

Historic England Project 7090: Evaluating the application of standards in artefact work Project Update, August 2016

Concern about the application of standards in artefact work in archaeological work in the UK dates back at least to the early 1990s. Over recent years this concern has been focused on what some consider to be declining standards of commercial archaeological work carried out in the context of housing, infrastructure and other development projects.

The Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA) secured funding for this project from Historic England, and in July 2016 appointed Alice Cattermole (Heritage Consultant) to undertake this project on their behalf.

This project is investigating the application of standards in artefact work carried out in commercial archaeological work in England by assessing a sample of recent grey literature to gauge the extent to which existing standards have been applied. In order to clarify the issues involved, opinions will be sought from groups and individuals representing all those involved in the process: finds specialists, commercial archaeological organisations, archaeological consultants, planning archaeologists, and the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists.

The Project Board has agreed a checklist which will be used to assess the extent to which existing standards have been applied. Over 1,000 reports have been selected and downloaded from the Archaeology Data Service's (ADS) Grey Literature Library. The sample has been selected to include fieldwork projects of all types, projects from all Historic Environment Record (HER) areas of England, and a wide variety of archaeological contractors. All grey literature in the sample includes at least one artefact report, and these have been selected to represent the types and periods of artefacts typically recovered during fieldwork projects.

Once these reports have been assessed against the agreed criteria, case studies will be prepared to illustrate and investigate issues raised during the assessment process. At this stage we will also seek feedback from all those involved in archaeological fieldwork, including finds specialists, archaeological consultants, archaeological contractors, curatorial and planning archaeologists, those looking after archaeological archives and CIfA, the body responsible for overarching archaeological standards. We plan to hold a 1-day seminar in late autumn where the findings of the assessment process will be presented, and where feedback will be sought. We are also keen to collate any further feedback via email. This consultation process will help clarify views on the current position, and how to improve the application of standards in artefact work in future.

The results of the project will be summarised in a written report. This report will also include recommendations on how to improve standards in artefact work in the future.

If you would like to be involved in the consultation process or would like any further information about this project, please contact Alice Cattermole at alice@alicecattermole.co.uk