Session title: THE PUBLIC, ARCHAEOLOGY SPECIALISTS, AND THE CORPORATE WORLD: “THE DEVIL’S OWN BREW”

Organizers: Yvonne Marshall, University of Southampton, UK
Faye Simpson, University of Exeter, UK
Gerry Wait, Nexus Heritage SRI Ltd, UK

Time: Friday afternoon

Room:

Session abstract:

The world in which archaeology now fits is radically changed from only a decade ago. Across Europe an increasing majority of archaeological – indeed heritage – work is now done in a much more commercial way and is incorporated into various ways of doing business such as property development or state sponsored infrastructural development. In retrospect, this may be seen to have given rise to a ‘specialist’ endeavour in archaeology called variously ‘public’ or ‘community’ archaeology. This seems to differentiate work that follows a communities’ own interests from work led by professional specialists, from work done for more academic specialist motivations. However, the worlds of both business and heritage are changing. The explicit recognition of the importance of local communities and social groups perceptions of the past, and the corporate worlds recognition that sustainable development does not finish the building or highway is built means that this three-way division can no longer be maintained.

This session will discuss the current state of the means of engagement between archaeological specialists, developers, and local communities. The debate concerns a wide spectrum of ‘the heritage’ whether tangible like archaeology or intangible such as folklore and traditions. It will pose the question of the roles that public or community interests and developer funding should play in directing research or investigations when mediated by the concept and implementation of corporate social responsibility.

The session will draw its ideas and conclusions from a range of papers on topics ranging from patrimony, ethics, the politics, and the values behind archaeology. Papers will assess the implications of developer funding on cultural heritage management and the public patrimony. It is proposed to publish the proceedings of the session plus invited papers as a lasting contribution to these debates.

Paper abstracts:

THE CHANGING FACE OF ARCHAEOLOGY: SCIENTISTS ENDEAVOURING TO ENGAGE AND EDUCATE THE PUBLIC AND WIN THE SUPPORT OF DEVELOPERS.

Diane L. Douglas and Donn R. Grenda, Statistical Research Inc, USA
Historically, our discipline has been romanticized through stories of adventurous antiquarians and Hollywood images—a la Indiana Jones. Almost magically, we use artifacts, features, and other vestiges of human occupation to paint images of past lives in various geographic settings. People that watch us painstakingly excavate features wonder how we reconstruct past cultures based on pot shards and stone. Everyone loves an archaeologist—until a project threatens a resource they find significant. Suddenly we are transformed from a scientist that reconstructs priceless intricacies of past lives, to a contractor out to make-a-buck at the expense of someone else’s cultural heritage. As contract archaeologists, we are called upon to evaluate the significance of heritage resources, engage the public, query ethnic groups about the cultural significance of a site, convey this information to our clients and convince them that their money is being well spent. Projects with heritage resources that are considered valuable by the public and/or ethnic groups succeed best when archaeologists amalgamate their knowledge of the human condition with skills of mediator and educator. This paper examines a controversial project that succeeded by engaging the public and developers and educating them about the significance of Native American sacred sites.

BUYING ALUMINUM HUBCAPS FOR THE BOSS’S MERCEDES

Geoff Carver, SUNY Buffalo, USA

This paper takes as its starting point a comment made during the debate over the introduction of private excavation firms to German archaeology. Much of the debate was published by the Verband der Landesarchäologen (Association of State Archaeologists) in 1994 and in the journal Archäologische Informationen in 1999. Somewhere along the way, one commentator suggested that developers would prefer paying state services—rather than private firms—to do archaeology, because the money given to private firms might go to pay for “aluminium hubcaps on the boss’s Mercedes.” Ultimately deleted from the published version (which is telling in its own right), this comment raises a number of interesting questions regarding relations not only between archaeologists and the people we are supposed to serve (present), but also between archaeology and the people we study (past). A large number of factual errors were mixed into the general debate; small, telling errors which could easily have been prevented by asking foreign colleagues for basic information on the history of private excavation firms in—for example—the USA or England. But no one, apparently, did. Which suggests that the view on the hubcaps was equally made-up, and that it could just as easily be argued that developers would prefer to work with other private companies, sharing the same ideas of profit-motive, corporate mentality, etc., in contrast to any of the clichés one might care to mention regarding unresponsive government bureaucracy. So what does this tell us about what we—as archaeologists—know about the people we serve? And what—by extension—do we know about the people we excavate?

BETWEEN “THE PRIVATE” AND “THE PUBLIC”. ARCHAEOLOGY IN 21ST CENTURY SPAIN

Jamie Almansa Sánchez, University College London, UK
In 1985 the new law for the protection of Cultural Heritage in Spain came with a radical change in Archaeology. From academics to companies, the actual socio-politic and economic situation of the country has built up a mosaic of management models where depending on the Autonomous Region we are, there are different ways of acting.

A common point for all the regions is the paradox where from an Archaeology defined as “public” it exist a major “private” execution of the works. The consequences of that go from the lack of interest and knowledge of the public, to a situation where the archaeologist is paid directly by the developer while it is working for the Public Administration. Furthermore, the situation of Archaeology and archaeologists is not as good as it was supposed to be after the laws, and the major damage is for Archaeological Heritage.

What can we do? Is it possible to promote a Public Archaeology in Spain? How can we be able to manage Archaeological Heritage in today’s Europe?

THE DISPUTED RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE CULTURAL HERITAGE – THE KVARNBACKEN CASE.

Göran Gruber Linköping University, Sweden

This article deals with the conflict about the responsibility for costs in connection with contract archaeology. Today, according to Swedish legislation, whoever disturbs, moves, or destroys an antiquity, either by active planning or by accident, must pay for the archaeological excavation. The starting point for the article is an empirical case from the county of Östergötland in which an actor perspective is applied. The case is also placed in a context with tendencies towards change and the discussion in recent years concerning the cultural heritage and national memory policy. By showing features of continuity and discontinuity in cultural heritage management, the author seeks to reveal and reflect on the dilemmas surrounding the legislation, questioned by many, with its roots in the 1940s.

Today there is a difference between (late modern) rhetoric and (modern) practise which can create tensions between the actors when they meet in the archaeological field situation. The way the legislation is applied prevents interactions between archaeologists – entrepreneurs – local communities, even in cases when this is asked for. Instead they easily fall in to traditional positions, contractors – experts – listeners, especially when economical issues matters. This is shown in the Kvarnbacken case, among others, as a conflict between authorities and developers.

If the National cultural policy is to find new grounds for cooperation, and increase an interaction between the actors surrounding the use of cultural heritage, and in the field of e.g. contract archaeology, the contract between the actors has to be renegotiated considering power and responsibility. The author states that the current legislation, and its application, works counterproductive in this matter and only produces uncertainty and frustration among archaeological specialists as well as the developers and local communities.
INTERSTICES: A STORY OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT WITH DEVELOPER FUNDED ARCHAEOLOGY IN THE ENGLISH MIDLANDS.

Paul Belford, Ironbridge Archaeology, UK

For five centuries Wednesbury Forge was at the heart of the local community, employing generations of families and embedding itself in the local culture. Redevelopment of the site took place from 2005 to 2008, accompanied by a comprehensive programme of archaeological work. This included above- and below-ground archaeology, process-recording and open days and public lectures.

The public archaeology elements helped develop interesting directions for post-excavation research. At one open day we had over 800 visitors, of whom the majority had familial connections to the forge. This resulted in an avalanche of anecdotes and photographs which enhanced (and complicated) our understanding of the 20th century history of the site.

The project raised a number of issues which required careful management by Ironbridge Archaeology as consultants and contractors. This paper will describe the various forces which were brought to bear during the course of the project, and will examine particularly the interstices between these different elements which enabled a positive and exciting engagement with oral history and the archaeology of the more recent past. Comparisons will be made with other projects in the region, and the paper will conclude by offering an optimistic way forward for developing public archaeologies in developer-funded projects.

COMMUNICATING BETWEEN COMMUNITIES

Jon Kenny, York Archaeological Trust, UK

In a time when the practice of archaeology in the UK is dominated by the interests of developers community archaeology has had a resurgence following comparatively lean times. This paper will look at the opportunities that exist and the lines of communication that communities must set up to find a place in the process of archaeology in the UK. This paper will use examples from York to show the opportunities and hindrances encountered by communities trying to negotiate a place in archaeology by communicating with professionals: professionals who sit in relatively powerful occupational territories as archaeologists, academics and commercial developers.

Even when a community group is able to establish itself as part of an archaeological project there is a very real difference between groups participating in activities where they have been invited in (top down) and those where their own research interest hold sway (bottom up). This paper will look at examples from York of both approaches and reflect on the ways in which the two can communicate and become mutually beneficial.

CONVERSATIONS WITH READERS: AN INFORMAL SURVEY OF PUBLIC RESPONSE TO ARCHAEOLOGICAL PUBLICATIONS.
The National Roads Authority has been engaged in a major programme of road building in Ireland since it was established by statute in the mid 1990s. In the course of this work it has commissioned hundreds of archaeological investigations. The fruits of these investigations have begun to appear in a variety of forms in recent years – as posters, leaflets, published seminar proceedings, excavation monograph reports and Internet summaries. These are all products that seek to package archaeological discoveries for public consumption. What is the public response to these products? How do people become aware of them? How do they use them? Do they want them at all or would they prefer something else? We asked these questions of schoolchildren, students, scholars and local interest groups in Sligo town, where the first of the excavation monographs was launched in December 2007. This presentation gives the results of our inquiries and uses video footage to allow the people to speak for themselves.

PARALLEL PERSPECTIVES: FINDING THE NEXUS BETWEEN DIFFERING VIEWS OF THE PAST

Jeffrey H. Altschul, Statistical Research, Inc, USA

For most of the 20th century, decisions about archaeological resources were the sole province of archaeologists in the United States. The situation changed dramatically in the early 1990s with the passage of laws providing Native communities equal status in decisions about their heritage. Long time allies became structural antagonists as Native Americans and archaeologists fought over who owned the past. In hopes of ameliorating the tension, Statistical Research, Inc. (SRI), a CRM consultant based in the western U.S., developed “Parallel Perspectives”. The project brings together archaeologists and Native communities to teach school age children. During archaeological excavations, school children from the reservation are brought to the site, where archaeologists teach how archaeological methods are used to develop interpretations about what is being uncovered. Tribal elders then instruct the children what these same features mean based on their tradition. The children go back to school and spend the next day integrating the two approaches into a holistic explanation that makes sense to them. Parallel Perspectives has been a tremendous success not only at teaching children, but also at bringing together the archaeological and Native American communities. This paper presents the program’s history, accomplishments, and future prospects as well as how it might be adapted to a European setting.

PUBLIC HERITAGE AND MANAGEMENT DECISIONS – WHAT MATTERS MOST, TO WHOM, AND WHY

Gerry Wait, Nexus Heritage - SRI Ltd, UK
John J Aston, Aston Eco Management, UK
The emergence of concepts of corporate social responsibility (CSR) over the past 5 years is fundamentally changing how businesses define what their business is, and how they will go about conducting ‘their’ business activities. Corporate social responsibility (CSR, also called corporate responsibility, corporate citizenship, and responsible business) is a concept whereby organizations consider the interests of society by taking responsibility for the impact of their activities on customers, suppliers, employees, shareholders, communities and other stakeholders, as well as the environment. In Europe, a majority of archaeological work and heritage management activities now occur within this sphere of business. Heritage issues have always been present in CSR considerations, but as just one among many elements. However, heritage is critically concerned with how a social group defines, relates to, and values its past, and the physical representations of the past in their present. These are all aspects of society and a culture that would be affected by development and redevelopment. CSR concepts introduce new ways of thinking about the elements of the past that matter, and potentially over-turning our traditional paradigms which give primacy of expert – archaeological – opinion over the beliefs, traditions and ways of thinking about their past that are held by local communities. This paper explores how these concepts have and can be implemented, and discusses the changing dialogs and negotiations that must take place in these new ways doing the business of archaeology within a CSR framework.