

Agricultural Shows: Shaping the Rural

A Case Study of the Royal Welsh Agricultural Show

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STATEMENT 1

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Dedicated to the many thousands of volunteers, past, present, and future. Without whom there would be no Royal Welsh Agricultural Show.

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Summary

Taking the case study of the Royal Welsh Agricultural Show, the largest event of its kind in Europe, this thesis examines the role that agricultural shows have in the modern-day countryside. Agricultural shows are a key fixture in the rural calendar. In recent years these events have changed from being a social and competition space, purely aimed at rural residents, to today displaying the finest livestock, mechanical, technological, and skills innovations serving a wide number of economic, social, cultural and environmental features targeted at the wider population. Despite their significance to rural society, agricultural shows remain largely unexplored in geography. Taking a mixed methods approach, and by undertaking an in-depth study of the Royal Welsh Agricultural Show, this thesis investigates the role that agricultural shows have in (re)imagining and (re)presenting their host communities. The thesis continues by examining the manner in which large-scale rural events can be seen as a nexus for knowledge exchange and innovation, before considering how large scale rural events influence the politics and governance of rural areas. This thesis suggests that agricultural shows are an important means of collective identity for rural people, and that these events reimagine their host communities. It also finds that agricultural shows are vital sites for the development of social capital in rural areas, have significant roles in knowledge exchange, and the development of rural buzz. Finally, it is concluded that agricultural shows inhabit a powerful, but extraordinary location within the political landscape of their host communities, having an influence on their politics and governance.

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Acronyms

ASAO – Association of Show and Agricultural Organisations
ATB – Agricultural Training Board
CLA – Country Land and Business Association
DEFRA – Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
EBVs – Estimated Breeding Values
EU – European Union
RASE – Royal Agricultural Society of England
RWAS – Royal Welsh Agricultural Society
RWS – Royal Welsh Show
RWSF – Royal Welsh Spring Festival
RWWF – Royal Welsh Winter Fair
FUW – Farmers Union of Wales
NFU – National Farmers Union
UK – United Kingdom
USA – United States of America
YFC – Young Farmers’ Club
YPV- Young Peoples’ Village

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 – Introduction

It has long been known that agricultural shows are significant events for rural communities. Using the case study of the Royal Welsh Show (RWS), the largest event of its kind in Europe, this thesis investigates the role that agricultural shows have in the contemporary countryside. It does so by exploring the RWS in depth utilising a mixed methods approach. Questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, and a lifetime of attending the RWS are used to establish the function of the RWS in contemporary Welsh society.

Festivals and events have flourished in recent decades, and particularly for rural areas these have grown and provided a new income stream for rural economies and a manner in which rural, cultural heritage can both be celebrated and preserved. As a result, the interest in understanding their significance has risen in the geographical, tourism, and events management literatures. Although the literature is small surrounding the impacts of festivals and events, they often involve a focus on cultural and social change, the reproduction of place and of tradition, and the role of communities as producers and consumers (Quinn, 2009). However, as yet, the rural is relatively ignored in this work.

Agricultural shows are a key fixture in the rural calendar, originally developed to promote and progress agriculture, today they encompass every aspect of rural life. Therefore, the contemporary agricultural show has multiple roles for the farming and non-farming communities, it has a role in knowledge, building of social capital, whilst educating a non-farming audience. These and other themes will be explored throughout the thesis.

The Association of Show and Agricultural Organisations (ASAO) estimate that approximately 10% of the population of the UK (7 million people) attend agricultural shows on an annual basis (ASAO, 2016); whilst the equivalent figures for Australia and

the USA are around 20% of the population (Jones, 2016)., Yet, agricultural shows have been relatively ignored in the literature, particularly in the UK, despite reaching a large sector of the population.

The timing of this thesis is pertinent. There is a lack of recent empirical research that focuses on social issues relating to festivals and events in the UK, which could be used to explore social and cultural policy, there is however a growing body of work relating to rural festivals in Australia (see Gibson and Connell, 2011; Gorman-Murray *et al.*, 2012). Calls have been made for research relating to the social impacts of festivals (Arcodia and Whitford, 2006) and in particular for research that could lead to the development of cultural policy (Selwood, 2006). Although the impacts of urban events have now been extensively studied, rural events¹ especially within the context of the UK have been relatively ignored.

The agricultural show industry is changing, visitor numbers are increasing, whilst also changing in demographics. There is a need to understand why people attend these events, and the way that agricultural shows have adapted to serve as platform for rural areas, whilst also being highly significant social and economic events.

Furthermore, although often perceived to be in crisis, agriculture is currently in state of flux with political events, and changing consumer trends creating a great deal of uncertainty for the industry. As such the role of the agricultural show in bringing together the rural community in celebration and solidarity, and well as its role in educating consumers has never been so important.

At its most basic level, this thesis contributes to the existing but limited literature on agricultural shows in the geographical, events management and business studies literatures. The thesis also gives an insight to the knowledge exchange mechanisms in place in rural Wales, and develops the idea that large scale events such as agricultural shows can build social capital between different rural actors. It is further hoped that

¹ This thesis defines rural events as events that both occur in rural areas, and that are distinctively rural in character.

the discussions of the findings will be able to make contributions to cultural and rural policy within Wales, whilst also being of use to the Royal Welsh Agricultural Society (RWAS) and other agricultural societies in terms of event evaluation and future planning.

1.2 – Why the Royal Welsh Agricultural Show?

As will be discussed in detail in Chapter Four, the chosen case study for this research, the RWS was first established in 1904 to assist, promote, and improve Welsh agriculture. Since that time the RWS has grown and adapted to changing audiences, with the 2014 show attracting 237,694 visitors. The modern Show is an important social, business and political occasion for rural Wales. 1,033 business exhibitors attended the Show in 2014, from multinational organisations to artisan Welsh food businesses.

The RWS houses displays and exhibitions relating to agriculture, forestry, horticulture, and the environment. This mass appeal is demonstrated by the fact that this research has found that 39% of visitors have no connection with agriculture industry. However, the Show is still first and foremost an agricultural event with the 2014 Show attracting 7,959 competitive livestock entries², including the largest exhibition of sheep and Welsh Ponies and Cobs to be seen in the world.

² Livestock at agricultural shows compete against each other to be crowned best in breed, which can lead to economic benefits, as others are willing to pay more for the animal and its progeny. The livestock are judged against breed traits as specified by their breed standards and breed societies.



Figure 1: The Grand Parade at the RWS (RWAS).

The RWS is the largest, and considered by many as being the finest agricultural show in Europe, and as such was chosen as the case study for this research. As an agricultural nation, the event has a unique cultural and social significance to Wales, celebrating Welsh culture and heritage, and is seen as being one of the must visit attractions in the country. It was due to this size and significance why it was chosen as the case study for this research. Furthermore, the RWS was chosen for practical reasons with it being both close to Aberystwyth University, and my home. As will be discussed in Chapter Three, I have personal links with the RWAS and such was granted full access to the event. The RWS was such a fruitful research site, and the data gained was so vast and significant, it was decided to focus the thesis on one spectacular case study, rather than a number of different events.

1.3 – Research Aims and Research Questions

The overall aim of this thesis is to contribute to the literature on rural shows, festivals, and other public events by:

- Investigating the role of agricultural shows in modern day society;
- Establishing how agricultural shows (re)image and (re)present their host communities;
- Ascertaining the role of agricultural shows as a site of social interaction;

- Investigating the role of agricultural shows in rural knowledge exchange;
- Contributing to the theories of social capital and knowledge exchange in rural areas;
- Determining the role that agricultural shows have in rural politics.

The aim of this thesis will be achieved by answering the following research questions:

1.3.1 – Research Question One

What role do agricultural shows have in (re)imagining and (re)presenting their host communities?

1.3.2 – Research Question Two

To what extent can large-scale rural events be seen as a nexus for knowledge exchange and innovation?

1.3.3 – Research Question Three

How do large-scale rural events influence the politics and governance of rural areas?

1.4 – Thesis Structure

This thesis consists of a total of nine chapters. Chapter Two introduces and summarises the existing literature that is relevant to this study. The chapter reviews the literature relating to rural Wales, and recent changes. Before looking at the way that agriculture in Wales has been governed, rural knowledge exchange mechanisms, rural festivals and finally agricultural shows. This chapter primarily focuses on literatures produced in a Welsh and British context, but it also draws on some global empirical case studies. The literature review suggests that there is very little published work on British non-metropolitan festivals, in particular agricultural shows. This thesis seeks to address this omission.

Chapter Three provides an overview of the research framework, the rationale for choosing the methodologies used, and how the data has been analysed. The study has taken a mixed methods approach in order to maximise the understanding of research questions, and to reduce the limitations of individual approaches, in order to ensure research validity. Starting my discussing researcher positionality and being an

insider/an advocate of the rural community, this chapter will then discuss the quantitative surveys that were undertaken at the 2014 Royal Welsh Show, archival research, interviews, and the Humans of the Royal Welsh Show project. A rationale for each of the qualitative methods is given, and it is discussed how these techniques were implemented, their limitations, and how the data was analysed. The two questionnaires used are then introduced and discussed.

The RWAS is introduced in Chapter Four, a detailed overview of its formation, history, aims, objectives, and role in contemporary Wales is given. Although this chapter does not aim to give a detailed history of the Society (something that has been done by Howell, 2003), this is something that is necessary in order to provide context for the study, and for an understanding of the development of the RWS. The other flagship events of the RWAS, namely the Royal Welsh Spring Festival (RWSF) and the Royal Welsh Winter Fair (RWWF) will also briefly be introduced. The main case study of RWS is then introduced, with a brief history given, before discussing its contemporary role is discussed, and its cultural and economic impact detailed. This chapter is more of an overview of the RWAS and RWS rather than a detailed analysis.

Chapter Five begins by outlining the results of the visitor survey undertaken at the 2014 RWS, before situating the Show within the global context. The multiple roles of the event, and its different meanings to different social groups within Wales are examined, and the manner of which the RWS can be seen as a performance is discussed. The chapter then analyses how the event (re)images Wales to itself as a nation, and the outside world, before investigating the role that the Show has in Wales in bringing the nation together and reconnecting rural/urban populations.

The thesis continues by looking at the role that the Show has for the people of Wales. Chapter Six investigates the role of the feature county and how the Show mobilises each of the thirteen historic counties in Wales to host their 'own' show on a cyclic basis. It discusses the loyalty that people in Wales hold in the RWS and the many millions of pounds that they have raised in the name of Show since its move to Llanelwedd in 1963. The role of the volunteer in managing and ensuring the smooth

running of the Show is then discussed, both in terms of their contribution to the Show, and the contribution that the Show makes to their personal development. Finally, the chapter investigates the way that the RWS can be seen as a rite of passage for members of the YFC movement.

In Chapter Seven, the way that the RWS can be seen as a facilitator of knowledge exchange is investigated. The manner in which the Show can build trust is discussed, before the event is looked at in terms of being a temporary knowledge cluster, and its role in the creation of rural buzz is analysed. The chapter investigates the different forms of knowledge exchange that occur at the RWS, developing a model for knowledge exchange at rural events.

Building on Chapter Seven, the penultimate chapter looks at the role that the RWS plays in Welsh political life. Although the RWS state the show is apolitical, the show is deeply political; perhaps not partisan, but it does have a major role in Welsh political life. Trust is created at the Royal Welsh Show between different actors, meetings take place, and the event provides a platform for all aspects of political life in Wales, a role that is identified by all major political parties and something that they use as a tool in their campaigning.

The thesis concludes in Chapter Nine, where the findings are summarised in relation to the research questions, and the implications of the thesis addressed, before identifying areas where further research is required.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 – Introduction

This chapter will situate my research into agricultural shows within the wider academic literature. The research will be situated within the rural change, rural governance and knowledge exchange literatures. Before looking more broadly at non-metropolitan festivals and focussing on the limited existing literature surrounding agricultural shows.

The literature has suggested that contemporary rural areas are in a continuous cycle of change, jumping from (perceived) crisis to (perceived) crisis, compounded by a (perceived) lack of trust in the government, which has led to rural populations turning to each other for support and the purposes of knowledge transfer. This helps to give a wider context to the purpose of agricultural shows and rural festivals.

Whilst there is a large body of work emerging on rural festivals, particularly in the context of Australia (see Anderson, 2003; Arcodia and Whitford, 2006; Gibson and Connell, 2011; Gibson and Stewart, 2009), there is very little contemporary work investigating agricultural shows. Generally, scholars have only mentioned the events in passing. Agricultural shows are not a natural by-product of rural life, but rather they are an event conceived and supported by political and economic elites seeking to promote the agriculture industry and rural areas, and as such they deserve attention (Edwards, 1999). This thesis hopes to address the omission of agricultural shows in the academic literature, both in geography and in other disciplines. The wider festival literature tends to focus purely on the social and cultural implications of events on the attendees, rather than the wider societal implications, again something which this thesis aims to do.

2.2 – General Overview

2.2.1 – The Contemporary Rural

This first section of the literature review does not intend to give a detailed account of the changes that have occurred in rural areas in recent decades, this is something that has been done by many others (see Ilbery, 1998; Woods, 2005; 2011 for the most comprehensive coverage). But rather it gives a brief overview of the current state of the countryside and the processes that have shaped it.

Traditionally agriculture has been the dominant force on the British rural landscape, with Angus *et al.* (2009) stating that in 2008 approximately 77 percent (17.5 million hectares) of land in Britain was used for agricultural purposes. As such the landscape of Britain is largely a result of agricultural management and government agricultural policies (Ibid).

Through the modern era, capitalist modes of production dominated European rural areas, and the rise of productivist agriculture has shaped rural economies, societies and environments transforming the countryside (Woods, 2011). However, in the mid-1980s there was a shift in European agricultural policy and it has been argued that there has been a shift to a post productivist era whereby farmers have been encouraged to diversify their activities through projects encompassing tourism/recreation, environmental improvements, high quality local foods and organic farming (Angus *et al.*, 2009).

Others have argued that there has not been as clear of a shift in the European countryside as first thought, and have focussed their attention towards the multifunctional nature of the countryside (Woods, 2011). The multifunctional approach to agriculture acknowledges that productivist systems are still highly significant in the modern-day countryside and still see the overall value of farms as part of the wider rural economy. According to Potter and Burney (2002) multifunctional agriculture produces food whilst sustaining rural landscapes, protecting rural biodiversity, generating employment and contributing to the viability

of rural areas (Ibid). The outcome of agriculture is no longer simply food, but rather there is a complex range of goods produced some of which have no commercial value, but social and environmental benefits (Woods, 2011).

As such the traditional image of rural areas being dominated by agriculture is no more, today the rural is a dynamic entity, constantly changing in response to a wide range of social, economic, political and environmental factors. Global restructuring has changed rural areas forever, a process that is still ongoing (Ilbery, 1998). Ilbery (1998) continues that the pace and processes of rural change has accelerated and there is no longer one single, uniform rural space, but rather we see a complex array of social interactions that occur in a distinct non-urban geographical area (Ibid).

As part of this move towards a multifunctional countryside there has been a move from an economy based on agricultural production to an economy that is based on the countryside as a form of commodity (Fløysand and Jakobsen, 2007). Drawing upon Marxist theory Cloke (1993) suggests that an object becomes a commodity when its exchange value exceeds its use value. In the sense of the countryside this means that objects are more valuable to producers as a good to be traded rather than property to be used. Commodification takes place when entities that have not traditionally been considered in economic terms are given an economic value, most recently, things such as landscape, fresh air become commodified. Controversially as part of a payment for ecosystems services approach, natural goods such as a biodiversity and carbon sequestration are now traded between farmers and the Welsh Government (Wynne-Jones, 2013).

Woods (2005) states there are five main elements to the commodification of countryside: the marketing of rural production sites as tourist attractions; the repackaging of rural heritage, creating the tourist gaze of the rural idyll based on nostalgia; the promotion of fictional rural landscapes whereby the tourist gaze is informed by fictional representations of rural life and landscape; the rural as a site for extreme experiences via adventure tourism that extend beyond the metaphor of the tourist gaze; and the use of rural areas as brand in the marketing of premium food and

craft products (Ibid). Essentially commodification involves the repackaging and re-presenting of the rural in order to emphasise the characteristics associated with the rural idyll, something which has been supported by policy changes at a European level (Little and Austin, 1996). This has enabled rural areas to become less reliant on agriculture (McNally, 2001), giving a more resilient rural economy.

Brandth and Haugen (2011) argue that this multifunctional countryside is not as common as first thought, and that some farmers have been very reluctant to change their activities, as they see this as being a betrayal of the agricultural profession. The livelihood of farming and the rural identity are so closely intertwined, by moving away from farming many within the industry have struggled with their identities, and fear that they can no longer be classed as a real farmer (Ibid).

Many businesses that used to solely operate within the agriculture industry now undertake what Shucksmith *et al.* (1989) call pluriactivity, that is they carry out a combination of agricultural and non-agricultural activities, and it is this pluriactivity which has saved many businesses at times of financial difficulty (Ibid).

2.2.2 – A Changing Countryside

The processes outlined in Section 2.2.1 have changed rural areas throughout Britain forever. Rural areas are further from the rural idyll than they have ever been. No longer is the economy of rural areas dominated by agriculture, and many agricultural businesses now have a form a secondary income.

Angus *et al.* (2009) report that in order to secure the future of their business, some farmers have opted to add value to their produce by moving up the food chain and undertaking the processing and sales themselves or through focusing on niche, quality products, rather than producing in bulk. This has also been driven by wider societal changes, whereby consumers have become more focused on the traceability of their food and its ethical history. As such some farmers have opted to diversify, and open farm shops, or sell their products directly at farmers' markets. Many agricultural

products have been rebranded as high quality local food and drink products, with a new emphasis being placed on consumption rather than production (Kneafsey *et al.*, 2008).

Driven by bottom-up processes, the migration of the creative classes to rural areas (often due to relatively cheap housing), and supported by EU level funding, a distinct (from the urban) creative industry has emerged in rural areas. This has created jobs and wealth in many areas that were previously reliant on agricultural production (Bell and Jayne, 2010).

This focus on the consumption of creative products in rural areas has seen the development of many different types of artist projects, festivals, theatre groups, and arts displays. Contributing to the new rural economy providing a source of income to rural areas, through generating a new industry, and the associated tourist trade (Ibid). Fløysand and Jakobsen (2007) argue that the development of a rural creative industry has helped to reshape some rural economies and change their place images, whilst also helping to develop a revitalised sense of community.

The diversification of farming businesses into multifunctional businesses has required a fundamental change in the skills and competencies of farmers which has inevitably effected the mentality and identities of farmers (Brandth and Haugen, 2011). This transition from operating a working farm to becoming a provider of services creates new occupational roles and identities. Despite this many still see themselves as being primarily farmers with a secondary identity as entrepreneurs.

This business restructuring as a result of moving to a multifunctional business model, means that many farmers have experienced a loss of identity and a denting of pride (Price and Evans, 2009). In recent times, agricultural geography has tended to take a political economy approach and has ignored many of the cultural impacts of change (Ibid).

These changes have also had a vast societal impact; rural areas are undergoing continual transformation. The move to a multifunctional countryside has been combined with a population influx to rural areas has changed social relations, and effected rural lifestyles (Paquette and Domon, 2003). This influx of migrants has meant that since the 1960s, many rural areas have experienced demographic growth (Robinson, 1990) particularly in terms of second homeowners, the elderly and commuters; it is argued that these trends are linked to wider improvements in transportation and communication infrastructure (Paquette and Domon, 2003).

This increasing residential mobility, which has led to counterurbanisation over the last thirty years or so, is a new form of rural gentrification argues Stockdale (2010). Drawing on the work of Cloke *et al.* (1995), she argues that rural places have become the preserve of the affluent new middle class particularly those in the professional and managerial service class (Stockdale, 2010).

The multifunctional countryside has actually helped to create the conditions for rural immigration and gentrification, changing farm patterns, farm mechanisation, lack of rural jobs and youth out migration has created many vacant properties which have been utilised by migrants. With fewer rural residents utilising rural services, a service rationalisation occurred seeing schools, railways and council buildings close leading to buildings suitable for conversion to residential use (Ibid).

The contemporary multifunctional rural is characterised by diverse migration flows, processes, groups, and motivations (Ni Laoire and Stockdale, 2016), which have led rural Wales to become more diverse. The majority of literature concerning ethnic diversity in the UK tends to ignore rural areas, but rather focuses on the experiences of those in England's largest conurbations (Robinson and Gardner, 2004). However census data has indicated that the minority ethnic population of rural areas is growing, and rural geography literature has mainly focused on how rural ethnic populations have been victimised and/or excluded (Pollard, 1989; Jay, 1992; Chahal and Julienne, 1999). Literature surrounding rural diversity tends to neglect the person and space specific elements of peoples experiences, and in addition overlooks unique

cultural and community dynamics (Robinson and Gardner, 2004). There is not simply one contemporary Wales, but that of a number, something which Robinson and Gardner (2004) state requires more attention in order to truly understand the diversity of Wales.

As much as the rural landscape was seen as a resource during the productivist era, it can now be argued that the rural landscape is a resource allowing for the wider redistribution of population and to help achieve rural development objectives (Paquette and Domon, 2003). This new use of the rural landscape has led to a reshaping of the rural, physically in terms of new builds and the conversion of existing buildings, and also socially which has led to changing relations between rural residents and a new understanding of rural space (Ibid).

Mather *et al.* (2006) discuss that post-productivism alone cannot account for all the changes that have been seen in rural land use and society throughout the last thirty years, and it has not led to a uniform change across Britain. The outbreak of Foot and Mouth disease in 2001 proved a turning point for rural areas, this combined with the BSE outbreak of the 1990s, resulted in many farmers changing their practices, or even leaving the industry. Resulting in an increasing number of vacant farms, in 2003 41% of these vacant farms were purchased by lifestyle migrants, who tend to focus on the production of amenities and commodities, rather than agriculture (Mather *et al.*, 2006).

Recent rural changes have not necessarily changed the look of rural areas, but they have changed the way that they feel to live in. New forms of employment have emerged, new services and recreation facilities (for locals and visitors alike) have arrived, which has had an impact upon social relations in rural areas. This is particularly important because of as Cloke and Goodwin (1992) state the outcomes of rural change is not predetermined, it is a socially constructed process.

Agriculture is not as dominant as it once was. There is now a peripheral focus on the development of strategies for wider rural development and environmental protection

due to changing market and policy contexts (Evans *et al.*, 2002). Contemporary rural areas are made up of many multiple and dynamic identities, that change and adapt depending on the type of activities that resident is involved in (Brandth and Haugen, 2011).

Although their impacts are yet to be truly measured, recent global and political events are likely to have an impact on rural areas, in particular debates surrounding food security, the 2008 – 2013 financial crisis, and the 2016 vote to leave the European Union.

Following the 2007 – 2008 food price spikes, anxieties about climate change, and resource pressures, food security has re-emerged as a key discourse in rural geography (MacMillan and Dowler, 2011). These destabilisations led to a realisation of the interdependence of pressures on global food security, and the differing responsibilities that lie with the state, private, and civic sectors. Scholars are now beginning to re-examine food security, sustainability, sovereignty and justice throughout the supply, allocation, and consumption chain (Marsden and Morley, 2014).

However food security debates within the UK context are notably absent due to a focus of scale, and an increasing interest in local food systems (Kirwan and Maye, 2013). Kirwan and Maye (2013) argue that the geographical focus on food security should shift from scale to making the most sustainable use of resources. They argue that a more holistic approach needs to be taken to analyse the current agri-industrial food paradigm (also see Horlings and Marsden, 2011). They continue by stating this approach should frame food security as a global issue where resilience can be best achieved through sustainable intensification, market liberalization and risk management (Kirwan and Maye, 2013).

Food security and issues surrounding the sustainable use of resources are going to present a key challenge to rural areas throughout the twenty-first century (Woods, 2012), and will no doubt shape rural areas over the coming decades.

Although anecdotally it has been reported that the impacts of austerity and corporate cost-cutting has decimated rural areas (Adams, 2017), no academic work has been found to have been published on the financial crisis and the countryside in the UK. The impact of financial crises on rural areas has however been examined in the international context particularly in relation to Ireland (Murphy and Scott, 2014), Greece (Anthopoulou *et al.*, 2017) and Spain (Sanchez-Zamora *et al.*, 2014).

Given the full repercussions are as yet unknown, there has been very limited academic work undertaken with regards to Brexit and rural areas. However Dwyer (2018) has found that changing trading conditions as a result of Brexit is likely to disadvantage the competitive position of Welsh agriculture. Furthermore it is anticipated that the level of public support for agriculture will reduce compared to current levels, and it is expected that agriculture will see very little of any Brexit dividend (Franks, 2016). Dwyer (2018) therefore concludes that unless farm businesses adapt accordingly Brexit will have a profound impact on agriculture. It can therefore be expected that in the next decade Welsh rural areas, will see substantial change, with there being a renewed focus on entrepreneurship, new skills, new products, and new markets for new alternative products (Ibid). If Dwyer's conclusions come to fruition, Brexit could lead to a new era for Welsh rural areas.

Much of the geographical work focusing on rural change has taken a political economy approach. This has provided good explanations of agricultural change through interdisciplinary efforts, whilst encouraging a move away from individuals and more towards the structures that constrain the choices that people make. Despite the cultural turn in human geography (and rural geography), there has been relatively little research undertaken on agriculture from a cultural perspective (Morris and Evans, 2004). Through using the case study of the largest rural event in Europe, the RWS, this thesis will take a cultural approach to examine how the event can lead to innovation within the industry.

2.3 – Rural Knowledge Exchange

2.3.1 – Trust and Social Capital

For any rural development and change to occur, trust must be present. Trust is fundamental in rural governance. Harvey (2003) summarises trust as an indicator of people's willingness to place faith in relationships and institutions in which they have a limited influence and is a key issue in citizen/government relationships. Trust is not a given, it is a complex social phenomenon which is shaped by knowledge, emotion, reputation, appearance, gender identities and power relations (Murphy. 2006). Therefore, in order for a government to be successful and for a positive relationship to exist between government and populations, it is vital that trust is present.

Whilst the role of trust has long been recognised as being important in facilitating rural development and technology transfer (see Curry and Fisher, 2012; Fisher, 2013; Sligo and Massey, 2007), it remains relatively undertheorised within geography (Murphy, 2006). No matter how trust is created, be it through business networks, friends or family, trust is a fundamental characteristic of the knowledge exchange process. Where trust is present people tend to be more flexible, adaptive and innovative in the knowledge transfer process, which ultimately yields better results (Ibid).

Murphy (2006) believes that trust is the means in which actor networks are extended across time and space consequently enabling economic agents to develop and stabilise relationships for learning, innovation and productivity. Humphrey and Schmitz (1998) write of three levels of trust. At the micro scale trust is constructed over time and through subjective interpretations of shared experiences and the competence of another agent. At the meso scale, trust emerges through face-to-face encounters on the basis of ascriptions, group memberships or other characteristics. Macro level trust is more generalised and derived from institutional attitudes about the trustworthiness of people, whether that be based around their religious or philosophical values or from beliefs in the ability of the government or other institutions to protect the citizen (Ibid).

The decision of whom to trust is ultimately made at the micro scale and individuals evaluate and consider the risks, benefits and likely outcomes of trusting a particular group or person and how the relationship will develop (Murphy, 2006). Trust will only emerge when all involved parties are aware of each other's roles and if they have similar aims and expectations.

In order for trust to be developed and for change to occur there need to be a high level of social capital, that is the value obtained from participating in social networks (Putnam, 1993; Halpern, 2005; Townsend *et al.*, 2014). For Putnam, social capital is the glue that binds people together, it builds the trust that forms the basis of flourishing relationships, as well as reinforcing social norms. It is a collective good benefiting the wider community, and leads to altruism and collective action (Townsend *et al.*, 2014). Putnam (1995: 67) states that social capital involves "features of social organisations such as networks, norms, and trust that facilitates co-ordination and co-operation for mutual benefit", where there is a high level of social capital individuals are able to act more effectively within institutional structures, benefiting them and others around them (Coleman, 1990).

Unlike other forms of capital, social capital is not privately owned, or tangible, it is transferable, and freely accessible by members of a community (Arcodia and Whitford, 2006). Social capital is a relational concept, and in order to possess it, a person must be related to others, and it is those other people who are able to create the advantage (Portes, 1998).

Social capital is constantly evolving; it does not remain static. If it is well used, social capital increases and can be used in other areas which may be unrelated, but when social capital is ignored and not used, it diminishes, and the community gradually loses its ability to access it (Hemmingway, 1999). Putnam (1993) suggests that social capital is cumulative, once successful collaboration has been made, and trust is present, further collaboration is possible, further increasing social capital, and local development.

Cox (1995) suggests that social capital is the most important of all capitals, as it provides the basis upon which civil society can be established. She however, further suggests, that social capital is in decline, as a result of increased residential mobility, the welfare state, increased demands on time and money, and the changing role of women. As such events and festivals, which are able to facilitate social capital are more important than ever to ensure economic success and community resilience.

Social capital is seen as being particularly important within the rural context, the geographical remoteness of businesses in rural areas often means that they are isolated from one another and potential clients (Townsend *et al.*, 2014). Networking opportunities not only help to reduce this isolation, but they also facilitate the building of this social capital. This geographical remoteness also poses a problem in terms of formal networking opportunities, as these locations contain fewer businesses to network with, and the sparse population means that engagement with formal networking events is often weak (Phillipson *et al.*, 2006).

Coleman (1988) has found that generally rural areas have a higher level of social capital, and this often means that rural residents have a higher level of trust in local entities which can help make the process of knowledge transfer and innovation more successful (Koutsou *et al.*, 2014). Trust is an essential component of social capital and without trust no social networks are able to flourish. Trust is essential to allow groups and individuals to face their common future in an efficient and collaborative way allowing for innovation (Trigilla, 2001). Only when trust is present can lasting rural change be made.

Rural change is normally as a result of top down policy interventions and in recent years the decisions made by successive governments combined with the various crises that have impacted on rural areas has meant that there is a distinct lack of trust between farmers and government (Fisher, 2013). Fisher suggests that farmers have become frustrated by the lack of government action and support for the agriculture industry, and they see many policymakers as having a lack of knowledge about the industry and the things that have an impact on their lives. Farmers tend to only trust

those who they feel have sufficient knowledge of their work and the realities of farming (Ibid).

Farmers do not give trust easily, generally they tend to have a very low level of system trust, it takes many years for farmers to build trust with government and policymakers, familiarity is key and personal contact such as that which occurs at the RWAS is vital to help build this trust (Curry and Fisher, 2012). Events such as the RWAS are key to building bridging social capital and therefore trust between farmers and policymakers as they allow these key actors to come into contact with each other, allowing for the negotiation of trust, the sharing of knowledge and ultimately facilitating rural change.

Rural events can be seen as a key space for rural elites to build trust and social capital. Events bring together elites from different backgrounds, and due to this proximity enables to the mobilisation of new and existing networks/entities (Latour, 1986). As discussed by Woods (1998) the elite space that rural events are able to facilitate allows for different rural actors, representing different interests to come together for discussion and negotiation can occur. As the name suggests these rural elites are able to influence rural areas (normally from the top down), should the right conditions be in place, the influence of elites can have wide implications for trust and social capital rural areas (Ibid).

Where there is a low level of trust and social capital in rural communities, farmers tend to fall behind with adapting to modern circumstances, they do not follow the government and other actors lead in innovating agriculture. Those farmers without trust are only marginally able to benefit from the latest opportunities and they remain exposed to threats. Those who lack trust are often defensive, which averts change and can lead to long term damage for individuals and the industry as a whole (Koutsou *et al.*, 2014).

However, where there are low levels of institutional trust, there tends to be a high level of trust between individual farmers and others. This high level of trust can be

used to build the foundations on which meaningful community action can take place. These networks where the members have a shared history and a common goal often sustain loose bonds and links between members without having any binding commitments, members can dip in and out of the group enabling changes to be made and sustaining a high level of social capital in rural communities (Ibid). Therefore, even if rural people do not have a high level of institutional trust, they often have a high level of trust with their peers and as a result of this high level of bonding social capital, knowledge can still be exchanged between farmers. Therefore, agricultural innovation can take place and the industry can develop.

This lack of system trust often leads to the formation of rural communities of practice (Wenger, 1998), these tend to be self-managed, where participants learn as a result of their participation in the social world (Oreszczyn *et al.*, 2010). As part of these communities of practice, members come together in order to achieve a common goal and to share best practice, over time a common history is developed which generates a high level of trust. These communities of practice are just one example the many complex rural innovation systems that allow farmers to learn from each other and from outside organisations. As will be discussed in the next section, these innovation systems have a very wide range of influencers allowing farmers to learn in a very social manner, encouraging the adoption of new techniques, allowing farmers to remain competitive (Ibid).

2.3.2 – Rural innovation systems

Agriculture is a highly complex industry with many human and non-human actors all of which have a major influence on the success of the industry. Due to the large numbers of actors involved, and their differing perspectives farmers are often given conflicting advice and often do not know who trust, all of which leads to a complex knowledge transfer system (Lane and Oreszczyn, 2013).

Lane and Oreszczyn (2013) write of a highly complex agricultural innovation and knowledge transfer system that is comprised of organisations and individuals, who are

linked and interacting through networks that are engaged with creating, sharing and using different types of knowledge in order to support innovation in agriculture. These knowledge exchange systems are often of a participatory form in an attempt to address the different power relations and to improve relations between the different parties.

It is vital that rural knowledge exchange networks are understood, so that future agricultural innovation can be managed, and information exchange systems fully understood and utilised (Spielman *et al.*, 2011). Multiple large organisations (for example government, farming unions, corporations and NGOs) are normally involved in providing resources such as information and capital, these organisations will link with farmers on the ground, producing bridging ties that facilitate the exchange of information (Isaac, 2012). Once these ties have been made and trust has been built, networks of exchange can be developed enabling change and innovation between the different actors (Ibid). Previous studies have found that it is not the relationships between the different organisations that are important, but rather it is the relationships between the individual actors that are the key to enabling knowledge transfer and innovation within the industry (Tindall, 2008).

Knowledge transfer at a community level has also proved to be highly effective, Prell and others (2009) concluded that when knowledge transfer agents connect with key community members and adopt them as demonstrators of new practice, it is more likely that knowledge will be transferred and rural change will occur (Ibid). There is often a divide between farmers and those who are considered to be rural experts, some farmers believe that the experts do not listen to their own lay knowledge and have a one size fits all programme (Proctor *et al.*, 2012). For knowledge transfer between experts and farmers to be effective it is vital that the knowledge is transferred both up and down the hierarchy, and that farmers feel they are listened too, in turn farmers must be able to see the benefits of dealing with the experts.

In an era of decreasing trust with key rural actors and a time of uncertainty for the agriculture industry it is likely that farmers will share a sense of adversity with one

another enabling greater trust and social networking behaviour (Sligo and Massey, 2007). These social networks allow for the new forms of horizontal knowledge exchange to form where farmers will share personal stories and experiences with one another, and a unique farmer to farmer system of knowledge transfer emerges as a result of personal relationships (Trauger *et al.*, 2008).

As found by Trauger *et al.* (2008), farmers often prefer to learn from each other in an informal manner, many farmers feel that that formal presentations given by so called experts often hinder the farmers learning process. This study found that farmers learn better from “their own people” and those who they feel shared their own embodied experiences (*Ibid*). This reliance on an informal means of knowledge transfer has long been known (see Pred, 1977), however due to the fact that it is unique and personal to each individual actor these methods of knowledge transfer are often overlooked in the literature.

The ability of farmers to produce their own knowledge has long been recognised and it has been noted that in periods of change within the industry farmers are not merely receivers of information, they produce and hold their own distinct form of knowledge (Goulet, 2013). This is particularly the case in areas that have strong social networks which enable farmers to exchange knowledge with their peers and to share their experiences. If done correctly this can lead to changes in the industry and can form a community of practice (Wenger, 1996).

Sligo and Massey (2007) explain how recreational events are key to knowledge sharing between different farmers who are normally isolated, these events provide a forum for farmers to catch up with old friends who they might not normally see, which allows them to share best practice in an informal manner. Farmers believe that through sharing best practice with other farmers they have nothing to lose and a lot to gain, as not only might it help their business, but it is also interesting for farmers to find out what others are doing (*Ibid*).

2.3.3 – Temporary Knowledge Clusters

Bathelt *et al.* (2004) argue that knowledge exchange and innovation are best understood as a result of an interactive process involving different types of knowledge and competencies, coming together and exchanging information. It is only by being located in the same local environment, and by meeting repeatedly in person (therefore building trust), can more subtle forms of information be exchanged (Bathelt *et al.*, 2004). This form of knowledge exchange typically happens between organisations operating within the same industry, and that are located within the same geographical proximity, enabling regular meetings, and exchange of knowledge (Torre, 2008). Organisations/individuals that exchange knowledge in this way are known as permanent knowledge clusters.

However, in later work, Bathelt and Turi (2011) argue that in the modern era of globalisation, and an increasing use of technology the need for geographical proximity to facilitate knowledge exchange relationships has subsided (Ibid). They argue that technology has enabled the development of new clusters that do not require regular physical contact for trust to be developed and knowledge to be exchanged. Although these clusters are facilitated by technology, face-to-face interaction is still key, and as such large temporary events such as trade shows, conferences and agricultural show becomes vitally important in the knowledge exchange process. Townsend and others (2014) state that given the remoteness of many rural areas it is this face to face communication that is vital in order to develop bridging social capital, and to ensure that any networks and clusters can lead to tangible benefits. The coming together of actors with the purpose to exchange knowledge at these temporary events means they can become known as temporary knowledge clusters (Bathelt and Turi, 2011).

Temporary clusters therefore support the processes of interactive learning, knowledge creation and the development of international networks (Bathelt and Schuldt, 2008) and they tend to be multidimensional, being characterised by both vertical and horizontal interactions. These vertical interactions occur through organisations interacting with suppliers and customers, which enables information

about market trends and possible future requirements to be exchanged. As part of a temporary cluster, organisations that normally compete with one another may be brought into contact, these horizontal exchanges bring opportunities for competing organisations to observe what each other are doing, and as a result improve their own practices (Ibid).

Through an organisation observing their competitors in this way it allows them to adopt new ideas, innovating their own products/practices, allowing them to improve and remain competitive. These clusters are not a closed system, by becoming part of a temporary cluster an organisation becomes embroiled in a complex web of knowledge exchange and innovation. This encompasses a wide variety of internal and external actors, and information exchange may take many different routes (Torre, 2008).

These temporary clusters bring together people from all walks of life and various communities of practice, which helps to stimulate interaction and knowledge exchange. Temporary clusters help to maintain and intensify existing networks with customers and suppliers, whilst also allowing new networks to be developed (Bathelt and Schuldt, 2008).

The coming together of actors as part of a temporary cluster leads to the creation of 'noise' (Grabher, 2002), 'local broadcasting' (Owen-Smith and Powell, 2002) or as I will refer to it in this thesis, 'buzz' (Storper and Venables, 2002). Buzz is the information and communication ecology that is created by face-to-face contact, and through multiple actors being located within the same geographical spaces (Bathelt *et al.*, 2004). Simply by being in the location actors can benefit from this buzz (Gertler, 1995), through being part of this temporary cluster members are able to pick up on specific information, both which is intended and unanticipated, through planned and accidental meetings (Bathelt *et al.*, 2004).

In order to participate in buzz, actors are not required to make any capital or social investment, they are able to receive any information automatically by simply being located (either permanently or temporarily) in the geographical region of that cluster.

The concept of buzz means that actors do not have to seek out information, but rather through being in that geographical location they are able to hear the latest industry rumours, recommendations and strategic information (Grabher, 2002).

The literature currently suggests that there are two main types of buzz, both of which offer their own advantages to members of that network. First, local buzz is highly beneficial to participants as it helps to generate a wider variety of unexpected innovation and collaboration opportunities. Global buzz, as the name suggest draws in a wider audience from around the world, enabling global connections to be made and new opportunities to be opened up (Bathelt *et al.*, 2004). However thus far buzz has not really been appropriated in the context of rural studies.

Buzz is not perhaps as simple as the preceding paragraphs suggest, it is a strong network of communication and information linkages, which have developed within a cluster as a result of longstanding trust and social capital developments (Bathelt *et al.*, 2004). Of course, buzz cannot be planned and two situations will never be the same, buzz is spontaneous and is very much dependent on the actors that it features. Over time, as a result of their shared history and trust in one another, the buzz becomes confirmed and more solid communities of practice are able to form (Wenger, 1998) allowing for the sharing of knowledge in a more formal and organised manner (Bathelt and Turi, 2011).

2.4 – Rural Festivals

Despite the recent growth of disciplines such as events management, events and festivals in the rural context, until recently have remained relatively unstudied in academia. There is a particular knowledge gap relating to the social, cultural, and/or the political impact of events on their host communities (Arcodia and Whitford, 2006).

The flourishing literature surrounding festivals and events tends to focus on their strategic and operational management, with the vast majority of this focussing on production and supply side issues and tends to be very applied in nature. Across the

social sciences there is a small but significant literature that has a focus on the social and cultural aspects of festivals and events (Quinn, 2009).

Recently, particularly in the Australian context, rural events have been receiving more attention. Gibson and Connell (2011) have published an edited volume on rural festivals and events. Gorman-Murray *et al.* (2012) have discussed how a festival has led to Daylesford being constructed as a lesbian and gay rural idyll. Furthermore Edwards (2012) has investigated how a local, cultural economy has been created from a traditional music festival in Gympie.

Many rural areas have sought to reinvigorate community and stimulate economic development through the staging of events/festivals (Gibson and Stewart, 2009). These events take many forms, from the traditional agricultural show, to fulfilling diverse niches. Although non-metropolitan festivals are becoming increasingly commercialised, they are still deeply connected to geography, they are an expression of local places, and local people (Gibson and Stewart, 2009). Despite these events being relatively short lived, as this section of the literature review will demonstrate, they have a significant impact on all aspects of rural life.

2.4.1 – Background

One of the most comprehensive definitions of a festival has been given by the South Australian Tourism Commission, they state: “Festivals are celebrations of something the local community wishes to share, and which involves the public as participants in the experiences. Festivals must have as prime objective a maximum amount of people participation, which must be an experience that is different from or broader than day to day living. It is not necessary to extend hands on experience by more than one day, though it is often economically desirable” (South Australian Tourism Commission, 1997: 2). In a similar vein, Jago and Shaw (1998: 29) define an event as “a onetime or infrequently occurring event of limited duration that provides the consumer with a leisure and social opportunity beyond everyday experience”. For the purpose of this literature review and thesis I will treat the two concepts as one, as the literature does not clearly differentiate between the two.

Festivals and events were traditionally the way in which communities celebrated special occasions. They were communal gatherings that objectifies people's collective wishes and dreams and provide an important occasion for a unique experience within their social lives (Earls, 1993). The origins of festivals as a celebration of a community can be traced right back to the carnival of Europe (Arcodia and Whitford, 2006), today festivals and events take many forms and function in many different ways around the globe. It is not the place of this thesis to give a detailed overview of festivals and their history, but this section of the literature review will give a brief overview of some of the impacts that arise from events and festivals in the rural context.

According to O'Sullivan and others (2008), festivals and events in rural areas have many intangible impacts, which are often neglected in traditional impact studies, and they have a multiple set of roles in rural development. They continue to state that there is a need to evaluate the potential of rural festivals and events more fully, which is something that this thesis will do.

2.4.2 – Impacts of Rural Festivals

Events and festivals bring a number of benefits to their host communities, they have the ability to draw in outside investment and financial resources to local communities, and to rural areas that are often neglected (Reid, 2007). It is undeniable that events in any context have the ability to boost the economy of their host communities, they generate income and help to create employment (Richie, 1984). This thesis does not want to focus on the economic benefits that these events can bring, but rather the social, cultural, and political implications of non-metropolitan events. Festivals and events can be seen as a type of social enterprise and they do not often focus on profit maximisation but rather they have a range of goals, they are important creators of social capital, and wider opportunities for their host communities (Pickernell *et al.*, 2007)

Much of the previous research on the social impacts of events, has been done within an urban setting (Richards *et al.*, 2013; Waitt, 2003; 2008), overlooking the social consequences of rural events. It is thought that rural areas will absorb the

consequences of events in a different way to rural areas due to the fact that urban environments are larger, more dynamic and increasingly multidimensional when compared to rural settings (Ife, 1995).

According to Reid (2007) rural events provide the opportunity to bring people together in a social environment in order to celebrate theirs and others' achievements, impacting both individuals and wider communities. Reid (2006) has identified a number of social consequences of rural events, these are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Social Consequences of events (Reid, 2006)

Positive Social Consequences	Negative Social Consequences
Showcase effect	Environmental damage and litter
Tool for regeneration	Loss of amenities
Encourages tourism	Antisocial behaviour
Enhances community spirit and improves quality of life	Creates very few job opportunities
Provides leisure and recreational opportunities	Exploitation and manipulation of event themes for commercialisation
Promotes civic boo	Degradation of positive tourism and promotional imagery
Provides educational and cultural understanding	Causes social dislocation and increases in housing costs
Encourages participation in sporting activities	Financial burdens
	Loss of traditions
	Changes in community values and patterns

By looking at the first column of the preceding table, all the of the elements identified by Reid (2006) are all linked by social capital, in order for any of the positive impacts of an event to occur there is a need for a high level of social capital.

Reid (2006) further notes that events allow the opportunity for residents to forget the hard times that they may be experiencing and allows for a releasing of stress and tension. Gibson and Stewart (2009) have found similar with them stating that rural festivals provide communities with a coping mechanism, particularly at times of

economic hardship, and catalyse community in the name of fun. As such rural events are vital for the psychological wellbeing of individuals and communities, and at a time of adversity can provide an impetus for communities to keep going. Until Reid's (2007) investigation into the impacts of rural events, the impact that these have on change was unacknowledged. She found that events within rural areas provide a catalyst for introducing and facilitating change, not only through the introduction of new ideas to an area, but also due to the fact that events often provide the opportunity for local people to work with new groups, helping to break down barriers, allowing a greater acceptance and tolerance.

Governments are increasingly seeing the benefits of events and are using them to their advantage, according to Arcodia and Whitford (2006) governments are now using events as a platform for industry and economic development. This is something that has been further noted by Hjalager and Kwiatkowski (2017), who within the Danish context note that rural festivals bring ubiquitous business benefits. More widely events allow governments to enhance the image of the host location enabling economic benefits (Burgan and Mules, 2000). Many politicians today get involved with events and festivals, and they are not only seen as an opportunity for electioneering, but large events also stimulate wider debate and can influence public policy (Marsh and Galbraith, 1995). However, if some festivals get too political, there is a danger that they may reflect the desires of the only the political/dominant classes, and allow them to peruse their own interests (Ritchie, 1984).

Due to their ability to bring businesses and the community together, festivals develop community resources and therefore help to build social capital. This interaction in organising and during a festival/event can create links between previous unrelated groups of individuals and organisations, encouraging stronger interactions and better relations between different groups (Arcodia and Whitford, 2006). Where festivals are a regular event, these social networks have the opportunity to last far beyond the life of the festival and they can have a long-term benefit, not only for creating new partnerships, but also revitalising existing ones (Ibid).

As such policymakers are increasingly recognising that festivals and events provide host communities with much more than an economic boost (Wood, 2005). Festivals are able to achieve a myriad of positive outcomes, they not only attract tourists and visitors, but they have a role in education, community building, promotion of government agendas, increased social capital, and increases quality of life for residents (O'Sullivan *et al.*, 2008).

There are a number of negative social impacts that are associated with rural events, these are again shown in Table 1 based around the work of Reid (2007), it was this work that identified some of these for the first time in a rural context. Economically at the time of events and festivals, local residents tend to experience inflated price, interruptions to their normal daily patterns of life, and many residents choose to leave the area at the time of the event (Dwyer *et al.*, 2000).

According to Arcodia and Whitford (2006) one of the most widely debated aspect of any event is the environmental impact that they have. Rural events are often marketed as a result of their unique physical characteristics, however physical attributes are often highly fragile, and need protecting against environmental damage, noise and overcrowding, which can be a negative side effect of any event.

2.4.3 – Community Building

Events allow rural people to get together in a celebration of their heritage and identity, as such they have a key role in community building. Rural events help to give communities a shared vision, a clear sense of purpose, which value individual ideas. Through the organisation of events communities work together on their shared issues, in order to celebrate their heritage and to solve contemporary problems, this enables a level of connectedness, belonging, and support to be created, allowing a shared purpose to be manifest (Dunstan, 1994).

Often rural festivals rely upon volunteers to work at, and ensure the success of the event. Through this process of volunteerism festival are deeply embedded in local

economies in a non-monetary way (Gibson and Stewart, 2009), rural festivals of all sizes depend on volunteers for their running and their success, this provides opportunities for personal development and can encourage greater uses of community spaces and wider involvement in community life (Arcodia and Whitford, 2006). To ensure the success of a festival, organisers have to be able to give up their own time, and persuade others to give up their time too, this helps to bind the community, and if the event happens on a regular basis it enables the community to constantly renew itself (Derrett, 2003).

Through providing opportunities for informal participation, rural festivals are able to provide residents with a good overall view of their community, and often through which connections are created, offering a sense of belonging, support, empowerment and participation. All of which can act as a social glue, and contributing to the solving of any community problems (Derrett, 2003). Festivals and events can help with the achievement of many government community strategies including the building of active citizenship, social justice, and social capital (Cox, 1995), allowing residents to create attachment to place and the people with whom they share the location. This form of celebration allows the whole community to participate in an occasion that generates a feeling of goodwill, and can give local populations the opportunity to break away from their daily routines, and to socialise with other members of the community (Earls, 1993). This in turn allows residents to create attachments to the place and people with whom they share that location (Derrett, 2003).

Festivals also give communities the chance to enhance their liveability for their resident populations, events such as these not only serve the needs of visitors, but also local populations. Festivals encourage local enterprises, and promote sustainable employment (Derrett 2003). This impact can last long after the end of the festival or event, with a cumulative impact being experienced in terms of destination branding and helping to create a positive image for the identity of that community.

However, the impact on the community is not always positive Gibson and Stewart (2009), divisions can exist between the festival organisers and the local community,

there is often an uneven distribution of economic benefits, a clash of cultures between local residents and visitors, and logistical problems associated with dealing with large crowds at these events. These divisions are often overcome through a process of social exchange whereby local residents are willing to exchange certain benefits and freedoms as a result of the monetary benefits that are received from hosting the event (Gibson and Stewart, 2009).

2.4.4 – Placemaking

An important aspect of any festival experience is the sense of place that is created by that event, and studies have shown that recognising people's attachment to a place influences their sense of stewardship to that place and community. Acting as a host for a festival allows a region to gain a shared purpose and as such they can provide a heart to the community (Derrett, 2003) and bring with it an opportunity for community cultural development (Getz, 1997). Festivals and events reflect the social identity of their individual communities, its historical continuity, and the physical survival of that community, they capture the individual society of that region, celebrating its local produce, cuisine, arts, youth practice and business involvement (Derrett, 2003). As Fountain and Mackay (2017) found when investigating Akaroa, New Zealand, their French Festival has enabled the town to construct and promote their unique place-based identity, allowing the town to demonstrate its local agency in a globalising world.

For a long time, place has been a significant aspect of geography (see Massey, 1991), but the use of festivals and events to recreate space has only recently been investigated in a geographical context, Quinn (2005) suggests that this is because in recent times festivals and events have been created on an unprecedented scale (Ibid). The modern events industry has seen places become repackaged and their heritage commodified, as part of an economy of signs (Lash and Urry, 1993) leading to benefits for the host communities.

According to Greene (1996), the greater the attachment that someone has to a certain place, the greater sense of stewardship they will have, something that is further emphasised by Theodori and Luloff (1998) who suggest that community involvement is an important factor in analysing the strength of a person's attachment to a community or place. As such those who have a greater emotional attachment to their local community are likely to have a greater stake in any local events. These shared memories, and communal history of those who have a greater sense of place, encourages people to come together and allows for spontaneous interactions, such as those which occur at festivals and events (Derrett, 2003).

As mentioned previously rural festivals are an important community event, and they constitute a vehicle for expressing the identity of that community to the outside world. They draw upon shared history, shared cultural practices and ideals to engender local continuity, whilst also acting as arenas where local knowledge is produced and reproduced (Quinn, 2005). As such festivals and events are able to promote particular sets of values and meanings to an outside audience (Jackson, 1988).

Like tourism, an event/festival can be seen as the experience and consumption of place (Meethan, 1995), and as such events are able to offer people tangible and intangible opportunities to connect people (both insiders and outsiders) to places (Derrett, 2003).

Festival and events are never impromptu, and as such the place image that they present is manipulated by human forces who are often trying to promote their own agendas, events are influenced not only by the organising committee, but by sponsors, government, the media, and other stakeholders (Quinn, 2005). As such the image of place that is presented by an event may not be authentic, but rather an image that is constructed and influenced by many different forces, and therefore as Quinn (2005) concludes the festival place is constructed from multiple social relations (Massey, 1991), that evolve continuously.

As part of their placemaking experience festivals use the full five senses of touch, taste, hearing, smell, and sight, and they offer a fully sensual experience. As such the landscape surrounding the event will have an influence on the visitor's experience of the event, and therefore ensuring that the right sense of place is constructed is key, so that the event meets the expectations of the visitors (Derrett, 2003).

2.5 – Showing Agriculture

According to Eversole and Martin (2005), one of the most common traditions for members of rural communities globally is to attend the annual fair or agricultural show, yet such events are under-researched in rural studies. As long ago as 1949, Kniffen (1949) noted that the US agricultural fair had received very little scholarly attention and called for there to be greater engagement with their geographical aspects. Some 55 years later, Holloway (2004) made a similar statement, calling for further research on the impact of agricultural shows on rural areas, a call again reiterated by Marsden in 2010. Thus far geographers have not taken up this call, this section of the literature review will summarise the limited academic literature that surrounds these events.

Agricultural shows are a key fixture on the calendar of many rural communities, but similar to rural society these events have changed over recent decades. Agricultural shows have changed from being purely a social and competition space aimed purely at rural residents, to today serving a number of economic, social, cultural, and environmental features targeted at rural people, tourists, and the wider population (Woods, 2011).

The ASAO, the industry body for agricultural shows in the UK estimates that seven million people visit an agricultural or country show on an annual basis (ASAO, 2016), as a result these events provide a unique opportunity for the rural and the rural to come together in a celebration of agricultural achievement and the rural heritage of the UK.

Agricultural shows are the nexus between tourism and agriculture (Mitchell, 2006) which are the two single most important industries for rural areas. Agricultural shows take a form of agricultural tourism. That is tourism that is based within the agricultural realm, whereby visitors are empowered to experience a wide array of agricultural products within a themed setting (Mitchell, 2006). But unlike other forms of tourism agricultural shows are hallmark events³ (see Hall and Page, 2006) whereby they are a discontinuous event rather than a year-round activity, attracting people to rural areas, impacting upon local culture, politics and economy.

2.5.1 – History and Development of Agricultural Shows

This thesis does not intend to give a history of the agricultural societies and shows of the world, this is something that has been done by many of the agricultural societies themselves (See Goddard, 1988; Howell, 2003). However, it is important to review some of the historical literature surrounding agricultural shows in order to get a greater understanding of their development and significance.

The early work on agricultural shows was undertaken in the context of the USA. In the USA agricultural shows are referred to as country fairs or agricultural fairs, but these events are the same in form and function as what we see in Britain. The early pioneer in work on the agricultural fair was Kniffen (1949; 1951), he wrote of the spatial elements of the agricultural, and his work was closely followed by Betts (1952) writing of the rise in the non-agricultural aspects of the events, and how this lead to the character of the events changing.

The early geographical work on the American agricultural fair addresses the spatial aspects of the event, such as how the pattern, form, time and place of the agricultural fair has an impact upon the definition of the event, and how these localised aspects alter the characteristics of the individual events (Kniffen, 1949). These early studies

³ Hall (1989: 263) states that “Hallmark tourist events are major fairs, expositions, cultural and sporting events of international status which are held on either a regular or a one-off basis. A primary function of the hallmark event is to provide the host community with an opportunity to secure high prominence in the tourism market place”.

tended to look at the development of the agricultural show either chronologically or from a historical perspective, and looked at the changing significance of the event to the local community over time (Kniffen, 1951).

Holloway (2005a) states that in the late eighteenth century agricultural shows emerged as a result of agricultural societies wanting to promote, progress and improve livestock breeding, equipment manufacture and tillage practices. A point which has been echoed for the American context by Kniffen (1949) stating that the primary purpose of the American fair was to improve agriculture and the domestic arts by offering attractive premiums for exhibits. These early shows were used to display the latest advances in the industry to members of the agricultural community, a role that is still held by the events today (Holloway, 2005a).

Early agricultural shows were set up with a based around the fact that agriculture was seen as being vital to the formation of a strong society and civilisation, and as such the events were formed in order to ensure that the agriculture industry was able to meet the needs of twentieth century America to be able to sustain a growing population (Edwards, 1999).

Kniffen (1949) writes that early agricultural societies were being seen as being out of touch with the typical working man, and the skills that they were trying to disseminate to the industry were at such a level, they had no relevance to the typical farmer. The introduction of the agricultural show was an attempt to break down this gap between the agricultural societies and the practising farmer. These events were used to educate the farmers to the latest agricultural innovations, with farming populations being encouraged to attend by the prize money that was on offer for exhibiting their stock (thus sharing best practice). Early agricultural shows acted as a staging ground where crops and livestock could be collected, exhibited and then distributed to other fairs and exhibitions around the United States and even the world. These events would not operate in isolation, but rather they were an important link between farmers and consumers, spreading throughout the whole supply chain (Edwards, 1999).

One of the biggest changes in the development of the contemporary agricultural show was the decision to enclose a showground and to start to charge for admission, exactly when this practice began is unknown, but the earliest reference can be found when looking at the New York State Fair in 1843 (Kniffen, 1949). Betts (1953) investigated the rise of the side stall and entertainment at the agricultural fair, although non-agricultural aspects are common place in today's events, they were initially met with much hostility and anxiety by those who wanted to agricultural shows to remain true to their roots and be scientific, educational, and social institutions (Ibid). When introduced the non-agricultural aspects of Shows were seen to be a moral and economic curse for agricultural societies (Betts, 1953). In fact, the opposite has happened as these aspects have enriched the agricultural show experience, supplemented the core aims of the societies, and ensured that visitors are kept entertained and return year after year to the events.

Throughout their history agricultural shows have had a large influence on the development of rural areas, they have served multiple purposes throughout their history, they are a site for education, trade and entertainment, all of which combine to promote agricultural and rural development. These early agricultural shows (as with agricultural shows today), were highly commended by the politicians and local business people as being a very important promotional tool for the agriculture industry and wider rural areas, in order to develop the industry (Edwards, 1999). Within the context of the UK agricultural shows have made an important contribution to advancing the agriculture industry and rural areas. They have allowed for the improving of husbandry technique and stock quality, and as such have enabled the country to meet the needs for increased food production (Henning, 1998). Aside from their impact on the agriculture industry, they are also a powerful means of communication between farmers and the general public, allowing the story of the industry to be told, often frequently competing against unfair perceptions of the industry (Ibid).

2.5.2 – The Modern-Day Show

2.5.2.1 – Background

In contemporary Britain, agricultural shows incorporate royal shows, county shows, horticultural shows, and equine shows. There are over 400 show days in Britain, which attract people from all different backgrounds (ASAO, 2016). The scale of agricultural shows in Britain varies; according to Gray (2010), there are three main types of shows in the Britain:

- Local shows – aimed at small communities and their outlying areas, with completion entries limited to a certain geographical area.
- County/regional shows – these do not limit entries to any geographical area, the competitions are similar to the larger national shows, but on a smaller scale.
- National/royal shows – these are large events that attract visitors from all around the world with a vast range of competitions, they often have national significance.

Gray (2010) continues by proposing that British agricultural shows are public events that have three key design elements. He proposes that agricultural shows are a festival representing the social ethos of their host communities, that agricultural shows display iconic agricultural activities, and that agricultural shows allow for visitors to gain a chronological experience of rural areas. For Henning (1998) agricultural shows are a vehicle to promote advances in agriculture, and educate consumers on the role of farmers as food producers, and as custodians of the countryside, as such they have a major role for both farming and non-farming audiences.

Much of the geographical work on agricultural shows is not from a British perspective. One country that has received particular academic attention is Australia, as with Britain agricultural shows in Australia vary in scale. From small local shows such as the Gympie District Show (Edwards, 2008), to large Royal Shows with national significance such as the Perth Royal Show (Yarwood *et al.*, 2010). One major difference between

Britain and Australia is the presence of metropolitan shows, whereby for a limited period of time, the rural encroaches into the urban and a unique form of economic and cultural exchange takes place.

Scott & Laurie (2010) write of the Brisbane Exhibition, which is an annual agricultural event occurring in the centre of Brisbane linking the city and country. Animals and machinery arrive in the city centre, helping to reconnect the nation with their rural heritage, bridging the gap between town and country (Ibid). Historically, the Australian agricultural shows were seen to be part of a wider discourse that celebrated the triumph of the European colonisers over the indigenous populations and the environment (Yarwood *et al.*, 2010). However, in more recent times these Australian events have taken more after the European model where the events now have a key role in encouraging farmers to remain productive in the face of significant environmental and economic challenges.

In the USA the scale of agricultural shows, is far greater than that of UK, it is estimated that more than 150 million people attend over 3000 county, regional, and state fairs (Henning, 1998). Similar to in the UK, agricultural shows in the USA serve rural communities but rather than trying to develop the agricultural industry, the USA based events have a greater emphasis on entertainment and education.

The largest agricultural shows in the USA are the state fairs, the largest of these is the State Fair of Texas, which attracts 3.5 million people over 24 days. According to Henning (1998), fewer than 25% of visitors to the state fair tour the livestock and agricultural exhibits, with them giving preference to the other attractions. Organisers of the event are aware of this and state that they are in the edutainment business, that is education through the means of entertainment. The organisers of the event see that they have a role in educating visitors in the importance of the agricultural industry for the state of Texas. As with the events in the UK the Texas State Fair has become increasingly commercialised with very few of the exhibits actually relating to agriculture, and the event hosting large pop concerts featuring artists such as Blondie, Mary J. Blige, and Weezer.

In Canada the major agricultural shows take place as indoor events in the autumn, these events have a higher agricultural content than the events in the USA. They still however, have a major entertainment attraction, in order to attract large visitor numbers. These Canadian events act as a tradeshow for the those involved in the agriculture industry, larger events such as the Farmfair International in Alberta have specific Agri-Trade Centres providing a meeting point for international visitors, and to enable business to be done and connections to be made. Similar to the UK, Canada has Royal Shows, the biggest of which is the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair, held in Toronto, here animals tend to take centre stage and the prestige of winning at the Fair often outweighs any monetary reward.

The contemporary agricultural show still has a crucial role for animal breeds, and breed societies, through having a class at an event it helps to facilitate the growth of livestock breeds, the competitive showing of a breed gives it prestige and a platform from which the breed can grow, allowing them to become a fixed part of the rural landscape (Yarwood and Evans, 2006).

Agricultural shows are an important part of the fabric of rural life, and tradition is still key to their success however in recent years' agricultural shows have had to innovate and become more entertaining in order to attract a wider, public audience (Henning, 1998).

Agricultural shows have to maintain a balance between agricultural interests and the interests of the general public. For many agricultural societies, this has meant staging of new non-farming events and organisations to attract the public. Many larger agricultural shows are now highly sanitised and commercialised events, despite this Cooper and others (2004) state that the animals and the authentic nature of agricultural shows are still a key attractor for people visiting agricultural shows. They go on to suggest that urban residents visit agricultural shows as a form of escapism as they get to see things that they would not get to see living in the city (Ibid).

According to Henning (1998) the need to cater for the needs of two diverse audiences, has placed a great deal of pressure on agricultural societies. Those involved within the

industry expect and require a strong technical aspect to the event in order to justify their attendance. Whilst on the other hand there is a need to entertain and educate those with little knowledge of agriculture. In response to this more specialised trade shows have started to appear on the scene, filling the educational and marketing needs to the agriculture industry (Ibid).

Despite becoming increasingly commercialised, agricultural shows still display the most traditional skills of rural life such as log-chopping and hand sheering of sheep. Even though these tasks were mechanised long ago, they often attract large crowds and international competitors, demonstrating the desire of the show society and visitors to ensure the survival of these traditions (Yarwood *et al.*, 2010). This keeping of tradition is vital to ensure that the rural story of the agricultural show is maintained at all times and that no matter what it is visitors go to the show for, that they go home having had a truly rural experience (Edwards, 2008).

As a result of the increasing commercialisation of agricultural shows, these events have many stakeholders, all of which have a major commercial and institutional interest in the success of the show. Generally, these stakeholders comprise of local and national businesses, local and national government (who often help fund these events), the various rural representational bodies, livestock breed associations as well as media organisations (Edwards, 2008). Pratt and Marling (1993) have remarked that only at agricultural shows can you see politicians, frozen bull semen, cosmetics, and confectionary all being promoted under one roof (Ibid).

This changing nature of the agricultural show can cause tension between the different types of visitors to the show. Farmers would like to see greater emphasis placed on the traditional farming and knowledge exchange aspects of the show, whilst the non-agricultural visitors would rather see a wider variety of sideshow acts and entertainments. This can further cause tension with the organising society of the show who need to try to balance the needs of the agricultural community (i.e. showcasing new and traditional technologies, traditions and values) with the need to

generate revenue from the general public to ensure the survival of the event (Marsden, 2010).

According to Kokko (2011), the role of the agricultural show has changed and its primary focus is no longer to educate farmers, agricultural shows now tend to fulfil a role of educating the general public with knowledge about farming and agricultural practices. At agricultural shows, non-farming visitors often get the chance to speak directly with the farmer/supplier, and they can see the development of their foodstuffs from field to fork. Often these non-farming visitors are able to participate in a form of agricultural practice such as milking a cow, which enhances their understandings of the industry and allows them to see for themselves the processes their food goes through (Ibid).

In his work on the Cheshire Show, Edensor (2006) made similar observations. He notes that the proportion of farm machinery and livestock on display at the show had declined and the space that was previously occupied by these agricultural functions now houses craft activities and food stuffs (Ibid). Furthermore, Edensor (2006) notes that the retail offering at the show has also changed from being focused predominantly on farm machinery and agricultural products to clothing items. However, these clothing items are not typical of the fashions of the high street but practical items such as sturdy boots, waxed jackets and tweeds, which are associated as being part of the rural idyllic lifestyle. In buying these goods, the visitors to the show are buying into a certain lifestyle and performing their version of idyllic rurality, which has become popular in recent years, therefore more showground space has been dedicated to selling this lifestyle.

Eversole and Martin (2005) state that agricultural shows are highly important cultural events, not just for that single rural community, but also as a key site helping to define rural national identity, agricultural shows can be seen as a localisation of modernity (Smith and Bender, 2001). They allow for producers and consumers to meet in their local place, which is in contrast to modern, complex and depersonalised global market chains. In recent years the revival in farmers' markets, localism, and an awareness of

food miles has seen agricultural shows reseat products in the local community in which they are sourced (Eversole and Martin, 2005). Through this agricultural shows are able to create a sensual experience which helps the event to enforce a national identity.

2.5.2.2 – Audience

According to Anderson (2003) the contemporary agricultural show is a site that sits between culture and nature, and the human and the non-human. For Anderson, agricultural shows are a ritualised narrative that display human ingenuity over the non-human world. She states that the events display characteristics of modernity and colonialism due to a European desire to bring an ordered relationship to a non-human world (Ibid).

The modern agricultural show is open to anyone, and they tend to be very sensual experiences, appealing simultaneously to all five senses, visitors can see, feel, smell, taste, and hear the blending of a traditional rural culture with modern day commercial activities in a unique carnival atmosphere (Marsden, 2010).

Although agricultural shows are a public event where all are welcome, a distinct insider/outsider dichotomy exists (Marsden, 2010). The insiders to the event are those that have some kind of agricultural knowledge, and this group of people tend to bring their livestock and/or the products of their harvest to be displayed and judged. The insiders to the event feel an immense sense of pride and experience the thrill of the completion. Prosterman (1995) notes that the insiders at the agricultural show will always make time to visit and speak to their fellow insiders, and those businesses that service and support them throughout the year. Agricultural shows allow for these conversations and meetings to happen in an informal and intimate setting and as a result much knowledge is exchanged and deals are done.

Outsider visitors attend agricultural shows to be entertained, whilst at the same time being educated to the ways of the countryside. These outsiders are able to lead a simulated rural lifestyle viewing stock and farm machinery, eating and drinking

traditional rural foods. Agricultural shows transform the typical daily lives of rural people into an artistic effort for outsiders to enjoy (Ibid).

Kokko (2011) argues that this insider/outsider dichotomy is too simple to be used in relation to the agricultural show. She argues that agricultural shows have the presence of three distinct groups; the producer, the local guest; and non-local guests/tourists. She states that the producers are those members of the agricultural society, they are involved in the production and organisation of the event, and those within this group may be a paid employee, volunteer, or a competitor in the show. It is the producers who have the power to control of the show, and the responsibility to educate the non-farming audience about the importance of agriculture.

Kokko defines the local guests as those visitors who are local, but do not compete or actively participate in the delivery of the event. These visitors tend to go to the show for leisure purposes and are motivated by a desire to partake in local culture, a sense of pride for their local community, and a desire to support the local agriculture industry. The non-local guests/tourists tend to travel to the show from outside of their usual environment, and therefore may require accommodation in the local area for the duration of the event. These visitors mainly attend to leisure purposes and tend to be the highest spending of all the visitor groups.

According to Eversole and Martin (2005) who investigated the Sheepvention event in Hamilton, Australia, most visitors to agricultural shows attend in order to 'have a look', 'learn something', 'meet friends' and 'catch up with what is happening in this industry'. As such agricultural shows are very much an event that people not only attend in order to socialise with likeminded people, but to also learn, and connect with the countryside.

Perl (1974) believes that it is this mix of work and leisure at the agricultural show that has led to their success. The fact that farmers and non-farmers alike are able to interact, and able to actively participate in the event remains a major drawing factor to people making repeat visits to agricultural shows. Marsden (2010) echoes the

importance of repeat visitors to agricultural shows, he describes them as the social event of the year for rural communities, they are seen as being a working holiday for members of the agricultural community, providing farmers with a morally legitimate, and socially sanctioned reason for farm families to rest from their work, and spend time socialising with other like-minded farmers (Ibid).

2.5.2.3 – The show community

Agricultural shows are a vital component of the communities of which they serve, often the organising committees are made up of local people who not only plan the event beforehand, they build the site, run the event on the day, and finally clean up the event after it has closed. This community aspect of agricultural shows has become increasingly important in recent decades, particularly as a result of economic, environmental, and social change which has been affecting the resilience of the countryside (Edwards, 2008).

The fact that agricultural shows are often organised at a community level by local people means that they are often a facilitator of a sense of community (Marsden, 2010). They bring the community together and allows them to demonstrate to the outside world what is important to them. The sense of community that is created at the event enables it to become a site of interaction, discussion, and competition (Edwards, 2008).

Gray (2010) has suggested that agricultural shows are a key event for rural communities, for members of these rural populations, they are a focal point of the year. The events take prominence in the community for many weeks before and after they are held. An excitement is built around them, community members will discuss preparations for the event, numbers and quality of exhibits, and changes to the events from previous years.

Due to their long history, agricultural shows provide an interesting lens into the communities that they serve, trophies and competitions are often named to mark the contribution that groups or individuals have made to the event. Many of these

trophies act as memorials to the deceased (Gray, 2010), and as such demonstrates the value of which community members hold agricultural shows. Agricultural shows present the rural without an intention to transform, they demonstrate the practice of a unique community which can help with its existence and vitality. Agricultural shows are highly influential agricultural institutions that reflect and have affected farming fortunes, traditions and innovations throughout their lifetimes (Yarwood *et al.*, 2010).

For Gray (2010), one of the key elements of the agricultural show is the “beer tent”. According to Gray, for some visitors the socialising and the celebrations that take place in the beer tent are more important than the main events itself. This aspect of agricultural shows is outside of the more formal elements of the event, allowing for the community to get together, to discuss the events of the day, and the wider agriculture industry, over a drink, often purchased by one of the prize winners in celebration of their achievements (Ibid).

Edwards (2008) states that agricultural shows are more than a display of a community, but they embody the community itself. They allow for a community to develop a story for themselves, and their place. Agricultural shows become a unique aspect of the identity of rural communities, representing the past, present and future possibilities of an area. Even for those not involved within the agriculture industry, the agricultural show is a key occasion for networking and provides the opportunity for people to meet others with similar interests who they might not have the opportunity to meet on a normal basis (Ibid).

As such Eversole and Martin (2005) state that it is the less obvious impact that agricultural shows have on community and regional identity that is perhaps the most significance impact of agricultural shows. The fact that these, perhaps most traditional of events attract a wide population, and not just those involved within the agriculture industry shows that for many areas agriculture still defines the regional culture, and attending agricultural shows helps to reaffirm this identity (Ibid).

2.5.2.4 – Agricultural shows and competition

Since their inception one of the key elements of agricultural shows has been the competitive livestock classes, these form the centre of shows and attract members of both the farming and non-farming communities. Generally, the organising committee of an agricultural show will decide upon the competitions for the event, and the competitions change on a regular basis. Through agricultural shows changing their competitions, it allows them to respond to changes that take place in the farming community (Gray, 2010). Therefore, agricultural shows can be seen as clear representations of the modern-day countryside, they continuously adapt their classes and exhibits in response to changing local agricultural practices and rural restructuring (Ibid).

Competitions at the contemporary show to focus on marketable crops and products, focusing on what the consumers want to purchase, and what they see in the shop. Prize winning livestock and produce tends to be that which is uniform in size and appearance (Pratt and Marling, 1993). Livestock at agricultural shows are judged to a strict and fixed breed criteria, by someone who is considered to be an expert in that field; animals are examined based upon their upholding of traditional breed values, whilst also showing innovation and progress within that field (Yarwood, *et al.*, 2010). Whatever the category of competition at agricultural shows be in livestock, cakes, or tradestands, the judging is based around beauty and other similar intangibles (Pratt and Marling, 1993) and as such, the judging of livestock is very much a subjective process, and more often than not members of audience will not agree with the decision of the judge (Yarwood, *et al.*, 2010).

Often exhibitors dress or exaggerate aesthetic features of their stock, this transforms the animals from being material and economic objects, to cultural objects that embody and present the personhood and farming skill of the competitor (Gray, 2010). Therefore, agricultural shows provide a space for farmers to display their finest stock, to get approval from other farmers, which in time can lead to longer term economic benefits through better market prices (Holloway, 2005b).

Holloway (2005b), has given a detailed account of the conflicts between aesthetics and genetics of cattle when judging stock at agricultural shows. In recent years it has become the case that the purebred and pedigree cattle that take centre stage at these events, are not representative of the commercial breeds, which are popular with consumers and wanted by the supermarkets, and therefore are becoming less relevant to society.

It is not just livestock that take the stage at agricultural shows, many agricultural shows also have classes for small animals such as cats, dogs, rabbits and birds. Very few of these animals are associated with farming and the classes tend to reflect the interest of fanciers, children and pet owners. It is often the case that many of the animals entered in these classes are considered to be pests by the farmers (Yarwood *et al.*, 2010).

The competitive classes do not just exist for the agricultural activities and animals; at agricultural shows, there is a wide variety of classes including cake making, cooking, handicrafts, flower arranging and vegetable cultivation, photography and art. These activities are normally associated with a particular, often gendered, vision of rurality and rural lifestyles, with many shows seeing booming entries indicating that these competitions are as important to the show as the actual agricultural competitions (Yarwood *et al.*, 2010). According to Edwards (2008) even within classes there is a gender divide, for example in the case of the gardening classes women were more involved in creating beauty whilst men's gardening tends to focus on the growing of vegetables (agricultural production).

The most recent research surrounding agricultural shows by Joanna Henryks *et al.* (2016) address the role of the prizes awarded at agricultural shows in terms of marketing of food products. Focusing on the Australian industry this paper concludes that for those within the food and drink sector, the awards given at agricultural shows are prestigious and a key element of product differentiation. In addition, competing at agricultural shows brings an opportunity to receive expert feedback on products, providing with it a mechanism to improve quality and to foster innovation within the

industry. Furthermore, winning agricultural shows contribute to brand awareness for businesses, and can help them with their marketing strategies.

The British agricultural show is an important site for members of the Young Farmers movement (YFC), the YFC movement often holds competitions where members compete for a wide variety of accolades for them individually, as a club and as a county (Edensor, 2006). Once the competitive stage is over, most agricultural shows cumulate in a grand parade, with the champions from each class being draped in rosettes and ribbons circling the main ring in a highly choreographed manner. This parade is under the control of humans with Anderson (2003) suggesting that this again shows the triumph of humans over nature.

It has been recorded that awards at agricultural shows have a vital role in identifying the best livestock for breeding purposes leading to a direct increase in their resale and progeny values (Darian-Smith, 2011; Yarwood *et al.*, 2010). However as stated by Henryks *et al.* (2016), there is a significant knowledge gap surrounding the impact that agricultural show awards have on non-livestock competition entries.

2.5.2.5 – Gender and agricultural shows

The role of gender in the agricultural show has received some attention in the literature with Edwards (2008) writing that until the 1990s almost every aspect of the Gympie Community Show was gendered, with the management committee of the Show predominantly being male. This eventually changed with women being given an increased role in the event, as a result of their contributions to the success of the event, and their increased participation in the Show. Edwards continues by stating that the increased role of women in the organisation of the event paralleled the increased role of women in society, as well as the changing roles of women only organisations in rural society (Ibid).

Traditionally many of the competitions at agricultural shows are also highly gendered, writing about agricultural shows in the Scottish Borders, Gray (2010) states that the agricultural competitions (such as those involving sheep, cattle and arable

production), tend to be dominated by men, whilst the industrial competitions (such as cookery, produce and handicraft) are mainly dominated by women. Edensor (2006) also notes similar in the YFC competitions at the Cheshire County Show, male members tend to compete in competitions such as farm handyman skills, stock judging, and rugby. Whilst female members are rewarded for their participation in competition that relate to cookery, home skills and photography.

The physical structure of the agricultural show further contributes to a gendered bias. Edwards (2008), again writes that commonly the masculine (agricultural and pastoral) sections tend to be displayed more prominently than the competitions that are considered to be feminine. The agricultural competitions tend to be the focus of the main rings at these events, whilst the cookery and home craft competition tend to be confined to the inside spaces of marquees and pavilions (Ibid).

Borish (1997) states that agricultural shows can be seen as a metaphor for wider rural society and as such can reveal a great deal about rural society and in particular the gender and power relations between rural men and women. These events are an occasion in which these identities can be performed culturally, and as such as women have gained more of an equal role in rural areas, they have also gained a more equal role in the organisation and performance of the agricultural show.

2.5.2.6 – Performance and the agricultural show

An agricultural show is a highly managed event, as such it presents a selective vision of rurality, only what is deemed to be important by the organising committee of the show is highlighted (Edensor, 2006; Yarwood *et al.*, 2010). Everything about the agricultural show is planned, each exhibit is carefully laid out and every route carefully constructed to give the visitors a good day out, whilst presenting the agriculture industry in a positive light (Marsden, 2010). Agricultural shows are careful to present a socially constructed version of rurality, with some activities such as mining and forestry (which often clash with farming interests) being excluded or presented on the periphery of the event (Yarwood *et al.*, 2010).

Due to this strong management, individual agricultural shows reflect the ambitions of their organising committee. Writing on the American agricultural fair, Prosterman (1995) sees the events as representing an idealistic world, the world that the agricultural societies would like to see existing. He continues by stating that the rules and expectations at the event are in place in order to help to reinforce a sense of togetherness for rural areas, which are often in crisis. As such the displays and exhibits at agricultural shows do not necessarily represent reality, but a version of reality determined by the political practices of that agricultural society at the particular moment in time.

Marsden (2010) argues similar, stating that no aspect of the agricultural show is unplanned. When visiting the events, the public are expected to use predefined routes, set up by the agricultural society in a deliberate manner so that they can get the full experience of the event. Marsden (2010) sees an agricultural show as being a form of art, showcasing the best of rural life, embodying aesthetic principles, whilst acting as a forum for the development of the industry (Ibid).

Agricultural shows are a manifestation of their own individual host communities, they allow for that community to construct a public account of their history and culture. They allow them to show off what they consider to be the best of their community, constructing a unique sense of place (Ibid).

As a result of their temporary nature occurring once a year, for a specific time period, and in a specific place, Marsden (2010) argues that agricultural shows can be seen as a separate world. An agriculture show has its own rules, personnel and expectations. Just like any other actor the agricultural show is its own character, representation its own unique community. It is separate from the living world, and yet it has similar components with the same social and economic concerns.

The entertainment aspects of agricultural shows are key to the performance of the rural at the event (Edensor, 2006). Not only do these displays allow agricultural shows to attract a wider audience, they also allow for a certain amount of education to take

place. The entertainment at agricultural shows generally takes two forms. That of family activities and the main grandstand performances. The family activities are often paid for commercial activities, such as side stalls, games of skill or craft related activities and often involve some sort of additional fee. The main grandstand entertainment is often large elaborate displays featuring horses, stunt shows, tractor pulls and lumberjacks, and is included in the entrance charge.

According to Kokko (2011), although primarily employed for entertainment purposes, these entertainment displays tend to have significant agricultural components, often leading to a form of education to those people who attend the event, but do not actively engage with the agricultural components of the event.

2.6 – Conceptual Framework

The primary philosophical approach that this thesis adopts is that Schatzki's (2005) site ontology. Site ontology has developed from social ontology. That is the examination of the basic structure of social life and social phenomena, something has been traditionally divided into two approaches, individualists (those that believe that social facts and phenomenon are constructed by individual people) and societists (those who believe that social phenomenon can only be explained through the examination of wider social groups, and that these social groups have a nature that is distinct from the individuals who make up the group). Site ontology is something that has only developed in recent decades, with Schatzki (2005) believing that social lives are tied to a context, or site of which is it is a part. By taking this approach this thesis theorises agricultural shows as a site of social lives composed of a nexus of human practices and material arrangements.

The site ontology approach bridges the gap between the individualist and societist approach, contextualising the actions, relations and mental states of individuals within their wider social vistas (Schatzki, 2003). The site ontology approach (as adopted in this thesis) believes that behavioural practices are not the property of individuals, but

rather than that of the social site. By examining the site where these relationships exist (in this case the RWS), the social life of those present can be analysed.

According to Schatzki (2003) there are three explanations of site. A site can be a location where something takes place, or it can refer to a teleological and activity place location. Secondly a site can be a location within a broader region, in which and activity takes place. Finally the third explanation of site is the realm or set of phenomena of which it is a part. The RWS fits all these explanations.

Using a site ontology approach to investigate the RWS enables an understanding of event, and how it shapes/has been shaped by various social, cultural, historical and political forces. This site ontology approach provides the foundation of which the empirical study of the RWS will be based.

The fact that this thesis is based purely on the RWS, and that all conclusions and analysis are based on the data collected at the event, meaning that theory has been discovered from data (Glaser and Strauss (1967) and therefore I have adopted a grounded epistemological approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1999). Through analysis of the RWS, links between categories have been made, and their relationship established, this has then been applied to relevant theories. The conclusions made, and the theories applied have emerged from the data, and given the nature of this grounded approach, they are not mutually exclusive, and have changed overtime. Given the nature of this grounded approach, it is recognised (and discussed in Chapter Three) that I, as a researcher will have a great influence on the findings of this thesis, and that the theory produced constitutes one particular truth, rather than the only truth about the data (Pidgeon and Henwood, 1997).

Finally this research takes an interpretive approach, assuming that social reality is not singular or objective, but is shaped by human experiences, and is therefore best studied within its socio-historic context. This takes the approach of social reality being embedded within its wider social settings, and therefore they are required to be studied as one (Geertz, 1973). A theoretical sampling strategy was employed, of the

RWS and those who attend the event, my role as a researcher has been key to this study and is discussed in Chapter Three (Orlikowski and Baroudi, 1991).

In addition the analysis has taken a holistic and contextual approach with my positionality being transparent throughout the entire process, and finally the data collection and analysis was conducted simultaneously, with each previous data collection activity influencing the next. The interpretative approach adopted has enabled an exploration of the complex, interrelated, and multifaceted social processes at the RWS which would have been difficult to establish using only quantitative methods, further as established in this chapter very little theory exists with regards to agricultural shows, this approach allows this to be developed. Finally this thesis is very context specific, and an interpretive approach is highly appropriate for the study of unique of idiosyncratic events.

Based on this philosophical approach, the following concepts were identified from the data, and employed within the thesis analysis and discussion. Following a cultural methodology the thesis utilises the concepts of, and contributes to the literatures surrounding social capital, buzz, knowledge networks, performance, imagined communities, nationalism, politics, and diversity. The remainder of this section will define these concepts used and give an indication of how they link together as part of this thesis.

This thesis uses Putnam's (2000) interpretation of social capital, in that social capital refers to "the connections among individuals' social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (Putnam, 2000: 19). Using this interpretation two distinctions of social capital are referred to: bridging (inclusive) and bonding (exclusive) social capital. Bonding social capital is the value assigned to networks between homogenous groups, these tend to be inward looking, and help to reinforce exclusive, already existing identities. For example that of a livestock farmer. On the other hand, bridging social capital refers to the networks between socially heterogeneous groups, it is more outward looking, and include a diverse range of people, from different social situations, for example that of a music festival.

Putnam (2000: 23) states that “bonding social capital constitutes a kind of sociological superglue, whereas bridging social capital provides a sociological WD-40”, meaning that bonding social capital helps to strengthen existing ties/relationships, whilst bridging social capital allows for different groups of people to come together, linking groups that normally operate externally to each other, facilitating knowledge exchange, for a common purpose. Bridging social capital enhances community cohesion, and can build bridges between groups that might not necessarily have a common bond, and can help mobilise them for common causes.

Both bonding and bridging social capital can be found within the same group, they cannot be neatly divided, but both serve different purposes, they can be subconsciously prioritised depending on the needs of the group or individual at the time. Putnam’s (2000) social capital is a key element of this thesis, in order for many of the processes outlined in the descriptive chapters to take place, there must be high level of social capital. Therefore social capital is the key facilitating concept for this thesis.

A high level of social capital is vital to ensuring that knowledge transfer can take place, something that is the focus of Chapter Seven. For knowledge transfer to occur, it is vital that trust is present, something that Harvey (2003) summarises as an indicator of people’s willingness to place faith in relationships, should there be enough trust present, through large groups of people coming together (such as at the RWS), knowledge can be exchanged. Based on the work of Lane and Oreszczyn (2013), this thesis understands that rural knowledge transfer systems are highly complex, participatory, and involving a wide range of linked individuals. Given their work and the work of Prell and others (2009), this thesis utilises the assertion that rural knowledge networks operate at their most effective at a community level.

One of the core arguments of this thesis is that the knowledge transfer undertaken at agricultural shows is done in the form of a temporary knowledge cluster. Here the definition of Maskell and others (2006) is used, whereby as with knowledge clusters, events are a chance for businesses to demonstrate their most advance findings,

innovations and products. At these events customers and suppliers can view these innovations, allowing them to identify the current market frontier, take stock of competitive positions, and form future plans. These activities take place as short-lived hotspots of intense knowledge exchange, network building, and idea generating, and therefore due they are known as temporary knowledge clusters.

The coming together of actors as part of the temporary knowledge cluster leads to the creation of noise or buzz (Grabher, 2002; Storper and Venables, 2002). This thesis has adopted the term buzz, and the definition put forward by Bathelt and others (2004), that is that buzz can be seen as the information and communication ecology that is created by face-to-face contact, and through multiple actors being located within the same geographical spaces (Ibid). Literature suggests that there are two kinds of buzz. Local buzz, allowing participants to generate a variety of unexpected innovation and collaboration opportunities; and global buzz, drawing in a wider audience from around the world, enabling global connections to be made and new opportunities to be developed. As rural areas are relatively ignored in the literature surrounding buzz, this thesis develops the buzz concept further, by proposing a third form of buzz, rural buzz.

The buzz that is produced at the RWS is part of the performance of the event, another key concept that is utilised in this thesis. The thesis takes a sociological approach to approach to performance, which can be attributed to the work of Goffman (1959). The most prevalent notion of performance in geography (Gregson and Rose, 2000) believes that codes of conduct govern behaviour, and that human beings use various strategies to manage ourselves in the presence of others. Furthermore they believe that social life is something that is staged by conscious agents who adhere to various scripts, and that the front stage area (where the performance occurs) can be clearly distinguished from the backstage. When focusing on performance in the thesis the space of the agricultural show is discussed, and a focus is given on the normative and the transgressive, as well as the way that agricultural shows utilise the senses, and the liminal spaces of the event is discussed.

Moving away from a social constructivist approach, rural performance can be seen as more than representational (Woods, 2010), with rural experiences being felt, senses and intuited through bodily actions and performances (Wylie, 2005). Edensor (2006) observes that rural performances are enacted on different stages by different actors, this thesis examines the different stages of rural performance at the RWS. For Holloway (2004) performance is at the heart of the agricultural show, and for him, these events stage manage the presentation of agriculture and rural life to a mixed audience of agricultural, and non-agricultural visitors.

Performance at agricultural shows can be seen to develop an imagined community (Anderson, 1983), another key concept of this thesis. Anderson argues that an imagined community is one whereby even though it is impossible to know every member, there is a bond that draws people together, in a form of comradeship irrespective of class, colour, or race. The thesis uses this concept in a way to demonstrate that the event of the agricultural show brings with it a temporal coincidence where visitors are united by their attendance at the event. By attending the event cultural conditions are created cutting across the norms of society, the agricultural show provides the common ground, bring people together, in a way that might not be possible in normal day to day arena.

Anderson's (1983) idea of the imagined community, is closely linked to nationalism, another concept utilised in the thesis. Anderson argues that nations are imagined, because nationalism mobilises a strong, but abstract sense of community between strangers that consolidates their identification with a common historical inheritance and a shared national space. In this thesis it is proposed that agricultural shows are a site for mobilising this sense of community, and bringing people together, to celebrate their shared heritage. Nationalism and imagined communities can both be linked to performance, whereby the nationalism that is displayed in a performance can open and close up opportunities for the imagining of new territories and nationalities. Nationalism is not a concept that functions alone, but rather it is something that is being constantly enriched (Balibar, 1991), as discussed in this thesis, the agricultural

show can be seen as part of this enrichment, with the events demonstrating civic spirit, and patriotism, helping to reproduce the nation⁴ to a variety of audiences.

Politics is something that is intertwined throughout this thesis, as it is the agricultural show in general. Given the fact that agricultural shows are significant meeting places for rural communities, means that they can potentially be used as a site for the acquisition and application of power. The thesis utilises the work of Redker (2008), in suggesting that the politics present at agricultural shows can be seen as a substitute for material power, and can act as a form of diplomacy, allowing those who are seen as elites to influence and shape rural areas.

This thesis also discusses, albeit briefly, diversity, particularly in relation to Wales. It is understood that Wales is not a homogenous nation, but one of great social, cultural, and economic difference. Even for the agricultural industry, there is not a uniform agricultural identity, but one that varies where in the nation the farmer resides, what is farmed, as well as wider personal identity. This thesis accepts diversity as the condition of having or being composed of different elements, taking this into account the diversity at agricultural shows is discussed.

The research methods utilised throughout this thesis will be discussed in detail in Chapter Three, however the methods chosen are directly related to this conceptual framework. Although primarily the findings of this thesis are based on qualitative data, a mixed methods approach has been adopted in this thesis. Quantitative techniques namely the 2014 visitor and trader surveys have been used a baseline to contextualise the qualitative data, which forms the main part of the thesis, as a site ontology.

⁴ In the same understanding as Jones and Fowler (2007) in this thesis the notion of a nation is discussed as a community of people who share and have an attachment to a particular territory, this thesis does not focus on the nation state as an organisation.

2.7 – Summary

It is well known that agricultural shows exist in various forms around the world, particularly in Western Europe, the USA, Australia, and New Zealand. However, despite this prominence in rural areas, their increasing popularity, and their major influence on the social and cultural vitality of rural areas, agricultural shows have received very limited academic attention (within geography and other disciplines). Agricultural shows are very often the glue that unites agriculture and the business community, and they bring the opportunity for rural areas to showcase their heritage, whilst celebrating the best of modern food and farming. By their very nature agricultural shows influence the next generation, and represents the people and places of its host community (Aslet *et al.*, 2015).

Due to the conversations that occur at the event, the visitor numbers, the exhibits, and the demonstrations of the various aspects of the rural community mean that agricultural shows can be used as a mechanism to explore wider aspects of the social and cultural life of rural communities (Gray, 2010).

There are many popular books and histories of regional and national shows which have been published, however these tend to be more of a who's who of the agricultural society and lists of the award-winning livestock and they therefore provide very little analytical commentary of the event (Edwards, 2008). The majority of this existing literature of agricultural shows are historical overviews full of personal observations, informal interviews and pictorial documentations, whilst these provide an insight into agricultural shows they are not peer reviewed and they tend to lack methodological rigour. This has left major gaps in the research of the economic, social and cultural aspects of these events and as discussed previously many have called for work to be done looking at these aspects of agricultural shows.

This PhD research hopes to address this gap in the literature and provide the first major study of an agricultural show in the British context, with academic rigour, whilst also appealing to a general audience. In addition, this thesis hopes to examine the role

that agricultural shows have in generating trust, social capital, and leading to rural change.

Although the value of social capital is recognised in rural areas, and the advantages of it are known in the literature, its role tends to be overlooked in rural geography, with the main focus being on business networking in urban areas. It has been long recognised that there is a need to improve social capital in rural areas, and to examine its role within rural development, however there is very little applied research as to how social capital can be improved within rural areas, particularly at the informal level (Townsend *et al.*, 2014). One of the main contributions of this thesis will be an examination of how large scale informal events in rural areas can help to facilitate the development of social capital, leading to greater trust, innovation and change.

I contend that festivals are not only occasions for celebrating local community, identity and history, but I believe that events such as these are a tool for facilitating the development of social capital, and therefore change in rural areas. Social capital is not a fully measurable concept (Schuller, 2000), but it does have the potential to challenge underlying assumptions and provides useful opportunities for theoretical exploration. Arcodia and Whitford (2006) state that although the links between festival attendance and social capital are theoretically tenuous, it is still possible to identify some connections. Arcodia and Whitford (2006) call for more research to be undertaken surrounding the connection between festival/event attendance and social capital, whilst ensuring that these measures of social capital are not benchmarked within an economic framework. Again, this thesis will take one example of a large-scale festival, the RWS and will investigate its links to the concept of social capital.

Pickernell and others (2007) state that despite festivals and events offering both social and economic development opportunities for rural areas, there is currently a dearth of research in this area, particularly with regards to rural areas. There is a distinct urban bias to festival research (Waite, 2008), and whilst rural festivals have gained some attention academically their treatment is largely insignificant compared to the amount of research on urban events (Gibson *et al.*, 2010). A similar knowledge gap exists

regarding the interaction of events and diplomacy, and the literature that does exist tends to take a state centric, realist position, that events are tools of politics (Beacom, 2000; Cha, 2009).

This chapter has reviewed the literature on rural festivals, agricultural shows, and rural knowledge exchange, and initially touched upon the contemporary rural and processes of rural change. The main aim of this thesis is to therefore address the lack of research into agricultural shows within the British context, to expand the knowledge around rural knowledge clusters, to investigate the political influence of temporary events, and to establish the role that the RWS has for the population of [rural] Wales.

The thesis draws upon work from the geographical, events management, and tourism literatures to enable an in depth understanding of the RWS and its wide-ranging influence on Wales. Chapter Three will discuss the methodological framework employed in order to investigate the RWS.

Chapter Three: Research Design

3.1 – Introduction

The previous chapters have introduced the research, and discussed the relevant literature that will form the theoretical discussion of this thesis. In this chapter I will introduce the role that I, as a researcher have had in the research, my positionality, personality, and the personal impact the research has had on my own status within the rural community. Furthermore, an overview of the research framework will be given, the methodologies used will be discussed and justified, and the manner in which the data has been analysed will be discussed.

Chapter One outlined how through using the case study of the RWS, this thesis aims to give an enhanced understanding of the multifaceted roles that agricultural shows have for rural areas. This thesis will contribute to the literatures on rural communities, rural knowledge exchange, and rural politics. The research framework outlined in this chapter has been designed to answer the following research questions:

- What role do agricultural shows have in (re)imagining and (re)presenting rural societies?
- To what extent do temporary events such as agricultural shows facilitate knowledge exchange and innovation within rural areas?
- How do agricultural shows contribute to the political economy of rural areas?

In order to address these research questions a mixed methods approach has been adopted, something, which Woods (2010) remarks as being largely absent from rural geography. However, this approach also known as triangulation, referring to “the researcher’s use of multiple sources, methods, investigators, and theories” (Denzin, 1978) is widely accepted in the literature (see Creswell, 2009). Through employing a mixed methods approach, utilising qualitative and quantitative methods, I hope to be able to maximise an understanding of the research questions (Clifford *et al.*, 2010), to

be able to reduce the limitations of individual methods (Cook, 2005) and to be able to strengthen the overall findings of the study (Baxter and Eyles, 1997). The mixed methods approach that my research takes utilises qualitative and quantitative methods, whilst although primarily an individual effort, a research assistant provided support for the Humans of the RWS element of the project⁵, and initial findings were discussed with them.

The qualitative methods are able to provide a richness and depth of (personal) information, that could be lacking if a pure quantitative approach was used (Clifford *et al.*, 2010). Whilst the quantitative information collected is able to provide a context and background, complementing the more subjective qualitative data. This triangulation method drew upon many different perspectives, sources, and methods in order to maximise the understanding of my research questions (Valentine, 2005).

3.2 – “You’re From Farming Stock?” – Researcher Positionality

3.2.1 – Me, Myself and I

The stories that we are told as qualitative researchers, the data that we collect, analyse, and the way which we share with others are inevitably influenced by our own position and experiences (Greene, 2014). When studying of one’s own community researcher positionality is something that is particularly called into question.

The purpose of this section of my research design is to address my positionality, any preconceptions that I may have had before commencing the research, and the way that these were overcome in order to ensure that a critical distance was maintained and that an objective and accurate account of the field was able to be obtained (Chavez, 2008).

⁵ This research assistant, an undergraduate student from the Department of Geography and Earth Sciences, Aberystwyth University, provided assistance for the Humans of the RWS element of the project. Their main role was to take photographs of the research subjects, whilst I was undertaking the interview/comment element of the research.

Born and bred in a small village on the near to Llanelwedd (where the RWS is held) and being from a farming family, I have always had an affinity with the RWS. My personal connection with the Show is strong; my own Grandfather is the Chairperson of the Brecknockshire Advisory Committee, a Senior Steward and Commentator at the event, and sits on the Council of the RWAS. For my family, the RWS is a major event on our calendar, similar to Christmas, a dividing point within the year, and as such I have not missed a RWS held since 1992⁶.

Furthermore, I am from “farming stock”, my Father, Brother, Grandfather, and all my close family are all practicing farmers in the Llanelwedd area, as such I possess an intrinsic knowledge of the Welsh agriculture industry. My Grandfather who is a well-known figure within rural Wales has had a major influence on the research. Due to him being a past Chairman (sic) of the Brecon and Radnorshire Branch of the NFU, past President of Brecknock YFC, and Chairman (sic) of the Welsh Ploughing Association. The standing and reputation of my Grandfather within the rural community opened many doors and granted me accessibility to potential participants (see Section 3.3.1).

Despite these connections with the agricultural community, similar to Heley (2011) I could not be seen as being as a true insider to the community, unlike many of my peers and early childhood friends, I left the area at the age of 18 (albeit only one hour up the road to Aberystwyth) and as such during my late teens and adolescent years I had a different experience to many who lived in the area. I lost touch with many former friends as our lives moved in different directions. Although my agricultural background and my connections with the RWS, put me in a good position in order to study agricultural shows, throughout the research I felt like I was treading a fine line and I was neither an insider nor outsider to the Welsh agricultural community.

⁶ In 2001, due to the Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak the Royal Welsh Show was cancelled (see Chapter Four).

This complex positionality is similar to that of Heley (2008), throughout the research I was considered a local lad, someone who has shared experiences which brings them closer to the participants, but who do not consider themselves to be part of the community. This positionality was something that brought a number of opportunities and challenges throughout the research process.

3.2.2 – Positionality

England (1994), remarked that research represents a shared space, shaped by both researcher and participants, and as such the identity of both the researcher and the researched have an impact on the research. As such in any qualitative research identity is key, not just our own identity, but also the way that we perceive others, and it is our biases that will shape the research process (Bourke, 2014).

As a qualitative researcher, especially given my closeness to the research subject, attempting to achieve pure objectivism would be a naïve quest (Ibid). As stated by Haraway (1991) when embarking on research we have maps of consciousness which are very heavily influenced by our gender, class, national and racial attributes. In my case you could also add my agricultural upbringing and association with the RWAS to this map of consciousness. As such a researchers' knowledge is always partial, and will be influenced by our own positionality (Mullings, 1999), something which I have been very aware of throughout my research and analysis. However, through being aware of my own subjectivity and positionality, I have strived to remain as objective as possible throughout the research. From the outset of this PhD research I have acknowledged who I am, both as an individual and as a member of groups (see Section 3.2.1), and how this has changed throughout the research.

Throughout the research and analysis process I have ensured that I have been continuously reflexive. As part of a “continuing mode of self-analysis” (Callaway, 1992), I have constantly scrutinised the relationship between myself and those that I have been researching (Bourke, 2014).

Bourke (2014) states that qualitative research places the researcher in the position as being a data collection agent, as such my personal beliefs, political stance, cultural background, and upbringing are all important variables impacting upon the research process. As stated previously I was born and bred near to Llanellwedd, my family are active farmers, I am a white, young male and I tend to sit towards the centre right of the political spectrum. Throughout my work I have been sympathetic towards farmers, perhaps too much of an advocate for the RWS, Welsh agriculture, and perhaps on times a little scathing towards the current Welsh Labour Government. However, through the process of self-reflexivity I have identified these aspects of myself, I have been aware of them throughout my analysis and have made conscious efforts to overcome these aspects of myself.

Similar to Harris (2008) my nationality and sense of Welshness are key aspects of my identity, and as such have an impact on the observations made. Given my connections with, and my affinity to the agriculture industry, many would argue that I was an insider researcher, however given my absence from the rural community for four years whilst completing my undergraduate and master's studies, similar to Heley (2011) I was not a true insider (at the start of the research), but I considered myself to be and was considered by others as being a local boy. As the research progressed, particularly beyond year one, I felt my own positionality change, I was creating new contacts, being invited to various events held by the RWAS, and my research participants. I have become embedded within the community of the RWAS, and wider rural Wales. I have been invited to give advice to different interest groups of the RWAS and to give presentations on my research. As Bell (1994) found in his ethnographic research, through being immersed in the field, and the social context of which I was studying, my positionality changed, I felt as if I changed from being a local boy to being a true insider and member of the community. Therefore, the observations and conclusions made, in particular surrounding the qualitative data are subjective, and that others may experience the RWS in different ways.

No researcher is able to occupy the same positionality as those who are the subject of his/her research (Mullings, 1999), however I felt that through being seen as an insider

to the community that I was studying, I was at somewhat of an advantage. The fact that the participants felt that I was on a similar level to them, with similar knowledge, enabled them to open up more easily to me, and they were willing to share intimate knowledge with me (Chavez, 2008).

3.2.3 – Personality

Writing about researcher personality Moser (2008) discusses how her interpersonal skills, emotional responses and mannerisms were one of the main standards in which her participants judged her. Moser states that personality is the positionality, but since her publication there has still been very little research on the impact of researcher personality. Here (similar to Wilkinson, 2016), moving beyond the traditional aspects of positionality, I will examine how my personal attributes, appearance and friendships (made during the project) have impacted the research process.

I am in agreement with Moser (2008) and Wilkinson (2016) that a lack of focus on researcher personality is an oversight in the reflexivity process, particularly as I believe that my personality played a major role in the research process. For any research project to be successful, and to gain a meaningful relationship with participants it is vital that trust is present, I believe that my personality, who I am, and the way that interact with participants is vital in gaining this trust (see Sultana, 2007).

There is a tendency in the literature (and academia) to see academics as one uniform body, with no emotions, that are a purely objective force. I do not believe this to be the case and it is not a sign of corrupt research, to show or get affected by emotion, emotion may influence the interpretation of the data collected, but it does not prevent rigorous analysis.

I am naturally an open, chatty, confident and caring person, personality elements which I believe led me to develop a close rapport with my participants. Even those who I only met once in the research were willing to open up and tell me often very

personal stories of their times at the RWS, and their experiences of Welsh agriculture. I feel that if it was not for this element of my personality, people would not have opened up to me, and I would not have been able to have gained such a breadth and depth of data.

However, on times, perhaps I was a little too open and chatty with my respondents, with some interviews lasting much longer than the allocated time slot, with tangents being made to my own personal life. I would reveal a lot about my own experiences of the RWS, living in a rural community and being from a farming background, I made the fieldwork personal and did not hide behind my professional researcher identity. I believe that as a researcher, you put some of yourself on the line, you share your own experiences, and new experiences are co-produced with your respondents, which may not just change the outlook on the research but on your own life (see Section 3.2.2 for details on my changing positionality). This is something that Wilkinson (2016) calls for more research into, a call that has not yet been taken up.

Being quite image conscious I find the clothing that I wear also reflects certain aspects of my personality, something that I became increasingly aware of throughout the research process. As previously discussed aspects of my positionality were key to allowing participants to open. But I also believe that the clothing worn for different aspects of the research was a key aspect of my researcher personality, something that is generally left out of academic debates (Longhurst *et al.*, 2008). During the RWS I would dress smart/casual⁷ in order to respect the prestige of the event and to also blend in with the other visitors to the event, whilst interviewing prominent figures and politicians I found myself dressing formally in order to respect their level of office. When interviewing members of the agricultural community I would try and dress more 'agricultural', ensuring that I was not wearing shiny shoes and that I had mud on my boots, in an attempt to appear as if I was on the same level as the farmer. However as noted in the work of Leyshon (2002), by doing this there was a danger of

⁷ I take smart casual to mean a neat and conventional style of dress, normally comprising of a shirt and jeans.

damaging my researcher credibility, after a great deal of thought, I felt that my farming connections, and the fact that despite not personally being a practising farmer, my family links would ensure that I would still be taken seriously and not seen as imitating my participants.



Figure 2: Interviewing a farmer at the 2015 Royal Welsh Winter Fair (Greg Thomas, personal collection).

From the beginning of my research, I did not want to be seen as an omnipotent expert, despite having a great deal of experience of the RWS and dealings with the RWAS I had much to learn from my participants, many of whom had given up much of their lives to support the event. It was my intention for this thesis to be co-produced through my research the RWAS, and my participants. Here my personality was key, as part of this effort I have entered personal relationships with my participants and the RWAS, I have given many presentations to the RWAS and other farming groups, participants have befriended me on Facebook, I have met with participants to update them on the research progress (often over lunch or a pint of beer), and I have even attended a Welsh rugby game with one participant and his wife. Again, similar to Wilkinson (2016) I felt that I could become a genuine friend to these people and as

such I created a relationship based upon mutual respect, something that has continued since the conclusion of the research stage of my PhD.

The style of research I have adopted could be seen as a form of telling tales (Sparkes, 2002), and in the same vein it could be read as a confessional tale (Van Maanen, 1988), in that I recognise as stated throughout this section, my own position in this research. The remainder of this section will now address the rationale for my chosen research methods.

3.3 – Qualitative Techniques

Having previously discussed my positionality and personality in relation to this research, here I will discuss the rationale for my chosen qualitative research methods, their implementation and their limitations.

3.3.1 – Interviews

The main data collection technique for this thesis was semi-structured interviews, one of the most commonly used social science research methods (Kitchen and Tate, 2000). As stated by Dunn (2005) the primary purpose of an interview is to elicit information from another person, in conducting these interviews I did not want it to be a one-way integration, I wanted them to be informal and conversational in style, and as such a semi-structured technique was adopted. Throughout the interview process I was mindful that an interview is a “conversation with a purpose” (Dexter, 1970) and tried to ensure that the interviews remained on topic, although inevitably conversation would often turn to mutual friends, contacts within the industry.

The main purpose of conducting these interviews was to gain in-depth knowledge of the individual respondents’ experiences, attitudes, motives, and beliefs surrounding the RWS (Valentine, 2005; Mikecz, 2012), and as such it was decided that those selected did not necessarily have to be representative of the wider population (this was the purpose of the various surveys, as discussed in Sections 3.4 – 3.6). The interviews were all conducted using a narrative approach (Willis, 2006) whereby

respondents were encouraged to recount their experiences, whilst I listened, and prompted where necessary. Through interviewing I was able to gain a real sense of emotion and the attachment that many have with the RWS, people recounted stories of their and their family's long associations with the Society, and a sense of pride was felt in their accounts. Something that could not have been achieved by simply conducting a self-administered questionnaire study.

Throughout 2014 and 2015, a total of 43 semi-structured interviews were conducted. Full information on the interviewees can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2: Interview participants (in chronological order)

Participant ⁸	Position ⁹	Organisation	Location	Date
Steve Hughson	Chief Executive	RWAS	Llanelwedd	24/4/2014
Tom Evans	Farmer		Llanelwedd	8/5/2014
Sara Jenkins	Knowledge Transfer Officer	Farming Connect	Aberystwyth	14/5/2014
Gary Haggarty	Head of Agriculture and Rural Division	Welsh Government	Aberystwyth	15/5/2014
Ryan Davies	Agriculture Strategy Manager	Welsh Government	Aberystwyth	15/5/2014
Hazel Wright	Senior Policy Officer	FUW	Aberystwyth	19/5/2014
Helen Ovens	Policy Officer	FUW	Aberystwyth	19/5/2014
Eleri Price	Farmer		Aberystwyth	20/5/2014
Sir Alexander Lockwood-Smith	High Commissioner of New Zealand to the United Kingdom	New Zealand Government	Llanelwedd	20/7/2015
Leigh Gosson	Head of Shows	Joules Clothing	Llanelwedd	20/7/2015
Hazel Baker	Secretary	Highland Cattle Society	Llanelwedd	21/7/2015
Chris Hopkins	Director	Ted Hopkins LTD	Llanelwedd	21/7/2015
Robert Pugh	Director	RVW Pugh LTD	Churchstoke	27/7/2015
Ros Roberts	Administrator	RVW Pugh LTD	Churchstoke	27/7/2015
Andrew RT Davies AM	Welsh Assembly Member (South Wales Central)/Leader, Welsh Conservatives	Welsh Assembly	Cardiff	28/7/2015
Prys Morgan	Head of Operations	Hybu Cig Cymru	Aberystwyth	3/8/2015
Ian Rees	Farmer		Nantmel	4/8/2015
Ruth Rees	Owner	Ruth Rees Photography	Nantmel	4/8/2015
Kirsty Williams AM	Welsh Assembly Member (Brecon and	Welsh Assembly	Brecon	5/8/2015

⁸ All participants were offered the opportunity to participate in the research anonymously and given the option to use pseudonyms. No participant took up this offer, and agreed for their full name to be used in the thesis and any associated publications.

⁹ The positions of the participants as at the time of the interview.

	Radnorshire)/Leader, Welsh Liberal Democrats			
Ben Briggs	News Editor	Farmers Guardian	Ludlow	7/8/2015
Andrew Price	Welsh Sales and Regional Support Manager	Shearwell Data LTD	Marden	10/8/2015
Lloyd Jones	Agricultural Columnist	Western Mail	Llanddewi Brefi	11/8/2015
Mike Parker	Travel Writer		Machynlleth	13/8/2015
Dr Glyn Jones	Feature County Member		Chepstow	13/8/2015
Elin Jones AM	Welsh Assembly Member (Ceredigion)/Shadow Health Minister, Plaid Cymru	Welsh Assembly	Aberystwyth	21/8/2015
Rebecca Williams	Welsh Director	CLA Wales	Presteigne	11/9/2015
John Davies	Deputy President	NFU Cymru	Llanelwedd	11/9/2015
Huw Thomas	Policy Advisor	NFU Cymru	Llanelwedd	11/9/2015
Hannah Barry	Lady Ambassador	RWAS	Llanelwedd	17/9/2015
David Morgan	President	RWAS	Usk	18/9/2015
Charles Arch	Commentator	RWAS	Pontrhydfendi gaid	22/9/2015
Harry Featherstonehaugh	Show Director	RWAS	Llanelwedd	5/10/2015
Dyfrig Davies	Director of Operations	Telesgop	Swansea	7/10/2015
Susan Jones	Chair Editorial and Publicity Committee	RWAS	Llanelwedd	9/10/2015
John T Davies	Chair Board of Directors	RWAS	Llanelwedd	14/10/2015
Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth	Parliamentary Under Secretary of State Department of Energy and Climate Change/Parliamentary Under Secretary of State Wales Office	UK Government	London	20/10/2015
Chris Davies MP	Member of Parliament (Brecon and Radnorshire)	UK Parliament	London	21/10/2015
William Powell AM	Welsh Assembly Member (Mid and West Wales)/Shadow Minister for the Environment, Sustainability, Agriculture and Rural Affairs, Welsh Liberal Democrats	Welsh Assembly	Aberystwyth	30/10/2015
David Walters	Former Chief Executive	RWAS	Aberystwyth	27/11/2015
Hannah Thomas	Correspondent/Presenter	ITV Cymru Wales	Llanelwedd	30/11/2015
Rhun ap Iorwerth	Welsh Assembly Member (Ynys Mon)/Shadow Minister for Economy, Enterprise and Transport	Welsh Assembly	Cardiff	2/12/2015
Katie Williams	Marketing Officer	RWAS	Llanelwedd	4/12/2015
Steve Hughson (2)¹⁰	Chief Executive	RWAS	Llanelwedd	4/12/2015

¹⁰ A second interview was conducted with Steve Hughson, Chief Executive of the RWAS at the end of the research period to clarify any issues that arose through the research.

As Table 2 demonstrates a wide range of rural actors, all of which are stakeholders of the RWS were interviewed. Those interviewed can loosely be grouped into six categories:

1. Show organisers/show staff (paid and unpaid);
2. Show traders;
3. Politicians/policymakers;
4. Media;
5. Rural networking organisations;
6. Farmers/general public.

Although every interview was conducted in a semi-structured style, the interview schedule varied depending on which of the six categories the participant was located in, as did the recruitment method. Following the advice of Dunn (2005), each interview was individually planned and thought through, and I changed my behaviour and personality based upon the individual respondent. All interviews were conducted on a face-to-face basis, although costly and time consuming, I felt that the personal touch would be key in my research, and a face-to-face technique made it easier to probe for more detailed answers (Mikecz, 2012). This also allowed me to analyse the body language and non-verbal cues of my participants.

Typically interviews lasted approximately one hour, however exact timings varied considerably, from ten minutes to almost four hours.

Every interviewee was given a verbal overview of the project, and pointed to the project website¹¹ for more information, they were invited to ask any questions that they might have, before giving a recorded verbal consent. I chose to use a verbal consent system, rather than written, due to the fact that many members of the rural community have a very low level of system trust, and I felt that they would be less willing to participate in the project if it was formalised with paperwork. No incentives

¹¹ A website was created to recruit participants as well as showcase this PhD research. The website can be viewed at www.showingagriculture.co.uk.

were given to any interviewees, they participated on the understanding that they were assisting with my academic pursuit, and the future development of the RWS.

As suggested by Healey and Rawlinson (1993) each interview began with an open question asking the participant to describe their association with the RWAS, by doing this I was able to find out more about the participant, and also able to identify possible questions to ask at a later stage of the interview. Again, following the advice of Healey and Rawlinson (1993) each interview ended with an open discussion, and the participants were invited to add any other views that they have, enabling a complete data set to be achieved.

The remainder of this section will briefly discuss the interview and recruitment strategy taken for each of the main categories of respondents, before discussing the analysis of the data.

3.3.1.1 – Show Organisers/Show Staff

Throughout the research process I regularly met with the Chief Officers of the RWAS, as such access to these officials was freely granted, and I was able to conduct a very informal interview, these interviews were as much about me sharing my ideas and vision for the RWS as they were me gaining information about the Show and its role in Wales.

Interviews conducted with those associated with the RWAS were based around the contemporary role of the event, the role of the event in agricultural innovation, and the role of the event within Welsh politics.

Steve Hughson, Chief Executive of the RWS was able to introduce, and give me the contact details of other RWAS officials who he thought it would be beneficial for me to speak with, this snowballing technique (Valentine, 2005) opened up many doors and generated a number of interviews. The contacts given to me by Steve Hughson were either written to, or sent an email inviting them to participate, something which everyone contacted did. These interviews were conducted either on the Royal Welsh

Showground in Llanelwedd, or at the home address of the participant. I was sure to interview people from all aspects of the RWS and other stakeholders (see Sections 3.3.1.2 – 3.2.1.6) to ensure that I was able to get ‘both sides’ (Sayer and Morgan, 1985) of the story, and not just the views of the RWAS on the event.

3.3.1.2 – Show Traders

Following the 2014 RWS all traders were invited to complete a survey on their experience at the event (see Section 3.5), the final question of this survey invited participants to leave their contact details should they be willing to be contacted for a follow up interview. Ten businesses who were deemed representative of the trade mix at the RWS were contacted for an interview. As a result, five interviews were carried out.

These interviews took place either at the 2015 RWS, or in the weeks following the event at their business premises. Where possible and when time allowed I tried to undertake these interviews at the RWS, as this enabled me to get a better feeling of the business operations at the event and to be able to better visualise what they were discussing (McDowell, 1997).

An interview schedule was devised based upon the results of the 2014 trader survey, these interviews gave me chance to delve deeper into the entrepreneurial implications of the RWS, whilst enabling clarification on points raised in the self-administered survey.

3.3.1.3 – Politicians/Policy-makers

Of all the categories of interviewees it was the interviews with the political ‘elites’ that took the most time, effort, and patience to set up, something that is a common experience. As Mullings (1999) states elites operate under strict security and time constraints, as such there is only a brief window of opportunity for an interview to take place. All of the other interviews I conducted were easy to set up, I would state a potential time or date, and the participant would agree or disagree. However, when

contacting the politicians (once I had got past the gatekeeper), it often took many weeks of negotiation to agree a date and location for an interview, with some interviews being arranged months in advance.

Although for all the interviews I was always fully prepared and knowledgeable about the participant, this process started much sooner with the political participants, in my initial contact letter I would state exactly why I wanted to speak to them, how I thought their views would benefit my work, and I would also use my personal knowledge of them to try and make an initial connection. For example, in the case of Lord Bourne, in July 2015 he was awarded an honorary fellowship from Aberystwyth University, at the start of my request letter I congratulated him on this. I used my own personal networks as well as the name of the RWAS in order to gain access to these political 'elites', as with Thuesen (2011) I found that my own social capital, the trust held in me by the RWAS and the wider rural community, gave me the opportunity to contact and interview these 'elites'.

Following the advice of Richards (1996), when scheduling interviews, I was sure to leave the interviews with the 'elites' until near the end of the research period, so to ensure that I was fully prepared and confident with my interview technique. This ensured that I did not needlessly take up the time of important persons (Dexter, 1970). The political 'elites' interviewed were selected on the basis of their attendance at the 2015 RWS (a list was provided by the RWAS).

All of the main political parties in Wales were offered the chance to contribute to this research, however after repeated contact with Welsh Labour¹², Carwyn Jones (Welsh Labour Leader and First Minister of Wales), Alun Davies (former Minister for Natural Resources and Food) and Rebecca Evans (Deputy Minister for Farming and Food)¹³, no

¹² At the time of the research, Welsh Labour were the governing party in Wales.

¹³ At the start of the research Alun Davies (former Minister for Natural Resources and Food) was responsible for the agriculture portfolio, following his dismissal for breaking the Ministerial Code, Rebecca Evans took the new position of Deputy Minister for Farming and Food, which included the agriculture portfolio, since the Welsh Assembly elections of May 2016, Lesley Griffiths has held the agricultural portfolio under the title Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs.

one from the party or the current Welsh Government were willing to comment. As such the views of Welsh Labour and the serving Welsh Government Ministers are omitted from this research.

All of the interviews with the political 'elite' took place in their offices (be it a constituency office, House of Commons, Department of Energy and Climate Change, or the Senedd), although this was a great experience being at the heart of British politics, it perhaps made me more nervous than I would have been had we met in a mutual location, and it also further placed the interviewee in a position of authority (Harvey, 2010). The fact that these interviews happened in the offices of the interviewee may have put a constraint on some of the participants, as we were in an official location, their responses are likely to represent the official, public version of events (Mikecz, 2012).



Figure 3: With Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Wales at the Department of Energy and Climate Change, Whitehall (Greg Thomas, personal collection).

These interviews tended to focus on the latest policy developments, the level of trust between farmers and government, communication techniques, and the political implications of the RWS.

3.3.1.4 – Media

One of my aims from the outset of the PhD project was to make my research as accessible to the wider audience of RWS as possible, and as such from the start of the research process, I have tried to engage with the media. Through working with the media, I made a number of contacts throughout the print, broadcast and online journalism sector in Wales, who were called upon to be interviewed as part of this project. These interviews took place in either in the offices of the participants or at the Royal Welsh Showground. These interviews focussed on the media coverage given to the RWS, the reasons behind it, audience profile and numbers.

3.3.1.5 – Rural Networking Organisations

Rural Wales is a very connected place, with groups such as the CLA, FUW and NFU Cymru representing the rights of their members and operating as networking groups. These groups all have a presence at the RWS, and operate throughout the year and as such it was important to discuss their views on the event.

These groups were contacted through my personal and family connections within the industry, and the interviews took place at the offices of the participants. These interviews were primarily focussed on the role that RWS plays within Wales, the networking role of the event and its significance in knowledge exchange in Wales.

3.3.1.6 – Farmers/General Public

Chiswell and Wheeler (2016) have recently discussed the challenges of interviewing farmers, they discuss how the geographical remoteness of farming, strength of tradition, and the male dominated nature of the industry brings with a unique challenge to the researcher. Although relatively young and, according to many unexperienced to the real work, and realities of farming. I did not find interviewing farmers a difficult. I believe this is due to my position within rural Wales (see Section 3.2).



Figure 4: Interviewing Hazel Baker of the Royal Highland Cattle Society at the Royal Welsh Showground (Greg Thomas, personal collection).

Due to the media coverage given to my research, and my own connections within the Welsh agriculture industry, recruitment of farmers and the general public was a relatively easy process, as those interviewed within this category all approached me, wanting to speak with me about their personal experiences of the RWS. These interviewees were a self-selected sample, this therefore could lead to bias in the data from these interviews, as those that have come forward are likely to have an association with the RWS or strong opinions about the event. These interviewees cannot therefore be seen as wholly representative of all that attend the RWS.

Here I would agree with Pini's (2004) assertion that having a rural background (despite not being a practising farmer) offered me a certain amount of legitimacy when interviewing farmers. In these interviews, I deliberately emphasised my farming identity and rural roots which I believe encouraged farmers to open up, particularly when discussing the Welsh Government (see Chiswell and Wheeler, 2016; Pini, 2004).

As with researchers conducting the Farm Business Survey (O'Regan, 2011), I quickly became known as being "the boy from Aberystwyth looking at the RWS" amongst farming circles, a title that will probably stay with me until my dying day.

Interviews with the farmers/general public generally took place at their home, which were often in incredibly rural locations, many hours were spent getting lost around the hills of mid Wales, something which was not just a logistical issue, but also a health and safety problem. Again, Chiswell and Wheeler (2016) note that safety advice given to researchers in the Social Researchers' Association Code of Practice (2006) are unfeasible or ineffective in rural locations. However, (despite not often having signal) a mobile phone was carried at all times, and a friend/colleague was aware of my location and my anticipated return time.

Similar to Chiswell and Wheeler (2016) due to the loneliness and isolation that many farmers experience, I felt that many farmers appreciated my visit. Beyond the formal realms of the interview, the hospitality I was receiving was often extended to further tea, cake and even dinner on one occasion. Although perhaps in some scenarios problematic, I believe that this enabled me to enhance my interview data, whilst allowing me to build a strong relationship with my participants, that would ensure that they do not feel like they have been exploited, and allowing me to call on their services in any future research projects.

The interviews with farmers/the general public tended to focus on the relationships that they hold with the RWS and the RWAS, their experiences of the event, and expanded upon the information that was collected in the visitor survey (see Section 3.4). For the interviews conducted with those who considered themselves to be practising farmers, questions were also asked about their relationship with the Welsh Government.

3.3.1.7 – Data Analysis

Perhaps the biggest issue experienced through the research process was knowing when to stop. Most people in Wales have some sort of view on the RWS, and almost

every person I interviewed suggested someone else for me to go and see, however the line had to be drawn somewhere, for me that was when the interview findings started to get repetitive.

Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim (although verbal pauses were excluded), all interviewees were offered a copy of the transcript, something that was declined by all interviewees, bar one. Whilst all interviewees were offered anonymity (in line with the ethical guidelines of Aberystwyth University), this offer was not taken up by any participant, and as such all participants will be referred to by name rather than any form of code. Although transcription was a long process, it was very rewarding and it enabled me to get a fuller understanding of the data.

Following transcription, transcripts were reread and compared to the recordings to ensure accuracy. A two-level coding process as outlined by Cope (2010) was undertaken, whereby first descriptive/in vivo codes were identified (codes using the respondents own words). Analytic coding was then undertaken, linking the descriptive codes to the theoretical literature. These codes were then built into themes which serve as the main empirical chapters for this thesis. This interview data, however was not used in isolation, throughout the coding process all the data collected (as outlined in this chapter) was referred to and linked back to the interview data.

3.3.2 – Focus Group

One of the most important stakeholder groups of the RWS is Wales Young Farmers' Clubs (YFC)¹⁴, due to their diverse membership and wide remit, I felt it inappropriate just to interview key figures within the organisation, and ignore the wider membership. As such a focus group was held at their Annual General Meeting in the Marine Hotel, Aberystwyth on Saturday 3rd October 2015. Members of the focus group were selected by Nia Lloyd, Chief Executive of Wales YFC, and it comprised of

¹⁴ Wales YFC is the largest rural youth organisation in Wales. The organisation has over 5,000 members aged from 10 – 26, and is run by the members for the members. The group encourages and facilitates rural youth to gain new skills, travel the world, help their local communities, and to network and socialise with other like-minded people throughout Wales and beyond (Wales YFC, 2013).

ten members from throughout Wales, of these all were aged between 18 and 26, nine were female and one was male, and they represented the different interests of Wales YFC. As with the interviews no incentives were offered to any of the participants.

All members of the focus group were briefed on the project before the session began, they were informed that the session would be recorded, and the data used as part of this PhD project, and any associated publications. Again verbal, rather than written consent was received from all the participants.

The focus group took the form of a discussion structured around the following themes:

- Reasons for attending the RWS;
- Role of the Young Peoples' Village¹⁵;
- The role of the RWS in personal and professional development;
- The political role of the RWS;
- The future of the event.

Following the work of Breen (2006), this focus group formed a social environment, which allowed the members to be more open, and more perceptive to others views than had I have undertaken individual interviews. I also felt that by placing these young people together, they would be more confident and willing to respond.

Following the completion of the focus group with Wales YFC, it was transcribed and analysed as outlined previously for the interviews in Section 3.3.1.7.

3.3.3 – Humans of the Royal Welsh Show

3.3.3.1 – Background

Given the uniqueness of the RWS, the wide variety and volume of people that it attracts, and the fact that almost everyone in Wales has some sort of opinion on the

¹⁵ The YPV is a campsite and entertainment venue operated by Wales YFC throughout the period of the RWS. The YPV attracts 4,000 campers and 14,000 party-goers and is considered by many to be the farming equivalent to Glastonbury Festival (Wales YFC, 2016).

event, it presented a unique methodological challenge. Although during 2014 I undertook a visitor survey (see Section 3.4) and a trader survey (see Section 3.6), I felt that I had a lack of qualitative information, and did not think that I would be able to gauge an overall view of the RWS by only using traditional research techniques.

Inspired by the blog and book 'Humans of New York' by Brandon Stanton (2013), I initiated (supported by the RWAS) the Humans of the Royal Welsh Show project. Stanton began his work in 2010 by photographing and interviewing New Yorkers, giving them an opportunity to tell their stories on social media and in print. The project now has over 20 million followers on social media giving daily glimpses into the lives of the people of New York (Stanton, 2016). Stanton has gone on to photograph people in 13 different countries, and many other sites have appeared based upon Stanton's work.

The Humans of the Royal Welsh Show project was one of these projects inspired by the work of Stanton. Through the project I wanted to tell the stories of the ordinary, and the extraordinary, the stories of the people that exhibit, compete, visit, and volunteer at the event. Each one of these people have a story, their own unique story, with the RWS being the common factor, bringing this diverse group of people together in a celebration of everything that is great about agriculture and Wales.

At the 2015 and 2016 RWS and the 2015 RWWF, working with the assistance of an undergraduate student, photographs were taken of people at the event, and they were asked to give a short statement about their experiences of the Show. Apart from being asked to give their name, participants were given free rein and able to say anything they pleased. This storytelling of the small, personal, and perhaps even mundane aspects of the events enabled links to be made to the broader social and political context to the event (de Jong, 2015). These statements were digitally recorded using a Dictaphone, and transcribed verbatim. Where the participants were able to speak Welsh, a second statement was given in Welsh.

In the build-up the 2015 RWS and during the four days of the event (15th July to 23rd July 2015), the photos and statements were immediately uploaded to a Facebook page (Humans of the Royal Welsh Show) and a Twitter page (@HumansOfTheRWS). As such the Facebook and Twitter page formed a live blog of the event with people liking, commenting and sharing the posts. The same format was repeated for the RWWF (28th November to 1st December 2015), and again for the 2016 RWS (14th July to 21st July 2016). Figure 5 shows one example from the Facebook page of the project.



Figure 5: A screenshot from the Humans of the Royal Welsh Show Facebook page.

Due to the very public nature of this element of the research, it was decided not to offer any of the participants any form of anonymity. Their names and photographs were posted online, and that was a crucial element of the project, all participants were fully aware of this and gave a recorded verbal consent.

On the Facebook and Twitter pages, it was made clear that the page was part of a research project at Aberystwyth University, and that any comments or views expressed may be used as part of this research. Due to the public nature of this method of research it would be difficult to ensure informed consent from everyone who visited the Facebook page. However, as Facebook and Twitter are public, open access sites, with their own privacy regulations and acceptable usage policies,

informed consent is not always essential (Ess and the AoIR Ethics Working Committee, 2002; Madge, 2007).

3.3.3.2 – Outcomes

Table 3 below gives information on both the Humans of the RWS and Humans of the RWWF projects. Full details of the participants in each project can be seen in the Appendix.

Table 3: Information on Humans of the Royal Welsh Show and Humans of the Winter Fair

Event	Number of profiles	Number of people reached (Facebook)¹⁶	Number of countries reached (Facebook)	Number of people reached (Twitter)¹⁷
Royal Welsh Show 2015	62	302,798	84	109,796
Royal Welsh Winter Fair 2015	38	109,225	59	62,832
Royal Welsh Show 2016	51	239,991	79	114,775

At the time of writing, the Humans of the RWS Facebook page has a total of 2,633 likes from 32 different countries, whilst the Twitter page has 357 followers. The level of engagement with this project has been unprecedented, with the page being the top trending topic in Wales on Thursday 23rd July 2015.

Throughout the project it was important to ensure that no matter who the participant was, and their significance to the event, they were treated the same as any other. No matter what role people have in the outside world, when they come to the RWS, they are equals, and they all have a role in the success of the event, this was something I hoped to achieve in this project.

¹⁶ Reach as defined by the Facebook Page Insights Tool as “the of times a post from your page is displayed” (Facebook, 2016).

¹⁷ Reach is defined by Twitter as “the number of times users saw the Tweet on Twitter” (Twitter, 2016).

All of the verbal statements given were treated similar to interview data, and upon returning from the field they were analysed using the same method as outlined in Section 3.3.1.7.

In adopting this method, I have dived into the murky world of internet mediated research, something which has not been explored in detail by geographers (de Jong, 2015). The internet and Facebook particular is both a method, and an object to be studied, where both the researcher and the participants produce research. By using Facebook in this way, through my participants I was able to tell the story of the RWS live, in-situ, through people liking the various posts they were able to show satisfaction on that person's views or that aspect of the RWS. Whilst often the comments were enabling social networking and further discussion between individuals.

3.3.3.3 – Criticism

In reflecting on the project, I realised that I had a certain amount of researcher bias. Unfortunately, even with two researchers in the field, time constraints and other research commitments meant that we were unable to cover the whole of the RWS, as such some aspects of the event did not receive any coverage. Furthermore, has been suggested that the stories that feature in 'Humans of New York' affirm the viewer's assumptions about the lives of people in New York (D'Addario, 2014), I would agree that this too could be a critique of the Humans of the Royal Welsh Show, as it takes quite a stereotypical view of the event, and there is nothing especially surprising in the content.

Those people who featured as part of the project we selected by me, and as such cannot define the whole population of the RWS, those featured were only people that I felt comfortable in speaking with, and who were willing to participate. It could be said that the project documented by own view of the event, however due to the triangulation/mixed method approach the study has taken this issue has been overcome.

3.3.4 – Participant Observation

The more formal aspects of this research have been accompanied by my own observations, not only throughout the whole research period, but also through my 25-year history of attending the RWS. According to Laurier (2010) participant observation “involves spending time being, living or working with communities in order to understand them”. As stated in Section 3.2, having been born and bred into a rural community I am essentially an insider to this community, and as such access to the field was an easy process. I simply had to be myself and continue with my daily life.

This participant observation method was used as it enabled me to witness (with a researcher’s eye) the processes and activities that occur at the RWS rather than just relying on third party accounts. As part of this participant observation, field notes were written up at the end of each day of the 2014 and 2015 RWS and many photos were taken across the two years. In addition to this, stories I am told, around the dinner table, in the pub, from friends and family will no doubt influence this thesis. As such this study is not taking an ethnographic approach but rather an observational approach which comprised of “the systematic noting and recording of events, behaviours, and artefacts in a social setting” (Marshall and Rossman, 1995).

This participant observation was carried out overtly, all my friends, family, and acquaintances knew of the research project. Whilst the Board and Officers of the RWS gave permission for the research to happen at the event. Due to the size of the event it would have been unfeasible to inform every visitor to the RWS about my research as the possibility that they may be observed/photographed, I attempted to overcome this issue by ensuring that the research was covered by the media. A condition of entry to the RWS is that videos and photographs may be taken for the purposes of marketing and as part of the media coverage of the Show, visitors are used to having their photographs taken and a person with a camera or making field notes would not be seen as out of the ordinary. I feel that the visitors to the RWS would not alter their behaviour upon seeing me with my field notebook and camera.

By undertaking the participant observation, I was able to add a new depth and richness to my data that would not have been possible had I not attended the Show, or been part of that rural community. I am however in agreement with Brewer (2000) that the observations that I have made are partial, selective and autobiographical in the fact that they are tied to my own views and the conditions of which the data was collected.

3.3.5 – Historical Research

Since its inception in 1904 the RWAS has published the *Journal of the RWAS*. This publication, sent to every member of the RWAS provides a detailed report on the RWS, informs members of the activities of the Society, and gives information about the current state of Welsh agriculture and rural life in both Welsh and English (Howell, 2003). At the time of its first issue in October 1904, no publication of its kind had been issued before in Wales, and all agricultural literature available had its origins in England.

Although now published on an annual basis, eighteen issues of the Journal were published between October 1904 and January 1910, however due to financial constraints publication was discontinued until 1923. Upon its return three issues were published annually, in January, June and October, with continuing financial concerns this was decreased to two issues, before becoming an annual publication in 1987. Since its inception the Journal has seen a number of changes, and since 1965 has contained only a limited number of articles relating to the historical and scientific aspects of Welsh agriculture. From 1965 the overall aim of the Journal was to project the image of the RWS to the agricultural community in order to attract visitors to the annual show, a role which remains to this day. The analysis of these journals gave an insight into the changing nature of the RWS, which in turn can be used to examine wider rural change in Wales.

The cultural turn in rural geography has seen greater attention to how the rural is represented in the public domain, and increased attention has been played to

representations of the countryside, their creation and consumption (Morris and Evans, 2001). As such the articles, photographs, and advertisements that make up the Journal of the RWAS transmits and promotes certain images of the event to the public (Ibid).

The Journals of the RWAS were obtained through either my personal collection (1999 – 2017), earlier issues were found in the National Library of Wales (1904 – 1999) which houses a complete collection of documents relating to the RWAS.

A discourse analysis approach was adopted to analyse the Journal of the RWAS, an approach similar to that used by Morris and Evans (2001) was adopted, and the Journal of the RWAS was examined to investigate the common themes and changes, and how these may reflect wider rural change.

A traditional expert reader approach was used (see Rose, 2001) to analyse these documents, and following the method outlined by Rhoades and Irani (2008), images were selected and signs identified. These signs were then explored in terms of what they signify and analysed in relations to other signs and texts contained in the journals. Due to my positionality as a regular showgoer and member of rural community, I was easily able to understand the intertextuality of the images and their relationship with wider rural Wales (Rhoades and Irani, 2008).

I was very aware that these Journals are official documents produced by the RWAS to inform their members of their activities, as such these documents paint a very positive picture of the RWS. With all historical documents, these are socially constructed, and the information presented changes as per the changing needs of the communities that the Journals serve (Kurtz, 2001).

The document analysis was combined with the interviews undertaken, and particularly the three surveys undertaken to provide an overview of the RWS (Chapter Four).

3.3.6 – Summary

This initial section has provided an overview of the qualitative research methods used. It has discussed the benefits and limitations of each of the chosen methods, as well as how they were undertaken in the field. Having discussed the interviews, focus group, humans of the RWS project, participant observation, and the historical research that inform this research, the remainder of this chapter will provide an overview of the three surveys undertaken.

3.4 – Visitor Survey

At the 2014 RWS a short self-directed visitor survey was undertaken, due to the scale of the event, and the fact that no visitor surveys have been undertaken at the RWS in recent years this was a challenging task. It was important that all data collected was of the rigour and accuracy expected of the social science tradition, whilst ensuring that it did not impact on the visitor experience, or place a burden on the respondents. As such a thirteen question, short, postcard style, self-directed questionnaire was designed to explore the profile of visitors, their attraction to the Show, and their overall perceptions and satisfaction.

3.4.1 – Survey Design

The questionnaire was designed to be quick to undertake, as I did not want to disturb people's day at the RWS, because of this twelve of the thirteen questions were fixed response questions, although these lacked the richness that could be gained from using open ended questions (McLafferty, 2010), the questionnaires were used in conjunction with the other qualitative data sources (see Section 3.3), and were primarily used to get a profile of the visitors to the event. The first six questions were used to establish a demographic profile of the visitors to the event, before moving onto fixed answer questions about the RWS. The final question was an open-ended question asking respondents to describe the RWS in three words.

The visitor survey was written using the guide to a good questionnaire as outlined by Fowler (2008), and I was sure that it was written avoiding any complex phrases, or

guiding language (Babbie, 2003). Figure 6 below shows the postcard questionnaire (English language) that was used at the 2014 RWS.

The postcard features the Aberystwyth University logo at the top left, with the text 'PRIFYSGOL ABERYSTWYTH UNIVERSITY'. The photograph shows a large crowd of people in white coats, likely judges, gathered around a large white bull in a show ring. A green circular logo for 'CAFC RWAS' is visible in the bottom right corner of the photo.

The questionnaire form on the right includes the following sections:

- Name:** _____
- Email address:** _____
- Postcode (or country if non UK):** _____
- Gender:** MALE FEMALE
- Age:** Under 18 18-25 26-40 41-50 51-65 Over 65
- Are you from a farming background?** YES NO
- Reason for attending the Royal Welsh Show:**
 - Business Day out Family holiday Education
 - Trader Competitor Family competing
 - Other: _____
- For how many days in 2014 will you attend the Show?** 1 2 3 4
- Which of the previous Shows have you attended?** Invented 2009 2010 2011 2012 2013
- In which section of the Show do you spend the majority of your time?**
 - Animals Machinery Food and drink YFC
 - Shopping Main ring Countryside Care Forestry
 - Other: _____
- Do you feel the Royal Welsh Show represents value for money?** YES NO
- Will you be attending the 2015 RWAS?** YES NO
- Describe the Royal Welsh Agricultural Show in three words:** _____

At the bottom, there is a disclaimer: "In submitting this postcard and entering the free prize draw you are agreeing to the terms and conditions available at www.showingagriculture.co.uk and you are agreeing to be contacted by Aberystwyth University and/or the Royal Welsh Agricultural Society." Below this is a checkbox: Please tick this box if you do not wish to be contacted.

Figure 6: The postcard style questionnaire used at the 2014 Royal Welsh Show.

In line with the Welsh language policy of Aberystwyth University, the survey was made available in Welsh and English, and a final copy of the questionnaire is enclosed in the Appendix. Before launching the questionnaire, it was tested (in English and Welsh) to ensure ease of use and accuracy of translation.

On the questionnaire, it stated that by submitting the postcard into the collection box, and thus completing the questionnaire, the respondent was agreeing to the terms and conditions of the questionnaire (therefore giving informed consent), and respondents were guided to the project website to view these. These terms and conditions were also printed on the side of the collection box. A box was provided at the bottom of the questionnaire which enabled participants to opt out of any further contact as part of the study.

The survey design meant only a limited number of questions could be asked, and therefore the results and insights that the visitor survey gives into the RWS are limited in scope, particularly in terms of in depth qualitative responses.

3.4.2 – Survey Distribution

The visitor survey was undertaken at the 2014 RWS, which attracted a total of 237,694 visitors. Those who visited or passed by the Aberystwyth University Education Pavilion were asked to complete a questionnaire. As such this questionnaire was administered through a random sampling technique and was open all those who attended the 2014 RWS. The questionnaire was available for completion between 9am and 6pm for the full four days of the Show (21st – 24th July 2014).

Respondents completed the questionnaire themselves, and in-situ, at the Aberystwyth University Education Pavilion. People who completed the questionnaire were given an Aberystwyth University branded pen, and each completed questionnaire was entered into a free prize draw to win a pair of tickets for the 2015 RWS. Figure 7 shows the data collection point in-situ at the Aberystwyth University Education Pavilion at the RWS.

I am aware that this sampling technique had its limitations, primarily (even though the survey was self-administered), it was only undertaken by one researcher. Therefore, there was a limit to the number of people that I was able to contact, much of my time was spent near or at the Aberystwyth University Education Pavilion, encouraging people to complete the survey. Herein lies another major limitation of the visitor survey, is that it was only available from one location on the Showground and as such only the people passing by this area of the event could access the survey.

To try and overcome this research bias, in the period following the 2014 RWS the questionnaire was made available online, using the Qualtrics online survey software (detail of which is given in Section 3.6). A link to the questionnaire was placed on the RWAS newsletter and the exact same questionnaire made available online from 1st – 31st October 2014.

A total of 1,042 questionnaires were completed, however 15 were discarded, due to the respondent being under the age of 18 (as per Aberystwyth University ethical

regulations). Therefore, the total number of recorded responses was 1,027. Table 4 shows the total number of responses through the medium of completion.

Table 4: Number of questionnaires completed (by medium)

Type of questionnaire	Number
Postcard (English)	698
Postcard (Welsh)	214
Online	115
Total	1027

At the end of each day, all questionnaires were removed from the deposit box at the Aberystwyth University Education Pavilion on the Royal Welsh Showground, these were then locked in a secure place before being transported to the Department of Geography and Earth Sciences, Aberystwyth University where they have been stored in a locked filing cabinet ever since. All electronic and processed data was stored securely on the Aberystwyth University password protected server.

3.4.3 – Survey Analysis

All questionnaire data was entered into, managed, and analysed using Microsoft Excel. Data was sorted and charts/graphs created, in order to present the data in an easy to read format. This data is summarised and a demographic profile of the visitors given in Chapter 4. Data is displayed in percentages, based on the total number of valid responses for the question. For some questions respondents were able to state more than one answer, as such the total number of questions for some questions may not add up to the total number of respondents.

Each question was analysed in turn, with key trends and data patterns noted. For the postcode data, a county level map was produced using ArcMap to establish where visitors who attend the RWS live, and a word cloud was generated to show the most popular phrases people used when describing the event. A comparison was also made between the responses of those groups who identified themselves as being from a farming and non-farming background, different ages, and genders.

3.5 – International Visitor Survey

At the 2015 event, Zoe Henderson, Senior Steward in the RWS International Pavilion¹⁸ conducted a short survey with the aims of establishing the numbers and demographics of the international visitors that come to the RWS. Although not designed or administered by myself, I have analysed the data for the RWAS and this thesis.

3.5.1 – Survey Design

This survey was a short paper based questionnaire comprising of 14 questions. Similar to the visitor survey, initially basic demographic and contact data was established, before moving onto specific questions relating to the reasons why people visited to the RWS, where they heard about the event, and how many days they would be attending the Show, and had they attended the event before. The survey then moved on to ask more about the wider impacts of the Show and the length of time that the visitors would spend in Wales.

As with the visitor survey, by submitting this questionnaire to the stewards in the International Pavilion informed consent was given, participants were able to withdraw their responses at any time, and they were able to state that they did not want to receive any more contact from myself or the RWAS. Good practice when discussing paper based questionnaires has previously been covered in Section 3.4.

3.5.2 – Survey Distribution

Overseas visitors who registered at the International Pavilion during the 2015 RWS (20th July -23rd July 2015) were asked by one of the Stewards to complete the questionnaire. A total of 450 questionnaires were returned from a total of 1,011 international visitor registrations, therefore they are representative of 45% of international visitors who signed in at the RWS.

¹⁸ The International Pavilion is a building at the centre of the Royal Welsh Showground, providing hospitality and information for overseas visitors to the event. The International Pavilion provides a space for these visitors to relax, a place for advice, and free refreshments throughout the four days of the event. International visitors are encouraged to sign in at the Pavilion on arrival at the Show.

Although overseas visitors are encouraged to attend the International Pavilion, many do not and therefore it cannot be reliably said that the results of this survey are representative of the whole population of overseas visitors at the event. However, it was decided that as the International Pavilion is the hub for these visitors it would be the most appropriate location to undertake such a survey.

As with the visitor survey at the end of each day all questionnaires were removed from the Royal Welsh Showground, and all data has been stored in a locked filing cabinet and on a secure server ever since.

3.5.3 – Survey Analysis

The data from the international visitor survey was processed and analysed using the same procedure as outlined in Section 3.3.3 for the visitor survey.

3.6 – Trader Survey

Working in conjunction with the RWAS an online trader survey was created in the period following the 2014 event. This survey aimed to establish the motivation of traders to attend the RWS, the impact that attending has on their business, the overall trader experience, and the future of traders at the event. This survey was conducted online and all those who had space at the 2014 event were invited to respond.

3.5.1 – Survey Design

The 2014 RWS trader survey collected both qualitative and quantitative data using the Qualtrics online survey software. It was chosen to use an online survey for this questionnaire as it was a low cost, fast, efficient method, which allowed for contingency questions to be asked, with direct data entry (Sue and Ritter, 2012). Coverage bias was not an issue in this case as when applying for a space at the RWS, traders submit an email address and as such an existing mailing list was used to contact participants. Qualtrics was used over other software as it is very visually

appealing, contains Aberystwyth University branding, allows for the use of contingency questions and is easy to use.

The survey was made to be compatible with both mobile devices and web browsers, enabling greater convenience for the participants, allowing them to complete it on the go and hopefully leading to an increased response rate. However, as Peytchev and Hill (2010) have identified, the use of mobile phones for online surveys has led to a reduction in lengthy open-ended feedback on surveys.

The questionnaire design was based around design principles for online questionnaires, as outlined by Dillman (2000), the questionnaire contained:

- A welcome screen – describing the purpose of the survey and a consent form. By passing the welcome screen the respondent was agree to terms and conditions of the survey and thus giving informed consent (see Figure 8).
- Access control – only organisations with the survey URL could access the survey.
- A conventional format – giving the respondent comfort and familiarity.
- Colour – making the survey more user friendly. The survey used the Aberystwyth University corporate design, giving it legitimacy.
- Instructions – full information was given for each question, avoiding any jargon.



Figure 7: The welcome screen to the trader survey.

Skip logic was used to ensure that the questionnaire was intelligent, that is, that only questions relevant to the respondent were displayed, and based on their previous answers respondents were sent to a different point in the questionnaire. As such the questionnaire comprised of multiple pages. This also allowed participants to move through the questionnaire quickly. A progress bar was added to each page of the questionnaire to indicate how complete the survey was, and a next and back arrow were included enabling participants to revisit their answers.

Participants were able to complete the questionnaire anonymously, as there was no way to know who submitted responses, although the final question on the survey allowed for participants to leave their details should they be happy to be contacted again in future.

As with the visitor survey, the questionnaire was made available in both Welsh and English, and it was tested by myself and the RWAS in order to ensure accuracy. Qualtrics enables the same questionnaire to be undertaken in multiple language, and the participants make their choice by using a drop-down menu.

A full copy of the trader survey can be seen in the Appendix.

3.5.2 – Survey Distribution

The trader survey was undertaken in period following the 2014 RWS, which attracted 1,033 tradestands, with the exception of those businesses that are located in the Royal Welsh Food Hall (they have their own feedback forms administered by the Welsh Government), every trader was invited to participate in the survey (a total of 800). A bilingual email was sent out to all traders by the RWAS, it was decided to let the RWAS invite the traders to complete the survey as it would give the survey credibility, and it would also ensure that the email did not appear as spam. The fact that the whole population I wanted to investigate were able to respond to the survey meant that there is no sampling error in this study.

The survey was available for completion between 6th August 2014 and 3rd September 2014, with a reminder to complete the questionnaire being sent out to all traders on the 29th August 2014.

A total of 295 traders completed the survey, or 27% of the traders at the 2014 RWS. A wide variety of traders participated, and those that participated were representative of the wider trade mix at the RWS. As such I believe the results give a good view of the whole trader body at the event. IP address recognition was enabled on the questionnaire, preventing respondents from completing the questionnaire more than once.

All of the businesses and organisations who have responded to this questionnaire have done so of their own accord, and they were not offered any incentive to participate. This may have the effect that the responses may be biased towards those who felt they had a particularly good RWS or those who unhappy with their experience, as such the satisfied middle may be excluded from this analysis.

One limitation of online surveys is so called survey fatigue (Witte, 2009), whereby online surveys have now become so popular that people have become immune to them (Sue and Ritter, 2012). On an almost daily basis, people receive invitations to complete online surveys, and as such they are not as appealing as they once were (Madge, 2010), which can have a negative impact on the overall response rate.

In the case of this survey, survey abandonment was an issue, with a dropout rate of 28%, indicating that the survey may have been too long or that it may have contained too many open text entry style questions. This was perhaps a flaw in the survey design, however the survey was trying to collect information both for my thesis and for the RWAS, it therefore had a wide remit and was required to be long in order to satisfy both parties.

3.5.3 – Survey Analysis

Initially data was downloaded from the Qualtrics online survey software, before being worked and manipulated using Microsoft Excel. Before the data was in a useable form it was needed to be cleaned, a common issue with online based surveys (Sue and Ritter, 2012). The data was cleaned using the guidance put forward by Van den Broeck and others (2005), where by data was screened for anomalies, before being diagnosed, and finally treated. The treatment stage of the clean-up processes involved either correcting or removing any data that was diagnosed as being anomalous. Following this the data was analysed in the same manner as outlined in Section 3.3.3.

3.7 - Summary

This chapter has given an overview of the research design and methods used to investigate the RWS, a mixed methods approach was adopted so to ensure validity of research, and to overcome the shortcomings from each specific method. In this chapter, each of the individual methods undertaken have been discussed including their benefits and limitations.

In addition to these formal methods, I have also received personal communications from Phil Hogan, European Commissioner for Agriculture and Grahame Davies, Senior Advisor on Wales to the HRH Prince of Wales at Clarence House. These communications will also be drawn upon in this research.

The early part of this chapter focused on my positionality as a researcher and highlighted the role that I personally have in this project. The next chapter will introduce the empirical case study of the RWS, and will present the data from the three surveys that have previously been discussed.

Chapter Four: The Royal Welsh Agricultural Society

4.1 – Introduction

This thesis uses the empirical case study of the RWS to address the research questions as set out in Section 1.3. Although this thesis focuses specifically on the RWS, there is a common misconception that the sole function of the RWAS is to organise the annual RWS. This is untrue, the RWAS embraces a wide agenda, hosting a number of out-of-show activities, with a wide-ranging programme promoting the agricultural and rural economy of Wales.

Although not intended to give a long a detailed history of the Society or the Show, this chapter introduces the RWAS, gives a historical and contemporary overview of the Society, before introducing the empirical case study of the RWS. The information in this chapter is based on research undertaken into the Journal of the RWAS and personal observations. I will always be grateful to the work of Professor David Howell, formerly of Swansea University for his detailed publication on the early history of the Society, saving me many hours in the archives.

4.2 – Society History

This thesis will primarily focus on the contemporary role of the RWS in Wales, as such I do not want to dedicate too much space to the history of the Society, this is something that has previously been excellently undertaken by Howell (2003), however I feel that it is important, for context, to give a brief overview of the historical events that have shaped the Society.

Although British agricultural societies have their roots in Wales with the formation of the Breconshire Agricultural in 1755 by Charles Powell, being established in 1904 the

RWAS was the last national agricultural society to be established in Britain¹⁹. The brainchild of Sir Lewis Loveden Pryse from Aberystwyth, the Welsh National Agricultural Society was established on the 1st February 1904 at their first meeting at the Lion Royal Hotel, Aberystwyth. Following a meeting of more than twenty prominent figures from Wales in Committee Room Twelve of the House of Commons, the Society was formed (and included Monmouthshire as part of Wales), and the following schemes were decided upon:

- To hold an annual show whose object it was to get the best of stock from all parts of the United Kingdom exhibited in Wales, so as to give the Welsh farmer an opportunity once a year to of seeing the best types of British breeds and, by giving special prizes confined to Welsh famers, to encourage them to breed their distinctive breed up to the best standard.
- To start new, and assist existing, Entire Horse, Pony and Bull Clubs throughout Wales, an aim to which, the founders were mindful of, followed the lines of the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society.
- To edit an agricultural journal in Welsh and English for distribution, free of charge, to members of the Society.
- To assist agriculture generally throughout Wales in every way in its power.

These founding schemes have since been updated to form the current charitable objectives of the society, which are:

- To promote sustainable agriculture, horticulture, forestry, conservation and the environment, and in particular in Wales.
- To promote the improvement of livestock, the welfare of animals and the prevention and eradication of diseases in animals useful to man.
- To hold demonstrations of modern agricultural methods, technology and processes.

¹⁹ The Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland was established in 1783, the Royal Agricultural Society of England in 1838, and the Ulster Agricultural Society was established in 1854.

- To hold shows for the exhibition of livestock, poultry, farm and horticultural produce and forestry, and for the demonstration of agricultural methods, machinery and modern technology and hold events of an ancillary nature.
- To promote and advance for the benefit and education of the public the conservation protection and improvement of the physical and natural environment.
- To promote rural arts, culture and heritage (RWAS, 2015).

From its initiation the Society was apolitical, one of the key rules within its constitution was that all questions of a political tendency relating to measures pending or to be brought forward in either House of Parliament should be excluded from discussion at any of the Society's meetings. This apolitical role is something that the Society still prides itself upon today.

The formation of the Welsh National Agricultural Society was not without controversy, many of the smaller regional/county based societies felt threatened by the establishment of a larger organisation. Many of these societies voiced criticism of the Welsh National Agricultural Society, with them stating that they had not been consulted surrounding its formation. At this time, there were many angry exchanges between those in favour and those opposed to the Society in the *Western Mail* (the national newspaper of Wales), which do make interesting, and often entertaining reading.

By 1910 the Society was seen to be a success, and some of the initial jealousy expressed by the regional agricultural societies were no more. The annual Show was experiencing an annual increase in visitor numbers and entries. In these initial years the Society received a great deal of support from King Edward VII, and George, Prince of Wales consented to become the Patron of the Society in 1907. However, the Society could not be granted Royal status by the Home Office until the Society was in a better/more established financial position. It was not until late 1922, following the post-World War One resurrection of the Society, that the Welsh National Agricultural

Society was given permission from King George V to use the Royal prefix in its title and the society was henceforth known as the Royal Welsh Agricultural Society.

Similar to the great learned societies, from its outset the Welsh National Agricultural Society was a membership organisation, with two subscription tiers, Governor and Members. In 1904 subscriptions were set at £5 for Governors, £1 for members, whilst tenant farmers or occupiers who made their living in Wales and whose rateable value did not exceed £100 per annum would pay 10s. 6d per annum. These membership subscriptions supported the activities of the Society and as such have had a vital role in the success of the RWS. Membership of the Society was initially very low, in February 1938 there were 1,057 members, making the RWAS the smallest of all the 'big' agricultural societies. By being a member of the RWAS members were entitled to speak at meetings of the Society, they received a copy of the Journal of the RWAS, and also were entitled to free entry to the annual show.

From the outset, the Society wanted to be seen as more than being a Show, and in these early days had a large influence on the development of agriculture in Wales. One constant throughout the history of the Society, albeit in different forms and regularity, has been the Journal of the Royal Welsh Agricultural Society. This reports on the activities of the Society in both Welsh and English, but also contains articles dealing with the breeding and improvement of livestock, and scientific aspects of agriculture. These journals have maintained a vital link between the Society and its wider membership, as well as ensuring that the RWAS was able to assist agriculture in every way possible throughout Wales.

Although apolitical, or perhaps in my opinion more accurate to say non-partisan, the RWAS has since its formation responded to consultation documents, stated its interest in policy issues that they have seen as being of importance to its members, and also been able to influence policy. As early as 1905 the Council of the RWAS decided to write to the then President of the then Board of Agriculture, stating its concern regarding the increasing occurrence of sheep worrying, and urging for legislation ensuring that all licenced dogs wore identification tags. Making the identification of

unlicensed, and potentially dangerous dogs easier. At the same Council meeting it was decided that the RWAS should write to all county councils in Wales asking them to enforce the 1893 Fertilizers and Feeding Stuffs Act. These are just two early examples of intervention by the RWAS in policy matters, and throughout its history the RWAS has had a considerable impact on agricultural and rural policy in Wales (and beyond).

These early decisions by the Council of the RWAS to intervene in policy issues of pertinence to its members, were highly commended by farmers and the press of day. The Society were seen as a medium between the farmers of Wales and the then Board of Agriculture. These actions of the Society were seen to have a positive impact on Wales, and as such enabled the Society to establish itself as a force within the nation.

After World War Two the RWAS experienced turbulent times with fluctuating revenues, due to higher administrative expenses, and greater costs of staging the annual RWS than had previously been experienced. These increased expenses saw many of the events held during the late 1940s and 1950s make a deficit, meaning that the funds of the Society were being eroded at an alarming rate. Year on year the Society was witnessing rising costs, particularly with regards to showground erection expenses, and with an unreliable income (often affected by the weather, industry conditions and location of the annual Show). These financial concerns combined with the fact that showgrounds were increasingly overcrowded, and growing criticisms from exhibitors and visitors of poor hygiene and food provision at these temporary showgrounds encouraged the Society to seek a permanent headquarters for the Society and therefore a permanent site for the RWS.

On the 5th June 1958, a working party was established in order to establish if a permanent site for the RWS would alleviate the financial pressures that hosting the event placed on the Society. Following much debate and discussion, on the 16th December 1960 the Council of the RWAS decided to purchase a 176-acre site in Llanelwedd, near Builth Wells, Powys for £38,497 (£22,000 was donated by the Builth Wells Permanent Site Committee, chaired by Alderman Edwards). This move to a permanent site, an unpopular move with some at the time, marked a new phase for

the Society and the Show. The RWS took full possession of the site in May 1962, with the first Show being held in Llanellwedd in 1963.

With the move to Llanellwedd came a greater emphasis for the County Advisory Committees, previously charged with hosting the Show in their counties, and with raising funds for their show, these thirteen Advisory Committees (made up of the historic counties of Wales and Monmouthshire) were to be seen as the vital link between the Society and the rest of Wales. These committees would feed directly into the Society's Board of Directors, ensuring that the whole of Wales was represented at the RWAS, but importantly each year a different Advisory Committee would act as a feature or host county for that year's RWS. The Feature/Host County idea, the brainchild of Dr Alban Davies, instigated a system whereby each county in Wales acts as host for the Show, providing the Show President and Lady Ambassador, and in turn they raise funds through organising a variety of events in order to purchase/build a specific item for the Society. Giving each county a legacy on the permanent showground, and also supporting the Society with the development of the site. Today, this feature county system and the money that it has raised for the RWAS is the envy of many of the other large agricultural societies in the Britain (Howell, 2003).

Writing in *Real Powys*, Mike Parker (2011) describes the feature county idea as being "Wales at its sweetest", and speaks of how often there is a tacit aptness between the building erected as a result of fundraising and the county. For example, Montgomeryshire have a substantial restaurant at the heart of the Showground, Pembrokeshire have the main ring control tower (which is two stories tall), whilst Meirionnydd have the shearing shed.



Figure 8: Porth Mon or Anglesey Gate on the Royal Welsh Showground. The building has been designed to showcase the local image and cultural identity of the island. Porth Mon was paid for by the £200,000 raised by the 2013 Feature County, Anglesey (RWAS).

As part of its ambition to be more than just a show, periodically throughout its history the RWAS has launched a wider variety of awards, aimed at recognising best or innovative practice within the industry, or to recognise individuals that have given much of their time/career to agriculture, as well as recognising the leaders of the future. In their infancy often field days were held on the winning entrants farm allowing for best practice and innovation to spread. The winners of these awards would also feature in the Journal of the RWAS, ensuring that the Society was assisting the development of agriculture in Wales.

Due to being a national society, covering and belonging to the whole of Wales, one major difficulty for the RWS in its early days was coming to terms with the relative status of the Welsh and English language in its various activities. From its inception English was seen to be the dominant language of the administration of the Society and of the annual Show. However, in the Journal of the Society articles and editorial notes were printed in both Welsh and English. Greater use of the Welsh language came in the interwar years when the Welsh language was seen to be under threat, and Welsh speaking administrative staff were appointed allowing for a more robust use of the language in the affairs of the Society.

However, it was the post-war years that saw a growing provision for the use of the Welsh language in the activities of the Society, in 1950 it was decided to include 'Cymdeithas Amaethyddol Frenhinol Cymru' under the English Society title on all its publications, and due to the fact that in 1952 the Show was being held in Caernarfon (a predominantly Welsh speaking area), it was decided that commentaries should be given in both Welsh and English. The first time in the history of the Society that this was done, and with the exception of the Cardiff show in 1953, something that has continued ever since.

Upon moving the event to Llanelwedd (which was, and still is a highly anglicised area) the Society was under pressure to make further moves to use the Welsh language in its affairs. This pressure increased with the formation of Cymdeithas yr Iaith and the Welsh Language Act (1967) being placed into statute. By 1975, the Welsh language was used as part of the opening ceremony, the 1978 show saw Welsh being used on the prize cards and bilingual signs being introduced. Progress was continued to be made right up until 1999 when with the introduction of Welsh language entertainment, the show the show was deemed to be fully bilingual.

Throughout its history the RWAS has held a vital role in supporting Welsh farmers, particularly through some of Welsh agricultures darkest days during the Foot and Mouth crisis of 2001. Something that HRH Prince Charles has said he will never forget, HRH is quoted by Howell (2003) "I will never forget the atmosphere at the Royal Welsh Winter Fair in December 2001, the first gathering of farmers after Foot and Mouth – the sense of relief was tangible, as was the determination of the remarkable farmers of Wales to continue in the way of life to which they had been born and in which so many excel". This commendation from the Prince of Wales demonstrates the significant role that the Society has had in Welsh agriculture, and the manner in which the Society and their events bring together the whole of the agricultural community in a sense of solidarity and celebration.

4.3 – The Society Today

The RWAS is today as strong as it ever was, and continues to break records on an annual basis. This continued year-on-year success has given the RWAS, and the wider industry confidence, however as Brexit looms the outlook for the agriculture industry looks particularly challenging, something that the Society is very aware of. The RWAS has only survived the past 111 years by building change, and supporting its members something that the RWAS continues to do. Today's Society provides support for business, social welfare and education in rural communities, as well as the organisation of the annual RWS, RWWF, and RWSF.

As of May 2015, the Society has over 21,000 members from all around the world, who as when the Society was in its infancy receive a copy of the Journal of the RWAS, are allowed to speak up at meetings of the Society, and are entitled to free access to the RWS. Additionally, however they get use of their own bar, restaurant, space in the grandstand, and discounted tickets for the other events of the Society. The RWAS is the biggest agricultural membership organisation in Wales, it's membership dwarfs that of NFU Cymru (15,000 members), the FUW (for commercial reasons the FUW do not reveal their membership numbers, but they state that they have many thousands of members, spanning 11 Welsh counties, and comprising of the sheep, beef, and dairy sectors).

As an independent apolitical body, the Society continues to respond to consultation documents and makes its views known to Government and other agencies, the Society is more than a Show and is in a unique position to engage with decision makers to help shape and influence the future of the agriculture industry. The RWAS has representatives on a number of high level committees including the Agriculture Advisory Panel for Wales, which considers ways to improve learning and development within the industry.

Although their membership stretched the length and breadth of Wales, it is a very well-known fact that the majority of members of the RWAS are so to take advantage

of free entry to the RWS, it is thought that very few of the Society Members are aware of the overall work of the Society, its charitable aims, and the purpose of their subscriptions:

“if you were to quiz individuals to find out why they are a member of the Royal Welsh Agricultural Society, I expect, I won’t say the majority, but the vast number will tell you, because we want to have the best deal to come into the Show during show week, and there is evidence to suggest that”. (Interview, John T Davies, 14/10/15).

Therefore, there is a need to move people away from the mind-set that they are Members of the RWAS to get the best deal on attending the RWS, by being a Member of the Society, they are investing in the Society and by virtue are able to have a say in its future direction, and the manner in which it works to achieve its charitable objectives.

The RWAS has had to diversify over time, not only to stay relevant to its members, but also to survive. The Society now operates an onsite hotel and hosts a range of events throughout the year, opening up new income streams, enabling a surplus to be generated in order to support the charitable activities of the RWAS. This chapter will later discuss the how the failure to generate a surplus led to the Royal Agricultural Society of England (RASE) to cancel their annual show.

The feature county system as is still key to the future of the Society and continues to provide infrastructure and improvements to the Showground in Llanellwedd, recent examples include the Equine Project which is being supported by the £215,000 raised by the Gwent Feature County of 2015, whilst monies raised by Radnor in 2014 funded the refurbishment and expansion of the Neuadd Henllan restaurant and hotel on the Showground.

The Society continues to support agriculture and share best practice throughout Wales through its ever-expanding range of awards. Individuals who have contributed over and above to rural Wales and/or the Society are recognised, with gifts from the Society (normally Life Governorship or Life Membership).

As part of their education and knowledge transfer objectives the Society has a number of highly prestigious awards and bursaries, which are awarded annually. These include:

- Sir Bryner Jones Award – the reason for the award changes on an annual basis, but typically it is awarded to someone who has shown commitment to improving and enhancing the Welsh agriculture industry.
- Dr Emrys Evans Award – awarded to a person under 35 years of age who live and works in Wales, and who has contributed in an exceptional way to rural skills.
- RWAS Nuffield Farming Scholarship – an £11,000 bursary for a scholar to undertake a research project of his/her choice which will be of benefit to the agriculture industry in Wales.
- John Gittins Memorial Award – awarded to a person born, working, or living in Wales who has made an outstanding contribution to the sheep industry in Wales. Each County Advisory Committee, the Welsh Mule Association, NSA Wales, NFU, FUW, and CLA are all invited to submit a nomination.
- RWAS Oxford Farming Conference Bursary – enabling two young people from Wales to experience the most influential farming conference in the UK.

These are just a few of the awards given by the Society, it would be impractical to name them all here. But all of the awards help to recognise individuals who have excelled in their field and provides opportunities for young people to develop their skills further. In addition, a number of student awards are presented in working in conjunction with the agricultural collages of Wales and the Borders. Each prize winner writes an article surrounding their work for the Journal of the RWAS, allowing the latest knowledge, information and research to improve day to day farming practices in Wales.

It is impossible to summarise the role of the RWAS in a few paragraphs. Although this thesis focuses on the RWS, the RWS cannot be discussed without the Society, the links

between the Show and the Society will become clearer throughout this work, and as such the impact of the both the Show and the Society will be analysed.

4.4 – Events of the Royal Welsh Agricultural Society

Today the RWAS hosts three main flagship events, the RWS, the RWWF and the RWSF. Furthermore, the Society provides the secretariat to the Welsh Ploughing and Hedging Association, and works in association with the annual feature county to host the biannual Welsh Grassland Event. The Showground in Llanelwedd is also available to hire for all manner of events from dog shows, to car rallies, to weddings, to political conferences. Ahead of the 2015 general election, the then Prime Minister David Cameron launched the Conservative Party Welsh Manifesto from the Royal Welsh Showground. These out-of-show events provide a great deal of enabling finance to the Society and in 2015 the Showground hosted over 400 events.

The RWS will be introduced in detail in Section 4.5, in this section I will give a brief introduction to the other two flagship events of the Society, the RWWF and the RWSF.

4.4.1 – Royal Welsh Winter Fair

The RWWF was first held as a one-day event in 1990. The first RWWF was as a result of a desire to do more with the facilities at Llanelwedd than to host one event a year. Initially conceived to fulfil a similar role as the RWS, the RWWF gave a second opportunity to act as a shop window for Welsh agriculture, and it was to serve a similar purpose as the London Smithfield Show. The RWWF, showcasing Welsh primestock, food and crafts soon became a key event on the Welsh farming landscape.

The RWWF is primarily a trade show, and this event holds a key commercial function for its exhibitors, with many of its prize winners being sold at auction in the afternoon of the event. Since its inception, the RWWF has seen growing livestock entries from Wales (and beyond), increasing numbers of tradestands and visitors, as well as very high bids for the prize livestock. The event expanded to a two-days in 2002, and

celebrated its twenty-fifth birthday in 2014, which saw a record crowd of 32,346 attend the event.

The modern RWWF has livestock at its core, and offers over £25,000 in prize money to its winning exhibits. The 2015 RWWF saw exhibitors from all over the United Kingdom with over 1,700 cattle, sheep, pigs and horses being shown over the two days. In addition to this there were 409 tradestands present as well as a variety of produce, handicraft and floral competitions.



Figure 9: The 2014 Royal Welsh Winter Fair (Wales Online).

4.4.2 – Royal Welsh Spring Festival

The RWSF is an event primarily aimed at the family audience, and those who have an interest in rural life. Originally established as the Royal Welsh Garden Festival in 2002, the event was launched by the Society to go some way towards compensating for the cancellation of the RWS in 2001 due to Foot and Mouth Disease.

Originally the event was a day out for the family with a wide range of attractions, food hall, and offered the first ever Welsh gardening platform. In addition to this the event provided practical assistance, advice and lectures for working smallholders. The event has grown, attracting a record 26,026 visitors in 2011, and now has a dedicated food

and drink centre selling the best of artisan produce, and hosts a biannual trail running festival. The festival has over 1,300 livestock, poultry and horse entries, over 300 tradestands, and the event also hosts the only premier open dog show in Wales.

4.5 – The Royal Welsh Agricultural Show

4.5.1 – History

Vital to the RWAS being able to achieve its key objectives (as set out in Section 4.2) is the annual Royal Welsh Show (RWS). The first RWS was held as a two-day event on the 3rd and 4th June 1904 on Vicarage Fields, Aberystwyth, and continued to be held in Aberystwyth until 1910, from this point the Show became peripatetic moving around the different counties of Wales on an annual basis. With the first Show away from Aberystwyth being held at Llanelli. Thereafter the Show would alternate between sites in north and south Wales, in an attempt to make the RWS a truly national event.



Figure 10: An aerial photograph of the 1950 RWS, held in Abergele, north Wales (People's Collection Wales/Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales).

The decision to move the Show away from Aberystwyth was deemed a success allowing the Society to reach a wider audience than ever before, and it was extended to cover three days in 1914. As discussed previously following a period of uncertainty for the RWAS, the decision was taken for the RWS to return to a permanent site. Having been in existence for 57 years, having moved to 37 different locations between

north and south Wales, in 1963 the RWS settled permanently in Llanelwedd, near Builth Wells, Powys, where it remains to this day.

Despite some early difficulties at the permanent site in Llanelwedd, the 1970s saw a period of growth and expansion for the RWS in terms of show attendance, livestock entries and numbers of tradestands, with the RWS first breaking the 100,000 visitor mark in 1976, two years earlier than expected. During this period, growth in visitor numbers at the show was assisted by changes in agricultural practice, with the increase in silage making, meaning farmers had completed their fodder conversion earlier before the show, timing of the show within school holidays, and the expansion of the Welsh tourism industry.

In an attempt to further boost attendance and to widen the appeal of the RWS, the Miss Royal Welsh competition began in 1970. This competition, the brainchild of Viscountess Chetwynd of Tyn-y-Coed, Arthog, Merioneth, was designed to simulate interest in the RWS in every area of Wales during the winter months. Generating publicity and promoting membership, there were a number of county selection events, with each county forwarding a representative to the final at the RWS. The winner would then attend a ball held in her honour and award various prizes around the showground. At times the finals of the competition could get rather heated, with a steward recalling that she once had to warn one male judge that it was not livestock that they were judging and so they should leave the rear quarters alone! By the mid-1990s the competition was seen as being degrading, and was replaced by the Royal Welsh Lady Ambassador²⁰ in 1997, chosen from the Feature County on the basis on an interview, rather than a beauty pageant.

²⁰ Although to some the role of Lady Ambassador may seem somewhat antiquated, and could be seen to build on traditional gender constructions, however the post holds a vital role within the RWAS and is not there simply to add glamour to the event. Any female can apply for the role and is selected on the basis of their ability to promote the RWAS, to be a spokesperson for the RWAS, and to fundraise for the Society. The postholder also has a key role within the governance of the RWAS, attending and participating in key committee meetings. Along with the RWAS President, the Lady Ambassador is one of the key links between the Society and the Feature County.

However, the increased numbers and demands of visitors led to the Showground becoming very crowded and uncomfortable by the late 1970s. Faced with this overcrowding and declining visitor satisfaction, the RWS was extended to four days from 1981, and remains that way today (despite many now requesting a five-day event).

By the Mid 1980s the RWS was the most popular farming event in Britain, with attendance at the event overtaking the English Royal Show, held at Stoneleigh, Warwickshire (as will be discussed later, this show ceased to exist in 2009, leaving no national English show). In its peripatetic years the Show was very much a farming occasion, however since settling in Llanelwedd the show has been attended by country dwellers not engaged in agriculture and increasingly by townspeople. In order to continue to attract the non-farming public, there was a recognition in the mid-1970s that entertaining grand main ring displays were required. Although resented by some of the traditional showgoers, displays such as the Royal Artillery Motorcycle Display Team, the Household Cavalry, and the JCB Dancing Diggers became a permanent fixture in the Main Ring.

At this time there was a realisation by Welsh farming leaders that if the Welsh farmer was to survive, there needed to be effective promotion and marketing of the food that is produced in Wales. The response of the RWAS was to introduce a Food from Wales Exhibition, originally held in the South Glamorgan Exhibition Hall in 1985, the exhibition was such a success that it was moved into its own newly built, specifically designed food hall in 1992, before moving into new larger premises on the Showground in 2010. This new dimension of the Show brought together food and farming for the first time, enabling the show to be a fully representative shop window for Welsh agriculture.

Since the RWS moved to Llanelwedd, the event has grown and developed and over seven million visitors have attended the RWS since 1963. As Figure 12 shows, visitor numbers increased from 42,427 in 1963 to 236,758 people in 2016, with a record breaking 242,726 visitors attending in 2015.

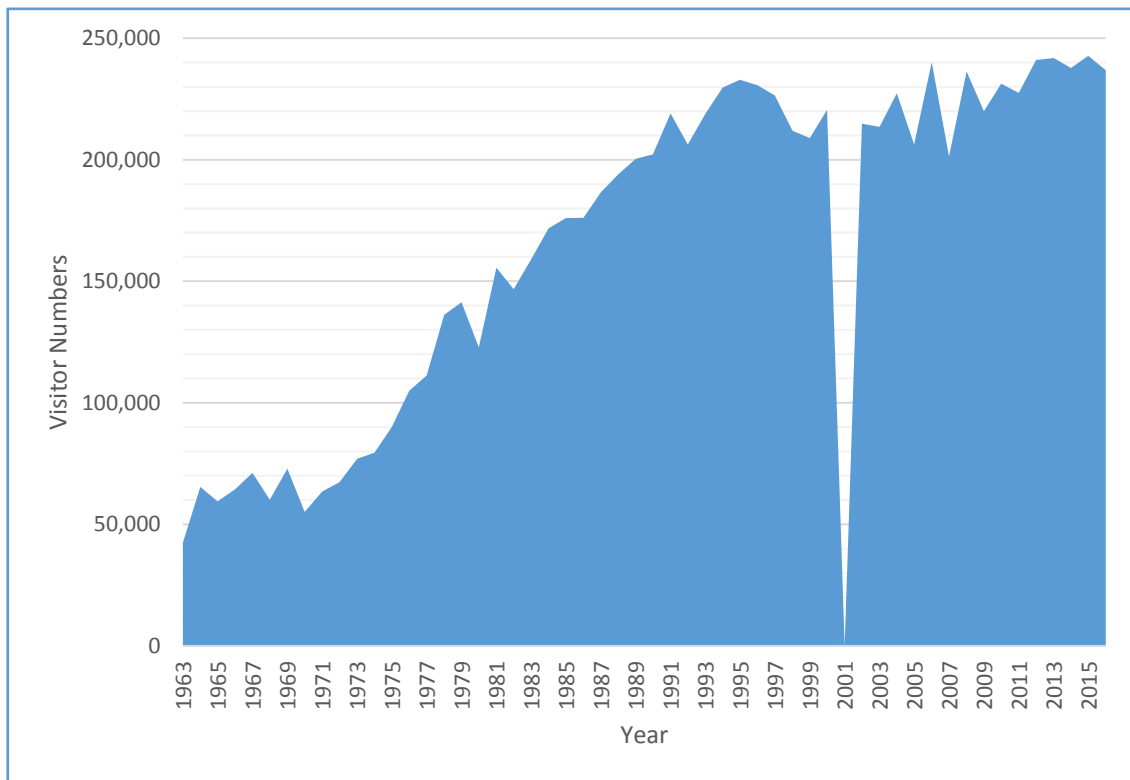


Figure 11: Visitor numbers to the Royal Welsh Show since locating on its permanent site at Llanellwedd in 1963. It should be noted that no show was held in 2001 due to the outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease.

The contemporary RWS aims to cater for everyone, as both a business event and an event that is a good day out for rural and urban folk alike, although, as will be discussed later in the thesis, these twin aims can cause conflict. Even today with its expanded remit, the RWS primarily functions as the shop window of Welsh agriculture, and the rural economy, reflecting the very best of Welsh agriculture, and its support industries.

Getz (2005) created the typology of planned events, based primarily on their form (that is differences in their purpose and programme) – see Figure 13. The varied nature of the contemporary RWS, means that it does not fit neatly into one of these categories, part of what makes the RWS unique is that there are many events within the main event, the Show covers all the categories defined by Getz. As will be analysed throughout the thesis, the RWS is equally a cultural celebration, a political and state occasion, whilst at the same time being an entertaining day out for their visitors. Due to its corporate nature, the RWS can be seen as a business event, whilst also being educational and scientific. Furthermore, the event can be seen as a sporting occasion, whilst encouraging recreational activities. There are also many smaller

private events that happen in the backstage areas of the Show. Taking Getz’s typology of planned events, and the fact that the RWS covers every type of event that is mentioned, it can be said that the RWS is an all-encompassing event, covering every aspect of Welsh rural life, and it, despite what some might think, is not just for farmers.



Figure 12: Typology of planned events (adapted from Getz, 2005).

Members of the Royal Family often visit the Show, with the first Royal visit being given by Princess Margaret in 1966, both Queen Elizabeth II and the Duke of Edinburgh attended the Show in 1983 and 2004. A great supporter of the Society is Charles, Prince of Wales, who regularly attends the Show, particularly at times of rural crises, Prince Charles’ visits to Show in 1999, 2000, and 2001 were seen by many commentators as being great morale boosters, for what many saw at the time as being a stricken industry. Prince Charles most recently attended the RWS in 2013, whilst the most recent Royal visitor to the Showground was the Princess Royal who opened the Royal Welsh Winter Fair in 2014.



Figure 13: HRH Charles Prince of Wales on his first visit to the RWS in 1969. He made return visits in 1988, 1995, 1999, 2000, 2001, and 2013 (People's Collection Wales/Ceredigion YFC).

Despite the show becoming more commercialised the RWAS has made a conscious effort to ensure that the agricultural content has remained at the forefront of the event. Unsurprisingly given the constraints of the climate, soil, and topography of Wales, livestock farming is the dominant force in Welsh agriculture, something that has always been reflected by the RWS.

Entries of cattle, sheep, horses, and (from 1977) goats have tended to rise year on year at the RWS²¹ (as shown in Figure 15). One notable exception to this rule over the livestock entries is that of pigs, although this is due to wider breeding trends. The RWS has always adapted to changing farming trends, with the Society regularly introducing new breeds, cross breeds, and showing styles depending on the industry at that time. One of very many examples is the Bluefaced Leicester sheep class was introduced in the 1981, when at this time the breed was highly popular in crossbreeding with the Welsh ewe in order to produce the Welsh Mule. Throughout the 1980s many larger animal breeds were introduced, reflecting the trend for trying to give strong, sizeable, vigour to the traditional Welsh hill animals. Again similarly, at this time many Welsh

²¹ The record entry numbers of 8,070 in 2005 has not been surpassed due to stricter controls on entry numbers, as a result of increasing animal welfare standards.

farms were introducing continental and non-pure breed animals, this saw many of these breeds taking prominence at the RWS during the 1990s.

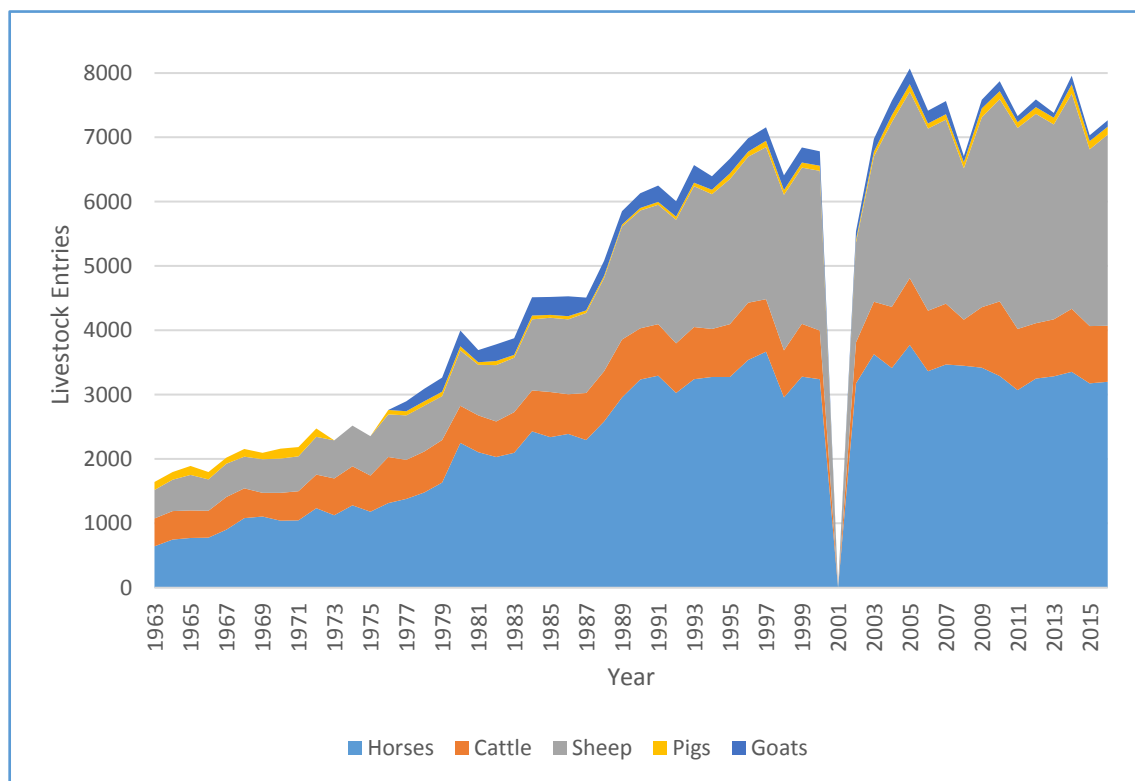


Figure 14: Livestock entry numbers to the Royal Welsh Show since locating on its permanent site at Llanelwedd in 1963. It should be noted that no show was held in 2001 due to the outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease.

As Figure 15 demonstrates, livestock entries at the RWS have not always been at their current levels. Throughout its history various farming crises have had a significant impact on entry numbers for the event. When the BSE crisis peaked in Britain in the late 1990s, the number of livestock entries at the RWS were reduced significantly.

Although the RWAS has been in existence since 1904, the RWS has not been held on an annual basis since that date. Due to World War One, no shows were held between 1915 and 1922, 1938 saw the RWS suspended due to the Royal Agricultural Show being held in Cardiff. The outbreak of World War Two saw no shows held between 1940 and 1946, and the return of petrol rationing saw the 1948 show cancelled. More recently the outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease in 2001 again caused that year's show to be cancelled. The cancellation of the Show in 2001 represented one of the lowest ebbs for Welsh farming, with it being described at the time by Show

Director Harry Fetherstonhaugh as “the most horrific decision we’ve ever had to make. It was with great reluctance” (BBC News, 2001). The confidence in the industry was at an all-time low, and its cancellation is estimated to have cost the economy of mid Wales £35 million (Howell, 2003), with it leading to RWAS facing a financial loss of more than £500,000. The RWS has managed to recover, with livestock numbers returning to their pre-BSE levels by 2003. However as with all agri-businesses the show has had to adapt and implement strict bio-security measures which has made the exhibition process far more complex.

The years since 2003 have not been an easy ride for the RWS. Writing in the 2008 Journal of the RWAS, David Walters, then Chief Executive of the RWAS describes 2007 as a “real annus horribilis” for Welsh agriculture. At this time the return of Foot and Mouth Disease, Blue Tongue Disease, and Avian Influenza, all impacted upon the industry, and therefore on entry numbers at the RWS.

In fact, the past decade has been one of the most difficult for the agricultural show industry, in 2009 the farming recession led to the collapse of some of the country’s leading agricultural shows including the Royal of England in 2009 and the Royal Lancashire Agricultural Society in 2012. Although once the largest and most successful agricultural show in the UK, the Royal Show failed to make the transition to the changing realities of farming in the 1990s, farmers were being encouraged to move away from traditional enterprises, this combined with more time pressures, and modern communications made dissemination of knowledge easier, and the traditional role of the Royal Show redundant. Unlike the RWS, the Royal failed to attract the general public, and members of the farming community found their needs were better served by smaller technically events. Combined with bad weather conditions, these factors saw visitor figures slump to around 100,000 in 2008, and the decision was made to make the 2009 Royal English Show the last (Aslet *et al.*, 2015).

Although the RWS did feel the impact of the 2008 – 2013 recession, the agricultural sector in particular maintained a high level of support to the Show, a number of

commercial traders, however did not take up the depth of stands as they previously had, which did lead to a loss of income for the RWAS.

4.5.4 – The Modern-Day Show

To quote the RWS website “the role of the modern RWS is a rounded one. As well as its principal function of showcasing the cream of Welsh livestock and the high-quality food and drink produced in Wales, it encompasses the wider spectrum of farming and rural life and successfully bridges the gap between town and country” (RWAS, 2016). Today, the RWS is the biggest event of its kind in Europe²² and is seen by many as being distinctly Welsh and unlike any other agricultural show in the world, through the incorporation of Welsh traditions and values the Show raises the cultural identity of Wales and Welsh agriculture on a global scale.

Still held on the permanent showground in Llanelwedd, and always held from Monday to Thursday during the third week of July, each day the Show hosts a twelve-hour programme of entertainment and events, attracting crowds from around the globe. The RWS is an important site for the Welsh farming community bringing individuals, policymakers, public and private organisations together for four days, on one site, creating a forum for debate, discussion and the building of trust.

In its fifty years at Llanelwedd the RWS has transformed the Showground from a virgin site, to a site that has the best facilities, and the best-connected site in rural Britain. Through the generosity of the feature counties, sponsors, and many public and private organisations Showground facilities now rival many small-town centres. Today the Showground is home to over 30 organisations, many of which use their buildings as permanent offices. For one week a year Llanelwedd houses three banks, an operational medical centre, police station, three television studios, bars, restaurants, and many other permanent and temporary buildings to house livestock and other

²² For comparison in 2015 the other four-day agricultural Shows in the United Kingdom, the Royal Highland Show and the Royal Bath and West Show attracted 188,449 and 132,000 visitors respectively.

exhibits. The RWS has emerged as a national institution and the Showground is seen to be one of the finest in Europe.

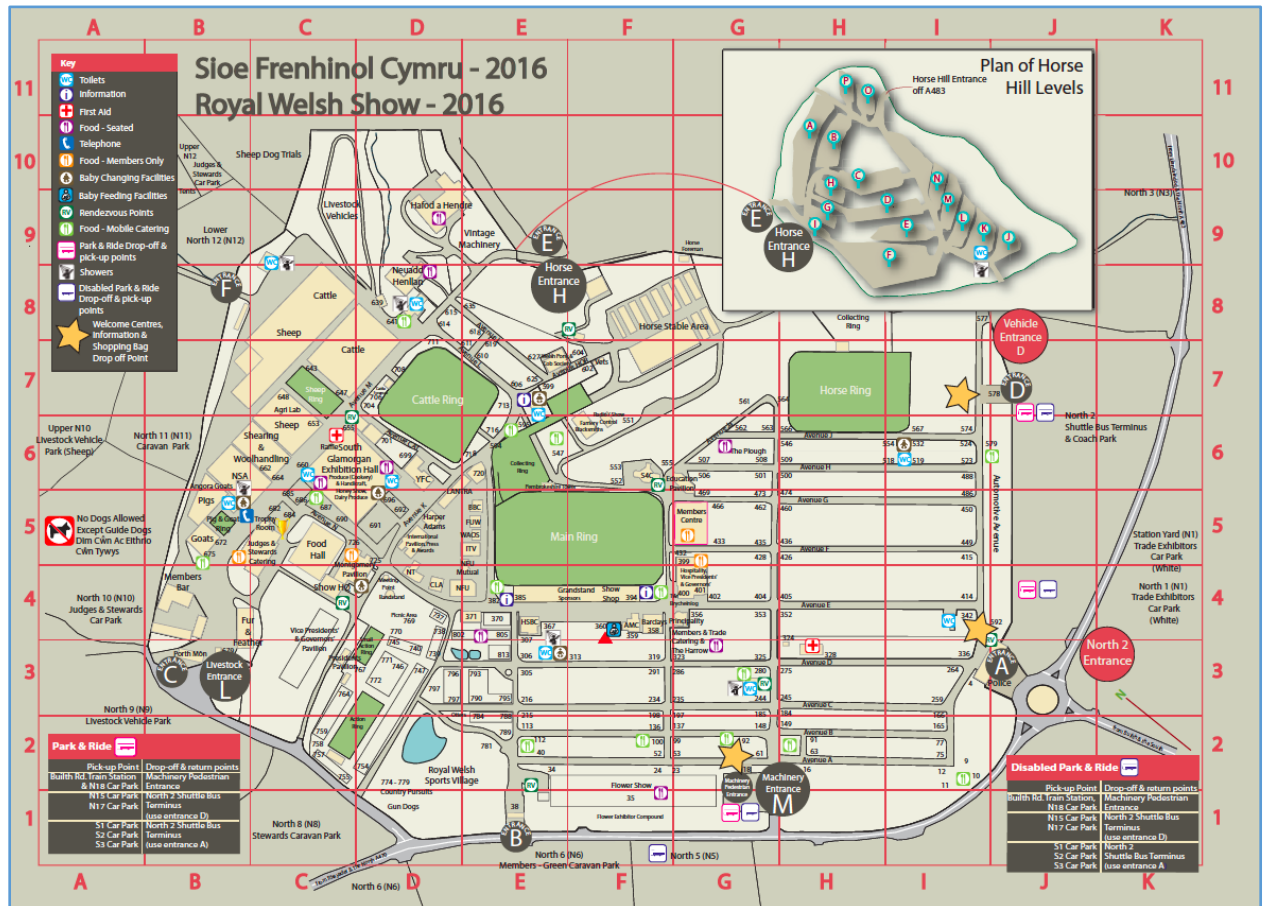


Figure 15: Map of the 176 acre Royal Welsh Agricultural Showground, please note the array of buildings and facilities that are permanently based on the Showground (RWAS).

The 2015 RWS was officially opened by Phil Hogan the European Commissioner for Agriculture, and due to its timing and the large number of significant figures it attracted, was described by Steve Hughson (Chief Executive of the RWAS) as being truly agenda setting. The event attracted a record breaking 242,726 visitors²³, and over 14,000 cars were parked in and around Llanellwedd on a daily basis.

²³ It is estimated that the 63% of the official attendance of the RWS is accounted for by the presence of visiting spectators drawn by the Show, the remaining 37% of attendees represents those individuals who were active for a reason during the event. This latter group includes judges, stewards, trade and livestock exhibitors and other competitors (Sherwood, 1994).

Despite the changes the Show has undergone in its history, the Show is still first and foremost an agricultural event. The 2015 RWS attracted a total of 7,033 livestock entries, including the largest exhibition of sheep to be seen around the world, and an unrivalled display of Welsh ponies and cobs. In order to ensure that agriculture remains at the heart of the event, the Society ensures that 60% of the tradestands exhibiting at the RWS are from the agricultural sector. Despite the economic challenges of recent years there were 1,010 tradestands at RWS in 2015, with a further 172 traders on a waiting list to attend future shows. The Show attracts a wide variety of organisations, representing the whole of Society, many of which are out of reach to most of rural Wales. Marks and Spencer, Waitrose, Barclays, NatWest, Tesco, Haribo, Porsche and McDonalds are just a few of the large multinational organisations to have a presence at the RWS.



Figure 16: Some of the entries in the sheep section at the RWS (Greg Thomas, personal collection).

The RWS is not just a business event, or an agricultural event, it is a rural event, encompassing all that is great about rural Wales. But it is more than that, it is the major social event on the Welsh calendar. Mike Parker (2011) describes the RWS as being the “nation’s true cauldron”. For Parker, the contemporary RWS is the great gathering of Wales, where our rural heritage pushes any “Cymraeg puritanism” out of the way, an event where everyone is welcome, no matter where they are from. In the

absence of other events such as the Badminton Horse Trials or the Henley Regatta, the RWS provides a chance for many to catch up with friends that they might not have seen since the previous RWS. For many the RWS represents their family holiday, bringing the whole of Wales (and beyond) together not just to compete, but to relax, and enjoy themselves.

To those involved in the farming industry the RWS is much more than an event or holiday, at times of agricultural crises in Wales the Royal Welsh Show has served as a morale booster for rural populations. Allowing farmers and their families to escape their often-isolated holdings, to share their problems and to get reassurances from others in a similar position, and from the industry leaders.

The RWS now has an international audience, and has become an important site to conduct business and to negotiate deals. The 2015 Show attracted 1,011 international visitors from 34 different countries. These overseas visitors included the High Commissioner of New Zealand to the United Kingdom, Sir Alexander Lockwood-Smith, and a delegation from Kazakhstan. As such the modern RWS has a much wider resonance beyond Wales, it provides an opportunity to project Welsh agriculture around the world.

The global image of the RWS has been further enhanced by the media coverage that the Show receives. The RWS receives more television coverage than any other agricultural event in Europe. S4C (the Welsh language television channel) broadcasts events from the Showground from 9am to 5pm every day, with an additional 60-minute-long highlights programme shown each evening. S4C also offers an online and red button streaming service where viewers can choose what aspect of the Show they want to watch. BBC Wales show a nightly 30-minute-long highlights programme, broadcast their flagship news programme, Wales Today from the Showground, and BBC Radio Wales and BBC Radio Cymru broadcast their daytime shows live from Llanelwedd. Similarly, ITV Cymru Wales come live from the Showground with their news bulletins, and they broadcast three-hour-long specials of their rural affairs programme Coast and Country focussing on the RWS.



Figure 17: Filming a feature on this research with Hannah Thomas for ITV Cymru Wales News at the 2015 RWS (Greg Thomas, Personal Collection).

In 2015 the five BBC Wales highlight shows (produced by Telesgop) attracted a total of 411,000 viewers, averaging 82,000 viewers per programme, which represented 9% of the Welsh audience share at that time. Interestingly 45% of viewers resided in the more urban areas of south Wales, 42% of viewers were within the more affluent ABC1 category. The TV coverage of the RWS demonstrates that there is an appetite for the event in urban areas, perhaps from those who cannot access the Showground as easily or perhaps do not have the means to attend the event. The S4C (produced by Boom Pictures) online coverage of the 2015 RWS was viewed by a total of 52,968 people from over 40 countries, with 22% of these viewers being from outside of the UK, proving that the influence and impact of the RWS spreads far beyond the boundaries of the Showground and mid Wales. This media coverage means that no one in Wales is excluded from seeing and experiencing the RWS, if they cannot physically make the event, they will still be able to experience it through the media.

Such is the significance of the RWS to Wales, it forms part of the Welsh Government's 'Event Wales: Major Events Strategy for Wales 2010 – 2020', the Welsh Government see the event as being a signature showcase event for the nation (Welsh Government,

2010). That is a major, recurring event that is unique to Wales, which is distinctly Welsh in flavour, and reflects the culture, traditions and values of the nation. Whilst also enhancing Wales' international reputation and the wellbeing of the nation's people and communities.

Given the size and perceived importance of the event to Wales, the RWS regularly attracts a number of prominent figures. Phil Hogan, the European Commissioner for Agriculture opened the 2015 Show, but the event was also attended by David Cameron (then Prime Minister), Carwyn Jones (First Minister of Wales), Steven Crabb (at the time Secretary of State for Wales), Rebecca Evans (at the time Welsh Government Deputy Minister for Farming and Food), and Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth (Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Wales).

The Royal Welsh Show facilitates the ordinary farmer/members of the public to have access to, and to engage in debate with policymakers and politicians in a way that might not otherwise be possible. However, as stated previously the RWAS is an apolitical organisation, and will stay that way.



Figure 18: Greeting the then Prime Minister David Cameron and the former Secretary of State for Wales, along with my family at the 2015 RWS (Greg Thomas, Personal Collection).

The tone of this chapter has been overwhelming positive towards the RWAS and the RWS, this is due to the fact that the information has been taken primarily from official RWAS sources. There is however a perception that the RWS brings some negative effects to the local area. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many of those who live in and around Llanellwedd are put off from attending the Show due to the cost of the event, and feelings that it never changes. A number of issues arise from the considerable number of visitors that are attracted to the area, there is a feeling that the high levels of traffic are causing an inconvenience, further criticism relates to the additional policing, medical, and cleansing services that are required during the period of the RWS. One major issue for the RWAS and the local community is the members of the travelling community who began an annual pilgrimage to Llanellwedd in the early 1990s.

These factors, although significant, are very much out of the control of the RWAS, and would occur with the hosting of any large event no matter where it was located. The impact of these is ameliorated through regular meetings between the Society and local groups, and conditions are improved based upon annual experience. However, it is unlikely that the situation will ever be ideal for the local residents. These negative social aspects of the event can only really be assessed within the context of the positive economic and social benefits that occur by having the premier agricultural event in Europe located within the town.

4.5.5 – Economic Impact

Although many economic impacts of events are incalculable, or at best can only be seen as estimates (Hiller, 1998), in 2015 Wavehill Ltd. were commissioned by the RWAS to conduct an economic analysis of the impact that the Show has on Wales. This study found that the average daily visitor spend per person, per day visiting the RWS was £39 (excluding tickets and accommodation). When applied to the total number of visitor days, the total estimated personal spend on the RWS is estimated as being £8,277,014. Of this it is estimated that £1,043,000 is spent in the catering outlets on

the Showground, with a further £7,248,608 being spent across the various traders on the Showground (Wavehill, 2015).

Due to the fact that visitors to the event spent much of their time on the Showground, direct local spend as a result of the RWS is thought to be quite low. However, around 34% of visitors to the RWS stay in paid accommodation (from campsites to hotels), as such it is estimated that £1,707, 107 is spent within the local area on accommodation purely as a result of the Show. The secondary spend associated with the Show is estimated as being £6,316,275, with it thought that the majority of this coming as a result of the brand exposure at the RWS, and sales being made through traders having a presence at the Show. This secondary spend is primarily associated with high ticket, agricultural items.

It is estimated that the RWS leads to an estimated £3,173,008 additional spend throughout the supply chain (known as induced effects). According the RWAS accounts (September 2015) the Society had an operational spend of £2,011,520 during this same period.

Taking into account displacement spend, Wavehill estimate that the total economic impact of the RWAS is £21,434,924. Of this it is estimated that the Welsh economic impact is £7,340,180, of which £2,423,966 goes to Powys alone.

Many of the economic benefits of the RWS are intangible, at least in the traditional way. Activities that take place at the Show contribute locally, regionally and nationally to the agricultural industry in Wales, and focuses attention on the quality of Welsh livestock and on the promotion of Welsh breeds. For exhibitors that are successful at the RWS, the subsequent increase in individual herd and flock valuations is likely to contribute substantially to the sale price of their stock. A similar impact is likely to be felt for the agricultural traders at the RWS. The substantial sale of agricultural machinery and equipment during (and in the months) following the event, contributes to the advancement and trading initiatives of agri-business, from both within and outside of Wales.

4.6 – Summary

This chapter has provided a descriptive account of the RWS within the context of the RWAS, to provide an understanding of why the event exists and why it has become so important in Wales today. The RWAS is more than just a show, it is an organisation that is deeply embedded within the consciousness of the Welsh rural population. Its survival and continuing influence on the Welsh agriculture industry corroborates the success of the Society and the meeting of the aims of its founding fathers.

The RWAS has adapted to, and even driven changes in the agriculture industry whilst also having a much wider resonance, impacting not just on the agricultural industry, but on wider Welsh cultural life.

This chapter has very briefly chartered the history of the RWAS from its initial formation in 1904 to the organisation with over 21,000 members that we see today. The turning point for the Society and the Show was moving to the permanent showground in Llanelwedd in 1963, the foresight of those pioneers of the Society helped to create the 176-acre Showground housing the premier agricultural event in Europe, which today generates over £21,000,000 per year to the British economy.

The information presented in this chapter is based around research undertaken into the Journal of the RWAS, personal observations of living near Llanelwedd, and attending the RWS, and has sought to develop an understanding of the context of the RWS.

In Chapter Five the discussion is developed looking at the role that the RWS has in contemporary Wales by considering the results of the visitor survey and interviews that have been undertaken.

Chapter Five: The Royal Welsh Show in Contemporary Wales

5.1 – Introduction

This chapter begins by considering the visitor survey undertaken at the 2014 RWS, and will give a demographic profile of the visitors to the event, before presenting information based around these questionnaire responses. Following this initial section, I will present data, mainly from the questionnaires and interviews undertaken surrounding the multiple roles of the RWS, before investigating how the event can be seen as a performance of rurality. Following this, the manner in which the RWS can be seen to (re)imagine Wales will be discussed, before its role in bridging the gap between rural and urban areas in a section entitled reconnecting Wales.

5.2 – The Royal Welsh Visitor: Results of the 2014 visitor survey

5.2.1 – Introduction

Here the results of the visitor survey undertaken at the 2014 RWS, as described in Section 3.4 will be outlined. A demographic profile of the typical RWS visitor will be given, before discussing trends surrounding attendance at the RWS, and visitor opinions surrounding the event. The results from the visitor survey will be discussed in further detail throughout the thesis.

A total of 1,017 valid responses were received to the visitor survey, which given that the official attendance²⁴ at the 2014 RWS was 237,694 visitors means that this survey

²⁴ Official attendance represents the sum of all those estimated to be daily on site, over a four-day period, but does not reflect the number of actual individual concerned since many visitors are engaged in protracted visits of two or more days. As such some visitors would account for two, three, or four of the total attendances recorded during the Show period. In order to estimate the number of different individuals present for the event, using data from the 2014 visitor survey, the method of Sherwood (1994) has been employed. The sample of 1,027 people who completed the survey over the four days, accounted for a total of 2451 attendances. In other words, the number of individuals present throughout the Show would be estimated to be 42% of the overall recorded attendance. Applying this proportion (a reducing factor or 0.419) to the official attendance allows an approximate count of the

was representative of 0.43% of the overall attendees. The reason for this response rate, which is believed to be representative is given in Section 3.4.2.

5.2.2 – Visitor demographics

A demographic profile of the visitors will be given, based upon age, gender, home address of visitors, and whether or not they consider themselves to be from a farming background. Race was excluded from the survey and as such the demographic profile, as 96% of the population of Wales are considered as being “White British” (Welsh Government, 2013).

As shown in Figure 20, 61% of people who responded to the survey were female, however I would suggest that this is as a result of response bias, rather than painting a true picture of show attendees. It has been widely reported that women are more likely to complete

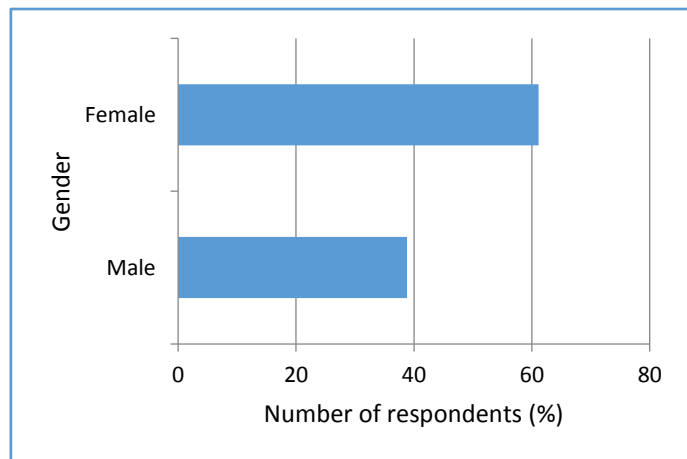


Figure 19: Gender of respondents.

social science questionnaires than their male counterparts (Curtin *et al.*, 2000). As such the views and conclusions expressed in the analysis of this visitor survey may be biased towards the views of women.

actual numbers likely to be present over the Show period. Thus, the total number of individuals attending the RWS in 2014 is estimated to be in the region of 99,597.

The majority of the respondents were aged between 18 and 25 (29%). With the exception of those over the age of 65, which only represent 14% of visitors, the other age groups are evenly represented in the survey (see Figure 21). As stated in Section 3.4.2, 15 people under the age of 18 completed the questionnaire, but due to the ethical policies of Aberystwyth University, these have been excluded from the analysis.

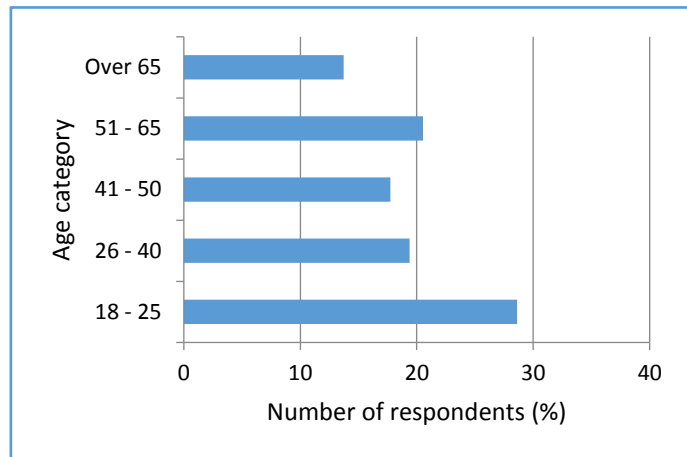


Figure 20: Age of respondents (by category).

Visitors attend the RWS from all over the world, this survey was only open to residents of the United Kingdom and found that 82.9% of visitors to the 2014 event were from Wales, 15.3% from England, 1.5% from Scotland, whilst 0.2% of visitors were from Northern Ireland.

Figure 22 displays the home residence of the respondents. As this map shows, the majority of the visitors to the RWS come from Powys (where the event is held) and its neighbouring counties, however every county of Wales is recorded as having visitors at the event.

When placed into the UK Government Rural-Urban Classification model (Benyon, 2013), it emerges that 78.9% of visitors to the 2014 RWS reside in an area that is considered to be rural, and as such 21.1% of visitors to the event reside in urban areas.

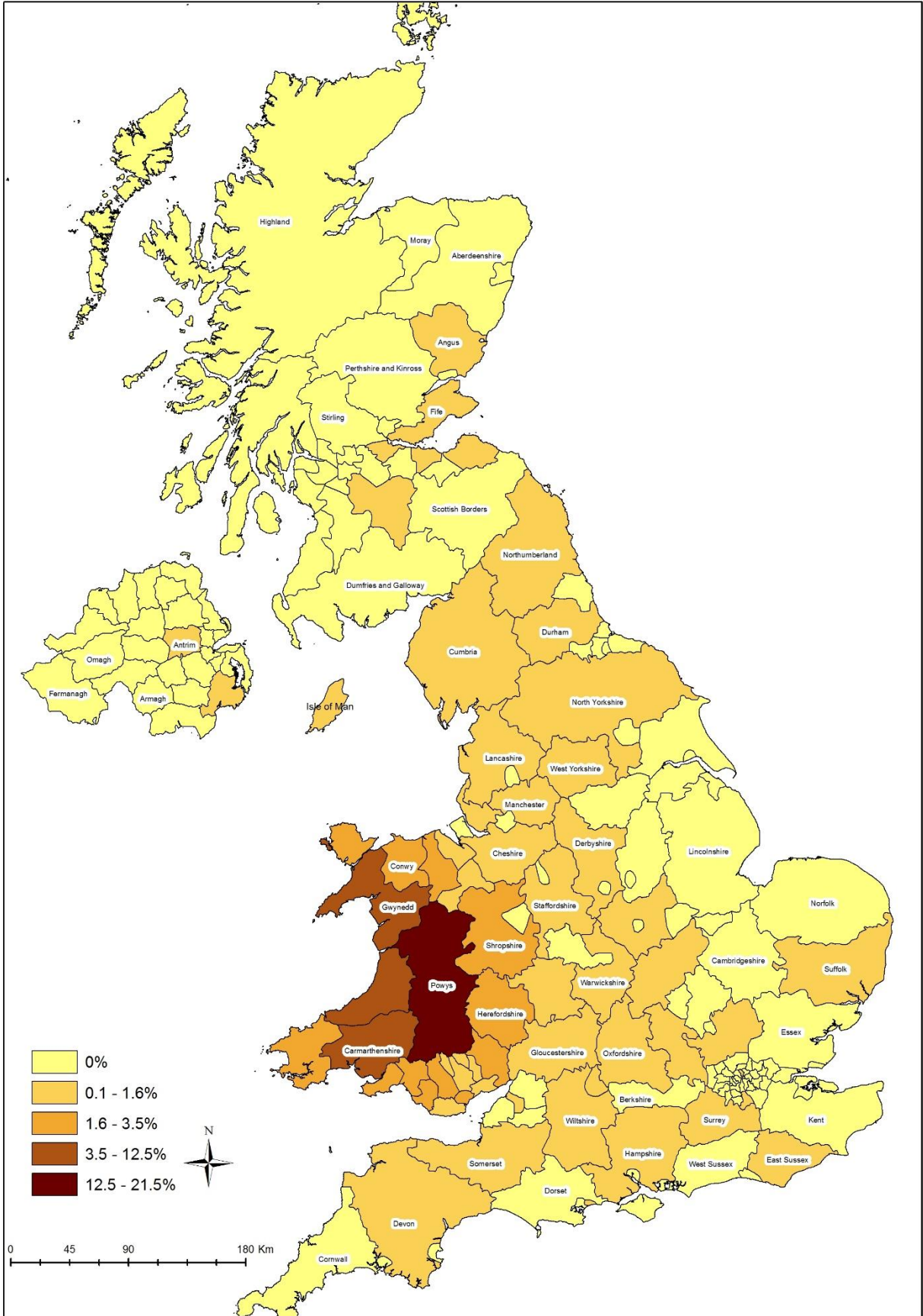


Figure 21: County of residence of the respondents to the visitor survey, shown as a percentage.

The fact that the RWS attracts visitors from the whole of Wales, and that visitors are recorded from England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland means that the influence of the event is able to stretch throughout the United Kingdom and beyond.

Traditionally the RWS is an agricultural event, but to understand if this is still the case respondents were asked, do they consider themselves to be from a farming background. As displayed by Figure 23, the audience of the RWS still consider themselves to be from a farming background (61%),

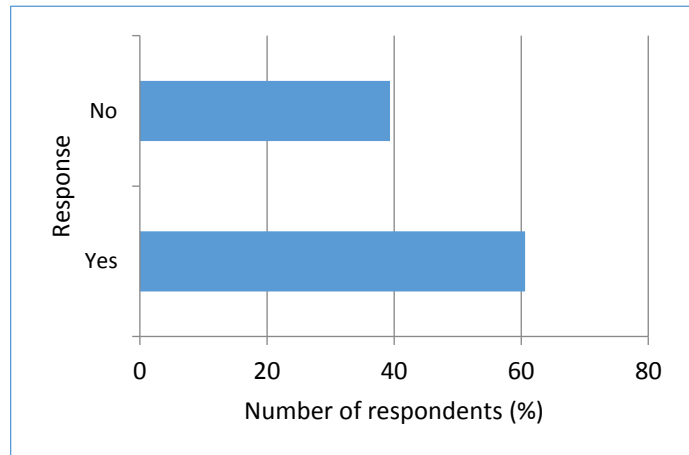


Figure 22: Are you from a farming background?

with 39% of visitors stating that they have no connection with the agriculture industry.

Despite the core audience of the RWS still being predominantly agricultural, the event is increasingly attracting a large amount of non-farming visitors, bringing with it an opportunity for them to reconnect with their rural heritage.

5.2.3 – Show attendance

5.2.3.1 – Reason for attending

The RWS has a large number of roles within rural Wales, and as such visitors have a wide range of reasons for attending the event, these are shown in Figure 24.

The most popular reason (46%) why people attend the RWS is for a day out, an event that they visit for one/two days, for recreational purposes, personal enjoyment and fulfilment. The RWS provides visitors a time to relax and catch up with old friends, and it is often colloquially referred to as the national farmers' holiday. This is supported by this survey, with 17% of respondents stating that they attend the RWS as their annual holiday.

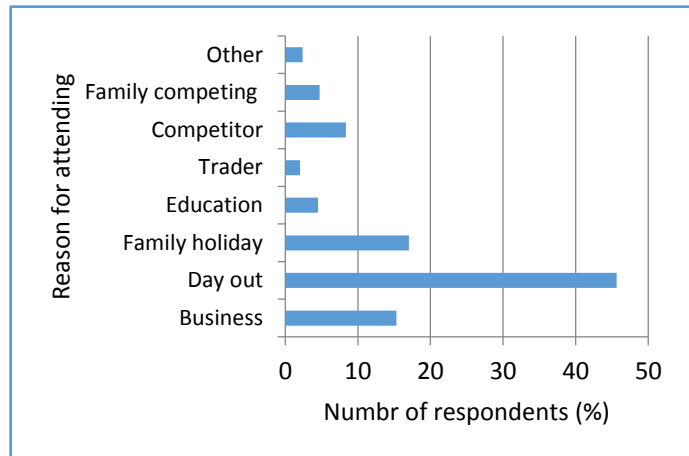


Figure 23: Why do you attend the RWS?

For others, the event is not a chance to relax, the RWS is about business (15%); it provides an opportunity for them to gather information and to discuss new ideas with other farmers. The RWS allows relationships to be built, maintained, and for contracts to be exchanged, something which will be the main focus of Chapter Seven.

13% of respondents were at the 2014 RWS due to either directly competing (8%) or as a result of having family competing (5%), despite these groups not making up a large amount of the overall visitors of to the RWS, they are vitally important as without the competitors and their loyal supporters there would be no Show.

The educational role of the RWS was something that was directly recognised by 5% of the visitors to the event; with them stating that they attend the Show for educational reasons. This is something of a testament to the educational value of the Show, as this is something that is not actively marketed by the RWAS, but a significant reason for many people to visit the event. Traders made up 2% of the respondents to this survey, a group which again will be discussed in Chapter Seven. The remaining 2% of respondents stated 'other' as their reason for attending the Royal Welsh Show, when asked to specify their reasons the common response was volunteering (in either an

official capacity for the society or for another organisation based on the showground).

5.2.3.1 – Time spent at the RWS

The RWS is a four-day show, and many visitors do not spend the full four days at the event, to establish how much time was actually spent by visitors at the RWS, they were asked to state for how many days had they/did they intend on spending at the 2014 Show. As Figure 25 displays, the most popular attendance was for one day (38%), closely followed by attendance on all four days of the event (35%), 18% of respondents said that they attend the RWS for two days, whilst only 10% of respondents attend the RWS for three days.

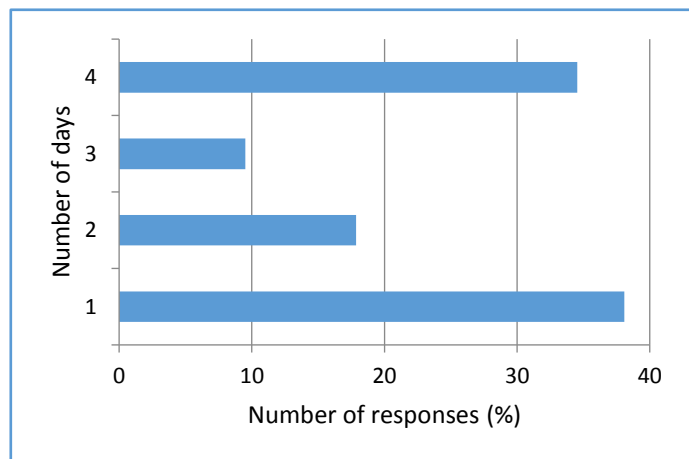


Figure 24: For how many days in 2014 will you attend the RWS?

The respondents to this survey collectively spent 2,451 days at the 2014 RWS, meaning that the average person spent 2.4 days at the event.

5.2.3 – Showground activities

As demonstrated in Figure 26, when asked in which area of the showground they spend the majority of their time the animals section was the most common choice. With 27% of visitors stating this is where they spend the majority of their time, indicating that this section

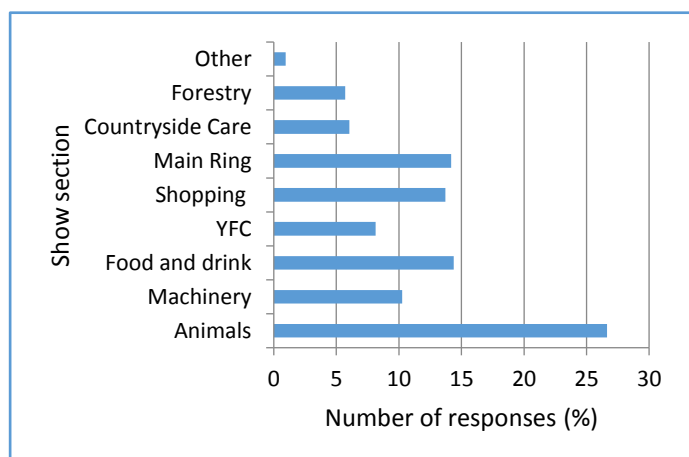


Figure 25: In which section of the RWS do you spend the majority of your time?

of the Show is the most popular, and further demonstrating how important the agricultural aspects of the RWS are to visitors from rural and urban areas alike.

The Main Ring, with its mix of attractions was the second most popular aspect of the RWS for many visitors (14%), this was closely followed by the more commercial shopping, and food and drink aspects of the Show. Again, the value of the agricultural aspects of the Show were revealed with the machinery section being the fifth most popular section of the RWS, with 10% of respondents stating that they spend the majority of their time in/around the machinery section. The importance of the YFC movement in the Show was highlighted with 8% of the respondents spending the majority of their time in the YFC section; of the options, the least popular areas were that of the Countryside Care and Forestry sections with 6% of people stating that they spend the majority of their time in each of these sections.

Despite the variation in the amount of time that people spend in different sections of the RWS, all areas of the event are equally as important to the overall success of the Show, and a number of people commented/wrote on the questionnaire that they spend an equal amount of time in all sections of the Show and that it is important to them to see the whole of the event.

5.2.5 – Visitor satisfaction

Of those who completed the survey, 97% had previously attended the RWS, meaning that 3% of visitors completing the questionnaire were first time visitors to the Show. When questioned upon which previous events they had attended, the respondents were

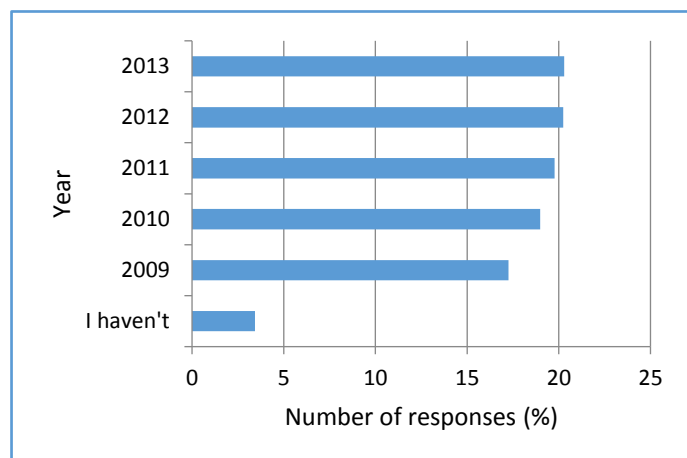


Figure 26: Which of the previous Royal Welsh Shows have you attended?

evenly distributed with similar numbers attending the RWS in 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, and 2013 (shown in Figure 27).

The fact that the RWS has a visitor return rate of 97% demonstrates a high level of satisfaction in the event. This high level of visitor satisfaction in the event is further demonstrated by the fact that 53.65% of respondents had attended the RWS every year from 2009 – 2014.

The RWS has a relatively high entrance charge (£26 per adult – Monday to Wednesday, £24 per adult – Thursday), despite this an overwhelmingly majority of respondents (85%) stated that the event was value for money (see Figure 28).

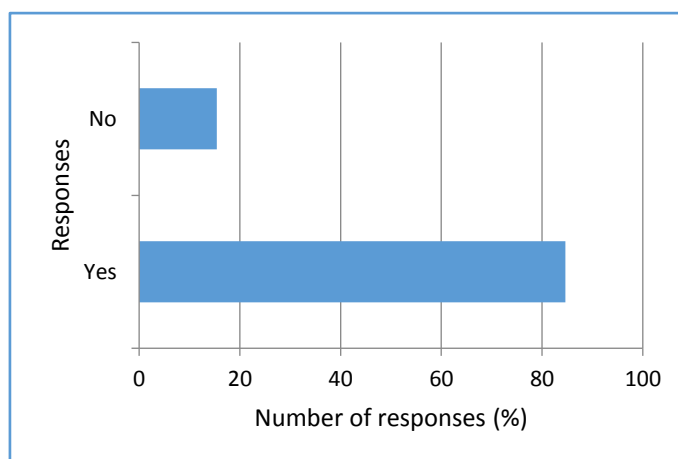


Figure 27: Is the RWS value for money?

When asked were they planning on attending the 2015 RWS, 93% of respondents said that they would be at the event (see Figure 29). These figures are a testament to the level of loyalty that the visitors have to the RWS, and the power that the event has to keep satisfying and drawing in audiences, and is a figure that is relatively unheard of in

the leisure industry. A visitor survey conducted at the British Museum (a free attraction) revealed that 51% of people had made a previous visit, whilst 22% of people had made 6 or more visits (Darnell and Johnson, 2001). A visitor survey carried out by the Lincolnshire Show demonstrated that 84% of

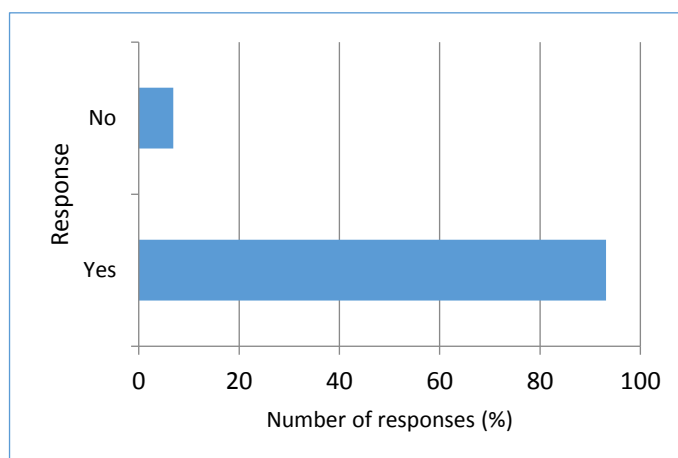


Figure 28: Will you be attending the RWS in 2015?

attendees had been to a previous event; again, this comparison looks favourably on the RWS (Lincolnshire Show, 2014).

Whilst 15% of people think that the RWS is not good value for money, only 7% of people do not plan on attending the event next year, therefore the remaining 8% intend on being at the 2015 RWS despite considering the event not to be value for money. This demonstrates the resilience and loyalty of the visitors to the RWS as they plan on returning to the RWS year on year.

Unfortunately, no data was collected to gain an understanding to why these visitors will not be returning in 2015, so it is unknown if they are not returning because they are dissatisfied with the event or simply because they do not attend the Show on an annual basis as a matter of course.

5.2.5 – The Royal Welsh Show in three words

The respondents were asked to describe the RWS in three words, these descriptions were overwhelmingly positive, with the only negative comments being received relating to the gate price of the event and the difficulties with mobile phone signal.

The vast majority of people described the RWS as being a “good day out”, a “great day out” and a “very good show”, most the responses were of this type and therefore the only real insight that this provides into the RWS is that people enjoy the event, and they consider it an essential part of their summer.

When the three word phrases were broken down into individual words, a greater insight was given into the show. ‘Interesting’, ‘educational’ and ‘informative’ were commonly occurring words, further demonstrating the fact that despite not marketing themselves on this, the RWS has a key role in both educating the general public about the agricultural industry, and also in educating and updating farmers about the latest developments in the industry. Another word that was emphasised by the respondents was ‘Welsh’, proving that many of the visitors to the RWS see the event as being

uniquely Welsh, portraying the best of Welsh produce and culture. This is very much a selling point for the event, and allows the RWS to differentiate from other agricultural shows in the United Kingdom.

The respondents also emphasised that the RWS is a “showcase” for the agriculture industry, demonstrating the importance of the event as a shop window for the industry and the opportunity that the Show gives for the industry to market itself to a wider audience.

The most popular fifty individual words used are displayed in the word cloud, Figure 30. The larger the word, the greater the frequency of its use.



Figure 29: Word cloud of the most popular 50 words used to describe the RWS. The size of the word represents its frequency.

5.2.7 – Summary

The findings of the 2014 visitor survey are extremely positive towards the RWS, with visitors remarking that the Show is “the best in the world”, “a Welsh spectacle”, and most commonly a “great day out”. However, some negative comments were received

with people noting that the RWS is an “expensive day out”, the “same every year” and a “complete rip off”. These qualitative answers are obviously highly subjective, but only 21 people (2%) described the event in negative terms, and of these negative responses 19 were related to the gate price of the Show.

This survey reveals the loyalty of the visitors to the RWS, but also the wide range of visitors that the event attracts. Unlike smaller, or more specialist events the RWS has mass appeal; the event attracts a wide range of people, from smallholders to senior managers of multinational companies. As the survey shows, these visitors come to the Show for a wide variety of purposes, for both business and pleasure.

The event receives praise from visitors, and from the industry alike for being one of the few remaining truly agricultural shows in Britain, as one respondent stated the Show has “maintained agricultural beginnings”, and unlike comparable events it has “not drifted towards ‘townies’”.

Drawing upon the visitor survey, and the interview data, the remainder of this chapter will discuss the multiple roles that the RWS has, and its impact on Wales.

5.3 – The global show

Given that the RWS is today recognised as being the largest agricultural show in Europe, it has understandably gained an international reputation, and as such is attracting an increasing global audience, and the effects of the event are experienced worldwide.

The 2015 RWS saw 1,011 international visitors from 34 different countries sign in to the International Pavilion²⁵ on the showground. The actual number of international

²⁵ The International Pavilion is a specifically designed building at the heart of the Royal Welsh Showground providing a welcome and free hospitality to those visiting the RWS from overseas. The Pavilion provides free programmes, food and drink to international visitors, welcoming them to Wales and the Show. In addition, full office and business facilities are provided for those who have travelled from overseas to the RWS for business purposes.

visitors to the event is of course expected to be higher, as only those visitors who signed into the International Pavilion were surveyed.

These international visitors each spent an average of 2.29 days at the RWS, with them spending an average of 13 days in Wales as part of their wider trip to the country (although it should be noted that this figure includes those who are staying in Wales for longer periods of time – for example those on working holidays). It can therefore be seen that the RWS is an event that brings people to Wales, and the impacts (economic, cultural, and social) of their visits are felt far beyond the showground.

248 visitors were first time attendees at the RWS; on average, each international visitor has attended the event 3 times before. 42 people who completed the questionnaire in the International Pavilion of the RWS were members of the Society.

International visitors attend the event for a wide variety of reasons. Many of the European visitors to the event focus on the Welsh Ponies and Cobs, whilst perhaps somewhat stereotypically those from New Zealand tend to focus on the shearing whilst attending the RWS. With one journalist attending the Show to specifically cover the Wales and New Zealand shearing test match.

In addition to the general public, the RWS attracts teams of journalists from many different countries including Holland, Germany, France, Belgium, South Africa, the United States of America, and the Czech Republic, generating global publicity for Welsh agriculture and for the Welsh nation.

The RWS provides an “international platform and stage... for Wales to be projected to the rest of the world” (Interview, John T Davies, 14/10/15), and has an important role for global relations and trade with Wales. The 2015 RWS saw Sir Alexander Lockwood-Smith, the High Commissioner for New Zealand to the United Kingdom attend the event, this attendance enabled a number of high level meetings to take place:

“I’ve met Meurig and his team, and the Welsh NFU people, I met with them and had discussions about the challenges that are facing farmers today and

how New Zealand and United Kingdom farmers need to work together more, how we can do more to help each other.” (Interview, Sir Alexander Lockwood-Smith, 20/7/15).

In addition to this the High Commissioner stated that he had also met the “First Minister of Wales, the Secretary of State for DEFRA for the United Kingdom, the European Agriculture Commissioner” (Interview, Sir Alexander Lockwood-Smith, 20/7/15), therefore the RWS has a role both in facilitating global relations. Without the RWS it is unlikely that Sir Alexander would have had the opportunity to meet as many British politicians in one day, and particularly Welsh politicians on one site, allowing for positive conversations to be had and for relationships to be sustained.

Furthermore, the Welsh sheep farmer is often guilty of blaming imported lamb from New Zealand for low lamb prices, and for the home industry suffering, his visit to the RWS not only allowed Sir Alexander Lockwood-Smith to speak with practising farmers but as evidenced above it also allowed higher level conversations to be had with senior members of the NFU in Wales. Rather than just being a talking shop, these higher-level conversations allowed full and frank conversations to happen, and for a future plan to be created for further meetings to start closer working between New Zealand and Wales.

The 2015 RWS also saw a delegation from Kazakhstan including Ambassador Erzhan Kazykhanov, and the Vice-Chairman (sic) of KazAgro National Management Holding, Aidarbek Hodzhanazarov, attend the Show. This delegation attended the event with the intention of developing new bilateral relationships with the United Kingdom in terms of the development and export of grain produce. Similar to the New Zealand High Commissioner, Ambassador Kazykhanov and Aidarbek Hodzhanazarov used the RWS to facilitate meetings with many different organisations who have interest in grain and the wider agriculture industry. The delegation met with Phil Hogan (European Commissioner for Agriculture), the FUW, representatives from the Institute of Biological, Environmental and Rural Sciences (IBERS) at Aberystwyth University, the NFU, the Welsh Black Cattle Society, and the National Sheep Association. These meetings with a global importance, forming part of a wider trade mission by

Kazakhstan were facilitated by the RWS, as the event brought together all the key actors within the field, on one site.

The global audience of the Show also has an impact on the Welsh farmer, with many overseas visitors choosing to buy the stock that they have seen at the Show, something identified by Main Ring Commentator, Charles Arch:

“They quite often buy before they go home. I don’t know how many people have said to me on the Thursday, ‘I’ve got to go home early this afternoon, because I’ve got some foreign people to coming to see sheep, or ponies, or cattle, or something, and there is a good chance I will be able to sell’”
(Interview, Charles Arch, 22/10/15).

The RWS provides an important marketplace for the Welsh farmer, it gives them access to a global market, and key rural actors, that they might not be able to otherwise access. Through these overseas visitors viewing the exhibits at the Show, they gain interest in the breed, start talking to the breeders, and this (anecdotally) can lead to sales, having a direct economic impact. Indirectly the sales of traditional Welsh breeds to a global market, also raises the profile of that breed around the world, potentially increasing sales further down the line, and leading to further positive benefits for the Welsh agriculture industry.

The global television coverage further extends the reach of the RWS, 22% of those who viewed the online coverage (produced by S4C) of the 2014 Show did so from outside of the UK, and the coverage was watched by people in at least 41 different countries (see Figure 31 for their locations). This television coverage enables global viewers to engage with the RWS without leaving their home country whilst also promoting Welsh agriculture and Wales to a global audience.

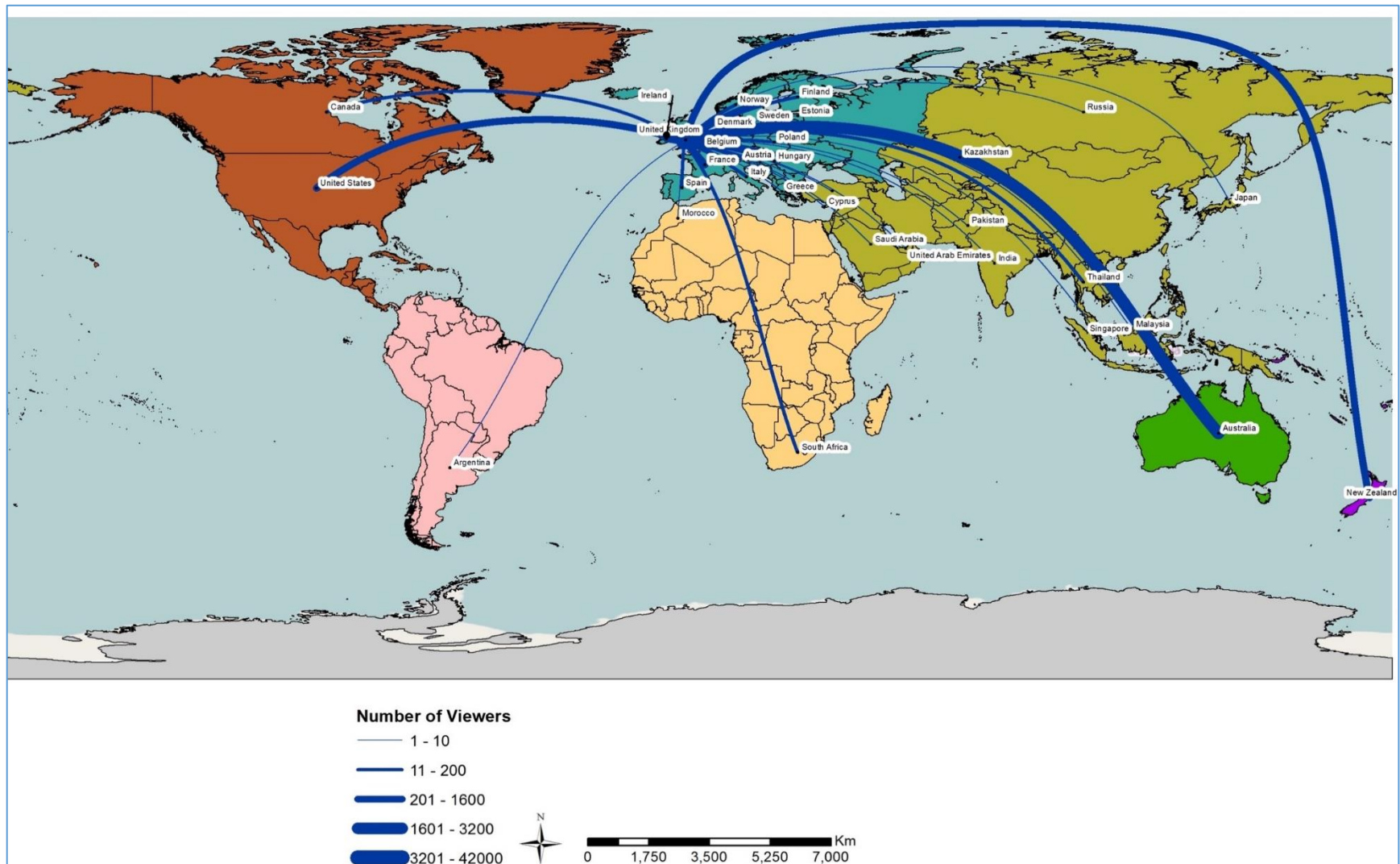


Figure 30: location and number of viewers of the S4C online coverage of the 2014 RWS.

5.4 – A layer cake? The multiple roles of the Royal Welsh Show

This section of the chapter will introduce the multiple roles that the RWS has within Wales, and will provide a framework for the more detailed discussions later in the thesis. As shown by the visitor survey, the RWS attracts a wide variety of people for a wide variety of different reasons. The fact that the RWS attracts such a wide variety of visitors to the event means that it has a key role in assisting the Welsh Government in achieving some of its strategic aims including agricultural development, healthy eating, and education. This role of the RWS is something that is valued by the Welsh Government, with them providing sponsorship to the value of £75,000 per annum to the Society. Within the Welsh Government there is a recognition that that the RWS is more than just an agricultural event, with one official remarking:

“The Royal Welsh Show is not just an agriculture event, it is a really important event on the Welsh calendar... you almost get the same feeling when you go to the Royal Welsh as when you go to the Millennium Stadium for a Wales v England game... it is much more than an agriculture event, it is one of those major events on the Welsh calendar.” (Interview, Gary Haggarty, 15/5/14).

The RWS has become a key social event for Wales, for many it is their annual holiday, with 35% of showgoers attending for the full four days of the event (with many arriving two/three days before).

“It is really important for the agricultural community to go, to attend, to use it as their annual holiday. Quite a lot of my own family do that. It is their annual holiday.” (Interview, Rhun ap Iorwerth, 2/12/15).

The RWS is one of the few occasions that farmers and other like-minded people get together in celebration and in solidarity of their industry, no matter what else has gone on that year farmers make a real effort to attend the event.

“Farmers say ‘this is our week of holiday’, they leave the harvest behind, they might leave someone at home to do the work and rotate round... but pretty much it is non-negotiable, it is something everyone wants to do.” (Interview, Helen Ovens, 19/5/14).

The RWS allows farmers to mix business with pleasure and to create new social networks. Similar to the work of Gray (2010) who studied small agricultural shows in

the Scottish Borders, the coming together of farmers from across Wales in a celebration of Welsh agriculture at the Show is a demonstration of the resilience of the industry. Something which is of particular importance at a time where farmers' livelihoods have been challenged by changing subsidy regimes, rural depopulation, withdrawal of institutions and state services, and most recently unease around the vote to leave the European Union.

Given the closure of many agricultural marts and decreasing on farm employment, the modern farming industry is often a very lonely and isolated job, and often apart from business purposes farmers do not tend to leave their farms. Some farmers do not see others for days, often weeks on end. As such particularly in recent times the RWS has provided a key meeting place for farmers. It gives them a chance to catch up with one another, to speak to their suppliers, and to see those who are in charge of Welsh agriculture.

“Farmers used to talk much more than they do now. Farming today is a very lonely job, you know I can go on my hill farm... I can be up there a week and not see a single sole. Not a single sole.” (Interview, Tom Evans, 8/5/14).

The RWS is as important socially as it is for business in Wales, these combined roles of the RWS means that the event is able to facilitate the building of trust in rural Wales, confirming long-term relationships, and facilitating rural change.

The RWS fulfils many different roles depending on its particular audience, all of these functions of the event are of equal importance, and there is not one single aspect of the Show that is more important than the others. Steve Hughson, Chief Executive of the RWAS describes the RWS as a “layer cake” (interview, 14/12/15), an analogy that I think perfectly describes the event.

Despite being first and foremost an agricultural event, the Show relies upon the gate receipts from the general public in order to remain profitable, and thus to survive and fulfil its charitable aims. In order to ensure that the event keeps attracting the public the Show needs to ensure that it entertains the public, every aspect of the Show must be it the sheep shearing, the competitions, or the main ring displays. However, the

RWAS aims to ensure that agriculture remains at the core of the event, because when other events have tried to change, they have failed. Agriculture is the heart of the RWS, and is arguably the biggest attractor, according to the visitor survey undertaken the animal section of the Show is where the greatest

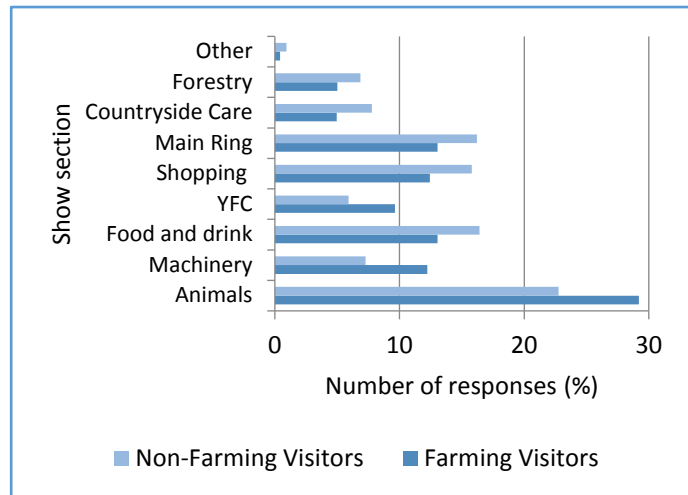


Figure 31: In which section of the RWS do you spend the majority of your time? (Comparison between visitor types).

percentage of the non-farming visitors spend their time (see Figure 32).

To use Steve Hughson’s analogy, the RWS can be seen as a layer cake, whereby the Show is built up from many different horizontal levels, for examples there is the entertainment for the public, the political layer, the exhibitors, the competitors, the farmers who want to business, the businesses that want to communicate with the farmers, and so on, and so forth. Each of these layers can operate on their own, and could almost be individual events of their own right. As someone visiting the RWS you can operate in an individual layer without interaction with any of the other layers. For example, you could stay in the sheep shearing section, and nothing else at the Show, without it impacting on any of the other layers. Essentially if we were to imagine a gateau each individual layer of sponge would be an element of the RWS, whist the cream/jam is agricultural and rural life holding the event together. For a visitor to get the most out of the Show they need to slice through the whole gateau tasting every layer, enabling them to experience the whole of the event. An example of the layer cake including just a small number of the layers can be seen in Figure 33.

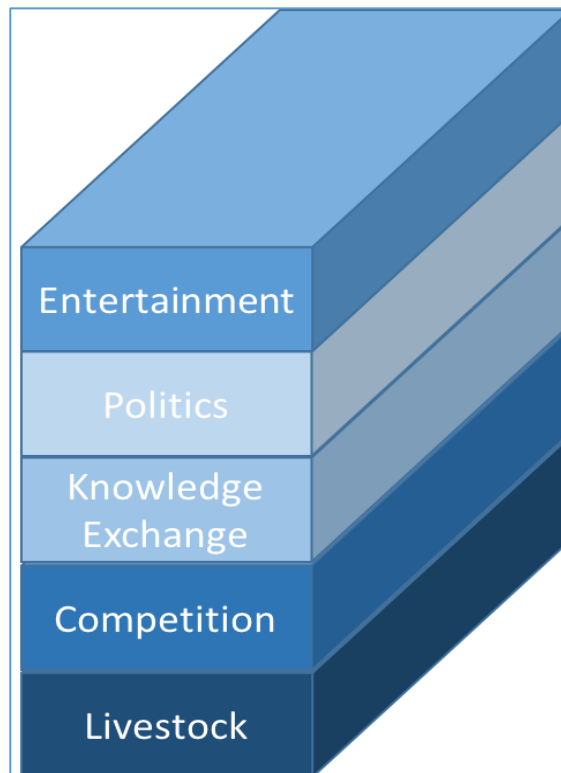


Figure 32: The layer cake model of the different elements of the RWS. For the visitor to make the most of the RWS they need to sample each layer.

The idea of the layer cake is to demonstrate how vast the RWS is, and how some groups can operate in complete isolation at the event and not interact with others. The RWS will mean something different to each individual/group at the event. However as will be demonstrated throughout this thesis, all of these features of the event are interlinked, and each are vital to rural areas.

Because of its size and nature often individual aspects of the RWS can be seen as being a “show within a show” (Interview, John T Davies, 14/10/15), many visitors will stick to the sections that they are familiar with/most interested in, and not see the remainder of show. Figure 34 summarises the multiple events that exist within the RWS.



Figure 33: The multiple events that form part of the wider RWS.

The RWS has a wide range of stakeholders, these can be categorised into four main groups (Table 5).

Table 5: RWS Four Stakeholder Model and the benefits that the event brings to that group

Farmers	Politicians/policymakers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Networking. • Knowledge exchange. • Innovation. • Relaxation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building trust. • Gaining feedback. • Launchpad for new policies. • Electioneering.
General Public	[other] Businesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Edutainment. • A good day out. • Chance to live a simulated rural lifestyle. • Chance to reconnect with the countryside. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Networking. • Sales. • Marketing. • Brand exposure.

Table 5, is a very simplified stakeholder model for the RWS, and the benefits that attending the RWS brings to that group. The role of the RWS for all groups is remarkably similar, and that is the Show being a social occasion, from which they derive benefits, be it business benefits, or social benefits. By being at an event such as the RWS people are able to gain exposure, whether it be an urban resident seeing farming for the first time, or a farmer seeing the latest agricultural innovations, people get exposed to something new, and leave the RWS having had an educational day out, whilst being entertained.

Of course, the real-life scenario is far more complex than this model suggests, and there will be costs as well as benefits to each of the groups attending the RWS. In addition to this there are further stakeholders such as community groups, local residents, the police and others, who are influenced by the activities of the RWS.

The RWS is more than a day out, it is an essential event for the wider rural community in Wales, it showcases the work of farmers whilst highlighting the importance of the agri-food sector to both an urban and a rural audience. Uniquely for agriculture in Wales, the RWS also brings together groups from across the agri-rural industry spectrum bringing with it a chance to discuss challenges and opportunities, and to negotiate new ways of working together to overcome the difficulties that the industry faces.

For Phil Hogan, European Commissioner for Agriculture, events such as the RWS highlight the high esteem that the population of the UK holds for its agri-food industry and the wider rural communities. However, Hogan does not just view these events as a celebration, he sees them as an important beacon and marketing tool for the safe, sustainable and high-quality food and drink production of the UK (Hogan, 2015).

Having briefly introduced the multiple roles of the RWS, the remainder of this chapter will focus primarily on the role that the RWS has for the general public, and for the nation of Wales. The remaining stakeholder groups will be discussed later in the thesis.

5.5 – Performing rurality

5.5.1 – Introduction

For Holloway (2004) agricultural shows are a key site for the re-imagination of agriculture on a wide scale, he argues that shows enable agricultural societies to stage manage encounters between farmers and non-farmers. The RWS takes this one step further although still highly authentic, attracting a large rural audience, the event stage manages, presents, and performs rural Wales to both an urban and rural audience. This section takes methodology applied to the Badminton Horse Trails by Goodrum and Hunt (2011) to frame the performance of the RWS in relation to the theories of Goffman (1959). Using this methodology, the RWS will be addressed under the following headings: sites/sights; fields; framing; staging; entrance/instruction; exhibition; boundaries; and liminality.

Similar to the Badminton Horse Trails (Goodrum and Hunt, 2011), the RWS provides a multiple of associations: an internationally renowned agricultural event which is geographically and culturally located in the Welsh countryside, it contains a substantial shopping village, making it as much a fashion event as an agricultural event, the RWS is a space that is temporally and spatially constrained, but it is a constructed space, embracing aspects of the rural and the urban, facilitating a series of interactions that are informed by appearance and self-presentation.

The RWS is not just a space for rurality to be performed to an outside audience. Similar to many other festivals and events, the RWS is a time that is set aside on annual basis to allow rural people to celebrate their own heritage (Turner, 1982). The RWS is no different to any other festival in the way that it functions as a space in which the Welsh rural community can express their beliefs, celebrate their identity, and contest the social structures that binds the nation together (Quinn, 2006). The RWS celebrates Welsh culture, whilst enriching the knowledge of its participants, at the same time entertaining and satisfying the community (Kim *et al.*, 2015).

Given the nature of the RWS the event visitors indulge in a sensuous experience allowing them to experience contemporary Welsh rural life, it gathers in both real and imaginary elements that identify the key features of rural Wales, the density of content, values held, and possible future developments (Derrett, 2003).

This section, albeit briefly will consider the RWS as being both a front stage and backstage performance, where by the front stage of the RWS is the public performance of the event, accessible to all and (re)presents rural life to the wider public, providing a space where the physical and social aspects of rural Wales are consumed by visitors from Wales and beyond. As will be discussed in Chapters Seven and Eight, the backstage of the RWS is out of sight of any public audience, only those invited or with special permissions can access the backstage performance at the event, and here high-level meetings and discussions are held, allowing for future policy to be shaped.

The RWS is not just a performance for those exhibiting at the Show, but it is also a performance for those attending the event. The Show allows its attendees, no matter what their background to lead a simulated rural lifestyle for a set period of time.

5.5.2 – Sites/Sights

The RWS is a wide-reaching event as much about food, retail and entertainment as it is about farming, as is marketed upon the fact that it is the largest event of its kind in Europe. The RWS can be seen to carry associations of being distinctly Welsh, an association that the event perhaps deliberately reinforces; similar to Goodrum and Hunt's (2011) observations on the association of the Badminton Horse Trails with Englishness.

The modern day RWS is rooted in its landscape, its permanent home in Llanellwedd both physically and metaphorically. The event is distinctly Welsh, something that is particularly apparent when comparing the event to other agricultural shows in the UK. The RWS occurs in a location that many consider to be the rural heart of Wales. This fosters a sense of placed identity, rootedness, authenticity and provenance (Goodrum

and Hunt, 2011). The decision in 1963, to move to a permanent home in the most sparsely populated county of Wales and in area that was still heavily reliant on agriculture has helped to further generate a sense of authenticity in the RWS. Typically, visitors have to travel for several hours, along small winding roads (there is a distinct absence of motorways in mid Wales), to a relatively isolated site, and although now considered the best connected rural site in Europe, still poorly connected compared to urban areas.

The location and isolation of the RWS adds kudos to its activities, the fact that visitors to the event will have travelled through rural Wales, and seen agriculture and rural areas in its purest form, brings credibility to the activities of the RWS, and its narratives surrounding its practice. These locational attributes of the RWS enable a “symbolic activation” (Daniels, 1993: 5) of certain aspects of the Welsh rural identity and as such help to promote an understanding of both agriculture in Wales, and the wider Welsh identity. Something which it has been noted is unique when compared to other agricultural shows in the UK.

The RWS has other wider links to Welsh identity and nationhood, these are covered in Section 5.6.

5.5.3 – Fields

In their analysis of the Badminton Horse Trails, Goodrum and Hunt (2011) utilise Bourdieuan terminology to describe the production and reproduction of the “field” (Bourdieu, 1993) of rural fashion. As much as this is the case at the Badminton Horse Trails, the RWS reproduces the field of rural Wales.

The RWS brings together field participants, be them farmers, government, food processing businesses, horse breeders or any other rural actors, in one spatially and temporally bounded event. By doing this the RWS becomes an agent for those inhabiting, embodying and legitimising rural Wales (Goodrum and Hunt, 2011). The

RWS therefore displays the field of rural Wales within the wider field of Wales in general.

Wherever an event is, it will always be defined in relation to the events of that field (Berger, 1980), which in the case of the RWS, an event that takes place in a literal field in Llanelwedd is the field of wider rural Wales. The RWS is an event that has multiple meanings, and through its performance it is capable of constructing and deconstructing multiple narratives of social and national identities, the manner in which it does so will be discussed in the remainder of this section.

5.5.4 – Framing

Frame analysis (Goffman, 1974) considers how experiences are filtered and organised socially and naturally (Goodrum and Hunt, 2011). As with the case with the Badminton Horse Trails, the RWS acts as a frame for individual and collective social experiences. The Showground itself provides a physical and geographical frame for the Welsh agriculture industry, whilst physically this frame is constrained to Llanelwedd the presence of the media enables it to spread throughout Wales, and beyond. Opening up new audiences for the event, and for the wider Welsh agriculture industry. Furthermore, the event is temporally framed. It is tradition that the RWS is held is held annually on the third week on July. Generally, much of Wales and particularly those in agricultural and political circles recognise that they need to be at the RWS during that week:

“[The Royal Welsh Show] will continue to be the place that you have to be that third week in July, you know, that is what, I hope the Show will continue to be the place that politicians consider it’s really important to be.” (Interview, Kirsty Williams, 5/8/15).

The Royal Welsh Showground itself frames the event, it is the RWAS whose management team assume clear roles in structuring and organising the programme of the event. From the children’s craft competitions, to the main ring displays, to the location of the commercial stands, it is all highly organised. Although at the first glance the RWS may seem very organic and free flowing, the senior management of the RWAS and volunteers organise the event with very near military precision. The RWAS

prepares a programme of events, typically years in advance, this programme is something that is adhered to in order to ensure that there is something going on to entertain visitors at all times, and this is something that Show Director, Harry Fetherstonhaugh is particularly strict about:

“I have certain sort of ground rules, that you know, we have showing classes, including in the Main Ring until lunchtime and then from lunchtime onwards in the Main Ring we are here to entertain the crowds. They’ve paid their money, they’ve had a chance to see the classes, they’ve got around the stock and therefore we’ve got to give them something. My other rule is that the Main Ring is never allowed to be empty for more than five minutes, to keep the crowd, hopefully in the palm of your hand, and so as long as we can do that.” (Interview, Harry Fetherstonhaugh, 5/10/15).

Although the RWS is framed spatially and temporarily by factors that are outside of the control of the RWAS, the RWAS still has control over many aspects of the event. They try to control the aesthetics, and the story that the event tells in order to ensure that visitors to the RWS have an enjoyable day out which meets their expectations. At the same time, it is also vital that the RWS does not present the rural in an idyllic manner, a true representation must be given.

The way that the RWS is framed could however bring concerns about the way that the event itself and the media over-simplifies rural Wales and Welsh national identity, something which could constrain the future development of rural Wales, and the Welsh identity. Only a small element of Welsh identity is performed at the RWS, and the reality is so complicated/diverse that it could not be displayed at an event such as the RWS.

5.5.5 – Staging

Something that is suited for an analysis of events, and particularly the RWS is Goffman’s (1954) theory and recognition of front/backstage behaviours. Goffman (1959) suggests that human interaction takes two, interrelated forms. Firstly, the frontstage where we are presenting ourselves/or being “on stage” for others. Secondly, the backstage whereby backstage is where humans let their guard down and do not perform in such a way as they do when front of stage.

The RWS can be seen as a stage which enables multi-layered and multi-faceted performances. Some of these performances take place within a clear structure, for example the Champion Dairy Cow, where presentation (of the beast and the owner), and handling style are all judged against a set of predetermined and clearly stated rules. Other interactions, with these being the most common interactions for visitors happen in a highly fluid, informal, but very socially conditioned way. People know that there are expectations of their behaviour at the RWS, and they very rarely, in the frontstage, stray from expectations.



Figure 34: Sheep showing at the 2015 RWS (Ruth Rees Photography).

The frontstage of the RWS is both highly intentional and purposeful, the mission of the event is to present and promote the Welsh agriculture industry and the wider rural both to an internal agricultural audience, and a wider more general audience. The frontstage of the RWS follows an often-predictable pattern, based around social and cultural norms, with those in attendance following familiar rules and expectations, wearing, talking, and interacting with each other in an expected way.

However, this frontstage performance of the RWS is not just a performance of the livestock on show, the machinery for sale, or the food for sampling, it is also a performance of government, of unions, and of those who lead any significant Welsh institution:

“There is an element of performance, there is an element of playing to the media and getting your announcements in, and trying to get as much good media as possible”. (Interview, Elin Jones, 20/8/2015).

As will be seen in Chapter Eight, the RWS is a key date in the Welsh political calendar and the front stage performance of the RWS goes beyond that of simply “playing to the media” (interview, Elin Jones, 20/8/2015). It gives politicians a chance to perform to the public, and in return for the public to express their views to politicians, and hopefully to get answers to their questions. The RWS provides a unique opportunity for politicians to interact with the coalface of farming:

“It is useful for politicians, because even if they, even if they can’t come up with a political answer, at least they become aware of the problems and that is important in all sorts of decisions that politicians make to do with the wider economy... and often what politicians do in the wider economy has a big impact on us. And so, I think it is useful, very useful for politicians to hear, it is probably as valuable as anything to hear what the farmers are saying”. (Interview, Sir Alexander Lockwood-Smith, 20/7/2015).

There is no firm evidence that conversations that take place at the RWS influence government policy, but anecdotally Sir Alexander Lockwood-Smith states “I think they do [listen at the RWS]” (interview, 20/7/2015). However even if the RWS does not directly influence policy the event facilitates conversations between policymakers and farmers, and creates a rare opportunity for these conversations to occur.

It is cultural capital²⁶ (Bourdieu, 1986) that is a significant factor in shaping the frontstage at the RWS, it shapes every aspect of the interactions that occur there, and how we view the actions of others. Visitors to the RWS act in such a way that they are fulfilling a form of the rural idyll, be it their day to day reality or a simulated temporary

²⁶ Here I take cultural capital to be the accumulation of knowledge, behaviours, and skills that one can use to demonstrate one’s cultural competence, and thus one’s social status or standing in society (Bourdieu, 1986).

lifestyle. By its very nature, the frontstage of the RWS undertakes takes repair work in order to ensure consistency in its performance, as such attempting to manage the impression that the general public have of Welsh food and farming and to generate a positive image for the industry in the eyes of the public.

“Back regions are typically out of bounds to members of the audience” (Goffman, 1959: 124), in these regions people are typically more relaxed, people let their guard down, and are known to act more like their uninhibited selves. It is in these backstage regions of the RWS where the front stage performances are prepared, cattle are dressed, sheep are fluffed, and humans themselves practice their showing routines. It is here where the norms and expectations of showing are practiced. As such even when inhabiting backstage areas of the RWS the norms and expectations of the event are known, and practiced, they influence the behaviour of the participants even when they are not on show to the wider public audience of the event.

In many industries and performances, the frontstage and backstage elements of an event are kept distinctly separate, with behaviours varying between the two areas. However, at the RWS this is not typically the case. The paying public visitor has access to certain backstage areas of the event and they can see the work that is involved in the preparation of the animals, and it is here where many of the animal husbandry techniques are displayed on an informal level to visitors. The RWS is a temporary event in the life of livestock, and their normal daily routine must be adhered to. They must still be fed, watered, and there is a functioning milking parlour on the Royal Welsh Showground, where dairy cattle are milked to their usual schedule. Although a temporarily bounded performance the daily life of farming and food production continues in the backstage areas of the RWS.

The open nature of the event, and the masses of temporary structures means that often the backstage spaces of the RWS are visible at all times with visitors being able to see the stored merchandise, livestock vehicles, televisual equipment and the other practical necessities to be able to ensure the smooth functioning of the RWS.



Figure 35: Cattle being prepared at the 2016 RWS (Wales Online).

One important backstage aspect of the RWS is the meetings and discussions that are held behind closed doors, often in the upstairs rooms of the many pavilions located throughout the showground. The event provides the platform for the farming unions and other key stakeholders to be able to meet with key figures in not just Welsh, but British politics allowing for debate and discussion to be opened, and for deals to be done:

“It is all a building process; it is about that opportunity to meet the very people at the highest level. The Prime Minister has been here twice in the last few years, you have the First Minister, you have the opportunity to speak with the First Minister on a one to one basis. You have Rebecca [Evans, Agriculture Minister], and all of the party leaders all of them, we make time you know. I think we had 100 meetings during the Show this year”. (Interview, John Davies, 11/9/15).

These backstage interactions are not seen by the public, but they are a vital element of the political role of the RWS and for the future sustainability of the wider agricultural industry. The RWS highlights the work of farmers in Wales, and therefore places agriculture high on the political agenda (albeit on a temporary basis).

5.5.6 – Entrance/Instruction

Anyone can enter and join in with the performance of the RWS, on the condition that they pay the entrance fee. However, the rural nature and location of the event may prevent some from attending, particularly those from lower socio-economic groups. It is difficult for those without their own vehicle to attend the Show, whilst the ticket price may prove a further barrier to attendance. However, for those that are unable to attend the RWS, they are able to experience the event through the various media coverage that it receives.

The whole of the RWS is a constricted environment. Through the series of tarmac roads, footpaths and signs, visitors are guided round the Showground, and in a sense subconsciously controlled by the infrastructure of the event. The RWAS manage people's entrance, and instruct them in a geo-spatial sense. Through the nature of the design of the Showground, clear straightforward routes are provided guiding visitors to around the showground (see Figure 16).

Showground spaces are highly controlled, with clear spaces laid out for commercial exhibitions, livestock, main rings, and social spaces. In addition to this infrastructure is used to guide people around the RWS. There are many permanent buildings of the RWS, the majority of which are situated around the Main Ring, creating a central core of the Showground, somewhere where the RWAS wish people to focus their attentions.

Although a rural event, on a rural site, Showground development has led to the arrival of features that would be better suited to an urban environment. An event that attracts upwards of 240,000 people requires a great deal of infrastructure, and as such, the Showground has many qualities of the urban. But due to the idyllic rural image that the event tries to portray these urban qualities are not highlighted by the RWAS, and are very much hidden from public view, only if looking closely will the casual observer be able to see the CCTV systems, maintenance areas, and essential utility works.

Generally, visitors are free to visit any of the front stage areas of the RWS, however access to the backstage areas of the vents is strictly controlled, and these areas tend to be only accessible by those within the inner circle of the RWAS, and who have the correct passes. There are different social spaces for Members, Governors, and exhibitors to the Show. In addition, many businesses, and rural actors, that are in attendance at the RWS will also be holding their own invitation only events. Entrance to these areas are strictly controlled by security staff, and only those with the correct permissions are able to access these backstage areas/events of the RWS.

5.5.7 – Exhibition

The general public are as much of the exhibition and performance of the RWS as those who are competing and exhibiting at the event. As with the remarks made by Gregson and Rose (2000) whilst discussing performance, performativity and power. There is an unwritten script for exhibitors, competitors, and visitors at the RWS which governs their behaviour, including their speech, their specific embodiments, and dress. The performance of the RWS is not just for one audience, but for multiple audiences, and is part of the overall exhibition of the Show.

The actions of the general public, and in particular the clothes that they wear are key to the overall performance, and therefore the exhibition that the RWS presents. It is long established that clothing is a form of non-verbal communication, language, and part of our experience of place (Barthes, 1983; Lurie, 1982; Roach and Eicher, 1979). These ideas have been further articulated by Barnard (1986) who suggests that the fashion that people choose to wear are signifying practices, and a way of generating meanings. As such the clothes that people wear are able to signify certain social differentials and positions, such as age, employment, character, and affiliations.



Figure 36: Stewards in their traditional dress at the RWS (Ringside Cobs).

Clothing is a key signifier at the RWS, people demonstrate their position within the RWAS through the clothes they wear. It is a tradition that all the Main Ring Stewards wear full suits and bowler hats, whatever the weather, be it 35 degrees and glorious sunshine or 10 degrees and raining. Through this formal dress, and particularly the bowler hat, something which in the past has been a status symbol, the Stewards are immediately recognisable to all visitors and competitors. This form of headwear also throws back to the early traditions of agricultural shows, and adds to the overall performance and cultural identity of the RWS (Jones, 2016).

Such is the tradition of the bowler hat at the RWS, the current Member of Parliament for Brecon and Radnorshire, and Assistant Honorary Director of Horses, Chris Davies was the first MP in modern times to be permitted to greet the Prime Minister in a bowler hat:

“I was the only, in modern times, the only Member of Parliament or candidate able to greet the Prime Minister with a bowler hat”. (Interview, Chris Davies, 21/10/15).



Figure 37: Former Prime Minister, David Cameron with Chris Davies (right) at the 2015 RWS (North Wales Daily Post).

These bowler hats are not just a fashion accessory they have a practical use. The stewards will keep the programme for the day in their hats, so it is not a surprise to often see steward's staring deeply into their bowler hat, in order to ensure the smooth running of the Show. However, perhaps the most important aspect of headwear is the water repellent qualities of fur felt, something vitally important given the unpredictable nature of the Welsh summer.

For those who compete in the RWS, although there is no hard rule, it is expected that they will be dressed in a formal and suitable fashion, which respects the tradition of the RWS. For some competitors this may mean wearing white overcoats, whilst for others that could mean traditional equine clothing that has descended from the traditions of hunting (Dashper and St John, 2016). Should competitors not be dressed in what is deemed appropriate for competition, they will not be prevented from entering, but it is often the case that any judge will be taking note of the showmanship as much as the animal that is being entered. By being dressed appropriately it denotes respect for oneself, for other competitors, and all the other rural actors present (Dashper and St John, 2016). In addition, and importantly for this

section of the thesis, it also adds to the performative element of the event, and can add to the excitement for the wider general public.

Typical dress at agricultural shows is still very traditional, and stems from the military and hunting domains (Riedi, 2006) even with increasing numbers of women competing at agricultural shows (unusually for what can be considered a sporting event, men and women compete at the same level), it is still very masculine in style and appearance. There have been very few changes to what is considered traditional (and acceptable) show dress in over a century (Dashper and St John, 2016).

By dressing up in this traditional manner to compete at the RWS, the competitor is tapping into the heritage of the event (Dashper and St John, 2016), it marks out the RWS as being something special and adds to the sense of prestige that competing brings. It is through competing at the RWS that insiders to the agriculture industry are able to distinguish themselves from those who could be considered outsiders to the event (the non-farming visitors). Those who compete possess embodied knowledge, physical prowess, and their dress marks this distinction (Bourdieu, 1978). Visitors to the RWS see this form of dress, and this knowledge as being aspirational, and this sense of rural knowledge and its association is something that they try and emulate, by attending the Show, exhibiting rural behaviours, and purchasing rural artefacts.

Attending brings with it an affiliation with a rural lifestyle and its associated social features. To belong at the RWS is to arguably dress in a certain way, visibly displaying and endorsing a shared identity through clothing which assists in the reproduction of a collective rural identity (Goodrum and Hunt, 2011).

At the Royal Welsh Show tweed tends to be a clothing tie-sign to communicate tribal membership (Goffman, 1971). It has very much formed part of the uniform for visitors to the RWS. The ability to recognise this, and the ability to purchase it (given its relatively high price) requires necessary amounts of cultural and economic capital. Therefore, the field of rural fashion is tightly bounded, access, and acceptance to the

inner community is negotiated through an awareness of visible appearance and self-presentation: of being front of stage in a bounded context.



Figure 38: Rhoswen Guardsman winner of the Royal Welsh In Hand Horse Championship 2014. Please note the exhibitors clothing (North Wales Daily Post).

In addition to this, in 2013 the RWS introduced its own range of clothing (originally produced by Joules now Lansdown), these tend to be worn by long term supporters of the event or RWAS officials. By wearing this official clothing bodies become affiliated with the RWAS and individuals identify themselves with the imagined community of the RWAS and its related identities (van Campenhout and van Hoven, 2014).

This desire or aspiration to be more rural and to have rural clothing, if you like is part of a wider change in Society, something which I am terming the rural revival. Certain items and specific brands that are seen to be synonymous with the rural wardrobe (for example Barbour jackets, and Hunter boots), these items that have traditionally signalled associations with the upper class rural (Goodrum and Hunt, 2011), have become increasingly popular amongst fashionistas, as have the numbers of people driving around our city centres in Range Rovers and other traditional rural vehicles,

which have been given new uses. The fact that two of the most popular programmes that are currently screened on the BBC, the *Great British Bake Off* and *Countryfile* make great use of rural imagery and play on these stereotypes is thought to further contribute to the growth in visitor numbers to the RWS.

These traditionally rural items that have been commodified to a wider audience are available to purchase at the RWS, be it a jacket, boots, or for those that can afford it a Range Rover. In addition, the shopping avenues at the RWS scramble traditional and taste conventions, there is a mix of traditional and modern items, high and low cultural products. If you want it, you can get it at the RWS. From tractors to kitchen knives, to flat screen televisions, to orthopaedic seats, to a wide range of international foods all with a Welsh flair.

However, the wide variety of attractions at the RWS can lead to conflicts between different interest groups. The traditional agricultural audience would rather the RWS take a pure agricultural focus. But the event needs to ensure that it can attract a large and diverse audience in order to remain economically viable into the future.

5.5.8 – Liminality

There are liminal zones of the RWS where typical frontstage and backstage are suspended, and the normal rules of the performance of the RWS do not apply. At the RWS, the carparks and in particular the caravan sites that surround the main site act as a preparation zone. Often visitors to the event will see competitors preparing themselves, their livestock, or other exhibits in their zones ready for their day at the Show.

When in these preparation zones, visitors are able to transform themselves from their usual selves into someone who has come to take part in a rural lifestyle. Here they construct their identities. Be it temporary or permanent. However, it is sometimes the case that visitors to the RWS has started to create their identities long before arrival, it is not unusual to see the car parks for the event full of Range Rovers or other

four-wheel drive vehicles, further representing the rural aspirations of those visiting the RWS.

This liminal space is also very important for those who compete at the RWS, it allows them to prepare for the competition. Unlike other forms of competition, when showing livestock, the competitors have to think of themselves as being a part of others – the animals. The animal must be prepared before they can be entered for competition (Dashper and St John, 2016). The final stage of this preparation is the exhibitor preparing themselves, changing from their daily farming clothes into formal competition dress. Something that Dashper and St John (2016) state is a symbolic transformation in purpose and attitude, ensuring that the exhibitor is ready for the performance of competition.

Although outside the official boundary of the RWS, for many one of the most important elements of the event is the Young People's Village (YPV). This is perhaps the most liminal of all spaces, it is a rite of passage, a break from normal life for many of the rural youth, and it is considered by many to be the farming equivalent of the Glastonbury Festival, and as such brings with it similar connotations. Many of the residents of this great, temporary tented city, spend their days at the RWS (although some never make it past the bar), but once evening comes, the organised performance of the RWS is replaced by a performance of a different kind. That of alcohol fuelled, big name (for mid Wales) acts such as Scott Mills, S Club, the Cheeky Girls, Goldie Looking Chain, and Tinchy Stryder. This outside element of the RWS has grown so much that it is now a festival in its right:

“It is amazing how many people just come to the YPV and don't know that the Show is going on next door.” (Focus Group, Wales YFC, 3/10/15).

At the YPV, the normal rules and regulations of the RWS are suspended and younger members are free to express themselves in many different ways. Here the social life of the RWS comes alive, particularly for those younger members of the community, who may often be isolated working on their own farms. It is often remarked that due to it

being seen as the rural dating service, the Young Peoples Village has a long-term impact on the population of Wales:

“It is where you find your future husband, wife, partner, whatever it may be.”
(Interview, Hannah Barry, 17/9/15).



Figure 39: The Wales YFC Young People's Village (Wales YFC).

To the uninitiated perhaps the Young Peoples Village might be seen as a distraction from the main RWS, however as will be discussed in Chapter Six, this aspect of the Show is vital to the Young Farmers movement and is also a rite of passage for many rural youths.

5.5.9 – Summary

Using theories of Goffman (1959) as set out by Goodrum and Hunt (2011) this section of the thesis has examined the way in which that the RWS can be seen as a performance of the rural. By its organised nature, the event is a constructed reality, representing rural life to an external audience, whilst at the same time allowing industry insiders to celebrate their own heritage with like-minded people.

The fact that RWS is held in a rural area, in the geographical heart of Wales means that the event is both physically and metaphorically rooted in the landscape, simply by being at the site, traveling to Llanellwedd, through the heart of Wales, a sense of rural

life can be grasped. The event performs the field of rural Wales to a wide audience, literally in a field in rural Wales, again this provides the spatial frame for the event.

The RWS is a stage for the event, with distinct frontstage and backstage areas, frontstage where the main performance of the Show happens, and the backstage is where deals (be it business or politics) are done. Anyone, as long as they are able/willing to pay their entrance fee, can attend the RWS, although when visiting the site, they are expected to follow certain unwritten conventions, and guidance as part of the exhibition of the event. The RWS is can therefore be seen as a performance of a Welsh rural idyll with different actors having distinct roles in its success. Although anyone is welcome to join this performance, they are expected to comply with certain rules and regulations. Given this complex picture, although it can be seen as a performance, the event is not stage managed, it is natural, free flowing, all-encompassing and can be seen as authentic.

5.6 – (Re)imaging Wales

5.6.1 – Introduction

There has been much work looking at the impact of mega-events on place and identity, however thus far the rural has been largely ignored in this work. Using an interpretative approach, this section reflects upon the position of the RWS in Welsh society and it will argue that the RWS forms an imagined community with Wales' rural heritage at its heart, and that the event mobilises national sentiments in a way that cannot be done in any other day to day arena. As much as the RWS (re)presents rural areas to an urban audience, the RWS places Wales and Welshness on an international stage (re)presenting the nation to an ever-increasing global audience. Similar to the findings of Jones (2008) the RWS can be seen as a place in where national ideologies are produced, circulated and consumed, and the event can be seen as a social and special context within which Wales is reproduced.

Mega events are described as events “which have a dramatic character, mass popular appeal and international significance” (Roche, 2000: 1), the RWS can be seen as one of

these mega events, particularly for rural communities, and as such it is an important driver for Wales to (re)imagine itself on a global scale (Harris, 2013). According to Hall (2005) image is one of the key concepts of the twenty-first century and (re)imagining developed from Anderson's (1983) work on the imagined community relates to the commodification of particular aspects of place (Harris, 2008).

Similar to other mega cultural spectacles such as the Olympic Games, the FIFA World Cup, and the Rugby World Cup, the RWS can be seen as a part of a circuit of promotion, that is a key aspect of a strategy in order to re-image Wales, both to a domestic and international audience (Jackson and Scherer, 2013). The RWS provides a means of putting rural Wales on the global map, and raising its profile, particularly within the rural context. Recently events such as the 2010 Ryder Cup, the 2012 London Olympic and Paralympic Games, and the 2015 Rugby World Cup have promoted the Welsh nation to this global audience (Harris, 2013). This is something that the RWS does in a similar manner, reinforcing this Welsh (rural) identity, albeit on an annual basis.

The RWS has done similar to promote the identity of rural Wales. Particularly in 1994 and 2010 when the [sheep] Shearing World Championships were held as part of the RWS. With teams from 28 countries competing, and the event being televised in many of these countries. Hosting the World Shearing Championships places a further spotlight on Wales, the event places the eyes of the rural world on the RWS, more so than normal. In a similar way as other sporting events place light on other regions.

Globally, no two agricultural shows will be the same. They are each an expression of society and their host community at that particular point in time (Jones, 2016). As such the RWS can be seen as one of the strongest representations of the Welsh agriculture industry and of Wales as a whole. The coming together of key Welsh actors at the RWS acts as a demonstration of the modern-day practices of Welsh rural areas (Gray, 2010).



Figure 40: New Zealand's Shearers performing the Haka, face-to-face with the Wales team at the RWS (North Wales Daily Post).

Traditionally the dominant images of rural Wales have been constructed in relation to dominant forms of employment, nonconformism in religion, and a distinctive language (Cloke *at al.*, 1998). The RWS allows for a contemporary Welsh rural identity to be displayed to a wide-ranging audience, but it provides a space where visitors can consume rural Wales, the Show transforms the physical and social aspects of rural life into aesthetic commodities that are consumed by rural and urban dwellers alike. The event allows rural Wales to (re)present and (re)imagine itself, on not just a regional, but a global scale allowing its often-conflicting identities to be negotiated (Harris, 2008).

This section will argue that the RWS forms an imagined community (Anderson, 1983) with Wales' rural heritage at its heart. Compared to only an international rugby game and the National Eisteddfod, the event mobilises national sentiments in a way that cannot be done in other day-to-day arenas. Placing rural Wales and Welshness on an international stage (re)presenting the nation to an ever-increasing global audience.

5.6.2 – Making a nation?

Throughout its history Wales has been made and remade (Williams, 1985), this making of a nation is an active and dynamic process shaped by those within power and major placemaking events (Harris, 2015). “Wales is an artefact which the Welsh produce” (Williams, 1982: 200), it is through placemaking events such as the RWS that the nation, its norms, and customs get remade, and reproduced to both internal and external audiences.

Cloke and others (1998) view Welsh identity as being composed of multitude of components linked to both internal and external factors, involving the local; the national; and the regional. As previously discussed, all these factors are at play at the RWS, enabling it to display a contemporary Welsh identity to a wide audience.

Given that the RWS has “dramatic character, mass popular appeal and international significance” (Roche, 2000:1), it attracts media coverage and is a major cultural event, it has a significant influence on the way that people perceive the nation. Due to the comparisons made by a number of those interviewed between the RWS and the rugby, this element of the thesis will draw heavily on the work of Harris (2007) who investigates the role that the Welsh rugby union has in the imagined community (Anderson, 1983) of Wales.

According to Johnes (2005) given its internal geographic, linguistic, and ethnic divisions, Wales as a unified entity is an imagined community, and Welshness has a variety of meanings. Sport has played a vital role in the creation in inventing, maintaining, and projecting the idea of Welsh national identity outside of Wales (Ibid), and for rural communities where there is an absence of any major sporting teams and any major media outlets, the RWS allows for the community of Wales to be projected on a wider scale. Due to its emotions, emblems, national colours, and use of the language, the RWS acts as a vehicle to express collective ideas of nationhood.

The RWS is a site where rural Wales has been reimagined as a consumption centre, whereby its physical and social attributes have become commodities to be sold and

consumed by various target audiences. This could be attributed to a wider shift to a multifunctional countryside, characterised by the shift from production to consumption. In this age of increased globalisation, hosting a major event such as the RWS provides a means of putting a place on the map, and raising its profile in an international context.

Visitors to the RWS consume the nation (or at least the imagined nation that is put forward by the RWS), the event mobilises the collective national identities and passions, for those four days Wales is united by this common bond, its rural heritage, and this imagined community of Welshness is asserted in the light of external pressures. The RWS brings people together in a collective experience that crosses all classes, genders and religions, helping to sustain a popular Welsh identity.

Anderson (1983) has noted the significant role that the media has in helping to create an imagined community, as mentioned previously, during the four days of the Show, and in its build up period the RWS takes centre stage in the Welsh media be it television, radio, newspapers and magazines. The RWS tends to occupy the front pages of the local and national newspapers, their associated websites, as well as wall to wall television and radio coverage. Something which Hannah Thomas, reporter and presenter, ITV Cymru Wales says is important because:

“The summer show is the premier event in the Welsh agricultural calendar, it is that time of year when all roads lead to Llanellwedd, everybody who is anyone is here, whether you come from town or country there is something at the summer show for everyone. I think to not cover that would be an injustice really to Welsh life.” (Interview, Hannah Thomas, 30/11/15).

As the above quote indicates, media sources tend to present the RWS as being at the heart of life in rural Wales, somewhere where the whole nation converges, it a celebration of everything that is rural Wales, and as such can help to define what Wales is (Harris, 2007). The media coverage given to the RWS not only enables Wales to be projected internally to its citizens, but also externally to a wider global audience, bringing the opportunity for both Wales and the event to grow.

The contemporary RWS has a crucial social function in terms of bringing together the whole of Wales, helping to reinforce its rural identity and heritage. The RWS evokes a connection with this rural heritage and can be seen in contrast to the industrialisation and urbanisation of south Wales in the modern era. By bringing together the nation, the RWS helps to create a tangible Welsh rural identity. As Mike Parker has observed:

“80% of the country is technically upland, this defines the politics, the culture, the history of Wales, I think that all, it is that idea of everyone coming down their valley, going down to the Wye, the banks of Wye at the Show, there is an undoubted sense of nationhood, and this is Wales’ flagship thing. The fact that it is the biggest, it really genuinely is the biggest in Europe, it is a wonderful thing really.” (Interview, Mike Parker, 13/8/15).

Mike Parker continued by discussing how the geographical location itself has an impact on the way that the RWS contributes to (re)imaging Wales:

“There was this feeling that this was the gathering point of the tribes somehow, it has never left me... Wales is a land of the tribes really, it just felt, physically it is located in a place that is perfect, they often say about Llandrindod being the place to meet, it is as equally inconvenient for everybody, but somehow Builth seems like the natural, one of the natural meeting places of the nation really.” (Interview, Mike Parker, 13/8/15).

The Royal Welsh Showground has therefore become somewhat mythologised and romanticised in the imagination of rural Wales, and for Parker, the fact that the Royal Welsh Showground is located in the centre of Wales brings with it connotations that it is meeting place for the nation, and that it is at the heart of Wales, bringing the nation and together in a celebration of its heritage. Many have a false impression that Wales is a glowing ember of close-knit communities (Owens, 2000), but Wales is far more complex than many think, it is divided, there is animosity between those from different locations. However, this does not emerge and the RWS, as Mike Parker states “the RWS does feel, more than anything else, more than any other event, that it is for anybody” (interview, Mike Parker, 13/8/15).

At the RWS the Welsh and English language are treated equally, the event is fully bilingual, reflecting the bilingualism of much of the farming community, the fact that the RWS is bilingual is an accepted fact, there is an absence of language politics, and

the nation is reproduced without acknowledgement of the language question, something which has dominated Welsh politics for more than a century (Harris, 2007):

“In Wales you have a split between those who do speak Welsh and those who don’t. All being Welsh, of course. You have then that cultural difference because of the language, you have people going to the Eisteddfod, but then others who don’t do anything with it. But the Royal Welsh actually brings everybody together, the Welsh speaking Eisteddfod people, the Welsh cultural people will be there. As well as those maybe, the second generation who have lost the language. But they will all be together, united.” (Interview, Dyfrig Davies, 7/10/15).

It could therefore be said that the RWS produces a modern image of Wales, one where the Welsh and English languages co-exist, both are accepted, with bilingualism being the norm. The nation that the RWS creates dispels the traditional north/south divide, as well as Y Fro Cymraeg versus British Wales²⁷ (Balsom, 1985).

The Royal Welsh Showground itself is a signifier of rural Wales, it is a rural site where people of all different backgrounds come together, for one week of the year the site in Llanelwedd becomes the beating heart of Wales. Somewhere where no prejudice exists, no matter what background people are from, they are welcome to the Show to celebrate contemporary Wales, whilst at the same time respecting its heritage.

Annually, albeit on a temporary basis the RWS creates a hyperstructure in which categories and stereotypes of Welsh identities are condensed, exaggerated and dramatized. These often taken for granted aspects of daily life make up the spine of the RWS, without which there would be no culture to demonstrate to the general public at large (Jackson and Scherer, 2013).

As with Wales in general, the RWS is not a fixed entity, and its definition as a place is constantly in a state of flux (Massey, 1991). The RWS can be seen as an intersection of flows of people and objects, and the identity that it presents is a form of throwntogetherness, and as Massey contends, the nation that is represented at the

²⁷ Balsom (1985) proposed a three Wales model whereby Wales is as Y Fro Cymraeg (a predominantly Welsh speaking area in the West), Welsh Wales (the industrialised and urbanised valleys), and British Wales (a wider border country).

RWS is always being made and remade, it is unfinished (Massey, 2005), and will be constantly changing based on wider societal patterns.

Following the work of Jones and Fowler (2008), the RWS can be seen as an important place in shaping the Welsh identity, people embed themselves within the event and its site in Llanellwedd. Those who visit, and participate at the RWS are embedded within the community of the event, reproducing the event, and their vision of the nation of Wales. The RWS allows for nationalist discourses and practices to be communicated to Wales and beyond, reiterating the identity, and imagined community of Wales to a broad audience.

5.6.3 – A Diverse Wales

Although I have here presented the RWS as an example of the imagined community of Wales, the reality is that Wales is much more diverse and fragmented than I (have suggested). The RWS presents a positive image of Welsh agriculture that may not necessarily hold true.

The RWS presents a vision of a white, heterosexual, Wales, made of stereotypical rural norms. Those who are considered as rural others are hidden from the mainstream representations of the event, whilst the reality is much different. Those who differ from the social norm do exist at the RWS but they are not thought of as part of the rural idyll of the event.

As discussed in the previous section, the Welsh identity and identity of Wales is not fixed, it changes based on the people who inhabit the nation. The audience of the RWS is still very much white, middle class event. It does not represent the true diversity of rural Wales. Although much has been done in recent years to make the event more inclusive, it is still dominated by the white middle class. However, the identity of those attending the event (as with wider Wales) is still unfinished, it is in flux, constantly changing. As the event changes, its visitors will, and eventually it will become more representative of rural Wales, and Wales more generally.

The exhibits at the RWS do not represent the full cross section of Welsh food and farming. The animals and items on display only represent the best of the industry, and there is therefore a danger of painting a perfect picture of agriculture to the outside world. Whereas the reality is much different. This concern was pointed out by Lloyd Jones when discussing the visit of the European Commissioner for Agriculture, Phil Hogan:

“It was only the shop window he saw, some people said he should have gone round the farms, he was looking at those cattle which was such a high standard and must have been thinking that Wales is doing well. It could give the wrong impression, couldn't it? And if you went to the big car park, see all the expensive cars, 4x4s, it could give the wrong picture.” (Interview, Lloyd Jones, 11/8/15).

This is a point that has been reiterated by David Morgan:

“What they don't experience is the hard side of farming, people that are really up against it, but they are probably seeing those who are more successful... They are not seeing the average even, it is a bit like going to a flower show and not walking around the garden.” (Interview, David Morgan, 18/9/15).

There is a danger that the RWS misrepresents the true image of Wales and that it enforces the stereotypical image of the rural idyll whilst hiding not only the problems of the agriculture industry but the deep-rooted problems that exist throughout rural Wales.

5.6.4 – Summary

The imagined community at the RWS is important for the collective identity of [rural] Wales, it brings the nation together enabling feelings of identity belonging and solidarity (Harris, 2007). Large scale events such as the RWS are a uniquely powerful tool for (re)imagining place on an international scale. Given the media coverage it receives, and the wide audience that it attracts the RWS is able to promote Wales and position the nation to an outside audience that might not otherwise be possible. In addition, the RWS provides a feel-good factor for rural Wales especially at a time of change and crisis, the event brings people together in celebration and solidarity, against globalising forces, and forces of change. The RWS is a constant for the Welsh rural community, no matter what else is going on in the industry, no matter how the

economy is performing, or the weather, the RWS still goes ahead²⁸, providing that contact with others, a common reference point, and a sense of unity for all involved within the agriculture industry.



Figure 41: The rather wet and muddy 1954 RWS at Machynlleth (National Library of Wales).

The RWS is therefore a powerful tool to (re)present the Welsh nation and to portray an imagined identity to the outside world. The projected images of the Show are extended to encompass the whole nation, whilst also being compressed to obscure social division that can be seen to threaten the unity of rural Wales (Harris, 2013). Similar to large sporting events, the RWS creates a media vortex with all the main Welsh television and radio channels broadcasting live and leading their flagship bulletins from the showground.

This section of the thesis has given an overview of how the RWS promotes a particular identity and images of Wales. The RWS presents a singular image of Wales, the reality is far different with people's experiences of being Welsh differing based upon all aspects of their own personal identity.

²⁸ Although the RWS is a consistent part of rural life in Wales, the event has in the past been cancelled due to issues that take national precedence. No events were held during World War One, World War Two, and during the 1947 fuel crisis. The Show has only been cancelled once since its move to Llanellwedd, during the Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak of 2001.

However, from the interviews conducted and observations at the RWS, it is obvious that the event is highly socially constructed. The way that the event is represented with vary based upon the experience of that individual, which depends on a whole host of personal and societal factors. The management of the RWS and the media portray one particular image of the RWS and rural Wales, one that might not necessarily ring true.

It could therefore be said that the RWS has a “soft power” (Freeman, 2012: 1263) whereby domestically the event helps to construct a sense of national identity and cohesion, whilst bringing with it a sense of prestige to an international audience. As such the RWS helps to construct Welsh identity in the face of societal norms. The construction of this Welsh identity has large overlaps with the political role of the RWS, where ideas of identity and values converge, something which is covered in further detail in Chapter Eight.

5.7 – Reconnecting Wales

5.7.1 – Introduction

Despite Wales being a relatively rural country, there is still a great chasm that exists between its rural and urban communities, as well as a growing disparity between urban areas and the peripheral rural. The 2014 RWS visitor survey found that 21.1% of the visitors were from urban areas. Again, despite the RWS being first and foremost an agricultural event, 39% of visitors have no connection with farming.

Upon its inception, the RWS was primarily an event for farmers, however with increasing cost pressures and changes in the agriculture industry, the purpose of the RWS has changed over time. Today, the event has a greater focus on the general public, and education (beyond the farmer) as a means of achieving their charitable aims (Jones, 2016). Therefore, in recent years it has been vital that the RWS have been able to attract a wider non-farming audience, and to ensure that they are both educating and entertaining this relatively new audience, whilst not alienating the traditional agricultural core audience of the event.

The RWS has moved from being a purely agricultural event to an event that can be used to facilitate encounters between farmers and a non-farming public. Something that is increasingly rare in an era where there is an increasing distance between those who consume agricultural products and the producers (Holloway, 2004). In 2003 the historian David Howell stated that perhaps one of the greatest achievements of the RWS has been to bridge the gap between north and south Wales and harmoniously incorporating Welsh and English speakers within the same movement (Howell, 2003). This section will discuss the reasons behind these successes of the RWS, and why the event is attracting an increasing urban audience.

5.7.2 – A rural revival?

In his 2004 article, Holloway stated that “doubts have been expressed over the future of agricultural shows for some time” (Holloway, 2004: 322), however in the period following the article, agricultural shows in the UK have made a tremendous recovery. So much so that in July 2014 an article on the BBC News website asked, “Why are country shows making a comeback?” (BBC News, 2014). Although since its move to Llanelwedd in 1963 the RWS has seen a consistent increase in visitor numbers (Figure 12), since the turn of the millennium visitor numbers have seen a particular increase, with the event recovering from the outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease far quicker than expected. Paul Hooper the secretary of the ASAO puts this success down to a realisation following the outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease in 2001 that agricultural shows needed to work with the whole of the agricultural industry to promote the countryside and rural affairs in general (BBC News, 2014).

The rural has never been so fashionable, it has become vogue to own a Range Rover, Barbour coats and Hunter wellington boots are the norm on many city streets, whilst brands such as Jack Wills aim their marketing activities towards a rural idyll and see themselves as being “Fabulously British”. British fashion has seen a wider move towards products with a traditional rural feel, Tory chic as termed by The Guardian (2009) is tied directly to the styles and the fashions of the RWS, this rise in rural

fashion and an aspiration to live the so called good life assists in explaining the growing audience of the RWS, particularly those who are from urban backgrounds.

Media portrayals of the rural are also on the increase, with programmes such as the *Great British Bake Off* and *Countryfile*, both of which play on the rural idyll (and particularly in the case of *the Great British Bake Off* typical activities of agricultural shows), often being the most watched television programmes. The 2016 final of the *Great British Bake Off* attracted 14.8 million viewers, over half of the British viewing public (BBC News, 2016). On a similar note, the expanding middle class tend to have greater concerns surrounding the environment, and they demand locally sourced and crafted foods (The Guardian, 2009), both of which are key elements of the RWS can be used to explain the increasing visitor numbers to the event.

Given the increased attention that rural areas are receiving in the media, and that rural lifestyles are considered to be desirable by some, it is no wonder that the RWS is attracting an increasing urban audience. The RWS has therefore become a very important vehicle in order to spread the message of Welsh farming and food, and has a very important role in bridging the gap between town and country in Wales.

Due to the original nature of this study, no previous visitor data is available, but due to the increasing visitor numbers, and the fact that the event has traditionally attracted a large farming/rural audience, it is assumed that these new visitors are predominantly from an urban/non-farming background. For these 39% of visitors that are from this non-farming background it is still the agricultural aspects of the RWS that are the most popular, as Table 6 shows:

Table 6: In which section of Show do you spend the majority of your time? (Non-farming visitors) (n = 962)

Reason	Respondents (%)
Animals	23
Food and Drink	16
Shopping	16
Main Ring	16
Countryside Care	8
Machinery	7
Forestry	7
YFC	6
Other	1

For visitors to the RWS that do not have any direct connection to farming, it is still the traditional aspects of the Show where they spend the majority of their time. 23% of these visitors spend their time in the animal/livestock section of the Show, and 16% of visitors spend the majority of their time in the food and drink sections of the Show, the two sections most closely aligned to the key themes of the rural revival. By visiting these sections of the Show visitors are able to see and experience the showing of livestock, and to taste the finest of Welsh food and drink, enabling them to lead a simulated rural lifestyle for the day.

The RWS encourages face to face contact between different groups, something that is particularly valuable for urban populations. The event gives them the opportunity to live within a rural idyll, allowing some people to get close to and interact with what perhaps they may have only previously experienced in books, television or online:

“The Show offers you an opportunity to get close up to, what people have only ever seen on Emmerdale Farm or something like that.” (Interview, Andrew RT Davies, 28/7/15).

Therefore, the RWS enables urban residents to make contact with their rural counterparts and to experience rural life, in a staged, but authentic manner. Although to an extent staged, the RWS is not a theme park or marketed as rural experience. It is first and foremost an agricultural event, this has remained, as such those attending the event are seeing real rural situations, and meeting real rural people, which helps to bridge the gap between urban and rural lifestyles. The focus of the next section.

5.7.3 – Bridging the gap

With the assistance of the rural revival, the RWS has been successful in attracting an urban audience to the event, allowing consumers to reconnect with the countryside. For those from urban areas the RWS provides them with a chance to encounter farming and to see the realities of the contemporary agricultural industry.

Modern day farming is a very isolated job with very few opportunities for farmers to connect with other farmers and particularly members of the public. The RWS brings farmers to the public, and provides an opportunity for farmers to connect directly to the public, to demonstrate the work that they do, and to also portray a positive image of the Welsh agriculture industry, and the wider food and drink sector. Holloway (2004) found farming and agriculture have become distanced from the consumer, and various unfortunate incidents have impacted upon the view that the general public have on farming, leading to suspicion and concern.

Holloway (2004) further recognises the role that agricultural shows have in bridging the gap between rural and urban populations. He recognises that in order to achieve their charitable objectives of “promoting agriculture”, their role has shifted from furthering agricultural progress towards acting like a public relations agency for the wider agriculture industry. Therefore, the RWS has a critical role bridging the gap between agriculture and the general public at large.

For the RWS they deliver upon this public relations role through “edutainment” (interview, Steve Hughson, 14/12/15). That is providing education to the public through the medium of entertainment, crucially as mentioned earlier people do not attend the RWS to be educated, they do so to have a fun and interesting day out. As Table 7 shows 57% of those who are from a non-farming background attend the Show for a day out with an additional 14% of visitors attending for a family holiday. This demonstrates that primarily these visitors from urban areas attend the Show for social purposes, for entertainment, and to enjoy themselves.

Table 7: Reason for visiting the RWS (non-farming visitors) (n = 457)

Reason	Respondents (%)
Day out	57
Family holiday	14
Business	12
Competitor	5
Family competing	4
Education	5
Trader	3

This captive audience of the RWS provides an opportunity for the Welsh agricultural industry to market itself and educate an increasingly urban visitor, who tend to be disconnected from food, farming, and other rural issues. The remainder of this section will address the role that the RWS has in marketing of, and education about agriculture to an urban audience, and how that this can help to bridge the gap between urban and rural populations.

5.7.3.1 – Marketing

The RWS provides the opportunity for the Welsh agriculture industry to market itself to the wider population, one particular area where this marketing role of the RWS is essential is the Welsh food and drink sector. Particularly for the primary producers (the farmers), the RWS provides a platform for them to reconnect with consumers, and to highlight the nutritional and environmental benefits of their stock.

Food and drink are key elements of the rural revival, and consumers, particularly the middle classes are increasingly interested in food provenance, traceability, and quality. The RWS provides an opportunity for farmers to demonstrate their quality commitment to consumers, and brings with it an opportunity to strengthen the domestic market. An issue that is now of particular importance given the uncertainty surrounding Britain leaving the European Union.



Figure 42: The RWS Food Hall (North Wales Daily Post).

As Holloway (2004) found, there is a recognition from the agricultural industry that they could possibly be to blame for some of the bad public perception of agriculture. Holloway states that this image could stem from misconceptions surrounding ethical farming practices, the use of chemicals, disease control, and environmental management practices. Ian Rees, a farmer and long-term visitor to the RWS believes this perception of farmers is because typically when farmers are seen by the public, they are working and potentially stressed:

“We’re all looked at as miserable farmers, well we are most of the time, because when they see us, we’re busy working and stressed out. They don’t see us in a happy environment, down the pub, playing darts or doing different stuff. They always see us when we are stressed out, when we are moving sheep on the road, if we went to say hello to them when they were in an office and half way through their job, and started chatting to them, I expect that they would be stressed out. They only talk to us, when we are stressed out on the roads or harvesting and things”. (Interview, Ian Rees, 4/8/15).

The RWS brings the opportunity for the general public to see farmers outside of their working environment where they are more relaxed and enjoying themselves. Whilst at the RWS farmers are very willing to answer questions from the general public and to discuss their work, helping to inform the general public about agriculture, whilst painting the industry in a good light. As Ian continues:

“It is not the Society that makes it. It is the farmers that go there. The people who are there every day. We took some people last year, who don’t know anything about farming, they asked questions, and every farmer there was answering them.” (Interview, Ian Rees, 4/8/15).

At the RWS the public are curious about the livestock on show, and they ask questions of their owners, the farmers tend to be very proud of their animals and are very willing to speak about their job and the industry in general. This helps not only to educate the public of the animal and of the industry, but it helps to put a human face to agriculture, helping to bridge the gap that exists between town and country. These conversations between farmers and the public give a realistic and true image of agriculture, and not the rose tinted, idyllic version that they may see in the media.

More widely the way in which livestock is presented at the RWS helps to create a positive image for agriculture. By its very nature the animals on display are best that the industry has to offer, they are in peak condition and made up to show conditions. By the public seeing these animals in such fine condition it demonstrates how caring and responsible the vast majority of farmers are (Holloway, 2004).

As contended by Holloway (2004) agricultural shows are not just about presenting farming to the public, but also about bringing farmers into contact with the consumers of their products, and the RWS is no different. The RWS is a great public relations machine for Welsh agriculture, and it allows for positive news stories surrounding farming to be published throughout Wales. This is something that is particularly clear for Prys Morgan of Hybu Cig Cymru, the organisation is charged with promoting Welsh meat products to global audience, they take the opportunity at the RWS to both market these products and to educate the consumer:

“It is all there, from an educational point, for people that buy and for consumers as well. We can educate them, probably on the butchery side, on the healthy eating, on the benefits of eating red meat, the balanced diet. There are a number of things that add together really.” (Interview, Prys Morgan, 3/8/15).

The nature of these discussions at the RWS allow for farmers to answer questions about their product, further marketing their work, something that is particularly

important in the present climate where Welsh lamb is at a much higher price point than its imported counterparts:

“I was speaking to a lady from Cardiff, several of them actually. They were on about Welsh lamb and where they can buy it, the benefits of it, understanding the price differential with New Zealand, having a very informed discussion really.” (Interview, Prys Morgan, 3/8/15).

The RWS is able to facilitate an enthusiasm in people for agriculture, be it on a large or small scale, it even encourages some to purchase stock and start their own smallholding, as Charles Arch testifies:

“There were kids there prodding their mothers and fathers to buy chickens, then you could hear the father or the mother afterwards talking to someone asking, ‘where can I get a structure to keep these chickens’ and of course the structures are there for them, and they were buying those as well, so you know, all this soaks in the public”. (Interview, Charles Arch, 22/10/15).

By being at the event, visitors are able to get a glimpse into an agricultural world that they may not be familiar with, and an industry that they have not previously engaged with. Through seeing the livestock on show, combined with talking to farmers, and learning some knowledge of the industry it can encourage them to get further involved, not only increasing agricultural education but also having an economic boost for those who are selling stock and accessories. This is again something that is appreciated by the Welsh Pony and Cob Society:

“The Welsh Pony and Cob Society can feel very happy about what happens at the Show, because all these kids from the valleys come up and they see little kids riding in the young classes, and they want to have a go, and as a result, mother and father, starts buying ponies for them. It is this sort of bringing the two communities together, happens more and more”. (Interview, Charles Arch, 22/10/15).

Almost accidentally, the RWS brings together communities throughout Wales, and it can instil a shared love for the countryside in visitors both young and old. However generally the younger visitors are more susceptible to wanting to participate in the lifestyle that they are witnessing, the RWS therefore encourages people to get involved, and as a result learn more about animals, livestock and the rural more generally. This has far reaching benefits for wider Wales both in terms of the economy and the increased social/cultural capital as a result of them participating in the event.

This role of bringing together communities is key, and for some, particularly those from urban backgrounds, visiting the RWS has been a crucial element in their understanding of Wales:

“It helped me to understand it a lot more, and to see the sort of, the pride that people had in it, and that was my first experience really of that sense of continuity that there is in the countryside, I hadn’t, that wasn’t mine from where I grew up in a large industrial town. You know it was so different, it was an English industrial town, to rural Wales, although it is only two hours away, it might have been a million miles away”. (Interview, Mike Parker, 13/8/15).

As Mike Parker demonstrates, the contemporary RWS has not just got a role in marketing agriculture, but also Welsh produce (something that will potentially increase give a recent emphasis by consumers and policymakers on a localised food agenda) and equally as important Welsh culture. This increased interest has partially come around as a result in an increased understanding of rural education, another key element of bridging the gap between rural and urban populations.

5.7.3.2 – Education

Holloway (2004) suggests that agricultural shows take the form of a spectacle, with the events being a dramatic staging of agricultural technology and success. The very nature of the RWS means that it contrasts with the nature of the visitor’s everyday experiences, perhaps visitors do not understand every detail of the event, but by being there they pick up on goings on of the agriculture industry, and take home new knowledge.

With fewer people involved in agriculture in Wales than ever before (59,621) (Statistics for Wales, 2015), and an increasing rural knowledge gap between those in rural and urban audiences, the role that agricultural shows have in informing the public about food and farming has never been so important or so timely. This is something that has been particularly noted by John Henning a Nuffield Farming Scholar and farmer, who has stated that audiences to agricultural shows are now more urban, and that they need to ensure that they are both an educational and entertaining experience for their visitors (Henning, 2016 quoted in Jones, 2016).

The education at the RWS is generally a by-product of visitors having fun day out. Of those who completed the 2014 RWS visitor survey, 5% stated that they attend the RWS specifically for educational purposes, showing that this role of the event is recognised by visitors, even though it something that the RWAS does not currently use in its marketing strategy. The RWS is a “conduit that allows people to have an appreciation, a relative understanding, and an experience of something that they are not used to everyday” (interview, John T Davies, 14/10/15). By the virtue of the nature of the RWS it is a different experience to what urban visitors are used to, this enlightens the audience, allowing them to see into a different world, but not one that they are indifferent to. By walking around the Show viewing the exhibits and having discussions with farmers and other traders alike, these non-farming visitors are learning subtle (and not so subtle) messages about agriculture in Wales.

Perhaps one of the most important groups that are able to be educated as a result of their attendance at the RWS is that of children, the Show is not just “a jolly, it really is an educational thing for a child” (interview, Susan Jones, 9/10/15). This education role extends to children from all walks of life, be it children from a farming background who may be showing their family’s livestock for the first time, giving them a chance to build their skills on a large stage, or for children from an urban background, who have no experience of rural life. However, the RWS does not just have a role in educating children, but people of all ages.

The education at the event is an incremental thing, it is not a formal education, but a by-product of them having a fun day out. Due to increased mechanisation of agriculture there is less opportunity for townspeople to go and help on the local farm, whereas in the past people might have gone and stacked bales or similar, today much work is done from the tractor, and as such people cannot get involved. Therefore, the RWS has a role in “maintaining the contact between urban and rural” (interview, William Powell, 30/10/15).

Although perhaps opportunities to assist on a working farm have diminished, as a result of what this thesis calls the rural revival, there is now a greater interest in food

and farming. In some quarters there is still a form of naivety that “spaghetti grows on trees, eggs come in boxes” (interview, Harry Fetherstonhaugh, 5/10/15) and the RWS provides an opportunity to bust these myths surrounding food and farming. The Wednesday and Thursday Grand Parades at the RWS are an essential aspect of the informal education of the event, it shows the world the produce on offer, but as Harry continues:

“It is an opportunity for the general public to understand that the lamb chop that they’ve eaten the day before is represented by something that has come in on the trailer, and just won a championship, and that the food chain starting with the producers that are represented here is incredibly important.” (Interview, Harry Fetherstonhaugh, 5/10/15).

The RWS facilitates a connection between the food that people buy in the supermarket and the animals on display at the RWS, re-educating them on the food chain and possibly encouraging them to purchase more Welsh products in future. This is something that has been identified by Hazel Wright:

“I’d like to think that people make different decisions when they go into Morrisons, Tesco, ASDA, whatever after the Royal Welsh because they see, one how amazing the quality is of the animals and the care that has been taken to look after them, and two that actually these are businesses that they would actually like to keep going, because there are faces behind them.” (Interview, Hazel Wright, 19/5/14).

People will always make purchases based on cost, however due to this subliminal education they have received at the RWS, consumers may make different decisions surrounding their purchasing choices. They have met the farmers, had conversations, and have been educated to the realities of farming. Through educating the public and acting as this public relations machine (Holloway, 2004), the RWS can potentially change consumer habits, benefiting farmers and having a wider economic impact. The RWS educates the consumers to see farming for what it really is, rather than how it is portrayed in the media.

Traders, particularly retail businesses such as Tesco and Marks and Spencer are aware of the desire of consumers to understand the origin of their food. In the last ten years their exhibition spaces have evolved dramatically, from what used to simply be a

supermarket and hospitality presence to now being very education focussed with activities and information, for both children and adults focusing on the origin of their goods. As Chris Davies testifies, the RWS has a critical role in educating children (and even adults) surrounding the origin of their food:

“I mean in this day and age, where children are growing up thinking that meat comes in a piece of cellophane, and milk comes in a plastic pot from Tesco, they don’t understand where it comes from, and it is Shows like the Royal Welsh that really promote agriculture at its best.” (Interview, Chris Davies, 21/5/15).

The RWS allows consumers to see the story behind the food that they have on their plates, and to interact with those that produce the food, connecting the raw product to the final prepared meal. Farmers themselves recognise that the RWS has a role of connecting them with the public, and it is something that they are conscience of:

“They learn as much out of it as we do, you know the country people, they come in there and the people from the towns learn from them.” (Interview, Tom Evans, 8/5/14).

The fact that there is this recognition from farmers means that they are willing to help educate the public about the modern-day agriculture industry. As well as being a farmer Tom Evans commentates on the shearing competitions at the RWS and is often referred to as the “Murray Walker of the sheep shearing world” (interview, Tom Evans, 8/5/14). Throughout his commentary he ensures that the public are fully aware of what is going on and tries to inform them of wider issues surrounding the industry:

“That’s what we do on the shearing, we explain to them about the price of wool, and we explain to them about the crosses. Like you know a Welsh Mule is a cross between a Beulah Speckled Face and a Blue Faced Leicester, we tell people all about them and they can see the lambs there being shorn, they learn a bit from that I am sure. I mean a lot of people say to me, that’s a good part of my commentary is the comments in between keeping them informed of what is going on and what is happening.” (Interview, Tom Evans, 8/5/14).

The practice of showing itself has an important educational role for members of the public, nose rings used to secure cattle, or pig boards used to direct pigs in the show ring may be seen by some as being cruel to the animals. However, the RWS gives a chance to show how these are used properly without harming the animals.

Similar to Tom Evans, Chris Davies, commentator, and Director of Horses at the RWS takes pleasure in educating the public through his commentary at the event, and has stated that people often approach him in the period following the Show to say how much they learnt from the commentary and how much they enjoyed it:

“Yes, and you are educating, half the time it is great when people say to you, a week after, a month after, I didn’t realise that, I heard you mention it over the airwaves and I hadn’t realised that, they’ve gone away learning something, which is good.” (Interview, Chris Davies, 21/10/15).

It is this informal education as part of the typical activities of the Show, which is the most effective teaching tool. By people visiting the RWS they are able to learn about life in rural Wales, learn where their food comes from, and the struggles that farmers undergo in order to get that food into supermarkets. Perhaps less obviously the public are also able to pick up knowledge surrounding the importance of rural land management, and how upland management can impact upon urban areas.

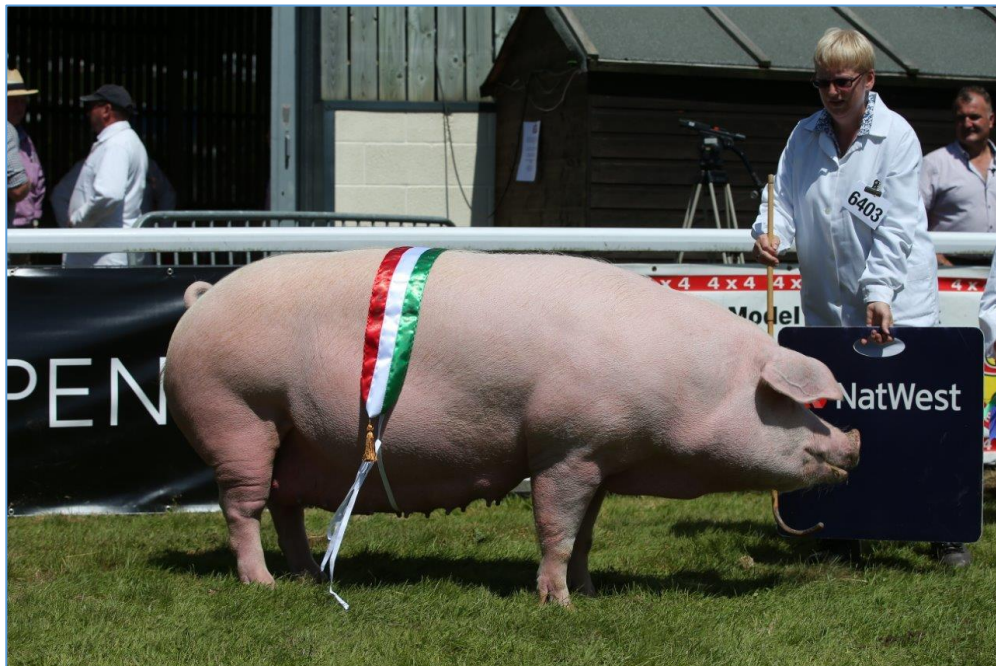


Figure 43: Pig showing at the Royal Welsh Show (RWS).

There is an element of formal education at the RWS, a number of agricultural colleges and universities have a presence at the event, with Aberystwyth University and Harper Adams University College having permanent pavilions on the Showground. During the RWS these establishments are “keen to attract students and young people especially into agricultural education” (interview, Elin Jones, 21st August 2015). Therefore, for

these educational institutions, the RWS is not only a chance to educate a captive audience, but to also market themselves as important sites for agricultural knowledge exchange within Wales and the borders. In addition to the informal education that it facilitates, the RWS showcases formal higher education opportunities within rural communities. The Show gives an opportunity to find out about the multitude of careers available in the industry, and the “opportunities that they offer to young people” (interview, Hannah Barry, 17/9/15), something which can often open people’s eyes to the potential of a rural career.

The education that that RWS facilitates is fundamental, it is both a soft and an active learning process, giving out a positive message about the agriculture industry and the wider rural lifestyle, whilst enabling society at large to get a greater understanding of agriculture. By undertaking this unintentional education role, the RWAS is fulfilling their aim of promoting Welsh agriculture, bringing it to a broader spectrum of the population.

5.7.3.3 – Summary

Although the non-farming public are an important audience for the RWS, the RWAS have tried to ensure that agriculture has remained at the heart of the event, as previously mentioned the Royal England Show changed direction too quickly, and eventually folded in 2009. However, the RWS has been conscious to ensure that the event remains an agricultural event. By doing this they have ensured that they remain an authentic event for the public, presenting a true (albeit overly positive) picture of Welsh farming whilst ensuring that visitors are both entertained and educated.

The educational aspect of the RWS could be something of a growth area, there is very little formal agricultural education in the school curriculum. In order to be able to secure a long-term future, it is vital that the consumer is educated as to the importance of Welsh agriculture, and to ensure that the public are not misinformed of issues that are important to public policy and agriculture. The RWS should not simply seal off an area of the showground and call it education. The activities at the Show

need to be backed up by pre and post show activities in order for the learning to have a long-term value and impact.

Education at the RWS should not just focus on the young and those within the formal education sector, it should focus on the population as a whole, and incorporate all educational bodies involved in food and farming. For the industry to develop it is important that people from all ages understand not only the basic agricultural system, but also the way that it is interconnected to other industrial sectors, potential career opportunities, and the way that the industry is linked the wider economy. However, the RWS needs to ensure that it continues its “learning by osmosis” (interview, Helen Ovens, 19/5/14) mantra and that any education is delivered subconsciously as a result of visitors having a good day out, rather than them being lectured. Although education is important, it is essential that does not come at the expense of the overall success of the Show.

The RWS is a major marketing tool for the agriculture industry and rural Wales in general, by displaying the finest livestock and food products, the event is described as being a shop window for Welsh agriculture. The RWS promotes agriculture and Wales to both rural and urban audiences, not only those who are on the Showground the television coverage of the event enables a positive image of agriculture to spread beyond the boundaries of the Show, throughout Wales and beyond.

5.8 – Summary

For Phil Hogan, the European Commissioner for Agriculture, the RWS is an essential event for Wales because it allows the pride and hard work of farmers and their families to be showcased, whilst highlighting the value and importance of the agri-food sector to both rural and urban audiences. Perhaps most importantly the RWS allows the different strands of the agri-food community, and people from the wider rural spectrum to come together, and in the ultimate form of diplomacy it allows them to discuss the challenges and opportunities that they face, and to find better ways of working (personal communication, Phil Hogan, 17/11/15).

The RWS brings with it a primacy and places rural Wales and agriculture at the heart of the nation. For one week a year, thanks to the RWS, rural Wales comes under the spotlight of the media, and all eyes are placed upon a small showground in the heart of Wales, showing the importance of agriculture to the identity of Wales. The event brings the Welsh rural community together with wider Wales in order to not only showcase rural areas, and the contemporary identity of rural Wales. But to showcase the wider nation, allowing these images of Wales to be projected all around the globe.

Similar to the findings of Jackson (2013) when investigating the 2011 New Zealand Rugby World Cup, the RWS can be seen as a form of salvation for its visitors, giving them hope in the agriculture industry for the future, and enabling them to have temporary respite from the realities of day to day life.

When discussing sports diplomacy Murray (2012), discovered that sports show promise in promoting positive values, reducing estrangement, and promoting exchange and dialogue, enabling the cultivation of favour, endorsement and popular support. The same can be said for the RWS, it presents an image of rural Wales, it encourages interaction between all different groups of people, from all around the world, helping to create an image of the rural reality, and generating favour for the industry, and Wales more generally. All of which is said to have a positive impact on the nation. For many, especially those who work with or are associated with agriculture, the RWS is a significant marker of their national identity, and similar to rugby it mobilises forms of national sentiments that other arenas, including politics cannot (Harris, 2008). The RWS also provides a stage in which Welshness, and certainly Welsh rural identity can be played out and re-enacted on an international stage. However, the version of Wales that is presented albeit unintentionally is that of a white, heterosexual, and rural nation, in reality the nation is far more diverse. Perhaps, again, the image of Wales that is presented by the RWS does not help the stereotypical identity that Wales is a nation of sheep lovers, coalminers, and rugby players.

Although Murray (2012) only makes a very loose connection between, sport and image, identity and national brands, it is clear though the discussions in this chapter and the discussions in future chapters that the RWS develops social capital through relationship building, collaboration and compromise, whilst presenting, the nation and developing a Welsh rural brand to both an internal and external audience. It can be said that the RWS has a soft power in constructing this Welsh rural identity, helping to create a Welsh rural brand, something which Freeman (2012) says helps to promote national cohesion within Wales, and a sense of prestige internationally.

Compared only to the national Eisteddfod and Welsh rugby international games, there are few other events in Wales that are as well-equipped as the RWS to express the modern-day Welsh culture (Johnes, 2005). The RWS has had a role in inventing, maintaining, and projecting the idea of a Welsh rural identity. Granted this is something that has changed over time, but given the ever-changing nature of the RWS, its offer changes, and is able to express the most contemporary of Welsh identity. Again, similar to Johnes' (2005) research on rugby in Wales, the RWS allows people to mobilise their collective identities and passions, with any internal divisions, difference in politics or language being put aside, in a celebration of their shared rural identities.

This chapter has argued that the RWS has a large role in Welsh public life, it is an event that has far reaching consequences for all aspects of Welsh life, be it rural life or urban life, and this is something that is in contrast to the findings of Harris (2013). Harris argues that in reality fostering a temporary "feel good factor" (2013: 108) is the most that many large events ever manage to achieve. Today many events are sold on the popular rhetoric of legacy and the impacts that staging events can have on host communities, and although more work is needed to explore the impact of events (Preuss, 2007) often the planned legacy of events goes unfulfilled, something which this chapter has argued is not the case for the RWS. Its legacy is the fact that it bridges the gap between populations in Wales and presents a positive impact of Wales to the outside world. The impact of which lasts beyond the life of the event.

Chapter Six: The People's Show

6.1 – Introduction

This chapter builds on the themes previously introduced, and addresses the role that the RWS has specifically for the population of Wales. This chapter looks at the role of the feature county system, and how this mobilises the thirteen historic counties of Wales to act as Show host and fundraise for the event on a cyclic basis. It investigates the loyalty that the people of Wales hold in the RWS and the reasons behind them fundraising many millions of pounds for the event since its moving to Llanellwedd in 1963. This section does not intend on giving a detailed overview of the governance of the Society, something which potentially deserves a chapter in itself, but rather a glimpse into how this model impacts on the social attributes of those who have a connection to the event.

The role that is played by 1,500 volunteers at the RWS will then be investigated and analysed, both in terms of their contribution to the Show and the role that the event plays in their own personal development. Following this, the way that the RWS can be seen as a rite of passage, particularly for rural youth and members of the YFC movement will be discussed.

6.2 – Community Building

6.2.1 – Background

The RWS has a significant role in building community capacity and resilience in rural Wales. As with all festivals, the RWS provides a vehicle to preserve and celebrate heritage and culture in Wales (Derrett, 2006). Before discussing certain aspects of the RWS in detail in later sections, this section will introduce the role that the RWS has in building community in Wales.

Due to the feature county system (see Section 6.3) the RWS has been able to develop a strong sense of community, over a long period of time, this is a result of community

members having a shared vision (the objectives of the RWAS), which has resulted in team work, building levels of connectedness, belonging and support (Derrett, 2006). This results in, as will be discussed later in the thesis in the development of social capital, and an informal forum for a shared purpose to be manifest (Ibid).

Given that the RWS is organised by the Welsh farming community, for the Welsh farming community, the event reflects the Welsh farming community in its rawest form, whilst celebrating the past achievements, and looking towards the long-term future of the industry. Although the RWS attracts people from all walks of life, attendees are normally united by the same passions, customs, images, habits and experiences. Before even entering the gates of the Showground, visitors tend to have something in common, promoting not only a sense of community, but it fosters a sense of belonging and wellbeing throughout Welsh rural communities.

“It allows people to meet up with fellow people from their communities, share ideas, discuss what everybody is up to. But also, it promotes that sense of belonging and wellbeing, and farming probably unlike any other business still has that social element, so to be able to facilitate that, it is vital really”. (Interview, Ben Briggs, 7/8/2015).

The RWS facilitates social interaction between different groups, something which is key to and unique to farming communities, and can give a strong view of the overall community, whilst commodifying certain aspects of rural way life. This helps to market rural Wales to a wider audience, generating publicity for rural Wales, and can feed into the future development of the community. Furthermore, the RWS creates opportunities for cultural exchange, revitalises local traditions, improves quality of life, and improves public perception of a community (Gursoy, 2004).

6.3 – “Our Show” – the role of the Feature County System

6.3.1 – Background

As discussed in Section 4.2 following the decision to move the RWS to the permanent site in Llanelwedd in 1963, in order to maintain the feeling of the Show as being an event for the whole of Wales, Dr Alban Davies instigated RWS feature country system. Whereby on an annual basis each county in Wales acts as host for the event, providing

the Show President and Lady Ambassador and in turn they raise funds for the Society. Since its inception, this feature county system has raised several millions of pounds for the RWS. This system has ensured that the event maintains its connection with the people of Wales, with each county feeding directly into the board of the RWAS, and with each county hosting their own RWS every thirteen years.

6.3.2 – Creating Enthusiasm

The feature county system creates enthusiasm about the RWS throughout the host county. It brings together the whole population in a unique way, typical rural/urban divides are forgotten, and the whole county united in an attempt to raise funds for what they consider to be their show.

Charles Arch records the time when Ceredigion hosted the Show in 2010 “we split the county into three sections and had three different Chairmen, at the Aberystwyth one, every night the room was packed, and the enthusiasm was unbelievable, what it does, I saw this linkage again between agriculture and the town people, we ran three events in Aberystwyth calling them bringing the country to town, and I commentated on things, going through the streets, we had YFC girls going through the streets with buckets collecting money. It was unbelievable, we were taking cattle, horses, and sheep down the Prom, we had shearing on the Prom, the enthusiasm, there were people there from Birmingham, and all over the place, on holiday and they were thoroughly enjoying themselves” (Interview, Charles Arch, 22/10/15). Similar to the RWS the activities of the feature county themselves bring people together through all manner of activities, with a shared goal of promoting the RWS, promoting Welsh agriculture, all whilst raising money for Wales’ national agricultural event.

The Ceredigion 2010 feature county campaign or Sioe’r Cardis as it become popularly known, fronted by the farmer and television presenter Dai Jones (Llanilar) raised a yet to be surpassed £400,000 for Society funds, which went towards building a new food hall on the Showground. It is typical for the funds that are raised by the feature county to be used for showground developments, and these funds have helped turn the

Showground into the site that it is today “if that county support wasn’t there, it would be a long way back from where it is in terms of facilities” (interview, David Walters, 27/11/15). These funds raised by the counties have been used to build this essential infrastructure on the showground and enabled it to be one of the premier rural events sites in Europe.

The feature county system has made an incredible contribution to the development of the RWAS, “when I left (2013) it was approaching £15 million that had been invested in the Showground, a third of that had been raised by counties” (interview, David Walters, 27/11/15). Obviously, the infrastructure of the Showground has not just been paid for by donations by the feature counties. There are some things that counties would not want to put their name to, “you couldn’t go to a county, no one would want the Monmouthshire Toilet. Again, it was something that we had to fund ourselves” (interview, David Walters, 27/11/15). But since 1963 the majority of major Showground developments have been paid for by the people of Wales, meaning the site can be seen as representative of the whole of Wales.

When visiting the RWS people often visit the buildings that they have helped to fundraise for, and they feel an enormous sense of pride in the buildings that they have helped to pay for, making them feel like a part of the Show. It brings an anchor point to the Show, the buildings are named after the counties themselves, and people feel part of that building, whether they were part of that fundraising campaign or not.

When a county hosts the RWS the ownership returns to that county, and combined with the various events that they host, a tangible excitement is created within that area. When their county is hosting the RWS they see it as their show, something that they have ownership over, and as such they will make an even greater effort to attend the RWS. Something which is further observed by Charles Arch: “everybody that could walk really in Cardiganshire [Ceredigion] had to come to Show at some time during that week, I saw it with Radnorshire, I think everybody from Radnorshire was at the Show last year” (interview, Charles Arch, 22/10/15). The feature county system gives people ownership over the Show, and brings them together David Morgan (RWAS

President 2015) states that “everybody in Monmouthshire feels really part of the Royal Welsh this year, and whatever we do, that will be Monmouthshire’s” (interview, David Morgan, 18/9/15).

In the feature counties, often people can be heard speaking about the RWS in the first person with Charles Arch stating that he heard many people saying things like “we’re going to have a good show” (interview, Charles Arch, 22/10/15). Residents of that feature county also make a special effort to enter their livestock in the year that they are hosting the show, due to them feeling that they have some sort of ownership of the event, they will be more inclined to contribute than in any other year.

Besides from being a fundraising tool, this system is a crucial element of the success of the RWS, by generating excitement within a different county each year, new stewards become more aware of the contribution that volunteer stewards bring to the RWS, and they offer to give up their time to assist with the organisation of the event. Something that as Charles Arch states is seen with even the smallest of counties “I was amazed when a small county like Radnor for instance, the number of young people that were coming in” (interview, Charles Arch, 22/10/15). By being part of the feature county it invariably encourages people to take more of an active role in the RWS, encouraging people to give up their time to contribute to the Show in years to come.

Therefore, the feature county system assists in reigniting people’s passion for the RWS, encourages them to put themselves forward as the next generation of showmakers, and helps to secure the future of the RWS.

6.3.3 – Personal Benefits

Being part of the RWAS feature county, brings with it immense benefits for those that are involved. Similar to the actual Show, being part of a feature county committee, organising events and fundraising can help to bring likeminded people together, helping to combat loneliness and rural isolation:

“In my case now, as I’ve moved to Monmouthshire, you get to know, like minded people quite quickly, it is good for team building, good for morale, and

it probably develops friendships, like in all rural areas, there's not that much opportunity all the time." (Interview Glyn Jones, 13/8/15).

The feature county system allows the rural community to come together under that shared goal of contributing to the RWS. Although as discussed in Section 6.3 many members of the public give much to the RWS, they also feel that they get something out of the RWS, so being part of the feature county give them that opportunity, and that feeling that they are giving something back, and contributing to the future sustainability of the RWAS. This friendship and comradeship is something that struck David Morgan, the 2015 President of the RWAS:

"The thing that has really struck us both is the friendship of everybody. Well friendship is a Welsh thing, you don't get this sort of thing in England, the fact that everybody has willed us on and wished us well." (Interview, David Morgan, 18/9/15).

These friendships that are made tend to be lasting, long beyond the life of that county hosting the RWS, and obviously brings with it all the associated benefits of having strong friendships formed over a common interest, in this case the RWS.

6.3.4 – Bottom Up Governance

The feature county system is not just fundraising tool for the RWS, it has an important role in the governance of the RWAS. Feature counties become advisory committees at a governance level, and these committees each have representatives on the RWAS Board of Management, with the exact number depending on the number of members that county has. As such every corner of Wales (and beyond) is represented on the Board of the RWAS, the RWAS can be seen as a democracy, whereby through their representatives every single member has a line to the Board of Management of the Society, and by virtue they can shape the way in which it operates.

Although they do not act as feature counties, some of the Welsh border counties feed into the governance structure of the RWS. Shropshire, Herefordshire and Cheshire (part of the Clwyd committee) all have advisory committees with representatives that sit on the Council of the RWAS. The influence of the modern day RWAS is therefore not something that is just constrained to Wales, it spreads beyond across Offa's Dyke.

With these border counties supporting the Show to such a degree that “in fact now that the Royal has gone, they regard it as their own” (interview, Charles Arch, 22/10/15).

Through this governance structure, the RWAS incorporates as many voices as possible, ensuring a cross section of views are taken into account. The RWAS continues to be a member led organisation, decisions are led by the members, those who give up their time to sit on committees, and not the permanent officers based at the headquarters of the Society in Llanelwedd. Again, something that is succinctly put by Charles Arch the “Chief Executive in particular, each and every time, doesn’t own the Show as such, they hand the responsibility over to different people, and you know we’ll be having a lot of the main meetings now starting, they’ll come into take minutes, but the views come from the floor. This is the great thing, you don’t have it being pushed upon you, it comes up all the time, from the industry. I think that is the great thing about it, whereas you take the National Eisteddfod, it tends to be the other way round, and it doesn’t work as well” (Interview, Charles Arch, 22/10/15).

Although it will be the Board of Directors, and those managing the Society on a daily basis who have the final say and have to give approval for any decisions that are made, the responsibility of running the Show remains with the volunteer stewards on the ground, and all major project and policy ideas stem from, and are voted for by the various feature/advisory committees of the RWAS.

6.3.5 – Summary

The feature county system ensures that the RWS remains “the people’s show” (interview, Hannah Barry, 17/9/15), no matter where someone may be from in Wales, the Show every thirteen years will again become their Show.

The system not only allows the RWS to fundraise, but it also allows it to spread its message throughout Wales. This system gives the counties ownership, it encourages

new people, especially those who are not associated with agriculture, to attend the Show, and see what the RWAS can offer them.

John T Davies, Chairman (sic) of the RWAS Board of Management states that the “greatest asset and benefit of the feature county arrangement is that it takes the Show to the four corners of Wales” (interview, John T Davies, 14/10/15). The RWS brings the four corners of Wales to the centre, but it also takes the RWAS, its principles, and everything it stands for out to the thirteen (historic) counties of Wales, providing universal ownership of both the event and society. Something that is reiterated by Steve Hughson “this isn’t our site; this is the peoples site. When I look out of the window here, I see what people consider to be home for a week” (interview, Steve Hughson, 24/4/14). This is the ethos of the RWS, it is the people’s show, and as evidenced in this section, this is not just rhetoric by the management of the event, but is something that is felt by members of the public.

6.4 – “The Showmakers”

6.4.1 – Background

Volunteers play an increasingly important role in events within Wales, and the subject of volunteering is an expansive area of research for geographers and event managers alike (Harris, 2013). The reliance on volunteers is not new for the RWS, ever since its inception in 1904 the event has been led from the bottom, with volunteers providing a crucial backbone, and being an essential element of the success of the event. This is something that is common throughout agricultural show industry (Getz, 1997), and according to Meyer and others (2007) very little is understood about the motivations, skills, and effectiveness of volunteer managed festivals.

Following the London 2012 Olympics it was said that the gamesmakers, an army of 70,000 volunteers made the Olympics the success that it was (BBC News, 2012).

Although a relatively new idea to the Olympic Games, a formula partially forged at the 2000 Sydney Games, the RWS has been built by volunteers and would not be able to operate without the support that they provide:

“I don’t think there’s another organisation anywhere in the world where volunteers carry so much responsibility” (interview, Charles Arch, 22/10/15).

The RWS is reliant on 1,500 volunteers to manage, organise and hold the event, without whom the event would not be able to go ahead. The volunteers at the RWS have an enormous sense of pride in their work, which can help portray a positive image of agriculture and Wales to the wider world, which is likely to help strengthen people’s positive images of Wales, and its sense of community.

Although the Society does have employed staff, the volunteers at the RWS (similar to other agricultural shows) are responsible for all stages of the event organisation, including programme content, operational activities, and even the management of other volunteers. As such they need to have a knowledge of not just their own particular area of the Show, but a knowledge of how the wider RWS works, and wider legislation that has an impact on their activities. There is a challenge therefore to ensure that all volunteers are fully trained and aware of their significant role in the management of the RWS.

Given their role in organising the event, these volunteers take a responsibility not just during the four days of the event, but throughout the year in terms of the organisation of the RWS and the RWAS. For their time these volunteers get very little compensation, typically they get a free meal and entry to the event, but yet they are still willing to contribute their time, such is their attachment to the RWS.

This is something especially pertinent when it is considered that those who give up their time for the RWAS, and sit on various committees are not just from mid Wales “they come from Anglesey, they come from north Wales, they come from Pembroke, and like it takes me an hour to get up there from here, but some of them are three hours getting there” (interview, David Morgan, 18/9/15). These are just some examples of where the volunteers come from, but many more come from all over the UK, and beyond, particularly for the horse and sheep shearing sections of the Show. People show real devotion to the RWAS, attending meetings, often monthly, because

they want the RWS to do well and be the best that it can be, and not for any personal gain. The volunteers at the RWS have an enormous sense of pride in their work, which can help portray a positive image of agriculture and Wales to the wider world, which is likely to help strengthen people's positive images of Wales, and its sense of community.

The volunteers who give up their time for the RWAS tend to do so for similar reasons to those found by Getz (1997). That is, they are enthusiastic and supportive for the RWAS and Welsh rural life in general, those who volunteer at the RWS tend to do so with people who are not only colleagues, but have become friends, as such they have fun during their time at the RWS, one of their key motivations behind volunteering at the Show. Meaning that as Edwards (2005) found volunteering at the RWS can be seen as a leisure activity, with people not just giving something to the RWAS, but they are getting remuneration for their contribution. Not financially, but in terms of their enjoyment and personal development.

This invariably draws upon Stebbins' (1996) perspective that volunteering is a form of leisure, and that many volunteer because it offers distinctive rewards or career paths. It can therefore be seen as a serious leisure, something which has been relatively overlooked in the study of festivals and events thus far. In his 1982 work Stebbins set out that the concept of serious leisure saying that includes six qualities: perseverance, the tendency for volunteers to have enduring careers in their volunteering endeavours; the use of knowledge; durable benefits; belonging to a social world; values and norms; and pride (Stebbins, 1982). Each of which is experienced and intrinsic to the volunteering system at the RWS.

Similar to the findings of Hall and others (2012), those who support and volunteer their time to the RWS are fully committed to the event and the RWAS. It is more than just a pastime, but it is tradition, and something that has led to them having a strong psychological and emotional connection with the event, something that they have passed down to their own children.

6.4.2 – Not just four days

Some of the volunteers have been involved in the RWS for many years, and often positions are passed through the family, from father to son, from mother to daughter. The children that are accompanying the Stewards as they are undertaking their duties are observing and preparing themselves for a future of assisting at the RWS. The RWS is not simply something that people pick up for four days, but it is something that “is in our DNA” (interview, John T Davies, 14/10/15).

Therefore, as many Stewards have been observing their parents in the role for many years, very little training is required and the vast majority of those involved know exactly what they are doing as they have been in informal, work based training, throughout their lives. This is highly similar to the findings of Meyer and others (2007) who found that family and peer pressure were the main reasons for people wanting to participate in volunteering at events.

The responsibilities that are being placed on the volunteers is increasing. Particularly for those who sit on the various RWAS committees they are having to take more of a strategic approach to event planning. The time commitment required is increasing and is the skills that are required, which can lead to difficulties in recruitment and retention in volunteers and committee members.

For many volunteers, supporting the RWS is not just something that they do for a four-day period on an annual basis, but it is a defining part of their social identity (Hall *et al.*, 2012), a place where they have found their friends, a place where they feel at home, and an occasion that they would not miss.

It is not just through volunteering at the event or through being part of a committee that these volunteers make a difference to the RWS. Many individuals have made large financial contributions to the RWAS, including the Honourable Islwyn Davies (former treasurer of Aberystwyth University) and the Llandinam family who drove the transformation of the Showground transforming the greenfield site in Llanellwedd, operating at a deficit to a well-appointed events site creating six figure surpluses.

One of the great characters and benefactors of the Show was Tudor Davies, the late father of Andrew RT Davies (the current leader of the Welsh Conservative Party), paid for the overtime out of his own pocket to ensure that the Glamorgan Hall was completed in time for the seventy fifth show. Furthermore, in the early days of the Show at Llanelwedd, when the event was in crisis Tudor Davies would pay the wages of the Society staff in order to keep the Society solvent.

As Andrew RT Davies says, “he was one of many who rolled their sleeves up and worked tirelessly to make the Society the success it is, and he got immense pleasure” (interview Andrew RT Davies, 28/7/15). It is for this reason, the fact that that so many people have been willing to give up their time to help and assist the Show is part of the success of the RWS. These volunteers participate in the RWS on an annual basis, because they believe in the ethos of the Society, and because they want the RWS to remain the finest agricultural shows in Europe.

“It is made up of so many people like your Grandfather and if you like, like my father, they didn’t brag about it, they just got on with it, and from them rolling up their sleeves and getting on with it, the Society turned into a brilliant success story.” (Interview, Andrew RT Davies, 28/7/15).

No matter how much or little time people are able to give up, they all still make a difference to the RWS. Some people might give up their time for the four days of the show, but others give up much more of their time.

“Whether it be from someone who might only have the time to give one day of stewarding, to people who are there all year round, attending meetings and everything else. It is made up of many hundreds if not thousands of volunteers, who passionately care about the Royal Welsh, believe in the ethos of the Royal Welsh and want it to succeed.” (Interview, Andrew RT Davies, 28/7/15).

Volunteering at the RWS is “a way of life, it is their reason for existing” (interview, Steve Hughson, 14/12/15), the event consumes a great deal of their lives and consumes a large part of their identity. The contribution made by these volunteers to the RWS cannot be overstated it is these people who oversee the organisation and the running of the event, they are the lifeblood of the RWS.

6.4.3 – More than a job

For those who give up their time for the RWAS it is more than a job, it is something that they are deeply committed to, more so than any other aspect of their life. Chris Davies the Member of Parliament for Brecon and Radnorshire speaks of the responsibility he feels in his role as Director of Horses:

“it not just a job that you do, a voluntary job. It is a major part of my life, and I don’t want anything to go wrong, because I keep on thinking about that for the next twelve months... it’s not just a responsibility to the general public, but my family are now growing up through it. I’ve got two little girls and you know, it is very important to them. So, it is very important that the Show runs right.” (Interview, Chris Davies, 21/10/15).

Volunteering at the RWAS is far more than just something that is done over a four-day period, it is something that stays with the volunteers throughout the year, and it brings with it a sense of duty, and a responsibility not just for that year’s Show but to ensure that the event remains strong so that it remains viable for the future. Those who give up their time to the RWS have a strong emotional bond with the event, they want to do their best for the event in order for it to continue into the future and the next generation to be able to enjoy the RWS experience.

Despite being the Member of Parliament of Brecon and Radnorshire, for Chris Davies for the week of the RWS, the event is his priority, then his constituents, for him it is not a place for politics. The Show first and foremost takes priority:

“My priority is number one to the Show, number two to constituents meet if they want to meet me, and three are the industries, the unions, the representative bodies, who can meet me up here or in Brecon and Radnorshire. I’m not going to shut myself away for an hours meeting with them.” (Interview, Chris Davies, 21/10/15).

The passion that people have for the RWAS is something that exists within a person, the reason for which is hard to place, volunteering for many is often something that is a result of a wider RWAS career, something that perhaps started through competing at the Show, before taking their time to participate in organising or judging. Therefore, the most important motivation for volunteering is that persons own interest in the RWS and Welsh rural affairs.

The manner in which the RWS facilitates volunteering (and to some extent training) means that the event can be seen as a public good (see Rao, 2001) and as such deserves recognition through government funding. The RWS provides an arena for people to show their collective commitment to the community of rural Wales, by doing this it allows them to be seen as a good citizen, and to develop strong, mutually reciprocal relationships with others, building trust – something that can be utilised for both business and personal gain. Therefore, although attendees to the RWS, generate social capital, those who volunteer will have stronger ties with one another, and they are likely to build a greater amount of social cohesion, and trust by reinforcing their relationships within the community (Gursoy *et al.*, 2004). The role of the RWS in facilitating the development of social capital is explored in further detail in Chapter Seven.

6.4.4 – Summary

Similar to the findings of Deos (2014) when investigating the 2011 Rugby World Cup, those who volunteer at the RWS do so in order to showcase their culture and county, and this helps to create a sense of pride. In the case of the RWS this sense of pride is towards the RWS, to the volunteer themselves personally, but also towards Wales more generally. All of which helps to build a stronger sense of identity and community within the nation.

There is a shared sense of community between those that volunteer at the RWS, those within different sections of the Show might not know each other, but they have this shared sense of identity, and all want to work together in order to do their best for the RWS. This shared identity leads to growth in both community and individual wellbeing, increasing active citizenship, social justice, and social capital amongst those who volunteer their time at the event.

However, given structural changes that are occurring in rural communities, and a declining rural population in Wales (and particularly Powys where the RWS is held), it is likely that in future there may be a level of difficulty in obtaining people to steward

at the event/sit on RWAS committees. The population of rural areas is aging, with younger people often being too busy to commit fully to the RWS, it will be vital for the future sustainability of the Show that young people are utilised, and that the membership of the Society is turned into volunteers to assist in the running of the events. Meyer and others (2007) also suggest that the declining importance of agriculture in rural areas has an impact on potentially recruiting people to volunteer at agricultural shows. That said the RWAS is still considered to be most prestigious event of its kind in Europe, and as such people want to be associated with the RWAS brand, furthermore the RWAS has recently reformed their Young Members Forum, with the purpose of developing younger members and their interest in the event.

6.5 – A rite of passage

6.5.1 – Background

For those in rural communities, attending the RWS and in particular the YPV is an essential part of growing up, the RWS is a must attend event at a rite of passage for rural youth, not just in Wales, but for people all around the world. This section of the thesis will look at the role of the RWS for young people in rural Wales, and examine the event as a rite of passage for young people.

6.5.2 – Engrained

Attending the RWS is something that is deeply engrained within Welsh society, a tradition that has been passed down from one generation to the next. It is the must attend event for rural youth, whilst urban youths may attend large music festivals such as Glastonbury or Reading Festival, rural youths attend the RWS. It is firmly on their calendar, and an engrained part of their life:

“It is engrained, isn’t it? My parents and grandparents have always gone, if I don’t go, I feel left out. It is our industries event.” (Focus Group, Wales YFC, 3/10/15).

For many youths attending the Show began as something of a family trip, but has grown to a trip that they now make themselves, be it to compete in the YFC competitions, to show their livestock, or simply for the social side of the event, there

is a big feeling of missing out should they not (for whatever reason) be able to attend the event. There is still however a recognition from members of the YFC movement that the RWS is just as much about business as it is pleasure:

“It is a showcase for the industry isn’t it, seeing what is new and what is coming up. It is of interest to the whole livelihood itself.” (Focus Group, Wales YFC, 3/10/15).



Figure 44: Crowds at the Wales YFC stage at the RWS (Wales YFC).

Although there is this recognition that the RWS is an event for business and a chance for them to develop their career/place in the industry, younger visitors to the Show “work hard and party even harder” (Focus Group, Wales YFC, 3/10/15). This work mentioned may include some of the voluntary/organisational roles as discussed in the previous section, be it for the YFC or the RWS itself, without the YFC feeding into the upper echelons of the event, it would not be sustainable in the long term. The YFC movement is in effect the apprenticeship or training ground for the next generation of RWS leaders, something that has recently been proven with the appointment of Aled Jones, a former Wales YFC member to the position of Deputy Chief Executive of the organisation. Similar was iterated by Hannah Barry, the 2015 RWAS Lady Ambassador:

“It definitely gives you confidence coming here, because it is such a big stage, to demonstrate things, you’ve got the stage competitions the singing, the dancing, the rugby, the sport, the tug of war, all of that side of it as well. Young

Farmers certainly here, the level of stock judging is second to none, the competition is very, very fierce. It provides a platform I think for young people to make new contacts (Interview, Hannah Barry, 17/9/15).

Even some current Welsh Assembly Members confess to enjoying the social side of the RWS: “in my early years of going there in my 20s, we used to hit the town hard, from the Lion up. It was a fantastic time” (interview, Rhun ap Iorwerth, 2/12/15). The RWS has therefore held an important role for many different groups and their social lives within Wales, and not just those who are closely associated with the event. For young people attending the RWS allows them to make contacts that they can use throughout their career (no matter what that might be), more than this, it allows them to develop their confidence and their sense of self belief.

For Wales YFC the RWS provides the chance to host its biggest fundraising and social event of the year, the YPV. But in addition to this, the event provides a stage for the organisation to showcase their activities, and an arena for competition, which is at the heart of the YFC programme. Competitions in the YFC section of the RWS cover a wide range of interests from stock judging to flower arranging, to singing and dancing. These tend to place on a relatively large stage and as such they help to build confidence in those that are competing, something that they can use throughout their lives.

Furthermore, the engrained nature of the RWS as part of the YFC means that many young people receive an introduction to the RWAS through competing in the YFC section of the annual Summer Show and Winter Fair. The now Chairman (sic) of the Board, John T Davies, was introduced to the RWS in this manner:

“Like many, many thousands of other show goers and show supporters, I was introduced to the Show in the early 1970’s by virtue of being a Young Farmer, and competing in the Young Farmers Section, a movement that continues to make a huge contribution to the wellbeing of our events, especially the Winter Fair, and certainly the Summer Show”. (Interview John T Davies, 14/10/15).

The experience of John T Davies, demonstrates that significant role that the Young Farmers movement have for the future of the event and the importance that attending the RWS from a young age can have on people’s future careers. Those

competing in the YFC section of the Show, are likely to become the future showmakers (as discussed in Section 6.4). Again, something that was examined by John T Davies:

“The fact is whilst that offer continues its success with the Young Farmers movement, the Show will continue to have a future. Because without the young people coming, expressing their interests, their contribution to the Show, there can be no future, so it aligns itself well with our constitution and our raison d'être in a way”. (Interview, John T Davies, 14/10/15).

This passion for the RWS is something that is initiated in YFC members, and something that remains with them throughout their lives. With them retuning to the Show year after year to possibly compete or to volunteer, meaning they will have a key role in the success of the event. As such the YFC has a vital role in ensuring that the Show is sustainable for the future. It provides the training, knowledge, and confidence to enable the next generation to fully participate in the event and more widely the agriculture industry in Wales.



Figure 45: Crowds enjoying the entertainment at the YPV (Wales YFC).

6.5.3 – The Farmers Glastonbury

Despite its name, the YPV is not just for the young, one of the highlights of his Presidency for David Morgan was visiting the YPV. He was taken aback by so many young people, together on one site, having fun, celebrating their youth, and their rural heritage:

“I think the big highlight for me was going to the Young Peoples Village, on the Wednesday night, I’d never been up there before, and I know the kids all talk about it, but to go up there, and see 5,000 people, young people having a whale of a time, no trouble, they probably have a fight now and again, and all the rest of it, but 5,000 people all having a whale of a time, they are our future. They are the future of the Show; they are the next generation.” (Interview, David Morgan, 18/9/15).

There is a respect from the show elders that the YPV has an essential role in giving young people a space to be young, and to practice typical youthful behaviours. This is of particular value to those who work within the industry, as they are often isolated, and away from peers of a similar age. The YPV fulfils a similar role as the main event of the RWS itself, but it is especially for younger visitors, the next generation of farmers. It provides them with a chance to make new friends, meet colleagues that they might come to rely upon in their agricultural career, but also for them to gain new experiences that might not otherwise be open to them as rural residents, this is something that has been noted by Hannah Barry:

“Making links with different people from different communities, like it has helped me to build up a network of friends and contacts really, throughout Young Farmers and the farming community, and just like-minded people. “(Interview, Hannah Barry, 17/9/15).

The experiences gained at the YPV are crucial to the development of many rural youth, both personally and professionally, and for many it is the experiences that they have at the YPV that shape their future and “it is where your memories are made” (Focus Group, Wales YFC, 3/10/15). These connections cannot be unvalued in the contemporary, isolated, agricultural industry, the RWS provides that point on the calendar something for the young farmers to look forward too, and for them to relax, in a productive, environment. Enabling them to grow both personally and professionally.

These contacts made at the RWS give a wider view of the industry to those in attendance, and can broaden horizons, as well as meeting people that can be utilised for both social and business purposes:

“It has helped me to build up a network of friends and contacts really, throughout Young Farmers and the farming community, and just like-minded people. You go on to put on an event maybe and you might invite people now from across Wales and I wouldn’t have had those contacts if it wasn’t for the Show.” (Interview, Hannah Barry, 17/9/15).

These acquaintances that are made at the RWS enable individuals to extend both their personal and professional networks, and these relationships will last far beyond the four days of the Show itself. Communication is often maintained using technology, and the relationship is confirmed, on an annual basis for the four days of the RWS, or at other related events throughout the year. The RWS is key for the formation of friendships and for making connections. Due to the variety of people it attracts, these stretch beyond the agriculture industry, allowing them to build up a network of similar minded people, often likely to be heading in the same career direction, allowing these connections to be drawn upon in their careers.

It is this highly social side of the RWS that generates excitement amongst the youngest attendees, in the lead up to the Show they will discuss the events of shows gone by, but they will not normally be discussing the prize-winning stock, or the mechanical innovations that were on display that year, but rather their own personal antics or the headline acts at the YPV:

“It is the socialising side, you will always have people in the run up to the Royal Welsh asking, ‘do you remember this show, do you remember that?’” (Focus Group, Wales YFC, 3/10/15).

Due to the fact that young people return to the YPV and particularly the YFC section of the Show on an annual basis, these younger members often develop a bond with the site. As demonstrated by the above quote the YPV develops a symbolic meaning to the young visitors which is socially and culturally constructed through their individual or group performances (Low and Altman, 1992). The YPV and the Royal Welsh Showground therefore represents more than a just a place of recreation for these

young people, “it is where your memories are made” (Focus Group, Wales YFC, 3/10/15), it holds highly symbolic meanings, with some members even comparing the Showground to home, similar to the findings of Charleston (2009) who investigated the English football club as a notion of home for its fans. Visitors to the RWS often repeat their acts on an annual basis, staying in the same place or visiting the same people, and the same traders, year after year. As discussed by Leach (2002) this repetition becomes part of peoples feeling of belonging with the RWS.

Despite often having to spend the week in a tent or caravan, the RWS is seen by young (and not so young) farmers as being their spiritual home, where they can relax and truly be themselves: “you just feel at home at the Show, it is your home for the week” (Focus Group, Wales YFC, 3/10/15). People of all ages make an annual pilgrimage to the event, as David Morgan states “it is the must visit, must see event” (interview, David Morgan, 18/9/15).



Figure 46: The winner of the 2016 decorated caravan competition at the YPV (North Wales Daily Post).

Visitors start attending the RWS when they are young, and they keep returning, the unique atmosphere, and opportunities both for social and business development

mean that visitors will return to the RWS year, after year. The RWS is very much locked into the calendar for every Young Farmer in Wales “every year, religiously, they are ready to come” (interview, Hannah Barry, 17/9/15). This form of visitation whereby venues have been transformed into places of pilgrimage is something that has been discussed at length in the tourism and events literature in recent years, with these secular pilgrimages being compared and contrasted with religious pilgrimages (see work by Gammon, 2004; Singh, 2006; Timothy and Olsen, 2006).

Some say that “everyone gets Royal Welsh blues when they leave” (Focus Group, Wales YFC, 3/10/15), with visitors thinking back to the experiences that they had, catching up with the television highlights, and looking towards the next event. The YPV plays a key role in facilitating interactions that (re)produce a sense of belonging for rural youths, the YPV and by virtue the RWS bring the opportunity for rural youths to spend time amongst their peers, an opportunity that might not fully if it was not for the RWS.

6.5.4 – Rural Dating Service

Colloquially the YPV and equally the RWS are known as the rural dating service “it is where you find your future husband, wife, partner, whatever it may be” (Interview, Hannah Barry, 17/9/15). Again, for those who are employed within the agricultural industry the RWS might be one of the few chances in a year that they get to leave their farms and their communities. By staying at the YPV for the week, it brings with it the chance for these young farmers to meet other likeminded people from all over Wales and beyond, to meet people that they would not otherwise meet at potentially, often fuelled by alcohol, find a potential suiter, and with this shared connection, they often stay in touch after the RWS, leading to romance. In the case of many leading to long term relationships and even marriage (with some returning to the showground for the nuptials), something that has been recently celebrated on Twitter and Facebook with the hashtag #LoveRoyalWelsh.

For some young people, this role of the RWS is perhaps what is in their minds first and foremost. The YPV has grown to such an extent that it is like an event or mini festival of its very own, and the nature of the activities are no different to what would be seen at its urban equivalents. Which often brings great fear to the hearts of the relatives of those who attend the YPV:

“My partner’s niece aged 16 went to the Royal Welsh, she and her mates had a week, loads of them went off to the Royal Welsh, my partner was just going, ‘she is going to come back covered in love bites’, you know 16 at the Royal Welsh, all these beefy farmers, and that is the thing. It is a sort of rite of passage for youngsters, and it is for them.” (Interview, Mike Parker, 13/8/15).

The YPV is a rite of passage for youths in rural Wales, it is one of the few times of the year that they can really let their hair down, and enjoy themselves in a guilt free manner, it is essentially a national holiday for those in rural Wales, and given that it is one of the largest gathering of young people in Wales, it brings with it a unique opportunity for young people to meet potential suitors. Two people interviewed as part of this research stated that they met their partners at the RWS with one going further, and saying that without the RWS her and her partner’s paths would never had met.

6.5.5 – Summary

For members of the Young Farmers movement, the RWS is both a chance to socialise, and a chance to show off their organisation, and their industry to the wider public. In terms of the later, the RWS is a chance for young farmers to show that they are not part of an industry that is just elderly gentlemen, wearing flat caps, looking after sheep in an idyllic rural setting, but that they are part of a modern industry, which is vibrant and moving forward. The RWS gives young farmers in particular the opportunity to demonstrate this message to those who are not directly involved in agriculture. The event provides a platform for young farmers to show what they really do in their working lives, not just to an outside audience, but to each other. Furthermore, it enables them to demonstrate to their fellow young farmers the latest in best farming practice and farming techniques.

This is related to the findings of Neal and Walters (2008), whereby being part of the Young Farmers' movement and attending the RWS means that these young people get to meet new people, a different set of friends, and even potential sexual partners, outside of their typical friends, and even their geographical area. This helps to open up new social connections whilst allowing them to undertake an activity that is seen as being specifically rural.

The RWS provides a space for young people to practice and perform specifically rural behaviours in a safe environment, this means that they are able to produce and maintain a specific rural identity, binding them together, in what can be seen as an example of binding social capital (Putnam, 2000).

6.6 – Summary

This chapter has discussed the social realms of the RWS and the influence that the event can have on Wales and the wider Welsh population (and beyond). Throughout this chapter it has become apparent that the RWS helps to build a sense of place, belonging, and community, the event does not just bring economic benefits to Wales, but it is vital from a social perspective.

Despite growing into a large organisation with a turnover of millions of pounds, the RWAS is still organised with its members and visitors at heart, the majority of the organisation of the event, and the day-to-day running of the Show is done by volunteers. Without the commitment of these people the Show would not be able to go ahead. These volunteers, whose work often goes unseen are the unsung heroes of the event.

This bottom up approach to running the event is reflected by feature county/advisory committee system, which have a direct line to the Board of Management of the RWAS. This system of governance means that every area of Wales is able to have a say in the organisation of the event, meaning that they are invested in the Show and its future. The feature county system means that ownership of the Show moves

throughout Wales on a cyclic basis, and such each county feels that the show they host is their show, and they will raise funds in order to secure the future of the event. The RWAS has benefited hugely from the generosity of the people of Wales, and The Show is “the peoples show, sioe y bobl, and the day we forgot the people, is the day we won’t have a show” (Interview, John T Davies, 14/10/15). The people, whether they be visiting, organising or volunteering are at the core of the RWS, without them, there would be no Show, the event truly is the people’s show, and it should remain that way.

The RWS has remained a popular event for the whole of Wales, because it is a public act of celebration of Welsh rural heritage, but more widely than this, it is a celebration of Wales and Welsh community in general. This role is particularly pertinent for the younger visitors to the event, and the YFC movement, for them attending the RWS and the YPV is a rite of passage, and a very important element of their agricultural education and future career development. For this group, the event combines business with a chance to develop themselves personally, attending the event is a marker, and a hugely important element of their life.

The Show is therefore vitally important for the people of Wales; it gives them a chance to unite around a common cause, it brings the rural nation together in an extraordinary way that would not otherwise be possible.

Chapter Seven: A Knowledge Nexus

7.1 – Introduction

The RWS brings together many key actors on site, for four days, on an annual basis. As such the event provides a forum for debate, discussion, and the building of trust which over time can lead to knowledge exchange, and as such can drive rural change. This role of agricultural shows is something that has long been recognised with Lord Daresbury stating in 1927 that “it is not too much to say that the high standard obtained among farmers in Britain today is due more to national and local shows than to all other agencies combined” (Daresbury, 1927 quoted in Aslet *et al.*, 2015). This is a role that continues to this day.

By bringing together key rural actors from throughout Wales, the RWS creates a temporary space of presentation between farmers, suppliers, producers, and consumers, which can lead to knowledge exchange and innovation within the agriculture industry. Firstly, this chapter will outline the role of the RWS for the business community, before investigating the role of knowledge exchange at the RWS, before proposing that the event can be seen as a temporary knowledge cluster (Maskell *et al.*, 2006; Torre, 2008). This chapter will conclude by proposing the concept of rural buzz, bringing a new rural focus to Bathelt and others 2004 concept of global buzz, creating opportunities for knowledge transfer in Wales and beyond.

7.2 – The business show

7.2.1 - Background

The RWS is a vitally important event for businesses in Wales, particularly those that operate within the agriculture and food sectors. In addition, the event has a growing reputation for being the place to launch and sell new products in Wales. The 2015 RWS attracted 1,010 tradestands (full capacity), and a waiting list exists with 172 traders wishing to attend future events. The Show attracts all manner of businesses, from Porsche to McDonalds, to more typically rural businesses such as John Deere or

Innovis (a business specialising in sheep breeding technology), as well as local craft and artisan food businesses.



Figure 47: The machinery avenues at the 2014 RWS (Greg Thomas, personal collection).

Based on the findings of the trader survey (conducted in 2014) and subsequent interviews this section will investigate the role that businesses and traders (the term will be used interchangeably) have at the RWS, and the role that the RWS can have in facilitating business success.

As shown in Figure 49 the majority of business sectors in Wales had a presence at the 2014 RWS. As Figure 50 shows the main reason why these businesses attend the event is for retail trading with the general public, this is reflected in the fact that the largest

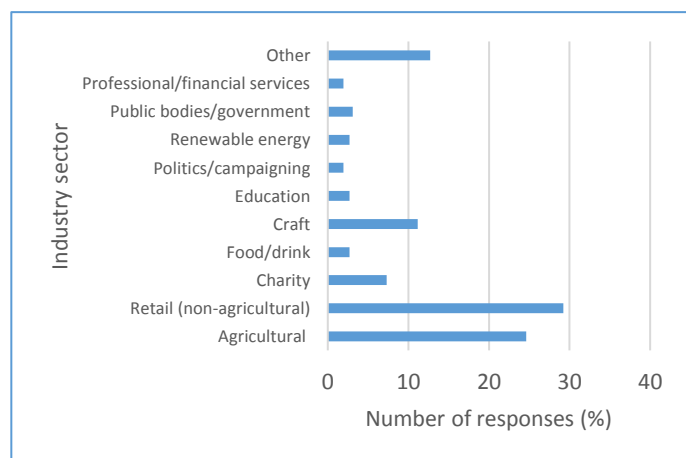


Figure 48: Type of business/organisation

category of business at the event is non-agricultural retailers.

Similar to the work of Bathelt and Schuldt (2008) on trade fairs, for businesses the RWS is a major opportunity both for raising awareness of products and for generating sales. Of the businesses that completed the 2014 RWS Trader Survey, 35% stated that the Show is important for retail trading with either the public or other businesses, whilst 48% of traders use the event to raise the profile of their product or service. For these businesses, the RWS is more about the development of these relationships within the temporary knowledge cluster rather than making direct sales.

In addition, as Figure 50 shows, the RWS is seen by 7% businesses/organisations as a key educational site where they can hold demonstrations and displays, helping them to inform and educate both rural and urban publics about a wide variety of subjects. Having a presence at the RWS allows

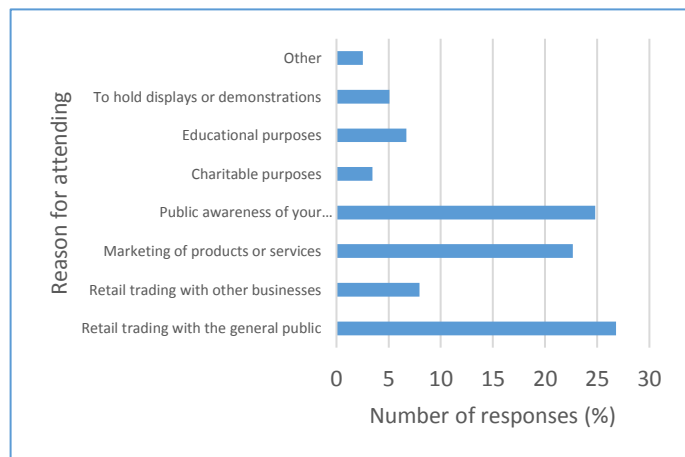


Figure 49: Reason for attending the RWS?

these businesses/organisations to spread their message to both a rural and urban audience in an informal atmosphere. Ultimately it can be concluded that although traders attend the Show for a wide variety of reasons, their presence at the Show helps them to secure sales or to promote their message to a wider audience.

7.2.2 – Benefits of the RWS

Attending the RWS brings three main interlinked direct business benefits, direct sales/membership subscriptions, brand awareness, and customer support.

7.2.2.1 – Direct sales/membership subscriptions

The importance of the direct sales that are generated at the RWS, depends greatly on the individual business, and the types of goods that they are offering. In general the event generates immediate interest in products or services. Businesses are able to demonstrate their goods or services, enabling customers to see it action, and therefore observe its benefits. Something which is far more effective than images, and specifications in a brochure or on a website, encouraging customers to purchase these items/services.

Joules Clothing (a fashion and lifestyle brand inspired by the British country) exhibit at over 60 events per year, of which the RWS is the most lucrative. With them seeing approximately 5,000 transactions over the four-day period of the Show, and it is estimated that treble that number pass through their stand, it is direct sales that are crucial for their presence at the event. Although the goods that Joules sell at the RWS can all be purchased online they find that the RWS creates “hustle and bustle” (Interview, Leigh Gosson, 20/7/15) bringing excitement around their garments, creating further sales.

Businesses selling larger, high ticket items such as agricultural machinery see the RWS as being less important in terms of direct sales. But rather it gives farmers the chance to “go and have a look” (interview, Robert Pugh, 27/7/15), for organisations of this type that may deal with farmers on a regular basis it also brings the opportunity to actually meet the farmer and to put a face to the account number, leading to a more traditional sales relationship.

These businesses tend to see the benefits come from the RWS in the long term. The event allows them to build up a strong relationship with their customers, with businesses such as Ted Hopkins “sowing the seed for next year, for maybe two years, three years down the road” (interview, Chris Hopkins, 22/7/15). Due to the price of these items of machinery (tractors can cost anywhere from £50,000 to over £100,000), especially given the current economic climate, farmers will not buy these items at the spur of moment.

Again, for these high-ticket items, the RWS “facilitates dialogue for business to happen” (interview John T Davies, 14/10/15), the event provides an introduction process for people to meet, and for some businesses it is the start of a longer-term sales relationship. John T Davies, the Chairman (sic) of the Board of Directors of the RWAS himself started long term business deal at the RWS in 2012.

“I completed a project for a wind turbine, a renewable energy project, it cost a lot of money, hundreds of thousands of pounds it was a two-year journey, but that first step of that journey started at the Royal Welsh on the Wednesday some three years ago.” (Interview, John T Davies, 14/10/15).

There are many similar stories to that of John T Davies, where one conversation at the RWS starts a process that leads to a later sale, in the case of this renewable energy business one that was worth several hundred thousand pounds.

For these higher ticket price businesses, the main purpose of them exhibiting at the RWS is to meet with new customers, to show them their products, and to sew a seed, generally these businesses take details from the client, and their interests, and they will follow up these contacts in the period following the Show. As was the case with John T Davies, the Show is often just the starting point of a long sales journey, these initial contacts will be followed up with at home demonstrations, further meetings and it “might be two years before you sell them something” (interview, Chris Hopkins, 22/7/15).

7.2.2.2 – Brand awareness

The Royal Welsh Show provides organisations with a unique opportunity to promote their products and/or spread their brand message to a large audience, helping to improve the knowledge held by both farmers and the general public of their goods/services. The Royal Welsh Show is a meeting place for many, enabling businesses/organisations to introduce new products to their customers, with the hope that this will eventually lead to increased sales.

For many organisations, the RWS is an important site for launching new products to the market. At the 2015 RWS, Ted Hopkins, a machinery dealership who have been

trading at the Show since 1989, launched a new range of Kubota tractor at the event. Traditionally Kubota is a brand associated with smaller farmers, and for the first time the brand was moving into the market for bigger farmers and contractors. Ted Hopkins were stocking this new range of machinery, and chose to launch it at the RWS because they knew that they would have the right audience at the event, and they hoped to be able to generate some excitement and generate some initial leads around the brand.

Referring back to Joules Clothing, Wales is an area that they are underrepresented in, in terms of their retail offering. Their presence at the RWS on an annual basis helps to mitigate this, and to ensure the business is able to gain exposure within Wales.

“We don’t have a great presence in Wales, on a retail side. We have a shop in Cardiff, Swansea, Mumbles, we don’t really have a great retail exposure in the country, so coming to the Royal Welsh Show, as you know, most of Wales goes to the Royal Welsh Show, so we go to an event which attracts a lot of the Welsh rural community to our stand. So, it works well for us.” (Interview, Leigh Gosson, 20/7/15).

By being at the RWS, it gives Joules brand exposure within rural Wales, and the event facilitates the brand becoming more widely known, leading to sales throughout the year. Furthermore, the brand uses the RWS as an opportunity to collect details of customers and future customers. When making a purchase, or enquiring at the stand customers are given the chance to enter a free prize draw using their email address. This enables the business to increase their database, allowing them to target customers in the future. The RWS allows the business to “reach those people who want to buy from us, but we don’t have shops near to them” (Interview, Leigh Gosson, 20/7/15). It could be said that through businesses having a presence at the RWS, they are able to connect with a greater audience, whilst at the same time removing some of the disadvantages of rural Wales. The RWS enables the rural public to access brands that they might not be able to access, albeit for a temporary period, on an annual basis.

Many consumers expect businesses to be at the RWS, especially if they are dealing with members of the Welsh agricultural community on a regular basis, as Robert Pugh testifies.

“Yes, we need to be there as a company, people expect us to be there, it is part of the farming community’s interest for us to be there, it’s a good all-round Show, a lot of livestock there, a lot of social activity, it is a good mix, and I think we need to be there.” (Interview, Robert Pugh, 27/7/15).

It is thought that if organisations such as RVW Pugh, who are recognised as being long standing traders at the RWS, were not to be at the Show then customers may think that the organisation is struggling. As such it is vital that organisations are seen to be there, and to be seen as supporting Welsh agriculture. This has links to the findings of Waterman (1998), who has suggested that music festivals are places to be seen. For businesses, they want to be seen at the RWS and they want to be associated with the RWS brand, as such they will make every effort to have a presence at the Show.

The rise of the internet has changed the nature of the RWS for many of its exhibitors, in the past agricultural shows were the main shop window for businesses selling to the agricultural sector. Today potential customers have the ability to research potential purchases at their own convenience. This has had a particular impact on machinery industry, with potential customers already being very aware of the brand and what they can offer:

“When you go to talk to them about a machine now, they sometimes know more about it than we do, they’ve done so much homework, particularly the younger ones, by reading on the internet, they’ve looked at so many different prices, it has become a more difficult market to work in.” (Interview, Chris Hopkins, 22/7/15).

Whereas in the past potential customers would be visiting dealers stands at the RWS with little knowledge of the product, they now know almost more about the product than the dealer, and most people only make contact with the dealer when they “know what they want to buy, and 75% know who they want to buy it off” (interview, Robert Pugh, 27/7/15), meaning that many people visit the dealerships at the Show to see the product in the flesh, before often buying it from a cheaper rival dealer, or someone that they may have contacted on the internet.

Again, the rise of online sales has led to a downturn in the sales that the machinery dealerships undertake at the RWS. In previous years, they used to sell smaller implements like rollers, toppers, the so-called cash and carry items, they do not sell these anymore because people tend to purchase these online.

Due to these factors, and particularly the rise of ecommerce, it could be argued that the role of the RWS in creating direct sales for high ticket items has diminished, but rather the Show has a greater role in the promotion of new products and in creating a brand identity. However, for businesses that sell cheaper items, and goods that are considered to be every day cash items, the RWS still have a vital role in creating direct sales.

7.2.2.3 – Customer support

For a number of traders, the Royal Welsh Show is more than just an event to secure sales. Many traders see the event as being a social occasion where they can speak to their customers in a relaxed environment, and in many cases the customers visit the traders to seek support, to cement an existing relationship, or to simply have a catch over a cup of tea. This aspect of the Show is just as important for many traders as actually making sales, as it gives them a chance to thank existing customers, creating good will, and hopefully generating future sales.

For organisations such as the CLA who do not have regional offices, the RWS acts as one of their “main ways of connecting with members on a face to face basis” (interview, Rebecca Williams, 11/9/15), as the event brings with it an opportunity to connect with members and customers that they might not have seen since the previous RWS. For the CLA their presence at the RWS is something that is very much steeped in tradition, and as such it is typical to see the same people visiting their pavilion, year after year, at the same time, with the same purpose. Referring back to the previous quote the RWS brings with it the opportunity of the CLA to connect with their members, and to share with them their activities over the last year, and to show these members the value of their continued membership and support.

The customer support element of the RWS is essential for many of the agricultural business that exhibit there, it is an informal opportunity for businesses to meet with their customers and to establish their current and future needs:

“We give them a cup of tea, or a glass of squash, lemonade, and just basically sit and chat with them and ask them what they are thinking of purchasing in the future.” (Interview, Chris Hopkins, 22/7/15).

Doing this it allows the customer to get a small token of thanks for supporting the business and it also allows for the business to be able to update their records on that customer, and to establish their future needs. This is all done in an informal environment and as such is often more successful than any traditional sales visits that may be done on the farm or in the office of the trader.

The RWS brings with it an opportunity for businesses to receive feedback from their customers surrounding their existing product range, this is something that will be discussed in detail in Section 7.33 but this element of feedback is vital in terms of ensuring that customers are satisfied with the business, and that they will remain as customers into the future.

7.2.2.4 – Other benefits

Having a presence at the RWS allows businesses to become an established and respected name in Welsh rural areas. A business being seen to be associated with the RWS gives a customer confidence in that business, and many traders believe that their presence at the Show means that they see increased customer loyalty.

For many traders being at the RWS is also a key networking event, not only helping their business or organisation to maintain their profile but also in terms of meeting other businesses/organisations that have similar objectives. Allowing them to keep an eye of their competition.

As much as the RWS provides a social event for its visitors, it does so for the traders that it attracts, many traders have indicated that it is their favourite of all the events that they attend:

“Personally, this is my favourite show, and I’m not just saying that. I think that there is a real great sense of community here.” (Interview, Hazel Baker, 21/7/15).

As discussed in detail in Chapter Five, the RWS has a unique sense of community, representing rural Wales, and this is something that that is appreciated by the traders at the event. The RWS creates a unique atmosphere that is conducive to undertaking business, in a social, and relaxed environment. Again, this often leads to the normal rules of business and competition being left in the office, and a relaxed rivalry forming between businesses:

“We tend to chat with our competitors and swap notes on different things, it is more of a social gathering... we deal with the same customers, we’ve got the same customers not paying us as well. We do get that sort of banter going on.” (Interview, Chris Hopkins, 22/7/15).

Therefore, the relaxed environment of the RWS enables information to be exchanged between those businesses that normally compete with one another, not just about those customers that do not pay their bills, but also for the latest developments within the industry, and in particular the marketing activities of their rivals:

“Probably from a marketing perspective, it is good to know what other people are up to.” (Interview, Robert Pugh, 27/7/15).

This chance to not only speak with their rivals but to see their latest products and business techniques, the RWS enables this to be done in an informal way, with the knowledge exchange being multilateral and reciprocal. The opportunity exists for competitors to work together, so that they are working together to achieve the same successful, and shared future for their industry.

7.2.3 – Business satisfaction

The trader survey (undertaken in 2014) indicated that businesses at the RWS are very satisfied with the event, and the benefits that it brings. 97% of traders said that they

would have a presence at the RWS in 2015. Only six individual traders said that they would not be at the 2015 event, stating that the RWS did not meet their expectations or that it was too expensive to attend.

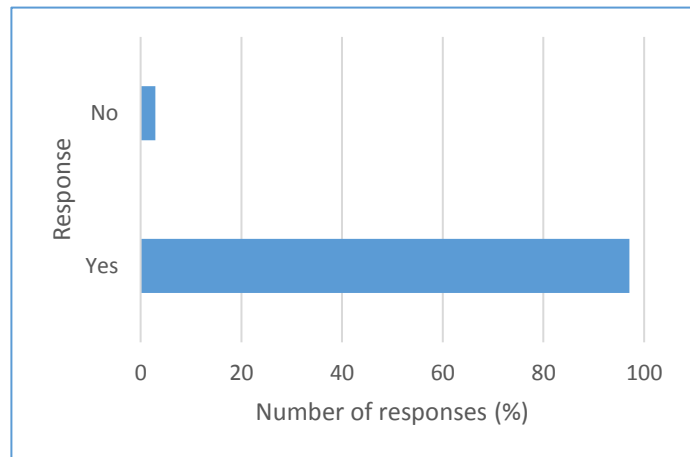


Figure 50: Do you intend on having a presence at the 2015 RWS?

It has been remarked that the success of the RWS cannot be based on the four days at Llanelwedd, attending the event is as much about profile building as it is sales/enquiries. These traders say that it is only six months after the event, that they will know if their presence at the RWS has been a success. By attending the RWS, traders also pick up a loyal customer base. One business reports that they see a year on year increase in sales and importantly for them, they have generated a following of customers who seek them out each year to make repeat purchases.

For Joules Clothing the RWS is the most important agricultural event of the year, it does not attract as large of an audience as some of the non-agricultural events that they attend but it generates the largest turnover for the organisation. The RWS sees a 20% greater turnover than the Great Yorkshire Show (the nearest competitor). When compared to the most lucrative event of the year for Joules, the Badminton Horse Trails, for which the organisation also provides the official clothing, the RWS takes approximately 70% of the turnover of that event. As such the RWS is the most important event of the year for the sale of the Joules branded goods.

The definition of success for a business at the RWS is entirely context specific, for a retailer or commercial enterprise success may be judged purely on the number of sales or numbers of people passing through their stands. However, for charitable organisations it may only take one person to come forward to seek assistance in order for the RWS to be considered as a success:

“We met with and discussed our work with many thousands of visitors. It will only take one request for help, for this to have been a huge success for us.” (Trader Survey, Help for Heroes).

According to David Walters, former Chief Executive of the RWAS many first-time exhibitors are shocked at how busy they are at the RWS:

“I remember, cup-cakes I think they were, there was a company that exhibited in the Food Hall for the first time about four years ago now probably, I said to them, this was at the end of day one ‘what sort of day have you had?’, ‘I can’t believe it he said, we thought we’d brought enough stock for two days, and we’ve gone through the whole lot’. So, there was a mad scramble back home, wherever that was, in the Valleys somewhere to get all these cakes produced for the following day, it summed it all up as far as I was concerned. ‘So, you’ll be here next year?’ ‘too true’ that sort of thing”. (Interview, David Walters, 27/11/15)

If a business is selling a product that is wanted and desired by the customers at the RWS, they have a captive audience and they are able to make a success of their time at the event, as demonstrated by David’s story. A story which is familiar for many exhibitors at the RWS.

The main reason given by the traders for their continued presence at the RWS is based upon their previous successes at the event. The Show provides an opportunity to connect with the farming community, as well as the wider general public. For many it is the biggest and most significant event that they attend and they would not want to be seen as missing the RWS, if they did their customers would be asking questions about the prosperity and future of their business.

7.2.4 – A wider network?

For many of the businesses that attend the RWS (86%) the event is just one event that they attend as part of a wider show circuit. With respondents stating that they attend other agricultural shows,

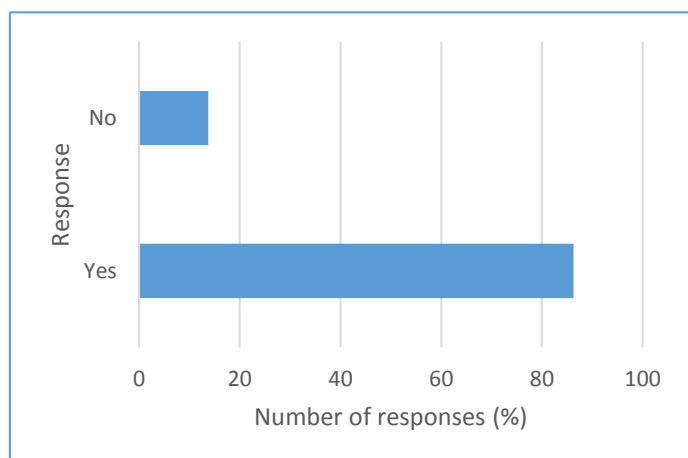


Figure 51: Do you attend other events that are similar to the RWS?

horse events, game fairs, and specialist trade events. With those businesses operating primarily in Wales attending the National, International, and Urdd Eisteddfodau, as well as the other events that are held by the RWS.

For the vast majority of businesses at the Show, the RWS is the most important annual event that they will attend. One respondent states that the RWS is “in a league of its own” when compared to other events, and tends to generate far more leads and interest. However, as another trader remarked, the benefits gained from the RWS is reflected in the price charged to attend.

On a personal level, many traders have stated that the RWS is their favourite event that they attend, with the diversity of the visitors making the event unique. For the traders, the fact that the RWS is as much of a social event as it is a business event is an important aspect, as it means that they are relaxing, and enjoying themselves whilst conducting their business. One trader, Timber Treasures, a gift retailer stated:

“I have said this before and will say again: It is the best Show I do and I am proud to be a small part of it. I will remember my days spent on the Stand there as amongst the happiest of my life I am sure.” (Timber Treasures, Trader Survey).

7.2.5 – Summary

For the business community, the RWS provides the “lifeline” (interview Leigh Gosson, 20/7/15) between businesses and the Welsh rural community. The Show enables businesses to reach that proportion of customers that they might not get the chance to interact on a regular basis, due to distance or the rurality of the customers. The RWS facilitates connections between businesses and customers that might not be able to happen unless that business attends the RWS, opening up new markets and securing existing customers.

However, for some of the agricultural traders in particular, the value of the RWS has decreased in recent years, according to Robert Pugh²⁹ this is mainly due to the growth

²⁹ Robert Pugh is one of the Directors of RVW Pugh LTD, a farm machinery dealer with three depots in mid Wales and the Borders.

of specialist event such as LAMMA or Grass and Muck targeted specifically at farmers³⁰. Where they can see a wider variety of machinery, and this machinery in use. Due to these events having a more specialised audience, they tend to offer a greater return on investment to manufacturers and dealers compared to the RWS (Jones, 2016). Holloway (2004) identified that many agricultural traders were questioning their attendance at agricultural shows. With this debate still ongoing thirteen years since publication, and the continued commitment of agricultural traders to the RWS, it demonstrates the strength of the RWAS brand and how despite the economic benefits for agricultural traders declining, it is still a highly significant shop window for them and the wider industry.

In the 2014 trader survey, one anonymous trader stated that they attend “one or two local shows but they don’t compare really, it’s like comparing Manchester United to a local league”, and as testified in interview by Ros Roberts, for traders there is “no comparison” (interview, Ros Roberts, 27/7/15) to being at the RWS. Many businesses have reduced their time that they spend at agricultural shows due to tough economic conditions, however they continue to attend the RWS. Besides from the perceived economic benefits of being at the event, this is for a variety of the reasons, firstly the fact that the event is held over four days means that they can cover the cost of setting up and recovering the stand can be diluted over a longer period of time. Secondly, the event can be seen as the shop window for rural Wales, and finally many businesses are expected to be there by their customers.

One concern identified by Holloway (2004) was the desire of show managers to ensure that agricultural traders remain at the event in order to maintain the agricultural flavour of the show. This has been a concern for the RWAS, they do not want the agricultural content of the event to diminish, and as such they ensure that a minimum of 60% of businesses at the show operate within or service the agricultural

³⁰ These specialist events have also lead to a decline in what could be called the ‘pure’ agricultural content of traditional agricultural shows, however they (including the RWS) have seen a rise in other aspects that are pertinent in the countryside today. For example, there has been an increase in diversification related businesses, conservation, renewable energy, and recreation, demonstrating the cultural shift in the wider industry.

sector. Unlike some agricultural shows, the RWS remains primarily an agricultural event, but with a secondary role in promoting a positive image of agriculture to a wider audience. Today's RWS is all encompassing, but this has not come at a detriment to its agricultural core.

7.3 – Knowledge exchange and the Royal Welsh Show

7.3.1 – Rural Trust

As identified in the literature review (see Chapter Two), for any rural change to occur, trust must be present, and without trust, no social networks are able to flourish (Trigilla, 2001). This section will briefly introduce the level of trust that is currently present in rural Wales in order for knowledge exchange to take place, from the farmer's point of view. Chapter Eight will continue this theme but with more of a focus on the political aspect of trust and social capital.

Recently unpopular Common Agricultural Policy reforms, changes to the Basic Payment Schemes and debates surrounding Bovine Tuberculosis have seen relationships between farmers and Welsh Government become strained with many of the arguments getting very personal. Many practising farmers do not agree with actions that are being taken by the Welsh Government and they feel let down and betrayed by their policies. One farmer testifies:

“I don't trust them a lot, because what they're trying to do to agriculture, particularly in my case, up in the hills, is ruin it at the moment. They're cutting my subsidy, on my hill area about 1300 feet, they're cutting it by 90% and I don't think you can trust a government that does that.” (Interview, Tom Evans, 8/5/14).

With another stating:

“They don't like farmers anyway. They can't bare us; they are only there to care about Cardiff.” (Interview, Ian Rees, 4/8/15).

Due to the personal and home-based nature of agriculture in Wales, many farming businesses are run from the dining room table (Sligo and Massey, 2007), and as a consequence, farmer's business, personal lives, and their associated networks often

overlap. Combined with devolution in Wales this means that farmers are very close to the policymakers, and one phrase that is often used is that “in Wales, you are only a few steps away from the Minister” (interview, Helen Ovens, 19/5/14). Relationships between farmers and the Welsh Government are very strained, with many rumours, accusations, and counter-accusations spreading across rural Wales. According to the FUW, some farmers have “reached breaking point in their frustration that politicians, civil servants and the EU are not listening to what they’ve been saying” (Jones, 2014) and feel that something has to change within the industry.

“It takes a lot for the industry to really rebel. We’re not in France, the industry wants there to be trust, they want to trust government, they really do. I think they are in a position that they are really uncomfortable in, they don’t feel they can, and it ends up resorting in a personalised diatribe against an individual... I think it is a real angst for the industry in general.” (Interview, Helen Ovens, 19/5/14).

For many, this lack of trust with the Welsh Government stemmed from one individual, the former Minister for Natural Resources and Food, Alun Davies:

“What I think hurt the Welsh Government the most was Alun Davies. He was spectacular, wasn’t he? Towards the end of his reign before he got fired or moved on, he was a gift for us at Farmers Guardian, we did interviews with him, where he was saying how he didn’t care what farmers think.” (Interview, Ben Briggs, 7/8/15).

This particular Minister did significant damage to the level of trust that farmers held with the Welsh Government, there was a perception within the industry that he did not care about the farmers and those he was supposed to be supporting. According to Ben Briggs “he become very arrogant where he stood” (interview Ben Briggs, 7/8/15). As a result, the relationship between the farmers and the Minister became very confrontational, which was not enjoyed by the farmers, it eroded trust and ultimately caused the downfall of Alun Davies.

This erosion of trust between Welsh Government and farmers, has placed farmers in a position that they feel uncomfortable with, farmers wanting more from the Government and particularly the portfolio holder for agriculture, wanting their support to help drive the industry forward.

“There is a general perception that this Government doesn’t have an empathy with the industry, there’s a feeling that it is a Government that is distant from rural Wales, look at where Labours representation is, they are not heavily represented in rural Wales... But really it is a party that doesn’t represent rural Wales, and I think the agriculture industry feels that. Again, back to this business of the government and its role in my view, it should be about leading the industry, I don’t think there is a feeling from the industry that this government is doing that.” (Interview, Rhun ap Iorwerth, 2/12/15).

A number of interviewees stated that they felt that relationships between farmers and the Welsh Government were at an all-time low, and these have been exacerbated by wider market conditions.

“Tensions are running high, because of low prices whether that be in the milk sector or in the lamb sector. When prices are as low as that, and when people are concerned about cash flow, therefore any potential threat to payments being made when the window opens in December is difficult, but the basis on which those payments are going to be made is a source of real concern to many. So, I think at the moment, things are not great, probably haven’t been this bad for a while.” (Interview, Kirsty Williams, 5/8/2015).

Since this lack of trust now exists between farmers and the Welsh Government, it will be very hard to rebuild, both parties must make a conscience effort in order to negotiate with each other in order to secure a sustainable future for Welsh agriculture. Curry and Fisher (2012), found that rural people have long memories both in terms of personal and system trust, once trust has been lost in a person or organisation it can never really be completely restored, this is presently the case between the practising farmers and the Welsh Government. Due to this erosion of trust, it is unlikely that farmers will act upon information from the Welsh Government even when it is in their best interest (Fisher, 2013).

However, in personal communication with members of the FUW Presidential team it has been stated that “despite sometimes being on different sides, there is an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect” (personal communication, Emyr Jones, 11/3/15). At the time of writing the rural affairs portfolio is under the title Deputy Minister for Farming and Food, a title of which has not helped with trust and communication between farmers and the Welsh Government. Some see it as being that the “Welsh Government don’t even think that agriculture is worthy of a full place

around the Ministerial table” (interview, Chris Davies, 21/10/15). The fact that agriculture, an industry that is vital to Wales does not have a full seat around the ministerial table has led to some thinking that the Welsh Government does not value the industry in the manner that it should. This has been a contributing factor to the lack of trust that those in the industry have in the Welsh Government. Those within the agriculture sector feel that the Welsh Government do not listen to them or their needs, and that they are not represented in the manner that they should be.

In order for the Welsh agricultural industry to be a success farmers and the Welsh Government should be working together, and a trusting relationship needs to be formed between the two parties, and as seen will be seen in this chapter and Chapter Eight, the RWS has a role in building this trust. As stated previously this chapter will briefly give an overview of the trust that is required for successful knowledge exchange.

7.3.2 – Trust building at the RWS

The title of this Section may be a little ambiguous, as addressed in the literature review trust is a very much a complex and contested term, it does not exist in a vacuum, and is very much context specific. Here I will briefly discuss the general role that the RWS has in building trust between different groups of farmers, their suppliers, and other key rural actors. The development of system/institutional trust will not be discussed here, but rather in Chapter Eight.

This role of the RWS in facilitating the development of trust between different actors is a role that is recognised throughout rural Wales. Steve Hughson the Chief Executive of the RWAS states that he sees the Show as a “honest broker” (interview, 24/4/14), whereby the Show acts as an independent body facilitating individuals and organisations in coming together to negotiate trust, leading to agricultural development and rural change.

The RWS enables those within the agricultural sector to get the full picture of what is going on within the wider industry. At this moment in time agriculture is going through a period of great change, and the RWS has an influential role in facilitating conversations around this change, enabling farmers to get a wider understanding of this change and some of the reasons behind it. Farmers are able to speak to all key stakeholders on one site, in a concentrated manner giving them greater understanding. This increased understanding leads to increased trust between these different stakeholder groups.

Due to there being a very low level of system trust in Wales at this present time, there is a high level of trust between the members of the farming community, they have been seeking solidarity with one another in the face of changing political and market circumstances (Curry and Fisher, 2012). The fact that farmers in Wales are all facing the same circumstances, has given them a shared bond, something to fight against, which has in turn allowed them to generate a high level of social capital (Koutsou *et al.*, 2014).

Given that Curry and Fisher (2012) have stated that for trusting relationships to be developed in rural communities it can take many years, the fact that the RWS is an annual event in the farming calendar means that people return to the RWS annual basis cementing these relationships, and over time strong friendships will form, leading to an increased level of rural social capital.

By facilitating the development of this social capital, the RWS is facilitating the development of trust between different actors in rural Wales, stabilising relationships, and creating an environment that is conducive to learning, innovation, and productivity (Murphy, 2006).

7.3.3 – Knowledge Exchange

The RWS brings together the Welsh Government, businesses, farmers and other key rural actors on one site facilitating discussions, and allows the industry to move

forward with one shared goal. These conversations, formal and informal, allow for trust to be built, leading to innovation and driving the industry forward.

The RWS is a key site for knowledge transfer within rural Wales. The coming together of different actors at the RWS facilitates knowledge exchange to take place between the product developers, field advisors, and the farmers. This enables a participatory multilateral knowledge transfer process to emerge and for new skills to be adopted throughout the rural communities.

At the RWS there are distinct horizontal and vertical interactions that can lead to the transformation of the countryside, these are summarised in Figure 53.



Figure 52: Summary of the key horizontal and vertical interactions that take place at the RWS.

7.3.3.1 – Horizontal knowledge exchange

Horizontal interactions occur between the farmers at the event. By walking around the Show and viewing various livestock entries and talking with other farmers, knowledge is exchanged in a way that farmers know and trust.

The Royal Welsh Agricultural Show is such an effective site for horizontal knowledge exchange, due to the fact that much of the knowledge transfer occurs subconsciously.

“It is learning by osmosis at the Royal Welsh, you don’t even know that you are learning sometimes, because it is a chat and you see something that you like and you know you go and you say, ‘why’d you do that?’, and someone will say ‘well we did this last year and it didn’t work, we did this, this time and it was fantastic” (Interview, Hazel Wright, 19/5/14).

The fact that much of the learning at the RWS is done passively makes the event a unique knowledge transfer event. Unlike traditional knowledge transfer activities whereby interested parties visit a location with a specific purpose to learn, the learning that is done at the RWS is done so as a by-product of the farmer having a fun and interesting day out. The RWS brings knowledge transfer to the farmers, farmers are able to learn from each other and gain new skills from one another, through attending an event that they would normally attend.

The event is not only important for horizontal knowledge exchange, but also as a reassurance event for farmer, reassuring them that they are not alone in any difficulties that they might face:

“You’re always learning something off another farmer, you realise that it’s not only you that has got problems, everyone has dead sheep, dead cows, and when you talk to other farmers it is a bit like therapy really. You know you think that it is only you that has problems”. (Interview, Ian Rees, 4/8/15).

This helps in the development of trust and creates a shared sense of solidarity between the farmers at the event. Farmers typically share best practice through discussions and informal meetings with key rural actors that they trust (Fisher, 2013), the relationships that develop at the RWS help to facilitate this highly social learning process. As such the knowledge transfer at the RWS is effective at encouraging the adoption of new techniques, which drives rural change, and allows farmers to remain competitive.

The Show brings together over 1000 businesses, many of whom will be competitors, and will not speak on a regular basis. Attending the RWS allows these businesses to

compare their products to that of their competitors, which can lead to innovation within the industry.

7.3.3.2 – Vertical knowledge exchange

As displayed in Figure 53, the RWS also facilitates vertical interactions between key rural actors and members of the farming community. These interactions between farmers, suppliers, Welsh Government and other advisors take place throughout the event and occur in both planned and unplanned circumstances.

The RWS brings together actors from across the world, many of which have a shared interest but do not communicate on a regular basis, and as such the event provides opportunities for new knowledge exchange platforms to be established. Due to the nature of the event visitors are surrounded by a thick web of agricultural knowledge, which is hard to ignore and as such even the most passive of visitors who do not wish to engage in any sort of exchange activities will take something home from the event.

For farmers, the RWS brings a chance to view the latest agricultural innovations, both in terms of machinery and livestock breed development. Farmers are able to see what others are doing, giving them ideas to take back with them to their own farms, and they are able to get assurance that what they are doing is in line with the rest of the industry. This role of the Show has become increasingly important due to the isolation that faces the modern-day farming industry.

“You walk around there and look at new things and think well that might work in my case and try it out. And the same with the people selling drenches and injections and all that sort of thing, they bring new products onto the market and that’s the place to go and see it... you talk to people at the Show and they can explain to you the way it works and one thing and another”. (Interview, Tom Evans, 8/5/14).

Simply by walking around the Show and viewing the exhibits, farmers are able to see the latest innovations within the industry, discuss their own requirements with sales people, and to also hear from other farmers about their own experiences. All of which can help to drive innovation within the industry.

It is perhaps the informal conversations that are facilitated by the RWS that are the most important element of the knowledge exchange that occurs at the Show. These conversations are vital for both social and business purposes, farmers have a real passion for their work, and they are often happy to share their stockmanship techniques with other farmers. Many farmers see this as being one of the most exciting aspects of the Show, and members of the older generation particularly like to share their knowledge. Farmers understand that the RWS is part of their personal development, with one stating “one real benefit is the wide range of ages present – we all have things to teach each other” (Interview, Eleri Price, 20/5/16), demonstrating the value that farmers, young and old place on the RWS. The event is a melting pot for ideas from people of all ages, rural elders are able to teach the new generation traditional farming methods, whilst members of the younger generation may be able to advise upon the latest technological developments. All of which leads to a consolidation of the industry, an increased level of trust, and can therefore lead to innovation, and rural change.

At the RWS farmers are able to view the latest releases from their suppliers, they are able to discover more about their uses, and ask questions about the product. These conversations allow farmers to get a good understanding of the product, and to see if it is right for them. The personal contact between the sales representative and the farmer, may also encourage them to purchase the product.

“You’ll see it in the Farmers Weekly but you, you don’t really know whether it will do what you want, but when you talk to people at the Show and they can explain to you the way it works”. (Interview, Tom Evans, 8/5/14).

By seeing, testing, asking questions and being able to physically hold an item, visitors are able to get a true impression of a product, something that cannot be gleaned by just reading about or viewing a product in the press/online.

These informal, often chance meetings drive rural change, and they are a key aspect of the innovation process of farmers at the RWS. However, there are also more formal innovation projects such as the Tomorrow Today exhibition, which is jointly hosted by

Farming Connect³¹ and the RWS. This exhibition showcases the latest innovations in agriculture to allow for a more efficient and productive industry, this exhibition comprises of traders showing off their latest products, and also formal seminars in order to demonstrate these products. Some of these innovations that have been first demonstrated at the Tomorrow Today exhibition have gone on to take their place on the operational farm.

As a direct result of demonstrating their innovative product at the Tomorrow Today Exhibition a number of products have been launched to market. For example, the Bella Ag Bolus, a chip that is swallowed by a cow and allows their health to be monitored, detecting illness, reducing treatment costs, reducing mortality rates, and increasing production efficiency, and ultimately improving the farmers bottom line. At the 2014 RWS the Bella Ag Bolus won the award for the product which showed the most potential for improving agriculture in Wales, and as a result was offered an exclusive supply contract with Wynnstay Limited (an agricultural supplier). This offer would have never of happened, or at least not as quickly if it was not for the RWS.

A further, less technological example of innovation facilitated by the Tomorrow Today exhibition at the RWS is the introduction of dung beetles onto a number of farms in Wales. Dung Beetles Direct also featured in the exhibition, and the business sells packs of dung beetles, with the aim of naturally fertilising grasslands. The beetles aerate soils and reduce pasture foiling, with the manure from five cattle able to cover an acre in one year. Launching the organisation at the RWS gave the business a large amount of publicity and allowed them to secure a number of orders for the beetles, potentially reducing the reliance of the industry on artificial fertilisers.

The networking opportunities facilitated by the RWS are also vital for long established businesses, at the Show businesses have the opportunity to get feedback from their

³¹ Farming Connect is a Welsh Government and European Union funded programme providing subsidised and online training activities to support continuous professional development, activities to enhance business focus and capacity for farm business management, and a mechanism to enable the measurement and improvement of business performance and competitiveness (Farming Connect, 2016).

customers about their current products, and for Shearwell Data a business where most transactions are completed by mail order the RWS is a vital element of their product innovation process.

“I always have a list from every show, from our customers that have used our software and they’ll say something like ‘why can’t it do this? Why can’t it do that?’” (Interview, Andrew Price, 10/8/15).

The RWS provides an opportunity not only to showcase new products, but to gain feedback on existing products, and improve them, and to ensure greater long-term customer satisfaction. It is farmers who are using the product on a daily basis, and as such they know the product and where it could be improved:

“This year was a guy who had set up his stock recorder to record all the treatments, it would read them all, but then he would come to an animal that hasn’t got a tag or the tag won’t read and he has to retag it. He has to go out of the treatment screen, and into the retag screen and then enter all his treatment details again and start again for the next one you know, and that is a real pain, as soon as he said that to me, I hadn’t thought of that before, so there was a suggestion there. Just have a shortcut to retag on the screens, which we can do and now will be done. I put it past all the software guys and they said that’s doable, that’s a reasonable request.” (Interview, Andrew Price, 10/8/15).

As a direct result of a customer suggestion at the 2015 RWS, Shearwell Data updated the software on their EID readers³², showing the direct role that the Show has in innovation for some businesses. Again, in the case of Shearwell Data, feedback from the RWS leads to direct product change:

“I took it back to the programmers and they said that’s simple, we can do that. It was out there within a month or so on all the new programmes, it was on there. Sometimes these little suggestions are easy, sometimes they are not.” (Interview, Andrew Price, 10/8/15).

However, for the larger organisations the impact on innovation is not as strong, particularly for the machinery dealers. For these businesses, their innovation

³² Since January 1st 2016 all lambs presented for slaughter before 12 months of age at a UK abattoir have had to be identified with an electronic slaughter tag (EID). When read these tags allow the lamb to be traced, and all movements are recorded. In addition, they allow for farmers to electronically monitor their stock, and record all treatments, and details of that individual animals. As such many farmers have purchased EID readers to manage their stock in whilst in the field.

processes tend to happen at specific trade shows, where a specialist audience are present. But, the event does still allow for them to receive feedback from their customers.

The RWS is therefore an important site for both formal and informal learning within rural Wales, not only for individual farmers, but also for businesses and rural elites. Over many years the interactions that are facilitated by the Show enable strong, and often very personal relationships to develop. Once there is a high level of trust, it means that detailed information can be exchanged, enabling complex information flows. These information flows that are facilitated by the RWS often outlast the event itself, and manifest into long term working relationships.

7.3.3.4 – Competition

Competition at the RWS facilitates both horizontal and vertical knowledge exchange, but not only this, the competitions at the event a “central part of the Royal Welsh, it is just like the Eisteddfod with the singing and the competitions” (interview, Elin Jones, 21/8/2015). Without competitions, there would be no RWS. These competitions are very much the centre piece of the RWS with 13% of visitors attending the 2014 event as a result of either directly competing at the Show (8%) or as a result of having family compete at the Show (5%). If were not for the competitive aspect of the event, there would be no RWS.

Livestock competitions were originally a way to promote and improve breeds, animals are judged against their breed standard in order to improve their productivity and to increase agricultural output (Yarwood *et al.*, 2010). Through the showing of animals, and discussion around the winning entries significant improvements were seen in livestock management, husbandry, and breeding. Something that has been identified by many observers:

“It [the RWS] provides excellent competition and can help to raise standards of livestock and competing livestock, and it is really valuable for that purpose.” (Interview, Elin Jones, 21/8/2015).

The competition at the RWS is never static and it changes over time with changing consumer demands. As consumer demands have changed, as have the animals that have entered agricultural shows, these events have always reflected consumer trends. Traditionally the bigger, the fatter the animal the more beautiful it was considered. However, consumers now demand leaner meat that is better suited to their nutritional needs and convenience, as such these days the animals that perform better at agricultural shows tend to be those that have an optimum meat to bone ratio, minimum carcass wastage, and minimum fat cover.



Figure 53: Reserve Beltex Champion Shearing Ram at the 2016 RWS (Wales Online).

Showing is a key component of the wider industry, particularly within the pedigree market. Show prizes and accolades add value to pedigree stock, and show often act as a shop window for herds, flocks and studs in advance of the autumn sales. At agricultural shows farmers display their best animal in return for monetary prizes, and the respect of their peers. For farmers, the viewing of livestock exhibits allows them to see the genetic progress in breeding to be seen, similar to the mechanical innovations that are on display at the event, people can see the betterment in the livestock, and use these innovations in their own farming practices.

“It has influenced betterment as far as livestock exhibits are concerned and genetics... people wish to see genetic progress in the flesh, to touch and feel it, and where better to see it than at the Royal Welsh.” (Interview, John T Davies, 14/10/15).

For larger highly commercial farmers, events such as the RWS are an important marketing tool, they enable farmers to market their livestock to other farmers, and even make sales before the traditional autumn sales. Generally, livestock that win prizes at the RWS (and other agricultural shows) increase in value both for the animal itself and their progeny, gaining a prize at the Show is something that is highly desired, and shows that an animal is a good investment. The same is the case for the horses that are shown at the event.

However, livestock showing is still a very traditional activity, with livestock being judged based purely on looks, showing is also a very highly subjective activity with the best animals the opinion of quite often one human being. With so much value on winning prizes at events such as the RWS recently conversations have turned to the relevance of showing for the modern-day agriculture industry. As Ben Briggs, News and Business Editor for the Farmers Guardian states:

“I wouldn’t buy a car, just because somebody told me it was a nice car, I would want to know what’s its miles per gallon, its performance, and it would be the same with an animal.” (Interview, Ben Briggs, 7/8/15).

Some have called for there to be new elements to the judging of stock, and for performance indices or Estimated Breeding Values (EBVs), to be used. This view is something that is increasingly gaining prominence in the farming press, and is subject to regular debates in the Farmers Weekly and Farmers Guardian, as well as featuring in the recent Nuffield Farming Report by Jones (2016). Jones states that the modern-day show animal is not an accurate reflection of commercial livestock, as despite the changes in breeding techniques and consumer demands, it is still large, muscular, and highly manicured animals that take prominence at these events.

“If I was running a commercial sheep flock, would I buy the tup that happened to win at the Royal Welsh, I don’t know I would, I would be looking at EBVs, I’d be looking at breeding plans and stuff like that, I would be looking at how I can maximise it. Not the fact that it has nice eyes, nice ears, or that somebody I

don't know has judged in an arbitrary fashion that it is the top animal."
(Interview, Ben Briggs, 7/8/15).

At the 2015 British Cattle Breeding Conference Tom Gubbins an Australian beef farmer urged British farmers to "ditch showing" to allow them to become more competitive against the highly efficient white meat industry (Price, 2015a). Gubbins is of the opinion that choosing stock by eye is holding the industry back, and that performance and genetic data must be used in order to make objective decisions. Following these comments, a poll run by the Farmers Weekly suggests that 54.98% of people agree that livestock showing is holding back genetic progress (sample of 311 Farmers Weekly readers) (Price, 2015b).

In recent years' technology has become a crucial element of farming, as such new performance indices have emerged, such as EBVs. These have been widely promoted in the sheep and cattle industry as a means of making better breeding decisions. EBVs have introduced scientific and evidential data to the traditional practice of selecting breeding matches solely on visual assessment and knowledge of bloodlines. They also give measurements of genetic potential based on a number of traits such as ease of breeding, growth, and carcass qualities (Jones, 2016).

Within the industry there is a disconnect between the animals that excel at shows and those that make money on the commercial market. Agricultural shows are being increasingly criticised for being detached from modern agriculture. Show livestock is seen as not accurately reflecting the demands of the consumer, and as such do not represent commercial livestock. The prize winners at agricultural shows tend to be large muscular and highly manicured, for many within the agriculture industry, showing has become a profession in itself. Although the animals that are shown at these events are not perhaps commercially relevant, agricultural shows have a vital role in the marketing of the industry to a wider audience.

A discussion piece in the Farmers Weekly (Price, 2015b) calls for a balanced approach to judging livestock taking into account EBVs and the traditional by eye approach, as

important elements such as the pedigree, the bloodlines and breed characteristics are not recorded on EBVs. In this article James Evans, a beef farmer from Shropshire states that in his view “showing has got no relevance in modern day beef production”, he believes that it should be seen as more of a hobby than a commercial venture. He believes that animals that are shown are not animals that are fit for the modern-day cattle industry, the traits that make a good show animal, are not those that are proven for contemporary profitable beef production. Prys Morgan, Head of Operations at Hybu Cig Cymru suggests that the RWS should introduce “evidence based classes looking at Estimated Breeding Values” (interview, Prys Morgan, 3/8/15), and believes that an opportunity exists to make showing classes more commercially relevant.

The Farmers Weekly article very much concluded that agricultural shows are very much a shop window for promoting and selling animals, they see the events as a chance to showcase their stock to both other farmers and the general public, one of the most important roles of agricultural shows is to educate the next generation (both farmers and non-farmers) about livestock (Ibid). In the 'From the Editor' section in the Farmers Guardian, Ben Briggs (who was interviewed as part of this research) remarked that the nature of farm breeding technology is changing the game when it comes to agricultural shows, they still have a key role in communicating the values of the industry to a wider audience (Briggs, 2016).

Compared to other nations, the UK is falling behind when it comes to the inclusion of EBVs in the judging at agricultural shows, as part of his research Jones (2016) visited 20 agricultural shows across 11 countries, he reported that in New Zealand and Australia, they have gone more performance-focused in their judging and utilise the EBVs, whilst the UK still tend to usual a visual appraisal in their breeding decisions. To quote Jones (2016) “no farmer wants a field of excellent figures, but animals that look like a bag of Liquorice Allsorts. Nor can a farmer expect to buy genetics which will produce the perfect commercial animal without maintaining the skills of good husbandry and stockmanship” (Ibid: 19). In order to ensure that the RWS remains innovative there will be a need to include the latest genetic measurements in their judging, safeguarding the commercial relevance of the event.

Referring back to the UK and the RWS, there is a perception within the industry that it is not just the animal that is being judged at agricultural shows, it is as much the showmanship, as it is the quality of the beast itself:

“Quite a few people who would say that half of it is having a good animal and the other half is the showmanship about how they present it, you know”.
(Interview, Prys Morgan, 3/8/15).

The showmanship is a crucial element of not just the performance of the RWS, but also for knowledge exchange/education, by observing and talking to other preparing their animals for the event, farmers are learning the latest husbandry techniques and often learning new skills, which they later use themselves. For the uninitiated, people preparing their animals for show provide quite the sight:

“An old couple were showing their prize bull, and she was at one end, kind of cleaning it with this cloth, he was at the other end with this kind of Hoover contraption, hoovering a bull, watching them both at work. It is amazing isn't it, it is exactly the same as you'll see with fellas and their cars. The same pride, the same affection, the same enthusiasm really”. (Interview, Mike Parker, 13/8/15).

It is not unusual to see cattle outside their sheds, being washed and prepared for the Show, and this openness of the preparation techniques allows for this knowledge to be shared throughout all the visitors to the RWS.



Figure 54: Cattle being cleaned prior to showing at the 2016 RWS (Wales Online).

The enthusiasm that people have for their livestock and presenting them to the highest standard is unparalleled, and although showing is essentially a business activity by competing at the Show exhibitors share a sense of impassioned mood, intensity of feeling and passionate dedication (Geoghegan, 2013). Although there has been acknowledgement by some that the industrial significance of showing livestock is diminishing, the social element, and the role that showing has the wider wellbeing of farmers is still crucial, as Ben Briggs points out:

“I think there is a huge social element to it, so it is bringing people together, it is bringing that competition, that kind of rivalry, and I think that people enjoy that, even if the commercial relevance of it, slowly I believe, is kind of sliding slightly out of view.” (Interview Ben Briggs, 7/8/15).

For Jones (2016), livestock showing is still relevant, but there is a disconnect between the animals that excel on the show circuit and those that commercially make money for the farmer. Perhaps the importance of livestock showing today is not so much for the commercial farmer but rather for the general public, showing of livestock promotes the agriculture industry and inspires confidence in the consumers. That said without the RWS, and its livestock classes the Welsh livestock industry would not be as strong or as successful as it is today. To quote David Walters, former Chief Executive of the RWAS “a lot of people who breed livestock will admit that they owe a lot to the Show really, picking up that red ticket, and it goes from there really. The value of the stock increases” (interview, David Walters, 27/11/15).

Showing of livestock has an important educational role for members of the public. Things such as nose rings and pig boards may be seen by some members of the public as being cruel, but it gives that opportunity to show how these things should be done properly without harming the animal. As discussed in further detail in Chapter Five, the commentators at the RWS have a key role, not just to keep proceedings in order, but to also explain the agriculture industry to the public, providing a key link and understanding.

Although they are arguably the most important element of any agricultural show, it is not just the animals that play a significant role in the RWS, there are competitions for

almost every aspect of rural life, from baking to butchery, to floristry, and farriery, in addition to the RWS Food Hall showcasing the best of Welsh food and drink. Similar to the findings of Henryks and others (2016) entering these competitions leads to an increased recognition for the brand/individual, with achievements being recognised through the award of rosettes, certificates, and monetary prizes.

It is often the case that the direct monetary prize for winning a competitive class at the RWS does not cover the cost of travel to the showground, or for producing the product. However, through competing at the event businesses are able to gain invaluable marketing and exposure.

The Food Hall at the RWS is quite unique, as it allows the exhibitors to compete with their products alongside selling their goods³³, this enables businesses to sell their produce, alongside promoting them for longer term business benefits. Awards at agricultural shows are seen to set quality benchmarks, and provide a third-party endorsement of the product, allowing for a confirmation of quality. This can increase the stature of the product/service and therefore the retail price of the product/service, whilst also generating brand and produce recognition.

The prizes awarded at the RWS act as a badge of external recognition for the business, and are seen by consumers (and perhaps more importantly wholesale organisations) as an independent arbitrator of the quality of the product. As found in studies around wine awards, receiving an award at the RWS is able to be used as a marketing vehicle by the producer (Allen and Germov, 2010). Typically, the fact that these awards have been won will take pride of place on the marketing of the produce, with the RWS logo appearing on the product, and on the associated product website. During the RWS, the media will also cover these awards, bringing further marketing and free advertising for the business.

³³ The Food Hall at the RWS is where registered food and drink producers, exhibit and compete with their products. Individuals compete with their homemade produce in the South Glamorgan Exhibition Hall.

Winning a category at the RWS can also assist consumers in being able to make an informed choice in what is an increasingly crowded marketplace (Lockshin *et al.*, 2009), consumers recognise the link between an award at an agricultural show and product quality (Henryks *et al.*, 2016), and as such they are more likely to purchase goods that have this third-party recognition of high standards.

Caws Teifi Cheese, an artisan cheese producer from Llandysul, Ceredigion, have won five Gold Awards including the Best Welsh Cheese and Supreme Champion Cheese at the 2015 RWS. As with many of prize winners at the event, they have included these awards as part of their marketing plan, the awards have also lead to them receiving a large amount of press coverage, and they have anecdotally revealed that they have received an increase in sales as a result of these awards.



Figure 55: Caws Teifi Cheese with the Best Welsh Cheese trophy and Supreme Champion Cup at the RWS. Also note the previous awards being used for marketing purposes in the background (Welsh Country).

For those within the food and drink sector, the RWS is a particularly valuable event, with a Welsh Government study showing that sales worth £1.4 million can be directly attributed to business relationships created at the RWS (Business Wales, 2016).

The RWS gives the chance for those competing at the event to demonstrate their products to both individuals and traders, for some businesses this brings the chance to sign trade deals with many national organisations. For example, at the 2015 event Llaeth y Llan and Puffin Produce were both able to secure deals with the Co-Operative Food supermarket on the basis of a relationship that was started as a result of their presence at the RWS. The desire to win an award at the RWS provides an incentive for producers to improve the quality standards of their products, allowing them to become established within the market, attending the RWS also allows businesses to get an idea of how their products compare to that of their competitors, both in terms of quality and presentation. Allowing them to see best practice, and to apply this to their own products, developing their business further.

These findings are similar to that of Henryks and others (2016), in that exhibiting and winning awards at the event, allows producers to market their products in such a way as to influence consumer perceptions in a crowded marketplace, which adds brand differentiation at the point of purchase. This marketing combined and the gate keeping role that awards bring means that as was the case with Llaeth y Llan and Puffin Produce, awards achieved at the RWS help to get products onto the supermarket shelves, and to expand into new previously unexplored marketplaces.

Similar to results of previous studies (Henryks *et al.*, 2016; Yarwood *et al.*, 2010) competing at the RWS is seen as being prestigious, and gaining an award at the Show whether it be for livestock, food produce, or tree felling signifies the quality and excellence of products/services and provides an independent recognition of high standards. In addition to these individual prizes, organisations are able to win prizes, for example there are competitions for various categories of tradestands, and innovative business practice. It would be unpractical to name all these competitions here, but competition covers all aspects of rural life and far beyond. By winning a competition at the RWS, businesses are able to gain a unique niche in their market, enhancing their brand image and recognition on a national scale.

The RWS is an independent organisation, and as much as it will not show fear or favour to any political party, it also shows no fear or favour to any commercial organisation or individual. Due to this independence of the RWS, similar to what Henryks and others (2006) found in the Australian context, the RWS can be seen as an independent benchmarking tool, something that is not tainted by marketing companies or any bias. Classes are only judged by industry leaders, to a clear and set criteria, meaning only the very best of the industry is able to win a prize at the event. Again, as with the work of Henryks and others (2016), this study does not have any specific economic or sales figures, but it is anecdotally known that consumers react positively to products that have won awards, and as such an increase in sales is witnessed.

The RWS allows exhibitors to evaluate their products against that of their competitors, to get feedback from industry experts (the judges) and to get feedback from current, and future potential customers. This feedback is something that is considered to be a crucial element of the market research process enabling feedback to be gained on newly launched products, or even before they are launched, bringing with it a further opportunity to develop products, and for knowledge to be shared in both a horizontal and vertical manner. Although there is a feeling that consumers respect RWS awards. There is a desire from some that there should be a campaign to raise awareness of the significance of the prizes, to develop consumer recognition of the prizes and the RWS. Some have suggested that there could be some form of education programme developed surrounding that the judging process in order to further increase the value of awards, and to ensure that they are recognised as signifiers of quality amongst a wider public audience. That said manufacturers and retailers have an understanding of the RWAS awards, and they have been used by many businesses to assist them in their pursuits. For many businesses, the RWS awards are a gatekeeper to bigger things.

7.3.3.4 – Society Awards

It is not just the top-class animals, machinery and produce that receive awards at the RWS. As mentioned in Section 4.3, on an annual basis the RWAS gives out a number of

awards to individuals covering all aspects of the Welsh agricultural industry. As well as recognising the contribution that individuals and organisation have made to Society and to rural Wales these awards are a key element to the agricultural and rural knowledge exchange systems that exist within Wales.



Figure 56: Tom Evans receiving the award of Life Governor of the RWAS from David Morgan, RWAS President 2015 (Ruth Rees Photography).

It is the other awards (a selection are listed in Section 4.3) that contribute to the knowledge exchange activities of the Society. The Society recognises the contribution that higher education makes to the industry, with awards recognising the achievements of higher educational standards and the formal knowledge exchange mechanisms that exist within the nation.

There are a number of awards at the RWS specifically for younger farmers, in order to support them to develop themselves, and to support their entrance into agricultural industry. Steve Hughson sees these awards as being a key element of the Society's role in investing in the future of the industry:

“We are committed to encouraging and supporting education and research within the agriculture and land based industries in Wales. This is part of our continued investment in young people as a key element of our future Society, ensuring that our rural industries continue to improve and benefit from research and learning”. (Interview, Steve Hughson, 14/12/15).

The recipients of most sought after awards, the Sir Bryner Jones Memorial Award, the Dr Emrys Evans Award, and the John Gittins Memorial Award (presented at the RWWF) are all nominated for by the 14 Royal Welsh Advisory Committees. Giving everyone across Wales an equal chance of receiving the award, and echoing the mantra of the RWAS being a member's organisation where every individual has a voice. This process in itself allows for knowledge exchange, as those members of the Advisory Committees will be discussing the latest innovations and best practice, allowing for these ideas to be spread throughout the membership of the RWAS.

A condition of receiving an award at the RWS is to write a report for the Journal of the RWAS, which as previously mentioned is distributed to over 21,000 members. This therefore allows best practice to spread throughout rural Wales (and far beyond), bringing with it a lasting legacy, far beyond the week of the Show itself. That said, as will be discussed in the following section, it is the temporary nature of the RWS which enables it to facilitate knowledge exchange in such a unique way.

These awards are not only a huge personal achievement for their recipients, but for businesses they can aid them economically. However similar to the findings of Henryks and others (2016) more needs to be done to market these to enable their recipients to truly benefit and for the RWAS to be recognised as facilitating knowledge exchange and innovation within the industry.

Drawing further on the work of Henryks and others (2016), it can be said that the RWAS awards bring with it an incentive for people (businesses, individuals, and students) to improve the quality of their practices, in order to be eligible for recognition. Candidates also receive feedback on their nominations, allowing for improvement in practices, and fostering a culture on innovation.

Through the awards, the RWAS is demonstrating that it is more than a show. In line with its founding principles and charitable objectives the RWAS are supporting the next generation of agriculture, whilst recognising and respecting those who have given

much of their lives to driving innovation within the industry, or to making a contribution to wider rural Wales.

7.3.4 – Summary

The RWS facilitates knowledge exchange between varying different actors in both planned and unplanned circumstances, formal and informal circumstances. A role that has been essential to the event since its inception in 1904. This knowledge can be exchanged by people either actively competing in the event seeking out information, or as a result of them simply attending the Show. This section has introduced the various methods of which the RWS can facilitate knowledge exchange, the remainder of the Chapter will theorise the RWS as a temporary cluster, before discussing and introducing rural buzz.

7.4 – A temporary cluster?

As a result of the trust that is developed at the RWS, the fact that vast amounts of knowledge is exchanged, on an enclosed site, for a temporary period of time means that the event can be seen as a temporary knowledge cluster (Maskell *et al.*, 2006). By its very nature the RWS provides a meeting point for key rural actors, providing potential partners with a position of proximity, which enables them to come into contact with one another, and for knowledge to be exchanged (Rychen and Zimmermann, 2008).

For those involved within the agriculture industry, the RWS provides a rare opportunity for them to get together in celebration of the industry. Throughout the four days of the Show there are both formal and informal opportunities for knowledges exchange. The fact that the knowledge exchange at the RWS happens in a short lived and intensified form means that these events can be seen as a temporary cluster within a rural setting. Firstly, many large organisations that operate in rural Wales use the RWS as an opportunity to hold formal receptions for their customers and business contacts. This provides a chance for farmers (who are often isolated) and others within the industry, to meet and share the latest agricultural innovations. One

example of this is Innovis (a sheep breeding technology business) who hold an annual formal reception for their clients:

“Innovis does a cheese and wine evening, and that is very informal talk where everyone hears what problems they’ve got; what good things are happening... It is just handy for farmers to talk to other farmers, because where else would they get that opportunity. We don’t” (Interview, Eleri Price, 20/5/14).

The proximity created within formal events such as those held by Innovis, enable contacts to be made, conversations to be had and for knowledge to be exchanged vertically (Rychen and Zimmermann, 2008).

Secondly, through its social nature, the Show provides informal opportunities for farmers to speak with other farmers (horizontal knowledge exchange); and this is often done by viewing and commenting on livestock entries or the latest mechanical innovations. Due to the nature of these informal conversations, the knowledge exchange is often reciprocal and the farmers are willing to share information both with other farmers, and the general public without expecting anything in return. Through this informal knowledge exchange process, farmers do not realise that they are gaining knowledge at the RWS which can enhance their own business practices:

“It is learning by osmosis at the Royal Welsh, you don’t even know that you are learning sometimes, because it is a chat and you see something that you like and you know you go and you say, ‘why’d you do that?’” (Interview, Hazel Wright, 19/5/14).

The learning that occurs at the RWS is done so as a by-product of the farmer having a fun and interesting day out, as discussed previously the primary reason for people visiting the Show is for a day out or holiday, but they are still able to gain new knowledge, influencing their business practices often many months after the event:

“I know of locally where what people have learnt at the Royal Welsh have influenced some changes, and have led to people changing their farming practices. Every farmer who goes to the Royal Welsh will pick something up, just by going to the show and picking up leaflets and information from the stands, looking at new machinery and things.” (Interview, Sara Jenkins, 14/5/14).

Farmers typically share best practice through discussions and informal meetings with actors that they trust (Fisher, 2013), the relationships developed at the RWS facilitate this highly social learning process:

“Getting a so-called expert to tell farmers how to do things is not the way to get a farmer to do something. You need a fellow farmer, who is able to speak to their fellow farmers.” (Interview, Kirsty Williams, 5/8/15).

The highly social nature of the RWS often encourages those who would not normally engage with knowledge exchange activities to get involved, and to participate or at least express an interest in the work undertaken by these organisations. This enables organisations to reach out to new audiences and to spread their knowledge further than if they did not have a presence at the RWS:

“When we set up the office of the ATB on the Showground, I was amazed at the number of people we had throughout the week and the number of people that we had never had contact with before, we were writing down addresses and telephone numbers and going to visit them subsequently.” (Interview, Charles Arch, 22/10/15).

The RWS allows for the instigation of relationships that potentially last for a number of years, the Show brings people who work in the same sector, but may not have previously communicated with each other together:

“Williams from Welshpool, he’s retired now, but he used to be with the Milk Marketing Board, he used to say to me ‘do you know, it’s a busy week, and I see far more people at the Showground, than I ever see throughout the year, and many of them, will be selling milk, but I haven’t made contact with them previously’.” (Interview, Charles Arch, 22/10/15).

Therefore, the RWS acts as a space of introduction bringing together groups and individuals that have a shared interest, enabling a line of communication to open, potentially exchanging knowledge, having benefits for all involved. Thirdly, the Show brings together key actors from throughout the agriculture industry, many of which have a shared interest, but do not communicate on a regular basis, and can provide opportunities for new knowledge exchange relationships to be established. Visitors to the RWS are hard pressed to ignore the agricultural web of knowledge that exists, and even the most passive of visitors who do not engage in any sort of knowledge exchange activity will take something home from the event.

To summarise, the fact that the RWS brings together all manner of rural actors for four days on one site, on an annual basis means that the event facilitates face-to-face contact and temporary co-presence, this leads to the establishment of trust, and for knowledge to be exchanged (Townsend *et al.*, 2014). The event allows for those engaged to increase their understanding and knowledge of the latest agricultural innovations, stimulating and driving forward rural areas.

7.5 – Rural buzz

Due to the nature of this temporary knowledge cluster, and the fact that it brings such a variety of different actors, together on one site, on a temporary basis it means that understanding and knowledge can be increased, using the processes as outlined in the previous section. Following on from the work of Bathelt and others (2004) proposes that this is rural buzz. This thesis defines the rural buzz that happens at the Royal Welsh Agricultural Show as, a distinct rural knowledge ecology, facilitated by face-to-face contact, temporary co-presence and co-location of rural actors. The rural buzz that is facilitated by the RWS generates a strong sense of community amongst these rural actors and as such allows rural Wales to present a united front in the face of globalising forces and industry challenges.

The event itself is only the start of a productive relationship between those who are involved with the rural buzz; the RWS acts as a prerequisite for the development of stronger relationships that are not geographically bounded (Bathelt and Schuldt, 2008). It has been noted that the amount of business undertaken by agricultural suppliers undertaken during the four days of the events is very little, but as a result of the new networks created/existing ones cemented at the RWS, in the weeks and months following the event they can many enquiries, which results in sales all year round and as such demonstrates this continuing buzz event after the event itself has finished.

The large media coverage that RWS attracts, enables the rural buzz to spread beyond the boundaries of the showground and Wales itself, 22% of those who viewed the online streaming of the 2014 event were based outside of the United Kingdom. The media coverage of the Show allows people from all across the globe to participate in and become part of the rural buzz, spreading the message of the event and rural Wales, to those who have not attended or actively participated in the event. This coverage allows for the latest agricultural developments and innovations to be spread around the globe and for innovation and rural change to occur.

Figure 58 shows a proposed model of the rural buzz created at the RWS, with Table 8 giving explanatory notes. By being at the Show, simply browsing the event, talking, and therefore spreading knowledge people are participating in this buzz. The non-farming public and the media that are present at the Royal Welsh Agricultural Show enable this buzz to spread throughout Wales (and beyond), in turn generating more buzz, helping to drive forward rural areas. For rural people the rural buzz continues throughout the year, and their annual visit to the Royal Welsh Agricultural Show (the temporary cluster) cements these relationships.

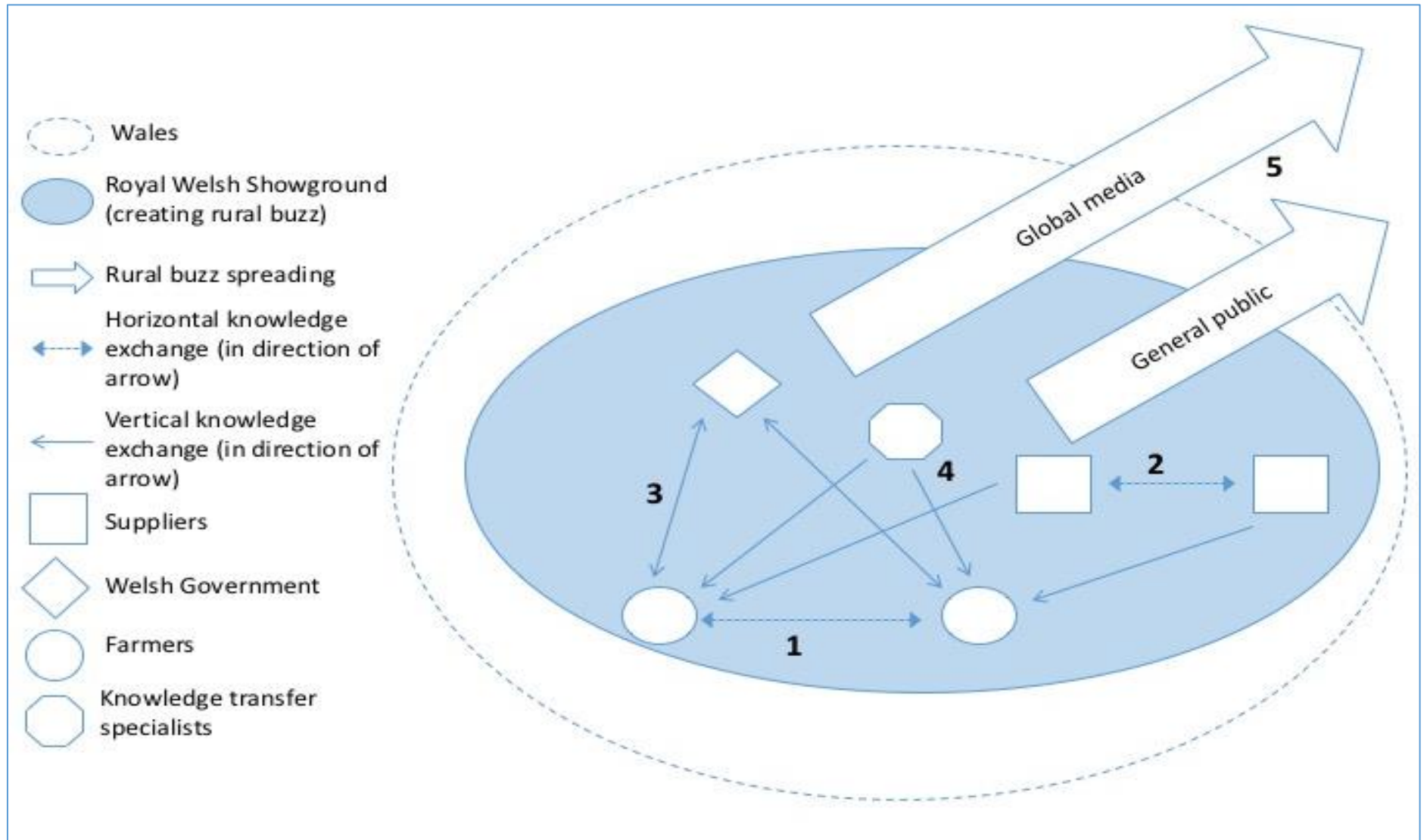


Figure 57: A simplified model of the rural buzz at the RWS. (1) Interaction between farmers. (2) Interaction between different agricultural suppliers/service providers. (3) Interaction between Welsh Government and farmers. (4) Interaction between knowledge transfer specialists. (5) The spread of knowledge throughout the community and beyond.

Table 8: The Rural Buzz explained

Element	Aspect of Rural Buzz	Example at RWS	Concept (as identified from literature review)
1	Interaction between farmers.	General interaction between farmers on an informal/conversational level whilst viewing competitions and tradestands.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Horizontal (but informal) knowledge exchange.
2	Interaction between agricultural suppliers/service providers.	Temporary co-presence allows businesses to come together, bringing opportunity to observe, communicate and collaborate with each other. Although some of these businesses may be urban based they are operating within a rural realm, further contributing to the rural buzz.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Horizontal knowledge exchange. • Temporary clustering.
3	Interaction between farmers and Government.	Government presence at events encourages trust, and fosters communication between different rural actors. This allows farmers to express their views to Government and to influence policy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vertical knowledge exchange. • Temporary clustering.
4	Interaction between knowledge transfer facilitators and farmers.	Through various outreach points and exhibitions, knowledge transfer specialists are able to give information on the latest agricultural innovations, training courses, and support available.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vertical knowledge exchange. • Temporary clustering.
5	Knowledge spreading.	Due to the presence of the media, the general public and the significance of the event, the knowledge created is able to spread throughout the region. The buzz spreading and the maintenance of the relationships created create trust, which over time enables complex information flows and rural transformation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trust. • Buzz.

Simply by attending the Royal Welsh Agricultural Show people become part of this buzz; by being at the Show for those four days they are surrounded by the agriculture industry they hear gossip, opinions and recommendations (Gertler, 1995). The rural buzz that is created as a result of the temporary cluster at the Royal Welsh Agricultural Show means that the various actors are able to receive a constant flow of information that is of interest to their organisation throughout the year, which over time will lead to a more established rural community of practice forming with stronger permanent links (see Wenger, 1998).

The fact that the knowledge exchange mechanism at the RWS persists beyond the four days of the event, means that this can be seen as rural buzz. This allows the RWS to become a centre for knowledge production and a catalyst for rural development within Wales.

This model is not definitive, but rather exploratory and suggestive. It can be applied to any occasion where a large number of groups/individuals come together in rural areas, be it an agricultural show, trade event, or demonstration day. It is the relationships facilitated by the event, which continue long after the event has finished, which create the buzz, and can lead to rural innovation.

7.6 – Summary

This chapter has discussed the role that agricultural shows have for business, knowledge exchange and innovation in rural areas. The observation and interaction that occurs at these events facilitates informal learning, helping to stimulate knowledge exchange, and can lead to innovation. The data presented in this chapter indicates that the RWS and more widely large scale rural events can be seen as a temporary cluster in a rural setting.

The RWS is a key event for the Welsh rural community, it is both a business and a social occasion, the RWS enables the whole Welsh agricultural industry to gather on one site, with one shared aim; the promotion of the agriculture industry. Due to the

large amount of observation and interaction that occurs at these events, interactive learning takes place, which helps to stimulate knowledge exchange and can lead to rural transformation. Agricultural shows showcase new and innovative technologies that will shape the future of farming, through demonstrating these innovations to the farmers; the whole agricultural industry is driven forward. In addition to this, these events allow the industry to reflect on the past, learn from any mistakes that have been made, whilst looking forward to future challenges.

The RWS a vital site for the development of bonding social capital as the event brings together people from all over Wales, binding them together both in both solidarity, reinforcing existing relationships, and in celebration of the Welsh agriculture industry (see Wilks, 2011). The RWS also enables new contacts to be made, and assists in ensuring that these new social connections endure – known as bridging social capital (Putnam, 1995). Figure 59 below demonstrates the various ways in which the way in which the RWS helps to build relationships between different community groups, something that becomes self-reinforcing and cumulative over time, building connections, thereby creating a greater amount of social capital (Putnam, 1993).

As displayed in Figure 59 the RWS can be seen to be developing community resources, the organising committee, the volunteers, the exhibitors, the businesses, and the visitors to the Show must all interact in order to organise the event, and to participate fully and make the event a success. The interactions that occur between the different groups at the RWS raises awareness of the services that are available within rural Wales, and develops links between previously unrelated groups and individuals, allowing for greater personal and business development. The social networks that are developed at the RWS lasts beyond the four days of the event, and has a far greater, and a lasting benefit for the communities of rural Wales.

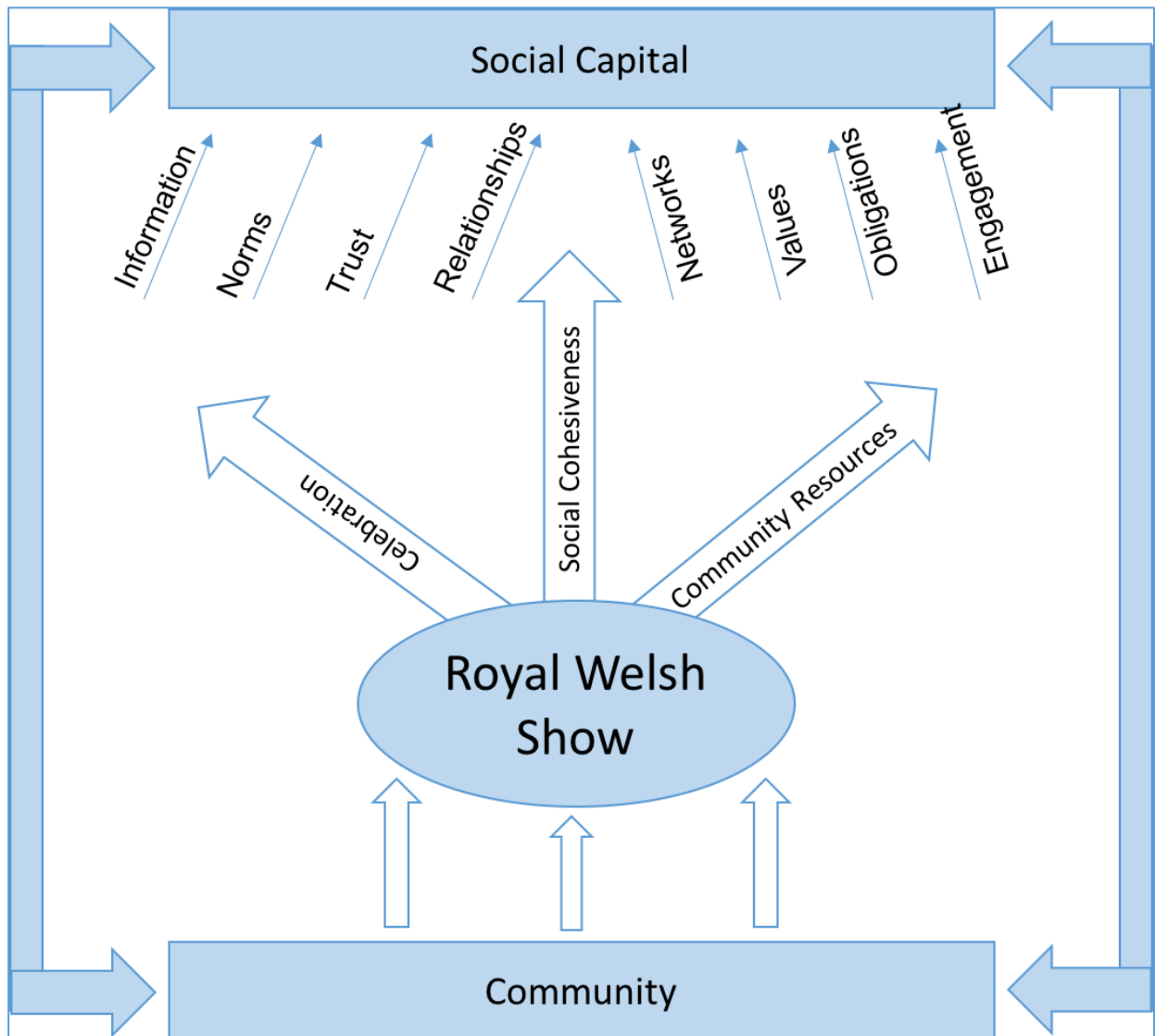


Figure 58: Conceptual model of the development of social capital at the Royal Welsh Show. Adapted from Arcodia & Whitford, 2006.

Given the fact that the RWS is a reoccurring social occasion that is attended by people with similar interests, it brings a regular opportunity to bind the Welsh rural community together, thus it promotes social capital through the development of social cohesiveness. The development of this social cohesion, as has been discussed thus far in the thesis gives a voice to the Welsh farming community, and places it at the heart of the media agenda for the duration of the event.

Taking the model in Figure 59 the RWS also creates social capital in rural Wales through giving the agricultural community something to celebrate, as previously discussed farmers are often portrayed as being miserable, unsociable, and

unapproachable. The RWS gives them an opportunity to relax and to portray themselves and their industry in a positive light, to both internal and external audiences. Facilitating the development of a contemporary identity of for rural Wales.

In her work on music festivals and social capital, Wilks (2011) argued that due to the fact that events and festivals attract attendees that are similar in demographics, they cannot be seen as a site that is valuable for combating social exclusion, building barriers between groups, and fostering wider rural cohesion. This is not the finding of this thesis, in fact very much the opposite is the case of RWS it develops social capital, by bringing together people from all walks of life, and all areas of the UK (and beyond). This allows them to make connections building bridges between different groups and driving the agriculture industry and wider Wales forward.

The temporary cluster at the Royal Welsh Agricultural Show enables the agricultural sector to get together and discuss the latest agricultural advances in an engaging format. Most people do not go to the Royal Welsh Agricultural Show with a specific purpose to gain knowledge, this is something that happens by accident, by walking around the event, viewing and engaging with the exhibits visitors are taking part in an informal knowledge exchanging mechanism. The RWS is the fact that the event does not simply disseminate information to the public, but it allows for the building of meaningful relationships between the different groups present at the Show (Zaharna, 2010).

This chapter also introduces the concept of the rural buzz, a model made up of five main knowledge exchange mechanisms, which coalesce into a temporary project, which is then able to spread throughout its host community. The RWS leads to the creation of a rural buzz, the Show creates excitement throughout Wales and as such leads to many conversations, rumours and innovations to be exchanged. This temporary proximity and rural buzz allows for tacit knowledge exchange and situational learning is facilitated.

The rural buzz that is created as a result of the temporary cluster at the RWS means that the event could become the centre of knowledge production and a catalyst for rural development in rural Wales. This buzz spreads far beyond the boundaries of the showground as a result of the presence of the general public and media. The rural buzz created by the Show lasts throughout the year with rural actors sharing knowledge and exchanging views on a regular basis, with these relationships being strengthened by the actors coming together at the Royal Welsh Agricultural Show on an annual basis.

The changes that the RWS leads to in the industry are subtle, but due to the trust that is held by the different actors that attend the Show, they tend to be long lasting and widely adopted. This is able to occur as a result of the high level of system and personal trust that is developed at the event. The strength of the relationships developed at the Show means that a rural buzz is created, lasting far beyond the four days of the event itself, driving constant innovation and transformation in the agriculture industry.

Chapter Eight: An Honest Broker? The Role of the Royal Welsh Show in Welsh Politics

8.1 – Introduction

Chapter Seven addressed the role of the RWS as a knowledge nexus in Wales (and beyond). Although this chapter specifically looks at the role of the contemporary RWS in Welsh politics, it will draw on many of the themes previously discussed. This chapter will argue that as the biggest gathering of people in Wales, and the biggest agricultural membership organisation in the country, the RWS is a key site for Welsh politics, and as such as a crucial role in the political process.

Despite those involved with the RWAS suggesting that the Society and the Show itself is apolitical, findings suggest that this is not the case. This chapter therefore argues that although not partisan, the event is deeply political. Similar to the role of the event as a knowledge nexus, the RWS facilitates communication between the general public and different political actors, enabling trust (or at least an understanding) to be created, various meetings occur between interested parties often behind closed doors, and the Environment and Sustainability Committee of the Welsh Assembly is held at the event. Furthermore, recently it has not been unusual to see UK Government Cabinet Ministers and even the Prime Minister attend the Show.

As such the RWS provides a platform for all aspects of political life in Wales, and this chapter will discuss this.

8.2 – An apolitical event?

The RWAS describe themselves as being an “honest broker” (interview, Steve Hughson, 24/4/14), there is an undeniable link between Welsh politics and the RWS. The RWS allows to the development and maintenance of relationships, collaboration,

and the exchange of resources across differing interest groups. The RWS therefore essentially allows for the development of social capital due to the fact that it facilitates interaction between different networks (both domestic and foreign).

Although they do respond to consultations on behalf of their members (within their remit), the RWAS tries to remain distanced from politics and in the history of the organisation, the Society has only ever intervened in political matters twice. The first was during the 1997 BSE crisis. Whereby the Society released a statement and lobbied the Welsh Office and former Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) urging the government to take immediate action to alleviate the consequences of the disease outbreak on Welsh farmers, before the whole of the rural economy became jeopardised. When releasing this statement, the then Chairman (sic) of the Council, Meurig Rees stated “the RWAS is not a political lobby, but they want members to know that they are behind them” (Rees, 1998 quoted in Howell, 2003). The second RWAS political intervention came during the Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak in 2001, where the Society the lobbied the newly formed Welsh Assembly Government and MAFF (which later on in the outbreak was rebranded as the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA)). These two disease outbreaks proved to be the most traumatic in living memory for Welsh agriculture, and the RWAS felt that it was essential that they were seen as supporting their members (and the wider industry) in a balanced and calm way.

Having been asked by their members the RWAS took a conscious decision to get involved with these major issues that were impacting the agriculture industry, and lobbied the Welsh Office and the Welsh Assembly Government (as it was known then). This as David Walters, former Chief Executive of the RWAS says was a two-way process with benefits for both parties:

“The thing is we were asked to sort of involve ourselves in major issues and I think when these major issues sort of cropped up, that stemmed the first regular meetings that we were getting with the Minister, and we would go to Cardiff or here to Aberystwyth, I remember when Elin Jones was the Minister and again that was very much a two-way process, we benefited and the Minister was always prepared to meet us.” (Interview, David Walters, 27/11/15).

By lobbying the authorities, the RWAS was able to get their voice, and the voice of their members heard. Something that might not have been possible if the organisation was overtly political. The fact that the RWAS has taken this apolitical stance representing their members, has enabled them to have this direct line to politicians in Wales, and has possibly enabled their views to be able to influence policy. If the organisation was to show fear or favour to any government, political party or viewpoint, they would potentially be putting at risk their reputation, which could also lead to the alienation of their visitors.

In recent years Welsh agriculture and rural areas has been dominated by a contested politics, with much disagreement and battles, which have often become very personal between farmer and politician, however the RWAS has made a conscious effort to stay out of these political wranglings:

“We’ve kind of avoided and skirted around the political overtures and issues that surround agriculture. Because politics divides people, and you can’t get 21,000 members by peddling politics day in night out.” (Interview, John T Davies, 14/10/15).

This neutral and apolitical stance of the Society does mean that, although not often, when they are called upon, their views are respected. Not only because they are representing over 21,000 members, but also because those at the helm of the Society are often highly respected throughout Wales and particularly within the food and farming sector:

“We’ve had some wonderful people throughout the Society, we’ve had some wonderful people at the top end of the Society who can, you arrange these meetings, with Welsh Government and they are respected, as I say people like the Honourable Islwyn Davies, people like Lord Gibson-Watt, people like Sir Meurig Rees, Alun Evans, two of those from Tywyn. When you took those people to meetings in Cardiff or wherever, you always felt like there was respect for them and they were being listened too, they were at the end of the day conveying the feelings of over 15,000 Members of the Society, I think that figure has increased now.” (Interview, David Walters, 27/11/15).

It is therefore not just the views of the Society that are respected by those in power in Wales, but also the views of those people who have been at the helm of the Society for many years, and are well respected by those within the industry.

John T Davies, Chairman (sic) of the Board of Management, RWAS recognises that in future this apolitical stance of the RWAS may be put into jeopardy:

“I think in the next few years, the Royal Welsh has to mature itself to the fact, and resolve the fact that, we will have to make more direct contributions to the steer and direction of agriculture. I think that government expect it of us to be honest with you, as stakeholders. Because we do get a small element of public funding, and on that basis, there is a buy in that we in partnership with Government departments and Ministerial departments therefore contribute to the voice. We are a voice, and we do respond to consultation documents, but we are a small voice amongst the choir of agricultural interest.” (Interview, John T Davies, 14/10/15).

Given that the RWAS receives a funding from the Welsh Government, it is likely that in future they are going to want to see some greater return on this investment. Currently the RWAS responds in the same manner to consultations as other stakeholders, but should the Welsh Government want a closer partnership with the RWAS given the fact they are a funder, the RWAS would have to develop this relationship further, enabling them to directly influence policy on behalf of its members.

Charles Arch, a veteran of the RWAS who has attended all bar one Show held since 1948 believes that the RWAS needs to remain apolitical, but needs to do more to speak for its members, if the Society is to remain relevant into the future:

“I think that that has got to be pushed further forward to speak up for agriculture, because there is a danger at the moment, that one week you have the NFU speaking up, the next week you have the FUW, and it doesn't have the punch that it ought to have with politicians, whereas a non-political body, I think would be far more effective.” (Interview, Charles Arch, 22/10/15).

Due to the fact that the RWAS are a non-political body, and the fact that they only speak on policy matters when asked, or when crisis is impacting upon the agriculture industry, their interventions get listened to. This is something that Charles Arch argues is needed more, and he feels that it is something that government would listen to, as other agricultural representative groups such as the NFU and FUW (which are political) have become ineffective:

“It is a non-political organisation and of course it is. It is also an organisation that I feel is well respected within the industry, so people are going to, in its simplest form, people are going to sit up and take notice if the RWAS says or

does things. So, it has got a role, it can influence people". (Interview, Gary Haggarty, 15/5/14).

The respect that the RWAS has got within rural Wales means that when the organisation does stand up and make its voice heard, they are listened to, and their concerns responded to by both the general public and those in charge of agricultural policy.

Rhun ap Iorwerth, Welsh Assembly Member for Ynys Mon has stated that "Agriculture is a very political thing" (interview, 2/12/15), and given that that the RWAS was established in order to promote and look after the interests of agriculture it is right that the RWAS makes policy points in order to ensure that it is meeting its objectives, and ensuring the survival of rural Wales:

"Because if you are of the viewpoint that rural Wales is under siege in some way, be it delivery of public services, or through falling incomes for farms, or linguistically in parts of Wales, wherever it might be. The Royal Welsh Show would be absolutely right in standing up and asking for things to be done to protect that way of life. That is political, it is not party political, because they would presumably ask all parties to respond positively, but when you've a party in government, obviously you are going to be targeting them. That is a political act then really, farming is the most political thing." (Interview, Rhun ap Iorwerth, 2/12/15).

As will be argued in the remainder of this chapter, despite the RWAS stating that they are a non-political body, this is not believed to be the case as the nature of the Society and Show makes it fundamentally political. The RWAS are deeply entwined within Welsh political culture, be it responding to consultations, or representing their members, or with the Show itself as a space for developing social capital, making policy announcements, or for political campaigning. However, the RWAS are strictly non-partisan, they do not show fear or favour to any political party, all the Welsh political parties are invited to the event, should they wish to attend, and no one is excluded from attending the RWS. Again, something that has been noted by Rhun ap Iorwerth:

"Well it depends what you mean by political, apolitical, a party political, of course they are, because it is not a party political show, the parties are there and it is important for us, we go there as a party, but as a show itself it is non-

party political... and I think that it is right that the Royal Welsh Show should make points on behalf of the rural communities of Wales, and when they do, they are political, obviously there are other bodies in agriculture that do the politicking, but I would assume that it is an important part of the RWAS mission to protect, defend and promote rural life in Wales, that in itself can be viewed as a political thing." (Interview, Rhun ap Iorwerth, 2/12/15).

Therefore, the RWS is explicitly political by its very nature, in its remit as an agricultural show, organised by an agricultural society. But it remains non-partisan at all times. The need for the RWAS to remain non-partisan is something that has been recognised by politicians themselves, Chris Davies MP and Director of Horses at the RWS spoke of the important role that politicians of all parties have had in the development of the event:

"Don't forget they have people who go to the Show from all political parties, right across the political spectrum, they've had Presidents and people involved from Plaid, from the Liberals, from the Conservatives, the odd Labour one, I think Lord Heycock, he was a Labour Peer, but you know, it is quite right, and I'm saying this as a politician as well. It is quite right that they should be apolitical. They tread a very fine line, and tread it well." (Interview, Chris Davies, 21/10/15).

Politicians from all parties have helped to shape the RWS, and they often, as is the case with Chris Davies, take a large role in the event. At one point or another, politicians from all parties have taken the presidency of the RWAS. They were chosen as a result of their own personal achievements within their counties rather than their role in public office. The role of President is taken up alongside, but separately from their day to day working life, and their political views have not interfered with their work for the Society, something of which will continue into the future, as the organisation remains all inclusive.

Perhaps it is good semantics to suggest that the RWAS is this honest broker, a nice bit of spin. But by putting on the RWS, attracting key rural actors from all of Wales (and beyond) it does facilitate discussion between rural actors, something that might not happen otherwise. Uniquely, the management and hierarchy of the RWAS do not get involved in these discussions, they do not try to sway it one way or another.

Although agriculture is highly political with politics impacting on every aspect of agricultural life, including the RWAS. The RWAS does a good job at remaining neutral in these debates and discussions. On times they may be political, but they are always non-partisan, meaning that the RWS is an event where the whole of Wales can come together for debate and discussion, driving the whole of the agriculture industry forward.

8.3 – A trust building exercise?

8.3.1 – Introduction

As discussed in Chapter Seven there is a very low level of system trust in Wales, Section 7.3.1 addresses rural trust in Wales particularly from the point of view of knowledge exchange, this section of the thesis addresses the manner in which the RWS can be used to build trust between farmers and government. This lack of trust between farmers and government is something that is recognised by First Minister, Carwyn Jones:

“I was Rural Affairs Minister for six years, I know my farmers, I know that farmers naturally distrust any government” (Carwyn Jones, speaking to author at Carwyn Connects, Aberystwyth, 9/10/15).

There might be this natural distrust between farmers and government, but in recent years this has been made worse given the uncertainty around Welsh Government agricultural policy and the way that many within the industry feel that they have been treated badly by the Welsh Government, as covered in Section 7.31.

8.3.2 – Relationship Building

As Pigman (2010) found whilst investigating international sporting events, the RWS creates the possibility for discourse, and exchange of information and the establishment of shared experiences. This is something which is critical at a time when political leaders are seen to be out of touch with the agricultural classes. As this section will address the RWS can be seen to facilitate cooperation, increase understanding, breakdown stereotypes, and bridge differences between the general

public and policymakers. A role which the Welsh Government recognises the event as having. Steve Hughson the Chief Executive of the RWAS sees the Show as being:

“a neutral ground upon which people can come together away from their thieftoms, their castles, their protected areas of interest and they can come to the Royal Welsh where we can perform a sort of mediator, UN type peacekeeping role, where people can come, share their views and have that knowledge exchange in a safe environment.” (Interview, Steve Hughson, 14/12/15).

The RWS can be seen as a site that is characterised by the formation and maintenance of relationships between different key rural actors, this is done through a variety of communication, collaboration and exchange of resources (not necessarily physical) (Deos, 2014). For the Welsh Government, the RWS has a vital role in their outreach and engagement activities with the agriculture industry. As part of this the Welsh Government has a permanent physical presence on the Showground.

The Welsh Government see their presence at the RWS as being one of their leading examples of “seeking different ways of promoting social cohesion throughout rural and urban Wales” (personal communication, Joanne Binding, 11/8/2015). As such members of the public are invited into the pavilion, and they are able to question staff on aspects of policy, should an answer not be available on the day then hard copy enquiry forms are available and a written response will be provided instead. The Welsh Government presence at the RWS therefore enables the public to have a unique level of access to civil servants and other government officials. Unlike in many situations, instant responses can be received, bringing with it a level of transparency and satisfaction in the level of service from the Welsh Government.

Due to the nature of the event, the conversations that take place at the RWS between Welsh Government officials and other actors are done so outside of an official, formal, environment meaning that these conversations tend to be more open and honest. These conversations can help to rebuild trust, and therefore can facilitate the change process. This role of the Show is something that is recognised by Welsh Government.

“Events like the Royal Welsh... It’s got to help, that interaction... so you can see that they are human, hopefully you can see that they are trying to do the best

that they possibly can, and that they understand the issues, it is bound to help build trust” (Interview, Gary Haggarty, 15/5/2014).

Again, the very nature of the RWS brings together key rural stakeholders from all over Wales, these actors do not attend the RWS to specifically gain knowledge, but to socialise with their friends and to see the finest stock that Wales can offer. Farmers might be reluctant to arrange a meeting with the Welsh Government at one of their divisional offices, due to the formality or the fact that they may have to give up half a day’s work to attend a meeting. However, the RWS brings the policymakers to the people, giving the Welsh Government an extra level of accessibility and transparency.

“There is an opportunity for farmers to go in and speak to someone about Glastir or TB or any other topic... so yes it does help that building of trust it certainly does... the Show is an opportunity to meet face to face with farmers and to and for them to air their views and for the Welsh Government to respond to those views. It is an opportunity, a unique opportunity really, yes.” (Interview, Sara Jenkins, 14/5/2014).

The fact that the RWS facilitates these conversations enables the Welsh Government to get feedback from farmers about their latest plans and subsidy schemes, something which is particularly valued by the Welsh Government.

“It is good to speak to those people; to hear what they have got to say. You know, it is a two-way process isn’t it... you are picking up information from them, about what the issues are for them, what they need. And you are able to take the opportunity to feedback to those people, what it is you are doing. Why you are doing it and how you are trying to support them in doing whatever it is they do.” (Interview, Gary Haggarty, 15/5/2014).

There is a feeling from farmers that government at all levels do not listen to their concerns, and that some of their policies actually damage the countryside, and that those in charge of agriculture and rural affairs in Wales do not have the experience to do so:

“They should have, have a background of agriculture and have worked out on a farm for, for ten years at least before they go into that job, so they know what they’re talking about. It’s like putting me on the production line at Ford, if they put me on the line at Ford, I’d be just the same as him, I’d be, I wouldn’t know what I was doing. But I would be different to him, because within three days I would have learnt what to do and I would be doing it. But he won’t listen or learn.” (Interview, Tom Evans, 8/5/14).

At the RWS policymakers get the chance to meet these farmers and too listen to their concerns, although how much of this is taken in by civil servants and elected representatives is up for debate:

“It is the only time of the year when the Ministers have to listen, or pretend to listen. It is the only time they pretend to listen.” (Interview, Ian Rees, 4/8/15).

For farmers, the RWS lets them have a chance to speak with those at the top of Welsh agriculture, it opens up these channels and can facilitate the building of social capital. However as hinted at by Ian Rees, some politicians are more affable than others. For some attending the RWS and talking to farmers seems natural, but for others attending the event is seen as a struggle. However, the fact that these politicians attend the Show, and are prepared to put in the effort to speak with farmers, helps to develop a level of trust, or at least begins to build bridges.

The role of the RWS in building trust is something which is recognised more widely, including from within the farming press. But it has been noted that farmers tend to judge politicians far more by their actions than their words, the event brings with it a chance for politicians to make policy announcements and if they become true, a level of trust will be regained:

“If I was a farmer and I went to the Royal Welsh and Rebecca Evans made an announcement, and six months later it became true, that would be a great way to build trust.” (Interview, Ben Briggs, 7/8/15).

Having that audience there at the RWS means that politicians are able to make announcements in a very public forum, with a specific date marker, and if these announcements become a reality it is a good way for this trust to be began to be built. These interactions facilitated by the RWS enable both top-down and bottom-up horizontal interactions, creating trust, which leads to knowledge exchange (see Chapter Seven), the informal, bilateral, vertical knowledge exchange that the event facilitates assists the Welsh Government in achieving their vision for a sustainable and resilient agricultural industry.

In addition to the presence of the civil service side of the Welsh Government at the RWS, there is a very large Ministerial presence at the event, the event is considered to be so significant for Wales, and there is an expectation that there will be a Ministerial presence at the Show. For these Ministers, the RWS provides a chance to communicate their vision for Wales to a wide audience.

Typically, the First Minister and the lead Minister for agricultural and rural issues, (currently Lesley Griffiths under the title Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs³⁴) will attend the Show. In addition to this other Ministers who have a portfolio that cover rural issues will attend the Show, as well as many other AMs in a personal capacity in order to interact with their constituents or for party political purposes.

Whilst at the RWS, Ministers will host events and functions within the Welsh Government Pavilion, for example in 2015 the then Minister for Natural Resources, Carl Sargeant, hosted the 'National Parks for All: Better Balanced Boards' event. Due to the platform it provides, the media presence, and as often all the key stakeholders are all present, it has become tradition for new policies and consultations to be launched at the RWS. It is not all political game playing at the RWS, the First Minister, Carwyn Jones uses the event as a chance to host an annual reception that recognises the success of the agriculture and environment industries in Wales.

The presence of Ministers and the Welsh Government (both cabinet members and civil servants) mingling amongst the general public and other stakeholders at the RWS dispels the normal hierarchy of politics and places everyone on level playing field.

“If I’m talking to the Minister in a meeting [outside of the RWS] it is very formal, it is very high brow, it is not relaxed, you are there with something to say and you have to say it. In the Royal Welsh, you can almost sum up a year’s worth of work in a casual meeting with a cup of tea and that is quite a nice forum to do that” (Interview, Hazel Wright, 19/5/14).

³⁴ In the four-year duration of this research there has been three different Ministers with the responsibility for agriculture in Wales, and with each new appointment comes a new title, as such it is very difficult to define the extent of their responsibility.

The RWS is not just a site that can be used by politicians and policymakers to disseminate information, but a place where there is mutual respect, and from where negotiations can be started, and relationships built. This is something that has been recognised by Sir Alexander Lockwood-Smith, High Commissioner from New Zealand to the United Kingdom:

“It is useful for politicians, because even if they, even if they can’t come up with a political answer, at least they become aware of the problems and that is important in all sorts of decisions that politicians make to do with the wider economy.” (Interview, Alexander Lockwood-Smith, 20/7/15).

The RWS is not the be all and end all of the communication between farmers and the Welsh Government. But it does give those politicians in attendance a better understanding of the current issues that are impacting upon rural Wales, and they will use what they have witnessed to better inform their decision making. Even if the politician cannot give an answer there and then, they will go away pondering what they have been asked, and often will respond at a later date. The RWS facilitates these communications, which enable greater understanding and therefore will help to build trust within the agricultural community.

The influence of the RWS spreads far beyond the Welsh political sphere, many UK Government Ministers attend the RWS, 2015 saw the then Environment Secretary, Elizabeth Truss, then Welsh Secretary Stephen Crabb, and the then Prime Minister David Cameron attend the Show. Again, this is in addition to many of the Welsh Members of Parliament who attend the event on a personal basis.

The 2015 Show was opened by Phil Hogan, the European Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development, this not only provided him with a chance to meet Welsh farmers and to further engage with the industry in Wales, but to also engage with the Welsh Government on a more informal basis. At the Show meetings were held between the then Deputy Minister for Farming and Food, Rebecca Evans and the Commissioner to discuss a wide range of CAP related and food and drink industry issues (personal communication, Joanne Binding, 11/8/15). Building relationship between different levels of government in Wales and not just the general public.

The RWS also provides a site for key rural actors to build relationships with the government (and other actors). The CLA, FUW, NFU, and YFC all testify to the value of the RWS in developing and maintaining relationships with each other and government.

“The Royal Welsh will be increasingly more important because at least at that event if nowhere else in the calendar year you get to see somebody on a face to face level to have a reasonable conversation that isn’t in a statute role or anything like that, you just have that face to face conversation with those in government, that is something that has to be hung onto by all concerned.” (Interview, Helen Ovens, 19/5/14).

This RWS therefore has had, and will continue to have a key role in building relationships between rural actors of all different levels. Given the manner in which communication is becoming increasingly reliant on the virtual world, the face-to-face communication that the RWS facilitates is essential, it facilitates trust, and new relationships whilst strengthening existing ties.



Figure 59: Former Prime Minister, David Cameron and former Environment Secretary Elizabeth Truss in the RWS Food Hall (DEFRA).

It is not just the elites and those who are considered to be key rural actors who have access to politicians at the RWS, due to the platform that the event facilitates Wales

YFC are able to arrange and through formal meetings at given access to key decision makers:

“I think on the political side, it actually gives us as an organisation access to people that we might not have access to like David Cameron, he came to YFC at the Show, where else would we have had that opportunity and where else would he have seen what Wales YFC do if it wasn't for the Show and meeting with AMs and having meetings. The Rural Affairs Committee got Phil Hogan, the EU Commissioner for Agriculture to the YFC Centre during the Show and we had him there for a good hour, we wouldn't have done that if it wasn't for the Show” (Focus Group, Wales YFC, 3/10/15).

Through the RWS attracting these big name and significant politicians, it gives accessibility to the public which would not exist if it was not for the RWS, the event allows people from throughout Wales to communicate with politicians, to put their views across, an opportunity as demonstrated in the previous quote, would not exist if it was not for the RWS.

8.3.3 – Summary

These interactions that are facilitated by the RWS are an example of an ever-changing public practice whereby non-state actors and the public are ever abler to influence public policy, the RWS gives the public the chance and the capability to influence policy not just at a local (Wales) level, but it provides a contact point with politicians and policymakers at a UK and European level too. This enables the general public to collaborate with those in power and to facilitate a wider co-produced policy environment, that is deemed to be more inclusive (Deos, 2014; Melissen, 2005).

The RWS allows politicians to place themselves where the people are, and to network with all the different rural actors that they might work intermittently with throughout the year, as Kirsty Williams says “it is a very efficient way actually to do your work as an Assembly Member” (interview, Kirsty Williams. 5/8/15). In this manner, the RWS can be seen as a form of new public diplomacy (Melissen, 2011), whereby it facilitates engagement with the general public and other actors, where governmental and non-governmental institutions collaborate and listen, interact and develop long term

relationships. The RWS gives the public this voice, and allows them to have an increasing influence on government policy.

This new form of public diplomacy that is delivered at the RWS is a process between the different collaborative partners, where the result is an increasing amount of trust and mutual understanding, in other words, social capital (see Chapter Seven) (Cowan and Arsenault, 2008). Granted the RWS is not this magical site, where all past issues have been forgotten and the slate wiped clean, it is a place where bridges can be started to be built and broken relationships to be rebuilt.

8.4 – Politics and politics

8.4.1 – Introduction

Due to the nature of the event bringing together politicians and the public, the RWS is a site where both Politics and politics are practiced, in both a top down and bottom up manner. Harris (2013:108) states that “sport has long been used as a tool for political gain” and the same can be said for the RWS, and in the eyes of the political elite, the Show can be seen as panacea to help combat the issues that is faced by contemporary Wales. As Rhun ap Iorwerth says every contemporary political issue comes together at the RWS:

“Before coming here as an AM, I was a BBC journalist and presenter for many years, I used to love going up to the Royal Welsh to maybe present for a week or maybe one or two programmes during the week, and of course those interviews that you would be doing, the issues that you would be exploring, some of them would be agricultural and rural, but they would be much, much wider than that, it was the whole of Welsh life. It is a forum for political discussion in very much the same way as the National Eisteddfod is, lots of discussions, debates going on about everything from healthcare, to language, to education, whatever it might be. I think you would probably find the same at the Royal Welsh in that people are there, there is a rural hook to pretty much everything. You’ve got health in rural Wales, education in rural Wales, transport in rural Wales, it all sort of comes together”. (Interview, Rhun ap Iorwerth, 2/12/15).

It is not just the politics of agriculture that are discussed at the RWS, given the way that the RWS brings so many people together from all walks of life, it is a melting pot

of issues, all of which are discussed by visitors, politicians and the media alike. This section will give examples of, and discuss how Politics and politics emerge at the RWS, and the manner in which the event facilitates this.

8.4.2 – Politics

Given the fact that a devolved Wales is a relatively new entity, which is has limited powers and limited finance, the RWS can be seen as part of this state building apparatus where the Welsh Government are able to make their views and positions known. This can lead to changing perceptions and to educating the general public, as such this form of diplomacy can be seen as a substitute for material powers in a similar way to Redker's (2008) work surrounding sport and material power.

8.4.2.1 – A rural spotlight

The RWS might raise issues for the first time that have not been raised before, and then can be acted upon or at least raised in the mind of that politician. Often these issues are raised in an informal setting be it over lunch, or coffee, and leads to greater engagement from the public with the politicians than might be seen in other settings:

“They are on home turf I suppose, and you know, you understand that. It is perhaps easier to put these points across when you are in a familiar setting, surrounded by people that you are familiar with. It takes some of that anxiety, formality out of the situation perhaps.” (Interview, Lord Bourne, 20/10/15).

Given the informal nature of the RWS, and the fact that visitors are surrounded by people that they know, people with similar experiences means that they are more willing to say what they think and to be honest. They are not sat in an office, but somewhere that they know and enjoy, leading to fuller, and more frank conversations to occur.

Politicians also find the relaxed environment of the RWS more conducive to business than their typical meetings. Given that they are surrounded by agricultural knowledge and rural affairs, in a location that is iconic for Wales, the RWS makes the politician more switched on, and more receptive to any rural/agricultural policy messages that they are being given. Whilst at the RWS they are not constantly clock watching,

looking to the next appointment, so they are far more focused on the discussions, they know that the day will be dedicated to rural affairs, and that is where their mind is focused.

The potential influence that these chance encounters at the RWS can have is recognised by farmers themselves:

“I was in the NFU a couple of times, and Carwyn Jones and the others were there and I’m sure ears were being bent about various things, I think it could have quite an influence, it is an opportunity to, like I met them all there, I was only introduced to them, pleasantries like, you know. But for Meurig and those sorts of people, I don’t say an unplanned, but to have an unrehearsed, fairly informal meeting, could be quite useful. I think it will have quite an influence.” (Interview, David Morgan, 18/9/15).

These informal conversations whereby there is no set agenda, where the politicians have no script, allows them to get a true view of the issues that face agriculture in Wales, and also allow them to give on the spot, honest responses that have not been influenced by civil servants. All of which can enhance communication, and assist in the building of trust between the establishment and practising farmers, the influence of which cannot be measured.

Lord Bourne attended the 2015 RWS with the then Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Elizabeth Truss, and people were raising issues with her surrounding the price of cow’s milk and the support that the UK Government could give to farmers:

“She went away, I’m sure she is in the process of trying to help, as I’m sure she was before, but it would have given it a freshness and an added impetuous I expect.” (Interview, Lord Bourne, 20/10/15).

As demonstrated by the actions of Elizabeth Truss, the RWS very much leads to an increased emphasis being placed on these issues that although MPs may care about, issues that may have slipped their mind. The RWS placed these back to top of the agenda, and can provide a new urgency for these issues to be resolved.

It is important to note that the RWS is a one off, an annual event and “its contribution is immense, but it is not an everyday contribution” (interview, Elin Jones, 21/8/2015). There is an intensity to the RWS and in the more formal meetings, there are more people than a politician would normally meet. For example, if a Minister was attending a meeting with Hybu Cig Cymru at their Aberystwyth headquarters they would be likely to meet three people. However, during their breakfast meeting which is held annually at the RWS anybody could come up to the Minister and raise a particular point. Therefore, attending meetings such as this at the RWS “is more open and more intense, so that adds additional value” (interview, Elin Jones, 21/8/2015) compared to ordinary meetings.

It is not just this interaction with people that has an impact on the politicians that attend the RWS, their experiences at the RWS lead to their mental picture of rural areas in generally changing. If it was not for events such as the RWS the images that politicians have of rural areas may be limited to that that of small towns and other official visits, at the RWS they see rural Wales in its rawest form:

“If we didn’t go to these events would be limited to small towns, small villages, and the roads between them... It is different at the Show, you can hear the exchange of information between people who are meeting at the Show, by design or by accident, you can see the competitive element, and what is actually happening on the Showground, all of that I think modifies I think, that we are not conscience of, the mental image that we have of rural Wales.” (Interview, Lord Bourne, 20/10/15).

The impacts of the RWS therefore goes much further than facilitating communication between politicians and the public, in fact as demonstrated by Lord Bourne often it is overheard conversations that have the most resonance with politicians at the Show, giving them a better understanding of the realities of rural Wales. Similar to how the RWS is able to (re)imagine Wales in the eyes of the public (see Chapter Five), it has the same effect for politicians. It allows them to see beyond the statistics, and their briefing papers, and to witness and be part of the reality of rural Wales, or at least the reality that is presented by the RWS. Something that Lord Bourne says is a result of personal chemistry:

“He’ll [the then Prime Minister, David Cameron] come away with a very good idea of what needs doing, he obviously represents a pretty rural constituency anyway, so he is rooted in rural Britain. That link I think is chemistry, it’s not sort of institutionalised, it might not be the same with a different Prime Minister, but I hope it would be... So, I think it is often the informal isn’t it, it’s not that there is any institutional underpinning of the link, but I think that it is the personal chemistry of people getting together and knowing each other, and the importance of it not being a formal business relationship, and once you get to the Show, it becomes a little bit more social, rather than the formal them and us.” (Interview, Lord Bourne, 20/10/15).

Should this chemistry be there, the RWS allows politicians and civil servants to speak with farmers and the general public in their own language, they are able to show that they are listening, and taking on board their views. However, there is a danger that due to the nature of some politicians and civil servants that they are simply there to pay lip service to the industry.

Some people may see the visits of politicians to the RWS as being nothing more than showmanship, a form of electioneering, but it is more than that. It is something that breaks down barriers between the politicians and the public. The RWS provides a chance for the formality of day to day politics to be forgotten about, placing decisions makers and the public on somewhat the same level allowing for relationships to be built, and possibly enabling the general public to influence policy. As with all forms of knowledge exchange it is personal relationships, and levels of social capital that is key to the success/influence that these relationships have at the RWS.

The conversations that are had at the RWS, be them on a formal or informal basis, are a good example of the way that the Welsh, UK and European Level Governments engage with their stakeholders, helping policy to evolve with their needs, in particular the needs of farmers. This has links with the idea of nation building and gives the Welsh Government a legitimacy particularly as in terms of devolution the nation is still young. However, this form of promotion could be seen as a tool of domestic propaganda (Huijgh, 2011). This is something that Andrew RT Davies, the leader of the Welsh Conservatives has recognised:

“The Welsh Government have this very bizarre rule or regulation, that if they put a pound in or a million in, you’ve got to have Welsh Government stamp all over it. I do believe that almost gives the impression of some sort of East European crackpot dictatorship, which is to brand everything, whether it be the pavement outside Builth or the workers republic of blah, blah, blah” (Interview, Andrew RT Davies, 28/7/15).

Therefore, despite being an apolitical event, due to the fact that the Welsh Government have a large presence at the RWS, and as they support the Show their branding is very visible, therefore there could be a danger that the RWAS become associated with the Welsh Government, and that they are seen as some kind of propaganda arm of the state. This is something that the RWAS will need to be aware of, and have to be very careful about in future.

8.4.2.2 – A launch site

Due to the stage that the RWS provides, it is frequently used by politicians as a site to launch new policy initiatives, it is used by politicians of all levels, including the Prime Minister. At the 2015 Show the then Prime Minister David Cameron used the event to announce a £7 billion food growth plan for the United Kingdom and to announce the cutting of “red tape” for those farming in England.

Interestingly, due to agriculture being a devolved issue, the plans to cut red tape announced at RWS would only impact on English farmers. The fact that the Prime Minister chose to announce these in Wales, at what is primarily an event for Welsh agriculture demonstrates that its significance goes far beyond Offa’s Dyke into England and beyond. Whilst at the RWS, David Cameron also issued a direct appeal to car makers Aston Martin asking them to use a former RAF hanger in St Athan, Vale of Glamorgan as their new manufacturing site in the UK. The fact that the Prime Minister made this appeal at the RWS further demonstrates the stage that the RWS provides, with wider Welsh policy and investment issues, which could not be further from the agriculture industry being announced at the event.

The announcements made by the Prime Minister at the RWS show that the event has a much wider impact than simply agriculture, it has wider impacts on rural areas, and

the informal conversations that are had by politicians at the event can lead to changes in policy and thinking of these elected representatives, something that is appreciated by Lord Bourne:

“You go away, I always go away thinking ‘that is a message that is important’, whether it is about Post Offices or Roads, or whether it is about some farming issue, rural issues, or specifically farming issues, dairy price, whatever. You always come away with something fresh.” (Interview, Lord Bourne, 20/10/15).

These announcements can be considered as being stage managed, with many politicians and policymakers using the event to showcase what they have been doing throughout the year, with much of the work being done behind the scenes for many months before, and the final project or policy launch coming at the RWS. For some more cynical people, the RWS could be seen as a PR tool for government and civil servants. For some these announcements are very false, and do not add much to the information that is already known to the public:

“Rebecca Evans at the HCC breakfast read off a piece of paper, and it was one of the most turgid ministerial speeches I’ve ever seen. Phil Hogan the European Commissioner got up afterwards, he had nothing else better to say, but at least he said it with a bit of charisma. I’m wondering if I was a grassroots farmer, how much that would mean to me.” (Interview, Ben Briggs, 7/8/15).

For the farmers at the RWS these announcements might mean nothing at all, they are not going to have an impact on their day to day activities, it is politicians speaking, making noise, something that they will not listen to. Farmers who are trying to firefight, to survive the next year, are not looking to what the government is going to be doing in the future. These announcements therefore mean very little to those who will ultimately be effected by their actions, and very few farmers will attend the actual announcement, but will typically read about them in the following weeks in the farming press or from the farming unions. These launches at RWS tend to be aimed at those in more senior levels of agriculture in Wales, and although the average farmer will be invited to these it is very rare that they actually attend.

Despite the RWS being a very busy period for all involved, one of the major advantages of conducting a launch at the event is that all interested parties are going

to be at the RWS. This gives them a chance to get involved, and if they have any concerns or misunderstandings to ask them there and then:

“Once you launch they will have a number of questions; they will want to speak to you. You’re there and you can have those conversations and make sure importantly that people go away with the right information and the right view of what is going to happen.” (Interview Gary Haggarty, 15/5/16).

By being present at the RWS and being able to answer the questions of stakeholders almost immediately after the policy is launched it prevents misinformation spreading through the agricultural community, and that people leave the event fully informed of the latest on goings within the rural policy sphere. By launching their schemes and having their officials at the event, the Welsh Government are able to ensure that farmers are able to leave having full information and able to make an informed choice about the future of their business.

Announcing something at the RWS be it a new product or policy tends to be positively accepted. It is being announced in an arena that celebrates the best of food, farming, and rural life. As such it is announced in somewhat of a party atmosphere which “gives it positive spin by association” (interview, Rhun ap Iorwerth, 2/12/15). This is combined with the fact that there is a media focus on the RWS during this time period, as Rhun continues:

“it is to get the focus, from a pure news management perspective, if you’ve got something to announce which is important and you want it to be taken notice of, it is good to do it in a context where people are looking at you for things to say about agriculture anyway, so it does make sense.” (Interview, Rhun ap Iorwerth, 2/15/12).

This in a way highlights the importance of the RWS for a political audience, one of the key attributes of the Show is that it is a public forum, which receives much media coverage. This in itself gives momentum to government announcements and schemes, and in some cases things get brought forward or gain momentum, because people want to have announcements to make at the RWS.

Taking into account the above results and analysis, the direct impact that these policy launches at the RWS have on the industry and particularly on the practising farmer is

unknown, these policy launches tend to be more important for the politician/civil servants themselves as they know that the media will be present and that they have a captive stakeholder audience.

8.4.2.3 – Bringing democracy to the people

Throughout the fourth National Assembly for Wales, a certain amount of official Welsh Assembly business has been undertaken at the RWS, with the Environment and Sustainability Committee of the National Assembly for Wales holding a general scrutiny committee meeting in the Wales YFC pavilion on the Showground. At the start of the fifth Assembly, following the 2016 National Assembly for Wales elections, no formal committee meeting was held by the newly formed Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee at the Show, although it was arranged for a public stakeholder meeting to take place at the event.

The RWS is one of the few occasions where the National Assembly for Wales, leaves the confines of the Senedd in Cardiff Bay, the work of Assembly Members is taken to the public, and similar to the livestock, it is put on show for the public (although these committees do not tend to attract the large crowds of the main ring displays). The RWS therefore facilitates the National Assembly for Wales in bringing democracy to the public, whilst at the same time allowing the committee to discuss rural Wales in the environment that their decisions effect, rather than in a great glass building in Cardiff Bay:

“It is really, really important. It does, it is a good opportunity, because it takes Members from across Wales, out of the Bay, and exposes them in that way.”
(Interview, William Powell, 30/10/15).

By being at the RWS in the environment of rural Wales it exposes the Assembly Members to the reality of rural life in a way that they might not have seen before, it takes them out of the Senedd and out to the communities of which their decisions will impact. It brings them into contact with real people, takes them out into the field, and allows for them to potentially gain a new perspective about the decisions that they are making. Similar to as described by Lord Bourne, the RWS highlights the issues with

rural Wales and places them at the forefront of the agenda leading to a greater understanding.

8.4.2.4 – Media management

As previously discussed there is very large media presence at the RWS and similar to the work of Murray (2012) surrounding politicians and their attendance at sporting events, some members of the public and particularly members of the farming community think that some politicians see attending the RWS as a photo opportunity and something of a political gimmick. An opinion of which is felt strongly by Ian Rees:

“It is just political jargon... Looks good for some pictures.” (Interview, Ian Rees, 4/8/15).

Ian Rees’ views are not uncommon, so perhaps the RWS does not have as big of a role in facilitating trust and knowledge exchange between policymakers and government as first thought:

“Rebecca Evans was there for four days, but did she take on board anything what farmers were saying over them four days? I will doubt it. Did they take on board what she was doing? Again, I doubt it. So, I think the thing is with all of this, is you can get into this rhetoric can’t you and they make all these big announcements and actually it is how it effects that farmer. It is like your family, once they go back to the farm, it is how the strategy and all those things is actually going to work for them in twelve months’ time.” (Interview Ben Briggs, 7/8/15).

There is an impression that some Ministers may treat the RWS as a publicity tool for their own benefit, and so that do not take home any messages from the wider farming population. Similarly, there is evidence that farmers do not listen to the announcements that are made by politicians, there is a view that farmers see these announcements as being empty rhetoric, and something that will not affect them in the short-term future. That said whether or not these messages are acted upon in the long term, these conversations are had, increasing social capital which can only be good for the long-term sustainability of the agriculture industry.

Elin Jones says that “there is an element of performance” (interview 21/8/15) for politicians when attending the RWS, they manage and play the media in order to get

as much good coverage from the event as possible. During her time as Minister for Rural Affairs, Elin Jones gave thirteen speeches in one day, all of which were covered by the press. This does however mean that as a Minister, there is not much time available at the RWS to speak to normal people, something which is particularly difficult if that Minister has a rural constituency, people want to talk to their constituency AM, and if there is not space for that interaction, they may risk losing their votes. It is due to these time constraints that some Ministers, particularly Labour Ministers (who are relatively unpopular in rural Wales) are sheltered from the general public at the Show. As such, despite the Show being seen as a tool where bridges are built between politicians and the general public, for the senior Ministers at the Show, there may only be very limited opportunities for contact with the general public to take place.

Due to the nature of the RWS, and how busy the event is, particularly for Ministers some of this interaction can happen in a rushed manner and in an almost superficial style. This can perhaps be seen as the rubber stamping of discussions that has been going on for many months. Often key actors are rushing from meeting to meeting, and although this interaction is beneficial, it often gets cut short. However, the main advantage is this interaction at the RWS tend to be very public and visible, shining a spotlight on these relationships.

There is an expectation from the public, stakeholders, and the media that there will be some kind of launch or policy announcement at the RWS, due to the presence of the media it is a “golden opportunity” (interview, Gary Haggarty, 15/5/14) to create publicity around a launch. The television cameras are constantly broadcasting from the RWS, as the event also dominates the printed press in Wales. The RWS provides a forum where questions from the media can be answered against a positive backdrop, accurate information can be given, enabling farmers to make accurate decisions about the future of their business. According to Gary Haggarty “you would be mad not to use that opportunity to get some of your messages out definitely”, and the Welsh Government certainly do make use of this opportunity.

Having attended the Show in 2008 as Opposition Leader, David Cameron became the first serving British Prime Minister to attend the RWS in 2014, and again returned in 2015 to offer a personal thank you to voters who helped him to get re-elected and to continue his premiership in Downing Street. His visit in 2015 was a relaxed affair with some official engagements in the morning of the event, before spending a relaxing afternoon with his family on a private visit of the Show. Speaking to media, Mr Cameron was quoted as saying:

“I like it so much, I promised my children I would bring them – they’ve come along today too to see things like sheep shearing competitions and to come and look at some of the rare breeds.” (David Cameron speaking to Andrew Forgrave, 23/7/15).

This private visit of the Prime Minister and his family to the RWS caused the RWAS a headache as they would have like to have had “more of a stage-managed approach” (interview, Chris Davies, 21/10/15), but this was not what the Prime Minister wanted, for one afternoon he was a normal member of the public and even queued up for ice cream like everybody else:

“I’m friendly with the owners of Llanfaes Ice Cream, and they said to me, they couldn’t believe it, he stood in the queue and people in front of him parted to let the Prime Minister go to the front of the queue, and he said ‘no, no, I’ll take my turn, the same as everybody else’ and he went and he said to his children and to his security guard ‘what flavour would you like?’ and had a chat with the owners of Llanfaes, it was just like you or I would have done. But that was the Prime Minister. It was pretty amazing.” (Interview, Chris Davies, 21/10/15).

On this private afternoon visit to the RWS, David Cameron was still meeting members of the public, and the RWS perhaps provided access to the then Prime Minister in a way that perhaps would not have been possible at any other event:

“I extended my hand out and I said, ‘Mr Cameron, I want to thank you for coming to the Royal Welsh Show and bringing your daughters’ I think they were, two daughters, ‘and bringing your children on a private visit, I hope you realise how important this event is, I know you were here last year as well’ I said. ‘But I want to congratulate you for coming privately and I just hope that you can just do a little more for our Welsh farmers at the moment, in that big house in London’ that’s how I refer to it. He said, ‘oh thank you, thank you for being so straight’.” (Interview, Glyn Jones, 13/8/15).

The RWS therefore brings with it unrivalled access to decisions makers and allows for the public to be make points to these significant figures. These decision makers are able to meet people beyond the “usual suspects” (interview, Kirsty Williams, 5/8/15) who tend to dominate discussions with the Unions and the other rural actors, allowing them to meet real people whose views they might not normally get. This enables them to get a true assessment of the state of the nation and helps to bridge the disconnect that is often felt between the general public and politicians. Dr Glyn Jones, was able to urge the then Prime Minister to do more for rural Wales, and it can never be known the impact that these conversations and what is seen at the RWS has. These images, memories, and conversations last far beyond the four days of the event, and it is possible that they could later have an impact on policy.

Again, those more cynical people may think that there was only such a large political attendance at the 2014 RWS as a result of the forthcoming 2015 General Election, and as a result of the Conservatives gaining some key rural seats in that election they returned in 2015 not only to say thank you, but to also to make their presence known ahead of the 2016 National Assembly for Wales elections. Even though some politicians may attend the RWAS for partisan reasons, their reason for attending the RWS does not matter to the Society, as Harry Fetherstonhaugh says “it is all good for our profile” (interview, Harry Fetherstonhaugh, 5/10/15).

Not every politician receives a warm welcome at the RWS, and some are considered by their own party/leaders as being too much of a risk to attend the event. In 2000 Christine Gwyther, the then Cabinet Secretary for Agriculture in the National Assembly for Wales was sacked by then First Secretary Rhodri Morgan on the eve of the RWS:

“I always remember Rhodri Morgan finally getting around to reshuffling his Agriculture Minister, Christine Gwyther before she was let loose at the Royal Welsh and Carwyn Jones stepped in at that very last moment, so there is a recognition by Welsh Government there about how important that it is.” (Interview, Kirsty Williams, 5/8/15).

Publically a vegetarian, and having previously had a high-profile dispute with the FUW, she was removed from position ahead of the public opening of the event. During her 15 months in office farmers and opposition politicians continuously called for her resignation, it is rumoured that the then First Secretary, was swayed by the views of farmers who did not want a vegetarian representing their interests. Christine Gwyther was sacked as it was likely that her presence at the RWS would have led to protests causing embarrassment for the National Assembly for Wales. With her sacking coming just 24 hours after press release detailing her engagements at the RWS, it was seen as something of a panic move by Rhodri Morgan (Gibbs, 2000). Her sacking was welcomed by the Farmers Union for Wales, and the appearance of her replacement Carwyn Jones, at the RWS went without a hitch.

For whatever reason politicians attend the RWS, it is important to note that the RWAS never invites a politician to attend the event, politicians ask the RWAS to attend the Show. They choose to attend the RWS of their own free will, something which the RWAS appreciate. Politicians who attend the Show realise the power of numbers, at the RWS they have a captive audience of those interested in agriculture and rural issues, something that they make the most of.

Phil Hogan, European Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development believes that the RWS has a role in bringing together policymakers and stakeholders, with farmers and rural dwellers, to discuss rural issues, however he states often these discussions are around one single policy theme. Due to the temporary nature of the event, it can sharpen the debate and can often set the ball rolling for new policy developments (personal communication, Phil Hogan, 17/11/15).

The Commissioner recognises that the RWS has a very important role in the future development of the Welsh agriculture industry, however he states that it will be vital for the Show to keep up to date and move with current trends in agriculture, agri-food, and agri-business policy (personal communication, Phil Hogan, 17/11/15).

Given the attendance of many key decision making, and the way in which they use the RWS as a political tool, the event can be seen as a key site for Politics in Wales.

8.4.3 – politics

As discussed earlier in this chapter the RWAS sees itself as an apolitical organisation, and it is something that is recognised throughout Wales, by public and policymakers alike. They are seen as being neutral, something which is vitally important for the RWS to continue to have an influence on Welsh political life.

The fact that the RWAS has a political role (importantly with a small p) is something that has been observed by David Walters, former Chief Executive of the RWAS:

“It is politics with a small p really, we always held ourselves as being non-political, and we made every effort to sort of continue to do that right through, we were seen as a sort of non-political and with no axe to grind, and certainly having relationships with Welsh Assembly and Welsh Office before that, was important, they looked upon us as being fairly neutral you know.” (Interview, David Walters, 27/11/15).

It has been noted that perhaps the reason why so many Westminster politicians have attended the RWS in recent years is because they are considered to be more in favour with the rural community than governments that we have seen in the past. But there is an acknowledgement that if the public/farmers were not happy with the Government, they would make it known:

“He might get some verbal abuse, I don’t think it was one of the safest places when Tony Blair or Gordon Brown was in charge, it wouldn’t have been safe for them. Especially Tony Blair, where is the safest place for him?” (Interview, Ian Rees, 4/8/15).

The reception that politicians get at the RWS will greatly depend on their party and their own views, as was discussed earlier relations are very personal and some politicians may be more comfortable and welcomed by the public at the Show than others. Even for those politicians who do attend the Show, not all meetings and encounters are cordial. At the 2013 RWS whilst he was Minister for Natural Resources and Food, one member of the public took exception to the presence of Alun Davies in

the NSA Bar, a debate ensued, and the Minister ended up with a pint of beer down his face.

Other more formal protests have taken place at the RWS and due to the presence of those in power, it is not unusual for the RWS to be used as an arena for farmers and general public to express their disappointment in government, in a symbolic way (Cha, 2009). In the space of the research for this thesis, there have been a number of examples of the RWS being used in this manner, in both a formal and informal manner, to varying levels of impact.

Particularly in recent years, farmers and farming unions have used the RWS as a platform in order to lobby Government, retailers, and processors with regards to the prices that they are paid for their meat and milk. One of the largest protests occurred in 2014 with over 60 farmers gathering outside the Tesco tradestand on the Showground, with placards standing against the retailer's decision to promote lamb from the southern hemisphere despite it being the prime season for British grass-fed, spring lamb. They were demanding fairer returns for Welsh farmers and for an end to meat imports when there is home grown product available, this protest lasted for around 45 minutes and was witnessed by then Prime Minister, David Cameron.

The success of these protests is unknown, with Tesco not refusing to comment, however they agreed to, and have since met with farmers in order to discuss their concerns. It was anticipated that a similar protest would be repeated in 2015, but rather than protest the NFU Cymru opted to "put forward a reasoned argument and show best practice" (interview, John Davies, 11/9/15). However, there was a feeling amongst the Union and farmers that this was not an effective way to get their message across because "Tesco have proven that they listen more to demonstrations very often, than sensible and reasoned positions" (interview, John Davies, 11/9/15). The RWS provides the opportunity, the platform, a chance for the protestor to have an audience, and therefore is an ideal opportunity for any group to make a political point or stand.



Figure 60: NFU members protesting near the Tesco stand at the 2014 RWS (North Wales Daily Post).

8.4.4 – Summary

The work of Murray (2012) on sport and diplomacy can easily be applied to the RWS, taking his theory it can be said that the RWS is able to promote positive values about the agriculture industry, and Wales more generally, whilst promoting exchange and dialogue, cultivating favour endorsement and popular support.

It can be said that the presence of politicians and senior policymakers at the RWS can bring with it a sense of mutual respect fostering discipline, tolerance and compassion. However, on the other hand for some politicians the RWS can be seen as a photo opportunity leading to members of the public thinking that the presence of politicians at the event is simply a political gimmick (Ibid).

The RWS and other large-scale events are highly valuable communication tools for those in power, but it should be used with much caution, their presence can have both positive and negative effects, and there is no guarantee of a positive outcome being recorded.

Similar to the work of Cha (2009) on sport and diplomacy the RWS can be seen as a prism that reflects identity, displaying it domestically and internationally, and can also initiate physical and ideational changes in society, as well as being a power that reflects the values of the Welsh nation.

Therefore, on the basis of the work of Deos (2014) and Murray (2012), this section concludes by suggesting that the politics at play at the RWS can be seen as an example of event diplomacy whereby the Show is used as a tool to engage, inform, and to create a favourable image amongst domestic and foreign publics in order for the Welsh Government to achieve their policy goals.

8.5 – Summary

The RWS blurs the lines between political, economic, social and cultural norms, creating a network that is a strong actor in Welsh political life. For government at all levels the RWS is considered as being a key event to support the agriculture industry and the wider rural community, in particular by being at the RWS it allows government to engage and communicate with a captive farming and wider rural audience on their key policies.

Similar to the way in which traders will use the RWS, the Welsh Government use the event to raise the profile of the organisation in Wales, and to also provide a platform for their vision for the future of rural Wales. Again, the RWS provides a unique opportunity for the Welsh Government to do this, as their target market, and the media are all present at the event.

Due to the RWS bringing together stakeholders from across the UK (and beyond) the event is used by the Welsh Government and senior civil servants to take the opportunity to hold catch up meetings with key stakeholders, and to update each other with developments and proposals that will impact upon the Welsh agricultural industry. In addition to the informal networking that is facilitated by the RWS, as addressed in Chapter Seven the event also provides the opportunity for more formal

knowledge exchange to take place, something that the Welsh Government takes full advantage of. In recent years the Chief Veterinary Officer for Wales, Professor Christianne Glossop, has held a number of stakeholder seminars specifically relating to the Bovine Tuberculosis Eradication Programme, biosecurity, and other health/welfare issues (personal communication, Joanne Binding, 11/8/15).

In the future, it is likely that the RWS will play a larger role in Welsh political life. As stated early in this chapter devolution in Wales is a relatively new thing, and “we are still in the process of building the nation” (interview, Rhun ap Iorwerth, 2/12/15). The RWS brings with it a chance for the Welsh Government (and other levels of government) to communicate with 250,000 people on an annual basis, and as such can allow for the profile of the institution to be raised. The RWS brings this unique opportunity, and should the Welsh Government be seen to be truly representative of Wales, it needs to be able to stand tall on the platform that the RWS provides. The event itself is not a product that is delivered for consumption, it is a process of many collaborating partners (farmers, unions, government, private businesses) in which the outcome is the development of trust and mutual understanding or social capital, leading to better relations between key groups in Wales (Zaharna, 2010).

Furthermore, as Slater (2011) found, festivals and performances such as the RWS are a very effective way to negotiate and intervene in forms of state power, it allows a government to assert agency over its nation. This is something that is particularly useful for the Welsh Government, as Wales is still a very young nation, in the early stages of devolution and nation forming. Whilst the Welsh Government has a presence at the RWS, they will gain legitimacy, as they are working with, and are associated with one of the oldest and most respected organisations in Wales.

The RWS is a key element of the Welsh political landscape, and as a result the event has a transformative effect on Welsh rural areas. The event is a key social movement and similar to Neal and Walters (2008) findings for the Women’s Institute and Young Farmers Clubs in rural England, the Show provides a social space where people can

perform specifically rural behaviours and allows visitors to understand the realities of the countryside.

Again, similar to the work of Neal and Walters (2008), the RWS inhabits a powerful, albeit extraordinary, location within the political landscape of Wales, as the event defines, shapes, and reproduces rural Wales on a mass scale to mass audience. Therefore, the Show is a highly powerful political tool, something that has been recognised by politicians throughout the UK.

The RWS, therefore can be seen as providing a relational approach to politics, whereby the event includes a mix of local, national, and international organisations that stretch from state institutions, to business, to farmers, and to the general public. This forms a dialogue across various mediums in a transparent and inclusive manner, developing relationships and collaborative networks for long term mutual benefit.

Chapter Nine: Conclusion

9.1 – Introduction

As set out in Chapter One, the aims of this thesis have been to:

- Investigate the role of agricultural shows in modern day society;
- Establish how agricultural shows (re)image and (re)present their host communities;
- Ascertain the role of agricultural shows as a site of social interaction;
- Investigate the role of agricultural shows in rural knowledge exchange;
- Contribute to the theories of social capital and knowledge exchange in rural areas;
- Determine the role that agricultural shows have in rural politics.

Using the case study of the RWS, the aims of this thesis have been achieved in the preceding chapters by utilising a mixed methods approach. Questionnaires, interviews, focus group, participant observation, archival research and social media techniques were used to collect the data and to enable the following principal research questions to be answered:

1. What role do agricultural shows have in (re)imagining and (re)presenting their host communities?
2. To what extent can large-scale rural events be seen as a nexus for knowledge exchange and innovation?
3. How do large-scale rural events influence the politics and governance of rural areas?

9.2 – Summary of Research Findings

This section of the final thesis chapter will briefly address and provide a final definitive answer to each of the three research questions.

9.2.1 – What role agricultural shows have in (re)imagining and (re)presenting their host communities?

This research question was largely addressed in Chapters Five and Six. As far back as 1988 Mewitt suggested that all festivals constitute some form of representation about their host society, and as a cultural artefact they can be used to comment on power relations in that society (Ibid). This is true for the RWS, it acts as an important means of collective identity for Welsh rural communities, and the event asserts, reinforces, and reproduces Welsh rural social norms, cultural values and beliefs to both an insider and outside audience.

It is well known (see Wilks, 2011) that festivals and events are seen as a tool for combatting social exclusion, overcoming barriers between people, and fostering community cohesion. Agricultural shows, especially the RWS can be seen as a hallmark event, that is they function like a monument, supporting and reinforcing the image of power. For those involved within the agricultural industry events such as these allow them to express their rural identity and to develop a sense of community in a safe space, with like-minded people.

Given their wide range of attractions, agricultural shows draw in large crowds from all walks of life. This gives rural communities the chance to both display and (re)imagine their communities to a vast audience (an international audience in the case of the RWS). Agricultural shows enable a wider public to see a glimpse of a performed rural reality, whilst allowing visitors to experience a diverse cultural experience, something in contrast to their normal day to day lives.

The fact that agricultural shows tend to be organised at a community level, by the people, for the people, means that visitors are able to get an authentic experience, like no other. Something which according to MacCannell (1976) is crucial to the tourist endeavour. Agricultural shows enable outsiders, or those from urban areas to get a genuine insight into rural practice and behaviour. By attending these events, people are able to enter the rural world, and position themselves as an insider, allowing them

to lead a simulated rural lifestyle. Visitors (whatever their background) to agricultural shows are encouraged to fully participate in the event, enabling them to acquire an embodied experience of rural areas, which has been constructed through a notion of materiality focused on all aspects of the rural (Galani-Moutafi, 2013).

Given their significance for rural communities, agricultural shows of all sizes receive some form of media coverage (at varying scales), as such their influence in reimagining rural community spreads far beyond showground itself, people can experience the event without even being there, allowing for rural messages and the rural idyll to spread beyond the showground itself. Furthermore, the larger agricultural shows (such as the RWS) attract an international audience, further allowing for the message of rural communities to be distributed around the globe.

Agricultural shows bring together a wide range of communities all in celebration of all things rural, it allows different groups of people to come together in celebration of rural areas. They allow for the projection of positive images of rurality, whilst at the same time building social and cultural capital.

In sum, agricultural shows reimagine the rural as a consumption centre, its physical and social attributes become commodities which are consumed by a wide variety of audiences. In an age of increased globalisation agricultural shows are a means of putting a place on the map, and to (re)imagine and (re)present their host communities.

9.2.2 – To what extent can large-scale rural events be seen as a nexus for knowledge exchange and innovation?

Research question two was addressed in Chapter Seven, and it can be concluded that due to the fact that agricultural shows bring together many key actors, on one site, on an annual basis, they provide a key forum for debate, discussion, and the building of trust. Therefore, large scale rural events are able to catalyse new encounters between

different social groupings, and as such they are able to reconfigure social relationships, even if only temporarily.

In order for any knowledge exchange or innovation to take place, trust needs to be present (Curry and Fisher, 2012). Typically, members of the rural community tend to be more trustful of similar people who have been through the same experiences as them, and with whom they have shared history. Temporary events such as agricultural shows provide an opportunity for key rural actors to meet, allowing them to discuss the latest industry news, innovations, and rumoured changes. All of which helps build trust. In addition to this, members of the farming community can view others stock, the latest product releases from global companies, and meet with all levels of government. Meaning that agricultural shows are a key site for the building of both bridging and bonding social capital, which results in both vertical and horizontal knowledge exchange taking place, in an informal manner that might not be possible in other situations (Wilks, 2011).

Much of the knowledge exchange that is undertaken at large scale rural events is done so subconsciously, as a result of people attending the event, socialising with their peers, and viewing the various exhibits. The knowledge exchange and learning is a by-product of people having a fun and interesting day out at the event, and not as a result of that person attending specifically to further their knowledge. However, there are more formal opportunities, often hosted by agricultural dealers, suppliers, and innovators for knowledge exchange.

The competitive nature of the more formal aspects of agricultural shows also have a key role in knowledge exchange – by seeing prize winners be it livestock, handicraft, or cheese, it leads to other entrants and those viewing the exhibits to improve their own practices.

Using the case study of the RWS this thesis has demonstrated the role that agricultural shows have in knowledge exchange in rural areas, the observation and interaction that occurs at these events facilitates informal learning, helping to stimulate

knowledge exchange, and can lead to rural innovation. The fact that this happens in a short lived and intensified form means that agricultural shows can be seen as a temporary knowledge cluster in a rural setting (Bathelt and Torre, 2011).

Agricultural shows, can be seen as temporary knowledge clusters, facilitating knowledge exchange, on an enclosed site for a temporary period of time, for three main reasons: Firstly, there are formal opportunities (often hosted by businesses) for knowledge exchange. Secondly these events give informal networking opportunities (mainly horizontal knowledge exchange) in a very social setting. Finally, agricultural shows bring together various actors, who do not communicate on a regular basis, and it provides opportunities for new relationships to be established. Visitors to agricultural shows are hard pressed to ignore the web of knowledge that exists at the events, and even the most passive of visitors will take something home from the agricultural show.

At agricultural shows, this knowledge exchange takes place in planned and unplanned circumstances, driving forward rural areas, something that the thesis has proposed is rural buzz. That is a distinct rural knowledge ecology, facilitated by face-to-face contact, temporary co-presence, and co-location of rural actors. Agricultural shows are only the start of a productive relationship, stronger relationships that are not geographically bounded are able to form as a result of initial contacts that have been made at agricultural shows, and once more the media presence is able to ensure that knowledge is spread throughout its host community and beyond (even to those who have not attended the event).

This knowledge clustering and the rural buzz which forms as a result, means that agricultural shows (and arguably other large scale rural events) can become centres for knowledge production and a catalyst for rural development, the concepts of knowledge based clustering and rural buzz has salience for rural areas. Therefore, agricultural shows are a vital part of the rural knowledge exchange mechanism, and due to the manner in which they bring a range of rural actors together, they can be seen a nexus for knowledge exchange and innovation.

9.2.3 – How do large-scale rural events influence the politics and governance of rural areas?

The final research question was addressed in Chapter Eight, with some initial thoughts being delivered in Chapter Seven. Many events would suggest that they are apolitical, however especially in the case of the RWS, whilst the event may be non-partisan, by its very nature it is highly political.

Large scale rural events blur the lines between political, social, cultural, and economic norms, meaning that they can be seen as a strong actor in rural political life. Rural events such as agricultural shows are significant sites for the building of system trust, between so called elites and those who operate on the ground, particularly at a time of change when relationships between politicians and farmers are strained.

Politicians and policymakers use large scale rural events as an opportunity to raise their profile, whilst allowing them to meet with members of the general public, giving them an opportunity to understand the key issues that affect the public, and allowing them to connect to the electorate at an informal level. Particularly for a young nation such as Wales, agricultural shows have a significant role in nation building, it allows for the idea and visions of a nation to be communicated, and to be discussed allowing the profile of the state to be raised. Performances such as those at agricultural shows are a very effective way of negotiating state power, and they can be seen as a useful way for a government to gain agency over a nation.

Large scale rural events can be seen as facilitating a new form of public diplomacy, whereby they facilitate politician and policymaker engagement with the general public and other actors, it provides politicians a chance to collaborate and listen with other rural actors and the general public, facilitating the development of long term relationships. Agricultural shows are a site where bridges can be built between politicians and different groups, allowing for influence to be made on policy. Often at large scale rural events, certain groups use them as a chance to protest and make their feelings known about policy choices or the current situation facing rural areas, to

varying amounts of success. However, events such as these give the opportunity and the platform for these groups to make their feelings known to politicians and policymakers, and in the case of the RWS even the Prime Minister.

The performance that takes place at agricultural shows demonstrates the complex power relations, social conventions, discursive practices, and institutional forces that are constantly combining and recombining in order to represent and understand the rural (Cloke, 2006).

Given the fact that agricultural shows inhabit a powerful, but extraordinary location within the political landscape of their host communities, they exert a large influence on the politics and governance of rural areas. Agricultural shows provide a unique and powerful opportunity for policymakers and politicians to communicate with their constituents, and for those at the events to be able to shape policy.

9.3 – Contribution of the Thesis

This thesis contributes to the limited existing literature on agricultural shows, and the impact that they have on rural society. More generally the thesis contributes to the literature surrounding rural events, the impact that they have on all aspects of their host community. Furthermore, the thesis contributes to the literature surrounding rural knowledge exchange mechanisms and the use of temporary based knowledge clusters in a rural setting. Given the fact that the thesis investigates the political role of the RWS, it also has impacts for the way that policymakers and politicians deal and interact with a rural audience.

The findings and methods utilised in this thesis can be seen to enhance a number of key geographical theories and concepts (see Section 2.6). This study has taken a grounded ontological investigating the RWS to establish the wider impact that agricultural shows have on society. In particular this research enhances existing knowledge on rural events, social capital in rural settings, knowledge exchange

mechanisms, performance of the rural, imagined communities, politics, and the nation of Wales.

Specifically, one of the main theoretical contributions of this research is that of the rural buzz model. This model is made up of five main knowledge exchange elements, which coalesce into a temporary project, which is then able to spread through its host community. Agricultural shows, through enabling a temporary proximity forming this rural buzz, allow for tacit knowledge exchange and situational learning to be facilitated. The rural buzz model is not definitive, however. But rather it is exploratory and suggestive. This model can be applied to any occasion where a large number of groups/individuals come together in rural areas, be it an agricultural show, trade event, or demonstration day. It is the relationships facilitated by the event, which long after the event has finished, which create the buzz and can lead to rural innovation. Although the model proposed here is based on evidence from one event, the RWS, it could be replicated, and applied more generally, and if similar findings are found for other case studies, it would raise interesting implications for regional studies, and the way that knowledge transfer and clustering are examined.

A large number of conference presentations have been given regarding this research, and outside of academia this thesis has made a great deal of impact in the public sphere. Given the nature of the RWS there is interest in the event each July, and since the instigation of the fieldwork in 2014, the research has been covered in both regional and national print and broadcast media. This research has been featured on the BBC, ITV, and in various print publications, and has been very well received by the public. Furthermore, in addition to this, this research has been the subject of a number of invited presentations and after dinner speeches to various groups throughout Wales.

9.4 – Limitations

As with all forms of research, this thesis does have its limitations. Although the methodological techniques employed were done so in order to reduce any limitations

or bias, the data presented in this thesis is very much reliant on the honesty and integrity of the participants. It was assumed that all participants answered the questionnaire and interviews honestly and accurately, and that they were knowledgeable enough about the RWS to actually be of benefit to the study. There is no way to ascertain whether the responses received represent the true opinion of all the attendees of the RWS. It should be noted that those interviewed tended to be very pro-RWAS and RWS and as such the majority of the views expressed in this study are positive.

One of the major limitations of this thesis is that it only focuses on the main event of the RWS itself. As mentioned throughout the thesis, the impact of the RWS stretches far beyond the boundary of the Showground, both physically and metaphorically. Particularly during the period of the Show, a number of fringe events (the YPV, Penmaenau Camping, and the town of Builth Wells itself, to name a few) appear on outside of the RWS boundary fence. This thesis does not address these fringe elements of the RWS, despite not being part of the main event they still have an influence on visitors to the event, and on the wider community. Given that these key, but fringe elements of the RWS are missing from this study it means that a broader assessment of social capital in the context of agricultural shows has not been possible, this is something that requires further work.

This research is limited in scope due to the fact that it is focussed on one case study, the RWS, as established throughout the research the RWS is a unique event, which takes place in a unique context, and as such the results of this study may not translate across to other agricultural shows around the United Kingdom. Due to devolution, the RWS is spatially tied to the governance structure of Wales, as such the impact of the RWS may be far greater within Wales, than would be seen at other agricultural shows in other areas of the world. Due to practical and time constraints when undertaking PhD research, it has not been possible to study other agricultural shows that occur in the UK and all around the world, many of which would warrant their own research and potentially even PhD study. The results and conclusions presented in this thesis,

are specific to the RWS but given the nature and similarities of agricultural shows worldwide it is thought that their impacts (albeit at a different scale) will be similar.

9.5 – Future Research

Time and space constraints on this thesis have meant that it has not been possible to explore every aspect of the RWS, as discussed throughout the thesis the RWS means something different to almost every attendee, and it would have been nigh on impossible to cover every aspect of the Show. In order to do the Show complete justice, further research could be conducted into aspects of the event that have not been covered in this thesis including, but not limited to, human livestock relations, the geographies of livestock showing, the socio-material assemblages at the RWS, and the impact of the event on mid Wales more generally.

In order to confirm the claims that this thesis makes, and reduce the limitations of the study as outlined in the previous section, further research could be undertaken into other agricultural shows, at different scales both in the UK and abroad. If similar conclusions were found for these other events it would confirm the validity of this study, and would have very interesting applications for studies of rural social capital, politics and identity. It would be particularly interesting to investigate the relationships between the larger agricultural shows, such as the RWS, and the smaller county level, or even village level shows.

Due to the methods employed, this thesis only investigates the motivations of those that attend agricultural shows, the research could be broadened to look at those who do not attend agricultural shows, and to establish why they choose not to attend, and if even though they do not attend, the impact that agricultural shows have on their lives.

One particular group that is of vital importance to the RWS and to Wales more generally, which was not given as much attention as they deserve in this thesis is the Wales YFC movement. The modern YFC movement influences all aspects of rural

Wales, its social, cultural, and political life, as well as providing a lifeline for many isolated communities. Despite this influence, there is no substantial academic work investigating the movement, something which a follow up to this thesis would like to address.

Agricultural shows provide a plethora of research possibilities, many of which it has not been possible to cover in this thesis and which have not previously been explored. I would urge others to study agricultural shows, and rural events more generally. As shown in this this thesis, their impact goes beyond the economy and they influence all aspects of rural life. Events such as these give a window into rural life and can tell us much about rural change. This thesis intends on being a starting point for a new research agenda around rural events and their impacts.

9.6 – Thesis Conclusion

This thesis has shown that agricultural shows are a significant field of study within rural geography. More widely the findings also provide interesting questions that will impact upon events management studies, tourism, business management, social and cultural geography, as well as regional studies. In addition, given its focus on knowledge exchange and rural politics, it has impacts on rural policy and political techniques. Therefore, as stated in the previous section, this thesis is a starting point for a new research agenda surrounding rural events.

The case study based research investigating the RWS has highlighted the fact that agricultural shows are significant events for not just rural communities, but their whole host community, in the case of the RWS, Wales. The RWS allows rural Wales to be presented in a positive light, not just to Wales but to a global audience, bringing with it a chance to change people's perceptions of the industry.

Furthermore, agricultural shows are vital community building tools they bring together an often-dispersed rural community to celebrate their heritage. This assists to build rural social capital. This social capital builds trust, and can facilitate knowledge

exchange between a variety of actors at the event, meaning agricultural shows can be seen as a temporary knowledge cluster.

This knowledge transfer lasts beyond the life of any individual agricultural show, with these agricultural shows acting a point to rebuild trusting relationships and to ensure that the level of social capital remains high. Due to the relationships that are created by agricultural shows knowledge can spread throughout the rural community, throughout the year, something that is conceptualised as rural buzz.

Due to the fact that agricultural shows bring together a large number of people, they create a critical mass, something that is recognised by politicians, politicians use the agricultural shows as a tool to connect with their constituents, and as an arena for policy launches, allowing them to get positive media coverage.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Humans of the Royal Welsh Show Profiles

Participant	Position ³⁵	Organisation
Aled Jones	Assistant Chief Executive	RWAS
Will Smith	Estates Assistant	RWAS
Will Hanks	Director of Cattle	RWAS
Ben Watkins	Estates Assistant	RWAS
Susie Stockton-Link	Administration Assistant	RWAS
Dee Rees	Receptionist	RWAS
Kay Spencer	Assistant Director, Glamorgan Hall	RWAS
Richard Davies	Director of Administration	RWAS
Phyllis Hammond	Sheep Officer	RWAS
Mike Coleman	Tradestand Steward	RWAS
Jacqueline Beverly	Owner	Jacqueline Beverly
Margaret Spencer	Chief Steward	RWAS
David Spencer	Biosecurity Officer	RWAS
Steve Hughson	Chief Executive	RWAS
William Nichols	Competitor	
Eifion Huws	Vice-President	FUW
Ruth Ince	Competitor	
Eifion Lloyd	Visitor	
Cyril Davies	Vice Chairman (sic), Council	RWAS
Arwyn Davies	Deputy Chief Vet	RWAS
Roland Wear	Officer	Careers Wales
Jill King	Judge	RWAS
Eirwen Carter	Exhibitor	
Hazel Wright	Senior Policy Officer	FUW
Angus McCall	Judge	RWAS
Terry Anthony	Steward	RWAS
Leighton Evans	Exhibitor	
Barbara	Volunteer	Royal Voluntary Service
Anthony Sherwood	Steward	RWAS
Stuart Eckley	Chief Inspector	Dyfed-Powys Police
Claire Price	Visitor	
Stephen Glover	Steward	RWAS
Chris O'Brian	Public Affairs Manager	RSPCA
Mark Ashdown	Exhibitor	
Hannah Thomas	Presenter/Correspondent	ITV Cymru Wales
Richard Vesey	Exhibitor	
Amy Jones	Exhibitor	
Marian Lewis	Steward	RWAS
Audrey Baylis	Steward	RWAS
Tom	Exhibitor	
David Fagan	Exhibitor	
Rhun ap Iorwerth	Assembly Member (Plaid Cymru)	Welsh Assembly
Petra Beresford-Webb	Chaplin	RWAS

³⁵ The positions of the participants as at the time of the profile.

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Chris Hopkins	Director	Ted Hopkins LTD
Huw Condron	Commentator	RWAS
Geoff Bemand	Competitor	
Tom Evans	Commentator	RWAS
Andrew Nichols	Exhibitor	
Harriet Power	Exhibitor	RWAS
Ian Roly	Owner	French Flavour
Clive Alexander	Assistant Director, Food Hall	RWAS
Mark Williams	Member of Parliament (Liberal Democrat)	UK Parliament
Alison Lea-Wilson	Director	Halen Môn
Dai Jones	Presenter	S4C
Dewi Roberts	Owner	Dewi Roberts Butchers
Lowri Fflur Davies	Producer	Telesgop
		Samosa Co
		Cwm Rhondda Ales
Alana Spencer	Owner	Narna's
Rachael Garside	Presenter	BBC Wales
Oliver Haine	Visitor	
Rhian Davies	Personal Assistant	RWAS
Amanda Burton	Secretary	RWAS
Rosemarie Harris	Steward	RWAS
Hywel Bowden	Exhibitor	
Lisa Howells	Administrator	National Federation of Woman's Institutes
	Exhibitor	
Liz Edwards	Exhibitor	
Glenda Gordon	Steward	RWAS
Peter Thomas	Assistant	National Trust
David Morgan	President	RWAS
Glyn Jones	Visitor	
	Owner	La Crème Patisserie
Pip Bensley	Judge	RWAS
Gwawr Edwards	Exhibitor	
Abi Reader	Visitor	
Buster Grant	Head Brewer	Brecon Brewing
Gwyn Williams	Visitor	
	Owner	Llanfaes Dairy Ice Cream
Vicky Hope	Chairperson	Wales YFC
Angela	Owner	Snowdonia Cheese
Tom Rees	Visitor	
Gareth Evans	Manager	Celtic Pride LTD
Glyn Roberts	President	FUW
		Radnor Preserves
Menna Evans	Chairperson, Young Members Forum	RWAS
Michelle Davies	Owner	Shelly's Food
Susan Jones	Director for Press, Publicity, and Sponsorship	RWAS
Joe McCalmont	Lecturer	Aberystwyth University
Ieuan Williams	Visitor	
Sarah Swinnerton	Marketing Officer	Harper Adams University
Eirwen Roberts	Consumer Executive	Hybu Cig Cymru
Catrin Roberts	Assistant	Twf
Ian Rees	Associate Solicitor	Agri Advisor
Joyce Owen	Exhibitor	
Ryan Joseph	Exhibitor	

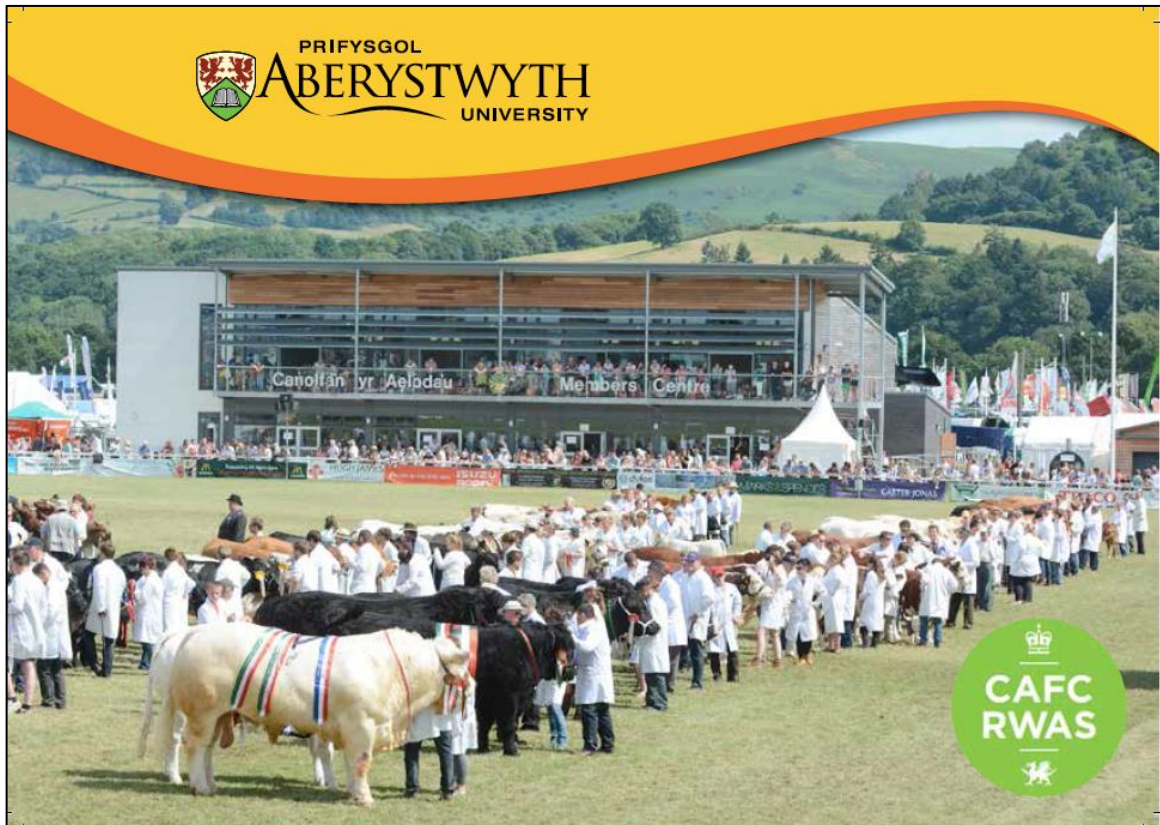
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Picton Jones	Visitor	
Nigel Owens	Presenter/Referee	Telesgop/Welsh Rugby Union
Simon	Owner	Show Shop
Matt Spencer	Operative	Ginger Exhibitions
Richard Jones	President	RWAS
John Owen	President's Assistant	RWAS
John Davies	Deputy President	NFU
Nicola Davies	Chief Announcer and Commentator	RWAS
Jeremy Lilley	Steward	RWAS
Gerald Brown	Chief Steward	RWAS
Sam Davies	Steward Coordinator	RWAS
Barbara Green	Steward	RWAS
Harry Fetherstonhaugh	Show Director	RWAS
Neil and Christine Hamilton	Assembly Member (UKIP)	Welsh Assembly
Matthew Howells	Sergeant	Dyfed-Powys Police
Lord Dafydd Ellis-Thomas	Assembly Member (Independent)	Welsh Assembly
Robin Gibson Watt	Visitor	
Wayne Lloyd	Visitor	
Malcom Thomas	Chairman (sic)	RABI
Elizabeth French	President	Welsh Pony and Cob Society
Paul Lubbinge	Visitor	
Sian Pritchard	Managing Director	Kuhn Farm Machinery
Len Bigley	Chairman (sic), Livestock Committee	RWAS
James Duggleby	Marketing Manager	Krone UK
Linda Jones	Regional Manager	RABI
Derek Brockway	Presenter	BBC Wales
		RSPB Cymru
Mike Perry	Head of Development and Policy	Plunkett Foundation
Clive Powell	Owner	Welsh Sheeptacular
Alun Jones	Visitor	
Mike Wilding	Salesman	Teme Valley Tractors
		Wales Air Ambulance
Chris Davies	Director of Horses/Member of Parliament (Conservative)	RWAS/UK Parliament
Roger James	Owner	Black Mountains Falconry
Gwen Davies	Administration Assistant	RWAS
Ifor Lloyd	Visitor	
Jamie Ferguson	Traffic Controller	RWAS
Ruth Wignal	Presenter	ITV Cymru Wales
Georgie Hyde	Associate	AD4Energy
Sam	Educator	Egg Seeds
Artie Thomas	Production Manager	Boom Pictures
		Woodland Trust
Shae Price	Competitor	
Alun Evans	Steward	RWAS
Amanda Thomas	Exhibitor	
Tim Farron	Member of Parliament (Liberal Democrat)/Leader of the Liberal Democrats	UK Parliament
Dafydd Jones	Senior Member of the Year	Wales YFC
Tom Jones	International Chairman (sic)	Wales YFC

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Sioned Davies	Visitor	
Katie Davies	Competitions Vice Chairperson	Wales YFC
Laura Elliot	Competitions Chairperson	Wales YFC

Appendix 2: 2014 Royal Welsh Show Visitor Survey



Name: _____

Email address: _____

Postcode (or country if non UK): _____

Gender: MALE FEMALE

Age: Under 18 18 – 25 26 – 40
 41 – 50 51 – 65 Over 65

Are you from a farming background? YES NO

Reason for attending the Royal Welsh Show:
 Business Day out Family holiday Education
 Trader Competitor Family competing
 Other: _____

For how many days in 2014 will you attend the Show?
 1 2 3 4

Which of the previous Shows have you attended?
 I haven't 2009 2010 2011 2012 2013

In which section of the Show do you spend the majority of your time?
 Animals Machinery Food and drink YFC
 Shopping Main Ring Countryside Care Forestry
 Other: _____

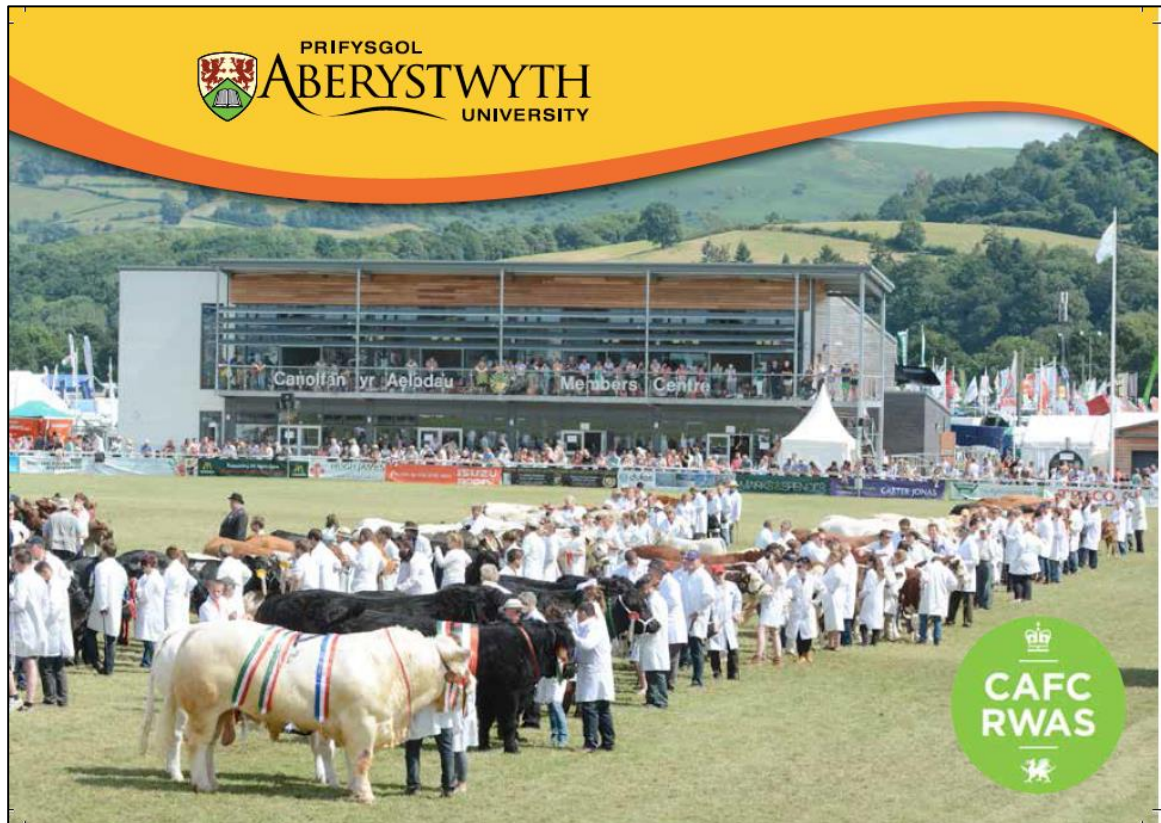
Do you feel the Royal Welsh Show represents value for money?
 YES NO

Will you be attending the 2015 RWAS? YES NO

Describe the Royal Welsh Agricultural Show in three words: _____

In submitting this postcard and entering the free prize draw, you are agreeing to the terms and conditions available at www.showingagriculture.co.uk and you are agreeing to be contacted by Aberystwyth University and/or the Royal Welsh Agricultural Society.

Please tick this box if you do not wish to be contacted.



Enw: _____

Cyfeiriad e-bost: _____

Cod Post (neu wlad os tu allan i'r DU): _____

Rhyw: GWRYW MENYW

Oed: Dan 18 18 – 25 26 – 40
 41 – 50 51 – 65 Dros 65

A ydych o gefndir ffermio? YDW NACYDW

Rheswm am fynychu'r Sioe Frenhinol Cymru:
 Busnes Diwrnod mas Gwyliau teulu Addysg
 Masnachwr Cystadleuydd Teulu yn cystadiu
 Arall: _____

Am faint o diwrnodau yn 2014 byddwch yn mynychu'r Sioe?
 1 2 3 4

Pa un o'r Sioeau blaenorol ydych chi wedi mynychu?
 Dwy heb 2009 2010 2011 2012 2013

Ym mha ran o'r Sioe ydych chi'n treulio'r rhan fwyaf o'ch amser?
 Anifeiliaid Peiriannau Bwyd a Ddiol CFFI
 Slopa Prif Gylch Gofal Cefn Gwlad Coedwigaeth
 Arall: _____

Ydych chi'n teimlo bod y Sioe werth yr arian?
 YDW NACYDW

A fyddwch yn mynychu Sioe Frenhinol Cymru 2015?
 BYDDAF NA FYDDAF

Disgrifwch Sioe Amaethyddol Frenhinol Cymru mewn tri gair:

Wrth gyflwyno'r cerdyn post hwn a gwneud cais am y raffi am ddim, rydych yn cytuno i'r telerau ar amodau sydd ar gael www.showingagriculture.co.uk ac rydych yn cytuno i gael eich cysylltu gan Brifysgol Aberystwyth a / neu'r Gymdeithas Amaethyddol Frenhinol Cymru.

Ticiwch y blwch hwn os nad ydych yn dymuno i ni gysylltu â chi.

Appendix 3: 2014 Royal Welsh Show Trader Survey

English - United Kingdom

Cydsyniad/Consent

Diolch ichi am gytuno i gymryd rhan yn Arolwg Masnachwyr Sioe Amaethyddol Frenhinol Cymru 2014.

Gall yr arolwg yma gael ei gwblhau yng Nghymraeg neu Saesneg. Dewiswch iaith trwy ddefnyddio'r ddewislen sy'n disgyn i lawr ar y cornel top ochr dde.

Mae'r arolwg hwn yn cael ei gynnal gan Gymdeithas Amaethyddol Frenhinol Cymru a Phrifysgol Aberystwyth. Bydd y canlyniadau'n cael eu defnyddio i wella profiad masnachwyr yn Sioe Frenhinol Cymru, ar gyfer marchnata ac at ddibenion ymchwil.

Trwy barhau gyda'r arolwg rydych yn cydsynio i'ch gwybodaeth gael ei defnyddio gan Gymdeithas Amaethyddol Frenhinol Cymru a Phrifysgol Aberystwyth. Ni fydd eich gwybodaeth yn cael ei rhannu gydag unrhyw sefydliad trydydd parti.

Thank you for agreeing to take part in the Royal Welsh Agricultural Show Trader Survey 2014.

The survey can be completed in Welsh or English. Please select a language using the drop down menu in top right hand corner.

This survey is being conducted by the Royal Welsh Agricultural Society and Aberystwyth University. The results will be used to improve the trader experience at the Royal Welsh Show, for marketing and for research purposes.

By continuing with the survey you are consenting to your information being used by the Royal Welsh Agricultural Society and Aberystwyth University. Your information will not be shared with any third party organisation.

Cyflwyniad/Introduction

Name of business/organisation?

Type of business/organisation? (Agricultural supplier, charity...)

Sioe Frenhinol Cymru 2014/Royal Welsh Show 2014

Why did your business/organisation attend the 2014 Royal Welsh Show?
(Please select all that apply).

- Retail trading with general public.
- Retail trading with other businesses.
- Marketing of products or services.
- Public awareness of your business/organisation.
- Charitable purposes.
- Educational purposes.
- To hold displays or demonstrations

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To have display or demonstrations.

Other (please specify).

Were your objectives met?

Yes

No

Were the visitors your correct target market?

Yes

No

Please expand upon your answer to the previous question.

Sioe Frenhinol Cymru 2014/Royal Welsh Show 2014

What direct benefits did attending the 2014 Royal Welsh Show bring to your business/organisation?

What long term benefits does attending the Royal Welsh Show have for your business/organisation?

Please summarise your experiences of the Royal Welsh Show.

Agricultural Shows: Shaping the Rural

Hanes/History

Have you had a presence at the Royal Welsh Show in previous years?

- Yes
 No

Which previous Show(s) have you had a presence at?
(Please select all that apply).

- 2013
 2012
 2011
 2010
 2009
 Had a presence for more than 5 years.

What encouraged you to have a presence at the 2014 Show?

Y Dyfodol/Future

Do you intend on having a presence at the 2015 Royal Welsh Show?

- Yes
 No

Why are you not intending on having a presence at the 2015 Royal Welsh Show?
(Please select all that apply).

- Too expensive.
 2014 Show did not meet expectations.
 Other events.
 Change in business circumstances.
 Other (please specify).

Digwyddiadau eraill/Other events

Do you attend any other events that are similar to the Royal Welsh Show?

- Yes
 No

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Please give examples of the other events that you attend.

How do the other events that you attend compare to the Royal Welsh Show?

Cefnogaeth masnachwyr/Trader support

Were you happy with the organisation and support provided by the Royal Welsh Agricultural Society?

Yes

No

What could be done to improve the trader experience at the Royal Welsh Show?

How did you find the application process?

Easy

Neutral

Difficult

Do you have any comments on the application process?

Cefnogaeth masnachwyr/Trader support

Please rate the following in relation to your experience at the Royal Welsh Show.

	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor
Trader application process	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Helpfulness of staff	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Tradestand information pack	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Method of marking out	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Do you have any additional comments on your Royal Welsh Show experience?

Cyfleusterau/Facilities

Please rate the following facilities at the Royal Welsh Show.

	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor
Toilets	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Showers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Waste collection	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Security	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Electrical services	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Caravan facilities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
General condition of site	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Do you have any comments on the facilities at the Royal Welsh Show?

Datblygiadau at y dyfodol/Future developments

Would you be interested in an online application service?

- Yes
- No

Would you find an online portal useful so you could check details (i.e. catalogue descriptions, stand sizes and stand numbers)?

- Yes
- No

Do you find the pre-completed application form useful?

- Yes
- No

How important is having the same stand location as in previous years?

- Important
- Neither Important nor Unimportant

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Unimportant

Would you be interested in using Wifi at the Royal Welsh Show?

Yes

No

How much would you be willing to pay for Wifi at the Royal Welsh Show?

Can you suggest any future changes or development for the Show in general?

Manylion cysylltu/Contact details

If you are happy to be contacted by either Aberystwyth University or the Royal Welsh Agricultural Society as part of a follow up to this survey then please fill in the below form.

If you would not like to be contacted, press next to complete the survey.

Contact Name:

Email Address:

Telephone Number:

Appendix 4: Humans of the Royal Welsh Show

NEIL AND CHRISTINE HAMILTON (WELSH ASSEMBLY MEMBER, UKIP)



"We're Neil and Christine Hamilton, and we are basically here to give you a couple of extra paragraphs for your thesis. But apart from that it is of course the biggest agricultural show in Northern Europe, and I believe this brings in £20 million a year to the Mid Wales economy. As one of the Assembly Members for Mid and West Wales it is a vitally important event in the year."

ROBIN GIBSON-WATT (PRESIDENT 2000, RWAS)



"I'm Robin Gibson-Watt, I've always enjoyed the Royal Welsh, I remember coming before it was even a permanent feature here at Llanelwedd, as you grow older you get different characteristics and enjoyments out of it, to start with you go a bit slower around it, so you don't see as much as the young ones do. But I never cease to be amazed at the enthusiasm of everybody, I was very lucky some years ago to be on the Board for a period of time and a member of various committees, and a feature of that was that whenever you sat together in committee, you might have had your disagreements, but always you were pulling for the good of the Royal Welsh, everybody knew that their role was to help the Royal Welsh, and to make it a wonderful, exciting, fun event, and for the future. I always remember the tremendous accent on trying to promote everything with the young in mind. We are standing here after the opening of the Show, amongst fairly senior people who have been involved for many, many years. But all of those people are very well aware of younger generations coming up who make the Show and will be standing here in ten, twenty years' time, carrying on the wonderful traditions that have been wonderfully promoted in our second century."

DEREK BROCKWAY (WEATHER PRESENTER, BBC WALES)



“I’m Derek Brockway, and I do love the Royal Welsh Show, I’ve been coming here for over fifteen years for Wales Today, predicting the weather, I’ve seen all kinds of weather during that time, as you can imagine. One year we had floods, everything was soggy and wet, today we’ve got baking sunshine, it is the hottest day at the Royal Welsh Show for ten years. We’ve had all kinds of weather bar snow! I do love coming here, it is an opportunity for me to get out of the studio, meet people from all around Wales, chat to farmers, about the weather of course, and enjoy the show. There is so much to see and do here, wonderful things going on in the Main Ring, the Food Hall, all the stalls, and it is the biggest show in Europe. It is absolutely fantastic, I’m already looking forward to next year!”

PAUL LUBBINGE (SHOW VISITOR)



“I’m Paul Lubbinge from South Africa, it is the second year that I have come to the Royal Welsh, and I’m here for the Welsh Ponies, I think they are very important all over the world, and this is the Mecca of the Welsh Ponies, the best, the biggest show you can get. So, it is fantastic to be here.”

GEOFF BEMAND (COMPETITOR)



“My name is Geoff Bemand, this is my third time coming to the Show, I only started keeping pigs three years ago, it is a retirement hobby. Showing has always interested me, a show is two things. You have a good social side of things, because the breeders together are good social people, but it is also our shop window. We meet people here who might be interested in times to come in, in buying pigs, give them a card. It is a shop window. We keep Large White and Welsh Pigs, but we brought predominantly Welsh pigs to the Royal Welsh, because it is its home in my mind.”

RUTH WIGNAL (WEATHER PRESENTER, ITV CYMRU WALES)



“I’m Ruth Wignal, I present the weather forecasts on ITV Cymru Wales, I also present a show called Coast and Country, so really the Royal Welsh is the perfect blend of the two. I’ve been coming to the Royal Welsh Show for about fifteen years now, and I just love, I love the fact that so many people are here, it is really the heartland for our viewers, I’m meeting people, I’m meeting faces that I’ve met time and time again. It is kind of like a meeting point really. Everyone who is here, we all love the same things. We all love the animals, we love the outdoors, we love the countryside, we love everything about this show. And when the weather is like this it couldn’t really get any better, so hopefully I’ve done fifteen years. I want to do another fifteen years. It really is the highlight of my year.”

DAVID MORGAN (PRESIDENT 2015, RWAS)



“I’m David Morgan, I have the great honour of being the President of the Royal Welsh Agricultural Society for 2015, it has been a tremendous honour and I have been proud to represent Monmouthshire. We’ve had a tremendous year fundraising and I’ve met so many friends, had such a wonderful time, it’s just slipping away so fast, because it is coming to the end now unfortunately. We’ve had a wonderful time, both Nancy and I.”

GLYN JONES (GWENT FEATURE COUNTY MEMBER)



"I'm Dr Glyn Jones from Chepstow, and on Sunday evening I had the privilege of assisting our President, David Morgan MBE FRAGS to comper the Sunday evening carol concert, Carolau o'r Cylch at this year's Royal Welsh Winter Fair. We've had a great year fundraising for the Gwent Feature County Committee which has organised so many different activities, it has been fantastic and wonderful to be part of the Gwent Feature County and we're all looking forward to supporting our very hard-working President David Morgan and his wife Nancy at the best Winter Fair in the world."

ALUN EVANS (STEWARD, RWAS)



“My name is Alun Evans, I come from Llandudno Junction, Conwy, North Wales, I’ve been stewarding here for a few years, I’m particularly interested in the horticultural side of the show. I like to give my time up to be a steward because the Royal Welsh means so much to me, it is a family show, and it is so friendly. We are all friends, it gives an opportunity to show flowers to the public and to share horticulture with them, and to pass on that skill to other people.”

WILL HANKS (DIRECTOR OF CATTLE, RWAS)



“I’m Will Hanks, Director of Cattle. This is my third year of being Director, I’m in charge of all the cattle from when they come up on the Saturday, to the following Friday. Looking after them in the sheds, at the Cattle Ring, judging purposes, results, and putting on two parades in the Main Ring on Wednesday and Thursday afternoon. I do it alongside a faithful bunch of stewards, who I call friends, as well as colleagues, without them we couldn’t do a show like we’ve got.”

CHRIS DAVIES (DIRECTOR OF HORSES, RWAS/MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT, CONSERVATIVE)



“I’m Chris Davies, Director of Horses, Programme and Main Ring at the Royal Welsh Show, and also the Member of Parliament for Brecon and Radnorshire, sometimes the two jobs can be a little conflicting. I’ve been here since last Friday, but on the Monday of this week I had to leave the Showground at 4pm, to drive to London for half an hour to vote on our nuclear deterrent, and then I drove back through the night. Eight hours in the car, half an hour in the House of Commons, and then back on duty here at 7am in the morning here at the Royal Welsh Show, on Royal Welsh Tuesday.”

NIGEL OWENS (RUGBY REFEREE)



"I'm Nigel Owens, and I've been coming to the Royal Welsh for years really, coming from a farming community and working on a farm, that was the interest originally but then over the last few years I've been President of Wales Young Farmers Clubs, and most of the time I've been coming here to compete with the Young Farmers when I was a member, and then coming to help out in the YFC Office during the competitions, and I think the last four or five years, I've been coming here to referee the final of the sevens tournament."

CHRIS HOPKINS (TRADER)



"I first attended the Show in 1989, we've been coming for 26 years. Basically, to meet customers, to expand and develop our business, we have been coming ever since that date. We've met a lot of new customers and subsequently we opened a branch in Brecon, which we didn't have when we first started here".

GWYN WILLIAMS (AUCTIONEER)



“I’m Gwyn Williams from Ross-On-Wye, it has been a great honour to open this year’s Winter Fair, I’m an auctioneer and farmer, I do an awful lot of work in Wales, at the moment most of my time is spent doing TB valuations in Wales, it is really a terrible business, the farmers are losing left, right, and centre, although farmers get the value, the loss is colossal. I’ve been very concerned by some of the actions of the Welsh Government, for instance, 15% transfer from pillar one to pillar two, the highest in Europe. It is totally and utterly wrong, now as far as conservation is concerned, I think that Welsh farmers are the people who do most conservation of all, they are stockmen, and they do not harm the countryside, by keeping livestock, they return a lot of fertility to the land. I’ve been concerned about the way that Glastir developed, farmers weren’t happy and the government were forced to amend it, the same business with the basic payment scheme this year. They treated the hill farmers very badly initially; now after judicial review we have the situation where the system has been altered to the detriment of the lowland farmer and that is wrong. They seem to be making a mess of everything, and my opinion is that the people who are dealing with the system, I’m not blaming Ms Evans, but it is her officials, they should know better. They seem to be lacking in experience and common sense”.

LORD DAFYDD ELLIS-THOMAS (WELSH ASSEMBLY MEMBER, INDEPENDENT)



"I'm Lord Dafydd Ellis-Thomas, the Assembly Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd, Meirionnydd is the host county this year, that is why I had the privilege of opening the show. I've been coming to the Show ever since it travelled, and ever since its settled down, I don't think that I've ever missed a Show or part of a Show because it is the prime event in Wales for business and agriculture, but also for politics. Because the bodies that I need to talk to, they are all here. The pressure groups, the official agencies, the parties, the ministers, the farming unions, the CLA, the National trust, everybody is here. It is an opportunity to keep doing business and to renew contacts, and to also talk through future ideas. This week especially, everybody wants to talk about how we sort out our relationships with the European Union, and I'm up for that".

JOHN DAVIES (DEPUTY PRESIDENT, NFU CYMRU)



"I'm John Davies, I come to the best show in the world, to meet with the best farmers, to see the best livestock, and to see the latest innovations. This week the NFU are representing our farmer members and growers, and we're putting forward the case to support the number one industry in Wales. 18% of the workforce in Wales are employed in food and farming, we contribute £6 billion to the economy of Wales, so obviously we believe that farming and primary production is a strategic industry, and underpins and is the foundation of our economy".

SHAE PRICE (COMPETITOR)



"I'm Shae Price, I live in Brecon. We have had a good Show, showing the Welsh Mountain Ponies, we got first with the Senior Stallion, Maesgwyn Highmark. We also got Female Champion with a mare called Afan Rock-Chick. It is a great achievement for a small stud".

RUTH INCE (COMPETITOR)



“My name is Ruth Ince and I’m from South Warwickshire. I’m here on behalf of my son, who is at home harvesting, hopefully, if the weather is dry. This is our fifth showing year now; we thoroughly enjoy the breed. It’s a Zwartbles, originally from Holland, a milking breed. But we are putting a little bit more meat on the bones now. They have become very popular with top end restaurants, and Michelin Starred Chefs. We were competing at the Great Yorkshire last week and we won the group of three, second with an ewe lamb, and third with an older ewe”.

DEWI ROBERTS (EXHIBITOR)



“I’m Dewi Roberts, Butcher from Ffairfach, just south of Llandeilo. We’ve been going for the last 30 years, coming to the Royal Welsh for the last 18. We keep salt marsh lamb, locally produced Welsh beef, basically all top dollar Welsh product that sells itself without any help from me. We’ve got a very strong customer base on the showfield, as you know there are quite a few thousand people here. We don’t regard them as customers, we regard them as friends”.

ALANA SPENCER (EXHIBITOR AND BBC APPRENTICE WINNER 2016)



"I'm Alana from Aberystwyth and the company is called Narna's and we make Belgium chocolate cake, it's been a fantastic week".

ABI READER (OXFORD FARMING CONFERENCE BURSARY RECIPIENT)



“I’m Abi Reader, I’m a dairy farmer from Cardiff and I’ve come up to the Winter Fair today to receive a bursary from the Royal Welsh Agricultural Society for the Oxford Farming Conference, so I’m really excited about going, it’s going to be really interesting to hear about science, about politics, from farmers, and from others throughout the industry, to hear all their opinions, to try and get some consensus and to move the industry forward”.

TIM FARRON (MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT, LIBERAL DEMOCRAT)



“I’m Tim Farron, I’m the leader of the Liberal Democrats, I’m the MP for somewhere just as rural as round here, in the Lake District. The Royal Welsh is an absolute premier show, the livestock here is immense, the whole event is a hugely important event. For me at the moment it is a chance to talk about how we make the case for whatever happens in the future. Farmers getting direct payments and to make sure that we continue to be a great producer of food in Wales and across the United Kingdom, even better than we are now perhaps, and certainly to make sure that we protect the family farm, and both those things are at risk if we don’t get the farm payment scheme that we need”.