

Archive Statement

Original data about recording systems was provided by Tom Loader, expanded by the documentary archive consolidation team (Abby Antrobus) and with notes on the digital products by Mike Feider, John Craven and Jude Plouviez.

PROJECT DEFINITION

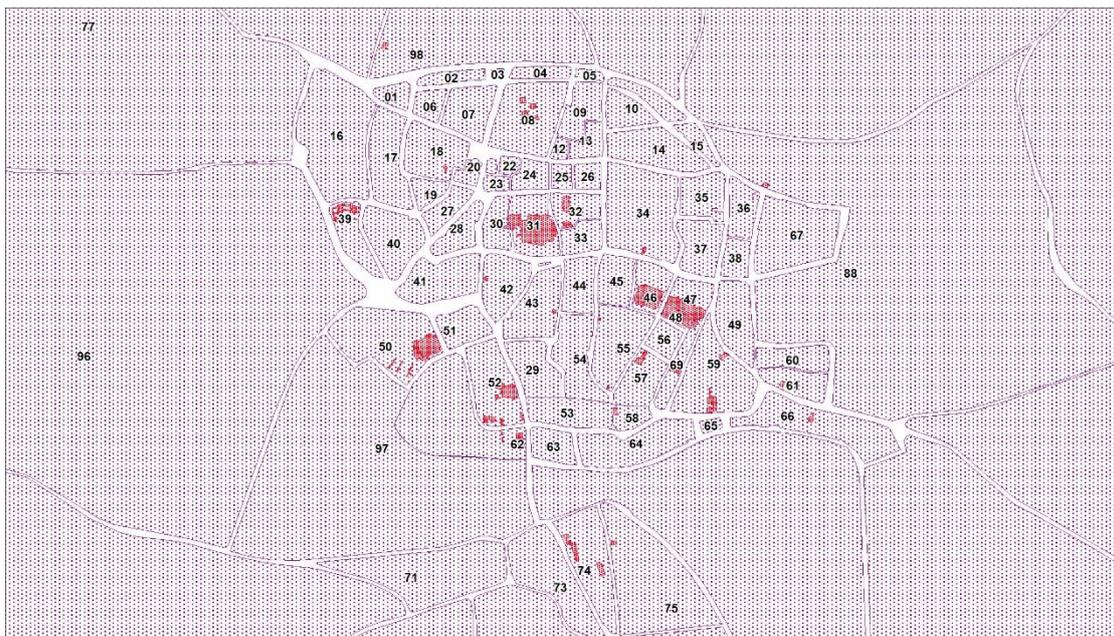
The Ipswich historic core archive project includes 34 sites excavated by Suffolk County Council between 1974 (formation of the Archaeological Service, known at that time as Suffolk Archaeological Unit) and 1990 (the introduction of PPG 16). It does not include the many watching briefs and building recording carried out during that period, nor does it include sites excavated outside the historic core.

However it proved more efficient to catalogue all the Ipswich documentary material in the early, archive consolidation, phase of the project as the vast bulk did relate to the 34 sites.

RECORDING SYSTEMS

The site numbering systems and its relation to the SCC HER

Site records relate to specific archaeological events (excavations, evaluations, watching briefs, casual finds etc.). Site numbering is different to that used in the County HER (where the convention is a 3-letter parish code plus a 3-digit number sequential within parish, eg IPS 015) with the Borough being divided into blocks, which are defined by streets. Each block has been allocated a two digit reference (01-99). Any site identified within a block is then also allotted a two digit reference, allowing up to 99 sites per block – thus IAS 3104 for the excavation at St Stephens Lane, being the fourth site to be recorded within the 31 block. IAS refers to Ipswich Archaeological Survey, as the section of the county archaeological service dealing with Ipswich was known initially.



The Ipswich block numbers for the urban core, with the 34 sites shown in red

Site context sheets

Paper

In 1974 an A4 single context sheet was produced, allowing for the recording of one single Observable Phenomenon (OP) per sheet. Such sheets were used on all the small sites excavated before the first major town excavation (School Street, IAS 4801) in 1983.

A separate A3 sized "Context" sheet was required in order to put individual OP records into groups / contexts. This was a combined context / finds summary sheet.

In 1983 the sheet was simplified allowing multiple OPs to be placed on one A4 sheet of paper. This system meant that excavators could have as much or as little space to record each OP entry as they thought appropriate. Occasional sketches, drawn to enhance the data were placed on the backs of the sheets. At the end of the excavation the same basic sheets could be used to reassemble the individual OPs into their Context groupings.

Digital

Computerisation of the data began in the late-1980s. All context sheets were input into dBase II databases by site but entries were abbreviated by the 255 character field system and anyway lacked parts of the record such as sketches. This data was copied across into MS Access in the 1990's in single tables for each site; this formed the basis for the IAS_OPList and IAS_OPRelationships tables.

The term OP has been updated to Context_OP in the tables to align better with current vocabulary. There was no separation of Cut and Fill numbers. Use of the term 'Context' was for grouping – the Context reference for a feature was generally the top OP of the fill. The term Context has been updated to Group_Context in the site table.

Finds record systems

Finds sheets have a similar history to that defined above for Context data. When the bulk of the finds were processed quantities (number or weight) and presence /absence of a wide variety of materials were recorded on paper sheets. These lists were input in the 1980's-1990's into dBase followed by MS Access, with separate tables for each site thus allowing variations in how a material type was listed between sites. The final IAS_BulkFinds table has accommodated as much of the data as possible but left out some minor classes of material, particularly where these were represented in the detailed material catalogues.

If a find was individually recorded on site it would be given an OP number (so now a Context_OP number). After excavation significant finds were catalogued in material type based lists to give an entry of the format 0004/0802Cu (copper alloy item number 4 from site IAS0802). This is only applied as standard to copper alloy and coins, most other materials have a mixture of catalogued and not. Where the catalogue numbers do exist they have been used as the primary reference, often abbreviated to remove the site element (eg in image filenames).

There were more considerable issues with the finds than with the context digital data because the catalogues had been copied out to specialists and amended, creating multiple variant versions. There had also been some serious losses, particularly of details about ferrous objects.

Pottery recording was re-organised by Paul Blinkhorn, who used a standard form for recording individual fabrics and forms by context. This involved a series of numeric identifiers for different aspects of the wares designed for easy input given the digital constraints of the 1980's; unfortunately there were at some stage two different versions of this list of identifiers. It has proved possible to identify the coding applied to the different sites and to produce an integrated pottery table, into which basic data for a few outstanding pre-1980 sites was added from the more minimal early record sheets. It was not clear whether the dating information in the pottery tables was a pottery spotdate or derived from the site records and so this was excluded – a field indicating the phases covered by each fabric/ware has been added instead.

Plans

Many early site plan originals were produced on exposed dye-line film provided by the drawing office of the County Planning Department. While this medium was not susceptible to shrinkage, it proved a poor substitute for drafting film. As such, redrawing of the original plans was undertaken as a priority at the end of each excavation. From the early 1980s onwards plans were drawn on drafting film, and the originals stored in hanging cabinets. Photographic copies of the inked plans were made for sites (IAS 3104, IAS 3201, IAS 4601, IAS 4801, IAS 5003, IAS 5203, IAS 5204, IAS 6106, IAS 6601 and IAS 9802). Film copies have been made and (generally) reproduced at 1:100 scale.

The film copies or the inked plans as appropriate were scanned for the archive project in 2012-13 and copied using AutoCAD. The drawing team produced a full set of layers showing detail such as human skeletal remains, stone and brick walls, break of slope as well as the polygon-only layer (FeatureBoundaries) defining each archaeological entity with the Context_OP number. The detail layers will be available for the production of appropriate publication plans. Data was converted to MapInfo for use by the rest of the team (SCC has been very reluctant to allow any licences for AutoCAD, preferring the use of MapInfo alone if mapping is essential).

Sections

The majority were drawn in pencil onto lined graph paper (at a scale of 1:20) but some were drawn onto:

- imperial scale graph paper (therefore inaccurate) (not sure whether any of these exist within the digital current archive...)
- paper reminiscent of Izal toilet paper, with a black grid, where the pencil image is hard to differentiate from the paper and gridded background.

They proved problematic to copy, for example photocopying very badly. Most were scanned, with variable results, in the early/mid 2000's as .gif files – although the resolution is not ideal these are mostly adequate for checking site detail and have been incorporated without change.

The sections were numbered in sequence on each excavation and this number was included in the original digital context lists; the numbers have been transferred to the IAS_ContextImages table and were used as the scan filename eg IAS 3104 Sheet 185.gif

Site notebooks

Site notebooks were not a feature of Ipswich excavations. A total of three notebooks, all used for recording features (mainly the Ipswich ware kiln and burned down buildings) on the Buttermarket site (IAS 3104), are in store - at least one of these notebooks contains additional material to that recorded on the context sheets but none has been digitised.

Levels

Data for most excavated sites is in level books in the archive store. Most reduced levels have been transferred to section sheets and is on the scanned sheets.

Photographs

The Ipswich photographic archive comprises colour transparencies and monochrome negatives.

Colour Transparencies

Slides were taken on sites, but were not intended as the primary photographic record because of their poor archival quality. Some have deteriorated markedly and the whole collection was scanned (by photography at Worcestershire Co Co archive service) in 2014, with an archive high-res set of .tifs and a set of .jpgs for general use.

The Ipswich slides were catalogued separately to the main SCCAS system with a single consecutive number identifier. This was used in the format S1 leading on the scan filenames with Site following eg S125_IAS1501.jpg. Where the context information had been transferred to the context record it was used to link the slides into the IAS_ContextImages table, but many are not linked to context although information may be found in the original catalogue IAS_Slides_catalogue table (and in labels used on site in the pictures).

Monochrome negatives

Mainly 2¼" x 2¼" format, some 35 mm format in the archive store, as are the contact prints. Alphabetic film numbers were used to catalogue in line with the general SCCAS system; the outstanding computer input of these was done as part of the archive consolidation and a copy of the relevant section of the count catalogue is held in the Ipswich Archive catalogues.mdb. None of the monochrome photographic collection has yet been digitised.

Radiographs

A high proportion of ferrous and non ferrous metal artefacts were sent for X-ray after excavation. The (integral) plate numbers are used as the X-ray reference, which was included in artefact catalogues (though probably not always).

The plates were originally stored in brown envelopes, on which information about the artefact numbers was indicated with sketches of the location of the different objects on the plate. This information was used to create an X-ray catalogue during archive consolidation and the envelopes have been retained so that information can be checked.

Because of the poor state of the iron objects by the time they were repacked for transfer to Ipswich Museum in 2009-10 the information on the X-rays is extremely valuable. They were therefore scanned in 2012 (at Bradford University) and a high-res archive tif and smaller lossless jpg file produced for each plate.