Introduction: emerging approaches to public archaeology

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*Emerging Approaches
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INTRODUCTION
Emerging approaches to public archaeology

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The papers in this special volume originated in two separate sessions of the 2012 Theoretical Archaeology Group conference held at the University of Liverpool ('Decentering the discipline: archaeology and extra-archaeological communities' and 'New approaches to archaeological outreach, engagement and ownership'). Both recognised the momentum that the study and practice of public archaeology has gained in recent years, an observation supported by the fact that the lecture theatres were filled to capacity during the sessions. They offered an exploration of new ways of approaching some of the multitude of challenges posed towards public archaeologists, especially informed by the state of public archaeology in the United Kingdom, but also informed by and responding to broader debates.

Questions of ownership, authority and benefit emerged as primary concerns. These issues have seemingly produced greater impacts in countries with Indigenous communities, but are being increasingly explored in other countries (Beck and Somerville 2005; Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2008; Dalglish 2013; Nicholas *et al*. 2011; Okamura and Matsuda 2011; Waterton and Smith 2009). This has been aided by the rise of areas of study such as archaeologies of the contemporary past (e.g. Buchli and Lucas 2001; Graves-Brown *et al*. 2013; Harrison and Schofield 2010; Orser 2010; Schofield 2014); ethnographies of archaeology (e.g. Edgeworth 2006; Mortensen and Hollowell 2009); digital archaeology and museology (Kansa *et al*. 2011; Lake 2013; Parry 2010); and wider theoretical developments in museum

and heritage studies (e.g. Marstine 2011; Waterton and Watson 2013). The notion of decentering was particularly debated in one of the sessions. This was forwarded as a concept that encapsulates many of the efforts of public archaeologists working under various labels (e.g. 'community', 'Indigenous'). It refers to the centering of previously marginal concerns, knowledges and perspectives held by various communities in addition to the more equitable distribution of benefits that accrue from archaeological work (Conkey 2005; Lyons *et al*. 2010; Silliman 2008; Wylie 2003, 2008).

The collection of five papers here offers a 'snapshot' of some of these complex and emergent discussions. They explore the epistemological and ethical challenges of engaging with extra-archaeological expertise; the authority of archaeologists and the archaeological discipline; disciplinary identity; the potentials and pitfalls of digital work; and, perhaps more fundamentally, the benefits and relevance of archaeology beyond the discipline itself.

Firstly, Donna Yates, explores the issues that arise through disciplinary labeling, informed by her own experience of transitioning from working in 'archaeology' to working in 'criminology'. Secondly, Paul Belford assesses theories of community archaeology by identifying concerns about the sustainability of partnerships between non-professional and professional participants. This is particularly informed by an ongoing public heritage project in Telford. Thirdly, Torgrim Sneve Guttormsen examines the dynamics of heritage production at Haugesund, a region believed to be the homeland of the Viking hero Harald Fairhair, the first king of Norway. The paper emphasises how a popular and commercial past enters into public debates and conflicts, and questions the role 'experts' play in local communities. Kerry Massheder-Rigby's paper questions whether there can be an informative research relationship between archaeology and oral history, particularly when studying late nineteenth and early twentieth century working-class housing. Finally, Dominic Walker surveys public archaeologists' varied uses of social media, highlighting three major factors that prevent the realisation of the more laudable aims of public archaeologists working online: inequities in internet access, the transference of pre-existing authority to online spaces, and the inequitable accrual of resources.

Throughout these papers, there is a sense that recent debates in public archaeology are not geared towards establishing archaeologists as silent experts with little or no authority. Instead, they are intended to establish other, perhaps 'extra-disciplinary', communities as equal participants or collaborators, expanding disciplinary boundaries and what it means to be an 'archaeologist' (Nicholas 2010; Silliman 2008). In many respects, attempts to decentre authority and practice can be considered a form of activism by taking a stand against the pernicious impacts of archaeology (Stottman 2010). This is opposed to the kind of public archaeology characterised by Dawdy (2009) as 'public-relations archaeology', wherein 'public engagement' and other methods are used in an attempt to prevent controversy and retain public support, but which ultimately bolster the authority of the discipline. Instead public archaeology demands hard work and a higher degree of socio-political, ethical and epistemological awareness to aid a shift towards a more effectively democratic and more broadly beneficial discipline. The papers included in this volume attempt to demonstrate such a shift.

Acknowledgements

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