

CARMARTHENSHIRE ARCHIVE SERVICE
Parc Myrddin, Richmond Terrace, Carmarthen SA31 1DS
NRA location number: 211

Visited: 20/7/00 by RJB (report not completed until January 2001 due to wait for return of draft)

Staff or officers met during visit: John Davies, County Archivist; David Cooke, Archivist; other staff briefly

Date of subscription to HMC Standard: not subscribed

Existing approvals: P, D (M&T recognition was suspended in 1998)

CURRENT ADMINISTRATIVE ARRANGEMENTS

A new structure has recently been introduced, in which JD has moved down a level. Archives now form part of the Education and Community Services Department. JD reports to the Heritage Manager, Chris Delaney, who has responsibility for museums and archives. CD reports to David Griffiths, Cultural Services Manager, who was formerly Llanelli Librarian and has direct responsibility for libraries. He reports to the Director of Education (this post was being filled on an interim basis at the time of my visit; a permanent appointment has since been made). The Director of Education reports to the Chief Executive.

CD is budget holder for the archives. The current budget is £147,000. CIPFA statistics for 1998-99 place Carmarthenshire eighth amongst Welsh authorities for total revenue expenditure.

STAFFING

There are five archives staff - three archivists, one searchroom assistant, one receptionist/clerk/typist, and two records officers, who are based at County Hall. There were until recently only two archivists, and this is the first time since the 1970s that there have been three. One archivist and one records officer are bi-lingual, the searchroom assistant has some Welsh and JD is learning it. (The third archivist, who was the Welsh speaker, has since left and the post has not yet been re-advertised).

SITE AND BUILDINGS

Sited in the Carmarthenshire Cultural Centre. This is a council-owned park area just beyond the town centre, surrounded by residential housing. Several other council services are based here, including the operations department, emergency planning and the register office. There is also a football pitch. There are a number of trees (none in the immediate vicinity of the record office) which help to create a pleasant environment.

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The park is about 20 mins walk from the railway station, and has a bus stop nearby, to which buses run regularly. There is plenty of car parking space.

The archives occupy the ground floor of a shared building. The first floor houses Cultural Services administration, and there is also one room, currently empty, rented by a business, Antur Cwm Taf, as well as two rooms which are intended for use by the archives; JD has had their load-bearing capacity tested, and feels they will probably not in fact be suitable for storage, so they may be used for conservation and/or a sorting room. The building is of stone with a slate roof. It dates in the main from 1899, with a 1930s extension and was originally a school. The archives moved there in November 1999 with HLF support; prior to this they had been based in County Hall in conditions which were badly below standard.

One third of the archives are still at County Hall, awaiting transfer. This process has taken a long time as the Council did not allocate money specifically for transport, and therefore what has been moved was done by just two County Council staff. When material still held at County Hall is required in the search room, they have to use the Council's vans to courier over the material. These are not always available, and in any case there is only one driver who JD feels can be trusted to move the archives safely. JD has written a report recommending that the service close for two weeks to enable the rest of the archives to be moved, but he has not yet received a response to this.

Subsequent to my visit: the archives at County Hall have now been moved to the new repository, which has also now been formally opened.

PUBLIC FACILITIES

Reception and admissions arrangements

The archives are reasonably clearly signposted within the park. There is a ramp for wheelchairs, and there is also wheelchair access to the archive service's one toilet. Searchers enter into a small reception room, with receptionist; this also acts as a rest room for searchers. Carmarthenshire Archive Service is not a member of CARN; searchers sign a register. It is advisable to book in advance, but only necessary for using the GRO indexes on microfilm, as these tend to be fully used. There is no charge for visiting. The reception room includes lockers, comfortable chairs and a coffee machine, and a number of leaflets are available. There is currently no noticeboard, although JD would like one.

Search room

This is approx 7m x 6m in size. There are three tables, including one for maps, accommodating about 14 readers. There are also two computer terminals, one of which is currently not in use but will have an Internet connection; the other is used for CD-ROMs. There were plenty of foam rests available and being used during my visit.

The windows are small, fixed shut, and have blinds. The search room is intruder alarmed; it currently lacks smoke detectors as the Council forgot (!) to include these, but JD will arrange for their installation.

Finding aids

Lists and card indexes are available in the searchroom, which also houses a good collection of reference books. The indexes need weeding, and JD feels they can initially be confusing but they are nevertheless useful.

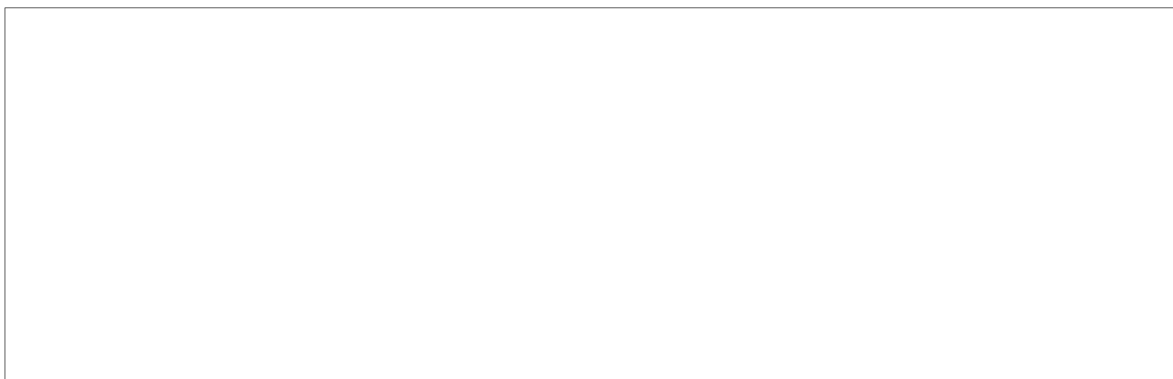
There is a considerable cataloguing backlog. JD mentioned the Cawdor estate papers, of which 800 boxes were received in the 1970s, and about one third of which has been listed in any detail. There were 54 accessions in 1999, of which three have been catalogued, and there has been no cataloguing at all since the move. Copies of lists and accessions returns are sent to the NRA. In addition to the demands on the archivists time caused by the move, the Council is producing a history, and the archives service is assisting in this. Cataloguing is not to ISAD(G). JD hopes that the service will participate in Archives Network Wales.

Rate of use

Since the move, there has been an average of 500 searchers per month, which is a considerable increase on numbers at County Hall. JD thinks their acquisition of the census on microfilm may also be a factor. Numbers of documents produced has risen as high as 1000 in one month.

Around 70-80% of searchers are from Carmarthenshire, and 60-70% are genealogists. There are also a significant number from Trinity College, Carmarthen which runs three courses which utilise archive sources (BA and MA in Local History, BEd).

For enquiries requiring the staff to undertake detailed research, a fee-paying research service (£35 per hour) is offered, although this is little-used. Otherwise, a list of local record agents is provided.



Other public areas

The microform room is about 4m x 2m in size, Copies of parish registers, census returns and the GRO indexes are held here on a self-service

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basis - There are seven microfilm readers, and eight microfiche readers.

STRONG ROOMS

General

SORTING ROOM/STRONG ROOM: Approx 5m x 4m. This will be used as an initial sorting room rather than a strong room, but it currently houses records being sorted by a student volunteer, and also records which have been transferred from the outstore. It may eventually be used as a strong room proper if a room upstairs comes to be used as a sorting room. Thick metal door. Very little shelving. Radiator. Fluorescent tube lighting. Tiled floor.

STRONG ROOM WITH MAPS AND PARISH REGISTERS: Also approx 5m x 4m, but very high ceiling. Thick metal door. Wooden floor. Currently only a little fixed shelving, more will be added. There will also be new map chests. Several radiators, which have been turned off. Smoke alarm. Intruder alarm. Fluorescent tube lighting. Environmental monitoring by digital thermohygrometer, which on my visit was showing temperature within BS 5454 recommendations but a surprisingly high relative humidity - JD thought the reading might be wrong.

MAIN STRONG ROOM: Approx 19m x 6m. Ceiling is 3.5m high, and JD intends to purchase a ladder to reach the upper shelving, which is not currently being used. Structural support beams prevent a mezzanine floor being put in. Thick metal door. Mostly mobile metal shelving, although there is also fixed racking along two walls. Archives are still being moved into this strong room, and there is currently a lot of space. Smoke alarms. Intruder alarm. Fluorescent tube lighting. Unlagged pipes, which do carry water. Flood alarms were not acquired for reasons of cost. Environmental monitoring by drum thermohygrometer, which on my visit also showed temperature within BS 5454 recommendations but high relative humidity.

Subsequent to my visit: the existing monitoring equipment has been replaced by Humbug dataloggers, which JD reports are more accurate and recording temperature and relative humidity within BS 5454 recommendations in the main strong room; figures for the other strong rooms have been distorted by the heating supplies having been cut off by the builders.

Security arrangements

Flood and damp prevention

There had been a flood in the strong room before the archives service moved in. A new drainage system around the building has now been put in place.

Fire protection

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Smoke alarms, in all strong rooms, are linked to the council's emergency room and from there to the fire brigade, which is about 5 minutes away.

Special storage

No special facilities for storage of other media. Hold only a few videos - film holdings have been transferred to the Wales Film and Television Archive. County Council minutes are now being created electronically, so these have been received by the records management service but nothing has yet been transferred to the archives.

Outstores

There is an outstore at Peniel, 4 miles from Carmarthen. All records held there will be moved to the new repository; they will need re-boxing owing to problems with damp.

CONSERVATION

Work is sent out, to West Glamorgan Archive Service. Part of this year's conservation budget has had to be diverted, as not everything was provided in the new offices that should have been. The archive service does not yet have a disaster plan.

STAFF OFFICES

JD's office is to the left of reception, with a kitchen next door. The other main staff rooms are approached through a wooden door leading off the searchroom – a sorting/cataloguing room, approx 3m x 3m, with large tables to spread out documents, and what will be a cataloguing room, but is currently housing old files, foam and other odds and ends. There is also a small room, formerly a toilet, now housing old furniture.

EXPANSION SPACE

JD estimates 15 years worth of expansion space, more if the sorting room is sited upstairs, freeing up the other.

MODERN RECORDS MANAGEMENT

This is at County Hall, and employs two record officers. It was set up in the 1970s, with the assistance of Michael Cook.

RELATIONS WITH OTHER ARCHIVE COLLECTORS

Good relations with other local record offices. There used to be more contact with Carmarthen Library, as this had a copies of the census whereas the archive service did not, but relations remain good, as they are with Carmarthen Museum, which transfers any archive material it acquires to the archive service. JD very concerned about Llanelli Library, which has significant archives holdings, although he is on good terms with the Librarian there, Richard Davies. JD has suggested having a branch of the record office in Llanelli, but this has not met with any success.

IT APPLICATIONS

Word 7 is used for cataloguing. The archive service does not feature on the Council's website, which is currently being revamped as the Eisteddfod is in Carmarthenshire this year; JD would like details of access and summary descriptions of main collections to be included, but this is under the control of the Chief Executive's Department. They do have e-mail.

ADDITIONAL NOTES

Outreach was impractical at County Hall as space was lacking for visiting groups, but JD is hoping to do some in the new premises. The service has good relations with local groups, and JD gives talks at Trinity College. JD would like to mount exhibitions (he has helped local museums with them in the past), but has insufficient time and space. A Friends organisations has been set up.

Best Value - after some initial concern from the Council, JD has heard little about this.

SUMMARISE YOUR VIEWS ON STANDARDS IN PLACE

Fire

Environmental controls

Difficult to judge until the new environment has ‘settled down’, but the recent purchase of the dataloggers is a positive move.

Staffing

Number of archivists barely adequate. Level of para-professional and non-professional staff inadequate.

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HMC APPROVAL

Would you feel confident in recommending the repository to a depositor ?

I would have reservations

Does the repository meet the requirements of the HMC Standard in all essential respects?

No; it falls short on staffing and security. Environmental conditions cannot really be judged at this stage

If No, is it realistic to expect the necessary improvements to be made to bring it in line with the Standard?

Not in the short-term. Some improvements, however, could be made relatively straightforwardly

What further action will now be taken?

Letter to JD suggesting that we are pleased to see the service moving forward but emphasising that further progress will be necessary and that Carmarthenshire is still some way short of the standard needed for HMC Approval

Signed: RJB

Date: 29/1/01 (ie. written August 2000 and revised Jan 2001 to incorporate new information received then)

Extra information about staff relations for context to report

JD gets on well with CD, but the latter being budget holder for the archives causes administrative problems when he is absent, as even routine financial expenditure has to be put on hold until he is available to sign the forms.

JD finds DG unsympathetic to, and uninterested in, the archives. Although they now work in the same building, he has visited the archives only once since they have been based there. JD related several unedifying incidents, including that when he had stated to DG that the archives had received 300 visitors in their first week following their move, DG told him this could not possibly have been the case. DG is likely to retire by the first half of 2002.

The Chief Executive has never visited the archives. The move gained publicity in the local press, but JD does not feel it has caused any impact upon the Council, and he has had no particular reaction from Councillors. There is however one Councillor who he feels is sympathetic to the archives service.

Llanelli Library: JD sees DG as the barrier to progress there.