

Provide a critical reflection of your role and responsibilities within a wider archaeological project considering the requirements for professional and ethical judgement, and your relationships with other team members and other stakeholders

Archaeological projects have many steps from start to finish. From a desk-based assessment (DBA) to written scheme of investigation (WSI) to the investigation itself (whether evaluation, excavation, watching brief etc.) with many people involved along the way. Each individual will have different roles and responsibilities and it is essential that people are aware these to allow for the project to run efficiently. Having clear boundaries between the roles and responsibilities of different individuals ensures that work that needs to be done is completed on schedule and that there is less confusion over what needs doing and what has already been done. Without this definition there is always the potential that work might be done twice (wasting time and money) or work might not get done at all (putting the project at risk). Therefore, it is an integral part of project planning and management that there is a set hierarchy that all staff are aware of, as well as a clear guide for that hierarchy entails in terms of responsibilities. This essay seeks to reflect on the roles and responsibilities of the author during the course of an archaeological project.

The project chosen for this reflection is an excavation in Cambridge at Sidney Sussex College. There were three phases of excavation for this project all of which had the same site code (ECB4266) with Phase One (the main excavation) taking place between July 2017 and August 2018, Phase Two (a watching brief) taking place between October 2018 and June 2019, and Phase Three (an excavation) taking place between November 2019 and March 2020¹. The excavations themselves took place before my employment at L-P: Archaeology, however due to the coronavirus lockdown, and other more pressing sites, the post-excavation processing for the final phase of excavation was put on hold until December 2020. Although each phase of investigation was carried out separately, it has been assigned the same event code by the Cambridgeshire County Council Historic Environment Team (CHET) and as such all the post-excavation and archive work has been carried out in tandem with it being treated as one archive (Duffy 2017, 2019). It is worth noting that the second phase, the watching brief, did not have a WSI as, according to the Project Officer, phases one and two were combined (Appleyard and Richardson 2021).

My initial role within this project was as a finds processor. Another processor and I were responsible for washing and quantifying the finds for the third phase of excavation. It was expected of us to be able to process finds with little to no direct supervision or input from our seniors regarding how to process the finds. Obviously if we came across something we were unsure of, then it was expected that we would ask for clarification rather than guess what we should do with it, but for the most part we were expected to carry out our role independently. Additionally, it was expected that we carry out the processing quickly and efficiently so as to remain in budget and on schedule while still maintaining a high quality to meet both the requirements of the company and the client.

L-P: Archaeology does not have an in-house finds processing manual due largely to the post-excavation department within the company having only been created the previous January

¹ This information was extracted from the digitised context registers for each phase.

with the processing of major sites we had taken on in mind. As a result, we were reliant on the knowledge and experience of the Post-Excavation Manager (PXM) to assist us as and when something occurred that we weren't prepared for. This was not an ideal situation as the PXM frequently worked from home in line with the UK Government Guidelines and the company Health and Safety policy (Fox Robinson 2020; Baker et al. 2021; Brown and Kirk-Wade 2021, 17)², and as such communication was limited to email and phone calls, which meant it could be difficult to communicate problems and issues. This was, of course, unavoidable, and luckily there was only one issue with this site particular which was what we were supposed to do with a cardboard sign found behind an electrical panel. Upon reflection, despite there being no major problems with the processing of these finds it would have been beneficial to have had a document based on First Aid for Finds (Watkinson and Neal 2001) as well as guidance produced by specialist organisations and groups such as Historic England and the standards produced by the three main pottery groups (Barclay et al. 2016, 23–24; Baker and Worley 2019, 8) to provide answers for basic questions. Having an in-house manual would have also aided us in dealing with simple issues and made the work flow smoother and quicker.

My next role in this project was the rapid assessment of the stone and ceramic building materials (CBM) recovered from the site. According to ClfA guidance regarding finds, post-excavation analysis must be carried out by those “suitably qualified and experienced, and fully aware of the work required under the project design or post-excavation project design” (ClfA 2014, 8). For the stone, myself and three others were trained by Ruth Shaffrey for one day. This training involved identifying the different types of lithologies that had been recovered from the site (namely clunch and sandstone) and the different types of tool marks that we might come across on the pieces of architectural stone (Shaffrey 2021c). This training was suitable for the assessment of the stone for Sidney Sussex as it was highly site-specific which meant it was in-line with the ClfA code of conduct (ClfA 2021, para.1.5) and ClfA finds guidance (ClfA 2014, 8). Although our team was not “suitably experienced” we were under direct supervision for the first day of recording and all of our work was double checked until Shaffrey was satisfied with our work, and any pieces that we were unsure of when we were recording after she had left we put to one side for her to assess on a second visit. In terms of professional judgement there were three different sheets we used (see appendix): one for architectural stone, one for roofing and one for unidentifiable fragments. We had to decide which sheet was most appropriate for each stone and the level of detail required for each piece in regards to the importance of each piece in the wider archaeological context. Sometimes this meant consulting with other team members for their opinion or consulting with Shaffrey for expert opinion. Upon reflection the amount of training and supervision we received was enough for the team to conduct work to a satisfactory standard in line with the ClfA Code of Conduct and the ClfA finds guidance (ClfA 2021, para.1.5, 2014, 8).

In regards to the CBM we received one day training with one additional day of supervision. The training we received was more generalised and focused mainly on how to describe

² At the time, the East of England office was based in Hertfordshire which was at Tier 4 under the UK Government Tiered restrictions plan.

different fabric types and forms rather than identifying recognised forms and fabrics (Mills 2021) as, not only would this be easier for the finds processing team to record the CBM by creating our own fabric-series, and also any existing fabric-series is either not relevant to the time period, or not freely available (for example MOLA has a Roman CBM fabric codes and Tudor stove tile fabric codes available on their website but for medieval and post-medieval CBM the only fabric codes available are for dating the fabrics and do not include a description of the fabrics themselves (MOLA 2014a, 2014c, 2014b). The fabric types we created for Sidney Sussex are subject to approval by the specialist (Mills 2021) so, again, despite the team's lack of experience we were supervised and our work verified to ensure that it was carried out to a high enough standard.

Most of the CBM and stone is set for discard in accordance with advice from each of the specialists (Shaffrey 2021c, 2021a, 2021b, 5; Mills 2021, forthcoming) and in line with the Cambridgeshire County Council deposition guidelines (Croft, Carroll and Wiles 2020, 15–16). As such it was expected that the recording we did was to a high standard as this record will likely be the only record of these artefacts. The ClifA Code of Conduct (ClifA 2021, para.2.1) states that the “creation and maintenance of an adequate record” will suffice should the conservation of the archaeological material not be possible. Given that most archaeological archives are struggling to find space to accept new archives (Boyle, Booth and Rawden 2018, 2–3, 44–46; Fernie, McNulty and Dawson 2017, 2), discarding artefacts, particularly those found in large quantities, is one way of maintaining space, provided that the objects are recorded. In this case, creating a digital dataset of information regarding these objects (lithology, size, fabric, tool marks, shape, function etc. – see attached appendices for the created datasets and pro-forma sheets³) has been deemed more beneficial as it creates an adequate record of the artefacts alongside a specialist's interpretation and reasoning for discard. This judgement meant that physical space in the county archives is saved but does mean that digital archive must be maintained. Currently the digital datasets are stored as a google sheet as this enabled the use of cloud storage and multiple users to make edits at the same time which suits the company's needs, but when the time comes to archive the project these will be converted to a comma separated value (csv) document which will allow the datasets to be stored a longer time without maintenance as the csv file is a basic file that can be read by several programmes (Microsoft, LibreOffice etc.) and different versions of those programmes; old versions of programmes can become unsupported and therefore unreadable so it is in better judgement to archive digital files in their 'raw' form to prevent the data from becoming unreadable and therefore unusable. The digital datasets for the project will be deposited with the Archaeology Data Service (ADS) and while they do accept Microsoft formats (ADS 2021a, 2021b) which are stable and widely supported, our company does not use Microsoft because of the associated cost so the files for this project will be uploaded as a csv format. Although, digital archives are beginning to face the same storage issues as physical archives (Green 2018), as the digital datasets will likely be the only remaining record of these artefacts it is essential that this record be deposited.

Regarding other stakeholders the project might have, the general public is probably the largest one. This site is located within Cambridge University and is one of the most well-known academic institutions in the country, if not the world, and as such its history is one

³ Please note that the CBM dataset is currently incomplete.

that ought to be public knowledge. By providing the information learned from this investigation and research on an easily accessible online database anyone who wants to access it can – more so than if that information was simply kept as a physical archive where time, money, and transport may function as a barrier.

Overall, my role within this project was relatively small in comparison to others, however I see it as an essential part in the wider project. My responsibilities during this project have been to the company and the client (getting the work done on time and within budget) and also to the public in ensuring that the archaeological record will be maintained to a high standard especially so when the artefacts I helped assess will likely not be archived due to lack of archiving space.

Total Words: 1911

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