

Museum nan Eilean Archaeological Assemblage Deposition Guidance

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Introduction

Museum nan Eilean (MnE) is the local authority museum for the Outer Hebrides. MnE actively applies to Treasure Trove for the allocation of archaeological material found or excavated on the Outer Hebrides.

Archaeologists working on the Western Isles are expected to adhere to all relevant Scottish and UK legislation, the standards and guidelines of the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists and other relevant professional organisations.

It is the sole responsibility of the depositor to ensure the full and complete assemblage is museum-ready. These guidelines illustrate the standards of documentation, condition and packaging expected by MnE.

This guidance has been developed to ensure archaeological assemblages deposited with MnE are accompanied by the relevant documentation and are in an appropriate condition to ensure their stability and access during long-term storage. The decision of the Museum nan Eilean Collections Committee on whether or not to apply for the allocation of an assemblage will be informed by the extent to which the material and archive complies with this guidance, and in accordance with MnE's collecting policy.

MnE Store Locations

The museum has two stores, one in Stornoway on the Isle of Lewis and a second on the Isle of Benbecula.

As far as possible, archaeological material from the Isles of Lewis and Harris are stored in Stornoway and that from the southern islands is stored on Benbecula.

The Collections Officer will indicate which store the assemblage should be delivered to.

Preparation of Archaeological Assemblage for Deposition

Treasure Trove Procedure

All archaeological material, artefacts and deposits are automatically claimed as property of the Crown and must be reported to Treasure Trove (TT).

Please note it is necessary to obtain permission from Treasure Trove to:

- **Remove any archaeological material from Scotland, for post-ex, analysis or any other purpose**
- **To borrow or display any archaeological material that has not been allocated, including material that has not yet been reported**

Reporting is required once post-excavation and the final report are complete.

The assemblage remains with the excavator until the assemblage has been allocated to a museum and arrangements are made with the museum to accept the assemblage.

If the excavator receives notification that the assemblage has been allocated to MnE, they should contact the Collections Officer as soon as possible to make arrangements for transfer of the assemblage.

Arranging Transfer to MnE

The museum will only accept material that is properly documented, in a stable condition and appropriately packaged. Samples should be retained only if demonstrated as relevant in the post-excavation analysis. They must be presented in volumes appropriate to the information they hold.

Any artefactual material requiring conservation to ensure stability during long-term storage must be completed prior to deposition of the assemblage. Conservation must be carried out by an appropriately qualified professional and is the responsibility of the depositor. Museum nan Eilean may be able to offer conservation services, the rate for which will be publically available online at www.cne-siar.gov.uk The cost of conserving, preparing and packing the assemblage to museum standard is the responsibility of the depositor. Spot checks will be carried out to ensure that these standards are adhered to and that the documentation provided is accurate.

MnE reserves the right to refuse an assemblage at the moment of transfer if it does not meet museum documentation, conservation and packaging standards, or to charge the depositor a fee to cover staff time and material costs associated with bringing it up to standard.

Documentation

Finds Lists

An catalogue of artefacts and samples, ideally in the form of an Excel spreadsheet, should be emailed to the Collections Officer in advance of the assemblage being delivered.

Box Labelling

All boxes of archival material must be labelled and contain a paper list of contents.

Boxes must be labelled with the following information:

- Site Name
- Site Code
- MnE accession number (provided by Collections Officer)
- Contents (pottery, bone, stone etc.)
- Box No. *x* of *y*

Box contents lists should contain the following information:

- Site Name
- Site Code
- Find or sample number
- Object

Specialist Reports

A digital copy, PDF or Word document, of any specialist reports or analysis carried out on any of the artefactual or sample material in the assemblage should be provided in advance.

This includes reports by finds or environmental specialists and conservators.

Reports should include the materials and methods used, in addition to the contact details of the specialist.

Packing Standards

All artefacts must be clean and stable when deposited at MnE; ie not covered in soil, wet, or waterlogged, etc.

Artefacts must be packaged and sorted in the order: material type, find number, context number.

Similar materials should be packed together.

Artefacts should be packed individually in polythene polygrip bags or plastic, or acid-free card boxes, as appropriate.

Artefacts should be packed in appropriately sized polygrip bags or archival quality boxes.

Artefacts should be packed with sufficient cushioning to prevent movement or damage from other artefacts or the container.

Do not wrap artefacts. Paper and other packing materials should be used to cushion artefacts.

Do not overfill boxes with heavy material.

Boxes should be lined with inert foam and/or crumpled acid-free tissue paper.

Do not layer artefacts.

Packing Specific Materials

Ceramics

Do not overfill bags with ceramic sherds.

Fragile or friable prehistoric or earthenware sherds should be packed individually in boxes with acid-free tissue cushioning to prevent damage to decoration or edges of sherds.

Metal Artefacts

Metal artefacts should be packed with dry silica gel to prevent corrosion.

The artefact should be placed in a well perforated polygrip bag, inside a larger polygrip bag or sealed plastic box.

A second well perforated bag containing dry silica gel should be placed inside the larger bag / box.

Artefacts should not be packed in direct contact with silica gel.

Multiple metal artefacts (individually bagged) can be packed in a single plastic box with an appropriate amount of silica gel (weight of silica gel = weight of metal).

Different types of metals should be packaged separately.

An RH Indicator card should be used if possible.

- Iron must be kept below 12% RH to prevent corrosion
- Other metals must be kept below 30% RH to prevent corrosion

If the RH rises above these values, the silica gel must be replaced or dried.

Organic Artefacts

Waterlogged organic artefacts must be dried appropriately; eg. freeze-dried, before packing.

Dry organic artefacts should be packed in perforated polygrip bags.

Textiles

Textile fragments should be supported on acid free blotting paper/card inside a perforated polygrip bag.

Textile fragments should never be folded. Larger pieces can be rolled with an interleave of acid-free tissue paper around an archival card tube or acid-free tissue wadding.

Larger or three-dimensional textiles should be packed in boxes individually with appropriate acid-free tissue support.

Labelling

All packaging of individual artefacts must be clearly labelled with:

- Site Code
- Find number or sample number
- Brief description; eg. iron nail or animal bone sample

Packaging should be labelled using a permanent marker.

Archival quality adhesive labels and permanent ink should be used to label boxes.

Labels should not be taped to boxes.

Human Remains

Human remains, including cremated bone, must be packaged separately from other artefactual or ecofactual material.

Boxes containing human remains must be clearly labelled as such.

The remains of an individual should be kept together in a single box, as far as possible.

If a box contains more than one individual, this should be clearly indicated on the box label and contents list.

Bones must be packed separately and clearly labelled; eg. right foot, left foot, vertebrae, etc.

Packing materials should be used where appropriate; eg. inert foam or acid free tissue around the cranium.

Packing Materials

Packing materials must be of archival quality and in good condition.

Do not use discoloured or dirty materials.

Archival packing materials include:

- acid-free tissue paper
- acid-free blotting paper or card
- archival quality cardboard
- corrugated plastic (polypropylene-polyethylene)
- plastic boxes
- inert foams; eg. Jiffy foam, Plastazote (polyethylene)
- Tyvek labels

Materials that are not acceptable include:

- non-archival quality paper; eg. newspaper
- non-archival quality cardboard; eg. banana boxes
- cotton wool, textiles or wool
- paper towels
- polyurethane or latex foam
- Biodegradable packing beads

Suppliers

Conservation by Design <http://www.conservation-by-design.com/home.aspx?pagename=home>

Conservation Resources <http://www.conservation-resources.co.uk/>

Preservation Equipment <http://www.preservationequipment.com/>

Stitched Boxes http://www.stitchedboxes.co.uk/home/archive_boxes/archaeology_boxes/