

Chapter 2

Life in the Archaeological Marketplace

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The Topic Our understanding of your backgrounds is that you have both worked in multiple roles in different places. So, we would like you both to discuss your experiences with different projects and generally describe what works and what does not. In your experiences, what aspects of archaeological work tend to go smoothly and where do problems come up? Who decides how archaeological work is designed and how much flexibility is there in cost, time frame, and approach? Are archaeologists the primary decision-makers, or do clients or other administrators also have lead roles? Are there situations where you have known –“if I was in charge I would do this differently/better?” If you are able to compare/contrast large-scale vs. small-scale projects, that would be great.

The Realities of Life as a Freelance Archaeologist: Chris Cumberpatch

Introduction

Since 1991 when I completed a Ph.D. on the production and circulation of late Iron Age pottery in central Europe, I have worked as a self-employed finds specialist based in Sheffield in northern England. My work has been in three main areas. The first and principal area has been in the preparation of reports on pottery assemblages from sites excavated in northeastern England by commercial archaeological units. This has involved mainly medieval, postmedieval, and later assemblages although

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in recent years I have taken on more work on later prehistoric material as older colleagues have retired from the field.

A minor but interesting area of work has been in the preparation of preplanning application “desktop” assessments. These documents, which usually form part of a broader environmental impact assessment, are designed to enable a developer to prepare a statement pertaining to the archaeological implications of proposed work on a site and are required as part of the planning process set out in a quasi-legal guidance note Planning Policy Guidance Note No. 16 (1990), better known simply as PPG 16 [since replaced by Planning Policy Statement No. 5 (PPS 5): Planning and the Historic Environment, 2010]. Archaeological curators, who work within the planning system, use the information in these documents to prepare briefs that will structure subsequent archaeological investigation on a given site.

Abroad I have worked as a finds manager on projects in Lebanon, Syria, and Turkey, dealing with the processing and preliminary recording of finds of all types and the creation of documented archives which can later be used by specialists to gain access to complete or part assemblages during the reporting stage of the projects.

In Syria and Lebanon I dealt with sites dating to the later Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine and Islamic periods. The Lebanese experience resulted in a number of rather speculative papers (Cumberpatch 1996, 1998, 2000a) and on a co-authored conference paper dealing with some of the problems encountered in bringing modern British methods to bear on sites in the Middle East (Cumberpatch and Thorpe 2003).

In recent years, I have worked less abroad, in part because of the enormous increase in the volume of work in Britain which resulted from the housing boom which ended only with the recession of 2008–2009 and in part because of my belief that air travel represents a major contributory factor in climate change and should thus be avoided unless absolutely necessary.

Alongside the housing and retail boom and the associated expansion of commercial archaeology there has been a growth in the funding of local archaeological and history societies through the funds raised by the National Lottery. Local societies have undertaken parish and area surveys that have included excavation and field survey. The best of these have involved close co-operation between professional archaeologists and the amateur and voluntary sectors. My involvement with such groups has been both stimulating as well as archaeologically productive.

Between 2003 and 2008 I served as Secretary of RESCUE – The British Archaeological Trust, an unpaid position within an organization funded only by its membership and sales of publications that seeks to campaign actively for the interests of archaeology in the UK and abroad. This enabled me to comment directly on government and quasi-governmental initiatives pertaining to the historic environment. These have included the reshaping of English Heritage by the Labour Government (Jowell 2001, 2004, 2005, English Heritage 2000) and interventions by politicians (noted below) which have convinced me that culpable ignorance and a willful refusal to listen to informed opinion are the chief characteristics of government ministers, or at least those appointed to positions within the Department of Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) under whose auspices archaeology and the historic environment fall.

Throughout the 1990s, together with my colleague Paul Blinkhorn, I wrote and published a number of papers which sought to examine the organization of archaeology in England following the introduction of PPG16 and to produce a critique of what we see as the negative aspects of the commercialization of archaeology (Blinkhorn and Cumberpatch 1998, 1999, 2008, Cumberpatch 2000b, Cumberpatch and Blinkhorn 2001). Some of the points made in these papers will be discussed below but briefly, my position is that while it is entirely right that those who profit from the destruction of archaeological assets and resources should pay for the steps that must be taken to mitigate the effects of their behavior, the system as it currently exists gives far too much power to the developers (and their hired consultants) to decide the scope and scale of the archaeological interventions undertaken under PPG 16. The lack of a deeply embedded research culture within both the curatorial and contractual archaeology sectors and the unexamined dominance of the principal of preservation in situ means that there is a tendency to opt for minimal intervention, even when this means that the information obtained by excavation and subsequent analysis is of limited value in terms of addressing broader research-orientated questions.

Commercial archaeology currently accounts for the majority of excavations and surveys undertaken in the UK and while the number of projects has been dramatically reduced since the onset of the recession, it seems likely that should a recovery take place (as predicted by economists and politicians) then in a few years time this situation will be back to something approaching that of the later 1990s and the period up to 2008.

The following notes are based closely on the brief given for this paper and I have chosen to interpret this as a “question and answer” format in an effort to provide an alternative perspective to the one presented in earlier papers. I shall not deal here with the foreign projects mentioned above but will limit myself to my work in the UK. I am unable to cite my informants by name and have chosen not to identify specific projects, other than in those cases where these references are positive. The reasons will, I think, be obvious to anyone who has worked in commercial archaeology, at least in the UK. The situation I describe is one known to me from my day-to-day work and from my conversations with colleagues throughout the country. There are honorable exceptions to many of the points I have made in this paper and there are many people who are striving within their own situation to make things better but they seem to be fewer by the day while the iron grip of the audit culture, enacted by managers and consultants grows ever stronger.

Project Experience: What Works? What Does Not?

I have been involved with few projects that have failed entirely to produce an outcome and some of those that have are still officially “active” even if it is hard at present to see how their completion will ever be funded other than by unpaid work by myself and others.

The conduct of archaeological excavation and survey was, in principal, governed by a document entitled *Management of Archaeological Projects II*, better known by its acronym, MAP II (English Heritage 1991). This has recently been superseded by a similar document known as MORPHE, but the projects I shall be referring to were all undertaken under the MAP II regime. Although there is room to quibble with individual aspects of MAP II, in general it offers a comprehensive breakdown of the process of archaeological fieldwork, postexcavation analysis, archive creation, and report production which aims to yield usable archives and publications within a research-driven environment. Unfortunately, it is often more honored in the breach than in the observance and effective enforcement of its principles is rare.

In a paper presented to the Society for Medieval Archaeology in 2008, Paul Blinkhorn and I described the typical role of freelance pottery analysts (few commercial archaeological organizations have in-house specialist staff) as follows:

A client will email or ring to say that they have an assemblage of pottery from an excavation, and can we produce spot-dates, an assessment or a report, and how much will it cost. Occasionally, a courier will appear on the doorstep clutching an archive box or two, or a large padded envelope containing pottery sherds will drop through the letterbox. [These are usually accompanied by a] ... letter saying where it is from and who the contractor is. Once in a blue moon, a contractor will ring up before a project starts for a quick chat regarding what we think may come up and how they should deal with it, and about once a decade, we are asked to attend a formal pre-project meeting with all the other staff involved to help with the formal formulation of the Project Design.

In the usual scenario, the pottery is assessed, and the assessment report sent off to the contractor, then a few weeks, months or years later, an email will arrive asking for the report to be written. This is sometimes accompanied by a copy of the full Project Design, but rarely by a comprehensive site narrative. The stratigraphic matrix, where such a thing exists, usually has to be requested, and it is not unusual for this request to be received with a little puzzlement, as there are definitely some project managers out there who cannot conceive of why someone who is studying the pottery from the site would need such a thing.

Next the report is written, sherds are sent off for illustration ... Occasionally, copies of illustrations are sent back to the pottery analyst to check their accuracy, and the edited version of the report also sent to allow checking that no major alterations have been made to the sense of the text. The latter is ... a rare occurrence. In the case of "grey literature", the analyst seldom ever sees a copy of the final product. I [PB] once asked a client if it would be possible to have a copy of a "grey" client report in which I had had written the pottery report as the site was relevant to a field of study in which I have a personal interest. I was told I could, but it would cost me £15. One positive in this area is the availability of some Grey Literature on the ADS [Archaeology Data Service] via the OASIS project [an online index to archaeological "grey" literature in the UK], but coverage there is still by no means universal (Blinkhorn and Cumberpatch 2008).

In one sense the system can be said to work in that reports are produced and deposited with the local Historic Environment Record (HER) and the site archives are deposited with the appropriate local or regional museum. The question which I believe remains unresolved is how far are we actually investigating human life in the past and how far are we merely undertaking a routinised set of procedures which result in outcomes which fail to contribute to any broader interpretative endeavor. All too often it seems that we are largely engaged in the latter and the scope for the investigation of issues and areas of concern within the wider framework of historical discourse is so limited

as to be nonexistent. This is largely a result of the uncritical adoption of a model of practice derived from the civil engineering industry that is wholly inappropriate for a research driven, investigative enterprise such as archaeology (see Cumberpatch and Blinkhorn 2001 for a more detailed discussion of this). The attitude taken by many Unit managers and particularly by consultants is that archaeological investigations undertaken within the commercial sphere should all be considered as “stand-alone” projects and that any comparative work or attempts at synthesis should be left for others, even though the actual identity of these “others” is never defined or specified. On more than one occasion I have been specifically instructed not to compare a pottery assemblage from one site with that from another as that is an activity which constitutes “research,” something which is actively proscribed under the commercial regime.

So what works is very much a matter of one’s perspective on the nature of commercial archaeology (see, e.g., Aitchison 2007; Tarlow and Pluciennik 2007 for contrasting perspectives). To the consultant, concerned above all to limit the financial obligations of his or her client (cf. Fenton-Thomas 2006) what works is an archaeological evaluation which produces results that can be dismissed as worthy of no further work or an excavation that can be written up and consigned to the shelves of the local HER with the minimum of expense. To the unit manager, what works may be a project which comes in under budget and ahead of time, allowing staff to generate a surplus and move on to the next project, thus fulfilling annual turnover targets. To some of us, particularly perhaps those specialists for whom new sites mean new potential for expanding our understanding of specific aspects of material culture, what works is a project with an explicit research element that leads to the publication of a monograph or Web-based archive which materially advances our understanding of a specific situation or contributes significantly to our broader perspective on a particular issue, period, or problem. There is, therefore, no real agreement on what constitutes a successful project and the principal divisions are between those (including many archaeological curators) who see the practice of archaeology as essentially an exercise in the mitigation of damage to a “resource” the nature and purpose of which is undefined, those who see archaeology as a service industry, facilitating the work of property developers, civil engineers, and planners (exemplified by the attitude of the IfA; Aitchison 2007) and those who see archaeology as an investigative, research-driven, and problem-orientated discipline concerned with the nature of human society and human life in the past, as preserved in its material traces (Cumberpatch and Blinkhorn 2001; Tarlow and Pluciennik 2007). It is difficult to see how these different perspectives can ever be resolved, given the fundamentally different predicates upon which they are based.

From the point of view of the pottery analyst, it is perhaps easier to define what does not work. In terms of pottery studies, this is principally the production of stand-alone, purely descriptive reports which fail to engage with fundamental issues such as the nature of the deposits constituting the site (including, e.g., the investigation of site formation processes), regional issues around the organization and chronology of production and distribution and the investigation of particular site or region-specific issues such as those identified by research agendas (e.g., Cooper 2006) and problem-orientated surveys (e.g., Mellor 1994).

On these grounds, it has to be said that a large number of projects, particularly in areas such as the archaeology of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century cities in northern England which are still at the stage of data gathering and the development of appropriate methodological tools suitable for tackling emerging questions, are not delivering all that they might. The reasons for this lie both in the scope and scale of the project designs which govern the conduct of field work but also because of the fact that the working practices and institutional hierarchies which have emerged and become fossilized since 1991 generally preclude interaction between the specialists themselves and between specialists and the project managers, project officers, and supervisors who undertook the excavation. The failure by both unit managers and archaeological curators to engage fully with specialists and to understand both what they require in order to answer the critical questions raised by the character of the archaeology and what they can offer if permitted to interact in the ways envisaged in MAP II inevitably leads to inadequate and partial reports which fail to maximize the potential offered by the data. The role of the unexamined and highly linear management structures that govern this process are considered further below.

Archaeological Work: The Smooth and the Rough

If one accepts one's role in the "sausage machine," producing descriptive report after descriptive report with no aspiration to interpret what one sees and records, then the system can be said to run smoothly but this is not to say that it works well or even adequately. Like the rhetorical sausage machine, ejecting identical anonymous frankfurters devoid of both texture and flavor, the system as it stands produces the standardized grey literature reports destined for the HER shelf and often inaccessible except to those with the time and money to travel, like medieval monks, across the country to examine the rare and expensive volumes. Routinisation of practice is a relatively easy state to achieve so long as the goals are limited. This was particularly so in the years of the property boom with one site following another often so fast that project officers who ought to have been researching and writing up their most recent site were rushed from project to project and specialists were processing and recording pottery (and the whole range of other artifact categories) as fast as possible.

The problems inherent in the system were, to some extent, concealed by the demand for our services during the boom years but, ignored and dismissed, particularly by those who saw archaeology as merely another service supplying the needs of the construction industry, they have continued to grow. These problems are numerous. They include a wide range of practical and logistical problems including the crisis in facilities for storing and curating the archives produced by fieldwork operations (particularly acute in local and regional museums), the loss of local knowledge within individual Units and HERs and an almost complete absence in investment in training and career development (particularly pronounced in areas such as pottery studies) as well as the adoption of contentious, unsubstantiated, and

formulaic sampling strategies to reduce the cost of excavation. These problems also include the nature of what we produce. While informative and academically useful monographs are produced (examples that I have contributed to include Roberts 2002; Brown et al. 2007; Lightfoot et al. 2008) on certain projects, the vast majority of reports remain as grey literature, irrespective of their wider importance to the research community or the growing numbers of individuals in the amateur/voluntary sector. While such reports have an obvious relevance to curatorial archaeologists in giving them an appreciation of the nature and character of the sites in their own particular regions, one has to ask what wider relevance they have if they are not made widely available, given the known and well-attested range of popular interests in archaeology, local and family history, quite apart from the needs of the academic sector. As mentioned above, the OASIS scheme, together with the grey literature library maintained by the ADS, are valuable indicators of what could be done, but neither seem to be systematic in their approach or comprehensive in their coverage.

Common factors in the fragmentation of the scope of archaeology include the failure to provide for both the continuity of the profession in human terms and to allow for the need to increase physical capacity in other areas, including archiving, dissemination and the opportunity for informed discourse and debate. At the practical level, cutting costs to the bone in an effort to win the next contract and to maintain a good relationship with the consultancy sector leaves no scope for investment either in skills through opportunities for training or in the dissemination of results. Nor does it allow investment in necessary logistical resources or the application of the latest analytical techniques. I have built from scratch in a Syrian brickyard better finds processing facilities than I have seen provided by some professional archaeological units in England (albeit a minority). While legal firms (for example) regularly take on trainees and provide them with practical experience and intensive mentoring by experienced senior members of the firm, there is rarely any provision for similar training in archaeology, specifically in the area of specialist services. By outsourcing most specialist skills, archaeological units divest themselves of the responsibility for bringing on the next generation of specialists. As most pottery specialists are self-employed and work alone or at most in pairs, there is insufficient time and no money to allow them the space to train their successors and very little scope to participate in training schemes, even where such schemes are, in theory, available. I have frequently been told “You should take on a trainee” when I cannot begin work on a project immediately but no one has an answer to the fact that this would immediately involve an increase in my fees by two-thirds simply to pay the trainee plus additional costs to cover insurance, national insurance, holiday pay, and the rest of the inevitable costs of providing employment. Nor is it possible to take the time to step back and to reflect on the results of a series of projects in a town or rural area with the aim of producing a synthesis of one’s recent work which will contribute to a wider understanding of a particular locality or a particular issue.

Methodological development is also restricted under the present system. As Paul Blinkhorn and I identified many years ago (Blinkhorn and Cumberpatch 1998), the management of archaeology is dominated by those who have a background in excavation.

While there are a small number of individuals in senior positions with a background in finds analysis, they are a tiny minority of the total. The result is that there is little or no recognition of the fact that most areas of artifact study are dynamic and continually evolving as new discoveries change the picture, sometimes radically. To deal adequately with this projects have to be seen as more than “stand-alone” interventions. There has to be room for the cross-funding of projects and sufficient margins for studies that cross-cut individual projects and operate between them. We seem to lack the managerial tools and structures, including accounting procedures that will allow such investment in the future of our profession. The system that existed before 1991 that depended on the core-funding of archaeological units, usually by local authorities was one with many serious drawbacks and was probably unsustainable in the long term. Its strength was that there was the possibility of core-funding which offered a degree of continuity and the possibility of inter-project funding. This was entirely lost in the rush to the contract-tender system in the early 1990s and today it is only support from English Heritage that offers the possibility of undertaking such work. With the imminent prospect of further deep cuts to English Heritage budgets as the costs of the collapse of the banking sector are met by central government, it is likely that this support will be weakened even further in the coming years. As it is already inadequate to meet the demand, this is a prospect that must be viewed with considerable alarm.

Design, Cost, and Flexibility (or Not) of Archaeological Work

From the perspective of the finds analyst, decision-making lies entirely in the hands of consultants and project managers who take the major decisions generally following a brief drawn up by the curatorial archaeologists. The input of consultants into this process appears to be a largely negative one; seeking to cut costs by limiting work on specific aspects of a project, whether in terms of the areas excavated, the sampling strategy employed on site or the scope and scale of postexcavation analysis is hardly a positive contribution to the production of an adequate report, yet it is the *raison d'être* of the consultancy industry. By the time a project reaches the specialists there is very little room for flexibility in any aspect of the project other than in the narrow parameters of how long it will take to “do” the pottery report. All the essential elements of the project will have been established before the project design reaches the specialist—the entire process is routinised and standardized which eliminates any contributory role for the specialist over and above the cataloguing of the material. The key phrase is “can you do the pot from this site” by which is usually meant “produce a report which emphasizes chronology and description above interpretation.” The end result is that specialists may have to contribute to the costs of a project through unpaid and entirely unacknowledged overtime which can involve days or weeks of unpaid work, simply to produce a report which conforms to the standards set by professional organizations and study groups. Paul Blinkhorn and I have discussed the almost complete ineffectiveness of such “professional guidelines” in more detail elsewhere (2008).

It is of particular concern that a generation of field archaeologists is emerging which knows no other system than this one and, without a background in research, perceives the problem to be how to get on and off site as quickly as possible rather than how to investigate the range of issues thrown up by a particular site and the information (including finds) that constitutes the results of the investigation.

Decision-Making in Archaeological Work

While curatorial archaeologists are, in theory, responsible for setting the brief for specific archaeological investigations, they are hedged around by competing interests. Local councilors and economic planners have interests that rarely include archaeology. The completion of a particular development project may be actively supported by a particular elected member because it is a prestige project or will bring jobs and/or facilities to a particular locality that will have a bearing on their re-election. A property developer has obligations toward investors and shareholders and will transmit these concerns to his or her hired consultants who will then seek to influence the content of the brief and the conduct of the subsequent excavation. While it would be naive to assume that archaeological criteria must always override other considerations, the nature of archaeology is such that it deals with a finite and limited resource that is uniquely vulnerable. Plant and animal communities can be relocated to alternative places. The natural environment will, to a large extent, regenerate itself, albeit as secondary growth. In contrast, once destroyed or compromised (e.g., by drainage) an archaeological site, by its very nature unique, is gone forever, together with all the information that it contained. Inevitably the costs of either extracting this information through excavation or preserving the site undamaged are the factors which are raised by developers, local politicians and consultants but these are, in a real sense, relatively low when compared to other components of a development. Archaeology in the UK is notoriously the lowest paid graduate entry profession in the country and its practitioners are by conventional standards, highly overqualified for the remuneration that they receive (IfA 2009). The costs of archaeology are dwarfed by those of other parts of the typical development project. Nevertheless, cost is regularly cited as the overriding reason why a site will not be investigated fully and why restrictions will be placed upon any proposed scheme of investigation. Attempts to justify such attitudes tend to be dismissive of archaeological priorities and to represent those who question them appear unreasonable or naive (e.g., Strickland 1993, see Cumberpatch and Blinkhorn 2001 for a response).

The fact that commercial archaeology exists only through the agency of two quasi-legal advisory documents (PPG 15 and PPG 16) means that archaeological curators have little in the way of statutory power to invoke in defense of archaeology. Much depends on negotiation and compromise, with most of the latter on the part of the archaeologists. Added to this the fact that curators are, by necessity, generalists and, though no fault of their own, are often out of touch with current issues within particular areas of specialization and have no formal means of consulting with specialists. The result is that the significance of a particular site may be entirely overlooked.

The same is often true of the project managers who will decide upon the specific investigative strategy once it has been agreed that a site will be investigated archaeologically. This inevitably means that the project design will stress the general over the specific with little or no scope for addressing issues of detail.

If I Was in Charge, Would I Do This Differently or Better?

Like most of the papers that I have written on this subject, this one gives a gloomy view of the prospects for archaeology as it is currently organized. Perhaps writing a Ph.D. in the late 1980s when skepticism regarding the Thatcherite/Reaganite economic project was virtually taken for granted in academic circles was a bad education for working in the last decade of the twentieth century and the first of the twenty-first century by which time this economic model had achieved such general dominance as to be both unchallengeable and unchangeable. The shift in political thought after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the liberation of central Europe from one in which ideological argument was central to politics to one in which the major decisions were reduced to issues of management, (even when they concerned matters of individual liberty and conscience) has ramifications which reach even into archaeology (see Hobsbawm 1994: Chapter 19 and McKibbin 2008 for a broader perspectives). We have accepted, virtually without protest, a situation in which we allow and in some cases even welcome, managerial structures which are essentially top-down and authoritarian, these having been naturalized not only by their apparent success in other professions but also by their incarnation as a substitute for political discourse (see Wolpert 1997 for a parallel in the biological sciences). The “line-management” system, in which the individual has a place only in a hierarchy and not in a Web of mutually informative interconnections, has come to be accepted as the norm within archaeology. While there may be situations in which such structures of practice work effectively, archaeology is manifestly not one of them. The necessity for input from a diverse and changing group of individuals bringing particular skills, perspectives and goals to a single project, throughout the life of that project, requires far more than traditional management structures can offer, as was recognized in MAP II (1991: Sect. 2 (2.2), Appendix 1 (A1.1.1)). We need, urgently, a new model for the management of archaeological institutions that will succeed where line-management has signally failed. This must recognize that the very heart of archaeology is a diversity of information and that the flow of information through a project and its participants must be full and open, not one-way and linear. Structure is required but it must be structure driven by the character of the discipline, not one imported, partially understood, from local government, the civil engineering industry or anywhere else. There are indeed methodological priorities within day-to-day practice and these have to be central to the structures of management around which the creation of archaeological knowledge is itself organized. In practical terms, these include specifically archaeological constructs such as the Harris Matrix and the site narrative, the latter conceived on one level in written terms but also as databases

of graphical and photographic representation. In more abstract terms they include the information flow within what MAP II defines as the project team. That it is impractical and grossly inefficient in terms of the quality of outcome to expect a range of specialists to proceed to the analysis of archaeological data without a full (if necessarily provisional) Harris Matrix and site narratives is on one level obvious, yet such a procedure is enshrined in the working practices of the majority of archaeological units within my experience. Specialists are expected to work in isolation with the full picture known only to the project manager or project officer whose attention will in any case usually be split between several different projects, all running at the same time and at different stages in their life cycle. While networks of informal contacts between specialists certainly exist, these are at best ad hoc and exist largely outside the structure of individual projects and are certainly not facilitated within the overwhelming majority of projects.

This critique raises more fundamental questions that may well have already been addressed outside archaeology. What, we might ask, is the purpose of management in the rigid and self-sustaining form within which it exists in archaeology? Is it to facilitate the investigation of a particular set of problems through the application of a range of appropriate methodologies? Or is it to implement a pre-established and non-problem-orientated methodology to attain the aim of vacating a specific area of land by a particular date and time? The latter is certainly the case under the present system and as a result has come to dominate archaeological practice, to the detriment of both our understanding the past and emplacing it within the fabric of our society. Rather than facilitating the creation of knowledge through the investigation of the physical traces of past human lives and activities, the management of archaeological projects has become a matter largely of extracting a bare minimum of information from the wealth with which we are presented when a site becomes available for investigation.

Conclusions

In the earlier paper cited several times above, Blinkhorn and I posed the question “who is the client” (2001: 40)? Our aim was to subvert the standard assumption that our clients are those who pay for archaeological mitigation and specifically for the removal of archaeological impediments to the process of capital accumulation. We hoped to reinstate archaeology as a social practice that aims to write accounts of the past based upon the interpretation of the diverse material traces of the past (or pasts) that survive to the present day. The question is also central to the issue of relevance. The relevance of archaeology is a subject that can be debated at many levels. As a discourse operating at the interface of “hard” science (through its deployment of analytical techniques which depend on the physical properties of objects), the social sciences (through its crucial relationship to history, anthropology, sociology, and economics) and the humanities (through its status as a subject in which narrative, discourse, and the production of texts is central to its very existence), archaeology

has a general relevance which it is hard to overestimate. This is relevance of the highest order and places archaeology as central to the investigative and self-reflective discourse which can be traced back at least as far as the Enlightenment; the relationship of humanity to its own past and the material traces of that past can scarcely be considered as anything other than relevant, given the central place of the past in the present and the increasingly uncertain relationship of the present to a viable future for the human race. Such grandiose claims perhaps require consideration at greater length and in greater detail than is possible here, although cases studies undertaken in postconflict situations (e.g., Cumberpatch 2000a; Bevan 2006) amply indicate the extent to which the past, and specifically the past as represented materially, is centrally implicated in the ethnic, religious, and racial conflicts which have come to define the post-Cold War era.

At the more local and personal level, as a collection of individuals united under a conventional disciplinary banner, we no doubt pursue archaeology and archaeological knowledge for a variety of reasons both personal and collective. But is the type of knowledge we are producing relevant to the variety of audiences that exist in our heterogeneous and diverse societies? We can, and increasingly are, producing accounts of the past aimed at different audiences. The physical recreation of full size ancient structures; roundhouses, Roman forts, Anglo-Saxon villages can, for example, provide schoolteachers with a means of engaging children in a conception of history that offers more than simply the type of chronological framework which is no longer deemed enough to form the core of the history syllabus. Nor do we have to stop at providing authoritative texts, either written or three-dimensional. Participation in excavations not only attracts widespread popular interest (Ellis 2005; Redhead 2005), but can lead to unforeseen benefits such as a drop in petty street crime (HLF 2009) as young people are engaged in a process of knowledge creation through their own participation. One major English university now uses participation in archaeological fieldwork as a means of demonstrating to children and young people from a wide variety of backgrounds the possibilities and potential offered by higher education (HEFA 2009). While architects and planners may seek to sweep away the material traces of the past through the destructive redevelopment of town and city centers, popular resistance to such inherently modernist projects and, indeed, the failure of the modernist project as a whole, can be traced in part to a reluctance on the part of significant sections of the population to consent to the erasure of class, regional, and ethnic biographies through the eradication of the physical traces of those lineages.

The question for those of us engaged in commercial archaeology has to be how far we are contributing to the production of pasts that facilitate engagement with the nature of the present. I would suggest that we are failing almost entirely in this respect. While many community and educational initiatives, including those mentioned above, represent successes, they lie largely outside the sphere of commercial archaeology and are barely informed by it. While many of us have participated in these successes, we have also failed and failed on a large scale. Commercial archaeology as it is currently practiced in Britain is unsustainable.

We are failing, at the most basic level, to provide for our own reproduction, and we are failing to adequately present the results of our work to the variety of audiences who we know exist from the evidence provided by opinion polls (English Heritage 2000: 4), television and radio audience figures and visitor figures from heritage open days and similar initiatives. At a strategic level we are also failing to communicate the benefits of our work to government, both national and local (Cumberpatch 2001). Evidence for the latter is abundant and can be seen in the progressive attacks on provision for heritage within local government (as reported regularly in *Rescue News*) and the systematic failure by government ministers to recognize the importance of archaeology as a component of the historic environment (Jowell 2001, 2004, 2005; cf. Cumberpatch 2001, RESCUE 2005a) and the nature of archaeological research (DCMS 2005; paragraph 44, cf. RESCUE 2005b). Artifact hunters continue to loot archaeological sites for their own gain, whether merely for the solipsistic pleasure in ownership or financial gain through participation in the international trade in looted antiquities and are hailed as “unsung heroes of the UK’s heritage” by the Government Minister charged with the care of the nation’s cultural heritage (Lammy 2007). In 2008, in spite of intensive lobbying by a confederation of archaeological and heritage bodies at the highest level a Heritage Bill with cross-party support was dropped by government at the last moment on the thin excuse of a lack of parliamentary time (RESCUE 2008, DCMS 2009). An updated Planning Policy statement, designed to replace both PPG15 and 16 with a more integrated system was not only delayed but the content of the draft text was withheld from all but a few individuals within the heritage community.

This is indeed failure of the most profound kind, particularly in a country where the central government is increasingly obsessed with the micromanagement of decisions down to the regional and local level and seeks to enforce this through increasingly authoritarian and intrusive techniques. But even more broadly than this, we are generating data that lies unused and unused data might as well not exist. The grey literature mountain, however beautifully adorned with company logos and “snappy” summaries, is a testament to our failure; a failure of nerve, a loss of self-confidence, an open admission that we lack the courage of our conviction that understanding our past is crucial to our future. This at a time when historical fiction, written and cinematic is an overwhelmingly popular genre, when elegantly written social history and biography (e.g., Adams 2009; Holmes 2008; Jardine 1996) is a prominent feature in bookshops and libraries, when interest in family history and local history have never been greater. Rather than seizing the moment and engaging with the diverse range of social groups who make up our societies, we would rather pose as the servants of the development industry or even doctors who will provide a cure for the sickness represented by the presence of archaeological deposits on a site (a disturbing metaphor discussed in greater detail by Chadwick 1998) in order to let developers sweep away thousands of years of history and culture merely to raise grotesque monuments to hubris that will last 30 years before being cleared away as an embarrassing eyesore, the result of a planning failure. In these terms we are

largely irrelevant and deservedly so for in a rush to claim a niche within the development industry we have thrown away our wider social relevance and have largely failed to contribute our unique perspective on the world at a time when such a perspective is sorely needed.

The Realities of Life as an Archaeological Project Manager: Howell M. Roberts

I have worked as an archaeologist since 1993, beginning as a site assistant on commercial projects in the UK. Since then I have progressed through various roles, organizations and countries – in both commercial and research-driven contexts. Today I am Head of Excavations for the Institute of Archaeology in Iceland (a private nonprofit group active in both research and development driven projects), and work both as a site director and project manager. On occasion I still excavate, which remains my joy and privilege.

I accept many of Chris's points about the limitations of and bleak prospects for commercial archaeology in the UK. It is for these and similar reasons that I left the UK a decade ago, to pursue hopefully more satisfying opportunities elsewhere. I have come to terms with my complicity in the "tyranny of the site director" and continue to seek amends. My initiation into professional archaeology in the UK was at a time when the impacts and implications of PPG 16 and the MAP II documents were beginning to be understood, and at a time when archaeology was just emerging as a fashionable topic for the popular media. In the years that have passed, public awareness of archaeology (and its relationship to development) has grown ever stronger and more widespread. Despite a number of reservations, this surely must be seen as a positive progression. Unfortunately, I cannot honestly say I feel the same about the progression of commercial archaeology in the UK as a workplace. Issues concerning professional standards, career structure, remuneration and so forth do not seem to have been usefully addressed, and little, if any, improvement in these areas is evident.

The introduction of the "polluter pays" principal for the funding of most archaeological work in the UK was a huge advance and a most vital step. However, the failure to adequately disseminate, synthesize, and "make relevant" the results of this huge body of work is rightly a matter of widespread concern. Chris has described the UK experience in harsh terms, and I can only hope that others have had a more positive experience in recent years. But I am familiar with the problems he has faced, and he is by no means alone. Site directors and project managers also find themselves caught between many competing pressures and constraints, from their own site teams, from specialists, from the curator, from the developer and from the developer's consultants. An overriding financial imperative dominates the decision-making process all too often, and we have all been obliged to work in environments far from the ideal. When a principled stand against poor standards or conditions equates directly with imminent unemployment, few people have a wide range of

options. Poverty and/or compromise are the archaeologists' reward. But this does not excuse inadequacy – and an excavation project unable to provide a credible outline of its stratigraphy, as Chris describes, is failing to meet a very basic requirement.

For developer-funded archaeology to function as it might it is essential that the design and commissioning of archaeological projects is carried out within a robust and sympathetic curatorial framework. Unfortunately, as Chris discusses, an ambiguous legislative position and competing agendas in the planning department may conspire to compromise the curatorial role, despite the best efforts of those concerned. The adequacy of an archaeological project, its adherence to professional standards and the adoption of best practice are all items that must be reviewed and where necessary enforced. I think we all know that our curatorial regimes and professional bodies could do better in this regard.

But these concerns are not unique to the UK – limited resources constrain both the quantity and quality of archaeological work everywhere. Before we turn aside the developer-funded model, we must remember how much more archaeology would be destroyed without any intervention whatsoever, were it not in place. We should also consider the situation in nations where such a principal is either not in place, or not adhered to. Public sector monopolies in archaeology must also prioritize according to their available (and limited) resources, and may not always be the most efficient or effective bodies to implement mitigation.

We often describe the archaeological resource in terms of a precious, unique or finite, threatened and dwindling asset, and base our claims to priority around this. We might alternatively view the evidence of past human activity as ubiquitous. There is little, if any, of the world's surface that does not have some anthropogenic imprint, whether in terms of archaeological sites as usually conceived of, or perhaps landscapes that have been deforested, grazed, and eroded. The pace and scale of our impact increases all of the time – we have changed the atmosphere and the oceans too. We have truly entered the “anthropocene” era. As archaeologists we seek to study, record, protect, and hopefully understand certain, variable (and ever growing) aspects of the record of that impact. How we prioritize this limitless endeavor differs from region to region, institution to institution and from individual to individual.

Archaeology is a costly pursuit, and it is vital that archaeologists are willing and able to justify their own work – to developers, planners, curators, and research funding bodies and not least to the public at large. That we sometimes fail in this regard is not remarkable. That this is sometimes not attempted is unforgivable.

I have had the good fortune to spend much of my time working in a mixed funding environment. The Institute in Iceland receives research grants from a broad range of local, national and international bodies and we actively collaborate with colleagues from the U.S., the UK, Scandinavia, and elsewhere in Europe. We have also enjoyed a positive relationship with the Reykjavik museums authority, and many other museums and interest groups around the country. In Reykjavik, the products of our relationship can be seen in an award winning new museum “871 ± 2 – the Settlement Exhibition,” built around a Viking Age hall preserved in situ in the

heart of the city center. Although the excavation was occasioned by development, an enlightened and sympathetic curatorial regime within the city granted us the necessary flexibility and support to maximize the results. The potential of the archaeology as a resource for tourism and education was recognized and the opportunity this presented was taken up whole heartedly. The development of a new museum also meant a lengthy process of discussion, negotiation, and clarification. For me, this was an admittedly steep learning curve. Adapting and developing our views and our knowledge for different media and audiences was challenging, novel, and satisfying.

Iceland is a country innately fascinated by its history. Many landowners and residents are proud of their connection to the land, and of their knowledge of its past. Our fieldwork priorities in the north eastern region of Thingeyjarsysla are developed through a dialogue with the local archaeological society and this is both informative and fruitful. Local knowledge should never be underestimated. There are countless remote sites we would simply not know of otherwise. Trying to explain what I am doing and why (and why there exactly?) is invigorating, especially as a foreign interloper. It is a small price to pay for the opportunity to excavate, and to pursue our own agendas.

The local society has also initiated an exceptional educational program together with the local schools system, and this has garnered support from the Ministry of Education, the local museums and other local interest groups. The “Fornleifaskoli Barnanna” (Children’s Archaeology School or Kids Archaeology Program) now forms part of an important outreach collaboration with colleagues from CUNY (City University of New York) in the U.S., and is also supported by the U.S. NSF (National Science Foundation). The program is now growing to include groups across the North Atlantic and also in the Caribbean. In north eastern Iceland, archaeology is at the forefront of scientific outreach. Children have the opportunity to observe and learn about the international and multidisciplinary nature of research within their own community, and to learn about and investigate their own heritage.

It has been refreshing to often work away from commercial pressures, and even small projects with limited budgets generally produce satisfying and useful results. This happens where committed and experienced archaeologists have the strongest input into the terms of their own research and are funded, if modestly, to carry out such.

So, I inhabit some kind of archaeological utopia? Of course I do not.

To secure such funding as we do achieve requires a considerable effort in mobilizing a broad constituency of local, national, and international support. I wish I could claim that funding for archaeology in Iceland is distributed purely in terms of research merit. It is not – personal, political, and social factors within a small (and fractious) archaeological community also figure in the decision-making process, when and where archaeologists are even present in that process.

But this is not a unique problem, and we must come to terms with it. In recent years – years of growing opportunity despite any difficulties – it has become increasingly vital that we demonstrate strong support from the local community, and engage with local museums, schools, and also the tourism industry. And we should not shy away from this engagement because it is in these collaborations that we educate

ourselves about the relevance of archaeology to the wider community, and it is there that we begin to justify the funding which reaches us, ultimately, from the taxpayer. Here we touch upon questions of “whose archaeology?” but that is beyond our remit here. Suffice it to say that “ownership” is spread over a much wider constituency than archaeologists alone.

Our participation in commercial archaeology has raised all the difficulties and conflicts one might expect. It is perhaps the inevitable baggage of development constraints and competitive tendering. Iceland does have a “polluter pays” concept to a greater or lesser degree, and the relevant legislation recognizes all material remains older than 100 years as archaeology. The application of this framework is variable. Just as in the UK and elsewhere the effectiveness of such arrangements relies upon a robust and influential curatorial regime, and just as in the UK external pressures sometimes conspire to undermine that regime. Unlike the UK, in Iceland archaeology does not have a history of high levels of media interest. Public awareness of the archaeological endeavor is less, and the archaeological implications of development are often poorly understood. Despite the 100 year rule, it remains challenging to justify significant expenditure on the remains of the nineteenth or twentieth centuries. As this represents two-elevenths of the nation’s archaeology, this is a challenge we must vigorously face.

A key problem is a lack of appreciation for the unknown archaeology. Iceland is a large country with a small population, and neither desk-based nor pedestrian surveys approach universal coverage. It can prove extremely difficult to persuade a developer, or sometimes even the curators, that as yet undiscovered remains might prove costly and time consuming to address. Large-scale evaluation procedures are rarely undertaken and when we then discover “more than was expected” this entails a predictable series of negotiations. These are usually, but not always, easier to resolve with a public sector developer. A full appreciation of the scope of postexcavation work remains difficult to convey. Furthermore, in a small archaeological community the lines between curators, consultants and contractors may become somewhat blurred, roles become confused, and personality may intrude. When a curatorial body intervenes on behalf of the developer to proscribe comparative work or some aspect of postexcavation analysis we are forced to consider their motivations, and also the terms on which we wish to be involved, if at all.

Further Thoughts on Life in the Archaeological Marketplace: Chris Cumberpatch

There is clearly a good deal of common ground between Howell and myself. I too have worked abroad and recognize that in contrast to the situation in some of these countries, that in the UK is significantly better. Like Howell I have worked (and continue to work) with amateur and voluntary groups and with school and college groups. Such work is frequently very rewarding even when budgets are small and the deficit has to be made up with the commitment shown by volunteers.

I also agree with Howell in his comment that for all its problems, the “polluter pays” model does at least ensure that archaeology at least occupies a place in the planning process; without PPS 5 it is clear that we would be losing far more archaeology than we are at present and scenes common in the early 1970s when a handful of volunteers, university staff and students raced to salvage what they could from beneath the blades of bulldozers would still be the norm. No one with any concern for archaeology (or issues of basic site safety) would wish for a return to those days. Nor is a model predicated entirely upon state funding realistic as the competing demands upon central and local government funds would rapidly squeeze archaeology as much or more than local and regional museums are currently being squeezed. The demands of equity too require that those who stand to make enormous profits from speculative building projects face up to their wider civic responsibilities whether these lie in the broad field of environmental conservation or more specifically in archaeology. One can feel considerable sympathy for the individual who wishes to extend his or her house or to build an annex for an elderly relative and finds that in addition to the building costs they must also pay for an archaeological excavation. It is here, perhaps, that the case for the imposition of a development tax that would share the costs of archaeology equitably is most persuasive. The fact is that for good or ill, the unpopularity of taxation among the population generally and particularly among the least responsible and loudest of the newspaper columnists and editors makes such a tax almost unthinkable, irrespective of its merits or the relief it would bring to individuals.

I have perhaps expressed myself in harsh terms, as Howell points out, and I could perhaps have moderated some of my comments. I certainly acknowledge that the majority of archaeologists whether working in a curatorial or a contractual context, give their best to the projects on which they work. Many, to my certain knowledge, habitually go “the extra mile” to ensure successful outcomes, all too frequently at their own expense. Far too often their work is compromised by the management structures that have grown up around the premises of PPG15 and 16 and PPS 5 rather than by any ill will. The lack of any effective enforcement of the principles enshrined in MAP II or the standards documents compiled and published by the various subject-specific study groups and the growth of the consultancy sector in the gap between contractors, curators, and clients both present serious problems. It is, in addition, profoundly disturbing that the outcome of many months of meetings and discussions between archaeological organizations and the government culminated in a replacement for PPG15 and 16 (PPS 5) that has proved unacceptable to many of us (RESCUE 2010). Persuading politicians to listen to informed opinion is not, of course, a problem unique to archaeology (as recent debates over drug and alcohol policy have made clear) and it is perhaps time for a more unified campaign to persuade our elected representatives that they should be paying attention to the views of those with a more informed perspective than media magnates, newspaper editors, ideologically motivated columnists, and hired lobbyists.

Final Thoughts on Life in the Archaeological Marketplace: Howell M. Roberts

We still need to clarify the role of the curator, consultant, and contractor, and the expectations one has for them, if we hope to sustain and improve the “polluter pays” principal for funding archaeology. While the archaeologist will (and should) seek to maximize their results, and further study (and cost) is always possible, the developer has a right to know that their obligation is finite, predictable, and well justified. Negotiation is necessary and the developer is entitled to their own advocate – the much maligned archaeological consultant.

It is a commonplace to hear the archaeological consultant described as a “parasitical growth” on the “real work” of archaeology, but this is of course unfair and unreasonable. This view emerges because of some of the contradictions inherent in the role. Ultimately, the archaeological consultant is paid to save his client money, and while there will be cost savings resulting from informed forward planning, quality assurance, and performance-related efficiencies, this truth inevitably introduces a pressure to “talk down” the merit of additional research, minimize days worked, and to seek the lowest possible price from contractors. This scenario may then be exacerbated by the need to reduce costs such that the outlay in employing the consultant is also “recovered” and it is the consultant himself who is very likely to be the most expensive archaeologist involved in the process. The consultant will often be charged with managing the appointment of archaeological subcontractors, who – in a shrinking and competitive market – are obviously keen to retain favor in the hope of future work. The net trend, unsurprisingly, is to drive down contract prices still further. The effect this has on all the problems described above is predictable.

As night follows day, poor pay and conditions and appalling career prospects for the typical archaeologist will encourage some of the brighter and more eloquent to seek a better life in consultancy – where their primary task is to cut costs for their client, and hence perpetuate the penury of their erstwhile colleagues. This is of course a grotesquely simplistic generalization, and most individuals genuinely seek to do their very best for the archaeology. But these pressures are nonetheless very real. A well-qualified and experienced project officer will struggle to modestly house and feed a family on any wage they might expect in archaeology, especially in areas where development is focused. If archaeological consultancy offers employment conditions closer approaching societal norms, then any sane individual has more than one crisis of conscience to consider.

The growth of archaeological consultancy is perhaps a symptom of our malaise, and not its cause nor its cure. The developer has a right to advocacy, but this perceived need would be much reduced within an improved legislative framework and a stronger curatorial regime. The gaps Chris alludes to are genuinely problematic – the grey areas of interpretation where any room for maneuver is and will be exploited. The archaeology (and the archaeologist) also has a right to advocacy, and it is here that we are failing to make our voices heard to those in authority.

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