

Blood and Glory: A Field Archaeology Section Revisited.

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The problem with hagiography is that it can be seen coming a long way off, and the astute reader soon begins to wander between the lines. How then to write something 'personal and Ordnance Survey related' that pays tribute to a friend and former colleague, while attempting an informative and honest reflection? To do so, I would like to lead the reader back to a time and place that did not typify Keith Blood's career and achievements, but which nonetheless linked him to a milestone in modern archaeological development. While many will always label Keith as the quintessential 'fieldman' of highland zone Britain, for a few years in the early 1970s he had to demonstrate skills of a different order in the 'soft' lowlands of the south-east of England.

Indeed, there was more to life in a quick moving Field Archaeology Section (FAS) of the Ordnance Survey than official histories can relate, and whereas I must point the reader to the latter for an accurate account of the development of the Archaeology Division itself, I would urge caution when reading the often brief details of the former. This would seem to be a world where, armed with all relevant information from the Division's recording sections in either Southampton or Edinburgh, the fieldman paid courtesy visits to the stalwarts of the local archaeology society and museum before making stately progress to the survey (Phillips 1980, 341). It is a world somehow frozen in the realities of the 1950s and 60s, and yet although this basic activity continued in later years, it in no way describes the radical changes to the structure of British archaeology generally in the early 1970s - changes which in turn affected the procedures and attitudes, if not the core mapping responsibilities, of the FASs. In the brave new world of Rescue, Units and County Archaeologists, we were about to liaise with highly professional teams on a basis that could not have been envisaged when the Division was established in 1947.

It was, however, to the credit of the Division and its fieldmen that it had not only the internal flexibility to recognise the new order, but the willingness to embrace the same. In fact there is evidence that in the mid 1970s the archaeology establishment in England actually wanted the OS to augment its unique capacity to transmit data from newly established and local Sites and Monuments Records to a national database within a credible timescale (Baker 1983, 54; Saunders 1975, 113). In other words, C. W. Philips

original observation that, given the acceleration of post-war destruction, the OS was 'the only organisation likely to move quickly enough across the country to make such a record', still had credence (albeit in a different context) some thirty years later (Phillips 1980, 341).

But therein was both an irony and a contradiction. The irony was that it may have been this very pressure for a heightened profile that first made the Ordnance Survey management nervous of its supposed responsibilities. In reportedly rejecting these overtures (Baker 1983, 54), the OS was also entitled to point out a contradiction in that it was the one body, unlike the Inspectorates of Ancient Monuments or Royal Commissions, that had neither statutory nor founding obligation to archaeological recording. The growth of the Division (by the early 1970s it had a staff of over seventy, including twenty odd in seven regional FASs) was as much a matter of indulgence by the OS hierarchy as it was of foresight by its esteemed Archaeology Officers; beyond an historic duty to cartographic quality, of which archaeology was just a small, if specialised, component, there was no reason why it should entertain further duties.

Nonetheless, there were few who could have expected that the position of the Division would, if not to go forward, actually be put into reverse. With the advent of monetarism and public spending cutbacks in 1976, came distinct fears that the Division was among the first units to be identified by the OS as a non-essential luxury (Cunliffe *et al.* 1977). The first major change occurred in that year, when the FASs were divorced from the Division; while allowed to continue the existing 'county' programme, they were placed under the direction of local regional managements' who often had little sympathy for their objectives. Let there be no false sentimentality about the final demise of the Division in 1983 and the transfer of its functions to the RCHMs: the intervening years were ones of endurance, the only pity being that the recommendations of the Serpell Committee (1979) took so long to implement (CBA 1983, 33).

All this, however, was a far cry from the more stable environment of 1972, when I first joined the S.E. FAS as a trainee under Keith Blood. I was soon taught that having proven surveying ability and an enthusiasm for the subject was the very minimum expected by a Division steeped in

values of O.G.S. Crawford and C. W. Phillips. It was a dedicated organisation, and, when considering the peculiar pressures of a quick-moving life, it was remarkable that the overall turnover in staff between 1950s - 80s was very low. This allowed for a continuity of experience and discipline that was essential if the new, earlier mentioned, challenges of 1970s were to be met. While the four other regional FASs in England had also to confront these changes, it is a matter of record that Keith (newly arrived from northern Scotland) inherited a particular burden insofar as many of the more far-reaching innovations within local authorities centred on the Home Counties. For example, John Hedges and David Baker, in Essex and Bedfordshire respectively, were at the forefront of integrating professional teams within the newly developing planning structures at county level. The vital point was that both men were in a position to recruit enough staff to make an immediate and progressive impact, and in so doing create model SMRs. With the benefit of hindsight it is interesting to speculate that one of the reasons for the successful interaction of the OS and county teams was the mutual understanding that archaeology was not an end in itself, and that we were both integrated within structures having wider environmental responsibilities. Whereas the modern reader is comfortable with the concept of total heritage management, this was not the case in the insular world of the early 1970s. From an historical viewpoint, the paper delivered by John Hedges to the *Planning and the Historic Environment* conference at Oxford in 1975, in which he illustrated the potential inherent to the then existing planning laws, was a groundbreaking achievement (Hedges 1975).

But while it was immediately apparent that County Archaeologists represented the future direction of regional field investigation, it does not follow that the OS teams received an unqualified welcome from the former. Initial contact, especially in Essex and Bedfordshire, was fraught with practical difficulties, and required no small amounts of diplomacy and elucidation on both sides. It did not help that the former were only dimly aware of our existence and were, rightly, concerned about the usage and end destination of *their* information. For our part, it was essential to establish that the material in the various SMRs was in an accessible form and compatible with National Grid Reference (NGR) retrieval system devised by the OS. At issue here was a problem that the Division never properly resolved, and which needed careful attention by the FASs. While the term 'National Non-Intensive Record' was used informally within the Division and elsewhere within the archaeological establishment, the problem was that it had no official status either within the OS itself or the national archives structure. Indeed the term has only in recent years appeared in the literature, and seems to have gained recognisable status, as the core archive of the NMRs, only as a result of transfer to the several RCHMs in 1983 (RCHME 1993, 30-31). Although it can be argued that the OS should have done more to promote the Record, it should be understood that its relevance was uniquely tied to the perceived status of the *intensive* NMRs themselves. Even though these were formed in the mid 1960s, they still had no coherent definition a decade later; as late as the 1980s doubts were being

expressed about the English NMR (Baker 1983,55). In this regard the OS was as much sinned against as sinning, and it was certainly the case that, in the early 1970s, the FASs had to tread warily around concepts and institutions which the modern reader takes for granted.

The experience gained in liaising with such pioneering county teams as Essex and Bedfordshire proved invaluable when Keith had also to negotiate the coincident development of Milton Keynes, where the creation of a new conurbation was about to link several small towns over an area of nearly a hundred square miles. The sheer volume and complexity of new data being generated by the on-site rescue unit, led by Dennis Mynard (Mynard 1987) can be imagined, as can the difficulty of an FAS attempting to record the same in landscapes which resembled the battlefields of the First World War. Again the liaison proved successful, and again it proved possible for current regional discoveries to be relayed to the central Non-Intensive Record within a viable timescale. The ability of FASs both to verify and locate new found sites to their true NGR positions was an added bonus to such units and county teams. Almost by definition, our visits to the disparate SMRs had to be on short term notice, dependent on OS mapping programmes in a particular area, and it was important to quickly establish a working relationship that did not interfere with routines.

By 1974-5 nearly all areas of the South East boasted a County Archaeologist, although it was more typical that he/she would have few, if any, subordinate staff and be severely restricted within, say, general Education or Museum budgets. Of necessity these liaisons tended to be on a more informal basis, yet they presented far more difficulty in terms of our programme efficiency than their more illustrious counterparts. At this stage many SMRs were rudimentary, and there was often a fine balance between the time spent sorting information and the likely benefits (to the OS) thereof. To illustrate this, I can remember Keith's timely intervention when my enthusiasm for identifying distribution patterns for Palaeolithic handaxes from the Upper Thames gravel terraces (from records assembled by Mike Farley of Buckinghamshire), began to be outstripped by the enormity of the task. It must be emphasised that the demands of this period were beyond those previously experienced by FASs, and that while the ability to record as well as survey had always been vital, there were more and more occasions when the specialist recording team at Southampton could be of little immediate help. While the hierarchy of the OS may have become sensitive to these facts, it is probably accurate to suggest that a doubling of field 'office' time was compensated by a quadrupling of new and relevant material for the Non-Intensive Record.

Two postscripts should be added here. To begin with, the quantity of private informant material also increased during this period. The extent to which this rise reflected the sheer galvanising affect of a local County Archaeologist or Unit is a matter of conjecture, but the vast growth of, for example, 'official' aerial photography, did have its match in the private sector. By the mid 1970s the lowland zone FASs were probably spending as much time locating and plotting AP cropmarks as surveying extant monuments. This leads

directly to the second point, concerning the misconceptions that surround the range and type of material collected by the OS: published comments on our operational limitations could range from the misleading (e.g. Benson 1975, 17), to the plain erroneous (e.g. Baker 1983, 53) and it is often unclear as to how these genuine misunderstandings originated. While it is true that there were restrictions on map publishable sites, in competition with other ground features, this should not be confused with the amount of inclusive survey and recording which, at all times, entered the Non-Intensive Record and that was promoted for inclusion on larger scale maps. The in-built reticence of the Division to publicise its achievements could not, however, properly account for the general failure of archaeological professionals to either understand fully or explore this resource. As stated, it is to be hoped that the absorption of the Record into the NMRs has gone a long way to rectify this anomaly.

It is also to be hoped that the period and place examined here has thrown further light on the extraordinary career of Keith Blood. Whereas his exploits in the wilds of Caithness, Sutherland and all points North has become the subject of legend, he deserves no less recognition for his work in the well trodden pastures of the South. His ability to impart knowledge was as important as his contribution to knowledge, and for this, I and many others have reason to be grateful.

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