

C.8 Sources

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C.8 Sources#

The term 'sources' covers various materials that provide information about the monuments in a locality. They include: documentary archives, maps, plans, antiquarian books, photographs, drawings, airphoto interpretation plots, publications, reports, journal articles, digital data and geophysical survey data.

It should be noted that these sources may, in turn, now be available in variety of formats: hard-copy, online, or a combination of the two.

C.8.1 Online sources#

Key Internet information sources for HERs at time of writing can be located via the following websites.

HEIRNET#

The **HEIRNET** - the Historic Environment Information Resources NETwork ? enables access to Historic Environment Information Resources (HEIRs) for conservation, research, learning and general interest, and promotes HEIRs, informing information managers about new developments in IT and offering them technical advice. It can be accessed via the following links:

- HEIRNET at: <http://www.britarch.ac.uk/heirnet/>,
- HEIRNET Register: <http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/heirnet/index.cfm> search the Register for details of Historic Environment Information Resources held by organisations across the UK. The register contains details of organisations holding information about archaeological sites, monuments, historic buildings and finds.

Technical advice: <http://www.britarch.ac.uk/HEIRNET/techadvice.html>

The OASIS Project ? Online Access to the Index of Archaeological Investigations#

The OASIS Project is being developed to provide an online index to archaeological grey literature that has been produced as a result of large-scale developer funded fieldwork (see also [C 7.3](#)). The OASIS data capture form has been designed to help in the flow of information from data producers, such as contracting units, through to local and national data managers, such as HERs, [Historic England](#) and the NMRs. The resulting information will be validated by Historic England or the relevant NMR and passed onto the ADS for inclusion in its online catalogue. OASIS can be found at: <http://oasis.ac.uk/>

biab online ? the British & Irish archaeological bibliography#

The biab online database contains datasets covering publications from AD 1695 to the present day on archaeology and the historic environment, historic buildings, maritime and industrial archaeology, environmental history, and the conservation of material culture - with a geographical focus on Britain and Ireland. It contains collection, unit and item level references and is developing an HER-compatible download function which will enable direct import into HERs. The service will also provide links to online documents and publisher websites plus tables of contents for key journals. It is also planned that the bibliography and the Archaeological Investigations Project (and OASIS) data will be able to be queried from a single interface. biab online, the British & Irish archaeological bibliography can be found at: <http://www.biab.ac.uk>

The Council for British Archaeology (CBA)#

The Council for British Archaeology's website provides information and links to: Defence of Britain project database; Database of Radiocarbon Dates; Training Online Resource Centre (TORC); and the forthcoming Online Guide to Archaeological Research (OGAR) at: <http://www.britarch.ac.uk>

The Archaeology Data Service (ADS)#

The ADS hosts many of the above services as part of its remit to facilitate the long term preservation of a broad range of digital datasets. The ADS's on-line ArchSearch facility is a valuable resource for HERs in cross-checking and identifying missing resources/sites (see section [F.8.3](#) for a description of ArchSearch). Links to this resource can be found on the ADS site at: <http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/>

Use of online & digital sources#

External digital data can be used as a source in either of the following ways:

1. A copy can be incorporated into the HER, treated as a backlog for Monument or Event record construction.
2. Alternatively, they can be treated as a source, with a reference to the specific data via the UID of the external dataset, for example.

Which option to choose depends on how searchable that reference needs to be. So for example a general reference to a dataset on Roman sites in Britain (say a British Archaeological Reports ? BAR ? gazetteer) could be treated as a source attached to existing monument records in the HER. However, if the HER wanted to use the BAR in more detail it might be necessary to actually import the data.

Whatever the format, when creating source records, the issues discussed below should be considered.

C.8.2 Distinguishing sources and events#

By their nature, sources contain information describing both events and monuments. As described above there are different kinds of sources. There are the primary data and archive collected during an event, for example the finds, photographs, digital-survey data and samples. Then there are interpretative accounts of the features observed during the event, such as the excavation report, maps and plans. Although an excavation report provides a source of information describing the event itself, the report should be recorded in the HER database as a source and considered as the product of the event.

This is equally true of historical documents, maps, drawings and photographs. Although these were produced following an event such as a land survey, often little information is available about that event and the documents may provide the only surviving record that it took place. HER officers are recommended to create source records to enable users to retrieve the original documents from the County Records Office, local museum or other repositories. However, there may be occasions when HER officers may consider that there is insufficient additional information available to create an event record from such historical documents.

C.8.3 Interpreting monuments from sources#

Most HER databases include some monument records which are based on information obtained from historical documents: for example antiquarian books may refer to monuments or features that are no longer visible, or place names recorded on maps suggest the presence of monuments in past landscapes. The problem is that limited information is available about the event to help to assess the reliability of the source and the interpretation given. Monument records that are derived simply from a historical document will have a measure of unreliability because it is difficult to validate the information.

C.8.4 Verbal reports#

Most sources have a physical form. They are objects that need to be stored on shelves or in cabinets and drawers and to be cared for as important parts of the HER's collections. However, another important source of information for HERs comes in the form of verbal reports. For example, a member of the public may visit the HER and report the location where an object was found. Normally the HER officer will make notes based on the conversation and these will be held in supplementary files and referenced to any record that is made in the HER database. It is not recommended practice to record the information directly into the database without also making notes of the conversation on paper to go on file. Clearly, this information is difficult or even impossible to validate, and the reliability of the locations reported can vary dramatically, particularly if the reporting takes place some time after the object was found.