

CHAPTER 5
BRITISH COMMERCIAL ARCHAEOLOGY:
ANTIQUARIANS AND LABOURERS;
DEVELOPERS AND DIGGERS

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INTRODUCTION

In the UK, as elsewhere, the replacement of Governmental funding for ‘rescue’ or ‘salvage’ excavations by developer funding - and the related competitive tendering (known as ‘bidding’ in the USA) for work - during the 1980s has led to significant changes in the experiences of site staff. Despite the fact that a degree is now insisted upon by most archaeological units when employing new staff, pay and conditions of employment remain substantially below what one might expect for a graduate career. Many within the profession agree that pay, conditions and the sheer number of jobs have consistently improved since the effective ‘privatisation’ of contract archaeology, yet there is a deeply held belief that competitive tendering is also actually preventing the sort of substantial improvements that would adequately reflect the skill, education and dedication of staff. In this paper I aim to investigate the changes in UK professional field archaeology that have been propagated by its increasingly commercial nature and in doing so provide a specific case study within the broader, global context represented by other papers in this volume. I will provide a brief historical background to the evolution of British professional field archaeology, before discussing some of the contemporary concerns of site staff that have been illuminated by a number of internal and external surveys. I will also draw upon examples from the early years of field archaeology and a related profession to

demonstrate that the employer-employee relationship is, even now, not far removed from that of antiquarian and labourer.

THE GROWTH OF DEVELOPER-LED ARCHAEOLOGY

Prior to the Second World War 'rescue' archaeology as it became known was almost unheard of. If construction workers found archaeological material it would be sent to a museum or university and occasionally an academic or interested amateur would sift through the spoil heaps at construction sites in order to obtain artefacts or bones.

During the war the large-scale construction of military installations required a governmental response and the first recognisable, centrally funded 'rescue' projects took place. The widespread redevelopment of historic towns and cities throughout the 1950s and 1960s led to the formation of local and regional archaeological societies who occasionally managed to negotiate some time ahead of construction work to undertake the excavation of remains, but during the 1960s it became clear that these volunteers could not keep pace with the destruction of the archaeology. So, in 1971, RESCUE: The British Archaeological Trust was formed in an attempt to address this rapid destruction of the archaeological resource. High on their list of priorities was the need to get far greater Government subsidies to support the work of 'rescue' archaeologists ahead of large-scale development projects. For a number of years RESCUE was successful and these subsidies were increased, though the financial support available from Government, via the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission, still fell well short of the figure required. At around this time the Manpower Services Commission (MSC) was created. It was a response to the economic troubles of the early 1970s and from 1974 it provided jobs and training for the long-term unemployed. Archaeology, with its high labour requirements, was

ideally suited to this and featured heavily in the Community Programmes run through the MSC from 1980.

The Community Programme (CP) is designed for adults of 25 and over who have been unemployed for 12 of the preceding 15 months, (and have been unemployed in the 2 months preceding the start of the project), and for people aged 24 and over, who have been unemployed for 6 months previously.

(Green 1987: 28)

By 1986 the MSC provided funding of £4.8 million for archaeology, compared to £5.9 million from the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission (Crump 1987), and in September 1986 there were 1,790 places on archaeological projects through the CPs. On top of the dependence archaeology developed for MSC funding there were a number of side effects to this relationship.

Ironically, one positive “spin-off” from MSC involvement in archaeology is that volunteer rates may have gone up in some areas to bring them into line with CP wages. Also, as site safety is one of the areas monitored by MSC, standards have to be rigorously maintained. The provision of safety clothing and foul weather gear by MSC also marks an improvement except where unscrupulous sponsors spend this part of the “capitation grant” on machine time and volunteers.

(Crump 1987: 45)

There were also some criticisms of the effect that the MSC was having, both on archaeologists and the unemployed that it was designed to help. The old ‘circuit’

had been replaced by CP projects and there were concerns that recent graduates were finding it harder to find work in archaeology. There were also concerns that the average CP wage of £67 a week meant that the CP workforce was not encouraged to have a commitment to the project and supervisors spent as much time policing the site as excavating it (Crump 1987).

However, despite this there is no doubt that MSC funding was vital to archaeology and when the commission was scrapped in 1987 it left a huge hole. During the 1980s the relationship between archaeological units and developers had become more solid and the void left by the MSC was to become increasingly filled by funding from developers. This relationship was to become an integral part of the future of professional archaeology after 1990. The 21 November that year witnessed the resignation of Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister and the launch of Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 as part of the Town and Country Planning Act (Wainwright 2000). PPG16 was carefully worded to place no extra financial burden on local authorities and was, of course only 'guidance' rather than statutory, but it still forms the cornerstone of current commercial, contract archaeology in the UK. It states, for example that

...it would be entirely reasonable for the planning authority to satisfy itself before granting planning permission, that the developer has made appropriate and satisfactory provision for the excavation and recording of the remains. Such excavation and recording should be carried out before development commences, working to a project brief prepared by the planning authority and taking advice from archaeological consultants.

(DoE 1990, paragraph 25)

With the 'polluter pays' principle thus enshrined (Graves-Brown 1997) British contract archaeology rapidly became a very commercial venture, with a number of units willing and able to work outside of the areas that they had traditionally been restricted to. This of course had huge implications for the maintenance of regional expertise in the field and since 1990 a number of the older county council based units have suffered at the hands of the many, more mobile, private units that have sprung up. In 2005 I believe that there are currently 121 contracting units (including those based within County Councils, Universities and established as Trusts) employing approximately 2,100 archaeologists.

THE DIGGERS

As previously mentioned a degree is now almost a prerequisite for the employment in contract archaeology of new site staff. Yet even in 1987, with the profession still very much in its infancy, it was clear that:

few, if any, of the [degree] courses were really seen, by those on them, as providing the necessary background for archaeological employment. One major factor in this was argued to be the perceived conflict between an archaeology degree as a general academic education and as an archaeological training. Put crudely, some archaeology degrees have little or no value for a student rash enough to want to follow a career in archaeology in Britain

(Joyce, Newbury and Stone 1987: v)

This situation has never been universally addressed - despite the efforts of a small number of universities to provide high quality practical courses - and the junior field archaeologist has become, by virtue of the system, not an inheritor of the world of the educated and respected archaeologists of old, but merely an enthusiastic labourer to be trained and moulded in the workplace. When Shortland (1994) discusses how Geologists in the field defined themselves, not through their perceived origins as 'Gentlemen amateurs', but almost unconsciously through their roots in mining, it throws up an interesting question. How do commercial field archaeologists define themselves? Perhaps it is through their perceived or actual roots; through the relationships they develop on site - both with their colleagues and with those 'others' with whom they share their workplace - and certainly through their perceptions of their position within the commercial environment. Field Archaeologists of the past defined themselves in opposition to the labourers on their site, whether they be culturally separate through nationality as in, for example, Woolley's (1930) work in Mesopotamia or through class as on any of the large field projects run in the UK which utilised large numbers of workmen. This relationship was class-based and often Imperialistic. The modern British commercial archaeologist might be described as having more in common with the scaffolders and bricklayers of a large construction site, dressing the same (all being required to wear the same Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) often only being distinguishable by the colour of their hard hats or the logo of their respective employer on their high visibility vests). Perhaps, in the same way as Shortland's geologists, commercial archaeologists see their roots lying more squarely with the labourers of the large-scale research digs than with the educated 'gentlefolk'.

Internal Surveys of the Profession

A number of surveys have been undertaken on the archaeological profession in the UK since the late 1970s. Prime amongst these was the work of RESCUE: The British Archaeological Trust. Spoerry (1992, 1997) synthesises some of this earlier data when writing about the 1990-1 and 1996 surveys. The total number of curatorial and rescue archaeologists in 1978-9 was estimated to be about 1600, of which 663 were 'permanent' posts. By 1986-7 the total figure had grown massively, due in no small part to the Manpower Services Commission, to 2900, though only about 600 of these were permanent. The end of the MSC saw numbers drop by 1990-1 to about 2200 archaeological staff, though permanent posts had risen to 860. The 1996 survey indicated an overall figure of 2100 jobs and suggested that the profession had achieved a certain stability. In terms of pay the surveys indicate that 'In 1990-91 three quarters of archaeological staff were paid less than £12,000 p/a. In this same period the national average salary (both sexes) was about £13,200 p/a.' (Spoerry 1992: 19). If one looks at the figures, however, and removes the permanent posts that most likely do not represent 'site staff' then in actual fact over three quarters were earning less than £10,000 in that period. "In 1995-6 just over three-quarters of archaeologists were paid less than £16,000 pa, when the national average earnings (both sexes) was about £17,500 pa." (Spoerry 1997: 6). One can again safely assume that archaeologists in the field were well below even that figure.

In 1999 the Institute of Field Archaeologists, English Heritage and the Council for British Archaeology published a survey of organisations in the UK that employed professional archaeologists. The results were published in the booklet 'Profiling the Profession' (Aitchison 1999). There were seven initial Objectives behind the undertaking of the study:

- 1 To identify the numbers of professional archaeologists working in Britain
- 2 To analyse whether the profession is growing, static or shrinking
- 3 To identify the range of jobs
- 4 To identify the numbers employed in each job type
- 5 To identify the range of salaries and terms and conditions applying to each job type
- 6 To identify differences in employment patterns between different geographical areas
- 7 To help those seeking to enter the profession

(Aitchison 1999: ix)

The survey identified 349 relevant organisations and these were divided into 10 categories including 'Archaeological Contractors' and 'Other Commercial Organisations', but also University departments, local government staff and independent consultants. Of the estimated 93 contracting organisations, employing approximately 30% of the total archaeological workforce, 51 responded to the postal questionnaire. This questionnaire required each unit to give details of their work and their staff as it stood on the 16 March 1998. There was some disbelief amongst the staff of commercial organisations when the published results demonstrated that the average salary for all full-time archaeologists was £17,079. This figure is clearly influenced by the inclusion of academic staff, consultants and other more highly paid members of the profession. However this relative distortion of results becomes particularly relevant in comparison with other related occupations.

In Table 5.1 the archaeological profession occupies a place above construction industry workers, but below the managers and other related specialists. However closer inspection reveals that had 'Builders, building contractors' been put together with 'Managers in building and contracting' - in the same way that Archaeologists had been lumped together – their average salary would well exceed that of archaeologists. The organisers of the survey could justifiably argue that their aim was not to specifically study any one group within the profession but to provide an overall picture. It is interesting, however to look at the information relating directly to those employed within the commercial sector of archaeology in March 1998 (see Table 5.2).

Data from the follow-up survey, published in 2003 (Aitchison and Edwards) do show an encouraging rise in the average full-time salaries over the preceding five years (Table 5.3). However, this is against a backdrop of substantial increase in other sectors that actually sees a relative fall for the entire archaeological profession in terms of salaries (Table 5.4). These figures would seem to suggest that the contracting organisations have been experiencing a period of growth and increased profit, which has been reflected in the salaries of staff. This is perhaps in contrast to the rest of the archaeological profession, which saw a far smaller wage increase in the same period.

There are also interesting statistics relating to age and gender within contracting organisations which demonstrate the relative youth of the profession (77% are aged between 20 and 40 in 1998 and 66% in 2002) and the under representation of females in the commercial workplace. There is also a significant female domination of the 'Finds Officer' roles (see Table 5.5) as discussed in Cane, Gilchrist and O'Sullivan (1994).

PROFESSION	Average gross earnings
<i>University and polytechnic teaching professionals</i>	£30,179
<i>Civil, Structural, municipal, mining and quarrying engineers</i>	£28,286
<i>Architects</i>	£25,882
<i>Town Planners</i>	£25,887
<i>Managers in building and contracting</i>	£25,689
<i>Building, land, mining and 'general practice' surveyors</i>	£24,495
<i>Draughtspersons</i>	£19,745
<i>Scientific technicians</i>	£19,641
<i>Librarians and related professionals</i>	£19,010
<i>Archaeologists</i>	£17,079
<i>Road Construction and maintenance workers</i>	£16,904
<i>Construction trades</i>	£15,512
<i>Builders, building contractors</i>	£15,345
<i>Other building and civil engineering labourers not elsewhere categorised</i>	£13,843

Table 5.1: Full time salary comparison with other occupations (Aitchison 1999)

The 2003 study of the Archaeology Labour Market (Aitchison and Edwards 2003) also included for the first time data on disabled employees and on the ethnic diversity of the profession. This demonstrated that there is actually very little diversity at all, with 99.34% of archaeologists being white (compared to 92.1% nationally), while only 0.34% of staff were defined as disabled (compared with 19% of the total working population).

Position	Average Full-Time Salary	Temporary Contract	Permanent Contract
Site Assistant	£10,094	73%	27%
Supervisor	£12,830	53%	47%
Finds Officer	£14,966	25%	75%
Project Officer	£15,060	43%	57%
Project Manager	£19,434	30%	70%
Director	£22,629	29%	71%
Average of all	£15,835.5		

Table 5.2: Average Archaeological Salaries. (Aitchison 1999)

Position	Average Full-Time Salary	Increase since 1998	Temporary Contract	Permanent Contract
Site Assistant	£12,140	20.26%	82%	18%
Supervisor	£14,290	11.38%	41%	59%
Finds Officer	£18,422	22.42%	35%	65%
Project Officer	£18,049	19.85%	17%	83%
Project Manager	£22,433	15.43%	12%	88%
Director	£27,148	19.97%	14%	86%
Average of all	£18,747	18.22%		

Table 5.3: Average Archaeological Salaries. (Aitchison and Edwards 2003)

PROFESSION	Average gross earnings	Increase since 1997/98
<i>University and polytechnic teaching professionals</i>	£34,791	15%
<i>Architects</i>	£34,426	33%
<i>Managers in building and contracting</i>	£33,924	32%
<i>Civil, Structural, municipal, mining and quarrying engineers</i>	£31,527	12%
<i>Building, land, mining and 'general practice' surveyors</i>	£30,275	24%
<i>Town Planners</i>	£27,064	5%
<i>Draughtspersons</i>	£23,227	18%
<i>Scientific technicians</i>	£23,157	18%
<i>Librarians and related professionals</i>	£22,728	18%
<i>Road Construction and maintenance workers</i>	£20,183	19%
<i>Builders, building contractors</i>	£19,277	26%
<i>Archaeologists</i>	£19,161	12%
<i>Construction trades</i>	£18,809	21%
<i>Other building and civil engineering labourers not elsewhere categorised</i>	£17,455	26%

Table 5.4: Full time salary comparison with other occupations (Aitchison and Edwards 2003)

Position	Male (1998)	Female (1998)	Male (2002)	Female (2002)
Site Assistant	69%	31%	67%	33%
Supervisor	57%	43%	66%	34%
Finds Officer	27%	73%	36%	64%
Project Officer	68%	32%	69%	31%
Project Manager	79%	21%	77%	23%
Director	75%	25%	72%	28%
Average of all	62.5%	37.5%	64.5%	35.5%

Table 5.5: Gender differentiation within the profession. Data taken from Aitchison 1999, and Aitchison and Edwards 2003

The Invisible Diggers

The data for my doctoral thesis, which was a study of the current situation in UK contract archaeology, was obtained by conducting extensive, qualitative interviews with commercial archaeologists, by undertaking a period of ‘participant observation’ within a commercial unit, and through an online survey which was to provide demographic information, but also test opinions across the profession. The quantitative data from my ‘Invisible Diggers’ website contradicts some of the IFA figures and provides an alternative view of the profession to that provided by previous studies.

Rather than contacting units and asking for data I instead specifically advertised for respondents in ‘The Digger’ – an anonymously produced, free newsletter that discusses and confronts many of the issues faced by site staff – and online at David Connolly’s ‘British Archaeological Jobs Resource’ (BAJR) – a free to use job service started in 1999 that now receives several thousand hits a week. By the

time I closed it down in June 2005 my online survey had received responses from an estimated 15.67% of UK site staff, producing results with a margin of error of 5.4% at 95% confidence. Interestingly, 77% of my respondents were aged between 20-40, which is identical to the IFA's figures from the 1998 survey but significantly larger than the IFA's most recent figure of 66%. It may be that younger staff were more motivated to take part in my survey, though I strongly suspect that this is also a reflection of an under-representation of the under 40s (and more particularly the under 30s) in the 2002 IFA study. Although my results suggest that 35.56% of site staff are female – almost identical to the IFA's 2002 figure of 35.5% - the results, as shown in Figure 5.1, indicate that actually there are more female than male staff in the 21-25 age group. The number of female contract archaeologists falls at a fairly constant rate from the early twenties to the mid thirties before beginning to level off. The figures for male staff, by contrast, fall off most markedly from the early forties.

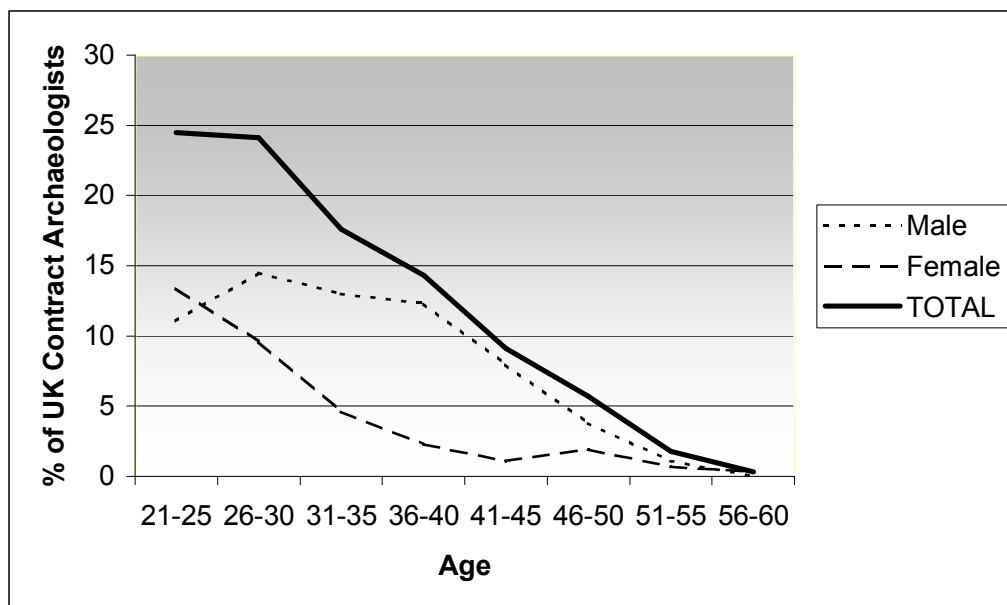


Figure 5.1: Gender differentiation across the age groups of UK archaeologists.

Data from the 'Invisible Diggers' project

In terms of experience in the field, Figure 5.2 demonstrates the noticeable fall in staff numbers after five years (which correlates to the number leaving the profession in their late twenties - shown in Figure 5.1). This is also borne out in my qualitative interviews with current and ex-contract archaeologists that indicate that staff become disillusioned with the pay, conditions of employment and the general level of respect they receive. After about five years experience there is a widespread tendency to re-examine their careers and this is when many opt to leave the profession in favour of a more stable, better paid career - despite still having a passion for archaeology. It is interesting, however, to note the obvious increase, against the general trend, at the 16-20 year experience bracket which I believe is directly related



Figure 5.2: Field experience amongst UK archaeologists. Data from the ‘Invisible Diggers’ project.

to the influx of staff through the Manpower Services Commission in the mid to late 1980s and the fact that a significant number of this body of people have managed to maintain employment and their interest in the job despite the obvious difficulties that are associated with it.

A view from outside the profession

In 2003 the All-Party Parliamentary Archaeology Group (APPAG) published its first report entitled 'The Current State of Archaeology in the United Kingdom'. Formed in 2001, APPAG advertised for 250 word submissions from organisations and individuals with an interest in archaeology, receiving 267 in total. It also questioned representatives from certain key bodies at a number of committee sessions. The published report was detailed and wide-ranging, with a large number of recommendations – not least that an absence of one, clear, non-governmental lobby group has created a confusing muddle of different voices that results in little being achieved. However, in Part 3, section B, the topic of 'Archaeology as a Career' is discussed. It is essential to quote large sections here as this represents the single most important analysis of the profession by an external body.

28. The submissions emphasised the plight of archaeologists as insecurely employed, poorly paid and generally itinerant, as demonstrated by Aitchison's report *Profiling the Profession* (1999). This is in large part due to the effects of the system of competitive tendering ... A mobile casual workforce is inevitably excluded from training opportunities where they do exist. The absence of proper training prohibits promotion to more secure senior posts. There is no clear career development path and, in most cases, neither

universities... nor employers appear to consider it their role to prepare archaeologists for professional practice. This is largely due to external financial pressures, with developer funding dominating and contributing sums approaching £75 million per annum; but it is also because archaeology only has a weak professional structure.

29. Although archaeology is a graduate profession this is neither reflected in the career opportunities nor in remuneration. Often those who work in excavation units are treated as site technicians who simply record archaeological deposits rather than as archaeologists who are capable of interpreting them. The current fragmentation of the profession is already exacerbating those problems...

31. ... Training is vital if archaeology is to achieve high professional standards and it needs to be linked to career development, providing benchmarks for salaries which reflect the true worth of the multifarious skills of the profession.

Recommendation

32. There is an urgent need to improve pay and conditions for employment in field archaeology so that they are commensurate with graduate entry level in allied professions such as local authority planning officers, civil engineers and university lecturers... In the longer term, the current fragmented commercial unit system which has resulted from competitive tendering should be replaced

with a more stable regional, or more local framework of archaeological organisations. (APPAG 2003: 14)

FIELDWORK AS ‘LABOURING’

Although most of the problems in contemporary British contract archaeology can be put down to the commercial market place that now drives it I believe that there is another reason behind the treatment of site staff. In many respects it seems as though junior staff, i.e. those who actually undertake the physical work on site, are being stripped of individuality by the process of excavation and the deferred interpretation of sites and, furthermore, are being completely removed from the process of knowledge production.

In many ways, site assistants are completely interchangeable – he or she is not a person but a digging machine and although some assistants may be more efficient than others, their ‘local knowledge’ or personality is often ignored and certainly never mentioned in any contemporary manuals on fieldwork.

(Lucas 2001: 9)

This form of physical invisibility is created by a sense of ‘interchangeability’. Site assistants become depersonalised on site, and feel overlooked and disenfranchised by their managers and professional body, the Institute of Field Archaeologists. Shapin (1989) makes a similar observation concerning scientific technicians, who are often almost completely overlooked. Using the historical example of Robert Boyle’s laboratory, Shapin highlights the huge number of skilled technicians and assistants who worked there – often unsupervised – who were rarely referred to by Boyle in his

writing. However, “the role of technicians was continually pointed to when matters did not proceed as expected. In such circumstances, technicians’ labor (or rather, the incompetence of their labor) became highly visible” (Shapin 1989:558).

This attitude towards skilled staff is seen in archaeological work from its earliest years. When, for example, Cunnington and Colt Hoare embarked on their fieldwork in Wiltshire at the turn of the nineteenth Century, the former, charged with managing the day-to-day activities, took on local labourers. Contemporary practice was to leave the labourers to the hard work and to receive the finds from them afterwards.

Cunnington from the first wanted more than this, though he never thought it necessary to be present all the time. He did the next best thing, however, and within a few years had trained two skilled diggers, Stephen and John Parker, on whom he and Hoare might rely to report where and how the finds were made as well as make them.

(Cunnington 1975: 13)

In an extremely socially stratified age the Parkers became renowned and widely respected for their skill - despite their effective status as “mere” labourers. In 1807 Colt Hoare’s friend Iremonger was preparing to excavate barrows near Winchester, Hampshire. He had already invited Colt Hoare to join him when he wrote to him again at the end of June.

You will I trust not think me guilty of great intrusion in requesting the assistance of your Wiltshire labourers on this occasion, for my Hampshire men

have disgraced themselves by their exorbitant demands; and I am confident the expenses of their journey will be amply repaid by their superior skill and alacrity

(Cunnington 1975: 107)

The death of William Cunnington in 1810 marked the end of their archaeological career and the Parkers presumably returned to their previous lives. John Parker however, as an old man, was able to give General Pitt-Rivers information about a barrow he excavated for Cunnington and Colt Hoare. To the end of his life, and beyond, he and his father would remain unsung heroes of the early years of archaeological excavation because of their status. I believe, however, that there is still very much a culture of ‘labouring’ within contemporary, contract archaeology not least because the unit archaeologists have been disenfranchised by the system – a system of management codified by “The Management of Archaeological Projects (MAP2)”, published by English Heritage in 1991 – which separates the excavation, interpretative and post-excavation elements. It is commonplace, and often accepted today, that the very people who are excavating archaeological features will have no say in their interpretation or integration into the overall site. In terms of the production of knowledge, the prime motivation for conducting fieldwork, junior site staff are treated as little more than labourers.

My research has shown that professional archaeology is not alone in its current predicament. In an article in “The Garden: The Journal of the Royal Horticultural Society”, a student at the RHS Gardens at Wisley comments on the situation.

Many people never consider horticulture as a possible career. Perhaps this lack of encouragement is related to the fact that most horticulturalists earn unacceptably low wages. For example, a gardener is unlikely to earn more than £12,000 in the first year of a new job, whilst most head gardener positions attract about £18,000. Compare this with the average UK wage of around £24,000, take into account the training and experience such a position requires, and something is seriously wrong – even when the employer provides accommodation. The benefits of a healthy, relatively stress-free lifestyle are small compensation, but the profession is not always as idyllic as we might like. Gardeners work outside in all weathers, for long hours, often doing monotonous or physically demanding tasks. But for those with passion, interest and commitment, the opportunities are there. Horticulture is often a vocation more than a career, followed by people who would not want to do anything else, however poor the pay. (Fitzgerald 2003: 797)

The parallels with contract archaeology are clearly very striking. Tim Hughes (personal communication), the Head of Training at the Royal Horticultural Society Garden at Wisley, puts the current situation down to a number of factors. Although Horticulture is a broad umbrella, like Archaeology, and covers a number of very varied professions from laboratory-based sciences to hard and soft landscaping, the professional gardeners are in much the same position as professional archaeologists. Trainees at Wisley Gardens start on £11,000, while a Junior Gardener earns £14,000. Despite this Mr. Hughes has seen an increase in people in their 30s leaving lucrative jobs in the City to retrain as Gardeners. He puts this down to a lifestyle choice and

that the perception of Gardening is of a low-stress, healthy profession which outweighs the low wages in the minds of many people.

Mr. Hughes also raised another interesting point with regard to the perception of gardening as a career. Traditionally, Careers Advisors at school, when dealing with children who were perhaps weaker academically, would point them towards a 'land-based' career. Equally, archaeology may be glamorised in the minds of the public through its media profile, but the actual physical act of excavation remains subject to some historic prejudices. Ask someone to name a famous historic gardener and their answer would most likely be one of the renowned designers of large private gardens. The hands-on, physical gardeners were generally servants. Even today advertisements for gardening positions at private houses often include family accommodation and the possibility of domestic work in the main house for their partner. So it seems that even qualified and experienced gardeners are often still seen as part of the system of servitude when it comes to pay and conditions. To quote Tim Hughes "Working with your hands and working with the land is still seen as labouring" and this is equally applicable to field archaeologists.

The combined effects of commercial values (including the separation of excavation from interpretation), inadequate fieldwork training in universities and what might be described as a 'labouring sub-culture' amongst many site staff result in something that many do not consider to be a 'proper job'. During my research I have conducted qualitative interviews with a number of British commercial archaeologists, including one who had recently been appointed a County Archaeologist (This is a curatorial post responsible for monitoring commercial archaeology – see Cumberpatch and Blinkhorn (2001) for a discussion on how archaeological responsibilities have been fragmented under a commercial system). Having spent 22

years working his way up the profession he had a number of interesting insights into it.

P19: But it has to be said you're not going to get rich as an archaeologist. It's a lifestyle choice. Doesn't mean you have to be underpaid to do it, but be realistic. There are only so many counties in Britain. There are only so many units in Britain, so there are only x amount of jobs. It cannot expand exponentially. It's at saturation point as it is so I would say to 85% of diggers, you know, accept it. Enjoy your three or four years as a digger, or five years as a digger. Use it, have a good life, smoke lots of drugs, drink lots of drink, get off with either women or men or both. Go abroad. And then get a proper job. If you're lucky and really want to be an archaeologist for the rest of your life then you'll make it. I mean, 22 years I waited to get where I am and who knows how long I'll be an archaeologist. I mean I'm never going to give it up. Absolutely not.

Starting as a Digger himself, P19 had also seen first hand how the profession had changed since the early 1980s. Believing that standards had declined, he apportioned the blame equally between poor university training, the failure of commercial units to invest in their staff and a change in attitude amongst Diggers, perhaps resulting from their own feeling of disenfranchisement.

P19: Managers I think have got more to manage. A lot more paperwork, a lot more worries. Health and Safety. Risk Assessments... Spot checks. The digger, strangely for the digger, like we discussed before, diggers... really a

lot has not changed, in as much as dreadlocks, ripped clothes, army combats are *de rigueur*. The one thing that has changed is they don't seem to have the interest and the confidence anymore. Because, again we go back, they come out of university and they have not a 'scooby doo' about how to dig a site and they never learn, because not at any point does a contracting unit have time to say 'heh, this is how we do it' or 'go and learn some blah, blah.' It's 'Can you do it?' 'No.' 'Right forget it. Get him. Can he do it? Yes he can. Right.'

Engage with the past and then you're worth your money. Until then I'm afraid you're a person who digs holes... slowly

CONCLUSION

It seems clear that in embracing a capitalist market place, having previously missed the opportunity to establish a national framework with regional units in the 1970s (Wainwright 2000), 'rescue' archaeology in the UK has become a profession that bears more similarities to the antiquarian activities of Sir Richard Colt Hoare than a modern profession that accurately reflects the skills, training and dedication of the archaeologists and other specialists employed within it. There is also a widespread concern amongst archaeologists that competitive tendering is resulting in some units undertaking low quality work, or even damaging the archaeology – cutting corners to meet targets and deadlines that are unachievable otherwise.

In the UK today by far the vast majority of archaeological sites are excavated by commercial units ahead of development projects. In many cases the quality of the work is of the highest standard and yet this is because of the professionalism of the supervisors and site staff who refer to themselves, disparagingly and with some humour, as merely 'diggers'. Many academic archaeologists sneer at these

endeavours, failing to appreciate the skill of people who, even in their mid 20s, have accumulated more field experience than could be achieved in a career's worth of summer seasons on site. It is a sad fact of contemporary archaeology that commercialisation and privatisation have almost universally disenfranchised the archaeologists who ply their trade within that system.

Increased unionisation is one way forward. Over the last several years many of the larger units have recognised the trade union 'Prospect' and it is hoped that a national pay agreement can be established in the future, with discussions between Prospect, the IFA and the Standing Conference of Archaeological Unit Managers (SCAUM) currently planned. There is also the recently established 'Diggers Forum'. It is hoped that this can provide a focal point for archaeologists and specialists below management level, with the aim of instigating real change within the profession. It can only be hoped that organisations like 'Prospect' - and the other trade unions including 'Unison' which represents many county council-based archaeologists - 'The Digger' newsletter, the 'BAJR' website and 'Diggers Forum' can work together to shift the emphasis away from the current profit-driven one toward one that is both ethical and fair for the archaeologists employed within the profession in the UK.

It is also important that the issue of training be adequately addressed. If units are to insist on university level education then there desperately needs to be a dialogue between the employers and academics resulting in the kind of fieldwork training that is so desperately lacking currently. Failing that, perhaps archaeology, like gardening, should be more widely available as non-degree level courses that deal almost entirely with site-based skills, though it may not be beneficial to further fragment the discipline along these lines. I firmly believe that the university system, which is sadly now also subject to commercial pressures as never before in the UK, has overlooked

its responsibility to prepare archaeology students for a career in archaeology in its rush to provide 'transferable skills' to those with no real interest in the subject. The training of archaeologists should not cease, however, once they have graduated. It is just as important that commercial units take their responsibilities seriously in this issue and look beyond the short-term contracts they offer their staff. Instead they should collectively consider the universal benefits of providing 'on the job' training and specialist courses etc. Unfortunately, in the cutthroat commercial environment, this is often seen as an avoidable expense (along with improving wages for staff) which makes it harder for them to undercut their competitors.

There also needs to be a recognition amongst some site staff that, as in all professions, a graduate archaeologist must spend a certain amount of time learning their trade on the job before earning extra responsibility. Equally it is unlikely that a graduate archaeologist will ever earn as much as a graduate engineer or architect because of the way that society values those professions and the perceived 'end product'. Such comparisons are ultimately useless in a capitalist society. There is, however, no reason why unit staff could not be paid a substantial amount more than they currently are to reflect the level of skill and training required.

The only wide-reaching solution I can see to the current imbalances in contract archaeology would be to create a state archaeology service, administered and managed through regional offices and funded by a tax on developers that was proportional to the construction work they were undertaking (this is really only a refinement of the existing 'polluter pays' system, but would allow greater flexibility when administered centrally rather than per job and per unit). Within this framework national pay scales, job grading and continuous training could be put in place. The work undertaken would utilise one, universally recognised recording system to agreed

standards of excavation, interpretation, illustration, analysis and publication.

Archaeologists would be able to move around between regional offices, when the demand was higher elsewhere, without losing the sick pay and holiday entitlement that they had earned and without, in all probability, suffering long periods of unemployment. Furthermore regional offices would support, and indeed encourage, the kind of local archaeological expertise that was once commonplace, but is rapidly becoming a victim of commercial pressures. Only when archaeology is no longer undertaken for profit will it become a truly profitable endeavour for all concerned.

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