

**Inquiry into the Welsh Government's Historic Environment Policy
Response from The Anglesey Antiquarian Society and Field Club**

Rhif Elusen Cofrestredig
507837
Registered Charity Number



Cymdeithas Hynafiaethwyr a Naturiaethwyr Môn
The Anglesey Antiquarian Society and Field Club

www.hanesmon.org.uk / epost/email mail@hanesmon.org.uk

Llywydd/President : Professor Antony D. Carr, Ph.D., M.A., F.S.A., F.R.Hist.S

Noddwyr / Patrons : Ardalydd Môn / Marquess of Anglesey FSA FRHistS FRSL Hon. FRIBA Hon.Dlitt
Arglwydd/Lord Stanley o/of Alderley

Ysgrifennydd Mygedol/Hon Secretary: Siôn Caffell, 1 Fronheulog, Tregarth, Bangor, Gwynedd LL57 4RD

Sent by email as a PDF file to: celg.committee@wales.gov.uk on 28 June 2012

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

Dear Sir

**Inquiry into the Welsh Government's Historic Environment Policy
Planning for the future of historic environment services in Wales**

The Anglesey Antiquarian Society and Field Club has this year celebrated its centenary and has reflected on its own work in celebrating, protecting and interpreting the history of the island. In preparing a substantial exhibition on this theme (follow the link below if you wish to see the content) <http://www.hanesmon.org.uk/aas/plugins/content/content.php?content.75> we have realised how inter-connected the work of third-sector organisations such as ourselves and the national bodies has become over the last century. In reviewing the work of Cadw, the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historic Monuments, the National Museum of Wales and the universities we have seen how they each have their own particular specialities which are complementary rather than overlapping in their application.

The Anglesey Antiquarian Society and Field Club, as the name suggests, has a wide remit to study the past of the island but in recent years the interest of members has been more strictly historical because other groups have grown up to cater for the concerns of naturalists and geologists. However in matters of protection and conservation we would urge the Welsh government to ensure that the historic environment and the natural environment are always considered together. Both are vulnerable and both are important to the people (and economy) of Wales; with proper understanding their care can be mutually beneficial.

Our observations to your Consultation Questions are as follows.

1) How appropriate and successful are the current systems employed by the Welsh Government for protecting and managing the historic environment in Wales?

In the early 1970s when a number of new archaeological bodies were set up across Britain to deal with the need to rescue historical information in advance of development, Wales was blessed with a coherent system which consisted of four Archaeological Trusts which between them covered the whole country, providing an informal regional arm to central government work and a source of consistent factual surveys and development control. Together with the

high quality Inventory work of the Royal Commission and their active site exploration through aerial photography, these systems (central government regulation; regional development control and active exploration and research) have provided a sound information base for the Welsh historic environment. Moreover their differing status (Cadw within government, RCAHMW outside it and the Trusts being charities) is beneficial in exerting influence and encouraging engagement on behalf of the historic environment. We do not consider, therefore, that there is an urgent need to re-organise the main structures.

However there are some matters of legislation which might be streamlined. We understand that the legislation protecting marine historic assets is extremely antiquated and not fit for current purposes; we feel that the current use of the Trusts' Historic Environment Records by local authorities should be given a statutory status; and we see a likely advantage in the proposal to make a single protective category of historic assets above and below ground, though we suspect that a number of troublesome administrative problems may be revealed in the process.

2) How well do the Welsh Government's policies promote the historic environment in Wales (for instance, in terms of interpretation, accessibility, attracting new audiences and tourism)?

There have certainly been great advances in the promotion of historic sites in Wales during the last few decades. This began with the new series of monument guides from Cadw way back in the 1980s. While not compromising the scholarly texts these colourful, illustrated booklets instantly made the prospect of reading seriously about the monuments more attractive. Since then the involvement of other artistic ventures has been to the fore and has undoubtedly widened the audience and brought great buildings like Beaumaris Castle much closer to both visitors and local people. Other organizations have followed suit and the profile of historic sites has been very successfully enhanced. Involvement with these sites by local communities has been actively encouraged and, as a local historical society, we welcome this very much.

There has also been a great increase in the virtual access to sites and artefacts on the web. This is certainly a development which the Society would applaud since it, too, is increasing access to its publications on-line. Both the RCAHMW and the Trusts have made a vast number of site records available through *Coflein* and *Archwilio*. Both these resources are easy to use but we have found that the security which inevitably surrounds Government IT makes it very frustrating to try to use similar resources within the government domain.

3) How well do the policies for the historic environment tie in with wider Welsh Government policy objectives (such as the regeneration of communities)?

The recent history of the copper mines on Mynydd Parys near Amlwch on Anglesey is a very good example of the way in which historic sites can contribute to the character and sense of place, of purpose and of history, and, if well promoted, can lead to regeneration in the economy and, in a sense, in the morale of a region. This story is a wonderful example of the co-operation between a dedicated local group and the local authorities to find national and European support. It also demonstrates the way in which history and the natural environment are one.

Such developments can, of course, put a strain upon the historic site and we would not like to see regulation abandoned in a rush to exploit the historic environment for short-term gain. We would hope that regulators would be imaginative and flexible in their reaction to development proposals, but not forget entirely their protective role. Such people need to be highly trained and confident in their knowledge to adopt this well-balanced approach. Where such staff exist they must be fostered.

4) What would be the advantages and disadvantages of merging the functions of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales with the functions of other organisations, including Cadw?

We do not see any compelling reason for this merger which we suspect is prompted by political considerations, such as a desire to be seen to be doing something which, superficially, might be thought to reduce costs. The two organisations do have genuinely different roles, different governance structures and different relationships with the public. Cadw might well wish to gain more staff (they need more staff) but would that mean that the open-handed relationship with site owners enjoyed by researchers would be jeopardized by a close relationship to regulation? Would the very active programme of aerial research survive, or would be it down-graded to monitoring? The recent history of the English Royal Commission is not encouraging.

The future of the National Monuments Record which is one of the major products of the RCAHMW needs very careful consideration. It is an active record being continuously enhanced and made available to the public. This means that it needs dedicated staff and is not suitable for a static archive. Its public role means that it must be easily accessible and our experience suggests that, if its on-line presence was within government IT, accessibility would suffer a great deal.

5) What role do local authorities and third sector organisations play in implementing the Welsh Government's historic environment policy and what support do they receive in this respect?

The Welsh Local Authorities are not well equipped with professional staff with historic environment knowledge and experience. The Welsh Archaeological Trusts are funded in part by Cadw and the local authorities to fill this gap by providing development control advice. This is the most cost-effective way of doing it and should continue. If possible, it should become a statutory arrangement.

Third Sector organizations such as the National Trust, Woodland Trust, the Council for British Archaeology Wales and societies such as ourselves can and do complement and extend the work of government agencies, (and may also receive grants from them) but they cannot be a substitute for these government agencies.

We hope these comments will be of interest to the Committee and would like to be kept informed of progress made.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Simon Coffell'. The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Hon Secretary