

Standard and guidance for forensic archaeologists

Published February 2026



The Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (“the Institute”) is incorporated by Royal Charter.

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Introduction to the Standard and guidance for forensic archaeologists

This Standard and guidance document was originally developed by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA) and an advisory group comprising forensic archaeologists who had previously been accepted by the Council for the Registration of Forensic Practitioners through a process of peer review. It has been revised and updated by CIfA's Forensic Archaeology Expert Register and Panel (FAEP) (see <https://www.archaeologists.net/register/faep>).

This document complements, but does not replace, the responsibilities and obligations of forensic practitioners as detailed within Criminal Procedure Rules (2020) and Criminal Practice Directions (2023). It will allow forensic archaeologists to demonstrate high levels of performance and competence by validation against seven professional Standards. These Standards are each supported by good practice guidance. This document does not provide the detailed methodologies for each area of practice that would enable it to be used as a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP). The forensic archaeologist must be able to demonstrate SOPs that comply with the Standards outlined in sections 4–10.

This document provides information about good practice within the legal framework of England and Wales. It also outlines good practice which is compatible with the legal system in Scotland. It draws upon UK professional standards and accepted techniques for archaeological practice including those outlined by CIfA (see <https://www.archaeologists.net/codes/cifa>), technical papers issued by Historic England and other organisations (eg MOLAS 1994; Watkinson and Neal 2001) and academic references (eg, Hunter and Cox 2005; Hunter *et al* 2013). It also takes into account the agreed standards and guidance of the Forensic Science Regulator (FSR) and other appropriate authorities,¹ and international standards outlined by the American Academy of Forensic Science and the United Nations.

There is reference to various documentation in this document that were current at the time of publication. These references will be reviewed and updated periodically, but please do double check that you are referring to the most up-to-date versions.

This document refers throughout to 'features'. A feature is considered to be any archaeological entity of interest. In forensic archaeology, this includes features of modern date, such as clandestine graves.

¹ The Crown Prosecution Service in England and Wales, the Public Prosecution Service in Northern Ireland and the Procurator Fiscal in Scotland

1 The duties and responsibilities of the forensic archaeologist

In line with other forensic support services, we consider the key duties and responsibilities of the forensic archaeologist to be:

- a) actively maintaining professional expertise through continuous professional development (CPD – which includes maintaining a CPD log (see <https://www.archaeologists.net/careers/kit/cpd>) for ClfA-accredited archaeologists). The forensic archaeologist should ensure a good breadth of archaeological knowledge and keep up to date with methodological advances within both the archaeological and forensic spheres. They should also be able to demonstrate a good basic knowledge of human skeletal anatomy and taphonomy
- b) working to agreed and documented standards
- c) participating in formal and informal peer review and audit
- d) ensuring reliability and consistency by performing within the confines of the individual's skills and expertise and by ensuring the integrity of the evidence at all times
- e) maintaining all specialist equipment to an appropriate standard to ensure the prevention of contamination between scenes
- f) communicating effectively – providing clear information during the investigative process and presenting findings in a balanced and impartial manner
- g) understanding their role within the criminal justice system, current legislation concerning both human remains and archaeology, and the obligations and responsibilities of the expert witness

2 Professional standards in forensic archaeology

There is no established organisation covering forensic archaeology alone, though practitioners may be members of a number of professional organisations providing measurement of competency to practise. ClfA maintains a list of accredited experts in forensic archaeology, with input from the FAEP and we encourage forensic archaeologists to seek professional accreditation through ClfA (see <https://www.archaeologists.net/join>). ClfA promotes professional standards in archaeology through a system of peer reviewed accreditation. Accredited members commit to maintaining their skills and knowledge through CPD and are held accountable under the Institute's *Code of conduct*.

The Standards outlined in this document define the processes and practices required to ensure that work is conducted to a high professional standard. The Standards can be used to help determine the performance and competence of the forensic archaeologist alongside their knowledge, experience and/or formal academic qualifications. We expect all practising forensic archaeologists to demonstrate competence and meet the Standards outlined in this

document. All ClfA-accredited forensic archaeologists **must** meet these Standards and abide by the ClfA *Code of conduct*. New recruits and trainees must demonstrate competence appropriate to the level of work undertaken. The overall responsibility for any archaeological work should be held by a person with skills and competence equivalent to those required of an MClfA. Opportunities for training/mentoring of staff can be considered where appropriate, in consultation with the Senior Investigating Officer (SIO) and forensic scene manager. Trainees and recent recruits (considered to be equivalent to a PCIfA) must be supervised by a more qualified and experienced forensic archaeologist. The forensic archaeologist must operate within the limitations of their competence and expertise.

Forensic archaeology is not subject to the Forensic Science Regulator's *Code of Practice* (2025). However, all practising forensic archaeologists must abide by the Criminal Procedure Rules (2020) and Criminal Practice Directions (2023).

2.1 Peer review

We encourage regular consultation with colleagues. Forensic archaeologists must have in place systems to enable peer review and ensure quality control (eg, a critical conclusions check). The process of peer review and fact checking, including reviewer's comments, must be documented, and draft versions of reports and statements retained in the casefile. Forensic archaeologists should maintain contacts within the discipline.

2.2 Record keeping

All notes and records pertaining to the case must be traceable to the individual and time of production (signed and dated). All records, whether physical or digital, must be kept in appropriate, secure storage. The forensic archaeologist must comply with the advice of the police or CPS on retaining records. The forensic archaeologist must proceed according to Section 23 of the *Criminal Procedures and Investigations Act (1996) Code of Practice* and relevant National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) guidance (2025), retaining all illustrative, written and electronic data and associated metadata until otherwise instructed. This must include calibration data and original notes, or images of them.

2.3 Maintenance and calibration of equipment

All equipment used to record metric data must be effectively maintained to ensure that data is repeatable within reasonable professional parameters. The level of calibration and testing must be proportional to the requirements for accuracy for that equipment and to the importance of the information recorded for the reconstruction and interpretation of the scene. This should include the accreditation of manual and electronic equipment to ISO/IEC 17020 and 17025 where appropriate (eg, GPS/survey equipment and geophysical survey equipment) and be documented according to international standards (ILAC 2022, section 3.12).

3 The ClfA Standards and guidance for forensic archaeologists

There are seven Standards for forensic archaeologists outlined below in bold text, with their accompanying good practice guidance (sections 4–10). The Standards comprise

- initial contact with the forensic archaeologist
- the briefing
- search
- forensic archaeological scene examination and evidence recovery
- forensic archaeology reporting
- case conferences and other subsequent action
- attendance at court

3.1 Compliance with the Standards for forensic archaeology

3.1.1 ClfA-accredited forensic archaeologists and Registered Organisations **must** meet the Standards and abide by the overarching ClfA Code of conduct (see <https://www.archaeologists.net/codes/cifa>). All other forensic archaeologists are encouraged to adhere to these Standards to demonstrate their commitment to accepted practice.

3.1.2 We strongly recommend that the guidance underpinning each Standard, expressed using '**should**' in this document, is followed to maximise the likelihood of compliance with the Standards. Other clauses using the word '**may**' indicate other permitted actions or identify advisable or desirable actions.

3.1.3 The forensic archaeologist should be prepared to justify any departure from the guidance to colleagues, ClfA and the criminal justice system. If the work undertaken fails to meet the Standards for forensic archaeology because of the way it was conducted, that work is 'sub-standard'.

4 Standard: initial contact with the forensic archaeologist

The forensic archaeologist must explain the importance of and methods for limiting further disturbance. They must request information from the commissioning party regarding

- a) the nature of the case
- b) the initial requirements for the attendance of a forensic archaeologist
- c) any scene/briefing locations and any access issues which could affect how long it will take to get there and/or impact the transportation of equipment to the scene
- d) the details of the SIO, if they are not the initial point of contact, and the name(s) of the forensic archaeologist's point of contact at any scenes/briefings

The forensic archaeologist must act in accordance with the requirements of ILAC (2022)

The forensic archaeologist must document the initial contact, including relevant dates and times, and the name and identifier of the person with whom contact was made. The forensic archaeologist must be aware of the potential for cognitive bias from the initial stages of contact onwards and follow the current guidance of the FSR (2020) for avoiding this, including but not limited to the sequential disclosure of information.

The forensic archaeologist must keep records of all work undertaken and any findings made for the duration of their involvement in the case. All written, electronically captured and graphic records, as well as physical material, must be retained until otherwise instructed. The written statement that reports the results of the forensic archaeological work must disclose all relevant material and the forensic archaeologist must make records available to the defence if requested. All notes and records must be traceable to the individual who made them and when they were made (signed and dated).

Where peer review has not been undertaken, this must be declared

4.1 Guidance: initial contact with the forensic archaeologist

It is the responsibility of the forensic archaeologist to establish that they are able to attend the scene/search area within the required timescale, and to provide advice on the requirements for other specialist or support services.

There **should** be no unreasonable delay in responding to a call. The forensic archaeologist **should** make the police aware of the time needed to prepare and travel to the site. The police may make arrangements for travel. The forensic archaeologist **should** also consider the time required to carry out background research before attending the scene.

5 Standard: the briefing

An effective briefing is essential to ensure the integrity of archaeological work. The forensic archaeologist must act in accordance with international standards (ILAC 2022, sections 4.2 and 4.3) in their initial discussions and must liaise with the SIO, forensic scene manager and other experts in attendance to advise on and determine

- a) the potential scope for forensic archaeological involvement
- b) their responsibilities and the responsibilities of others at the scene for health and safety issues relating to the search and/or examination
- c) the initial plan for the search/examination
- d) requirements for evidence recovery and packaging and measures to prevent contamination including the requirements for personal protective equipment (PPE)
- e) requirements for support services and/or equipment

Forensic archaeological examination strategies must be agreed with the forensic scene manager prior to the commencement of this work.

5.1 Guidance: the briefing

The forensic archaeologist **should** request a briefing from the SIO or a relevant police representative at the earliest opportunity. Prior to the forensic archaeologist attending a scene, they should expect the forensic scene manager to provide them with sufficient information to effectively undertake their required examination. It will be of assistance for the forensic archaeologist to be sighted on the investigative forensic strategy (prepared by the Officer in the Case (OIC)) and the examination strategy (prepared by the forensic scene manager). Using the information provided, the forensic archaeologist **should** establish an initial strategy for the search or excavation and evidence recovery in consultation with the SIO, forensic scene manager and other specialists who may be involved. Specialist scene preparation (eg, screening) **may** be discussed with the forensic scene manager where appropriate.

The briefing **may** include information on the circumstances of any previous discoveries, witness reports and other intelligence.

The forensic archaeologist **should** ensure they are aware of the available resources, such as Police Search Advisors (PoSAs), photographers and other specialists.

The forensic archaeologist **should** establish whether there are any known or suspected health and safety issues relating to the search/examination area. If there are any specific risks associated with the archaeological work, the forensic archaeologist **should** give appropriate advice and document it. Specific risk assessments **may** need to be produced for the forensic archaeological work at the scene. The forensic archaeologist **should** provide themselves with appropriate PPE for scene attendance.

The forensic archaeologist **should** retain a record of all information and associated correspondence provided by the police, including relevant dates and times.

6 Standard: search

The forensic archaeologist must act in accordance with the appropriate ILAC requirements (2022). Before and during search the forensic archaeologist must

- a) undertake all reasonable practical research to fully understand the area to be investigated
- b) establish the parameters of the area to be searched based on the information available at the time
- c) produce a documented specialist search strategy in consultation with any PoSA search strategy, based on the information obtained and making best use of available resources within the scope of the search

- d) ensure that the agreed search strategy is compatible with that of the forensic scene manager, PoISA, or other individual responsible for the search
- e) work at all times with an awareness of contamination issues and within the forensic scene manager's scene management strategy, using agreed routes of access and protective clothing as appropriate
- f) understand the requirements and potential contribution of other attending specialists and members of the search/investigative team
- g) have, or be able to obtain, adequate knowledge of the types of deposits and structures relevant to the scene
- h) document background information and results (positive and negative findings)
- i) where appropriate, advise on the protection and storage of relevant evidence types
- j) with the agreement of the SIO, report previously unknown archaeological (non-forensic) findings and trench locations to the local planning archaeologist and Historic Environment Record (HER)/monitor and be aware of the legislative requirements of intervention in archaeological deposits

6.1 Guidance: search

Safe working practices **should** be followed at all times in line with any scene risk assessment and the advice of the Health and Safety Executive. Health and safety arrangements **should** be agreed and understood by all members of the search team before work commences and any changes that become necessary as work progresses should be documented and agreed.

In addition, ClfA-accredited forensic archaeologists **must** (and all other forensic archaeologists **should**) work in accordance with rule 5.2 of the ClfA Code of conduct which states 'A member shall give due regard to the requirements of health and safety legislation relating to employees or to other persons potentially affected by their archaeological activities'.

6.1.1 Before the search

The forensic archaeologist **should** try to undertake research to fully understand the area as necessary and formulate a search strategy based on the information obtained.

Background research **should** include

- geological and topographic information relevant to the search parameters
- information on the past history of the area, including archaeological information
- evidence of possible contamination or other health and safety issues

The forensic archaeologist **should** also gather information from the briefing and from other attending experts. If aerial photographs are available these **should** also be reviewed. Background research **should** include investigation of reliable internet sources for historic information and local images of the area.

The forensic archaeologist **should**

- have a thorough understanding of archaeological formation processes
- establish the presence of characteristics which may affect the visibility of features of forensic interest, and the presence of historic burial grounds and archaeologically sensitive areas
- consult historic maps (from local archives or on-line databases) and the HER
- identify areas of potential interest, such as changes in the landscape which may indicate areas of concealment
- maintain confidentiality and discretion when undertaking research in publicly accessible areas or in consultation with bodies external to the justice system

The forensic archaeologist **should** document background information at the scene and provide a reference copy to the appropriate member of the investigative team as required. Receipts **should** be obtained for all documents provided to the investigative team.

6.1.2 Search strategy

The forensic archaeologist **should** prepare the search strategy in discussion with the SIO, forensic scene manager and PoSAs as appropriate. This **should** include the staffing levels required for effective archaeological work. Consideration should be given to the attendance of two forensic archaeologists, which can assist with quality assurance, reduce bias and provide peer review of specialist interpretations. The forensic scene manager **should** be advised of any welfare and lighting requirements.

The forensic archaeologist **should** combine the information gathered before attendance and at the scene to advise the forensic scene manager of high- and low-priority search areas.

The specialist search strategy **should**

- define the parameters of the search
- consider any intelligence regarding the case or activities on the site
- consider available resources
- define methods of deployment

Search methods for consideration within the strategy include

- ground-level survey
- topographical survey and archaeological landscape assessment
- geophysical survey
- remote sensing (eg, aerial and thermal imagery)
- fingertip search
- use of cadaver dogs

Any indicators (eg, crop marks, obstacles, changes in ground surface or flora) arising from the search that identify areas for further investigation **should** be identified and discussed with the investigation team.

Difficult working environments **may** require the consideration of different search and recovery methods, as well as additional health and safety protocols, in discussion with the forensic archaeologist.

The search **should** identify whether there are areas of interest requiring further investigation, which **must** then follow the Standard outlined in section 7. The forensic archaeologist **should** justify and document their recommendations and discuss the level of significance with the SIO/forensic scene manager.

6.1.3 Search management/action at the scene

The forensic archaeologist **should** be briefed by the relevant police representative before the search (see section 5). If a briefing has not been possible before attendance, it **should** take place before archaeological work starts at the scene.

During the search it **may** be appropriate to reconsider decisions made at the briefing and in the initial search strategy. The forensic archaeologist **should** take all appropriate steps to liaise with the Police Search Advisor (PoLSA) and integrate the archaeological strategy with the overall search strategy.

As anomalies or items/features of interest are located, search methods **may** also be altered. If changes to the search strategy are needed during its implementation, the forensic archaeologist **should** document them. If the forensic archaeologist believes that decisions made by other members of the investigative team will compromise them professionally, they **should** make this clear to the SIO/forensic scene manager/PoLSA and record this in their notes. The forensic archaeologist **should** consider asking the police personnel to sign the record of the discussion. If a satisfactory resolution cannot be reached, the forensic archaeologist **should** decide whether to continue their involvement at the scene. They **should** comprehensively record the nature and results of any subsequent involvement.

The search area may consist of extensive areas of the landscape or be smaller and more clearly defined scenes under the control of a forensic scene manager, often in conjunction with a PoISA. In either instance, the forensic archaeologist **should** consult with the forensic scene manager before entering any area. Discussions with the forensic scene manager **should** include routes of access and the prevention of contamination.

The forensic archaeologist **should** fully record the identification and investigation of any areas of interest. They **should** assign each distinct archaeological entity (context) a unique identifying number. Items of interest **should** be exhibited under the instructions of the forensic scene manager.

Liaison with the investigative team **should** involve discussion of the potential state of preservation of human remains and associated evidence (taphonomy), including differential decomposition, based on the following factors (if known):

- a) age, size and prior health of the target individual (to assist with anomaly detection)
- b) surface disposal versus buried or submerged remains (including airflow, depth of overburden, soil pH, permeability, ingress/egress of water into the depositional environment, etc)
- c) entomology, microbiology, scavenging and dispersal of human remains (influenced by location/timeframes/season)
- d) barriers (eg, clothing/wrappings/receptacles)
- e) vegetation regrowth and silting
- f) temperature, sunlight and other environmental impacts (eg, effect of weathering on bone, clothing and other associated evidence)
- g) anthropogenic impact (eg, trauma, burning and dismemberment)

6.1.4 Involvement of other specialists

The forensic archaeologist **should** ensure that they have a basic awareness of other specialist techniques and evidence types which may be of importance during the search. They **should** be prepared to contribute to discussions about whether it is appropriate to seek advice or assistance from other specialists and communicate this to the SIO and the forensic scene manager. The forensic archaeologist **should** consider the requirements and methods of other specialists and implications for the order of work when determining an initial strategy and during the search, before any invasive investigation of features of interest. Where other specialists are involved, they are expected to maintain their own documentation.

6.1.5 Importance of notes

The forensic archaeologist **should** record their actions, decisions and observations during the search using comprehensive written notes. Documentation would normally include the production of sketch and measured plans, context sheets and scene notes, as appropriate, supported by photography (see 6.1.6). The forensic archaeologist **should** accurately record the location of all items and features of interest.

6.1.6 Photography

The forensic archaeologist **should** determine the provision of support services, including the requirement for a photographer from the police forensic-scene examination team. The forensic archaeologist **should** advise the police on the importance of adequate photography of anomalies prior to any physical intervention/excavation and during the examination (see 7.1.5). The forensic archaeologist **should** discuss their requirements with the police photographer and **should** request the photographic record for the case file and for the production of the written report/statement. Photographs directed by the forensic archaeologist **should** include an appropriate scale, where relevant, and the orientation of the photographs **should** be recorded. We recommend that the forensic archaeologist maintains a record of photographs relevant to their work, as recorded by the police photographer.

6.1.7 Digital and remote sensing data

Searches **may** include the use or capture of digital remote sensing data – captured by unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), aircraft or satellites – and the subsequent processing, visualisation and analysis of such data using specialist software, such as geographical information systems (GIS) and systems developed for 3D data. The forensic archaeologist **should** retain unmodified copies of all raw data, prior to processing or other processes that could alter the data, along with the associated metadata. Where remote sensing data is captured by the police, provision of copies of the data to the forensic archaeologist **should** be discussed for subsequent analyses or to augment reporting.

6.1.8 Prevention of contamination at scene

The forensic archaeologist **should** wear appropriate personal protective clothing/equipment, as determined by the forensic scene manager, at all times during the search. The forensic archaeologist **should** be aware of the issues of scene contamination, the potential for disturbance of other evidential material during a search, and the importance of adopting a common approach path.

The forensic archaeologist **should** maintain all specialist equipment in line with section 9 of IAF/ILAC (2004) and *Product, Manufacturing and Forensic Kit Assembly Specification – PAS 377* (BSI 2023) for consumables used in the collection, preservation and processing of material for forensic analysis. A risk assessment relating to contamination management **should** be prepared in relation to equipment used for forensic

examinations. The forensic archaeologist **should** prepare a documented cleaning protocol that ensures that equipment which may be used at more than one scene is cleaned using appropriate cleaning agents to prevent cross-contamination. The forensic archaeologist **should** discuss requirements for equipment procurement with the forensic scene manager and wherever possible, disposable equipment should be used. The forensic archaeologist **should** be prepared to exhibit items of equipment used on scene for the elimination of materials from the enquiry (eg, tool marks, brush fibres) if requested by the forensic scene manager or other crime scene specialist. The forensic archaeologist **should** keep a contamination log recording location, date, time and personnel using all equipment, together with a record of any measures taken to avoid contamination, such as the cleaning/sterilisation of equipment between scenes. This **may** be required following a contamination incident. The forensic archaeologist **should** also keep records of their movement and handling of exhibits.

6.1.9 Reporting

The forensic archaeologist **should** retain all notebooks and other records from the site, whether the search is successful in locating features of interest or not. They **should** keep all records in a secure location. All electronic records **should** be maintained in a secure directory (ie, password protected or with limited user permissions) with a regular backup protocol to ensure data is not lost. Retention **should** be carried out in line with the guidance of *The Disclosure Manual* (CPS 2018, Ch 30) and section 23 Code of Practice of the *Criminal Procedures and Investigations Act (1996)*.

Report structure **should** draw on the guidance in section 3.9 of the Universal guidance for archaeological field evaluation to ensure that both the methods and results of the search are fully documented (see <https://www.archaeologists.net/codes/cifa>). The report **should** be clear and the conclusion easily read by a non-specialist to ensure it is suitable for presentation in court if required. Where technical or specialist terminology is used, this **should** be supported by a non-technical explanation.

The report **should** include details of the briefing, search strategy, results and their interpretation and the conclusions drawn.

Each context **should** be referred to by its unique identifying number and all recovered items by the exhibit number assigned during lifting. The forensic archaeologist **should** be able to demonstrate understanding of the chain of custody and the processes for seizing exhibits. Photographs, sketches and measured plans **should** be cross-referenced in the report to enable the full reconstruction of the search and any findings. The minimum requirements for context recording are considered to be comparable with those outlined in section 3.1.1 of the *Museum of London site manual* (MOLAS 1994) and consist of the location, description (written, measured and drawn), interpretation and stratigraphic relationship of each context, together with the date, initials of the recorder and cross-references to photographs, plans and samples as appropriate.

All archaeological interpretations **should** be supported by appropriate evidence. The date and nature of finds or features **should** be established by relative (stratigraphic and

contextual) and/or absolute (scientific techniques) as appropriate. Skeletal remains **should not** be established as non-suspicious by isolated observations of the colour, weight or state of preservation of the bone. This is of particular importance where remains are surface finds or have been deposited in waterways or waterlogged contexts where the state of preservation may vary. If destructive analytical techniques are being considered, bones **should** always be assessed by a forensic anthropologist in line with their current Code of Practice.

The forensic archaeologist **should** complete a final report and/or statement or formal letter communicating the findings of the search as appropriate to the nature of the work. This **should** include dates and times, methods used and conclusions drawn, supported by appropriate archaeological evidence. Conclusions **should** be justified and supported. Alternative explanations **should** be considered and discussed (see section 8.1.6). Where authorisation for a report is not provided, the forensic archaeologist **should** always provide a verbal debrief and email summary as a minimum.

Where a search concludes that no items or features of forensic interest are present, the forensic archaeologist has a professional duty to report items of archaeological interest to the appropriate authorities and advise other parties on the legal requirements relating to the removal of historic human remains (including but not exclusively the following: *Human Tissue Act 2004*; *Human Tissue (Scotland) Act 2006*; *Burial Act 1857*; *Burial and Cremation (Scotland) Act 2016*; *Disused Burial Grounds (Amendment) Act 1981* (c 18), and the *Town and Country Planning (Churches, Places of Religious Worship and Burial Grounds) Regulations 1950*). In such instances, and with approval of the SIO, the reporting process **should** include informing the local authority archaeological advisor and HER officer (see <https://algao.org.uk/algao-uk/orgs>) and relevant national heritage agency archaeological advisors, such as the Historic England archaeological advisor, of the location and nature of any findings.

7 Standard: forensic archaeological scene examination and evidence recovery

The forensic archaeologist must

- a) ensure that features are investigated and excavated using the archaeological technique most appropriate to the specific circumstances of the case
- b) ensure all forensic archaeological examinations
 - i) are undertaken stratigraphically, as applicable
 - ii) maximise the recovery of evidence
 - iii) are recorded in sufficient detail to enable the spatial and stratigraphic character of the scene to be reconstructed. This will include written, photographic and survey records
- c) take appropriate steps to avoid contamination within the police scene management

strategy. This will include using agreed common approach paths and personal protective equipment

- d)** advise on samples that should be taken and bring evidence, including contextual information, to the attention of the investigation team
- e)** be prepared to contribute to discussions regarding the attendance of other specialists (including police personnel) to maximise forensic opportunities without compromising the recovery of other evidence types
- f)** sufficiently document the forensic archaeological examination (written and survey records) to enable a three-dimensional reconstruction of features
- g)** identify and interpret indications of human activity at the scene (where present) and provide a relative chronological framework
- h)** request that adequate photographs are taken to record characteristics relevant to the forensic archaeological examination, and provide guidance as necessary
- i)** ensure that there is a record of all exhibits recovered at the scene under their direction. The forensic archaeologist must follow the force-specific policy for seizing exhibits
- j)** recording, recovery, packaging and storage of evidence, including human remains, must be undertaken in consultation with the forensic scene manager
- k)** be prepared to offer advice on preservation issues that may be associated with particular evidence types, within their area of expertise
- l)** ensure a suitable strategy is employed if spoil is sieved, including using grades of sieve that are appropriate for the size and character of items that may be present, and consider the retention of sieved spoil, as appropriate
- m)** consider the fact that spoil may be contaminated with human tissue. In these instances, the forensic archaeologist should refer to the guidelines set out by the FSR (2021)
- n)** record their actions at the scene and those of others that may have affected their work

7.1 Guidance: forensic archaeological scene examination and evidence recovery

7.1.1 Before attending the scene

Please also see sections 5 and 5.1.

Either before or on arrival at the scene, the forensic archaeologist **should** be briefed by the police investigation team and be prepared to provide advice and recommendations relating to the scene examination. This may include joint examinations with other forensic specialists. The forensic archaeologist **should** request background information

pertinent to the case and crime scene (see section 5). Relevant information may include

- an estimated deposition date for the remains
- the site's use prior to the estimated deposition date
- the use of the site between this date and the present

The forensic archaeologist **should** ensure that relevant parties are made aware of the technical, methodological and logistical requirements of a forensic archaeological examination. An initial examination strategy **should** also be discussed and recorded at this time. In ideal circumstances, the forensic archaeologist **should** have a colleague assisting, but this will be at the discretion of the investigating force. The forensic archaeologist **should** advise the forensic scene manager of any welfare and lighting requirements.

The initial approach to examining the scene, the consideration of contamination issues and all subsequent actions undertaken at the scene by the forensic archaeologist will be carried out in consultation with the SIO, forensic scene manager or their representatives at the scene, and other scene-of-crime experts. The forensic archaeologist **should** advise the forensic scene manager on the need to sieve and/or retain excavated material.

7.1.2 Recovery of surface-level remains

The forensic archaeologist **may** be required to assist with the recovery and preliminary identification of surface remains, some of which may be partially or completely disarticulated and scattered. This work **may** be carried out in association with crime scene examiners and search officers.

In these circumstances the forensic archaeologist **may** need to establish and use strategies for both search and excavation. Any search and/or excavation **must** be carried out in accordance with the Standards outlined in this document (sections 6 and 7).

The forensic archaeologist **should** be prepared to contribute to discussions with the SIO or forensic scene manager, as appropriate, regarding the need for other forensic specialists to attend the scene.

When recovering partially or totally decomposed and dispersed remains, the forensic archaeologist **should** ensure that

- body parts or skeletal elements are adequately photographed and recorded before their removal
- they consider the requirements of all attending specialists
- the search and excavation strategies adopted do not compromise the evidence and enable the sequence of events to be reconstructed

7.1.3 Excavation

Where excavation is undertaken, the forensic archaeologist **should** give consideration to the appropriate excavation strategy. All excavation **should** be undertaken in accordance with ClfA Standards and guidance (see <https://www.archaeologists.net/codes/cifa>) and specifically the ClfA Standard for archaeological excavation and the ClfA Universal guidance for archaeological excavation.

The forensic archaeologist **should** be prepared to adopt a flexible approach to excavation strategy and to change and adapt this as necessary.

7.1.4 Recording

The forensic archaeologist **should** produce both written and illustrative records during the excavation. These records **should** include a note of all observations and actions undertaken by the forensic archaeologist during their attendance at the scene.

The forensic archaeologist **should** also complete pro-forma record sheets at the scene. These **should** include context sheets but **may** also include others, for example level recording sheets, as appropriate (see section 6.1.8). Illustrative records **may** include, as appropriate,

- sketch plans of the scene
- scale plans showing the location of any target features and evidence
- detailed, scaled plans and sections of any excavated features
- digital survey data (see section 7.1.6)

Upon completion of the excavation, the forensic archaeologist **should** have made sufficient records to enable them to produce measurable representations of the feature(s), including critical dimensions, such as width, length, height, and depth.

7.1.4 Photography

The appointed police photographer **should** take all primary record photographs at the scene. The forensic archaeologist **should** give guidance where necessary and ensure that record photographs are taken before excavation begins and at appropriate stages throughout the excavation. Additional, more detailed photographs (eg, macro photographs, oblique lighting to show tool marks, etc) **should** be requested if deemed necessary. The forensic archaeologist **should** discuss requirements with the police photographer and **should** request the photographic record for the case file and for the production of the written report/statement. An appropriate scale bar, such as a ranging rod or footwear scale, **should** be visible in photographs. It is important for the forensic archaeologist to maintain a record of photographs relevant to their work, as recorded by the crime scene photographer.

7.1.6 Digital and remote sensing data

Scene examinations may include the use or capture of digital data, including survey data and remote sensing data. The forensic archaeologist **should** retain unmodified copies of all raw data, prior to processing or other processes that could alter the data, along with the associated metadata. Where remote sensing data is captured by the police, provision of copies of that data to the forensic archaeologist **should** be discussed for subsequent analyses or to augment reporting.

The forensic archaeologist should familiarise themselves with the guidance for the control of digital data provided in Sections 26.1 and 26.2 of the FSR Code of Practice (2025). Although forensic archaeology is not subject to the FSR Code of Practice, this provides valuable insights into national requirements for forensic science activities.

7.1.7 Involvement of other specialists

The forensic archaeologist **should** be aware of the requirements and potential contribution of other specialists present at the scene and be able to work effectively alongside them to ensure that evidence is not compromised. The forensic archaeologist **should** be prepared to seek advice and assistance from other crime scene or forensic specialists if necessary. They **should** need to inform the SIO or forensic scene manager of their concerns and request the attendance of additional specialists. Where other specialists are involved, they are expected to maintain their own documentation.

7.1.8 Recovery of exhibits

The forensic archaeologist **should** be aware of the policy for seizing exhibits before the scene examination begins. They **should** record the exact location of any exhibits identified before their disturbance or removal, where possible. If exhibits have already been disturbed, the forensic archaeologist **should** undertake recording as soon as practicable. Forensic archaeologists **should** only undertake recovery of exhibits in accordance with their training and competence.

The forensic archaeologist should familiarise themselves with the guidance for exhibit handling and chain of custody provided in Section 29 of the FSR Code of Practice (2025). Although forensic archaeology is not subject to the FSR Code of Practice, this provides valuable insights into national requirements for forensic science activities.

7.1.9 Preservation issues

The forensic archaeologist **should** ensure that they have an appropriate knowledge of the methods for safeguarding evidence recovered during excavation, based on

- minimising contamination
- requirements for labelling and packaging of exhibits
- awareness of biohazards

- appropriate measures for processing and storage of evidence (eg, use of drying cabinets, freezing and refrigeration as required)

When fragile, ephemeral or sensitive evidence is encountered, specialist lifting or casting measures may be appropriate in recovery and/or recording. Fragile materials (eg, corroded metals and degraded textiles) **may** require additional support measures and/or considerations for packaging and storage. Standard archaeological conservation procedures (eg, Watkinson and Neal 2001) may not be appropriate as these techniques may conflict with other forensic requirements; consultation with other specialists may be necessary.

7.1.10 Environmental sampling

It **may** be necessary for the forensic archaeologist to take soil, botanical, or entomological samples during the excavation process or for them to make provision for other specialists to collect samples. Forensic archaeologists **should** be aware of the requirements of other specialists, especially if the forensic archaeologist is requested to take samples on their behalf. It is the responsibility of the forensic scene manager to manage the requirements of different specialists, but the forensic archaeologist **should** obtain and consider this information in line with the Standards set out in sections 5 and 7. They **should** also refer to the *Human Tissue Act 2004* or *Human Tissue (Scotland) Act 2006*, as appropriate.

7.1.11 Retaining spoil

The forensic archaeologist **should** discuss the retention and storage of spoil and other recovered material with the forensic scene manager before the excavation begins, in order that provision can be made. Justification for this **should** be considered and explained if necessary. Retained spoil **should** be separated in accordance with any divisions made during the excavation process and appropriately labelled with context and exhibit numbers (see also 7.1.8, 8.1.5 and 8.1.7).

The processing of spoil **may** be undertaken or supervised by the forensic archaeologist during the crime scene investigation or ideally at a subsequent date in a controlled environment. Where such work is under the control of the forensic archaeologist, they **should** ensure that it is undertaken in controlled conditions, with reference to appropriate standards (eg, EA 2008, section 9).

Note: For sections 7.1.8–7.1.11 the forensic archaeologist **should** be prepared to advise on the longevity of packaging materials used for temporary and long-term storage of exhibits, samples and other materials associated with their scene examination, and the potential for contamination/transfer from packaging materials to samples and exhibits. Retaining unused samples of packaging materials for later analysis **may** be considered. The ultimate decision on the treatment of exhibits rests with the police or relevant authority.

7.1.12 Prevention of contamination at scene

Access to the scene is normally restricted to those personnel essential to the scene examination (see EA 2008, section 9.4).

Prevention of contamination can comprise a range of approaches depending upon the specific characteristics of an incident scene. To ensure the most effective measures are utilised, the forensic archaeologist **should**

- a) carry out, and document, a risk assessment of the end-to-end process, identifying the critical points at which there is a contamination risk, such as entering an incident scene or at the point of sampling
- b) identify, and document, appropriate measures to manage the risks of contamination occurring at these points, noting that these measures may not be the same at all critical points or at all incident scenes, and for all types of contamination

In cases that involve multiple scenes, inter-scene attendance is not recommended. However, if necessity dictates, the forensic archaeologist **should** be able to demonstrate that they have taken all practical measures to avoid cross contamination (eg, new PPE, maintenance of cleaning log for non-disposable tools, etc). The forensic archaeologist **should** undertake changes of clothing and footwear, or effective decontamination of footwear, between attendance at different scenes.

7.1.13 Body recovery

The forensic archaeologist **should** be satisfied that all necessary recording and identified evidence recovery has been completed before any attempt is made to remove the body from the grave or scene. The requirements of other specialists **should** be considered.

The responsibility for the recovery of a body lies with the relevant authority² or forensic scene manager. However, the assistance of the forensic archaeologist **may** be required for the physical removal of the body. The forensic archaeologist **should** ensure that sufficient excavation has taken place to enable the effective recovery of the body from a grave. This will ensure that the risk of damage to the remains, stratigraphic horizons, and other evidence types is minimised.

8 Standard: forensic archaeology reporting

The forensic archaeologist must

- a) ensure that any final formal report or statement (in contrast with e.g, initial summary reports/emails) produced includes
 - i) background information provided about the case

² The Coroner in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and the Procurator Fiscal in Scotland

- ii) confirmation that written records justifying actions and decisions taken at the scene have been retained. This includes the excavation strategy, methods used and/or considered, and records of samples taken and exhibits seized by the forensic archaeologist, referring to police exhibit numbers where allocated
 - iii) the results of the examination
 - iv) investigative opinions, interpretations and conclusions with explanation and reference to current and pertinent literature when appropriate
 - v) the justification for preferring one interpretation over others, where findings may lead to more than one interpretation
 - vi) any additional information required, with reference to the Crown Prosecution Service guidance on expert witnesses' obligations on disclosure (CPS 2018, Ch 36)
- b)** ensure that the requirements outlined in the *Criminal Procedure Rules 2020*, Part 19; and the *Criminal Practice Directions*, Chapter 7 (2023) are met
 - c)** have in place a peer review and critical conclusions check. Where peer review has not been undertaken, this must be declared, and a caveat must be included that the results are subject to change following peer review.
 - d)** produce the report as quickly as is practical within the specific circumstances of the case and within an agreed timescale, taking into consideration key dates, such as dates relating to the production of evidence for court
 - e)** be prepared to consider new information and produce supplementary reports as appropriate
 - f)** ensure that the report contains sufficient detail to comply with current and relevant guidance
 - g)** ensure that conclusions and interpretations are supported by sufficient evidence
 - h)** write the report in a clear, fair and unbiased manner, taking into account all relevant issues
 - i)** ensure that a record of all data and findings is surrendered in accordance with the relevant sections of *The Disclosure Manual* (CPS 2022). This includes an index of all unused material
 - j)** A description of work undertaken by other people must be provided where this could have influenced the forensic archaeological results and interpretations. This includes assistance at scene examinations and peer review/critical checks.

The statement or report must be laid out in a logical, clear and easily accessible way and with reference to ClfA Standards and guidance – see <https://www.archaeologists.net/codes/cifa>. The report must be written in such a way that it is easily understood by the layperson, including the use of non-technical explanations for technical terminology. This will help make it suitable for presentation in court. The report must contain sufficient detail and precision for other forensic archaeologists to be able to understand the significance of the results and subsequent interpretations.

The forensic archaeologist must keep records in a secure location. All electronic records must be maintained in a secure directory (ie, password protected or with limited user permissions) with a regular backup protocol to ensure data are not lost.

8.1 Guidance: forensic archaeology reporting

8.1.1 General comments

Written reports may vary in style and format and can include initial summary reports, full statements that are suitable for use in court for criminal cases, and full reports that may be suitable for use in Coroners' courts.

We recommend the following report headings. They can be adapted as appropriate.

- a) Non-technical summary
- b) Introduction
- c) Background
- d) Methods
- e) Results
- f) Supplementary analysis
- g) Discussion and conclusions
- h) Record of samples taken and exhibits seized
- i) Glossary

8.1.2 Non-technical summary

The provision of a non-technical summary **may** aid in the accessibility of the report to those without experience in archaeology; this will make it easier for a jury and the wider court to understand.

8.1.3 Introduction

As appropriate to the format of the report, the report **should** include the name, qualifications, appointment and range of experience of the forensic archaeologist (see CPS 2022, Part 1).

The report **should** also identify any relevant senior police officers, crime scene examiners or other attending forensic specialists in attendance. The forensic archaeologist **should** include a note to detail the date and time of arrival at, and departure from, the scene. A brief description of the scene upon arrival **should** also be included in the report.

8.1.4 Background

This section of the report **should** summarise information given to the forensic archaeologist in relation to the case.

8.1.5 Methods

Depending upon the type of report, the forensic archaeologist **should** detail the methods used and those excluded, justifying the chosen method. Any changes to the proposed methodology as work progresses **should** also be included, and the reasons for these changes explained. The forensic archaeologist **should** be able to identify complex cases that may require additional peer review and have such a procedure in place.

8.1.6 Results

The results section **should** outline the results of the work in an easily understandable manner. Each context **should** be referred to by its unique identifying number, and exhibit numbers included, as necessary. Photographs, sketches and measured plans **should** be cross-referenced throughout the report to enable a full reconstruction of the site. In accordance with Directive 80/181/EEC all measurements **should** be stated in SI units (conversions may be given in brackets).

8.1.7 Supplementary analysis

The forensic archaeologist **may** be able to advise on the use of additional techniques (eg, scientific dating methods, isotopic analysis) which may be useful to the investigation.

8.1.8 Discussion and conclusions

The forensic archaeologist **should** set out conclusions that are clear and understandable. If the forensic archaeologist provides a full report or statement, this section **should** outline the interpretation of all relevant findings, and the facts that lead to those interpretations. For example, the forensic archaeologist may be able to provide a reconstruction of the sequence of events relating to a feature and to consider the type

of activity responsible for each constituent part (e.g, associated deposits and cuts). All archaeological interpretations **should** be supported by appropriate evidence. The forensic archaeologist **should** consider the degree of reliability of the conclusions, with alternative interpretations acknowledged, discussed, and only discounted with reasoning. If findings are made that are determined to be irrelevant, the forensic archaeologist **should** explain why.

The forensic archaeologist **should** comply with the requirements of *Criminal Procedure Rules 2020*, Part 19 and the *Criminal Practice Directions*, Chapter 7 (2023). They **should**

- a) summarise any range of opinions that exists about the data contained within the report and provide reasons for their own opinion
- b) provide a summary of conclusions reached
- c) state that they understand their duty to the court and that they have complied, and will comply, with this duty
- d) make it clear that they may change their opinion and that this will be communicated to relevant parties and the court, should it occur

8.1.9 Retaining samples

The report **should** clearly indicate any material that has been submitted to, or sent by, the forensic archaeologist for further analysis. The relevant context and exhibit numbers **should** be stated, as appropriate. Where samples of human tissue, or samples possibly containing human tissue, are to be retained, the forensic archaeologist **should** refer to Home Office guidance (2020) relating to the implementation of the Human Tissue Act.

8.1.10 Final check

It is the responsibility of the forensic archaeologist to check their work for typographical and grammatical errors before signing and submitting the report. Misinterpretation of the findings can easily result from a simple typographical error. Such mistakes can also give the impression of a lack of care or interest in the work or report.

The peer review and critical conclusions check, undertaken by another forensic archaeologist, **should** ensure that

- a) there is consistency within the report
- b) any conclusions drawn are justifiable considering the data contained within it
- c) the report is a complete and stand-alone document

The forensic archaeologist **should** be able to identify complex cases that may require additional peer review and have such a procedure in place.

8.1.11 Submission of the report

Following the completion of work at the scene, the forensic archaeologist **should** give an estimated delivery date for the report to the investigative team. The time needed to complete the report **should** be based on the complexities of the case and nature of the report required. It is good practice to submit the report at the earliest possible opportunity.

The forensic archaeologist **should** be prepared to submit an interim report if the investigative team require it. If there is a delay in the report production, the forensic archaeologist **should** inform the investigative team and give the reasons for the delay.

8.1.12 Archive storage and quantification

The casefile and/or digital casefile **should** contain all unused material, for example written notes, record forms, illustrative material and digital data, as well as any retained samples.

8.1.13 Keeping up to date

Forensic archaeologists **should** ensure that they have access to a library of relevant journals and reference materials, including historic mapping. They **should** demonstrate awareness of the need for security of information and confidentiality issues.

9 Standard: case conferences and other subsequent action

The forensic archaeologist must be prepared to attend any case conference or meeting called by the police or CPS, as requested, to discuss their findings, interpretations, report or any other issues relevant to the case. The forensic archaeologist must record all relevant information and discussions accurately and comprehensibly.

The forensic archaeologist must consider alternative explanations of results presented to them and give advice based on the facts of the case and established practices.

9.1 Guidance: case conferences and other subsequent action

The forensic archaeologist **should** be prepared to identify, clarify and summarise any areas of agreement and disagreement between their interpretations and alternative explanations presented to them.

10 Standard: attendance at court

The forensic archaeologist must

- a) ensure that they are well prepared in advance of their appearance in court to give evidence

- b) ensure that their appearance and behaviour is in accordance with standards expected by the courts
- c) deliver all evidence in a clear, audible, and comprehensible manner
- d) ensure that testimony they give is in accordance with the contents of their written report
- e) answer questions truthfully and impartially
- f) ensure that evidence and opinions they provide are unbiased and objectively presented
- g) consider any alternative hypotheses that are presented to them
- h) ensure that any results, interpretations and conclusions they give are within their field of expertise
- i) attempt to bring to the attention of the court any evidence which appears to have been misunderstood or misstated by a lawyer
- j) be prepared to discuss any differences in opinion with other specialists relating to findings and conclusions, and be prepared to write a joint report with them

The forensic archaeologist must give proper consideration to alternative interpretations or conclusions presented to them in court. If facts emerge during a court case that make the forensic archaeologist reconsider a previously held opinion, they have a duty to consider them. They must be prepared to change their opinion, as the facts dictate, and to state this change clearly to the court.

10.1 Guidance: attendance at court

The forensic archaeologist **should** ensure that all relevant documentation, such as a copy of their report and contemporaneous notes, are taken to the court, unless alternative arrangements have been agreed.

The forensic archaeologist **should** conduct themselves in a manner compatible with Principle 1 of the ClfA Code of conduct at all times (see <https://www.archaeologists.net/codes/cifa>).

Where appropriate, the forensic archaeologist **should** make clear which parts of the evidence are fact and which are opinion, making available the evidence upon which those opinions are based. If questions are unclear, the forensic archaeologist **should** seek clarification before offering a response. They **should** also avoid the use of technical language when answering questions and offer explanations of the meaning of such language if it is needed.

11 References and resources

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CifA Code, regulations and Standards and guidance – see <https://www.archaeologists.net/codes/cifa>

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Home Office, 2020 *Human Tissue (Seizure and Disposal) Policy (for Police Forces in England and Wales)* – see https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fassets.publishing.service.gov.uk%2Fmedia%2F5f72fcb1d3bf7f479f938c88%2FHuman_Tissue_Policy_for_England_and_Wales.odt&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK

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12 Author groups and acknowledgements

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The authors of this document are grateful to members of the FAEP for their input and feedback. This is the second revision of the 2014 *Standard and Guidance for Forensic Archaeologists* drafted by Natasha Powers and Lucy Sibun, which was authored in collaboration with members of the Advisory group for Forensic Archaeology (subsequently renamed FAEP).