

## **CARMARTHENSHIRE RECORD OFFICE**

Parc Myrddin, Richmond Terrace, Carmarthen SA31 1DS

**NRA location number:** 211

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**Visited:** 4/10/05

**By:** NK (accompanied by Mary Ellis, Cymal)

**Staff or officers met during visit:** John Davies, County Archivist; Chris Delaney, Heritage Services Manager

**Date of subscription to TNA Standard:** Not subscribed.

### **Existing approvals [delete as appropriate]**

<b>Public</b>	<b>Manorial &amp; Tithe</b>	<b>HMG</b>	<b>Diocesan</b>	<b>n/a</b>
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## **CURRENT ADMINISTRATIVE ARRANGEMENTS**

The structural position of the archive service has not changed significantly since 2000. The County Archivist still reports to the Heritage Services Manager, who is also responsible for the county museum service and has a museum background. Heritage Services are now part of the Lifelong Learning Division of an Education & Children's Services Directorate. The County Archivist is therefore a fourth tier officer. All responsibility for records management has now been transferred to the Corporate Development department, where it is managed alongside data protection and freedom of information.

The budget for the archive service is managed by Chris Delaney, not by John Davies, and John has not been informed of his budget allocations for 2005/6. A 'miscellaneous expenses' budget of £10k p.a. was established at the time the office moved into new accommodation, in order to pay for conservation work to be undertaken. Unfortunately this budget has borne the brunt of cuts over the ensuing years and is now down to around £3k p.a. Since this budget also has to pay for boxes the result has been a diminishing amount of conservation work carried out.

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## **STAFFING**

The staffing is unchanged since 2000: there are three archivists, one searchroom assistant and a receptionist. There is a need for a second searchroom assistant as the service frequently only has two staff on duty, which is not enough to maintain security and the public service, a minimum of three are needed to maintain these. The service does have access to a two relief staff, and one of these has been used fairly frequently but is not always available. There might be some possibility of having a reciprocal support arrangement with the County Museum at Abergwili, but this has never been developed as it felt that the museum staff have insufficient knowledge of the

operation and function of an archive or the specific knowledge needed to deal with enquiries.

The records officers mentioned in previous reports are no longer part of the Record Office complement.

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## **SITE AND BUILDINGS**

The archive service was relocated into the Carmarthenshire Cultural Centre in 1999-2000, as a result of an HLF-funded project to which the County Council contributed just £39,000. The grant was conditional upon continued investment by the Council in the service, which has not materialised. Chris Delaney says that the Council's capital programme has been dominated by efforts to improve school buildings, but that this programme is coming to an end and there should be more potential in the future for investment in other services.

The Centre occupies former school buildings in a Council-owned park just outside the town centre. Several other council services are based here, including the IT department, library headquarters staff and Childrens' Services staff. The grounds are used as sports pitches. The cultural centre is not well signposted within the town, although once on the campus, the archives are reasonably prominently signed. Car parking is available, but it is barrier controlled and looks like a staff only car park to first-time visitors. Readers have to collect a token from the reception desk to exit from the car park.

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FOI exemption  
s31.

There has been some difficulty with water penetration into the archives accommodation, both as a result of leaks in the office accommodation above and because of flooding from blocked drains. The searchroom was flooded to a depth of several inches in one incident and much of the furniture was written off, although there was no damage to catalogues or documents. A new drainage system is believed to have eliminated the risk of a repetition.

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## **PUBLIC FACILITIES**

### **(i) Reception and admission arrangements**

There is a ramp for wheelchairs to gain access to the archives, and the public spaces are all on one level. The large public toilet is wheelchair-accessible and suitably equipped for use by the disabled.

Readers enter a small reception room, where the receptionist is based, and where lockers are available for personal belongings. The room also functions as a rest room for users, with a coffee machine and two sofas. The office is not yet a member of CARN (although this is planned), and users do not have to produce proof of identity, only sign a searchroom register. There is no charge for visiting. It is advisable to book in advance, and necessary for those wishing to use microform readers, as these tend to be fully used.

The service is now closed to the public on Mondays but to compensate opens late on a Tuesday evening. This change has been made to give staff some concentrated time for work other than the public service. The searchroom normally remains open at lunchtimes, but there is no production of original material between noon and 2pm.

### **(ii) Searchrooms**

The main searchroom is approximately 7m x 6m in size, with staff desks down one side. [redacted]

[redacted] In the searchroom there is space for about 16 readers at the main table, and an extra table accommodates users with maps or large documents. Two PCs provide access to CD-Roms and the Internet. The windows are sealed and have recently been treated with UV-screening film. They also have blinds. The room tends to become unacceptably warm in summer. [redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted] However, there are also plans to move the local studies collection from Carmarthen Library into the room currently used for digitisation, which would appear to conflict with the purpose of these plans.

The microfilm reading room is a long, narrow space, partly below the level of the adjacent car park. It has small windows, fixed shut. Readers are reported to find the space claustrophobic for extended research. [redacted]

### **(iii) Finding aids**

Lists and card indexes are provided in the searchroom, which also houses a good collection of reference books. CALM is used for accessioning and for the small amount of new cataloguing which takes place. It is intended to provide online access to CALM (which the Museums Service also use) from January 2006.

The rate of accessions increased only slightly with the move to the present premises, and now run at 50-60 a year. There is very little time for cataloguing and the backlog has got bigger in the last five years. John Davies estimates that 50-60% of the holdings are unlisted and that many of the lists which do exist are completely inadequate: the office will be participating in a survey of cataloguing needs led by Cymal in the near future which should demonstrate this more objectively. JD feels that the older catalogues just defy logic and really need scrapping or at least completely re-ordering into more logical sequences. The service has participated in the Archives Network Wales, and new collection-level descriptions of many of the holdings are available on this website.

### **(iv) Rate of use**

User numbers dipped in 2004 but have since recovered to around 4500 per annum. In 2000, it was estimated that 70-80% of users were local to Carmarthenshire and 60-70% were genealogists, but the service did not participate in the 2004 user survey and there are no comparable current figures.

The number of enquiries has increased, especially since the introduction of e-mail. Family history enquiries are a considerable burden, and it is intended to increase the proportion of these which are referred to record agents, so as to reduce the staff time spent on research.

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**(vi) Other public areas**

None.

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**STRONGROOMS**

**(i) General**

The archive storage occupies three rooms. Since 2000, the equipping of these rooms with shelving and plan chests has been completed and the whole of the archive holdings are now held here. Environmental monitoring is by Humbug dataloggers, which show that SRs 1 and 3 tend to be too warm and that all areas have humidity levels in excess of BS5454 recommendations. Diurnal variations are substantial, and are exacerbated by the heating being turned off in the evening, at weekends and during statutory holidays. All the strongrooms have radiators and pipes, and the main strongroom has a 4" rising main. Water alarms would therefore be highly desirable, but have not been provided because of cost.

**Strongroom 1** is approx. 5m x 4m. The room has a mix of shelving and map chests. There has been a minor problem with water penetration from above in this room, which has now been resolved.

**Strongroom 2** is also approx 5m x 4m. There is mobile shelving with exposed raised tracks, which provide a significant trip hazard. Above this, a mezzanine deck supports very tall map racking. At the time of my visit, there was considerable disorder in this area, although I was told that it would be sorted out during the office's stocktaking closure in December. A low beam crosses the room at eye level and represents a significant hazard. Access to the upper shelves of the map rack is by wooden steps. There has been water penetration into the room from above (reputedly now resolved).

**Strongroom 3** is the main strongroom, 19m x 6m and some 3.5m high, with a pitched roof and tie beams, which prevent a mezzanine deck being inserted. The room is equipped with Nordplan mobile shelving, which is now sticking and proving difficult to operate. Repairs have been estimated at £1,000 but the funds for this are not available. The problem may result from a flooding incident after the shelving was installed but before it was occupied, when water got under the false floor and into the tracking mechanism of the shelving. The design of the shelving system makes the use of the large ladder to access the upper shelves very difficult, often needing two people to physically drag the ladder around the corner of the shelving. The large roof area heats up considerably in the summer making temperature control difficult given the lack of air-conditioning, the reverse occurs in the winter period.

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**(iii) Flood and damp prevention**

There are pipes and radiators throughout the strongroom accommodation, and there have been floods and leaks on a number of occasions, although none of these have done significant damage to documents. A new drainage system around the building is believed to have eliminated the external flood risk.

Much of the risk could have been designed out of the building if a more thorough conversion had been done when the building was occupied. Efforts should be made to minimise the risk through the introduction of water alarms and the elimination of unnecessary pipework.

**(iv) Fire protection**

Smoke alarms in all strongrooms are linked to the Council's emergency control centre and from there to the fire brigade. The brigade arrives within 5 minutes.

The fire escape door into the main building from the corridor near strongrooms 1 and 2 is not alarmed, and is frequently left open by the caretaker.

**(v) Environmental controls**

There is no air conditioning, although there are dehumidifiers in each room. Those in strongroom 3 are plumbed, but those in other rooms have to be emptied. They run only during working hours, which may contribute to diurnal fluctuations in humidity. The dehumidifiers are totally inadequate for the size of the strong rooms.

**(vi) Special storage**

None.

**(vii) Outstores**

None.

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**CONSERVATION**

There is a small budget for work to be sent to Chivers Period, but there is no consistent programme. Only about six items a year are treated, although last year the library service contributed a further £1200 for urgent work on material transferred from Llanelli Library. The Friends Association contributes to, or pays for completely, one or two items to be repaired each year. There has

been some discussion of the possibility of acquiring space on the first floor of the building for use as a workshop, and a forthcoming reshuffle of office accommodation may provide an opportunity for this. However seems to be no chance of revenue being available to establish a conservation workshop.

There is no disaster plan.

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## **STAFF OFFICES**

The staff offices are on the other side of the reception area from the searchroom, and consist of a workroom for the junior archivists, John Davies' office and a small kitchen/staffroom. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] They are adequate for the existing staff but would struggle to accommodate any growth. There is no access control on the door from the reception area.

In addition, a small room between the searchroom and strong rooms is used for storing and sorting recent accessions and for digitisation. There have been water penetration problems in this area. There is a very large table in the middle of the room which means that the space is inefficiently used. There are proposals to bring the local studies collection from Carmarthen Library to the Record Office and use this space to store it. However this would probably only be possible if funds are forthcoming to convert part of the basement into a sorting space.

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## **EXPANSION SPACE**

There is still some expansion space, mostly in Strongroom 3. John Davies estimates this at 5 years worth, but it could be more if the upper shelves of the mobile racking were more intensively used. Quite large transfers from Llanelli Library have used part of what was intended to be 15 years expansion space when the office moved here. There is more material to come from Llanelli: the official records (including Llanelli PS) have been transferred but not the privately deposited material in the library's "local collection", held in very poor conditions. They are currently expecting the transfer of parish and some other records from the National Library of Wales, which will have a further impact on the available capacity, as would the proposed transfer of local studies material from Carmarthen Library.

The searchroom is adequate for current levels of use, but the microfilm room is very crowded. There is space behind it (currently a car park) into which the building could be extended to allow more space.

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## **RECORDS MANAGEMENT**

The responsibility for records management is no longer with the Record Office, the two records officers and the RM store having been transferred to the Corporate Development department, where responsibility for data protection and freedom of information is held. However, John Davies says

that records management is weak in Carmarthenshire and that Fol has not had the hoped-for effect of raising the priority of record keeping in the organisation. Only two departments make proper use of the RM service.

JD is on the Fol working group of the Council, but it has not met since January. He believes there have been several hundred Fol requests, partly because the Council arranged some local advertising of the new right. The Record Office has not, however, received any enquiries that have been treated as formal Fol requests. The advent of freedom of information did not lead to any additional staff appointments. Since the transfer of responsibility, transfers of appraised records to the historic archive – always modest in scale – seem to have dried up.

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## **RELATIONS WITH OTHER ARCHIVE COLLECTORS**

Generally good. There are no collecting policy issues with neighbouring record offices and because of the assiduous collecting activities of Major Francis Jones the big family and estate collections are mostly here rather than at the National Library. The service is currently awaiting transfers of parish records for several deaneries from the National Library. These will include quite a lot of Cardiganshire material because the deanery boundaries do not follow the county boundaries.

There are no active collaborative projects with other archive services. West Glamorgan formerly provided conservation facilities but this ceased when their unit was closed a few years ago.

The service does not have the staff capacity to maintain a proactive acquisitions policy, and this is reflected in the low level of deposits.

The service is on friendly terms with the library and museum services, but does not do much in the way of joint working.

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## **IT APPLICATIONS**

The office uses CALM for accessioning and such cataloguing as is currently done. The web interface should be operational in January 2006 but it will give access to little data as there has not yet been a project to retroconvert the existing catalogues. The quality and structure of some of the old lists make this problematic. More positively, the office has been a major contributor to the Archives Network Wales and ISAD(G) collection descriptions for many collections are on the ANW website.

The service has some basic information on the County Council's website. John Davies is about to be trained in how to write webpages and should



thereafter be able to develop these slowly to make them more informative and attractive.

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## **ADDITIONAL NOTES**

### **(i) Outreach**

John Davies and his colleagues are active in this area. They give an average of 18 talks a year, mainly to branches of the very active Dyfed Family History Society. They also have an active relationship with Trinity College, Carmarthen. JD sits on the advisory board for their BA and MA programmes in history, and reports that the latter is thriving. The Record Office does presentations to history students from the college (and also holds the College's archive)

### **(ii) Liaison with local groups**

The service is in active consultation with Carmarthenshire Antiquarian Society and Dyfed Family History Society, with members of staff sitting on both committees, the meetings for which are hosted at the office. There is a regular attendance by staff to Open Days and other meetings. An active link is also maintained with Carmarthenshire FHS. Informal links are maintained with other local history groups. A Friends Association was formed in 2000 which meets regularly in the archive searchroom with a full programme of talks and visits.

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