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FORUM

Brexit, Archaeology and Heritage: Reflections and Agendas

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This brief reflection considers some of the inter-relationships of, and implications for, archaeology and heritage in the narrow majority 'Leave' vote in the 2016 referendum on the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union, and the subsequent invocation of Article 50 of the Treaty of the European Union by Theresa May's administration in March 2017. We argue that heritage and archaeology were intimately implicated in the referendum result, and have and continue to play an important role in the rise of what have been termed 'new nationalisms' in Europe. We aim here to consider some of the ways in which this might be said to be the case, and to begin to explore what an emerging Brexit, archaeology and heritage research agenda might look like. In doing so, we aim to engage with a broader popular critique against 'expertise' and to forge a new role for research in archaeology and heritage studies which embeds itself within the very political context it seeks to study.

Introduction

'Brexit means. . .' what? This question has been hanging over archaeology and heritage, like every other sector of UK society, for over a year now, and the uncertainty is likely to continue for quite some time. In the face of exhortations from Leave-campaigning politicians for people to be 'optimistic' and even 'patriotic', there is widespread concern about the impact of leaving the European Union on archaeologists and heritage practitioners as individuals, and on these fields as domains of

practice that intersect with varied academic, commercial and public-sector interests. While there has been considerable rumination on the consequences of the referendum result in a huge range of print and online media, and individual universities including UCL are marshalling analyses along a range of trajectories (see http://www.ucl.ac.uk/european-institute/brexit-hub), there has yet to be a detailed, formal consideration of relevant issues across the subject-sector. To address some of these questions at the local level, the authors organised a 1-day workshop at the UCL Institute of Archaeology on 5th May 2017.[1] This discussion paper arises directly from the ideas developed during

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that day, as well as from the handful of other published reflections on the situation currently available (e.g. Gardner 2017; Pitts 2017; cf. Green (ed.) 2016). In this short contribution, we cannot cover all of the multi-faceted aspects of the Brexit situation in great detail, but rather seek to offer some responses to, and reflections on the immediate implications of the vote to leave the EU, and then to consider how a research agenda might be shaped in response to these issues.

The implications of the Leave vote for archaeology and heritage

For the purposes of our workshop, we grouped several of the major themes arising out of the Leave vote in relation to archaeology into three broad domains. These were: 'Scholarship, citizenship and collaboration'; 'New nationalisms and the past'; and 'Expertise and academia in the age of 'post-truth' politics'. The first of these encompasses the very profound and immediate implications of the UK heading towards the EU exit door for practitioners, in terms of citizenship and residency rights, access to funding from EU sources, and the nature of post-Brexit international collaborations. These are issues which have already been raised from within the heritage sector itself (e.g. Heritage Alliance 2017; Museums Association 2016; The Archaeology Forum 2016). All of these areas give cause for concern, but perhaps most serious is the uncertainty which now afflicts the many nationals of other EU countries working in British archaeology and heritage, across the full range of employer organisations. Only at the time of writing, a year after the vote, have anything like detailed plans for the recognition of the rights of non-UK EU nationals begun to be discussed, and these are some way off from being finalised or taking effect (BBC 2017). These will be in addition to an already highly complex – and expensive – immigration system which, as Gai Jorayev (Centre for Applied Archaeology) detailed in his presentation, already puts many barriers in the way of people

seeking work in the UK. Isa Benedetti-Whitton (Archaeology South-East (ASE)) highlighted the increasingly international workforce in commercial archaeology over recent years, and many universities are similarly enriched by the contributions of colleagues from across the EU, and of course beyond. There is already evidence of an adverse effect on student recruitment, with UCAS figures showing an overall 5% fall in applications for 2017 entry to UK universities from students from other EU countries (Sellgren 2017). The impact of any withdrawal or down-scaling of EU research funding is another major issue in archaeology, as a recent report by the Technopolis Group has singled the discipline out as drawing the greatest proportion of its research income from EU sources (Technopolis 2017). Many universities have been lobbying for any lost funding to be replaced from UK sources, with some success – and Oliver Patel (UCL European Institute) spoke at the workshop about UCL's efforts in this regard. However, since the diligence of archaeologists in seeking EU funding has come about because of squeezed UK funding for such disciplines, there is no guarantee that any replacement funds will be distributed in the same proportions (Pitts 2017). The collaborations that such funds have enabled must also be regarded as being under significant threat, a topic addressed in Michael Browne's (UCL European Research and Innovation Office) presentation. Overall, many of the best aspects of current archaeological and heritage practice that have made these disciplines in the UK both world-leading and outward-looking seem to be in grave danger of being much diminished in the future.

Another major theme that has arisen in the wake of the referendum, but with earlier and wider roots, is the emergence of new nationalisms in many parts of the world, often finding expression in right-wing anti-globalisation rhetoric. As with 19th and 20th century movements, these inevitably imbricate archaeology and heritage

in the definition of shared and opposed identities. Interrogation of ideas about the past has therefore become more urgent both in terms of explaining the origins of these movements and in terms of thinking about where they might lead. The four papers in the central session of the workshop on 5th May shed light upon a wide range of the intersections between heritage and these political trends. A common thread is the remarkable persistence of ideas about national and ethnic identity-groups that ultimately derive from archaeology and other historical disciplines as they were previously constituted within the earlier phase of 'old' nationalisms. Both specific identity groupings, and more general ideas about the continuity of identities over time and the mechanisms of their persistence, remain rooted in 19th and early 20th century conceptualisations. Particularly relevant to Brexit are definitions of 'indigeneity' and 'Englishness', which Matt Pope (Institute of Archaeology (IoA)/Archaeology South-East (ASE)) and Andrew Gardner discussed in their respective presentations. Interestingly, while new scientific innovations, like DNA analysis, are being commercially exploited to fit in with these traditional paradigms, as Lorna-Jane Richardson (UCL Digital Humanities/Digital Social Research Unit at Umeå University) and Tom Booth's (Natural History Museum) contribution highlighted, new theoretical approaches to identity have been much less effectively popularised, raising questions about the nature and status of 'expertise', to which we return below. Another important, and in a way contradictory, theme, most strikingly manifest in Chiara Bonacchi's (IoA) analysis of deployments of the past in Brexit-related discussions on social media (as part of the Ancient Identities project; http://ancientidentities. org/; Bonacchi et al. 2016) is the malleable nature of past events and groupings in contemporary discourse. Comparisons between the Romano-British period, for example, and the place of Britain in the EU, have the

potential to be used in either the Leave (domination by a 'foreign' power bloc) or Remain (participation in a multi-cultural international community) causes. This reflects a wider slipperiness in any trans-historical comparative exercise, whether glib or serious (see e.g. Vasunia 2011). However, given the inevitability of such comparisons – indeed, their centrality to any argument for the relevance of archaeology and heritage in the world today – we must repeatedly confront these difficult questions around the intersection of our politics and our expertise. This was a key theme in the final session of the workshop event, and one to which we now return.

Towards a Brexit, Archaeology and Heritage Research Agenda

One of the areas of acute concern for academics across a range of different disciplines has been the coincidence of Brexit with an apparent growth in the general public's mistrust of academic expertise and the development of what has been termed 'post-truth' politics. Thus, in the lead up to the Referendum, prominent Leave campaigner Michael Gove was famously quoted as having said 'I think people in this country have had enough of experts' (Deacon 2016). Rodney Harrison's (Institute of Archaeology) presentation noted the irony that critical heritage scholars have themselves long questioned the role of expertise in official heritage decision making processes (see Harrison 2013; Schofield 2014), only to feel this scrutiny now turned on their own work. He drew parallels between the issues which had arisen in the wake of the Abdication Crisis which stimulated the development of Mass Observation in the 1930s (see Bennett et al 2017), and the ways in which viewing Brexit and its relationship to questions of heritage, truth, publics and expertise through the lens of Mass Observation might help us to understand the contemporary dynamics of these issues. The nature of expertise and post-truth politics were issues similarly

raised by Wendy Higgs' (IoA) presentation, reflecting on her own experiences supporting the Remain campaign during the weeks leading up to the referendum in June 2016. Finally, Dean Sully (IoA) discussed how people-based approaches to conservation might help to bridge the gap between popularism and publics, considering ways in which new notions of expertise might emerge if they were understood to be less fixed and more contingent to the experience of specific lifeworlds.

One of the important conclusions of the day's discussion was that archaeologists and heritage researchers should feel emboldened to engage directly with questions of popular nationalism and post-truth politics through their work. Accordingly, we make some preliminary suggestions here regarding how an emerging Brexit, archaeology and heritage research agenda might develop and where the priority areas for such an agenda might lie. We suggest that such an agenda would need to engage with heritage *and* Brexit, heritage *in* Brexit, and the heritage *of* Brexit. In what remains of this paper we aim to put some more detail on each of these areas of future research and engagement.

When we speak of heritage *and* Brexit, we mean the ways in which Brexit will impact upon heritage and archaeology in practical terms. Here there is a clear need to partner with policy makers and heritage managers to consider the impact of Brexit on the sector, in terms of mechanisms and funding for research, conservation and management of archaeology and heritage; issues related to free movement of labour; the impacts on loans of museum objects and movement of other materials; tourism; forms of protection for heritage objects, places and practices; and so on. As we have noted, these questions have already begun to be explored within the sector itself, and they are pressing ones, particularly given the strong dependence of UK archaeological research on EU funding sources, and the ways in which EU funding in particular has promoted strong comparative

approaches to understanding the human past and present.

An exploration of heritage *in* Brexit would aim to explore the ways in which the material and immaterial past has been bound up in the politics of the present, and the role of heritage and archaeology in the emergence of popular nationalisms. One might explore such questions spatially as well as historically. Here there is also a need to address the ways in which heritage expertise has become questioned in relation to post-truth; inclusivity; the politics of participation; how community is framed and by whom; and the possibility of different forms of participatory practice. We note that heritage and archaeology may have a specific role to play in the sense in which heritage values are often most clearly articulated within the context of conflict and the negotiation and renegotiation of collective identities and values, such as that which characterises the politics of this contemporary moment. Archaeology and heritage also have a role in uncovering the deep pasts of historic and contemporary migrations as a point of contrast to current popular nationalist discourse within the context of the contemporary European 'migrant crisis' (e.g. see Hamilakis 2016) in which questions of heritage, inheritance, rights and territory are never far from the surface of public debate.

Finally, the heritage *of* Brexit is a topic which, as far as we are aware, has hardly yet been discussed – but one which we see as equally pressing. Who is 'collecting' the material and immaterial heritage of Brexit, and how might we go about doing this? What role is there for the tangible and intangible heritage and material culture of both Leave and Remain campaigns in actual and speculative future-making (cf. Harrison et al. 2016)? What will be the long-term impact of Brexit on the material, social and ecological environment (not to mention the political environment), how might that be documented, and in what ways should it be preserved (if at all)? These are again questions which might be explored spatially, as well as temporally,

and require the co-operation of researchers and methodologies drawn from across a range of different fields.

Conclusions

Our brief reflection on the relationship between heritage, archaeology and Brexit is necessarily contingent and preliminary. However, we think it points to the real need for engagement of heritage and archaeological researchers with both the relatively shallow histories of the referendum trail, and the deeper histories on which the politics of the present are premised. We do so not only because Brexit is likely to have a very real practical impact on archaeology and heritage and the ways in which they are practiced and researched in this country, but also in the light of more recent understandings of heritage which see it as intimately related with actual and speculative forms of future making (Harrison et al 2016). In making these observations, we suggest that archaeologists and heritage researchers must forge for themselves a new role in which they, and their research, is embedded within the very political contexts they seek to study. This requires an acknowledgment of the active and necessarily subjective role of research and the complicated, entangled, long term cultural implications of archaeology, heritage and nationalisms, both 'old' and 'new'.

Note

[1] The 'Brexit, Archaeology and Heritage' workshop was live-streamed online by the UCL MediaCentral team. A recording of the second and third sessions is still available at: https://mediacentral.ucl.ac.uk/Play/6676.

Acknowledgements

Competing Interests

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