

Glossary

A

Access Trench: a ditch dug around the boundaries of the feature of interest.

Admissible: acceptable as evidence in a court of law.

Arbitrary Excavation Method: a method whereby the site is divided into square or rectangular excavation units. The deposits contained within a unit are removed in arbitrarily defined levels, usually 5cm or 10cm in depth.

Archaeological Experience: knowledge and skill gained through participating in archaeological investigations.

Archaeological Feature: a non-portable artefact of past human activity.

Archaeological Qualification: the successful completion of a course or examination related to the discipline of archaeology.

Archaeological Site: a defined area of land that contains evidence of past human activity.

Archaeological Site Report: a document that contains the results of an archaeological investigation.

Archaeologist: an individual who uses established archaeological methods and theories to excavate, record, interpret and understand past human activity.

Archaeology: the study of the human past through the excavation, collection and recording of physical remains of human activity present at archaeological sites.

Artefact: any object that has been created or modified by a human being.

B

Baulk: an unexcavated wall of archaeological deposits left standing between two or more trenches.

Bias: an inclination or prejudice for or against a particular method, theory or result.

Body: the entire physical structure of a human being or animal.

Box Excavation Method: a method whereby an archaeological site is divided into square or rectangular trenches with baulks left standing between them.

C

Chronology: the organisation of events into the order of their occurrence.

Civil Court Proceedings: deal with non-criminal cases.

Context/Stratigraphic Unit: the smallest identifiable unit of stratification. A context can be classified as a positive record, which is created by the placement of material, or a negative record, which is created by the removal of material.

Contextual Information: is information that relates to the physical location and association of an artefact, ecofact, deposit, fill or feature to other such evidence forms within the archaeological site.

Credibility: the quality of being trusted and believable.

Criminal Court Proceedings: deal with criminal cases.

Cut: formed as a result of the removal of material.

D

Deposit/Layer/Fill: formed as a result of the placement of material.

Deposition: a process whereby material is moved from its point of origin and is placed elsewhere.

Demirant: division of an object into two halves.

Demirant Excavation Method: a method whereby an archaeological feature is divided into two halves, each of which are excavated separately.

E

Ecofacts: are non-artefactual organic or environmental materials that have been used by humans.

Evidence: information, documents, or objects that will be used to establish facts during court proceedings.

Excavation: a process whereby layers/deposits/fills are removed in order to recover the physical remains of the human past.

Excavation Manual/Guideline: a set of instructions that inform an archaeologist of how to excavate and record an archaeological site.

Expert Witness: an individual who by virtue of education, experience, training or skill is deemed to have gained a sufficient level of knowledge, in a particular field, to render an opinion about a fact in issue during legal proceedings.

F

Field Archaeology: is a sub-discipline of archaeology that focuses on archaeological fieldwork, including: excavation, recording, interpretation and publication of archaeological site reports.

Fill: a deposit that is contained within an archaeological feature.

Forensic: used in a court of law.

Forensic Archaeologist: an individual who has received training in archaeology, biological anthropology and crime scene investigation techniques, who utilises this training to assist with forensic and humanitarian investigations, and mass disaster recovery operations.

Forensic Archaeology: is a sub-discipline of archaeology that applies archaeological principles and methods to recover evidence for forensic and humanitarian investigations, and mass disaster recovery operations.

Forensic Platform: a thin rectangular sheet of rigid metal or plastic that is used to support human remains as they are removed from their burial environment.

Formation Process: a term used to describe the way in which archaeological sites and their associated layers/deposits/fills were created and altered by the activities of humans, animals, natural and environmental phenomena, up until the point of their excavation.

G

Geotaphonomic Features: are non-portable artefacts that have been formed as a result of the interment of buried evidence. Such features are classified as belonging to one of the following six categories: stratification, tool marks, bioturbation, sedimentation, compression/depression and internal compaction.

Gezer Method: a method whereby an archaeological site is divided into sixteen 3m square excavation units or 12m x 15m rectangular excavation units in order to form a trench, once one trench has been fully excavated another is started next to it.

Grave: a hole that has been purposefully dug into the ground in order to receive human remains.

Grave Block: is created by excavating around the circumference of a grave whilst leaving the grave structure intact. This results in the grave being left as a standing block of soil that can be undercut and transported away from the excavation site.

Grave Cut/Grave Boundary: is the border between the grave and the undisturbed soil surrounding it.

H

Human Remains: the remnants of a human being's entire physical structure after death.

I

Inadmissible: not acceptable as evidence in a court of law.

In Situ: when artefacts are recovered from the location in which they were originally deposited.

Interface: the point at which two deposits/fills/features meet.

Interpretation: the point at which the results of an archaeological investigation are analysed in order to explain their meaning.

M

Mass Grave: a grave which contains the remains of more than one individual.

Material Culture: a term used to refer to objects that have been created by human beings.

Multi-Context Recording: a process in which multiple contexts are recorded simultaneously.

N

Narrative: a written or oral account of the sequence of events that resulted in the creation of an archaeological feature or site.

Negative Record: results from the removal of material and includes features such as: pits, graves and ditches.

O

Out Of Situ: when artefacts are not recovered from the location in which they were originally deposited.

P

Positive Record: results from the placement of material and includes such things as: structures, deposits/layers and fills.

Pre-determined Strata Recording: a process that uses a pre-determined list of strata and feature codes in order to record any stratum or feature uncovered during an archaeological investigation. *Example: A pit feature is allocated the code P. If, during the process of excavation a pit is discovered it will be referred to as P.*

Q

Quadrant: division of an object into four parts.

Quadrant Excavation Method: a method whereby an archaeological feature is divided into four parts, each of which are excavated separately.

R

Recording System: is a set of established procedures designed to document the results of an archaeological investigation.

S

Schnitt Excavation Method: a method whereby the site is divided into a series of rectangular excavation units. These units are then excavated in a series of pre-defined spits, usually 5cm or 10cm in depth.

Single Context Recording: a process in which each context is exposed and planned in isolation.

Single Grave: a grave that contains the remains of one individual.

Skeletal Remains: the remnants of a human being's skeleton after death.

Soil Pedestal: a raised platform of soil that is left below an object as the excavation proceeds.

Stratigraphic Excavation Method: a method whereby contexts are defined and removed in isolation, in the reverse order of their deposition.

Stratigraphic Relationship: refers to the relationship that one context has with another within the stratigraphic sequence.

Stratigraphic Sequence: refers to the order in which contexts were created over the course of time.

Stratigraphy: is the overall study and validation of archaeological stratification; the process by which layers/deposits are continually laid down over time in a series of sequential layers one on top of another as a result of human activities and/or natural phenomena. This process of archaeological stratification is governed by the following principles:

Principle Of Superposition: in a series of layers, as originally created, the upper units of stratification are younger and the lower older, as each must have been deposited on, or created as a result of the removal of, a pre-existing mass of archaeological stratification (Harris 1989).

Principle Of Original Horizontality: any layer deposited in an unconsolidated form will tend towards a horizontal position; strata found with tilted surfaces were originally deposited that way, or lie in conformity with the contours of a pre-existing basin of deposition (Harris 1989).

Principle Of Original Continuity: an archaeological layer as originally laid down, will be bounded by a basin of deposition or will thin down to a feather edge. If any edge of the layer is exposed in vertical view, part of its original context must have been removed by excavation or erosion and its continuity must be sought or absence explained (Harris 1979).

Principle Of Stratigraphical Succession: any unit of archaeological stratification takes its place in the stratigraphic sequence of a site from its position between the lowest of all units which lie above it and the uppermost of all those units which lie below it and with which it has physical contact (Harris 1979).

Principle Of Intercutting: if a feature or a layer/deposit/fill is found to cut into, or across, another layer/deposit/fill it must be more recent (Darvill 2008).

Principle Of Incorporation: all artefactual and ecofactual material found to be contained within a layer/deposit/fill must be the same age or older than the formation of that layer (Darvill 2008).

Principle Of Correlation: relationships can be inferred between layers that exhibit the same characteristics, contain the same range of artefactual and ecofactual material, and occupy comparable stratigraphic positions within related stratigraphic sequences (Darvill 2008).

U

Undercutting: the deliberate removal of soil from underneath the feature of interest.

Unit Level Recording: a process in which each horizontal surface, revealed by the removal of a level or spit, is planned.