



OASIS: an online index to the mass of archaeological grey literature produced as a result of large-scale developer-funded fieldwork.

### OASIS: sharing information across the profession

The Online AccesS to the Index of archaeological investigationS (OASIS) project brings together a number of strategic partners, including the Archaeology Data Service (ADS), English Heritage (Historic Environment Enabling Programme and National Monuments Record), the Archaeological Investigations Project (AIP) of Bournemouth University and, from 2005, Historic Scotland and The Royal Commission for Ancient and Historic Monuments for Scotland.

In line with the government's agenda for e-service delivery on the historic environment, the overall aim of the OASIS project is to provide an online index to the mass of archaeological grey literature produced as a result of the advent of large-scale developer-funded fieldwork. As part of this overall vision, the online OASIS data-capture form has been designed to assist the flow of information from fieldworkers. Its aim is to engage contracting units with local and national data managers in Historic Environment Records (HERs) and National Monument Records (NMRs) and, at the same time, to provide access for professionals and amateurs alike to a wealth of untapped archaeological resources in the form of grey literature reports.

The volume of grey literature reports of small to medium-scale developer-led

archaeological investigations produced annually in the UK is both a problem and an opportunity. Planning laws and associated guidance require that any development likely to impinge on archaeology must be the subject of an archaeological investigation before building can be undertaken. In the 10 years since they came into force, these planning guidelines have given rise to some 28,000 archaeological investigations, at an annual cost of around £35 million, largely funded by commercial developers (Darvill and Russell 2002). The trend is towards growth and the implications for the archaeological profession are profound. For small excavations, surveys, desk-top evaluations and watching briefs, the lack of any formal publication means that it is often difficult to find out about the archaeology of a site at anything but a cursory level. Ironically, it can be harder to obtain a 20-page excavation report than a 10-volume set (Kilbride and Hardman 2004). Without sophisticated mechanisms for capturing this data, like those provided by OASIS, future generations of heritage professionals and the public will be denied access to this invaluable archaeological resource.

OASIS is essentially a large database. Access to enter information into this database on-line is given to those carrying out fieldwork. Subsets of appropriate information can then be made available to various interested bodies. Archaeological units, researchers or amateur interest groups can enter information about their fieldwork, attaching a copy of any grey literature report. The entry is validated by the HER and NMR entered into the appropriate regional and national historic environment records. A copy is provided to ADS for inclusion in its online catalogue, ArchSearch. This enables users to search for the latest information pertaining to a particular site and to follow web links through to the grey literature report. Reports are also being made available directly through the ADS Library, where it is possible to search and retrieve literature based on a variety of different data fields, all based on data originally input into the OASIS system.

#### Catherine Hardman

*Collections Development Manager, Archaeology Data Service*

#### REFERENCES

- Darvill, T and Russell, B 2002. *Archaeology after PPG16: Archaeological Investigations in England 1990-1999*. Bournemouth University and English Heritage
- Kilbride, W and Hardman, C 2004. 'It's the small things that count: digital preservation and small-scale research projects in the UK'. *CSA Newsletter* 18, No. 1