

WEST MIDLANDS
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Archaeology Rationalisation and Review

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April 2016

Ironbridge Archaeology

The Archaeology Unit of the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust



Archaeology Rationalisation and Review for the West Midlands Museum Development Programme

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West Midlands Museum Development Programme

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Summary

Ironbridge Archaeology was commissioned by the West Midlands Museum Development Programme to undertake a programme of research with a view to better understanding the current situation with regards to museum-held archaeological collections and any work that is being undertaken locally, regionally or nationally on the issue. This research forms part of an investigation into the potential of future work in this particular subject area which could raise the profile of underused archaeological collections in the West Midlands Region and the creation of stronger links between museums holding archaeological material and non-museum bodies.

The information gathered during this programme of research has been synthesized into this report which provides a summary of responses provided by museums based in the West Midlands, national bodies, and relevant Subject Specialist Networks, and an identification of themes and patterns arising from these responses.

Recommendations are made based on these responses, these include the development of a nationally recognised toolkit for selection and rationalisation of archaeological archives; the development of a national archaeological archives register integrated within the redevelopment of OASIS; standardised transfer guidelines for the county alongside the development of a regional selection, de-selection and rationalisation strategy that is specific to the West Midlands.

Introduction

Archaeological archives and collections have long been recognised as an important resource for future knowledge and research.¹ The issues surrounding archaeological archives and collections, principally regarding subjects such as storage, curation, access and expertise, are well documented (Museums and Galleries Commission 1992, Edwards 2013). However, an appreciation of the specific challenges and opportunities facing museums in the West Midlands holding archaeological archives and collections is less clear, neither is there consensus or a clear and consistent strategy on how to resolve these issues, be it on a local, regional or national basis.

Background to report

In January 2016 Ironbridge Archaeology was commissioned by the West Midlands Museum Development Programme to undertake a programme of research with a view to better understanding the current situation with regards to museum-held archaeological collections and any work that is being undertaken locally, regionally or nationally on the issue. This research forms part of an investigation into the potential of future work in this particular subject area which could raise the profile of underused archaeological collections in the West Midlands Region and the creation of stronger links between museums holding archaeological material and non-museum bodies.

The information gathered during this programme of research has been synthesized into this report which provides a summary of responses provided by museums based in the West Midlands, national bodies, and relevant Subject Specialist Networks, and an identification of themes and patterns arising from these responses.

This report has been prepared based on information current and available as of March 2016; it represents the initial investigation by West Midlands Museum Development Programme's 'Archaeology Rationalisation & Review Project' into the potential for future work.

¹ The archaeological archive, as defined by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA 2014) is all parts of the archaeological record, including the finds, samples, and digital records as well as written, drawn, and photographic documentation.

Aims

The overarching aim of this initial scoping exercise was to identify any work currently being undertaken by individual groups or institutions, and make recommendations for potential initiatives, partnerships and/or networks moving forward.

More specifically, the aims of this scoping survey were to:

- Generate a broad picture of the current situation surrounding archaeological archives and collections within the region's museums.
- Identify common issues pertaining to archaeological archives and collections within the region's museums.
- Establish what work is currently being undertaken by national bodies and Subject Specialist Networks.
- Make recommendations about practical ways forward and partnerships to support museums with archaeological collections in order to better understand their significance and raise the profile of underused archaeological collections.

Methodology

Museums in the West Midlands

Museums that are actively collecting archaeological material or hold archaeological collections in the West Midlands region were identified utilising the Archaeological Data Service's 'Archaeological Collections Areas Database and Map'², the Council for British Archaeology West Midlands' list of local museums³, and Fast Forward 2010, a point in time survey of museums and galleries in the West Midlands⁴.

Where possible the relevant post-holder for each museum was contacted and posed the following set of questions:

² http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/sma_map/

³ <http://archaeologyuk.org/cbawm/museums.php>

⁴ <http://www.collectionstrust.org.uk/collections-link/going-digital/copyright-and-licensing/item/1144-fastforward-2010>

1. Do you have any issues with archaeological archives at your museum?
2. If there are issues are you attempting to address them?
3. Do you feel that you have the specialist support you need when dealing with archaeological archives?
4. If a solution needs to be found to issues surrounding archaeological archives do you believe it should be a local, regional or national one?
5. Do you have any further advice, comments or are you aware of any projects that are pertinent to the aims of our research?

In addition to contacting the museums identified through the above means, an advert for the project was distributed as part of the West Midlands Museum Development Programme Newsletter and via the Society for Museum Archaeology. The profile of the project was also raised via social media.

National Bodies and Subject Specialist Networks

Relevant national bodies and Subject Specialist Networks⁵ were identified and posed the following questions:

1. What do you consider to be the main issues surrounding archaeological archives in England?
2. Has your organisation/network approached this issue? If so, in what ways?
3. What do you consider to be the solution to issues surrounding archaeological archives, and do you think this approach should be local, regional or national?
4. Who do you think should be involved in feeding into, co-ordinating and implementing a collective solution to this issue?
5. Do you have any further advice or comments that are pertinent to the aims of our research?

⁵ <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/supporting-collections-and-cultural-property/subject-specialist-networks>

Results

The following is a synthesis of the responses provided by representatives of the national bodies, Subject Specialist Networks, and museums based in the West Midlands to the questions outlined above. The responses in full can be found as Appendices 1 and 2 of this report.

Responses from museums in the West Midlands

There has been an excellent response to the survey from 15 museums based in the West Midlands, of whom the following provided some very useful and constructive replies:

Table1. Museums that responded to the scoping questionnaire

	Museum	Respondent	Position
1	Nuneaton Museum and Art Gallery	Becky Harvey	Assistant Museum Officer
2	Sandwell Council Cultural Services	Frank Caldwell	Principal Officer Museums Arts and Heritage
3	Shropshire Museum	Emma-Kate Lanyon	Team Leader (Collections and Cultural Services)
4	Worcester City Art Gallery and Museum	Deborah Fox	Curator of Archaeology and Natural History
5	Tamworth Castle	Sarah Williams	Collections Officer
6	The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery	Don Steward	Curator (Natural History)
7	Hereford Museum Resource & Learning Centre	Sam Craig	Collections Officer
8a	Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery	Ellen McAdam	Director of Birmingham Museum Trust
8b	Birmingham Museum Trust	Adam Jaffer	Curator of World Cultures
9	Herbert Museum and Art Gallery	Huw Jones	Curator (Human History and Visual Arts)

10	University of Birmingham (Research and Cultural Collections)	Clare Marlow	Collections Manager
11	Warwickshire Museum	Sara Wear	Keeper of Archaeology
12	Malvern Museum	Faith Renger	Curator
13	Walsall Museum	Catherine Lister	Collections Officer
14	Shakespeare Birthplace Trust	Rosalyn Sklar	Museum Collections Officer
15	Wolverhampton City Council	Ellie Ramsey	Archaeology and Historic Environment Officer

The following is a synthesis of the responses provided by individual museums. The full text from the responses can be found in Appendix 1. Recommendations based on these and the responses provided by national bodies and Subject Specialist Networks can be found in the Recommendations section (page 17).

Question 1. Do you have any issues with archaeological archives at your museum?

Most of the museums that responded to the questionnaire have reported that they are experiencing issues with regards to the archaeological archives and collections in their care. Whilst the scale and scope of the issues encountered by each respondent differs according to that particular museum/museum service, many of the same or similar concerns can be seen across the responses.

Inherited Issues

These concerns/issues include inherited problems such as poor documentation which means that curators/museum archaeologists have a lack of understanding of what is in their archaeology archive, the result being that they don't know what could be of significance or what the strengths or weaknesses of the collection might be. This has been exacerbated further in some cases by a backlog from large legacy sites, which haven't been written up or archived appropriately. Poor collecting policies and over collecting (either by choice or as a consequence of the planning process) in the past is having its toll on many of the museum respondents. This has meant that some of the museums have a lack of storage space or their stores are overcapacity.

In some cases, decisions made by museums in the past mean that the finds archive is physically removed from the paper archive.

A number of respondents highlighted the dichotomy between the amount of space that their archaeological archives take up and the amount of archaeological material that they have on display. This is further exacerbated by the fact that there is a perception that County/Planning Archaeologists pay no heed to the storage constraints at 'collecting' museums when producing briefs, and many of the respondents report that their archaeological archives are very rarely accessed by researchers. The impact of the potential archaeology archive produced by HS2 looms large over those collecting museums in counties that will be affected by the route.

Poor Storage Conditions

Some of the respondents highlighted poor or inappropriate storage conditions as a major concern. This ranges from poor packing in the past to unsuitable packaging to completely inappropriate environmental conditions.

Staffing Concerns

It is clear from the responses that the current financial constraints that museums find themselves in have had an adverse effect on their capacity to retain or employ specialist staff. This has led to a number of the respondents raising their concerns that a lack of in-house specialists has limited their abilities to rationalise or understand the significance of their archaeological archives/collections. Some of the respondents have also noted that the increase in technical language in archaeological reports has made them inaccessible to non-specialist curators.

Question 2. If there are issues are you attempting to address them?

It is very positive to see that, despite the issues highlighted above, many of the responding museums have taken or are making attempts to address the archaeological archive-shaped issues that confront them.

Inherited Issues

Some museums are undertaking a collections audit, including in one case the production of a gazetteer of sites, which will help identify gaps in knowledge or expertise and help plan for the future. This should further help with rationalising their archaeological archive/collection.

With regards to archaeological archives compiled as a result of the planning process, some museums have indicated a willingness to work with the planning archaeologists and provide an input into briefs. Others have remarked that archaeological archives should be seen as a resource and not a waste product, and that we need to define who is going to use it and why, and how we actually manage it?

Poor Storage Conditions

Issues with storage conditions and capacity issues are being mitigated against in some cases by stores relocation or the purchasing of new shelving, whilst volunteer help has been sourced to help with repacking and re-boxing the archive.

The Digital Archive

It is also positive to see that some museums have indicated that they are working with the Archaeological Data Service (ADS) with regards to depositing digital archives.

Despite the positive nature of the above, due to funding cuts, threats of closure, lack of specialist staff or other priorities, other respondents have been unable to attempt to address the issues facing them.

Question 3. Do you feel that you have the specialist support you need when dealing with archaeological archives?

A number of the respondents feel that they have the specialist support that they need when dealing with archaeological archives. This support is provided by in-house specialists or colleagues who have an archaeological background, or from retired colleagues or former planning archaeologists. Despite this, it was noted that specialist staff have been greatly reduced and lack of time is a key concern. Others noted the relationship that they have with national bodies such as Chartered Institute for Archaeologists and the Society for Museum Archaeology, and local assistance such as the county archaeological service and local archaeology units.

There appears to be a great deal of differentiation between the level of in-house support and knowledge that museums across the region have access to. A number of respondents noted the lack of specialist staff required to identify, review and assess the significance of the collection and have suggested that some form of formal guidance or best practice would be useful. An ability to access or consult a wide range of relevant specialists was also raised as something that would be useful.

Question 4. If a solution needs to be found to issues surrounding archaeological archives do you believe it should be a local, regional or national one?

There was a varied response to this question. This was largely dependent on the size of the museum and the nature of the collection. Overall it would seem that a local/regional solution with national guidance would be appropriate.

National

On a national level it was felt that Historic England has the potential to influence planning policy and produce appropriate guidance regarding archaeological archives. It was also noted that national bodies or Subject Specialist Networks such as the Society for Museum Archaeology could play an important role in developing a solution to the issues surrounding archaeological archives.

Others have suggested that a consideration of archaeological archives could be built into Arts Council England's Museum Accreditation Scheme.

Regional

It has been suggested that working with other museums in the region would be interesting and that selection policies that worked across the region would be a positive step in the right direction. It was also felt that a regional solution would encourage good relations, shared resources and joint working between neighbouring local authorities.

Local

At a local level some respondents highlighted the important role that local contacts and specialists have had in resolving queries.

National bodies and Subject Specialists Networks

Responses were received from the majority of the national organisations and Subject Specialist Networks that were contacted during the timeframe of the project (Appendix 2).

The results summary is compiled from the responses received from the Archaeology Data Service (ADS), Archaeological Archives Forum (AAF), Society for Museum Archaeology (SMA), Chartered Institute for Archaeologists Archaeological Archives Group (CIfA AAG), English Heritage (EH) and the Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers (ALGAO). No specific responses have

been received from the Federation of Archaeological Managers and Employers (FAME) or the Institute for Conservation (Icon).

Several respondents referred to the 2012 Archaeological Archives and Museums Report (Edwards 2013) which was jointly funded by the SMA, English heritage and FAME as the most up-to-date representation of what they consider the problems to be.

Table 2. National bodies and Subject Specialist Networks that responded to the scoping questionnaire.

	National organisation or Subject Specialist network		Respondent
1	ADS	Archaeology Data Service	Louisa Matthews
2	AAF	Archaeological Archives Forum	Claire Tsang
3	SMA	Society for Museum Archaeology	Gail Boyle
4	CIfA AAG	Chartered Institute for Archaeologists Archaeological Archives Group	Group Committee
5	EH	English Heritage	Matt Thompson
6	ALGAO	Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers	Chris Patrick (WM Region)

The responses of the National Bodies and Subject Specialist Networks can be found in Appendix 2 of this report. These have been summarised and contextualised here and recommendations based on these and the responses provided by West Midlands-based museums can be found in the Recommendation (page 17).

Question 1. What do you consider to be the main issues surrounding archaeological archives in England?

Although the responses varied from all of the respondents, the main issues identified were space/storage, gaps in collecting areas, loss of expertise, use/access, selection strategies and best practice, and digital archiving.

The ‘storage crisis’ and gaps in collecting areas

The issues surrounding storage and space were detailed in the 2012 Archaeological Archives and Museums Report (Edwards 2013) at which time only 84 of the 150 museums included in the

survey were able to accept archaeological archives without known conditions and 36 mentioned that lack of space might become an issue. 47 local authorities were identified as having not having any museums collecting archaeological material, a number which is thought to have increased since 2012 (Gail Boyle pers.comm. SMA Conference 2015). Within the West Midlands many local authorities do not have a repository for archaeological archives, with Wolverhampton being a case in point, and in 2012 FAME (Federation of Archaeological Managers and Employers) estimated that there were 9,000 undepositable archives in England. The archives from these areas are therefore at risk and Recommendation 6 of the report (Edwards 2013) was to 'seek solutions for archive material that currently cannot be transferred to a repository'. The adoption of Recommendation 4; to 'develop a national strategy for the storage and curation of archaeological archives' was also agreed at an open meeting in 2013 at the Birmingham Midland Institute which was attended by representatives from AAF, EH, SMA, FAME and ClfA.

Loss of expertise

The loss of subject specific expertise within museums was considered to be a significant issue with only 30% of museums containing specialist archaeological curators in 2012 (Edwards 2013). Many curators are becoming generalists and taking on additional responsibilities such as the management and administration of their organisations. Planned local authority cuts mean that many more museums are under threat with closures in the West Midlands region a possibility within the next 5 years. One respondent suggested that 'we may no longer be able to guarantee the longevity of archives' (Chris Patrick, ALGAO, Appendix 2).

Use and access

The use of, and access to archaeological archives once they reach the museum was commented on by the English Heritage respondents who pointed out the disparity between the large quantities of material needed to be retained to create viable research collections and the small number of items which are displayable within a museum setting.

Although attempted for the Archaeological Archives and Museums Report, how archaeological archives are used by museums, researchers, archaeologists and the public has yet to be quantified as most museums do not keep detailed data on these activities (Edwards 2013).

Digital archiving

With regard to digital archiving it was noted that even where archaeological expertise exists in museums there is rarely any provision for the curation of digital material. The ADS notes that 'there's still a long way for digital archives in the Historic Environment sector to go in terms of raising awareness and understanding of the importance and need for long-term preservation of digital material' (Louisa Matthews, ADS, Appendix 2). There is also a lack of vision as to where digital archiving could increase research possibilities and links with institutions such as museums and HERs. The need to bring balance across counties as to the levels of digital archiving required in briefs and WSI's, and that which is actually undertaken with the ADS was also highlighted.

Question 2. Has your organisation/network approached this issue? If so, in what ways?

Encouragingly, all respondents detailed some form of activity with regard to the issues they perceived surrounding archaeological archives, and many of these initiatives have involved more than one organisation working together. However, there is also awareness that while several institutions, organisations and regional groups are attempting to address specific issues, it can sometimes appear disjointed with variations in the creation, adoption and implementation of new policies. It was also noted that many groups are formed of volunteer committees with little or no funding to support projects potentially increasing timeframes and reducing the impact of any initiatives undertaken.

The 'storage crisis' and gaps in collecting areas

A solution to the storage crisis has been debated at several meetings attended by representatives of all of the responding groups, although no permanent solution has been found, suggesting that Recommendation 4 of the 2012 report (Edwards 2013) has yet to be met. Awareness of the growing number of individual institutions and bodies attempting to address the issue through the reduction of the archives they hold or accept has prompted the ClfA AAG to organise a day conference on 'Selection, De-selection and rationalisation' in March 2016. The aim of the conference was to consider what a selection strategy should look like by providing overviews and case studies for context, introductory guidance alongside practical examples.

The specifics surrounding the gaps in collecting areas across the country is constantly changing which may explain why Recommendation 6 (Edwards 2013) is still being discussed by all respondents with no agreed solution. Recommendation 8 of the 2012 report (Edwards 2013) was to 'promote and publicise the collecting areas map', and while the map, which is hosted by the

ADS has recently been updated, awareness of its existence is not universal. The SMA, however, will be instigating an annual survey of museums that have archaeology collections, to establish which ones are continuing to collect archives from archaeological projects. 'The survey will also establish the scope and estimated longevity of collecting within each museum, arrangements for curatorial care for digital material and levels of archaeological curatorial expertise among employed personnel. The overall aim is to provide information on the level of collections care offered to the archives resulting from archaeological projects across the sector.' (Gail Boyle, SMA, Appendix 2).

Loss of expertise and use and access

The focus of the majority of the respondents has been to improve policy documents, update guidelines, and promote best practice across the sector in order to tackle the loss of expertise and hopefully facilitate better use of archaeological archives through removing the accessibility barriers perceived by many museums.

The guidance and best practice documents have been reviewed and updated by the Archaeological Archives Forum (AAF 2007), Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA 2014) and the ADS (ADS 2014). Workshops and training events have been run by the CIfA AAG and ADS to promote best practice and encourage communication across the sector.

Historic England was directly involved in the production of the "Standard and Guide to Best Practice for Archaeological Archiving in Europe" (ARCHES 2013). The ARCHES project "is aimed at making the archaeological archives throughout Europe sustainable by guiding them into easily accessible collections of finds and documentation by accepted standards of procedures, ready for reuse, now and in the future by all who have a genuine interest in the past" (ARCHES 2013). The new guidance document was developed by the ARCHES project (Archaeological Resources in Cultural Heritage, a European Standard) which is a collaboration of nine political entities across Europe funded by the European Union Culture Fund and supported by the Europae Archaeologiae Consilium (EAC).

Question 3. What do you consider to be the solution to issues surrounding archaeological archives, and do you think this approach should be local, regional or national?

The answers received to this question were varied, however, there does appear to be consensus that this is a sector-wide issue and should be addressed as such, *i.e.* that it is not a problem for one organisation to solve. While some suggested the need for a national approach it was also

recognised that regional and local variations would need to be taken into account. The 'place-specific' nature of archaeological archives was noted as a significant factor by English Heritage, while ALGAO suggested the need for regional archive stores in all authority areas therefore removing archives from local museums.

Question 4. Who do you think should be involved in feeding into, co-ordinating and implementing a collective solution to the issue?

All respondents to this question demonstrated a willingness to be involved in further discussions, though the volunteer nature of many of the groups as well as funding for future projects was mentioned as a potential stumbling block. In addition to the Archaeology Data Service (ADS), Archaeological Archives Forum (AAF), Society for Museum archaeology (SMA), Chartered Institute for Archaeologists Archaeological Archives Group (CIfA AAG), English Heritage (EH), and the Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers (ALGAO), other institutions were suggested as potential contributors to any future project. These include; the Federation of Archaeological Managers and Employers (FAME), Institute of Conservation (Icon), Historic England, Subject Committee For Archaeology, Arts Council England, Society of Antiquities, Council for British Archaeology (CBA), National Trust, Historic Royal Palaces and The National Archives.

Conclusions

The responses to the scoping questionnaires from the fifteen responding museums, Subject Specialist Networks and relevant national bodies revealed several key themes. Many of these themes are not dissimilar to those identified in the 2012 Archaeological Archives and Museums Report (Edwards 2013) suggesting that while awareness has grown, significant change has yet to occur. The 'storage crisis' was mentioned by many of the respondents with several museums stating a lack of storage space and stores being overcapacity resulting in poor storage conditions. The resulting gaps in collecting areas has also been highlighted with the Black Country (there is no collecting museum in Wolverhampton, Walsall, Dudley and Solihull) identified as a significant issue within the West Midlands. There also appeared to be a perception by some that County/Planning Archaeologists pay no heed to the storage constraints at 'collecting' museums when producing briefs and that this workflow of project inception to end user could be better thought through.

The dichotomy between the amount of space that their archaeological archives take up and the amount of archaeological material that they have on display was mentioned by several museums. Several reported that researchers very rarely access their archaeological archives.

One key point that the authors thought pertinent was the number of museums that requested clarification on what constitutes an archaeological archive. Some initially only referred to the paperwork and others just the finds, whilst one asked if artefacts retrieved from the ground constituted archaeology. It was clear that while many museums had a good understanding of what made up an archaeological archive, several were confused as to the nature of the material in their care with little knowledge of basic agreed standards within the profession. It therefore seems that despite the presence of recognised guidelines, several museums are unaware of their existence. The reasons for this could perhaps be attributed to the loss of specialist staff reported by many museums, or the fact that some smaller museums have no capacity for commercially derived archaeological material. These issues were further exemplified with regard to the access and use of archaeological archives with many responding museums stating an inability to fully understand the archives in their care, be it due to the loss of specialist curators, the lack of paperwork, overly technical reports or badly compiled archives. Decisions over selection and retention and the ability to identify significance were also highlighted as particular concerns.

Several of the fifteen responding museums, as well as most of the relevant national bodies and Subject Specialist Networks, have made steps in addressing some of these issues since the 2012 Archaeological Archives and Museums Report (Edwards 2013). Whilst guidelines have been updated and collection reviews have taken place (see section 2 above) many of the key themes identified in the 2012 (Edwards 2013) report still stand as issues requiring attention.

The specific question regarding whether any potential solution should have a local, regional or national approach received an almost unanimous response: a regional/local solution with national guidance. It seems key that the whole process of the collection of material culture and the creation of archaeological archives could be standardised and streamlined to facilitate understanding, access by non-specialists and highlight their potential to museum curators, researchers and beyond.

Recommendations

Based on the feedback provided by national bodies, relevant Subject Specialist Networks, and West Midlands-based museums, the following recommendations for potential initiatives, partnerships and/or networks moving forward are proposed:

Recommendation A: Develop a nationally recognised toolkit for selection and rationalisation of archaeological archives

Due to the great deal of variation that can be found between museums, on a national, regional and local level, a single national policy would be neither practical nor implementable. Additionally, as guidelines for the creation, compilation and deposition of archaeological archives are up-to-date there seems little point in duplicating existing documents (AAF 2007, CifA 2014, ADS 2014 and ARCHES 2013). Rather, a toolkit that could be applied by individual institutions or commercial archaeology companies to specific projects, or by a museum or groups of museums, in the creation of policy documents, could take into account regional research frameworks and collecting policies.

This toolkit should be as applicable to the creation of archives from the outset of a new project, as to rationalisation of an old archive held in a museum store. Recommendation A was discussed at the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists Archaeological Archives Group day conference on Selection, Retention and Rationalisation on 16 March 2016. While the room agreed with the recommendation in principle, there was not a unanimous consensus on what a selection policy should contain, however a National approach was largely requested. Several examples of projects where selection and rationalisation policies have been attempted were presented at the conference and an additional request for information on these be included within the possible toolkit. Based on the responses provided as part of the current study and discussions of Recommendation A at the day conference, a working group could consider the following as part of a toolkit:

- The identification of key stages during an archaeological project at which questions need to be asked regarding selection and retention strategies (including involvement of Planning/County Archaeologists)
- The identification of the types of questions that should be asked before implementing a selection strategy and highlighting who should potentially be involved in those discussions
- The recommendation that all digital material should be stored at the ADS
- Negative archives (records of those archaeological interventions where no archaeological evidence was recovered) to be stored in digital format **only** (*i.e.* data and report logged with OASIS)

- Where archaeological evidence of little or no significance is recovered during a project, digital storage **only** may be appropriate. This decision should only be made following discussion with the receiving museum/ institution.
- The adoption of generally accepted rationalisation procedures where no material specialist involvement is required such as the discard of un-stratified finds and archives where the paper records and drawings have been lost (subject to an appropriate review).

(Key contributors: ClfA AAG, SMA, AAF, ALGAO, FAME, HE and the ADS)

Recommendation B: The development of a national archaeological archives register integrated within the redevelopment of OASIS

It has been demonstrated through several projects that access, use and research greatly increases when a synopsis of a collection's location and contents is available online (The Portable Antiquities Scheme⁶, The National Slag Collection⁷, and museums up and down the country see recent article from Museums and Heritage for case studies⁸).

The establishment of a national index of archaeological archives would promote their access and use, stimulate research, raise the profile of unused collections, and create links between museums and non-museum bodies. The majority of the data to create a national archive index is already being collected through the OASIS⁹ system and therefore should not nor need to be duplicated.

OASIS is an online index of archaeological grey literature and project data that aims to facilitate the rapid flow of information from producer to user. The system is in the process of being updated and re-designed through the HERALD project (Historic Environment Research Archives, Links and Data) and work to date has focussed on establishing user needs, workflows and processes, and where the information gathered by OASIS could better support other initiatives and activities (<http://oasis.ac.uk/pages/wiki/HERALD>). One aspect of the HERALD project has been to establish how museums could be included within the OASIS workflow, providing a 'tracking system' for archaeological projects and therefore, also for archaeological archives. This could facilitate the transfer of knowledge between the creators and curators of archaeological archives, stimulate

⁶ <https://finds.org.uk/research>

⁷ <http://hist-met.org/resources/national-slag-collection.html>

⁸ <http://advisor.museumsandheritage.com/features/digitising-collections-breaking-museum-walls-opening-collections-world/>

⁹ <http://oasis.ac.uk/pages/wiki/Main>

communication between relevant parties, provide a means to disseminate archive transfer policies and accessioning details, and allow greater access to the archaeological record for museums, researchers and the public.

The key stages during an archaeological project at which questions should be asked regarding selection and retention strategies established through the creation of a national selection and retention toolkit (*i.e.* Recommendation A), could be linked with the new OASIS workflow process. This would provide prompts to both museums and contractors to request or provide the required information, and allow the monitoring of the process by County/Planning archaeologists through to completion (deposition of the archive with the appropriate body).

Any system should also provide for the addition of historical archives by the museums that hold them as well as facilitate the tracking and monitoring of un-depositable archives by County Archaeologists. The creation of a system by which researchers could easily establish the location of historic archives, and archives that have yet to reach a museum store, would go a long way to raise the profile of under used archaeological collections in the West Midlands Region. Such a system would need full support from planning archaeologists and museums from the inception of any given project.

An academic viewpoint on the types of information they require to instigate and facilitate research would therefore also be useful.

Recommendation B was discussed at the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists Archaeological Archives Group day conference on Selection, Retention and Rationalisation on 16 March 2016. This was the most popular recommendation on the day with a very positive response in the room, complemented by the authors receiving follow up emails on the concept.

(Key contributors: ADS, IfA AAG, ALGAO, SMA, museum curators, academics)

Recommendation C: Develop a regional selection, de-selection and rationalisation strategy that is specific to the West Midlands

Following on from the development of a national toolkit for the selection and rationalisation of archaeological archives, a regional policy specifically geared to the West Midlands should be developed with specific reference to the regional Research Framework and Subject Specialist

Networks. Projects undertaken by the Sussex Museum Group and Derbyshire Museums provide templates for how such a document could be created.¹⁰

The new Selection, Retention and Discard guidelines for Sussex were discussed at the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists Archaeological Archives Group day conference on Selection, Retention and Rationalisation on 16 March 2016. The response to the approach was positive but it was pointed out that these guidelines were not a solution to the problems of overcrowded stores and underused archives, but a means to reduce the issues moving forward.

Recommendation D: Develop standardised guidelines for the transfer of archaeological archives within the West Midlands region.

The variations in individual museum transfer guidelines, whilst not insurmountable are seen as an unnecessary complication by archaeological contractors to the process of archaeological archive compilation and deposition. A set of standardised guidelines could be compiled and interwoven with the regional selection, de-selection and rationalisation strategy (Recommendation C) therefore formalising a standard for archaeological archives across the county (nationally would be great!). Such standards could include:

- The point at which accession numbers are assigned
- The order in which the archive is to be sorted and organised,
- The terminology used for find types and sub types
- Where dating information is required
- How significant finds are identified within the archive
- Standardisation of databases and archive contents recording

The standardisation of not only selection and retention strategies, but also the physical make up of an archaeological archive may remove the barriers that several museums reported to the accessing and use of archaeological archives. Commercial units and outside researchers would welcome a uniform approach as un-depositable archives could be completed and stored in a manner that could be accessed and understood easily and therefore would immediately transferable once the opportunity arose.

¹⁰ Copies of these strategies can be obtained from the authors.

Once again this could be linked with any new OASIS workflow (Recommendation B) to enable transparency and involvement by all interested parties.

Recommendation D was discussed at the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists Archaeological Archives Group day conference on Selection, Retention and Rationalisation on 16 March 2016. The recommendation was thought not only feasible but potentially useful to museums, researchers and commercial units.

Find a solution to the Black Country 'black hole'

A solution to the storage crisis has yet to be agreed nationally (see National bodies and Subject Specialist Network section) and it would be remiss to suggest that one could easily be found for the West Midlands. However, the lack of repositories for archaeological archives in Wolverhampton, Walsall, Dudley and Solihull must be acknowledged here as a potential loss of knowledge for the future. While the archives from these areas remain outside of the museum profession they are at risk and an awareness of their importance and vulnerability is advised.

Following the adoption of a regional selection, de-selection and rationalisation strategy (recommendation C) it may well be that the numbers and volume of un-depositable archives can be greatly reduced therefore allowing for a re-appraisal of the situation.

It may be useful for the West Midlands Museum Development Programme to look into the cost and implications of remote storage. The use of remote storage for archaeological archives has been raised by several museums and national bodies in the past, though a full investigation of the possibility has yet to be undertaken.

Acknowledgements

This project was commissioned by the West Midlands Museum Development Programme. Thanks are extended to Karen Davies and Helen Johnson for their support throughout. A great deal of gratitude also goes to all of the respondents from the national bodies, Subject Specialist Networks, and museums based in the West Midlands. Finally, thanks must go to Arts Council England who funded the project.

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Appendix 1. Responses from museums

Nuneaton Museum and Art Gallery

Respondent: Becky Harvey, Assistant Museum Officer

Nuneaton Museum and Art Gallery
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Coton Road
Nuneaton
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1. Do you have any issues with archaeological archives at your museum?

Poor documentation – generally undocumented; poor storage conditions and non-archival storage materials sometimes used; lack of understanding about the material – its provenance, strengths and weaknesses of the collection; no in house specialist expertise. Some archaeological material is on display, but a large proportion is probably underused.

2. If there are issues are you attempting to address them?

A store move is planned for this spring which will mark a massive improvement in conditions. As part of this move we will purchase new storage enclosures, although we may not have the budget to ensure all boxes are archival standard. We are also undertaking a collections audit. When we come to audit the archaeological material we are aware we will need to buy in external expertise to help us to review and audit this collection.

3. Do you feel that you have the specialist support you need when dealing with archaeological archives?

Need support in identifying, reviewing and assessing the significance of the material. In the longer term, potentially support to rationalise the collection.

4. If a solution needs to be found to issues surrounding archaeological archives do you believe it should be a local, regional or national one?

All three could be valid in different ways. We are currently participating in both regional and national projects to review our ethnography collection which are so far proving really helpful. Both

projects are enabling us to benefit from specialist expertise elsewhere in the country. I think the Society for Museum Archaeologists could play an important role in this solution.

I've also benefitted from local contacts with a background in archaeology that have been able to help with small queries. In my last job, one in particular helped to develop an informal, basic framework for volunteers to use when reviewing archaeology collections at an audit level.

Sandwell Council Cultural Services

Respondent: Frank Caldwell, Principal Officer Museums Arts and Heritage

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Museums & Arts, Libraries & Archives
Neighbourhoods
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Oldbury
West Midlands
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1. Do you have any issues with archaeological archives at your museum?

We have an internal issue in that historically the archives were separated into artefacts and documentation and lodged with different organisations. Accessing 'the archive' can be a bit awkward.

More significantly, a large archive was collected in the 1980s/1990s and again in the early 2000s.

A couple of years ago I discussed the sheer quantity with Ian George in the context of museums beginning to decline to accept archaeology archives on the grounds that there was no space. I think this comes down to a number of things

The lack of archaeologists (and I have to say historians) working in museums

The increase technical language in the reports

Archaeological briefs being prepared without any consultation with the proposed depository – even I have had archaeologists ring me to arrange delivery. I think we need a brief standard that takes into account future storage requirements (ie lets rebury duplicate material etc as we just can't fit it in) and get a plain language précis written into a report so as to give curators some chance of getting 'the story'.

No consideration given to storage issues under planning requirements – if the developer is paying for the excavations then surely some recognition of storage/care costs should be considered.

2. If there are issues are you attempting to address them?

See above. We will input into briefs (but the absence of archaeological input into development within our borough at present has somewhat reduced the pressure.

3. Do you feel that you have the specialist support you need when dealing with archaeological archives?

No. I think see 1 above. The standard for the brief needs to accommodate the storage issue

4. If a solution needs to be found to issues surrounding archaeological archives do you believe it should be a local, regional or national one?

Oh where to start. Professional museum management training for example – seems to allow archaeology to be a separate area of responsibility and one the art historians are not willing to engage with. So archaeology collections are little valued. But given the amount of space an archive can occupy compared to the frequency of research consultation - would hate to do a cost per contact analysis for the archaeology archives here in Sandwell!

Nationally Historic England can impact on the way excavation is tackled and make archives more accessible - to the public and museum staff as well as to researchers.

Given the pressure on local authority museums/ex museums now in trust at present perhaps this should have been addressed earlier!!!

One could look at building a specific archaeological requirement into the accreditation standard.

However, the accreditation standard is increasingly irrelevant and onerous. I'm not sure I want to put the current/disposal collection requirements in front of my cabinet member!

Shropshire Museums

Respondent: Emma-Kate Lanyon, Team Leader (Collections and Curatorial Services)

Shropshire Museums, Visitor Economy Team
Shropshire Council
Shrewsbury Museum & Art Gallery
The Music Hall
The Square
Shrewsbury
Shropshire
SY1 1LH

1. Do you have any issues with archaeological archives at your museum?

Yes – Our available storage is currently over capacity. In 2012 we merged our Archaeology Archives storage needs with those of Shropshire Archives after an options analysis as this would allow the finds to be curated by museum staff and the paper records to be curated by archivists.

This seemed like an ideal solution to the needs of the material and users. However, despite moving to a shared facility in March 2014, Council savings targets have forced all of the expansion space to be allocated to other services. Access to the store has also been reduced due to a reduction in staff support for the facility.

2. If there are issues are you attempting to address them?

No. Shropshire Council have published their three year financial strategy which states that 'All museums and locally commissioned tourism facilities are at risk of likely closure' with the budget against the Museum Service removed completely from 1 April 2017. It is likely that should closure go ahead the responsibility for the care of archaeology project archives would have to be transferred to Shropshire Archives (as a statutory service) but it is unlikely that they would accept further depositions as there would not be the specialist in-house staff to curate the finds or provide specialist advice and access to them.

3. Do you feel that you have the specialist support you need when dealing with archaeological archives?

Currently yes – The curatorial team at Shropshire Museums has been reduced to just myself but my background is archaeology. However, I do not have the time and/or resources to do more than process new depositions and provide a basic enquiry service.

4. If a solution needs to be found to issues surrounding archaeological archives do you believe it should be a local, regional or national one?

It needs to be national. If the requirement to undertake archaeological assessments prior to and/or as a requirement of planning consent then there needs to be a national strategy regarding the retention of the archive. At present museums (on the whole local authority museums) have picked up this responsibility but the current threats to museum provision in the UK puts this service in jeopardy.

Worcester City Art Gallery and Museum

Respondent: Deborah Fox MCIfA, Curator of Archaeology and Natural History

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1. Do you have any issues with archaeological archives at your museum?

Yes - unpublished sites, large legacy sites that have been collected en mass, lack of storage space, some inappropriate storage space, over-packed boxes which are a health and safety issue, mouldy boxes which again are a health and safety issue and need re-boxing, packaging from sites in the 80s and 90s that is having to be renewed en mass as the plastic shatters, still some old blue/pink silica that needs to be renewed, some lost provenances on particularly, stonework that needs to be tracked down, a few decades of digital archives that are not archived in a managed repository but are just on a disc, current digital archiving with ADS that is proving difficult to enforce and expensive for units - there may be more but it doesn't spring to mind.

2. If there are issues are you attempting to address them?

Yes - volunteer help for repacking and re-boxing, working with ADS and local planning archaeologists to try and sort digital issue, working with planning archaeologists and units to try and ensure appropriate selection and retention is carried out on new depositions, from May will be looking at some selection of legacy sites, talking to University and planning archaeologists about how to address unpublished sites but this continues to be difficult.

3. Do you feel that you have the specialist support you need when dealing with archaeological archives?

I'm an archaeology curator with networks through WEMACRU, SMA and ClfA, locally have very good relationship with Worcestershire Archaeology Service and planning and HER archaeologist, generally find most depositing units to be great to work with.

4. If a solution needs to be found to issues surrounding archaeological archives do you believe it should be a local, regional or national one?

Given current funding of most institutions is local authority, local and regional solution with national guidance via ClfA/SMA. I also think it's important to maintain archaeological collections close to the locations they were excavated, near the archaeological community who best understands them and the local population who should benefit from them and who pay for their care and storage through taxation.

5. Do you have any further advice, comments or aware of any projects that are pertinent to the aims of our research?

Interesting project at the ARC in York a couple of years ago to rationalize animal bone - think the paper was called an embarrassment of riches or something similar. Around the same time there was a conference/seminar at LAARC where professionals from all over the country talked about selection and retention material by material. I think Roy Stephenson (or someone at MOL), wrote that up.

Additional comments from Derek Hurst from Worcestershire Archaeology who Deb often works with on selection and retention issues:

Re 5. Another important example of proactive archive sorting is Winchester museums where they have made great strides in sensible archaeological directions as they have access to good expertise (one of my ex colleagues) BUT importantly I thought they have bound rationalisation up with making archives (what's left) more accessible.

Re 5. A series of useful relevant studies on archives were done fairly recently – but I can't remember the title – copies were available at the SGRP meeting last year in Norwich.

Tamworth Castle

Respondent: Sarah Williams, Collections Officer

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1. Do you have any issues with archaeological archives at your museum?

Yes, although the archaeology has been audited roughly in terms of quantity, number of boxes, we have no one on the staff with Archaeological training. There is some material we know could be disposed of, such as large quantities of animal bone and smaller quantities of soil samples, but both need to be checked, assessed and recorded first. Not all of the finds have had reports written up.

2. If there are issues are you attempting to address them?

No, we are not able to address the issues as we have no one on the staff with Archaeological training, and it is not one of our priority areas. In the last 10 years we have maybe had six enquiries at the most relating to the Archaeology.

3. Do you feel that you have the specialist support you need when dealing with archaeological archives?

No, there has been no one available. We are hoping to take advantage of the 'Expert Eyes' programme in the West Midlands, which 'seeks to link subject specialists directly with areas of collections which lack the relevant expertise among the staff team on site and which would benefit from time to identify, check and improve documentation relating to those collections'.

Alternatively, any other support would be helpful.

Some years ago there was discussion with Stoke-on-Trent to deposit our collections with them, but this never came about.

4. If a solution needs to be found to issues surrounding archaeological archives do you believe it should be a local, regional or national one?

Local, or regional would be preferable with a national register of what exists in the same way as Natural History collections have been assessed.

The Potteries Museum and Art Gallery

Respondent: Don Steward, Curator (Natural History)

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1. Do you have any issues with archaeological archives at your museum?

Only really in terms of storage space, and an apparent over-collecting historically (rationalisation needed).

2. If there are issues are you attempting to address them?

Investing in new shelving when funds available.

3. Do you feel that you have the specialist support you need when dealing with archaeological archives?

Deb Klemperer

4. If a solution needs to be found to issues surrounding archaeological archives do you believe it should be a local, regional or national one?

Probably local (county based).

Hereford Museum Resource and Learning Centre

Respondent: Sam Craig, Collections Officer (Documentation)

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1. Do you have any issues with archaeological archives at your museum?

The main problem that Hereford Museum Resource and Learning Centre experiences is due to the reduction in qualified staff. We have gone from 17 full time members of staff to 6.2 over the last three years (2 posts unfilled). All members of staff have become generalists and all forms of specialism have been taken away. This has reduced the services they used to provide such as artefact ID's, outreach work and archaeology day. Lack of display space in the museum is also an issue.

Storage space is not an issue as we have moved to a new site with open storage which has made access easier and we do get the occasional researcher using the archives. We had 30% expansion space when we first opened though some of this has been used and when we are approaching full we will have to consider issues of rationalisation and value.

2. If there are issues are you attempting to address them?

The move to the new site was partly in response to the storage and lack of access to the archaeological archives which were stored in damp basements. We approached this issue in a local way through the creation of space and new facilities to improve access.

3. Do you feel that you have the specialist support you need when dealing with archaeological archives?

As the space and access issue has currently been solved for the Hereford collection centre these questions have not been fully considered. However, I do believe that they are not always made aware of the significance (or lack of) of an archive which we receive. There is a question as to whether negative archives or sites with very little significance should be deposited at all and if

more use of digital records could be made in this case. Also one of our collection officer has an archaeological background.

4. If a solution needs to be found to issues surrounding archaeological archives do you believe it should be a local, regional or national one?

A national response would be useful and it would not be hard for a committee to develop guidelines for what should stay physical and what should only be stored virtually. Working with other museums in the region would be interesting and selection policies that worked across the region would be a positive step in the right direction.

Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery

Respondent: Ellen McAdam, Director of Birmingham Museum Trust

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1. Do you have any issues with archaeological archives at your museum?

They are not used - in the past two years there has not been a single request and it seems that this was the case before I came as well. I don't think there is a space problem, Birmingham is not generating such a large quantity that we can't cope and my feeling is that if we got the money to re-order them simply re-packing them would make it shrink dramatically. However, if they excavated the Soho foundry which is technically Sandwell/Dudley (but they don't have a museums service) it is such an important site for the industrial revolution I would not want to turn it away but unless there was a rigorous selection policy that would tip us over the edge. I really think the standards across museums transfer policies need sorting out before HS2 goes thundering across the countryside.

2. If there are issues are you attempting to address them?

I have instigated a review to look into the significance of the archaeological archives we hold on a site by site basis, partly from the point of view of research and partly from the point of view of public use of the collection - because ultimately it's the public that are paying for it. One of my problems with professional archaeology is they view the archive as the waste product not as a resource - but it is a resource but we need to define who is going to use it and why and how and they how we actually manage it and at the moment that has not been thought through. I have also asked Mike Hodder to do a mini gazetteer of the sites we have got and assess the significance of each site just to give me some sort of indication from his personal knowledge of how important an archive is.

3. Do you feel that you have the specialist support you need when dealing with archaeological archives?

I was a professional archaeologist and at one time I set up the archive section at Oxford Archaeology so I am very aware that archives can be vehicles for future research.

4. If a solution needs to be found to issues surrounding archaeological archives do you believe it should be a local, regional or national one?

No I think it needs to be nationally, I think the CfA should take this seriously, they should take the lead and set up a working group. I think there could be a set of standards and then applied regionally - it could be built into accreditation. I think there needs to be series of facilitated meetings between the three groups - maybe CfA could do this - the academics, the professional archaeologists and the museums about what we should keep and why and what people will do with it. And it doesn't seem sensible me to just say that in the future there may be research techniques that will allow us to find out all sorts of groovy stuff, that's not possible - more often than not new techniques are applied to a newly excavated site where they can be rigorous in their sampling and context. It's very unusual for people to go back to a site.

I think the discussion should be between academics, professional archaeologists and museums. I don't think any one group should be left to solve this on their own.

5. Do you have any further advice, comments or aware of any projects that are pertinent to the aims of our research?

An outcome of all of this is to look at what academic archaeologists are actually doing - what is that they want from an AA we are producing.

Birmingham Museums Trust

Respondent: Adam Jaffer, Curator of World Cultures

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1. Do you have any issues with archaeological archives at your museum?

The curatorial post for this area was deleted in 2015. The collection is documented to a minimal standard.

If there are issues are you attempting to address them?

No. Unfortunately, there are other priorities for the Museum and Art Gallery and we have no specialism in this area.

3. Do you feel that you have the specialist support you need when dealing with archaeological archives?

Occasionally we discuss with Mike Hodder, the (now retired) city archaeologist and seek advice from Museum staff who have retired.

4. If a solution needs to be found to issues surrounding archaeological archives do you believe it should be a local, regional or national one?

Not sure.

Herbert Museum and Art Gallery

Respondent: Huw Jones, Curator (Human History and Visual Arts)

Herbert Art Gallery & Museum
Culture Coventry

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1. Do you have any issues with archaeological archives at your museum?

The stuff that has been coming in in the last seven- eight years has been coming in in reasonable order and we have kept on top of trying to accession it and get it into our systems. The paper archives are all stored in decent boxes in the archive store, the finds are all in numbered boxes on shelves where we can find them, so this material does not appear to have added to the back log or created major problems.

However, we had more staff than we have now. There are now only three of us to tackle the new material so the stuff that had just come in, it has been given an accession number but when it is catalogued I have no idea as there is more pressure on us that there was a year ago.

The storage however is awful, there is pressure on it. The metalwork and sensitive finds are stored in this building where we do have climate controlled stores so that's no too bad - a little bit of pressure on space but OK. All the bulk finds and the older excavations are stored off site in a store that is not by anyone's stretch of the imagination suitable, and is getting full. Long term, the building is likely to get taken away from us.

As it stands at the moment - anything from before the last seven- eight years, especially the excavations from the 70s and 80s, are a mess. There is a big back log to sort out, the paper archive when there is one is a mess and there is a big job there to match them up. Some of the sites have reports - for example White Friars which was a big dig over many years has a report published but it was only published a few years ago and that was 20-30 years after the last dig was done, by which time a lot of the stuff - well no one knows where it is anymore! I am not sure if the archives were visited during this process. There are things listed in that report that I can find but other things they may be here, they may not.

2. If there are issues are you attempting to address them?

Time, money and staff. Selection and rationalisation is something we think that we need to do but we haven't thought about how we would do that, the criteria we would use etc.

3. Do you feel that you have the specialist support you need when dealing with archaeological archives?

I would go to the Archives group at ClfA and the SMA and colleagues. I have talked to my colleague at Warwick who is probably the only proper curator in our local area. But decent advice is needed. We think that the only way to tackle that whole rationalisation issue is to apply for funding for people with expert elsewhere in the area to come and try to get to grips with it.

4. If a solution needs to be found to issues surrounding archaeological archives do you believe it should be a local, regional or national one?

Broader approach would be useful - it would be good if museums were taking a similar approach using similar criteria across the board rather than us just doing up with something here that suits us but is totally difficult. I would feel nervous with just doing criteria of our own - if they were applied across the board that would be useful.

University of Birmingham (Research and Cultural Collections)

Respondent: Clare Marlow, Collections Manager

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1. Do you have any issues with archaeological archives at your museum?

We have some issues around documentation. Some of our records are in paper form rather than on the collections management database. The collection is generally well documented however although accession numbers have not always been applied to the objects. A location audit is also required.

The collection is relatively small and the university has invested in storage facilities, there are also archaeological volunteers plus a post graduate academic advisor.

2. If there are issues are you attempting to address them?

We are to begin regular meetings with the new academic advisor for the subject area for a plan of action. Reasons for not addressing issues = funding, staff time.

3. Do you feel that you have the specialist support you need when dealing with archaeological archives?

I would not feel we have the knowledge/support for rationalisation, or to undertake significant collecting. Guidelines/best practice info would be useful.

4. If a solution needs to be found to issues surrounding archaeological archives do you believe it should be a local, regional or national one?

It should be both regional and national. Support and advice needs to come from nationals but with a local focus and a pragmatic approach. Any rationalisation/discussion of disposal/collection policies needs to happen in consultation with other institutions as well as the accreditation standard/MA code of ethics.

Warwickshire Museum

Respondent: Sara Wear, Keeper of Archaeology

St John's Museum

Warwick

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sarawear@warwickshire.gov.uk

1. Do you have any issues with archaeological archives at your museum?

Yes. Mainly storage space, the need for rationalisation for older excavation archives, the acceptance of digital archives/elements such as images, HS2.

2. If there are issues are you attempting to address them?

Yes- Digital archives - I am currently working with ADS with a view to getting digital archives deposited directly with them. Storage is not something I have control over, although with an imminent stores move, we have argued for more space. Rationalisation - time is a major factor, as well as specialist knowledge for an informed approach/rationale.

No - Budget restrictions, staff time and low priority within wider organisation (local authority).

3. Do you feel that you have the specialist support you need when dealing with archaeological archives?

Being able to consult with a range of finds specialists would help with forming a rationalisation strategy, conservators for continuing advice on storage and display of sensitive objects.

4. If a solution needs to be found to issues surrounding archaeological archives do you believe it should be a local, regional or national one?

All three for different elements, eg HS2 needs to be regional.

Malvern Museum

Respondent: Faith Renger, Curator

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Great Malvern
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As a preface to these answers, I have to ask two things:

How would you define archaeological objects - we have some pottery, mostly sherds, lots of fossils and rock types, some coins, several broken clay pipes, horseshoes, medieval tiles - all these have been retrieved from the ground but does this make them archaeology?

By archaeological archives do you mean how we store, identify, label and display them? The following answers will probably reflect our somewhat amateurish approach and slight confusion about the nature of the information you are really seeking! ...sorry.

1. Do you have any issues with archaeological archives at your museum?

No - we have very few archaeological items, many of which are on loan from Hartlebury Castle who would resume responsibility if we felt there were concerns, or Malvern Priory. Most items are stored in acceptable archive boxes. Two have been identified by Worcester City Museum staff.

2. If there are issues are you attempting to address them?

N/A

3. Do you feel that you have the specialist support you need when dealing with archaeological archives?

Support has been forthcoming from Hartlebury County Museum before their severe cutbacks, and from Worcester City Museum. A national audit of our rocks and fossils took place several years ago which was very helpful, followed up by a full report. We have worked closely with Earth Heritage Trust in identifying and displaying fossils and rocks, and the local U3A Geology group has shown a

keen interest. Much of our archaeological collection listed above is on display or available in a catalogue (fossils and rocks).

4. If a solution needs to be found to issues surrounding archaeological archives do you believe it should be a local, regional or national one?

I think local would suit our small voluntary museum best.

Walsall Museum

Respondent: Catherine Lister BA (Hons) PgD, Collections Officer

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Walsall Leather Museum
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1. Do you have any issues with archaeological archives at your museum?

Yes. Although our archaeological holdings are very small, they are completely unused. They have not been accessioned as part of our permanent collection so I'm not sure who knows we even have them, let alone how to access them. I am also uncertain how to deal with an archaeological archive compared to a museum collection.

2. If there are issues are you attempting to address them?

No. In my eight years with the museum service I have never had an archaeological enquiry so it is not a high priority issue.

3. Do you feel that you have the specialist support you need when dealing with archaeological archives?

No. Guidance on how to interpret the information within the archive would be useful. It would be good to have a contact list of archaeological organisations to whom we could turn if we did get any enquiries.

4. If a solution needs to be found to issues surrounding archaeological archives do you believe it should be a local, regional or national one?

I think a regional solution would work best for museums, as it could encourage good relations and joint working between neighbouring local authorities, which is needed in the current climate of job cuts and museum closures.

5. Do you have any further advice, comments or aware of any projects that are pertinent to the aims of our research?

For a social and industrial museum collection, I want to retain interesting, displayable objects that can be interpreted as part of a wider story. The retention of a whole archive doesn't serve our purpose and would be enormously expensive just to store. Perhaps if archaeological organisations communicate future plans to local museums then the museums could say from the outset whether or not any finds from that project that would be of interest and if they would wish to retain them, rather than being offered an enormous collection of papers and finds after the event.

Speaking for my museum service – we only have one museum left in the Borough, and it is a specialist collection. The main local history museum closed last year, so any large deposit would have to be of outstanding local interest because we simply haven't got the space or resources to keep it.

The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust

Respondent: Rosalyn Sklar, Museum Collection Officer

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1. Do you have any issues with archaeological archives at your museum?

- Large amount of archival material (paperwork and finds) which is not currently accessible to the public and is not displayed (and therefore) interpreted in any meaningful way.
- Over the years the finds have been separated from identifying numbers and paperwork and so quite a lot of work is needed to reunite paper archives with finds.
- Some finds, I suspect, have been wrongly identified and this needs looking in to.
- We have a great deal of the same amount of one type of material e.g. metal working waste from Tiddington Road. It does not seem like a good use of space or resources to keep all of it but we don't have the expertise to know for sure.
- On the other hand we also have some very good and probably nationally important Anglo-Saxon finds which are hidden from public view and researchers. It would be nice to be able to approach other museums who might be able to provide a more suitable home for this type of object even if that constituted a loan rather than a disposal.

2. If there are issues are you attempting to address them?

- We have had several reviews of our archaeology collection carried out over the last two or three years which has really helped bring everything together and put it into context.
- We have relocated a great deal of our archaeology from unsuitable storage and brought it together in one place.

3. Do you feel that you have the specialist support you need when dealing with archaeological archives?

We do not have specialist support in-house. We would need trained and experienced archaeologists to be able to progress the work that has already been done.

4. If a solution needs to be found to issues surrounding archaeological archives do you believe it should be a local, regional or national one?

Ideally this would be a national effort but local and/or regional is a start and could provide a model for other regions on a national scale.

Wolverhampton City Council

Respondent: Eleanor Ramsey, Archaeology and Historic Environment Officer

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1. Do you have any issues with archaeological archives at your museum?

As far as I'm aware, the problem is mostly space related – although this may be a historic problem. There is an additional problem in that there has been so much loss of staff and so much mixing up of remaining staff in the museums/archives, that the people who made the decision originally probably aren't there anymore. These places are mostly run by volunteers who can't make accession decisions, and it's unclear (until I have the meeting) who exactly now has the authority to say yay or nay as to what gets taken. So if the decision was made in the past, there is no one now who is obvious to collar and say – "This is actually your responsibility!" if you see what I mean. If the decision was made not to take archaeological archives before the archives moved into the Molineux building, then it's possible that they do have space – although that's not to say they will take them, or if they should, as the actual archives takes mostly paper and photos, and it might be that the museum is the appropriate place for actual finds (and they might not have room).

2. If there are issues are you attempting to address them?

Tracking down who has responsibility and finding out what the options are hopefully will happen. There is also a problem with money (obviously) – not just the costs of deposition, but for on-going storage. The museums and archives are under so much pressure to keep costs down at the same time as generate money/be educational/increase footfall. Archaeological archives don't necessarily do any of these things.

3. Do you feel that you have the specialist support you need when dealing with archaeological archives?

We do have a part-time archivist, a local history curator, an archives service, and a museum, so we are not as badly off as some...

4. If a solution needs to be found to issues surrounding archaeological archives do you believe it should be a local, regional or national one?

I'm not sure what the solutions are – I guess it depends on why we are keeping archaeological archives. If the intention is to make them accessible to the public, then a more imaginative approach to what to do with them might help (exhibitions, lending to schools or something?). But if they are going to deep storage as a preservation by record deal, then a more regional/national approach might be more relevant, with long term storage being paid for by developers as part of the program of archaeological works that generated the archive in the first place?

Appendix 2: Responses from national bodies and SSNs

Archaeology Data Service (ADS)

Respondent: Louisa Matthews

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1. What do you consider to be the main issues surrounding archaeological archives in England?

In terms of digital archiving, the main issues for us are: awareness, cost and capacity. Relative to physical archiving, digital archiving is a fairly new concept (although we have now been around for 20 years!). There's still a long way for digital archives in the Historic Environment sector to go in terms of raising awareness and understanding of the importance and need for long-term preservation of digital material.

There's still a problem with lack of vision (i.e. recognising the potential of open access to data) in terms of research and value to the knowledge economy. There is also a lack of understanding about what digital preservation actually is (this isn't necessarily confined to the Historic Environment sector) – for example many people confuse secure backup with long term preservation.

Cost and capacity are an issue (as I'm sure they are for other archives), which is linked to the issues in the previous paragraph. There are two major obstacles for us: lack of inclusion or under budgeting of archiving costs in project designs/funding applications. The commercial sphere find it difficult to justify additional charges for archiving into projects, and there is significant resistance in some quarters who consider the preparation onerous and our prices unreasonable – again this is a problem with understanding what is actually involved in the process of preserving and disseminating collections.

Our final issue is capacity – we're solely project funded now (we used to have a level of core funding but this has not been the case for some years) so although we know there are more projects suitable for archiving out there, we lack the capacity to proactively pursue these.

2. Has your organisation/network approached this issue? If so, in what ways?

We've repeatedly reviewed our costs – especially in relation to archives generated in the sphere of commercial archaeology. This was the thinking behind ADS - easy, however, the technologies we've employed are fairly new to archaeology (and indeed I suspect digital preservation more widely – we're considered to bat well above our weight in digital preservation circles) so although we've had some success, the process of review is a continuous one (which can become a problem in itself as it takes resources away from other things!).

We do try and raise awareness and understanding, so Katie in particular does a lot of CPD workshops, presentations, conferences etc. and she's also on the AAF. We also provide an awful lot of guidance (Guides to Good Practice, Guidelines for Depositors etc.). In terms of capacity we do conduct internal reviews, look at business processes etc. but there's only so much you can fit in alongside the day job!

3. What do you consider to be the solution to issues surrounding archaeological archives, and do you think this approach should be local, regional or national?

I'd hesitate to offer an opinion here – as I think most of this will related to issues coming up in physical archiving.

We certainly advocate a national approach (we work closely with HES and RCAHMW), but there are benefits to regional approaches as there's more granularity and scope for taking into account local variation in resources. One thing I've been trying to do is talk to archaeological advisors at a regional level to get archiving into briefs/WSIs for commercial work. With the exception of the big companies, a lot of contractors work at a regional level, so the idea is to encourage digital archiving region-by-region so that there's level playing field and a degree of consistency between counties.

4. Who do you think should be involved in feeding into, co-ordinating and implementing a collective solution to the issue?

Stakeholders – usually represented by AAF. The problem is only likely to be addressed with changes to legislation that would provide a best-practice framework.

5. Do you have any further advice or comments that are pertinent to the aims of our project?

We'd welcome an approach that takes this work forward in such a way as the physical, paper and digital archives are considered holistically, as opposed to conceptually separate entities.

Archaeological Archives Forum (AAF)

Respondents: Claire Tsang, Archaeological Archives Curator

Historic England

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1. What do you consider to be the main issues surrounding archaeological archives in England?

- Storage
- Loss of expertise
- Selection strategies
- Standards for Best Practice

2. Has your organisation/network approached this issue? If so, in what ways?

The AAF exists to link together all major parties with an interest in archaeological archives in Great Britain and Northern Ireland, so that common policies and practice can be developed and applied, and we can identify the courses of action necessary to further best practice in the field of archaeological archives and to effect the means to achieve this action. However the Forum has no budget so initiatives are carried out by its members.

Recently a major project '*Evaluating the archaeological resource in store – informing the future*' funded by the Historic England and the SMA made a list of recommendations which the AAF members have been following and developing projects from:

- R1 – Produce a policy statement on the significance of archaeological archives nationally, and their importance as a key resource in the future.
- R2 – Promote the potential of archaeological archives as a resource for engaging all communities.
- R3 – Establish a national strategy for archive completion as a means of providing easy access to the archaeological record.

- R4 – Develop a national strategy for the storage and curation of archaeological archives.
- R5 – Ensure that the significance of archives is fully recognised at all stages of planning-led archaeological work.
- R6 – Seek solutions for archive material that currently cannot be transferred to a repository.
- R7 – Develop a framework for the provision of archaeological archive advice to practitioners in planning authorities, contracting organisations, museums, and community groups.
- R8 – Promote and publicise the collecting areas map.

Past Initiatives and projects have included:

- Using 'Archaeological Archives' as a model, '[A Standard and Guide to Best Practice for Archaeological Archiving in Europe](#)' has been produced.
- 2011: Archaeological Archives: A guide to best practice in creation, compilation, transfer and curation (revised edition)
- Archaeological archives are an essential element of the archaeological resource providing the raw material for further research, informing museum displays and teaching collections and giving every member of our society access to the evidence for our shared past.
- The 2003 AAF report, 'A Review of Standards in England for the Creation, Preparation and Deposition of Archaeological Archives' highlighted considerable inconsistencies in approaches to the archiving process and recommended the publication of a guidance document or standard.
- In 2007 the AAF published 'Archaeological Archives: a guide to best practice in creation, compilation, transfer and curation'. This is a comprehensive guide to the process of archaeological archiving for both material and documentary archives, from project planning through to final deposition and curation.
- 'Archaeological Archives' subsequently informed the development of the IfA 'Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Archives', adopted by the Institute in 2009.

- English Heritage has now supported the production of a revised edition that includes an expanded section on Selection and Retention (Section 4). Written by Duncan H Brown and Claire Tsang of [English Heritage](#), the revised section sets out the principles and procedures that should be followed when selecting for the documentary and material archive. A hard copy will be available for insertion into the existing publication while the downloadable version also includes an updated bibliography with additional links to web editions. This revision accords with Recommendation 14 of the *Southport Report* (Southport Group 2011) but it is recognised as 'high level' guidance that it is hoped will inform other, more detailed documents that engage with specific selection issues.

- Download the 2011 version of '[Archaeological Archives. A guide to best practice in creation, compilation, transfer and curation](#)' (PDF 868KB).

- 2009: Securing a Future for Maritime Archaeological Archives Project

There is a critical lack of long-term, accessible and secure homes for maritime archaeological archives (the artefacts, samples and documentary and digital records from the many investigations undertaken in the marine zone around the UK). There is an acknowledged lack of capacity in our museums and archives to curate maritime archaeological archives and a lack of clarity over roles and responsibility for archives from the marine zone. This project has provided baseline information on the scale and extent of the problem to inform future solutions to the current situation, by gathering data on three key areas:

- Current geographical remits of museums and archives in the offshore zone
- The extent of the current situation regarding maritime archives
- Gauge future demand for maritime archaeological archive capacity

The project was undertaken in three stages and the individual project reports are now available for download as PDFs

- [Element One Report: Mapping Maritime Collection Areas](#) (PDF 4.65MB)
- [Element Two Report: Review of Maritime Archaeological Archives and Access](#) (PDF 3.75MB)

- [Element Three Report: Analysing Present and Assessing Future Archive Creation](#) (PDF 1.45MB)

- 2007: Archaeological Archives: A guide to best practice in creation, compilation, transfer and curation.

Archaeological archives are an essential element of the archaeological resource. That mass of collected paper, drawings, photographs, objects and digital data, is a resource that enables not only the reinterpretation of original findings, but also provides the raw material for further research, informs museum displays and teaching collections and gives every member of our society access to the evidence for our shared past.

- In May 2004, 'A Review Of Standards In England For The Creation, Preparation And Deposition Of Archaeological Archives' was received by the Archaeological Archives Forum (AAF). This report highlighted major inconsistencies in the ways various types of archaeological practitioner perceive their role within the archaeological archiving process.

Planning archaeologists, contracting units, specialists and museum curators were all consulted, together with as much documentation as possible.

- The AAF asked the [Institute for Archaeologists](#) (IfA) to manage the preparation of a best practice guidance document that brings together procedures in all stages of the archive process, that has the support of all areas of the archaeological profession, and is available to all practitioners. The final version of the document, written by Duncan H. Brown of Southampton Museums, is now available to [download](#) (PDF 1MB). It is a comprehensive, practical and exhaustive guide to the whole process of archaeological archiving for both material and documentary archives, from project planning through to final deposition and the archive's subsequent curation. The document will also inform the IfA in the preparation of a Standard and guidance for the creation, preparation, transfer and curation of archaeological archives.

- Before 2007:

- 2004: *Disaster management planning for archaeological archives*, by Kenneth Aitchison, published as the Institute of Field Archaeologists Technical Paper 8. This paper sets out in the required detail the considerations that need to be addressed in preparing and implementing a disaster management plan for archaeological archives.

- 2003: Access to archaeological archives, a report for Resource and the Archaeological Archives Forum, by Val Bott. This study sought to define costs associated with the storage of, and provision of access to, archaeological archives in museums.
- 2003: Archaeological Collections Areas Database and Map (Society of Museum Archaeologists), a survey commissioned in September 2002 by the Society of Museum Archaeologists, with funding provided by English Heritage. The research was carried out by Val Bott, a museum consultant.
- 2003: A review of standards in England for the creation, preparation and deposition of archaeological archives, undertaken for the Archaeological Archives Forum by Duncan Brown: [DOC](#) | [PDF](#)
- In addition, the Archaeological Archives Forum endorses and supports the OASIS project as a means of enhancing access to archaeological archives.

3. What do you consider to be the solution to issues surrounding archaeological archives, and do you think this approach should be local, regional or national?

Due to the nature of archaeology in England there is not a one single strategy that will work for England, because of how repositories are funded, work needs to be undertaken at all levels to ensure issues are dealt with.

4. Who do you think should be involved in feeding into, co-ordinating and implementing a collective solution to the issue?

Historic England, archaeological contractors, museum curators (and museums), and local authority archaeological officers, the Society of Museum Archaeology (SMA) and the Federation of Archaeological Managers and Employers, (FAME), ICON, ClfA, SCFA, Arts Council, Society of Antiquities, CBA, ALGAO, ADS, National Trust, Historic Royal Palaces, The National Archives.

Society for Museum Archaeology (SMA)

Respondents: Gail Boyle, Senior Curator (Archaeology)

Bristol Culture
Bristol Museum and Art Gallery
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1. What do you consider to be the main issues surrounding archaeological archives in England?

2. Has your organisation/network approached this issue? If so, in what ways?

The most recent study SMA did with regard to archives was published in 2012 (covers the above questions) – the link to this and the most up to date archaeological collecting area map we have can be found on our website <http://socmusarch.org.uk/projects/>

We are in the process of commissioning an important piece of project work. The purpose of this project, over an initial period of three years, is to conduct an annual survey of museums that have archaeology collections, to establish which ones are continuing to collect archives from archaeological projects. The survey will also establish the scope and estimated longevity of collecting within each museum, arrangements for curatorial care for digital material and levels of archaeological curatorial expertise among employed personnel. The overall aim is to provide information on the level of collections care offered to the archives resulting from archaeological projects across the sector. This intelligence will inform discussions on the future of archaeological archive provision in England at a time when there is growing uncertainty over the role of museums and the ways they are resourced.

A representative from the SMA attended a meeting of representatives from HERs, museums and units operating in the SW which took place at Wessex Archaeology to look at the possibility of developing a regional strategy for dealing with archives.

SMA has been involved in round table discussions with HE, FAME, ALGAO and CIFA with a view to providing solutions to the problem of orphaned archives (and others) – one of the actions that has arisen from this is that from 1 April 2016 SMA will be asking museums across the UK to submit a record of when/how/by whom stored archives are being used using a Survey Monkey form to collect and collate the data.

3. What do you consider to be the solution to issues surrounding archaeological archives, and do you think this approach should be local, regional or national?

4. Who do you think should be involved in feeding into, co-ordinating and implementing a collective solution to the issue?

I can confirm that Society for Museum Archaeology might be interested in helping to develop the West Midlands Museum Development Programme initiative further but we would need to discuss the best and most appropriate mechanism for our members/others in providing access to specialist advice and support and in what form.

With regard to exemplar practice relating to mitigating the effect of the loss of expertise and skill sharing (albeit by other subject specialists) you may be interested in a project that is being run by the South West Museum Development Programme in conjunction with Bristol Museum, Galleries and Archives (BMGA). This is definitely an approach we might seek to replicate.

<http://www.southwestmuseums.org.uk/projects-grants/john-ellerman-foundation-project/>

SMA has recently been very active in promoting better communication between it and the other SSNs and to this end I will be attending a meeting in London on 12 Feb. It is entirely possible that other initiatives will come to the fore that I can share with you.

Chartered Institute for Archaeologists Archaeological Archives Group (CIfA AAG)

Respondents: CIfA AAG committee

<http://www.archaeologists.net/groups/archives>

1. What do you consider to be the main issues surrounding archaeological archives in England?

The Chartered Institute for Archaeological Archives Group was founded in 2012 as a response to growing concern regarding the current status of archaeological archives amongst the institute's membership. As the representatives of a professional body the main aims of the group are to focus upon issues relating to professional standards, best practice, advocacy and access, and to promote awareness of archaeological archives within the profession. This has mainly taken the form of representing the interests of those working with archives in all CIfA activities and to hold seminars and workshops to facilitate the promotion of these professional standards amongst the sector.

2. Has your organisation/network approached this issue? If so, in what ways?

Following the completion of a successful series of workshops on 'Good Practice in Archiving Archaeological Projects' during 2013 and 2014 the group has moved on to consider the wider aspects of archaeological archives. The 2015 AGM event held in Birmingham involved a cross-discipline discussion to find common ground and to consider specific archive issues arising from the differing ways of collecting archaeological data, with the aim of providing mutual support and creating networks. The day involved talks from commercial units, independent museums and national bodies followed by a discussion during which common themes such as archive creation, storage and access were highlighted.

The CIfA AAG is aware of the issues surrounding Archaeological Archives within the museum sector (i.e. storage, access, dwindling expertise) and individual members are routinely involved with discussions and workshops on the subject. Given the growing number of individual institutions and bodies attempting to address what they see as the problem, the group has organised a day conference on 'Selection, De-selection and Rationalisation' to be held in Birmingham in March. The aim of the conference is to consider what a selection strategy should look like by providing overviews and case studies for context, introductory guidance and practical examples.

3. What do you consider to be the solution to issues surrounding archaeological archives, and do you think this approach should be local, regional or national?

The ultimate goal following the day conference is the creation of national guidelines for developing a selection strategy. These would not be a one size fits all set of rules but more a template for museums and archaeological units to apply as necessary.

4. Who do you think should be involved in feeding into, co-ordinating and implementing a collective solution to the issue?

The group has close ties with the archaeological Archives Forum and the Society for Museum Archaeologists and hopes to recruit a new member from the ADS at this year's AGM. The group is keen to work with these organisations to see guidelines in place that would contribute to the search for solutions to the archaeological archives 'crisis'.

English Heritage

Respondent: Matt Thompson, Head Collections Curator

English Heritage

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1. What do you consider to be the main issues surrounding archaeological archives in England?

Retention and use; there are real issues about the quantity of archaeological material that is retained. Storage is a major issue everywhere in the museum/heritage sector but the implications for archaeology are huge. However, this is made more complicated by the fact that archaeological collections are generally research collections - only a small percentage of the items will be suitable for display in exhibitions etc. but that small percentage of 'star' objects only make sense when looked at in context with the other 10,000 pits of broken pot/bone. Disposal of museum objects is often predicated on significance and the potential for display/access BUT with archaeological collections an individual object or group of objects may be extremely insignificant on their own (say 25 pot sherds out of 10,000) but could be extremely significant when looked at as a whole (the only 25 sherds of amphora from a Spanish olive oil estate etc). It sometimes feels like it is precisely the quantities of archaeological material that can make them so useful (and the results of processing so statistically significant) as sources of potential research.

2. Has your organisation/network approached this issue? If so, in what ways?

Lots of things - stone clamps come to mind... reburying architectural stone work on the sites where they were originally used/excavated. We have done some high end scientific work looking at the right conditions to justify doing this. But there is a lot more to do. We are also carrying out what I can only describe as 'secondary excavation' where we are taking excavation records from the 10s, 20s and 30s and reassessing their interpretation of their findings by reuniting them with the finds - this is producing some seriously interesting results.

3. What do you consider to be the solution to issues surrounding archaeological archives, and do you think this approach should be local, regional or national?

There is a strong argument for a national approach but it is difficult to apply the same rationale to the issue as with museums. For example... there is sense in the idea that Ironbridge have a strong

collection of Maw and Co tiles therefore the V&A needn't focus on that particular area. But there is a strong sense of place associated with archaeological collections - it's not just that it is what it is; it's also that it was found where it was found... given this, the idea of disposing of lots of archives of, say, villa excavations in Essex, or whatever, because we have got some excellent archives of villa excavations in Gloucestershire just doesn't stack up. The place-specific nature of much of this stuff means that it always carries with it a level of significance. Anyway... this issue is not complicated (which to me implies that it's difficult but that there is a solution- like making a clock) it's complex... there is no solution - just a whole bunch of ideas we need to explore to try, incrementally, to improve things.

4. Who do you think should be involved in feeding into, co-ordinating and implementing a collective solution to the issue?

See above... not sure we should presuppose a collective solution exists... but we do need to share ideas etc. There seems to me to be a bit of a disconnect between archaeological and museum approaches and, while there need to be differences (see above) I think it would be really helpful if, say, the Collections Trust were involved or some such? Ultimately even ACE should get involved

5. Do you have any further advice or comments that are pertinent to the aims of our project?

I guess I have answered here about excavated archaeological as well as the paper archive that accompanies this - and that may be a mistake on my part. Also there is a general caveat that I'm writing this in haste without thinking it through properly!

Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers (ALGAO)

Respondent: Chris Patrick, Conservation and Archaeology Officer

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1. What do you consider to be the main issues surrounding archaeological archives in England?

We would consider there to be three principal issues, firstly many West Midlands local authority areas do not have a repository for archaeological archives, Wolverhampton being a case in point. Other areas like Coventry and Herefordshire do have museums willing to take archives and with plenty of space but the problem now is that the museums have a declining number of staff to curate the collection and operate a service. Thirdly areas that do have space and staff often have no capacity to securely store digital information. More generally all museums are under threat to a certain extent and looking into the future we may no longer be able to guarantee the longevity of archives.

2. Has your organisation/network approached this issue? If so, in what ways?

Nationally ALGAO has been raising the issue at various forums and to various partner organisations.

3. What do you consider to be the solution to issues surrounding archaeological archives, and do you think this approach should be local, regional or national?

If we can no longer guarantee museums in all authority areas there need to be regional archive stores with accompanying regional or national solutions for securely storing digital data. These would need to easily access material, have dedicated staff and space to study material on-site.

Greater provision (funding) needs to be made by developers (or whoever initiated the fieldwork) at the outset of the project for long term storage. Museum storage is currently very cheap and it will not stay that way for long.

4. Who do you think should be involved in feeding into, co-ordinating and implementing a collective solution to the issue?

National government, local government, Historic England, museums. It is a nationwide problem and needs a nationally led solution.

5. Do you have any further advice or comments that are pertinent to the aims of our project?

Archives need to be made more relevant and shown as the receptacles of our material heritage that they are, if not the political solution might be seen as 'keep less' then 'collect less' and finally not do it at all!



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