

**WHY DO WE HAVE THIS? A STUDY OF MUSEUM APPROACHES TO
RETENTION AND DISPOSAL OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL ARCHIVES**

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Abstract

The purpose of archaeological archives at first glance appears to be clear; it is defined in national and international standards, taught as a basic requirement of any archaeological project and required by professional bodies as part of best practice policy. However, this research has demonstrated that this vision for the purpose of archaeological archives is not reconcilable with the current situation surrounding their long-term curation. The opinions and actions around whether archaeological archives should be treated as museum collections or as a resource for future research are complicated, and while there does appear to be a disconnect between those who produce archives and those who curate them, the division is not clear-cut. The many problematic and inter-related obstacles for gaining real value from archaeological archives, are compounded by the range of organisations and individuals responsible for their creation and curation and the social, political and economic spheres they must work within. This thesis concludes that if the competing visions for the purpose of archaeological archives cannot be reconciled under the reality of the current system, the system requires re-organisation and four recommendations are made to that effect.

Dedicated to my family

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Forward: A personal perspective

I have been a professional archaeologist for nearly nineteen years, working in both development-led and academic archaeology. During my years on site and then back in the office writing reports and publications, I have contributed to the creation of many, if not hundreds of archaeological archives. Their place within the archaeological record and importance as a testimony of a destructive process I never really questioned. An archives compilation by the post-excavation staff and deposition with a willing museum for curation in perpetuity seemed to be a given.

However, the economic downturn of 2008 led to the closure of several commercial archaeology units (including eventually my employer Birmingham Archaeology) and a greater involvement with the archiving process. I was now responsible for the compilation and deposition of several thousand boxes of development-led archival material from a closed commercial unit, and by 2013 I began to see the holes in the mantra 'preservation by record'. At subject specialist meetings and conferences, stories were told of poor archiving standards, lack of space within museums and very low re-use of the stored archives either within the museums or by academics. Many museums had simply closed their stores to new archaeological archive depositions, leaving what I had always considered to be an irreplaceable resource, in limbo and at risk of destruction.

The general frustrations being expressed by many museum staff were highlighted in 2013 when I accompanied collection staff at one museum around the various basements, lofts and purpose-built storerooms containing their archaeological archives. Boxes were opened and exclaimed over when something caught the imagination of a collections assistant, and notes made about the locations of 'interesting finds' for future reference. In a loft jumbled with early medieval cremation urns, Roman oil lamps (there was no way for any of those present to tell if they were genuine artefacts or replicas), human skulls and sherds of Tudor pottery, a great deal of time was spent reading basic information cards and exclamations such as "I didn't know we had these" and "wow, come and look at this!" could be heard from the other side of the room. The Aladdin's cave nature of the archaeology storerooms was clearly enjoyed by those present, but there was also a sense of frustration from the staff when confronted with boxes of material for which they could see no immediate use. In a rather damp basement, we found badly labelled boxes of soil samples alongside unsorted pottery sherds, and the comments changed to "why on earth do we have this?" and "I am not sure these need to be kept". It became clear that the staff did not have a full understanding of the archaeology collections, what they contained, where they were from and what their potential may be. When discussion turned to plans for rationalisation and disposal, I began to wonder what the purpose of these archives actually was.

1 INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

1.1 Introduction

Archaeology has been referred to as ‘the unrepeatable experiment’, and the retention of the finds and data from archaeological excavations is considered necessary to preserve the site ‘by record’ for future generations (Wheeler, 1954). The significance of these archives has long been recognised by those within the sector and their appropriate storage has been discussed for over a century (Petrie, 1904). However, since the growth of rescue archaeology in the 1960s, archaeological fieldwork within England has increased and so therefore has the rate at which archaeological archives are produced, with little consideration given to the finite nature of museum storage (Shepherd, 2015).

While the interpretation and application of Planning Policy Guidance 16 (PPG16) in 1990 varied across councils and local authorities, the guidelines enabled archaeology to become integral to the planning process, moving the collection of archaeological material largely outside the museums control, though the storage of the archives generated through the development-led process remained their responsibility (Merriman and Swain, 1999, Shepherd, 2015). It was within PPG16 that the widely quoted and accepted term ‘preservation by record’ was coined (Breeze, 2006 p66, Lucas, 2001) yet there was not a requirement for the contractor to produce and transfer an ordered and well-documented archive. Therefore, museums effectively became a dumping ground for the disorganised results of developer-led archaeological interventions (Merriman and Swain, 1999 p252).

Recent surveys have reported a ‘crisis’ in archaeological archiving: an ever changing list of museums closing their doors to new depositions from developer-led archaeology, leaving thousands of archaeological archives stored with commercial units rather than in publicly accessible repositories

(Edwards, 2013, Smith and Tindle, 2012). The most recent quantification of the 'storage crisis' found that, of those museums that still collect development-led archaeological archives, nearly two thirds will be full in five years or less (Booth et al., 2018 p3). The current system, where museums accept responsibility for collecting the archives from commercial archaeology in perpetuity, would appear to be at breaking point.

While commercial archaeological archives receive a generous portion of the blame for the current museum storage crisis, current discourses of sustainability in museums suggest that without rationalisation the situation will never resolve (Merriman, 2008). At the National Museum Directors Conference in 2003 archaeological archives were specifically mentioned as an example of "the more space and resource consuming areas covered by museums" where questions around cost, value and potential should be asked (National Museums Directors Conference, 2003 p8).

Museums are therefore beginning to review their archaeological collections in order to ascribe value and significance and facilitate rationalisation and disposal from their stored collections. However, these archaeological archive reviews are largely taking place outside of the development-led profession, and some have called for an explicit rejection of these "poorly conceived schemes for the dispersal and/or de-accessioning of archaeological archives" (RESCUE, 2012).

While the issue of discard is a highly contentious one within the archaeological sector, evidence that all archaeological material should be kept in perpetuity has yet to be demonstrated. The assumed long-term museum-based curation of developer-led archaeological archives appears to be out of balance with the reality of museum storage and resources. Professional archaeology bodies such as the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists Archaeological Archives Group have attempted to address the issue through raising the profile and standards of archaeological archiving in the United Kingdom (Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, 2014). Yet there remains a lack of research relating to the promotion, use and ultimately the value of archives in the present and for the future.

The collection review and rationalisation projects discussed in chapters 3 to 6 have the potential to inform on how archaeological archives are valued within the museum profession, and their place within the collection as a whole. This in turn could provide insight on the purpose of archaeological archives, and the value judgement points which could be applied prior to their final deposition with a museum.

This thesis aims to address the lack of research around the current and potential value of archaeological archives through analysis of seventeen archaeological collection review case studies. The history of archaeological archiving and museum collecting is presented in Chapter 2, alongside the current industry wide accepted definitions and vision for archaeological archiving, around which this research is based. The case studies discussed in Chapters 3 to 6 highlight the many complicated and interrelated economic, political and professional obstacles to gaining real value from archaeological archives encountered in this research. Therefore, a series of four recommendations have been developed (Chapter 7) that represent a return to the initial principles of collecting archaeology for the benefit of future generations, facilitating re-use for research and supporting accessibility for all.

1.2 Research aims

The potential value and significance held within stored archaeological archives as either a research resource, public assets or museum collection is only just beginning to be addressed, and only by those museums that have begun to review their collections with the aim of meaningful rationalisation. But how are these decisions being made and what implications do these have on the future long-term retention of archaeological material, and creation of the archives in the first place?

The overarching aim of this research is to ask:

What is the purpose of archaeological archives?

Through a series of case studies, this thesis will attempt to address this aim by considering the following sub-questions:

1. Why do we keep them?
2. How are they used?
3. How much do we need?
4. Whose responsibility are they?

1.3 Methodology

1.3.1 Approach

In order to address the aim of the research, it was important to assess real-world examples of museums undertaking collection reviews, and to ensure that these included stored archaeological archives within a variety of collecting institution types and geographical locations. Hence this research took a holistic approach to the analysis of seventeen case studies, considering each one in its entirety, thus understanding how various aspects affect each other (Denscombe, 2014 p56). A case study approach was chosen in order to “understand the complex relationships between factors as they operate within a particular social setting” (Denscombe, 2014 p4). It was important that each of these case studies was examined longitudinally as this allowed each review to be contextualised within the wider setting of developer-led commercial archaeological practice.

The case study approach facilitated the use of a combination of research methods (interviews and document study) supporting qualitative analysis of this social research (Denscombe, 2014 p56). A discovery-led approach allowed the author to explore particular aspects of each case study in detail, ascertain the underlying causes for decisions and compare alternative review approaches in order to answer the research questions outlined above.

Each Individual case study followed represents a unique insight into the way archaeological archives are used and valued within a museum setting and should not be regarded as part of a survey sample. Instead, the findings from each case study were analysed individually in order to develop a set of

generalised theoretical propositions (Yin, 2009 p15) on the purpose of archaeological archiving practice. By following a qualitative approach to this research, the author was able to understand the results of each archaeological archive review in context and detail the multiple interrelationships between a wide range of factors in operation, providing a holistic perspective on each case study (Denscombe, 2014 p426).

It is acknowledged that a researcher's knowledge cannot be entirely eliminated from the process of analysing qualitative data (Denscombe, 2014 p300), and therefore the researcher has been mindful to avoid letting their experience and values bias the outcomes. However, it is also acknowledged that several of the case studies would not have been included within this thesis had it not been for the author's personal involvement in the heritage and museum sector and professional background in commercial archaeology. An existing understanding of the background and structure of archaeological archiving practice in England facilitated the interview process.

1.3.2 Case studies

Museum collection reviews are rarely publicised, and while the results and reasons behind the decisions made may be discussed at subject specialist conferences, they are seldom published in any detail. It was therefore necessary to identify those museums undertaking, or planning to undertake, a review of their stored archaeological collection in order to conduct interviews and collect data in as close a timeframe to the projects as possible. Seventeen case studies were identified as suitable for inclusion in this research.

Several of the case studies were identified by word of mouth, through the author's involvement in subject specialist networks and committee memberships (Archaeological Archives Forum and ClfA Archaeological Archives Group committees). Additionally, on behalf of the author, a request was put out by the Society for Museum Archaeology in 2013 via their weekly e-bulletin for information regarding potential archaeological archive review or rationalisation projects. All responders to the

e-bulletin were contacted to ascertain the appropriateness of their inclusion in the research, and several further case studies were identified in this way. There were a number of responders who were not considered appropriate as case studies as they had either not undertaken a formal review or rationalisation project involving archaeological archives, or the project dates or geographical location were outside of the scope of this research (see below). It was only possible to include those case studies where the museum staff were willing to be interviewed and provide their review data for inclusion in the research (see Table 1). The data from several additional interviews and site visits carried out during the course of this study are not included within this thesis as no specific review of the archaeological archives had taken place.

Following the data gathering phase of this research, a series of cross-sector reviews and surveys were undertaken which have some bearing on the outcomes and recommendations of this research. Where applicable, the projects are discussed within chapter 7, and a resume of all relevant findings can be found in Paul (2020). No archaeological collection review and/or rationalisation projects undertaken after this date are included in the results chapters of this thesis, though they are mentioned in the discussion if applicable (Chapter 7).

Only those museums undertaking review and/or rationalisation projects within England were considered for inclusion as case studies within this research. The primary reason for this geographical distinction being the differing systems by which archaeological archives are created, compiled, deposited and curated within the four constituent countries of the United Kingdom (Brundel, 2010, Hull, 2011, NPAAW, 2017). The current archaeological archiving system employed within England is detailed in Chapter 2.

Table 1. Case Studies included in this thesis				
Case Study	Museum/Institution Type	Dates of review	Staff interviewed	Chapter
Bucks County Museum	Local Authority Museum	2014	Keeper of Archaeology Senior Post-Excavation Manager	6
Cambridge County Council	Regional County Council	2013-2014	Historic Environment Team Manager	6
Chesterfield Museum	Local Authority Museum	2014	Collections Officer	5
Epping Forest District Museum	Local Authority Museum	2012-?	Collections Officer	5
Horsham Museum	Local Authority Museum	2000 - ongoing	Heritage and Museum Manager	5
Gloucester City Museum (2)	Local Authority Museum	2008-2011 2014-2015	Curator	5 6
Museum A	Charitable Trust	2016	Museum Director Independent Consultant	6
Museum B	Anonymised National institution	2011-2012	Curator of Collections Conservator	5
Museum C	Anonymised Local Authority Museum	2014	Senior Post-Excavation Manager	6
Norton Priory	Charitable Trust	2014	Curator	5
Peterborough Museum	Managed by a Trust, collections owned by local authority	2010	Archaeology Development Manager and Team Leader	5
Royal Albert Memorial Museum	Local Authority Museum	2011-2014	Senior Collections Manager Collections Manager Assistant Curator Collections Assistant	4
Salisbury Museum	Limited company supported by the Local Authority	2012	Senior Curator Senior Post-Excavation Manager	6
Shakespeare Birthplace Trust	Independent Charitable Trust	2013-2014 and 2016	Collections Manager Collections Intern Collections Assistant Volunteers	3
Tamworth Castle	Local Authority Museum	2013	Collections Officer	5
Winchester City Museum	Regional Cultural Trust	2011	Curator of Archaeology Senior Post-Excavation Manager	6

Table 1. Case studies included in this thesis.

1.3.3 Interviews

In-depth interviews were undertaken with all personnel immediately involved with the implementation of each of the case study collection reviews. These interviews provided an insight into the differing institutional and personal approaches to review and rationalisation projects within a museum setting. This allowed the author to explore and gain valuable insights into the personal opinions, feelings and experiences of those involved with the long-term curation of archaeological archives (Denscombe, 2014 p186).

Interviewees were selected based on their involvement with the case study and availability/willingness to be interviewed (although every effort was made to speak with all appropriate personnel). Interviews were undertaken in order to understand the role of each individual within the review process and gain a deeper understanding of the ways an individual can engage with, and impact upon, assessing an archaeological archive.

A semi-structured interview technique was adopted throughout the interviews (Bryman, 2008 p438, Denscombe, 2014 p186), however questions were kept to a minimum, allowing each interviewee to speak as freely as possible. This permitted the author to evaluate if questions would be addressed without specific prompting, as well as supporting “an iterative process of refinement, whereby lines of thought identified by earlier interviewees could be taken up and presented at later interviews” (Beardsworth and Keil, 1992 p261-2 cited in, Bryman, 2008 p439). Interviews were conducted at the location of the case study, or by telephone, as it was felt that the interviewee should be able to choose a location and time that was most convenient for them around their other work commitments. The completion of this research relied wholly on the goodwill of the curators and the other museum staff interviewed.

1.3.4 Data collection

Site visits were made to nine of the case study museums (determined by availability of museum staff to support a visit). Due to the geographical proximity and on-going nature of the collections review, one museum was visited on three separate occasions, each time to new areas of storage and interviewing different members of the curatorial team (manager, curator, assistant curator and volunteer). The experience of visiting the case study location and gaining a familiarity with the physical storage environment greatly increased the author’s understanding of the review process and how individuals approached each project within a specific setting. The majority of collection reviews were undertaken during the period of study, allowing the author to follow the review process in detail. However, a small number of the reviews (four) included as case studies had been

completed in the preceding years (2008-2012). In general, the author was less able to obtain detailed review data from those projects that had already completed.

Where the museum/institution was willing to provide their data on their review methodology and results, this was collected by the author. In the majority of cases, only the methodology and end of review report was made available, and in some cases no review documentation appeared to exist at all. Only one case study provided access to their baseline data and full review results.

1.3.5 Limitations

It is acknowledged that many of the issues around archaeological archiving in England (space, resources, knowledge, standards, accessibility) are reported within the devolved countries of the United Kingdom (Swain, 2012). However, the case studies in this thesis are limited to England as the differing archiving systems employed within Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland would have wider implications on the discussion and recommendations, which the word count of this thesis would not support.

It is further acknowledged that many factors affect the success (or failure) of the archaeological archiving system in England such as the legal issues around Transfer of Title, availability of accessible storage, variations in deposition fees, specialist curation staff and engagement with digital archiving (Nixon, 2017, Southport Group, 2011, Shepherd, 2015). While these issues clearly affect each of the case studies to a greater or lesser extent and are discussed where relevant, they have not been specifically investigated as part of this thesis.

Additionally, the author recognises the potential for institutions to be sensitive and/or defensive to some forms of questioning and analysis. In some cases, museums were unwilling to provide access to baseline review data fearing that it may be 'misinterpreted', affecting the level of detailed analysis that could take place. The museum and curator response to both the review implementation and

interview questions will have been influenced by the status of the museums under discussion (i.e. charitable trust, local authority funded, local authority institution or national heritage body).

This thesis does not set out to debate the competing definitions of 'sustainability' or 'sustainable development' since there are numerous publications that cover the subject (Carman, 2016, Madan, 2011, Merriman, 2008, Scott, 2016) as well as Howard's 2019 thesis on Discourses of Sustainability within Archaeological Heritage Management (Howard, 2019). Nor did any of the case studies followed during the course of this research define how they were applying the term 'sustainability' to their review strategy. Instead it is assumed that the term 'sustainability' is applied in its most general definition; it is at its root about equality, within and between generations (Merriman, 2008 p9 after, Holdgate, 1987).

This research recognises the many ways in which 'value' can be defined, assessed and ascribed, within both the archaeology and museum communities, for example research, enjoyment, educational, symbolic, financial. This research does not attempt to further the existing research on the subject of value (Carman, 2002, Carman, 2005, Darvill, 1994, Holden, 2004, Nudds and Pettitt, 1997, Merriman, 2004, Young, 1994, Samuels, 2008), nor debate the definitions of how 'value' is attributed by individuals or institutions consulted during this course of study. Instead the proposed manner in which 'value' is to be identified by each collections review is compared with the industry accepted best-practice definitions and guidance on archaeological archiving (Chapter 7). While the manner in which the 'value' of commercially derived archaeological archives could be defined, assessed and ascribed would prove an interesting course of study, to pursue it in detail would have diverted from the true purpose of this research to engage with how the archaeological and museum community *use* rather than 'value' their collections; both aspects could not be covered in the same thesis.

Finally, the author had intended to include evidence for the ways in which archaeological archives could be used outside of a museum setting as either a research or public resource. However, it became clear throughout the data collection phase of this study that the records and evidence required to support this were simply not available, either because the museums did not keep records of such use, or such use did not take place.

1.3.6 Definitions and abbreviations

Throughout this thesis, terminology common to archaeological and museum practice is used, therefore it is necessary to define exactly what is meant by each term and abbreviation. In general, the most commonly accepted definition is given from current best practice standards and guidance. Where use of a term strays from that given below, or an alternative interpretation of a term is employed during a case study, this is discussed in the main body of the text.

Table 2. Abbreviations used in this Thesis	
ACE	Arts Council England
ALGAO	Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers
CBM	ceramic building material
CHET	Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Team
CIFA	Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (formerly the IfA)
EH	English Heritage
FAME	Federation of Archaeological Managers and Employers
HE	Historic England
IfA	Institute for Archaeologists (later Cifa)
MA	Museum Association
RAMM	Royal Albert Memorial Museum
SBT	Shakespeare Birthplace Trust
SMA	Society for Museum Archaeology

Table 2. Abbreviations used in this thesis

Table 3. Definitions of terms used in this thesis	
Term	Definition
Archaeological Archive	All records and materials recovered during an <i>Archaeological Project</i> and identified for long-term preservation, including artefacts, ecofacts and other environmental remains, waste products, scientific samples and also written and visual documentation in paper, film and digital form (Perrin et al., 2014 p20).
Archaeological Project	Any programme of work that involves the collection and/or production of information about an archaeological site, assemblage or object in any environment, including in the field, under water, at a desk or in a laboratory. Examples of an Archaeological Project include: intrusive projects such as excavation, field evaluation, watching brief, surface recovery and the destructive analysis of objects; non-intrusive projects such as landscape or building survey, aerial survey, remote sensing, off-site research such as desk-based assessment and the recording of objects or object assemblages. (Perrin et al., 2014 p20). One result of an Archaeological Project will be an <i>Archaeological Archive</i> .
Bulk Finds	Finds that occur in relatively large quantities on site and can be recorded as a group; usually materials that do not require special recording during recovery. Examples are animal bone, ceramic building material and slag (Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, 2019b).
Curator	The individual that curates <i>Archaeological Archives</i> on behalf of the <i>Museum or Collecting Institution</i> (Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, 2019b).
Depositor	The individual or organisation wishing to transfer an <i>Archaeological Archive</i> to a <i>Collecting Institution</i> (Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, 2019b).
Digital Data	All documents and records in digital form, including: correspondence, contracts, specifications, notes, records, pro-forma, indexes, catalogues, reports, maps, plans, section drawings, elevations, site photographs, object images, CAD files, databases, digital aerial photograph interpretations, geophysical and other survey data, GIS files, audio records, images, satellite imagery, spreadsheets, text files, analytical results and 3-D data (Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, 2019b).
Disposal	The permanent removal of an item from a museum collection (Museums Association, 2014 p27).
Documents	All documents and records in paper or film form, including: correspondence, contracts, specifications, notes, records, pro-forma, indexes, catalogues, reports, maps, plans, section drawings, elevations, site photographs, object images and x-rays (Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, 2019b).
Materials	All materials recovered during an <i>Archaeological Project</i> including: artefacts such as pottery, tile, worked stone, glass, metalwork, worked bone, leather and textile; biological remains such as animal bone and botanical material; human remains, which require specific treatment in accordance with relevant national or state standards and legislation; waste products, such as industrial residue, hammerscale and off-cuts; material extracted during analysis, such as thin-sections, microfossil slides, dendrochronological specimens (Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, 2019b).
Museum/Collecting Institution	Receives an <i>Archaeological Archive</i> from the <i>Depositor</i> for long-term curatorial care (Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, 2019b).
Rationalisation	The application of agreed <i>selection strategies</i> to previously accessioned archaeological project archives, with the purpose of de-selecting parts of the collection and creating storage space (Baxter et al., 2018 p4).
Registered Finds (small finds)	Finds usually recorded individually during recovery. Examples are coins and other metal objects, glass, leather, stone tools, textile, wood and worked bone. These have often been known as ‘Small Finds’ (Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, 2019b).
Selection	The process of applying a <i>Selection Strategy</i> to a working project archive to determine which archive components, including <i>Documents</i> , <i>Digital Data</i> and <i>Material</i> objects, should be included in the <i>Archaeological Archive</i> . The aim of selection is to ensure that the <i>Archaeological Archive</i> contains everything required to establish the significance of the project and support future research, outreach, engagement, display and learning activities (Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, 2019b).
Selection Policy	A non-project-specific, generic methodology for selection. As such, a Selection Policy may inform decisions about de-selected <i>Materials</i> but should not be used to determine a project specific <i>Selection Strategy</i> . (Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, 2019b).
Selection Strategy	The methodology detailing the project-specific selection process, agreed by all stakeholders, which will be applied to the working project archive in order to create the <i>Archaeological Archive</i> (Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, 2019b).
Specialist	An individual who is competent in, and specialises in, collecting, recording, analysing, interpreting and/or reporting on specific <i>materials</i> , objects or scientific data. A Specialist will have developed expertise through the extensive study in their particular field, working to accepted standards of practice and ethics, and reporting in reputable peer-reviewed sources. They should also be accredited in line with any recognition schemes in place for their field of expertise (after Chartered Institute for Archaeologists Finds Group, 2008 p3).

Table 3. Definitions of terms used in this thesis.

1.3.7 Structure

This thesis comprises eight chapters which together examine the value and purpose of archaeological archives within the museum sector. This chapter, Chapter 1, has introduced the thesis and the key themes that will be used throughout the discussion. The direction of study and specific research questions are detailed, followed by the chosen investigation approach, case study specifics and research methodologies employed.

Chapter 2 details a brief history of the relationship between archaeological archiving and museum collecting, outlining how the growth of 'development-led' archaeology in England has resulted in a 'storage crisis', leading museums to question the value of the archaeological archives they hold.

Chapters 3 and 4 then present in-depth studies of the two main case studies, whereas Chapter 5 and 6 look at broader collection reviews, including both internally led reviews (chapter 5) and institutions whose collections have been reviewed by external bodies or individuals acting on a commercial basis (Chapter 6). Chapter 7 draws together an analysis of these case studies and their implications for the study and the final chapter offers conclusions and ideas for further research.

Throughout the thesis, direct quotes from interviewees are italicised, while printed quotes are not. All direct quotes are transcribed from recorded interviews.

1.4 Conclusions

This chapter has introduced the thesis, the main research aim, and supporting sub-questions to be considered throughout the results chapters. The direction of study is outlined alongside the chosen holistic approach to the analysis of seventeen case studies. The following chapter provides a brief history of the relationship between archaeological archiving and museum collecting and highlights how the current archiving system in England has led to the presence of developer-led archaeological material in museums stores being questioned.

2 ARCHEOLOGICAL ARCHIVING AND MUSEUMS

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a brief history of the relationship between archaeological archiving and museum collecting. It presents a chronological study of how the creation, compilation and deposition of archaeological archives has evolved following the instigation of the first large-scale rescue excavations during the 1960s and early 1970s. Evidence is presented on how the changes to national planning policy led to a split between field archaeology and museum archaeology, though the storage of the archives generated is still considered the responsibility of the local museum or repository.

2.2 A brief history of the relationship between archaeological archiving and museum collecting

2.2.1 Rescue archaeology and museum collecting

Government funding of rescue excavations began just before the 2nd World War, and by 1972, the year in which the first professional units came into being, accounted for around 1100 excavations (Butcher and Garwood, 1994 p9). However, it was in the late 1960s and early 1970s that large-scale redevelopment of bombed historic towns, building of motorways, housing and factory estates, and the escalation of intensive farming expanded Rescue archaeology nationally (Rahtz, 1974). The resulting increase in government funding for rescue archaeology in the mid-70s led to the establishment of regional archaeology units, capitalizing on this new revenue stream (Everill, 2007). While the emphasis was on recording the *in situ* archaeological resource, very little consideration was given to the excavated finds, and the records and documentation that accompanied them (Shepherd, 2015). Archaeology units were now based within universities, local government departments and some independent charitable trusts, generally independent of museums, though

museums continued to house the products of these excavations (Boyle, 2019). This new split between field archaeology and museums archaeology meant that the implications of the boom in fieldwork within England was not immediately felt by the commercial archaeology sector. However, museum professionals were already expressing concern over the role museums played in the archaeological process, and their lack of control over decisions that affected them.

“Is the museum archaeologist merely the caretaker of a warehouse? Why do archaeologists draw up important policy statements without mentioning the possible contribution of museums?” (Davies, 1978 p123)

The exponential increase in archaeological finds and data requiring long-term storage was now largely outside museums’ control, though the storage of those generated archives was still considered the responsibility of the local museum (Merriman and Swain, 1999 p252, Shepherd, 2015 p134).

Against a background of increased archaeological activity nationwide, soaring publication costs and post-excavation backlogs, several attempts were made to address the crisis. The Frere Report (1975) attempted to establish a baseline for archaeological publication coupled with an improvement in the organization and preservation of archaeological archives. The report gave priority to the records generated by archaeologists, requiring that they be stored “in a readily accessible form in a permanent archive” (Frere, 1975 section 2.6). While the emphasis was on preservation of the records which were discussed in terms of ‘the excavation archive’, it was considered “desirable that the excavation archive be housed with the finds”, and that in order for a museum to obtain custody of the finds, they should also agree to house and make accessible the excavation records (Frere, 1975 section 3.6). This was furthered by the Dimbleby Report (1978) which stipulated that archaeological archives should be held with an appropriate museum store:

“Ideally no excavation should take place until arrangements for the adequate future storage, conservation and maintenance of the archive have been made” (Dimbleby, 1978 p24).

These reports therefore laid the basic expectation that museums would act as the final repository for archaeological archives. The reports which followed (Department of the Environment, 1983, English Heritage, 1991) were more to do with managing the increasing post-excavation cost and backlog than addressing the long-term curation of the archive, and though most stipulated it as a fundamental part of the process, little consideration was given to the finite nature of museum storage (Shepherd, 2015 p135).

In 1981 a funding stream was made available to which museums reaching an approved standard could apply for a grant to assist with the storage of archaeological archives, but only for those from English-Heritage funded excavations (Swain, 1998). This important move was the first official acceptance of the specific nature of archaeological archives within museums. However, during the 1980s the number of excavations funded by English Heritage reduced as the onus moved towards the developers to pay the fieldwork and post excavations costs, and archaeological units to compile and deposit archives. In 1986, the Society for Museum Archaeologists (now the Society for Museum Archaeology, or SMA) alongside the Standing Conference of Archaeological Unit Managers (SCAUM, now the Federation of Archaeological Managers and Employers or FAME) attempted to create criteria for standards in recording and preparation of archives for deposition (Boyle, 2019 p382). Two years later the SMA committee reported that the draft criteria demonstrated a “lack of consultation with museums” (Society for Museum Archaeologists, 1998 p2), and the introduction of ‘development-led’ archaeology in 1990 further sidestepped the museum perspective.

2.2.2 Development-led archaeology and museum collecting

Growing concern over the potential loss of important archaeological and heritage sites such as the Rose Theatre in London, placed pressure on the government to clarify what was expected of developers and the planning system (Brenan, 1994 p396) and led to the introduction of ‘Planning Policy Guidance 16: Archaeology and Planning’, known as PPG16 (Department of Communities and Local Government, 1990). PPG16 enabled archaeology to become integral to the planning process

ultimately creating the conditions which led to competitive commercial, 'development-led' archaeology within the United Kingdom. It was within PPG16 that the widely quoted and accepted term 'preservation by record' was coined (Breeze, 2006 p66, Lucas, 2001, Merriman and Swain, 1999 p253). However, the policy did not stipulate what form 'preservation by record' should take and contained no mention of long-term curation of the archaeological record. There was therefore no requirement for the contractor to produce and transfer an ordered and well-documented archive, and by 1992 the effects of this new policy were being felt (Merriman and Swain, 1999 p253). Museums now had no say in the rate at which archaeological material was collected, what was collected and the standard under which it reached them, though the assumption remained that they would continue to curate the resulting archives in perpetuity. The Archaeological Investigations Project demonstrated that over the 20 years of PPG16 (1990 to 2010), 80,000 archaeological projects were undertaken in England, 90% of which originated in the planning process (Darvill et al., 2019 summary). The resulting scale of the archaeological archives amassed over that period is enormous (Boyle, 2019 p384).

PPG16 was replaced by 'Planning Policy Statement 5 (PPS5): Planning for the Historic Environment' in 2010 (Department of Communities and Local Government, 2010) which did contain a reference to archaeological archives. The onus was put on the planning authority to ensure archaeological archives were properly completed and deposited and therefore became a required outcome of the planning process. Unfortunately, PPS-5 lasted less than a year and was replaced with the *National Planning Policy Framework* or the NPPF (Department of Communities and Local Government, 2012) though archaeological archives are still referenced as the outcome of an archaeological project. The NPPF requires local authorities and developers to make publicly accessible the evidence from all archaeological projects resulting from development, and to deposit archives with "a local museum or other public depository" (Department of Communities and Local Government, 2012 paragraph 199). Therefore, archaeological recording and the creation of archives became a

requirement of national planning policy. However, there is no corresponding statutory requirement for museums or repositories to collect the resultant archaeological archives. Despite this, archives continued to accumulate in museums (Boyle, 2019 p384).

The decision to undertake archaeological fieldwork within the United Kingdom was now firmly rooted within the planning process, but it was no longer the case that only the local unit would be undertaking fieldwork and creating records, archives and reports (the effect of the 2008 crash on the structure of development led archaeology is discussed later). The majority of archaeological units now tendered competitively for work across the country and even abroad, producing archives with varying degrees of success and financial input, for museums with which they have no connection, and rarely any contact regarding expected standards (Brenan, 1994 p395). This increased gulf between the museum or repository collecting the archives, and the contractor undertaking the fieldwork, coupled with lack of guidance meant that museums effectively became dumping grounds for the disorganised results of developer-led archaeological interventions (Merriman and Swain, 1999 p252). Once the archives were deposited, the museums were largely left alone to find the additional resources needed to incorporate these vast quantities of finds and data into their collections.

2.2.3 Implementing archiving standards

Unfortunately, the standard of archaeological archives has not always been very high. Paperwork accompanying finds from some of the earlier rescue excavations often amounted to little more than a site notebook and the legibility of the information was dependent on the thoroughness of the excavator. Even once standardized practices such as context records and registers became the norm from the 1970's for development-led archaeology, what was included within the archive, and what wasn't, was subjective, leading to a situation where museums were becoming filled with unorganized and therefore unsearchable archives. Clearly there was a need to ensure that all archaeological archives were compiled so that records could be re-examined in the future as well as

transferred to museum stores in a manner that supported long term curation and access (Boyle, 2019 p383). While most contracting units appreciated the importance of the archive, they did not generally understand the relationship between what they created, and the collections held by the museum. From the museum's perspective, anything accepted into the stores becomes part of the overall collection or resource, which should be searchable and understandable, but if some parts of the collection are not as organized, documented or accessible, their use and value within the collection, and therefore the museum, decreases. This has led to a general perception that archaeological archives are not worth the space and time they take up within museum stores (Swain, 1998).

Partly in response to the implementation of PPG16, a series of advisory notes and guidelines were developed by the museum community. These included the 'Standards in the Care of Museum Collections' which contained a section on the preparation and transfer of archaeological archives (Museums and Galleries Commission, 1992 p15-18), and 'Selection, Retention and Dispersal of Archaeological Collections' published by the Society of Museum Archaeologists (SMA) which specifically drew attention to "The lack of a unified framework for museums and archaeology at either local or national level" (Society for Museum Archaeologists, 1993 p3). A major barrier to establishing a unifying framework for museums and contracting units during the PPG16 era, was that no clear definition of what an archaeological archive was, or should be, existed. An internal report by English Heritage, which aimed to address the problem (Perrin, 2002) defined an archaeological archive as:

"All parts of the archaeological record, including the finds and digital records as well as the written, drawn and photographic documentation." (Perrin, 2002 p3).

For the first time it had been stipulated that 'all parts' of the archaeological record were important, not just those things collected through fieldwork. While some parts of an archaeological archive

were obviously interesting and presentable within a museum, the archive should also be seen as a reusable and researchable resource in its own right.

The Archaeological Archives Forum, or AAF, was established following the Perrin report in order to link together in partnership all major parties with an interest in archaeological archives and museums in order that common policies and practice could be developed and applied (Archaeological Archives Forum, 2017). In the early 2000s the AAF undertook 'A Review of Standards in England for the Creation, Preparation and Deposition of Archaeological Archives' (Brown, 2003). Planning archaeologists, contracting units, specialists and museum curators were all consulted, as well as any documentation readily available. The report highlighted major inconsistencies in the ways various types of archaeological practitioner perceived their role within the archaeological archiving process, and that various pressures could affect how 'preservation by record' was applied to archiving practice including a lack of resources, indifference and general bad practice (Brown, 2003, 3.3). One main conclusion was that the importance of the expertise, personnel, time, and facilities needed for the archive was not reflected within the brief at the planning stage, nor financially within the project tender (Brown, 2003, 3.3.2). Therefore, the resulting quality of the archives deposited was generally considered low and curators found it difficult to sort and curate the archives as they did not understand them. There did not seem to be a mechanism in place to allow a museum to go back to the unit for help, as the contractors believed the project was over once the archive was deposited. Support was also not forthcoming from the planners who stopped their involvement once the report had been completed. Archives were therefore considered to be more of a hindrance than an asset at all points in the chain: museum curators, commercial archaeology units and planners (Brown, 2003).

The 2003 AAF report suggested huge variations in standards within units and museums alike and one of the recommendations was that a guide be produced which would enable planners and museums to set out good practice for archaeological archives. 'Archaeological archives, a guide to

best practice in creation, completion, transfer and curation' was first published in 2007 and copies sent to all museums, planning organisations and contracting units (Brown, 2011). This guide represented a major step forward for those compiling archives and detailed what those curating them should expect. The first industry guidelines produced by the Institute for Archaeologists, or IfA (now the Chartered Institute for Archaeology, or ClfA) in 2009 referenced the AAF guidelines and required its members to ensure that "all archaeological projects that include the recovery and generation of data and/or archaeological materials (finds) will result in a stable, ordered, accessible archive" (Institute for Archaeologists, 2009 p3). More recently, the creation of a stable, ordered and accessible archive as a fundamental aspect of any archaeological project has been defined at European level (Perrin et al., 2014), and international standards are in the process of being developed (International Committee for Documentation of the International Council of Museums, forthcoming).

The impact of such policies on changes to museum requirements is demonstrated through the recently completed SMA 'Museums Collecting Archaeology Survey' which took place following the data collection aspect of this thesis. It was reported that 86 % of those museums that continued to accept archaeological archives from developer-funded projects did so in accordance with their own deposition guidelines (Booth et al., 2018). While many museums now enforce such policies, there are significant variations in the requirements and detail owing to the need to meet the individual institution's needs, and how they evolved as a response to development-led archaeology. Where countywide deposition policies have been compiled (Paul, 2017a, Paul, 2017b), it was still not possible to create a completely uniform approach due to individual museum's administrative and site-specific needs.

2.2.4 Archaeological archives and sector resources

While changes to guidance and policy have mainly focused on the standards around archival practice, the impact archaeological archives are having on museum resources has been long

reported. According to the Museum and Galleries Commission Digest of Museum Statistics (DOMUS) report in 1999, archaeological objects were the second largest type of collection held by British Museums (after Biology and Natural Sciences), which are largely maintained at the public expense (Carter et al., 1999). However, the more recent Collections for People report, that aimed to address the issues surrounding museum-stored collections, found that archaeology was the second least used collection type (Keene et al., 2008 p51). Following the implementation of PPS-5, the Southport Group released a report on the public benefits of development-led investigation on the historic environment (Southport Group, 2011). (The group was formed following the Institute for Archaeologists conference in Southport and represented a variety of professional organisations involved in the development-led archaeology process.) One of the aims of the group was to identify how the archives created following the mantra 'preservation by record' could enhance the public record, and through consultation with museums, units and planners, identify the barriers to achieving this goal.

However, the issues identified by the Southport Group seem strangely familiar and imply that nothing had changed since the implementation of PPG16 twenty-one years earlier: archives are an afterthought, standards are variable, the stored resource is under-used, and since the advent of PPG16, stores are full and some museums are no longer accepting archaeological archives (Southport Group, 2011 p17). Therefore, thirty-five years on from the Dimpleby report (Dimpleby, 1978) which advocated only undertaking archaeological excavations when the record of that work can be appropriately curated and disseminated, it appeared that sites were routinely excavated in counties with no receiving repository, creating a situation where archives are un-deposited, un-accessible and ultimately may be lost. Herein lies one of the major flaws to the development-led system; there is no statutory requirement for local authorities to provide a museum, yet the majority of museums which collect, or have collected archaeological archives in the past, are fully or partly funded by local authorities (Edwards, 2013 p20). The provision for collecting the results of

archaeological projects instigated through the planning system are therefore vulnerable to changing economic and political pressures.

To better understand the effects on commercial archaeology, the Federation of Archaeological Managers and Employers, or FAME, undertook a survey in 2012 of un-deposited archaeological archives in England, Wales and Scotland (Smith and Tindle, 2012). Responding archaeological organisations were thought to represent around 75% of commercial units and the results suggested that organisations were holding around 9,000 un-deposited but complete archives as there was no store or museum able to take them. The completed archives occupied around 1,160m³ while the total volume of archives temporarily held by archaeological practices in England (which included works in progress and incomplete archives) were around 5,860m³ (Smith and Tindle, 2012 p1-6). To further exacerbate the problem, there is no quantification for what may be stored in the attics, garages and sheds of smaller independent organisations, or those archives from projects whose resources have run out and have been ‘taken home to complete’.

One large sector, as yet completely un-quantified, are the archives resulting from research-led archaeological excavations held mainly within universities. These projects are outside of the planning process and there are rarely any requirements for deposition stipulated by funding bodies. At the time this research was instigated, a small number of university archaeology departments (University of Birmingham, University College London, University of Leicester, University of Winchester Department) were Registered Organisations, or ROs, with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CifA). All ROs are expected to comply with CifA standards and guidance:

“All archaeological projects that include the recovery or generation of data and/archaeological materials (finds) will result in a stable, ordered, accessible archive.”
(Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, 2014 p3)

For those departments outside of the CifA’s governance, there is no mechanism in place to monitor the status of the archaeological archives from research excavations, or reprimand bad practice. It

could be argued that the more prominent excavations and projects are monitored by the appropriate curator, and that interested researchers could contact the relevant university directly to gain access. However, this potential use has never been quantified and is unlikely to be the case for the multitude of excavations undertaken abroad, and therefore inaccessible to the communities from where they originated. There are also anecdotal stories of academics leaving universities, retiring or dying, and their archives being left in the institution's care to become forgotten within storerooms until no one has any real memory of what they are.

The economic downturn of the late 2000s increased pressures on local authority museum funding (Museums Association, 2018 p5) and saw many commercial contractors facing, or succumbing to, abrupt closure (for example Birmingham Archaeology, Gloucester Archaeology unit and the University of Manchester Archaeology Unit). Concurrently, university archaeology departments have been subject to reduction in staffing and in some cases full closure, leaving both commercial and research archives homeless and at risk of simply being skipped. The situation surrounding archaeological archives was now considered to be in crisis (RESCUE, 2010).

2.2.5 Archaeological archives and the museum 'storage crisis'

The issue of space within museum stores has been widely reported (Perrin, 2002, Swain, 1996 p88) with archaeological archives resulting from developer-led interventions discussed as a major culprit (Swain, 2012 p357). The developer-led archaeology model was developed independently of a museum system and under the PPG16 and PPS5 policies, archaeological fieldwork takes place wherever a decision for preservation by record is made in advance of development. Swain (2012) argues that the competitive tendering process bought about by PPG16 has created poor communication networks between museums and archaeologists, who move around the country from one fieldwork project to the next without proper thought to the long-term curation of the material they are excavating.

In order to ascertain whether the opinions and comments recorded by the Southport Group were an accurate representation of the situation regarding archaeological collecting and Museums, the Society for Museum Archaeology (SMA), the Federation of Archaeological Managers and Employers (FAME) and English Heritage (EH) commissioned the Archaeological Archives and Museums review (Edwards, 2013). The aims were to characterise the users of archaeological archives once they had been deposited, establish how much had been collected since the advent of PPG16, and the quantity of un-deposited archives held by contractors. 134 museums responded to the survey (Edwards, 2013 p15). The main findings included identifying 47 local authorities, plus parts of another four, that had no collecting museum and within the stores themselves archaeological archives took up the second greatest amount of space, second only to local history archives (Edwards, 2013 p8).

In contrast to the belief that the advent of PPG16 had brought on the museum storage crisis, it was established by the 2012 review that the largest quantities of material were in fact collected during the rescue excavations of the 1970s (Edwards, 2013 p35). The mismatch of opinion and fact may result from the significantly higher numbers of individual development-led excavations resulting from the PPG16 policy, giving the impression that they are having a greater effect on museum stores than they really are. The post PPG16 interventions include large numbers of much smaller fieldwork projects such as evaluations and watching briefs. The rescue excavations of the 1960s and 1970s were larger in scale, often involving whole town redevelopment projects (Butcher and Garwood, 1994 p9). These projects which sometimes extended over several years, generated huge quantities of finds (Brown, 2015 p4). As previously discussed, the documentation and records kept during this time predate the development of standards and guidance, therefore stores are full of large quantities of unorganized, undocumented and therefore potentially inaccessible archives. Conversely many of the post-PPG16 projects involved pre-determination evaluation of a proposed development site's archaeological potential, sometimes producing little in the way of finds, though each intervention resulted in at minimum a paper archive. The Edwards report data indicated that

while there was an increase in the number of projects following PPG16 policy, there was not a corresponding increase in the quantity of material, however archaeological archives continued to be collected by museums at a steady rate (Edwards, 2013 p35).

While individual local authorities hold data on the number of planning-led archaeological interventions in their area, the resulting size of the archaeological archives created has never been quantified by locality, regionally or even nationally. Neither did the FAME survey (Smith and Tindle, 2012) identify un-depositable archives by area, and anecdotal evidence implies issues in some regions which were not covered by the report (for example North Yorkshire). While the Edwards survey identified general trends nationally around closed stores and museums reporting that space was at a premium, many of the issues reported were locally based, influenced by local pressures, political agendas, and how the museum had developed over time (Edwards, 2013). Together however, the FAME survey (Smith and Tindle, 2012) and Archaeological Archives in Museums Review (Edwards, 2013) make stark reading, suggesting that there are thousands of archaeological archives being held by commercial units rather than in publicly accessible repositories. The most recent quantification of the 'storage crisis' by the Society for Museum Archaeology took place following the data collection aspect of this research and implies the situation has not improved; Nearly two thirds of the responding museums that currently collect development-led archaeological archives reported that their stores would be full in five years or less (Booth et al., 2018 p3).

2.2.6 Archaeological archives end users

A Survey of archaeological archives in England published in 1998 reported that overall usage of stored archaeology archives was low, dominated by in-house access for display, and that 29% of archive repositories has received no enquiries or visitors the previous year (Swain, 1998). Where external demand for access did exist, this was centred around the most fully published and publicised excavations. For the majority of the less well-known archives, an often-reported barrier to their potential re-use, is the specialist knowledge required to understand and access the resource

(Edwards, 2013, Swain, 2012, Swain, 1996). The economic downturn of the late 2000s and subsequent local authority budget cuts have resulted in fewer and fewer museum archaeologists and museums are finding it increasingly difficult to support research enquiries (Research Information Network, 2008 p5). In 2012 it was reported that only 30% of responding museums had an archaeological curator on staff (Edwards, 2013 p8) and lack of in-house expertise was considered a serious barrier to use of the archives.

“To a non-specialist they are difficult to manage and appreciate.” (Edwards, 2013 p21).

On the other hand, where an archaeological curator was present the archives had been used for a range of in-house exhibitions and projects. The contents of archaeological archives were considered especially useful for outreach activities contributing to teaching collections, handling packs and loans (Edwards, 2013 p26). However, due to a lack of data compiled by museums, the report did not manage to fully characterise the other end users of archaeological archives following deposition. Nineteen of the responding museums were able to provide data on who was accessing their stored archaeology collections: volunteers by far represented the largest user group (45%) followed by the public (20%), private researchers (14%), universities (10%), community groups (6%), schools (3%) and commercial archaeologists constituted only 1% of the visits (Edwards, 2013 p71).

Data from 40 museums responding to the 2012 survey suggested around 2000 visits are made each year to stored archaeological archives. That represents about 50 visits per museum per year, or roughly one visit per week, and almost twice as many visits than the same 40 museums reported for their local history (a term with no formal categorisation in the museum sector) collections (Edwards, 2013 p72). The report therefore found that “archaeological archives have been used by responders to reach a very wide and diverse range of audiences” (Edwards, 2013 p8). However, the 2008 ‘Collections for People’ report that aimed to address the issues surrounding museum’s stored collections, found that archaeology was the second least used collection type (Keene et al., 2008 p51). This disparity could be interpreted as an increase in user numbers between 2008 and 2012.

However, when the 2012 review data is looked at in more detail, the '50 visits per year' were not achieved by the majority of the responding museums. In fact, only three reported a number over this 'average' with the majority reporting numbers well under 15 per year. The skew seems to result from the response of one museum/repository that reported over 900 visits that year, but they did stipulate the collection had recently moved to a new location allowing numbers to increase (Edwards, 2013 p73). These numbers could well have been a result of tours, local history societies, community groups and schools visiting the new facilities. If this exceptionally high number is removed from the equation then the average number of visitors to archaeological collections per year is closer to 26, or two visits per month with several reporting as few as one visit per year. For the museum reporting 900 visits that year, the public value of the stored collections is clearly demonstrated, however it is less evident for those museums or stores only achieving two visits per month or fewer. It could also be inferred from these results that the public do wish to visit archaeological archives where they are easily accessible, within highly promoted stores, though this situation normally results from a very large investment in the infrastructure by the local authority and in-house specialist staff (for example the London Archaeological Archive and Resource Centre and The Hive in Worcester).

“In museums with no archaeological expertise and few staff it is unlikely that archaeological archives in store will reach much of an audience at all.” (Edwards, 2013 p45)

The 2012 review demonstrated that re-use of stored archaeological archives by commercial archaeologists, the group which create them, is especially low (Edwards, 2013 p71). It has been suggested that the majority of archaeologists are not interested in researching archives, despite their continued assertion on the importance of preservation by record through long term curation and access (Swain, 2012 p361). Archaeologists have largely left this problem to the museums to deal with, and archaeological archives remain under resourced and underused by the profession (Shepherd, 2015 p136, Swain, 2012 p366).

However, the 2012 Archaeological Archives and Museums review did conclude that archaeological archives received almost twice as many visitors over the past 12 years than local history collections which took up twice as much space (Edwards, 2013 p24-26). So why is it that archaeological archives are targeted as a major cause of the storage crisis (Museums Association, 2005, Swain, 2012)? It is likely due to the fact that they have no agency or control over what is collected from developer-led archaeological excavations, and the rate at which it is collected; whereas, as with other collections in their care, they can choose what becomes part of the local history collection (Swain, 2012 p359).

2.3 The current archaeological archiving system

2.3.1 Standards and guidance

Current professional archaeological standards and guidance on the creation and compilation of archaeological archives are based on the principle that archaeological site records and materials are non-renewable. All archaeologists know that the archaeological archive is one of the most important elements of any archaeological project that converts the *in-situ* resource into an *ex-situ* record (Shepherd, 2015 p133). We cannot go back into the past and re-make the archaeological resource, and therefore it should all be retained. Archaeologists save archaeological sites through collection of materials and creation of records for future generations so that they too can appreciate the past.

“The archaeological resource is finite . . . a non-renewable resource in that . . . once a monument has been lost it cannot be recreated.”(Darvill, 1993 p6).

The creation of a stable, ordered and accessible archive as a fundamental aspect of any archaeological project has been defined at national (Brown, 2011), European (Perrin et al., 2014) and international (International Committee for Documentation of the International Council of Museums, forthcoming) level. The industry accepted standard is that an archaeological archive should contain a complete record of an archaeological project; the methodology, aims and objectives, data or objects collected, analysis, results, interpretations, research and publications (Brown, 2011); all parts working together as one interrogatable whole. An archaeological archive

should be compiled in a way that preserves the relationships between every element of the archaeological record in order to facilitate access in the future (Perrin et al., 2014). The national and European standard definitions of what constitutes an archaeological archive has been adopted by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists as part of their Standards and guidance for the Creation, Compilation, Transfer and Deposition of Archaeological Archives (Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, 2014). Compliance with the ClfA standards and guidelines is expected of all its members and Registered Organisations (ROs), ensuring that ClfA members and RO's work to high ethical and professional standards (Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, 2019a).

National Standard:

“Archaeological Archive: All parts of the archaeological record, including the finds and digital records as well as the written, drawn and photographic documentation.” (Brown, 2011 p3).

European Standard:

“An archaeological archive comprises all records and objects recovered during an archaeological project and identified for long term preservation, including artefacts, ecofacts and other environmental remains, waste products, scientific samples and also written and visual documentation in paper, film and digital form.” (Perrin et al., 2014 p20).

British Industry Standard:

“The archaeological archive is defined as all parts of the archaeological record, including the finds, samples, and digital records as well as the written, drawn and photographic documentation.” (Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, 2014 p3).

Standards on the compilation of archaeological archives also stipulate that they should be compiled in a manner that allows easy assimilation into the collections of recognised repositories, and that any repository that accepts archaeological archives into its care should be recognised as suitable for providing long term curation and facilitating access to the archives (Brown, 2011). The industry accepted standards and guidelines also define the responsibility of the archive repository to

appropriately incorporate archaeological archives into their institution, look after them, and make them available for consultation:

European Standard:

“It is the responsibility of the receiving repository to ensure that the archive is stored to recognised standards for long-term preservation, documented according to accepted internal procedures and made accessible for consultation.” (Perrin et al., 2014 p22).

British Industry Standard:

“Curation of the archive in a recognised repository will ensure the survival of archaeological evidence for future use.”

“It is the responsibility of all curators of archaeological archives to ensure that archives are stored to recognised standards for long-term preservation and made accessible for consultation.” (Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, 2014 p3).

However, the collection of archaeological materials and records, and the instigation of the standards by which they are to be compiled into archives, are both processes outside of the museum’s control (Boyle, 2019 p2, Society for Museum Archaeologists, 1993 p9). Some have argued that the mantra of ‘preservation by record’ as supported by the current archaeological archiving system, has led the sector to be overwhelmed by the sheer volume of the amassed archaeological record (Holtorf, 2001 p287, Thomas, 1991 p828).

The current situation surrounding archaeological archives and museums is therefore problematic. A storage crisis has led to large numbers of museums closing their doors to new acquisitions and commercial field units are left holding large quantities of archival material within their own stores that they are unable to deposit. The economic downturn has led to fears that if the units holding this material were to fail then this unique resource would be lost and anecdotal stories are told of museum staff and local planning archaeologists rummaging through skips outside closed units to ‘save’ archives (comments during ClfA AAG AGM 2016). At the same time museums feel unable to appropriately support their end of the commercial development-led system over which they have

no control or financial recompense. The current system, where museums accept responsibility for collecting the archives from development-led commercial archaeology in perpetuity, would appear to be at breaking point.

The split of responsibility at national level compounds the issue: Creation of archives through the planning process sitting with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), while the maintenance of the archives within museums lies with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). The Arts Council took over the responsibilities for museums and libraries in 2010 (through DCMS) and produced a report in 2011 on their vision for the future (Arts Council England, 2011). While the report contained no practical guidelines on how they may be achieved, some of the relevant goals for museums included:

“collections are being conserved, sustainably managed, displayed, interpreted, discussed and shared” and that “Everyone should have the right to benefit from the collections and knowledge that public funding supports within museums and libraries” (Arts Council England, 2011).

2.3.2 Archaeological archives and sustainability

While archaeological archives do receive a generous portion of the blame for the current museum storage crisis, current discourses of sustainability in museums suggest disposal as a collection management tool across all collection types (Museum Association, 2020). It is suggested that museums need to continue collecting, but without rationalisation the situation will never resolve, reducing standards for existing collections and compromising the ability of future curators to meet the needs of the collections and users (Merriman, 2008). Merriman suggests that museums that continue to accept new material into their stores whilst their existing collections lack effective management are unsustainable, and recommends managed growth alongside managed disposal in order to pass on better museums in the future and to realise the potential of their collections in the present (Merriman, 2008 p5). The idea that by collecting we are maintaining the past for future

generations is growing, therefore museums that continue to grow while existing collections suffer are unsustainable (Merriman, 2008 p9).

“In simplistic terms, the only way for museums to become sustainable, is to cease to collect or dispose of as much material as they collect.” (Merriman, 2008 p10).

At the National Museums directors conference (National Museums Directors Conference, 2003) it was argued that disposal was an issue which must be tackled seriously and responsibly. It was suggested that while retention may be desirable, “in some cases it may be right to dispose of material, which may otherwise merit retention to make way for activities and collections which would otherwise be neglected” (National Museums Directors Conference, 2003 p8). Archaeological archives were specifically mentioned as an example of one of “the more space and resource consuming areas covered by museums” (National Museums Directors Conference, 2003 p8) where questions around cost, value and potential should be asked.

In a climate where all public spending requires significant justification and council budgets have been cut following the 2008 downturn, museums are increasingly finding their remit changing, reducing the emphasis on a purely curatorial function and moving towards presentation to the public and community engagement. Museums are generally moving away from an intrinsic value approach to objects and collections, and towards measuring value in terms of public benefit (Swain, 2012 p366). From a museum perspective it has therefore been suggested that the reference potential of a stored collection is not, on its own, a sufficient justification for its retention (National Museums Directors Conference, 2003 p6), and that museums need to make space for the needs of the present, that will also allow new stories of the past to be collected and constructed (Holtorf, 2001 p295, Museums Association, 2015). Disposal is therefore now being seen as an important element within a sustainable approach to museum collections, and museums must begin to ascribe value and significance to collections, in order to allow their sustainable development.

Disposal is not a commonly used tool within the museum sector, museum curator's training instilling a 'presumption against disposal' (Merriman, 2008 p4) in much the same manner that archaeologists learn the mantra of 'preservation by record'. However, this is changing and there are now examples of institutions such as Southampton Museum beginning to grade their collections so that they can make decisions about their future management, and in a few cases, this is being attempted with archaeology collections (Brown, 2015). It has been reported that some museums are de-accessioning whole or parts of their stored archives though the details are unclear and not widely publicised (Swain, 2012).

The issue of discard is a highly contentious one within the archaeological world. In response to the reports of museum disposals, RESCUE (the British Archaeological Trust) called for the archaeological profession's "explicit rejection of the dispersal, de-accessioning and discard of existing archives" so that "Britain is not to lose a substantial proportion of its unique and irreplaceable archaeological heritage through the ... implementation of short-term and poorly conceived schemes for the dispersal and/or de-accessioning of archaeological archives" (RESCUE, 2012). Many in the profession agree with this sentiment and opinions against disposal and discard from the archaeological record are openly voiced within subject specialist networks and at conferences.

"We don't want to be remembered as the generation that threw everything away" (anon ClfA Archives Group Conference May 2013).

It has been discussed that the obvious choices for discard are the bulk finds; the numerous boxes of pottery sherds and animal bone reported as one of the major causes of the storage problem (Southport Group, 2011, Swain, 2012). Some in the sector argue against such disposals citing the loss of future research potential, that breakthroughs in research have only been made possible through the long-term retention of certain assemblages (Swain, 2012 p358). Equally, the majority of curators can point to stored archival material that has never been accessed for research or any

other purposes. Therefore, evidence that all archaeological material should be kept in perpetuity has yet be demonstrated.

Material specialists appear to be especially reluctant to advocate the disposal of material, even following full analysis, stipulating that techniques may improve, or new questions may be asked of the archive (Rainsford et al., 2016 p10). These discussions and decisions are rarely recorded and do not appear in academic literature. An example of this problem was the excavation archive for the Delamare Street Quarry in Chester which totalled 184 boxes of finds and 16 boxes of paper records. The final contents list details 64 boxes of pottery, 64 boxes of animal bone and 24 boxes of ceramic building material (CBM). The majority of these finds were recovered not from their primary depositional context, but from refuse layers and dumps within the backfilled quarry. The lack of context greatly reduces the research potential of the artefacts though the quantities were so large that it was believed different questions could be asked of the assemblages (Cutler et al., 2012). At the time of analysis each specialist was asked to implement a discard policy however none felt it was appropriate. When it came to the time of deposition, the accepting museum enquired if any of the bulk finds could be disposed of, but the specialists once again refused to participate in any form of selection or discard. It has however been reported that some museums are de-accessioning whole or parts of the archives they hold, therefore the process and decisions around discard are being taken out of the specialists' and archaeologists' hands (Swain, 2012).

2.3.3 Gaps in our understanding

It is widely agreed that the archives that result from archaeological interventions are an important heritage asset though there appears to be little in the way of research to support this belief. Limited mention is made of stored archaeological archives in the academic literature beyond those by Merriman and Swain (Merriman, 2008, Merriman and Swain, 1999, Swain, 2012) who highlight the issues of storage and lack of use, and call for us to move beyond debates of how archives are generated, ordered and transferred, towards hopefully understanding the true value of

archaeological archives. While anecdotal stories are told about the storage crisis and lack of use of developer-led archives, the value, and/or significance of the archives currently held by museums has not been addressed as either a public asset, research resource, or as part of the museum collection as a whole. However, as a direct result of the current space crisis within museums, the value and future potential of these archives is being questioned by those that hold them.

While the issues around archaeological archives are rarely discussed in museology literature, they have been highlighted for a number of years within the Society of Museum Archaeology (SMA) membership newsletter (Barton, 1977 p2, Society for Museum Archaeologists, 1986 p1, Society for Museum Archaeologists, 1998 p2). Archaeological archives are specialist in their nature, and through the SMA and ClfA committees, museum curators report difficulties in knowing how to access, use and promote them, though planning legislation decrees that they are responsible for their long-term curation. The overall situation around archaeological archives in museums can be simplified as lack of space, low reuse, inaccessible collections and management outside of the museum's control. Current projects in museums are attempting to address these issues through review and rationalisation of their stored archaeological collections. The implementation and results of these reviews may inform on how archaeological archives are valued within the museum profession, and their place within the collection as a whole. This in turn could provide insight on the creation of the archive, and the value judgement points which could be applied prior to their final deposition with a museum.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a brief history of the relationship between archaeological archiving and museum collecting and detailed how the rescue excavations of the 60's and 70's and followed by the growth of 'development-led' archaeology in England has resulted in an exponential increase in archaeological finds and data requiring long-term storage in museums. The situation surrounding

archaeological archives is now considered to be in crisis and many museums are beginning to question the real value of the archaeological archives as either a research resource, public asset or museum collection through collection review and rationalisation projects. But how are these decisions being made and what implications do these have on the future long-term retention of archaeological material, and creation of the archives in the first place? Can the project methodologies and outcomes provide insight into the value and/or significance of archaeological archives and address the issues of storage, resources, accessibility and use within a fragmented sector? Analysis of a series of seventeen case studies within a variety of collecting institution types and geographical locations will attempt to address the aim of this research and ascertain the purpose of archaeological archives. The following four chapters present in-depth studies of museum collection reviews beginning with an Archaeology Collections Review at Shakespeare Birthplace Trust.

3 AN ARCHAEOLOGY COLLECTIONS REVIEW AT SHAKESPEARE BIRTHPLACE TRUST

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results of a longitudinal study into the archaeology collections review at Shakespeare Birthplace Trust in Stratford-upon-Avon. Following changes to the Trusts' acquisition policy in 2008, the inclusion of archaeological archives within the museum's stores was questioned by senior staff, leading to the instigation of a detailed programme of review and rationalisation in 2013-2014. The archaeology review at Shakespeare Birthplace Trust provided an opportunity to follow a museum-led review process from the very beginning, understand the strategy and implementation of the review, and how individuals can impact upon decision-making and therefore the results and outcomes. This case study establishes several of the key themes within this thesis, including how lack of resources, accessibility and knowledge can highlight the various ways in which significance and value are attributed to archaeological archives across the sector. This chapter provides insight into the purpose of archaeological archives, why we keep them, how are they used and how much is needed, with the potential to influence their creation through developer-led archaeology.

To achieve this, views of Shakespeare Birthplace Trust staff were canvassed prior to the review and again afterwards in order to establish how notions of value changed throughout the process. This chapter presents the combined review results and interview data in order to establish the reasoning and decision-making process behind how Shakespeare Birthplace Trust attribute significance to their archaeological collections, and how external pressures influenced the process and outcomes. Detailed review results are included in Appendix 1. The chapter begins by contextualising Shakespeare Birthplace Trust and outlining the changes to collecting practices that led to the archaeology collections review.

3.2 Context

3.2.1 Shakespeare Birthplace Trust and Archaeological Collecting

“The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust is the independent charity that cares for the world’s greatest Shakespeare heritage sites in Stratford-upon-Avon, and promotes the enjoyment and understanding of his works, life and times all over the world. Celebrating Shakespeare is at the heart of everything we do.” (Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, 2016b)

The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust is an independent registered educational self-sustaining charity based in Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire (Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, 2016b). The Trust was founded in 1847 following the purchase of William Shakespeare's birthplace for preservation as a national memorial and now maintains and preserves five Shakespeare Birthplace properties (Shakespeare’s Birthplace, Mary Arden’s Farm, Ann Hathaway’s Cottage, Shakespeare’s New Place and Hall’s Croft) as well as a museum, collections, library and objects with particular reference to the life and times of William Shakespeare (Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, 2016e).

The activities and responsibilities of Shakespeare Birthplace Trust are governed by the Shakespeare Birthplace Act of 1961, which makes little mention of archaeology.

Under the act, the objectives of the Trust are defined as being:

- To promote in every part of the world the appreciation and study of the plays and other works of William Shakespeare and the general advancement of Shakespearian knowledge
- To maintain and preserve the Shakespeare properties for the benefit of the nation
- To provide and maintain for the benefit of the nation a museum and a library of books, manuscripts, records of historic interest, pictures, photographs and objects of antiquity with particular but not exclusive reference to William Shakespeare, his life, works and times

(Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, 2016f)

The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust has however collected archaeological material from Stratford-upon-Avon and South Warwickshire since it first formed. The volume of archaeological material

acquired by the Trust notably increased during the 20th century, due to large-scale urban developments in the town and surrounding areas (Mitchell, 2012 p4). Included in the collection are significant archaeological archives relating to the Roman excavations at Tiddington, the early medieval cemetery excavations at Alveston Manor and Bidford-upon-Avon, as well as archaeological projects and surveys from within Stratford-upon-Avon town centre (Mitchell, 2012). Some of the archaeological artefacts from these projects had been displayed at Nash House during the early years of the Trust when the site functioned as a town museum (Tinsley, 2014b). However, in more recent times, the displays and visitor experience at Shakespeare Birthplace Trust has been brought increasingly in line with the mission and objectives of the Trust (above). As a result, with the exception of a small quantity of finds displayed during the 'Dig for Shakespeare' excavations (2009-2016) at New Place, archaeology has not been featured much at all within the museum properties (Tinsley, 2014c p6).

"We have no remit as a Trust to do anything with archaeological material that doesn't relate to the mission and objectives of Shakespeare Birthplace Trust." (Collections Manager, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust).

3.2.2 Changes to collecting policy and collections reviews

In 2010, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust staff decided they would better meet the Trust's objectives if they stopped collecting archaeological material from South Warwickshire, the responsibility for which they passed to Warwickshire Museum service (Mitchell, 2012 p5). A new acquisition policy (Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, 2008) detailed this change to archaeological collecting and significantly reduced the quantity of material coming into their stores.

"The trust will continue to only acquire archaeological material found in the Stratford-upon-Avon District or its immediate environs (within a maximum ten mile radius of the town)." (Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, 2016f).

These policy changes coincided with a restructure of the collections department as well as a programme of review and rationalisation projects across all of Shakespeare Birthplace Trust's

collections. The archaeology collection comprised mainly of archives from developer-funded excavations, the large majority of which fell outside the recently updated acquisition policy. It was therefore felt that a similar programme of review and rationalisation as had taken place elsewhere in the Trust's collections, should be applied to the archaeological archives.

The basis on which it was hoped decisions would be made regarding the archaeological archives was outlined in the Archaeological Collections Policy Addition of 2011. This amendment to the policy states that the retention of archaeological material will be based on:

“its value in aiding the study and interpretation of the history of Stratford-upon-Avon, with a special emphasis on the early modern period and especially the periods associated with William Shakespeare and his family (through displays/education handling sessions/research).” (Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, 2011).

The Archaeology Collections Review was instigated in order to establish how the recently amended policy on retention and discard could be applied to the archaeological archives, in the same manner as the policy is applied to the other collections held by Shakespeare Birthplace Trust. However, unlike the other collections held by Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, the archaeological archives have been reviewed on three separate occasions since 2010. The second review in 2013-2014 was particularly significant in terms of physical interaction with the archaeological archives and forms the basis for this chapter. The preceding review in 2012 and the most recent review in 2016, are presented in Appendix 2 and discussed within the context of the 2013-2014 results.

3.2.3 A 'redundant' collection

During the initial stages of the 2013-2014 review process, site visits highlighted how collections were dispersed across various basements, lofts and purpose-built storerooms. These disparate elements of the archaeological collections held by the Trust were due to be collated and moved to an off-site store outside of the town centre. Before the collections review in 2013, the staff did not have a full understanding of the archaeology collections, what they contained, where they were from and what

their potential may be. The desire to address this issue and establish what they had, and why they had it, was one of the driving forces behind the project.

“Why on earth do we have this?” (Collections Assistant Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, looking in a box of unmarked animal bone).

The preceding archaeology collections review and catalogue project in 2012 (Mitchell, 2012) was not mentioned during any of the interviews or discussions with collections staff. One senior manager commented that the review of the archaeological archives came about:

“for the main reason that nobody at the trust now was involved in the collecting of that material, apart from the recent excavations at New Place, so we didn’t understand what the collection was and what its potential was and how it could be better used and better made available. So, the review has been primarily about us understanding what we’ve got so we can then start to make some decisions about its future.” (Collections Manager, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust).

It was hoped that a key outcome of the review would be establishing *“what’s in the collection, what its significance is, where it relates to other collections in the region”* (Collections Manager, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust). This expressed lack of understanding generally seemed to sit side-by-side with the issue that The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust’s primary mission is to tell the story of Shakespeare in Stratford, not the archaeological history of Stratford:

“Shakespeare Birthplace Trust isn’t telling the story of the history of Stratford, or the history of South Warwickshire, we are telling a very specific story of Shakespeare, his life and times and the legacy afterwards, that’s were its different to a town museum or a county museum.” (Collections Manager, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust).

While the members of staff openly expressed a lack of knowledge about the archaeological collections, they also commented that it was very unlikely that they would ever be used by the trust:

“for a lot of the material where its Roman and early medieval, it’s never going to form part of the public offer of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust”
“it’s not a collection we are getting any benefit from”

“we store it and we can make it accessible to researchers and that’s fine but in terms of getting it out to the widest possible audience it’s very hard to see how we are ever going to do that.”

(Comments from Shakespeare Birthplace Trust collections staff).

This presented an identified conflict for the collections staff: on the one hand they wanted to know more about the archaeology holdings; but on the other, their belief that increased understanding would not result in increased use. The recent changes to the collection policy (Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, 2008) were mentioned as possible reason for this conflict, but it also became clear that staff believed the archaeology had been neglected for a while. One manager commented that *“the archaeology’s been ‘just some archaeology’, and it’s been hidden I guess, it’s not been perceived as significant or of value or of interest to the activity of the trust”*. However, it appeared the collections staff intended the review to be used as a mechanism to address this:

“It’s not really been thought of at all is the problem, and at least with this process we think about it and we can make a proper decision rather than just sweep it under the carpet.”

(Collections Manager, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust).

It was suggested during the interviews that one way the archaeology could be better positioned within the Trust was as a research collection; however, it was also acknowledged that there was currently no mechanism for researchers to establish what Shakespeare Birthplace Trust held in the way of archaeological archives. The website (www.shakespeare.org.uk) describes the collections as being:

“At the heart of all things ‘Shakespeare’, the Trust holds the world’s largest Shakespeare-related library, museum and archives open to the public, with over 1 million documents, 55,000 books and 12,000 museum objects.” (Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, 2016e).

These publicised figures however *“don’t include the bulk finds collections that comprises the archaeology archives”* (Collections Manger), supporting the concern raised by collections staff that the archaeology is ‘hidden’ at Shakespeare Birthplace Trust. The small number of archaeological objects detailed in the on-line catalogue in 2013 (Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, 2016d) included

individual sherds of pottery and early medieval gold jewellery. When questioned about past use of the stored collections by researchers, two of the staff were aware of research visits to the early medieval cremations from Alveston Manor (a published excavation) and several requests to view the jewellery in particular but could not recall any other instances. The use of this particular archive by researchers seems to have had the effect of raising its perceived importance within the Trust, but potentially only for this specific aspect (or pocket) of the collection:

“I know some of the research interest has been about the cremations we have, so there are pockets that are really interesting and there are significant collections that we hold.”
(Collections Manager, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust).

It was not just the lack of use of the archaeological collections by the museum and researchers that was mentioned, but also the feeling that the archives had been forgotten about by archaeologists.

“it’s essentially becoming a redundant and orphaned collection that nothing was ever happening with and that wasn’t good for it and wasn’t good for us ... it’s not being used, it’s essentially become dormant or redundant.” (Collections Manager, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust).

In the case of one specific excavation archive, the material (finds) portion of the archive had been held by Shakespeare Birthplace Trust since the final phase of the fieldwork ended in 1981, while the paper portion of the archive was housed at Warwickshire Museum. The report on the project was still pending, creating a situation where the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust collections staff had no information on this archive in their care, and any potential researchers could not identify objects *“without running backwards and forwards which isn’t very practical”* (collections intern, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust). Additionally, current staff could not recall the finds archive being accessed by the archaeologists reputed to be working on the publication of the excavations.

3.2.4 The Trust’s mission vs. a few ‘star items’

The comments across the board demonstrated how little the archaeological collections were understood and utilised at Shakespeare Birthplace Trust. However, throughout the visits and

interviews there was one particular element in the archives that all staff members were keen to discuss:

“the early medieval gold jewellery is absolutely fabulous”

“the beautiful gold brooches”

(Comments from Shakespeare Birthplace Trust staff).

The brooches in question come from two different excavations but are kept in the same box (not standard archaeological archiving best practice) in the most easily accessible store below the Birthplace Centre where they are regularly shown off to visiting dignitaries, including the various Royal visitors Shakespeare Birthplace Trust receives:

“historically a tour around the stores is about getting the nice, the known things out. When it comes to the archaeology collection the things we know about are the early medieval brooches because they are most visibly appealing.” (Collections Manager, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust).

It was suggested by some of the staff that the box housing the brooches was pretty much the only one opened during tours of the store, therefore being chosen over items that could be considered more Shakespeare orientated. There is therefore a contradiction in where Shakespeare Birthplace Trust perceives the value in its collection lies (objects associated with the life and times of Shakespeare), and what is reflected in practice.

However, the highlighting of the early medieval brooches may have been a deliberate choice on the part of the collections staff to include archaeology on the tours that would otherwise never be accessed.

“It’s easy to do it on a tour because ‘here’s a box, or here’s a nice early medieval brooch or a necklace or amber beads’, because it’s not a lot of work. But to put it in an exhibition, to explain to the general visitor why we have got this out of context that has nothing to do with the house they are visiting is a much more challenging process.” (Collections Manager, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust).

There were therefore aspects of the stored archaeological archives that a wide range of staff at Shakespeare Birthplace Trust were aware of prior to the 2013-2014 review, and certain objects were considered to be amongst the Trust's 'star items'. However, beyond the occasional outing on a store tour, even the 'star items' do not form part of the Trust's offer.

"There are handful of what you might consider star items that have been reasonably well know and well regarded, still nothing's been done with them" (Collections Manager, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust).

3.2.5 Aiming for rationalisation

From the outset of the 2013-2014 review it appeared that both the understanding and use of the archaeological collections held by Shakespeare Birthplace Trust could be considered low. While there was some hope that by reviewing the archaeological archives they held, the use of this material would increase, there was no expectation that archaeology would ever form a core offer of the Trust. However, simply increasing the visibility of the collection both within the organisation and for external researchers was expressed as a potential positive outcome of the review:

"I am hopeful the review will make it more visible."

"If it's being used by researchers it's raising the profile of the collection and raising the profile of the trust and it might mean there are more opportunities for us to use those collections in partnership with other organisations in other ways."

*"While a collection is in our care, I want it to be used, whatever form that takes."
(Collections staff, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust).*

The collections staff were clearly keen to learn more about the archaeological materials in their care (specifically the physical objects not paper records), although there did appear to be some preconceptions about the review's outcomes:

"This archaeological review focuses on collections which have become anomalous to the aims and objective of Shakespeare Birthplace Trust." (Tinsley, 2014c).

Therefore, it was assumed that rationalisation of the collection would be one outcome of the review. The general opinion at the beginning of 2014 was that much of the archaeology collection was no

longer relevant to the Trust, and the review would bear this theory out. It was hoped the review would provide Shakespeare Birthplace Trust with the information they needed to make decisions about the archives and bring them in line with the Archaeology Collections Policy Addition (Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, 2011). It was assumed that material not selected for retention under the amended collection policy would be transferred to another museum.

“The review will give us the raw material with which we can have a sensible conversation with other museums and services about what the best future for the collection is.”

“If it can be homed elsewhere where it is more accessible to searchers and general visitors, where it fits in a better context then I think that would be better for the collection.”

(Collections Manager, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust).

3.3 Strategy

3.3.1 A review of every object

The stated long term aims of Shakespeare Birthplace Trust’s archaeology review were to “strengthen the collection by methodically assessing all the objects in the archaeology collection” (Tinsley, 2014c p3) with a view to rationalisation and potentially disposals from the collection. A methodology was therefore required that would allow the assessment of every archaeological object in Shakespeare Birthplace Trust’s collections from a range of perspectives.

The final strategy for the archaeology collections review was devised by an independent consultant (Chaplin, 2013) based on the framework created by University College London in their Collections Review Toolkit (Dunn and Das, 2011). Under this model, collections are examined from a range of different angles including the rarity and uniqueness of objects, their sensory and visual impact, the potential and meaning for specific groups or communities as well as the exploitability of objects for income generation, product development, audience development and inspiration (Dunn and Das, 2011 p12).

It was not believed that the current Shakespeare Birthplace Trust staff had the capacity to undertake the proposed assessment of every object in the archaeology collection. The Trust curators therefore applied to the University of Birmingham to run the project as Cultural Internship placement between Shakespeare Birthplace Trust and the University (University of Birmingham, 2019).

The University of Birmingham Cultural Internship scheme offers paid six-month placements on meaningful projects at leading cultural organisations in the West Midlands Region. The scheme is open to recent graduates with a 2:1 or first-class Honours degree or a postgraduate qualification. It was proposed that the appointed intern would carry out the review of Shakespeare Birthplace Trust's archaeology collections.

The original aims of the review were outlined in the Cultural Internship brief against which applications to the role were requested to apply:

- Carry out research on the archaeology collections linking objects to their associated archival record
- Rationalise the archaeological items from the Dig for Shakespeare project accessioning relevant items into the permanent collections
- Identify objects which fall outside of the collections current remit and no longer meet Shakespeare Birthplace Trust's strategic objectives in preparation for their potential disposal
- Carry out retrospective cataloguing to enhance existing records
- Catalogue un-accessioned items
- Review storage of all archaeological material in our collections and pack or repack objects into conservation standard materials as appropriate.

(University of Birmingham, 2013)

Prior to the implementation of the review, some potential limitations were identified within the remit of the Cultural Internship: The depth of specialist archaeological knowledge that would be required to achieve all the aims within the timeframe of the project was considered beyond the role of an internship placement. Additionally, the reviewer (the intern) was to be assisted by a group of

volunteers pulled from Shakespeare Birthplace Trust's existing volunteer pool, the day-to-day management of which would be down to the appointed intern. Therefore, the original aims were modified and it was decided that the 2013-2014 archaeology collections review would be the first stage of a longer process: For this stage "the focus would be on gaining an overview and better understanding of the archaeological collections" (Tinsley, 2014c p3).

The proposed review framework was devised to support a methodical review of all the objects in the collection, without the need for specialist archaeological knowledge. Following an initial pilot project that tested the suggested methodology against archaeological archives from one of the better-known archaeological sites in the collection (Bidford-on-Avon), the final framework for the review was set out in the review rubric (Table 4).

3.3.2 The review rubric

The review rubric (Table 4) set out a framework under which the archaeological collections held by Shakespeare Birthplace Trust would be assessed against six categories:

- The significance of the material or object
- Its public engagement potential
- Its potential to support learning or teaching activities
- Its research potential
- Ownership
- Its condition

(Tinsley, 2014c)

Each category was divided into five sub-categories with definitions attached to a ranking of A to E (A being the highest, and E the lowest). The review aimed to establish where a single 'review unit' (discussed below) rated under each category heading by assigning the appropriate ranking.

	Significance	Public Engagement Potential	Supports Learning	Enquiry/Research Use	Ownership	Condition Assessment
A	Does the provenance demonstrate a direct connection to a historical event, person, family, place or theme of international significance ?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is considered a 'star' object and a focal point of a key exhibition space High 'wow' factor Deemed 'iconic' by visitors Strongly identified in the public's mind with your organisation or location Regularly used in public events or outreach teaching Stimulates strong personal/ associative response from visitors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can actively be used as a learning aid Fosters interdisciplinary teaching and learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Part of a specifically created research collection Regularly used by researchers Strong potential for international/ national research use Regularly the subject of or cited in responses to public enquiries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accessioned and owned by the organisation Proof of purchase/ letters of ownership/ documentation On a documented loan with a clear timeline. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stable material Good condition No conservation problems
B	Does the provenance demonstrate a direct connection to a historical event, person, family, place or theme of national significance ?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engages visitor interest and stimulates gallery discussion and enquiries Important support object in an exhibition space Occasionally used in public events, talks, handling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has recognised potential for use in outreach and learning activities Has potential to foster aspects of learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Occasionally used by researchers and cited in enquiries Clear potential for research use 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accessioned and regarded as owned by the organisation No letters or documentation as incorporated into the organisation over time On a documented loan that is regularly renewed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stable material Minor cleaning: stable and not at risk
C	Does the provenance demonstrate a direct connection to a historical event, person, family, place or theme of site significance to SBT ?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Useful support object for display and handling No current public focus, but potential for future public focus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Was originally collected and used as a learning/ education aid but is no longer used. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unique to SBT but similar Collected as part of research collection but no longer used Some potential for future use 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not accessioned but proved/ known to be owned by the organisation Collected by SBT staff for research/ teaching with no letters of ownership On a documented long-term loan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stable material but needs monitoring Some risk: some restoration or repair conservation desirable
D	Does the provenance demonstrate a direct connection to a historical event, person, family, place or theme of wider regional or local significance ?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not known to have been used in a public focus capacity Issues around access to the object need to be overcome 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Little potential for current use but could be relevant in the future 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Little potential for current use but could be relevant in the future 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accessioned but not regarded as owned by the organisation On a documented indefinite loan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unstable material High risk: immediate action required Specialist conservation required Major restoration, additions or loss
E	Not deemed to have historical interest OR provenance/ identity unknown	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No potential for public focus Not suitable for display or handling use 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is not known to have been used in a learning capacity No future value in learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sample of a common type or types Never used for research and no potential to do so 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not accessioned, provenance not documented Believed to be on a long term/ indefinite loan but not documented. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very unstable material Beyond repair Poses immediate risk to other specimens

Table 4. Shakespeare Birthplace Trust Archaeological Collections Review Rubric

Against significance, a review unit would receive the highest rating if “the provenance demonstrated a direct connection to a historical event, person, family, place or theme of international significance” (Table 4), then down a level to national significance (B rating). Interestingly it would only receive a rating of C if it were considered significant to the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust. A ‘review unit’ considered to be of regional or local significance would only receive a rating of D which is interesting from a professional archaeological perspective as the large majority of commercial work would fall into this category. Only one level down from this is a rating of E: having no historical interest whatsoever.

Each of the other categories are similarly divided with a rating of C appearing to be the benchmark which has been set by the Trust as the lowest acceptable perceived value. Review units rated at this point reflect objects that are not currently used for teaching, public engagement or research but are deemed to have the potential to do so in the future. Units receiving a D rating or below are perceived to have a low possibility of forming part of the Trust’s engagement or teaching output, or little potential for future research use and would therefore be considered for disposal.

3.4 Implementation

3.4.1 A detailed review by an intern and volunteers

Shakespeare Birthplace Trust is the only museum contacted during this research to have reviewed the contents of every box of material they hold, rather than looking at specific groups of material, individual site archives or representative samples (see Chapters 4-6). Therefore the 2013-2014 review undertaken by Shakespeare Birthplace Trust provides the most detailed case study followed during this research in terms of actual interaction with stored archives.

The review was carried out over a one-year period by the collection’s assistant on the University of Birmingham Cultural Internship placement. The collections assistant had recently graduated with a Masters in International Heritage Management from the University of Birmingham but had no

previous archaeological experience. The original Internship placement, and therefore the proposed time period for the review, had been billed as six months, but this proved unachievable and so the intern was employed by Shakespeare Birthplace Trust as a collections assistant to work part time on the review for an additional seven months. The completion of the review in this timeframe was “achieved through the help of four volunteers” (Tinsley, 2014c p3).

The four volunteers had worked with the Trust for several years in various capacities such as within the properties as house stewards and as trainee excavators on the Dig for Shakespeare project. The Dig For Shakespeare excavation was a seven year archaeological investigation into Shakespeare’s family home, New Place, in Stratford (Edmonson et al., 2016b). The community engagement project trained the volunteers in skills such as archaeological excavation, field recording, finds washing and sorting, and engaging the visiting public with the project. The volunteers therefore had archaeological experience and a direct relationship with some of the archives being assessed during the review, having been involved in their original creation.

The review was undertaken by the collections assistant and volunteers with very little input from outside sources such as specialists or individuals with a museum or commercial archaeology background. The collections assistant and volunteers worked side by side, the volunteers recording their scores (A-E) for those ‘review units’ they had assessed against the review rubric, and the collections assistant monitoring the process as a whole.

3.4.2 Splitting archives into ‘review units’

The review was undertaken on a site-by-site, or archive-by-archive basis. An archaeological archive was not rated against the review rubric as one unit in its entirety (see definitions, section 1.3.6) but was subdivided into ‘review units’. Within the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust Archaeology collections review there was no set criteria for how the term ‘review unit’ should be applied, therefore what

constituted a 'review unit' in the final spreadsheet varied between a whole box of archival material, and an individual object.

It became apparent through the interviews with staff and volunteers that decisions about the perceived value of the contents of an archive box were being made before the framework of the review rubric could be applied. Whether the box of material was considered as one 'review unit' in its entirety, or specific items were pulled out and assessed against the review rubric individually, depended very much on the initial significance the reviewer placed on the material they encountered upon lifting the lid of the archive box:

"When I look at a box, I give it that initial evaluation and think what is in here? Often it's all the same sort of material anyway so it does not have to have that separating out, often things stay the same, just sometimes there may be something that is very nice and can be thought of as an object by itself that needs a bit more attention."

"When I take a box, well it's not necessarily a box by box approach, it can be for instance if there are two really fantastic objects in one box then I will take those as separate objects and review them separately."

"So, I would record what was in the box as a starting point, and once we have seen what's in the box, then go and do the review afterwards, just in case there is a hidden gem in the bottom of the box."

(Comments from Shakespeare Birthplace Trust review staff).

As a result of this initial appraisal, the objects or finds the reviewer considered of greater value to the Trust, or being of greater personal interest, would receive a more detailed assessment as part of the review, compared with material they found less appealing or considered to have less future potential for Shakespeare Birthplace Trust. To translate that into archaeological fieldwork terms: the registered finds received much more attention than the bulk materials within the framework of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust collections review. However, had registered finds been assessed within the same 'review unit' as bulk material, the likelihood of the results to appear confused was high. Due to the way the review rubric required a grade of A-E for each review unit against the 6

categories, the *prima facie* value decisions made by the reviewers upon opening a box appeared to serve a purpose:

“If there is a box with a lovely gold brooch with a pile of rusty nails, I would take the brooch out separately from the nails otherwise that would give quite a distorted view on the review itself.” (Collections Assistant, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust)

3.4.3 Pre-determining significance

At the start of the review it was agreed by the review staff and collections manager that certain aspects of the archaeological collections would take priority during the review. The order in which the boxes or ‘review units’ were assessed against the review rubric demonstrated that certain objects or types of archival material such as registered finds and non-bulk material were pre-determined to have a higher potential value to Shakespeare Birthplace Trust as these were reviewed first.

“We thought it would be best just to look at what would be more used in the future and work that way.”

“The bulk pottery finds and the boxes of finds have kind of been left till last ... just because they are less likely to be used in display or used in the future, so it was about looking through first what could be used for educational purposes or for display purposes and then working through that way.”

(Collections Assistant, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust).

The decision to review material thought to have most potential value to the Trust first was made at management level. However, the day-to-day choices of which order to undertake the review was very much at the discretion of the collections assistant and the volunteers based on their immediate opinion of a ‘review units’ potential significance to the Trust. The ‘review units’ within a single site archive were therefore not always reviewed together, often with the assessment of the bulk finds from an archive being left until much later in the process.

The implication is that the ratings given at the start of the review would generally be higher than those attributed to the ‘review units’ assessed during the latter stages of the project. However, the

collection assistant suggested that over time, the ratings given to 'review units' also lowered as a result of increased confidence in knowledge of the collection as a whole. Therefore, the pre-determination that this material would receive a low score was compounded by the increased confidence of the collections assistant to be "*a bit harsher*" (Collections Assistant, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust) with the rating of 'review units' as the project progressed. It was suggested that if time allowed, the site archives assessed during the early stages of the review should be re-scored, generally with a negative effect on the ratings.

"I can definitely see from when I started the review, I was very cautious in my scoring. As I have gone through, I have become a bit harsher. I don't know if it's my knowledge of the collection that has increased, the type of objects can be an influence on it, but I do feel I am a lot more confident in saying 'that box is definitely an E' now where perhaps in the past I would have said D." (Collections Assistant, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust).

While the collections assistant had final say on the ratings each 'review unit' received under the six headings in the review rubric (Table 4), the presence of the volunteers did influence some of the final ratings individual 'review units' received. The archaeological experience gained through the Dig for Shakespeare excavations provided the volunteers with background knowledge for some of the archives, allowing a "*more enthusiastic*" (Collections Assistant, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust) assessment of some of the 'review units'. The collections assistant also believed the volunteers' previous archaeological experience influenced how they rated the archaeology collections, often with a more positive approach to how 'review units' should be rated.

"Their knowledge has been invaluable, especially with the Dig for Shakespeare finds because they actually helped excavate those, so they had the site knowledge."

"The thing I have noticed is they are perhaps more positive than I am, not positive, but I mark perhaps slightly harsher than some of the others might."

(Collections Assistant, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust).

3.4.4 Objects and records

The 2013-2014 Shakespeare Birthplace Trust archaeology collection review focussed entirely on the material (finds); it did not include the paperwork aspect of the archaeological archives. Where a site had been published then the book or journal article was consulted and cross-referenced into the final review spreadsheet, but only if the object or 'review unit' was specifically mentioned in the publication. If the excavation paperwork (generally the site report) was accessed during the review it was only to aid in the reviewer in assessing the material archive:

"Well I've looked at them (paper archives) in relation to my understanding of the objects, and there's also associated objects here (points to category on review spread sheet) so if I know something's associated such as a report or a book that's got the object in then I will add that to the report as well." (Collections Assistant, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust).

The original review methodology (created by an independent consultant) appears to acknowledge a difference in attitude towards the material and paper aspects of the archaeological archives, and highlighted the "need to resolve how to cover the paper archive in conjunction with the artefact archive" (Chaplin, 2013 p1).

Separating the material archive from the paper archive conceptually is not uncommon with regard to museum attitudes to archaeological archives (see chapters 4-6), however it is at odds with the definition of an archaeological archive at national (Brown, 2011), European (Perrin et al., 2014) and international (International Committee for Documentation of the International Council of Museums, forthcoming) levels; where the paper records are always integral to the understanding and function of the archive as a whole (see definitions section 1.3.6).

Shakespeare Birthplace Trust's splitting of registered finds from bulk finds, and objects from their records in order to consider significance and future potential, is one example of the variations in how meaning and value is attributed to archaeological archives across the sector.

3.4.5 Meeting the needs of Shakespeare Birthplace Trust

It was openly acknowledged by the museum staff that the framework for the review was very much based on the perceived needs and future considerations of the Trust:

“That’s how the review has been formed; it’s about ‘how can Shakespeare Birthplace Trust use the collection?’ So, it’s all tailored towards the organisation.”

“We are very aware that this is a review that has been done from our perspective and we are not archaeologists, we are not experts and it is based on the knowledge we have.”

(Collections review staff, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust).

The questions asked of the archives under the framework of the review rubric were therefore focused on how the museum would define concepts such as significance, use and research potential; definitions which would not necessarily match how a commercial archaeologist, academic or finds specialist would describe these concepts. For example, under the 2013-2014 Shakespeare Birthplace Trust archaeological archives review, a ‘review unit’ would be defined as being of local significance (a rating of D on the review rubric, see Table 4) if it were from the local area. While this was not a particularly high rating within the framework of the review it achieved this on the merit of the site or project’s original location alone. Additionally, any finds or archives directly related to one of the Trust’s properties automatically received a rating of C within the framework of the review as these were considered to have more significance and value to Shakespeare Birthplace Trust than other archives of local or regional significance.

A professional archaeologist or specialist would have different parameters to define local significance such as the site or finds being unique to the area, representing a good example of the period or significantly adding to the overall archaeological record.

The original review criteria intended to provide an objective and methodical assessment of every object in the archaeology collection against the framework set out in the review rubric. However, the review was open to interpretation and value judgments through the subjective decisions around

which aspects of an archive to review first, and how archives were separated into 'review units'. The review report acknowledged that:

"The review is subjective: it is the perception of one person" (Tinsley, 2014c p5).

The subjective nature of the project was also acknowledged during the interviews, although it was suggested that the reviewer's lack of archaeological background brought objectivity to the project that would allow consistency throughout the review:

"It's all very subjective at the end of the day, it's my view which is going to be different to someone else's view on it."

"I'm no expert and I think that in some ways that's a strength because I can look at it objectively."

(Collections Assistant, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust).

"So, if (the reviewer) has been consistent in her evaluation then we are quite happy with that. Someone who is a specialist in animal bone or Roman pottery may be able to give you a finer gradation on it but as long as it is consistent across the board we can say everything in grade A is equally significant from (the reviewer's) perspective because that gives us a starting point"

"There's no way around it- we could get ten archaeologists in a room and get ten different answers, and ten non-archaeologists likewise, so it is subjective, these sorts of processes always are."

(Collections Manager, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust).

3.5 Results and Outcomes

3.5.1 The Archaeology Review Spreadsheet

The review was undertaken on a site by site basis and the results fed into the Archaeology Review Spreadsheet (Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, 2014). The review results spreadsheet contained the known details for each 'Review Unit': the site name, any information from the box label, if the object(s) were accessioned into the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust collections, as well as any additional descriptive information or notes the reviewer thought necessary to include. It was the

intention that this spreadsheet would allow easier access to the stored archaeological collections by Shakespeare Birthplace Trust staff.

Each of the review units was given a score of A to E under the six headings of the Review Rubric and a colour coding system was used to further define this area of the spreadsheet (A= green, B= pale green, C= yellow, D= orange and E= red). The intention of the coloured area of the spreadsheet was to allow whoever was searching through the data to easily spot area of potential engagement opportunities, those parts of the archive that could be used for teaching and handling activities and those areas of the stored archaeological collections that could be considered for disposal (see Tables 5-8):

“Each excavation (or group of excavations) has their own summary sheet which highlights the strengths within that particular collection as well as possible disposals.” (Tinsley, 2014c).

Example sections of the review spreadsheet are detailed below (Tables 5-8) and discussed in detail within Appendix 1. The chosen examples provide a broad illustration of how the review spreadsheet was completed for a variety of sites and material types and how colour coding the ratings enables the spreadsheet to act as a visual tool to those who wish to identify significance or areas of engagement within the collection. For the first three examples (Alveston Manor, Tiddington and New Place) a small exemplar section of the site’s entire review spreadsheet has been included, whereas the entire review spreadsheet of the final example (TGC81) is presented below:

- Alveston Manor is one of the better-known archaeological archives held by Shakespeare Birthplace Trust; a large early medieval cemetery archive excavated in the 1930s and 1970s that contains one of the Trust’s star items. The site has been published and is one of the few archives to receive research enquiries (Table 5).
- Tiddington is one of the larger archaeological archives held by Shakespeare Birthplace Trust; an unpublished Roman settlement excavation containing large quantities of bulk material (Table 6).

- New Place was the location of the Dig for Shakespeare Excavations; a seven-year archaeological investigation into one of Shakespeare Birthplace Trust’s properties (Table 7).
- TGC81 is illustrative of the smaller archives held by the Trust and details the entire archaeological review results from an exploratory trench excavated in 1925 (Table 8).

Example - Alveston Manor archive review results

Object Name	Brief Description	No. of objects	Significance	Public Engagement Potential	Supports Learning	Enquiry/Research Use	Ownership	Condition Assessment
Cinerary urn	Early medieval cinerary urn, fragments. Thick, undecorated fragments.	2	D	D/E	D/E	D/E	A	C
Cinerary urn	Early medieval cinerary urn. Complete, undecorated, grey ware urn. Has been glued and repaired post excavation. Also, 1 bag containing charcoal and another bag containing iron fragments.	1	D	C	C	D	A	B
Human Remains	2 bags of human remains.	2	D	E	E	A/B	C	C
Pottery	Pottery sherds forming a fabric type series. Various sherds of Roman, early medieval and medieval (unspecified) pottery, some burnt sherds. Also, a small number of sherds originate from the AM (Smith & Unit) 1971 excavations.	18 bags	D	D	D	D	C	A
Human Remains	Human remains. Some fragments of the skull and smaller fragments of bone. Perhaps part of an arm bone. Teeth and part of mandible still with teeth.	13 bags	D	E	D	A/B	C	C
Human Remains	Human remains. Some fragments of the skull and smaller fragments of bone. Some larger bones, perhaps part of the arm or leg. Teeth and parts of mandible still with teeth.	11 bags	D	E	D	A/B	C	C
Pottery, Cinerary Urns, Human Remains	Pottery sherds from graves 23 & 94. Possibly from cinerary urns. Undecorated.	1	D	D/E	D/E	D/E	C	A
Pottery, Cinerary Urns, Human Remains	1 small complete pot. Undecorated. Grave 37	1	D	C	C	D	C	B
Pottery, Cinerary Urns, Human Remains	1 large cinerary urn, undecorated, containing human remains. Grave 29.	2	D	C	C	A/B	C	C
Brooch	Copper alloy, square headed brooch with gold-gilt decoration to the front and silver plated on the reverse. Six garnets remain of the eleven that would have originally decorated the brooch. In the centre there is a carnelian from a Roman seal ring depicting cupid milking a goat (AM 5).	1	D	A	A	A	A	B

Table 5. Snapshot from the Archaeological Review Spreadsheet, Alveston Manor 1930 (Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, 2014).

Example - Tiddington review results

Object Name	Brief Description	No. of objects	Significance	Public Engagement	Supports Learning	Enquiry/Research Use	Ownership	Condition Assessment
Animal Bone	Animal bones, bone fragments and teeth.	15 bags	D	E	E	E	C	A
Animal Bone	Animal bones, bone fragments and teeth.	9 bags	D	E	E	E	C	A
Animal Bone	Animal bones, bone fragments and teeth.	7 bags	D	E	E	E	C	A
Pottery	Mixed pottery sherds, various fabrics and types.	3 bags	D	E	E	E	C	A
Pottery	Mixed pottery sherds, various fabrics and types including a few sherds of medieval glazed wares and post medieval pottery sherds.	4 bags	D	E	E	E	C	A
Pottery	Mixed pottery sherds, various fabrics and types including a large number of loose greyware sherds.	100+	D	E	E	E	C	A
Pottery	Mixed pottery sherds, various fabrics and types.	4 bags	D	E	E	E	C	A
Human Remains	Human skeletal remains including fragments of skull.	5	D	D/E	D	D	C	B
Human Remains	Human skeletal remains including skull.	2	D	D/E	D	D	C	B
Human Remains	Human skeletal remains including arm and leg bones.	4	D	D/E	D	D	C	B

Table 6. Snapshot from the Archaeological Review Spreadsheet, Tiddington (Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, 2014).

Example - New Place (Dig for Shakespeare) review results

Object Name	Brief Description	No. of objects	Significance	Public Engagement	Supports Learning	Enquiry/Research Use	Ownership	Condition Assessment
Animal bones	Fragments of animal bones and teeth. Variety of sizes, some evidence of butcher's marks. Also jaw bones and antler.	14 bags	C	E	D	E	A	B
Animal bones	Fragments/pieces of bone, variety of sizes. Tooth and part of an antler(s)?	20 bags	C	E	E	E	A	B
Animal bones	Fragments/pieces of bone, variety of sizes. Teeth and part of an antler(s)?	12 bags	C	E	E	E	A	B
Animal Bones	Horse Skull	1 bag	D	C	D	D	A	C
Pipes	Clay pipes. Mixture of bowls, stems and spurs.	19 bags	C	D/E	D/E	D	A	B
Pottery	Pottery sherds, mainly post medieval glazed sherds including a number of black glazed wares and blue and white transfer wares.	4 bags	C	D/E	D/E	E	A	A
Pottery & Plaster	Pottery sherds, mainly post medieval glazed sherds, some unglazed sherds. 1 fragment of white plaster. 8 sherds of Tudor green glazed pottery.	27 bags	C	D/E	D	E	A	A
Pottery, Brick & Plaster	Pottery sherds, mainly post medieval glazed sherds with some earlier unglazed sherds.	26 bags	C	D/E	D/E	E	A	A

Table 7. Snapshot from the Archaeological Review Spreadsheet, New Place (Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, 2014)

Example - TGC81 (Exploratory Trench from 1925) review results

Object Name	Brief Description	No. of objects	Significance	Public Engagement Potential	Supports Learning	Enquiry/Research Use	Ownership	Condition Assessment
Pottery	Large pieces of pottery, all from fabric 6. Some large rim pieces and large body sherds.	18 bags	D	E	E	E	C	B
Daub/Burnt Clay & Tile	3 bags of tile fragments and 6 bags containing daub/burnt clay fragments.	9 bags	D	E	E	E	C	B
Tile	Various pieces and fragments of tile.	7 bags	D	E	E	E	C	A/B
Tile, Slag, Plaster, Mortar, Iron Nails	1 stone roof tile, plaster and a few pieces of yellow painted plaster. 1 large bag of plaster/mortar. 6 iron nails, with corrosion. 2 pieces of slag.	12 bags	D	E	D/E	D/E	C	B
Quern Stone, Glass	6 fragments of quern stone, 4 fragments of glass.	8 bags	D	E	D/E	D/E	C	A/B
Pottery	Box containing a large number of pottery sherds, predominately grey ware but there are various fabrics represented.	27 bags	D	E	E	E	C	B
Animal Bone	Animal bones, many fragments as well as teeth and claws. No obvious signs of butchery.	10 bags	D	E	E	E	C	A
Animal Bone	Animal bones, bone fragments and teeth from cattle, sheep/goat, horse and dog.	12 bags	D	E	E	E	C	A
Animal Bone	Animal bones and bone fragments.	18 bags	D	E	E	E	C	A

Table 8. Archaeological Review Spreadsheet, TGC81 (Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, 2014).

3.5.2 Combined review ratings

Tables 9 and 10 detail the combined review results from the 17 excavation review summaries totalling 1096 ‘review units’ (Tinsley, 2014c p8). A small amount of archaeological material was not assessed during the 2013-2014 review including the finds that were displayed in Nash House at the time, and the remainder of the Dig for Shakespeare finds that were held at the University of Birmingham pending the publication of the excavation report.

The 2013-2014 review concluded that only 7.2% of the archaeological collection were considered to be of significance to the Trust (rating C against the review rubric). No single ‘review unit’ received a rating of A or B under significance. 84.9% of the archaeological ‘review units’ were rated as of wider local or regional significance based on their original location alone, many (including the entire TGC81 archive) subsequently identified for disposal. This highlights the variation between how value and significance is attributed across the sector. A commercial archaeologist or finds specialist working

to best practice guidance (see chapter 2.3) would not suggest that material or an entire archive considered being of local or regional significance would be a candidate for disposal. However, a commercial archaeologist or finds specialist would not rate something as being of local or regional significance based on the site’s location alone. Under the public engagement category, 12.2% of the ‘review units’ scored C or higher in the review with 11.6% falling squarely within the C bracket. The report suggested that “over half of the archaeological collections have no potential for public focus” (Tinsley, 2014c p9) as 51.5% of the ‘review units’ received a rating of E. Had the material “not known to have been used in a public focus capacity” or having “issues around access to the object” been included (see Table 4), this figure would have risen to 89%. It is worth remembering here that a ‘review unit’ is not necessarily a box of material, it can be an individual object. A large part of the 12.2% of ‘review units’ scoring a C or above under public engagement were individual objects or registered finds, and therefore represent a much smaller percentage of the stored archaeological collection as a whole.

Rating	Significance	Public Engagement	Learning Potential	Enquiry/Research Use	Ownership	Condition Assessment
A	0	2	2	2	225	350
A/B	0	0	0	38	1	14
B	0	3	35	9	34	581
B/C	0	1	0	0	0	6
C	83	132	73	5	779	189
C/D	1	5	12	1	0	0
D	967	176	235	228	13	3
D/E	77	218	191	267	0	0
E	11	602	585	589	85	0

Table 9. SBT Combined Review Ratings - Number of review units in each category against their review rating

Rating	Significance	Public engagement	Learning Potential	Enquiry/Research Use	Ownership	Condition Assessment
A	0	0.20%	0.20%	0.20%	19.80%	30.60%
A/B	0	0	0	3.30%	0.09%	1.20%
B	0	0.30%	3.00%	0.80%	3.00%	50.80%
B/C	0	0.09%	0	0	0.20%	0.50%
C	7.20%	11.60%	6.40%	0.40%	68.50%	16.50%
C/D	0.09%	0.40%	1.60%	0.09%	0	0
D	84.90%	15.50%	20.70%	20.00%	1.10%	0.30%
D/E	7%	19.10%	16.80%	23.40%	0	0
E	1%	52.90%	51.50%	51.70%	7.50%	0

Table 10. SBT Combined Review Ratings - Percentage of review units in each category against their review rating

The large majority of the 110 'review units' which scored C or above under learning potential were either already being used by the Trust to support learning or formed part of the new archaeology teaching sessions (discussed in section 3.6.1). The majority of the 110 'review units' scoring C or above for learning potential were individual objects (including a few pottery sherds) or registered finds, not bags of bulk material or complete archive boxes of finds. Of the remainder of the 'review units', 51.5% were thought to have "no future value in learning" and an additional 33.4% were considered to have "little potential for current use but could be relevant in the future". The learning potential score of a 'review unit' was decided by the reviewer and volunteers, yet no details were given in the review methodology (Chaplin, 2013) or report (Tinsley, 2014c) as to how learning potential was defined or to be measured.

The 4.7% of 'review units' scoring C or above under research/enquiry use, did so mainly based on the knowledge of how the collection had been accessed by researchers in the past:

"54 review units have high potential or have already been used for research purposes (scoring A-C)." (Tinsley, 2014c p10).

The report suggested that "over half of the collection is of a common type and has never been used for research and there is little future potential that it will be either" (Tinsley, 2014c p10). It is interesting that the review concluded that 'common' archaeological objects would be of no interest to researchers based on Shakespeare Birthplace Trust's past experience of the use of their collections for research purposes. It is often believed by archaeologists that it is through the large numbers of objects, and the quantity of bulk finds that can be compared across sites and regions, that the most in depth research can occur. This is especially true of pottery studies (Barclay et al., 2016) which once again exemplifies the variation in the way value and significance is attributed to archaeological material and archives across the sector.

Overall, the report on the 2013-2014 review concluded that a large proportion of the archaeological collections in Shakespeare Birthplace Trust’s care would not be selected for retention under the Archaeology Collection Policy Addition (Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, 2011).

“Approximately 50% of the archaeology collection could be considered for disposal (based on scoring ‘E’ in the categories of public engagement, supporting learning and research/enquiry use. If ‘D/E’ and ‘D’ are considered then this figure would be much, much higher.” (Tinsley, 2014c p11).

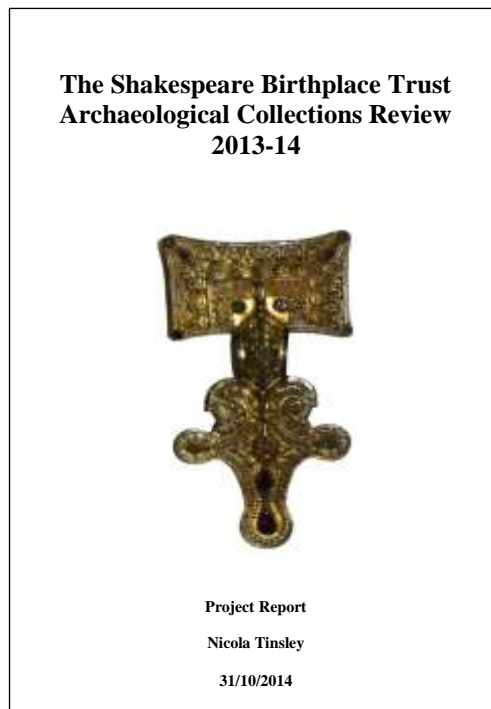


Figure 1. Shakespeare Birthplace Trust review report cover.

Generally, those objects that an archaeologist would consider registered finds scored consistently higher than bulk material in the categories that denoted their perceived value to Shakespeare Birthplace Trust. The report concluded that there were “two star items in the collection” (Tinsley, 2014c p9) and presented one proudly on the report cover (Figure 1). The great square headed brooches from the excavations at Alveston Manor and Bidford-on-Avon are still considered the archaeology collections star items despite only scoring a D for significance (Table 5 and Appendix 1) on the review as they have no relevance to the objectives of Shakespeare Birthplace Trust

(Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, 2016f). A small selection of objects (10) were highlighted in the review report as having the potential for display (Tinsley, 2014c: appendix 2). The chosen Roman and early medieval objects include the head from a Roman statue, early medieval jewellery and two complete pots.

As well as the review identifying perceived areas of strength and weakness in Shakespeare Birthplace Trust's archaeological collections, it was also able to catalogue the ownership status of the archives as well as their condition. This is detailed in the spreadsheet for future reference and to allow targeted conservation where needed (Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, 2014).

3.5.3 Raising the profile of the collection within the Trust

Throughout the 2013-2014 review it appeared that the profile of the archaeological collections held at Shakespeare Birthplace Trust was raised amongst the Trust staff. Initiatives such as a blog about the review process (Tinsley, 2014a), and adding images of some of the 'newly discovered' objects to the website were also thought to be making the collection more visible to researchers:

"(The review) has raised the profile of the collection within the Trust."

"(The collections assistant) who has been leading the review has written a series of blogs about the material she has uncovered; it has become a little bit more visible already so hopefully that will promote interest from researchers."

"Some digitisation of the really nice visually appealing artefacts, that can make it a bit more visible and some of the material is getting a bit better known."

(Collections Manager, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust).

The review also provided Shakespeare Birthplace Trust with the information they required to respond to researchers' requests about the archaeology archives. In the past, enquiries had been received that staff were unable to facilitate as they could not identify the correct material in their stores. It was hoped that the new database and review spreadsheet would make the process easier. It was also believed that simply having the archive data in a format that suited the museum would increase usability and ease of access for staff, researchers and visitors alike.

“ We’ve had an enquiry about a stone head actually which I had not come across yet in the collection, and someone had found it in a past journal and they wanted to do some research on it, and for us that was all quite a surprise. Quite difficult to track down actually because I hadn’t come across it, but a couple of weeks ago I was going through the boxes and that was quite nice to see, a little stone carved head.” (Collections Assistant, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust).

While these immediate effects of the review were discussed in a positive light, the examples have as yet not been expanded onto the permanent output by Shakespeare Birthplace Trust. The Collections page of the Trust’s website states: “You can explore our collections through the displays and exhibitions in the Shakespeare properties, through our dedicated online catalogue and online exhibitions” (Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, 2016c). A look at the on-line catalogue however confirms that very little of the archaeology collection continues to be accessible via this on-line database (<http://collections.shakespeare.org.uk> accessed 27.05.2017). The small amount of material that is listed consists mainly of registered finds (including the star items) and a few individual sherds of pottery, but no large quantities of bulk material are included and there is no reference to the full extent of their archaeological holdings.

In 2017 Shakespeare Birthplace Trust applied to the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation to fund a community project utilising the archaeology collection which was unfortunately unsuccessful. Increasing researcher numbers and use by the community is clearly the direction that the collections staff are now taking with regard to their archaeological collections. Some of these ideas are being written into their forward plan for archaeology though how this will fit with the Trust’s objectives is still to be ironed out.

“What we want to do in the future, get more researchers in, publicise it a bit more because we can’t research it really. Sadly, there isn’t much of an appetite to exhibit it”
“It’s still all up in the air as to what that would look like, but I think it will be more about collaborating with others in the area and in archaeology departments, and we might do

some small disposals. I think it will be piecemeal, a bit each year and keep going with it rather than letting it just sit there.”

“I would like to display some of it and talk about it more but it’s not really what the Trust wants to do.”

“I really don’t think we will display it any time soon so that is why we will have to fall back on, well not fall back on, promote it more to researchers.”

(Comments by collections staff, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust).

As with many of my other case studies (Chapters 4-6) the curatorial staff at Shakespeare Birthplace Trust believed that any form of use of the collections was worthwhile and therefore justified the material’s presence in the stores. However, this could be at odds with the views of senior management and the Trustees.

“If it is getting used even by researchers rather than more general visitors then it starts to have a life and a profile and starts to become important again for its own sake, not necessarily for our sake.”

“I would much rather have a slightly tangential collection being used than a collection sitting there and doing nothing, because doing nothing it’s not earning its keep in any sense.”

“I would be happy with any use of the collection”

(Comments from Collections staff, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust).

Interestingly, despite the continued assertion that much of the archaeology did not belong at Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, there was also a reticence to any of it leaving the museum’s ownership. This was expressed more keenly when I questioned the willingness to transfer their star items (*“There’s a slight possessiveness about it definitely”*, Collections Assistant Shakespeare Birthplace Trust), but also with regard to some of the other archives:

“Especially those early excavations, the people who did that were very much part of establishing the Trust in the town so that keeps that time and maintains the sense of possessiveness as well. And these really glamorous items are the things we would want to keep but you can’t really separate them out as it were, they are all part of the picture.”

(Collections Assistant, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust).

3.5.4 Rationalisation?

The report on the 2013-2014 review was completed in October 2014 and contained the overall results (Tables 9 and 10) as well as recommendations on different categories of material and possible futures for that material. As the review had been designed with the museum's needs in mind, the recommendations were based on the objectives of Shakespeare Birthplace Trust and in line with the updated Archaeological Collections Policy (Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, 2011). One of the standout recommendations was that "approximately 50% of the archaeology collection could be considered for disposal" (Tinsley, 2014c p11). However, it appeared that while the collections staff largely agreed with the findings of the review, they still did not feel they could follow the recommendations through. One of the hurdles to implementation appeared to be the collection staff's concerns over how specifically Shakespeare Birthplace Trust orientated the review results were, as well as the lack of archaeological expertise at the Trust:

"This is the batch of material we think is not relevant to us, lets double check and get some expert opinion and make sure because we may have missed something." (Collections Manager, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust).

"We felt that we don't have the expertise to deal with the archaeology we have got, and we had been thinking of rationalising it and we wanted some more advice on that." (Collections Assistant, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust).

It was clearly expressed through the interviews and discussions with staff members before and after the 2013/2014 review that the collections team felt a strong duty as curators to look after and preserve all the collections in their care, regardless of their significance to the organisation. This has led to a position where the collections staff were still a bit unsure of how to proceed with regard to the archaeological collections; the majority of the archives still do not meet the aims and objectives of the Trust and so will not be displayed or worked on by the staff, but they cannot move them to another museum or dispose of them in another way they feel comfortable with.

“We have a duty of care, we have looked after this material for almost 100 years now, it’s not something we are just going to get rid of, we will do the right thing by it.” (Collections Manager Shakespeare Birthplace Trust).

3.6 External pressures

3.6.1 A new life for some of the archaeological objects

The 2013-2014 review coincided with a major overhaul of the national curriculum which expects Key Stage One (KS1) and Key Stage Two (KS2) pupils to “know and understand the history of these islands as a coherent, chronological narrative, from the earliest times to the present day” (Department for Education, 2013 p1). This unforeseen external pressure was at odds with the original perceived outcomes prior to the review, affecting the value attributed to some of the archaeological material assessed during the project.

“Our education department have started to think slightly more widely about the offer we have about telling the story of the town and the activities that were going on pre-Shakespeare’s time because we need to adapt our offer to fit with the curriculum if we want schools still to visit” (Collections Manger, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust).

In order to attract schools that pay for the education sessions at Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, the offer would now have to include topics such as prehistory, the Romans and the early medieval period. As a result, some of the archaeological objects held by the Trust obtained an “*unexpected life in our activities*” (Collections Manager, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust) and were rated higher under the supports learning category as a result.

The new teaching sessions include objects that were ‘discovered’ or identified through the review process (Figure 2). The review staff recommended Roman and early medieval objects considered safe to include in a handling collection (Tinsley, 2014c appendix 1). While a few sherds of Samian, mortaria and early medieval courseware form part of the offering, for the most part the handling boxes contain what archaeologists would consider small or special finds, not large quantities of bulk

material. This unexpected use for a small quantity of archaeological material seemed to take the staff at Shakespeare Birthplace Trust by surprise; though it had a positive effect in the way the archaeological collections were viewed at the Trust:

“They (schools) are taking an interest in the Roman and medieval finds that we hold, and actually that may mean that the review has raised their profile.”
(Collections Manager, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust).








Roman Items	Image	Comment	Early medieval Items	Image	Comment
Sherds of Samian ware		We will find a selection of these; rims, body sherds, decorated, stamped etc.	Sherds of courseware pottery	No images available	Again we will find a selection.
Sherds of <i>mortaria</i>		Again we will find a selection.	Loom weights x2		We have two of these; they are a little heavier than the other handling items.
Oil lamps x2		We will find 2 plainer examples for the handling.	Spindle & whorl		Again smaller items so they will need to be monitored when handled.
Replica games board		Initial research has found it difficult to ascertain what game this is! But we can do a little more research to try and narrow it down.			
Brooches x2		These are quite small and will need to be monitored carefully during handling.			

Figure 2. Roman and early medieval objects identified for the new national curriculum handling boxes at Shakespeare Birthplace Trust with notes from the review staff.

3.6.2 Where the 'stories' come from

During the 2013-2014 review one of the trust's properties, New Place, was closed for large-scale re-development. The results of the Dig for Shakespeare excavations were utilised in the re-interpretation of the property which was due to re-open in 2016: The garden layout and landscaping were directly influenced by the archaeology with the position of the central gateway, flower beds and walls following the courses of the Tudor and Stuart structures uncovered during the excavations. There are also changes in the colours of the flagstones and bricks chosen for the pathways which reflect the buried remains below.

The information utilised in the re-interpretation of the garden at New Place was extrapolated from the documentary element of the archive from the Dig for Shakespeare excavations, specifically material that was not included in the 2013-2014 review. However, use of the documentary portion of the archive to directly guide the interpretation at New Place, appeared to influence the ratings given to the material portion of the archives under the review. Those parts of the archaeological collection that rated highest under significance almost wholly relate to the properties owned by the Trust, and the collections staff were clear on the reason for this; it was because of the way that those objects and archaeological results helped tell the story of that property. The phrases 'telling stories' or 'the story' were repeated throughout the interviews and cropped up often during discussions with members of the collections staff and the house guides. During the interviews, the comments regarding artefacts recovered during the Dig for Shakespeare excavations at New Place were especially positive. In this particular property's case, the archaeology was deemed the only way to reveal the story of that site, though the documents and records that told that story were not part of the review.

"It does tell the story of that property and it was part of the quest to find Shakespeare's final home, it fits really nicely because it is part of the story of that site and because New Place as a building does not exist; it was knocked down. The archaeology is really the only way we can tell the story of that site, unlike the other properties which are still extant and

are still the original, if heavily modified, buildings that Shakespeare would have known at the time. So, in that particular context it's really invaluable, it forms part of the interpretive offer and I know that the staff at the site really value that as it helps them tell the story when they engage with the visitors.” (Collections Manager Shakespeare Birthplace Trust).

Archaeology clearly played a key role in the design and reinterpretation of New Place, however that role is not explicitly clear to visitors to the site, and there is no mention on the current New Place web page of the Dig for Shakespeare or its influence on the garden design (Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, 2016a).

“Archaeology was always at the forefront of all of the design meetings, but what I do think is that unless you worked on the project, then this might get lost.” (New Place Project staff).

The choice of whether or not to include artefacts or information on the archaeological remains uncovered in the public offer at New Place, was based on the story they chose to tell to visitors at that property; not the story of the archaeological history of the site, but the story of Shakespeare's last home experienced through a beautiful garden:

“A registered garden has been designed to commemorate the importance of the site and allow visitors to make their own personal connection with Shakespeare” (Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, 2016a).

The final design for New Place therefore did not include a detailed explanation of the archaeology within the garden, instead concentrating on encouraging visitors to “walk in Shakespeare's footsteps” (Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, 2016a). A small quantity of archaeological artefacts were hosted next door at Nash House in 2017 as part of an exhibition on local life under the Tudors. Therefore, where archaeological material fits with the stories that Shakespeare Birthplace Trust tells through their properties, it is utilised. However, where the relevant archaeological archival material does not fit with the story that Shakespeare Birthplace Trust are telling, or the story they think the visitors are interested in, it is not included in the offer at the properties.

“There’s certainly opportunities for us to display elements of the archaeology collection where it fits in with the stories we are telling.”

“Where it fits absolutely, we want to make more of it.”

“Where we can find objects that reflect a particular theme, we could display some archaeological material, but for the non-Tudor/Stuart stuff it’s only going to be the odd item here or there.”

“But to put it in an exhibition, to explain to the general visitor why we have got this out of context, that has nothing to do with the house they are visiting is a much more challenging process.”

(Comments from Collections staff Shakespeare Birthplace Trust).

The documents and records which revealed the archaeological ‘story’ at New Place were not assessed as part of the 2013-2014 review so a definitive understanding of how they would have been rated is not possible. However, based on their importance in establishing the story of the property, it is probable that some of the documents would have scored the same if not higher under significance, as the corresponding material archive from the site.

Under the review criteria, the Dig for Shakespeare document portion of the archive would have held significance due to location. Yet, had Shakespeare Birthplace Trust broken each paper archive up into ‘review units’ in the same way the material archives were divided, it is probable that different values would have been assigned to different records. The prehistoric archaeological evidence was not incorporated into the design of the gardens at New Place as pre-history does not form part of the Trust’s objectives as governed by the Shakespeare Birthplace Act of 1961 (Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, 2016f). This is very much in keeping with the results of the archaeology review where all the finds from the Dig for Shakespeare were rated C for significance except the prehistoric finds which received a rating of D. Had the context sheets and drawings of the Iron Age features been reviewed, it is likely they would score lower under significance than those recording the Tudor remains. In the case of the material archive from the Dig for Shakespeare project, the review results

not only demonstrate the objectives of the Trust, but they have been followed through into the interpretation and offer at one of their properties.

“If we are looking at the trust and the stories it’s telling then it’s particularly the stuff from Stratford in that 100 year period, 25 years either side of Shakespeare’s life because that really gives us the stories of the environment. That world, the spaces that Shakespeare knew, from the Trust’s perspective, straight down the line this fits with our objectives.”
(Collections Manager, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust).

The importance the Trust places on telling the story of Shakespeare in Stratford, is supported by their research around visitor satisfaction. Shakespeare Birthplace Trust is a commercial organisation and a large part of their activities are around meeting the expectation of their paying visitors who are expecting the story of Shakespeare in his hometown. While archaeology can be a very effective tool in the telling of stories, the results of the review demonstrate that much of Shakespeare Birthplace Trust’s archaeological collection does not assist them in telling the stories they want to tell.

“What our visitors value more than anything is something that gives them a direct connection back to Shakespeare, that’s the common thread through the feedback we get.”
“If you’re buying a ticket to come through the door to see Shakespeare’s Birthplace or New Place or any of the properties, that’s the story you are expecting to be told, and it would not be meeting expectations if you were suddenly in a room full of archaeological material.” (Collections Manager, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust).

The unexpected use of some of the archaeological archives, as well as the reluctance to implement their own review recommendations around rationalisation, led the Trust to commission a further review in 2016 through the West Midlands Museum Development Expert Eye programme (discussed in Appendix 2). Both the 2016 and earlier 2012 reviews (Appendix 2) discussed the archives in terms of future research potential and recommended a re-think regarding Shakespeare Birthplace Trust’s Acquisition and Disposals Policy in relation to their archaeological collections, and as a result the proposed disposals.

3.7 Conclusions

The archaeology assessment at Shakespeare Birthplace Trust provided an opportunity to analyse a collections review from the very beginning and assess how value and significance are defined and attributed to archaeological archives in a museum setting. This chapter has detailed how the designed strategy and subsequent implementation of a museum-led archaeological archive review can be influenced by institutional, personal, professional and external pressures.

The review documentation and reports, and the interviews with the collections and house staff, highlight several contradictions regarding the purpose of archaeological archives in museums and the wider archaeological sector. This case study provides evidence for answering the research sub-questions which will be considered in more detail in the discussion chapter (Chapter 7).

Why do we keep them?

One of the driving forces behind the archaeology review at Shakespeare Birthplace Trust was that the museum staff did not understand the archives in their care. However, undertaking a review did not provide the clarity the museum thought they needed as the archaeological collections have already been reviewed in 2012, then again in 2013-14, and subsequently re-reviewed by experts from Museums Worcestershire as part of the West Midlands Museum Development Expert Eye programme in 2016. The differing approaches to the museum-led review (2013-2014) that aimed to establish how or if the archaeology collection met the aims and objectives of the Trust, and the reviews orientated around future archaeological research potential (2012 and 2016), highlighted that opinions on why archaeological archives are kept, varies across the sector (Appendix 2).

In contrast to national standards on archaeological archiving, the contextual relationships between individual elements of an archaeological archive were not taken into consideration when scoring each 'review group'. The paper records were not assessed as part of the review, yet the archaeological data that had the most impact and influence on development and public output at

Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, were the paper records from the Dig for Shakespeare excavations. The role these documents played in the development at New Place were counter to the original strategy of the review, and where staff had originally perceived the value within the archives to be held. The review outcomes were further disrupted when alterations to the national curriculum resulted in changes to the significance attributed to some of the previously disregarded 'review groups'.

How are they used?

Prior to the 2013/2014 review, the collections staff at Shakespeare Birthplace Trust reported the archives were un-used by the museum and rarely accessed by external researchers. Under the 2013-2014 review rubric, value was assessed based on the potential of a 'review group' to be used for public engagement, teaching, outreach and research/enquiry. The report concluded that only 7.2% of the archaeological collection was considered to be of significance to the Trust and the staff still struggled to see how archaeology would ever be displayed or promoted within the museum. Approximately 50% of the archaeology collection was considered of no potential future use to the Trust, however the museum found that the value and use of material can change due to external pressures, such as a change to the national curriculum.

The 'star items' identified by the Shakespeare Birthplace staff prior to the review process, remained the museum's star items following the review. The 'star items' were used by the museum curators as a means of demonstrating the wealth of the Trust's collections to visiting dignitaries, despite the gold brooches in question holding no relevance or significance to the Trust or its on-going mission.

How much do we need?

The results of the 2013/2014 review bore out the opinions expressed at the beginning of the project, that the sheer size of many of the bulk archaeological assemblages held by the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust hampered the curator's ability to understand the collection fully. In general bulk archaeological material scored consistently lower than registered finds under those headings that

established value to Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, and objects considered to be of a 'common type' were not perceived to have any potential as part of Shakespeare Birthplace Trust's future offer. However, where an excavating unit had separated off specific assemblages such as the type series or illustrated pottery sherds, these scored higher in the review, suggesting it is not the type of material that reduces its appeal to the museum, but the volume it appears in and the information that accompanies it.

The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust staff demonstrated their lack of enthusiasm to immediately follow through with the proposed 50% disposal by commissioning the 2016 Expert Eye review. The 2016 review highlighted value in much of the archaeology collections as a research resource and that this value might lie outside of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust mission and objectives (Appendix 2). However, the Trust's staff still express a belief that much of the material did not belong within the museums stores and should be moved elsewhere.

Whose responsibility are they?

The 2013-2014 review results generally bore out the curator's belief that much of the archaeology did not align with the newly updated acquisition policy and had become anomalous to the mission and objectives of the Trust. Throughout the interviews, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust staff had expressed a desire to 'do right' by the archaeology alongside a certain amount of possessiveness with regard to all the collections they looked after. Where the volunteers were involved with the Dig for Shakespeare archives, their knowledge and enthusiasm positively influenced the value placed on certain 'review groups', and the 2016 review helped the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust staff better understand the 'significance' of the archaeological archives as a research resource. However there still remained little chance of the collection being considered significant within the remit of the Trust's activities, the staff expressing frustration that archaeological archives have to be treated differently to other museum collections. The lasting impression was that the collections staff felt their hands were tied; unable to promote or display the archaeological collection they held, not able

to transfer the archives to a more suitable museum, and yet prevented from making firm decisions about the collection due to a perceived lack of knowledge or authority to do so.

The following chapter details the process and outcomes of an archaeology collections review at the Royal Albert Memorial Museum in Exeter.

4 AN ARCHAEOLOGY COLLECTIONS REVIEW AT THE ROYAL ALBERT MEMORIAL MUSEUM

4.1 Introduction

The Royal Albert Memorial Museum (RAMM) in Exeter underwent a major re-development at the start of the 21st century and many of the collections were reviewed and ‘ranked’ as part of the re-design of the galleries. This chapter presents the results of a longitudinal study into the archaeology collection review, providing insight into the purpose of archaeological archives, why we keep them, how they are used and how much is needed (see research aims, Chapter 1). To achieve this, RAMM staff were interviewed, and the reported results examined in order to establish how opinions and perceptions around archaeological archives and their significance to the museum changed throughout the review. The review results upheld many of the opinions expressed by the staff and had a major effect on the museum’s methodology for the collecting of archaeological archives from commercially funded projects.

This case study highlights the variations in how archive creators and archive curators perceive archaeological archives future use and accessibility, leading to the splitting of archives and changes in collecting policies that not all in the sector agree with. This chapter covers several key themes within this thesis including the political and economic pressures on resources and knowledge and begins by contextualising the museum’s move towards a more ‘visitor focussed’ experience. The review strategy and implementation are discussed in detail in Appendix 3. As with the previous Chapter, the review results are scrutinised, followed by a discussion of how unforeseen external pressures can affect the review outcomes and alter opinions on value and significance. Throughout the chapter, interview excerpts are included where appropriate to illustrate the opinions of RAMM staff during the review process.

4.2 Context

4.2.1 A local authority museum collecting archaeological archives

“It exists to enrich the lives of people living, working in and visiting Exeter by providing them with opportunities to be inspired, informed and entertained. RAMM will acquire collections that document the natural and cultural history of Exeter set within its regional and national context as well as those that represent the City and region’s connections across the world. The museum holds collections in trust for present and future generations, managing and caring for them for the public benefit.” (Royal Albert Memorial Museum, 2018c).

The Royal Albert Memorial Museum and Art Gallery (RAMM) is a large local authority museum located in the centre of Exeter City in the county of Devon (Durrant, 2012). Today, RAMM is primarily funded by Exeter City Council but received additional funding from the Arts Council as a Major Partner Museum until 2018 (Durrant, 2012). RAMM underwent a major re-development at the start of the 21st century, re-opening in 2011 with the tag line “home to a million thoughts” and winning the Art Fund prize for Museum of the Year in 2012 (Royal Albert Memorial Museum, 2018b). The £24 million transformation included “dramatically re-interpreted displays” (Art Fund, 2012) and the museum was praised for its move away from traditional collections interpretation towards a focus on the visitor experience.

RAMM’s collecting of archaeological materials dates back to the 1860s when the museum was first established in memory of Prince Albert. The museum collected archaeological objects from the local area and more recently commercially derived archaeological archives from the city of Exeter and around half of the county of Devon. RAMM’s stores now contain over a million objects and all of the collections, including archaeology, continue to grow (Gulliver and Khreisheh, 2012).

Developer-funded archaeological work accounts for a large portion of the stored collections at RAMM, thanks in part to the establishment of Exeter Archaeology unit in the early 70s. Exeter Archaeology Unit was one of the earliest commercial archaeology operations to be established in

England (Devon Heritage Centre, 2012) and “operated on a prolific scale until its demise a few years ago” (Durrant, 2014 p4). However, the demise of Exeter Archaeology in 2012 did not stem the flow of material as many other commercial archaeology units continued to work in the county, creating archaeological archives to be deposited with the museum.

A large quantity of undeposited material came to the museum following the closure of the Exeter Unit, and this, alongside the increasing volume of archaeological archives from developer-funded archaeology, put RAMM’s storage facilities under extreme pressure. As a result the museum temporarily ceased to collect archaeological archives in 2010 (Royal Albert Memorial Museum, 2018a) at the same time as the museum’s acquisition and disposal policy expired during the museum redevelopment. While RAMM re-opened to the public in 2011, the stores would not re-open for archive deposition until the collections review was completed and a new collections development plan was in place.

4.2.2 Opinions prior to the review

During the closure of the museum for redevelopment, many of the collections were assessed and ‘ranked’ as part of the re-design of the galleries. Ranking and assessment of collections is standard working practice at RAMM for the management of their holdings, but prior to the review this had never included archaeological archives. The curators believed that there was a pre-established methodology for the process, with clear ideas of how objects reached the top of the pile.

“We have been ranking our collections anyway. What goes on display is the most historically important, the most visually stunning, the most complete, the most nationally important, so you have in a way already separated out layers in your collection. So that’s the top layer and the items that get cited in the literature as they are the best examples.”
(Senior Collections Manager, RAMM).

However, it was believed that only a small percentage of the stored archaeological archives would fall into this 'top layer' of importance, and that much of the material within archaeological archives was not relevant to the new 'visitor focused experience' at RAMM.

"(Our visitors) want to see how things fit into the story of the town, the greater timescale, whether a particular item is unusual or interesting, not really the petrology of that sherd but the fact that it was made 200 miles away"

*"So, for most of our users, most of the archival material that is produced is meaningless."
(Curator, RAMM).*

The museum had come under increasing financial pressure following the closure of the local archaeology unit when it acquired all of the undeposited archaeological archives *en masse*, effectively filling the museum's store (Senior Collections Manager, RAMM pers. comm.). Questions were raised around the museum's lesser-used collections and the cost of continuing to store them. As a publicly funded institution, the cost of maintaining material from commercially derived activities had to be justified. The curators reported that demonstrating the importance of the archaeological archives and their on-going need for storage and curation to non-archaeologists was not always easy:

*"The chief exec of the council starts from a different basis: why keep it? It's not on display!"
"Our museum director is not from an archaeological background and she really, really struggles with why we have got warehouses full of brown boxes full of mud. Her words."
(Senior Collections Manager, RAMM).*

The curators believed many of the clashes in opinions are due to the variance between the museum's long-term goals, and the short-term funding streams that members of the council are subject to.

"Making the case for long-term research potential is a lot harder to people with short term funding issues. Most council members are in post for 2-3 years, so museum long term is different to their long term." (Senior Collections Manager, RAMM).

The inclusion of the archaeology archives in the collection review was an attempt to treat that collection in the same way as the rest of the museum's holdings and provide demonstrable evidence for the value of the continued inclusion of the material in the stores. There was clearly a belief that not all of the archaeological archives RAMM had accepted in the past, were worth the financial burden they placed on the museum. Therefore, it was also hoped that the review would clearly identify the material and archaeological archives that the museum wished to continue collecting moving forward.

“My perception that it’s the sites that get cited in the literature that people go back to. What doesn’t get used is the small-scale evaluation reports and watching briefs because the content of them is difficult for people to get into. And they are troublesome because they take as much time as anything else in a way. Bigger sites often come with proper funding and are dealt with, whereas the smaller ones are not properly dealt with and not used for display.” (Curator, RAMM).

4.2.3 Changes to collecting practices leading to review

During discussions and interviews at the museum, it became apparent the staff had very clear ideas about collections management and the evolving nature of museums in the 21st century. The curators believed that their role at the museum had changed during the period leading up to the collections reviews “away from being collections keepers towards being collections sharers” (Gulliver and Khreisheh, 2012 p4).

The review of RAMM's collections was prompted by what the museum staff perceived as a shift in approach to collections management nationally and internationally. They believed that collecting for collecting's sake was no longer acceptable and that active management of the museum's collections was the way forward.

“How do you actively manage the collection rather than just staying on top of it? What is of value in the collection and why are things there? Are there any parts of the collection that should not be there? Are there pockets that we could get more from? So, it (the review)

was to manage the collection in an active and dynamic way rather than it just sitting there.” (Senior Collection Manager, RAMM).

The curators considered this view to be supported in both the academic literature on museum collecting, and current sector policy documents: “the inexorable growth of collections is no longer in the best interests of the communities they purport to serve” (Merriman, 2004 p34-35). The changes made to the Museum Associations’ Code of Ethics in 2008 (Museums Association, 2008) (note: an up-dated version is available (Museums Association, 2015) now allowed for curatorially motivated disposals in order to increase the public benefit derived from those collections retained by the museum. The 2008 revised code was a result of the Effective Collections Programme which the Museums Association had been running since 2005, aiming to change the culture in museums in order to get more stored collections into use (Cross and Wilkinson, 2007). Additionally, from 2011 the Museum Accreditation Standards required pro-active collections management, including reviews and clear themes and priorities for future collecting (Arts Council England, 2018).

Alongside these national policy changes, the museum had been completing a retrospective documentation project resulting in a comprehensive database containing a minimum of inventory-level details on objects in the collection, including the archaeological archives. RAMM considered the shifts in collections management theory alongside their newly completed object database as an opportunity to “drive new work and unlock maximum value from its collections” (Gulliver and Khreisheh, 2012), resulting in the proposal for a collections review.

The review was undertaken in two phases: Phase One consisted of a preliminary collections assessment whereby ‘review groups’ were scored and placed into league tables. Only ‘low scoring’ review groups (scoring 50% or below) were included in the Phase Two in-depth collections assessment. Access to neither the review results nor league tables from Phase One of the review was provided as part of this research, however it is possible to conclude from the Phase Two documentation that each of the archaeology groups received a score of below 50%. A new

Collections Development Plan was written for each of the collections review groups reassessed during Phase Two of the RAMM review, effectively detailing the results of the Phase Two assessment. The RAMM review strategy, implementation and targeted Collection Development Plans are discussed in detail in Appendix 3.

4.3 Results and outcomes

4.3.1 A new methodology for collecting archaeology

During the re-development of RAMM the museum had ceased collecting archaeological archives. When the museum re-opened and the new collections development plans were put into action (Appendix 2), a new archaeological archives deposition policy was developed (Royal Albert Memorial Museum, 2018a). The new policy took into account the original reasons for the museum ceasing to collect archaeological archives from developer-funded projects in 2010 (pressure on storage facilities), as well as addressing the issues seen as contributing factors to the archaeology collection's 'low' score during Phase One of the review. The aim of the new deposition policy was to continue to collect archaeology in a sustainable manner in-line with the new collection development action plans (Royal Albert Memorial Museum, 2014).

The newly implemented archaeological archives deposition policy significantly changed what was accepted from development-led archaeology into RAMM's stores. The curators described this as a *"fundamental change in how we approach archaeological archives"* (Assistant Curator, RAMM) supported by the results of the collections review. Prior to 2010, RAMM had taken archaeological archives into their store as a commercial archaeology unit presented them, with any selection generally focussed on the modern material. The new policy stipulated that the museum would be much more particular with what they chose to collect, from all periods of the archaeological record.

"RAMM will only accept finds of an exceptional nature and ones that significantly add to its holdings of a community's heritage." (Royal Albert Memorial Museum, 2018a p4).

RAMM will now only collect material that addresses a 'gap' in their collection or knowledge as identified during the review and documented in the collection development policy. The result is that only small quantities of finds, or only certain parts of an archaeological archive are taken into RAMM's stores, where previously the entire project archive would have been accepted.

"Now we are much more rigorous in what we take, we will just take in stuff that adds significantly to our understanding of Exeter's archaeology or a particular community's archaeology." (Assistant Curator, RAMM).

The curators believe that the knowledge they have gained through the review of the stored archaeological collections has allowed them to understand where additional collecting needs to take place, and where the duplication of material already held within their stores is unnecessary.

"So, we have identified areas as priorities, something that is very significant we will take it but where it is simply duplicating what we already have then no."

"A small lithic scatter with a reasonable report there's no need for further storage, no need to endlessly duplicate."

(Assistant Curator, RAMM).

Alongside this selection of material to be accessioned into the museum, RAMM "will act as the consulting museum to work with archaeological contractors and planning archaeologists to create an archive of the other material which is deemed worthy of preservation but cannot be taken into RAMM's collection" (Royal Albert Memorial Museum, 2018a p4). This means that the curators will assess the rest of the archive and make suggestions as to whether they believe it should be retained for the future or disposed of, based on the museum collecting policy and their current stored collections:

"This archive will have been subject to agreed sampling and disposal strategies which will have taken into account RAMM's existing archaeology collection." (Royal Albert Memorial Museum, 2018a p4).

The deposition policy states that the material archive of potential significance (but not selected to be accessioned into the museum's collections) should be sent to Deepstore, a specialist storage

facility at Winsford Rock Salt Mine in Cheshire. The documentary archive should be digitised and deposited alongside the rest of the digital archive with the Archaeology Data Service (ADS). RAMM are therefore suggesting what they believe is of potential significance and should be retained, but not by them. While these decisions are based on the museum collection development plan for each review group, the care and responsibility for this material would be held outside of the museum. RAMM charge a box fee for the material selected for deposition at the museum and an hourly rate for the consultation process. The museum accepts full responsibility in perpetuity for any material accessioned into the collection but none for the material recommended for deposition at Deepstore and the Archaeology Data Service.

“Other material that may have future potential should be placed elsewhere and we recommend Deepstore and should be managed by some people other than us.” (Assistant Curator, RAMM).

There are therefore four potential outcomes for the individual elements of an archaeological archive that would have originally been deposited wholly with RAMM:

1. Deposited with RAMM: Objects of exceptional interest
 2. Deposited with Deepstore: Material with some research potential
 3. Deposited with ADS: Digital data/documentary archive
 4. Disposal: material of very low research potential
- (Royal Albert Memorial Museum, 2018a).

During the interviews the curators described how the new archaeological archive deposition policy has been put into practice: Two landscape surveys were presented to the museum on the same day containing *“little scraps of pottery, Bronze Age pottery, a few lithics, Romano British sherds, medieval and post-mediaeval sherds”* (Assistant Curator, RAMM). The museum has chosen to retain the small quantity of prehistoric and Bronze Age pottery as there is a known gap in the collection that the material fills. The lithics and Roman pottery was recommended for disposal as they had been adequately reported, as had the medieval and post-medieval pottery that was considered to repeat assemblages already held by the museum. In this case the museum chose to retain a small quantity

of the archive and accession it into the collection, the documentary portion of the archive was to go to ADS and the remainder of the archive was recommended for disposal.

“So, from two sites with a range of material we have narrowed it down to prehistoric pottery and a few chosen pieces, but the rest there’s no need for it to go to Deepstore or anywhere else.” (Assistant Curator, RAMM).

In contrast, a large roadwork scheme outside of Exeter city was considered to be more significant by the curators and a greater proportion of the archive was suggested for accession into the collection. The Medieval and post-medieval finds were recommended for retention at Deepstore and the Roman finds, which actually repeated existing collections, were requested for the museum’s collections.

“Our biggest Roman site outside of Exeter that has come here, within that collection it does duplicate a lot of the material we already have but as a collection it is significant so we will take all of that . . . the huge amounts of med and post med material that is potentially of significance, we are recommending you archive that at Deepstore.” (Assistant Curator, RAMM).

This selection of archaeological material is only considered possible due to the years of collecting that have already taken place. The curators suggested that they would not have been able to make such decisions on the potential and value of development-led archaeological archives back when this type of material first started being deposited with them. The history of archaeological collecting by the museum alongside the two-stage review and resulting collections development policies have given RAMM’s curators the confidence to be choosy with regard to archaeological archives.

“It is because we have got this bulk of material behind us that is why we are saying no to new stuff . . . I would not be so confident to get rid of stuff or turn stuff away if I did not know what we had and what its significance was.” (Assistant Curator, RAMM).

4.3.2 Requiring a ‘different kind of information’ from contractors

As identified during Phase Two of the review, RAMM required a ‘different kind of information’ to properly understand archaeological archives and their potential significance. Under the new

deposition policy, archaeological contractors are required to provide that information so appropriate 'selection' decisions can be made regarding the deposition and/or disposal of the material archive. A 'Statement of Potential' outlining the "importance, or not, of the site and its finds"(Royal Albert Memorial Museum, 2018a p5) is now required at the start of the consultation.

The collections review had concluded that the grey literature reports that accompanied the material archive did not contain the information that RAMM needed to fully understand and make use of the archives they held (Appendix 3). Therefore, in order to make decisions around significance moving forward, more detail was required to be included in the grey literature and specialist reports. The review had found that where material was not mentioned specifically in the report, it was not possible to determine its significance and therefore moving forward, RAMM's curators did not want to be presented with material on which they had no data.

"If we are confronted with material that wasn't reported on, we can suspect that is isn't important, but in that case why wasn't it disposed of, why has it come to the museum? So it's very tricky even with a report to figure out what you have and how significant it is and if you can get rid of it or not."

(Assistant Curator, RAMM).

The perceived specialist detail found in monographs and journals led to the review finding that significance was easier to judge from published sites than grey literature reports (Appendix 3). RAMM curators wanted this level of information to be available to them for all projects proposed for deposition with the museum. The new deposition policy therefore requested that where "individual artefacts have been identified within specialist reports it is essential that they are individually identifiable within the archive"(Royal Albert Memorial Museum, 2018a p7). Additionally, where a specialist had sorted finds within one context into their types, this organisation should be retained within the archive and labelled accordingly; a departure from traditional archive compilation which is by context and material only.

The result of this 'different kind of information' was not only to better enable the curators to ascribe significance to the archives in their care, but also to facilitate curator access and therefore increase the use of those archives in museum activities.

"when you are confronted with boxes of material, trying to establish in the bag of pottery what has been referred to in a report of some sort, you can't necessarily match up a physical object to a written report, and when you have got lots of boxes of stuff it's a huge problem." (Assistant Curator, RAMM).

4.3.3 Pushing research projects

The anecdotal evidence gathered prior to the collections review suggested that the re-use of archaeological archives once they reached RAMM's store was low, if at all. It was felt by the curators that the ability to demonstrate use of the material for research would partly address the concerns over the storage of the archives raised by those outside the museum.

". . . curators here would say they (archaeological archives) are used all the time. The chief exec of the council, they start from a different basis: 'why keep it? It's not on display!'" (Senior Collections Manager, RAMM).

The review results demonstrated much of the museum's stored archaeology collections had potential to contribute to research, but that this had not been taking place (Appendix 3). For each of the collection development plans, a series of potential research projects had been suggested in order to provide the much-needed knowledge that would raise that group's future score, as well as draw out the significance of the amassed archaeological archive. The curators commented that despite the review findings that the archives held research value, they required demonstrable evidence that archaeological archives should be kept as a research resource.

"The argument is you are keeping archaeological archives as a research resource but who is doing this? Is it being actively used? And here is where I need more convincing . . . it doesn't convince me and it's not going to convince someone from the council and it's not going to convince our museum director." (Senior Collections Manager, RAMM).

To address this perceived lack of engagement by researchers, the curators actively pushed these projects out to potential researchers, advertising them on the website and approaching archaeology departments personally. The museum had to target individual academics in order to get projects started, *“they did not come to us”* (Senior Collections Manager, RAMM). For example, the entire animal bone archive was considered to be in need of further research and RAMM made the whole collection available to Exeter University staff and students.

“The process we have gone through has kick-started the research. We applied for funding to start a research section on the website, so we spent time matching up projects and material for potential research.” (Senior Collections Manager, RAMM)

“We made our whole (animal bone) collection accessible, targeted at researchers saying come and use it.” (Collections Assistant, RAMM).

The curators all expressed a desire to work more closely with university academics not only to facilitate access to the collections for external research projects, but also to work collaboratively for a shared outcome. Phase Two of the review identified the strength of the amassed Exeter archives; *“it became apparent just how strong a group the Exeter group is, it’s a significant resource of material relating to towns”* (Collections Assistant, RAMM). This has led to a collaborative project between the museum, Reading University, Exeter City Council and Cotswold Archaeology. ‘Exeter: A Place in Time’ will run from 2016 to 2020 funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and Historic England (Cotswold Archaeology, 2016). The project aims to produce the first ever synthesis of the archaeology of Exeter, utilising unpublished excavation archives from the 1970s and 1980s in order to shed light on how the city developed and interacted with its hinterland (Royal Albert Memorial Museum, 2016). Modern techniques including radiocarbon and tree-ring dating and isotope analysis have been applied to artefacts held for many years in the stores, and the results are highlighting the information that can be extracted from old archives to the museum’s funders.

“Ancient objects excavated decades ago then catalogued and stored at RAMM can now reveal details of the local economy through the millennia; details that were unimaginable when the objects were found.” (Cllr Rachel Sutton, Lead Councillor for City Development, Exeter City Council, (Royal Albert Memorial Museum, 2016)).

It is expected the project will have a range of impacts on the museum and beyond. RAMM’s current gallery displays and web-based educational offerings will be updated in line with the findings of the project while enhancement of the city’s historic environment record will inform future development control decisions (Rippon et al., 2018). The results will influence recommendations for future excavations and research aims, in turn affecting the archaeological archives that are presented to the museum for deposition in the future. The project will therefore carry out several of the tasks in the archaeology collections development plans, demonstrating the potential significance that stored archaeological excavation archives can hold and their long-term value to research.

4.3.4 Rationalisation

Through the interviews following the completion of the review of RAMM’s collections, it was clear that there remained a desire to rationalise the stored archaeology collection. Rationalisation was not a specific aim of the archaeology review, though it did appear in the action plans of several archaeology group collection development plans. Additionally, given the discussions around storage and use of the archaeology archives prior to the review, it was likely to have been a consideration during the review process. The curators discussed rationalisation in terms of improving the collections, making them more accessible and creating the capacity needed for future collecting.

“By rationalising, we will have a more focused collection, a more manageable collection, and one that is a better research tool and will give us room to carry on collecting.”

(Assistant Curator, RAMM)

“At the end of the day it’s about removing items from the collection that have no value because then you are in a better place to look after what you have got.” (Collections Manager, RAMM).

Rationalisation was only specifically mentioned in the collection development plans for four of the review groups; Devon Archaeology: 1970-1989, Devon Archaeology: 1990-2012, Exeter Archaeology: 1970-1989 and Exeter Archaeology: 1990-2012 (Appendix 3). However, the 'low scores' that all the groups received supported the opinions that the archaeology collections contained material that was not relevant to RAMM. Rationalisation of the archaeology collections was therefore seen to not only be in line with the new collection development plans, but also a way of dealing with material that the museum would not consider for acquisition today.

"Material deposited in recent years, like the watching briefs that weren't given to us with any thought, there's a lot of junk in there that has no potential for anything, scrappy bits of post-med pot and clay pipe stems that no one thinks is any use for anything. So we are trying to get that out of our stores and focus on the material that is useful, making the collections more accessible and relevant." (Assistant Curator, RAMM).

The curators identified metalworking debris as a body of material that would benefit from expert assessment. 130 boxes (from 367 identified for potential rationalisation) were selected for a pilot expert review to sit alongside the Phase Two assessment of the archaeology review groups. However, the recommendation for disposal by the specialist was relatively low and the rationalisation of that collection has been put on hold.

"The metalwork: we commissioned an assessment for recommendations, but I have not been able to act on the disposals. But retrospectively the disposals would have been little bits here and there, so I have seen that as a priority." (Collections Assistant, RAMM).

The curators also described how the rationalisation of any collection was difficult and the fear of making mistakes was widespread in the museum sector. However, following the review process and the implementation of the collection development plans, they were no longer afraid to make these hard decisions. There was pride in their willingness to put their plan into action.

"I am not afraid to look at these collections and go 'it's been in here for 20-30 years but it's not been looked and I don't think it ever will, or it's been looked at and people have decided it's not of any use.'"

“We will make mistakes, we will get rid of stuff that has future potential, but in the grand scheme of things we can’t keep everything, there’s no point keeping everything and if those mistakes happen, they will be the minority not majority.”
(Collections Assistant, RAMM).

4.4 External pressures

4.4.1 Professional archaeology has its own policies and agendas

The collections development policy on which the archive deposition policy is based was instigated in 2014, and since then its implementation has met with some resistance from outside of the museum. The policy has been referred to as *“not fit for purpose”* by a local planning archaeologist and *“unworkable”* by commercial archaeological project managers. Senior members of the Society for Museum Archaeology (SMA) and Historic England (HE) have used the term *“cherry picking”* to describe the museum’s methodology for selecting the material to be accessioned into the museum.

“I have had a lot of comments from archaeologists: why are you chucking this stuff away?”
(Assistant Curator, RAMM).

While some archaeologists have always been outspoken with regard to the disposal of any material from an archive (RESCUE, 2012), the majority of complaints about RAMM’s policy are related to the splitting of the archive and the responsibility for its curation. The museum stipulates that it will only choose the material that significantly adds to its collection, and this they will look after in perpetuity. Whereas the material considered of ‘potential significance’ they recommend should go to Deepstore under someone else’s care.

“We have said what the museum wants and is willing to collect and it is for other people to decide beyond that.” (Assistant Curator, RAMM)

“It’s a group of material with lower archaeological potential but that maybe should be kept, and they (professional archaeologists) would like us to manage it but we haven’t got the resources to manage it, so we batted it back to them.” (Assistant Curator, RAMM).

The museum policy of active curation means they will not take responsibility for material held outside of its stores, and this is where some contracting units, national bodies and planning archaeologists have an issue with the policy. Who will manage and provide access to the archive held at Deepstore and how are the archive's relationships maintained if it is split three ways: RAMM, Deepstore and ADS? The result has been that some archaeology units have refused to engage with the policy:

"The units don't want to manage it in Deepstore, and the curators don't want to manage it in the museum, so we are at an impasse, but we don't want it in the museum collection."

"One unit has said the guidelines are unworkable."

"One unit deposited a large number of archives and paid the fees but this week I had an e-mail from the manager saying they were unmanageable guidelines; they are not going to do it."

"There is one contractor in the region that has never deposited with us in 10 years, including some really important sites."

(various Assistant Curators, RAMM).

This unwillingness to apply RAMM's deposition policy may in part be attributed to the current national and international standards on archaeological archiving. The European Archaeology Consortium (EAC) 'Standard and Guide to Best Practice for Archaeological Archiving in Europe' principle 4.3.5 states: "The entire archive must be compiled in a way that preserves relationships between each element and facilitates access to all parts in the future"(Perrin et al., 2014 p21). The Archaeological Archives Forum (AAF) 'Guide to Best Practice in Creation, Compilation, Transfer and Curation' principle 1.3.4 states: "ensuring the security and stability of the archive . . . is as relevant on site as it is in the laboratory or museum" (Brown, 2011 p4). Both the national (AAF) and international (EAC) guides to archiving standards are acknowledged as best practice by the Chartered Institute for archaeologists (CifA) in their own standard on archaeological archiving (Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, 2014) and are therefore required working practices for membership of the CifA Registered Organisation (RO) scheme.

It is not clear to the wider archaeological sector how an archive split between repositories with no clear links, actively managed by only two of those repositories and with no guarantee of the long-term preservation of the material held in the third, can be considered stable, or fully accessible. The museum curators have acknowledged that they have no knowledge or links to the rest of the archive once they have accessioned the material they selected for inclusion in the museum's collections, clearly indicating that the 'relationship' between each archive element is not being preserved.

"We don't know if that material is going to Deepstore, or if the unit is just keeping it, we have passed that back to the planning archaeologist and archaeology community as a problem for them to tackle. It's not something the museum wants."

"RAMM does not accept paperwork and that must go to the ADS, but we do not check if that happens, that is down to the Planning Archaeologist."

(Assistant Curator, RAMM).

Much of the commercial excavation data and specialist reporting that accompanies the material archive is now born-digital and without adequate links to this data the contextual information around objects is lost. This implies that the material the museum has selected to accession is considered part of the museum collection and not part of an archaeological archive, supporting the 'cherry picking' comments made by people outside of the museum. While it is now common practice to split the digital archive from the material archive into different repositories for storage, this is only considered best practice if the relationships between these disparate elements can be maintained and understood (Brown, 2011). In order to facilitate access to split archives, all parts must be actively managed. This is considered to be impossible under RAMM's archive deposition policy.

"The policy is not fit for purpose. If you think one bit is significant why can't the whole lot go to the museum or Deepstore?" (Local Planning Archaeologist pers. comm.).

However, RAMM's curators feel that commercial archaeological contractors do not really consider the long-term existence of the archive that they create beyond the end of the project:

“They dig it up, they report on it, they fulfil the planning requirements then it’s passed to the museum and that’s as far as their responsibility goes.” (Assistant Curator, RAMM).

In some cases, commercial contractors have expressed this sentiment directly to the museum curators, preferring to hand the entire archive over to the museum for them to sort and discard as they wish:

“They argue that it is a museum’s role to sort out what the museum wants to keep and does not want to keep, and we agree to a certain extent but there needs to be dialogue with the contractors. They dug the site.”

“They maintain the whole archive should come to the museum, they would pay the fees for that and then it’s up to the museum to sort out what they don’t want and get rid of it.”

“There is a discord between what contractors see as the museum’s responsibilities and what the museums see as the contractor’s responsibilities.”

(various Assistant Curators, RAMM).

From the curator’s perspective, this ‘apathy’ from commercial archaeologists regarding the long-term care of the archives they produced, fed into a lack of understanding around how hard the museum was working on ‘archaeology’s’ behalf. It was expressed that while this should be a shared problem, where all parties worked towards a solution, the staff did not see any action being taken by the development-led sector and therefore created a solution that worked for the museum. Approval for the new collection development plans and archive deposition policy had not been unanimous within Exeter City council members, some of whom did not see the need to continue accepting archaeological material from commercial projects at all. The museum staff expressed the feeling that they were working hard for the future of archaeological archives and that the wider archaeology community did not appreciate this.

“During writing our archaeological archive guidelines we had long and difficult meetings with people at the city council. The museum team had to spend a long time convincing them that this was a worthwhile project, I don’t get the sense that the archaeology community or the contractors understand how hard we are working to keep this process

going. Frankly left to some people they would say we are not collecting archaeology; you can sort it out yourselves.” (Curator, RAMM).

4.4.2 Museum collection or archaeological archive?

There is clearly a difference of opinion on the treatment of archaeological archives between some in the commercial archaeology sector and RAMM. The museum believes this discord is down to a fundamental difference in the way archaeologists create and compile archives, and how a museum collects and manages the collections in its care. For archaeologists, the creation of a stable, consistent and accessible archive has been a fundamental building block of archaeological activity since the late 19th and early 20th century, and the records and post-excavation analysis of a site should be available for re-examination and reinterpretation (Brown, 2011). RAMM curators believe that in reality the whole archaeological process is more selective than this, and archaeological archives could be brought more in line with the rest of the museum’s collections.

“What’s ended up in the ground is highly selective and what gets dug up is highly selective, so saying we can’t select more, for me is not rational.”

“The notion that everything has to be repeatable, that people should be able to re-do everything is largely irrelevant.”

(Collections Assistant, RAMM).

The fundamental issue for RAMM is that they wish to choose which material comes into their stores, in the same way they do for their other collections, that if RAMM is to be responsible for this material in perpetuity they should be able manage it in the same way as their other collections.

“Other collections there is a choice and a strategy but with archaeological archives you don’t have the same control, so if we can’t make the current system operational then the obvious choice is that we will accept what we want to accept or the antiquarian approach where you select the best bits or you select one site as representative.” (Senior Collections Manager, RAMM)

“We are constantly having discussions about how something fits into our existing collections, how are we going to use it in the future, who is going to benefit from it. We are

making those decisions for other collections so why aren't museums making them for archaeological archives?"

(Collections Assistant, RAMM).

The curators point out that for some types of archaeological material they can be very selective. The treasure system allows museums to choose which archaeological pieces to acquire and which objects to turn down. The decisions are made based on what is already in their collections and the cost of acquiring the piece. They would not choose to duplicate something that they currently hold, stipulating a responsibility to care for what the museum has already accessioned into its collection.

"When the (treasure) scheme first started we acquired a number of Tudor dress pins because we did not have any in the collection, the ones that are coming up now are really nice compared to what we have now but because we have already got some in the collection we got grant aid to purchase, we need to keep those rather than going for the better examples."

(Collections Assistant, RAMM).

4.5 Conclusions

This chapter has presented the results from a longitudinal study of the Royal Albert Memorial Museum collections review in relation to investigating the purpose of archaeological archives. This case study has investigated how a museum-led review can highlight the contrasting approaches to assigning value to whole archives, or their individual components, and how the decisions and approaches to establishing significance can change over time.

The results and outcomes of the collections review and the implantation of a new collecting policy have highlighted how the opinions on why we keep archaeological archives, how they are used, how much needs to be kept, and who should be making those decisions, varies between individuals and across the sector. The RAMM case study has provided an array of supporting evidence to address the aim of this research by answering the research sub questions which will be discussed further in chapter 7.

Why do we keep them?

The preliminary archaeology collections assessment at RAMM was based solely around the documentation RAMM held on the archaeological archives within the collections database together with a small number of corporate documents. As discussed in Appendix 3, for the purpose of the review, the archaeology collections were divided into collection classes, based on the period in which they were collected by the museum, rather than the period(s) in history which they represented. Each collection class was divided into review groups, with a review group representing anything from 1 to 73,696 objects. Neither the material nor documentary aspects of individual archives were assessed, instead the review relied on the notes section on the museums database which did not allow reviewers to differentiate between time periods, records and material types. Decisions around significance were based mainly on the sites within the review group that had been published. The grey literature reports were rarely thought to contain enough detail to adequately judge significance in the material archive and in general the museum believed they were interested in different information than that traditionally contained within an archaeological archive. It was concluded that the data contained within the archaeological archives from developer-led projects needed to be made available in a format that the museum could use, and that a 'different kind of information' was needed in order to establish an object or archive's significance.

How are they used?

It became apparent that the information required to 'give a fuller picture of an individual objects significance and usage' did not exist in the museum's collections database and that the museum considers an archaeological archive as a collection of individual objects rather than as a single entity. If the 'collection highlights' (as the curators knew them) fell outside the sample of fifty taken for each review group, a low score would be achieved and therefore the curators added personal recommendations of the objects they considered significant and displayable.

Before the review, only those sites with well-known publications had been re-accessed and therefore demonstrable evidence that all archaeological archives should be kept as a research resource was required for the funding body. To justify the retention of the archives the curators approached academics and universities, suggesting a series of research projects within each of the new collection's development plans (Appendix 3). As a result of the curators initiatives, a number of external research projects were initiated, adding weight to the argument that the majority of the archaeological archives should be retained.

How much do we need?

The review concluded that the archives from post-PPG16 planning-led archaeological projects were considered in need of rationalisation in order to 'weed out' quantities of weaker material and strengthen the collection thereby increasing use. However, very little rationalisation has actually been carried out due to time and cost restrictions. RAMM considered it easier to reduce the volume of incoming archives than tackle the existing material held in store in a major way. However, the proposed methods of archive reduction have met with resistance from the commercial archaeology sector, with some units simply refusing to undertake the required selection, stating ethical reasons or a lack of funds to undertake the required work.

Whose responsibility are they?

As a publicly funded body it was felt that the cost of maintaining material from commercially derived projects had to be justified by their use. The staff believed that collecting for collecting's sake was no longer acceptable and that active management of the museum's collections, including their archaeological archives, was the way forward. The review would identify areas of the archaeological collection of no future use to the museum for disposal and aim to increase the public benefit derived from those archives retained by the museum. For each low-scoring review group, which included all of the archaeology groups, a new collections development plan was written, detailing how the collection could be improved moving forward and brought better into alignment with the museum (Appendix 3). The curators believe that there is no need to 'endlessly duplicate' material that already

exists in the stores and therefore will only collect material that addressed a 'gap' in their collection. The aim of the new deposition policy was to continue to collect archaeology in a sustainable manner, however this new policy has been referred to as 'not fit for purpose' and 'cherry picking by some in the sector. It has been questioned whether an archive, split between three repositories with no clear links, can be considered stable, or fully accessible as required by the professional industry standards. However, the museum curators believe that their long history of archaeological collecting, alongside the two-stage review and resulting collections development policies, have given them the confidence to be choosy with regard to archaeological archives. The fundamental issue for RAMM is that they wish to choose which material comes into their stores, in the same way they do for their other collections, that if RAMM is to be responsible for this material in perpetuity they should be able manage it in the same way as their other collections.

5 MUSEUM-LED ARCHAEOLOGICAL ARCHIVE REVIEW CASE STUDIES

5.1 Introduction

The following case studies detail archaeological archive reviews that have taken place at eight museums over the last decade: Museum B, Chesterfield Museum, Epping Forest District Museum, Gloucester City Museum, Horsham Museum, Norton Priory, Peterborough Museum and Tamworth Castle. The case studies have been grouped in this manner to reflect the general approach to the review as curator-led, or from the museum perspective, therefore allowing comparison with the case study methodologies and outcomes discussed in Chapters 3 and 4. Either the curators undertook the review entirely in-house, formulating their own set of review criteria or following industry standard practice such as the Society for Museum Archaeology guidelines for Selection, Retention and Rationalisation, or the museum devised or commissioned review criteria for others to implement. In some cases, no criteria were officially created for the review, and individual curators made decisions around the value and significance of the archaeological archives based on their personal knowledge and opinions. The case studies presented in this chapter display several of the key issues discussed within this thesis, including how lack of storage, resources, accessibility and knowledge expose the variations in how value and significance are attributed to archaeological archives across the sector.

For each case study, the museum's background and history of archaeological collecting is briefly outlined in order to contextualise the review, followed by the details on the review strategy and implementation where they were available. As with the previous two Chapters, the results and any external pressures encountered, are discussed alongside analysis of the interview data to establish the reasoning and decision-making process behind how each museum attributes significance to their archaeological collections.

5.2 A Conservator-led review at Museum B (anonymised)

Background

Museum B owns and manages over four hundred archaeological and heritage sites on a national level. Alongside the architectural collection, an estimated 380,000 artefacts and associated documentary archives from archaeological investigations are housed within several regional stores (Anonymised, 2014). Following the economic downturn in 2010, a major drop in funding prompted a review of Museum B's storage rental expenditure. It was proposed that five of the existing stores were combined into one newly outfitted central 'superstore'. The planned transfer of the archaeology and architecture collections was seen as an opportunity to undertake a condition and significance review (Anonymised, 2014). The archaeology collections in general were considered overlarge, under used, and in some cases poorly documented; only around 50% of the collection appeared on the institution's databases. The review was seen not only as a way to rationalise and reduce expenditure, but also to improve the understanding of the stored material and therefore open up the collections to researchers and the general public.

"Improving conservation and long-term preservation, improving the documentation, creating a facility where we could actually have researchers in the building and opening up the stores so visitors could learn about the work (Museum B) does behind the scenes. So those were the four big goals." (Curator of Collections, Museum B)

"Previous to that they had been languishing there under the curatorial philosophy of keep everything and worry about it later on. There's an archaeological philosophy as well, of keep all your evidence." (Conservator, Museum B).

Strategy and implementation

The two-year condition and significance review (June 2011 to November 2012) addressed a number of physical issues within the archaeology collections identified by the conservation team: patchy or inadequate documentation, poor packing methods and difficulty in accessing certain objects or archives. The move was considered an opportunity to re-pack the entire collection to a good, basic standard, and improve the long-term preservation of the archives. Documentation of the whole

collection was improved as minimum to box level, but to object level if possible (Anonymised, 2014). Each box and pallet were allocated a unique barcode linked to Museum B's database allowing objects to be tracked as they moved around the store, linked to other associated objects and, improve accessibility to staff and researchers.

Alongside the condition assessment, there was also an aspiration to re-examine the collections with a view to the potential disposal of items considered not relevant to the collections, disposal of duplicate items, and sampling of large assemblages. Unusually, the review was led by conservators rather than curators, and the curators believed that this brought a different approach to how questions around significance were asked: Conservation standards and the cost of the long-term conservation needs of the collection were at the forefront of the project and the conservators would require the curators to justify spending on repacking or conservation. While some of the curators found this approach challenging, it was also realised that the conservators wanted to understand the collections and be rigorous with selection and retention decisions.

"They were always asking these questions; why do we have this? What is the significance? Where did it come from? What's its provenance? Sometimes the documentation was brilliant and other times it wasn't. So, if it doesn't have a provenance and we don't know anything about it, and we have five, why are we keeping five? Why aren't we keeping just one?"

"I think some of the curators that had been there a really long time found it really tough."
(Curator of Collections, Museum B)

"From a conservator's perspective we need to know how significant it is so that we can then say if we are spending money on it. To be blunt."

"A robust argument had to be put in place by the curators to change a decision that had been made by the conservators."

(Conservator, Museum B).

For some parts of the collection, establishing the significance was straightforward, primarily where all the documentation was present and the relationship to one of Museum B's sites was evident. When all the documentation was present, disposal was not considered. Where provenance could

not be established the conservators asked if the object or material in question was significant in its own right with a view towards disposal if it was not. Where sampling could be applied to duplicate items, large bulk collections or collections in a poor condition, this was implemented so storage and conservation costs could be better applied elsewhere. The reduction of large bulk assemblages was not considered a reduction in knowledge by the conservators or curators; the information was retained and held within the records.

“We just had so much of it that we could sample it and still retain the information required.” (Conservator, Museum B)

There were instances where an object was significant in its own right but was not considered relevant to the museum’s collections. In these cases, disposal was only considered if a more suitable museum could be found to take the object or archive, if it could not, then it was retained by Museum B. The conservators believed that if the curators had not been involved in the decision-making process, a much greater quantity of material would have been recommended for disposal than was the case. While they believed that decisions were made much more with their heads than their hearts, it was acknowledged that the curators better understood how the collections related back to the original sites.

“If it was up to the conservators, we would probably have thrown a lot of stuff, I do think we are quite savvy at recognising the important stuff, but we don’t have the detailed expertise.”

*“It’s always about how to prioritise our conservation money.”
(Conservator, Museum B).*

When making decisions around selection and retention of large assemblages, the curators did worry that a decision made in the present could affect the future research potential of the material. At the request of the conservators, a large assemblage of medieval floor tiles consisting of three pallets of plain tiles and six boxes of decorated examples was assessed for its potential to be rationalised. The tiles represented a complete medieval pavement from a palace in London, and through advances in

scientific techniques, research on the tiles manufacture, origins and use would now be possible. If the collection had been sampled back in the 1980s, those questions could not now be asked. While many of the other CBM assemblages were sampled, it was decided by the curators that complete retention of the pavement was justified. The conservators however still managed to reduce the physical footprint of the assemblage in the new store through purchase of specially designed crates.

“I think you have to be very careful because research agendas change.” (Curator of Collections, Museum B).

None of the archaeology collections considered for disposal were officially accessioned into Museum B’s collections, however all proposals were still passed by the director for approval. Approved disposals were offered to other museums following the Museums Association Disposal Guidelines (Museums Association, 2014). The curators considered this their ethical responsibility; to fully record the material and dispose of it in the industry approved way. However, there was no uptake on any of the archaeological material advertised through the *Museums Journal*. While this was not a surprise to any of Museum B’s staff, it did not make the process any easier as they did not like to simply ‘throw things away’.

“Unfortunately, because that is part of the ethics, we have to advertise it, so we do.”

“At the end of the day saying goodbye to a piece of history because whatever reason kind of goes against what we do!”

(Curator of Collections, Museum B).

Results

“A new sustainable future for over 160,000 stored archaeological and architectural artefacts has been achieved at (Museum B).” (Anonymised, 2014 p1)

The move to the new store was completed by the end of 2013 and shortly after, the project was shortlisted for the Institute of Conservation (Icon) Pilgrim Trust Award for Conservation (Icon, 2015). During the summer following the opening of the new store, one hundred and twelve visitors participated in curator-led tours of the collections. The follow-up feedback forms suggested 96-98% enjoyed the tours and would recommend them to a friend (Anonymised, 2014 p9). While there are

no specific records, the curators and conservators both felt that the number of researchers utilising the collections has greatly increased. To support this increased level of engagement, Museum B developed a dedicated volunteer team to deliver the public tours and facilitate researcher access to the archives. The staff believes that through re-packing and conserving the archaeological collections, as well as rationalisation of the bulk, repetitive and poor condition material, a more sustainable, accessible stored collection has emerged. The process of conservator led selection and disposal is considered to have had a positive impact on the collection, guaranteeing its future.

“I don’t think we have weakened the quality of the evidence for future investigations, in fact I think we have strengthened it because we know what we have got, and people can get to it easily.”

“The potential that we might have got rid of something that was quite important, the risk of that compared to the benefit of creating much greater interest is worth taking.”

(Conservator, Museum B)

“Conservation expertise was at the heart of the undertaking informing decisions and actions, which have ultimately facilitated wider research and community access.”

(Anonymised, 2014 p1).

5.3 A Curator-led review at Chesterfield Museum

Background

Chesterfield Museum and Art Gallery and all their collections are owned and operated by Chesterfield Borough Council, accepting archaeological archives from the market town and borough of Chesterfield. While the majority of the stored archaeological archives represent ‘Rescue’ and Developer-funded interventions, the earliest excavations revealed the town’s Roman origins as a fort along Ryknield Street. The majority of the archives had not been properly accessioned into the museum’s collections and therefore do not appear on the museum catalogues. It was felt that the very reason the archives had never been added to the museum database is that historically they were seen as having no value to the museum and therefore did not need to be accessed in the way

the other collections were. As a result, the archaeological archives were almost impossible to access by either the museum curators or external researchers.

“The problem is if you are not an archaeologist you don’t know how to interpret it and display it.”

“Museums tend not to have their archaeological archives thoroughly catalogued because sometimes it’s boxes and boxes of pot that you are not going to display.”

(Museum Collection Officer, Chesterfield Museum).

The existing archaeological archives were considered under-used and neglected by the museum staff. A new Collecting Policy was introduced in 2014 (Chesterfield Borough Council, 2014) that not only changed Chesterfield Museum’s approach to how they would collect archaeological material moving forward, but also prompted the curators to ask how the existing archives fit into the new policy. The museum staff believed the existing archaeological archives had the potential to improve the current archaeology displays as well as provide resources for teaching and outreach, however they did question whether all the archaeological archival material had the same potential. To better understand the collection, increase accessibility and establish the evidence for rationalisation, the museum curators undertook a project to catalogue and review the archaeological archives.

“It is Chesterfield Museum’s policy not to actively collect new archaeological material. Exception to this would either be significant local finds with their associated archives . . . or important individual finds by individuals including items declared Treasure Trove.”

(Chesterfield Borough Council, 2014 p9)

“There is potential there to do events and educate the public on what archaeology is and why we keep it.” (Museum Collection Officer, Chesterfield Museum).

Strategy and implementation

The review was undertaken by the museum curators at the same time as the cataloguing project. The archives held by Chesterfield Museum are not extensive, so the curators felt they had the time to open all the boxes, document the contents to add the information to the museum database. In

addition to a description of the archives, a photograph was added to the database. In the future it will be possible to see the object without having to physically visit the archives in store.

*“So, you don’t have to open lots of boxes, or open them at all to see the object.”
(Museum Collection Officer, Chesterfield Museum).*

While the archive data was added to the museum database, the contents of the boxes were also reviewed by the curators with a view to establishing the material’s potential to support display, teaching and research. No formal system of assessment was established for the review of the archaeological archives; the project was undertaken by the museum curators making recommendations based on their personal knowledge. The curators considered how the archives could update the current archaeology display, handling collections or teaching resources. At the same time the curators were considering which materials and archives did not meet the new collecting policy and therefore could be considered for rationalisation.

*“I knew the display needed updating so I went with that in mind. I have gone through and thought ‘that could be used in education’ for example.”
“Chesterfield will not accept archaeology unless they contain ‘significant finds’ and you interpret that as one or lots of finds.”
(Museum Collection Officer, Chesterfield Museum).*

The curators looked in depth at the post-1800 pottery from the 1960s Rescue excavations and recommended that large quantities of the material could be discarded from the collection. This decision was based on the material neither supporting the research aims of the original investigation, nor adding to the story of the history of Chesterfield. Large quantities of sherds were thought to have no future potential when the museum held complete examples elsewhere in the collection. However, during the project, the curators felt they did not have the expertise to properly review all the archaeological material for rationalisation purposes due to a lack of in-house knowledge. For example, the animal bone assemblages from the same sites were left intact, even though they were considered to be in need of rationalisation.

“We have complete pots in the collection, so the sherds did not add to the collection.”

“We did not look at the animal bone because we are not experts.”

(Museum Collection Officer, Chesterfield Museum).

Results

The report into the Chester Museum archaeological archive review concluded that the majority of the archives had “the potential to be promoted for research purposes and display both within the museum context and in a virtual format” (Chesterfield Borough Council, 2015). The curators highlighted where the archives helped to tell the story of the town, supporting the requirements of the new collecting policy (Chesterfield Borough Council, 2014 p9). Changes were made to the permanent archaeology display within the museum based on the knowledge acquired during the cataloguing process.

While the majority of the archives were recommended for retention, it was acknowledged that they primarily functioned as a resource for research rather than supporting the day-to-day activities of the museum. Several large collections of post-1800 pottery sherds were recommended for rationalisation alongside those archives that consisted only of paper records. The curators devised the rationalisation procedure without involvement of a post-medieval ceramic specialist, compiling a detailed record of the rationalised material, including the feature numbers and the bag contents and adding a thumbnail photograph. The curators believed this adequately represented the material removed from the stores.

“This archive is of extremely important archaeological significance to the town and the potential for research and outreach is high.”(Chesterfield Borough Council, 2015 p5).

One of the reasons that the majority of the existing archives were not recommended for disposal may be that the curators did not find the rationalisation process easy. The decision to remove anything from the museum stores was considered a tough one to make. The curators considered it easier emotionally and ethically to say no to new depositions, than to reconsider the material when

it was already in the storeroom. They felt they were responsible for the material in the museums' collections, the archaeology archives being no different in that regard. Therefore, moving forward the curators would be stricter in implementing the new Collection Policy and what is accepted into the museum's collections from commercial archaeology projects.

*“Rationalisation is an emotional subject for museum curators; we are attached to stuff.”
(Museum Collection Officer, Chesterfield Museum).*

In the five years following the review and the implementation of the new collecting policy, no new archaeological depositions have been made at Chesterfield Museum. As part of a county-wide initiative, the museums in Derbyshire have devised a joint archaeological archive deposition plan whereby they work more closely together to help make decisions on archaeological archiving practice (Derbyshire County Council, 2015). The Procedures for the Transfer of Archaeological Archives in Derbyshire set out the manner in which archives should be compiled and presented to the four collecting museums in the county (Derbyshire County Council, 2015). This document sits alongside the Chesterfield Collecting policy, the main addition being that the museums in Derbyshire no longer accept archives without finds.

“Yes, we have archaeological finds, and yes we are going to keep them but . . . we are going to be very specific about what we are going to accept and not accept.” (Museum Collection Officer, Chesterfield Museum).

External pressures

The curators at Chesterfield believe one of the main reasons that they have not taken in any more archaeological archives since the introduction of the new collecting policy is the manner in which professional archaeologists present the findings of their investigations and the associated archives to the museum. The museum is interested in how the material in the archive adds to the story of Chesterfield, yet the curator believes that reports are often from the “*feature perspective*” (factual presentation of stratigraphic sequences and site formation) rather than the significance of the finds to Chesterfield and its surroundings (Museum Collection Officer, Chesterfield Museum). It would be

easier to map archaeological archives to the collecting policy if the interpretation was geared towards museum use.

“We need more focus on the finds and the significance of those finds, rather than the importance of the features. It’s separating the site from the features.”
(Museum Collection Officer, Chesterfield Museum).

5.4 Rationalisation at Epping Forest District Museum by a local archaeology society

Background

Epping Forest District Museum in Waltham Abbey in Essex acts as the archaeological repository for the area, collecting archives for commercial archaeology units and chance finds by residents. The stored archaeological archives were rarely used by the museum, with the exception of *“small finds and whole pots that are interesting and suitable for display”* (Collections Officer, Epping Forest District Museum). At the time of the museum’s HLF funding bid for redevelopment during the early 2010s, the archaeological archives were housed off site in a store owned by the local council earmarked for re-development. The need to move the museum’s collections to a new store highlighted that the museum had reached a critical point, prompting a review of the existing archaeological archives with a view to rationalisation.

“The museum had reached a critical point, there are always more sites, so material was backing up in units.”
“All in the museum think it’s a shame we have been hoarding boxes of stuff without having the time or capacity to actually do anything”
(Collections Officer, Epping Forest District Museum).

Strategy

The strategy for the rationalisation project was devised by an independent consultant (Shepherd, 2012). Two sites were identified to use as a pilot project: Abbey Mead and Little London. The archive from the medieval monastic site of Abbey Mead was considered large and unwieldy and had never

been used by the museum. The staff hoped that by reducing the size of the assemblages within it, they could better understand its contents in order to facilitate access and increase use in the future.

“The site is used for absolutely nothing.”

“The reason we began the rationalisation project was to make the archaeological archives more accessible, we knew the sites were important, but we could not demonstrate that, or make them accessible to people.”

(Collections Officer, Epping Forest District Museum).

A top-level audit by museum staff listed the archive boxes and their contents, as well as identifying two material types (ceramic building material (CBM) and masonry) for potential rationalisation. The CBM from Abbey Mead was to be reviewed as part of a community outreach project. A CBM specialist created a reference collection and a set of criteria against which the assemblage was to be assessed for selection and disposal purposes (the project criteria were not made available for this research). It was estimated by the external consultant that between 50% and 70% of the CBM and masonry from Abbey Mead would be deselected from the collection. The material from the second site, Little London, was to be assessed following the completion of the Abbey Mead project.

“The individual fragments have no display value and little handling value, other than a few which could be retained.”

“Put simply, it is just not necessary to retain so much duplicated CBM or unstratified, duplicate and mundane worked stone.”

(Shepard 2012).

Implementation

While it was the museum and specialist that devised the review criteria, the volunteers were to identify the material which could be used by the museum for display, handling, education and research purposes. The museum staff and CBM specialist trained a group of volunteers from the local historical and archaeological society to quantify the collection and apply the selection criteria to batches of CBM. The local society undertook the project during the gaps in their excavation programme, removing batches of CBM from the museum’s stores to review at their leisure; the

project has therefore been taken out of the museum's control. The staff had no understanding of the timescales involved in the assessment of the material, how and why decisions are being made and what is being retained or discarded. At the time of the interview (September 2015) the project was in its second year with no proposed end date. The museum staff believed that the group undertaking the assessment were "losing interest" and preferred to be out digging. They interpreted this as archaeologist's preference of the discovery of the new, to working on old archives.

"it is frustrating for the museum; it has been taken out of our hands. There is a loss of control and we are not aware of how long it is really taking and what the results are."
(Collections Officer, Epping Forest District Museum).

It was decided that further reviews of the archaeological archives should be kept in-house to retain better control of future projects. Subsequently, a pilot project to review the masonry from Waltham Abby took place within the museum stores. The review was undertaken over a four-day period by an independent consultant who recommended that many of the architectural fragments could be rationalised from the collection if a 'substitute' collation was created through the use of digital, photographic and paper records to sit alongside a reference collection (Architectural Archaeology, 2015). This would "allow future researchers to obtain all the necessary information without access to the stones themselves." (Architectural Archaeology, 2015 p3). Of the material assessed during the pilot project, 97 fragments were recommended for additional recording to create a substitute archive, 297 fragments were recommended for additional recording and discard, and 104 fragments identified as requiring illustration and publication.

Results

Storage space within the museum stores has increased, in the main part due to the removal of the material from the stores for assessment. However, the full recommended rationalisation of the CBM and architectural fragments has not been undertaken (as of September 2015- NOTE: no update was made available). The remaining collection is better understood as a result of the top-level audit and

recording of the archive into a format more accessible to museum staff. Due to this increased understanding, the museum is now requesting that archaeological archives are only deposited following a selection and retention process (undefined as of September 2015), accompanied by detailed archive contents lists, on-site selection strategies should also be imposed, especially with regard to architectural stone and CBM.

Following the implementation of the review and rationalisation project, the museum staff continued to believe that that the museum's retention of archaeological archives was not justified by their use. The museum staff hoped that by making the CBM reference collection available on-line they would be able to encourage researchers and external parties to take an interest in the archaeology collections as a whole. The museum also believes that smaller collections are more attractive as a research resource, this is based on their experience that the existing large collections are never accessed by researchers. However, due to the unforeseen loss of control of the review project created through the removal of the CBM from the museum premises, the on-line resource is yet to be made available.

“Work on the archaeological archive post publication does not happen enough, it is a forgotten resource.”

“If the collections are reduced, they would be easier to access and be more attractive to researchers.”

(Collections Officer, Epping Forest District Museum).

External pressures

Regardless of the new requirements for the deposition of archaeological archives, the museum believes there is still a fundamental difference in the way commercial archaeologists record and use archives, and the information museums require to understand and access them. Additional work is required by the museum to turn it from an 'archaeological archive', into part of the museum collection.

“I don’t think it’s what the excavators do, recently stuff has come in in a reasonable state. It’s more to do with what museums do. I am moving and cataloguing the archaeological archives with a team of volunteers who have been trained in a museum way rather than an archaeological way.” (Collections Officer, Epping Forest District Museum).

The material so far de-selected from the archaeological archives has been incorporated into the backfill of the volunteer group’s recent excavation trenches at the Waltham Abbey site. The museum therefore did not follow the Museum Association disposal guidelines proposing that the methodology is not relevant for this ‘type of material’, and that ‘re-burial’ was not full ‘disposal’.

“Not for the archaeological archives because of the type of material it is and because we have agreed that the de-selected material will be re-buried at the site of the current dig and its location recorded so we are not fully disposing of it.” (Collections Officer, Epping Forest District museum)

“Alternative uses for the material, such as sale or donation to either schools or commercial companies is not a viable option. Such exercises are rarely successful.” (Shepherd, 2012 p4).

5.5 On-going curator-led collection reviews at Gloucester City Museum

Background

Gloucester City Museum is a local authority museum administered by Gloucester City Council. The museum has a long history of archaeological collecting and “by the 1930s archaeology had come to be seen as the most important collection” (Gloucester County Council, 2016 p32). Individual archaeological objects and archives from commercial excavations were collected from not only the City of Gloucester, but across the whole region. Up until the early 2000s, it had been assumed that the museum facilities (including storage) would continue to expand and the collections grew accordingly, though there was a greater emphasis across all collections to only accept material from the City of Gloucester and its immediate environs from the early 1990s onwards (Gloucester County Council, 2016).

The collections held by Gloucester City Museum, including the archaeology collections, are under constant process of assessment and rationalisation. Records demonstrate several instances of disposal from the archaeology collections such as the “Undocumented archaeological bulk finds destroyed when E&J Building cleared 2004” and “110 cubic feet of archaeological animal bone and 13 cubic feet of archaeological building material destroyed in 1979” (Gloucester County Council, 2016). However, disposals from the archaeology collections have not always been recorded so the overall extent of archaeological rationalisation activities cannot be fully quantified.

“I’ve done loads (of disposals from the archaeology collections) officially and unofficially. We have moved stores a couple of times and every time there is stuff left behind, and there are always tea chests of Roman tiles and building material we have got rid of.” (Curator, Gloucester City Museum).

“Material appears to have been disposed of without records being made.” (Gloucester County Council, 2016 p18).

In recent years, two official reviews and disposal programmes have involved the archaeological archives; a three-year museum-led collection review from 2008 to 2011 discussed here, and an external led Archive Enhancement project in 2015 discussed in the following chapter.

During the 2000s, several restructures within the museum and city council created uncertainty over long-term storage capacity and the museum’s ability to support sustainable collecting moving forward. This promoted the commencement of an official collections review and disposals programme. The museum-led collections review was carried out between 2008 and 2011 during which the Archaeology, Social History, Natural Science, Archive and Art Collections were assessed for their significance and potential for disposal.

Strategy

In early 2008 a new Collections Development Policy was drafted, and the storage needs of the museum assessed for their ability to support future sustainable collecting (Gloucester County Council, 2008b). The commitment to rationalise the existing collections was established and the

curators developed a scoring system to identify potential candidates for disposal (Gloucester County Council, 2012). The Collections Development Policy was adopted in 2009 and the review aimed to assess the collections against the newly adopted policy using the agreed matrix scoring system. The matrix scoring system (originally designed for assessing the social history collections) rated 'groups of items' on a score of 0-3 against the following categories:

- Completeness (is everything there?)
- Condition (displayable or needs fixing?)
- Relevance to collecting policy (would we collect it today?)
- Access (How often seen by the public?)
- Cost of Storage (size and special conditions)
- Duplication (how many like it?)
- Provenance (how local?)

(Gloucester County Council, 2008a p1).

A 'group of items' could be an individual object or an associated group of material such as an archaeological archive. Under each category the chosen object or archive received a score of 0-3. The scores were then added up and any object or archive with a score lower than eight was considered a candidate for disposal. Any disposals were to be carried out following the Museum Association Disposal Toolkit (Museums Association, 2014) and to support this aim, the curators attended a course on ethical disposals at the start of the review process. The museum curators who identified the material for potential disposal, mainly from the Archaeology and Social History collections, undertook the collections review.

"The idea is to achieve some sort of objective assessment of the items in the outstores. Items with low scores would be targeted for disposal." (Gloucester County Council, 2008a p1).

Implementation

Details of how each 'group of items' achieved their final score was not made available during the course of this research, nor was a breakdown of the group's individual scores.

For each ‘group of items’ a database entry was created on the ‘provisional list’ detailing the group’s name, material type, volume or size of the group, where it is currently located, the level of documentation associated with the group, the reason for disposal, a recommendation as to where the group should go and the overall score the group received during the collections review (Gloucester County Council, 2012). Un-provenanced ‘groups of items’ scoring eight or less were generally recommended for destruction or incorporation into education or handling collections. For ‘groups of items’ with a score below eight where provenance could be established, disposal following the Museum Association Disposal Toolkit was recommended.

Results

The majority of the recommended disposals were from the Archaeology Collections. The numbers of disposals from each collection and the general manner of disposal is detailed in Table 13.

Collection type	Recommended manner of disposal	Items to be destroyed
Archaeology Collections	2972 groups of items disposed of to other museums and universities	8 groups of items destroyed
Social History Collections	3 items disposed of to other museums	162 items destroyed
Natural Sciences Collections	1 item disposed of to a community group	4 groups of items destroyed
Archive collections	30 items disposed of to public archives	-
Art Collections	Several items identified for potential disposal.	-

Table 11. Disposals made during the 2008-2011 Gloucester City Museum collections review.

As the oldest museum in the county, it had been the collecting policy of Gloucester City museum to accept archaeological archives from a much larger area than is defined by the city limits. The area from which the museum would collect material was resolved through agreement with the other county museums in 2007 and ratified in the updated collections development plan in 2009 (Gloucester County Council, 2016). Therefore, the majority of the archaeological object and archives identified for disposal in the ‘provisional list’ simply lay outside of Gloucester City Museum’s current collecting area. The ‘groups of items’ that received low scores and lay outside of the current collecting area were offered to the relevant museums for accessioning into their collections. These

groups of material were largely comprised of bulk finds from archaeological archives; however, a few registered finds were included within these archives. While these 'groups of items' were recommended for transfer to the appropriate museum, it is unclear to what extent this has been successful. Stroud Museum closed its doors to all new acquisitions of archaeological archives in 2014 due to lack of available storage space (Clark, 2017 p2) and the curator who undertook the review believes that many of the other museums do not have the capacity to take the material either.

"We have not found strong associations to other institutions' collections for the items on our latest provisional list, however, should another institution identify a claim, this will be explored before disposal." (Gloucester County Council, 2012 p2)

"We would like to move it on, but the other museums don't want it because they don't have the space." (Curator, Gloucester City Museum).

All of the 'groups of items' which received low scores but lay within the current collecting area were recommended for destruction. The similarity of the material for destruction to the 'groups of items' recommended for transfer to other museums, might provide an indication as to why the other museums were unwilling to take that material into their collections.

Not all of the material identified as being outside the current collecting area was offered to the relevant museums. Nineteen 'groups of items' outside of the collecting area scored above eight during the 2008-2011 review and were therefore considered for retention by Gloucester City Museum. This material comprised largely of objects already on display, registered finds and 'good pottery' as they had a proven value, or easily identifiable potential future value to the museum (Gloucester County Council, 2012). These items were not offered to the museums under which collecting area they fell, as their retention was considered easy to justify.

"It's easy to demonstrate why we have to keep a silver coin, but when it comes to big quantities of pottery people don't get it. I've had people say if it's not on display, why have you got it?" (Curator, Gloucester City Museum).

The 2008-2011 collections development plan was reported as a normal part of the museum review and rationalisation process, whereby collections are continually assessed for their relevance and disposals form part of a museum's everyday activities. Despite the lack of transfers to other museums, archaeological archives continued to be assessed for disposal purposes following the end of the 2008-2011 review with "Seven boxes of archaeological stratified bulk finds destroyed in 2012" (Gloucester County Council, 2016 p32).

"Over the last three years we have worked exceptionally hard to bring the Museums Service up to date and make them relevant and attractive to a broader range of users."

"The acquisitions and disposal process are an intrinsic part of our transformation process." (Gloucester County Council, 2012 p3-4).

The profile of the archaeological archives was raised within the museum as a result of the review, and the need to address the state of future acquisitions was met with updated 'Guidelines for the pre-deposition preparation of archaeological archives' and a deposition fee was introduced in 2010 (Gloucester County Council, 2010). The deposition fee was considered a source of revenue for the museum, supporting it to reach the income targets set by the council. The ability to charge for incoming archaeological archives made it easier for the curators to justify their inclusion in the museums' collections. However, It was not clear if the new deposition covered curation in perpetuity, and therefore precluded newly deposited archives from future rationalisation.

"What makes a difference is that we charge for deposition now and that is an important source of income." (Curator, Gloucester City Museum).

External pressures

The 2008-2011 collections review was concerned solely with the stored archives and objects that had been accessioned into the museum collections, and therefore sat under the Museum Association guidelines for collections reviews. However, the curator believes that it is not easy to follow the Museum Association code of ethics (Museums Association, 2008, updated 2015) and Disposal Toolkit (Museums Association, 2014) when it comes to archaeological archives

recommended for disposal. The lack of uptake with regard to the proposed transfers, and the time required to fully implement the Disposal Toolkit methodology were considered evidence that archaeological archives are different to other museum collections.

“The material is still here, I moved onto higher priorities.”

“No, I didn’t follow the disposals guidelines, nobody really understands archaeology archives. Yes, archaeology archives are separated off from the rest of the collections.”

(Curator, Gloucester City Museum).

The concept of archaeological archives requiring different treatment than other museum collections came to the fore following the closure of Gloucester City Council’s Excavation Unit, when the museum ‘inherited’ the entirety of the unit’s development-led archives. The museum curator was unwilling to accession the material in its current form, given what had been learned during the 2008-2011 review. Therefore, in order to transform the archives into something the museum would be willing to accession into their collections, an externally led Archive Enhancement Project was initiated by Gloucester City Council and undertaken by a commercial archaeology unit (discussed in the following chapter).

5.6 Curator-led review and rationalisation at Horsham Museum

Background

Horsham museum in West Sussex was founded in 1893 and became part of Horsham District Council in 1974. Two full time members of staff and a pool of fifty volunteers run the museum. Horsham museum has a long history with archaeology and archaeological collecting. The museum has taken in archaeological archives from commercial projects since 1974 following its incorporation with the District Council. However, the archaeological archives have been neglected in the past and several important collections such as the Horsham flint collection created by the museum’s founder, can no longer be located.

“There has been a catalogue of neglect in the archaeological story.” (Heritage and Museum Manager, Horsham Museum).

Before the review and rationalisation process was initiated, the archaeological collections were stored in damp basements and cellars and the curator believed that the museum could no longer accept material from development-led archaeology projects under the current methodology. Therefore, the museum closed its stores to new depositions and began a process of assessment and rationalisation.

“Before 2000 archaeological material was stored in damp storage conditions so I started rationalising to deal with that. (Heritage and Museum Manager, Horsham Museum).

Strategy and implementation

Rationalisation of the current collections was considered a way to alleviate the pressures on the museum stores and potentially support a new approach to archaeological collecting moving forward. The process of assessment and rationalisation began in 2000, undertaken as-and-when the curator had the time. No formal framework for reviewing the archaeological archives was established; the curator, based on personal knowledge of the collections, identified archives or specific types of material for potential rationalisation. Decisions around significance and rationalisation were based on the information the museum held on the material, personal knowledge (curator’s and volunteer’s) about the museum’s other collections, and the costs of long-term storage. The aim was to create a more sustainable archaeological collection for the museum.

“If there are reasons why we have these things then fine, but if there is no reason then we dispose of them.”

“I take the view that collections need to earn their keep in a museum, offered out to schools, put on display, otherwise what are we keeping them for?”

“What you have to do is cut your cloth to what you can manage, that means heating, lighting, the cost of looking after this stuff.”

“With limited space you have to make that value judgement. My judgement is that it’s barmy keeping this stuff.”

(Heritage and Museum Manager, Horsham Museum).

Disposal of the material identified for rationalisation followed the Museum Association Disposal Toolkit guidelines (Museums Association, 2014), being offered to other museums in the first instance and then to other institutions and organisations. However, for the large part this did not prove a viable means of disposal and the material was advertised through the local newspaper and eventually put up for auction. A collection of Palaeolithic material identified as having no direct link to Horsham Museum was offered to other relevant museums, but with the exception of a few pieces taken by Kent's Cavern, the remainder was put up for auction and bought by private dealers and collectors. No museum could be found to re-home a large, poorly documented collection of flint collected during the 1930s, earmarked for rationalisation as the boxes were labelled with only the name of the site. The *"two carloads of axe heads and flints"* was offered to the Institute of Archaeology at University College London for their student projects.

"Do you keep boxes of flint with no archaeological merit and turn away sites with detailed records backing up the finds?"

"It's barking keeping archaeological material with limited archaeological value."
(Heritage and Museum Manager, Horsham Museum).

Several archaeological archives from excavations carried out in the 1970s have also been rationalised with large quantities of bulk material being removed from the collection, specifically pottery body sherds or pottery types where complete examples exist elsewhere in the collection. However, the decision to remove material is not always a unanimous one within the museum.

"Got rid of the grot pot in large quantities"

"Bits of blue and white porcelain, we have complete ones in our collection, why would we want bits? There have been heated discussions in the museum over this disposal."
(Heritage and Museum Manager, Horsham Museum).

Results and outcomes

"I hold the record for disposing of more items than anyone else in the country, not just archaeology!" (Heritage and Museum Manager, Horsham Museum).

The curator reports that large quantities of archaeological archival material have been removed from the Horsham Museum stores since the assessment and rationalisation programme began in 2010 (no specific data on quantities was provided). Disposal of museum objects on such a large scale drew the attention of the national press and the curator appeared on News Night in 2010 billed as a “pioneer of disposal, selling and getting rid of unwanted items” (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2010).

While there has been a small financial benefit to the museum, the curator believes that the real positive is that he is creating “*manageable collections*” that the staff and volunteers have the time and resources to properly curate.

“I would much rather look after the stuff we have left better, than be swamped with vast quantities of stuff because we don’t have the resources. (Heritage and Museum Manager, Horsham Museum).

The resultant space in store has also allowed the museum to re-open its doors to commercial archaeological archive depositions. However, the curator is now very selective with regard to the archaeological material he will accept into the museum’s collections. The Archaeological Archive Deposition Guidelines contains a list of material ‘not normally considered for deposition’ asking archaeological contractors to either catalogue and discard, or catalogue and retain exemplars of material such as stratified ceramic building material (CBM), industrial kiln waste and unworked flint, without prior consultation with Horsham Museum. Additionally, with the support of the county archaeologist through the planning process, the museum accepts only that material considered not repetitive or represented elsewhere in the collections. Bulk archaeological material, specifically large quantities of pottery, will only be accessioned following a strict selection process (Horsham Museum, undated). This policy does not apply to all criteria of archaeological material; Prehistoric pottery and registered finds for example would be considered to hold more significance to the museum than bulk archaeological finds.

“By all means keep rim sherds and base sherds and a few body sherds but the bulk which is body sherds is useless because it doesn’t tell you much.” (Heritage and Museum Manager, Horsham Museum).

However, not all the decisions around what will, and will not be taken into the museum stores are based on the significance of the material within the archaeological archive; some are made solely on space alone. One commercial unit was asked to significantly reduce the size of an archaeological archive down to a specific number of boxes in order for the archive to fit in an available space. The unit’s compliance with the request supported the curator’s belief that much of the material from commercial archaeology organisations does not really need to come into the museum.

“One site where the unit said they had forty boxes of material and I said they could give me twelve, they rationalised it down to twelve.”

*“The museum should be stricter and only accept what they want because once it is in the museum the site excavators wash their hands of it.”
(Heritage and Museum Manager, Horsham Museum).*

One outcome of the assessment and rationalisation process has been felt more keenly than the rest by the museum curator, volunteers and visitors; the disposal of material across all collection types has facilitated the creation of six new galleries situated in the old storerooms. This has allowed the museum to tell new stories, appeal to new audiences and ultimately increase visitor numbers. One of the new galleries housed material found during a local commercial archaeological excavation depicting medieval pin making.

“Medieval pin making is an important story for the town, an important industry and it’s fascinating.”

*“By creating new galleries, we create new stories.
(Heritage and Museum Manager, Horsham Museum)*

“We get more public in, they get more involved in the past and they get more excited about it, that’s part of our job.” (Heritage and Museum Manager, Horsham Museum via British Broadcasting Corporation, 2010).

External pressures

Despite the space created through the assessment and rationalisation process, and the new archive deposition policy, the curator believes that the museum is still under pressure from archaeologists to take in material without full consideration of the long-term impact on the museum. The curator also feels that once an archive reaches the museum, very little is ever done with the material by the archaeologists and in general the museums needs are not considered during the creation and deposition of commercial archaeological archives.

“Archaeologists expect the state to hold this stuff that no-one but them looks at and it’s boxes and boxes and boxes of stuff.”

“If archaeologists complain, which some of them have done, then I say ‘well, you pay for storage’ and they say ‘it’s not our job to pay’. But it’s not the museum’s job either”
(Heritage and Museum Manager, Horsham Museum).

In 1989 Horsham museum had agreed the future deposition of two boxes of Mesolithic material from a nationally important site in East Sussex. Following the completion of the project and publication in 2004, the same unit said they were ready to deposit but that they now had 1.25 tonnes of material to come to the museum. The curator turned the deposition away on the basis that it was not the two boxes that had been agreed. The unit responded that ‘it depended how big the boxes were!’ (pers. comm. Heritage and Museum Manager, Horsham Museum). As the site is nationally important the British Museum has accepted the deposition; However this does mean that the archive has been removed from the county and is not immediately accessible for research, display, teaching or outreach activities by either Horsham Museum or the local community.

The curator therefore believes that changes are still needed with regard to the collection of archaeological material from commercial excavations and their long-term sustainability as part of a museum collection. Not only does he believe that there needs to be a greater emphasis on the detailed recording of material followed by robust disposal, he also advocates re-burial as a form of storage.

“Most museums and their governing bodies would willingly take in items that can be put on display or items that are extensively viewed, but box after box of pottery fragments from pipelines and housing developments are being buried in museum storerooms.

Reburial as an option is not neglecting the archaeology, but rather transforming long-term storage costs into a sustainable option. Such an option ensures the material remains in the public domain and access is assured.” (Knight, 2012)

While there has been no official response to this opinion from the museum or archaeology sectors, anecdotal evidence suggests that the majority of the archaeology community are not in favour of this approach. However, it may be that reburial of archaeological archive material will happen regardless.

“The material should be re-buried back in the landfill; it’s told us what we need to know but we don’t need all this stuff because its grot. If the archaeologists won’t do it because it’s sacred, then the museums need to do it.”

“I’ve got agreements with the council that we will re-bury this stuff and we will keep a selection in the museum”.

(Heritage and Museum Manager, Horsham Museum).

5.7 A curator-led archive assessment project at Norton Priory

Background

Norton Priory is the largest excavated monastic site in Europe with over 100,000 archaeological objects in its collection (Norton Priory, 2019). The museum holds all the archives from the archaeological excavations that took place on the site between 1970 and 1987, as well as some archaeological material from the surrounding area that is considered to aid the interpretation of the Priory. It was felt the storerooms were “crammed full” in the 1990s and the museum tailored its collecting policy to only accept those registered finds of value to the museum. While the museum considered the archaeological archives to be of importance, and their storage as integral to the museum’s function, the material remained largely unused. However, the future of Norton Priory’s archaeological record came under threat during the summer of 2010 when a severe mould outbreak

affected the entire stored collection, including over 1000 boxes of finds and 130 individual human remains (Longworth, 2010).

The whole material archive was moved to the local industrial estate under the care of the local council. During the crisis, the staff realised that they could not identify the archives and objects of future value to the museum and that the records and databases associated with archives were inadequate with regards to providing access and establishing significance. It was also decided that the current museum buildings were unsuitable for storage of the collections and therefore decisions around the long-term future of the archaeological archives needed to be made.

Strategy

In January of 2014, Norton Priory submitted a bid of £5 million to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for a new museum and community project, and in July 2014 was awarded £3.7 million from the HLF with help from the Arts Council (Longworth, 2010). The aim of the community project was to establish the significant archaeological material within the Priory's collections, effectively dividing the museums' holdings into two collections: the 'Priority Collection' and the 'Bulk Collection'. In the event of another crisis, the Priory staff would be able to identify the material to be 'saved' first, namely the 'Priority Collection'.

In 2008, publication of the 1970s and 1980s Priory excavations by Oxford Archaeology established a new set of research questions and priorities for Norton Priory (Brown et al., 2008). It was felt that the published results provided a starting point that could be used to determine how significance was defined within the collections, and if any material could be identified for rationalisation. The collection was therefore to be assessed for inclusion in the Priority Collection against the following criteria:

- If an object appeared in the volume = Priority Collection
- If an object was unusual and did not appear in the volume = Priority Collection
- If an object is very ordinary but is a typical example of its type = Priority Collection

- If an object fits the story/theme = Priority Collection
- If an object feeds the research framework leading to a discrete group = Priority Collection
- All other objects/material selected for retention = Bulk Collection.

No specific criteria were defined for the rationalisation of the collection. The paper elements of the archaeological archives were not reviewed as part of the project.

“So, we found a definition of what was classified as part of the Priority Collection, and now if there was another crisis, the priority collection would be saved first”.
(Curator, Norton priory).

Implementation

The assessment of the archaeological archives took place while the material was being stored off site at the local industrial estate. The project was undertaken by a group of volunteers overseen by the museum’s curators (six to eight volunteers for two days a week, over a four-year period). Each box of material was sorted, cleaned (of mould), catalogued, assessed against the Priority/Bulk Collection criteria, and re-boxed accordingly for deposition at the newly built museum. An object sheet was created for everything in the Priority Collection detailing the dimensions, interpretation, context and related images (such as excavation photos etc.). The entire Priority Collection was photographed in order to establish a digital record of the material considered of most significance to the museum. It took one of the volunteers four years to photograph the Priority Collection and add the images to the object sheets. The project did not have the resources to support the photographing of the Bulk Collection though the material was recorded to a basic level in the museum catalogue.

While the archaeological archives were almost all from the same site (the Monastic Priory), they resulted from different phases of excavation. The integrity of the individual archives was not retained within the two new groups (Priority and Bulk Collections), however the relationships

between the disparate archive elements were maintained within the collection as a whole through labelling and cataloguing.

The criteria used to establish if an object or group of objects (i.e. bag of pottery sherds) belonged in the Priority collection was intended as an objective assessment of the museum's collections. However, the curator believes that the process allowed for a certain amount of subjectivity with regard to how decisions were made. The effect of the personal approach to establishing the significance of the collections was not considered an issue as long as its effects were understood. It was not only the curator's personal opinions that shaped the 'Priority Collection', but also that of the volunteers who influenced the decisions made around the long-term value of the material to the museum.

"these decisions are very subjective, there is one person recording it all and that has to be understood and accepted."

"The volunteers have helped with what went into the Priority Collection by sharing their opinions on what they did and didn't like."

(Curator, Norton priory).

Results and outcomes

The archaeological collection at Norton Priory has been split into two distinct collections: The Priority Collection contains around 200 boxes of material and the Bulk Collection contains around 800 boxes. As the names suggest, the Priority Collection is composed mainly of registered finds, complete objects (pots etc.) unusual finds and best examples of material types. The Bulk Collection is composed almost entirely of 'bulk' finds: animal bone, pottery and ceramic building material (CBM) etc. The Priority and Bulk Collections are housed in the same new purpose built store in the new Norton Priory museum, however the Priority Collection is located in the most accessible part of the store in order to facilitate use by museum staff, as well as support the decision that this is the material that would be 'saved first' in the event of another disaster.

The new museum opened in August 2016 following the major HLF funded redevelopment and displays thousands of objects drawn from the Priority Collection. The Priority Collection is used for display, outreach, handling and teaching activities. While the Bulk Collection is accessible by potential researchers, it is not actively used by the museum. The museum remains open to future deposits of archaeological material, though they will continue to collect as they did before the review: material from the Priory site will be assessed against the priority/bulk assemblage criteria and stored accordingly, and material from the surrounding area will only be collected if it is thought to significantly add to the Norton Priory Story.

External pressures

Rationalisation had been considered as a desired possible outcome of the project, and while a few objects were de-accessioned from the collection (for example un-conserved leather objects destroyed by mould), the number of boxes actually increased as a result of proper archiving: re-boxing to current archiving best practice standards resulted in each of the 170 animal bone boxes becoming two or three boxes. The choice to retain the extensive animal bone collection (and therefore re-box appropriately) was taken based on the recently published report (Brown et al., 2008), which highlighted the potential future research that could be undertaken on the animal bone assemblage. Had the storage crisis taken place before the publication of this report, the curator believes that the retention and discard policy around bulk finds would have been very different.

“The decision to retain the large animal bone collection was based on an up-to-date research framework (for Norton Priory) being in place, and a new understanding of how archaeological archives link with it”. (Curator, Norton Priory).

The influence of an external professional company has *“resulted in the collection growing without anything being actually actively collected”* (Curator, Norton Priory) at significant on-going cost to the museum. However, the increased understanding of how the archaeological archives link to the

site has made the staff see that the archives *“can feed into Norton Priory and move the interpretation forward”* (Curator, Norton Priory).

5.8 A curator-led collections review at Peterborough Museum and Art Gallery

Background

Peterborough Museum and Art Gallery (PM&AG) was founded in 1871 by the Peterborough Natural History and Field Club whose collections formed the basis of the city’s first museum. The museum has been managed by a trust, Vivacity, since 2010 but the collections remain in the ownership of the city council (Vivacity, 2019). Peterborough Museum has a long history of acquiring archaeological material, recording two hundred rescue and post-PPG16 developer-funded commercial archaeological archives numbering over 5,400 boxes (Peterborough Museum and Art Gallery, 2010).

The archaeology collections are used for display, teaching, research and loans, and the museum has around 350 objects on permanent display in the Archaeology Gallery. In 2010 the museums stores were almost at capacity with only a few shelves remaining empty for new archives. Around ten enquiries a month are made to the curators regarding the archaeology collections, mainly by commercial archaeology units and academic researchers (Peterborough Museum and Art Gallery, 2010). Access to the archaeology archives is therefore regularly requested, however, the curators are often unable to locate the material due to lack of specific knowledge of the stored archaeology collections. One solution was considered to be the rationalisation of historic archives from the 1970s and 80s in order to not only increase storage capacity, but also facilitate better understanding and access to the archives moving forward.

“Researchers, PhD and local groups use the archives, especially particular archives are accessed time and time again. But there was an issue with locating stuff and sometimes the museum could not help.”

“Archaeological archives traditionally have been the hardest to access physically and intellectually.”

(Archaeology Development Manager and Team Leader, Vivacity).

Strategy

In 2010 Peterborough Museum and Art Gallery applied for Esmée Fairbairn funding through the Museums Association to undertake a collections review of the archaeological archives. The initial proposal was to fully assess the entire stored archaeology collection. It was soon realised that this was not possible given the time and financial constraints, and therefore the project focussed on one large archaeological archive from the site of Roman Castor in Peterborough.

“The museum did not know the value within this archive” (Archaeology Development Manager and Team Leader, Vivacity).

Around 200 boxes of archaeological material from nineteen separate excavations were spread across three different storerooms and incorporated into the antiquarian collection, while the documentary portion of the archive was stored in the museum basement. The project aimed to fully document the material and documentary aspects of the archive, identify all the registered finds within the archive with display potential, and assess the bulk finds for rationalisation and discard purposes. The bulk material was assessed against criteria set out in the Society for Museum Archaeologists Selection, Retention and Dispersal of Archaeological Collections guidelines (Society for Museum Archaeologists, 1993). Any disposals would follow the principles set out in the Museum Association Disposal Toolkit (Museums Association, 2014).

“We assessed the archaeological archives for display, loans, use etc. The aim was to achieve better use of the archaeology collections” (Archaeology Development Manager and Team Leader, Vivacity).

The full aims of the project were to:

- Create a file for all the archaeology.
- Check all boxes in the basement for registered finds.
- Check all boxes at (the off-site storage facility) for registered finds.

- Create basic inventory for all the archive, including the paper archive.
- Include displayed material in the Archaeology Gallery.
- Prepare object list for touring exhibition and Archaeology Gallery Display.
- Write panels and manage touring exhibition.
- Rationalise bulk finds using 'Selection, Retention and Dispersal' guidelines
- Dispose of unwanted material using MA toolkit.
- Update micromusee database.

(Peterborough Museum and Art Gallery, 2020 p1).

Implementation

The collections review was undertaken by Peterborough museum staff, specifically focusing on the Castor archives' registered finds potential for use by the museum as outlined in the project aims. During the review, the local unit received funding to complete the publication of Roman Castor, synthesising 180 years of excavation at the site into one volume (Upex et al., 2011). The museum staff were therefore able to assess the collections alongside the commercial archaeologists while the material was being accessed for the publication. Decisions were made based on the value of the material in the present and its potential value in the future. The curators were clear that the decisions were based on the knowledge they had at that moment in time; they could not foresee every possible research need in the future and therefore *"judgements have to be made on that moment in time"* (Archaeology development manager and team leader, Vivacity).

Disposal of any material considered of no further value to the museum was one of the main aims of the project. The curators were positive about the removal of material from their stores. In the case of old soil samples, it appeared an easy decision to recommend (and carry out) disposal from the collection. When the decisions were not so easy, such as with some of the bulk pottery assemblages, external specialists were brought in to advise on the most appropriate methodology. The curators were therefore able to identify where further information was needed before disposals could take place.

“Decisions have been made around utilising the collections, making more of what we have but with a view to getting rid of what is not needed.”

“Is there value? No. Therefore dispose and rationalise. It has been a liberating experience to get rid of stuff.”

(Archaeology Development Manager and Team Leader, Vivacity).

I was not provided with the figures and data relating to the full rationalisation and disposals undertaken as part of the project, nor details as to how the decisions around value and significance were made.

Results and outcomes

The material recommended for rationalisation during the collection review was for the most part bulk archaeology, not registered finds. The curators believe that this is not only because registered finds have more value to the museum for display purposes, but also that it is possible to establish the significance of bulk finds through increased documentation procedures. One of the outcomes of the project was the creation of the Nene Valley reference collection: a small, detailed assemblage of material that replaces many boxes of pottery sherds. The museum staff and researchers can utilise the material through the use of the reference collection, alongside the enhanced pottery records created during the project. In significantly reducing the Nene Valley pottery collection the curators believe that they have created a more accessible archive. The collections were utilised before the review took place and therefore external researcher access has not necessarily increased, however the curator’s ability to locate the material for researchers has improved as a result of the project.

“We have got rid of endless boxes of pottery sherds and the collection is now more accessible and user friendly.”

“Generally small finds have more value to us.”

“It’s easier to rationalise bulk and still demonstrate significance as long as you have good records behind you, than to do the same with small finds.”

(Archaeology Development Manager and Team Leader, Vivacity).

Rationalisation and disposals were recommended and carried out for a significant portion of the Roman Castor Archive, opening up space in the stores to allow the collecting of archaeological material to continue into the future. The museum will however collect archaeological archives in a different manner than it did before the collections review. The updated deposition guidelines include “a policy of object dispersal for material of low research value” (appendix 1 in Peterborough Museum and Art Gallery, 2010) which must be discussed and agreed with the museum prior to deposition. The hope is that resources can be better targeted at the archives that do come into their stores, and that future curators will not have to deal with similar issue with regard to the archives collected following the review.

“What we have achieved is more space and capacity for the future, and new up-to-date procedures for archaeological archive acquisition.”

“If we stop retaining archaeological archives that are never going to be used, it stops this issue arising in the future for curators.”

(Archaeology Development Manager and Team Leader, Vivacity).

External pressures

While the rationalisation and disposal that resulted from the collections review has been a positive outcome for the staff at Peterborough Museum and Art Gallery, the process has left some questions unanswered regarding the museum’s role in development-led archaeology projects. The value of displayable objects to the museum can be easy to justify when issues such as public spending, museum funding and capacity arise. However, the retention of material with future research ‘potential’ can be less easy to demonstrate when it is not being accessed or utilised in the present.

The museum curators do not feel they are receiving the support they need from archaeologists in order to make these arguments and question if museums are the right place to store material ‘just in-case’ it is needed in the future.

“If we are just storing them for the future why do they need to be in a museum?”

*“The standards that a museum upholds can be difficult for outsiders to understand, certainly some of the local units do not understand what a museum requires.”
(Archaeology Development Manager and Team Leader, Vivacity).*

5.9 A curator-led collections audit at Tamworth Castle

Background

Tamworth Castle has functioned as a museum since 1897 and acted as the repository for all archaeological archives created and objects found in the local area until the end of the 20th century. The museum archaeology collections include material from the castle grounds and Tamworth town, specifically the early medieval gateway and watermill. The internationally significant watermill is believed to be the earliest identified post-Roman watermill in Britain (Rahtz and Meeson, 1992).

The museum presents 900 years of the castle’s history through furnished chambers and hallways. The current interpretation offered to visitors leaves very little room for the display of archaeological material.

“There are more than 15 fully furnished rooms to discover and everything is clearly signposted. The castle is packed with information and displays matching the era of the room.” (Tamworth Castle, 2019)

“We would struggle to use them [archaeological archives] as the castle is interpreted very much by the time period the room relates to” (Collections Officer, Tamworth Castle).

The archaeology collections at Tamworth Castle are therefore rarely used (if ever) by the museum staff and as of September 2015 had never been accessed by external researchers. However, the storerooms are not full, and the castle is therefore not running out of storage space, so the staff are *“not desperate to reduce them or get rid of them”* (Collections Officer, Tamworth Castle). The staff did however want a better understanding of the archaeological material they held and what its potential may be.

Strategy and implementation

A complete audit of the material archaeological archives was undertaken by the museum staff and the results compiled into an excel spreadsheet. No specific criteria were used to assess the collection. However, notes were made by the museum staff when an object was considered to have potential for display, outreach or teaching activities, as well as material considered in need of further assessment for potential disposal. The documentary element of the archives was not included in the assessment.

Results and outcomes

Following the archaeological collection audit, new interpretation boards and displays were commissioned in 2013. Some of the archaeological objects recorded during the audit had been earmarked as having display and outreach potential, however the objects themselves were used for neither. The curator and education department instead chose to use replicas of the chosen whole pots and animal bones, stating security and health and safety as the reason for the choice.

“we used some of the ceramics, the whole pots, but I insisted we had replicas made for security reasons as they were out in the castle grounds”

“The education department use replica objects for health and safety reasons as they don’t want the children handling bone.”

(Collections Officer, Tamworth Castle).

The museum staff believe that gaining a full understanding of what archaeological material they hold has confirmed the opinion that the collection does not belong at Tamworth Castle, and would be better suited within another museum. The collections officer wanted the archaeological archives transferred to The Potteries Museum in *“the hope they get used more and to save space”*, however when the Stoke-on-Trent museums converted to Trust status in 2015, the process was put on hold and the collection is now *“in limbo”* (Collections Officer, Tamworth Castle).

External pressures

The only enquiry made regarding the archaeological collections held at Tamworth Castle in recent years involved the timbers recovered during the excavations of the early medieval Water Mill in the 1970s. The enquiry did not lead to a request for access, just a query from an academic as to whether or not the timbers were somewhere safe? This led the Collections Officer to investigate the whereabouts of these internationally important objects as they had not been recorded during the archives audit. Piecing together second-hand stories and verbal accounts of the events surrounding the artefacts disappearance, it is suggested the timbers were uncovered during excavations, preserved in sugar solution, and re-buried with the intention of re-using them in a re-creation of the watermill. The re-creation never happened, and the likely re-burial site is now covered by a car park. The knowledge of this project and the location of the re-burial site was held by the individuals involved, and therefore has been lost over time due to retirements and personnel changes both at the castle and local council. Local knowledge is often held by individuals and can be lost when colleagues can no longer simply ask each other questions.

“Our retired county archaeologists (anonymised) did work in the area; it may be that there is more of it that is of significance than I know about”.

(Collections Officer, Tamworth Castle).

Locating the watermill timbers re-burial site has therefore proved impossible, the watermill excavation records are incomplete (the curator believed that the *“boxes are still in the excavator’s garage”*) and the Collections Officer does not know where the buried timbers are located.

“I still have to get someone at the council to tell me where they re-buried them! I have tried to find out for ages. Someone at the council said they knew but I have never been told.”

(Collections Officer, Tamworth Castle).

The Collections Officer was therefore able to respond to the enquiry in the affirmative, but that the academic cannot see them *“because it’s under a car park!”* (Collections Officer, Tamworth Castle).

5.10 Conclusions

This chapter has presented a series of eight case studies into curator-led archaeological archive reviews that have taken place over the last decade. The case studies have demonstrated the variety of approaches that can result from a museum-led collections review, and how institutional, economic, political and professional approaches to the valorisation of archaeological collections, can affect the review outcomes. While some of the museums instigated a formal collection review, supported by documentation outlining the aims and objectives of the project, for a small number no formal framework for reviewing the archaeological archives was established. This was generally seen as a normal aspect of curatorial care, an on-going process of assessment and disposal to maintain the functionality of the collections.

The majority of the museums discussed in this chapter reported a lack of use of archaeological archives in their care and in order to address this, review strategies tended to base significance and value decisions on potential for use by the museum in the present, with little consideration of future research needs. In general, the curator-led reviews demonstrated that registered finds and individual displayable objects were considered to have more potential for use than assemblages of bulk material. Reduced collections were more accessible and understandable by the museum resulting in new collection and deposition policies to reflect this. Analysis of the interview data also indicates the emotional and ethical dilemma the curators expressed around any disposals from the collections; regardless of the belief that not all of the archives belonged in their stores, they were responsible for the material in the museum's collections, the archaeology archives being no different in that regard.

While opinions and actions vary greatly across the museums in these case studies, following the archaeological archive reviews, many museums reported that the archives were not, or could not, be appropriately incorporated into their institution in a manner that supported the museum's

activities. The analysis of these case studies provides insight into the purpose of archaeological archives, why we keep them, how they are used, how much is needed and who should be making the decisions around their long-term care. These research questions and the supporting evidence contained within these case studies will be discussed further in chapter 7.

6 EXTERNALLY-LED ARCHAEOLOGICAL ARCHIVE REVIEW CASE STUDIES

6.1 Introduction

The following case studies detail archaeological archive reviews that have taken place at seven museums or collecting institutions since 2012: Museum A, Cambridgeshire County Council, Gloucester City Museum, Winchester City Museum, The Salisbury Museum, Bucks County Museum and Museum C. The case studies have been grouped in this manner to reflect the general approach to the review as externally led, or from a professional, 'development-led' perspective, in order to allow comparison with the review methodologies and outcomes discussed in the previous chapters. Six of the archaeology archive reviews detailed in this chapter were undertaken by representatives of a commercial archaeology unit, while one was led by an independent consultant with a background in planning archaeology. The case studies within this chapter highlight the competing visions for the purpose of archaeological archives and expose how differing approaches to the allocation of value and significance can significantly affect outcomes and future collecting plans.

For each case study, the museum's background and history of archaeological collecting is briefly outlined in order to contextualise the review, followed by details of the review strategy, implementation and outcomes. The results and any external pressures encountered are discussed alongside analysis of the interview data to establish the reasoning and decision-making process behind how significance was attributed to the archaeological archives under review.

6.2 A review by an independent consultant with a background in planning archaeology for Museum A (anonymised)

Background

Museum A is a large regional museum at the heart of a major metropolitan city. The museum is funded in part by the local city Council and Arts Council England, subsidised by income from other areas of the organisation where visitors are charged for admission. The Museum first opened in 1885, amassing collections *“that some national museums in Europe would die for”* (Director, Museum A). The history of archaeology collecting has been sporadic, guided in part by the interests of individual curators over time, and chance finds being offered to the museum by the public.

“One of the greatest regional collections of the United Kingdom. . . Few civic collections in Europe can rival these historic, encyclopaedic collections.” (Museum A, 2014 p1).

From the 1960s onwards, Museum A acted as the repository for all Rescue and developer-led archives created in the county (references not included in order to preserve anonymity). Over the past two decades, other museums in the region have opened, and then closed their doors to the collecting of archaeological archives from commercial projects, while local authority boundaries in the county have changed several times. Museum A however, has continued to accept every archive they were offered from both within its own unitary authority district, and from further afield. The museum has never had a deposition policy for archaeological archives and material has been accepted into the stores in whatever format the depositing unit presented the archives. The quantity of archives entering Museum A’s stores has varied greatly dependant on the deposition policies of the other museums at the time. Additionally, the lack of an archaeology curator for many years has resulted in a chaotic and little understood collection that is rarely accessed and never promoted by the museum and its staff.

“The stuff is pretty inaccessible. You would have to be terribly persistent and dedicated to come and track down a site in our stores, and we don’t have a lot of evidence on-line about what we have got.”

“Not enough has been made of the archaeology collections other than the Egyptian and near eastern stuff, as a whole it has been underexploited.”

“I came to feel the museum wasn’t doing anything useful or meaningful with the archaeological archives we have.”

(Director, Museum A).

In recent years, changes in staffing and an ambitious plan to re-frame the entire museum and its collections have brought the issue of archaeological archives and their place in the museum to the fore. Archaeological archives are considered underused within the museum, their potential to add value to the stories being told has not been realised and it is hoped the project to re-frame the collections could address this. The new director hoped archaeology could be better incorporated into the museum collections rather than being seen as separate and different. The proposed changes in how the collections are presented to the public would see a realignment of the history and archaeology collections, bringing the information about the city held within the two collections closer together. The director believes that this would better serve the visiting public.

“(It’s a) project to join the collections together; they all provide evidence of what (anonymised city) used to look like and how it has evolved and grown.”

“The public, opposed to archaeologists, don’t differentiate between archaeology and history, for them it’s just the past.”

“Regional museums have been heavily dominated by fine art curation and that’s because the fine art is so valuable. And this flies in the face of what is important to local audiences, its local history and I feel we are very unbalanced, and we need to address this by doing more about local history and archaeology.”

(Director, Museum A).

However, in order to bring the British archaeology and history collection closer together, Museum A needed to ascertain the potential and significance of the archaeological archives within their stores. The archaeological archives were therefore reviewed as part of a wider survey of the museum’s collections.

Strategy

In advance of the proposed re-presentation of the collections to the public, Museum A initiated a 'Survey of Significance' across its entire holdings. Two of the curators devised a hierarchical system of 'Levels', under which the collections were divided into review groups. Level 1 represents Museum A's entire collection "of around 800,000 items, displayed and stored in nine venues and attracting over one million visitors a year" (Museum A, 2014 p1). Level 2 describes the four main disciplines represented: Art and Design, Human History, Natural Science and Science and Industry. Each discipline was then divided by collection type (Level 3) and then again into review groups (Level 4). The archaeological archives from rescue and developer-funded excavations, and the social history collections form the Level 3 [anonymised region] archaeology and [anonymised city] history collections.

Due to their size, the Level 4 categories within the [anonymised region] archaeology and [anonymised city] history collections were again sub-divided to create Level 5 review groups (see Figure 3). For example, the Level 4 review group 'medieval' was sub-divided into five Level 5 review groups including medieval moated sites, medieval monastic sites and medieval villages and farms. The Level 5 review groups therefore could still represent several sites or excavations. For example, 'medieval moated sites' covered the archives from all the medieval moated sites within the region held in Museum A's stores. Level 5 review groups encompassed large numbers of whole archives, each containing varying types and quantities of materials and documentary evidence. No other collections sub-divided to Level 5.

The Statement of Significance template was completed in 2014 by an independent museums and heritage consultant based on the review methodology outlined in Significance 2.0 (Roslyn and Winkworth, 2009). The collections were to be examined from a range of different angles including provenance/acquisition, rarity/uniqueness, visual and sensory impact, condition/completeness, historical meaning, and exploitability (Reed, 2012). The reviews of each collection were completed

in-house by the Museum curators, with the exception of the [anonymised region] Archaeology collection where it was felt the current museum staff did not hold the expertise required.

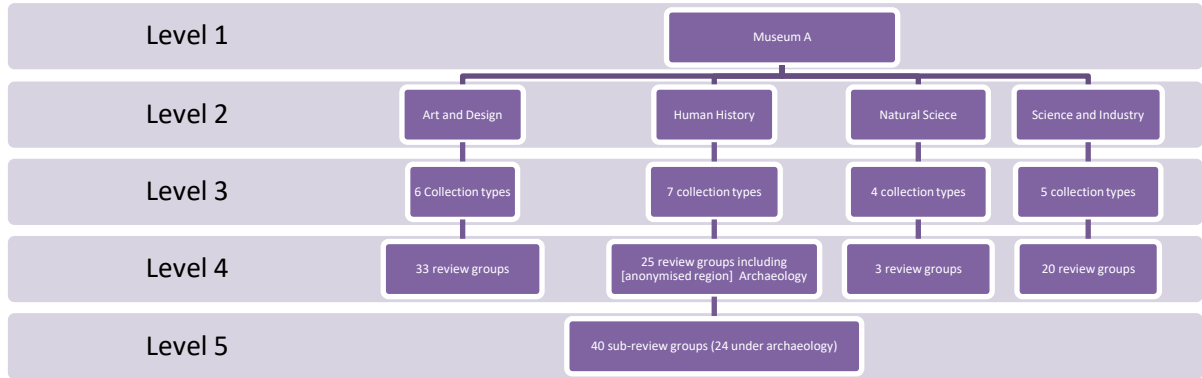


Figure 3. Museum A review levels and groups.

At the request of Museum A’s Director, the [anonymised region] archaeology collection review was undertaken by an independent archaeological consultant: the ex-Local Government Archaeological Officer for the city. The Independent Consultant (or reviewer) was asked to assess the significance of each Level 5 site, groups of sites, or type of object, and produce a mini gazetteer of the results. The archaeology collections review was to be undertaken *“without going into the archives themselves”* (Independent Consultant, Museum A) and specifically implemented to take advantage of the reviewer’s personal knowledge. The results would be used to determine how the archaeology collections could be utilised by Museum A during the re-framing of the museum, identify where further research could improve collection knowledge and use, as well as establish aspects of the archaeology collection that could be better employed outside of the museum. Recommendations for rationalisation of the collection was considered a desirable outcome of the project.

“Just to give me some sort of indication from his personal knowledge of how important an archive is.”

“I do have constructive ways in which we could use some of the material, for example it would be nice for every school in (anonymised city) to have a (anonymised city) archaeology handling kit and mini dig.”

(Director, Museum A).

Implementation

Unlike the other museum collections, the [anonymised region] archaeology collection Significance Survey was not completed using the Statement of Significance Template (Reed, 2012). Instead, each group was reviewed under four headings devised by the Independent Consultant: Site Description (basic details about the review group), Museum A Collections (a summary of the objects in), Significance (an assessment of) and Opportunities (identification of, for display and further research). While the consistent approach across the [anonymised region] archaeology collection review under the same four headings would allow different review groups therein to be compared, the findings could not be easily compared with the other museum collections survey results. A scoring system (as suggested by Significance 2.0) was not attempted due to the time constraints of the project.

As the review of the [anonymised region] archaeology collection was being undertaken by a consultant with a background in planning-led archaeology, it was approached from the perspective of individual sites and how they fit within the regional archaeological picture, under the premise that an archaeological archive should be considered as a whole, rather than as its individual components. The survey was undertaken from the reviewer's perspective of what was significant, drawing on their own personal knowledge of the review groups and how they correspond to each other. For example, under the significance survey it was possible to review each medieval moated site separately. However, the reviewer believed that these sites are more significant as a group than individually, and therefore assessed the sites together when undertaking the Significance Survey. The significance of the group was discussed at the level of site interpretation, with little-to-no reference to the material contained within the archives. The establishment of significance at such a high level at the outset of the project invariably meant that many of the smaller site archives (watching briefs, small evaluations etc.) or sites with a minimal archaeological result (but still producing an archive) were not considered by the review.

“I had to make it clear from the outset that I am not a museum’s archaeologist.”

“I tried to identify for my own benefit what were the significant groups, so I didn’t get bogged down . . . having to spend time on things where there were very small amounts, it was really a quantities measure on that as much as anything else.”

(Independent Consultant, Museum A).

The majority of the information establishing the review groups had been drawn from the museum’s EMu (collections management software) database. However, during the review it was not always easy to identify the full extent of the individual review groups and what they contained from the museum records. Regular instances of mislabelling or misspelling of sites were noted within the database, alongside misidentification of sites or an object’s date. Determination of a review group’s contents was further hampered by the museum recording system. If a site was predominantly one period but contained material from other periods, the entire archive will be ascribed the main period represented on the database, meaning some material was *“very hard to locate”* (Independent Consultant, Museum A).

The independent consultant believes many of the mistakes are due to curator’s lack of knowledge about the individual sites, and the methods and recording systems utilised by commercial archaeologists. There appeared a misunderstanding on the curator’s part as to what constituted an archaeological archive; following the initial request to ‘see the archaeological archives’, the reviewer was taken to the filing cabinets containing the antiquarian paper records, the curator thinking they *were* the archaeological archives. In some cases, archives were split across several storage areas with no cross-referencing between the disparate parts.

“I know there is stuff I have found field walking in the 80s and the site is recorded in the EMu as medieval, and I know its Roman.” (Independent Consultant, Museum A).

Often it was only the reviewer’s own personal recollection of the sites and their archive’s contents that facilitated the completion of the [anonymised region] archaeology collection Significance Survey. Much of description of each review group and the summary of the objects included in the review

report was drawn from the reviewer's extensive background working within the region. This personal connection to the archaeology of the region facilitated a subjective approach to the survey; the level of detail provided in each review group's Significance Survey very much indicating the reviewer's interest in the subject. While one type of site could receive a great deal of attention and therefore a detailed report, another group of material (one of the museum's main attractions) was described as "overrated"!

"It would have been difficult to do without my extensive background, so to get these together depended on me."

(Independent Consultant, Museum A).

The independent consultant and the museum Director acknowledged the subjective nature of the review, suggesting that it would not have been possible to complete the review any other way within the time frame and budget.

"I think if you spent a lot of time at the museum, much longer than I did, you could extract all that."

"It was the time that limited it, so it's very subjective and very much a (name anonymised) assessment."

(Independent Consultant, Museum A).

Results

"The survey has clearly demonstrated the quality and importance of the [anonymised region] Archaeology collection held by [anonymised city] Museum Trust. It has also enabled identification of potential further work, including reassessment of excavation records and publication of hitherto unpublished excavations." (anonymised, 2016 p1).

A Significance Survey report was completed for each of the Level 5 sub-review groups within the [anonymised region] Archaeology collection. Each report contains a general description of the sub-group, how that group is physically represented within the museum collections (finds etc.), a summary of the significance of the group and where the reviewer sees the opportunities for further research and analysis. The length of each report gives an indication of not only the amount of information that could be easily accessed about the group, but also the reviewer's personal interest

in the subject. Where the Independent Consultant could call on their own knowledge and enthusiasm for a site or group of sites, the reports are detailed and draw out the types of finds present within the collection. Whereas several of the reports are based solely on the information contained in the museums database, often consisting of only one or two sentences under each heading.

“From a personal point of view, it’s the type of site I am particularly interested in and formed part of my PhD.”

(Independent Consultant, Museum A).

However, even where the survey of a group was lacking in detail, the reviewer still struggled to downgrade significance: for the reviewer, all the region’s archaeology was significant. In several instances, archives were identified as being incomplete, missing key stratigraphic information that would render full re-examination of the site impossible. Yet even in these cases, the reviewer concluded that significance could be found in the assemblage alone, or in the group’s comparability to another site in the region. No recommendations for rationalisation or discard were made as part of the review, the independent consultant stating that there are differences between the methodology commercial archaeologists follow in order to discard on site and during post-excavation, and the manner in which museums would approach the situation.

“I do find it hard to step away from it because for me every bit of the (anonymised region) archaeology is important.”

“There is probably an argument for discard or use somewhere else, but I worry about discard because we make one level of discard decisions on site already and then there would be another level of discard later on.”

(Independent Consultant, Museum A).

While the reports did mention where archives contained displayable material, for the most part the significance and opportunities focused on the group’s position within the bigger archaeological picture regionally or nationally. Sites or groups of sites were highlighted for their relationship to inter-relatable archives within the Museum or more widely, and often the recommended

opportunities involved the re-examination of the archive data or finds against more recent archaeological findings. These are very much archaeological research-led values, a high-level review of how archaeological archives are categorised as records of a destructive event to be preserved for future re-assessment and interpretation. These are the values attributed by a professional archaeologist, and potentially very different to how a museum curator would define the significance of a collection (not to say that a museum curator would not take those values into account, but it would not be their only/main consideration).

“The assemblage can be compared with those from other sites represented in the museum collection”

“This particular site is significant because of its relationship to nearby kilns”

“There is potential to undertake further study on the objects and compare them with . . .”

“There is potential for reassessment of the excavation records . . .”

(anonymised, 2016 p3-15).

The differences in approach were evident following the completion of the archaeology collections Significance Review, when museum staff immediately asked the reviewer, “*But what can you highlight as having REAL significance?*” (Independent Consultant, Museum A- quoting curator). The review reports as they stood did not provide the type of evidence that would allow the curators to make decisions around display, rationalisation and retention. In simple terms, it was not an object-based review. The Significance Survey therefore highlighted not only the potential of the archaeological archives as research resource, but also the work still required for the curators to fully understand and integrate the archaeology into the museum collections.

“*It’s a very different point of view . . .they think of it from an object base which is what museums do.*”

“*I think the bridge to be built now is the contextual background and that collections are far more than objects.*”

(Independent Consultant, Museum A).

In an attempt to take more control of the archaeological archives entering their stores, a new archaeological archive deposition policy was introduced in 2019 (Paul, 2019). The deposition policy requires a selection strategy to be implemented at the start of every project and the strategy methodology to be agreed in advance with the museum. Additionally, a statement of significance outlining the archive's potential to contribute to future research, teaching, display and engagement activities must accompany each deposited archive. Under this new methodology, the curators should have a better understanding of the archives entering their stores, while easily identifying where the significance of that material fits with their activities. The policy covers archaeological projects undertaken within Museum A's unitary authority, but unusually also includes archaeological material from outside of the designated collecting area. For archaeological projects where no other collecting institution exists or the appropriate collecting repository has closed to archaeological archives, Museum A will consider archives on a case by case basis, accepting material that will significantly add to its collection. This approach has been referred to within the sector as 'cherry-picking from the archaeological record' (SMA and ClfA FG committee members discussion at ALGAO meeting 26.06.19). However, Museum A believes that by taking in material that would otherwise have no repository, it is supporting the commercial archaeological process.

External pressures

Following completion of the Significance Survey, Museum A and the local university attempted to establish a collaborative research partnership. The aim of the partnership was to identify projects and research outputs based on the themes identified through the Significance Survey. Two half-day seminars were attended by academics from colleges and departments across the university, and a broad range of curators from the museum. A long list of promising collaborative research projects was established, and potential funding streams investigated. Unfortunately, the university department facilitating the partnership was abolished before any of the proposed research could be undertaken (a scenario experienced across the higher education sector where several university

archaeology departments have faced cuts or full closure in recent years). While the long list of potential collaborative projects was impressive, not a single proposal involved visiting the museum archives, or physical interaction with any of the museum's collections; all could be completed through desk-based research. The Director believes this is further evidence that academics have moved away from studying material culture, reducing the argument that all archives should be retained for future research.

"I would like to persuade the academics to come and use the collections in teaching and research, and if they don't, if they come clean and say 'no we don't want do this' then I think we should start to think about throwing it all away, honestly because there is no point." (Director, Museum A).

Further complications arose with regard to the archaeological archives held by Museum A, when the futures of the other museums in the region were considered. Many of the most important archives appeared to be split across different museums in the region for reasons that were not always clear, and in some instances museum A held archives that rightly belonged within another museum's stores (in a few cases this was only identified through the review process). These could all be seen as instances where rationalisation through transfer to another museum was not only appropriate but also straightforward. However, at the time of the review the future of some of the other region's museums was uncertain. Museum A believes that as the main institution in the region, ethically they must consider the long-term viability of the other museums when making decisions about their own collections.

The Independent Consultant believes that a large problem with how the archives are perceived within the museum is that they are different to other museum collections; that the museum does not know what to do with them. The director is also of the opinion that the archaeological community does not appreciate the remit of a publicly-funded museum and how archaeological archives fit (or do not fit) within that context. The archaeology collections review at Museum A

illustrates the clash between commercial/professional archaeology and museum archaeology and how the two groups attribute significance differently.

“My personal feeling is that (anonymised city) finds it difficult to cope with archaeological archives, in that you are sending stuff over there that is catalogued and has all the site records and they don’t know what to do with it.”

(Independent Consultant, Museum A)

“It does seem a bit perverse to keep bits when you have complete examples in the collection. What is 400 boxes of sherds telling you?”

“Both museums and archaeologists need to take archives seriously or stop pretending because this doesn’t work.”

(Director, Museum A).

6.3 A Historic Environment Team-led assessment and re-archiving project at Cambridgeshire County Council

Background

Following the introduction of PPG16 (Department of Communities and Local Government, 1990) the museum in Cambridge stated they were unwilling to take archives that resulted from the planning process. Therefore, since the early 1990s Cambridgeshire County Council has acted as the county repository for archaeological archives, which they stored and managed in a large barn in Cambridge. The council currently holds over 12,000 boxes of material from over 1000 sites (Cambridgeshire County Council, 2019a). The briefs requiring an archive to be created and deposited as part of every development-led archaeological projects are written by the Historic Environment Team (CHET) as part of the planning process. The briefs also stipulate that Cambridgeshire County Council will care for the archaeological archives in perpetuity.

While the archives were accessed occasionally for research, displays and handling collections, the Historic Environment Team did not see them as part of their day to day offer. The main concern was to provide a suitable home for the material collected as a requirement of the planning process. The team realised their current store was filling up in the early 2000s but that simply extending the store

would only produce five more years of storage space. Following several failed collaboration attempts, CHET proposed a solution that was unheard of in the heritage sector: moving the archives out of the county in which they were created, to Deepstore, a commercial storage facility within the salt mines in Cheshire.

“To us they are not something we need every day.”

“It’s a problem trying to get a good economic basis for storage of archives.”

(Historic Environment Team Manager, Cambridgeshire County Council).

Strategy

The rationale behind the proposed project was based solely on the business case established by the Historic Environment Team (CHET). The tendering process (for storage provision) was weighted towards quality of care, though the financial cost of the re-archiving project and subsequent long-term care was also a consideration. Deepstore provided the most economically advantageous solution to the local authority and delivered the storage and access standards required by CHET. Deepstore however was only suitable for the storage of stable (bulk) finds and documentary archives, the unstable or fragile finds were to be housed at the council’s converted bunker beneath the County Council offices in Cambridge (Cambridgeshire County Council, 2013). The sale of the existing store would fund the entire project and the introduction of a new box deposition charge (or box fee) of £75 per box would cover the on-going storage costs (applicable to archives stored at both Deepstore and the council offices).

In advance of the transfer of the existing archives to Deepstore, new and highly detailed deposition standards were written by the Historic Environment Team. The new deposition standards required all archives produced within Cambridgeshire to be conserved, sorted, packaged and documented in the same way (Cambridgeshire County Council, 2013). This process was to be supported by the completion of a detailed database linked to the barcode system already employed by Deepstore. All the existing archives were to be assessed and re-archived against the new standards. It was hoped

that the new cataloguing system would improve accessibility and therefore increase use of the archaeological archives both new and old.

*“One of the goals of the project is to increase the amount of access we get from it.”
(Historic Environment Team Manager, Cambridgeshire County Council).*

Implementation

The archaeological archive assessment and re-archiving project was undertaken by a team from the local commercial archaeology unit, Oxford Archaeology (East). The existing archives held by Cambridgeshire County Council were all re-boxed and catalogued to the new Archive Deposition Standards (Cambridgeshire County Council, 2013). During the project it became clear to the CHET team that archaeological archiving required a specialist skill set; it was important that the ‘right people’ were sorting the archives for deposition. Therefore, unlike many of the other projects followed during this study, no volunteers or individuals without specific archaeological archiving knowledge were involved in the process.

“You need people that know archives, not field supervisors etc., You need people who spend their days around archives, it’s a hugely specialist area.” (Historic Environment Team Manager, Cambridgeshire County Council).

Rationalisation of the existing archives was tested at the start of the project when archives containing extremely large bulk material assemblages came to light. However, it soon became apparent that the cost of full review and rationalisation involving re-assessment by appropriate specialists would be prohibitively expensive. The project therefore did not require that the archives were reviewed other than to assess the condition of the material and either recommend conservation, or discard. The number of boxes were however rationalised due to the new policy of allowing more than one site archive to be stored in a single box.

*“To be honest it’s cheaper to keep it than to rationalise it.”
(Historic Environment Team Manager, Cambridgeshire County Council).*

The re-archiving project highlighted that even though these archives do not sit within a museum repository, the Historic Environment Team faced similar issues to museum curators when trying to understand some of the older 'Rescue' excavation archives. The team manager believes that the sites where post-excavation was never completed are the biggest issue they have with regard to archaeological archives. The archives from some of the most important sites in the region cannot be made fully accessible to researchers because CHET do not really know what they contain. Addressing this is considered a more pressing concern than rationalising material that is better understood. However, the re-archiving project and move to Deepstore resources did not cover this quantity of additional work.

"We simply put the problems to one side . . . we know we are going to have to deal with at some point, but the resource we had allocated we didn't have the opportunity."

"If someone had said to me here's another £50,000, I wouldn't have said let's go through ALL the animal bone, I would have said let's get some meaning out of the problem archives."

(Historic Environment Team Manager, Cambridgeshire County Council).

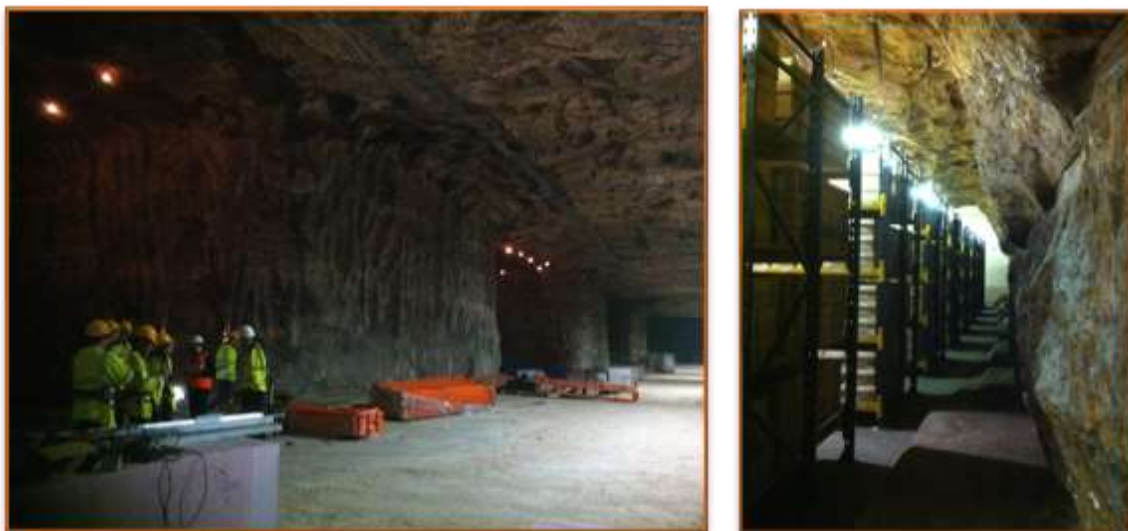


Figure 4. Visit to Deepstore 22.05.14 showing transportation tunnels and CHET managed archives within one of the caverns.

The archaeological archiving and deposition process required by Cambridgeshire County Council was completely unheard of within the heritage sector and was totally unlike any archiving process

undertaken within commercial units. The CHET team decided to address the rumours circulating in the sector about the ‘burying of archaeology archives in a hole hundreds of miles away’ (ClfA Archaeological Archives Group conference discussion 2013) by inviting representatives of the large commercial units to tour Deepstore to see the facilities for themselves (Figure 5). The Historic Environment team felt that they had to ‘get the archaeology community on board’ with the concept of the Cheshire Salt Mines as one possible ‘solution’ to the storage crisis.

“Proactive correspondence with units, groups etc. often dispelling myths about archive access and removing potential obstacles” (Senior Archaeological Officer, Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Team).

Results

Following the assessment and re-archiving project, Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Team managed the archaeological archives from developer-funded excavations in three locations: Deepstore in Cheshire, the bunker below the Cambridgeshire County Council offices, and CD’s containing digital archives in a box below a CHET member’s desk. All new depositions of archives are delivered to Cambridgeshire County Council for checking and eventual transfer to Deepstore, or in the case of larger archives, a direct ‘uplift’ with Deepstore personnel from the commercial unit’s offices can be arranged. In these cases, the archives would be checked by the CHET staff at the commercial unit’s offices prior to deposition. Access to the archives can be requested at the Deepstore facility or at the council offices by applying to CHET, or the boxes can be recalled and loaned out to researchers or museums using the Deepstore barcode tracking system.

The CHET team retained a small quantity of bulk material at their offices along with the registered finds for use in handling boxes, but lack of constant on-site access to the majority of the archives was not seen as an issue. The Historic Environment team believed that their main function was to provide access to the archives for research purposes and this is where they differed from a museum.

They are not caring for material that needs to be constantly accessed for exhibitions, or its presence in the stores justified to funders as it would be in a museum.

“In terms of use of archives for researchers, where you are storing it for other people, that is our main focus really. Whereas, I could be wrong, but museums store stuff for themselves and for other people, and the use for themselves is probably the bigger call.”
“I can see a museum might have different issues over use than we do.”
(Historic Environment Team Manager, Cambridgeshire County Council).

As a result of the re-archiving project the profile of the archives was raised and there was an immediate increase in the number of requests to access the material. In the six years since the completion of the project requests have risen steadily, with around 500 boxes on-loan in 2019 (Cambridgeshire County Council, 2019c). The archives have been used as part of temporary exhibitions by local groups and museums, and also as part of larger exhibitions such as the ‘Hide and Seek: Looking for Children in the Past’ exhibition at the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology in Cambridge that ran for twelve months in 2016 (Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 2016). Several large-scale research projects have been undertaken using material retrieved from Deepstore; the ‘After the Plague Project’ (Robb, 2019) where Cambridge University is looking at over 200 skeletons from three early medieval sites in Cambridge, and the ‘Feeding Anglo-Saxon England Project’ is studying environmental samples stored by CCC since early 2000 (Cambridgeshire County Council, 2019c).

“Within 18 months during 2017 and 2018, 8% of our total holdings had been accessed by researchers, students, community archaeology groups, professional archaeological companies, museums and educational institutions.” (Cambridgeshire County Council, 2019c).

The archive deposition standards have been reviewed and updated several times since the initial policy overhaul. From April 2020 all digital archives must be deposited with a publicly accessible, accredited digital archive repository with Core Trust Seal certification (currently only ADS performs that function) in line with current best practice archiving standards (Dig Ventures, 2019).

Additionally, the most recent version includes a 'Selection and Retention Policy' requesting that all material archives are accompanied by supporting documents detailing the reasoning for their retention. Despite the reluctance to rationalise the existing archives, the Historic Environment Team manager believes that the physical size of many of the new archives coming into Deepstore need to be reduced. This is not because the archives are taking up too much room (there is plenty of room at Deepstore), or that the storage costs too much (the box deposition charge would cover the costs), but that some of the material simply does not need to be retained. However, the belief is that 'selection' is more relevant to large excavation archives than sites producing small archives; it is the quantities of bulk finds that require reduction rather than the number of individual archives.

"Not for small excavations where you've got half a dozen boxes, but the big sites where you end up with box after box of body sherds and animal bone, you have to think well, why?"

"There is no need to keep 450 boxes of animal bone when 50 will do."

(Historic Environment Team Manager, Cambridgeshire County Council).

External pressures

The geographical separation of the majority of the material from the county in which it was collected was questioned by some in the sector (SMA Annual Conference discussion, Great North Museum, 11.11.15). However, CHET believe that the model they have pioneered not only assuages these concerns, but also improves access to archaeological archives. By removing the archives from the museum environment and managing them as a separate resource, many of the barriers to access (museum catalogue systems, personnel knowledge, storage and physical access) are immediately removed.

"A particular high point for us was the financial year 2017-18 when several large projects coincided and 8% of the archive, around 1200 boxes, was used for research means alone."

(Senior Archaeological Officer, Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Team)

"Personally, I don't think archaeological archives belong in museums. A museum builds up a collection for its own use and I don't see how archiving fits in with that. I think archiving

can provide items for their collection, it can be a source for collecting, but it's not the same as collecting, I think archiving is entirely different."

(Historic Environment Team Manager, Cambridgeshire County Council).

6.4 An excavation archive enhancement project by a commercial unit for Gloucester City Museum

Background

Gloucester City Museum is a local authority museum administered by Gloucester City Council. The museum had undertaken a three-year collection review from 2008 to 2011, assessing its archaeological archives against a set of criteria based on the recently updated Collections Development Policy (Chapter 5.5). The collections review not only identified large quantities of bulk archaeological finds for disposal, but also highlighted the different approaches required for appropriate curation, assessment and disposal of archaeological material, compared to their other collections. This difference was brought to the fore following the close of Gloucester City Council's Excavation Unit when the museum 'inherited' the entirety of the units' commercial archives.

Gloucester City Council Excavation Unit was active from the 1970s until it was disbanded in 2004, during which time it amassed a huge backlog of unpublished site archives that did not meet the museum's deposition requirements. In 2002 the museum had introduced deposition guidelines that required archaeological archives to have a full transfer of title agreement, objects to be marked with accession numbers and properly prepared for long-term storage, "however these guidelines were not followed by the (Gloucester City) Archaeology Unit" (Gloucester County Council, 2016). The curator was therefore reluctant to officially accept the material into the museum's collections in its current state, knowing that once that happened the Museums Association guidelines would once again become applicable with regard to rationalisation and disposal. The material however was moved into the museum stores.

“Gloucester used to have their own excavation unit and they did whatever they liked and built up a massive archive of stuff, and then when they were disbanded, they abandoned it all”

“It wasn’t really an archive. It was a pile of stuff with no sense to it”

“Even though we were being dumped with all this stuff, it hadn’t been properly deposited so I was reluctant to take responsibility for it.”

(Curator, Gloucester City Museum).

The need to address Gloucester Excavation Unit’s backlog had been long acknowledged and seventeen key sites in need of attention were identified during the 1997 annual report (Sermon, 1998). Some progress was made with the post-excavation work on these sites though no final report or publication was ever produced, and the archives were never deposited. Following the closure of the unit and the transfer of the documentary and material archives to the museum stores, no one who had been directly involved in the Excavation Unit remained at the city council and the archives were at risk of degradation (Armstrong, 2014). Lack of personal familiarity with the original excavations amongst current council staff was thought to exacerbate the issue (something the museum staff have always encountered). As the archives in question remained un-accessioned, the museum was unwilling to accept responsibility for them in their current state, and so Gloucester City Council initiated the Gloucester City Excavation ‘Archive Enhancement’ Project (Armstrong, 2014).

Strategy

Fourteen key sites were chosen by the Gloucester City Council Planning archaeologist to be part of the Gloucester City Excavation Archive Enhancement Project (GCEAEP). The project brief was put out to commercial tender in a similar fashion to archaeological projects initiated through the planning process (Armstrong, 2014). The project aimed to address national and regional objectives regarding preservation of the historic environment including Regional Research Aim 11 to “improve knowledge and study of under-utilised museum collections” (Webster, 2008).

The general aims of the project were to:

- Sort and repackage the documentary, drawn and photographic archives to approved modern standards.
- Sort and repackage the bulk finds archive to approved modern standards.
- Deposit the archives at the Gloucester City Museum and Art Gallery.
- Compile a report on the work undertaken for each site, including an assessment of its condition, recommendations for retention/discard, and an assessment of its significance.

And one of the more specific aims of the project was to

- Recommend a selection strategy for bulk materials to allow for the disposal of inappropriate material.

(Cotswold Archaeology, 2015)

The project was only concerned with the bulk finds from the fourteen key sites and therefore registered finds and human remains were excluded from the enhancement programme.

A Selection Strategy for the bulk material was designed specifically for GCEAEP through consultation with Gloucester City Council and Gloucester City Museum. The strategy was based on the Archaeological Archives Forum (AAF) guide to best practice in the creation, compilation and deposition of Archaeological archives (Brown, 2011), and the Society for Museum Archaeology (SMA) guidance on 'Selection, Retention and Dispersal of Museum Archaeology Collections' (Society for Museum Archaeologists, 1993). The SMA guidelines were specifically created for the rationalisation of stored archaeological collections, whereas the AAF guidelines were devised as a standard in archaeological archiving best practice prior to deposition with a museum. This therefore represented both a professional archaeology-based approach, and museum collection-based approach to the project. The condition of the archives was to be brought up to current best practice standards (normally applied prior to deposition with a museum), but the selection of the bulk material was to be applied as if the archives had already been accessioned into the museum's collection.

Implementation

Cotswold Archaeology (CA) won the tender and the project was undertaken almost exclusively by a team of volunteers supervised by member of the CA post-excavation staff. A total of 162 volunteer days by twenty-two individual volunteers were used over a period of fourteen weeks (Cotswold Archaeology, 2015). The large majority of the work-undertaken by the volunteers was to bring the archives up to modern archaeological archiving standards. This included re-bagging, re-boxing and re-labelling of the material archive in line with the standards outlined in the AAF best practice guidelines (Brown, 2011).

The strategy was revised throughout the project to meet the reality of the state of the archives. While every attempt was made to undertake the project on a site-by-site basis to aid understanding of the whole archive, it was often more ergonomic to clear continuous shelves rather than search for specific archive boxes within the museum stores. The project programme was therefore altered in order to work on several sites at once (Cotswold Archaeology, 2015). During the course of the project it was also discovered that the majority of the bulk finds did not have corresponding records within the documentary portion of the archive, hindering the ability to ascertain the archive's completeness. Creation of new records was not covered under the original project brief and therefore those records remain absent. In fewer instances, documentary records for finds did exist, but the material detailed could not be found. For example, one documentary archive contained analytical records for pottery, CBM, coins and general finds, as well as specialist reports for pottery, glass, burials and other finds. In this instance only the pottery assemblage (incomplete) from the site could be identified (Cotswold Archaeology, 2015) .

Recommendations for discard of material other than CBM was made by the CA finds officer on the grounds of contextual insecurity or archaeological value; defined as unstratified and modern materials as outlined in the selection and retention strategy. An external CBM specialist assessed

the whole CBM assemblage and made recommendations for retention and discard to be approved by Gloucester City Council.

In-line with the project aims the material was not assessed for its value to the museum. The curator believed that the project was already being undertaken on archives of significance (as identified in the 1997 annual report (Sermon, 1998)) and would not require further assessment along those lines. The value of the material had therefore been pre-determined through its choice to be included in the programme by Gloucester City Council's city archaeologist. This value judgement was based on each site's importance to the overall archaeological story of Gloucester from a planning and future research perspective, rather than a museum collection perspective. The incompleteness of many of the archives, both materially and documentarily, did not change this perception of significance within the framework of the project, despite the AAF guidelines definition that an archaeological archive should contain "All parts of the archaeological record" (Brown, 2011 p3, after Perrin, 2002).

"We chose the most important sites" (Curator, Gloucester City Museum).

As part of the 2015 Archive Enhancement project report, Cotswold Archaeology made seven recommendations for further work required on the fourteen 'key' sites in order to determine their future potential use and value to Gloucester City Museum and the city as a whole. These recommendations included the assessment of the extent of missing information and its effects on what is achievable in terms of understanding the site to support all potential future research.

Results and outcomes

At the end of the six-month project, Cotswold Archaeology staff and volunteers reduced the physical size of the fourteen site archives from 631, to 253 boxes. This was done through a combination of simply re-bagging and boxing the material in a more streamlined manner to modern archiving standards, and the disposal of material through application of the agreed selection strategy (Cotswold Archaeology, 2015). 127 boxes of archaeological bulk finds (around 400kg) were destroyed as part of the Archives Enhancement Project comprising: 113 boxes of CBM, three boxes

of animal bone, four boxes of samples, two boxes of daub, one box each of post medieval bottles, stone, clay pipes and mortar, and a box of pile caps! The 60% reduction in box numbers overall and re-organisation of the remaining material was considered a positive outcome for the project and the archives were accessioned into the museum's collections. The project also highlighted that while this material could now be found and accessed, many more archaeological archives within the Gloucester Museum stores could not.

"We liberated valuable storage space and created a stable archive accessible to the public." (Cotswold Archaeology archives officer)

"We have already had a couple of researchers... because it has been properly ordered and they wouldn't have been able to access it before."

"Other site archives . . . everyone is washing their hands of them; we can't use them because we have no idea what is in them."

(Curator, Gloucester City Museum).

Moving forward the archaeological archives were considered of importance and of future use but remained subject to the museum's on-going process of review and rationalisation. A further ten boxes of archaeological building material from other archives was destroyed on specialist advice in 2015 (Gloucester County Council, 2016).

Despite the positive outcomes associated with the project, it was believed that a new approach was needed for the collection of archaeological material by the museum so that similar issues could be if not avoided, then pre-empted in the future. Gloucester City Museum was not the only institution in the county to be experiencing storage, access, and rationalisation issues and therefore a county-wide approach was considered a sustainable way forward. The new deposition standards were compiled by an independent consultant in consultation with the six Gloucestershire museums, Gloucester City and Gloucestershire County Archaeologists, and the museum development officer for Gloucestershire.

“By creating a more uniform approach, the Museums in Gloucestershire aim to ensure the future sustainability of archaeological archive curation in the region, thereby facilitating long-term care and public access to Gloucestershire’s shared past.” (Paul, 2017a p1).

The Gloucestershire Archaeological Archive Standards represented the first county-wide approach to the collecting of archaeological material from developer-funded projects in the country. The excavating unit is expected to engage with the relevant museum from the start of any project that may result in an archaeological archive. The new guidelines detailed how an archive should be compiled prior to deposition, including the layout of an ‘Archive Contents Spreadsheet’ to be completed by the excavating unit, listing each box’s content in detail. The spreadsheet can be easily uploaded to the museum’s cataloguing system, allowing increased access to the archaeological archives by both museum staff and the public.

A selection strategy was required as part of every project and an archive would only be accepted if accompanied by a Statement of Potential and Significance for each category of material selected for inclusion in the archive. The Statement of Potential and Significance should refer to any on-going research priorities for the area (such as the regional research frameworks) in order that the museum could understand the wider context in which the material sat, as well as consider the material’s ability to support one of the following:

- research
- display
- public engagement
- outreach
- teaching

Material that had no future potential under one of those headings would not be accepted for accessioning into the museum’s collections (Paul, 2017a). It was hoped that the adoption of these county-wide standards would support the creation of stable, accessible, and sustainable

archaeological archives with documented potential to support the future activities of the museums in Gloucestershire.

“If the archive does not support research, display, public engagement, and outreach or teaching activities, I don’t want it in my store!” (Curator, Stroud Museum).

External pressures

In 2017, mere months after the adoption of the county-wide archaeological archiving standards, Gloucester City Council announced a large-scale restructure of the city’s museum service and amalgamation into other council services. The two museum curators left their jobs to be replaced with learning officers “who will carry out an element of curatorial work” (Knott, 2017). Therefore, no-one remained at Gloucester City museum to implement (or understand) the new archive deposition standards or continue the Archive Enhancement Project. The future of the Gloucester City’s stored archaeological archives is once again in limbo. Archives already in store are at risk of further degradation, and while new archives created through the planning process could be compiled to the new deposition standards, there is no curator in post to implement the policy or actively curate any archives deposited with the museum.

6.5 A series of archaeological archive reviews by a commercial archaeology unit for Winchester City Museum, The Salisbury Museum, Bucks County Museum and Museum C

Background

Wessex Archaeology is one of the largest commercial archaeology companies in the United Kingdom. While the company now has several regional satellite locations, the head office remains in the town of Salisbury in Wiltshire (Wessex Archaeology, 2019). Since 2011, the unit has undertaken a series of archaeological archive reviews at the request of four regional museums: Winchester City museum, part of Hampshire Cultural Trust; Salisbury Museum, a limited company supported partly by Wiltshire Council; Museum C; and Bucks County Museum funded by the County

Council and Milton Keynes City Council. While the four reviews by Wessex Archaeology have been grouped together due to the similarities in strategy, the variation in implementation and outcomes illustrates how institutional, economic and professional pressures can influence results. The initial driver for all of these reviews was the space crisis, and each museum's need to reduce the physical size of the archaeology archives in their care.

"The museums wanted to rationalise their space, unfortunately that is what drives a lot of this work." (Senior Post-Excavation Manager, Wessex Archaeology)

"So, it was space but also the academic question of whether it was worth retaining all this material that no-one had looked at for 20 years"(Senior Curator, Salisbury Museum)

Museum C is at the heart of one of the most important archaeological landscapes in Europe and holds collections of national significance." (Museum C 2018).

The first project in 2011 was instigated by Winchester City museum who were hoping to rationalise their holdings as their storage was at capacity. The museum approached Wessex Archaeology who were thought to be familiar with the large majority of the material, being the original creators of many of the archives. The following year, the unit was approached by Salisbury Museum to review a specific archive: the Stonehenge Environs Project fieldwalking archive. The review was prompted by a need to rationalise their collections and increase storage space. The Stonehenge Environs Project was targeted as a large archive that had not been accessed by the museum staff, researchers or members of the public for over twenty years. Museum C heard what Wessex Archaeology had done for Salisbury Museum and contracted them to devise a project to rationalise their store. The museum was aware of many important excavation archives residing with commercial units, that were un-depositable as the museum could not accommodate them in their overcrowded storerooms.

Through their involvement in the earlier museum rationalisation projects, Wessex Archaeology had come to the conclusion that they needed to be more rigorous in what was kept for preservation in the archive. Within their own organisation selection and retention practices had begun to be

implemented, and by 2014, the unit realised they could offer out their services commercially to museums looking to review, better understand and/or rationalise their archaeological collections. Bucks County Museum saw the advertised rationalisation services as an opportunity to address the large archive they had taken into the museum's care when the Milton Keynes commercial excavation unit folded a decade previously. While most of the projects had been published in a series of monographs (for example: Mynard, 1987, Williams, 1991), the museum was reluctant to officially accession the three and a half thousand boxes into the stores before establishing significance and rationalising the collection into a more manageable size.

Each museum also expressed a desire to realise the potential of the archaeology collections, better understand their significance and ultimately increase their use. The assumption that the archives contained value prior to the review was likely a result of the strong archaeological history at each of the four museums: the archaeological collections at The Salisbury museum are nationally designated including the archives from Stonehenge and the surrounding landscape, and the archaeology collection at Wiltshire museum are utilised all the time within their displays and outreach activities. However, despite this belief that the archaeological archives contained significant material, they were rarely accessed in the present and considered of low future potential. The museums often expressed a lack of understanding of what the archives contained and questioned the retention of material they perceived to have no further value.

Strategy

Winchester City Museum

The review at Winchester Museum focused on specific types of material across their archaeological archive holdings. The project aimed to consider the significance of the ceramic building material (CBM), stone building material and a large quantity of un-processed soil samples. Rationalisation was an expected outcome. Wessex Archaeology (WA) already implemented selection and retention processes for building materials within their own stores and the review criteria were based on these

in-house guidelines. On beginning the review, it was established that the existing pdf print-out of the context data held by the museum was not considered useful to the exercise. The material would therefore be re-recorded digitally to best practice standards, supporting any recommendations made for rationalisation as well as facilitating future access. The museum curator did not want the animal bones or processed environmental material included in the review. She believed that the potential of that material was yet to be realised and that hasty rationalisation now could harm the research potential in the future.

“The environmental stuff tells you so much, especially the animal bones, I feel they are very neglected.” (Curator of Archaeology, Winchester Museum).

The Salisbury Museum

The Salisbury Museum Review was targeted at a specific archive of fieldwalking flints and excavation archives from the Stonehenge Environs project. The museum believed that the archive itself had great potential to support future research and display, however it was hard to identify given the size of the assemblage. The archive had been recorded to a higher level than average for a fieldwalking project; material was related to a type series and metric data for each of the tools was detailed within the paper records. However, much of the archive was also considered to contain poorly stratified, repetitive material that had rarely been accessed since its deposition in 1991/2. The project aimed to create a digital record of the archive’s contents to be made available to the general public and researchers. During the databasing exercise, the material was to be assessed for rationalisation purposes. The selection criteria were based on the provenance, intrinsic interest and level of recorded detail present in the archive (Mephram, 2012). The paper records were therefore accessed as part of the review. The discard process was informed by nationally recognised guidelines on selection and retention (Brown, 2011, Society for Museum Archaeologists, 1993).

Museum C

At Museum C, four sites were targeted to be part of the archive review project through a joint agreement between the museum staff and Wessex Archaeology. Within the four sites, various

materials were selected for review on the basis of assemblage size combined with an initial opinion that they had low potential for future research being of commonly occurring types (Mephram, 2014b). As with the other reviews, the initial approach to the archive assessment was to create a 'basic but consistent' digital record of the materials including trench, context, small find number, quantification, additional comments and a note of which pieces have been retained and which have been discarded. The retention and discard decisions were based on the Wessex Archaeology in-house recording and retention policies for CBM, flint and pottery.

Bucks County Museum

The Bucks archive review attempted to prepare a full digital inventory of three and a half thousand boxes of material and paperwork in a format that could be utilised both in the rationalisation process and form the basis for the final index. The material inventory would highlight large blocks of material like CBM and animal bone which could be targeted for rationalisation. The paperwork inventory would identify all the finds records (bulk and small) as well as other records such as illustrations or specialists reports to aid the rationalisation process. In contrast to the other reviews, the decisions around rationalisation of the material archive were to be based entirely on the integrity of the archive as a whole: how well the material archive could be attributed to the paper records, the level of detail within the specialist's data and if specific finds mentioned in the reports could be identified in the archive. Criteria for rationalisation included: unstratified or poorly stratified material unless of intrinsic interest, small context groups of marine shell, animal bone, redeposited metalworking, finds from smaller sites as small groups could have limited potential.

"Any discard should be based on a perceived value for future research, and provenance"
(Mephram, 2014a)

"It will be nice if some space is saved but if it turns out that all the material is great and useful for research then we will be keeping it." (Keeper of Archaeology, Bucks County Museum).

The strategy for all four of the Wessex Archaeology led archive reviews was initially to create a digital record of the archives (or specific material) selected for potential rationalisation. As the majority of the archives under review predated the use of digital recording or databasing for archival purposes, it could be seen that the projects were simply recording the archive to modern standards. However, the type of information included in the new archive catalogues does not normally appear in one all-encompassing record within an archaeological archive. The context data is often held in a separate database to the specialist material data and interpretation, while the archive database will detail the context information for finds within a box but will not give the stratigraphic detail found in the context database. All four museums believed that making a digital inventory of the archive publicly accessible would increase access and research. A couple of museum staff commented that if this had been done before, the archive may not even require reviewing for rationalisation as it would have been accessed regularly.

"If it had been digitised, I assume it would be used more."

(Keeper of Archaeology, Bucks County Museum)

"The issues of space and income generation would be irrelevant if these were living collections used on a regular basis."

(Senior Curator, Salisbury Museum).

Implementation

Winchester City Museum

The Winchester Archive review was carried out by Wessex Archaeology post-excavation staff over a nine-week period in 2011. An excel spreadsheet was created of all the CMB assessed for selection purposes. The paper records were not consulted for provenance and interpretation information during the review, instead all decisions were to be made based solely on intrinsic interest (Mephram, 2011 p3). While no definition of 'intrinsic interest' appears in the project documentation, some suggestions of how staff could consider the concept of 'intrinsic interest' are covered in the Wessex Archaeology handbook which all members of staff have (Wessex Archaeology post-excavation

manger pers. com; the handbook was not provided as considered “commercially sensitive”). The decision of whether an individual object or group of objects demonstrated enough ‘intrinsic interest’ to be retained in the archive was at the discretion of the individuals carrying out the review. Disposal of the material de-selected from the archive was undertaken by the Wessex Archaeology staff into a skip provided by the museum. The Museum Association Disposal Toolkit (Museums Association, 2014) was therefore not followed, the museum curator believed that no one would want it.

*“To try and dispose of it officially through the MA, you just wouldn’t get any takers.”
(Curator of Archaeology, Winchester Museum).*

The Salisbury Museum

Much of the detailed recording for the Stonehenge Environs project was already present within the archive at Salisbury Museum, and only where the primary records could not be located were supplementary records added to an Excel spreadsheet (Mephram, 2012). The archive was divided between the fieldwalking assemblage and the excavated material from stratified deposits around Stonehenge. The existing specialists’ reports were considered an adequate record of the fieldwalking assemblage to allow for significant discard to take place. Wessex Archaeology undertook the review in 2012 and divided the archive based on their recommendations for discard. During the review process, all the flint tools were allocated registered find numbers, and these were stored separately from the bulk flint. A ‘classic example type’ list was created for the several thousand flint scrapers from the existing detailed records and type series, and apart from a few examples, the scrapers were included with the bulk flint assemblage. The new registered finds information was recorded not only in the new Excel database, but the original records were also edited to reflect the change. However, no changes were made to the original paperwork with regard to the ‘bulk’ fieldwalking flint, the disposal quantities being recorded on the new database alone.

While the large majority of the fieldwalking flint was unstratified and therefore the review staff could be rigorous in their selection for retention, the excavated finds proved harder to rationalise.

The material was accepted as having value by both the museum and Wessex Archaeology and the museum staff thought its positioning within the wider context of the Stonehenge landscape added relevance to the museum's other archaeological collections. It was decided that all finds from stratified contexts would be retained with the exception of large quantities of bulk flint from intrinsically unimportant assemblages. Bulk finds from topsoil contexts and environmental samples were also earmarked for discard, but the rest of the finds were considered too important to consider further rationalisation. Wessex Archaeology staff felt confident in their ability to make the decisions around rationalisation because they were familiar with the material, which in turn meant the museum were able to support the recommended disposals.

"The excavated material, there wasn't much more we could do with that, excavated stratified remains from around Stonehenge are very important, crucial ceramic sequences and animal bone assemblages from Neolithic pits"

(Senior Post-excavation Manager, Wessex Archaeology)

"With animal bone it all comes down to context, for example animal bone from a Neolithic pit there is no way that is going to be discarded."

"It's part of who we are, part of our core our mission. Telling the story of South Wiltshire."
(Senior Curator, Salisbury Museum).

Museum C

During the archive review at Museum C, several issues arose that resulted in a change to the expected outcomes of the project. Museum staff had identified a series of assemblages which they believed were in need of rationalisation including a large flint assemblage from Mount Pleasant. Upon undertaking the review of this material, Wessex Archaeology staff found that the assemblage had been recorded and published in detail (Wainwright, 1979) and unlike the fieldwalking flint from the Stonehenge Environs project, came from significant, stratified deposits. Therefore, the proposed rationalisation of the Mount Pleasant flint was rejected by Wessex Archaeology. Upon examination of the worked 'sarsen' from the same site, the review staff discovered that the majority of the material showed no signs of 'working' as reported in the publication, and the few illustrated stone

artefacts described in the report could not be located. Wessex Archaeology decided that a simple database and photographic record was all that was required for this material before recommending almost full discard. The record that this material is not in fact worked appears only in the museum database and the review report (Mepham, 2014b), while the published report contains details of 1928 fragments of worked stone from stratigraphically significant Neolithic contexts.

“It’s quite important and it shouldn’t be thrown away no matter how well recorded.”

“It was basically just stone rubble that had been pulled out of Neolithic ditches so we couldn’t see any reason why it has been described as struck and why it had been retained in the first place.”

(Senior Post-Excavation Manager, Wessex Archaeology).

Upon the examination of forty-four boxes of gypsum plaster from Poundbury Cemetery, Wessex Archaeology once again found they were unable to carry out any significant rationalisation as requested by Museum C. The gypsum plaster has been used as dry packing around embalmed bodies and many of the pieces contained the impressions of the bodies round which the material was packed, displaying details such as the shape of the head and the fabric in which the body was wrapped. Wessex Archaeology decided the assemblage had a high potential for future research and recommend that with the exception of a few small fragments, the collection should be retained.

A detailed catalogue was created accompanied by digital photography of all grave groups and individual lumps with impressions. Wessex Archaeology found it hard to understand the request by Museum C that the assemblage be rationalised; While the material had not been fully analysed, a short report and catalogue of the plaster appears in the publication and its importance was highlighted. Additionally, an approach had previously been made by Bradford University to look at the material as part of their on-going research into Roman-British burial practices. It could be the lack of a digital inventory, and an original mis-recording on the museum’s system meant that the curators simply did not know the importance of what they held.

“The majority of this material was of high research potential, so we flagged that up, and we found it hard that they did not know how important this was.”

“We dealt with them in a similar way to Winchester, we have those guidelines now so that was quite straightforward.”

(Senior Post-Excavation Manager, Wessex Archaeology).

The remainder of the assemblages reviewed at Museum C consisted of bulk CBM and Post-medieval pottery. Wessex Archaeology followed the selection and retention guidelines they devised for the Winchester review and have since implemented in-house, for the assessment, recording and rationalisation of this material.

Bucks County Museum

The review of around 3000 archive boxes held at Bucks County Museum from the closed Milton Keynes unit was undertaken by a team of volunteers following training from the Wessex Archaeology post-excavation manager. A full inventory of the entire collection was created digitally over several months detailing both the material and paperwork aspects of the archives. The review of the material identified for potential rationalisation was also undertaken by a team of volunteers using the guidelines established by Wessex Archaeology during the Winchester and Museum C collection reviews.

This work remained on-going at the time of the fieldwork for this research, however the curator did state that one issue they had come up against was how well the volunteers understood the paperwork that accompanied the archives. The planned testing of the archive’s integrity (i.e. how easy it was to identify finds from the records and vice versa) was hampered by the volunteer’s lack of archaeological recording and reporting knowledge.

“We need to understand the paper archive, if finds are not referenced back to the paper archive that significantly reduces their value as they essentially become unstrat.” (Keeper of Archaeology, Bucks County Museum).

Results

Winchester City Museum

The archaeological archives assessed for rationalisation during the review at Winchester Museum were reduced to between 10-20% of the original holdings (Mepham, 2011). The museum regained some valuable space within its stores, but the biggest benefit was seen as the digital database and photographic records created during the review, improving accessibility for the museum staff and researchers alike. The curator believes that overall the review has had a generally neutral effect on their holdings; the positives in the increased accessibility being balanced out by the reduction of their holdings. While the increase in research of their collections is welcome, as an archaeologically focused museum the removal of any archaeological material from the stores was not an easy decision to make.

“It’s a slight positive because we have improved access but reduced what we hold.”

“There is no point having a museum if you haven’t got archaeological archives.”

(Curator of Archaeology, Winchester Museum).

The Salisbury Museum

The proposed disposals from the Stonehenge Environs project archive were carried out by Salisbury Museum resulting in the reduction of 640, to 310 boxes of material, around 52% (Mepham, 2012). Salisbury Museum is not a member of the Museum Association and therefore had no requirement to follow the Disposal Toolkit guidelines, however the curator was confident that no other museum would have been interested in the flint that was sent to landfill, had it been offered out. In 2014, the new Wessex Gallery opened at Salisbury Museum. The new gallery housed one of Europe’s most extensive collection of Stonehenge and prehistoric artefacts, many of which were drawn from the recently rationalised Stonehenge Environs project archive (The Salisbury Museum, 2014). The curator believes that the new digital database facilitated the use of far more of the objects than originally anticipated. Following the completion of the Stonehenge Environs Archive Review Project, the museum has changed the way they collect for commercial archaeology projects. Salisbury

museum now expects a rigorous selection and retention policy to be applied to all archives deposited with the museum, accompanied by detailed spreadsheets that can be fed into the museum's own databases.

"I am 99.99% certain that no-one would want this material."

"There is field a walking project coming up and I told them to apply a selection strategy."

(Senior Curator, Salisbury Museum).

Museum C

While several of the assemblages of material that Museum C put forward for rationalisation remain pretty much as they were, the CBM assemblages from two sites were significantly reduced. A total of 13,406 fragments were recorded in detail, of which 424, just over 3%, were retained (Mephram, 2014b). A similar discard was applied to the post-medieval pottery. The 're-discovery' of the Gypsum Plaster lumps from Poundbury Cemetery prompted several research enquires including the original excavator who wrote an additional report for the museum on the history of the assemblage and how it came to be accessioned in the museum stores (Sparey-Green, 2014).

Bucks County Museum

The Bucks County Museum archaeological archive review was not finalised during the fieldwork portion of this thesis, however the full catalogue of the archives inherited from Milton Keynes Excavation unit has been completed by the volunteers. The ability to easily identify individual objects and assemblages of material in the archives has increased the use of the archives by the museum and by researchers. Following completion of the catalogue, a large research project was initiated in partnership with University College London. Post-graduate osteology students from the university are creating a full catalogue of the museum's human remains collections which span 150 years. The students are not only compiling a catalogue of the skeletons but are also recording the basic pathology and noting anything that may be of further interest to researchers. The hope is that by involving the university in the creation of this resource, the end product will be better suited to other researchers.

“By finding out what the academics want to know, we can make the archive more useable.” (Keeper of Archaeology, Bucks County Museum).

Wessex Archaeology believe that being involved in these museum archive review projects has had a significant effect on their own working practices. Guidelines have or are being written for on-site and post-excavation selection and recording of all material types. All archaeological archives compiled by the commercial unit are subject to a selection and retention process in collaboration with the appropriate museum, and all specialists are expected to make a statement in their report on the significance of the material and future potential.

“If you have decent records, I know that is no substitute for looking at the real thing, but realistically we cannot hold onto all this material.” (Senior Post-Excavation Manager, Wessex Archaeology).

External pressures

The post-excavation team at Wessex Archaeology were one of the first to undertake an archive review as a commercial venture and did receive some negative pushback from some individuals in the sector. Comments about ‘people coming in and throwing away material in the store’ and ‘why am I digging it up if you are going to just throw it in a skip’ were directed at the team (pers. com Senior Post-excavation Manager, Wessex Archaeology). However, the post-excavation manager was never involved in a proper discussion as to why the process may be wrong, and consequently did not think these were particularly strongly held beliefs.

“I get the impression that people think it needs to be done but they don’t want to be the people to do it.” (Senior Post-Excavation Manager, Wessex Archaeology).

Wessex Archaeology do believe that the projects have raised several issues with how the current methods of archaeological archive creation, compilation and curation, sit alongside these post-deposition review and rationalisation practices. The realisation that the ‘sarsen’ from Mount Pleasant was not worked stone as reported in the publication, highlighted that material specialists are not always right, and the project reports may contain inaccuracies. In this case, a large group of

material had been retained unnecessarily, however this suggests that the alternative could also take place, where significant material is disposed through a selection and rationalisation process prior to deposition. While some in the sector believe this justifies 100% retention (British Archaeological Jobs Resource, 2019), the Wessex Archaeology post-excavation manager believes that the answer is detailed recording and sampling of bulk material assemblages. Archaeologists should have confidence in their abilities to make these decisions.

"I think we need to be much more upfront about this and much more confident in our ability to identify things that are important, and things that aren't important."

"At some point you have to go out on a limb and say this is what we think, this is what we have done, we have kept a sample."

(Senior Post-excavation Manager, Wessex Archaeology).

During the reviews, it became clear to Wessex Archaeology that the manner in which the museums wanted the archives sorted and catalogued did not entirely match the normal commercial archaeological archiving process. The museum curators would like to see each archive presented in a manner that made them immediately accessible i.e. dividing pottery and animal bone not only by context, but also by individual ware types and specific species. While Wessex Archaeology staff understood the reasoning behind these requests from a museum accessibility point of view, the extra work required to compile an archive in this manner would not be commercially viable.

"That is just something we can't do as contractors; we don't have the resource. So, there is conflict there." (Senior Post-excavation Manager, Wessex Archaeology).

From the museum perspective, the archive review projects highlighted the differences between the archives received through commercial archaeological practices, and their other archaeological collections. For the large part, the older antiquarian collections were accessioned by choice, and the museums would not consider rationalisation of that material. The archives that have ended up in the museum as a result of the planning process, however, have not been 'collected' in the same way. Some of the curators felt that the current system was not sustainable, and that the museums

did not have the resources to appropriately curate the archaeological archives in their care. The material continues to be created through the planning process, often as bitty, unrelated projects creating large quantities of material and to review and rationalise them once they were in the museum was very costly.

“It’s a bit like landfill, we just keep generating it.”

(Senior Curator, Salisbury Museum).

6.6 Conclusions

This chapter has presented a series of case studies into externally led archaeological archive reviews for museums and collecting institutions since 2012. The case studies have demonstrated the variation in approaches that can result from externally led collections reviews, and how professional standards, personal connections and institutional pressures can affect the significance and future potential attributed to stored archaeological archives. In general, archaeological archives were considered in their entirety by external reviewers. Significance was often discussed in terms of future research potential while selection criteria was based on the provenance, intrinsic interest, level of recorded detail present and the overall integrity of the archive.

However, it was often the case that additional interpretation, or the creation of detailed records in digital form, was required to support an archive’s research potential. In some cases, significant material was highlighted through the documentation process that may never have been identified had selection and disposal practice been undertaken prior to professional archaeological involvement (though it is also important to note that professional archaeologists were the original creators of the documents in need of improvement). The externally led reviews highlighted that a museum’s misunderstanding of material remains and how to interpret them using the accompanying documents, could lead to confusion over how to access archaeological archives and therefore decrease their use. One reviewer summarised that professional archaeology archives are not compatible with museum’s cataloguing systems.

While several of the museums involved in these externally led reviews claimed that aspects of the archaeology collections were utilised for display and outreach activities, the curators still hoped for a reduction in the size of the bulk assemblages. Some of the proposed disposals were halted by the reviewer on grounds of future research potential, yet in the majority of cases, the externally led review still resulted in significant rationalisation of specific bulk assemblages. The decisions around potential for future research were based on assemblage size, material type and context. In all cases where reduction of the archive volume took place, an increased use of the archives was reported by the museum for both museums-based activities and external researchers.

The externally led archive review case studies have highlighted the importance of accessible digital databases about an archive's content and demonstrated that public access to a detailed database increases use by researcher, curators, community groups and the general public. The analysis of these case studies therefore provides insight into the purpose of archaeological archives, why we keep them, how they are used, how much is needed and who should be making the decisions around their long-term care. These research questions and the supporting evidence contained within these case studies will be discussed further in the following chapter.

7 MUSEUM COLLECTION OR ARCHAEOLOGICAL ARCHIVE?

7.1 Introduction

The majority of the collection reviews followed during this research have their origins in some aspect of the 'storage crisis', attempting to address the issues around long-term archaeological archive curation through assessment and rationalisation. The implementation and results of these reviews can inform on how archaeological archives are valued within the museum profession, and their place within the collection as a whole. This in turn could provide insight on the creation of the archive, the value judgements points which could be applied prior to their final deposition with a museum, and therefore the purpose of archaeological archiving in England.

To address the aims of the research, this thesis takes a holistic approach to the analysis of seventeen case studies, each one representing a museum or collecting institution review of their stored archaeological archives. This chapter will discuss the collated evidence to answer the four sub research questions, pulling out the key findings from each case study and analysing them within the wider context of archaeological archive creation, compilation and deposition in England:

- *Why do we keep them?* How archaeological archives are created and understood by the museum and developer-led archaeology sectors.
- *How are they used?* The reality of archaeological archives as a re-usable resource following deposition.
- *How much is needed?* Is it possible to see the wood for the trees and establish where significance and potential lies within archaeological archives?
- *Whose responsibility are they?* If archaeological archives feel like a round peg in a square hole, whose opinions on significance and disposal are relevant?

The chapter will discuss key issues highlighted by the seventeen case studies (Chapters 3-6), and how the lack resources, accessibility and knowledge can expose the competing visions for the future

of archaeological archives across the sector. The chapter will conclude by considering my primary research aim: *What is the purpose of archaeological archives?* It will detail a set of four recommendations to re-organise the system to address the concerns voiced by those engaged in the sector and supply a vision of a sustainable future for the creation, compilation and curation of archaeological archives.

7.2 How are archaeological archives created and understood?

The creation of a stable, ordered and accessible archive as a fundamental aspect of any archaeological project has been defined at national (Brown, 2011), European (Perrin et al., 2014) and international (International Committee for Documentation of the International Council of Museums, forthcoming) levels (see Chapter 2). The industry accepted standard is that an archaeological archive should contain a complete record of an archaeological project; the methodology, aims and objectives, data or objects collected, analysis results, interpretations, research and publications; all parts working together as one interrogatable whole. Archaeological archives should be compiled in a manner that allows easy assimilation into the collections of recognised repositories where they will be curated and made available for consultation (Brown, 2011, Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, 2014, Perrin et al., 2014).

7.2.1 How do museums 'understand' the archaeological archives in their care?

"Archaeological finds and archives should only be accepted if the museum can curate them to the proper standards." (Society for Museum Archaeologists, 1993 p9).

General practice within professional archaeology has therefore been for many years, to undertake an archaeological project, and deposit an archive with a museum for long-term curation (see Chapter 2) where the industry standards say it will be appropriately stored and made accessible for future use (Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, 2014 p3). However, a recurring theme through the interviews during this research, was that many of the museum staff did not fully understand the

archaeological archives in their care, either where they fitted with the museum's other collections, how they were organised, what they contained, how to access them or make them accessible to others. This suggests that archives are not being deposited in a manner that could be "assimilated easily into the collections" (Brown, 2011 p1). Sometimes this was the result of lack of documentation linked to the museums systems, or inaccuracies in the way the archives had originally been recorded by the museum. The staff at Peterborough were often unable to locate requested material due to lack of specific knowledge of the stored archaeology collections while at museums like Tamworth Castle, Epping Forest and Chesterfield, the archives did not appear on any of the museum's catalogues and effectively did not exist from the museum's point of view. The staff at Chesterfield museum felt that historically archaeological archives from developer-led projects were seen as having no value to the museum, and therefore did not need to be accessed in the way the other collections were.

"The problem is if you are not an archaeologist you don't know how to interpret it and display it." (Museum Collection Officer, Chesterfield Museum).

The lack of knowledge around archaeological archives and how they are recorded internally by museums was seen as a hindrance to the operation of several reviews. At Chesterfield Museum, the curators felt they did not have the expertise to properly review all the archaeological material for rationalisation purposes due to a lack of in-house knowledge. Similarly, the curators at Museum A felt unable to complete the archaeological review in-house, so an external consultant with knowledge of the material and history of the collection was employed. Through the course of the review, the consultant found many issues of mislabelling or misspelling of sites within the museum catalogue, alongside misidentification of sites or an object's date. This not only hampered the completion of the review, but also explained where some of the curators confusion around the archives came from. As at many other museums, archives were split across several storage areas with no cross-referencing between the disparate parts. The independent consultant believes many

of the mistakes are not only due to the curator's lack of knowledge about the individual sites and the recording systems utilised by commercial archaeologists, but also that professional archaeology archives are not compatible with museums cataloguing systems.

A similar misunderstanding of material remains and how to interpret them using the accompanying documentary records was highlighted by Wessex Archaeology: Museum C asked the commercial unit to review (for rationalisation purposes) forty-four boxes of gypsum plaster which were quickly re-identified as the dry packing from around embalmed bodies. While the museum did not understand the material's importance, a short report and catalogue highlighting the significance of the plaster does appear in the publication. Additionally, an approach had been made by Bradford University to use the archive as part of their research into Roman-British burial practices. Wessex Archaeology found it hard to understand the request by Museum C that the assemblage be rationalised and recommended almost 100% retention of the assemblage.

7.2.2 Archaeological archives: One inter-relatable whole or a series of objects?

While national and international standards on archaeological archiving (Brown, 2011, Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, 2014, Perrin et al., 2014) state that an archive represents all parts of the archaeological record as one inter-relatable whole, the museum-led reviews in this study have tended to approach an archaeological archive as a series of individual objects or assemblages. The review framework at Shakespeare Birthplace Trust was devised to support a methodical review of all the objects in the collection, without the need for specialist archaeological knowledge. Under this methodology, 'review units' within a single site archive were not always reviewed together, often being considered as separate objects for display, teaching and outreach purposes. The contextual relationships between 'review groups' was not taken into consideration during the review while the catalogue created as part of the review treats each archive as a series of individual objects (or bags of objects) and makes recommendations for use and disposal on this basis.

It was rare that the paper aspect of an archaeological archive was assessed as part of the museum-led review projects, either for rationalisation purposes or to inform the review findings. Where paperwork was consulted, this often involved the published literature rather than the grey literature or specialist reports that accompanied the archives. Not one museum-led review reported accessing the context sheets, registers or post-excavation records during the process. Where a site had been published, the perceived significance of that archive increased within the museums, especially the objects that appeared as photographs or illustrations within the publication. At the Royal Albert Memorial Museum (RAMM), decisions around significance were based mainly on the sites within the review group that had been published. The grey literature reports were rarely thought to contain enough detail to adequately judge significance in the material archive. For the majority of the review groups it was concluded that the data contained within the archives needed to be made available in a format that the museum could use, and that a 'different kind of information' was needed in order to establish an object's significance. This suggests that in general, the type of information that accompanies an archaeological archive is not useful to a museum. Similarly, Chesterfield museum staff felt that commercial archaeology reports are often from the context and stratigraphic feature perspective and therefore do not address how the finds add to the story of Chesterfield. It would be easier to incorporate archaeological archives into the museum, if the interpretation was geared towards museum use. Epping Forest museum staff concluded that additional work was required by the museum to turn an archaeological archive into a useful part of the collection that supports the remit of the museum.

"Archaeologists from my time in the sector and work in a museum are concerned with typologies and numbers and the minutiae of sherd counts which is great if you are a detailed researcher wanting to come and look at this material, but from the museum's point of view this is completely meaningless." (Assistant Curator RAMM).

Undertaking a review did not always provide the clarity the museum thought they needed with regard to their archaeological archives. The archaeological collections at Shakespeare Birthplace

Trust were reviewed in 2012, again in 2013-14, and then re-reviewed by experts from Museums Worcestershire as part of the West Midlands Museum Development Expert Eye programme in 2016 (Appendix 2). The Expert Eye findings highlighted how several of the archaeological archives formed some of the founding collections of the museum, an aspect that had been missed in the earlier reviews. The 2016 review also demonstrated that the regional and national importance of the material from the Roman site of Tiddington was increased due to the strength of the paper records accompanying the archives. The findings of the Expert Eye review seemed almost surprising to the Trust, suggesting therefore that neither the 2013-2014 or earlier 2012 review had given the museum staff the information they needed to fully understand what the archaeology collection contained or why it was significant.

It can also be the case that the review does not ask the 'right kind of questions' from the museum's point of view. Following the completion of the review at Museum A, staff immediately asked the reviewer, "*But what can you highlight as having REAL significance?*" (Independent Consultant, Museum A, quoting a curator). The independent consultant had not completed the significance survey using the statement of significance template devised for the review of Museum A's collections, but had instead approached the review from the perspective of individual sites and how they fit within the regional archaeological picture. The significance of whole archives was discussed at the level of site interpretation and provided information on the potential for future research. The report contained little-to-no reference to the material contained within the archives and therefore none of the information required for decisions around display, rationalisation and retention. While the review at Museum A was not the objects-based review the curators clearly hoped for, it was also not a review that tested the integrity of the archaeological archives as those by Wessex Archaeology did for Salisbury, and Bucks County Museum. The selection criteria for Salisbury Museum were based on the provenance, intrinsic interest and level of recorded detail present in the archive and therefore included the paper records, while at Bucks County Museum, the decisions

around rationalisation of the material archive were to be based entirely on the integrity of the archive as whole. None of the museum-led reviews approached an archive in this manner: testing how well the material archive could be connected to the paper records and how easily finds mentioned in the report could be found.

7.2.3 Are archaeological archives always ‘understandable’?

Industry accepted standards stipulate that modern archives from developer-led archaeology are compiled under the premise that all parts work together as a whole, with all data, material and reports cross-referenceable within that whole (see 7.2). The museum-led approach to reviewing archives has often been to dismantle that whole into separate components to better understand what they have in their store; sometimes by object or bag of pottery, but nearly always the finds are separated from the paperwork. However, conceptually that approach is at odds with the definition of an archaeological archive at national (Brown, 2011) and European (Perrin et al., 2014) levels, where the paper records are always integral to the understanding and function of the archive as a whole. It is the responsibility of the archaeologist or company undertaking the project to accurately compile the data collected and results analysis into an understandable, re-useable resource:

CIfA Standard: All archaeological projects that include the recovery or generation of data and/archaeological materials (finds) will result in a stable, ordered, accessible archive. All archaeologists are responsible for ensuring that the archive is created and compiled to recognised standards, using consistent methods, and is not subject to unnecessary risk of damage or loss. (Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, 2014 p1).

However, it is not only museums who can struggle to access archaeological archives. The Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Team, when trying to understand some of the older, ‘Rescue’ excavation archives, discovered that post-excavation analysis was not completed for some of the most important sites in the region and therefore remain inaccessible to researchers due to lack of understanding about their contents. Archive compilation and deposition standards have improved significantly in recent years, although many of the larger archives collected during the Rescue

excavations and early years of PPG16 do not meet those standards. This suggests there may be many, as yet unidentified, archaeological archives across the country that will require a considerable amount of work before they can be accessed by museums or researchers for any purpose.

During the archives review at Museum C, Wessex Archaeology countered the 'significant discovery' of the Romano British gypsum plaster grave linings from Poundbury, by finding that a large quantity of 'worked sarsen' from Mount Pleasant had been misidentified during the original excavation project. The stone specialists could find no evidence that any of the stone had been worked, despite the published results. While the publication is widely available through open access (Wainwright, 1979) and contains details of 1928 fragments of worked stone from stratigraphically significant Neolithic contexts, the record that this material is not in fact worked appears only in the museum database and the review report (Mephram, 2014b).

Issues with finds reporting have also been highlighted in the 2017 'Review of the Standard of Reporting on Archaeological Artefacts in England' by the Chartered Institute for Archaeology Finds Group and Historic England (Cattermole, 2017). The study was particularly concerned with how finds data was presented within 'grey-literature' from developer-funded archaeology, and its re-usability in the future. One thousand unpublished specialist artefact reports from grey literature and a further sixty-one published specialist artefact reports from journal articles were assessed for their content and quality against a checklist of criteria. Of the specialist reports assessed, only forty-three percent met half of the criteria, while none of the reports achieved the targeted one hundred percent of the requirements to achieve best practice. These results were compounded by the findings that very few artefact reports contained details on the archives contents, selection and retention strategies, an object's dimensions or other quantification data, and that specialists' baseline data was rarely included with the archive in a manner that was re-useable. This supports many of the museum curators' opinions reported in this research, that the material assemblages contained within

archaeological archives are often impenetrable and, without meaningful interpretations to place the artefacts within the wider story, they are often considered unusable.

“Specialist reports do not routinely include a discussion of the assemblage in its wider context.” (Cattermole, 2017 p2).

While museum curators report an inability to penetrate the large data sets and material assemblages contained within many archaeological archives, it is these components that should allow results to be compared statistically, facilitating a deeper understanding of site function, regional or national patterns of trade and market economics, or changes in cultural identity over time (Doherty, 2015). The ‘Town and Country in Roman Essex’ project aimed to undertake a major research project relying primarily on the existing data from published or archival sources (Perring and Pitts, 2013). However, it was discovered that variable standards in recording and archiving practices had a detrimental impact on the project, limiting the research that could be completed. In many cases it was found that the individual site publications did not clearly define the methodologies used to record the material, different coding systems were used to record similar fabric types, and that often the type series had to be re-analysed in order to interpret the form-codes in the datasets (Doherty, 2015 p8). In some cases, entire assemblages had to be re-analysed at significant cost to the project as the specialist data within the archive was unusable. The project therefore identified that while modern standards on the creation and compilation of archaeological archives exist, as yet they do not cover the standardisation of the internal components and datasets that would truly allow statistical comparisons. While such standardisation would clearly be advantageous to researchers (potentially achieved through a national training programme), the project noted that while the majority of post-excavation specialist work was undertaken on a project-by-project basis through the planning process it is hard to see how a nationally consistent method of recording finds could be established (Doherty, 2015 p10).

7.2.4 Why do we keep them?

“We keep it because it is important” (Shepherd, 2015 p144).

From a professional or academic perspective, the need for archaeological archives seems to be clearly understood and defined (Chapter 2). National and international standards on archive creation, compilation and deposition exist, supported and upheld by professional standards and guidance (see above). Retention of the primary records and evidence for past occupation and activity is taught as a basic building block of archaeology within universities. The standards state that archives should be compiled in manner that allow all parts to work together as one interrogatable whole, and that the archive repository should appropriately incorporate archaeological archives into their institution, look after them, and make them available for consultation. However, receiving museums report a lack of understanding of the archives in their care, how to access them, what they contain and how to incorporate them into the museums' systems. Often museum staff feel they do not have the expertise to access an archaeological archive and that museum cataloguing systems are incompatible with how the archaeological archives are presented to them for long term curation.

The manner in which many of the museums approached their reviews suggested that they did not generally consider archaeological archives as one interrogatable whole, but as a series of individual objects or assemblages to be separated before meaning and significance could be attributed. The reviews did not consider contextual relationships between the separated objects or assemblages when establishing their potential for display, teaching and outreach purposes. Rarely were original paper records included or consulted during the review process, and often it was reported that a 'different kind of information' was needed in order to establish an object's significance and turn the archive into a useful (i.e. displayable) element of the museum's collection. Conversely, where archives were considered in their entirety by external reviewers, significance was often discussed in terms of future research potential. Yet it was often the case that additional interpretation, or the

creation of detailed records in digital form, was required to support this potential. As a result, the material assemblages and records contained with archaeological archives are often considered impenetrable by museum curators, and in need of improved standardisation by researchers to truly allow statistical comparisons and facilitate future re-use. Therefore, the industry accepted standard on what an archaeological archive is and why we keep them does not meet the reality of how they are perceived in museums. This mismatch is not a 'storage issue', but a difference in expectation of how they will be used in the future.

7.3 Archaeological archives: A reusable resource?

Standards on archaeological archiving (see Chapter 2) stipulate that they are compiled and deposited under the assumption that they can and will be re-used in the future. The Chartered Institute for Archaeologists state that the purpose of an archaeological archive is to be a 'researchable resource', the key to understanding any published interpretations of the results, and that all members and Registered Organisations should ensure that all records and materials are kept for future analysis (Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, 2014). Specialist material standards and guidance stipulate that the data and results compiled during post-excavation is to a standard that will inform present and future studies of the past (Barclay et al., 2016, Archaeological Ceramic Building Materials Group, 2002).

Reuse "may extend to the re-analysis of data, re-interpretation of evidence, renewed understanding of events, objects or structures, re-publication of findings or the presentation of evidence or materials in a public context." (Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, 2014 p1)

"The aim is to create an archive that will inform future study" (Barclay et al., 2016 p19).

7.3.1 Use justifies curation

The implication therefore is that archaeological archives from developer-funded projects are primarily created as a resource for future research. However, many of the museums followed by

this study stated that lack of use of the stored archaeological collections was one of the drivers behind instigating an archive review. Very few, if any, of the museums kept detailed records of external access to their stored collections prior to the reviews, therefore the opinions on low use are based on anecdotal evidence and the memories of the curators in post. The potential to use the material in the future was one of the major considerations when recommending disposal or retention in the review outcomes. In the case of museum-led reviews, potential use was often framed in terms of display, handling, teaching or outreach activities as these could be easily defined within each institution's current remit. Although aspects of the archaeology collection at Wiltshire museum were utilised often for display and outreach activities, much of the material was rarely accessed in the present and was therefore considered of low future potential. This finding resulted in significant rationalisation of specific bulk assemblages. While the archaeological collections at Salisbury Museum are nationally designated and archaeology features prominently in several galleries, the curators believed that the majority of the Stonehenge Environs Project flint assemblage would never be of use to the museum. The subsequent review resulted in significant disposals from the archive.

For some institutions, such as Tamworth and Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, the archives were not used by the museum staff as they did not fit with the museum's current remit and were rarely accessed by external researchers. Where the curators at Shakespeare Birthplace Trust could remember an archive being accessed by a researcher, the perceived importance of that specific element of the collection increased and therefore received a higher score during the review. Material that was not known to have been used before in any capacity and thought to have no future use to the museum for teaching, outreach, learning or research activities, received a low score during the review and was recommended for disposal. However, a major overhaul of the national curriculum resulted in some of the archaeological objects held by the Trust finding an 'unexpected use' as a teaching resource and were rated higher under the 'supports learning'

category as a result. Therefore, where a use for archaeological material could be found, the Trust were happy to support its continued curation.

“I would be happy with any use of the collection” (Comment by SBT Collections staff).

Questions around lesser used collections and the costs of continuing to store them had been raised at RAMM, and it was felt that as a publicly funded body, the cost of maintaining material from commercially derived projects had to be justified. When instigating the review, the museum staff referenced the Museums Associations’ Code of Ethics which allowed for curatorially motivated disposals in order to increase use of remaining collections (Museums Association, 2008), alongside the Museum Accreditation Standards requirement for pro-active collections management (Accredited Museum, 2011). The staff believed that collecting for collecting’s sake was no longer acceptable and that active management of the museum’s collections, including their archaeological archives, was the way forward. The review would identify areas of the archaeological collection of no future use to the museum for disposal and aim to increase the public benefit derived from those archives retained by the museum.

It was not solely use by the museum that was seen as a justification for retention: many of the museum-led reviews concluded that the potential for use by researchers in the future would justify retention. However, it was generally unclear how museum-led reviews concluded that an archive or material type had the potential to support future research. It is difficult to define what potential research may be undertaken in the future, and which assemblages or sites will be called upon to answer specific research questions. It is clear from the changes to the review outcomes by Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, for example, that the value of material can alter due to external pressures such as a change to the national curriculum. Just as different collections have life cycles for display, outreach and storage, so can research agendas based on changing political, scientific and economic pressures. In general, the reviews were not set up to take into account changes like these, where material may become more or less in demand in the future, the majority basing their

outcomes on ideas around use in the present. As a result, several museums considered that the ability to demonstrate use of the material for research in the present would partly address the concerns over the storage of the archives raised by those outside the museum.

7.3.2 Can researchers be enticed into the museum stores?

Several museums specifically stated that one of the goals of the review process was to increase external use of the stored collections by better understanding their significance. The storage and curation of Norton Priory's archaeological archives was thought integral to the museum's function, though the majority of them remained unused. One outcome of the review was that the Bulk Collection was made accessible to potential researchers, while it was acknowledged that it would remain unused by the museum. Museum B saw the review process as an opportunity to release the collection's potential, specifically, to open up the archives to external researchers and increase visitor numbers to the stored archives. Similarly, by increasing documentation alongside rationalisation of larger bulk assemblages at Peterborough, Museum C, and Salisbury Museums, the archaeological archives are considered by the museum staff to be more accessible to external researchers.

The curators at RAMM took the concept of 'research as a means to justify curation' one step further, by suggesting a series of research projects within each of the new collection's development plans. Previously, only those sites with well-known publications had been re-accessed and therefore demonstrable evidence that all archaeological archives should be kept as a research resource was required for the funding body. However, it was the task of the RAMM curators to approach academics and universities, rather than researchers seeking out the potential resource at the museum. As a result, a number of external research projects were instigated and the museum hoped that the results would be mutually beneficial, adding weight to their argument that the majority of the archaeological archives should be retained.

While the number of research projects have increased at several of the museums that instigated a review process, this is mainly down to the efforts of the curators approaching academics. Review and rationalisation has not in itself increased the use of the collections: it has been down to museum staff to actively push the knowledge they have gained through the process outwards by approaching universities in person or through their on-line presence. However, many of the museum curators believed that even with the availability of databases and potential projects highlighted on-line, the number of external researchers accessing the archives did not justify their retention as a 'resource for research'. Enquiries often only involved requests for specialist data or digital images and encouraging academics into museum stores was not easy. For example, not one of the long list of potential collaborative research projects identified by Museum A's local university department involved visiting the museum archives. All could be completed through desk-based research, supporting the curators' belief that the argument for retaining all archaeological archives for future research no longer stands.

"I would like to persuade the academics to come and use the collections in teaching and research, and if they don't, if they come clean and say 'no we don't want to do this' then I think we should start to think about throwing it all away, honestly because there is no point." (Director, Museum A).

Several museum reviews therefore acknowledged the significance of much of the material contained within archaeological archives for external researchers, but they did not have the resources or knowledge required to promote their potential.

7.3.3 Objects, not bulk

"Selection should be based, however, on the premise that every pottery find has the potential to inform future research and a strong case has to be made for not selecting pottery for archive." (Barclay et al., 2016 p17).

It became clear through the interviews and review results, that in general museums found more value in the registered finds and displayable objects from archaeological archives, than the bulk

finds such as pottery and animal bone that make up the large majority of the collections. At RAMM, the curators found that if the 'collection highlights' (as they knew them) fell outside the sample take for each review group, a low score would be achieved. To counter this, the curators added personal recommendations of the objects they considered significant and displayable within each review group, without affecting the overall score of that group. The 'star items' identified by the Shakespeare Birthplace staff prior to the review process, remained the museum's star items following the review, despite the gold brooches in question holding no relevance or significance to the Trust or its on-going mission. While a few sherds of pottery found prominence within the Trust's new teaching collection, the large majority of the bulk assemblages were considered ripe for disposal, while those objects that an archaeologist would consider registered finds, consistently scored highly in the categories that denoted value to the museum.

Several other museums demonstrated a predisposition to value archaeological registered finds above bulk material prior to the review being undertaken. The Peterborough review specifically focussed on the potential future use by the museum of registered finds, while facilitating disposal from the bulk collections through increased documentation. The curators considered this approach appropriate for the museum as registered finds have more value for display purposes. Within the Gloucestershire Archive Enhancement Project registered finds were excluded from the review and therefore any potential rationalisation at the outset. Additionally, bulk material that fell outside of the museum's collecting area was automatically disposed of, whereas registered finds and whole pots that were (or had previously been) on display, were not offered to the museums under which collecting area they fell; their retention was easy to justify. At Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, the order in which the boxes or 'review units' were assessed against the review rubric demonstrated that certain objects or types of archival material such as registered finds and non-bulk material were pre-determined to have a higher potential value to the Trust. The 'review units' within a single site archive were therefore not always reviewed together, often with the assessment of the bulk finds

from an archive being left till much later in the process as they were believed from the outset to have less future value.

The selection of registered finds and displayable objects over bulk material, could be interpreted as the museum staff being realistic over the use of the archaeological archives in their care. The exceptional volume of worked flints contained within the Stonehenge Environs Project archive required Salisbury Museum and Wessex archaeology to agree a practical approach as to which material would realistically be used and accessed in the future. The flint tools were allocated registered find numbers and separated from the bulk flint under the assumption that these held potential. A few examples from the several thousand flint scrapers were retained, while the remainder of the scrapers were included with the bulk flint assemblage recommended for disposal.

However, elsewhere bulk collections can be viewed through the lenses of visitors and specialist researchers such as the archaeological archives at Ironbridge Gorge Museum. The nationally designated collection is rarely if ever used by the museum for display purposes, yet the National Slag Collection is accessed often by the Historical Metallurgy Society and this use justifies the retention of the collection to the museum (Historical Metallurgy Society, 2009).

“Well loved by enthusiasts but will never go on display” (Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust Archaeologist).

7.3.4 Data, data, data: Accessibility is the key

One of the main components of the archive reviews studied during this research, was the creation of searchable spreadsheets linked to (or within) the museum’s existing collections database. In most cases, data about each archive was recorded in a format that suited the museum in order to increase usability and ease of access for staff and therefore researchers. At Tamworth Museum, a complete audit of the material aspect of the archaeological archives was undertaken by the museum staff and the results compiled into an excel spreadsheet. At Peterborough Museum, the project recorded the material and documentary aspects of the archive, specifically identifying all the registered finds

within the archive with display potential. Data compiled by the volunteers undertaking the Bucks County Museum Review has increased the use of the archives by the museum and researchers by allowing the easy identification of individual objects and assemblages. The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust review spreadsheet detailed each 'review unit', its content, location and potential usability or recommendation for rationalisation.

A lack of archive data (in a format the museum found accessible) was seen to hamper their understanding and use of the collection, but also act as a barrier to reviewing the material for rationalisation and disposal purposes. The archive 'review groups' at RAMM were based on the Collections Database together with 'immediately accessible information'. In many cases, only a global record existed which could represent several hundreds or thousands of objects; in one case a single 'review group' incorporated 73,696 objects from a single archive. The curators did not feel they could assess the significance and value of the large global records as they could not identify individual objects and assemblages easily. It became apparent that the information required to 'give a fuller picture of an individual object's significance and usage' did not exist in the museum's collections database, and that basic documentation needed to be improved.

The curators also concluded that that data about the material needed to be presented in a format that the museum could use, suggesting that not only are archaeologists not compiling archives in a manner that is suitable to museum use and active curation, but also that the museums consider an archaeological archive as a collection of individual objects rather than as a single entity.

The initial stage of all the Wessex Archaeology led projects also involved the creation of a full digital inventory of the archives under review, in a format that could be utilised in the rationalisation process and form the basis for the final museum index. The databases therefore included the type of information that Wessex Archaeology now routinely compiles during post-excavation analysis, as well as the object-based data required by museums to facilitate access. At Museum C and

Winchester, a 'basic but consistent' digital record of the materials included trench, context, registered find number, quantification, additional comments on potential use, and a note of which pieces have been retained and which have been discarded. The Bucks archive database was to be compiled by volunteers and Wessex Archaeology post-excavation staff instigated a system where a full digital inventory of three and a half thousand boxes of material and paperwork could be compiled by non-specialists. The Stonehenge Environs Project archive at Salisbury Museum had already been recorded to a higher level than average for a fieldwalking project, and therefore the existing data was updated by Wessex archaeology to a level where it was considered a suitable substitute for the physical archive, allowing significant disposals from the collection.

While these records were compiled by a commercial archaeology unit, the type of information Wessex Archaeology included does not normally appear in one all-encompassing record within an archaeological archive, and therefore would not normally be presented to a museum in this manner. However, compilation of the archive data in this format allowed for accurate recording of rationalisation and disposals, as well as a reported increase in accessibility and use of the remaining material by all four of the museums.

The project by Cambridgeshire County Council to move their entire archaeological holdings to the Cheshire Salt Mines was supported by the completion of a detailed database linked to the barcode system already employed at Deepstore. All new archives deposited with Deepstore were to be catalogued using the same system to improve accessibility and therefore increase use of the archaeological archives both new and old. The deposition standards issued by Cambridgeshire County Council were unlike any archiving process undertaken before in development-led archaeology. The details required within the database have more in common with those recorded during the museum archive reviews and the post-excavation details recorded by Wessex Archaeology (discussed above). Not only does the database record context, trench, and site information, but it also documents the details for each individual registered find and bag of bulk

material. This means that a member of Cambridge County Council staff, a researcher or interested member of the public can request to access not just a specific archive, but also a single object, bag of material, or whole context assemblage from one or several archives. Cambridge County Council staff are clear that making the archaeological archives database publicly accessible and the detail contained within it has improved access to stored material. In the six years since the completion of the project, requests to the archives have risen steadily, with around 500 boxes on-loan in 2019 (Cambridgeshire County Council, 2019c). While the Cambridgeshire archive database may not contain the level of detail expected for an object entry in a museum catalogue, a curator could still search the database for coins, brooches or complete pots for display purposes. A researcher on the other hand, could easily identify the contexts containing the pottery assemblages to be analysed and in which boxes they were located. The result is that the archives have been used as part of exhibitions by local groups and museums, and several large-scale research projects have been undertaken using material retrieved from Deepstore.

“Within 18 months during 2017 and 2018, 8% of our total holdings had been accessed by researchers, students, community archaeology groups, professional archaeological companies, museums and educational institutions.” (Cambridgeshire County Council, 2019c).

Some of the more recent museum deposition standards introduced in England (Paul, 2017a, Paul, 2017b, Paul, 2019) have used the Cambridgeshire cataloguing system as the basis for their own archaeological archiving deposition standards. In some cases, additional columns have been added to record details such as the measurements or condition of registered finds, recommendations for display and reference to published images. However, for the most part, the database can be completed by an excavating unit, to be manipulated and re-ordered in any manner that best suits the museum. The curators at Museum A realised that by simply changing the headings in the database requested as part of the archive deposition process to match those in the existing museum catalogue, the information could be incorporated and accessed straight away. This realisation has

been the subject of conference papers (Reed, 2015, Parslow, 2017) and discussion panels within the sector have noted that commercial archaeologists struggle to accommodate the huge variance in museum deposition standards. The manner in which an archaeological archive is ordered and recorded often has more to do with a specific museum's historical working practices than modern archaeological systems; depositors need to attempt to make the archive fit the museum's systems, acting as a barrier to external access. It has often been requested that a single methodology for compiling and recording an archaeological archive should be agreed (Reed, 2015, Parslow, 2017), though given the variety in museums and their working practices this has always seemed unlikely.

Additionally, the data contained within an archive is more accessible and useable when compiled in a standardised way and made available as a digital resource. The Town and County in Roman Essex project which used the comparative analysis of large assemblages to study the origins of urbanism in Roman Britain (Perring and Pitts, 2013), found that where specialist data existed in digital form it was much easier to manipulate and interrogate than where it only existed as a paper record or within the report or publication. In some cases, specialist data had to be recreated from scratch as large comparison projects can only be undertaken where datasets contain common fields of quantification. The project's call for standardisation of data in a digital format (Doherty, 2015) was echoed by the joint Historic England and ClfA Finds Group report on finds reporting in England (Cattermole, 2017). A few museums have seen themselves as the gatekeepers of the process, refusing to accept an archive unless it meets the required standards: Lincolnshire Museum now requires contractors to sign up to a handbook that defines how specialists write reports and compile data, and how its data is deposited to better facilitate access in the future (Lincolnshire County Council, 2019).

It has also been suggested that the creation of detailed records accompanied by images may reduce the need to physically access the archives. Following the division of the Norton Priory archaeological holdings into a 'Priority Collection' and 'Bulk Collection', an object sheet was created for everything

considered of most significance to the museum. The object sheet contained the dimensions, interpretation, context, and related images (such as excavation photos etc.) as well as a photograph of everything in the 'Priority Collection'. The photograph not only allowed the curators to view the object without visiting the stores, but also provided a record of the 'most important' material in the event of another disaster. Similarly, at Winchester Museum and Chesterfield Museums, the biggest benefit of the reviews was seen as the digital database and integrated photographs. In the same way that photographs accompany the majority of museum object records, it will now be possible to see the content of an archaeological archive without having to physically visit them in store, increasing access to both staff and external researchers.

7.3.5 How are they used?

"The aim is to create an archive that will inform future study" (Barclay et al., 2016 p17).

Within the professional archaeology industry, it is accepted that one of the main aims of creating an ordered, stable, and accessible archaeological archive, is as a resource for future research (see above). The standards and guidance on best practice stipulate that re-use may include the re-interpretation of evidence, re-analysis of data, facilitate new theories on events, objects or structures and the re-publication of sites (Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, 2014). However, there is little to no published evidence on how archives or their components are re-used (Wills, 2018 p8) and few museums keep detailed records. During the recent South West Museum Development project 'Seeing the Light of Day', anecdotal evidence from curators suggested that archaeology archives were amongst the most-used collections for exhibitions, handling sessions, education and research (Ferne et al., 2017 p7). This is supported by research into the benefits of all museum handling collections including archaeological materials (Chatterjee, 2009). However, the museums in this study reported a lack of use of the archaeological archives in their care, by either themselves or external researchers. Increased pressures from funding bodies and councils on curatorial resources and storage space drove many of the reviews to question the use, or lack thereof, of these

stored collections. In attempting to re-define the archives to increase use within museums, potential was framed in terms of display, handling, teaching or outreach activities rather than solely as a research resource. Under the museum-led reviews, registered finds and individual displayable objects were generally considered to have more potential for use than assemblages of bulk material. Review strategies focussed on attributing significance and value based on potential for use by the museum in the present, with little consideration of how material may become more or less in demand in the future due to changing political, scientific and economic pressures. In-line with the Museums Association code of ethics (Museums Association, 2015), material considered of no further use to the museum, was recommended for disposal in order to increase the public benefit derived from the material being retained.

While museums found it easier to establish the significance of registered finds and displayable objects, the potential that bulk assemblages could be used for research purposes was acknowledged, and the majority of the museums suggested they would welcome external academics into their stores. However, this often only came about through active promotion by the curators advertising potential projects or directly approaching local academics. External requests to access stored archives was not common, and many curators believed existing re-use by researchers did not justify retention for that purpose. The major barrier to use of archaeological archives, both by the museum and researchers, was reported as the lack of accessible data about the archive's contents. This is true of both museum's internal cataloguing systems where a single entry can represent thousands of objects within one archive, and the inaccessible datasets and incomplete specialists' reports held within them. In all cases where basic inventories of archaeological archives contents were created and uploaded into the museum's systems, the curators reported an internal increase in the accessibility and use of the archaeological archives. The positive effect of establishing archive metadata was re-enforced by the 2018 Society for Museum Archaeology project which assessed the overall efficiency of archaeology rationalisation projects:

“The audits required by the rationalisation process are seen to be useful exercise in collections management since they increase knowledge of and access to collections.”
(Baxter et al., 2018 p4).

However, it is where a detailed database is made publicly accessible that archaeological archives have been re-used for a range of projects across all areas of the sector. The Cambridgeshire County Council archaeological archives have been accessed by museum curators for displays, the public for community projects, and academic researchers for large-scale research projects. The ease that some other museums have incorporated a similar cataloguing process into their existing systems, demonstrates that it is not just the archive’s metadata that is important, but also the interoperability of the metadata that facilitates access.

However, it is not just the lack of data about the archives’ contents that reduces access, but also the manner the project results are recorded and presented within the archive. Where archives were accessed by external researchers and material specialists, it was discovered that the lack of standardisation of artefactual datasets and reporting acted as a significant barrier to re-use. While the accepted industry standards are that archaeological archives are created and stored in order to support future research, the reality is that this is not how they are currently perceived by many of the institutions that hold them, nor the experience of researchers attempting to re-access the data they contain.

Many factors affect how archaeological archives are used and by whom, but generally archives within museum stores are rarely used for the primary purpose, unless curators specifically push potential projects outwards. Anecdotal evidence from museums involved in the South West Museums Development project ‘Seeing the Light of Day’ suggests that archaeology collections become important for research 10-20 years after publication (Ferne et al., 2017 p8). However, quantifiable research is required on how the components of archives could be used by specialists, contractors or the public (Wills, 2018 p8). This study does suggest that reducing the main barrier to

access, namely the manner they are recorded and presented, would increase accessibility to all and widen the scope by which archives could be re-used. Instigation of standardised archive metadata and material specialist data requirements that can not only be incorporated into an existing museum cataloguing system, but also made available on-line for external researchers and specialists to search and manipulate as they require, would increase use for all in the sector.

7.4 Can we see the wood for the trees?

National industry standards stipulate that “all parts of the archaeological record, including the finds” (Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, 2014 p3) are retained within the archaeological archive. Bulk finds such as pottery and animal bone have long been thought necessary to inform future studies of the past and often retention of complete assemblages is recommended by material recording and archiving standards (Barclay et al., 2016).

“Only when heritage is preserved in the archive in its entirety will it be possible for future generations to use the evidence to create their own narrative” (Perrin et al., 2014).

7.4.1 **Where significance becomes blurred by volume**

A theme present throughout the interviews and archive review implementation, was that the museums considered many of the assemblages contained within them, overlarge. This not only was felt to contribute to the museum’s storage issues, but reduced understanding, accessibility and manageability from a museum perspective. The sheer size of many of the bulk archaeological assemblages held by the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, Museum B, Epping Forest District Museum, Chesterfield and Peterborough Museum were thought to hamper the museum curator’s ability to understand the collection fully and many of the reviews were designed specifically to assess the bulk assemblages for rationalisation. Where archaeology formed a major part of the museum’s remit, such as Norton Priory and Salisbury Museum, large scale bulk collections were still considered a hindrance to extracting significance and meaning from the archive:

“I think everything gets blurred when there is too much” (Society for Museum Archaeology representative).

The manner in which the review was implemented at Shakespeare Birthplace trust exemplifies the differential way that bulk assemblages are treated compared to the rest of the material archive. The division of each archive into ‘review groups’ allowed the bulk assemblages to be assessed separately from the registered finds, often *en masse* and consistently scoring lower than those objects reviewed individually. However, where aspects of bulk material had been separated off by the excavating unit prior to deposition (pottery type series, illustrated material), these were reviewed away from the remainder of the assemblage, suggesting it is not the type of material that reduces its appeal to the museum, but the volume it appears in and the information that accompanies it. The curator at Horsham museum believes there is no need to keep large quantities of bulk pottery where complete examples exist elsewhere in the museum’s collections.

During the collections review at RAMM, the scale of the archaeological archives necessitated a ‘scatter gun’ approach to the original review, whereby fifty ‘sample records’ were selected at random to represent an entire review group (potentially containing hundreds of archives and thousands of objects). However, the curators believed that this methodology masked the collection’s highlights. Instead they chose to assess the large-scale rescue excavations and post-PPG16 planning-led archaeological projects with a view to ‘weed out’ quantities of weaker material.

The identification of large bulk assemblages as having reduced future potential was not solely a museum perspective. The archaeological archive review undertaken by Wessex Archaeology for Museum C targeted large assemblages of material, considered to be of ‘commonly occurring types’. In this instance the commercial archaeology unit undertaking the review considered the combination of those two factors (assemblage size plus bulk material) to indicate a low potential value for future research use within the chosen archives. The material inventory created by Wessex Archaeology during the Bucks County Museum review also highlighted large blocks of CBM and

animal bone for rationalisation. It is not only within traditional bulk assemblages (pottery, animal bone, CBM) that the potential significance can be masked through volume. Salisbury Museum staff were aware that the Stonehenge Environs Project archive contained material that could support display, engagement and research activities both within the museum and externally, however that material was almost impossible to identify given the size of the flint assemblages.

While the archaeological archive assessment project by Cambridge Historic Environment Team did not review the archives or their content's significance or potential, the process did lead the team to conclude that the physical size of newly deposited archives should be reduced. This judgement was not based on storage or cost parameters, but that some of the material simply does not need to be retained. The updated disposition standards therefore included a requirement for section process to be specifically targeted at large bulk assemblages.

"You end up with box after box of body sherds and animal bone, you have to think well, why?" (Manager, Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Team).

7.4.2 Smaller = better

The museums which implemented the recommended rationalisation or disposals following the review, reported that the collections had become more manageable as a result of the reduction in their size. In some cases, such as at Epping Forest and Horsham, this was simply a case of fewer boxes in store, taking up less space on shelves, so that staff and volunteers had the time and resources to properly curate the remaining material. The extensive disposals and rationalisation at Horsham Museum prompted the curator to be referred to as 'a pioneer of disposal' during a Newsnight appearance in 2010. Museums such as Peterborough and Waltham Abbey were better able to provide access to the reduced collections through improved documentation and integration of the remaining material into the museum's existing database. Reducing the archaeological archives from developer-funded excavations not only increased storage capacity at the museums, but also facilitated better understanding and access to the archives moving forward. At Gloucester

museum, the curators only felt they were able to accept the archaeology archives from the closed commercial unit officially into the museum, following the 60% reduction in box numbers and re-organisation of the remaining material.

In other museums, reduction of the stored archives was thought to significantly increase their use. By removing the repetitive and poor condition material at Museum B, the curators believe they created a more sustainable and accessible collection. The use of the archives increased to such an extent that a volunteer team was required specifically to deliver the public tours and facilitate the researcher access to the archives. During the re-presentation of the prehistoric galleries at Salisbury Museum, a far greater number of the objects from the Stonehenge Environs Project archive were chosen for display than originally anticipated. The curator believed this was a direct result of significantly rationalising the collection, coupled with improved documentation.

Several of the commercial archaeology led reviews also resulted in smaller collections such as the Gloucester Archive Enhancement project by Cotswold Archaeology, and the archive reviews by Wessex Archaeology for Winchester, Bucks, Salisbury and Museum C. While Wessex Archaeology did not always reduce the collections as the museum had originally anticipated, the knowledge gained through undertaking earlier archive reviews encouraged Wessex Archaeology post-excavation staff to implement stringent recording and disposal practices at Museum C, retaining only 3% of the original CBM collection. As a further by-product of the reviews, Wessex Archaeology have updated and strengthened their in-house selection and retention policies, encouraging specialists to make recommendations for disposal of material based on future research potential, prior to deposition within a museum.

During the course of this study, several museums across England have begun to implement selection and retention policies to be applied to the archaeological archive prior to deposition (Museums A, Gloucestershire, Hertfordshire, Sheffield, Derbyshire). These policies can be a simple request to

require specialist recommendations on disposal or a detailed list of what the museum will or will not accept as part of an archaeological archive. The Selection, Retention and Disposal Guidelines devised by Sussex Museum Group in 2015 were finally issued by one of the county museums, Chichester Museum, in 2018 (Sussex Museum Group, 2015). The guidelines stipulate the aspects of a material assemblage they will and will not accept such as “all body sherds other than ones in unusual fabrics” and “Repetitive assemblages that are already well represented on this and/or adjacent sites” (Sussex Museum Group, 2015 section 2). In this case decisions on selection and retention are to be made based on the requirements as laid out by the museum, rather than on the future research potential of the individual project. While this approach has been criticised by members of the CfA Archives Group and Finds Group (Archaeological Archives Group and Finds Group, 2018), several commercial post excavation officers have publicly supported the approach as an easy and straightforward means to compiling archives that allows costs to be understood from the outset.

In response to the museum rationalisation projects and increased number of detailed archive deposition policies being introduced across England, (discussed in Chapters 3-6) the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists Archaeological Archive Group aimed to produce national guidance on how to approach the selection of an archaeological archive prior to deposition with a repository or museum (Paul, 2018). The project (funded by Historic England) sought to standardise the selection process through development of a Selection Toolkit (Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, 2019b). The Selection Toolkit provides everyone involved in the creation, compilation, deposition and curation of archaeological archives the information they need to implement project-specific selection strategies from the outset of a project, with the aim that the significance and future potential of any archive deposited with a repository has already been demonstrated and documented. Selection is recommended on a project-by-project basis, based on the aims and objectives of the project, local or regional research agendas and the receiving repository’s collecting

policy. The selection Toolkit has been ratified by all the major bodies within the sector (CIfA, SMA, ALGAO, FAME and AAF) and implementation of selection strategies will be required of all CIfA members and Registered Organisations by the end of 2020. Creation and implementation of such a process clearly demonstrates the industry's acknowledgement that the volume of archaeological archives could be reduced. However, the toolkit does not prescribe that every archive should be reduced; it is just as acceptable to retain 100% of the archive, as it is to dispose of 100%, and anywhere in-between.

“The aim of Selection is to ensure that all the elements retained from the Working 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.” (Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, 2014).

Use of the CIfA Selection Toolkit has been requested as part of the updated deposition standards at Museum A, and the most recent version of the Cambridgeshire deposition policy contains a ‘Selection and Retention Policy’ requesting that all material archives are accompanied by supporting documents detailing the reasoning for their retention in line with the toolkit. The Selection Toolkit is also mentioned as a key supporting document within the newly updated Standards and Guidance in the Care of Archaeological Collections (Boyle and Rawden, 2020) as best practice methodology, demonstrating that aspects of the museums sector are engaging with the commercial sector on the issue of selecting from the archaeological record prior to deposition.

7.4.3 Is smaller always better?

Many of the projects and initiatives aimed at reducing the archaeological archive in store are seen as originating from the museum sector rather than with commercial archaeologists. Questions have been raised over the actual cost of these practices both with regards to the loss of knowledge and

future research potential, as well as the monetary cost of undertaking the rationalisation in store, or selection of the archive pre-deposition.

The suggestion that contents of an archaeological archive should or could be selected and rationalised either before or after deposition, has often led to an outcry from some in the non-museum areas of the sector (RESCUE, 2012). During one of the first discussions of museum rationalisation practices at an archaeology conference, speakers were questioned “*why are we bothering to collect and record archaeology if museums were just going to throw it all away?*” (audience comments ‘The Future of Archaeology had been Shelved’ session, ClfA conference 2015). Such responses exemplify the tensions that can exist between the those that create archaeological archives (generally commercial archaeologists) and those responsible for their curation (often museums). This could be linked to the archaeological tradition of ‘keeping everything in perpetuity’ (see Chapter 2) but is often framed in the view that we do not know what the future needs or requirements of the material may be, and therefore nothing should be removed from an archive, ‘just in case’. In response to the introduction of the ClfA Selection Toolkit, one specialist instigated a long discussion on social media by asking “how they managed to find out what analytical tools archaeologists will have at their disposal in 2-300 years' time so we can decide what to throw away?” (British Archaeological Jobs Resource, 2019). Similarly, in response to the Wessex Archaeology led rationalisation of the Stonehenge Environs flint, the academics who led the original project questioned the museum’s right to discard material that had been archived with them (project lead pers. comm).

The 2016 Chartered Institute for Archaeology Archaeological Archives Group (ClfA AAG) annual day conference call for papers resulted in abstracts on ‘Selection, Retention and Rationalisation’ from across the sector. While most of the proposed papers represented post-deposition rationalisation by a museum in a positive light, the proposed paper abstract from RESCUE (the British Archaeological Trust) condemned the removal of material from the stored archaeological record

and called for a halt on all rationalisation and selection processes. The proposed paper was not accepted for the conference as it was thought by the ClfA AAG Committee to be neither a productive nor helpful addition to the conference's line-up (ClfA AAG Committee previous Chair pers. comm.). However, two separate papers presented at the following years conference (Carroll, 2017, Pelling et al., 2017) demonstrated how new scientific techniques were being applied to environmental remains, and in some instances, unprocessed sediment samples. The researchers concluded that the application of modern analytical methods (e.g. isotopes, radiocarbon dating, aDNA, residue analysis) that might not have been anticipated during the original collection of the remains highlights the importance of continuing to collect and store biological material for future use. Not surprisingly, this has not been seen as good news by many museums; anecdotal evidence describes many instances of museums disposing of unprocessed soil samples from their stores, and all recent archaeological archive deposition standards have included a caveat that the museum will not accept unprocessed samples (Paul, 2020, Paul, 2017a, Paul, 2017b).

The impact that new scientific techniques have had on the re-use of archaeological archives can also be seen with other collections such as the articulated animal bone, pollen and cereal grain assemblages from Wroxeter Roman City in Shropshire (Hammon, 2011). When the samples were originally collected, they were too small to be datable given the technology of the period. However, through development of high-precision AMS radiocarbon dating and the application of Bayesian modelling (Hines and Bayliss, 2013 p33-87) the samples that were collected and stored more than 30 years ago can now be analysed, allowing the entire stratigraphic sequence on the Baths Basilica site at Wroxeter to be accurately dated (project in progress – pers. comm. Roger White). Many of the samples in question would not have been accessed since the original archive's deposition in 1990, and therefore considered perfect candidates for rationalisation under many of the projects discussed in this study. Un-rationalised, large bulk assemblages also played a major role in the Town and Country in Roman Essex project where correspondence analysis of finds assemblages looked at

how consumption is influenced by factors such as market economies, cultural identity and site status/function (Perring and Pitts, 2013). The research was undertaken on both published data sets and material contained within the stored archives, though it was noted that where good quality digital data existed, there was no need to access the physical archives.

During the period following the completion of data collection for this study, the concept of rationalisation was increasingly being discussed at museum and archaeology conferences, events and subject specialist network meetings (SMA conference 2016 and 2017, Archaeological Archives Forum 2007 and 2008) as one way forward to help alleviate the archaeological archive storage problem and create storage space. It was identified that, with the exception of papers presented at conferences, no-one had published the results of their efforts and little practical guidance existed for those wishing to carry it out. Therefore, Historic England commissioned five museums to undertake an audit of their holdings, establish appropriate selection criteria and estimate the resources required to deliver rationalisation to its conclusion. The five museums were also asked to calculate the amount of storage space that would be likely to be created and to reflect critically on the whole process (Baxter et al., 2018). The results and recommendations from the five scoping projects have been combined with sector best practice by the SMA to produce wide-ranging guidance relating to: project planning, auditing collections, assessing the significance of collections and disposal of collections. The report concluded that while the audits required by a rationalisation process are seen as very useful because they increase collections knowledge, rationalisation is unlikely to release large amounts of space in store (Baxter et al., 2018). Additionally, all five participating institutions conclusively demonstrated that rationalisation is not a cost-effective way to increase storage capacity. One museum identified 568 boxes during the scoping process, and established that the cost of rationalisation of these boxes would be £259,008, or £456 per box! (Fox et al., 2017 p48-52). This process would only free up 10.125m³ and the museum concluded that selection of the archaeological archive prior to deposition was therefore essential.

The cost of undertaking a selection and rationalisation processes, or not, can affect all sides of the argument. The introduction of per-box deposition fees (see Chapters 4-6) has led to accusations that some commercial units are arbitrarily reducing the size of the archives to lessen, or in some cases totally remove the need to pay museum deposition fees (discussion at Gloucestershire museums workshop 12.10.16). Conversely, some units have suggested that museums may request a greater degree of retention than necessary in order to bolster this revenue stream (discussion at ClfA AAG committee meeting 18.01.17). However, some museums that do wish the size of archaeological archives to be reduced prior to deposition, report resistance from commercial units who say that the selection process is too costly, or that it is the museum's job to choose what they do and don't want in their stores (ClfA Selection Toolkit Workshop, Cambridge 04.07.19). In some instances, this has resulted in a commercial unit simply refusing to undertake selection, stating ethical reasons or a lack of funds to undertake the required work (see Chapter 4). However, when reduction of an archive was requested by Horsham museum based solely on available shelf space, the commercial unit complied without question, supporting the curator's belief that not all of the material from archaeological archives requires retention.

7.4.4 How much do we need?

The industry standard requirement that "all parts of the archaeological record, including the finds" (Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, 2014 p3) are retained within the archaeological archive has been considered by some as a contributing factor to the current museum storage crisis (Swain, 2012, Merriman and Swain, 1999). The majority of the reviews and subsequent changes to deposition policies followed during the course of this study have been born from individual museum's attempts to address the 'storage crisis' themselves (see Chapters 3-6). In general, the review reports and outcomes supported the curator's opinions that archaeological archives take up too much room and that the bulk assemblages contained within them are over-large, either repeating material that appears elsewhere in the collection or masking significance and potential through their volume.

Where rationalisation took place, the curators reported that the collections had become more manageable as a direct result of the reduction in their size: Reducing the archaeological archives from developer-funded excavations not only increased storage capacity at the museums, but also facilitated better understanding and access to the archives moving forward. In some cases, the reduction in volume increased access and knowledge of the archives to such an extent that additional staff were required to facilitate research requests (Museum B), and new galleries and displays were created using the pared down collections (Horsham Museum and Salisbury Museums). Following the reviews, many of the museums instigated new deposition policies that would significantly reduce the quantity of bulk artefactual material entering their stores in the future.

The reviews undertaken by an external commercial archaeology unit also resulted in significant disposals of bulk material, the unit in question updating their own in-house selection and retention policy to better reflect their new knowledge on establishing future potential within large assemblages. Recent studies have demonstrated that the cost of undertaking in-store rationalisation could be considered prohibitive by many and that selection of archaeological archives should be taking place prior to deposition.

During the '21st Century Challenges for Archaeology' workshops in 2017 (by Historic England and the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists), the consensus was that 'we' can't keep everything forever (Wills, 2018 p8). The subsequent creation of the CifA Selection Toolkit in 2019 demonstrates the industry's general acknowledgement that the volume of archaeological archives could be reduced pre-deposition through a selection process. The guidelines stipulate the archive's significance and potential to contribute to future research should be retained if selection is appropriately instigated. However, not all in the sector support the reduction of archaeological archives either pre or post-deposition, stating we cannot know how archaeological archives will be called upon in the future to contribute to research and therefore appropriate selection decisions

are not possible. Some commercial archaeologists consider the introduction of box deposition fees and generalised selection policies as the museum sector either forcing the unethical reduction of archives or profiting from their deposition. These tensions around the retention of archaeological material are compounded by contrasting evidence for and against large-scale assemblage preservation. Some projects have demonstrated the value that can be derived from old stored material including unprocessed samples (Carroll, 2017, Pelling et al., 2017), while others suggest that detailed digital records can act as a replacement for large bulk assemblages (Doherty, 2015, Rainsford et al., 2016). The question of how much we should keep is therefore not straightforward. Though the greater proportion of the sector feel that some reduction needs to take place, whether the reduction should be based on museum collecting policies, engagement opportunities or future research potential depends on who in the sector is making those decisions, where the archives will be stored and who will be curating them in perpetuity.

7.5 A round peg into a square hole?

7.5.1 **Bringing archaeological archives in line with collecting policies**

Many of the museums that undertook a review of their archaeological archives, concluded that not only were changes required in the manner the existing material was stored, catalogued and integrated into the museum, but that in order to make archives 'fit' better, changes needed to be made in the manner archives were accepted into the museum in the first place.

The ranking, assessment and active management of collections is standard working practice at RAMM, but prior to the 2011-2014 review this had never included archaeological archives. Following the Collections Review, a new collections development plan was written for every review group which scored 50% or less; this included all of the archaeology review groups. The action plan detailed the factors that had contributed to the low score, how the collection could be improved moving forward and brought better into alignment with the museum. While the need to rationalise the

material deemed not relevant to RAMM was acknowledged, implementation was difficult and instead the curators focussed on bringing any new acquisitions in line with the museum's new collection policies: Moving forward, RAMM would only collect material that addressed a 'gap' in their collection or knowledge as identified during the review and documented in the collection development policy. The result is that only small quantities of finds or only certain parts of an archaeological archive are taken into RAMM's stores. The curators believe that there is no need to 'endlessly duplicate' material that already exists in the stores, while at the same time identifying where collecting should continue. Having identified the need for 'a different kind of information' to accompany an archaeological archive, archaeological contractors are required to provide a 'Statement of Potential' outlining the "importance, or not, of the site and its finds" (Royal Albert Memorial Museum, 2018a) as well as information to support selection and retention decisions. The aim of the new deposition policy was to continue to collect archaeology in a sustainable manner in line with the new collection development action plans. However, this new policy has been referred to as "*not fit for purpose*" by a local planning archaeologist and "*cherry picking*" by senior members of the Society for Museum Archaeology (SMA) and Historic England (HE). Many of the negative comments are related to the plan to split the archive: The museum stipulates that it will only take in the material that significantly adds to its collection to look after in perpetuity while material considered of 'potential significance' should go to Deepstore under someone else's care. Some in the wider archaeological sector commented that an archive split between three repositories, only actively managed by two, and with no guarantee of the long-term preservation of the material held in the third, can be considered neither stable nor fully accessible.

It had been hoped that the 2013-2014 archives review at Shakespeare Birthplace Trust would provide the museum with the information they needed to bring the archaeology in line with their newly updated Collections Policy (Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, 2011). The questions asked of the archives under the framework of the review rubric were therefore focused on how the museum

would define concepts such as significance, use and research potential. The review report suggested that “over half of the collection is of a common type and has never been used for research and there is little future potential that it will be either” (Tinsley, 2014c p10), that only 7.2% of the archaeological collection was considered to be of significance to the Trust, and approximately 50% of the archaeology collection could be considered for disposal (Tinsley, 2014c p11). The review results therefore bore out the curator’s belief that much of the archaeology had become anomalous to the mission and objectives of the Trust. The curators at Chesterfield Museum felt much the same when a new collecting policy was introduced prompting them to ask how the existing archaeological archives fit into their new policy. The subsequent review highlighted where many of the archives helped to tell the story of the town, supporting the requirements of the new collecting policy and thereby justifying their retention. However, moving forward the curators would be stricter in implementing the policy to not actively collect new archaeological material. The only exception to this would be significant local finds with their associated archives, or items declared Treasure Trove (Chesterfield Borough Council, 2014). In the five years following the review, no new archaeological depositions have been made at Chesterfield Museum as they do not fit the new collecting policy.

Regardless of whether the review was museum-led, or undertaken by an external company or individual, a common outcome has been the introduction of new archive deposition standards aiming to align the archaeological material coming into stores, closer to the museum’s remit. Horsham Museum now only accepts that material considered not repetitive or represented elsewhere in the collections, while bulk archaeological material will only be accessioned following a strict selection process. Epping Forest Museum now requests archaeological archives are only deposited following a strict selection and retention process in consultation with the museum. At Peterborough the updated deposition guidelines include “a policy of object dispersal for material of low research value” (Peterborough Museum and Art Gallery, 2010) which must be discussed and agreed with the museum prior to deposition. Salisbury Museum now expects a rigorous selection

and retention policy to be applied to all archives deposited with the museum, accompanied by detailed spreadsheets that can be fed into the museum's own databases. At Norton Priory, material from the surrounding area will only be collected if it is thought to significantly add to the Norton Priory Story, while finds from the Priory site itself will be assessed as either priority or bulk material and stored accordingly. New deposition policies for Museum A, Gloucestershire and Hertfordshire requires a selection strategy to be implemented at the start of every project agreed in advance with the museum, as well as a statement of significance outlining the archive's potential to contribute to future research, teaching, display and engagement activities.

"If the archive does not support research, display, public engagement and outreach or teaching activities, I don't want it in my store!" (Curator, anonymised Museum).

It was not solely the contents of the archive that the new deposition standards attempted to bring in-line with the museums' policies, but also the manner in which the archive contents were organised. RAMM required that where finds had been sorted into their types for analysis, this organisation should be retained and labelled accordingly, and Wessex Archaeology reported requests for pottery and animal bone to be divided by species and ware types as well as context. These requests to make the archives more immediately accessible for museum purposes fall outside of what is considered traditional archaeological archiving practice, and the extra work required to comply would not be commercially viable. However, Cambridgeshire County Council also introduced new detailed standards on archive compilation based entirely around the ability to retrieve material and boxes from Deepstore. While this has had financial implications for commercial archaeology organisations, Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Team appear to have met less resistance to their new deposition policy.

7.5.2 Whose significance?

Many of the new deposition standards therefore require the selected archive to be accompanied by recommendations on potential future significance. Yet the recommendations for selection and discard very much depend on who is attributing that significance and for what purpose.

No-one involved in the original collection of the archaeological archives remained at Shakespeare Birthplace Trust to advise on significance. Therefore, a reviewer with a lack of archaeological background was chosen with the intention that they would be objective and bring consistency throughout. However, the opinions of the curators did affect the order in which the archives were reviewed and therefore the time given to them, additionally the objects highlighted as having value at the start of the process subsequently received the highest rankings. Where the volunteers were involved with the Dig for Shakespeare archives, their knowledge and enthusiasm also positively influenced the value placed on certain 'review groups'. Following the 2013/2014 review many of the 'review groups' were recommended for disposal based on scoring D (having local significance). Units receiving a D rating or below were perceived to have very little possibility of forming part of the Trust's engagement or teaching output, or little potential for future research use. However, a commercial archaeologist or finds specialist would not suggest that material or an entire archive considered being of local or regional significance would be a candidate for disposal. Conversely, a commercial archaeologist or finds specialist would not rate something as being of local or regional significance based on the site's location alone. The subsequent review by Museums Worcestershire focussed on the significance of the archives at a regional and national level and their importance as some of Trust's founding collections (West Midlands Museum Development, 2016). Following this review, SBT staff said the 'significance' of the archaeological archives was better understood as a research resource and there was less urgency to move forward with the 2013/2014 recommended disposals, but that there was still little chance of them being considered significant within the remit of the Trust's activities.

Several other museums aimed at an objective methodology to review their archaeological archives. The reported aim of the 'non-expert' approach at RAMM was that Phase One of the review, the macro-level assessment, would be objective. The removal of a scoring system and the use of yes/no responses was reportedly to remove the subjectivity in determining significance within the review process. However, many of the questions could not be answered by the non-expert reviewer and these were often left to the collections curator to answer from their own personal knowledge and experience. The curators also felt that the original review methodology missed the collection highlights (as they knew them) and therefore additional information was added to the report for each review group. At Norton Priory, it was not only the curator's personal opinions that shaped what was chosen for inclusion in the 'Priority Collection', but also that of the volunteers who influenced the decisions made around the long-term value of the material to the museum. The curator acknowledged that the process allowed for a certain amount of subjectivity with regard to how decisions were made, but this was not considered an issue as long as its effects were understood.

At Horsham, Chesterfield and Tamworth museums, no formal framework for reviewing the archaeological archives was established. The curators used their own personal opinions and knowledge of the collections to identify archives or specific types of material for potential rationalisation. Decisions around significance were based upon how the archives could update the current archaeology displays, handling collections or teaching resources and the costs of long-term storage. The individual curators acknowledged that the review outcomes were influenced by their own passions and influences but stated that this was how museum collections grow or contract.

It has also been suggested that in some cases knowledge of an archaeological archive's contents and significance can reside in an individual. At museum A, the review was specifically implemented to take advantage of the reviewer's personal knowledge. Often it was only the reviewer's own personal recollection of the sites and the contents of the archive that facilitated the completion of the

[anonymised region] Archaeology collection Significance Survey. The level of detail provided in each review group's Significance Survey very much indicated the reviewer's interest in the subject. While one type of site could receive a great deal of attention and therefore a detailed report, another group of material (one of the museum's main attractions) was described as "overrated"! Where the survey of a group was lacking in detail, incomplete or missing key stratigraphic information, the reviewer still struggled to downgrade the material's significance: for them, all the region's archaeology was significant. This personal connection to the archaeology of the region facilitated a subjective approach to the survey, in a similar way that a curator may have a personal connection or interest in a specific collection. However, the recommended opportunities generally involved archaeological research-led values: the re-examination of the archive data or finds against more recent archaeological findings. The review reports therefore did not provide the type of evidence that would allow the curators to make decisions around display, rationalisation and retention.

For those reviews led by commercial archaeology units, considerations of future research potential, rather than personal opinions led the decisions around significance and disposal. During the Gloucester Archive Enhancement Project, recommendations were made by the Cotswold Archaeology finds officer on the grounds of contextual insecurity or archaeological value. No material with a secure archaeological context was recommended for disposal. The material was therefore not assessed for its significance to the museum, but from a planning and future research perspective. The reviews undertaken by Wessex Archaeology were either based on their own in-house recording and retention policies or a perceived value for future research. While significant disposals were facilitated by Wessex Archaeology, not all the museum's requests for rationalisation were supported by the commercial archaeology unit: It was found that the flint assemblage from one site came from significant, stratified deposits and therefore the proposed rationalisation was rejected. Similarly, the gypsum plaster from Poundbury Cemetery used as dry packing around embalmed bodies was considered highly significant for future research and retained in its entirety.

However, where no ground for retention based on research or provenance could be claimed, significant disposals were undertaken.

7.5.3 Reinterpretation and the telling of stories

Many of the museum curators and staff members interviewed through the course of this study discussed the importance of being able to interpret objects and collections in their care for their own purposes. The re-design and re-interpretation of New Place in Stratford was based on the records contained within Dig for Shakespeare archive which established the story of the property and directly influenced the new garden design. However, the close relationship between the archaeology and the layout of the paths and flowerbeds is not explicitly clear to visitors to the site, who instead are encouraged to “walk in Shakespeare’s footsteps” (Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, 2016a). Therefore, the archives from the Dig for Shakespeare excavations were valuable to the Trust, not as a resource for external researchers or as a source of displayable objects, but as a tool for interpretation and storytelling at one of their properties.

It is not uncommon for archaeological objects to be taken out of their original context and be re-interpreted to support public engagement or outreach by a museum. At M-Shed (Bristol) a Roman tomb stone is displayed in a gallery that presents the story of the multicultural town and at the London Archaeological Archives Resource Centre the ‘Archive Lottery’ project focuses on public engagement through social media (Tincture of Museums, 2014). However, this focus on telling stories and engaging with museum audiences, has led some museums to question the place of material within their stores that does not support these activities. Sussex museum group has stipulated within their revised deposition standards, that once the potential to tell new stories has been exhausted, then disposal of material should be considered (Sussex Museum Group, 2015). Yet, sometimes it is only through the reduction of existing collections that museums can find the space and knowledge to tell new stories: the disposal of material across all collection types at Horsham museum facilitated the creation of six new galleries situated in the old storerooms, one of which

depicts medieval pin making using material found during a local commercial archaeological excavation.

The increase in standardised archiving methods, as well as the growth of born-digital recording has also led to concerns that archaeological archives are losing the link to the human hand that created them, and therefore reducing the stories that museums can tell through them. At M-Shed the curator believes that their visitors are better able to connect with the past through galleries that are “people-focussed and story-led, and respond more empathetically to the lived human experience rather than to boxes of impersonal records and digital data sheets” (Boyle, 2020). Discussions on social media have also highlighted the number of individuals that can be identified through the pencil lines, signatures and initials on section drawings, plans and context sheets and worries that we are de-humanising archaeological archives through our increased reliance on digital recording and archiving. While industry standards focus on ensuring the long-term survival of the archaeological record, it has yet to be understood what stories are being lost through standardisation. It has been suggested the potential to add value to the stories being told through traditional archaeological archiving techniques has not been realised, and that from the museum perspective, an archaeological archive should represent the people that made it (Boyle, 2020).

7.5.4 Disposal or retention? The emotional and financial costs.

For accredited museums, disposal should follow the Museum Association code of ethics (Museums Association, 2015) and Disposal Toolkit (Museums Association, 2014) but this did not prove easy with regard to archaeological archives. At Horsham museum, disposal of the material identified for rationalisation followed the Museums Association Disposal Toolkit guidelines, being offered to other museums in the first instance and then to other institutions and organisations. However, for the large part this did not prove a viable means of disposal and the material was advertised through the local newspaper and eventually put up for auction. There was also no uptake on any of the archaeological material advertised through the Museums Journal by Museum B. While this was not

a surprise to any of Museum B's staff, it did not make the process any easier as they did not like to simply 'throw things away'.

Given the reported storage crises across the sector (Chapter 2), it is unclear how transfer to another museum will ever be a viable methodology for disposal. Knowing this, the curator at Gloucester museum was reluctant to officially accept the material from the closed commercial unit into the museum's collections knowing that once that happened the Museums Association guidelines would become applicable with regard to rationalisation and disposal. Therefore, following the Archive Enhancement project, the recommended disposals were carried out by Cotswold Archaeology (to landfill). Salisbury Museum were not members of the Museums Association and therefore the reduction of 640 boxes to 310, of material from the Stonehenge Environs Project could be undertaken by Wessex Archaeology (to landfill) without use of the Disposal Toolkit. While Winchester museum were members of the Museums Association, disposal of the material de-selected from the archives was carried out by Wessex Archaeology staff into a skip as the museum curator believed that no one would want it. While several museums mentioned the requirements around disposal for accessioned material, not all the museums were certain that the archaeological archives actually were accessioned at all. Several knew the material was in their store, but it did not appear on their databases or records, adding to the confusion of whether the Museums Association methodology was applicable.

"To try and dispose of it officially through the Museums Association, you just wouldn't get any takers." (Curator of Archaeology, Winchester Museum).

Several museum curators also stated that disposal of any material from the museum stores was difficult from an emotional perspective. While the majority of the archives at Shakespeare Birthplace Trust do not meet the aims and objectives of the Trust, no means of disposal could be found that the curators felt comfortable with as the offers to other museums were rejected. The material therefore remains in the museum's stores, something the curators were not entirely

displeased by, expressing a reluctance to any of it leaving the ownership of the Trust. This does suggest that the significance placed on some archives relies simply on the context in which they are stored, that the “archaeological material is not protected because it is valued, but rather it is valued because it is protected” (Carman, 1996 p115). The curators at Chesterfield felt it easier emotionally and ethically to say no to new depositions, rather than reconsider the material when it was already in the storeroom. They felt they were responsible for the material in the museums’ collections, the archaeology archives being no different in that regard.

“We have a duty of care, we have looked after this material for almost 100 years now, it’s not something we are just going to get rid of, we will do the right thing by it.”
(Collections Manager, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust).

In several instances, re-burial as an appropriate form of disposal has been suggested through the course of this study. The material de-selected from the archaeological archives at Epping Forest was incorporated into the backfill of recent excavation trenches at the Waltham Abbey site. The museum curator suggested that the Museums Association methodology was not relevant for this ‘type of material’ and that ‘re-burial’ was not full ‘disposal’. One museum curator suggested that re-burial of archaeological archives *en masse* is not neglecting the archaeology, but rather transforming long-term storage costs into a sustainable option (Knight, 2012). However, where this was attempted at Tamworth museum, the exact location of the re-buried timbers is currently unknown and they are likely covered by a car park. Re-burial of archaeological archives is generally not supported throughout the sector but it has been suggested that many archaeological archives are currently no better than buried in museum basements and the sheds and attics of the original excavators (Swain, 2012). This analogy has been compared to the use of Deepstore by Cambridge County Council, though the ease of access and demonstrable re-use of the material does not support the claim that the archives have been ‘left buried in a salt mine’.

The selection, retention or disposal of archaeological archives can often be influenced by the finances of the project, institution or funding body. While commercial units have suggested that the request for selection to take place prior to deposition would be too costly in terms of specialist fees, the cost of undertaking rationalisation post deposition can be exceptionally high (Fox et al., 2017). Therefore, while some commercial archaeologists suggested that it is the repository's job to decide what they do and do not want to keep, museums struggle to justify the retention of material in their stores they did not actively collect, to the council or unitary authority paying for their upkeep. The long-term costs of curation of all museum collections do not tie in with short-term funding streams that members of the council are subject to. The implantation of box deposition fees by many museums can be interpreted not only as the institutions attempting to cover the long-term curation costs, but also that the planning-led archaeology system has until recently been an untapped revenue stream. The deposition fee at Gloucester museum was considered a source of income for the museum, supporting it to reach the income targets set by the council. The ability to charge for incoming archaeological archives made it easier for the curators to justify their inclusion in the Museums' collections. There was clearly a belief that not all of the archaeological archives RAMM had taken in the past were worth the financial burden they placed on the museum. The museum now charges a box fee for the material selected for deposition at the museum as well as an hourly rate for the consultation process. While RAMM accepts full responsibility in perpetuity for any material accessioned into the collection, it is not clear if other museums that charge a box fee are agreeing that no further rationalisation will take place on that material in the future.

Following the closure of a major commercial archaeology unit (anonymised) in 2013, two of the museums approached regarding the deposition of significant quantities of archives from within their collecting areas initially refused the transfer. The museums stated their stores were full, and they did not have the capacity to accept and curate any further material. However, following a proposal that box fees would be paid (a system neither museum employed in 2014), the museums said they

were willing to accept the archives after all. Although a welcome development, it was not clear that a policy was implemented at the same time for scholars to be able to physically access these archives in the future, nor what their long-term future was. This approach might be characterised as an unwelcome outcome of the ‘age of austerity’ in local government funding. It is, however, also an opportunity for those units nimble enough to offer their services to hard-pressed museums to review their archaeological collections and how to better understand and/or rationalise them.

Many of the projects and decisions around rationalisation and disposal of archaeological archives have been instigated within the museum sector, with many curators believing that they have been forgotten and abandoned by the archaeologists that created them. It is reported that museums are still under pressure from archaeologists to take in material without full consideration of the long-term impact on the museum (Booth et al., 2018) and that their needs are not considered during the creation and deposition of commercial archaeological archives.

7.5.5 Whose responsibility are they?

“It is the responsibility of all curators of archaeological archives to ensure that archives are stored to recognised standards for long-term preservation and made accessible for consultation.” (Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, 2014).

National, European and professional standards on archive creation, compilation and transfer stipulate that it is the archaeological practitioners’ responsibility to ensure a stable, ordered and accessible archive is deposited with a recognised repository and the responsibility of the archive repository to appropriately incorporate archaeological archives into their institution, look after them, and make them available for consultation (see Chapter 2). However, following the archaeological archive reviews monitored in this study, many museums felt that the archives were not, or could not, be appropriately incorporated into their institution in a manner that supported the museum’s activities. The introduction of new deposition policies following both museum-led and externally led reviews, attempt to align the archaeological material coming into stores closer to

each museum's remit. Many museums will now only collect material that adds to the existing collections, address a 'gap' in their knowledge as identified during the review process, or are presented in a manner that makes them immediately accessible. A key consideration for many of the curators was the archive's ability to support the stories being told by the museum, so that material could be presented and interpreted out of its original context. It has been suggested that once the archaeological material's potential to tell new stories has been exhausted, then disposal should be considered. The apparent treatment of archaeological archives as museum collections as opposed to a resource for future research, has led some to question the review's ethical and commercial viability from the planning-led perspective, and accusations of 'cherry picking' from the archaeological record.

These competing visions of what an archaeological archive should be, are often influenced by the individuals implementing the policies or making decisions around selection and disposal. Many of the museum curators acknowledged that the review outcomes were influenced by their own passions and influences, and even where the use of 'non-experts' was intended to bring objectivity to the process, the overall results were subjective in nature. However, the subjective outcomes of many of the museum-led reviews was not considered a problem by the curators as long as it was understood as part of the reality of collections growth and contraction. Curators used their own knowledge of the museum's collections as well as potential future display and public engagement needs, to identify areas of significance and or candidates for rationalisation. For those reviews led by commercial archaeology units, considerations of future research potential, rather than personal opinions, led the decisions around significance and disposal. The choices by regional and material specialists on what was to be de-selected from the archives was therefore from a planning and future research perspective, rather than a museum collection point of view, though the results directly impacted the museum. The influence of individuals over the establishment of significance is exemplified by the results of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust 2013-2014 review where archives

deemed of 'local significance' were considered candidates for rationalisation. Within the commercial archaeology sector, projects deemed of local significance would not be considered for de-selection on this basis alone, however, location alone would also not define 'local significance'. Further variation in retention and accessibility occurs locally, regionally and nationally as some material specialists, commercial archaeologists and curators engage with selection to a greater or lesser extent, while others will not countenance any disposal from the archaeological record.

The competing visions and personality driven responses to the issues around archaeological archives have led to expressions of mistrust within the sector. Some commercial archaeologists raise ethical questions over museum deposition and disposal policies, while curators report they are still under pressure from archaeologists to take in material without full consideration of the long-term impact on the museum and their financial and procedural constraints. Under the Museums Association Disposal guidelines disposal of accessioned material should be offered to other museums in the first instance. However, this did not prove a viable means of disposal for any of the museums followed in this study, the material instead being auctioned, buried or sent to landfill. Re-burial was suggested as an alternative to disposal by some curators, implying archives are currently no better than buried, abandoned by archaeologists in museum basements and sheds.

The emotional and ethical attachment to material already in the museum stores meant that some curators considered it easier to say no to new depositions, therefore potentially excluding new archives compiled to a higher and more accessible standard. Other museums consider the deposition of new archives a source of income for the institution and the practice of implementing box deposition fees is growing across the country. These museums stipulate that the money is required to cover the cost of long-term curation of material that they have not actively sought to collect, that it is not the museum sectors job to take on the burden of archives created through commercial practices without being recompensed. With the exception of Cambridgeshire County Council, there is little evidence that this payment will support researcher access or guarantee that

further rationalisation of the archive would not take place in the future. While the archaeological archives under the responsibility of Cambridgeshire County Council have been accessed and re-used for a multitude of reasons, the £80 box deposition fee only covers storage in Deepstore for twenty-five years. It is not clear within the documentation who will take over the responsibility for fees beyond this point though the assumption is that the council will cover the on-going costs (Cambridgeshire County Council, 2019b p11). Contractor's mistrust and confusion over box fees are compounded by the huge variance in the charges levied by museums across the country, from £17.23 to £300 per box (Vincent, 2019 p11) and a lack of consensus about which elements of care these fees are aiming to cover. However, the Historic England Survey of Fees for the Transfer of Archaeological Archives in England found that when the true costs of long-term curation are considered, no organisation currently covered its storage costs through box fees (Vincent, 2019 p9). Additionally, around 55% of the respondents to the 2016 SMA survey of archaeology in museums did not charge at all for deposition (Booth et al., 2018) and many organisations are reported as hesitant to raise fees to accurately represent their costs in case this proves a deterrent against deposition (Vincent, 2019 p9). It has been demonstrated that the cost of deep storage facilities is lower than both the cost of commercial units retaining the archives in their own stores and many museum deposition fees, leading to concerns that it would be financially beneficial for excavators to use those facilities (Tsang, 2017). While this would not be supported by current best practice and professional guidelines that stipulate deposition within an appropriate repository, non ClfA Registered Organisations are not bound by ClfA Standards and Guidance.

Many individuals, organisations and institutions are involved in the creation, compilation, and curation of archaeological archives and while responsibility at each stage of a project is defined within the professional standards, this is not the reality of the current situation. There still remains a significant disconnect between those creating the archives, and the institutions that curate them in perpetuity (Wills, 2018 p8). The responsibility for the long-term curation of archaeological

archives currently falls to the museums and institutions that hold them, though the manner in which they should accept and curate them has been stipulated by others in the sector, and the financial cost of this arrangement is yet to be balanced. The professional archaeologist's response to museum's attempts to treat archaeological archives as they would other museum collections, has demonstrated that the competing visions of those who create archaeological archives and those who hold them are not in alignment.

“Nothing illustrates better the failure of all the sectors to work together . . . than the long-term curation and care of and access to the primary records and finds created in the course of archaeological interventions.” (Shepherd, 2015 p133).

7.6 What is the purpose of archaeological archives?

“These primary data, together with the physical finds, are the closest we can ever get to the lives of past generations . . . Only when this heritage is preserved in its entirety will it be possible for future generations to use the evidence to create their own narratives.” (Perrin et al., 2014 p10).

The purpose of archaeological archives at first glance appears to be clear; it is defined in national and international standards, taught as a basic requirement of any archaeological project and required by professional bodies as part of best practice policy (see Chapter 2).

“The process of excavation is destructive, and no archaeological interpretations are sustainable unless they can be backed up with the evidence of field record and post excavation analysis. Such records and analysis should be available for re-examination and re-interpretation” (Swain, forward to Brown, 2011).

However, this research has demonstrated that this vision of what archaeological archives should be, is not reconcilable with the current situation surrounding their long-term curation. So, what therefore is the purpose of archaeological archives? The answer depends on who you ask, their role within the process, and the economic, political and professional constraints that impact them. A commercial archaeologist, development control officer, academic researcher, material specialist, museum curator or volunteer will give very different answers that compete with each other, none

of which fully represent the system of archive creation, compilation and curation as it currently exists. At a basic level, the issue can be divided between those who create the archaeological archives as a resource to support future research, and those who curate the archaeological record as a museum collection to be used for display, teaching and outreach. However, this is an oversimplification of the situation as within each area of the sector, opinions and actions vary greatly as does the uptake of standards and guidelines. These competing visions on why we keep archaeological archives, how they are used, how much is needed and whose responsibility they are, often leads to localised initiatives and personality driven responses to perceived problems, fostering mistrust and accusations of unprofessional and unethical working practices from and against all aspects of the sector.

There have therefore been several public calls for the sector to work more closely together to tackle the 'crisis' in a way that supports all who work with archaeological archives (Edwards, 2013, Fernie et al., 2017, Southport Group, 2011, Wills, 2018). The Archaeological Archives Forum (AAF) in theory preforms this role, linking together all major parties with an interest in archaeological archives in order that common policies and practice can be developed and applied (Archaeological Archives Forum, 2017). The forum has overseen the creation of national archiving standards (Brown, 2011) and members have been involved in several of the projects detailed below. However, it has not proved straight forward to bring all levels of the archaeology community together to champion the value of archaeological archives, and recent regional and national projects have highlighted the continued fragmentation of the sector (Nixon, 2017, Wills, 2018). Recommendation 1 of the Archaeological Archives and Museums 2012 report called for "a policy statement on the significance of archaeological archives nationally, and their importance as a key resource in the future" (Edwards, 2013 p9). The policy statement was written soon after the publication of the report and ratified by the Archaeological Archives Forum, Historic England and Arts Council England, but is yet to be acknowledged by ministers at a national level (AAF member pers. comm.). The need for

acknowledgement at a national policy level that archaeological archives contribute to the national heritage, was highlighted again by the Seeing the Light of Day project (Fernie et al., 2017 p3) and the 21st Century Challenges in Archaeology report which called for “an ‘advocacy statement’ or ‘good practice statement’ from ACE/HE on the value of archaeological archives” (Wills, 2018 p6). The continued calls for the sector to work together and for national recognition of the importance and value of archaeological archives, suggests that the divisions of opinions and actions are yet to be reconciled. This thesis has demonstrated where many of those divisions lie and how they can be exacerbated by localised economic, political and institutional pressures.

Back in 2011, the Southport Group envisioned an optimistic future where “archives and archaeological collections are linked through a fully resourced national network of ‘resource centres’, able to draw on expertise to curate, provide access and disseminate as hubs fostering innovation, research and life-long learning” (Nixon, 2017 p2). Significant effort has been put into achieving this goal in recent years. Strategies to ‘solve’ the issue of archaeological archives and realise their purpose within the current planning-led system have been attempted by cross-sector archaeology and museum special interest groups (SEN’s) and professional networks: Cross sector initiatives include the:

- Society for Museum Archaeology (SMA) ‘Museums Collecting Archaeology’ project (Booth et al., 2018) funded by Historic England.
- Historic England (HE) project ‘Gathering Information on Deep Storage Archive Facilities in England (Tsang, 2017).
- South West Museum Development Partnership ‘Seeing the Light of Day’ on creating sustainable public access to archaeological archives in the south-west of England (Fernie et al., 2017) funded by Arts Council England Museum Resilience Fund.
- Society for Museum Archaeology (SMA) Guidance on the Rationalisation of Museum Archaeology Collections (Baxter et al., 2018) funded by Historic England.
- Historic England (HE) ‘Survey for the Fees for the Transfer of Archaeological Archives in England (Vincent, 2019).

- Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers (ALGAO) project looking at the relationship between national planning policy and the creation and management of archaeological archives. (Donnelly-Symes, 2019) funded by Historic England.
- Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA) Toolkit for the Selection of Archaeological Archives (Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, 2019b) funded by Historic England.
- Dig Ventures (DV) project 'Work digital/think archive - A guide to managing digital data generated from archaeological investigations' (Dig Ventures, 2019) funded by Historic England.
- Society for Museum Archaeology (SMA) update to the 'Standards for the Care of Archaeological Collections (Boyle and Rawden, 2020) funded by Arts Council England.

However, these are all quite recent initiatives (many of which have taken place following the data gathering phase of this research) by individuals and special interest groups (SEN's) working together from across the higher levels of the archaeology community. Many of the recommended actions are yet to be taken up by the sector as a whole. It does appear that a disconnect exists between those writing the policies, and those experiencing the practicalities of implementation within development-led archaeology especially those in the field. Therefore, the overall vision of Southport has not yet been achieved (Nixon, 2017 p2). There remains underfunding within the sector to appropriately curate the results of commercial archaeology projects, a lack of access to stored archives, and parts of the country with no receiving repositories resulting in an ever-growing backlog (Nixon, 2017 p10).

As discussed throughout this thesis, there are many complicated and inter-related obstacles for gaining real value from archaeological archives. While a range of organisations and individuals have responsibility for the decisions around archaeological archives at differing points in their creation and curation, it is hard to see where the leadership required to truly effect change will emerge. The projects detailed above indicate bodies such as Historic England and Arts Council England

acknowledge the need for investment and resources, and that many SEN's and professional bodies are putting in a lot of time and effort to address the issues around archaeological archiving. However, the case studies followed in this thesis demonstrate that the elements within current archaeological archiving structure are not well enough aligned to fully support all the proposed best practice guidance and updated policies. It is also the case that some within the process refuse to engage with attempts to improve the current system or acknowledge the position and needs of others within it. The opinions and actions around whether archaeological archives should be treated as museum collections or as a resource for future research are complicated, and while there does appear to be a disconnect between those who produce archives and those who curate them, the division is not clear-cut. The split of responsibility at national level between the creation of archives through the planning process (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government -MHCLG), and the maintenance of the archives within museums (Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport -DCMS) further compounds the issue when attempting to strategically align the sector. To say that the system was broken would be disingenuous, as this would suggest that the current system had once worked, or that it had come about through a purposeful period of creation rather than grown and evolved organically as policy, funding streams and technology changed (see Chapter 2). Therefore, if the competing visions for the purpose of archaeological archives cannot be reconciled under the reality of the current system, the system requires re-organisation to support everyone's version of archaeological archive's creation, compilation and curation.

This thesis has demonstrated that the systems that are put in place are only as effective as the individuals implementing them. Variations in local and regional approaches occur where there is leeway to interpret policies or guidelines in response to localised economic, political or professional pressures. The following recommendations are therefore broad and generic in nature in order to accommodate as many in the sector as possible. They are based on the findings of this research and represent a return to the initial principles of collecting archaeology for the benefit of future

generations, facilitating re-use for research and supporting accessibility for all. A standardised national system for the creation, compilation and curation of archaeological archives that supports the needs of the whole sector, should be implemented and required of all who work within it. While these recommendations primarily apply to archives derived from the planning process, they would be equally applicable to archives created through other means such as research and community archaeology projects.

The differing opinions, wants and needs placed on archaeological archives cannot be reconciled within the system in its current state, and therefore significant reorganisation is recommended.

7.6.1 RECOMMENDATION 1. A National Archaeological Archives Registry linked to detailed archives contents databases.

This research has demonstrated that access and re-use of archaeological archives is greatly increased when information about an archive's location and contents is available digitally, preferably on-line. Many museum curators commented that they were unsure how academics or members of the public would know about the archives in their care, and academics have voiced surprise at the actual location of some archives (senior lecturer, University of Birmingham, pers. comm.). It is therefore proposed that archives need to be more 'findable', and that establishment of a National Archaeological Archives Registry would raise the profile of these un-used collections, promote their access and re-use, and stimulate research. Similar recommendations have been made by the 21st Century Challenges in Archaeology project (Wills, 2018) and the Archaeology Rationalisation and Review for the West Midlands (Kelleher and Paul, 2016). The majority of the data needed to create a National Archaeological Archives Registry is already collected through the OASIS system (an on-line index of archaeological grey literature and project data) and should not be duplicated elsewhere. The current redevelopment of OASIS through the HERALD project (Historic Environment Research Archives, Links and Data) will include increased archives creation, selection and deposition data, and allow 'tracking' of an archive's progress throughout an archaeological

project (ADS, 2016). A National Archaeological Archives Registry should therefore draw from the information within OASIS and be hosted on an existing on-line platform such as the Heritage Gateway or through the Archaeology Data Service (ADS). The National Archaeological Archives Registry should either link directly to or provide details on where users can access the archive's contents database (the archive's metadata).

Detailed archive metadata

It has been demonstrated within this thesis that where detailed metadata about an archive's contents exists, that archive is more accessible and useable by curators, researchers and other interested parties. The large majority of archive reviews followed during this research began with undertaking a detailed inventory of the archive's contents. In some cases, this was simply because the archives were deposited prior to any form of digital recording systems being employed by archaeologists, but in other cases it is because the archive metadata has not been presented in a manner that the museums could access. Several museums report that where an archive does not appear in their systems it essentially does not exist and cannot therefore be used. Additionally, it has been suggested that where an archive appears only as a single accession number in the catalogue, the individual objects and assemblages within it cannot be displayed as there is no mechanism to log when an object is removed for display. The new databases were therefore often more object orientated than standard archaeological archiving best practice calls for, including data such as type, form, species and condition, as well as the potential for display and outreach activities. While commercial archaeologists may stipulate they do not have the knowledge or expertise to fully document an archive to aid in all museum-based activities, the potential for display and to inform future research should be achievable through material specialist's recommendations and discussions with the museum curator. A detailed archive database could additionally record the material that has been de-selected from the archive prior to deposition, allowing future users a full

record of the archive's original contents while supporting the need for meaningful selection to take place (linked to RECOMMENDATION 3).

Standardised databasing requirements should follow those recently instigated by Gloucestershire, Hertfordshire and Birmingham museums, which were in turn based on the Cambridgeshire County Council deep storage systems. The same basic database can be manipulated by each receiving institution, incorporated into their existing cataloguing, or tracking and retrieval systems. The archive metadata needed is the same no matter how it is used and by whom, but compilation does require increased detail and consistency in order to be fully accessible and support future re-use in whatever form that takes (linked to RECOMMENDATION 2). The success of making such data publicly accessible is demonstrated by the re-use within an eighteen-month period of 8% of Cambridge County Council's archaeological archive holdings for research, museum display and community projects.

Academic research on the results of commercially derived projects is rare, anecdotal evidence suggesting many consider the data and materials inaccessible. However, where data is findable and accessible such as grey literature reports through OASIS and the National Slag Collection, research is undertaken (Cooper and Green, 2015). Re-use of easily accessible, consistent and manipulatable data for research purposes has also been demonstrated by the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) where on-line access to the records of archaeological objects found by members of the public has supported 455 projects including 95 PhDs (Lewis, 2016 p31). The PAS does not represent an archive that has physical form, yet the data has supported a higher number of research projects than any museum has reported where the physical material can be accessed. Several museums within this study who undertook databasing exercises as part of their review project claimed that the records they have created would negate the need to actually open boxes or physically access the archive, the database and photographs adequately representing the material. While the PAS records do contain photographs of the objects, therefore facilitating non-physical access, they do not generally

include context information. It is notable that the Rural Roman Essex project did not re-analyse any material where context was unknown (Doherty, 2015), Wessex Archaeology used lack of context to identify material for disposal, and many of the museums in this study considered provenance and context a key factor in establishing significance. Therefore, archaeological archive and object data can be studied, manipulated and re-used in many different ways, and any standardised archives contents database should include all the information that could possibly be required from a broad spectrum of users (Linked to RECOMMENDATION 2).

The creation of a National Archaeological Archive Registry accompanied by detailed databases would increase the research undertaken on the results of commercial archaeological projects, as well as facilitating access for display and engagement activities. Detailed metadata has the potential to reduce the need or desire to access the physical archives, supporting the Deepstore model as a viable solution to the 'storage crisis', therefore reducing the strain on museum resources as well as facilitating movement of archives between stores or users (linked to RECOMMENDATION 4).

7.6.2 RECOMMENDATION 2: National standards on archive compilation and recording.

To support a National Archaeological Archives Registry linked to detailed archives contents databases (RECOMMENDATION 1), standardised systems on archive compilation and recording will be necessary. Standards on archive creation and compilation do already exist (Brown, 2011). However, this thesis has demonstrated that it is the specifics of how materials are stored, how bag and boxes are labelled, and how the 'metadata' (the data about the archive) is presented, that can either support or hinder archive access and re-use. The current variations in museums' deposition requirements sometimes bear little relation to standard archaeological working practices, increasing the time and resources required to compile and transfer archives from planning-led archaeology. Post deposition, archive data is often entered into the museum system by staff who are rarely archaeologists or material specialists, broadening the potential for inaccuracy.

While some museums may be against the idea, a standardised system of archive compilation and transfer would be welcomed by commercial archaeologists and streamline curation and accessibility for the majority of curators and researchers wishing to re-use the material. National standards could be followed by units in areas where no repository exists or where a museum has temporarily closed its doors to new acquisitions, expediting their eventual transfer to permanent storage (linked to RECOMMENDATION 4). A single methodology of archive compilation would facilitate access to anyone wishing to work with an archive regardless of its location, and ease the issues around dealing with archives when a commercial unit goes out of business. Standardisation of archiving procedures has also been called for by the Archaeological Archives and Museums report (Edwards, 2013 p9), the Seeing the Light of Day project (Ferne et al., 2017 p10) and the Archaeology Rationalisation and Review for the West Midlands project (Kelleher and Paul, 2016), though little, if any progress has been made due to the fragmentation of the sector and variation in existing museum standards.

Archive standards on compilation and recording should include the order in which archives are sorted and organised, the terminology used for finds and sub-types, how significant finds are identified in the archive, and standardisation of archive contents recording i.e. the archive's metadata or archive contents database (linked to RECOMMENDATION 1). In order to truly facilitate access by all areas of the sector and members of the public, the archive contents database will necessarily be very detailed and should function as both the overall contents list and the individual box lists that accompany the physical archive to the repository. The database should also detail the material and documentary archive components that have not been selected for inclusion in the archive (linked to RECOMMENDATION 3). A copy of the database should be provided to the curating institution and deposited with the Archaeology Data Service (ADS) for public accessibility. A proposed database layout is detailed below, though this would be subject to change following further research into user requirements (see Next Steps section at the end of this thesis). National standards on archive compilation and recording should take into account the upcoming Chartered

Institute for Archaeology Finds Group guidelines on Finds reporting (forthcoming), the Dig ventures guidelines on digital archiving (Dig Ventures, 2019) and other relevant period and material specific guidelines.

The archives contents database

The archive contents database should function as an overall contents list for the archive. A printout of the relevant columns should be included in the first box of the documentary archive or material archive as necessary, and a copy should accompany the deposited digital archive. Individual lines or groups of lines of the spreadsheet can also be printed and included as box contents lists in the material archive boxes. The archives contents spreadsheet details not only the documentary (including digital) and material archive selected for long-term retention, but also the material not selected for inclusion in the archive.

Each 'object' within the archive requires its own row on the spreadsheet. An 'object' is a registered find, an individual context in a box of bulk material, individual human remains or a specific element of the documentary archive such as context sheets, specialist report or the grey literature report.

For example:

- Each registered find should have its own line on the spreadsheet.
- A bulk box of pottery containing seven contexts will require a minimum of seven lines on the spreadsheet. Contexts containing pottery of more than one period should be split by period.
- A bulk finds box containing material from three contexts, but in a number of material types, will require a line for each material type within each context. The same will apply to document cases containing mixed record types.
- If an individual skeleton (or large context of bulk material) is divided over two boxes, two lines on the spreadsheet will be required as the box number will differ. The same will apply if, for example, context records are split between several document cases.

(after Cambridgeshire County Council, 2019b, Paul, 2017a, Paul, 2017b, Paul, 2019).

7.6.3 RECOMMENDATION 3. Confidence in ‘our’ ability to select for the future.

“Archaeologists have the skills, experience and responsibility to assist our society in constructing one or more pasts that are appropriate for all of us.” (Holtorf, 2001).

It has been accepted by the sector that we can’t keep everything for ever (Brown, 2015) and the creation of the ClfA Selection Toolkit (Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, 2019b) demonstrates the industry’s general acknowledgement that the volume of archaeological archives could be reduced pre-deposition through a selection process. Instigation of project specific selection processes will become a requirement of membership of the ClfA Registered Organisation Scheme by the end of 2020, the guidelines stipulating that an archive’s significance and potential to contribute to future research will be retained if selection is appropriately instigated (Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, 2019b). However, selection of the archaeological record for long-term curation is still a new concept to many in the industry, with questions raised over its appropriate application and long-term effects. The organic growth of archaeological archiving practices, based on the belief that we must keep everything ‘just in case’, has resulted in a ‘risk adverse’ approach to selection by many archaeological practitioners (Wills, 2018 p11). In general, professional archaeologists and material specialists lack confidence in stating what should be retained in an archive, where significance lies, and how to establish potential to support future research. However, rationalisation and disposal from archaeological archives is taking place, often outside of any commercial sector influence, which some have suggested is to the archaeological record’s detriment.

“if we don’t make choices, others will do it for us since not everything can be retained”
(Wills, 2018 p11).

The archaeological archive reviews followed in this study have demonstrated that reducing the size and/or number of archaeological archives, increases use both by the curating institution and external researchers. Simply put, small archives take up less room on museum shelves, are more sustainable and are easier to access. However, rationalisation of the archaeological record once it

has reached the repository is costly, and disposal decisions can centre around the museum's expectations of re-use rather than potential future research requirements. Therefore, the archaeologists undertaking the projects and the specialists analysing the material need to take control prior to deposition and have the confidence in their own knowledge and experience to decide what should be retained for long-term curation. The ClfA Selection Toolkit stipulates that selection should take place on a project-by project basis and "aim to ensure that all the elements retained for inclusion in the archive are appropriate to establish the significance of the project and support future research, outreach, engagement, display and learning activities" (Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, 2019b). This best practice policy therefore supports the needs of both future researchers and the museum or repository. The policy is relevant for archives to be deposited in a museum, resource centre or deep storage facility (Linked to RECOMMENDATION 4). The decision-making process around material and documentary components not selected for inclusion in the archive should be recorded within the archive and detailed in the Archive Contents Database so as future users can fully understand the composition of the stored resource (Link to RECOMMENDATIONS 1 and 2).

7.5.4 RECOMMENDATION 4. Develop a National Archaeological Archive Resource as an alternative to museum-based curation.

The responsibility for the long-term curation of archaeological archives currently falls to the museums and institutions that hold them, though the manner in which they should accept and curate them has been stipulated by others in the sector. Despite many cross-sector initiatives in recent years (see above), there remains a significant disconnect between those creating archives, and the institutions that curate them in perpetuity. The museum-led reviews of archaeological archives have led some to question the ethical and commercial viability of museum storage from the planning-led perspective, and accusations of 'cherry picking' from the archaeological record. Conversely, curators report they are still under pressure from archaeologists to take in material

without full consideration of the long-term impact on the museum and their financial and procedural constraints. Additionally, professional museum guidelines on disposal from collections are not considered viable with regard to commercially derived archaeological archives. An archaeological archive is therefore not the same thing as a museum collection, however archaeological archives can be used to build or support museum collections.

This thesis has demonstrated that the competing visions of those who create archaeological archives and those who hold them, and the standards and guidelines imposed at either end of the process, are not in alignment. The 'storage crisis' will never be solved while the main means of curation of commercially funded archaeological archives is within our local and regional museums; The 'pipeline' of developer-funded archaeology will continue to produce new archives, and therefore an alternative to museum storage needs to be considered.

There is therefore a demonstrated need for new repositories for archaeological archives at a regional or national scale in order to remove the burden of commercially derived archives from the museums who feel unable to appropriately curate them. This thesis has suggested that unless substantial additional funding were provided specifically for the development and administration of regional stores administered nationally, organisation at a regional level would prove difficult. As the variations in complex overarching political, economic and financial pressures and cross local-authority funding arrangements halted the development of county stores in both Gloucestershire and Hertfordshire, it is hard to see how scaling the issue up to also include all the county councils within one region would reduce those stresses.

This thesis therefore recommends that that storage of archaeological archives should be at a national level, either in one location, or through central organisation of satellite stores. The physical storage environment should meet the SMA definition of a publicly accessible repository as fair, inclusive, equitable, flexible and responsive (Society for Museum Archaeologists, 2019). The ideal

situation would be a large, publicly accessible resource centre, staffed by qualified curators and professional archaeologists that supported access to the archaeological resource for any purpose such as research, exhibition, learning and general interest as defined by the Archaeological Archives Forum (Archaeological Archives Forum, 2010). However, the use of Deepstore for the long-term storage of archaeological archives from developer-funded projects by Cambridgeshire County Council has demonstrated that the location of the archives is immaterial if the systems are in place to access and retrieve that material when necessary (linked to RECOMMENDATIONS 1 and 2). While some have suggested that archives should be stored locally or regionally, this research suggests that public interest is best served when the archives are located where they will be best understood, valued and made accessible. Additionally, many museums now have out of town stores, some at a significant distance from the main site, and the experience at Cambridgeshire County Council suggests that location does not have to be a barrier to use.

The call for a national or regional solution to the 'storage crisis' is not new, though the continued and repeated requests suggest that we are still far from a solution being found. The Southport Group called for the development of resource centres in 2011 (Southport Group, 2011 p33), the Archaeological Archives and Museums report recommended development of a national strategy for the storage and curation of archaeological archives (Edwards, 2013 p9) and the 21st Century Challenges in Archaeology reported the consensus that new repositories for archaeological archives were needed at a national or regional scale (Wills, 2018 p10). It is not hard to understand therefore where some of the museums frustrations and opinions around 'abandoned archives' expressed in this thesis originate as little progress has been made in this area. The financial cost of the existing arrangement has yet to be balanced, and while many museums have attempted to address the imbalance through the introduction of box fees, no organisation currently covers its storage costs in this manner (Vincent, 2019 p9).

This thesis has not attempted to establish accurate costings for archaeological archive storage in the long term, nor the form that storage should take, and therefore this recommendation does not set out to define the specifics of financing and administering a National Archaeological Archive Resource Centre. It does however recommend that any National Archaeological Archive Resource Centre should be directly linked to a National Archaeological Archives Registry (RECOMMENDATION 1), that all archaeological archives should be compiled to national standards linked to detailed archives contents databases (RECOMMENDATION 2), and that all archaeological archives should be selected prior to deposition to ensure that only that material appropriate for inclusion in the archive is retained in perpetuity (RECOMMENDATION 3). Such a scenario would provide access to the archaeological record for all users, supporting research projects, museum exhibitions, outreach and community engagement initiatives, and general enquiries by members of the public; a true resource retained for the benefit of future generations. Encouragingly, research has already begun on Recommendation 4 as in March 2020 Arts Council England and Historic England commissioned a feasibility study for national (or regional) archive stores or resource centres, the final report to include a business case, which should be completed by December 2020. This project has the potential to quantify the financial and organisational requirements of establishing and administering a National Archaeological Archive Resource Centre (Arts Council England, 2020, Workstream 1: Paul, 2020).

The creation of a National Archaeological Archive Resource Centre may well remove the emotional and ethical burden on curators to look after material that is rarely accessed or used within the museum, and neutralise some of the mistrust between commercial archaeologists and museum curators around box fees, selection criteria and financial incentives to deposit, not deposit, or how much to deposit. However, this may well not suit everyone as issues over possessiveness and ownership of the more significant objects and archives, and the loss of an important revenue stream for some museums, may mean they would be unwilling to move to a national system of curation.

This research has demonstrated that many museums do not want to lose control of their archaeological collections, and for some, involvement in the planning process supports local authority funding of the museum and its staff. Where museum provision for archaeological archive storage is considered to be adequately resourced and accessible, this could be retained alongside a national solution. Therefore, it could be that uptake of RECOMMENDATIONS 1, 2 and 3 would support and link national and museum-based storage, though RECOMMENDATION 4 would be the ideal scenario.

It is interesting to consider if the crisis in archaeological archiving would have come about and Recommendation 4 be required at all, had we listened to Flinders Petrie over a century ago:

“A square mile of land, within an hour’s journey from London, should be secured; and built over with uniform plain brickwork and cement galleries, at the rate of 20,000 square feet a year, so providing 8 miles of galleries 50 feet wide in a century, with room yet for several centuries of expansion at the same rate” (Petrie, 1904 p133-134),

8 CONCLUSIONS

From a professional or academic perspective, the purpose of archaeological archives seems to be clearly understood and defined. National and international standards on archive creation, compilation and deposition exist, supported and upheld by professional standards and guidance. Retention of the primary records and evidence for past occupation and activity is taught as a basic building block of archaeology within universities. The standards state that archives should be compiled in a manner that allows all parts to work together as one interrogatable whole, and that the archive repository should appropriately incorporate archaeological archives into their institution, look after them, and make them available for consultation as a researchable resource. Yet a museum 'storage crisis' has led several museums to question their role in the archaeological archiving process, reviewing their stored archaeology collections to establish their significance and place within the museum.

The implementation and results of these reviews can inform on how archaeological archives are valued within the museum profession, and their place within the collection as a whole. This in turn could provide insight on the creation of the archive and the value judgements points which could be applied prior to deposition, with the aim of establishing the purpose of archaeological archiving in England. To achieve this aim, this research has taken a holistic approach to the analysis of seventeen case studies, each one representing a museum or collecting institution review of their stored archaeological archives. While the review strategies varied between institutions, the manner in which many of the museums approached their reviews suggested that they did not generally consider archaeological archives as one interrogatable whole, but as a series of individual objects or assemblages to be separated before meaning and significance could be attributed. Conversely, where archives were considered in their entirety by external reviewers, significance was often discussed in terms of future research potential, implying the industry accepted standard on what an

archaeological archive is and why we keep them, does not meet the reality of how they are perceived in store.

The majority of the museums in this study reported a lack of use of the archaeological archives in their care, by either themselves or external researchers. Increased pressures from funding bodies and councils on curatorial resources and storage space drove many of the reviewers to question the use, or lack thereof, of these stored collections. In attempting to re-define the archives in order to increase use within museums, potential was framed in terms of display, handling, teaching or outreach activities rather than solely as a research resource. Under the museum-led reviews, registered finds and individual displayable objects were broadly considered to have more potential for use than assemblages of bulk material.

While the museums generally found it easier to establish the significance of registered finds and displayable objects, the potential that bulk assemblages could be used for research purposes was acknowledged, and the majority of the museums suggested they would welcome external academics into their stores. However, this often only came about through active promotion by the curators advertising potential projects or directly approaching local academics. External requests to access stored archives was not common, and many curators believed existing re-use by researchers did not justify retention for that purpose.

The major barrier to use of archaeological archives by the museum, development-led archaeologists and researchers, was reported as the lack of accessible data about the archive's contents and standardisation of artefactual datasets and reporting. In all cases where basic inventories of archaeological archives contents were created as part of the review and uploaded into the museum's systems, the curators reported an internal increase in accessibility and use. However, it is where detailed databases are made publicly accessible that archaeological archives have been accessed by external users from across the sector. This is exemplified by the re-use of the archives

held at Deepstore by Cambridgeshire County Council; A staggering 8% of their entire holdings were accessed within one 18-month period by museum curators for displays, the public for community projects, and academic researchers for large-scale research projects.

In general, the review reports and outcomes supported the curator's opinions that archaeological archives take up too much room and that the bulk assemblages contained within them are over-large, either repeating material that appears elsewhere in the collection or masking significance and potential through their volume. In-line with the Museums Association code of ethics, material considered of no further use to the museum, was recommended for disposal in order to increase the public benefit derived from the material being retained. Reducing the archaeological archives from developer-funded excavations not only increased storage capacity at the museums, but also facilitated better understanding and access to the archives moving forward. Of the reviews undertaken by external bodies to the museum, all but one also resulted in significant disposals from the collections. Disposal was not always an easy process however, some curators stating that emotionally and ethically it was easier to say no to new depositions than part with material they already held.

Following the reviews, many of the museums instigated new deposition policies that would significantly reduce the quantity of bulk artefactual material entering their stores in the future. They now only collect material that adds to the existing collections, address a 'gap' in their knowledge as identified during the review process, or are presented in a manner that makes them immediately accessible. The creation of the ClfA Selection Toolkit in 2019 demonstrates the industry's general acknowledgement that the volume of archaeological archives could be reduced pre-deposition through a selection process. However, whether this reduction should be based on museum collecting policies, engagement opportunities or future research potential depends on who in the sector is making those decisions, where the archives will be stored and who will be curating them in perpetuity.

The opinions and actions around whether archaeological archives should be treated as museum collections or as a resource for future research are complicated. At a basic level, the issue can be divided between those who create the archaeological archives as a resource to support future research, and those who curate the archaeological record as a museum collection to be used for display, teaching and outreach. However, this is an oversimplification of the situation as within each area of the sector, opinions and actions vary greatly as does the uptake of standards and guidelines or acknowledgement of the position and needs of others. Recent regional and national projects have highlighted the continued fragmentation of the sector, and this thesis has demonstrated that the systems that are put in place are only as effective as the individuals implementing them. Variations in local and regional approaches occur where there is leeway to interpret policies or guidelines in response to localised economic, political, or professional pressures. Many of the reviews were intended to be objective in nature yet were influenced by an individual's passions and professional experiences.

The competing visions and personality driven responses to the issues around archaeological archives have led to expressions of mistrust within the sector. Questions have been raised over the ethical and commercial viability from the planning-led perspective of museum deposition and disposal policies, alongside accusations of 'cherry picking' from the archaeological record, while curators report they are still under pressure from archaeologists to take in material without full consideration of the long-term impact on the museum and the financial and procedural constraints they work within.

This thesis has demonstrated that the competing visions of those who create archaeological archives and those who hold them, and the standards and guidelines imposed at either end of the process, are not in alignment. Therefore, if the competing visions for the purpose of archaeological archives cannot be reconciled under the reality of the current system, the system requires re-organisation. A standardised national system for the creation, compilation and curation of archaeological archives

that supports the needs of the whole sector, should be implemented and required of all who work within it. The 'storage crisis' will never be solved while the main means of curation of development-led archaeological archives is within our local and regional museums and evidence implies that the location is immaterial if the systems are in place to access and retrieve that material when necessary. By reducing the main barrier to access, namely the manner archaeological archives are recorded and presented, accessibility would increase for all and widen the scope by which archives could be re-used. To this end, a series of four recommendations are made for the creation of a National Archaeological Archive Resource:

1. A National Archaeological Archives Registry linked to detailed archives contents databases.
2. National standards on archive compilation and recording.
3. Confidence in 'our' ability to select for the future.
4. Creation of a National Archaeological Archive Resource Centre as an alternative to museum-based curation.

8.1.1 Impact

Through this research, I have impacted in a significant and lasting way on the professional archaeology, museum and heritage sector. I have established my specialist knowledge in the field of archaeological archiving as an independent consultant, been commissioned to undertake policy and standards development projects as well as provided guidance and advice to a variety of subject specialist networks and national policy initiatives. Relevant commissions, projects and committee memberships include:

- Member of the ClfA Archaeological Archives Group Committee 2013-2019, elected Chair 2017-2019.
- In 2016 commissioned to undertake a review of archaeological archive provision within the West Midlands, funded by the West Midlands Museum development Programme (Kelleher and Paul, 2016)
- Asked to represent ClfA at the National Archaeological Archives Forum 2016-present.
- In 2016 commissioned to develop countywide deposition standards for six museums in Gloucestershire, funded by the South West Museum Development Programme (Paul, 2017a).
- In 2017 commissioned to develop countywide deposition standards for nineteen museums in Hertfordshire, funded by the Hertfordshire Association of Museums (Paul, 2017b).
- Asked to be part of the working group for the Museum of London Archaeological Archive Rationalisation Project 2017, as part of the Society for Museum Archaeology Rationalisation Review assessment funded by Historic England (Museum of London, 2017).
- Managed a working group at the 2017 NEARCHING FACTORY: Archaeology, Spatial Planning and Economic Development (Paul and Howard, 2017).
- Developed, managed and delivered the ClfA Selection Toolkit for Archaeological Archives project, funded by Historic England (Paul, 2018, Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, 2019b).
- Contributed content to the updated Society for Museum Archaeology Standards and Guidance in the Care of Archaeological Collections, funded by Arts Council England (Boyle and Rawden, 2020).

- Project Investigator for the 2020 Options for Sustainable Archaeological Archives in England project, funded by Arts Council England and Historic England (Workstream 1: Paul, 2020 Workstreams 3, 5 & 6 forthcoming).

8.1.2 Next Steps and further research

This research has demonstrated that archaeological archives could be used for a variety of purposes within the museum environment, yet little evidence exists on other end-users. How would the potential researchers, community groups or general members of the public prefer to access stored archaeological archives, and what form might that use take? Evidence implies that the existing barriers to access have effectively stopped the majority of researcher access, yet if those barriers were removed would use increase and how could this be facilitated? What changes to archaeological data collection and archiving practices would improve accessibility and expedite new research and understanding of our archaeological heritage?

The identification of archaeological archive ‘end users’, and the potential access requirements that would be required to support that use is an area that would benefit from survey and could include looking at public knowledge of, and attitudes to archives. Building on the findings of this thesis, potential directions for further research include:

- Academic viewpoints on the types of information required to instigate and facilitate research.
- Specialists access and data requirements.
- Would changes to recording practices enable less physical retention of artefacts while supporting potential future needs?
- How could existing archaeological archives be used to inform selection and retention strategies.
- How much of the physical past do we need to keep to support future research needs? Would reduction in duplication of sites or assemblage types aid or hinder research?
- Could selection and retention of archaeological archives be based on ‘big research questions’?

9 APPENDIX 1. Shakespeare Birthplace Trust Examples

9.1.1 Example - Alveston Manor archive review results

Table 9.1 (duplicate of Table 5) provides a small snapshot of the results from the review of a large early medieval cemetery archive from Alveston Manor excavated in the 1930s and 1970s. This snapshot of the results illustrates how colour coding the ratings has enabled the spreadsheet to act as a visual tool to those who wish to identify significance or areas of engagement within the collection. In the case of the Alveston Manor results, there is rather a lot of orange and red in the columns that establish the value of the archive to Shakespeare Birthplace Trust (Table 9.1). The general rating of D for significance (being of regional or local significance- see Table 4) was achieved on the basis of the excavation's location alone without considering concepts such as uniqueness, representativeness, or comparability with other archives locally, regionally or nationally. The 'review units' receiving D for significance included human remains, a cinerary urn, un-stratified material, grave goods and the pottery type series. On the one hand the idea that the archive as a whole has a significance regardless of its component parts does conform to the accepted definitions of what an archaeological archive represents (Brown, 2011, Perrin et al., 2014). However, current ideas on selection and retention do suggest that component parts of an archaeological archive can be considered for their significance on an individual basis alongside their place within the archive as a whole (Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, 2019b).

Across the whole Alveston Manor archive (96 'review units') only a single 'review unit' received a rating of A under one of the first three headings, none received a rating of B and the only materials that rate C for significance, public engagement potential and supports learning are complete pots and registered finds (for example jewellery, beads, knives and other personal objects). Bulk pottery and human remains only ever received ratings of D or E.

Object Name	Brief Description	No. of objects	Significance	Public Engagement Potential	Supports Learning	Enquiry/Research Use	Ownership	Condition Assessment
Cinerary urn	<i>Early Medieval</i> cinerary urn, fragments. Thick, undecorated fragments.	2	D	D/E	D/E	D/E	A	C
Cinerary urn	<i>Early medieval</i> cinerary urn. Complete, undecorated, grey ware urn. Has been glued and repaired post excavation. Also, 1 bag containing charcoal and another bag containing iron fragments.	1	D	C	C	D	A	B
Human Remains	2 bags of human remains.	2	D	E	E	A/B	C	C
Pottery	Pottery sherds forming a fabric type series. Various sherds of Roman, <i>early medieval</i> and medieval (unspecified) pottery, some burnt sherds. Also, a small number of sherds originate from the AM (Smith & Unit) 1971 excavations.	18 bags	D	D	D	D	C	A
Human Remains	Human remains. Some fragments of the skull and smaller fragments of bone. Perhaps part of an arm bone. Teeth and part of mandible still with teeth.	13 bags	D	E	D	A/B	C	C
Human Remains	Human remains. Some fragments of the skull and smaller fragments of bone. Some larger bones, perhaps part of the arm or leg. Teeth and parts of mandible still with teeth.	11 bags	D	E	D	A/B	C	C
Pottery, Cinerary Urns, Human Remains	Pottery sherds from graves 23 & 94. Possibly from cinerary urns. Undecorated.	1	D	D/E	D/E	D/E	C	A
Pottery, Cinerary Urns, Human Remains	1 small complete pot. Undecorated. Grave 37	1	D	C	C	D	C	B
Pottery, Cinerary Urns, Human Remains	1 large cinerary urn, undecorated, containing human remains. Grave 29.	2	D	C	C	A/B	C	C
Brooch	Copper alloy, square headed brooch with gold-gilt decoration to the front and silver plated on the reverse. Six garnets remain of the eleven that would have originally decorated the brooch. In the centre there is a carnelian from a Roman seal ring depicting cupid milking a goat (AM 5).	1	D	A	A	A	A	B

Table 9.1. Snapshot from the Archaeological Review Spreadsheet, Alveston Manor 1930 (Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, 2014). 'Review unit', accession number, notes, location and reviewer data not included. Duplicate of Table 5.

Alveston Manor is a well-documented and published cemetery site (Ford, 1996, Edmonson et al., 2016a, Webster and Cherry, 1972) and the Trust does receive enquires about the human remains

and cremations in their stores. It therefore appears that enough research visits were remembered for them to be rated A/B for research potential under the framework of the review:

“I know some of the research has been about the cremations we have.”

(Collections Manager Shakespeare Birthplace Trust).

“There have been occasional enquiries, more often concerning Bidford-on-Avon and Alveston Manor.” (Tinsley, 2014c).

The early medieval gold gilt brooch which received an A for ‘public engagement potential and display, supports learning, and research/enquiry use’, was in fact one of the star items mentioned to me during the initial interviews. Despite this star status, it still only received a D for significance under the framework of the review rubric (Table 4), therefore one rating below the material considered of significance to the Trust.

I visited the Alveston Manor archive during my tour of the stores in early 2014 and my personal impression was that this was a well organised archive: human remains were stored individually and labelled by grave number and all the other materials were well labelled, also by grave number. In contrast to some of the other archives we encountered that day it appeared to all present that any staff at the Trust, an archaeologist, a researcher or even a non-archaeologist would find accessing this archive pretty straight forward. Therefore in the case of the Alveston Manor material, it is not that Shakespeare Birthplace Trust does not understand what the archive contains or how to access it; but under the framework of the review the large majority of the material was considered to be of little significance or no future use to the Trust.

9.1.2 Example - Tiddington review results

Table 9.2 (duplicate of Table 6) provides a typical snapshot of the results of the Tiddington archive review (an unpublished Roman settlement excavation). The material in general is thought to be of wider local or regional significance (rated D) but not of significance to Shakespeare Birthplace Trust which would have received a rating of C in the first of the colour coded columns. The D/E ratings in

colour coded columns 2 to 4 imply the large majority of the material from the Tiddington excavations “is not known to have been used in a learning capacity” and is considered to have “no future value in learning”, has “never been used for research” and is considered to have “no potential to do so” in the future (see Table 4). The ‘review units’ scoring E for public engagement potential and supports learning would fall under the ‘BULK’ material category i.e. animal bone and pottery sherds. However, six of the 197 ‘review units’ did receive a rating of C for public engagement potential and supports learning due to their inclusion in new teaching and handling collections (discussed in section 3.6.1). As a result of the low ratings the majority of the material achieved, the Tiddington archive was highlighted by the review as being an ideal candidate for rationalisation:

“It is clear that there are areas of the archaeological collection which would benefit from rationalisation. This is certainly the case for the bulk finds from the Tiddington excavations.” (Tinsley, 2014c).

Object Name	Brief Description	No. of objects	Significance	Public Engagement Potential	Supports Learning	Enquiry/Research Use	Ownership	Condition Assessment
Animal Bone	Animal bones, bone fragments and teeth.	15 bags	D	E	E	E	C	A
Animal Bone	Animal bones, bone fragments and teeth.	9 bags	D	E	E	E	C	A
Animal Bone	Animal bones, bone fragments and teeth.	7 bags	D	E	E	E	C	A
Pottery	Mixed pottery sherds, various fabrics and types.	3 bags	D	E	E	E	C	A
Pottery	Mixed pottery sherds, various fabrics and types including a few sherds of medieval glazed wares and post medieval pottery sherds.	4 bags	D	E	E	E	C	A
Pottery	Mixed pottery sherds, various fabrics and types including a large number of loose greyware sherds.	100+	D	E	E	E	C	A
Pottery	Mixed pottery sherds, various fabrics and types.	4 bags	D	E	E	E	C	A
Human Remains	Human skeletal remains including fragments of skull.	5	D	D/E	D	D	C	B
Human Remains	Human skeletal remains including skull.	2	D	D/E	D	D	C	B
Human Remains	Human skeletal remains including arm and leg bones.	4	D	D/E	D	D	C	B

Table 9.2. Snapshot from the Archaeological Review Spreadsheet, Tiddington (Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, 2014). ‘Review unit’, accession number, notes, location and reviewer data not included. Duplicate of Table 6.

Unlike the ‘review units’ made up of bags of animal bone and pottery, some of the human remains did receive a rating of D under supports learning and enquiry/research use implying they had “little potential for current use but could do so in the future” (see Table 4).

The two columns where yellow and green are most prevalent are under ownership and condition assessment. This archive has not been accessioned into the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust collections but they have clear documentation of ownership and the material in the archive as a whole is in great condition.

9.1.3 Example - New Place (Dig for Shakespeare) review results

Table 9.3 (duplicate of Table 7) provides a typical snapshot of the New Place archive review. New Place was the location of the Dig for Shakespeare Excavations; a seven year archaeological investigation into Shakespeare’s family home in Stratford (Edmonson et al., 2016b).

Object Name	Brief Description	No. of objects	Significance	Public Engagement Potential	Supports Learning	Enquiry/Research Use	Ownership	Condition Assessment
Animal bones	Fragments of animal bones and teeth. Variety of sizes, some evidence of butcher’s marks. Also jaw bones and antler.	14 bags	C	E	D	E	A	B
Animal bones	Fragments/pieces of bone, variety of sizes. Tooth and part of an antler(s)?	20 bags	C	E	E	E	A	B
Animal bones	Fragments/pieces of bone, variety of sizes. Teeth and part of an antler(s)?	12 bags	C	E	E	E	A	B
Animal Bones	Horse Skull	1 bag	D	C	D	D	A	C
Pipes	Clay pipes. Mixture of bowls, stems and spurs.	19 bags	C	D/E	D/E	D	A	B
Pottery	Pottery sherds, mainly post medieval glazed sherds including a number of black glazed wares and blue and white transfer wares.	4 bags	C	D/E	D/E	E	A	A
Pottery & Plaster	Pottery sherds, mainly post medieval glazed sherds, some unglazed sherds. 1 fragment of white plaster. 8 sherds of Tudor green glazed pottery.	27 bags	C	D/E	D	E	A	A
Pottery, Brick & Plaster	Pottery sherds, mainly post medieval glazed sherds with some earlier unglazed sherds.	26 bags	C	D/E	D/E	E	A	A

Table 9.3. Snapshot from the Archaeological Review Spreadsheet, New Place (Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, 2014). ‘Review unit’, accession number, notes, location and reviewer data not included. Duplicate of Table 7.

Straight away the colour coding applied to the Archaeology Review Spreadsheet identifies that this archive is considered significant to Shakespeare Birthplace Trust. Of the 74 'review units', all but three were rated as C for significance due to the "direct connection to a historical event, person, family, place or theme of site significance to Shakespeare Birthplace Trust" (Tinsley, 2014c). Despite the reported significance of the archive to Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, as a whole the material was still thought to have little to no potential for public engagement, to support learning or for research use. Strangely one of the three 'review units' considered not to be significant to Shakespeare Birthplace Trust (a horse skull), did receive a C rating for public engagement potential where all the other 'review units' considered of greater significance were rated D or below. As this excavation took place on one of the properties owned by the Trust, the ownership column is entirely green informing the collection staff that this material can be used by Shakespeare Birthplace Trust with no concerns over who has title.

9.1.4 Example - TGC81 (Exploratory Trench from 1925) review results

Table 9.4 (duplicate of Table 8) details the entire archaeological review results from an exploratory trench excavated in 1925 (site code TGC81).

The archive is rated as having regional or local significance but is thought to have no potential for public engagement, teaching or learning activities or be of use to researchers. Under the framework of the review rubric this archive is considered locally or regionally significant, however the review report suggested that "All the review units from TGC81 and TK83 could be considered for disposal" (Tinsley, 2014c p11). This highlights the variation between how value and significance is attributed across the sector. A commercial archaeologist or finds specialist would not suggest that material or an entire archive considered being of local or regional significance would be a candidate for disposal. However, a commercial archaeologist or finds specialist would not rate something as being of local or regional significance based on the site's location alone.

Object Name	Brief Description	No. of objects	Significance	Public Engagement Potential	Supports Learning	Enquiry/Research Use	Ownership	Condition Assessment
Pottery	Large pieces of pottery, all from fabric 6. Some large rim pieces and large body sherds.	18 bags	D	E	E	E	C	B
Daub/Burnt Clay & Tile	3 bags of tile fragments and 6 bags containing daub/burnt clay fragments.	9 bags	D	E	E	E	C	B
Tile	Various pieces and fragments of tile.	7 bags	D	E	E	E	C	A/B
Tile, Slag, Plaster, Mortar, Iron Nails.	1 stone roof tile, plaster and a few pieces of yellow painted plaster. 1 large bag of plaster/mortar. 6 iron nails, with corrosion. 2 pieces of slag.	12 bags	D	E	D/E	D/E	C	B
Quern Stone, Glass	6 fragments of quern stone, 4 fragments of glass.	8 bags	D	E	D/E	D/E	C	A/B
Pottery	Box containing a large number of pottery sherds, predominately grey ware but there are various fabrics represented.	27 bags	D	E	E	E	C	B
Animal Bone	Animal bones, many fragments as well as teeth and claws. No obvious signs of butchery.	10 bags	D	E	E	E	C	A
Animal Bone	Animal bones, bone fragments and teeth from cattle, sheep/goat, horse and dog.	12 bags	D	E	E	E	C	A
Animal Bone	Animal bones and bone fragments.	18 bags	D	E	E	E	C	A

Table 9.4. Archaeological Review Spreadsheet, TGC81 (Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, 2014). 'Review unit', accession number, notes, location and reviewer data not included. Duplicate of Table 8.

10 APPENDIX 2. The 2012 and 2016 reviews at Shakespeare Birthplace Trust

10.1.1 The 'bigger picture'

Given the unexpected use of some of the archaeological materials, as well as the reluctance to implement their own review recommendations around rationalisation, the Trust decided to obtain an external view on the archaeological archives. The archaeological archives were re-reviewed by experts from Museums Worcestershire as part of the West Midlands Museum Development Expert Eye programme in 2016. The Expert Eye programme aims to “support museums with collections which are potentially at risk; identifying objects, improving the knowledge of staff and volunteers, adding to documentation records and developing new ways to interpret and engage audiences” (West Midlands Museum Development, 2017). Given the level of recommended disposals, the archaeology collection at Shakespeare Birthplace Trust could be considered by some, to potentially be at risk.

The 2016 review was undertaken by the Curator of Archaeology and Natural History and the Museum Registrar and Interpretation Assistant at Museums Worcestershire, each having background knowledge of archaeological archives and collections in museums. During the six-day review, samples of individual archives including both the material and the paper portions of the archive were assessed on a site-by-site basis. The findings from the Expert Eye review were presented at a 'sharing day' at Shakespeare Birthplace Trust attended by staff, volunteers and some external parties. The presentation discussed the archaeological collections held by Shakespeare Birthplace Trust in a different way to the 2013/2014 review, focussing on the significance of the archives on a regional and national level, as well as their importance as some of Trust's founding collections (West Midlands Museum Development, 2016).

The cemetery sites of Bidford and Alveston Manor were presented in light of their importance to early medieval studies in the region and how the need to re-evaluate such sites is detailed in the regional research framework (Watt, 2011). The large quantity of bulk material and registered finds from the Roman site of Tiddington were considered to be in excellent condition but the reviewers did question why the archive was separated across various stores. The “surprising amount of documentation including reports and photograph albums” was highlighted as unusual for archives dating to the 1920s and 1930s, therefore increasing these three archives’ significance regionally and nationally (Crawford, 2003).

The finds and records from the Dig for Shakespeare excavations at New Place were discussed in light of the nine phases of occupation revealed at the site. The report contrasted the 2000 year archaeological story of a site in the middle of Stratford, against the relatively small amount of archaeological material that could be attributed to the time of Shakespeare (West Midlands Museum Development, 2016). The Expert Eye review also drew out the information on some of the oldest archaeological archives held by Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, and highlighted how sites such as Meon Hill (excavated in 1904-1906) actually formed some of the founding collections of the museum and therefore had specific significance to the history of the Trust. The 2016 review thought that while some rationalisation may still be appropriate, it was recommended that the Trust look again at the question of significance in the 2013/2014 review and as a result the proposed disposals.

“They showed us how good a lot of it was and they said don’t get rid of it, which is not necessarily what we wanted to hear but we don’t want to do anything irresponsible.”
(Collections Assistant, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust).

The findings of the Expert Eye review seemed almost surprising to Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, suggesting therefore that neither the 2013-2014 or earlier 2012 review (discussed below) had given the staff the information they needed to fully understand what the archaeology collection contained, or why it was significant.

“We did a sharing day and invited staff and volunteers to that and shared what we had found out, what the collection was really.”

“They gave us a clearer understanding of all the context around archaeology, and the thinking and ideology behind archaeology so now we have a better grounding in that.”

“They explained what we had in the context of the regional area but also nationally.”

“Since doing the project I think we have a better understanding of what constitutes an archaeology archive and what’s valuable and what’s valuable to researchers.”

(Collections Assistant, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust).

10.1.2 Museum collection or archaeological archive?

The earlier review of the stored archaeological collections in 2012 followed the professional standards (Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, 2014) approach to documenting the Trust’s archaeology collections, recording the archive’s location, basic contents and details of the site, as well as cross referencing to documentation, reports or published material where necessary (Mitchell, 2012). Additionally, the report briefly detailed the significance of some individual site archives on a local and regional archaeological level (Mitchell, 2012 p7-8). The 2012 review made repeated reference to a report on the archaeological collections held at Shakespeare Birthplace Trust by Peter Gardner in 2000 (in house report) that contained similar details on the location and contents of the archives. Basic information about archive contents and relevance to regional agendas therefore, had been included in both the 2000 and 2012 reports. This is at odds with the comments regarding the staff’s lack of knowledge of the archaeological collections in 2013, potentially due to the non-museum orientated focus of those earlier reports and subsequent staff turnover.

In 2012, Mitchell noted how the “archive had remained relatively static” since the 2000 report was completed, with no attempts at digitisation, re-interpretation and dissemination of the archaeological collections (Mitchell, 2012 p5). Similarly, there has been very little movement in these areas following the 2013/2014 review where the online catalogue appears unchanged. This is

despite digitisation and photographing of the archaeological collections to allow easier researcher access being one of the recommendations in the 2012 review.

The original aims and objectives of the 2012 review and basis on which Shakespeare Birthplace Trust commissioned the project are not detailed in the report. However, Mitchell (who has background in commercial and academic archaeology) states that “the purpose of this report is to review the entirety of the archaeological collections with a view to ultimately creating an updated recording, storage, acquisition and disposals policy” (Mitchell, 2012 p3). Unsurprisingly, the 2012 review suggested that the Trust’s current collections policy was not entirely appropriate with regard to archaeological material, and recommended a new policy be devised:

“A review of the Trust’s Acquisition and Disposals Policy, plus associated collections policies should be undertaken. Not all archaeological material offered to Shakespeare Birthplace Trust for acquisition should be disregarded.” (Mitchell, 2012 p44)

While some of the 2012 recommendations have been followed through (i.e. removal of archives from damp basements), the Acquisitions and Disposals policy 2008-2012 (Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, 2008) and the 2011 amendment (Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, 2011) remain unchanged and the archaeology collections have been reviewed a further two times.

Both the 2012 and 2016 reviews therefore recommended a re-think regarding Shakespeare Birthplace Trust’s Acquisition and Disposals Policy in relation to their archaeological collections, and as a result the proposed disposals. During interviews with Shakespeare Birthplace Trust staff following the 2016 ‘sharing day’, it appeared that there was less urgency to move forward with the 2013/2014 recommended disposals as the importance of these collections as archaeological archives was now better understood.

“After speaking to (Worcestershire curator) we have less of a desire to rationalise in a big way, they were very clear that it’s all quite valuable.”

“So now we are reluctant to do a big rationalisation project which was suggested by that earlier review, or if we did, it would very much have to go to another museum that would use it in the right way.”

“There was more of an appreciation of what is there, which may increase the possessiveness of the collection.”

(Collections Staff, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust).

However there was still a strong belief that the findings of the detailed 2013/2014 review were relevant to Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, giving the impression that the collections staff felt ambivalent about the situation; on the one hand attempting to meet the objectives of the Trust, and on the other, ‘doing right’ by the archaeology.

“The information (2013-2014 review) is still important, I think what we need to do is balance that approach, if its fully relevant to the collecting policy, but also its general relevance as well.”

“We would be reluctant to say ‘right, we are going to let it go’ and not keep it any more. With other things we have been quite proactive with disposals and rationalisation, that’s something I am quite proud of, but in this area (archaeology) we would be more cautious.”

(Collections Staff, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust).

Additionally, there remained a desire to dispose of some of the archives that had been rated as E under significance through transfer to another museum. However, due to storage issues across the sector (see Chapter 2), and the feeling that archaeology just does not work the same way as other museum collections, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust staff believed they had no option but to retain the material for the foreseeable future.

“It would need to go to another museum and the problem is so many other museums don’t have the space. For example, much of what we have got would fit better at Warwick, but I think those conversations have been had before and they don’t have any appetite to take it, so it’s better that we keep it.”

“We donated some items (furniture) to other museums through the find an object Museum Association process, and then we sold some stuff at auction but that just doesn’t seem a route for archaeology.”

(Collections Staff, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust).

11 APPENDIX 3. Royal Albert Memorial Museum Review Strategy and Implementation

11.1 Strategy

11.1.1 Reviewing 1 million objects needs a 'new' review methodology!

The Royal Albert Memorial Museum's (RAMM) Acquisition and Disposal policy expired during the museum's closure for re-development in 2010, and therefore the review was undertaken during a period where no collections development policy was active. The review would consequently require a methodology that allowed complete assessment of the collections without reference to existing collections development mechanisms. RAMM staff wanted their review to consider what the museum collects and why, with the production of a new Acquisitions and Disposals policy being an eventual outcome of the process. The methodology would also need to cover a variety of angles as it was intended that the review would cover the museum's entire collection of around one million objects.

"Some of the heavyweight methodologies of reviews advocate going from box to box but that would have taken another ten years . . . and that was not acceptable." (Senior Collection Manager, RAMM).

In order to establish the best methodology for the review, existing collections review models in the UK and internationally were assessed in terms of their practical transferability to an organisation of RAMM's size, and their suitability to address the museum's current needs (Gulliver and Khreisheh, 2012). These included the University College of London Collections Review (Dunn and Das, 2011), the British Postal Museum and Archive Collections Review (unpublished), Manchester City Council Collections Rationalisation (Manchester City Council, 2009), Glasgow museums survey of significance (unpublished), National Maritime Museum Collections Reform Programme (Royal Museum Greenwich, 2004), Renaissance North West Collections Reviews (Renaissance North West,

2008), Reviewing Significance framework (Reed, 2012), The Collections Council of Australia reports (Roslyn and Winkworth, 2009, Heritage Collections Council, 2001), and Renaissance East Midlands Pilot Collections Review Projects (unpublished).

A large number of the frameworks examined were considered unsuitable to meet RAMM: the UCL review dealt with a teaching and research collection with no outreach component; the British Postal Museum assessed the objects against their current collecting policy; Glasgow museum intended to improve the knowledge of non-specialist curatorial staff; Manchester Museum identified a small group of objects for disposal and appointed specialist curatorial staff to carry this out; and the National Maritime Museum review involved primarily two-dimensional material only. Additionally, with the exception of the National Maritime Museum project, all the other reviews were focussed on one small section of the organisation's collections, for example Italian objects, the costume collection or ceramics collections. None of the reviews existing at the time of RAMM'S scoping project involved the assessment of an entire museum's collection, or archaeological collections or archaeological archives derived from commercial archaeology activities (Gulliver and Khreisheh, 2012).

The review model that came closest to meeting RAMM requirements was 'Reviewing Significance' (Reed, 2012), the framework commissioned by Renaissance East Midlands in 2010 and derived from 'Significance 2.0' (Roslyn and Winkworth, 2009) and the UCL Review rubric (Dunn and Das, 2011). Under this model, collections are examined from a range of different angles including the rarity and uniqueness of objects, their sensory and visual impact, the potential and meaning for specific groups or communities, as well as the exploitability of objects for income generation, product development, audience development and inspiration (Dunn and Das, 2011).

In light of the lack of an active collecting policy, the curators considered Reviewing Significance the most appropriate model for the review. It was felt that the "360 degree assessment of objects is

closely aligned to the redevelopment of RAMM's new role as a resource for conversation, learning, debate, social interaction and imagination" (Gulliver and Khreisheh, 2012 p9). However, the scoping process also suggested that the proposal to review RAMM's entire holdings of around one million objects was "unprecedented in its scale" (Gulliver and Khreisheh, 2012 p1). One of the reviews looked at during the scoping process assessed 400,000 objects in eighteen months, with three people deployed to the task, whereas the RAMM review proposed that the equivalent of one fulltime member of staff would assess one million objects in nine months. Therefore, the 'Reviewing Significance' framework would need to be substantially pared down and the timescale for the review would need to be a consideration in order to create a realistic methodology.

11.1.2 A Two-Phase review

The Collections Review was launched in June 2011 with the following objectives:

- To carry out a review of RAMM's collections in order to establish a robust and sustainable Acquisitions Disposals policy 2012-2017.
- To establish a body of knowledge about the collections and a set of priorities that can be used as the basis for shaping future programmes of work.
- To advise on collections management policy with a view to maximising public access and engagement (Gulliver and Khreisheh, 2012 p6).

The review was undertaken in two phases: Phase One consisted of a preliminary Collections assessment and Phase Two, an in-depth assessment of selected areas chosen and informed by the results of the Phase One assessment.

Following the scoping project assessing existing collection review models for their adaptability to meet RAMM needs, and appraisal of the time constraints, it was decided that the preliminary assessment would not involve reviewing physical objects. Phase One therefore would be limited to an assessment of the documentation associated with the various collections. RAMM reported this was "in order to capture a preliminary assessment of the total collection, rather than attempt detailed investigation of all materials in all collections" (Gulliver and Khreisheh, 2012 p1). In reality

this meant that the Phase One review of the archaeology archives held by RAMM was based solely around the documentation the museum held on the archaeological archives within the 'collections archive', rather than the contents of the archives themselves. For the purpose of the review, the 'collections archive' was defined as the Collections Database together with immediately accessible information limited to a small number of corporate documents such as 'History and Description of Collections' (internal document - not accessed) and Exeter City Council Publications such as Exeter Fine Art (Exeter City Council, 2000).

11.1.3 Review groups

There are seven categories of collections held by the museum: Antiquities (which contains the archaeology collections), Decorative Art, Fine Art, Ethnography, Natural History and Miscellaneous. Each of these categories is sub-divided into collection classes; the Antiquities category divisions are Devon Archaeology, Exeter Archaeology, British Archaeology, Foreign Archaeology, Numismatics, Architectural Fragments, Social and Industrial History and Publications.

For the purpose of the review, each of the collection classes was divided up into 'review groups'. The review groups were based on information contained within the collections database where large groups of records could be retrieved and sorted in a variety of ways. Due to the recently completed backlog elimination project, the majority of objects in RAMM collections had an entry on the collections database. However, some parts of the collection were recorded as 'global records'. A 'global record' could represent a small group of objects or paperwork or, as with the Antiquities collection (the collection encompassing archaeology), it could represent several hundreds or thousands of objects. The majority of the global records were within the Exeter Archaeology and Devon Archaeology collection classes which largely consisted of archaeological archives. Of the 1,171 global records representing archaeological archives, nearly all the objects and paperwork relating to an individual archaeological project were represented by one 'global record'. The largest global record on the RAMM collections database at the time of the review was for the excavation at

Goldsmith Street and represented 73,696 objects (Gulliver and Khreisheh, 2012). The details about these archives and the individual objects within other global records were held within the ‘notes’ field in the database with no means of sub-dividing by material type, record type, or individual find type. Consequently, methods of grouping the antiquities collections were limited as one ‘global record’ could hold data on a large variety of time periods, records or material types. This resulted in a very different methodology than seen in other archaeology archive reviews (Chapters 3, 5 and 6) for the creation of review groups.

Archaeological archives and archaeologically derived material fell under two categories on the RAMM database: Exeter Archaeology and Devon Archaeology. Through the agreement of the curators, the Exeter Archaeology and Devon Archaeology collections were each sub-divided into four sub-collections or ‘review groups’.

Exeter Archaeology Review Groups	Number of database records in group	Devon Archaeology Review Groups	Number of database records in group
Exeter Archaeology: pre-1945	1218	Devon Archaeology: pre-1945	5854
Exeter Archaeology: 1945-1969	459	Devon Archaeology: 1945-1969	3106
Exeter Archaeology: 1970-1989	5406	Devon Archaeology: 1970-1989	8759
Exeter Archaeology: 1990-2012	1076	Devon Archaeology: 1990-2012	16341

Table 12. Royal Albert Memorial Museum collections review: Archaeology review groups.

The review groups were based on the period in which they came into the museum and the type of collecting that was taking place at this time (see Table 11). The groups were considered to roughly equate to the periods of collecting in archaeology as expressed in the museum’s collections; the pre-1945 group represented antiquarian collecting; the 1945-1969 group characterised the collections of early archaeologists, with a few exceptions thought largely to be “*enthusiastic amateurs*” (Assistant Curator, RAMM); the 1970-1989 group was largely the result of rescue archaeological excavations; and the 1990-2012 represented developer-funded archaeological projects undertaken by commercial archaeology companies after the introduction of Planning Policy Guidance 16 (see

Chapter 2). The review groups were used during both Phase One and Phase Two of the RAMM collections review.

It was acknowledged that it would have been desirable to sub-divide these groups by material type, but it was simply not possible during Phase One of the review due to the large numbers of global records that the archaeological archives contained.

“Those review collections were so big they would have been done as one large chunk, so they were split into the period the fieldwork was done in. I am not sure we split them into manageable chunks” (Collection Curator, RAMM).

Each of the review groups within the Devon Archaeology and Exeter Archaeology collections contained anything from 459 to 16,341 database records (see above). Of those database records, 1171 represented global records, each of which may contain several thousand individual objects.

11.2 Implementation

11.2.1 Phase One: A ‘macro-level assessment by a non-expert’

Phase One of the collection review was reported as a “broad-based, macro-level review that would enable us to quantify RAMM’s diverse holdings and make a preliminary assessment of significance, usage and potential” (Gulliver and Khreisheh, 2012 s4, p1). Phase One of the review was to be undertaken not by the collection curators, but by ‘non-expert’ external reviewers, or *“independent reviewers”* (Assistant Curator, RAMM). Phase One of the review had been completed prior to the time of the curator interviews, and therefore the ‘independent reviewers’ were not available for interview.

The reported aim of the ‘non-expert’ approach was that Phase One of the review, the macro-level assessment, would be objective: “Crucially, Phase One of the review would be undertaken from the perspective of a non-expert, almost as if a member of the public” (Gulliver and Khreisheh, 2012 s4, p1). The decisions made by the ‘independent reviewers’ would form the basis of the Phase One

'macro' assessment results, and therefore influence the requirement for a more in-depth assessment during Phase Two.

During Phase One, a sample of fifty records was assessed from each review group. The choice to review only fifty sample records per review group was reportedly due to reasons of timescale and budget:

"We always realised that what we were doing was a snapshot, taking little tasters if you like." (Collections Manager, RAMM).

The fifty 'sample records' were selected at random by the 'independent reviewers' at regular intervals throughout the Collections Database, and only those selected records were assessed against the review criteria. As Phase One was from the 'stance of a non-expert, or member of the public', the choice of the fifty sample records was thought to increase the objective nature of the review, and the results would represent the entire review group.

11.2.2 Assessing significance and Phase One criteria

Although the Phase One assessment methodology for the collections review was based on the Reviewing Significance Assessment Grid from Renaissance East Midlands (Reed, 2012), the curators did not feel the criteria or scoring system were quite right for the RAMM review. The changes to the proposed methodology were made in-house, with the collection's curators deciding upon the final criteria against which each review group were to be assessed and scored. As a condition survey of the collection store had been carried out in 2005, it was deemed unnecessary to look in detail at the storage and condition of the objects during the 2011-2012 review.

The RAMM Phase One collations review criteria were:

- Provenance and history
- Representativeness
- Sensory, symbolic and evocative impact

- Usage/potential usage (for research, audience development, learning, business, tourism, product development etc.).

A set of generic questions were also developed to assess each review group against these criteria. The questions were based on each of the overarching review criteria, but rather than assigning a score under a criteria heading as suggested by 'Reviewing Significance 2.0', (Reed, 2012), a series of questions asked for a yes/no response. The removal of a scoring system and the use of yes/no responses was reportedly to remove the subjectivity in determining significance within the review process. For example, under the 'Provenance and History' category questions 1 and 2 asked:

1. Does the review group sample contain any material whose provenance or history demonstrates a direct connection to a historical event, person, family, place, group, activity (social, cultural, domestic, spiritual, religious, work) or theme of national/international significance? Y/N
2. If 'Yes', does this material represent 50% of the review group sample? Y/N

The reported aim of the second question which asked whether a 'yes' answer applied to 50% or more of the review group sample, was to establish which review groups were "strong throughout and those which had just a small handful of significant objects" (Gulliver and Khreisheh, 2012 s4, p2). Questions 3 and 4 followed the same theme as questions 1 and 2 but asked if the material had significance to Devon or the South West, while questions 5 and 6 asked if review group sample had particular relevance to a specific community or group.

Under all criteria bar 'Provenance and History', follow up questions also asked for evidence to support 'yes' responses. This was a free text box in the assessment grid "to ensure that it was not possible to state that an object was 'significant' without explaining the reason" (Gulliver and Khreisheh, 2012 s4, p2). For example, under 'Representativeness and best examples of object type', questions 1 through 3 asked:

1. Does the review group sample include material that is the best example of its type, in the UK or Internationally? Y/N

2. If 'yes', does this material constitute more than 50% of the review group sample?
Y/N
3. If 'yes' to 1, what particular characteristics of this material make it the best example of its type, in the UK or internationally?

Questions 4 through 6 follow the same format but ask if the review group sample includes material that is the best example of its type in Devon or South West England, while questions 7 through 9 are concerned if the review group sample includes material that is the best example of its type to represent a particular community or group in Devon or South West England.

The final three generic questions regarded the potential disposal or transfer of the review group:

1. Does the review group sample contain material that you think could be transferred or ethically disposed of? Y/N
2. If 'yes', does this material constitute more than 50% of the review group? Y/N
3. What particular characteristics, or absence of characteristics, make this material suitable for consideration for transfer or ethical disposal?

The report also refers to a series of collection specific questions (not provided for this research), developed in order to draw out the significance and potential of each individual collection and ensure no collections category was disadvantaged by a standard set of questions (Gulliver and Khreisheh, 2012 s4, p5).

11.2.3 Scoring

Phase One of the RAMM review was scored. The RAMM curators decided against a rating system whereby a question asked for a rating on a scale (i.e. 1 to 5) and instead opted for a scoring system of '1' for yes and '0' for no. Only those questions requiring a Y/N answer were scored, the answers requiring a descriptive content or examples to support 'yes' answers were not scored. This binary scoring differs from several of the other museum reviews that RAMM consulted during the scoping process and is a departure from the 'Reviewing Significance 2.0' (Reed, 2012) framework on which the review was based. The curators discussed this in the light of 'removing the subjectivity' from the

review. They believed that curators naturally consider their collections significant and therefore would always score them highly given the option.

“In other reviews they get the curators to look at their own collections and give them a score of 1-5, so surprise surprise, they score their collections highly. So, what we did with our review we constructed a yes or no answer so that eliminated that subjectivity of what determines significance.” (Collections Curator, RAMM).

However, it was clearly felt the binary scoring system may miss or fail to identify certain aspects of the collection that the curators thought important; the collection-specific questions were double pointed as “a way to record collection’s strengths” (Gulliver and Khreisheh, 2012 s4, p6).

11.2.4 Introducing subjectivity

While Phase One was intended to be fully subjective, as if ‘a member of the public’ was considering the collections, several issues arose that resulted in a greater curatorial involvement than was originally intended. A number of the questions were almost impossible for the ‘independent reviewer’ to answer: the questions around ‘Representativeness and Best Example Type’ almost always recorded an answer of ‘U’ for Unknown, and the questions around potential disposals or transfers within the review group, could rarely be answered by the primary, ‘non-expert’ reviewer (Gulliver and Khreisheh, 2012). These questions were often left to the collections curator to answer from their own personal knowledge and experience, indicating that this information was not available through the ‘collections archive’. The methodology was further altered to allow the curators to comment on each of the review groups from their collections.

“I am sure things have been missed, but once we decided on sampling method you have to stick to it. But we did give the curators the chance at the end to comment.” (Collections Manger, RAMM).

There appeared to be a concern that not only were the fifty random sample records not adequately representative of the review group as a whole, but that the ‘independent reviewers’ were unable to draw out what the curators considered to be the collection’s strengths and highlights. This was

confirmed when the preliminary questionnaires were passed to the relevant curator for their comments. The reviewers were unable to comment on potential 'collection highlights' if they fell outside of the fifty sample records. This was due to not only the implemented Phase One methodology, but also the 'independent reviewers' lack of collections knowledge. The curators were concerned that the Phase One review was failing to record an "accurate picture of the collection" if the collection highlights fell outside the sample take for each group (Gulliver and Khreisheh, 2012 s5, p2). A 'curators score' was therefore added to each of the review groups scores. The 'curators score' was a score given for the review group by the relevant curator for the whole review group, including those objects and archives which fell outside of the sample of fifty.

The intended subjective nature of the Phase One Review had therefore been altered, not only by the need for individual curator's comments on each review group, but also the final score that each group received would have been affected by the involvement of the curators answering some of the questions and the addition of the 'curators score' to each group. The curators did not seem worried about this alteration to original Phase One review goals; the inclusion of personal knowledge and individual preferences was expressed as almost inevitable.

"So even through the review, individuals still have an impact on the results." (Senior Collections Manger, RAMM)

"How things have ended up in the museum in the past is highly selective" (Collections Assistant, RAMM).

11.2.5 Phase One Results determine inclusion in Phase Two

Once the Phase One review was completed and the review groups reports commented on by the curators, league tables were produced for each review group using the scores achieved by the fifty sample records plus the additional curator's score. The 'low scoring' review groups (those with an overall score of 50% or lower) would go on to the Phase Two of the RAMM Collections Review. The score from the fifty sample records represented the whole review group regardless of if the sample constituted 5% or 50% of the entire review group. It appeared the issue of using small samples to

create league tables of whole collections was identified as a concern at the time of the review, and that there was a worry that the results and rankings may be misinterpreted outside of the museum:

“That is why we do not give out results of that survey because we understand that some of the scores are based on a good sample, others a few records taken from thousands. So we understood that the records would be patchy.”

“The Archaeological Archives had massive caveats against the league tables produced.”
(Collections Manager, RAMM).

“We wouldn’t want these internal scores to be misinterpreted outside of the museum.”
(Collections Manager, RAMM).

Consequently, access to neither the review group results nor league tables from Phase One of the review was provided as part of this research. Accordingly, details of the scores given to each of the archaeology groups during Phase One of the review and their place in the league tables cannot be discussed as part of this research. However, it is possible to conclude from the Phase Two documentation that each of the archaeology groups received a score of below 50% and was therefore considered to be ‘low scoring’.

It was recorded at the end of Phase One that the RAMM curators did not consider a ‘low scoring’ group to have a lower value than higher scoring groups. The scores and league tables were seen as a vehicle to extract the potential from a collection and focus attention where it was needed. It was also acknowledged that the attention given to these groups during Phase Two may identify material that deserves no further expenditure of staff time or resources.

“A low scoring group could indeed reflect an uninspiring, repetitive or poorly provenanced sub-collection. But it could also indicate that a group of material is not fulfilling its true potential.”

“Ultimately, decisions must be made about which, if any, of the low-scoring sub-collections should have staff and resource invested in them.”

(Gulliver and Khreishah, 2012 p4).

11.2.6 Phase Two: The methodology does not work for archaeology!

Phase Two of the review was proposed as an “in depth assessment of selected areas, chosen after and informed by Phase One” (Gulliver and Khreishah, 2012 s4, p1). The Phase Two assessment was implemented only for those review groups which score 50% or below during Phase One and formed the basis for a new collection development plan. The individual Collections Development plans were proposed as a means of improving the score for that group during future reviews.

“Collections Development Plans need to set out the actions necessary for each Collections Review Group scoring less than 50% or lower in 2011-12 to score more next time around.” (Royal Albert Memorial Museum, 2012 p7).

The Phase Two review of the ‘low scoring’ review groups within the Antiquities category was carried out by the then Curator of Antiquities. Right from the start of Phase Two, the Curator of Antiquities encountered problems following the review methodology as it had originally been outlined, specifically due to the nature of the archaeology collections. The curator believed that it was not possible to assess the significance of the archaeology collections from looking at the fifty sample records and therefore chose to ‘look’ at everything within each review group.

“So, the independent reviewers had taken a tiny section of each group and gone through on a record by record based on what was on the database and immediately I found that wasn’t going to work at all for these sorts of collections.” (Assistant Curator, RAMM).

Where the original review methodology had called for a few individual records to be assessed and scored, the archaeology review groups were not approached in this manner during Phase Two. The curator described how they did not believe significance could be assessed through the database records, or by looking at individual projects or objects. The approach therefore taken was to assess the entire amassed collection of archaeological archives to determine their value to the museum.

“The significance tends not to be on a project-by-project basis or seen in database records, it’s a significance built up over an area. So the sites from Exeter are telling us about Exeter not just about that particular site, and the initial review couldn’t hope to pick that up. So I thought, I’m going to have to look at everything.”

“So that was my aim, it was extremely challenging to look at all this material, read around the subject and come to some decision about significance.”

(Assistant Curator, RAMM).

While the curator believed that they needed to ‘look at everything’ in order to properly review the archaeology collections, this did not generally mean looking inside archive boxes at the finds and paperwork contained within the archives. The reviewer believed that the information needed to establish the significance of the collection would be found within the paper records, notably published sites rather than grey literature reports. This was not the case for the Phase Two review of other collections at RAMM, where boxes were opened and objects assessed alongside the records and publications.

“Mostly it was paper records, published reports but I did open boxes ... not so much for the archaeological archives to be honest, I was relying on reports. There was so much material looking at a box of sherds would not help. Whereas some of the other collections I did open boxes to see what the record was talking about.” (Assistant Curator, RAMM).

The decisions around significance were based mainly on the sites within the group that had been published. The grey literature reports were rarely thought to contain enough detail to adequately judge significance.

“For most published reports then yes (they contain the information needed to determine significance) for grey lit. far less so. It seemed to be just a list of finds, a lack of rigor there, often pretty hopeless.”

“I would certainly say the ones that are published we can judge the significance.”

“Researchers build on this and the knowledge grows. But the stuff that hasn’t been fully reported.... It’s thought there is potential there, but that is never demonstrated, but with others there just isn’t any potential.”

(Assistant Curator, RAMM).

This divergence from the original review methodology indicates that the archaeology collections at RAMM and the archives derived from commercial archaeology activities require different forms of assessment to their other collections. Opinions on how significance could be attributed therefore

varied from collection to collection, and the personal opinions of the individual curators clearly impacted on Phase Two of the review. The curators did reflect on the sampling strategy and its effectiveness with regard to reviewing the archaeological archives. However, while the curator who undertook Phase Two of the review states that the original review methodology did not really work with regard to the museum's archaeology collections, the Phase One results have had a long-term impact on the collection and how archaeology is to be collected in the future.

*"We did use the figures and comments to write our collections development plan so strategically it (the scores and league tables) has had an impact on what we do in the future."
(Senior Collections Manger, RAMM).*

11.2.7 A new collections development plan for each review group

A new Collections Development Plan was written for each of the collections review groups reassessed during Phase Two of the RAMM review, effectively detailing the results of the Phase Two assessment. The collections development plans were created "in response to the need to manage collections more pro-actively, maximising their potential and building a more sustainable foundation for their continued enjoyment" (Royal Albert Memorial Museum, 2014 p7). The Collections Development Plans were divided into four sections:

- A. Commentary and analysis
- B. Factors contributing to 'low' preliminary assessment score of 50% or less
- C. Proposed actions for this Collection Review Group
- D. Action Plan (table).

Section A. 'Commentary and analysis' asked the curator to record "why the material in this review group is – or is not – important, significant or useful" (Royal Albert Memorial Museum, 2014 p1). This section contains a brief summary of how the material within the individual review group was collected, the number of database records represented by the group (including global records) and general comments on where the curator believes the significance of the group lies, followed by a list of the 'most significant groups of material from the review group'. Across all the review groups

the general comments lean towards describing the significance and value of the archaeological material to the museum, rather than highlighting areas of low significance or value, though this is mentioned too. For example:

Devon Archaeology: 1990-2012 selected general comments

“...this review group contains the most recently acquired collections of Devon archaeology...it represents some of the most important material in defining sense of place for many Devon communities.”

“This review group is a large one with over 16,500 records...many of these records (nearly 600) cover whole archaeological archives, the number of objects involves several 100,000s”

“They record archaeological heritage lost during the development process...they represent an irreplaceable record of an area’s heritage... have an importance for academic research.

“However...there are some archaeological archives in this group that have little research potential or local heritage value.”

Exeter Archaeology: 1990-2012 selected general comments

“This is an extremely large group. It contains over 5,500 database records, many of which cover hundreds or even thousands of objects (73,000 in one case!).”

“Objects from over 450 database records are on display”

“material... from an era of large-scale urban archaeology in Exeter. The importance of this group is not from particular individual finds but because it represents an exceptionally complete archaeological picture of an English city.”

“There is huge potential in linking results of research”

(Royal Albert Memorial Museum, 2014).

Section B. ‘Factors Contributing to a low score’ asked the curator to tick ‘all that apply’ against a series of statements regarding why they thought the review group scored 50% or less during the preliminary review. Table 12 collates the answers given in section B of the RAMM collection development plan for each archaeology review group; factors contributing to a ‘low’ score during the preliminary assessment (Royal Albert Memorial Museum, 2014).

For all review groups, statements 1 and 2 were ticked indicating the curator believed not only that the basic documentation for the review group needed to be improved but also that the existing knowledge about the material needed to be made available in a format that the museum could use. For all but two of the review groups (Exeter Archaeology: pre-1940 and 1945-1969) it was also recorded that a 'different kind of information' was required to 'give a fuller picture of the objects' significance and usage', suggesting that in general the type of information that accompanied the archaeological archives was not necessarily what the museum wanted or found useful. This was borne out in the interviews when curators described the differences between how archaeologists record data, and what the museum wants to know in order use the material for display, outreach or teaching activities:

"Archaeologists from my time in the sector and work in a museum are concerned with typologies and numbers and the minutiae of sherd counts, which is great if you are a detailed researcher wanting to come and look at this material. But from the museum's point of view this is completely meaningless." (Assistant Curator, RAMM).

However, for all review groups there was 'sufficient knowledge' to determine that they contained material of significance or potential usage (no checks against statement 4, Table 12). Therefore, the curators hold the knowledge needed to see the potential significance and use of the material, but this is balanced against the requirement for different information and documentation to unlock that potential by the museum.

"It's those bigger pictures that our audience are interested in, so having a box of stuff containing a series of things is great for a small number of our users, but for the 95% means we can't interpret it without a lot of work or further research . . . And it's not the job of the contractors to do that. We are the museums; we are here to interpret it but it's (grey literature) not the kind of information we need." (Assistant Curator, RAMM).

	Why do you think this review group has scored 50% or less in the Preliminary Collections Assessment? Please tick all that apply	Devon Archaeology: pre-1940	Devon Archaeology: 1945-1969	Devon archaeology: 1970-1989	Devon Archaeology: 1990-2012	Exeter Archaeology: pre-1940	Exeter Archaeology: 1945-1969	Exeter archaeology: 1970-1989	Exeter Archaeology: 1990-2012
1	This review group needs more basic thorough documentation, to make it easier to assess the objects' significance and usage.	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
2	The review group has been researched, but there is a need to transfer or reference this knowledge to the collections database, to give a fuller, more easily accessible picture of the objects' significance and usage.	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
3	There is a need to add a different kind of information about this review group to the collections database, in addition to the information already present, in order to give a fuller picture of the objects' significance and usage.	Y	Y	Y	Y			Y	Y
4	There is insufficient knowledge about the review group to determine its significance or potential usage.								
5	The review group would benefit from rationalisation, to 'weed out' quantities of weaker material which is having a negative impact on the stronger material.			Y	Y			Y	Y
6	The review group predominantly consists of material which is of limited significance or potential usage.								
7	Another reason (please describe):								

Table 13. Answers given in section B of the Royal Albert Memorial Museum collection development plan for each archaeology review group: Factors contributing to a 'low' score during the preliminary assessment.

For four of the review groups, the need for rationalisation was thought to be a contributing factor to the low score they received in the preliminary assessment. Devon archaeology: 1970-1989, Devon Archaeology: 1990-2012, Exeter Archaeology: 1970-1989, and Exeter Archaeology: 1990-2012 represent the period in which the museum took in the archives from large scale rescue excavations and post-PPG16 planning-led archaeological projects. These "would benefit from rationalisation, to 'weed out' quantities of weaker material which is having a negative impact on the stronger material" (Royal Albert Memorial Museum, 2014 p2).

Section C. 'Proposed actions for this collections review group' asked the curator to suggest discrete pieces of work that could be undertaken to strengthen any future score the group may receive. A series of headings were provided under which potential work activities could be identified, but suggestions were not required under each heading. The proposed projects were transferred under the same headings to **Section D. 'Action Plan'** and given a priority level from high to low. The actions included collection management tasks, proposed pieces of work by a specialist, potential research projects, rationalisation assessments, regional reviews of the material and public access improvement projects. These actions were carried forward as the new collection's development plan was implemented.

"The collections review coincided with the museum development, so it's been really good timing having reviewed all the collections, seeing how much it is used, its potential, where the gaps are. Then that informs our new policy of where we want to fill those gaps or add to areas we know are very popular or have genuine research potential." (Assistant Curator, RAMM).

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