

THOUGHTS FROM A CORNER OF SWEDEN: IF THE UK LEAVES EUROPE, WHERE DOES THAT LEAVE ME ? (AND THE MANY OTHER ARCHAEOLOGISTS IN THE SAME SINKING BOAT)

July 29, 2016 Kevin Wooldridge Day of Archaeology, Day of Archaeology 2016, Digital Archaeology, Excavation, Jobs, Landscape Archaeology, Location, Post Medieval Brexit, EU, Europe, fieldwork, free movement, politics

This year my Day of Archaeology posting comes from Sweden....At the moment I am working on the site of Nya Lödöse, the old town area of Gothenburg. I am told it is the largest urban excavation ever to have been undertaken in western Sweden. My interest is in the early post-medieval houses and workshops of the town, but we are also excavating the church and its associated cemetery. As with every urban excavation, anywhere in the world, we are under pressure both in terms of time and resources.... but there are many joys. The scale and survival of the buildings is brilliant, the cemetery is producing all kinds of interesting anatomical and spatial data.



Nya Lödöse excavations 2016

I continue to follow the progress of the Intrasis dedicated archaeological GIS, but this time in the nation that developed the system....I am sure all my colleagues back at Historic England would love to see the

latest version of Intrasis being used on a really intensive excavation...and to see demonstrated the facilities where onsite inputting of GIS data linked to an external remote database is possible.

We finish this phase of the project at the end of August....but there is another part of the cemetery and town to be excavated in 2017....



Three members of the team

But enough of the good news... there are bad times a coming and coming up fast. Anyone who has read any of my previous Day of Archaeology posts, will note that over the years, I have taken full advantage of my rights as an EU citizen to travel and work in quite a few different EU and EEA countries. Unfortunately,

future opportunities of this type are likely to be limited for us Brits. I don't intend to say anything about the motives or mind set of the 52% of British voters who decided the UK should quit the EU. Those folk will one day have to justify their decision to someone mightier than any of us and may indeed feel real regret as they descend into the ninth circle of Hell, sweating through the flames of the Inferno and overcome by the stench of the raw sewage within which they hopefully will stew for all Eternity....

No, what I would like to say is something about how the decision of the UK to leave the EU will affect archaeology and archaeologists across the whole continent.



In the first instance those of us Brits that work in other EU countries will have our wings clipped by the Brexit vote. Hopefully some arrangement will be reached where we can still work within the EU/EEA area, but I imagine that extra layers of bureaucracy will be placed upon us. As someone who worked in Europe before freedom of movement, I can recall the hours spent waiting at various airports, police stations and the like getting documents and permissions verified; on occasions having to attend medicals to ensure that I wasn't bringing the Black Death back to one of its source nations and often having to take out separate (and often expensive) private health and liability insurances. Let alone the difficulties of opening bank accounts, transferring funds from work nation back to the UK etc etc.

Secondly, the situation will become equally difficult for the large number of EU nationals currently working in UK archaeology. EU citizens do not at present require visas to work in the UK, but that is likely to change following Brexit. Archaeology is not a 'protected profession' when it comes to granting work visas

and non-Brit archaeologists wanting to work in the UK will find they are subject to the most restrictive forms of visa. The worst of this is the requirement for the post to provide a minimum salary level, currently £35,000 pa, before a work visa is granted. Only a very few UK archaeologists currently earn that amount and it seems unlikely that a massive wage increase will be instigated to retain non-UK workers

Thirdly, there is the question of research funding, collaboration projects and the status EU archaeology students in the UK and UK students in other EU countries. I anticipate a minefield of funding options, none of which will be less expensive than current levels and surely will result in less choice, less research and less collaborations. My personal grief will be compounded if employment with European research institutes and/or universities becomes difficult if not impossible as a result of Brexit.....It is already being predicted that the Erasmus student exchange programme will be severely curtailed for UK students travelling abroad and UK universities hosting EU students.

So here's the rub. I think that the opportunities for British archaeologists to work in many different European corners and for EU nationals to come and do the same in the UK has contributed to a wider and more comprehensive understanding of our discipline. Archaeology across the EU benefits from the UK being an active participant. We equally learn from our interaction with colleagues from across the continent. I believe that there are cultural and social advantages in exploring the commonality of our continents history/prehistory.

Postscript: If anyone knows of a nation out there willing to offer asylum to the large number of UK archaeologists who are proud to rise above petty nationalism and declare ourselves 'European', please get in touch....