



APRIL 2014

# Research & Impact Group



IN THIS ISSUE

## RIG Three year plan

by Natasha Powers, Chair

Welcome to the second edition of the RIG newsletter.

At the end of our first year, the RIG now has over 450 members (all IfA members) and the committee would very much like to thank you all for getting involved. Hopefully you will also have seen that we are now on Twitter @IfA\_RIG

The AGM in February saw the adoption of our three year plan. This plan is not set in stone, but sets out our intentions and priorities as we now see them. In the next month we will be asking you for your opinions on whether we have got this right and what subjects you think we should be tackling first, by sending you a very short 'survey monkey' survey.

In line with the ethos of the group, it is our intention that we will alternate the location of committee meetings between academic and commercial organizations, and between the north and the south of the country. In addition, to increase the options for attendance, one meeting per year will be 'virtual' with attendance by conference call or Skype only (an option which will also be available at as many of the other meetings as practicable).

Future AGMs will include an event specifically aimed at opening up access to one area within archaeology – the provisional plan is to start with a tour of an academic research department in 2015.

Rather than running our own CPD events, the group would like to follow the model of the AEA and sponsor up to four speakers per year at conferences or workshops. Helping people to attend and present at events that they might otherwise feel unable to do so and with the aim of enabling greater information exchange between archaeological 'silos' (academic, commercial, curatorial). Details of how to apply will be circulated in the summer.

In September we intend to hold a one day workshop on collaborative research for students. The University of Leicester/ULAS have kindly agreed to host and again, details will follow shortly.

Last but by no means least, the group aims to publish our impact 'toolkit' by the end of the three years.



### Archaeology and Impact in the Anthropocene

Climate change. Global warming. Pollution. Extinction. What has archaeology got to do with this?  
Image by Norman Kuring, NASA, using VIIRS instrument aboard Suomi NPP, 2012

Page 2



### Researching the First World War Home Front

Dan Miles discusses the Home Front Legacy Project.  
Image: Arch of remembrance, Victoria Park, Leicester  
© N Powers

Page 4

# Archaeology and Impact in the Anthropocene

by Matt Edgeworth, Honorary Research Fellow, University of Leicester  
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Climate change. Global warming. Depletion of Earth's resources. Environmental pollution. Extinction of species. Doubling of world population within a single lifetime. What has archaeology got to do with any of these critical issues?

More than one might think. In 2000, the Nobel prizewinning atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen and freshwater biologist Eugene Stoermer suggested that the Earth had entered a new geological epoch, characterized by human impact on global systems. They called that new epoch 'the Anthropocene'. Geologists developed the idea further, looking for stratigraphic evidence to support these claims. Recently the idea has gone viral, and today hardly anyone in academia can be unaware of its rapid spread across a range of disciplines. Like all big ideas, this one has its flaws. But something about the concept has encouraged natural scientists, social scientists and humanists to actually talk to each other about issues that should concern us all. Thinking about global problems in terms of the Anthropocene seems to have opened up a whole new arena for interdisciplinary debate and research. Now almost every week we hear of another multi-disciplinary conference or research network set up to explore Anthropocene topics.

*Archaeology has an important role to play in discussing the Anthropocene*

More to the point, it is becoming clear that archaeology has an important role to play here. We do not have to go looking for the Anthropocene: it has already come looking for us. Other disciplines have realized that there are certain key questions about the Anthropocene which can only be resolved through examination of archaeological data.



"Heathrow rainbow 3" by Wessex Archaeology, 2006. CC by 2.0  
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/wessexarchaeology/321404281/>

Consider for example the question of when the Anthropocene began. Should it be taken to start with the invention of the steam engine and the dawn of the industrial age in 1750–1800? Or was its start marked by proliferation of artificial radioisotopes resulting from atomic bomb tests and detonations in the late 1940s? Or should the proposed new epoch be taken to begin with partly human-driven extinctions of megafauna at the end of the Pleistocene? There are arguments for all of these and more, but each position needs archaeological evidence (alongside geochemical and other forms of data) to back it up.

Then there is the related question of the stratigraphic basis of the Anthropocene. For it to be formally ratified as a geological epoch, its lower boundary must be located within stratified deposits. The International Commission on Stratigraphy has set up the Anthropocene Working Group (AWG) to consider such issues. But where is the stratigraphy of the Anthropocene to be found if not within the layers and features and deposits of the archaeological record?

Archaeologists may have been studying the stratigraphy of the Anthropocene all along without realizing it. No matter where the lower boundary is set, or when the Anthropocene is taken to start, the material archaeological record provides a useful stratigraphic index for discussion. Far from being peripheral to the issue, then, archaeological evidence is actually central to it.

Let us state the case plainly on the broadest level. Most current trajectories of human-environment interaction have their roots in the more or less distant past. In understanding these trajectories, archaeology can provide that much needed longer perspective, giving discussions some necessary grounding in the concrete material realities of the archaeological record.

That is why the AWG now includes not only geologists, soil scientists, landscape ecologists, climatologists, atmospheric chemists, biologists, palaeontologists and other natural scientists amongst its members, but an increasing number of archaeologists too. Currently there are three.

The purpose of this short article is partly to highlight the relevance of archaeology to the debate and the opportunities for collaborative research with other disciplines that are likely to arise in the near future. But it is also to reflect on the nature of this 'impact'. For such collaborations will inevitably have reverberating effects, not only on relationships with other subjects and on the emergence and development of inter-

disciplinary collectives, but also on archaeology's view of itself and its own role in the wider world.

### *Impact works both ways*

While there is considerable potential here for archaeological research to have impact on areas far beyond disciplinary boundaries, then, it is important to recognize that impact works both ways. There could be real archaeological influence on understanding of global environmental problems, perhaps even on policies and strategies for action, but this will not be a one-way transmission of effects, and archaeology itself stands to be impacted on and positively transformed in the process. I believe that in using the word impact to justify research or apply for funding, we should make sure that it has this notion of impacting in both directions built into its definition. Recall that the very idea of the Anthropocene as a proposed new geological epoch tends to be defined in

terms of the 'human impact' on global systems, and a major criticism that can be levelled against it is that over-emphasizes the role of the human at the expense of the role of other active participants in the geobiosphere. A comparable mistake might be to argue that a community-based archaeological project has impact on local people, without the latter being considered to have an active role in shaping the research and its findings. The concept of impact has a dangerous hubris associated with it if assumed to be merely one-way, whether considered in relation to the demonstrable effects of archaeological research or humanity's role in changing the face of the Earth. When viewed as a two-way or multi-directional process of mutual influence, however, it becomes a valuable concept for framing research.

### ANTHROPOCENE WORKING GROUP

For further details on the activities of the AWG, and links to relevant documents, see:

<http://quaternary.stratigraphy.org/workinggroups/anthropocene/>



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### TELL US ABOUT YOUR PROJECTS

If you have a research project or resource that you would like to tell the group about, or to offer a contribution for the next newsletter (anything from 200-1000 words), please do get in touch!

EMAIL

[groups@archaeologists.net](mailto:groups@archaeologists.net)

### IFA CONFERENCE 2014

If you attended the IfA Conference in Glasgow and would like to write a short piece for the group e-bulletin on the key points that you think we should take away from it, or to pose a question via twitter or Facebook please contact us.

EMAIL

[groups@archaeologists.net](mailto:groups@archaeologists.net)

# Researching the First World War: The Home Front Legacy Project

by Dan Miles, Research Resources Officer, English Heritage



*Investigating the First World War prisoner of war camp at Yatesbury  
© Paul Adams*

On Thursday 6th March 2014, the Council for British Archaeology (CBA) launched the Home Front Legacy project.

This project, in partnership with various national and local partners, aims to support local communities researching and recording First World War military and home front sites and landscapes in Britain. It is not what it appears at first glance (a Defence of Britain II national project, with the CBA organizing an army of volunteers to go out and record sites) but a much more supportive and

enabling project, with the CBA understanding that local groups and communities are already independently embarking on recording their local First World War heritage. The project has developed a recording toolkit (paper and online) and guidance and hopes to develop a programme of training for community groups to record the remains of surviving sites, structures, buildings and landscapes around Britain.

In addition to the community engagement, the data collected by the contributors will populate an online national map, displaying the location of the sites recorded, and it will

be made available to local Historic Environment Records (HERs). This is significant as it will enhance and enrich these local authority maintained datasets, and as well as providing information for further local research and dissemination, the data will become embedded within the local authority historic environment management system, informing planning decisions and potential heritage protection outcomes.

**Who is researching the Home Front - is it pitched at the wrong audience?**

Researching the Home Front is a very good opportunity for the historic environment

community to engage with different groups as well as to take on board different approaches to research.

Badged as a CBA project, the majority of people may think it is an “archaeologically” based project – but it isn’t – and in all honesty is First World War research going to enthuse the majority of archaeologists in the country – whether professional, academic or amateur? Will a county such as Wiltshire, steeped in long standing prehistoric traditions, put to one side the classification of a collection of antiquarian found Neolithic axe heads, to identify and record Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) hospitals in the county? What it could be, is a fantastic opportunity to promote archaeological and historic building recording techniques and research to the wider world of local history societies, study and archive groups, historians (military, social, political), genealogists - in fact everyone who has an interest in their own local history – personal/family and place.

*A perfect opportunity to link together the history of “place” with “people”*

There are already thousands of people actively undertaking personal genealogical family research or researching their own or local community fallen soldiers on war memorials. Many of these people are also increasingly interested and aware of their local heritage.

Archaeological and historic building recording techniques can be used to find, record and understand sub surface remains and standing structures. These approaches

#### HOME FRONT LEGACY PROJECT

For further details see:

<http://www.homefrontlegacy.org.uk/wfp/>



combined with documentary research, contemporary photographs, memories and personal or collective stories can enrich the understanding of the sites and put them into context, not just within their physical landscapes, but also within the socio-political context of the war and its impact on Britain.

### Areas of Research and Dissemination

The variety of potential areas of research is enormous, from military landscapes associated with the preparation for war, to those associated with the war effort such as agricultural landscapes changed through the mechanization of farming and the conversion of large areas of pasture to arable. Areas of the Home Front traditionally associated with the Second World War are now being identified as having their origins in the First. These include rationing, the land army, allotments and dig for victory, air raids and prisoners of war. This is significant, not just in terms of understanding the historic environment and identifying associated sites, but in the public perception of the Home Front and its significance during the First World War.

This re-evaluation of the Home Front, brings with it a perfect opportunity to link together historic environment research of “place” with the social history research of “people”. This will provide opportunities for different types of public engagement and dissemination – from participating in an excavation, to recording oral history testimonies, all of which will provide information to develop exhibitions, local publications and better heritage protection.

#### RESEARCH NEWS



### LoCloud

The Archaeology Data Service (ADS) is excited to be involved in LoCloud, a Best Practice Network of 32 partners, co-funded under the CIP ICT-PSP Programme of the European Commission.

The projects goal is to add to over 4 million digital resources from European cultural institutions to Europeana, an on-line portal providing access to millions of digitized materials from European museums, libraries, archives and multimedia collections.

<http://www.locloud.eu/Resources/LoCloud-video>



### CITiZAN

MOLA has received initial support from the Heritage Lottery Fund to develop a Coastal and Intertidal Zone Archaeological Network. The CITiZAN project builds on the model created by the award winning Thames Discovery Programme (TDP) and aims to create a national network of volunteers, providing them with the skills and systems to record, monitor and celebrate these highly significant but fragile archaeological sites. The funding from the HLF, coupled with matched funding from The Crown Estate, has enabled MOLA to appoint Dr Courtney Nimura to prepare the submission of the second round application which will support an ambitious three-year community programme.

Image: the wreck of the Amsterdam, Bultherhythe, Hastings © N Powers

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