



## THE FEDERATION IS CHANGING

For the first time in its history the Federation is becoming truly independent and is gaining a powerful voice with which to influence museum development in Wales. This is not just a result of becoming a charitable organisation, though the status and recognition that charity registration brings should not be overlooked. It is because the demise of the Council of Museums in Wales has left a void and the Federation committee has made a determined effort to ensure that it now fills that void in a truly meaningful way.

### GOODBYE CMW

All of us, and not just those former CMW staff who were left to watch while the CMW body was dismembered, will understand the feeling of sadness at the winding down of such a vital organisation. CMW had its faults and its moments of crisis but it did something very special through its life, it created a Welsh museums 'fellowship'. The essence of CMW was that it represented and supported member organisations and fought the good fight on behalf of those museums and galleries. CyMAL will be a different organisation, and while we will all work hard to ensure its success there can be no doubt that it will remain a body that will be part of the regional government. Time will tell if such a difference has any long-term impact.

### WELCOME CYMAL & A NEW FEDERATION

Having said goodbye to CMW, we await policy from CyMAL and a real understanding that will

only come from contact with the, yet to be appointed, CyMAL staff. Meanwhile I think that we can all be proud of the way in which the Federation has actually pre-empted the CMW/CyMAL change by establishing itself as a charitable public body and by creating its first business plan. The Federation intends to become the voice of the museum world in Wales, the membership mantle that CMW has left for another organisation to take up. But to do this, the Federation itself must be as vibrant and effective as CMW once was. Such aspirations can only become reality if there are museum people in Wales who actually want it to happen and, more importantly, are prepared to contribute.

### SUPPORT THE FED

Once upon a time I worked for CMW and was active in encouraging contact between museum people throughout Wales, in encouraging better standards, and in supporting individual professional development. The CMW team was one of the best but it was helped in its work by the enthusiasm and dedication of the CMW membership. I believe that the Federation can achieve as much as CMW but it can only do so if the museum community rallies round in the same way. So let us all lend our support and make sure that the Federation maintains the valuable, indeed vital, feeling of membership and community created by CMW.

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## THANK YOU CMW

It was a sobering experience, reading, in the final edition of *Cysylltu*, the list of CMW staff that had helped us all over the years. For those of us who have been around museums in Wales for some time, many of those names will have brought back a wealth of memories.

CMW struggled early on with meagre funds and patchy support. The Federation helped out a bit there and CMW grew to be a good friend to us all. It's been a roller-coaster ride with colourful characters and interesting times. Outside the National, all the museums and art galleries in Wales are medium to small in size and we have all needed CMW's help from time to time, whether it's funds, practical help, advocacy, training or advice. We've rather taken CMW for granted and now they are gone.

When I first started here there weren't many museums in Wales at all, now there are many and most of them owe their existence to CMW. Such a wealth of museum service enriches the whole museum movement here in Wales. Perhaps this is CMW's most important legacy - a vibrant, united, friendly, Welsh museum community. Thank you CMW, you will be missed.

**Bruce Campbell**  
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## NEW MEMBER

### ESSEX HAVARD

Up to March 31<sup>st</sup> I worked at the Council of Museums in Wales as Project Officer (Education & Access). My career has been firmly grounded in museum education and events organising (Bath City Council for 5 years and NMGW for 5 years), policy development and, latterly, access advice (I am currently Wales Liaison Officer on the MAGDA national committee). I also have some fundraising and grant monitoring experience and am currently registering with the HLF on their Directory of Expert Advisors.

I comprise half of the rhythm section in two South Wales based bands (Voodoo Jive & Stormy Weather and the Lightning Conductors). I am 6 ft 4" and have just been told, by my physiotherapist, that my left leg is 2 centimetres shorter than my right.



I have good personal hygiene, my favourite colour is blue and my lucky number is 5 and, yes...my name really is Essex!

I am looking for work (consultancy or otherwise) from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2004 and would welcome any enquiries.

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## TRENCH FEVER

A new exhibition has opened at Newport Museum & Art Gallery. Trench Fever takes a look at the archaeological excavations carried out at Caerwent (Roman Venta Silurum) between 1899 and 1913. On display is a selection of the original archive of material that documents the pioneering excavations undertaken by members of the Caerwent Exploration Fund (C.E.F.). This includes watercolour drawings of mosaics, tracings of painted wall plaster, photographs, excavation notebooks and letters as well as some of the hundreds of artefacts unearthed during the 14 years of excavation.

### THE CAERWENT EXPLORATION FUND

The Caerwent Exploration Fund was set up in 1899 by members of the Clifton Antiquarian Club in Bristol. The village of Caerwent had remained unchanged for many years and presented an opportunity to excavate and record a Roman civilian settlement. Money was always tight and the C.E.F. was often bailed out by its President, Godfrey Morgan, Lord Tredegar. Despite these financial setbacks the C.E.F. succeeded in uncovering two-thirds of the late Roman town over a period of 14 years. This was thanks to the support of people like Lord Tredegar and the perseverance of Thomas Ashby, a newly qualified archaeologist and later Director of the British School at Rome, Alfred Hudd, a local enthusiast of just about everything and, of course, the team of diggers.

### WHAT'S IN STORE?

This exhibition has highlighted the importance of the archaeological archive, an issue that has been topical lately with the publishing of *"What's in Store"*, a document with recommendations that are food for thought for all of us responsible for archaeology in Wales. The archaeological archive encompasses all material from excavations - artefacts, samples, paper records and publications. *"What's in Store"* demonstrated that *"archaeological archives are not being exploited to their full potential, particularly in interpreting them for the public"*. Trench Fever is a step towards improving access towards some of Newport Museum & Art Gallery's archaeological archives. Putting some of these unique records on display has made us address some storage and documentation concerns which has resulted in the conservation of original watercolours and cataloguing the archive.

### ARCHIVE AND ARTEFACTS

The Caerwent archive is a lucky survivor from a period when there were no real guidelines on excavation or archive deposition in place for archaeologists, amateur or professional. However, the archive not only helps me give meaning to the artefacts through excavation notebooks, it also documents pieces of archaeology now lost, like numerous mosaics. But most enlightening have been the records of day-to-day site management, the visitors and the "rewards" paid to diggers for finds. It was fascinating to be able to trace real objects back to annotations of their discovery in 100 year old field notebooks. Also to read correspondence between members of the C.E.F. on age old problems of funding excavations and what to do with all the *"pieces of pot that nobody will be interested in"*. One hundred years on these pieces of pot are being identified and catalogued by the Cardiff Samian Group, a project that is now in its sixth year and with five interim reports under its belt.



### A SOCIAL HISTORY OF ARCHAEOLOGY

It has been a refreshing change to curate an archaeological exhibition that has focussed on the characters of those involved in revealing the true significance of Venta as well as some of the objects they were first to see. I have discovered a sort of social history of archaeology within Newport's collections and I hope the exhibition has breathed new life into the story of Caerwent.

Trench Fever runs until 24<sup>th</sup> July 2004 at Newport Museum & Art Gallery with special events including live interpretation, on National Archaeology Day, Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> June.

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## BIG CHANGES AT BIG PIT

Most readers will be aware that great changes have occurred at the humble Big Pit Mining Museum – now elevated to the status of The National Mining Museum for Wales. However, I would like to take a more personal view of the new home for the Welsh coal mining collections.

### CURATING COAL

In December 1986 I was working as a development worker in the South Diamond district at Cwm Colliery, Beddau (as the colliery was due to close in a month this was faintly ridiculous, but the National Coal Board was willing to pay me so I wasn't arguing!) and, while walking back to the shaft at the end of the shift, we were discussing what we would like to do when the pit shut. After listening to various mad money making schemes, I said that I wanted to work in an industrial museum. This gained me some very old fashioned looks but, after many years of further education, volunteering in museums and part time contracts, here I am as the curator at Big Pit.

I sometimes feel a bit of a fraud because my previous idea of a curator was some kind of Oxford don with a stained tweed jacket, a brain the size of a planet and difficulty in crossing the road unaided. I have since modified my view (slightly!). However NMGW seem willing to put up with both me and my eccentric curatorial style so, as in my dealings with the NCB, I'm not arguing.

### WONDERFUL THINGS

My first view of the National Museum's coal collections was when it was stored in Bute Street in Cardiff. Although the storage conditions were not as good as they now are in the museum's new Collection Centre, I felt a little like Howard Carter when he first entered Tutankhamen's tomb – seeing some 'wonderful things'. Over the last few months I have had the privilege of putting at least some of these items on display to the public in the new exhibitions at Big Pit's former pit head baths.



I remember one museum colleague putting forward the view that the only objects available to interpret the mining industry were some large white painted machines and a few hand tools. I hope that we have proved him wrong. In our new exhibitions he will find topics ranging from the 1842 Employment of Children Act to mining memorabilia with objects ranging from shovels through to medals – including childrens' working boots, dust masks, clothing, silverware, tobacco tins, trade union badges, commemorative ceramics, fine art and a 'Spitting Image' of Margaret Thatcher- in all types of materials from wood to precious metal.

### A MODERN MUSEUM

We have tried to put in place a 'modern museum' by making it as visually rich as possible. Our graphic panel texts are cut down to around 75 words in each language (Welsh/English) and make use of as many of the National Museums collection of images as possible.

The Welsh text is not a slavish translation from the English but is often a subtly different one. We also used the Rhymney Valley dialect rather than 'Cymraeg Byw'. Labelling of objects is also as minimal as possible – we didn't want the objects to become lost in a sea of cardboard backed text. The displays are arranged by topic i.e. Geology, Mines Rescue, Trade Unions etc. and based on the collections we actually hold. This was made easier by the efforts of past curators and generous donors who between them managed to fill our shelves with a wide ranging collection of both social and technical items.



### MINING GALLERIES

In addition to the 'museum display' we have created mock underground workings on the surface of the colliery – the 'Mining Galleries', which take the visitor through a series of tableaux putting the above mentioned big white machines into their context in a (hopefully) humorous, and sometimes poignant way.

Although we are aware that certain parts of our exhibitions can be criticised, we hope that the visitor will go away with the feeling that what he or she has seen has been an insider's view of an industry which changed the face of Wales.

Our canteen is rather special too!!

**Ceri Thomson**  
**Curator of Coal**  
**Big Pit National Mining Museum**  
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# LEARNING HOW TO WRITE MUSEUM TEXT

One of the last training courses run by CMW was Interpretive Text Writing at the Dylan Thomas Centre, Swansea on 4<sup>th</sup> March. The course was really well attended, it was clear that this is a popular topic in museums, which people are eager to have guidance on. Jenny Sabine, who works for Swansea Museums Service led the course.

## The Programme for the day

Jenny outlined the objectives of the course which were to consider and discuss the purpose and possibilities of museum texts, the pitfalls and failures of museum texts, what the reader needs and bilingual texts and writing for the web. We would also learn the basic principles of language, meaning, readability, presentation and relating the text to the exhibition and have the chance to discuss and analyse some texts and have a chance to re-write text ourselves.

## Communication

We started off by looking at two important principles of writing text in the museum. The first is to aim to make people forget they are reading, and to feel that someone is standing next to them and talking to them. The second principle is to make people want to listen. All museum visitors will come in with their own expectations and there needs to be a two-way dialogue between the museum and its visitors which is conversational and not dry. It is also important to know who you are writing for and, as museum visitors are made up of different groups of people all with differing needs, the text needs to speak to as wide a range of readers as possible.

## Reading Age

Museum visitors have to read text under difficult physical conditions. They have to stand up while reading, they are often carrying things, the light levels are often lower than usual for reading, they cannot adjust the label to a convenient reading position and they may have difficulty focussing on the print. Sometimes they can be distracted by other people or sound effects in the museum. Under these conditions, the reading ability of an adult with normal literacy is reduced to an age of 12 to 15. With this in mind, texts need to be easy to understand with interesting information, conversational and friendly, accessible to children and people-centred. Visitors want to learn, but not be taught.

## Writing principles

A principle that Jenny did emphasise was leaving enough time to write the texts for an exhibition, so that it could be planned in and involve everyone. The information in the text should be simple but not patronising, introduce ideas rather than long explanations and connect to the familiar by making links with existing knowledge. The text should question the visitor and provoke response, encouraging discussion amongst visitors, and tell stories rather than list facts. The comfort of readers must be considered in the design and layout of museum text. It is very important that there is a clear typeface in a clear format, that is easy to read.

## Ekarv

Jenny explained the principles of the Ekarv method, which is a style of easy-to-read text pioneered by Margareta Ekarv and has been used successfully in museums. The text is broken up into short paragraphs of four to five short lines, with shorter lines including one idea on each line. The end of the line coincides with the natural end of the phrase. It is advisable to revise the wording and to concentrate the meaning to an almost poetic level. The text is left justified which is a more helpful layout as it is easier to read for those with learning difficulties. It does require a lot more time and effort and there was some discussion as to its effectiveness. Jenny commented that she didn't feel the Ekarv method could be used throughout an entire exhibition, however it is a different style of writing that many people find easier to read.

## Practical sessions

There was time in the afternoon to look at some texts and analyse them and also to re-write a text in the Ekarv method. It was useful to put principles into practice. The day was very useful and it was felt that there were perhaps subsequent related training sessions that could be organised on more specific issues relating to text writing. I certainly found it helpful in thinking about the issues of text writing and discussing ideas with colleagues. You can see examples of Ekarv text at Swansea Museum, temporary exhibitions at Newport Museum and Art Gallery and The Royal Naval Museum in Portsmouth.

## Rachael Anderton

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## NOTICES

### **SPECIAL GENERAL MEETING** Federation of Museums and Galleries in Wales

Welshpool Council Offices  
Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> May 2004, Lunch  
12:30pm, Meeting starts at 1:15pm  
For more details contact:  
Michael Freeman,  
museum@ceredigion.gov.uk

Please bring the business plan with  
you; it has been included with this  
mailing of Y Mag.

**This is an important meeting and  
your attendance would be valued.**

### **Society of Museum Archaeologists Training Seminar: Lithics**

National Museum of Wales, Cathays  
Park, Cardiff  
Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> June 2004.

For more details contact:  
Tim Bridges,  
Worcester City Museum,  
(01905) 25371.

tbridges@cityofworchester.gov.uk

## CEFNI BARNETT FUND

The Federation can provide occasional bursaries to its members for research and/or attendance at recognised professional conferences. This fund is based on a bequest by Cefni Barnett, a founding member of the Federation. The Cefni Barnett Fund is limited and support will be controlled by the Executive Committee of the Federation to whom applications should be submitted through the Treasurer. The criteria for acceptance are set out below but it should be emphasized that funding is not always guaranteed.

### Criteria

- The CBF is available in the form of small bursaries of not more than £100 to cover legitimate costs and expenses related to private research undertaken by members or for attendance at recognised professional conferences or seminars.
- Research must be on a museum related topic that assists the applicant personally in the enhancement of their professional education. Research carried out for an employing authority is not eligible for support.
- Conferences and seminars supported by the scheme would normally be those arranged by a professional body such as the *Museums Association* and should relate to an area of relevant professional development for the applicant.
- Those applicants engaged in formal Continuous Professional Development programmes such as through the *Museums Association* will be given preference.

If you are interested in applying to the CBF please contact the Treasurer, Emma Chaplin, 01352 704400 or email Emma\_Chaplin@flintshire.gov.uk

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### EDITORIAL & DESIGN TEAM

The Editors of Ymag are Rachael Anderton and Victoria Newton-Davies. It is designed by Richard Davies

The Welsh Federation of Museums and Art Galleries does not accept responsibility for, nor necessarily agree with, any views expressed, statements or claims made in articles, news items or letters published in Y Mag. The Federation welcomes contributions in both Welsh and English to the newsletter.

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## COMMUNITY MEMORIES

'Community Memories' is an oral history project, run by Newport Museums and Heritage Service, which is currently aimed at recording the life stories of Newport's Black and Minority Ethnic communities. These communities' experiences are largely missing from Wales' recorded history and Newport wants to acknowledge the important contribution made by these groups to the City's unique heritage. As project officer, I work in partnership with groups and individuals to collect their stories and bring their memories and experiences to the wider City community.

People of an Asian or African background make up about 5% of Newport's population. However this percentage varies in different areas of the City. In Maindee for example, where the project is based, numbers are much higher.

### NEWPORT'S DIVERSE COMMUNITIES

Particularly since the 1960s, many people have arrived in Wales and made Newport their home. They have frequently moved in search of work or new opportunities and have raised their families here. Traditionally men belonging to the Pakistani and Bangladeshi cultures have come to Britain first and only called their wives and families over when they have made enough money to buy a house and support them.

*"My dad used to be a business man and he lived in Newport for such a long time. He even talked to us about when the George Street Bridge was nearly finished. He used to go and come back [to Bangladesh]. He was here at that time to earn money, to support the family, and slowly he found it difficult to go, to look after us and look after his business as well. So he decided to bring us over too."* (Shamima)

Today, as well as being the home of many first generation immigrants, Newport is also the living place of children and young people of the second and third generation as well.

*"[Our parents] don't think we appreciate Pakistan as much as they do but they understand that we've grown up here and that's why we like that kind of environment. Even if we were to go and live on a farm here [in Britain], it's such a different experience for us, we wouldn't like it."* (Saira)

### ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVE

The 'Community Memories' project will create a new permanent oral history archive at Newport Museum and Art Gallery.

This will enable memories and stories to be preserved and be used for the benefit of future generations.

### EXHIBITIONS AND LOAN BOXES

The recorded material is also being used to inform exhibitions, publications, web pages and school resources. One project is shortly to begin with the 'Edge' Asian Girl's Youth Group in Newport. The girls are compiling a cultural loan box of objects to promote understanding of their culture within schools and community centres. They will be recorded talking about their chosen objects and their explanations will be used to create a CD resource to accompany the box.

### HOLIDAYS TO THE HOMELAND

Newport Museum and Art Gallery's next 'Community Memories' exhibition is called 'Holidays to the Homeland'. It launches in May and explores the experiences of second generation Black and Minority Ethnic community members when they have visited their motherlands for the first time.

*"What I remember from my first visit [to Jamaica] was that it was the first time I saw my cousins and my auntie and the family. I remember they didn't have any electricity, no electricity at all. But it was great. It did show us that we don't need TV, how lazy we have become and how fixated with this little box."* (Paula)



Paula and her father

'Community Memories' is funded through 'Cymorth: Newport Childrens' and Young Peoples' Framework', a source of funding from the Welsh Assembly Government.

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