DEBS: Using digital tools in graveyard recording

Society for Historical Archaeology, Boston, 10 January 2020

Julian Richards
with Debbie Maxwell, Toby Pillatt, Nicole Smith, Gareth Beale & Katie Green

http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk
Introducing DEBS: Discovering England’s Burial Spaces

DEBS: Sept 2017 – Nov 2020

Working with community groups to develop new tools for burial space research and dissemination

- UK national burial space survey recording form - OASIS
- Exploring the digital workflow – mobile app / online form / simple spreadsheet / RTI
- Creating a pilot national database for burial space research
- Suite of online user resources - linked to Harold Mytum’s Practical Handbook

http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk
Going Digital: Advantages

- Ease of processing and analysis
- Ease of access to data
- New questions - Big Data projects
- Skills transmission, e.g. digital skills for older people
- Social inclusion activity (everybody has something to offer - historical research, memory, technical skills, a camera)
- Community building activity
Going Digital: Challenges

- Technical development
- Level of IT literacy, and resistance to born digital approach
- Data standards
- “Doing it our way”
- Definition of core fields
  - Interoperability
- Data curation
- Sustainability
- Maintaining interest and contacts
EXPLORE YOUR BURIAL SPACE

1. Design and fund your research
   Surveying burial spaces is a popular activity for community heritage groups. They are a great way to revive and reconnect with underused and unloved churchyards and cemeteries, and can be funded by small grants from the National Lottery Heritage Fund. DEBS surveys are...
   - Relatively inexpensive
   - Suitable for a range of ages and abilities
   - Easy to set up – they don’t require specialist equipment

2. Record and interpret your burial space
   Every burial space is a unique archive, documenting the history of our communities and our families. They are places in which identities are constructed, and widespread social changes marked. Use DEBS resources to...
   - Organise your survey
   - Identify subjects of interest
   - Uncover the stories in your research

3. Share your findings
   While burials spaces are important records of local history, they can also be set within fascinating national trends concerning commemoration and attitudes to death. In the past, this kind of research has been hindered by disparate methodologies and archive practices. Use DEBS resources to...
   - Standardise your recording methods
   - Share your findings within a publicly accessible database
   - Archive your research with the Archaeology Data Service
   - Notify local and national heritage bodies of your survey
User testing – community groups

- St Mary the Virgin Embsay, North Yorkshire
- Eastby Churchyard Survey Team
- All Saints’ Church, Slingsby, North Yorkshire
- Leavesden Hospital History Association
- Friends of St Matthew’s Churchyard, Lightcliffe, West Yorkshire
- Caring for God’s Acre Beautiful Burial Grounds: Birmingham cemeteries project

http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk
Mobile App prototyping

http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk
Mobile App prototyping
Desk-top data entry forms

Qualtrics form

• Provides data validation
• Interaction valuable
• Can be done inside later

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Digital tools for deciphering inscriptions
In Memory

Sampel Harris late Merchant in Hereford who died January 13 1793 aged 80 Aged 113.
Finding what’s been done

- No register of burial space surveys
- Problems of accessing data
- Duplication of effort
- Lack of credit for work
- Records languish in Record offices..
- ... or remain in private hands ....and are lost
- Therefore, use UK national OASIS burial survey recording form
ACCORD with the Ardnamurchan Community Archaeology Group

ACCORD was an AHRC funded research project that took place from October 2013 to March 2015 and was a collaboration between the Digital Design Studio at the Glasgow School of Art, the University of Manchester, the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland and Archaeology Scotland. In the summer of 2014 the ACCORD project worked together with communities across Scotland to co-design and co-produce 3-Dimensional digital models of heritage places and monuments. We explored how forms of community-based social value associated with sites and places can be addressed and transformed through engagement with 3D digital technologies. The ...

ALL SAINTS CHURCH WILLIAN

Historic England NRHE Excavation Index for England

Radar survey carried out in advance of proposed graveyard extension works. Information from OASIS Online Form.

HERTFORDSHIRE

BETHEL CHAPEL ROBINSON ROAD

Historic England NRHE Excavation Index for England

Project No: 1112. Archaeological interpretative survey of the post-medieval chapel and graveyard in advance of proposed works.

WEST SUSSEX

PURCHERS AND GRAVEYARD
ACCORD with the Kirkcudbright History Society
ACCORD project, 2017

Introduction

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Full project details including references to methodology are available from the main ACCORD programme pages.

This archive contains the outputs from the eighth co-production project. The ACCORD team worked with The Kirkcudbright History Society on the 4th and 5th of October 2014. Together in the Kirkcudbright Kirkyard we modelled and recorded the inscriptions of two grave monuments using photogrammetry and the technique of Reflectance Transformation Imaging (RTI). The three grave monuments included one dedicated to the traveller Billy Marshall who died in 1792; an 18th Century gravestone with one face completely occupied by raised lettering; and an ornate tablestone grave dedicated to Samuel Herries who died in 1793. For more information on this technology please see the ACCORD project overview page.
ACCORD with the Kirkcudbright History Society
ACCORD project, 2017

Introduction
Overview
Downloads
Metadata
Usage Statistics

ACCORD: Archaeology Community
Co-production of Research Data

Data copyright © Kirkcudbright History Society, ACCORD project unless otherwise stated

Primary contact
Dr Stuart Jeffrey
Research Fellow
Glasgow School of Art
Digital Design Studio
The Hub
Pacific Quay
Glasgow
G51 1EA
Scotland
Tel: +44 (0) 141 566 1465

Send e-mail enquiry

Downloads
Documents | Production Images | Photogrammetry | RTI | Additional Files

Documentation (all files)

| Kirkcudbright Metadata | XLSX | 60 Kb |

RTI Files
Please select an RTI file from the table below.

| SamuelHerries |
| RobertMclellan |
**ACCORD with the Kirkcudbright History Society**

**ACCORD project, 2017**

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**Downloads**

Documents | Production Images | Photogrammetry | RTI | Additional Files

**Documentation (all files)**

- Kirkcudbright Metadata
  - XLSX
  - 60 Kb

**Downloads - Kirkcud RTI SamuelHerries**

Select another RTI file

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**Primary contact**

Dr Stuart Jeffrey
Research Fellow
Glasgow School of Art
Digital Design Studio
The Hub
Pacific Quay
Glasgow
G5 1EA
Scotland
Tel: +44 (0) 141 566 1465

**Send e-mail enquiry**

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**Resource identifiers**

**ADS Collection:** 2153
**DOI:** https://doi.org/10.5284/1042730
How to cite this DOI

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**RTI files**

(Using multi-volume ZIP files)

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If a visitor comes to the website for the first time, or if they visit a page (or download a file) more than 30 minutes after their last page view, this will be recorded as a new visit. A unique visitor making multiple visits per day will register as several visits.

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• Digital data are fragile
• They are often still archived as objects rather than computerised information
• Digital data standards
• What are the significant properties of our data?
• Data licensing – Creative Commons framework
• Privacy issues
Discovering England’s Burial Spaces (DEBS)
University of York, Historic England, 2018

Overview
Burial spaces offer a unique opportunity to study named individuals and the communities to which they belonged. In addition, burial space research can shed light on changes in fashion, society, economy, attitudes to death and commemoration. Almost every graveyard contains a wide variety of monument types, and yet there is also a degree of standardisation. This means that gravestones offer a fascinating opportunity for classification. By analysing the adoption of particular monument forms and styles, it is possible to identify regional and national trends. More general changes over time are cross-cut by the particular preferences and predilections for memorialisation developed in relation to different social, religious and familial identities, the practicalities of paying for and sourcing materials, and the skills and stylistic leanings of individual masons.

Surveys submitted to the Burial Space Research Database have been standardised to a format agreed with representatives from community groups, Historic England and Churchcare during the DEBS project, and the system described in the Council for British Archaeology handbook Recording and Analysing Graveyards has been updated by Harold Mylum and will be available for use by community groups and heritage professionals, together with advice documentation. This ordering of data allows fine-grained comparisons within and between datasets, enabling exciting new burial space research that transcends individual sites and surveys.
Discovering England’s Burial Spaces (DEBS)
University of York, Historic England, 2018

### Results

**Records 1 - 25 of 2340**

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<th>Surname</th>
<th>Broad Type</th>
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<td>Legacy ID: [68]</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Buine 2005</td>
<td></td>
<td>1824 Inferred date from first mentioned individual</td>
<td></td>
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#### Resource identifiers

**ADS Collection: 3302**

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**Search the database**
- Memorial
- Year
- Start: End:
- Associated historical event
- ID
- Material
- Broad Type
- Select from list
- Detailed Type
- Memorial Code
- Decoration (keyword)
- Decoration (ID)
- Epitaph Text
- Epitaph Quote Type
- Select from list
- Footstone Description
- Bodystone Description
- Kerb Description
- Infill Description
- Element Code
- Mason Name
- Mason Mark
- Site
- Region

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**Historic England**

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**University of York**

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**DEBS** Discovering England’s Burial Spaces

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**DEBS Collection**

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**Measurement**
- Height: 1242
- Width: 743
- Thickness: 92
- Height: 1242

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**Material(s)**
- Sandstone

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**Panel:**
- Shape [code] Definition
- Broad Type: Detailed Type [code] Description
- Memorial Type: [code] Description
- Decorative Motifs: Type [code] (location) Interpretation

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**Condition & Notes**
- Rectangle, vertical - Semicircular central feature - Concave shoulders/corners (B270) Incised design
- Headstone: Flat top with semicircular central feature, Concave shoulders (B107)

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**Sound.**
RESOURCES
for your burial space research.

OASIS+
Report your graveyard survey to your local Heritage Environment Record and national heritage bodies.

Read more about OASIS+

Handbook and Worksheets
Download the latest worksheets and guidance.

Coming Soon

Data Entry
Use our online data entry system to prepare your data for archiving.

Coming Soon

Reflectance Transformation Imaging (RTI)
Difficult to read gravestones? Download our guides for this specialist photographic technique.

Database
Explore our database of burial space research.

Read more about the database

Links
Check out our links to other resources and organisations that can support your burial space research.

Coming Soon
1. Need to mentor community groups within a professional framework to ensure long term value of their work
2. Community groups value being embraced within academic research projects
3. Difficulties of maintaining enthusiasm and momentum
4. Difficulties of ensuring standards – just like professionals!
5. Value of IT approaches in this regard
Thank you!

https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/
https://debs.ac.uk

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