

HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT INFORMATION RESOURCES NETWORK (HEIRNET)

Minutes of an HEIRNET meeting, held on Thursday 29 November 2007 at the Council for British Archaeology, St Mary's House, 66 Bootham, York, starting at 1pm.

Those present: David Baker OBE (CBA) (Chair), Nigel Clubb (EH NMR), Vikki Fenner (EH NMR), David Thomas (RCAHMW), Rebecca Jones (RCAHMS), Dan Pett (PAS), Prof Julian Richards (ADS), Dr Stuart Jeffrey (ADS), Dr Mike Heyworth (CBA), Dr Dan Hull (CBA), Ian Shepherd (ALGAO Scotland), Dave Barrett (ALGAO England).

1 Welcome and introductions

David Baker welcomed everyone to the meeting on behalf of the CBA who hosted the meeting.

2 Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Gill Chitty (CBA), Christine Longworth (SMA), David Dawson (MLA).

3 Minutes of the last HEIRNET meeting

The minutes of the last meeting were AGREED.

4 Report on current HEIRNET services:

i. web site & email list (<http://www.britarch.ac.uk/heirnet>)

Dan Hull reported web statistics for the HEIRNET site. Although the site has had very little added since the last meeting, stats continue to show reasonably strong usage. Figures for 28.11.06 to 27.11.07 show a total of 69,006 page requests. Some of this continuation of interest is due to conference information for the Data sans Frontières conference – unsurprisingly, May 2007 was the busiest month for page requests.

ii. HEIRNET Register (<http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/heirnet/index.cfm>)

Stuart Jeffrey reported on use of the HEIRNET register. There have been 9 updates (all of existing entries) in the last year, all using an online form.

iii. HEIRPORT (<http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/heirport>)

Stuart Jeffrey also reported on the current state of functionality of HEIRPORT. All of the resources are fully functional, though some Z39.50 targets have gone down due to maintenance, and that this has affected usage statistics (for example, COFLEIN, OGAR). In the period 1 Aug to 31 Oct 2007, there were 13,000 accesses of the directory, demonstrating a reasonable continuation of usage. Julian stated that ADS will now relegate the HEIRPORT link from their homepage, due to advancements in web services now rendering HEIRPORT somewhat out-of-date.

5 Presentations on current projects and plans from members, including:

i. NMR Access Programme and other new resources

Vikki Fenner presented the latest developments with the NMR information services, giving us an insight first into the scale of the NMR audience, the origins of the Access Programme, and then

providing an update on the range of live projects, including: Archives Online, EH Images, Heritage Explorer, Heritage Gateway, PastScape, ViewFinder, and then other work looking at usability & business process re-engineering, audience development & research, and marketing & communications. In addition, a publically-available GIS toolkit is being developed, with pluggable modules available to others. A series of usability tests are being carried out, in combination with web statistics analysis. Heritage Explorer will go live from January 2008, Pastscape in early December 2007.

The presentation was then followed by a discussion on the role of simple versus advanced searches; on how new resources were being publicised; on the value of discovering the referring page for each user; and on the importance of understanding web statistics in depth to discover the true meaning behind peaks and trends.

ii. **Archaeology Data Service catalogue and other services (<http://ads.ahds.ac.uk>)**

Julian Richards began with a summary of the AHRC & JISC withdrawal of funding from the AHDS (but with the ADS as an explicit exception). ADS funding is secured for five years from April 2008. Julian predicted that there may be a change of business model in the long run, with funding generated more through responsive mode.

Stuart Jeffrey reported on Archaeotools: JISC interested in funding this service for a further 12 months. There is funding in place from further sources also for Archaeotools (more details given on the website: <http://wit.shef.ac.uk/archaeotools>). One aspect of development will be to create a new interface into the ArchSearch catalogue. A further aspect which has just begun will be to natural language process the grey literature library at the University of Sheffield so that a FASTI-like ontology can be populated.

Julian Richards reported on the ACE project (Archaeology in Contemporary Europe), which is a five year European Culture project, running from Nov 2007 to 2013 (with 4.8m Euros funding). 13 partners will be coordinated in Paris. ACE will be involved with two large excavation projects, postgraduate training, and will be undertaking a 'Profiling the Profession' exercise for Europe. The ADS role will be primarily in information provision, data management and standards. The DARIA project will also be involved (reinvigorating ARENA and making it more extensible and sustainable).

iii. **SWISH partnership**

Rebecca Jones reported on behalf of RCAHMS that Coflein and Canmore will be relaunched next year, both now written using a web services model. A thesaurus for Scotland went live this year. An 'events' module is currently being worked on. OASIS has been 'live' in Scotland since April 2007 – currently working with CSA so that OASIS includes D&ES records. A new resource – Scotland's Images – is currently being worked on, which will make available a small set of images for commercial use. Treasured Places (to coincide with the RCAHMS centenary) consists of 100 favourite archive items which were made available for a public vote; use was made of blogging for the first time by RCAHMS.

David Thomas reported on behalf of RCAHMW that Historic Wales was launched one year ago. This consists of a map-based with incorporating data from RCAHMW, Cadw, National Museum Wales, and HER data to come. There are challenges with browser and Java updates, so some re-engineering is to take place. Work is underway to make Coflein more 'Google-like' (in terms of searching and results pages). The mobile devices project has progressed well: a new booklet and launch will take place soon. Currently not using live Coflein data, but a download. Different 'skins' being designed depending on the nature of the device.

The Welsh Archaeological Archives project was also reported on. A discussion took place of the options available to the Welsh Trusts in a post-OAD situation – there is an option for them to come into

the SWISH partnership.

Julian enquired what had happened to the SCRAN project. Rebecca responded that it is currently housed with the RCAHMS, but that are awaiting a government decision and it may move in the future.

There was some discussion of the Heritage Protection Review implications for both Scotland and Wales.

iv. **CBA's information services**

Dan Hull reported on current progress with the Community Archaeology Forum, the ongoing upgrade to the biab online service, and the launch of ArchLib. The launch of ArchLib (an electronic library of publications for archaeology) in June 2007. There are currently eight publishing partners (of which the CBA is one), with a fairly small range of content as a pilot. There are plans to expand the service early in 2008. CAF continues to grow with over 20 projects now on board, and frequent updates of content. The interface is soon to have a slight design change to make it more accessible and attractive. The biab online project was delayed somewhat during the summer due to the collapse of OAD, but is now proceeding again using a freelance team of developers. Hoping for launch of the new service in mid-2008. Users of the new service will be able to benefit from having their own accounts with saved search options, the ability to build and save their own profile, improved browsing facilities, improved display facilities such as TOC function, and improved data-mining.

v. **Portable Antiquities Scheme (<http://www.finds.org.uk>)**

Dan Pett reported on the Pleiades project – a mash-up of PAS data and Google Earth. The issue of accessibility issues with regard to mapping tools and their visual clarity was noted. A 'Top 10 Objects' service is due for launch soon.

vi. **Report on meeting of EH, Royal Commissions, ADS and CBA in Swindon, Jan 2007**

Nigel Clubb set the meeting in context by explaining that there had been a long tradition of the three Royal Commissions meeting to discuss common issues. There was general agreement at the meeting that the HEIRNET register should develop; that the impact of Google should be noted; that audience development is crucial to all of our services; and that we should compare practices in the collection of web metrics. These are all 'macro issues' where an economy of scale would be useful. Further issues discussed at the meeting included the fact that the GeoCrossWalk project from EDINA (which was discussed as a possible means of natural language processing so that information geographic locators (i.e. names) on maps could be transferred to the geographic location information held within a database) is now going ahead. Image archiving was also discussed, as was the fact that HEIRs should be ready to provide information in the light of the impact of climate change on the historic environment.

vii. **Data sans Frontières conference**

This was felt to be very successful with over 90 attendees, and positive comments from the feedback forms. AHRC have now made the audio presentations available. It was suggested that these should be linked to from the HEIRNET website.

i. **Web services**

Stuart described the web services model for HEIRNET first suggest at the DSF conference. This would involve the conversion of the HEIRNET register to a UDDI (Universal Description, Discovery and Integration), which would be an XML-based registry. He also described the nature of the ‘T-model’ approach to this, and suggested that this should be MIDAS-compliant. It would be non-exclusive, so that all HEIRs could also register elsewhere. Z39.50 targets would still be compatible (as indeed would OAI), so the registry need not necessarily be run on an exclusively Service-Oriented Architecture (SOA) model. However, the level of granularity must change in that rather than just each HEIR registering (as at present), each *service* must now register. The ADS, through the ACE project, is happy to construct the UDDI Registry on behalf of HEIRNET. However, they did not suggest dealing with the levels of service and other documentation. Depending on ADS workload, the UDDI should be up and running by ‘late summer’ 2008.

There was a discussion about which information sources would be suitable to include, especially as some information is not necessarily designed to be MIDAS-compliant (such as the CBA OGAR service, for example). Stuart responded that it is up to the individual service providers what will be included, and also to do the work of making their data compliant. Dan Hull enquired whether HEIRPORT would then still exist, but it was suggested that this be a decision for further down the line.

It was suggested that a technical working group be held in the spring of 2008 to take this work forward.

ii. **Web statistics cooperation**

Dan Hull reported that the Swindon meeting in Jan 2007 had included discussion of the need to compare techniques for the gathering and analysis of web metrics across HEIRs. A pilot questionnaire has been composed and was shown to HEIRNET for comment. Several useful suggestions were received, and it was agreed that an amended version would be sent out to the HEIRNET list for circulation, and then the results circulated to HEIRNET in due course.

It was also reported that an HEIRNET online forum has been set-up by the CBA for discussion of the outcomes of the Swindon meeting, and matters arising with relevance to HEIRNET.

7 Other business

Rebecca Jones reported that MIDAS Heritage had now been published, and was available from www.midasheritage.org.uk.

8 Dates/venues for future meetings

Technical working group: Stuart agreed to lead this, once funding and project arrangements had been confirmed.

It was suggested that the next HEIRNET meeting take place sooner than a year’s time, so that the web stats and web services work could be advanced. The ADS offered to host the next meeting in King’s Manor (York), on July 17th. The date of 27th November was also pencilled in for a subsequent meeting.

David thanked everyone for attending.