

## **Recording the Welsh historic environment for posterity**

The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales (RCAHMW) has two principal duties as set out in its Royal Warrant: to compile an inventory of the buildings, archaeological sites, landscapes and maritime heritage that make up the historic environment of Wales; and to maintain the National Monuments Record of Wales (NMRW) and to make it available to users.

Today the task of inventory compilation is largely focused on making a record of significant buildings and sites in Wales on land and in Welsh coastal waters that are at risk of being lost to redevelopment or climate change – most recently places of worship, schools and educational establishments, civic buildings, libraries, town halls and law courts, theatres and leisure centres and coastal and maritime heritage threatened by the corrosive and erosive impacts of climate change.

The RCAHMW is a statutory consultee in the Welsh development control process, which means that we are required by national and local governments to give advice on applications for listed building consent where this involves partial or total demolition of listed buildings, and to comment on national infrastructure projects, including marine licence applications.

The NMRW is, along with Amgueddfa Cymru and the National Library of Wales, one of three Welsh national collections. It is a statutory place of deposit under the 1958 Public Records Act and an Accredited Archive, subject to standards of conservation and public access set and monitored by The National Archives. The NMRW is a resource much used by local and national government officials especially within the planning system.

We exchange data with other record holders and provide an index to data from other sources. We play a key role in establishing and maintaining national standards in surveying, recording and curating records relating to archaeology and historical architecture and providing guidance on these matters to other bodies. We are responsible for the oversight of the statutory Sites and Monuments Records managed by Heneb. In addition, we compile the statutory Historic Placenames List on behalf of Welsh Government and promote its use for naming new developments in Wales.

Our expertise is sought by the various Welsh, UK and international advisory boards and panels on which we sit, including the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority's Heritage Forum, the Digital 4Culture Forum, the UK Industrial Archaeology Network, the Welsh Historic Places of Worship Forum, the Historic Environment Group, the Historic Built Environment Group, the Wales Heritage Group, the Architectural Archives Panel, the Welsh Local Heritage Initiative, the Welsh Archaeological Research Framework Steering Group, the People's Collection Wales Management Group, and the Slate Landscape of Northwest Wales World Heritage Site Management Group.

In addition, we undertake an extensive programme of outreach and community engagement work, involving substantial projects (such as our Welsh Asian Heritage work and our Pendinas hillfort project), as well as lectures, guided tours, publications and symposia (such as our annual CartoCymru historic maps conference convened annually with the National Library of Wales) and a regular stream of blogs, social media posts and progress reports.

In meeting the requirements set out in the Royal Warrant, we also support the delivery of Welsh Government priorities, including the goals of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and Cymraeg 2050.

We were also actively involved in the development of the Priorities for Culture (Pfc). The draft Pfc, on which we were consulted during this period, sets out three priorities:

1. Culture brings us together
2. A nation of culture
3. Culture is resilient and sustainable

We will embed the Pfc into our future reports by demonstrating how our work supports the final priorities and ambitions.

## **Highlights of the year**

During 2024-25, the staff of the Royal Commission

- Undertook visits to 54 coastal or intertidal sites to check their condition and created 3D digital baseline records for 40 of them
- Updated the records for 56 intertidal wrecks following site visits, with 33 sites now benefitting from 3D digital surveys
- Added 157 shipwrecks sites to the NMRW
- Responded to 70 formal marine licence consultations issued by Natural Resources Wales
- Created new SketchFab models, bringing the total available on the RCAHMW page to nearly 200
- Undertook 24 hours and 45 minutes of aerial survey work to record evidence of buried archaeological sites and carry out condition surveys in hard-to-reach parts of Wales
- Identified a new 19.7 hectare Roman marching camp on Gardiners Hill, in the north-western part of the Sennybridge military training area in Powys, this being evidence of the military use of the area some 2,000 years ago

- Carried out a full suite of recording, including laser scanning, photogrammetry and photography, at the Capel Newydd, in Nanhoron and the Jerusalem Chapel, Bethesda, both in Gwynedd.
- Played a part in the successful listing of three buildings at Aberystwyth University – the Arts Centre (Grade II\*), the Hugh Owen Library (Grade II) and the Belltower (Grade II) and Wrexham Waterworld (Grade II)
- Created 17,790 new archive catalogue records and made 18,112 digital archive records directly available to the public via Coflein
- Digitised 33,182 site file pages in the NMRW to create high-quality files now accessible to Coflein users
- Recorded 4,256,777 user interactions on Coflein
- Added 869 new site records to the NMRW and updated 4,632 records
- Added almost 4,000 historic place names to the Historic Place Names List
- Answered 2,538 enquiries, resulting in over 6,692 transactions with more than 1,502 hardcopy archives being retrieved and consulted
- Welcomed fourteen group visits to our Library and Search Room, totalling over 300 visitors
- Scanned 7,598 pages of registered files relating to Scheduled Ancient Monuments thanks to the hard work of seven volunteers
- Total of 385 volunteering hours by 10 Library volunteers.
- Engaged with over 3,000 local residents of all ages as part of the Pendinas Hillfort project
- Published *Darganfod Bryngaer Pendinas / Discovering Pendinas Hillfort* and distributed copies to local schools; downloaded 313 times in 2024-25, this proved to be the RCAHMW's most popular publication this year
- Completed an independent evaluation by consultants Wavehill who described the Pendinas project as 'exemplary'; the project was also Highly Commended in the 2024 Council for British Archaeology (CBA) Archaeological Achievement Awards in the Engagement and Participation category.
- Mounted an exhibition at the Senedd to mark the end of the Welsh Asian Heritage Project, attracting 6,440 visitors – a record for any exhibition at the Senedd; public recognition for the project came in the form of an award for project leader Perminder Dhillon, who received a Equality and Inclusion Award from Race Council Cymru.
- Distributed 2,504 publications in the form of 892 eBooks and 1,612 printed volumes

- Received two major awards from the Railway & Canal Historical Society for our 2023 *Swansea Canal and its Early Railways* publication: Transport History Book of the Year and Canal and Waterways Book of the Year
- Reached over 844,000 users via Facebook, our primary outreach channel, while our YouTube channel received more than 20,000 views, generating in excess of 1,000 hours of viewing time
- Delivered a wide-ranging programme of 92 public events, reaching a total of 11,791 attendees.

## **Staff deployment**

The RCAHMW is a small but highly productive team and several staff undertake multiple roles. Our current staff complement consists of 20.5 FTE staff who undertake the core work of the RCAHMW.

- Six work in survey and field recording, including specialists in aerial photography, maritime heritage and geomatics, each of whom is the only person in the Welsh heritage sector providing these services. This team also leads the sector in climate change adaptation, World Heritage Site conservation recording and conservation activity and fulfilling the RCAHMW's role as a statutory consultee within the planning regime, providing advice on Listed Building Consents, ecclesiastical faculty applications and marine licences.
- Four are involved in outreach work, encompassing our Coflein digital delivery system for access to the NMRW holdings (an increasing amount of which can now be downloaded on a self-service basis) as well as being responsible for setting the sector's record-keeping standards and monitoring the work of the HERs, but also for organising our events, lectures, social media posts, educational work, our contribution to the People's Collection Wales, and our compliance with Welsh Language standards,
- Two full-time and one part-time posts are involved in managing the Archive, cataloguing records deposited with the NMRW, digitising Archive holdings and making them available, and for digital preservation.
- Two run the very busy Library & Enquiries service, answering enquiries by phone, online, email and in person, and administering copyright and image reproduction licences, managing volunteers and hosting the many groups that come for an introductory tour of the NMRW collections.
- The Secretary leads the senior management team and two posts underpin the work of the work of the RCAHMW by providing the ICT infrastructure and ensuring compliance with Cyber Security standards. One full-time and one part-time post provide financial management, payroll, pension and procurement services and invoice payments, as well as facilities management and Health & Safety compliance and HR. One post is responsible for our research work, fundraising and external funding bids, as well as for the development of the RCAHMW's Geographical Information Systems.

- One post is funded by Welsh Government to compile and promote the historic placenames list, as required by the Historic Environment (Wales) Act 2023.

## **Financial report**

During the year 2024-25, our Welsh Government core revenue funding was reduced by 10.5 per cent. Because of this, and following consultation with the Prospect trade union, we decided to launch a voluntary redundancy programme which resulted in five members of staff leaving the Commission. Three further members of staff moved on to new roles elsewhere, and their posts were temporarily suspended, pending a review of the relationship between the RCAHMW and Cadw, including possible merger (further details will be given in the 2025-26 Annual Report).

As result, several members of staff agreed to take on additional work temporarily and the RCAHMW was restructured into two divisions, with the staff of the Library, Enquiries and Archive team and the Survey and Investigation team reporting to Gareth Edwards, Head of Knowledge and Understanding, and the Corporate Business team and the Online and Public Engagement team reporting to the Secretary.

The money saved from the suspended posts, along with the final year's funding under the cooperation agreement between the Welsh Government and Plaid Cymru, was supplemented by a one-year Mitigation Funding sum made available by the Welsh Government to help the Commission adapt to a reduction in staffing. Taken together, this funding enabled us to employ staff on short-term contracts to support the Library and Enquiries team, to undertake financial and administrative work, to undertake Coflein data enhancement and to undertake digitisation to make our much-used site files available online on a self-service basis. We were thus enabled to employ recent graduates from the Aberystwyth area and provide them with a valuable opportunity to gain working experience in the heritage and archives sector.

Subsequently, through a targeted capital funding grant from Welsh Government, we have been able to undertake the aerial photographic digitisation and conservation work referred to earlier in this report (see 'National Monuments Record of Wales'). In addition, our capital funding from Welsh Government has enabled us to invest in the new laser scanning equipment that is essential for efficient and accurate field recording work, and to keep our IT equipment up to date.

We continue to receive a special grant from Welsh Government for discharging the statutory duty to research and promote the use of historic placenames and we were successful in obtaining a grant from Welsh Government's Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan fund for our Wesh Asian Heritage project. Additional sums came from our contribution to the People's Collection Wales programme, our participation in the Unpath'd Waters work funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council to bring the maritime heritage records in the four UK nations together to a common standard, and from our share of the National Lottery Heritage Fund grant for the Pendinas

community engagement project. We also received a small grant for our art in the MOWLIT (Mapping the March: Medieval Wales and England, c.1282) project, funded the UKRI Horizon Guarantee scheme.

Salaries will always form the largest part of our expenditure, which is why funding cuts have such an impact on our staff capacity. Running costs include the substantial costs of ICT capacity (including storage and back-up costs, software licences, Cyber Security costs and consultancy), on which a data-heavy organisation is dependent for its work.

### **Cyllid / Funding £000**

Cyllid net gan Lywodraeth Cymru / Core funding from Welsh Government	1,556
Welsh Government Co-Operation Agreement Funding	100
Welsh Government Mitigation Funding	147
Grantiau allanol / External grants:	
Enwau Lleoedd Hanesyddol Cymru / Historic Place Names of Wales	60
Welsh Asian Heritage	139
Project Income:	
Casgliad y Werin Cymru - People's Collection Wales	42
Unpath'd Waters	6
Pendinas	47
MOWLIT	6
Incwm a enillwyd / Earned income	22
Cyllid Cyfalaf gan Lywodraeth Cymru / Welsh Government capital funding:	110
Aerial Photography Digitisation	49
Cyfanswm / Total	2,284

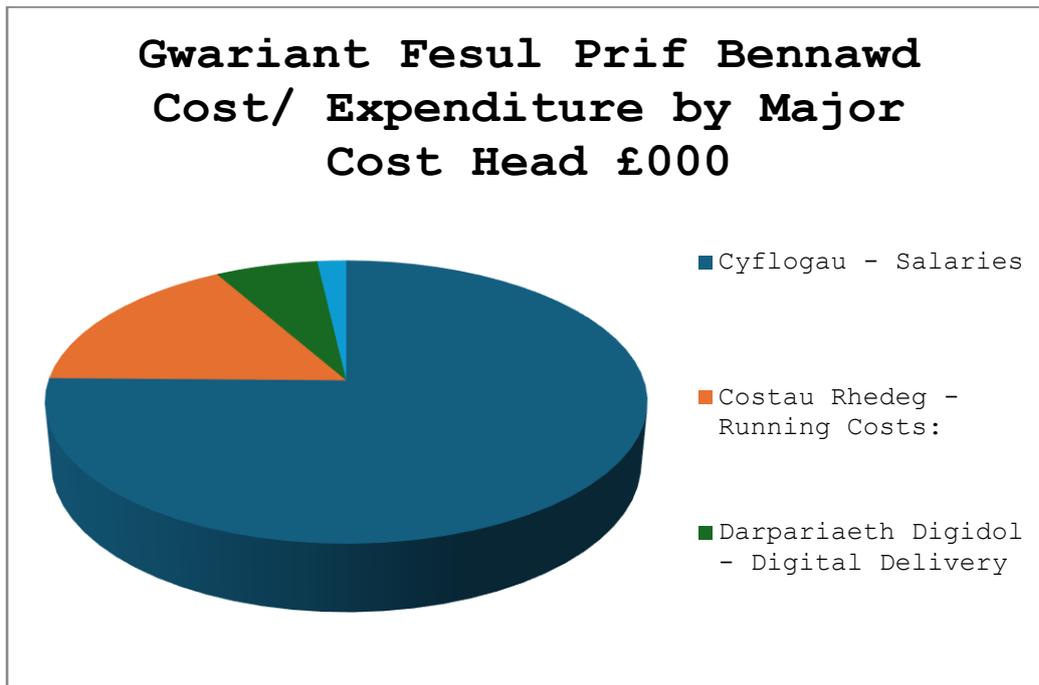
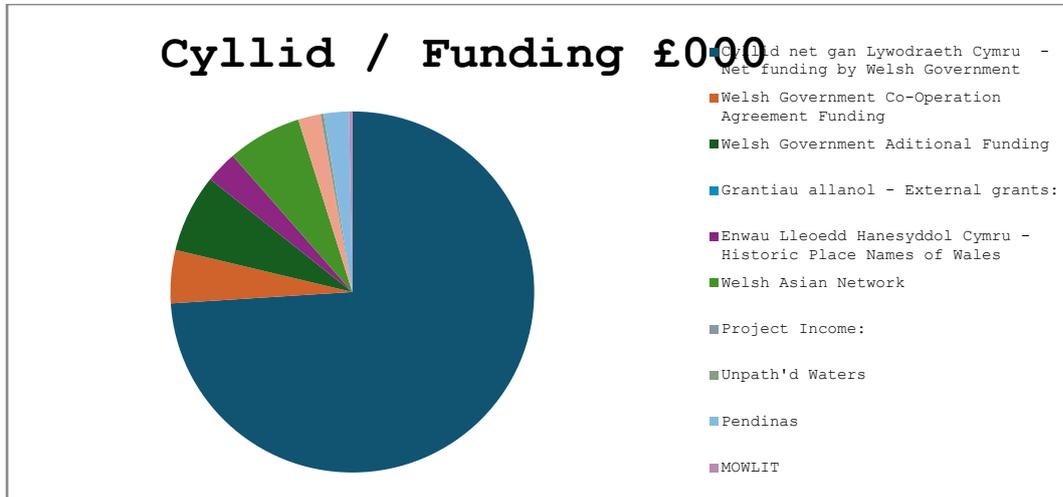
### **Gwariant Fesul Prif Bennawd Cost/ Expenditure by Major Cost Head £000**

	£000
Cyflogau - Salaries	1,551
Costau Rhedeg - Running Costs:	341
Darpariaeth Digidol - Digital Delivery	132
Teithio a Chynhaliath - Travel and Subsistence	37
Cyfalaf - Capital:	106
Aerial Photography Digitisation	49
Cyfanswm / Total	2,216

### **Incwm a Enillwyd / Earned Income £000**

	£000
Gwerthiant Llyfrau - Book Sales	8

Archrediad MEDIN - MEDIN Accrediation	5
Gwasanaethau CHCC - NMR Services	7
Breindaliadau - Royalties	2
Cyfanswm / Total	22



# Incwm a Enillwyd / Earned Income £000

