

What we leave behind: building legacy

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As archaeologists, we all know that the creation of a stable, ordered and accessible archive should be one aim of any archaeological project. The records, materials and results of post-excavation analysis should be available for re-examination and reinterpretation, a tangible legacy of our archaeological endeavours that we pass on to museums and other repositories to care for in perpetuity. Archives are what we leave behind after the report is written, the planning requirement is fulfilled, and the project is finished. However, the current reported archaeological legacy as represented by archaeological archive isn't great. Lack of storage space in museums and the reduction of in-house archaeological expertise has been widely reported over the last few years, and as a result there has been an increased focus on being selective during archive creation and compilation. The idea that a selection strategy could determine which material should be retained for future generations has led several commercial units and museums to instigate a formalised selection process with regard to physical archaeological archives. The creation of born-digital archaeological data is also increasing rapidly, but the management, preservation and dissemination of digital data is costly. As is the case for physical archives, it is not possible, or desirable, for all digital data to be kept forever and it should therefore also be subject to a selection strategy.

The aim of a selection strategy should be to ensure that the elements retained from a working project archive for inclusion in a preserved archive are appropriate to establish the significance of the project and support future research. However, the application of such a process is not universal, and many units, specialists and museums have described misunderstandings and a lack of knowledge and tools when it comes to the creation of appropriate, project-specific selection criteria. Several calls for national guidance on how to approach the selection of an archaeological archive prior to deposition resulted in the ClfA Archaeological Archives Group's *Developing a selection toolkit for archaeological archives* project funded by Historic England (HE).

During the three-year project (2017–2019) the ClfA Archaeological Archives Group (AAG) led a cross-sector working party to create a nationally recognised Selection Toolkit to aid the formulation of project-specific archaeological archive selection strategies. The working party represented and consulted with ClfA AAG, ClfA Finds Group (FG), the Archaeological Archives Forum (AAF), the Archaeology Data Service (ADS), Society of Museum Archaeologists (SMA), HE and the Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers (ALGAO) to ensure that the needs of the entire sector were represented. A key output of the project was the production of an online resource to help archaeological practitioners in the preparation of a project-specific selection strategy. The on-line resource consists of a series of web pages hosted on the newly updated ClfA website, each of which can be downloaded as an accessible PDF.

The on-line resource can be found at:
<http://archaeologists.net/selection-toolkit>

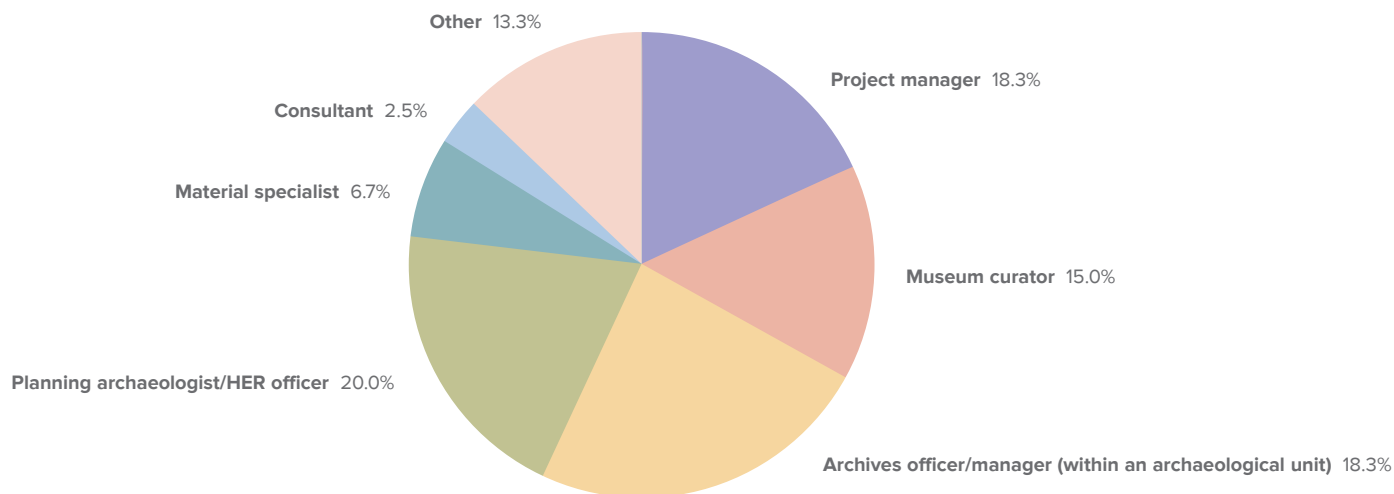
While the use of the Selection Toolkit is not a requirement of Registered Organisations (ROs), implementation of project-specific selection strategies will be assessed as part of RO inspections and applications from the



Participants listening to a presentation by Duncan Brown (Historic England) at the Manchester Workshop. Credit: Sam Paul

through selecting archaeological archives

Manager, Archaeology Data Service



Pie chart showing the professional demographic across all six workshops. The professional roles identified as ‘Other’ included the following: Documentation Officer, Finds Supervisor, CIFA Management, Curator and Field Archaeologist, Archive curator (not a museum), Freelance, Academic Researcher, Associate Director, Head of Organisation, Collections Officer, Collections Management

end of 2020, and it is hoped that more units, planning authorities and repositories will engage with such processes throughout this year. To support sector uptake of the toolkit and train archaeological practitioners in the development of appropriate selection strategies that best meet the needs of their projects, six workshops were convened during the summer of 2019 in Birmingham, Cambridge, York, Taunton, Manchester and London.

In total, 120 individuals from over 75 organisations took part in the training across all six workshops. The number of attendees identifying their roles as Museum Curator (15%), Planning Archaeologist/HER officer (20%) and Project Manager (18%) – the key roles ensuring that selection strategies begin to be implemented – was relatively even across the workshops. Despite each workshop having a number of attendees who identified themselves as project managers, feedback from other attendees was overwhelmingly that more project managers needed to attend.



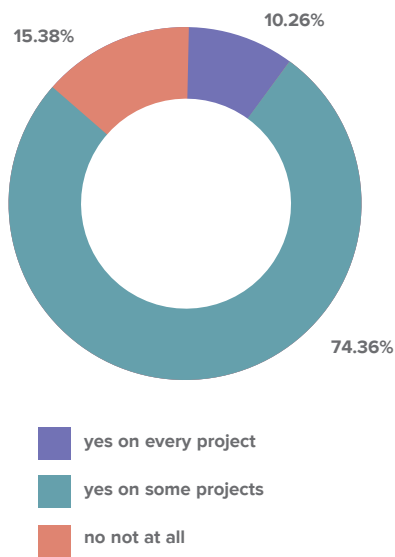
‘It is a shame that more project managers didn’t attend. This may indicate a lack of awareness that they are an important part of the process.’



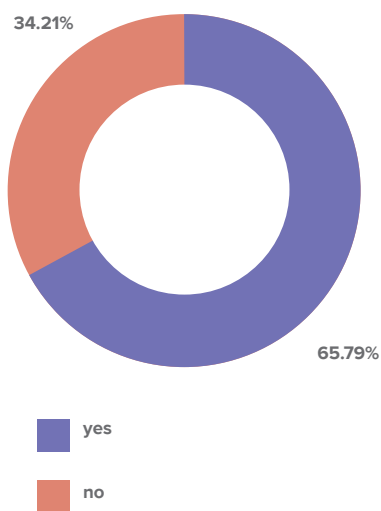
The workshops were very positively received, with feedback demonstrating the value participants found in the discussions that the workshops facilitated with colleagues in different roles from across the archaeological sector. Pre-, immediately post- and six months post-workshop surveys aimed to identify the impact the workshops had on the knowledge development of participants and their working practices.

The pre-workshop survey recorded that 40 per cent of individuals instigated some form

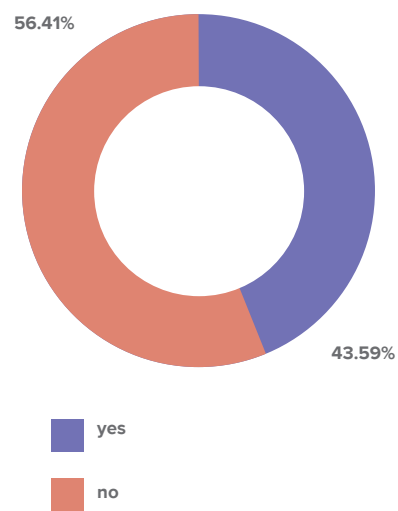
of selection process during archaeological projects, but also identified that recording practices for selection activities were varied and inconsistent across the sector, being commonly recorded in a piecemeal fashion in site records, archive lists and grey literature. However, despite the erratic selection recording practices, many of the responses did indicate that selection decisions were being carried out with thought and consideration. In addition, the Selection Toolkit had already been trialled by the organisations of three attendees before attendance at the workshops. Despite this, several individuals responded that selection is rarely recorded, and that key stakeholders such as specialists or museums are not being consulted during the decision-making process, an attitude anecdotally reflected further during discussions in the workshops themselves. Encouragingly, 85.3 per cent of the respondents to the six-month post-workshop survey replied that they have now implemented formal selection strategies, and 10.3 per cent of those had implemented selection strategies on all of their projects



Pie chart showing the percentage of responses to the question 'Have you begun to implement selection strategies in your role?'



Pie chart showing the percentage of positive and negative responses to the question 'Have you implemented the skills learnt in the workshops in your role?'



Pie chart showing the percentage of positive and negative responses to the question 'Have you used the Selection Toolkit Resources in your role?'

following the workshop. This is a huge success.

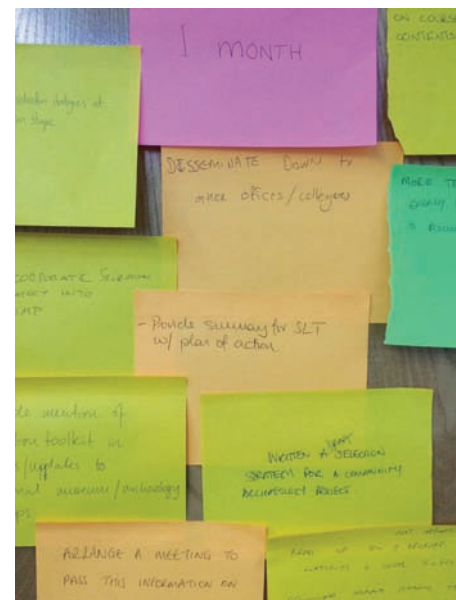
The six-month survey also demonstrated that the level of knowledge gained during the workshops was retained well in the months following the workshops, confirming that the

knowledge imparted during the workshops was well understood by the attendees. When questioned 'Have you implemented the skills learnt in the workshops in your role?' 65.8 per cent of participants responded positively, though not all of those had used the toolkit resources directly.

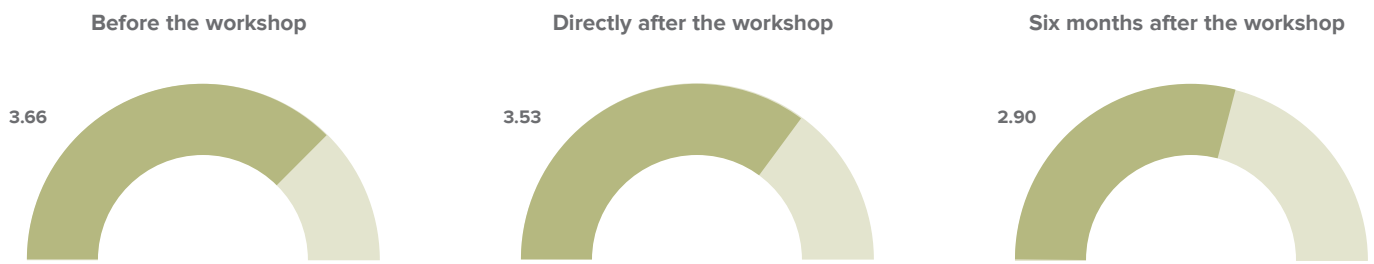
However, some survey respondents did report a difficulty in implementing selection strategies within their organisations, with many citing time constraints, staffing resource, communication between stakeholders and engagement by project managers as key barriers. There was also



Taunton workshop attendees taking part in the Next Steps practical activity. Credit: Katie Green



Manchester Next Steps practical exercise: 1-month goals. Credit: Sam Paul



Graphs showing the change in perception of how easy it will be to implement selection strategies before, directly after and six months after the workshops

some evidence of a push back from specialists on the selection of materials, though most were on board with the concept. Some of these issues had already been identified during the Next Steps exercise that took place at the end of the workshops.

An interesting outcome of all three surveys was that the perception of how easy it would be to implement a selection strategy decreased having attended a workshop, and again six months after the workshop. This demonstrates a realism in understanding the effort that has to be put into instigating and recording a selection process correctly, and

highlights that more aid may be required to help practitioners in the early stages of the requirements for selection strategies.

Despite this, participants identified many significant benefits from implementing selection strategies, suggesting the hard work required to begin to implement them will have considerable positive benefits for the sector as a whole in the future. Benefits identified included encouraging early discussion between stakeholders about archiving, ensuring adequate records on selection and disposal were kept and accessible to future researchers, reducing

costs long-term in regard to storage and curation, the creation of better, more sustainable archives for research and engagement and the improvement of our archaeological legacy.

The Selection Toolkit web pages will be managed and updated by ClfA and reviewed annually by the ClfA AAG as part of the group's on-going responsibilities. As part of the annual review, feedback will be sought from the AAF, ClfA membership, and relevant SSNs such as the SMA, Fame and ALGAO as to how the Selection Toolkit has changed working practices.

Samantha Paul

Samantha specialises in archaeological archives and the use of archaeology within museums. As former Chair of the ClfA Archives Archaeology Group and a member of the Archaeological Archives Forum, Sam is an experienced researcher and has developed countywide deposition standards for Gloucestershire and Hertfordshire museums, completed a review of archaeological collections and archives in the West Midlands regional museums and, most recently, developed and delivered the Selection Toolkit for Archaeological Archives. Samantha is a part-time PhD candidate investigating the value of archaeological archives in museums.



Katie Green

Katie specialises in digital archiving and data management for archaeology and is particularly interested in promoting the access, use and re-use of archaeological data. As the Collections Development Manager for the Archaeology Data Service (ADS) Katie is the primary point of contact for archaeologists wishing to discuss new deposits and agreements. Katie's role at the ADS involves liaising with partners in digital and physical archives in UK heritage, and representing the ADS in key projects developing best practice in data management in the heritage sector. Katie's most recent projects have included the Selection Toolkit for Archaeological Archives and working with HS2 to secure the preservation of the digital outputs of the Historic Environment Works. Katie is also Treasurer of the ClfA Archaeology Archives Group and a member of the Archaeological Archives Forum.

