

Cwmbran New Town: Exploring the contents of the Cwmbran New Town Archive



Contents

Introduction	1
Cwmbran Development Corporation collection at Gwent Archives	1
What can I find in the collection?	3
Housing	3
Design	3
Urban Planning	4
Building a community	5
Public Art and a sense of place	5
Everyday Life	5
Sport	6
Working in the New Town	6
Importance beyond Gwent	7
How to access the collection	8
Other new towns in the UK and Ireland	8
Further reading and other resources	8
Contact Us	9

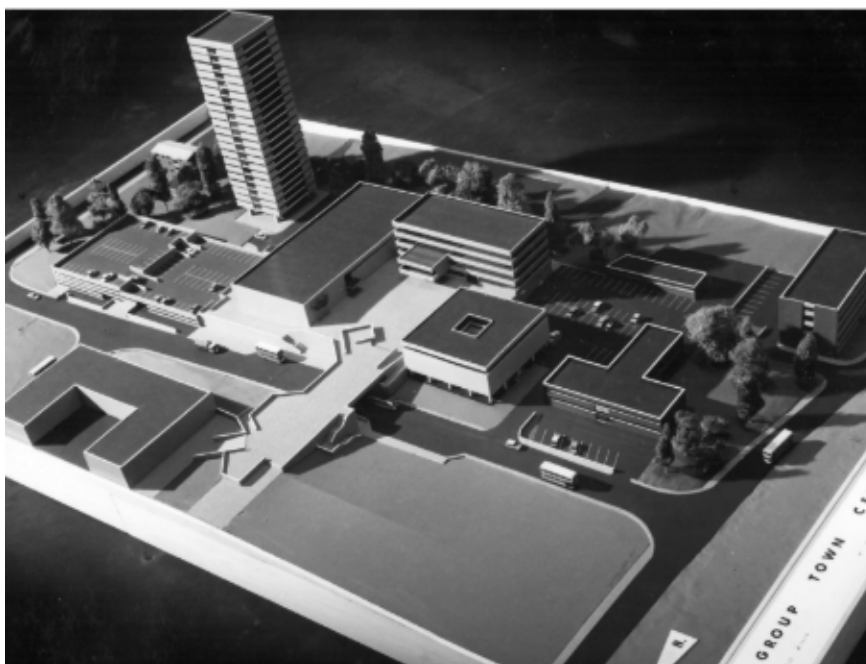
Introduction

Cwmbran was part of the post-war New Town movement that sought to rebuild Britain after the Second World War and realise the vision of a “New Jerusalem” alongside other landmark reforms such as the creation of the NHS. Designed as a self-contained community, Cwmbran combined homes, jobs, schools, shops and green spaces so that daily needs were within easy reach. Unlike most other New Towns, Cwmbran already had a strong industrial base of around 20 factories employing some 6,000 people and a population of 13,000 in 1949. The aim of the new development was therefore to integrate the existing and incoming communities, providing well-planned housing, modern facilities and attractive open spaces.

Cwmbran Development Corporation collection at Gwent Archives

Here at Gwent Archives we hold the records of Cwmbran Development Corporation, the body appointed by the Government to design and create the New Town. The collection contains the working documents of the Corporation, including those that record the administration of the corporation such as minutes, board papers and reports, but also a wide range of other items including publicity brochures, maps, plans, architectural drawings, and a rich collection of photographs.

The Cwmbran Development Corporation archive (D2603) comprises c.4,000 items, covering dating from the Corporation’s creation in 1949 to its formal closure in 1988. These are stored across over 330 boxes, 97 volumes and 11 plans and include 39 volumes of minutes, 177 reports, 17 registers, c.3,000 correspondence files, 132 volumes of press cuttings, 151 photographs and 14 photograph albums, and 20 booklets, 5 sets of slides, 187 maps and plans and almost 200 title deeds.



D2603/A/C/3486 photograph of a model of Cwmbran

What can I find in the collection?

The Cwmbran Development Corporations records cover their entire history, from their creation in 1949 to their dissolution in 1988 and beyond. The oldest item is dated 1871, and the most recent is dated 1990. The amount and quality of information kept in these records means that there is enormous research potential in the collection and will allow you to undertake research on practically any aspect of Cwmbran New Town.

Some examples of subjects you might be interested in:

Housing

Development Corporations worked on all aspects, from design and building homes to their occupation by new tenants and owners. The records show what types of dwellings were built where, together with contracts for construction, cost estimates and bills.

Cwmbran Development Corporation focussed on housing for those from neighbouring valleys, and providing a variety of housing stock. A large number of photographs document the type of housing being built as well as images of the interiors. Most of these photographs are held in albums labelled with the area name and inside many of the photographs are labelled with their location:

- Photograph Albums (D6203/A/C/3470-3484)
- Photographs (D6203/A/C/3362-3528)

Also of interest would be

- Board Minutes (D2603/A/M/1-37)
- Committee Minutes (D2603/A/M2/1-2)
- General Reports (D2603/A/R1/1-67)
- Annual Reports (D2603/A/R2/1-36)

Design

The records don't stop on the outside; you will find designs and photographs for domestic interiors, as well as showrooms and exhibitions. There is a renewed interest today in design from the 1950s through to the 1980s, which can be explored using the New Town records.

D6203/A/C/3370, 3387 exterior and interior of Cwmbran housing



The collections contains a substantial amount of papers that relate to how the new community was accommodated. There are many compulsory purchase orders, car parking surveys, transportation studies, population studies, papers and correspondence.

- Photograph Albums (D6203/A/C/3470-3484)
- Photographs (D6203/A/C/3362-3528)
- Surveys, structure plans, surveys, compulsory purchase orders and correspondence files (D6203/A/C/1-1673)

Urban Planning

New Towns were the most ambitious urban planning projects ever carried out in the UK. Studying the records for Cwmbran can help reveal why decisions were made and how plans changed over time. There is renewed interest in planning principles that shaped New Towns including: a 15-minute neighbourhood where you can have your daily needs met nearby; safe cycle routes; and well-design green spaces.

Front page, 'Cwmbran New Town; It's concept and development', 1974 D2603/A/R1/94



Records relating to urban planning include:

- Board Minutes (D2603/A/M/1-37)
- Committee Minutes (D2603/A/M2/1-2)
- General Reports (D2603/A/R1/1-67), D2603/C/R1/1-
- Annual Reports (D2603/A/R2/1-36)
- Records of Public Inquiry (D2603/A/C/97-122)
- Surveys, structure plans, compulsory purchase orders and correspondence files (D6203/A/C/1-1673)
- Maps and plans (D2603/A/G/1-7)



*Left: D2603/A/C/3372 Aerial Photograph, Cwmbran
Right: Monmouth House, D6203/A/C/3366*

Building a community

New towns were not just about houses but creating a whole community. As well as homes, there are files for schools, further education, shops, churches, the market and other amenities. A great deal of discussion took place around street names, and a file in the collection contains various items of correspondence from local people with suggestions for new street names (D2603/A/C/184). Most wanted street names to reflect the history of the area. Also of interest would be the general correspondence files at D2603/A/C/1-1673)

Public Art and a sense of place

Public art was a key feature of the New Towns, helping to provide a 'sense of place' for the new residents. The most famous in Cwmbran is the Gwent House Mural, designed by Joyce Pallot and Henry Collin.



- Administrative file on the Gwent House Murals (D2603/A/C/213)
- Administrative file on the town centre decorative features (D2603/A/C/214)
- Board Minutes (D2603/A/M/1-37)
- Committee Minutes (D2603/A/M2/1-2)
- General Reports (D2603/A/R1/1-67)
- Annual Reports (D2603/A/R2/1-36)

Everyday Life

Community life flourished, with theatres, music societies and local sports clubs forming an important part of daily life. You can find out more about the large range of clubs and societies in Cwmbran, including theatres, an arts and craft association, community farms, the Gwent Foundation Concert Society, boys' club, scouts and much more. The shopping centre in Cwmbran was very well known, and included shops such as Marks and Spencer, BHS and Sainsburys.



*D2603/A/C/3485 Shopping in the town centre Congress Theatre, Gwent Square
D6203/A/C/3363)*

Information about everyday life can be found in the following records:

- Photograph Albums (D6203/A/C/3470-3484)
- Photographs (D6203/A/C/3362-3528)
- Correspondence files (D6203/A/C/1-1673)
- Board Minutes (D2603/A/M/1-37)
- Committee Minutes (D2603/A/M2/1-2)
- General Reports (D2603/A/R1/1-67)
- Annual Reports (D2603/A/R2/1-36)

Sport

Being healthy was about being able to take exercise and keep fit. The files and photographs detail the many sports clubs, their premises, sporting events and competitions. Facilities in Cwmbran included sports centres and swimming baths.

Information about sports can be found at:

- Correspondence files (D6203/A/C/1-1673)
- Board Minutes (D2603/A/M/1-37)
- Committee Minutes (D2603/A/M2/1-2)
- General Reports (D2603/A/R1/1-67)
- Annual Reports (D2603/A/R2/1-36)

Working in the New Town

Employment opportunities were available before the development of the New Town in Cwmbran, but the new development brought even more industry to the area – including some very well-known companies.

*Employees at Eyclure, with the Mayor
D2603/C/3373*



These include:

- Girlings Limited
- Saunders Valve
- Burtons Biscuits
- Alfa-Laval Limited
- Redifon Telecommunications
- Linpac Cans and Closures
- South Wales Electricity Board
- Hinchly Engineering
- Siebe Gorman Limited

We hold an excellent set of photographs for an exhibition called 'Good Things Come to Cwmbran' which showcase the different businesses in Cwmbran.



'Good Things Come to Cwmbran' (D2603/A/C/3365)

Records relating to work and the development of industry include:

- Photograph Albums (D6203/A/C/3470-3484)
- Photographs (D6203/A/C/3362-3528)
- Surveys and correspondence files (D6203/A/C/1-1673)
- Board Minutes (D2603/A/M/1-37)
- Committee Minutes (D2603/A/M2/1-2)
- General Reports (D2603/A/R1/1-67)
- Annual Reports (D2603/A/R2/1-36)

Importance beyond Gwent

Visitors from across the UK to see the New Towns and learn about how they were being developed. The New Towns were prominent in public life in the UK, and there are photographs and other documents from Royal visits including the visit of HRH Princess Anne in November 1971 (D2603/A/C/218)

How to access the collection

The catalogue for the Cwmbran Development Corporation records is available online, on the Discovery Catalogue (<https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>) and we are working to make it available on our searchable online catalogue. Search terms and keywords can be used to search across the catalogue, such as:

- Names of places, streets, businesses or individuals. Personal names will only find results when the person is mentioned in a catalogue description
- Type of record, such as Cwmbran Development Corporation Minutes, or photograph albums
- Subject terms, such as public inquiry, housing, sports or leisure

To consult the original documents you will need to visit Gwent Archives, in Ebbw Vale. Information about visiting can be found on our website at <https://www.gwentarchives.gov.uk/en/visiting-us/>, and feel free to contact us in advance at enquiries@gwentarchives.gov.uk or telephone 01495 766261.

You can also be one of the first to hear when the catalogue is launched on our catalogue by signing up to our email mailing list. Just contact us at enquiries@gwentarchives.gov.uk to let us know if you would like to join. You can also follow us on Facebook, Instagram and X.

Other new towns in the UK and Ireland

Cwmbran is just one of the New Towns built in this period and making their records accessible as part of the New Jerusalems project. This project, funded by the Wellcome Trust, catalogued and conserved the records from eleven post-war New Towns in the UK and Ireland. For researchers, this opens up the potential for studies that compare several new towns. For heritage, arts and cultural organisations, you can get inspiration and share ideas from the ways other New Towns have used the archives. Visit the New Jerusalems website (<https://www.newjerusalems.info>) to find out more about the other New Towns in the project.

Further reading and other resources

At Gwent Archives, there is a small local studies reference library, holding a number of books relating to Cwmbran and Cwmbran New Town. You can search for items of interest at <https://www.gwentarchives.gov.uk/en/our-collections/library/>. In addition, please see the following resources:

Books

Cwmbran New Town: A plan developed for Cwmbran Development Corporation by Minoprio and Spencely & P W Macfarlane (1951)

New Towns: the rise, fall and rebirth. By Katy Lock and Hugh Ellis. RIBA publishing (2020). A good starting point for those interested in post-war New Towns in the UK. The book sets out to challenge many of the negative preconceptions associated with the New Town Movement. Chapter seven is a case study of Cwmbran.

Rebuilding a Valley: A History of Cwmbran Development Corporation by Philip Riden. Cwmbran Development Corporation (1988).

Online Resources

Advice to Inform Post-War Listing in Wales: Report for Cadw by Edward Holland and Julian Holder. Holland Heritage (2019) <https://cadw.gov.wales/sites/default/files/2019>

National Government papers. The reports, letters, and other working documents created by civil servants are held in the National Archives in Kew. These are mostly catalogued as HLG (Ministry of Town and Country Planning). The National Archives also holds the corporate archives of the Commission for the New Towns and its successor English Partnership. You can search for these on the Discovery catalogue at <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/towns-and-cities/>

Royal Institute of British Architects. Their catalogue contains the working papers and drawings of architects, and architectural journals and books. The catalogue is online and can be searched for material related to Cwmbran <https://www.architecture.com/contact-and-visit/riba-library>.

Site record: Cwmbran by Susan Fielding. Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales (2018) <https://coflein.gov.uk/en/site/408671>

Town and Country Planning Association. The historical issues of the journal, which includes articles about the development of Cwmbran can be accessed here <https://archive.tcpa.org.uk/archive/journals>

Contact us

If you have any questions about the records we hold, or how to start your research, please contact us at:

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