

The Archaeologist

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In this issue:

The challenge of
ensuring legacy from
archaeology
p3

Digital archives,
open data and
unexpected legacies
p16

Preserving the
wider legacy: a
personal museum
perspective
p19

Neurodiversity
and archaeological
practice
p26

DIG DIGITAL

getting to grips with digital archives

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Funded by Historic England* and in partnership with ClfA, DigVentures have explored how people deal with digital data in archaeological projects, creating guidance to help support the process. The project team highlighted an existing gap between a broad understanding about digital data in archives and what happens in practice. This gap results from multiple things: unclear requirements, inconsistent advice, under resourcing, misperceptions and lack of up-to-date processes.

Our sector has been slow to respond to the impact that an increased use of digital data in projects has had on the long-term storage of the archaeological archive. Digital data – whether born digital or digitised – is present at every stage of an archaeological project. In order to secure that vital platform of project legacy – the stable archaeological archive – digital data must be part of a managed and appraised archive process. As Arjun Appadurai neatly sums up, our aim for all aspects of a project archive should be the creation of something deliberate (eg appraised and ordered) and not accidental (eg everything in the project folder!).

‘We need to look at the archive, in the spirit of Foucault, less as a container of the accidental trace and more as a site of a deliberate project.’
Arjun Appadurai**

Those responding to our 2018 survey indicated Duncan Brown’s *Archaeological Archives: a guide to best practice* (2012) is well known and well used – 30 per cent having read it and 24 per cent implementing it. Practical guidance for digital is less so: *ADS & Digital Antiquity: Guides to Good Practice* is implemented by 13 per cent of respondents, and Digital Curation Centre’s *Data Management Plan Checklist* by only 3 per cent. Those results focused the Dig Digital project: our aim was to create practical and implementable guidance.

The result, *Work Digital/Think Archive*, is available as a comprehensive downloadable document, including our own Data Management Plan and guidance. Using the DMP as a starting point and management tool, a few tweaks during project delivery may be all that’s needed to maintain a well-documented working project archive. From there – using guidance from ClfA’s selection toolkit – the project archive can be appraised and deposited with the appropriate repository. You can find the *Work Digital/Think Archive* guidance at: <https://digventures.com/projects/digital-archives/>



Using digital tools at every stage of a project is becoming more and more common, and will have an impact on the project archive. DigVentures uses an online database for site records which provides a full and accessible archive from the trench; this image shows project volunteer Jake adding a new find to the site register, which immediately appears online. Whether site data is born digital as this is, or digitised during project delivery, a Digital Management Plan will help ensure that the working site archive can be neatly transferred to the archaeological project archive once completed. Credit: DigVentures

Phase two of the project will create a web-accessible version of the guidance, with an expanded resource including step-by-step guidance for practitioners, case studies looking at different project types, visual guides for process management and training materials designed to help the implementation of the *WD/TA* guidance. As well as the existing DMP template, we’ll add a set of editable metadata tables and some tips on resource planning for digital archives. Keep an eye on the ClfA website for updates and look for #DigDigital on Twitter.

* HE project 7796: Creating a sectoral standard and guidance for managing digital data generated from archaeological investigations

**Appadurai, A, 2003 *Archive and Aspiration*, in J Brouwer and A Mulder *Information is Alive: Art and Theory on Archiving and Retrieving Data*. Rotterdam: V2 Publishing, 24. <https://e-artexte.ca/id/eprint/19207/>

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