



Archaeological Watching Brief

Standards & Guidance

1 Requirement for Archaeological Watching Brief

- 1.1 An Archaeological Watching Brief is a formal programme of observation and investigation conducted during any operation carried out for non-archaeological reasons where there is a possibility that archaeological deposits may be disturbed or destroyed and where a more extensive programme of investigation is not warranted.
- 1.2 SYAS must be consulted in advance to agree the scope of necessary archaeological works and an appropriate methodology.
- 1.3 Note: All references are correct at time of publication, and it is the responsibility of the undertaking body to review the guidance and ensure that they refer to the most current.

Professional Standards

- 1.4 Archaeological work should be carried out using appropriate expertise and the archaeologists undertaking the work should be adequately qualified. It is good practice to use professionally accredited experts such as a ClfA Registered Organisation¹. SYAS also maintain an open list of archaeological contractors who operate in the region.²
- 1.5 All archaeological work needs to comply with:
 1. the Regional Statement of Good Practice for Archaeology in the Development Process;³
 2. the Chartered Institute for Archaeologist's (ClfA) standards and guidance;⁴
 3. Historic England's guidance on managing archaeological projects (MoRPHE)⁵
 4. Historic England's best practice guidance relevant to the project.⁶

Written Scheme of Investigation

- 1.6 The undertaking body may be required to produce a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) to set out a proposed methodology for the watching brief in sufficient detail.
- 1.7 The contents of a WSI on any given site should be agreed with SYAS.

¹ A register of Registered Organisations is available online: <https://www.archaeologists.net/lookingforanarchaeologist>

² Available online: <https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/home/planning-development/south-yorkshire-archaeology-service>

³ SYAS 2018

⁴ ClfA 2020a

⁵ Historic England 2015a

⁶ Available online: <https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/find/a-z-publications/>

- 1.8 The WSI should be formed in reference to relevant standards, and as a minimum contain:
1. Site location (illustrated on OS MasterMap or similarly detailed survey showing National Grid Coordinates);
 2. Context of the project (including planning background and consultations);
 3. Project stages and timetable;
 4. Monitoring arrangements;
 5. Description of the site identifying its geology, topography, condition etc.;
 6. Brief summary of the archaeological and historical background of the site and its environs;
 7. Detail implications (of 5 & 6 above) for archaeological and palaeo-environmental potential (of both buried and standing remains);
 8. Aims and objectives with reference to the South Yorkshire Historic Environment Research Framework;
 9. Detail the rationale behind the location of each recording area and a plan that clearly shows their location within the site;
 10. Summary of the specific outputs of the project (e.g. report, archives etc);
 11. Methodology for recording, sampling, assessment, analysis and reporting;
 12. Strategy for seeking preservation in-situ and/or additional recording of identified features of unexpected importance;
 13. Strategy for the deposition of the project archive (including a selection strategy and data management plan produced in accordance with ClfA guidance);
 14. Strategy for publication and dissemination of the results;
 15. Details of the competent person/persons or organisation undertaking the works.
- 1.9 The WSI must include an outline sediment sampling strategy based on suspected archaeology, and previous nearby discoveries. Provision should be allowed to revise this strategy in consultation with appropriate specialists, including the Historic England Science Advisor, during the fieldwork as appropriate to account for unexpected discoveries.
- 1.10 A template Written Scheme of Investigation covering archaeological watching briefs is available⁷, providing additional guidance and allowing any deviations from these standards to be identified and justified.

Selection Strategy & Data Management Plan

- 1.11 A proposed archive selection strategy must be included with the WSI, detailing the project-specific selection process, agreed by all stakeholders, for all records and materials arising from the work in creating the Archaeological Archive.
- 1.12 Where digital data is anticipated as an output of the project, the selection strategy must include a data management plan, setting out the methodology for data management from acquisition to deposition.
- 1.13 This should be produced in accordance with ClfA guidance.⁸

⁷ See guidance for archaeological projects, available online: <https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/syas>

⁸ Available online: <https://www.archaeologists.net/selection-toolkit> & <https://www.archaeologists.net/digital>

Monitoring

- 1.14 SYAS will be responsible for monitoring the contractor's work. The contractor must give a minimum of one week's notice of the commencement of fieldwork in order that arrangements for monitoring can be made.
- 1.15 Should features of unexpected importance or complexity be identified that would warrant special measures to record or protect them, then the supervising archaeologist should notify SYAS at the earliest opportunity to implement the appropriate strategy for their management.
- 1.16 If it becomes clear during the archaeological watching brief that little of archaeological interest is likely to survive on the site, the contractor should discuss their work with the monitor. A joint decision will be made on reducing the work to an intermittent watching brief or ceasing observation of groundworks.
- 1.17 Minor changes to an agreed WSI must be submitted to SYAS for written approval. Major changes will require the preparation of an updated WSI for submission to the approving body (SYAS or planning authority as appropriate).

2 Aims

- 2.1 The purpose of an archaeological watching brief is to allow the investigation of features and deposits of archaeological interest, the presence and nature of which could not be established (or established with sufficient accuracy) in advance of disruptive works.
- 2.2 The work will be undertaken in reference to general aims and specific objectives formulated with reference to the South Yorkshire Historic Environment Research Framework⁹ and other period specific or thematic research frameworks/strategies, as applicable.

3 Scope

- 3.1 The archaeological watching brief will be maintained during all groundworks within the agreed area(s), including those for temporary works such as construction compounds, unless otherwise specified in the WSI.

Recommended Contingencies

- 3.2 Contingencies should be budgeted for and identified in the WSI, including, where relevant:
 1. Attendance of additional archaeologists to record areas of extensive or complex archaeology;
 2. Additional specialist sampling and scientific dating;
 3. Conservation of artefacts;
 4. Post-excavation analysis, in the event that detailed reporting is required;
 5. Publication of results.

⁹ Available online: <https://researchframeworks.org/syrf/>

4 Standards for Archaeological Watching Brief

- 4.1 Archaeological fieldwork will be undertaken in accordance with ClfA standards and guidance.¹⁰
- 4.2 Detailed procedures for investigation and recording will be undertaken in accordance with professional best practice, such as that established in Historic England's *Excavation Recording Manual*.¹¹
- 4.3 All records, finds and samples generated during the programme of works should be safely stored as part of a Working Project Archive (see Section 7).

Groundworks

- 4.4 During a continuous watching brief, all groundworks within the area(s) of the archaeological watching brief must be undertaken under archaeological supervision to allow for the identification and recording of any archaeological material that might be uncovered.
- 4.5 Machine excavation will be undertaken by backactor excavator, using a toothless bucket of appropriate width, to reduce ground levels in level spits. Excavated areas should not be smoothed with the back of the bucket. Under no circumstances will the machine be used to cut arbitrary trenches down to natural deposits.
- 4.6 Toothed buckets are only to be used in exceptional circumstances, and where express permission has been given by the supervising archaeologist.
- 4.7 During an intermittent watching brief, where archaeological remains are observed or suspected by contractors or plant operators outside of periods of archaeological supervision, they must immediately cease work in that area and notify the archaeological contractor.
- 4.8 Where features or deposits of potential archaeological interest are exposed or disturbed by groundworks, sufficient time will be allowed for the archaeological contractor to clean, assess, excavate, sample and record them.
- 4.9 Heavy plant or excavators must not be operated in the immediate vicinity of archaeological remains until the archaeological contractor has given explicit permission for operations to recommence at that location.

Investigation of Archaeological Features

- 4.10 Archaeological features and deposits will be cleaned and excavated by hand, where safe to do so, using appropriate tools and according to accepted principles of stratigraphic excavation.
- 4.11 Features and deposits will be investigated sufficient to characterise their nature and importance.
- 4.12 The stratigraphy of the area is to be recorded, even when no archaeological deposits have been identified.

¹⁰ ClfA 2020a

¹¹ Available from Historic England's website: <https://historicengland.org.uk/content/docs/research/historic-england-archaeological-recording-manual-2018/>

Removal of Contaminated Deposits

- 4.13 Wherever possible, the risk of contamination should be established prior to work commencing, and appropriate measures implemented to reduce or avoid risks in accordance with Historic England best practice guidance.¹²
- 4.14 Where hand excavation is not possible, any necessary machine excavation of archaeological features and deposits should be undertaken under the supervision of an archaeologist and in accordance with the agreed WSI.

Recording

- 4.15 A standard single context recording system will be used to keep a documentary record of all archaeological remains that are encountered. The individual contexts will be cross-referenced as appropriate to associated features that are exposed.
- 4.16 Stratigraphy will be recorded in all recording areas, even where no archaeological deposits have been identified, and a Harris Matrix diagram compiled.
- 4.17 All records will be checked for consistency and stratigraphic relationships.

Drawn Record

- 4.18 A range of survey methods may be applied depending on the nature of the archaeology encountered, including survey by hand, by total station, real-time kinematic global navigation satellite system (RTK GNSS), or photogrammetry. All measured survey will be undertaken in accordance with relevant guidelines.¹³
- 4.19 Hand-drawn and digital surveys will be annotated in the field to produce interpretative drawings with relevant context numbers and boundaries between features.
- 4.20 A drawing register will be maintained, recording the scale, location, date, subject, levels, and surveyor.
- 4.21 The extent of the excavated areas and archaeological features will be recorded in plan at an appropriate scale (1:500, 1:1250 or at most 1:2500), including the position of section lines, and tied into the National Grid.
- 4.22 All archaeological features will be drawn in plan and section at an appropriate scale (minimum 1:50 for plans and 1:20 for sections) with Ordnance Datum heights on each drawing.

Photography

- 4.23 Photographic recording (film or digital) will be required showing the site in context, all excavated areas and individual archaeological features, and including shots of work in progress.
- 4.24 Film photography will be undertaken using panchromatic black and white film no faster than ISO400, supplemented with colour slide film.

¹² Historic England 2017a

¹³ Including Andrews *et al*/2015 and Historic England 2017b.

- 4.25 Digital photography will be undertaken in accordance with standards set by Historic England and the recipient archive.¹⁴ All digital photography will be undertaken using a high-quality camera recommended to have no less than an APS-C or DX size sensor of 10 megapixels and to be capable of generating images in TIF (v6) or unprocessed RAW format.
- 4.26 Metric scales of appropriate size will be clearly and discreetly placed in photographs to preserve scale including, where colour is important factor, colour control patches.
- 4.27 A register recording the details of each image will be maintained, including subject, location, date, and photographer.

Finds and Samples

- 4.28 Provisions should be made for relevant specialists to visit the site where required.
- 4.29 The Historic England Science Advisor can be consulted for advice on appropriate approaches to sampling and other archaeological science components.

Artefact Recovery

- 4.30 All stratified archaeological finds will be collected, except for modern (mid-20th century or later) finds from topsoil and subsoil contexts unless it is determined that they are of archaeological interest. Unstratified archaeological finds will be collected where they are determined to be of intrinsic archaeological interest. All artefacts will be bagged and labelled by context.
- 4.31 Removal, packaging, and labelling of finds will be undertaken in accordance with 'First Aid for Finds'¹⁵ and specific Historic England guidance as required.

Environmental/Sediment Sampling and Scientific Dating

- 4.32 All sampling must be undertaken to a site-specific strategy to be set out in the project WSI. It is to be produced in consultation with specialist advice, and in accordance with best practice guidance (including specific guidance on industrial residues, geoarchaeology, and animal remains where appropriate).¹⁶
- 4.33 The sampling strategy should also identify a process for determining when scientific dating will be considered, such as radiocarbon dating, luminescence dating, archaeomagnetic dating, or dendrochronology.
- 4.34 Provision should also be made in the WSI for the sampling strategy to be refined at suitable stages during the fieldwork programme, utilising appropriate specialists where necessary including the Historic England Regional Science Advisor.

Human Remains

- 4.35 Should any inhumation or cremation burials be encountered, their extent, number and state of preservation will be established and SYAS will be notified to discuss an appropriate strategy for their management. Remains should not be removed or chased beyond the existing limits of excavation prior to agreement with SYAS.

¹⁴ Historic England 2015b. and Archaeological Data Service 2009

¹⁵ Watkinson and Neal 1998

¹⁶ Historic England 2011, 2018b, 2019 & 2022.

- 4.36 Where necessary, a licence for removal will be requested from the Ministry of Justice, and SYAS notified, and no development should take place until burials are removed or alternate arrangements made.
- 4.37 The treatment of human remains will be in accordance with the requirements of Civil Law and all relevant best practice guidance.¹⁷ The remains will be recorded in-situ before lifting in accordance with best practice guidance.¹⁸

Treasure

- 4.38 Written agreement must be sought from the landowner to confirm that they waive their right to receive a reward under The Treasure Act 1996 should eligible finds be made.
- 4.39 Artefacts defined as treasure under the Treasure Act 1996 (as supplemented by the Treasure (Designation) (Amendment) Order 2023) will be treated in accordance with the Treasure Act 1996 Code of Practice.¹⁹ All finds of treasure must be reported to the local coroner within 14 days of discovery. In the first instance, it is recommended that details of the find are provided to the local Portable Antiquities Scheme Finds Liaison Officer to confirm that it constitutes treasure. They will then be able to apply for a Treasure Reference Number and declare the find to the coroner on your behalf. SYAS should also be notified.
- 4.40 A short Treasure Report will be compiled for submission to the coroner.²⁰
- 4.41 Where recovery of treasure cannot be undertaken on the same working day as the discovery, suitable security measures will be taken to protect the finds from theft.

Post-Excavation

- 4.42 All finds are to be treated in accordance with current best practice guidance. Finds are to be cleaned and marked, according to accepted principles and in line with appropriate period/material guidelines.
- 4.43 For all categories of material recovered, including finds, palaeo-environmental, industrial and other specialist samples, an assessment by an appropriately experienced specialist will be undertaken in accordance with best practice guidance.²¹
- 4.44 Basic stratigraphic information will be supplied to the project specialists.
- 4.45 All sediment samples collected in accordance with the project sampling strategy should be processed, sorted, and assessed (excluding samples from obviously mixed deposits, etc.).
- 4.46 Scientific dating of suitable material should be undertaken where required to provide chronostratigraphy of features of archaeological interest.
- 4.47 Advice from appropriate specialists should be sought on the storage and conservation of unstable artefactual remains (e.g. metallic, wood or leather).
- 4.48 Ferrous objects, and a selection of non-ferrous objects (including all coins), will be x-radiographed in accordance with Historic England guidance.²²

¹⁷ APABE 2017

¹⁸ Brickley, et al., 2017 & Historic England 2018c

¹⁹ DCMS 2008

²⁰ A template treasure report can be requested from the Finds Liaison Officer

²¹ Watkinson and Neal 1998, Historic England 2011 & Barclay *et al.* 2016)

²² Historic England 2006

- 4.49 The specialists will provide assessment reports describing the material, proposing selection for the permanent archive, and identifying recommendations for further detailed analysis and illustration in consideration of any research potential.
- 4.50 For ceramic assemblages, recording shall be carried out in a manner compatible with existing typological series in local pottery reference collections, e.g. the South Yorkshire / North Derbyshire Medieval Ceramics Reference Collection.²³
- 4.51 The guidelines for handling Post Roman Ceramics produced by the Medieval Pottery Research Group are also to be followed, for relevant material: MPRG, 2001 "Minimum Standards for the Processing, Recording, Analysis and Publication of Post-Roman Ceramics" Medieval Pottery Res Group Occ Paper 2.

5 Reporting

Reporting

- 5.1 Depending on the results of the archaeological watching brief, and in consultation with SYAS, it may be necessary to prepare a post-excavation assessment report and updated written scheme of investigation. These will provide a brief assessment of the potential of the data collected during the fieldwork stage and establish what additional work (post-excavation analysis) is required to achieve the project aims and objectives.
- 5.2 Following completion of any additional works agreed with SYAS, or where a post-excavation assessment is not required, an analysis report will be produced.

Post-Excavation Assessment & Updated Written Scheme of Investigation

- 5.3 A post-excavation assessment report shall contain:
1. A summary of stratigraphy and finds and samples recovered (this should not be a detailed stratigraphic description of the entire site);
 2. A brief description of identified phases;
 3. A statement of potential for each component of data, carried out by appropriate specialists;
 4. Recommendations for further investigation and/or preservation, to be determined in consultation with SYAS.
- 5.4 Following finalisation of the post-excavation assessment report the WSI will be updated to:
1. Identify any changes to the aims and objectives of the project;
 2. Identify any material that would merit further study;
 3. Update the Selection Strategy and Data Management Plan.

Analysis Report

- 5.5 An analysis report shall contain:
1. An introduction including background information (with planning application details, where appropriate);
 2. The original research aims and objectives and rationale for selected area of investigation;
 3. An archaeological and historical baseline;

²³ Available online: http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/ceramics_eh_2003/

4. A description of results;
5. A report of all find and sample categories, by appropriate specialists, including their future research potential;
6. The results of any scientific dating;
7. A discussion of the results including a phased interpretation of the site;
8. A summary of the results in their local, regional, and national context, and the extent to which the work has addressed the project aims and objectives;
9. Supporting illustrations, including as a minimum:
 - (a) A detailed location map;
 - (b) A detailed site plan showing all monitored areas, as excavated;
 - (c) All plans and sections;
 - (d) Detailed plans of archaeological features;
 - (e) Detailed sections of archaeological features;
 - (f) An overall (phased) site plan showing all archaeological features recorded;
 - (g) Selection of photographs of work in progress;
 - (h) Select artefact illustrations and/or photographs.
 - (i) Supporting tables of data, as relevant.
10. A detailed context index;
11. An archive index;
12. Acknowledgements identifying those involved in the project, including SYAS.

6 Standards for Publication and Dissemination

Public Engagement & Outreach

- 6.1 Archaeological work is undertaken for public benefit and SYAS encourage opportunities for public engagement to be integrated from the outset.
- 6.2 It is not anticipated that a watching brief will require public engagement and outreach from the outset, however the need for this should be reviewed and updated dependent on the results.

Dissemination of Results

- 6.3 Digital and physical copies of the report must be supplied to SYAS for incorporation into the South Yorkshire Historic Environment Record. Copies of any digital data must also be provided when requested.
- 6.4 Printed copies of reports will be included with the physical archive to the recipient museum.
- 6.5 Copies of the report, or details on where it can be accessed, should be provided to all external specialists involved in the project.
- 6.6 The archaeological contractor should initiate or update an online OASIS form²⁴ at commencement of the project. Details of the results and archive are to be added, along with a copy of all formal reports, upon completion of the project.

²⁴ Via the OASIS online portal hosted by the Archaeological Data Service <http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/project/oasis/>

Formal Publication

- 6.7 A summary report of an appropriate length, accompanied by illustrations (at 300dpi resolution), must be prepared and submitted in digital format, for publication in *Archaeology in South Yorkshire* or an equivalent SYAS publication.
- 6.8 Where results warrant it, and following discussion with SYAS, formal publication in the form of a journal article or monograph should be produced.

Furthering Research

- 6.9 Provision must be made for updating the South Yorkshire Historic Environment Research Framework where the results of a fieldwork project contribute towards agenda topics. This is to be achieved by adding 'comments' to relevant research questions briefly summarising the results and providing a bibliographic reference to the relevant report²⁵.

²⁵ The research framework is accessible online: <https://researchframeworks.org/syrf/> - new users must register for a new account to add comments.

7 Standards for Archaeological Archives

General

- 7.1 In accordance with regional policy,²⁶ the archaeological contractor must notify the relevant museum at project initiation, mid-point review and completion stages to discuss archaeological archiving requirements. The relevant form (Project Initiation Form/ Mid-point Review Form/ Completion Form) will be filled out and sent to the museum with a copy provided to SYAS. Template forms are available for download from the SYAS website.²⁷
- 7.2 Details of archiving arrangements should be confirmed with the client and landowner at the outset, and a budget allowed for to cover the museum's expected deposition charge.

Working Project Archive

- 7.3 All material (whether digital or physical) recovered or generated through the duration of the watching brief will be appropriately and securely stored in a working project archive. This will be undertaken in accordance with the selection strategy and digital data management plan set out at the commencement of the project (see paragraphs 1.11-1.13).

Physical Records

- 7.4 Any physical documents or drawings will be indexed, collated, and stored in a secure location when not in use.
- 7.5 Film photography will be processed at regular intervals throughout the duration of a project.
- 7.6 Digital security copies will be made of physical records at regular intervals, to be stored and backed up in a secure location. Documents and drawings will be scanned at an appropriate resolution (no less than 300dpi for documents and drawings, 600dpi for photographic prints, and 4000dpi for negatives or slides) and to an appropriate format (e.g. a lossless format, such as TIF, for scale drawings), and scans checked for quality.²⁸ Standards adhered to should be included in the Data Management Plan. If digitised data is to form part of the final digital archive it should be treated as set out for Born Digital Records below.

Born Digital Records

- 7.7 All digital records will be treated in accordance with a project data management plan.²⁹
- 7.8 Digital records will be routinely downloaded, stored, and backed up in a secure location.
- 7.9 All digital records will be consistently labelled, files logically structured, and embedded with appropriate metadata (or have their metadata stored in an accompanying spreadsheet).³⁰

²⁶ Turnpenny 2012

²⁷ See guidance for archaeological projects, available online: <https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/syas>

²⁸ For further guidance see: [Digitisation at The National Archives](#)

²⁹ ClfA guidance available online: <https://www.archaeologists.net/diqdigital>

³⁰ Archaeological Data Service 2009

Final Archaeological Archive

Selection Strategy

- 7.10 On the completion of fieldwork, the relevant specialists and recipient museum will be consulted to update the selection strategy set out in the WSI in accordance with best practice guidance.³¹
- 7.11 This should consider all documents, finds, samples, and digital files generated during the project, including illustrations.
- 7.12 The aim of this process is to produce a project archive that allows a full re-examination and interpretation of all the results of the project whilst avoiding replication, repetition, or the retention of materials not considered germane to future analysis.

Archive Deposition

- 7.13 The final archive will then be assembled in accordance with Archaeological Archives Forum, ClfA, and museum guidelines.³²
- 7.14 Agreement in principle for full transfer of title of finds to the recipient museum needs to be obtained at the outset. Confirmation of transfer of title from the landowner and confirmation of assignment of copyright, along with a full archive inventory, will be submitted with a project completion form³³ to the recipient museum. SYAS will be provided with a copy of the completion form, including the assigned accession number.
- 7.15 The recipient archive will be licensed to use the deposited material, in perpetuity, without restrictions; this licence will allow the archive to reproduce material, including for use by third parties, with the copyright owner suitably acknowledged.
- 7.16 It is preferred practice for generated material to be archived in its original medium (i.e. physical or digital). Digitising of physical records will only be considered where it retains the same level of accessibility and information as the original medium.
- 7.17 The physical archive will be deposited with the appropriate museum. A copy of the archive receipt will be provided to SYAS.
- 7.18 The digital archive will be deposited with a Trusted Digital Repository (CoreTrustSeal certified). For archaeological archives this is presently limited to the Archaeology Data Service (ADS) at the University of York. A link to the final digital archive will be provided to SYAS.

8 References

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³¹ AAF 2011, SMA 2020 & ClfA toolkit for selection archaeology: <https://www.archaeologists.net/selection-toolkit>

³² AAF 2011, ClfA 2020e & Turnpenny 2012

³³ Utilising the proforma agreement available online: <https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/home/planning-development/south-yorkshire-archaeology-service/guidance-for-archaeological-projects>

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