



BioArCh facility, University of York. Credit: Alex Holland, University of York

# Introducing the Heritage Science Data Service

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In October 2024 the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) launched the Research Infrastructure for Conservation and Heritage Science (RICHeS) programme. Over the next five years, this £80m investment will create a distributed infrastructure led by a dedicated RICHeS Infrastructure Headquarters (IHQ) team co-located at Sci-Tech Daresbury in Warrington. The new distributed infrastructure will include 17 laboratory facilities, 13 reference collections and a single Digital Research Service: the Heritage Science Data Service (HSDS), managed by the Archaeology Data Service (ADS) in York.

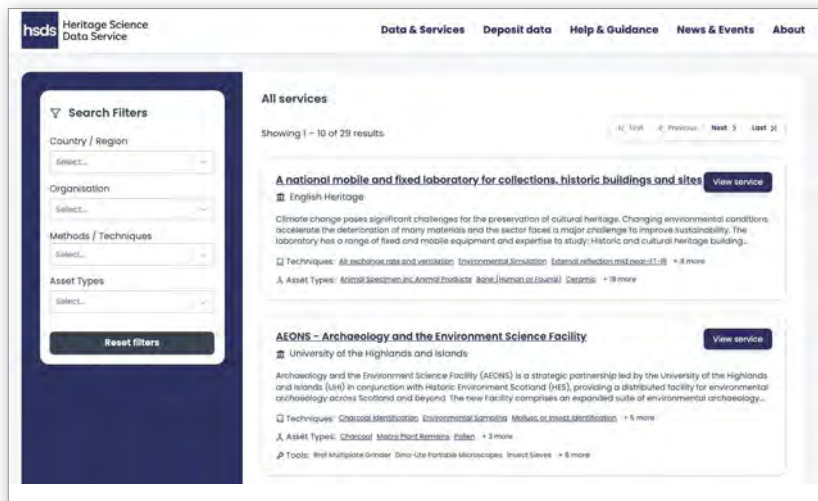


The facilities and collections embrace a broad spectrum of scientific techniques and national reference collections. Facilities include X-ray and 3D imaging centres, a marine survey laboratory, laboratories for biomolecular tools and archaeological dating, and a national network of integrated national mobile and fixed laboratories to address climate change impacts on heritage preservation, sustainability and energy efficiency. Reference collections include archaeozoology and archaeobotany, thin sections archives, and paint samples, to give just a few examples. (The full list is available on the RICHeS website: <https://www.riches.ukri.org/>)

These facilities and collections will open for external users in 2026, with usage costs covered by a central RICHeS Access Fund. Applications are welcomed from a broad range of individuals and organisations, including commercial companies or freelance specialists working in collaboration with eligible partner organisations. Most of the facilities and collections are also able to undertake chargeable work and the RICHeS Access fund is not intended to be used as a substitute for standard post-excavation costs and analyses required as part of curatorial briefs. However, it can be used to undertake more advanced analyses, outside the scope of commercial development control archaeology.

The HSDS is a core component of the RICHeS programme. In October 2025 we launched a catalogue of heritage science datasets and a catalogue of facilities and collections (based on information collected by our partners at Manchester Metropolitan University). The data catalogue is underpinned by a trusted digital repository, managed by the ADS, encouraging access and re-use and ensuring that all datasets are preserved for the future. All beneficiaries of the RICHeS Access Fund are required to deposit their research data with the HSDS, and all digital reference collections are also being safeguarded by the HSDS. Working in collaboration with the software engineering and technical teams at the STFC Hartree Centre, we are also developing a suite of Virtual Research Environments (VRE) and software tools to allow researchers to visualise and analyse data. The first of these will become available in summer 2026 and will be free for all to use. We have also launched a small grants programme for preparation of datasets for deposit with the HSDS and development of Virtual Research Environment applications. The first call has now closed but there will be a second call opening in summer 2026.

Because the HSDS is embedded within the ADS it benefits from 30 years' experience. The additional HSDS staff have been integrated within the ADS team, bringing it to nearly 40 staff. HSDS shares the same technical infrastructure and data and metadata stores as ADS and has the same charging policy for



*Catalogue of Services.  
Credit: HSDS*

commercial data deposition. It also uses the same online data ingest system. Hence for archaeological researchers and contractors there should be no change to their normal workflows. Where they deposit datasets that are relevant to heritage science and conservation, our curators will tag them so that those archives will appear in both the ADS and HSDS data catalogues, at no extra charge. Similarly, if specialist scientific reports are uploaded via OASIS they will appear in both catalogues.

At this point the HSDS data catalogue contains mainly heritage science data already archived by ADS, but this will be supplemented by datasets from a wide range of core partners: Historic England, Historic Environment Scotland, Amgueddfa Cymru – Museum Wales, the British Museum, the National Gallery, the National Archives, The Natural History Museum, and the British Geological Survey. Our set-up phase continues for another two years and there are opportunities to influence the shape of the service by contributing to user needs analysis being undertaken on our behalf by the National Heritage Science Forum.

**Julian Richards**

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**Jo Tozer**

Jo is the Service Manager for the HSDS. She has worked in archaeology for 20 years, firstly as Editorial Manager for *Antiquity* during Martin Carver's editorship and then as Research Manager for the Department of Archaeology at the University of York. She has considerable experience managing projects from conception to completion from a broad range of funding sources. Outside of work, you can usually find Jo buried in a classic crime novel or walking with her two dogs.

