

**DYFED ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST**  
**ARCHAEOLOGICAL ARCHIVES: DISPOSAL AND RETENTION**  
**GUIDELINES**



Current since: July 2018

Adopted at the Management Committee [board] Meeting of: 19 July 2018

Date of review following first adoption: 2021

Revised following review: 22 August 2023

Re-adopted by Trustees on: 23 August 2023:

Date of review following re-adoption:

**DYFED ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST**  
**ARCHAEOLOGICAL ARCHIVES: DISPOSAL AND RETENTION GUIDELINES**

**GENERAL**

Until fairly recently almost all archaeological archives were routinely deposited in museums, but due to lack of space they are becoming more reluctant to accept them. One solution is to be more selective in what is included in an archive and so reduce the volume of material being deposited.

These guidelines are designed to assist in identifying materials that are suitable for deposition with a museum so making them available for future research and display and those which may be disposed of. They are general and not exhaustive and it is recognised that unusual items or assemblages will be found that do not fall within the general criteria set out here and will have to be treated separately. If an archive is suitable for retention, or possibly suitable for retention, then discussions with a museum curator should be entered into at an early stage of the project not towards the end.

These guidelines mainly apply to artefacts and ecofacts, but a short section on paper archives is also included.

Application of these guidelines should be done in consultation with the *National Standard and Guidance for Collecting and Depositing Archaeological Archives in Wales 2017*  
<http://www.welshmuseumsfederation.org/en/news-archive/resources-landing/Collections/national-standard-and-guidance-for-collecting-and-depositing-archaeological-archives-in-wales-2017.html>

**CONTEXT AND DATE**

**High priority for retention**

Rare finds from stratified and unstratified contexts

Prehistoric and early medieval assemblages

Key stratigraphic dating assemblages crucial to the structural development of the site

Assemblages which are not well represented in museum collections

**High priority for disposal**

Unstratified material unless intrinsically dateable and unusual/rare

Artefacts from residual/intrusive contexts unless of key stratigraphic importance to the site

Assemblages already well represented in museum collections

**CATEGORIES OF MATERIAL**

**PREHISTORIC**

**Lithics**

**Retain:** All assemblages whether stratified or not that contribute to our understanding. If an assemblage is too large to retain in its entirety (ie it includes

a large amount of waste material) then consultation with the museum curator and a specialist may be necessary to formulate a sampling/disposal strategy.

**Dispose:** Unstratified/unprovenanced undiagnostic artefacts/small assemblages.

**Recording/reporting:** For excavated material to be retained a specialist's report, for material to be disposed of a description and quantification and a HER entry.

### **Pottery**

**Retain:** All, whether unstratified or not.

**Dispose:** Not applicable

**Recording/reporting:** For excavated material a specialist's report, otherwise a description and HER entry. Conservation may be required.

### **Daub/burnt clay**

**Retain:** Normally not retained.

**Dispose:** Normally disposed of.

**Recording/reporting:** Normally recorded in context records and a note in reports.

### **Metal artefacts and metalworking debris**

**Retain:** All, artefacts whether unstratified or not. Normally all metalworking debris will be retained, but if a large assemblage is present consultation with the museum curator and a specialist may be necessary to formulate a sampling/disposal strategy.

**Dispose:** Normally not applicable, but see above.

**Recording/reporting:** For excavated material a specialist's report, otherwise a description and HER entry. Conservation may be required.

### **Organic material**

**Retain:** All, artefacts whether unstratified or not.

**Dispose:** Not applicable.

**Recording/reporting:** For excavated material a specialist's report, otherwise a description and HER entry. Conservation may be required.

### **Animal bone**

**Retain:** All. Normally all animal bone will be retained, but if a large assemblage is present then consultation with the museum curator and a specialist may be necessary to formulate a sampling/disposal strategy.

**Dispose:** Normally not applicable, but see above.

**Recording/reporting:** A specialist's report.

### **Human bone**

**Retain:** Retention/reburial may be governed by a Burial Licence. Normally all prehistoric human bone will be deposited with a museum with a secure human

remains store, but if a large assemblage is present then consultation with the museum curator and a specialist may be necessary to formulate a sampling/disposal strategy.

**Dispose:** Normally not applicable, but see above.

**Recording/reporting:** A specialist's report.

### **Processed environment samples**

**Retain:** These are not always returned from specialist analysis, but if they are they should be retained.

**Dispose:** Normally not applicable, but see above.

**Recording/reporting:** A specialist's report.

### **Unprocessed environmental/soil samples**

**Retain:** Charcoal samples are normally retained. Bulk samples are not normally retained, as they should have been processed and analysed during a post-excavation programme.

**Dispose:** Normally bulk samples are disposed of.

**Recording/reporting:** Quantification.

## **ROMAN**

### **Worked stone**

**Retain:** All, whether unstratified or not.

**Dispose:** Not applicable

**Recording/reporting:** For excavated material a specialist's report, otherwise a description and HER entry.

### **Pottery**

**Retain:** For very large stratified assemblages from excavations consultation with the museum curator and a specialist may be necessary to formulate a sampling/disposal strategy. Small excavated assemblages are usually fully retained. Unusual/rare unstratified material may be suitable for deposition.

**Dispose:** Possibly selected elements of large assemblages, common unstratified material.

**Recording/reporting:** For excavated material a specialist's report, otherwise a description and HER entry.

### **Metal artefacts**

**Retain:** All, artefacts whether unstratified or not.

**Dispose:** Not applicable.

**Recording/reporting:** For excavated material a specialist's report, otherwise a description and HER entry. Conservation may be required.

### **Metalworking debris**

**Retain:** Normally all metalworking debris will be retained, but if a large assemblage is present consultation with the museum curator and a specialist may be necessary to formulate a sampling/disposal strategy.

**Dispose:** Normally not applicable, but see above.

**Recording/reporting:** For excavated material a specialist's report, otherwise a description and HER entry. Conservation may be required.

### **Organic material**

**Retain:** All, artefacts whether unstratified or not.

**Dispose:** Not applicable.

**Recording/reporting:** For excavated material a specialist's report, otherwise a description and HER entry. Conservation may be required.

### **Building material**

**Retain:** For very large stratified assemblages from excavations a sampling strategy will be required resulting in only a small part of the total being retained.

**Dispose:** Most of the assemblage will be disposed of, see above.

**Recording/reporting:** Quantification of material accompanied by a report if appropriate.

### **Animal bone**

**Retain:** All. Normally all stratified animal bone will be retained, but if a large assemblage is present then consultation with the museum curator and a specialist may be necessary to formulate a sampling/disposal strategy.

**Dispose:** Unstratified material and selected elements of large assemblages.

**Recording/reporting:** A specialist's report.

### **Human bone**

**Retain:** Retention/reburial may be governed by a Burial Licence. Normally all Roman human bone will be deposited with a museum with a secure human remains store, but if a large assemblage is present then consultation with the museum curator and a specialist may be necessary to formulate a sampling/disposal strategy.

**Dispose:** Normally not applicable, but see above.

**Recording/reporting:** A specialist's report.

### **Processed environment samples**

**Retain:** These are not always returned from specialist analysis, but if they are they should be retained.

**Dispose:** Normally not applicable, but see above.

**Recording/reporting:** A specialist's report.

### **Unprocessed environmental/soil samples**

**Retain:** Charcoal samples are normally retained. Bulk samples are not normally retained, as they should have been processed and analysed during a post-excavation programme.

**Dispose:** Normally bulk samples are disposed of.

**Recording/reporting:** Quantification.

## EARLY MEDIEVAL

### Worked stone

**Retain:** All, whether unstratified or not.

**Dispose:** Not applicable

**Recording/reporting:** For excavated material a specialist's report, otherwise a description and HER entry.

### Pottery

**Retain:** All, whether unstratified or not.

**Dispose:** Not applicable

**Recording/reporting:** For excavated material a specialist's report, otherwise a description and HER entry. Conservation may be required.

### Metal artefacts and metalworking debris

**Retain:** All, artefacts whether unstratified or not. Normally all metalworking debris will be retained, but if a large assemblage is present consultation with the museum curator and a specialist may be necessary to formulate a sampling/disposal strategy.

**Dispose:** Normally not applicable, but see above.

**Recording/reporting:** For excavated material a specialist's report, otherwise a description and HER entry. Conservation may be required.

### Organic material

**Retain:** All, artefacts whether unstratified or not.

**Dispose:** Not applicable.

**Recording/reporting:** For excavated material a specialist's report, otherwise a description and HER entry. Conservation may be required.

### Animal bone

**Retain:** All. Normally all animal bone will be retained, but if a large assemblage is present then consultation with the museum curator and a specialist may be necessary to formulate a sampling/disposal strategy.

**Dispose:** Normally not applicable, but see above.

**Recording/reporting:** A specialist's report.

### Human bone

**Retain:** Retention/reburial may be governed by a Burial Licence. Normally all prehistoric human bone will be deposited with a museum with a secure human remains store, but if a large assemblage is present then consultation with the museum curator and a specialist may be necessary to formulate a sampling/disposal strategy.

**Dispose:** Normally not applicable, but see above.

**Recording/reporting:** A specialist's report.

### **Processed environment samples**

**Retain:** These are not always returned from specialist analysis, but if they are they should be retained.

**Dispose:** Normally not applicable, but see above.

**Recording/reporting:** A specialist's report.

### **Unprocessed environmental/soil samples**

**Retain:** Charcoal samples are normally retained. Bulk samples are not normally retained, as they should have been processed and analysed during a post-excavation programme.

**Dispose:** Normally bulk samples are disposed of.

**Recording/reporting:** Quantification.

## **MEDIEVAL**

### **Worked stone**

**Retain:** For very large stratified assemblages from excavations consultation with the museum curator and a specialist may be necessary to formulate a sampling/disposal strategy. Unusual/rare unstratified material may be suitable for deposition.

**Dispose:** Possibly selected elements of large assemblages, common unstratified material.

**Recording/reporting:** For excavated material quantification and possibly a specialist's report, otherwise a description and HER entry.

### **Pottery**

**Retain:** For very large stratified assemblages from excavations consultation with the museum curator and a specialist may be necessary to formulate a sampling/disposal strategy. Small excavated assemblages may be disposed of, unless they are crucial to the structural development of the site. Unusual/rare unstratified material may be suitable for deposition.

**Dispose:** Possibly selected elements of large assemblages, small assemblages, common unstratified material.

**Recording/reporting:** For excavated material a report, otherwise a description and HER entry.

### **Metal artefacts**

**Retain:** All, artefacts whether unstratified or not.

**Dispose:** Not applicable.

**Recording/reporting:** For excavated material a specialist's report, otherwise a description and HER entry. Conservation may be required.

### **Metalworking debris**

**Retain:** Normally all metalworking debris will be retained, but if a large assemblage is present consultation with the museum curator and a specialist may be necessary to formulate a sampling/disposal strategy.

**Dispose:** Normally not applicable, but see above.

**Recording/reporting:** For excavated material a specialist's report, otherwise a description and HER entry. Conservation may be required.

### **Organic material**

**Retain:** All, artefacts whether unstratified or not.

**Dispose:** Not applicable.

**Recording/reporting:** For excavated material a specialist's report, otherwise a description and HER entry. Conservation may be required.

### **Building material**

**Retain:** For very large stratified assemblages from excavations a sampling strategy will be required resulting in only a small part of the total being retained.

**Dispose:** Most of the assemblage will be disposed of, see above.

**Recording/reporting:** Quantification of material accompanied by a report if appropriate.

### **Animal bone**

**Retain:** All. Normally all stratified animal bone will be retained, but if a large assemblage is present then consultation with the museum curator and a specialist may be necessary to formulate a sampling/disposal strategy.

**Dispose:** Unstratified material and selected elements of large assemblages.

**Recording/reporting:** A specialist's report.

### **Human bone**

**Retain:** Retention/reburial may be governed by a Burial Licence. Normally medieval human bone will be reinterred, but in consultation with the receiving museum it may be possible to deposit human bone in a secure human remains store.

**Dispose:** Normally reinter, but see above.

**Recording/reporting:** A specialist's report if required.

### **Processed environment samples**

**Retain:** These are not always returned from specialist analysis, but if they are they should be retained.

**Dispose:** Normally not applicable, but see above.



**Recording/reporting:** A specialist's report.

### **Unprocessed environmental/soil samples**

**Retain:** Charcoal samples are normally retained. Bulk samples are not normally retained, as they should have been processed and analysed during a post-excavation programme.

**Dispose:** Normally bulk samples are disposed of.

**Recording/reporting:** Quantification.

## **POST-MEDIEVAL/MODERN**

### **Worked stone**

**Retain:** This is dependent on the date of the material and its quality. Generally only rare or unusual pieces will be retained.

**Dispose:** Most to be disposed of.

**Recording/reporting:** For excavated material quantification and possibly a specialist's report, otherwise a description and HER entry.

### **Pottery**

**Retain:** Only rare/unusual/complete items or stratified assemblages crucial to the structural development of the site to be obtained. For very large stratified assemblages from excavations consultation with the museum curator and a specialist may be necessary to formulate a sampling/disposal strategy

**Dispose:** Most to be disposed of unless they fit the above criteria.

**Recording/reporting:** For excavated material a report, otherwise a description and HER entry.

### **Metal artefacts**

**Retain:** This is dependent on the date of the material and its quality. Generally only rare or unusual pieces will be retained.

**Dispose:** Most to be disposed of.

**Recording/reporting:** For excavated material quantification and possibly a specialist's report, otherwise a description and HER entry.

### **Metalworking debris**

**Retain:** Not normally.

**Dispose:** All, normally

**Recording/reporting:** Quantification.

### **Organic material**

**Retain:** This is dependent on the date of the material and its quality. Generally only rare or unusual pieces will be retained.

**Dispose:** Most to be disposed of.

**Recording/reporting:** For excavated material quantification and possibly a specialist's report, otherwise a description and HER entry.

### **Building material**

**Retain:** For very large stratified assemblages from excavations a sampling strategy will be required resulting in only a small part, if any, of the total being retained.

**Dispose:** Most of the assemblage will be disposed of, see above.

**Recording/reporting:** Quantification of material accompanied by a report if appropriate.

### **Animal bone**

**Retain:** Not normally.

**Dispose:** All, normally

**Recording/reporting:** Quantification and possibly a report.

### **Human bone**

**Retain:** Not normally, but retention/reburial may be governed by a Burial Licence.

**Dispose:** Normally reinter.

**Recording/reporting:** A specialist's report if required.

### **Processed environment samples**

**Retain:** No normally.

**Dispose:** Normally.

**Recording/reporting:** A specialist's report.

### **Unprocessed environmental/soil samples**

**Retain:** No

**Dispose:** Yes

**Recording/reporting:** Quantification

## **PAPER/DIGITAL ARCHIVES**

A paper/digital archive should be produced if artefacts from an archaeological intervention have been assessed as being worthy of retention, unless the intervention was small-scale and the report is sufficiently comprehensive.

A grey literature report will be produced for all interventions. If there are no artefacts then the following criteria can be used to decide whether a paper/digital archive is produced or not:

**Desktop assessments/site visits:** If no original material is produced then it is not necessary to produce an archive. If original material such as photographs, sketches etc are produced then attaching data to the HER may be appropriate. New site records in the HER may have to be created.

**Watching briefs:** It may not be necessary to produce an archive if the report is sufficiently comprehensive and if the watching brief was negative or relatively small-scale with little archaeological evidence. An archive may be required for large-scale watching briefs.

**Building recording/surveys:** Photographs, site drawings and survey data will be created during this type of project and thus an archive is normally produced. However, for small-scale works a grey literature report may be sufficient.

**Evaluation:** An archive will not be required for negative evaluations, and possibly not for those that produce little archaeological evidence. Production of an archive is normally required where significant archaeology has been found. However, the decision on whether to create an archive or not may have to wait until after further archaeological interventions or until development has been completed.

**Excavation:** Unless very small in scale, in which case a report may be sufficient, excavation will normally require the production of an archive.