Think piece for the re-imagining Scottish Archaeology workshops

Delivering Archaeology – "Structure"

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Over a period of several decades, and in various contexts, I have dutifully trotted out variations of a lecture entitled The Structure of Archaeology.   The intention was to help people new (and in some cases not so new) to the subject to understand who was who, who did what and how they related to each other. The hardest part proved to be trying to create a single diagram which would accurately reflect the situation in a simple, visual way.   Despite repeated attempts to refine it, that diagram always ended up most closely resembling the floor beneath the Christmas tree on Twelfth Night. Archaeology, with its numerous dimensions, facets, tendrils and influences, defies efforts to capture its full range of applications, uses and values in a managerial flow diagram – something I think we should both recognize and celebrate.

It was suggested that, in preparing this think piece, I consider - in the context of "structure' - issues such as standards and guidance, quality management and other such gems from the lexicon of management speak. With respect (for these are important subjects), I would rather eat my own feet. Instead I think it would be more useful, more pertinent and for those gathered in rooms to discuss my "provocations", more interesting and enjoyable, to lift our heads from the detail and look at the bigger picture.

General (later President) Dwight D Eisenhower is famously alleged to have declared: "in preparing for battle I have always found that plans are useless but planning is indispensible".   The older I get, the more I find myself in agreement, and never more so than right now. As I write this, in November 2019, we are in the most uncertain situation of my professional lifetime. We find ourselves in the hustings phase of another general election, unclear how that will unfold, unclear still of the consequences of the Referendum on membership of the European Union, and unclear of the potential and possibly historically game-changing ramifications of the various possible outcomes of these two events, including the future of the Union and the possibility of an independent Scotland. Which does rather beg the question – is this the right time to be making a plan about anything, let alone how we might deliver archaeology? I would suggest it is not but, following the wisdom of the WWII Allied Commander in Chief, it is never the wrong time to be planning.

I would argue that the focus for that planning should not be to devise a plan (a closed solution) but rather to work together to create conditions (an open solution) which will allow our subject the best chance to flourish in as many and various ways as possible, not least so that we can adapt to whatever is coming our way (over which, in truth, we have little or no meaningful control). I think it will be crucial to position ourselves to be able to provide tangible support for the long-term stability of existing organizations (public, private and third sector) - the cornerstones of our overall practice - and to meaningfully encourage and support innovation and experimentation, including new areas of practice, new roles and new organisations. That means ongoing, sustained and purposeful dialogue and deliberation – i.e. forums for collective decision making - with a clear pathway to delivery on agreed decisions. What we don't need right now, I would contend, is another plan – plans inevitably lead to people spending vast amounts of time agonizing over supporting minutiae.   For me, the focus now needs to be big picture – principles, purpose and good ideas about what we should be doing, and how we can work together (and with others) to make that happen.

When I began to scribble down some thoughts for this piece, I recalled a workshop I helped organise in Glasgow under the Scottish Archaeological Forum banner in November 1991 entitled: "What Kind of Archaeology Can We Expect? Scottish Archaeology Into The Next Millennium". The workshop was preceded and informed by a questionnaire which had been distributed to as many archaeologists working in Scotland that we could collectively think of, which asked a range of questions about the discipline. The workshop followed, and was quite deliberately designed as a response to a by-invitation-only symposium held in Edinburgh two weeks previously entitled "What Kind Of Archaeology Do We Want?"

Reading my notes from the workshop, and from feedback on the Symposium, the themes which came to the fore seem worth recalling briefly here. (I have retained the original language and terminology from those notes.) Scottish Archaeology was considered by everyone to be in the process of undergoing a profound metamorphosis, represented by: the growth of private funding and "contract archaeology" and the concomitant reduction in funding from central government (including the privatisation of the government's Central Excavation Unit); the establishment of organisations to deal with this change, including the creation of a professional body (the then C-less IFA); and the rapidly accelerating importance and influence of regional archaeologists.

The Edinburgh symposium tackled the question of how to harness the potential of Scottish archaeology, particularly by means of research initiatives – and tried to address the need for an

agreed strategy "<u>because of</u> the unconnected nature of private sources of funding" (my emphasis). The Glasgow workshop was a reaction to that, reflecting a concern, especially but not exclusively among then younger archaeologists, that issues were being discussed and agendas set above their heads, and that they were being denied an opportunity to participate in discussions informing decisions which would affect their futures.

The workshop revealed several key points of keen interest – a call for more practical dimensions in University degree courses, the fear of the drop in quality developer funding would lead to, the need for a trade union, the need for a regulatory body and, of course, pay. But one common feature of the two events, that both were agreed on, was the need for democratization of the subject.

28 years later two things immediately occur to me. The first is a question. Are we more democratic as a discipline and, if so, has that made things better or worse, and either way, how? The second is an observation. This time of political flux has also seen the emergence in Scotland of the trialing of different forms of representation and decision making – deliberative rather than representative democracy, through the use of citizen assemblies and by means of methods such as participatory budgeting. The Scottish Government has pledged that 1% of all local authority funding will be determined by means of PB by 2022. Could we, in archaeology, use this shift in mindset to kick start the creation of our own mechanisms for a yet more democratic way of delivering our subject – one in which we directly involve the wider public in decision making perhaps and which, through that process, helps make what we do better understood, more present and important in people's lives and thus more valued?

If so then I would contend we need to do more than simply set up a few citizen juries on archaeology or run a   few more questionnaires asking people what they want us to do or how they value us. If what we want is, as Aim 1 states, to broaden and deepen impact, then what we need is for people to be more fully involved with what we do and, <u>crucially,</u> for us to be much more involved in what people do and what matters to them. For that to happen we need to be more present in their lives, both in the sense of being visible within communities and in the sense of having tangible effects on their lives. It is nice that some people enjoy taking part in archaeological fieldwork and/or attend events and activities we organize. It is nice that archaeological stories always seem quite popular when published by newspapers. But to bring about the sea change I think we need in order to lay foundations for a secure, purposeful long-term future for our discipline in the public consciousness, we need to aim higher for our delivery of the subject. We need to go to

a different level. This does not mean throwing out what we already do and do well, to become social workers or mental health specialists.   But it does mean being far smarter and more determined to use what we do more effectively and it means having the courage to support the transformation of what we do to better meet the needs of the 21st century. We have made some progress on this front – recent work on climate change led from Orkney, on social value led from Stirling, and in a variety of other organisations are to be commended and encouraged – but I would argue we still need to do much, much more.

Traditionalists look away now. One aspect of planning for how we might deliver archaeology now and in the future relates to the very essence of what an archaeologist is and does. We need to be ready and willing to stretch and bend that definition, to contemplate the potential for new disciplines to emerge which include the core skills and experience of archaeologists in tandem with those of what have traditionally been seen as separate and distinct professions.   Some signs of this are already apparent and it seems to me there is real evidence of, and real potential for future merging of disciplines to meet the demands we will all be facing in the coming decades. This should not faze us. The combinations of the skill sets of archaeologists with forensic scientists, with botanists, with professional surveyors, and many others, to create discrete specialized roles are now so well established as to cause no comment. Yet the viability and benefits of these fusions were not always deemed obvious.   Future fusions of skill sets which might be considered range from the fairly obvious (Archaeology and Landscape Architecture), to the perhaps less so (Archaeology and Community Development, Archaeology and Health Care). This will require a more inclusive, less rigid understanding of what archaeology is, incorporating the broader palette provided by drawing it into the wider sphere of Heritage, being adaptable to what might work best to meet specific needs in specific circumstances. Education and training which better prepares new graduates for entering such an environment, taking into account some of the considerations just noted, would thus seem to be an area worth further exploration.

There are many other areas which we could usefully explore, together, as a discipline. Here are a few fairly loose ideas for the sorts of things we might consider in contemplating how we might be more effective in delivering archaeology.

One key area where I would suggest archaeology has proved less effective than it might be is the area of advocacy. Who are our best advocates?   Many different organizations purport to be, or self-identify in the role of spokespeople for the discipline – but are they? And are they the best people.

And either way, are we collectively supporting them properly in that role? Perhaps we might consider identifying how we might collectively determine who, as a discipline, we think would best perform such a role on our collective behalf – individuals as well as institutions - in the many relevant different contexts (politics, business, media, education, whatever) where effective advocacy would be most valuable, and consider ways in which we might actively and tangibly support them to perform that role on our collective behalf?

Advocacy perhaps relates most obviously to national & international visibility and relevance, but Aim 1 states that we want to deepen and widen the impact of archaeology at a local level too.   All very noble and sensible – but to achieve this aim, we need to make it viable for archaeologists to be more embedded in local communities, and/or for local communities to effectively grow their own archaeologists. I have my doubts about how much of a meaningful impression we will make on this without some state support, as least in a pump-priming role.

So to conclude this ramshackle collation of ideas on structure and how we deliver archaeology, here's one vision of what could be. Maybe there are some bones to be picked out of it and discussed further. But the point is not to adopt (or reject) this idea. It is to stimulate everyone to start thinking their own thoughts about what we need to do, and press for forums in which we can meaningfully discuss and progress the best ideas which emerge.

We have an uncertain future ahead of us. Money is likely to be tight, and for a while, whatever happens and whatever our specific roles within the subject. At worst, we risk losing lots of accumulated skill and knowledge, not least as archaeology is unlikely to be high on anyone outside archaeology's list of what money should be spent on.   Assuming we don't have a complete meltdown on the Irish scale, what might the lead body do to support the key strategy delivery aim while helping support the retention of what we already have?

How about – facilitate (including financially contribute to) strategic leasing (or purchase) of disused shops across the country, on our beleaguered High Streets and in rural communities. Make them community hubs, highly visible to the public, places where people are encouraged to come and drink coffee, chat and get involved in projects related to archaeology and heritage (and perhaps beyond). This facilitation process would involve working with partners – local community development organisations, or health and social care groups, or schools, or whoever and whatever is relevant to and useful for the place. Make archaeology physically part of communities. Encourage (with

subsidies) our existing organisations to take on the running of some of these hubs, from which to mount programmes of activity designed in tandem with community and local authority representatives with a view to ensuring some of the activity is directly geared toward meeting some of the challenges facing that community. Spread the load of running these hubs throughout our discipline – some could be run by commercial organisations, some by charities, local museums or other constituted groups, some perhaps could be new entities with financial priming to create new posts. These hubs could also serve as shops – showcases for local artists, or artisans, which may further help contribute to local benefits (including income streams for local residents) and indeed toward the running of the hubs themselves). But ensure that the archaeology dimension is front and centre in the design and content of these spaces and that the activities run from them maintain a clear archaeology and heritage theme. In other words, a form of soft diplomacy and investment. How the financing of this would work is up for discussion – it would be interesting to cost it – but there are routes for exploration here too – and among the options, perhaps some hybrid adapted version of the universal basic income concept, in which organisations are allocated a certain amount in order to establish and run these hubs at a basic level could be explored.

If we did have a network of archaeology hubs, we could link to that programmes of training and opportunities for employment of young and/or local archaeologists. Establishing an associated budget would mean those young archaeologists could receive at least a small income, and training, so that this "burden" is removed from other organisations but give them access to a pool of well trained staff who in addition to a core role could perform other roles, including on larger fieldwork projects and as cover for other staff on training courses, leave, maternity/paternity, sick leave or whatever. Such a scheme would need some co-ordination of course – perhaps something with which CIfA would be able to assist.

I think most people will be able to see where this particular idea might go, and contribute many other ideas, including issues such as embedding archaeologists around the country which could help reduce the safety risks and carbon emissions related to long-distance travelling (commercial archaeological concerns could also use these hubs as outposts for activity in those areas). These archaeological hubs could also adopt other principles of good practice – e.g. some version of the Preston procurement model, under which the local economy has been significantly improved through implementation of a policy requiring goods and services to be obtained from within a defined radius of Preston town centre.

This idea is only a scenario, in which there will be also of course be problems and potential pitfalls – the point is not to exhaustively discuss this particular idea, but rather to use it as a springboard to encourage thinking differently and thinking "big picture". Quality management and standards and guidance can follow, when we've sorted out the principle and purpose behind delivering archaeology in the decades to come.

As a post script, whatever we decide to do, and however we decide to do it, I would argue we need to work together more effectively to harness critical data about what we do. Evaluation is now a constant in all our professional lives, an often onerous requirement on everyone, in multiple contexts.   And while some of that requirement, or the data which needs to be gathered and processed, is project/context specific, quite a lot of it is not. So one challenge – and this is probably something which the lead body would need to drive – is how can we be more effective about gathering and sharing data for evaluation purposes? And not just for third parties. What would we want to see gathered, both for general use across the profession and specifically to show us how we are meeting the challenge of delivering archaeology?