

HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT INFORMATION RESOURCES NETWORK (HEIRNET)

Minutes of an HEIRNET meeting, held on Thursday 30 November 2006 at the Council for British Archaeology, St Mary's House, 66 Bootham, York, starting at 1pm.

Those present: David Baker OBE (CBA), Nigel Clubb (EH NMR), Catherine Cayley (EH NMR), Hilary Malaws (RCAHMW), Dr Roger Bland (PAS), Prof Julian Richards (ADS), Dr Stuart Jeffrey (ADS), Dr Gill Chitty (CBA), Dr Mike Heyworth (CBA), Dr Dan Hull (CBA).

Apologies for absence: Ian Shepherd (ARIA), Dr Dave Barrett (ALGAO), Noel Fojut (HS), Christine Longworth (SMA), David Dawson (MLA), Rebecca Jones (RCAHMS).

1 Welcome and introductions

David Baker welcomed everyone to the meeting on behalf of the CBA who were hosting the meeting. It was pointed out that this is the first HEIRNET meeting since July 2005.

2 Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from the above list.

3 Report on current HEIRNET services:

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

Dan Hull and Mike Heyworth reported web statistics for the HEIRNET site. While use still remains fairly high, and indeed continues to rise slowly, the site has not been actively maintained since the end of Kate Fernie's secondment period. The email discussion list is now also no longer maintained. Julian asked what could be done to update the HEIRNET website. Mike offered to do an update. Nigel suggested the need for increased promotion of HEIRNET.

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

Julian Richards presented some web statistics for the use of the HEIRNET Register. This also continues to be reasonably well used, and is maintained on behalf of the ADS by Jonathan Bateman. Some discussion took place as to whether HEIRNET data could be used as Universal Resource Identifiers. Stuart Jeffrey is to look further into this.

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

Julian reported on the current state of functionality of HEIRPORT. All of the resources are fully functional beside partial functionality with the CANMORE database (currently being investigated); SCRAN is also only partially functional through HEIRPORT. The PAS target has been down for a while – Roger Bland reported that this is being looked at.

Julian pointed out that enthusiasm for aggregated searches continues, and that it would be useful to discuss how such searches can continue to be UK-wide.

Stuart Jeffrey raised the possibility of a joint Data Service Registry for archaeology, which dispersed resources could 'connect to', rather than necessarily having to be interoperable with one other. He pointed out that this would seem to be the next logical stage. David Baker enquired what the state of play is with data sets that

wished to join HEIRPORT. Julian commented that they would need to find funds to do so, but that a shortcut for now would be for them to make their data available through ADS. c.20 HERs have expressed an interest in doing this.

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

i Heritage Gateway for England (<http://www.heritagegateway.org.uk>)

Catherine Cayley presented the latest progress in the Heritage Gateway project, now in its second year of a five year partnership. The rationale for the project, the infrastructure behind the portal, and plans for future development were all reported on. A version of this will go live in April 2007.

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

Stuart Jeffrey reported on recent developments at ADS. RCAHMS are now looking to link directly through from CANMORE to PAS holdings on ADS with static urls.

There has been an expression of interest from JISC (CIE, now re-branded as the JISC E-Content Alliance) to maintain the Archaeobrowser service for another 6-12 months.

The ADS have a number of ongoing projects aimed at developing a spatial databases engine interface – the eventual aim of which is to present all ADS data as GIS layers for users through their own web browser.

iii SWISH partnership

Hilary Malaws reported that Public Portals for the Historic Environment in Wales is a project to launch a portlet, being developed by the Ancient Monuments Advisory Council, CADW and RCAHMW. An early version will be ready by the end of March 2007.

Hilary also reported on an outreach project using PDAs – the ‘E-trail’ project. This has now been extended with further funding so that E-trail information can be downloaded by users onto a range of mobile computing devices – mobile phone, mp3 player etc. A pilot will be ready by early March and a technical paper will be published soon. SWISH are also working on increased crossover between text and map searches.

Julian made the point that interesting developments may derive from the EPOCH framework, as they are very active in developing mobile computing technology.

Funding has also been secured to develop an online searchable database across all museums – potentially to work in Scotland as well as Wales.

[Welsh report from Hilary about bringing in information from the National Museum of Wales for finds and agreement to the possibility of adding PAS findspot data too?](#)

David initiated a discussion about the linking of resources either side of the Welsh border. It was generally agreed that such a notion goes to the core of HEIRNET’s remit.

iv CBA’s information services, including the Community Archaeology Forum (www.britarch.ac.uk/caf) and an upgrade to biab online (<http://www.biab.ac.uk>)

Dan Hull reported on the CBA’s creation of a Community Archaeology Forum: CAF. This will be launched on 4 December, and is a wiki-based format intended for anyone involved in community archaeology to upload pages on their projects, advice and guidance, or research. A useful discussion ensued on whether a link with OASIS forms

could be incorporated – ADS offered to provide advice on this. Hilary suggested that similar links with grey literature archives in Wales could be made.

Dan also reported on the ongoing work to upgrade the biab online, funded by English Heritage, the Heritage Council of Ireland and the CBA. The new system will be based on Oxford ArchDigital's TOAD software, and will mean that content can be added more easily, search and retrieval will be improved and tailored download options provided. There will also be increased navigability of online documents and library holdings, grey literature will be included from the AIP, plus links through to the papers held in the forthcoming ArchLib service. The new service will be launched in spring 2007.

Mike added that biab online have had some useful discussion with SWISH regarding the addition of GeoCrossWalk technology in the future. This would enable users to carry out geographical searches using clickable maps, and to display results through a WebGIS.

Dan reported on the progress of the ArchLib service, which CBA have been working on in collaboration with SAL. This is intended to be an electronic library of publications for archaeology with a search and buy facility, and will focus in particular on making available smaller county and society journals online. A pilot version will go live early in 2007.

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

Roger Bland reported on the current state of the Portable Antiquities Scheme online service. Almost all county HERs have now signed up; there are new search mechanisms specifically for items recorded as 'treasure'. There have been 600,000 web visits over the course of a year. Further analysis of the web stats reveals that users look at around 20 pages per visit, over an average period of 10 minutes. Dan Pett is making full use of open source software by implementing wiki sections, a blog, Google Analytics. Data from the Celtic Coin Index has now been added.

Mike commented that mash-ups with PAS data being presented over Google Map backdrops are to be welcomed.

5 Other information issues of common UK-wide concern, including:

i Government Connect (<http://www.govconnect.gov.uk>)

Mike pointed out that there are common issues for all HEIRNET partners with regard to Government Connect. Nigel suggested that we all look at the website and are aware of its content and future plans. He asked whether HEIRNET should systematize information exchange about strategic government initiatives?

ii Planning Portal (<http://www.planningportal.gov.uk>)

Gill Chitty reported that the CBA and the other national amenity societies have been working on a nine month project with seven planning authorities looking at establishing a common e-planning infrastructure. DCLG's PARSOL project recognizes that there is a lack of standardization: there are currently very diverse systems in operation across the country, though paper applications are still the norm. Electronic archiving in planning is still some way behind archaeology as a whole, and we should focus on bringing it up to speed.

Mike reported, on behalf of David Dawson, that a Council on the European Union agreement on archiving and preservation has been issued. The UK have signed up to this and DCMS will be holding a seminar on the issue in February. Julian pointed out that this will inform some of the grant programme in Framework 7.

6 Proposal for an HEIRNET conference on web portals, portal technology & interoperability

Mike opened this point by saying that when Kate Fernie was in post, a successful HEIRNET conference was organised: 'Opening Doors' in 2003. Would it be advantageous to have another conference on portals under the HEIRNET umbrella?

Stuart reported that under the AHRC Methods Network, ADS have been asked to organise an 'expert seminar'. Could this be taken forward by HEIRNET?

It was agreed by the meeting that this would indeed be a suitable opportunity for HEIRNET to arrange a conference in May. This could be based in London and consist of a two day event: one day being hosted through Roger at the British Museum and being a public event with a series of papers, and a second day being the HEIRNET meeting held at the British Academy under the auspices of the CBA.

The ADS would arrange the agenda and running order for the conference, while the CBA could coordinate the administration. Mike and Stuart agreed to discuss a May date for the conference, and circulate ideas to HEIRNET members.

7 Areas for future HEIRNET activity and joint working between HEIRNET members

David suggested that HEIRNET meet more frequently and resolve the 'gaps around the table'.

Mike added that there is still a need for a body to discuss strategic issues at a UK-wide level. In future, issues such as the Planning Portal must be discussed to work out how our sector responds. The CBA can help by acting as a secretariat, but HEIRNET should share the formation of the agenda.

Nigel suggested that HEIRNET be careful to draw other organisations in, rather than engaging only with those organisations who are involved with HEIR provision on a daily basis.

Julian suggested the idea of an HEIRNET conference and meeting held in London each spring, then a meeting at York each autumn, which met with general approval around the table.

It was agreed that it is important for HEIRNET to sustain links with such organisations as MLA, IHBC and ALGAO, and that inviting external speakers on relevant topics is important.

8 Other business

No further business was raised.

9 Dates/venues of future meetings

It was agreed that the next HEIRNET autumn meeting would be on 29 November in York.

David thanked everyone for attending.