

A.2 How and why did SMRs and HERs develop?#

The Early Days#

Systematic records of archaeological and historic monuments began to be created in 1908 when the Royal Commissions ([RCHME](#), [RCAHMS](#), [RCAHMW](#)) were set up and instructed to make an inventory of the ancient and historical monuments of their respective countries. For example, the warrant for the RCHME required the Commission 'to make an inventory of the Ancient Monuments and Constructions connected with or illustrative of the contemporary culture, civilisation and conditions of life of the people in England covering the period from the earliest time to the year 1700'. The remit also included identification of 'those which seem most worthy of preservation' ([RCHME 1992](#)). In Scotland the cut-off date was initially set at 1707, the date of the union of the English and Scottish parliaments. In Wales no formal cut-off date has ever been set.

In fact, the [OS](#) had been depicting antiquities on maps since 1791. From the 1920s, its [Archaeology Division](#) developed a card-index system and a network of local correspondents provided this with information. Local records of field monuments and finds, often based on information collected by these correspondents, began to be developed by many museums.

During the 1960s there was a growing awareness of the rate at which archaeological sites were being damaged or destroyed and a need for the information amassed by the Royal Commissions and the OS to be available to the local-authority planning system. The Committee of Enquiry into the Arrangements for the Protection of Field Monuments (the 'Walsh' Committee, which covered England, Wales and Scotland) recommended the strengthening of existing legislation for the protection of ancient monuments, and concluded that the local-authority system could in future play a vital part in identifying and moderating threats to the historic landscape. It recommended that county planning authorities maintain a record of field monuments and that county councils should consider appointing archaeological officers to provide professional archaeological assistance ([Walsh 1969](#)). Following publication of the [Walsh report](#), national networks of archaeological officers and [SMRs](#) began to emerge in England and Wales in the 1970s. Oxfordshire is generally credited with establishing the first SMR ([Benson 1974](#)). Similarly between 1974 and 1976, SMRs were established in the four newly formed Welsh Archaeological Trusts ([WATs](#)) thereby providing a national coverage across Wales.

In Scotland the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland produced a document in 1974 entitled 'Archaeology and Local Government' in advance of the re-organisation of Scottish local government in 1975. The first local authority appointment was in Stirling County Council in 1974, before transfer to Central Regional Council in 1975, and the first direct appointment to a Regional Council was at Grampian Regional Council shortly thereafter.

The 1980's and 1990's#

In 1983 the [OS's Archaeology Division](#) was transferred to the Royal Commissions. The OS card index became part of the national archaeological records in the three national areas. The card index provided an essential source of information, which was used to establish many local SMRs.

During the 1980s and 1990s, the respective government departments, Royal Commissions and national agencies were concerned with the structure, content and development of local SMRs. In England, [English Heritage](#) (and earlier the Department of the Environment (DoE)) and the RCHME supported enhancement projects and initial computerisation based on the [AN32](#) recording form for scheduled monuments and the '[Superfile](#)' database program. In 1989 the RCHME was given the lead role in respect of SMRs (continued by EH following merger) and subsequently supported fieldwork and recording projects in SMRs, and the development of data and recording standards (such as [RCHME and ACAO 1993](#)). During the 1990s the RCHME assisted in the development of software for

SMRs. This culminated in the launch in 1998 of an SMR software package ([Historic Buildings, Sites and Monuments Records \(HBSMR\)](#)) jointly developed with [ALGAO](#) and [exeGesIS SDM Ltd.](#)

In Scotland equivalent roles were played by the Scottish Development Department's Historic Buildings and Monuments Division, later [Historic Scotland](#), and the [RCAHMS](#). The Scottish bodies have not led software development for SMRs, but instead concentrated their efforts on trying to extend the geographical coverage of the Scottish SMRs by provision of pump-priming grants, firstly from the RCAHMS and later Historic Scotland, with the RCAHMS providing basic data from the national record. Now that the geographic coverage of HERs in Scotland is almost complete, the focus of attention of both the national bodies and the local HERs has switched to securing a national strategy for HER development through the auspices of the Scottish [SMR Forum](#).

From their inception the four Welsh SMRs were curated by the Welsh Archaeological Trusts (WATs). Initially some partnerships were established with local authorities, where these employed their own archaeological staff, although over time these all but ceased. From 1980 the original paper records underwent computerization, and considerable enhancement, although here the process was led by individual Trusts, following the 'Oxford model' and using a variety of software and hardware, with funding and support from various private initiatives and government agencies (such as Job Creation and Employment Training schemes).

Following the publication of This Common Inheritance ([DoE 1990b](#)), government planning guidance was issued in the national areas. The [DoE's](#) Planning Policy Guidance Note 16: Archaeology and Planning (PPG16) appeared in 1990 ([DoE 1990a](#)), for England, in 1991 ([Welsh Office 1991](#)) for Wales and for Scotland National Planning Policy Guideline (NPPG) 5 ([SDD 1994a](#)) and Planning Advice Note (PAN) 42 in 1994 ([SDD 1994b](#)). These recognised the importance of archaeological sites and emphasised both that archaeology is a material consideration in making planning decisions and the key role of SMRs in providing information for decision-making. Following the publication of the planning guidance, the 1990s saw a significant rise in the number of archaeological projects carried out in response to development proposals. This increased both the amount of information entering SMRs and the demand for that information from users. These changes sometimes gave rise to backlogs as SMR staff fulfilled the dual roles of planning advisor and also SMR manager. Another consequence of the planning guidance was competitive tendering for archaeological projects and it is now normal for a number of archaeological contractors (whether local authority units or independent companies) to compete for work in any area. This has emphasised the importance of SMRs as a central access point for information.

Until the mid-1990s in England most SMRs were operated by county councils or, in the former metropolitan counties, were jointly funded by district councils. In Scotland they were operated by the Regional Councils, in one region with joint funding from the district councils after 1994. This pattern changed after local government reorganisation following Local Government Acts, of 1992 for England and 1994 for Scotland. This resulted in England in the creation of a number of unitary authorities, mainly in urban areas with high population densities, with the two-tier system of county and district councils continuing elsewhere, and in Scotland in a system of unitary authorities. Some of the new unitary authorities have chosen to establish their own archaeological services and SMRs, whilst others have contracted out archaeological services under a joint arrangement, often with a neighbouring county council, under the terms of service-level agreements. In Scotland there are several joint arrangements and three unitary authorities buy in a service from a local heritage or amenity trust.

The Welsh SMRs, being operated by the [WATs](#) and therefore outside local authorities, have kept the same geographical boundaries since their inception in the mid 1970s. Originally conceived to cover the then newly created counties of 1974 the SMRs have continued to provide services to successive county, district and, since 1996 unitary authorities, under partnership arrangements and with each authority adopting the relevant SMR by formal resolution. Dislocation due to local government re-organisation has therefore been largely avoided in Wales.

In the 1990s a joint English Heritage-RCHME initiative created a series of Urban Archaeological Databases ([UADs](#)) in England. Some are effectively HERs for major historic towns, for example Chester; others are the enhancement of part of an existing HER such as Northampton. There is no such equivalent in Scotland but since 1977 Historic Scotland has funded the production of the Burgh Survey series which summarises the historical and archaeological evidence for Scotland's medieval burghs. These are available to the Scottish SMRs but practice differs in respect of the incorporation of relevant data into the SMRs. There has been no systematic incorporation of the Burgh Survey information into the relevant SMR.

In 1999 the RCHME and English Heritage were merged to create a single organisation, English Heritage, concerned with the recording, protection and management of the historic environment in England. As the Government's statutory advisor on heritage conservation, archaeology and the management of the historic environment.

The New Millenium#

In 2007 the digital elements of the four Welsh HERs were transferred into a single bespoke web based data management system developed by the [HEROS](#) partnership.

English Heritage was split in 2015. One of the two successor bodies, [Historic England](#) remains concerned with the effective application of HERs to heritage management at both local and national levels and has continued the former RCHME's lead role. It continues to work to support inter-interoparability between local and national heritage information records.

In Scotland, Historic Scotland and the RCAHMS were merged in October 2015 to form a single organisation, Historic Environment Scotland (HES). To facilitate co-ordination of HER development, a [Scottish SMR Forum](#) was formed in 2000 and comprises Scottish HERs, Historic Environment Scotland, and the National Trust for Scotland. Within the Scottish SMR Forum, the SMR Technical Working Group discusses information related issues and the technical aspects of the work of the Forum. At the end of 2004 the SMR Forum participants agreed in principle to work together to incorporate online HER data into [Pastmap](#). PastMap provides map-based information about the historic environment, and it brings together information from several sources, including Canmore, HES designation data (including Listed Buildings, Scheduled Monuments, Battlefields, Gardens and Designed Landscapes, Marine Protected Areas, and World Heritage Sites), HER data, and local authority Conservation Areas.

In February 2000 English Heritage was asked by the Government - jointly by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) - to co-ordinate an important and wide-ranging review of all policies relating to the historic environment. This was published as [Power of Place: The future of the historic environment \(English Heritage 2000\)](#). In its response, [The Historic Environment: A Force for Our Future \(DCMS 2001\)](#), the Government committed itself to holding a consultation on the future of HERs. This was carried out in 2003 and included a draft two-stage benchmarking standard Historic Environment Records: Benchmarks for Good Practice ([Chitty 2002](#)). The results were published together with the findings of the [Heritage Protection Review as Review of Heritage Protection: The Way Forward \(DCMS 2004\)](#). The results showed support for statutory status and standards. In parallel English Heritage commissioned a report assessing the resources required to bring all the HERs in England up to the 1st stage benchmark ([Baker, Chitty and Edwards 2004](#)).

There has been no equivalent support for statutory status for SMRs from Scottish Government, but the issue of standards is being covered by the Scottish SMR Forum and the SHED (Scotland's Historic Environment Data) Strategy.

From the late 1980s [Cadw](#) and the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historic Monuments in Wales ([RCAHMW](#)) have taken a more formal role in Welsh HERs, including monitoring work programmes

and direct funding to support their operation. Initiatives have come from the [Extended National Database](#) for Wales partnership, the Strategic Framework for Historic Environment Records in Wales working group and now the Welsh Strategic Planning Board's Records Co-ordination Group, each group comprising representatives from Wales' various national, regional and local record curators. The Welsh Government, through Cadw, encouraged the Welsh Archaeological Trusts to secure the HERs as publicly accessible records should any Trust cease to operate. Accordingly each record and its assets are now held by a separate charitable Trust, administered by the Trustees of the four Welsh Archaeological Trusts. Alongside this Cadw, through the Strategic Framework for Historic Environment Records in Wales, has recognised, and slightly amended, the HER Benchmarks for Good Practice ([Chitty 2002](#)) and funding for the HERs was targeted to enable Welsh HERs to achieve the stage one benchmarks.

In March 2016 the [Historic Environment \(Wales\) Act](#) came into force. This charged Welsh Ministers with a statutory duty to maintain Wales' Historic Environment Records thus making Wales' HERs the first statutory HERs in Europe.

The development of SMRs and HERs is more fully described elsewhere (for example in [Baker 1999a](#), [Baker 1999b](#), [Benson 1974](#), [Burrow 1984](#), [Gilman 1996](#), [Gilman 2004](#), [RCHME and ACAO 1993](#), [Hunter and Ralston 2006](#) and [Robinson 2000](#)).