

A GUIDE FOR PRACTICAL ARCHAEOLOGY

If you are interested in Archaeology and would like to undertake some practical work this is a suggestion on how to produce a meaningful report. It does not involve excavation but it does involve fieldwork. Therefore, you should first check that you have permission to walk the area of your site if it is on private land.

Report on ?

Choose a site near where you live as you will visit it several times.

Check too that it is a site mentioned in your county Historic Environment Record (HER) or Sites and Monuments Record (SMR).

The Report needs to be business-like and there will be two halves to your finished Report, that is the Desktop Study section and the Fieldwork section.

Desktop Study

- This is compiled from documentary sources which can be collected as photocopies, print-outs, guidebooks, your own notes from relevant books, aerial photographs.....
- In other words, absolutely every scrap of documentary evidence that can be found.
- Of course the amount available will be different for different sites but compilation presents few problems. Remember to record your sources immediately.
- All information should be credited / acknowledged as to source.
- You should include:

1) The print-out from the **Historic Environment Record (HER)**, which may still be called by the older title of **Sites and Monuments Record (SMR)**. These print-outs can be obtained in person from your county HER/SMR or many HERs/SMRs can be contacted through the web, letter or telephone.

Every county has an HER/SMR, some are attached to Council Leisure Departments, others to Planning Departments:

- Contact your Council switchboard and ask for the HER/SMR Officer.
- You will find that every site has a HER/SMR number.
- The HER/SMR will have a list of references relating to the site which will help too.
- The HER/SMR may also have copies of aerial photographs that can be photocopied.

Most HERs/SMRs are now linked to the National Monuments Record (NMR), Swindon, which may provide further information.

However, remember that if a site is not recorded on the HER/SMR it may be because

(a) there is nothing there to find or

(b) conditions have not yet allowed anything to be found.

2) Your county may also have printed information available in, for example:

- the **RCHME** (The Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, England) which will be very useful for plans of Iron Age hillforts, Medieval motte-and-baileys, castles and bridges; all relevant plans and information can be photocopied.
- the **VCH** (Victoria County History), same as above, if your county has this resource.
- **County Journals**, even **National Journals**, which may have more recent information.

3) Add to this printed information any recent evidence from other sources such as **Ground Survey, Geophysical Survey, Aerial Photographs, LiDAR or Excavation Reports** on your site; the HER/SMR will have noted these.

4) There may also be **other information** in guidebooks and local books, though be careful to record information that is supported by facts (not speculation). The books may include the Domesday Book.

5) By now you will know the history of your site so you may find additional information in the archives in your local **County Record Office**. These archives may include:

- **Maps** of different ages.

- Look for **Placenames** in and around your site; for instance Roman sites can be indicated by names which include *castor* or *cester*, e.g.: Gloucester or Colchester.

Look for the **Fieldnames**, which are archaeological indicators recording distinguishing features of fields. Details about fieldnames and how they can be used can be found on the web pages of Herefordshire Through Time : Field-Name Search.

6) It may be useful to look for a picture of what the site may have looked like when new; this will help you to see what has survived and what has been lost.

Place all your information in a folder...this is your Desktop Study.

Fieldwork

Your first step may be to ask for **permission** to visit your site if it is on private land. It is always preferable to write in advance explaining what you wish to do and that you are carrying out a non-destructive investigation that only involves walking, and perhaps measuring, the site. You may need to provide a reference to prove your probity. This will also help you as a farmer may remove a bull from the field prior to your visit! However, it is likely that most sites will have access allowed.

When you visit take a **plan** of the site if possible. You may have found one in your documentary search. This makes it easier for you to understand any earthworks that may have survived. (If you want to include **hachures** then check these before you visit.)

Take a notebook, a camera, a scale measure and a tape measure to record everything you can about your site. This will include a **full description** of the site. Use a sheet with headings for the date of each visit, the weather, the conditions underfoot, the type of soil, the vegetation and topography, problems on the site, possible damage, etc. If the site was a settlement for any length of time then look for the water supply.

It is important to record the weather as you may see more in some conditions than in others. For instance, if you are fieldwalking a ploughed field after rain you will find that flints will sparkle if the sun comes out. Vegetation can denote traces in the soil; a student of mine was able to identify the magazine of an iron mine by the particular plants in the nitrogen rich soil.

Take **photographs** of all relevant features using a **scale**. If you have a ranging rod make sure it is arranged vertically or horizontally to your camera as this makes it easier to gauge size on your photographs. For small features you can use a coloured ruler; I once used my wedding ring as this is a standard size. You can use a person (standing straight) at the side of your photograph looking towards the relevant feature (dogs are hopeless...); record the person's height to write on the reverse of your photograph.

Add all this to your folder...this is your Fieldwork.

Compiling your finished Report on ?

Use a folder and include in this order:

- a title page giving the title, your name and completion date
- contents page and number your pages
- location map for your site (you can take this from web) with its OS grid reference number
- plan of the site (as with everything else, source should be credited)
- your own summary of the information in your Desktop Study; you can include footnotes then include all the Desktop Study evidence
- then describe what chosen site was like when new
 - you can use a picture from any book to illustrate this
- then show what the site is like now using your own photographs with scale, captions, and compass directions and, if appropriate, footnotes
 - you can use overlays to highlight certain features
- photographs and other illustrations need to be within the text use and comment upon them.
- say what is missing on the site and what has been preserved and why
- assess if the site is stable or has continuing damage
- give a full Bibliography of all your sources
 - if someone has given you verbal information then record this as a personal comment from the named person.
- include Acknowledgements to anyone who has helped you.

You may have found new information about your site. Even if you have not, your photographs and description will provide up-to-date information on the site. So show your Report to the County HER/SMR Officer and, if appropriate, place a copy of your Report in the County HER/SMR. You have produced really useful information so well done....

Parish Regression Maps

You can investigate an area, for example a parish, in the same way. Here you will produce regression maps. Your headings will depend on the surviving features of your particular site; the following is a general outline but some areas may require, for example, an Iron Age section or perhaps a division in the 19th century section. The same map is used in each section. So your folder will slightly differ from the above list by including:

- An overall map of the whole area indicating your sub areas
- Then a Prehistoric Section showing the same map but highlighting the Prehistoric features (earthworks, artefact finds) you have located.
- This is then followed by a full description of each feature.
- Then you do the same for the next, Roman, section and so on.....
- At the end have a Conclusion summarising your findings to demonstrate the way your parish has been used, where people have lived, where evidence could have been expected but has not survived, where further fieldwalking or geophysical surveying may provide more evidence and so forth....

Again, show your Report to the County HER/SMR Officer and, if appropriate, place a copy in the HER/SMR for future researchers.

I hope you have enjoyed this...and maybe you will continue investigating and perhaps go on to volunteer to help on a directed excavation as well.

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