

Halton Chesters, Northumberland

Report on an Archaeological Evaluation



Trench Base looking south

ARS Ltd Report 2008/4
November 2008

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In November 2008 Archaeological Research Services Ltd were commissioned by British Telecom to undertake an archaeological evaluation at Halton Chesters, Northumberland. The work was carried out prior to the installation of a new telegraph pole in a field to the west of Halton Chesters Roman Fort.

Six fragments of pottery were found within the plough soil dating to around AD120 – 150. No structures were located during this excavation down to the natural level, and given that no artefacts were found below the topsoil layer, it is unlikely that the proposed work carried out within this area would damage anything of archaeological significance.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Location and scope of work

1.1.1. In November 2008 Archaeological Research Services Ltd were commissioned by British Telecom to undertake an archaeological evaluation at Halton Chesters, Northumberland (Fig. 1). This document details the work that was undertaken during the evaluation in accordance with discussion with Mike Collins of English Heritage. The purpose of the evaluation trench was to ascertain whether there were any archaeological constraints that may have affected the installation of a new telegraph pole, by British Telecom, in a field to the west of Halton Chesters Roman Fort.

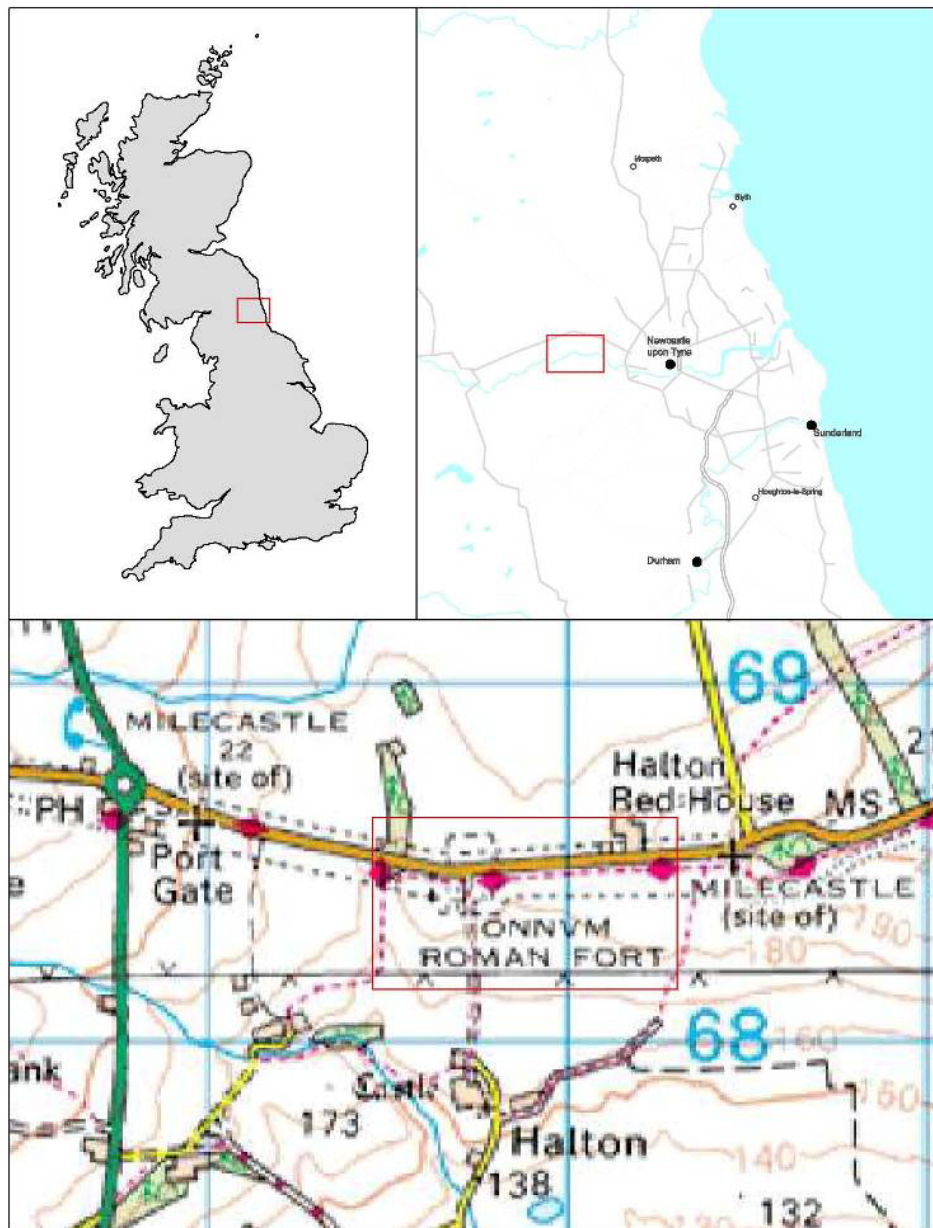


Fig. 1 Site location
Ordnance Survey data copyright OS, reproduced by
permission, Licence no. 100045420

- 1.1.2. Halton Chesters (ONNV/M) Roman fort is situated on Hadrian's Wall approx 0.8km east of Milecastle 22 and 0.8km west of milecastle 21. The site is centred at NY 996684 and lies approximately 4.3km north of Corbridge and 8.5km east of Chesters.

2. METHODOLOGY

- 2.1. An archaeological evaluation was undertaken to establish whether any archaeological features would be affected by the proposed installation of the new telegraph pole. A trench measuring 1m by 2m was excavated by hand. Down to the natural level.
- 2.2. Each separate layer encountered was given a unique context number (a Harris matrix can be found in Appendix I and a full context register can be found in Appendix II) and recorded using *pro forma* context sheets. The trench was then photographed in colour transparency film, black and white print and digital formats.

3. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

3.1 Prehistory

- 3.1.1. The earliest remains found around the study area were found in Corbridge. They date as far back as the Mesolithic Period. Flint tools dating from this period have been discovered in the vicinity of Shorden Brae (Davies 1983), Cairstron Field (Miket and Burgess 1984), Red House (*ibid.*), and Gallowhill (Weyman 1975). At Gallowhill over 40 flint tools were found and it is thought that this may have been a tool production site (*ibid.*).

3.2 Romano-British

- 3.2.1. There is extensive evidence for Roman activity in the area in the form of Hadrian's Wall and its associated forts and Milecastles. Following a visit from the Emperor Hadrian in AD 122, the Romans began work on the wall and once complete it had an approximate length of 80 miles. The route ran roughly parallel to the 'Stanegate', the main Roman supply road from east to west running from Corbridge to Carlisle (Forde-Johnston 1978). The 80 miles of the wall were marked with 'Milecastles'. These Milecastles were fortified structures to house garrisons of soldiers.
- 3.2.2. Halton Chesters Roman fort was originally 4.37 acres in size, later to be extended in the 3rd century AD to 4.87 acres. A dedicatory slab from the west gate of the fort tells us that the Sixth Legion were responsible for the initial building work, but unfortunately, does not give us the name of the original garrison. The garrison in the 3rd and 4th centuries was the quingenary *Ala I Pannoniorum Sabiniensis* (RIB 1433; *Notitia Dignitatum* XL).

4. RESULTS

- 4.1. A 2m long by 1m wide trench (Fig. 3) was placed on the site 30 meters south of the main road and 1m away from a field boundary (Fig. 2). The trench was excavated by hand down to the underlying natural clay.
- 4.2. The stratigraphy consisted of, a layer of dark brown silty topsoil (001) with a measured depth of 0.53m which existed throughout the trench. Directly beneath the topsoil (001) was a layer of broken stones and pebbles within a dark brown silty subsoil (002) which had a depth of 0.36m.
- 4.3. These stones were not consistent throughout the length of the trench (Fig. 4). Within this layer, 4 shards of coarse ware and 2 shards samian ware were discovered. These shards were sent off for specialist analysis which can be found in appendix IV. The dates given for the shards are between AD 120 and AD 150, which links them to around the time Hadrian's Wall was built. Directly below the stony subsoil layer (002) there was natural yellow/ grey clay which continued beyond the depth of excavation.

5. CONCLUSION

- 5.1. Although the trench was located very near to the roman fort of Halton Chesters. No archaeological features were found. 6 Pottery shards (Coarse and samian) were found amongst the topsoil dating to around AD 120-150 which corresponds with the building of Hadrian's Wall. It is not surprising that pottery was found given the close proximity to the fort, but as they were discovered in the heavily ploughed topsoil, it is evident that they are not in situ.
- 5.2. No structures were located during this excavation down to the natural clay, and given that no artefacts or features were found below the topsoil layer, it is unlikely that the proposed work carried out within this area would damage anything of archaeological significance.

6. PUBLICITY, CONFIDENTIALITY AND COPYRIGHT

- 6.1. Any publicity will be handled by the client.
- 6.2. Archaeological Research Services Ltd will retain the copyright of all documentary and photographic material under the Copyright, Designs and Patent Act (1988).

7. STATEMENT OF INDEMNITY

- 7.1 All statements and opinions contained within this report arising from the works undertaken are offered in good faith and compiled according to professional standards. No responsibility can be accepted by the author/s of the report for any errors of fact or opinion resulting from data supplied by any third party, or for loss or other consequence arising from decisions or actions made upon the basis of facts or opinions expressed in any such report(s), howsoever such facts and opinions may have been derived.

8. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 8.1. Archaeological Research Services Ltd would like to thank all those involved in this project, in particular Alan Cavender of British Telecom and Mick Collins of English Heritage.

9. REFERENCES

Huntley, J.P. & Allen, J.R.M. 2004. *An Iron Age or Romano-British enclosure at South Heddon, Northumberland*. London: English Heritage. Archaeological Investigation Report I/5/2005

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Symonds, M. 2005 'The Construction Order of the Milecastles on Hadrian's Wall', *Archaeologia Aeliana* 5th series, 34: 67-81.

Tolan-Smith, C. 1997. '*The Romano-British and late prehistoric landscape: the deconstruction of a medieval landscape*'

Landscape Archaeology in Tynedale (Newcastle), 69-79

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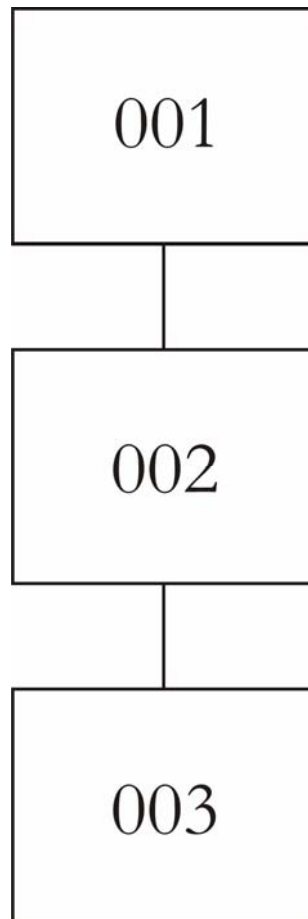
British Geological Survey <http://www.bgs.ac.uk/geoindex/index.htm>

Northumberland Communities <http://communities.northumberland.gov.uk>

Keys to the Past <http://www.keystothepast.info/>

Roman Britain <http://www.roman-britain.org/>

APPENDIX I: HARRIS MATRICES



APPENDIX II: FIGURES



Fig. 3 Trench 1 base looking south.



Fig. 4 East facing section of trench 1



Fig. 5 Re-instated land with marker pole.

APPENDIX III: CONTEXT & PHOTOGRAPHIC REGISTER

Context No.	Trench	Description
001	1	Topsoil
002	1	Stony Subsoil
003	1	Natural Clay

Film One: Black and white print

Shot Number	Photograph Content
1	Trench 1
2	Trench 1 west facing section
3	Re-instated land

Film Two: Colour transparency

Shot No.	Description
1	Trench 1
2	Trench 1 west facing section
3	Re-instated land

APPENDIX IV: SPECIALIST POTTERY REPORTS

Halton Chesters Coarse Pottery

Report by Ruth Leary

Four fragments were submitted for identifications. These comprised one fragment of tile or pipe (67.1g.) of unknown date, two fragments of Dressel 20 oil amphora (221.3g.) and a basal fragment of mortarium (96.9g.). The Dressel 20 oil amphora sherds were from the body and are not closely datable. This amphora was the most common amphora type in Britain during the Roman period and came from the Roman province of Baetica in southern Spain where olive oil was produced in large quantities (Peacock and Williams 1986, Tomber and Dore 1998 BAT AM). The Dressel 20 form was imported from the mid-first to the mid-third century AD. The fragment of mortarium is in an off white fabric with darker yellowish external surface and pinkish cream internal surface. The internal surface is well worn and has lost all its trituration grits making identification more difficult. The white core and yellowish outer surface compare well with the earlier Mancetter-Hartshill products (pre AD140, Tomber and Dore 1998 MAH WH) but the pinkish hue of the internal surface is rather unusual. A date in the first half of the second century is tentatively suggested.

Bibliography

- Peacock, D.P.S. and Williams, D.F. 1986 *Amphorae and the Roman Economy*, London.
Tomber, R. and Dore, J., 1998, The National Roman Fabric Reference Collection. A Handbook, MoLAS Monograph 2. London

HALTON CHESTERS HCH08. The samian ware

by Margaret Ward, MA MIFA

1. Methodology

The samian ware was catalogued on a Microsoft Access database and was converted to an Excel spreadsheet.

The two vessels examined are listed in Section 2. Their type numbers are based on Dragendorff's standard forms. For general terminology, see, for instance, Bulmer 1980 and Webster 1996.

Numerical date-ranges (c AD 120-150) rather than epochs (eg Hadrianic-early Antonine) were used in the database and in the Catalogue below. They were employed primarily to enable their digital entry into the database and should not be considered more precise than epochs.

2. *Catalogue of samian vessels*

Two sherds, both found unstratified, represented two dishes that were produced within the same general period (Hadrianic to early Antonine). Neither of them displayed any characteristics that would allow for closer dating and no statistical significance can be surmised from two small sherds.

1) Central Gaulish dish, form 18/31 or 31, produced most probably in the range c AD 120-150/160. A rimsherd: 2% of rim diameter approximately 9 cm, weight 20 g.

2) Central Gaulish dish, form 18/31 or 18/31R, produced most probably in the range c AD 120-150. A sherd from the junction of the wall with the base, weighing 10 g.

3 Summary

The two sherds under examination together weighed 30 g and represented 0.02 EVEs. Both were from dishes that were produced at Lezoux in Central Gaul, probably in contemporary workshops. Both sherds were in very good condition, but represented parts of the vessel that, as here, tend not to show any evidence of wear from primary use.

The primary interest of these sherds lies in their provenance: all samian ware found in such a location merits detailed publication.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bulmer, M 1980 An introduction to Roman samian ware, with special reference to collections in Chester and the north-west, *J Chester Archaeol Soc* 62, for 1979, 5-72

Webster, P V 1996 *Roman samian pottery in Britain*, CBA Practical Handbook in Archaeology 13, York

APPENDIX V: SPECIFICATION

Written Scheme of Investigation: Evaluation trench at Halton Chesters, Northumberland

1. Introduction

- 1.1. BT Openreach need to site a new telegraph pole in a field to the west of Halton Chesters Roman Fort. This project design details the works to be undertaken during an archaeological evaluation at the site in accordance with discussion with Mike Collins of English Heritage.
- 1.2. The telegraph pole location needs to be at NY 9962968441 to the west of Halton Chesters. There have been no previously recorded archaeological works at this location, although the fort had been the subject of previous investigative fieldwork, both in terms of excavation in the 19th and mid-20th century and geophysical survey in the late 1990's.

2. Site Specific Requirements

- 2.1. The client for this work is BT Openreach who are proposing to install a new telegraph pole. The client has provided a plan of the pole location.
- 2.2. The work to be undertaken is an archaeological evaluation trench which aims to ascertain whether there are any archaeological constraints which may affect the proposed development. This will be done by establishing the presence or absence of archaeological remains, their quality, depth and preservation. Brief examination of the literature indicates that the fort at Halton Chesters spanned Hadrian's Wall and had a distinctive extension, making the fort L-shaped in plan, added to the south-west corner in the early 3rd century. The site of the evaluation trench is located around 8m to the west of the exterior wall of this extension and so lies outside the fort. Geophysical prospection of the site in 1999 indicates extensive and significant structures surrounding the fort on its east and south sides, forming a *vicus*, and it is possible that such structures would exist in the area targeted by the evaluation trench. The geophysics results indicates rectilinear anomalies continuing to the modern field boundary line, adjacent to which the evaluation trench is to be located.
- 2.3. The overall aim of the evaluation will be:
 - to establish the presence/absence, nature, depth and character of any possible archaeological features
 - to define an area of no archaeological activity where the telegraph pole can be sited.
 - to place a 2m long, clearly visible pole at the location of the archaeologically sterile area and to supply BT Openreach with the necessary maps and plans to accurately identify the location of the pole. Alan Cavender of BT Openreach will be made aware of the location and significance of the pole at the earliest opportunity.

- 2.4 Should archaeology be discovered within the entirety of the initial trench a site meeting will be convened between ARS Ltd, BT Openreach and English Heritage, to discuss whether an archaeological sterile location can be found, or if it is necessary to extend the trench. Should trench extension be necessary it will be continued to the north, towards the Military Road, and further action will be discussed with Mike Collins of English Heritage and Alan Cavender of BT Openreach and approved prior to further work being undertaken on the site.

3. Project Management and Standards

- 3.1. The project will be carried out in compliance with the codes of the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA) (2000) and will follow the IFA Standard and Guidance for Excavations (1995).
- 3.2. All staff employed on the project will be suitably qualified and experienced for their respective project roles and have practical experience of archaeological excavation and recording. All staff will be made aware of the archaeological importance of the area surrounding the site and will be fully briefed on the work required by this specification. Each member of staff will be fully conversant with the aims and methodologies and will be given a copy of this written scheme of investigation to read. All members of staff employed by Archaeological Research Services Ltd are fully qualified and experienced archaeologists, this will ensure that appropriate decisions regarding environmental and dating sampling will be made in the field

4. Methods

- 4.1. All those involved in the works must be informed of the scheduled status of the monument, its extent, and the legal obligations which apply.
- 4.2. Equipment and machinery shall not be used or operated in the scheduled area in conditions or in a manner likely to result in ground disturbance other than that which is expressly laid out in this document.
- 4.3. Topsoil and unstratified modern material will be removed by hand down to the first significant archaeological horizon in successive level spits.
- 4.4. The trenches will be cleaned using appropriate hand tools in order to expose surviving archaeological features and deposits.
- 4.5. All archaeological features and deposits will be recorded on a pre-excavation plan. Sufficient excavation by hand, and recording thereof, will be undertaken to characterise the nature of any archaeology revealed in the trench.
- 4.6. In the event of human burials being discovered, they will be left *in-situ*, covered and protected and the coroners' office informed. If removal is essential, work will comply with relevant Home Office regulations.
- 4.7. Appropriate procedures under the relevant legislation will be followed in the event of the discovery of artefacts covered by the provisions of the Treasures Act 1996.

- 4.8 Deposits that have the potential for providing environmental or dating evidence will be assessed while the work is in progress. An environmental sampling strategy has been agreed with the English Heritage Scientific advisor for North-East England, Jacqui Huntley. The sampling strategy comprises the following:
- All intact archaeological contexts will be sampled. Small pit features will be 100% sampled while bulk samples of 40 litres will be taken from larger feature contexts, such as linear ditch fills.
 - Any samples recovered will be floated on site in graduated sieves with the smallest being 500µm and the flots and residues collected. Samples will be analysed by B Johnson of Archaeological Research Services Ltd and an assessment report prepared in accordance with Management of Archaeological Projects 2 (HBMC 1991).
- 4.9 During and after the excavation, all recovered artefacts and environmental samples will be stored in appropriate materials and storage conditions to ensure minimal deterioration and loss of information (this will include controlled storage, correct packaging, regular monitoring of conditions and immediate selection for conservation of valuable material).

5. Recording

- 5.1 The site will be accurately tied into the National Grid and located on a 1:2500 or 1:1250 map of the area.
- 5.2 A full and proper record (written, graphic and photographic as appropriate) will be made for all work, using pro-forma record sheets and text descriptions appropriate to the work. Accurate scale plans and section drawings will be drawn at 1:50, 1:20 and 1:10 scales as appropriate.
- 5.3 The stratigraphy of the trenches will be recorded even where no archaeological deposits have been identified.
- 5.4 All archaeological deposits and features will be recorded with above ordnance datum (AOD) levels.
- 5.5 A photographic record of all contexts will be taken in colour transparency and black and white print and will include a clearly visible, graduated metric scale. A register of all photographs will be kept.
- 5.6 Where stratified deposits are encountered, a 'Harris' matrix will be compiled.

6. Access

- 6.1 Archaeological Research Services Ltd will give the Mike Collins of English Heritage 10 working days (or less if so agreed) notice of the commencement of fieldwork.

- 6.2 Archaeological Research Services Ltd will afford access to Mike Collins or her representative at all times, for the purposes of monitoring the archaeological evaluation.
- 6.3 Archaeological Research Services Ltd will maintain regular communication with Mike Collins to ensure that the project aims and objectives are met.

7. Finds Processing and Storage

- 7.1 All finds processing, conservation work and storage of finds will be carried out in compliance with the IFA guidelines for Finds Work (2001) and those set out by UKIC (1990).
- 7.2 Artefact collection and discard policies will be appropriate for the defined purpose.
- 7.3 Bulk finds which are not discarded will be washed and, with the exception of animal bone, marked. Marking and labelling will be indelible and irremovable by abrasion. Bulk finds will be appropriately bagged, boxed and recorded. This process will be carried out no later than two months after the end of the excavation.
- 7.4 All small finds will be recorded as individual items and appropriately packaged (e.g. lithics in self-sealing plastic bags and ceramic in acid-free tissue paper). Vulnerable objects will be specially packaged and textile, painted glass and coins stored in appropriate specialist systems. This process will be carried out within two days of the small find being excavated. Prehistoric pottery will not be cleaned or be subject to any abrasion or loss of adhering residues.
- 7.5 During and after the excavation all objects will be stored in appropriate materials and storage conditions to ensure minimal deterioration and loss of information (including controlled storage, correct packaging, and regular monitoring, immediate selection for conservation of vulnerable material). All storage will have appropriate security provision.
- 7.6 The deposition and disposal of artefacts will be agreed with the legal owner and the Museum of Antiquities prior to the work taking place. All finds except treasure trove are the property of the landowner.
- 7.7 All retained artefacts and ecofacts will be cleaned and packaged in accordance with the requirements of the recipient museum.

8. Site archive

- 8.1 The archive will be compiled in an orderly fashion to the standards and format set out in Management of Archaeological Projects 2 (HBMC 1991) and in accordance with the Guidelines for the Preparation of Excavation Archives for Long Term Storage (UKIC 1990). The archive will be deposited with the

Museum of Antiquities within 6 months of the fieldwork once all post-excavation work is completed and the final report produced.

9. Report

9.1 One copy of the report will be submitted to the client, and two hard copies (one bound and one unbound) and one digital copy will be submitted to the Northumberland SMR within fourteen working days of the completion of the fieldwork. One bound copy of the report will be submitted to English Heritage. Each report will be bound with each page and paragraph numbered and will include as a minimum the following:

- executive summary
- a site location plan to at least 1:10,000 scale with 10 figure central grid reference
- contractor's details including date work carried out
- nature and extent of the proposed development, including developer/client details
- description of the site location and geology
- trench plans to a suitable scale and tied into the national grid so that features can be correctly orientated
- discussion of the results of field work
- context & feature descriptions
- features, number and class of artefacts, spot dating & scientific dating of significant finds presented in tabular format
- plans and section drawings of the features drawn at a suitable scale
- additional plans/map extracts to display noted and recorded archaeological features as appropriate
- bibliography

11. OASIS

11.1 ARS Ltd will complete an on-line OASIS form for this evaluation. ARS Ltd is a registered contractor on the OASIS system and has uploaded archaeological reports before.

12. Dissemination/Publication

12.1 A summary will be prepared for 'Archaeology in Northumberland' and submitted to Northumberland County Council by the beginning of December of the year in which the work is completed.

12.2 A short article will be prepared for a local journal if appropriate.

13. References

Institute of Field Archaeologists. 1995. *Standard and Guidance for archaeological excavation.*

Institute of Field Archaeologists, 2000. *Code of Conduct.*

Institute of Field Archaeologists, 2001. *Standard and Guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials.*

UKIC (United Kingdom Institute for Conservation). 1990. *Guidelines for the Preparation of Archives for Long-Term Storage.*