

C.1 Data dictionaries and recording-practice guidelines

- [C.1 Data dictionaries and recording-practice guidelines](#)
- [C.1.1 Keeping the recording-practice guidelines up to date](#)
- [C.1.2 Quality assurance procedures](#)

C.1 Data dictionaries and recording-practice guidelines#

The aim of this section of the manual is to give general guidelines on recording in HERs. These guidelines are based on the MIDAS data standard but it is important to remember that this is an open standard and does not specify the physical data structure of a database.

When developing a database from such a standard, it is normal practice to prepare a data dictionary. This is a document which sets out all of the data fields that make up a computer record and specifies what information may be recorded in each field, including the reference data lists to be used and any other rules (for example the use of abbreviations). Data dictionaries have been developed for HERs. In 1993 "[Recording England's Past: A Data Standard for the Extended National Archaeological Record](#)" ("[RCHME](#)" and [ACAO 1993a](#)) was published and in 1997, [SMR '97 \(RCHME\)](#) was circulated in draft. "[SMR '97](#)" provided the basis from which the ExeGesIS SDM Ltd's SMR software was developed and has continued to be developed to provide the data dictionary for that software. A range of different computer systems is in use across the UK and HER managers are recommended to make sure that a data dictionary specific to their system is available as a reference aid.

Looking beyond the physical data structure of HER databases, a complex range of information is available about the local historic environment, its investigation and management and the sources of information. HER professionals must decide how to organise that information into computer records. This manual gives some general illustrations of the issues involved in this process but it is possible to include only a limited number of case studies. HER managers are recommended to use this as a base to develop local recording-practice guidelines for recording particular monument classes in their area, for example, Roman roads, medieval historic towns, 19th-century industrial complexes.

Data dictionaries and recording-practice guidelines are a helpful coaching aid for new members of staff or volunteers. These documents also provide useful points of reference as people are learning how to record information in the HER's computer system. They are part of the Recording Manual (see [section B1: policy and Planning](#))

C.1.1 Keeping the recording-practice guidelines up to date#

Various forums exist for discussion about recording practices ? in England and Wales the HER Forum, regional HER working parties and data-standards working parties, and in Scotland the SMRForum. HER managers are encouraged to discuss issues and, where possible, to develop consistent approaches. As discussions develop, this manual will be updated. Local recording-practice guidelines will also need to be kept up to date as changes occur, such as the introduction of new database software or the start of new enhancement projects.

C.1.2 Quality assurance procedures#

However well documented the HER's working procedures are, it is people who create the records in its computer database. HER managers are recommended to establish routine procedures for checking a sample of the records being created. This is particularly important when new people commence data input but it remains important however experienced staff members are. Mistakes can occur in computer data for a number of reasons, some as a result of human error but others may be

caused by system or network problems. Without routine monitoring procedures these errors will only be picked up when queries cannot be answered or when the data is migrated.