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CONTENTS PAGES

EDITORIAL		5
DOSSIER - ARCHAEOLOGY: FROM THE AGENDA 2030 TO THE WORLD POST-COVID		
G.P. Brogiolo, A. Chavarrfa Arnau	Archeologia e sostenibilità nell'era post (?) COVID-19	7
P. Gould	Resilience and innovation: an economic contemplation on public-facing archaeology after COVID-19	21
P. Gelabert	Past diseases: present questions and future perspectives from an archaeogenetic approach	35
C. Holtorf	An archaeology for the future: from developing contract archaeology to imagining post-corona archaeology	57
P. Everill	<i>Quo vadis?</i> What next for British archaeology?	73
D. Henson	Archaeology's place in education: under threat or an opportunity?	91
A. Rey da Silva	Sailing the waters of sustainability. Reflections on the future of maritime cultural heritage protection in the global sea of development	107
R.J. Williamson, M. Nevell, B. Humphrey-Taylor	Increasing the resilience of cultural heritage using novel technologies: the perspective from a UK volunteer-led site	135
C. Rynne	Waterpower and sustainable energy in 19 th -century Europe and the USA. An archaeology of the water turbine	147
RESEARCH - RETHINKING THE LATE ANTIQUE COUNTRYSIDE		
C. Corsi	The villa- <i>mansio</i> in the Late Antique Mediterranean: between historiographical creation and archaeological impotence	165
T. Lewit	<i>"terris, vineis, olivetis..."</i> : wine and oil production after the villas	193

- N. Conejo** Coins and *villae* in late Roman Lusitania: collapse of the Roman currency economy? 219
- A. Carneiro** Adapting to change in rural Lusitania: zooarchaeological record in the Horta da Torre Roman villa (Portugal) 247
- R. Montagnetti, D. Pickel, J. Wilson, F. Rizzo, D. Soren** New research in the Roman villa and late Roman infant and child cemetery at Poggio Gramignano (Lugnano in Teverina, Umbria, Italy) 279
- J.M. Nolla, M. Prat, A. Costa, N. Corominas, L. Palahí** La visualización de los visigodos en Gerunda y sus entornos. Datos significativos de un problema sin resolver 303

BEYOND THE THEME

- N. Tsvikis** Moving beyond the Invisible Cities of Byzantium 325
- P. Todaro, G. Barbera, A. Castrorao Barba, G. Bazan** *Qanāts* and historical irrigated landscapes in Palermo's suburban area (Sicily) 335
- S. Bianco, E. Allué, S. Riera Mora, A. Fernández, M. Soberón Rodríguez, C. Miró Alaix** The evolution of wood fuel exploitation in the El Born Market site (Barcelona, Spain) during the 15th-18th centuries starting from charcoal analysis 371
- A.R. Staffa** La transumanza in Abruzzo fra tarda antichità e medioevo 401
- P. Marcato** Analisi diacronica del paesaggio storico delle malghe di Brentonico (TN) tra XIX e XXI secolo 449

REVIEWS

- E. Dodd, *Roman and Late Antique Wine Production in the Eastern Mediterranean: A Comparative Archaeological Study at Antiochia ad Cragum (Turkey) and Delos (Greece)* - by **T. Lewit** 473
- M. Cavalieri, F. Sacchi (eds), *La villa dopo la villa. Trasformazione di un sistema insediativo ed economico in Italia centro-settentrionale tra tarda antichità e medioevo* - by **G.P. Brogiolo**
- F. Grassi, J.A. Quirós Castillo (eds), *Arqueometría de los materiales cerámicos de época medieval en España* - by **C. Citter**
- G.P. Brogiolo, A. Chavarría Arnau, *Archeologia postclassica. Temi, strumenti, prospettive* - by **A. Guidi**
- C. Giostra (ed), *Migrazioni, clan, culture: archeologia, genetica e isotopi stabili* - by **V. La Salvia**
- E. Guttmann-Bond, *Reinventing Sustainability: How Archaeology Can Save the Planet* - by **M. Fecchio**
- I. Huvila (ed), *Archaeology and Archaeological Information in the Digital Society* - by **L. Durjava**
- C. Holtorf, A. Pantazatos, G. Scarre (eds), *Cultural Heritage, Ethics and Contemporary Migrations* - by **A. Borsato**

Paul Everill*

Quo vadis? What next for British archaeology?

The British departure from the European Union has created unprecedented economic uncertainty for the UK, regardless of one's political viewpoint. As the UK enters a transition period, and the future trade relationship with the EU is being defined, it was perhaps harder than ever to predict what the future holds – even before the emergence of Coronavirus. Outlining the ways in which British and European protections for the historic environment have evolved in parallel, if not often hand-in-hand, offers a glimmer of hope for the future, assuming the economy and political cohesion of the UK can continue to support these protections.

Keywords: commercial archaeology, British politics, Europe

L'uscita del Regno Unito dall'Unione Europea ha creato un'incertezza economica senza precedenti per il paese, a prescindere dalle diverse visioni politiche. Con l'entrata del Regno Unito in un periodo di transizione e la futura ri-negoziazione degli accordi con l'Europa, era più difficile che mai fare previsioni per il futuro – anche prima dell'emergenza legata al coronavirus. Delineare i modi in cui la tutela britannica e europea dell'ambiente storico si siano evolute parallelamente, quando non mano nella mano, offre uno spiraglio di speranza per il futuro, assumendo che l'economia e la coesione politica del Regno Unito continuino a supportare queste tutele.

Parole chiave: archeologia preventiva e d'emergenza, politica britannica, Europa

1. Introduction

It is something of a challenging time to try to imagine what the future holds for British archaeology. Since this article was first proposed, in April 2019, the date of the British exit from the European Union through the 'Article 50' mechanism was extended until 31st October that year, having already been extended from March into April. In July, Theresa May was replaced as Prime Minister by Boris Johnson, as Conservative Party civil war raged between pro- and anti-EU factions. On the 19th October 2019, Johnson was compelled by an Act of Parliament, commonly known as the

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'Benn Act' after the Labour MP who sponsored it, to request a third extension until January 2020. Johnson pointedly did not sign the letter to the EU requesting the extension and submitted a second letter, which was signed, stating that he felt an extension was not necessary. Despite this an extension was approved by EU Ambassadors until 31st January 2020, and a snap UK General Election in December saw Johnson secure an increased majority in government. Negotiations over the future economic relationship between the UK and the EU were then overtaken by the appearance of a fast-moving global coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the epicentre of which has, at the time of writing, now moved from China to Europe. Against this backdrop of unprecedented political chaos in the UK, the nature of the future relationship between Britain and the EU is as hard to predict as the implications for British economic stability and, consequently, the implications for the protection of the historic environment. As a firm believer in the European Union, and its power to promulgate a progressive political agenda, I gladly declare an interest and make no secret of the huge sadness I feel having been stripped of my EU citizenship. That said, what follows is intended as a balanced appraisal of the present condition and future prospects of the archaeological profession in the UK. However, it must also be acknowledged that the current COVID-19 crisis is likely to strike an unprecedented blow to the global economy, probably resulting in a construction slowdown and ultimately redundancy for many archaeologists across Europe.

This article seeks to position the development of British archaeology against the backdrop of changing domestic legislative priorities, primarily those relating to the planning process, and the emergence of a supranational, European political movement over the last few decades. This, alongside consideration of recent economic factors, provides context for the current state of British archaeology and a basis for attempting to map it forward.

2. Visions for post-war Europe

In order to contextualise the current environment within which British archaeology operates it is, of course, necessary to examine the key historical events that ultimately shaped both the legislative frameworks and the profession itself. The secondary benefit to be derived from this is in the provision of a sense of trajectory that might be plotted forward, and used to inform speculation on the future form of both.

Prior to the Second World War, archaeological fieldwork in the UK was almost entirely research-led, with rare 'rescue', or reactive inter-

ventions often consisting of retrieving artefacts and bones from contractors' trenches (Rahtz 1974). However, legislation already existed to protect some sites, beginning with the Ancient Monuments Protection Act of 1882 and its successor Acts – most notably of 1913, 1931 and 1979, the current iteration. Despite this, the best protection for British archaeology was to come in the form of planning regulations after 1990. The UK Parliament passed the first Town and Country Planning Act (TCPA) in 1932, extending the concept of planning schemes to non-urban environments and to the redevelopment of urban areas. The Acts of 1943 and 1944 were concerned predominantly with the rebuilding of war-damaged towns and cities, but by 1947 the focus was on implementing a modern vision for Britain and the Act of that year provided the framework of planning legislation for decades to come (Blackhall 2000). The TCPA 1947 repealed nearly all of the previous legislation, removing planning decisions from local authorities and centralising them at a time when industries and utilities were also being nationalised by the post-war government – a progressive Labour Party administration also responsible for the National Health Service. Central government implemented a system of town and country maps to be produced by local planning authorities – using standardised scale, notation and colour coding – and demonstrating land use. The long-established system of planning 'zones' was abandoned in favour of 'land allocation', whereby the primary land use of certain areas is decided by the planners, but allowing flexibility in secondary land use such as for retail in residential areas. The TCPA 1947 also took some rights away from individual landowners meaning it was no longer possible for someone to develop on his or her own land without prior approval; and where approval was forthcoming the landowner was required to pay in tax the difference between the value of their land before and after the granting of planning permission. The Planning Acts of 1953, 1954, 1959 and 1960 made minor amendments to the 1947 Act, all of which was consolidated in 1962 (Blackhall 2000).

The 1950s and early 1960s saw a return to power of the Conservative Party, and even Churchill's return as Prime Minister from 1951 to 1955. The period saw the focus shift from Empire to Commonwealth, and the near economic collapse brought about by the war led to the domestic agenda taking priority. Despite this, Churchill himself had played a key role in promoting the concept of a Council of Europe during the war, in order to secure peace and economic stability in the aftermath of the dreadful conflict. In 1949, the Treaty of London founded the Council of Europe with Belgium, Denmark, France, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden signing the statute alongside the UK. At home, efforts were targeted at rebuilding, redeveloping, and mod-

ernising – with predictable threats to the historic environment. The Labour government had shown interest in co-founding a European Customs Union in 1947-8, but ultimately had withdrawn in order to retain favourable trade arrangements with the Commonwealth (Singleton, Robertson 1997) and after the ECU concept faded, the modernisers on the continent took a different path. The signatories of the 1951 Treaty of Paris – Belgium, France, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and West Germany – created a European Coal and Steel Community to promote cooperation and shared economic prosperity. This, in 1957, led to the Euratom Treaty creating the European Atomic Energy Community, and the Treaty of Rome, which established the European Economic Community (EEC). The three communities brought the six signatories into closer union and in 1961 the UK, along with Denmark, Ireland, and Norway, also applied to join. De Gaulle's veto of British membership meant that the communities did not expand their membership until 1973 when the UK, under the Conservative government of Edward Heath, joined along with Denmark and Ireland. The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), introduced by the EEC in 1962, was perhaps the biggest cause for concern for British voters at the time, with particular issues over the impact on consumers of subsidies for agriculture. Perceived interference, incentives to over-produce and, partly consequential to that, negative impacts on the environment, made the CAP the primary focus for anti-EEC sentiment.

The 1950s and 60s in Britain were characterised by slow economic recovery and the increasing pace of development. After the war the Ministry of Works, through the Ancient Monuments Inspectorate created by the 1882 Act and now based within that Ministry, had taken on greater responsibility for the funding of rescue excavations. As Rahtz (1974) and Wainwright (2000) have recalled, the role of Government as landowner, developer, and statutory conservation body during the construction of defence installations during the war had perhaps heightened the sense of responsibility, and set the tone for what was to follow. Thus the pace of development encouraged by post-war planning legislation was partly reflected in the increase of state-funding for archaeological intervention, though it still struggled to meet the demands. By the mid to late 1960s the widespread destruction of archaeological sites by developers was a cause of great concern amongst UK archaeologists (Addyman 1974; Barker 1974a; Thomas 1974). Most rescue excavations in this period were undertaken by local amateur groups that had been able to negotiate some time before development, with few lucky enough to receive funding. In the case of Scheduled Ancient Monuments government agencies struggled to organise adequate excavation prior to develop-

ment. Brian Philp (2002) recalls an incident in 1964 when the Inspector of the Ministry of Public Buildings and Works telephoned to say that the Faversham Royal Abbey site was due for development and, due to an administrative oversight, needed instant excavation as it was a Scheduled Ancient Monument. A similar episode occurred in 1969 when Sir Mortimer Wheeler invited Brian Philp and his Kent team to assist the desperate efforts of archaeologists to excavate as much material as possible ahead of the groundworks at York Minster. Richard Morris (1999) describes the same project in 1971, when archaeologists worked around the clock to keep ahead of the works.

The desperate situation brought a generation of British archaeologists together, inspired by six individuals – John Alexander, Philip Barker, Martin Biddle, Barry Cunliffe, Peter Fowler and Charles Thomas – who called a meeting in February 1970, with a second held in November. Across the two meetings over eighty excavators attended, and proposals were put forward to tackle the problems within archaeology. The first public meeting, which followed these, was an opportunity to talk about the proposals and to put them to a wider archaeological community. The immediate result of this meeting was the formation of *RESCUE: The British Archaeological Trust*, with a stated intention to mobilise public support and increase awareness of the threat to the historic environment. The new campaigning body would also push for legislative improvements, increased Government funding for rescue archaeology, and better training for archaeologists (Barker 1974b). The initial response was positive, and funding rose from £133,000 in 1970 (Barker 1987) to £450,000 in 1972 and £800,000 in 1973 (Barker 1974b). However, despite the efforts of RESCUE and increased media and public interest in archaeology, this level of funding increase could not be maintained. By 1986 it had reached a high of about £5,000,000 per year (Barker 1987). The early success of RESCUE, the first organisation to lobby for British archaeology, was only sufficient to slow the crisis, and it soon became clear that rescue archaeology needed some degree of financial independence from Government.

The concerns that had forged RESCUE were not unique to the UK however. The 1969 London Convention, the first European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage, sought to protect and preserve archaeological sites though the perceived threat came from unauthorised excavations. Signatories recognised

that while the moral responsibility for protecting the European archaeological heritage, the earliest source of European history, which is seriously threatened with destruction, rests in the first

instance with the State directly concerned, it is also the concern of European States jointly

(Council of Europe 1969)

International conventions such as this are not legally binding, however, and simply represent a commitment by state signatories to abide by the terms and, if necessary enact legislation in support of them. Despite this, the assertion of an international moral responsibility for archaeological heritage was important, as was the instruction to avoid acquisition of objects from “clandestine excavations or [...] coming unlawfully from official excavations” (Council of Europe 1969). The London Convention is perhaps less well known today than its revision, signed in Valetta in 1992, but was an important international agreement, and one that demonstrates early, parallel, concern for the protection of the historic environment.

In the UK, the 1950s and 1960s had seen a period of extensive slum clearance and rehousing and the appearance of private developers profiting from the redevelopment of town centres. The TCPA 1947 requirement of plan making and approval was proving unwieldy in this new and fast-moving environment, and a revised Act in 1968 amended the aging system (Blackhall 2000). It installed a two-tier structure, which meant that county councils produced plans to the 1947 requirements while district councils produced more detailed and technically up-to-date local plans, which, significantly, required the participation and approval of local communities. The Local Government Act 1974 created new metropolitan counties and the two-tier system of planning was extended to the whole country. Internationally the UK, under a Conservative Government, had joined the EEC in 1973 and had seen its continued membership approved by the public in a referendum held by the Labour Government of Harold Wilson in 1975. By 1979 the UK was participating in the first democratic elections of representatives to the European Parliament. Domestically, archaeology was still bolstered by huge numbers of volunteers supporting local research and ‘rescue’ projects, and institutions such as the Workers’ Educational Association and the Open University encouraged increasing levels of public engagement across a range of subjects.

The General Election of 1979 also saw the return to power of the Conservative Party, under Margaret Thatcher. The new government was fixated on private investment and keen to encourage developers and redevelopment. Seeing the existing planning legislation as a barrier to progress, by 1986 the government had introduced Enterprise Zones, Urban Development Corporations and Simplified Planning Zones. These initiatives were intended to promote the redevelopment of target areas, effectively by removing large portions of the planning requirements, and

by its abolition of the metropolitan county councils the government also removed a whole tier of planning requirements in the cities. It was during this period that the Government began trying to reduce local authority expenditure by encouraging private investment. For much of the 1980s “planning was ‘developer led’ because of the government’s determination that private investment should not be stifled by the planning system. Where local planning authorities refused planning permission, their decisions were frequently overruled by the then Secretary of State” (Blackhall 2000, p. 14).

For most of that decade British archaeology was also being bolstered by central government through a new channel. The Manpower Services Commission (MSC) had been created in 1973 to provide on-the-job training for long-term unemployed, and from 1980 the Community Programmes (CPs) managed through the MSC included archaeology (Green 1987). Developer-led archaeology, with its high labour requirements, was perfectly suited to this initiative, and by September 1986 there were 1,790 places on archaeological projects through the CPs. This also meant an additional £4.8 million in government funding for archaeology through the MSC, on top of the £5.9 million from the government via the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission (Crump 1987). There is no doubt that MSC funding became vital to British archaeology and when the commission was scrapped in 1987 it left a huge gap in the finances. This gap was increasingly filled by funding from developers in the late 1980s, as the relationship between archaeological units and developers had solidified over the course of the decade. As the 1980s came to a close,

archaeological discoveries in York and London – culminating in the Rose Theatre – had highlighted awareness and interest in archaeology, and the need to ensure that archaeological remains were being considered early on in the planning process

(Wainwright 2000, p. 926)

This happily also coincided with a shift in government policy towards a tightening of planning controls, and led to the creation of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and the Planning Policy Guidance Notes (PPGs) associated with it. The language of archaeology as a fragile and non-renewable resource appears in both PPG16, through which archaeology was embedded into the planning process in the UK, and the contemporary ICOMOS’ *Charter for the protection and management of the archaeological heritage*, approved by its 9th General Assembly in Lausanne. In the UK, local authorities now had the responsibility to ensure that fragile, and potentially important archaeological remains were protected:

If physical preservation in situ is not feasible, an archaeological excavation for the purposes of 'preservation by record', may be an acceptable alternative... From the archaeological point of view this should be regarded as a second best option

(DoE 1990)

Furthermore, although PPG16 was only guidance and was not statutory, it allowed local authorities to place an archaeological condition on planning permission. PPG16 had made the 'polluter pays' principle the corner-stone of British archaeology (Graves-Brown 1997) and thrust the discipline into the market place, but the initial response from the profession was mixed, with many uncomfortable with an explicitly commercial role for archaeologists. Richard Morris (1994), in a brief review of the effects of PPG16 four years on, wrote that it

has brought undoubted benefits to archaeology. It has provided a framework for locating development away from archaeologically sensitive areas; and it (quite reasonably) requires developers to pay for any reconnaissance needed. It thus frees public money from the exigencies of rescue archaeology, to be spent in more measured ways

Morris also observed, however, that it had generated a new set of problems for the profession, principally that the system of competitive tendering does not always deliver the highest quality archaeological work; that local authority Sites and Monuments Records, now known as Historic Environment Records (HERs), which support the system, are not statutory and are often underfunded; that units keep running costs down by largely employing young archaeologists on short-term contracts; and that PPG16 was never designed to generate a research output so the academic component of 'rescue' archaeology had all but disappeared.

Chadwick (2000) also identified initial problems, particularly in cases where large projects were given pre-PPG16 planning permission, but also that:

Reliance upon developers may leave some archaeological projects vulnerable to financial changes. The Lower High Street in Southampton remains unfinished thirteen years after archaeological work began, following the bankruptcy of the development firm. In Doncaster, the cancellation of Department of Transport (now Highways Agency) funding for a road scheme meant that the re-

gionally important medieval North Bridge site was only written up as a basic archive report, with minimal specialist analysis. Full publication was refused

Despite these concerns, and with some early difficulties adjusting to the new landscape, there can be no doubt that archaeological jobs in the UK became more numerous, and marginally better-paid and more stable, as a result of PPG16. It was a turning point for the discipline that ensured that hundreds of important sites were preserved either by record, following excavation, or by being left *in situ* by developers who have been made aware of the significance of the archaeological remains on their land.

In the early 1990s the Council of Europe also sought to revise the 1969 London Convention, recognising that the major threats to archaeology came less from unauthorised excavation and far more from (re)development. The revised treaty, signed at Valletta in 1992, sought to ensure that archaeologists and planners worked closely together to protect the resource. At the time, the requirement that all excavation should be “carried out only by qualified, specially authorised persons” (Council of Europe 1992) was considered controversial among the UK’s long-established ‘amateur’ sector, though other articles of the Convention clearly promoted public access to, and awareness of, its archaeological heritage. In hindsight the controversy perhaps resides in the gap that can exist between being ‘qualified’ and being ‘skilled’, though it is hard otherwise to argue that destructive archaeological excavation should not be carried out only by those with sufficient skill and experience.

That year also witnessed the so-called Maastricht Treaty through which members of the European Communities (the ECSC, EAEC and EEC, founded in the 1950s) created the European Union and citizenship thereof, becoming effective in 1993, and laid the foundations for a single currency. In the UK the debate over ratification of the Maastricht Treaty was a major point of political conflict, drawing many of the battle lines still familiar today. Many on the right wing railed against a perceived federalist agenda – while talking down the importance of economic, social, cultural, political and judicial cooperation – with the rhetoric frequently referencing the UK’s historic power. The Conservative government of John Major, who was in favour of Maastricht and ultimately won the support of Parliament, was almost collapsed by internal party rebellion. The so-called ‘Maastricht rebels’ of the 1990s are the founding fathers of modern Conservative Euroscepticism and the cross-party Anti-Federalist League, a small political movement created with the sole purpose of opposing Maastricht, evolved into the UK Independence Party (UKIP) in 1993.

3. Global economic crisis, austerity, and Brexit

For the remainder of the 1990s, and into the early 2000s, the general trend in terms of archaeological jobs and wages in the UK was upward (table 1; fig. 1), reflecting political and economic stability and increasing professionalisation – and perhaps confidence – within developer-funded archaeology. The current, turbulent, political and economic landscape can be traced back to the collapse of the sub-prime mortgage market in the US in 2007 which, by the following year, had snowballed into a global financial crisis. While the impact on the Eurozone was particularly acute, in the UK the global recession was portrayed by the Conservatives as a national issue, namely as a failure of the Labour government's economic policies. The 2010 election resulted in a coalition government, with the Conservatives supported by the Liberal Democrats, and a programme of 'austerity' to reduce the budgetary deficit. These austerity measures continued until 2019, covering a period that included two further elections (leading to Conservative governments in 2015 and 2017) and the EU referendum of 2016. In that time central funding to areas including local government, Higher Education and the welfare state was cut, leading some to believe that the cuts were, in part at least, ideologically driven. Over the same period British politics became increasingly polarised, with a right wing agenda first prompting the EU referendum and then ultimately determining the course of what followed.

The initial impact of the global economic crisis was felt keenly by the archaeological profession, amongst others in construction and closely linked sectors. Ironically, in 2007, the Institute for Archaeologists (now Chartered) had established a *Benchmarking Archaeological Salaries* project, recognising that commercial archaeological salaries did not compare well with comparable professions. The report produced by the project unsurprisingly identified the commercial marketplace as responsible for keeping wages low over the previous two decades.

The acceptance of job-by-job tendering also had an impact and in terms of pay and conditions seriously affected how pay rates etc. were established. The advent of job by job tendering also saw a change in the main mechanism effecting terms and wages of the majority. Around 60-70% of staff are now employed by organisations whose level of wages tend to be dictated not by reference to wider external norms, but by the need to ensure the survival of the organisation in an archaeological market.

(Price, Geary 2008)

	Excavator (PIfA)	Supervisor (AlfA)	Project Officer (MIfA)	Project Manager	National Average Salary
1995	£8597	£11911	£13616	£18094	
1996	£9281	£12011	£13644	£16942	
1997	£9880	£12029	£13484	£16606	£19167
1998	£10314	£12732	£14274	£18268	
1999	£11311	£12700	£13788	£18671	
2000	£12024	£12868	£15518	£19447	
2001	£12378	£12741	£15572	£20881	
2002	£13232	£14806	£18489	£21536	£24498
2003	£12903	£14765	£16592	£19701	
2004	£13710	-----	£16563	£20957	
2005	£14179	£15900	£17598	£22259	
2006	£14294	£15879	£18593	£23350	
2007	£15078	£17037	£19928	£25535	£29999
2008	£15299	£18715	£21200	£28532	
2009	£16032	£18926	£22548	£30585	
2010	£16744	£19016	£22160	£30262	

Table 1. Average archaeological earnings compiled from Turner 1997; Aitchison 1999; Malcolm 2000; Aitchison, Edwards 2003; Drummond-Murray 2007; Aitchison, Edwards 2008; Rocks-Macqueen 2011, quoted in Everill 2015, p. 127.

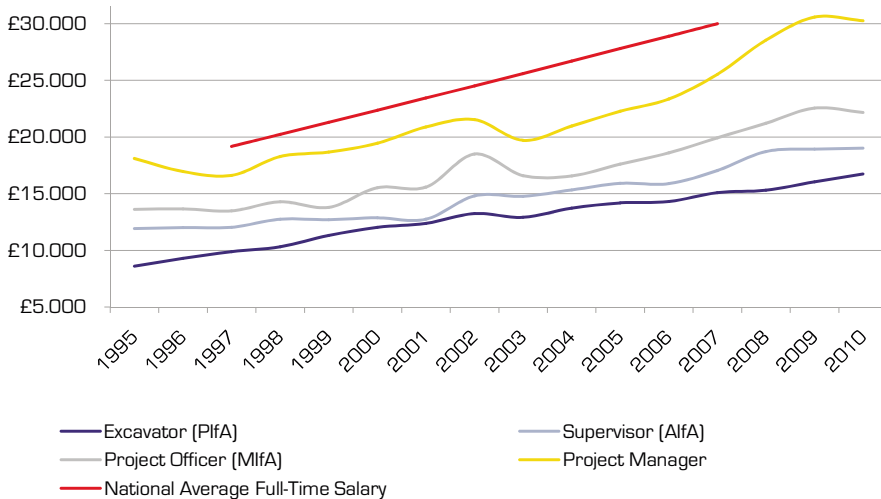


Fig. 1. Graphic representation of data in table 1 (Everill 2015).

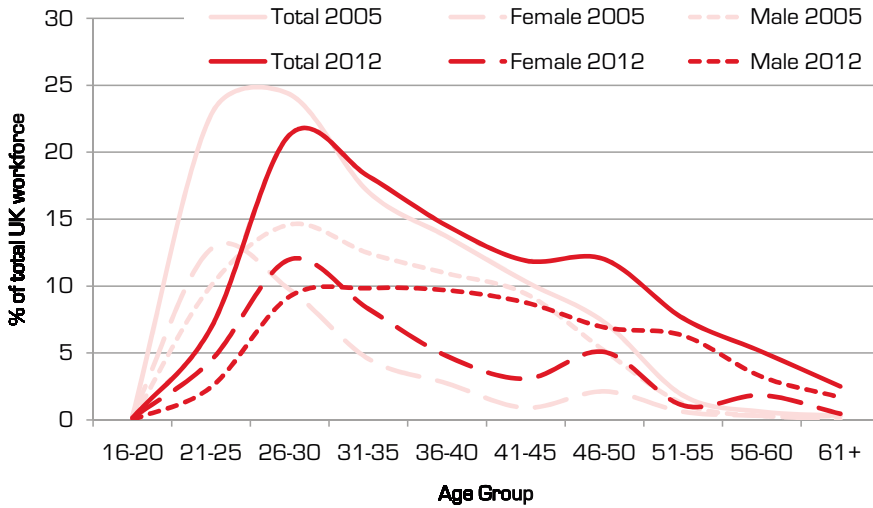


Fig. 2. Age of staff by gender compared across ID2005 and ID2012, as a percentage of total workforce (Everill 2012).

The project identified a significant gap between IfA salary minima and external comparators that ranged from 13%–53% and concluded that “in order to raise IfA minimum salaries to a level more appropriate to the work complexity and the qualifications, skills and experience required by professional archaeologists, an increase of at least 13% would be required” (Price, Geary 2008). IfA council voted to implement this recommendation in 2008, deciding to increase minimum salaries by 13% over inflation over a five-year period. However, within a few months the deteriorating global economic situation slowed the pace of development and started to seriously impact the commercial sector, which saw widespread redundancies, and instead IfA pay minima were frozen (fig. 1). By the time that they were ‘thawed’, in Spring 2012, the numbers employed in commercial archaeology were down 15.78%, and curatorial, local government archaeologists down 13.67% on their August 2007 levels (Aitchison 2011).

The Invisible Diggers surveys of 2003–5 and 2012 (Everill 2012) provide some interesting detail on the demographics of UK commercial archaeology, but also on some of the impact of the economic recession. However, in reviewing these data it must first be acknowledged that even the most recent survey is now several years old and a third survey is probably overdue. The indication from both the original survey and the follow-up is that, while the profession is almost 2/3 male, it seems that the ‘under 30’ age group is predominantly female. It is also possible to see

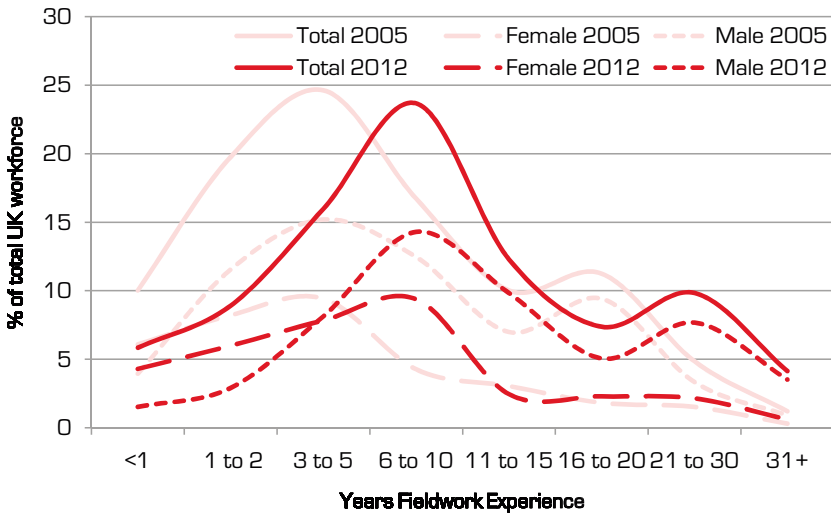


Fig. 3. Fieldwork experience by gender compared across ID2005 and ID2012, as a percentage of all responses (Everill 2012).

(fig. 2) the relative youth of the profession, and the different rates at which male and female staff leave. A fascinating comparison can be made across the two surveys, with fig. 1 showing the changing age profile. General trends appear to continue, and yet the whole profession seems to be several years older and somewhat reduced in numbers. It is particularly striking that there was no significant increase in the numbers of staff aged under 25 filling the more junior positions at the time of the 2012 survey, which probably reflects the impact of widespread redundancies and reduced recruitment after 2007/ 2008. Analysis of the number of years' field experience (fig. 3) further underlines the evidence that the majority of UK commercial archaeologists leave the profession after only a few years. The original survey was the first to demonstrate what had long been believed from anecdotal evidence, that most staff left after up to five years' experience. The 2012 survey, however, held a number of surprises, including that the drop off was now after about ten years, but that there appeared to have been no significant new intake of younger staff. The drop in numbers after ten years' experience correlates broadly with the similar drop in numbers from the age of 30 onwards seen in fig. 1. It may be surmised that it is often at this stage of their career that junior site staff are seeking promotion or considering leaving the profession altogether. It is possible that the absence of a significant younger intake, or the scarcity of alternative employment oppor-

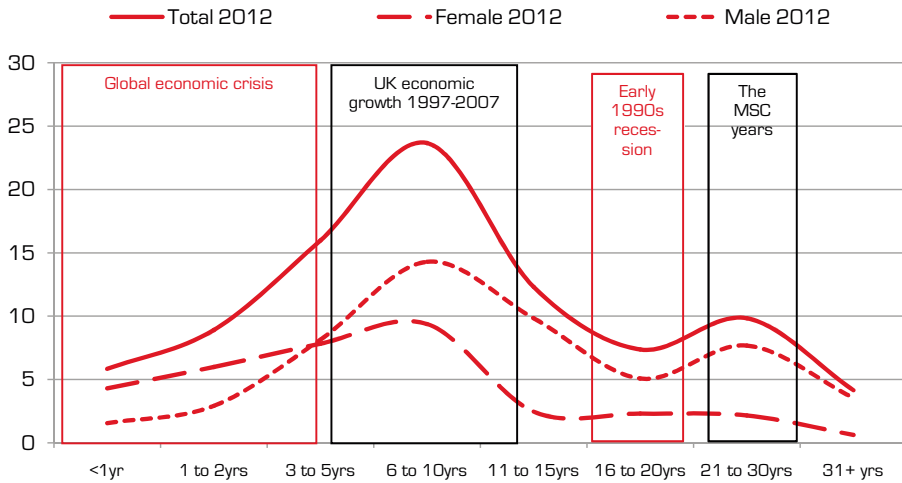


Fig. 4. Number of years fieldwork experience by gender, as a percentage of all responses, and mapped against UK economic events (Everill 2012).

tunities during the recession, encouraged staff to remain in their posts, and this reduction in the rate of staff turnover would explain the ageing profile. Mapping staff numbers directly against the UK economy and other factors (fig. 4), also appears to underscore the close relationship between economic stability (and the subsequent confidence felt by developers) and the patterns of recruitment and retention of staff.

The demise of PPG16 in March 2010 brought to an end what was unquestionably a golden era in British archaeology and its successor, Planning Policy Statement 5, was greeted with very mixed feelings in the profession. PPS5 was rather short-lived, effectively falling victim to the global economic crisis followed by a change of government in 2010. In March 2012 the National Planning Policy Framework was launched, and this has seen some significant new emphases, including a change away from 'presumption in favour of preservation' of heritage assets, to a 'presumption in favour of sustainable development'. Anecdotal evidence appears to suggest a greater number of watching briefs, where previously archaeological evaluations might have been required of developers, but on the whole the system appears to be functioning in a very similar manner as before. However, the suspicion is that the current political and economic landscape might lead developers, or indeed the Government itself, to challenge these requirements and to begin undermining the process that currently protects the historic environment. The issues asso-

ciated with major infrastructure projects such as High Speed 2 (HS2) could, simultaneously, provide for increased levels of archaeological employment and trigger a watering down of the protections currently in place to facilitate the work and reduce costs. An Historic England report (Hook *et al.* 2016), expressed concern over the size of the current archaeological workforce in light of the demands being placed on it by “over 40 major infrastructure projects [...] planned in the UK during the period 2015-33” (Hook *et al.* 2016, p. 4). Published the month before the EU referendum, the report already noted a drop in the number of non-UK EU archaeologists from 5% of the workforce in 2008, to 3% in 2013 (Hook *et al.* 2016, p. 11). Watson (2019) also provides an interesting appraisal of the current situation in British archaeology with regard to methodology and project design, particularly with regard to the huge impact of HS2, but, by necessity, assumes broad continuity of the protections currently afforded by the planning process.

4. What next...?

The focus of this article has effectively been on establishing the chronology over which planning policy, economic strategy, and attitudes to the historic environment have evolved over several decades, at the UK national level and European supranational level. By defining a number of detailed points along this narrative it was intended to provide a trajectory that could be mapped forward with greater accuracy. Yet these are times like no other. Since starting work on this article I have ceased to be a citizen of the European Union. Even now, however, the full impact of this will not be realised for months as the UK enters a transition period until December 2020 – after which we may yet be faced with the catastrophic economic consequences of a failure to agree constructive trade arrangements with our biggest and closest market. With the economy intrinsically linked to professional archaeology via construction companies and developers, this was the single biggest barrier to predicting the future shape of the sector. The recent appearance of Coronavirus (COVID-19) has, of course, fundamentally changed the global economic landscape in ways that might not become clear for months to come.

In terms of the British departure from the European Union, the best case scenario at this stage is that the economic impact on the UK is not too great; that protection of the historic environment through planning guidance is retained; and that the UK continues to abide by the European Conventions that are, by and large, in alignment with domestic practice

anyway. Worst case scenarios come in many shapes and sizes, but without being overly dramatic the most likely threats might come from future efforts to stimulate employment and a weakened UK economy, through a loosening of the planning process to facilitate development. Boris Johnson's relatively new government has already demonstrated its commitment to spending on high-profile infrastructure projects, and a populist approach that could conceivably see the historic environment and archaeologists written off as impediments to 'progress'.

The major 'elephant in the room' of course, is that in discussing the future of archaeology in the UK there are already indications that the Union itself faces some stern tests in the near future. The pro-EU Scottish Nationalists probably have a better claim than ever for independence. Northern Ireland might ultimately, if this is not too crass an oversimplification of very complex issues, have to choose between the return of a policed border, separate customs arrangements to the rest of the UK, or reunification of the island of Ireland. In the event that any of that comes to pass it is impossible to predict what the future holds for archaeology in the constituent parts of the United Kingdom.

The other unspoken truth with regard to existing European Conventions, including the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage, is that these are agreements of the Council of Europe, founded by the Treaty of London in 1949 and of which the UK remains a member. The bitter-sweet irony, of course, is that the azure flag emblazoned with a circle of twelve five-pointed gold stars has been the flag of the Council of Europe since 1955 – almost 30 years before it was also adopted by the EC's and almost 40 years before the EU was created and adopted it – and can still be legitimately flown in the UK on that basis. We can but hope that British politics has not moved too far from the founding principles of the Council of Europe.

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