

# **21st Century Challenges for Archaeology: What can the sector do to redefine the archaeological archive and realise its public value?**

## ***Project members participating:***

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## ***DISCUSSION PARTICIPANTS***

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## **DAY1**

(Garry Lavin) I'll just repeat the last point.....who pays?

[Robin Page](#) For those of you joining us today for this discussion we've already had two comments- [Garry Lavin](#) above draws attention to the question "Who pays" - or who should pay-for archaeological archives.

Also [Katie Rees-Gill](#) posted to the original article saying: "We need to factor in the research relevance of archives and bring in some professional honesty about what our current research parameters are. Using Big Data and research frameworks can help in this. We can't continue with current rate of archive creation and deposition. Archive creation (including discarding) needs to feature early on in archaeological project design. Bring in greater professional collaboration and lay audience engagement at project planning. Give more consideration to role and creation of digital archives. We need to demonstrate worth and value of archives (not just from research perspective) in social, cultural and economic terms. We have to find the right language to communicate this to a society outside of the historic environment sector that increasingly are not interested in boxes of stuff on shelves. Imaginative approaches to engagement and clear sense of need and added value needs to be expressed"

[Jan Wills](#) Following up one of Katie's points: how do we better embed the creation and use of the archive into project planning and implementation? Are there some examples of how this has worked well? Or is the archive still an afterthought?

[Aisling Nash](#) One way would be for archaeological contractors to engage with museum curators (where they are still in post) to discuss selection/retention rather than deciding themselves at the end of the project

[Jenny Mathiasson](#) I think one problem is that we (i.e. museums) accept archives with very little understanding of their contents or how they could possibly be used for display or other museum activities. There's very little communication between depositors and recipients. Nobody goes, "By the way this stuff is marvellous, you could do an exhibition about X or tie it into narratives about Y," when they offload the archives. There's always potential there but it needs to be communicated: don't assume museum professionals inherently understand what they're being given.

[Peta Glew](#) Could that not be addressed by simply adding a relevant box to deposition paperwork? Or having a phone conversation?

[Nicola Scott](#) My personal thoughts are that it is unclear to me if museums are the best repository for archives. For sure museums can use items from the archives to enhance their displays and collections but much of the archive is not useful for display. Spread across hundreds of museums with no coherent list of what is where is surely a major block to the archives being used for research - how do you find them and if you do then you may have to visit numerous locations, with resultant travel and time costs, to access them being another block.

The debate about whether the content is useful as if it isn't accessed regularly cannot be equitably explored without equally exploring what is blocking the access and research.

I would suggest exploring creation of a national index of archives - a daunting task but much of this information is already recorded what is needed is a compilation of sources.

[Nicola Scott](#) One suggestion to Gavin's point. A percentage of known excavation costs could be paid, at the outset of work, into a national trust fund which is managed to pay for ongoing costs of a deepstore archive facility. Costs of access are then borne by whoever wants the access and the maintenance costs by the fund. Coupled with a national index of holdings this would provide storage, covers costs and be a national resource. Archives are too frequently characterised as a problem when they are in fact an under utilised resource. Use being blocked by many factors. Museums could still be involved in providing access points for recalled archives from their traditional collecting areas if they wished but could equally draw upon the resource for their own exhibition requirements.

[Aisling Nash](#) It is possible to record the location of archives in HERs. In Worcestershire, we are notified when archives are about to be deposited ensuring that we have all of the required information relating to that piece of work in the HER. We can also record that the archive has been deposited, what type of archive and we also record the types of finds included. There is potential here for HERs and Museums to develop closer working relationships which would result in benefits for both. However, we have to also be mindful of the pressures on Local Authority services and HERs but it could be possible?

[Helen Parslow](#) Some places do ask the contractors if they have anything displayable and some contractors do tell museums that there are objects or if it is a site where there are good images etc. But this is not common practice

[Nicola Scott](#) I am hoping that the forthcoming version of OASIS will help cover new sites but I don't think it will cover existing archive holdings nor am I clear where volunteer or non commercial research projects are recorded. We have gathered all of the archives for years but it is time to tie all this information together and see what it is telling us. There have been some notable projects in this direction in recent years but an archive deposition system that facilitates this type of research is still lacking.

[Sam Paul](#) Current initiatives are attempting to address these issues, with communication required from the outset of a project so that the museum, planning archaeologist and contractor discuss not only the selection policy to be applied but also the value, significance and potential of the archive that will result from any given project. However, this is still not standard practice and yes Jan, many contractors (normally the smaller ones) I have spoken with still consider the archive an afterthought..... if they consider it at all!

[Nicholas Boldrini](#) I think we have started off discussion half way down the list. All the discussion about how to access archives presupposes that we know the answers to (in particular) the first part of question 1.

And I would say no - we don't know why we are creating and keeping archives anymore. When significant sites were the only ones ever investigated by gentleman antiquarians (and by significant I mean sites with lots of stuff on) then it seemed obvious that the archive should be kept, and that logic has been applied *carte blanche* to all sites.

But it is questionable in the context of investigation of site of no archaeology (ie ones that find nothing) or of limited significance if that is still the right model.

[Nicholas Boldrini](#) Had to split this as too long but (continued)

Similarly, there is an assumption that we should keep stuff so it can be looked at later by future generations, but that actually happens very rarely in my experience, because as a discipline we're about finding and investigating new stuff, not re-examining old archives (somewhat paradoxically).

And until we agree that basic idea – what are we keeping and why- everything else is smoke and mirrors because it all gets swamped by the sheer quantity of archives being generated and curated.

So back to first principles – why do we keep archives?

[Jonathan Webster](#) As a contractor I would argue that the archive is never seen as an afterthought. At the end of the day it is the only physical evidence we have for the money spent by the client and everything we do from inception through to completion is focused on making sure that it is as useful as possible. Normally if there are any parts of it that warrant special attention then this is flagged up within the report and highlighted to the appropriate planning archaeologist, HER and where appropriate museum. In my mind would it not make more sense to have tighter integration between the HER and museums in the flow of information so that both services can improve. At present the system seems to be relatively blinkered with each element only focused on how to improve its individual problems rather than looking at the wider picture of how we improve the whole and how each department can help the next. Our discipline in my mind grows organically and clumsy rather than in an organised and focused manner.

[Nicholas Boldrini](#) I'd also suggest that, arguably PAS has defined a new paradigm for archiving. Many finds are fully recorded by PAS and then given back to finders to basically disappear for ever, so the only unit of study is that digital record. Is this a model that might be suitable for other types of archive material? IE sites which produce small numbers of finds or archive material - create a digital archive and bin the physical material? I would suggest it is

[Nicholas Boldrini](#) The fact is we are spending lots of resources archiving stuff which will never be looked at, and essentially wasting those resources, as well as causing problems for museums. I think its time to think long and hard about that model and come up with one which is more fit for purpose

[Aisling Nash](#) I think we now keep archives because that is what we have always done. It's now come to the point where we, the sector, are addressing this (Archives SIG as well as the SMA and others). Archaeology as a whole is slow to change methodology especially as we have grown organically to a certain extent (as per the comment above). Do we need to keep archives from sites that result in no archaeology? Not necessarily, that's where digital archiving has a role to play as well as HERs - surely there's no need to generate a paper archive for these types of sites? However, we need firm and agreed digital archiving standards and guidance on a national level which can be applied across the sector.

[Jan Wills](#) So project managers need to include in the commissioning of specialist analyses a retention/discard proposal, and aim to have, by the time of deposition, an assessment of the potential value of the resulting archive for research/display/education etc?

[Aisling Nash](#) Jan, I would agree as long as the PMs have had discussions with planning archaeologists/HERs/Museum curators. Without these discussions, there is the danger that selection/retention proposed by the contractor may not be appropriate for that particular area.

[Nicola Scott](#) When agreeing who chooses what to keep we need to be mindful of the pressures that body is under, PM's facing large deposition charges on a small remaining budget will be looking to reduce an archive to save costs. Museums without archaeological expertise may see no value in non display items and even those with archaeologists face huge pressures of space availability which is really nothing to do with the purpose of keeping an archive. By nature an evaluation archive is already a sample of a site. It is also important to distinguish documentary and material archives when discussing selection since reduction of objects may in fact require increasing documentation and reporting on what is discarded.

[Aisling Nash](#) If discussions are open, transparent and importantly, pragmatic then agreement can be reached. But they need to happen first.

[Nicola Scott](#) I agree that replacing documentary archives with a well curated digital archive - even using scanned PdfA of hard copy to create a wholly digital archive where necessary is a sensible way forward where funds and proper curation of the digital data is done. Indeed accessible through a web address is more likely to increase its use and consultation than having to travel to visit its hard copy equivalent which is why ensuring it is available wholly in a digital medium is important. What use context sheets in hard copy in the museum but the relevant corresponding finds analysis and primary drawings in digital form at ADS or elsewhere such as the contractors server? Clear guidelines to digital archive content are needed.

[Nicola Scott](#) There is no value to a hard copy \*archive\* of a negative site if that site has no features at all, an OASIS report upload, with images curated through the enhanced image feature if necessary, should be sufficient as long as the report has good plan locations in it defining the negative area. In some areas the site boundary is mapped through an HER GIS and this covers negative sites too.

BUT we need a clear definition of what 'negative' means. At present there are some in the sector who would interpret it as a site with no artefacts even if there are features. In such cases where there are features a depositable archive would be needed alongside the report. This is where depositing a hard copy is often cheaper than depositing a digital copy with ADS and so the temptation to push for hard copy deposition is more significant for those paying the bill but adds to the space crisis in museums.

[Sam Paul](#) I agree that selection has to be discussion between all the relevant parties and in some counties this is happening. However, someone always seems to have a problem with selection of archives: a non archaeological museum curator will say that the archaeologist should make the decisions, the contractor says they cant know what a museum will want (or that its cheaper to give the museum everything than go through the process of selection- even with increased box charges!), a specialist will refuse to apply a selection process as it all may be relevant in the future etc etc. I think that this comes back to Nicola Scott's comment about if archaeological archives (in their current form) belong in museums, and the bigger questions of who should be leading on this and who should be paying. At the moment it is all rather piecemeal with museums taking the lead in the majority of projects which at their biggest are county wide. Should not the approach be national?

[Nicholas Boldrini](#) I think the apparent expense of digital versus analogue archiving is more down to museums being bad at estimating the actual costs of archiving, than digital inherently costing more. I think this in part has contributed to the issue - archiving was for many years "free" to the developer, but was actually a hidden cost. The cost needs to be passed back to them.

[Theodora Anastasiadou](#) In an ideal world of adequate resources either side as overall I hear the 'time and money ' argument , we could co-operate better in order to achieve this at max. as we together can create a 'future proof' usable resource. 4) I do believe that we, the archaeologists, do access and re-visit archives may be in a smaller number compared to academic and I have encountered a number of cases over my time 5) on the public benefit front, a good number of commercial units have run community digs and do co-operate with the local archaeology groups-work experience and uni students - volunteers 6) communication and ways forward is the key and you can see it in good practice in counties where the Planning team works closely with the Museum curators :this is a strong foundation to deal with various issues of e.g. a major fieldwork project from beginning to final deposition - from our part is key to ensure all of our relevant colleagues are in touch with the county staff from day one (of project).

[Theodora Anastasiadou](#) Just picking up a few points from your previous posts: 1) from my experience working with depositions with circa 30 counties, there is still a very local context of issues and ways forward-understandably. 2)The recession has

hit hard a number of museums which in some cases lost up to 40% of their staff. So, yes, in some areas we are dealing with non-archaeological curators nowadays who might not be interested perhaps? or fully confident about the contents of our boxes. 3) But equally I had to co-operate with museum curators on selection/retention who they decided to leave it to us mainly as it is long winded and our projects managers have overall view of each project in conjunction with our internal/external specialists.

[Theodora Anastasiadou](#) NB> my numbering is not replying to the points above (of the brief) - it is to differentiate my various points to your previous posts

[Aisling Nash](#) So lack of consistency of approach across counties is clearly a problem. How do we resolve this? Do we need some sort of support system for those non-archaeological curators who feel that they can't comment on selection/retention? Can those policies be included in regional Research Frameworks? Again, it comes down to the issues of resources (staff and time) as well as funding. However, as Nick points out above, why do we collect archives and do we need a fundamental shift in our thinking around how and why we collect archives before we can hope to achieve consensus on the rest?

[Robin Page](#) A personal view here: notwithstanding obstacles to this happening, one of arguments/ideals for collecting archives is so that the evidence can be reinterpreted. Can we say this should be the case?

[Jonathan Webster](#) The argument for consistency is a very good one, I know from first hand how frustrated developers get when costs and requirements vary drastically from one site to the next based solely on geography. I would argue, and I am happy to be wrong, that policies of this sort should be organised at a national rather than regional level. I do believe that with the vast advances onsite with regards to digital recording will greatly affect the way archives are presented and stored I am also cautious of who is responsible for the long term storage and file upkeep to make sure that archives are not corrupted and remain in a stable digital format that does not become obsolete.

[Aisling Nash](#) In answer to your question Robin, it is true that evidence can be reinterpreted. However, how much more information can be gained on sites where very little or nothing has been found (in terms of artefacts)? How much more knowledge can be gained in those areas which are very clearly understood?

[Aisling Nash](#) I don't believe that selection/retention policies can be imposed on a national level but could certainly perhaps be agreed on a regional level taking in account the character of each county? This would be a lot of work and would involve a lot of collaboration not to mention funding with regular updating.

We do, however, need a national policy with regards to digital archiving. Digital archiving should also be subject to selection/retention.

[Robin Page](#) Just a slight digression back to something [Nicola Scott](#) asked about earlier today.

It is definitely part of the OASIS redevelopment plans to enhance the reporting of local society investigations and non-commercial research from universities and others. This has been informed by the initial user-needs work on HERALD to consider the requirements of such groups. There have already been some training sessions with local societies on the existing OASIS set up.

The OASIS blog has a recent entry on community group engagement also has some information on some of the intended improvements for joining up the reporting of Archive deposition in the new system-

<http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/blog/oasis/?p=383>

[Aisling Nash](#) Following on from Robin's post, community, voluntary and academic research is also recorded in HERs. There is a problem with archives resulting from community work - Rob Hedge and I completed a HE funded project called 'Assessing the Value of Community Generated Research'

<https://historicengland.org.uk/research/support-and-collaboration/research-resources/assessing-community-generated-research/>

[Nicholas Boldrini](#) But we still haven't answered the question - why are we keeping archives? Selection etc will flow from that - if you know why you want to keep archives, then you can work out which ones to keep.

[Jonathan Webster](#) Surely we keep archives to allow for reinterpretation and comparison of sites over time. If you were to remove the archive then the report would need to contain everything and for anything above a small site would become an unwieldy document to use. There is no way any individual can state what is important at any given time, my boring undated field boundary at the edge of my site may turn out to be one wing of your ground breaking henge enclosure. Alternatively the ditch that I believe is identical to yours is in actuality, on comparison not. This is the reason that writing simply 'ditch' will not do on context sheets anymore, a truly good archive should allow any individual to be able to reinterpret a site regardless of them stepping on site and without prior biases or interpretations getting in the way.

[Aisling Nash](#) Then we surely need a different archive methodology for those sites that have no artefacts or features such as suggested above at the very least? Do we need to improve the standards of recording on site in order to ensure that really good archive?

We somehow can't seem to get away from the need to keep everything 'just in case'....

[Jonathan Webster](#) Now one possible alternative to this would be that all archaeological works are undertaken in such a manner that it allows for that spatial data to be placed in a GIS style database along with all associated documentation so that this can be stored and compared in a HER database. Like a regional/national version of Intrasis, but that would require huge investment in time, money and

cooperation between all elements of the heritage sector and at the end of the day how easy would that setup be to access and query? Its one option although I admit that I am not sure how viable it would be.

[Jonathan Webster](#) Improving standards on site is one step and I feel in the last 15+ years many companies have done much to do this, likewise the advent and improvement in digital recording has also had an impact. In my mind it is not necessarily a case of what we keep so much as a question of how we choose to do so.

[Jonathan Webster](#) A radical concept as it may at first appear has anyone considered creating a unified software that flows from site, through the HER to the museums. At present we tend to use varying GIS based platforms that integrate and work with varying success. Is one answer to standardise the process across the sector?

[Nicholas Boldrini](#) I am not going to be around tomorrow to continue the discussion so here are some of my thoughts to ponder on the questions posted.

Before we decide to carrying on keeping everything we need some data on how much archives are actually used, how often, who by and why. That research needs to note what archives AREN'T looked at as well, to see if any conclusions can be drawn. It should probably include some research amongst archaeologists who might like to look at archives but don't can't. That would help us work out why we are keeping stuff.

[Nicholas Boldrini](#) In relation to question 4 – almost certainly not anymore. I think we are wasting resources archiving stuff for completeness/just in case when those resources could be better used. I think for pragmatic reasons we have to move away from the idea of keeping everything for ever as a blanket response and think about coming up with criteria for what is kept (physically). Part of that might involve adopting a PAS type approach to recording – create a good digital record and then get rid of the actual object in some cases.

[Nicholas Boldrini](#) Who pays – the developer (in most cases) should. But that would mean actual archiving costs should better reflect the actual costs – and some research will probably be needed to try and work this out. How much does it cost a year to keep a box of pot? A bag of soil sample? A metal small find? Etc etc

[Nicholas Boldrini](#) We also need to actively encourage a culture of going back and examining archives. Unless we do this, the archives will just be stuff we haven't got round to discarding yet.

[Nicholas Boldrini](#) But we also need to think about how much more we can actually get out of archives- is there much more to be actually gleaned from the physical archives? If on present techniques available (even if apparently too expensive now) there is, then its probably worth keeping. If there isn't much, then consider sampling retention of archives for retention in case new techniques are developed

[Nicholas Boldrini](#) The key thing is – we can't ignore this, its already at crisis point in many places, and that will only increase with time. And at the point when the archives are full, then sampling/selection will de facto happen, but on an essentially random basis – with poor value watching brief potentially being archived, but full excavations not, just because the WB happened before the archive was full.

Many thanks for your contribution today [Nicholas Boldrini](#)

[Gail Boyle FSA](#) OK so have been out on business all day but will read all the comments that have been made and respond - one thing I will say immediately is that as a museum curator responsible for the long term care/access too over 100 years worth of excavated archives there are undoubtedly huge amounts of material that has been retained historically 'for the sake of it'. Many of the older long-lived research type projects undertaken over a number of years are guilty of this. The newer archives generated over the last 25 years are more considered - what we have to be mindful of is the need to retain enough material for further research - a digital record of an object will not enable it to be sampled. PAS is not necessarily a good analogy for an archive process since we can never go back to re-examine the real item when new questions/techniques arise that many of us will never have even imagined yet.

[David Gill](#) Is the still buried archaeological archive under major threat from random but deliberate disturbance?

## **DAY 2**

[Steve Trow](#) Apologies for not joining the conversation yesterday. I was in a meeting in Edinburgh with colleagues who are the archaeological leads for Cadw, Historic Environment Scotland and the Historic Environment Division of Northern Ireland's Department for Communities.

Amongst other things, we compared notes on the archive issue and agreed it certainly wasn't an England-only challenge.

Thanks for the comments so far. There are some good issues for us to pursue. I certainly agree with Nicholas Boldrini's point about the need to get a far better handle on who is using our archives, what in particular in those archives is being used, what for and how often. This would certainly help to improve thinking on retention policy.

[Steve Trow](#) By way of explanation...

It may seem odd for the first in the series of '21st Century Challenges' workshops to address the issue of archives, generally the last lap in the archaeological fieldwork process.

The practical reason for this is that the DCMS Museums Review is due to report in the summer. We hope that the issue of archaeological archives will feature amongst its recommendation as evidence was submitted from a number of organisations including Historic England.

It is therefore timely for us to hold this conversation and workshop so that we are on the front foot when the Review reports. The government may also find its conclusions helpful as it prepares to report.

Notwithstanding this practical reason for our timing, it also seems to me that archaeological archives are all-too-often the 'poor relation' in most discussions of the state of the archaeological process and profession. So, it is perhaps a good idea, for once, if we address this topic front and centre?

[Robin Page](#) Thanks Steve for setting the scene for the second day of this discussion. I'd just like to briefly attempt to sum up in a couple of posts yesterday's discussion for the benefit of those joining the discussion for the first time today. On the initial question of why we continue to create and keep archaeological archives the main reasons were to allow sites /evidence to be reinterpreted and compared anew; and by inference because some elements of archives (but not all) can potentially be of wider public benefit via exhibitions and other display methods. Some contributors thought that there was not clear enough thought on why we do this and that more research into the use of archives is required.

[Robin Page](#) We discussed the relationship between depositors and museums, a more rigorous process of hand over to explain the significance and possible uses of the given archives was suggested, as was the need for more consistent standards for creating and depositing archives. It was suggested that Research frameworks have a part to play in the selection/retention process for archives. We noted Issues with (lack of) capacity for specialist archaeological curators some areas. Some contributors suggested alternative models for deposition at a regional /national level outside of museums. On the point of retention some have argued that we need to have a hard think about what we keep- based on significance/ usefulness before those hosting archives are overwhelmed and cannot accept even the "significant" material. However others- also in an offline contribution argue that we cannot in advance safely predict the significance of the archive.

[Aisling Nash](#) With regards to the argument that we cannot predict the significance of an archive in advance, this is true. However, I don't think that this is enough of a reason to keep everything carte blanche. The harsh truth is that we can't do that anymore. However, we can make pragmatic decisions once fieldwork has been completed with regards to whether an archive should be deposited or not. This already happens in some areas. I guess we should also address the question of whether all archives are included in this discussion or is it just the archives of commercial archaeology?

[Barney Sloane](#) The SMA survey of 2012 has some really useful information if you have not seen it).

[http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archiveDS/archiveDownload?t=arch-381-1/dissemination/pdf/2012/1001589\\_Archaeological-archives-and-museums-2012.pdf](http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archiveDS/archiveDownload?t=arch-381-1/dissemination/pdf/2012/1001589_Archaeological-archives-and-museums-2012.pdf)

In particular Fig 3 shows the very significant reduction in the number of boxes of finds retained in recent decades compared to the 70s-90s. Whether this is a real trend is yet to be seen, but is a hopeful sign of more considered approaches. The current pilots HE are funding, exploring rationalising historic holdings, may show one way of creating some space in the short term. For bulk finds (eg building ceramics, worked stone, animal bone), perhaps we can envisage tests for continued retention (secureness of context, existing level of recording etc) and for ceramics and petrology, a seed-bank approach (keeping small fabric samples along with metrics and imagery). Needs thought, but may provide best of both worlds: re-usability and space creation.

Aisling's comment yesterday about professional standards is also very pertinent.

Standards will be examined in a separate workshop but it seems intuitively correct that if we can carry out our fieldwork and post-excavation analysis to higher standards this should allow more incisive decision making about what needs to be kept in the archive.

[Theodora Anastasiadou](#) Just to add a few replies to the main questions after reading all comments from yesterday : Q1: preservation by record is the final product of a staged process - excavation being one way process of retrieval before backfilling- which leads to final deposition -with today's framework- to a designated museum or repository (although in some areas I have come across small establishments run by the local archaeology group which do accept archives). An archive can carry regional or national significance /value and via PPG 16 the volume of fieldwork has completed the pieces to our knowledge 'puzzle' on both levels (regional and national) establishing research frameworks which are used both by commercial units and academics. Does not this demonstrate our contribution to the Heritage Industry? With our ClfA Archives group we held last week 'are archaeological archives relevant ' day and we had really good responses which you can read soon on our webpage - just as one example to Q1.

[Nicola Scott](#) Picking up on Steve's comment that the archive can be the poor relation in the archaeological process we perhaps also need to ask why we dug the site in the first place. If it is worth digging there should be some sort of archive. Selection and retention of quantity is a different matter. The latter also diverts us from issues surrounding the management of the the retained archives. Not having a robust national solution is the main problem ultimately reducing, selecting etc are never going to solve the storage crisis nor the issues surrounding access and in my view sorting the latter is the priority.

[Steve Trow](#) There is no doubt of the research and public engagement potential of archaeological archives in general and HE has funded important projects that demonstrate this. But this potential will vary based on the content and significance of any given archive. In our recent evidence to the DCMS Museums Review, HE reiterated the academic and social value of archives and pressed the case for Government to take a more strategic approach to the issue. However, recognising that public money is very limited (and likely to become more so for the foreseeable future) we also said that we believed it was incumbent on the archaeological

profession to consider how it will manage demand for archive resources in the future. It is this management of demand on which we hope the workshop will focus, simply because this is the area that archaeologists are most able to influence directly. It is simply not realistic to assume that the taxpayer can pick up the bill for an limitless amount of archive storage.

[Theodora Anastasiadou](#) Q1 (cont) : alternative uses of archives which I have encountered rather than museum storage: (parts of archives) open days/outreach - school handling kits- reference collections for county/unit/university /freelance specialists - sampling to test new methods for PhD theses/national or local projects - HB assemblages on loan to Unis instead of reburial - one artist has used bulk pottery after grinding it for a wall mural in the same town where this material was excavated - in a number of sites in the Med the bulk pottery and CBM have been used after grinding into the mix of mortar to maintain the walls of the standing buildings in situ - Q2: Under the current economic circumstances and storage crisis , the museums have responded either by rising the box fee (deposition) up to £300/box - I am told that the HE standard box is c.£30 today - or stopped receiving archives : this is a pattern across England as of the last 5 years or so.

[Nicola Scott](#) Does it have to be public taxpayers money? I refer to the suggestion I made yesterday

[Nicola Scott](#) Also who currently pays for the museum storage if not public money? How is splitting the archive across hundreds of museum stores efficient and effective?

[Steve Trow](#) Interestingly the 2016 EH/SMA survey to which Barney Sloane referred earlier suggested that only 55% of collecting museums that responded charge for deposition. If correct (and we assume it is), it suggests a lot of museums are neglecting a valuable potential revenue stream.

[Theodora Anastasiadou](#) Q3: Archive should not be an afterthought, I have held sessions with my colleagues on post-excavation, final deposition and the issues by county to ensure that we do create a complete record in the field and under the guidelines we have to work with (by county) which will enable us to go through the post excavation stages smoothly. Due to the recession though, a good number of units have lost considerable numbers of experienced staff and so did the Museums and as we are now entering a new era of major infrastructure projects, we need to employ very fast big numbers of project assistants with varied backgrounds which will impact on the recording, I think. The Universities from what I hear they are providing less opportunities for excavation to current students although apparently a degree in Archaeology is considered very highly in a number of interviews outside the profession, I am being told.

[Theodora Anastasiadou](#) Q3 (cont) : On the analysis front, a good number of specialists have been sceptical about recommendations on selection depending on how long they have worked in the specific county , their experience and again about the future researchers debate. They would happily do so in most cases via a combined approach with the project manager, planning archaeologist and the

Museum curator so we are hitting again the wall of 'time and money'. May be it will be good to publish the good practice examples from various counties who had dealt with the above successfully and see how this 'model' can be adopted by county?

[Nicola Scott](#) In terms of users of the archives are the museums who retain them being counted as users? Where objects from an archive are displayed are the visitors to the museum / exhibition being counted as 'users' ?

[Steve Trow](#) Good practice examples are a good idea, Theodora.

One other avenue we would like to explore is whether universities can become more engaged in the thinking about what we retain, how much we retain and how we retain it. We are aware of two current PhD studentships considering the management of archaeological archives (rather than the historical narratives to be derived from them): one at UCL, which is looking at ownership and title issues and another (that we are co-supervising) at Reading, which is looking at archaeological palaeoenvironmental archives. Colleagues may know of others?

If we can encourage more work of this type it could really help to advance our thinking and it is a topic area with undoubted real-world 'impact': something universities increasing want to demonstrate.

[Sam Paul](#) While selection of archives (whole or parts of) is now an accepted reality for many in the sector (though this does not mean it always happens in a standardised or productive way, if at all!), reducing the size or number of archives coming into a museum store does not solve their problem. According to the SMA survey a large percentage will still run out of space no matter how much 'selection' takes place.

In the course of my research I have become more and more aware of how archaeological archives (in their current agreed form) do not really sit well within the majority of museums (a few however do make good use of AA's ). We as archaeologists collect and produce archives with a very different set of parameters to the way a museum collects, provides access, displays and undertakes engagement etc. I am beginning to wonder if we need to either think very differently about what constitutes an archaeological archive in a museum, or if we should rethink where they should go altogether?

[Steve Trow](#) Nicola's comment reinforces the point made yesterday by Nicholas Boldrini that we have very limited understanding or overview about how archives are used or by whom. We will pursue this further at the workshop.

[Helen Parslow](#) I agree with Theodora, we have to make sure that archives are not seen as something we do at the end of a project. We need to ensure that they are considered at the beginning of a project from the brief, WSi and throughout the life of the project. We need to be considering the eventual archive throughout fieldwork as well as post ex and involving contractors, planning archaeologists, specialists and museums. If museums don't have the archaeological expertise then they should still be involved but given guidance

[Barney Sloane](#) Relating to Q4: The European Archaeological Council (members are representatives of national archaeological agencies/ministries) has a working group dedicated to archaeological archives. A recent survey of their members suggested that the issue of archive storage pressure is by no means limited to the UK, so there may be a chance to consider the suggestion of case studies on a wider front. As the current UK rep on the Board, I will feed that idea back to the working group to see whether there are insights which would help us.

HE are funding some work on the practicality and risks associated with the controlled reburial of some artefact types (sandstone, wood). These are long-term studies but may also point to a mechanism for reducing pressure on 'active' storage.

[Steve Trow](#) It is worth noting Barney Sloane's point earlier about studies to re-evaluate and rationalise 'historic' archaeological archives. This may have the potential to release some more storage space and to alleviate the immediate pressures, giving us time to consider alternative longer-term approaches.

The 'Seeing the light of day' project may help us developing this and other approaches, see:

<https://2cultureassociates.com/2017/02/24/seeing-the-light-of-day-archaeological-archives/>

[Sam Paul](#) P.S I am in my final year of PhD study on the value and sustainability of commercially derived archaeological archives in museums, specifically following museums who have undertaken reviews of their collections with the aim of assessing the significance of the collection with a view to rationalisation.

[Stefanie Vincent](#) Weighing in from the museum side of this discussion, I agree with some previous points. It can feel like we are an afterthought; I attended the Cifa conference in Birmingham last week and there was a huge variation in how the presenters interacted with and regarded museums. Many museums are struggling with funding and there is less focus on specific collections expertise but in spite of this museum storage is not where archives come to die! The 'alternative' uses of archives mentioned; outreach, open days, loans, input to larger research projects are actually what we do all the time, but once the archive is deposited there is no way to feed this back to excavators (assuming they are interested).

[Steve Trow](#) Sam, that's helpful to know. We would be interested to know more about your findings.

[Steve Trow](#) The 'cultural divide' issue raised by Stephanie is not helped by policy for archaeological archives sitting uncomfortably on organisational 'fault lines' between the responsibilities of Arts Council England; the interests of Historic England and professional archaeologists working in the private sector; and the undoubted importance of the Heritage Lottery Fund.

The issue also awkwardly straddles the cultural responsibilities of DCMS and the

land-use planning role of CLG.

These organisational arrangements are unlikely to change in the foreseeable future, but they could probably be made to work better?

That will also be something we hope to explore at the forthcoming workshop.

[Aisling Nash](#) It's also not helped by the sector itself. In general (as there are always exceptions), people have been silo'ed into their roles. We need a more holistic approach (which is starting to happen) with greater collaboration among the different stakeholders.

[Stefanie Vincent](#) There is also an odd expectation that museums can do all of this for nothing, while everyone else in the process gets paid. Box fees represent skilled staff assisting the depositor, cataloguing and checking the archive, maintaining reasonable conditions for storage, and processing, assessing and facilitating research requests in perpetuity. Although new fee structures are high in comparison to £0 they do not cover the actual costs of these activities. We are also often missed out of the planning stages of funded projects; instead of being seen as useful collaborators we are again often an afterthought (although not always). On a positive note I think there are lots of things we could do to improve the situation; be more vocal about the services we provide, the suggestion about a fuller handover on deposition is great. It's unlikely anyone's funding situation will improve soon, but by working together more closely we can maximise all of our skills to everyone's benefit.

[Steve Trow](#) That's a key issue, Stefanie. And part of the answer may be to revisit professional archaeological standards and guidance to make sure that planning for the archive stage is always built into the project from the get-go. We can pick this up in the second workshop on Standards and Guidance, as well as the one on archives.

[Aisling Nash](#) There is definitely a need to get across that Museums are suffering chronic under funding same as local authority archaeological services. As you say Stefanie, a significant amount of time goes into maintaining archives not to mention things like racking etc. It's important that contractors factor these costs in correctly as well as the cost of digital archiving in any quote. Some do, some don't.

Getting on my soapbox, I believe that there is a real opportunity for Museums and HERs to work together more effectively as well as with other parts of the sector. HERs are often seen as an afterthought but there can be real value in building relationships with Museums.

[Sam Paul](#) Steve Trow my plan is to write up this year (along with all the other projects I have already agreed to do!) but hopefully I will have something ready for dissemination that can feed into all the other projects currently taking place.

[Theodora Anastasiadou](#) Q4: I know of 2 counties which have taken the decision not to accession and accept an archive with no finds. So it is now left to the commercial units discretion to assess these finds archives. There is 1 county which is thinking to implement for negative archives the scanning of the paper record and then again

leaving to the units to assess their retention or not.

It seems that the immediate answer is no we cannot keep everything anymore but we have to tackle a variety of issues on a county basis and it will be down to the teams (Planning - Unit/specialists - Museum - Local groups?) who operate in these counties to co-operate to take selection/retention decisions. I would very much like to see national approaches but after getting to know c. 30 counties structures , I have turned skeptical on how can one size fit all?

[Aisling Nash](#) Theodora, I'm not sure one size can fit all. But I do think that there can be guidelines in relation to how we can work within different scenarios. Support networks could be built across regions for those museums without archaeological curators for example. We could have national guidelines in relation to digital archiving and reach some sort of consensus with regards to what we archive digitally and what we don't.

[Stefanie Vincent](#) [Aisling Nash](#) It's an excellent soapbox to be on! HER's are a great public resource but it's often difficult to connect their records with our archives. Admittedly this is a much worse problem with our older archives, where the location data is sometimes less.....structured/consistent. We're working with our HER to improve the situation but it's becoming clear that we need planning archaeologists and commercial companies to be on board for it to be successful. Watch this space.....

[Aisling Nash](#) Great to hear Stefanie. I'm working on it in Worcestershire too!

[Steve Trow](#) I'm afraid that I have to leave this conversation now, but Barney Sloane and Robin Page will continue to be involved from the Historic England perspective.

I'd like to say how constructive and thoughtful the contributions have been.

I'd also like to reiterate one key point that follows on from Aisling , Stefanie and Theodora's last few posts.

It is really important that archaeologists assume responsibility for taking decisions on this issue, even if we find the process challenging and uncomfortable. If we fail to do this, or if our proposed solutions are unrealistic and unaffordable (particularly in the current difficult climate), our voice will be marginalised and others will simply take the decisions without involving us. This would be the worst possible result. Thanks all.

[Jan Wills](#) Sam - picking up your second paragraph about possibly re-thinking where archaeological archives should be curated and used: at the time of Southport (2011) we were proposing new resource centres for archives, linked to existing museums. Should we be reopening the debate about where archives are deposited?

[Tim Malim](#) FAME undertook an extensive survey in 2012. There are 9000 homeless archives not accepted by a museum or other repository. The artefacts, analysis and records undertaken to comply with a condition of planning permission, are held in temporary storage indefinitely by commercial archaeology because too few museums or local authority stores have space, curators or requirement to accept

these archaeological archives, resulting in the potential value of archaeological archives being denied to the nation. Scotland and Wales have national stores, in England and N Ireland no such strategic option is available.

To ensure public benefit is achieved as intended within planning policy, national agencies and government departments responsible for heritage within the constituent countries of the UK need to resolve the current situation, and to ensure for the future a specific requirement for museums and appropriate repositories to take these archives for an appropriate fee from the applicants

[Sam Paul](#) Hi Jan, yes I do but we all know that the talk of regional stores has been going on for years and they have not materialised (is there any money for them?). I think it is the bigger questions that need answering first- what is the purpose of the archives we produce and who are they for? There are many great arguments about future knowledge and preservation of the past etc but for who? The average museum visitor will only engage with the nicest hand axe that has ended up on display but a researcher will want the whole flint archive including the debitage. Museums however report that the large majority of their archives are never accessed by researchers- but we as a profession say that is why the museum should be keeping them! If a museum attempts to 'pick and choose' what comes into their store to improve accessibility as they see it, there is an outcry from archaeologists (I have been to many conferences!). So are they a museum collection or a record of data for future research?

[Aisling Nash](#) That goes back to Steve's point above that we have to, as a profession, make a decision on archives rather than having the decision made for us. But will we ever reach a consensus?

It's an interesting question that you pose Sam. Are they both?

[Edmund Lee](#) On Q1 on improving access to archives, as Jonathan Webster commented, one issue is poor accessibility of site / context data. Better access for researchers to actively searchable context records (not just in data archives) would drive interest in the physical archive, and thus perceived value. One technical solution might be the Open Context system pioneered in the U.S. . A UK example of this applied is at West Stow - see Pamela Crabtrees data at <https://opencontext.org/projects/59E7BFBC-2557-4FE4-FC14-284ED10D903D> Lots of organisational issues around common standards, but the technology is there to do this.

[Helen Parslow](#) As Sam says the debate re regional stores has been going on for years and in an ideal world would be brilliant but also as she says we need to decide why and what we are archiving and work out a way to encourage their use. We need a way to let people know of their existence and that they can be seen, this will need money, as we cannot expect the museums to bear the cost of more access to them.

I also hope that the new OASIS/HERALD show allow people to know what and where things are

[Barney Sloane](#) There are some great examples of the re-use of archival material (eg Gathering Time's revisiting of archived carbon samples for high-precision dating of Neolithic causewayed enclosures), but I think we have to be clear that the permanent retention of substantial quantities (in aggregate) of low-significance or trace assemblages from evaluation exercises ought to go through a form of SWOT test. They are arguably neither a museum collection (in the form of something to be visited and used) nor a record of data for future research. Yes, there \*may\* be a research question answerable by this material which becomes unattainable because of the decision to de-accession and dispose. But how does this fare against the risk of strained local authority budgets triggering large scale museum closure? We must manage both supply and demand which involves everyone, not just the national agencies (qv Tim's comment above).

[Dan Miles](#) on qt 1 improving access to data...issues with physical archive and digital archive was brought up yesterday in the cifa workshop on finds standards. physical archive to museums (or not when they are closed) and digital data to.....? museums....? to be kept with physical collections (on servers or Cdroms)..or curated by a digital repository eg the ADS

[Sam Paul](#) [Aisling Nash](#) ideally they would be both (I think....). The archaeological profession has clearly assumed they are both for a very long time by expecting that museums will store, curate and conserve them in perpetuity- but in the form which is most relevant to archaeological researchers! But my research suggests that archives in their current form generally do not work well as museum collections. Obviously there are some museums with a more archaeologically focused remit where this is less of an issue and their stores are accessed regularly by researchers- even in those cases though they report that the same archives are accessed over and over while others are never touched. This comes back to one of the other points about a national register for archives- that may go some way to opening up the less known archives to research- often it is the published sites that get re-visited when it is those that have not been published that need the attention. (these boxes are too small !!!)

[Dan Miles](#) oops pressed send...and split away from the collections....this also feeds into the discussion of where all our stuff goes....

[Edmund Lee](#) On Q2 the policy framework, while I agree with Steve Trow's point that we can't expect the taxpayer (national or local) to fund archives, we could, if we co-ordinated our lobbying, make better use of developer funding. Does the Community Infrastructure Levy offer us a route to, for example, fund the development of local / regional archaeological resource centres? <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/community-infrastructure-levy> . The campaign to reduce VAT reduction for listed buildings repairs could be a model.

[Jan Wills](#) There are some promising initiatives on funding through the planning process e.g. I believe in E Sussex that S106 agreements have started to be used to obtain capital sums to pay for museum facilities for storage of archives from housing developments, and in Wiltshire there is an archaeology policy in the Local Plan covering heritage assets which makes specific reference to managing archives. We

need to consider what can reasonably be asked of developers, and how this can be secured through the planning process.

[Edmund Lee](#) On Q3 as others have commented, field practices (or indeed contract negotiation and project planning practices before going out into the field) could make a great difference. Let's commit ourselves to answering Michael Heaton 's question on the CIFA LinkedIn list a couple of years back. How much does it cost to excavate, analyse, publish and archive a cubic metre of archaeology in the UK? A proper Cost Information Service for archaeology, like the Building Cost Information Service <http://www.rics.org/uk/knowledge/bcis/online-products/bcis-online/> would give developers the ability to compare tenders on quality as well as just cost.

[Aisling Nash](#) We also need to consider how we get all counties in England to buy into initiatives such as securing funding within Section 106 as well as incorporating archiving into local plans. It can be difficult to argue in some areas especially in two tier authority areas. Perhaps some really good case studies that are easily accessible?

[Aisling Nash](#) With regards to a national register of archives, perhaps a starting point could be recording the type of archives and locations in HERs. We're often the first point of contact for researchers, the archives could be highlighted in relevant records and touched on in the information sent to researchers? It would definitely act as a signpost.

[Kate Fernie](#) A modified version of the OASIS reporting system could be a better starting point for making connections between the reports, paper archives, material archive and digital archives - and creating an easily sharable information base of what's out there.

[Jonathan Webster](#) In my mind it would be a better solution to integrate, 'standardise' and improve HERs rather than adapt OASIS. The HERs are already the first port of call for commercial units and that is where we go when undertaking a search of the dataset such as for DBA/HIA etc. The HERs also, from my point of view, has a closer link with the commercial unit, planning archaeologists and museums than OASIS and as such it would be easier to adapt them than to try and push OASIS into doing something the HERs are already in place to do.

[Jonathan Webster](#) Plus, in my mind, if we can charge the developer in a more formal and even way across the country for HER and archive deposition then it reduces their frustrations in an ad hoc system, makes it easier to justify such charges and include them in future fee proposals and, most importantly adds additional revenue into HERs and museums at a time of continual cuts and decline.

[Kate Fernie](#) Jan - there are some other examples of funding through the planning process, which we can report on through Seeing the Light of day. S106 agreement money is contributing to the establishment of the new store in Wiltshire, and there are some other examples in the South West. We're also looking the possibility of

seeking funding through Community Infrastructure Levies. Arguing the case can be difficult, given the pressure on funding and the different political discussions that go on at local and county level (in unitary authorities as well as the two tier areas). Greater transparency over the costs and case studies illustrating the access that we're trying to achieve, should help.

[Jan Wills](#) Robin and I are going to sign out around 5pm today but we will leave the discussion open till midday on Monday for any last thoughts. After that we plan to collate the contributions and feed them in to the archaeological archives workshop next Friday - which some of yesterday and today's contributors are attending. I'd like to ask, by way of concluding comments, what would your priorities be for actions that could be taken by us, the sector, to address any of the issues raised in this discussion?

[Jonathan Webster](#) Finally, and in relation to the above question regarding releasing the potential of archives to a wider audience and particularly the public. That is something that HERs are much better placed to do as physical entities in the landscape rather than an ethereal place in the tinterweb

[Jonathan Webster](#) Finally, in relation to the final part of the question asked above regarding releasing the potential of archives to a wider audience and particularly the public. HERs are in a much better place to do this as a physical space as opposed to OASIS which is more of an ethereal concept on the interweb.

[Aisling Nash](#) Determining how and if archives are being used.  
How to increase accessibility.  
Building case studies for funding regional storage centres as per your point above and Kate's.

[Aisling Nash](#) Digital archiving - going someway towards establishing national guidelines and good practice.  
How do we support those museums where there is no specialist curators?

[Theodora Anastasiadou](#) Just a comment on our current roles as archiving officers and Museum curators: I have suggested to the ClfA Archives group that I would like to collect the job spec of archiving officers from a number of contracting units so we can clearly see the level of responsibilities and expectations in the current framework, we already have a matrix for the group for validation with the ClfA Committee. May be on the same level, it would be interesting to find out what is expected from a Keeper of Archaeology nowadays so then we can see how pragmatic this is in the context of developer led archaeology and the volume of material generated.. after this may be we are closer to what a Museum store is functioning as ? As of this week I am being told by one county that 5% of the collections are really displayable

[Theodora Anastasiadou](#) Due to Northamptonshire not having a county store despite the scale of development, I feel I have stepped into a Keeper of archaeology shoes as we do retain and manage at least 70% of the counties archives: hopefully due to HLF funding and a team from all relevant colleagues in our county we should reach

the optimal solution for the future store, based on good and bad practices we have seen, we do hope we all get involved though.

[Stefanie Vincent](#) Supporting increased communication between museums and commercial contractors, HERs and planning archaeologists. Demonstrating the cost-benefit analysis of these relationships as standard, as opposed to relying on individuals to be open (or even enthusiastic) about it.

[Stefanie Vincent](#) (thought I'd already posted this but it's now gone from my thread) Supporting closer relationships between museums, HERs, commercial archaeologists and planning archaeologists. I think the system can be improved and fixed without it being completely torn apart but these relationships need to be a given instead of being based on individuals being prepared to work together.

[Jan Wills](#) Thanks very much, everyone, for your contributions. Lots of information to feed into the workshop next week.

But please let me know what your priorities are - we want to come out of the workshop with some achievable action points. In saying this, I don't mean to underestimate the size, complexity and long-standing nature of the issues - but to emphasise that we do want to make a difference.

Have a good weekend!

## ***WISH LISTS AND FINAL THOUGHTS***

[Robin Page](#) I'd just like to echo Jan's thanks for all your contributions over the last two days!

Kate Fernie

My comment about OASIS relating to improving access to information via a common reporting system, and using this to allow contractors, HERs and museums/archives to share data, and then re-using this to publicise the reports, digital and physical archives and making sure they're connected. Using different reporting forms and repeating information for the various bodies involved must be very frustrating.

[Dan Miles](#) i agree with [Kate Fernie](#) OASIS is not an alternative to HERs but is a way of reporting information to HERs and can link HER event and Museum Accession numbers. HERs are not digital archives or repositories nor physical archives/museums.... They are info points and key sign posting systems... we need to link the info better and develop sustainable digital and physical museum stores

[Dan Miles](#) priorities as requested by [Jan Wills](#). ok new sustainable model for keeping archaeological archives. the present system is unsustainable. we want to keep arch collections for ever... but what for...ok some great research projects as highlighted above but compare these small amount of projects to the total costs of keeping all the archives im sure this is no way cost effective way of researching.. we dont dig everything up from a site so we shouldnt keep it all...we need to think what we keep is driven by research questions... these may change with time and so therefore should our collecting policies. bottom line is we cant

afford to keep it all just in case someone may want to research it in the future.....u less we change the funding model....

[David Dawson](http://www.edp24.co.uk/news/fears_of_a_disaster_in_norfolk_archaeology_because_of_closure_of_expert_unit_1_4957719) News of the closure of another archaeological contractor - [http://www.edp24.co.uk/news/fears\\_of\\_a\\_disaster\\_in\\_norfolk\\_archaeology\\_because\\_of\\_closure\\_of\\_expert\\_unit\\_1\\_4957719](http://www.edp24.co.uk/news/fears_of_a_disaster_in_norfolk_archaeology_because_of_closure_of_expert_unit_1_4957719)

[Toby Catchpole](#) Many good points above. I agree with the need for wider dissemination of information regarding what the museums currently hold, whether that be via HERs/OASIS or something else.

I haven't seen any discussion regarding using cold store; for what it's worth I think this is kicking the problem a decade or two down the road to a time when there definitely won't be any developer funding once contracts with cold store expire.

I'd also say that there needs to be more discussion regarding what we need to do with digital archives. The current guidelines are perhaps overly onerous for most interventions, having been designed for major research projects. They also seem to cause particular problems (regarding expense) for geophysical surveyors.

[Dan Miles](#) Last post weekend thoughts - priorities for me are:

1 Working out a sustainable model for funding archiving (physical and digital) - could be standard cost % from developers for museum archiving (a levy?)

2 Better consistency and standardisation in the project management flow from excavation, post ex and archiving,

3 Greater involvement of museums at the outset of a project to discuss archiving with contractors/consultants/developers - this would benefit not just archiving but public engagement etc... contractors may engage with communities during the process, but it is museums that engage with the new home owners/school kids etc....

In fact that last point is very relevant for the whole issue - it is the museums who deal with the future of archives and communities that are created from say new housing developments, therefore they must have a much larger say in the decision making that is taking place.

[Theodora Anastasiadou](#) Replying to the last question of Jan: I know that a few counties asked all the contractors to submit the volume of archives they hold and the reason/s why they are not deposited yet (audit of the arch collection of the county).

This will be a good opportunity of collaborations per county and for the curators to inform the units about the use of the arch collections and the audiences but similarly how can they work together on the storage crisis. On that front, how the experts operating in the county can work together on a project design to solve the issues with the resources available or potential - apply for funding.

Still think it will be useful to publish success stories here.

[Theodora Anastasiadou](#) On a second matter, digital data deposition needs to be taken on a national level even from each county as this is above any county's local issues really. Good news from one county: the curator will set a day from which on all archives will be deposited by ADS and all the developers will be informed of the new added costs in advance. Otherwise the archive is not to be accepted for deposition.

So understanding the collection: the volume and the issues which this carries and

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[Kate Fernie](#) priorities cont... how about a grant programme for Endangered Archives (cf. <http://eap.bl.uk/>) to enable archives to be rationalised, digitised and made more accessible for research and community uses?

[Steve Trow](#) Here is a personal viewpoint from me, divided (over two posts) between the supply of archive storage space and demand management by archaeologists.

Firstly, in terms of enhancing the supply of storage space

Selective provision of resource centres (a matter for consideration by ACE/HLF/Local Authorities)

Assistance for museums to review existing 'historic' archaeological archive holdings: selective disposal to create short-term storage 'headroom'

Periodic review of 'supply' in order to guide strategic decision-making (this is already in place for two more years through the HE/SMA annual review project).

2<sup>nd</sup> post...

Steve Trow (2<sup>nd</sup> post) And on managing demand...

Develop better understanding of the current patterns of archive use (by whom, for what, how often?)

Develop clear guidance and procedures on 'transfer of title'

Develop a transparent and justified national schedule for storage costs to be adopted by all collecting museums to support revenue costs.

Importance of planning for selective archive deposition to be built into all appropriate professional archaeological guidance.

Current technical guidance on retention to be supported by readily available case studies and training materials.

University-led studies on sampling-for-storage approaches to different material types; on the likely long-term research potential of different material types; and on the potential of digital v's physical storage.

Further work on material reburial options

Consideration of the practicality of time-limited retention policies.

Consideration of the potential of improved fieldwork standards to reduce the demand for retention.

END as of 14:57 03/04/2017.

## ***CONTRIBUTIONS BY EMAIL***

An email contribution with an attached document was also sent to Robin Page from Dr. Christopher Cumberpatch. This has been forwarded to the project leads already.

A later contribution was also received via email from Gail Higginbotham:

*1. Do we know why we are creating and keeping archives, what their archaeological value is and how they are actually being used? What is their potential for future research, display, public access?*

*In relation to "how they are actually being used", no doubt record keeping of such activities is what is required and some organisations do this, like the HERs at the Archaeological Trusts in Wales (or they should be). Such methods can be applied across the board with some updating and refining no doubt. The people to ask as a group are archaeologist, historians, librarians and bring in a social scientist who knows how to create questionnaires. In my experience as a trained social scientist and historian (social psychology etc before becoming an archaeologist) one of the things that I always notice is the lack of ability to create sound questionnaires or record keeping about human behaviour in archaeology or the use of archives - especially those carry out research on archaeology in the public sphere or on archaeologists themselves. I have spent some time correcting students' questionnaires that come to my notice via Facebook, archaeology chat groups etc (in a nice way of course) and those of my colleagues. I am happy to participate in any exercise like this, having been trained and worked in libraries, archives, as an historian, as an archaeologist, as a psychologist and as a social and physical scientist.*

**2. Is the existing legal and policy framework sufficient to enable the archaeological archive to be created, deposited and curated?**

*In regards to the last two points, the answer is a resounding no. This is primarily linked to the issue of storage of 'hard copies' and the misguided trendy idea that scanning and/or having digital copies of everything is the answer to deposition and storage in the future. The digitising and scanning of all archives is an excellent way to share archives with the public and interested parties (of any kind) around the World, there is no doubt about that.*

*However, it seems many archival record keeping assessments have been deciding over the last 10 years that scanning hard copies and then sometimes throwing away some of the hard copies maybe what is required as a solution to lack of storage (a solution for some groups). This has been made clear by the number of books that libraries around the UK have been throwing out (sometimes secretly; and has certainly happened here in Australia, also).*

*Other issues include the idea that Central Storage is the way forward of the archives we have. I would say absolutely not, though access is so much easier this way. But even if the UK organises some single underground massive nuclear bunker I would say this is not the answer. Why? Because if that storage unit is targeted or an accidental fire occurs everything is potentially destroyed all at once (as we have seen in ancient history and even today). These were the sorts of things being discussed by the HER Officers within Wales with the RCAHMW, National Museum and Libraries when I was there in 2005-2006. Personally, I believe such things must be paid for by the government and the government must be lobbied. Decisions need to be made now about storage locations and buildings. Also, whilst it is important that the major National Museums being free for their citizens, I think so many free Museums were a mistake by the UK government. It is possible that other Museums could go for a gold coin donation - even for an entire family (so cheap as possible) and direct this money towards storage of archives of these same places and advertise it as such? EG, it could be a campaign entitled "Saving our Heritage for the Future".*

3. Are there fieldwork and analysis practices we could improve that would refine our approach to selection?

*But what are we selecting?*

*I think field work should collect everything it can, constrained naturally by the time each project has and also what they collect may well be defined by the a priori project goals.*

*But in the process, collect as much as you can, because (i) we can collect digitally as we go and (ii) all 'notations', photographs, etc, should be labelled appropriately and we can decide which of these to pull out as records to be kept in whatever place requires particular information.*

*But it is entirely important to still collect B/W film photographs and paper records for long-term stable storage. Seriously, there is not any existing legal and policy framework sufficient to enable the long-term/permanent support of archaeological digital archives to be created, deposited and curated. I don't think we have a law in the UK yet that has yet fully stated and supported that we must (for instance) change the hard ware every 12 months and software every 6 months to ensure the stability and accessibility of all digital records. Plus, it is necessary that the copying over and re-saving of every single photograph is done every two years, say, or at least check the software is compatible. Will, for instance, any old \*.png files be able to be opened? Also image files get corrupted over time, who is going to ensure they will always be able to be opened by next year by anyone with new software or be opened at all. The same copying regime has to be carried out to prevent having images that are corrupted (maybe someone has written a routine by now that can do this?). I do know that the Trusts in Wales were backing up at the end of everyday and hard drives were changed over regularly to prevent the loss of data and archives. But this is not enough in the long-term.*

4. Should we keep everything forever, irrespective of the significance of the sites that the archives represent?

*If we could, of course, we can never know the exact significance of things, especially of things in our own time.*

