

## Archaeological Archives Forum

Minutes of Meeting: Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> October 2010  
Huntington Room, Kings Manor Buildings, University of York

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Meeting (16<sup>th</sup> meeting) of the Archaeological Archive Forum was held at 13.00 on the 13<sup>th</sup> October 2010.

In attendance: Philip Wise: SMA (PW) [Chair], Duncan Brown: IfA Finds Group/EH (DB), Quinton Carroll: ALGAO (QC), Claire Driver: EH (CD), Iain Fraser: RCAHMS (IF), Catherine Hardman: ADS (CH), Mike Heyworth: CBA (MH), Patrick Ottoway: Patrick Ottoway Archaeology (PO), Jesse Ransley: IfA Maritime Group (JR), Nicky Scott: SMA (NS), Rowland Smith: FAME (RS) and Jim Spriggs: ICON/AG (JS).

### 1. Apologies

Mike Evans, Noel Fojut and Hedley Swain.

### 2. Minutes of last meeting

MH asked that 3b be amended to say PPS5 is a replacement of both PPG15 and PPG16. With this addition the minutes were agreed as a record of previous meeting.

### 3. Presentations

#### *Yorkshire and Humber Archaeological Collecting Project – Patrick Ottoway*

PO gave the background to this project (Project Report circulated prior to this meeting). It was prompted by the closure of ARCUS archaeological contractor based at the University of Sheffield. The archive at ARCUS was intended for Sheffield and Rotherham Museums but there was no Curator of Archaeology at Sheffield Museum. The project was set up to assess the capacity of museums in the Yorkshire and Humber region to deal with the financial and managerial pressures arising from an unexpected request to accept an archaeological archive. PO noted, if the forum are requesting that national bodies support archives the forum also needs to ensure these national bodies are aware of the importance of the archives particularly in the museums sector. PO picked out some particular parts of the report:

- The report tries to be realistic and give useful, feasible options for action; regional stores are one possible suggestion.
- Archaeological conditions should not be signed off by Local Authorities if they are not to the standard; LAs should take a more proactive role.
- There should be a standardisation of requirements for deposition of archives; currently contractors are asked to do different things by different museum services.
- The report cites the issue of disposal as particularly important at this time; there are not enough specialists to give advice on this.
- Digital archives; a problem arises if there is no strategy for accepting digital material (the example was given of museums taking boxes of CD roms without a plan of what to do with them).
- Importance of access to the archive; little point of an archive in store without anyone using it or looking at it again.
- Disaster management; the project looked in to the possibility of insuring the archive. It found it is possible to do so (though the insurers he spoke to had never been asked to cost such insurance before).

DB welcomed the report; it is very useful to have a regional context to much of what the AAF have been concerned about for a long time. One of the most important issues touched on by the project is that of access to and use of archives. Decisions about resource centres can only be made if there is some clear data about: who uses archives and why, why people don't use archives and why certain archives get used more than others. MH suggested that from this data, case studies and exemplars could be produced to encourage more groups (e.g. local and community groups) to access archives. PW suggested the sector has not been particularly successful in the past at raising the profile of archives and showing why they are really worthwhile to the public; this must be demonstrated explicitly. There has been research of this nature started in the past but it needs to be brought up to date.

*ACTION: DB to write a PD which considers undertaking a survey of the use of archaeological archives in museums and repositories (including archaeological units).*

*ACTION: MH/PW will add to their forward agenda for SMA meetings.*

#### **4. National Reports**

##### ***4a. Scotland***

IF informed the group that the large scale programme of data cleaning has now been completed for the collections page. It now runs on a hierarchical system, which has made the search process much faster. It is hoped the live webpage will be launched in the next financial year. RCAHMS are progressing with TDR requirements; modular programmes are to be developed as resources become available.

IF reported some sad news; the building of a new state of the art archive store costing £12million has been scrapped as part of the freeze on capital projects. The building was agreed by the Labour government and the plans were almost complete when the new administration called for its discontinuation. The city council have agreed to temporarily house the collection but there is no longer term plan, and the decision is unlikely to save any money in the long term.

##### ***4b. England***

The AAF executive group met in May to prepare a response to the new PPS5 for publication in The Archaeologist. They agreed there are good parts of the PPS and Practice Guide, in particular that it recognises the importance of archives, but unfortunately some things have been missed; there is no phrase identifying how the archive should be prepared for deposition and little reference to sustainability. MH stressed the responsibility of the profession to make the PPS work to their advantage; it may not be perfect but the collective discipline should make the best of the wording that is provided. There are real opportunities as a result of the PPS; a sector wide group has been formed, the 'Southport Group', to promote positive broad thinking on how to make the most of PPS5.

QC expressed disappointment that the note in The Archaeologist criticised ALGAO members, this is not the view of all AAF members but the note was badged as such. The group agreed in future to circulate correspondence to all AAF members before releasing it with AAF name attached.

MH noted that the Heritage Bill, as it stood originally, is completely off DCMS's agenda.

*ACTION: ALL to look at the Heritage Counts document released next week. ALL to send comments to PW by end of November.*

*ACTION: PW to collate comments and release joint AAF response, to appear on AAF website. PW to ask IFA for a space in their newsletter for this response.*

#### ***4c. Northern Ireland***

No representative could attend today but it was reported that the organisation have already suffered cuts and have returned solely to their statutory function.

#### ***4d. Wales***

The group were concerned they were not approaching the correct contact in Wales as they have had minimal contact with the AAF recently. MH suggested the Chair speaks to Richard Brewer.

*ACTION: PW to make contact with Richard Brewer, and ask if Wales may be kind enough to host the next AAF meeting in Cardiff.*

### **5. MLA report**

The MLA as an organisation is being abolished; it is currently being wound down and will cease to exist by 2012. The group agreed an MLA EH memorandum of understanding would have been useful but was never agreed. The fate of the MLA is still undecided but it is thought that its functions could move in to the Arts Council. The question of which organisation would take on the MLA's accreditation role was raised. Renaissance is to be retained. Resources are being cut which means not all 9 of the regional hubs will receive the same support. The Public Bodies Bill is released tomorrow; it is likely we will know more then.

The group agreed to have an extra-ordinary meeting of the AAF in January to discuss the implications of the MLA abolition, implications of budget cuts generally and to discuss accreditation.

*ACTION: PW will put together an AAF response to the MLA and the changes to Renaissance and will circulate this to DCMS.*

### **6. Presentations**

#### ***Trial project on digital photographic archiving solutions – Roland Smith***

This is a collaborative project between Wessex Archaeology, Wiltshire and Hampshire. It comes about due to the various issues relating to maintaining to produce analogue photos; the expense, the inefficiency. Wessex Archaeology is proposing to introduce a policy of using digital photography as the primary photographic record for all its fieldwork projects. This project consults with stakeholders to agree what does and what does not work. RS informed the group that he would like to continue with the trial and report back to the group at a later date to update them on progress. The results will be disseminated in spring 2011; RS would be happy to return to an AAF meeting or forward the report to the group. The group agreed it is unarguable that the profession has to move forward with technology and welcomed this project.

CH informed the group that ADS will curate the images and PDFs according to ADS archive standards and place them in a suitable managed archive storage. Copies of the report and of the images at a range of resolutions will be made available via the ADS website. The OASIS forms mean contracting units can deposit in this way and the profession is moving towards semi-automated archiving. This could also be made available for Scottish colleagues once OASIS has been refreshed; it is due to be modified to make it more flexible but this is currently on hold until the outcome of the CSR is clear.

The group recognised that with these developments Trusted Digital Repositories (TDRs) are becoming more important, but there is currently no form of accreditation of them. This makes it difficult to specify the kind of repository suitable to meet the requirements for digital data. It was agreed the accreditation of TDRs should be looked in to by DCMS or the IfA.

## **7. Ongoing Projects**

### ***7a. Selection and Retention Guidance project – draft***

DB reported that the draft is still out for consultation; FAME executive have sent it to all FAME members. The group agreed the format of the eventual selection and retention guidance should be suitable for slotting in to the AAF guidance document to prevent a total reprint being necessary.

*ACTION: ALL to send comments to DB by end of November.*

Once the draft version has been finalised hard copies will be printed and sent to all those who received the original AAF guidance document, the AAF guidance document PDF will also need to be amended. The budget necessary for this to happen is not massive and as DB is now in house at EH, his time will not cost the project, but the money for printing will need to be found.

DB informed the group that the guidance is already being implemented in Southampton museum service and this could be seen as a pilot project and be reported on the SMA newsletter as a case study if the group so required. NS noted that the importance of the guidance should be stressed to contract managers as the principles should be established right at the beginning of the project. JS identified the need for clarity when it comes to what has been discarded, this information should then become part of the archive itself.

### ***7b. Maritime Archives – update***

Since the last AAF meeting much has changed, much of the work surrounding Maritime Archives has slowed down due to the current political climate or been put on hold until the new situation clarifies. Notably the proposed briefing note to APPAG has been put on hold.

JR informed the group that a publications proposal for the Securing Maritime Archives quantification project has been accepted by English Heritage and a PD will be submitted shortly. The three project reports from the original project contain an enormous amount of data so a smaller summary monograph will be produced for dissemination, along with an article in the Museum Journal.

There are also plans for future work to assess how coastal curators address maritime archives during the planning process and produce an 'Advice note for coastal curators'.

JR informed the group that the next long-term step will be a feasibility study to look at how to solve the problem we have now quantified. Identifying the solution is necessary prior to beginning the process of raising funding/developing maritime arch archive resource centre(s).

18 months ago there was a positive feeling about this but the situation now looks more bleak. This will be followed up in the extraordinary meeting in January.

## 8. AOB

### *8a. Safeguarding Archaeological Information*

This project was the responsibility of Kenneth Aitchison who is no longer a member of the AAF. DB updated the group on progress of this document. A review/consultation exercise took place where planning archaeologists, contract archaeologists and museum archaeologists were asked their views on how to manage the archives of contractors which go in to administration. DB has written a document which summaries a procedure for contractors that find themselves in this position. This document is an EH product which is currently being consulted on by the interviewees. The final draft will be produced as an EH publication.

*ACTION: DB will circulate the consultation draft to the AAF.*

### *8b IfA Archives Special Interest Group*

DB has been approached by various interested parties to look into starting an IfA group for archives; he would be happy to take this forward but is keen to ensure there is no overlapping with the AAF. NS welcomed the idea, it could improve the communication between the AAF and those working in the sector, it could also encourage more archaeological archivists to join the IfA.

*ACTION: DB will take this forward.*

### *8c Archive advice source*

The AAF guidance has been issued but there is a feeling that there is still a lack of advice about archives for those people working at the 'coal face' (museum curators, ALGAO members). An official network of archives advisors will not materialise due to cuts to budgets but DB urged the group to consider setting up a group of advisors/experts who can be called upon for ad hoc advice. The group discussed the possible forms this could take, they agreed an e-group or online forum would probably be the best but this relies on the appropriate people joining the list and responding. To make this work the project needs first to establish a list of people who would be looking for this advice and who would be able to provide advice.

*ACTION: DB will make this the first project for the IfA archives group (item 8b).*

### *8d Microfiche*

The group discussed the problems around microfiche, some museums still insist on having it as part of the archive but it is becoming increasingly difficult to find. NS informed the group that she has recently sourced it from Switzerland, which is not preferable.

### *8e New Chair of AAF*

PW reminded the group that he had been in the Chair's role for the last three years and according to the ToR of the group it is time he stepped down. He asked the group to allocate a new Chair by the next meeting. The group expressed their thanks to PW for his contribution to AAF over the last three years.

*ACTION: ALL to decide upon a new Chair.*

***8f Observer/corresponding members***

The question of Giovanni Vitelli's position as a potential North America observer/corresponding member was raised. Some members of the Forum pointed out the fact AAF is an organisation-based group (not individual members),

*ACTION: PW will circulate her bio/details so that the group could make a decision as to whether she should be an official addition.*

**9. Date of next meeting**

Extraordinary meeting – Monday 24<sup>th</sup> January 2011, 14.00, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor Meeting Rooms A&B, Waterhouse Square, English Heritage

Annual meeting 2011 – Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> October 2011, Cardiff? TBC