

## Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales *Quinquennial Review: Position Statement*

### *1. Purpose*

The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales is responsible for the survey and record of the historic environment of Wales. It is currently empowered by a Royal Warrant of 2000 to survey, record, publish and maintain a national database of archaeological and historical sites, structures and landscapes within Wales and up to the limit of its territorial waters. It is also responsible for the National Monuments Record of Wales, an archive open daily for public reference; for the supply of archaeological information to the Ordnance Survey for mapping purposes; for the co-ordination of archaeological aerial photography; and for the sponsorship of regional Sites and Monuments Records.

### *2. The Historic Environment*

An understanding of the surroundings in which we live is fundamental to an understanding of society and national identities and contributes to an effective policy for sustainable development.

The Valetta Convention, ratified by the UK Government in September 2000, identified the 'archaeological heritage' as **structures, constructions, groups of buildings, developed sites, moveable objects, monuments of other kinds as well as their context, whether situated on land or under water** – in other words, the historic environment. The Royal Commission's remit relates to four of the Articles of the Convention:

**Article 2:** *...the maintenance of an inventory of its archaeological heritage...*

**Article 7:** *...to make or to bring up to date surveys, inventories and maps of archaeological sites in the areas within its jurisdiction.*

**Article 8:** *...to facilitate the national and international exchange of elements of the archaeological heritage for professional scientific purposes while taking appropriate steps to ensure that such circulation in no way prejudices the cultural scientific value of those elements.*

**Article 9:** *...to conduct educational actions with a view to rousing and developing an awareness in public opinion of the value of the archaeological heritage for understanding the past and of the threats to this heritage.*

### *3. Background*

The Royal Commission was established in 1908, along with similar organisations in England and Scotland. Legislation enabling the preservation of archaeological sites had been enacted about 25 years earlier, but had achieved little because of the lack of an effective information base and indifferent co-operation and sometimes hostility from landowners. Royal Commissions were appointed to address this problem because they could be set up quickly, they are 'neutral' investigative bodies, and they can draw on the best available expertise. All three attributes remain important to this day. As an expert body RCAHMW preceded the advisory Ancient Monuments Board for Wales, which was established by statute in 1913.

The organisation's role has expanded and changed considerably over the past forty years. The significant milestones are:

- 1963, under a revised Warrant, when the Welsh material of the National Buildings Record, a London-based charitable body set up to record historic buildings damaged by

war-time action, was incorporated in the Royal Commissions and retitled the National Monuments Record. The new name reflected the largely archaeological archives already held by the Royal Commissions;

- 1983, following the Serpell Report of 1979, when the Archaeology Division of the Ordnance Survey was wound up. The OS sites index, together with the responsibility for surveying, interpreting, and maintaining a record of archaeological sites depicted on OS maps, was transferred to the Royal Commissions;
- 1992, following the KPMG Report, which led to a further revision of the Warrant. The responsibility for oversight of local Sites and Monuments records was transferred to RCAHMW, together with the requirement to maintain a national index of archaeological and maritime databases of material covering all periods up to the present day. The requirement to compile inventories was withdrawn;
- 2000, the current Warrant, following the formation of the National Assembly for Wales, transferring day-to-day responsibility for RCAHMW to that body. RCAHMW falls under Schedule 4 of the **Government of Wales Act 1998: Public Bodies subject to reform by Assembly**, Part IV ‘Bodies which may only gain functions and only with consent’.

#### 4. Organisation

The Royal Commission at present comprises a Chairman and ten Commissioners, together with thirty-three members of staff headed by the Secretary. The structure of the organisation reflects its core functions, namely to investigate, understand and record the historic environment, to manage the resulting information, and to make it available as widely as possible. Over 85% of the staff are deployed in three branches covering **Survey** (air survey, archaeological ground survey, historic buildings survey), **Information Management** (data management, archaeological mapping, archive management) and **Publications and Outreach** (reader services, publications, web-site). The work of each branch is overseen by a committee of Commissioners to facilitate the highest level of interaction between the expert governing body and the expertise of the staff.

The Secretary heads a small administration team comprising a finance officer, human resources officer, procurement officer and administration assistant.

Business is conducted under *Standing Orders* approved by Commissioners.

#### 5. Strategic Direction

The Royal Commission publishes its forward programme annually in a Corporate Plan, which is addressed to the Minister for Culture, Sport and the Welsh Language. The Plan is developed in the context of the National Assembly's policies and prioritises work programmes to take account of both these policies and certain statutory requirements:

- Emergency Recording of Historic Buildings. Under the Planning Acts 1990 and the circular WO 61/96 local planning authorities are required to notify RCAHMW of listed building consent applications to demolish, and if consent is granted the owner is then obliged to grant access, if required, for RCAHMW staff to survey and record. The resulting records are deposited in the National Monuments Record;
- The National Monuments Record is recognised as a *place of deposit* under the Public Records Act 1957. Public Records Office staff regularly inspect NMRW storage arrangements and management;
- The Royal Commission is required to conform to the Welsh Language Act, and a Scheme under the Act was submitted and approved in April 2002;
- As ‘major occupier’ of Plas Crug, a Crown freehold building open to the public, the Royal Commission has statutory obligations with regard to fire, health and safety.

RCAHMW drafted its first Corporate Plan a little over ten years ago, following the KPMG Report on the three Royal Commissions in England, Scotland and Wales. Shortly afterwards, in 1992, the revised Royal Warrant clearly established the change of direction. In the simplest terms, the compilation of an 'inventory' was replaced by the National Monuments Record as the primary core function or *raison d'être* for the organisation. Instead of the principal and recognisable **outcome** of the organisation's work being large, printed volumes concerned with themes within historic counties, published on average about every eighteen months, the primary requirement became the enhancement of the NMRW and the improvement of public access to it. Publications are now more frequent and are descriptive, analytic and synthetic.

**Inputs** are all-Wales based and comprise air survey, archaeological survey of the Welsh uplands, and buildings surveys driven by threat and NMRW need. Because the resulting data must be structured and stored to strictly observed standards, the management of NMRW data and collections is a very high priority. Indeed, without a high level of structural compliance data will not be capable of on-line delivery to the OS for mapping or to public users through Geographic Information Systems. In the areas of survey and data management RCAHMW is a standard-setting body for Wales, and to this end it works with its partners in Wales and the UK to define, develop and promulgate the appropriate protocols.

## 6. Performance

Up to 1992 the 'inventory' system provided the only comprehensive methodology and a clearly measurable output. Since then, over a period of fundamental change, performance measures have been put in place as a substitute for this system. The measures are largely quantitative and related to process. They were designed to measure the flow of material from the field to the point of delivery to the public, to measure the efficiency of statutory activity and to identify the effectiveness of resource management. The yearly targets which have been set have very largely been achieved. Recently there has been a shift into qualitative measures, notably with the introduction of a user satisfaction target. By regularly reviewing its running costs RCAHMW has managed to achieve required efficiency savings, some of which have been redeployed to recruit staff into emerging specialist areas, such as computer-aided mapping and education.

## 7. Partnerships

The Royal Commission carries out its remit with an active involvement in partnerships. It is an active partner in a number of consortia within Wales, and in others within UK. Of particular significance within Wales are:

- *Gathering the Jewels*. RCAHMW is a partner in a group of Welsh archive and museum organisations, led by the National Library of Wales, digitising elements of their collections for on-line delivery. Funded by the New Opportunities Fund;
- *Blaenavon World Heritage Site*. An initiative led by Torfaen County Borough Council. RCAHMW is both a founding and a funding partner, providing professional support to historic environment interpretation and a GIS-based information system;
- *ENDEX*. RCAHMW is the convening partner of this group comprising Cadw, NMGW and the four Welsh Archaeological Trusts' Sites and Monuments Records. Its on-line output is *CARN- Core Archaeological Record Index*;
- *Chapels survey*. RCAHMW is in partnership with *Capel*, the University of Wales's Board of Celtic Studies and the National Library of Wales to provide records for NMRW and an on-line database of Welsh chapels.

Within UK:

- *Ordnance Survey*. RCAHMW has supplied ‘antiquity models’ to OS for map depiction since 1983. It is now finalising arrangements to ‘populate’ the heritage layer for Wales of the on-line MasterMap series.
- *HEIRNET: Historic Environment Information Resources Network*. Partnership of Council for British Archaeology, NMRs of England, Scotland, Wales and other national agencies and museums formed to find new ways to help people to access UK-wide information about the historic environment.
- *SWISH: Shared Web Information Systems for Heritage*. The embryonic partnership to link up the Scottish and Welsh National Monuments Records’ computing systems.

## 8. Achievements

During the period of transition since 1992 RCAHMW has made notable achievements, which can be seen in the context of its published, high level objectives:

*Objective 1: Compiling information by surveying, recording and interpreting terrestrial and maritime archaeological and historical sites, structures and landscapes, particularly those of national or local importance which are threatened with destruction.*

- Completion of survey and record of all Welsh chapels traceable from documentary sources;
- Completion of Radnorshire Farmsteads survey;
- Emergency recording of at least fifty historic buildings each year;
- Integrated air/terrestrial survey of Welsh Uplands 42% complete after ten years (all land over 244m OD); on schedule for completion in 2012.

*Objective 2: Creating and maintaining a comprehensive archive in the form of a National Monuments Record, including a national index to regional Sites and Monuments Records.*

- NMRW currently holds 1.2 million photographs, 67,000 drawings, and 18,000 special collection maps;
- The ENDEX Agreement provides for on-line access to CARN, an index to the Welsh historic environment databases held by the SMRs, National Museums & Galleries of Wales and Cadw, and the establishment of standing technical working group on data standards;
- Following PRO designation all public records of heritage administration in Wales are held in NMRW

*Objective 3: Publicising the scope and publishing the results of investigations carried out in pursuit of the above objectives.*

- The RCAHMW website provides full information about the organisation, its staff, its governance, and links to kindred bodies;
- The publication programme has completed the ‘inventory’ series of volumes and launched a new series of thematic publications;
- *COFNOD*, twice-yearly newsletter established;
- Regular exhibitions at *eisteddfodau*, agricultural shows and other events;
- Welsh Language Scheme approved.

Objective 4: *Advising on the survey, interpretation, preservation and conservation of ancient and historical monuments and constructions.*

- Industrial Archaeology Panel convened regularly by RCAHMW to support work across Wales in that sector;
- Partner in Mynnydd y Fynnon agri-environmental initiative, Cambrian Mountains;
- Archaeological input to Integrated Land Management Programme, MoD Training Area Sennybridge;
- Advice on historic farmsteads and buildings for *Tir Gofal* initiative;
- Aerial monitoring of scheduled ancient monuments for Cadw;
- Scheduling recommendations to Cadw resulting from Uplands survey.

Objective 5: *Setting standards and providing guidance and funding to other organisations and individuals to survey, record and interpret the archaeological landscapes and historic buildings of Wales*

- Uplands Forum convened regularly by RCAHMW to support research and survey work – publication in preparation
- ENDEX partnership (including technical working-group meetings) convened regularly by RCAHMW; funding to Sites and Monuments Records.
- Partner in Blaenavon World Heritage Site initiative
- Partner, *Gathering the Jewels* initiative
- Partnership with *Capel* with regard to Welsh Chapels survey

Objective 6: *Seeking to achieve progressive improvements in the quality and efficiency of the services provided*

- Physical access to the NMRW collections greatly improved by the provision of a purpose-designed search room with facilities for disabled persons. User satisfaction, 2001-2: 89% (target 80%);
- Redirection of activities including comprehensive use of ICT largely achieved through staff flexibility and retraining;
- On-line access to increasing range of RCAHMW services.

## *9. Current Work Programme*

The current work programme includes activities which are ongoing, those which are winding down, and those which are coming on stream.

**Survey: ongoing.** The three core survey activities of air survey, uplands survey and emergency buildings survey account for the bulk of the available resource.

*Air survey* staff monitor a minimum of 650 Scheduled Ancient Monuments each year in addition to exploratory work and flights in support of uplands survey within a flying programme of about 60 hours. There is also a small grant-aided regional flying programme.

*Uplands survey*, working to a revised method, is programmed to cover 15,000 hectares each year for a further ten years, double the average for the years up to 2001-2, when work was suspended due to Foot & Mouth Disease. In order to maintain standards, evaluate methods and monitor contractors' work, two senior staff archaeologists also carry out survey work.

*Emergency buildings survey* staff are in the first year of a revised programme to double their output to 100 buildings recorded, following the introduction of state-of-the-art equipment. In 2001-2 referrals totalled 480, of which 378 were Listed Building Consent cases.

**Survey: winding down.**

*The Chapels* recording programme will wind down, with residual work subsumed within the *Detailed Building Surveys* project. The outcome is an on-line database with more than 8,500 entries, an image collection and selected drawn surveys. Similarly, work will finish on the *Radnorshire Farmsteads* study; in addition to the publication, about 2,500 building records will have been prepared for archiving and on-line access by autumn 2002, to complement the hard-copy publication due in 2003.

**Survey: coming on stream.** Following the introduction of GPS equipment, the in-house archaeologists will commence a programme of *Detailed Archaeological Survey* of recently discovered upland sites. With regard to historic buildings there is an increasing reactive workload as a result of the Cadw listing programme and the *Tir Gofal* initiative.

**Information Management: ongoing.**

The *maintenance and development of existing databases*, including *monitoring the SMR grant-aid Action Plans*, includes the editing of more than 7000 records comprising the Ordnance Survey published antiquities database at the rate of 650 records per person month. The *management of archive collections*, and the improvements to the stores and liaison with the PRO are major core activities. Over the past six months there have been 4939 additions to the NMRW catalogue (target 2000).

The *archaeological mapping* team's work in support of the uplands survey (*qv*) is currently compiling mapping at the rate of 150 sq km per person year.

**Information management: winding down.** No programmes are winding down.

**Information management: coming on stream.** Information Management staff are bearing the brunt of change in two areas. They are in the lead with regard to the *renewal of the computing platform* and the proposed *partnership with RCAHMS*. Immediately this involves detailed discussions on data compatibility and putting in hand the data editing required. The *archaeological mapping* team is also involved with the RCAHMS partnership and is also liaising with regard to the *graphic outputs required for the OS partnership*.

**Publications and Outreach: ongoing.** The core activities are the *Public reader and enquiry service*, which handled 1100 enquiries in 2001-2, an increase of 8.7% over the previous year; the *Web site*, through which 6700 enquiries to the CARN database were made over the past four months, and the *Publications programme*, which averages the production of at least one book a year, together with the Annual Report, two newsletters, leaflets on demand and exhibitions at major shows.

**Publications and Outreach: winding down.** No programmes are winding down.

**Publications and Outreach: coming on stream.** The existing engagement with the educational sector at all levels will be strongly reinforced during the year by the *appointment of a dedicated education officer*

## *10.The Future*

The Royal Commission's immediate tasks, with which work is already under way, are clear. They are:

- To bring the new, more powerful computing platform into use, in partnership with RCAHMS, as soon as possible to enable the availability of GIS and images on line;
- To digitise NMRW collections beyond those selected for the *Gathering the Jewels* scheme, and along the lines recommended in the CWLIS consultant's report, to enable on-line availability to the public at large;
- To work within the schools sector to develop the awareness of young people to the historic environment and as a means of engaging more closely with communities;
- To bring the emerging partnership with the Ordnance Survey to fruition, so that map users can follow up historic environment interests on line;
- To review and maintain survey and data standards which will ensure the greatest integrity and enable the widest transmission of information;
- To complete the survey of the Welsh uplands within ten years to enable the compilation of an archaeological resource map;
- To maintain the existing air and historic buildings survey programmes, deploying digital technology as far as possible whilst maintaining standards;
- To compile 'electronic atlases' of Welsh key building types commencing with chapels;
- To maintain and develop the book publication and exhibitions programmes to inform the widest audience of the scope, significance and depth of the NMRW collections and databases.

These objectives align closely with those of the Welsh Assembly Government with regard to life-long learning, social inclusiveness and sustainability. In addition, these tasks align with the First Minister's recently issued strategic themes of **building our opportunities as a small smart nation by increasing skills and innovation; harnessing our creative strengths and strengthening our action to support communities.**

RCAHMW  
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