

INTERVIEW

An Interview with Paul Everill

Hana Morel*

HM: *Hi, Paul, thanks so much for taking the time for this interview. To start with, I was wondering how you have seen the community of archaeology change since you've been involved, and what changes you see as positive or even negative?*

PE: When I first started as an undergraduate it was less than a year after PPG16 had come in, and I remember being taught a little bit about it. It was still a bit of an unknown quantity, but there was still a tendency for people to see it negatively that archaeology was being thrust into this commercial market place and that it wasn't the best place for archaeology to be as a discipline. The focus was very much on the negatives; the downsides of that approach. I was only an undergraduate student, so my involvement in archaeology was very limited, but I think subsequently - and certainly post-PPG16 - everyone now is quite rightly looking back at that as a Golden Age, actually, in terms of the protection of the resource. There's a rather different take on the PPG16 years.

On the other hand, I still think there are issues with the discipline working within a commercial setting, I think a lot of people would have that problem with it. I guess that's really the main change in the discipline in the time I've been involved with it. Obviously there are technological advances and changes in terms of methodology or

approaches to sites, but that's just kind of the evolution of how we do what we do. I think, really, the big disciplinary shift has been post-1990 and the introduction of PPG16.

HM: *How do you think it changed the community and relationships? Do you think under competitive tendering that relationships became more competitive? Or was it always like that?*

PE: On a personal level or across the discipline?

HM: *Well, there has always been vendettas in archaeology, so I imagine that's continued. But perhaps more about the practice and the sharing of data and information. Things like that.*

PE: That's a tough one to call. I think the nature of academic disciplines - let's still consider archaeology an academic discipline regardless of the sector it's based in - means that there's still a tendency for academics and academically-minded people to be quite conservative in terms of sharing data, information and expertise. I also think one of the things you find in commercial archaeology now - and maybe it's just an artefact of the way employment practice works - is that people are in a rush to demonstrate their own expertise and skills, for example. So, diggers who are desperate to get supervisory positions. You hear stories in the pub about someone being a better digger than so-and-so and how so-and-so got the supervisory post...there can be a sort of nasty side

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to working in that kind of environment, and developing a careers in that kind of environment, rather than a more collegial, supportive one. Has that changed? I think it has changed. When I was interviewing for the 'Invisible Diggers' work, I interviewed a lot of archaeologists who had come through in the 80s when having a degree effectively put you into a supervisory role, simply by virtue of having a degree. Now, of course everyone getting into archaeology has a degree. Many of them have also got a Masters degree. So it's quite hard to make an impact as an individual. The career structure is better than it used to be, I think there's more clearly defined career structures, but it still strikes me as a little bit ad hoc. I think it's survival of the fittest. Most diggers, I would say, are simply focused on surviving the next winter cull of site staff. It makes it very difficult for individuals to take their career forward.

HM: *When you say 'more clearly defined career structures', how do you see opportunities for career progression? As in opportunities for training, or great minds leaving the profession because of working conditions. Do you think that's something that needs to be addressed?*

PE: Yes. Absolutely. I think it comes with the difficulty of defining what makes a good archaeologist. We have this at Higher Education level: how do you mark a student's performance on site? What defines a good troweller versus an average troweller versus a poor troweller? You can only broadly categorise some of those skills. I do think there is a career structure, clearly it's a very wide-bottomed pyramid and it is hard for people to progress through that or feel that they are progressing and being taken seriously as a professional etc. In terms of career structure, I think you have a more embedded system - in the majority of units certainly - if a digger is with them for a year, they are permanent staff (whatever permanent really means), and sometimes that's considered to be an assistant supervisory post, and people might feel they're moving up the ladder a little bit.

But I think people do get really frustrated and feel they're not given the chance to get more responsibility; or the opportunity to have an impact on perhaps how things are done, or more input into the work of the unit. And people get frustrated and they look elsewhere for more responsibility, for better pay, or better conditions of employment. Certainly, that was my main reason, really, to go off and do the PhD. It wasn't so much the poor pay, although that was a factor, it was the fact that I felt frustrated by my own slow progress in that set-up. I consider myself to be a good field archaeologist, but there's a lot more involved in climbing the greasy pole in commercial archaeology. In some units, I'm afraid, there is still a suspicion that it's who you know rather than what you know, and perhaps being involved in the after-work pub culture with the right people. Rightly or wrongly, I think there is that suspicion. And people get frustrated by that.

So a lot of talented archaeologists do leave. The problem we're going to have is that if we're losing talented people before they've even really started their career, then in 5–10–15–20 years' time, there are going to be fewer good people training the next generation. I think that's another thing, that increasingly there's a recognition that we do what we can in terms of training at university, but that training has to continue at unit level, within the job. And that only works if you've got people with sufficient skills and expertise - and patience, perhaps - in those roles.

HM: *I have a question for you about senior and junior relationships. What do you think about 'invisible diggers' versus established names that operate in the bubble of archaeology - is there a relationship between the two?*

PE: I got some stick for going with the title 'Invisible Diggers', because I think there were people higher up the profession that felt it was deliberately putting diggers in opposition to project officers and managers. That was certainly never the intention, although obviously having been a digger myself when

I was developing the idea, maybe there was a certain amount of personal feeling involved in choosing that title. I, like a lot of diggers, felt invisible. But I think it doesn't take very much scratching of the surface to realise that actually supervisors, project officers, and project managers, are also to an extent made invisible by the system. This is partly due to competitive tendering, which I don't think is healthy for many disciplines, not just archaeology. There is also the process of how we tackle archaeology and how we take ourselves out of that picture. There was a TAG paper I read some years ago, by Leslie McFadyen and others, about how archaeologists are very good at removing ourselves from archaeology, whereas in actual fact I firmly believe we should be like the sciences. Now I would never say archaeology is a science, but scientists often include a statement - this is my background and where I come from, and the ways in which my own ideas are affecting my interpretation - and that's something that I try and do with my own work. Not necessarily the fieldwork, but certainly the sociological work that I've done. I've tried to be very clear that I'm coming to this study from a certain perspective. It's not completely objective. I think we have to recognise that. I would say, for example, that some of the IfA labour market studies have superficially said, 'this is scientifically objective data', but of course it's also trying to tell a certain story to a certain audience about how the discipline is structured.

So, going back to the original question. I think it's invisible diggers versus the system. It sounds a bit tub thumping, doesn't it? I think archaeologists across the board are victims of expectations. In a commercial environment, we are treated like we're removing a contaminant from the site. We're simply removing obstacles to development. Actually the value of what we do is very hard to quantify, if you should even try to quantify it. I think, hopefully like most other archaeologists, that it's valuable simply because of what it is, and what it can tell us about our own society. You can't put a price-tag on that,

but you can put a price-tag on an evaluation, or an excavation, or a watching brief or a desk-based assessment. It think there's a real tension there. So the invisible diggers refers I guess to all archaeologists.

HM: *That's one thing about archaeologists that I've noticed. We've become increasingly fragmented, in a way we're not able to see archaeology as a holistic process. The process is broken: academics aren't working with commercial, for example, and everyone has different roles and agendas. In a way, post-1990s, that fragmentation accelerated. Do you think that has any effect on public perception? I suppose the question is, how did the restructuring of archaeology under the planning system affect public perception?*

PE: I think there's a series of very important inter-related issues there. In terms of fragmentation, I think it's probably always been the case. Whether it's people working in different parts of the country, or perhaps historically some big egos competing in terms of how they tackle sites and disseminate information and getting the prestige for doing that. One of the big things in terms of fragmentation - to my mind - would be actually the foundation of the IfA. From what I've read, I think it was in 1979 that the Association for the Promotion of the Institute of Field Archaeologists (as it was) was set up by some of the people who had been involved with setting up Rescue, Philip Barker primarily, with a view to setting up something to regulate standards for the management of archaeological projects. But there was a huge body of people working in archaeology who wanted it to be more like a Trade Union, something to defend wages and workers' rights etc. And there was tension between these two groups: the people who wanted it to be a management body for standards and the people who wanted it to protect diggers, wages and pay, and conditions of employment. In the end, obviously, the people who wanted it to be more of a management tool won out. And I can't help

thinking that a lot of the antagonism towards the IfA that is still very prevalent stems from that rupture in the discipline. Even now, we have students going into archaeology, and they're going to the pub with old lags and being told how terrible the IfA is. Of course it's a very different beast to what it was in the 80s, but I think there is still that simmering resentment. Sadly, I think that is one of the fracture points in the discipline. I'm a member of the IfA, I support it, in broad terms anyway, if not word for word. But I do think, sadly, that's one of the fracture points, at that time.

And of course that's not long after you have all of the big issues between Biddle, Barker etc, and the commercial approach to archaeology, the emergence of single-context recording, the big expansion in the DUA. Again, there's a fracture point there between the older way of doing things, very hierarchical, very thorough and very methodical, but very hierarchical. I think single-context recording and the commercial approach was seen by some as a democratising force. Now I'm not sure I subscribe to that view, but it was certainly seen that way at the time. So you've those things as well, that leads into the IfA and perhaps setting in stone those divisions. So I think we've always been a fragmented discipline, but what happened during the 70s and into the early 80s has set that in stone, and we're still dealing with that as a discipline.

HM: *Regarding single-context recording and the Harris matrix, you talk at some point about the increasing trend towards deskilling the field digger. At the same time, there's the idea that the Harris matrix empowered the digger to move away from the 'General Pitt-Rivers'/ Director sort of hierarchical structure on site. Do you see those two things as interrelated?*

PE: Personally, I do use the Harris matrix in my own work, because I find it a useful way of thinking about the remains. But I don't subscribe to the view that it's a great panacea. I don't think Harris was a particularly

experienced archaeologist when he conceived the matrix. I don't think of it as a shortcut. It's still a very useful process, but I think it takes us away from archaeology. It's a useful schematic but I don't think it should be the engine that drives the process, which I think it has become for some people. In terms of it being involved in democratising archaeology, I think that was more to do, in effect, with a commercial need to have archaeologists working with minimal supervision. So the DUA using these stratigraphic matrix, pro-forma sheets and single-context planning allowed archaeologists to work more quickly. You weren't having to stop the whole site to do phase plans or whatever, like Biddle and Barker were doing. Things could move quickly, and people worked with less supervision. So I think the Matrix is a tool within that, in terms of democratising archaeology. However, I think it would be a mistake to equate democratising with improving quality, because I think people like Biddle and Barker would say, we didn't need a Matrix to understand what was going on, and that it's just another part of the toolkit for archaeologists. But actually, I believe Philip Barker wrote something along the lines of, where a Matrix has been used, it doesn't change the interpretation that's been reached on the ground. It's a way of ordering and organising data. So, the democratising of the discipline was more a shift towards the commercial approach and the need, really, to have a less hierarchical - not less but different - set up.

The deskilling, I remember using the phrase and I think with hindsight it's probably a bit harsh, but certainly I think it's fair to say that if you look at the big-named archaeologists of the 20th century, and the huge raft of skills that they were able to draw on, they had a more-than-basic understanding of ceramics and other artefact groups. Whereas now, because it's so much more fragmented, you have ceramics specialists, very often self-employed, not even working in same organisations; or you have osteologists. Units have these people but there's

quite a lot of freelance as well. And they're so separated from what's going on on-site. Or even back in the office, they may be working elsewhere. The whole thing is very fragmented now. There are pockets of knowledge and expertise that are drawn on, but a lot more of that used to be in the field. That's my view anyway.

HM: *So that touches on the emergence of specialisation and that it could lead to difficulties in the synthesis of sites or developing an holistic view. With specialisation and different methods of recording, do you think that has an impact on the ability to do comparative research between sites?*

PE: It's all being outsourced. It makes it very hard for people to draw all that information together and do very much more than scratch the surface in terms of interpretation. You're obviously then reporting facts, aren't you? You're reporting quantities and assemblages and overviews. But I think we lose something in the overall story of the site then.

HM: *I'd like to ask you, in line with the theme of this volume, how you view relationships between senior and junior archaeologists, with regards to peer-review journals and so on. The PIA practices double-blind peer-reviewing, and we choose experts in the field to read and comment on submissions. They come back with their views, and some of them are quite harsh. In this edition, I've given the authors more benefit of the doubt and tried to work with suggestions and get authors to improve their papers. But do you think that the enthusiasm of the younger generations, or the desire to publish, are sometimes potentially crushed by a fixed mind-set among more senior reviewers.*

PE: I think it's always been the case in academia, in particular, up and coming researchers sometimes find it hard to make head-way against ideas that are more established. Yes, like many people I've had disappointment of papers I thought had been strong, going off for review and being told - sometimes

quite rudely - that the reviewer considers it to be a parochial subject, because I suppose - relevant to what we've been talking about - apparently looking at British archaeology is parochial. There are several thousand people who would find it interesting! Some reviewers use the anonymity as an opportunity to be quite rude, and it can be very disheartening. It would be nice to see more positive feedback, even if it's ultimately going to be declined. I mentioned training, and how training should continue when diggers go to units, but I also think in Higher Education, training doesn't stop when we get our PhD, when we get our first lectureship. I think we're learning to be professionals in Higher Education throughout our career. It would be nice if more senior colleagues would embrace the idea and perhaps offer constructive feedback, like you would for a PhD student. I don't think you ever stop learning. I've recently taken on the role of Programme Leader for our undergraduate courses. I'm just in my second year of it, I'm still learning the ropes. There are people who've been doing that for years. I'm not a new lecturer, but I'm a new programme leader. I think no matter what stage you are at in your career if you're doing something that's new or just moving to a new research area, some constructive feedback in reviews would be very, very useful. Certainly, I've had some reviews that have been really helpful. Just to point you to new areas, or perhaps even challenging some of your ideas, but doing it constructively and positively.

HM: *As someone who is in academia, but has also been a digger who worked in the commercial sector, do you think it is possible to bring the different value-systems from these sectors together? Do you think commercial archaeology can have a research framework as an integral part of its work?*

PE: I certainly think that commercial archaeology can contribute more to research overall, and I think predominantly the reason why it doesn't is the failure of academics to

engage with it, and engage with the output. I think there are problems in the commercial structure which mean that, well, primarily I suppose, units aren't able to choose sites based on a research framework. They have sites imposed on them, in effect, and they then have to try and fit that site into a framework. So it's the cart before the horse, in that sense. It also goes back to what we were saying before about the relative disengagement between commercial and academic archaeology, which - regardless of what some senior archaeologists would have you believe - is very much the case. I would love to see academics reach out more to commercial archaeologists, many of whom have research qualifications and an interest in doing research, but perhaps don't have the vehicle to do that.

But also, of course there is a limitation on people's time in commercial archaeology, so I think you do tend to see grey literature coming out, which does what it needs to do, but the resources aren't there to go very far beyond that (with some notable exceptions). It would be nice to see a much stronger link between the two sectors.

HM: *How do you think REF has impacted academia?*

PE: Like a lot of people I have a problem with impact, and how you measure impact. As you know, I co-direct a project in Georgia. In Georgia, it's a very big deal because we're bringing in modern methodology, we're training Georgian archaeology students, and we're starting to become a yard stick by which other projects are measured in Georgia. So, in Georgian terms, the impact is huge! You try and tell the REF that my project in a former Soviet Republic is significant, when the majority of the articles are perhaps being published in Georgian. I don't know. I think most archaeologists are - whether here or abroad - trying to have an impact, whether that's simply by doing their job properly, by disseminating and publicising what they do, or by involving communities. I think it's

quite an artificial thing to try and measure that with the very narrow parameters that the REF use.

Impact is a positive thing, but I think it becomes very restricting if you try and define what important impact is versus so-called trivial, or parochial, impact.

HM: *I'm going to throw this question out there. What do you think actually is the value of archaeology?*

PE: I suppose like a lot of archaeologists I came to it with an interest in history. The value of studying history in general is partly learning lessons from the past and partly understanding how our society works today, so that we can move forward. I also have a deep fascination with trying to understand how people in the past lived. I'd be lying if I said I didn't want to find a princely burial covered in gold, but for me, the most thrilling archaeology is the archaeology of ordinary people doing recognisably ordinary things. As a dad now, the sort of things that speak to me are families and their lives; humble set ups where it doesn't take a huge leap to recognise that people 500 years ago or 1000 years ago or whatever were just like I am, trying to keep their kids healthy, trying to put food on the table. We don't have plagues to deal with - touch wood - we live in a very different world, but the basic things that make us human haven't really changed that much. Certainly for several thousand years, the bare minima - if you like - the core of being human, is recognisably the same. That's what I find fascinating about archaeology.

Part of the problem we have in communicating that passion to developers is that all too often they see archaeologists as holding up a site to excavate yet another Saxon pit with domestic rubbish in it, and they look at that and think 'how's that important?' Maybe it's heresy, but thinking pragmatically we also have to recognise that a little bit of give-and-take can help. Perhaps by saying that something isn't actually that important and having made that sacrifice, we might

then have a stronger case to say 'but this over here *does* need looking at, and money spent on it; *this* is something which is really important locally, nationally, internationally' - however you define that. We do have a problem communicating that to developers, because they're paying their digger-drivers by the day or whatever, and if the archaeologists stop the site and the construction workers don't get paid, then it upsets a lot of people. So we have to be quite certain about what is important. Perhaps there is a certain amount of overzealousness in terms of protecting the Historic Environment, when sometimes you do have to question the value.

Of course the problem we have is not knowing precisely what's going to be there until it's revealed, but I think maybe we can be more pragmatic about it and use that to strengthen our case for the sites that really do need protecting. Yes, it's about communication. We don't seem very good at mobilising the millions of people that follow anything to do with archaeology on the television. I don't know whether that's because there's a divide between the way television portrays what we do, and the reality of what we do. Not all archaeology is about a great story. Sometimes it's quite hard to take a site and do that with it.

I don't know, but I think sometimes we feel quite isolated.

HM: *Do you think that mobilising of the public would come after mobilising our profession, in that we have so many different groups looking at so many different things, there's no single authoritative voice.*

PE: Maybe it's naive, but I would say that's an example of where a state archaeology service would be useful, because then you're talking about state policy towards archaeology rather than going away and interpreting it in different ways by different contractors, different developers, different local authority archaeologists. If you have a state set up and a state policy on archaeology, then that discussion is being held between the profession

of archaeology and policy-makers. Then it's down to the people on the ground to implement that policy, rather than negotiate over it.

HM: *I'm wondering whether with a lack of state policy in the UK, whether the IfA could or should have played that role instead.*

PE: In Geoff Wainwright's article 'Time Please', he makes a very good point about the attempt to set up a state archaeological service in the 70s, and I think it was the same time as the first ideas for an Institute for Archaeology were emerging. And again, it fell down to the fragmentation in the discipline. The point was that academics at the time felt threatened by a professional institute, and the whole thing fell apart. Around the same time, '74ish, there were moves to create a state archaeological service, and we obviously got the regional units, but it never really took off. Having missed the opportunity, I don't think we'll have that opportunity again. We've moved too far, there are too many vested interests, too much money at stake. It would be seen by many - and probably fairly - as a backward step now. Which is a shame, because I do think that something like a state archaeological service funded through a development tax would strengthen the discipline, and would allow us as a profession to talk to policy makers, rather than having the IfA and various different groups talking to ministers.

The IfA, should it do more? Well, that's the question everyone's been asking since 1982, isn't it? The IfA is doing more than it used to. The stick that it gets beaten with about protecting or improving wages and pay and conditions or whatever, some of that's old news. Certainly, in the last decade or so in particular, the pay benchmarking working group, the minimum wage arrangements and that sort of thing - we have seen an improvement. Perhaps not as quickly as we should have. We are partly paying the price for being a discipline that came from the voluntary sector into a commercial environment, where people were just grateful to

have a job, let alone seeking certain levels of salary.

The IfA is a corporate body talking to ministers and engaging in politics, and I think to an extent their hands are tied. At the risk of having more fragmentation, maybe there's room for another body to try and drive that forward, but I think everything's already all over the place and so fragmented, it would probably be a backward step!

HM: *So, my last question, with your work on profiling the profession, what do you think are the main challenges that archaeology faces and which ones should it address?*

PE: We have significant concerns in terms of teaching and training archaeologists. I used to be in favour of the IfA's NVQ as a way forward. Particularly, however, having seen the very low uptake of it in the profession, I don't think the NVQ is the way forward anymore.

I think the way forward is for Higher Education to recognise that we should not just be talking about transferable skills, we should be talking about discipline-specific skills as well. We should be - well, it's down to budgets - seeing more investment in practical skills training at university level, more placements, more employer engagement in developing our curricula. One of my big concerns is getting it right. If we've not got the training right, people are entering the profession and right from the outset experience limitations and problems. I'd like to see increased recognition by the units of their role in teaching and training. Admittedly some are really good; some units are really running with that and doing some great work. We send our students off to do placements, and I've been really impressed by

the units that we've dealt with. But it's not universal. I think units need to be much better in developing the raw materials that universities send them. We can't send them a finished product, because they need that commercial experience. I'd like to see a mentoring system, where new diggers are assigned to an old lag, someone who perhaps has an interest in teaching/training, to help hone those skills. That's something that we desperately need to address. We've been talking about it in circles for decades, literally decades, and we've not really gotten any further or closer to addressing the issue. I firmly believe, as I described in a recent Diggers' Forum newsletter, that we need to think of it as a 'training triangle', with on-site mentoring and support added to the broader training provided by universities and units.

I also have a big concern about the whole notion of assigning economic capital value to the historic environment. I think it's an horrific way of measuring something's value. It goes hand-in-hand with the direction our education has gone with the increased fees: this idea that you buy your education, you are a 'consumer' of it. I firmly believe that education is valuable in and of itself. Archaeology, also, has a value that you simply can't assign a price-tag to. Increasingly, we're no longer talking about the 'historic landscape', we're talking about 'heritage assets'. I really loathe that sort of language when we're talking about the historic environment. So that's another big concern that I can only see getting worse, I'm afraid.

That's probably enough to be getting on with, isn't it?!

HM: *Yes! Exactly! Well, thanks so much for your time Paul.*

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