

Assignment 4: Critical Reflection of Roles and Responsibilities

Provide a critical reflection of your role and responsibilities within a wider archaeological project considering the requirements for professional and ethical judgement, and your relationships with other team members and other stakeholders

Within the context of the park street mitigation my role undertaken was that of a Post Excavation Supervisor. The main tasks involved in this role are to assist in providing an analytical and advisory service on all aspects of archaeological artefacts and ecofacts for both internal projects and external clients. This also extends to coordinating and undertaking finds and environmental processing and other related works such as assessment of material recovered, in the context of the park street excavations this consists exclusively of the metalwork assemblage.

There is also a large element of archival work involved where both physical and digital archives are prepared for deposition with a relevant museum / repository in addition to liaising heavily with other team members and external bodies and specialists. The aforementioned assessment of material recovered is at this stage of expertise undertaken under supervision by a suitably qualified and experienced mentor however other elements of the post excavation work (Environmental / finds processing and archiving) are done so at an experienced level and it is expected that the role will involve training up less experienced members of staff in these areas.

At the stage of Post Excavation Supervisor within Headland archaeology it is expected that the role weighs heavily towards either a finds or environmental proficiency to aid with training up to be a specialist in a relevant field, within this context the specialism being aimed for by the author is that of a metal finds specialist / archaeometallurgist.

Within this role one of the key aspects to cover is that of safety & welfare in the workplace. Although working within the post-excavation department some of the responsibility for safety extends out to fieldwork departmental staff in the role of evaluating risks and hazards that might be encountered in the field when recovering both environmental and artefactual material. This also extends to a general positive attitude towards health and safety in the workplace as both a company first aider and a fire marshal I am responsible for maintaining easy access routes throughout my office workspace through clearing potential slips, trips or falls in addition to making sure first aid kits are well stocked and accessible. Professional judgements are employed heavily as whilst processing deadlines must be met, time must be allocated to ensuring a safe work environment and where the former starts to take up more time, the latter begins to suffer and so am typically faced with the professional dilemma of making my workplace safe for myself and work colleagues whilst also having to dedicate enough time to work tasks to meet deadlines.

Key responsibilities for this role include coordinating finds / environmental work between different members of staff to ensure a smooth work flow in addition to undertaking, supervising and providing advice on the processing of artefacts, ecofacts and environmental samples which extends to their package, storage and transportation either between headland offices, external specialists or museums for archival deposition.

Previously when working in field archaeology my professional and ethical judgement has been more widely employed on sites containing human remains mostly due to the contention and sensitivity of said projects. This can vary wildly from material being incorrectly looked after on sites (ascribed incorrect numbers or poorly packaged) to sites not being properly screened off from the public which they should be in accordance with the BABEO codes of ethics (BABAO Codes of ethics and practice, 2019) though in the case of the latter this is an area subject to ongoing ethical questioning drawn from the Oakington Anglo Saxon cemetery excavations in which a key element of the project draw into question the ethics of ancient human remains on display in public view which although a valid area of ethical discussion this assignment's author having been present at the excavation of this site as part of university fieldwork excavations can firmly state that tunnel vision regarding answering research questions on ethics should not render individuals blind to more pressing modern ethical considerations such as the processing of ancient human remains directly next to the entrance of a modern cemetery which is still visited by grieving family members.

With regards to the excavation of human remains it is only as recently as 2021 that the author of this assignment has experienced commercial archaeological projects taking into consideration mental health risks associated with the exhumation of skeletal remains on fieldwork staff whereby budget is put aside or work flow considerations are made for field staff that might have to take time off due to excavating human remains. Although some archaeologists may be desensitized to such undertakings not everyone has the same outlook on death and burial in the archaeological record and so such considerations should be more widely thought about across the sector as a whole. On one previous large scale strip, map and record project in which human remains were found, the author of this assignment was given on-the-spot training by a company osteoarchaeologist and had to keep the excavation discreet due to the location of the body being within the former roaming grounds of the Yorkshire Ripper and that if news of human remains got out there would be issues of members of the press attempting to get onto site, this was exacerbated by groundworkers insisting on 'having a look' and the former landowner paying a visit to ask if they could 'keep the skull for their coffee table' which was vocally objected by both the author and aforementioned osteoarchaeologist.

Outside of the domain of human remains there is ethical considerations of best practice on archaeology sites regarding site safety and this is a widely shifting area with different practices varying from site to site based primarily on the needs of the site contractor. Some projects will have far more lax considerations for health and safety whereas others will be far more strict whether it's the PPE used or even going so far as to make a request for a Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS)

card as well as additional checks such as ones specific to HS2 or national grid projects.

Personal experience of site safety with regards to excavations has been much more fraught, both archaeology companies and contractors espouse safe working conditions and working slower and safer when subject to audits and inspections from health and safety executives but when deadlines approach and pressure is applied, said pressure usually ends up rolling downhill towards field staff and excavators who are pressured into overlooking safe working practices in order to meet conditions which ends up with them put into the ethical dilemma of working safely and to best practice but finding themselves missing deadlines and being subject to increasingly more critical annual reviews or possibly even risk of dismissal or working to meet deadlines but overlooking safe working practices to the detriment of the safety of others or more likely themselves which can lead to a number of problems especially later in life be it various muscular / skeletal problems from back pain to joint issues all the way to more deadly issues such as asbestosis or silicosis this is in addition to the realm of mental health issues brought on from such stresses such as anxiety and depression which can be long lasting. There is a counter argument to be made that there are checks and processes to prevent both sides from happening however at the moment in time when the decision is made it is usually far more immediate and can be influenced heavily by threats or harassment from senior staff. Although it is starting to change in recent years, field archaeology has been especially fraught with temporary and insecure work contracts that make it harder for staff to be more vocal about ethical and professional concerns in the workplace.

Although not directly a problem associated with the scheme, ethical and professional concerns can come from members of the public in a variety of ways. Previous schemes the author has worked on have been ones considered 'unpopular' in the public / political eye and so issues with protestors and how to deal with them is a particularly ethical concern. In the case of one project a toolbox talk was issued by the contractor stating not to talk to members of the public or press and to call for site security if any part of site is breached. This culminated in one particular incident where the author of this assignment and two coworkers were almost assaulted by a member of the public at a railway station due to being misidentified as groundworkers with the aforementioned project though quickly became friendly upon realizing that we were archaeological staff and that we were "Holding the project up". Similar issues have also come up on smaller scale watching briefs, in one incident a local resident crossed a barbed wire fence and came walking across a field in which two 360 excavators were working to complain that we shouldn't be building for another six weeks. Upon pointing out that we were archaeologists undertaking a watching brief going through topsoil for the installation of piling rigs they changed their attitude though this highlights that archaeologists are often misidentified as construction workers and so ethical and professional issues that affect them can sometimes be directed to those working in the heritage sector.

Further ethical concerns surrounding archaeology and the roles undertaken involve those surrounding issues of sustainability and carbon footprints, although companies are taking more efforts to push sustainable practices from recycling consumable

products to more eco-friendly choices in management (such as working from home) there is still a long way to go and a lot of the issues are overlooked as they impact commercial archaeology as a sector. A key example of this is the amount of mileage field archaeologists when travelling to sites in some cases on the other side of the country where there are already archaeology companies. A lot of this is something that cannot be solved by token gestures such as recycling but are symptomatic of bigger issues that go far beyond roles such as that of a post excavation supervisor who cannot influence the tendering process in such a way to ensure archaeology companies only work on local projects to cut down on emissions.

As is the case with both field archaeology and undertaking tasks in post excavation, it is easy to consider ethical and professional practices in the workplace when job security is not at risk, when deadlines are not looming and when the concerns are outside of your own department or remit as many concerns are ones that can only be solved from a management position and in personal experience raising these concerns can lead to being earmarked as a 'troublemaker' or ultimately get ignored for more pressing matters such as maintaining a smooth workflow or maintaining a more 'positive' relationship with clients (prospective or otherwise)

Bibliography

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