B.8 Management of data standards - FISH

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Management and development of data standards for the historic environment is co-ordinated through FISH, the Forum on Information Standards in Heritage (see http://fishforum.weebly.com/). All of the major heritage bodies in the UK, including ALGAO, are involved in the steering committee of the Forum, which meets twice a year.

FISH is an online data standards forum aimed at anyone interested in improving data management, indexing procedures and the exchange of historic environment information. It develops and supports a wide range of professional heritage tools - such as indexing terminologies, recording standards and guidelines ([MIDAS Heritage](#)), technical data mapping and exchange tools (FISH Toolkit). Membership is open to anyone with an interest in heritage information standards and all products produced and maintained by FISH are free to use and download.

Figure 9: The [FISH website](#) is the starting point for finding out about data standards for the historic environment.

B.8.1 How to get involved[#](#)

There are several ways in which HER officers can become involved in the work of FISH

E-mail discussion list[#](#)

The easiest way to get involved is to join the free open membership e-mail discussion list run by FISH (see the website for details of how to join). List members may ask questions, raise issues that require attention, seek advice and will receive news about data standards issues, conferences and meetings. The e-mail discussion list is also host to ?e-conferences? - specially focused discussion on particular standards related topics. These are announced in advance on the list.

Candidate term submission[#](#)

As HERs expand the scope of their content, there is a continuing need for the addition of new terms to the existing [wordlists](#). HER officers can get directly involved in standards development by submitting candidate terms ? suggested additions to one of the controlled vocabularies or thesauri managed and maintained by the [FISH Terminology Working Group](#) in conjunction with a network of different working groups and standards bodies. Details of the appropriate contact for submission of candidate terms and information about special procedures for submitting terms can be found in the Terminology section of the [FISH website](#). In general candidate term submission will involve:-

- Identifying a term or an idea that is not covered by the existing list.
- Describing when the candidate term should be used (a [?scope note?](#)).

- Providing background information, such as examples of record where the candidate term would be appropriate, or published sources which use the term.

Peer review participation#

FISH, as the co-ordinating body for the development of data standards, is particularly concerned to ensure that new data standards meet the needs of the historic environment sector. To do this newly developed standards will in most cases be circulated in draft form for peer review. This is an opportunity for HER staff to identify concerns, express support and to play a part in shaping an emerging standard. All peer reviews will be announced via the FISH email discussion list (and often via other email discussion lists). It is vital that HER staff participate in this process. Only by participation can effective and relevant data standards be developed.

Relevant links

http://fishforum.weebly.com/] the website for the Forum on Information Standards in Heritage.

From this page you can:

- Consult current versions of the FISH MIDAS standard and FISH Terminology
- Participate in discussion via our email discussion list run by JISCmail.
- View recent discussion and download files from the forum archives.
- Find out more about the contributors that direct the work of the forum.
- View our Terms of Reference
- View what's new from FISH

See also ADS Guides to Good Practice

Panel 5: Tools for indexing and retrieval: 1. Wordlists#

Westshire HER designed a database and transferred its records from the original card index. The card index had built up over a number of years and was maintained by several different members of staff. As part of the computerization the HER officer decided to standardise the terminology used to index site types in the database.

As each site was recorded the site type was checked against the HER's wordlist. If the site type did not appear on the wordlist it was added and the list amended. Where a site type already existed on the list the HER Officer checked the consistency of the spelling and removed any abbreviations prior to indexing the type in the **MONUMENT TYPE** field within the new database record.

Below is a sample of the monument types that had been recorded on the HER card index.

Altar	Tomb Barrow
Barrow	Round Cemetery
Disc Barrow	Tumulus
Gravestone	Graveyard
Headstone	L. Barrow
Long Barrow	Mausoleum
R.C. Cemetery	Round-Barrow
Tomb	Tombstone

The HER Officer rewrote the wordlist taking the decision to use rules to ensure that the wordlist isconsistent. These were:

- Natural word order
- No abbreviations
- No punctuation
- Include Preferred and Non-Preferred terms

The revised wordlist that was developed for the computerization appears below. Preferred terms appear in upper case, Non-Preferred in mixed case.

ALTAR TOMB		
BARROW	use for	Tumulus
CEMETERY	use for	Graveyard, R.C. Cemetery
DISC BARROW		
GRAVESTONE	use for	Headstone
LONG BARROW	use for	L.Barrow
MAUSOLEUM		
TOMB	use for	Tombstone
ROUND BARROW	use for	Barrow, Round

The new wordlist included all the old terms but only those which were Preferred could be used to index in the new database. Any Non-Preferred terms were included as a guide to which term to use for indexing.

The computer records were indexed using the new wordlist and as a result information retrieval was improved. A request from a user for all information about Barrows could now be answered by a relatively simple search of the database, rather than following a long trawl through the card index.

Panel 6: Tools for Indexing and retrieval: 2. Thesauri[#](#)

Like a wordlist, a thesaurus is used to standardise terminology and help the user to choose terms to enter into database fields. However, unlike a wordlist, a thesaurus:

- allows terms, related by a similar subject, to be grouped together into hierarchies and crossreferenced to other groups of terms which may be relevant to the subject.
- provides the user with a single Preferred term to use where there is a choice of terms with the same or similar meaning e.g. **BARROW** use for Tumulus.
- through the use of hierarchies, allows terms to be selected at a general or specific level, depending on the level of indexing required.
- is a dynamic tool, which can be developed by the addition, amendment and deletion of terms,

relationships or hierarchies as dictated by individual needs.

Example Westshire HER acquired the HBSMR Software from exeGesIS SDM Ltd and migrated all their records from the old database. A similar search to that carried out using terms from the wordlist can now be done using the thesaurus built into the software.

This allows the user to either search for a specific term, e.g. **ROUND BARROW** or to carry out a search using the "Broad Term" of **BARROW** and asking for all the records indexed with its "Narrow Terms". This search would retrieve any records indexed with any of the terms listed below, but would only require one search instead of twenty!

- BARROW
    - BANK BARROW
    - CHAMBERED BARROW
        - CHAMBERED LONG BARROW

- CHAMBERED ROUND BARROW
  ◦ D SHAPED BARROW
  ◦ LONG BARROW
    - CHAMBERED LONG BARROW
    - OVAL BARROW
  ◦ POND BARROW
  ◦ RING BARROW
  ◦ ROUND BARROW
    - BELL BARROW
    - BELL DISC BARROW
    - BOWL BARROW
    - CHAMBERED ROUND BARROW
    - DISC BARROW
    - PLATFORM BARROW
    - SAUCER BARROW
  ◦ SQUARE BARROW

Using a thesaurus also allows the indexer the flexibility of indexing at either the general level (where the only information known is that a **BARROW** exists) or the more specific level (where investigation shows the monument to be a **CHAMBERED ROUND BARROW**).