

IfA Archive Special Interest Group

Minutes of inaugural AGM: Wednesday 30 March 2011

LAARC, Mortimer Wheeler House, London

The inaugural AGM of the IfA Archives Special Interest Group was held at 2pm on the 30th March at the London Archaeological Archive and Research Centre

In attendance:

Karen Averby, Archangel Heritage (KA)	Duncan H Brown, EH (DHB)
Amanda Forster, University of Birmingham (AF)	Francis Grew, LAARC (FG)
Cath Maloney, LAARC (CM)	Lorraine Mepham, Wessex Archaeology (LM)
Daniel Nesbitt, LAARC (DN)	Helen Parslow, Albion Archaeology (HP)
John Shepherd, LAARC (RS)	Roy Stephenson, LAARC (RS)
Steve Tucker, LAARC (ST)	Juanna Wylie, LAARC (JW)

Apologies received from:

Kenneth Aitchison, Landward Research Ltd; Duncan L Brown, EH; Holly Duncan, Albion Archaeology; Rachel Edwards; Julie Franklin, Headland Archaeology; Mark Hall, PMAG; James Newbolt, Albion, Archaeology; Patrick Ottoway; Richard Pollard, Leicestershire County Council; Julie Satchell, Hampshire & Wight Trust for Maritime Archaeology; Anna Slowikowski, Albion Archaeology; Roland Smith, Wessex Archaeology; Timothy Vickers, Luton Culture; Don Wilson, Headland Archaeology

- 1 Introduction
DB stated the immediate objectives of the group were the adoption of the IfA constitution, the election of the group's committee and discussion of the ensuing agenda items. The IfA would then require notification (post-AGM) that that the group is formally constituted. KA to action.

Each Group member present then introduced themselves.
- 2 Adoption of the Constitution
DHB stated that the Acting Committee had viewed the model constitution on the IfA website and had no objection to its adoption. JS proposed its adoption, seconded by RS. The group then voted unanimously for its adoption by a show of hands, with the exception of FG (awaiting membership validation).
- 3 Election of the Committee
KA confirmed that no nominations had been received for Committee posts in addition to the Acting Committee; it had already been confirmed that the Acting Committee were willing to

stand as actual Committee members, as detailed in the notice advertising the AGM on the group's webpage on the IfA website.

DHB added that there was also capacity for another two Ordinary Committee members. No one present volunteered for this, but anyone interested should contact KA. CM asked how often the Committee would meet, and DB responded that the next meeting would be as soon as possible after the AGM.

In the absence of other nominations, it was agreed to vote en block for the Acting Committee to stand as the actual Committee, a move proposed by ST and seconded by JS. The group voted unanimously to elect the Acting Committee by a show of hands.

4 Aims of the group

DHB gave some context for the formation of the Archives Special Interest Group: The publication of *Standards and Guidance in Archaeological Archiving: The Work of the Archaeological Archives Forum and the Institute For Archaeologists* [in 2009?] created possibilities for its promotion, and the Group would be very well placed to undertake this, in tandem with the work that the Archaeological Archives Forum (AAF) and Registered Archaeological Organisations (RAOs) group carry out.

DHB pointed out that whereas the AAF was represented by a conglomeration of bodies (EH, etc), the Archives Group was for individuals with an interest in archaeological archives.

JS asked DHB when the AAF last met [DHB is an AAF Committee member], in light of the current situation re: cuts in the sector. DHB confirmed that this was in October 2010, before the effect of budget cuts and CSR, etc would have been felt, and again in January 2011. The AAF is restricted by monetary considerations, but realise the need for more information to feed into discussions on archives. The Forum has written to the Minister for the DCMS regarding concerns, but have received only a formulaic response. They may also be contacting the Arts Council in the near future.

There was a general consensus that the relationship between the Archive Group and other groups concerned with archaeological archives should be discussed: the IfA Finds Special Interest Group, the Southport Group and also the Society of Museum Archaeologists (SMA). Group membership from individuals from the SMA in particular should be sought.

DHB suggested that if the AAF and Southport Group broadened their remit to other heritage activities, this would leave the Archives Group to focus upon archaeology and archives. JS then raised the issue of maritime archives; DHB hoped that maritime archive issues could complement broader archaeological archive issues dealt with by the Archive Group.

Further discussion suggested that working with the SMA could, for example, lead to the updating of established museum collecting areas, the location of persons with curatorial experience, and the identification of possible locations for regional resource centres. Such information would need constant updating.

DHB returned the discussion focus to the group's specific aims, and it was agreed that although the Archive Group should not encroach on or duplicate the work of the

aforementioned groups, the Group needs to work with and establish a good relationship with them.

The following issues were proposed for consideration by the group, some with ensuing discussion:

- increasing number of instances of museums having to return new accessions to depositors
- the growing number of contractors with backlog archives. Such issues also have to be looked at in the light of anticipated cuts to budgets.
- PPS 5 requires the deposition of archives, (with input from the local planning authority) and are important in 'assessing significance' within the context of PPS 5
- the professional appreciation of archaeological archives by RAOs is not consistent, a point confirmed by AF from her experience of sitting on the RAO Committee. The RAO committee endeavours not to be prescriptive in maintaining standards, but there are clearly issues relating to archaeological archives.
- monitoring of archives: planning officers do not understand procedures relating to archaeological archives and do not monitor them; contracting organisations do not always follow a set of standards and if they are not specifically requested to do so in a project brief, may not feel obliged to do so. Museum professionals cannot always monitor archives and cannot establish whether projects have been successfully completed in terms of correct archive procedures being undertaken. JW stated that it is difficult to get feedback from museum professionals,

DHB suggested that ideally a scientific advisory network could exist alongside archive network officers, presumably to foster better communication and dissemination. This led to discussion of how the Group could look at how an archaeological archive network could address archival issues and problems; interaction between other archives could only be useful. CM suggested that this would essentially be an update of Hedley Swain's review of archaeological archives.

The discussion then moved to the problems with identifying 'significant' archives, and problems surrounding publication. ST pointed out that some bodies would potentially wish to access archaeological archive material e.g. universities, which DHB stated leads to issues of access. HP suggested that if an archive is perceived as important by the creator, they should flag it as being so. JS mentioned a former project he had worked on which looked into university use of archaeological archives, who were a potentially important user group.

Further discussion highlighted certain problems: individual tutors/ academics may lack knowledge of and access to collections; collections may be managed by social history curators, and therefore there would potentially be no cross-promotion between disciplines. A network of regional facilitators would therefore be needed to bring together information. It was suggested that the Group could assist with the promotion of archives at various national regional/ local levels, for study purposes.

DB pointed out this aim overlaps with the SMA, whose aim is to promote archives in this way/ similar way.

RS again highlighted the fact that there are different attitudes towards collections within museums- there are 'core' collections and 'other' collections...and there are also digital records and their issues.

JW suggested that students were another source to tap into- student users of LAARC often write a review for inclusion on the LAARC website describing their use of the archives.

RS stated that record keeping at LAARC was better than at MOLAS, and therefore LAARC had a better idea of the archives available within their collections. This leads onto issues of Best Practice.

HP stressed the importance of promoting the value of archives and the archive process within units/ organisations themselves, a point reiterated by AF, CM, LM and KA. RS added that there is often no money allocated for archiving, and there must be a way to change the way of processing/ considering archives. DHB stated that the project brief should emphasise this; both he and HP noted that ALGAO should be made aware of this, emphasising how long the archiving process actually takes, rather than the project brief just assigning a token amount of time without proper consideration. LM agreed that this should be monitored.

DHB stated that one of the group's main aims should therefore be to raise awareness realistically. This is apparently already happening in the AAF and SMA camps.

ST commented that project publications often mention an archive, which in theory people may wish to see. But in reality there is sometimes no concordance with where the archive is located. DB added that this leads to the issue of grey literature. JS pointed out that London publications state that the archive is deposited with LAARC, while on a related point, ST noted visits to LAARC raise its profile.

A series of related points were then raised: RS suggested that there were opportunities for novel uses for archives e.g. art, creative writing, to provide inspirational material. ST and DB both mentioned local and regional working, with ST adding that contractors should be made accountable for deposition as material would be shown to local people.

FG suggested that a real challenge is how to communicate the necessity of fieldwork to create material for archives, and the justification of the fieldwork costs vs. the number of people who access and consult an archive. DHB stated that the timescale involved would justify this i.e. the number of people accessing an archive would grow over time: archives in perpetuity, therefore, their value increases.

Discussing the issue of collection policies, CM suggested that the Group could give input as to what should be collected. DHB and HP emphasised that the archive does not just consist of finds and digital elements, and it was agreed that clearer definition is needed. However, it would be impossible to convince everyone to keep everything suggested. Although a strategy on collecting policies is therefore needed, it has to be a project by project strategy. There was a general consensus that there is an ongoing debate re: retention v deposition.

JS stated that finds specialists need an input. However, as DHB pointed out there is a danger that material will be discarded if there are guidelines for discarding, without the input of a specialist. The Group could enter this debate – decisions cannot be made at a

national level, and so regional level specialists are needed. FG suggested that academics could underpin this- universities with theoretical interests e.g. animal bone specialists

AF then reclarified the aims of the Group, with a focus upon the following areas:

- awareness
- promotion and professional practice
- advocacy
- best practice

LAARC's similar aims were then stated: curation, leadership/ advocacy, research and promotion, communication, and it was recognised that these are all interlinked.

JS added that the Group should also provide professional support to archive officers within units, although as JW pointed out, few appear to be IfA members.

5. Strategic plan

JS proposed that regional workshops should be key, and the Group discussed who should attend the workshops. It was agreed that anyone involved in the archive creation process should be the key focus: planning officers, museum professionals/ curators, scientific advisors, representatives from the HE sector, archaeologists/ contractors. The purpose/ content of the workshops should foster professional networking and raise awareness, promote current guidance, with the relevant elements of PPS 5 forming the basis. AF asked whether such workshops could coincide some way with the AAF's collections mapping project, but this is perhaps not currently workable.

JS suggested that researchers could monitor/ analyse the contents of the workshops

DHB suggested a session could be held at the IfA Conference 2012

A different strategic aim to the workshops/ Conference came from FG's repeated suggestion that the theoretical and academic element could underpin archive projects e.g. data processing projects. AF also suggested that funding from other sources could also be sought e.g. from Marie Curie.

Another strategic move would be to feed into other interest groups. DHB is on the AAF Committee, for example. RS asked if there was a possibility of having an individual elected to the IfA Council, but as this was probably not practicable/ possible, the Group could instead ask for issues to be brought to Council discussions. AF stated that something formal was needed to feed into to the processes of the RAO committee.

DHB suggested that a way to support archaeologists in archive work (advocacy and support) should be established e.g. emphasising the need for expertise and to address ways of providing expertise. CM emphasised the lack of expertise on the digital side. LM reiterated that there was no understanding by senior staff of the problems involved, and HP also pointed out that digital archive requirements were often too technical.

JW suggested that the Group could give advice and suggested an emailing list through which individuals could email questions issues problems- the Finds Group has an email address, for example. KA to action

HP mentioned OASIS- there are inconsistencies with the current verification process. CM suggested that this could be part of issues discussed at the regional workshops.

6. Publicising the group

It was suggested that the IfA Conference was a good place to attract new members, and DHB suggested asking IfA if a Group Leaflet could be included in the Conference bags for the forthcoming Conference (13-15 April 2011). KA to action.

Other suggestions included Britarch, contractors in London and The Archaeologist- the latter have already been in touch with KA re: composing a paragraph on the AGM for the next issue.

KA stated that the Group has a page on the IfA website, in the Special Interest Groups section, which could provide the Group's aims objectives and also include contact information, etc. DB suggested contacting the Secretaries of the other IfA SIGs with a link to the website. KA to action.

DHB and JS suggested joint workshops seminars with the SMA/ other groups.

7. Future meetings

It was suggested that the next AGM be held at the IfA Conference 2012, but KA pointed out that this may potentially deter non-IfA members from attending the AGM. It was agreed that perhaps an AGM with a seminar attached would be of most use.

A joint event with the Finds Group and or London Group was also a possibility to consider.

DB Stated that any business of the Group would be handled by the Committee.

8. AOB

KA asked everyone to ensure that any new members contact her, so they can be added to the emailing list.