

Archaeological Archives Forum

Minutes of Meeting 25th September 2007

The 11th meeting of the Archaeological Archives Forum was held at 1.30pm on 27th September at the Society of Antiquaries of London.

In attendance: Philip Wise – SMA (PW), Gavin Evans – Welsh Museums (GE), James Dinn - ALGAO (JD), Mike Heyworth - CBA (MH), Julie Satchell – HWTMA/ IFA Maritime Affairs Group (JS), Stuart Jeffery – ADS (SJ), Liz Barham – ICON-AG (LB).

1. Apologies

Kenneth Aitchison – IFA, Noel Fojut – HS, Vince Devine - CADW, Lesley Ferguson – RCHMS, Duncan Brown – IFA Finds Group, Kathy Perrin – EH, Headley Swain – MLA.

2. Minutes of last meeting

The training subgroup discussed at the February meeting is still to be set up.

Action: PW to contact suggested members and take forward

John Sheppard was suggested as a representative for Higher Education.

Action: PW to write to John Sheppard to formally invite him onto the AAF

3. ICON – Archaeology Group Representation on the AAF

The inclusion of ICON on the AAF would be a positive step to increase sectoral involvement. Liz Barham from the ICON Archaeology Group attended the meeting as an observer. PW proposed that ICON be formally invited to become a member of the AAF. This was unanimously agreed.

Action: PW to write to ICON to formally invite them onto the group.

4. Archives Guide to Best Practice - Update

The Archives Best Practice Guide had a successful launch at the AAF seminar which had 78 attendees. This document has helped raise the profile of archaeological archives. The discussion and points arising from the afternoon break-out sessions require formulating into a document (also see 5b).

It was noted that there is a lot of interest in archive issues at the moment and it would be useful to have an AAF strategy for improving articulation of the work of the AAF to a wider audience. It was suggested that writing short articles for a range of publications would be useful.

Actions: PW to liaise with KP and write short articles for newsletters and periodicals.

SJ to add short piece into ADS newsletter.

JD to ask ALGAO members if they are using the new archives guidance document.

LB to advertise archives guidance on ICON archaeology group website

There are still a quite a number of copies of the archives guidance document at the IFA office. AAF members requiring more copies should get in contact with Kenny Aitchison. It was asked whether copies had been sent to DCMS and key organisations for awareness raising. It was requested that a list of all receiving organisations be circulated to the AAF.

Action: JS to contact KA for list and circulate to AAF.

PW asked whether the new AAF archives guidance replaced the 1992 MGC document. The SMA had hoped to update the MGC document, but this initiative hasn't moved forward.

Actions: PW to find out if MGC documents are all being reviewed. HS may know about this if the MLA is seen as inheriting the MGC documents. If there are no plans for review then the AAF should suggest the MLA consider updating them.

MH suggested that a forward agenda for the next 5 to 10 years would be useful to develop and would pull all the work of the AAF into a holistic agenda for the future.

Action: PW to meet with KP to discuss taking this forward and producing a draft prior to the next AAF meeting.

5. AAF Forward Agenda

5a. Archaeological Archive Resource Centres Guidance

Those involved in taking this project forward were unable to attend the meeting. A project proposal for the production of guidelines for developing archaeological archive resource centres is being drafted for submission to EH.

5b. Guidance on selection and retention

The AAF has committed to tackling this area as part of its forward plan. It was suggested that a short document be produced outlining current thinking to help future work. It was highlighted that representation at the recent AAF seminar was good and that comments from the break out session in this area would be useful.

Action: PW to meet KP to take this forward by producing a draft document for consideration at next AAF meeting.

5c. Maritime Archives

A project design to produce baseline information on the situation regarding maritime archives which includes mapping marine collection areas, examining maritime archaeological archives and public access to them, and assess present and future archive demand, has been produced. Support has been indicated from English Heritage, Historic Scotland, RCHMS and SMA. At present the project will include detailed assessment of the situation in England and Scotland and assessment of how this relates to initiatives in Wales and Northern Ireland.

Actions: GE to chase up situation in Wales and provide JS with information.

Two maritime conferences were discussed. A joint conference between ICON archaeology group and the IFA MAG is being planned to focus on marine conservation and will include archive issues. This will now be timetabled after the IKUWA3 conference (www.ikuwa3.com) which is taking place in July 08.

5d. Production of policy recommendations from previous completed projects

Item carried over to next meeting.

5e. Ministerial meeting

After Robert Key MP raised awareness of archaeological archives and storage in the Commons the Secretary of State James Purnell requested a meeting with Philip Wise. This was due to take place in September but will now be rescheduled. Discussion of what should be brought to the ministers' attention included:

- Query whether PPG16 will be replaced
- Push for clear inclusion of archives in any PPG revisions
- Highlight the large amount of money put into archaeology by developers and the need to secure the public benefit of this
- Urgent need to ensure maritime archives receive parity of treatment with terrestrial archives

(PMN: Meeting with James Purnell held on Monday 8 October. Attended by Robert Key, Jude Plouviez (Rescue) and Sue Davies (Wessex Archaeology). Written response from James Purnell accompanies these minutes.)

6. National Reports

6a. Scotland – LF

The follow update was kindly supplied by LF for inclusion with the minutes:

SWISH - RCAHMS continues to work in partnership with RCAHMW to develop a joint public access database. SWISH initiatives currently underway or just completed include developing thesauri covering Monuments, Objects and Maritime which have now been implemented in the Canmore database; upgrading catalogue information to ensure compliance with ISAD (G); working towards the development as a Trusted Digital Repository; and working with the National Museums of Scotland to explore joining details of their finds with RCAHMS information on archaeological sites.

OASIS - Following a period of development by ADS, OASIS went live in Scotland in April 2007 and has been adopted by the Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers (ALGAO Scotland), Historic Scotland and the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland as the mechanism for reporting fieldwork. Grey literature reports submitted via the form are currently available online via the ADS ArchSearch site and will be available via Canmore when it is re-launched in 2008. Geophysical survey data is also being dealt with via OASIS.

Agreement has been reached between the CSA, ADS, Historic Scotland and RCAHMS to adapt the OASIS form to enable users to complete their Discovery and Excavation in Scotland (DES) submissions on-line, which will encourage the wider uptake and use of the application across both the professional and voluntary sectors. Discussions are currently underway to develop a similar and related application to ease the information flow for radiocarbon dates.

Scotland's Rural Past Project - This project is working with local communities to research, record and interpret historic rural settlements in Scotland. Various professional training sessions have been held covering subjects such as recording techniques, photography and documentary research and developments are being made which will enable the communities to share the results of their research and survey by uploading their archives directly into the national database in RCAHMS.

6b. Wales – GE

There is a new minister for culture and heritage in Wales who has an interest in heritage – Rhodri Glyn Thomas.

A 'What's in Store' training day has been held which presented the results of the assessment of the feasibility of a national database for museum collections.

6c. Northern Ireland

MH reported – A Northern Ireland Archaeology Forum is being developed to raise the profile of archaeology and heritage. Chaired by Nicky Whitehouse it will be launched on the 18th October. A HLF bid has been submitted to support a post to develop the forum.

A new licensing regulation has been put in place to promote publication and archiving.

A review of public administration is currently on-going; it is unknown how this will affect heritage.

7. European work on archaeological archives, update – KP

The first meeting of the European Archaeological Archives Working Party will take place in Switzerland on October 11th. The working party consists of 10 member countries from across both western and eastern Europe. One of the first tasks on the agenda will be to devise common European standards. KP will be pushing for these to be based on the AAF standards.

Action: PW requested the contact details for the European Archives Working Party – KP to supply.

8. AOB

American Society of Archaeologists – KP is chair and co-organiser of a session on 'International curation standards, what's working, what's not?'. KP will be in direct discussion with the ASA curation committee during the conference about forging links and co-working with the European Working Party (see 7).

Action: PW requested the contact details for the American Society of Archaeologists – KP to supply.

MH highlighted the need to reach out to the voluntary sector, especially to promote the Archives Guidance Document.

Action: This is to be added as an agenda item for the next AAF meeting.

JD highlighted a one day meeting on Grey Literature to be held at Docklands on October 17th.

LB reported that ICON is reviewing First Aid for Finds document. JS asked how this relates to First Aid for Underwater Finds and wondered if they could be considered together.

Action: JS to liaise with LB

SJ reported that Big Data Project Report is now with EH. ADS are also involved in the VENUS project for visualisation of underwater wrecks which is a European project lead by CNRS in France.

JS reported that Slipping through the Net: Maritime Archaeological Archives in Policy and Practice has been revised following consultation and is available from:

(<http://www.archaeologists.net/modules/icontent/inPages/docs/groups/IFAMAGSlippingThroughNetFINALAug07.pdf>)

A strategy document summarising key issues and required actions is currently being finalised and will be released soon, provisional title 'Tightening the Net'.

PW highlighted the SMA conference in Glasgow taking place between 8th – 10th November. www.socmusarch.org.uk for further details.

Date of next meetings:

5 February 2008 – British Academy, Carlton House Terrace, London

9th September 2008