

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

Inquiry into the Welsh Government's Historic Environment Policy

Response from the National Association of Mining History Organisations

Historic Environment Services in Wales

The National Association of Mining History Organisations (NAMHO) represents interests in mining history and archaeology across Britain and Ireland. It has twelve constituent organisations based in Wales, and many others with interests in mining and quarrying within its borders. For more details on the aims of the Association and its constituents, go to our website at www.namho.org

I am the Conservation Officer for NAMHO, responsible for managing investigation of the historic environment relating to mining and quarrying, and wish to make a submission to the committee of inquiry into the Welsh Government's Historic Environment Policy on behalf of the Association.

It should be stated from the outset that Wales is well served in all aspects of its historic environment services. In many respects the service provided is superior to that provided in parts of England. It is the experience of the Association, in the course of research carried out in support of a Research Framework for the Archaeology of the Extractive Industries in England, that the provision of services in the hands of some English local authorities is fragmented and subject to cutbacks which have seriously impaired the ability to provide a full public service. A report on the Historic Environment Record (HER) in respect of mining and quarrying archaeology within England, available on our website (www.namho.org), highlights the inconsistent nature of its provision across the country. Contrary to the impression given in the recent report on the Welsh Historic Environment Assessment Exercise carried out by the Council for British Archaeology (CBA 2011, 7) there is not "a stronger commitment to conservation and enhancement of the historic environment as a cultural and economic asset" across all local authorities in England. The current structure in Wales, with an independent national body in the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales (RCAHMW) and four regional archaeological trusts, the provision of historic environment services is consistent and effective, and isolated from the immediate impact of cost cutting by local authorities.

At present the RCAHMW is independent of the Welsh Government and can work pro-actively to investigate and record all aspects of the historic environment, and its activities are monitored by the commissioners who understand the objectives. It is also capable of attracting external funding, as currently accessed through the

European Union InterReg programme for the Atlanterra and Metal Links cross-border projects, something which received little comment in the CBA report (2011). The RCAHMW has been at the forefront of investigating and recording all aspects of the historic environment, in particular the upland archaeology, including mining and quarrying sites, and has attracted significant funding towards those objectives - funding which would be threatened, if not impossible to attain, under the direct control of the Welsh Government.

Cadw, on the other hand, is reactive in nature. It can be very effective in protecting the historic environment, responding to threats to known archaeological features and historic elements within the built environment but is not in a position to go out and investigate, to advance our knowledge of the historic environment: that is in the hands of the RCAHMW and the archaeological trusts, sometimes funded by the Welsh Government through Cadw. A significant proportion of Cadw's responsibility is to the historic properties in its care, responsibilities which could perhaps be equally effective in the hands of the National Museum.

The CBA report (2011, 25) highlighted a case for better collaboration between the separate elements in the current structure of historic environment services and that might be achieved through closer co-operation but not to the extent that it removes the ability of the pro-active elements to act independently. Better collaboration might also be achieved by relocating Cadw to Aberystwyth, a central geographic location where it would be in closer contact with the other leading elements.

Overall, it is essential that the two leading elements in the provision of historic environment services in Wales, the RCAHMW and the four archaeological trusts, remain independent, under the scrutiny of those who understand the objectives but at arms-length from political control be it local or national, and retaining the capability of attracting outside funding. A central location in Aberystwyth is also essential, with enhanced provision for archive storage, perhaps including the relocation of the Air Photograph Registry from Cardiff as long as the excellent service provided by the Registry is retained (the author of this submission currently prefers using the Registry in Cardiff rather than the air photo collection held by the RCAHMW, although the latter is closer, on account of the quality of reproduction). Serious consideration should also be given to divesting Cadw of its role as a curator of historic properties, and relocating its core statutory and regulatory functions to Aberystwyth. All elements would then be best positioned to work together and reach out to communities across Wales, engaging with both national and local issues.

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