

SPOTLIGHT The CfA *Standard and guidance*

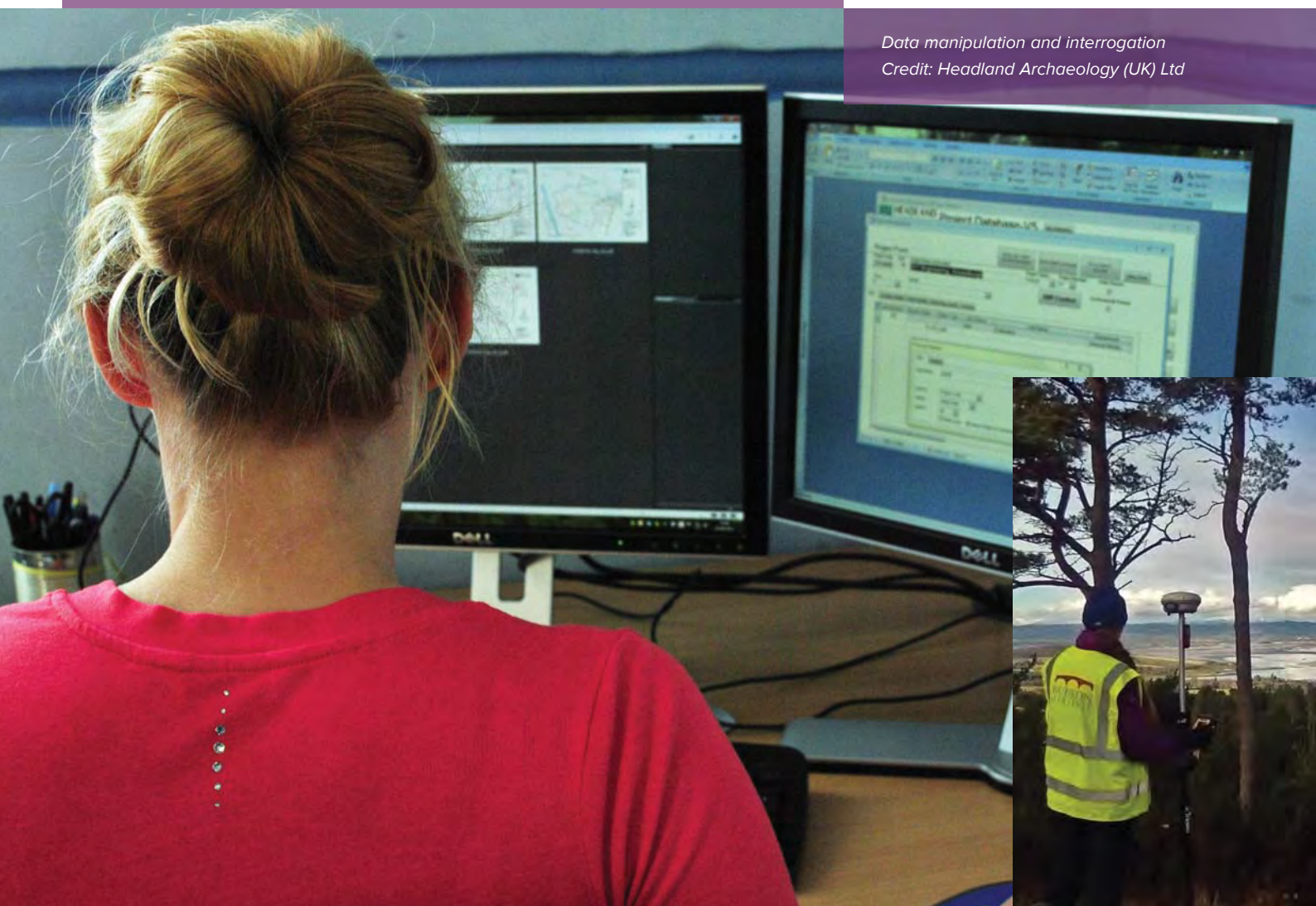
Available at <https://archaeologists.net/work/standards>

Desk-based assessment is a programme of study of the historic environment within a specified area or site on land, the inter-tidal zone or underwater that addresses agreed research and/or conservation objectives. It consists of an analysis of existing written, graphic, photographic and electronic information in order to identify the likely heritage assets, their interest and significance and the character of the study area, including appropriate consideration of the settings of heritage assets and, in England, the nature, extent and quality of the known or potential archaeological, historic, architectural and artistic interest.

Historic environment desk-based assessment is useful in a wide range of circumstances. For the purposes of this 'Spotlight' we are focusing on its role within the context of development (or other land-use change) proposals.

Despite different regimes (and occasionally, terminology) in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, planning policy and associated guidance relating to the historic environment across the UK refers to the need for appropriate assessment in order to identify known and potential heritage assets affected by proposed development. In some cases (England and Wales), this is specifically

*Data manipulation and interrogation
Credit: Headland Archaeology (UK) Ltd*



for historic environment desk-based assessment

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identified by the term 'desk-based assessment' and reference is made to the ClfA *Standard and guidance*. Regardless of terminology, all four national planning policies emphasise the importance of applications being submitted with sufficient information to allow for informed or reasoned decision-making.

Once an initial appraisal has highlighted the potential of a proposed development to impact on heritage assets, desk-based assessment is the first phase in a staged approach to the provision of sufficient information to support informed decision-making. Its aim is to identify

- known and potential heritage assets within the study area
- their interests and significance
- the character of the study area, including the setting of heritage assets
- the impact of a proposed development, or the need for further evaluation if necessary

Membership of ClfA places a professional obligation on individuals or Registered Organisations to comply with the *Code of conduct* and *Standards and guidance*, in

addition to any other requirements placed upon them by legislation or policy or its interpretation by the local planning authority, or other advisors or by their clients. Where the requirements of clients and/or advisors appear to require a less rigorous approach, members and Registered Organisations are, nevertheless, expected to adhere to the *Standard*.

So what does the *Standard* say?

In order to comply with the *Standard*, a desk-based assessment **must**

- 1 determine, as far as is reasonably possible from existing records, the nature, extent and significance of the historic environment within a specified area
- 2 be undertaken using appropriate methods and practices which satisfy the stated aims of the project, and which comply with the *Code of conduct* and other relevant regulations of ClfA
- 3 in a development context, *either* establish the impact of the proposed development on the significance of the historic environment *or* identify the need for further evaluation to do so
- 4 be sufficient to enable reasoned proposals and decisions to be made whether to mitigate, offset or accept without further intervention that impact

Desk-based assessment is not just a data-gathering exercise. The archaeologist carrying out the desk-based assessment needs the knowledge and skills to

- understand and assess **potential**
- understand and assess **significance**
- understand and assess the **impact** of the proposed development/land use changes on that significance

The assessment of setting is a complex issue and further guidance has been produced by Historic England in its Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 3 – *The Setting of Heritage Assets*. An initiative to develop further guidance on cultural heritage impact assessment between ClfA, IHBC and the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA) was announced in April.

Professional practice is constantly evolving as new techniques are developed and legal, administrative and ideological frameworks change. Feedback on this, and on any of the ClfA *Standards and guidance*, is welcome at any time. Any substantive changes will be subject to consultation with ClfA members and the wider sector.

ClfA Standards and guidance

- Define good practice, expanding and explaining general definitions in the Code of conduct
- Define a required **outcome**: the **standard**
- Advise on how the outcome may be reached: the **guidance**
- Are formulated *by the sector*, based on current understanding of good practice
- Are used when commissioning or designing archaeological work in order to define measurable **quality standards**
- Are not optional: compliance with the *Standard* is a **professional obligation** for ClfA members and Registered Organisations



Rubicon surveyors at Craig Phadraig, a late prehistoric hillfort overlooking the town of Inverness and Beaulieu firth - This survey was one of a series of topographical surveys undertaken by Rubicon Heritage Services examining late prehistoric settlements across north and northwest Scotland, Spring 2014. Credit: Enda O'Flaherty, Rubicon Heritage