



A CORE STANDARD for ARCHAEOLOGICAL ARCHIVING

1) DEFINITIONS

An archaeological archive comprises all records and materials recovered during an archaeological project and identified for long-term preservation, including artefacts, ecofacts and other environmental remains, waste products, scientific samples and also written and visual documentation in paper, film and digital form.

An archaeological project is any programme of work that involves the collection and/or production of information about an archaeological site, assemblage or object in any environment, including in the field, under water, at a desk or in a laboratory. Examples of an archaeological project include: intrusive projects such as excavation, field evaluation, watching brief, surface recovery and the destructive analysis of objects; non-intrusive projects such as landscape or building survey, aerial survey, remote sensing, off-site research such as desk-based assessment and the recording of objects or object assemblages. The re-investigation of archives in curatorial care also constitutes an archaeological project.

2) COMPOSITION

An archaeological archive consists of two main elements:

- The documentary archive comprises records and associated documentation created during the course of an archaeological project.
- The material (finds) archive comprises objects and associated samples.

Documentary Archive

The documentary archive may include: correspondence, contracts, specifications, notes, records, pro-forma, indexes, catalogues, reports, maps, plans, section drawings, elevations, site photographs, object images, CAD files, databases, digital aerial photograph interpretations, excavation archives, geophysical and other survey data, GIS files, audio records, images, satellite imagery, spreadsheets, text files, analytical results and 3-D data.

These can be created on the following carrier media:

Drawn, photographic, written and printed material on paper

Drawn material on film

Photographs on film, transparencies, x-radiographs, videotape and microfilm

Digital files on hard drives or transfer media.

Material (Finds) Archive

The material (finds) archive may include:

artefacts, such as pottery, tile, worked stone, glass, metalwork, worked bone, leather and textile;

ecofacts or environmental remains, such as animal bone and plant remains;

human remains, which require specific treatment in accordance with relevant national or state standards and legislation;

waste products, such as slag, hammerscale and off-cuts;

material recovered from scientific sampling, which is often the product of laboratory analysis, such as environmental samples, thin-sections, microfossil slides, casts.

3) PRINCIPLES

1. All archaeological projects must result in a stable, ordered, accessible archive.
2. It must be recognised that all the processes of an archaeological project affect the quality of the resulting archive.
3. Standards and procedures for the creation, selection, management, compilation and transfer of the archive must be agreed and documented in the design of every archaeological project and understood by all project personnel.
4. Ensuring the security and stability of the archive is a continuous process and a universal responsibility.

5. The entire archive must be compiled in a way that preserves relationships between each element and facilitates access to all parts in the future.
6. An archaeological project is not completed until the archive has been transferred to a recognised repository and is fully accessible for consultation.

4) RESPONSIBILITY

The manager of an archaeological project has responsibility for ensuring that the archive is created and compiled to the standards described in this document.

Every person involved in an archaeological project has a duty of care towards the archive and must make sure that it is created and compiled to recognised standards, using consistent methods, and it is not at unnecessary risk of damage or loss.

Once the archive has been transferred it is the responsibility of the receiving repository to ensure that the archive is stored to recognised standards for long-term preservation, documented according to accepted internal procedures and made accessible for consultation.

5) STANDARDS FOR ARCHAEOLOGICAL ARCHIVES

These standards are intended to apply to all parts of the archive and all stages of the archaeological process, from planning to curation of the end product.

General standards

1. All archive items must at all times be treated carefully and handled, packed and stored in conditions that minimise the risks of damage, deterioration, loss or theft.
2. All archive items must be marked or labelled with an identifier related to the archaeological project and/or the accession code used by the repository.
3. The archive must be organised in such a way as to preserve the contextual relationship between the documentary and the material (finds) archive elements.

4. Selection criteria and procedures must be fully documented and included in the project archive.
5. Long-term storage must be conducive to preservation, security and accessibility.

Specific standards

The documentary archive

1. All types of record must be created according to consistent, accepted standards in content, format and file naming and use recognised terminology.
2. Recognised stable materials or media must be used when creating analogue written or visual records.
3. All original records, including those born digital, must be considered for inclusion in the archive.

Paper

4. Each type of written document, e.g. context records or drawing indexes, must be ordered together prior to transfer to the repository.

Visual records

5. All drawings and photographs must identify the subject and where appropriate include a scale and a north sign, or other means of location/orientation.
6. Media suitable for long-term storage in its original form must be used for unrepeatable photographs, e.g. those taken on site during an excavation.

Digital

7. Prior to archive transfer a digital backup strategy must be implemented.
8. Creation of the digital archive must be fully documented, with information such as software used, operating systems, types of hardware, dates, creators, field descriptions, and the meanings of any codes.
9. Transfer and short-term storage media are not suitable for the long-term preservation of the digital archive and should only be used to submit digital material for permanent archiving.

10. All digital files and transfer media such as disks or drives must be free of viruses before submission to the repository.
11. A digital archive index must be compiled and deposited in digital form with the digital archive.
12. Long-term storage must be on permanent servers that are regularly backed up and all software and hardware must be refreshed and the archived data migrated as necessary. Hardware and software refreshment and data migration must be fully documented.
13. The digital archive must be deposited in a Trusted Digital Repository where it can be preserved and maintained for the long-term future and made accessible.

The material (finds) archive

14. All finds must be cleaned and/or conserved as appropriate, according to recognised standards and using consistent methods, to ensure their long-term survival.
15. All finds must be marked or labelled, as appropriate, with project and context identifiers and, where relevant, the individual object identifier.

GLOSSARY

Artefact

Assemblage

Curation

Ecofact

Field evaluation

Long-term

Object

Off-cut

Pro-forma

Repository

Spreadsheet

Transfer

Trusted digital repository