

16 April 2024		THE
Dr Jeff James		NATIONAL
nationalarchives.gov.uk		ARCHIVES

Rt Hon Mark Drakeford MS  
Welsh Parliament  
Cardiff Bay  
Cardiff  
CF99 1SN

Dear Mr Drakeford,

Thank you for your letter of 15 March 2024 concerning the preservation of public records and accessibility to our collection.

I agree with you that it is of the utmost importance that records of historical interest are sufficiently deposited with the archive. In this instance, the responsibility for selecting records<sup>1</sup> to be transferred to The National Archives for permanent preservation lies with the devolved administration as established in the Public Records Act 1958. I am pleased to advise that my officials work very well with the Welsh Government’s knowledge and information management team to ensure we secure the Welsh public record for future generations.

With that said, I know we can all do more to guarantee that the historical record is fully reflective of the breadth and depth of powers exercised in Wales. We are especially keen to receive contemporary digital records and have introduced a Transfer Digital Records service that makes it easy to pass digital records to the archive. We would therefore encourage the Welsh Government to take full advantage of this new service, ideally with a view to moving to regular and routine transfers of digital records to The National Archives.

With regards to the accessibility of our collections, we are working hard to make it easier for people to research what we hold. Indeed, we know from user research that the experience of researching an archive can be challenging and confusing. While we appreciate that people increasingly want and expect fully digitised content, we do not have the resources to achieve this. This leaves users having to engage with our catalogue, and the catalogues of other archives; yet we understand that this is a very different type of offer from other types of web-based resources that people may be more familiar with, such as those of commercial genealogy companies.

Our catalogue is an amazing, if elaborate, information environment, but traversing it is not like exploring a regular website. Searching it can pose a particular challenge, as the approach people use may not correspond with how the records have been described in the catalogue. This is due to how the records themselves were organised and then provided to us by government departments, and indeed devolved administrations.

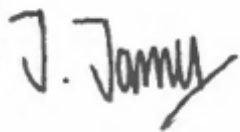
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<sup>1</sup> That relate to Welsh Government functions.

It is for this reason that we are continuously working to improve the catalogue. Last year alone, we made 850,000 enhancements or additions and many of those improvements relate to the description of records. Furthermore, we are in the process of developing a new website, as well as researching new ways of connecting and linking content in the catalogue. Our aim is to connect users with relevant and useful content from the archive, wherever we can. This involves providing meaningful data that search engines favour, then building user's confidence and skills, encouraging exploration. There is a lot still to do, but we hope that people continue to research the archive despite the challenges and are able to benefit from the progress that is being made.

Thank you again for taking the time to write to me. Please do not hesitate to get in touch again should you have any further queries.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "J. James". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'J' and a long, sweeping underline.

Dr Jeff James

Chief Executive & Keeper