Beyond the Pale: grey literature as a method of publication

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Introduction

• A (very) quick overview of grey literature
• Case studies in archaeological publication
• The potential of an Open Access approach

• A mix of my own PhD research
• Ongoing projects at the ADS:
  • OASIS and the Rural Settlement of Roman Britain
• Note: based on data from England
Rise in work

Data from the Historic England Excavation Index
http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/304/
Publication crisis
Change over time
Consequences/current thought

• Currently in an age of advanced data re-use.

• Post-PPG16: Drowning in Data?

• Unknown unknowns

PPG16 investigations used by the Prehistory of Britain and Ireland project
[Data from doi:10.5284/1028304]
Attitudes to ‘grey literature’

• A problem (for academics at least)
  • Inaccessible
    • Available in hard-copy only
  • Poor quality
    • Lack of interpretation
    • Lack of information (plans)
Attitudes to ‘grey literature’

“...stands for manifold document types produced on all levels of government, academics, business and industry in print and electronic formats that are protected by intellectual property rights, of sufficient quality to be collected and preserved by library holdings or institutional repositories, but not controlled by commercial publishers i.e., where publishing is not the primary activity of the producing body”
Questions

• How much grey literature is there relative to traditional published material (and wholly unpublished works)?
• Why does it exist?
• Is it all bad?
Case studies

North Yorkshire

Staffordshire
Definitive record of excavations + outputs

**Excavation**

**Output**

**Quality**

😊

😢
What’s published?

- Not published
- Part published - monograph
- Part published - journal
- Part published - grey report
- Completely published - national journal
- Completely published - monograph
- Completely published - local journal + serials
- Completely published - grey report

Staffordshire vs North Yorkshire chart showing distribution of publication status.
Fate of planning-led events

All recorded events

- Not published
- Part Published - national journal
- Part published - grey report
- Completely published - organisation serial
- Completely published - national journal
- Completely published - monograph
- Completely published - local journal
- Completely published - grey report

Just excavations of regional or national significance

- Not published
- Part Published - national journal
- Part published - grey report
- Completely published - organisation serial
- Completely published - national journal
- Completely published - monograph
- Completely published - local journal
- Completely published - grey report
Why is there so much grey literature

• Evaluations very rarely have recourse to further publication
• Smaller excavations are often deemed to be adequately served by a (grey) report only
• Personal/organisational – mistakes, disaster etc
• Local curators can have difficulties in enforcing post-excavation recommendations
• Money (or lack of)!
• Not accepted by local journals
Is it a bad thing?

Represents an increase in works reaching some form of written output.
Content of ‘grey literature’

Staffordshire

- plan
- section
- photos
- finds
- archive
• Is it even possible to publish everything in the traditional manner?
• Should we refine what it is to be published?
• Publication by wider synthesis rather than at a site-level?
• Increased (and pragmatic) emphasis on grey literature (including stop calling it that!)
Library of Unpublished Fieldwork Reports

Introduction
The aim of this resource is to make available unpublished fieldwork reports in an easily retrievable fashion. There are currently 38752 reports available and this number is increasing steadily through the OASIS project in England and Scotland.

Through this resource it is possible to list the reports by contractor, using the browse by contractor option and also to do a more advanced search filtering these reports by period, monument/artefact type and location using the search option. These unpublished reports cover archaeological interventions such as watching briefs, excavation reports and building surveys. Desk-based assessments and specialist analysis are also included.

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Resource identifiers
ADS Collection: 1093
Reports released into ADS library via OASIS (England)
In academic practice
In academic practice

• 3479 records from England (1800s to 2014!)
• 1630 records with GL
• 1375 records with only GL
  • 1477 reports
  • 337 reports from OASIS (22%)
In academic practice

Reports used by the Roman Rural Settlement project

- All reports
- Online via OASIS

doi:10.5284/1030449
Final thoughts

• A pragmatic approach: grey literature can be a good thing
• The tip of the iceberg – what about the data behind the reports?