

Depositing Archaeological Archives at the Herbert Art Gallery & Museum, Coventry

October 2025

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1. Introduction

This document sets out the conditions and standards for the deposition of Archaeological Archives with the Herbert Art Gallery & Museum, Coventry (the Museum). The best way to contact the Museum is via email:

museumcollections@cvlife.co.uk.

In accordance with the Herbert's Collections Development Policy, the Museum is the repository for archaeological material from within the current Coventry city boundary and Coventry City Council owned land nearby, such as the Lunt Roman Fort and Coombe Abbey. The Museum reserves the right to refuse any objects that are not in accordance with its current Collections Development Policy.

It is the responsibility of the Archaeological Contractor to ensure the archive is complete, stable and organised in a logical format to allow easy access for public and researchers.

The Museum reserves the right to reject any depositions that fail to meet the minimum conditions set out in these guidelines, or to charge for time to bring archives in line with requirements. This charge is currently £50 per hour plus cost of materials.

2. External guidelines

Up-to-date guidance from the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CifA), Historic England (HE) and the Society for Museum Archaeology (SMA) should be followed unless overridden by special conditions in this document. All these should be considered above the Archaeological Contractor's own guidelines.

3. Notification

3.1 Timing

Where an archive of any nature will be generated, it is the responsibility of the Archaeological Contractor to notify the Museum as early as possible in the project's life. This should normally occur before work has begun on site.

3.2 Project Notification Form

The Archaeological Contractor should advise the Museum at this stage of the nature of the brief and the likely extent of the archive by completing the Project Notification Form. The Archaeological Contractor should continue to liaise with the Museum concerning the deposition of the archive.

3.3 Site Code¹

After notification the Museum will issue a Site Code to the Archaeological Contractor. Due to existing naming conventions it is unlikely that the Museum will be able to use the Archaeological Contractor's project code as a Site Code, so early contact is required. The Site Code must be marked on all elements of the archive and must be used as the prime method of site identification in all correspondence.

¹ Some museums refer to this as an accession number

4. Sterile projects

The Museum follows CiFA guidance in relation to the definition and processing of sterile projects.

A sterile archaeological project is one that produces nothing of evidential value... The preserved archaeological archive for a sterile project can take the form of a single digital document that incorporates all the relevant elements from the working project archive. This document can be uploaded to OASIS as a means of submitting it for curation by the ADS. A document uploaded to OASIS is not preserved until it has been released into the ADS library, from where it will be curated.

A project will only be considered sterile if all stakeholders, including the Museum and the Local Planning Archaeologist, are satisfied that it meets the definition of producing nothing of evidential value. The Museum should be consulted if the project is judged by the Archaeological Contractor to be sterile.

If documentation is produced which the Archaeological Contractor or the Museum believe should be archived physically at the Museum or digitally, follow guidance in Section 8.

In either case the Museum's Site Code should be used on documentation relating to a sterile project.

5. Transfer of Title and Intellectual Property Rights

The Museum will not accept an Archive unless it can acquire a valid title to it. It is the responsibility of the Archaeological Contractor to get written permission from the landowner to transfer title of the finds to the Museum. Any inability to meet this requirement should be discussed with the Museum as soon as possible, and at the latest when deposition arrangements are being made. In addition, the Museum expects to acquire all intellectual property rights (IPRs) relating to the Documentary Archive.

5.1 Finds Transfer of Title

The Archaeological Contractor should ask the Landowner to complete the Transfer of Title (ToT) form to ensure ownership of the finds is transferred to the Museum. The ToT form is appended below and can be obtained as a separate document from the Museum. This form should be used by preference.

The ToT form is not necessary where Coventry City Council is the Landowner.

5.2 If the Landowner does not sign the ToT

If there is difficulty in completing the ToT, the contract between the Archaeological Contractor and Landowner may be a suitable substitution. Contact the Museum to ensure the contract is suitable, and if so a copy of the signed contract should be included in the Documentary Archive.

If the Landowner has not signed the ToT form then Historic England's Toolkit of Managing the Ownership of Archaeological Finds in England (2024) should be followed, namely:

Material assemblages stored by archaeological contractors

The tort of conversion, as described above in relation to museums/repositories may also apply to assemblages of archaeological objects held by archaeological contractors for six years or more.

If the landowner at the time the objects were found cannot be traced, or has expressed no interest in ownership of them since they were recovered, then as long as the archaeological contractor can show they have carried out actions on those objects that the true owner would (such as cleaning, marking, cataloguing, analysis, packing), they have a claim to ownership. This applies as long as it is six years since those actions were enacted. They would therefore have a right to claim ownership against anyone purporting to be the true owner.

Having thus assumed the right of ownership through conversion, an archaeological contractor is able to transfer ownership to a museum or repository from the position of being the owner, thus negating any requirement to prove that transfer is made with the consent of the landowner at the time of recovery.

In this case evidence of the contractor holding the material for six years or more, plus copies of attempts to contact the Landowner should form part of the Documentary Archive.

5.3 If the Landowner wishes to retain the finds

Where the landowner withholds permission for transfer of title or wishes to retain the finds themselves, the Archaeological Contractor should still deposit a copy of the Documentary Archives with the Museum or the ADS.

5.4 Incomplete finds archives

If the Landowner does not wish to transfer all the finds archive to the Museum, the Archaeological Contractor should discuss this with the Museum. The Museum reserves the right to refuse to take the archive in this circumstance.

5.5 Documentary Archive IPRs

Unless otherwise agreed in writing, the Museum will acquire all intellectual property rights (IPRs) in the documentary archive. Exceptionally, where this is not possible, e.g. because the IPRs are vested in some other party, the Museum will be granted unconditional licence to use the material for publication in any form or medium relevant to its legitimate activities.

Transfer of IPR can be done through the ToT form, Project Deposition form or the Archaeological Contractor's own form. The Museum should receive a signed copy of a form transferring IPR.

6. Selection strategy

In view of the limited amount of available space and the associated cost of storage, the Museum requires the application of a thorough selection strategy to the Finds Archive prior to deposition. Deselected material should be recorded within the Documentary Archive.

6.1 Sector Guidance

The selection strategy should be in line with good archaeological practice such as the Toolkit for Selecting Archaeological Archives (CifA 2022) and Selection, Retention and Disposal of Archaeological Collections (SMA 1993).

6.2 Exceptions

The following exceptions to this are:

- There is a presumption against acquiring further architectural fragments unless they are of exceptional quality, historical interest or from a poorly represented site or time period.
- There is a presumption to collect minimal material from post-1800, unless in exceptional circumstances, such as it contributing substantially to the history of a particular site or is of significant research value.
- The Museum does not accept unprocessed soil samples or unstable material (see 7.1).

6.3 Consulting the Museum

The Museum requires Archaeological Contractors to discuss a selection strategy on a site-by-site basis. Depending on the complexity of the site it may be appropriate to start discussions at the excavation stage, but should be no later than once the finds reports have been completed. For some sites it may be necessary to discuss the selection strategy with the Local Planning Archaeologist as well.

6.4 Human remains

Human remains present particular ethical and legal considerations and the Archaeological Contractor should discuss this with the Museum at an early stage.

The Museum will not accept human remains that date to less than 100 years of the deposition date.

Although there is a presumption against retention of human skeletal remains, each case will be considered on its merits given its archaeological context and scientific value. Guidance for Care of Human Remains in Museums, (DCMS, 2005) or subsequent publications should be used as guidelines for any human remains that are retained.

6.5 Specialist advice and finds reports

In order to allow an effective selection strategy to be implemented the Museum requires that finds reports include a statement of significance and recommendation regarding selection. If the recommendation is to retain all finds then a robust justification should be included.

7. Preparing the archive - finds

7.1 Preparation

- All finds and samples must be physically prepared by the Archaeological Contractor prior to deposition. This should include cleaning and conservation where appropriate.
- To avoid wasted resources, contact the Museum prior to significant conservation work to confirm that the material will be retained.
- As a minimum, all objects should be prepared to a standard where they are stable within a controlled environment. Highly unstable items such as unconserved waterlogged material will not be accepted.
- Unprocessed environmental samples will also not be accepted.
- Qualified conservators must carry out specialist conservation work, including the cleaning of small finds.
- All conservation records (lab sheets, X-rays, treatment records, photographs) should be presented as part of the complete archive.

7.2 Packing and marking

- Finds should be marked in a manner appropriate to their material, with the site code, context and small finds number where appropriate.
- All finds should be bagged in re-sealable grip-top polythene bags and clearly marked with the site code, context number and small finds number as appropriate. Information about the type of object(s) should be included.
- Fragile finds should be packed separately and should be buffered against damage. For example fragile pottery and glass should be cradled in acid-free tissue or inert foam such as Plastazote.

7.3 Boxing

Small finds should be packed individually in re-sealable bags or crystal boxes. Bulk finds should be bagged by type within context and boxed by material in context order. The Museum's box sizes are listed in Appendix 1.

- All boxes should be clearly marked on the outside with the site name, code and summary of contents in archival quality permanent black ink. The Museum can provide a sticker template for finds, skeleton and skull boxes, see Appendix 2 for examples.
- Each box must contain a box contents sheet identifying material type, quantity and weight.
- Finds boxes should be packed to a maximum of 6kg.
- Stable finds such as pottery should be packed in cardboard boxes which should be of acid-free material with stainless steel or phosphor bronze staples.
- Oversized items should be packed in bespoke boxes or on pallet. The Museum should be informed of such items and the sizes before delivery. There may be an additional charge for oversize boxes or pallets.
- Unstable finds such as metalwork and glass should be packed within airtight (Stewart) polythene boxes with a perforated bag of conditioned self-indicating silica gel and an indicator card.

- Human skeletal remains should be packaged with one set of remains per box with each anatomical element in separate plastic re-sealable bags. The remains should be packed into the smallest standard box size they will completely fit into. If the remains are too large for the skeleton box, a skull box should be used as well. In cases of disturbed remains it may be necessary to pack by context rather than individual, please consult the Museum.
It may be inappropriate to mark the remains so the Archaeological Contractor should contact the Museum to establish a procedure specific to the site.

7.4 Purchasing standard boxes from the Museum

For smaller depositions it may be possible to purchase boxes from the Museum at cost. Contact the Curator for an estimate and to arrange logistics.

7.5 Transporting the archive (finds processing stage)

See also 9.2

- Records should be kept as to where all the elements of the Finds Archive are, especially when transferring sections to specialists or labs for analysis.
- Finds should be transported in a secure manner with appropriate insurance to and from the Archaeological Contractor.

8. Preparing the archive – documentary

All sites are expected to generate a Documentary Archive, including sterile ones. This archive may just be a short report.

8.1 Basic Documentary Archive standards

- The site code must be clearly stated on the front cover of any publication material and on all documentary archives including finds data.
- An index of all photographs and drawings must be included.

8.2 Deselected finds

- Finds that have been deselected should be recorded within the Documentary Archive.

8.3 Digital archiving

The Museum acknowledges that most, if not all, contemporary Documentary Archive material is born digital. The Museum is partnered with the ADS for long-term preservation and dissemination of digital material.

From 2026 all digital Documentary Archives relating to archaeological work carried out in the Museum's collecting area are to be deposited with the ADS. Earlier archives can be deposited via ADS rather than a physical copy with the Museum.

Archives should be prepared for deposition with the ADS in accordance with their Guidelines for Depositors and with reference to their Guides to Good Practice where appropriate. Fees for deposition are paid directly to the ADS.

The Museum's ADS details are as follow

DOI	https://doi.org/10.5284/1137626
Collection ID	1008857

The Museum requires an emailed pdf copy of the final report for its records.

8.4 Physical archiving

If there is a physical archive it should be deposited with the Museum using the following guidance.

- The paper archive should be boxed in a new archival quality flat box, box sizes are listed in Appendix 1.
- All paper records should be presented in appropriate acid free bindings.
- Photographs and negatives should be packed in archival quality clear sleeves.
- Plans and drawings will be stored flat so should not be folded.
- Masking tape, staples and paper clips prone to rusting must not be present on any part of the archive, secure with an inert material such as plastic treasury tags or plastic or copper paperclips instead.
- Digital material will no longer be accepted at the Museum, see guidance in 8.3.

9. Deposition process

9.1 Notifying the Museum

- The Archaeological Contractor should complete one Project Deposition Form per site code. The following sections should be completed and returned to the Museum: Field Unit; Site Code; Transfer of Title (contractor section); Amount in deposition (contractor section)
- The Museum will issue an estimated deposition fee and a deposition date can be arranged.
- At least two weeks' notice should be given for small deposits (less than 10 units) and at least one month's notice for medium deposits (10-29 units) and three months' notice for large deposits (more than 30 units).

9.2 Transporting the archive

See also 7.4

- Records should be kept as to where all the elements of the Finds Archive are, especially when transferring sections to specialists or labs for analysis. With some sites, especially those with a large finds archive, the Museum may ask the Archaeological Contractor to confirm that the entire site is present at deposition, or the location of any finds not with the Archaeological Contractor.
- Finds should be transported in a secure manner with appropriate insurance to and from the Archaeological Contractor, specialists and to the Museum. The cost of transport, and any necessary insurance cover for the archive whilst in transit, will be the responsibility of the originator of the archive.
- Every effort should be made to transfer the whole archive to the Museum in one batch. The Museum will not accept the deposition of finds without the associated full digital or paper archives. Finds located after the initial deposition are likely to incur additional charges to account for processing work incurred by the Museum.

9.3 Handover

- The Museum will confirm where the delivery is to be made and any special arrival instructions.
- Archives will be checked on entry to ensure that all required paperwork is present, such as the signed Transfer of Title, that the archive is complete and that boxing meets the standards. Incomplete or incorrect archives may be turned away or incur an additional fee, see 10.5.
- At deposition the Archaeological Contractor will be asked to complete an entry form and sign the IPR statement, see 5.5.

10. Deposition fees

The Museum charges for the deposition of archives and finds to cover ongoing costs associated with archaeological archives. There is no charge for project notification or for issuing site codes.

10.1 Community projects

Community projects are unlikely to incur charges, but these archives will be expected to meet the Museum's standards for selection strategy, preparing all aspects of the archive including boxing and will not be accepted unless there is a final report. Please contact the Museum to discuss.

10.2 Fees

The fee is per unit is listed in the table below. This does not include VAT.

A unit is a one of the required boxes listed in Appendix 1, or a roll of drawings.

As a guide the charge also applies per single outsize object; these should be flagged and discussed with the Museum ahead of deposition.

Year of excavation	Fee per unit ex-VAT		Year of excavation	Fee per unit ex-VAT
Pre-2016	£20		2023	£115
2016-2019	£30		2024	£120
2020	£100		2025	£125
2021	£105		2026-2030	£150
2022	£110			

10.3 Incorrectly prepared archives

An additional administration charge for staff time and materials may be made if an archive does not meet the standards set out in this document. This charge is currently £50 per hour plus cost of materials.

10.4 Payment terms

- Please supply the following information in order for the Museum to invoice for deposition: contact name, address, email and telephone number; contact name and details of the finance department, if appropriate; reference number, such as a Purchase Order number.
- An invoice will be received from CV Life accounts acting on behalf of Culture Coventry Trust. Payment terms are usually 28 days.
- For depositions of 30 units or more the Museum may require 50% of the estimated fee prior to deposition. This charge usually only applies if the Museum needs to do work in advance of deposition, e.g. building new shelves to accommodate the material.

Appendix 1 – required box sizes

Standard archaeological box	Ryder ref - 12451
maximum weight: 6kg	450 x 250 x 200 mm External dimensions
for most finds	
Wire Stitched Boxes Made from 1900 micron double Kraft lined board Low acid (pH 6.5-8) With a 100mm lift off lid. Stitched with pure brass wire.	

Half standard box	Ryder ref – 12452
maximum weight: 6kg	450 x 250 x 100 mm External dimensions.
for heavy material or small groups / sites	
Wire Stitched Boxes Made from 1900 micron double Kraft lined board Low acid (pH 6.5-8) With a 100mm lift off lid. Stitched with pure brass wire.	

Skeletal box	Ryder ref - 12855
maximum weight: 8kg	600 x 250 x 250 mm External dimensions
For human remains only, when they will not fit in a standard or half standard box. One set of remains per box. To contain the complete skeleton where possible, skull can be stored separately if necessary (see below).	
Wire Stitched Boxes Made from 1900 micron double Kraft lined board Low acid (pH 6.5-8) With a 125mm (half depth) lift off lid. Stitched with pure brass wire.	

Skull box	Ryder ref - WS449
maximum weight: 6kg	238 x 162 x 165mm Internal dimensions.
To be used if only the skull excavated or retained Or if a single set of remains will not fit in a skeleton box	
Wire Stitched Skull Box (With Die Cut folding Acid free Tray FT235) Box made from 1900 micron double Kraft lined board Low acid (pH 6.5-8). Die cut folding acid free tray made from 650 micron Grey/White Acid free archival boxboard (pH 8.5). With a 76mm depth lift off lid and a drop front on the short side. Stitched with pure brass wire.	

Unstable finds box	Stewart boxes
maximum weight: 6kg	All boxes to be the same size
Unstable finds such as metalwork and glass should be packed within airtight (Stewart) polypropylene boxes. Where appropriate, silica gel and indicator strip should be included	
The Museum does not currently have a standard size for these boxes. Unstable finds boxes deposited should be the same size as each other	

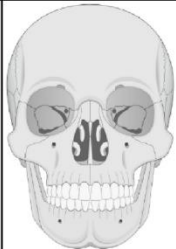
Paper archive box	
maximum weight: 6kg	external dimensions 400mm x 270mm by 50mm high or 400mm x 270mm by 100mm high
Wire Stitched Boxes Made from 1900 micron double Kraft lined board Low acid (pH 6.5-8) With a full depth lift off or hinged lid. Stitched with pure brass wire.	

Appendix 2 - example box stickers.

The Museum uses Smartbuy 99.1 x 139mm labels, 4 per sheet

Site name and code		Context(s)
Site box count	Material(s)	
Box number	Accession number	

Site name and code		
Material	Context(s)	
Box number	Site box count	
		/

Site name and code		Accession number
Material	Context / notes	
Box number		

Project notification form	
Herbert Art Gallery & Museum, Jordan Well, Coventry CV1 5QP	
Archaeological Contractor:	HER site number:
Project Manager:	Site Name:
Contact Details:	Site address:
Contractor reference number:	
Parish:	Grid reference:
Start date:	Expected deposit date:
Type of fieldwork: evaluation / trenching / watching brief / field walking / excavation/ survey	
Period of site expected: Prehistoric / Roman / Anglo-Saxon / Medieval / Post-Medieval	
Type of site expected:	
Estimated quantity of material expected in standard boxes:	
Conservation problems anticipated:	Waterlogged material anticipated? Yes / No
	Human remains expected? Yes / No
	Landowner informed? Yes / No Note: Transfer of Title form is a condition of acceptance unless the landowner is Coventry City Council
Museum use only	
Site Code	
Entry Number	
Accession number	

Transfer of Title of Archaeological Finds Herbert Art Gallery & Museum, Jordan Well, Coventry CV1 5QP
Site name, site code and address
Archaeological Contractor
Landowner
Description of finds
Completeness of Archive
I, being to the best of my belief the owner of the finds described above, or acting on behalf of the owner as an agent, do hereby donate the above finds to the Herbert Art Gallery & Museum. The title in the finds described above is hereby transferred to the governing body of the museum. Signed: _____ Date: _____
Documentary archive intellectual property rights (IPR)
All IPR transferred to the Museum Yes ☐ No ☐ If no, complete the following The Museum is granted unconditional licence to use the material for publication in any form or medium relevant to its legitimate activities Yes ☐ No ☐ If no to both, the Museum will not accept the archive
Receipt of the finds described above is hereby acknowledged: Signed: _____ Date: _____
MUSEUM USE ONLY Entry number: Accession number:

Project deposition form			
Herbert Art Gallery & Museum, Jordan Well, Coventry CV1 5QP			
<i>Contractor to complete prior to deposition</i>			
Site Code:			
Field Unit:			
Transfer of Title Coventry City Council land ☐ Herbert form signed by landowner ☐ Contractor form signed by landowner ☐ (copy of signed form must be provided)		<i>Museum to complete on deposition</i> Site Code issued (date): Transfer of title form present ☐	
Amount in deposition (complete numbers)		Number received	Charge
Standard archives boxes			
Rolls of paperwork			
Standard finds boxes			
Standard metalwork (Stewart) boxes			
Standard human remains boxes			
Non-standard boxes*			
Loose items*			
*detail:			
<i>To be completed on deposition</i>			
Documentary archive intellectual property rights (IPR)			
All IPR transferred to the Museum Yes ☐ No ☐ If no, complete the following The Museum is granted unconditional licence to use the material for publication in any form or medium relevant to its legitimate activities Yes ☐ No ☐ If no to both, the Museum will not accept the archive			
Signed (on behalf of contractor):		Date:	
Museum use only			
Additional charges (detail)			
Total ex-VAT			
VAT			
TOTAL to be charged			
Invoice sent			
Payment received			