DigVentures

Digital Archives in Archaeology – a new project to help support the creation of complete and sustainable archaeological archives

The question of how to handle digital archive data has been a hot topic in archaeology for years – now we're doing something about it. Historic England has commissioned DigVentures, in partnership with CIfA, to develop materials which provide up-to-date guidance for those working with digital data in archaeological projects. The guidance will be published as part of the Archaeological Archives Forum's ongoing series of practice guides for archives management aimed at practitioners. CIfA's Standards and guidance will be updated to include key information and ensure consistency between practice guidance and regulation.

In May 2018, DCMS welcomed and endorsed Historic England's proposals to respond to the Mendoza Review of Museums. One such proposal was to develop guidance… 'that relieves museums of the expectation that they should attempt to curate digital material from archaeological projects in favour of their deposition in a Trusted Digital Repository that will guarantee the preservation and accessibility of digital material'[1]. To support this recommendation, HE recognise the need to provide clear guidance for practitioners which work alongside industry standards and are supported across the sector. The Digital Archives in Archaeology project has been initiated by the Archaeological Archives Forum to provide such guidance and encourage the consistent and robust management of digital data in archaeology.

Barney Sloane, Director of Research at Historic England, said "The Digital Archives in Archaeology project is a timely approach to ensuring that clear and practical guidance is available to all practitioners. We are entering a new era, where a 'digital-first' approach to all aspects of archaeological archive creation is becoming a reality. This project will help define what that means for those working with archaeological data every day – from data creators to museum curators".

The Digital Archives in Archaeology project

Digital technologies have transformed the way archaeologists work providing innovative research tools, improving how we investigate sites and giving new life to knowledge about the past. As with all parts of an archeological archive, digital data contributes to the long-term preservation of sites by providing key information which can be accessed by researchers and the public alike. How that information can be used in the future is an important consideration and, as new technologies become the norm, we have to be sure that our archive processes adapt to incorporate innovative methods, tools and data.

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[1] https://historicengland.org.uk/content/docs/consultations/archaeological-archives-dw-dcms-mendoza-pdf/

The ambition of this project is to

- understand how digital data is currently used and managed
- signpost how different digital data should be collected and stored
- highlight relevant technical guidance and relate that to industry standards
- provide step-by-step guidance for practitioners at all stages of an archaeological project
- explain how digital data can form part of a sustainable archaeological archive

Can you help?

The use of digital data within archaeological research is extensive and varied, and we know a lot of people are working with a lot of data every day. Over the next few weeks the project team will be asking practitioners to get involved and share their experiences. We want to understand the different ways that archaeologists collect digital data and manage it throughout the project life cycle. If you would like to contribute to the project, we are looking for a cross-section of practitioners to join our #DigDigital Beta group. The role of the Beta group will be to respond to short project surveys and provide ongoing feedback as we draft and shape guidance documents.

If you want to get involved in our Beta Group or learn more about the project, head over to the project website at https://digventures.com/projects/digital-archives, or email Manda Forster on manda@digventures.com.

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