

The Council for British Archaeology is using its 80th anniversary celebration to focus on how it can strengthen ties with the archaeological sector and connect with new audiences.

Looking to the future of the CBA and its network

As the Council for British Archaeology celebrates its 80th anniversary, reflecting on the challenges and the successes of the organisation since its establishment in 1944, it is simultaneously turning its attention to the next 80 years and the future of the CBA with a new NLHF-funded project, *Reconnecting Archaeology*.

Reconnecting Archaeology is an 18-month project which seeks to bridge gaps and strengthen ties within the archaeological sector in two key ways.

First, by reshaping how the CBA can support and connect grassroots archaeology and address challenges around the perception of the discipline, resourcing and audience development, and by reimagining the CBA's role as a network and membership organisation.

Second, by championing and promoting best practice in engaging new audiences for grassroots community archaeology by highlighting four *Catalysts for Change* pilot projects around the UK that have successfully reimagined community archaeology through new approaches.

Grassroots archaeology can be defined as archaeology that is developed locally and undertaken/led by non-professionals and volunteers, but often with the support of professionals and higher-education institutions.

It is driven by a love of the discipline, the pursuit of knowledge and the sense of community that it fosters by not-for-profit organisations such as county societies, charities, and community groups, some of which have been in existence for over 100 years.

Yet many are facing significant challenges that are threatening their survival as independent organisations that make a significant contribution to the archaeological sector and their local communities.

In 2023, the CBA undertook a survey of 257 groups and societies to understand the current state of grassroots archaeology and how the CBA can better support it through its work and membership. Funded by Historic England, this survey, *Taking the Temperature*, was a continuation of previous research findings carried out by

the CBA in both 2018 and 2021.

The survey found that, while the archaeological activities of the many groups and societies were many and varied, the level of these has been going down in recent years.

Particularly those more expensive activities such as community digs and fieldwork. This is due to factors such as an aging membership, an aging volunteer cohort, not enough volunteers to sustain a healthy level of activity, a lack of expertise and access to equipment, a lack of training in several relevant areas and, in many cases, a lack of funding.

This means that there is a narrow representational demographic leading to entrenched attitudes and practices; a lack of understanding of how cross-sector working can lead to a potentially younger membership and routes to a wider reach generally; a need for training in specific areas, and a need to shift the perception of archaeology away from activity-led practice (digs and fieldwork) to more accessible, less expensive ways to engage with heritage.

Interestingly, when asked, most groups allocated 'audience development' as their lowest priority, pointing to a clear lack of understanding of the relationship between developing audiences and attracting new members.

Ultimately, what the grassroots archaeology community want is help. They are looking for support to address falling and aging membership numbers, to support wider engagement, and to attract younger and more diverse audiences.

Reconnecting Archaeology will therefore draw together the grassroots archaeological community so that it has a stronger voice that understands the opportunities of wider engagement and has the tools, skills, resources, and opportunities to reach more people.

The project will be a first step towards a multi-year transformation for the CBA incorporating changes to its name, identity, marketing, governance, and even purpose.

We will achieve this through four pillars of activity:

- Understanding our audiences

- Reimagining membership and growing our network
- Catalysts for Change projects, and
- Organisational resilience.

Each of these pillars addresses separate issues being tackled by the project, while also interconnecting to achieve its overall aims.

Understanding our audiences

The first, and arguably most important pillar of the project, is audience research. Without understanding the CBA's existing audiences, and those of the wider network, we cannot understand how to better serve them and how to better design, promote, and deliver activities to do this.

Without also understanding new audiences – both those who are interested in archaeology but not accessing opportunities for deeper participation, and audiences who do not think archaeology is for them – we cannot support grassroots archaeology to become more inclusive, diversify their audiences, and work to break down barriers to participation.

We have commissioned audience engagement specialists, Morris Hargreaves McIntyre, to undertake the audience research. They will be gathering audience data to understand opinions on the CBA, its membership offer, and on the discipline of archaeology itself, by undertaking interviews and surveys with sector stakeholders, CBA members and non-members, community members and volunteers, and visitors to CBA events.

Alongside this, they will be identifying and finding a way to speak to those who do not currently engage with the CBA, or even archaeology, to understand both why and how they might want – or not want – to get involved.

The data that Morris Hargreaves McIntyre gather will underpin every output of the project and ensure that the activities and membership offer delivered by the CBA in the future is research and audience led, and is responsive to current social, economic, and technological preferences and trends, making it meaningful, useful, and

engaging to the UK's diverse communities.

Reimagining membership and growing our network

One of the CBA's greatest assets is its long-established network of grassroots organisations including county societies, charities, and community groups that engage with the CBA through its membership.

Being a member of the CBA currently brings benefits including a subscription to the *British Archaeology* magazine, access to a regular series of *This Is Archaeology* lectures, access to past editions of *British Archaeology* through Exact Editions, 80% off books in our online shop, and voting rights in our AGM.

Like many cultural membership organisations however, our membership numbers and income have been impacted in recent years with the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent cost-of-living crisis. Addressing this and reaching new audiences is critical to the core resilience of the CBA and this requires a complete reimagining of our membership structure and offer.

To do this, we are piloting a number of initiatives through *Reconnecting Archaeology*, including new, incentivising models of events and activities, a new 'Access to Archaeology' pass for adults, offering discounts and benefits in partnership with heritage and archaeological visitor attractions, and a cross-sector pilot project working with Photoworks, a photography organisation that supports and showcases contemporary photographers and artists, and young people, to explore their local and personal heritage.

Alongside this, we will be exploring the feasibility of a new communications platform to provide opportunities for members knowledge sharing and ongoing, active dialogue, and delivering a series of online *In Conversations* events for organisational members exploring key themes and issues through facilitated dialogue with peers.

Catalysts for Change

With audience development one of the



CBA

key challenges reported by the groups and societies surveyed in the *Taking the Temperature* research, there is a clear need to provide support through examples of best practice in diversifying and attracting new audiences.

We will, therefore, be working with four existing examples of new approaches in archaeology which positively demonstrate equity and community participation.

We are calling these our 'Catalysts for Change' projects to reflect their pursuit of social change and equitable participation. Situated across the UK, in the Scottish Highlands (The Scottish Crannog Centre), Cumbria (Uncovering Roman Carlisle), Northamptonshire (The Chester House Estate Archaeology Project, and Wales (The CAER Heritage Project), they are effectively and successfully piloting new ways of involving local audiences who may face specific barriers, such as low-income, physical and mental disabilities, ethnicity, low levels of confidence, and ill health.

Through *Reconnecting Archaeology* we will be facilitating site visits and workshops for the lead staff teams and volunteers involved in the projects with the aim of sharing learnings, challenges, and successes. This will result in a co-created set of guidance or principles for successfully diversifying audiences and co-developing inclusive activities that will be disseminated by the project

participants to their own network, and that of the CBA's. You can find out more about our Catalysts for Change partners on pages 22-31 of this edition.

Alongside this, we are consulting with existing groups that are working, typically voluntarily, to break down barriers in archaeology for specific disadvantaged groups and communities, for example the European Society of Black & Allied Archaeologists (ESBAA) and the Enabled Archaeology Foundation (EAF), to understand their challenges and barriers, and to identify where the CBA can support them to deliver their incredibly important purpose and aims.

Organisational resilience

We know from research that the archaeology sector lags behind in comparison to other heritage sub-sectors (most notably, museums) in terms of equitable participation practices. For our network of grassroots organisations it could be said this is their 'modernise or die' moment.

In this context, there is a real imperative for the CBA to become a sector leader by drawing out and collaboratively showcasing best practice, as with the Catalysts for Change projects, and to provide the training, events, resources and opportunities for learning about areas such as climate change, representation, and sustainability.

Above: Volunteers excavating under supervision as part of the Uncovering Roman Carlisle



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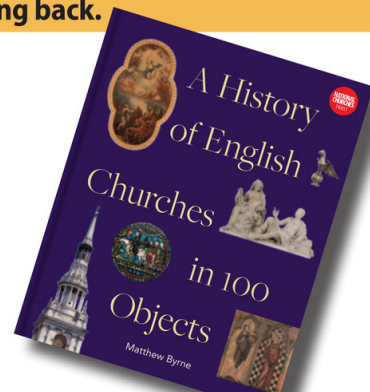
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However, if we are to lead change then we need to embrace and change ourselves. We will do this through *Reconnecting Archaeology* by addressing the CBA's organisational resilience. This includes updating our government practices, developing our messaging and brand with a new marketing and communications strategy, changing our name, developing a new logo and merchandise, and upgrading our existing website and CRM system.

Alongside this, we are working with partners and stakeholders, including Historic England, to improve and develop our own organisational environmental sustainability and targets to become Net Zero by 2030, and in becoming more equitable, diverse, and inclusive. We will then cascade our learning and facilitate training in these areas for our members.

The *Reconnecting Archaeology* project is an important next step in the life of

the CBA and will set in motion crucial thinking and testing that will enable the organisation to have a bright future in which it brings real life benefits to its network and members.

The outcomes and insights gained through the project will inform a proposal for further funding to reshape the CBA's mission and purpose, and more permanently implement the activities that are being piloted.

This will be supported by robust evaluation led by evaluation consultants, Bright Culture, which will include a focus groups, surveys, and staff reflection workshops to assess the extent to which the project aims are met.

There will also be an opportunity for you, as readers of *British Archaeology* to also contribute your voice to the project and the future of the CBA.

We will be launching a survey in a future edition to gather your thoughts

and opinions on matters relating to the project aims, including your perceptions of archaeology, the CBA, and the magazine. So watch out for that landing through your doors and into your inboxes.

Ultimately, we hope that *Reconnecting Archaeology* will become a prime example of how heritage organisations can address and build a long and sustainable future.

By becoming a more confident, knowledgeable, and skilled organisation in key areas of audience development and organisational resilience, we will be better placed to serve our membership, network, and existing (and new) audiences, and to meet their needs now and in the future.

We will then, in turn, help the archaeology sector become more inclusive, sustainable and impactful, led by the communities and grassroots organisations it supports. ■

Meet the team who will deliver the Reconnecting Archaeology project

Katrina Gargett Audience and network manager

Katrina is a community engagement specialist with nearly a decade of experience working in the archaeology and heritage sector.

She is the project manager for *Reconnecting Archaeology*, which means she is responsible for liaising with the project consultants and stakeholders, facilitating the delivery of the project's key outcomes and outputs, and reporting to the NLHF (amongst many other things).

Previously part of the Public Impact and Community Engagement teams at MOLA

and York Archaeology, she has led the development of innovative community engagement programmes focused on improving health and well-being and citizen empowerment, including YA's Archaeology on Prescription and MOLA's Delapré Digs.

She champions an audience-led approach to engagement and feels passionate about dismantling barriers and supporting communities to benefit from archaeology in ways that are meaningful and impactful.

She has a BA in Heritage Studies and an MA in Cultural Heritage Management from the University of York. ■



Tejaswi Mehta Audience and network officer

Tejaswi is an experienced audience and engagement expert with over eight years of experience in the arts and heritage sector.

In her role as audience and network officer at The Council for British Archaeology (CBA) she conducts extensive research to understand audience demographics and preferences, which informs future membership strategies.

Before joining the CBA, Tejaswi worked as a senior content and interpretation producer at Avesta Group, where she identified content creation and revenue generation opportunities, and supported the master planning and design of museum experiences.

Tejaswi holds a Master's degree in Conservation Studies from the University of York and another in Ancient Indian Culture and Archaeology from St. Xavier's College, Mumbai. Her previous roles include arts research manager at Rooftop, where she developed educational programmes and partnership strategies, and assistant professor at St. Xavier's College, teaching various subjects related to ancient India.

Tejaswi is passionate about preserving and promoting cultural heritage. She has published works on the impact of stepwells on contemporary arts in India and has been recognised for her contributions to art conservation and heritage education. ■