

Archaeological Archives Forum

Minutes of Meeting: Wednesday 14th October 2009
John Sinclair House, 16 Bernard Terrace, Edinburgh

The 1st Annual Meeting (15th meeting) of the Archaeological Archive Forum was held at 1pm on the 14th October 2009 at RCAHMS's John Sinclair House, Edinburgh.

In attendance: Philip Wise: SMA (PW), Duncan Brown: IfA Finds Group (DB), Quinton Carroll: ALGAO (QC), Mike Evans: EH (ME), Noel Fojut: Historic Scotland (NF), Iain Fraser: RCAHMS (IF), Catherine Hardman: ADS (CH), Dan Hull: CBA (DH), Rob Lewis: ICON/AG (RL), Jesse Ransley: IfA Maritime Group (JR), Rhonda Robinson, DOENI (RR), Julie Satchell: IfA Maritime Group (JS), Hedley Swain: MLA (HS), Kenneth Aitchison: IfA (KA), and Sarah Colley, University of Sydney (SC).

1. Apologies

Lesley Ferguson, Ed Lee, Hilary Malaws, Brian Williams.

2. Minutes of last meeting

Agreed as record of previous meeting.

3. National Reports

3a. Scotland

IF, the RCAHMS' Curator of Archaeological Collections, welcomed the Forum to Scotland and the RCAHMS. He reported on several key Royal Commission initiatives including the Treasured Places project, expansion of digital archives, the Scotland's Places project (with the National Archives of Scotland) and TARA. The Treasured Places project, begun in 2008 to celebrate the Commission's centenary, has expanded over the last year with new Web 2.0 phases and the new Scotland's Places project. The latter project brought together place-related archives from a number of organisations, including the National Archives of Scotland, to create a GIS-supported searchable website with images, SMR records and archives from all over Scotland was launched this month (Oct 2009). There has also been considerable work developing and expanding the digital archives holdings in relation to archaeological units, architects and private researchers. In addition the Commission have been working with RCAHMS to develop oracle systems in the restructuring of the collections pages, in order to enhance the search facilities and speed up entry of new material. Finally, the Tactical Aerial Reconnaissance Archives (TARA) is also being developed online as a searchable resource. CH asked about the middleware being used to facilitate these projects online.

3b. England

PW reported back on the new EH draft Planning Policy Statement (to replace PPG16) which is currently open for consultation. PPS5 includes a reference (paragraph 63) requiring developers only to 'offer' archives for deposition. PW suggested the wording was inadequate and required a strong AAF response, offering to include it with the SMA response he was preparing. KA suggested there was a need for separate responses, arguing the AAF should suggest there needs to be reference to the Archives Standards included as well as re-wording of paragraph 63. HS drew attention to the use of 'may' and 'could' throughout the references to archives in the draft and referred the Forum to the original words drafted by the Forum when the new EH planning policy statement was first in development. DB and KA agreed there needs to be further response on this since PPS5 does not enshrine

best practice regarding archives – and that a number of people within EH were already aware this was an issue and were looking for strong responses. ME supported the AAF response.

ACTION: PW to write submission and circulate to Forum early next week.

3c. Northern Ireland

RR reported on recent issues in NI. She referred to archive issues related to the retirement of university lecturers and the uncertain situation for archives in NI. PW asked about the structure of archive management in NI. RR explained there is a centralised DoE agency responsible and that they hold paper records and some artefact material as well as architectural drawings. The museum is separate from the DoE, however, and DoE have employed the Centre for Maritime Archaeology in Coleraine to maintain the archive. There is no clear definition of who takes which part of the archive and this is becoming a further issue with companies losing staff during the recession and losing the knowledge – and in some cases material – related to the archive, compounded by the migration of excavators from the 1960s/1970s into southern Ireland more recently. The disjointed picture is problematic. KA asked about NI archives stored south of the border. RR responded that there are a number held outside the UK, including one storage firm facility which was originally in the north shifting south and that this complicated the management of archives further. There was some discussion of the need for export licences. DH referred to the Archaeology Forum's last meeting in January which focused on archives and included discussion of these issues.

3d. Wales

A short briefing note on the current position in Wales by Hilary Malaws was circulated - including reference to the new National Panel for Archaeological Archives in Wales. An observer from AAF was invited to attend.

ACTION: JR to contact panel chair Richard Brewer and arrange for attendance of future meetings on behalf of AAF.

4. MLA report

HS reported on the MLA and government position on archives, reflecting that archaeological archives do not fit within the current government position and are simply not a priority (or even an acknowledged issue) in civil service or government thinking. It is considered primarily a local government/local authority issue, with the disjuncture between planning control and the culture/heritage departments within LAs a significant problem. Part of this invisibility issue for archaeological archives is the result of DCMS/EH and other organisations using completely different language about archives. HS also suggested that there will only be cuts to these organisations in future, so there is a need for new solutions since there is no new money. He suggested the resource centre model was the strongest option, partly because the MLA are so focused on the regional hub model. This requires considerable engagement and awareness-raising in organisations like the MLA by the archaeological community. He reported that with the MLA currently downsizing and retracting from the regions, it is through MLA regional officers that Local authorities are connected to the larger system – yet there has been only one instance where archaeological archives have been raised by an LA. The MLA can help with these problems, including potential resource centres, if contact is made from them, but it is simply not happening at the moment, which is part of the issue. He also reflected on those archives which are deposited but no longer accessible because curators don't know the archives, and on the need for education and outreach for them (possibly through the resource centre model).

With the EH-MLA MOU it is now a joint issue. HS reported on a proposed joint statement of policy. A short statement is being developed setting out areas for action and explaining why archives are in crisis and important etc. This will broadly include the following points 1) collect less, save less in practice; 2) proper resources to ensure they are curated and accessible (a regional answer is required for this, tied into the Renaissance in the Regions programme which has 'hubs' acting strategically and taking responsibility within each region); 3) Best Practice in archive management must be followed throughout; 4) Better communication, including EH actively promoting the need to rationalise collecting policy and MLA to make the strategic links through renaissance programme. This can all be 'sold' as a solution which will save money in the long-term. HS and Adrian Olivier (EH) are developing a draft to go to the MLA executive followed by the EH executive.

JS asked how maritime archives would be dealt with in relation to the regional model and HS conceded there needed to be several specialised resource centres within the system. DB queried how high this was on the MLA agenda, and HS responded 'not very far' since it is not being raised as an issue by regional officers. PW asked about the Kent proposals for resource centres and there was some discussion of the current situation. QC agreed the problems are not simply an archaeology/museum split, but expressed concerns that the MLA/EH are talking about something that will actually be implemented at LA level (which they in fact have little control over). After some discussion, HS acknowledged the proposed statement and regional model to would in the end be 'advice'. QC wondered how it could be attached to the larger government vision for the HE, since it is currently only a statement of intent from MLA and EH.

5. Presentations

5a Maritime archive project – Julie Satchell

JS presented on the findings of the now completed maritime archaeological archives assessment project. [All three project reports are now published online]. Questions included discussion of the PAS system and potential connections or a model for the way forward, and JS explained the current relationship between the Receiver of Wreck (who individual finds are reported to) and PAS. HS commented on the connection of the current maritime situation to the 1998 situation which prompted the establishment of the Forum as well as PAS. With regard to the PAS model, HS suggested there needs to be a strong argument for what tax payers get out of such a solution for maritime finds. CH asked if there was scope for digital survey, and that weighing up the costs of curation of finds v digital survey may be useful. Discussion moved on to the issue of finds from submerged prehistoric landscapes, conservation fears and whether resource centres could resolve the maritime issue by including it in regional centres. JS drew the Forum's attention to the lack of both typological or reference collections currently and also conservators to deal with the material archive. HS suggested there was a need for a briefing note setting out why this is important – for APPAG and also for public dissemination – to push the case at a broader level and raise awareness, selling the 'Britain's maritime heritage' angle.

ACTION: JS and JR to provide two summaries of forward recommendations based upon the project findings (one for Scotland and one for England) for the Forum, and to develop a briefing note for APPAG. [A press release/public briefing note is currently under development].

5b NSW Archaeology On-Line project – Sarah Colley

SC presented on the New South Wales Archaeology On-Line project and the initiative by the University of Sydney to make the connection with contractors. The

project is developing an online archive to bring together grey literature. SC also discussed legacy issues and sustainable digital archives.

6. Ongoing Projects

6a. Selection and Retention Guidance project

KA and DB reported on the current position of the project. The project outline has been drafted to secure funding for the development of guidelines on selection and retention policies (to be developed as insert to Archives Standards doc). This will be circulated to the Forum in November for comment. HS commented that since selection and retention issues were central to the EH-MLA strategy (set out in 4. above), the project should work in parallel and the AAF guidance could slot into their approach. CH made a link with the work on significance by the collections council in Australia, highlighting this work for the Forum. DB suggested there was a need to get museums people involved at an early stage, so that the development of the guidance is supported by both sides of the archives management – contractors/archaeologists and museums.

ACTION: DB and KA to circulate the draft project proposal to Forum and following agreement submit it to funding organisations.

6b. Resource Centre Guidance and Policy Statement

DB and KA reported on the AAF policy statement which has been developed but as yet not issued. HS suggested he was uncomfortable putting the MLAs name to the Resource Centre Guidance without the policy statement being issued. DB pointed out it was only to be agreed by Forum and then it could be issued. DB also reported that the Guidance doc is complete, but similarly needs to be issued by Forum and disseminated. The draft is to go on the website and feedback to be invited on it via various newsfeeds – including CBA (via DH), with reference to fact this is general guidance to which the Forum would welcome feedback and that policy content will follow.

ACTION: JR to circulate policy statement for final AAF agreement, then to issue via website. DB to upload Guidance to website – JR to organise invitation for feedback and dissemination via various newsfeeds.

7. AOB

7a. Community Infrastructure Levy

Ed Lee forwarded a briefing note to the Forum on the proposed CIL regulations. Discussion highlighted that this only applies to England and Wales (Scotland would only be included if there was a particular development project which crosses the border). NF pointed out that though it had been discussed in Scotland it was sidelined with the heritage protection review and development of new legislation. ME questioned whether the CIL was a useful tool for archaeological archives management and developing capacity – asking whether it involves ongoing expenditure or singular ‘capital’ expenditure (to be used potentially for development of stores or museums extensions etc). NF suggested it was more about spreading out infrastructure costs for development in a local area as organised by the LA and that he’s not certain it could be used for developing archive deposition capacity. Inclusion of museum facilities on the list of infrastructure would not necessarily secure their inclusion in CIL funding at a local level, because it is up to the individual LA to determine what it spends CIL on. QC suggested that planning officers have given the impression that at a local level it will be tied to their agendas and to the particular projects providing funds. The Forum agreed that they didn’t feel it was

appropriate for the Forum to respond to the proposed regulations, but that they support EH doing so. PW commented on Ed Lee's proposal letter and its details were discussed. It was agreed PW would email Ed Lee with these comments stressing that whilst the Forum supported his proposal, it felt EH should take the lead on this.

ACTION: PW to email Ed Lee with Forum's views.

7b. FAME survey on undeposited archives – Kenny Aitchison

KA reported on a number of issues. Firstly the Archives Standards and Guidance developed from the AAF Archives Guidance project was officially adopted by the IfA at the AGM earlier in the week. Secondly, he commented on the FAME survey on undeposited archives and the effects of the economic downturn on archaeological contractors and archive management. Five archaeological businesses had ceased trading over the course of the year in England. There was some discussion about the nature of the FAME survey, the number of organisations involved, whether questions concerned the volume or number of archives. DB highlighted the project that has been underway with the support of Kathy Perrin (highlighted at the previous AAF meeting) to assess the quantity of undeposited archives in units (and at risk), which FAME has been very supportive of. He noted that he had asked about specific quantities in the survey element of the project, and had had some responses in cubic metres which provides some useful context and spatial distribution of the potential problem. HS highlighted the 1996 report in which there were quantification of archives in backlog and suggested it might be a useful comparison. The project has included a number of interviews and checks on the procedures in place to secure any 'archives in transit' if a unit was to reach a crisis point. Much of the work has also been a consultative exercise establishing what sort of guidance/support the profession requires in relation to these issues. JR asked about the timetable for publication of the project report. DB reported the draft report would be complete by the end of November and once it was reviewed by Kathy Perrin should be available at the end of the calendar year.

This led to a broader discussion of the situation in Scotland. NF reported the same issues are being managed by close contact with the units and that to some degree crisis was mitigated by the fact all assemblages are considered property of the Crown and go to the Commission. IF commented that they are in fact collecting material from a unit in difficulties next week, and that the process has been managed pretty successfully by good and early communications on the potential problems the unit was facing and the nature of the archives they held etc. QC commented that ALGAO were also monitoring the situation across the country and talking regularly to units to try and establish where potential issues may arise.

SC asked a question about copyright related to these archives in crisis and ME commented that in theory intellectual property rights would go to the receiver of the archive. DB added that it is not simply a question of disaster management but that the current situation is amplifying the backlog issues many organisations face; and reflected that several organisations are considering following YAT's approach and applying for repository status. There was further discussion about quantification of the backlog issue – about volume, comparison with the 1996 survey, and whether it is possible or desirable to cost the storage by units (in terms of rent, space, staff time). QC argued it was dangerous to go to for into costings because it reduced the problem to a question only of storage costs, and the perceived solution may simply be therefore a very large warehouse, when in reality it is also about accessibility and management in the long-term. DB highlighted the case of Alan Vince's medieval pottery archive which was 'rescued' managed and deposited with the help of EH, suggesting archives at risk can be secured and that it involves assessing not just quantity but also quality and looking for key archives to put resources into.

ACTION: DB to circulate the project report to the Forum. KA to collate and circulate the stats and figures from the FAME survey to the Forum concerning what percentage of the commercial sector were involved.

8. Date of Annual Meeting 2011

TBC: Wednesday 13th October 2010 – hosted by ADS in York.