

National Panel for Archaeological Archives in Wales

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ARCHIVES: SELECTION, RETENTION AND DISPOSAL GUIDELINES FOR WALES

GENERAL

Archaeological projects potentially generate a wide range of material. Ultimately not all the records or materials recovered will need to be permanently retained in a museum or other permanent repository and it is usual for there to be a process of selection before an archive is deposited.

A process of selection will be exercised in order to establish what will be retained in the long-term. Selection process sets out to ensure that all the elements retained from the project archive for inclusion in the archaeological archive are appropriate to establish the significance of the project and support future research, outreach, engagement, display and learning activities. Selection should be focused on selecting what is to be retained to support these future needs, rather than deciding what can be dispersed.

In Wales the *National Standard and Guidance for Collecting and Depositing Archaeological Archives in Wales 2017*

<http://www.welshmuseumsfederation.org/en/news-archive/resources-landing/Collections/national-standard-and-guidance-for-collecting-and-depositing-archaeological-archives-in-wales-2017.html> is the core reference that details the archaeological process specifically as it applies to Wales. This can be used in conjunction with CIfA's Selection Strategy Toolkit <http://cifa.heritech.net/selection-toolkit> which outlines the process that should be followed to ensure that all relevant stakeholders are engaged at the right time, taking decisions that will lead to the creation of a useable and effective future archaeological archive.

These guidelines are designed to supplement these standards and the toolkit; they address a concern raised by a number of practitioners working in Wales about what materials should be permanently retained and what, if anything discarded. These guidelines are intended to be general and are not exhaustive, it is recognised that unusual items or assemblages will be found that do not fall within the general criteria set out here and will have to be treated separately. If an archive is suitable for retention, or possibly suitable for retention, then discussions with a museum curator should be entered into at an early stage of the project not towards the end.

These guidelines mainly apply to artefacts and ecofacts, but a short section on paper and digital archives is also included.

Application of these guidelines must be done collaboratively. Decisions, once taken, may never be undone so as important as considering selection and retention is the action of recording all that has been found as well as all decisions that are taken, their justifications and considerations that may lead to any disposal.

SIGNIFICANCE

A significance assessment should be undertaken to determine the priority level given to specific types of object or materials. Selection based on significance should always be undertaken by the relevant specialist in discussion with the project director and repository manager. Significance can be determined by a range of criteria. In order to help determine priority areas the document *A Research Framework for Wales* <https://www.archaeoleg.org.uk/intro.html> must be considered and justification for decisions linked, where appropriate, to this. Also essential is the overall understanding of the nature of the site. The value of retaining collections is also in the stories that they can be used to tell.

High priority for retention

- Chronologically distinct but rare finds from unstratified deposits
- Good sealed feature groups with no/limited signs of residuality/intrusiveness
- Key stratigraphic dating assemblages crucial to the structural development of the site
- Unusual forms/types from any stratified deposit

High priority for disposal

- Unstratified material unless intrinsically dateable and unusual or rare to Wales.
- Material that can offer no justifiable potential for future understanding of the nature of the site.
- Artefacts from residual/intrusive contexts unless of key stratigraphic importance to the site.
- Unprovenanced finds.

RECORDING

A key part of selection and retention is ensuring that the assemblage is fully recorded in the site digital archive prior to any disposal being actioned.

Specialists will need a good dialogue with the Project Director prior to recommending disposal. Specialists working on assemblages, creating archives and recommending disposal should have suitable experience.

All specialists in their fields will be aware of the relevant national standards for recording that class of object or material. All recording must be done in conjunction with the Project Director. All artefacts need to be included in an HER entry whether they are retained or disposed of.

Recording standards should include:

- Full quantification of the material;
- Description of the material;
- Creation of a record;
- Preparation of a specialist report;
- Creation of an HER record.

DISPOSAL

Where disposal is deemed appropriate the following are possible options for disposing of the material:

- Seek to identify a purpose the items could be put to, e.g. handling or a teaching collection;
- Offer to transfer to another repository;
- Leaving artefacts in place at the site after full recording.
- Reburial at the site.
- Destruction, e.g. crushing.
- Hard core e.g. some classes of building material.

CATEGORIES OF MATERIAL

STONE

Prehistoric Lithics and Worked Stone

Retain: All assemblages whether stratified or not that contribute to our understanding of Welsh prehistory or lithic technology. Consultation with the museum curator and a specialist will be necessary to formulate a selection strategy for some knapping debitage.

Dispose: Unstratified/unprovenanced undiagnostic artefacts.

Roman Worked Stone

Retain: For stratified assemblages from excavations consultation with the museum curator and a specialist will be necessary to formulate a selection strategy. Unusual/rare unstratified material should be considered as suitable for deposition.

Dispose: Selected elements of common unstratified material.

Early Medieval (410 - 1100) Worked Stone

Retain: All, whether stratified or not.

Dispose: Not applicable.

Medieval (1110 - 1539) Worked Stone

Retain: For stratified assemblages from excavations consultation with the museum curator and a specialist will be necessary to formulate a selection strategy. Unusual/rare unstratified material should be considered as suitable for deposition.

Dispose: Selected elements of common unstratified material.

Early Post Medieval (1539 - 1750) or Later Post-Medieval and Industrial (1750–1899) Worked Stone

Retain: This is dependent on the date of the material and its quality. Generally only rare or unusual pieces will be retained.

Dispose: Most to be disposed of.

Modern (1900 - present) Worked Stone

Retain: This is dependent on the date of the material and its quality. Generally only rare or unusual pieces will be retained.

Dispose: Most to be disposed of.

CERAMICS

Prehistoric Pottery

Retain: All, whether stratified or not.

Dispose: Not applicable.

Roman Pottery

Retain: For stratified assemblages from excavations consultation with the museum curator and a specialist will be necessary to formulate a selection strategy. Unusual/rare unstratified material should be considered as suitable for deposition.

Dispose: Selected elements of common unstratified material.

Early Medieval (410 - 1100) Pottery

Retain: All, whether stratified or not.

Dispose: Not applicable.

Medieval (1110 - 1539) Pottery

Retain: For stratified assemblages from excavations consultation with the museum curator and a specialist will be necessary to formulate a selection strategy. Unusual/rare unstratified material should be considered as suitable for deposition.

Dispose: Selected elements of common unstratified material.

Early Post Medieval (1539 - 1750) Pottery

Retain: Only rare/unusual/complete items or stratified assemblages crucial to the interpretation of the site to be retained. For other pottery consultation with

the museum curator and a specialist will be necessary to formulate a selection strategy.

Dispose: Most to be disposed of.

Later Post-Medieval and Industrial (1750–1899) Pottery

Retain: Most will not be retained.

Dispose: Most of the assemblage will be disposed of.

Modern (1900 - present) Pottery

Retain: This is not normally retained.

Dispose: Dispose of.

Later Post-Medieval and Industrial (1750–1899) and Modern (1900 - present) Clay Pipes

Retain: Normally retain complete pipes, bowls and mouthpieces. Consultation with the museum curator and a specialist will be necessary to formulate a selection strategy.

Dispose: pipe stem fragments.

BUILDING MATERIALS

Prehistoric Daub/Burnt Clay

Retain: Normally not retained. Consultation with the museum curator and a specialist will be necessary to formulate a selection strategy.

Dispose: Normally disposed of.

Roman, Early Medieval (410 - 1100), Medieval (1110 - 1539) or Early Post Medieval (1539 - 1750) Building Material

Retain: Consultation with the museum curator and a specialist will be necessary to formulate a selection strategy that ensures that a representative selection of the total is retained.

Dispose: Most of the assemblage will be disposed of.

Later Post-Medieval and Industrial (1750–1899) Building Material

Retain: Most will not be retained.

Dispose: Most of the assemblage will be disposed of.

Modern (1900 - present) Building Material

Retain: This is not normally retained.

Dispose: Dispose of.

METAL

Prehistoric Metal Artefacts and Metalworking Debris

Retain: All, artefacts whether stratified or not. Normally all metalworking debris will be retained.

Dispose: Not applicable.

Roman, Early Medieval (410 - 1100) or Medieval (1110 - 1539) Metal Artefacts and Metalworking Debris

Retain: All, artefacts whether stratified or not. Normally all metalworking debris will be retained. Consultation with the museum curator and a specialist will be necessary to formulate a selection strategy.

Dispose: Not normally applicable.

Early Post Medieval (1539 - 1750) or Later Post-Medieval and Industrial (1750–1899) Metal Artefacts and Metalworking

Retain: This is dependent on the date of the material and its quality. Generally only rare or unusual pieces will be retained. Consultation with the museum curator and a specialist will be necessary to formulate a selection strategy.

Dispose: Most to be disposed of.

Modern (1900 - present) Metal Artefacts and Metalworking Debris

Retain: This is not normally retained.

Dispose: Dispose of.

GLASS

Prehistoric Glass

Retain: All, whether stratified or not.

Dispose: Not applicable.

Roman, Early Medieval (410 - 1100) or Medieval (1110 - 1539) Glass

Retain: All whether stratified or not. Consultation with the museum curator and a specialist will be necessary to formulate a selection strategy.

Dispose: Not normally applicable.

Early Post Medieval (1539 - 1750) or Later Post-Medieval and Industrial (1750–1899) Glass

Retain: This is dependent on the date of the material and its quality. Generally only rare or unusual pieces will be retained. Consultation with the museum curator and a specialist will be necessary to formulate a selection strategy.

Dispose: Most to be disposed of.

Modern (1900 - present) Glass

Retain: This is not normally retained.

Dispose: Dispose of.

WORKED BONE, ANTLER AND IVORY

Prehistoric, Roman, Early Medieval (410 - 1100) or Medieval (1110 - 1539)

Worked Bone, Antler and Ivory

Retain: All, artefacts whether stratified or not.

Dispose: Not applicable.

Early Post Medieval (1539 - 1750) or Later Post-Medieval and Industrial (1750–1899) Worked Bone, Antler and Ivory

Retain: This is dependent on the date of the material and its quality. Generally only rare or unusual pieces will be retained.

Dispose: Most to be disposed of.

Modern (1900 - present) Worked Bone, Antler and Ivory

Retain: This is not normally retained.

Dispose: Dispose of.

ANIMAL BONE

Prehistoric Animal Bone

Retain: All. Normally all animal bone will be retained. Consultation with the museum curator and a specialist will be necessary to formulate a selection strategy.

Dispose: Not normally applicable.

Roman, Early Medieval (410 - 1100), Medieval (1110 - 1539) Animal Bone

Retain: All. Normally all stratified animal bone will be retained. Consultation with the museum curator and a specialist will be necessary to formulate a selection strategy.

Dispose: Unstratified material and possibly selected fragments of assemblages.

Early Post Medieval (1539 - 1750) Later Post-Medieval and Industrial (1750–1899) or Modern (1900 - present) Animal Bone

Retain: Not normally retained.

Dispose: All, normally.

HUMAN REMAINS

Prehistoric, Roman, Early Medieval (410 - 1100) or Medieval (1110 - 1539)

Human Remains

Retain: Retention/reburial will be governed by a Ministry of Justice Burial Licence. Normally all human bone of these dates will be deposited with a museum with suitable storage if justification for its retention can be made.

Dispose: Not normally applicable, but see above.

Early Post Medieval (1539 - 1750) Human Remains

Retain: Retention/reburial will be governed by a Ministry of Justice Burial Licence. Normally all early post-medieval human bone will be reinterred.

Dispose: Normally reinter.

Later Post-Medieval and Industrial (1750–1899) Human Remains

Retain: Retention/reburial will be governed by a Ministry of Justice Burial Licence. All later post-medieval human bone will be reinterred.

Dispose: Reinter.

Modern (1900 - present) Human Remains

Retain: Modern human remains will be subject to the Human Tissue Act 2004 and will require reinternment or disposal in a manner that is agreed with the Human Tissue Authority.

Dispose: Normally reinter but see above.

WOOD

Prehistoric, Roman, Early Medieval (410 – 1100) or Medieval (1110 – 1539)
Wood

Retain: All worked wood as long as it has been fully conserved.

Dispose: Natural wood and unconserved wood.

Early Post Medieval (1539 - 1750) Wood

Retain: This is dependent on the date of the material and its quality. Generally only rare or unusual pieces will be retained.

Dispose: Most to be disposed of.

Later Post-Medieval and Industrial (1750–1899) or Modern (1900 - present)
Wood

Retain: Not normally retained.

Dispose: All, normally.

ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOIL SAMPLES

Prehistoric, Roman, Early Medieval (410 - 1100) or Medieval (1110 - 1539)
Processed Environment Samples

Retain: These should be retained.

Dispose: Not applicable.

Prehistoric, Roman, Early Medieval (410 - 1100) or Medieval (1110 - 1539)
Unprocessed Environmental/Soil Samples

Retain: Charcoal samples are normally retained. Other bulk samples are not normally retained, as they should have been processed and analysed during a post-excavation programme.

Dispose: Normally unprocessed bulk samples are disposed of.

Early Post Medieval (1539 - 1750), Later Post-Medieval and Industrial (1750–1899) or Modern (1900 - present) Processed Environment Samples

Retain: Not normally retained.

Dispose: All, normally.

Early Post Medieval (1539 - 1750), Later Post-Medieval and Industrial (1750–1899) or Modern (1900 - present) Unprocessed Environmental/Soil Samples

Retain: Not normally retained.

Dispose: All, normally.

PAPER/DIGITAL ARCHIVES

A paper/digital archive should be produced if artefacts from an archaeological intervention have been selected for archiving, unless the intervention was small-scale and the report contains all the recorded data.

Producers should follow the *RCAHMW Guidelines for Digital Archives*, which forms an Annexe to the *National Standard and Guidance to Best Practice for Collecting and Depositing Archaeological Archives in Wales*, when assessing digital records for inclusion in an archive. These set out guidance for the selection of digital records, including general content, formats of file, and metadata.

A **grey literature report** will be produced for all interventions. If there are no artefacts then the following criteria can be used to decide whether a paper/digital archive is produced or not:

Desktop assessments/site visits: If no original material is produced then it is not necessary to produce an archive. If original material such as photographs, sketches etc. are produced then attaching data to the HER will be appropriate. New site records in the HER may have to be created.

Watching briefs: It may not be necessary to produce an archive if the report is sufficiently comprehensive and if the watching brief was negative or relatively small-scale with little archaeological evidence and the report contains all the recorded data. An archive may be required for large-scale watching briefs.

Building recording/surveys: Photographs, site drawings and survey data will be created during this type of project and thus an archive is normally produced. However, for small-scale works a grey literature report may be sufficient.

Evaluation: An archive will not be required for negative evaluations, and possibly not for those that produce little archaeological evidence. Production of an archive is normally required where significant archaeology has been found. However, the decision on whether to create an archive or not may have to wait until after further archaeological interventions or until development has been completed.

Excavation: Unless very small in scale, in which case a report may be sufficient, excavation will normally require the production of an archive.