



**General Certificate of Education**

**Archaeology 1011**  
*Specification*

**Unit ARCH2**

**Report on the Examination**  
*2010 examination – June series*

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Set and published by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance.

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# Unit ARCH2

## Archaeological Skills and Methods

### General Comments

This paper was accessible to most candidates, with the majority able to provide sensible, focused and relevant responses. The use of sources was again much better, with the emphasis being more on *use* rather than simply *name-checking*; it is clear that this message is getting through to centres. The chosen site permitted a range of questions on such central themes as documentary sources, excavation, geophysical survey and dating methods, with Section B testing the candidate's broader understanding of familiar topics. In Section B the best candidates revealed a familiarity with archaeological material, and were able to refer both to appropriate other sites they had studied as well as the case study material from Section A in their responses. However some candidates wrote generic responses, free of any case study material.

### Section A

#### Question 1

This was a fairly familiar question which the majority of candidates handled well. It was, however, surprising that a number of centres did not seem to have taught about the most obvious first port of reference, the HER (or SMR). There was clear evidence that candidates knew the uses and limitations of a variety of documentary sources. Better responses were able to raise their responses beyond "old maps" and provide named examples such as Tithe Maps. The best responses of all were also able to select their choice of maps appropriately relating them to the site of Town Farm Quarry, considering its age and location. On a lighter note, our friend the "Doomsday Book" made its annual appearance!

#### Question 2

In the majority of cases this question was answered quite well. Candidates were well versed in the most common forms of geophysical survey: resistivity, magnetometers & GPR, and were able to describe how these worked. The vast majority were also able to locate from the sources where they would be most useful, with the very best answers also considering how the precise nature of the individual features and site conditions might not be equally ideal for all of the methods. However, a significant minority simply gave generic answers, and another significant minority who did not know which methodologies discovered which types of anomaly.

#### Question 3

The best responses to this question really took on board the challenges of excavation and recording in wet and muddy conditions, with the precise challenge of the excavation, the delicate nature of the finds, the visibility and the unpleasant conditions all considered. Furthermore, this was illustrated using the sources. However, a number of candidates did not consider recording at all, and another significant minority that concentrated on post excavation techniques such as the spraying of wood with PEG. This highlights the need to carefully read

the question and to clearly distinguish between what takes place on site and post-excavation techniques.

#### **Question 4**

This question received a mixed response, with a number of candidates providing excellent answers on wet sieving and/or flotation (often spelled "floatation!") or the extraction of samples via augering, with only the very best considering both. It was disappointing that a number of candidates interpreted the term "extracted evidence" as meaning "made interpretations from", and then went on to discuss the analysis of pollen, etc.

#### **Question 5**

This was done well. Most candidates were able to recognise the sequence and describe it using the context numbers. The quality of responses here seemed to reflect whether or not the skill of interpreting section drawings is taught in some centres.

#### **Question 6**

This proved to be a very accessible question. Candidates considered a variety of factors such as carpentry skills, environment, tree species, etc and clearly related these to the drawings. However, apart from the obviously generic responses, there were a number of candidates who had not considered the artefacts in the context of the whole feature, and came up with some very strange interpretations.

#### **Question 7**

This was probably the question that caused the most problems. Candidates demonstrated an awareness of dendrochronology, together with its uses and limitations (which was not required), but few were able to outline the process by which the dates were arrived at (bar "counting rings") and did not consider the importance of a ring sequence of at least 50 rings, or the importance of the presence of sapwood. Few candidates made any use of the diagram.

## Section B

This year it was very pleasing to note that the vast majority of candidates are now leaving sufficient time to complete this section properly, and it is interesting to note that a number of candidates (usually within specific centres) attempted it first. Furthermore, the use of relevant examples was far more prevalent this year than last, reflecting some interesting fieldwork opportunities and an extensive DVD collection in many centres!

### Question 8

Candidates that attempted this question had clearly studied some interesting and relevant case studies such as the Mary Rose and Oetzi the Iceman, which they were able to discuss in some depth and detail. Many provided a great deal of relevant information about the techniques, describing precisely how they work, and why. Where responses tended to fall down was in the form of imbalance, with a number of answers giving very little consideration of on-site methods.

### Question 9

As with Question 8, candidates that attempted this question had also studied some interesting and relevant case studies such as Danebury and Oetzi the Iceman, which they were able to discuss in some depth. Many provided a great deal of relevant detail about the types of evidence and the interpretations that can be drawn from it. Where responses tended to fall down was in two main areas: one was imbalance, with a number of answers giving consideration to *either* faunal *or* floral evidence; the other was the fact that a number of candidates wasted time writing about macro-faunal evidence; especially the “rhino butchery site” at Boxgrove.

### Question 10

This proved very popular, with fieldwalking being a popular and quite straightforward topic. Responses were very strong on the organisation and execution of a fieldwalking project, with the use of metal detectors and walkovers on other surfaces also considered in some cases. Disappointingly however, a significant number of candidates provided wholly generic responses to this question, with no references to examples at all. Obvious choices would have been the Shapwick Project and any fieldwork opportunities that the candidates may have had an opportunity to enter into themselves.

In summary, it is pleasing to observe that most centres continue to act upon advice from previous examiner’s reports by using well-chosen DVDs, excavation reports and other original archaeological material to support learning in the classroom. Few centres now seem to be teaching this unit using a primarily theoretical approach and this has resulted in far fewer generic responses. The importance of using the sources needs to be relentlessly stressed, as does the need to read the questions carefully so that if candidates are asked ‘how archaeologists organise **and** carry out...’, both parts are answered. Furthermore, in Section B, the use of examples needs to be stressed as an essential component in any response.

## Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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