



The best preserved  
Medieval Pottery Kiln  
in the UK

Yr Odyn Grochenwaith  
Ganoloesol  
a oroesodd orau  
yn y DU

## Newport Medieval Pottery Kiln at Newport Memorial Hall

**Teachers notes: Discovering history through archaeology: Group Work. Gig site exercise.**

Suggested Years 5, 6, 7, 8

***Please note:*** the 'information about this site' sections below are the same as the power point presentation. This document also contains additional information to the power point presentation:

- it identifies what the pictures in the Dig sites are,
- a few optional facts,
- an optional 'What have you learnt? Quiz at the end of the Group exercise.

### 1. Dig Site 1# – Newport Medieval Pottery Kiln.

**What is this site?**

**Answers:**

Image 1 – rim of a jug and handle of a jug

Image 2 – a lot of broken pieces of pottery called sherds. This shows that the kiln must have made a lot of pottery – as there are so many broken pieces from pots that were not good enough to be sold – maybe they were misshapen or broke while being fired.

Image 3 – this slate must have come from the floor of the kiln. You can see the bottom of a pot stuck to it.

Image 4 – finger print of the potter on a piece of clay

**Information about this site:**

- Newport Medieval Pottery Kiln is the best persevered medieval pottery kiln in the UK.
- It is 500 years old and could produce 1200 pots in one firing deduced by its size. With only approx 40 or 50 ish household in Newport at the time – the pottery must have been traded along the Welsh coast and likely beyond.
- No written records have been discovered about the kiln. Therefore we have had to learn about the kiln from the archaeological study .
- Archaeologists discovered 10,000 sherds of pottery during the work at the hall in 2016. By piecing the sherds back together again, the archaeologists worked out what the kiln made. This helps us understand what it was like to live back then.

## 2. Dig site 2# – Cardigan Castle

### What is this site?

#### Answers:

Image 1 – medieval flag

Image 2 – a necklace pendant of a jester. Jesters would entertain guests during a grand banquets.

Image 3 – archaeological site of a Cardigan castle

Image 4 – arrow heads found at Cardigan Castle.

#### Information about this site:

- Cardigan Castle is thought to be the first stone castle built by the Welsh princes and was the stronghold of Rhys ap Gruffydd, prince of the medieval kingdom of Deheubarth.
- It is also said to have hosted what is regarded to be Wales' first eisteddfod.
- Castles were a fortification to protect the Lord's subjects and were a sign of wealth and power– but they also held grand banquets to entertain special guests.
- Banquets were grand affairs with jesters to entertain.
- A dolphin's skull dating back to the medieval period was discovered at Cardigan castle; it would have been eaten by people at medieval feasts along with swans and other large animals.

## 3. Dig site 3# – a Medieval Dwelling

### What is this site?

#### Answers:

Image 1 – shoes and a purse. There were no pockets in the medieval time - so people had purses.

Image 2 – an archaeological dig of a medieval house.

Image 3 – broken pottery called 'sherds'. There was no plastic – so mainly people used wood or pottery for eating, cooking and storing food. Some metal was used.

Image 4 – Skelton of a horse – all households kept animals for food and work.

- **Information about this site:**
- Peasants lived in wattle and daub houses (made of earth and manure with a timber frame) and a thatched roof.
- A fire in a centre of the house, open to the roof, provided heat to cook and warm the house. The peasants' clothes would have reeked of smoke - a hole in the roof was the only form of chimney!
- By the late medieval period – a chimney, called a side hearth, had been invented which meant no more smoky living!
- Peasants trudged out to work as soon as there was daylight. They went to work on their own long strips of land, or to the lord of the manor's fields if he needed them that day.
- Peasants kept animals for food and work.

- You can still see the long strips of lands in Newport – which now make up the gardens of Newport's modern houses.

#### **Optional extra information:**

- The Black Death of 1348 killed a large number of the peasant population. This meant that there were not enough peasants to work in the fields. Landowners desperate for workers to harvest their crops began offering wages to anyone who would work on their land.
- Peasants were, for the first time, able to offer their services to the landowner that would pay the highest wage. This meant peasants could afford better houses – as described above. Before this, peasants lived in one room hovels simple stick and straw houses.
- Many of the towns, and cities, of today grew up in medieval times. Some developed from much older settlements, for instance at the crossing of a river. Others were laid out by the Normans below a castle – such as Newport.
- Shops opened out on to the street with a flap down counter.
- Down the middle of the street ran a central drain into which everyone threw their rubbish.
- There was no organised police force. If someone was seen stealing a 'hue and cry' was raised. Everyone able to do so chased after the villain.
- Many towns had walls and gates which were closed at night. There was a curfew after a certain time when no one was expected to be on the streets without good reason.
- Curfew comes from 'cover fire' (*couvre feu*) - a good idea when many of the houses were wooden!

#### **4. Dig site 4# – Medieval boat**

##### **What is this site?**

##### **Answers:**

Image 1 – boat

Image 2 – rigging from the Mary Rose ship

Image 3 – Sea captain's hat

Image 4 – a cargo container from a ship wreck

##### **Information about this site:**

- Ships were used for trading around the coast because roads were poor or non-existent.
- The Port Record in the Archives at National Library of Wales gives details of everything that came in and out of Wales' ports during the late medieval period and early Tudor period.
- In Newport, boats carried herrings (fish) and clothe which was woven in the mills in Newport - to Ireland and the rest of the UK.
- Boats also brought in goods: Newport imported tools to help with the wool trade as well as other goods.

## 5. Dig site 5# – St David’s Cathedral

### What is this site?

#### Answers:

Image 1 – excavated grave yard in a church

Image 2 – medieval book

Image 3 – paintings depicted religious scenes in a church

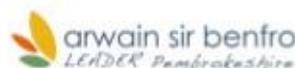
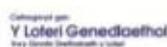
Image 4 – a statue on a tomb in St David Cathedral

#### Information about this site:

- St David’s Cathedral has been a site of pilgrimage and worship for more than 800 years. St David’s - the patron san of Wales - built a monastery on the grounds which the cathedral now occupies.
- There were two important parts to the church - the parish priests who lived in the villages and towns, and monks and nuns who lived in special communities called monasteries or nunneries.
- Everything was organised around worship in medieval times.
- Priests and clergy men held a high position in a medieval village because religion was very important part of daily life but also because they could read and write.
- The majority of people could not read or write. Monks kept very large books . The books were not written in Welsh or English – but rather in Latin.
- Church services were delivered in Latin as well– which no one could understand!

## Optional Quiz: What have you learnt?

- How did we learn about the kiln? Was it through written records or from an archaeological study?
- What animal did they find at Cardigan castle and why do you think it was there?
- What invention during the late medieval period made it healthier and pleasanter to live in a medieval house?
- Why was the sea used to transport goods?
- What skill did monks and priests have that made them different and important?



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