

Archaeology in the years of austerity

by

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THE RECESSION AND THE JOURNAL

In terms of the county journal, the most obvious impact of the recession, which began in 2008 and continues today (whatever official figures may claim about 'seeds of recovery'), has been the absence of offered articles from commercial archaeological contractors covering development work across the county. It is this material that brings in the funding to cover most of the production costs, and the society could not continue to publish a journal for long without this financial support, at least not without raising the membership fees substantially.

While it may be obvious that commercial organisations based outside the county have little moral incentive to publish the results of work carried out in Northamptonshire, this has even applied within my own organisation, Northamptonshire Archaeology, working within the County Council. For the past couple of years everyone within the organisation has been spending more time providing basic support for the field teams to make sure that the fieldwork and the resulting client reports, the grey literature, are brought to completion, as budgets and timetables have got even tighter with everyone fighting for a smaller pool of work. The battle for survival at the front line of commercial archaeology has had to take precedence over the luxury of taking material on to publication. This has been the main reason for the appearance of another biennial, rather than an annual, edition of the journal.

We also have to mention another factor, and that is the increase in digital publication of client reports through the Archaeology Data Service (ADS), as is mentioned later in the Notes section. As a result, many people are arguing, 'if it is published online for free, why bother to pay extra to have it published in a journal?' I hope the journal offered here, with its thematic core that includes small items of interest that would otherwise be lost in larger reports, and set within a period context, shows that there is a value to journal publication as an effective means of communication.

However, given the rising costs of paper publication and distribution through the post, we do have to think carefully about what we publish. As a result, county journals are increasingly publishing shorter articles providing a synthesis of the results of larger projects, and therefore acting both as a resource of knowledge and as a gateway to further knowledge, probably only available in digital form, rather than trying to be a repository for all knowledge.

In this context, when I first took over the editorship of the journal I was accused by some of introducing a policy of not publishing finds reports. This has never

been the case, but some people, particularly those producing specialist reports on finds, animal bone and environmental archaeology, seem to have little concept of how to focus on results of significance and to present them in a way that will be of interest to a broad spectrum of readers. Instead, they produce reports evidently aimed purely at their fellow specialists. So I make no apology for having a policy in which we will not publish endless pages of pottery rim sherd drawings or pages of tabulated animal bone or environmental data. That information should be produced digitally for the few people who need to reference that level of detail.

THE RECESSION AND COMMERCIAL ARCHAEOLOGY

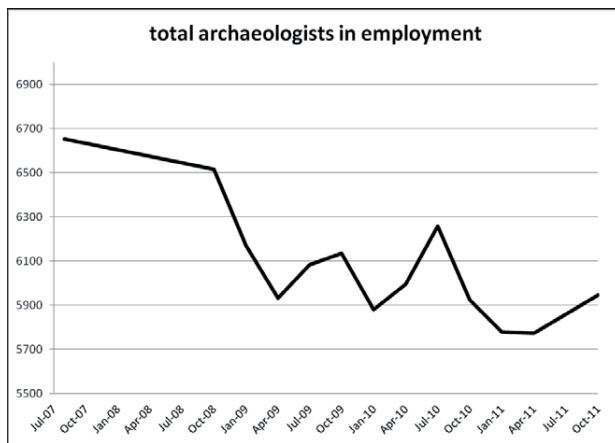
To return to the original topic: a major impact of the recession was the collapse in house building, along with the impact on related activities such as quarrying and road construction. These were all the bread and butter of commercial archaeology, so the recession caused a dramatic decline in the available work. There was a tidal wave of frozen building projects that hit us all in the spring of 2008, even though the media seemed to remain unaware of what had happened to the construction industry until the autumn.

Figures compiled for the Institute for Archaeologists (IfA) show that from August 2007 to January 2011 nearly 25% of staff employed in commercial archaeology lost their jobs (see table and graph below). This hit Northamptonshire Archaeology as it did all of our competitors, and in early 2011 it became necessary to downsize the business, with 10 of our permanent team being made redundant. Another important effect has been on young archaeologists, with new graduates finding it increasingly difficult to get employment in competition with unemployed experienced archaeologists. We are in danger of losing much of, and probably the best of, the current generation of young archaeologists

The graph of employed archaeologists (p. 2) illustrates what has happened across the country since the spring of 2008. Commercial archaeology had had a couple of boom years leading up to 2008, with more work than we could cope with, and this had generated record turnover and profits. The peak of this wave carried many organisations through to the autumn of 2008, but a sharp decline in the number of new projects starting up through the winter of 2008-9 led to many organisations making significant cuts in both their digging teams and at higher levels of staffing. Through the next couple of years the summers of 2009 and 2010 saw a slight increase in work, with some extra staff being taken on, but probably on short-term

Total numbers of archaeologists in employment in the UK, 2007-2011

Date	Curatorial	Other	Commercial	Total
Aug 2007	512	2105	4036	6653
Oct 2008	505	2105	3906	6516
Jan 2009	505	2105	3561	6171
Apr 2009	505	2105	3323	5933
Jul 2009	505	2105	3472	6082
Oct 2009	505	2105	3526	6136
Jan 2010	505	2105	3270	5880
Apr 2010	485	2105	3404	5994
Jul 2010	485	2105	3669	6259
Oct 2010	485	2105	3333	5923
Jan 2011	485	2105	3189	5779
Apr 2011	442	2105	3225	5772
Oct 2011	442	2105	3399	5946



Data compiled by Landward Research for the Institute for Archaeologists and the Federation of Archaeological Managers and Employers

contracts, while the winters saw less work and staffing reduced to ever lower levels each winter, reaching a low through the winter and spring of 2010-11.

Since the summer of 2011 work has picked up a little. This is partly a real increase, but part of the effect is that there are now fewer and slimmer organisations chasing a slightly increased work load. So, for those that have survived prospects are a little better. However, the market is more competitive than ever, which is not good news for the archaeology, as everyone is trying to win jobs by doing more for less, or perhaps less for much less.

The government might like us all to believe that huge cuts in spending can all be encompassed by efficiency savings, with no loss of service and quality, but we are not all naïve enough to believe such simplistic propaganda. In archaeology, as well as in all public services, it is always possible to be a little more efficient, but the reality is that if you spend significantly less on a service you get less back; and clever corporate phrases are no more than a cloak for the politicians to hide behind. Cuts are cuts, and they mean declining services and declining quality.

As a professional archaeologist who has spent nearly forty years making a modest living as a field archaeologist,

it has also been disappointing to see the glee with which certain sections of the larger archaeological community have welcomed the potential demise of commercial archaeology. Like the government with so many of our services, they seem to think that we can abandon the next generation of professionals and make up the difference with lots of volunteers.

While organisations like UNAS and CLASP are important, as their community-based archaeological projects provide opportunities for all to be involved, there has been a clear need for commercial archaeology employing people who will, for example, spend three months of the winter wading through mud on a wind-swept hillside excavating an Iron Age settlement producing minimal finds. There are few who would do such work as willing and unpaid volunteers, five-days a week in order to compete the work to a developer's timetable. Without commercial archaeology, fieldwork would return to being highly selective, with the less glamorous sites left to the bulldozer: like the 1960s and earlier, it would become an archaeological landscape populated largely by Roman villas.

The commercial world, local societies and university-based archaeologists should be complementary in focussing on different aspects of the subject and different markets, although there is often potential for overlaps, but all of us are in the common business of increasing knowledge of the past and in promoting that knowledge to a wider audience.

Another important aspect of the IfA commissioned study is the noted decline in curatorial archaeologists, based in local authorities and providing advice to planning authorities using the solid foundation of a well-maintained and up-to-date countywide Historical Environment Record (HER). Some 70 posts have been lost nationally, endangering the basic process of continual enhancement so that the HER can provide reliable information to serve the planning process, with suitably qualified archaeologists determining the conditions to be attached to planning permissions and monitoring the archaeological works of commercial archaeologists to ensure that the work is properly executed.

It is unfortunate, to say the least, that the last Labour government brought in a bill to make the maintenance of a Historic Environment Record a statutory requirement far too late in its term of office for it to get through Parliament, and it was put on the shelf. The present government claims to support the same principles, but in the new National Planning Policy Framework, published in March 2012, the document that will guide the planning process and how it responds to archaeology, the catch phrase is "should", when it could have been "must". In terms of archaeology there is good practice that "should" be followed but, as happened previously in Northamptonshire when the County Council decided for a number of years not to maintain an archaeologist to advise the planning authorities, good practice counts for little in years of austerity when cuts are being sought. We will see over the next year or two what the new reality will be.

Please note: all views expressed in this editorial are those of the editor and do not necessarily reflect the views of other members of the NAS committee, or of my employer.

THE JOURNAL**NEOLITHIC AND BRONZE AGE
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE**

For the first time in the history of the journal we have managed to create a volume with a thematic core, rather than just an assemblage of whatever articles were available. The volume includes several, mainly short contributions that illustrate how work in Northamptonshire is making a contribution, even if often a small one, to a range of hot topics in Neolithic and Bronze Age studies. There is little more to say here as everything relevant is contained in the short introductory essay, *Towards a new prehistory*.

OTHER PERIODS

In the centre of the journal we have an account of recent fieldwork carried out at Hunsbury Hill by Dennis Jackson and Martin Tingle, and this too has a link with some of the earlier articles through a common location, the higher ground of the Hunsbury ridge to the south of Northampton, which has been a focus for human activity since the Neolithic period.

With the exception of the work in Kettering Market Place, we move away from below ground archaeology for the rest of the volume. Of particular interest is the article describing and explaining the meaning of the early tympanum at Pitsford church. Such carvings are now inexplicable in terms of modern theological interpretations or are shoe-horned into a storyline acceptable to current theology. This article sets the stone within its contemporary theological setting, when the story told by the stone comes vividly and convincingly to life.

Our coverage of prefabricated buildings of the late 19th and 20th centuries is continued. We began with prefabricated housing for staff at Wickstead Park in the 1930s (Volume 32, 2004) and more recently we have covered the tin tabernacle at Desborough and a prefabricated hut used post-Second World War as a school classroom at Cranford (both Volume 35, 2008). This year we have an iconic structure from both First and Second World Wars, the Nissen hut, with examples recorded at former RAF Chelveston.

This interest, perhaps some might say - obsession, that the editor has developed with recent prefabricated buildings may derive from spending too many years in the leaky temporary office buildings, too cold in winter and too hot in summer, that have housed Northamptonshire Archaeology within the County Council for more than two decades at Bolton House, Wootton Hall Park, Northampton (Bolt-on-house, obviously someone's idea of a joke when they were erected in the early 1970s). When the first volume of the journal was published in 1974, the secretary of the society was then Paul Everson, the first permanent field officer employed by the County Council (pre-dating the appointment of Alan Hannan as County Archaeologist in 1976), and he too was housed in the same building, although the roof probably didn't leak in those days.

Given the current national housing crisis and the lack of affordable homes, whether to buy or to rent, it

is interesting how little interest there is in modern prefabricated housing, which could provide a way forward that would be both quick in execution and economic in production, but only if politicians were willing to take on the bricks-and-mortar house building monopolies. Of course, if practiced on a large enough scale to actually have an impact on the national lack of affordable housing, prefabrication would inevitably force down the price of conventional housing and reduce the spiralling cost of renting, but there are too many well-connected interests who would then lose out to permit such a sensible solution to ever happen.

THE CD

We again provide extras on an attached CD. In keeping with our policy that only the last five journals remain for sale or for distribution to members only, with all early volumes freely available in digital form, we provide pdf copies of journal volumes 30, 2002; 31, 2003 and 32, 2004, ending with the last volume that was compiled edited and taken to publication by Martin Tingle alone.

In addition, we provide copies of a number of reports or articles relevant to both the Neolithic and Bronze Age theme of the journal and to the study of Hunsbury Hill. From over a century ago, 1885, we include a copy of Sir Henry Dryden's account of the original archaeological works at Hunsbury Hill, which provides a backdrop for the latest work reported by Dennis Jackson and Martin Tingle. From a little later, 1917, T J George provides an overview of the early prehistory of the county and then goes on to account for the Iron Age, which includes a study of the work at Hunsbury with further details on the finds. From a century later than Sir Henry Dryden we have the report on the excavation of the Briar Hill Neolithic causewayed enclosure, published by the Northampton Development Corporation in 1985, which provides further, and more recent, background to the articles dealing with Neolithic and Bronze Age archaeology on and around the Hunsbury ridge to the south of Northampton and in the environs of the Briar Hill enclosure. We hope readers will find these hard to obtain early volumes of interest. Paper copies of the Briar Hill report are still available from the editor, c/o Northamptonshire Archaeology.

The CD also contains a late 19th-century paper on Norman sculpture in Northamptonshire, which includes the Pitsford tympanum. This article, as well as the article on Hunsbury by Henry Dryden, has been extracted from digital copies of the *Associated Architectural Societies Reports and Papers*, which contain much archaeological material relating to Northamptonshire.

FUTURE VOLUMES

I am hoping that this volume will be the first of a series of period themed volumes. We have the potential to produce both Iron Age and Roman volumes and, of particular interest to me having come to Northampton in 1976 to work for the Northampton Development Corporation, would be a Northampton volume providing a modern statement and summary of the archaeology of the town.

EDITORIAL

With Northampton apparently poised to undergo a new wave of development, including the railway station and nearby areas within the probable limits of the Saxon town, there has recently been much publicity generated about the history of the town, particularly through the organisation The Friends of Northampton Castle. Some of the reporting in the local press has, as always, been somewhat lacking in historical accuracy, and the debate has also focussed on the Norman castle, almost entirely ignoring the pre-Conquest origins of the town. The work of the Northampton Development Corporation from the mid 1970s to the mid 1980s demonstrated the presence of successive timber and stone halls set between St Peter's church and the church of St Gregory, long since

demolished, and it seems likely that between the mid 8th and late 9th centuries the town grew around the focus provided by this probable Saxon minster complex. This story needs a modern retelling, and hopefully this can be achieved in a future journal.

As in this volume, the intention is that the dominant period theme of each of the future volumes will be reflected in an accompanying CD, which will contain pdf copies of reports on relevant excavations from the past, to add to the value of each volume as a resource of information.

Andy Chapman
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