# E DITORIAL: PUBLIC ARCHAEOLOGY

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This issue of the *European Journal of Archaeology* is aimed at examining matters of public archaeology and in so doing begs the questions – 'what is public archaeology and how should it be defined?'. I hope the papers in this issue lay out at least some of the scope of the definition, but undoubtedly there will be those who will wish to question whether the term should be used at all. I was recently asked to define public archaeology (on the grounds that I was giving a postgraduate course on the subject<sup>1</sup>) and my reply to the effect that it was concerned with any area of archaeological activity that interacted or had the potential to interact with the public – the vast majority of whom, for a variety of reasons, know little about archaeology as an academic subject. This was dismissed as providing far too broad a definition to have any use, especially as 'archaeology is a public activity anyway'. Whilst it may be true that broad definitions might appear to be too all-embracing, I should argue that my original statement is defensible in terms of how and why the public becomes involved in, or aware of, archaeological issues.

Briefly, as an example, the campaign involving Viking Dublin in the late 1970s and early 1980s saw a large element of public involvement with archaeology that at its height resulted in tens of thousands of Dubliners taking to the city streets ostensibly, but not entirely, to protect the city's archaeological heritage; there were other underlying causes and at least some political fallout. There was also considerable litigation (Bradley 1984; Heffernan 1988). This incident involved a series of issues which represent a proper area for research and explanation that can be seen in terms of public archaeology, but which are a long way removed from more conventional views of what public archaeology is seen to be.

The term 'public archaeology' first received widespread attention with the publication of Charles R. McGimsey III's *Public Archaeology* in 1972. This volume, which received some recognition in the UK and Europe at the time, was written 'with two audiences in mind: . . . colleagues in the archaeological profession . . . and the growing number of legislators and other interested citizens who are becoming

European Journal of Archaeology Vol. 2(2): 147-158

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increasingly concerned with preserving their states' archaeological heritage' (McGimsey 1972:*xiii*).

McGimsey explained that he feared the destruction of most American archaeological remains and indicated that there was an urgent need both to record and preserve if anything was to be left for the future. The bulk of the book provides the design of a state-supported archaeological programme, and is followed by an 'ideal' State Antiquities Act; a case study of the state of Arkansas, and a summary of the (then) current level of state and federal support for archaeology in the United States together with (then) existing legislative measures.

McGimsey stated from the outset that 'there is no such thing as "private archaeology"' and that 'no individual may act in a manner such that the public right to knowledge is unduly endangered or destroyed' (McGimsey 1972:5). In so saying, he left a number of areas undefined, especially the definition of 'public right', but his concern for greater public involvement with and access to the study of archaeology is clear. There will always apparently be tension between professionals, academics and 'the rest' but, as I indicate later, in the changing society in which we live access, involvement and openness are increasingly demanded and the increasing trend towards freedom of information will have an effect on our often inaccessible archaeological data, as indeed it should.

McGimsey was above all concerned with the management of the archaeological resource, and the possibility that legislation combined with thoughtful and wellconsidered programmes of investigation would preserve the archaeological resource for the future. From the late 1960s, the term CRM (Cultural Resource Management) increasingly made its appearance - and subsequently the terms ARM (Archaeological Resource Management) and Archaeological Heritage Management (AHM) have been increasingly widely used. It is not my intention to attempt a lengthy discussion on the development of, and differences between, these terms (although see Carman 1996, especially pages 3-20, who considers in some depth both the origins of these subjects and their definitions). What can be seen is an increasing use and development of both national and supra-national legal instruments which are assumed to operate in the public interest for the protection of the archaeological resource. As well as national laws, there has been a steady flow of international and regional conventions and recommendations relating to cultural and archaeological resource protection (for example UNESCO 1983, or the Valetta Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage, see Council of Europe 1992). The need to produce comprehensible and comprehensive legislation which meets the current requirements of archaeological thought and process is dealt with in Domanico's examination of the current state of Italian legislation in this issue. In this case study, she makes clear the shortcomings of existing legislation and the need for archaeologists to intervene and explain to legislators far more complex concepts than are currently catered for within the legislation. In turn, she recognizes that in Italy at least there is a reluctance on the part of the archaeological community to widen the debate on the nature of cultural heritage.

The approach to managing the archaeological heritage has an extensive and international literature (for example Cleere 1984 contains a number of papers which demonstrate the complexity of the archaeological heritage in terms of both legislation and philosophy in Europe and the rest of the world). One matter that clearly emerges is the different nature of both the legislative and philosophical approaches from country to country, although a majority of the contributors claim public support for archaeology and by implication for the work of archaeologists. The continuing concern with management of what is perceived as a finite resource (*pace* McGimsey 1972) has also resulted in programmes aimed at gaining a better understanding and in some cases an improved level of protection for the archaeological resource.

The development of the Monuments Protection Programme (MPP) by English Heritage in the 1990s is an excellent example of an attempt to improve the management of the archaeological resource (Startin 1991: 1993). This scheme introduced a wide range of proposals, one of which was a scoring system for identifying levels of relative importance of sites. It may be worth noting that, when making decisions in connection with the programme, there appears to be no role for the public directly, although there is a tacit assumption that decisions will be made for future generations by archaeologists. Although the aim is to serve the public, they appear to have no designated role within the process – the archaeologists' views are apparently paramount (Startin 1995).

In their paper in this issue, Deeben, Groenewoudt, Hallewas and Willems extend approaches to the management of archaeological monuments by proposing a system of significance evaluation which they suggest will be more transparent and more comprehensible for non-archaeologists; as in the case of MPP, the evaluation would be carried out by archaeologists but emphasis is placed on comprehensibility. The authors recognize the need to encourage a debate and develop a system which not only has widespread applicability but will also be capable of meeting both academic and management requirements. The adoption of this proposal could also open the way for supra-national comparisons and further research.

The need to be able to evaluate the state of the archaeological resource is clear and was demonstrated by the results of 'The Monuments at Risk Survey' – MARS (Darvill and Fulton 1998). This survey had two aims: to provide a general picture of the condition of England's archaeological resource and the risks it faces; and to set benchmarks against which future changes (to that archaeological resource) can be monitored. The survey not only provided a reservoir of information relating to management of the archaeological resource but will also inform decisions on priorities for future programmes of archaeological activity. The results of MARS, which represent an audit of the state of the archaeological resource in England, demonstrate the importance of data management, and also the potential for using the accumulated spatial data of archaeological sites and monuments records for further analysis. Much of the data in England lacks uniformity and the situation is no better in Europe as a whole. As García Sanjuán and Wheatley point out in this issue, there is a need – if archaeologists are to take advantage of the recent advances of GIS – to consider not only increasing uniformity of national systems but also the possibility of supra-national approaches towards standardization of archaeological inventories. There is an increasing element of convergence in many European countries but if it is going to be possible to look at cross-national data (especially using increasingly sophisticated GIS techniques), it seems that the conclusion should be to move towards agreed international standards which would allow analysis on a wider scale.

Many of the issues raised by McGimsey in the areas of legislation for, and management of, the archaeological resource have seen considerable advances in recent years as the articles in this issue indicate. But what of the public interest not represented by bureaucracies and through regulation? He was surprisingly dismissive of the need for, and level of, public involvement. . . . Obviously, the vast majority of the public is not going to become involved beyond appreciating the proper need for archaeological recovery and preservation and perhaps taking some interest in the results (McGimsey 1972). Nevertheless, he subsequently stressed the fundamental importance of education in the following terms:

While it will always be true that archaeologists need to communicate among themselves, it is now abundantly clear that unless they also communicate effectively with the general public . . . all else will be wasted effort.

(McGimsey and Davis, quoted in Jameson 1997:9)

The development of concern to educate and communicate with the public about archaeological matters has proceeded apace in the USA (see, for example, McManamon 1994; White and Williams 1994; Jameson 1997) and this movement has also taken aboard the concern of individual ethnic groups (see for example Whittlesey 1997). There will be different public archaeologies for indigenous peoples; these will serve different purposes for different interests and stakeholders. The same concern with education seems to be less obvious in Europe, where the majority of work has related more to museum-based archaeology, possibly because of the concerns that museum archaeologists have about their ability to present coherently and comprehensibly archaeological material to the general public (Merriman 1989).

The publication of *The Presented Past* (Stone and Molyneaux 1994) demonstrated the concerns of both museum-based and academmic archaeologists to widen the understanding of their subject and also the possible approaches that could be taken to do so. There is less evidence that archaeologists in the field have the same concerns for engaging a wider public, and the number of community-based archaeology projects is relatively small despite the work of Liddle (1989), whose development of community archaeology has gone on for over 15 years and has demonstrably produced results by involving the public in field walking and other practical projects. There is, however, increasing evidence that more attempts are being made to widen public involvement in archaeology at a local and community level (for example Kershaw 1998; pers. comm. Duncan Brown). Much of this work is based in English local authorities, often closely tied to museums; it is clear that, since recent local government reforms, there has been a decline in the number of community-based archaeologists (pers. comm. T. O'Connor).

Despite the assumption that the public in general supports the efforts of archaeologists in protecting their heritage (see for example Reichstein, Kristiansen in Cleere 1984), there is remarkably little hard statistical evidence for the level of public support and interest in archaeology. In the UK, most information that exists can be derived from museum-based surveys, and does not suggest total public engagement with archaeology. For example:

Although the value of archaeology in the abstract is affirmed by the large majority of the public, for most people it is seen to have little relevance to their lives, and it is this lack of perceived relevance which leads to lack of interest and understanding [of the subject].

(Merriman 1989:23)

Merriman carried out a national survey which, although primarily looking at the role of museums in archaeology, carries a number of serious messages for archaeologists if they wish to claim public support. Merriman concludes that, '... It is only by education that archaeologists can possibly hope to stimulate interest in the subject and care for the archaeological heritage, and it is only by getting out and doing it ourselves that this can be achieved' (Merriman 1989:23). Other surveys demonstrate support in general terms for archaeology and museums to a remarkably high degree (for example Prince and Higgins 1992) but to what extent that support is passive or active is unclear.

One area that does need serious and sustained research is that of public attitudes towards archaeology. A so far unpublished survey carried out in connection with the future of Stonehenge (Kennedy 1999) has produced some interesting results. The numbers of people supporting the need to preserve Stonehenge for future generations was very high, and was matched by the results of similar museum-based surveys, which show a high level of commitment to maintaining the heritage. The survey also made it possible to produce an estimate that there were enough people willing to pay more than £37 per head through taxation to raise £183 million to build a tunnel underneath the World Heritage Site. More significantly, it appeared from the survey that 9 per cent of the sample said preserving heritage was the most important cultural 'problem that needed action compared to less than 1 per cent giving priority to the visual' (Kennedy 1999). This survey related mainly to the case of Stonehenge and might not represent a view about all archaeology. The public outcry over the fate of the seventeenth-century Rose Theatre in London, where thousands demonstrated against the possible reburial of the site (Eccles 1990), may have had more to do with the Shakespearean connection than the archaeological remains, even though it was one of the few cases in which there was direct public involvement with archaeological activity in the UK. Remarkably

little empirical work has been done on public attitudes to archaeology, and it is important not only to establish levels of 'passive' concern but also active concern.

The expansion of archaeology departments across the world since the late 1960s has meant, certainly in Europe, that there are increasing numbers of archaeology graduates and theoretically that there are many more graduate archaeologists (many of whom will not be working directly in the field of archaeology). This expansion should have an impact on the public understanding of archaeology. It appears that there is a steady demand for a variety of part-time courses in archaeology from the public (pers. comm. A. E. Brown ) and that numbers of part-time students attending adult education courses in the UK exceed 10,000 a year. However, there is little evidence that there has been a significant expansion of archaeological understanding or public commitment to archaeology, although it is difficult to gauge levels of commitment or interest without more research. It was recently pointed out to the author that, for example, the Council for British Archaeology (CBA) still had only about 5000 members whilst other environmental pressure groups such as the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) numbered their membership in millions (G. Wainwright, pers. comm.). Of course, the CBA has only offered individual membership for the last five years, and with nearly 500 institutional members could claim to represent many more individuals than the individual membership figure; nevertheless, despite being the biggest representative organization for archaeology in the UK, the CBA is small by comparison with other environmental interest groups.

Maybe we should not be concerned that the CBA has a low membership compared with other environmental organizations – it is debatable whether or not the CBA was ever intended as a mass membership organization, but there is some evidence that the membership of many archaeological organizations is not increasing significantly. The only mass membership archaeological organization in the UK that can be fairly claimed is English Heritage with over 100,000 members in 1998; however, most of this membership is presumably joining to enjoy passive participation by visiting archaeological sites rather than direct involvement in archaeological activity.

Archaeology relies in general on large amounts of state funding; in the UK, for example, the likely funding for archaeological activity will be in excess of £318 million for 1999 (CIPFA 1998; DCMS 1998). It is not easy to arrive at a total aggregate figure for archaeological support, because funding comes from local authorities as well as central government and also various NDPBs (Non-Departmental Public Bodies) and agencies. This makes quantification difficult in the UK, but this figure is likely to be on the conservative side, and does not include funding derived from developers. Much archaeological endeavour cannot survive without public funding and, in a climate of increasing public accountability which increasingly dominates public expenditure in the UK, it seems that archaeologists would do well to recognize the importance of public understanding and support in their activities. Although this requirement for access in the widest sense may

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be particularly emphasized in recent years in the UK, it represents a trend particularly in contemporary western societies as a whole.

This requirement both to justify expenditure and allow access is one of the points which lies behind Merriman and Swain's paper on archaeological archives and their use and function. The growth of archaeological activity since the 1970s has placed great pressure on many museums in the UK. The costs of storing (or maintaining reserve collections) of excavated archaeological archives form a significant element in many museum budgets and yet the total usage of these collections is extremely limited. The need to demonstrate the effective use of resources does require a significant reappraisal of the role and use of such archives and collections which were recovered often with public funding and which are maintained in most cases at the public's expense.

There is a clear economic and political dimension to the problem of usage of the excavated archaeological resource, and there are other areas of archaeological interest, activity and concern which link with public interest and economics. One of these is the matter of the market in illicit antiquities which is, to some extent, covered by both the UNESCO 'Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property 1970' and the UNIDROIT 'Convention on Stolen and Illegally Exported Cultural Objects 1995' (UNESCO 1983; Prott 1998) Most European states have ratified or are signatories to these Conventions, although the UK has still not ratified either. Supporting, publicizing and promoting these Conventions is a matter in which all archaeologists should be actively involved (Schadla-Hall 1999a). There is a growing literature and press interest in issues of restitution of archaeological material. There has been the perennial debate about the Parthenon marbles (e.g. The Times 1999), which may be viewed as an historical issue which has less immediacy than the sorts of incidents which are currently taking place on a wide scale. In the UK, cases such as the Salisbury Hoard (Stead 1998) and the Icklingham Bronzes (Palmer 1998:28) continue to demonstrate the widespread nature of looting and the abuse of the archaeological resource. After years of debate and discussion, the UK law on treasure trove was changed in 1996 (Bland 1996; DNH 1997), and has been accompanied by a voluntary recording code for antiquities which is currently being co-ordinated by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. This scheme seeks to widen involvement of the public, including metal detectorists, in recording archaeological material and aims to have a powerful educational role, including a web site, to demonstrate the information value of material recovered through the work of the scheme's officers (DCMS 1999). This scheme represents a significant advance in both involving the public and making information more readily available, and probably elicits political and funding support because it is aimed at increasing access to the subject.

The involvement of archaeology in political issues has been widely recognized and researched. Meskell's recent edited volume, *Archaeology Under Fire* (1998), places archaeology in a socio-political dimension which clearly falls within the purview

of public archaeology. The individual contributions also demonstrate the complex relationships and cross-currents which comprise what is essentially public archaeology where nationalism, ethnicity, contemporary politics, sociology and economics at both an individual and national level, all play different and yet related roles.

Rather than accepting a narrow definition of the term 'public archaeology', we should be seeking a broader definition and engaging the public as a whole in issues which do relate to them and which should be of far greater concern than they currently appear to be in the study of archaeology. There is at least one area of archaeology which has often been ignored by practising archaeologists – that of 'alternative archaeologies'. Morris (1993:12) has pointed out:

... the public feels more comfortable with mythologies. This is partly because it is a function of mythologies to be retold. Unless we come up with better ones, public mythologies – about Druids, dancers or gold under the hill or ley-lines – will continue to be reiterated. Yet our own frameworks could replace them, provided we have the nerve and imaginative flair to embed them in public consciousness, or maybe I mean public unconsciousness. In effect we must provide new myths, which have the potential to be more viable than the fantasies which presently rule. Myths? if you recoil, you make my point, which is that we have overlooked some of the public's needs. Fantasies flourish because to many people the past is an open field in which the imagination can wander. It is because they do not know exactly what stone circles are for that they find them fascinating.

Outside what we may call mainstream archaeology, those fantasies are alive and flourishing in the open field and archaeologists ignore them at their peril. The late Glyn Daniel (1992) took many joyous swipes at what he referred to as 'the comforts of unreason', but as Crawshay-Williams (1947) pointed out, there are reasons why people cling to notions which are clearly fantastic. However, as far as one can discern, what are often seen as lunacies by some of the archaeological profession are increasing, and ignoring or mocking such views has not and will not make them go away.

Two UK examples will suffice to illustrate the point, although there are many more available. The first is best summarized by the fact that, in the history section of its Christmas catalogue for 1998 (Dillons 1998), one of the UK's largest bookstore chains advertised a book by G. Hancock and S. Faiia (1998) as a best-selling work, even though many of the ideas scarcely advance on those propounded by Perry (1923) in *The Children of the Sun* – a classic hyper-diffusionist text of the pre-war era. The possibility of giving prominence to such works when they are at best inaccurate calls into question the potential of archaeology to make a real impact with work that has been properly researched and criticized. It may be acceptable to dismiss such works as anti-intellectual, but there is a growing trend to coat them with a veneer of academic rigour by including footnotes and references which confer on them an academic tone.

One of the most successful books in the UK in 1998 and on into 1999 is by the former pop star Julian Cope, of the group the Teardrop Explodes, with sales reportedly of over 20,000 in three months (Schadla-Hall forthcoming). The Modern Antiquarian (Cope 1998) is a bizarre work in many ways - it claims to be a work on Megalithic Britain, and its sales have been aided by extensive reviews in Time Out and the Guardian. The author is now going on extensive tours to various UK venues and talking about his book to audiences in their thousands (Scanlon 1999). Cope follows recent trends in 'alternative archaeology' by using extensive references, and the book is sumptuously illustrated. Most archaeology students I have spoken to find the book odd or inaccurate, but many admit to having read it and some suggest that it represents an alternative interpretation of the past. There are many who would argue that the popularity of such books, which are accompanied by a series of dubious television programmes, is best ignored. The fact that, for example, 'Time Team', a popular and well produced 'mainstream' television programme, has up to 6 million viewers and is well supported should not allow archaeologists to ignore other archaeological output which also achieves high audience ratings and is extremely misleading, as was the case with the recently screened 'Quest for Civilisation' mini-series by Graham Hancock. We do not know if the public does distinguish between 'good' and 'bad' archaeology in the media. This is another area where in-depth research would be most informative and also give real insight into the nature of public interest in archaeology.

The problem with integrity and with the recognition of ambiguity in archaeological interpretation is that there is a clear range of alternative hypotheses which can be accepted with equal validity. The real challenge is to ensure that debate and discussion of alternatives is based on evidence rather than imagination and fact rather than fiction. In this context, Holtorf and Schadla-Hall's paper on authenticity is particularly relevant. It raises issues connected both with the public experience and tourism. They question the role of archaeologists in terms of their potential effect on both valuing and understanding the past. The fields of authenticity, reproduction and reconstruction are areas which require further empirical studies in terms of their impact on the public perception of the past. Archaeologists argue at length over the relative merits of particular reconstructions and their purpose; they possibly need to consider whether the public cares. There was considerable debate over the 'authenticity' of the reconstruction of Shakespeare's Globe Theatre in Southwark, London, that still continues even after the opening, with questions being raised over external decoration of the completed edifice, as well as the authenticity of the experience (Schadla-Hall 1999b). However, the project has been an outstanding success and the numbers of visitors and customers have far outstripped initial projections. The public seems to accept what is offered and has shown little concern about the criticism.

I have attempted to offer a wider definition of public archaeology than is generally accepted because I suspect that many archaeologists in Europe choose to ignore or discount public opinion, and do not see archaeology as a public activity. It may also be important to recognize that many of the artificial divisions we impose on archaeological research and teaching make it impossible to follow through and analyse what are often multiple factors which affect archaeological activity. We should consider not only public interest in terms of protecting and recording the past but also ways in which we can both involve the public and make it possible for them to engage in many of the issues which we too often debate without reference to them.

The complexity of public archaeology issues is well illustrated by the current debate over Stonehenge; recently the long-standing discussion about the ways in which it might be possible to improve all aspects of the site and improve the World Heritage Site were summarized by Malone and Stoddart (1998) with a number of guest contributions. The present solution of driving a 'cut and cover' tunnel across the centre of the World Heritage Site (Malone and Stoddart 1998) which appeared to be unacceptable only a few months earlier (Wainwright 1996a, 1996b), now appears to be a favoured solution on the part of English Heritage, who had in turn long campaigned for a bored tunnel. There is undoubtedly a political element to this decision which is difficult to introduce into normal academic publication - not least is the issue of why the government's advisors on archaeological matters should change their advice. Instead it is still dealt with in the newspapers. Stonehenge and its environs have been the subject of years of debate (for example Chippendale 1997). There is likely to be considerable debate about the solution now proposed for securing the site and, although the issues involve not only archaeological site preservation but also international convention and national policy, as well as local interests, there is little evidence that the public is well informed on many of the issues. The general public concern for the heritage needs to be converted into public debate.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to Nick Merriman and Neal Ascherson for their thoughtful comments and Nicholas Stanley-Price for advice and patience.

# Note

1. The definition does exist more formally in the description of MA and MSc courses, 1999–2000, Institute of Archaeology, University College London, published in 1999.

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