

London Journal of Canadian Studies

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Simon Lloyd ^{1,*}

How to cite: Lloyd, S. 'Not Just Another Anonymous Spot': Government Support for Memory Institutions in Prince Edward Island and Wales.' *London Journal of Canadian Studies*, 2016, 31(1), pp. 67-88. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14324/111.444.ljcs.2016v31.006>.

Published: 01 September 2016

Peer Review:

This article has been peer reviewed through the journal's standard double blind peer-review, where both the reviewers and authors are anonymised during review.

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Open Access:

London Journal of Canadian Studies is a peer-reviewed open access journal.

*Correspondence: sloyd@upei.ca

¹ University of Prince Edward Island's Robertson Library, Canada

'Not Just Another Anonymous Spot': Government Support for Memory Institutions in Prince Edward Island and Wales

*Simon Lloyd**

Abstract

In view of the important role that libraries, archives and museums – collectively referred to here as memory institutions – can play in regenerating communities that have faced economic and social difficulties, this essay examines government support for this sector in Prince Edward Island (PEI) through a comparative study with Wales. A historical sketch of the development of government administrative and planning capacity in this field in both Wales and PEI is offered, followed by a comparison of current funding commitments by each government. The study finds that relative funding levels are about the same in both jurisdictions, but that the Welsh government can offer an instructive example to the government of PEI through the former's commitment to planning for museums, archives and libraries, and for cultural and heritage activity as whole.

Introduction

As two relatively small parts of the Atlantic World, both at the edge of larger and more powerful political entities in which they find themselves relatively marginalized and disadvantaged, and accustomed to grappling with issues of identity and autonomy, Prince Edward Island (PEI) and Wales can find many points of sympathetic (and instructive) identification with each other. Furthermore, now that devolution

has brought Wales a measure of political capital at least somewhat commensurate with her immense cultural and historical riches, its government can be a useful exemplar for other Westminster-style democracies – such as those found in Canadian provinces – which must also function within larger political units.

It is a confluence of recent, current and upcoming events, however, that offers a particularly compelling invitation for the province of Prince Edward Island to look to the Welsh example, specifically in the management and planning of government support for libraries, archives and museums (collectively referred to here as memory institutions). The year 2014 found Prince Edward Island embarking on a decade of commemorations: the sesquicentennial of the 1864 Charlottetown Conference, which ultimately led to Canadian Confederation, will soon be followed, in turn, by the 150th anniversaries of Confederation itself (1867) and of Prince Edward Island's belated joining of the same (1873). Moreover, 2015 marked the 250th anniversary of the completion of British cartographer Samuel Holland's survey of Prince Edward Island, an epochal event in Island history and a landmark achievement in British imperial mapmaking.¹

The year 2014 also proved momentous for Wales. In March, the Welsh government positioned itself firmly at the forefront of any discussion of cultural identity and memory, and their place in socio-economic regeneration, with the release of a remarkable report from Baroness Kay Andrews, entitled *Culture and Poverty: Harnessing the Power of the Arts, Culture and Heritage to Promote Social Justice in Wales*. Andrews' report offers sweeping recommendations for arts, culture and heritage bodies – including memory institutions – to improve cooperation and engagement with the educational and voluntary sectors and the community at large, '[to] help to raise achievement, reduce poverty and foster pride in community'.² In May 2015 the Welsh government unveiled the first phase of its action plan to implement the report's recommendations, under the title, 'Fusion: Tackling Poverty Through Culture', an initiative in which libraries, archives and museums will play a lead role.³ These promises, of course, come hard on the heels of heightened expectations for expanded powers for the Welsh government, in the aftermath of the referendum on Scottish independence, with Wales's First Minister, Carwyn Jones, envisioning nothing less than 'a new constitutional future for the UK'.⁴

Just as Wales and the UK are contemplating questions of culture, heritage and identity, so, too, are PEI and Canada (albeit without the high drama of narrowly averted Scottish separation). At a 2014 Island

meeting of the federal and provincial/territorial ministers responsible for culture and heritage, PEI Tourism and Culture Minister Robertson Henderson spoke of ‘our investment in culturally significant events like the 150th anniversary of the Charlottetown Conference and Canada’s 150th anniversary in 2017. It strikingly illustrates the importance of the social impact of arts, culture and heritage that “helps shape our identity”.’⁵

But what should this government investment look like? How should it be managed? As this essay will show, the Welsh experience could prove especially instructive to PEI in embracing the challenges and opportunities raised by these questions. Essential context, however, is provided by recent history.

The PEI government and memory institutions: twenty-first-century challenges

Prince Edward Island’s 2014 anniversary celebrations attracted C\$29 million of state funding, including C\$18.5 million from the government of PEI,⁶ and so the preparations for upcoming anniversaries should, in turn, invite considerations of the role of memory institutions and government involvement with them. There have certainly been benefits. Prince Edward Island has a vibrant and dedicated culture and heritage community, and extra government investment and promotion in 2014 has given Island memory institutions the opportunity to undertake an array of innovative projects, including the PEI Public Library’s ‘14 Books, One Island’ campaign, celebrating Island authors,⁷ and the PEI Public Archives’ creation of an 1864 commemorative almanac.⁸

Unfortunately, however, and notwithstanding the current celebratory climate and the sustained high quality of professional service on offer at Island memory institutions, PEI government policy in this area is clouded by uncertainty and disappointment. Going forward, the provincial government will have successes and strengths on which to build, but it will also have to contend with the lingering effects of some significant errors and omissions. Two issues, in particular, continue to cast shadows over any discussion of the PEI government and memory institutions:

- In 2006, the incumbent Progressive Conservative government announced plans to move ‘the Artifactory’, the PEI Museum and Heritage Foundation’s ageing artefact storage facility,

from Charlottetown to Murray River, a small, relatively remote community in the then-Premier's home riding. The planned move was widely decried as politically motivated, and fanned long-standing discontent about the lack of a central museum facility on PEI into a fully-fledged controversy on the eve of the 2007 provincial election.⁹ Following the Conservative defeat in that election, the new Liberal government quickly acted on its campaign promises to halt the planned Artifactory move and to proceed with plans for a new provincial museum, in the context of a broader Island heritage strategy.¹⁰

- Another issue relating to funding of memory institutions that has become particularly controversial over the past decade is the unfortunate legacy of Charlottetown's Founders' Hall. Opened in June 2001 in a handsomely refurbished former railway building on the city waterfront, the facility cost C\$6–C\$8 million (estimates vary), with most of the money coming from the federal and provincial governments. Offering a range of multimedia displays and exhibits celebrating the Charlottetown Conference of 1864, the 21,000-square-foot facility was meant to be a major tourist draw and money-making enterprise, with an average of 75,000 annual visits projected. In the event, Founders' Hall never drew more than a fraction of expected visitation, and operated at a heavy financial loss for years, earning it the derisive nickname 'Flounders Hall'.¹¹

While the root causes of the unfortunate outcomes in these two cases are varied and complex, one could point to the government's inadequate planning and consultation with the Island culture and heritage community as being at least partly responsible. Though both projects had their supporters, they received far more criticism than praise from constituencies that would normally have been expected to offer strong support for major capital investment in memory institutions.

In the case of the planned Artifactory move, such criticism was widespread and vocal as soon as word of the impending move became public; so great was the hue and cry over the lack of public discussion and planning that a research agency affiliated with the University of Prince Edward Island, the Institute of Island Studies, felt compelled to organize public consultations independently of the provincial government.¹² Despite being organized in haste, and in the dead of winter, the consultations drew more than 100 attendees, and received dozens of written submissions. One of these, from the PEI

Scottish Settlers Historical Society, included this apt summary of the prevailing mood:

It is extremely unfortunate that these plans have been developed without consultation with the very people who will be effected [sic] by them – those dedicated Islanders who devote a considerable amount of volunteer or professional time and energy to improve the public knowledge and understanding of Prince Edward Island’s history ... [W]e sincerely hope the provincial government will reconsider their current plans and heed the advice of many who have said this is the time to conduct a long-overdue review of the policies and objectives regarding our responsibilities to our ancestors.¹³

As for Founders’ Hall, concerns had been expressed publicly as soon as funding for the project was announced in 1999. *The Guardian* (Charlottetown) newspaper reported in September of that year: ‘Cultural groups in the province say the proposal excludes Islanders and will drain provincial coffers of millions of dollars long after it’s built’.¹⁴

Not surprisingly, these criticisms have been echoed repeatedly in the years since, as the plight of Founders’ Hall became steadily more apparent. A 2007 scholarly discussion of the Hall’s mandate to ‘make history fun’, which provides the most erudite and even-handed assessment available on the whole venture, concluded it was reasonably entertaining and informative, but noted major concerns at the limited role granted to the consultants from the heritage sector:

A group which included local heritage professionals as well as nationally and internationally recognised Canadian history scholars. This body played an important role in establishing a broad outline for the narrative and designing the basic chronological template for the Confederation story. However, their influence waned once the designers began the task of creating the installations and shooting footage ... We find it significant that the discursive input of professionals and academics was made secondary to the creative role of media professionals, who had the ultimate power to shape messages.¹⁵

The display/exhibit part of the hall closed early in 2012, and it was even suggested that these spaces would be entirely given over to other uses

by the end of 2014.¹⁶ At time of writing, this has not come to pass, but the future seems uncertain, at best.

These incidents left a difficult legacy for succeeding provincial governments. To its credit, the Liberal administration of Premier Robert Ghiz made a strong start on confronting this challenge upon winning the election in 2007, cancelling the Artifactory move almost immediately and commissioning a comprehensive public review of PEI heritage and memory institutions the following year. That review, the first exercise of its type undertaken on PEI, also identified the government's poor planning and inadequate consultations, along with chronic underfunding, as widespread and longstanding problems for Island museums and associated memory institutions, contributing to a 'sense of urgency at what is at stake – what is being identified and what is being lost'.¹⁷ Topping the prioritized list of the reviewers' recommendations was: 'Develop a heritage strategy to guide government action.'¹⁸ The other major recommendation was for work to begin on a central provincial museum facility (which the reviewers suggested could also serve as an expanded home for the Provincial Archives), with a view to having it ready for occupation in approximately five years.¹⁹ The provincial government publicly welcomed the reviewers' recommendations upon their release in November 2008 and did take some action, including modest funding increases to the Prince Edward Island Museum and Heritage Foundation, and urgently needed repairs at the existing Artifactory. A consultant was also hired to begin detailed consultations and planning for a new museum/archives facility.²⁰ However, neither a museum nor a heritage strategy has yet materialized. Government officials have commented that the estimated price tag of C\$50 million for a central museum was 'somewhat larger than the community had anticipated',²¹ but the ongoing lack of a heritage strategy has never been publicly addressed.

Why Wales?

While the pressing need for creative and strategic thinking by the PEI government on the province's memory institutions is clear, we might still ask why Wales is a useful place for Island legislators and policy-makers to look towards. To put it in the simplest possible terms: while PEI is – even in the midst of what should be a time of excitement and celebration for its memory institutions – beset by uncertainty and disappointment (at least as far as provincial government policy

is concerned), one searches in vain for signs of similar high-profile controversies and missteps in the Welsh government's relationships with memory institutions and their supporters. Indeed, the available indicators on Welsh museums, archives and libraries are remarkably positive. Representative examples include the following:

- Even as funding to the local authorities responsible for Wales's public libraries has been cut, CILIP, the leading professional advocacy body for UK librarians, recently praised the Welsh government's commitment to public libraries,²² while an independent mid-term evaluation of the government's *Libraries Inspire* support programme found that visits to libraries had increased in 2012–13 and that most users had noticed improvements in their library service.²³
- In spite of a difficult restructuring and layoffs at National Museum Wales, 2013 visits to the national museum system were at an all-time high, and the latest *Wales Visitor Survey* found that nearly a quarter of all visitors to Wales planned to visit a museum (making it the third most popular activity), with 80 per cent of those who had done so saying [they] would recommend it to others.²⁴
- Recent data for archives and records offices was more difficult to locate, but the latest Archives and Records Association's 'Survey of Visitors to UK Archives' shows user satisfaction with archival service in Wales trending steadily upwards, with 78 per cent rating it 'very good', the best results in the UK.²⁵
- Perhaps the most striking indicator of the value accorded memory institutions in Wales, of course, is Andrews' 2014 report and the ensuing *Fusion* programme, already noted. The report's comments on the achievement, and potential, of Welsh memory institutions were laudatory: 'Libraries, archives and museums are probably the most visible of the local cultural "anchors" – and many are already pushing at the boundaries of what can be done both to welcome and cherish visitors, and to take their precious collections out into community settings.'²⁶

It would, of course, be no more reasonable to suggest that all is well in Welsh memory institutions than it would be to say that the circumstances of their PEI counterparts are entirely negative. Strengths and weaknesses exist in both jurisdictions. However, Wales has valuable public policy lessons to offer from its work with memory institutions in recent years. Furthermore, Wales enjoys no great 'head start' or

unfair funding advantage over PEI in the development and support of its public memory institutions. What could be called the ‘Welsh Advantage’ in this area is rooted not in experience or money, but rather in planning.

The development of public memory institutions in PEI and Wales

While the idea of Welsh nationhood pre-dates the existence of the province of PEI by many centuries, the key memory institutions in Wales are not so very much older than analogous provincial agencies in Prince Edward Island.

- The groundwork for a free, universal public library service in Wales, as elsewhere in Britain, was laid with the *Public Libraries Act* of 1919;²⁷ in Prince Edward Island, the provincial government assumed responsibility in 1936 for the province-wide regional system of public libraries established three years prior as a ‘demonstration project’ by the Carnegie Corporation of New York.²⁸
- The National Library of Wales was established by Royal Charter in 1907.²⁹ As a province, not a nation, PEI has never had a ‘national library’, but the Library of the Legislative Assembly was, by the dawn of the twentieth century, making some effort to act as a central reference and research service for Prince Edward Island.³⁰ The Legislative Library faded out of existence during the latter part of that century, however, and a somewhat ad hoc mix of services has developed over the past 40 years to fulfill the need for something like a provincial library of record: the University of Prince Edward Island Library has been building a PEI Collection since the early 1970s, with the aim of acquiring all published material relating to the Island; the main branch of the PEI Public Library Service has also developed a large PEI Collection, though its acquisitions mandate is not as exhaustive as that of the UPEI Library.³¹ More recently, the PEI Legislative Library has been revived, though it currently functions mainly as a research office for provincial Assembly members and their staff.³²
- Wales still lacks a National Records Office.³³ The National Library has a long-standing practice of acquiring manuscript collections relating to Wales, and the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales – established in 1908 – maintains

a large archive, the National Monuments Record of Wales, while National Museum Wales also has significant archival collections.³⁴ For now, however, the UK National Archives at Kew remains the official public record office for the Welsh government and Assembly. Prince Edward Island established a provincial Public Archives and Records Office in 1964,³⁵ which serves as the official repository for provincial government records and also acquires other records of provincial significance from such sources as private citizens, business firms and community groups.³⁶

- National Museum Wales (formerly the National Museums and Galleries Wales), which originated with a 1907 Royal Charter, boasts the greatest head start over any comparable institution in Prince Edward Island.³⁷ On PEI, the provincial government offered no support of any kind to museums until the early 1970s, when it began offering grants to a newly established private trust, the Prince Edward Island Heritage Foundation.³⁸ The Foundation operated essentially as an independent contractor to run several museum sites on the Island for a number of years, although it became much more closely affiliated with government in the 1980s, as its operations expanded. The 'PEI Museum and Heritage Foundation', as it is now known, operates seven provincial museum sites on the Island, along with the central artefact storage facility.³⁹

Both PEI and Wales have active networks of smaller memory institutions, primarily local museums and archives (or museum/archive hybrids). Valuable as these entities are, however, the involvement of governments above the local authority level in both Wales and PEI has been very limited, and so they are largely excluded from the scope of this essay. Also not considered here are archaeological and historic sites and monuments, as there is such a vast gap between the age and extent of built heritage and archaeological sites in Wales and PEI that any meaningful comparison would be difficult. European settlement in numbers on PEI dates back less than three centuries, and the far older Mi'kmaw civilization traditionally drew most of its strength from living lightly on the land, leaving practically no built heritage and only a modest archaeological record.⁴⁰ The main focus here, then, is on those memory institutions through which the governments of Prince Edward Island and Wales have exercised the greatest responsibility and influence in their respective jurisdictions.

The place of memory institutions in the governments of PEI and Wales

With the post-devolution changes in Welsh governance, the governments of PEI and Wales are now quite similar in overall structure. The leader of the political party holding the most seats in the elected assembly becomes the head of government – as First Minister in Wales, and Premier in PEI – and selects a cabinet of ministers from the ranks of other elected assembly members to be appointed by the Crown as ministers and to oversee executive functions.⁴¹ Any functional area of cabinet responsibility that is assigned its own ministry (or ‘line department’, in the common Canadian parlance) may, therefore, be taken to have particular importance.

Prince Edward Island

Although Canadian federalism is predicated on an explicit division of powers between the federal and provincial governments, matters pertaining to culture, the arts and heritage were not foreseen as state responsibilities in the era of Confederation and have never been included in these arrangements. As a result, a hybrid network of federal, provincial and municipal programmes and institutions in this sector has developed over the years. Broadly speaking, however, provincial governments have been left to develop provincial memory institutions – and programmes supporting the same – largely as each one sees fit.⁴²

As noted above, the PEI government’s first significant involvement with memory institutions began when it assumed responsibility for public libraries in 1936. The government’s work with memory institutions expanded during the mid-1960s, when the Provincial Archives was established, and yet again with financial support for the PEI Heritage Foundation in the 1970s. Culture and heritage matters did not appear in any cabinet minister’s portfolio, however, until 1974, when the newly appointed Finance Minister was also assigned responsibility for ‘Cultural Affairs’.⁴³ Though the sums allocated were modest, Cultural Affairs then began appearing recurrently in provincial budgets, with the portfolio usually assigned to either the Finance Minister or the Premier, until a Department of Community and Cultural Affairs, with its own minister, was created in 1982.⁴⁴

The creation of this department foreshadowed a further expansion of the provincial government’s memory institution role, with the

designation of the PEI Museum and Heritage as a provincial Crown corporation (and the inclusion of its personnel in the PEI civil service) under the *Museum Act* of 1983. Because the Foundation had operated for over a decade as an independent, not-for-profit trust, with the provincial government's role largely confined to the offering of a modest annual operating grant, the move to bring the organization more fully under the government's umbrella was a significant departure. Though nominally independent still, the PEI Museum and Heritage Foundation effectively operated thenceforth as a unit of the Department of Community and Cultural Affairs.⁴⁵

The Provincial Archives, meanwhile, had spent its first years with no departmental home at all, before being taken up by a short-lived Department of the Provincial Secretary in the mid- to late 1970s. With the demise of that department, the Archives transferred to the Department of Education in 1980.⁴⁶ In 1988, the Archives transferred again, to the Department of Community and Cultural Affairs, 'further consolidating Government's operational mandate in the historical resources field'. In 1990, the Provincial Library Service, which had been under the Department of Education ever since the 1930s, was also moved into the Department of Community and Cultural Affairs, so as to bring it, 'within a department whose focus on cultural activities and community development are very complementary with those of the library'.⁴⁷ Thus, by the beginning of the 1990s, the province's key memory institution responsibilities were, for the first time, concentrated within one department. Another positive administrative development came in 1992-3, when a Culture and Heritage Division within the department was established.⁴⁸

The unification of the PEI government's memory institution functions in a single department has endured for more than 20 years, though the responsible department has continued to change. The Department of Community and Cultural Affairs was reorganized in 1993 and the Culture and Heritage Division, along with the Provincial Library Service, was transferred to the Department of Education and Human Resources.⁴⁹ In 2000, the Culture, Heritage, Recreation and Sport Division of the Department of Education was transferred back into a revived Department of Community and Cultural Affairs, along with responsibility for the Provincial Library Service and the Archives.⁵⁰ In 2003, this unit was reorganized as the Division of Culture, Heritage and Libraries, with the sporting and recreation responsibilities hived off to another division.⁵¹ This administrative integration was retained with the division's 2010 move to the Department of Tourism, which became

the Department of Tourism and Culture.⁵² Shortly thereafter, however, the incumbent Director of Culture, Heritage and Libraries retired, and his replacement was given responsibility only for the provincial library system and the Provincial Archives, effectively ending any notion of a 'heritage' portfolio within the provincial government. Early in 2015, responsibility for the library system and the Provincial Archives shifted once again, to a newly reorganized Department of Education, Early Learning and Culture.

This interminable shuffling of museum, archive and library responsibilities within the PEI government is an unfortunate indicator of the lack of a clear government plan for these institutions and for heritage more broadly. Indeed, the PEI government has never developed a provincial strategy in this area, though it has commissioned many reports – especially in the museums field – over the past 40 years.⁵³ A 2002 'Cultural Policy for Prince Edward Island' usefully articulated general principles on a range of culture, arts and heritage matters, but offered no specific planning or budgetary prescriptions.⁵⁴ As noted above, a Liberal government came to power hard on the heels of the 2006–07 Artifactory controversy, promising both a central PEI museum and a broader provincial heritage strategy. It commissioned a comprehensive public review of PEI heritage policy in 2008,⁵⁵ and *Charting a Course: The Study of Heritage on PEI*, was duly presented in September of that year,⁵⁶ but there has been little concerted action to date to address the report's most urgent recommendations.

Wales

By contrast the Welsh government has identified culture and heritage as one of 12 priority areas in its *Programme for Government*,⁵⁷ and the *Fusion* initiative has recently added further urgency. Looking at the years since 1999, the speed with which the devolved government in Wales has grasped the opportunity to support and coordinate cultural, arts and heritage enterprises in general, and memory institutions in particular, is striking, especially when contrasted with the slow, piecemeal incrementalism seen in PEI.

The Welsh government has enjoyed a particular asset from the start in this regard, since the original instrument of devolution, the 1998 *Government of Wales Act*, gave the Assembly broader powers in the field of culture and heritage than in any other area. Section 32 of the Act empowered the Assembly to: 'do anything it considers appropriate to support – a) museums, art galleries or libraries in Wales; b) buildings

of historical or architectural interest, or other places of historical interest, in Wales'.⁵⁸ In 2002, the incumbent Minister for Culture, Welsh Language and Sport remarked to the Richard Commission on devolution that his portfolio was: 'probably the best job in the Cabinet ... You are not confined in any way by the constitutional settlement, whereas you would be in other portfolios, and you can make a real difference, as is happening, I think, in terms of culture in Wales.'⁵⁹

Less than a year into its first mandate, the National Assembly for Wales (as it was then known) launched a 10-year action plan, *A Better Wales*, recognizing the Welsh language and 'a rich and diverse cultural inheritance' as key national strengths, and pledging support to the National Library and the National Museums and Galleries of Wales.⁶⁰ Later that year, the Assembly's Post-16 Education and Training Committee outlined a bold vision for culture, heritage and the arts in Wales in its report, *A Culture in Common*, which included a declaration from the Chair, Cynog Dafis, that 'culture ... is at the heart of our national enterprise'.⁶¹

By the time *A Culture in Common* was released, the government had already created a new cabinet position for a Minister of Culture, Sport and the Welsh Language. This ministry, in turn, oversaw the development of *Cymru Greadigol – Creative Future: A Culture Strategy for Wales*, released early in 2002. While this report did not include any overarching strategy for memory institutions, it did offer some direction and support for museums, archives and libraries to cooperate with schools-based initiatives and encourage cultural tourism. It also projected increased funding throughout 2003 for a range of cultural organizations and agencies, including the National Museums and Galleries of Wales, the National Library of Wales and the Council of Museums Wales.⁶²

While the two national memory institutions, the National Library of Wales and the National Museums and Galleries of Wales, had both been operating semi-autonomously under Royal Charter for some 80 years prior to devolution, the UK government, via the Welsh Office, was providing roughly 80–90 per cent of their funding by the late 1990s, and had developed strong working 'arm's-length' relationships with both institutions. A post-devolution review in 2002 found that these funding and reporting arrangements had transferred from the Welsh Office to the Welsh Assembly without serious difficulty or disruption.⁶³ The National Museums and Galleries for Wales, meanwhile, simply shifted from reporting on performance indicators agreed to with the Secretary of State for Wales in 1998/1999 to those arranged with the National

Assembly in 1999/2000.⁶⁴ Furthermore, the Minister for Culture, Welsh Language and Sport soon began issuing annual 'remit letters' to a range of Assembly Sponsored Public Bodies (ASPBs), including the National Library and the National Museums and Galleries, outlining the Welsh Assembly government's expectations of these institutions.⁶⁵

Perhaps the single most significant development as far as the relationship between the Welsh Assembly government and memory institutions was concerned, however, was the creation of CyMAL: Museums Archives and Libraries Wales in April 2004. CyMAL was a new division of the government, with a staff of some 25–30, reporting to the Minister for Culture, Welsh Language and Sport, and tasked with 'an ambitious agenda to work with the sector to help develop local museums, archives and libraries and to build on their contribution to Welsh culture and heritage'.⁶⁶

CyMAL represented an imaginative approach to the challenge faced by the Welsh Assembly government, arising from the fact that museums, archives and libraries were clearly critical to any culture and heritage strategy, but were not directly under its control. For the national memory institutions, close ties with CyMAL were ensured by including representation from the National Library and the National Museums and Galleries on the CyMAL Advisory Council, and the formal delegation of Assembly government funding 'sponsorship' arrangements for both agencies to CyMAL in 2007.⁶⁷

Most libraries, archives and museums in Wales, however, are not, and never have been, 'national' in any sense of the word. There were, for example, more than 350 public libraries in Wales at the time of devolution, controlled by 22 local authorities, but this did not deter the Assembly government from asserting its influence. In September 2001, the government promulgated its first set of *Welsh Public Library Standards*, to cover the years 2002–05, asserting that: 'The *Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1964* makes it the duty of the Minister for Culture, Sport and the Welsh Language within the National Assembly for Wales "to superintend and promote the improvement of the public library service provided by local authorities"'.⁶⁸ Considering that the Minister's office was less than a year old when these words were written, and the Act in question had not originally contemplated the existence of a Welsh Assembly, this arguably represented a certain sleight of hand. Nevertheless, the Welsh Assembly government confidently identified public libraries, local jurisdiction notwithstanding, as part of the Assembly's national vision: 'Public libraries can contribute substantially to the achievement of many of the policies of the National Assembly for Wales.'⁶⁹

In addition to the *Public Library Standards* – which are now in their fourth iteration, covering the years 2011–14⁷⁰ - as well as the remit letters to the national memory institutions, and the broader cultural strategies already discussed, the Welsh Assembly government has embarked on sector-specific planning and development for libraries, archives and museums in Wales, especially since the establishment of CyMAL in 2004. Welsh public libraries, for example, have benefited from three multi-year funding and planning programmes, covering the years 2005–07, 2008–11 and 2012–16.⁷¹ Museums have also been drawn into closer ties with CyMAL and with each other. In addition to the funding and reporting arrangements with National Museums and Galleries Wales (which became National Museum Wales in 2005) already discussed, CyMAL also established itself as the administrator, in Wales, of the *Accreditation Standard for Museums* maintained by the United Kingdom’s Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, a move analogous to the agency’s involvement with the Public Library Standards. In 2010, CyMAL released *A Museum Strategy for Wales*, intended to guide the development of Welsh museums through to 2015.⁷²

The Welsh government’s public libraries policy, its boldest and longest-running intervention in memory institutions to date, was found to have strong support during a recent inquiry on Welsh libraries by the all-party committee of the Welsh National Assembly on Communities, Equality and Local Government. The committee recorded unanimous praise from a host of organisations – including the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), CILIP and the Carnegie UK Trust – for the work of CyMAL in general and for the Public Library Standards in particular. On the Standards, WLGA declared: ‘... it has been recognised by all partners that the previous frameworks were extremely effective ... in ensuring a more consistent and better quality of public library service across Wales and raising the standards of libraries’.⁷³ As for CyMAL, generally, the WLGA and the Carnegie Trust, among others, testified that it had played a critical role in placing Welsh libraries in a better position than those elsewhere in the UK, even in the face of ongoing austerity, since the agency was able to ‘make connections between libraries and other service providers, and encourage regional or national responses to issues which are most cost effective when dealt with at those levels’.⁷⁴

The Welsh government seems to have been slightly less assertive with archives and records offices – possibly due to the lack of a central Public Records Office for Wales and to the limitations of the relatively small and new (post-1994) network of local authority archives⁷⁵ – but

it has certainly not been idle in this area. CyMAL played an active role in developing a Welsh edition of the *21st Century Archives* strategy, spearheaded by the UK National Archives, and is now overseeing the Welsh implementation plans arising from this document. CyMAL is also involved with the Archives and Records Council of Wales and has funded important Council initiatives, notably a comprehensive 2008 study of uncatalogued backlogs in Welsh archives.⁷⁶

For the present, however, the Welsh government in general and CyMAL in particular have evidently reconciled themselves to the UK National Archives' lead role in Welsh public archives and records, though the National Archives' new UK-wide Archives Services Accreditation Scheme will be administered in Wales by CyMAL.

In the years since the creation of CyMAL, the agency and its partners have doubtless benefitted from the Welsh government's continuing policymaking enthusiasm in the culture and heritage arena. The 2007 agreement establishing the Welsh Labour and Plaid Cymru coalition, *One Wales: A Progressive Agenda for the Government of Wales*, included the protection and promotion of 'a rich and diverse culture' as one of its key elements.⁷⁷ As part of the *One Wales* agenda, the Welsh government sought, and obtained, increased powers from the UK government over cultural matters in a Legislative Competence Order on 'Culture and Other Matters', granted in 2010. This Order gave the Welsh government powers to, 'plac[e] a statutory obligation on local authorities to promote culture and encourage partnership to deliver high quality cultural experiences for their communities'. The aim was to support and encourage local authorities in providing a uniformly high level of access to cultural and recreational opportunities throughout Wales.⁷⁸

Although the Welsh government has not yet made significant use of its legislative powers in this field – aside from a planned Heritage Bill, focusing on historic properties, marine areas and landscapes⁷⁹ – it has managed to accomplish a great deal without resort to legislation, and the 2011 *Programme for Government* has, as already noted, plenty to say on culture and heritage matters generally. Among the items most pertinent to memory institutions are continuance of the popular free entry at National Museum sites, the encouragement of cooperation between the 'Heritage Department' and other Welsh government agencies on projects such as the Book Prescription programme, and ongoing grant funding 'to develop regional and national collaboration in the museums, archives and library sector in Wales'.⁸⁰ Most recently, of course, has come the announcement of the *Fusion: Tackling Poverty Through Culture* initiative.⁸¹

Comparing government investment in Welsh and PEI memory institutions

Financial issues are inseparable from government actions regarding memory institutions, as in every other area. Differences in the public accounting and reporting regimes of the two governments make direct comparisons challenging, but it is possible to get some sense of the public funds allocated by each jurisdiction to culture, arts and heritage in general, and to memory institutions in particular.

- For the 2014–15 fiscal year, the PEI government budgeted total programme expenditures at just over C\$1.46 billion. Of that, the Department of Tourism and Culture was allocated C\$17,877,700, roughly 1.2% per cent of the total budget and about C\$121 in per-capita terms. It can be assumed most of this money was actually directed to culture, arts and heritage, broadly defined – including the Provincial Library Service, the PEI Museum and Heritage Foundation and the Provincial Archives, as well as a programme of arts and culture grants – since tourism functions receive a separate budgetary allocation.⁸²
- The Welsh government budgeted for spending of £15.3 billion for the same fiscal year. If this amount, just a little over £125 million – about 0.8% of total Government expenditures, translating into per-capita spending of just over £40 (about C\$70, at the current exchange rate) – was earmarked for culture, arts and heritage, broadly defined, including Museums, Archives and Libraries, the Welsh Language, the Historic Environment and support to the Welsh Arts Council and media and publishing in general.⁸³

All governments in the UK have faced recent fiscal difficulties, in that the impact and aftershocks of the 2008–09 financial crisis have been much more severe than in Canada. This has forced a steady retrenchment in Welsh public finances in recent years.⁸⁴ Clearly, then, the Welsh government is not, proportionally, outspending the government of PEI in this area, nor is there any prospect of it doing so in the near future.

Nevertheless, Prince Edward Island has significant fiscal challenges of its own, with perennially high levels of unemployment and a persistent public debt. Politically unsympathetic central governments have further deepened the financial woes of both Wales and PEI in recent years, with right-leaning administrations in Ottawa and Westminster making

significant and ongoing cuts in the amount of money available to other levels of government.⁸⁵

Looming over all, meanwhile, in Wales, PEI and many other places besides, are spiralling health-care costs, which already account for about one-third of total spending by the Welsh government and the government of Prince Edward Island.⁸⁶

The Way Forward?

The fear that government support for culture, arts and heritage generally, and for memory institutions in particular, might be swept aside or trampled in a rush to meet daunting fiscal challenges is not unreasonable. And yet, the very smallness of memory institutions in the overall picture of government finance and operations may ultimately be their salvation. Both the Welsh government and the government of Prince Edward Island ultimately owe their very existence to the cultural health and integrity of the places they seek to govern. The Second Assembly Welsh government put it neatly in *One Wales*:

In a globalising economy, those places which will prosper in the future will be those which offer the clearest sense of stability, sustainability and identity . . . In a world where people and organisations can go anywhere, the *somewhere* has to be not just another anonymous spot on the world's surface but a place which offers a sense of identity which is confident and out-going . . .⁸⁷

Viewed in this context, the wisdom of emphasizing strategic planning and investment, especially apparent in the Welsh government's work with museums, archives and libraries, becomes clear. One or two per cent of total government expenditure looks like a very small price to pay to help safeguard the repositories of cultural heritage. Furthermore, while huge sectors such as health and education can absorb significant public funding increases without producing 'good news' improvements, even small investments in a library, archive or museum can produce demonstrable benefits out of all proportion to the amount spent. Indeed, the Welsh example even offers the tantalizing possibility that it might be possible, with careful consultation and long-term planning, to do more with less. Reminding our governments, and the electorates they serve, of these facts will be the great task of the twenty-first century for all who care about memory institutions in PEI.

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* **Simon Lloyd** received his Master of Library and Information Science (MLIS) degree from Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, in 1997. After several years working at various Halifax-area archival institutions, including the Shambhala Buddhist Archives, Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management, and the Council of Nova Scotia Archives, he moved to Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, in 1999. He is currently University Archivist and Special Collections Librarian at the University of Prince Edward Island’s Robertson Library.