AFTERLIFE
OF PRIVATE COLLECTIONS

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Contents

Cover image: late Roman copper alloy nummus of Divus Constantinus (Constantine I), posthumous issue, dating to AD 337-40. The reverse shows the emperor riding a chariot to heaven. Courtesy of the Portable Antiquities Scheme. Found in Etton, East Riding of Yorkshire. Database ref. FAKL-D865F5.

Summary of project

The *Afterlife of Private Collections* was undertaken between January and April 2022. The project sought to develop a strategic understanding of the character and fate of archaeological collections held privately. The project was undertaken as an initial scoping exercise with the aim of identifying potential areas for further research.

In England, most archaeological investigations are commissioned through the planning system in response to development proposals. Archaeological material produced during these investigations is normally rationalised and then deposited with an accredited museum for long-term curation.

Archaeological material is, however, also held by organisations and individuals other than public museums. These include archaeological archives produced during community-led investigations, as well as legacy archives from old investigations and which effectively have been abandoned. A significant volume of cultural objects is also held by private collectors such as metal detectorists, mudlarks, and field walkers. Despite community archives and private collections being a significant aspect of the archaeology of England, little is known about their character, significance, and future. The *Afterlife* project is an initial exploration into these issues.

The *Afterlife* project found that a distinction can be made between archaeological *archives* produced by the Research and Societies Sector, and private *collections* held by private individuals. Producers of *archives* tend to be organisations established for public benefit, and whose material is, in theory at least, held for public benefit. Archives held by the Research and Societies Sector are traditionally destined for a museum. However, many groups continue to face challenges on post-excavation assessment, which in turn acts as a barrier to dissemination of knowledge, archiving, and public engagement. Further information is needed on the volume of archives requiring baseline archaeological assessment.

In contrast to these Research and Societies sector archives, private collections are held as corporeal personal property by private individuals. Although ‘private’, these collections have potential to make important contributions to archaeological knowledge especially when curated in a methodical and ordered way and when used for exhibitions, talks, or in schools. The degree to which this occurs is, however, highly variable. While there are clear pathways that allow information associated with these collections to be recorded via the Portable Antiquities Scheme, the private nature of these collections means that long-term physical access to cultural objects is uncertain. Significantly, the *Afterlife* project found that while most owners of portable antiquities took pride in their collections, few had given much thought to what will happen to them in the longer-term. There is much uncertainty, and indeed some anxiety, among current owners regarding the fate of their collections. Given there are at least 1.5 million cultural objects recorded by PAS and returned to private ownership – and given that the first generations of metal detectorists are reaching old age – it is expected that the next decade or two will see significant challenges arising from these collections changing hands.

Similarly, the *Afterlife* project demonstrated that owners of private collections would value advice on preparing their collections for the future. This might involve very pragmatic steps such as offering advice on inheritance, bequest, donation, or sale of significant cultural objects to public museums. Thoughtful engagement with owners is needed to encourage them to curate their collections in such a way that third parties can make sense of them, especially where finds have not been recorded.

The *Afterlife* project has also demonstrated that owners of private collections often see their collections as holding meaning beyond those that focus on their contribution to archaeological knowledge. For many owners, private collections are sources of personal memory. Different finds mark different seasons of life, different friendships, and different times. Many of the finders who contributed to the *Afterlife* project noted that the *survival of their memories* was just as important to them as *where* their collection would eventually be held. Understanding collections in this way will undoubtedly help the heritage sector to thoughtfully engage with private collectors to ensure that the stories behind collections are preserved alongside the cultural objects themselves.

Collaboration between museums, collectors, and local communities could make the most of the opportunity to reconnect objects and stories back into the local communities in which they originated. In this way, cultural objects could be used to make significant contributions to local sense of place.

The *Afterlife of Private Collections* was undertaken between the 24th January 2022 and the 24th April 2022. The project was carried out by Adam Daubney with contributions from Duncan Brown (Historic England), Neil Redfern (Council for British Archaeology), Jenni Butterworth (PAO for Historic England), Michael Lewis (Portable Antiquities Scheme), Tom Redmayne (metal detectorist), Hella Eckardt (University of Reading), Gail Boyle (Society for Museum Archaeologists), and Jenny Durrant (Society for Museum Archaeologists). Additional input was received from Keith Westcott (Association for Detectorists), Pieta Greaves (Drakon Heritage and Conservation), Lara Maiklem (Author and mudlark), five anonymous independent metal detectorists, and one metal detecting club of 14 members.

Key findings

- Cultural collections are held across a wide range of stakeholders in England. These include accredited public museums, research institutions, community groups, and private individuals.
- The long-term fate of privately held cultural objects rests on the current owner in three ways: first, granting public access to archaeological information about those collections; second, maintaining ordered collections even where they have not been recorded; and third, having a clear future pathway for these collections.
- The long-term challenges facing collections produced or owned by private individuals are distinctively different to those generated or owned by community groups.
- **Research and Communities Sector:** post-excavation assessment of archaeological archives often stalls owing to lack of funding, time, or expertise. Long-term stalling has potential to create legacy or abandoned archives. This occurs less often where community groups have close relationships with heritage professionals.
- Further information is needed on the character and significance of undeposited archives held by community groups. A systematic way of capturing basic information would be beneficial, including size, character, and location of archives. This could help to identify what level of support is needed to carry out post-excavation assessments, as well as creating clear pathways for future use and curation.
- **Private collectors**: clear pathways exist that allow owners to have their collections assessed and recorded for public benefit. However, owing to their private character, physical access to previously recorded archaeological material can be challenging or even impossible. Indeed, not all finders choose to record their finds with PAS, and not all finds shown to PAS are selected for recording.

- Private collections are curated in a variety of ways. Many owners maintain their collections in such a way that it would be easy for a third party to see which finds have been recorded with PAS. Finds which are considered by owners to be less significant tend to be curated in a less methodical way. Some collections are at risk.
- Cultural objects which have not been recorded and which are not maintained in a methodical way have potential to create legacy collections or abandoned collections in the future.
- Most finders feel supported by the level of advice they receive through FLOs or through online publications such as the PAS conservation guide.
- However, the majority of finders consulted in the *Afterlife* project were uncertain about what will happen to their collections in the long-term. Most expressed a desire to ensure the survival of the object and its associated archaeological information; many also expressed a desire for the survival of personal memories attached to those collections.
- Thoughtful engagement between heritage sector professionals and private collectors will help to encourage positive *afterlives*.

Aims and methodology

The *Afterlife* project was undertaken to gain an overview of archaeological collections held privately in England. The project sought to provide a strategic understanding of the issues around the long-term stewardship and curation of archaeological collections in private ownership.

The project explored only those collections which had legally been found in England and for which the owner had legal title. The Afterlife of Private Collections project was stimulated by several key questions:

- What are the different types of archaeological collections in private ownership?
- Do different types of collections present different challenges in terms of their long-term survival?
- What are the barriers to accessing privately held collections and associated information?
- What is currently happening to privately owned collections? Are they being inherited, sold, or deposited with museums?
- How can the heritage sector engage thoughtfully with private property owners and develop strategies which promote stewardship and appropriate levels of access, regardless of what the eventual 'afterlife' of the archive is?
- What recommendations are there for further research?

The *Afterlife* project was largely a desk-based exercise. A literature review was undertaken to explore previous research into community-generated archives and private collections. Liaison with a range of stakeholders was also undertaken to listen to a range of perspectives.

Definitions

The *Afterlife* project includes collections produced by a range of stakeholders, from community organisations through to private collectors. As such, it was necessary to define certain words, especially as some have particular usages within the heritage sector.

Collection

This is a broad term which the *Afterlife* project simply defines as groups of cultural objects. A 'collection' may include material from multiple sites and may have been amassed over many years. Within the context of this document, 'collection' is exclusively referring to material that has been lawfully found in England and to which the owner has legal title.

Privately held

The term 'privately held' indicates that the collection is owned as personal property. The term does not necessarily mean that the finds are withheld from the public, however. Information on these finds might exist within the heritage sector, such as on the Portable Antiquities Scheme database. Similarly, privately held finds might at times be on public display or be used for public engagement, such as in schools.

With regard to the present report, the term 'privately held' excludes material held by the Research and Communities Sector, much of which was accumulated through research based archaeological projects rather than ad hoc exploration.

Private Collections

Accordingly, the *Afterlife* project defines 'private collections' as *provenienced cultural objects held as corporeal personal property by private individuals*. In this context, 'private collections' are those held exclusively by one person who can exercise power over it to the exclusion of all others.

Archive

The word 'archive' has a very specific definition within the heritage sector (Brown 2011, 3; Boyle and Rawden 2020, 18; Carroll *et al.* 2021, 7).

"An archaeological archive comprises all records and material objects (finds) recovered during an archaeological project and identified for long term preservation, including artefacts (e.g. pottery, metalwork), environmental remains (e.g. animal bone, seed remains), waste products (e.g. slag), scientific samples and also written and visual documentation in paper, film and digital form." (Boyle and Rawden 2020, 18).

Professional standards on archaeological material state that there should be two main outcomes. First, the work should result in an 'ordered, stable, accessible archive using appropriate methods and practices' (CIfA 2014, 3). Second, 'finds work will result in report(s) intended for dissemination'. Within the heritage sector definition of 'archive', the museum plays a significant, though not exclusive, role as the eventual public depository (Brown 2011, 3).[1] Within the heritage sector, the word 'archive' normally applies to material generated through development-led investigations, and through research organisations and community archaeology groups (see above 'privately held'). While museums also collect individual objects, the word 'archive' does not always easily map across to those held privately.

Use

[1] The word 'public' does not mean that archaeological archives could only be stored and curated by local museums (see Donnelly-Symes 2018, 7 for discussion). The European standard in archiving does not use the word 'public' when it comes to the repository, but instead simply states that it should be a 'recognised repository' where archives are 'stored to recognised standards for long-term preservation, documented according to accepted internal procedures and made accessible for consultation.' (Perrin *et al* 2014, 22).

One of the aims of the *Afterlife* project is to gain a strategic understanding of how finds in private collections can continue to contribute to archaeological knowledge through their use more widely.

The *Afterlife* project follows the SMA definition of 'use' of a collection as: '*the active physical or intellectual engagement with an object(s) and/or associated information or records for beneficial purposes relevant to a particular individual, organisation or society'*.

In the Heritage Sector, such activities are also sometimes known as 'finds work':

Finds work is defined as the process of retrieving, sorting, cleaning, marking, conserving, recording, analysing, interpreting and preparing for permanent storage all materials retained as a result of archaeological fieldwork, and disseminating the results (CIfA 2014, 3).

The purpose of 'finds work' is the production of knowledge:

Finds work seeks to provide an understanding of societies and their environments, not only at a site-specific level, but also in a local, regional, national and international context (CIfA 2014, 3).

Accordingly, one of the strategic aims of the *Afterlife* project is to explore the degree to which it is possible for 'finds work' to take place with private collections.

Cultural Objects

Throughout the *Afterlife* project, the term 'cultural object' is used. This is an intentional choice in favour of other words such as 'antiquity' or 'cultural property'.

"Cultural objects from the past are variously referred to as "antiquities," "cultural property," "cultural resources," and "cultural heritage," with usage changing over time and often weighted with political and social subtext. These terms reflect different understandings of ownership, value, and meaning." (Messenger 2014, 2469).

In the United Kingdom, the term 'antiquities' is widely used to describe archaeological objects. The term 'antiquity' implies something that can be held, studied, and collected, much like the term "cultural property" and "cultural resource" imply something that can be owned or extracted (Messenger 2014, 2469). Increasingly, heritage professionals are using the more neutral term "cultural object" as a way of overcoming some of the difficulties (Messenger 2014, 2469).

The term "cultural object" is a useful one in the context of the *Afterlife of Private Collections* in that it moves away from objects as 'property' and instead illuminates their tendency to transcend multiple owners over long periods of time. Additionally, it places the emphasis on the *long-term survival* of cultural objects in private ownership, rather than on the *ownership* itself. This subtle change also helps to emphasise the role of owners of cultural objects as temporary stewards.

A key understanding for all stakeholders to endorse is that cultural objects should not be principally regarded as property, but rather as cultural objects which have significance beyond the current owner or steward.

Archaeological collections and archives in England

This section explores the general background to archaeological collections and archives in England. A desk-based survey was undertaken to synthesise pertinent research on the different sectors in England that produce and own cultural collections as well as the main challenges these collections face.

Finding and owing the past

The archaeology of England spans over 750,000 years and includes a rich array of sites, monuments, and cultural objects. From this rich resource have arisen a multitude of investigations undertaken by a diversity of stakeholders including professional archaeological contractors, museums, local archaeology societies, and private individuals.

In England, most archaeological fieldwork is undertaken through the planning system. Archives produced by these works are normally assessed, rationalised, and then deposited with an accredited museum where they are curated long-term.[2] Fieldwork is also undertaken by research institutions and archaeological societies though these usually fall outside of regulatory frameworks, and as such, archaeological archives produced by them may not always end up in a museum. Archives may continue to be held by those groups, either because the archiving process has stalled, or because they are used locally for research, education or outreach purposes.

A significant number of other cultural objects are also held as personal property, usually by private individuals such as metal detectorists, mudlarks or beachcombers. These so-called 'privately held collections' have potential to contribute to archaeological research and to people's enjoyment of local heritage; but, by their very nature, the fate or 'afterlife' of these collections is often uncertain. Legislation surrounding the discovery and ownership of cultural objects in England often emphasises private property rights, and in most cases, archaeological material is owned by the person who owns the land on which the find was discovered.[3] Ownership of this material can be transferred to other parties within the United Kingdom without additional permissions and can even be exported from the UK subject to relevant export licences being obtained.[4]

In England, the system of reporting archaeological knowledge generated outside the planning system is largely dependent on people volunteering this information. Clear pathways exist that enable information arising from chance finds and organised fieldwork to be incorporated into wider archaeological knowledge. The Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) employs a network of Finds Liaison Officers with whom finders of archaeological objects can report and record their finds.[5] Similarly, information arising from community-led fieldwork can be deposited with the local Historic Environment Record (HER) or the Archaeological Data Service (ADS).

[2] Museums are increasingly facing challenges in archaeological archive storage and access due to increased levels of archaeological work since the 1990s and reductions in funding (Mendoza 2017; see also Historic England 2018). The most recent research into the archives crisis proposes the creation of a National Collection of Archaeological Archives (Carroll *et al* 2021).

[3] Exceptions include finds that quality under the Treasure Act (1996) or the Merchant Shipping Act (1995). Finds recovered from the River Thames usually belong to the London Port Authority. For a general background see Lewis 2016.

[4] https://www.gov.uk/guidance/export-art-antiques-and-cultural-goods-special-rules

[5] www.finds.org.uk

The presence of cultural objects within private collections is not simply the product of private collecting or undeposited archives. In some instances, museums are unable to acquire objects offered to them because of a lack of funds; this is indeed sometimes the case with items that are offered to museums through the Treasure Act (1996). In other instances, museums simply do not wish to acquire material, either because it falls outside of their collecting strategy, or because of limited storage facilities or other resource issues (Perrin 2009). A certain amount of archaeological material is also strategically deselected for archiving by commercial archaeological units prior to deposition with a museum (CIfA/Historic England 2019).

Archaeological collections held outside of public museum contexts are, consequently, a significant reality of the cultural landscape of England. These collections are of varying archaeological significances, varying states of recording, and in varying states of preservation.

Given these realities, it is prudent to explore what the fate or 'afterlife' of private collections currently looks like, and importantly, whether this future can be positively shaped through creative reimagining of private collections and through thoughtful collaboration between owners and heritage professionals. This may include developing strategies which promote stewardship and which encourage owners to think about the longer-term survival of cultural objects in their care.

Indeed, while there has been much investment in encouraging finders to report their finds over the last 20 years, there has been relatively little discussion about what will happen to these finds in the future. This issue is increasingly pertinent; privately held collections are now increasingly under threat as the first generation of hobbyist metal-detectorists retire from the hobby or pass away; likewise, the founders and committee members of archaeological societies.

Archive Producers and Owners

A broad understanding of the issues can be gained by exploring who the different archive producers and owners are in England.[6] Previous research into archive producers and owners for maritime archives identified six categories: public museums and archive repositories, non-public museums and private collections, archaeological contractors, research and societies sector, designated wreck site licensees and archaeological advisors, and finally, individual divers, salvors and collectors (Satchell 2016, 9).

A similar range of stakeholders is visible across terrestrial collections.[7] These include Public Museums and Archive Repositories; Non-Public Museums; Archaeological Contractors; Research and Societies Sector; and Individual Collectors (table 1). These categories undoubtedly oversimplify the situation, but they are helpful in gaining an overview of owners and the general nature of the material they produce.

Viewing archaeological material according to producer quickly demonstrates that the character of material produced by individual collectors is distinctively different to that produced by the research and societies sector, as are the risks and challenges. First, the Research and Societies Sector is largely comprised of organisations or groups established with public benefit as one of the principal driving forces. Accordingly, archaeological material produced and held by them is, in theory at least, motivated by public dissemination of information, and public enjoyment of the material. Curatorial

[6] In this context 'producing' describes the first-hand process of creating an archive, for example through excavation or fieldwalking.
[7] To maintain some synergy with maritime archives, some of the categories and definitions used in Satchell (2016) are maintained here.

practices employed by this sector may not always meet the standards of those that govern the public museum sector, but nonetheless public interest remains a primary motivator.

The Research and Societies sector is also more likely to produce archaeological material that meets the definition of an archaeological archive as opposed to an archaeological collection. While the nature of investigations undertaken by individual collectors usually results in the accumulation of small finds and associated spatial metadata, those undertaken by research or community organisations usually result in the accumulation of bulk material and associated documentary material such as photographs, site drawings, context sheets, and reports. This material is usually also intended for deposition with a public museum, even if the reality is different.

Perhaps the most profound difference seen within the Individual Collectors Sector is the long-term risk to collections. Risk occurs from the way in which collections are looked after as well as from changes in ownership. Both processes can result in the loss of archaeological information, as well as risk to the physical objects themselves. For these reasons, the *Afterlife* project makes a clear distinction between community archaeology groups and individual collectors.

Table 1. Archive producers, owners, and associated risks.

Archive Producer	Main characteristics	Type of collections and fate	Producing private collections?	Long-term risks	Key documents
Public Museums and Archives Repositories	Usually registered with body such as Museums Association and/or accredited by ACE. Collections held in trust on behalf of society.	Single objects and bulk archives with associated documentary material. Long-term curation. Enabling digital and physical access where possible. Occasionally rationalised but undertaken according to national guidelines.	No	Minimised through ongoing curation according to standards set through accreditation. Governed by Local Authority and Heritage Sector principles.	Standards set by Arts Council Accreditation scheme Society for Museum Archaeologists SMART guidance, resources and reports SPECTRUM standards Museums Association Code of Ethics
Archaeological Contractors	Usually private commercial companies. Archives usually generated through development-led projects. Regulated through governing bodies such as CIfA, ALGAO etc. Some are also charities or linked with charities (see below).	Single objects and bulk archives with associated documentary material. Archives usually temporarily held for assessment, analysis and preparation for deposition with accredited museum. Some have reference or teaching collections.	No. Teaching/reference collections may belong to a private company, but the intent is on public benefit.	Minimal given that most archives are prepared for deposition. Financial collapse of company could create legacy/abandoned archives. Likewise, problems could arise for particular archives where there are disputes within the planning system.	CIfA regulations, standards, and guidance (various documents) CIfA Code of Conduct Historic England guidance notes (various) Local museum archaeological handbooks and guidelines for deposition Local Authority Planning Regulations
Research and Societies Sector	Includes universities, charities, local archaeological societies and other 'not for profit' organisations. Usually has a legal structure, governing body and associated constitution.	Single objects and bulk archives with associated documentary material. Some archives are temporarily held for assessment, analysis and	Not usually. Private collections may be produced when a society folds or where a researcher dies leaving an 'legacy archive'.	Variable. Minimal risk where archives are processed for deposition in a timely manner. Some conservation risk for archives which have stalled	As above, but usually voluntary adherence Founding charters or constitutions Charity Commission regulations (if applicable)

	May be governed by Charities Commission regulations.	preparation for deposition with accredited museum. Some groups hold reference or teaching collections. Some hold stalled archives or abandoned archives.		Governance documents should help determine fate of archives should the society fold.	
Individual Collectors	Usually private individuals with personal collections. Often hobbyists who are 'first-hand' producers such as mudlarks, metal detectorists, and chance finders. Also includes collectors who produce through purchasing objects from the trade.	Variable. Most remain in private ownership. Some finds enter public museums through sale, donation, or acquisition through Treasure Act 1996. Usually formed of objects only and usually privately owned though sometimes recorded.	Yes	Significant long-term risks to stability and integrity of cultural objects. Long-term ownership usually uncertain.	PAS codes of practice Treasure Act 1996 Code of Practice Merchant Shipping Act 1995 Port of London Authority mudlark Licence

Community archaeology archives

This section explores the character of cultural collections held by community archaeology groups. A desk-based survey was undertaken to synthesise current understandings of archaeological archives produced by community archaeology investigations. Information was sought on the estimated volume of unarchived material, as well as the range of barriers that groups face regarding post-excavation practices.

Community Archaeology

Previous research has helped to develop a strategic understanding of archaeological archives produced by community archaeology investigations (Evans 2015; Hedge and Nash 2016; Spence 2020). The community archaeology sector in England is vibrant, with over 2000 active groups (Thomas 2010; Stringfellow 2017). Between 2010-2015, an estimated 3357 community-generated projects undertaken in England contributed a total of over 5192 research outputs (Hedge and Nash 2016, 10).[8] 286 of these were intrusive fieldwork projects with potential to generate archaeological archives. Of the 223 respondents, 36% had undertaken archaeological field survey, 37% had undertaken fieldwalking and 44% had undertaken archaeological excavation. A similar picture was gained through the 2018 'Supporting Community Archaeology in the UK' survey, undertaken by the Council for British Archaeology (Frearson 2018). Of the 697 valid responses, 53% said their usual annual activity included excavation, while 34% included fieldwalking (Frierson 2018, 16).

Despite the enthusiasm that community archaeology groups have for fieldwork, accessibility of associated research is often poor (Hedge and Nash 2016, 10). In many cases this was because the fieldwork had not been written up or deposited with the relevant heritage sector organisations (Allen 2016; Frearson 2018, 54-55; Mitchell and Colls 2020). Many community archaeology groups cited a range of challenges to archiving, including time, costs, funding, and difficulty in accessing appropriate expertise. Externally funded projects do not always allocate the correct budget to post-excavation, publication and archiving process, making it more difficult to deposit within a HER or contribute to a Research Framework (Hedge and Nash 2016b, 80). A similar array of challenges was also found for maritime archaeology collections (Satchell 2016, x).

Hedge and Nash did find, however, that professional support makes a big difference to the destination of the research. Among respondents undertaking specifically archaeological research, around 2/3 of those who had received support or advice from professional archaeologists sent research to an HER. By contrast, the figure among those who'd had no professional support or advice was just 37% (Hedge and Nash 2016, 11). Community groups who do not receive support or advice from a freelance, unit or Local Authority-based professional source were 45% less likely to report their research to HERs (Hedge and Nash 2016, 65).

Assessing archaeological significance

The assessment of archaeological significance is a fundamental part of preparing an archive for long-term curation, whether that be in a public museum setting or otherwise. The Hedge and Nash survey demonstrated that community-generated archives do hold archaeological significance in a variety of ways:

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[8] In addition, the survey of maritime archives identified over 48,000 objects currently not residing within public museums, and another 30,000 objects held by private collectors and reported to the Receiver of Wreck. The total is thought to be much higher (Satchell 2016, 72, 75).

The [community-led] research generated has significant value and largely untapped potential to enhance research resources and HERs, which could have a positive impact on the sector's ability to manage and protect the historic environment. (Hedge and Nash 2016, 12).

The challenges faced by community-archaeology groups was the subject of an HLF funded community archaeology project called the 'Open Lab'. The project ran between 2012 and 2014 and was managed by staff at Bishop Grosseteste University, Lincoln (Tomlinson 2014; Spence 2020). The 'Open Lab' sought to help community groups to work on their archives and prepare them for deposition with a museum. The project consisted of weekly lab-based finds processing sessions, and a programme of skills development workshops led by subject specialists.

The Open Lab project noted that one of the barriers faced by community archaeology groups was that much of the current guidance on archaeological archives was written with commercial projects in mind, and consequently most community-based archaeologists found it inaccessible (Spence 2020, 115).[9] The Open Lab project found that it was practical engagement with heritage staff through workshops that brought the greatest benefits:

It is with reference to this first phase of the project's activity where perhaps the greatest – although apparently most mundane – success was to be found: the instillation of a professional approach among the volunteers regarding the correct packaging and labelling of archaeological finds (Spence 2020, 115).

All groups working with the Open Lab project made significant progress in the cataloguing, stabilisation, packaging, and analysis of their assemblages (Spence 2020, 133). In total, some 9,000 volunteer hours were committed to the project, and 10 different archaeological archives were worked on, with the majority reaching a stage ready for archival deposition (Spence 2020, 118).

Risk

The discussion so far has focussed on risk to collections from the point of view of ongoing curation and the lack of archaeological assessment. Risk also exists in the longer-term from the possibility of closure of an institution or community group. Indeed, closure of archaeology departments has been, unfortunately, a feature of the last decade.

The fate of archaeological archives held by institutions or groups within the Research and Societies Sector would vary depending on whether the material was owned by the institution or group, or if it was under some sort of transfer of title agreement with the landowner from whom the archive originated. In some cases, it might be that the landowner has signed a transfer of title agreement subject to the archive being deposited with a museum. In other cases, the agreement might be less clear, or even non-existent.

Very often, it is this process of transferring archaeological material out of former institutions or groups and to individuals which creates so-called 'legacy archives'. Legacy archives usually stem from archaeological investigations for which the lead archaeologist or group were unable to curate or finalise for deposition. In most cases, the current owner of the legacy archive is not directly related to the project, but instead acts as a caretaker.[10] Legacy archives present a range of

[9] Guidance for community archaeology groups is available online at www.isgap.org.uk

[10] Legacy archives and abandoned archives have been studied in the US, and guidance exists which aims to help prepare legacy archives for deposition with a museum: https://documents.saa.org/container/docs/default-source/doc-careerpractice/saa-guidelines-for-preparing-legacy-arch-collections.pdf?sfvrsn=5a6a1e5_2

difficulties such as legal title, provenance, and financial costs involved in preparing the archive for deposition with a museum.

It is important that current owners of archaeological material located within the Research and Societies Sector are aware of their potential to create legacy or abandoned archives, and that they take measures to mitigate such risks. For the most part, this is a simple as ensuring there are adequate resources in place for post-excavation and archiving before any fieldwork takes place.

Reflections

A substantial volume of archaeological material and associated information is in settings other than public museums in England. A major holder of this material is the Research and Societies Sector, within which there exists an array of organisations and groups that primarily exist for public benefit. These groups are active in archaeological fieldwork and often produce bulk archaeological material such as pottery, tile, CBM, and small finds, as well as an array of associated documentary material such as drawings, photographs, and notes.

These archives are of varying archaeological significance, but that significance is often not understood owing to the lack of assessment. This in turn stems from challenges around a lack of funding, time, and access to archaeological expertise. Creative solutions to tackling unpublished archives have been initiated at a local level with success (Spence 2020), and these highlight the importance of heritage professionals working closely with community groups.

While it possible to estimate the volume of unarchived material held by community archaeology groups, it is more difficult at present to understand the specific needs that groups have that would help them to bring their archives up to a baseline level of archaeological assessment. Some sort of online portal on which groups could register their collections and submit basic information might help the heritage sector to better understand how to help. This platform could enable groups to input information on the size, character, and current location of the assemblage, as well as any specific areas that they may require help with. Assessment would help to identify those archives which should be prepared for deposition with a museum, and those which could be appropriate for alternative forms of curation, such as in and by the community in which they were found. This digital platform could help to strengthen partnerships between amateur groups and the heritage sector, as well as stimulating new research and community-led projects. It could also help to encourage a more sustainable future, as was the intention of the Open Lab project (Spence 2020, 117):

- to equip the volunteers with the knowledge, skills, and resources to undertake post-excavation work in an increasingly independent manner.
- to enhance the groups' understanding of professional standards, and the obligation upon them to plan and budget accordingly were they to undertake future archaeological interventions.

This section has explored the character and afterlife of archaeological archives produced by community archaeology groups. These archives are, however, quite different to those produced by individual collectors. Accordingly, they are explored separately in the next section.

Private Collections

This section explores the character of archaeological collections held by private individuals, especially those held by metal detectorists. Information was gathered through a series of informal conversations with finders, which explored themes such as how collections are being stored, how they are being used, and what hopes owners had for the future of their collections.

Private collecting

The *Afterlife* project defines 'private collections' as *provenienced cultural objects held as corporeal personal property by private individuals*. In this context, 'private collections' are those held exclusively by one person who can exercise power over it to the exclusion of all others.

Private collecting has a long history in England and continues today variously through purchase, inheritance, loan, or gift, though principally through discovery. Private collections normally comprise archaeological 'small finds' though some can include notable volumes of pottery or lithics. Over several generations of ownership, a collection may eventually include a mix of these biographies. Private collections can be closed (in that they are no longer being added to), or open (in that they are part of an active collection). Private collections can also vary in terms of archaeological significance and documentation.

Access to information

Clear pathways exist for owners of private collections to have them recorded by heritage sector professionals.[11] These pathways ensure that those privately held finds offered for recording make a continuing contribution to archaeological knowledge. The process of recording an archaeological object or collection is an attempt to preserve information about the object in its absence. It aims to mitigate the potential loss of information that comes with not having access to the object, though it recognises also that not all aspects of the object that might be wanted by future researchers can be captured.

The Portable Antiquities Scheme employs a network of Finds Liaison Officers with whom finders can record their finds. Liaison with finders also allows FLOs to better understand the wider archaeological significance of the material being found on a particular site or area. Not all finds offered for recording will be recorded; most FLOs employ a sampling strategy to recording assemblages, and this can be stringent depending on work pressures and other factors.

Access to information on portable antiquities is made possible through the scheme's public online database. The public-facing database includes basic geospatial data on where the object was found, as well as descriptive and temporal data on the object's physical and aesthetic properties. Higher level spatial information is also available to *bona fide* researchers, and each year dozens of research projects are undertaken which incorporate PAS data.

The Portable Antiquities Scheme database also includes information on finds recovered through so-called 'mudlarking'. Anyone searching the tidal Thames foreshore from Teddington to the Thames Barrier - in any way for any reason - must hold a current foreshore permit from the Port of London Authority. This includes all searching, metal detecting, 'beachcombing', scraping, and digging. The

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[11] Finds can be voluntarily reported to the Portable Antiquities Scheme or the Marine Antiquities Scheme. Certain classes of finds must legally be reported under the Treasure Act 1996 and the Merchant Shipping Act 1995. Not all finders choose to report their finds (see footnote 13).

permit stipulates that all finds of archaeological interest must be reported to the Portable Antiquities Scheme where they can be assessed for recording.[12]

A similar permit system is in operation for maritime archaeology. There are at least 30,000 objects held by private collectors and which have been reported to the Receiver of Wreck, though the total number of objects in private ownership is thought to be much higher (Satchell 2016, 72, 75).

Ownership of these objects is variable. For the majority of terrestrial finds, ownership rests with the landowner, though in practice most have written or verbal agreements with the individual searching their land. Finds recovered through mudlarking on the River Thames belong to the London Port Authority. Finds that fall under the Treasure Act 1996 belong to the Crown unless disclaimed, in which case they are normally returned to the finder. Similarly, finds reported to the Receiver of Wreck belong to the Crown if no owner can be found after a period of one year, though in practice the Receiver will normally dispose of the find on behalf of the Crown back to the finder.

Access to physical objects

Owing to the nature of personal property, access to cultural objects in private ownership is often difficult. Finders who record with the Portable Antiquities Scheme are asked to sign a privacy notice which allows the scheme to hold personal details in accordance with GDPR legislation. The PAS database does not record where the finds are currently being held or by whom. On occasion, FLOs are asked by researchers to facilitate access to privately held finds where the digital record is unable to provide the detail necessary for study. Physical access to finds is sometimes required for scientific analysis, typological studies, and for the development of research frameworks. The privacy notice allows FLOs to contact finders to request access to finds on behalf of the researcher; however, responses are not always successful especially when the finder is unwilling or where the find has changed hands.

The maritime archives survey similarly found that maritime cultural heritage in private ownership was largely inaccessible to researchers beyond basic information about the object recorded through the Receiver of Wreck (Satchell 2016, 73, 74). The survey did, however, find that divers and dive clubs were often willing to become involved in heritage recording when staff resources were available to meet with groups (Satchell 2016, 73). Furthermore, the survey found that finders often had extensive research archives related to the sites they had been investigating, and which they were willing to share (Satchell 2016, 74).

Collections care

Over 1.5 million finds have been recorded with the Portable Antiquities Scheme since its inception in 1997. It is unclear what volume of finds go unreported each year, nor is it clear what volume of archaeological finds formed private collections prior to the scheme.[13] The true number of portable antiquities in private collections is undoubtedly much higher. The standard of care given to these collections is highly variable, though advice exists online and via FLOs.[14]

Similar to terrestrial collections, the maritime archaeological archives survey found there was very little information available on the storage and curation conditions of material held by private individuals and groups (Satchell 2016, 72). The survey noted, however, that although divers are

[12] https://www.pla.co.uk/Environment/Thames-foreshore-permits
[13] Estimating the number of finds that go unreported each year is exceptionally difficult, though there is broad agreement that it is not insignificant (Daubney 2017; Hardy 2017; Deckers et al. 2018).
[14] https://finds.org.uk/conservation/index

often proud of the objects they find, this does not always mean that appropriate conservation is undertaken (Satchell 2016, 72).

Afterlife questionnaire and discussion

In order to better understand the character of private collections and their potential afterlives, a series of conversations were had with five independent metal detectorists, one mudlark, and one metal detecting club of fourteen members. These conversations were held around eight questions, divided into four key themes:

Table 2. Questions discussed with collectors.

Theme A: how private collections are stored	
Q1	*How do you currently store your collection? For example, are your finds bagged and labelled?*
Q2	*How easy would it be for someone else to look at your collection and see which finds have been recorded with PAS?*
Theme B: how private collections are used	
Q3	*What are the different ways that you use your collection? For example, personal research, local exhibitions, schools, talks.*
Q4	*Are there ways in which you would like to see your collection being used more often?*
Theme C: what might happen to private collections in the future	
Q5	*Have you thought much about what you would like to happen to your collection in the future?*
Q6	*Have you made any arrangements (formally or informally)?*
Theme D: advice and help on conservation and storage	
Q7	*Are there any aspects of conservation and storage that you would like more advice on?*
Q8	*Is conservation something that you are willing to pay for to keep your collection in good condition?*

Given the nature of the project – which is a scoping exercise - the research was intentionally designed to gain qualitative insights through discussion rather than through collecting statistics. The sample size allowed key insights into the issues to be gained, but further research is required to see if these are insights are representative of the hobby of metal detecting as a whole. The pertinent comments are summarised below.

Theme A: How private collections are stored

QUESTION 1. How do you currently store your collection? For example, are your finds bagged and labelled?

The majority of respondents said they store significant finds in separate bags with labels giving either the PAS reference or the grid reference. Coins were usually bagged separately or placed into coin wallets or coin trays, again with a catalogue system in place. Small finds which were deemed to be of less significance were frequently placed into a bulk bag:

- *"Finds are all bagged in perforated, zip-seal plastic bags with the PAS reference written on and filed in plastic multi-compartment storage cases."*
- *"All my finds are bagged and labelled and separated into types and era. Other than Musket balls and Buttons and weights which are all in one big bag, unless the buttons are special!"*
- *"All finds that have been recorded on PAS are stored in bag with their label. These are all stored in various boxes. Coins are kept in a proprietary partitioned coin box holder."*

In some cases, FLOS are handed finds which are bagged by field. During the recording process, the FLO often individually bags each find and writes the PAS number on the label, before handing back to the owner. The cost of the bags is usually absorbed by the FLO's host organisation since there is little budget for materials from PAS central office. For some detectorists, the way in which the FLO returns the find to the owner influences how the object is then stored:

- *"Most of my artefacts are still bagged as they came from the PAS"*

One respondent noted that their method of storage had changed in recent years owing to time pressures:

- *"All finds used to be bagged and labelled with GPS reference/date etc, too time consuming so now I only bag and label what I would class as "notable" find."*

Not all collections were stored systematically, however. Others were stored in a wide variety of containers, such as margarine tubs, metal tins, carrier bags, matchboxes, or even take-away tubs. In some cases, the physical integrity of artefacts was at risk through inappropriate storage, such as placing heaver objects on top or adjacent to fragile ones, or by wrapping fragile objects in toilet paper or cotton wool. The range of items used by metal detectorists reflected almost entirely the range that were found to be used by community archaeology groups (see Spence 2020, 114).

QUESTION 2. How easy would it be for someone else to look at your collection and see which finds have been recorded with PAS?

The majority of respondents thought it would be easy for others to see what finds had been recorded.

- *"Very easy. All items are PAS recorded and the unique PAS reference written on the storage bag."*
- *"All the finds recorded on the PAS show on the envelopes they are in, other than the finds from Norfolk from before the PAS was started, but even they are in envelopes."*
- *"For bagged finds, very easy as there is a space on the label for the PAS entry number".*

Notably, most detectorists also maintained their own database, usually using Microsoft Excel, which includes the PAS database number where recorded:

- *"I have found over 1800 coins and approaching 5000 items so far and they are all on a spreadsheet starting from 1992 so I know where all my items were found in every field."*
- *"my finds numbers are held in a spreadsheet with description, finds spot, measurements, weight etc. If recorded on PAS the PAS number is also tied to the finds number. So you'd need to understand the spreadsheet is there with the supplementary/important additional finds information.*

Theme B: How private collections are used

QUESTION 3. What are the different ways that you use your collection? For example, personal research, local exhibitions, schools, talks.

Most respondents noted they enjoy viewing their finds and carrying out personal research. Many have also used their finds for talks, exhibitions or within schools:

- *"I have used my collection in talks at schools and societies and WIs etc. Also have started writing a book or two showing what I feel are special finds."*
- *"I have provided Roman finds to a primary school project (daughters of landowner where I have permission).*
- *"Used to send to the schools and someone recently had some for his school project"*
- *"I have used several objects from my own collection during my research into specific artefact types. I have also taken objects to talks given to local interest groups and to larger events such as the public engagement day at The Society of Antiquaries in London and the annual PAS conference. I have loaned several objects to friends' and family's children for school projects."*

The responses gained from the survey can be supplemented by a range of examples published the annual reports of the Portable Antiquities Scheme where finds donated by metal detectorists have been used as handling material (PAS 2012, 9; PAS 2019, 9).

QUESTION 4. Are there ways in which you would like to see your collection being used more often?

This question received a range of responses, from those who wish to keep their collections private, to those who would like to see their finds used for a set period of time. Some expressed a desire to engage more but didn't know how.

- *"My collection is always available for anyone to use. I have also given away many objects to people that I know who collect in specific areas. A central point of information/contact for anyone wanting objects for research or for loan would be a good starting point to getting my collection, and those of others, more widely used."*
- *"I would love to see my finds used in display and educational settings 'for a period of time'. I am reluctant to give them to museums as I get pleasure from seeing and handling them and feel that a long term/museum loan would preclude that."*
- *"It would be nice for other people to appreciate the finds, not sure how".*

Conversations with individuals from the heritage sector and the hobby both identified potential for drawing together local communities with local finds and finders. It was recognised that most or all the 1.5 million finds recorded on the PAS database are drawn from localities in which there are local communities who would be interested in seeing those finds. Drawing together local finds and local communities was suggested to be a good way to encourage privately held finds to make better contributions. Suggestions included using local finds in local pubs, village halls, schools, shops, and cafes. It was suggested this could also be a good way of disseminating lower value finds across local communities, should a private owner eventually wish to do so. It was recognised that at present however, finds are largely divorced from the places they were discovered.

One respondent mentioned a highly successful exhibition of mudlarking finds at Southwark Cathedral. The exhibition was modest in size and included locally found objects from the River Thames; yet, it was estimated to have attracted over 50,000 people.

Theme C: What might happen to private collections in the future

QUESTION 5. Have you thought much about what you would like to happen to your collection in the future?

Responses to this question were variable, though most admitted they had given the subject little or no thought. A minority had thought deeply but were still unsure what to do. After discussion at the club meeting, almost all members expressed concern about the fate of their collections and felt inspired to think more on the matter.

- *"I know that my immediate family have little or no interest in my metal-detected finds so, in the event of my demise, the collection would almost-certainly be disregarded and given away or simply discarded. I have approached my solicitor regarding arrangements in my will for the future of my collection, but the problem here is where to actually donate it to. Museums do not want collections of this nature, and where else/to whom else would it go?"*

A few respondents said that they are considering leaving collections to the local museum, though as of yet no discussions have taken place:

- *"I am considering leaving my flint finds (about 10,000 pieces) to [NAME OF MUSEUM] (probably), they would make an incredible case study for the Mesolithic period"*

One respondent said they intended on dividing up the collection between different family members, but that the Roman coins would 'go to the British Museum'.

One finder expressed concern that if they donated their finds to the museum the finds would end up in storage where no one would see them. This is a commonly encountered view in the metal detecting hobby which suggests there is a need for further outreach and education in this area. However, while it reveals a misconception of museum practice, it does nonetheless show that some finders desire for their collections to have an afterlife in which finds are enjoyed by the public.

Only two respondents noted they might consider selling finds privately at some point. Online auction houses show there is a steady flow of material from the metal detecting community into the antiquities trade, though only a small portion of these have accompanying information to indicate if they have been recorded with PAS.

One metal detectorist at the club meeting described how he felt that his collection was important on a personal level. The collection was a sort of 'biography' of his life, with each find reminding him of different stages of life, different memories, and different experiences. In this way, the collection held meaning beyond the traditional ways in which archaeologists would normally perceive them. Other club members enthusiastically agreed with this member's description of metal detected collections and related warmly to it. It was for this reason that the majority of metal detectorists at the club meeting were keen that their collections stayed together in the future. While detectorists were aware that within their collections were items of greater or lesser archaeological significance, it was their significance as a whole which was the concerning factor regarding the long-term fate. Most detectorists expressed concern that their family members might not appreciate their collections in the same way, or that their collections might one day be dispersed.

Countering this, one respondent noted that it is impossible to pass on personal memories around collections; and, even if it were possible, would others care about those memories? The respondent noted that 'every time an object changes hands it loses something from its story'. However, 'new stories would be constructed by new owners'. This respondent noted their role as just a temporary custodian of the collection.

QUESTION 6. Have you made any arrangements (formally or informally)?

No respondents had made any informal or firm arrangements, though one said they were in the process of updating their will, and another had said they had been in contact with their solicitor.

Theme D: Advice and help on conservation and storage

The final two questions sought information on whether detectorists felt they needed further help or advice on conservation and storage of collections.

QUESTION 7. Are there any aspects of conservation and storage that you would like more advice on?

Most respondents said that they did not need further help. The discussion at the metal detecting club meeting also showed that finders were aware of the conservation guide produced by Drakon Heritage/PAS.

- *"I am quite confident on my procedures for conservation and storage and there is a wealth of information from the heritage sector that is freely available."*

Those that wished for further advice asked for things that are already covered in the conservation guidance available via the PAS website:

- *"How to stop Roman coins from degrading."*
- *"How to clean (or not)…"*
- *"I've not really thought about storage, so would be open to advice in this area."*

Several respondents suggested they would find it helpful if there were workshops or occasional talks on conservation and storage from time to time.

QUESTION 8. Is conservation something that you are willing to pay for to keep your collection in good condition?

A few respondents thought this was something that they don't currently need. Others said they would pay for conservation of finds that were special or of higher value, but that they would be reluctant to do this for low value finds.

- *"Not needed."*
- *"I would definitely consider this for special finds."*
- *"if the need arose, I would be happy to pay for courses and knowledge on the subject, especially for iron objects."*

In order to understand the ways in which owners of private collections understand and respond to conservation, the *Afterlife* project had an informal conversation with an archaeological conservator. With regard to private collections, the conservator only works on material that has been recorded with PAS. Around 30-40 objects were sent for conservation over the last few years. The majority of these were copper alloy, and most were either weapons, brooches, or coins. Most owners wanted remedial conservation undertaking on their object, especially where 'bronze disease' was suspected by the owner. Advice on storage or requests for appropriate packaging were rarely requested, though the conservator would often send items back with enhanced packaging to demonstrate and encourage best practice. All referrals to the conservator came through the local FLO; this highlights the importance of the network of relationships between PAS, private owners, and the wider heritage sector.

Glimpses of the afterlife

To explore the afterlife of collections further, an email was sent out to all Finds Liaison Officers to ask them if they were aware of any detectorists passing away in the last few years, and if so, what happened to their collection? The responses show there is a range of outcomes, though many involved liaisons with the local museum.

- Not sure what happened to the collection (four instances)
- Donated as a whole to museum – all finds previously recorded with PAS or seen by them (five instances)
- Donated as a whole to museum – retrospectively recorded with PAS (three instances)
- Family retained a number of finds for posterity, and the remainder were donated to museums (four instances)
- He left it to his children who then sold it off to various members of his local metal detecting club which he was a member (one instance)
- Relatives brought in the collection to the museum for information. All finds were unlocated, and therefore the archaeological information was lost. The collection stayed with the family. (one instance)
- Stayed with his widow (two instances)
- Sold to help pay for the funeral (one instance)
- Some of the finds were interred with the finder (one instance)
- Collection broken up and sold (two instances)

Reflections

Clear pathways exist that allow owners of private collections to have information about their finds recorded. While not all finds offered for recording will be added to the PAS database, the FLO is able to assess the finds or collection for archaeological significance. The volume and significance of finds that have not been reported is, of course, impossible to determine.

Insights gained from a variety of metal detectorists show that there is a spectrum of attitudes to collections care, much of which is dependent on the enthusiasm, understanding, and resources of the owner. Some are diligent in creating ordered and well-maintained collections and will even pay for professional conservation of certain items. It does seem to be the case, however, that more effort is put into curating those finds which an owner deems to be more significant. Other finds which are deemed to be less significant tend to be bagged together as bulk finds. Collections care is, therefore, often based on perception of significance and is therefore unevenly applied to finds.

It was clear that the process of recording finds with PAS played an important role in collections care. Most finders kept their finds in labelled bags they were returned in by the FLO. It seems to be the case, therefore, that if FLOs had resources to return finds in individual crystal boxes, for example, this would have a positive impact on collections care overall. Regardless, emphasis needs to be placed on finders having a responsibility on maintaining their collections in an orderly fashion so that information is not lost in the future. Emphasis needs to be placed on finders as temporary custodians of cultural objects, not as owners of cultural property.

Finders were largely warm to the idea of certain finds being used in a range of public settings such as schools. The degree to which this happens is, however, dependent on relationships between finders and the local community. There seems to be a great opportunity to develop or encourage initiatives which better connect local finders with local communities.

It appears that only a minority of finders are thinking longer-term, and those that do are encountering challenges – and some anxiety – over knowing what exactly the best course of action is. The issue of the long-term survival of collections is complicated by some misunderstandings around how museums operate. At one end of the spectrum is the expectation that museums will want to accept finds that are unsolicited and which arrive through bequest. There is a general lack of appreciation that museums require provenience (where the object was found), as well as provenance (proof that the object has legally changed hands from landowner to current owner). The issue is further complicated by the commonly held view that if an object owned by a museum is not on display, then it just sits in a drawer where no one sees it. Display is just one form of access to archaeological objects in museums, and many that are in storage are frequently used for research, education, and handling.

Conversely, there are owners who fully appreciate that museums may not wish to acquire their material, which leaves them with the difficult question of what to do with the finds. While a minority of finders eventually intend to sell their collections (or parts of them), the majority thought fondly of their collections and expressed a desire for these finds to 'stay together'. This desire was in part motivated by the perspective that collections were personal – that they held meaning beyond traditional notions of archaeological knowledge. In this way, personal collections are seen as illustrating the life of the finder, as well as contribution to our understanding of the past. However, while it is possible for memory to be recorded in the sense of placing the finder's name on a display label, it is more difficult at present to preserve the finder's personal memories attached to each object.

The general lack of future planning is not especial to archaeological collections. Research carried out by Royal London, YouGov, IRN Research and Orchard shows that around 60% of UK adults do not have a will, for example (IRN Research 2020, 6). Archaeological collections are one aspect of corporeal personal property for which owners currently have no firm future plans.

The combination of these issues suggests there will be significant volumes of cultural objects at risk in the next few decades as owners find themselves unable to care for their collections. Thoughtful engagement is needed between the heritage sector and private collectors to best position these collections – or perhaps the most significant finds – for long-term survival.

Afterlife of Private Collections: further research

The *Afterlife* project has gained a baseline understanding of the character of community-generated archives as well as private collections. The project has highlighted the importance of ongoing dialogue, training, and knowledge-exchange between archive producers, collectors, and heritage professionals. The project has also identified that community-generated archives are distinct from private collections and that they face different challenges regarding their long-term survival. Three potential areas of further research have emerged from this scoping exercise.

Survey of community archaeology archives

The *Afterlife* project has highlighted the importance of helping community groups to get their archives to a basic level of archaeological assessment. However, further information is needed on the character and significance of undeposited archives held by community groups. There might be scope to develop an initiative which helps community archaeology groups to register their collections online and submit basic information on its character (volume, material, period, location etc). This information could then be fed back to local HERs or county archaeologists, who in turn would then have a better awareness of what material is out there, and how groups can best be supported in reaching a baseline assessment. Baseline assessments would then inform strategies for deselection or archiving. The Archaeological Data Service (ADS) and OASIS (the online system for reporting archaeological investigations and linking research outputs and archives) might have roles to play within this.

Identifying significant finds or collections

The *Afterlife* project has shown that many private individuals and community groups are aware that they hold significant cultural objects, collections, or archives. Many private individuals recognise these finds ought to end up in museums, either through bequest or sale. Likewise, some are keen to sell significant finds on the open market and allow museums to bid alongside other private collectors. Further research could explore whether there are initiatives which could encourage finders to liaise with museums at an early stage and therefore attempt to safeguard the future of significant find(s). Clearly there are important finds in private collections which ought to be in museums, and it is reasonable (and apparently welcome) for trusted individuals within the heritage sector to have those conversations with private owners. Those conversations might be best held informally, though it is possible that some sort of non-binding pledge-based initiative could help to firm up intentions of owners.

Collections in the Community

The *Afterlife* project has emphasised the significance that archaeological finds have for local places and the communities in which they are found. There appears to be a timely opportunity to further explore the role of cultural objects within local communities.

In particular, the *Afterlife* project has shown that many finders are interested in their collections being used in public settings, such as in schools or in local exhibitions. Some were keen for this to happen temporarily while they were still the owners of the finds, while others were interested in this occurring after they had finished with the collection. Further research could aim to better understand the potential of using collections in different public spaces, such as schools, libraries, cafes, shops, churches, and village halls. Further research could also to explore different methods of collaboration and co-curation between museums, PAS, local communities, and finders, which make the most of the potential within the collections and the people who collected them. Further research could also explore local, grass-roots curation of material not collected by museums.

Given that the Portable Antiquities Scheme has recorded public finds from almost every parish in England, there is great potential contained within private collections up and down the country to tell local stories. While rural exhibitions of local finds would not attract the same volumes of visitors as perhaps the mudlark exhibition *'Treasures from the Thames'*, they would nonetheless help to tell the stories of particular communities. Local exhibitions of finds have potential to enrich people's sense of place, as well as stimulating the local community, especially where the community is involved in creating the exhibitions and telling the stories.

This community-based approach to storytelling also responds to a poignant point raised by the finders themselves. By listening to the perspectives of owners of private collections, it became apparent that private collections hold meaning beyond those that focus on their contribution to archaeological knowledge. For many owners, private collections hold memories. They hold tales of finding artefacts in gale force winds, or memories of ripping trousers while jumping over farm gates. Different finds mark different seasons of life, different friendships, and different times. Their collections are a source of nostalgia and memory. Finders want a bit of themselves to survive with their collection - their stories and their experiences.

These memories are rooted in landscape – in local places, local fields, and local communities. Collections are, therefore, important forms of cultural heritage which can play vital roles in placemaking. Local collections locally displayed help to '*create places for people to fall in love with… giving people the opportunity to connect their individual stories with collective narratives, helping to make their place feel like home*' (Polly Hamilton, cited in Mendoza 2017, 49).

Ongoing liaison with finders will help to find the best solutions for the survival of both artefact and story; in many cases this will likely involve collaborations and co-curations between local accredited museums, finders, their families, and local communities. An objective of further work might be to clarify how best to prepare collections for future curation while the owner is still alive. Similarly, further research into collections as sources of memory and as placemaking tools could be beneficial. Understanding collections in this way will undoubtedly help the heritage sector to thoughtfully engage with private collectors and local communities to ensure that the significance of the finds – and their finders– are preserved for generations to come.

Recommendation: Project design for a phase 2 *Afterlife of Private Collections* project

This initial scoping project has demonstrated there is great potential for a follow-on project which explores many of the issues raised here in greater detail. The main focus of the follow-on project might be to set up a few case studies where collections are researched from the perspective of memory and placemaking, working closely with collectors, local communities, and local museums. These case studies could explore the archaeological and place-making potential of collections, which in turn could act as an example to other collectors of what futures or 'afterlives' are possible. This process would also ground-truth the practicalities of using collections in the community, as well as exploring the issues around pledges, donations, and the use of material which museums do not wish to collect. In essence, the objective of the phase 2 project would be to demonstrate how the heritage sector can creatively engage with collectors at an early stage to ensure a positive 'afterlife' for archaeological objects, as well as best outcomes for finders, museums, and the communities in which finds were discovered.

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Appendix 1

A view from the world of fossil collecting

The issues outlined above are pertinent to other forms of collections where location, context, and ownership are important. Fossil collecting is a hobby in which there has also been discussion on cataloguing and organising collections (Geological Curators Group, nd.). Similar to metal detecting, voluntary codes of conduct encourage fossil hunters to carry out their hobby in a responsible manner. This includes obtaining permissions, recording finds, and caring for collections (Natural England 2012; Rother District Council, nd.). The main codes of conduct encourage finders to keep their collections in an organised manner and with a clear catalogue system in place. However, there is very little guidance that helps collectors to think longer-term. The main fossil hunting code of conduct notes that 'scientifically important specimens should be eventually placed in a suitably managed collection, such as a museum, where there are adequate curatorial and storage facilities to ensure they remain available for further study'.

A Fossil Recording Scheme exists within the Axmouth to Lyme Regis Undercliffs National Nature Reserve (NNR). This scheme promotes a Code of Conduct which encourages responsible and safe fossil collecting. There are two categories of fossils in Fossil Recording Scheme - Key Scientifically Important Fossils (Category 1), and fossils of some (but not key) importance (Category 2). Under the Scheme there is a requirement to record all category 1 fossils. The recording of Category 2 fossils is strongly encouraged. The Code of Conduct goes into some detail about the fate of collections:

Under the Code, collectors who intend to sell or otherwise dispose of their Category 1 specimens must first offer them to UK registered museums for a period of six months and then for a further 6 months to relevant worldwide museums (further advice available from NE and the Jurassic Coast Trust). If no purchase has been agreed after 12 months, the collector will be free to offer the specimen elsewhere… Those individuals with private collections that contain Category 1 specimens are encouraged to make provision for the ultimate placement of such specimens within UK registered museums.

A *Scottish Fossil Code* also exists which gives advice on the full range of activities within fossil collecting, from collecting to storing, labelling, cataloguing, and the eventual transfer of the material to others (Scottish Natural Heritage 2008). The Code strongly encourages owners of private collections to think long-term:

If you are the owner of a significant private collection, thought should be given to its long-term future with instructions left in your will.

If you are the owner of a significant private collection, you cannot usually expect your family or executors to know what to do with your fossil collection in the event of your death. Thought should therefore be given to its long-term future with instructions left in your will. Instructions should be sufficiently flexible to allow for changing situations (for example the policies of particular museums), and for the fact that museums may not accept an entire collection, or may use some of it for exchange or as handling material (see section 4.4). Sometimes it is best to deal with the matter yourself while you are still able to do so. (Scottish Natural Heritage 2008, 46)

Similar to the Code of Conduct for Lyme Regis, the Scottish Code encourages owners to sell the most significant finds to accredited museums:

[Exceptional fossils] are invaluable for the advancement of palaeontological science and ought to be secured within a curated permanent collection within an Accredited museum, where they are available for research purposes. There may be some fossil locations where access and collecting permission are given on condition that scientifically important specimens will in the first instance be offered to museums. Before selling fossils you must ensure that you have secured full legal title to the material. (Scottish Natural Heritage 2008, 51)