



**Museum  
nan Eilean**

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# Guidance on Deposition of Archaeological Assemblages

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Comhairle nan Eilean Siar

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## Introduction

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

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

This policy has been developed to ensure archaeological assemblages deposited at MnE are in an appropriate condition to ensure their stability and access during long-term storage.

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



## **Preparation of Archeological Assemblage for Deposition**

### **Treasure Trove Procedure**

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

Reporting is necessary once post-excavation is complete, however permission must be obtained from TT if archaeological material is to be legally removed from Scotland for any purpose, including post-excavation.

During the TT process, the assemblage remains with the excavator. The excavator is notified by TT once the assemblage has been allocated.

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

### **Arranging Transfer to MnE**

The museum will only accept material that is properly documented, in a stable condition and appropriately packaged.

Any artefactual material requiring conservation to ensure stability during long-term storage must be completed prior to deposition of the assemblage.

Conservation must be carried out by an appropriately qualified professional and is the responsibility of the depositor.

The cost of conserving, preparing and packing the assemblage to museum standard is the responsibility of the depositor.

MnE reserves the right to refuse an assemblage or to charge the depositor a fee to cover staff time and material costs associated with ensuring an assemblage meets museum documentation, conservation and packaging standards.



## Documentation

### Finds Catalogue

An catalogue of artefacts and samples should be sent to the Collections Officer in advance. This should be in the form of an Excel spreadsheet and should contain all relevant information relating to the finds and samples being deposited. This includes, but is not limited to:

- *Find or Sample number*
- *Object title*
- *Object description*
- *Context*
- *Dimensions, if recorded*
- *Material, if recorded*
- *Grid co-ordinates, if recorded*
- *Box number*

### Box Labelling

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

Boxes must be labelled with the following information:

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

### Reports

A digital copy, Pdf or Word document, of the final excavation report and any specialist reports or analysis carried out on any of the artefactual or sample material in the assemblage must be provided in advance.

This can include reports by finds specialists, osteologists and conservators. Specialist reports should include the materials and methods used, in addition to the contact details of the specialist.



## **MnE Store Locations**

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

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

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



## Packing Standards

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

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

Similar materials should be packed together.

Artefacts should be packed individually in appropriately sized polythene polygrip bags or plastic, or card boxes, as appropriate.

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

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

Do not overfill boxes with heavy material.

Place heavier artefacts in the base of the box.

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

## Packing Specific Materials

### Metal Artefacts

Metal artefacts should be packed with silica gel to reduce ongoing corrosion.

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

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

Different types of metals should be packaged separately.

An RH Indicator card should be used if possible.

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

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



## **Ceramics**

Do not overfill bags with ceramic sherds.

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

## **Organic Artefacts**

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

## **Textiles**

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

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

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

## **Labelling**

All packaging of individual artefacts must be clearly labelled with:

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

Packaging should be labelled using a permanent marker.

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

Labels should not be taped to boxes.



## Human Remains

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

Boxes containing human remains must be clearly labelled as such.

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

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

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

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





## Packing Materials

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

Archival packing materials include:

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

Materials that are not acceptable include:

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

## Suppliers

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

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

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

G. Ryder & Co. Ltd. <http://ryderbox.co.uk/>



## Standards

Further information on standards relating to the deposition of archaeological assemblages can be found in the following documents:

Archaeological Archives Forum (2007) *Archaeological Archives: A guide to best practice in creation, compilation, transfer and curation*

[https://www.archaeologists.net/sites/default/files/ifa\\_practice\\_archives.pdf](https://www.archaeologists.net/sites/default/files/ifa_practice_archives.pdf)

Treasure Trove (2016) *Code of Practice*

<https://treasuretrovescotlandorg.files.wordpress.com/2017/01/tt-code-jan-2016.pdf>

Chartered Institute of Field Archaeologists (2014) *Standard and guidance for the creation, compilation, transfer and deposition of archaeological archives*

[https://www.archaeologists.net/sites/default/files/CIFAS&GArchives\\_2.pdf](https://www.archaeologists.net/sites/default/files/CIFAS&GArchives_2.pdf)

Chartered Institute of Field Archaeologists (2014) *Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials*

[https://www.archaeologists.net/sites/default/files/CIfAS&G Finds\\_1.pdf](https://www.archaeologists.net/sites/default/files/CIfAS&G Finds_1.pdf)

Chartered Institute of Field Archaeologists (2014) *Standard and guidance for archaeological excavation*

[https://www.archaeologists.net/sites/default/files/CIfAS&GExcavation\\_1.pdf](https://www.archaeologists.net/sites/default/files/CIfAS&GExcavation_1.pdf)

