



## **Opportunity for Artists / Architects / Designers**

### **'Y CABAN' Art Project**

#### **Introduction**

PONTIO is an exciting new development at the heart of the University of Bangor. The new building designed by Grimshaw Architects, set on the slope below the Main University Building will house a mid-scale theatre, a studio theatre, a cinema, design and innovation centre, Students Union, administrative base, spacious lecture theatres, social learning spaces, bar, café, external performance space, outdoor seating and panoramic views.

<http://www.pontio.co.uk/the-new-centre/overview.php.en>

The lead designers are Atkins with Grimshaw Architects, Arup as Theatre Consultant and Landscape Architects Gillespie's making up the design team.

We wish to appoint an artist/designer/architect collaboration to create one or a series of structures to be located within the landscape setting of PONTIO.

The public art part of the capital build is funded by the Arts Council of Wales, with the whole project funded by the Welsh Government, European Regional Development Fund, University of Bangor, Arts Council of Wales, Gwynedd Council and the National Lottery.

#### **Background**

Artist Bedwyr Williams was appointed in 2011 as Lead Artist to develop public art proposals for the new building. His research and consultation led to the concept of *Y Caban* as one of the public art opportunities for Pontio.

#### *Y Caban*

The *caban* used to be a place where quarrymen in the Welsh slate quarries (and mines) met during their lunch break - to sing, debate, discuss various topics etc. A *caban* was a standalone building above ground (or a small chamber within a mine), which had been created by the men. Early examples were very small with only one or two windows, dark and stuffy, and though there were many *cabanau* for a gallery, there wasn't enough room for all the men to have their lunch there. Later structures were larger, for instance at Dinorwig Quarry, new sheds were built in the 1920s and new *cabanau* were also built, with enough room for everyone.

The workforce was primarily Welsh-speaking, from local areas, with little immigration from outside Wales. Because of this, there was a rich cultural aspect to working at a slate quarry, and the *caban* was the hub of these cultural activities. It was a great privilege to be the President of a *caban* and each *caban* had a committee. A surviving set of minutes from a *caban* at the Llechwedd mine at Blaenau Ffestiniog for 1908-10 records discussions on Church Disestablishment, tariff reform and other political topics. Union matters, charitable causes, Sunday sermons, educational topics and current affairs were the most common topics. During the 1904-5 Reformation prayer meetings were held in the *caban*.

Minor Eisteddfodau were held in the *caban* of some of the larger galleries during lunch hour, with someone from outside the quarry invited to judge. Competitions were held for soloists, groups, wind instruments, recitals, and poetry and prose writing. Two of the quarry Eisteddfodau even held a Bardic Chair competition, with the awarding ceremony taking place in the *caban* with all pomp and circumstance.

When a quarryman retired (usually between the age of 70 and 80) the committee of the *caban* organised a retirement event. These events were jolly affairs, avoiding a tearful farewell, with much leg-pulling, telling stories, rousing hymn singing, as well as folk singing, comical speeches and present giving.

Music played a significant part in the lives of the quarrymen. Those who conducted choirs or bands, or those who led the singing were considered important men. Every member of the male voice choir which won the 1884 Eisteddfod in Liverpool was a quarryman.

Brass bands also played an important role in the social life of the villages and quarries. When a concert needed to be arranged, such as a St David's Day concert, or a retirement event, it was easy to find a brass quartet to accompany two or three pieces.

Many influential preachers and writers started their careers as quarrymen and credit the *caban* and the older quarrymen as inspiration for their calling. Some became clergy of the Church, and others ministers of Welsh nonconformist chapels. Quarrymen were also poets and writers, writing popular poems, and winning prizes and medals at Eisteddfodau. Their achievements are all the more remarkable considering they started their careers at a very early age some as young as 8 years old and were largely self-taught.

It is thought that the slate quarries made a greater contribution to Welsh literature in the 20th century than any other industry in Wales. Much Welsh literature has also been directly inspired by the slate quarries, for example, the classic novel *Chwalfa*, by T Rowland Hughes (1946), which chronicles the history of the Ifans family in the imaginary quarry town of Llechfaen. The story is based on the real events in Bethesda, Gwynedd, at the time of the 'Great Strike' at Penrhyn Quarry between 1900 and 1903. (Appropriately, a stage adaptation of this novel, by Theatr Genedlaethol in partnership with Pontio and Theatr Fran Wen, will be the first production to be staged in Pontio, when the centre opens in September 2014.) Furthermore *Lle - chi* (Welsh for "slate" and "your place") will be the backcloth to the whole of the opening programme of Pontio instilling a sense of ownership and belonging in the Pontio audience also evoking a sense of cultural resonance..

*Y Chwarelwr* ("The Quarryman") produced in 1935 was the first Welsh-language film. It showed various aspects of a slate quarryman's life at Blaenau Ffestiniog.

### **The Commission**

We would like to commission an artist / designer or collaboration between artist, architect, poet, to design a structure or series of structures based on the concept of the *caban* - the University will work in partnership with the successful artist/team to deliver the commission. There is no requirement to make the structure look like the original *caban*, or be made of slate. Rather, we would like a modern day interpretation of a meeting place where people can informally or formally meet and hold events. The fact that Y Caban is a standalone structure separate from the main building, although nearby, means that its design can also be independent of the main building. Although this brief makes constant reference to Y Caban as a 'structure' we emphasise that we are open to a wide range of interpretations and responses to the brief - from 'virtual' spaces to interactive sculptures - and encourage lateral thinking.

Y Caban would be a place for everyone - students and staff at Bangor University, residents of Bangor and the region, as well as visitors.

### Purpose

The original *caban* had a distinct purpose - it was a meeting place for cultural activities at lunchtime, on work days. What might a *caban* be in 2014?

Should it be another meeting place specifically for lunch-time activities? Why might someone want to use Y Caban, as opposed to a meeting space within the main building itself? What would draw them out to Y Caban? What would make it special, unique? Perhaps it would be an ideal place to make a lot of noise without disturbing others. Perhaps it would be attractive for those seeking privacy and solitude. It could be an ideal platform for impromptu performance or protest. Or a place for a scheduled debate regarding university/social/political issues.

As well as debate, the *caban* was a place for performance and competition, something of which we have a long history in Wales. In contemporary culture there is still the same drive for these activities (from the Eisteddfod to X Factor to sing-along karaoke events).

Potential uses will inform the design. If there is more than one structure, it will be possible to cater for more purposes. A private, closed space where only the people inside can hear and see the activities within would be a very different to an open structure designed for 'show', to arouse onlookers' curiosity and draw them in.

### Design

As stated above, the structure/s or virtual space should be in the language of 21st century design rather than

pastiche of the original *caban*. However it may be possible for Y Caban to nestle into the side of the hill, through partially excavating a chamber and building a cantilevered floor. The Pontio building is clad with stone and has sections of glazed elevations. Building materials for Y Caban should be robust and low maintenance and the structure should have a minimum expected lifespan of 25 years.

Design considerations:

- Acoustic qualities, both within and without - how will sound reverberate within the structure and how might sound travel beyond the structure. If there are a series of structures, how might sound travel from one to another? Could there be in-built elements to create sound/music?
- Thermal properties - how warm and sheltered can/should the structure be? Could it be a sun-trap facing due south? However, designing in comfort would need to be balanced with the need to avoid anti-social behaviour.
- Lighting. Would Y Caban need lighting? If it is only for daytime use, it could be left dark at night. There is low level lighting around the perimeter of the Pontio building but there is no lighting within the landscaping. Some ambient lighting may reach Y Caban or the artist may want to explore extending ducting along the footpath to light the structures.
- Wi-fi. There will be free wi-fi within Pontio, but not extending out to the landscaped area. However, the extension of the wi-fi range to include external paved areas at the entrances to Pontio, is currently being explored. If a structure is close enough to these spaces, it may be possible to have wi-fi connection.
- DDA requirements. Y Caban needs to be fully accessible, therefore a footpath from the main building would need to be built into the commission budget and there should be level access to reach and 'enter' Y Caban. However, this does not preclude other means of reaching and entering the work - steps, lifts, slides etc - as long as there is one easy access route.

We envisage between one large Caban or at most 3 smaller structures within budget.

During the design and build process we would like the artist to make occasional use of the Pontio Shop which is a temporary presence on the High Street to share information, progress and photographs of the public art project. Local people drop-in to the shop to buy tickets for Pontio events, attend informal bitesize activities, seek updates on building progress and to meet the people involved in the project. 'Meet the Artist' dates could be publicised in advance in coordination with Pontio Marketing Manager Elin Thomas. This proactive engagement with the community would be warmly welcomed.

Pontio arts mission statement should also be considered in the design of Y Caban:

"To create an artistic programme of the highest quality which is innovative, ambitious and one which resonates and is relevant to our communities."

### **The Site**

The site adjacent to Pontio is a steep hill and given the requirement for full access to Y Caban, a footpath will need to be built from the main building to Y Caban as part of this commission, ie this would need to be covered within this budget. In order to have a footpath on fairly level ground, the options for locating Y Caban within the grounds are limited. There appear to be two options:

1. At Level 2 at one of the entrances to the Theatre there is a large paved area (which is the external performance space) and beyond this is level ground where Y Caban could be sited (this is possibly the preferred option) Along the perimeter of the outside paved area there will be low level bollard lighting which could be sited sympathetically to suit Y Caban
2. At Level 3 from the entrance to the cafe bar a footpath could lead people into the landscape along a fairly level route. However the ground is sloping here (please refer to plan).

As a guide, a path of epoxy bound gravel with a timber or concrete edge would cost approximately £80 per linear metre. There are epoxy bound gravel paths elsewhere within Pontio, but other options would be considered in consultation with the Steering Group.

At both locations a connection could be made to power supply within the main building.

### **Artist/designer**

The artist/ team will need some experience of designing structures/buildings/virtual spaces and be able to demonstrate their experience of working to a similar scale and budget through their portfolio of past projects.

Experience of working within a building site managed by a main contractor, awareness of CDM regulations and H&S is also desirable. However, the University will work in partnership with the successful artist to build Y Caban and will help to manage site-preparations and contractual arrangements with the main contractor.

The artist/designer may wish to apply as a partnership or team to bring all the skills of design and fabrication required to the project. If applying as a team, please state in your application how you will work together and allocate tasks. The contract would be awarded to the lead person and he/she would be responsible for sub-contracting the other members of the team.

We would also support and encourage the successful artist/team to take on a young artist as a mentee, to follow the detailed design process and shadow the artist at key meetings.

### Schedule

A short-list will be drawn up in mid January and invited to submit concept designs. Around mid to late February, short-listed artist/teams will present their concept proposals to the Steering Group and one team will be selected. Site-preparation work should if possible dovetail with the main contractor's schedule. Y Caban should be in place by the end of August 2014.

### Budget

There is a budget of just under £100,000 to include all fees, detailed design, site preparation, materials, fabrication, delivery and installation.

### Process

Please send a CD with a powerpoint or pdf showing between 8 and 12 previous projects and project list, as well as a CV and a brief letter explaining your interest in the project. Email applications will also be accepted but please contact [mererid@celfwaith.co.uk](mailto:mererid@celfwaith.co.uk) or 02920750992 before sending an application by email.

Between 3 and 5 artists will be short-listed and given a fee of £1,500 to develop a concept design outlining their approach to the project. Artists will present their ideas to the Steering Group and one artist/team will then be appointed.

Send applications to:

Celfwaith, 7 Pontfaen, Cardiff, CF23 7DU

**Deadline for applications: Tuesday 7th January 2014 (6pm)**

