Historic Environment Record News

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Figure 1 Nigel Pratt from Hampshire County Council speaking at the recent HER Forum meeting in Birmingham

A View From the Chair
Nick Boldrini, North Yorkshire County Council

Hello HEROes

Hopefully you will not need to loosen your belts too much after some traditional festive over-indulgence, but I hope the New Year finds you well.

Shortly before Christmas, a good number of us turned out to Birmingham for the latest HER Forum meeting, on the topic of "Putting the e into E-government". I suspect the high turnout was prompted by the fact that many of us have been recently grappling with the consequences of the E-Government agenda as deadlines for delivery of key e-services came and went (at least in our local authority they did). In North Yorkshire we did not see any of the E-Government money, though in Hampshire they did and one

talk by Nigel Pratt showed how to use E-government funds to get your HER on-line on a limited budget.

At the other end (I suspect) of the funding spectrum was the impressive Shropshire's History Online project, detailed by Jason Sidall, which is using XML to link the HER, Museum, and Record Office collections in an online interface, as well as involving numerous partners such as local societies.

Other talks on the day highlighted how the Welsh and Scottish NMR's are dealing with E Government, developments in OASIS; plans for the English Heritage led Heritage Gateway and also DEFRA's SPIRE project (standing for the Spatial information repository – an apparent development of the MAGIC website).

By the end of the day my head was fairly spinning with acronyms and the wealth of possibilities for the electronic delivery of HER services. And here in, to some degree lies my problem and confusion. With so many routes and possibilities, what is an HER officer supposed to do? Wait until the Heritage Gateway and SPIRE are working and use these resources to put our HER on line? Dive into the HLF process with a lot of work going into a bid which may

not be approved? Or filch some money from a budget and do it all on the cheap?

The momentum of E government means that ignoring it until it goes away is unlikely to be a successful strategy; as how we deal with E-Delivery of HER Services is likely to become a more pressing issue for us all. And the issue of backlog, that not everything is digital to start with, seems to have been somewhat lost in the whole E government agenda.

With a career firmly rooted in the IT age, I sometimes yearn nostalgically for the Card index days I never actually knew….

The Heritage Gateway Project: delivering online access to HERs
Catherine Cayley, English Heritage

The goal of the Heritage Gateway project is to build a website providing access to national and local historic environment information. Over a five year period of phased development, local records (held by HERs) will be digitally connected with the national record. The project's initial target is to establish web presence by April 2006 with contact information for all HERs and links to HER websites where they are already

online. Website content such as topical articles and education and outreach project information will be commissioned from HERs as well as from the buildings and conservation sector. Over the next two to five years, the aim is to build a more comprehensive and cross-searchable site. HERs will be encouraged and assisted to web-enable their data. It is anticipated that local information will also encompass links to village and parish website historic environment material. Furthermore it is intended that the Heritage Gateway could be the digital public dissemination route for the national and local registers as part of Heritage Protection Reform (HPR).

The need for this project was identified in the 2004 NMR Review, following extensive consultation with the sector. The Review explicitly stated that it should be a partnership project. Key partners are the Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers (ALGAO) and the Institute of Historic Building Conservation (IHBC), together with English Heritage (EH). The project will bring these important sectoral bodies together, helping develop a common framework for working in what is currently a fragmented sector.

Preliminary web presence in 2006 will focus on a professional audience, and user requirements of the sector will be ascertained throughout early development. The Project Board believes it is critical to design the *Heritage Gateway* directly involving the historic environment sector and responding to its needs. The site hopes to develop other more general audiences over the medium term and will hold focus groups to discover their user requirements. Findings from all user evaluation will be used to inform the *Heritage Gateway's* final content, design and navigation.

Later phases of the Heritage Gateway project will enable HERs to get their data online where they are under-resourced in terms of staff or technological support to achieve this themselves. The project aims to build HERs' capability to manipulate their own information electronically and will develop a common toolset to help HERs implement web services where their content is already online. Non web-enabled HERs will be assisted to send their data to a holding server for web dissemination over the short to medium term. Proposals to grant HERs statutory status as part of HPR would necessitate their online development – the Heritage

Gateway project looks to assist in the longer term goal of dissemination of local register information as part of HPR.

One of project's main aims is to increase accessibility to Historic Environment information and thus broaden audiences. This will help HERs to reach local and national government targets as well as increasing their profile within the community. Increased public access to HER information was identified as a key potential benefit of the project in the recent Heritage Gateway user requirements survey, completed by around 45 HERs. The technology which will be implemented to search across national and local datasets requires common standards such as MIDAS to be applied, and will help HERs to reach Level One benchmark standards. This will facilitate information exchange across the sector as a whole, encouraging more open working and enabling HERs to see data across boundaries. E-delivery of information for HERs such as audit material will also streamline current working practices. The project aims to significantly enhance the current situation of dispersed datasets and join-up local and national working.

The Heritage Gateway website will also provide end users with a more complete picture of England's historic environment than has previously been available. The resulting interpretation by both EH and HER staff, as well as external sectoral colleagues, will be more accurate and balanced. The project seeks to provide remote access to a basic level of historic environment data which will benefit users who would otherwise be physically or geographically unable to access local information. It will enable the public to understand the historic environment better by providing basic access to information in one place. It is hoped that this work to remove tangible and intangible barriers to historic environment information will broaden audiences and encourage them to find out more in-depth information through their local HER. Specifically targeted areas of the site devoted to education and outreach will be crucial methods of engaging schools and communities.

Open communication about project development is crucial given the partnership working the project is fostering. HERs will be kept informed with project progress through articles and conferences as well as being invited to participate

in project development and website content provision.

For more information on any aspect of the Heritage Gateway project please contact the Project Manager, Cat Cayley on 01793 414560 or Catherine.cayley@english-heritage.org.uk

Discovering Shropshire's History: The delivery of an integrated heritage resource
Jason A. Siddall, Shropshire County Council

Background
In the process of research archaeologists, archivists and museum curators generate a wealth of material. Such material is rarely made available to the public or integrated across the three disciplines.

This means that much of the material that is available only to the select few that visit the respective repositories of the resources.

Discovering Shropshire's History is supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund and run through a partnership of services across Shropshire County Council. Discovering Shropshire's History is an innovative project which aims to bring the resources of Shropshire's Museums, Archives and Archaeology services together into one accessible web resource available to anyone on the internet. It will act as a 24 hour one stop shop to the heritage resources for Shropshire.

Through web technology it will help to support and encourage the work of local societies throughout Shropshire. With it's locally focused content it will deliver content that is relevant to the work of schools and promote interest in Shropshire's rich and varied history.

Scope
The scope of the project is substantial. To fulfil the "one stop shop" for Shropshire's Heritage it was necessary to expand our partnerships to external organisations beyond the County Council to encompass local societies, groups and museums.

This expansion dictated four core requirements:
- 3 of the core partners had relational databases which they wanted to be integrated together, while retaining their current systems and being able to synchronise the content offline.
- A website whose content could easily grow over time.
- Enable external groups and people to add content to the website.
- Where a partner had a current website to retain this whilst integrating with what we are creating.

Issues
It was evident that a simple static hypertext markup language (html) web resource would not meet the requirements since:

- The three databases were on different technologies that did not match. There was also no option to change the 3 databases. Each database was on a different upgrade cycle.
- Many of our partners did not have the technical skills to develop or maintain websites and so would need substantial aid in developing web content.
- Some of our partners had existing websites that they wished to retain and add content to. They requested that we link to their website.

Resolving the Issues
Through a series of workshops we developed an IT Requirement Specification. This specification detailed options to resolve the issues. The specification was sent out to IT

Developers so they could bid to develop a workable solution to the issues.

Moving to a Solution

In all it took six months to identify scope, issues and possible solutions.

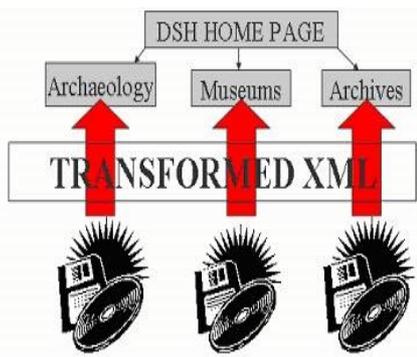In the end we selected the following solutions:

Figure 2

- For the 3 databases we selected an extensible markup language (XML) export from each system with a mapping tool that would manage the integration (See Fig 1). The benefit of this is that it is:
    - System independent
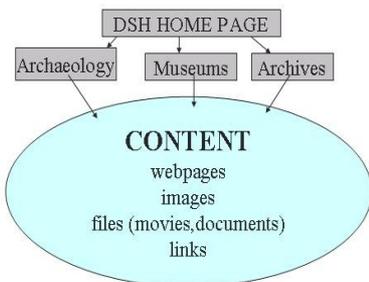   - The database owner can develop their systems as long as they export into XML.

Figure 3

- To enable easy creation of website pages for all groups of users from local societies to professionals we opted for a content management system attached to a document and image management system (See Fig 2). With a content management system we can allow partners to add content for themselves making it sustainable in the long term. The local groups, meanwhile, have access to technology that they would not be able to normally use.
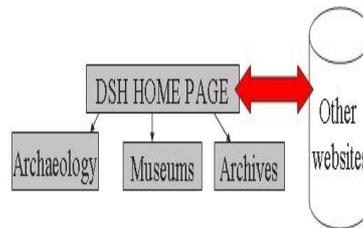

Figure 4

- Where partners have websites of their own we enable hyperlinks. Where they already have a website that is a content management system we enable a live protocol link such as SOAP (Simple Open Access Protocol). This creates a portal infrastructure to the system which promotes all the partners' websites allowing cross searches.

This three tier approach to adding content to the website allows us to increase the range of potential avenues through which partners can submit data.

The benefits of being flexible

The benefits of this approach are that we can fulfill the aim of a "one stop shop" for Shropshire's heritage since we can include an ever growing number of partners from across the county. The technology being deployed frees up users to concentrate their efforts on developing content.
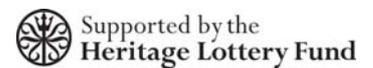
Great Expectations: getting Hampshire's HER online without the Heritage Lottery Fund

Nigel Pratt, Hampshire County Council

Abstract
There is an increasing expectation that Historic Environment data will be available online. Most HERs currently online have benefited from substantial Heritage Lottery Fund grants, there are, however, other sources of funding which may be available to achieve this aim more quickly. At Hampshire

County Council a comparatively small amount of money derived from E-Government funding was used to make the HER data available over the internet in six months. The article also outlines how professional users can access full HER records via the internet as a subscription service.

Hampshire County Council's HER, known as the Archaeology and Historic Buildings Record (AHBR), could be described as being a typical county planning based service. Like many HERs, its origins go back to the early 1970s, with the creation of a card index and annotated 1:10,000 base maps. This system is still in use as a paper back-up to the computer database which, from the 1980s onwards, has been hosted on a succession of platforms, including *Superfile* and *Exegesis.* The current incarnation of the AHBR database uses Oracle software linked to an Arcview Geographical Information System. Developed in-house, this was envisaged as a modular system and has the advantage of being fully integrated into the GIS, whilst retaining the independent functionality of the relational database. This versatility has allowed it to be adapted to meet the changing needs of HER users.

Changing user needs
Over the last five years there has been a shift in the way that both public and professional users access the AHBR and how they expect to receive data. In 2000, 24% of enquirers visited the AHBR in person, but by 2005 this had halved to 12%. This fall in the number of visits is contrasted by the rise in enquiries via email, from 11% to 36% over the same period, and increasingly these electronic enquirers expect to receive the data back in a digital form. The long-term aim of making all the paper-based AHBR data available electronically will be achieved over the next three
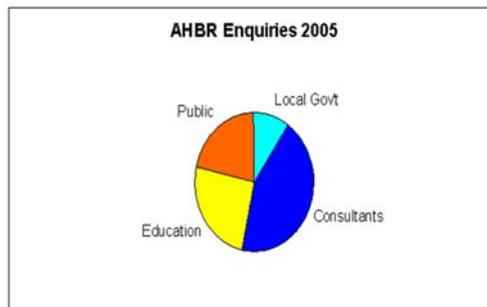

Figure 1

years, but in the meantime, some of the immediate demands of two groups, the conservation professional based in district authorities, and members of the public, which together form over 50% of the user base (Fig 1), could be met by on-line access to the AHBR database. As both groups have different requirements, this access would be delivered in two different ways, through an internal

Internet connection and via the World Wide Web.

Hants Web Interface
Conservation professionals based at district level planning authorities constitute a significant percentage of AHBR users, and are primarily interested in getting access to historic building data for planning related work. These users require access to the full AHBR database and GIS with the facility to build queries and print reports. Fortunately, the means to deliver this service on-line was already in place, in the form of the Hants Web Interface (HWI), which was developed by the county council to allow subscribers to access the internal network through an Internet connection.

Enabling the AHBR database to be available through HWI was a relatively simple procedure and did not require any redesigning of the system. The AHBR editing functions were, however, disabled. The system has been piloted at Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council where conservation officers can access the read-only AHBR database in exactly the same way as the editable version used by AHBR staff. The success of this pilot means that it will soon be extended to more districts, with a version also planned for Bournemouth

University where it will be used for research projects.

AHBR Website

While HWI can answer some of the needs of professional users in the non-commercial sector, it is not a suitable means to deliver AHBR data to public and educational users. Following the lead of other HERs, it was decided to design a searchable AHBR website for this purpose. However, while the majority of the HERs have been able to go online using Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) grants, which have a number of advantages, not the least of which is the prospect of receiving £100,000, it was decided that Hampshire would attempt this using money procured from E-Government funding. The amount available was significantly less than might be obtained from the HLF, but the flexible structure of the AHBR database meant that county council's internal IT Services believed that something usable could be delivered for under £6,000.

The specification for the website was drawn up by the Historic Data Manager, with internal IT support instructed to do the technical work. This proved fairly straightforward to get up and running, with the project being completed in six months, although finances dictated that some desirable features, such as the GIS mapping, had to be omitted. Also, for reasons of economy, the means of searching had to be restricted to certain key fields (Fig 2).
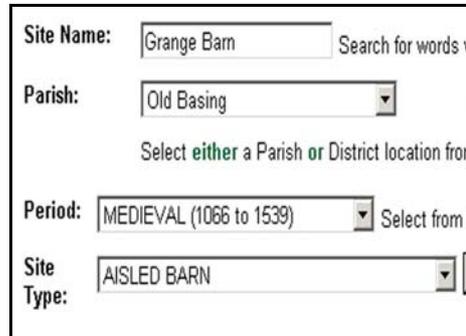
Figure 2

However, with the exception of the National Grid References, which were deliberately filtered to display only six figures, web users are able to access the full text version of the AHBR dataset and because it is updated on the web server through a live link, records entered by AHBR staff can be viewed online instantaneously. The website cannot, however, answer every query and if additional information is required a web form is provided to send an enquiry to the AHBR staff.

Developing the website without HLF support inevitably meant that some corners had to be cut, for example there was no opportunity to 'clean-up' the data, beyond some basic 'find and replace' operations. Such relatively minor jobs can, however, be rectified as part on an on-going programme of data enhancement and need not delay going on-line. More significant is the time saved by not needing to go through the process of applying for and then administrating a grant and, for good or bad, there was no obligation to commit to a long-term programme of reaching out to new audiences as part of the project.

Despite being launched with little publicity, people have found their way to the AHBR website and when asked how have replied that they 'expected it to be there'. Such expectations did not exist five years ago. The Hampshire experience demonstrates that with a solid database platform, some IT support, and a comparatively small budget, HERs can get online quickly, and satisfy the requirements of users, both professional and public, who increasingly expect HERs to be accessible as an online resources.

The AHBR website development is an ongoing project and comments from readers on its usability are gratefully received.

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Keeping it simple?: How to meet the needs of HER Officer and Researcher alike in defining archaeological science data

Gill Campbell, English Heritage

The idea behind this project is to make the results of research in the different areas of archaeological science more accessible to researchers and the wider community. It is particularly concerned with flagging up grey literature and

Sprouted cereal grain: For the purposes of searching we do not need to know that there is sprouted grain, but the presence of charred preservation as opposed to anoxic preservation is of interest- hence the need for the modification state.

the results of archaeological interventions carried out under PPG16.

The working group needed to consider not only how Historic Environment Record Officers would store data but also the needs of

researchers. What, for example, would a researcher want to search for? Would they be an archaeological scientist or could they also be a biologist or a food historian? We agreed early on that we could not store detailed information but rather that information on archaeological science placed in the HER should act as an index of research and provide a pointer to further information (ie what was in the published report or grey literature).

The fields the working group decided on as necessary, or desirable, are listed below, with a brief description of what each should contain:

Object type: (controlled entry) Type of remains (item) worked on e.g. animal remains.
Material type: (controlled entry) The material of which the item is composed. e.g. bone, teeth, skin.
Modification state: (controlled entry) The physical condition of an item of interest, particularly documenting its state of preservation or changes subsequent to its cultural life.
Aspect: (controlled entry) A feature of the remains, divided into natural aspects, e.g pathology, and those features resulting from modification by humans, e.g toolmarks.

Investigative technique: (controlled entry) The scientific or statistical technique used to investigate the item, especially dating.
Method of Recovery: (controlled entry) The technique used to gather physical material for further analysis.
Key Assemblage: Is this a highly significant assemblage (yes/no). This is justified in the potential field.
Potential Field: The potential of the assemblage for further research- free text with date and author for each entry as potential may change over time.
Period:(controlled entry) Date of the from existing RCHME (Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England) Archaeological periods list
Reference: Bibliographic reference
Location: Location of the physical and paper archive
Notes: Free text with any other information.

The list looks long and detailed but after much argument, deletions and reinstatements we believe that this will best meet the requirements of researchers and will not be to onerous for HER officers to use. For the fields requiring controlled entry there were existing lists or thesauri that could be used, but only the list for **period** was sufficient

to this type of data. It was thus necessary to develop new terms as candidates for existing thesauri in some cases, and to develop lists and further thesauri for others.

We used the Environmental Archaeology Bibliography database (EAB) (http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/catalogue/specColl/eab_eh_2004) subject code list to help give us the number of reports on a given subject as well as an idea of currency from the publication date, to decide what terms to include. We also consulted with colleagues in conservation and ancient technology as to what terms they would find useful. Edmund Lee was instrumental in mapping the EAB subject codes and giving us a place to start.

Various problems however arose and some of these are discussed below. The solution for these problems often involved creating addition fields, hence our rather long list, or finding a compromise.

Building the entries for **object type** and **material type** gave us the most headaches. For **object type** we looked to develop the Museum Documentation Association (MDA) Archaeological Object Thesaurus. However, as this thesaurus has been principally developed for use in museums it does

assume that you have the items in your possession, whereas it our case the items e.g. a soil section may only have been observed in the field. At the same time the thesaurus assumes that you can always classify something as animal, vegetable or mineral. This does not sit easily with modern biological classification or work some types of remains.
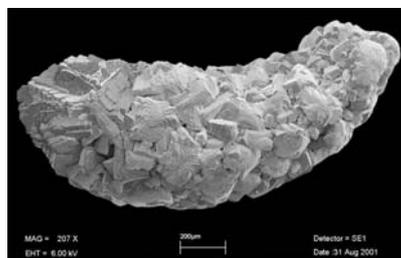
An earthworm granule – Animal, vegetable or mineral?

For example an earthworm granule is the remains of an earthworm but is also a mineral since it is made of calcium carbonate, while fungi are not plants but have a phylum of their own. Human remains present a special case and have been placed under animal remains, but outside vertebrates, not very biologically sound. This is because animal bone researchers don't want human remains to be included when they search on vertebrates in a database.

Parasites also presented a dilemma as this is just a mode of living, but when used as a term by archaeologists usually

refers to the remains of tapeworms etc. meaning that the scope note for parasites had to be very carefully worded.

Sheep ked, a flightless insect which lives as an ecoparasite on sheep. The pupa (right) survives in archaeological deposits. (Mark Robinson)

Much debate was also engendered by whether something was a material or an object. For example from our point of view pollen is a material as it is part of a plant, just as teeth and bones are parts of mammals. Pollen, however, is treated as an object in the MDA Thesaurus. However, what do we do about an oak wood table. The table is the object but can also be classified as oak remains that have been modified by humans. A search on oak wood tables on Google gets you to billiard tables for some reason but do the same with rosewood tables and you get straight to information on rosewood tables.

Classification is not an easy business but what we get in the end, though it may not be perfect, will ensure that scientific archaeology

makes use of the huge amount of information out there but as yet glimpsed darkly.

Archaeological Science and the Greater London Sites and Monuments Record

Jane Sidell, English Heritage

The Greater London Sites and Monuments Record has been collecting data from archaeological interventions in London for twenty years. During this time, archaeological fieldwork in London has been taking place, largely driven by commercial and housing development alongside the constructions of infrastructure associated with road, rail and air travel. Considerable amounts of scientific analyses have been undertaken during this time, but generally suffer the usual indignity of languishing in the corpus of grey literature. In fact, the majority of scientific reports are summarized for the overall site report, so rarely does any detail make it into local libraries or the GLSMR itself.

Nevertheless, such a corpus of scientific data, if brought together has the potential to act as a powerful research tool. Therefore, several enhancement projects have been devised and are being developed at the GLSMR. The first of these is a database of all absolute dates collected from London. This is drawing together over a thousand radiocarbon, archaeomagnetic and optically stimulated luminescence dates with background data, such as date of fieldwork and any published references as well as more crucial data such as the lab number, material dated, grid reference and calibration, meaning that any researcher will have enough detail to go back to the laboratory with questions if need be. The aim is that the database will be housed at the GLSMR and eventually be available on line for researchers to search for key dates, but also thematic research, such as looking at all known dated human remains, or dates associated with prehistoric pottery. It will also be supported by a published commentary. The project has been undertaken by John Meadows with funding from English Heritage.

The second project is a database of all pollen samples examined in Greater London. A significant amount of pollen analysis has been done over the last thirty years, but particularly since the advent of PPG16, which has expanded the area routinely examined archaeologically into some of the wetter and more organic parts of London. Sadly, much of the work in these areas has not been published and may never be so as it largely based on evaluations of peatland sites with little physical archaeology. Pollen records were obtained from the key pollen analysts, Rob Scaife and Nick Branch, whilst others were tracked down through the grey literature and some published works. 165 reports have been found, and added to a new database on the GLSMR and can be examined by querying the database, or through the GIS system. The records include the usual location and dating information, but also nature of the environments represented by period, with key species per vegetation type and also key events such as the elm decline and the rise of cereals have been noted. Again, it is hoped that this will eventually be available on-line. The project was undertaken by Yvonne Edwards for an MA dissertation, with no funding from anyone!

We now face the additional task of updating these datasets, however, the initial work has been done to create the databases, and the potential has been seen, therefore, there is

great goodwill from SMR staff and also contracting units and specialists to let their data be used for the broader research good in the region. It is to be hoped that it can be disseminated more widely in time, and may be an initiative that other regions may also take forward.

Worcestershire Historic Environment and Archaeology Service
A model for accessing environmental evidence through Historic Environment Records,

Victoria Bryant and Liz Pearson, Worcestershire County Council

Introduction

Over the last 15 years the Worcestershire SMR has been seen primarily as a development control tool. As a result environmental evidence has either not been recorded or has not been recorded in a way which would allow consistent, reliable retrieval of the data.
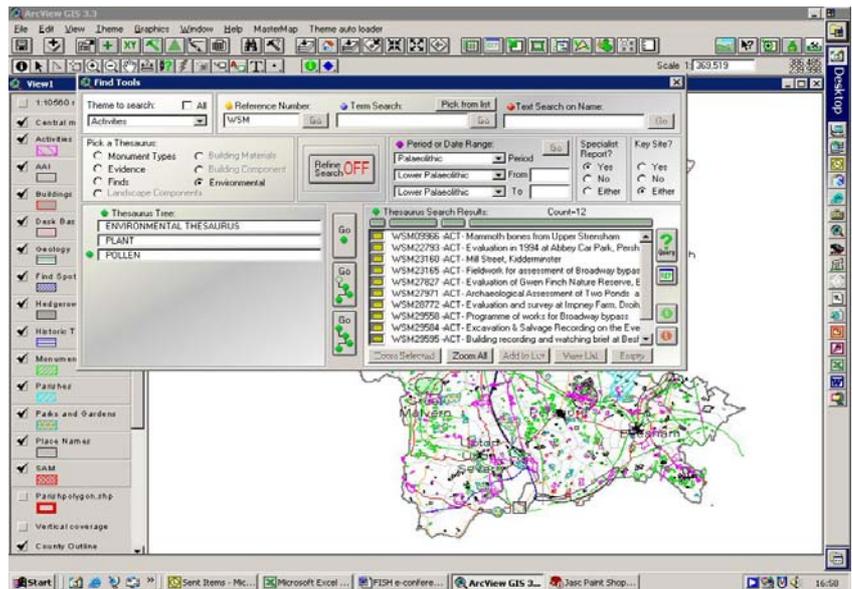

Fig. 1 Results of search for reports containing information on pollen analysis

We believe that this is no longer a sustainable position but to change it we needed to record all environmental data recovered from archaeological activity in Worcestershire. This included antiquarian as well as modern reports.

Given the scale of this task we, and we suspect many HERs, could not afford to produce a detailed environmental record for each site. We have aimed instead to provide a general, consistent index. The creation of this index, within the Activities/Events data within the GIS, is the *first* step towards transforming the HER into a useful tool for environmental research. In addition it will inform all management decisions.

A user of the index will not be able to find every site

where, for example, a particular type of mollusc has been found but they will be able to discover which sites of a particular period, or in a particular area, or on a particular soil type, have produced molluscs and which of these sites have specialist reports. The majority of these reports are "grey literature" but these can be accessed via our on-line library www.worcestershire.gov.uk/archaeology/library. The combination of even a simple environmental data set with the geological, topographical and archaeological data held within a GIS is a powerful research tool

The present situation

We are adding the information from every new site as it comes in but we have also completed a project to enter "old" data published in grey literature as well as that in journals and monographs. We were

allocated an arbitrary sum of £2000 from the Service's small strategic budget to pilot the software and to provide an estimate of the total cost of the project. To our surprise this covered the cost of inputting data from all the grey literature, the majority of reports within the Transactions of the Worcestershire Archaeological Society and all the major environmental reports for the County. We estimate that the index now holds at least 90% of all the environmental data for Worcestershire. The remaining data is from older, smaller sites which are "hidden" in our monument records. We are undertaking a process of cleaning all these records which will, over the next two years, pick up these sites.

Conclusion

This model has been developed jointly by the Environmental team and the HER team of Worcestershire Historic Environment and Archaeology Service. We believe that it is a simple, affordable way of starting the process of developing the HER into a useful research tool. Much more detailed information may be desirable but to acquire the funding it is necessary to demonstrate the need. As we see what demand there is for this information we can assess priorities for enhancing the record. For

instance it may be the case that more detailed information on plant remains is often asked for, whereas more detailed information on molluscs is not. The thesaurus of environmental types is in a format which can be extended to be as detailed as necessary and the creation of the simple index allows us to accurately calculate the quantity of reports that would need to be looked at to enhance the data. Thus making an accurate costing of such a project possible for the first time.

For more information on environmental archaeology and research in Worcestershire please contact epearson@worcestershire.gov.uk

For more details on the structure and function of the database please contact vbryant@worcestershire.gov.uk

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Are Watching Briefs a Useful and Effective Form of Archaeological Mitigation?
Louise Hayward

In May 2005, as part of an undergraduate dissertation at the University of Bradford, the author attempted to answer the

above question. As literature on the subject is limited, the majority of information was obtained via a questionnaire sent out to 35 archaeological contractors and 45 curators around England. The author also analysed the watching briefs reports filed at Kent County Council (KCC) and West Yorkshire Archaeological Service Sites and Monuments Record (WYAS SMR) for 2004. This article attempts to discuss the findings of the research and the possible way forward for watching briefs.

From analysing a large number of reports from KCC and WYAS SMR, it is clear that the quality of reporting varies immensely despite the fact that detailed specifications exist. Some reports contained great detail including trench depths, soil types, detailed maps and section drawings and exact locations of trenches and archaeological features. Others, and this is especially the case with negative watching briefs, contained very little accurate information regarding trench size, depth or location. This obviously greatly impacts on the usefulness of watching brief reports.

From the data received via the questionnaires, approximately half of the recommended watching brief conditions were

executed each year. There are a number of reasons that need to be considered for this apparent deficit: planning applications have a five-year lifespan (therefore many may still be pending); non-compliance of developers (either through ignorance, misunderstanding or a deliberate act); and that not all watching briefs recommended get carried out (for varying reasons).

Of the watching briefs that were successfully completed, approximately half revealed archaeological remains of some description, with only a small number finding archaeological remains significant enough to necessitate further archaeological investigation. The results gained from KCC, WYAS SMR and the questionnaires revealed an average of 1 in 3.31 watching briefs executed resulting in a positive outcome. One of the main issues, therefore is what constitutes a good watching brief? Is a good watching brief a negative one, where no remains have been uncovered or attempts have been made to excavate in less than ideal conditions? Or is a good watching brief a positive one, where at least some attempt has been made to record the archaeology present before it is destroyed or buried under concrete?

The main problem with watching briefs appears to be one of communication and understanding. If a watching brief is carried out well with a competent contractor, good communication and compliance between developers, contractors and county archaeologists, good access and weather conditions then, potentially, the information gathered will be extremely useful. However, developers, contractors and development control officers all seem to have different interpretations and understandings of what the term watching brief means and what it should entail. The results from the questionnaires have shown that implementation varies around the Country, with different names and types of watching briefs and different uses for them. Watching briefs are often seen, by all parties involved, as an easy job that is not particularly important and is often a waste of time, money and resources. This is not the case, as spotting archaeological remains in a small trench that is being quickly dug out by a machine, in less than ideal conditions, involves extraordinary skill, archaeological experience and a keen knowledge of the archaeology of an area. Other necessary attributes are: communication and

negotiation skills, the ability to make on-the-spot decisions and the courage to stand by your convictions. Another problem highlighted by the comments received via the questionnaires was that many contractors feel that watching briefs are being overused as 'catch-all' conditions, in an attempt to cover curators' backs if any archaeology is uncovered.

A further issue that was raised by this study involves finance. Money appears to have a great deal of influence on which tender a developer chooses, as the cheapest offer, but not necessarily the best, will usually be chosen to avoid too much extra cost for the development. The added cost of archaeological intervention may well cause some developers not to report when developments begin as well as dictating how long archaeologists can be present on a site. Another problem with finance is when unexpected finds or sites turn up during a watching brief. A developer will often not have enough money put aside for excavation and post-excavation work, when all that they are expecting to pay for is a watching brief. Another issue with the funding for councils is that councils and planning authorities are clearly understaffed. This will affect the standard and rate at which planning

applications can be processed and followed up, thus affecting the successful implementation of watching briefs and other archaeological conditions. The key problem regarding this is that there are usually other, more pressing, funding needs such as education, housing and social services, which usually take precedence over such archaeological issues.

Whilst the results obtained present a useful insight into the use of watching briefs, they should be treated with caution for the following reasons: return rate of questionnaires; reliability of data; interpretation of questionnaires; and the five year life-span of planning applications. In addition, this study does not accurately represent the views of developers as only a small number were contacted and none of those approached had replied by the time the dissertation was submitted.

The solution to the problems surrounding watching briefs lies in a number of things. Firstly, there needs to be a re-evaluation of the purpose of watching briefs and a re-education of contractors, curators and developers. If people better understand the purpose of the watching brief, it may be performed and applied more effectively and efficiently, leading to

better retrieval of archaeologically relevant data. Secondly, the way in which watching briefs are implemented could be improved. The use of more targeted watching briefs, as mentioned by a number of the curators contacted, is a much better way of recording any archaeology present in a more controlled and satisfactory manner. Thirdly, the way in which reports are written, especially with regard to negative watching briefs, has a detrimental affect on the usefulness of the data collected. This is a difficult issue to resolve, as there are already standardised specifications produced by councils as guidance for archaeological contractors. Finally, the way in which the published reports are ordered and stored needs to be improved. From the evidence of the questionnaires, it is obvious that some councils have inadequate cataloguing and storage regimes and facilities for the information received. Unfortunately, the only solution to this problem is a greater level of funding and the employment of more staff within councils and local planning authorities.

Despite the problems involved in the implementation of watching briefs, the planning system would probably be in a worse state if they did not exist at all. In the absence

of watching briefs, then evaluations would become the main form of archaeological investigation. This would greatly increase the expense to the developer as well as leaving areas with limited or unknown archaeological potential, unexcavated, as an evaluation could not be justified. It seems that watching briefs can be a useful and effective form of archaeological mitigation, but a number of factors have an effect on their success and the usefulness of the data that can be collected. Watching briefs can investigate parts of sites where evaluations cannot reach; they can extract key pieces of information from developments in historic towns; and their use can fill in gaps within the SMR for future developments. Even a negative watching brief, where no archaeology is found, can be useful if the specification given is followed correctly.

The Artefact Density Index in North Yorkshire
Nicholas Boldrini, North Yorkshire County Council

The problem of recording finds in Historic Environment Records (HER), is not a new one, and various suggestions have been put forward on

ways to do this (Fernie & Gilman 2000). This is especially true when it comes to mapping these records, particularly when trying to map imprecisely located stray finds which may only be known about to a parish, Quarter sheet or kilometre square precision. Paper based systems got round this issue by using marginalia notes (OS 1978). Transferring this data into Geographical Information Systems (GIS) has often been done fairly crudely, and the solution has usually been to represent what is really a polygon (the Parish or Kilometre square area) with a point. This has lead to clusters of findspots in the corner of a Grid Square supposedly representing their possible presence in the Grid Square north and east of that point, or the placing of a single point somewhere within a parish.

Using data such as this for development control (DC) decisions is possible, but the data may be missed if the area of development is within the right parish, but not near the mapped point, giving a distorted view of the archaeological potential of an area. However, to fully understand the archaeology of an area, even 'fuzzy' data such as this need to be borne in mind, otherwise one may miss evidence of activity which may not be visible from other complimentary sources (e.g. Phillips 1980:19 – 20).

With these issues in mind, in 2004/2005 I undertook a Dissertation project (Boldrini 2005), as part of the Msc in Archaeological Information Systems at the University of York, to look at alternative ways of mapping finds in a way which might be more useful in informing DC decisions. The project looked at an area within Selby District in North Yorkshire, incorporating North Yorkshire County Council (NYCC) HER and Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) finds data, using Arcview GIS software.

At an initial stage, it was thought that what was needed was what I called an Artefact Density Index (ADI). The ADI was envisaged as a grid of data across the whole project area which would reflect the density of finds within each grid cell.

It was hoped that by producing this data, hot spots of finds might become evident, which could help influence DC decisions. It should also be made clear that the ADI was always envisaged as an additional data source to aid DC decisions, rather than the sole source to be used.

The eventual methodology chosen for creating the ADI was briefly as follows. Finds were initially classified into generic classes. These classes were those used in the Archaeological Objects Thesaurus (MDA 1997). This is because it is the INSCRIPTION recommended Thesaurus, and also because it is what is actually used in the NYCC HER and PAS data. Finds were also classified by broad period (e.g. Prehistoric, Iron Age etc).

The data were then added to polygon files; so that a parish polygon might also record that it had 3 Prehistoric Armour and Weapon finds within it, 2 Medieval Currency finds, and so on. This process was carried out for all the polygons used. This data was then combined, with the values being weighted to reflect the precision of the location of the finds (i.e. finds recorded only at parish level were given less weight than those recorded more precisely). This process involved converting the polygon data into grids, and then combining these grid layers.

The actual computing process involved was complex, but the eventual outcome was a grid of values representing a number of ADI's (e.g. one for Prehistoric Armour and Weapons; another for Medieval Currency, etc) for each grid cell. Whilst the raw numbers might be difficult to interpret, thematic mapping of the results can be used to show areas of higher artefact denser,

which may indicate clusters of activity. It is also possible to thematically map the data in a variety of ways, for example all medieval finds could be mapped to give some indication of the pattern of medieval activity across the landscape.

As stated, the model cannot be used in isolation, and its application still needs to be tested, but it is believed that this is a useful exploration of one way of mapping imprecisely located stray finds, and incorporating the information they represent into the DC process.

References
Boldrini, N (2005) *Mapping Ambiguity: Using stray finds data to determine archaeological potential in North Yorkshire* Unpublished Thesis University of York

Fernie, K; Gilman, P (Eds). (2000). *Informing the future of the past: Guidelines for SMR's.* English Heritage: Swindon.

Museum Documentation Association (1997). *Archaeological Objects Thesaurus.* http://www.mda.org.uk/archobj/archint.htm#Class

Ordnance Survey (1978) Archaeology Division Map

'Recording of Antiquities'. Appendix 1. In Baker, D; Jeffrey, T; Hedges, J (Eds). (1978). *A guide to the establishment of sites and monuments records.* ACAO. pp 29 – 31

Phillips, C W. (1980). *Archaeology in the Ordnance Survey 1791 – 1965.* The Council for British Archaeology. London.

English Heritage Copyrighted Material: It's free and it's legal! The Future of the ALGAO Licence Agreement
Martin Newman and Nick Davis, English Heritage

The more seasoned campaigners amongst you who belong to ALGAO member authorities will perhaps recall that nearly six years ago a warmly received offer was made by the National Monuments Record (NMR): An agreement had been reached within which ALGAO members maintaining heritage management databases could, through the simple process of 'signing on the dotted line', gain permission to hold and disseminate NMR material. The material in question was that which was held by the NMR under the terms of English Heritage Copyright and all this could be yours free, gratis and for nothing!

Since the instigation of the project SMRs have begun the process of metamorphosis into HERs and, so far, sixty authorities have, after taking up the offer, been aided in this transition by additional information received from the NMR. A questionnaire undertaken in 2004 sought to monitor progress and to review the arrangements entailed within the terms of the agreement. The findings from this have informed subsequent discussions between the NMR and ALGAO. It would seem therefore an appropriate time to take stock and look to the future of the initiative.

What HERs Should Receive

Those who have come to the agreement more recently might appreciate a quick resumé of the entitlements associated with it:

After signing HERs initially receive:
- An initial pack of information containing details of the licensing agreement.
- A checklist of information to be supplied.
- Some information about NMR holdings not included under the agreement (including listings from selected

catalogues) and details of services available from the NMR including top copies of forms.

Under the agreement HERs are then entitled to:
- Lists of Archaeological Surveys
- Lists of Buildings Files/Lists of Air Photographs
- Copies of EH copyright survey reports post 1999
- Lists of Events Records
- Lists of Monuments Records.

Not all participating HERs have so far received all of the above. However, the NMR is now renewing its efforts in this respect as the survey showed that the majority of those who had received material found it useful. Evidence suggests that there is potentially even more useful information in the next batch of material that is to be to be supplied. This will include listings of monuments records. The 2004 NMR/HER concordance exercise (EH 2004) revealed that 10% of monuments in the NMR were not present in HERs. These listings will thus potentially enable HERs to identify gaps in their record and remedy them employing NMR data accessed through PastScape. More detailed information on monuments

that appear in both the NMR and HER records may also be available.

In addition the NMR is currently planning to deliver three other categories of material at regular intervals as they become available to the NMR:
- Technical reports produced by Archaeological Survey, Architectural Survey or Aerial Survey.
- Plots produced by the National Mapping Programme.
- Plans produced by Archaeological Survey.

Perhaps the most significant entitlement conferred by the agreement, however, is to legitimise the dissemination of English Heritage copyright material by participating HERs, a privilege which is not granted to those outside the initiative.

The Future

The next stage of the dissemination will see the NMR supply the remainder of the data still outstanding under the terms of the agreement to all signatory organisations. Once the NMR has complied with these existing arrangements, attention will be turned to promoting the initiative to those who have not yet taken up the offer.

Consideration is also being given to a list (assembled from information gathered by the 2004 questionnaire) of other NMR material which those who responded said they would like to receive.

HERS that are not currently signed up to the initiative and would like to join should contact Duncan Brown at duncan.brown@english-heritage.org.uk. Queries concerning material outside of the agreement should be addressed to nmrinfo@english-heritage.org.uk.

References
EH, 2004 NMR/HER concordance report
EH, 2005, ALGAO Questionnaire Report Summary
www.english-heritage.org.uk/pastscape

News in Brief

Publications

Parfitt, C. (ed) *Buildings at Risk: The Register 2005.* (2005) English Heritage, London.

Fidler, J. *Discovering the Past, Shaping the Future: Providing the knowledge base for the Historic Environment and its sustainable management.* (2005) English Heritage, London.

Embree, S. & Stevens, J. (eds) *English Heritage Research Agenda: An introduction to English Heritage's Research Themes and Programmes (2005)* English Heritage, London.

Cowell, B., Trow, S. & Tunnicliffe, S. (eds) *Heritage Counts: The state of England's Historic Environment 2005* (2005) English Heritage, London. Available at www.heritagecounts.org.uk

People

Alex Godden has joined Hampshire County Council as an Archaeological Assistant.

Rachel Salter, formerly of the Isle of Wight County Archaeology Service, has now joined Hampshire County Council as an Archaeological Assistant.

Ian Scrivener-Lindley has been appointed SMR Officer for Chichester.

Jenny Stevens, formerly of Portsmouth SMR, has now become Curator of the Museum of the Iron Age at Hampshire Museums and Archives Service.

Diary

7th-8th February
Archaeology, Planning and Development
Course covering a broad range of relevant topics including primary

legislation, PPG 16 and local authority spatial planning. (Oxford, Oxford University Continuing Education) E-mail alison.macdonald@conted.ox.ac.uk

14th-15th February
Aerial Photography: Archaeological interpretation and mapping.
Course aiming to provide skills necessary to identify and understand archaeological features on aerial photographs. (Oxford, Oxford University Continuing Education). E-mail alison.macdonald@conted.ox.ac.uk

22nd February
Historic Environment Sources on the Web.
One day course. (Oxford, Oxford University Continuing Education) E-mail alison.macdonald@conted.ox.ac.uk

25th February
Silbury Hill
Day school. (Oxford, Oxford University Continuing Education) E-mail alison.macdonald@conted.ox.ac.uk

4th March
Aerial Archaeology in Europe.
One day course describing the basics of aerial archaeology and its significance for an improved understanding of our past.

(Somerset, Dillington House) E-mail dillington@somerset.gov.uk

7th March
An Introduction to Architecture for Archaeologists (Part 1)
Two day course (see 12th April) providing, in concise form, a broad framework for analysing, dating and understanding a series of major building types. (Oxford, Oxford University Continuing Education) E-mail alison.macdonald@conted.ox.ac.uk

15th March-17th March
Public Inquiry Workshop.
Practical course designed to improve the performance of those who may be called upon to participate in a public enquiry concerned with the historic environment. (Oxford, Oxford University Continuing Education) E-mail alison.macdonald@conted.ox.ac.uk

18th March
Historic English Landscapes.
One day course. (Oxford, Christ Church) Contact AST, 3 White's Forge, Appleton, Oxford OX13 5LG

20th March
Managing Archaeological Publication.
One day course examining the essentials of preparing reports for publication.

(Oxford, Oxford University Continuing Education) E-mail
alison.macdonald@conted.ox.ac.uk

21st March
West Midlands HER Forum.
(Warwick)

24th-26th March
Maritime Archaeology
Week-end course considering the nature of the subject and presenting examples of recent research. (Oxford, Oxford University Continuing Education) E-mail
alison.macdonald@conted.ox.ac.uk

30th-31st March
Computer Applications and Quantitative Methods in Archaeology (UK Chapter) Conference.
(Southampton, Southampton University) E-mail
graeme.earl@soton.ac.uk

3rd-4th April
Environmental Assessment and the Cultural Heritage.
Course outlining the principles of Environmental Assessment and its role in managing the cultural heritage. (Oxford, Oxford University Continuing Education) E-mail
alison.macdonald@conted.ox.ac.uk

8th April
Council for British Archaeology South-West AGM: Metal Detectors and Archaeology.

(Yeovil, Yeovil College-To be confirmed)

11th-13th April
IFA Annual Conference for Archaeologists: Identity.
(Edinburgh, University of Edinburgh) E-mail
admin@archaeologists.net

12th April
An Introduction to Architecture for Archaeologists (Part 2).
See 7th March.

18th-23rd April
Computer Applications and Quantitative Methods in Archaeology: Annual Conference.
(Fargo, North Dakota, North Dakota State University) E-mail
registration@www.caa2006.org

22nd-23rd April
Regionality in Roman Britain.
Week-end course.
(Oxford, Oxford University Continuing Education) E-mail
alison.macdonald@conted.ox.ac.uk

25th April
South-East HER/SMR Working Party Meeting.
(Reading, Berkshire).

1st-5th May
Archaeological Survey Week: Analysing and Recording Historic Landscapes.
An intensive practical training corse providing an introduction to analytical

site and landscape investigation. (Oxford, Oxford University Continuing Education) E-mail
alison.macdonald@conted.ox.ac.uk

11th-12th May
Historic Gardens and Landscapes: Threats and the Conservation Tool Kit.
(Oxford, Oxford University Continuing Education) E-mail
alison.macdonald@conted.ox.ac.uk

19th May
Planning and the Historic Environment: The new regime.
Day school reviewing refinements to the systems involved in managing the historic environment resulting from the publication of the Heritage White Paper in Spring of this year. (Oxford, Oxford University Continuing Education) E-mail
alison.macdonald@conted.ox.ac.uk

29th May-2nd June
Building Survey Week: Analysing and Recording Historic Buildings.
An intensive practical training course introducing participants to the concepts, skills and methods involved in surveying and interpreting historic buildings. (Oxford, Oxford University Continuing Education) E-mail
alison.macdonald@conted.ox.ac.uk

10th June
Yorkshire, Humber and North East SMR/HER Working Party.
(Northallerton).

15th June
ALGAO HER Committee Meeting.
(English Heritage, West Midlands Region, Birmingham).

July
HER Forum Meeting exploring the reforms to Heritage Protection and their potential implications. (Venue to be confirmed*).

* If you are able to offer a suitable venue to host the next meeting (ideally needs to be easily accessible by public transport from various parts of the country) do please get in touch.

Contact
nick.davis@english-heritage.org.uk

The Future of HER News – a footnote

Bruce Howard, English Heritage

Readers of HER News may be interested to know that this issue will be the last in its present format. The next issue of the newsletter would have normally been published in July, but as the Heritage Gateway (see article on page 2 by Catherine Cayley) will be available online starting from about April/May 2006, it has been decided to host the content of HER News on that web site along with the archive of past issues of SMR and HER News. The role fulfilled by HER News will be continued within elements of the new Heritage Gateway website.

By doing this we hope that you will find the HER News area of the Heritage Gateway becoming a more dynamic electronic publication which will include content from across the Historic Environment sector (including historic buildings to a larger extent than previously).

Content is being commissioned from HERs and others in the sector and will in due course be fully cross-searchable.

An email will be sent out via the HER Forum list with a hyperlink to the relevant web page once the material is available online. More details to follow…..

Submissions and ideas for content (as well as events for the diary) for the new online version of HER News can still be emailed to the existing editors here at English Heritage using the following contact details: