

How much, and how long is it going to take, before we come to recognise this fact?

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Editor's Note

1. It is hoped that the issue of whether South African publica-

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What Shall We Dig And Who Will Pay?

It is a cliché to say that the entire British landscape is an artefact fashioned by generations of farmers, foresters and industrialists. It is nonetheless true and arguably the most far-reaching conclusion drawn from archaeological research. The changes to the landscape wrought by human activity are a continuing process and modern development will alter what had previously been established. However, the pace and scale of change is accelerating so that the land that was deforested in the Neolithic and subsequently farmed and built upon, is now being quarried away by modern machines. Current archaeology seeks to preserve the previous evidence of land use and change either in the ground or by record.

Before a selection of sites for any purpose can be made, we must know of their existence. Britain is fortunate in that the history of prospection, survey and record goes back even beyond the well known antiquaries Camden (1551-1623) and Stukeley (1687-1765). Survey is an academic aim in its own right, some surveys focusing on important monuments (eg. Danebury, Stonehenge environs), others on problematic areas where archaeological sites are obscured (eg. the Kennet Valley, Hullbridge Basin, the Fens). Almost anyone can participate in this essential data collection process. Excellent work has been done by individuals

tions should come under the rubric of the ban, touched on here, will be expanded in a subsequent edition of ARC. The Commentary Editor is writing to various individuals concerned requesting comment, and unsolicited contributions to this theme will be very welcome.

(Charlton, Witton), museum enquiry services, the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments and university teams inter alia. But the information is only useful if it is accessible and communicated. The data must be assembled in centralised archives and should be publicly available. Libraries have been quarries of information for many years, but we now have the technology for rapid selection and extraction through computerisation.

It must be counted as one of the major successes of English archaeology in the last decade that county Sites and Monuments Records (SMRs) have been established. These must be maintained, improved and preferably made compatible (as the National Archaeological Record seeks to do) as they should be the starting point of much original research pointing the student to relevant literature, museum collections, aerial photos, to the precise field, and indeed the exact spot, of discovery. It is encouraging to see that concerted efforts are being made in Scotland and Ireland to establish such records. However, it must always be borne in mind that SMRs are only an interim statement of the communicated results of recording. Nor are they interpretative in their own right and it is for the researcher to judge the value of the evidence. Some recorded observations will be objective (eg. there are six barrows in Hillsburgh...), others subjective (...with nicely rounded profiles). There is a call for

greater and greater objectivity. To this end scoring systems have been devised (eg. Salisbury Plain Training Area), but such systems are frequently biased by the requirements of the scorer (eg. visual amenity, scrub growth) and may not be wholly archaeological.

Most changes in land use require planning consent from a county or district authority. These authorities have been given the power to control development by Parliament. Their intended constraints are set out in Structure and Local Plans approved by the Secretary of State, and archaeology may be included as a legitimate reason for control of land use (DoE circular 22/84). Hence, the archaeological data base (the SMRs) must be readily accessible to planning departments so that the effect of any proposed development on the vulnerable archaeological evidence can be gauged. For this reason, SMRs are best placed in planning departments and maintained and interpreted by qualified archaeologists integrally involved in the planning process.

Many Structure and Local Plans seek to protect 'important' archaeological sites. 'Importance' can only be defined by academic study which defines the criteria for selection. These results are promulgated through publications by the period-specific, and other specialist, societies. Before a decision is made on the importance of a site, we must be sure that we have adequate information on which to base the decision. Hence, if a planning application is submitted which has archaeological implications, the authority should ask the applicant (as it is he or she who wishes to destroy the site) to supply adequate information about the site, on which an informed decision can be made. There should be a presumption against development where important archaeological sites are affected, unless it can be demonstrated that the site does

not merit preservation in situ. An evaluation of the site should reveal the nature, extent, preservation and contents of the site. This may be achieved by geophysical survey, fieldwalking, aerial photography and even excavation. Any excavation should be the minimum required to answer specific questions without causing undue damage. (This strategy should be the same for any excavation whether for evaluation or research.)

Having established the relative importance of sites there is a need to preserve and conserve the best for future generations. The power to enable this comes through Acts of Parliament (1979 and 1983) and may be enforced at a national level (by scheduling) or at a local level (eg. Hampshire County Council's Countryside Heritage Policy seeks to acquire sites or to enter into voluntary management agreements with landowners). Not all sites will warrant preservation in situ but may warrant preservation by record: this may be achieved by excavation. Similarly, not all sites will warrant excavation and there is a need to define the criteria for selection at both national and local level.

Archaeological themes and policies must be regarded as relatively long-term objectives because the opportunities to pursue them are threat-led: it is not the archaeologist but the developer who determines which section of the countryside is next in line for change (although the archaeologist may seek to influence the decision!). Hopefully, the aged arguments for separating 'rescue' archaeology from 'research' are now passed: even if the long-term objectives are borne in mind 'rescue' can supply an extensive and unbiased perspective, as excavations in and around Dorchester have demonstrated for Neolithic Dorset. Also, it is a sad reflection on the financial state of

British archaeology that 'rescue' commands most of the funds for active fieldwork.

Greater pressure must be applied to developers to be responsible for their actions, especially if they are profiting at the expense of the archaeological record. Morally, those who bring about destruction must be held responsible and this is the basis of legislation in many other countries such as Sweden or the USA. Why should the Government be held responsible for the actions of others, when limited resources could be spent on statutory obligations such as archaeological conservation and education?

There are many fine examples where developers have supported archaeological investigation (eg. Esso Midline, Reading Waterfronts, Trowbridge Castle etc.) and the British Property Federation's voluntary code of practice should be encouraged. But legislation is needed to combat those who seek to disregard archaeology.

Although provision has been made in the Planning Acts and the Secretary of State's opinion has been expressed (for example with the Barnstable case), clear guidelines on how the Act should be implemented have not been issued by the Department of the Environment.

Some local authorities (notably Berkshire) have taken a strong line in promoting archaeological investigation, while others suggest that archaeological constraints through planning conditions are ultra vires. Archaeological investigation requires access, time and funds. If the Government expects the private sector to be

responsible for its actions it must define clear guidelines on how these basic requirements are to be met. Funding is the most difficult hurdle, but if archaeological investigation is an integral requirement of development the question of cost should be no different than 'who is paying for the house bricks?'.

If the Government is convinced that the developer should pay, then it should show the way by example and insist, as the House of Commons Select Committee has done, that its own departments act accordingly. For example, the Department of Transport or local Water Authorities should make adequate provision for archaeology on a scheme by scheme basis. In all cases, the costs of investigation should include those of prospecting, evaluation, excavation, analysis, archiving and publication.

What shall we dig? Only those sites which require evaluation, or that do not warrant preservation. Who shall pay? The agent responsible for the destruction. However, one consequence of private sector funding may well be freedom of choice in the selection of investigators. Design competition and competitive tendering are common practice in the construction industry and British archaeology will have to adjust to such practices rapidly and hopefully harmoniously.

Having fought for greater powers for protection and for greater funds to record, we had best know how to cope with them when they come.

A.J. Lawson

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