



BRIGHTON 2018

WEDNESDAY 25 APRIL

SESSION AND PAPER ABSTRACTS

14.00 – 17.30 MAKING THE MOST OF THE ASSESSMENT STAGE

Organisers: Phil Mills, Freelance/University of Leicester
Mags Felter, York Archaeological Trust and ClfA Finds Special Interest Group

This workshop will critically examine the post excavation assessment, how it has developed, how it is used in current commercial practice and what role, if any, the PXA has in the on-going development of commercial practice.

The workshop will begin with a few brief papers situating current practice and its development and then participants will be asked to critically evaluate existing PXAs in small groups with reference to how much information can be presented in them and how they can be used to inform project design as well as making recommendations for what should form an ideal assessment.

PAPER ABSTRACTS

A MAP2 thing

Duncan Brown, Historic England

It is a truth universally acknowledged that assessments are a MAP2 thing. This paper will examine that in further detail, looking at times both pre- and post- MAP and tracing the development of something that is a persistent presence in project programming. The rest of the session will consider the merits of this approach, so this is something of a context-setting exercise. In addition, however, the value of assessment in archive creation will also be considered. An archaeological archive is, of course, one of the ultimate aims of any archaeological project, so it may be timely to re-visit where in a project timetable archiving tasks fit, especially with reference to the assessment stage.

Spare us the detail

Kasia Gdaniec, ALGAO

As planning-led commercial archaeological projects increase in scale and command ever higher costs, there is a growing need for better, quicker and smarter decisions and sharper business insights in the post-excavation process. There are four main things to consider if the post-excavation assessment is to be an effective project management stage

1. the critical review or audit of newly amassed evidence is vital in determining what further analytical work is required for its interpretation and transmutation into hard or digital books of results and websites, and for retention for the permanent archive its conservation and display

2. the PXA & UPD stage should define a break-point in the budget leading to a refinement and negotiation of costs needed to complete the archaeological programme –excavation contracts should only be signed on this basis
3. the PXA is not the final archive report. Keep its narrative lean and embrace digital technology to support the text with tabulated information and high-quality photos. This will help curators to understand the rationale given in the UPD
4. specialist advice should be properly commissioned and followed. Get it early!

Post-excavation from a consultant's perspective

Simon Mortimer, CgMs

The Byzantine and arcane nature of post-excavation carried out by remote specialists to glacial timescales means that very few developers have any understanding of the process. Further, having completed their sites, they are bemused to be still waiting for archaeological conditions to be discharged. The focus of this paper will be to reflect on whether it is fair to link occupancy of dwellings to archaeological post-excavation works. Can we speed up the assessment process by adopting a Framework (T5) type approach to processing finds and samples during the fieldwork stage and framing questions on site? Can we find a model to avoid some of the issues raised in the last recession – where many developers put post-ex on major projects on hold? In a downturn post-ex could enable more units to retain more staff and to erode their post-ex backlogs – but unfortunately that has not always been possible in the past. Finally – how is it possible to span the divide between QS and client requirements for fixed price budgets and the flexibility anticipated within the profession for post-excavation and publication costs to evolve during projects

Modelling landscapes: assessing risk and opportunities at Skeffling

Ian Milstead, York Archaeological Trust

York Archaeological Trust (YAT) recently completed the evaluation of a 430-hectare area of the North Humber shoreline near Spurn Point, East Yorkshire on behalf of the Environment Agency (EA) and Associated British Ports (ABP). The EA and ABP are preparing to deliver a major coastline realignment scheme to provide compensatory wildlife habitat and more resilient flood defences in this part of the East Riding. YAT undertook a programme of archaeological geophysical survey and trial-trenching along with extensive borehole sampling and geo-archaeological deposit modelling during a tightly time-tabled 6-week site programme, bringing together a variety of different disciplines during the assessment phase and producing both a 'standard' assessment report and a separate risk map for our client. This approach has produced a model of 12,000 years of change at a landscape scale at an early stage of the scheme design phase, providing critical information for both design and planning.

Post-ex specialist assessments: the good, the bad and the ugly

Ruth Pelling, Historic England and Kayt Hawkins, Surrey County Archaeology Unit

This paper begins by asking what the purpose of a specialist assessment is: a sales pitch, a catalogue, the establishment of a research agenda or all three? Perhaps more importantly, who is the assessment report for? It will then go on to present some examples from our own work (mistakes, successes and the downright dull) and those we've encountered through our professional lives, comparing the approaches of environmental and artefact specialists. We will propose that while a degree of standardisation and methodology is desirable, assessments must be led by the needs of the specific project and funding organisation.