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Herding cats

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'Herding cats': building archaeological communities

Abstract

Periodically archaeologists turn their gaze inwards towards their own field, to consider it as a craft activity or as a community of interest in its own right. The phrase 'archaeological community' is one widely used but rarely defined, and there is always a tendency towards the division of archaeology into a variety of distinct specialisms: yet one of the major aspects of academic life is in the construction of communities of shared interests. Here I draw upon my own experiences of encouraging others to become involved in efforts to develop those areas of enquiry that interest me. This includes the construction of formal networks but also more 'covert' activities by inserting contributions into conferences and sometimes publications where they may not have been initially welcomed. It was awkward and slightly dangerous work, especially early in my career, and I am not sure it always achieved what I intended.

Keywords

Academic community, disciplinarity, networking, conferences, practice, division

An introduction: tendencies [A]

There is a tendency within academic disciplines for centrifugality: that is, for individual academics to identify their work as different from that of other academics by giving it a different name. For those who work in the field of Historical Archaeology, for instance, practitioners may call what they do 'Historical Archaeology' (Hicks and Beaudry 2007) or may choose to identify it by other terms: 'text-aided archaeology' (Little 1991) or 'documentary archaeology' (Beaudry 1988). Similarly, those concerned for the role of archaeological remains in the present may choose to call what they do 'public archaeology' (McGimsey 1972; Merriman 2004), 'archaeological heritage management' (AHM; Cleere 1989), 'cultural resource management' (CRM; Sebastian and Lipe 2009) or 'archaeological resource management' (ARM; Hunter and Ralston 2006; Carman 2016) among other things. The concern and title of this journal – 'community archaeology' – is itself a product of this tendency to division: community archaeology can be seen as a particular form of the wider 'public archaeology' or distinct from it if the latter is defined exclusively in terms of 'outreach' or in terms of resource management. The same is true of other branches of archaeology: elsewhere I have noted the tendency of the new concern for studies of conflict in the past to dissolve into specialist areas of 'battlefield archaeology', 'modern conflict archaeology', 'combat archaeology' as well as various forms concerned with the archaeology of internment and occupation, among others (Carman 2013a, 10-13). Nonetheless, proponents of different versions of the same areas of study will meet at archaeological gatherings to discuss their different versions in exactly the same terms as one another. The tendency towards division is therefore matched by an equal tendency towards union.

A second periodic tendency in archaeology is the examination of archaeology itself as an activity. This may take the form of considering archaeology as a 'craft' (Shanks and McGuire 1996), as a technical exercise (Carver 2004), as an interesting social activity

(Edgeworth 2006), as an exercise in material transformation (Lucas 2001), as a product of particular ideologies (Thomas 2004), or as an international or global activity (Kobyliński 2001; Ascherson 2006; Carman 2016, 185-199), among other things. Such 'navel-gazing' can serve obviously useful purposes such as determining the likely or possible future trajectories of archaeology, its place within wider cultural and political processes, and in developing ethical practice. They also serve to unite archaeologists in a single endeavour – a valuable counterpoint to the divisive tendencies noted above. If nothing else, these examinations may represent an interesting change of view for us, from our usual obsession with looking at the ground to looking instead inwardly at ourselves. Such ruminations do however provide a valuable opportunity for us to ask what exactly it is that we do when we do archaeology, what we produce, why we produce in that particular form, and what alternatives may be available.

This paper is offered as a contribution to such thinking. It considers the processes of building communities of interest in studying particular objects of enquiry that fall within the broader category of 'archaeology'. It draws especially upon my own experiences in doing so, the efforts involved, the small achievements, the perhaps greater failures, and what these tell us about 'the archaeological community' as a disciplinary grouping.

Locating different archaeologies [A]

FIG 1 NEAR HERE

According to Michel Foucault the 'human sciences' (which include anthropology and archaeology) exist in a realm marked out by three other areas of study:

- *Biology*, which concerns questions of function and norms, and is therefore about organising things in terms of taxonomies and categories;
- *Philology*, which concerns questions of signification and systematics and is therefore about meaning and symbolic structures; and

- *Economics*, which concerns questions of conflict and rule and is therefore about systems of control (Foucault 1970, 357).

Various approaches to, branches of, or styles of archaeology can be located in various places in this space. This diagram accordingly represents a 'slice' through archaeology as a whole, with all the possible types of archaeology representing a third dimension at ninety degrees to the plane shown here (sticking outwards towards the reader). It follows that all styles of archaeology are involved simultaneously in questions of meaning, of categorisation and of control — but not necessarily in that order. From the perspective of Foucault's understanding of the human sciences, any kind of archaeological work can be seen as 'moving' the object of archaeology around in this triangular space, and the practice of archaeology therefore serves to mediate between these three areas of meaning, of categorisation and of control. All archaeologists are doing the same thing, whatever label they like to stick on themselves. The only question is where do they start from, and where do they finish, bearing in mind none gets outside this three-sided space.

FIG 2NEAR HERE

To take a single example, any form of public archaeology starts with material remains somewhere between the Biology and Economics corners of Foucault's three-sided space as a body of material that can be identified and classified as ‘archaeological’ or at least as ‘old’. These remains will finish somewhere on the other end of the base line of the triangle — in the realm of symbolic values, near the Philology corner, as something with cultural significance. They do not get there directly. What happens instead is that the material goes through a stage of characterisation and categorisation (Carman 1996). In so doing it passes through the realm of Biology — shown here as the apex of the triangular space. Public archaeology therefore manipulates the object of archaeology in a particular way: it turns a material phenomenon into a symbolic one in the present by applying to it ideas about categorisation.

Building an archaeological heritage community [A]

It has been interesting for me to see over the past 20 years how the area of public archaeology has become one of regular focus. The first major archaeological conference I attended was the Theoretical Archaeology Group (TAG) meeting at Sheffield, UK in 1988, where there was only one session devoted to 'public' archaeology; and that was really concerned with work in museums. The next ten or so years was one in which at various TAGs, at the European Association of Archaeologists (EAA) conferences and at the World Archaeological Congress (WAC) meetings, among other gatherings of archaeologists, 'heritage' and 'public' archaeology *fought* for a legitimate position. It was a real battle. It was a battle to be taken seriously – 'public' archaeology and 'heritage' were not seen as 'real' archaeology; audiences had to be encouraged in by fooling them into believing it was not about that at all. It was a battle also fought in 'real' archaeology sessions – inserting 'public archaeology' papers into others' sessions and insinuating ourselves into the wider archaeological discourse. As a result many of my early conference papers and sessions notionally concern the structure of archaeological discourses (for which read how we communicate between ourselves and with others), the nature of the archaeological record (for which read how it becomes 'heritage'), archaeological practices (for which read how archaeology can be considered a 'public' activity), and the history of archaeology (for which read the invention of 'heritage'). Each notional topic is a 'legitimate' concern of 'real' archaeology but the actual content is of course about various aspects of 'public' archaeology.

A particular example of this 'covert' activity is a paper I delivered at a conference in March 1995 (subsequently published as Carman 1999). The one-day event – on *Conceptualising settlement in prehistoric archaeology* – was as its title implies focused upon settlements in prehistory. My own paper instead focused upon the concept of the settlement

site as applied in archaeological thinking and allowed me to insert a section especially upon the treatment of the idea of the *archaeological* site in archaeological heritage management, a topic technically irrelevant to the session as planned. I am grateful to Joanna Brück and Melissa Goodman for including me in the conference in the first place and for allowing publication of the paper in the resulting volume (Brück and Goodman 1999): but it was a blatant cheat on my part, however necessary to establishing the legitimacy of archaeological heritage management as an intellectual concern for the 'proper' archaeologists who attended the conference and who would acquire and read the publication.

Organising conference sessions was always easier since archaeological heritage management was regarded as a legitimate area for discussion, albeit in a rather limited, self-congratulatory and repetitive way (witness the papers given at conferences over a number of years that described and lauded the construction of replica Iron Age roundhouses, as if it was an inherently meaningful activity) that often also reduced it to a purely technical exercise. Persuading conference attendees that the topic was one worthy of closer attention from a theoretical perspective was harder, and required more imagination. In 1993 the session *Redefining Archaeological Categories* at that year's TAG conference in Durham sought to match my interest in heritage issues with theoretical approaches to understanding archaeological practice and provided an opportunity to invite others with similar interests: the trick as before was to inveigle those with no direct interest in 'public' archaeologies to a session which engaged them in just that topic.

More overtly, the organisation of sessions at the larger international conferences – especially EAA and WAC – allowed me to recruit other workers in the field of public archaeology and heritage, from academia and the academically-minded practitioners, to create platforms where we could debate issues of interest and concern. Some of the current leaders in the field had their first major outings at such sessions, and I am proud to have

played a role in developing the field in that way. It did pay off – such concerns are now considered the standard fare of archaeological conferences, alongside a concern for interpreting material from the past.

Overall, this development of a concern for 'public archaeologies' has been a positive movement which takes archaeology beyond the narrow concern of a few diehard intellectuals into a contemporary world of real people. It serves archaeology well: we are seen as engaged and relevant. But I cannot help but wonder if it comes at a cost. The number of conference sessions, of books and indeed journals on aspects of public outreach, public education, public and community engagement, and the role of new technologies, has grown and grown until they have become part of the archaeological scene. We expect such sessions at our conferences these days and audiences attend them in numbers, but I wonder at the content. In 2000 to 2001 there were a series of sessions at several conferences organised by a group of dedicated public archaeologists (one of them an editor of this journal) – sessions at WAC, TAG, meetings of the EAA, the Society for American Archaeology (SAA) and Society for Historical Archaeology (SHA) – which aimed to cast a more critical eye over public archaeology. The sessions addressed what ought to be the crucial question, it seems to me: of what doing public archaeology does; and what changes it actually makes in the world. Like this journal, the aim was to raise some important questions and to encourage those working in the field of public archaeology to think much more about what they were doing and its consequences both for archaeology and the communities with whom we work. The sessions were held against a background of an acceptance of public archaeology and heritage as an integral and normal part of archaeological discourse. I wonder now at how much impact they had or could have had. Certainly I have not noted any real movement towards widespread critical reflection in the practice of public archaeology since the early 2000s: the fact that this journal is needed is evidence of this.

We have made heritage work a part of our general understanding of what archaeology is. It has become accepted, normalised, and integrated into our assumptions about what we do. We understand its value and we appreciate its importance. Instead of those involved asking difficult questions, it seems to me, we concentrate increasingly on confirming to ourselves and others that value and importance. The emergence of heritage as a topic of debate in archaeology began – for some of us at least – as a critical exploration of archaeology's place in the modern world. It was difficult, edgy and frequently unwanted. It challenged our understanding of what it was to be an archaeologist. Now it is incorporated into that understanding to such an extent that we often now no longer ask what it is for.

It is the *edginess*, the *sense of danger* that we have lost. Community archaeology is not a comfortable area to work in, and it should not be. We have successfully created a community which is reflected in our ready acceptance at formal gatherings and in the range of publications that are now available. But in doing so I wonder if we have abandoned our capacity to affect the future of our discipline? As a community we are so well integrated into the mainstream that our voice is subsumed. In the game of 'insiders' versus 'outsiders' we have established ourselves so well as 'insiders' that we can no longer be recognised as a critical voice. The success of establishing our field as legitimate is matched by a failure to achieve what that legitimacy was designed to allow us to do.

Building a conflict archaeology community [A]

Unlike the field of public archaeology, once proponents of the various forms of conflict archaeology came together a recognisable community was forged easily and quickly. The reason for this difference is that the proponents of Conflict Archaeology always saw themselves as somewhere outside of mainstream archaeology. While in public archaeology, the aim was to persuade *others* to recognise that the field involved more than mere practice,

for Conflict Archaeology it was to provide a large enough community for its practitioners to feel secure in their own work: the focus was upon *ourselves* rather than other archaeologists.

The processes were largely driven by a desire to find and identify others working in the field.The first gathering of researchers on 20th century conflict took place at the WAC meeting in Cape Town in 1999 (since published as Schofield et al. 2002) and the first international conference on battlefield archaeology in 2000 (published as Freeman and Pollard 2001). The latter was originally designed as a workshop to promote the work of its organisers but such was the interest in presenting alongside them, it was reorganised as a full three-day conference (Freeman 2001, 1). The contacts made at such events provided the basis for further collaborations which arose from other opportunities. One such was the project that developed around commemoration of the 300th anniversary of the Battle of Oudenaarde in Belgium. Quite by chance in 2004 I gave a paper at a conference in Cambridge that mentioned the battlefield at Oudenaarde, one of those the *Bloody Meadows Project* had studied (Carman & Carman 2006, 78-81). As a result we were invited by the Ename Center for Public Archaeology and Heritage Interpretation to become part of an advisory group for the commemoration of the battle to be held in 2008 (Lachaert 2008). The commemoration comprised three elements: a major exhibition about the city of Oudenaarde and the battle; a re-enactment weekend on the anniversary of the battle (Van der Plaetsen 2014, 162); and the 5th *Fields of Conflict* conference, held in Ghent and Oudenaarde in October 2008, co-organised by Patricia Carman and myself with the Ename Center. That collaboration in turn led to the formation of the ESTOC (European Studies of Terrains of Conflict) group which provided further opportunities for battlefield archaeologists in different countries of Europe to meet one another (Carman 2013b, 176). It also led to the survey by metal detector of the battlefield – one of the largest in Europe prior to the 20th century (Foard and Curry 2013,

102) – and growing recognition of the specialism of battlefield archaeology (Scott et al. 2007; Foard and Morris 2012).

The *Fields of Conflict* conferences – together with other series at the UK National Army Museum and among postgraduates, as well as more focused irregular meetings – provide a regular meeting-space, but otherwise Conflict Archaeology has remained a specialism detached from other areas of archaeology. Especially in relation to the study of battlefields, it involves technology regarded with suspicion by many archaeologists (the metal detector), engages with the relatively recent rather than the distant past, and deals with short-term events rather than longer-term site histories. Many of its practitioners are young in the field, and hold junior positions with limited opportunities for advancement while Conflict Archaeology remains outside the mainstream of archaeological teaching and research: they look to more firmly-established colleagues to provide support and encouragement. This is where regular conference series and groups such as ESTOC and CAIRN (the Conflict Archaeology International Research Network established online by Tim Sutherland: http://cairnworld.free.fr/index.php) play their part, providing professional recognition and endorsement of the value of the work.

Things are changing for us, it has to be said. Mainstream conference series are happy to host sessions on conflict archaeology and such sessions attract good audiences. Unlike the early days of the heritage field, there is no need to sneak papers into other sessions and papers that concern aspects of Conflict Archaeology are accepted with no qualms into sessions on landscape archaeology, on the applications of particular technologies, or on archaeologies of the ploughzone. Publishers accept books on the topic (see e.g. Schofield 2005; Scott et al. 2007; Foard and Morris 2012; Ralph 2013; Geier et al. 2014) and not just in English (e.g. Knarrström 2006; Rubio 2008), and there is a well-established journal devoted to the field (Pollard and Banks 2006). Nonetheless, the field remains divided into various sub-

specialisms and only recently has any cross-over between them been identified as valuable. Meanwhile, others who also engage in conflict archaeology remain outside and detached from the community that has been forged over the past fifteen years, preferring to avoid the main forums for engagement with others in the field: but one reason for this may be a desire not to be seen as separate from the mainstream of archaeology, but as part of it. In terms of locating Conflict Archaeology in the Foucauldian space considered earlier, it may be a case of a shift from an initial positon in the realm of economics – the space of contestation and control – via philology and the creation of meaning to a position in the biology realm of normalisation (Figure 3).

FIGURE 3 NEAR HERE

In Conflict Archaeology, the sense of real *threat* that has been lost from public archaeologies persists. Despite widespread recognition of the field as legitimate, the number of professional posts in the field remains low to non-existent, and although the field is attractive to young researchers, the likelihood of building any kind of career as a 'Conflict Archaeologist' is very slight. Those more established in the field are secure but largely because we also conduct other kinds of archaeological work (there is only one senior post I am aware of dedicated to Conflict Archaeology at a British University; others are temporary or honorary). Opportunities for funding work on conflict sites – especially battlefields – is limited, and, like other groupings, ESTOC labours under a constant lack of funding to support meetings. Much of the funding for dedicated field projects comes from heritage agencies (the National Parks Service in the USA; English Heritage or Historic Scotland in the UK) rather than research funding bodies. Many PhD students in the field are self-funding and opportunities for field experience in exploring sites of conflict difficult to acquire.

As a community we cohere very well, but we do so from the fringe of the wider field of archaeology from where our voice is not well heard. In the search for that coherence, there is

a strong desire to establish what is ‘proper’ in the realm of Conflict Archaeology, and work that does not fit with an established orthodoxy is regarded with suspicion if not outright hostility. To be ‘inside’ is to conform to particular research agendas and methodologies: to act as a critical voice from within is perceived as a danger to the whole. The sense of *uncertainty* and *edginess* that has been lost from public archaeologies which persists in Conflict Archaeology drives its practitioners to develop a sense of unity that is detached from membership of the mainstream of our home discipline and which effectively stifles the development of different archaeologies of conflict.

Discussion: creating communities [A]

Perhaps unsurprisingly, my experiences of different communities of archaeologists suggest that very different processes are at work in relation to different contexts but these merge to similar aims. In the field of ‘public’ archaeologies (including studies of archaeological heritage practice), the aim was to have us recognised at not only ‘legitimate’ but also interesting, and that meant integration within the wider archaeological discipline. In the case of Conflict Archaeology, it has been a process of providing secure venues for debate and discussion from which to speak to that wider archaeological community. While both contexts concerned issues of recognition, one process was about integration and the other was about independence. It follows that to be legitimate within archaeology is to offer at once a distinctive expertise but also a contribution to more general debates. The problem of meeting these two oppositional demands is what we all face, and the community that is ‘the archaeological community’ is forged out of the tensions created in doing so.

The tendency towards division and separation – what I called ‘centrifugality’ in my opening sentence – derives directly from these processes of community formation. Rather than being hostile to the creation of a bond between archaeologists, it is part of the glue that

holds us together. It is out of our different interests that our unity comes. Elsewhere (Carman 2016, 186) I have suggested that "Archaeology is one of the few humanities subjects – possibly the only one – in which international practitioners can meet and meaningfully engage in discussion, regardless of the material or period that is their individual specialism" and my own experiences confirm this: I have enjoyed conversations on professional matters with archaeologists from all over the globe studying all kinds of material from every period of the past and the present, something I have not noticed so readily among colleagues from, for instance, History or Classics. The differences in our work provide interesting alternatives rather than threats to our field. On the negative side, however, they also invite us periodically to focus on labelling rather than substance: separating 'CRM' from 'AHM' or 'ARM' or from both (see e.g. McManamon and Hatton 2000); or 'combat' from 'conflict' archaeology, all in an effort to establish some kind of unnecessary distinction from others who are in reality allies rather than rivals.

Again elsewhere (Carman 2016, 188) I have argued that "the status of professional with which the archaeologist is endowed is what allows us to emerge as a community of interest in our own right", but the converse is also true. The community of interest that is created by the dual processes of division and union is what allows archaeologists to present themselves as particular kinds of experts and to develop the status of professional. This one reason for our periodic need to look inwardly at ourselves, a second tendency noted at the beginning of this paper: it seems we need periodic confirmation – and maybe reassurance – that our expert and professional statuses are still deserved and intact, for it is these that provide the authority by which we are allowed to determine which practices are properly 'archaeological' and who may carry the title of 'archaeologist'. This in turn allows us to present ourselves as members of a global discipline rather than a set of separate regional endeavours and our object of enquiry – the 'archaeological record' – as a universal phenomenon rather than just lots of

randomly-distributed ‘stuff’ (although it may be the latter as well); as a universal category it allows the application of similar treatment everywhere and thereby confirms the global status of archaeology and archaeologists. This global status affirms our unity as an archaeological community despite our attempts at partition into distinct sub-fields.

It has implications also for our relations with others, and thus also for the focus of this journal. We not only try to separate ourselves from each other (while affirming unity), we also seek to separate ourselves as ‘real’ archaeologists from others who also have an interest in investigating the past through its material remains (e.g. Italian *tombaroli:* Thoden van Velzen 1996; metal detectorists: Thomas 2012; ‘fringe’ archaeologists: Schadla-Hall 2004). There is scope here for research into the ways in which we may create a sense of ourselves by using our authority as experts to enforce identities upon others (as argued in Carman 2016, 178-180). Such research could look in particular at the relationships between established groups of archaeologists and those regarded by them as ‘other’ – including professionals’ relations with amateurs in territories where such a distinction is meaningful. The link is of course always the theme that ultimately underlies this paper – that between power and identity.

Conclusion [A]

Unlike cats, archaeologists are something of a herd animal: the practice of archaeology is inherently a collective and social activity (Van Reybrouck and Jacobs 2006) which perforce requires the creation of a sense of community. The tendency for archaeologists towards separation of what each does from the work of any other is a paradoxical component of that community-creation. We create sub-groups and sub-sub-groups to which we claim allegiance, ideally to the extent that we stand alone as the sole practitioner of our particular specialism, but in doing so we risk finding ourselves detached from our fellow

archaeologists, and in consequence seek to be considered nonetheless part of the larger whole. Ours is therefore a paradoxical existence, in which we claim simultaneous uniqueness from and identity with others. The archaeological community that is thereby forged is not a single entity but an amalgam of sub-groups: it is the anarchist's dream community, a federation of federations in which the smallest decision-making unit is the individual.

We work hard to build our separate communities, whether to establish our particular specialism as valid within the wider context of archaeology, or as a support group for work that needs to recognise its difference from more mainstream archaeological activity. An accidental consequence of both seems to be the loss of any capacity to accommodate critical – albeit friendly – voices.

Acknowledgements [A]

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