

FUTURES FOR GLOUCESTERSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGY¹

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First and foremost ladies and gentlemen, we must start by saying congratulations to Gloucestershire Archaeology, and its predecessor GADARG, on fifty years of successfully undertaking and promoting archaeological work in the lower Severn Valley and adjacent areas of the Cotswolds and Forest of Dean. A golden anniversary is something to be immensely proud of, and today we recognize the enthusiasm, dedication, and hard work of numerous officers, members, and supporters over many years.

Our group was formerly inaugurated on the 21 March 1967, a day laced with several other interesting events. A military coup unfolded in Sierra Leone, and in Britain many people were worried about the environmental effects arising from the grounding of the super-tanker Torrey Canyon off the Scilly Isles on 18 March. But 1967 was not just the year of launching GADARG and walking the M5 corridor to record the rich archaeology of a previously poorly understood landscape; it was the summer of love! The Beatles released their much acclaimed album *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* in June, and Pink Floyd released *The Piper at the Gates of Dawn* in August. I was aged 10 at the time, but already interested in archaeology and received my first 'thanks but no thanks' response to a job application soon after when I applied to join the Leckhampton Hill excavations in 1969. I joined GADARG in 1972, and vividly remember the first lecture I attended in the Old Bakery behind Cheltenham Museum; an account by Alan Hunt of his excavation of a medieval moated manor at Much Marcle, Herefordshire.

But this is not a history lesson, nor a trip down memory lane. For this, Nigel Spry has produced a splendid account of the group's history, personalities, and work that everyone needs to read.² Rather, my task this evening is to look forward, to think about the future of Gloucestershire Archaeology; about archaeology in the county and the work of our group. It's a tall order, and I don't have a crystal ball to help with the task. But that won't stop a little speculation.

As a starting point we should perhaps remind ourselves that the study and appreciation of archaeology and heritage contributes to what philosophers call the common good – the idea that what we do makes the world a happier and better place to live. Archaeology can and does contribute to

a sense of well-being, and when we look forward we must ask what exactly can we, or should we, contribute to that common good?

Luckily, most of those interested in archaeology and the cultural heritage are public-spirited individuals and embrace the idea that public benefit justifies their efforts. Archaeologists are good people, and the perspectives we offer should help us all understand the world a little more and make it a better place in which to live. And if we are doing our job properly we should be grounding our arguments in the truly great material that is all around us. In Gloucestershire we are especially lucky, the envy of many, because our landscapes contain some of the most amazing archaeology in northwest Europe. We have occupied caves from the Palaeolithic in the Forest of Dean, and flint scatters representing Mesolithic camps right across our area. The Neolithic barrows and enclosures on the Cotswolds show that these were amongst the most densely settled lands on the Atlantic Seaboard when farming first came to the region. Our Bronze Age barrows and barrow cemeteries illustrate the continuing importance of the area, and our Iron Age hillforts and settlements are amongst the very best in Britain. Roman villas in the Cotswolds and beyond show a scale and wealth rarely seen outside the heartlands of the Empire, and we have two major cities and several small-towns on our doorstep too. Saxon churches with their exquisite sculpture survive well and some are still used, while our medieval towns and villages are icons of the British countryside and highly desirable places to live and work. And nor should we forget our rich industrial heritage of mills, factories, quarries, mines, and farming infrastructure that is all around. We are so lucky here in Gloucestershire and we need to count our blessings now and again.

Faced with the familiar it is tempting we think we know about it: but do we really? We tend to tell the same old stories about it despite rapidly changing interpretations and revised understandings. We often try to fit new information into old narratives. I'm thinking here very much about insights from the hundreds of development-led investigations over recent years; the rich harvest of new information from the national mapping programme; and the results from an increasing number of extensive geophysical surveys. There is so much new information that it is

sometimes hard to know where to start, and in many cases we simply don't know what some of it means, what its cultural context is, or even what date it is.

It's not a new problem, but perhaps there are new solutions. The world changes, and archaeology changes with it at such a pace that it's hard to stay on top. Fifty years ago, when GADARG was formed, we were at the end of the post-war period of reconstructionism. 'Rescue Archaeology' was the norm, it was the banner behind which we formed up and championed our interest in the past. We were re-active in the sense that we fought against actions that threaten the remains of the past, and jumped into holes to quite literally 'rescue' what we could when the battle was lost. By the 1970s monetarism had become the prevailing political philosophy and through the 1980s archaeology was seen as a resource that had to be preserved and conserved at all costs. Too much had been lost already we argued; don't touch the past, just admire it. We packaged the past and commodify it, slowly becoming pro-active by influencing the decision-making processes to save our precious remains.

But the game moved on. By the mid-1990s 'instrumentalist' was the underlying philosophy and heritage become a tool to promote social cohesion, increase knowledge of the past, and provide context and identity. The past was seen as an 'asset', and that meant engaging professional people to manage it and exploit it. Locking the conservation and management of archaeological remains into the top-down, government-driven, town and country planning system of the time detached decision-making from local communities and, not surprisingly, meant that many archaeological enthusiasts felt disengaged and marginalized.

It was a heady mix, but after the turn of the millennium times changed again and 'localism' appeared as a new and potentially interesting political philosophy, soon finding its way into law through the *Localism Act 2011*. Importantly, this new way of thinking dismantled much of the overbearing centralized control of planning that was embodied in such documents as the Regional Planning Strategies, and replaced it with opportunities for local communities to get involved in ways that have many implications for archaeology and heritage. It is this sea-change in thinking that provides, as I see it, exciting new pathways for the future of Gloucestershire Archaeology and Gloucestershire's archaeology over the next few years. Two areas in particular deserve attention this evening.

First is advocacy and engagement. At a structural level localism shifts the focus of planning and decision-making from a regional to a local level, and in doing so provides a number of new tools. Changes to the

jurisdiction and roles of local authorities are under review, with the likelihood that more areas will enjoy single-tier arrangements such as unitary authorities in the near future. Just as the archaeological world was successful in getting an archaeological presence into the county councils during the 1980s, the task now is to ensure an appropriate presence in the emerging authorities relevant to the twenty-first century. One of the key tools that these new arrangements will be supporting are Neighbourhood Plans that allow individual communities to say what's important by directly addressing the development and use of land in their area.³ Such plans give communities direct power to develop a shared vision for their neighbourhood and to shape the development and growth of their local area. They can be created by a parish or town council, a neighbourhood forum, or a community organization, but require support from a local referendum to be approved.

Nationally, more than 500 Neighbourhood Plans are in preparation or have already been approved; estimates suggest that there could be several thousand by the end of the process. Around 30 seem to be under development in Gloucestershire, but so far as I can see only the Highnam Plan has been adopted after being backed at referendum in November 2016. Importantly, Neighbourhood Plans can cover archaeological matters, including for example where finds are deposited, how local communities can engage in the investigation of sites, where assessment and evaluation is essential and where it is unnecessary, and which heritage assets the community most values. There are some excellent plans with strong heritage policies already approved that can provide models for the future, including for example the Birdham Parish Neighbourhood Plan for an area of Chichester District in West Sussex.⁴ So one opportunity in front of us now is to engage, both as a group and as individuals, with the on-going process of plan-making.

Second is participation, investigation, and enjoyment. At an operational level, localism puts the focus back on local sites, landscapes, and communities. It takes us back to the idea that we would like to know more about our heritage. We need to make sense of the accumulating record of our past that I have already touched on. We need to do more to find out about the past, and we should not be ashamed of acknowledging the enjoyment that comes from the process of investigation as well as from learning about the results. We need to be curious! Conservation is important, but if we don't investigate we don't learn. Finding appropriate ways of investigating sites is therefore crucial, and the survey work already started by Gloucestershire Archaeology is a platform that can be built upon.

Partnerships are one way forward, perhaps with universities and commercial companies for example, facilitated through greater access to the Heritage Lottery Fund that has supported just such initiatives by helping local societies buy-in specialist help. Bottom-up initiatives are the future. This is already evident in the community archaeology undertaken on the Greyfriars/Gloscat site in Gloucester that Gloucestershire Archaeology has been involved with in partnership with Cotswold Archaeology. This came about because the planning system provided for it by including community participation within the development management process. In some senses it was a one-off, but there is no reason why the principle represented here could not be embedded in a relevant Neighbourhood Plan so that all future development-led archaeology in the city (and elsewhere) included a community dimension.

So, as we look forward, there is much to be done. Lots of familiar things need to carry on – lectures, surveys, publications, events, and so on – for these are the bedrock. But the context, focus, and content might change. What should we do with all that information from mapping and survey? How can we find out what it's all about? What date are the recorded features? And what are they? In trying to answer these questions we must not be shy in throwing off traditional classifications and typologies; new interpretations come from new ways of thinking that in turn demand new categories of thought.

The trick in looking forward is to follow the thinking. Forget rescue archaeology, forget monetarist approaches to resource control, and forget instrumentalist notions of realising value; think instead of localism and the opportunities it brings for new ways of doing things. Localism focuses on exactly what we are interested in through archaeology, and it opens up the stage for some exciting and worthwhile investigations that work for the social good, improve well-being, and extend knowledge. There is so much archaeology out there and so much still to be investigated that we need to get going.

For the long term we must watch for what comes next in the post-Brexit world now being fashioned and negotiated. But right here, right now, let's celebrate fifty years of work well done, and look forward to the next fifty and the exciting discoveries that it will surely bring!

Notes

- 1 This text is a tidied and slightly expanded version of a presentation given at a dinner held at the Hatton Court Hotel, Upton St Leonards, Gloucestershire, on 18 March 2017 to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the foundation of GADARG and its successor Gloucestershire Archaeology.
- 2 Spry, N., 'The first fifty one years of Glosarch', *Glevensis* **49** (2016), 23–34.
- 3 Full details of Neighbourhood Planning can be found on the government website at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/neighbourhood-planning—2> but also useful is the Royal Town Planning Institutes introduction at: <http://www.rtpi.org.uk/planning-aid/neighbourhood-planning/what-is-neighbourhood-planning/>.
- 4 The plan, covering the period 2014-2029 is available online at: <http://www.chichester.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=23102&p=0>

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