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Archaeology and the State We're In: Defining a Role for Historic England in the Archaeological Practice of the Twenty-First Century

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ABSTRACT

The conduct of archaeology in England has changed radically over the last quarter century, particularly as a result of the introduction of development-led funding. It continues to evolve, not least because of the significant – and in all probability permanent – reductions that have occurred in the UK's public expenditure since 2007–2008. Further change may be anticipated as a result of the UK's exit from the European Union. The creation of Historic England in 2015 has offered an opportunity to review its future role in a national archaeology that is now dominated by the commercial sector, with all the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that this involves. This article summarises the outcomes of our review and the way Historic England's approaches to archaeological practice will develop as a result. It also provides a more personal perspective on the background to those deliberations. During the review process, Historic England was aware that others were also considering the future of the discipline from different vantage points. These commentators included the British Academy, which chose to address archaeology in the second of its Reflections on Disciplines exercises, and various European archaeologists who were engaged in debate over practice models with differing degrees of state control or commercial freedom.

KEYWORDS

Historic England; English Heritage; development-led archaeology; preventive archaeology; commercial archaeology; archaeological practice; archaeological publication; archaeological synthesis; archaeological archives; archaeological research; public value in archaeology

Introduction

In April 2015 the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England, commonly known as English Heritage and first established by the National Heritage Act 1983, was split into two organisations. These are Historic England, which continues to act as the government's principal adviser on the historic environment in England, and a new English Heritage Trust, a charity that manages the state's portfolio of over 400 historic properties under the terms of a licence issued by Historic England.¹ Arguably, this was the biggest organisational change in the statutory arrangements for managing England's historic environment since English Heritage was first created as an arm's-length agency of government.²

These organisational adjustments have taken place against the backdrop of a halving of Historic England's funding over the last decade, reflecting the wide-ranging reductions in

public expenditure that followed the financial crisis of 2007–2008. This challenge has nevertheless afforded the organisation the opportunity to review a number of areas of its activity in the light of wider governmental, economic and societal changes. This process of reflection has included an in-depth reconsideration of the organisation's relationship with key aspects of the practice of archaeology in England: something it has not done in quite such detail for a number of years. This paper sets out some of the thinking behind – and outcomes from – those deliberations.

The Background to the Review

The principal engine for our review process was a rolling programme of topic papers discussed with our statutory Historic England Advisory Committee (HEAC) during 2016 and 2017. In addition, several of the key topics were also explored with the wider archaeological sector in six '21st Century Challenges for Archaeology' workshops, held during 2017,³ jointly sponsored by Historic England and the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA). Around 150 individuals attended these workshops and over 90 people contributed to preceding on-line discussions. These will inform a cross-sector implementation plan to be formulated in 2018.

During this process of consultation, we were aware of legislative and policy development within the UK devolved administrations and also that other stakeholders were considering the strategic future of the discipline from different vantage points. Of particular note was the decision by the British Academy to address archaeology, including the relationship between archaeology and academia, in the second of its Reflections on Disciplines exercises.⁴ At broadly the same time, a lively debate was also taking place amongst European archaeologists about the respective merits and challenges of practice models with differing degrees of state control or commercial freedom, with the UK seen by some as exemplifying the most liberal approach.⁵ Alongside our partnership with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, Historic England has engaged with both of these high-level discourses and we support the British Academy's assessment of the impact of archaeology at the 'macro-level' on cultural, political, scientific and environmental issues and its ability to contribute to answering societal 'big questions'.⁶ However, with no prospect of new heritage legislation on the horizon and the UK's future political and fiscal dispensation far from certain, our review process has been very deliberately focused on addressing current practical challenges and 'art of the possible' responses. Our focus was to identify pragmatic solutions to immediate real-world problems that can be delivered within the current statutory framework and approach to the public finances, rather than on longer term and more aspirational change.

The Evolving Discipline

Throughout our review process, Historic England has been aware that, in order to determine the role of a national agency in the archaeological practice of twenty-first century England, we have had to reflect – at least to some extent – on the wider state of our profession. In the 34 years since the creation of English Heritage, archaeological practice has changed almost beyond recognition, as have its practitioners. The main catalyst for this change was the requirement that developers make provision for the recording of archaeological remains ahead of construction works: first confirmed as government policy in 1990, with the issuing

of *Planning Policy Guidance Note 16: Archaeology and Planning*.⁷ Prior to this, although some excavation was funded voluntarily by developers, most emergency recording in England was grant-aided by English Heritage and its Department of the Environment predecessor.

The effect of this policy change was dramatic. In 1988, for example, it was estimated that archaeological units, were generating 30–40% of their income (£14 million) from developer funding, with state spending providing the balance.⁸ While the forward projection of budgets is certainly not an exact science, we estimate that, if the state's rescue archaeology budget for England been protected and kept in line with inflation, it would be worth between £13 and £15 million at today's prices. In contrast, by 2010, 90% of all archaeological interventions were already development-led⁹ and, today, most archaeological practices are wholly developer funded. Recent estimates suggests the UK industry had a total value in 2014–2015 of £163 million, and in 2016/2017 of £197 million, the majority of which was spent in England.¹⁰

The circumstances of this transition have been well rehearsed and need not be repeated in detail here. Readers are referred to 'Time Please', the best (and certainly most entertaining) account of these developments, provided by the late Geoffrey Wainwright in typically forthright style.¹¹ The main results of the changes described by Wainwright have been to free the taxpayer of the responsibility for funding development-led archaeology; to ensure that available archaeological funding is far more proportionate to the scale of the impacts arising from development; and to allow the remaining (if declining) state budget for emergency archaeological recording to be focused on other areas – such as climate change¹²; coastal erosion,¹³ and agricultural attrition¹⁴ – where the 'polluter pays' principle does not have a direct or simple application.

From the outset, therefore, our review was informed by the key conclusion that development-led funding for archaeology was delivering significant public benefit in terms of England's heritage. This, in turn, led us to conclude that, while it is certainly not Historic England's role to regularly intervene in the general functioning of the archaeological services market, there is a genuine public interest in ensuring the continued health of that market. Historic England should, therefore, have a role in helping to address those challenges that the commercial sector cannot itself resolve – issues that economists would term its 'market failures'.

Other Models are Available

The system now operating in the UK is certainly not without critics, some of whom appear to be motivated as much by personal political beliefs, as by purely professional ethical considerations.¹⁵ As noted earlier, the review of our future role in archaeological practice coincided with a renewed round of debate amongst European archaeologists about the appropriate balance of influence between the state and the market in our discipline. French colleagues have been particularly prominent in this discourse, perhaps spurred on by an election in 2017 that was seen as a significant crossroads for France's future economic direction and market philosophy.

Notwithstanding the concerns in some quarters, successive reviews of 'preventive' archaeology across Europe have emphasised the increasingly wide adoption of development-led commercial delivery models.¹⁶ These each exhibit differing levels of centralised state control – through mechanisms such as licensing and close supervision – depending on local statute, policy, practice and inclination. Considering the UK approach against this pan-European

backdrop,¹⁷ it is also clear that England operates one of the least (if not the least) centrally-controlled approaches to the practice of archaeology in Europe. This is perhaps unsurprising for a system which must, perforce, operate in one of its most liberalised economies – hence the title of this paper and its nod to Will Hutton’s seminal 1995 publication.¹⁸

The fact that most UK archaeology takes place in a landscape of increasing deregulation led Historic England’s review to acknowledge the importance of a professional institute representing the public interest in the practice of archaeology in England: and one that can respond effectively to the limited degree of government intervention in the market with a strong ethos of professional self-regulation. Without the twin pillars of at least some degree of central and local government involvement on one hand and a robust professional institute on the other, we find it difficult to see how England’s liberalised approach to archaeology can continue to deliver high quality outcomes. This conclusion provided the rationale for our choice of the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists as our partner in delivering a joint ‘21st Century Challenges’ programme.

Archaeology and the Historic Environment

Having broadly defined Historic England’s relationship with the commercial archaeological sector, our review also considered the articulation of the archaeological resource – particularly the buried and submerged resource – with the wider concept of the historic environment. For this purpose, we adopted our own broad definition of the practice of archaeology as: ‘an investigative discipline aimed at enhancing understanding and public appreciation of the human past through the study of material remains: an approach equally applicable to submerged and buried remains, landscapes and the fabric of standing buildings’.

Archaeology has, rightly and productively, been fully integrated within thinking about the wider historic environment since the term and idea gained currency during the 1980’s. In terms of practical delivery, this vision was pioneered by Historic England when it established cross-disciplinary teams for the majority of its work in the early 1990’s. Since then, the philosophy and approach has become unremarkable for many (but by no means all) organisations in the heritage sector. Notwithstanding the fundamental importance of this integrated approach, for the purpose of our review we found it useful to define and acknowledge a series of particular management challenges presented by the *buried and submerged archaeological resource* that are generally not shared with other aspects of the historic environment and which, therefore, require specific policy and practice responses. Arguably, in the effort over recent years to promote unified thinking on the historic environment, some of these more particular archaeological challenges have been overlooked or side-lined in terms of policy formulation. Our review defined these as follows:

- (1) Albeit often a continuum with above ground remains, the buried and submerged archaeological resource is by definition largely ‘hidden’. As a result, the significance, condition, boundaries and inter-relationships of individual assets are often poorly understood; different methodologies (such as excavation and geophysical survey) are required to interrogate and understand them; and very many assets (inevitably including many remains of national importance) remain undiscovered or unrecognised.

- (2) The archaeological designation system has a different legislative basis from that for buildings. Importantly, the scheduling of nationally important archaeological assets under the terms of the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 (or their designation as historic wrecks under the Protection of Wrecks Act 1973) is discretionary; the detailed controls imposed are often ill suited to spatially extensive designation, in contrast to the often extensive character of the resource itself; and Government deals directly with the resultant consent system, rather than doing so at arm's-length, through local authorities, as it does for Listed Building Consent.
- (3) As a result of 1 and 2 above, a smaller proportion of nationally significant buried and submerged archaeology is likely to be designated than is the case for the built heritage. Consequently the planning process (rather than the heritage consent process) and local authority advisory services are likely to bear a proportionately greater responsibility for the protection of the nation's most important heritage assets, where they are buried or submerged.
- (4) Damaging processes outside the control of the planning system (such as agriculture, erosion and hydrological change) are arguably a greater threat to the buried archaeological resource than development, because they are both extensive in their effect and because they do not benefit from the protective or compensatory recording measures delivered by the development management regime. This may mean that a greater proportion of the nationally significant buried archaeological resource is at risk than is the case for the built heritage.
- (5) Developer funded compensatory recording of the buried archaeological resource threatened by development is a generally better established practice than for the built heritage. But, in contrast to the latter, it generates a significant material archive that poses its own resource and management challenges.
- (6) Finally, for the reasons given in 5, and because individual archaeological artefacts still have significance when separated from their parent context, archaeologists tend to be concerned with far larger numbers of portable artefacts than others in the historic environment sector.

These particular management challenges were recognised at the start of our review process and have informed its conclusions. They also helped us to define a pragmatic scope for the review, which otherwise could have become too wide-ranging and difficult to manage. In short, we focused on only those issues unique or particularly pertinent to the buried and submerged archaeological resource, rather than attempting to be wholly comprehensive in terms of all the ways Historic England engages with archaeology: and we chose not to address in detail those issues that apply to the historic environment as a whole, such as training or information management.

A Question of Scale: The Resource, Investigations and Budgets

Alongside the six factors listed above, three others have influenced Historic England's thinking on our relationship with future archaeological practice. These are: our developing understanding of the scale of the archaeological resource; the unprecedented number of investigations that have taken place since archaeology become embedded in the planning

process; and the implications of the reduction in government grant-in-aid support for Historic England (and other public bodies) carrying out archaeological functions.

In 1990, the resource as a whole was described in PPG 16 as ‘finite and irreplaceable’;¹⁹ drawing intellectually on comparisons with the then novel concept of ‘critical environmental capital’. By 1995 there were approaching one million archaeological sites recorded in national and local inventories, with an expectation that the total would exceed a million by 2000.²⁰ Since then a gradually widening definition of the archaeological resource, coupled with widespread archaeological recording and inventories, has significantly increased our perception of its scale. As result – and notwithstanding the fact that certain categories of archaeological site are being significantly depleted – the recognised and recorded resource is now significantly larger than it was in 1990.²¹ While this fact has had no overt effect in the current policy framework, it can be suggested that it has caused a gradual shift in professional attitudes that now provides a more balanced view of the respective merits of *in situ* preservation, compensatory recording exercises and research excavation.

Undoubtedly, the most significant change in the last quarter century has been in the scale of archaeological investigation being undertaken. Soon-to-be published figures from a review of the Bournemouth University Archaeological Investigations Project (AIP) suggests that over 75,000 archaeological interventions, ranging from trial trenching to full-scale excavation, have been initiated by the planning system, between 1990 when PPG 16 was published and 2010 when the AIP project came to an end.²² This is an order of activity several magnitudes greater than what went before. This, in turn, has delivered some very important benefits for the discipline: not least a significant increase in the resources available to it; the recording of thousands of important sites that would otherwise have been destroyed unrecognised; and quantum leaps in our understanding. It has also created some major practical challenges and it is arguable that some areas of our professional thinking and practice have not yet been adequately reconciled with the remarkable change in the scale of investigative work. These are considered further below.

In the latter half of this period, government grant-in-aid for Historic England decreased significantly (Exchequer funding of the organisation will have decreased by more than 50% between 2010 to 2020) and this has inevitably reduced spend on archaeology, alongside other areas of activity. Notwithstanding its own, often difficult, cyclical variations, the contribution to archaeology made by developer funding has therefore continued to increase not only in real terms, but also in terms of its relative importance in the overall funding landscape.

Outcomes of the Review: Defining Historic England’s Continuing Contribution

Based on the factors considered above – and taking account of the current legislative framework and fiscal climate – our review attempted to frame a simple expression of Historic England’s continuing contribution to the practice of archaeology. Inevitably, this focussed on identifying what we do that others do not and on those areas where we believe we can continue to add particular value. The result was the following re-expression of our role, which brigaded most of our archaeological functions under five broad headings:

- (1) Information and advice to government, to local authorities and to others on scheduling (listing), Scheduled Monument Consent, planning casework and a wide range of technical, specialist and scientific matters;
- (2) Action to maintain and enhance the effectiveness of the archaeological aspects of the planning system and reduce risks for developers by managing and sharing information on the archaeological resource (including for designated (listed), marine and other sites), and continuing to enhance that information, particularly in poorly understood landscapes and areas of high development potential;
- (3) Selective intervention to address weaknesses or failures in the market in commercial archaeological services;
- (4) Strategic responses to address archaeological impacts that lie outside the control of the land-use planning system, such as agricultural intensification, climate and hydrological change, and coastal erosion; and
- (5) Acting as the 'agent of last resort' for the recording of nationally important archaeological remains, whether unexpected discoveries in the planning system or unavoidable losses from threats other than development (such as those outlined in 4 above).

The continuing pressure on our resources will require us to further sharpen our priorities and seek efficiencies within a number of the more detailed areas of practice that support these broad functions. Some of these are considered in more detail below.

Statutory Protection and the Planning System

Statutory protection of the buried and submerged archaeological resource in England depends mainly on the Protection of Wrecks Act and the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act, dating from 1973 and 1979, respectively. The failure, in 2008, to find sufficient parliamentary time to complete the passage of a new Heritage Protection Bill means that England is likely to continue to operate this 1970's ancient monument legislation for the foreseeable future, in contrast to Wales which updated its statute in 2016. Notwithstanding this, Historic England is examining ways to make the Scheduled Monument Consent process more transparent and consultative, within the current legal framework.

Despite recent acknowledgement by Historic England that it will seek to increase the rate at which threatened archaeological sites are listed (scheduled), limits on our capacity, and extra measures now required to ensure transparency and accountability, mean that the annual number of statutory designation cases will remain comparatively limited and undoubtedly insufficient to counteract the wide range of pressures acting on the resource. We will, therefore, continue to explore other strategic initiatives that can offer protection to a greater number of archaeological sites. This will include seeking incentives for their positive management through any successor to the agri-environment measures of the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy. It will also include measures to sustain or, where practicable, improve the effectiveness of the archaeological aspects of the terrestrial and marine planning systems, while supporting Government's ambition to ensure that they facilitate sustainable growth. An important aspect of this will be to further refine our previous thinking²³ on how 'non-designated heritage assets of archaeological interest that are demonstrably of equivalent significance to scheduled monuments', as recognised in paragraph 139 of England's National Planning Policy Framework and associated guidance,²⁴ can be effectively

incorporated into its marine and infrastructure counterparts. Our overall aim is to improve the transparency and consistency of decision-making applying to this category of archaeological site, in order to offer greater clarity to local authorities, communities and developers. We will also continue to review whether pursuit of this aim may, in the short term, offer a comparatively better investment of Historic England's limited resources than the statutory designation of a comparatively small number of marine or terrestrial sites.

No consideration of the planning system can be oblivious to the fact that, between 2006 and 2017, the number of archaeological specialists advising local authorities in England has fallen (from its all-time high water mark) by 35%.²⁵ This continuing reduction in local authority advisory service capacity, largely due to restraint on public expenditure, is a matter which affects the historic environment as a whole, not just the buried and submerged archaeological resource. It therefore lay outside the formal scope defined for our archaeological review and it is being pursued by Historic England in other ways. For the purposes of our review, however, we did note that the discretionary nature of scheduling – in contrast to the listing legislation – laid a significantly different emphasis on the role of the planning system in protecting 'non-designated heritage assets of archaeological interest that are demonstrably of equivalent significance to scheduled monuments' (see above) and this was the subject of one of our 'C21st Challenges' workshops held jointly with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists.²⁶

Investigation

The vast majority of archaeological investigation is now delivered as an integral part of the development management process, either as pre-application interventions intended to inform the design process and reduce risk for developers, or as the post-permission mitigation of any unavoidable impacts arising from agreed development schemes. This integration of archaeology within the planning process has significantly reduced uncertainty and delay for applicants and responsible developers now accept the archaeological dimension of the planning process as routine. In 2015, the Chief Executive of the British Property Federation confirmed that: 'This approach has served the development industry well since 1990. Today, developers comfortably take archaeology in their stride. It is now very unusual for archaeological remains to cause a fundamental problem for a well-planned new development scheme.'²⁷ While Historic England is not party to the details of commercial transactions, we believe that the costs of archaeological recording and analysis are generally quite low as a proportion of overall development costs.²⁸ Indeed, we consider the UK's system of private sector archaeological practices and the process of competitive tendering to be an important safeguard in ensuring that costs remain reasonable and proportionate. Where occasional tensions do arise, this tends to be where planning best practice has not been observed.

This does not mean that our profession should be complacent about its approaches and our review suggested that it could continue to improve performance in a number of areas. For example, there remains a real challenge for the profession in terms of whether commercial archaeological investigation is yet sufficiently 'research question-led' and Historic England believes it has a role to play in driving improvement here. Since the mid-1990s we have supported various partnerships (mainly led by local authorities) in their production of a series of regional research frameworks and, in parallel, we have sponsored a number on national period and thematic frameworks. The purpose of these publications is to encourage

those undertaking investigations to adopt more sharply defined research questions and, therefore, increasingly selective recording. These frameworks are an important addition to the professional toolkit and are being referenced quite widely in briefs, specifications and project designs. It is not yet clear, however, to what extent they are successfully influencing on-site recording practices. Having recently reviewed the take-up and utility of these research frameworks, Historic England has concluded that they still have a role to play in driving more effective fieldwork, but that a different approach is warranted. We will now move away from hard-copy publication to a 'wiki' approach, with the potential to make research frameworks more collaborative, more current and more cost effective. We will also, over time, encourage other institutions to take long-term lead responsibility for maintaining the frameworks and we believe this could be an important role played by university departments.

Historic England would also like to see the wider adoption of a more 'reflexive' model for archaeological fieldwork. The apogee of this approach was the Heathrow Terminal 5 excavations, which commenced in 1998. In this exemplary project, the archaeological recording programme was not specified in inflexible detail from the outset. Instead, the initial research aims were allowed to evolve, informed by each preceding phase of work and the developing historical narrative. The project was also delivered through a lower – but more highly targeted – level of sampling than might normally be the case. While this 'reflexive' method clearly has many attractions, it has not yet been widely adopted, its utility has not been demonstrated for different types of archaeology and many archaeological practices and local authority advisers remain uncomfortable with the approach.²⁹ Despite our comparatively limited influence in this area, Historic England would like to see this approach tested further and we will consider promoting a more reflexive approach amongst those archaeological practices and their government agency clients that are engaged in archaeological schemes on which we are called to offer advice. We believe that a commitment to continue to promote a reflexive approach, coupled with our willingness to support a new generation of collaborative research frameworks and better professional standards, will be important steps on the road to achieving an even more efficient approach to archaeological investigation.

Agent of Last Resort

Because of the current effectiveness of the arrangements for archaeology in the planning system, Historic England no longer needs to routinely commission or grant-aid 'rescue' archaeological excavation. It does, however, retain a discretionary role as the funder-of-last-resort for work of this type, where nationally important archaeological remains are unavoidably threatened with damage or destruction. It does so in three carefully defined circumstances. Firstly, where damage is being driven by natural processes, such as coastal erosion; secondly, where damage is occurring outside the controls of the planning system, often with no direct or immediate causal link to an individual or organisation, such as agricultural impacts, the contextualisation of metal detecting finds or hydrological change due to drainage; and thirdly, where a recipient of planning permission and a local planning authority have put into place all reasonable measures to mitigate development impacts, but remains of unanticipated complexity, extent or significance are encountered and cannot be accommodated through re-design. The need for this safety-net for the development management process was recently dramatically illustrated by the discoveries at Must Farm, in Cambridgeshire, where Historic England stepped in to assist an exemplary developer and

planning authority when remains of international importance were encountered. For below ground and submerged archaeology, this last-resort role is not currently fulfilled by any other public body in England. It will continue to be part of our work, although all cases of this type must still be tested against the availability of funding and the value-for-money and public benefit achieved.

Analysis and the Publication Backlog

However instigated, archaeological excavation is fundamentally a research process and unrepeatable at the site specific level because, uniquely amongst the sciences, the process of investigation destroys the primary evidence. Archaeologists therefore have an ethical duty to publish their findings, although most would acknowledge that our profession's record in this respect is imperfect. After the publication of PPG16 in 1990, resources for post-excavation work were – at least in theory – secured through the planning process. Nevertheless, a large (if un-quantified) backlog of publication from the last quarter-century is known to exist. The reasons for this are complex but revolve around inadequate estimation or provision of resources for the analytical and publication phases of projects; the instability of some organisations undertaking the investigation work; commercial imperatives to take on new projects rather than complete old ones; and skills shortages. It is important to recognise, however, that the challenges of full publication are not limited to England or to countries which have adopted similar commercial practices. Indeed, many of the UK's archaeological operators have an excellent publication record, which may be the envy of many colleagues operating within different systems. A good, but not isolated, example is provided by Oxford Archaeology, which has an impressive rate of project completion, publishing over 200 excavation reports (ranging from monographs to journal papers) and depositing over 1000 archaeological archives since 1999 (personal communication: Anne Dodd, Post-Excavation Manager, Oxford Archaeology).

Over several decades Historic England and its predecessors have grant-aided the analysis and publication of a large number of important 'backlog' projects, focussing in particular on the pre-1990 era when post-excavation resources were often absent and routinely inadequate. Significant inroads have been made in terms of this challenge and, given this and the reduction in Historic England's resources, our emphasis on the backlog must now change. We will, therefore, move away from the funding of analysis and publication of orphaned pre-1990 archives, to an approach based on securing and signposting the remaining nationally important examples. Our intention is to enable other institutions, such as universities, to unlock this often internationally significant knowledge resource, with support from research councils and other funding bodies. In addition, for the first time, we will consider how we can best assess the scale of unpublished investigations which post-date 1990. In the current fiscal climate, however, this can be only a first step towards scoping a problem that is likely to remain intractable for very many years to come. Our main ambition, and a key challenge for the profession, is to improve standards, guidance, training and professional resilience to the point where new 'backlog' is no longer being generated.

Dissemination

The dramatic increase in the number of archaeological interventions since 1990 has been accompanied by a corresponding growth in the volume of publication undertaken outside formal academic channels: the body of so-called 'grey literature'.³⁰ With an average of perhaps 4000 investigation event reports generated annually, this has posed two challenges for the profession: firstly, a major variation in approaches to reporting and the standards adopted for it; and, secondly, difficulties with the discoverability and ease of retrieval of these 'grey literature' reports.

Between 1990 and 2000, Historic England grant-aided the painstaking gathering-up and indexing of archaeological grey literature through the Bournemouth University Archaeological Investigations Project (AIP). This aimed to significantly improve the on-line retrievability of 'grey literature' and its indexing via the British and Irish Archaeological Bibliography (BIAB) and, subsequently, the Archaeology Data Service Library. This initiative also involved the systematic reporting on broad fieldwork trends to support policy formulation.³¹ Although the value of this project and the public investment in it cannot be doubted, the costly *post hoc* gathering up of publications by others is no longer sustainable or warranted in terms of public expenditure, particularly given advances in digital technology. Instead, in partnership with the Archaeological Data Service (ADS),³² Historic England has invested in the continued development of OASIS (Online AccesS to the Index of archaeological investigationS) in order to allow local authorities and archaeological practices to make archaeological 'event' information available on line. In addition we have supported the development of a new ADS library³³ which encompasses the earlier AIP and BIAB records. Many archaeological practices and curators now use OASIS routinely as part of their workflows: but some do not. Historic England believes that this should now become an essential professional duty for all practitioners, clearly set out in professional standards and guidance. Once we are clear that these measures are successfully in place for a majority of practitioners, we will consider how to periodically harvest information from OASIS and the ADS library, in order to report on trends in the discipline, in a similar manner to the AIP project.

If the reliable retrieval of grey literature looks like a challenge that should soon be within the profession's grasp, we still appear to face a challenge with its quality. The issue has recently been given greater prominence as a result of a methodological review, funded by Historic England, as part of the wider Roman Rural Settlement project. This demonstrated a significant and continuing variation in the standards of grey literature reporting, with a resultant reduction in the academic, curatorial and public value of the products derived from development-led archaeology.³⁴ Because of this, Historic England has committed to support the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists in a review it plans to undertake of its core standards and guidance which, we believe, should include a clearer specification for the structure and content of grey literature intended to improve its utility.

Notwithstanding the growth in grey literature, a significant amount of state-funded, academically instigated or commercially led archaeological investigation is still published through long-standing traditional channels, either as monographs or as articles in learned journals. This has been estimated by the Archaeological Investigations Project³⁵ to be 'less than 10% of the total' of archaeological reporting and the Southport Group (a cross-organisational grouping set up to review the state of UK archaeology) estimated that monographs made up 5% of total reporting.³⁶ Arguably, if not demonstrably, it is these formal publication

channels that tend to be chosen for dissemination of the results of what are considered to be the most significant investigations.

Although long-anticipated, the advent of digital technologies has, as yet, made only a limited impact on the profession's approach to publication. And, where digital publication has taken place, it has generally translated the format of hard-copy publication into a digital milieu without taking full advantage of its new possibilities. Similarly, despite the facility offered by the ADS to deposit documentary archives in a digital format, this too appears to have had only a limited impact on the format and design of hard-copy or digital publications. It must, of course, be recognised that archaeology is certainly not the only discipline that has not moved away from the hard copy monograph, despite concerns over its 'fit' with the Government's stated intention to provide open access for publically funded research³⁷ and the weight placed by academia on the traditional long-form publication may explain much of that inertia. This approach does, however, face real and increasing challenges in terms of demonstrating public value. In 2003, for example, the CBA's survey of user needs³⁸ highlighted 'widespread dissatisfaction with the structure of reports, and diversity of opinion about the purposes of writing them'. It also concluded that, in terms of research and public benefit, 'the present pattern of publication is arguably falling short on both counts'. In 2011, the report of the Southport Group was even more critical, concluding that,

... there appears to be an over-reliance on publication in what were described to us as 'large dusty academic journals', with a lot of technical detail but very limited public readership. These generate high use value for scholars but very little for the public at large.

The report also noted that, 'Because of their specialist nature these monographs have very limited print runs. For the most interesting or important excavations an edition of 250–500 might be printed ... These beautifully printed volumes have a very small audience.'³⁹ In order to address these concerns, Historic England would like to see the widespread adoption of on-line digital archiving for all investigations. This would, in our view, make 'grey literature' largely obsolete and ensure that a well-structured and appropriately summarised documentary archive becomes the standard baseline for the reporting of all archaeological interventions. We believe that it could also pave the way to more inventive, accessible and multi-media summary publications, which make full use of digital technologies and which secure maximum public value by serving both professional and lay audiences. We realise that such changes may need to be evolutionary and that Historic England has only limited traction in this area, but we were impressed by the consensus around this approach revealed by the 'C21st Century Challenges for Archaeology' discussion of future approaches to publication.⁴⁰ We therefore want to lead by example and our review concluded that Historic England, acting as a publisher, should no longer issue detail-heavy excavation reports as hard copy monographs: nor should we grant-aid their production, other than on a print-on-demand basis. In all investigation projects we grant-aid, we will now always seek a 'digital-first' approach to publication, with the creation of a digital archive that is designed to be a core component in the dissemination of the project. We are also keen to promote public interest throughout the process of investigation and discovery, not just at its completion. We will therefore encourage other forms of digital outreach and engagement through all stages of the investigation projects that we support, as we did in the case of the Must Farm excavation.

New Understanding and Narratives: The Importance of Synthesis

While the recording and publishing of individual threatened sites is a vital aspect of archaeological practice, the full potential and public value of this work can be realised only by building new understanding and developing historical narratives that operate on a greater than site-specific scale. Indeed, it is arguable that this is the most important public benefit delivered by our discipline. Notwithstanding the early lead provided by the pioneering work of Richard Bradley,⁴¹ had this paper been written five years ago, the paucity of completed large-scale syntheses deriving from the outputs of commercial archaeology would have been a major concern. In the last few years, however, this omission is increasingly being addressed through a new generation of major synthetic projects. These have been undertaken mainly by university-based academics, generally funded by research funding bodies and, at least once, undertaken in close partnership with a commercial archaeological practice. They include: *The Towns of Roman Britain*⁴²; *The Rural Settlement of Roman Britain*⁴³; *Fields of Britannia*⁴⁴; *British and Irish Prehistory in their European Context*⁴⁵; *People and Places in the Anglo-Saxon Landscape*⁴⁶; *Londinium: A Biography*⁴⁷; and, based on an analysis of those records already incorporated in local inventories, *English Landscapes and Identities*.⁴⁸ These projects have confirmed the cumulative value of large numbers of interventions at a variety of scales. They have also demonstrated how development-led investigation is exploring landscapes and site types previously neglected by research-driven investigation and how, notwithstanding its own biases, the commercially-generated record is far more comprehensive and representative of the archaeological resource as a whole, when compared with the results of research-led fieldwork.⁴⁹ In addition, a methodological analysis component of the Roman Rural Settlement project, funded by Historic England, has confirmed the pressing need for better professional standards and guidance for archaeological fieldwork and publication in order to achieve even greater increases in the knowledge accruing from development-led investigation.

It is the sheer scale of developer-funded archaeology that has made the most significant contribution to the important new historical narratives emerging from our enhanced knowledge base. This can be illustrated by the fact that in London alone, over 200 excavations have encountered significant Roman remains since 1990⁵⁰ and that the studies of rural Roman Britain have drawn on the results of more than 2500 excavations. The resultant increase in knowledge is impressive. For example, as a result of this commercial work and its synthesis, Britain now has a good claim to be the best studied province in the Roman Empire.

Clearly, continuing work is required to exploit the still largely untapped potential of developer-funded investigation and Historic England will encourage the UK and European research councils to fund further major synthetic projects. We will also assist with such projects where we can, not least through our continuing efforts to improve the discoverability of 'grey literature' and to promote on-line archiving and publication. We will also encourage the higher education sector to undertake further critical methodological studies, in order to promote continuous improvement in professional standards for fieldwork and analysis.

Archives

One of the unintended consequences of the boom in development-instigated investigation has been to generate a significant challenge in terms of the capacity of museums to accept and effectively curate archaeological material and documentary archives. This is a particularly pressing problem because recent surveys have illustrated the significant number of site archives still held by archaeological practices and potentially posing a risk to their business; a continuing reduction in the number of museums willing to accept archaeological archives due to space and skills shortages; and the inability of many local museums to effectively curate and migrate digital documents over the long term. A survey in 2012 by the Federation of Archaeological Managers and Employers found there were 9000 homeless archives that had not been accepted by a museum or other repository⁵¹ and the more recent Seeing the Light of Day project⁵² suggests that, in the South West of England alone, there are over 1300 cubic metres of archaeological finds and documentary archives awaiting deposition. In responses to a survey by the Society for Museum Archaeology on behalf of Historic England, 71% of respondents that provided returns on their storage capacity reported they had 20 m³ or less space available for archaeological archives and 63.5% estimated they will run out of space in 5 years or less.⁵³ Similarly, in the South West, most museums estimate that they will run out of storage space in the next 2–6 years and that the significant backlogs already held by archaeological contractors will take up much of that space.⁵⁴

At the time of writing, a major review of museum policy⁵⁵ has highlighted this issue and asked Historic England to make recommendations to the Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, aimed at making the situation more sustainable. In doing so, we will be clear that any bid for a more strategic solution to archaeological archive storage will need to be informed by a clear expression of the public benefit delivered by those archives and the true costs of long-term curation. It will also need to be balanced by evidence that the profession is actively addressing the issue of what it needs to keep and why, in order to ensure that any future strategic archive capacity remains sustainable. In addition, any solution is also likely to require a move away from long-held professional assumptions about the co-location of documentary and material archives. Instead it should reflect current and future digital capabilities, the demands of long-term digital information management and the need, discussed above, for digital archaeological archives to be the core approach to the dissemination of fieldwork outcomes, rather than an after-the-fact and passive deposit of documentation.

In partnership with various stakeholders, Historic England is already taking forward various projects to make the case for a new approach to archives. We would, however, like to see universities and research councils taking a far greater interest in developing scientific, digital and theoretical approaches to the selection and recording of archaeological material in order to reduce the bulk of material stored and increase its discoverability for professionals and the public. As in the case of new approaches to publication, the re-framing of our professional standards and guidance on archival practice, together with professional training, will help drive improvement.

Conclusion: Key Themes from the Review

Historic England's exercise in critically reviewing its role in modern archaeological practice has been a stimulating process, particularly when informed by our conversation with the wider profession, in partnership with the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists. It has allowed us to clarify and confirm how Historic England might best continue to add value to the profession at a time when our resources are increasingly constrained. It has also underlined the importance of a strong professional institute to set and safeguard the discipline's standards in a system which operates with the minimum of external regulation.

A number of significant themes reoccurred throughout various stands of the process, not least the central importance of the planning system in terms of the way today's profession operates. This has been emphasised by the powerful new historical narratives that are now emerging as researchers mine the wealth of data generated by the development-led archaeology of the past quarter century. It is vital that archaeologists continue to emphasise the enormous public value of this increased understanding of our common national story, to ensure that it is not lost from sight as government continues to reform the planning system.

'Public value' was another thread that resonated through many aspects of our review: not only in terms of synthesis and new narratives, but also in terms of the wealth of material retained in archaeological archives and the potential of new technologies to help us tell even more engaging stories to a far wider audience. While Historic England certainly agrees with the assessment, in the 'Reflections on Archaeology' report, of the impact of archaeology at the 'macro-level' and its ability to contribute to answering societal 'big questions',⁵⁶ we also believe that it can and should demonstrate public value at the local and site-specific level by offering people the chance to engage with the process, with question-setting and with the generation of new understanding.

If these goals are to be fully realised, it is clear that they will require far closer working between the academic, public and commercial sectors, all of which face their own pressures. In particular, our review process noted the vital importance of effective local authority advisory and museum services to the continued effectiveness of the commercial sector, in order to serve the needs of sustainable economic growth. These are not parallel systems: they are symbiotic. With public expenditure liable to continue to be under pressure, it is important that developer funding supports the health of the archaeological ecosystem as a whole. However, the corollary must be a more acute, selective and transparent approach to what we value, excavate, publish and retain. The ability for the sector to demonstrate that developer funding has been used responsibly and to minimise costs to the public purse is likely to be the best means of convincing local and national government to continue to support those archaeological functions that the market cannot.

This need for a more coordinated approach to our profession in turn led us to one final – and perhaps overarching – theme. This emerged not only from our review, and from the stimulating conversations which accompanied it, but was also a central conclusion in the British Academy's 'Reflections on Archaeology' report. The challenge is whether we continue to have effective leadership in the archaeological profession of the twenty-first century and, if we do not, what do we need to put into place in order to reflect the plural nature of today's discipline? The solution lies with us all.

Notes

1. Throughout this remainder of this article the name Historic England is used to refer to both the current organisation and its predecessor, English Heritage, except in bibliographic references.
2. See Thurley, *Men from the Ministry*, as background.
3. See <http://www.archaeologists.net/21st-century-challenges-archaeology>.
4. British Academy, *Reflections on Archaeology*.
5. See e.g. Novaković, *Recent Developments in Preventive Archaeology in Europe*.
6. British Academy, *Reflections on Archaeology*, 38.
7. DoE, *Planning Policy Guidance 16*.
8. English Heritage, *Exploring Our Past*, 12.
9. Darvill et al., *Archaeology in the PPG16 Era*.
10. Hook et al., *National Infrastructure Development and Historic Environment Skills and Capacity*, 7; Aitchison, *Archaeological Market Survey*, 22, 29.
11. Wainwright, "Time Please."
12. See e.g. Howard et al., "The Impacts of Climate and Environmental Change on the Historic Environment."
13. See e.g. Murphy, *The English Coast: A History and a Prospect*.
14. See e.g. Trow "Ripping up History, Sordid Motives or Cultivating Solutions?"
15. See e.g. Kristiansen, "Contract Archaeology in Europe"; Demoule, "Preventive Archaeology"; and Schlanger, "If Not for You'.
16. See e.g. Bozóki-Ernyey, *European Preventive Archaeology*; Florjanowicz, *When Valletta Meets Faro*; and Novaković et al., *Recent Developments in Preventive Archaeology in Europe*.
17. See e.g. Thomas, "Development-led Archaeology in England"; Trow, "25 Years of Development-led Archaeology in England."
18. Hutton, *The State We're In*.
19. DoE, *Planning Policy Guidance 16*, para. 16.
20. Darvill et al., *MARS: The Monuments at Risk Survey of England*, xix, 65.
21. In 2017 there were 439,492 monument records in Historic England's National Record for the Historic Environment NRHE, including the c47,000 marine records (Pers Comm Gill Grayson and Neil Guiden). In parallel, the number of HER records provided by the 2016 HERs Content and Computing Survey was 1,470,511, with an 84% response rate.
22. See note 9 above.
23. See <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/what-is-designation/scheduled-monuments/national-importance-programme/>.
24. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/planning-practice-guidance> and note that the National Planning Policy Framework is currently under review.
25. Historic England et al., *The Ninth Report on Local Authority Staff Resources*.
26. See <http://www.archaeologists.net/21st-century-challenges-archaeology> for the workshop outputs.
27. Historic England, *Building the Future, Transforming our Past*, Foreword.
28. Hook, et al., *National Infrastructure Development and Historic Environment Skills and Capacity*, p. 8.
29. See Fulford and Holbrook, 'Relevant Beyond the Roman Period' p.7 for one view on the failure to adopt the reflexive approach.
30. While the term 'grey literature' is in many ways unhelpful, it is used here because it has no commonly accepted synonym. The Twelfth International Conference on Grey Literature in Prague in 2010 arrived at the following definition: "Grey literature stands for manifold document types produced on all levels of government, academics, business and industry in print and electronic formats that are protected by intellectual property rights, of sufficient quality to be collected and preserved by libraries and institutional repositories, but not controlled by commercial publishers; i.e. where publishing is not the primary activity of the producing body."
31. Darvill and Russell, *Archaeology After PPG16*; Darvill et al., *Archaeology in the PPG16 Era*.
32. <http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/>.
33. See <https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/library/>.

34. See Smith et al., *New Visions of the Countryside of Roman Britain* for the Main Project; Fulford and Holbrook, "Relevant Beyond the Roman Period" for the methodological discussion, together with various topic papers at <http://cotswoldarchaeology.co.uk/community/discover-the-past/developer-funded-roman-archaeology-in-britain/methodology-study/>, especially Paper 9.
35. See note 9 above.
36. Southport Group, *Realising the Benefits of Planning-led Investigation in the Historic Environment*, 67.
37. Initiated by the Finch Group Report *Accessibility, Sustainability, Excellence*.
38. CBA, *From the Ground Up*.
39. See note 36 above.
40. See note 3 above.
41. Bradley, "Bridging the Two Cultures"; Bradley, *The Prehistory of Britain and Ireland*.
42. Fulford and Holbrook, *The Towns of Roman Britain*.
43. Smith et al., *New Visions of the Countryside of Roman Britain*.
44. Rippon et al., *The Fields of Britannia*.
45. Bradley, et al. *The Later Prehistory of North-West Europe*.
46. Blair, *Building Anglo-Saxon England*.
47. Hingley, *Londinium: A Biography*.
48. Green et al., "Understanding the Spatial Patterning of English Archaeology."
49. Bradley et al., *The Later Prehistory of North-West Europe*, 26, 27, 329–330).
50. Perring, "Recent Advances in the Understanding of Roman London."
51. Smith and Tindall, *A Survey of Archaeological Archives*.
52. Fernie et al., *Seeing the Light of Day*, 1.
53. Society for Museum Archaeology, *Museums Collecting Archaeology (England) Year 1 Report*.
54. Fernie et al., *Seeing the Light of Day*, 6.
55. Mendoza, *The Mendoza Review: An independent Review of Museums in England*.
56. See note 6 above.

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