

OPEN EXETER PROJECT



PhD Research and Copyright: A Personal Experience

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I began my PhD in Archaeology at the University of Exeter in September 2009 and, probably similar to most doctoral researchers, thought little about the final submission of my thesis at this very early stage. As my thesis progressed, it became clear that my research, which looks at Anglo-Saxon settlements and landscapes, requires a significant level of illustration. Landscape archaeology is very much a spatial study, where the geographical location of sites and findspots has a significant impact on the way in which the material is interpreted. As a consequence, my thesis contains numerous maps and plans, as well as illustrations.

Throughout my research I had never properly read-up on copyright law but was under the understanding that as my thesis would not be a fully published volume, I could reproduce information including illustrations as long as it was properly referenced. It was only in the Spring of 2012, well into my third year of study, that my supervisor made me aware of the changing implications of copyright due to the introduction of Open Access. More information on Open Access can be found here (<http://as.exeter.ac.uk/library/resources/openaccess/>), but the basic aim of the approach is to create an immediate and permanent online resource of research data which is readily and freely available for anyone.

The body which has funded my research, the AHRC, states in its guidance to applicants that '*Ideas and knowledge derived from publicly-funded research must be made available and accessible for public use, interrogation and scrutiny, as widely, rapidly and effectively as practicable*'. In addition, the University of Exeter has made it mandatory that any MPhil, MbyRes and PhD thesis is uploaded to the Exeter Research and Institutional Content (ERIC) archive upon completion¹. Once my

¹ <http://as.exeter.ac.uk/library/resources/openaccess/e-theses/>

thesis is submitted it will therefore become an Open Access document and crucially, will be a published piece of work.

The new environment created by Open Access means that the numerous graphics (totalling nearly one hundred) that I have used from existing research require permission from the author and/or the publisher. On learning this news, I was immediately aware that gaining permission for all of the graphics used would not be possible before my desired submission date of September/October this year. In addition to the potential cost of obtaining copyright to illustrations, based on my own personal experience, receiving written consent is a notoriously protracted and time-consuming practice. Attempting to gain written copyright permission for two graphics in an article that previously published this year took around three months, including various phone calls, emails, etc.

I have therefore been left with a couple of options of how to progress. Firstly, it is possible to place a temporary embargo on publication through ERIC, either of 6 months or 18 months, during which I could hope to obtain the appropriate copyright permissions so that the thesis could be published fully. This appears the most attractive approach, as the other option would be the removal of all the graphics for which I do not have permission, which would significantly impact the value of the research. In hindsight, I would have ideally begun to obtain copyrights as soon as mandatory access had come into effect, or alternatively redrawn the relevant images therefore negating the need for permission. What is perhaps most worrying is that I was only made aware of the changing implications of copyright that Open Access has created as my supervisor is Dean of Postgraduate Study and was present in a meeting when this material was discussed. Open Access and all of its implications is clearly an area that requires more comprehensive exposure to all students and researchers, so that people do not share my experience or, worse still, get themselves into deeper trouble for publishing material for which they do not have the rights.

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