

Safety on Archaeological Sites

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES are always potentially dangerous places. On some sites the dangers may be obvious while on others less so, but they are always present. Organising an excavation therefore includes a moral and legal¹ responsibility for (a) for the safety of workers on the site, (b) the safety of visitors to the site, and (c) provision in case of accident—first aid, medical liaison and insurance. This article has been prepared in response to public request but can obviously only be a summary. Anyone involved in excavation is advised to have a copy of *Responsibility and Safeguards in Archaeological Excavations* ed. P.J. Fowler, Council for British Archaeology, 112 Kennington Road, SE11 (temporarily out of print) on which this article is based. This article does not, it must be emphasised, carry any legal force, but is designed as an aide-memoire for directors.

Workers on Site

All work involving the use of tools on an outdoor site carries the risk of minor cuts and scratches which can result in infection or tetanus. All helpers should seek medical advice on the need for anti-tetanus injections before commencing work.

All tools used in archaeology can be dangerous when defective or used without due care. Make sure that all tools are serviceable and that any becoming defective are replaced. Make sure that all workers have adequate space and that when two or more are engaged in a single task, there is a clear understanding of who does what.

The risks of tripping, slipping or falling on an archaeological site are great—in fact well over half of all accidents are the results of falls. Keep the site tidy and free of obstacles like loose tools, finds trays, etc, and provide barriers where necessary. Never allow running on the site.

Most sections are potentially dangerous and may need to be shored, stepped or angled out. Basic standards are set out in the Construction Regulations 1961-66. Sections are dangerous when they form sides of a narrow trench, particularly after heavy rain, or if heavy weights (spoil heaps, barrows, machines, etc) are allowed too close to the edge. Safety helmets should be worn on any urban site and other sites if the excavation goes deeper than waist height (say 3½ feet). No one should ever work

1. Under the Occupiers Liability Act 1957, those in charge of an excavation have a duty to care for all "visitors" to the site, e.g. employees, helpers, contractors and visitors, and a limited duty towards tres-

alone on an excavation.

Injuries can occur through the lifting (and dropping) of heavy objects, or through pushing overloaded barrows. Make sure that volunteers work within their own limits and prevent displays of strength. Forbid the throwing of tools or materials of any kind.

If machinery is hired to clear a site, keep all helpers well clear of it and visitors off the site completely. A 'banksman' should always be posted at a safe vantage point to assist the operator and warn off any stray helpers. For technical advice, consult *Earthmoving on Open Archaeological Sites* by Francis Pryor, Nene Valley Archaeological Handbook 1 (1974) price 25p from Mrs C. Macketh, 32 Hall Lane, Werrington, Peterborough.

Proper clothing, especially footwear, is essential for personal safety—make sure that volunteers are suitably clad.

Visitors to the Site

It is important to take reasonable precautions against accidents to third parties, particularly children, who can not always be expected to behave responsibly. Make provision for the control of visitors before they arrive (whether or not you are encouraging them to come). Allow no children on site unless under parental control or in organised parties. Keep dogs off the site completely if possible. Fence the site at night and when it is not being worked, and erect warning notices where risks occur (but still take adequate precautions against those risks). Keep visitors away from the edge of trenches.

First Aid

The provision of first aid is part of the excavator's legal duty to employees, volunteers and visitors. Wherever possible ensure that there is someone trained in First Aid on the site. Basic provision for First Aid has been outlined in an earlier article². Check the First Aid kit regularly and replace items before they are used up. Have a procedure ready for contact with a doctor or hospital in case of emergency. Keep an Accident Book and enter details of all accidents, however trivial they may seem at the time. Ensure that the First Aid kit is always in full view and accessible, rather than, for example, hidden away in the boot of a car.

passers in this respect.

2. B. Robertson, "First Aid," *London Archaeol* 1 no. 9 (1970) 202-3.

Insurance

Every excavation should be covered by insurance. Although insurance can be arranged on an *ad hoc* basis, it is simpler and cheaper to use one of the existing schemes, such as C.B.A.'s national insurance scheme. It is open to all archaeological societies who are members of the Council or of its Regional Groups. (Similar schemes are also run by some county societies). Briefly, it provides for:—

(i) third party liability insurance cover of £100,000 for any one incident (e.g. when someone hits you with a pick)

(ii) personal accident insurance (e.g. when you put a pick through yourself)—£1,000 for death, loss of two limbs, loss of sight of two eyes, PTD³. £500 for

3. Permanent Total Disablement—means lasting 12 calendar months and at the expiry of that period being beyond hope of improvement; total disablement means disablement which entirely prevents the assured from attending to his business or occupation or if he has no business or occupation from attending to his usual duties.

4. Temporary Total Disablement—limited to 48 weeks.

loss of one limb, loss of sight of one eye, TTD⁴ excess of four weeks at £5 per week up to 48 weeks.

(iii) additional personal cover is available to the individual upon payment of an extra premium (£2.50 for a named worker doing part-time work and not more than 10 weeks excavation work for his society in anyone year, or £5 for longer periods and/or full-time work). This premium quintuples the capital amounts mentioned in (ii) above and trebles the weekly payment.

For persons under 16 years of age the death benefit is limited to £250 and all temporary disablement benefits are excluded.

Exclusions:

1. War. 2. Nuclear. 3. Flying.
4. Any claim outside Great Britain
5. Underwater work, tunnelling, pot-holing and work in subterranean caves.

Societies may find it useful (psychologically rather than legally) to give anyone coming on the site the following handout and to ask volunteers to sign a form along the following lines:

1. Wear the correct clothing:
 - (a) in the majority of conditions strong footwear is necessary, but absolutely essential on a site strewn with demolition material where, for example, a nail through a plank will pierce plimsolls or everyday shoes with ease—which could lead to a case of lockjaw!
 - (b) women should wear trousers—in deep trenches and rubble conditions skirts are very dangerous.
 - (c) use kneelers when trowelling—the gay, young and healthy often disregard their use, but this is one of the quickest ways of contracting rheumatism!
 - (d) rainproof clothing should always be taken on site—anoraks, etc should be properly waterproof.
 - (e) wear a safety helmet in any deep trench, i.e. when the position of your head is lower than the ground surface, unless the trench is a very wide one and you are nowhere near a section.
2. General Points:
 - (a) you are advised to have anti-tetanus injections.
 - (b) find out where the First Aid kit is kept—not only for your own sake, but for others as well.
 - (c) keep well clear of deep trench edges and of machines working on site.
 - (d) do not lark about or throw equipment (or stones) on site.
 - (e) keep well clear of anyone using a pick or sledgehammer.
 - (f) never work in a deep trench or an isolated one by yourself.
 - (g) never run on a site.
 - (h) find out the details of the insurance policy covering the site—accident do sometimes happen!
 - (i) above all, use your common sense.

“I agree that I am taking part on the excavation as a volunteer and at my own risk. I will not hold the staff, or the Society/Committee responsible for any damage or injury which I may suffer directly or indirectly from my presence or activities on the site. I also agree that all material excavated from the site is subject to such arrangements as have been agreed between those responsible for the excavation and the landowner and that none of it will in any circumstances be claimed as my personal property, secreted or removed from the site without permission.”