

# A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A HERITAGE INFORMATION PARTNERSHIPS SUPERVISOR

June 29, 2012 Sarah MacLean Day of Archaeology, Day of Archaeology 2012, Digital Archaeology Auditing, Birmingham, e.g. pillbox, English Heritage, fantastic information management tool, HER, HER Forum, HER Officer, Heritage, Heritage Gateway, Heritage Information Partnerships Supervisor, Historic Environment Record, Northern Ireland, Sarah MacLean, Scotland, the Heritage, United Kingdom, Wales

Although I plan to be on holiday on 29<sup>th</sup> June this year I really wanted to contribute to Day of Archaeology this year. So this is a day in the life of a Heritage Information Partnerships Supervisor! First a bit of background...

My name is Sarah MacLean and I work at English Heritage in the Heritage Data Management Team. My role is to act as a liaison between English Heritage and Historic Environment Records (HERs) staff.



*A HIP Supervisor at work*

HERs are databases that hold information about known archaeology, historic buildings and other historic sites for the area they cover. They can cover single local authority areas, multiple local authority areas, whole counties or a national park. They were originally set up to provide data to inform the planning process. Now they also provide information to researchers and local

communities about the history of their area. You can find out more about which HER covers your local area and how to access their information on the [Heritage Gateway](#).

We support the development of HERs through advice, guidance and partnership working. We promote the adoption of standards and good practice. There are over 80 HERs that we support in England.

I have previously worked as a HER Officer which gives me a useful insight into that world. HERs are a fantastic information management tool in archaeology and can be used for a whole host of purposes. From advising the planning process, to academic research, to plain curiosity of what is down your street. I have always been interested in sharing knowledge and information management. With a passion for archaeology working with HERs has always seemed like a natural career path for me.

A typical day for me starts around 8:30am. I check my e-mails and look at my plan for the day. I've usually planned my day before I finish the previous day. However there is always the possibility an e-mail has arrived in the interim to change my mind!

I have a couple of small tasks to do first. I am one of the people responsible for making minor edits on the [Heritage Gateway website](#). I have to update a couple of the contact pages for the HERs. We try to keep these up to date and we rely on HER officers to provide us with this information.

At the moment I'm writing a report on the 2012 Content and Computing Survey. We run this survey every 3-4 years to see how English HERs have changed. We ask a range of questions about the types of sites they record, what database package they use and which data standards they adhere to. This year we have run the survey online for the first time. We have had a fantastic response with 87% of HERs completing the survey. It is important for us to make sure we feed the information back to HERs to help them with their forward planning. The report won't be completely finished until the autumn but I want to make a good start. I spend most of my morning working on the section about data standards and thesauri. We encourage HERs to try and use the same terminology across the country. The good news is that all the respondents use the national monument thesaurus. This means that if you are looking for a specific type of site e.g. pillbox, it doesn't matter whether you are in Northumberland or Cornwall the pillbox records should all be indexed as 'pillbox'.

Just before lunch I finish pulling together information I need for an upcoming meeting. I am involved with 'Informing the Future of the Past'. This is a set of guidelines written for HERs to use across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. A number of organisations have collaborated to produce these guidelines and a number of HER officers have provided useful, illustrative case studies. At the moment the guidelines are being moved on to a new wiki format website to make them easier to update. At the steering group meeting we will be discussing the progress of this project.

After lunch I get to work on another large task. One of the main pieces of work we do throughout the year is HER audits. We encourage HERs to undertake a self audit to identify areas of improvement and create a forward plan of work. HERs are also encouraged to review their audits every 3-5 years. We provide the specification for the audit and a small grant towards the cost of the work. We monitor the progress of the audit and read and respond to the finished report. Many HERs who have undertaken this work have found it beneficial.

This year I am looking after four audits. Three of these have already started and this afternoon I have a monitoring meeting with one of them. The meeting is conducted by telephone and the HER Officer has provided a current draft in advance for me to check on their progress. The meeting goes well, the audit is on time and the report is looking good. I really enjoy this part of my job. I like to encourage people and help them with their work.

After my meeting I check my e-mails to see that I have had a couple of queries in. I regularly receive queries from HER staff. No two are ever the same. Sometimes they are seeking guidance for a specific situation they find themselves in. Sometimes they are trying to find out who they need to contact within English Heritage for further information about the projects we run.

At this time of the year we also get queries relating to our twice yearly HER Forum. The HER Forum meetings are held in summer and winter, currently in Birmingham. Presentations are given at the Forum meeting and HER staff have a chance to network during the breaks. It provides a fantastic opportunity for them to hear what other HERs are doing. Although they meet regularly at a regional level, the national meeting is sometimes the only chance to meet HER officers outside their region. This summer our theme is Local Engagement. We have some exciting talks lined up. I'm looking forward to the meeting as I'm very interested in Local Engagement. I also can't wait to catch up with some of the HER Officers I haven't seen for a while. There is even a possibility people will be tweeting from the meeting this year so keep an eye out for that!

After another busy day, it's time to catch my train home. Some days I do feel that I'm another step removed from the archaeology itself, but I really enjoy my work. I feel I can make a difference, if only a small one, to ensuring our past is recorded and available to all.