

The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery

Conditions and Guidelines: Preparation and Deposition of Archaeological Archives



The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent, is the official archaeological repository for the County of Staffordshire. The Museum houses a large and important collection of archaeological material, spanning almost 12,000 years of human activity in the area. The collection is professionally curated and includes finds from numerous excavations carried out over the years by diverse bodies and, significantly, substantial archives from Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission-funded excavations.

The document outlines the conditions under which The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery will accept the deposition of archaeological archives. Guidelines have been prepared to ensure the smooth transfer of archaeological archives - finds and documentation - from the excavating body to the recipient museum. This can be achieved by early consultation and co-operation between excavator and museum, and by adherence to clearly defined procedures.

The guidelines are also intended to ensure the long-term well-being of the archive, and to ensure that it is accessible to researchers, students, and the general public.

Terms used in this document

Museum – The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery

Depositor – the individual or organisation wishing to deposit the archaeological archive

Archive – An archaeological archive, defined as all parts of the archaeological record including the finds, samples, and digital, written, drawn and photographic documentation identified for long-term preservation

Contents

Conditions	– Page 3
Costs	– Page 4
Guidelines	
Introduction	– Page 5
Project Timetable	– Page 5
Ownership	– Page 6
Material Finds	– Page 6
Storage	– Page 6
Standard Storage Box Sizes	– Page 7
Selection and Retention	– Page 7
Archive Documentation	– Page 8
Digital Documentation	– Page 8
Further Reading	– Page 9
Useful Contacts	– Page 10
Appendix 1 – Project Initiation Form	– Page 11
Appendix 2 – Project Completion Form	– Page 13
Appendix 3 – Blank Excel Finds Register	– Page 16

Conditions

The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery is prepared to accept material from archaeological excavations and fieldwork provided the following conditions are met:

1. The project falls within the present day boundaries of the County of Staffordshire, as specified in the Museum's published collecting policy.
2. The whole archive, both documentation and finds, should be presented in accordance with the guidelines listed on pages 5-9 of this document.
3. Ownership of the material should be fully documented and title transferred to the City of Stoke-on-Trent in perpetuity. The Depositor is responsible for ensuring the landowner agrees to deposit.
4. The Museum must have unrestricted use of the documentary archive. The Depositor agrees to transfer all copyright to the Museum, or to grant a license allowing unrestricted use.
5. The Depositor will pay a one-off charge to cover the costs of long-term storage, conservation and curation of the archive. (see 'Costs' page 4, for more information)

Costs

When an archive is deposited at the museum a charge will be made to cover the costs of long-term storage, conservation and curation. Payment of charges is the responsibility of the Depositor, unless otherwise agreed with the Museum.

A minimum charge of £75.00 is payable, with additional fees based on the overall size of the archive.

Item	Description	Cost
Minimum charge	Includes deposition of the following: Up to one A4 box containing paper archive and related material, including photos and CDs. Up to one finds box, maximum size 550x260x120mm, maximum weight 8kg. Up to one tube of rolled for plans A3 or above.	£75.00
Additional items	Charge for each additional box or plan tube	£25.00

Any costs relating to bringing an archive up to the required standards for deposition will be borne by the Depositor, including but not limited to: specialist advice, conservation, and digital archiving.

Any archives that do not meet the necessary standards will either be returned to the Depositor, or the Depositor will be charged, after discussion, for the work and supplies required to bring the archives up to the acceptable standard. This includes any conservation work that may be required to stabilise objects.

Costs relating to the transfer of archives to the Museum, including but not limited to, transport and insurance, will be the responsibility of the Depositor.

Where material will not fit within the maximum box size or weight limit of 8kg, the museum may, after discussion with the Depositor, make additional charges for the transfer and storage of the archive.

The museum retains the right to waive or reduce charges at its discretion.

Guidelines

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1** These guidelines have been prepared to ensure the smooth transfer of archaeological archives, their long-term well-being, and that they are accessible to researchers, students and members of the public.
- 1.2** Archaeological archives that are not prepared in accordance with these guidelines will not meet the conditions of deposition (page 2) and could be refused entry, returned to the Depositor, or the Depositor may be charged, after discussion, for work undertaken by the Museum to bring the archive to an acceptable standard.
- 1.3** The guidelines have been based on standards defined by Historic England, the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, the Museums and Galleries Commission, Archaeological Archives Forum

2.0 Project Timetable

- 2.1** It is essential that, as a potential recipient of excavated material, the Museum is contacted at the planning stage of any archaeological project. Potential depositors will be issued with a Project Initiation Form to record details of the project and predicted nature of the archaeology.
- 2.2** Agreement should be reached on recording systems to be employed, to ensure compatibility with the Museum's own documentation requirements, upon the manner of storage and presentation of finds, and upon the nature and contents of the written archive.
- 2.3** On receipt of a completed Project Initiation Form, the Museum will assign a unique accession number to the archive. Reference to the accession number should be made in the project's Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) when submitted to the relevant planning officer as evidence that the Museum has been consulted before the project commences.
- 2.4** The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery's documentation system is based upon unique numbers. The whole archive will be identifiable via a unique accession number issued by the museum. Within the archive, the Depositor will provide unique numbers for individual items, or groups of items. The Museum will normally require certain classes of finds to be given unique numbers which may be used subsequently, including:
- i) plotted finds
 - ii) conserved finds
 - iii) finds referred to specialists
 - iv) finds illustrated in the report
- All details of numbering systems used will be agreed in advance.
- 2.5** Throughout the archaeological project the Depositor will update the Museum on key milestones and advise of any changes to the information provided on the Project Initiation Form

2.6 Prior to deposition, the Depositor will complete a Project Completion Checklist describing the final nature and size of the archive.

3.0 **Ownership**

3.1 The excavating body should undertake to negotiate with landowners on the future of any finds.

3.2 Ideally, agreement should be reached at the planning stage of a project but, at the very least, the Depositor should be in a position to ensure that title to any finds is transferred to the Museum, in perpetuity and without conditions, at the time of the deposition of the archive at the latest. Proof of title transfer from the landowner should be provided alongside the archive.

3.3 There should be a presumption against splitting an archaeological archive. If any part of the excavation collection or archive is to be deposited elsewhere, this should be agreed in advance by the Museum, and should be fully documented.

4.0 **Material Finds**

4.1 Best practice must be applied to the handling and storage of all archaeological finds during the post-excavation process. Where human remains are encountered and/or included in the archive, a copy of any relevant licenses for excavation and retention should be included in the archive documentation.

4.2 All finds should be cleaned and dried in an appropriate manner, unless conservation requirements dictate otherwise. Where further conservation activities are required, work will be undertaken, or procured, by the Depositor (e.g. unstable metalwork, glass, prehistoric pottery, etc).

4.3 In the event of referral to a conservator, full records of all treatment must be made, kept and presented with the archive documentation.

4.4 All relevant finds should be labelled or marked with an agreed numbering system (see section 2.4) in accordance with acceptable museum standards and with the appropriate archival materials. Sensitive/unstable finds, and bulk finds will not usually require physical marking unless otherwise agreed with the Museum.

4.5 All significant ironwork should be x-rayed as part of the post-excavation process before it is deposited at the Museum, and the results of x-rays should be included in the archive documentation.

5.0 **Storage**

5.1 All finds should be bagged, in a manner agreed with the Museum, in archival grip-top polythene bags with write-on panels.

5.2 Bags should be marked in permanent ink with the agreed numbering system, find and context numbers, and a brief indication of contents.

- 5.3 Bags should be perforated with small holes to prevent the build-up of unsuitable micro-climates.
- 5.4 Bags stored in standard boxes (below, Section 6) should be adequately cushioned against damage with acid-free tissue or foam.
- 5.5 Unstable finds of metalwork, glass, etc., should be individually bagged and wrapped in acid free tissue and stored in sealed, archival polythene boxes
- 5.6 Silica gel should be introduced into boxes containing unstable material as appropriate. This should be in a perforated polythene bag, but separated from the finds (by acid free tissue, etc.).
- 5.7 Delicate finds should be packed in archive-quality foam to cushion them and prevent damage.
- 5.8 All finds should be grouped by material type for separate storage in the appropriate bags and boxes.
- 5.9 All boxes should be labelled with the museum accession number, site/project name and code, and, if the archive is spread over multiple boxes, relevant find and context numbers, and a brief indication of contents.
- 6.0 Standard Storage Box Sizes**
- 6.1 Stable finds should be presented in archive-quality storage boxes no larger than 550 x 260 x 120mm. Boxes should have a full depth lid and be made of acid-free material.
- 6.2 Finds within the standard boxes should be easily accessible and the whole box should not weigh more than 8 kg in total.
- 6.3 Unstable finds should be presented for storage in sealed, archival polythene boxes, appropriately sized for the object(s) and packing within them, again weighing no more than 8kg in total.
- 6.4 Where items will not fit within standard box sizes or within agreed weight limits the Depositor will liaise with the Museum to discuss the most appropriate storage methods. Additional charges may apply in these circumstances.
- 7.0 Selection and Retention**
- 7.1 It is important that material finds retained for long-term storage are relevant to the interpretation of a site.
- 7.2 The Depositor will provide a schedule of material selected for retention to be reviewed and agreed by the Museum prior to deposition.
- 7.3 It is anticipated that the question of selection and retention of material finds be addressed continually during the course of an archaeological project. A final agreement should be reached during the handing-over of an archive.

7.4 Environmental samples will normally be retained only if arrangements have been made for analysis at a future date, or if their future usefulness to the interpretation of a site can be justified.

8.0 Archive Documentation

8.1 The archive documentation should conform to the site archive and research archive specifications published in MAP2 (*"Management of Archaeological Projects"*, English Heritage [now Historic England] 1991 - Appendices 3 and 6).

8.2 The paper archive should be prepared to an A4 format where possible, and should be presented in rigid box files of archive quality.

8.3 Drawings and plans larger than A4 should be rolled into plan tubes.

8.4 Non-digital photography should be presented in appropriate archive-quality polyester sleeves or hanging files for flat storage, and should be presented in archive-quality boxes.

8.5 Material supplied on disc, or other digital media, must also be present as hard copy in the archive documentation.

8.6 The Depositor should provide the Museum with two copies of an indexed inventory listing of the excavation archive, the contents of which should be agreed in advance.

9.0 Digital Documentation

9.1 The Depositor will transfer the primary digital archive for the project to a trusted digital repository such as the [Archaeology Data Service \(ADS\)](#). Costs associated with this digital deposition are the responsibility of the Depositor and should be addressed directly with the repository.

9.2 A secondary digital archive should be provided on a PC compatible CD-ROM or DVD within the archive documentation box. Details of the software and hardware used to generate files should be included. Any file formats not compatible with the standard Microsoft Office suite should be agreed with the Museum before deposition.

9.3 Where archives contain itemised finds identified by a unique numbering system (see sections 2.4 & 4.5), an Excel spreadsheet should be provided, listing each numbered find or group of finds. This list should record:

- Find number
- Finds type (e.g. pottery, brooch)
- Number of items
- Date/time period
- Site context
- Names of any identifying specialists
- Publication references

An example template is shown in appendix 3.

Any queries may be addressed to the Curator (Local History):

The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery, Bethesda Street, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent, ST1 3DW.

Email: joseph.perry@stoke.gov.uk

Tel 01782 232585

Related Reading

[Brown, DH. 2007. *Archaeological Resources in Cultural Heritage a European Standard.*](#)

[Brown, D.H. 2001. *Archaeological Archives: A guide to best practice in creation, complication, transfer and curation.* Archaeological Archives Forum \(2nd edition\).](#)

English Heritage. 1991. *Management of Archaeological Projects* (2nd edition)

[Lee, E. 2015. *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment.* Historic England.](#)

Museums and Galleries Commission. 1992. *Standards in the Museum Care of Archaeological Collections.*

Useful Contacts

Joseph Perry

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01782 232597

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Appendix 1 – Project Initiation Form

Project Initiation Form

To be forwarded to the Curator (Local History), The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery

Project name and reference:		Site code:
Main contact:		
Contractor:		
Address:		
Telephone:		
Email:		
Site Details		
Site name: Address:		
National Grid Reference (centred):		
Nature of expected archaeology		
Type of Fieldwork (<i>highlight or write below if not listed</i>): evaluation/ excavation/ watching brief/ survey		
Date of Site expected (<i>highlight or write below if not listed</i>): Prehistoric / Roman / Medieval / Post-Medieval		
Do you expect to encounter human remains? YES/NO		
Conservation & Storage Problems Anticipated		
Waterlogged material anticipated: YES/ NO		
Bulk environmental samples anticipated: YES/ NO		
Bulk industrial/kiln waste products anticipated: YES/ NO		
Building materials/architectural fragments anticipated: YES/ NO		
Additional description/comments on nature of site and expected archaeology:		
Estimated size of archive		
Anticipated number of A4 boxes for paper archive:		
Anticipated number of finds boxes (stable finds), max size 550x260x120mm:		
Anticipated number of sealed, polythene boxes (unstable finds):		
Anticipated number of plan tubes:		

Anticipated boxes/objects not covered above:		
Proposed project milestones	What? Expected by when?	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Field work starts	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Field work completed	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Mid project review of deposition	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Post excavation work completed	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Title of transfer secured	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Deposition	
<p>On behalf of the Depositor, I confirm that we intend to offer this archive to The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery. I have read and understood the museum's <i>Conditions and Guidelines: Preparation and Deposition of Archaeological Archives</i> and the archive will be prepared in accordance with said policy including transfer of title, copyright, and payment of deposition charges.</p> <p>Date: Name: Job Title: Organisation:</p> <p>Signature:</p> <p>Please email this form to joseph.perry@stoke.gov.uk.</p>		

Appendix 2 – Project Completion Checklist

Project Completion Checklist

To be forwarded to the Curator (Local History), The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery

Project name:		Accession No.:	Site code:
Main contact:			
Contractor:			
Address:			
Telephone:			
Email:			
Nature of archaeology			
Any changes from Project Initiation Form? If yes, please fill out below:			
Type of Fieldwork: (<i>highlight or write below if not listed</i>): evaluation/ excavation/ watching brief/ survey			
Date of site (<i>highlight or write below if not listed</i>): Prehistoric / Roman / Medieval / Post-Medieval			
Did you encounter human remains? YES/NO			
Conservation & Storage Problems			
Waterlogged material collected: YES/ NO			
Bulk environmental samples collected: YES/ NO			
Bulk industrial/kiln waste products collected: YES/ NO			
Building materials/architectural fragments collected: YES/ NO			
Additional description/comments on nature of archaeology:			
Archive Checklist			
Please confirm you have undertaken the following activities:			Complete
Transfer of title agreed with landowner, evidence provided with archive			N/A
Copyright transferred, or license granted for unrestricted use, to The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery, City of Stoke-on-Trent, evidence provided in archive			
Two copies of an indexed inventory of the archive provided			
Finds cleaned and dried (unless conservation requirements prevent this)			

Relevant finds numbered and marked with agreed system		
Bags and boxes all marked with appropriate accession numbers, site code, context, and finds numbers		
Primary digital archive transferred to Archaeology Data Service		
Secondary digital archive provided in archive on PC compatible CD-ROM		
Excel finds register emailed to curator		
Schedule of material for retention supplied and agreed with the Museum		
Drawings and plans larger than A4 rolled in plan tubes.		
Museum consulted over any oversize/overweight objects/archive boxes (max box 550 x 260 x 120mm, max weight 8kg).		
Licenses for excavation and/or retention of human remains included in archive		
Full records of any conservation treatment presented in the archive		
Significant ironwork x-rayed and results included in archive		
Silica gel introduced into archive boxes where appropriate		
Justification attached for inclusion of environmental samples in the archive		
Size of archive Please record overall size of the archive to be deposited	Quantity	
Rigid, A4 box files for archive documentation:		
Archive-quality storage boxes (stable finds), max size 550 x 260 x 120mm:		
Archive-quality sealed, polythene boxes (unstable finds):		
Plan tubes:		
List any boxes/objects below that do not fit into the categories above – they must be agreed with the Museum in advance of deposition.		
<p>On behalf of the Depositor, I confirm that we intend to offer this archive to The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery and have prepared it in accordance with the Museum's <i>Conditions and Guidelines: Preparation and Deposition of Archaeological Archives</i>, including transfer of title, copyright and payment of deposition charges.</p> <p>Date: Name: Job Title: Organisation:</p> <p>Signature:</p>		

Please email the completed form, with an electronic copy of the final report and any other relevant attachments, to joseph.perry@stoke.gov.uk.

