

Introducing the Centre for Applied Archaeology

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The Centre for Applied Archaeology (CAA) is a new research centre within the Institute of Archaeology, established in 2006 to develop the work of the Institute's Field Archaeology Unit, Archaeology South-East (ASE), through the creation of a productive research environment and the building of links with academic staff members of the Institute. In this article the Director of CAA defines "applied archaeology" and describes the aims and work of the Centre.

The Centre for Applied Archaeology (CAA) is a new research centre within the Institute of Archaeology, University College London (UCL). It was established to encourage research and innovation in professional archaeological practice, building links between archaeologists working in cultural resource management projects and their academic colleagues, as well as with local communities and other stakeholders interested in the historic environment.

These are, of course, areas of archaeology that the Institute of Archaeology has always been involved with. Although the CAA only came into existence in 2006, its origins go much further back: to the creation of the Institute's Field Archaeology Unit some thirty-five years ago. Why, then, was it thought necessary to establish a new research centre and what does the CAA hope to achieve that could not be achieved before? First it might help to establish what applied archaeology is.

What is Applied Archaeology?

The term applied archaeology has only recently come into fashion, and

it can still mean different things to different audiences. Anthropologists have long been able to identify a sub-discipline involving an "anthropology put to use" that is generally known as Applied Anthropology.¹ The idea of an anthropology of practical worth inspired North American archaeologists to coin the term Applied Archaeology for use in situations where research was undertaken that involved the analysis and solution of practical problems. The term was pioneered in studies intended to inform contemporary programmes of rural development and change, where archaeological understandings of past landscapes suggested ways of improving modern farming practice.² This emphasis on the social benefits of archaeological research also meant that applied archaeology became concerned with understanding the needs of the communities that lived and worked within study landscapes. This has allowed for the development of a further definition of applied archaeology in which "archaeology becomes 'applied' when those outside of archaeology are engaged. These 'outsiders' tend to consist of community members

directly affected or involved with the resource". Building on this definition it has been argued that one of the goals of such archaeology is "to give voice to the disenfranchised and help create a 'shared heritage'".³ This politically aware version of applied archaeology has much in common with what in the UK is more commonly known as public archaeology.

A rather different interpretation of the domain of applied archaeology has seen the term used to embrace the field of cultural resource management (CRM) and describe the work of professional contract archaeology undertaken to mitigate the impact of construction projects on the historic environment. This has allowed Lozny to propose that "the principle behind applied archaeology is that fieldwork and interests of practicing archaeologists focus on preservation orientated investigations of cultural landscapes".⁴ This is an archaeology of professional practitioners engaged in conservation projects, concerned more with resources than communities.

The Society for American Archaeology (SAA) has recently wrestled with these different ways of defining what it is that archaeologists do when they find themselves working beyond the portals of academia. The SAA has done so because it hopes to develop a new MA curriculum that can be used to train archaeologists in the practical and intellectual skills needed for the wider world of employment. Having decided that this new MA should be described as a Master's programme in applied archaeology – in order to escape the narrower focus of cultural resource management – the SAA has proposed the following definition of the subject:

*"Applied Archaeology refers to the application of archaeological research and its results to address contemporary human problems, including (but not limited to) issues that involve cultural resource management, heritage tourism and development, long-term modeling of human/environment dynamics, and public education aimed at awareness and stewardship of archaeological remains."*⁵

The pragmatic elasticity of this definition has its attractions, although it would not be difficult to extend the range of the applications listed. For present purposes, however, it will serve. It includes the research activities now embraced by the UCL Centre for Applied Archaeology. The CAA is also concerned with archaeological practice, including field research methodology. This emphasis on professional practice builds on the work and experience of the Institute's Field Archaeology Unit.



Figure 1 Aerial photograph of the Cuckmere estuary, East Sussex



Figure 2 Excavations along the Grain to Shorne gas pipeline in Kent

The Field Unit and Archaeology South-East

The Institute of Archaeology’s Field Archaeology Unit was first established in the early 1970s, when its main purpose was to provide professional support for the Institute of Archaeology’s training excavations and related research projects. From the outset the Field Unit also undertook rescue archaeology projects in Sussex, which is where many of the Institute’s training and research projects took place. Because of this involvement in rescue archaeology the Unit was able to employ full-time field staff, and developed an independent professional standing. The subsequent history of the Field Unit has mirrored changes in the profession as a whole. In the 1980s, operating as the Sussex Archaeological Field Unit, it was the regional fieldwork unit responsible for publicly funded programmes of rescue excavation and research. As core-funding gave way to project-funding in the 1990s, and as competitive tendering became more commonplace in the wake of new planning guidance, the Field Unit was transformed into Archaeology South-East (ASE).⁶

Working from its offices near Brighton Archaeology South-East still offers a full range of archaeological services to the development industry, undertaking Environmental Impact Assessments, evaluating the potential of archaeological sites and landscapes, recording historic buildings and townscapes, excavating those sites that can not be preserved, undertaking specialist research into the finds uncovered, and so on (Figs 1–5). One of the services provided – not directly foreseen by the definition of Applied

Archaeology offered by the Society for American Archaeologists but illustrative of the increased range of contemporary human problems that archaeologists now address – is to undertake scene-of-crime

and subsequent forensic excavations on behalf of the police. In order to provide expert advice in so many fields of archaeological research, ASE now employs over forty staff working on hundreds of different projects throughout Southern England and beyond.

Despite the changes of name and the overtly commercial nature of much of its work, Archaeology South-East is still very much the Field Unit of the Institute of Archaeology. Everyone working for ASE is a full member of the Institute’s staff, and all project revenues go directly to the Institute (supporting the overall budget for archaeology as well as the direct expenses of the ASE team). ASE exists to further the research and teaching goals of University College London. It is also busy doing things that can be considered to fall within the remit of applied archaeology – and draws on a long-standing involvement in fieldwork that establishes a platform for graduate teaching and research.

It has not always been possible, however, to realize the full benefits of the relationship between the Institute and its Field Unit. The short-term requirements of commercial clients and projects can distract from research and teaching goals.



Figure 3 Photographs illustrating Finds and Environmental Services offered by ASE. Clockwise from top left: silver penny dating to the reign of Edward the Elder, King of Wessex, AD 899–924 found with fifteen others in a cesspit in Lewes, East Sussex; charred cereal grains from an environmental sample after flotation; ring-neck flagon, in Canterbury oxidized ware, found in a cremation group dated to c.AD 70–85 at Ramsgate; faunal remains in a 4mm sieve



Figure 4 Cobham Aviary, Cobham Park, Kent, undergoing restoration and repair

The vagaries of the economic cycle can play havoc with forward planning, and it is sadly easy to move from a position of being too busy to arrange teaching opportunities properly to being in a situation where no fieldwork can take place at all because of a shortage of work. There are many problems in sustaining dialogue between academic and field staff, when the problems and issues that they face can be so different.

The aims of the Centre for Applied Archaeology

The Centre for Applied Archaeology was brought into being to create a research environment for the work of the Field Unit, to give direction to its activities, and to forge links between the academic, social and economic goals of applied archaeology. The establishment of the CAA was also an opportunity to extend the range of work undertaken. When it was first established the Unit was essentially a digging team, responding to the need for publicly funded rescue excavations. Over the last twenty years things have changed considerably. The subject of interest is the historic environment at large, and the main goal is often conservation and presentation rather than excavation and publication. To this end new services have been developed in remote sensing, landscape research, conservation planning, outreach and community archaeology, specialist and scientific analysis, and so on.

Archaeology South-East provides such services as the contracts division of the Centre for Applied Archaeology. A modest levy is now raised on all commercial projects handled by ASE for the CAA to invest in research and development, and for teaching and community projects that can not otherwise be supported. The CAA also works on public-sector and

other non-commercial projects, building partnerships between academic members of staff, students, the professional staff of the Archaeology South-East, and a wide range of other stakeholders (ranging from local archaeological societies to NGOs and overseas universities).

A key feature of applied archaeology is the way in which it obliges us to consider the impact of our work on others. Because of this the CAA does not normally undertake expert missions in the field of heritage management without seeking to involve local communities, preferably in partnership projects. A key part of the CAA mission is to promote training and capacity building. We believe that all projects should aim to enhance the understanding, conservation and sustainable development of the cultural resources and the communities associated with them. The CAA is committed to transfer its expert skills in cultural resource management, archaeology, conservation,

interpretation and project management to those responsible for our shared historic environment.

Some current projects

As should be clear from the above summary, most of the work of the CAA is undertaken by its contracts division (ASE) in the context of development and reconstruction projects. We are also, however, working on a variety of strategic and training projects in the field of applied archaeology. The following somewhat selective list gives an idea of the range of work being undertaken. As can be seen, the activities of the CAA are not restricted to southeast Britain, but have an international scope, fully commensurate with the "World Archaeology" remit of the Institute as a whole.

Research into aspects of professional practice, involving reviews of:

- Ethical issues that must inform efforts to protect endangered cultural property in conflict and post conflict states – with particular emphasis on work in Lebanon, the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Iraq and Afghanistan (International conference on *Archaeology in Conflict*: funded by the British Academy, British Council, Global Heritage Fund and others).⁷

- The impact of the Aggregate Levy Sustainability Fund on the development of techniques, standards, and guidance in archaeological research and heritage conservation.⁸

- The ethnic profile of organizations working within the historic environment sector. This survey will conclude with recommendations on how greater diversification in the workforce might be achieved (being prepared for the Council for British Archaeology by James Doezer).

- The reliability of the stratigraphic sequences and discoveries of exceptional



Figure 5 Excavation of graves from a medieval hospital site in Lewes, East Sussex

graffiti from the Roman city of Veleia (Iruña de Oca, Álava), Spain.

- Roman period finds assemblages recovered from excavations in Essex, UK – allowing for research into the social and economic impact of urbanization but whilst developing a strategy to improve standards of data collection and exchange.

- Best-practice in risk management and conflict avoidance/resolution in cultural heritage management .

Guidance on heritage management and conservation

- Preparation of a management plan for the World Heritage Site at Merv, Turkmenistan.

- Editing and finalizing the management plan for Hadrian's Wall World Heritage Site on behalf of Hadrian's Wall Heritage Ltd.

- Assistance with the development of the management plan for the Red Fort, Delhi, India.

- A landscape characterization and heritage assessment of the proposed South-Downs National Park in the UK.

Professional training

- In-service training programmes based at Archaeology South-East, providing detailed professional training in archaeological ceramics (funded through the English Heritage Professional Placements in Conservation programme), Roman period registered finds, and historic building recording.

- Contributions to the Institute's MA programmes and arranging internships for graduate students.

- Provision of professional support and training at the Institute's undergraduate training excavation at West Dean in Sussex.

Outreach and community engagement

- Public open days arranged for recent excavations of the Roman villa at Snodland in Kent, and the medieval town of Lewes, Sussex.

- Technical support and training on a variety of forthcoming community archaeology projects including those of the Surrey Archaeological Society (Woking Palace, Surrey) and the Young Archaeologists Club (Kent High Weald Project).

Looking to the future

These are uncertain times for archaeologists who rely on the commercial sector for their work. Archaeology South-East – like many others employers in the sector – has already had to make some staff redundant because of work shortages. Declining commercial revenues will also have an impact on the funds available for research and development.

The present economic changes represent a challenge for the profession. It is more important than ever to demonstrate the social value of the work being undertaken in order to justify expenditure, and to find new and better ways of delivering specialist archaeological services. There are also worries that professional training and development will be one of the first areas to suffer as archaeological employers attempt to reduce costs in order to improve competitiveness. There is, therefore, a growing need for the strategic approach to heritage management and field archaeological practice that can now be championed and developed by the Institute's new Centre for Applied Archaeology.

Notes

- 1 J. Van Willigen, *Applied Anthropology: An Introduction*, 7 (Westport CT: Bergin & Garvey, 1993).
- 2 C. Erickson, "Applied Archaeology and Rural Development: Archaeology's Potential Contribution to the Future", *Journal of the Steward Anthropological Society* **20** (1–2), 1–16, 1992.
- 3 P. Shackel & C. Erve, (eds.), *Places in Mind: Public Archaeology as Applied Anthropology* (New York: Routledge, 2004).
- 4 L. R. Lozney, *Landscapes Under Pressure. Theory and Practice of Cultural Heritage Research and Preservation*, 250 (New York: Springer, 2006).
- 5 S. W. Neusius, "Changing the Curriculum: Preparing Archaeologists for Careers in Applied Archaeology", *The SAA Archaeological Record*, **9.1**, 18–22, 2009.
- 6 DoE. *Planning Policy Guidance Note 16: archaeology and planning* (London: HMSO, 1990).
- 7 D. Perring & S. van der Linde (eds), "Archaeology in Conflict", *Conservation and Management of Archaeological Sites* (forthcoming, 2009).
- 8 J. Flatman, J. Short, J. Doeser, E. Lee (eds) *ALSF Dissemination Project 2002-07 Benchmark Report: Sustainable Heritage – Aggregates extraction and the historic environment* (London: UCL Centre for Applied Archaeology, 2008).