



# Research & Impact Group



JULY 2013

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## Welcome to the RIG...

by Natasha Powers, Chair

*...and thank you for joining!*

**The IfA Research and Impact group was formed in response to the increasing concern that the various parts of the archaeological world are moving further apart, and in the recognition that collaboration creates innovation, improves research, and results in positive impacts.**

The group committee is comprised of members who work in commercial archaeology, academia and for NGOs, so we will be able to draw on a wide range of experiences and connections.

Over the coming months, we aim to use this forum to highlight the research work which takes place within commercial archaeology and to foster and facilitate research and training links between the academic, voluntary and commercial worlds. In time we hope to develop research networks, frameworks and resources.

We are starting this process by looking at the issue of how to demonstrate the varied impacts which archaeological work undoubtedly has whether they be social, cultural or economic.

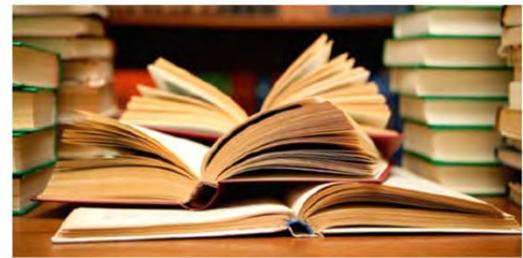
In order to achieve this, the IfA Research and Impact Group, is currently engaged in a project to gather opinions from across the sector with the intention of producing a guide to demonstrating impact in archaeological projects.

We are an active and proactive group so please do share your concerns and ideas and send in contributions for the newsletter via the group email.

You can keep in touch with the Committee and other group members on Facebook and Twitter.

If you are tweeting about issues which the group might be interested in, please use the hashtag #IfAimpact.

We look forward to hearing from you!



### Impact in academia

RIG Secretary, David Petts outlines how the REF2014 is defining the way in which impact is measured by university departments.

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### Meet the Committee

A short introduction to the backgrounds and interests of the RIG committee.

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### JOIN THE GROUP

Membership is free to IfA members (£10 for non-members)

EMAIL  
groups@archaeologists.net

# Impact week

by Natasha Powers

At the inaugural group meeting, we agreed that our first task should be to carry out some research to coordinate with the theme of the IfA conference for 2013 and with the aim of producing a professional practice guide. To this end we ran a short survey, advertised through e-mail and social media to find out what (if anything) 'impact' meant to archaeologists. The survey was on-line for one week and the initial results formed the basis of a presentation at the seminar session 'Demonstrating impact in archaeological projects'.

The survey received responses from 56 people, most of whom defined themselves as working in commercial archaeology. Although all sectors were represented at least once, clearly we cannot say that this provides a full picture of professional opinion.

## What do you understand impact to mean?

The responses suggest that the term 'impact' is indeed currently used by archaeologists. However, some respondents felt that it was restrictive and one-dimensional; whilst others had either not heard it used in archaeology or felt that it was not relevant or useful. There were a number of common threads in the answers. Firstly, the concept of defining impact as a (measurable) change. Whether that change was positive or negative, it was felt to be always there and several responses mentioned the physical impact of archaeological work in this respect. Another common response was that impact was about 'spreading the word' and passing on the results of the work which we do to as wide an audience as possible.

Some pointed out that the Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2014, which will be used by the four UK funding bodies to assess the quality of research in higher education institutions (HEIs), has a specific list of terms to describe impact and that this is the definition adopted by most universities - see the article by David Petts on page 4 of this newsletter.

## Is impact necessary?

Around 80% of respondents said yes. Though quite reasonably some said that really depended on how we were defining

impact! It seems that there is some consensus that there is no point in doing what we do unless there is some (measurable?) impact but that some projects have a negligible impact and contribute little in terms of new knowledge.

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*"Many projects are carried out without them having noticeable change to anything or anyone"*

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There were questions about whether considering impact adds value to a project and how to deal with the issues of cumulative impact or the need to synthesize work to have a measurable impact (ie all those one-feature watching briefs may eventually add up to create something more). Yet the majority of respondents didn't feel that we should only carry out projects that have a measurable impact.

## What type of impact is most important?

Most of those who answered felt that impact on planning or heritage policies; community activities and education or outreach was 'important' or 'very important'. There was less of a consensus about the importance of media activity (though few felt it was 'not important') or about the importance of peer reviewed publication.

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*"Archaeology needs to be, and feel, accessible and applicable to all members of our society"*

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Nearly 80% rated the current economic impact of UK archaeology as 'low' or 'very low', a pattern that was reversed when rating the research impact of the profession with more than 75% of those who replied scoring this area of impact as 'moderate' or 'high'. Community impact scores were somewhat contradictory with 26% saying that the impact was low but 67% scoring it as 'moderate' or 'high', and a similar pattern was shown with educational impact. The only area in which more than 10% of those who responded felt that archaeology has a 'very high' impact was in planning.

There was no consensus on how important

personal impact was and this had the highest percentage of people who stated it was not at all important (14%). Nearly 90% of those who replied stated that local impact was 'important' or 'very important'. Regional and national impact both scored similarly positively, whilst international impact again split the vote across the range of scores from 'quite important' to 'very important'.

## Who should we impact on?

73% of those who replied said that they currently increase the impact of their projects by working with other heritage organizations, whilst more than 60% said that they work with community groups, local societies and universities. Just over 50% mentioned working with the media and 40% with schools.

The main target audiences for impact activities were drawn from a wide variety of groups, with local people (including special interest groups) scoring most highly, followed by all levels of education audiences, local government, national government and peers. Commercial clients scored second from bottom, with only tourists receiving fewer mentions, though many answers included the fact that impact was aimed at anyone who was interested!

## What next?

We need more information so please do complete the updated survey which will run until 09 July and/or get in touch via the group e-mail, Facebook or Twitter. You can find the survey at:

[www.surveymonkey.com/s/6XYKCHL](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/6XYKCHL)

The results, together with opinions gathered during the IfA conference session will be reported in a future edition and will form the basis of the IfA guide, so this is your chance to shape the way in which the group approaches this task.

## FAST FACTS

78%

Agree that impact is a necessary element of archaeological projects. Yet...

61%

Do not feel that we should **only** carry out projects that have a measurable impact.

# The Research and Impact Group Committee

## Natasha Powers, Chair

Natasha began her archaeological career digging for commercial units and on research excavations before specializing in the study of human remains.



As Head of Osteology and Research Coordinator at MOLA, she manages a team of environmental specialists and works to develop partnerships with academic departments. She has helped to design post-graduate research projects and many recent and forthcoming osteological publications include such a contribution.

Natasha is keen to promote better dialogue between commercial, academic and freelance archaeologists (even those who are traditionally competitors), to work towards improving the profile and outputs of archaeology, to strengthen the discipline as a whole and to bring about a greater appreciation of the research value and wider impact of commercial work.

Natasha was elected to IfA council in October and is also a member of the Forensic Archaeology SIG Expert Panel.

## David Petts, Secretary

David has worked in most areas of archaeology during his career and is currently a Lecturer in the Archaeology of Northern England at Durham University and Director of Research for Archaeological Services in the University's commercial contracting unit.

He is currently particularly involved in running a major research excavation at the Roman fort of Binchester, Co. Durham. This project brings together students from Durham, a group of US universities and members of the local community.

David has also developed a programme of training workshops in heritage research skills for local individuals and groups. His academic research is centered on Northern England in the Roman and early medieval period and makes extensive use of 'grey literature' which is radically reshaping understanding of the archaeology of this region.



David is particularly interested in exploring how the traditional divides in archaeology can be overcome, in terms of sharing skills, people and data.

## James Morris, Treasurer

James has been a lecture in Archaeology at the University of Central Lancashire since 2012. He began his career as a field archaeologist in 2002 working on sites around Southampton and Winchester, before moving into post-excavation. After finishing his PhD in 2008 he worked as a zooarchaeologist, most recently for Museum of London Archaeology (2009 to 2012).

James is also a committee member for the Association for Environmental Archaeology. James's research draws

heavily on the synthesis of 'grey literature' to better understand trends and patterns in faunal material. He has most recently collaborated with a number academic and commercial partners to utilize London's



vast wealth of unpublished faunal datasets.

James believes that commercial datasets remain underused and is keen to promote collaborative projects.

## Paul Belford

Paul is an archaeologist with an enthusiasm for delivering social benefits from all aspects of the archaeological process. He has worked for various public, private and third-sector organizations over the last twenty years, and has also been closely involved with the Universities of York, Bristol and Sheffield. Paul is currently Director of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust; previously he was at Nexus Heritage for three years, following ten years as Head of Archaeology at



Ironbridge.

Having seen archaeology in practice from various angles, Paul is very keen to promote better connections between the professional, academic and community sides of the discipline.

Paul very much hopes that the RIG can facilitate better communication between archaeologists in all areas, and will encourage the development of best practice.

### Caroline Sturdy Colls

Caroline trained as an archaeologist and worked in both research and commercial archaeology before taking up her current role as a Lecturer in Forensic Investigation at Staffordshire University. Her main specialisms lie in Holocaust and Forensic



Archaeology, in particular the application of interdisciplinary approaches to the investigation of Holocaust landscapes. She completed her PhD thesis on this topic at the University of Birmingham.

Caroline is an active member of a number of research groups in Holocaust and forensic archaeology, including the IfA Forensic Archaeology Special Interest Group. She also regularly undertakes forensic archaeological consultancy for UK police forces and manages archaeological projects from a variety of periods.

### Matt Edgeworth

Matt has a long career in archaeology, spanning the academic, commercial and government sectors.

He worked as supervisor, Project Officer and Site Director for several commercial archaeology units – including Albion Archaeology, Cambrian Archaeological Projects and Birmingham University

Archaeological Fieldwork Unit.

Matt is an Honorary Research Fellow at the University of Leicester where he previously worked as Project and Research Officer for the AHRC-funded Wallingford Burh to



Borough Research Project (2008 to 2010). In early 2011 he was Leonard Slater Fellow at University College, Durham, where he wrote the book *Fluid Pasts: Archaeology of Flow*. He is currently working as Senior Investigator for English Heritage.

### Dan Miles

Dan currently works for English heritage as the Research Resources Officer but has worked in the archaeological and museum sector for a number of years in both England and Spain.

In his current role Dan is responsible for developing Research Resources (Research Frameworks and Reference Resources) and identifying ways to promote the better



coordination of research in the sector. He is also an active member of the Wiltshire Archaeology Field Group, Finding the Forgotten and is the Wiltshire representative for CBA Wessex.

Dan understands the impact that research can have and the importance of promoting

this value. He believes in making research available and accessible and in creating collaborative networks throughout the sector.

### Rebecca Nicholson

Rebecca has worked as Environmental Manager for Oxford Archaeology South since 2005. Her key role is to design and coordinate sampling programs and to liaise with other specialists within and outside OA with the aim of ensuring high academic standards are reached.

Rebecca has almost 30 years of experience in professional and academic archaeology



and is widely published on material ranging in date from the Mesolithic to the post-medieval. Her main research interested focus on the study of ancient fishing and fowling.

Before joining OA, Rebecca spent a number of years as a research fellow at the University of Bradford and maintains strong links with the academic community as well as offering specialist advice and training to local volunteer groups.

She is committed to forging closer links between commercial, academic and community archaeologists and to breaking down intellectual barriers.

#### GET IN TOUCH

EMAIL  
[groups@archaeologists.net](mailto:groups@archaeologists.net)

WEBSITE  
<http://www.archaeologists.net/groups/RIG>

# Impact in academia

by David Petts

For most academics the 2014 Research Excellence Framework (REF) is looming large. Previously known as the Research Assessment Framework, this is the latest of a series of regular audits of the research being carried out in Higher Education, which are of particular importance as successful performance is linked to directly to levels of research funding.

The most significant element of this process has been the peer assessment of the research outputs of each Department, such as books and journal articles. However, for the first time, REF 2014 is also making an evaluation of the impact of this research beyond academia. This impact now contributes 20% of the overall REF submission, and this percentage is expected to increase in future cycles.

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*The assessment of  
Impact in HE is here  
to stay*

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Not surprisingly, impact has risen higher up the agenda within UK universities in recent years. The notion of impact is one that has been achieving an increasing profile in recent years, as many grant giving bodies have demanded that grant applications show how the results would be disseminated or share to the wider public. Crucially though, the official definition of impact in the REF is a very tight one. Impact only counts if it can be shown to have effected material change in some aspect of wider society, such as new policies or increased levels of training. Many traditional outreach activities, such as a media presence, lectures or talks do not count as impact; these are seen simply as dissemination, and generally assumed not to cause real changes.

The second important aspect of the REF 2014 definition of impact is that the activities must be shown to have arisen directly out of specific named research publications. Again, this means that many important activities such as basic public training or education events can only be counted if it can be shown that it arose directly out of research activities rather than simply occurring as general knowledge transfer.

Together, these two tightly defined aspects of impact in Higher Education mean that a lot of general archaeological and outreach activities being carried out by universities do not qualify as impact.

A further complication is that as this is the first time impact is being measured and the official rules and guidance came out once the new cycle was underway: there is great uncertainty about how precisely the required case studies should be written and evidenced. Often the necessary evidence or supporting material may not have been gathered effectively at the time the activities took place because it was not known it was going to be needed for the REF. This uncertainty in how the assessment of impact will be assessed by the REF is leading to considerable nervousness within the sector.

In the longer term, it looks like the assessment of Impact in HE is here to stay.

On the plus side this means that, as impact is now directly linked to funding, there may be a greater will at Departmental and institutional level to encourage and support impact activities that might previously have been seen as simply an optional extra or just a good PR opportunity. Potentially, we will see these impact creating activities receiving the same practical support in terms of time and money as the research itself gets. However, due to the tightly drawn definitions being used by the REF, it is possible that many of the simple, traditional outreach activities such as local day schools or general dissemination might see less support as they do not fit the new impact model.

## TELL US ABOUT YOUR PROJECTS

EMAIL  
groups@archaeologists.net

## COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH NEWS



### Digitised Diseases

The University of Bradford, MOLA and the Royal College of Surgeons are currently engaged in a major, research and resource project, funded by JISC. Digitised Diseases seeks to bridge the gap between modern clinical medicine, the use of historic medical collections and archaeological assemblages, with the mass digitization of pathological type-specimens, primarily using textured 3D laser scans. The project will be completed this summer and will result in the production of a comprehensive on-line resource.



### Oakington cemetery

Since 2010 Duncan Sayer (University of Central Lancashire), Richard Mortimer (Oxford Archaeology East) and Faye Simpson (Manchester Metropolitan) have been leading excavations of an Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Oakington, Cambridgeshire. Students work side by side with professional archaeologists, using Oxford Archaeology recording sheets and techniques. The skeletons are excavated, stored and analyzed in accordance with BABAO guidelines. The project includes a significant public engagement component as part of 'bones without barriers'. Excavations this year run from 17th June to 15th July. Look out for more information in following newsletters

# RIG at IfA2013

by Amanda Forster

At the IfA annual conference and training event in Birmingham earlier this year, the Research and Impact Group made its own impact by hosting a session looking at how we demonstrate impact as heritage professionals. A full write up on the session will appear in the next issue of *The Archaeologist*, but some extracts of the discussion and images below give a teaser of the session highlights...



The starting point has to be who you are trying to have an impact on



Impact means different things to different people but all impact should be definable by having had a measurable change of the current condition



We should be talking, documenting and thinking about impact in the same way across the profession....

When we asked those attending the session what they felt the Research and Impact Group should do next, we got the following advice;

- 1) Reissue the impact survey
- 2) Provide some light touch considerations for project designs to aid consistency
- 3) Include some 'lessons learnt' case studies from relevant projects
- 4) Develop an impact toolkit for heritage professionals, including identifying potential, ways of optimizing and measuring impact
- 5) Start with what other professions do – what is out there already?

Just a few things for RIG to be thinking about! We have reissued the survey (the results of which will be discussed in the next TA), and if you have any ideas which you would like use to include in the above list, please get in touch with us via the IfA groups email address ([groups@archaeologists.net](mailto:groups@archaeologists.net)).