



## What's in Store?

Towards a Welsh strategy for the management of, and access to, the archaeological evidence of our past

Cover photograph and background photographs on pages 5, 6 and 8 show details of Llyn Cerrig Bach plaque. © National Museum of Wales.



△ Gwynedd and Môn Young Archaeologists' Club dig at Nant Gwynant. Finds deposited at Gwynedd Museum and Art Gallery, Bangor.



THE COUNCIL OF MUSEUMS IN WALES  
CYNGOR AMGUEDDFEYDD YNG NGHYMRU

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# Foreword

In 1997 English Heritage and the former Museums & Galleries Commission conducted a survey of archaeological archives in England. The resulting report, published in 1998, highlighted the difficulty many museums were having in properly caring for archaeological archives; the inability of some museums to accept further archaeological archive; the lack of good guidance and standards in transferring archaeological archives to museums; and the limited use that archaeological archives were being put to once in museums. It was recommended that a similar survey be undertaken in Wales.

Since then English Heritage has produced a further report 'Archaeological Archives: Documentation, Access and Deposition' (2002). In Spring 2002 the Archaeological Archives Forum was established. This forum, which includes representatives of the main archaeological and museum bodies in Britain, is working to implement the recommendations of both reports.

In response to these initiatives The Council of Museums in Wales with the National Museums & Galleries of Wales (NMGW) and the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monument of Wales (RCAHMW) commissioned Cardiff based consultants Jane Henderson and Phil Parkes to undertake a survey in Wales. Although organisational structures are different in Wales, the problems of caring for and providing access to archaeological archives are broadly the same. The opportunity was also taken to address additional issues relevant to those working in Wales. The excellent response to the survey, and subsequent consultation which indicated widespread support for the reports conclusions, has provided a valuable backdrop to inform a future strategy.

Recent changes within the Welsh Assembly Government – the portfolio of the Culture Minister now includes Cadw, and the formation of CyMAL (Museums, Archives & Libraries Wales) – make this report and its recommendations of particular value and significance.

As chair of the steering group I would like to thank all the organisations and individuals who responded to the survey and consultation and the members of the steering group who have taken this work forward. The steering group was composed of Richard Brewer and Elizabeth Walker (NMGW), Hilary Malaws (RCAHMW) and Charles Hill (Glamorgan Gwent Archaeological Trust representing the four Welsh Archaeological Trusts). Our thanks are due to Jane and Phil for their hard work and stimulating discussion. The final recommendations and content of the report however remain the responsibility of the steering group.

It is hoped that the recommendations within this report will provide the basis for the Welsh Assembly Government to move forward on these important issues. We believe that, of the recommendations are acted upon, there will be a positive future for our past in Wales.



**John Marjoram**  
Chair of Steering Group  
Acting Director  
Council of Museums in Wales

# Introduction

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This report considers the needs of archaeological collections. These collections span some 230,000 years from the first known arrival of early humans in Wales to the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. The project was intended to gather evidence to inform policy makers in planning the future needs for archaeological storage and to promote the value of the archaeological record.

Archaeological archives are physical evidence of our shared past. They comprise archaeological objects and specimens, and the supporting paper, photographic and digital records. They play a considerable role in increasing our knowledge and appreciation of Welsh cultural heritage from local communities to a national and international audience. It is, therefore, vital that these collections are cared for to ensure their long term preservation and made accessible to those who have an interest in learning about Wales' past.

The term 'archaeological archive' is used widely amongst archaeologists to describe all of the material generated by the archaeological process including small finds and environmental samples as well as the supporting written and digital records.

*In the context of this report we define the Welsh archaeological archive as:*

All material from archaeological excavations, evaluations, site assessments and formal field walking projects from Wales.

This includes all artefacts, human remains, environmental evidence e.g. bones, soil samples, paper records e.g. plans, notes and record sheets, photographic materials, digital records and any post excavation records in any format e.g. specialist reports, conservation reports, archive reports and publications.

*This specifically excludes:*

Non Welsh material such as ethnographic collections or Egyptology, single finds e.g. portable antiquities, non portable archaeology such as monuments, historic buildings, crosses, standing stones or sites and industrial collections

Central to the project was a survey conducted among museums in Wales and those organisations and individuals who have carried out archaeological work in Wales. This included:

- Registered Museums in Wales
- Contracting archaeological units
- Individual excavators and University researchers
- Local archaeology societies who have carried out excavations



© Oriol Ynys Môn



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△ Top: Henry I penny.

△ Left: Anglesey schoolchildren enjoy a prehistoric workshop with John Lord.

△ Right: Mark Lodwick investigates a Late Bronze Age hoard with the finder, Alan Jenkins.



The survey took the form of a questionnaire that was distributed to 133 organisations of which 95 replied, giving a response rate of 71%.

As well as the questionnaire, consultation was carried out with stakeholders in Wales and across the UK to establish a national perspective and professional views on the issues raised.

Following this process a full consultation report was published. This contained an assessment of the current status of archaeological collections, an investigation into the future levels of growth and an analysis of the threats and opportunities associated with these collections. The consultation report concluded with a series of nine recommendations.

Further consultation was held across Wales and much helpful feedback was received. The report was warmly welcomed and there was strong agreement that action was urgently needed. Following detailed responses, the nine recommendations have been reduced to eight and some have been amended to reflect the views of the archaeological community.



△ Archaeological archive.

## Recommendations

### **Recommendation 1**

Create shared archaeological resource centre(s)

### **Recommendation 2**

Create a database of Welsh archaeological collections

### **Recommendation 3**

Establish a national panel for archaeology

### **Recommendation 4**

Encourage and develop a nationally framed collecting policy through the Museum Registration Scheme

### **Recommendation 5**

Draw up standards for the deposition of collections and supporting information

### **Recommendation 6**

Review the management of the information base

### **Recommendation 7**

Improve the management of archaeological archives prior to permanent deposition in a museum

### **Recommendation 8**

Additional training and awareness building

# Research Findings

## Raising standards of transfer and deposition

A striking point to come out of the survey related to the standards which inform the management of archaeological archives.

There is a plethora of relevant standards and guidelines, in place: but in Wales there is no requirement to adhere to any standard for the management of archaeological archives.

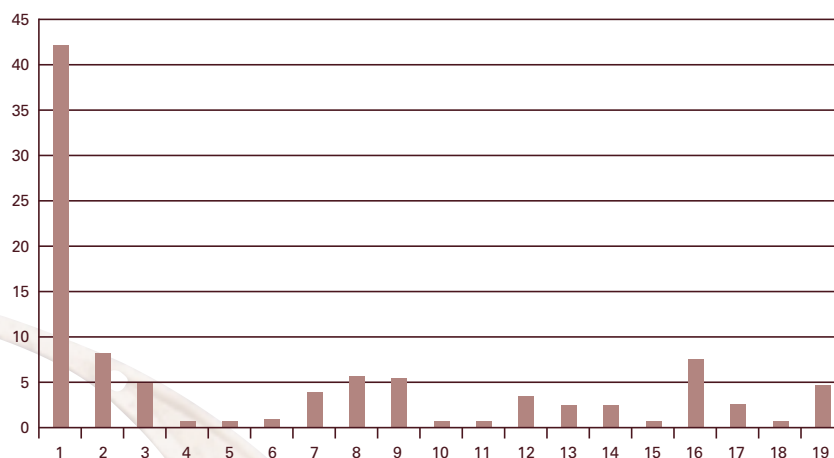
As a result there is no single standard that is commonly used, resulting in confusion and inefficiency.

Many respondents noted problems with the transfer of archaeological material from excavators to museums.

Museums complained of not being involved early enough in the proceedings and felt they needed more advice on what to retain as well as the value of the archaeological archive they were retaining.

Meanwhile, contracting archaeological units complained of not receiving replies from museums or in some cases having a problem finding somewhere to deposit material.

There is no central agency in Wales, which can resolve such problems. Very few museums have a policy for the deposition of archaeological archives. Both excavators and museums welcomed the recommendation of providing concise written guidelines for deposition.



△ *Standards and guidelines exist for the transfer of archaeological collections, but none is universally adopted nor promoted in Wales.*

- 1 None
- 2 Internal documents
- 3 Guidelines from place of deposit
- 4 Borrowed from other organisation
- 5 Advice from NMGW
- 6 Commissioned advice
- 7 *SPECTRUM: The UK Museum Documentation Standard, mda*
- 8 *Guidelines for the Preparation of Excavation Archives for Long-term Storage, UKIC*
- 9 *Standards and Guidance for Archaeological Excavation. IFA*
- 10 *First Aid for Finds Watkinson & Neal*
- 11 *Wessex Archaeology Guidelines No 20*
- 12 *Towards an Accessible Archaeological Archive, SMA.*
- 13 *Selection, Retention and Dispersal of Archaeological Collections, SMA*
- 14 *General Standards for the Preparation of Archaeological Archives Deposited with the Museum of London, Museum of London*
- 15 *RCAHMW / WAT cataloguing system*
- 16 *Standards in the Museum Care of Archaeological Collections, MGC*
- 17 *Management of Archaeological Projects. English Heritage 1991*
- 18 *Strategies for Digital Data, ADS*
- 19 Other



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© Powysland Museum



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- ◁ Left: Poor standards inhibit access and use.
- △ Centre: Bringing archaeology to life at Powysland Museum.
- △ Right: Good stewardship encourages research.

## Storage issues and standards of care

A third of permanent collections in museums are described as 'being in unsuitable stores' by their curators, with several commenting specifically on the poor environmental conditions and lack of space.

The research showed that the vast majority of museum stores in Wales are over-full and that none have more than ten years growth capacity.

Worryingly, when projecting future growth, the situation is much worse than museums realise.

Excavators report that over 500m of collections are waiting to be deposited in non-national museums in Wales, yet the museums are aware of only 6% of this material. It is clear that museums are facing a potentially disastrous situation.

From survey data it has been calculated that the average figure for the cost of storing archaeological archives in Wales is £116 per metre length of shelving per year.

This cost can be converted to a figure of £696 per m<sup>3</sup> and compares closely to English Heritage's calculation of £746 per m<sup>3</sup>. It should be stressed that this figure places a single value on costs which do vary between different institutions, but it is reasonable to assume that the cost of storage is between £500 and £1000 per m<sup>3</sup> for most museums in Wales. Using an average of £700 per m<sup>3</sup>, the minimum annual cost of caring for material waiting to be transferred to non-national museums in Wales is £60,000.

Non-national museums have neither the capacity nor the resources to accept the material evidence of our history waiting to be transferred to them.

Another concern is the standard of storage used by excavators. Many consider that their storage conditions are satisfactory, because collections are only being stored on a temporary basis. However, the survey results showed that two-thirds of excavators held archaeological archives from excavations dating from more than five years ago, which cannot, in our view, be defined as temporary.

## Access and use of collections

The reasons for retaining archaeological archive are to provide access for research and to encourage a wide audience to develop an interest in the history of Wales.

Many curators identified that poor storage and a lack of archaeological expertise in many museums inhibits access and use of collections.

They also reported that their priorities for advice and support were: defining the significance of the archive, conservation, understanding the archive and interpreting it for the public.

Overall the survey demonstrated that archaeological archives are not being exploited to their full potential, particularly in interpreting them for the public.

# The Way Forward

## Recommendation 1

### Create shared archaeological resource centre(s)

The lack of storage capacity across Wales could be remedied by the provision of central, shared storage and research facilities. This would ensure good quality care of and better access to archaeological collections.

Concentrating archaeological archives into a single or small number of resource centres would ensure the most cost effective use of space. Collections would be more accessible to researchers and staff with archaeological expertise could be employed to interpret the material.

This would raise standards of storage and improve access and understanding; thus strengthening the research carried out on Welsh archaeological collections and raising awareness both nationally and internationally.

However, further research is required to establish how such an arrangement would be managed, to identify potential locations and to establish the scale of provision necessary.

Consultation suggests that where a museum has no access to archaeological expertise, there would be much to gain in transferring collections to a central store facility, as long as issues of ownership, copyright and retrieval for display and loan are satisfactorily resolved. The practicalities of how museums could retain displays of important local finds whilst relinquishing the responsibility for storing the associated archaeological archive needs to be investigated.

The location and number of facilities will have both access and cost implications. Greater centralisation can generate economies of scale, but this is at the expense of increasing travel time from many parts of Wales. Initial consultation revealed that whilst the principle of centralised facilities was welcomed there was a range of views on the number and location of facilities required. It will be necessary, therefore, to carry out a detailed cost benefit analysis and further consultation on a

variety of options. In addition, work is required to establish whether central stores can be accommodated within the existing museum framework or whether new storage buildings would need to be commissioned.

Further consultation is also required to establish the scale of collections that may be deposited in a central store. This would require discussions with individual museums which would wish to transfer collections – their attitudes to material in their existing collections, and their attitudes to material not yet deposited by excavators.

Such a study should also take into consideration the development of NMGW's National Conservation and Access Centre at Nantgarw; investigate how NMGW might work in partnership with these centralised resource centres and whether specialist provision, such as the storage of waterlogged wood, could be built into the framework.

## Recommendation 2

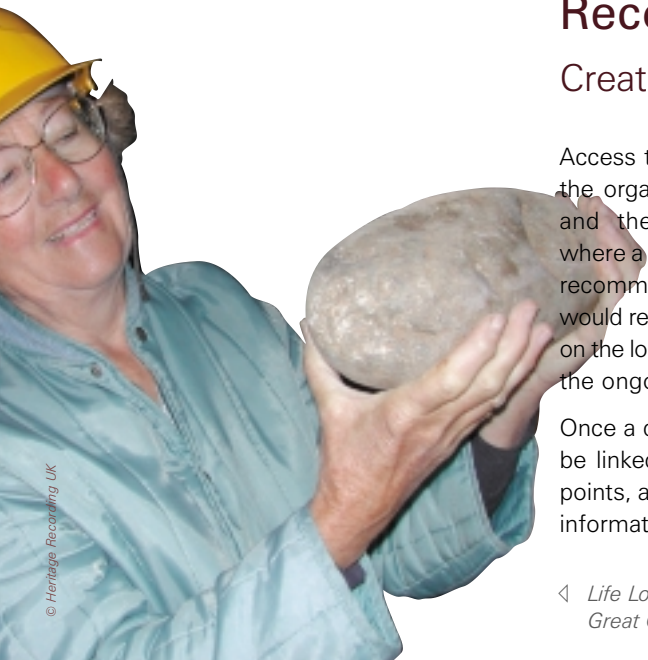
### Create a database of Welsh archaeological collections

Access to collections depends on both the organisation of the physical space and the level of knowledge about where a particular collection is held. The recommendation to create a database would require the collation of information on the location of existing collections and the ongoing updating of information.

Once a database is established it could be linked to existing electronic access points, allowing the public to search for information on particular collections.

This will improve access to information and, by providing details of their location, will also encourage use of the collections themselves.

In order to ensure interoperability, it is essential that any new initiative is carried out in collaboration with bodies such as RCAHMW, NMGW, and the Welsh Regional Archaeological Trusts, who have already developed databases. This work could be carried out as a project funded through CyMAL.







## Recommendation 3

### Establish a national panel for archaeology

There is an urgent need for a national, unified approach to archaeological archive. No one body in Wales has a remit for the entire archaeological process and the necessary expertise is spread amongst many organisations. This has had the positive impact of encouraging partnership working developed through informal networks. But with no co-ordinating body issues, such as providing standards for the management of the transfer of archaeological archives, remain unresolved.

An advisory panel made up of representatives from all of the key bodies is a central recommendation of this report. In order for the panel to have sufficient influence, it must have access to supportive measures such as grants and enforcement procedures, as well as credibility in the sector. It is, therefore, recommended that the panel develops a formal collaborative relationship with CyMAL, which might exercise an executive role.

## Recommendation 4

### Encourage and develop a nationally framed collecting policy through the Museum Registration Scheme

There is a need for a unified Welsh strategy for collecting archaeological material. The Museum Registration Scheme is a mechanism by which CMW has been able to co-ordinate and review collecting policies for all Registered Museums in Wales. It is recommended that CyMAL should strengthen and enforce the Registration scheme, using it to deliver a single Welsh collecting policy through co-ordinated policies for each museum.

## Recommendation 5

### Draw up standards for the deposition of collections and supporting information

There is an urgent need to devise a national policy detailing a standard procedure for the deposition of archaeological archives in museums and the National Monuments Record of Wales. This policy should be compiled by a representative working group (funded by the Welsh Assembly Government) in consultation with those working in the field. This policy would be devised as a framework and would not preclude organisations from introducing specific requirements where necessary.



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△ From Top:

*National Archaeology Days.*

*Maesmôr Macehead.*

*National Archaeology Days.*

*Excavations at Letterston under  
Dr H N Savoy 1961.*

## Recommendation 6

### Review the management of the information base

The multitude of organisations with responsibility for the management of information has led to a fragmentation of the resource.

There is a need for a review of the management of information, including documentary, digital and photographic records and archives. This review must be primarily user focused. The review should encompass the appropriate deposition of records, grey literature,

copyright, ownership and practice for digital information. The timely creation of a 'Strategic Framework for Records Relating to the Historic Environment of Wales' announced recently by the minister for Culture Welsh Language and Sport should greatly assist the review.

Whilst the standards for deposition should make reference to the transfer of information, the constantly changing technology for record keeping means

that a specific and technical review is required.

The varied nature of archaeology involving field work, scientific examination and interpretation makes this problem acute, but it is not an issue that is unique to archaeology. Strategies for digital preservation, the management of grey literature and copyright of transferred materials will have relevance for a much wider user base.



© Peter Webster

△ *Experts and Lifelong Learners study samian ware.*

## Recommendation 7

### Improve the management of archaeological archives prior to permanent deposition in a museum

Contracting archaeological units, universities and independent excavators holding archaeological collections should be required to match the minimum standards for the management of their archaeological archives during the transition between excavation and deposition in a permanent collection. Where the public purse has financed an excavation there must be a corresponding public right to access, within a reasonable timescale, and accountability.

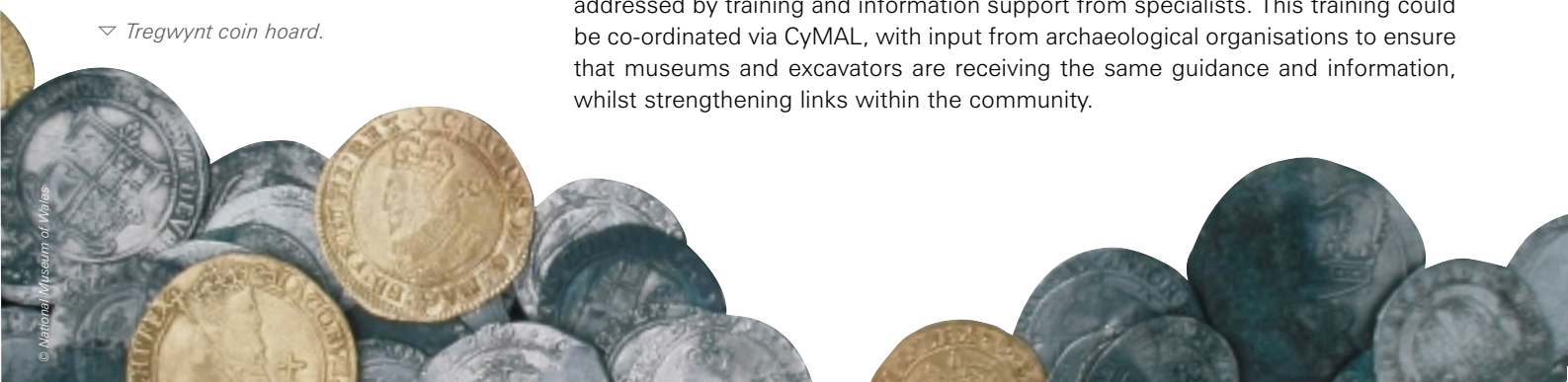
The Museum Registration scheme has identified minimum standards in the management, documentation and care of collections to ensure their legal, intellectual and physical protection. This ensures accountability to the public and guarantees access to the collections. An established framework, such as this, should be adopted to ensure that the legal status of these collections is established and that there is a clear responsibility to manage and account for collections before their permanent deposition in a museum.

## Recommendation 8

### Additional training and awareness building

There are several areas of concern for those operating in the sector that could be addressed by training and information support from specialists. This training could be co-ordinated via CyMAL, with input from archaeological organisations to ensure that museums and excavators are receiving the same guidance and information, whilst strengthening links within the community.

▽ *Tregwynt coin hoard.*



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