

Archaeological Archives Forum
Minutes of Meeting 2nd Sept 2008
The British Academy, Carlton House Terrace, London

The 13th meeting of the Archaeological Archive Forum was held at 12.30pm on the 2nd September at the British Academy, Carlton House Terrace.

In attendance: Philip Wise: SMA (PW), Duncan Brown: IFA Finds Group (DB), Kenneth Aitchison: IFA (KA), Jesse Ransley: IFA Maritime Affairs Group (JR), Mike Evans: EH (ME), Quinton Carroll: ALGAO (QC), Kathy Perrin: EH (KP), Isabel Holroyd: CBA (IH), Catherine Hardman: ADS (CH), Gavin Evans: Welsh Museums (GE), Sue Whitehouse: IHBC (SW).

1. Apologies

Noel Fojut, Rhonda Robinson, Brian Williams, Julie Satchell, Hilary Malaws, Dan Hull, Nick Merriman, David Uffindell, Lesley Ferguson, Jim Spriggs, Adrian Brown, Michael Dawson.

2. Minutes of last meeting

Agreed as record of previous meeting.

3. Matters arising from previous minutes

Sue Whitehouse (Institute of Historic Building Conservation) gave a presentation on Built Historic Environment archive issues before the meeting.

John Sheppard has agreed to join the Forum as representative for the Academic sector. Jim Spriggs has agreed to represent ICON/Archaeology Group on the Forum.

PW has received copies of Archives Guidance to Best Practice for SMA members. These are being promoted through the SMA website and will be taken to the SMA annual conference for further distribution. ADS has also received copies. PW still to write article for TA, and KA still to contact Current Archaeology and British Archaeology about review of the Guidance.

Training Programme group has not met re: Training day. However, ALGAO is organising seminar day on Archives process on 14th November 08 at which DB will be speaking.

PW now has dates for meeting with Hedley Swain museums deposition policy and regarding box grant/charging schemes.

QC reported back on draft guidance for use and preservation of digital archives by IFA CoWP: CoWP responded to enquiry by suggesting that the document highlighted by ALGAO at last AAF meeting was only for targeted, limited consultation (which included ALGAO but not AAF), and if it is developed further will go to wider consultation.

Actions: PW and DB to write article on Archives Guide for TA;

KA to contact Current Archaeology and British Archaeology about reviewing the Guide;

PW to meet with Hedley Swain re: Box grant/charging schemes.

[AGENDA POINTS 4 and 5 were addressed together in the context of discussion about the future of the Forum]

4. AAF Implementation Group

5. AAF Terms of Reference

PW suggested it was appropriate, given recent discussion of potentially broadening the AAF to include the built historic environment, that the Forum consider its role and

future. KP outlined the AAF's origins in 2002 and the central goal of facilitating the development of archive resource centres; two years ago the Forum looked at its agenda again and began to address the maritime archives issue. She further suggested that by spring 2009 the Resource Centre development Guidance and the maritime archives project would be complete, and asked if the Forum has work to do beyond these two central projects or whether it has fulfilled its role. PW named the three ongoing issues on the Forward Agenda (Training, Museum Deposition policies, Selection and Retention guidance) and raised the potential (given current political climate) for developing relationship with wider HE sector. He then asked for Forum members' views:

JR suggested that if Forum continued it needed to change and evolve, and to reform with broader built historic environment representation, if it wishes to achieve 'buy-in' from the built historic environment community for future initiatives.

KA responded that if there are still issues with archaeological archives than there is a role for the Forum. DB suggested there was further work in promoting resource centre development beyond the guidance, that there is a need to clarify relationship between Record Office and Resource Centres, to address links to HERs and to look at built historic environment in relation to this.

CH highlighted the strengths of the Forum – bringing the right people together, identifying issues and actioning work to address them – but suggested that a change in the running of the Forum maybe needed (possibly meeting only once a year with different working/project groups addressing specific problems in between). IH suggested a JISC e-list might be a useful way to support on-going AAF discussion outside meetings. KP suggested that if the Forum wishes to fully engage wider HE sector, it needs to look at the idea of rounding-up forum and re-constituting a new group since re-branding the current forum was not likely to be perceived as inclusive by built historic environment sector. PW pointed out that even in a re-constituted Forum archaeological organisations would be dominant because of the numbers, but that with the Heritage Bill and changes in legislative landscape the built historic environment issue certainly needed to be addressed.

QC asked if the crisis which promoted development of AAF in 2002 has been resolved and suggested there is still much work to do – with a key issue selection and retention – and argued that disbanding and reforming would dilute the Forum. KA and DB agreed adding that it should be possible to continue in dialogue with wider HE groups without 'treading on toes', and that if an attempt to meld with archive/records organisations was made it will begin with a semantic problem over 'archive'.

GE added that the Welsh presence on the Forum was felt to need to change now that 'What's in Store?' recommendations have been submitted to the Welsh Assembly and suggested that they were ready to downgrade to observer status.

PW summed up views – AAF should continue, there are still problems to address, but need to address relationship with built historic environment sector and Devolved Nation involvement (adding that would be detrimental to work of AAF to lose UK wide remit and that a resolution for Wales might be corresponding member status rather than simply observers).

JR suggested issue was one of Forum's structure and how it implements projects in the future, not whether it should continue. KP suggested an annual meeting as an annual national event, with national reports first and projects reports/updates afterwards so that national issues can be fully raised. CH added that this format would allow the annual meeting to set the agenda – whilst recognising that the solutions to issues might be different in different areas. GE supported the idea, pointing out that the maritime archives issue highlighted the value of bringing different national issues to the attention of all. ME suggested an annual meeting

might also then allow for further presentations such as SW's on the Built Historic Environment which helped inform both Forum work and member organisations – he suggested County Archivist as next possible presentation and supported the idea of an annual meeting for core business but also horizon searching other areas through such presentations.

PW summarised: further meeting in spring 2009 to tie up current projects, beyond which Forum would become annual meeting with smaller implementation/working groups meeting between on particular issues/projects.

He queried whether a different location might also be useful to national heritage agencies, but KP pointed out the comparative cost issue (since room at BA is in effect free to AAF and EH covers food, but elsewhere room costs would have to be met).

CH and IH offered to set up JISC list for AAF (as .ac.uk email address required to do so), both Forum group and other wider, public group possible to improve communication with organisations such as IHBC.

Action: JR to produce outline of suggested changes to Forum structure and working practice to circulate before next meeting.

6. Archives Guide to Best Practice - Update

KA reported that ADS has sent copies to all university departments, ALGAO have sent to all members, and SMA are attempting to distribute to all their members. (DB added that requested copies have been sent to HS and DOENI as well). However, IFA members have not yet received individual copies. 450 copies of the Guidance are still held by IFA, and there are c.2800 members. KA reported EH are sometimes cautious about paying for publications to be sent direct to IFA members (since they are not certain it is the best way to get to all archaeologists at large). KP pointed out that since all badging organisation members have copies of the Guidance, it is appropriate to argue for further copies to be provided for IFA members.

KA reported on European follow-on project. EAC have provided money for KA and DB to prepare a bid to CULTURE 2007-2013 for an expanded Archives Best Practice Guidance to apply across Europe. Bid response will be 2010, with project proposed for 2010-2012. KP offered congratulations to DB and KA on the response from the European working party, which were so impressed with the AAF Guidance that they wished to pursue follow-on project (and noted the American interest – a representative has now been sent to the working party to observe).

Action: KA to make application to EH for further c.2000 copies of Guidance to send to all IFA members.

7. AAF Forward Agenda

Selection and Retention – KP provided background: AAF commissioned a scoping project towards goal of producing framework of selection and retention decision-making process. Consultant sought opinion of sector and project became bogged down in individual artefact categories. Issue then shelved for time-being by Forum in favour of other projects.

PW recognised this was a difficult subject which raises strong opinion, and suggested SMA guidelines as potential starting point. These have not been picked up enough, but he suggested they might be useful with further updating (published in 1992). KP commented on poor take-up on SMA guidelines by archaeologists. JR suggested because they are seen as end of process, and not integrated in to project planning and implementation. DB suggested SMA guidelines would require considerable updating of decision-making sequence of events in line with how projects are now run and funded etc. CH queried whether SMA guidelines included

digital data. PW said unlikely since produced in 1992. KP suggested premise of SMA guidelines is 'end of process' and they address categories of material – and that what is required now is guidance which addresses the whole archaeological process, and the need for each project to fit selection and retention to research priorities, that guidelines should bring the decision-making tree into the process (possibly as an extra module in the Archives Guidance document, since it should fit that framework). DB agreed.

QC reported the initiation of a project by Cambridgeshire County Council to draw up retention policies for both backlog and future deposition. The opportunity had arisen as Oxford Archaeology had recently taken over the council's field unit, and found a large archiving backlog. Both Oxford and Cambridgeshire wanted to address this, and funding is available to work up a project design and set out intentions/scope. Process will begin this autumn. Project will address more than rationalisation of backlog/retrospective guidelines, want them robust enough to fit future projects as well, and to develop criteria based on academic value and research potential as well as sustainability of long term archiving. KP questioned whether could/should be used as pilot. QC suggested intention was to frame an idea and seek responses – to begin the process.

There was further discussion of the scale of issue – whether project archives produced previously reflect selection and retention policy being applied less and less, or more. KP suggested problem is framed by 'preservation by record' notion, which encourages idea of an objective material record where everything can be preserved for future research (and archaeologists become 'bean counters' as a result). DB warned against going to far the other way and providing a 'throw away as much as possible' driver. The key difference between a site discard policy and rigorous application of the process in the finds room was highlighted by several members.

PW enquired over IFA position – KA reported the Finds S & G addressed treatment not selection and retention, DB reported IFA Finds group policy states specialist should be involved at each decision-making stage.

KP suggested a working group was needed to set out PD to produce selection and retention guidance (as a further module to fit within Archives Guidance). PW, DB, JR, KA, QC and CH all signalled happy to contribute (plus KP as corresponding member). PW enquired after Cambridgeshire project timetable to fit working group meeting in usefully. QC reported 6 months til PD will be ready. A brainstorming session of working group was suggested for end of October – beginning of Nov.

Training Programme – PW suggested that for the moment the Forum should support other archive training initiatives, since not felt Forum members could sustain further initiatives at the current time.

Further – PW raised museum deposition policy issues (box-grant and collecting areas coherency etc). He will discuss with Hedley Swain at meeting. KP raised question of public awareness of Forum work and accessibility of webpage. IH reported CBS redeveloping website and will report worries back to CBA. Links from other webpages need to be improved.

Actions: JR to email working group with possible meeting dates and location.

PW to discuss museum deposition policy issues at meeting with Hedley Swain.

IH to report 'visibility and accessibility' AAF webpages worries to CBA.

PW to check link to AAF webpage on SMA website. KA to check link from IFA website. JR to check link from IFA MAG webpages.

8. Policy Statement on Archive Resource Centres

KP reported the Policy statement was one element of three-part approach to Resource Centres (RC) developed by project team. It is intended to sit alongside the Best Practice Guidance on developing a RC, as an over-arching document which states why these need to be developed (to support funding applications etc.). Hedley Swain also plans to produce a more statistical supporting document to the Policy Statement. The Statement has been revised in response to HS and DOENI comment; it is now less of a 'pressure document'. In Scotland, HS are happy with the document, but are unable to engage the museums sector and unwilling to endorse without their agreement. JR asked if HS do not sign up whether further Scottish circulation/advocacy is possible to try and secure support before the Statement finalised.

KP asked for comment by the end of the month and reminded forum members to circulate to relevant colleagues since members are representing whole organisations.

Actions: JR to circulate revised version by email.

Forum members to provide feedback by end of September.

9. Ongoing Projects

9a. Developing an Archaeological Resource Centre Guidance

Draft Guidance document has been submitted to the project management team, and the organisations visited during development, and revised based upon their comments. The revised version was submitted to the Forum for comment with the meeting agenda. Comment is sought asap, so that the final version can be produced by Christmas.

Action: Forum members to provide feedback to DB by end of September.

9b. Maritime Archives Project

JR reported that the project website is up and running and all questionnaires are live and online. Initial response to Phase One (Mapping collecting areas - and archives held by public museums) has been good. The deadline has been extended to facilitate full completion of the questionnaire and the project team has developed an excel spreadsheet version of the questionnaire to aid those with multiple archives who need to be able to return to it over a period of time (which makes online completion less suitable). The follow-up calls to those museums who have not responded will begin soon. Responses to Phase Two (Review of current archives and access - who holds what and where) are beginning to come in. There have been a number of articles in diver magazines, society newsletters and on online forum to publicise the survey, as well as direct contact made with target groups through the development of a large circulation list. The number of private individuals responding is positive, and personal follow-up is planned as necessary for university/research sector, private exhibitions and all PWA licensee/nominated archaeologists. Phase 3 (Analysing present and assessing future archive creation) is just beginning with the first meetings with key groups (Wessex Archaeology were the first in late August). The meetings should be completed by end of Dec 08.

10. National Reports

No national representatives were present from Scotland or Northern Ireland.

Wales

GE reported that the 'What's in Store?' working group has submitted its report to the Head of Historic Environment/Welsh Assembly with its recommendations (and also held its final meeting in May). It awaits the response, but there is some indication that it will result in the establishment of a National Panel for Archaeological Archives.

Actions: GE to discuss RCAHMW/CADW becoming corresponding member rather than observer with Hilary Malaws.

PW to approach Elizabeth Walker to establish formal liaison with Welsh panel for archaeological archives once established.

11. AOB

Thanks were offered to ADS for archiving the Archives Guidance project and to SW for her very well-received presentation.

12. Date of next meeting

3rd February 2009, British Academy, Carlton House Terrace, London.
2pm start (lunch at 1pm).