ROADS TO NOWHERE? Archaeology, landscape, and a planning process that by-passes more than towns.

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The planning and construction of recent major roads in Britain, including Newbury, Twyford Down, Solsbury Hill, Cirencester, the M77 in Glasgow and the M66 near Manchester, has highlighted two archaeological issues which I feel can and must be addressed by future road schemes and other large-scale developments. Despite the publicised British Government curtailment of the national road-building programme, the construction of numerous new or larger roads as local by-passes and major trunk roads is still proposed throughout the country. The first issue is the inadequate consideration given to the recording and assessment of our cultural heritage as represented by the archaeological landscape. The second is how the conceptualisation of the archaeological landscape as islands of designated monuments of national significance surrounded by 'white space' can downplay the importance of different cultural landscapes to local communities living today. What we can do to address these issues is not only about what we can learn about archaeology and road-building, as well as other large-scale developments such as quarrying and open-cast mining; it also relates to the wider state of archaeological rescue and research in Britain at this time, and the relationships between archaeology and contemporary environmental concerns.

As social beings we have a reflexive relationship with our surrounding landscape. It is the context within which human activity, thought and creativity occur. It is itself shaped and reworked by human action. Certain locations and areas are given importance by people through use. Humans are not static beings ñ as we move around and experience our surroundings we develop the sense of who we are, our identity and the ways we relate with other people. Landscapes are the places people live in, where they meet with each other, where they cultivate, hunt or gather food, where they construct buildings, where they make material objects and where they bury their dead. Today in Britain the landscape has an identity worked-out on a nation-state level which equates the countryside with a picturesque and tranquil ideal of what it is to be English, Scottish or Welsh. The existing dominance of the perspectival, southern-centric and stereotyped English landscape in Britain has been discussed elsewhere in depth (Bender 1993: 1-17). At present the majority of people in Britain live in urban areas. Landscape is the distanced countryside that a substantial number of people pass by as they drive between work and home, or visit as a packaged and commodified recreational area.

To those who live in any landscape, their immediate surroundings are their landscape of being, which has meaning in relation to individual lives and the construction of multi-layered and overlapping social communities. Often for those living and working in the 'countryside', their surrounding landscape is perceived in much more close-grained terms than the idealised perspective presented through the media. Aspects of topography and built structures may be important because of activities undertaken by the individual or community, in the remembered or folkloric past, which have occurred within and around them. Urban areas are also landscapes, being the surroundings for human action, but they are often remaindered from our narratives on landscape because they do not fit into the ideal of what a landscape should be.
The main, and usually only, source of information for much of our past survives as physical archaeological remains. Such remains, whether built structures or deposits of artefacts, found standing above ground or buried below ground, cover much of the landscape of the British Isles. They do not exist in isolation but are connected across the landscape through the relationships they have with each other as used by people in the past. They also range across large stretches of time, dating from the earliest human occupation of Britain onwards. Every part of Britain is therefore a cultural landscape, comprising elements of different past human activities which display great time-depth, change and overlapping regional variations. They also extend from potentially any part of the human past into the present. As Richard Morris, the Director of the Council for British Archaeology states,

_the consciousness of time and of ourselves as social beings are among humanity's defining characteristics. A desire to understand and approach these characteristics through the prism of history [and archaeology] (or one of its relatives, like myth), is thus implicit in what we are._ (1995: 11)

Archaeologists have a role as storytellers to the present about the past through interpretative research. Government directives in relation to archaeology such as the Department of the Environment's Planning Policy Guidance 16 and English Heritage's guidelines for Managing Archaeological Projects assume that such a research background to rescue archaeology exists. However under the current system, whereby archaeologists compete to present the lowest-cost tender for a piece of work, the first casualty is usually the research element ñ that is, the attempt to interpret how people lived their lives in the past. This failing is also highlighted by the lack of space given to cultural heritage in the recent Rural White Paper for England (Griffith 1995: 11).

I therefore feel that the study of the landscape should be the initial level of archaeological investigation, especially in relation to extensive and destructive development projects such as road-schemes, quarries and open-cast mines. The knowledgeable approach will be the first stage of integrating conservation issues with investigation of the past. Investigation is the primary role of archaeology. It is only when the landscape is viewed in its entirety that its complexity and overall importance can be appreciated, and an assessment of the importance of each of its archaeological component parts can be made. This landscape approach allows archaeologists to move away from the static, schematic, view of the past by looking at human relationships across geographical space and time. This is also the only way we can understand how we have come to the different types of landscapes which characterise different regions and localities today.

I would suggest that initial extensive landscape investigation is needed for the whole of any area potentially affected by a large-scale traffic management scheme as part of an environmental impact assessment which should be integral to the planning process. The European Commission Directive on the environmental impact of developments (85/337/EEC) calls for a comprehensive assessment to be made. The archaeological input to proposed traffic management schemes should be integrated with other environmental and social impacts of a road. The archaeological landscape provides the temporal dimension to the environment as a whole. Ideally all alternatives to reducing traffic flow and congestion should be considered rather than an overstated reliance on building more roads. Fundamental to this approach is management of traffic in a holistic way which gives preference to proposals which are sustainable in the long-term. Unfortunately, this is extremely unlikely under the current ideological reliance on private transport and road-building as the means to

~ 51 ~
resolve traffic congestion. The prime ideological mover behind the construction of roads is usually economic. This and any desire to improve the local environment is considered only on a simplistic and short-term basis that more roads will accelerate traffic flow. However, recently, the Standing Committee on Trunk Road Assessment concluded that new or wider roads increase traffic congestion and pollution.

As part of a potential traffic management scheme, the archaeological landscape which could be affected by any road-building options, including all alternative routes under consideration, needs to be assessed. This includes not only the archaeology in the line of the routes but how a route will separate and fragment interrelated aspects of the archaeological landscape which had a cohesiveness in the past. For example, the elements of a medieval landscape ñ the castle, villages, farmsteads, fields, churches and trackways ñ only become truly meaningful when their inter-relationships are understood.

If archaeological input occurs at this initial stage, then the relative effects of different potential routes can be assessed. This will allow better informed choices to be made about the overall environmental impacts of a proposed road scheme: whether a new road should go ahead or whether alternative options for reducing traffic would be more effective, which of any alternative routes has the lowest impact on the environment and where more archaeological work is required if the road-building proposal is to progress.

If such an approach had been taken with the Newbury by-pass, archaeologists would have been more actively involved in field work as far back as 1980. In reality, archaeological field work only began in 1991, after the final route had already been chosen ñ a case of too little, too late! As is common with archaeological assessments for such developments, only a tiny amount of the archaeology was sampled. Of twelve conventionally defined archaeological sites identified, only one has been evaluated as being of national importance. This will be excavated while the remaining eleven will receive only watching briefs. This only hints at what we are about to lose and tells us nothing about what we have.

All forms of archaeological investigation need to be conducted with a holistic appreciation of the landscape. In relation to road schemes it is all too often only the high status sites such as the medieval castle which are considered. This narrow focus on monuments has tended to ignore the surrounding archaeological landscape, relegating it to a position of such little importance that it is often lost to development without investigation.

The focus on individual monuments can also potentially distance the importance of archaeology from the local community's point of view by highlighting only those sites evaluated as important on a nation-state scale of social organisation. People may feel that unless they live within an area with a prestigious site, there is no past to their locality. Of equal importance is the relationship a local community has with the landscape it lives within, much of which will have a long time-depth of creation and use, and be given no statutory protection at all. The more visible historic landscape of trackways, boundaries, buildings, industrial processes and earthworks creates the character of a local area. There are also the more indistinct prehistoric and buried landscapes, which bring with them a sense of discovery for archaeologists and non-archaeologists alike. This time-depth gives an area meaning to the people who live within it in the present-day. The places people live within, visit or travel past become important because of this everyday use, not only because of a nationally derived importance decided at a distance.
English Heritage has begun an historic landscape characterisation programme to attempt to move beyond these monument-focused designations of archaeological importance. The programme aims to analyse landscapes as a whole and remove the archaeologically sterile ‘white space’ that surrounds the islands of monuments and sites. The effectiveness of the English Heritage programme, and its ability to allow the dynamics of human interaction with the landscape through time to be incorporated into resulting characterisations, have still to be discovered.

While landscape characterisation is an attempt to broaden the focus of consideration given to archaeology within the planning system, archaeologists must also do more to bring archaeology to a wider audience. As storytellers to our society about the past, archaeologists need to communicate to people the time-depth of human occupation of their local landscape rather than restricting that knowledge to just a technical report for a developer or planning committee. We also need to involve and empower local people much more in making their own discoveries and understanding their past to enrich their perceptions of the places they live in. With this more personal interest and support for archaeology among the wider public, the relevance of archaeology and the case for investigation or conservation of archaeological remains and landscapes is much easier to demonstrate to planners and developers.

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