"Is it safe?" Adventures in retrospective rationalisation
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This paper concerns two projects Mark has been involved with in Scotland, one based in Perth Museum & Art Gallery and the other with the archaeology and heritage service of the Western Isles. Both deal with retrospective selection or rationalisation of archaeological material excavated (in the main) decades ago.

The first project (grant aided by Historic Scotland and the Hunter Trust) reviewed the bulk medieval-Perth collections of Perth Museum. The medieval archaeology collections are pivotal to the Museum's Recognition status with respect to its archaeology collections. Although the project remains unfinished, pending further resource allocation, it did successfully map a way forward in dealing with large bulk assemblages and successfully rationalised a large group of medieval building stones. In my capacity as curator of the archaeological collections I worked with a team of finds specialists who reviewed the collections of ceramics, animal bones, building stone and iron nails, principally in line with the Society for Museum Archaeologists Guidelines on *Selection, Retention and Dispersal of Archaeological Collections.* Assessing the building stone relied on medieval stone specialist Mary Markus. Out of a total of 140 stones reviewed, 90% were deemed disposable: much of it classified as walling block or function unknown – these are often stones with no worked surfaces, i.e. boulders, rubble, or stones so badly damaged as to have no features remaining. Catalogue records were made of all the de-selected stones and these were deposited with the Museum and with the National Monuments Record. The retained stones are now stored in a re-organised heavy stone store (made possible by grant-aid from the Museum Recognition fund); some of those which were not kept have been adopted by the architectural services and community arts departments within the council for reuse within regeneration projects.

By contrast the second project is on-going within the context of museums that collect archaeology but do not employ a professional museum archaeologist and where the further arrival of large archaeological finds assemblages can create a dark foreboding mood. Mark is looking at this aspect as part of his secondment to the Western Isles to work on the Udal Project (https://www.facebook.com/Udal-Archaeology-Project-432096106878685/): an unpublished 30-year excavation for which a post-excavation and publication programme has commenced, along with tackling the need to make the finds accessible in the Uists. The Project has exposed an underlying problem of storage and expertise and it has now been recognised that this needs to be solved. Rationalisation is being built into the post-ex of the Udal assemblage and will need to be applied to several other assemblages which are within the Museum nan Eilean's collecting purview, and may possibly be allocated there by the Scottish Archaeological Finds Allocation Panel. The accessibility of archaeological collections is seen as pivotal to developing an archaeological strategy for the Western Isles, helping to release its tourism and educational potential.

In terms of the way forward around selection and rationalisation my conclusions are:

- The problem is created by the whole archaeological process and so the whole of archaeology needs to own that problem and help find the solutions
- The desirability of a CIfA-SMA joint working group to issue new guidelines and toolkit
- Such guidelines need to be useable by museums without archaeologists on their staff
- Embed rationalisation strategies within research agendas and wider frameworks
- The need for a UK-wide professional audit of the problem
- A minimum three year project in which a peripatetic team of curators help to get archaeological collections back on track
- Increased Parliamentary lobbying on the fundamental need to value and store archaeological archives
- Partnerships to create regional stores and which include the leading research drivers within universities