

Llanerchaeron prepares to welcome Urdd National Eisteddfod

With the Urdd National Eisteddfod visiting Ceredigion next year, The National Trust site at Llanerchaeron will be the venue for this huge youth cultural event. We spoke to **Paul Boland**, Property Manager at Llanerchaeron to see how things were progressing.

How are the preparations on site for the Urdd National Eisteddfod?

Preparations are going well; I have regular meetings with the Eisteddfod Maes and Business Manager Ian Carter who's in charge of preparing the actual Maes itself. We are currently discussing draft 2A of the site plan, but I'm told we'll probably have a draft 36 site plan by May!

Are the staff and volunteers looking forward to the event?

They are looking forward to the event though with trepidation too. We normally greet 35,000 visitors every year to Llanerchaeron so to have a potential 100,000 in a week is a little bit daunting! However, with good planning and weather, I'm confident everything will be great.

Tell us a little about Llanerchaeron?

Mr J P Ponsonby Lewes, the last of the family's 10 generations to live here, bequeathed Llanerchaeron to the National Trust in 1989. This rare example of a self sufficient 18th Century Welsh minor gentry estate has survived virtually unaltered. The villa, designed in the 1790s is the most complete example of the early work of John Nash (John Nash was responsible for Brighton Pavilion, Regents Street, and rebuilding Buckingham Palace). It has its own service courtyard with dairy, laundry, brewery and salting house, and walled kitchen gardens producing fruit, vegetables, herbs and plants - all now on sale in season. The pleasure grounds with ornamental lake provide wonderful peaceful walks. The Home Farm at Llanerchaeron has an impressive range of traditional and atmospheric outbuildings and is now a working organic farm with Welsh Black cattle, Llanwenog sheep and rare Welsh pigs. Visitors can see farming activities in progress, such as lambing, shearing and haymaking. Beyond, the wide expanse of historic parkland offers breathtaking walks through the beautiful Aeron Valley.

What will the staff's role be during the week long festival?

Our role will be ensuring that Llanerchaeron is at its best and that visitors to the Eisteddfod see what we do here. In addition, we'll give them the opportunity to see the work that Yr Ymddiriedolaeth Genedlaethol \ The National Trust does throughout Wales in conserving our heritage and culture. We'll also be welcoming lots of colleagues from all over Wales who are volunteering their time to help us with

the management of the property during the event. We are always looking to welcome volunteers here so any one who would like an informal chat please feel free to call us.

Are there any specific issues being looked at in preparation for the Eisteddfod?

The main emphasis of this early planning stage is trying to mitigate any potential lasting damage the event could have on Llanerchaeron. It is not natural to have 100,000 people in one area for such a short time. The main part of the Maes will be positioned on a hay meadow, which we have been restoring for the last ten years; we also have a medieval village in the area. Therefore, the planning is critical to ensuring that these are enjoyed but also protected.

Is hosting the Eisteddfod on a National Trust site a new experience?

Hosting a festival of this size is a new experience for Yr Ymddiriedolaeth Genedlaethol \ The National Trust. However, we do have experience of running large visitor attractions and ensuring that the visitors' enjoyment is foremost in our work. The Eisteddfod will be the largest event we have ever held here at Llanerchaeron. We have over 3,000 visitors from far and wide who attend our Christmas fair which we organise annually – held this year on the 5 and 6 December, and our Apple Festival is very popular during the last week of October.

On a personal level, what are you looking forward to most during Whitsun week?

Firstly, I am looking forward to dry sunny weather. Even though I am not a Welsh speaker, the Eisteddfod has a wealth of attractions for non-Welsh speakers, and I've always had a soft spot for the Urdd having been a member whilst in school. I won at the Urdd's Barry Eisteddfod in 1977 as a member of the seven-a-side rugby with Gors School of Swansea. The headteacher, Miss Thomas, listened to my version of "Lili Fach y Gwanwyn" and thought it best I stuck to the rugby!

For more information on Llanerchaeron contact 01545 570200 or llanerchaeron@nationaltrust.org.uk