

Introduction - Appendix:

Maritime Archaeological Archives and Collection Issues.

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The accessibility and security of archives generated from maritime archaeological investigations has a significant impact on the development of research. As maritime archaeology in England has developed, it has often been seen as 'different' and outside of the mainstream for both archaeology and museums. Differing management and legislative regimes have also had an impact on the generation and deposition of archives. Extra to this the often additional requirements for conservation of objects from the marine zone has made many museums nervous about acquiring maritime material, and the vast size of some of the digital datasets involved in investigations make suitable storage difficult. The result has been a lack of deposition of archives within public repositories.

This section reviews archives and collections with a particular focus on issues which have a direct bearing on current and future research. It should be recognised there are a range of issues related to the management of and access to maritime archives, these are explored further in the reports generated from the Securing A Future for Maritime Archaeological Archives project (Satchell 2009 a, b and c).

1. Summary of Archive Production, Type and Collections

There are four key sectors currently involved in the production of maritime archaeological archives, they are:

- Archaeological contractors;
- Research organisations, Trusts and Societies;
- Designated wreck site licensees and advisors; and
- Divers and salvors.

The regulation (or non-regulation) of the production of the archive from the different sectors is having a significant impact on whether material is deposited within a public repository. Likewise the motivation of each sector is very different, and hence the format and contents of the archives are often inconsistent.

In addition to the archive held within each of the sectors above there are also collections within:

- Public museums
- Private museums, exhibitions and collections

The summary of archives produced by each sector below provides context to the research framework. The material and data being recovered and methodology of how this is done has an impact on its suitability, use and integration with research. Additionally a brief summary of collections currently held in public and private museums has been provided.

Public Museum Collections: These holdings are dominated by objects, documents and images. There are some museums holding large collections from single sites, but often there are small amounts of archive from a larger number of sites.

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Private Museum, Exhibitions and Collections: In general there are high numbers of object holdings, although there are some notable exceptions where considerable paper and/or image archive also exists. There is very little video or environmental samples within these archives. Some of the Designated Historic Wreck Sites are well represented. Many of the holdings are wreck material, this demonstrates the very large, generally untapped, research potential of non-designated wreck material. Included within this category are private companies, industries such as aggregates dredging and ports and harbours often have extensive private archives. Much of this material is digital in nature, although they also have limited object holdings. While shipwrecks are the dominant archive type, there are some notable examples of prehistoric material held by fishermen and aggregate companies.

Archaeological contractors: these archives have low levels of objects within them, and often include large digital data sets. Again there are relatively small amounts of video and sample archive. Types of project represented include a wide range of studies with survey and excavation included. Most of these archives are related to development control projects, they have been generated over relatively short periods of time. Many of the projects have been completed and are 'closed' archives now residing on contractors shelves with no repository to take them.

Research Organisations, Trusts and Societies: This sector is characterised by fewer object holdings and large amounts of digital data (although the inclusion of the Archaeological Data Service (ADS) within this sector increases this representation). There are some particularly large archives within the sector; there are also many examples of 'open' archives that are still being added to.

Designated wreck site licensees and advisors: the archives from our nationally important wreck sites have a small percentage of digital material, and high numbers of objects. Many of these sites have had excavation undertaken on them, and hence provide archives that are representative of the type of material to be expected during intrusive fieldwork. In general these archives are accumulated over long periods of time, with over half of them being currently active and publication remains limited.

Divers and salvors: This sector is based entirely around object recoveries. While some of these may have small levels of documentation held by the owner, the majority do not and are single recoveries. Objects are routinely collected from sites all around the English coast, meaning a gradual degradation of the seabed archive. Due to the need to report wreck recoveries there is a dataset of objects brought up, however, there is not requirement for assessment of the historic or archaeological importance of this material. A Wreck Amnesty was held by the Receiver of Wreck in 2000 (Receiver of Wreck 2001), during which over 30,000 objects were reported.

2. Key Archive Issues

There are a number of factors affecting maritime archives which are having a bearing on their availability and utilisation in research. Underlying all of these issues are a number of conceptual problems, which have and are shaping responses, these are:

- Poor communication and integration between archaeology, maritime archaeology, museums and maritime museums is a barrier to developing maritime archaeological research and associated reference collections and centres of specialism;

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- There is a lack of understanding about what a maritime archaeological archive might consist of and how big it might be and therefore how it should be curated or utilised for further research;
- Many museums are concerned that they will be asked to accession lots of waterlogged wood and the perceived associated curatorial problems do not in fact match the reality of most maritime archives;
- A marine archaeological archive is perceived to be somehow different from a terrestrial one; and,
- There is a focus on collection rather than analysis and dissemination, meaning material that is in store is often uninterpreted and hence both less accessible and an untapped research resource.

3. Archive delivery system – factors influencing deposition

A fundamental problem for maritime archives is that in general they do not progress to deposition. This is due to a range of issues and problems related to the ‘archive delivery system’.

Creation and Compilation: It is recognised that the creation of a stable, ordered, accessible archive is a prime responsibility of all those undertaking any archaeological project (Brown 2007). Although there are standards and guidelines (S&Gs) relating to archive creation and compilation in place these are not always being adhered to. There are multiple reasons for this, with some of the most influential being a lack of awareness of the S&Gs, an absence of monitoring systems in the marine zone and inconsistent specifications in project designs/briefs/conditions.

Legislation: While a review of legislation affecting archives is outside the scope of this review, it is important to recognise the fundamental effects the current legal regime has on maritime archaeological archives. (For further information on legislation there are a range of publications available, e.g. JNAPC 2000 & 2003; Oxley 2004; Dromgoole 2006). Archive production and deposition is particularly affected by law related to the salvage regime of the Merchant Shipping Act 1995, which is administered by the Receiver of Wreck, and a lack of legal protection for marine heritage sites (other than small numbers of Designated Historic Wreck Sites). As a result of the salvage regime object recoveries by divers are most often awarded to the recoverer in lieu of a salvage award, with few historic objects finding homes within public museums. This means there is on-going attrition of the seabed archive with the collections being highly dispersed in private ownership, without full consideration of their historic context. As only a very small number of historic wreck sites are provided legal designation under the Protection of Wrecks Act 1973, and hence are protected from unlicensed recoveries, this means the majority of historic wrecks remain open to indiscriminate removal of material. This results in the long term degradation of our marine historic environment. Moreover, as published research and coherent archives from maritime archaeological investigations are so few, there is not the current body of knowledge to be able to fully assess the significance of individual recoveries and hence determine whether they should be acquired for the nation through the salvage regime.

Roles and responsibilities: As the roles and responsibilities of museums and archives, curators, contractors, clients and regulators are not clearly defined, this means that the fate of archives, whether through development control or research investigation, is unclear. Once again the net

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result is archives which are undeposited, and hence in accessible. Particular areas affecting archives are:

The extent of archive repositories (museums) collecting areas being undefined, or not including the marine environment;

- Curatorial responsibility being inconsistently applied and/or a lack of curatorial involvement in marine projects;
- A lack of established framework within which curators can work;
- Lack of conditions on consent, and if there are conditions confusion over who is responsible for ensuring these conditions are met; and,
- It is unclear who is responsible for monitoring adherence to archive standards.

4. Lack of Museum and Archive Capacity

There are few museums or repositories that collect maritime archives. As many of them do not have the space, facilities or training to deal with them. This means there are few places where willing depositors can go for advice, and there are no national reference collections for maritime objects. This results in:

- A lack of access and security with archives having a highly uncertain fate;
- Large amounts of material is in private ownership;
- A lack of understanding of the need for and advice on marine conservation (also see below); and ultimately
- The marine historic resource is not safe guarded for the nation.

5. Access

The archaeological resource in the form of archive exists for the education and enjoyment of the public as a whole as well as researchers. Despite the value of archive re-assessment and publication projects, there is a marked lack of research on extant archives in English maritime archaeology; this is notable not least because there are very few new or ongoing excavation and intrusive investigation projects in the marine zone, so these archives represent an unrealised research resource. For a number of reasons this is not happening.

Physical access: access to the marine archaeological resource in the form of archive material in store is severely limited because too much is held in private collections, or on shelves of contractors due to a lack of receiving repository. This means:

- There is little or no access to material through display; and
- A lack of professional access as the results of investigations are not reaching the NMR, HERs, and hence policy makers and planning decisions.

Lack of physical access to recovered maritime archaeological archives is an urgent and pressing issue. As most of the resource lies under the water, and hence out of bounds for most of the population, there is an increased need to develop other means of access.

Lack of publication: there are a number of large past maritime archaeological investigations, as well as ongoing projects that have not published data, analysis or interpretation through a peer reviewed process. As a result there are:

- Large numbers of 'grey literature' reports;
- Poor signposting of resources;

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- Little structure for disseminating the results of marine research. For even if archives are theoretically accessible, lack of publication mean that no one knows they exist; and,
- A general lack of presentation of marine archaeology.

6. Conservation

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The issues with regards to the deposition of maritime archives have been explored in a number of reports (Satchell 2009a; HWTMA, Satchell 2009b; Ransley & Satchell 2006). One of the main issues brought up time and again is the backlog of un-conserved marine artefacts, which do not get deposited into museums. A majority of museums feel unwilling or unable to accept maritime archaeological material because they feel they have insufficient expertise and resources to curate it or they do not regard it as their responsibility. This assessment looks at the conservation provision currently available in England to see whether we could provide conservation facilities and expertise to deal with this backlog and with future material. It is not part of this assessment to put a figure on the current backlog of un-conserved or un-deposited material. Suggestions on how to overcome this problem form part of the second part of this section.

It is extremely difficult to find information regarding provision for conservation of maritime archaeological material. The consulted surveys are now out of date and their results have to be used cautiously (see list below¹). The information on the conservation register is incomplete and generally vague. Similarly it is difficult to access information regarding the level of teaching of maritime archaeological conservation actually occurring in universities. The problem of lack of conservation provision was discussed by Panter (2007). It seems that since then not much has changed. There is still a perception that the provision of maritime archaeological conservation facilities and personnel is inadequate and this view appears to be borne out by the statistics. Whilst researchers may find conservation facilities dealing with maritime material through word of mouth, but these facilities are not well 'sign-posted'. Without knowledge of the system or the existence of a maritime conservation network it is extremely difficult to find access to maritime conservation facilities.

- *Securing a Future for Maritime Archaeological Archives – Element One: Mapping Maritime Collection Areas, 2009*
Out of 104 museums asked, 51 provided information as to why they are not collecting maritime archaeological archives. 14.4% said: Lack of facilities and 10.5% said: Lack of expertise. Whether these two findings refer to lack of conservation facilities and expertise for maritime artefacts remains unclear as the survey did not go into further detail.
- *Esther Cameron, Sarah Watkins, David Watkinson, Provision for Archaeological Conservation in England and Wales: A Review. 1988*
This report was compiled by the United Kingdom Institute for Conservation – Archaeology Section. It highlights various issues in terms of conservation provision and backlog, but

¹ As part of this project we were asked to assess the available information and not to collect new data. A number of surveys were consulted and the ICON conservation register was queried to assess the current conservation provision for maritime artefacts.

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does not make any references to maritime archives or conservation provision for maritime artefacts as such.

- *Kenneth Aitchison, Profiling the Profession – A survey of archaeological jobs in the UK, 1999*
This survey mentions underwater archaeology, post excavation conservation and preparation of archaeological archives as a service provided by different organisations, but does not make specific reference to the conservation provision of maritime artefacts.
- *European Science Foundation (ESF), Archaeology, Natural Science and Technology: The European Situation, 1979*
This survey was compiled by the European Science Foundation in 1979. Admittedly it is now out of date and many of the institutions named either do not exist anymore or have changed the nature of their work. It nevertheless gives a good overview of laboratories and institutions offering scientific services for the archaeological sector at the time. Out of 111 institutions surveyed across the United Kingdom, 25 stated that they have conservation facilities. Out of those 13 can deal with waterlogged material, mainly wood and leather.
- *ICON Conservation Register: www.conservationregister.com*
The Institute of Conservation (ICON) is the professional body representing conservators in the UK. Accredited conservators can advertise their services on their website; individuals looking for a conservator can search for type of work (Conservation/ Restoration or Survey/ Assessment), by material and area (postal codes). A search for 'archaeological material' resulted in 17 hits, for 'marine antiques' in 19 hits and for 'ship' in 4 hits. There was no category as such for maritime archaeological material. Not all archaeological conservators offer facilities for maritime artefacts. Marine antiques and ship do probably not refer to maritime archaeological material.

7. Recommendations

Having publicly accessible marine archaeological archives would be of fundamental value to realising the research agendas within the following chapters. To enable future deposition and hence security and availability of archives, there are a range of recommendations to address the key issues outlined above:

- **Conceptual issues:** *awareness-raising is required in the form of publications and training events.*
- **Archive delivery system:** *there is a need to increase distribution of existing standards, and to develop archive standard guidance tailored specifically to marine archaeological audiences (see section one for summary of archive producers).*
- **Lack of effective legal protection for marine historic assets:** *There is a need to continue to lobby for legislative change, to develop legislation and management that properly serves the interests of the marine archaeological resource.*
- **Roles and responsibilities:** *A summary of the existing system is required to fully determine current structures and areas of responsibility in order to develop a strategy for improving the mechanisms for archive creation, compilation and curation.*
- **Lack of museum and archive capacity:** *a strategy is needed for the creation of proper archive curation facilities, which is then followed by a programme of implementation.*

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Within these facilities national reference collections and centre(s) of expertise should be established to help develop research.

- **Access:** *It is essential that proper funding is provided for public dissemination of the marine archaeological resource in the form of exhibitions and educational programmes. The development of publicly funded facilities in the form of museums/ resource centres would enable enhanced access. There is also a clear need to encourage and fund analysis and publication of extant archives to improve access for future research and planning.*

The volume addresses the urgent need to take a strategic look at archaeological investigations within the field. However, it will be vital to the success of taking forward its recommendation in the future that the archives of past and future investigations are made publicly available and have a secure future.

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Satchell, J, 2009c *Securing a Future for Maritime Archaeological Archives – Element Three: Analysing present and Assessing future archives creation*. Hampshire and Wight Trust for Maritime Archaeology Report. Available at <http://www.hwtma.org.uk/archaeologicalreports>