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Data Service

ADS Collections Policy

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1. Introduction

The Archaeology Data Service (ADS) Collections Policy has developed throughout the life of the service in response to the needs and aspirations of its user community. The ADS Collections Policy can be thought of as embracing two central strands:

- The delivery of high quality open access digital resources to the designated user community.
- The provision of a FAIR repository for the long-term preservation of historic environment datasets.

In this way the ADS will maintain its position as the leading accredited digital repository for historic environment data and fulfill its mission to ensure the long-term preservation, integrity, and accessibility of digital data generated by fieldwork and research.

The ADS Collections Policy explains the nature and scope of the resources that the ADS makes available in its [Data Catalogue](#) and [Library](#), and how our collections may be used.

2. Designated User Community

The ADS is designed to serve as a data repository for UK archaeology and historic environment sectors.

Historic environment, and in particular archaeological, data often results from the destruction of primary evidence (such as through excavation) as a result the sector places considerable emphasis on 'preservation by record', with the results of fieldwork or laboratory-based analysis acting as a snapshot of a resource before it is altered or destroyed. The ADS provides the designated user community with a critical infrastructure for both the long-term preservation, and the reanalysis and reinterpretation of data cutting across traditional boundaries to ensure that this data remains open and accessible in perpetuity.

The ADS designated user community is composed of:

Academic and Professional Researchers: Individuals and organisations from any discipline who require access to archaeology and historic environment data for their own research purposes.

Data Creators and Depositors: UK commercial archaeology units, individual data creators, UK academic researchers and heritage organisations generating historic environment data that require an accredited repository to preserve their data.

Funding Bodies, National and Local Agencies: Organisations such as research councils, museums, local and national authorities, that require a secure, accredited repository to fulfill data management and open access mandates, and to ensure the public benefit of funded research.

International e-Infrastructure Collaborations: Global networks (such as ARIADNE) and national interest groups (such as MEDIN) that rely on cross-searchable, open-access data to facilitate large-scale comparative studies.

Educational Institutions: Teachers and students utilising the ADS resources to support learning.

General Public: Community archaeology and heritage groups, independent researchers and the general public, who have an interest in the historic environment and wish to access our resources.

Although the ADS designated user community is principally defined as UK based, the nature of historic environment research means that some data held and disseminated by the ADS has international interest, value, and relevance.

The designated user community is represented by the ADS Management Committee, which includes members of key UK stakeholder groups and user communities. Members of this Management Committee meet annually to assist in the development of strategic goals, advise and monitor the work being carried out by the ADS.

3. Scope of Collections

3.1. Geographical Range

The geographical remit of the ADS is to provide digital archiving facilities for all areas of the world in which UK historic environment researchers have research interests.

However, it is recognised that as the ADS is UK-based and serves the high demand for extensive, quality UK historic environment data from UK historic environment professionals, therefore priority is given to UK data.

It is equally recognised that there is a substantial body of quality digital resources that are created by UK-based researchers working overseas where there may be no alternative archives, therefore the ADS will accept this data. Researchers funded by UK research councils may be required to offer their digital historic environment data for deposit with the ADS.

Where digital archives exist for other countries and regions, the ADS works with these bodies to define areas of responsibility and facilitate data exchange.

For digital data created in the course of historic environment research and fieldwork in the UK the mandated archive may vary with respect to geographical area and historic circumstances.

- **In Scotland**, Historic Environment Scotland is the designated archive for all fieldwork records, including digital data, generated during archaeological fieldwork.
- **In Wales** the RCAHMS collects and curates archaeological records and archives (paper, photographic and electronic) within the terms of the National Monuments Record of Wales (NMRW) Collecting Policy. NMRW is the national repository for records of the archaeological, architectural and historic environment in Wales.
- **In England**, Historic England operates a selective archiving policy, with all other archives deposited following local authority requirements.
- **In Northern Ireland** the Historic Environment Division (Department for Communities) Northern Ireland is the statutory depository for all records from fieldwork within the province.

The ADS works with the national heritage bodies, including ALGAO, to ensure that specifications for historic environment work include the obligation to offer an ordered digital archive for deposit. The ADS also works with the museums community, the Society of Museum Archaeologists and the Archaeological Archives Forum to ensure that museums make deposition with an accredited digital archive a condition of accepting historic environment archives. A list of local authorities and museums currently recommending deposition with ADS can be found on our partnerships page.

The ADS may be the only appropriate archive for digital datasets which encompass two or more of the constituent countries within the UK, or which relate to the UK as a whole (such as the CBA's Archaeological Site Index to Radiocarbon Dates from Great Britain and Ireland). Equally local, regional or national data creators may choose to provide access to their digital information through the ADS in order to contextualise it amongst other complimentary data resources and to take advantage of the opportunities of access to the scholarly community.

For secondary and analytical datasets, particularly research databases generated by those working in higher education (including databases created by research students) the ADS may also be the natural place of deposit.

3.2. Chronological Range

The chronological range of the ADS collections covers the historic environment of the Palaeolithic to the present day. In the areas of evolution and archaeology of the early hominids, the ADS shall liaise with other digital archives to define areas of responsibility.

3.3. Thematic Range

The ADS collects datasets within the area broadly defined as Archaeology and the Historic Environment, including the material culture aspects of Ancient History and Classics. The ADS does not limit its Collections Policy according to any particular theme. Consultation with the designated user community indicates a broad range of research and teaching interests across all aspects of cultural history. Nonetheless, where the opportunity arises, the ADS seeks to build upon existing strengths to provide a critical mass of resources pertinent to specific themes.

3.4. A Layered Collections Policy

The ADS maintains a **layered** Collections Policy, providing access to datasets held by the ADS, resources maintained by Cooperating Agencies and links to authoritative Internet resources. The ADS Collections can be classified into three types:

- **Archived Collections**
These resources are archived by the ADS and the ADS intends to preserve and keep the intellectual content of the resource available on a long-term basis. Such resources tend to be 'static', that is, the dataset is a coherent collection of digital information that is in its final state, and will not be changed.
- **Served Collections**
The resource is accessioned, catalogued and disseminated by the ADS, but another institution has primary responsibility for the content, maintenance and long-term preservation of the resource.
- **Catalogued Collections**
Electronic finding aids and metadata are held in the ADS catalogues facilitating high quality resource discovery. This may include pointers to resources delivered by another institution but for which ADS has assumed responsibility for the preservation of an offline digital archive copy.

Historically the ADS also provided:

- **Brokered Collections**

The resource is physically hosted elsewhere and maintained by another institution but the ADS has negotiated access to it with a collaborating agency and includes metadata and links to it in its catalogues.

Both **Served** and **Brokered** digital resources may be thought of as being 'volatile'. Here the data creator is actively editing such a dataset. Where possible ADS policy will be to create metadata catalogue entries and to point to the online collections maintained by a Cooperating Agency (a **brokered** resource). In cases where the data creator wishes to make a volatile dataset available for re-use but lacks network access then the ADS may take a "snapshot" which is periodically refreshed (a **served** resource).

Bibliographic Finding Aids and Special Collections

In addition to the [ADS Library](#), the ADS provides access to specialised electronic bibliographies, such as that of the [Vernacular Architecture Group](#).

3.5. Data Types

The ADS accepts the full spectrum of historic environment data types in accordance with ADS's [accepted file formats](#) when accompanied by the [required metadata](#). The decision to undertake such a wide-ranging collection policy was supported by the results of the ADS User Needs Survey, [Strategies for Digital Data](#). Please note that the [accepted file formats](#) is not an exhaustive list and the ADS is open to discussing deposition of new and innovative techniques and datasets using alternative file formats. Please contact collections@ads.ac.uk to discuss.

3.5.1. Electronic Texts

The ADS will maintain electronic versions of published journals, books, and monographs, and unpublished 'grey literature' fieldwork reports and provide free, open access to these resources via the [ADS Library](#).

- **Unpublished Reports**

Consultation with our user community revealed a desire for access to unpublished evaluation reports. In response to this perceived need the ADS, in collaboration with Historic England and other funding bodies, developed the [OASIS system](#) and associated [ADS Library](#) to ensure the wider and more systematic dissemination of this form of 'grey literature'.

- **Journals and Monographs**

The ADS will seek to preserve the functionality of electronic journals, including text, images, and multimedia features. The ADS already provides the archival home to the journal [Internet Archaeology](#). The ADS also provides access and preservation for the detailed information formerly held in the fiche of traditional paper publications and provides a service whereby it archives and provides online access via the [ADS Library](#) to national, period and local society journals and monograph series.

- **PhDs and Supporting Data**

The ADS takes deposits of PhDs undertaken in UK universities in historic environment, archaeology and related subjects, along with supporting data. The ADS does not accept other postgraduate or undergraduate dissertations, unless these include datasets of outstanding re-use value. These are assessed on a case-by-case basis.

3.5.2. Software

Software is frequently hardware dependent, of only short-term interest, and is incapable of migration without substantial programming effort. The ADS does not usually collect applications software, unless it exists in a form that makes it viable for future use, and is essential to support the re-use of a specific data resource.

3.6. Paper Records

The ADS only holds digital information. The ADS is not equipped for the adequate archiving of paper-based resources and does not hold any paper-based historic environment archives; it may however, provide advice about the digitisation of archives. The ADS is committed to the linking of distributed paper records, artefacts,

and other related materials through their documentation, and through the [OASIS system](#).

4. Collection Priorities

The ADS Collection Policy was originally developed through an extensive consultation process with its user community, published as [Strategies for Digital Data](#). The ADS continues to coordinate its collection priorities in conjunction with cognate organisations so as to ensure the preservation of quality digital datasets. These are recorded in the [ADS Strategic Plan](#). The collection priorities of the ADS will continue to develop in response to digital archive and data management policies within the UK.

5. Acquisition Methods

The layered nature of the ADS Collection Policy necessitates data to be acquired by a number of means.

2.4.1. Archive Collections

Archive level datasets will enter the ADS Collection by deposit under the [ADS Deposit Licence](#). The ADS acquires and stores datasets produced by individuals, projects or institutions. This strategy is preferable in the case of fixed or static datasets. As a condition of acquisition, the ADS will negotiate the broadest possible assignment of rights to guarantee access and enable redistribution of the dataset. The ADS will negotiate a non-exclusive licence to distribute deposited data. Datasets with severe restrictions will be accepted only under exceptional circumstances.

2.4.2. Served Collections

Where appropriate the ADS will negotiate data exchange or access agreements with other organisations to provide Served Collections. These Served datasets will ensure similar levels of data integrity and access as offered by the ADS in order to maintain consistency across the collections.

2.4.3. Catalogued Collections

Where appropriate the ADS will negotiate data exchange or access agreements with other organisations. It should be noted that Catalogued Collections will only provide links to quality resources of high utility to its user community and which have persistent URIs.

2.4.4. Licenced Datasets

While the ADS is unlikely to purchase or licence datasets directly, it may approach other bodies for funding to acquire a dataset of particular value.

2.5. Acquisition Strategies

Priorities for acquisitions will be defined by the ADS through its Management Committee inline with the [ADS Strategic Plan](#) and through a continuous process of consultation with its user community.

6. Standards

6.1. Evaluating Data

It is of considerable benefit to both depositors and users that there be an effective process of appraisal of materials proposed for accessioning. This process is documented in the ADS [Appraisal Policy and Procedures](#).

Where questions arise about the suitability of a dataset for archive or its reuse potential is unclear, the ADS can refer to a Collections Evaluation Working Group drawn from its Management Committee to assist the ADS evaluate datasets and maintain the rigorous standards necessary for the effective development of a quality resource base.

Data resources that are offered for deposit to the ADS will be evaluated to:

- Assess their intellectual content and the level of potential interest in their re-use.
- Evaluate how (even whether) they may viably be managed, preserved, and distributed to potential secondary users.

- Determine the presence or absence of another suitable archival home.

Whereas the first form of evaluation involves assessment of the content of a data resource, the second focuses more on data structure and format, and on the nature and completeness of any documentation supplied. The third evaluation criterion is intended to prevent duplication of digital archiving efforts within the historic environment community, and to preserve the integrity of existing digital archives.

Such evaluation is essential to determine how best to manage a digital resource for the purpose of preservation and secondary re-use, and also to determine what costs may be involved in accessioning and migrating the digital resource. A dataset that does not meet all these criteria may not necessarily be rejected, particularly if it has significant re-use value. Instead, documentation accompanying such datasets will be modified to warn users of potential pitfalls.

2.3.1. Assessing Intellectual Content

The ADS seeks to accession high quality material which will facilitate future historic environment research or which preserves a primary record of past archaeological work. A review process ensures that the content of datasets is of the highest intellectual quality: collected and recorded according to accepted archaeological standards. Assessing 'quality' is a subjective exercise and in this the ADS will be guided by the following principles:

2.3.2. Evaluating Preservation Potential and Re-use Value

2.3.2.1. Re-use Value

While some material may fit the needs of a particular project, institution, group of students, or other body, ADS datasets must have a wider applicability to the historic environment community as a whole. An assessment of re-usability must therefore be a key evaluation criterion. The re-usability of datasets is largely determined by community needs. Inevitably requirements continue to change and consequently the assessment of user needs forms an ongoing part of the activities of the ADS. The ADS monitors requests from potential data users and actual demand for datasets to inform the process of determining re-use value. Re-use value is also determined by the formats in which data are stored. If proprietary software packages form the basis of data entry/retrieval, and a majority of archaeologists do not have access to these proprietary systems, the dataset may be ranked low on the re-use value criterion.

2.3.2.2. Adequate Documentation

The quality of datasets will be affected by whether or not they are accompanied by an appropriate level of documentation. This documentation should relate to both the content and the technical format of the resource.

Documentation provides important detail about the context in which data was created and maintained before archiving, and about the relationships between the dataset and other information sources.

2.3.2.3. Suitability for Digital Preservation

If the format in which a dataset is stored means that the digital resource is irrecoverably obsolete upon presentation to the ADS this will be sufficient reason for recommending that the dataset not be accessioned.

2.3.3. Determining need of Primary Archival Home

There is no need to duplicate digital archiving services. If a dataset is being curated by an accredited organisation other than the ADS it will not be given high priority for accessioning. If a resource, however, is deemed to be of particular value to its user community, the ADS will seek to enter into a partnership with a collaborating agency in order to provide access to it. This may be at Served collections level and in such cases duplicate datasets may be accessioned into the ADS catalogues.

2.3.4. Interdisciplinary Resources

The ADS will also provide a home for datasets from allied disciplines that are of value to its user community, regardless of their disciplinary origin. These may include numismatics, place-name studies, sculptural research, and aspects of manuscript studies. Material culture aspects of social and cultural anthropology are also included and, from within physical anthropology, the field of hominid studies and human evolution.

2.5.1. Agreements with Cooperating Agencies

Where significant bodies of material are held by other agencies, the ADS may pursue Cooperative Agreements for the exchange of catalogue data and access to

information in preference to direct acquisition. The ADS will monitor the collecting activity and scope of other agencies to identify opportunities for collaboration.

2.5.2. Agreements with Granting Agencies

The ADS will seek to sign agreements with granting agencies that support humanities research, to encourage or mandate funding recipients to deposit their datasets. The ADS will seek to strike and sign such agreements with funding agencies that support research on the historic environment and related disciplines. The ADS will also seek to strike and sign such agreements with granting agencies that fund research exclusively or primarily in archaeology. The ADS will continue to work closely with all UK national heritage agencies. A list of the ADS current partnerships can be found [on our partnerships page](#).

2.5.3. Acquiring Data from Individual (and Institutional) Depositors

The ADS will seek to accession data from individual and institutional depositors. The ADS will inform depositors and potential depositors about data management planning, digital preservation and the deposit process and will provide guidance to them in appropriate forms.

2.5.4. Acquiring Data from Commercial Archaeology (Including Large Infrastructure Projects)

The ADS will seek to negotiate agreements with commercial archaeological units and large infrastructure projects to preserve data created as part of the UK planning process.

2.5.5. Resource Creation

The ADS may enter into data creation projects where a significant resource is identified as missing. For example, the [OASIS](#) project with Historic England and Historic Environment Scotland, provides index level data for all archaeological interventions and associated unpublished reports.

Sensitive Data

Historic Environment archives may sometimes include sensitive, confidential or personal data which relate to identifiable individuals, but which may also provide valuable historiographical or contextual information of importance for an understanding of the context of data collection. The ADS wishes to preserve such

data, and to make it available for research, learning and teaching. At the same time it recognises that this may raise issues of confidentiality and privacy covered by institutional ethics policies and possibly within the scope of the General Data Protection Regulation and the UK Data Protection Act 2018 and other legislation. The ADS has a [Sensitive Data Policy](#) which provides guidance on the deposition of sensitive, confidential and personal data.

2.9. Embargo Periods

When dealing with the archiving of digital data it is important that the data is archived (accessioned and ingested) at the point of deposit. This is to ensure that the data is in the correct format and accompanied by the appropriate documentation to ensure long-term preservation and sustainability. This does not mean that the data would be automatically accessible to the public. It may be deemed appropriate to establish an embargo period during which the data will be secured in the archive, but not accessible to the public. The length of the agreed embargo period will depend on the sensitivities involved.

Collections Management

4. Standards

Data standards are essential to ensure that data can be preserved in open formats and are interoperable with other data. Datasets offered for deposit to the HSDS must meet the standards set out in the ADS's Instructions for Depositors.

These include, but are not limited to:

- In the correct format.
- Collection-level metadata are provided.
- All digital objects have core metadata.
- All digital objects have additional technical metadata when required.
- All digital objects can be opened, are valid, and can be re-used.
- That the data collection is not and shall be in no way a violation or infringement of any copyright, trademark, patent, or other rights whatsoever of any person and does not and will not contravene any laws, including but not limited to the law relating to defamation, or obscenity.
- The data have no sensitive data concerns.
- No malware or malicious code.

Collections Management procedures and systems have been developed by the ADS which are recorded in our [procedural policies and manuals](#). These are based on a framework of documentation and technical standards, and indicate target service (or performance) levels. The ADS has implemented a Collections Management System to track the progress of a deposit through the accessioning and preservation processes.

3.1 Documentation Standards

3.1.1. Shared Metadata for Information Discovery

In conjunction with bodies such as the UK Office for Library and Information Networking (UKOLN) the ADS identified a core set of resource description elements that may be applied to enable the development of an easily integrated catalogue. These core elements have been implemented by the ADS in describing resources in its collection. Over time these have been enhanced by the addition of Library of Congress Linked Open Data subject terms, use of Heritage Data Vocabularies and other structured thesauri .

3.1.2. Domain Specific Metadata

The ADS has identified, documented, and adopted the richer level of resource description standards as appropriate for the resources in its collection. Including, but not limited to the Forum on Information Standards in Heritage (FISH) Thesauri vocabularies.

3.1.3. Dataset Documentation

The ADS maintains detailed data documentation at an object level as may be required in the secondary re-use of resources in its collection.

3.1.4. Administrative Data

The ADS documents the administrative data it records about resources in its collection to enable the effective management of those resources through the implementation of its Collections Management System.

3.1.5. Data provided by Collaborating Agencies

Data held in the ADS catalogues includes that from other agencies received by the ADS under a Cooperative Agreement. As part of the definition of a Cooperative Agreement with another agency the ADS will be responsible for developing a concordance between data structures, and for managing the exchange of catalogue records.

3.2. Technical Standards

3.2.1 File formats

The [ADS Instructions for Depositors](#) sets out a framework of technical standards that define the file formats in which data will be accepted and stored. For specific deposit types these guidelines are augmented by the recommendations contained in the [Guides to Good Practice](#) series.

3.2.2 Network/Communications Protocols.

A framework of [endpoints and metadata services](#) has been implemented by the ADS. This includes interoperability with a number of European partners and the ADS is actively involved in the adoption of a service oriented approach to data aggregation and cross-searching.

3.2.3 Network Security.

A framework for maintaining the [security and integrity](#) of datasets and their documentation has been developed and implemented by the ADS. The ADS servers sit behind the University of York firewall, which controls the types of access to the data held on the server. At the point of delivery most of the information provided to users is presented as part of a dynamically generated web page that ensures the integrity of the underlying data source.

3.3. Collections Management System

The ADS has developed a Collections Management System that describes its holdings and centrally records descriptive, technical and administrative data as described above.

7. Payment

7.1. Payment for Acquisitions

While the ADS is unlikely to purchase or licence datasets directly, it may approach other bodies for funding to acquire a dataset of particular value.

7.2. Receiving Payment for Services

The ADS implements a [Charging Policy](#) for the long-term preservation of a dataset or development of a bespoke interface as described in the [Charging Policy](#). The [Charging Policy](#) recognises that digital archiving and bespoke interface design entails significant expenditure and that these costs should be recovered from the body funding the data collection and/or research. Although ADS digital archiving pilot projects have indicated that basic archiving costs will add an overhead of less than 5% to the original project budget, more explicit statements of the costs are set out in the ADS [Charging Policy](#). The Charging Policy will be implemented sensitively. The usage of ADS resources will continue to be supported free of charge.

4. Preservation

The ADS implements an archival system based on the Open Archival Information System ([OAIS](#)) for digital preservation. This is an ISO standard which determines the process of ingest, archive and dissemination for digital resources. The ADS first received the [Data Seal of Approval](#) as a Trusted Digital Repository in 2013 and is now a [CoreTrustSeal](#) accredited repository.

5. Access and Use

The ADS encourages broad access to and use of its collections, both within the UK research community and beyond. The ADS actively develops opportunities to facilitate cross searches of distributed archaeological resources held by collaborating organisations, such as Europeana, the [Ariadne Portal](#) and [MEDIN](#).

5.1. Data Use

The ADS has a dedicated post (Collections Development Manager), responsible for investigating ways of aiding and encouraging the use of its collections. These may include, but are not limited to, workshops, training events, lectures, and the development of Guides to Good Practice. If necessary, the ADS will support the design and development of tools to support data analysis, although it is unlikely to undertake development alone.

5.2. Rights Management

A [Deposit Licence](#) for use with individual and institutional depositors has been implemented to protect the rights of depositors, users and the ADS. Within this Deposit Licence the terms under which the dataset can be accessed and re-used is identified.

Access to the holdings of the ADS is free at the point of use to all users. Users are required to abide by the [Terms and Conditions of the ADS website](#) and the appropriate Access Licence displayed in each archive collection when reusing data. The ADS reserves the right to control the downloading of some or all resources by a system of user authentication at some point in the future.

5.3. Data Delivery Mechanisms and Tools

Data is distributed to users via the [ADS Data Catalogue](#) and [ADS Library](#).

5.3.1. Via the Searchable Catalogue of Metadata Records

[ArchSearch](#) has been developed to enable the searching of the entire ADS collections, as well as the collections of cooperating agencies. The principle underlying the ADS catalogue, [ArchSearch](#), is that archaeological data can be geo-referenced, inviting spatially based queries. Therefore we have developed cooperation agreements with the CBA, Historic England, Historic Environment Scotland, RCAHMW and DoCNI, and various local authorities and organisations which have provided us with over 1.4 million metadata records at site or monument level. These cover England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Any site-based search within these areas will generally provide several hits pointing users to further resources. In specific cases, users can drill down from the site level metadata index record into a full digital archive held by the ADS.

5.3.3. Via 'Special Collections'

The ADS have developed specific tools or working environments for the delivery and use of significant datasets including the development of map-based tools and search queries accessed via the [ADS Archives](#) search facility.

5.3.4. Via ADS Library

The [ADS Library](#) has been developed to bring together material from the CBA's British and Irish Archaeological Bibliography (BIAB), the ADS library of unpublished fieldwork reports as well as documents from the ADS archives and archaeological publishers. Users are able to search over 300,000 bibliographic records for the historic environment, and when available link directly to the resource held by the ADS or by an external provider.

8. Disposal of Data

The presumption within the ADS archive is against disposal of data once accessioned within the archive. However, there may be the rare instance when disposal of data is appropriate and in such cases the ADS actions are determined by the Deaccession and Data Disposal Policy and the procedures outlined in the [Deaccession and Data Disposal Procedures](#).