

Archaeological Archives

This note sets out National Trust policy on archaeological archives. It is intended for use by anyone creating or managing an archaeological archive. It concentrates on the primary material but excludes artefacts.

Archaeological Archives Policy

- All Archaeological Archives should have a catalogue and an index;
- All archaeological archives are irreplaceable unless proven otherwise, retention should be considered along side the potential loss of information and the reputation of the National Trust as a conservation organisation and museum. All archaeological archives should be stored in a suitable location and digitised;
- Ensure that when commissioning work you retain or negotiate that the material can be used by the National Trust. All material in archaeological archives should have the appropriate copyright and permission's recorded, taking into account the Trust's IP guidance;
- To store and maintain our archive in an appropriate manner as set by internal and external standards and to provide access to the archive for all relevant audiences;

What is an Archaeological Archive?

An archaeological archive is the collection of material generated by the work of the Trust's archaeologists, both internal and external. It is often original material that in many cases is an irreplaceable record of the work undertaken and the archaeological remains.

The archaeological archive is split into three main components:

- **Regional Property Files:**
This forms the active property filing for archaeological work undertaken on the properties. This will include general property information, Scheduled Ancient Monument details and archaeological reports.
- **Archaeology Section Library:**
This is the journals, periodicals and books held by the Archaeology Section.
- **Survey Archive:**
This is the material generated by the projects and work undertaken by the department, contractors and volunteers. It includes primary research, original fieldwork, photographs, maps and plans. In addition to this an archaeological archive can include reports, digital data, sound recordings and moving images. The archive is classed as an irreplaceable resource.

How do I know what is in the Archaeological Archive?

The only way to know what is in an archive is to record the contents. There are different levels of recording. Firstly the Collection Level Description which records that the archive exists and its character. Secondly the detailed item by item list of the content of the archive, this is called the catalogue. In order to retrieve and order the archive it is important to index it, this structured approach allows anyone to access the record, find out what is in the archive, where it is and how it can be retrieved.

Policy

"All Archaeological Archives should have a catalogue and an index."

How do I know what to retain and what to dispose of?

Archaeological archives are an important resource and form the core source for the understanding of the historic remains on National Trust properties. They have a high re-use potential for further research, education and interpretation. A great deal of National Trust resources goes into generating the archive and into managing it. It is therefore important that archives are maintained appropriately and are made accessible. They do not have a shelf life and even after 10 years the information is still relevant.

When dealing with archaeological archives three things must be considered:

- There is often only one copy of the archive
- They are a record of sites and monuments that may have been destroyed
- They are a record of work that may have been expensive to conduct

This means that many archaeological archives are irreplaceable. The presumption is that no archaeological archive should be disposed of. All steps should be taken to find a suitable location for the archive and to digitise it.

Policy

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What is copyright and Intellectual Property?

This issue is defined by a legal framework and by the National Trust’s Intellectual Property guidelines. When indexing an archive you must record key information about who owns the material, where it is derived from and the author. Work paid for and directed by the National Trust is the property of the organisation and the right should not be given away without first contacting the Head of Archaeology. Failure to obtain or retain ownership may lead to the National Trust being charged for any further use of the material, or that the material will be used by others for their own commercial benefit.

Policy

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Where do I keep my archive and who can have access to it?

Archives should be kept in an appropriate place. This will either be at the Central Office, Regional Office or at a designated County Records Office. Individual types of material should be stored appropriately as per the Trust’s guidance. Multiple copies of reports should be kept in different locations for security and access reasons.

As a conservation and membership organisation we have a responsibility to make our archives and the information contained accessible to all internal staff, the professional community, the wider public and the members. This will ultimately be done through the Sites and Monuments Record. We also have a responsibility to maintain the archive within set standards defined by the wider profession.

Policy

“To store and maintain our archive in an appropriate manner as set by internal and external standards and to provide access to the archive for all relevant audiences”

How can I find out more?

See National Trust guidance note on ‘Managing Archaeology Archives’ or contact the National Trust Archaeology Section on 01285 651818.