Selection Strategies for Archaeological Archives:
Making Archaeological Archives Sustainable
CIfA AAG Day Conference and AGM
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Speakers' abstracts

Session 1: The Rationale for Selection

a) **Rationalising archives in museums to create space: the case studies**
   Kat Baxter, Society for Museum Archaeology

Recent studies have demonstrated the pressures that museums with archaeological collections are facing in terms of diminishing storage space, staff reductions and loss of expertise. It is in this context that rationalisation was suggested as a solution to the storage crisis faced by museums, particularly in relation to archaeological archives. The recently published 'Guidance on the Rationalisation of Museum Archaeology Collections' by the Society for Museum Archaeology and Historic England has now demonstrated that rationalisation is not a cost-effective way to increase storage space, and that selection prior to deposition will be crucial to the sustainability of archiving in the future.

This paper will give a brief overview of the rationalisation project, and will concentrate on two of the case study museum services involved, looking at how they audited and assessed their collections, the lessons learned, and the legacy of the project going forward.

b) **Introducing the CIfA Selection Toolkit: a Toolkit to aid in the selection of the working project archive**
   Sam Paul MCIfA, Heritage Consultant

Archaeological archives are an integral component in safeguarding the evidence of our past. However, pressure on storage space and curatorial resources has increased the focus on being more selective when it comes to what we choose to retain for future generations. The aim of a selection strategy should be to ensure that the elements retained from a working project archive for inclusion in a preserved archive are appropriate to establish the significance of the project and support future research, outreach, engagement, display and learning activities. However, the application of such a process is not universal, and many contractors, specialists and museums have described misunderstandings and a lack of knowledge and tools when it comes to the creation of appropriate, project specific selection criteria. This paper will present the recently completed CIfA 'Selection Toolkit', its origins, format and application.

c) **A survey of archaeological archive selection practice in Europe**
   Duncan H. Brown MCIfA, Historic England

The recent 'Making Choices' project initiated by the Europae Archaeologiae Consilium (EAC) included, amongst an extensive array of topics, a survey on selection carried out by the EAC Working Group for Archaeological Archives. All member states of the EAC were sent a questionnaire and 22 responses were received from across the continent. This paper will set out the questions asked in the questionnaire and the results from the preliminary analysis. The aim of the survey was to explore the various mechanisms that exist for making selection decisions as part of (or not) an archaeological project. Beginning with fundamental issues such as ownership and curatorial responsibility, the survey has produced a useful insight into the variability that exists within what is becoming a subject

of universal interest. It is hoped that presenting the results of this survey will stimulate discussion of how we make selection decisions in this country, and consideration of possible alternatives.

d) Will the new Selection Toolkit make my job as an Archives Officer easier?
Helen Parslow MCIfA, Albion Archaeology

This talk will aim to show the issues that an Archives Officer, or indeed anyone within a contracting unit currently dealing with archives has. It won't just be a series of moans, but will aim to highlight the issues which we all know already exist. The aim will be to show that, in an ideal world, most of what the new Toolkit requires should already be happening – but is it, if not then why not, and will the Toolkit help? In an ideal world, the Toolkit should mean that the life of an Archives Officer will be easier when people sign up to it and start using it … but will today's conference show that it in reality, it just creates more issues?

Session 2: Selection strategies in a digital age

a) Work digital / think archive: collecting and selecting digital data for sustainable archaeological archives
Manda Forster MCIfA, DigVentures

Digital technologies have transformed the way archaeologists work, providing innovative research tools, improving how we investigate sites and giving new life to knowledge about the past. As with all parts of an archaeological archive, digital data contributes to the long-term preservation of sites by providing key information which can be accessed by researchers and the public alike. How that information can be used in the future is an important consideration and, as new technologies become the norm, we have to be sure that our archive processes adapt to incorporate innovative methods, tools and data.

Whilst born digital data and digitised records are central to most current archaeological projects, the management of digital material within archaeological archives remains challenging to many. From those collecting information to those curating archives, digital data can be the cause of much frustration – which often results in incomplete or unsustainable material being deposited. The Dig Digital project, funded by Historic England, has developed a series of how-to guides on collecting, managing and depositing digital data. This paper presents some key messages and top tips around collecting and selecting digital material as part of the day to day management of archaeological projects.

b) Not the end of the Line: data selection and sustainability in the Crossrail archive
Karen Thomas, MOLA and Kieron Niven, ADS

The first part of this presentation will look at the extent to which selection was possible for the digital records of the Crossrail project at the Archive stage. It will consider how time pressures help to concentrate the mind and how, sometimes, the obsessive control imposed on a large infrastructure project can come in useful. The second part of this presentation will look at the creation and deposition of the Crossrail digital archive with the Archaeology Data Service, with a focus on archive documentation and long-term sustainability.

c) Making an informed choice: selecting wreck material for archive deposition
Angela Middleton, Historic England

Excavations of wreck sites can often result in the recovery of large quantities of artefacts in a comparatively short space of time: working in a short window, dictated by the tides, artefacts are recovered fast from mainly unstratified contexts. These large assemblages not only result in a

lengthy post-excavation analysis phase but can also put strain on the archive repository with regards to long-term storage and curation. Large ship structures or iron from the marine environment require huge resources. In some cases, a selection process is already applied underwater by the divers.

Using two case studies, the London and the Rooswijk, this presentation will give an insight into the approach taken in making an informed choice, when it comes to selection and retention. Both protected wreck sites present a different angle of underwater excavations: the work on the London is a combination of surface recovery and limited excavation and is nearing completion; whilst work on the Rooswijk comprised excavation only and has almost completed the assessment phase. The presentation will outline project stages and put emphasis on the multi-disciplinary approach that was applied during the decision making at various stages, involving project management, conservators, finds specialist and the archive repository.

Session 3: Selection in Practice

a) **The end of GIGO? On-site prioritization of archaeological material recovery: marine shells as an example**
   Greg Campbell, 'The Naïve Chemist'

The business of deciding what to archive begins with deciding what to excavate, and how to excavate it. Rationalizing the archive in post-excavation will often be too late, if the materials are excavated from deposits with lower research potential, or collected by inappropriate or 'traditional' methods. Therefore materials specialists must think through their priorities, and then explain clearly and succinctly to site staff, as well as project managers and statutory archaeologists, which deposits need excavating, and how they should be excavated. Since the last AAG meeting one class of materials (marine shell) has had a first attempt made at guidelines on selection, retention, and recovery during excavation, which has passed peer-review and been published. This includes a guide for identifying the research potential of deposits, a ranking of those deposits by importance (so high-potential deposits are prioritized during fieldwork and therefore naturally end up in the archive), and a guide to appropriate collection for those deposits (so their high research potential is maintained through to archive). The thinking that led to this fieldworkers' guidance will be outlined, in the hope that it might lead to fieldwork directly producing higher-potential archives for other archaeological materials.

b) **Talking Toolkits – the experience of applying the Toolkit to a commercial site**
   Hazel O'Neill ACIfA, Cotswold Archaeology

This case study will look at a Cotswold Archaeology project which the Toolkit has been trialled on. The presentation will look at the overall process, plus any strengths, weaknesses and questions raised.

c) **Large projects *v* small: how easily does one size of Toolkit fit all?**
   David Ingham MCIfA, Albion Archaeology

This second case study will look at Albion Archaeology's trialling of the Toolkit and will consider how easily the Toolkit can be applied to real-life projects of different types and sizes.