

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru / National Assembly for Wales
Pwyllgor Diwylliant, y Gymraeg a Chyfathrebu / Culture, Welsh Language
and Communications Committee
Blaenoriaethau ar gyfer y Pwyllgor / Priorities for the Committee
CWLC(5) PFC05: Ymateb gan Monmouthshire Antiquarian Association /
Evidence from Monmouthshire Antiquarian Association

The Monmouthshire Antiquarian Association was founded in 1847 to establish a museum of local antiquities at Caerleon, but has broadened its remit to include the publication of an annual journal, concern for research, education and preservation of monuments for the whole county. As a society this means involvement also on the wider issues of the historic environment and landscape in Wales, where we feel that the National Assembly should take account of the following points:-

1. Underlying the planning decisions by government and local authorities is the information available to inform them; this is provided by the National Monuments Record, Wales and the Historic Environment Records, maintained by the four Welsh Archaeological Trusts. Public and private organisations all benefit from the ability to consult these records, which are now being converted to a bilingual format. Funding should both maintain the present level of recording and its translation. Currently funding is only in place for three years, but it is essential that finance is provided for the full five years. This is a core activity maintained by expert staff and to let the translation slow down the public services, or affect the entry of new records, would create a data backlog detrimental to its effective use. The ability of these records to provide an analysis of the information on ancient monuments and historic buildings by date, type, or distribution is a necessity for cost effective development such as the new M4 link.
2. The contribution of Cadw and Welsh Archaeological Trusts is important for the education of both schools and the general public. The community projects which they organize, give insights into technical subjects and the wider spectrum of history, and they provide expertise to assist local communities wanting to learn more about their past. A BBC survey carried out in the nineties showed 35% of the population were visiting monuments, or historic properties, on a regular basis and another 20% did so at least once a year. The cultural importance of heritage is borne out by the increased visitor numbers each year. The role of Cadw needs to be maintained and funding to be stabilized if it is to continue its key role in preservation and conservation.

3. Wales has recently benefited in 2015 from a review of Local Museum Provision. Many museums have collections and premises maintained by local enthusiasts, sometimes in co-operation with other public agencies or authorities. We are fortunate to be able to benefit from this dedication to Welsh heritage, which raises funds, maintains buildings and improves collections. Both government and local authorities gain financially by the creation of visitor centres which bring in tourist income. Methods to enhance their profile should receive more central support. Assistance with printing would be valuable, and the small museums and collections, such as at Risca and Torfean need more recognition. In Yorkshire for example an annual publication is produced listing all museum and society events and lectures; allowing members and the public to attend each other's meetings and to organize their programmes by the exchange of this information. Welsh radio and TV could be urged to give more publicity to smaller museums with short features included in local news programmes.
4. National Museum Wales has suffered badly from restrictions of its budget, which should be maintained at its present level for at least five years to adjust to the re-organisation. If new resources to provide advice and practical assistance with exhibitions, conservation and printing were available, it could offer expert help where this would be of greatest use. Also

we would like to see the continuation of the Portable Antiquities Scheme in Wales (PAS Cymru) as it is an invaluable national resource which captures and makes publicly accessible cultural information of the highest importance that would otherwise be lost. A stable funding basis for PAS Cymru must be prioritised and maintained or (preferably) enhanced if this resource is to be maintained for Wales. It is also a valuable and constructive means of liaising with the general public and enhancing their awareness of the importance of recording heritage in a practical way.

5. Government needs to press for multi-disciplinary co-operation between agencies working in different areas. Joint projects between agencies in the natural and historic environments should be the pattern for a way to see landscapes, as the creation of both man and nature, for example on the Gwent Levels or on abandoned industrial sites now reclaimed by wildlife.

6. The Society is keen to encourage the regeneration of Newport through the development of its historic resources, eg. the Transporter Bridge, its important museum resources and the maritime collections. These merit a new approach to integrate them. The museum has important archaeological, art and natural history material, and the Transporter Bridge can provide the basis for an industrial history site for southeast Wales. The region also has a unique collection of historic ship remains, beginning with the Bronze Age fragments from Goldcliff, the Roman boat from Magor Pill, Barland's Farm, while the Newport ship gives continuity down to the medieval period. This is unlike any other group in the Bristol Channel or elsewhere in Western Britain where it complements the later post-medieval collections at the Maritime Museum, Swansea. The maritime links of Newport to Ireland, France, Spain, Portugal and the Mediterranean offer the opportunity for an important cultural development that could attract major financial input from the Heritage Lottery. The Newport Ship, when discovered, created great interest internationally among the maritime nations of Europe and conservation and evaluation of the ship have been followed closely. In the next five years this process will be finished. A new and permanent home for the ship would have the kudos to help the city and its collections advance.