

The Newsletter of the SMR Software Users Group

An Update on SMR issues

Dave Barrett, Convenor ALGAO
SMR Sub-committee

These are interesting times for SMRs with a number of important and interlinked initiatives which are developing at a sometimes unnerving pace. I was pleased therefore, to be offered the opportunity in Glenn's absence to try to provide an update on developments. I am also particularly concerned that information on developments does get through to SMR officers and staff and I am aware that this has not always happened as well as it might, despite our best efforts.

As I hope you are all aware the Joint Cooperation statement on SMRs between the RCHME, EH and ALGAO was launched in April and I hope that this will provide a very positive platform for genuine cooperation between the national bodies in developing local SMRs as part of a truly national network of information systems in the new millennium. Copies of this should have been sent out to all ALGAO members, but if anyone is having difficulty seeing a copy please contact Caroline Ingel at Essex, who would be able to send you one.

The Joint Statement identifies the Heritage Lottery as one source of funding to help in progressing developments in SMRs and making the information they contain more accessible and the HLF themselves have identified SMRs as a specific area of funding. Currently representatives from ALGAO, including some SMR officers, RCHME and EH with involvement from ADS, are developing a document for the HLF which will provide a framework within which individual SMRs can make bids for grant aid. The HLF is keen to see the idea of a national network and Integrated Information System develop and some resources will certainly go towards leading edge projects, which explore the idea of networks and synthesis and public accessibility. However, I want to make it clear that the framework document is intended to allow every SMR the opportunity of bidding for funds, whatever their current state of development. Further discussions are needed with the HLF, but it is hoped to have a document ready by the end of July.

Informing the preparation of this document is the SMR Assessment Project, which is being carried out by David Baker on behalf of ALGAO. I would like to take this opportunity of thanking everybody who took time to

fill out what was a daunting looking questionnaire. Initially there was an 80% return rate, which will probably rise to c. 90%, an excellent response. David Baker is still working on the report and this will be available for comment and discussion in the near future. It is likely that the Scottish SMRs will be assessed in a similar way over the next few months and we will have the beginnings of a truly national overview of our local archaeological records.

Underpinning all of these initiatives is the continuing development of agreed recording standards. The Thesaurus of Monument Types and MIDAS have made important strides but there are still areas to develop. The new exeGesIS software has highlighted the importance of adopting the Event / Monument model which is a daunting task and one which will clearly take time and resources to fully implement. There is also still a lack of clarity about definition and how prescriptive the standards need to be. Consequently discussions are underway to obtain RCHME funding for ALGAO to appoint a consultant to look at this issue of recording practice.

So it is going to continue to be an exciting time for SMRs and I hope to keep everyone informed of what should be important and I hope stimulating developments.

CALENDAR

COTAC 1998 International Conference: Modern technology and building conservation. 28th June, Old Town Hall, Swindon. Details: Robin Rolfe, 0171 973 3613

Roman Kent and Beyond, Kent Archaeological Society Conference, 24th October, Christchurch College, Canterbury. Tickets £5 Full details at <http://dspace.dial.pipex.com/c.broomfield/kas.htm>

SMR Software Users Group meeting, 17th September, King's Manor, York. The agenda for the meeting is likely to centre on recording practice, SMR assessments, the heritage lottery bid and networking. If you have any suggestions or would like to lead a discussion please contact either Glenn Foard or Kate Fernie by early August.

The statement of co-operation: a future for local Sites and Monuments Records.

Neil Lang.

On 7 April, at the London offices of the Local Government Association, the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England, English Heritage and the Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers launched their joint statement "*Unlocking the Past for the New Millennium: A new statement of co-operation on Sites and Monuments Records in England*". This marks the successful fruition of discussions between these bodies on the strategic development of local SMRs, originally commenced in 1996.

Over the last two years, RCHME has developed a planned series of initiatives in support of SMRs, in partnership with the ALGAO and other bodies. These initiatives have emphasised three major themes: *-standardisation*, through terminology control, promotion of a common data model and affordable software embodying nationally agreed standards; *advocacy*, to promote the interests of local SMRs and place them on a statutory footing; and *access*, enabling SMRs to foster public enjoyment and understanding of the historic environment.

They have resulted in:

- ◆ the production of revised standards for the development of Inventory Records (MIDAS) and the establishment of the Forum for Information Standards in Heritage, England (FISHEN).
- ◆ the initiation of a forum for developing spatial standards, in October last year;
- ◆ the launch of a new suite of software programmes, produced by exeGesIS SDM, in March this year; on-going support of a user

- group for SMRs, and
- ◆ the production of this newsletter (which has a wide and increasing readership, both nationally and internationally, from those wishing to keep up to date with the latest developments in heritage records)
- ◆ the programme of Data Audits (which have enabled SMRs to plan for future developments and prioritise enhancements within a strategic framework)
- ◆ a better interchange of information between the Commission and local authorities, including quarterly publication of all RCHME Surveys undertaken
- ◆ the Co-operation statement
- ◆ co-ordination and financial support to enable bids to the Heritage Lottery Fund, including
- ◆ a consultancy to provide a detailed appraisal of the current state of English SMRs
- ◆ a framework document, currently in preparation, to advise the HLF on SMR submissions

In tandem with these developments, RCHME continues to make representations to local and central government on behalf of SMRs, and has been active throughout the period of the local government review. We continue to press for SMRs to be accorded full statutory status as soon as legislative time is available.

Unlocking the Past for the New Millennium, as a formal mark of the strategic partnership that now exists between the RCHME, EH and ALGAO, offers a new vision and future for these vital services, at a time when many are feeling vulnerable from spending reviews and reorganisations. The partners in the statement will work closely with each other to create a national network of heritage information, accessible to all.

Obtaining the resources to achieve this vision will require careful thought, patience and creativity. The HLF has identified SMR development as an area it will consider supporting as part of the new guidance on applications to it for funding support. However, the window of opportunity

offered by the HLF may not stay open for ever and it is important that SMRs will be able to respond to this opportunity in a timely fashion.

Funding from the Lottery will not be sufficient to realise all of the vision set out in *Unlocking the Past*. However, it is an invaluable start in raising the profile and role of SMRs. It is essential that the available funding is used in a manner which will place SMRs in the best position to bid for further funding in the future, both within their host organisations and outside, through the creation of a highly visible asset.

The level of co-operation between the English SMRs envisaged in the statement presents an exciting and major step forward. The HLF also anticipates that there will be SMR-related lottery bids from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. There have already been several relevant pioneering projects, including the Extended National Database (END) between RCHAMW and the Welsh Trusts, and the CANMORE project, between RCAHMS, the ADS and ORACLE, to provide on-line access to text databases.

The development of a national network should benefit from the collective experience of recording, explaining and publicising the past gained in these initiatives, as well as the extensive work already undertaken in England. Equally, the future development of SMR records must be sufficiently co-ordinated to enable, in time, seamless retrieval of information across the United Kingdom. The CBA is currently assisting through the co-ordination of a new UK forum to discuss and harmonise initiatives.

The creation of the national information network for the heritage will require an unprecedented level of integration and co-operation on the part of local and national bodies. It is a fitting project with which to mark the end of the century, and it is one which I would argue is vital to the well-being of heritage records into the next Millennium.

Modelling the Past - a way ahead

Rob Bourne, Babbie Group Ltd

What are monuments and events?

Since Glenn Foard and Steve Catney's paper at the 1996 IFA conference, there has been a lot of talk about a new structure for SMRs based around the concept of monuments and events. This concept has emerged as an integral part of the current drive to move SMRs into the new millennium and is the core feature of the logical data model for the exeGesIS software.

However, whilst the terms 'monument' and 'event' have been widely used over the last two years, there has been little agreement on the definitions of these terms. It is imperative that definitions are agreed as a matter of urgency. Without this agreement, there is a great danger that non-standard usage will prevent data exchange and jeopardise the creation of an Integrated Information System. As discussed at the SMR Users Group meeting at DCMS, it is intended to discuss definitions at the next meeting.

What is meant by modelling the past?

Modelling of the past is the next stage on from the implementation of the monuments/events structure in the creation of a new era of SMRs. It has to be the way forward for SMRs as they become more accessible to the public and have to compete for attention and resources in a world used to sleek multi-media presentation. An amazing example of such modelling combined with cutting edge IT public presentation was demonstrated at the recent IFA conference in Cambridge. Timeframes have devised an interactive interpretation, reconstruction and presentation of an abbey which has more than a passing reference to Lara Croft and Tomb Raider. If this was a vision of the future, SMRs have a long way to go!

One of the primary purposes of an SMR has to be the interpretation of the data contained within it to produce a dynamic synthesis of the historic environment. That is, in order for SMRs to develop and start to meet the challenge presented by new technology, we must look beyond mere data management and storage to modelling the past in a meaningful, easily accessible form.

All archaeologists are used to modelling the past from the site level to landscapes, regions and even whole countries or continents. We do this all the time in our heads, when talking to colleagues, friends, the public, etc. We all (hopefully) understand our own personal models and the rules and assumptions that we used to create them and, on the whole, most archaeologists use models that are based on a consensus of opinion. This has allowed us to have meaningful discussions with each other and create very sophisticated and elaborate models for most periods of history and prehistory.

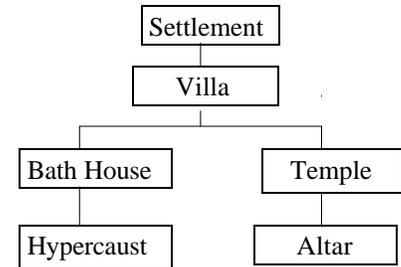
The rules used are generally not explicit, are extremely subjective and sometimes biased by a partial understanding of the evidence. Furthermore, no two people generally use exactly the same rules. As with events/monuments, there is a need to devise recording standards for modelling the past in order to allow understanding, tracking and validation of interpretations. The intention should not be to stifle local individuality or innovation but to set some basic ground rules regarding how to construct meaningful models.

It is suggested here that these recording standards should be based on a hierarchical structuring of the data according to four levels:

- Complex
- Group
- Element
- Find/feature

The boundary between each level is an interpretative leap and is generally rather fuzzy. As a consequence it is imperative for the decision making

process to be recorded to allow for reinterpretation. Without this, the currency and validity of a model would be hard to assess. When constructing models at higher level, e.g. a landscape or region, it is necessary to create links between the relevant complexes and groups. It has also to be made clear whether the hierarchies are based on geographical and / or chronological / cultural relationships.



The model of a Roman settlement is both geographical and chronological. All four levels of the hierarchy occupy all or parts of the same area of land at the same time. The composition of the hierarchy will alter during the time span of the complex as it expanded / contracted.

When building higher level models, it may be that chronological/cultural relationships become more important than geographical relationships, as such a model will contain many archaeological remains that have no physical relationships with other monuments. If a model was constructed in this way, the fact must be made explicit.

There are other ways of modelling the past that are beginning to be explored at a theoretical level utilising concepts such as fuzzy space and fuzzy time, however, although these have enormous potential for exploring landscape development, this article is not the place to discuss them.

What is needed now is an informed debate on the practise of modelling the past in the context of SMRs, in order to devise clear workable rules. I hope that the above example will help fuel this debate.

Sites and Monuments Records Database - Progress Report

exeGesIS Spatial Data Management

The new software package was launched on 2nd March by exeGesIS, RCHME and ALGAO. The software is the result of detailed consultation between ourselves, the RCHME's SMR Liaison Unit and local authority Sites and Monuments Records. We have aimed to provide a flexible and thorough solution for SMR officers that is compatible with national data standards and incorporates the RCHME Thesaurus of Monument Types.

Following extensive user testing and demonstrations of early versions of the software at meetings the response to its launch was immediate. Spurred on by the end of the financial year, 15 organisations had purchased licences for the SMR text database by the middle of April.

The Sites and Monuments Record Database is a modular system with text, image and map management modules. The release of the MapInfo GIS link and Photo Library modules coincided with the launch of the text module with 11 organisations purchasing licences for the MapInfo link by mid April. An ArcView link will be available shortly and 2 clients are already waiting for its release.

The level of response to the release of the software in March and early April unfortunately produced a backlog of clients waiting for data migration. At the peak of demand clients were being advised of a 2 months wait for data migration to be completed. Waiting time has now reduced.

Data migration is proceeding smoothly and has been completed for clients in Berkshire, Essex, South Yorkshire and Lincolnshire. Migrations for Bath & North East Somerset and Torbay Councils will soon be completed. On average, data

migration is taking between 3 and 4 days, no system taking longer than 6 days to convert. The most complex data to migrate into the SMR database has been from either the Monarch database or those systems where limited data validation has been carried out in the past.

We are committed to the long term development of the software together with our partners in ALGAO and the RCHME and are constantly receiving ideas for minor modifications and upgrades. Development work will continue over the summer with the completion of the Maritime forms, the Consultations and Site Management module and the ArcView GIS link. The new group (announced below) will provide a forum for users of the SMR database to discuss new ideas and coordinate priorities for upgrades.

If you would like more information about either the SMR database or demonstrations of the system please contact Tony Pettitt of exeGesIS SDM on 01874 711145.

exeGesIS SMR Users Group

Rob Bourne, Babtie Group Ltd.

I have been asked by Bob Croft, the Chairman of ALGAO to act as the Chairman/Secretary of the exeGesIS SMR Users Group. This group intends to support users of the exeGesIS software and to provide a forum for them to discuss such things as recording practices, technical matters, potential future developments, etc..

Meetings of the group will only involve people who are currently using or about to use the software. It is not intended to be exclusive but it is important that discussion remains focussed on the software. Group meetings will be organised alongside meetings of the main SMR Software Users Group where wider SMR issues will be discussed. (Although the two obviously overlap to some degree).

The meetings are likely to be every six months and are intended to be fairly informal. In order to

disseminate information to the wider SMR community I will report significant discussions/decisions to each meeting of the full SMR Users Group. The RCHME will also be attending each meeting of the exeGesIS SMR Users Group.

In order to prevent exeGesIS from being bombarded by disparate requests for future alterations/additions to the system, suggestions should be channelled through the group. This will allow us to assess how well the software is meeting the needs of its users and prioritise suggestions for future development.

I will be contacting all authorities that have purchased the software directly to set up the first meeting.

SMRs and the international perspective

Kate Fernie, RCHME

Over the last twelve months the RCHME has been contacted by people responsible for developing SMRs for Hong Kong, Palestine, Jordan, Syria, Kenya, Sri Lanka and, slightly nearer to home, Guernsey, Scotland and Wales. We have been only too pleased to discuss the information that is being recorded, how it is being used (or may be used in future) and to demonstrate the exeGesIS software. The CIDOC data standard and archaeology means that we share interests and ideas but sometimes hold different viewpoints. It will be very interesting to see their SMRs in action.

Portable Antiquities Initiative

Dr Roger Bland, Co-ordinator,
Department for Culture, Media and
Sport

On 24 September 1997 the Treasure Act, the first ever reform of the medieval law of treasure trove, came into force. At the time of writing the Act has been only in force for seven months and it is too early to assess its long-term impact, although the early signs are encouraging. Some 80 cases of potential treasure have so far been reported, representing roughly a four-fold increase on the previous situation. Of these there are 36 finds of coins, 13 finds of prehistoric and Roman objects and 31 finds of medieval and later objects.

Although the Treasure Act substantially increases the number of finds that receive legal protection, it is clear that only a very small proportion of all finds will come within its scope (a 1995 CBA survey suggested that detector users may be discovering as many as 400,000 archaeological objects a year). For this reason the Department for Culture, Media and Sport is funding an initiative to promote the voluntary recording of all archaeological finds, following the publication of *Portable Antiquities. A discussion document* in March 1996.

The Department is funding five finds liaison officers in Kent (Kent County Council), Norfolk (Norfolk Museums Service), Yorkshire (the Yorkshire Museum and the York Archaeological Trust), the North West (Liverpool Museum) and North Lincolnshire (North Lincolnshire District Museum), for two and a half years from October 1997 until April 2000. In addition the British Museum is funding a sixth post working with five museums in the West Midlands (Birmingham Museum, Warwickshire Museum, Worcestershire Museum, Worcester City Museum and Stoke on Trent City Museum).

Pilot schemes

The aims of the pilot schemes are:

- to advance our knowledge of the history and archaeology of England and Wales;
- to initiate a system for recording of archaeological finds and to encourage and promote better recording practice by finders;
- to strengthen links between the detector users and archaeologists;
- to estimate how many objects are being found across England and Wales and what resources would be needed to record them.

Results so far

Richard Hobbs describes his experiences as Finds Liaison officer in Kent elsewhere in this newsletter. The liaison officers have so far concentrated building up contacts with finders in their areas, the essential groundwork for the scheme, and there is no doubt that the most important part of the liaison officers' role is educational. The raw numbers of objects recorded by each of the liaison officers varies considerably, reflecting the different circumstances in each area, but overall some 5,000 objects have been recorded during the first six months which is a very encouraging start. The support given to the scheme by the National Council for Metal Detecting is an important element in ensuring its success.

Next round of pilot schemes

It is hoped to extend the Portable Antiquities initiative with a second round of pilot schemes starting later this year and bids have been submitted to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a further seven posts for 18 months from this October until 31 March 2000. These bids are from:

- Somerset County Museums Service and Dorset County Council Archaeology Section (a shared post to cover Somerset and Dorset)
- Winchester Museums Service (on behalf of other Hampshire museums to cover Hampshire)

- Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service (Suffolk)
- Northamptonshire Archaeology (Northamptonshire)
- Council of Museums in Wales (the equivalent of two posts on behalf of National Museums & Galleries of Wales and the four Welsh Regional Archaeological Trusts to cover Wales)
- Museums and Galleries Commission (for an Outreach Officer to be based at the British Museum to explain the purpose of the scheme and its results to the public).

The Heritage Lottery Fund's decision is expected in August. If all these bids are successful the initiative will cover more than half of England and Wales by the end of this year.

The scheme has great long-term potential as it could become an immensely important new resource for our past. The goal is to move to a national scheme once the pilot schemes have come to an end in April 2000. The Museums & Galleries Commission, which is acting as the channel for the funding of the current pilot schemes, has agreed to act as the lead body in a consortium including the British Museum, the National Museums & Galleries of Wales, the RCHME and the RCAHMW to make a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a national scheme and to run it.

Portable Antiquities program

It became clear at an early stage in the project that common standards for recording finds did not exist. It also became apparent that the best way to develop standards would be to produce a software program for use by the Finds Liaison Officers. Its development has been a priority of the first six months of the initiative and we are very fortunate to have secured the services of the British Academy's computer officer, Victoria Cassely, who formerly worked for an SMR. We have also been able to incorporate the Archaeological Objects Thesaurus, recently developed for the Museums Documentation Association

by representatives from the RCHME, SMRs, museums and archaeological services. This ensures that objects are described consistently at the highest level; more detailed standards for recording different types of object need to be worked out as the project develops.

A working version of the Program was distributed in May, together with a User Guide that sets out the standards insofar as they have been developed. The records entered by the six liaison officers will be gathered onto a central database at the DCMS which we want to make publicly available (we will be looking at putting the data on the Internet), with safeguards for any information supplied by finders in confidence. When it has been fully developed it is intended that the Program should be freely available to any interested organisation that would like to use it. Hopefully in time it will become a very useful tool.

Role of SMRs

The information about finds will also be passed on to the relevant SMR to ensure that it can also play its full part in the local planning control process. The development of the new SMR software by the RCHME and exeGesIS should greatly ease the process of transferring portable antiquities data by ensuring the adoption of common standards by SMRs. In the longer term if all SMRs were to adopt the new program and if they were all interlinked, then it would no longer be necessary to maintain a separate portable antiquities database. For the present, however, a central portable antiquities database is necessary to ensure that data can be exploited to its full potential.

Leaflet and annual report

A leaflet explaining the scheme to finders, *Recording our Past*, is now in the course of production. The Department will also be publishing a report at the end of the first year of the scheme and a series of leaflets providing basic advice on conservation for finders: these will be freely available.

Metal Detectorists and Archaeologists in Kent

Richard Hobbs, Finds Liaison Officer,
Kent.

Relations between metal detectorists and archaeologists in Kent have been relatively healthy for a number of years, largely due to the existence of the Kent Archaeologists and Detectorists Liaison Group (KADLG), conceived in the early 90s. KADLG came about after a number of successful metal detector rallies (for example, the South of England rally) had taken place in the county, and had brought the two sides together under what were initially confrontational circumstances.

Archaeologists generally do not approve of metal detecting: often, all they see are amateurs digging holes in the ground with no understanding of stratigraphy and the damage which can be caused to archaeological contexts. Even more sacrilegious, archaeologists perceive that the aim of the hobby is the narrow-minded pursuit of personal gain rather than the preservation and disciplined study of our heritage.

When sites get raided or 'nighthawked', this only adds fuel to the fire and blackens the name of responsible detecting further. Because there *is* such a thing as responsible detecting: many clubs and individuals in Kent are only too pleased to show me their finds, tell me exactly where they have come from, and would never dream of digging down into archaeological contexts, respecting that this is the preserve of professionals and an entirely different ball game.

There are also many detectorists who have a deep and disciplined knowledge of material and meticulously kept records which would put many specialists to shame. The point that I am making is that metal detecting is an extremely

powerful tool for the understanding of our past, and therefore can only benefit archaeology if used in the correct manner.

I remember when I first took up this position, Jon Iveson of Dover Museum (which has, incidentally, just provided the White Cliffs Metal Detecting Club with their own case for the display of club finds) said to me that he would personally like to see, in twenty years time, a map of Kent on which we could plot exactly what finds had been made in every farmer's field throughout the county. This is clearly something of a tall order but is, in theory, possible.

Detectorists are at the forefront of field survey (many collecting lithics and ceramics in addition to metal finds), and Sites and Monuments Records can benefit substantially from the systematic recording of this material and the enthusiasm of these hobbyists. That is why detecting is such a powerful tool, and the key aspect of my job is to encourage detectorists to act responsibly and allow their material to be seen and recorded.

I make a point of attending virtually every club meeting (which means eight evenings a month), in order to educate detectorists in practical ways of recording their finds, such as how to take National Grid references and what aspects of different artefact classes should be described. (I can also offer practical advice on the cleaning, preservation, and storage of finds, as few detectorists could afford the services of a professional conservator).

Achieving this requires some considerable public relations dexterity, as detectorists are often extremely suspicious of my motives: gaining trust is no mean feat. I have to demonstrate in the first instance why it is important to record where things have come from (David Holman's distribution maps of Iron Age coins in Kent are a good way of illustrating this, as many club members have come across David at club meetings). Secondly, I have to dispel a number of myths, which crop up time and time again when I visit

clubs: that recording finds will automatically lead to sites becoming scheduled; that landowners will restrict access to their land if finds become known; that archaeologists will use the information to excavate 'their sites'.

I have to explain that the information will not only vastly improve our knowledge of objects themselves, but once on the Sites and Monuments Record will generally only be used to assess the archaeological potential of

Finds Recording and the changing role of SMRs

Chris Addison

SMRs were established principally for the purpose of localised management of the historic landscape, and for this reason the recording of finds assemblages has frequently been given a low priority. Combined pressures of workloads and under-resourcing have led to a distorted dataset in which stray finds have generally been indexed, but more useful artefact assemblages from excavations, fieldwalking etc have not been recorded. The digital revolution has already had a profound effect on the way most SMRs work, but further exploitation of the technology is necessary to ensure comprehensive and enhanced finds-recording. Since the required mechanisms are already largely in-place this can be achieved without significantly increasing the burden on our resources.

Firstly, the majority of meaningful finds data will in future come from developer-funded, planning-based fieldwork. Much of this data is already being computerised by contractors. PPG16 presents the opportunity to apply minimum data-standards to the on-site recording of finds, and also to ensure that those standards will meet the requirements for submission of digital finds data to the SMR. The aim should be not only to import data directly from text-based finds databases, but also to substantially underpin the record with

a particular area of land when and if development occurs.

A long term aim of the project in Kent, in addition to establishing a database of detector finds linked in to the SMR, is the full integration of detecting into the archaeological process. Myself and the County Archaeologist, John Williams, see detector surveys as a desirable aspect of pre-excavation work which can go hand in hand with geophysical survey. (I would even make the

the spatial data necessary for landscape modelling, data such as flint and/or pottery distribution plans from fieldwalking. In Northamptonshire we are currently exploring standards for the submission of digital data using our in-house experience of aerial survey, and pursuing the possibility of a pilot study in collaboration with English Heritage, using data from the Raunds Area Project.

Secondly, the voluntary recording of finds via the Portable Antiquities initiative (funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund) offers the opportunity to establish a system for the recording of finds from "casual fieldwork". It is essential that this project embraces the needs of the archaeological curator and conforms to standards of finds recording employed throughout the profession. Submission for a project in Northamptonshire has recently been made, and will look closely at issues of data transfer and/or networking to the SMR for management purposes.

The two mechanisms above should be sufficient to deal with the vast majority of finds recovery. Initial data standards must deal with issues of software compatibility, recognised data-fields, nationally adopted terminology and the use of metadata to understand the dataset. It is also essential that in both cases the standards used embrace the concepts of Monument/Event/Archive record structure, including the cross-referencing of finds (and features) gathered from fieldwork to **all three** of these datasets in order to retain the

suggestion that in the not too distant future, a small number of detectorists could turn their hobby into a full-time pursuit actually as archaeological consultants: if they become proficient in the use of EDMs and surveying techniques, why not?). All of the above will make for a harmonious relationship of benefit to both archaeologists and detectorists alike, and if a national scheme does materialise, I would hope that we can see the same sorts of things happening over the whole country.

integrity of the original archive, afford traceability for quality control purposes, and provide an effective multi-purpose tool for statistical analysis.

Several issues arise from the above proposals, most significantly perhaps being that they transform the role of SMR staff from data-inputters to data-validators, the archaeological fieldworker assuming a role in SMR data-compilation. The idea was recognised over twenty years ago ".....the volume of artefacts and associated data is such that, if a comprehensive index is to be built up.....indexing of the artefacts must be done at the time the data is collected in the field.....using indexing methods which will be compatible with.....the record as a whole." A Guide to the Establishment of Sites and Monuments Records 1978 ACAO. It must however be considered that whilst these systems might effectively deal with finds-related archaeological data, they do not address the very significant problems of managing existing finds-related, paper-based backlogs by SMRs, nor take account of new backlogs which may be created as a result of the adoption of new recording standards, for example, the comprehensive recording of finds of the post medieval and Industrial periods. However, the technology, legal framework and funding now exists to put into practice ideas first outlined at the very inception of SMRs.

Year 2000 Compliance

Kate Fernie, RCHME

With all the excitement and controversy over the Millennium Dome and Tony Blair getting in on the act, Year 2000 compliance has been in the news lately. Many of you will have had your computer systems checked already but this is intended as a timely reminder for those with more limited access to IT support.

Year 2000 problems can affect both your hardware and your software. Computers and other electrical machines contain microchips with date counters. If the date counter uses 2 digits for the year rather than 4 digits, i.e. 98 rather than 1998, on the 1st of January 2000 you will have problems. Date fields within SMR databases may also be affected; although Data Audits have revealed that in many of the older SMR systems dates are stored in text fields.

Another problem for some systems is the use of 99 in a year field to indicate a special condition, e.g. end of file.

The problem originated in the early days of computing when memory and storage space were expensive. Despite the rapid reduction in costs of both in the last 10 years the IT industry has been quite slow in dealing with issue. Even fairly new hardware and software may cause you problems.

SMR officers and County Archaeologists should be making sure that their computer systems are tested for year 2000 compliance. Even if you are confident that your SMR database is year 2000 compliant (e.g. if you have recently purchased the exeGesIS software) you will need to check the computer or network that it is running over.

A simple test is to reset the internal clock on your PC to the last few minutes of 1999 and wait to see if the clock rolls forwards to 2000 - or 1900! Another test is to enter dates beyond the year 2000 into your databases.

Don't leave it too late to assess the resources required to keep your SMR running in the year 2000.

Local Government Reorganisation - new administrative arrangements

Berkshire County Council was abolished on April 1st 1998 and replaced by six unitary authorities: Bracknell Forest, Slough, Reading, Windsor & Maidenhead, West Berkshire and Wokingham. Following the installation of the new exeGesIS software, the database was split into its six constituent parts and consequently each unitary authority has its own SMR. These are held centrally by Babcie Group who are contracted to maintain and develop each SMR and deliver archaeological related planning advice. The Babcie Group can be contacted at its new address: School Green, Shinfield, Reading, RG2 9HL. 0118 988 1611

Hereford & Worcestershire County Council was abolished on April 1st 1998 and replaced by two authorities: Herefordshire Council and Worcestershire Council. The SMR is to be disaggregated and Herefordshire

Council is in the process of appointing a County Archaeologist and SMR Officer. Worcestershire Council have retained the services of the County Archaeologist and SMR Officer from the former joint authority and will be hosting the SMR until the process of disaggregation is complete.

Peterborough Council has become a unitary authority and has disaggregated its SMR from Cambridgeshire. A new SMR Officer, Ben Robinson, has been appointed and is installing a computerised database for the city.

Southend Council became a unitary authority on the 1st April and will be maintaining its own SMR. Essex County Council have transferred a paper copy of the SMR for Southend. No SMR officer is currently in post.

PEOPLE

Bruce Howard is the new SMR Officer (Assistant Archaeologist) for Hampshire County Council.

Neil Lang and Chris Cox are the proud parents of twins - Caitlin and Richard.

Jim McNeil is another proud parent - to a son, Alaistair.

Bob Yarwood has retired from the West Yorkshire Archaeology Service.

MOVES

Lincolnshire SMR has now moved into County Hall. The address is: Lincolnshire County Council, Archaeology Section, Highways & Planning Directorate, 4th Floor, County Hall, Lincoln, LN1 1DN. Telephone: 01522 553072, Fax: 01522 552811.

West Midlands SMR is now a subsidiary of Mott Macdonald and its new address is:

jdt, Canterbury House, 85 Newhall Street, Birmingham, B3 1LZ. Telephone: 0121 237 4002 Fax: 0121 237 4003

Lancashire SMR has become part of the Environment Department and has moved to: Guild House, P.O. Box 9, Cross Street, Preston, PR1 8RD. Telephone: 01772 261551 Fax: 01772 264201

THANKS to everyone for confirming their address details. There were lots of minor changes to departments, post codes, phone numbers etc. Keep me posted!