

Inquiry into the Welsh Government's Historic Environment Policy  
Response from Dr Law

Committee Clerk,  
Communities, Equality and Local Government Committ  
National Assembly for Wales,  
Cardiff Bay CF99 1NA

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am Reader in History in the Department of History and Classics of Swansea University, and Chair of the Swansea and South-West Wales branch of the Historical Association. This letter is 'personal', but written from considerable experience in Wales and elsewhere.

I have been consistently impressed by the work of the Royal Commission in terms of the range of its concern for the Heritage of Wales, and the high quality of its 'record' of that Heritage, a resource which is very accessible, and which has been made even more accessible in recent years in the form of publications, television programmes and virtual recreations of historic monuments. Throughout, high standards have been achieved in academic terms, as well as in terms of professional integrity and 'outreach'.

Cadw has some high quality, dedicated, staff, and while it has a large 'archive' of information this seems to be accessible only 'by appointment'. Cadw also seems to me to be seriously under-resourced and recent attempts to 'engage' the public have been inept in terms of publicity and content - lectures held in cellar rooms and the 'medieval past' being represented by 'wenches' with baskets - for example. A recent heritage day at Neath Abbey was advertised by only a few A4 poster attached to random lampposts.

Neath Abbey is a case in point Cadw has identified it as a priority, but seems to be either unable or unwilling to do much to enhance an appreciation or understanding of the site; it also seems reluctant to allow other bodies to participate - Neath-Port Talbot Borough Council, Swansea University, the Gwent-Glamorgan Archaeological Trust, the Royal Commission, local heritage groups. Whether this come from some matter of principle or from a dog-in-the-manger attitude or from a lack in resources - or a combination of these factors - it is hard to say.

My recommendations would be:

- Cherish the Royal Commission as the 'jewel' in the Heritage crown. A merger with Cadw, with the state Cadw is in now, would be a disaster.
- Enhance the custodial role of Cadw, possibly by merging it with the regional archaeological trusts - while avoiding the 'economy of scale' argument. It needs more resources
- Encourage the example of Neath-Port Talbot in hosting regular meetings of those interested in the local heritage, while at the same time insisting that local/regional authorities take more active responsibility for the sites/monuments in their areas. A recent initiative taken by Swansea to raise public awareness of Swansea castle - while welcome in itself - was inept in execution.
- Avoid the dismal example provided currently by the universities in Wales. Put resources into the front line and not into managers and consultancies.

I would appreciate an acknowledgement of this letter.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John Law". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the "Yours sincerely," text.

Dr John Easton Law, FRHistS, FSAScot