

Working in field archaeology and the Institute of Field Archaeologists

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In 1993, the director of a major English archaeological field unit wrote:

Professional archaeology has now progressed enormously in the realisation that it would neither attract nor retain the best qualified staff on a subsistence-level wage. Archaeology is now an accepted profession that commands reasonable fees. (Lawson 1993:149)

A series of surveys before and since has refuted this view and the results have shown that pay is poor, conditions of employment are far from ideal, and that many within the profession are unhappy about this state of affairs (Spoerry 1992, Aitchison and Anderson 1995, Reeve 1995, Drummond-Murray and Wooldridge 1996, Turner 1996).

Pay and Conditions

The situation is especially bad for the most junior fieldworkers; the average pro-rata wage advertised for 'Excavators' in 1994 was £8741 pa (£168 per week), while one job in 1993 (the same year that Andrew Lawson was writing [above]) was advertised at the equivalent of £5307 pa ñ only £100 per week, before tax or National Insurance deductions (Aitchison and Anderson 1995:8).

Speaking to the Young Archaeologists' Conference in 1985, Anne Fahy said that '... it would almost appear that young archaeologists should be grateful that they have been able to find work. Any considerations of pay, conditions etc., have been subsumed in the [effort] to stay in work.' (Fahy 1985:31). Things have not significantly changed in the decade since; an article by Liz Howe in *The Field Archaeologist* in 1995 (Howe 1995:27-28) expressed many of the same concerns that had been raised ten years before.

It is not only low pay that is the problem, but also the conditions of employment. Job security does not exist with short contracts, which also bring with them further problems such as a lack of sick pay or holiday entitlement. Many archaeologists are obliged to move around the country in search of work. There is no clearly defined career structure, and no obvious way to rise from the most junior positions.

Field archaeology can be an immensely satisfying and challenging job, and many put up with the poor situation that they find themselves in because of their love for the work. But this proves intolerable for some, who leave archaeology, disillusioned and disappointed, before they feel it is too late to begin to forge a new career outside the field. The profession is then only able to survive because there is a constant 'crop' of enthusiastic young diggers replacing them, who will, in their turn, be frustrated by the lack of opportunities and poor financial rewards and ultimately be forced to abandon their career in archaeology.

Spoerry's 1995 study found that the situation was also bad, although not so desperate, for those in senior posts. He compared archaeological salaries with the national professional and technical average ñ and found that the advertised starting salaries for archaeological managers was below this level. Archaeological managers earned an average of £16 450

annually in 1994, while the national professional and technical average was £17 628 (Spoerry 1995:2).

To some, financial reward is not an issue. 'Archaeologists have still not shaken off the legacy of their roots in the 1970s volunteer culture ...' (Turner 1996:8), and there are still individuals within archaeology who regard the profession as a 'hobby' and not as a career. If they are prepared to receive commensurately low wages, then they prevent those who do aim to make a living from archaeology from getting adequate financial reward. Archaeology has come a long way towards its establishment as a professional discipline, and it must not be allowed to slip back into the domain of the wealthy amateur. To prevent this, archaeologists must be prepared to work to high professional standards, and the incentive to maintain these standards must be professional rewards.

Architects and engineers thrive financially in a development-funded environment ñ why don't archaeologists ? An unregulated market economy will mean that archaeologists will never be paid any better unless demand exceeds supply, and the workload outstrips the available labour. Internal, professional regulation is the only way that this can change, as '... there will never be pressure from outside archaeology to pay archaeologists for what they do. It is down to us to resolve the situation' (Spoerry 1995:2).

Trades Unions

One possible way in which conditions of employment for field workers could be improved might be through the involvement of trades unions.

A survey conducted by the Institute of Field Archaeologists in 1994/5 (Reeve 1995) found that 51% of respondents were union members. However, it should be noted that this was a very small sample of only 70 individuals, representing perhaps 10% of the participants at the Theoretical Archaeology Group conference 1994 and the Archaeology in Britain Conference 1995. This sample could also be considered to be unrepresentative of the estimated 4-5000 people directly involved in professional archaeology in Britain (Anonymous 1993:369). However, it is the only published study relating to archaeologists and trades union membership.

In this sample, six unions were represented. 55% of respondents were members of Unison, the public service union. 25% were members of the Institution of Professionals, Managers and Specialists (IPMS), which is largely a civil service union, and a further 11% were members of the Association of University Teachers (AUT), a union which is also open to university contract staff. The other unions represented in the survey were the Manufacturing, Science and Finance union (MSF), the MPO and the NATHFE. The members of each of these unions made up 3% of the survey (only one individual from each union). No employees of private firms were union members ñ but this may not be significant, as only eight such individuals responded (Reeve 1995:9).

The Institute of Field Archaeologists has contacted several of these unions ñ the AUT, the IPMS, Unison and the MSF ñ to discuss protection for archaeologists (Turner 1994). Other than the MSF, which is open to anyone as long as there is no other recognised union in their place of work, these unions all restrict membership by place of work.

Furthermore, these unions, in common with all others, are reluctant to accept as members individuals who do not have a recognised place of work, such as itinerant, short-contract workers. It was significant that nobody from this set of archaeologists responded to the IFA's 1994/5 survey ñ it is this group who are most in need of protection. It is also notable that all of the union members who did reply were working in the public sector ñ it may be that the privatisation of archaeology has led to a largely non-unionised workforce, although this supposition is based on flimsy survey data and anecdotal evidence.

Archaeological Organisations

It can be seen that there is no archaeology-specific trades union, and it is difficult for archaeologists to join existing unions. But there are a number of specifically archaeological organisations which are concerned with employment issues. The Council for British Archaeology is a registered charity, and as such it is legally prevented from becoming involved in areas such as conditions of employment. However, a CBA working party on employment conditions was convened in 1974, from which emerged the Standing Conference of Unit Managers (now the Standing Conference of Archaeological Unit Managers), which has since expressed concern on some issues relating to archaeological employment. SCAUM is, by the definition of its title, not a body open to everyone working in field archaeology. This leaves the Institute of Field Archaeologists, with a current membership of around 1250, representing a significant proportion of all those working in archaeology in Britain today, and which is open to anyone who can demonstrate archaeological competence and experience.

The Institute of Field Archaeologists

The pay and conditions debate has, to date, largely taken place in the pages of *The Field Archaeologist* (the IFA journal), and as such has been a debate within an IFA forum. However, this is an issue which affects everyone working in field archaeology, not just the Institute's members ñ IFA membership in 1993 was estimated as representing '20-25% of the employment sector' (Anonymous 1993:369). In 1993, the total number of IFA members was 1073; by early 1996, the corporate (voting) membership of the Institute stood at 1119, in addition to six Honorary Members and 137 Affiliates. The corporate membership is divided into three grades; admission to each grade is dependent on demonstrated competence and experience, which reflects the different levels of professional responsibility that members of each grade have undertaken. The three grades, in increasing levels of experience and responsibility, are Practitioner, Associate, and Member.

From the very inception of the Institute, it has been accepted that the IFA should be concerned with employment matters. In the first issue of *The Field Archaeologist*, Martin Carver, then the Honorary Secretary of the Institute, wrote that the IFA would be concerned with '... the problems of protecting the standards, principles and livelihood of its members' (Carver 1984:5).

Principle 1, Rule 1.9 of the IFA's Code of Conduct states that 'An archaeologist shall respect the interests of employees, colleagues, and helpers. He or she shall give due regard to the welfare of employees in terms of pay, conditions, security of employment, equal opportunities and career development' (IFA 1994:2).

However, the IFA cannot act as a trades union. Clause 3 (dd)(ii) of the Memorandum of Association states that 'The objects of the Institute shall not extend to the regulation of

relations between workers and employers, or organisations of workers and organisations of employers' (IFA 1993:4).

Without contravening this regulation, the IFA has taken some positive steps. The 1986 IFA AGM passed a special resolution declaring that the use of full-time archaeologists as 'paid volunteers' contravened the aforementioned Rule 1.9 of the Code of Conduct 'in every respect' (Fahy 1987:9). Namely, this referred to low pay, no written contracts, no sick pay or holiday entitlement and failure to inform employees of their rights and obligations in respect of Income Tax and National Insurance (so potentially disqualifying the individual from benefits).

While this resolution did not directly affect the issue of low pay, it made it clear that all employees must have the same rights, and all employers have the same obligations towards them.

The IFA's Council passed a further resolution in December 1987 that stated that 'It is IFA policy that persons pursuing a career in archaeology should not receive remuneration on volunteer subsistence rates, but at a proper wage' (Hall 1988:13).

A Working Party on Archaeological Employment in Britain has been established, which reports to the IFA Council. In 1993, the Working Party reported that:

A principal concern was about the poor career structure in archaeology. Some respondents felt that the IFA should set guide-lines on pay-scales in archaeology. This raised the issue of how the IFA might act as a Trades Union ... the suggestion that these issues should be considered when drafting standards and codes of conduct for professional archaeological practice is a valid one. (Bell et al. 1993:361)

It was then reported in 1994 that the Council was '... considering whether a pay policy was feasible, where defined jobs would have recommended pay scales attached' (Anonymous 1994:2). Subsequently, the Working Party has considered many of the key issues relating to pay and conditions, and they have presented a number of recommendations to the Council ñ fundamentally, that the Code of Conduct should be amended to incorporate a new principle relating to employment matters, that the Council should encourage employers to consider the previous experience of employees when setting pay and employment benefits, and crucially that the 'Council should set and publish annual recommended minimum rates of pay' (AEBWP 1996:4).

These suggested minimum rates of pay are graded by level of responsibility for jobs, equated to the IFA membership grades. These rates are:

Grade	Annual Salary (1995)	Weekly Equivalent
Practitioner	£9 905	£190
Associate	£11 538	£222
Member	£14 943	£287

(AEBWP 1996:3)

The Working Party states that while they consider these to still be fairly low levels of pay, they would represent an improvement for many, particularly the lowest paid (AEBWP 1996:3).

These proposals were presented to the IFA Council on 21st March 1996. To date, there has been no published response from the Council.

The IFA is a democratic organisation, and if the membership were to press for the adoption of standards regulating pay and conditions, then they would ultimately have to be accepted. However, the IFA is a very top-heavy organisation. In early 1996, the three grades of corporate membership were divided into 178 Practitioners (16% of the corporate membership), 341 Associates (30%), and 600 Members (54%) (IFA 1996, 56-82). The corporate membership is thus dominated by the Member grade. In addition, the governing body of the IFA, the Council, is constitutionally composed of 21 elected corporate members ñ three Practitioners, six Associates and twelve Members (IFA 1993:26).

Being so top-heavy, the IFA is perceived as representing the interests of members who are in senior posts within archaeology. This has been expressed within the IFA ñ a letter to the editor of *The Field Archaeologist* showed concern about the IFA 1992 conference becoming '... yet another forum for unit managers, county archaeologists and equivalent grades.' (Oakey 1992:338). And this has led to the perception that the IFA has not benefited the less senior grades of members, for '... despite the existence of an Institute of Field Archaeologists for the last fifteen years, there has been no discernible improvement in the real rates of pay or conditions for the majority of field archaeologists' (Drummond-Murray and Wooldridge 1996:2).

And even more often negative views are expressed by archaeologists who are not members of the Institute, many of whom feel that the IFA does not actually 'do' anything, and that the aims of the Institute are to create a closed shop and so to exclude non-members from practising field archaeology. This is expressly not an aim of the IFA (Bell et al. 1993:357), but it is the external perception of the Institute that remains important. The IFA recognises that '... resentment can be caused among non-members when advertisements appear requiring, or preferring IFA membership' (Bell et al. 1993:357).

Conclusions

It is archaeologists who decide how much archaeologists get paid. The only body which has any possibility of insisting upon minimum conditions of service and wages is the IFA.

The IFA wishes to establish standards of practice and professionalism. These standards should include pay and conditions, which would in turn help to create a firmer career structure within archaeology. Jobs are already informally graded within archaeological organisations (Aitchison and Anderson 1995:8), and the IFA should take the bold step of clearly defining jobs by responsibility and reward, and crystallising the fine words of the Code of Conduct.

Such action would help the IFA gain esteem in the eyes of its members, and in the eyes of the many archaeologists who do not wish to join the Institute because of their negative perceptions of it.

If the need for increased wages leads to archaeology becoming more 'expensive', then so be it. If a site is under threat from development, then the requirements of PPG 16 and the equivalent guidelines in Scotland and Wales mean that the developers will have to pay for that archaeology to be preserved or recorded. If that is going to be more expensive than at present, then, to paraphrase the sentiment of PPG 16, the polluters will just have to pay more. 'The main reason why non-archaeologists have an unrealistic impression of the cost of archaeology is because the profession has consistently underbid' (Fahy 1987:9).

Similarly, if invasive work is planned for a site that is not under threat, then adequate funds will have to be raised to pay adequate rates for the professionals involved in the excavation. If that is not possible, then excavation should not take place.

The IFA does not have to act as a trades union in order to protect its members; it can do that by acting as the professional association that it is. The constitutional framework and declared intentions are already in place. What is needed now is the will to act, and that can only come from the membership of the Institute. Those who work in field archaeology and who feel that their skills and abilities are not being rewarded should join the IFA to demonstrate their professional credentials, and then press for the Institute to adopt standards for pay and conditions that will reward field workers and give them the respect that they are due.

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Since this article was submitted for publication, two relevant documents have appeared in print ñ the report of the IFA's working party on employment, and the Institute's Annual Report for 1996. In addition, the Annual General Meeting of the IFA has endorsed some important constitutional changes.

The "Report and Recommendations of the Archaeological Employment in Britain Working Party" for 1996 has been published in *The Field Archaeologist* (Schaaf 1996) and the IFA Council has agreed to the recommendations made therein (Murray 1996, 2), which are outlined above. The publication of this report has meant that the recommended pay scales have been publicly disseminated for the first time (Schaaf 1996, 13).

These are very welcome developments, and do indeed appear to mark a significant step for the IFA towards the improvement of conditions for junior archaeologists. Formally, the only change to the rules of the IFA is that Principle 1, Rule 1.9 of the *Code of Conduct* has been replaced by a more comprehensive new Principle (adopted at the AGM), and so there will be no official retribution against archaeological employers who go against the recommendations of the Council – for example, those who pay below the minimum recommended wage – but it would be hoped that in this case the publication of recommended minima will pressure employers into complying.

According to the most recent figures, the corporate membership of the Institute now stands at 1117, of which 185 (16.6%) are Practitioners, 334 (29.9%) are Associates and 598 (53.5%) are Members, plus 6 Honorary Members and 153 Affiliates (Miller 1996:14). This confirms the dominance of the Member grade discussed above, but there are now constitutional changes which may reduce even further the influence of the junior grades. The quota system for election to the IFA's Council has been scrapped, and all Council Members can now be drawn from any corporate grade. This writer feels that, owing to the higher profiles enjoyed by the senior archaeologists of the MIFA grade, Council will become even more dominated by these members than at present. In addition, Council members can now serve for six years, instead of three as previously, so potentially reducing Council turnover and the opportunities for change.

This writer feels that these are less welcome changes and that the IFA Council may now become even more orientated towards the interests of those in senior positions, leading the whole Institute to be steered increasingly in that direction.

However, in general, the developments of this summer are encouraging. If a ball has started to roll, I feel the sentiments outlined in this article are even more valid. Junior archaeologists must grasp the opportunities to use the IFA as the only possible vehicle for change, and to hasten the improvement of their own conditions – no-one else is going to do it for us.

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