

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

Inquiry into the Welsh Government's Historic Environment Policy

Response from Richard Haslam

I write as someone active in promoting the preservation and understanding of Wales's built environment since the 1970s, through writing about Welsh architecture (in the Pevsner Guides and elsewhere), through advising public bodies on building maintenance and use, and through encouraging a variety of people to join in this fine work.

This experience has taught me that people everywhere have a keen interest in what is a very broad field. It has also taught me how much depends on personal interests and hard work (and probably always will), often at the un-remunerative end of the scale.

While the Welsh government must be right in aiming to advance concern for the historic environment at community level, this has to be well supported at the national level. There is no obvious substitute to the cumulative knowledge and high standards of performance achieved by central bodies, like Cadw for Wales's incomparable monuments in care and its watching brief over the Listed buildings. In this the local Conservation officers have a significant role – but all in the official sector, and necessarily so.

Wales is rich in having sites of historic interest spread over much of its land area, adding greatly to residents' lives, and to reputational gain among those beyond Wales's borders. In this the private sector has a fundamental role, not just through members of the Historical Societies and the architecture-related professions, but also through the mediation of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales, its archives and its staff. In this its role may be more comparable to the National Library of Wales's, than to Cadw's.

Having been a Commissioner during the period when the RCAHM began the modernising which has made it so effective, I have admired its ability – demonstrated also in the recent, outstanding series of television programmes – to capture the contemporary appeal in Wales of its past and the evidence for it. This, judged from the standpoint of my long and continuing experience of work at a responsible level in Italy, is something special to Wales. Since such a service is both rare and not easily recreated, it would be of public benefit to explore ways of developing this study+interpretation body.

There will, I hope, be ways of achieving that continuity led by the RCAHM, among Wales's related organisations but maybe outside Cadw. To set that aside or reduce its scope would risk depriving Welsh life and learning of one of its most admired supports. No doubt you are well

beyond such a stage by now, but please let me know if I could contribute further, and again my regrets at missing the due date.

With kind regards,

Richard Haslam