

# **Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials**

---

Published December 2014

Updated October 2020

- Minor formatting changes made

The Chartered Institute for Archaeologists is incorporated by Royal Charter.

Power Steele Building, Wessex Hall, Whiteknights Road, Earley, Reading, RG6  
6DE

---

# **Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials**

---

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <b>Definition of finds work</b>                      | <b>3</b>  |
| <b>Purpose of finds work</b>                         | <b>3</b>  |
| <b>Occurrence of finds work</b>                      | <b>3</b>  |
| <b>1 Introduction</b>                                | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>2 Principles</b>                                  | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>3 Procedures</b>                                  | <b>5</b>  |
| <b>3.1 Preamble</b>                                  | <b>5</b>  |
| <b>3.2 Project identification</b>                    | <b>5</b>  |
| <b>3.3 Project specifications and design</b>         | <b>6</b>  |
| <b>3.4 Fieldwork</b>                                 | <b>7</b>  |
| <b>3.5 Post-excavation assessment</b>                | <b>7</b>  |
| <b>3.6 Post-excavation project design</b>            | <b>8</b>  |
| <b>3.7 Analysis</b>                                  | <b>8</b>  |
| <b>3.8 Publication and dissemination</b>             | <b>8</b>  |
| <b>3.9 Monitoring</b>                                | <b>9</b>  |
| <b>3.10 Archives, ownership and deposition</b>       | <b>9</b>  |
| <b>3.11 Other considerations</b>                     | <b>11</b> |
| <b>Annex 1: Checklist for finds work</b>             | <b>13</b> |
| <b>Annex 2: Recommendations for digital archives</b> | <b>15</b> |

## The Standard

**Collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials (hereafter finds work) will result in an ordered, stable, accessible archive using appropriate methods and practices. Finds work will result in report(s) intended for dissemination. The methods and practices employed must satisfy the stated aims of any project of which finds work comprises all or part, and comply with the *Code of conduct* and other relevant regulations of Cifa.**

### Definition of finds work

Finds work is defined as the process of retrieving, sorting, cleaning, marking, conserving, recording, analysing, interpreting and preparing for permanent storage all materials retained as a result of archaeological fieldwork, and disseminating the results. The term 'finds' is taken to include all artefacts, building materials, industrial residues, environmental material, biological remains (including human remains) and decay products.

### Purpose of finds work

Finds work seeks to provide an understanding of societies and their environments, not only at a site-specific level, but also in a local, regional, national and international context. The results of this work must be documented and should be disseminated in one or more published accounts. Finds work also creates a stable, ordered, well documented, accessible material archive, which should act as a resource for current and future research. Finds work contributes to the formulation of conservation, preservation, collection, dispersal, presentation, education and management strategies, as well as to local, regional, national and international research frameworks and policies.

### Occurrence of finds work

Finds work may occur

- a. as part of a programme of field evaluation, excavation, watching brief and building investigation and recording
- b. as part of a programme of investigation of archaeological materials
- c. within a programme of research not generated by a specific threat to the archaeological resource
- d. within the context of the interpretation and presentation of the finds to the public
- e. as a result of enquiries by members of the public
- f. as a result of the continuing curation and care of collections in long-term storage
- g. as a result of the requirements of planning and heritage legislation

Finds work may therefore be instigated or commissioned by a number of different individuals or organisations, including local authorities, archaeological trusts and units, national bodies, government agencies, educational establishments, private owners, members of the public, developers or their agents, or archaeological researchers.

## GUIDANCE

### 1 Introduction

- 1.1 This guidance seeks to define best practice in the execution of finds work and concomitant reporting, in line with the regulations of ClfA (in particular the *Code of conduct*). It seeks to expand and explain general definitions in the *Code* for the practice of finds work and reporting.
- 1.2 The Standard and guidance applies to all archaeological projects involving finds work, irrespective of research objectives and size. The guidance has been compiled so that all those involved with archaeological finds work, whether excavators, finds research staff, archaeological curators, museum curators, site owners, developers or others, have an agreed framework within which to define the range and extent of activities that must be undertaken in a finds project or in the finds work element of a larger project, thus setting a standard against which compliance can be measured. Compliance necessarily requires resources to be adequately allocated.
- 1.3 In addition, this guidance seeks to amplify directions given in national planning guidance (see Appendix 6) and to be compatible with current guidelines issued by other authorities, such as the UK Institute for Conservation, Resource: The Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries, and the Society of Museum Archaeologists (see Appendix 7).
- 1.4 Finds work must be fully integrated into all stages of the archaeological process, from the earliest stage in project planning. All persons expected to contribute to the finds work of a project should be fully involved with project planning throughout the life of the project.
- 1.5 This document provides guidance for work carried out in the United Kingdom and Isle of Man. Although general guidance is given, this document cannot be exhaustive, particularly in its treatment of legislative issues. Archaeologists must ensure they are familiar with the specific legislation and common law pertinent to the area of the United Kingdom and Isle of Man in which they are working. Archaeologists, commissioning bodies and others may find it useful to consult the relevant documents listed in Appendix 6 and can obtain further guidance from the appropriate advisory bodies listed in Appendix 7.

### 2 Principles: the Code of conduct and other regulations of the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists

- 2.1 An archaeologist undertaking finds work must adhere to the principles enshrined in ClfA's *Code of conduct*, and the rules governing those principles:
  1. A member shall adhere to high standards of ethical and responsible behaviour in the conduct of archaeological affairs.
  2. A member has a responsibility for the conservation of the historic environment.
  3. A member shall conduct his or her work in such a way that reliable information about the past may be acquired, and shall ensure that the results be properly recorded.

4. A member has responsibility for making available the results of archaeological work with reasonable dispatch.
  5. A member shall recognise the aspirations of employees, colleagues and helpers with regard to all matters relating to employment, including career development, health and safety, terms and conditions of employment and equality of opportunity.
- 2.2 Following rule 1.4 of the *Code of conduct*, an archaeologist shall not undertake finds work for which he or she is not adequately qualified.

### **3 Procedures**

#### **3.1 Preamble**

- 3.1.1 The importance of finds work to the understanding of archaeological sites is widely accepted. The significance of finds is, however, conditioned by methods of recovery, treatment, recording, analysis and curation. The following sets out good practice in the administration and implementation of finds work.
- 3.1.2 Two points are fundamental to the successful organisation of finds work:
- a. finds work needs to be fully integrated into all stages of the archaeological process, from the earliest stage in project planning
  - b. those with the necessary understanding of the contribution finds work can make to a project should be fully involved with project planning throughout the life of the project. This means people with expertise in the methods of recovery, treatment, analysis and archiving, those with specialist regional and period expertise and persons currently undertaking finds work.

#### **3.2 Project identification**

- 3.2.1 Finds work may:
- a. form part of a programme of intrusive fieldwork and subsequent analysis, by whatever route it occurs (whereby archaeological material is removed from the context of deposition in antiquity)
  - b. form part or all of a project of interpretation and presentation of archaeological material to the public, including displays and publications
  - c. form part or all of a programme of curation and care of collections in long-term storage designed to ensure a stable and accessible archive
  - d. be initiated by the requirement to assess, identify and record archaeological material in the context of legislation and practice relating to portable antiquities

An archaeologist should only undertake such finds work if it is governed by a written specification or project design (see Appendices 2 and 3), agreed by all relevant parties as this

is the tool against which performance, fitness for purpose and hence achievement of standards, can be measured.

- 3.2.2 Finds work may also be carried out in furtherance of research that does not affect the long-term stability and accessibility of the archaeological material or its documentation. A written specification or project design may not always be necessary in such circumstances.

### **3.3 Project specifications and design**

- 3.3.1 Finds work, which can encompass some or all of the activities of recovery, assessment of data, analysis, interpretation, publication, conservation, archiving and storage, must be identified and costed whether it be an element of a programme of fieldwork, or a project in its own right. A project design should be written, setting out a schedule of works in sufficient detail for the work undertaken to be quantifiable, implemented and monitored.
- 3.3.2 A recovery policy for archaeological material outlining aims and methods should be written for submission as part of a fieldwork project design and specification. This will reflect the number and type of material expected, excavation methods, sampling strategies, finds retention, the nature of soil deposits, and the achievement of the project research aims.
- 3.3.3 Suitably qualified and experienced archaeologists should be involved in the preparation of the project design and in undertaking finds recovery and analysis.
- 3.3.4 Those involved with recovery, treatment and packing and subsequent analysis of archaeological material must be fully familiar with accepted methods for its care and storage.
- 3.3.5 Provision must be made for suitable premises for finds work, both on and off site. Provision must be made for appropriate numbers of suitably trained and qualified staff to recover, process, record and store archaeological material during fieldwork, and to prepare the finds element of the site archive. Provision should be made, where possible, for the continuity of finds staff into the post-excavation phase of the project.
- 3.3.6 Finds collection and discard policies, strategies and techniques must benefit the defined purpose and be understood by all staff and subcontractors.
- 3.3.7 Appropriate provision should be made for the physical/chemical stability and security of finds and the finds archive, both on and off site.
- 3.3.8 The programme of work will result in a stable archive. The specification or project design should identify relevant data standards for records organisation and content that will be used in information recording systems employed by the project.
- 3.3.9 The project design should address assignment of ownership of archaeological material and requirements for the deposition of the archive with a recipient museum or repository.
- 3.3.10 It is essential that communication and liaison between all project workers are maintained throughout the programme to ensure dissemination of information and

monitoring of project progress. It is vital that specialists liaise directly with the illustrator/photographer working on the material.

### **3.4 Fieldwork**

- 3.4.1 During invasive fieldwork, the recovery policy for archaeological material should be kept under review and, if necessary, amended. Any changes in recovery priorities or procedures should be agreed and documented for inclusion in the project archive.
- 3.4.2 There should be a presumption against disposal of archaeological material during invasive fieldwork. Any disposal that does take place should be on academic and professional grounds and, where possible and appropriate, in consultation with the receiving museum. The reason for any disposal, the manner in which it is done, and where the material was disposed of should all be documented in the fieldwork archive.
- 3.4.3 Selective sampling of archaeological data is a valid method of saving valuable time and resources, especially when dealing with very large quantities of mundane or repetitive evidence. Any sampling should be clearly documented and its implications for analysis recognised.
- 3.4.4 All finds and samples must be collected, processed, sorted, quantified, recorded, labelled, packed and stored according to the project design, or agreed with the archaeological curator, planning archaeologist or recipient museum or repository. Provision should be made to consult designated conservators and other specialists in circumstances which require specialist advice. An archaeologist must ensure that digital information, paper and photographic records should be stored in a secure and appropriate environment, and be regularly copied or backed up, and copies stored in a separate location.
- 3.4.5 Health and Safety take priority over archaeological requirements. All people conducting finds work should do so under a defined Health and Safety policy. Archaeologists undertaking finds work should observe safe working practices; the Health and Safety arrangements should be agreed and understood by all relevant parties before work commences. Risk assessments should be carried out and documented for every project. All archaeologists have a professional and moral responsibility to report unsafe practice.

### **3.5 Post-excavation assessment**

- 3.5.1 After processing, including conservation, recording and marking, the finds assemblage must be assessed to give an overview of its potential to meet the research aims of the project. The value of the archaeological material for research and/or educational use beyond the terms of the project design should also be recorded. The recommendations for the extent or depth of further analysis of all, or selected components, of the finds assemblage should be given and justified at this stage, and will contribute to the updated project design. The assessment will also determine the resource requirements for analysis and identify conservation needs both for analysis and long-term storage and curation. Further analysis should not proceed without the assessment.
- 3.5.2 Assessment of finds material recovered from intrusive fieldwork cannot be undertaken without knowledge of its provenance. Information on context, phasing, date and

methods of retrieval and an internally consistent stratigraphic matrix should be provided for assessment.

- 3.5.3 In Scotland, a list of all finds from fieldwork must be supplied in line with Treasure Trove requirements.

### **3.6 Post-excavation project design**

- 3.6.1 An updated project design will incorporate contributions from finds assessment.
- 3.6.2 The updated project design will specify the methods and resources for each category of finds work required to fulfil the project's revised research aims.
- 3.6.3 The updated project design will include a task list indicating which personnel will undertake which finds tasks, the methods by which the tasks will be carried out, the duration and cost of each task including archive preparation and deposition, and the intended scope and nature of dissemination.

### **3.7 Analysis**

- 3.7.1 All analysis must conform to the project design or post-excavation project design; any variation must be confirmed by all relevant parties in writing.
- 3.7.2 All techniques used must be demonstrably fit for the defined purpose(s) and comply with relevant legislation.
- 3.7.3 Those carrying out the work should be suitably qualified and experienced, and fully aware of the work required under the project design or post-excavation project design.
- 3.7.4 Analysis may include examination and quantification leading to the identification of function, form, date, method of manufacture, material/fabric type, source, parallels, attributes and condition of artefacts; of the exploitation of wild or domesticated resources; the reconstruction of environments; and the nature of human populations. The use of regional (where appropriate) reference collections is essential. Post-excavation work is normally an iterative exchange of information between project team members which may refine by agreement the scope and structure of the report.
- 3.7.5 Material sent to, and retrieved from, outside specialists must be appropriately documented, packed, and transported.
- 3.7.6 A stable, accessible archive must be created. All data generated as a result of analysis should be included in the project archive.

### **3.8 Publication and dissemination**

- 3.8.1 The publication format should conform to the project design.
- 3.8.2 Subject to the project design, any publication should include sufficient finds data and illustrations to support all the conclusions drawn from the evidence and permit interpretation to be challenged. Published finds data should be capable of being linked

to provenance and phase, and evidence from the finds should be included in the overall discussion and conclusions.

- 3.8.3 Subject to the project design, published finds reports should describe the methods employed during assessment and analysis and indicate any constraints on report preparation. The report should include a quantification of all material categories, including those not selected for analysis or publication, with a statement outlining the reasons for selection. The dates of commencement, completion and revision should be published.
- 3.8.4 The report should discuss factors affecting the reliability of the evidence and its contribution to such issues as dating, phasing, site formation processes, socio-economic trends, technology, climate and demography.
- 3.8.5 Contributors must be given the opportunity to check and correct their reports during any major revision of the text, to correct the final draft and, wherever possible, to check proofs. Specialist authors must be allowed to read and comment on sections where their data has been integrated and synthesised. All specialists should be credited in the publication in a way that makes the nature and scope of their contribution clear. The names of finds illustrators, photographers and conservators should be included. If specialist finds work comprises a substantial part of the publication, those specialist(s) should be credited as co-author(s).
- 3.8.6 The final report should specify where every component of the archive is deposited. Accession numbers given by the receiving institutions should be published whenever possible. The existence and location of unpublished documentation, if known, should be indicated.
- 3.8.7 Consideration should be given to publicising the results of finds work through a range of media, from conventional archaeological publications to, for example, display panels, exhibitions and lectures, open days and school visits, radio and television programmes, videos and popular publications and the Internet.

### **3.9 Monitoring**

- 3.9.1 Where finds work is part of a fieldwork project it should be included in the overall project monitoring process. Archaeologists should also expect representatives of the planning authority to ensure that standards are met. In Northern Ireland, where any search for archaeological objects must be licensed, this monitoring will be undertaken by representatives of the licensing body, and in some parts of the UK (but not Scotland) representatives of the receiving institution may monitor finds work.
- 3.9.2 Specialists may also be monitored by project managers to ensure the requirements of the project design are met. A monitor should be suitably experienced and qualified, or have access to appropriate specialist advice, according to the specified purpose of the monitoring.

### **3.10 Archives, ownership and deposition**

- 3.10.1 The requirements for archive preparation and deposition must be addressed at the outset of the project. The proposed recipient museum or other approved repository

must be contacted at the project planning stage and arrangements for deposition of the material archive should be detailed in the specification and/or project design. Requirements for archive deposition vary across jurisdictions, therefore the specific requirements for the country or region being worked in must be consulted.

- 3.10.2 The archive, including all retained artefacts and ecofacts, must be treated and packaged in accordance with the requirements of the recipient museum/repository and national guidelines. The treatment of human remains will be governed by the relevant legislation and government regulations.
- 3.10.3 In England, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Isle of Man, ownership of objects rests with the landowner, except where other law overrides. In Scotland, in the absence of an original owner or his/her demonstrable heir, ownership of objects rests with the Crown. The archaeologist undertaking the fieldwork, or the planning archaeologist, must make this clear at the inception of the project (in the brief/project outline, specification or project design).
- 3.10.4 It should be noted that in England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Isle of Man there are differing finds reporting and deposition procedures. Archaeologists are advised to seek specific advice on excavation and export procedures as in some instances licences are required.
- 3.10.5 Except in Scotland, it is the responsibility of the archaeologist undertaking the fieldwork to endeavour to obtain the written consent of the landowner for finds donation and deposition with the recipient museum.
- 3.10.6 Except in Scotland, in the event that the landowner is unwilling, for whatever reason, to donate the finds to the appropriate recipient museum, the archaeologist undertaking the fieldwork must endeavour to ensure all artefacts and ecofacts are recorded, safely packaged and conserved where appropriate before transfer to the owner, and that their location and ownership are stated in the site archive and public record. It should be noted that the owner's explicit (written) permission is required before entering such personal information in the public record.
- 3.10.7 In Scotland, all archaeological artefacts, irrespective of raw material, may be claimed on behalf of the Crown under common law. This applies no matter where, or on whose property, artefacts are found (see paragraph 3.5.3).
- 3.10.8 The rules of ownership applicable to material which has come from a vessel (ie all those classified as 'wreck') are dealt with under the Merchant Shipping Act 1995 (see Appendix 6). In cases of wreck material, the Receiver of Wreck, in the Maritime and Coastguard Agency, should be contacted.

### **3.11 Other considerations**

- 3.11.1 It is advisable for finds work to be covered by a written contract or agreement to which the specification or project design may be attached.
- 3.11.2 Archaeologists should be aware of, and fulfil, the requirements of the appropriate Historic Environment Record. These should be included in the specification or project design.

- 3.11.3 Archaeologists should be aware of, and fulfil, their legal obligations with regard to human remains
- 3.11.4 Archaeologists should be aware of, and fulfil, their legal obligations with regard to copyright. It is normal practice for both copyright and ownership of the paper and digital archive from archaeological work to rest with the originating body (the archaeological organisation undertaking the work). The originating body deposits the material with the recipient museum or repository on completion of the contracted works, and normally transfers title and/or licences the use of the records at this stage. These arrangements may be varied by contract, and for the avoidance of doubt it is advisable to include statements on ownership and copyright in a written contract or agreement.
- 3.11.5 Archaeologists should be aware of and fulfil their legal obligations to report all finds defined as Treasure and of any other legislation within the UK that is relevant to archaeological finds.
- 3.11.6 Archaeologists should pay due consideration to legislation about copyright and intellectual property rights, plagiarism and to issues of accessibility to research.
- 3.11.7 Archaeologists should be aware of and fulfil their ethical and professional obligations with regard to portable antiquities and finds for which the provenance is unclear.

## **ANNEX 1: Checklist for finds work**

This Standard covers the following actions relating to finds work.

### **Project planning**

**Gather information on the site and its vicinity**, including:

- a. the nature of the site (geology, geography, soil conditions)
- b. consultation of the SMR and local museums for earlier finds
- c. predicted period and type (eg urban, rural, village, manor) of site
- d. previous intrusive or non-intrusive investigation
- e. ownership and requirements for the deposition of archaeological material

**Contribute to the setting of the project's research aims.**

**Identify, and liaise with, all project specialists.**

**Carry out costings** for the fieldwork and assessment stages of the project. These will be based on the information acquired above and the predicted scale, and agreed sampling policy, of the excavation. Costings will take account of:

- a. estimated finds recovery rates and material types
- b. feedback of information to fieldwork staff
- c. processing time
- d. provision for x-radiography of all ironwork and emergency conservation
- e. materials required for packaging and documentation
- f. staff time, including any external specialists and related transport costs
- g. provision for box storage grant for recipient museum or other approved repository

Once the project design has been accepted, **inform all specialists and agree the provisional timetable** for the project.

**Establish the processing procedures** both on-site and off-site, and agree areas of responsibility within the project team.

**Set-up the processing area**, ensuring that it:

- a. complies with all Health & Safety regulations
- b. is secure

- c. has adequate light, heat and water sources
- d. has adequate room to both work in and form an interim storage area for non-sensitive finds
- e. is furnished with the necessary equipment, materials and furniture.

**Once excavation is completed, ensure that all finds are documented and packaged appropriately.**

**Submit all ironwork, and any other metals deemed necessary, for x-radiography.**

### **Assessment**

In order to **assess the potential of the finds** to address the project research aims it is necessary to:

- a. quantify the assemblages by material and state their condition
- b. state their provenance, including how retrieved (hand excavated, metal detected, within soil samples), and contextual integrity
- c. provide an identification and date range of the assemblages
- d. identify the extent to which the assemblages can contribute to each of the project's stated aims and any new aims which may be addressed

**An updated project research design** must be compiled in consultation with all project specialists and this will include:

- a. identifying finds requiring further analysis, in order to meet the project's research aims
- b. a method statement detailing how further analysis will be carried out
- c. a detailed task list of work to be carried out, including further analytical, stabilising or display conservation
- d. the cost of this work
- e. a timetable for each task
- f. publication scope and format

### **Analysis and report preparation**

**The assemblages must be analysed** in accordance with the stated project research aims and agreed method statements. This work will normally include the **preparation of catalogues and publication reports**. All reports from specialists should be acknowledged and retained as part of the research archive.

## **Archiving, accessioning and dissemination**

**The material and documentary archive should be deposited** with the recipient museum or other approved repository according to their stated requirements.

**Seek to obtain from the owner of the material archive transfer of title to the recipient museum or other approved repository upon deposition** (in England, Wales and Northern Ireland), if not already established.

**The archive, both material and documentary, should be deposited in the recipient museum or other approved repository** for long-term storage, and where appropriate be accompanied by a storage grant.

**A report of the excavated materials and analyses should be disseminated and, where appropriate, published.**

## **ANNEX 2: Recommendations for digital archives**

Projects vary in their organisation and implementation, even where standards and best practice are employed. This annex thus provides a checklist for the types of data to be included in the digital archive of finds work. Where that data type does not exist, it need not be created. Where it is not available in digital format, it need not be digitised. The archive has two components: the minimum archive is the index level record, with other materials as appropriate. Thus, the archive should consist of:

### **1. Index level record**

An index level record for the finds work should conform to standards agreed by local and national agencies. The exact content and structure of that record should be agreed with the local agencies and identified in the project design. Local circumstances will dictate form of delivery though digital supply should be preferred, in order that the record may be appended to existing databases without the need for manual data entry. If the finds work forms part of a programme of field work, it is especially important that this should be documented in the index level record, to assist future researchers.

### **2. Other associated data sets**

Other associated data sets as identified in the project design should be included in the digital archive, where these exist in digital form. The precise composition of the archive will vary with local circumstances and the nature of the analysis. In broad terms, however, the digital archive should include data sets such as databases of finds catalogues, specialist databases derived from analysis, digital images, project specification documents and updated project design documents associated with the finds analysis, recovery policy documents (as amended during fieldwork), sampling policy documents and post excavation assessment report.

## **Data creation**

All data created as part of a project should follow standards and guidelines for good practice. Data that is being deposited in a digital archive should be supplied in a form consistent with that archive's deposition guidelines.

Further guidance on the management and archiving of digital data can be obtained from the Archaeology Data Service (see Appendix 7).

In addition, standards for data and records management from the museum community may well be relevant to archaeological finds work. Contact details for MDA, The Museum Documentation Association, are included in Appendix 7.