

Archaeological Archives Forum

Minutes of Meeting: Monday 24th January 2011
English Heritage Offices, Waterhouse Square, London

The 17th meeting of the Archaeological Archive Forum was held at 14.00 on 24th January 2011.

In attendance: Quinton Carroll: ALGAO (QC) [Chair], Duncan Brown: IfA Finds Group/EH (DB), Philip Wise: SMA (PW), Dave Allen: SMA (DA), Claire Driver: EH (CD), Catherine Hardman: ADS (CH), Nicky Scott: SMA (NS) and Rowland Smith: FAME (RS).

1. Apologies

Noel Fojut, Iain Fraser, Mike Evans, Mike Heyworth, Jim Spriggs and Jesse Ransley. There were a high number of apologies due to a Southport meeting on the same day.

2. Minutes of last meeting

NS noted that the tone of the sentence about microfiche at item 8d should be changed; it was not a positive point that she had to get it from Switzerland!

ACTION: CD to amend the minutes.

3. Actions from last meeting

Item 3. *Yorkshire and Humber Archaeological Collecting Project – Patrick Ottoway*

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

This will be covered at item 5.

Item 4b. *National Report England. 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.*

This will be covered at item 5.

Item 4d. *National Report Wales. ACTION: PW to make contact with Richard Brewer, and ask if Wales may be kind enough to host the next AAF meeting in Cardiff.*

ACTION COMPLETE

Item 5. *MLA report*

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

This will be covered at item 6.

Item 8a, *Safeguarding Archaeological Information. ACTION: DB will circulate the consultation draft to the AAF.*

ACTION COMPLETE. (This is covered at item 7).

Item 8b. *IfA Archives Special Interest Group. ACTION: DB will take this initiative forward. ACTION COMPLETE.*

DB has now received the requisite number of signatures and the proposal goes before IfA council this week. If the group is agreed by council they will organise an inaugural meeting in March. This will allow the group to advertise at the IfA conference in Reading. DB will also talk to the IfA finds group about the developments.

Item 8e. New Chair of AAF. ACTION: ALL to decide on a new Chair.
ACTION COMPLETE (This is covered at item 4).

Item 8f. Observer/corresponding members. ACTION: PW to circulate Giovanni Vitelli's details for the group to make a decision as to whether she should be an official Forum member. ACTION COMPLETE.

The group agreed GV should remain a corresponding member, all minutes and papers will be circulated via the JISMAIL distribution

4. Election of new Chair

QC offered to take over from PW as Chair of the AAF. DB seconded the proposal. The motion was agreed by the group. QC thanked PW for everything he has done for the AAF over the last 3 years. QC took this opportunity to disclose his aspirations for the forum; he has looked at the last forward plan 2007-2010 and is now looking to develop the next forward plan.

ACTION: ALL to think of priorities for inclusion in the new forward plan.

QC identified some areas he would like to see the AAF focus their work on:

- To encourage ALGAO members and developers to participate more actively in the archive discussion.
- To look for alternative avenues of funding and innovative working methods to counteract the gloomy reality of cuts in resources across the sector.
- To encourage a move towards Archaeological Resource Centres.

5. Archaeological archives in England and PPS5

5a Project Design for current position of archaeological archives

DB brought the group's attention to the development of a PD which was suggested at the last meeting (Item 3). This project would aim to establish the current state of archives and their use in England the outcome of this would determine where the group should focus efforts in the future. English Heritage would support a fact finding exercise of this sort as understanding the national picture would feed in to the PPS.

A potential means of support for this project is a paper currently being written by DB and Kathy Perrin. This is for English Heritage Executive Board detailing the current crisis in archive provision, they will included in this proposal the recommendation that this data gathering project would be a useful tool to tackle the problem. The group discussed who this project could be carried out by and where resources could come from for it; the SMA could take a leading role in it possibly contributing some funds. By the end of this week Kathy Perrin will have produced a working document which will be then worked up in to a proposal by AAF to be sent to HEEP.

ACTION: DB will send this to QC.

The group discussed what could potentially be included in this data gathering project. It should be linked to a map of the UK to identify where gaps are and to give a baseline understanding. The project should aim to find out why some archives are not looked at and

why other are. It should investigate whether these problems are just related to archaeological archives, or the problem of storage space impacting on the museum world more generally.

5b Heritage Counts

The group discussed the relevance of the archaeological archives in this publication; QC noted that its main focus is designated assets.

5c Archaeological Archives Conference

PW asked the group to consider the potential for running a one day conference in early summer 2011 to discuss the future of archaeological archives. It would aim to reach an agreement on the way forward with archaeological archives post-PPS5, it would dovetail with the Southport Group and could be a means of disseminating the results of discussions to a wider group. Points for consideration at this conference could be:

- The need to take control of the issue as a unified profession
- The revival of the MLA-EH memorandum of understanding in the light of the merger of the MLA's museum functions in the Arts Council.
- Agreement on stopping digging certain types of site or at least retaining certain types of artefact to reduce the amount of material entering museum collections
- Utilising volunteers to rationalise archaeological collections for the benefit of research.
- Specific case studies
- Seek to produce an agreed statement at the end of the seminar which could be used in discussions with Government and other bodies.

RS and CH offered their support to the proposal; FAME and ADS would like to attend the conference. The group agreed they would need to think how this would fit with the work of the Southport Group. There is a Southport seminar organised today looking specifically at archives and the PPS; this will be followed up in February and at the IfA conference in April. If the AAF organise a seminar for the summer it should have a specific aim, and give practical everyday solutions to bridge the gap between Museum Curators and contractors.

ACTION: PW will take this forward. He will have it confirmed with the SMA committee and Roy Stevenson, PW will circulate a note to the AAF when a decision on the details has been made.

5d Safeguarding Archaeological Information

The final draft of this document is now ready to be disseminated; DB would like it to be signed off by AFF first. It was written by Kathy Perrin and Duncan Brown in response to the recession and its impact on some archaeological units; questionnaires were sent out through FAME and ALGAO to inform the document. It has now become a guide to best practice for minimising risk and disaster planning.

ACTION: ALL should send comments to DB before Friday 4 February.
(POST MEETING NOTE MARCH 2011– document has now been printed and sent out)

5e National Planning Framework

The group understands that PPS5 will become a part of the National Planning Framework; the full scale of the changes are not yet known. It is imperative that the positive parts of

PPS5 are championed by the AAF if they are given the option of commenting on any changes. There is no forward timetable for this initiative.

5f Mission Statement

DB stressed the need for a position statement to be released publicly from the AFF; this group should have an equal profile to that of the Southport Group. FAME have recently released one through the Archaeologist, the AAF could potentially do the same.

ACTION: QR will update the previous AFF mission statement with the key issues the group should be pursuing.

5g NHPP

The winter consultation for the NHPP closes on 12th February.

ACTION: QC will make a comment on behalf of the AAF.

6. MLA changes

PW has had a reply from Ed Vaizey (minister for Culture Communications and Creative Industries) regarding his letter to the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport about the abolition of the MLA. The reply was short; it said “the future of archives work currently undertaken by the MLA is still being considered and the issue of archaeological archives will be part of continuing discussions”.

A MoU was produced between the MLA and EH, but it was not signed by MLA. The group discussed whether a new MoU should be developed for the Arts Council.

ACTION: DB will speak to Kathy Perrin and Hedley Swain to decide on the correct approach the AAF should take regarding the potential movement of MLA in to the Arts Council and to find out about the MLA's current position.

7. Ongoing Projects

7a. Selection and Retention Guidance project

The group are happy with the current draft and agreed that this update to the guidance document should be pursued internally by English Heritage. EH will look to printing the document and sending to current owners of the original guidance document.

ACTION: DB will speak to Kathy Perrin to decide the best way forward for this.

It was agreed that the IfA special interest group for archives will take forward the recommendations in the document; the dissemination and implementation. RS stressed the importance of the case studies in this guidance document.

8. AOB

8a. AAF web presence

Updating the website is the AFF Secretary's responsibility.

ACTION: CD will contact the CBA to update minutes, contact details and position statement..

8b Deposition grants

RS noted the rise in the amount of local authorities now charging for depositing an archive with them. This is another sign of the financial pressure local authorities are now facing; Surrey and Chichester are both now charging but did not before.

9. Date of next meeting

**Wednesday 12 October 2011
National Museum of Wales, Cardiff**