

ARCW Marketing Report & Strategy (2026): Summary for Member Services

1. Context, Purpose and Intentions

Wales has 23 archive services holding collections of extraordinary depth, breadth and human significance. They are staffed by expert, passionate people. Almost everyone who encounters them finds them genuinely surprising. The challenge is that very few people know that they are there. **The sector is loved by those who use it and almost entirely unknown to those who do not.**

As part of the Welsh Government-funded Archives Wales Alive / Archifau Cymru Byw project, [Gwent Archives](#) and [ARCW](#) commissioned [Monument Marketing](#) to develop a **national marketing strategy** to support greater visibility, relevance and engagement across the archive sector. The report and strategy are informed through research with users of archive services, lapsed users, online audiences and non-users in Wales and beyond.

The purpose of the strategy is not simply to 'promote' archives, but to:

- **Lower the threshold for engagement**, particularly for first-time and under-represented users
- **Build a shared, national story about Welsh archives**, while respecting local identities
- **Create confidence**, clarity and inviting pathways into archive services
- **Enable sustainable growth**, without relying solely on individual staff 'champions'
- **Support member services** with practical, scalable tools and shared resources

The report acknowledges that structural barriers, including geography, transport, limited opening hours, digital inequality, funding constraints and staff capacity, shape who can engage with archive services. The proposed strategy positions marketing as a **collective, long-term activity** that sits alongside – not instead of – advocacy for better funding, staffing and infrastructure.

2. Key Findings

1. **The archive sector is loved by people who use it – and almost unknown to those who do not.** Positive associations such as discovery,

history and preservation are strong, but awareness is limited beyond existing audiences.

2. **Confidence is the single biggest barrier to engagement.** Many people – including experienced archive users – feel unsure about visiting unfamiliar archive services.
 3. **People often do not know what to ask for or where to begin.** A lack of clarity about what archives hold and how to start research prevents engagement.
 4. **Handling original material is the sector’s greatest strength.** The tactile, physical experience of archives is deeply valued but under-represented in current messaging.
 5. **Staff expertise is crucial to creating positive experiences.** Skilled, welcoming staff provide reassurance and build user confidence, but this reliance creates fragility where capacity is limited.
 6. **Creative industries and community organisations want access but face structural exclusion.** There is a strong appetite and enthusiasm for collaboration, but archives are often perceived as academic or inaccessible.
 7. **Online engagement is growing but can create misconceptions.** Online content is essential, especially for diaspora and disabled users, but may lead to assumptions that ‘everything is already online’.
 8. **Effective messaging makes clear archives are for everyone.** Perceptions persist that archives are for ‘other people’. The antidote is language that is personal, welcoming, discovery-led and inclusive.
 9. **Social media is the primary discovery channel – but is under-used strategically.** Archives often speak to each other rather than to new audiences, and content can be overly institutional.
 10. **Structural inequalities limit what marketing alone can achieve.** Geography, opening hours, transport, diversity and funding shape access and must be acknowledged alongside promotional activity.
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3. Target Groups

The report identified 5 key groups to target as part of the marketing strategy:



Regular or lapsed users motivated by discovery, depth of knowledge community, and access to original documents. Barriers include limited opening hours, travel, health or mobility issues, and anxiety when staff or systems change. Best reached via word of mouth, Facebook, talks, exhibitions, genealogical and local history networks.

Online and diaspora users motivated by Welsh identity and family heritage, primarily engaging digitally. Barriers include distance, digital access issues, limited understanding of what is available beyond online records. Best reached via social media, email newsletters, digitised collections, virtual events.



People with general cultural or historical interests but no archive experience; motivated by local stories, talks and exhibitions. Barriers include feeling intimidated, uncertain and a fear of 'not knowing enough'. Best reached via clear invitations and welcoming language delivered via accessible social media content and at introductory events.

Artists, designers, writers, filmmakers, community groups and creative businesses seeking inspiration from authentic material and distinctive local stories. Barriers include a lack of clear entry points, uncertainty about how to engage and academic framing. Best reached via creative networks, partnerships, open calls, personal introductions and facilitated access.



Younger, diverse audiences drawn to tactile, hands-on, social and emotionally resonant cultural experiences. Barriers to entry include low awareness, institutional tone and a perception that archives are 'not for them'. Best reached via Instagram, TikTok, experiential programming, pop-ups and collaborations with influencers and venues.

4. Recommendations

To reach the above target groups and appeal to non-users more broadly, the report recommended 4 pillars for a National Marketing Strategy:

Pillar 1: Lower the Threshold for Engagement

- Provide **clear pathways to entry** and **consistency of language** to breed familiarity and confidence
- ARCW to work with member services to develop a shared **website standard**, friendly 1-2-3 'how to use an archive' guides and welcome videos for use across the sector
- Longer term, develop **creative engagement methods**, including an archive research app and archives escape rooms.

Pillar 2: Build a Strong, Shared National Brand

- **National visibility, consistent language** and a **coordinated media presence** can help transform the archive sector from a well-kept secret into a mainstream cultural resource
- ARCW to work with member services to **develop resources** to promote and coordinate social media activity across the sector
- Showcase archivists and the work they do through initiatives such as **'Story Keepers'** portrait films and longer-term media partnerships.

Pillar 3: Create Formal Entry Points for New Audiences

- Develop **structured, repeatable pathways** for creatives, community organisations, private sector companies and underrepresented groups to engage with archives that do not rely on individual members of staff
- Pilot initiatives like **themed browsing sessions**, inspired by Cardiff University Special Collections and Archives' Rummage Club
- Longer term: develop an **archive fellowship** or **innovation partnership** programme.

Pillar 4: Promote Archive-Based Outputs and Stories

- Make the inspiring work that comes from **archive engagement visible**, creating a virtuous circle that draws new audiences in
- Develop **touring or pop-up exhibitions** to take archives into communities

- Build a **shared case-study** and **content library** to celebrate the excellent existing work being done and support future activities across the sector
- Longer term: Produce a quarterly **ARCW magazine** and/or **children's history magazine** highlighting sector activity.

A more detailed overview of all 17 report recommendations can be found [here](#).

5. Next Steps

The report recognises that **marketing alone cannot fix structural challenges**, but argues that the recommendations can help broaden the reach and impact of Welsh archives. Central to success is **collaboration**: between archive services and ARCW, and with creative partners, communities and users themselves.

As part of the Archives Wales Alive / Archifau Cymru Byw project (December 2025 – 31 October 2026), ARCW has employed 2 project officers - James Phillips and Emma West - to begin delivering project recommendations. They aim to:

1. **Consult with ARCW member services** to see which of the report recommendations would most help them engage with new audiences (May-June 2026)
2. **Co-develop and test shared resources** with member services (June-September 2026)
3. **Launch new resources at a national archives' festival**; develop funding bids for future projects (September-October 2026).

Our vision is to work with members to create **practical tools and resources** to help Welsh archives become more visible, more visited and more diverse in their audiences, giving the sector's fantastic staff and collections the attention they deserve.