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Outreach and Education in Archaeology

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Abstract

There is often a disconnect between archaeology and the education system. Archaeologists, as well as educators, can use many aspects of archaeology to help teach children about science and history in multi-disciplinary ways. However, archaeology is not included in the curriculum of the United Kingdom.

The role of commercial archaeology is also essential in this, because they also have a responsibility of informing local communities about the archaeology they are doing. By making strides to include archaeology in the classroom by educators and continuing it in archaeological practice by archaeologists, children will be better informed about what archaeology is and how it works. Also, teaching children about archaeology can help to provide them with not only a greater understanding and appreciation for archaeology and but also its application of the scientific method outside of the typical spectrum of science courses.

Key words

Educational Role, Commercial Archaeology, Public Interaction

Introduction

Archaeologists have an opportunity to provide the public with access to their pasts and the history of their local area. Yet, unfortunately, one of the basic ways in which this opportunity could be provided is often neglected. The education systems in many countries, specifically the United Kingdom for the purpose of this discussion, often neglects this chance by failing to include archaeology in their national curricula.

Alternatively, the chance for educational outreach from those in the field is also often neglected. So, while the education system fails to provide for the inclusion of archaeology, the people actually doing the archaeology are just as much at fault for this lack in transfer of

information. Perhaps, many times, everyone assumes that the education system knows what is best for teaching children. Consequently, they may forget to look deeper into what is actually happening and actually being taught. When this occurs, subjects like history and science are taught without presenting practical applications for the topics, which would include subjects like archaeology, anthropology, or other areas that could provide cross-disciplinary avenues for education. Ultimately, there must be a compromise between the archaeologist and the educator if any sort of solution is to be found. The educator must realize the value that archaeology can present to the education of children and the wider public. In turn, the archaeologist must also realize that the burden of education cannot stop at the educator's door.

The ability to think beyond the norm is something that archaeology and other interdisciplinary subjects can provide. This paper intends to examine the problem in the relationship between education and archaeology, the reasons as to why those in the field do not necessarily promote archaeology and education, and the positive aspects that compromises such as curriculum-based resources from archaeological units can provide. As a note, these scenarios will also discuss the situation of archaeology and education in the United Kingdom, as a discussion of the global state of archaeology and education is not possible within the confines of any singular discussion.

Archaeology and Education

Everyone has a right to their past. Not only that; the public has a right to learn and understand archaeology. At any given point, during any given day, there is most likely some form of archaeology going on in the area. While this may not be the actual digging, the work associated with it is happening. Perhaps there is research going on into the background of a site, analysis of the information found from an excavation, or even the writing of reports themselves. There is always archaeology happening because there is always new history being discovered.

With this in mind, what is the point of all this work if the public is unaware of, uninformed, or uninterested in what is going on? Many museums and sites are making a great effort to try to provide the public with a greater sense of the meaning of archaeology. "*There is a widely shared conviction that people have a right to a meaningful past*" (Grima 2002: 84). However, the bigger issue is how to make archaeology meaningful to people if they do not have a general

understanding of what it is to begin with. This lack in information and this state of being uninformed about archaeology is a repercussion of the fact that archaeology is not part of the curriculum being taught.

One of the biggest problems of not including archaeology in the curriculum is that it becomes something that people are not familiar with. As children, they are taught the basics for understanding math, science, language, etc. However, by failing to include such concepts as archaeology, they are not exposed to it at a level where they could begin to understand everything that it is and everything that it could offer them. Consequently, this leads to misconceptions about the field of archaeology and unrealistic expectations from archaeologists that can never be lived up to. *"The local archaeologist visiting his local school or teachers centre is likely to have these preconceptions forced upon him and he may find himself expected to perform as the all-knowing expert on the Romans, the Neolithic, and probably the Victorians too, when he only wants to be able to talk about his consuming interest in postholes or whatever"* (Clarke 1986: 9).

Also, by not learning about archaeology in school, children are never given the chance to have it as a part of their frame of reference as they grow up. For example, archaeology is not something that they would be aware of in daily life because it would not be something that, unless they learned it through a different medium, they would have been exposed to. Another way to say this is that people are simply more aware of the world around them when it is in terms of something that they understand. Children will most likely never be able to process something in the manner of the scientific method if they were not exposed to it at some point in their life. *"The popular image of archaeology needs to be broken down and replaced with a flexible approach to specific skills and methods that can be relevant to different levels in schools"* (Clarke 1986: 9). In order for children to understand what archaeology is, they need to be taught about it in school and not just as an aside to their regular history lesson.

Archaeology would be a useful method for trying to convey such concepts of the scientific method while incorporating history. Another important point to note in the use of archaeology is its ability to provide children with the idea of the use of evidence (Clarke 1986). They would be able to take many different avenues to try to find the purpose of a site or an artefact even. For example, they could use historic buildings, other artefacts, historic documents or maps, geology, and even landscape studies to try to come to an answer. *"Understanding*

the nature of evidence, being able to evaluate it, and use it to make hypotheses and reach informed conclusions are skills that have uses beyond archaeology" (Clarke 1986: 9).

Children in primary school are at the most impressionable stages of their lives. It is during this time, that many children learn the basics of their knowledge as well as establish their own personal goals and understandings of the world around them. Many archaeologists will admit that they decided to go into archaeology at a young age. However, like Peter Clarke has pointed out, by encouraging the study of archaeology for children, archaeologists are not trying to convert a whole new generation to the field. They instead support the inclusion of archaeology into the national curriculum feel that children have a right to a subject that can provide them with many of the tools for inquiry and understanding that cross-disciplinary work can provide. Additionally, it is also important to focus on the early Key Stage groups because children have the option to stop studying history after Key Stage 3 and follow different paths of study.

However, in pointing out the need to include archaeology in the curriculum, it is necessary to note that there are instances where the subject of archaeology is alluded to. For example, in some of the requirements for teaching history, the curriculum states that the teacher should ensure that:

"Pupils should have opportunities to learn about the past from a range of historical sources, including artefacts, pictures and photographs, music, adults talking about their past, written sources, buildings and sites, computer-based material" (Corbishley 1999: 74-75).

Even though this is an example showing that the topics generally covered by the sphere of archaeology are present, it does not actually cover or name the discipline itself. It is essential that the term archaeology be used in order to stop this cycle of people being unaware of the subject and unfamiliar with what it entails.

Another way to do this is to make sure that the training and education of teachers includes archaeology. How can anyone expect teachers to share and encourage archaeology if they themselves know nothing about it? For example, *"there is still a cycle of deprivation here in teaching history. First pupils learn out-of-date ideas about history, and that archaeology sometimes helps here and there. Then these students go to teacher training institutions where there is no one to put*

the record straight. In turn they [then] pass the infection on to their pupils" (Corbishley 1999: 77). By being more familiar with archaeology, teachers are able to teach it better. In turn, children become more familiar with and have a better understanding of archaeology. This scenario is much more desirable than the one of an endless cycle of misinformation, which only leads to people being misinformed and not understanding archaeology. These people then go to sites like Stonehenge in the UK and only see a circle of big rocks that they have been told they want to take their pictures in front of, rather than the greater landscape that encompasses the whole site. In this example, Stonehenge does not seem to mean much to the general tourist because the general tourist has never been taught how to understand what Stonehenge means in a larger picture of history and archaeology.

Archaeology and the Archaeologist

The claim that those in the field of archaeology do not generally promote archaeology in education does not mean that archaeologists do not want to educate the public. Very often, most archaeologists have the ideal that they are protecting and preserving heritage for everyone. Yet the problem in the relationship between the archaeologist and the public becomes apparent when the archaeologist does not necessarily do anything to encourage this relationship of education. Most in the field are working with an end in mind. They have research goals and questions that they want to answer. However, it seems that many times the public gets left behind in the quest for knowledge –therein lays the irony. What is the point of all this research if the people for whom it is supposed to be done are unable to receive any benefit from the work?

The field of archaeology can basically be split into two groups. There are those that do it for research or academic purposes and there are those that do it in the commercial sector as a sort of salvage or contract archaeology. Both of these sets work very hard and do a lot to protect and preserve the archaeological resource but how often are they able to contribute to the education of the public? There are many factors as to why this is not always done. To be clear, it is not fair to say that no outreach or education is done by either of these groups. Because, more often than not, the average archaeologist would prefer to have the unlimited budget and time to provide information to the public. It is, however, important to note the reasons why many in the field are unable to contribute to education in order to show why it is

necessary to include archaeology in the curriculum and why curriculum-based resources are so important as a supplement to teachers who do recognize the importance of it.

One main factor that many in the field do not focus on archaeology and education is the constraints in budgets. Public education programs cost money. More often than not, most researchers are limited to the grants that they receive. And, generally, when it comes to budgeting out the money for the project, the first item to go is the public outreach program. Many feel that while the latter are important for informing the public on what is going on, they are not necessary to the success of the project in the research sense. Additionally, this is one of the largest limiting factors for commercial archaeology units. Their research is based on the money that they receive from their clients. As a result, they are often bound to the budget that they have set out with the contractor.

A major factor in the educational role that commercial archaeology can play is the client for whom they work. Despite any beliefs that the archaeology unit may have for or against outreach education, they are limited to what the contractor requests in regards to the project. While there is legislation requiring that before development contractors have to adhere to standards determining whether or not archaeology needs to be performed, there is no legislation requiring contractors to conform to or promote any sort of education for children or the local community. This, however, seems to make no sense. If contractors are required to have an archaeological survey done, should they not also then be required to make some sort of effort to provide an educational resource if, in fact, the archaeology performed results in the recovery of any archaeological data that is relevant to the community?

An equally important point to make is the ability for commitment to education by those in the field. As previously mentioned, it seems that money is one of the driving forces and factors in the outreach of those in the field to education. Since money is usually limited, the amount of effort that is put into community and public education is limited as well. Clarke, however, recognizes the problem in this as he describes the idea that commitment to archaeology in education has to be long term or else it will fail. "*Presenting archaeology for the wrong reasons (as a hollow 'community' element in a Manpower Services Commission project proposal, for example) without the commitment to the long-term development that is required is likely to be less than successful*" (Clarke 1986: 9). The community has to be able to see the

commitment of the archaeologist to their education in order to be able to fully commit to the education and information that the archaeologist could provide. This is similar in the relationship of a child to their teacher. The child ultimately respects and has a relationship with the teacher that involves trust and the understanding that the teacher will follow through with their commitment to education. A relationship like this also bases a lot in the trust that the children will have in the teacher to provide them with accurate and correct information. As a result, if archaeologists make promises to provide education and a resource to the community, they must follow through with this commitment in order for the community to trust them and the information they provide, ensuring thus the relationship between archaeologists and the community, rather than just furthering the divide with broken promises.

The Compromise

The big questions for these two areas of curriculum and the field of archaeology are: How can anyone expect the public to be knowledgeable if no one is making an effort to make a change? If archaeology is not required in the curriculum and educational outreach is not required in commercial archaeology, how are children and the rest of the public to receive any information or education on the subject at all? The answer lies in the art of compromise.

By examining the relationships of archaeology and education and education as a factor in the field of archaeology, it makes it easy to see the benefits that compromise between the two areas can provide. Since the curriculum is not currently changing to involve the topic of archaeology and since it is not required for professionals in archaeology to outreach to the community, the only solution is members from each group coming together to create a solution. Members from each side have recognized the benefits that the other can provide for the education of children and, ultimately, the general public. This solution is most often found in the collaboration between archaeologists, especially in archaeological units and other researchers, and educators. The benefits that curriculum-based resources from archaeological units provide are a perfect example of this solution.

Rather than just continuing to try to solve the issue of archaeology and education, those in archaeological units have also used this scenario as a means with which they can connect with their communities. Many units have found that the most important part of their clientele is the

community that surrounds them. While the efforts may not always be huge, several units, such as the Canterbury Archaeological Trust and LP Archaeology, have made the effort to connect with the public and be the educational resource that is lacking. Unlike many archaeologists, archaeological units are able to be more of a part of the community. They are not limited to research based projects and sites that will most likely be available for an extended period of time. They are involved in projects that directly impact the community and sites that are most likely going to be destroyed. For example, most of the survey work that these units perform is a precursor to development that will come after it. As a result, the unit is also aware that they are the last line of protection for the potential archaeological data that is at the site. They realize that it is their responsibility to accurately record the information available. Unfortunately though, as previously mentioned, many of the units are limited to budgets along with the demands of contractors and other clients and are unable to provide wide scale community educational projects. But the effort that they can make in order to at least be a resource of information is still useful and, simply, better than no effort at all.

Conclusion

The fate of archaeology in education is not bleak. There are many who are working towards a solution whilst the debate for archaeology in the curriculum continues. As of now, archaeology is only an aside to subjects in the curriculum in the United Kingdom. Hopefully, soon it will be recognized for the benefits that it can provide both for children and the general public.

There are several archaeology units that are an excellent example of the type of outreach that many archaeologists and educators should aim to achieve. Not only do they provide information that is both accessible and understandable, but they are also committed to creating a positive relationship.

By examining the roles that archaeology plays for education in the curriculum as well as in commercial archaeology, members of both fields will be able to see the necessity for teaching archaeology. If it is left out, children are denied a wealth of information and knowledge that would be applicable the whole of their lives. If it is included, the cycle of information and knowledge can continue and, overall, the benefits would greatly exceed any of the opposition points anyone could bring up.

In conclusion, archaeology units that are creating and applying curriculum-based resources are providing a great opportunity to both educators and children. By doing so, they are allowing the chance for archaeologically-based education when and where perhaps otherwise there would be none.

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Web links to other resources and sites cited in the text [All the links were checked on December 2010].

For further information on children's education after key stage 3, see the Parent Centre's website:

http://www.parentscentre.gov.uk/learnjourn/index_ks4.cfm?ver=graph&subject=a1

For further information on the Canterbury Trust see their website:

<http://www.canterburytrust.co.uk>

For further information on LP Archaeology see their website:

<http://www.lparchaeology.com/>

For further information on the Prescott Street Site excavation by LP Archaeology see their website:

<http://www.lparchaeology.com/prescot/>

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