



Comisiwn Brenhinol
Henebion Cymru
Royal Commission on the Ancient
and Historical Monuments of Wales

Operational Plan 2019–21

Mae'r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn y Gymraeg.
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1. Our operational environment

Over the last four years the Royal Commission has developed into an outward-facing organisation, engaged in a number of nationally and internationally significant research projects that address core contemporary issues relating to the historic environment, including the impacts of climate change and the empowerment of people from all backgrounds to participate in the heritage of Wales.

In order to achieve this, we have developed professional partnerships with key organisations engaged in understanding, protecting, enhancing and creating access to the natural and cultural heritage of Wales, including the RSPB, the National Trust, Natural Resources Wales, the Universities of Wales Trinity St David's, Swansea, Cardiff, Bangor, Chester and Aberystwyth, and a number of local authorities and volunteer groups, as well as the other three national institutions responsible for Welsh cultural heritage – Cadw, Amgueddfa Cymru–National Museum Wales and the National Library of Wales.

Working with these and other partners, we have been successful in securing research funding to enhance our core Welsh Government grant. These externally funded projects now account for some 20 per cent of our income and this has enabled us to take on additional staff to undertake activities that contribute to the delivery of our Royal Warrant remit of historic environment research and record curation.

We thus approach 2019–21 with confidence and energy, aiming to build on the achievements of recent years and to bring to a successful conclusion a range of ambitious projects, the principal ones being:

- **Wales Slate World Heritage Site bid:** our work to compile a persuasive dossier of evidence to inform the bid for UNESCO World Heritage Site status will be delivered to the Department of Culture by October 2019 so that UNESCO can undertake its review of the evidence and reach a conclusion in August 2020.

- **Commemorating the Forgotten U-boat War:** our project to commemorate the First World War at sea around the Welsh coast, partly funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF), in partnership with Bangor University and the Nautical Archaeology Society, will continue until December 2019. A programme of marine geophysical surveys to capture high-resolution data of 17 wrecks has now been completed, and the emphasis in the second phase will be on the hosting of a major summer school for sports and hobby divers to study one of the wrecks. The project will continue to capture local stories of the First World War and explore the impact of the war at sea on the coastal communities of Wales through a series of facilitated events at 16 maritime museums around Wales. The outcomes of the research will be made available in a series of exhibitions, events, and online resources, coinciding with the ‘Year of Discovery’. We hope that the successful completion of this project will enable us to prepare a follow-on application to the NLHF for work to commemorate neglected aspects of the Second World War.
- **Unloved Heritage: Ceredigion Off-limits?:** our project, to empower young people to define what aspects of the heritage they value and why, and to help them acquire the skills to research and record that heritage and tell compelling stories about it, will run until September 2020. With our other partners, including Cadw and the Welsh Archaeological Trusts, we will seek ways to sustain this activity after the NLHF comes to an end.
- **Digital delivery:** subject to the approval of our capital funding bid, we will make major progress during 2019–20 towards developing a new data platform, to deliver more and better content online to the widest possible range of users, aiming to launch the new platform in 2020. We will develop the platform in such a way that it will also allow Cadw to directly input and access its digital archives. We aim to bring to a successful conclusion a discussion with the Welsh Archaeological Trusts and Cadw about using the same platform for the creation of an All-Wales Historic Environment Record, in place of the current multiplicity of records, to ensure that all of the core content is available in the same place.
- **CHERISH:** we will deliver the remaining three years of the five-year CHERISH programme, which runs until 31 December 2021, funded by the EU Inter-reg fund, in partnership with Aberystwyth University, Geological Survey

Ireland and The Discovery Programme Ireland. Having established baseline data sets that establish the current position, we will seek ways to continue this study of the impacts of climate change on coastal heritage around and beneath the Irish Sea for the long term, to monitor future change.

Community engagement work forms an important component of this research, and we will be running training excavations over the next two summer seasons in partnership with Dyfed Archaeological Trust.

- **Field projects:** we will continue our work to record heritage at risk, with a particular focus on 20th-century buildings and places of worship, as well as making records of individual Welsh buildings of significance that are at risk of demolition, such as Wrexham Police Station and Brecon Library.
- **The National Monuments Record of Wales:** we will continue to curate the National Monuments Record for Wales, and we will pursue with our National Library partners a bid to UK Research and Innovation for funding to develop a trusted digital repository for digital archives for the whole of Wales.
- **People's Collection Wales:** we will participate in the planned review of the People's Collection Wales and work to support whatever recommendations emerge; in particular we will seek ways to increase our involvement in the project on a number of fronts including innovation and community engagement.
- **List of Historic Place-names in Wales:** as a contribution to the promotion of the Welsh Language we will continue to champion the recording and use of Welsh place-names through the List of Historic Place Names of Wales that we manage on behalf of the nation. We will work with Cadw and other partners to promote the various ways in which the List can be used, and we will continue to work closely with the stakeholder group and the University of Wales Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies in developing relevant content.

Delivering this ambitious agenda is not without its challenges, not least the risk that leaving the EU without an agreement could force us to bring the CHERISH project to a premature conclusion if EU funds for the project are no longer available.

Given that it typically takes around 24 months to develop applications for research funding, we will also be working to develop new projects and partnerships to take the place of those that are due to be completed during this plan period.

We also have to balance the obligations we have entered into as an arm's length body funded by Welsh Government with the duties imposed by our Royal Warrant and the commitments we have entered into as a result of our external funding and partnership agreements. Each of our funders has different reporting and governance regimes, and compliance is now a major activity in its own right, accounting for around 15 per cent of our overall costs and resources.

For that reason, we welcome recent Welsh Government initiatives to ease the burden of compliance on arm's-length bodies, including the implementation of 'whole of government' remits. Hence this operational plan covers a 30-month period (from April 2019 until the Welsh Government elections in 2021), after which we will respond to any new framework be developed by the incoming Government.

We are also strongly committed to the Historic Wales Strategic Partnership and to closer collaboration with Cadw, the National Library of Wales and Amgueddfa Cymru-National Museum Wales in promoting the rich culture of Wales to local and international audiences, to deliver an excellent service to the public, to delivering efficiencies wherever possible through joint working with our partners and to a programme of skills enhancement and training for staff.

We also support the efforts of the First Minister and the Public Bodies Unit to create a single workforce for the public sector in Wales and to achieve greater effectiveness through co-operation with other public sector bodies.

2. Meeting Key Deliverables

This operational plan sets out the main activities that we will undertake over the next 30 months in response to our remit letter from the Deputy Minister for Culture, Sport and Tourism, which sets out the Royal Commission's Key Deliverables (KDs) for the remainder of the current Term of Government (to May 2021).

- KD 1: Subject to further discussions with my officials and advice which they will submit to me, develop a new robust and effective IT platform to deliver access to the Royal Commission's archive and services.**
- KD 2: Provide high quality digital content, services and resources to reach national and international audiences.**
- KD 3: Increase access to the Royal Commission's collections, services and resources, including through outreach activities and local partnerships.**
- KD 4: Provide leadership for the management of the historic environment data in Wales, including the statutory Historic Environment Records (HERs).**

The Royal Commission holds the national collection of records relating to the Welsh historic environment, including large and comprehensive collections of photographs. This is a key resource for anyone seeking to understand how various aspects of the Welsh identity have evolved since the earliest times.

Digital content and delivery: the majority of the people and organisations making use of the National Monuments Record of Wales do so by searching and retrieving records using our Coflein web-based search facility. Having relied for more than a decade on our SWISH partnership with the former Scottish Royal Commission for this facility, we have now embarked on the development of a new digital delivery platform that will give user-friendly access to the rich resources of the National Monuments Record of Wales.

This is a major objective for the period, and we aim to launch the replacement digital platform in 2020. This will in turn release the funds that we are

currently contributing to the SWISH partnership to be used for equipping staff with the skills to maintain and enhance the new system. We will then explore further opportunities to develop the new platform as a service for the wider historic environment in Wales (see *Digital delivery* above).

Access: we will continue not only to collect, preserve, catalogue and make available materials relating to the Welsh historic environment of Wales, we will also continue to promote usage and awareness of the National Monuments Record of Wales and provide access to the Royal Commission’s resources through our long-established public service and outreach activities. These include our online services and our public search room, as well as a busy programme of outreach events and activities, consisting of publications, talks, lectures, symposia, guided walks, open days and travelling exhibitions, as well as our stands at the Royal Welsh Show and the National Eisteddfod.

HER leadership: we will continue to provide leadership for the management of the historic environment data in Wales through our independent oversight of the Historic Environment Records. We will explore the options for the creation of an All-Wales Historic Environment Record to deliver more responsive and efficient delivery of HER-based data, and we will also review our auditing procedures to ensure that the HER quinquennial audits due in 2020 form a solid basis for improving the quality of the data and service delivery.

KD 5: Monitor user satisfaction and incorporate user feedback into future initiatives and developments.

User satisfaction: we will continue to monitor user satisfaction and feedback and ensure that this is used to inform the way we plan our projects, products and services. We will begin a review of our public engagement strategy with the aim of providing assurance to Commissioners and Welsh Government that we are meeting the needs of our users and providing access to cultural opportunities for people from all backgrounds, reflecting the diversity of our nation, and encouraging participation in cultural activities by the broadest range of diverse audiences. In this way the Royal Commission will contribute to the aim of Wales becoming a creatively active nation.

KD 6: Continue your current investigative programme, and in particular to support the development of the Gwynedd Council-led nomination of the Welsh Slate Landscapes for World Heritage Status as it reaches its critical stages prior to submission to UNESCO.

Wales Slate World Heritage Site bid: we will continue to play a fundamental role in supporting the Welsh Slate World Heritage Site bid as it approaches its critical final stages with a submission to UNESCO in autumn 2019. Our field staff will continue to work on the core documents for the nomination, working in the field to identify significant assets. We will undertake aerial photographic flights to supply up-to-date images for the nomination documents and supply historic images from our archives. We will assist in the final design and production of the nomination document using our GIS, mapping, design and 360-degree modelling resources. Staff and Commissioners will comment as ‘critical friends’ on drafts of the nomination document.

Survey and investigation: the Commission’s team of highly experienced field staff will carry out a busy programme of survey work to record and interpret Wales’s most significant historic buildings, landscapes and ancient monuments through archaeological survey, photography, 3D laser scanning, drone, LiDAR and aerial photography.

Our strategy for survey includes thematic or area-based projects to develop knowledge and understanding of elements of our heritage that are under-represented, of outstanding importance, or at risk from neglect, environmental damage or development. In certain circumstances, we will record buildings of particular significance in response to specific threats, and work in partnership with relevant stakeholders to do this where possible.

We will continue our long-standing work on medieval vernacular buildings in Wales, working with such partners as the local societies, and supporting informal training for their volunteers. We will also continue to work with the University of Cardiff on pioneering new timber-dating methods based on oxygen isotopes.

Historic Places of Worship: we will work with Cadw and the Architectural History Practice to complete a survey of all the Roman Catholic churches in Wales as a means of determining their significance and to enable informed decisions to be made about grant applications, listing and possible closures and disposals. We will work with Cadw and the Catholic Church to identify subjects for a more detailed record. We will also carry out the pilot phase of a survey of late 19th and 20th-century places of worship in Wales as the pilot project for a pan-Wales survey. We will continue to Chair the Welsh Historic Places of Worship Forum with the aim of helping congregations meet the challenges of looking after the historic places of worship for which they are responsible.

KD 7: Continue to collaborate with Visit Wales to promote Wales, including through the ‘Year of Discovery’ and subsequent themed tourist promotion years.

The Royal Commission has an important role to play in promoting and protecting Wales’ place in the world, showcasing Wales’ vibrant culture, heritage and language to an international audience and helping to promote our nation worldwide. We do this in a variety of ways, including our exhibitions, talks and publications, our social media activity, our fieldwork and research and our public services. We will support activities to promote Wales’s World Heritage Sites, and to celebrate the inscription of the North Wales Slate Industry if this is successful. Through our chairmanship of the Welsh Historic Places of Worship Forum, we will organise a symposium to bring together all those involved in faith tourism and pilgrimage with the aim of achieving better coordination and financial benefit.

Historic Environment Group: in addition to the activities below, we will work with partners in the Historic Environment Group to promote Welsh heritage, contribute to the ‘Heritage Counts’ report, which has proved to be a powerful advocacy document by the sector, and participate actively in Welsh heritage-sector forums and strategic boards.

Year of Discovery: we will seek to develop a coherent series of activities for the Year of Discovery, including events, website content and exhibitions aimed at encouraging people to explore and discover more of the heritage of Wales

in partnership with Visit Wales, Natural Resources Wales, the National Trust, Cadw, the Welsh Places of Worship Forum and other sectoral partners. We will launch our *Wales and the Sea* publication, a 328-page fully illustrated, bilingual book being produced in partnership with the publisher, Y Lolfa, and our travelling exhibition on the same theme will continue to tour museums in Wales.

KD 8: Continue to deliver high-quality learning experiences.

KD 9: Continue the creation of digital learning resources for Hwb in partnership with the National Library, Amgueddfa-Cymru and Cadw.

KD 10: Work in partnership with higher education institutions within Wales and internationally.

As part of our CHERISH programme we will run community excavations in Wales during the summers of 2019 and 2020; and we will support the work of the Strata Florida Trust in their delivery of a programme of field survey and excavations designed to discover more about the monastic landscape around the abbey.

We will continue to deliver high-quality learning experiences, both informally – through our public library and search room manned by our knowledgeable staff, as well as through group visits by school children, students and community groups – and more formally, through offering volunteering or student placement opportunities.

We will continue to contribute to the definition of a new Wales-centred schools' curriculum through our membership of the working group set up for this purpose by the Learned Society of Wales.

We will also continue to support the work of the Historic Wales Strategic Partnership in its delivery of its skills action plan, including working with Apprenticeships Wales in the definition and delivery of formal Apprenticeship Frameworks for the heritage sector.

KD 11: Continue to support the active management of the historic environment in the context of climate change, in part through your role as members of the Historic Environment Climate Adaptation sub-group, and in particular in those areas for which you hold particular expertise, such as marine heritage.

Planning advice: we will continue to support those who work in planning, conservation and environmental policy to contribute to the sustainable management of the historic and natural environments, and in particular those areas for which we hold particular expertise such as marine heritage.

Maritime archaeology: we will contribute to the definition and promotion of maritime archaeology policy in Wales and provide specialist advice in response to applications for marine licences as part of the marine consents regime, ensuring that historic wrecks and drowned paleo-landscapes are better understood and well protected.

Buildings at risk: we will continue our dialogue with Cadw on individual buildings and building types that are most at risk and, where we have the resources, we will undertake recording work (and where the need exceeds our capacity we will scope the work and seek appropriate levels of funding).

CHERISH: in addition to the above, the work that the Royal Commission is doing on CHERISH will make a contribution to our understanding of climate change and its impacts, as will the work undertaken by the Commission on behalf of the Historic Environment Group's Climate-change sub-group, modelling the potential impacts of sea-level change and flooding on the one hand and rising temperatures on the other.

KD 12: Continue to provide support for local authority conservation services and to work with Cadw on the identification of recording priorities as part of the management of historic assets at risk.

Support for local authority conservation services: we will, in our capacity as statutory consultees in the Listed Building Consent process, continue to support local authority conservation officers with advice on Listed Building Consent applications. We will implement new procedures for managing and

monitoring this work (as well as the work on marine planning advice and licensing). We will produce guidance on levels of recording for use by local authority conservation and planning officers to encourage the use of planning conditions that require applicants for listed building consent to make records of the buildings concerned at an appropriate level of detail. We will work with heritage agencies in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland to ensure a consistency of approach across the four home nations.

KD 13: Continue to offer activities and experiences that impact on the health and well-being of our communities, working in partnership with appropriate organisations and volunteers.

Mental health: following the day-long event that the Royal Commission hosted in 2017, at which we introduced mental health professionals to the National Monuments Record of Wales, we have begun to establish a solid base of further activity to promote the archive as a memory archive, a resource that can be used to stimulate reminiscence and memory for those living with dementia. We will develop this in collaboration with People’s Collection Wales and seek to develop a common approach across institutions in Wales.

Guided walks: we will help to promote good health and well-being for everyone by continuing to work with local groups to lead guided walks of areas of Wales with a rich heritage.

KD 14: Encourage and increase participation in cultural activities from the broadest range of diverse audiences.

Unloved Heritage: Ceredigion Off-limits?: we will deliver the final phase of our NLHF-funded Ceredigion Off-limits? project, which focuses on developing best practice when working with young people who might not otherwise be engaged with heritage. The project action plan is based on the needs and motivations of the young people, interested partners and stakeholders as identified during consultation, and is structured in a way that will enable young people to drive and define the details and outputs of their project as it develops.

‘Skills for the Future’ placement: the Royal Commission is a partner with the National Library and the Ceredigion Museum in the HLF-funded *Cultural Ambition: Diversifying the heritage workplace through collaboration, opportunity and skills* scheme, designed to give 18 to 24-year-olds from a lower socio-economic backgrounds opportunities to gain work experience within the heritage sector. We have successfully completed one three-month paid placements and intend to continue to offer placements as long as the funding continues.

KD 15: Continue to maintain an effective and efficient organisation by delivering your corporate functions in line with Welsh Government corporate guidance and best practice standards.

Corporate functions: the Royal Commission’s corporate functions include governance, finance, procurement and payment of suppliers, facilities management, disaster planning, risk register maintenance, health & safety, ICT and Cyber Security, human resources and training activities, equality and diversity monitoring, fundraising and the development of external partnerships, Welsh Language compliance, quarterly reporting to Welsh Government, the annual report, the annual audit, organising Commission meetings and recruiting Commissioners, and much more.

Having recently been audited for our General Data Protection Regulation compliance and having obtained Cyber Essentials Plus with IASME accreditation, we will continue to give a high priority to Cyber Security and personal privacy in all our activities.

We will continue to work with Welsh Government audit on a rolling programme of investigation and assurance: in 2020 we will be audited for our compliance with procurement rules in relation to our digital delivery sub-contracting activity, and in 2021 it will be the turn of our HR activity to be audited.

Historic Wales Strategic Partnership: as a member of the Historic Wales Strategic Partnership and its four work groups, we will work with other organisations, staff and recognised trade unions in the historic environment, museum, archive and library sectors in Wales to address specialist skills

requirements within the four national institutions and the wider cultural heritage sector.

The Royal Commission's Secretary will continue to serve as joint chair of the Historic Wales Strategic Partnership and will seek to drive forward the partnership's other agendas: addressing back-office efficiencies, customer service, commercial opportunities, branding, the harmonisation of salaries and terms and conditions of employment across the sector and the removal of bureaucratic barriers to the free movement of staff from one institution to another.

3. Grant in aid from the Welsh Government

The Welsh Government will provide the following funding allocation to the Royal Commission in 2019-20 to deliver the priorities outlined in this Operational Plan. Provisional figures are also given for capital expenditure in 2020–21 to cover the costs of developing the new digital delivery platform.

Revenue	Budget 2019-20 £000
Revenue (gross)	1,618
Less: generated income	(87)
Revenue baseline	1,531
Allocation of funding to meet additional public sector pension costs	65
Transfer from Cadw to fund the List of Historic Place-names in Wales	60
Grant from Cadw for work on the Statutory Parks and Gardens Register	63
Total Revenue (net)	1,719

Capital	Budget 2019-20 £000	Plans 2020-21 £000
Total Capital	TBC	TBC

Additional non Grant-in-Aid funding that has already been earmarked to support specific activities:

	Plans 2019-20 £000	Indicative 2020-21 £000
People's Collection Wales programme	TBC	TBC