"I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving, hysterical, naked..."

Introduction

A recent IFA-sponsored debate discussed the motion that British archaeology was in crisis. Some senior archaeologists present concluded there was no crisis, and one even stated that 'we have never had it so good' (Stone, 1998, reported in McAdam, 1999). This came as news indeed to many of those working in archaeology, either for museums and local authorities, or those in commercial contract units. I am well aware of the artificial and deliberately provocative nature of the debate format. Nevertheless, the defeat of the motion does seem to reflect an unwillingness on the part of many in archaeology to face up to growing problems within the wider discipline, and in commercial archaeology in particular.

In this paper, I examine the present state of English developer-funded archaeology, some of the difficulties that it is experiencing, and some possible ways of ameliorating these problems. I will not be discussing the situation in Scotland and Wales, simply because I am unfamiliar with conditions in these countries, as my career as a contract archaeologist has been largely confined to England. Some may claim that English commercial archaeology is a rather parochial subject, yet this sector of archaeological practice is regularly held up as an example to the rest of the world. The problems currently experienced by English archaeology, and possible solutions to them, must have international as well as national significance.

This article is based upon my personal experiences and those of colleagues, and is a critique of many of the accepted methodologies and power structures in...
contemporary English archaeology. It is unashamedly a work of polemic, and reflects the growing mood of despondency and despair felt by many within the discipline.

**A dangerous complacency?**

The rise of post-war rescue archaeology, encouraged by the Ministry of Works and the Department of the Environment (DoE), and the concomitant development of Sites and Monuments Records offices (SMRs), has been outlined by others (Harris, 1989; Hudson, 1981; Jones, 1984). The creation of county archaeologist posts and the emergence of field units to deal with the increasing amount of rescue excavation and survey has also been described (Hunter, Ralston and Hamlin, 1993: 33-36). The pressure groups RESCUE (the British Archaeological Trust) and the Council for British Archaeology were instrumental in raising public and government awareness of the threat to archaeology from redevelopment work.

It is important to put this work in its historic context however. Resources were never evenly spread, and securing SMR coverage of England took over twenty years. Recording and database quality may still vary enormously between SMRS (Baker and Baker, 1999; Baker and Shepherd, 1993), and some SMRs are still not adequately computerised. Rescue work was often purely reactive and poorly planned, and many projects are still in a post-excavation limbo decades later. The quality and quantity of rescue work varied greatly between urban centres. London, Winchester and York for example, were better served than historic towns such as Doncaster and Chesterfield, where far less resources were available to record or preserve archaeology.

Archaeology was rapidly becoming professionalised. Government and European Community policy during the early 1980s became concerned with the 'polluter pays' principle (DoE, 1989; English Heritage, 1986). The Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act of 1979 allowed government funding only for specific projects, ending the provision of block grants to institutions. Public spending cuts during the 1980s restricted money from local authorities and English Heritage, and many archaeological units increasingly sought developer funding. Until 1989, English Heritage and its predecessor had also met most of the funding for the SMRs, but after this date local authorities became financially responsible for them.

The publication of the *Planning Policy Guidance Note 16* in November 1990 was an important watershed. Though the Ancient Monuments and
Archaeological Areas Act of 1979 was concerned with historic conservation, PPG 16 placed archaeology firmly within development control and the commercial sector. This was followed in 1994 by PPG 15 (DoE, 1994). Archaeological investigation and monitoring is now an important part of the planning process, and few developers remain unaware of the need to seek archaeological advice when contemplating development schemes. In recent years, archaeology’s public profile has also risen through articles in local and national press and television programmes like The Time Team and Meet the Ancestors. English archaeologists (and those from Britain as a whole) are highly respected world-wide. They have been at the forefront of debate in archaeological theory, and on-site methodologies, analytical and conservation techniques continue to be pioneered in this country.

There is no doubt that in many respects archaeology is in a much stronger position at the end of the 1990s than it was at the end of the 1980s. However, we should not adopt the apparent complacency of some of those at the IFA debate. The many problems concealed beneath the superficially successful surface of archaeology are largely ignored at present, but will become graver over the years if they are not addressed. Crisis may indeed be the wrong word for such long running, deep-seated difficulties (Pooter, 1999), and I have no wish to spark off a sensationalist panic. To those of us working on the 'frontline' though, the failure to address these problems is causing widespread anger, bitterness and despair.

These problems are both intellectual and practical. The most recent English Heritage national report outlined the lack of research, the lack of resources and the widespread disenchantment currently felt within professional archaeology (Olivier, 1996: 31-33). Letters and articles in Rescue News, The Field Archaeologist, British Archaeology, Britarch and The Digger continue to illustrate the difficulties facing many English archaeologists. Most worryingly, experienced people are leaving the discipline in droves. In the past five years most of my original peer group have left. Many of these friends and colleagues are some of the finest archaeologists I have ever worked with - the brightest and the best. The reasons for this malaise are examined below.

**A ten year assessment of PPG 16**

Archaeologists generally welcomed PPG 16's introduction. Though not statutory, the obligation on developers to fund assessments of archaeological impact and any subsequent work was a boon for the archaeological community, leading to a dramatic increase in the work of contractual archaeology.
units (Pagoda Projects, 1992). Over time however, some negative aspects of PPG 16 have become apparent, reflecting how it has been implemented in practice, and more indirect effects.

PPG 16 has some internal inconsistencies (Biddle, 1994: 4-6), and some developers still only accept it on sufferance. Local planning officers may still ignore the advice and recommendations of their archaeological colleagues, and local politics, investment and employment issues may place curators in extremely difficult positions. Whilst some large firms may resent paying for archaeology, despite annual turnovers of millions of pounds, small developers, charities and individuals may not be able to afford archaeological work at all, and this may delay projects for years.

Reliance upon developers may leave some archaeological projects vulnerable to financial changes. The Lower High Street site 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 regionally important medieval North Bridge site was only written up as a basic archive report, with minimal specialist analysis. Full publication was refused. The nearby Church Street excavation found evidence for several phases of Roman fort, the Anglo-Scandinavian burgh defences, the Norman castle defences, and later medieval buildings and a tannery. DoT funding ended long before an archive report could be produced. The local council, the Highways Agency or English Heritage evinced no interest in completing and publishing these sites from a much neglected, historic northern town.

There have been some notable cases where the implementation of PPG 16 has been problematic. There was the debacle at Elms Farm near Colchester in Essex, where pre-PPG 16 planning permission, conflict between the district and county SMRs and equivocal evaluation results combined to allow development of a site that should have been scheduled. A well preserved Roman town, with an earlier Iron Age settlement beneath, was excavated in a desperate salvage operation, and even an emergency grant from English Heritage could not redress the damage. Recently, there has been controversy over an Iron Age site in the Gwent Levels, where inadequate time was available to excavate three waterlogged timber buildings prior to their destruction.

Problems continue with development projects granted planning permission prior to PPG 16, particularly old mineral extraction licenses. Some expanding quarries now have to go through planning permission again as ROMP
submissions (Review of Old Mineral Planning Permissions), but not all. Furthermore, crown, government and Church of England properties are exempt from some of the conditions in PPG 16. The Church of England’s own system of faculty jurisdiction is archaic and often not applied in practice. Recent intrusive groundwork inside Durham cathedral was carried out without any archaeological monitoring. The sad saga of Sheffield cathedral's cemetery will be outlined below.

The very success of PPG 16 has had an insidious effect. Regardless of the reality of the lack of research funding, before 1990 there was a much more widespread feeling within the discipline that research into the past was at the centre of archaeological work. Since PPG 16, archaeology has become reactive rather than proactive, increasingly responding to development rather than following research-driven goals. An almost anti-intellectual atmosphere has developed amongst some archaeological practitioners today, who seem content with simply recording the past, rather than critically analysing and interpreting it. The continued funding and employment that is offered by PPG 16 has engendered a conservative culture within archaeology, one that is loath to question the shift in emphasis that has occurred.

"Getting archaeology properly preserved or recorded through the planning prescriptions of PPG 16 pitchforked an academic discipline firmly into a commercial sphere, fundamentally uninterested in its basic purpose, which is research as a means of presenting the past to a wide range of social audiences. The fault lies not with PPG 16, a welcome symbol of archaeology’s social maturity, but with the view of it as panacea, which further hinders the creation of compensatory mechanisms for feedback in already adverse financial and political conditions." (Baker, 1999: 16).

The growing troubles of local authority archaeology

Many SMR personnel now serve as development control officers, in addition to maintaining and updating records. They also monitor work carried out by contractual units within their areas, especially where county archaeologist posts have been cut (Mellor, 1996). English Heritage has called for regional research agendas to be established (English Heritage, 1991a), and this responsibility has also fallen on curatorial staff. Some curators lack sufficient knowledge and experience of field methodologies and theoretical developments, and are often absent from conferences and research seminars. This is partly the result of their enormous workloads however, which leave little time for attending such gatherings. Many of the problems associated with contemporary archaeology have been unfairly blamed on them (Heaton, 1999).

SMRs are expected to cope with these increased workloads using existing staff, or even fewer personnel as a result of local authority cuts. Local government
Budget slashing has led to the drastic downgrading of several local authorities’ archaeology services, and others remain under threat (Baker, 1994; Morris, 1996). A recent review of English SMRs detailed serious problems with the management and availability of resources, and falling staffing levels (Baker and Baker, 1999).

SMRs have no statutory recognition, and local authorities do not necessarily have to retain them. Some boroughs have threatened to withdraw funding from county SMRs altogether (Aitchison, 1999a; Mellor, 1996). The reorganisation of local government will have profound effects on SMRs. In the Bath unitary authority, the archaeological officers are in the same building as planning, conservation and environmental officers, and have regular inter-disciplinary meetings (R. Sydes, pers. comm.). This is a very efficient and productive arrangement. What must be avoided is a fragmentation of existing SMRs, with several different offices becoming responsible for areas previously served by one office. This would be very inefficient, and would dilute already scant resources. Potential conflict or contradiction between county and unitary authority curatorial services must also be foreseen and avoided.

**Competitive tendering and other stories**

"I don't f*ck much with the past but I f*ck plenty with the future..."

Competitive tendering in archaeology was encouraged by the Local Government Act of 1988, which sought to separate 'enabler' and 'provider' functions within local authorities. This was supported by English Heritage itself (1991c). These ideas were heavily influenced by Conservative ideas of the 'internal market'. Some consequences of competition have been advantageous. The need to develop structured approaches to project planning forced archaeologists to assess their goals and methodologies. The Frere and Cunliffe reports (AMBECRA, 1975; CBA/DoE, 1982) had dealt with some of these issues, but the *Management Of Archaeological Projects* publication (English Heritage, 1991b) was the first to create nationally standardised approaches to all project management, from initial planning through to publication.

Further guidelines have since been published (e.g. ACAO, 1993), and discussions of archaeological management have ranged from the enthusiastic (Cooper, 1995; Lawson, 1993) to the more critical (Adams and Brooke, 1995; Brooke, 1995; Johnston, 1994). Effective management of financial and other resources is obviously necessary now that archaeological units are involved in multi-million pound development schemes, and may
themselves have large annual turnovers. However, archaeological managers find much of their time is now taken up with Gantt charts and time tables, and some confess that they are losing touch with developments within the discipline. Again, there is less time to attend conferences and explore personal research interests.

The adoption of 'off the peg' management techniques has also increased the perceived distance between archaeological managers and staff, and the drive for cost-effectiveness leads some to regard the people working for them as just another resource. Stereotyping people on-site by the patronising sobriquet of 'diggers' ignores the education, experience, personal research interests and commitment of the individuals concerned. Management techniques should be developed to maximise the potential of those working in archaeology (Adams and Brooke, 1995), rather than to simply exploit them.

Competitive tendering was highly controversial (e.g. Cooper-Reade, 1998; Heaton, 1991; Lambrick, 1991; Morris, 1993; Schadla-Hall, 1991; Symonds, 1995; Walker, 1996). It ended the 'territoriality' of units that had developed over time, but as these units had differential access to resources truly fair competition between them was often impossible. Those units in the strongest position prior to PPG 16 have enjoyed the benefits. There has been a proliferation of units whose main purpose is to carry out desk-based assessments and field evaluations. As field archaeology has become more constrained by tighter budgets, contributing to education and research has become difficult. Local communities and volunteers have been increasingly excluded from archaeological projects (Schadla-Hall, 1999; Start, 1999).

Archaeology is not an 'accepted profession that commands reasonable fees' (contra Lawson 1993: 149). Some developers are still uncooperative, and their on-site contractors can sometimes be very antagonistic. On a recent project in Hampshire, one morning archaeologists discovered that heavy plant had been deliberately tracked over half the site during the night. Like many contract archaeologists, in the past I have been verbally abused and manhandled on site. On a watching brief on a road scheme, one colleague was even threatened with being doused in petrol and burnt!

Wages have fallen ever further behind inflation and the pay of comparable professions (Aitchison, 1996, 1999b; Howe, 1995; Reeve, 1995; Schaaf, 1996; Spoerry, 1997; Turner, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999). Although the average archaeological wage is over £17000 per year (Aitchison, 1999b), the majority of people within contract units, SMRs and museums are paid far less than this – many less than £11000. Some units still have structured pay
scales, and provide contracts, sick pay and paid leave for employees. However, others are often more competitive because their staff are paid less, have no paid sick leave or time off, and work for very short-term contracts (Aitchison, 1999b; Howe, 1995). In terms of contract length and employment conditions, most of the archaeologists working in England today are in little better position than in 1990.

The position of women in archaeology has continued to decline. This is partly due to continued sexism and discrimination, direct or indirect (Scott, 1998). It is difficult to plan families and maintain a career when contracts are short, pay is poor and crèche facilities are non-existent or very expensive (IFA, 1991). Most employers still continue to maintain inflexible working practices. Women often leave field archaeology to become specialists. These are perfectly valid career decisions, but it means that field archaeology continues to be dominated by men, although there are also more complex gendered discourses and practices behind this (Moser, 1996). Few women become site directors or project managers, and many simply leave archaeology altogether. This can only be to the detriment of the discipline.

Training opportunities are few, and acquiring new skills has become a matter of luck rather than forward planning (Hardy, 1997). The high turnover of personnel in many of the larger units can lead to excavators being regarded as little more than labourers or 'trowel fodder' (Howe, 1995), whilst the input of specialists is routinely ignored (Blinkhorn and Cumberpatch, 1998). All these factors have caused many experienced archaeologists from different grades or fields of expertise to leave the profession, and there is widespread disenchantment at a grass-roots level (Drummond-Murray, 1998; The Digger 1 1998 and 2 1999). Despite the lofty-sounding ideals presented in the latest SCAUM guidelines (1999), the reality is that most employees are treated poorly by contract unit, museums and SMR management.

A few large units dominate a disproportionate amount of the work undertaken in England, and may tender for work in areas completely removed from the experience of their personnel. More of the 'bread and butter' work of assessments and evaluations is being taken from local units, but it is these units which have the local knowledge. Local does not necessarily mean good, but within a few years most contract work in England will be carried out by only half a dozen organisations, with worrying implications for diversity and plurality. Archaeologists from different units who once thought of themselves as colleagues now often cannot talk openly to people who are potential rivals. Debate over field techniques and methodologies has declined, and units are often unaware of work other organisations have carried out nearby. This has
adversely affected specialists, who depend on networks of contacts in order to carry out their jobs effectively. The increasing trend towards the use of confidentiality clauses in contracts and project briefs must be viewed with considerable concern (Anon. 1998). All these are side effects of competitive tendering.

Competitive tendering forces units to undertake work in the minimum amount of time, with fewer resources for excavation, post-excavation and publication. Financial and other resources available for research have never been adequate, but core funding to units from local authorities and central government at least allowed for some to be carried out. Research has now declined across the country (Biddle, 1994; Carver, 1989, 1994; Mellor, 1997; Symonds, 1995), despite claims to the contrary (Strickland, 1995). The publication of Exploring Our Past (English Heritage, 1991a) failed to significantly improve the situation. The Draft Research Agenda (1997) is sometimes used as an official guide to preparing research designs, but has never progressed beyond its sketchy and often theoretically contentious format.

Commercial pressure drives tender prices down, but increases the costs to units, for competing on a job-by-job basis wastes resources when tenders are unsuccessful (Graves-Brown, 1997; Walker, 1996; Spoerry, 1997). Though guidelines for tendering have been published (Darvill, 1993; Darvill and Atkins, 1991; IFA, 1990; Williams, 1991), the situation is difficult to administer fairly (Buteux, 1991; Cooper-Reade, 1998). Most crucially, there is no effective means of regulation or monitoring. Concern has grown about the quality of archaeological work now being carried out, and there have been many occasions where developers have selected the cheapest tender (Blinkhorn and Cumberpatch, 1998; Cranstone, 1995; Jones, 1995).

Most senior unit managers would enthusiastically endorse competitive tendering, and the continued success of commercial field units now depends on it. Ask most of those in contract units at project officer grade and below however, and they will recite a litany of projects where the archaeology has been compromised because of inadequate time and resources. Apart from letters to Rescue News, British Archaeology, and Britarch, and newsletters such as The Digger, these people are normally denied a platform, and their opinions ignored by senior management. This is why most references discussing competitive tendering date from 1990-1995. The debate about competitive tendering has not ceased, but has been marginalised.

Examples of questionable practice and system failure
I will only provide a few examples here, mainly concerning the activities of one notorious archaeological consultancy. The now sadly defunct South Yorkshire Archaeology Unit developed considerable local expertise regarding Iron Age and Romano-British cropmark sites within the county, but lost a contract to a consultancy based outside of the region. The consultancy staff attempted to locate cropmark features using test pits, and as a result of this inappropriate and largely ineffective methodology they were criticised by the South Yorkshire SMR. The consultancy’s site supervisor then wrote to the South Yorkshire Unit for advice on how to better excavate similar sites in the future!

At a meeting regarding a medieval cemetery site in Lincoln, the archaeologist who heads the same consultancy firm was advising the developers. He suggested that each burial could be removed using a JCB, and proposed that if osteologists wished to study the skeletons present, they could pull the bones out of the machine bucket - his professional opinion. This consultancy operates across many counties in the north and east of England, and their client reports are regularly criticised by many of the SMRs in this region. However, this firm continues to operate despite numerous complaints, and is an IFA Registered Organisation. This supposedly means that it is 'monitored annually for the quality of its work' (IFA, 1999a: 66).

An example of system failure involves the Supertram project in Sheffield, planned prior to PPG 16 without an archaeological impact study. When the South Yorkshire Unit did carry out an evaluation of a proposed tram stop outside Sheffield cathedral, this work revealed burials from the post-medieval cathedral cemetery. Remains of the medieval moot hall were also thought to be on the site, a Saxon cross shaft had been found nearby, and the cathedral itself was originally the parish church for Sheffield from at least the 13th century onwards. Plans for a joint research project were tentatively begun with osteologists from Sheffield University’s Department of Archaeology and Prehistory. However, the Church of England’s own Diocesan Archaeological Advisor stated that no archaeological remains were likely to be encountered. Despite the site being surrounded by hoarding, horrified people in offices overlooking the site watched a grave removal firm machining skeletons out of the ground and shovelling them into bin liners. Local archaeologists were denied access to the site, so it is not known if any medieval burials or stratigraphy were encountered during this operation.

Central government funded the Supertram project through Sheffield City Council, and along with the Church their wishes were allowed to override archaeological considerations, ignoring the protests of the SMR, the local unit, and local specialists. Burial on the site only ceased in 1880, so a full research
excavation may have always proved too controversial, but would have been much less destructive to the bodies. Archaeologists would have treated the remains with more respect than the grave clearance firm, and metric measurements of the skeletons made prior to their removal would have provided an invaluable insight into Sheffield’s past population. A more recent grave clearance in Sheffield’s centre did involve archaeologists and osteologists from the university’s contractual unit, but only after they and the SMR persistently lobbied the council. They still had to suffer the stressful sight of coffins and bodies being ripped apart by machine buckets.

I have not 'named names' here for legal reasons, but also so I do not assume some spurious moral high ground. Many of us are complicit in the perpetuation of such problems. Maintaining tenure of work and the danger of gaining 'troublemaker' reputations discourages many from making formal complaints. In common with others in contract archaeology, when working for previous units I have been placed in professionally compromising situations, where archaeological features have had to be 'trashed' in order to extract some dating information. Features may only be minimally and arbitrarily sampled, on a last minute, ad hoc basis. Unless curatorial services have insisted on adequate contingency funds being built into tenders, there may be little or no time and resources available to deal with unexpected remains. In its present guise, competitive tendering exacerbates and contributes to this malaise.

The role of consultants

PPG 16 (DoE, 1990) and English Heritage guidelines (1991c) both suggested that developers might employ consultants for advice during the planning process, and subsequent archaeological work. They provide advice to other consultants such as environmental consultancies, or are engaged directly by architects, engineers and development companies. Contract units and broader-based consultancy firms now employ consultants, or they may operate on an independent full-time or part-time basis. Their work usually takes the form of desk-based assessments and mitigation proposals, and the monitoring on behalf of their clients of contractual operations carried out by other archaeological organisations. Specialists also operate as consultants in fields such as artefact, environmental and osteological analysis, and historical documentary research. Many consultants provide several different services.

There are several problems with the operation of consultants. Firstly, finds and environmental specialists require proper facilities and support for their work that are rarely available to them as individuals. These include access to work
space and reference collections. Small field units often cannot provide these, despite the fact that a network of locally based and experienced specialists can be highly productive, as only the larger units can afford to employ full-time specialists of this nature.

The SMR staff who should be assessing the quality of consultants’ work are under-resourced and under-staffed, and many SMR staff lack the specialist knowledge needed to monitor finds consultants effectively. In the case of consultants to developers, there are inevitably difficult questions about impartiality and objectivity (Collcutt, 1993: 162-166), and the minority of consultants who have offered dubious advice and recommendations have exacerbated this. Operating as they do only within purely voluntary guidelines of professional organisations such as the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA), there is now the potential for corruption beyond any of the imaginary restrictive practices some believe to have been in operation prior to PPG 16. Various groups such as ceramics and osteological specialists have also produced standards documents for their members, and along with IFA guidelines these are important contributions. However, without an effective registration or regulatory system, problems will still continue.

**Sampling, fieldwork and mitigation strategies**

Most contractual archaeology now consists of assessment procedures, including archive based desktop studies, geophysical surveying, and trial trenching (Marvell, 1990). This work focuses on predictive sampling of the total development area, inevitable given the large areas often affected by development. Techniques and case studies have been published for fieldwalking (Fasham et al. 1980; Haselgrove, Millett and Smith, 1985) and geophysics (Clark, 1990; Gaffney, Gater & Ovenden, 1991; Scollar, 1990), but trial trenching has been taken as a proven methodology.

A study focusing on rural assessments concluded however that although trenching evaluations usually recorded the presence and date of archaeological remains, identifying their nature, extent and 'quality' was often more problematic (Champion, Shennan and Cuming, 1995: 40-50). There are also considerable difficulties in assessing urban stratigraphy (Watson, 1993). It would seem that evaluation results have to be regarded with caution rather than confidence (Adams and Brooke, 1995; Matthews, 1993; Miles, 1999).

Despite aerial photographic evidence, geophysical survey and evaluation trenches, the presence of archaeological deposits or their complexity may still...
remain unresolved. Unless contingency funding has been specified in curatorial briefs, contracting organisations may find themselves financially responsible for any 'unforeseen' archaeology encountered, or English Heritage may have to intervene to provide emergency funding. This happened at Elms Farm, and more recently at Carlton Colville in East Anglia. The uncertainties inherent in evaluation procedures mean that such situations will inevitably continue to occur. If the preservation or recording of archaeology is compromised, this involvement with the 'big boys and girls' (Miles, 1999: 24) is hardly something to be proud of.

Developer funding has placed increased emphasis on mitigation strategies. PPG 16 states that wherever possible, important archaeological remains should be physically preserved in situ (DoE, 1990). This may involve methods such as concrete rafting or the burial of stratigraphy underneath makeup deposits. Alternatively, schemes of piling can be proposed to limit the presumed impact of construction work. These methodologies were widely adopted with little critical discussion of their theoretical implications and their physical effects. To my knowledge, only one English conference has examined the issues involved (Corfield, Hinton, Nixon and Pollard, 1996), and this discussed technical matters rather than debating whether or not preservation in situ is indeed desirable.

Piling may often have deleterious effects upon stratigraphy however, including vertical or lateral damage (Biddle, 1994: 12-13; Nixon, 1996; Thorpe, 1999: 44). I have witnessed perimeter secant piling drag modern rubble overburden over 3 metres down into intact medieval stratigraphy. The heterogeneous nature of archaeological deposits means that the physical effects of piling on stratigraphy may vary greatly, and the chemical and biological changes induced by such schemes are largely unknown. The weight of plant and machinery on site is often not considered, and finished buildings may still distort and compress stratigraphy despite rafting or piling. In some cases water tables have been punctured, allowing the degradation of waterlogged deposits. This happened recently at Ilkley in West Yorkshire, where piling will adversely affect waterlogged timbers thought to be Roman plank floors.

On some urban sites, proposed piling schemes have included dozens of intrusive post piles cutting through the stratigraphy, with archaeologists only excavating small pits a few metres square in advance of this, in a bizarre return to Wheelerian box grid techniques. This practice must be condemned, for such tiny windows into the deposits rarely provide understanding of the complexities of the stratigraphy, and the lack of contextual relationships for any finds recovered renders them almost valueless, except as crude dating indicators. In
such cases more sensitive piling schemes (Tilly, 1996) or full excavation must be considered instead. The benefits of open-area excavation should not be comprised merely because it is awkward or expensive for developers.

Some archaeologists seem reluctant to pursue these issues, as their work increasingly depends on maintaining good relationships with developers. One former employer prohibited me from mentioning Biddle’s 1994 paper in an assessment report, on the grounds that it would not be in the developer’s or the unit’s best interests. Computer modelling may allow some effects to be predicted (Shilston and Fletcher, 1996; Welch and Thomas, 1996), but experimentation, widespread discussion and the long-term monitoring of preserved deposits is needed before national guidelines can be produced (Nixon, 1996: 43).

Preservation in situ is widely believed to preserve archaeological deposits for future generations, perhaps when excavation techniques will have improved. This is misleading however. Many deposits now preserved in situ have been removed from study for decades, if not hundreds of years. Future techniques are unlikely to be able to interpret archaeology buried underneath multi-storey car parks, motorways and housing estates. Excavation methodologies (as opposed to analytical and display techniques) will not be radically different in ten, twenty or even thirty years time (Startin, 1993). The current procedure only delays the inevitable decision regarding the fate of such deposits, and their survival into the future is not necessarily assured. It hinders contextual and interpretative work in the present (Cumberpatch 1997).

On one site I supervised in the City of London, a block of intact stratigraphy some 10 metres by 10 metres in area and up to 0.50 metres thick contained a fragment of Roman wall and a few medieval pits. Discussions between consultants, developers and curators dragged on whilst alterations in the proposed building’s foundations were considered, yet the archaeology itself could have been excavated by two people in two days. There are many occasions when preservation in situ is desirable and justified, but the emphasis on it is now too great.

"…the discussion…raised a very fundamental issue: archaeological preservation is predicated on a fallacy, namely that a stable state exists. This attitude ignores the undeniable fact that the work of archaeologists constitutes interference with what is a natural process of decay. This highlights an important philosophical, even metaphysical aspect of our work that has up to the present been given all too little serious attention." (Cleere, 1996: 188).
Some developers regard the presence of archaeological deposits as a contaminant problem, which archaeologists can solve by the removal of this stratigraphy. Some archaeologists are in danger of subscribing to such opinions themselves, perhaps from a desire to emulate the construction industry (Heaton, 1999). One study of assessments used an alarmingly inappropriate medical metaphor for evaluation methodologies, describing them as processes of 'diagnosis' used to recognise 'common complaints' and even 'intractable cases' (Darvill, Burrow and Wildgust, 1995: 8). Here, archaeology is perhaps seen as cancerous growths, to be surgically removed as swiftly and as inexpensively as possible. Such views set very dangerous precedents.

**Storage, analysis and dissemination**

There has been a dramatic post-PPG 16 increase in the number and volume of artefact assemblages, but this has caused difficulties for museums which find that they are running out of storage space (BAN December 1994; Perring, 1996). PPG 16 made no allowance for this. Many museums are now charging for storage, this cost being incorporated into contractors' tenders, but these shorter-term solutions do not address the core issues. Museums staff rarely form part of the fieldwork project design process, and many museums have also experienced savage cuts in recent years. At Sheffield museum for example, three positions dealing with the conservation and curation of artefacts have now been reduced to one. As even three people found it difficult to deal with existing work, it remains to be seen how the museum will cope.

As fieldwork methodologies become more systematised and economised, there are fewer opportunities to experiment with new techniques (Chadwick, 1998). Increasingly, all that is required of artefact analysts is dating of the material. Few archaeologists are now able to produce overviews of fieldwork results and artefact assemblages from different projects (Brown, 1994; Cumberpatch and Blinkhorn, 1997). Postgraduate students in universities were once able to do this, but cuts in Ph.D funding and tightening of deadlines mean that they feel increasingly reluctant to embark on innovative, wide ranging research programmes.

Many assessments remain as unpublished client or archive reports (Carver et al., 1992; Thomas, 1991). Developers may insist on these reports being kept confidential for periods of six months or more (Darvill, 1993; Hinton, 1992). Some assessments may be mentioned in units' annual reviews or as notes in local archaeological journals, but as developer funding is project specific, post-exavation funding is rarely available to analyse and publish evaluations within
larger research agendas. Rising costs of full publication mean that developers balk at the expense of funding post-excavation analysis that may take years to complete. Many sites remained unpublished for decades (and in some cases are still not in print). Post-exavation costs can indeed be high, but there should be a powerful ethical commitment to full publication. Archives should not be considered a substitute for more widespread circulation. Archaeological fieldworkers and specialists alike cannot make informed interpretations and decisions about their material unless they are aware of the results of other investigations.

Developments in desktop publication means that some contractual units do try to maintain a systematic publication policy, though there are usually few additional resources to aid them. The development of new technologies such as CD-ROMs and the Internet (Champion, 1995; Thomas, 1995) may allow information about sites to be distributed more widely amongst archaeologists and the public, but even the existing potential is not being exploited (Winters, 1999). Some publications already forthcoming include short, standard hard copy reports that summarise and interpret data, but the bulk of the data itself is present on CDs. This may prove to be a useful format, provided CDs do not become the microfiche of the next generation.

The role of English Heritage

The block grants provided by English Heritage to units in the 1970s and 1980s, to maintain core staff and finance post-excavation and publication backlogs have ceased (Butcher & Garwood, 1994). English Heritage funding was also provided for large research projects such as Flag Fen, and West Heslerton, but these too have wound down. Increased budget restrictions from central government have taken their toll, and a recent review of its work questioned its structure and very existence (Dixon, 1996).

English Heritage does support valuable specialist training programmes however. English Heritage could be a more pro-active Inspectorate, monitoring the work of field units and consultants, and providing specialist advice to SMRs. Their Inspectors could intervene where local authorities are failing to provide adequate resources to deal with archaeological matters, or where contractual field units are carrying out sub-standard work. They should be more responsive to local needs and circumstances.

The role of RESCUE, the CBA and the IFA
RESCUE and the CBA are still vital pressure groups, and both have intervened to stop some cuts in local government archaeology. They provide an invaluable forum for all those in archaeology, whether contract archaeologists or dedicated amateurs. *Rescue News, British Archaeology* and *Britarch* allow archaeologists to keep in contact with projects and developments around the country, and are a platform for people to air grievances. They still highlight positive developments within the discipline, but the increasingly angry tone of their articles and editorials (e.g. Mellor, 1997; Morris, 1996) is evidence of the mounting frustration of many archaeologists.

Despite being the main professional association open to archaeologists in Britain, the Institute of Field Archaeologists is still perceived by many as a club for project managers, who until recently formed the majority of the membership (Oakey, 1992). Membership rates and conference fees are expensive, and beyond the means of many. There is also the widespread belief that the IFA wishes to operate a closed shop (Bell et al. 1993), and some people are indeed forced to join the organisation as a condition of their future or continued employment. No one has seen fit to challenge the ethics or legality of this. Certain members of the IFA have been linked to questionable or sub-standard practice, and the fact that only one person has ever had their membership revoked is a continuing source of concern to many. The IFA has also been seen as vacillating over issues of pay and conditions (Aitchison, 1996; The Digger 1, 1998).

The IFA has however published many investigations of such matters, and guidelines relating to them (Darvill & Atkins, 1991; IFA, 1990, 1991, 1997; Reeve, 1995). Their own surveys have highlighted the poor pay and conditions faced by many professional archaeologists (Reeve, 1995; Schaaf, 1996; Turner, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999). There have recently been some positive developments, including the publication of principles regarding employment practices, job descriptions and training (Schaaf, 1996). Membership fees for more poorly paid members may be rethought or subsidised (Hinton & Davies 1999), and a new initiative linking formal training to wage levels will soon be launched, based on the results of the most comprehensive survey yet of professional archaeology (Aitchison, 1999b; Hinton & Aitchison, 1998). Job descriptions and even wage levels may begin to be standardised as a result.

The IFA still has a long way to go before it obtains grass roots support though. Recent communications from the IFA suggest that the problem lies not with its members but with its non-members! (Hinton, 1999). This unfortunately shows that the IFA continues to respond to criticism in a defensive or even negative manner, and underestimates the strength of the cynical way in which it is
regarded by many in contract archaeology. Some are now advocating that one way to change the current status quo may be to join and change things from within (Aitchison, 1996; The Digger 1, 1998), to make the inner workings of the IFA more accessible to all. There will clearly be many interesting debates in the years ahead, and as a press-ganged IFA member myself I look forward to them.

Where do we go from here?

PPG 16 and competitive tendering have forced archaeologists to query the very nature of their discipline (Morris, 1995). Developer funding is undoubtedly here to stay, but should archaeology be forced to rely on the upturns and slumps of the market economy? (Barrett, 1995; Carver, 1996; Morris, 1993). Archaeology should surely be invested with greater long-term cultural significance than this. Are archaeologists simply providing a service to developers, or is it to inform the public and ourselves about the past (Andrews & Barrett, 1998), as part of an inquisitive, research-driven humanities discipline? At a time of increasing public awareness of and interest in archaeology, the ability of the public to participate in archaeology has been severely curtailed. Outside the profession, in England as elsewhere it remains a hobby for largely middle class and retired people (Duke & Saitta, 1998). This must be changed.

"The changes wrought by PPG 16 are steadily eroding the involvement of ordinary people in their local archaeological heritage. Their opportunity to participate in, enjoy and understand the archaeology and local history around them...has markedly decreased...Post-1990 local archaeology faces a serious problem and a major challenge: we have taken archaeology away from the people, and we need to find a way to bring it back." (Start, 1999: 49).

A continual problem remains the fact that most developers are essentially uninterested in the results of archaeology, and archaeologists have not helped matters. The reports and publications produced are often very site-specific, and lack real research input. Client reports usually make for very dull reading. If however, it could be demonstrated that archaeological knowledge could be genuinely advanced by developer-funded work, and local communities were involved and informed during such projects, truly challenging visions of the past could be created. The cachet of sponsoring such ventures, and the public relations, media coverage and advertising associated with them, may mean that developers would be more enthusiastic.

"If PPG 16 is to survive, it is vitally urgent to reform the ways in which it is being applied. The route to that reform is by re-establishing archaeology as a research discipline devoted to the increase in knowledge." (Biddle, 1994: i).

What are our responses as archaeologists to issues such as road schemes and environmental degradation? (Anon. 1998; Bevan, 1996; Lambrick.
1985; Macinnes & Wickham-Jones, 1992). Large road and quarry schemes permanently destroy or damage many archaeological features, but work prior to this allows employment for many archaeologists, and may provide the opportunity to examine large samples of urban areas or the countryside. This is why some consultants, senior commercial archaeologists and contract units have been so reluctant to criticise any schemes. These contradictions have previously been ignored or left as questions of personal ethics, but contract units should become more proactive in attempting to limit the effects of such proposals.

At the present time, local authorities have to financially compensate quarry companies whenever their quarrying or spoil tipping proposals are halted. This inevitably means that such schemes are often allowed to go ahead because of local political and financial pressures, no matter how detrimental they are. In areas such as the Peak District and on Dartmoor, quarrying schemes that are currently being proposed or produced as ROMP submissions may have truly horrific impacts on local environments and the archaeological landscapes within them.

The integration of archaeology, countryside management, conservation and development issues in the strategic plans of county, unitary and local authorities has been advocated (Countryside Commission, 1993, 1997). The introduction of Environmentally Sensitive Areas, PPG 7 (DoE, 1997), the Environment Act 1995 and the Hedgerow Regulations 1997 will hopefully lead to more productive assessment procedures, linking SMR data to habitat surveys and landscape characterisations (Dormor, 1999; McCrone, 1999). Many of these issues are now affecting people from many different backgrounds and disciplines. The erosion of soils across the country has increased dramatically, and is a serious problem in areas like the Southern Downs and the Yorkshire Wolds, whilst the drainage and destruction of peat deposits continues at an alarming rate (Cox, Straker & Taylor, 1996; CPRE, 1998; RCEP, 1996; Swain, 1993). These issues concern farmers, environmentalists, politicians, government scientists and archaeologists alike.

**How to stop the rot - proposals for change**

I do not claim to have many profound insights or answers, or to be presenting any form of cogent philosophy. This may only be achieved through widespread debate within the discipline as a whole, although at the present time this debate has been marginalised. These issues will not go away however, and neither will the growing clamour of protest within the discipline. I also wish to stress that I do not believe the answer lies solely with increased restrictions and legislation.
I do not wish to make things more difficult for all developers, and I believe that with many of the changes suggested below, the planning system would function more smoothly. Greater emphasis on research and community involvement would also provide them with more 'value for money'.

There is currently a move away from centralised government, and this has great bearing on archaeology. Whilst some proposals made here involve funding or assistance from central government and English Heritage, I recognise that like many other large organisations, English Heritage suffers from top-heavy management, and sometimes wasteful expenditure. It is also to some extent democratically unaccountable. Many of the proposals therefore involve change at more local levels, albeit with English Heritage co-operation and guidance.

- Statutory development control is clearly required in this country, but it has to be more flexible than PPG 16, taking into account the broader landscape effects of planning applications. Infringing this statutory protection should bring with it the possibility of severe financial penalties. It should be more closely linked to the protection of Environmentally Sensitive Areas, Sites of Special Scientific Interest and Ancient Woodlands (Lambrick, 1985; McCrone, 1999; Swain, 1993). The protection of some lithics scatters should also be considered (Austin & Sydes, 1998; Lisk, Schofield & Humble, 1998), and the preservation of peat and alluvium deposits containing palaeoenvironmental information (Cox, Straker & Taylor, 1996). The legal loophole that allows some developments granted planning permission before PPG 16 to proceed should be removed. This would make the situation much clearer for developers. There also needs to be a Minerals Tax, and the end of the compensation of quarry firms by local authorities.

- This statutory control would be monitored by local authority archaeologists, whose provision would itself be a statutory requirement for local authorities. Existing SMRs would form the core of these local archaeological offices (Cooper-Reade, 1998), and to achieve this, they would be given more staff and resources. These local government archaeologists would be an integral part of the planning and environmental sections of each local authority. Funding from English Heritage would allow the development of regional and local research programmes (Olivier, 1996: 42), through close co-operation between commercial units, universities, specialists, consultants and amateurs (Thomas, 1997). The dynamic possibilities could revolutionise archaeology in this country.

- Museums staff and find specialists should be more closely involved with archaeological projects from the planning stage (Blinkhorn & Cumberpatch, 1998). Regional archive stores need to be established, these to be easily accessible to people wishing to study the material. Considerable funding would be necessary for this, from central and local government and perhaps the National Lottery. The current downgrading of many local museum services must also be reversed.

- Competitive tendering and developer funding require a pragmatic rethink. Rather than developers providing all the financing for specific projects, a proportion of the funding, particularly for post-excavation and publication, could come from a
general development tax (Carver, 1989; Graves-Brown, 1997). This would be an incremental levy on development firms by central government, based on the assessed value of their assets. Large multi-nationals would make significant contributions, but with small-scale developers most or all of the project funding necessary would be provided for out of the general development tax. This money may also assist with research programmes within contract units, and with the provision of regional find stores.

- There needs to be a re-examination of the extent to which contractual units geographically distant from the development area can tender against local units. Local knowledge and expertise could be lost as units lose work to external contractors. Developers should still decide which contractual units to engage, but perhaps should be offered a more limited number of approved contractors. Local government archaeological services should be able to penalise and ultimately exclude organisations and individuals that fall below an acceptable professional standard. Better funded curatorial services would be able to produce more detailed and exhaustive briefs and research designs, which would establish a more level playing field for tendering organisations and would ensure that the cheapest tenders did not necessarily win contracts.

- Organisations such as the IFA should continue to have their own codes of conduct, and I am not proposing franchising (cf. Walker, 1996). However, there would be a national standard of archaeological practice, which would be drafted by English Heritage in conjunction with local authority archaeologists and contractual units. In this manner, organisations and individuals that repeatedly carried out below standard work would lose tenders and would have to cease operating as professional archaeologists.

- At the same time a new, chartered archaeological organisation needs to be established. This must be open and accessible to all, with clearly set out and transparent application and disciplinary procedures. No non-chartered archaeological organisation should be allowed to operate commercially, and there must be no more 'quiet words' behind the scenes (q.v. Hinton, 1999) that have so plagued the IFA and alienated so many within the discipline.

- The use of new multi-media technologies may allow for more extensive publication of work (Champion, 1995; Hodder, 1998; Winters, 1999), particularly very large data sets. An Annual Compendium of work undertaken by all contractors could be produced on the Internet (Carver et al. 1992), to save costs and facilitate dissemination, but this must not become a substitute for more comprehensive publication. I am however slightly wary of ideas that digital recording, archiving and access via the Internet will necessarily lead to greater democratisation and interpretative potential within archaeology (Hodder, 1998). Many people in this country and world-wide do not have access to computers and the Internet, and we should be wary of creating a Western European-North American information hegemony based on these technologies. Paper, books and microfilm are still the most stable and reliable media for the long-term storage of information (Handley, 1999).

- Research should influence how and where we excavate to a greater extent (Andrews & Barrett, 1998; Barrett, 1995; Biddle, 1994; Carver, 1994). All
archaeological projects, no matter how small, can still contribute to wider understanding of landscape and cultural change, if there are suitable research frameworks or agendas. In addition, English Heritage could use development tax money to fund a programme of research excavations around the country (Olivier, 1996: 34). These could investigate sites or areas rarely investigated through developer-funded archaeology, and would function as on-going interpretative experiments for new recording and analytical techniques (Tilley, 1989). A detailed, nation wide study of the effects of piling and rafting is also long overdue. This could be carried out by English Heritage in consultation with engineers, developers and contract units.

- Archaeologists are a skilled and highly motivated workforce, but contract units, museums and SMRs need to be better structured and managed to empower and encourage individuals and project teams (Chadwick, 1998; Johnston, 1994; Owen & Steane, 1993). Theoretical and methodological developments cannot take place until people feel that they are valued team members (Adams & Brooke, 1995). There is a vocational component to archaeology, which is why many people stay on despite poor pay and conditions. Archaeology is a craft (Shanks & McGuire, 1996), one that has to be learnt over many years. It is a fascinating combination of sensual and intellectual engagement, whether on-site or in the laboratory (Chadwick in prep.), and the enthusiasm and dedication should be explicitly acknowledged.

Many of the suggestions I have proposed could be put into practice using existing structures and organisations, and would lead to enhanced efficiency and cost-effectiveness. Inadequate funding remains a basic issue however. A general development tax, a Minerals Tax and a guaranteed proportion of National Lottery funds would be able to provide some extra funding, but only increased government expenditure, administered through local authorities and English Heritage, will be able to provide for first class SMRs and museums. The reintroduction of a measure of core funding to contract units may also facilitate research, education and community projects, training and proper career structures (Blinkhorn & Cumberpatch, 1999). At the present time the political will to implement these changes does not seem to exist within central and local government or, more sadly, within archaeology itself. Too many managers in local authority, museums and contract archaeology appear to be satisfied with the current state of affairs. This short-term outlook can only be harmful to the long-term future of archaeology.

Conclusions

There are thus structural weaknesses in the whole of the English archaeological process. These affect development control, evaluation and excavation, and deposition, storage and publication. Many of the problems involved in these areas are similar and inter-linked. Fewer resources are available to museum services and local authority archaeologists, and specialists are being excluded from all stages of the process.

Competitive tendering has benefited a few, but it has driven standards down, and the recording or preservation of archaeological deposits is being compromised more and more frequently. Increasing numbers of projects are
becoming salvage operations, because they are under-funded from the beginning. Contract archaeology is becoming a mere technical recording exercise, and archaeologists are in danger of joining other contractors such as plumbers and electricians (no offence to these professions), 'fixing' the archaeological problems of developers. At least these other contractors are regulated, respected by developers, and charge higher rates for their services.

It does not have to be like this. Research-led archaeology need not interfere with the needs of developers, and may actually be cost-effective, for with clear research goals more targeted approaches may be possible on some projects (Andrews & Barrett, 1998). At the same time, it would produce archaeologies of people, rather than features or objects. Archaeology cannot and should not be considered solely as a commercial enterprise. English archaeology has come far in the last two decades, but these advances will be negated if action is not taken to address the growing problems. The suggestions made above would be an important step in ensuring that archaeology continues to develop to meet the challenges of the new millennium.

"...historical enquiry surely invigorates us all and exposes the importance of archaeological residues not as remains with some inherent value (for few of them have that) but as the means to explore how the past may have been. It is surely of greater importance that we preserve the practical and intellectual traditions of that enquiry for future generations than it is to preserve material remains whose possible significance will have been long forgotten." (Barrett, 1995: 12).

Notes


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Abbreviations/contractions:

ALGAO Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers

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