

My role, as with any role in archaeology, is diverse. I work towards the end point of a project, in post-excavation. Working in the industry for six and a half years, I have learned a lot. I have experienced many professional and ethical dilemmas in my time and have seen others experience them as well. Thankfully, different organisations are available for guidance on how to conduct oneself in such situations. The guidance offered by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CiFA) has been the most helpful to me, with their topic-specific guidelines for professional judgement and their Code of Conduct for ethical judgement. Other forms of guidance (particularly internal) inform my professional judgement, especially as an individual typically working in the vast area of environmental archaeology (Historic England guides have been invaluable). Of course, I am a realistic individual. I use my common sense and experience to guide me through tricky situations and realise that what is ideal and what is realistic are not always the same in commercial archaeology. There are many different instances in which this discussion may factor.

The handling and processing of human remains is a regular part of my current role. Such work can vary in how often it is part of my role, dependent upon the types of sites that the company is currently working on. Given that Headland Archaeology works across the United Kingdom on a variety of urban and rural sites, the archaeology recovered has the potential to vary substantially. Having worked in the industry for six and a half years, I am confident in my ability to undertake such a complex task and I am experienced in the excavation and post-excavation processes associated with human remains. The CiFA Code of Conduct Principle 1.5 instructs that a member only undertake work for which they are qualified, undergoing frequent training in all areas. This is particularly relevant to the processing of human remains given their delicate nature and somewhat infrequent occurrence. Furthermore, it is

paramount that human remains are treated with the utmost respect and care.

Towards the end of 2023, we received large amounts of unurned and urned cremations. Whilst I am familiar with processing inhumations, this was unfamiliar to me. I sought out training on how to best process unurned cremations, learning how to process these through gentle and non-destructive wet sieving. I acknowledged that there is a gap in my knowledge in processing urned cremations. Although I have excavated a small number of these in the field, I have not undertaken their post-excavation micro-excavation when some have been block-lifted, instead choosing to observe a more experienced colleague do so. This has also allowed the best labour and time management of this extensive task, allowing different members of staff to take part in understanding this aspect of the site. I feel supported by the CiFA Code of Conduct Principle 1.12 in doing so, as this supports me to raise legitimate concerns about a task which may hold “significant cultural or religious meaning or connotations.” Discussion of this has helped to understand and distribute the workload where appropriate, ensuring that all members of the team working on these remains feel comfortable and confident.

Ensuring that best practice in the excavation of human remains is followed on site, such as use of appropriately sized and robust archival boxes for storage, is paramount, often hinging upon effective communication with the senior management of the project. It is notable that we are typically made aware that we are to receive human remains after a license and authority to excavate them by the Ministry of Justice has been granted. In terms of uniform and respectful excavation, Headland Archaeology provides guidelines to all its staff on the standards and process of excavation of human remains. As a company, we are working on digitising these to make them more accessible. These are created by individuals with many years of

experience, but the guidelines are reviewed by colleagues and informed by the guidelines of other reputable organisations (Mays *et al.* 2018; Mitchell and Brickley 2017). I have noted small discrepancies in how human remains are excavated on site, such as where samples are taken from and the how different elements are numbered on site. This is likely due to many staff taking part in the excavation of human remains for the first time and lots of the finer details being lost. I have taken care to flag these small points to senior staff when they occur to ensure that high standards continue. Staff, who may feel uncomfortable flagging such difficulties to senior members of staff, can talk to a network of Mental Health First Aiders or a staff representative. As a staff representative, I have fielded a small number of anonymised requests from the field team for better communication from the post-excavation department. We are attempting to better this through making departmental emails available to excavation staff. For example, one may send a photo of a sherd of pottery to the finds team if they wish to know more information about it.

The dissemination of information in archaeology can be a difficult task, posing a multitude of professional and ethical challenges. CiFA Code of Conduct Principle 4 encourages the member to make results of their work available with “reasonable dispatch”, while Principle 5 encourages the member to recognise the aspirations of other staff members. While these are not explicitly in contradiction of one another, they can often conflict in my experience. Commercial archaeology is an industry of tight deadlines and small margins. As a result, training is often given only when it is deemed necessary (as aforementioned in the case of human remains) and not when it is desired. I am happy to work for an employer that prioritises the training and development of staff, although I am aware that this may not be in the case in the

field. In post-excavation, we often take an individual's preferences into consideration regarding their workload. For example, a new junior member of staff recently started in a general post-excavation role. When I learned of her passion for (and experience in) osteoarchaeology, I suggested that she process some of the human remains from site to the management team. Despite the task perhaps taking more time, management prioritised her training in this situation. When working elsewhere, I have not always known this to be the case. In many cases, it can be difficult to speak up about such matters. Training requests on site can often fall of deaf ears and be seen as unnecessary. I have known certain members of staff to have informally become the go-to person for excavation of an "unusual" find or feature, such as waterlogged wood or complex, deep stratigraphy. By senior staff, this may be seen as compliance with CiFA Code of Conduct Principle 3, ensuring that the archaeology is appropriately and properly recorded and conserved. Realistically, this behaviour causes this principle to become difficult to follow in the long-term, as informal "specialists" in this sense may leave the role, company, or even industry. Instead, providing all members of staff with at least a basic understanding of such areas should be prioritised. In my experience, the senior team of a site can be loathe to delay a site to the upset of stakeholders, particularly the client. Clients can vary, but many would not be pleased by delays to a process they may already view as unnecessary.

It is for this reason that dissemination of information to member of the public is a tricky area. A minority of the rural sites I have worked on have been near public rights of way, and locals naturally want to know as much as possible about the site. As a junior member of staff, I have always been careful about the information I disclose. According to the CiFA Code of Conduct Principle 4.6, I am to accept the

consequences of providing such information to members of the public. The effect of this has been minimal as I have only worked on rural sites, although I have experienced individuals breaking into site cabins and tearing down fencing. In this case, ensuring staff safety and the maintenance of public rights of way for public safety were prioritised. The level of disclosure permitted would undoubtedly differ on a large infrastructure-based site, especially those with significant government backing (such as HS2). As suggested by CiFA Principle 1.2, I have found that public outreach is the best method of engaging the public. I have often known this to go ignored, causing members of the public to act more dangerously in how they engage with a site. For example, I have known individuals to climb under or over secure Heras fencing and attempt to enter site to talk to archaeologists. On such sites, I have tried to emphasise the importance of public outreach but often felt ignored by busy or disinterested senior staff. Having passionate and proactive senior members of staff helps to counteract this. Valiant efforts have been made by commercial organisation to better public understanding and involvement in archaeology, such as the Coastal and Intertidal Zone Archaeological Network (CITiZAN) scheme as spearheaded by the Museum of London. This combines smart phone (or tablet) technology and volunteer efforts to record possibly at-risk archaeology exposed in coastal and intertidal zones. The scheme wisely cites a code of conduct and health and safety guidelines (CITiZAN 2020a and 2020b). There is still much to be done in this area and accessible forms of media (such television programming made by archaeologists) have helped to better this understanding.

Although somewhat rarely discussed, archaeology has its own part to play in the climate crisis and in sustainability in general. This factors into my role as it factors into everyone's; we all have a part to play in the climate crisis. In terms of ethics, this

is a relatively newly covered topic by professional bodies. Between 2021 and 2022, government legislation enforced large companies to disclose climate-related information (Department for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy 2022). Outside of criticisms of how such legislation allows companies to “fudge the numbers” on climate impact (Timperley 2021), only larger companies, which commercial archaeology companies are not, are held accountable. This calls for real change to be enacted by individual organisations and the people who work for them. Independent of government legislation, different archaeological bodies have issued their own statements on climate change (CiFA 2020; Historic England 2022). Schemes such as the CITiZAN scheme work to preserve archaeology that may otherwise be damaged because of climate change. As a staff representative, I am privy to conversations to attempt to better our environmental impact. For example, minimising the impact of transport to and from site on the climate. Ideally, using hybrid or electric vehicles would assist in this. We have highlighted issues of charging availability and site access (electric vehicles can be difficult to tow, a common occurrence on wet sites) and are still struggling to form a plan for this. It is undoubtable that there is little we can do until we have the appropriate infrastructure, but it is still worth trying. It is important that the industry itself seeks to lessen its own impact on the environment where possible, both to the climate and environment in general. For example, archaeology is a large user of single-use plastics. In my experience, this is often seen as a necessary evil to properly transport and store finds, but Headland Archaeology is taking steps to better this attitude and practice internally. For example, many plastic finds bags are wasted due to errors in labelling, lack of adherence to museum standards, and poor conditions on site rendering bags too dirty or impossible to seal or being faulty to begin with. We are striving to correct

this yet talks are ongoing. Better education (typically through early involvement of archivists) on museum-specific labelling standards and effective recycling schemes can help in the meantime. We are trialling the recycling of both Tyvek labels and nitrile gloves to further combat plastic pollution.

As one can discern from this, there are many professional and ethical quandaries posed by commercial archaeology that I encounter in my role. As an industry, archaeology is still somewhat nascent. It is sadly limited by the unsustainable practices of the time it operates within, but this does not mean that we should not strive to improve it where possible. We are lucky in that we are an industry comprised of many resourceful and forward-thinking individuals, but that we also exist as part of the larger construction industry often due to our role within the house-building process. As a result, deadlines often come around very quickly, and margins can be thin. As with the rest of society, archaeologists face many ethical dilemmas on how to continue in this trying time of climate change.

Word count: 2141