

*East of England Archaeological Research Framework Review***Research, Planning and Management in the East of England: Introduction**

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‘The treasures of time lie high, in Urns, Coyns and Monuments, scarce below the roots of some vegetables. Time hath endless varieties, and shows of all varieties; which reveals old things in heaven, makes new discoveries and even the earth itself a discovery.’

*Urne-Buriall* Sir Thomas Browne

Research frameworks are not really new; archaeologists have always had a strong tendency to want to think about what they are doing and why they are doing it. In the East of England there is a long tradition of developing co-operative, at times even collective, approaches to these issues and this has been particularly strong over the last 30 years or so (Buckley 1997). This long tradition led to the East of England preparing and publishing, under the auspices of the Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers East of England (ALGAOEE), the first Regional Archaeological Research Framework (Glazebrook 1997; Brown and Glazebrook 2000) resulting from the English Heritage *Frameworks for our Past* initiative (Olivier 1996). This more formalised process of considering research frameworks arose from the introduction of PPGs 16 and 15 which transformed how archaeology related to the planning system. Four years after completion of the East of England Research Framework, a wide variety of archaeological work has been undertaken or is underway and major changes to the planning system are again being implemented, consequently review and revision of the Framework appeared timely. To initiate the process a conference was organised by ALGAOEE with financial support from English Heritage. The core of the present volume represents the proceedings of that conference which was held in Ipswich, in February 2004, with the title ‘Reviewing the Research Framework: Research Planning and Management in the East of England’.

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Whilst the origins of the Regional Research Framework initiative are described in some detail elsewhere (Buckley 1997), it may be worth reiterating the basic principles which underpin the concept of research frameworks. There should be no sharp distinction between 'research' and 'rescue' (for the latter it might be helpful if we considered adopting the term 'preventive' which is commonly used in Europe). Similarly there should be no mutually exclusive association of these areas of work with 'academic' and 'professional' archaeologists with all too little contact between them and not much room for the role of the 'amateur'. All archaeological work, whatever its context, is in some way about research; which is to say that it is about enhancing our understanding of the past and passing that understanding on to others. Critically this includes *all* fieldwork carried out through the planning system, in the context of PPGs 15 and 16 and increasingly through the implementation of the directives on Environmental Impact Assessment. A research focus is necessary if all this work is to be worthwhile; so that we can enhance our understanding of the past, develop knowledge based policies and provide reasoned justification for the nature and level of archaeological investigation required. A research focus must underpin the process of assessing value, importance and sensitivity to change which are likely to become increasingly critical to the treatment of the historic environment in terms of spatial planning.

PPG 16 has been enormously important in giving archaeology a very firm locus in the planning and development control process. It has brought resources to bear to undertake field work and evaluation, and has produced a more dynamic process for injecting the knowledge gained back into both academic and policy thinking. It has been important to be able to justify the extent of archaeological work required, both pre- and post-determination, of planning applications. The Research Framework provides a useful strategic level of justification for that work.

Many of the pressures inherent in the system established in the early 1990s and which led to the Research Framework initiative are still present. They include; a tendency toward of isolation and fragmentation between different sectors of the archaeological

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community, lapses in the reciprocal relationship between research output and fieldwork and lack of academic focus. The Research Framework for the East of England plays a significant role in resisting these detrimental pressures, and developing the great potential inherent in the current system.

The Research Framework process can play a significant role in supporting the development of a new generation of research linking curatorial and academic objectives, to provide a firm basis for cultural resource management and developer funded fieldwork.

The *Research Framework for the Eastern Counties* has been widely used both in the promotion of research projects designed to enhance our understanding of the region's archaeology and to promote knowledge based policy and management of the historic environment. For instance over 80% of briefs issued for archaeological work arising from the planning process in the region contain explicit reference to the framework and over 50% of written schemes of investigation received from archaeological contractors refer to the research framework.

Over the past 30 years or so, much has been achieved to establish the role of archaeology and conservation of the historic environment within local government. At present the core of that strength lies within the County Councils in two tier areas, although districts clearly have an important role to play in the process, not least in their development control function. It is probably true to say that unitary authorities have found the role of managing the historic environment very challenging some have risen to the challenge through developing their own services or through partnership arrangements, others have struggled. The Research Framework has supported the maintenance of a strong historic environment capability and has also provided a platform for more strategic research which has assisted in shaping the strategic planning context and influencing wider corporate policy within local authorities. In Essex, for instance, the work done on the Thames Gateway and on the coastal zone has been significant, and would have been much more difficult to mobilise without a strategic

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capability operating at the County level. The same applies to the ability to attract external resources to fund project work, as evidenced by the successful bids under the Interreg programme for Planarch and European Route of Industrial Heritage, and Crossing the Lines. The strength of ALGAOEE and its good working relationship with the English Heritage East of England Regional Office, has provided a firm basis for a strategic approach to historic environment management in the East of England. This is just as well given the scale of the challenges that this region faces, some of which are briefly noted below.

Current changes to the planning system, are now being implemented following the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act of May 2004. This Act has the objectives of speeding up and streamlining the planning system, whilst making the system more accessible and responsive to local communities, objectives which could be seen in opposite directions. The bill scraps county based Structure Plans and the principle vehicle for strategic planning becomes the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS), with local plans replaced by Local development Frameworks and Local Development Documents. As this introduction is being written the RSS for the East of England is in its final stage of consultation. It will of course be critical to get appropriate wording into this new suite of planning documents to provide the necessary policy structure through which conservation and enhancement of the historic environment can be delivered. Once that is achieved it will be necessary to ensure that the appropriate level of informed advice is available. As the locus of strategic decision making shifts to Region, the foundations which have allowed the County based archaeological strength of the Region to be developed, become less firm. To this complex situation must be added the sub-regional planning linked to implementation of the Sustainable Communities Plan which will be of particular importance in the East of England, in Thames Gateway, M11/Harlow/Cambridge/Peterborough corridor (with the complication of the proposed expansion of Stansted Airport) and Milton Keynes. Additionally, although at present slightly less prominent at a national level, Haven Gateway is likely to be of considerable regional significance. The outcome of the review of PPGs15 and 16 and their

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amalgamation into a new PPS is still pending. The review of designation with its decision to move to a unified list of Scheduled Ancient Monuments and Listed Buildings has been set out in the government statement *Review of Heritage Protection: The Way Forward (DCMS 2004)*. If, as noted above, the County based strength of specialist archaeological advice seems threatened by the changes to planning arrangements, recognition of this may be implicit in this review, which suggests that Service Level Agreements between various organisations may be required to ensure that appropriate levels of expertise are available (DCMS 2004, 24). Perhaps more importantly *The Way Forward* holds out a clear prospect of a statutory basis for Historic Environment Records (HER), with Local Authorities required either to maintain, or have access to, a HER. Aside from these important changes to planning arrangements, in the wider field of landscape management the nature of the East of England's coastline with its remarkable archaeological richness and sensitivity, make issues around ICZM particularly important. This is especially true of planning for floodrisk management at a time of rising sea levels. With regard to floodrisk the region's topography and its numerous rivers and streams will similarly mean that valley catchment management will be a significant challenge for the historic environment. Last, but by no means least in a region which is largely and famously agricultural, are the implications of the Haskins review, farm diversification, and the need for a thriving rural economy. Here the new Environmental Stewardship scheme offers considerable potential for enhanced conservation of the historic environment.

After such a long list, which although ending on a somewhat upbeat note, might strain the ability of even the most optimistic aficionados of management speak to describe such a litany of challenges and problems as 'opportunities'; any link to archaeological research may seem less than obvious. However, the connections between these issues and the central concerns of archaeological research in the East of England, can be made without too much difficulty. We are entering a phase when it should be relatively unproblematic to demonstrate, that archaeological research is both intrinsically

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interesting and directly relevant to the way in which we create and structure the physical reality of our own time. Just a few indications of how this might be achieved are outlined below.

Work on the coastal zone can focus attention on the scale and effects of sea level change, a process which can be viewed across several hundred thousand years. Some of the region's most distinctive landscapes, such as grazing marshes, of great importance for nature conservation and often thought of as natural, were, of course, created by human action. Research into their origins and development can tell us much about the medieval and post-medieval past but also inform both the conservation of existing, and the restoration of former, marshlands. Similarly the coastal zone, along with many other areas of the East of England, contains some of the best evidence for studying the origins and development of agriculture in the Neolithic and Bronze Age. When we also consider the central role played by the East of England in the agricultural revolution of the post-medieval period, the contemporary relevance of research into these issues is clear with significant agricultural change currently in the offing which will impact on the region's landscape in a variety of ways. Recent work on historic fields and settlement patterns (summarised elsewhere in this volume) are significant pieces of archaeological research in their own right and have great potential for informing the future shape of the rural landscape. The role that this region has played, and will continue to play, in terms of the origin and development of towns whether in the Roman, Saxon, Medieval or post-Medieval periods, is unsurpassed. The *European Spatial Development Perspective* takes as one of its fundamental principles the sustainable management of the natural and cultural heritage, and seeks to develop a new urban – rural relationship, something which is clearly reflected in the wording of the draft RSS. Here again the historical perspective provided by archaeological research can have a clear relevance and influence. These and many other issues are explored in the papers arising from the Ipswich conference which follow, and further discussion together with clear priorities are set out in the Strategy at the end of this volume.