



University of **HUDDERSFIELD**

University of Huddersfield Repository

Baker, David and Morris, Richard K.

Last orders?

Original Citation

Baker, David and Morris, Richard K. (2001) Last orders? *Antiquity*, 75 (289). pp. 608-611. ISSN 0003-598X

This version is available at <http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/id/eprint/11334/>

The University Repository is a digital collection of the research output of the University, available on Open Access. Copyright and Moral Rights for the items on this site are retained by the individual author and/or other copyright owners. Users may access full items free of charge; copies of full text items generally can be reproduced, displayed or performed and given to third parties in any format or medium for personal research or study, educational or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, provided:

- The authors, title and full bibliographic details is credited in any copy;
- A hyperlink and/or URL is included for the original metadata page; and
- The content is not changed in any way.

For more information, including our policy and submission procedure, please contact the Repository Team at: E.mailbox@hud.ac.uk.

<http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/>

to be only reluctantly accepted. I knew we were getting somewhere, however, when, on one of several visits to Ministers, a Personal Private Secretary greeted us as 'the people who are causing me more work than everything else put together'.

Wainwright castigates those of us who wrote *Archaeology and Government* (1974) as being authors of 'the last illogical surge of the rescue crusade'; presumably because, from within, he could not see that at the time it was utterly logical to propose an executive structure 'complementary to but distinct from' the DoE Inspectorate. The logic lay precisely in the continuing inadequacy of what the Inspectorate (not all individual Inspectors) seemed able to do, and its continuing appearance of being unable to bring about significant change from within. Further, following Walsh, Barford, *Rescue*, and the humiliating political retreat at the first whiff of grapeshot over regional archaeological units (how many of us still have letters offering us Directorships of such?), in despair it seemed that the better bet — for the field situation remained serious — was to attempt to by-pass the Department and put effort into bringing about political action to create a new organization specific to the real situation. English Heritage was not quite what we had in mind, but 10

years later, there it was, and now it is regional. But a fundamental difference between Wainwright and myself is that his narrative quietly but insistently parades a smoothed-out history of goodwill, deliberation and far-sightedness whereas, on both the particular and in general, I am much more inclined to remember on the one hand and look for on the other, unpreparedness, confrontation and even conflict as triggers of action and change.

Nevertheless, some events were, to an extent, serendipitous. Wainwright is kind but wrong in placing on me the sole responsibility for bringing archaeological resource management back from the USA in 1975 after drinking deep in Dallas of the teachings of Bill 'Conservation ethic' Lipe and Bob McGimsey, author of the original *Public Archaeology* (1972). The then Chief Inspector of Ancient Monuments was there too. Andrew Saunders, who knows I tell this story, pronounced 'Nothing new in this — it's what we've been doing for 100 years'. If so, maybe Wainwright's narrative, even if nearer a sort of historical correctness than I am allowing, may be telling posterity only how PPG was stitched up the borders of an already-old heritage canvas. Either way, historical truth, like the last quick one, is sometimes difficult to put down.

Reference

WAINWRIGHT, G.J. 1999. Honor the past and imagine the future, *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society* 65: 447–55.

Last Orders?

DAVID BAKER & RICHARD MORRIS*

Professor Geoffrey Wainwright's perspective on the last half-century of British archaeology ('Time please', *ANTIQUITY* 74 (2000): 909–43 — below TP) was an explicitly personal account of a remarkable series of developments in which he played an influential part. This equally personal comment reflects mainly on the world of archaeology's collision with market forces.

The world of archaeology

The world of archaeology's 'intensely tribal love

of gatherings, feastings and vendettas' is both a strength and an Achilles' heel. Until the 1980s, economic irrelevance allowed the discipline to develop internal philosophies, methodologies and practices which were largely unconditioned by either external paymasters or wider social obligations. Perhaps no bad thing in itself, this had a downside in weak structural and intellectual contact with the rest of humanity.

A classic example was the abortive attempt to create a regional structure of field archaeol-

*Baker dbb@suttons.org.uk Morris aasv24@dial.pipex.com

ogy units in the 1970s. TP over-estimates the influence of archaeologists on its outcome, even to the extent of assuming that one of us engineered its collapse. The reality was messier, and more prosaic.

The Department of the Environment's proposal was not preceded by consultation with the Association of County Councils (ACC) about what naively amounted to central direction of how locally-raised taxes should be spent, and an assumption that local authorities would cheerfully fund something which would often be based and working outside their own borders. The ACC sought advice from the newly-founded Association of County Archaeological Officers (ACAO) which found itself trying to limit damage while persuading puzzled ACC lawyers that good men had made the proposals in good faith in an entirely worthy cause. ACAO opposed the regional proposal, not to safeguard local positions but because it was impracticable. The interests of research and the span to achieve critical organizational mass did indeed point temptingly towards regional arrangements, but these would neither have served, nor have been served by, a local government system with responsibilities in planning, museums and education at county or district level. Today, with regional government back on the political agenda, it is timely to remember this.

The sixteenth PPG – Planning and Archaeology (PPG-16)

TP rightly celebrates the genesis of PPG-16, which successfully integrated a mechanism for archaeological conservation into development control and planning policy, but does not face up to its inherent limitations. PPG-16 is not a strategic blueprint for a knowledge-based activity, and nor should it be; in those terms it is tactical, an environmental land-use planning document for managing threats to the material inheritance. It is not designed to provide wider access to results through the social purposes of research, education, tourism or community interest. In the absence of parallel provision for such access, economic forces to which archaeology is secondary have sapped the discipline's primary strength as a knowledge-based activity, while doing nothing to improve what TP acknowledges as a poor record in non-academic communication.

The plight of Sites and Monuments Records (SMRs) illustrates the point. The pioneering Oxfordshire system created by Don Benson in the mid 1960s was based in a County Museum service, and sought to inform the good folk of Oxfordshire as much as land-use planning. Yet as SMRs spread with the steady appointment of County (and later District) archaeologists, mostly in planning departments, increasing pressures and reducing resources made wider dissemination of information holdings almost impossible without an institutional framework, such as a museum, dedicated to such activities. An assessment of English SMRs in 1998–99 showed that most were run by one person; that usage was mainly internal, planning-related and largely disconnected from the wider social uses *which politically justified the planning constraint in the first place*. Attempts to stimulate public debate on the latter aspect were played with a dead bat by government and English Heritage alike, in terms which failed to see past the restricted scope of PPG-16.

Those growing pains — the three 'C's

TP also celebrates the emergence of the 'curator', 'contractor' and 'consultant' — a re-formatting of the tribes that was a steep entrance fee to pay for access to the real world. The new roles overlaid an older concept of managing and understanding the archaeological inheritance through a universally shared curatorship — something which TP dismisses as an 'illusory golden age' and which admittedly was never seriously tested by real world pressures. Yet the new model is itself inadequate because in practice, thus far, the roles do not *inherently* embrace researchers and communicators. Too many curators are under-resourced and handicapped regulators of an essentially commercial process, lacking the time and sometimes the fieldwork experience or academic background fully to monitor or control contracting activities. Contractors mostly find themselves 'mitigating environmental impacts' rather than answering historical questions, adding to knowledge of a topic or a place, or sharing the knowledge on a sustained basis with those who live in it. To survive, many have to bid prices below a level at which a site can be properly examined, with deleterious consequences for quality of output, staff wages and conditions of work. Some consultants seem to promote their

clients' interests on the tacit assumption that a good curator will make it all turn out right in the end. The Institute of Field Archaeologists struggles with the burdensome administration of self-regulation through its scheme for Registered Archaeological Organisations, but the main problem lies with those who would never get registered; dealing with instances of alleged unacceptable practice is difficult in the dangerously litigious waters of the commercial market. All this is the context for the £30 million or more triumphantly said to be generated by the new 'industry' (more inapt jargon). In reality it is an atomistic spend, not a lump sum at the disposal of coherent enquiry that could ultimately benefit all.

Nonetheless, what PPG-16 has helped achieve should not be underestimated, and it is easy to forget the conditions prevailing before 1990. Today, more people are doing more work to higher standards; major projects are being conducted within rigorous research designs; some high quality reports are emerging. Yet 10 years on, most of the strategic effort within archaeology's world is still going into the slow and painful preparation of research frameworks, regional and topic agendas and urban strategies. This is effort essentially related to input, helping to improve the aim of development-led archaeology (or compensate for the lack of control outside the planning system), rather than the output of results into understanding and the community. The views of respected researchers about the usefulness of what PPG-16 is actually generating have been sounding warning bells for some time.

More change

Continuing change in archaeological and wider worlds has created both obstacles and opportunities for those who want to mitigate the impact of commodification. The biggest structural problem is the continuing decline of the public service ethos, exacerbated by political insensitivity to archaeology's social value. PPG-16's appearance coincided with the introduction of 'purchaser-provider' models into public services, and energetic attempts to externalise or privatize the providers. Misleading analogies with the 'curator-contractor' model increased the vulnerability of locally based archaeological services trying to provide intellectual access for local people. PPG-16's require-

ments made demonstrating commercial propriety more important than building or providing a viable local service. In most areas, the emerging territory-free market-orientated commercial network is intrinsically unfitted to sustain local services with any knowledge-based continuity.

The exceptions tend to prove the rule. TP cites Essex, but Essex has always been one of the best counties for historical conservation services. More symptomatic is Bedfordshire's experience. The county-wide historical conservation service could not survive cuts arising from the mid '90s review of local government. Though planning work continues, its 25-year-old field unit lost its core funding for local service provision including backlog post-excavation work. Recognizing a crisis, but suffering financial problems of its own, English Heritage substituted an archiving programme in place of analysis and publication for most of its grant-aided projects. The field Unit has recently been commercially rebranded as part of a Council programme of wholesale privatization with a view to stand-alone financial viability.

Ironically, just as the world of archaeology reformatted itself to serve commercial requirements, the world of ordinary people has declared a hunger for knowledge that market-driven archaeology is largely unable to deliver. TP describes the growing popularity of programmes like *Time Team*, *Meet the Ancestors* and *Talking Landscapes*. Again, contributions from commercial archaeology, such as the Museum of London's effective projections of the Spanish Lady and girl-power gladiators, tend to be the rule-proving exceptions. Sadly, instead of recognizing a potential bridge, the world of archaeology's introspective tendency reacts to the Time Team with self-defining hostility.

Seeds of another kind of dysfunctionality lie in the new comparatively well-funded cultural and environmental access initiatives triumphantly wheeled out by governments of decidedly unjoined-up temperament. Enterprises such as the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), the Local Heritage Initiative and Culture-on-Line bestow their largesse into a situation in which resources for the basic management and promotion of the historic environment (upon which access depends) are generally reducing. Referring back to SMRs, HLF funds are avail-

able for access projects, but not adequately for the structural development that must underpin access; many archaeological officers are saying that the time-take of complex paper-work rules out developing project proposals.

What to do?

In order to realize its cultural value in the widest, public, sense, the world of archaeology needs to revisit its root idea: that everything to do with the historic environment is knowledge- and question-based. There is an unassailable case for adequate — not extravagant — support from public funds for necessary infrastructure and the provision of intellectual context and continuity for otherwise disembodied commercial work. Public interest archaeology calls for public support. No other source exists. Honourable exceptions aside, neither site-based privatized solutions, nor public–private collaborations, nor independents and societies are *by themselves* able to provide the permanence and stability essential for long-term knowledge-based activity.

Here we must consider the frustration and the future of archaeology's independents and local societies. For decades they have been the mainstay of interaction with the rest of society. Many feel overwhelmed by or suspicious of the bureaucracies and procedures of 'public' archaeology. Reasonably enough, many will want to continue to do their own things rather than provide bottom-up responses to top-down imperatives for access which seek to reach constituencies wider than they usually address. Even so, non-commercial partnerships between locally based professional services and local independents, carefully handled, could re-energize on all sides, assuming a realistic approach by the latter, whose contributions would vary greatly from place to place.

Funding from the public purse would bring responsibilities. 'Best value' regimes now being applied to many public services might provide the right kind of scrutiny and accountability — provided they can be adapted (with 'value' properly defined) to deal effectively with knowledge-based activities. For commercial archae-

ology, some kind of regulation may be the only way to equilibrate existing distortive and often counter-productive stresses generated by market forces. 'Curators' (better called 'planning archaeologists') ought to be able to ensure not only that what is required in the commercial sector is fair both to the developer and the archaeological inheritance, but also, crucially, that the process requires results to be fed back to research and community. This will demand new mechanisms, resources and performance indicators in order to confer permanence and prominence upon public explanation. A properly resourced professional Institute ought to be able to inspect and monitor the standards and infrastructure of all fieldwork-related organizations. Development of training programmes in parallel would consolidate the standards needed to make regulation light-handed rather than confrontational.

Regulation, of course, will be anathema to some — as indeed it deserves to be if it amounts to a festival of managerialism or restrictive practice in narrow professional or academic interests. But it is not the kind of control some currently fear in the context of implementing the Valetta Convention; rather, its purpose would be to protect the knowledge-based nature of archaeological work. It is the unavoidable antidote to the market-driven nature of development-related 'interventions' if they are to pull their academic weight beside the research projects that TP rightly celebrates. As many have said many times, we need a structure within which the right kind of competition can take place, for the best research design, for the best ability to provide the range and continuity of skills for the task, and for the most economical and efficient delivery of results within those parameters.

Get these ends and means across to the politicians, the professions and archaeology's involved or supporting public at large, and we will be faced not with Last Orders and drinking-up time, but an extension of licence, to print history rather than money, without term into a productive future for the continuing exploration of history's universe.