**Society for Museum Archaeology**

***Annual Survey of Museums Collecting Archaeology, Pr 7358***

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**Are museums running out of space, staff…and time?**

The Society for Museum Archaeology (SMA) forthcoming survey of museums holding archaeological collections will build on findings from 2016, which revealed a startling picture of the state of museum archaeology in England:

* 22% of respondent museums had stopped collecting archaeology.
* Of those museums who have ceased to collect archaeology, 91% cited a lack of space as the reason, followed by 51% reporting lack of expertise and staff resource.
* Almost 30% of respondent museums reported a drop in museum staff with archaeological collections care responsibilities since 2010.

The responses received in 2016 from over 200 museums in England demonstrates that the financial crisis and subsequent austerity has led to real, on-the-ground reductions in staff resource and capacity in museums in England, something previously only known through anecdotal evidence. In addition, the storage crisis has been highlighted in stark terms by the number of museums who have ceased to collect archaeology due to lack of space. The information provided by museums in England has ensured that discussions on the future of archaeological archive provision in England is informed by hard data – and that data has demonstrated the growing crisis over the role of archaeology and museums, and the ways they are resourced.

The findings from the 2016 SMA survey raises the question - How do we both preserve the precious resource that is our shared archaeological heritage while also protecting museums in a climate of local authority funding cuts and archaeological expertise loss in the sector?

Funded by Historic England, the project aims to chart change in the museum archaeology sector over a three year period, providing both a national picture and an insight into the regional impact.

Archaeology offers a unique engagement opportunity, bringing communities together and providing innovative opportunities to understand our place in time. There has never been greater interest in archaeology, but the scale of the impact museums have faced due to the financial crisis requires a concentrated effort to define, in order to ensure we can quantify and acknowledge the impact museums are experiencing and work to identify practical solutions and support.

**Gail Boyle FSA, Chair of The Society for Museum Archaeology said:**

*“Our Year One survey showed exactly how austerity measures have resulted in the loss of specialist expertise and fewer places being able to collect the UK’s unique archaeological resource – the results may have been read with dismay across the sector but as we had hoped it has also prompted action, with CIfA, HE, and SMA leading the way”*

*“We can only deliver the annual survey because Historic England provided the funding for us to do – SMA will continue to gather evidence to underpin revised archaeological collecting and storage strategies so that future generations will continue to be able to benefit from their past.”*

**Steve Trow, Director of Research at Historic England, said:**

*“Archaeological finds are an important part of our national heritage and their proper care is a pressing problem facing both archaeologists and museums. We hope this will be acknowledged in the Museums Review currently being carried out by DCMS. It is important to understand the scale of the challenge and we are pleased to have assisted the Society for Museum Archaeology in obtaining this information.*

*“In the current economic climate, solutions cannot lie solely with national and local government. Archaeologists must also shoulder responsibility. We are delighted, therefore, to be working already with key archaeological organisations to ensure that the flow of archaeological finds and records is both sustainable and focussed on securing the greatest benefit for the public.”*

**Notes to editors:**

Who are the Society for Museum Archaeology?

The Society for Museum Archaeology is recognised by Arts Council England as the subject specialist network for British Archaeology in the UK: it has members in all of regions as well as abroad. The Society promotes museum involvement in all aspects of archaeology and works to encourage greater public understanding of the archaeological past and a fuller public appreciation of the importance of archaeology. It campaigns for the acceptance of museums as guardians of a vital part of the nation's heritage and as the appropriate location for the storage and interpretation of all archaeological material. <http://socmusarch.org.uk/socmusarch/gailmark/wordpress/>

Who are Historic England?

Historic England (formerly known as English Heritage), are the public body that champions and protects England's historic places. We look after the historic environment, providing expert advice, helping people protect and care for it and helping the public to understand and enjoy it. <https://historicengland.org.uk/>

Links

Society for Museum Archaeology/Historic England Annual Survey of Museums Collecting Archaeology 2016:

<http://socmusarch.org.uk/socmusarch/gailmark/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/HE-SURVEY-2016-FINAL.pdf>

Society for Museum Archaeology Report (Archaeological Archives and Museums, 2012):

<http://socmusarch.org.uk/socmusarch/gailmark/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Archaeological-archives-and-museums-2012.pdf>

Collecting area map, managed and maintained by the Society for Museum Archaeology:

<http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/sma_map/map.cfm>

**Contact for interviews**

Gail Boyle, FSA

Chair, Society for Museum Archaeology

Gail is Senior Curator of Archaeology at Bristol Museums. Gail is also a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries and sits on Historic England’s HIAS Advisory Board, the Portable Antiquities Advisory Group and represents SMA at meetings of The Archaeology Forum. She has long-standing collaborative and teaching relationships with both the University of Bristol (where she is a Research Fellow) and the University of the West of England. Gail also sits on the Board of Trustees at Dr Jenner’s House, Museum & Garden in Berkeley, Gloucestershire.

***Photographs to accompany this press release can be provided on request***