

Pwyllgor Diwylliant, y Gymraeg a Chyfathrebu
Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee
CWLC(5)-08-16 PTN13

A RESPONSE TO THE 'HISTORIC WALES' PROPOSAL AND PwC REPORT
'INVESTING IN THE FUTURE TO PROTECT THE PAST'.

As one who has been involved with Amgueddfa Cymru–National Museum Wales since the 1980's when I served as a co-opted member of the Museum's sometime Corporate Sponsorship Steering Group and more recently as Chairman of the Friends of the National Museum from 2006 until 2014 I write to express a personal view derived from a long association with the institution. I am concerned to note well-meaning but misdirected solutions to the widely acknowledged problems which beset the arts generally at the present time. I may add that in addition to my continuing membership of the Friends I am a Patron of the Museum.

When Amgueddfa Cymru–National Museum Wales was established by Royal Charter in 1907 its mission, pithily stated at the time and still apposite, was 'to tell the World about Wales and to tell Wales about the World' - not one might note a remit of a purely historical kind. The philosophy was that the Museum should represent and embody an independent element of Welsh identity, divorced from direct government control. The same might be said of the National Library which was established at the same time.

Major museums, like universities, are institutions where much of the activity is 'invisible' with functions of research and scholarship going largely unrecognised by the public at large. The 'iceberg' analogy – for which I claim no originality - springs to mind. Regrettably, the PwC findings take little if any cognisance of the probable deleterious effect that hiving off some 'visible' functions would have upon the overall integrity of the Museum's operations. At a time when best business practice argues for empowerment, the Historic Wales (HW) concept goes in quite the opposite direction in advocating partial disempowerment of those charged with conducting the institution's widely varied functions.

More specifically, drawbacks inherent in options 2 to 4 of the PwC report might include:

- 1) Perceived greater control, possibly political in nature, by government over the activities of the Museum
- 2) The fear that HW might prove to be, if not now but in the future, the 'thin edge of the wedge' as regards the Museum's future governance
- 3) The as yet unquantified costs of implementation and ongoing operation of HW
- 4) Loss of public confidence in HW or whatever new entity were to be set up – how readily might individuals be identified who would match in calibre and experience the existing directors of the Museum and other bodies affected by the proposals?
- 4) Demotivation of the Museum's directorate (who would no longer be wholly masters in their own house) and the professional staff generally. Would people such as curators maintain

the same readiness and enthusiasm for seeing a project to conclusion and exploitation if reference to an outside (and possibly bureaucratic) merged body were first required? One suspects not.

The diminution of the Museum's standing and its posited closer alignment with government could well deter potential benefactors such as charitable trusts from providing support. Again, the Museum has of late been the beneficiary of substantial testamentary bequests where future potential donors might feel less prepared to benefit what they perceived as something akin to an organ of government. (Do people ever remember Cadw in their wills, one wonders.)

Change is in the air and it is widely recognised that something has to be done. But to place at risk an admired and valued Welsh institution that has itself already demonstrated the possibilities of partnership and joint ventures with other bodies would be at best mistaken but possibly catastrophic for the Welsh cultural scene in the years to come.

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26 October 2016

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