

The Heritage Policy Group: Policy Development and Community Engage- ment at the UCL Institute of Archaeology

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The Institute of Archaeology has a long history of involvement in policy and community engagement, dating back to the work of the Institute's founding director, Mortimer Wheeler, and continuing since that time through the work of all subsequent directors and numerous staff and students. One needs only to consider the key role of W.F. Grimes in the rescue of much important archaeology in the City of London during the 1950s and 1960s for example, or of Peter Ucko's political work surrounding the World Archaeological Congress in the 1980s and 1990s, to appreciate the consistent commitment to a sense of wider social responsibility that its directors have brought to the Institute. This includes engagement with a diverse cross-section of communities both far and wide from the physical location of the Institute and, in a broader sense, an ongoing role by the Institute in influencing and informing political policy-making in partnership with other London based organisations, such as the Society of Antiquaries of London and the British Academy.

In mid-2011, as part of the planning for the Institute's 75th anniversary celebrations, reported on elsewhere in this volume (pp. xx-x), this commitment to engage in and influence policy and community work was formalised through the creation of an Institute sub-committee, the Heritage Policy

Group (HPG). Officially launched at the first of the '75th Anniversary Debates', on 20 February 2012, the HPG will provide critical intellectual leadership on issues of domestic and international heritage policy from the unique perspective and collective experience of the UCL Institute of Archaeology (**Fig. 1**).



Fig. 1: The new Heritage Policy Group logo.

Heritage policy issues are broadly defined by the HPG, but include commenting upon, monitoring and informing the aims and objectives of governmental and non-governmental organisations and national, regional and local bodies concerned with archaeology and heritage. The HPG has the following specific objectives designed to fulfil this overall aim:

1. To organise timely heritage policy debate and discussion events of relevance to policy makers, social commentators, academics, students, and the public, and to expand the Institute's strategic leadership in heritage public policy.

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2. To formulate statements on heritage policy from the unique, global perspective of the Institute at every level, from the local to the international, in collaboration with the Institute's Centre for Applied Archaeology and Centre for Museums, Heritage and Material Culture Studies.
3. To promote to the public and students alike the range of teaching undertaken at the Institute that relates to heritage policy and its development, highlighting in particular the transferable benefits of Institute degrees, and draw upon the wide-ranging expertise found among the Institute's staff.
4. To facilitate networking opportunities for individuals and corporate bodies working in heritage policy development and implementation, providing an intermediary venue for the exchange of ideas and critical debate.
5. In time, to provide an online collation of heritage policy statements and guidance produced by other organisations. In the interim, to explore possible funding sources to allow this work to be undertaken.

Membership is drawn from interested Institute staff and selected honoraries, plus appropriate staff of other UCL departments and institutes. At present, the membership comprises: Dr Marilena Alivizatou, Dr Paul Basu, Dr Joe Flatman (chairperson), Dr Gabriel Moshenska, Dr Dominic Perring and Professor Andrew Reynolds. As the work of the HPG expands, other members, including external partners, are anticipated.

The first formal events of the HPG were the '75th Anniversary Debates', sponsored by CgMs Consulting. This series of five debates followed a 'Question Time' format, in which panels of key public and professional figures considered a series of major themes relating to the role of archaeology in the modern world. The debates comprised:

Debate 1 (20 February 2012): *Archaeology and the Media*, with a panel comprising Maev Kennedy (Chair), Alexander Langlands, Charles Furneaux, Caroline Norris and David Keys. The first debate was a wide-ranging one, considering both the role of the media in archaeology and also the role of archaeology in the media. The debate highlighted in particular that archaeology as a discipline has much to learn about the technical and logistical structures shaping television provision, particularly the fact that learning how to 'think TV' (especially as regards linear, fact-filled storylines) is crucial if archaeology is to maintain and advance its popular media appeal.

Debate 2 (27 February 2012): *Archaeology and Politics*, with a panel comprising Mark D'Arcy (Chair), Bridget Fox, Jenny Jones, Neal Ascherson and Tim Schadla-Hall. The second debate revolved around the global economic crisis and thus the relationship between archaeology and public resources. Archaeology's clear contribution in relation to education, international relations and local community engagement were all discussed, and specific problems including the salvage of naval heritage and the crisis of archaeological archives were also addressed. A constant refrain throughout the debate was how the sector can be more effective, taking opportunities to highlight the value of archaeology within politics and the public consciousness.

Debate 3 (5 March 2012): *Presenting the Past*, with a panel comprising Chris Chippendale (Chair), Lisa Westcott Wilkins, Robert Bewley, David Clarke and Dominic Tweddle. The third debate included bullish discussion of the place of museums in society, and the general opinion that museums currently are often failing the public that they are intended to serve. Debate also focused on the place of chronological explanation in museums, and whether or not this is a relevant structure for most visitors, who often care little about the actual age of an artefact. Returning to the themes of the previous two debates, the third debate also explored the lack of funding and investment in the sector. Crucial to



Fig. 2: The fifth '75th Anniversary Debate' on the topic of 'Archaeology into the 3rd Millennium' (photo Ken Walton).

solving this problem is challenging the current disconnection between museums and their local communities.

Debate 4 (12 March 2012): *Archaeology and Contemporary Society*, with a panel comprising Sara Selwood (Chair), Nathan Schlanger, Tiffany Jenkins, Neil Faulkner and Ben Cowell. The fourth debate saw some of the strongest discussion in the series, thanks to a very diverse set of viewpoints on archaeology and the human past among the panel. Returning to a consistent theme of the earlier debates – the economic crisis and its effects on the world of archaeology – debate ranged across issues of inclusion, the values of archaeology and the boundaries of the discipline, especially the question of archaeological approaches to the material culture of modern society.

Debate 5 (19 March 2012): *Archaeology into the 3rd Millennium*, with a panel comprising Kristian Kristiansen (Chair), Stephen Shennan, John Barrett, Marilyn Palmer and Martin Carver (**Fig. 2**). The fifth and final debate saw a distinguished panel from the heights of academic archaeology grapple with an intriguing set of questions from the audience. On the one hand, there was much discussion of advances in archaeological method (especially scientific techniques) and theory, especially how archaeology can reclaim leadership of the understanding of the deep past

from the scientific community. On the other hand, there was also much discussion of how archaeology as a practical – especially professional commercial – endeavour can change in the third millennium, breaking the cycle of low financing that harms both the practice and its practitioners alike.

While the debates were well attended in person, a significant feature of these events was the wider 'virtual' audience, viewing the debates via a live video-stream (available for viewing subsequent to the event as well) and also engaging actively in online discussion during and after the debates via Twitter, under the hashtag #ioa75. The active engagement of a wider community of interest in the work of the Institute through the use of such social media is an important development that is likely to be crucial to the future work of the HPG.

Policy Development and Commentary

An expanding part of the HPG now and in the future will be writing formal commentaries on recent domestic and international policy developments impacting on the heritage profession. 2011–12 saw a diverse array of such developments in the UK alone, and these have been the primary policy focus of the HPG in its first year of operation.

In particular, the widely criticised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (CLG 2011; CLG 2012), the proposed replacement for Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment (PPS5) (CLG 2010), the current main piece of planning law affecting heritage in England – and itself a replacement for the better-known PPGs 15 and 16 of the 1990s – was published in draft form in the autumn of 2011 and in final form in the spring of 2012. The HPG submitted a formal statement to the draft document's consultation. When placed alongside the wider planning reforms of the Localism Act (2011), the Marine and Coastal Access Act (2009) and the Penfold Review of Non-Planning Consents (2011), the NPPF is the final step in the most comprehensive reform of the planning system in England since the end of World War II and the 1947 planning acts. Time will tell if the NPPF has a positive or negative impact upon the management, protection and promotion of archaeology, but the initial signs are not good. The NPPF cuts the current guidance on heritage management in PPS5 from 18 to only 2.5 pages and comes in a climate of severe cutbacks to local authority heritage planning advisory services, the key 'gamekeepers' who monitor and enforce planning law and advise on proposals impacting upon archaeology in advance of development. The fear has to be that this reform of the planning system through the NPPF will dangerously weaken the protection of heritage within the planning system, particularly the NPPF's focus on an ill-defined 'presumption in favour of sustainable development' that seeks to put economic interests above all others. This risks taking England back to the bad old days of the 1950s to 1980s, when countless archaeological sites of domestic and in some cases international significance were lost to uncontrolled development. Such a retrograde step would arguably be in breach of the UK's European and international treaty obligations as regards the protection of heritage, not least the 1992 European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage (the Valletta Conven-

tion: Council of Europe 1992). The HPG will be monitoring events closely in this regard.

In a different light, the HPG has also been active in renewed debates surrounding the protection of underwater cultural heritage. The spring of 2012 saw major international interest in the activities of the US-based company 'Odyssey Marine Exploration' (OME) on two sites in the North Atlantic. Members of the HPG, especially its chairperson Joe Flatman, were regular media commentators on this subject, in both print and on the radio (e.g. Flatman, 2012). On the one hand, the spring of 2012 saw the culmination of a legal battle between the government of Spain and OME over the rightful ownership of c.500,000 gold and silver coins that OME had recovered from the wreck of a Spanish vessel (probably the *Mercedes*). A final federal court of appeal in Florida decreed in February 2012 that these coins were the possession of Spain, and ordered OME to return them to that government, setting an intriguing legal precedent for similar cases in the future. The aggressive activities of Spain to protect its cultural heritage and assert its legal rights at sea stand in marked contrast to the ongoing relationship of the British government with OME, where the government has been more interested in partnership agreements to share the financial proceeds of materials recovered and subsequently sold from sunken British warships – most recently on the site of HMS *Victory* (a predecessor of the famous 18th-century flagship of Nelson) – than to protect the nation's heritage. This variation in governmental approach to organizations like OME reflects a broader difference between the Spanish and British governments in respect of their defence of underwater cultural heritage. Spain is one of the founding signatories of the 2001 UNESCO Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage. Meanwhile, although the British government has formally stated that it is willing to abide by the principles laid out in the annex of the 2001 convention, the government there remains unwilling to ratify the convention, despite intensive lobbying

from organizations such as the Joint Nautical Archaeology Policy Committee and the Council for British Archaeology. However, collaborative activities like joint working with OME are arguably in direct contradiction to the convention's annex, making something of a mockery of the British government's claims in this respect. The HPG anticipates significant further contributions to popular debate in this connection.

Public Engagement

A significant part of the remit of the HPG is one of expanding work in and opportunities for public engagement in archaeology, contributing to the wider commitment to and national leadership of UCL in this field. As in the field of policy engagement, the Institute has a long history of involvement in community engagement, dating back, again, to Mortimer Wheeler's exemplary founding role. Numerous staff and students are involved in a diverse array of public engagement and have been since Wheeler's time, including organising and running community archaeology projects (e.g. Moshenska et al., 2011; see also Cohen et al., below, pp. xx–x), Young Archaeologists Club events, and public talks, walks and events.

In May 2011, over twenty staff and post-graduate students met for a one-day workshop to develop additional plans for public engagement by the Institute. The possibilities were discussed for an expanded relationship with institutional partners, such as the British Museum, and local partners, such as community groups in Camden (the London borough within which the Institute is based), as also other parts of London and south-east England, and plans were developed for a new impetus in this field, in partnership with UCL's Public Engagement Unit.

Next Steps

The future of the HPG lies in following up and developing the illustrious work of its predecessors mentioned above. With the impetus of the 75th anniversary events powering

it, and with ever more numerous challenges being faced by the archaeological community in the modern world, there is clearly both the demand and the need for sustained work in the fields of policy and community engagement. In coming years, the HPG expects to comment formally upon policy and legal developments within the UK, Europe and eventually further afield; to lead events, seminars and workshops discussing key concerns of the archaeological community; and to publish and teach across this field. It should be noted that members of the HPG are already actively publishing in this field: details of latest books by Institute staff in this area can be found in the 'Bookshelf' feature elsewhere in this issue (pp. xx–x).

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