

‘UNEARTHING THE PAST’

**A TEMPLATE FOR INCREASING PUBLIC AWARENESS OF
ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS ASSOCIATED WITH MINERAL
WORKINGS**

- *Review and Discussion Document* -

Christopher Evans
Cambridge Archaeological Unit
University of Cambridge
Dept. of Archaeology
Downing St, Cambridge
CB2 3DZ

As a whole the project has proved an exciting challenge as it has called upon us to communicate archaeology in different media than standard publication formats, and the initiative can only be counted as a success. It is, however, for these self-same reasons that ‘teething’ problems have arisen, particularly as regards timetabling. Throughout it has involved producing to estimates for tasks outside of our immediate experience and also working with new suppliers - from web-site designers to the company supplying exhibition panels and the carpenters for the school boxes. As is so often the case when working on unfamiliar ground, most things take longer than anticipated.

In contrast to the emphasis on the project’s visual component discussed below, what has come as something of a surprise (and which has allowed the project to still stay in budget) has been that the quantity of text production has been rather less than originally anticipated. This is largely the result of the pilot schools study. Teachers were adamant that the last thing they wanted was more, or even any texts whatsoever. Nevertheless, the texts have proven difficult to produce. Writing ‘down’ to targeted age-ranges is clearly a major skill and, though we feel the texts ‘work’ whilst still having some degree of academic integrity, in any such ventures in the future it might well be worth involving appropriate ‘copy authors’. (Again, this is something that units have little experience of and English Heritage could consider maintaining a list of appropriate professionals.)

Because a multi-faceted project like this spans and represents a number of different organisations - in this case, Hanson, English Heritage, DEFRA/ALSF and the University - more attention had to be given to ‘professional’ design qualities than was originally envisaged (e.g. collective and project-specific ‘logos’ and diverse entitlement). Yet this equally has the benefit that once a satisfying solution is eventually achieved, it obviously becomes a template for the project’s many components. In the end we think that a very appropriate ‘look’ has been struck, bridging corporate, organisational and academic interests. Nevertheless, it is recommended that in comparable projects in the future a professional designer be involved at an early stage.

In terms of the integration of the initiative as a whole, we have found that the combination of brochure and web-site ‘announcement’ works well together. The former (which was not originally a part of the project) has the benefit of wide public dispersal for those without immediate access to electronic media and can readily draw attention to the project’s many components (including web-site address and how to order loan materials). This being said, there can be no doubt that given available technologies web-site presentation must now be the backbone for such projects. Being both an initial ‘approach platform’ and the bases of in-depth support, it thereby integrates the many parts of the programme (e.g. basis to turn to for further information on exhibition panels, site displays and school boxes, *etc.*). It certainly came as quite a surprise for us to learn that most parish councils now have their own web-sites and clearly in the future these will be a major media to communicate site-related information to local communities.

Schools Boxes

Schools have been very enthusiastic about this part of the project. They differ from the project's other components in that they fulfil a real need as they are a means of hands-on curriculum-related activity learning. There have though been difficulties. Due to changes in the curriculum, the school year is now normally quite full and access to teachers/classrooms (i.e. programme box loan) takes considerable planning. From a corporate point of view such material collections have the disadvantage that (like the exhibition panels) they require long-term maintenance and regular curation.

After consulting with teachers it was realised that what they did need was curriculum-related activities involving various small-group sorting exercises relating to the interpretation of materials. For this reason - and because it fits the curriculum (and a range of affordable period replicas are also available) - it was decided to drop the prehistory box and instead produce two Roman boxes. It should be noted that for this purpose schools do not seem to be after site-specific materials but rather generic period-based collections. In other words, what they need is access to material to illuminate life in Roman times in general, not study individual sites.

Monument Restoration

The restoration of the great Bronze Age circular enclosure at Over proved very successful. The results exceeded our expectations and reactions are consistently enthusiastic both throughout Hanson and also from residents; it is widely felt to make a positive contribution to the local environment and landscape. Being something of an 'event', it acts as a focus for the project as a whole. There was local newspaper and radio coverage of its construction and it will be where Hanson/English Heritage officially launch the initiative at the end of April (with national press coverage).

On a strictly pragmatic basis, thanks to a highly skilled machine driver who has worked with us over more than a decade, its construction was surprising easy to achieve (involving only careful survey marking-out and a hinged plywood template to ensure a uniform bank profile). It should be stressed that this involved no disturbance of the buried archaeology whatsoever, but that the re-built monument only 'exists' within the topsoil as it were. Given the local goodwill achieved (enhancing the fabric of the countryside and ensuring the long-term physical demarcation of important sites), such earthwork restorations should be considered in the future when developers decide to preserve large ditch-defined sites - regardless of whether this is due to the quality of the archaeology or by purely pragmatic grounds alone (i.e. cost).

Overview

In review of the main components of the project:

Web-site - Having received all the necessary material from the CAU, the designers have now almost completed the web-site. It will be tested and up and running by the end of the month (<http://www.unearthingthepast.net/>).

Exhibition - The display posters are completed and we have just received the exhibition panels from the suppliers. Its first showing will be in Cambridge Public Library at the end of the month (five further venues are currently being organised).

Schools Boxes - All materials have been assembled and we only await the delivery of the boxes on the 12/03/04. Five school bookings are anticipated after Easter.

Over Monument Group - The enclosure's circle has been restored and the signboard erected. Following commissioned aerial photography over the coming weekend of the site 'as built' (i.e. clearly showing as an exposed dark-soil ring), the larger display area will be ploughed and put down to grass. The official opening of the Over Monument Group 'park' will be in late April/early May.

Posters and Brochures - These are both back from the printers and we will begin their distribution next week.

A Template for Public Awareness

The following recommendations are made based on the outcome of English Heritage/ALSF:

1) Because of low maintenance requirements, it would seem that web-site presentation is the most successful and realistic means for companies to promote their archaeological sponsorship. Following the CAU's led, the backbone of this must be high quality visual imagery. This however is not necessarily easily achieved as few archaeological units still employ professional photographers and often, due to the time pressure of much fieldwork, sites today are rarely clean of spoil. Units working for major companies should therefore be encouraged to produce a minimum number of high standard photographs from their major excavations (minimum 10-20 per site).

Based on the experience of the project it is felt that *reconstruction paintings* are the most ready means by which to convey excavation results to the public at large and should feature in excavation-based web-site presentations. They have the ability to bring sites 'alive' and, by the careful selection of what activities are portrayed (e.g. 'buildings', 'burial' and/or 'ritual', *etc.*) provide a means by which to structure and access (by visual 'triggers') the accompanying theme-based web pages. For major developers who regularly contract field units the commissioning of site reconstruction paintings would have the secondary advantage that in 2-4 years' time they would have sufficient material to form the basis of well-illustrated popular books outlining their contribution to archaeology. Not all sites are, of course, necessarily suitable for public web-site presentation (i.e. large, open-areas excavations involving a substantial settlement component seem the most successful).

Nevertheless, when appropriate, they are a reasonable means of presentation and, if building off of already established web-sites, can each be constructed for *c.* £5,000.00 (including imagery, text and web-site integration).

Further avenues that would be worthwhile exploring in the future could involve the incorporation of site video footage and also, potentially, the animation of the reconstruction scenes. The latter could involve both the movement of individual figures within single pictures and also visual means by which individual paintings are themselves linked (e.g. canoeing along a 'river of time' with shore-side scenes appropriately changing). Such technological developments certainly would make the web-site presentations more 'child friendly'.

2) As long as it involves no disturbance to preserved archaeological deposits, monument/enclosure restoration should be encouraged and its potential further explored. Such ventures need not be expensive (and require only low/no maintenance) and are clearly seen as enhancing the fabric of the countryside. Equally, for the same reasons, developers might also wish to consider the re-building of the main perimeters of excavated sites in the course of their landscape restoration programmes (i.e. post-mineral extraction).

3) Both school boxes and exhibition displays are seen as worthwhile facets of public presentation, but both demand long-term curation and maintenance (e.g. delivery and repair/re-stocking). School boxes are not required on a site-by-site basis, but for major firms it would probably be worth having them regionally. To this end, in our experience what is needed are large collections of 'sortable' materials (e.g. Roman pottery), which is best achieved from unstratified and fieldwalking contexts (following necessary analysis).

APPENDICES

1) School Loan Boxes

J. Carman

The final product is two boxes of loan materials for schools, containing materials relating to the Roman period in Britain. These are to be made available for schools for up to half a term at a time, to be used as teachers see fit. Each box contains the following:

- a set of 'Teacher's Notes' outlining the possible use of the box and its contents in the classroom
- about 160 Romano-British potsherds collected by fieldwalking and excavation from sites in the Over and Earith region. These represent various types of vessel (both fine and coarse wares, food preparation as well as eating vessels), divided fairly evenly among 10 storage bags, one bag for each group of about 3-4 children in a class (i.e. each group will have about 16 sherds to examine). Among these sherds – and distributed unevenly but fairly across the bags – are a number of rim and base sherds as well as body sherds
- additional materials, representing aspects of Roman life retrieved from archaeological sites:
 - samian ware sherds with makers' names stamped on them
- replica Roman objects (one for each group of children):
 - chatelaine set (personal grooming kit) and strigil
 - wax writing tablets and styli
 - spinning materials & weaving combs (textile production)
 - oil lamp
- an exercise using the plan of a Roman hall dwelling excavated in Cambridgeshire.

Areas of the curriculum addressed by the box and associated activities are:

History	Literacy and English
Maths	Geography
Science	Citizenship
Technology	

Activities suggested in the Teacher's Notes included asking the children to place potsherds into suitable categories, describing sherds and categories, and identifying from indicators given different functional areas in the house plan exercise. Other activities centred upon replica objects, including identification of their function and modern equivalents.

Tests of the boxes in Cambridgeshire schools indicated the need for some measure of teacher training in cross-curricula use of the materials. In practice, it became clear that arranging such INSET training was difficult because of other pressures on teach time. However contact with Mr Andrew Renne, History Advisor to Schools with Cambridgeshire County Council, has opened the possibility of attending with him sessions for school History co-ordinators that he organises at a number of venues during September and October 2004. This will act as a suitable means of advertising the availability of the boxes and introducing teachers to associated activities.

2) Communicating Archaeology in Connection with Mineral Workings at Over, Cambridgeshire - An Assessment for Cambridge Archaeological Unit

N James

The brief for the work and the methodology are explained. The results of investigation are summed up. As a community, Over welcomed information on the local archaeology but publicity has been somewhat ineffective: events were not advertised with enough notice; nor were all media used. Options for improvement are considered: there is scope for a systematic strategy of local educational outreach which could be applied to such projects in future. For Over, in particular, it is recommended that a free summary leaflet could be produced to describe the archaeology and relate it to other features of the environment.

In advance of quarrying in the north of the parish of Over, the Cambridge Archaeological Unit was commissioned to carry out a series of archaeological excavations. The Unit provided for letting residents of the parish know about what was discovered. The writer was commissioned by the Unit, in turn, to assess the effectiveness of that provision.

One meeting convened for letting residents know about the archaeology had been highly successful, and there were open days at the digs. In all, however, little awareness of the archaeology has been generated. Accordingly, the writer consulted informants about scope for improving publicity; and he has gone on to suggest broader principles for the future.

The method of investigation was to consult selected local informants about what has been done to make the archaeological work and its results known and about ways in which to improve the dissemination. Consultations were carried out by three means: meeting in person; discussion by telephone; or communication by e-mail.

Results

A selected sample of residents and their representatives was consulted about what has been done to publicise the archaeology and about ways of improving publicity. Some informants declared that very little was known about the archaeology but one asserted that "A number of villagers seem to know a little".

Two informants mentioned public meetings and a couple mentioned open days at the digs. They concurred that the most successful of these events was a meeting at the church hall, which had been packed. The other meeting had been in the context of an annual parish meeting not convened specifically to announce the archaeological results, and this occasion was less successful for the archaeologists.

All informants concurred that the archaeology is or would be of interest to residents. A couple pointed out that the meeting at the Town Hall had been much better advertised in advance than the other events.

One interviewee, a trustee of the village's new Community Centre, claimed that there is considerable awareness of community and *esprit de corps* in the village, and that this condition is propitious for engendering interest in the archaeology. Another informant pointed out that, in the late Ernie Papworth, Over had lost its recognised authority on local history: when he spoke or wrote, people attended. Several informants pointed out that there is widespread awareness of the well publicised proposals for creating new wetland habitat after the quarrying. The implication was that, so far, much opportunity for arousing interest in the archaeology has been missed.

All informants emphasised that, in Over, there are effective media for publicity. As well as parish meetings and the church hall, opportunities taken by the Unit, three further options were recommended.

The Community Centre, it was pointed out, is equipped for meetings and will be yet better equipped in future. It was suggested that the Centre is ideal for gathering to hear about the archaeology.

The *Over News* is a newsletter distributed monthly to every household in the village and widely read. A couple of informants recommended that this publication should be used to let residents know about the archaeology. One pointed out that, while the *News* had featured items on the proposal for reconstructing wetland, there had been nothing on the archaeology.

The village has a bright and well organised site on the Worldwide Web. The person who supports the site recommended that it would be easy to set up a page on the archaeology. He pointed out that the Cambridge & St Ives Railway Organisation has an effective page, and he argued that the site is a good opportunity to bring the archaeology to wide notice. He remarked too that the site includes a discussion 'board' which could be used for gathering responses.

There is also a notice board at the local post office. That too could have been used.

Discussion And Recommendations

The general view is that there is little awareness of the archaeology but that, as for wildlife habitat so for archaeology, there would be plenty of interest, partly because Over, in particular, is a well integrated and buoyant community. Five recommendations can be offered.

1. The steps taken, so far, by the Unit have been appropriate. The meeting at the Village Hall, in particular, was a success. However, the strategy could have been developed much further.
2. Outreach has to be based on a systematic appraisal of both potential audiences and the particular and specific local opportunities for publicity. Three media in Over were unused by the Unit. Nor was enough notice given of the events, except, evidently, for the meeting at the church hall.
3. Neither the Unit nor the quarrier are well equipped for local outreach but either or both could have worked with other organisations for the purpose. Archaeology is, traditionally, an academic pursuit. Several institutions are available to provide courses of flexible 'open learning' that, together or independently, could be tailored to local opportunities and requirements: the Anglia Polytechnic Centre for Regional Studies, based in Cambridge; Swavesey Village College; or branches of the Workers' Educational Association in Cottenham or St Ives. The Centre for Regional Studies is developing a scheme for outreach that embraces the principles envisaged by the Unit.
4. English Heritage is developing a policy of outreach for archaeology. The Unit's endeavours are of just the kind envisaged. By the same token, the quarrier has an opportunity to help both English Heritage and the County Council's Directorate of Education, Libraries & Heritage to fulfil their missions for archaeology. It follows, from the previous three recommendations, that the Unit and/or the quarrier could consider the work in Over a step in a direction that could now lead much further, if not there then in connection with similar schemes elsewhere.
5. For Over, it would yet be appropriate to produce a simple leaflet that summarises the archaeological findings. It could be done in a shorter and less technical version of the one produced in 1996 (Evans 1996), with information on where to enquire for further details. It should show how the archaeology relates to other aspects of the local environment, including wildlife. It could be distributed in the village free of charge.

Over is hospitable to outreach on archaeology. Other communities are too. Required in future is a systematic strategy that can be adapted to local conditions and requirements. There would be benefit to public relations for the Unit and the quarrier in particular as well as for public appreciation of the cultural heritage. The principle matches present government policy on public consultation.

Reference

Evans, C. 1996 *A Fenland Delta: the Archaeology of ARC's Lower Ouse Quarries*
Cambridge: Cambridge Archaeological Unit

Consultees

Mr B Chapman (Hanson Aggregates)

Mr R Cox

Mr C Evans (Cambridge Archaeological Unit)

Ms J Hook (Over Day Centre)

Cllr S Johnstone (Cambridgeshire County Council)

Mr A Smith (Over Village Web Support)

Cllr S White (Over Parish Council)

Mr W Wilson (Over Community Centre)

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