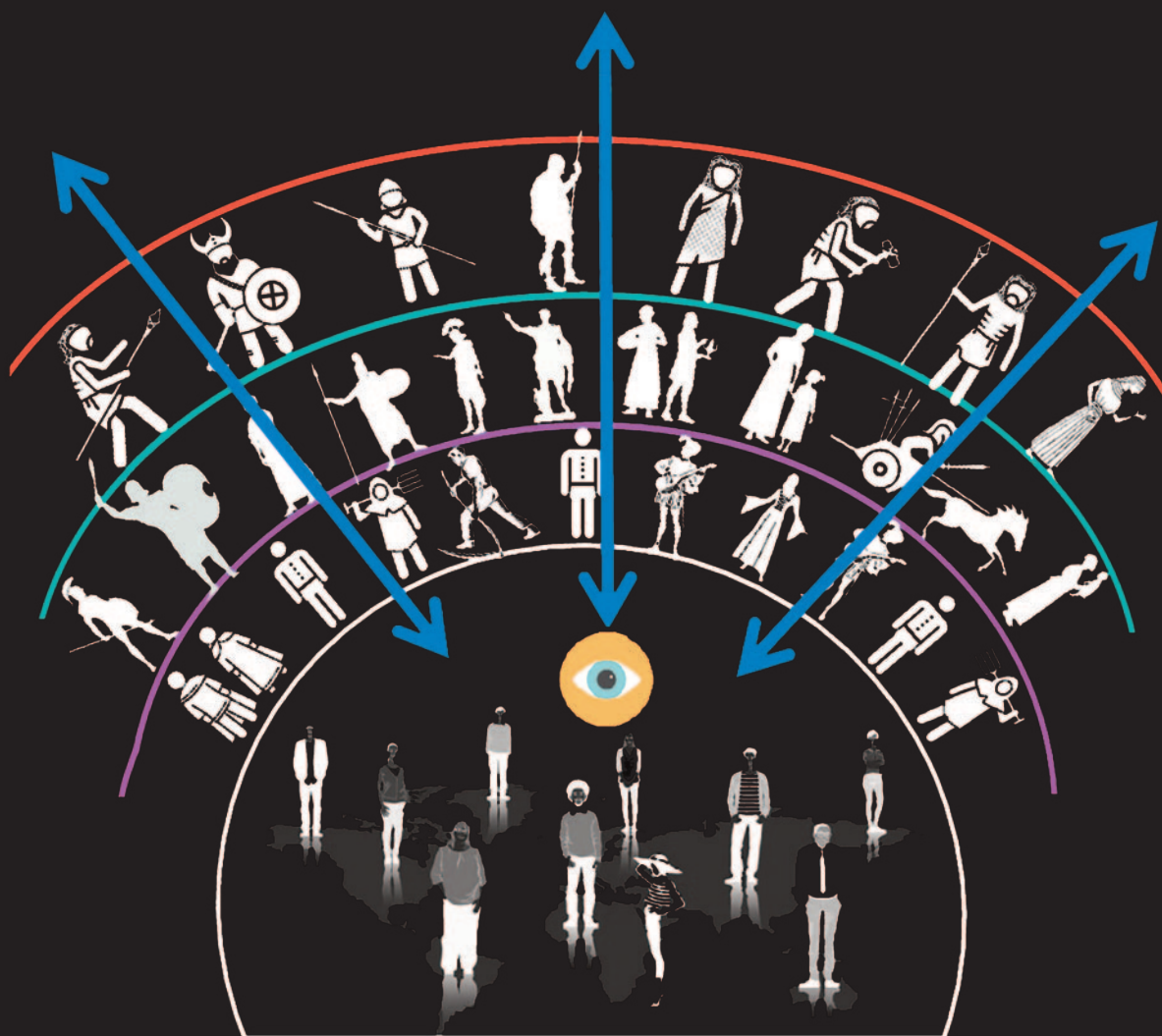


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Carenza Lewis\*

# Who cares? Why and for whom are we now doing archaeology in the UK?

## 1. Introduction

Perceptions regarding the purpose of archaeology (actual and aspired) in contemporary society have been subject to extensive discussion and considerable evolution over the last few decades. It is an oft-expressed truism that the current moment (whenever that might be) is a challenging point at which to be writing about the purpose of archaeology because external conditions are in a particularly acute state of flux. This certainly applies to 2024, when social, political, economic and environmental conditions are all shifting rapidly around us. However, this applies to most of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and it is important to keep under review the question: 'For whom are we now doing archaeology?', not least because any consideration of this immediately opens up the more pertinent supplementary issue: 'For whom *should* we now be doing archaeology?'. And it is of course shared solutions to this latter conundrum that may help us best support the practice of archaeology as we move into the second quarter of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

This paper will review the reasons why archaeological investigation is carried out in the UK and consider the impact of public participation in this process on the sustainability of archaeology.

## 2. The purpose of archaeology in the UK

Writing in 2019, Darvill and colleagues distilled the 'pillars' of archaeological investigation in the UK into two. Pillar 1 was enquiry-led investigation that included problem-oriented research (investigating pre-defined questions) and curiosity-driven 'blue-sky' investigations (aiming simply to 'see what's there'), both of

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Fig. 1. Members of the public visiting archaeological excavations in the bailey of the medieval castle of Clare, Suffolk (UK).

which involve the archaeologists in choosing where, what and how to investigate. The second pillar was development-led investigation, carried out to manage threats to archaeological remains from construction, in which the choice of location and approach is directed and constrained by the proposed development.

### *1.1. Enquiry-led investigation intended to discover and understand archaeological remains (Pillar 1)*

Before the 20<sup>th</sup> century there were no salaried career archaeologists in the UK, and archaeological investigation was driven entirely by personal intellectual curiosity. Leaving aside (for the purposes of this paper) medieval and earlier interest in archaeological remains, serious endeavour started in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with ‘antiquarians’ such as John Leyland (1503-52), William Camden (1551-1623), John Aubrey (1626-97) and William Stukeley (1687-1765) who visited sites across the UK (mostly prehistoric), carried out and published accounts of their observations and ideas. A focus for discussion was provided by the Society of Antiquaries of London (founded in 1707) which involved serious scholarship alongside dubious practices such as tasting fluids from sealed lead coffins (Pearce 2007). The 19<sup>th</sup> century saw more scientific approach to archaeological investigation, including stratigraphic excavation, developed by pioneers such as William Cunnington (1754-1810), Richard Colt Hoare

(1758-1838) and Augustus Henry Lane Fox Pitt Rivers (1827-1900), inspired by advancing geological understanding of the age and stratigraphy of the earth.

From the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century many universities opened archaeology departments, whose staff developed ambitious programmes of investigation across (and beyond) the UK. Outside universities interest was nurtured by groups such as the Council for British Archaeology (CBA) and the Standing Conference for Local History (now the British Association for Local History (BALH)) founded in 1944 and 1948 respectively. After World War II, post-war reconstruction and development revealed an embarrassment (literally, given the lack of resources to investigate them, discussed below) of riches in the form of archaeological remains buried beneath the UK's towns and cities, while aerial photography revealed cropmarks and earthwork remains in the countryside. All this new evidence broadened interest in the material remains of the past beyond the exceptional sites that had attracted antiquarian interest, to encompass more 'everyday' remains seen to be present in, under and around every community.

New techniques, particularly in prospection and post-excavation analysis, made archaeological investigation increasingly informative but also more specialised, complex, time-consuming and costly. Concern rose about the number of archaeological discoveries exposed during construction only to be lost due to lack of resources to excavate. Excavation came to be considered a last resort, only to be carried out by trained and experienced professional archaeologists if sites were threatened by development, reducing the amount of enquiry-led excavation.

The ultimate aim of enquiry-led investigation is to advance knowledge and understanding of the past. The Anglo-Saxon burial ground of Sutton Hoo (Carver 2020) and the deserted medieval village of Wharram Percy (Wrathmell 2012) are just two of the sites where understanding has been transformed by sustained programmes of curiosity-led investigation, which has delivered new insights into all periods of our past. Excavations of sites as diverse as Stonehenge and the burial site of King Richard III have created major new visitor centres.

Returning to the key question of this paper, the people for whom we are carrying out *enquiry-led* investigations are those who are interested in the discoveries and insights they offer, including the millions who watch archaeological TV programmes or visit heritage sites every year: in 2021-22 the latter amounted to 63% of the UK population (Historic England 2023a).

### *1.2. Development-led investigation intended to mitigate threats to archaeological remains (Pillar 2)*

Not until the mid-twentieth century did the second 'pillar' of archaeological investigation come to the fore: investigation of archaeological remains threatened by proposed development. In towns and cities across the UK, awareness of the



extent and vulnerability of physical remains from the past was raised as wartime damage was repaired, town centres replanned, transport infrastructure updated and new industrial, commercial and housing estates built, all involving rapid construction at scale. In 1947 the *Town and Country Planning Act* established planning practice as a discretionary process involving case-by-case decision-making, but this did not prevent the destruction in 1954 of a Roman temple to Mithras in London. This was greeted with widespread public horror (Historic England 2016, p. 2). Government responses aspired initially to conservation, with the introduction of 'conservation areas' in the *1967 Civic Amenities Act* (1967) intended to preserve areas and buildings of highest architectural or historic interest, informed by rapidly compiled lists of places deemed most worthy of preservation (CBA 1964; 1966).

The conservation area strategy was however an inadequate response to growing recognition that every city, town and village in the UK was an archaeological site containing an unknown wealth of buried remains, knowledge of which was being lost forever on a daily basis as the archaeology was swept away during construction with little or no record being made (Biddle 1968; Ward 1968). In 1972 Carolyn Heighway's chilling report *The Erosion of History* starkly distilled the extent of this threat to the urban historic environment (Heighway 1972). This called for legislation to require archaeological assessment of all proposed development sites, and archaeological investigation and recording of any significant remains if their destruction could not be avoided (Heighway 1972, p. 61).

This ushered in an era of 'Rescue' archaeology in which archaeologists in museums and local authorities reviewed planning notifications to identify those likely to threaten archaeological remains and did their best to ensure archaeological investigation took place. But neglect of a key *Erosion* recommendation – that the developer should pay for the archaeological work (Heighway 1972, p. 62) – limited its effectiveness, as funds from government (local or national) repeatedly proved inadequate for the volume of work required (Darvill *et al.* 2019, pp. 3-4). Although the situation was given some help by the *Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act* (1979), it was not until 1990 that Planning and Policy Guidance 16 (PPG16) (DoE 1990) formally included the 'polluter pays' principle that *developers* should fund investigations of archaeological remains affected by their proposals. By and large, this is what has happened since then. Within a decade 80,000 excavations had taken place that would not have otherwise done so, and by 2007, 93% of all archaeological projects in England were being delivered this way (Darvill *et al.* 2019). Generally, it has worked well: in 2015 the Chief Executive of the British Property Federation confirmed that since PPG16 "developers comfortably take archaeology in their stride. It is now very unusual for archaeological remains to cause a fundamental problem for a well-planned new development scheme" (Historic England 2015, Foreword).



Fig. 2. Development-led excavations beneath Norwich Castle in 2018.

The tens of thousands of development-led excavations, including many “in places which were not previously recognised as important” (Historic England 2015, p. 4) have transformed our knowledge of the past. Individually, development-led excavations have included discoveries such as the first-ever evidence for Mesolithic human cremation that pushes back the known origins of this ritual in the UK by thousands of years (Gilmour 2015); and the only gladiator cemetery to have been excavated anywhere in the Roman empire (Muldner *et al.* 2011). Excavations of Anglo-Scandinavian deposits in York have led to creation of a major visitor attraction. Collectively, bringing together evidence from tens of thousands of smaller development-led investigations has transformed our understanding of the extent of human habitation in the past, and our knowledge of the extent and vulnerability of the archaeological resource. PPG16 has been a success for developers and for the archaeological resource it sought to help, with many of its principles reflected in the Council of Europe’s 1992 Valletta Convention on archaeological heritage adopted by 40 states (<https://www.coe.int/en/web/culture-and-heritage/valletta-convention>).

Returning again to the key question of this paper ‘For whom are we doing archaeology?’ in *development-led* work, the main beneficiaries have been archaeologists, heritage managers, developers and, most importantly, posterity, as knowledge that would have been lost has been saved.

## 2. Current causes for concern

It might be inferred that archaeology is securely thriving in the UK, with those two ‘pillars’ showing clearly why and for whom archaeology is practised: enquiry-led activity benefitting those who are interested in archaeology; development-led activity benefitting those responsible for curating the archaeological resource. Across these pillars, billions have been invested in UK archaeological investiga-

tion over the last half-century, delivering a rich dividend of knowledge and understanding for today and for posterity.

There are however, causes for concern. These come to the fore on a cyclical basis, usually in response to economic and political changes (eg Sayer 2014). Most are at present flashing amber, if not red, for the practice of archaeology in the UK.

### *2.1. Inadequate resourcing*

A particularly persistent cause for concern is inadequate resourcing for archaeology. In spite of billions spent by developers and the lottery, these funding streams are vulnerable to economic downturns, can be limited in the range of activity they cover, and in any case do not fund essential services that provide advice, maintain records and police standards. A 2014 review commissioned by the then minister for Culture, Communications and Creative Industries noted “the provision of archaeological advice services and historic environment records are currently under severe financial pressure in the current economic climate and ... are failing, or in danger of failing, to meet an adequate level of service provision” (Howard, Redesdale 2014). While noting “the large majority of those giving evidence who favoured a statutory solution” the recommendation was for a weaker incentive-based system. This meant such services remained under-resourced, with a 2019 report bemoaning a “reduction in the capacity of local authority archaeological staff whose advice on local planning policy, land allocations for development, and individual development proposals is essential to the successful operation of the current system”. Services remain vulnerable in 2024, and given the weak state of the UK economy over the last decade and the urgent need for investment in butchered public services that affect people at a more existential level than heritage, such as health, this situation seems unlikely to improve soon.

### *2.2. Legislative change*

Another cause for concern is the depressingly frequently re-animated zombie threat of losing legislative protection for archaeology in the planning system. While the 2012 replacement of PPG16 by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (DLUHC 2023) maintained most earlier provisions for heritage, celebration of PPG16’s achievements (Historic England 2015) seemed premature when in 2016 a new Housing and Planning Act proposed changes including ‘permission in principle’ which “*generated concerns that this successful system will be undermined, leading to a reduction in the protection it provides to non-designated heritage assets in particular.*” (Wills, Bryant 2019, p. 9).

Since Brexit and the blizzard of bewilderingly frequent changes in UK political leadership that followed, NPPF has been revised five times in as many years

(in 2018, 2019, 2021 and twice in 2023) (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework>). A 2020 consultation explicitly aspired to ‘tear down’ existing legislation (MHCLG 2020a, p. 6) and characterised planning ‘obligations’ as increasing delays and risk (MHCLG 2020a, p. 13). Proposed changes included the replacement of discretionary case-by-case assessment of planning applications with automatic approval for development on any land within pre-defined ‘growth’ areas (MHCLG 2020b). These proposals proved controversial (Garton Grimwood 2022) but concerns about archaeology expressed by CBA and ClfA (Chartered Institute for Archaeologists) were countered by vague assurances that “local consideration of the impacts of the development on heritage and archaeology ... will be used” (Garton Grimwood 2022, p. 63). While legislation has most recently been delayed by the July 2024 UK general election, the risk remains that future governments may look to remove ‘obligations’ within the planning process.

### *2.3. Loss of expertise and training capacity*

There is a severe shortage of suitably qualified and experienced people to work in UK archaeology. Archaeology in the UK is a 97% graduate profession (<https://profilingtheprofession.org.uk/2-11-archaeologists-qualifications/>) but numbers enrolling on UK undergraduate courses have not kept up with demand. Until 2016 the shortfall was made up by EU archaeologists who comprised 15% of the UK workforce, but since 2016, Brexit and then the Covid19 pandemic caused many to return to Europe. In 2020 70% of commercial archaeological companies reported staff shortages as a constraint on activity (<https://profilingtheprofession.org.uk/1-10-perceptions-of-market-conditions-in-development-led-archaeology/>).

UK universities are unlikely to be able to turn this around, in the short term at least, as resources are being cut by university managers under financial strain due to declining tuition fee income and high inflation. This has led to closure of courses – like archaeology – that are expensive to teach. A rash of closures were announced in 2021 (Adams 2021; BBC 2021; Connett 2021; Wood 2021) and with 40% of UK universities expecting to be in deficit in 2023-24 the situation is unlikely to improve. The sector has not been helped by a UK government until July 2024 ideologically keen to reduce the numbers of undergraduates studying courses that do not lead to high-paying careers –such as archaeology.

### *2.4. Lack of public support / public apathy*

On the face of it, public support for archaeology should not be a problem in the UK. As noted above, the UK public appear to care deeply about archaeology, watching TV programmes, visiting sites and even becoming paying mem-

bers of organisations, in their millions. But opinions of archaeology can easily fall into the 'nice but not needed' category when hard choices have to be made about funding: heritage is invariably placed well below other needs such as health, education, safety, transport and suchlike in public surveys by national and local authorities. For example, in Lincolnshire County Council's 2022-23 survey, 'local areas, places and the environment' was ranked sixth out of eight priorities for support, well below 'road maintenance' and 'public safety' ranked first and second respectively (Lincolnshire County Council 2022).

A decline in public interest in archaeology appears also to be evident in a 2018 public survey of community archaeological activity (Frearson 2018). This showed a substantial decline in the number of community archaeology group members since a previous survey in 2010 (Thomas 2010) (from 78,500 to 9,728), and a decline in group size from an average of 159 members per group to 89 (Frearson 2018, p. 12). Membership had also become slightly older, in 2010 averaging 55 but in 2018 into the 61+ bracket (Frearson 2018, p. 13). While the 2018 figures may not all be directly comparable with 2010, they are nonetheless not encouraging, especially as they predate the Covid19 pandemic and the current cost-of-living crisis.

Much of this may be due to lack of engagement with the professional archaeological sector. A 2021 survey with respondents across England, Scotland and Wales showed that "less than 30% of the local authority archaeologists who responded regularly require, and 60% only occasionally require, community engagement to be part of a developer funded investigation" (O'Hare *et al.* 2022). Frearson's 2018 survey of public interactions with archaeological specialists recorded "considerably less percentage interaction than the 2010 survey where most interactions were with a County or other local authority archaeologist" (Frearson 2018, pp. 44-45). This lack of engagement with either development-led or government-funded archaeologists means members of wider publics will not be able to connect with archaeology, or even find out about it, in which case we can hardly be surprised they may not care about it. Of course, this problem is due at least in part to reduced resources (discussed above) for such interactions, hence we see one challenge exacerbating another.

### **3. A source of hope: People-led archaeology carried out to benefit people**

Although the above causes for concern are serious threats to the health of UK archaeology, one remedy may lie in a third 'pillar', people-led archaeology carried out to benefit communities of place, interest, experience, identity or need (Thomas 2014).

In the UK, opportunities for those without privileged or professional access to *take part* in archaeological investigation have been essential to enabling the ar-

archaeological process to impact positively on wider publics “*there will be little or no direct impact from encounters with the historic environment on people’s lives without participation*” (Van den Dries 2021). Public participatory community archaeology has a long history in the UK, one consequence of which is that there has never been a move to control who can and cannot take part in archaeological investigation: anyone is permitted to take part in fieldwork and can do so anywhere they have the landowner’s permission (unless the site is ‘scheduled’ as a protected monument of national importance (DCMS 2013)). One of the merits of this permissive regime is that people who are not qualified archaeologists can get involved in archaeological fieldwork much more easily than most other European states (Benetti, Brogiolo 2018). One consequence is that we have had a wide range of opportunities to see the benefits this offers.

### *3.1. The history of public archaeological participation in the UK: a long and winding road*

Even in the UK, it took centuries for archaeological participation to percolate beyond the uppermost social classes, who were for long the only people with the education and leisure time to pursue such interests. Although their excavations usually did involve people from lower social backgrounds, and not always simply as laborers, such as the Parkers who worked with Cunnington in Wiltshire (Everill 2010), the drivers and discussants of discovery were fairly exclusively upper class. Not until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century did the growth of an educated upper middle class, alongside improved transportation, begin to broaden public interest in and access to archaeology. This period saw the foundation of many county archaeological societies that ran museums, carried out excavations and published reports (eg Cambridge Antiquarian Society founded in 1840). However, the social composition of these communities of interest remained narrow: the 2021 film *The Dig* about excavations in 1939 at Sutton Hoo (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt3661210/>) tellingly represents the class divide determining who was able to participate in different roles.

From the mid-twentieth century, improving social and economic conditions that gave more people more leisure time, combined with the expansion of secondary, tertiary and adult education, enabled and encouraged a more diverse range of people to engage with archaeology. Many communities acquired local historical and archaeological groups of local residents researching and/or excavating local sites, motivated by an interest in knowing about the past of places they themselves inhabited. Many were supported by archaeologists in local authorities and museums, such as Peter Liddle at Leicester City Museum who established numerous community archaeological fieldwalking groups and published early technical guidelines for community archaeology. Such activities offered participants purpose, intellectual stimulation, social connections and self-

fulfilment while developing new knowledge about – and thus greater appreciation of – the places they investigated.

However, by the early 1980s funding to support community archaeological groups was being cut during recessions and the laborious process of post-excavation analysis began to outstrip the capabilities (or even lifespans) of some of their instigators. As the view that excavation should be a last resort only to be carried out by professional archaeologists became the prevailing orthodoxy in the UK, opportunities for community groups diminished further. Participatory projects such as the interdisciplinary community investigation of the multi-period settlement of Shapwick in Somerset (1989-99), led by Mick Aston from the University of Bristol (Gerrard and Aston 2007), were rare exceptions. Shapwick involved scores of local residents and delivered a rich, deep-time knowledge of the settlement's history over millennia that increased residents' appreciation of the place where they lived. For most other people, the only way to engage with archaeological investigation was through television, which millions of members of the public did every week for nearly two decades, following the on-screen ups and downs of archaeological investigations undertaken by *Time Team* (1994-2012).



Fig. 3. Filming excavations by the long-running archaeological television series *Time Team* at Llandeilo Roman fort in South Wales (UK) in 2005.

Change was on the horizon, however. In 2000 Neil Faulkner issued an impassioned endorsement of the value of participatory community archaeology, based on his long-running excavations at Sedgeford in Norfolk (Faulkner 2000). He was not alone, as recognition grew that supporting communities to engage with their local archaeology was vital not only to maintain public support for archaeology more generally, but also to empower communities (Tully 2007). In 2005 this was reflected in a new European convention: while the 1992 *Valletta Convention* had aimed above all to *protect* cultural heritage, the *Faro Convention* foregrounded the need to *engage* 'everyone in society' with cultural heritage. This recognised that if heritage was to fulfil its aim of supporting sustainable development and quality of life, everyone should have "*the right to benefit from the cultural heritage and to contribute towards its enrichment*" (Council of Europe 2005, Article 4). A key word here is "benefit", and we will return to this below.

In the UK, the funding situation for community archaeology was transformed by the National Lottery Heritage Lottery Fund (NLHF). Founded in 1994, in its early years NLHF favoured large capital projects (including £15million to the British Museum in 1997 (Heritage Fund nd)), but in 2002 the fund changed its policy to direct more funding to smaller-scale grassroots community projects (Maer 2017; Thomas 2014). Over the 30 years since its foundation, NLHF has given £8.8 billion to more than 51,000 heritage projects, and those offering public participation in archaeology have often proved to be particularly attractive. One example of this was the *Managing a Masterpiece* (2011-2014) local authority-led landscape partnership project on the Suffolk-Essex county border, in which target participation numbers for the archaeological excavation strand were exceeded fifteen-fold (Parry 2013, p. 31). A 2018 survey by the CBA into community archaeology in the UK showed that of 116 funding awards, the largest single benefactor was NLHF, providing 58 grants, the next largest being, local authority (15 grants) and the CBA and its Regional Groups (11) (Frearson 2018, pp. 49-50). The majority of grant funding was for post-excavation work or exhibitions.

In 2010, a survey by Suzie Thomas showed there were more than 2,000 active archaeology groups in the UK with around 215,000 individual members, 41% involved in excavation and others in activities including fieldwalking, photographic recording, attending talks and heritage lobbying (Thomas 2010). The gulf between community archaeology and the 'professional' archaeological sector narrowed, as loss of income from reduced development-led archaeology after the 2008 financial crash encouraged many professional archaeological organisations to offer their services to community archaeology projects (many funded by NLHF).

In 2011 an attempt was made to strengthen local communities' connection to local assets (including archaeology) in the Localism Act (DCLG 2011; Thomas 2014). Among other initiatives, this encouraged residents to develop 'Neighbour-





Fig. 4. Members of the public excavating a medieval rural manorial site in Essex (UK) funded as part of the 'Managing a Masterpiece' multi-year programme funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund in 2014.

hood Plans' that would help shape their communities' development, including by nominating buildings or land (in private or public ownership), as Assets of Community Value which could not then be sold without the community being given exclusive first rights to purchase. When precisely this mechanism enabled residents of Bures in Suffolk to purchase land threatened with development in 2013, they celebrated by successfully requesting the NLHF-funded *Managing a Masterpiece* scheme to provide a community excavation that enabled residents to investigate the archaeology of their new heritage asset for themselves (Parry 2013, p. 30).

People-led participatory archaeology is now firmly embedded in the UK. With many programmes now funded with the *primary* purpose of benefitting members of the wider public, we can now add people-led archaeology as a third 'pillar' of investigation.

### *3.2. The benefits of public-led participative investigation: archaeology helping people*

The relevance of people-led investigation to a discussion of the threats facing UK archaeology lies in the capacity it has to deliver wider public benefits.

As noted above, the concept of 'benefit' was foregrounded in the 2005 *Faro Convention*. This benefit could simply be interpreted in narrow financial terms: heritage contributes tens of billions to the UK economy each year (c. £45billion in 2021 (CEBR 2023)) which reaches communities of all sizes (Historic England 2023c). However heritage can deliver other benefits as well, able to improve community wellbeing (Pennington *et al.* 2018; Power, Smyth 2016) and help tackle entrenched social, economic and environmental inequalities by "using heritage assets and *activities within a place* [can] create sustainable, equitably distributed growth and ... enable the development of inclusive place-based identities" (Antink *et al.* 2020, p. 11, author's emphasis). These 'activities within a place' can include public participatory archaeological investigation, and there is mounting evidence that this specifically can confer a wider range of social benefits.

One example of an early 'post-Faro' archaeological programme that sought to benefit individuals was the *Higher Education Field Academy* (HEFA) (2005-18) run by Access Cambridge Archaeology (ACA) from the University of Cambridge (James 2020, pp. 82-87). HEFA aimed to boost transferrable skills, self-esteem and academic aspirations in 13-15-year-old school pupils through participation in new archaeological excavations within inhabited communities (Lewis 2007). The success of this scheme, in which more than 90% of 7000+ young people gained new skills, perspectives, aspirations and cultural capital (Lewis 2014a; Johnson, Lewis 2013) while 75 host communities gained new knowledge about their underfoot archaeology (James 2020, pp. 88-92; Lewis 2014b; Lewis 2016a), enabled it to run for thirteen years. HEFA's primary aim was educational, but it was immediately apparent to ACA archaeologists leading the scheme that



Fig. 5. Teenagers on the *Higher Education Field Academy* (left) and adults on a community excavation gaining a wellbeing boost from archaeological participation (right).





Fig. 6. (top) An 'Operation Nightingale' programme supporting mental wellbeing and trauma recovery in military veterans, excavating the foundations of World War II Nissen huts that accommodate troops before the 1944 D-Day invasion of Nazi-occupied France; (bottom) Members of a Royal Air Force (RAF) families taking part in excavation of a rural Roman site in Lincolnshire (UK) funded by 'Wings to the Past' in 2019 to increase mental wellbeing by giving quality time together to serving parents and children frequently separated by remote posting.

the participants found it a very emotionally positive experience (Lewis 2014, pp. 305, 315-318). Similar positive impacts were also noted in adult participants in community excavations, including a series funded jointly by the NLHF and United Kingdom Research and Innovation (UKRI) in 2012-13 (Lewis 2016a).

The observation that archaeological participation made people happier was being made by many others involved in participatory archaeological projects throughout the 2010s (eg Nevell 2013; Fujiwara *et al.* 2014; Paddon *et al.* 2014; Sayer 2015; Finnegan 2016; Ulke 2018), including some beyond the UK (eg Lewis *et al.* 2022; Samek Lodovici *et al.* 2022; van den Dries 2021). Understanding why it does this was frequently framed through the 'Five Steps' model (Aked *et al.* 2008), with participation in archaeological programmes self-evidently (to those in the know) offering some or all of the five 'steps' to wellbeing (connecting with others, being physically active; learning new things; giving to others; being mindful (NHS undated a)). Since the later 2010s, syntheses of evidence from this growing number of studies have developed an agreed consensus that connecting with archaeology can and does benefit health and wellbeing (eg Price, Keynes 2020; Reilly *et al.* 2018).

This has led to an increasing number of UK archaeological projects securing funding on the basis of at least some of their aims being to benefit the health and wellbeing of participants. Public recognition of this seems to be growing, as Frearson noted in 2018: "Health and Wellbeing: this area of engagement is expanding ... Our 2018 survey indicates that this is particularly attractive to groups within the 31- 61+ age ranges" (Frearson 2018, p. 15). This age group is notable as one that is under-represented in the membership of many archaeological groups.

Building on the consensus that archaeological participation can benefit health and wellbeing, attention has turned to developing a more refined understanding of precisely how and why it does this (Gallou *et al.* 2022; Lewis *et al.* 2022; Pattinson *et al.* 2023). These have included the first-ever quasi-experimental studies with control groups, which showed statistically significant increases in wellbeing-related conditions such as community identification, social support, community esteem, self-efficacy, life satisfaction and positive emotions on participants that were not observed in control groups (Brizi *et al.* 2022). It is hoped this sort of robust evidence will enable more people in need to be steered most effectively to the most appropriate activity for them.

There is further high potential for yet more archaeological activity to benefit people's health through a mechanism called 'social prescribing' which "*connects people to activities, groups, and services in their community to meet the practical, social and emotional needs that affect their health and wellbeing*" (NHS undated b). Prescribing a social activity (instead of or in combination with other treatment) is a relatively new approach to improving poor mental health: evidence

Excavation participants reported a significant rise in **life satisfaction** (how pleased people feel about their lives) at time 2 compared to time 1, while there was no significant change over time in the control group.



Excavation participants reported stronger **place attachment** (how appreciative people feel about the place they live in) than the control group at time 1, an increase which made the difference from the control group statistically significant by time 2



Excavation participants reported significantly higher **social support** (how supportive people feel their community is) at time 2 than at time 1, while there was no significant change in the control group for this condition.

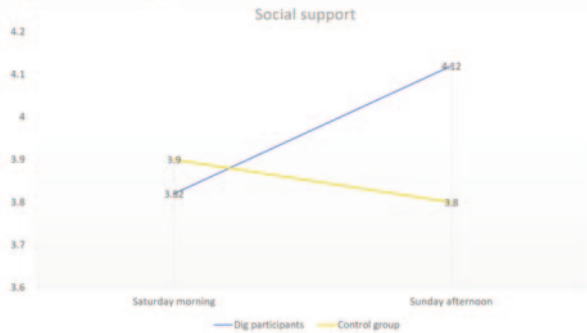


Fig. 7. Quasi-experimental survey data from time points before and after volunteers look part in a two-day community archaeology activity showing impacts on participants (blue line) not seen in a control group of non-participants (yellow line), on three conditions related to wellbeing (life satisfaction, place attachment and perceived social support).

of the positive psychological impact of archaeological participation means that prescribed activities can include archaeology. Accommodating the needs of socially prescribed participants requires careful assessment by prescribers and careful programme design and planning by archaeologists and some organisations working at scale do not yet have capacity to deliver this (Roberts *et al.* 2020), but outcomes of early programmes such as York Archaeology's Archaeology on Prescription (York Archaeology 2023) have been very positive.

There is here, surely, part of the solution to the challenges that beset archaeology today, because if archaeology can help health and wellbeing, which is a top priority for everyone, this will increase its value. In turn, if archaeology is more highly valued, it is more likely to be able to attract resources and to repel attempts to 'tear up' protective planning legislation. This will enable more archaeology to take place, that can benefit more people and places, competing a virtuous circle.

#### **4. Public engagement with archaeology: a mechanism helping archaeology help people to help archaeology**

Archaeology is already benefitting people's health and wellbeing, of course, as we have seen. But awareness of this remains low, hence its perceived value is not as high as it could, and should, be. This pertains at all levels. A 2014 enquiry into *The Future of Local Government Archaeology Services* commissioned by the then Minister for Culture, Communications and Creative Industries (reference Howell, John, Redesdale, Rupert 2014) barely considered the benefits to people. In 2021 Monica Van Den Dries noted that there was "*still a need to better understand what the public benefits of archaeology exactly are or can be, and how to generate such benefits in a development-led daily practice... Apart from 'gaining knowledge', other benefits of archaeology seem much less obvious to the public. ... if archaeology wants to 'sell' its development-led practice as an endeavour that yields social public benefits or adds to individuals' quality of life, some work needs to be done*" (Van den Dries 2021).

Some of the responsibility for this lack of awareness lies within our sector. We have been too slow to use new evidence from development-led investigations to advance knowledge and understanding of the past, leading inevitably to questions whether the excavation of 'yet another' minor site is really necessary (eg O'Keeffe 2018). Too many development-led investigations are cursorily written up in reports that focus on describing what was present rather than analysing its significance, and once submitted to archived are. Simultaneously, too many curiosity-led investigations take too long to share emerging insights. We have not been quick, nimble or committed enough in engaging local people with archae-

ological investigations (the vast majority of which are, as noted above, development-led): if people do not know what is going on, what has been discovered and what it means, they will not care about it. This weakens their support for archaeological investigation being required within the planning process. There are now very few places indeed in the UK that have not had a unique archaeological site excavated in or around their community, but in far too few places have these discoveries been shared in ways that add value to local communities. We have not been as effective as we should have been in ensuring people beyond the heritage sector benefit from development-led discovery. We have also not communicated as effectively as we can and should the social and health benefits of archaeology. If people do not know about the benefits of these activities, they will not seek them out, or appreciate their value.

All of these impediments could be helped by better at public engagement, which is currently mostly reliant on very variable levels of commitment. UK archaeologists are by and large strongly committed to public engagement (Richardson *et al.* 2018, p. 21) but public engagement is rarely included as a requirement in the commercial tendering process (O'Hare 2022), leading to its omission by organisations motivated to cut costs to the bare minimum to win a contract assessed on price-to-funder grounds. A recent survey of Local Planning Authority archaeologists "87% of the respondents ... don't think developers value community engagement through archaeology as a way of meeting their social value requirements". Issues raised included "a lack of awareness of the range and variety of potential engagement activities; uncertainty of what engagement options could be chosen and whether these are proportionate to the works being undertaken. Difficulties were also raised around funding, restrictions on undertaking activities and a lack of clear information or guidance to facilitate the implementation of community engagement." (O'Hare *et al.* 2022, p. 1).

This is not a problem restricted to the UK. In 2020 the *Europae Archaeologiae Consilium* resolved that tackling these issues was a high priority when a survey of member states revealed a widespread wish for support in explaining the public benefits of development-led archaeology (to policymakers, developers, archaeologists and the wider public) (Watson 2020). This stemmed from a desire both to increase public engagement with archaeology and to counter any emerging perceptions that development-led archaeology was a financial burden with no public value (Sloane 2020).

Progress is being made. The 2022 Local Planning Authority survey showed the sector wanted resources to support the incorporation of community engagement into developer funded projects (O'Hare *et al.* 2022, p. 4): the ClfA now provide toolkits for public engagement (ClfA undated). This offers grounds for hope, as we now know we have a myriad of good stories to tell, and the motivation and means to do this.

## 5. Conclusion: a more secure future for archaeology is a people-led archaeology

Social value is now widely recognised as an important (and increasingly, the *most* important) outcome of archaeological investigation: “all archaeology is for the benefit of the public” (Belford 2019, p. 191). There are increasing numbers of archaeological programmes where public benefit, including to health and wellbeing, is the *primary* aim. We can see the two-pillar motivation for archaeological investigation has become a three-pillar model: in Pillar 1 (enquiry-led) the primary aim is knowledge about the past; in Pillar 2 (development-led) the primary aim is preservation for the future; in Pillar 3 (people-led) the primary aim is social value today. But these pillars are not siloes, and one way to help archaeology move forward more securely is to find ways to braid together these three motivations such as, for example, by enabling more people to benefit from development-led archaeology (Sloane 2020), which as we have seen, constitutes the vast majority of investigation in the UK.

Improved understanding of how and why archaeological participation benefits people will open up new ways to achieve this more effectively and more widely in the future. Meanwhile, the social value of archaeology needs to be more widely appreciated, if archaeology as a practice is to be strong enough to deliver these benefits. It is within our power to both achieve and promote public benefit through public engagement, and UK archaeologists are by and large not only strongly committed to do this (Richardson *et al.* 2018, p. 21) but are better equipped to do this than ever before (ClfA undated) including in ways that do not have to be expensive (Van den Dries 2021).

This is one key to a more secure future for archaeology. If more public engagement (participatory activities, open days, educational resources, exhibitions etc.) was included as part of archaeological investigation (whether curiosity-led, development-led, public-led) more people would benefit from, know about and care about a practice and a resource that can enhance local pride, place attachment, education, environments, leisure pursuits, visitor economies, health and wellbeing.

One anonymous quote as long ago as 2015 sums up both problem and solution: “The public benefit is the only justification for the entire commercial sector, without public support cuts in council funding for council posts and ‘simplification’ of planning regs will lead to poor guardianship, management and excavation. And countless sites will be lost to development” (Richardson *et al.* 2018, p. 14). Better still, archaeology will have improved the lives of more people in more places: archaeology will be helping people who will be helping archaeology. The answer to the question “For whom *should* we be doing archaeology?” is that we both can, and should, do it for everyone.



## Abstract

This paper offers a UK perspective on why, and for whom, archaeology has been carried out in the past, and considers the impact of new motivations and stakeholders based around public benefit. The UK has been at the forefront of archaeological investigation which has long been carried out under two 'pillars': enquiry-led investigation, carried out to advance knowledge; and development-led investigation, carried out to ensure knowledge of threatened sites is preserved for the future. Such investigations have made countless new discoveries and nurtured a very effective profession, but there are causes for concern which today threaten the sustainability of archaeology. However, one source of hope lies in an emerging third 'pillar' of investigation, people-led archaeology, carried out to benefit members of wider society in a range of ways. As evidence for these benefits becomes more scientifically robust and more widely appreciated, this will give archaeology a valued new role that will help sustain it into the future.

**Keywords:** people-led archaeology, participative archaeology, community archaeology, social benefit, health and wellbeing

*L'articolo offre una prospettiva britannica sulle motivazioni e i beneficiari per cui è stata svolta l'archeologia in passato e considera l'impatto di nuove motivazioni e soggetti interessati, sulla base del concetto di public benefit. Il Regno Unito è stato all'avanguardia nelle indagini archeologiche, che per lungo tempo sono state condotte sotto due 'pilastri': le indagini di ricerca, condotte per far progredire la conoscenza, e quelle guidate dallo sviluppo residenziale e infrastrutturale, condotte per garantire che la conoscenza dei siti minacciati sia preservata per il futuro. Queste indagini hanno permesso innumerevoli nuove scoperte e hanno dato vita a una professione molto efficace, ma ci sono cause di preoccupazione che oggi minacciano la sostenibilità dell'archeologia. Tuttavia, una fonte di speranza risiede in un terzo 'pilastro' emergente di indagine: l'archeologia per le persone, condotta a beneficio di membri della società in generale in vari modi. Man mano che le prove di questi benefici diventeranno scientificamente più solide e apprezzate, l'archeologia assumerà un nuovo ruolo di valore che la sosterrà in futuro.*

**Parole chiave:** archeologia guidata dalle persone, archeologia partecipativa, archeologia di comunità, benefici sociali, salute e benessere.

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