



CIFA2021 ONLINE: ANNUAL CONFERENCE

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SESSION TITLE

Stuck between a rock and a hard place: defining the role of the buildings archaeologist amongst our peers and the wider conservation profession

SESSION ABSTRACT

What is Buildings Archaeology, and how can we expect others to value what we do? It is a sub-topic within the wider archaeological discipline, although buildings are an integral part of how landscapes and settlements have developed since the medieval period. We use the same principles of stratigraphy, the same techniques of survey and photography, the same methods of intrusive investigation, and yet Buildings Archaeology is often placed on the periphery of the archaeological profession. Our role is viewed as being to record, and not to discover. Thereby our findings are rarely reported in standard archaeological media.

This seminar aims to engage with the question of how we can better integrate with the wider archaeological profession, to encourage greater collaboration, and, as an extension, how we can promote buildings archaeology to the wider conservation industry and for others involved in planning for and discovering places.

SESSION PROGRAMME

13:15 - 13:25	Opening Statement <i>Buildings Archaeology Group Committee</i>
13:25 - 13:50	What can buildings do for us? Broadening approaches to buildings archaeology <i>Jeremy Lake, CIfA Buildings Archaeology Group</i>
13:50 - 14:15	Promoting Buildings Archaeology to the Premier League <i>Michael Heaton, Buildings Archaeologist</i>
14:15 - 14:40	Towards an archaeology of nothing, or an archaeology of everything; buildings archaeology in the world. <i>John Mabbitt, Environment & Infrastructure Solutions UK</i>
14:40 – 15:00	Buildings archaeology - a classic case of try, fail and try again <i>Kate Clark</i>
15:00 – 15:15	Break
15:15 – 15:40	What is happening to buildings? Our casework in context <i>Catherine Bell, Council for British Archaeology</i>

15:40 – 16:05	Historic buildings recording and OASIS <i>Teagan Zoldoske, Archaeology Data Service</i>
16:05 – 16:30	Are we there yet? Using HERs for research and planning <i>Emily Hathaway, Worcestershire Archives and Archaeology Service</i>
16:30 – 16:40	Discussion

SPEAKER ABSTRACTS

What can buildings do for us? Broadening approaches to buildings archaeology

Jeremy Lake, ClfA Buildings Archaeology Group

It may seem a truism to state that all places and buildings are a reflection of how people have lived, worked, thought and related to each other, throughout history. It may also seem obvious that understanding the series of changes, throughout time, that have created a place, can inspire and guide future change, including the scale, style, form and location of new development, as well as opportunities presented by the natural and historic environment. However, the way that buildings are recorded and the mechanisms for their conservation have developed along different paths than archaeological sites and the landscapes of which they form part. How can we turn this situation around, and how can we better consider the benefits that buildings can bring to issues ranging from Natural Capital and ecosystem services to research frameworks and the rapidly-growing concepts of health and well-being. I will use case studies (rural, urban and one subject to a Public Inquiry) to show how we can broaden our approach and reach - perhaps – those sectors and interests who are ignorant of the value we can bring.

Promoting buildings archaeology to the premier league

Michael Heaton, Buildings Archaeologist

Nearly 20 years ago, Jane Grenville, in her CBA paper 'Out of the shunting yards...', identified the conundrum implied by the title of this session very clearly: an obsession with descriptive recording that is not reflected in increased historical understanding or, in the case of today's session, improved professional status. We are churning out thousands of lovely drawings and descriptive reports, but very few academic papers, let alone thematic discoveries; and we struggle to have our discipline recognised by our fellow archaeologists, never mind other professionals. It seems that any Tom, Dick or Harry with a tape measure and a Brunskill can call himself a 'Buildings Archaeologist'. This is a situation entirely of our own making: In common with much 'professional archaeology' (and I use the term 'professional' guardedly), the intellectual content of much of our output diminishes every year, to the point that non-archaeologists such as Building Surveyors, Architects or Planners can produce their own record surveys or Heritage Statements without our involvement, but charge 2 – 3 x more than we do. Not until we raise the knowledge and intellectual bars of 'significance' by doing work that others cannot, to our clients' benefits, will we be able to make the optimum viable use of the NPPF and promote Buildings Archaeology to the Premier League of the professions.

Towards an archaeology of nothing, or an archaeology of everything: buildings archaeology in the world

John Mabbitt, Environment & Infrastructure Solutions UK

Many of us were excited when the draft PPS15 was issued, promising a holistic vision of the historic environment that was notionally embedded in subsequent planning policy. The boundary between historic building and archaeology drawn by national planning policy before then had reinforced professional and academic divisions. Ten years on, it seems legitimate to ask what the practical ramifications of this policy change have been. This paper draws on professional practice in field and buildings archaeology, as well as in academic research and consultancy to explore the relationship between historic buildings and archaeological practice, and understand how far this relationship has changed, whether the well-established boundaries of archaeology and historic buildings have persisted, and what the place of the buildings archaeologist is to develop practice by crossing disciplinary boundaries.

What is happening to buildings? Our casework in context

Catherine Bell, Council for British Archaeology

The Council for British Archaeology (CBA), along with the other national amenity societies, are consulted on over 4000 planning applications each year. Over 85% are listed building consent (LBC) applications, others involve large scale developments / redevelopments or proposals in conservation areas.

The CBA bring an archaeological approach to assessing proposed changes to listed buildings and the broader historic environment. How does that make us differ from our amenity society colleagues? It's all about evidential value for us, and how buildings illustrate change over past generations. Adaptive change over time creates layers of stratigraphy in buildings with much to reveal about relationships between successive generations with the same place. This paper will consider how certain building types illustrate this and how a site's evidential value can be used to inform appropriate change. We'll also consider the current trends in planning applications for adapting buildings and the impacts they can have on evidential value.

Buildings archaeology – a classic case of try, fail and try again

Kate Clark

There was a great flowering of buildings archaeology in the 19th century, which was quashed as part of the reaction against restoration, with which it was associated, and from then on there has been a perception in building conservation at least that recording is something that you only do because you are going to demolish something and not before you make the decision. A view that got stronger with the creation of the Royal Commission as a body of record, and the emphasis on recording in mitigation of loss.

In the early 1990s we set out to challenge these perceptions, with new guidelines on the role of recording and understanding as part of the conservation process. We took it a step further with the introduction of Conservation Plans and indeed the conference that launched that approach in 1998 was actually led by the (then) IFA Buildings Special Interest group. Some of that legacy survives - for example in the new Cadw guidance on heritage impact assessment which applies the basic process of understanding used in archaeology to other kinds of heritage. Yet there is still a gulf between the professions on the role of analysis and understanding in informing conservation. And still doubts over the role of buildings archaeology. Clearly we tried and failed - what can we learn from that and how can we avoid failing better?

Historic buildings recording and OASIS

Teagan Zoldoske, Archaeology Data Service

A key similarity between buildings archaeology and other investigations is the importance of public awareness that a project has taken place and where the outputs are. These records are often the last remnant of important pieces of the past that are then erased for development with records themselves disappearing all too easily, preventing future reuse. A key initiative towards improving access to outputs, like unpublished reports and archives, is the OASIS system. OASIS is a free online form for recording work, communicating this to relevant local authorities, repositories and national bodies, and disseminating uploaded reports through the ADS Library. The new form, funded by Historic England (as part of HIAS) and Historic Environment Scotland, has been launched making the OASIS form easier, with new workflow for buildings projects. This paper will demonstrate the new workflow, and discuss the benefits of archiving and disseminating building recordings through OASIS and ADS. It shall also consider how OASIS can help to facilitate the new generation of Research Frameworks, through making available new knowledge and contributing to the research cycle.

Are we there yet? Using HERs for research and planning

Emily Hathaway, Worcestershire Archives and Archaeology Service

Over the last two years, and starting with the mapping of farmsteads undertaken for the West Midlands Farmsteads and Landscapes Project, we have been one of the few HERs nationally who have been lucky enough to develop tools for considering the built environment in its landscape context, and using this to inform neighbourhood plans, provide advice to local authorities and developers, to work with recording groups and also to consider the issues for future research. This talk will not only, therefore, demonstrate how we can take forward and contribute to future research, but also the other issues considered by the speakers in this session – how we as archaeologists can really add value and context to recording and research, and to consideration of the options for future development, consideration of landscape character and adaptation to climate change. Case studies shall range from the date and patterning of farmsteads and rural buildings in the landscape to the ‘everyday’ architecture of the recent past.