

Metadata of the chapter that will be visualized online

Chapter Title	British Pioneers and Fieldwork Traditions	
Copyright Year	2013	
Copyright Holder	Springer Science+Business Media New York	
Corresponding Author	Family Name	Darvill
	Particle	
	Given Name	Timothy
	Suffix	
	Division/Department	School of Applied Sciences
	Organization/University	Bournemouth University
	City	Bournemouth, Dorset
	Country	UK
	Email	tdarvill@bournemouth.ac.uk

1

B

2 **British Pioneers and Fieldwork** 3 **Traditions**

4 Timothy Darvill
5 School of Applied Sciences, Bournemouth
6 University, Bournemouth, Dorset, UK

7 **Introduction**

8 From its antiquarian origins, the development of
9 field method in Britain reflects attempts by
10 archaeologists to balance the merits of survey
11 against excavation, research against rescue, and
12 empiricism against theorized interpretation.
13 While early methods lacked consistency, most
14 were based on a modified form of empiricism
15 known as inductivism: observations in the field
16 gathered together to create interpretative state-
17 ments (Marsden 1983). Richard Colt Hoare
18 (1758–1838), excavator of more than 500 sites
19 in the early 1800s, memorably summed up the
20 position by declaring that “We speak from facts
21 not theory” as the epigraph to *Ancient Wiltshire*
22 published between 1812 and 1820. Importantly, a
23 community of practice emerged to foster a
24 network of amenity societies.

25 **Key Issues/Current Debates/Future** 26 **Directions/Examples**

27 The late nineteenth century was a watershed in
28 the development of archaeological fieldwork.

Positivism strengthened as the preferred philoso- 29
phy, suiting archaeology well by perpetuating 30
distinctions between *facts* as things that could 31
be observed and *laws* or *interpretations* as state- 32
ments making sense of the facts. Maintaining the 33
integrity of the facts therefore became important, 34
and one of the main steps toward achieving this 35
involved structuring investigation methods and 36
recording systems. Leading this field was General 37
Pitt Rivers (1827–1900) whose interests in social 38
evolution carried through to developing a method 39
of excavation that charted sequences of activity at 40
particular sites. In practice, this meant recording 41
every object so it could be replaced accurately in 42
its findspot through the use of plans and section 43
drawings – essentially three-dimensional record- 44
ing of finds. A generation later, Mortimer 45
Wheeler (1890–1976) added the need to record 46
strata (every layer) three dimensionally as well. 47
To achieve this, he developed an excavation 48
method that still bears his name – the Wheeler 49
system – in which the area of investigation was 50
divided into squares with balks between. Each 51
square was separately excavated, and the plans 52
and four sections of each carefully drawn 53
(Wheeler 1954). 54

Continental methods of *open-area excavation* 55
were meanwhile imported into Britain, notably 56
by Gerhard Bersu (1889–1964) at Little Wood- 57
bury, Wiltshire, in 1938–1939. This approach to 58
excavation and recording had far-reaching con- 59
sequences after the Second World War, but even 60
during the war, a small team of archaeologists led 61
by W.F. Grimes (1905–1988) recorded sites in 62

63 this way before they were destroyed by the con- 111
64 struction of military installations. Noteworthy 112
65 was Grimes' rigorous open-plan excavation of 113
66 the Burn Ground long barrow, Gloucestershire, 114
67 in 1940–1941, where he planned every stone in 115
68 the mound. After the war, rebuilding programs 116
69 coupled with industrial expansion, agricultural 117
70 extensification, urban regeneration, and infra- 118
71 structure renewal created many opportunities for 119
72 archaeological investigation. Subsequent 120
73 changes in methodology can be gauged 121
74 from five successive textbooks on the subject by 122
75 Richard Atkinson (1946), John Coles (1972), 123
76 Philip Barker (1977), Ian Hodder (1999), Steve 124
77 Roskams (2001), and Martin Carver (2009). 125

78 Operationally, work has expanded into hith- 126
79 erto under-investigated environments such as 127
80 occupied towns, wetlands, uplands, agricultural 128
81 land, and coastlands, often with rich rewards. 129
82 Practically, there was much experimentation 130
83 with the shape and size of excavation trenches, 131
84 including uses of quadrant methods, *planum* sys- 132
85 tems, and large-scale open-area excavation taken 133
86 from continental innovations. However, in Brit- 134
87 ain, attention remained focused on the removal of 135
88 individual layers or *contexts* as they became 136
89 widely known, in the reverse stratigraphic order 137
90 to deposition. Teasing apart complicated 138
91 sequences, finding natural construction or ero- 139
92 sional surfaces, positive and negative features, 140
93 deposits, and cuts became a technical as well as 141
94 an intellectual challenge. Finds were associated 142
95 with contexts as the basic unit of recovery, and 143
96 the application of archaeological site science pro- 144
97 moted systematic sampling for ecofacts and arti- 145
98 facts down to microscopic levels as well as the 146
99 recovery of environmental indicators and chemi- 147
100 cal characterization. 148

101 In field survey, the tradition based on the idea 149
102 of cultural property and monuments promoted by 150
103 Pitt Rivers was continued for much of the twen- 151
104 tieth century by government-sponsored *Royal* 152
105 *Commissions* which had the remit of recording 153
106 everything visible on the surface (Crawford 154
107 1960). Aerial photography was adopted for 155
108 archaeology immediately after World War 1 and 156
109 exported to the countries of the then British 157
110 Empire. The postwar period saw the development 158

of *landscape archaeology*, a set of more sophis- 111
112 ticated and analytical approaches that focused on 112
113 wide geographical areas and assumed that the 113
114 land was regularly overwritten by successive 114
115 generations to form a *palimpsest* (Darvill 2001). 115
116 Aerial photography, remote sensing, ground sur- 116
117 veys, place-name studies, and past cartography 117
118 were among the many primary sources used to 118
119 create landscape regression models – snapshots 119
120 of a landscape as it might have been at 120
121 a particular period. Uniquely, in England, where 121
122 treasure hunting on private property remains 122
123 legal, a new voluntary scheme has encouraged 123
124 the reporting of objects found by metal 124
125 detectorists. The *Portable Antiquities Scheme* 125
126 has produced an immense harvest of reported 126
127 finds, creating a rich geographical database of 127
128 dated artifacts, the majority of metal. 128

129 From the 1960s, representatives from 129
130 museums, universities, local and national archae- 130
131 ological societies, local authorities, and the gov- 131
132 ernment agencies began working together to meet 132
133 the needs of *rescue archaeology* in their locality. 133
134 While the rescue of archaeological sites in Britain 134
135 is not obligated by law, in 1990, its justification 135
136 was embedded in Planning Policy Guidance Note 136
137 16 (=PPG16 *Archaeology and Planning*) for 137
138 England, with similar statements for other parts 138
139 of Britain, and these have remained the basis for 139
140 the funding of archaeological intervention by the 140
141 private sector. In excess of 4,800 investigations 141
142 a year were being undertaken in England alone by 142
143 the year 2000. This has coincided with 143
144 a revolution in IT, resulting in innovative 144
145 approaches to on-site data capture and the subse- 145
146 quent production and processing of plans, sec- 146
147 tions, photographs, and descriptive records. 147
148 Compiled in *client reports*, these are presented 148
149 to the commercial sponsors of the work in fulfill- 149
150 ment of contract. 150

151 More than 95 % of archaeological fieldwork in 151
152 Britain is now prompted by planned commercial 152
153 development. It comprises predetermination 153
154 work such as desk-based assessments, field eval- 154
155 uations, and environmental impact assessments, 155
156 and post-determination work that focuses on mit- 156
157 igating impact, implementing conservation mea- 157
158 sures, recording buildings, and investigating 158

159 deposits faced with destruction through a range of
 160 techniques that include both trenching and open-
 161 area excavation. Conceptually, the *archaeologi-*
 162 *cal resource* of the 1970s and 1980s, *heritage* as
 163 it was called in the 1990s, has now been redefined
 164 as *historic environment assets*. Large-scale pro-
 165 jects remain common, including, for example, the
 166 high-speed railway line from London to the
 167 Channel Tunnel and Terminal 5 at London's
 168 Heathrow Airport. But size is less important
 169 than quality. Since revisions to the planning sys-
 170 tem in 2010 and the gathering strength of *local-*
 171 *ism* as a political philosophy, integrating
 172 archaeology with local communities and using
 173 the knowledge generated to create public value
 174 have taken center stage.

175 Economic instability and the global recession
 176 are having an effect on archaeological fieldwork
 177 traditions in Britain at the time of writing (early
 178 2012). The profession has already scaled back,
 179 and more cuts are anticipated in order to meet
 180 lower demand for archaeological services
 181 (Aitchison 2010). On the brighter side, current
 182 conditions allow the chance to take stock of
 183 achievements over the past 20 years: to rebalance
 184 the scope and aims of fieldwork, reconcile posi-
 185 tivist and relativist approaches under the rubrics
 186 of creative science and community engagement,
 187 promote academic recognition and definitions of
 188 the discipline, and integrate opportunities offered
 189 by development-driven research with the power
 190 of problem-orientated research – in fact,
 191 a twenty-first-century version of the agenda
 192 faced 300 years ago by the founders of Britain's
 193 fieldwork traditions.

Cross-References

194

- ▶ [Archaeological Record](#) 195
- ▶ [Excavation Methods in Archaeology](#) 196
- ▶ [Landscape Archaeology](#) 197

References

198

AITCHISON, K. 2010. United Kingdom archaeology in eco- 199
 nomic crisis, in N. Schlanger & K. Aitchison (ed.) 200
Archaeology and the global economic crisis. Multiple 201
impacts and possible solutions: 25–30. Tervuren: Cul- 202
 ture Lab Editions. Available at: [http://ace-archaeol-](http://ace-archaeology.eu/fichiers/25Archaeology-and-the-crisis.pdf) 203
[ogy.eu/fichiers/25Archaeology-and-the-crisis.pdf](http://ace-archaeology.eu/fichiers/25Archaeology-and-the-crisis.pdf) 204
 (accessed 10 January 2012). 205

ATKINSON, R.J.C. 1946. *Field archaeology.* London: 206
 Methuen. 207

BARKER, P. 1977. *Techniques of archaeological excava-* 208
tion. London: Batsford. 209

CARVER, M. 2009. *Archaeological investigation.* London: 210
 Routledge. 211

COLES, J. 1972. *Field archaeology.* London: Methuen. 212

CRAWFORD, O.G.S. 1960. *Archaeology in the field.* 213
 London: Phoenix. 214

DARVILL, T. 2001. Traditions of landscape archaeology in 215
 Britain: issues of time and scale, in T. Darvill & M. 216
 Gojda (ed.) *One land, many landscapes. Papers from* 217
a session held at the European Association of Archae- 218
ologists Fifth Annual Meeting in Bournemouth 1999: 219
 33–46 (BAR International series 987). Oxford. 220
 Archaeopress. 221

HODDER, I. 1999. *The archaeological process. An intro-* 222
duction. Oxford: Blackwell. 223

MARSDEN, B. 1983. *Pioneers of prehistory. Leaders and* 224
landmarks in English archaeology (1500–1900). 225
 Ormskirk: Hesketh. 226

ROSKAMS, S. 2001. *Excavation.* Cambridge: Cambridge 227
 University Press Manuals in Archaeology. 228

WHEELER, M. 1954. *Archaeology from the earth.* Oxford: 229
 Clarendon Press. 230