Community Archaeology in Leicestershire: The Wider View, Beyond The Boundaries.

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The Leicestershire Achievement

My aim in this contribution is to place community archaeology in Leicestershire into a wider context. I realise that much of this volume is concerned with analysing and describing the results from twenty-five years of endeavour. Peter Liddle deals with the origins and early history of development of the project in a subsequent chapter and I shall attempt not to stray into that area. At the outset it is important for me to remind the reader that much, if not all, of what follows in the meat of this volume is the result of dedicated work by part-timers, or amateurs if you will. There will be countless unsung contributors to this volume who over the years have given long and faithful support. Some will have given service by tramping across the fields for years recovering sherds and flints, all of which have helped to develop a clearer picture of Leicestershire's rich archaeology. Those who are not aware of the achievements of those workers cannot fail to be impressed by the results contained within this volume, many of which draw upon the results of years of endeavour.

For those readers who are not familiar with the activity of Community Archaeology, I want to describe how I first came upon the remarkable developments in Leicestershire. I arrived in Leicestershire in 1984, as Deputy Director of the countywide Museums, Arts and Records Service. That Service, a result of the 1974 reorganisation of local government was one of the few integrated countywide museum services in the country. It may not have been generously funded, but it had as wide a range of core specialisms as any museum service in the country. One of its core areas of activity was in the field of archaeology, and it is worth remembering that in terms of numbers of staff and expertise it was in many ways the envy of the country, at least in archaeological circles. There was an Archaeology Section, based at the Jewry Wall Museum and an Archaeological Unit based at Humberstone Drive. The former grouping included a field survey section responsible for planning advice and also for community archaeology.

This relative abundance of archaeologists surprised me, especially as I had never thought the East Midlands, and Leicestershire, as particularly rich in archaeology, unless one was a mediaevalist. Compared with Hampshire or much of Wessex or Yorkshire where I had done much of my early fieldwork, it did not rate as a key area for much of prehistory at any rate! Of course, one of the reasons it appeared so uninteresting was because there had not been enough information available from the survey work that had continued apace since the 1970s. There were, however, some clear published summaries available on what had been known at the start of this period (Liddle 1982a, 1982b; Leicestershire Industrial History Society, 1983).

Within the archaeological activities in Leicestershire what caught my attention was Peter Liddle and his Community Archaeology programme. I have always been committed to fieldwalking (I think that I was first confronted by a field in the Yorkshire Wolds at the age of eleven - it was at least in well drained fields on the chalk - rather than one of those clayey, claggy Leicestershire fields!). Fieldwalking combined with an eye for landscape seems to me still essential as a prerequisite for any serious archaeological activity. I worked in Hampshire during the 1970s and persuaded school students and the members of adult education classes to participate in occasional projects, and even helped to produce a little booklet on fieldwalking (Fasham et al. 1981). I had thus also grown up in a tradition of weekend working with amateur or rather part time workers in the field.

None of this background equipped me for what I found in Leicestershire. There was a comprehensive guide to the effectiveness of fieldwalking specifically aimed at engaging the public - *Community Archaeology* (Liddle 1985), and a programme to collect and recover information on a scale that I had never envisaged. I may have suggested schemes for regional fieldwalking surveys on a sampling basis in southern England a few years earlier (Schadla-Hall and Shennan 1978), and I was familiar with the East Hampshire survey work that was being undertaken at the time using a mixture of professionals, students and part timers (Shennan 1985), but Leicestershire was on a different scale.

I have always believed that archaeology is about people and the public, but I felt that the struggle to persuade people that this was the case was a huge and possibly insurmountable one. My experience of long term field work was reduced to going round in Hampshire and explaining that fieldwalking was cheaper than golf, used the brain, and involved meeting a better class of person in a field than one ever would on a golf course! By way of contrast, Peter Liddle already had a network of groups operating semi-dependently, with training available over the whole of the county. The members of this growing organisation were recording finds and building up a wealth of information, at low cost, and for their own enjoyment.

So coming to Leicestershire was for me a revelation. Here I found already developed, and almost unsung outside the county's borders, an operation that engaged people in their past, gave the thrill of discovery and the chance to analyse and understand the fragments of the past that are all around us. I suppose that back in the 1970s we were all privileged to be in archaeology, the idea of a wider public enthusing about *Time Team*, as it does today, seemed remote. Even more remote was the idea of hundreds of people walking across landscapes, and collecting information in their spare time ... but here it was in Leicestershire actually happening under the guise of community archaeology.

Fieldwalking remains a labour intensive activity that can only take place at certain times of the year, and is arguably one that is still neglected by professional archaeologists except as a short-term activity. There still remain far too few facilities or chances for part-time archaeologists to engage in this pursuit for knowledge. One recent work (Parker-Pearson and Schadla-Hall 1994) contained the results from twelve fieldwalking projects in Eastern England, but only two were based on the work of local and interested part timers, and one of these was from Leicestershire (Liddle 1994). The rest were contributions from full time archaeologists or archaeology students.

I want to draw attention to one other success story at this point that stems directly from the original success of the Community Archaeology scheme, not only because it is a success but also because it highlights a principle that I want to touch on later, of involvement in archaeology. In 1996, the then Leicestershire Museums Arts and Records Service launched the Leicestershire Archaeological Network. This was based on the success of the community archaeology scheme as well as on the fact that there are a large number of parishes in Leicestershire and what is now, again, Rutland. The results of the twenty years of development of the Community archaeology scheme meant that many parishes - particularly those round the Medbourne area were already familiar with archaeology. At the same time, the increasing importance of examining planning applications as a result of PPG 16 (Policy Planning Guideline 16, see Cookson 2000 for details), as well as the increasing numbers of applications meant that it was not always possible for the service staff to know about what was going on. It seemed a logical extension of what had already been accomplished to persuade individual parish councils to appoint archaeological wardens in each parish.

The scheme, which also provides training, has been a great success and now about 60% of the parishes in Rutland and Leicestershire have parish wardens (Liddle *pers. comm.*). These wardens act as the eyes and ears of the archaeologists, not only in terms of the discovery of new information, but also by looking at and where necessary taking action in relation to development. They are also able to provide information to the inhabitants of the parish about the archaeology on their doorsteps. All the wardens are issued with their own sites and monuments information that is copied from the existing SMR information. This development seems to me to be sensible - it promotes a public understanding of the past

and at the same time allows people who are local to take a stake in their own immediate landscape. However, I well remember being questioned by an archaeological colleague (and non-Leicestershire resident) who first of all thought that the real SMR was being given to the wardens, rather than copies, and secondly questioned whether non-professional archaeologists should be given access to so much information! Needless to say I was amazed by this attitude and told him so. Personally I see no reason why information about archaeology should not always be made widely available, and I believe that as archaeology is a public activity and that local people are the best defenders of their own past as represented by the archaeology of their local landscapes. This is a theme that I shall return to later.

The Idea of Community Archaeology

I now want to turn to the concept of community archaeology and make a few observations about definition, as well as reasons for and purpose of the activity, before looking at its development in a wider sphere. Where does the term come from? I have frequently claimed that Liddle was the first person to use it, but I should be grateful to anyone if they know of an earlier reference to the term, or indeed when it was first used in print. We all know that words are widely open to abuse through interpretation. In fact, the term 'community', currently used to cover a variety of sins, is extremely fashionable in political quarters and is arguably one of the most overused and consequently devalued terms in existence. Nevertheless, it has a real ring to it - it attempts to make a link with the past from which we as individuals have become increasingly disconnected. The current government has been concerned to recreate ideas of community. So far English Heritage (2000) has only managed to talk about urban areas and communities (no doubt it will sooner or later realise that there is another world out there called the countryside). I still believe that what was and is happening in Leicestershire is so far in advance of the rest of the country that people are only just beginning to realise the full potential of the activity.

Let me briefly try to place this development in a countrywide context and throw in a few points. Community archaeology emerges in the 1970s, but what was happening in the rest of archaeology? The 1970s were heady days for archaeology. Rescue was changing the urgency with which central government was approaching archaeology, the units were being established and there was a burgeoning of university departments undertaking archaeology as a degree level course. Much of the expansion in activity took place because of the belated recognition that, as the country's economy had begun to expand from the late 1950s onwards, huge areas of archaeological interest had been destroyed in our towns and cities without any record being made. Much of the expansion took place at local authority level, but was underwritten by the efforts of the

DOE (Department of the Environment) through the DAMHB (Directorate of Ancient Monuments and Historic Buildings), now known as English Heritage (more correctly, The Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission). There was a move towards increasing professionalism. During the immediate post-war period, there was no great interest in the nation's past as it struggled to shake off the damage of the war, but this was changing in the 1960s and 1970s.

The days of the amateur involvement were reaching their end. I have no intention of offering a history of local archaeological societies 1850-1960 and there are plenty of sources for doing that anyway (e.g. Ebbatson 1994; Manley 1999), but both nationally and at a local level, with a few honourable exceptions, the power and activity of local societies was waning. Many of the county archaeological societies had ceased to be active in the field, the relatively wealthy who had treated archaeology as a part time antiquarian pursuit did so no longer although how far this characterisation of a small group of wealthy middle class people really represents the constituency is open to debate, (Aitchison 2001). It is possible to discern a change in the social composition of at least some archaeological societies between 1850 and 1960 (Ebbatson 1999), but it also interesting to note that in most, but not all cases the total membership of archaeological societies at both a national and county level went in to a clear decline in post war Britain.

Thus the 1970s saw a clear increase in archaeological activity at a time when the public interest was not particularly high, and at a time when the state was expanding its activities.

What the 1970s did not see was a move towards greater public involvement in a majority of cases. Whereas the museum geography of pre-war and wartime Britain is littered with isolated examples of archaeology being developed, nurtured and maintained by a local museum curator with an interest in archaeology and a desire to reach and educate the public, this tradition (to a large extent) died after the war. This decline may have been to do with the decline in quality of the museum profession or indeed the originality of museum workers or indeed the increasing professionalisation of museum workers. At the same time there has been a general move to eschew part-timers as diggers on archaeological sites, partly as a result of the increasing professionalisation of archaeology. The development of PPG 16 together with the growth of the contracting culture has made archaeology part of a process of planning and development rather than an academic and enquiring activity.

It may seem strange in retrospect that archaeology became increasingly a part of the state apparatus during this period, especially as it was in 1974, and in another country, that *Public Archaeology* was published (McGimsey 1974). Although it was American, this book had a profound effect on me because in it McGimsey set out the need to care for and protect the archaeology of the USA from destruction (Schadla-Hall 1975). He saw two clear planks for saving what he saw to be a disastrous situation - new laws and the involvement of the public to achieve this end. Nevertheless, in the UK in the 1970s it was not the public that was mobilised but the professional archaeologist.

One of the few, if not the only place in the UK where archaeologists continued to develop archaeology as a participatory public activity is Leicestershire, where Peter Liddle started his community archaeology. Now I do not believe for one moment that he took all that I (with the advantage of hindsight) have said here into consideration. But I believe that this is the only scheme dating from the expansion of archaeological activity in the 1970s that attempted to take a public view. I am confident that there is no scheme in the country that has involved so many people for so long in the practice and process of archaeology.

The fact is that archaeology – all archaeology - is about the accumulation of information and its analysis, which in turn will hopefully illuminate the past. That process has become increasingly expensive and time consuming. It has also fallen increasingly into the hands of professional archaeologists with, post-PPG 16, an agenda that does not always take the public and the public interest, into account (Aitchison 2001, 5; Schadla-Hall 2001, 33).

At this stage I want to deal with whether or not archaeology is something that anyone can be involved in. I shall return to this theme later. I want to remind readers first that archaeology is about the discovery of the past of all of us, and secondly that it is an inexact science, open to interpretation, manipulation, and different value systems. Anyone who watched the Time Team programme on Seahenge (2000), or who followed the controversy (see for example Champion 2000) will be well aware of the tensions that can exist between the different interests/stakeholders in local archaeology. Even in the archaeological world where we, the professional archaeologists, discuss what the public need and deserve, we do not always discuss the need for active participation; indeed Skeates (2000, 109-18) manages to discuss 'Experiencing the Archaeological Heritage' without once mentioning the need to actively participate, or the existence of community archaeology!

The Growth of Interest in Archaeology

No one today can be unaware of the popularity of such television programmes as *Time Team*, and *Meet the Ancestors* or indeed *Discovery* and *National Geographic* channels, which show a large number of archaeology related programmes. With viewing figures of over 4 millions and a series of publications on making the programmes, as well as the participants (for example, Taylor 1998; Aston 2000), this success and interest in archaeology took everyone by surprise initially. The number of programmes on archaeology-related topics has rarely dropped below three a week in recent years (*per comm.* Rebecca Wilcox). Indeed, like gardening

programmes it appears that archaeology has become one of the things to watch and discuss. Sadly I do not know of any longitudinal research on the effects of this upsurge of interest, although I do know that the *Time Team* club already has a bigger individual membership than the CBA, which aims to represent the interests of British archaeology. I am not sure how one would measure the effectiveness of *Time Team* and similar programmes in terms of their impact on British archaeology, but it is difficult not to conclude that there must be an increasing interest in archaeology and the process of archaeology.

Personally I do not believe that this upsurge of interest is solely because of the presence of Tony Robinson. I do not intend to look at this phenomenon in detail, but I would venture to suggest that the appeal of these programmes to viewers rests on the appeal of archaeology itself - it is about us, and the fact that it involves discovery and also a fair degree of logical analysis. In the context of being about us, it is interesting to note that the only blip in the steadily rising viewer figures was when the programme went abroad (Swain per. comm.). I would suggest that many of the viewers of Time Team are primarily interested in their own past, but in the absence of clear evidence, I accept that I may be wrong. Similarly, I suggest that an interest in our own past is what, to some degree, and without detracting from the personnel involved, makes community archaeology so successful. I also believe that by helping and training people to look at landscapes - to look at their feet if you will - we make everyone more at home with their surroundings, creating a sense of place.

Community Archaeology in the Rest of the Country

If community archaeology has been such a good idea and I believe this volume will demonstrate that it is - then you would be right to ask why there is not a countrywide movement. There are other examples of community schemes for archaeology, but as I have noted elsewhere (Schadla-Hall 1999) community archaeology relies on contact and therefore on local commitment to the process and practice of archaeology. That in turn means funding and support from local authorities. The case of Leicestershire shines out in a UK context. One of the distressing features of current trends in local government has been the impact that progressive reductions to local government have had on relatively inexpensive activities such as community archaeology. The recently recognised, but long known about, crisis in museum funding that resulted in the recent report from Re:source (2001, 18-21) has also had an impact on archaeological activity in some areas. It is sobering to reflect that, despite the frequent statements made by both central government and English Heritage about the value of developing public understanding of, and concern for, the historic environment, the recent survey commissioned by English Heritage (English Heritage 2002) made no comment on community archaeology and concentrated

exclusively on archaeology and funding within the planning process. There were no direct references to using the public to aid in the process of either recording or protecting the historic environment.

The funding required to run schemes for public benefit and participation is very small, and the best examples of such activity are all from local museums. However they all too frequently require at least one archaeologist in post to make them work! The example of Harrogate Museum Service where a volunteer group has done an impressive amount of fieldwork with only limited professional assistance is another example of success (Schadla-Hall 1999; Kershaw 1999). Another example where survey and excavation has had a pronounced effect and shows what a local group can achieve, was demonstrated by the development of a scheme in Sandwell, which resulted in the post of the Borough Archaeological officer, threatened with deletion, being retained as a result of community support (Waller 2000). The public pressure came from local people who had been involved in archaeological activity. Andrew Russel (2000) recently described the range of activities that the Community Archaeology Programme in Southampton had achieved despite a low level of funding. In Lincolnshire, the Trust for Lincolnshire Archaeology has three posts described as community archaeologists, who are expected to carry out a wide range of tasks, and critically have a role of developing public participation (Start 1999). What is clear in the case of all these schemes is that they achieve a great deal on very limited resources. These examples are just a few of the many small-scale schemes that do exist and are important, but often lack long term support.

More recently the development of the Portable Antiquities Scheme, that resulted from the requirements of the Treasure Act 1996, has seen an extremely successful programme that has generated a far wider interest in the past than could have been originally envisaged. This programme (see, for example Bland 1999; DCMS; 2000, 2001) was originally developed as a pilot scheme to ensure a network of professional archaeologists covering the whole of England and Wales was available to handle finds that were being made by part time archaeologists, metal detectorists, and members of the public. After a lengthy period of negotiation, this scheme was finally expanded and given a fairly secure future as a result of a Heritage Lottery Fund grant in 2002, which will secure the scheme until March 2006. Before then the future funding of the scheme will have to be reexamined, but it currently represents a nation-wide system and involves a wider non professional archaeological community than any other one in the country. It even has its own web-site (www.finds.org.uk). Nearly 2,000 individuals reported finds in 1999-2000, and with the expansion of the scheme to cover the whole of the country this number will increase considerably in future years. Undoubtedly one of the keys to its success is the fact that the liaison officers for the scheme are based at local level and have spent time going out to talk to and communicate with people at a local level... 'All the activities of the scheme are focused on raising public awareness of the importance of recording finds for the benefit of our archaeological heritage, helping to develop new audiences in the process' (DCMS 2001, 3).

Community Archaeology in the Rest of the World

Elsewhere in Europe the view that archaeology is an activity that should involve the public is not widely held, indeed the reverse seems to be the case. The demise of community interest in the UK has not been as great as that in other parts of Europe. Indeed the whole idea of discovering about the past has been increasingly taken up by the political and bureaucratic process - one of the results has been to move archaeological activity away from a wider public involvement. Today there is considerable debate about the role of archaeology in society - recently when I suggested that there was a place for amateurs in archaeology a Norwegian colleague pointed out that as he wouldn't want me to do brain surgery on him, he would rather use a trained brain surgeon, and he argued by analogy that the same applied to archaeology - he would only want a qualified archaeologist to carry out archaeological work!

There are those in the UK who would disagree with this point of view; recently Faulkner criticised what he called the BPT (the 'bureaucratic professional tendency') in British archaeology, arguing that:

... 'top official archaeologists ...demand that bureaucratically authorised standards should be upheld, a claim to universal and eternal validity for a particular set of procedures.....The effect of this drive towards increasing state regulation of archaeology is twofold. First it empowers a group of top bureaucratic functionaries at the expense of everyone else interested in archaeology..... Secondly, restriction and prescription threaten the scientific integrity of the subject' (Faulkner 2000, 25)

This may seem irrelevant to the fieldwalkers of Leicestershire, and I do not necessarily share all of Faulkner's views but it does raise the issue of whose archaeology? How should it be done and under what auspices? The vast increase in knowledge and activity that has been created in Leicestershire through the community archaeology programme takes place quietly and effectively, as nowhere else in the country, and the only regulation is that provided by the Fieldwork Group. The concerns that Faulkner and others have raised however relate to the point about archaeology as a professional practice (Aitchison 2000), as opposed to a community operation. Faulkner has taken his concerns further arguing in favour of democratic archaeology (Faulkner 2002). Although Leicestershire continues to develop its scheme the point about who does archaeology is unlikely to go away where there is local interest.

This question was at the heart of the recent furore over

the Valletta Convention (Council of Europe 1992), when the British Government proposed ratification of the Convention. The fear that the Convention would spell the end of amateur archaeology was expressed by the Council for Independent Archaeology, and articulated widely through the pages of Current Archaeology by Andrew Selkirk who expressed the fear that, technically at least, there was a possibility that archaeology would be taken entirely from amateur and part time archaeologists, and left as the area exclusively for professional, qualified archaeologists (Current Archaeology 2001). This discussion on the potential impact of the Valetta Convention was magnified by questions in the Houses of Parliament and actually deflected from much of the real importance of the Convention; it finally resulted in a statement on the attitude that would be taken by the UK government in England, Wales and possibly Scotland (but possibly not Northern Ireland (Brian Williams pers. comm.)) as to what constituted a properly qualified archaeologist (Schadla-Hall 2001; House of Commons Library, 2001). As far as I know there were no similar concerns expressed across Europe.

This issue is about whose archaeology is it? And also who is it for? Aitchison's recent analysis of archaeological practice in the England and Wales (Aitchison 2001) studiously and clearly avoided a consideration of the role of non-professional archaeology, examining archaeological practice in terms of The Institute of Archaeologists (IFA) definition. The recent publication by English Heritage, Power of Place (English Heritage 2001), made scant reference to archaeology and, despite the current Government's concern with community involvement made few references to actual public participation, as did the subsequent response by government (DCMS 2001a). Indeed, not even the Portable Antiquities Scheme was referred to in terms of being a community scheme! The role of the community was certainly not envisaged in terms of something like the Leicestershire programme. The development of the All Party Parliamentary Archaeology Group (APPAG), which is at least partly a response to the failure on the part of the current government to promote any sensible and far reaching archaeological legislation (Antiquity 2001), has resulted in the development of a series of enquiries into the current state of archaeology in Britain. It will be interesting to see if this group takes an interest in the development of public archaeology (see www.sal.org.uk/appag)

Further afield, one of the interesting aspects of archaeology in the wider world has been the way in which the subject has become a matter of concern for indigenous peoples. Archaeology has become used, or at least developed, as an area of concern for indigenous people, for example in the USA. The conflict between American Indians and archaeologists has resulted in legislation covering matters of internal repatriation, as well as control of artefacts, and has certainly developed awareness about the value and ownership of the archaeological resource (Watkins 2000). I am not going to suggest that there is a parallel between these developments, which also exist in, for example Australia (*pers. comm.* L. Ormond-Parker), and Leicestershire or the UK! But it is worth noting that archaeology and an understanding of its importance does have a clear significance for many people in the world, and that the significance that is attached to archaeology and the past is often reflected by communities who are anxious to establish their identity and existence. Community archaeology in the broadest sense is more than just recovering and recording artefacts.

Conclusions

But back to the achievements of Leicestershire's community archaeology scheme. It is unique in terms of the UK, and I suspect in terms of the world. I assume that the rest of the archaeological community has failed to recognise the achievement of the work in Leicestershire for two main reasons; first because the work has gone on in a sensible and low key way for 25 years without anyone emphasising just how effective it has been, and because those involved in the work are too busy achieving to boast about it; and second because it is neither spectacular nor appealing to many who would find it hard work to sustain a similar activity for so long. Its value is not in the odd spectacular find, although there have been plenty of these, nor is it in pages of instant media coverage. Instead, it lies in the solid achievement of recovering the story of the communities that comprise Leicestershire's long and rich history. Its value is cumulative and enduring, and it is the product of part time archaeologists working for the pleasure of discovering their past, in conjunction with a handful of full time archaeologists who recognise the value of the achievement.

The whole continuing programme was not set up to counter the 'BPT' (see above), nor was it set up to develop community and access - although it does both! It was set up to harness the interest that all people potentially have in their pasts for inter-generational benefit. What makes it important is that it works, and produces high quality results that are available for all, and that it involves a range of people who develop expertise in many fields that would (should) put many professional archaeologists to shame.

I hope that sooner or later the fact that this work has been carried out by so many for so long, and enriched so many lives, will be more widely recognised. Somehow I doubt it; a recent publication on *Communicating Archaeology* (Beavis and Hunt 1999) failed to make any real reference to community archaeology at all, and as I have already noted neither English Heritage (2001) nor the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS 2001a) managed to make a single reference to the value of community archaeology. The latter omission is the more remarkable when one considers that two key platforms for all government departments relate to access and community! But there again maybe it isn't surprising, as the current preoccupations of most professional archaeologists do not often actually extend to treating the public as partners and key players in their endeavours.

Community archaeology in Leicestershire works; it is very inexpensive in terms of the costs of its results, and the costs of running it, indeed the voluntary fieldworkers themselves defray many of the incidental costs themselves. It is unsung by those outside the County who do not recognise the solid achievements of 25 years of hard and dedicated work, and because it goes on, those inside the county accept it as the norm. Archaeology is a public activity, without public understanding and involvement it has no right to survive or expect support. Community archaeology has worked in Leicestershire as a 'beacon' scheme for 25 years, and hopefully, before another 25 years has passed by its true value will be recognised. If this is not the case, in one sense it does not matter because its true value is in the results that it has and will produce for the understanding of the past story of the county. The people who have made it work have benefited and so will future generations.

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