

Archival Mapping Project for Wales

A survey of archival provision in Wales

Final report, 2001

Archives Council Wales / Cyngor Archifau Cymru

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The Archival Mapping Project for Wales was carried forward under the aegis of the Council members of the Archives Council Wales (ACW)¹. Leadership for this project was provided by the ACW Chair, initially Kevin Matthias and latterly Susan Edwards, and by the ACW Secretary Gwyn Jenkins. The project was maintained on a day to day basis by staff in the Public Record Office's Archive Inspection Service.

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Contents

1. Introduction
 2. The Archival Mapping Project for Wales
 3. Summary of main findings

 4. Archival Accommodation: records storage and working areas
 5. Public Access: accommodation, facilities and services
 6. Catalogues and other Finding Aids
 7. Information and Communication Technology
 8. Electronic Records
 9. Conservation and Preservation
 10. Staff Training

 11. Local authority archive services
 12. Other archive services

 13. Conclusions: the way forwards for archives in Wales?
-
- Appendix 1: composition of the Project Board
Appendix 2: list of participants

1. Introduction

Archives are an important part of our social and cultural heritage, and their use and understanding play a key role in many people's lives. Archives include records created by local and central government, businesses, local groups and societies, religious bodies, and individuals. Record offices in Wales are run by local authorities, museums, libraries, universities, and government bodies.

Public awareness of our national and local collections is growing with the rising popularity of historical research, and demand for the many treasures in our archival holdings has never been greater. These are exciting times for the archive profession with archival issues being treated with ever higher priority at Government levels. Increased funding opportunities are opening up hitherto inaccessible routes for the development of archival services and facilities, and the health of record offices around the country is steadily improving. The time to survey provisions and services in our record offices, and to identify their priorities for investment and development, could therefore hardly be more auspicious.

The production of this report echoes that of similar projects in England and Scotland. The project data and this resulting report provide a snapshot of provisions as they truly are in record offices in Wales. The objective views of archivists in the field have been considered and evaluated by a professional team and a body representative of Welsh archives, and this report stands as a valuable document of fact and future direction.

Funding bodies, government agencies, boards and archivists alike are now urged to consider the findings of this report, and to plan for a better future for archives in Wales.

2. The Archival Mapping Project for Wales

A. Why did we want a mapping project in Wales?

During the past few years the archival community in the United Kingdom has become increasingly aware of the value of a coherent and objective approach to the determination of its funding needs and priorities. Such an approach is essential in Wales if the sector, and individual archive services, are to address areas of provision which are under-resourced. By taking a coherent approach to the development of the sector areas of excellence can also be identified, which will help to ensure that success is celebrated and built upon.

Although individual record offices have always been well aware of their own areas of success and need, steps had to be taken towards the development of a fuller understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of provision in archive services across the country. It was also essential that investment priorities for archives in Wales could be assessed on the basis of detailed, structured and reliable knowledge, so that grant aid and other resources could be distributed appropriately and fairly.

B. Why a mapping project particularly?

Statistical information on archive services in Wales has been gathered since as long ago as 1971.² Subsequently, more recent surveys were undertaken in 1992 and 1996;³ the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy has gathered statistics on public sector archival provision for a number of years,⁴ and the Joint Information Systems Committee carried out a survey of the records of British universities in 1997.⁵ The Historical Manuscripts Commission first carried out a pilot Archival Mapping Project in Wales in 1996-97. The results of this project were helpful at a number of levels, and the experience laid the foundations for future mapping initiatives. Ultimately the Archival Mapping Project for England, focusing on local authority record offices, set the pattern and methodology for future mapping of local and specialist repositories in England and Scotland between 1997 and the present.

The Archival Mapping methodology has been found to be a reliable and objective means of gathering and evaluating data on provisions and facilities in record offices. The methodology is equally applicable to record offices of all types and scale, and the inter-comparability of survey results has made Mapping data a vital assessment and measuring tool for funding bodies, government agencies, and record offices alike. The project to survey record offices in Wales rested on these twin qualities of reliability and value.

C. What was the focus of the project?

² "Survey of Local Archive Services in England and Wales", Society of Archivists, 1971

³ "Survey relating to Local Authority Archive Services (SOLAAS)", National Council on Archives and Historical Manuscripts Commission, 1992 and 1996

⁴ "Archive Services Statistics Estimates", CIPFA, annually since 1988

⁵ "Study of the Archival Records of British Universities", JISC, 1997

Like the English surveys, the Archival Mapping Project for Wales focused on record offices run by local authorities (of which there are 14 in Wales). Additionally, like the Scottish Mapping Project, the Welsh project focused on specialist record offices: those run by universities, museums, libraries, and national bodies (the survey covered 8 such record offices). This broader focus on all record offices, whatever their type or parent body, reflects the representation on the ACW Council. In a comparatively small branch of the UK archival sector, such as Wales is, fragmentation of the sector into its component local authority / specialist groupings for this Mapping exercise would not have been sensible or produce particularly meaningful results. Consequently a whole-sector approach was taken in Wales, as in Scotland.

In parallel with other Mapping Projects, the Welsh project used a 20-page questionnaire to assess facilities and services under seven headings or themes, which were:

- accommodation (building structure, records storage, staff areas)
- public access (reading rooms and associated services)
- conservation (preservation and conservation facilities and activities)
- finding aids (catalogues, guides, indexes, web sites)
- information technology (policy, infrastructure and use)
- electronic records (their use, storage, and archiving)
- staff training (for both professional and non-professional skills)

Assessing provisions in these seven areas provided data which could be compared with that from other mapping projects. The data could also be used to inform and support national archival initiatives such as the Archives Network Wales project, the LISC-Wales survey of conservation facilities, and the drafting of the *National Archives and Records Policy for Wales*. Individual participating record offices could also use their own results to indicate performance and need, either for internal planning or for bids for external funding. With the results and conclusions of this research targeted particularly at funding bodies such as the Heritage Lottery Fund it is hoped that the business of evaluating funding bids from record offices in Wales will be a simpler and fairer process. It is also hoped that this will in turn ensure that inadequacies in Welsh record offices are brought up to standard, and archival excellence developed further, in a structured and reasoned manner.

D. What was the project methodology?

The Project Board was appointed in July 1998, consisting of members of the Council of the Archives Council Wales (Project Board and Project Team members are listed in Appendix 1 of this report). The project methodology, having been developed by a representative board for the Archival Mapping Project for England, was considered by the Welsh board and found to be suitable for use in Wales. An additional question relating to Welsh language provision was added to the Welsh questionnaire.

All 22 record offices approached completed the 20-page questionnaire, giving us a complete picture of provision in Wales. Participating record offices are listed in appendix 2 of this report. Completed questionnaires were evaluated

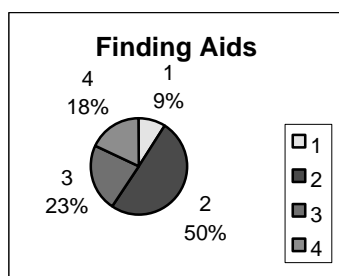
by professional archivists in the Public Record Office using an established scoring methodology. Participating archivists from the Welsh record offices then had the chance to comment on their scores and request slight revisions, before the final provisional scores were ratified by the Project Board.

Owing to the delay in writing the final project report⁶ there was a necessary exercise to update the questionnaires to ensure that scores were based on the very latest levels of provision in record offices. Scoring updates were carried out using a combination of knowledge held by the record office inspecting teams at the Public Record Office and Historical Manuscripts Commission and by input from participating archivists.

Scores resulting from the evaluation of the questionnaires are expressed in “priority bands” as follows:

SCORE	PRIORITY BAND	SIGNIFYING
1.00 – 1.99	1	Very poor provision
2.00 – 2.99	2	Poor provision
3.00 – 3.99	3	Fair provision
4.00 – 5.00	4	Good provision

These scores can also be represented in pie charts, as they are in this report:



The numbers in the key refer to the four priority bands above. The percentage figures refer to the number of record offices' scores falling into each priority band. Scores for each record office were sent individually to each record office in the form of a column graph. Aggregated scores from all 22 questionnaires, expressed in their priority bands, were also sent to all record offices in the form of pie charts. Additionally, aggregated scores expressed in their priority bands were compiled for the 14 local authority and 8 specialist record offices.

The project data and original questionnaires now reside with the Public Record Office.

⁶ The scores were ratified at an ACW meeting in late 1999 but the draft report text was not completed until 18 months later owing to staff changes at the Public Record Office

3. Summary of main findings

Accommodation

Nearly two thirds of all the archive repositories in Wales occupy accommodation that falls significantly short of today's best standards. Almost every repository surveyed was running out of storage space. In some cases improvements may be achievable at relatively little cost, by upgrading protection against fire and flood and by improving environmental control systems, and these will be investment priorities. But in other cases more radical solutions are going to be necessary, involving new buildings and new partnerships with other service providers.

Public Access

Public access provision and the quality and ability of staff are the main strengths of the record offices in Wales, but in places insufficient search room accommodation is provided to keep pace with reader demand, whilst restrictions on opening hours mitigate against policies of social inclusiveness. In many cases further investment is needed in microfilm readers and computers for public use, and in security equipment for search rooms. Resources are also required to promote the development of education and outreach programmes to bring awareness of archival resources to a wider audience.

Finding Aids

With very few exceptions archive services throughout Wales have serious and growing arrears of cataloguing. This restricts, and in many cases prevents, access to a large proportion of the learning resources held. Urgent investment is required to unlock the potential of these documents by ensuring that holdings are listed in at least summary form. Where this cannot be achieved by core staff, external grant aid might be sought for project staff to tackle specific collections of some national or local importance. The development of overall guides to the holdings of individual repositories is a key priority. Access will increasingly be enhanced by making archival finding aids available electronically. To this end, investment in retro-conversion of existing hard copy catalogues into machine-readable form is going to be the gateway to Wales' full participation in UK networking initiatives. This is another area where external grant aid could be of significant help.

Information and Communication Technology

Most Welsh record offices are poorly equipped to reap benefits from the growing use of computers and networking in public life. Significant investment is required, not least in basic hardware and software. Governing bodies of archive repositories need to ensure that their services are repositioned and empowered to meet growing and legitimate public demand in this area, and to play a wider part in the UK government's e-business agenda. A Wales-wide national strategy is required, to identify and build on existing best practice and to seek innovative and effective

applications of ICT in this area for the future. The proposed Archives Network Wales should have a major part to play in this. The production of electronic catalogues (mentioned above) and of digital images of original materials need to be promoted, with the aid of national funding schemes where appropriate.

Electronic Records

Wales is not alone in having so far failed to address the challenges posed by electronic records. The problem is widespread throughout the United Kingdom. This has serious implications for the future of archive services and the democratic rights of citizens to have access to information which was 'born digital' and of which no paper copy exists. As a priority, investment is required to support sustainable public access to electronic records, beginning with appropriate staff training and extending to the provision of suitable hardware and software solutions to the storage and retrieval of electronic information. This should not be done at the expense of caring for archives in the traditional media.

Conservation and Preservation

Provision in Wales is divided between well-equipped record offices with insufficient staff, and unequipped offices with limited resources to buy into services. A national preservation strategy for Wales is urgently required, but models already exist for preservation strategies at the level of the individual repository and these should be further encouraged. Priority attention is required for collection surveys to determine conservation needs. Creative partnerships between repositories and / or with other cultural services might go some way to meeting demand, whilst external grant aid could be sought for individual projects in this area.

Staff Training

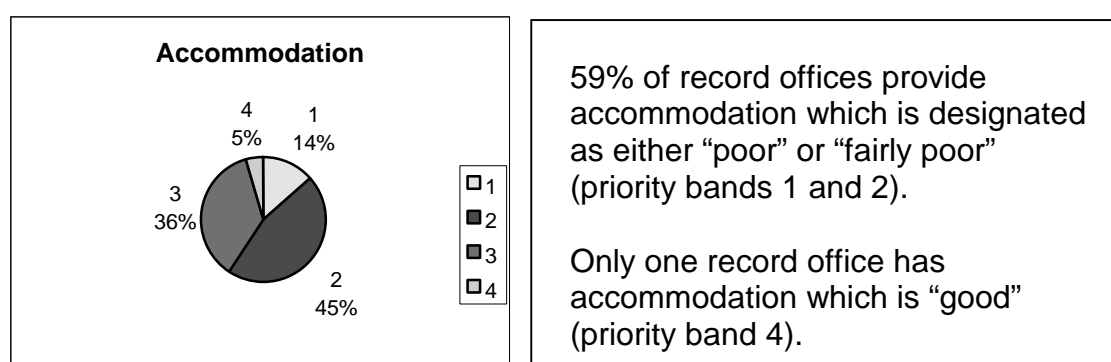
This is a strong area of provision in Welsh record offices, but staff need to be trained in 'new' as well as the more traditional archival skills, including many of the areas of strategy and priority set out in this report.

4. Archival Accommodation

Archives must be held in appropriate accommodation if they are to be preserved in perpetuity. Without adequate storage facilities, in which proper environmental conditions are maintained and the security and safety of collections ensured, archival materials can deteriorate, become damaged, or in extreme cases be destroyed by fires or flooding.

Any of these eventualities could restrict or even deny users' access to archives. If archives are to be enjoyed and exploited, their accommodation must be of a suitable nature, and in a suitable location, to permit their use.

The results of the Mapping Project survey almost speak for themselves:



Nearly two thirds of all record offices in Wales are inadequate in terms of their archival accommodation. This does not indicate universally poor provision across the board, but it is a clear illustration that archival buildings in Wales are significantly lacking in terms of their ability to provide safe, secure permanent homes for archives. Most record offices in Wales are full or very nearly so; most have difficulty in providing a controlled environment for archival storage; many are lacking in their defences against fire and flood; and many have insufficient space for staff to work with the records. It is impossible to generalise safely about record office buildings in Wales, but there is clearly a need for every office to move into a position of closer compliance with the recommendations of British Standard 5454.

Investment to tackle these deficiencies need not be large-scale, though a number of record office services do incontestably have greater difficulties in their current accommodation than could be resolved with issue-specific funding. For most offices, however, **the upgrading of specific building elements, whether air conditioning, fire defences, or some similar defined area of need, is worthy of HLF support** as this would provide a solid level of good archival preservation on which record offices could build sustainable services for the future.

Locations, sites and structures

Record offices in Wales tend to be located in close proximity to their parent authorities, in towns and cities which are easily accessible to users. The sites on which they stand tend to be low-risk: 59% of respondents identified no

significant risks associated with their office's location. Record office buildings in Wales range from converted accommodation to purpose-built structures. Offices may be housed within museums and libraries, university complexes, or local authority council headquarters. A good number are dedicated, stand-alone record offices. Generally, record offices surveyed tend to be structurally sound – these are not buildings in danger of imminent collapse or decay – but with one or two significant deficiencies affecting their performance as archival repositories. **Typical comments from respondents concerned with their building's structure included “in need of overhaul”, and “requires much maintenance”. Many offices would benefit from such investment.**

Fire, water and intruders

There is considerable scope for upgrading archival accommodation in Wales by focusing on precautions taken against fires, water ingress, and intruders. Many record offices, while essentially sound and broadly adequate for records storage, have fundamental shortcomings in one or more of these areas. These needs can frequently be addressed with small-scale investment, and the benefits of doing so can be significant.

Nearly all record offices take basic precautions against **fire**, but the risk of damage or destruction from this source remains high. 27% of respondents regarded their office's fire defences to be either poor or fairly poor. Worryingly, more than a quarter of all record offices surveyed do not have any system of fire detection and alarm. Almost two thirds of record offices (64%) have no system of automated fire extinction, and are reliant on rapid response times from local emergency services. Of those few which do have automated systems of fire detection and extinction, three are reliant on Halons, which are soon to be prohibited under European Union legislation. Efforts do seem to have been made to reduce the risk of fire in many record offices, but the inadequacies of outdated electrical wiring, power supplies which cannot be isolated, and ducting without appropriate dampers, are common nonetheless. **A programme of investment to provide these essential precautions against fire should be considered a priority.**

Archives in Wales are at considerable risk of being damaged by **water**. The problems range from leaking roofs and pipes, to damp or flood-prone basements. Poor drainage restricts many offices' ability to recover swiftly from high-volume water ingress such as might be incurred during flooding or fire extinction. 27% of record offices have basement storage areas which are liable to flood; an entirely different 27% are at risk from roof leaks; and over three quarters of all offices surveyed recorded water pipes of varying extent and condition running through or above records storage areas. A respondent admitted: “The presence of so many water pipes is a constant source of anxiety. There have been 3 occasions in the last 5yrs where water has entered the storage areas”. If the proportion of offices at risk from water is worrying, of even greater concern is the fact that 82% of record offices have no early warning mechanism for water detection, and that 77% have no means of draining water from their repositories once water has infiltrated. **Water risks are high on most record offices' lists of necessary improvement, and funding to address this needs to be identified.**

Most record office buildings in Wales have broadly adequate **security** provisions. Far fewer have exterior CCTV coverage – just 18% – but other conditions can contribute positively towards security provisions: “security officers patrol outside and check the building throughout the night” at more than one record office, while in another “the massive structure of the building renders security good”. Difficulties can arise in securing records storage areas against unauthorised staff where buildings are shared, but **on the whole security provisions were not identified as a key area of need for the country as a whole, though some offices do have considerable room for improvement.**

Storage environment

British Standard 5454 (2000) states that “unsuitable environments damage documents more extensively than any other single factor”. It stresses the need for environmental stability within certain ranges of temperature and relative humidity. Provision for adequate and controlled repository environments in Welsh record offices is markedly varied, though the general picture is that most offices (73%) provide conditions which comply with the principal recommendations of BS 5454.

One of the principal areas in which many offices need to invest is environmental control: only 45% of respondents recorded good or fairly good provision in this area, which strongly suggests that the majority of record offices are reliant on thermal dynamics and structural characteristics to provide and maintain a suitable storage environment. While this is to be encouraged in new archive buildings, in some older record offices this can be decidedly risky. One respondent commented on significant “fluctuations between summer and winter conditions” while another conceded that their “attempt to attain BS 5454 is only partially successful”. With 64% of record offices having good or fairly good environmental monitoring systems, awareness of conditions and deficiencies is quite high. Investment in systems to address these known deficiencies is, however, required.

Accrual space

The need for **additional space for the storage of new accruals of archival material is arguably the greatest area of need highlighted by the Accommodation section of the Mapping Project survey.** 36% of record offices were recorded as being full when the questionnaires were completed. Of those which do have some remaining storage space, 93% have sufficient for less than 5 years’ accrual (based on current estimates of known and anticipated accessions). Around a quarter of these have only a year’s space remaining. The position is as dire for storage of special format records (audio-visual magnetic tapes for example) as it is for traditional archival media. There is no simple solution to this issue: large-scale capital investment could only secure new buildings for a minority of record offices in Wales, and even then matching funding for grant applications would as ever be difficult to obtain. Intelligent conversions of other available accommodation may be the way forward instead, particularly in authorities where suitable existing properties may already exist.

The problem is not solely one of space: “remaining space at present awaits shelving”, one archivist reported. Another noted that “within [the] current store, replacement of current racking/shelving would increase space for boxed documents to 6-10yrs”. Clearly **the need can be as strong for new or improved shelving as it is for space itself. A case can be made for investment in the re-racking of repositories for offices in such circumstances.**

Staff areas

It is of course not sufficient that records are stored and preserved in a repository. Provision must be made for staff to work with the records, to receive, arrange, and catalogue them, and to undertake research and preservative care of them. Staff must have workrooms for these activities, as well as office space for general record office business, and rest areas for refreshment breaks.

Staff accommodation in record offices in Wales is generally insufficient for staff working needs. One respondent noted their position bluntly: “No common room for staff. No catalogue work area. No document reception area”, echoing comments made by others in the survey. Only 18% of respondents felt able to describe staff areas as good or fairly good. A typical view of the situation came from a different local authority respondent: “this is a particular area of weakness but the constraints of the building preclude an easy solution”. **For those record offices able to consider the creation or conversion of new premises, staff working areas should be given high priority. For those for whom the constraints of the building are too tight, refurbishment seems to be the only option for improvement.**

Out stores

By necessity some record offices must currently store a proportion of their archival holdings in storage units away from their main site. The transportation of records between out store and main building can be labour-intensive and time-consuming, and can cause extensive damage to documents. Public access is not provided at such sites, and storage conditions tend to fall below those in the main building. Only 5 record offices in Wales maintain out stores in addition to their main site: all of these tend to be inadequate. 71% of these out stores are assessed as being poor or fairly poor, with problems ranging from structural defects to inadequate storage environment. One respondent’s summary typified this area of provision: “records urgently need to be removed from this building”. Out store deficiencies are included along with comments on main sites under the headings above.

CONCLUSION

Record office buildings are the keystone of all archive services. No ‘digital revolution’ of the foreseeable future will lessen significantly the need for buildings which provide secure, safe, stable conditions for the permanent preservation of archival materials. Without such accommodation records will

deteriorate, accessibility decline as a consequence, and the whole *raison d'être* of record offices would be threatened. Investment priorities must therefore include support for building improvement programmes.

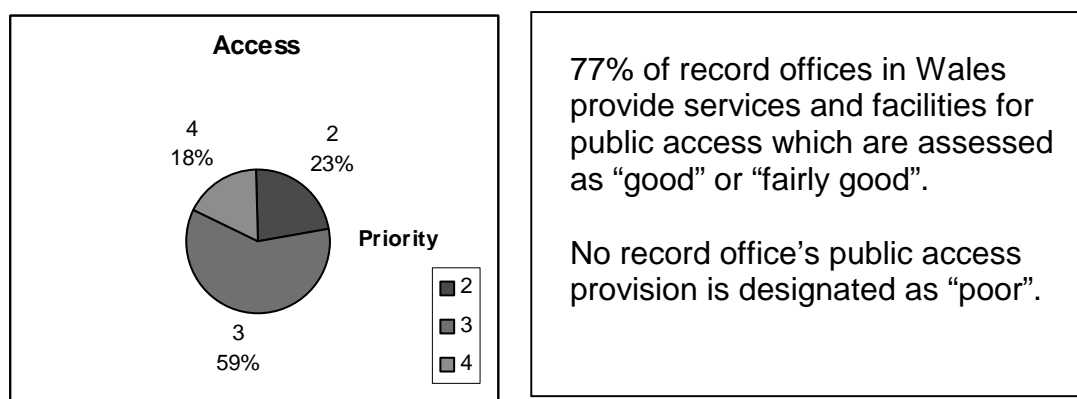
As noted above, however, few record offices will have the opportunity to create or convert new buildings. Those which do should of course be encouraged, both financially and intellectually, drawing on the experiences of other authorities which have constructed new repositories and record offices. For most, a smaller-scale approach to investment will be more realistic, and could, over an extended period of time, bring benefits similar to that which a new building can offer. **Issue-specific investment – into precautions against fire and flood, to help provide a safe and stable storage environment, or to facilitate access for those currently denied – is the most achievable and sustainable way forwards.**

5. Public Access

Throughout the archive sector great advances are being made in the promotion of access to the valuable materials held in our repositories. A recent boom in genealogical research, coupled with a rise in the general awareness of what archives are and what they have to offer, has seen many offices' reader numbers escalate to record levels. The principle of increasing access to archives – through provision of more open services, extensive cataloguing, and new on-line initiatives – reflects the Government agendas for increased openness and social inclusiveness. At a time when access to information is seen as essential to any community, the provision of good facilities and services for public access in our record offices is of paramount concern.

Record offices in Wales need to build on their strong traditions of public services. Efforts to draw non-users into record offices will also need to be made, as part of the drive to bring cultural and educational services to new or hitherto excluded audiences. Second only to preservation in archival priority, public access facilities and services are the key to the future success of record offices in Wales.

The results of a survey of visitors to record offices in the United Kingdom⁷ showed that readers are generally very happy with the service they receive in Welsh record offices. The Mapping Project adds professional credence to this popular perception. Public access services are one of the major strengths of record offices in Wales, and this is very clearly illustrated here:



Many archivists might reasonably claim, without any supporting evidence, that their record office provides a good level of service to readers. The results of this survey provide just that evidence. **Nearly three quarters of all record offices in Wales provide good services for public access. However, although the overall picture is positive, success is achieved despite, rather than because of, accommodation for search rooms and other**

⁷ “National Survey of Visitors to British Archives” (Public Services Quality Group, 1998 and 1999): see http://www.pro.gov.uk/archives/psqg/Survey_Summary_overall.htm

facilities. Investment must be made to ensure that further success is not restricted by the spaces in which public services are delivered.

Services

The recent National Survey of Visitors to British Archives showed that the majority of readers in Welsh record offices are satisfied with the services they receive. Questions in that survey, to which readers responded voluntarily, focused on opening hours, customer care, range of services, and quality of public spaces.

Opening times in record offices surveyed varied greatly, from limited hours on limited days to full 'office hours' five days every week, with Saturday and late evening openings included. In order to make archival information available to all, record offices must continue to strive to provide long opening hours, or adapt to other ways of delivering information, such as 24-hour access to high-quality record office web sites. The Government's social inclusion agenda advocates making such services available to all for the good of the community, and record offices must find ways of meeting this agenda. **Authorities responsible for record offices must support public access services, including preserving existing opening hours and providing sufficient staff to operate search rooms and public facilities.**

One area which may benefit from investment is outreach: regular newsletters, Friends groups, courses in such useful skills as palaeography or genealogy, and exhibitions relating to relevant historical topics. All these activities help to encourage readers to use record offices, and create a wider understanding of what a record office is and does. Outreach into schools is a particularly crucial area in this theme, as archives can be linked into pupils' studies within the National Curriculum. Very few record offices surveyed operate an education service or have access to a designated education officer. A typical comment from one respondent was that "we are unable to conduct as much outreach activity as we would like because of staff and financial constraints". **Support should be given to record offices' outreach activities, to ensure that the widest possible audience is able to reap the greatest benefit and enjoyment from the collections and services which record offices offer.** It must be borne in mind, however, that successful outreach activities will lead to increased reader numbers: record offices must be able to accommodate such increased demand, and therefore **funding for outreach and marketing activities must in many cases go hand in hand with investment in extended public access accommodation.**

Search rooms: space, security and equipment

An archive search room must provide an environment in which readers and staff can work comfortably and efficiently, while ensuring that the well-being of archival material in use is not threatened. Good provision for seating and access to records (whether original materials or surrogate copies) is therefore essential. Equally there must be adequate space and equipment to enable

the safe use of archival materials. Search room design should also address the requirements of document and staff security.

Over two-thirds of respondents assessed search room **layout, accessibility, and space** as being “fairly good”. Many offices, however, have to use an appointment booking system to manage attendance. While this is an acceptable and practical way of ensuring that the best use of space is made, it does mean that potential readers of original materials have to be turned away by some record offices at certain times: 41% of respondents admitted this to be the case at one time or another. This figure is slightly higher with regard to potential users of microfilm reading facilities. One respondent commented that “microform readers are almost always fully booked on a daily basis”.

The problem of overcrowding should not be stated out of proportion however. Demand is being managed with hard-won success through archivists’ common sense and the co-operation of readers. **Sufficient staff and opening hours must still be provided to ensure that readers’ demands for search room space can be accommodated.**

Search room **security** – for the protection of documents and staff against potential threat or damage – seems at first sight to be unsatisfactory. A common theme among responses was that “security in the search room is essentially dependent on staff vigilance and goodwill. It can be breached by anyone determined to do so”. Only a small percentage of record offices have invested in additional search room security devices such as CCTV or “panic buttons”. However, in many cases the same small search rooms which cause overcrowding benefit from the highest levels of security as a consequence: “the search room is so small that invigilation is relatively easy”, and “small room assists monitoring”. In many cases staff and readers share the same office accommodation, which is unsatisfactory for reasons such as privacy but does allow for a high degree of security monitoring and doubtless engenders an atmosphere of trust between staff and readers. Additionally, as noted earlier in this report, security provisions for record office buildings overall in Wales tend to be good. **Some record offices, particularly those with awkwardly shaped or multiple search rooms, would benefit from investment in improved security provision.**

Search room **equipment** such as furniture was not covered by this survey, but various comments from respondents make clear the need for search room refurbishment in many record offices. Equipment such as microfilm readers, preservation tools, photocopiers and computer terminals were all examined.

Most record offices surveyed do make surrogate copies of original records available on microfilm or microfiche. The use of microform copies of records is convenient and reduces wear and tear on original documents: their benefits are felt in access terms and preservation terms. As noted above, queues of readers waiting to use these machines are not uncommon, and often places are fully booked for days in advance. Less than half of the record offices

surveyed have equipment to print from microform to paper. 45% of Welsh record offices reported that they have microform reading machines which are unusable and in need of repair (indeed at the time of the survey 21% of all Wales' microform readers in record offices were out of action). Where microform machines are limited in number, losing one temporarily can be extremely restrictive to public access.

Increasing provision in this area was identified by many respondents as a priority, though in some cases spatial limitations restrict any expansion of provision. Similarly the majority of record offices identified a lack of provision for the consultation of records in more specialist media, such as electro-magnetic tape: only 18% of respondents felt their provision to be good or fairly good in this area. **Grant-awarding bodies have supported previous applications for the provision of new microform and special media access equipment, and the continuation of investment in this area is to be encouraged.**

Around half of the record offices surveyed indicated that they have insufficient preservation equipment in the search room: document weights and book rests enable readers to treat records with care, and help to ensure that records are not made inaccessible through damage. **Small-scale investment in this area should be encouraged, particularly as part of a wider preservation-conservation funding programme.**

Computer terminals are increasingly becoming essential research tools in record offices. Only 27% of record offices surveyed provide computer terminals in search rooms for the public to use for research. On-line resources such as catalogues, databases, and the Internet are being under-exploited as a result, and research opportunities are being missed. **General investment in computer equipment is likely to increase as authorities develop their IT strategies in line with the modernising government agenda. It is hoped that record offices will benefit from this trend.**

Other public facilities

While search rooms are correctly the priority area of concern in a record office's public service accommodation, reader expectation increasingly extends to other facilities: exhibition spaces, group visit rooms, and refreshment areas are high on the agenda for readers across the UK.

Generally, as can be imagined in record offices where search room space is at a premium, other public facilities tend to be limited or entirely lacking. A number of record offices benefit from being able to share facilities with other bodies, such as might be found in some County Hall or university accommodation. All offices provide refreshment areas for public use, though these facilities may be shared with staff in many cases. For group visit activities, such as lectures, school groups, study workshops and so on, between 30% and 40% of record offices have made provision.⁸ Most do have

⁸ The exact figure is uncertain as in many offices the lecture room, group visits room

an exhibition area (68%) though these range from extensive display cabinets to a small number of wall-mounted boards.

The absence of any or all of these public facilities can both lessen readers' enjoyment of their record office visit, and can be a restraint to proper understanding of collections or services. Outreach activities such as those advocated earlier in this report will undoubtedly be harder to deliver, and will be less effective, without the provision of space for complementary public access activities such as those described here. Many record offices will not be able to make such provision themselves. Clearly in such cases the opportunities for working with neighbouring partners such as libraries, universities, or museums, should be explored if such public access facilities are to be provided. **Financial support for the development of such cross-domain work is essential, and would have significant impact within and without the archival world.**

Finally, from comments made in responses by archivists, it is clear that **there is much work to be done in making record offices accessible to users with disabilities**. One archivist noted that "access for the disabled, though possible, is poor by modern standards". Others recorded that there are severe restrictions on their office's ability to offer access to disabled users: a first-floor search room with no lift, access through a trade delivery entrance only, or limited space for seating once inside the search room, were three situations reported. The will is evident, as several respondents noted that access for disabled users could be arranged "by prior notice"; the buildings themselves, however, often being old or converted properties, simply do not allow these good intentions to be fully realised.

CONCLUSION

As is evident from readers' feedback, public services in record offices in Wales are popular and broadly satisfactory. Staff who responded to the questionnaire were also keen to highlight the quality and popularity of their services, and justifiably so. The future of these good services will, however, be under threat as long as the current provision of public access accommodation continues. While some record office services have, or have access to, good search rooms and quality public spaces, others are struggling with cramped facilities and limited opportunities for change.

For some record offices, particularly where an acute need for increased public space is coupled with a shortage of records storage space, a move to new or expanded accommodation is undeniably the only way forward. For others, however, it may be possible to identify additional or new space within existing record office buildings which can be adapted for public access use. Others still may, through refurbishment programmes or room layout reorganisation, be able to make better use of existing search room space. **It will be for archivists to determine where such opportunities lie, but in many cases**

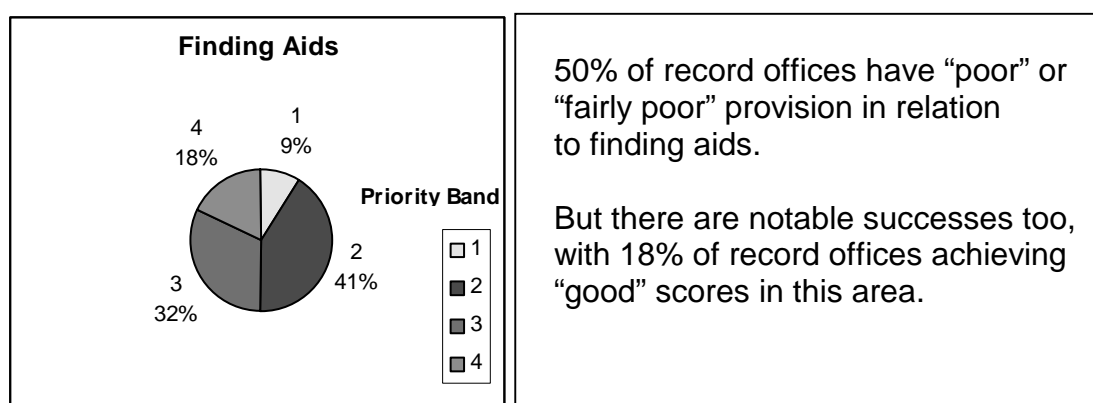
and exhibition space are one and the same.

support from grant-awarding bodies will be crucial in turning good intentions into the practical development of public access facilities.

6. Finding Aids

Finding aids – catalogues, indexes, general guides, databases and so on – are crucial to the success of any record office’s public services. Finding aids are, simply, the way in to archival collections. As has been stated in the previous chapter of this report, Welsh record offices can feel proud of their success in public services – but without real investment to tackle the backlogs of material waiting to be catalogued, many potential resources will remain inaccessible and offices will always fall short of their full potential for reader satisfaction. For some this shortfall will be considerable.

Great advances have been made in this area during the past few years, with individual projects being taken forwards to open up previously inaccessible collections through cataloguing. There is scope for creating retrospectively converted catalogues through the Access to Archives initiative and other similar funding strands. Interpretative web sites are increasingly being developed in record offices across the UK. It is the core finding aids which must be addressed, however, if we are to see real success. The Archives Network Wales should be an important vehicle for this success, and individual record offices must ensure that they are prepared to take full advantage of the opportunities this project will bring.



It is impossible to generalise about the situation as regards finding aids in Welsh record offices. Cataloguing backlogs range from 80% of material unlisted at one office to almost nothing unlisted at another. The provision of indexes to place names, personal names, and subjects, is even more varied, ranging from 100% indexed to no indexing at all. **What is clear is that half of Welsh record offices are in dire need of finding aids to open up their core collections. Equally, however, there are offices, less than one fifth of those surveyed, which can look forward to creating new and enhanced finding aids to supplement and build upon their existing catalogues and guides. Investment programmes must seek to raise the lower standards while simultaneously ensuring that those leading the field are not penalised for their success by being held back.**

Catalogues and indexes

There are two main areas of finding aids which require investment to make progress. The first is the preparation of **catalogues** for material which is currently unlisted. In general, record offices surveyed have managed to catalogue only 60-70% of their collections, leaving 30-40% of their collections entirely without catalogues. Given that, on average, less than 50% of all this un-catalogued material has even the simplest summary box list, it is not difficult to see that there are large quantities of material held in record offices which are not accessible for study.

The second priority is the preparation of **indexes** to complement other existing finding aids and provide greater ease of access to catalogued material. Both areas of work have, in many record offices, stagnated as the demands of front-line public service duty and low staff levels combine to draw resources to the search room. As one respondent put it, “a long term backlog exists, progress on which has not been possible for a very long time”, while another commented that “some unlisted collections have been here 20 years”.

Priorities are known (nearly half of offices have carried out a cataloguing survey already) but as one respondent said “. . . [there is] no prospect of them being acted upon.” Another common observation was “we hold some large accessions which would be impossible for us to catalogue without external funding” or more specifically “impossible to catalogue without extra staff”. Clearly **current staffing levels are inadequate in many offices, and only by the appointment of grant-aided project staff will it be possible for specific areas of cataloguing and indexing to be tackled.** This work cannot easily be carried out by volunteers, as there are archival standards for cataloguing and indexing which must be adhered to by suitably experienced and / or qualified individuals. Equally if computerised cataloguing is to be undertaken, staff must be adequately trained.

Even where record offices have managed to provide catalogues and indexes for large quantities of their collections – three offices have done so for over 95% of their material – these may be in ‘traditional’ paper-based formats which can only be used on site at the record office. Record offices with such lists will want to work on the **retrospective conversion** of these finding aids into more manageable and flexible automated media. Given the increasing trend towards providing remote access to services via the Internet, and particularly given the geographically isolated position of several record offices in Wales, **funding for the retrospective conversion of existing catalogues and indexes must be seen as a further investment priority for finding aids.**

Other finding aids

A general guide to collections can be as essential a finding aid as any detailed catalogue. Indeed in many ways the guide is the fundamental finding aid, as it summarises the holdings of a record office and can serve as both an access tool and an aid to marketing or outreach. Consequently it is of some

concern that only 54% of record offices in Wales have prepared such a guide to their collections. It is not only record offices without good cataloguing provision which require summary guides to be created. One respondent (at whose office over 90% of the archival collections have been catalogued and indexed) stated that the “need for an up to date guide is an identified priority task”. **The creation of ‘comprehensive works of reference’ such as a record office guide is one of the areas which HLF has stated would be eligible for support.**

Mention must be made of the extent to which record offices in Wales have made provision for the country’s bilingual (English and Welsh) population. No specific figures were requested in this Mapping survey, but it is clear that where record offices are situated in a community with a high preponderance of Welsh speakers those offices have made efforts to ensure that both languages are treated equally. Most commonly provision consists of bilingual (or parallel) information leaflets, describing record office services, regulations and so on. For catalogues and other finding aids, considerable progress seems to have been made, particularly where Welsh language archival material is concerned. Comments on provision ranged from “Welsh language material is catalogued satisfactorily as Welsh is the first language of this department” to “we have very little Welsh language material . . . but if necessary we can look outside the office for linguistic support [for its cataloguing]”. The common consensus seems to be that where the cataloguing of Welsh language material is an issue, resources have been found from within the staff or from one-off sources such as Follett funding, and catalogues have been satisfactorily prepared.

CONCLUSION

The greatest area of need for finding aids is undoubtedly the allocation of resources to tackle the large or complex collections which remain entirely un-catalogued. The elimination of cataloguing backlogs was one of the national priorities identified by the Historical Manuscripts Commission’s “Archives At The Millennium” report. There are no other effective ways to provide access to these elements of a record office’s holdings. **Support for a programme of special funding for cataloguing, perhaps in grant aid support from the HLF, should be seen as a priority.** This programme must be ambitious but realistic: targets for the reduction of cataloguing and indexing backlogs must be measured in years, so that the work can proceed sensibly and with due consideration for other areas of funding need. The establishment of the Archives Network Wales will help to drive cataloguing efforts, and record offices must be in a position to take advantage of the opportunities that are offered by such vehicles.

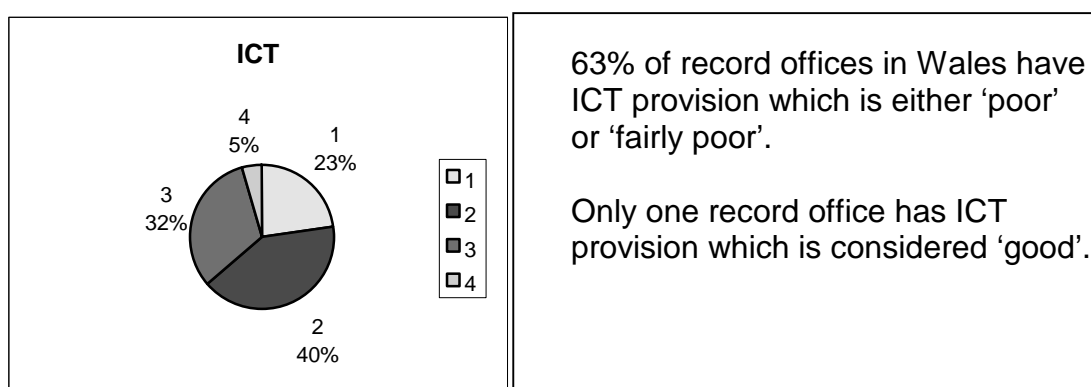
7. Information & Communication Technology

All archivists recognise the importance of information and communications technology (IT, or more correctly ICT) in the archives domain. Through ICT we can make information about record offices more widely available, and more excitingly we can make archives themselves available to anyone at any point around the world. ICT skills and provision will sit alongside traditional archival skills to create new forms of services, products and staff, and will revolutionise the ways in which readers learn about record offices and use the materials which they hold.

Before any real benefits can be seen on a national scale in record offices within Wales, a number of elements must be in place.

- A national strategy for ICT development is needed, to provide a framework which will help to guide all local ICT efforts.
- A base level of ICT provision must be achieved by all record offices, so that common standards of service provision can be adhered to.
- An ICT infrastructure must be developed, so that archivists are connected to a Wales-wide network of information sharing.
- ICT must be exploited to transform the ways in which archival information is accessible: on-line catalogues and other interpretative finding aids will be a starting point, but digitisation technology will take matters several steps further.
- Finally, archivists themselves need to be able to understand, develop, implement, and maintain this new ICT environment. Training resources and support are therefore essential in all these areas.

The Archives Network Wales project should address many if not all of the above areas of need. There is much work to be done by individual record offices in the meantime however, as this Mapping Project result shows:



There can be little doubt that significant investment in ICT for record offices will be required before any of the more ambitious areas of archival work described above can be advanced. **While the Archives Network Wales bid may address and resolve certain areas of ICT need, record offices**

require small-scale and localised funding to develop infrastructure and content and to provide a foundation on which the benefits of the Archives Network Wales can be built.

Strategy and infrastructure

ICT strategy in many individual record offices is lacking, but this is not always seen as being poor provision, due to other beneficial ICT strategies being in place. In total, 77% of record offices in Wales are covered to a greater or lesser extent either by their own ICT strategy or by that of their parent authority. It seems, however, that these strategies do not fulfil the function which archivists would hope. Around half of the respondents rated their ICT strategies as being 'poor' or 'fairly poor'. The benefits of a dynamic and inclusive ICT strategy are clear. Simply having an ICT strategy is not adequate: it must be effective, and designed with the future development of the record office in mind. **Authorities responsible for ICT in record offices must make appropriate investments of resources to ensure that good progress in the key areas of need is made. The aims and intentions of the Archives Network Wales must be borne in mind when developing such strategies.**

Use of ICT in record offices

In a strong ICT environment, archivists can make great use of technology to enhance existing services and create opportunities for new services. The Mapping survey looked at areas in which archivists are already using ICT to make progress in these areas. 27% of those surveyed use ICT to manage document production systems; the same offices also manage conservation databases to record their areas of collection need and past treatment. Just 36% use automated software packages to create archival catalogues, and none of these offices have yet produced more than 40% of their catalogues by this means. As noted elsewhere in this report **the funding of projects for the conversion of manually-produced catalogues to automated formats should be supported. Appropriate support for cataloguing of existing backlogs using ICT packages must also be identified.**

32% of record offices surveyed are using, or beginning to use, document imaging technology to create copies of records which can be made available on-site as preservation surrogates, or on-line as a means of making records globally accessible. **Digital imaging of archival material brings considerable advantages of access and preservation to users and collections, and projects focusing on such work deserve investment and support from grant-awarding bodies.**

According to these figures, ICT use for archival management is quite low in Welsh record offices. One respondent noted (with evident relief) "we have finally taken a step on the IT highway". Another suggested a possible reason for low IT use: "I am reluctant to go any further e.g. with digitisation when it is difficult to maintain core functions." The core of the problem seems to be a lack of resources to make a start on projects which would help develop ICT

provision. Without computers in sufficient number and of sufficient power, and without staff time and expertise to work with these, progress will inevitably be difficult. There is clearly an intent to make greater use of ICT, but it seems that the opportunities are limited because so many offices and their authorities are still at an early stage of development in this field: “improving from a low base” was how one respondent put this, while another saw that “the potential is there” but had no means of realising this potential. **Investment is clearly needed in the basics of ICT provision: computers, associated hardware such as image scanners and laser printers, archival software packages, and infrastructure technology to enable wider exploitation of archival resources must all be supported if progress is to be made.**

Web sites and other on-line resources

Record offices in Wales fare better in their contribution to web sites about their services and collections than they do in other areas of ICT provision. Over two thirds of those surveyed do have a web site (not necessarily exclusive to the record office); of those 100% provide basic information about the record office and its services, and over a third provide up to date collection level data or catalogues of holdings. 100% of those with web sites can also receive e-mail enquiries from this source (in addition to other record offices which can receive and send e-mails more generally).

As for so many other organisations and businesses, the Internet is an area of potential growth and excellence for Welsh record offices. Some good beginnings have been made, and examples set for others to follow and develop. The potential for on-line services delivered via web sites must be fully exploited by record offices in Wales, particularly given that developments in physical communications and transport are likely to move at a slower pace for the foreseeable future. If it is difficult to bring people to record offices due to the geography and physical infrastructure of Wales then services must be taken to people: the Internet offers just such an opportunity. **Investment in innovative and effective applications of on-line technology and resources is to be encouraged, particularly where added interpretative value can be created through web sites and CD-ROM projects.**

CONCLUSION

Record offices in Wales are “improving from a low base”. This may in fact be to their advantage, as the ability to start almost ‘from scratch’ enables a fresh approach to be taken as regards the establishment of ICT environments and networking structures. The Archives Network Wales is likely to play a crucial part in the future development of archive services in Wales, as well as making a significant contribution to the wider information society: all record offices should be aware of the potential benefits this project aims to deliver, and should focus thought on ways to benefit from the opportunities it will offer.

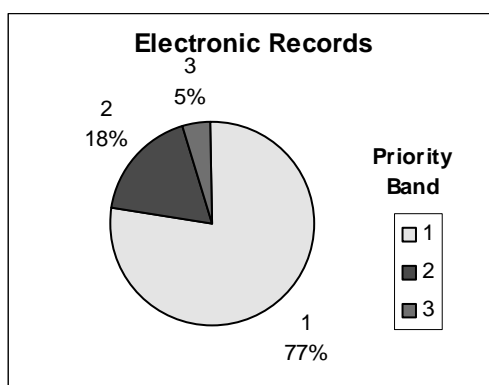
Building from a low base means, unfortunately, that the establishment of basic levels of provision may take time and eat into limited resources. It is to

be hoped, for those offices in this position, that local authorities, and the hosts of the various specialist repositories, will bear these costs as part of a fundamental move towards modernised working, rather than viewing this investment as a one-off need to support specific archival initiatives. **In the field of ICT, grant-awarding bodies should focus their resources on the projects which address the retrospective conversion of catalogues, the creation of new automated catalogues, digital imaging work, and the innovative development of web sites and other on-line resources.**

8. Electronic Records

The nature and functions of electronic records, at the simplest level of thinking, are exactly the same as records in more traditional media. They record transactions of individuals or bodies, they are required to be retained for their evidential and cultural value, and they must be properly managed by appropriately knowledgeable staff in conditions conducive to their long-term preservation and accessibility. Many archivists are now well aware that electronic records have ceased to be a challenge which can be left for records managers or ICT specialists to address, and many are now actively involved in addressing the long-term needs of these records. The proper care of electronic records is as important to the future of record offices and archival services as any other aspect of provision surveyed in this Mapping Project.

Since this survey was begun, issues surrounding electronic records have become the subject of wider and higher-level concern than previously. New legislation for Data Protection and Freedom of Information will place a greater responsibility on archivists to be able to provide information on request quickly and accurately, increasingly from records which have been created electronically. The European Commission has long been aware of the potential damage to the integrity of information which poorly-managed electronic records systems can bring. The UK government, too, has set out strategies for e-business which include the necessity of managing and preserving electronic records through their various lifecycle stages. Archivists and users will be required to change the ways in which they think about records, and services and facilities will also need to change accordingly. As yet, however, archivists and record offices in Wales (as elsewhere) are clearly not fully prepared for the increasing responsibility and opportunity which electronic records could bring:



Provision for electronic records in 95% of record offices in Wales is 'poor' or 'fairly poor'.

There are limitations on the extent to which grant-awarding bodies such as the HLF can make funding available for projects which focus on electronic or modern records. Investment can be made into projects more which seek to make electronic records more accessible to the public, however, and **public access projects for electronic records could be worthy of funding**

support as more archivists develop their understanding of this area of work. The short-term aim should be to move all record offices in Wales towards the position in which one respondent stands: “[this office] is aware of potential problem and is actively investigating the best approach . . . [we are] currently developing staff expertise and skills on appraisal and preservation of electronic records.” Certainly success in this area will not be immediate, but a progressive corporate attitude such as this will go a long way to ensuring that the electronic challenge is met sooner rather than later.

Undoubtedly one of the key areas of need as regards electronic records is **staff training**. Just 9% of respondents had been trained in electronic records issues by their office or parent authority. Many archivists across the UK may still be all but unaware of the skills which they will need in order to address electronic records issues. This is hardly surprising given the focus of archival training and education over the years. A fundamental shift in thinking is required, and this must begin with the postgraduate courses for archivists. **Any investment into electronic records must of course include elements of education and training for both new and experienced archivists.**

Record offices, almost without exception, are at present unable to provide the specific **storage conditions** which electronic records require. Although e-preservation is in its infancy as yet, it is evident that distinct strong rooms able to provide the exacting environment required for long-term electronic storage will be a necessity. **Management programmes** will also be required to ensure that electronic records can be read even as hardware and software adapts, and to ensure that data refreshment and security back-up copies are strictly maintained. The Mapping Project results in these areas are bleak: one respondent alone stated that their record office provided a suitable environment for electronic records storage. No respondents at all could say the same for their office’s provision for data migration, maintenance, checking, or appraisal. **Investment in appropriate storage facilities for electronic records is essential, whether for individual offices or for a joined-up approach between groups of record offices in partnership.**

The final issue relating to electronic records which archivists will need to address is **public access**. Just as readers now demand access to the papers and parchments of yesterday, so they will expect to have the same levels of access to the electronic records of today and tomorrow. Arguably, demand could be even higher for these types of records, as public expectation for easy access to readily communicable electronic information is now high. 14% of those surveyed already have provision for public access to electronic records, while 32% foresee a time in the near future when they will have such provision. Of those which have no such provision or immediate plans, 18% make paper copies of electronically-created records available to researchers on demand. Finally, 23% of all respondents are at least at the planning and discussion stage with their parent authorities about the need for electronic access provision. **Investment is needed to ensure that public access to electronic records can be provided as universally as access to records in traditional archival media. All elements of access need to be**

addressed, from the provision of suitable computers to the creation of finding aids and to the establishment of information security policies.

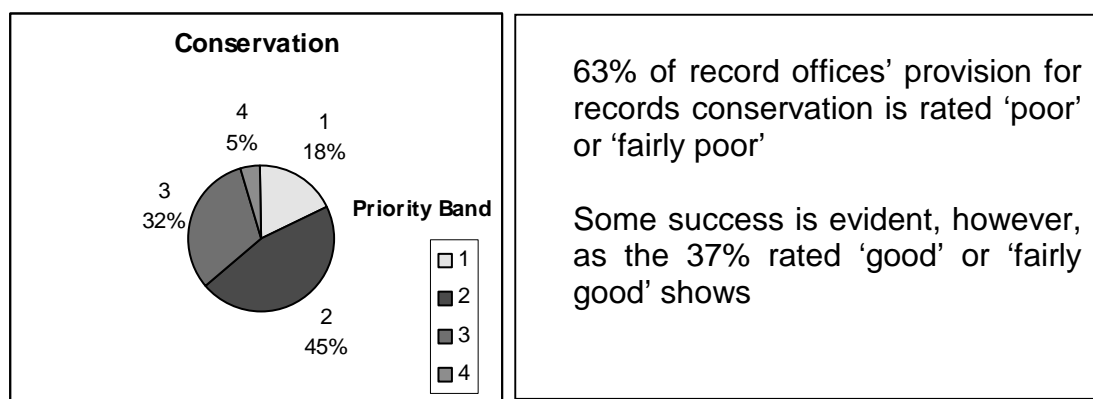
CONCLUSION

Electronic records are already becoming electronic archives, selected for permanent preservation and in demand by readers and business users alike. This situation will rapidly become normal rather than exceptional, and although records in traditional archival media will always need to be preserved and made accessible, a balance of provision must be struck which ensures that all types of records are equally available regardless of form or media. **Investment programmes will need to address the specialised needs of this area – but not at the expense of caring for traditional archival materials – if we are to avoid endangering the future delivery of archival services in Wales.**

9. Conservation and Preservation

Conservation of archival material can be defined as hands-on intervention techniques applied to records to achieve chemical and physical stabilisation and thereby extend their useful life and accessibility. Activities such as records cleaning, repair, packaging, and protection can be included in this definition, as well as a range of other physical activities. In most offices specialised conservation materials, equipment and rooms are used by trained and qualified conservators in order to provide conservation care for records.

Conservation and preservation go hand in hand: some definitions of preservation are very broad, taking in everything from conservation care to cataloguing and from training to finance provision. While this is quite correct, the preservation section of the Mapping Project survey focused largely on preservation policy, conservation facilities, and conservation work backlogs. As this chart shows, conservation provision in Welsh record offices is varied:



There is undoubtedly a need for more work to be carried out to develop office- and national-level strategies for the co-ordination of preservation efforts in Wales.⁹ As with certain other areas of provision surveyed in this project, for some offices there is also a need for the refurbishment or expansion of conservation facilities. Greater collaboration between record offices may be a more achievable aim in cases where insufficient resources exist for such expansion. There is also an evident need for funds to support conservation programmes for specific collections or items, in order to increase their stability and therefore their accessibility. In many cases record office staff will first need to undertake a full survey of the conditions of their collections before a full understanding of the collections' preservation needs and priorities can be established. **Investment programmes should seek to support the aims of a new national preservation strategy for Wales. Programmes should address collections condition surveys, subsequent repair and associated treatments, and should help to prop up falling staff numbers.**

⁹ This conclusion was also emphasised in the report "Survey of Library and Archive Materials in Welsh Repositories" (LISC(Wales), 2000)

Backlogs of conservation work

A simple performance indicator for a record office's preservation and conservation work might be the percentage of its collections identified as being in need of conservation treatment, or is known to be unfit for use by researchers. Data such as this can be gathered by collection surveys, in which material is examined to build up a picture of the collections' overall physical condition. Only 23% of record offices had carried out such surveys: clearly, for those offices which have not, it will be very difficult to accurately identify and prioritise the preservation needs of their collections. All offices, whether they had completed a collections survey or not, were asked to identify or estimate the percentages of their collections which are in need of repair or are otherwise unfit for use. 23% of record offices reported more than a third of their collections as being in need of significant repair, while 41% reported that 5% or more of their collections were entirely unfit for use due to their fragile physical condition. Over half reported that these figures were increasing despite their efforts to address the work.

Such backlogs have a direct and negative impact on public access to collections, as damaged documents must be withdrawn from production pending their repair. Yet there are few internal resources available to undertake repair and bring records back into public use: as one archivist put it "there is no provision for funding long term projects on specific collections."

Investment should be encouraged on two fronts: carrying out collection condition surveys to establish the extent of preservation needs, and subsequently supporting work to help tackle the growing backlogs of conservation work in record offices and thus make unfit records accessible.

Policies and management

Without adequate planning and management, conservation and preservation activities can be limited, ad hoc, or non-existent. Preservation policies can include resource allocation, facilities management and development, condition surveys, staff training, work to address backlogs of treatment, preservation microfilming and surrogacy programmes, and planning for preparedness against potential disaster. Only a handful of record offices had prepared such a preservation and conservation policy at the time of the survey. More positively, 64% of offices surveyed do have a disaster preparedness plan. 73% reported that their staff have been adequately trained in conservation and preservation practices, and almost two-thirds make use of microfilm or other surrogates to reduce wear and tear on original materials. This is all encouraging, as it shows that record offices are engaged in activities which help to provide good levels of collection care. What is needed, however, seems to be a more considered approach to conservation work in Welsh record offices: preservation policies can incorporate all these activities in a co-ordinated fashion, ensuring that scarce resources are being directed to the areas of highest priority or maximum benefit. **Support for preservation policies and planning, at all levels, could bring great benefits of organisation to this essential field of archival work.**

Facilities and resources

Of course, preservation awareness and planning are likely to be ineffective unless record offices have access to conservation facilities and resources in which remedial care for records can be carried out. In an ideal world each record office would have its own dedicated conservation studio, with sufficient staff, space and equipment to address the conservation needs of its collections. No record office in Wales would claim to be in this position. 64% of record offices surveyed have in-house conservation facilities in the form of a studio or similar, with most reporting that their provision of equipment is adequate for the office's needs. There is a clear deficiency in staffing levels, however, as just 14% felt able to say that they had sufficient staff to address their collections' preservation needs. **Investment to support project-based staff would go some way towards ensuring that collection needs are addressed, and would bring expertise into record offices for the general good of collections care.**

Record offices which do not enjoy the benefit of their own in-house facilities might be encouraged to share other offices' resources, though clearly those with inadequate budgets to buy such services would still not find this arrangement satisfactory. A more radical solution might see offices which currently lack facilities joining forces to establish shared conservation facilities. This would serve both the needs of the record office and its partner(s) and would ensure that vital resources are not disaggregated by supporting multiple small and inadequate conservation studios. **Funding to support such collaborative ventures would build partnerships between record offices and other bodies, and would help to ensure that conservation and preservation care can be provided even to collections in smaller or less well-resourced offices.**

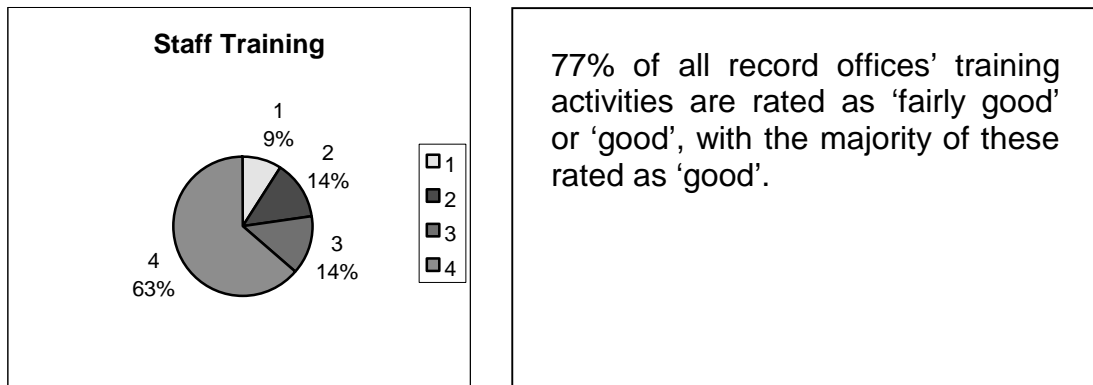
CONCLUSION

It is important to recognise that almost no amount of money and resources could address all the conservation and preservation needs of archives in Wales. This fact is reflected across the UK and elsewhere. It is vital, however, that provision is made to ensure that inroads are made into the conservation backlogs which exist. **Investment in the form of support for collection condition surveys would be a fundamental step forwards.** In order to take benefit from the findings of such conditions surveys **subsequent investment must support project-based staff to tackle identified conservation priorities.** Finally, it is essential that such work does not take place in an ad hoc fashion. Rather **support should be given to record offices for the development of preservation policies and action plans.**

This investment would have the greatest positive impact if it were part of a nationally co-ordinated plan for the preservation and care of archives in Wales. A national strategy is therefore an essential development to which immediate consideration should be given.

10. Staff Training

The issue of staff training has been touched upon in previous chapters of this report. It has been shown that there is a need to have suitably skilled staff to carry out conservation work, and that increased use of electronic records will demand a new level and focus of staff training in the immediate future. Alongside these training needs must be seen the need for the continuing professional development of archivists and record office staff in all areas of archive work. Practical skills such as customer care, ICT use, records administration and cataloguing are qualities which many archivists have already, but which many more have only to a limited degree, or even not at all. Equally there are wider training issues such as education about new information policies, including legislation for freedom of information and for data protection. In Welsh record offices, staff training is an area of success:



This gives a clear picture of a professional, capable, and committed workforce in record offices in Wales, and indeed this is a picture which other sections of this report would support. Some respondents acknowledged difficulties in maintaining high levels of skills among their staff: "difficult to find appropriate courses and also to release staff from work", or equally "distance from specialist training provision" might be an issue for some offices. Geographic isolation can be overcome, however: all record offices in Wales are within relatively easy reach of an institute of higher education where management and ICT training can be had, often in addition to archival training. Co-operation between record offices on a regional level can also attract training providers to otherwise isolated regions. The overall picture, then, is that record office staff in Wales are equipped for their work, which bodes well for all the other development priorities identified in this report.

CONCLUSION

Complacency or inactivity are not acceptable, particularly as so many new issues and challenges are making increasing demands on archivists' professional abilities. **Investment in archival training programmes, particularly those focusing on 'new' skills relating to automation and electronic records, is to be encouraged.**

11. Local authority archive services

The Archival Mapping Project surveyed the archival provision of 14 local authorities (see appendix 2 for details). Although it is difficult to make general conclusions about such small survey populations, there are variations in the levels of provisions between the local authority and non-local authority elements of the archives sector in Wales. Equally there are variations in levels of provision within both the local and non-local elements. There are still valuable observations to be made, however, through closer examination of the distinct survey results for the local and non-local authority elements of the project.

Analysis of the levels of provision of the fourteen local authority repositories has proved to be problematic in some respects. Two of the participating repositories (Conwy, Wrexham) had not established full archive services. Several offices have off-site records outstores, Gwynedd operates two formerly distinct offices, and others such as West Glamorgan operate access service points. These differences make generalised analysis of local authority sector results difficult. What is clear, however, is that there are several areas of need which are common to most local authority record offices in Wales:

- improvements to archival storage accommodation
- enhancement of public access through cataloguing
- enhancement of public access through the development of online services
- development of greater provision for archival conservation

Local authority archive services in Wales are faced with a multiplicity of opportunities to address these areas of need. As the conclusion to this report sets out, one of the main ways forward for all archive services in Wales is through collaboration, whether with other like bodies or between, for example, university and local authority archive services. Much depends, however, on the availability of resources to take advantage of these opportunities. Having emerged in many cases from the local government reorganisations of the mid-1990s with (by and large) stable agreements for the management of record offices, the Best Value review process now gives local authorities the chance to examine their archive services in great detail. Local authorities may be able to use this chance to draw up strategies for the improvement of their archives services, by stages if necessary, with a view to reaching national standards over a reasonable length of time.

The current emphasis on electronic local government is also likely to provide opportunities for the development of local authority archive services, whether through the development of web sites for on-line service delivery or in addressing some of the areas of need for electronic records and ICT identified in this report.

Locally held archives can be seen as raw materials to be exploited in projects and other work as partnership opportunities arise. Local record offices can

take advantage of the potential partners within their own authorities: local libraries and museums are faced with many challenges and opportunities common to those of their neighbouring record offices. Their close relationship as part of the same local authority, and often in the same directorate within an authority, can form a strong foundation for collaboration and co-operation. There are also unquestionably benefits of record offices working with their local education departments to address the learning and education agendas being advanced by government and professional bodies.

Partnerships outside the local authority also offer great potential for progress. Resources and facilities for conservation, education, and other areas of work might conceivably be pooled by neighbouring authorities where one office working alone could not support such activities. Other local authority record offices, national bodies with archive collections, and university archives – with their ready audience of students – can all contribute skills, materials, and resources to projects which might be unachievable by an office working alone. The Archives Network Wales – a project to create a major new source of information on archive collections held in Wales - should offer great possibilities in this respect. Partnerships with offices and bodies outside Wales might also be attractive, such as where neighbouring English and Welsh local authorities share common or overlapping histories.¹⁰

The picture is therefore far from bleak as regards the opportunities for the development of local authority record offices in Wales. It must be borne in mind however that, without adequate support and investment, few projects and partnerships such as those outlined here stand any chance of realisation. There is clearly a need to examine and prioritise the opportunities which local record offices now face, both individually, in partnership with other offices, and at a national level.

¹⁰ It is perhaps worth noting as an aside that Welsh local authority archive services scored on average lower than their English counterparts in almost every category of the Mapping Project questionnaire. Summary details of the English Mapping Project scores are in the report "Our Shared Past" (PRO / English Mapping Project Board, 1998) on the Public Record Office web site at <http://www.pro.gov.uk/archives/> Welsh local authority record offices returned slightly higher average scores for the Finding Aids and Public Access sections than their English counterparts. Direct comparison between English and Welsh Mapping Project scores has been avoided in this report due to the disparity of survey populations (130 offices in England as opposed to 14 in Wales).

12. Other archive services

The Archival Mapping Project surveyed eight archive services operated by non-local authorities (see appendix 2 for details). Universities, libraries and museums running archive services were included in the survey alongside local authority record offices. Although only five non-local *authorities* participated in this survey, the total number of non-local *repositories* for which scores were awarded is eight due to some authorities running multiple offices.

The difficulties of making generalisations about such a small survey population are arguably greater even than for the local authority sector. The National Library of Wales, Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales and the National Museums and Galleries of Wales have broad nationwide remits, while the university repositories at Swansea and Bangor have more specialised interests. Archival provision is physically more fragmented than in the local authority sector: three sites of the National Museum of Wales hold archival material, while the University of Swansea stores archival material and makes it available at both the Singleton Park campus and the South Wales Miners Library. Clearly, there are also enormous differences between the very considerable holdings of the National Library of Wales and the nine linear metres of audio and visual tapes held by the South Wales Miners Library. The high scores achieved by NLW also significantly increase the averages for the non-local sector. These factors mean that any generalisations about archive provision outside the local authority sector and the NLW must be made with extreme care.

Some important points can, however, be drawn from the results for these eight archive services. The main areas of need for non-local authority record offices mirror those made for local authority archives:

- improvements to archival storage accommodation
- enhancement of public access through cataloguing
- enhancement of public access through the development of online services

The Mapping Project results for the non-local authority element also show evidence of good practice which should be built upon to ensure that opportunities for excellence are not lost:

- continuing development of ICT infrastructure
- continuing development of the role of archives in learning and education
- continuing use of the archives alongside museum and library collections

None of these final three bullet points are by any means exclusive to non-local authority archive services, but analysis of the results of the Mapping Project show that there has been a great deal of work in these areas by the universities, museums and library already.

Perhaps the main route forward is again through collaboration with other archive services. Non-local repositories seem quite well prepared for this, with

existing ICT infrastructures rated in this survey project as “fairly good”, and strong traditions of providing access to information through shared networks. The South Wales Coalfield collaborative cataloguing project,¹¹ led by the University of Wales Swansea and involving partners from Welsh and English local and non-local authorities, is a good example of the way in which such collaboration might evolve. University to university links doubtless offer opportunities for information sharing and joined-up learning, and there may be great benefit in partnerships between, for example, university archives and their local record offices, where concerns for learning, openness and social inclusion are high on the agenda.

Archive services run by non-local authorities may have the opportunity to focus on specific audiences in ways which local authority archives, with their often wider remit, cannot always do. The particular academic strengths of a university may be supported by collaboration between the archives and faculty staff, for example, while the Museums’ or Library’s exhibitions and initiatives can be tailored to their own audiences’ needs and enriched by contributions from their archive holdings.

As with the local authority sector in Wales, the picture of non-local authority archival provision is far from bleak. There is clearly a need, however, for extensive support and investment to maintain current levels of provision and ensure that future development opportunities are not jeopardised.

¹¹ For further details of this project see <http://www.swan.ac.uk/swcc/>

13. Conclusion: the way forwards for archives in Wales?

Throughout this report many conclusions and recommendations for investment, development and support have been made. Any of the participating repositories could doubtless add their own specific areas of need, such is the disparity of provision in archives across Wales. Although the majority of the points made seek to address areas of under-investment or poor provision, there are also points made in reference to areas of good practice which are deserving of continued support to ensure that high standards are maintained. In drawing this report to a close it is possible to summarise these many and diverse priorities, and to indicate ways in which the archive sector in Wales might tackle them and make progress towards improved levels of service and provision.

There is a fundamental need for improved archive storage accommodation if the archival heritage of Wales is to be properly preserved now and handed on in good shape to future generations. In some instances the present provision is so bad that only a fresh start in a new building, or radical new partnerships with other services providers will address the problem adequately. Simultaneous investment in new record office buildings throughout Wales is not a realistic proposal, any more than it is elsewhere in the United Kingdom. The difficulty for many authorities of raising matching funding for large HLF bids is just one of the factors against this.

But sequential improvements are desirable, and meanwhile investment should address specific deficiencies in a focused manner. A number of successful projects have been completed in record offices which, while achieved on relatively modest budgets, have brought great benefit to these offices and their holdings.

The following are areas in which, based on the findings of this Archival Mapping survey, development and investment should be focused:

- the development of action plans derived from the new *National Archives and Records Policy for Wales*. The opportunity for the creation of an overall strategy for Welsh archives has been taken with both hands, and will help to create an environment in which the areas of need identified in this report can be addressed in a unified, collaborative way;
- the development of ICT infrastructure, at a basic level in the case of some authorities, is necessary in order to take advantage of the opportunities for public services, efficient archival management, and co-operation which ICT can bring;
- subsequent or parallel development of national archive-specific ICT initiatives, whether for the establishment of a sound and foundational ICT infrastructure (such as that proposed by the *Archive Network Wales* project) to enable inter-office working and collaboration, or for the creation of digital content (such as the *Gathering the Jewels* project);

- the development of a national preservation strategy, with objectives of satisfying the need for a clearer picture of conservation backlogs and advocating for increased provision of conservation facilities;
- phased programmes of accommodation improvement for individual record offices where possible, or new-build projects where improvement is not a realistic option;
- the continuing support of efforts to identify, collect, preserve, and make accessible Wales' film, moving image and special media heritage;
- the continuing development of staff, especially in 'new' archival skills.

The overall theme against which these conclusions should be set is that archive services in Wales should continue to work towards greater cross-sector collaboration, to make the best use of limited resources where interests are held in common. The new *National Archives and Records Policy for Wales* offers a strategic framework within which these conclusions can be addressed: it must be remembered that piecemeal improvements made in the absence of strategic prioritisation, however desirable in themselves, may fail to tackle more deep-seated but potentially more significant problems.

There are many positive activities being advanced in record offices in Wales, and areas of excellence which deserve to be encouraged and supported. Record office services in Wales are clearly very popular and deserving of resource allocation, both to raise levels of provision where required and to ensure that successes are built upon. The unified strategy which the *National Archives and Records Policy for Wales* represents will be crucial in helping to raise the profile of archives, and in creating a structure and climate within which record offices will be empowered to press for increased resources and support.

Appendix 1: Members of the Project Board

Members of the Project Board at the project's inception were:

Kevin Matthias	(Chair; representing local government archive services)
Gwyn Jenkins	(Convenor; representing the National Library of Wales)
Susan Beckley	(representing local government archive services)
Anthony Carr	(representing university archive courses)
Susan Edwards	(representing local government archive services)
Mary Ellis	(representing the Historical Manuscripts Commission)
David Leitch	(representing the Public Record Office)
Arwyn Lloyd Hughes	(representing National Museums and Galleries of Wales)
Hilary Malaws	(representing the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales)
Ann Rhydderch	(representing local government archive services)
David Rimmer	(representing local government archive services)
Linda Tomos	(representing Consortium of Welsh Library & Information Services)
John Watts-Williams	(Minutes Secretary)
Rowland Williams	(representing the Society of Archivists)

Subsequently the following Project Board changes were effected:

Susan Edwards	became	Chair, Archives Council Wales
Gwyn Jenkins	became	Secretary, Archives Council Wales
Anthony Carr	was replaced by	Elisabeth Bennett
Mary Ellis	was replaced by	Christopher Kitching, then Robert Baker
David Leitch	was replaced by	Steven Jones

Appendix 2: list of participants

The following record offices participated in the Archival Mapping Project for Wales by completing the 20-page questionnaire based on their facilities and services. All record offices which were invited to participate did so.

Record Office	Respondent
Anglesey County Record Office	Anne Venables
Carmarthenshire Archives	John Davies
Ceredigion Archives	Helen Palmer
Conwy Archives Service	Susan C Ellis
Denbighshire Archives	Kevin Matthias
Flintshire Record Office	Rowland Williams
Glamorgan Record Office	Susan Edwards
Gwent Record Office	David Rimmer
Gwynedd Archives Service: Caernarfon	Ann Rhydderch
Gwynedd Archives Service: Dolgellau	Einion Thomas
National Library of Wales	Gwyn Jenkins
National Museum & Gallery, Cardiff	Gayle Evans
Museum of Welsh Life	Arwen Lloyd Hughes
National Museum of Wales: Department of Industry	Carolyn Charles
Pembrokeshire Record Office	John Owen
Powys County Archives Office	Gordon Reid
Royal Commission on Ancient & Historical Monuments of Wales	Hilary Malaws
University of Wales Bangor	Tomos Roberts
University of Wales Swansea	Elisabeth Bennett
University of Wales Swansea: South-Wales Miners Library	Elisabeth Bennett
West Glamorgan Archive Service	Susan Beckley
Wrexham Archives Service	Helen Gwerfyl