Power of Place: Critique and response

C.G. Cumberpatch BA PhD

Introduction

In February 2000 an initiative was launched which was intended to begin a process which would result in ‘an entirely new, integrated approach to managing out historic surroundings for the next century’ (Cossons 2000). The initial invitation to participate was followed, in June 2000, by the publication of five Discussion Papers (Understanding, Belonging, Experiencing, Caring, Enriching), formulated by five working groups, which set out to ‘provoke wider involvement in the review’. Responses were sought to the ideas set out by the working groups. A number of these were published by the Council for British Archaeology on their website. The Discussion Papers and other information was made available on the English Heritage website. The results of the consultation exercise and of the discussions within the working groups was published both on web and hard copy in November 2000 as Power of Place (English Heritage 2000) a forty-eight page document summarising the results and setting out eighteen main recommendations, most with a number of sub-clauses.

In the light of the statements made in Power of Place and the very wide consultations that contributed to it, it is clear that it requires serious and careful study. In particular the implications of both the recommendations and the very significant omissions must be considered by all who work in the 'heritage sector', particularly archaeologists. This contribution is intended as part of the debate which must surely follow the publication of Power of Place and focuses particularly on the relationship between archaeology and the content of the document. As the most internally diverse of the components of the 'heritage sector', archaeology is one of the disciplines most centrally affected by the proposals for action which form the final section of the document. This discussion can be seen as having begun with the debate in the House of Lords (20th December 2000) during which a number of useful and pertinent points were made, particularly by Lords Renfrew and Redesdale. The discussion continued at an open meeting in February 2001, hosted by the C.B.A., during which Sir Neil Cossons responded to questions put by members of the C.B.A. and others.
At the outset it must be acknowledged that *Power of Place* contains much that is of value. Many of the recommendations, such as the reform of the VAT regime and the long overdue inclusion of the Historic Environment in education at all levels, should be acted on without delay. Other recommendations are clearly positive in their intention. Unfortunately, from the point of view of archaeology, substantial parts of the document fail to deliver either the kind of radical critique of the current situation which is required or the necessary solutions to the many problems facing archaeology. There are, in addition, significant omissions, many of which are of particular concern in an archaeological context and these will be discussed in detail below. Many of the recommendations fall well short of what is required and little attention appears to have been paid to recent discussions of the situation 'on the ground' (Anon, 1998, Blinkhorn and Cumberpatch 1997, 1999, Blinkhorn and Cumberpatch in press, Boldrini 1999, Chadwick 2000a, b, Cumberpatch 2000, Cumberpatch and Blinkhorn 1997, in press, Graves-Brown 1997, Morris 1998, Robbins 1999, Schadla Hall 1991, C.B.A. Britarch archive, The Digger 1999-2001, Rescue News).

The presentation of the results of the MORI opinion survey in *Power of Place* are of great value and will, no doubt, be cited frequently in discussions of the perceived value of the historic environment to the population at large. They provide a useful measure of the actual strength of public feeling which most archaeologists are familiar with from talking to visitors to excavations and in other informal situations. Also to be welcomed is the attention paid to the place of the historic environment in the context of the multi-cultural nature of contemporary British society, an aspect which is at last being addressed by archaeologists as the archaeology of the later post-medieval period and the Industrial Revolution emerges from its concern with technology and embraces the wider issues arising from an acknowledgement of the actual nature of seventeenth to twentieth century society. A reconsideration of British post-medieval archaeology, perhaps in terms of 'the archaeology of global empire' (understood in inclusive terms) is clearly one aspect which emerges from this and other recent initiatives (discussed, for example, at the 2000 T.A.G. conference in Oxford, see also Hall 2000, Tarlow and West 1999). This aspect of the document provides welcome acknowledgement that there is no homogenous group called 'the public' but rather a heterogeneous society made up of different age, gender, class, ethnic, racial, religious and other groups and sub-groups, all with their own perspectives on heritage, history and environment (see Cumberpatch and Blinkhorn, in press). The replacement of the single grand narrative with competing contingent, situated and context-specific narratives triumphantly exposes the errors of both
Whiggish notions of history-as-sequence as well as the preposterous arrogance of modernism. It also vindicates the theoretical work undertaken in archaeology and allied disciplines over the last ten to fifteen years.

These and other positive points are made effectively in the document and we can but wait to see how they are taken up and what effect their clear statement and the related recommendations have upon the conduct of archaeology in Britain.

*Power of Place and the place of power*

Having acknowledged the progressive aspects of the document, there remain a disturbing number of omissions and it is around these that debate should surely focus. As so often with such documents it is in the silences and omissions that we can recognize the influence of powerful interest groups and ill-defined ‘official’ concerns which are deemed to override the problems encountered by those who have to deal with the reality of the day-to-day destruction of limited assets and finite resources.

The problems with the document, from an archaeological perspective, can be divided into two; general problems stemming from the orientation of the document as a whole and specific problems with particular sections which appear to derive from inadequate, partial or faulty analysis. That these are closely related will become apparent in the discussion which follows.

The general problems with the orientation of the document can be subdivided and each of these can be illustrated with reference to specific parts of the document;

- The range of threats to the Historic Environment is inadequately represented;
- The diversity and wealth of the Historic Environment is inadequately represented, with the urban built environment being emphasised at the expense of other environments;
- The recommendations fail to take into account serious structural problems which bedevil the organisation, management and funding of
provision for the Historic Environment, its investigation, conservation and presentation, particularly in archaeology.

The range of threats to the Historic Environment

Quarrying and opencast mining
Amongst the most outstanding of the issues omitted from the document is the severe threat posed to both extant landscapes and buried archaeology by mining, quarrying and peat extraction (Aitchison and Wickstead 2000), arising largely from the issues of the renewal of mineral extraction planning consents granted in the 1940s and 50s. A number of current cases affect sites in, or immediately adjacent to, National Parks (on Dartmoor and at Stanton Moor in Derbyshire for example), while others affect areas of Special Scientific Interest (including Thorne Moors and Hatfield Moors in South Yorkshire and Wedholme Flow in Cumbria), quite apart from cases in less high profile locations. The publication of Power of Place will no doubt be welcomed by companies involved in the exploitation of peat, china clay, stone and gravel as offering no explicit comment on their activities, in spite of the fact that they pose a major and lasting threat to some of the most fragile, archaeologically significant and valued landscapes in Britain. It is ironic that the example of the value of tourism to the economy (cited in section 2.5:87) should draw upon the example of the south-west, an area which faces a severe (but far from unique) threat from large scale quarrying and associated activities.

The omission of such landscapes (particularly from section 2.5), which are important not only archaeologically and from the point of view of the contemporary landscape, but also culturally, in terms of their impact on eighteenth to twentieth century artists, writers and others, is significant in what it says about the perspectives of those who have compiled the final report and highlights what appears to be a predominant concern throughout the document with the urban built environment and a neglect of both archaeology and the rural landscape. Here, as elsewhere in the document, the implications of other surveys are alluded to without the implications being followed up (e.g. 2.6:104). In the light of these failings Recommendations 4, 12 and 13 appear wholly inadequate and the implications for the scope of the proposed ‘state of the historic environment’ reports are hardly encouraging.

Farming and archaeology
Work by RESCUE and others has demonstrated the continuing effects of
ploughing and allied agricultural practices on buried sites (e.g. Geake 2000, see also Sydes 1991) and has highlighted the problem of identifying funds which might be used to mitigate the problem. While a move away from unsustainable farming practices, as advocated by the compilers of Power of Place, is to be welcomed, the problems of plough damage to sensitive archaeological sites will remain and must be addressed. It is insufficient for the compilers of the document to note that ‘an estimated 22,000 ancient monuments … have been destroyed since 1945’ (section 2.2:44) – proposals for change and the radical mitigation of the ongoing and increasing problem are required as a matter of urgency. That Power of Place fails to do this in explicit terms must be accounted a severe weakness of the document as a whole. No specific recommendation actually addresses this issue and it is conspicuous by its absence from Recommendation 4. The contrast with the detailed proposals for the urban built environment could hardly be drawn more strongly. Recommendation 4 stands out as manifestly inadequate for dealing with the range of threats to rural environments.

Urban development and archaeological research
Although, (perhaps because), the emphasis of Power of Place is primarily on the built heritage, there is a worrying lack of concern with the structure and mechanics of archaeological work within towns. A number of these, concerned with organisational and regulatory aspects of the existing system will be discussed below, but it should be noted here that, while the existing provisions of Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (DOE 1990) are being applied on a routine basis, there remain serious weaknesses in the system. Notable amongst these is the question of ‘preservation in situ’ and the actual extent of the problems of understanding the archaeology of sites which are the subject of this policy. In addition, the failure to provide adequately for the full publication of excavated sites, for the curation and conservation of the artefacts and samples recovered and the apparently increasing tendency for developers to retain artefactual assemblages for their own, often undisclosed, purposes are all matters of growing concern within archaeology, but are barely acknowledged in Power of Place. At the broader level, the rapid movement within archaeology away from research and education and towards a ‘service’ role for the development industry has had a variety of implications for the conduct of archaeology and the scope of projects, many of which have been discussed at length both in print and at conferences. It is unfortunate that the compilers of Power of Place have remained seemingly unaware of, or uninterested in, these discussions and debates.
The unacknowledged diversity of the Historic Environment

In a brief document such as *Power of Place*, there are almost bound to be issues arising from the differential representation of the diversity of England’s Historic Environment. Even given this however, the overwhelming emphasis on the built environment at the expense of rural and upland landscapes and of archaeology, both in the sense of upstanding prehistoric and early historic monuments and also the buried archaeology, is striking. There seems little excuse for this. A number of contributors to the consultation process noted that the emphasis on the position of the built environment in the discussion papers, but these concerns do not seem to have been acknowledged in the final document (CBA website). That the whole thrust of the document appears oriented towards the built environment is reflected both in the text and in the pictures chosen to illustrate it. The built environment dominates sections 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 and is scarcely less prominent elsewhere. Of the case studies, presented in section 2.2, for example, only one is concerned with a rural site (Segsbury Hillfort) in contrast with three urban landscapes and one marine site. Throughout the document as a whole, of the thirty-one case studies, only six show rural sites and of these all but one (the hillfort) are buildings. There are no pictures of subsurface archaeological features either visible on aerial photographs or under excavation and no pictures of upstanding prehistoric monuments. The text reflects this bias, as do the recommendations. Although rural environments could be said to be subsumed under the terms of some of the broader recommendations, this is an inadequate substitute for their explicit inclusion, either in the body of the text or as case studies.

The whole of section 2.5 ‘Managing change and enhancing character’ is concerned with the built environment – where, one might ask, is the discussion of landscapes threatened by quarrying and mining? How, one might ask, is this section relevant to the cases of Dartmoor or Thorne Moors? The kinds of change in prospect in these and other areas will certainly not enhance their character and nor are the proposed changes to these environments of a kind which can be ‘managed’ to mitigate their destructive impact. The only enhancements likely are to share-holder dividends, company profits and the status of individual managers within the multi-national mining companies responsible. As elsewhere in the document the silence on this matter is far more eloquent than the what is said and Recommendation 13 appears wholly inadequate in the face of real and present threats to the archaeological heritage.

The result of this general bias towards the built environment is a document which fails to acknowledge the remarkable diversity of historic landscapes and...
monuments within England and the potential that this diversity has to contribute to the educational and economic benefits which are outlined in other parts of the document. While attention to the existing built heritage is to be welcomed (in the light of the ongoing and increasing scale of destruction, particularly within town centres) there can be no doubt that in the future those who profit from the destruction of other, and specifically archaeological, assets will seize on these omissions for their own rapacious ends.

**Structural and institutional problems**

**The status of Planning Policy Guidance note 16 (P.P.G. 16)**

Currently P.P.G. 16 ([DOE 1990](#)) is the mechanism through which the majority of archaeological work takes place in England, but the implementation of the provisions of the note are patchy and, to a degree, irregular. All too often implementation depends upon the relative institutional strengths of the different elements within the local government planning process and sometimes even on the nature of inter-personal relationships between different local authority departments. The non-statutory nature of P.P.G. 16 means that curatorial archaeologists are in a relatively weak position not only in terms their abilities to deal with controversial cases, but, increasingly, in the very security of their jobs. As a general statement it is fair to say (and to echo the point made by the Environment Agency in section 2.5, page 34) that Sites and Monuments Record Office (S.M.R.) staff are normally under-resourced (in terms of access to books, journals, conferences, specialist advice etc as well as with regard to levels of staffing, job security etc) as well as being institutionally undermined by the non-statutory nature of P.P.G. 16. Why, one may ask, in the light of this, does Recommendation 13 (specifically 13e) fail to tackle this issue and to recommend the translation of P.P.G. 16 into law? What is the point of implementing only uncontroversial amendments to the current system when fundamental flaws remain in its very structure?

Section 2.6:101 notes that problems exist with respect to P.P.G. 16, particularly with the costs of publication, but this is an under-estimate of the actual situation. The fact that the majority of P.P.G. 16 sites remain in the ‘grey literature’ category poses a threat to the traditional mechanisms for the inclusion of such work into the body of published work which represents the totality of archaeological endeavour (preservation by record). Where attempts have been made to bring such sites to public and professional attention, these are threatened yearly by budget cuts and staff shortages in S.M.R.s. Publications such as the British and Irish Archaeological Bibliography (B.I.A.B)

~ 149 ~
Supplement Series, while invaluable for the professional with the resources to travel to consult the archives, are lacking in the kind of information required by the non-professional and are simply tantalising for the professional circumscribed by an inadequate level of support.

In situations where there is a high level of institutional hostility to issues arising from the historic environment the problems encountered in the implementation of P.P.G. 16 have significant implications for the very survival of elements of the historic environment and even more so for the excavation of threatened sites. *Power of Place* signally fails to address such issues with the degree of emphasis found in the case of, for example, the standardisation of VAT regulations pertaining to the maintenance of historic buildings. Once again, the emphasis on the built environment, apparently at the expense of other elements within the Historic Environment appears to have led to an imbalance in the final report.

**Sites and Monuments Records or Historic Environment Record Centres?**
The suggestion that Sites and Monuments Records (S.M.R.s) be replaced by regionally based Historic Environment Record Centres (H.E.R.C.s) (section 2.6: 107 – 109) recalls the old joke that changing the name of British Rail to B.R. doesn’t make the trains run on time. The problems encountered by S.M.R. staff and by those using S.M.R. facilities are not ones which are primarily to do with the location of the archives or their geographical remit. They are to do with funding, with management and with the commitment of the host bodies towards the Historic Environment. At one level, the manifold inadequacies of local authorities in the maintenance and enhancement of S.M.R.s. makes the idea of regional Historic Environment Record Centres superficially attractive, but a number of factors have to be born in mind when considering the issue more broadly.

The definition of the regions involved needs to be clearly though out. The definition of heterogeneous regions would run the risk of individual towns or local areas becoming dominant. In Yorkshire, for example, it would be dangerous for vested interests in certain major towns to be allowed to become predominant, if such traditionally overlooked areas as South and West Yorkshire, which are just beginning to demonstrate their importance as historic landscapes, were to suffer in comparison.

Centralisation, even if undertaken on a regional basis, if not informed by the existing knowledge base, will risk the loss of valuable local knowledge. A comparable loss of such knowledge has already affected the conduct of
fieldwork undertaken by consultants and contractors in archaeology. The author has certain knowledge of situations where contractors with a background in one region have, when working in other regions, been misled into making statements which do not take into account specific local traditions and practices. This inevitably has a negative impact upon the quality and reliability of the resulting reports. In such situations it is essential that S.M.R. (or equivalent) staff have the necessary local knowledge and understanding to spot such problems before they can lead to erroneous decisions or incorrect advice. It is easy to envisage a situation in which problems would be compounded by the regionalisation of H.E.R.C.s.

There is also an issue surrounding the cost and inconvenience of having to travel long distances to consult the proposed H.E.R.C.s. This will hardly facilitate their use by anyone, professional or non-professional, a situation which already exists with regard to unpublished archaeological site archives. There would seem to be a danger of a contradiction emerging here between the concern for local communities (emphasised elsewhere in the document), their access to primary data and the potential loss of local relevance and accessibility consequent on regional centralisation. The suggestion of increased access to data via electronic methods (Recommendation 16b and d), while admirable in the long term, is, at present hardly feasible. Even a small file from an S.M.R. typically contains photographs, hand written notes, sections from journals, drawings and sketches as well as formal record sheets. The task of transferring all this to fully comprehensive databases for consultation over the internet is one that surely carries immense cost and logistical implications. In addition the nature of the proposed electronic networks are imprecisely defined. The professional archaeologist or the closely-engaged amateur will require different types of information to, for example, a G.C.S.E. student, university undergraduate, community group or planning official. The vagueness of Section 2.6: 107-9 and Recommendation 16 in this regard is outstanding and the emphasis on general, non-specific information ‘designed to be used by non-specialists’ raises the concern that essential detail (the very core of archaeological interpretation) will be lost in favour of bland and uncontroversial generalisation. This same problem appears to affect a number of the other proposals relating to the development of internet access to archival resources.

As a long term aim, the idea of making information available via electronic means is of great value, but in the short to medium term practical measures involving staffing and resources are needed to enhance the capabilities of S.M.R. staff and to improve access at the local level on a day-to-day basis.
The reference in Recommendation 16a to ensuring that local authorities have access to H.E.R.C. neglects the point that such authorities already have access to S.M.R.s. Indeed, they are responsible for maintaining them. The problem is not one of access but rather the use made of such assets. The prime requirement is for local authority officers to understand the nature of the Historic Environment, its potential and relevance to local decision making and to train planners and other relevant officials in the wider significance of the Historic Environment.

An alternative to greater centralisation might be the removal of existing S.M.R.s from local authority control, a limited degree of rationalisation in the areas covered and their direct funding, either through the Department for the Environment Transport and the Regions or via English Heritage. Such a change could, with advantage, allow a detailed review of the role and position of S.M.R.s in relation to local authorities, development agencies, the development industry and archaeological consultants and contractors without the cost and inconvenience of their physical relocation and the loss of resources to local communities.

Far more crucial than the reorganisation of S.M.R.s on regional lines is the issue of their role in relation to the planning process and the position of planning regulation and the contracting units which are now such a major feature of archaeology in England. As noted above, a major omission from *Power of Place* is the failure to recommend the translation P.P.G. 16 into law and the placing of S.M.R.s on a statutory basis in the short term (rather than the long term, as suggested in section 108). Such a step would empower S.M.R staff in relation to planning officers, local authority engineering departments, development agencies and commercial developers and would also address the critical issue of the regulation of commercial archaeology.

Given that self-regulation has been shown to be as ineffective in archaeology as elsewhere (Chadwick 2000a, Cumberpatch and Blinkhorn, *in press*), S.M.R. staff need to be given the powers and resources required to more effectively monitor and control the activities of consultants and contractors. Some form of sanction is required which will allow the inept and unscrupulous to be effectively regulated wherever they try and work. This implies that staff should have budgets sufficient to allow them access to current books and journals, to attend relevant conferences and to commission appropriate specialist reports on specific issues. Given the diversity of specialisation within archaeology, the need to consult specialists from the university and consultancy sectors to review work and provide expert advice should be considered seriously. The failure to tackle these issues (notably in...
Recommendation 16), in spite of their prominent place in recent discussions within archaeology, is further evidence of the restricted perspectives or remit of the compilers of the document.

The role of local government
A crucial issue for archaeology is the role of local government in the processes of regulating and monitoring fieldwork and the curation of archives arising from such fieldwork and other forms of research. The record of local authorities is far from positive in any of these fields. Annual cost-cutting exercises within local authorities invariably involve the targeting of museums, S.M.R.s, community archaeology, conservation and outreach posts. The title of a recent seminar organised by the Archaeology Section of the United Kingdom Institute of Conservation (UKIC) Death by a Thousand Cuts (December 2000), amply summarises a situation in which three quarters of museum services believe their in-house conservation services to be inadequate. In the light of this, the recommendations relating to local authorities appear to have been devised in almost complete ignorance of the actual situation, as well as reflecting the bias towards the built environment noted elsewhere. Why, one might ask, is support sought for architecture centres and not for museums or archives (Recommendations 9 and 10)? Why is the role of architecture centres highlighted in section 2.4:74, while the work of museum staff is omitted?

Issues of leadership in local government are addressed in section 2.7, but the picture drawn of dynamic and effective leadership within local authorities overlooks the many failures that have resulted from the manifest inadequacy of such leadership. The decision to close the South Yorkshire Archaeology Field Unit, to take one concrete example, was taken by an arts administrator with no experience of, or apparent interest in, archaeology, supported by finance officials. Advice and information provided by staff with specialist knowledge was ignored. Elsewhere, ongoing police investigations (such as Operation Danum) have identified numerous examples of corruption within the planning system; hardly encouraging for an archaeological system so closely tied into this system. Backing people rather than structures (Section 2.7 and Recommendation 17) may have a fine and dynamic sound to it, but support for structures which regulate the excesses and personal concerns of individuals where they might conflict with wider and more inclusive projects is also essential. The danger of reinforcing personal ‘fiefdoms’ within local authorities is an issue which must be taken seriously. Related to this, the importance of allowing a role for dissenting voices must be acknowledged, particularly as it is those concerned with the Historic Environment who are
generally forced into a taking a dissenting position as they oppose those with particular political or personal interests in development and industrial projects.

Local authority control of local and regional museums has, in recent years, proved disastrous for these institutions (Clarke 2001). Where local authority control has been maintained the implications for funding are almost universally negative and each year sees a round of proposed cuts and reductions in staff numbers, hours of work and in resources. This is ultimately passed directly on to the public (both local inhabitants and visitors) in the form of reduced services and unchanging and outdated displays. Where control has been passed to trusts or other bodies, carelessness has led to situations (known to the author) where individual elements within the ‘culture industry’ have been able to neglect or down-grade other elements.

Local museums not only have a central role in education and community outreach, but also play a key role in the conservation and curation of the archives resulting from archaeological fieldwork. This role is fundamental to the model of archaeological practice established by P.P.G. 16 and enshrined in Management of Archaeological Projects 2 (M.A.P. 2) (English Heritage 1991a). The implications of the decay of local and regional museums is thus extremely serious, particularly when combined with the commercialisation of the archaeological process, to be discussed below. Museum collections are assets that require curation and conservation. Without appropriate staffing and funding, collections will suffer inevitable degradation and will eventually cease to be available as a resource. Recommendation 9 fails to acknowledge this and Recommendation 14d (see also section 2.6;102) flies in the face of the day to day experience of those working in local and regional museums.

**Education**

Education features prominently throughout Power of Place and it is clear that the intention of the compilers is to stress the educational potential of the Historic Environment (Recommendation 8). While this potential is certainly present, the statement ‘History … lies at the heart of the National Curriculum’ (2.4:62) seems anomalous in view of the fact that history has, in fact, been relegated to the margins of the National Curriculum. The wide relevance of history cannot be doubted, History ‘understood in an ordered chronological framework’ (section 2.4:62) is certainly central to an understanding of the modern world, but so are general themes such as power, structure and agency, not to mention such historically specific themes as industrialisation, the slave trade and the origins of global capitalism, the foundation of the welfare state, the emergence of liberal democracy as a political ideology and so on.
The techniques employed to gain access to data pertaining to the past are of great educational value. Archaeology has a long history of the employment of investigative and interpretative techniques drawn from both the natural and the social sciences. It is thus in an excellent position to demonstrate the positive applications of physics, chemistry, biology and mathematics in both their pure and applied forms as well as the insights that are possible from fields such as philosophy, sociology and the traditions of critical thought.

As elsewhere in the document, practical matters are overlooked; section 70 lists the assets which constitute the resource that could, potentially, be drawn on to enhance learning at all levels and stages of life. There is no sign, however, of any appreciation that locally funded resources are under constant threat from cost-cutting initiatives by local authorities and failures of support from national government. Recommendations 8 and 9 fail to address the fundamental issues of staff shortages and underfunding which effectively preclude the development of existing assets in new and useful ways. The statements in Recommendations 8 and 9 can scarcely be challenged as broad objectives, but the failure to recommend concrete targets for local government (in sections 2.4:65 and 70 for example) appears to imply that local authorities will be able to continue the progressive closure and down-grading of museums, archives, libraries and other assets in programmes of cuts and ‘downsizing’; designed to address problems of funding in other areas. Related to this, the emphasis on Architecture Centres (Section 2.4:74, Recommendation 10) appears designed to exclude archaeological assets such as the collections and archives maintained by local and regional museums. Why, one might ask, study the outward form and structure of buildings while ignoring the huge variety of activities that took place inside and around them (as represented, in part, by material culture)? And why study standing buildings at the expense of the buried remains of earlier buildings with all the implications that these have for the origin, growth and transformation of town, villages, cities and the countryside? Once again, the influence of the built environment and architecture lobby seems to have been exerted at the expense of a holistic and inclusive notion of the Historic Environment.

The commercialisation of archaeology and the role of the voluntary sector
The many issues surrounding the commercialisation of archaeology have been extensively debated within archaeology in print, on the internet and at conferences (Biddle 1994, Cumberpatch and Blinkhorn 1997, 1999 and Cumberpatch and Blinkhorn, in press, Brown in press, Carrington 1993,
In the light of this, the decision to omit all reference to the subject from *Power of Place* appears curious to say the least. Without wishing to reiterate points which have been made at length elsewhere, it should be noted that education, training, research and the role of the voluntary sector in archaeology are all threatened by a system which permits the essential decisions regarding the conduct of archaeological investigations to rest with those least appropriate to make them; the developers. Their effective control, exercised through budgets and timescales, means that many aspects of fieldwork and subsequent post-excavation analysis and interpretation are fundamentally compromised. Work undertaken in a commercial context effectively eliminates the possibility of amateur or voluntary involvement and the role of the county and local societies has been systematically restricted since the imposition of the contract-tender system. Timescales, budgets, insurance and health and safety issues all combine to preclude meaningful amateur involvement on the majority of archaeological sites in England. The omission of any discussion of this matter from sections 2.4:77 and 78 and from Recommendation 11 appears inexplicable, given its high profile within the professional and voluntary sector in archaeology. It is to be hoped that the recommended review of the needs of the voluntary sector will focus on the reform of the current system in order to bring the voluntary and professional sectors together again. This will certainly involve facilitating the involvement local societies in fieldwork, in restoring posts designed to facilitate voluntary involvement in the types of extensive survey not feasible for professional bodies, in post-excavation work, oral history and in the monitoring of the state of Scheduled Ancient Monuments, Sites of Special Scientific Interest and conservation areas (including the state of listed buildings). It should be noted that where co-operation exists between local societies, whether archaeological in the traditional sense or from the alternative sector (including metal detector clubs, local history groups, mystical groups etc.) the results can be highly beneficial to all concerned. Such activities are often amongst the first to be eliminated during exercises in rationalisation and cost-cutting. It is particularly important to note the crucial role played by industrial history and archaeology groups. Alongside, and often in advance of, professional archaeology, groups of concerned individuals have been active in the recording and preservation of aspects of Britain’s industrial heritage. Such groups are often amateur in name only and operate to the highest standards in terms of the research undertaken and the results produced. Mechanisms whereby the accumulated knowledge of such groups and individuals can feed directly into broader professional and academic schemes of research are
critical if our understanding of the archaeology of the early modern and industrial periods is to advance.

At the broader level (including museums and archives), the encouragement of community participation is clearly crucial, but all too often local authority managers appear to be promoting specific individual agendas which are divorced from the reality of people’s lives. At other times, the chaotic, and often incompetent, nature of local authority management leads to decisions being taken by people who have no interest in, or understanding of, the Historic Environment and associated matters.

The importance of research
Archaeology, whether considered narrowly as an academic discipline or more broadly as a social practice, is driven by research. Knowledge of the past does not (and indeed cannot) exist prior to the collection and interpretation of data pertaining to the past. This is true, not only in the context of the location of buried sites through proactive surveys and reactive work driven by P.P.G. 16, but also in terms of the nature of our knowledge and understanding of people’s lives in the past.

Outside universities, research has been systematically ignored and even denigrated over the last decade as archaeology has been transformed from an investigative, knowledge-led, enterprise to an arm of the development industry concerned primarily with the mitigation of the destructive effects of development.

Knowledge, as noted in paragraph 98, is certainly never static and the re-evaluation of existing archaeological data and material generates new interpretations and hence, new knowledge. As a general point, it is worth noting that, while we need to undertake a variety of types and scales of surveys (including, but not limited to, the archaeology of landscape; section 2.6:99), backed up by targeted excavation, a great deal of information has accumulated since the inception of P.P.G. 16 which lies unused, and largely unusable, in archives and Sites and Monuments Records. The restrictions on publication (existing structures, time, the identification of appropriate funds) effectively make the consultation of primary data an inconvenient, even an unfeasible, business. The failure to identify and allow for the different needs of professionals, amateurs, teachers, university students and individuals from allied disciplines has resulted in a backlog of information and the inhibition of creative and dynamic research which will justify the expense of the excavation and preliminary processing of archaeological data. Changes in the structure of archaeological reports and the rise of the ‘archiving’ of data which is
inconvenient to publish in conventional ways has led to the production of summary or synthetic reports in situations where fuller accounts are needed. This is not to argue for the uncritical perpetuation of older structures, but rather to highlight the need for the actual use and value of archaeological data to be investigated and addressed. This cannot be undertaken in a situation where the convenience and funding priorities of the development industry are deemed to have priority over the requirements of archaeology as a discipline in its own right, as an educational tool or as a means of enhancing the industries, notably tourism, which depend, in part, upon it.

Recommendation 14 begins with the statement that research and scholarship should be encouraged in order to ‘underpin conservation’. While this is undoubtedly one requirement, research, as indicated above, also has a much wider role than simply facilitating to maintenance of existing assets, important though this is. Recommendation 14a appears to overlook the fact that English Heritage carried out a comprehensive exercise in setting out a broad research agenda for the future in 1997 (English Heritage 1997). This attracted a good deal of interest and responses were both sought and received. Unfortunately, this document was apparently never revised to take account of the responses received and seems never to have been fully promulgated or published. Any future programme of research could, with advantage, begin by using this as a basis upon which to build.

The omission of regional research designs from Recommendation 14 is also curious, particularly given the emphasis elsewhere of the importance of the regional scales of action. Given that omission is a major characteristic of Power of Place however, perhaps this should not be so surprising.

Recommendations 14b and c identify a major problem, but, without the reform of P.P.G. 16 suggested above, it seems unlikely that the development industry will respond positively, other than in a handful of high profile cases. As archaeological knowledge is built up from many smaller elements, apparently insignificant in their own right, but contributing to a greater whole, this seems an inadequate basis upon which to proceed.

To reiterate a point already made widely within the profession, control over developer-funded work and the establishment of research agendas requires adequately funded and staffed S.M.R.s. Such bodies need to be able to insist upon the design-led (rather than cost-led) award of contracts in order to be able to maintain quality in terms of the outcome of archaeological interventions. It is difficult to see how this could be achieved, other than
through statutory means, the operation of the market having proved inadequate as a means of assuring quality, in archaeology as elsewhere.

The curation of archives is another issue which (together with strategies for the dissemination of results) raises many questions regarding the structure of archives, their accessibility and the roles of various scales and levels of publication (Merriman and Swain 1999). The type of publication which is appropriate in one context will be inappropriate in another. Again, the issue that is ducked here is the reluctance or inability of local government to face up to the costs of the Historic Environment related sector.

The problems with Recommendation 14d have been discussed above; while local authorities remain responsible for local and regional museums, it seems likely that these will continue to be the target for cuts. Such institutions need either to be directly funded by an independent body or a statutory requirement for their maintenance must be laid upon local authorities. The nurturing of curatorship means not seeing the cultural and heritage spheres as a ‘soft target’ for cuts in times of financial stringency. It will also entail increased funding from central government when local resources prove inadequate.

Environmental audits
The notion of environmental audits to monitor the state of the Historic Environment appears to be one of the principal practical proposals to come out of Power of Place. Like so much else in the document however, there seems to be a lack of connection between the advocacy of these measures and the practicality of their implementation. To work effectively, input from individuals with detailed local and thematic knowledge is needed. In practice this means that S.M.R.s must be sufficiently well resourced to be able to employ relevant individuals to work with local and regional special interest groups to identify, quantify and delineate problems and threats and to establish the potential of local and regional assets. At present S.M.R.s and buildings conservation officers simply do not have the resources to do this. Local government has effectively demonstrated its lack of concern for the Historic Environment through its repeated cuts in services and it seems unlikely that existing resources will be sufficient to undertake the kind of audits envisaged in section 2.6:105. One must presume that Recommendation 15a, that the Government commission such reports, implies that new funds will be made available, together with additional experienced and locally knowledgeable staff to carry out the work. Such a presumption may well be naïve.
Conclusions

There are, at the time of writing, indications that the problems with *Power of Place* are being acknowledged ([H.E.F. 2000](#)). In particular the observation that it represents a missed opportunity for archaeology seems to have gained widespread acceptance. This, in itself, is no bad thing, given the many inadequacies of the document which have been discussed above. It does, however, raise further problems. What will become of *Power of Place*? Will it be set aside and, if so, what will replace it? If parts are to be retained to contribute to government policy pertaining to the Historic Environment, who will make the decisions as to which parts? Will the development and mining industries be able to use the statements in, and omissions from, *Power of Place* to support their proposals for the destruction of yet more of our scarce archaeological assets? Will the emphasis on education and public access be employed as legitimatory devices to divert those few funds remaining away from primary research and curation and towards the presentation of old, inadequate and outdated perspectives on the past? More generally, we are entitled to ask why was the opportunity for a thorough and fundamental review of the policies pertaining to the Historic Environment so badly mishandled? Why was the scope of the final report, based as it was on a process of wide consultation, so restricted and apparently biased towards certain elements within the Historic Environment and away from others? When will we be offered another opportunity to put forward a statement which recognises the central place that the past holds in our society and the implications which a neglect of the past has for the social order and the political process ([Cumberpatch 1996, 2000, unpublished](#))?. The mishandling of the process which led to the publication of *Power of Place*, while extremely regrettable, has at least opened up the opportunity for wider and more sustained debate. It is vital that this opportunity is not wasted as thoroughly as was that which preceded the publication of the document.

Acknowledgements

I have discussed this paper with a number of people, not all of whom feel able to have their contributions directly acknowledged. In respecting their right to anonymity, I am not seeking to appropriate their contributions or to pass them off as my own. It is a depressing measure of the state of the archaeological profession in England that individuals are no longer able to dissent from the views of the organisations for which they work without risking adverse reactions on the part of management.
Those who have discussed this and other papers with me know that I am grateful to them for their insights and for sharing their experiences with me.

**Bibliography**


Blinkhorn, P.W. and Cumberpatch, C.G. 1997 The interpretation of artefacts and the tyranny of the field archaeologist *Assemblage* http://www.shef.ac.uk/~assem/3/


Brown, D.H. in press Who puts the art into artefact? (and who puts the meaning into environmental?) *The Archaeologist*.


Chadwick, A.M. 2000a Taking English archaeology into the next millennium- a personal view of the state of the art. *Assemblage* 5 http://www.shef.ac.uk/~assem/5/tableofc.html

Chadwick, A.M. 2000b How green is our valley? The state of contemporary archaeological practice in Britain. *Rescue News* 82.


The Digger 1999 – 2001 Periodical newsletterhttp://www.archaeo.freeserve.co.uk/MainFrame.html

DOE 1990 Dept. of Environment Planning Policy Guidance Note 16, HMSO

English Heritage 1991a Management of Archaeological Projects Second edition English Heritage


Geake, H. 2000 We plough the fields and scatter Rescue News 84:4-5.

Graves-Brown, P. 1997 S/he who pays the piper Archaeology and the polluter pays principle. Assemblage 2 http://www.shef.ac.uk/~assem/2/

~ 162 ~
Hall, M. 2000 *Archaeology and the modern world. Colonial transcripts in South Africa and the Chesapeake.* Routledge


Chris Cumberpatch is an archaeological consultant based in Sheffield. Email *cgc@ccumberpatch.freeserve.co.uk*

© C.G. Cumberpatch
© assemblage 2001