



**Archives Network Wales**

**Project evaluation**

**Results of a user survey, July-August 2005**



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# Archives Network Wales Project evaluation : Results of a user survey, July-August 2005

## Summary

*An online questionnaire survey was carried out in July-August 2005 to gather the views of users on the Archives Network Wales website and to establish the user profile. The responses indicated that more than half of users were new to archives; many now intend to visit an archive. Almost all users reported that they had benefited from using the site and would use it again in the future. The profile of users is dominated by those aged 45 and over, and is evenly divided between employed and other statuses. User comments have identified areas where the website design could be improved, and they have also identified the need to provide item-level content in the future.*

## 1 Introduction

Archives Network Wales is a project for Archives and Records Council Wales, supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, to create a free searchable website containing summary descriptions of the archive holdings of the 20 project partners. It started in January 2003 and is due to be completed in December 2005. The project has been managed by the ARCW partners acting as a Project Board and by a Project Management Group drawn from the Board and with HLF monitors. One of the project deliverables is an evaluation of the project to determine how well it has met the requirements of the partners, users and other stakeholders. To examine the level of user satisfaction, and to assist in drawing up their profile, an online questionnaire was drawn up and mounted on the website in July-August 2005. This information complements overall usage statistics extracted from the website log files.

The website had a 'soft launch' in March 2003 and has been amended in response to user comments regularly since then. A major revision of the interface was undertaken in autumn 2004 to improve the index formats and performance in multiple browsers. A small user panel has been asked to test parts of the website from time to time. The website has some bilingual content, although the core description data is provided only in English. The user interface can be flipped from English to Welsh from any point in the site.

## 2 Methodology

The questionnaire was drawn up using the Generic Learning Outcomes approach as adopted by the *Inspiring Learning for All* project. Users were invited to score agreement or disagreement with a series of statements. In some cases, qualitative free-text feedback was also sought. There were 23 questions altogether.

The questionnaire was run from the home page and the rest of the website as an opt-in. The software employed (php) took responses as completed on the html pages and sent them as an email to the Project Manager. The responses were collated on an Excel spreadsheet.

Since the intention was to establish the spectrum of response, rather than full quantification, a small sample was considered sufficient; the survey results were collated after 30 days, during which time there had been 19 responses, and an initial analysis was undertaken. After a further 30 days, an additional 24 responses had been obtained. These matched the previous results very closely.

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The responses were then compared against the overall usage figures (Table 1).

**Table 1: Archives Network Wales website usage statistics, June 2005**

Hits (page views)	380,573
User sessions	34,600
Hits/user session	11.0
Unique users	12,004
Sessions/user	2.88

### 3 Results

There were 43 responses received in the survey period (a response rate of 0.13%).<sup>1</sup> The responses were largely complete (14 questions, 100% completion); eight questions had 93%-98% completion, and one (on disability) 88%. The free text Comment box elicited 29 replies (67%).

**Table 2: Responses to Questions 1-7**

<i>Question</i>	<i>Strongly agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly disagree</i>	<i>Total responses</i>
1. It was easy to find the information I wanted	16 (37%)	18 (42%)	5 (12%)	4 (9%)	43 (100%)
2. The information was clear and easy to understand	20 (47%)	16 (37%)	5 (12%)	2 (5%)	43 (100%)
3. The website has told me something I didn't know before	23 (53%)	14 (33%)	3 (7%)	3 (7%)	43 (100%)
4. I understand more about archives and archive services now	14 (33%)	18 (43%)	10 (24%)	0 (0%)	42 (100%)
5. Using the website has made me realise that archives are more interesting than I thought	17 (38%)	16 (41%)	8 (14%)	2 (7%)	43 (100%)
6. Using the website has changed my mind about something	13 (30%)	12 (28%)	15 (35%)	3 (7%)	43 (100%)
7. I will use the website again	29 (69%)	10 (24%)	1 (2%)	2 (5%)	42 (100%)

Questions 1 and 2 relate to the website design and information presentation. The responses were overwhelmingly positive (78%-84%), and could have scored higher, since the Comments revealed that the two "Strongly disagree" responses to Q. 1 were in fact noting the absence of information from the website (detailed item descriptions) rather than difficulty of finding it. The positive response to Q. 2 is, perhaps, surprising, since the archival descriptions are presented in raw ISAD(G) format and sequence, and there was a danger that the inclusion of technical and irrelevant information would prove distracting to casual readers. The emphasis placed on clarity of expression and consistency in creating the descriptions has allowed users to locate the relevant information.

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<sup>1</sup> An equivalent exercise in 2004 featuring much more intrusive promotion, carried out for 20 days on 5 websites yielded 567 responses, probably a similar rate.

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Questions 3-6 explore the effect that visiting the website has had on the users' knowledge and beliefs. The positive responses range from 58%-86%, and almost all users have learned new information from their visit, even those familiar with archives previously.

Question 7 demonstrates that almost all users (93%) intend to use the website again, showing that its value as a source was recognised and that the search mechanisms were sufficiently usable to avoid frustration. This conclusion bears out the overall usage figures for repeat visits (2.88 visits per month per user).

Question 8 was a free-text Comment box. Twenty-nine responses were received.

**Showed me which manuscripts I need to research with out taking up someones time.**

**much less helpful than A2A because info on items found by search is inadequately detailed**

**Material not available for viewing though listed?**

**This website needs to be more dynamic and user friendly: 21st century users demand more than an electronic version of hard copy catalogues!**

**your information is very limited - you should be including finding lists and item level descriptions eg as does the NLW**

A2A provides full catalogue entries for individual items; ANW only provides a summary of a collection as a whole. Archives are not viewable on ANW. *Action: devise follow-up project to create item-level data*

**I am trying to find my ancestors. We have gone back to late 1800's to the name Nanney from Llan Ffestiniog and thats as far as we have got**

**I would have liked more info. concerning the "Penygarn Tent". Eastern Valley etc.**

**I am too inexperienced in the use of websites for my opinion of yours to be valid. I did like even to see that your site existed, though, so thank you for that.**

**Like other areas, I had hoped to find at least Trade Directories that were on-line and searchable but none found**

**I visited Cowbridge recently and saw the Grammar School, hence my curiosity to learn more about it.**

**Brilliant site, very informative, very easy to use, very easy to understand. Will be using this site more often.**

**This website needs much wider publicity**

**i couldn't find what i wanted but that is not the archive fault**

The amount of information on ANW depends on the nature of the collections. More detailed information would be available if item-level data were created.

**the site lacks plain english.I have just bought a house that was part of the moore gwyn estate.I really wanted to know the basic history in leymans terms.**

**Excellent for background on family history**

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Could not find any info about me

have added to favourites

This site is just great

Since ANW descriptions are intended for a range of uses, they will inevitably include some technical terminology. *Action: provide glossary. Review clarity of text.*

Is there a checking mechanism re collections which record offices are putting up for inclusion? i.e. is it possible that some relatively small collections may be overlooked?

could be bit clearer about whether you can view records on line.

Some small collections will be excluded at present. The project aims to describe 90% of the catalogued collections held by partners. The remaining 10% will be added by the partners in the course of their work in the future. In addition, some descriptions have not yet been released on the website because they are being validated. *Action: summarise coverage on home page update: done*

Q. 5 is a 'have you stopped beating your partner' question. I already know that archives are fascinating! I still think they are.

The purpose of the question was to measure the degree to which users' beliefs had changed as a result of their visit, rather than to survey attitudes to archives in general.

I was unable to find what I wanted when I accessed the site direct. Via Google, I was taken straight to the right page.(I was looking for coal mining in South Wales)

The "Quick search" entry box currently treats search terms as a single string ("coal\_mining\_South\_Wales") which would only be matched if it occurred in this form. *Action: alter search default to "any of these terms" as used by Google*

The quick search returns the title and first couple of lines of description. These usually do not include the search term. Might I suggest returning the search term in context (say the half dozen words on either side), so that the user can quickly differentiate between, say, Talesin Pen Beirdd, Theatr Taliesin (Swansea), Tre Taliesin (Llangynfelyn), the arts magazine Taliesin, Taliesin Williams (son of Iolo Morgannwg), and the any number of other people who have had it as a personal name, bardic name or eisteddfodic nom de plume.

*Action: consider showing search term in context*

Llanfair returns 153 hits, and displays them 20 at a time, and no way that I could see of increasing the figure. Why not have an option for the user to increase the number of hits returned, as for example Google, AbeBooks and eBay all have.

*Action: consider varying hits shown on the results page, sorting by relevance, and filtering of results*

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### Question 9/10. How did you find out about the ANW website?

Google/Yahoo search	27 ( 64%)
Archive staff	7 ( 17%)
Leaflet	1 ( 2%)
Link from archive website	7 ( 17%)
Other (specify)	0 ( 0%)
<i>Total</i>	<i>42 (100%)</i>

The high visibility of ANW's indexes to search engines is reflected in these responses. In contrast, linking from other archive sites has proved less effective as a way of re-directing traffic; links to other sources are typically not featured prominently on web pages. The critical role of archive staff's direct contact with users is also reflected.

### Question 11. How often do you use the ANW website?

First visit	30 ( 70%)
Daily	0 ( 0%)
Weekly	5 ( 12%)
Monthly	1 ( 0%)
Occasionally	7 ( 16%)
<i>Total</i>	<i>43 (100%)</i>

Established users demonstrate that they are familiar with the resource and will return to it when next required. The 'weekly' users are reflected in the average 2.88 visits per month recorded for the website as a whole.

### Question 12. What is your main purpose in using ANW?

Family history	22 ( 51%)
Professional	2 ( 5%)
Education	1 ( 2%)
Research	15 ( 35%)
General	4 ( 9%)
<i>Total</i>	<i>43 (100%)</i>

The preponderance of family history is to be expected, although it is notable that almost half the users defined their purpose as other forms of research. There is some contrast here with archive service visitors (in person), where family history accounts for 70% + of users' purposes.

### Question 13. Have you visited an archive service before using ANW?

Yes	18 ( 45%)
No	22 ( 55%)
<i>Total</i>	<i>40 (100%)</i>

In terms of reaching new audiences, this is a critical measure, suggesting that 6,720 users per month are new to archives.

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### Question 14. Have you visited, or do you intend to visit, an archive after using ANW?

Yes	37 ( 90%)
No	4 ( 10%)
<i>Total</i>	<i>41 (100%)</i>

This figure suggests that many (78%) of the new users remain interested in pursuing their research and archive use further. This may be an effect which only results in actual visits in the long term.

### Question 15. Sex

Male	22 ( 54%)
Female	19 ( 46%)
<i>Total</i>	<i>41 (100%)</i>

*UK Census England and Wales 2001: Male 48.67%, Female 51.33%.*

### Question 16. Location

Wales	22 ( 51%)
Elsewhere in UK	16 ( 37%)
Outside UK	5 ( 12%)
<i>Total</i>	<i>43 (100%)</i>

These figures reflect that the main focus of interest in Welsh archives is from within Wales; those elsewhere in the UK benefit substantially from ANW since previously the information would have been inaccessible without excessive travelling.

### Question 17. Employment

Employed	19 ( 45%)
Unemployed	2 ( 5%)
Education	0 ( 0%)
Retired	13 ( 31%)
Other	8 ( 19%)
<i>Total</i>	<i>42 (100%)</i>

For those of working age (see Q. 18), the employment rate of respondents is 58%, with 6% classifying themselves as unemployed. *UK Labour Force Survey*, Office for National Statistics, 2002, give the equivalent figures of employment rate for working age: 74.5%; unemployment: 4.8%.

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### Question 18. Age

Age group	No. (%)	England and Wales % (UK Census 2001)
0-15	0 ( 0%)	18.89%
16-24	0 ( 0%)	12.18%
25-34	2 ( 5%)	14.26%
35-44	4 ( 10%)	14.89%
45-54	9 ( 22%)	13.23%
55-64	18 ( 44%)	10.58%
65-74	6 ( 15%)	8.39%
75 +	2 ( 5%)	7.58%
<i>Total</i>	<i>41 (100%)</i>	

Users aged 45-74 are over-represented compared to the population as a whole; those aged 25-44 and 75+ are under-represented; those aged under 25 are absent.

### Question 19/20. Which language(s) do you speak?

English	35 ( 81%)
English and Welsh	8 ( 19%)
Welsh	0 ( 0%)
<i>Total</i>	<i>43 (100%)</i>

Other (specify):	French	3
	Spanish	2
	German	1
	Turkish	1

The Welsh pages of the website are used by a stable 30%-35% of visitors; the response to this question suggests that those users are under-represented in the sample. *UK Census 2001* gives a figure for 21% Welsh speakers in Wales<sup>2</sup>, matching the user profile. Of users in Wales, the proportion of Welsh speakers is 36%.

### Question 21. Ethnic group

White	43 (100%)
White/Black	0 ( 0%)
White/Asian	0 ( 0%)
Mixed other	0 ( 0%)
Black	0 ( 0%)
Asian	0 ( 0%)
Chinese	0 ( 0%)
<i>Total</i>	<i>43 (100%)</i>

*UK Census 2001 for Wales* shows White 97.88%; Mixed 0.61%; Asian 0.88%; Black 0.24%; Chinese 0.22%; Other 0.18%.

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<sup>2</sup> There has been some debate about the reliability of this figure but is used here as an indication.

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### Question 22. Disability: Do you consider yourself to have a long-standing illness or disability?

Yes	5 ( 13%)
No	33 ( 87%)
Total	38 (100%)

UK Census 2001 for Wales shows 23% having a long-standing illness or disability.

### Question 23. If so, did this affect your use of the website? (please specify)

No	5 (100%)
Total	5 (100%)

*The Web: Access and Inclusion for Disabled People* (Disability Rights Commission, 2004) found that only 19% of websites conform to basic WAI accessibility standards or better (ANW does), and that in undertaking specified tasks, disabled users reported a 24% failure rate. The ANW website has no reported failures.

## 4 Conclusions

The ANW website's design and content has been endorsed by users, whose main complaint is that at present it only provides collection summaries rather than item-level data. Users report that they have been provided with new information and insight as a result of their visit. Recommendations on the user interface include changing the results page design, providing a glossary, and altering the *Quick search* mechanism. ANW is effectively delivering a new audience for archives.

Users of ANW can be characterised as:

- fairly evenly split between male and female, but male predominating
  - aged 25-75+, mainly 45-64
  - employed or retired
  - mainly from Wales
  - mainly English-speaking
  - White
  - not disabled
- 
- √ Half of users are new to archives
  - √ Almost all users say they will return to ANW
  - √ Almost all new users say they will visit an archive as result of ANW

## 5 Acknowledgements

The survey was drawn up by the Archives and Records Council Wales' ANW Information Sub-group, and was implemented with the technical assistance of the National Library of Wales.