Archaeological Archives Glossary for Museums v1.0

This document was prepared as part of the 'Before the Museum Project' led by the Association of Local Government Archaeologists Scotland (ALGAO Scotland), the National Museums Scotland (NMS), and the Museum Working Group of the Scottish Strategic Archaeology Committee, and funded by Historic Environment Scotland (HES) as part of Scotland's Archaeology Strategy.

It addresses the identified need for additional guidance for museums relating to the accessioning and cataloguing of archaeological objects. Following a review of available existing resources, the following key thesauri have been identified as being of use. These, along with additional thesauri relating to the historic environment, are available from the Forum on Information Standards in Heritage (FISH) and the Collections Trust.

Archaeological Objects Thesaurus (Scotland)

Developed by Historic Environment Scotland from the MDA Thesaurus this contains objects made by human activity in Scotland. Note there will be significant overlaps with the 'Archaeological Objects Thesaurus' below.

Search: Linked Data – ordered by top concept of object type (e.g. furnishings and furniture)

Archaeological Objects Thesaurus

Originally developed by the Archaeological Objects Working Party and published by the MDA (now Collections Trust) and has since been further developed by the Forum on Information Standards in Heritage (FISH). It includes terms for physical evidence, usually portable, resulting from past human activity or environmental remains that can be recovered from archaeological fieldwork across the whole of the UK and Ireland. It is now maintained by FISH on behalf of the heritage sector.

Search: Alphabetical – listed by alphabetical name

Hierarchical – listed by object classification

Linked Data – ordered by top concept of object type (e.g. furnishings and furniture)

CSV File – downloadable zip file of object groups, relations, terms

Objects Material Thesaurus

Originally developed to assist with the recording of materials for maritime wrecks but now used more generally for objects found in findspots (however note that the thesaurus is not complete).

Search: Alphabetical - listed by alphabetical name

Hierarchical – listed by substance classification out of which an object can be made

CSV File – downloadable zip file of materials and substance groups

As an alternative there is a more extensive list maintained and available at British Museum Materials Thesaurus The linked data formats allow users to map terms from one authority to another.

Maritime Fixtures and Fittings Thesaurus

Thesaurus of non-structural, movable items on vessels (e.g. lifting gear, deadeye, clenched nail).

Search: Alphabetical - listed by alphabetical name

Hierarchical – listed by object classification

CSV File – downloadable zip file of maritime object groups and terms

Maritime Ordnance Type Thesaurus

A list developed by FISH for recording the ordnance and armament associated with a vessel.

Search: Linked Data – ordered by ordnance type or element grouping

Maritime Nationality Thesaurus

List of nationalities for indexing vessels and aircraft developed by FISH.

Search: Linked Data – grouped by continent

Waterways Object Name Thesaurus

The thesaurus is primarily concerned with suggesting preferred terms for use in describing objects which relate to the inland waterways of the British Isles and establishing relationships between them. Created originally by the MDA and now maintained by the Collections Trust.

Search: Class List or Alphabetical – webpage has both options and further background documentation

Archaeological Sciences Thesaurus

Terminology used for recording the techniques, recovery methods and materials associated with archaeological sciences (e.g. tree-ring analysis, modification state, pathology). Maintained by Historic England on behalf of the FISH Terminology Working Group.

Search: Alphabetical - listed by alphabetical name

Hierarchical – listed by techniques, recovery methods and materials

Linked Data – ordered by top concept of technique, recovery method or material type

CSV File - downloadable zip file of science groups, relations, terms

Event Thesaurus

Use for recording archaeological events (e.g. architectural investigative, data collection exercises); from intrusive interventions into the resource to non-damaging survey events (e.g. grab sampling, auger survey, remote sensing).

Search: Alphabetical - listed by alphabetical name

Hierarchical – investigative and data collection techniques

Linked Data – ordered by top concept of intrusive or non-intrusive technique

CSV File – downloadable zip file of investigative and data collection techniques

Monument Types Thesaurus (note reference to Scottish version)

Terminology relating to the built and buried heritage of the UK and used for recording sites, monuments, buildings and structures (e.g. beer cellar, macula, railway hotel).

Search: Alphabetical - listed by alphabetical name

Hierarchical – classification of monument types by function

Linked Data – ordered by top concept of monument function

CSV File – downloadable zip file of monument and site types, groups

There is a Scottish version of this thesaurus (available as Linked Data) and includes Gaelic translations of most terms.

Maritime Craft Types Thesaurus

Historic Environment Scotland developed list of maritime craft that survive as wrecks, or documented as losses, in Scottish maritime waters.

Search: Linked Data – ordered by top concept of craft type

Periods List

The Scottish Archaeological Periods and Ages (ScAPA) is a list of archaeological periods and ages for cultural heritage use in Scotland, created and maintained by Historic Environment Scotland.

Search: Archaeological Periods – ordered by top level classifications of time period

Centuries – 100-year time periods starting in the 1st Century AD

Regnal Periods – Organised by Royal family house

List of the main archaeological and cultural periods used within the UK (e.g. Mesolithic, Middle Iron Age, Jacobean). Note that these lists may vary compared to other period lists from the UK such as the Chronological guide for recording periods in the UK developed by Historic England. See also Scottish Archaeological Research Framework for more details about specific Scottish periods.

Resource Description Thesaurus
Officially called 'English Heritage and National Trust Resource Description', also known as THRED. Terminology for the description of archive type and format, now updated by FISH (e.g. excavation report, newspaper article, video clip).

Search: Alphabetical - listed by alphabetical name

Hierarchical – resource formats and material types ordered by class

CSV File – downloadable zip file of archive resource formats and material types

For Information

Please be aware that Historic England have been working with the Getty Conservation Institute to develop a Reference Data Manager to replace the www.Heritagedata.org resources included within this document. The proposed release date is Summer 2021.