

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

Inquiry into the Welsh Government's Historic Environment Policy

Response from Ian Thompson

To whom it may concern,

I write as a family history researcher in Wales, having used the National Library in Aberystwyth, Archives in Caernarfon, Dolgellau, Bangor and Llangefni, and with a keen interest in the social and economic history of Wales.

It has struck me in the course of over 25 years' interest in Wales that the potential for unlocking the resources available for research - and the benefit in terms of jobs and tourism that might result - have not been realised.

There is, of course, in this, a balance to be struck in putting appreciable content online versus everything which might detract from users seeking the original record and visiting the place of interest to them. I would cite as one example the archives of Bangor University which hold a considerable amount of information not available in the National Library or anywhere else but which is only available to researchers on site.

I would contrast that with the Archifdy in Caernarfon which has considerable document-level information online on its own website and Access to Archives (a2a.org.uk), or the National Library's digitisation and online projects.

The balance to be struck is what "taster" can be put on line to aid a family historian (or interest a member of the public) versus ensuring they visit? What interesting information is hidden in the 18th century minister's day book in Bangor Archives relating to house fires and local subscriptions or sending a local lady to hospital in Chester to have a mastectomy for cancer?

I have had 10 holidays in Bangor, Caernarfon and Aberystwyth with predominantly the aim of visiting the local archives and libraries. I am sure that the archived treasures of Wales - as well documented in "Gathering the Jewels" can be expanded.

As part of my research into houses and communities, the RCAHMW has been a wonderful resource. Its work in recording ancient monuments and buildings is remarkable. If it is merged with Cadw, they must retain their identities. Their roles are very complementary, however, and a new umbrella could be very invigorating to the work of both.

I remain,

Ian Thompson