

Collaborative Doctoral Award

Archaeological Palaeoenvironmental Archives: Challenges and Potential

Research area: Archaeology (Landscape & Environmental) and Cultural and Museum Studies

University Partner

University of Reading, Department of Archaeology

Project Summary

This project will maximise the potential of palaeoenvironmental remains for academic research and public science engagement by co-designing new structures for their creation, curation and interpretation based upon a systematic evaluation of current archiving practices.

Research from the Society of Museum Archaeologists (SMA) has found that: there are 9000 undeposited archives, 27% of museums had no further space for archaeological archives, and 70% had no specialist curator (Edwards 2012). Research funded by Historic England explores the impact of austerity on archaeological archives (SMA 2016). Copley (2010) identified the challenges. The project will combine quantitative research with qualitative and collaborative academic research. Unlike previous research projects (Edwards 2012; SMA 2016) on durable materials, this focuses on environmental archives.

Research Questions:

- a) What are the threats and opportunities for environmental archaeological archives?
- b) Which aspects of these archives are especially important to users?
- c) How can these archives be improved?
- d) How can theoretical and practice- based developments in public archaeology and science engagement enhance archive potential?

The archive has two parts:

- i) Digital records shared as part of wider databases which facilitate additional research e.g. assemblage comparisons, spatial contrasts and species occurrence through time. Many existing databases are partial.
- ii) The ecofacts archive itself.

The volume of material has increased dramatically with huge scale excavations following PPG16. Plant remains may be charred, mineral-replaced or anaerobically preserved and this PhD will focus on archaeobotanical and micro-zoological (e.g. insects and molluscs) archives where issues of value, reuse and retention need addressing. Environmental archaeology archives need to be better signposted to the potential user community so that they are more used and valued. They also need to be accessible for research

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