

ARTICLE

Reflections on the 1943 'Conference on the Future of Archaeology'

Gabriel Moshenska*

At the height of the Second World War the Institute of Archaeology hosted a conference in London to map out the post-war future for archaeology. Over a bank-holiday weekend in August 1943 several hundred archaeologists – amateurs, professionals, academics, civil servants and refugees – debated the future of archaeology. The discussion ranged across fields as diverse as the British Schools of Archaeology abroad, Islamic urban archaeology, licences for excavators, and the need for a national card-index of archaeological sites. Two themes loomed over the event: the question of state funding and control of archaeology caused considerable controversy; whereas the need for greater public engagement and education in archaeology enjoyed near-universal approval. Today the proceedings of the conference are a rich, illuminating and often amusing snapshot of British archaeology at a pivotal moment in its development.

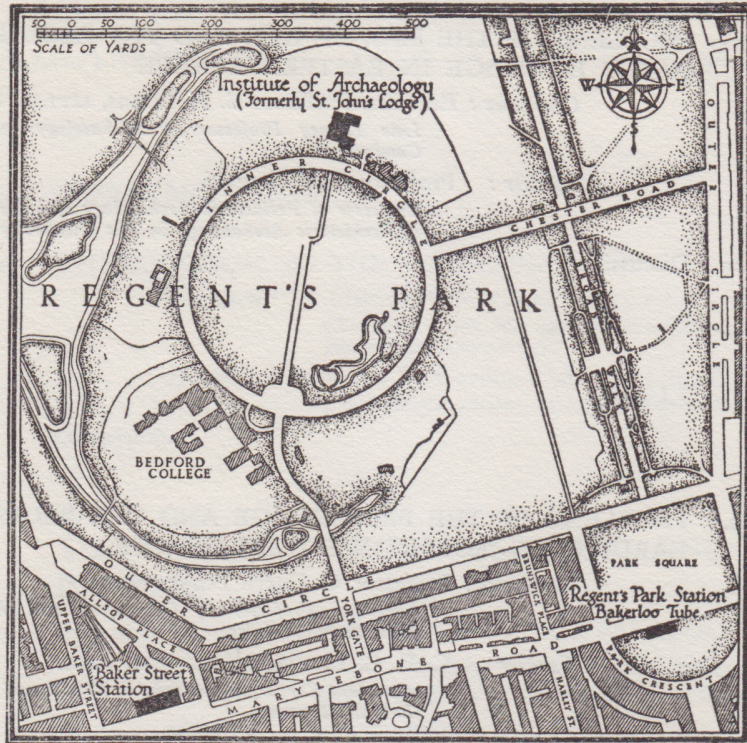
This year marks the 70th anniversary of the 'Conference on the Future of Archaeology', held in August 1943 at the Institute of Archaeology, University of London, in its home at St John's Lodge, Regent's Park (**Fig. 1**). The conference brought together more than 280 archaeologists including many serving in the military, a number of foreign refugee scholars, and representatives of universities, museums and learned societies. The proceedings of this conference, published as the Institute's Occasional Paper No. 5 (*CFA*, 1943; **Fig. 2**), provide an extraordinary record of a historic event, serving as a testament to the sense of excitement and possibility that archaeologists and others felt in contemplating the post-war world, as well as to the sense of collective purpose and social responsibility that they felt for themselves and their discipline. At the heart of the conference was a

debate about both the possibility and desirability of state funding for rescue archaeology on a large scale, and the consequences of such funding (or lack of it) for the development of the discipline. Seventy years on it is worth reviewing some of the principal arguments and ideas raised at the conference.

The 'Conference on the Future of Archaeology' (hereafter *CFA*) must be understood in the context of two other events: the meeting of the 'Conference of Archaeological Societies' that preceded it, in May 1943, and the 'Conference on the Problems and Prospects of European Archaeology' that followed in September 1944 (Evans, 2008). The former sowed the seeds for the foundation of the Council for British Archaeology – seeds that were further nurtured into life at the *CFA* – whereas the latter expanded at some length upon the already ambitious programme of research set out during the *CFA*.

The Acting Director of the Institute of Archaeology during this period was Kathleen Kenyon (**Fig. 3**), while the founding

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



The Institute of Archaeology is housed in the building formerly known as St. John's Lodge in the Inner Circle, Regent's Park, N.W.1. It is close to Bedford College, and the nearest Underground and Tube stations are Baker Street and Regent's Park. Bus services Nos. 1, 18, 27, 30 run along the Marylebone Road and Bus services Nos. 3, 59, 159 along Albany Street, all in the immediate vicinity of the park.

Fig. 1: Map showing the location of the Institute of Archaeology at St John's Lodge, Regent's Park.

Director, Mortimer Wheeler, fought his way across North Africa as commander of a light anti-aircraft artillery unit. Kenyon's appointment, made at the insistence of the Chairman of the Institute's Management Committee, Charles Peers, gave her the means to continue the Institute's activities throughout the war (Davis, 2008: 89). According to her biographer, Miriam Davis, the idea for the conference was Kenyon's, based on both her interest in post-war reconstruction and-

her concern for the future of the Institute of Archaeology.

The Institute of Archaeology Management Committee minutes include a *Draft Scheme for a Conference on the Future of Archaeology*, dated 8 December 1942. This document shows the conference at an embryonic stage, focusing only on 'the future of archaeology and archaeological training in Britain and the Near East' – a clear reflection of Kenyon's personal interests (IoAMC, 1942). The con-

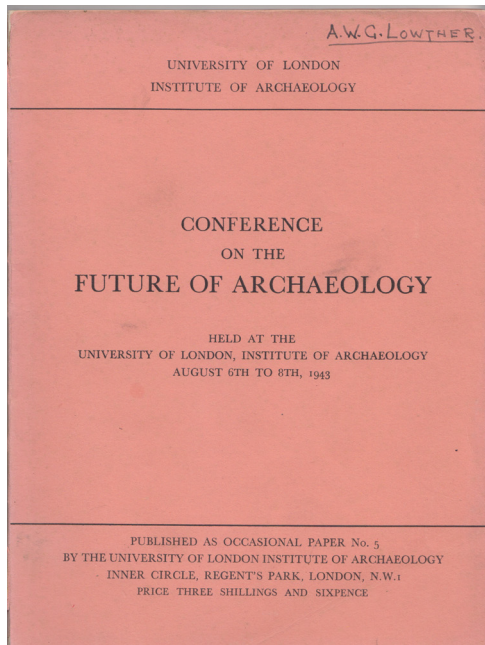


Fig. 2: The proceedings of the 'Conference on the Future of Archaeology' (1943).

ference was initially planned for March 1943, and the organisers took the peculiarities of wartime life into account, noting that: 'It would be possible for many archaeologists engaged in war work to arrange a long weekend of three days', and that 'the lengthening spring days would allow members attending to get away from the building before black-out time' (IoAMC, 1942).

The list of sessions outlined in the draft scheme is markedly similar to the actual event, although the geographical and thematic scopes were both widened, and one part – marked in the draft as 'Session 6. "Antiquities Laws"' – was dropped from the programme (IoAMC, 1942). Various factors may have delayed the conference planning, but in March 1943 Kenyon convened a planning committee which included staff from the British Museum and the Institute itself, and the date of the conference was set for August that year (Davis, 2008: 90).

Aims of the conference

The foreword of the conference proceedings states that: 'The Conference on the Future of Archaeology was held in order to provide an opportunity for the discussion of a number of problems connected with post-war archaeology.' (CFA, 1943: 4). At the time of the conference this post-war world was still almost two years away. It is worth noting that the conference preceded the Allied landings in Italy and Normandy, as well as the onslaught of the V weapon attacks on Britain; the London County Council bomb-damage maps show St John's Lodge at the centre of a near-perfect hexagon of V1 missile strikes (Fig. 4), one of which, in September 1944, shattered windows at the front of the building (Davis, 2008: 92; Saunders, 2005). However, by the time the conference planning began both America and the Soviet Union had entered the war, the German 6th Army had been crushed at Stalingrad, and an Allied victory seemed ever more probable.

The spirit of optimism and hope for the post-war world was by no means restricted to archaeology: in planning the conference Kenyon was inspired in part by a similar conference that she had attended on the future of science (Davis, 2008: 90). Meanwhile, down the road at UCL's Bartlett School of Architecture and Planning, the town planner Patrick Abercrombie had begun to produce the vast and detailed plans for the rebuilding of London, Hull, Plymouth and other cities from the ruins of the Blitz. Abercrombie's plans were sleekly modernist and utopian, not to mention mind-bogglingly comprehensive, ranging from a titanic repositioning of heavy industry, to the carefully planned paving and pedestrianisation of most of Bloomsbury, which would have necessitated digging a traffic tunnel beneath Gower Street (Abercrombie, 1945; Forshaw and Abercrombie, 1943). At the CFA delegates spoke of a post-war boom in archaeological fieldwork in advance of what they imagined would be a rapid and expensive rebuilding of urban areas across the globe.



Fig. 3: Kathleen Kenyon in Red Cross uniform, in 1943, at the opening of an exhibition, 'The Present Rediscoveries the Past', as Acting Director of the Institute of Archaeology.

Like many of the more optimistic plans for post-war Britain the 'Abercrombie Plan' for London, and the archaeological work that it would have generated, were scuppered by the financial hardship and austerity that followed the victory.

The conference

In 1943, 6–8 August was a bank-holiday weekend, allowing a full three days for the conference. Two hundred and eighty-two people attended the event, including the formal representatives of upwards of 60 societies, museums and universities. These ranged from the Museums Association and the Royal Asiatic Society to Carmarthen County Museum and the Walthamstow Antiquarian Society: a full list is given in the proceedings (*CFA*, 1943: 100; **Fig. 5**). Several of the speakers were then or subsequently connected to the Institute including its next two directors, Gordon Childe and W.F. Grimes, as

well as Frederick Zeuner and Kenyon herself (Harris, 2009). Amongst the other speakers were prominent figures in archaeology such as Grahame Clark, Cyril Fox, J.N.L. Myres, Ian Richmond, Christopher Hawkes, Alan Gardiner, T.D. Kendrick and Leonard Woolley. The wartime conditions meant that it was not possible for many archaeologists to attend, either due to service overseas or other inflexible commitments. In light of this the organisers decided that, while plans might be proposed at the conference, nothing should be set in stone so as to allow for further discussion and correspondence on the matters. As the conference proceedings delicately put it: 'It was felt that views as to the course of action which might be desirable would emerge, and that suggestions would be made as to the way in which such action could be taken.' (*CFA*, 1943: 4).

From the pages of the simple, salmon-pink conference proceedings one can get a sense



Fig. 4: Bomb damage map with St John's Lodge at the centre, showing V1 missile impact points as circles, and bomb damage to buildings colour-coded from pale (minor) to dark (severe) (image: © and courtesy of City of London, London Metropolitan Archives).

of the excitement, humour and vitality of the event. As Aileen Fox recalled:

It was the first occasion for four years that so many archaeologists had been able to get together and the atmosphere was exhilarating. I left inspired by a sense of missionary zeal and a feeling that there were good times ahead. (Fox, 2000: 100)

Charles Peers' opening address set the tone:

This is a venture which I think we may say has obviously from the first moment proved a success. We have been told that this was no time for such light things as archaeology or education, but I think we may say that Man does not live by guns alone ... We are chiefly concerned at present with the survival of those things that make life worth living, and we are here to discuss the future of archaeology. Do not look

on archaeology as merely a digging in the past; it is a science of how to manage the future. (Peers, 1943: 5)

Even amidst this excitement the war intruded into the proceedings. Cyril Fox noted in his talk that the 15m-long prehistoric Brigg logboat had been destroyed in the bombing of Hull Museum just three weeks before (Fox, 1943: 52).

The conference was divided into the following sessions, some of which contained just a single paper:

- The contribution of archaeology to the post-war world
- The future of discovery: archaeology at home
- The unity of archaeology
- The future of discovery: archaeology overseas
- The training of archaeologists
- Records and discovery – local and national
- Planning and the independence of societies
- Archaeology and the state at home
- Archaeology and the state overseas
- Museums and the public
- Archaeology and education

In the remainder of this paper I will examine some of the themes that emerged from the papers and the subsequent discussions.

Archaeology and the state

Throughout the conference there was one issue that permeated most of the sessions and many of the papers and discussions: the role of the state in funding and controlling archaeology. While the focus of many of the papers was on Britain or the role of the British government overseas, several speakers – including foreign archaeologists – kept the discussion from becoming too parochial. J.N.L. Myres' paper opened with a frank declaration of his understanding of the forms – and limits – of state control:

What is the relation of planning and State control? Does a planned archaeology imply a State controlled archaeology? ... It would be possible of course to accept a planned archaeology and to make the State the planning authority, but in this country with its long tradition of amateur work, I feel this would be an error. As I see it the function of the State in regard to archaeology in this country is primarily negative rather than positive. The State should primarily protect our records of the past from destruction and from exploitation. Once it proceeds beyond that protective function there are very grave and obvious risks. (Myres, 1943: 54)

The issue of state control was overshadowed by the politics of the 1930s and 1940s, and in particular by the Nazi model of total state control of archaeology, an example few would have wanted to emulate. The German Egyptologist Elise Baumgartel, a refugee from Nazi Germany, responded to the discussion by noting that:

There is ... a danger in State Control of the teaching of prehistory. German prehistory was nationalistic from the start, and when the Nazis came to power, they seized upon it for the inculcation of their ideology. We must remember the dangers of the misuse of archaeology. (CFA, 1943: 69)

Myres' view of state archaeology as primarily reactive, rescue archaeology was strongly echoed by Grahame Clark, who had long taken an interest in the subversion of archaeological research in totalitarian states (CFA, 1943: 62; Evans 2008). Myres suggested that the state's role in planning archaeology should include funding for rescue archaeology in the rebuilding of bombed areas, and in particular for funding publication. Most importantly, like many at the conference,

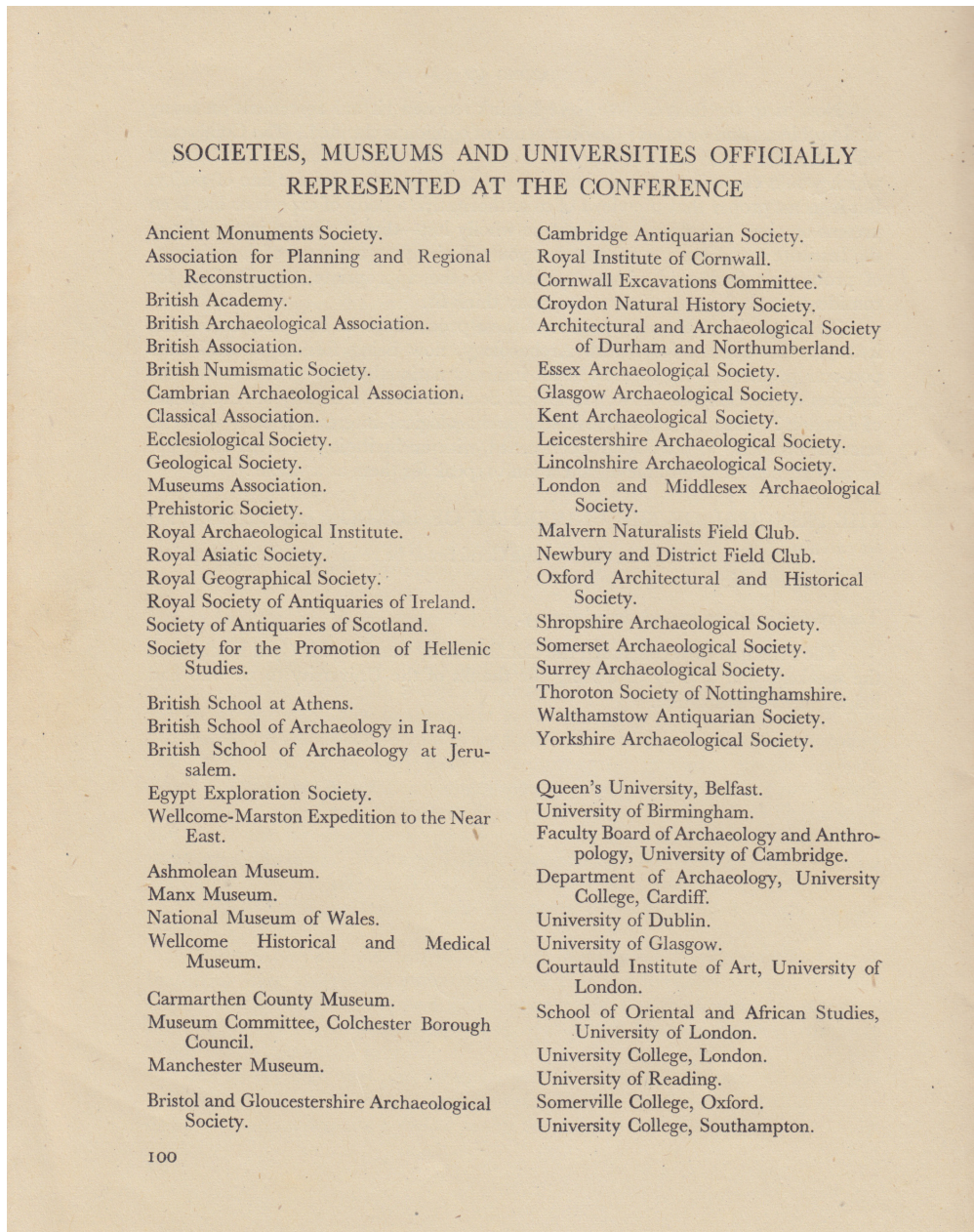


Fig. 5: List of organisations represented at the conference (from *CFA*, 1943).

he recognised the vital connection between state funding for archaeology and the need to educate the public about archaeology: 'We must educate our masters before we can press them to part with their money.' (Myres, 1943: 55).

Following the outbreak of war the British government had gradually taken control of nearly every aspect of society, with widespread acquiescence, in the process laying the foundations for the post-war expansion of the welfare state. Many of the

archaeologists in attendance at the conference were employed in one way or another by the state, whether willingly or not. This understandably coloured the views on state interference in archaeology in a way that it would not have done a few years earlier. Thus Jacquetta Hawkes took a wry view of Myres' and Clark's cautious approach to the state, noting that:

Archaeologists seem to be a flock of sheep flying before the big bad wolf of State Aid ... Is the Civil Servant a different species? The private societies have not been unwilling to enter the British Museum in search of advice, and this is the State. What is the state except ourselves. Mrs. Chitty has opened up the difficulty of getting money. Surely it would be easier to get it by taxation. (*CFA*, 1943: 64)

The Ordnance Survey archaeologist W.F. Grimes, in responding to the same point, noted that many archaeologists including himself were already employed by the state: 'Civil Service archaeologists include people like Mr. Bush-Fox, Mr. Clapham, Mr. Crawford, Mr. Kendrick, Dr. Wheeler, and others whose reputations and works are of the highest quality.' (Grimes, 1943: 65). Grimes pointed out that the scale of post-war reconstruction would have a serious impact on archaeological sites, and that pre-existing funding models would not be able to support the amount of archaeological work required to ameliorate the damage. In a conference where amateur archaeological societies were well represented, Grimes dared to suggest a licensing system for excavators, to protect the archaeology from the untrained. This was echoed by the French archaeologist Claude Schaeffer who noted that 'You need a licence for shooting, but why not a licence for digging, in order to husband our dwindling archaeological reserves?' (*CFA*, 1943: 50).

Archaeology and education

In discussions of state funding and control, many of the speakers raised the issue of public archaeology, both in the need to educate the public about the achievements of archaeology and, more strategically, to convince them and their political representatives of its social and cultural value. Nonetheless the overall tone of the discussion was ideologically charged, with numerous speakers attesting to the public's interest in archaeology and the responsibility of those present to meet that demand.

Miss M. Whitley said that in post-war conditions we must appeal to a new public. The interest of the Worker's Educational Association should be enlisted, for through it we might be able to secure the help of trained and interested labour ...

Miss Keef said that her experience as a hospital librarian showed that there was a real interest in archaeology among the younger generation today.

Mr. Faulkner suggested Summer Schools in archaeology should be held for members of the public, who should be given the opportunity of helping on a dig. Part-time evening classes at Universities would also be helpful. (*CFA*, 1943: 63)

The discussion continued in this tone across several sessions, with a town planner Miss J. Tyrwhitt complaining that 'the results of excavations were not made available to the general public' (*CFA*, 1943: 82). Perhaps the clearest expression of the educational potential of archaeology can be found in Liverpool prehistorian W.J. Varley's paper on archaeology in universities. Varley's paper is most valuable in opening up the idea of archaeology as a truly popular pursuit open to all, regardless of class and income:

There were signs, long before the last war, that the days in which the concept of the place of archaeology in

the Universities as the pursuit of a very recondite erudition by a select few in a quiet temple dedicated to no other purpose, were passing. Anyone who has conducted an excavation within moderately easy reach of a populated centre will bear me out when I claim that there was a staggering volume of popular interest in archaeology. Even though much of this was pure vulgar rubber-necking, may I, as a teacher, remind you that anyone concerned with education who can start from any sort of interest has the hardest part of his task behind him. (Varley, 1943: 91)

Varley described the pre-war evening classes and fieldwork opportunities that he offered for interested Liverpoolians of all classes, including an account of a Bootle docker excavating an Iron Age ditch with grim enthusiasm. He also highlighted the advantages of archaeological education for those who perhaps found traditional schooling dispiriting or difficult:

Men, women and children of all shapes, sorts and sizes, do possess an almost instinctive curiosity about the history of human kind ... that interest is largely killed, or at least stunned, by the kind of history teaching that is inflicted on children and undergraduates. But I have known it revive ... under the compelling fascination of three-dimensional history that you can see and touch. (Varley, 1943: 91–92)

In the discussion following Varley's talk, Beatrice de Cardi (at the time of writing probably the last surviving attendee of the conference) spoke passionately in favour of making excavations more publicly accessible for visitors, and of creating mobile exhibitions of photographs and plans that could provide a more enduring educational resource for local communities once the dig had ended. In contrast to Varley's and de Cardi's idealism, Stuart Piggott's contribution to the debate returned

the issue of archaeological education to its more utilitarian dimensions, noting that 'From the archaeologist's point of view it should also condition the public to recognize the value of research, and so ultimately paying for it.' (CFA, 1943: 95).

The most extraordinary statement on education made at the conference was undoubtedly Grahame Clark's paper, published in summary form in the proceedings, and more fully in *Antiquity* under the title 'Education and the Study of Man' (Clark, 1943). Clark's vision for archaeology has been discussed in depth by both Evans (2008) and Fagan, who described it as 'among the most radical of his publications' (2001: 116). Clark argued that archaeological education was a vital component for developing a unifying, humanistic and thoroughly internationalist scholarship, and ultimately a path to greater human well-being. Evans has suggested that Clark's espousal of internationalism may have been driven in part by regret at his earlier admiration of the state-sponsored archaeology carried out in 1930s Nazi Germany (Evans, 1989: 447). Wide-ranging, erudite, eccentric and inspirational in its utopian imagination, Clark's paper – like the CFA conference proceedings – deserves to be much better known within the canon of vital archaeological texts. Clark asserted that:

Had the German, Italian and Japanese peoples of the present generation received a grounding in the natural and cultural history of mankind, it seems impossible that they could have been mesmerized by the crazy dreams of racial and cultural domination which today are sweeping them to ruin. (Clark, 1943: 119)

One wonders what Clark made of the paper on elementary school education later in the conference, in which the speaker cheerfully reported that:

It is possible, also, to teach children a little physical anthropology ...

they enjoy taking each other's head measurements, and noting different skull shapes, and can get an idea of physical racial differences in this practical way. (Dobson, 1943: 84)

Social inclusion

Varley's Bootle docker volunteering his free time on an excavation highlights another aspect of the discussions around archaeological education: the need to make archaeology more socially inclusive. This was generally expressed in economic terms, reflecting the rise over the interwar period of the middle-class archaeologists based in museums and universities over the independently wealthy set who had long dominated the field. This can be seen in the contrasting careers of figures such as grammar-school-boy Mortimer Wheeler and marmalade heir Alexander Keiller. Philip Corder of the Verulamium Museum, speaking on 'Secondary and Public Schools', asked

If our schools train archaeologists of the future, as they must, what careers are open to them? How often have those of us who are or have been teachers had sorrowfully to damp the enthusiasm of some gifted youngster who wished for an archaeological career because we knew there could be no chance of his finding a livelihood in it? (Corder, 1943: 86)

Leonard Woolley argued for an expansion of the fieldwork budgets of the British Museum and the British Schools abroad, in part to provide bursaries to support fieldworkers during the 'off season'. Aside from increasing the amount and quality of fieldwork carried out by British archaeologists abroad, this would have the benefit, Woolley argued, of providing

that degree of 'security' which has been sadly lacking in the past [to] make archaeology a possible career, open, without regard to private means, to any genuine student possessed of

the gifts which archaeology demands. (Woolley, 1943: 74)

The political dimension of these demands was clearest perhaps in the comment by Peter Shinnie, who became a pioneering African archaeologist. Shinnie, an active and longstanding member of the Communist Party, argued that

a reasonable remuneration should be fixed for all excavations and that no one should be allowed to accept work except at the recognized rate. This is necessary to stop the employment of the wealthy at the expense of others, as happens too frequently under the present method. (CFP, 1943: 71)

Reflections on the Conference

It is interesting to note the sense of excitement that the conference elicited in the attendees; as Aileen Fox recalled, 'there was a new mood and sense of purpose' (2000: 101), but it is also necessary to ask what became of it. The first report of the conference, a brief notice in *The Times*, concentrated on the debates around state control (Anon, 1943). Harvard archaeologist Hugh Hencken reviewed the conference proceedings in the *Archaeological Journal*, giving a fair summary of the event, but his suggestion that the conference was 'purely an internal British affair' suggests a rather superficial reading (Hencken, 1945: 9). Seán Ó Ríordáin pondered the lessons that the CFA might offer Irish archaeology, concluding that the main need was for more trained archaeologists (Ó Ríordáin, 1944). Over the years the conference has largely been studied in terms of specific individuals who attended, such as Kenyon, Clark and Childe. Evans' analysis of Clark's internationalism is one of the very few texts to engage with the conference in any depth, and to recognise the conference proceedings as the extraordinary historical source that they are:

They provide unguarded insights into the complex interrelationships then

existing within British archaeology. It was not the habit of the time to proclaim disagreements within published papers and in this regard the discussion portions of the volume are of the greatest relevance. (Evans, 2008: 224)

Evans (1989) has also noted that the optimistic atmosphere reported at the CFA can be found in the subsequent volumes of *Antiquity* dated 1944–1945.

Reading the conference proceedings today raises a number of questions, of which two are of immediate interest to me. Firstly, what do they tell us about the conditions and directions of archaeology in Britain in 1943? Secondly, what can these debates and ideas of a past generation tell us about archaeology in Britain today – how it came into being, and where it might go from here? The speakers at the conference appeared defiantly confident of the socio-cultural roles and values of archaeology in rebuilding post-war society in Britain and beyond. They envisioned an inclusive discipline, global in its perspective and reach, firmly embedded within frameworks of formal education, and enjoying funding – if not control – by the state and taxpayer. Within this broad matrix some points still stand out: Clark's insistence that learning prehistory would inoculate against racism; Kendrick's plea to extend archaeological chronologies to encompass the modern; and Gibb's argument for more fieldwork and local capacity-building in Islamic archaeology. Kenyon's lament at archaeological training standards raises a wry smile: 'Too often a reputation in the theoretical side of the subject has been regarded as qualifying someone to dig.' (1943: 39). The impact of the Second World War overshadows the entire event, with discussions of destruction and reconstruction alongside expressions of thanks from refugee academics who had found homes in Britain. There is a sense that the war and the near-moratorium on fieldwork that it imposed created a space for reflection on archaeology in Britain, its find-

ings and its directions, and its relationship to society as a whole. The influence of wartime living and working conditions, including an intrusive and apparently all-encompassing government, cannot be overstated. Against the grey backdrop of rationing, air-raids and war work, the opportunity to spend a long weekend discussing post-war archaeology in the company of long-absent friends and colleagues must have been a delightful tonic to the war-weary.

What does the 'Conference on the Future of Archaeology' have to tell us about archaeology today? I am naturally wary of over-interpreting or cherry-picking themes that correspond to contemporary concerns, but there are many to choose from: the impact of violent conflict on archaeological heritage; funding and legislation for rescue excavations; the general absence of archaeology in mainstream education; and pay and labour conditions within the profession. However, what I have found most remarkable in reading and re-reading the conference proceedings is the general consensus that what we would now call public archaeology was already in 1943 a well-established field of discussion. This includes questions of the social values of archaeology; the need to provide fieldwork opportunities for members of the public; the benefits of critical feedback from museum audiences; and most notably the sense that archaeology should be for everyone, not merely the wealthy and privileged few. What is most inspiring from a viewpoint 70 years on is the passion and clarity of purpose with which these arguments were made.

In this short paper I have barely scratched the surface of a subject that deserves a more detailed and intense scrutiny by historians of archaeology. The archaeology conferences held at the Institute of Archaeology, Burlington House and elsewhere during the Second World War are pivotal points in the development of modern academic, professional and amateur archaeology in Britain, within which we can find the seeds and the first green shoots of much that we now take for granted.

Acknowledgements

I have been fascinated by the 'Conference on the Future of Archaeology' ever since I acquired a copy of the proceedings, formerly owned (it appears) by Surrey archaeologist A.W.G. Lowther. I admit that I have, at times, been quite boring in my insistence on the Conference's historical and intellectual significance, so hopefully writing this brief reflection will get it out of my system somewhat. I am very grateful to Chris Evans and Chana Moshenska for their comments on a first draft of this paper. For assistance, advice and general interest in the conference, I am also indebted to Ian Carroll, Rachael Sparks, Katie Meheux, Eleni-Maria Nikolaidou, Adam Koszary, Pamela Jane Smith, David Gill, Chris Naunton, Margarita Díaz-Andreu, Pat Hadley, Jonathan Trigg, Will Carruthers, Sam Hardy, Amara Thornton, Sara Perry and Megan Price.

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