

# PAS Conservation contract 2005 – 2006 (MLA contract ID 1869 August 10<sup>th</sup> 2004)

## Final Report

1.0 As a result of the concerns expressed by delegates at the UKIC/PAS 'Whose Find Is It Anyway?' conference in 2003, the Portable Antiquities Scheme, through the MLA, and in collaboration with ICON/AG, formed a 12 month contract to tackle some these conservation issues. The contract was let to the York Archaeological Trust Conservation Department, the contract (with agreed extension) running from September 2004 to March 2006.

2.0 The agreed tasks, and what was finally achieved, were:

- Develop guidance on best conservation practice. Research and publish a broad-based series of Conservation Advice Notes to establish 'best practise' for metal-detected finds (Booklet published, with associated pages on PAS website, plus publication in 'Treasure Hunting')
- Provide support and training for FLOs, with instruction and resources for advising detectorists on conservation issues (Two major training sessions were held, and various teaching resources and demo materials developed and distributed to FLOs)
- Deliver training sessions to detectorist and other amateur archaeology groups around the country (Ten delivered nationwide)
- Establish contacts between FLOs and conservation labs in the regions, both to provide 'quick response' advice, and also to provide X-ray and other occasional investigative or analytical services (FLOs in all six major areas 'hooked up' with local conservators prepared to act as links for advice and services)
- Provide specific conservation advice to PAS and FLOs on particular cases, e.g. lifting fragile items in the field) as they arise. (At least 25 enquiries logged for advice on specific finds and conservation problems, also requests for advice on behalf of MDs, text and images for regional newsletters etc)

Additionally, we undertook the following tasks:

- Look at feasibility providing conservation services direct to MDs (A number of conservators were identified prepared to work directly for MDs, and their details disseminated)
- Develop conservation policy within the PAS on conservation related issues, and provide advice on specific finds and issues as they arose. (This was achieved, the 'policy' being the type and level of advice

included in the 'Advice Notes' and the further recommendations in this report)

- Recommend conservation policy and action for the next and subsequent periods (see below)

3.0 A number of spin-offs also resulted from the work, mainly resulting from the publication of the guidelines, entitled 'Conservation Advice Notes' which have found uses within the archaeological community beyond what was originally intended. Community archaeology and local history groups are finding the booklet (and its web-based equivalent) a useful compliment to other standard works, such as 'First Aid for Finds'. The opportunity was also there to disseminate information about where to acquire conservation materials and equipment (both for FLOs and MDs), and also to identify qualified conservators who are willing to undertake work directly for MDs.

4.0 Feedback received from FLOs indicate that the training sessions, Advice Notes booklet and other resources have made a real difference to their own personal understanding of conservation issues, and given them the information to advise MDs correctly and with confidence.

5.0 The YAT Conservators and the two independent conservators, Julia Park and Dana Goodburn-Brown who took on some of the MD training workload, found that the training sessions were very well received, and feedback was very positive, with requests for 'more of the same'. Perceptions, we felt, are being changed, and we were impressed by the level of knowledge and dedication to the hobby displayed by many who attended the training sessions, and how willing they were to take advice and (we hope) act on it. We were very aware, though, that the MDs we did meet were just the 'tip of the iceberg' and that only by mounting more sessions at different times and in different places, can we get through to more people.

6.0 Now the contract has been completed, it would be a good idea to take stock of what has been achieved. There is a sense that this was just the beginning of a continuing process and that plans need now to be made to keep up the pressure and not to lose momentum.

7.0 Recommendation for the future include maintaining the levels of training for FLOs and awareness-raising activities for MDs. The content of these sessions is likely to develop and change in response to changes in the Portable Antiquities Scheme methodology. It is recommended, for instance, that FLOs make better use of local X-ray facilities, and are encouraged to use low-power microscopes when examining artefacts. It will also be important to monitor

closely the uses, to which the PAS database is put for research purposes, and modify and adapt the levels of conservation input at the recording stage so that the best is made of the one-off opportunity to examine and record metal-detected finds.

8.0 There is now a growing feeling amongst conservators that conservation advice via the PAS should generally be enabling and not restrictive, but there are still differing views (some strongly held) as to the level to which MDs should be empowered to undertake their own objects cleaning. There is certainly a strong presumption that MDs should be actively discouraged from undertaking any invasive action on objects which could be archaeologically sensitive, or which falls within the remit of the Treasure Act. The PAS may, anyway, feel that it is beyond its remit to advise MDs on how best to clean their objects, but there is a sense in which this is the next logical step to take having started the advisory process on conservation matters. Good practical advice on simple cleaning techniques and materials could be given in print or, better, via training videos (CD or web downloads), but there is a feeling that this could be giving out mixed signals if such information were provided under the aegis of the PAS. There may be other for a or mechanisms through which such information and training could be provided and this is an area that clearly needs further thought and discussion.. But without doubt such information and training could save many potentially important artefacts for inappropriate and damaging treatments that we are now all too familiar with.

9.0 Our recommendations for the next period include:

- a) Further training for FLOs in e.g. microscopy and object investigation procedures. Update their conservation advice. Training for new FLOs.
- b) Greater FLO use of regional conservator contacts for e.g. radiography and site retrieval, also e.g. authentication where find-site report accuracy may be in doubt.
- c) Continue training sessions for MDs & Community. Arch. Groups in good conservation practice and advice on sources of materials and services. This could be run on a much larger scale than currently, with separate funding.
- d) Update PAS website, write articles on conservation issues for MD journals
- e) Secure funding for regional conservation service providers to PAS
- f) Regularise use of BM & NMGW conservators and resources for preparing 'treasure' material for the Treasure Valuation Committee

10.0 Conclusion:

There is obviously both a perceived and a real need to for continuing conservation input into the Portable Antiquities Scheme. Apart from the more obvious and immediate benefits of conservator input into the PAS, there are a variety of potential spin-offs that might be developed in the future. These could include greater conservator input into Community Archaeology programmes and possible training opportunities for young conservators.

The PAS could have a very positive effect in supporting the positions of regional museum-based conservators through maintaining strong links between FLOs and their local conservators.

It might now be a good time for members of the PAS management and the Archaeology Group of ICON to meet and decide where to go from here.

#### 11.0 Acknowledgments:

Our work was made very considerably easier, and more enjoyable, by the assistance and generosity of our many contacts within the PAS, the conservation profession and the metal-detecting community. We would particularly like to thank the members of our original 'contact group' who provided such good advice; the PAS Finds Liaison Officers who set up the MD training sessions, and members of the ICON Archaeology Group for their support and advice.

Jim Spriggs

Julie Jones

Erica Paterson York Archaeological Trust

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