

# Welsh Archaeological Archives National Database Feasibility Study - Project Brief

## 1. Background

During 2003 the Council of Museums in Wales (CMW), the National Museums & Galleries of Wales (NMGW) and the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales (RCAHMW) undertook a survey of archaeological archives in Wales. The resulting report, *What's in Store?: towards a Welsh strategy for the management of and access to, the archaeological evidence of our past*, published in March 2004, made a series of strategic recommendations for improving access to, and the management of, these collections.

One of these recommendations concerned the creation of a database of Welsh archaeological collections:

*'Access to collections depends on both the organisation of the physical space and the level of knowledge about where a particular collection is held. The recommendation to create a database would require the collection of information on the location of existing collections and the ongoing updating of information.*

*Once a database is established it could be linked to existing electronic access points, allowing the public to search for information on particular collections. This will improve access to information and, by providing details of their location, will also encourage use of the collections themselves.*

*In order to ensure interoperability, it is essential that any new initiative is carried out in collaboration with bodies such as RCAHMW, NMGW and the Welsh Regional archaeological Trusts, who have already developed databases. This work could be carried out as a project funded through CyMAL'.*

The vision is therefore to establish a national database, accessible remotely and inclusively to the public via the internet, that will provide knowledge of the archaeology held in Welsh museums and enable searching of their holdings. The database should allow interrogation geographically or by archaeological site, type, object or period and be interoperable with other archaeological databases. The initial focus for the database will be on collection level information but where item level data exists this will be catered for in the system.

The existing *Coflein* database has been chosen as a basis on which to create this new database. *Coflein* provides free internet-based public access to the National Monuments Record of Wales archive, and currently provides details of thousands of archaeological sites and references to related archive items. *Coflein* has been produced through the RCAHMMW/RCAHMS' SWISH partnership, and its development allies closely with the vision for archaeological archives.

Overall responsibility for acting on the *What's in Store* report now rests with the Historic Environment Group (HEG), which has been established by the Minister for Culture, the Welsh Language and Sport, and brings together representatives of appropriate organisations concerned with the historic environment in Wales under the chairmanship of the Chief Executive of Cadw. A sub-group of the HEG has been set up in order to deal with the report's specific recommendations, including the national database for archaeological archives. To this end the group has secured funding from CyMAL, in order to take forward the issue, as follows.

## **2. Objective**

To use an expert consultant to undertake research into the cataloguing systems/facilities and resources currently in place in the museums that hold archaeological material, and to quantify any backlogs. This work is intended to be part of a two-stage project to establish the feasibility of providing and sustaining a web-based national database linked to *Coflein*, developed through the SWISH partnership, with remote local access for museums. The work will include identifying the issues and possible barriers that might prevent museums holding archaeological collections using and inputting to this public resource and will require completion of a detailed report covering the research.

## **3. Outcomes**

A useful and informative body of data from the consultation exercise, which will allow for the production of a draft analysis and preliminary feasibility report by 28/02/06 and a final detailed analysis and finished report by 31/03/06.

The final analysis and report should confirm whether or not such a project is feasible, and identify any requirements and issues affecting take-up of the proposed system by museums. The report will be presented by the HEG sub-group to CyMAL and the Historic Environment Group by 01/05/2006. The consultant will be required to provide five copies of the final report which must be a bilingual document in Welsh and English. It is anticipated that the consultant will also give a presentation on his/her research to a meeting of the HEG sub-group during January or February.

#### 4. Methodology

The consultant will assess the cataloguing systems/facilities and resources currently in place in those Welsh museums holding archaeological material and gauge their ability to contribute to a national database, with reference to current levels of IT expertise and infrastructure, staff resources, and enthusiasm for such a system. In addition they will quantify any backlogs of uncatalogued archaeological archives currently outstanding in Welsh museums.

The research will be accomplished in the following stages:

- Preliminary awareness mailing to Welsh museums
- Preparation and mailing of questionnaire
- Follow-up visits and telephone contact
- Collation and analysis of museum data
- Regular reports to project management team
- Drafting final report for submission to CyMAL and Historic Environment Group

The consultant's data collection from the museums will establish the following details:

*General:*

1. *Is the museum prepared to participate?*
2. *Is archaeological material and/or excavation archives held? (distinguish between collections and odd finds)*
3. *Does the museum require archaeological and/or cataloguing expertise?*
4. *Are computers used for cataloguing in the museum?*
5. *Are these internet-enabled?*
  
6. *Can one be made available for participation in this projected scheme and if so what is its specification?*
7. *Is a manual cataloguing system still used? (please provide details)*
8. *Is all the material on an accessions inventory?*
9. *Is there a backlog of material for identification/cataloguing? (quantify)*
10. *How much is on a system at present? (quantify)*
11. *Please supply a sample printout of a record and/or a sample paper record*
12. *At what level is material catalogued (collection/item levels)*
13. *How detailed is the catalogue?*
14. *Is there an inter-relationship with the cataloguing of non-archaeological archive museum collections?*
15. *Will the museum wish to include digital images on the planned database in the future?*

*IT specific:*

1. *Internet access and speed*
2. *Existing cataloguing procedures and standards*
3. *What is the existing software platform?*
  - a. *Off the shelf software*
  - b. *Software adapted for the museum*
  - c. *Own programme*
4. *What are the details of the system?*
  - a. *Software manufacturers details*
  - b. *Programme*
  - c. *Version*
  - d. *Can the software import and export data to Access and Oracle?*
5. *What is the table structure?*
  - a. *Entity relationship diagram*
  - b. *List of fields and field values (for archaeology)*
6. *How many records are there?*
  - a. *In the existing system?*
  - b. *New added per month / quarter / year?*
  - c. *Size of backlog?*
7. *To what extent does the existing system need to be developed?*
  - a. *Does it perform all that is required for cataloguing?*
  - b. *Does it enable an audit trail?*
  - c. *Is it user-friendly? (consultant to define)*
  - d. *Is there a public interface?*
8. *How many users use the system and what are its present access requirements?*
9. *How does the system relate to other museum programmes and needs?*
10. *What, if any, locational information is there?*
  - a. *Place name*
  - b. *Grid Reference*
  - c. *Parish / Community*
  - d. *County etc*
11. *What standards are in place, and how flexible is the museum in working towards a national standard or with existing standards?*
  - a. *Is SPECTRUM or any mda standards in place?*
12. *Does the museum envisage continuing to use its existing system and downloading data on a regular basis to a portal / network?*
  - a. *How easy is it for the system to export data in a suitable format (access/Oracle)?*
13. *Does the museum envisage moving to a new system and inputting the information directly?*

## 5. Timetable

### **Stage 1**

**December 2005 – February 2006:** collection and analysis of data

**by February 28<sup>th</sup> 2006:** submission of preliminary report.

### **Stage 2**

**By March 31st 2006:** Final analysis of data and production of detailed finished report

**by May 1st 2006:** final submission of finished report to CyMAL and HEG.

## 6. Management of Project

The feasibility study will be directed and managed by a project team drawn from the HEG sub-group responsible for the delivery of the recommendations of the *What's in Store?* report and the SWISH partnership team. The project team expects to meet at least four times with the appointed consultant, in Aberystwyth/Cardiff, at appropriate points during the contract period but this is flexible and can be adjusted if necessary. Written progress reports will be required at regular intervals to be agreed. The consultant will report directly to this project team, who will in turn report on progress to meetings of the full HEG sub-group.

It should be noted that the HEG sub-group intends to submit a further bid to CyMAL to carry out stage 2 as described above, together with the creation of a pilot database.