

“There’s no money to be made in finding a Roman mosaic”: a reflection of a team approach to Session 8 Ethics Case Study

Tabitha Lawrence 2214078



¹ Screenshots from the television show *Detectorists*, season 3 episode 2

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Introduction

On Wednesday 3rd April 2024 the cohort completed a scenario based about the television series *Detectorists*. The scenario took place in our weekly online lectures and involved six students and one lecturer (Martin Locock). Two clips of three minutes each focused on a field archaeologist Andy discovering a mosaic with his site supervisor then obstructing its acknowledgement and subsequently destroying it. We were instructed to watch these as a group and then comment on two elements: the health and safety and the ethics. What followed was an animated discussion on the health and safety as displayed within the clips and the ethics shown within the scenario. The reflection of these two discussions will follow below and consider several factors. This will include session structure, experience and knowledge and what challenges were encountered. This is basely solely on my own experience of the scenario both at the time and with consequent rewatching of the scenario's recording.

The scenario

The scenario was based on the popular television show *Detectorists* (2014-2022). Focusing on two friends Lance and Andy who are not "metal detectors, they're detectorists" (BBC Four website), these clips focused solely on Andy and his work within what is presumed to be a developer-led archaeological unit. The scene opens on site to where Andy is seen rushing to inform his supervisor Tim that he has uncovered a mosaic. After viewing photographs of it they both run across the site to look again at it, before Tim hurriedly tells Andy to cover it with a tarpaulin. What follows in the next clip is Andy returning to site to find the mosaic has been destroyed and removed by a JCB which he angrily chases. A heated argument follows between himself and Tim who is revealed to have orchestrated its removal. Andy quits on the job in disgust and the scene ends.

After viewing the clips, the six students were asked to comment on two elements: the health and safety of the site/ individuals and the ethics of the scenes.

Successes and Challenges:

1.1 Personal bias

It was clear that the discussion was influenced by the personal bias of all those present. Firstly, all those present are employed currently or previously within the heritage sector. Immediately our view was altered as our perception of the show clearly differed from our own reality within this sector (Schollmeyer, 2016). Out of the six students present, one of those is training to be a metalwork specialist and is an avid fan of the show itself therefore was extremely vocal in beginning discussion. I was also extremely vocal during both discussions through my role as a field archaeologist and having encountered

several metal detectorists in my career. These experiences were not always positive, therefore making me biased immediately towards the stereotype of a detectorist.

The students highlighted the show's bias itself, aptly named *Detectorists*. The show became extremely popular and ran for three series alongside one-off specials. The book *Landscape of Detectorists* edited by I.M Keighren and J. Norcup (2020) focused solely on the show's effect on heritage and popular culture. This agenda is part of a wider fascination with metal detecting that has exploded over the last few years (Webb, 2020). Bolstered by the COVID Pandemic and rise of social media, shows like *Detectorists* are joined by others like *Treasure Hunting* (2021) and *Finders Keepers* (2024) (Kale, 2020, Braidwood, 2023). Social media forums like BAJR had anticipated the show's effect with one comment noting "I do believe this will stereotype both for comedic effect" (Connolly, 2013). Comments like this rang true again in our discussion, of the reality versus the fantasy on screen.

1.2 Experience

My experiences shaped my approach towards the scenario by boosting my confidence to share my views. Through work as a field archaeologist, I have encountered a range of sites, often with interaction with detectorists. Another unique experience which I did not feel comfortable enough to share for fear of boasting was work I conducted on a Roman mosaic in central Colchester (Furniss, 2024). This work featured in the local and national press and social media (see figure one), meaning I could empathise with Andy immediately. When asked by Martin what I would have done once the mosaic's removal by Tim was apparent, I said I would "throw him (Tim) under the bus". This emotion was a direct result of my experiences of the Colchester site, which sadly we did have to backfill in the hope of remediation in the future. This experience presented a challenge as it was a complex site and one that I decided not to talk about, despite its relevance, in our discussion.

My experiences also made me comfortable to contribute to the ethics discussion. My volunteer role within ClfA and as an early career professional has made ethics a daily encounter. My approach towards health and safety was also influenced by my experiences, some of which I shared clearly. One example was the mattocking of flint and why safety goggles should be most important in the circumstance. Fieldwork health and safety has shaped my view as often it is not nearly as genuine as made out to be on paper.



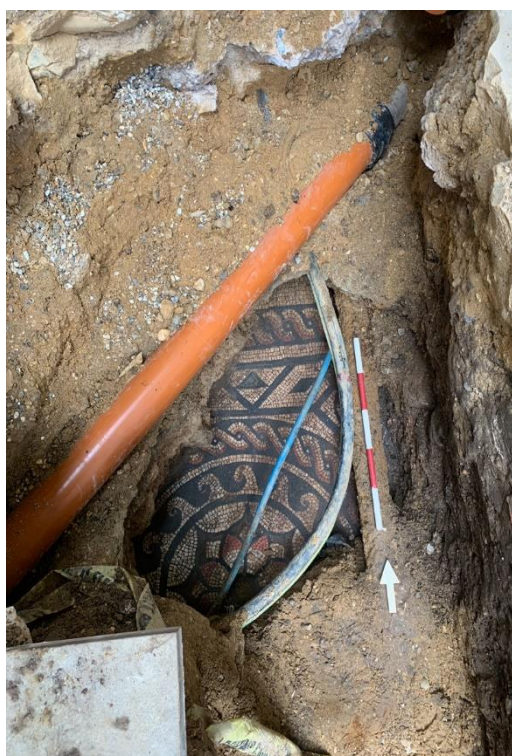
Martin Leatherdale, the Lion Walk shopping centre manager, explained further work is now being taken to ensure the mosaic can be excavated and then preserved in its best condition.



Teamwork - Tabitha Lawrence, Martin Leatherdale, Philip Crummy, and Harvey Furniss on-site (Image: Martin Leatherdale)

He said: "The reveal forms the first stage of investigative works to fully understand how much remaining mosaic is underground.

"Secondary to that, we are looking at the moisture content of the ground, which needs to be scientifically considered for the encapsulation.



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lionwalkshopping If a royal visit wasn't enough, we've discovered a piece of history that's been buried beneath our city for almost 2,000 years! 🤩

An incredible Roman mosaic is being uncovered in Red Lion Yard. We are working with @colchestercitycouncil and colch_archaeological_trust to excavate and preserve this artwork so that by the end of summer you can get a chance to see it.

It's shaping up to be an incredible year already 🌟

Figure One: photographs and screenshots from the excavation at Lion Walk Yard in Colchester, March 2023 (Rees, 2023, Lawrence, 2023, Lionwalk social media, 2023)

1.3 Knowledge

My knowledge was stronger in some areas of the discussion than others. I felt secure in my understanding of the ethics, and what factors may be at play in the scenario. Some of these were discussed as length like time pressures, hierarchy and business commitments. I was expecting the discussion to highlight the mosaic's destruction in a wider context, which I why I chose to ask about heritage crime and whether this would be an applicable label for this site. Heritage crime is a growing concern amongst organisations and individuals alike (Historic England, 2012, NPCC et. al, 2023) and the formation of a new Heritage Crime Special Interest Group within ClfA is akin to this (ClfA, 2023).

My knowledge faltered more on the requirements for health and safety. I relied heavily on my experience, what I had done in previous occasions regarding PPE, movements around machines and site awareness. But I was unable to quote any acts, laws or acronyms until after (such as RIDDOR). This is due to the fact I have fallen into a pattern like many field archaeologists of signing RAMS or H&S documents without fully digesting their contents (ClfA, 2014, HILTI, 2018). The last time I actively researched H&S was for my CSCS Card test in 2020 when it was a

requirement. I have since investigated it sporadically, but I realised with a lack of detail and understanding as needed through the discussion.

Outcomes:

2.1 Cohesion

The scenario gave all those present the opportunity to articulate views in a unique way. The use of television clips was a change to the routine scenarios we had encountered, which were often document based. This was also the first scenario to be based on popular culture, which was a key factor in our cohesion as a group. The group was made up of individuals from different backgrounds and career pathways. To my knowledge, I am the youngest and newest member of the profession within our cohort. In the past I have felt out of depth or at its worst severe imposter syndrome (Kilby, 2019).

However, this scenario was a new step in our group's cohesion where we could bond over something popular like television. A few group members had watched the show already, I admitted that I had never watched it but did know of it. I believe the pressure of not having a peer as a chair helped enormously. Whilst chairing is an essential part of professional interactions, this scenario allowed cohesion on a peer-to-peer basis (Jones, 2007). We were allowed to interact with each other as equals, regardless of background or previous performances. Cohesion was aided by a smaller number of people present, as we were missing at least one lecturer and four additional students (Abrams, 2019). We could discuss ideas without speaking over each other, and even overran the session by twenty minutes displaying our eagerness to continue discussions.

2.2 Understanding

The scenario developed our understanding of each other's daily lives which are often based in the construction industry where relationships can be fractured (Raynor, 2019). Several of us are either currently working within fieldwork or have a background in it. However, there are others who are based in other areas such as aerial reconnaissance or lab work. The discussions started as heavily 'field work leaning', however the discussion over health and safety brought greater group perception. Instances based in both labs and post-excavation environments were discussed, leading to additional voices in the conversation.

Despite our roles in other areas, the one common ground we all had was health and safety: its use, application and setbacks. We were provided an opportunity to reflect on it, and how often its reasoning was misaligned with the reality of a situation (for example wearing a hard hat in an open rural space).

The use of emotive language and visual cues was a key aspect throughout the scenario. Virtual learning and networking have increased dramatically since the COVID Pandemic, and to many it has signalled the loss of human connection (Baker, 2020). The scenario participants seemed engaged throughout with each other, and I felt personally it put me more at ease with speaking my own opinions. There was a common goal which was the comment on the video clips, facilitating discussion and visual cues like eye rolling, facial expressions, and laughter.

2.3 Ethical judgement

Upon reflection, ethical judgement played a crucial role in the scenario and to such an extent that it was commented on at the scenario's conclusion (M. Locock per comms). It was incredibly clear that all the participants held the same ethical judgement: that the destruction of heritage was wrong. As highlighted in the scenario PowerPoint ClfA guidance relies heavily on the work of Steare (2014) and uses RIGHT frequently in its discussion of ethics (see figure two).

- R** what do the **Rules** say?
- I** how do I act with **Integrity** – that is, how do I integrate my values into my actions?
- G** to whom would the possible courses of action do the most **Good**?
- H** to whom would the possible courses of action do the most **Harm**?
- T** am I being **Truthful**? How comfortable would I feel explaining why I acted the way I did to a group of my professional peers? If I think I wouldn't be comfortable, it is a bad sign!

Figure two: The mnemonic as composed by Steare (2014) and now a foundation stone of ClfA's approach to professional ethics.

If the same mnemonic is applied to the scenario of the mosaic's removal, we may get the following outcome. This is formed upon my own reflection of the scenario.

R – Rules: heritage crime laws, health and safety acts.

I – Integrity: report in a calm professional manner, avoid use of expletives, use of professional titles or roles within the scenario (my supervisor Tim).

G – Good: by reporting the mosaic's removal I am doing the most good to the archaeological record, the historic environment record itself and its curators, members of the public in the wider area, my own personal ethics towards the situation.

H – Harm: by reporting the mosaic's removal I am doing the most harm to my supervisor Tim who may face disciplinary action, the plant operators who may or may not have been aware of their role in the mosaic's removal.

T – Truthful: I am being truthful and would have no vested interest to lie, I have evidence both from memory and a digital record.

Conclusion

Overall, I believe out of the suite of scenarios that have been completed so far this scenario allowed for the most dynamic interactions between the group. Previous scenarios had included a formal set up reminiscent of 'board room meetings'. This was one of the module's aims. However, the scenario's informality aided two discussions on topics which could ordinarily be seen as unapproachable. The group were able to make decisions based on ethical judgment and mutual understanding. These foundations were highlighted at the end of discussions as being crucial. The lack of chair and small number of participants aided free-flowing ideas and led to effective time management and social cues.

Challenges were presented such as a lack of in-depth knowledge and often a bias towards fieldwork. Despite this, the group did gain cohesion to form conclusions which overall were to be expected. The destruction of heritage was a concept which was collectively agreed to be unethical. This core value was carried throughout the discussions. If the heritage had not been as 'significant' or of a different time period, I believe the outcome would have been different based on people's individual backgrounds, knowledge and experiences alongside their vested interests.

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