home-grown materials, which are infinitely re-usable, recyclable and ultimately biodegradable, show potential ways forward for housing a growing population in buildings which are genuinely 'sustainable' in terms of life expectancy, energy consumption and end-of-life breakdown. These aspirations have already been simply and elegantly accomplished by an existing Welsh cultural icon – the small vernacular homes of the Welsh countryside. We should not ignore these 'small but perfectly formed' models for sustainable building practice!

This study covered a relatively small area but has highlighted the huge number of previously un-recorded sites of this type. This is almost certainly representative of many other parts of rural Wales, and so the methodology used for this study (described in the full mapping report) is directly relevant to other areas.

ABC's mapping programme has started to collate more detailed information on many new sites, and capture associated local knowledge, but there is so much still to be done, and it needs to be done very soon. Even a continuation of the mapping programme in the area already covered could provide opportunities for the information collected to be added to and enhanced, and could be achieved through community volunteer participation (desk-based research, field visits and building recording). It is hoped that this research will provide a basis for, and impetus to further research and recording.

More information of this kind will help find ways to look after this important aspect of Wales' historic environment. Raising awareness of abandoned vernacular buildings will hopefully underline the importance of looking after those which survive and are still in use, and help protect Wales vernacular heritage from decline due to lack of recognition and understanding.

Most of the identified buildings and the sites that were once occupied by buildings represent heritage 'at risk'. The *Historic Landscape Mapping Programme* has shown that, of the abandoned buildings which were homes at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries, many have been lost completely; some have barely any above ground remains surviving. The condition of the remains of the upstanding buildings is deteriorating very rapidly. Their significance and value as part of the wider historic landscape is still not widely recognised, despite their clear cultural importance.

ABC hopes that the *Historic Landscape Mapping Programme* and the wider *Grass Roots Heritage Project* will go some way towards redressing this situation. We should be very proud of our vernacular built heritage in Wales, not just for what it has been in the past, but also for the opportunities it represents for the future.



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Thank you to our dedicated and enthusiastic board of trustees, to our former executive directors, to our project officers, and to our translators. Thanks to staff and colleagues at DAT, and to the many people from the communities within the study area who have given help, support and knowledge. Thank you to our fantastic volunteers who have given their time to be part of the project, and help with recording and furthering our understanding of these buildings.