FROM DIGGING TO DIGITAL

a look into the importance of digital archiving and data reuse within a commercial archaeology unit

Chloé Hill PCIfA (13541), Senior Post Excavation Assistant, Colchester Archaeological Trust (CAT)

Digital archiving has allowed us to recognise the entire journey of the archiving process, from the initial creation of an archive to the incorporation of different datasets and metadata. Digital archiving is a huge part of our company and allows our work to connect to people across the world. Ensuring our work is clear, consistent and understandable allows the potential for data reuse, where researchers can access our work for their own needs or interests. There is an element of planning involved, with a data management plan playing a huge part. A factor CAT has found increasingly important during the archiving process is the inclusion of the raw dataset. The archive benefits from this inclusion of digitised documentation (site records, site notes, drawings, plans, photographs) as it helps to piece together what has happened between the collection of data and the output. Internet archaeology has become increasingly more recognised over the years for its accessible, interoperable and reusable attributes.

Through our engagement with the digital archive I have gained a huge sense of acknowledgement for the work our team puts together, both in field and post excavation. It is important that site-based teams maintain high standards of observation and recording, often referred to as transitional methods. I have found that it is hugely significant that our field team continues this high level of work to ensure a safe transition of analogue records into digital project files.

Recently, I took part in the *Dig Digital: data management for archaeological archives* course (see page 25). This course provided me with a new insight into data management and the importance of reviewing data creation and storage during each project stage to ensure a smoother archiving process. I am preparing a digital archive handbook to provide our field team with a similar insight on why it is so important to keep data consistent, clear and well communicated. As a team, we already have strong documentation skills, which adds another dimension to the data that has been collected, such as what equipment was used and which controlled terms might be used to ensure this information remains readable. Through signposting vocabularies, balance and workload through our archaeological

Working shot of Chloé on a site recording a ditch section.
Credit: Colchester Archaeological Trust

Chloé documenting for physical archives.
Credit: Colchester Archaeological Trust

projects I can provide a clear image of the site. These range from archaeological monitoring and recording jobs to evaluations, excavations and historic building recordings.

At CAT we are fortunate to have in-house specialists that contribute towards the archiving process. It is great to see their knowledge get recognised and become available for others to benefit from. I am honoured to be able to document and digitise our company's history and the archaeology we have encountered across the years, dating back to the 1970s! The research potential of our data is vast and internet archaeology has allowed us to display our findings in multiple formats through metadata forms, dxf files, spreadsheets and classic photographs. We have a range of projects on Archaeology Data Service (ADS) for all to view, with full access to everything involved with our projects, from sites across East Anglia.

Re-interpretation plays a huge part in the post excavation process, where different people during the analysis and documentation stage can offer their insights into finds, drawings, photographs and CAD plans. Once I have documented and checked over this data, it can then be uploaded to the ADS, where it then becomes accessible and reusable for the wider public. Once the data is out there it can be reinterpreted endlessly – the beauty of digital archiving!

As well as our projects on ADS and our grey literature available through Oasis, we have the CAT Online Report Library, which is a joint project between CAT and the University of Essex. This library offers free access for the public to view all our reports and publications. The accessibility and readability of our library proved useful for me before I worked for the company. As a master's student it was hugely beneficial, offering easily available and informative pieces of information for my Roman-based dissertation. Having these accessible platforms is significant for encouraging the reuse of archaeological data. The continuation of reuse can only help with outreach and the understanding and reinterpretation of archaeological data across the country.
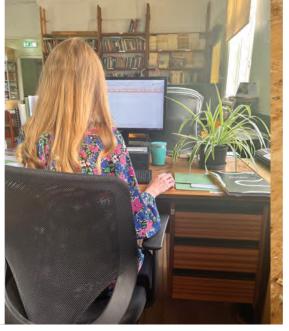
The selection process for materials once they are gathered during an archaeological project is important, particularly for ensuring correct conservation and documentation processes. Metadata has become like an old friend, as I constantly consider how data will be created, stored and shared. Our projects are incredibly valuable in allowing more of the past of East Anglia and beyond to be understood. In recognising each stage of data creation and the archive process we can also recognise each team member's contribution, and with our data we can understand and interpret the history of the area, together, bringing a story to life.

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Chloé Hill

Chloé is a Senior Post Excavation Assistant at Colchester Archaeological Trust, where her main responsibility is the digital archiving; she also helps with museum depositions and writing written schemes of investigation. She graduated from the University of Hertfordshire in 2019 with a BA in History and went on to do her MA in Classical Archaeology at Birkbeck, University of London in 2020. In her spare time she enjoys reading, being with family and exploring new places in Suffolk with her partner and two Pomeranians.

Chloé entering data on metadata forms for the digital archive. Credit: Colchester Archaeological Trust

Chloé cleaning Roman finds on an archaeological site. Credit: Colchester Archaeological Trust