

ClfA Conference 2025

Shaping the future (of our profession)

Wednesday

11:00 – 12:30

A Conversation about Conservation....

Organisers: Steven James Allen, Morgan Creed

Description: Artefact conservation is more than the immediate preservation of a find. There are long-term implications if the object is to be available for future study. Conservation is often under-resourced -partially because the aims of conservation are not necessarily understood.

In a commercial model resources are under pressure. So does conservation have a sustainable future? Are the expectations of our clients realistic or do we need to manage expectations whilst still meeting professional and ethical obligations? Should retention be more selective? Does the sector have the skills to cope with what we do now or in the future?

This session aims to clarify what happens in a conservation facility in the current commercial environment, what challenges we face and how we go forward. We will look at how existing methodologies have evolved and what approaches are making this work more efficient, cost-effective and enhancing of the cultural value of the resource.

11:00 – 15:00

Challenges and opportunities in post-excavation: lessons learned from archaeological 'mega-projects'

Organisers: Alex Smith, John Halsted

Description: There has been an increasing number of extremely large-scale archaeological projects relating to infrastructure in recent years, which together have involved a sizable proportion of the commercial archaeology sector. The post-excavation programmes of these come with great challenges but also provide the most promising opportunities for collaboration and innovations in methodologies and outputs, with the potential to reach out and engage with wider audiences and to help address specialist shortages and inequalities in our profession.

Led by the Access+ HS2 post-excavation consortium and the HS2 Historic Environment team, this session will draw upon a number of these projects to provide a lesson learned review in terms of best practice and pitfalls to avoid and will look ahead to discuss how such projects can be harnessed to truly help shape the future of our profession. It will include papers on themes such as specialist work, scientific practice, archives and social impact.

Stories of our past to inspire our future

Organisers: Jim Williams, Louise Rayner, Mark Hinman

Description Over the last few ClfA conferences we've had some great sessions on how archaeologists work together and how we use new technologies and methods. However, we've feel there has been

a shift away from talking about archaeology itself and the results of our collective ground breaking work. In this session, we've challenged our presenters to demonstrate the extraordinary range and diversity of RO-led archaeological projects, and wow us with the new stories their work enables them to tell. We've asked them to talk about all aspects of their projects, from innovative methodologies illustrated with stunning imagery to the best analytical work, and through creative approaches to meeting the challenges of our sector, show how commercial archaeology in the 21st Century is helping us understand our past and is serious about communicating its value and significance.

13:30 – 17:00

Crossing the Divide: Starting a conversation to improve communication, collaboration, co-ordination and creativity between the commercial and academic sectors

Organisers: Megan Schlanker, Matilda Holmes, Daria Dabal

Description: Archaeology degrees are one of many ways that we can shape the future of our profession, but higher education is widely considered to be in crisis, while commercial and academic archaeologists often work in isolation to each other with little crossover or communication, to the detriment of the sector.

This panel, comprised of five fifteen-minute papers and a roundtable discussion will focus on questions such as: How can we work to improve communication, collaboration, and co-ordination? How can we improve the connection between higher education and archaeological employment? What innovations in archaeological education are being made? What role can collaboration between students, higher education institutions, professional bodies, and employers play in shaping the future of archaeology?

A variety of perspectives are welcomed and by the end of the session we aim to have produced an action plan with clear steps to facilitate better relationships between archaeological organisations and universities so we can move forward together.

15:00 – 17:00

The contribution of heritage to the design and delivery of major infrastructure projects. Two case studies: A303 Stonehenge tunnel project and Trans Pennine Railway Upgrade project

15:00 – 15:45

Journey's End, a review of the A303 Stonehenge Scheme: An insight into this collaborative project in an internationally significant World Heritage landscape

Organisers: Melanie Pomeroy-Kellinger, Abi Tompkins

Between 2014 and 2024, the A303 Amesbury to Berwick Down "Stonehenge" Scheme sought to improve connections between the South West and the South East, whilst both protecting and enhancing the World Heritage Site and bringing significant benefit to local communities.

The project involved a wide range of archaeologists and specialists collaborating on innovative approaches for working within one of the most important archaeological landscapes in the world.

The Scheme obtained legal consent, and the support of the World Heritage Committee, but was cancelled in July 2024; this session will present the perspectives of the range of heritage bodies and advisors involved – contractors, consultants, curators, land owners and land managers. The focus

will be on the innovative approaches, strengths and challenges of the project, and lessons than can be taken and applied to future infrastructure schemes.

The session falls into two papers. The first will give a brief overview of the Scheme and will then identify some of the key innovations and ways of working established by the archaeological contractor and consultants for working in such an important landscape. The second paper will focus on the collaborative curatorial approach to the project and the opportunities and challenges it presented.

15:45 – 16:30

The TransPennine Railway Upgrade (TRU): The role of heritage in upgrading 19th century railway infrastructure for 21st century travel needs through embedded design development, multi-specialist collaboration and engagement

Organisers: Matthew Jenkins, Katie Rees-Gill

Description: The session will discuss how Heritage is playing an essential role in shaping our future infrastructure and how, as a profession, we have been fully engaged in the TRU scheme since 2017. Being embedded within the design team from the project outset enabled early conversations and problem-solving around issues of substantial change or even loss of significance and how to reverse, mitigate and compensate through the design process. Heritage specialists' advice was integral to the design development for new facilities and helped to achieve bespoke, innovative and sensitive new additions within the setting of historic structures. The success is tied into the strong collaboration between Network Rail, designers, engineers and construction managers as well as our facilitation of early engagement with critical stakeholders such as Kirklees Council's Conservation team and Historic England. This provided continuous opportunities for shaping designs and critical thinking through joint working group sessions and meetings.

15:30 – 17:00

Don't Call it a T3D Talk: The future of the profession in big ideas

Organiser: Emily Plunkett

Description: The future of our profession is shaped not just by those big ideas beyond our profession such as policy or sustainability, but also those big ideas which come from within the profession.

One example is the big idea that archaeologists should tender for work rather than only working 'their patch', which for better or worse led us here.

This session will present up and coming professionals with their 'big ideas' for the future of the profession in a series of T3D style talks.

Thursday

09:00 – 15:00

Shaping the future: Ensuring legacy and accessibility of archaeological resources

Organisers: Alphaeus Lien-Talks, Claire Tsang, Barney Sloane

Description: As the heritage sector continues to grapple with increasing volumes and heterogeneity of data, it faces growing challenges in ensuring accessibility, reusability, and long-term value. At the same time, archaeological archives confront a crisis in management and access, prompting an urgent need for transformative solutions. This session unites these critical conversations, exploring innovative strategies to safeguard the legacy of heritage data and archaeological archives while enhancing their accessibility for diverse stakeholders.

Future for archaeological archives

The first session reflects on the work of the Future for Archaeological Archives Programme. This initiative, a C21st Challenges for Archaeology work package, has been working towards a sustainable future for archaeological archives tackling the current and ongoing crisis in the management and access to archaeological archives. This segment will explore the work of that multi-project programme, including a picture of how a national collection for archaeological archives could operate and reflecting on its position within the broader heritage collections context.

Heritage data

The second session will cover heritage data management, reviewing progress in national programmes and updates on systems, challenges, and barriers. It will highlight best practices and explore emerging technologies like AI to advance the field. Attendees will gain actionable strategies to improve data reusability and build a lasting heritage legacy. The session promotes collaboration, transparent planning, and open data practices to maximise the future potential of heritage data.

The overall session will conclude with a summary and a Q&A discussion to encourage dialogue on future strategies and solutions.

09:00 – 10:30

The DCMS Culture and Heritage Capital Initiative – what's in it for archaeology?

Organisers: Kate Clark, Tom Dommett

Speakers: Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, Hannah Fluck, Adala Leeson, Sadie Watson

The DCMS Culture and Heritage Capital Initiative is exploring ways to widen our understanding of the value of heritage on an economic platform, to include not just its economic value but its contribution to welfare, sustainable growth and standards of living, using economic methods. The aim is to create a formal approach to culture and heritage capital to sit alongside other models of natural, human, social and financial capital to make a stronger case for investment.

This session will introduce archaeologists to the overall initiative and showcase two projects that are currently involved in taking the initiative forward.

The presentations will be recorded. In addition to this conference session, CIFA members will have the opportunity to take part in a free online workshop in June. This will be an opportunity for

members to ask questions, to debate the application of the approach and provide feedback on the two projects.

Shaping the future of evaluation

Organisers: John Mabbitt, Richard Higham

Description: Archaeological evaluation is the most important stage in any development-led archaeological investigation. It is the process of moving from an understanding of potential to the demonstrable presence (or absence) of archaeological remains, and encompasses all aspects of archaeological investigation, from desk-based research through remote sensing and prospection to excavation. Considerable effort has been made in establishing the validity of different evaluative techniques, through methodological research into both gathering and interpreting survey data or understanding sampling strategies and sizes. Questions still remain around how we know when we have done 'enough', how the effectiveness of evaluation strategies is evaluated, how investigative techniques are tailored to a proposal and to a specific policy need, and how we practice in a proportionate and timely manner. This session will explore the progress made, to understand the challenges to the practice of evaluation and understand how practice can be developed.

11:00 – 12:30

Archaeologists for a nature and climate positive future

Organisers: Hannah Fluck, Coralie Acheson

Description: Concerned about the future? Not sure whether being an archaeologist is something that can help in a nature and climate crisis? Want to feel positive and empowered, an archaeologist fit for the future?

In this workshop you will be given the opportunity to apply your skills as an archaeologist to address some real-world challenges for a nature and climate positive future. We will use experiences of archaeologists, ecologists and countryside managers to challenge you as archaeologists to use what you know to help make better land use decisions that deliver benefits for nature and climate. Expect group work, interaction and inspiration, bring an open mind and an interest in a different approach to our sector.

11:00 – 15:00

Wellbeing-focused engagement in archaeology: How and why we do it and what it means for us?

Organisers: Kate Geary, Heloise Meziani, Katherine Miller, Linda Monckton

Description: This session will dive into how archaeology provides meaning and purpose for participants, communities, and archaeologists through exploring the current research, case studies, and panel discussion.

Outreach and education have long been part of archaeology and are ever evolving with the increasing perceptions and knowledge of health and wellbeing. What wellbeing means for us; how to make things happen in an intentional way, and how we utilise the work of the sector to influence policy and opportunities within the planning system will be explored here.

However, while we understand wellbeing-focused archaeology can and has transformed people's lives, what is the impact of these projects and programmes for archaeologists? At the 2024 EAA

Sarah May posed the question 'If heritage is good for wellbeing, why are professionals so miserable?'. We will explore how - done well - archaeology provides meaning and purpose for those paid to do it and acknowledge that - done badly - it can be soul-destroying. Given that, we also would like to discuss and highlight positive ways we can all rediscover the joy in archaeology.

13:30 – 15:00

Archaeology that doesn't cost the earth: building green competencies for all archaeologists

Organisers: Coralie Acheson, Daniel Phillips

Description: In this session, ClfA's Climate Change Working Group will share a call to action for archaeologists across the profession to make sustainability central to our work, whether we are in the field, the office or with the public. To do this we will need to develop our existing skills and learn new ones. To support this, we will be launching a sustainability toolbox talk – the first resource in a learning pathway we propose to develop collaboratively with members. Come along to engage with the toolbox talk and inform the development of future resources.

15:30 – 17:00

Closing Keynote

Creating small wins: Preparing wicked archaeologists for the heritage future

Organisers: Andrea Bradley, John Schofield

Description: In his recently published book, 'Wicked Problems for Archaeologists' (OUP, 2024), John Schofield suggests that archaeologists have the superpowers necessary to address some significant global challenges faced by society: climate change, environmental pollution, crime and conflict, social injustice, health and well-being, so-called 'wicked problems'. In this session John will introduce us to some of the thinking in his book, including looking at how archaeologists can engage in global challenges through the concept of 'small wins'. Short responses to John's paper will develop ideas raised by the book around the need for strategic frameworks, advocacy, and what needs to change in the way we teach and learn about archaeology. Based on these papers, and on ideas raised by the conference as a whole, the follow-on structured discussion will home in on actions and opportunities, to be developed further after Conference. In the session we will address the following questions: How could professional archaeological practice become better at addressing wicked problems in the future? Do we need better transdisciplinary working or more developed 'policy entrepreneurship'? What about the idea of 'small wins': what would help extend these small wins to create wider impact? What skills, abilities and personal attributes does an archaeologist of the future need to tackle wicked problems, and what do we need to 'unlearn'?