

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

Inquiry into the Welsh Government's Historic Environment Policy

Response from Richard Keen

28th June 2012

I would like to comment to the current debate on the merging of the functions of the RCAHMW with other organisations, including Cadw.

I do so from a background of having spent my life involved with and contributing to the heritage of Wales including working for the National Museum of Wales, the National Trust and in the private heritage sector as well as serving on the HLF Committee for Wales, Ancient Monuments Board for Wales and the Historic Buildings Advisory Council (as Chairman until its dissolution).

For the sake of brevity I wish to make the following points:

- the RCAHMW is one of the jewels in the crown of Welsh Heritage, it has, in my opinion, an unassailable and highly laudable record of service and provision to our heritage
- it is staffed by individuals of very high quality and commitment
- its output and publications are of the very highest standard
- the role performed by its Commissioners is absolutely vital in that they provide all-important independent scrutiny and advice. This independence is, I think, essential to maintain the existing high standards of performance and to ensure that the work and output of the RCAHMW are not subsumed and diluted in a large organisation that has multiple roles to perform, and likely to be less focussed and provide less insight into the valuable work of recording and presenting the breadth and depth of our heritage
- the publicly appointed Commissioners, besides providing their acknowledged academic skills and knowledge for the benefit of Welsh heritage, also provide independent advice not necessarily conditioned by political expediency. They are able to offer a wide spectrum of advice and opinion
- the RCAHMW has a proven track record of adaptation as is evident in the way that it has embraced and led the way in technological change
- the RCAHMW is a specialist body with specialist functions and I perceive the potential for the diminution or loss of those functions if incorporated into a large organisation. There is a distinct need for plurality in the function and presentation of our heritage

- I perceive that the important research and record keeping roles currently performed by the RCAHMW being vulnerable to short-term pressures constantly extant in a multi-functional organisation, especially one with a strong tourism brief

On a personal note, I have had the privilege of using the services of the RCAHMW over many years and drawing upon the knowledge and expertise of its staff in their particular fields. That knowledge and expertise has been, and is, seldom matched elsewhere in Wales.

May I make the plea that this service and independence is not lost in a, perhaps misplaced, desire for reorganisation and cost saving that has been proved so often in the past to be quite the reverse.

The RCAHMW has high national and international status as one of our principal repositories and storehouses of the the richness and depth of the human history of our nation. We owe it to future generations to ensure that it is allowed to continue with this work unassailed and unencumbered.

Richard Keen