



The wreck of the Amsterdam, Bulverhythe © N Powers

NOVEMBER 2014

Collaborating for better research

In this edition we report back on our first day conference, held at the University of Leicester on Wednesday 24 September.

Thank you to all who presented on the day and for those of you who attended and contributed to the excellent discussion sessions. We are extremely grateful to English Heritage, MOLA and Allen Archaeology Ltd for their sponsorship and to Lianne Birney and Amanda Forster for all their support. The RIG committee would also like to particularly extend their thanks to Dr Emma Dwyer whose help and organisational skills were invaluable.

Inside this edition of the newsletter you will find an article by the Roman Rural Settlement project team, who presented on the day; feedback from our bursary holder Benn Penny-Mason; a report on our three-year plan news from the world of research and an update on the English Heritage review of Research Frameworks.

For those of you who were unable to attend, the University of Leicester team have put together videos of each of the presentations,

and these will be available on YouTube shortly.

The discussion session showed the strength of feeling within the profession for improving the way in which we all communicate and work together; the key role which iterative and inclusive research frameworks can and should play, and the challenges of resourcing the effective collection and presentation of grey literature.

Some of the suggestions of how to improve collaboration included, greater standardization (of data collection and reporting formats) and the increased provision of cross-sector training opportunities.



Research & Impact Group



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The Roman Rural Settlement Project

Robert Skinner outlines how this cross-sector project is using a wealth of 'grey literature'.

Image: Roman road, Sussex © N Powers

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MOLA becomes an IRO

Recognizing the contribution of commercial archaeology to academic thought

Image: MOLA staff discuss recent finds © N Powers

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The Roman Rural Settlement Project: Cotswold Archaeology, the University of Reading and the Archaeology Data Service

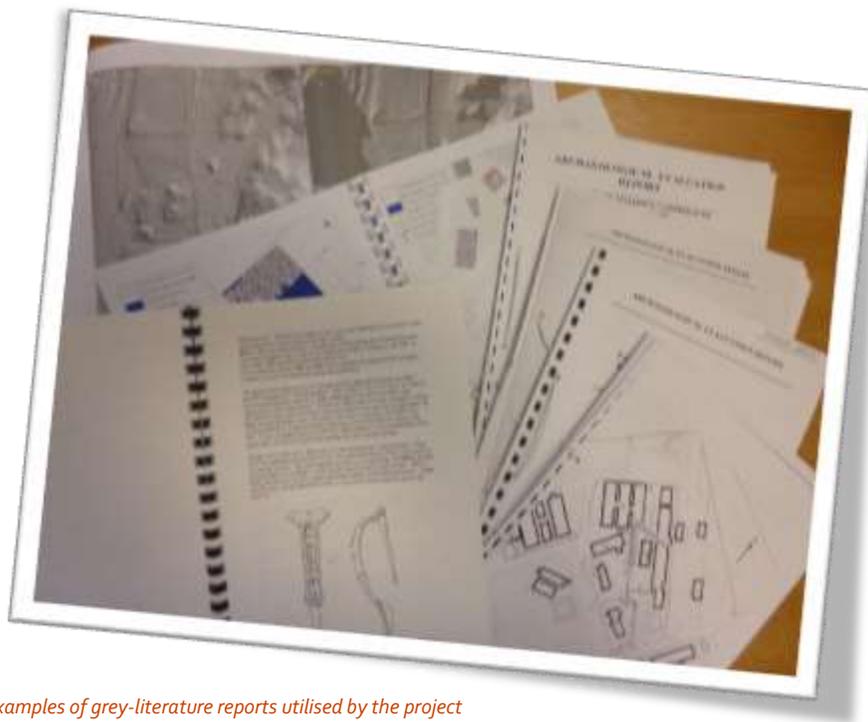
by Robert Skinner, Assistant Heritage Consultant, Cotswold Archaeology
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The Roman Rural Settlement Project is a cross-sector national research project, joint-funded by English Heritage and The Leverhulme Trust, that has been running since 2011 and is due to conclude in 2015. The project aims to realise the potential of the research dividend derived from developer-funded investigations of Roman period sites in England by analysing the ways in which commercial archaeological work, and in particular that only reported in 'grey literature', is changing and challenging the conventional perception of Romano-British rural settlement.

The project aims are being achieved via the review and interrogation of conventionally published reports and the extensive 'grey literature' resource derived from commercial investigations. The potential of this dataset is huge and is as yet untapped: there have been in excess of 10,000 recorded investigations in England between 1990 and 2010 which encountered Roman period archaeology.

Initial data collection concluded in June 2014, and well over 2500 original grey literature reports have been collected specifically for the project. These reports are analysed in considerable detail by the research team at the University of Reading, with the ultimate aim of providing an interactive online spatially-referenced database, online library and accompanying publication. It is hoped this output will form an essential resource for future research, which will be easily accessed and interrogated via the Archaeological Data Service (ADS) website. Furthermore, during the project a series of regional seminars have been held to disseminate the initial assessment findings.

The project is an excellent example of a successful cross-sector partnership in which



Examples of grey-literature reports utilised by the project

the key organisations involved have brought together their individual strengths to create a product that is worth more than the sum of its parts. The core team involves three organisations that are collaborating closely and reflect the cross-sector nature of the project:

Cotswold Archaeology

Cotswold Archaeology have brought their strengths to the table with established contacts within the sphere of local government and commercial archaeology and experience of managing complex, data-rich projects.

The team at Cotswold Archaeology are responsible for data collection with a particular focus on identifying and acquiring copies of unpublished grey literature reports. This task involves processing extremely large quantities of raw data, provided by local government Historic Environment Records and databases (HERs/UADs/SMRs) and Bournemouth University's Archaeological

Information Project (AIP). This resource is overwhelming, with the AIP database comprising over 11,000 individual records of recorded Roman archaeological remains (between 1990-2010), and the individual local government databases providing at least the same number of entries again (many duplicated).

The project is an excellent example of a successful cross-sector partnership

Using the summaries provided within these datasets, reports were selected on the basis of their potential to contribute to the project's research objectives (<http://www.cotswoldarchaeology.co.uk/developer-funded-roman-archaeology-in-england/>).



The East Midlands Regional Seminar, June 2013

Once reports had been identified, copies of the original grey literature reports were obtained from the local HERs or the original archaeological unit.

Accessibility of the grey literature resource was variable, and flexibility on behalf of the project team was essential, as it became readily apparent during the course of the project that there is huge variety in the systems, policies and resources employed by HERs.

Although support for the project has been considerable, the acquisition of HER data and resources has presented challenges. HERs are under considerable resource stress and many local authorities have, out of necessity, prioritised development control responsibilities over 'fringe' activities such as research projects. In many cases long waits for data were the norm and often project researchers were required to visit in person in order to obtain HER data and retrieve reports. Such requirements are time consuming and delays should be factored in to the costs of any project of this nature. In this context, the emerging 'digitisation' of the cultural heritage record proved to be hugely important (i.e. digital copies of recent reports could be acquired relatively easily), allowing the project team to retrieve reports that would otherwise have been resource-intensive to acquire.

All relevant 'paper-only' reports were digitised for use in the study and will be uploaded onto the project website. This is one of the most important aspects of the project, facilitating greater access to the immense grey literature resource that has accumulated since 1990, many aspects of which remain poorly documented and largely inaccessible.

University of Reading

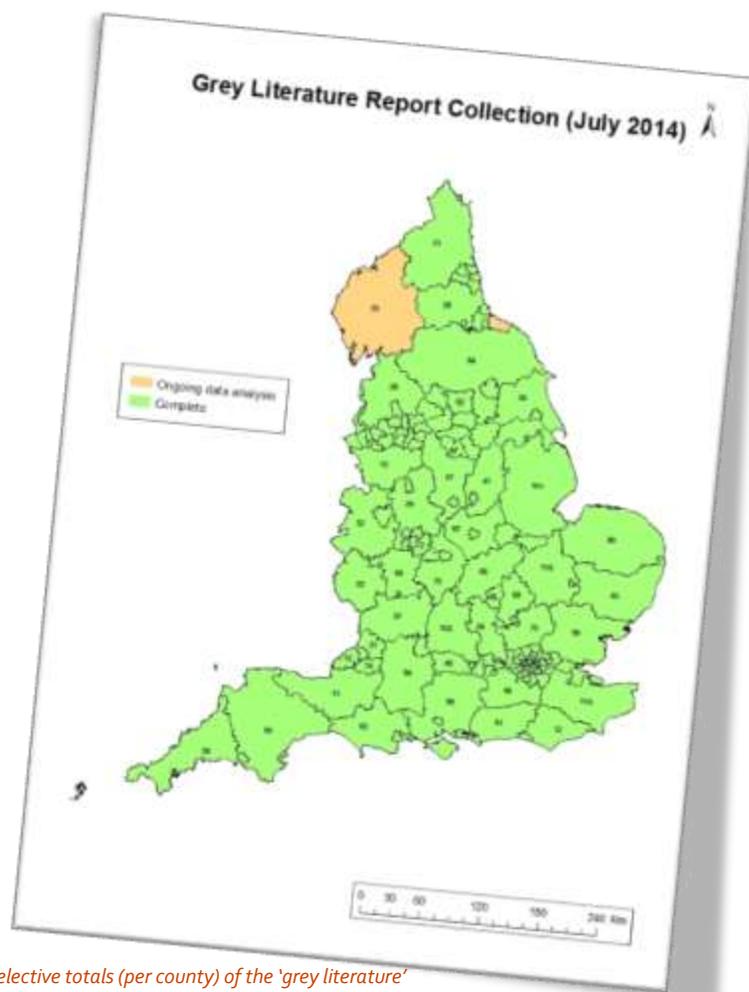
Central to the project is the Leverhulme Trust research team at Reading University. The team have brought extensive academic knowledge and research expertise to the project under the leadership of Professor Michael

Fulford. The team consists of three research fellows – Dr Alex Smith, Dr Tom Brindle and Dr Martyn Allen – who are undertaking the detailed analysis of the published and unpublished reports. The team are generating standard statistical data based on the available resource for the whole country, which will form the basis of the interactive online database.

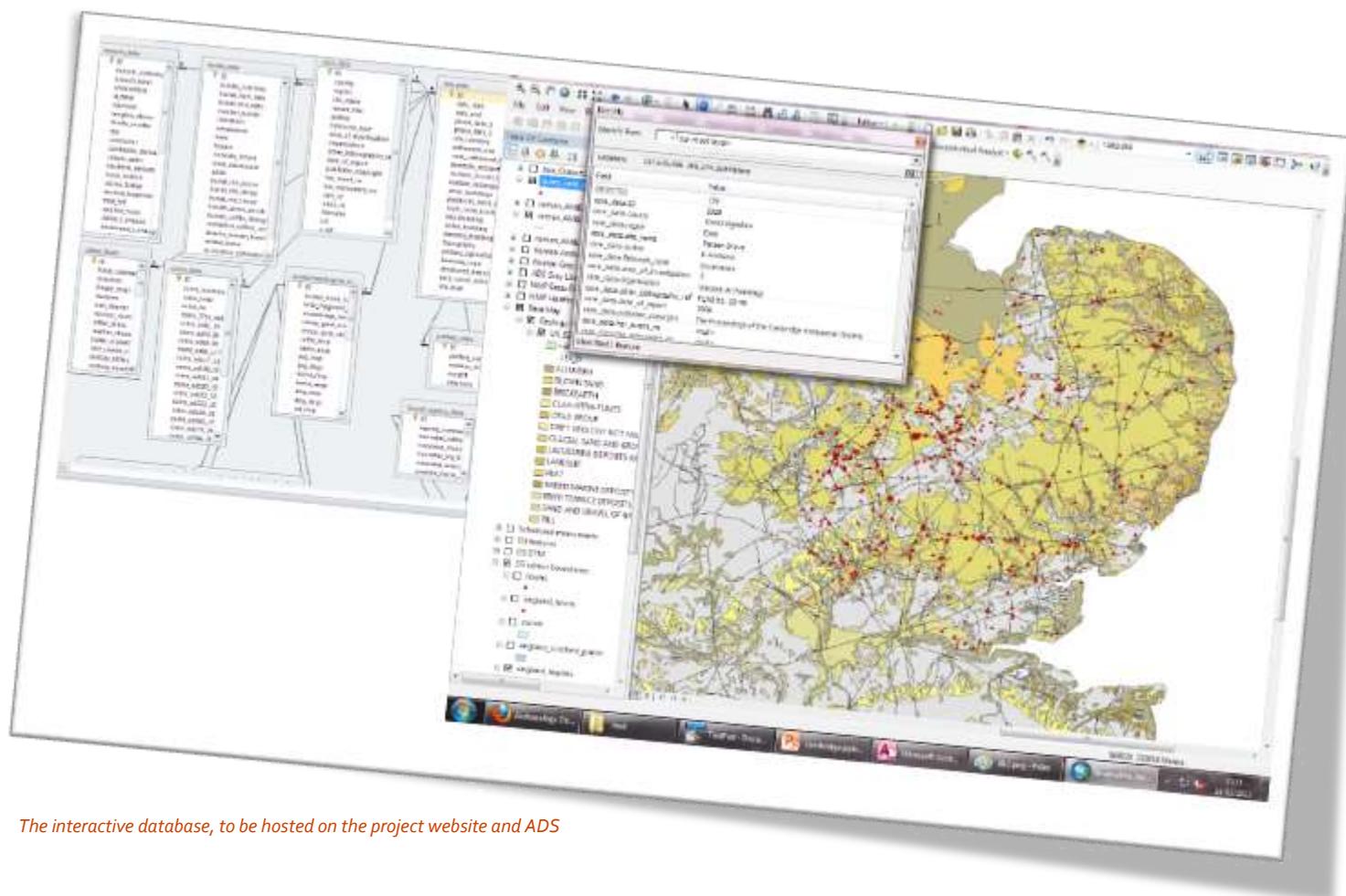
The subject of Roman rural settlement is very broad and whilst the project will provide a detailed overview of the topic, the research team have necessarily focused upon particular areas of expertise; namely small finds, agriculture and animal husbandry and burial and ritual practice. The analysis is ongoing and is due for completion in 2015.

Archaeological Data Service

The Archaeology Data Service (ADS) have been involved from the beginning of the project, primarily in the design and construction of a spatial database to facilitate data collection and analysis by the University of Reading team. This database is currently being rebuilt as a web-based



Selective totals (per county) of the 'grey literature' reports collected



The interactive database, to be hosted on the project website and ADS

interface to be publicly available at the end of the project in 2015. The interface will replicate the original tool used by the project team, and thus allow advanced queries on facets such as site morphology, burial practices or zooarchaeological data to be constructed by the user. An additional aspect of this interface is the use of web-mapping to allow results to be viewed in their geographic and thematic context. The interface also allows for results to be downloaded in a range of formats, and where appropriate link to digital inventories and grey literature held online. It is hoped that this resource will be a highly valuable research tool for a wide range of users.

In addition to this work, the ADS have also been accessioning and archiving digital grey literature reports (not already held through OASIS) identified and collected by the project team. Each of these reports is, or will be, discoverable within the ADS Grey Literature Library (http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archive_s/view/greylit/), assigned a Digital Object Identifier (DOI) enabling accurate citation

and classified according to English Heritage thesauri.

Summary

The data collection undertaken as part of this national research project has highlighted several trends within the heritage sector. Firstly, the enthusiasm for greater engagement across the sector, be it academic, commercial, local government or charity.

Secondly, a general push towards a greater level of digitisation, accessibility and dissemination of developer-funded reports, in relation to which this project has benefited and contributed. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, a desire for greater synthesis of the immense, yet largely untapped, grey literature resource that has accumulated since 1990. This project represents a significant step in the right direction.

ROMAN RURAL SETTLEMENT PROJECT

Further details of the project can be found here:

www.reading.ac.uk/archaeology/research/roman-rural-settlement/

Collaborating for better research: feedback from a bursary holder

by Bennjamin J Penny-Mason, Oxford Archaeology

The Collaborating for Better Research Conference 2014 was an insightful and thought-provoking day.

As a commercial archaeologist who has spent considerable time during my degrees implementing data from grey literature into my research, I was interested to discover how others had undertaken projects using similar material, as well as exploring the extent to which commercial archaeology impacts academic investigations. My previous research had been into the health of the children of Reformation Britain, predominately utilising grey literature data, and I was intrigued to discover the tactics individuals are employing to undertake research using this commercially obtained data. I was also keen to discover whether other commercial archaeologists who were attempting to promote research in their units were experiencing difficulties in nurturing cross-sector collaboration.

It is a rarity to gather together such an eclectic group of specialists from all over the heritage sector, each with unique and important perspectives on a variety of common interests. It was interesting to discover from the presentations that grey literature data studies had produced a significant impact on the academic narrative of entire historic landscapes and periods of time. The results from these studies contradicted the previously held archaeological and historical narratives constructed from limited data sets and this re-emphasised the importance of implementing commercially retrieved data in broad, cohesive research projects.

Considering the impact commercially obtained archaeological data can have on academic investigations as demonstrated, the consistent lack of perception of exactly how commercial units function is very apparent, yet surprising considering the importance of the units as a fundamental source of archaeological data. It was also useful for me to understand how different academic specialities are utilising grey literature data in their work, as an individual who now has an effect on creating such data, it is important to be aware of how to best assist these projects at the source. I believe it can be difficult to move past a singular

perspective of the data produced in the commercial sector; efforts should be undertaken to theorise about the wide variety of interests of every researcher who might wish to utilising grey literature data. Having a room full of individuals each with their unique classification and interpretation of grey literature data was a significant factor that was highlighted and would certainly impact on my approach to data presentation in the future.

Before attending the conference, I was particularly hopeful it would provide a number of strategies to enhance interaction in research between the commercial and academic sectors. As I am currently undertaking research using commercially obtained data for an academic publication, I was hopeful the day would provide useful ideas for increasing inter-sector interaction and potentially enhance my current project. My research, investigating the implementation and impact of the Harris Matrix on bioarchaeological data, is a topic that is underrepresented in both sectors and often neglected from consideration after the grey literature has been produced. What the conference confirmed for me was that open, clear and consistent dialogue is key to improving cross-collaborative research. Amongst the many issues raised during the day, it became apparent that it was consistently a breakdown in communication that is the main component to a lack of co-operation between the two sectors. Language also seems to be important, with misunderstandings easily arising in the narrative of cross-sector discussions, a product of specialist jargon and unintelligible terminology. Striving for greater clarity will likely provoke more open and unhindered dialogue. The day also confirmed for me that it will be down to those individuals within the commercial sector who are passionate about research to be advocates for collaborative work and provide tangible links between sectors. Individuals who have a firm understanding of the cultures of both sectors could prove vital at promoting dialogue and increasing levels of engagement, in order to increase the transfer of knowledge.

The outcomes of the conference impacted significantly on my research project. I decided for my current research that I would gain the best cross-sector response by

splitting the resulting publication into two separate papers. One for a bioarchaeological audience, with a view to emphasising the data implications and one for the commercial sector, emphasising the need for standardisation. The conference changed my initial approach of a single publication as it became clear that the multipurpose project would become lost in translation, with the likely outcome that both sectors would only comprehend the elements relevant to their sector.

The conference reaffirmed that open dialogue is key. Cross-specialist, open and clear discussion will provoke easy and constructive debate between the sectors. With a fresh collaborative project on my horizon, I will certainly be keeping my impressions of the conference in the forefront of my mind moving forwards. The conference was an excellent starting point for improving dialogue and disseminating cross-sector ideas; I look forward to more Research Impact Group events in the future.



With thanks to our event sponsors whose support made it possible to offer Benn a travel bursary



Independent Research Organisation status for MOLA

by Natasha Powers, Senior Manager, Allen Archaeology Ltd

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MOLA Specialists at work © N Powers

MOLA (Museum of London Archaeology) has become one of a small group of organisations to be granted Independent Research Organisation (IRO) status by Research Councils UK.

MOLA is now one of only a handful of non-university organisations who are eligible to apply directly to the Research Councils for funding and the first archaeological contractor to be awarded IRO status. This achievement demonstrates the contribution that developer-funded archaeology makes to archaeological understanding.

In order to achieve IRO status, MOLA demonstrated their in-house capacity to carry out research which 'materially extends and enhances the national research base' and a strong track record in maximising the impact and value of that research, together with a substantial, peer-reviewed publication record; evidence of leading and co-leading innovative research projects and an average of at least £0.5M pa in research funding over the past three years.

Becoming an IRO presents new opportunities and MOLA is eager to hear from potential research collaborators with

ideas for pioneering and valuable research studies.

If you would like to discuss a possible collaboration, find out more about our recent and current projects or discuss access to MOLA data or materials please get in touch via research@mola.org.uk

You can read more about previous research projects, search for and buy publications and investigate the on-line Resource Library at www.mola.org.uk

Your thoughts on the RIG three year plan

by Natasha Powers, Chair

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Following the last committee meeting at which we created the group three-year plan, we sent out a survey asking for your feedback. Thirty-three of you responded to our call for comments and the results were as follows:

Where?

45% would like to see meetings alternate between a northern and southern location and we will be doing our best to accommodate this.

We are always happy to hear from organisations who can act as host, and would be pleased to discuss combining the RIG meetings with other events.

What?

There was no clear consensus on what type of tours you would be interested in participating in but the most popular workshop topic was 'Research in commercial archaeology' with 73% of those who

responded expressing an interest. Measuring impact, using HERs and getting funding were equally popular at 54% each, whilst collaborative research for students was the least popular of the suggested topics at 36%.

How?

An overwhelming majority (94%) would like to see the impact toolkit as an on-line guide and 70% felt that it should include case studies.

Over 60% said you would use a RIG LinkedIn group (although only half would actively contribute) and we will be looking to set one up in the near future.

RESEARCH NEWS



ENGLISH HERITAGE

English Heritage review of Research Frameworks in England

Pye Tait consulting and English Heritage have published the result of their review. The Research Frameworks model was established in 1996 and comprises a Resource Assessment; Research Agenda; and Research Strategy. A variety of Research Frameworks now exist (e.g. regional, period-based, thematic) both on-line and in hard copy.

The review has shown that two thirds (68%) of those who responded to the on-line survey were using Research Frameworks, with Regional frameworks more frequently used than other types. Local authorities reported using them for assessing the significance of historic environment assets; providing a greater focus on research in development-led investigations; and in helping to develop local authority plans and policies and strategies. Commercial archaeologists use them as tools to help with Desk-Based Assessments; Written Schemes of Investigation and environmental impact assessments (EIAs). Whilst, academics report using them to scope out research projects and to provide direction for postgraduate research.

Read more about the review and its recommendations in this article by Dan Miles, RIG committee member

<http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/publications/research-news/developing-next-generation-of-research-frameworks/>

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TELL US ABOUT YOUR PROJECTS

If you have a research project or resource that you would like to tell the group about, or to offer a contribution for the next newsletter (anything from 200-1000 words), please do get in touch!

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