

Using culture to tackle poverty and social exclusion: a response from the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales to the Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee's inquiry into how publicly funded bodies can use culture to tackle poverty and social exclusion in Wales.

In March 2014, Welsh Government published a report that it had commissioned from Baroness Kay Andrews looking at the ways in which cultural and heritage bodies can work more closely together to broaden access to and participation in cultural activities as a way of tackling poverty and social exclusion in Wales.

The report was welcomed by the heritage and cultural sector, which has long known that engagement in the arts and heritage has the power to inspire and engage people and to give new purpose to people's lives. We also know that cultural participation appeals to people who have rejected formal education, and by engaging in cultural and heritage activities, people can acquire a very broad range of transferable skills without being aware that they are engaged in 'learning'.

Access Cambridge Archaeology (ACA) is just one long-standing and successful example of this truth. Since it was set up in 2004, ACA has enabled 10,000 young people from deprived backgrounds to take part excavations and work alongside experts from the university to analyse their finds. Participants in the ACA project develop self-confidence and new skills; many have gone on to be the first members of their family to enter higher or further education.

However, the sector expressed concern that new money would be required to enable a meaningful response to the report's recommendations. Though funding was available to local authorities and other potential partners, there was no money available to cultural institutions so existing funds, already committed to core organisational tasks, had to be redirected towards the Poverty and Culture agenda. All that could be done was to ensure that as much of that core activity as possible was targeted at areas of deprivation – for example, mounting exhibitions in libraries and museums in areas of deprivation, though we were also able to develop limited opportunities to partner with other organisations who had received Fusion grants, or who had



focused funding from other sources on projects that addressed issues of poverty and social exclusion. These included:

- As a partner in People's Collection Wales we helped develop individuals' digital skills in Pioneer Areas by developing elements of the accredited training for oral history recording that accompanied establishment of digital heritage stations.
- In 2017 we started delivering the Ceredigion Off-limits? project under the Unloved Heritage? HLF-funded programme. This sees a panel of young people developing their own heritage activities, including working closely with a wider group from the Ceredigion Council's Youth Justice and Prevention Team, to plan, host and deliver activities relating to the historical landscape of Ceredigion.

We encountered initial scepticism on the part of social services 'gatekeepers' as to the potential value of anything the cultural and heritage sector might be able to offer to their clients. There were exceptions, however, and fruitful relationships began to be built between social service professionals and heritage sector bodies that enabled activities to take place that were targeted at real needs. Examples of these are given in the Evaluation Report that was published in March 2016 (<https://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/evaluation-pioneer-areas-pilot-year/?skip=1&lang=en>).

What the evaluation report shows, and our experience confirms, is that working to bring the benefits of cultural participation to people living in deprived communities is a very complex matter. It depends upon the knowledge and facilitation of social services professionals; and where the effort is made, it leads to good quality results, but for a very small number of people – people counted in the tens, not hundreds or thousands. The results can be life-changing for the individuals concerned – for the person who secures a job because he has the confidence to perform better in job interviews; for the person suffering from anxiety who now leads sewing workshops at her local museum; for the people who learn to read and write thanks to participation in library literacy schemes – but these interventions are not scalable. They depend on focused attention by professionals on helping individuals – the ability to bring the benefits of cultural participation to large numbers of people has eluded us so far.



Attachments

Two internal reports produced to inform our Commissioners and sponsor body of the work of the Royal Commission in responding to the access and diversity agenda.

- A report on initiatives taken to widen access, deliver community benefits and encourage new and diverse audiences to take a greater interest in the heritage.
- Widening Access Report: Further Analysis and Lessons Learned.

Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales

A report on initiatives taken to widen access, deliver community benefits and encourage new and diverse audiences to take a greater interest in the heritage



Introduction

The Royal Commission (RCAHMW) recognises the important place heritage has in building confidence, developing skills and promoting social cohesion. It makes its resources available to audiences in innovative ways to make learning more relevant and exciting, and promotes greater participation through a range of public engagement activities, publications and online resources.

Whilst the Commission initiates and manages its own programme of engagement, it also finds it very effective to support other organisations and community groups across Wales by providing resources, information and guidance to enhance their activities. We continue to target our activities at Communities First areas wherever possible, and we are represented on the Fusion programme's learning group.

Widening Engagement

Guided Walks

During the last two years our guided heritage walks have been targeted at Communities First areas. The events in Holyhead and on Gelligaer Common (which involved Maesteg and Darran community groups), promoted the benefits of better health and enabled local people to discover, understand and develop pride in their local heritage. One walker commented *"Thanks very much for organising the walk on Saturday. A great mix of exercise and archaeology!"*

Exhibitions

Travelling exhibitions promote our resources amongst communities across Wales. The 'Britain from Above' exhibition has been displayed at Cardiff Airport since 2014, and is seen by over 200,000 users of the airport every year. This is an important way of showcasing the country's heritage to travellers, many of whom will be visiting Wales for the first time. A similar exhibition was hosted at Cadw sites and national and local museums and libraries, and in August and September 2015 we supported Rhyl Local History Society to host the 'Britain From Above: Wales' exhibition in Rhyl Town Library. This attracted 8,780 visitors, and an exhibition about Denbigh created by the Royal Commission is on long-term loan at the town's museum.

82,396 visitors attended exhibitions created by the Commission (1 April 2015 – 30 September 2016). Between 1 April 2015 and 31 March 2016, 58% (20,265 people) attended an exhibition displayed within a Communities First area.

Talks

As well as providing talks in the community, the Commission arranges its own programme of talks. This has proved very popular not only with our established audience but in drawing in new users, e.g. from such organisations such as the Young Archaeologists' Club and the U3A.

Events

We use our resources to widen access and engagement with the heritage of Wales through a wide range of events organised by ourselves, and in collaboration with others. As part of the 2015 'Explore your Archive' initiative, we worked with Aberystwyth University's School of Art and other art and craft groups who ran public events that involved participants in creating their own collective artwork using material from our archive. One group's tapestry, inspired by the Commission's images, is on public display in our Library and Search Room. Of those who completed evaluation forms at our 2016 Open Doors event, 48 per cent were new users (i.e. this was their first visit to the Commission).

By working with other national and local organisations, the Commission is able to engage with a larger and more diverse audience than it would be able to if it relied only on its own resources. Family engagement is an important element at national events such as the Royal Welsh Show, and the Commission was one of the lead partners of Y Lle Hanes at the 2016 National Eisteddfod.

We also provide resources and material to support other organisations to add value to their events, such as providing an exhibition for the Dyfed Archaeology Trust for their Festival of Archaeology event in 2016.

During the year 2015–16, excluding visitors to our exhibitions, the Commission organised, or contributed to, 79 events, which were attended by 24,857 people.

Group Visits

The Commission regularly welcomes groups to the Commission to view our work and collections, and many of the group members are new to the Commission. Recent visits include those by Merched y Wawr, the Coastlands History Group, and the Carpenters' Fellowship of Great Britain.

Media

The media draw on our resources for news reports and TV documentaries about the Commission and its work, or through their use of historic images from the NMRW. This year we licensed the use of our material in Open University publications, tourism booklets for Oswestry Border Tourism, and an article on the hillforts of the Clwydian Range published in the Archaeological Institute of America's *Archaeology* magazine. Our images were also used this year by the BBC Crimewatch programme to recover the stolen Nanteos Cup and to help South Wales Police solve an historic crime in Cardiff. The media's use of our resources supports our work to widen access, deliver community benefits, and encourage new and diverse audiences to take a greater interest in our heritage.

Building Confidence and Skills

Through the CBA Bursary scheme, and the 'Metal Links' and 'Britain from Above' projects, the Commission has used funding opportunities to employ Community Archaeologists to widen access to Wales' rich heritage and support the development of skills that enable communities to survey, record and celebrate their own local heritage.

As one of the partners in the HLF funded 'Unloved Heritage?' project led by Cadw, we have been consulting and working with young people to prepare the 'Ceredigion Off-limits?' project action plan for the HLF Stage 2 bid. This has included young people under the wing of Ceredigion Council Youth Justice and Prevention Team.

In 2015 volunteers helped excavate parts of the Abermagwr Roman villa courtyard to see whether any evidence survived of agricultural buildings and practices linked to the villa. The work was funded by the Cambrian Archaeological Association. The excavation provided 1,050 hours of training activities for 15 local volunteers, as well as providing the subject of lectures given to a capacity audience at the local village hall and Ceredigion Museum as part of the Festival of Archaeology. One volunteer wrote to say: "It is something I shall remember for the rest of my life, not least for the humour and camaraderie that comes from hanging on to the field shelter in the middle of horizontal rain and gale, the pleasure of trowelling away in brilliant sunshine and good Ceredigion drizzle, and from the sheer amount of learning that comes from working with the other archaeologists that I have met during the years of the dig."

We worked with communities during our chapels project, and were very successful in gathering information from people during community events. In 2011 we used volunteers to update our building condition information, and we are considering re-running this survey to see how the condition has changed since that date.

A key part of our CHERISH bid for European funding through the INTEREG scheme is the inclusion of citizen science projects. This will leave a legacy of increased awareness and transferable skills among coastal communities.

On-line Innovation

The Commission is committed to using online technology to make the content of the NMRW available to as many people as possible. It also uses innovative technology to make it more engaging and exciting, and features a diverse range of topics through blogs and social media outlets.

RCAHMW Website

To widen access, we recently overhauled our website (www.cbhc.gov.uk / www.rcahmw.gov.uk), which is fully bilingual and now has a fresher, more contemporary design as well as a much simplified navigational interface. The website is now accessible on any platform— tablet, mobile and PC. The home page provides a one-stop shop for information about the services of the Royal Commission and the National Monuments Record of Wales. The news section has replaced our 'Heritage of Wales' blog, and our Twitter account is now visible on the front page of the website.

News stories have been used to reflect the diversity of the heritage and people of Wales. For example a blog on the Ladies of Llangollen marked LGBT month, and a story featuring the changing communities in Butetown featured photography from the 'Britain from Above' project.

Coflein

Our relaunched Coflein website (www.coflein.gov.uk) now provides even easier access to data held by the National Monuments Record of Wales (NMRW), including details of many thousands of archaeological sites, monuments, buildings and maritime sites in Wales. Users can browse online galleries highlighting the richness and variety of the material we hold, and the gallery on culturally diverse Wales has proved very popular. Users can find detailed records using a map interface or a word search (place name, site type, keyword). Whilst the website's interface labels and help pages are bilingual, we are continuing to increase the Welsh-language facilities available on Coflein, including preparing a thesaurus, a list of Welsh terms for building and monument types and features.

People's Collection Wales

The Royal Commission has been leading the Innovation strand of the 'People's Collection Wales' project since its inception. As part of this work, we have developed a series of Culture Beacons which delivers information to users' tablets and smartphones when they are visiting museums and heritage attractions. The information is drawn from the People's Collection website and allows users to explore a great range of content; for example, interviews with slate workers and photographs of their working lives that adds depths and richness to a visit of the National Slate Museum. Culture Beacons are very flexible tools.

Culture Beacon projects are currently being developed by Cadw, Pembrokeshire Coast National Park, the National Botanic Garden of Wales, the Church in Wales and St Dogmaels Abbey. Further projects, including those in collaboration with MALD, Snowdonia National Park, the Senedd and the Wales Millennium Centre are in the initial stages of development.

We also helped Girlguiding Cymru in their successful application for a £40,000 grant under HLF Cymru's 'Young Roots' grant scheme. In the centenary year of the Girl Guides' Senior Section, this project will seek to tell the stories of the past 100 years drawing upon a wealth of archival material, oral history and personal anecdotes, preserving the past and bringing it into the present using modern digitisation and dissemination technologies. Through this project those involved will gain a wide range of new skills, and recognised qualifications.

Publications

In May 2015, *Llechi Cymru—Archaeoleg a Hanes / Welsh Slate—Archaeology and History of an Industry* was launched in Penrhyn Castle. The book has won two awards: the Peter Neaverson Award for Outstanding Scholarship in Industrial Archaeology, awarded by the Society for Industrial

Archaeology, and the British Archaeological Awards 'Best Archaeological Book' award for its originality and impact at international, national and local level. At a local level, it was agreed that it was the successful outcome of a 'conversation' with proud communities who have supplied much of the information about their own histories, which are a combination of oral history, observation on the ground and documentary history. The book is available in Welsh and English as slate is 'the most Welsh of Welsh industries'. A review in Wales's weekly national periodical, *Y Cymro*, said: 'this thrilling study fills an important gap in our historiography and offers a description and interpretation that cannot be surpassed'.

The book will lead to a greater interest in Welsh heritage following the inclusion of the slate industry of North Wales on UNESCO's tentative list of World Heritage Sites.

In partnership with Glandwr Cymru: The Canal and River Trust in Wales, we published a guide to the Pontcysyllte World Heritage Site on behalf of the Pontcysyllte World Heritage Partnership. The guide was written by our former Secretary Peter Wakelin, and was launched in June 2015 at the aqueduct visitor centre. It is aimed at increasing the appreciation of Welsh heritage internationally, providing guidance and material to support World Heritage Sites nominations in Wales, and increasing heritage-based tourism to Wales.

Archaeoleg Ucheldir Gwent / The Archaeology of Upland Gwent was launched at the 2016 National Eisteddfod. The book celebrates the archaeology and history of upland Gwent and its neighbouring regions. It also encourages readers to explore the area with its guided walk section that completes the book. To support the dissemination of information about the heritage of this part of Wales, various events were arranged to complement our publication, including free talks and guided walks.

A successful partnership with the Dating Old Welsh Houses Group led to the publication, in 2014, of *Darganfod Tai Hanesyddol Eryri – Discovering the Historic Houses of Snowdonia*. This was the result of 'an ambitious exercise in community archaeology and partnership working [and] has involved over two hundred enthusiasts ... contributing to a sense of shared heritage and creating opportunities for learning new skills.' Partnership work has continued with this group, with further dendrochronology sampling and community activities. Following the success of this partnership a new tree-ring dating project has been set up with the Brecknock Society with members and volunteers working in the local community to enhance the knowledge and understanding of historic buildings.

Conclusion

This summary of our recent widening access projects demonstrates the commitment of the Royal Commission to working with community groups and volunteers to help them become contributors to our work, not just consumers of it. This is a key principle for the Royal Commission: we aspire to build community engagement into all our projects and we aim to encourage and empower people to participate in our recording, research and curation activities, combining our specialist knowledge

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with the local knowledge of people in the community who have most to gain from understanding their own heritage.



Widening Access Report: Further Analysis and Lessons Learned

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Introduction

As demonstrated in our recent Widening Access Report, the Royal Commission is committed to widening access and participation, and we are in the process of trying to recruit a Commissioner with the experience in this field to help us formulate an appropriate and realistic strategy and to help us identify potential partners for this work. In advance of that, this short paper has been drawn up to analyse what works best and, conversely, what does not work so well from our recent experience.

Much depends on whether the measures of success are quantitative or qualitative. Widening access, as we will discuss below, requires a considerable input of budget and staff resources only to reach a relatively small new audience. The Commission's resources are very constrained, and we are doing as much as it can within the resources available.

Successes

The following activities have proved particularly successful for the Commission in terms of widening access and participation in the last few years:

1. Travelling exhibitions

These are an effective way of getting material out of the archive and across the country, significantly increasing (the possibility of) under-represented groups encountering our work and the historic environment more generally. Libraries and museums in Community First areas are deliberately targeted. As panels are re-used at various venues, they provide a good investment of resources.

2. Guided walks

By bringing our expertise to life within the historic environment, our guided walks inspire and lead to further engagement with the Commission (through signing up to our Friends network, etc.). They also reach a different audience through collaboration with the Ramblers (see below).

Less effective activities

The following have proved less effective:

- **Indiscriminately responding to invited talks**

The Commission often gets requests for staff to come and do talks. In the past we responded to such requests too indiscriminately. In recent years we have adopted a more strategic approach by:

- a. requiring an audience of at least 30 people (to avoid investing valuable staff resources in too small events);
- b. prioritising Community First areas; and
- c. prioritising first-time requests (to try and spread our distribution).

Approach

Our public engagement activities are guided by the following approach which, in our experience, leads to the greatest success in widening access and participation:

1. National initiatives

Taking part in a national initiative (for instance, the National Eisteddfod, Royal Welsh Show, Big Welsh Walk, Festival of Archaeology, or Open Doors) allows the Commission to:

- a. benefit from name recognition and external marketing initiatives; and
- b. reach beyond its usual (often local) audience.

2. Collaboration with local partners

It is through working with local partners/groups that the Commission best reaches underrepresented groups in areas that we wish to target. On our own we struggle to reach these groups, as they are not tapped into our regular communication channels (website, Friends network, Heritage of Wales blog, Facebook page, Twitter, etc), which require people to sign up or, at the very least, know about our existence. Local groups have different networks both in the geographic as in the demographic sense.

For instance, our guided walk in the Community First Area of Gelligaer, Bargoed was organised in collaboration with the local Gelligaer Ramblers. The

consultation phase of Ceredigion Off-limit (part of Unloved Heritage), a project aimed at young people, benefited from collaboration with the Ceredigion Youth Justice and Prevention Team in widening access and participation.

Furthermore, by working together with other heritage organisations such as Cadw, the National Library of Wales and the National Museum of Wales, in organising event (e.g. Open Doors) and exhibitions (e.g. Year of the Sea), we try to pool our resources and expertise to reach as wide an audience as possible.

3. Diverse venues

Since moving to the National Library of Wales, our in-house talks and events take place either in our own library and search room, or in the National Library's Drwm or Council Chamber.

While our new location has already increased our exposure to a broader audience, it is particularly through choosing different types of venues for our travelling exhibitions (for instance, Cardiff Airport for 'Britain from Above' but also to Cadw sites, local museums and libraries) that the Commission increases the *number* of people who encounter our work across the country, and broadens the *type* of people who do so. Conversely, local libraries benefit from having new material to display.

One future avenue for exploration may be to diversity this even further to venues and locations visited by underrepresented groups (not necessarily or directly connected to the historic environment).

4. Refreshments

While this may seem peripheral to the question of how to widen access to the historic environment, offering free refreshments undoubtedly contributes to people's positive experience of an event (it is often commented on in feedback forms), which encourages a return visit. More importantly, it may also draw people in – especially if refreshments are advertised with the event.

For instance, in the consultation period of the Ceredigion Unlimited project, the two main elements that seemed to make an activity a success were a) a very hands-on approach and b) the nice food commented on by participants. Similarly, several people arriving to attend our recent Christmas lecture asked where they could find the mince pies and mulled wine (provided by the National Library).

5. General interest themes

It is important to choose general interest themes (as opposed to more specific, niche themes), especially for exhibitions, to ensure appeal to the widest audience possible.

6. Technology

Social media is good for events promotion.

Broadcasting our 2016 Christmas lecture live through Periscope and publicising the link afterwards enabled us to reach an online audience of 250 within the first 24 hours (compared with 98 physically at the event). While it is impossible to say whether this online audience included any underrepresented groups, using such technology certainly increases the range of our activities at a relatively low cost.

Similarly, 1,255 volunteers have helped us (and our partners) transcribe and contribute to historic maps of Wales as part of our crowdsourcing projects, Cymru 1900 Wales (www.cymru1900wales.org) and Cynefin (cynefin.archiveswales.org.uk). Such projects allow online participation of underrepresented groups, though we don't ask participants for information that would allow us to monitor this.

7. Project work

We use our externally-funded project work to instigate initiatives that our current resources do not allow us to pursue.

For instance, the employment of Community Archaeologists mentioned in the report was funded through the CBA Bursary Scheme, and the 'Metal Links' and 'Britain from Above' projects. Likewise, the Cambrian Archaeological Association funded the 2015 Abermagwr Roman excavation in which 15 local volunteers took part.

We intend to use our externally funded project work to initiate future widening access initiatives. In particular, if we receive Stage 2 funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund for our U-boat and Unloved Heritage projects, we will be able to put substantial resources into widening access, and there is a strong community engagement element to our EU-funded Cherish project.

Challenges

While the Commission is committed to and would like to do much more widening access work, we have identified the following key barriers:

1. Labour and resource intensive

Widening access and participation is very labour and resource intensive. Building up relationships with communities across the country, and arranging activities with these communities, takes time and resources that we do not have.

2. Evaluation

While evaluation and 'after-care' are crucial in building relationships with new audiences and learning lessons from the work we do, these are often difficult or impossible due to:

- a. lack of time and resources – as above, the Commission does not have the staff resources to invest in after-care; while we do evaluate feedback forms the pressures of new activities often take priority over this work;
- b. cost – evaluation through consultancy is expensive.

Conclusion

Possibly the main lesson that the sector as a whole has learned from the last two years of trying to respond to the Andrews Report on Poverty and Culture is that the sector depends on social services and local authority employees to provide access to under-represented groups and hard-to-reach individuals. Many of them are sceptical about whether heritage and culture have anything relevant to offer them or their clients. Much work has had to go into winning hearts and minds of the gatekeepers.

Where we have been able overcome this hurdle, it is usually because somebody in a local authority has approached a heritage body with a specific idea or proposal that has then been developed and delivered jointly. We struggle to devise relevant projects without their participation, and even when we do work together, you need substantial resources to be able to respond effectively, the outcomes are uncertain and the numbers of people helped can be very small.