

Using a project design, preferably from a completed project with which you have had direct involvement, critically assess the extent to which the design successfully delivered a contextualised research design, appropriate methodology, effective project management and communication within and beyond the project team, and a suitable outcome in terms of publication and archive.

Introduction to the project and its wider context

This assignment will be evaluating the success of the research project titled *Beadlam Roman Villa: Assessment of the Landscape Setting. Aerial Investigation and Mapping Project* which was designed, conducted and published predominantly by members of the Aerial Investigation and Mapping team at Historic England (Knight and Roberts, 2022). The project's success will be decided against the project design phase, assessing how the project was delivered and organised as well as looking at the projected outcomes versus the actual outcomes. Beadlam Roman Villa is a scheduled monument as well as an English Heritage Trust guardianship site situated in the county of North Yorkshire (English Heritage, n.d.). The Beadlam Roman Villa project (Knight and Roberts, 2022) was initially formulated by the Aerial Investigation and Mapping team within Historic England from a support request sent from the Properties Curator of the North for the English Heritage Trust (which will be referred to as EHT henceforth). Historic England and EHT have a shared service level agreement which is set out in the corporate plan, meaning Historic England should support EHT with projects where possible (Historic England, 2021, p.6).

Beadlam Roman Villa site is currently situated on private land only allowing access around the exterior of the monument on booked tours offered by English Heritage on their website, which before 2022 was not possible and the site remained inaccessible (English Heritage, n.d.). The intention of making the site more accessible was the main motivation for the support request submitted by EHT, with the expectation that a new research project would provide the information and materials necessary to open the site to the public fully, placing two new interpretation boards at the site (Evans, 2021, p.2). The motivation to open the site to the public is demonstrated in the aims set out in the project design which states that the project results would enhance the visitor experience and provide a framework for further community engagement (Evans, 2021, p.4-5). The project also aimed to increase the overall understanding of the site by conducting a range of surveys to help identify any visible archaeological remains within the Beadlam Roman Villa site as well as an aerial

investigation and mapping survey of the surrounding landscape to place Beadlam Roman Villa into the wider landscape context (Evans, 2021, p.4-5).

How were the aims of the project addressed in the project design and how was the project managed?

The aims for the project are set out very clearly in the project design, something which is less obvious within the published report. The initial project design sets out clear motivations behind the research, which helped provide a concise set of aims for the project (Evans, 2021, p.2-3). The project design also lists very clearly how the aims would be achieved, through a set of objectives which touches upon the methodology. When reading through the final report there are no sections that explicitly define the aims of the project; The background section hints at the motivations for the project and provides a very vague statement which might allude to the aims, but it is not inherently clear what the research questions are within the finished report (Knight and Roberts, 2022, P. 1).

The background information about Beadlam Roman Villa's history is very sparse within the project design, something which is not reflected in the final report as this forms a generous section(four pages)(Knight and Roberts, 2022, P. 4-8). The background section was written separately from the rest of the report by a properties historian working for EHT. As the project design was authored by the Aerial Investigation team this could explain the small emphasis on the historical context within the project design. As the section on the historical context of Beadlam Roman Villa was written by an external EHT colleague, interaction between team members working on the different sections of the project was limited to meetings over Microsoft Teams and using Projectview to update on progress throughout the project which may not have been all that effective (Knight, 2024). It seems apparent in the final report, that the content of the historical context section perhaps does not fit with the end results of the project as well as it could have done. The section of the report which introduces the historical context of Beadlam Roman Villa and how the site fits into the wider Roman landscape in North Yorkshire sets the report up very specifically to engage with the Roman characteristics and archaeology in the surrounding landscape. I think this perhaps highlights that the research had hoped to find new information about both Beadlam Roman Villa and also specifically the Roman elements within the landscape. The results provided limited evidence of Roman occupation in the surrounding landscape and had very little

conclusive new information about the Beadlam Roman Villa site itself. For the different research project sections to fit more seamlessly together it might have been useful to present some added historical context on other periods in the surrounding landscape, providing a loose historical background for the areas surrounding the Beadlam Roman Villa including both the later Prehistoric and Medieval periods. This would have tied nicely into some of the other findings of the research from other periods which were more extensive than the Roman features. If the Historic England team members working on the research had confirmed the lack of new Roman discoveries with the EHT team member writing up the introductory historical context section, this might have resulted in a more comprehensive and complementary contextual section that places the villa locationally within its wider context but also periodically.

How well did the methodology consider the aims of the project outlined in the project design?

The methodology set out in the Project design planned to deploy a range of surveys and investigations, mostly by the Aerial Investigation and Mapping team at Historic England (Evans, 2021, P.10). These included a UAS survey (Unmanned Aircraft System) of the Beadlam Roman Villa site as well as a full aerial investigation and mapping survey of the wider landscape using a range of sources including LIDAR from the Environment Agency, Historic England Archive vertical and oblique photographs, APGB orthophotographs (Aerial Photography for Great Britain), NRHE monuments and events (National Record of the Historic Environment) and Historic Environment Records (Evans, 2021, p.9). The methodology also set out that the Historic England Geophysical Survey team would assist in providing a specification and managing a tender process to use an externally contracted company to undertake a GPR (Ground Penetrating Radar) survey. Upon conversing with the author of the project design (Evans, 2024), it seems the internal Historic England Geophysical Survey team were extremely busy at this time and did not have the staff resources to do the survey themselves, they were however successful at tendering an external contractor. It seems there was a breakdown in communication for this part of the project and even those involved (Knight, 2024) in the project are unsure what happened to the geophysical survey element of the project or even if a separate geophysical report was ever completed by the external contractors. This is reflected in the recommendations

section of the report which states that further geophysical survey of some of the features spotted in the wider landscape would improve their interpretation (Knight and Roberts, 2021, p.30). This is one of the areas that the project perhaps could have done better, by ensuring that the geophysical survey was completed by the internal team at Historic England. Any sites of interest identified through the aerial investigation and mapping survey would have been prime candidates for further geophysical survey which would have improved the interpretation of the features as well as further enhancing the aim of the project to understand the wider landscape around the Beadlam Roman Villa site. It has been demonstrated in the past that cross-team projects are successful at enhancing the end results using a multidisciplinary methodology such as the *National Archaeological Identification Survey: Upland Pilot final project report (Cumbria and Lancashire)* which used information gathered from air photographs and LIDAR analysis to determine which areas should be targeted by further ground-based work, including geophysical survey (Oakey et al, 2015).

Conducting a UAS survey of the Beadlam Roman Villa site, which was proposed and outlined in the project design, created a collection of detailed photographs. These images were processed to create an orthomosaic photograph (this is where the images are overlapped, stitched together and rectified to a singular plan view) and a Digital Elevation Model (DEM) both of which helped interpret the site as well as creating illustrative images that could be used by EHT on their interpretation boards at the site. This shows how the methodology kept in mind the use of the products both within the research stages of the project and also as illustrative products which could be repurposed to help wider audiences engage with the site in the future, again targeting the aims of the project successfully.

Through completing an aerial investigation and mapping survey of the wider landscape around the Beadlam Roman Villa, the research report places the villa into its wider context both spatially but also periodically, considering earlier and later archaeological activity. The research includes details about Iron Age enclosures within 20km of the Beadlam Roman Villa site and considers the possibility of Iron Age routeways through the surrounding landscape which also relates to the *Yorkshire Archaeological Research Framework: research agenda* specifically the Iron Age and Roman agendas. The report also hits the aims for future archaeological research through the integration of remote sensing

techniques(Roskams and Whyman, 2007, P.5). Overall the methods chosen to approach both a single site as well as the wider landscape were effective at meeting the aims set in the project design. It is a shame there was no updated geophysical survey of some of the features within the wider landscape as this could have helped develop a better interpretation of the activity surrounding the Beadlam Roman Villa.

What were the projected outcomes of the Beadlam Roman Villa research and how well were these delivered?

The project was motivated heavily by the interests of the EHT in opening the Beadlam Roman Villa site to the public. The results of the research were intended to be used as material for both guided tours and interpretation boards, this includes information about the archaeology at the villa site and the archaeological landscape it sits within as well as any UAS-captured photographs and models which would provide illustrative details. Providing useful content that will help open the site to the public forms part of the justification for the project itself, which as a Historic England project must prove how research projects will benefit the public through their public value score. The Public Value section within the project design explores how the project will run as efficiently as possible to create the optimum value for public spent money; Historic England have devised an assessment process which helps build a business case for why the project should go ahead (Evans, 2021, P. 6-8) (CIFA, 2021, P. 4)(Historic England, n.d.). Each project must be assessed against four 'pillars', each with its own criteria, which evaluate how well the project will achieve the outcomes and deliver public value in line with the Historic England Corporate Plan (Historic England, 2021)(Historic England, n.d.). Within the project design for the Beadlam project, three of the four 'pillars' scored four out of four, with only the 'Public Support' pillar scoring three out of four. The reason for this was that even though the stakeholders were clearly identified (Historic England colleagues, EHT and its visiting members, North York Moors HER and Ryevitalise Landscape Partnership Scheme volunteers), the impact of the research would be difficult to measure (Evans, 2021, p. 6-7 & 11-12). This issue has become even more apparent after the completion of the research project as the site still has not been fully opened to the public and the impact that the research has had on EHT is still unclear. It could be seen to have had a positive impact in a small way as although the site is not open, tours are being conducted which hopefully the

new research will contribute, with a fresh take on the villa's history and its surrounding landscape.

Although the project design had high hopes to aid EHT with opening the site, at present the site remains closed and even though tours are being conducted they are limited in number (only six are scheduled for 2024) (English Heritage, n.d.). Having spoken to those involved in the project (Knight, 2024)(Evans, 2024), it has become clear that there were problems agreeing access rights between EHT and the current land owners which is why the site remains closed to the public. This might have been something that would have been worth discussing in depth before commissioning work from Historic England, as although the project adds to the known information about the area it essentially failed its main role in benefiting the public through its inability to contribute to improving the quality of a place (CIFA, 2021). This is not a failure of the research report alone, as it achieved the research it set out to complete, however as it was so heavily motivated by the outcomes of the Beadlam Roman Villa site, the functionality of some of the materials created in the project have not been used to their full potential. The report is accessible to the public via the Historic England research reports portal, however, the report is not linked on the English Heritage webpage about Beadlam Roman Villa's history (English Heritage, n.d.), which again shows that the research has not been used to its full potential.

Another way that the project aimed to provide public benefit was through delivering outreach to local communities and volunteers as part of the Ryevitalise Landscape Partnership Scheme (Evans, 2021, P.). The Ryevitalise Landscape Partnership Scheme has been running different projects aimed at improving how people connect with their local landscape in and around the Rye River valley and its tributaries (North York Moors, n.d.). The outreach sessions planned in the project design would contribute towards the *Reconnecting People* scheme which had a number of projects aimed at connecting people with their local history (North York Moors, n.d.). The outreach suggested in the project design planned to provide training for volunteers involved in the Ryevitalise project, teaching aerial investigation and mapping techniques as well as presenting the results of the research (Evans, 2021, P.3 & 18). Upon talking to Knight (2024) who was meant to conduct the training sessions, it seems the outreach opportunity was never taken up by the volunteers after being offered. The outreach would have coordinated well with the *LIDAR*

Landscapes project which taught the volunteers how to use LIDAR data and what to look for when examining landscapes, looking for new discoveries as well as enhancing information about existing HER records (Frodsham, 2021). Combining the LIDAR training with aerial investigation and mapping training would have given the volunteers a well-rounded set of skills to analyse both LIDAR data and aerial photographs in the best way. This seems to have been a missed opportunity by the Ryevitalise project and it is a shame this was not taken up. Again, this is not a failure of the project as it is something that was out of the control, however, it again adds to the failings of the public benefit aspect that was promised in the project design.

Conclusions

To conclude, the project was set out clearly in the project design, with very clear motivations and aims. The research was conducted successfully and employed an appropriate range of survey methods, although it does seem a shame that a geophysical survey was not employed to complement the aerial investigation and mapping findings within the research report. The project design set out to have strong public benefit outcomes which would have provided outreach in a range of forms and for a wide range of audiences. These were not fulfilled due to circumstances out of the control of the project which were not foreseen as risks in the project design (Evans, 2021, p.13). Ultimately although the research report as a standalone document provides a useful collection of information and research about Beadlam Roman Villa and its surrounding landscape, the purpose of the research has not been successfully fulfilled and ultimately the research report and the materials created from the research process have not been used to their full potential.

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