ARCHAEOLOGICAL ARCHIVES FORUM: ANNUAL REPORT

INTRODUCTION

The need to ensure that archaeological archives are an accessible, useful and well-used resource is a priority both for English Heritage and the archaeological community as a whole.

David Miles, Chief Archaeologist, neatly summed up the reasons in his foreword to the 2002 EH report on archaeological archives which highlighted the current situation with respect to archaeological archives in England.[1]

'In many archaeological projects the emphasis is placed on discovery, recording and publication. The archive, vital for future interrogation, can all too often be neglected, poorly curated and inaccessible. In fact the archaeological archive is the corner stone in any project, containing as it does the irreplaceable data and material record of a site which may no longer remain extant. The importance of the archive in the archaeological process and the contribution it makes to the heritage cannot be over stressed. As we look to the future, it becomes even more apparent that exciting developments in digital access to information and the growing impact of the government's e agenda will combine to allow the archive to be explored in ways never before imagined by local communities and by people around the world.'

There has been a clear need to address some of the complex and often long-standing issues surrounding archaeological archives, some of which were identified in the Swain report 1998[2]. These range from a lack of storage facilities, problems with access, lack of proper documentation of the archives, the need for more use and imaginative re-use of the resource, through to the modern challenge of digital archiving.

In late 2001, order to tackle such a huge and complex agenda, English Heritage undertook a project which identified all the issues, began to prioritise the most pressing and outlined courses of future action. This was based on wide consultation throughout the heritage sector. The results are described in the 2002 English Heritage report, (see endnote 1), one of whose main recommendations was that the most effective way forward was for the wider heritage sector to work together in partnership on an agreed action plan.

This goal has now been achieved with the establishment in May 2002 of a UK wide Archaeological Archives Forum comprising representatives of the major bodies in the heritage sector. At its inaugural meeting the Forum formally adopted the 11 recommendations of the EH report as its initial agenda for action. In the year since its inception the Archaeological Archives Forum has successfully progressed almost all these objectives and importantly it now has

full national representation in its membership. This report sums up the main achievements for the year.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE FORUM

The Archaeology Data Service

The Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers

CADW

The Council for British Archaeology

Department of Environment and Heritage Northern Ireland

English Heritage

Historic Scotland

The Institute of Field Archaeologists

The Institute of Field Archaeologists Finds Group

The Museums Association

Museums Documentation Association (corresponding member)

RCHAMS

RCHAMW

Resource

The Society of Antiquaries of London

The Society of Museum Archaeologists

The Forum Chair is Hedley Swain, who represents the Society of Museum Archaeologists and the two Vice-Chairs are David Morgan-Evans, General Secretary of The Society of Antiquaries of London and Diana Murray representing the RCHAMS. The Forum secretary is Kathy Perrin who represents English Heritage. Minutes of the Forum meetings which are held bi-annually can be found on the Forum Web page hosted by The Council for British Archaeology web site at www.britarch.ac.uk/archives/.

FORUM AGENDA 2002–3, PROGRESS REPORT.

1. Standards guidance on archive roles, procedures and responsibilities.

'Standards guidance should be developed, under a multi logo umbrella, which sets out archive procedures, roles and responsibilities for the wider profession. This should draw on current documentation and form a set of model procedures that can be adapted at a local level. The production of draft procedures must be followed by a wide professional debate in order to assure agreement and sign up. A steering group should be charged with this role, headed up by representatives of key involved groups, such as IFA, ALGAO, SMA, SCAUM, EH and Resource.'

ALGAO and the IFA agreed to work in partnership on this project and a project design for the work was presented to the Forum meeting of March 2003. It was agreed at this meeting that the work would benefit from a national rather than a purely English focus and the project managers were asked to revise the text accordingly and also to seek additional funding sources from our national colleagues for the programme expansion. In the interim English Heritage agreed to fund the English element of the project. This has now been agreed and commissioned and work began on the project in August 2003.

2. Local Area Forums

'Local area forums should be established which bring together the wider discipline. The Resource initiative, which intends to set up regional hubs for archives, libraries and museums, should be capitalised on as a stepping stone for wider forums. It is recommended that EH and Resource work together to examine the potential for expanding this initiative.'

English Heritage pre-empted work on this issue as within the last year all the EH regional offices have successfully established regional Historic Environment Forums. At its March 2003 meeting the Forum agreed to pursue formal liaison channels with the emerging regional Historic Environment Forums.

3. Training programmes

'Training programmes in archaeological archive processes for the wider archaeological discipline should be devised, aimed at differing audiences and cross sector teaching. The MDA are an ideal body to take the lead in this initiative.'

The IFA and SMA have jointly agreed to produce a project design for this work which will be completed for the next Forum meeting.

4. EH box grant and museum charging policies

'*EH and Resource should review both the EH box grant, and museum charging policies. Options such as a developer tax, general investment funds, and alternative sources of sustainable funding should be explored. The need for investment in digital curation should not be overlooked*'.

A review of the EH box grant system has been undertaken and in consultation with Resource new procedures have been agreed. This will ensure a fairer simpler procedure for the museum service and also smooth the transfer procedure from archaeological practice to museum.

Resource is also undertaking a review of museum storage costs with a view to rationalising museum charging policies for the accession of archaeological archives. This project is due to report before the next Forum meeting.

5. Standards guidance for temporary storage of archives

'*Standards guidance for temporary storage of archaeological collections should be developed for both museums and contractors. Current standards should be utilised to produce baseline guidance. This initiative should be linked to the review of the current museum registration standards proposed by Resource. The new standards should be developed under a multi logo umbrella, including the SMA, IFA, ALGAO, Resource, and EH.*'

This guidance will be included within the ALGAO/IFA project on 'standards guidance on archive roles, procedures and responsibilities'. (see above)

6. PPG 15/16 revision

'*EH and Resource should seek to influence DCMS and DTLR on the need to revise PPG16 to include the duty of care to medium and long term storage of archaeological materials, and the costs involved in storage and curation.*'

An AAF working party was formed to address this issue. Basic principles and a form of words were agreed and provided for the EH representative on the ODPM working party. This had a successful outcome as the suggestions were fully incorporated in the latest revision of the text.

7. SMA museum collecting areas and policies project

The SMA initiative which will map museum collecting areas should be broadened to include collecting policies. The results should be used to inform the wider discipline on combining collecting policies with national, regional and local research agendas where relevant, and also where resources should be targeted to counteract gaps in provision.

This project report is now complete and there will shortly be an interactive map on the ADS website which will allow the heritage sector access to up to date information on local museum provision and collecting policies.

8. Framework for archaeological selection strategies

'English Heritage should collate the views of all sectors of the profession on a proposed national framework for the selection, retention, and discard of archaeological archives. The results from this study will be analysed along with the results of the SMA mapping project (10.2.4), in order to draw up an overall position statement, which will be brought before the Archaeological Archives Forum (10.4) for endorsement.'

A project, funded by Resource, is undertaking the first stage in a process which will eventually provide a full decision making framework for archaeological selection strategies. The current stage aims to map the archaeological process across the whole spectrum of archaeological work, identifying decision making points and the relevant consultation resources necessary to the selection process. A draft report is imminent.

9. Disaster management planning guidelines

Disaster management planning guidelines for archaeological contractors should be drafted. These should be produced under the auspices of the IFA.

EH have recently commissioned the IFA to undertake this work for the AAF. This draft guidance should be ready for circulation to the Forum members early in the New Year for approval at the March meeting.

10. Archaeology and the law

The IFA should produce a guidance note on archaeology and the law, which should include model clauses for archaeological contracts.

The IFA began to work on this project but unfortunately, due to the complicated issues involved, work has stalled and it is now dormant. It was agreed that the SMA would provide a discussion paper for the next Forum meeting in October.

11. Grant procedures and model briefs

IFA, ALGAO and EH should carry out a scoping project to review current grant procedures and model briefs in order to determine how new standards, which should incorporate a wider view of dissemination up to and including deposition in a public repository, can be implemented and monitored.

The Forum will implement work on this project once the new PPS is issued.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ARCHIVES FORUM

FORWARD STRATEGY 2003–2004

Current agenda

In the coming year the Forum intends to press on with its current agenda in order to bring the remaining active projects to completion. These projects were viewed by the Forum as essential building blocks that had to be put in place prior to any innovative changes taking place in the way archaeological archives are managed and used.

Regional archaeological resource centres.

There is widespread acknowledgement that archaeological resource centres, whether regional or more locally based, are a good solution to some of the current problems in England. The LAARC in London is a prime example, and already a number of areas in the country are actively developing plans to follow suit. The Forum intends to aid and facilitate the development of archaeological resource centres throughout England, and hope to start the ball rolling with a day conference early in the new year.

Access to and re-use of archaeological archives

The morning of the October Forum meeting will be devoted to this issue and we intend to examine current use of archives and proposals for Forum involvement in the development of policies to promote access and re-use. The membership are charged with bringing proposals to this meeting, the end result of which we hope to be the formation of a small working party to drive the initiative forward.

Europe

Other plans for the coming year include developing links with our European colleagues. We intend to explore the possibility of forging a European archaeological archives working party, beginning with a round table session at this year's EAA conference in St Petersburg in September.

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September 2003

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[1] 2002, Perrin, K, Archaeological Archives, Documentation, Access and Deposition, A Way Forward, English Heritage.
[2] Swain H, 1998, A Survey of Archaeological Archives in England. A report prepared for English Heritage and the Museums and Galleries Commission, English Heritage and the Museums and Galleries Commission.