

Archaeological Archives Forum

Minutes of Meeting: Tuesday 5th May 2009
The British Academy, Carlton House Terrace, London

The 14th meeting of the Archaeological Archive Forum was held at 2pm on the 5th May 2009 at the British Academy, Carlton House Terrace.

In attendance: Philip Wise: SMA (PW), Duncan Brown: IFA Finds Group (DB), Quinton Carroll: ALGAO (QC), Mike Evans: EH (ME), Lesley Ferguson: RCAHMS (LF), Catherine Hardman: ADS (CH), Dan Hull: CBA (DH), Kathy Perrin: EH (KP), Jesse Ransley: IFA Maritime Affairs Group (JR).

1. Apologies

Kenneth Aitchison, Noel Fojut, Hilary Malaws, Rhonda Robinson, Julie Satchell, Jim Spriggs, Hedley Swain, Brian Williams.

2. Minutes of last meeting

Agreed as record of previous meeting.

3. Matters arising from previous minutes

PW met Hedley Swain in January: Memorandum of Understanding between MLA and EH was discussed at that meeting. (The MOU arose following questions in the House over archives, which resulted in the Minister saying EH would work with the MLA on the issue.) The MOU has stalled with Head of Strategy at EH, Adrian Olivier. KP pointed out EH's main means of affecting change for archives is through the Forum. LF added that one of the things she is tasked with is developing an MOU relating to documentary and digital archives between RCAHMS and HS. Box grant/charging schemes were not discussed at the meeting.

PW and DB plan to produce an article for TA on the Archives Guidance over the summer – either focusing on the addition of the planned Selection and Retention Guidance to the Archives Guidance, or the results of DB's survey on use of the Guidance.

Training Programme – PW suggested that for the moment the Forum should support other archive training initiatives, since felt Forum members could not sustain further initiatives at the current time. Both the ALGAO training day last November and the PW's paper on archives at the IFA conference were discussed as examples of this approach.

DH reported on the changes to the CBA website and the renewed link to the AAF page from the partners section of the homepage. He suggested further links might be made through the NGO section of the Archaeology Online contacts list and any other pages the Forum might suggest.

Actions: PW to email Adrian Olivier re: EH-MLA MOU on behalf of Forum.

PW will meet with Hedley Swain again to discuss museum deposition policy issues (box-grant and collecting areas coherency etc).

PW and DB to write article on Archives Guide for TA.

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

4. National Reports

4a. Scotland

LF reported on the planned new archive buildings in Scotland. The land was bought for the complex next to the National Museum in Edinburgh, but the planned complex, to include archaeological archives alongside archives from the entire built environment, has stalled following change in government 15 months ago. Despite this disappointment and given the pressure on storage space for archives, RCAHMS are looking at other options and still collecting. RCAHMS/HS are looking to open up data they have to wider audiences – this has included: HLF project 'Scotland's Rural Past' with database for direct transfer of survey drawings etc (which are looking to expand to include NAS/maritime projects); web 2 technology to allow members of the public to post comments/include pictures in online databases; online shopping for digital images to make archive materials more accessible; changes to full archive catalogue to become ISAG compliant so it can link into wider systems.

PW asked about areas of concern for Scotland. LF responded that with the current recession there are concerns over archives from those archaeological units and architectural practices which are folding. RCAHMS are stepping-up outreach to these groups, and are also trying to further develop voluntary programmes to help deal with these archives.

CH asked about the online purchase of digital images. LF added it was digital/online equivalent of purchasing copies of images from archive by email/phone/visit, but with new technology available they have had more purchases in one week than in several previous months. ME commented it was a system the NMR would like to offer eventually.

Discussion expanded to Issues resulting from the Recession across the UK:

It was acknowledged the problem relates to units going into administration/receivership, when archives (digital archives held on computers for example) can be seen as 'assets', or of developers folding during archaeological investigations and potential issues with funding for post-ex. and project completion. QC asked LF and KP what procedures were in place to deal with the issue.

In Scotland, LF added that at this stage it was a liaison process. RCAHMS have escalated normal yearly visits to units, and asked units to contact them as soon as they are aware of potential problems.

In England, KP reported that currently solutions had been tailored to individual units. But EH had input into a policy document developed with ALGAO, which sets out the responsibilities and legal duties re: Archives. EH are also initiating a project developing a how-to guide to disaster management for archives. It will become a chapter in the Archives Guidance. It will be circulated to AAF and it is hoped finished by September.

LF noted that the issue is as much about finding out what is at risk, including what is still held by units, and that gathering this information whether in recession or not allows for planning for future space requirements.

There were no reports from Wales or Northern Ireland.

Actions: KP to chase up and inform AAF of timetable for ALGAO-EH policy statement.

5. Proposed Changes to AAF Structure and Working Practices

PW referred to the proposed changes outlined after the last meeting and to KA's email on the issue. He outlined the plan to shift to one annual meeting which will be centred around reports from each country, AAF project results, information sharing and identifying future issues. Projects would be developed between meetings by project groups, and communication/discussion and updates would be maintained via the AAF JISCmail list. In addition, any seminars/project events should be scheduled for the same day as the annual meeting.

This plan was accepted by the committee.

JR suggested the annual meeting should stick to the same date each year. LF suggested the meeting might move from London to enable/encourage all members to attend, and that RCAHMS/HS might host it in Edinburgh. CH suggested ADS could also host it in York. KP suggested the Forum should also look to meet in Wales.

It was suggested Hedley Swain should be invited to make a report on current state-of-play re: MLA at the Annual meeting. In addition, it was hoped the maritime archives project final report could be presented, and the EH disaster management guidance would also be completed.

There was some discussion of inviting IHBC to become an observer on the Forum. DB suggested there was some doubt over the value of this at the last meeting. PW suggested with the HPR it was clear that we ought to acknowledge the shift towards a joined-up HER service. QC commented that there are different issues for conservation officers. KP added that they are still clearly exercised by loss of their records and that we might be useful to them, without changing the Forum's own remit, in developing approaches to the issue.

QC reported that one of the issues arising from recent workshop on archives in Cambridgeshire was that contract units do not feel they have a direct stake in the Forum. KP responded that Forum was set-up to have organisational rather than individual membership and that SCAUM (now FAME) were included to represent unit managers and IFA to represent practitioners, as well as the CBA. Issue with archaeologists within units hearing about the Archives Guidance was raised by LF. It was acknowledged that training and dissemination still remain an issue and would need to be monitored and further addressed by the Forum in the future.

Summary of agreed changes:

- Annual meeting – early October each year.
- Meeting to move outside London, to focus on National Reports and completed projects.
- JISCmail list and project meetings to support Forum work/communication between meetings.

Actions: PW to talk directly to HS, DOENI and CADW to confirm they support the new working practices for the Forum.

PW to contact Seán O'Reilly of IHBC to discuss including an observer at annual meetings.

LF to check availability in Edinburgh to host Forum Annual meeting in October 2009 (dates 13th/14th suggested).

JR to ask Hedley Swain to present brief report at Annual meeting. JR to chase Roland White about membership/representation of FAME on Forum.

6. Archaeological Archive Resource Centres

6a. (Policy Statement) and 6b. (Developing Archaeological Archive Resource Centre Guidance) were discussed together.

KP reported that both the policy statement and the Guidance were ready. The missing element was the statistical paper Hedley Swain had proposed writing to provide the facts and figures behind the policy and Guidance. DB asked if it was

necessary to include this paper if it is holding up the others. KP added that since it is something the wider sector has been waiting for, she was reluctant to hold them back any longer. CH suggested publishing the policy and guidance documents might prompt the production of the other paper. JR asked if this paper was part of the original discussion with HLF re: what was needed to support applications to develop Resource Centres to HLF. KP reported uncertain, since the projects were driven by letter to Hedley from HLF. DB suggested that he and KA would contact Hedley and discuss this, and if necessary contact HLF again. DB asked if publication of the Guidance would get EH funding. KP responded that it ought to since it was always part of project. KP added that if the Guidance were published, EH would be likely to write a letter of support for it, which should add further weight to funding applications with HLF. DB asked LF to clarify the Scottish position on the Policy statement. LF suggested that politically at the moment this was not a policy HS/RCAHMS could support, but that if the policy's wording acknowledged that the AAF badging should still be used.

Actions: KA to establish figures for publication of Guidance and approach EH for funding. DB and KA to contact Hedley re: statistical paper and the original HLF discussion. Publish by October meeting.

7. Ongoing Projects

7a. Maritime Archives

JR presented the update (written paper attached to agenda) on behalf of Julie Satchell. The Forum were pleased with the results so far. LF asked what the timetable for completion is – which JR will ask JS to forward to her. It was suggested the final report should be presented at the October Annual meeting. CH highlighted the inclusion of maritime projects into OASIS, which should help act as signpost to some archives.

7b. Archive Guide to Best Practice – Updates

PW reported SMA have sent out nearly all of their copies, and there was discussion of the need to print further copies. DB pointed out that this would depend on the Selection and Retention Guidance project – and that in the meantime it is downloadable as a PDF from ADS, CBA Community Archaeology Forum and AAF webpages.

7c. Selection and Retention Guidance Project.

KP reported the project proposal being produced by KA would be with EH by May 10th. PW asked about potential success of proposal. KP believed it was high because this is an issue that has long been on EH's agenda. DB reported the intention was to produce Selection and Retention Guidance to fit into the current Archives Guidance. There is capacity for an additional 5 double-pages in the current design. So the options were to either postpone printing more to include the extra Guidance, or produce full revised edition with new contents page etc. The project timetable is quick – if funding can be agreed. The PD will be produced in the next 8 weeks, and the project is hoped to complete by early autumn. PW raised question of partnership funding. DB said they were keen for any partnership funding, but would need to hear back in the next 4-6 weeks and DB will send project proposal to Forum to facilitate this. PW will discuss with SMA. LF will raise with Noel Fojut at HS. CH offered ADS partnership in time contributed to project.

*Actions: DB to circulate project proposal to Forum mid-May.
PW to respond on partnership funding from SMA in next 4-6 weeks. LF to raise with HS.*

8. AOB

8a. AAF JISCMail List

CH reported many Forum members had signed up and suggested the draft minutes should be sent through the list as a test run. Intention of list is to facilitate report on project progress between annual meetings and enable dissemination, but also to facilitate continued discussion of issues as they arise between meetings.

8b. Cambridgeshire Archives Workshop

QC reported on the internal Cambridgeshire workshop from which a few generic issues arose. The first is feeling of dislocation from Forum and Guidance which was raised under Agenda point 5. This was compounded by a general fear about making selection and retention decisions – there was still a feeling that answers need to be made clear. CH added the day was useful but still demonstrated how far we have to go. Selection and Retention questions proved key. QC reported people are afraid to be the one responsible for making these decisions. Specialists often write recommendations in archive assessment reports knowing they will not be carried out. If Guidance appears on this issue, then it gives people permission to make these decisions. Part of problem is training to reassure them they are doing the right thing. Part of it is that contractors should not be making these decisions alone – but museums should have policy articulating this and provide help.

DB reported on the first issue that IFA are about to adopt the Guidance as part of their S & G at AGM in September, so they should provide further training as a result. ME asked if this workshop would be a useful model for other areas and training. QC said it had been driven by internal pressures and local issues, but might be. PW suggested that it might be useful to create a list of the questions raised at the Forum, and then produce answers. CH suggested this could generate a FAQ list for the AAF webpages.

On the second issue, QC suggested the issue of gap between contractor and museum all comes down to Project brief, and that discussion was needed between ALGAO/SMA/IFA. CH suggested this also linked to the Selection and Retention Guidance, but there was a need to tighten up the procedure and the wording in both museum policies and local government planning briefs.

Discussion moved onto Guidance dissemination/archives practice within the academic sector. DB suggested this was not being reached. CH reported that of 50 archaeology departments ADS sent Guidance to, only 2 wrote back for more copies for the library/teaching resource. She suggested ADS could raise the issue at SCFA (Standing Committee for Archaeology).

8c. Maritime and Marine Historic Environment Research Framework project

JR reported on the initiation of the project which will include a working group on Archives and Collections (project introduction attached).

8d. Other AOB:

- CH asked about the SMA 'mapping collection areas' project phase 2. PW reported the SMA are reviewing this, because they are looking at a different project to deal with where museum archaeologists are, rather than simply collection areas.
- KP has to stand down as EH representative to the Forum, but will find suitable replacement. PW offered thanks from Forum for all her work.
- PW reported on the IFA Geophysics Special Interest Group which has a questionnaire on archiving online at the moment.

- CH reported ADS are revamping guide to good practice in digital archiving, are looking to engage with community as whole and looking for views.
- PW reported he was coming to the end of his stint as Chair of the SMA, but was keen to continue as Chair of the AAF if the Forum was happy for him to. DB suggested it would be a positive thing in the interest of continuity and KP suggested the AAF chair was not tied to the SMA Chair.

*Actions: QC to circulate notes on generic (FAQ) archive issues. Forum to respond – and generate a FAQ list for the webpages/ADS pages etc.
Forum to look again at training and Archives Guidance dissemination in future – and support IFA/SMA/ALGAO sessions.
CH to get ADS representative to raise archives management in teaching and within university research projects at SCFA.*

9. Date of Annual Meeting 2009

TBC: 13th/14th October 2009, Edinburgh – hosted by RCAHMS and HS.