

Assignment 4: 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.

My role in the ongoing archaeological excavations at Sizewell has taken many forms over the course of my work on the project, and several different positions within the company. Since 2021, I have been variously involved in sampling for geoarchaeological modelling ahead of work on one site, digging on the first three open area excavations, geomatics and landscape survey across the sites, and finally, the recording, analysis and reporting of artefactual material, and in particular, prehistoric pottery. The project as a whole is one of the largest archaeological projects ever undertaken in this country, and at times involves upwards of 100 field archaeologists from two companies working together across multiple projects. The archaeological opportunity is enormous: the geographical span of the sites alone will provide a rare chance to look at 'big picture' patterns of activity across a wide, interconnected landscape quite unlike that presented by linear schemes like pipelines or roads. What is more, the opportunity for the development of archaeologists as part of this project is huge. The training I received in geomatics, and geoarchaeology before that, the creation of my current role and the capacity to pursue this apprenticeship programme, is in large part due to the huge commitment to social value made by the Sizewell project, and to the Cotswold Archaeology (CA) team's commitment to Principle 5 of the ClfA Code of Conduct, supporting the professional development of our team.

As of now, the project's first set of completed excavations are undergoing post-excavation assessment, while several more sites are in the midst of fieldwork at the same time. In my

current role, my core responsibilities are to record, analyse and report on artefactual material for the post-excavation assessments, and because of my pottery focus, to provide ongoing spot-dates to the field teams on all areas, to help inform on-site investigative strategies. Tied to these are more situational responsibilities, such as providing advice to the field team on particular finds recovery strategies, and helping to identify and resolve any problems with recording or tracking systems. Few roles within the project are so consistently connected to both fieldwork and post-excavation, and as such it makes sense that more informally, my responsibilities include supporting communication between various stakeholders both within the project, and in the wider community and public through outreach activities. My work on this project varies week to week, with so many sites and such diverse responsibilities, but in all areas is bound by commitment to CA's statement of values (CA 2024), the principles of the ClfA code of conduct (ClfA 2014), in addition to my own ethical judgement as an archaeologist and a colleague.

Supporting fieldwork

On a weekly basis, I go down to the warehouse to spot-date all the ceramics that have been brought in from site and washed that week. By feeding information on artefact dates, associations, areas of likely residuality, etc. back to the field teams weekly, I'm able assist stakeholders on site in understanding the significance of the archaeology, and help to inform strategic decisions to be made on site. This overlap of assessment work and fieldwork is enormously beneficial because it allows for the adjustment of investigation strategies and expectations on an incremental, ongoing basis rather than waiting for more widely spaced visits to site by the specialists team. In doing so, it supports the field team in confidently

upholding ClfA Principle 3: conducting work such that “reliable information about the past may be acquired” (ClfA 2014). The quality of my recording work benefits from this process, too: because I use the daily updated web-based survey plan of the site as I spot date, over time I am able to build a strong familiarity with the broad phases and distribution of archaeology present on each site as I go, as well as generate relatively accurate period-by-period quantifications far in advance of the assessment stage. In line with Principle 3.2 of the Code of Conduct (ibid.), on always being prepared for a project, this gives me time and space to thoroughly prepare my understanding of the site long before the official assessment stage begins, as well as feed information back to various stakeholders on the post-excavation side early enough to prepare programmes and resources in advance.

In the spirit of Principle 5.8 (ibid.), supporting the training and development of colleagues, I have tried to conduct my work in this role in a way that supports wider, systematic sharing of knowledge and access to information among my colleagues. Sizewell was one of the first sites where I started recording spot-dates for all ceramics directly into our Digital Recording System (DRS), rather than the previous system of creating a spreadsheet which would be passively available to the project leaders: I mentioned sharing with “stakeholders” above, because using the DRS means that the information is now directly available to everyone working on the project. The DRS is accessed by all field staff several times a day to record their features - so where previously, excavators often heard little more about their finds after bagging them up, they are now able to see how their contributions have progressed through the system, as well as use the information to build their own understanding of the feature types and assemblages they encounter. To the same end, I worked with the geomatics team to ensure that this information is also visualised on the webmap in real time, so that all team

members are able to engage with the information at site-level as it progresses, rather than just feature by feature until the report comes out. Indeed, it is a CA core tenet that “engagement with heritage activities, either directly or indirectly, benefits individual wellbeing” (CA 2024), and I hope that this democratised access to information in some small way helps to facilitate not only junior staff’s personal skill development but also the whole team’s sense of engagement and investment in the heritage.

A further aspect of my involvement with the field team is as a point of contact when Project Leaders are seeking specialist guidance on best practice for finds recovery, transportation and storage, in accordance with CA procedures and in accordance with the ClfA Principle 3.5, “ensure that the record [...] including artefacts [...] is maintained in good conditions while in his/her charge and [...] that it is eventually deposited where it is likely to receive adequate curatorial care and storage”. This is of particular importance on Sizewell because of the composite nature of the teams working on site, representing both Cotswold and Oxford Archaeology, which are therefore often unfamiliar with CA methodologies and processes. Perhaps because I was part of the Sizewell field team and have maintained close relationships with personnel of both companies, I am often called directly to ask about specific situations in need of a differentiated recovery strategy. However, in many cases I currently lack the experience to offer advice, bearing Code of Conduct Principle 1.4 in mind, on not undertaking work for which you are underqualified (CIFA 2014). My responsibility in such situations, then, is to act as a liaison between teams, and assist more senior team members in providing specialist advice on say, the storage of shale artefacts, processing of unfired loomweights, etc. Less obviously, but perhaps more importantly, my role there also includes actively learning from applying the experience of more senior finds personnel to a

wide range of real situations, so that my sphere of competence grows to include these situations.

Preservation by record

My other core responsibility on this project is to undertake recording, analysis and reporting of a range of artefactual material from the sites, but especially prehistoric pottery, and in doing so to “commit to the maintenance and development of the highest professional standards in our activities” (CA 2024). This includes identifying and recording appropriate variables to generate datasets and enhance understanding of the significance of the assemblages, as well as their potential to contribute to knowledge, especially in line with research frameworks such as the East of England Research Framework (2021) or relevant thematic agendas such as the PCRG Research Framework (2015). This work is undertaken with the mentorship of more experienced team members, to ensure my competence and capacity to adequately undertake it.

Of all the tasks I undertake in my work on Sizewell, this likely carries the heaviest ethical weight of responsibility: given the destructive nature of the excavation, the recording process contributes to the wider preservation-by-record of the significance of the site (Frere 1975). As such, undertaking it entails a further responsibility to produce an archive (or part of an archive) of material ‘as a resource for study and enjoyment now and in the future [...] the creation and maintenance of an adequate record through appropriate forms of research, recording [...] and dissemination of results” (CIfA 2014, Principle 2.1). In a modern context, this means creation of a durable, stable digital archive, with rich data and metadata to

enable both human and machine readers to search and access the information (Go FAIR, 2016). Within our corporate structure, responsibility for the process of deposition of digital and physical archives technically lies with a separate team – however, in practice, responsibility for the creation of a transparent, legible and useful record, in line with widely adopted standards (e.g. PCRG, SGRP, MCRG 2016), falls to the recorder.

Sharing the good news

A tangential part of my role at Sizewell has been to contribute to ‘outreach’ activities, engaging local and regional stakeholders in discussion of the early results of the uncovered heritage. CA core values include “[making] the past relevant, interesting and enjoyable to a broad spectrum of beneficiaries”, and “developing knowledge of the past among stakeholders [to increase] community cohesion and identity, and [further] overall appreciation of the world we live in”(CA 2024). In light of the significant impacts that Sizewell development is already having on local and regional communities, and the long road to final publication of the results, it has been a priority to find ways to share the benefits and early results of investigations in the interim. To that end, an ongoing programme of in-person events and press releases has helped to inform and engage local and regional stakeholders, in the spirit of Principle 4 of the Code of conduct (“making available the results of archaeological work with reasonable dispatch”). It was my responsibility to help develop an exhibition of artefacts and interpretational posters, as well as interactive activities, for inclusion at the Suffolk Show last June. On that occasion alone, we engaged around 2000 people in conversation about the results over the course of two

days, and further outreach activities are planned for the year to come, to further spread the benefits of archaeology to communities beyond academia.

On other projects, I have been able to work with our Finds Manager to apply a similar approach for our own colleagues: we developed a “Finds Roadshow” where we curated a collection of the artefactual assemblage from an evaluation and took it to the team on-site at the subsequent open area excavation, to facilitate training and discussion around the interpretation of the site. Given the vastness of a project like Sizewell, it is easy for staff to feel dwarfed and perhaps become disconnected from the significance of the archaeological work they are contributing to – so this is a project I am keen to repeat for our Sizewell teams, to enhance the engagement of all stakeholders, develop team competence, and raise awareness of the nature of the work that we are doing.

Conclusions

My role on this project carries a range of significant ethical responsibilities: the provision of good information to inform sound strategic investigative decisions, the engagement and professional development of my colleagues through information sharing, the creation of reliable data and transparent research into the past, and the sharing of results and benefits from our work with wider communities of stakeholders, both academic and public. The effective fulfilment of these responsibilities relies in most cases on the cultivation not only of my own competence, through mentorship and self-development, but also of relationships within our own teams and further afield. It is clear to me that my experience in, and maintained relationships with, teams on varying aspects of the project before taking on this

role has enormously enhanced my ability to bridge communication gaps between disciplines, teams, and even companies. Furthermore, by its very nature, the creation of this liminal role, sitting between the specialist team, processing team and field staff, has increased curiosity and reduced hesitancy of junior and intermediate staff to engage with the specialist team, providing perhaps a more approachable point of contact for more regular, informal consultation. It is my particular hope that, moving forward, I am able to continue to develop the role to be more inclusive and find new ways to uplift and support the engagement of colleagues from other departments with finds, since it is only through greater co-operation that we will develop robust, capable teams with the capacity to make the most of the archaeological resources we are lucky enough to work with.

References

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