

The London Excavations Index

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THE COMPILATION of an Excavations Index for London began in August 1987; this article is intended to give individuals interested in the archaeology of London information on the Index and its purpose.

The article is divided into three parts: a general introduction to the work of the Archaeological Records Section which is funding the compilation, details of the National Excavations Index and finally information on the London Excavations Index itself.

The National Monuments Records, RCHME

The National Monuments Record forms the archiving body of the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments of England. The NMR is divided into three parts: Architectural and Archaeological Sections and an Aerial Photographic Unit.

The Archaeological Records Section

The Archaeological Records Section of the National Monuments Record was created in 1963 to serve as the national repository for archives relating to archaeological monuments in England. As well as being the repository for the Royal Commission's archaeological archive, the Section holds collections of photographic, textual and graphic materials covering all aspects of archaeological activity, as well as copies of original archive materials held elsewhere.

Brief details of the work of the Archaeological Records Section will follow for those unfamiliar with its work. More detailed accounts can be found in the annual reports of the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England, produced since 1983.

The broad categories of information held by the Archaeological Records Section are as follows:

1. The National Archaeological Record

In 1983 RCHME assumed responsibility for the supply of information on antiquities to the Ordnance Survey, and as a result has inherited and maintained the OS card index of approximately 400,000 cards on 250,000 archaeological sites. This record is currently in the process of computerisation. The card index is held at the RCHME office in Southampton, but a duplicate set on microfilm of the cards and record maps is housed in the public search room of the National Monuments Record in Fortress House.

2. The Microfilm Archive

In 1975 the Frere Report on the principles of publication in Rescue Archaeology recommended that where adequate conditions for storage of excavations records did not exist in local repositories, they should be housed in the NMR with arrangements for making the material available to researchers on request. It also proposed the establishment of a central archive that would hold originals and/or duplicate copies of full excavation records for as many sites as possible.

In response to the Frere Report the Archaeological Records Section provides a microfilming service for archaeological archives and houses a large and rapidly expanding collection of microfilm records. In addition to excavation archives, the section has sought to copy other unpublished material of archaeological interest such as antiquarian collections, university dissertations, surveys, etc. The collection policy is to microfilm all archives of state-funded excavations and those collections of archives which are unpublished or under threat of destruction or dispersal. A free copy of microfiche is given to the archive-holding body or individual.

The Department of Urban Archaeology has for several years been using this facility and has recently been joined in this policy by the Department of Greater London Archaeology.

3. The Photographic Archive

A collection of over 40,000 items covers a broad spectrum of archaeological activities from the 1860s to the present. In addition to material produced by RCHME in the creation of its inventory volumes and theses works, the collection incorporates material copied from private sources and other institutions. A computerised catalogue of the photographs is being compiled.

4. The Medieval Village Research Group Archive

This archive contains records of over 3000 deserted and shrunken medieval village sites, compiled over 35 years by Prof. M W Beresford and J G Hurst. The records of the group are available for consultation in London, and a computerised database containing the site information and indexes to the archive and associated sources is being compiled and will be completed in 1988.

5. Original Archives

Collections of original material are occasionally donated or bequeathed to the Section by individuals or organisations. Examples of such acquisitions include the L F Chitty archive and the excavation records of Gerhardt Bersu and Dame Kathleen Kenyon.

6. English Heritage Records

The Archaeological Records Section maintains copies of Ancient Monuments Laboratory reports and archaeological and architectural archives from the Historic Plans Room of English Heritage, which are available for public consultation. In addition, the section on behalf of English Heritage makes available for public consultation the records of statutorily protected Scheduled Ancient Monuments in England.

7. The Excavations Index

In 1978 the Archaeological Records Section commenced the compilation of a National Index of Excavations carried out in England. The Excavations Index has four main objectives:

1. To compile a list of all sites that have been excavated.
2. To locate the original documentary and visual archive from excavations.
3. To locate the finds from excavations.
4. To show which excavation reports have been published.

The National Excavations Index

To date (April 1988) the Index comprises some 20,000 records covering 44 of the 47 counties of England. Northern England was compiled at the beginning of the project, being completed between 1978 and 1980. Of the remaining counties, compilation should be completed for Dorset in 1988 and finally for Suffolk and London in 1989. Fig. 1 shows the numbers of records compiled or projected to be compiled for each county. The following numbers of records have been compiled for the counties surrounding London:

Buckinghamshire	250
Berkshire	350
Hertfordshire	458
Essex	893
Kent	990
Surrey	573

For the whole of England, the Index is expected to include some 25,000 to 30,000 records.

As well as forming part of the publicly consultable records of the NMR, the Excavations Index will have an integral role in defining the collection policy

of the Archaeological Records Section. The ability to retrieve information from the Index on any one of its fields will allow the examination of excavations on a national and regional basis. Unpublished or state-funded excavations where the archive has not been microfilmed to provide a publicly consultable security copy can be identified. In addition, it is possible to retrieve excavations on a thematic basis for specific site types, archaeological periods, excavators or era of excavations, and this can be used to select records which should be copied to enhance existing collections or suggest new areas for collection policy.

Compilation

The Excavations Index has been compiled on a county by county basis, aiming to provide a comprehensive survey of all excavations carried out in England.

The most effective means of compiling the index has proved to be the creation of a basic list of excavations from the National Archaeological Record (formerly the records cards and files of the Ordnance Survey Archaeological Division) and the county's own Sites and Monuments Record. These sources provide the basic list, which will normally contain about 60 to 70% of the final number of excavations for any county incorporated into the Index. This list is then supplemented by noting additional excavations described in published sources, and deriving information from individuals, institutions and societies involved in the archaeology of the local area. This supplementary work is often important in obtaining information on unpublished excavations or those which have only been published in a very brief or ephemeral form.

Once this basic list is complete, the major objective of the Index can be pursued: to locate and identify, wherever possible, the original excavation archive and the finds for every excavation that has taken place in the county. In order to achieve this museums, libraries and archaeological units are systematically approached for excavation archives and finds. Individual excavators are also contacted to provide further details of archive and finds locations. The importance of this work lies in the fact that no organisation has systematically recorded this information before. In this way the Excavations Index combines information from many disparate sources to provide a unique record of archaeological excavations throughout the whole of England.

Defining an Excavation

For the purposes of the Excavations Index, the definition of an excavation includes all instances of methodical study on a given site where either or both the following criteria are satisfied:

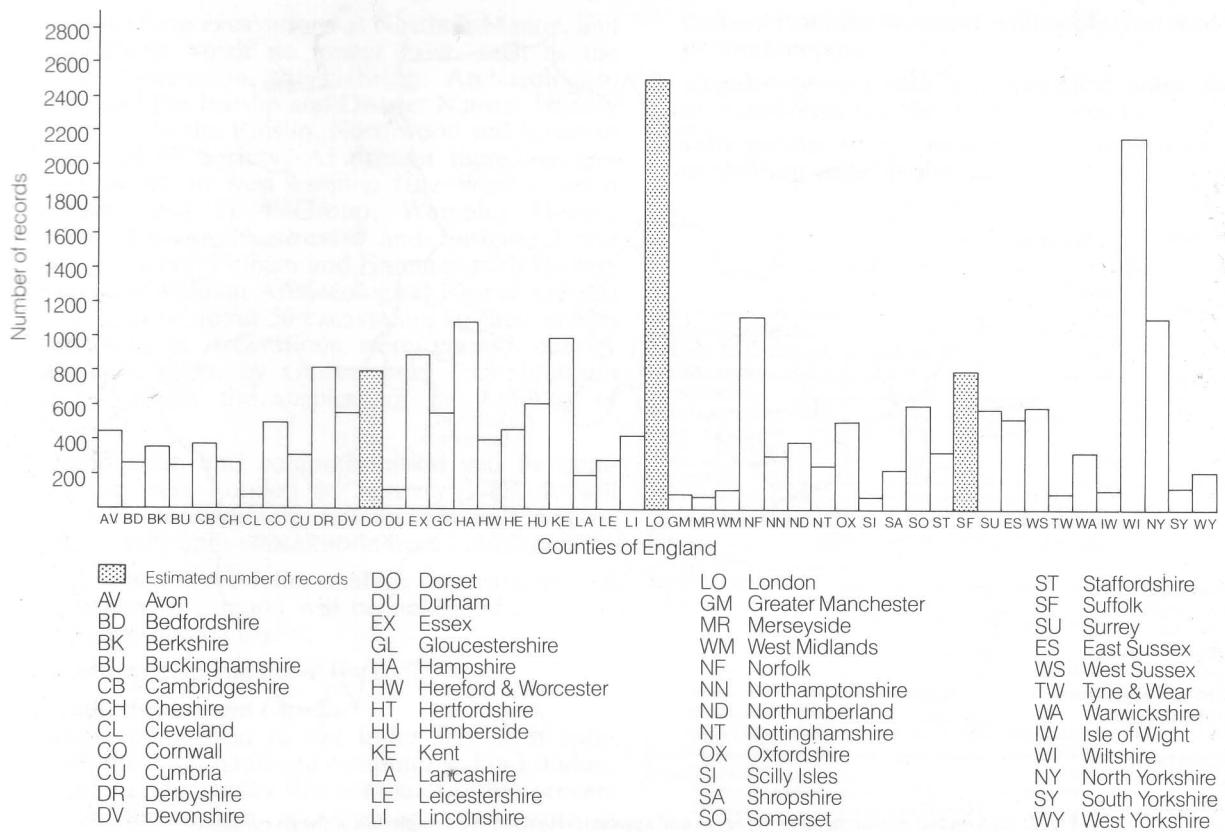


Fig. 1: number of records on the Excavation Index compiled or estimated for each county in England.

- Physical removal of earth with the intention of obtaining archaeological knowledge.
- The recording or artefacts and features found on the site by means of notes, plans, drawings, photography and geophysical methods.

The Excavations Index does not include the following categories as archaeological excavations:

- The recovery of artefacts, randomly or otherwise, from non-archaeological excavation, e.g. ploughing, laying of field drains, excavations for minerals (flint digging), foundations and other structural purposes.
- The methodical recording of non-archaeological excavations as described above – a watching brief for example. However, if it does develop into an archaeological excavation, as happens on many urban sites, then it may be included as an excavation on the Index.

The London Index

The London Excavation Index is being compiled over the two-year period from August 1987 to September 1989. When the compilation of the Index for London is finished, it will complete the coverage

of the Excavations Index for the whole of England, at least to the primary standard for checking.

It is projected that the area of Greater London and the City will include approximately 2000 to 2500 records in total. The London Index will form an integral part of the National Excavations Index and provide a database for the London region, to which access will be easily available for professional and amateur archaeologists alike.

Compilation of the Index will sequentially cover the areas of London which are within the sphere of influence of the major archaeological bodies responsible for the capital. They include the Department of Urban Archaeology, the Department of Greater London Archaeology, the Passmore Edwards Museum and the Kingston Heritage Centre. Fig. 2 shows the Boroughs of London as divided between the various units and museums, and incorporates the expected order and approximate dates when these respective areas will be compiled.

Although these bodies are responsible for many of the excavations in these areas, previous excavations have been carried out by other organisations which

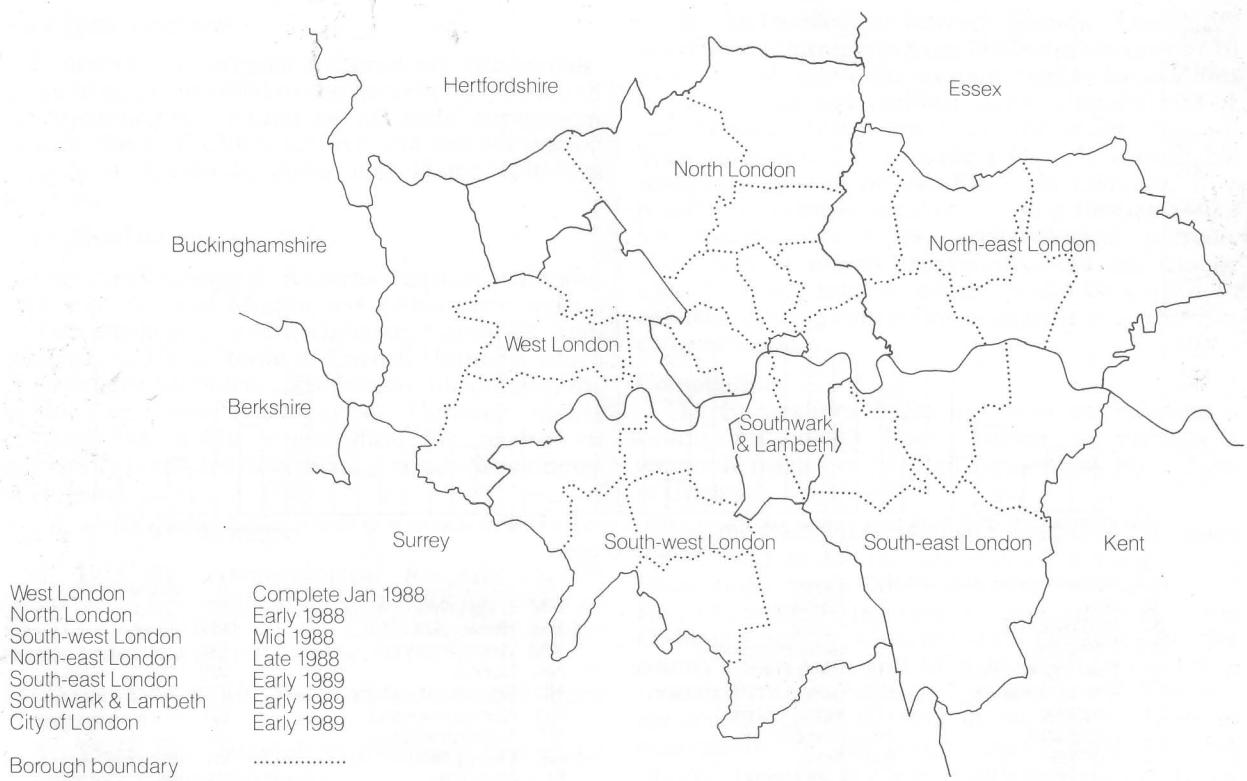


Fig. 2: the London Boroughs showing areas and approximate dates for completion of the Excavations Index.

are now defunct or have been amalgamated into the present structure for London archaeology. There is also a large body of material relating to excavations carried out by private individuals in the past, which will require substantial investigation to locate and identify.

West London

The first area to be covered was west London, which consists of the Boroughs of Brent, Ealing, Fulham and Hammersmith, Hillingdon and Hounslow. A basic list of excavations was compiled from the following sources:

- The record cards and linear files of the National Archaeological Record, RCHME. The record cards are somewhat out of date for London, but contain details of earlier excavations. The linear files contain information on Roman roads and other linear features such as canals, and include surveys and notes on any sections excavated.
- A printout from the Greater London Sites and Monuments Record. This is a site-based architectural and archaeological record for London which is in the process of compilation and with which we cooperate closely in exchanging data.

- c. A hand list of excavations in west London compiled by John Mills of the DGLA West London Unit. This also provided a preliminary list of excavations by the local history and archaeology societies.

The next stage was to locate the archives and finds from the excavations wherever possible. Fig. 3 shows an example of the questionnaire used in enquiries.

The Department of Greater London Archaeology, West London Unit provided details of their own material. They have conducted about 35 excavations in the west London area with a further 15 being carried out under the auspices of the London Museum before the establishment of the Unit.

Local societies and individuals were contacted, adding about another 70 excavations. This demonstrates how important the coverage provided by these amateur bodies can be to projects of this nature.

There are ten societies that have been involved in archaeology in west London. They include those such as the Northolt Excavation Committee, formed

just to perform excavations at Northolt Manor, and organisations which no longer exist, such as the Ruislip Association, the Uxbridge Archaeological Group and the Ruislip and District Natural History Society – now the Ruislip, Northwood and Eastcote Local History Society. At present there are five groups active in west London (the West London Archaeological Field Group, Wembley History Society, Ruislip, Northwood and Eastcote Local History Society, Fulham and Hammersmith History Society and Fulham Archaeological Rescue Group) with a total of about 50 excavations to their credit. A further six excavations were carried out by individuals, three by Gunnersbury Park Museum and two under the auspices of the Ministry of Works.

Compilation and computerisation will be complete for west London in January 1988. It will comprise approximately 130 records and will be available for public consultation from February.

It is hoped that a fuller analysis of archaeological excavations in London will be published after the completion of the project.

Computerisation and use of the Index

Computerisation and Checks

Once compilation of the Index has been completed, the data sheets are computerised in London. For the London Index this computerisation process will be undertaken in stages as each area is completed (see Fig. 2). There are a number of primary checking procedures which involve checking the computerised record against the original data entry sheets, followed by a number of checks to ensure internal consistency in coding and format. Copies of the compiled Index will also be forwarded to each of the Units and larger societies for proof-reading and comments. Final checking assesses the academic content and adds any information received after the completion of compilation. Fig. 4 shows the progress in compilation, computerisation and checking of the Excavations Index up to May 1988.

Updating the Index

Once the compilation of the Index for London is complete, plans for its future updating will be put into effect. The information required to maintain the Index is essentially of two types:

- Basic information on site location, site type, bibliographic references, etc.
- The location of archive and finds.

Four major sources will be used to provide this information:

- Information abstracted from national and local journals and other archaeological literature

derived from the National Archaeological Record in Southampton.

- Regular contact with archaeological units, societies and Sites and Monuments Records.
- Information from museums on accessions of excavation archives and finds.

QUESTIONNAIRE

N.M.R. INDEX OF EXCAVATIONS FOR SOMERSET

PLEASE PRINT

Site/Locality Name:	GLASTONBURY LAKE VILLAGE		
National Grid Ref:	ST 492 407		
OS/NMR/ Antiquity No.:	5.00		
County SMR No.:	2/24/01		
Scheduled Monument No.:			
Brief classification of site by period and type: (continue overleaf if necessary)	IRON AGE LAKE VILLAGE		
Excavation director(s) and address:	BULLEID, A. and GRAY, H. ST.G.		
Auspices:	GLASTONBURY ANTIQUARIAN SOCIETY		
Funding body:			
Date of Excavations:	1892-1907		
<u>Location of original site archive:</u>			
1. Please tick those categories still in your possession (see notes): NO - PH - SL - MS - PL - NG - CO -			
2. All/some records have been/will-be deposited with the following museum, record office etc: SOMERSET ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY			
3. Approx. year of transfer:			
4. Copies lodged elsewhere: COPIES OF PHOTOGRAPHS IN NATIONAL MONUMENTS RECORD			
<u>Location of finds</u>			
1. In your possession? (please delete) ALL/SOME/NONE			
2. All/some finds have been/will-be deposited with the following museum/other body: SOMERSET COUNTY MUSEUM, TAUNTON AND THE TRIBUNAL MUSEUM, GLASTONBURY			
3. Approx. year of transfer:			
<u>Bibliography:</u> Please list major published refs., with the form it takes (see notes):			
1. BULLEID, A., GRAY, H. ST.G/1911/GLASTONBURY LAKE VILLAGE/ REP			
2. BULLEID, A., GRAY, H. ST.G/1917/GLASTONBURY LAKE VILLAGE/ REP			
3.			
4.			
5.			

NOTES FOR COMPLETION OF QUESTIONNAIRE

Archive

NO	= Excavation notes, context sheets, etc.
PL	= Plans and other drawings
PH	= Photographic prints
NG	= Negatives
SL	= Slides
CO	= Correspondence
MS	= Manuscripts, draft reports, specialist reports, etc.

Bibliography - please use one of the following abbreviations for each bibliographic ref.

REF	= Reference
NOT	= Note (as in annual round-up of excavations in county journalists, etc.)
REP	= Report (full excavation report)
INT	= Interim (excavation report)
MSS	= Manuscript (unpublished)
PAM	= Pamphlet
JNL	= Journal (as in Current Archaeology, etc.)
CUT	= Cutting (press)

Fig. 3: an example of the questionnaire and notes used for postal enquiries in compiling the Excavations Index.

4. Information obtained from individual excavators.

Potential uses of the Index

There is a wide range of potential uses for a national record of excavations. The following describes some of the different uses to which the record has been put in the last two years:

1. Enhancement of existing record systems such as County Sites and Monuments Records or the National Archaeological Record.
2. Site research prior to excavation:
 - a. previous excavations on the site, location of excavation archive and finds, any publication.
 - b. excavations on similar sites types, e.g. all previous excavations on leper hospitals or Gilbertine religious houses.
3. University or private research, e.g. all excavations by members of the Yorkshire Roman Antiquities Committee or all excavations funded by MoW/MPBW/HBMC or MSC in Essex.
4. Museum collection policy:
 - a. Lists of all archive locations and types for excavations conducted in the county or district.
 - b. Lists of all excavation archives held and their contents for any specified institutions.
5. Assistance in decisions on record-copying or accession by the Archaeological Records Section, RCHME.
6. Research by local officers of RCHME prior to field survey.

Consulting the Index

The Excavations Index is computerised and information can be retrieved from any combination of the 68 fields which form the record (for example period, site type, site name, parish/borough, excavator, auspices, date of excavation, funding, archive location, finds location, etc.).

On-line searching of the Index is possible via a computer terminal in the public library of the National Monuments Record in Fortress House in London, where NMR staff will guide you through the enquiry screens. This service is free except for the cost of copying if this is required.

Printouts of the Index for London will be available in the NMR library when completed. They contain a catalogue ordered by Ordnance Survey 1:10,000/1:10,560 Quarter Sheet and National Archaeological Record (former OS Archaeology Division Record) number, as well as indices for date of excavation and periods represented on excavated sites.

Printouts of the Index for London will be deposited in the Museum of London, and the archaeological units of the Department of Greater London Archaeology and Department of Urban

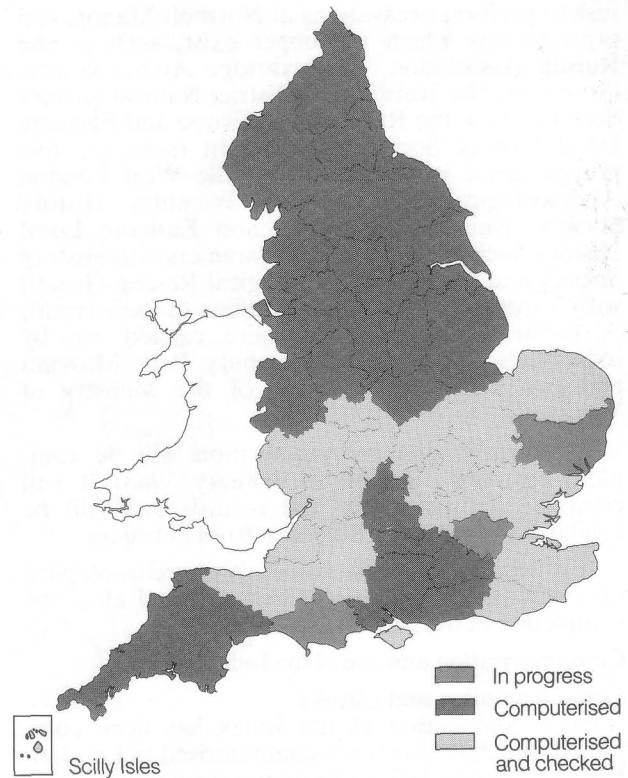


Fig. 4: progress in compilation, computerisation and checking of the Excavations Index to May 1988.

Archaeology will receive coverage of their own areas.

Enquiries which require printouts selected or ordered by other specified criteria, for example excavator, archive location or site type, or information on excavations outside London, can be answered by contacting the Archaeological Records Section at the address given below.

Contact Address

Archaeological Records Section
RCHME
Fortress House
23 Savile Row
London W1X 2JQ
Telephone (01) 734 9847.

Acknowledgements

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