

NEWS

Centre for Applied Archaeology (CAA)

Dominic Perring*

The practice of archaeology is dominated by the concerns of the wide-range of external clients who commission our services, from public agencies through to individual householders. The main source of work comes from the construction industry, which invests in archaeological research in order to satisfy the concerns of local planning authorities whose goal is to ensure that archaeological sites can be investigated and protected in advance of new building.

The Centre for Applied Archaeology was established in order to give the Institute of Archaeology a leading role in undertaking research and rescue projects on behalf of such clients, whilst forging links with local communities. Most of our commercial and outreach services are delivered by the contracts division of the CAA, working as Archaeology South-East. The main challenge in such work is to reconcile commercial pressures with research ambitions and social responsibilities. This is a particularly daunting task in times of economic contraction. The CAA is wholly reliant on external income, and so the overriding concern of the past few years has been to generate sufficient work to retain the core skills that allow us to undertake high-quality research. Our success at doing so reflects on the dedication and competence of an effectively managed team. The problems of the cyclical contraction in the UK

construction industry were also met by refocussing attention on a large post-excavation backlog, allowing for the publication of a series of important monographs (e.g. Perring and Pitts 2013), and by diversifying the range of services provided (as reported on in previous issues of *Archaeology International*). For similar reasons UCL also agreed to take-over the former Essex County Council Field Archaeology Unit, involving the transfer of an experienced team of staff managing a healthy portfolio of active research projects. For 25 years the Essex team stood at the forefront of rescue archaeology in East Anglia, and the successful absorption of the Unit (now operating as Archaeology South East: Essex) has helped to strengthen our research base and broaden access to new project work. Despite the success of these initiatives it has also been necessary to keep a tight control over costs, in order to remain price-competitive, and use the constraints of the recession to maximise working efficiency. This has unavoidably restricted opportunities to invest in more adventurous fields of research.

It will not have escaped attention that the UK housing sector has now, however, returned to growth and we are witnessing the first stages of a new construction boom. At the CAA we have witnessed a 35% increase in recent invitations to tender for new work, which are now arriving at the rate of some 100 a month. Lifted by this tide of new work our annual turnover is heading towards £4M and we currently employ over 100 archaeological staff (seventy-five of whom are on permanent contracts, with Institute of Archaeology

* UCL Institute of Archaeology, London WC1H 0PY, United Kingdom
d.perring@ucl.ac.uk

graduates making up a gratifyingly significant proportion of the team). The incipient housing bubble presents just as much of a challenge as the preceding recession. How do we meet increasing demand, soon likely to result in the skill-shortages and capacity bottle-necks that follow a lengthy period of under-investment, without compromising on the quality of research? How do we find the time for training, teaching and experimental research as our work programme grows faster than our ability to recruit new staff? The temptation to redirect staff from writing reports into digging new sites can be hard to resist, but is a certain path to diminishing returns on the work that we do. In boom-times developer funded archaeology is characterised by short lead-in times and tight windows of opportunity, further encouraging a tendency towards short-term thinking in the commercial practice of archaeology. The very status of archaeological research as a necessary precursor to potentially destructive construction could be at risk if our works were seen to act as a break on building the new houses that most commentators believe are urgently needed. The needs of now shout loudest, but cannot always be heeded.

This return to growth therefore brings a host of new problems, and requires us to rebalance activities and reconsider priorities. It is critically important to overcome capacity-related problems so that we can use present opportunities, unlikely to be sustained, to build a platform for future research. This is not straightforward, and in our haste to meet the needs of commercial clients opportunities will be missed. How can we, as a team of archaeological practitioners reliant on commercial income but based within a research institution, improve on the contribution we make to research, teaching, conservation, public engagement and generating wider social impact? To this end we are now embarking on a wide-ranging consultation exercise, both internally and externally, from which we can set new goals for the CAA. A key objective is to be able to translate experimental developments pioneered in academic

research into viable tools for use in commercially funded work. A series of CAA workshops will be held at the Institute, and in our other offices in Sussex and Essex, over the coming year (2015) in order to share ideas about how to better integrate our commercial work with the wider teaching and research mission of UCL. One of the great advantages of working within a research university is that this gives us privileged access to new ideas and new talent, in return for which we can find funds and opportunities for new field-based research. It is important that the work of Archaeology South-East remains embedded within the wider research environment, despite the apparent constraints of commercial pressures.

A good example of this is found in our current work on developing tools for digital terrain modelling and survey, using photogrammetry from unmanned aerial vehicles. Here CAA research undertaken in the context of Institute research projects at Merv in Turkmenistan (Williams 2011–12) and at Olduvai Gorge (de la Torre *et al* 2011–12) is now being adapted for work in commercially funded projects. An example of this is illustrated here (**Fig. 1**) where our current excavation of a late Iron Age landscape near Harlow has revealed a surprisingly complicated scheme of carefully planned narrow fields and extensive parallel ditch systems. The results of an afternoon overflight by the unmanned aerial vehicle were swiftly converted into a photo-rectified image that could be used on site to aid in the recording and interpretation of this site.

Other initiatives aimed at bridging the divide between academic research and commercial archaeology have attracted funding from the public sector. Although these projects form but a small part of our funded work programme they give important breadth to our operations. Four examples are illustrative of the range of work currently being undertaken by the CAA.

In 2014 the CAA, in partnership with Brighton and Hove City Council and Brighton and Hove Archaeological Society, secured a



Fig. 1: a) Rectified ortho-mosaic aerial view of excavations near Harlow in Essex, 2014; b) Preliminary archaeological interpretation of the landscape illustrated in Fig 1a, drawing on survey data. Most of the archaeological features appear to be of late Iron Age date, and represent field-systems flanking roads. The locations of archaeological trenches dug during an earlier phase of evaluation are also illustrated (photo: Gai Jorayev and Andrew Lewsey).

substantial grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund for our community archaeology project based on the Neolithic Causewayed Enclosure at Whitehawk Hill in Brighton (led by Jon Sygrave, Matt Pope and Hilary Orange). This project, which builds on earlier initiatives, allows us to work with the local community in giving new value to the monument and its wider landscape. Work started

with a geophysical survey, the early results of which suggest that there is much more to the monument than we had expected. Outreach events at the site will examine themes such as our relationship with food, the bio-diversity of Whitehawk Hill and the site's relationship with the wider Downland landscape.

The Centre for Applied Archaeology was also commissioned to coordinate

consultation in preparation for the drafting of the 2015–2019 Hadrian's Wall World Heritage Site Management Plan (<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/caa/hadrianswall>). Led by our principal consultant, Kirsty Norman, the aim of the consultation is to find practical ways forward for the next Management Plan period for Hadrian's Wall, based on as wide a consultation as possible. Our report on this work is nearing completion and will hopefully make a useful contribution to the future management and enjoyment of the Wall.

A major commitment has been the EDUCCKATE project (Education Cultural & Creative Knowledge Alliance for Tomorrow's Entrepreneurs). This 18 month initiative was led by Sarah Wolferstan of the CAA, and co-funded by the European Commission under the Directorate-General for Education and Culture. The project aims to develop an innovative training and mentored internship scheme for the support of Higher Education Institutions and businesses, the cultivation of entrepreneurial mind-set amongst students and graduates and the promotion of entrepreneurship. The project provides students and graduates with access to businesses in the sector as well as opportunities to develop business projects and discover new professional routes. One immediate advantage is that it has opened up a series of career opportunities for UCL graduates, and we are grateful to UCL Advances for directly supporting a series of funded internships.

In partnership with the UCL Centre for Sustainable Heritage (Kalliopi Fouseki of the Bartlett, UCL), and University Departments in Oslo, Barcelona, Eindhoven and Leiden, we

also launched the Heritage Values Network in 2014. This is an exercise in building cross-disciplinary dialogue between heritage practitioners, researchers and policy makers on 'heritage values' through the conduct of a series of networking workshops.

Building on these diverse initiatives the CAA continues to play a vital role in exploring ways of making the doing of archaeology matter to a wide range of audiences, whilst building Archaeology South-East into one of the largest and most research active contract archaeology teams in the UK.


References

- de la Torre, I, McHenry, L, Njau, J and Pante, M** 2011–12 The Origins of the Acheulan at Olduvai Gorge (Tanzania): A New Paleoanthropological Project in East Africa, *Archaeology International* 15, 89–98. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5334/ai.1505>
- EDUCCKATE project** <http://educckate.eu/#!/home>
- Heritage Values Network** <http://heritagevalues.net/>
- Perring, D and Pitts, M** 2013 *Alien Cities: Consumption and the origins of urbanism in Roman Britain*, SpoilHeap monograph 7, Dorchester: SpoilHeap Publications
- Whitehawk Hill** <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/caa/whitehawk-hlf>
- Williams, T D** 2011–12 Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Photography: Exploring the Medieval City of Merv, on the Silk Roads of Central Asia, *Archaeology International* 15, 74–88. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5334/ai.1522>

How to cite this article: Perring, D 2014 Centre for Applied Archaeology (CAA). *Archaeology International*, No. 17: pp. 46–49, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5334/ai.1704>

Published: 23 October 2014

Copyright: © 2014 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported License (CC-BY 3.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>.

 *Archaeology International* is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by Ubiquity Press

OPEN ACCESS 