

A Level

Archaeology

ARCH2 Archaeological Skills and Methods
Report on the Examination

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ARCH 2: Archaeological Skills and Methods

General Comments

This paper was accessible to most students; the majority were able to provide sensible, focussed and relevant responses. The site of the Swan shipwreck allowed a range of topics to be tested, only one question of which actually requiring an in-depth knowledge of underwater archaeology. As in previous years, where sources were used well in Section A, they were properly integrated into the answers rather than name checked. Unfortunately, as in previous years, there was still a significant minority of students of all abilities who did not use the sources at all. There is an increasing tendency to include case studies which would have been better included in Section B, in Section A. Section B type case studies are not necessary in Section A and waste the time of students in the exam. The focus should be on the sources in this paper and how they relate to the theory of archaeology, rather than specific sites. Schools and colleges are also reminded that introductions and conclusions are not necessary in Section A.

The questions in Section B tested the student's broader understanding of a range of familiar topics. The best students in this section read the question carefully and referred to case study material. However, a significant minority wrote a long description of the techniques with little explanation or wrote generic responses with no exemplification. A number of good answers were limited to level 3 marks due to the lack of an introduction or conclusion.

There was also a significant minority of students who had mis-numbered questions in the answer booklets, and some ignored the rubric in Section B and answered more than one question. There was some confusion between spellings such as affect and effect, site and sight, and erode and corrode. Schools and colleges are reminded that quality of written communication is assessed in Section B, and poor spelling can affect the mark that students achieve.

Section A

01 This topic was a familiar one for students, although in a new context. Most students could mention relevant sources, although fewer could explain their relevance as the question required for the higher marks. Although not necessary for full marks, it was good to see that a few students mentioned sources specific to maritime archaeology, e.g. Lloyds of London insurance records, admiralty charts and RNLI journals.

02 This question required students to have a reasonable knowledge of the specific techniques of excavation (i.e. getting material out of the sediment) and what archaeologists could do to remove the spoil and mitigate the visibility problems. It was encouraging to find that most students had some knowledge on the specifics of underwater archaeology. However, many students misread the question and discussed underwater excavation more generally, including finds recovery techniques and post excavation conservation, possibly answering the question they hoped for, rather than the one set. Many could discuss the use of the diver's hand to gently sweep away silt, and some could discuss the airlift although they generally called it the underwater vacuum. Often where the airlift was named, it was described as a lifting device for artefacts. Some mentioned the water dredge and water lance. Cofferdams and experimental 'sea curtains' were usually well explained where mentioned.

- 03** It was gratifying to see that this topic is being taught very well in most schools and colleges. Students could discuss a wide variety of information that could be derived from human bones, often in impressive detail. However, many students missed the instruction 'such as those illustrated' in the question and subsequently wrote generic answers. There was some confusion between 'gender' (a social construct) and 'sex' (a biological fact and discernible from the bones). As this will be relevant in ARCH3 if students study theme one, students are advised to ensure that they know the difference. Isotopic analysis was frequently mentioned and was often well explained. Sometimes there was confusion over the different isotopes and what they could tell archaeologists (Carbon, Nitrogen and Sulphur for diet, Strontium and Oxygen for place of origin, and Carbon for dating).
- 04** Students generally responded well to this question, although some found it difficult. Most could identify at least one relevant issue, but often the statement was not developed any further.
- 05** Students were very good at producing generic answers about why archaeologists would produce photographs and drawings, but were not as good at discussing specifically why *both* were produced for this wooden artefact. Level 1 answers tended to be descriptive, whilst few were able to both explain and make good reference to the sources. Some students stated that a drawing could not include a scale. Some students also thought that the drawing was a reconstruction drawing.
- 06** Students were generally able to discuss anaerobic conditions and why organic material would be preserved. However, some students seemed to think that it was the oxygen that caused the decay, rather than bacteria. There were also a variety of spellings for anaerobic and many accounts of archaeological sites, rather than a clear focus on the question. A surprising number of students misunderstood the question and discussed what the environmental remains could be used for or how they can be preserved in the lab.
- 07** The phrasing of the question clearly prohibited students from talking about dating techniques, so it was disappointing to see a number of students ignore this, and a few even discussed the use of thermoluminescence on metal. Answers relating to the wooden artefact were generally good and many students were able to describe the post excavation conservation processes in detail, both in terms of active and passive conservation techniques. This was good, if not a little surprising given that conservation is not on the specification. Where it appeared it was credited, but it was possible to score full marks on this question with no mention of conservation techniques at all. Cleaning and recording were often mentioned, but were rarely discussed in sufficient detail for good marks. Discussion of visual analysis techniques generally focussed on X-ray and use-wear analysis. There was some misunderstanding of the nature of concretions, with a number of students thinking that it was actually concrete.
- 08** This question was generally well answered, although there were a few students who did not seem to understand the question at all. Even amongst those that did understand the question, there was some confusion as to what C-transforms actually were, some assuming that they were related to society in some way or to Historic Scotland's protection of the wreck site. Those who did understand the thrust of this question were able to offer a good description and explanation of c and n transforms, although natural transforms were generally better dealt with. A number of students missed out on marks because they did not clearly identify which transforms were which.

Section B

There seemed to be a slight increase in students this year who had not left sufficient time to complete both sections A and B. The amount of time that students have per mark equates to about a minute, so plenty of exam practice is important for student success. Good responses in this section used a variety of case studies, going beyond just name checking, whereas generic responses with no case studies could not achieve more than level three. There was a noticeable increase in students talking about sites where methods *could* have been used, especially in question 9. Although students get credit for knowing about the application of the technique, they cannot achieve more than level 3 marks by following this strategy. Good exemplification from real sites is the way to gain access to the higher levels in this section. It would be useful for teachers to point out to students that the examiners will check the validity of the case studies used. Students must ensure that they give the full name of the site so that the site to which they are referring is clear, allowing them to gain the credit they deserve. A number of students discussed Boxgrove in question 9 and did not receive credit as it was not clear whether they were referring to the quarry with the remains of *Homo heidelbergensis*, (the famous site, but where geophysics was not carried out) or Boxgrove Priory (the much less well known site where some geophysics had been carried out). Where the nature of the answer indicated that they were talking about a site with the remains of structures, some credit was given.

09 This was by far the most popular question and many students were able to outline what the different methods would identify and could comment on differences between them and the advantages and disadvantages of a particular technique. The explanations of the principles underlying each method varied from detailed and lucid to thin and very confused. Some students stated that caesium vapour magnetometry detects wood (it detects the magnetite in the remains of the bacteria that had consumed the wood) or that burning *creates* iron oxides. There was also a significant minority of students who confused resistivity and ground penetrating radar.

Some students discussed geophysics at Inchtuthil Roman fort and/or Town Farm Quarry. It is important to note that whilst quarrying past papers for information is fine, what the question actually asked was what techniques **could** have been carried out. It did not state that any particular technique **was** carried out.

A number of students appeared to respond to the word 'methods' on the question without actually noticing the geophysics aspect to the question. These students discussed a variety of irrelevant techniques such as field walking, geochemical analysis, landscape survey, LiDAR and aerial photography as either their whole answer or a part of it. Some essay planning activities using past papers might help to clarify student understanding for both students and teachers.

10 This question was the most poorly answered of the three Section B options. Many students failed to achieve more than 10 marks. Some students were able to discuss a range of on site recording methods in detail, but the majority of answers were vague, lacked case studies and/or discussed off site methods. Few students appeared to know what a context sheet was, or what might be on one. Few students were able to discuss sections and plans, and some even discussed aerial photography. There was a lack of specific technical vocabulary, and the focus of many responses was on the recording of artefacts rather than features, which missed the point of the question.

11 This was the least popular Section B question, but many of those who answered it had been well prepared for it. There were some excellent answers to this question, from students who clearly knew this material very well. There were some very good discussions of thermoluminescence dating, although ‘typology’ still appeared occasionally as ‘typography’. There was confusion among some students regarding organic and inorganic techniques, carbon dating being the most common. Fluorine, Uranium and Nitrogen dating appeared numerous times in students’ answers. This was unfortunate as it is carried out on bone and is therefore also organic and irrelevant. Some students referenced techniques that could be carried out on inorganic materials, e.g. use-wear, but did not then develop their answers to discuss how this contributed to dating.

Schools and colleges are advised to note that AQA are currently still accepting PPG16 for these responses because changes in legislation and guidance are not yet reflected in most textbooks, but we are also crediting more up to date knowledge. From 2015 we will expect knowledge (at an appropriate level) of the existence of the National Planning Policy Framework, and will no longer credit PPG16 as knowledge of current practice. PPG16 may still be relevant in terms of the development of archaeology and planning policy and also particular past examples.

There is a really clear outline of the new NPPF including a comparison with PPS5 at:

<http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/professional/advice/government-planning-policy/national-planning-policy-framework/>

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.

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