INTERVIEW

Interview with David Miles, Chief Archaeologist, English Heritage

Interview conducted on the 5th of August 1999, by Andrew Gardner, Cornelia Kleinitz, and Astrid Lindenlauf

Could you give us a brief outline of your archaeological career?

I think I decided I wanted to be an archaeologist when I was seven or eight years old, so I always knew what I wanted to do. It wasn't a very realistic thing to want to be, though, because I came from a fairly working-class background in Yorkshire, where not only were there no archaeologists in the family, but I don't think anyone had even heard of archaeology. But I still got interested in it, from watching the television or something, in the time of 'Animal, Vegetable and Mineral'. I moved to Coventry when I was about 15, and started excavating there with Brian Hobley, when he was at the Coventry Museum. So I had a couple of years digging in deep, soggy holes in Coventry in winter, so that assured that I had a vocation for it; if you could do that, you could do anything. I studied archaeology at Birmingham, where I did Ancient History and Archaeology, because my main interests were in the Mediterranean. While I was there I worked in the Mediterranean quite a bit, especially in Israel, but I also worked in North America, particularly excavating Native American sites in Canada. Then I started doing a Ph.D. in Bristol, on the Romano-British countryside, but I kept getting offered jobs, so I started digging on the M5 motorway. Then I did work for Rescue, in the early days when it had just begun, and there was a big drive to make people more aware of archaeology, so it was quite an interesting period. And having been told by my tutor at University that I'd be lucky to get a job by the time I was 30, I suddenly found that - this was in the early 70's - there was a sudden boom in employment prospects. I packed in doing the Ph.D., with the pious intention of finishing it later, and in fact after I'd worked for Rescue on the M5 motorway I got a permanent job to excavate sites in Abingdon. The organization working there became part of the Oxford Archaeological Unit, which started up in 1973. I stayed there, and eventually became the Director.

Having moved from a major field unit to a branch of government, do you now feel much more distant from the trowel's edge?

No, I don't think so, because I'd got fairly remote anyway when I left the Oxford Unit. We were employing something like 160-170 people, and had offices in France and in Ireland. I had tried to keep the calluses on my hands by running a project in the West Indies. It's one of the privileges of being the Director of a Unit - you get to pick your projects, so I picked one in the West Indies! But unfortunately, the volcano blew up and buried my site, so that came to an end. Actually, though, running a Unit is partly about administration and partly about marketing. All the time you're thinking about what's happening next. It's interesting because of the sheer amount of archaeology you do, but you don't get very closely involved in it. So coming here is not that different, actually - it's more of the same, but English Heritage generates more paper.

Within the organization of English Heritage, how much influence does the Chief Archaeologist have on policy and decision-making?

I've been here three months and so its still early days, but the job of Chief Archaeologist now is quite different to what it was before. Geoff Wainwright had been in English Heritage for 13 years, and been Chief Archaeologist for a long time, and so of course people automatically think of the job of Chief Archaeologist as the job that Geoff was doing. Its a very different job because the new English Heritage is, of course, the coming together of the old Royal Commission for Historic Monuments with English Heritage. So, as Chief Archaeologist I not only have the responsibilities that Geoff Wainwright had, but in addition the surveyors for the Royal Commission, the air photography and so on come in to English Heritage as well. This also brings with it responsibility for scheduling, and also for listing of buildings, so the new definition of archaeology, as it were, is a more holistic one, because it involves survey, air photography and buildings, as well as below-ground archaeology. The organization is getting on for 300 people, along with the new nine regions, plus the new archaeological centre at Fort Cumberland, where the Ancient Monuments Laboratory is in the process of moving to. What is noticeable at English Heritage, though, is that the Chief Archaeologist is the highest ranking professional, but above the Chief Archaeologist is a smaller group of, if you like, non-professionals: Pam Alexander is the Chief Executive, and I come under the Conservation Group, which is headed by Oliver Pearsey. So I think that, in answer to your question, the Chief Archaeologist potentially has a lot of influence, but is not represented personally in the highest management group, and it remains to be seen how much influence, in fact, the Chief Archaeologist does have.

Do you have any particular personal goals you wish to achieve within your role as Chief Archaeologist?

Yes. I'd been doing the job of Director of the Oxford Archaeological Unit for about 10 years, and I'd taken it from being a relatively small regional unit to being one of the two biggest in the country, and in particular, of course, broadened its horizons to doing a lot of work overseas, and also a lot of work in areas like buildings archaeology, and environmental assessment and so on. So having gone that far I had to make a career decision as to whether I was going to spend the next ten years doing more of the same, or come here. In many respects I saw this as the biggest job in archaeology, because it was a tremendous opportunity to change the culture of archaeology in this country. As I say, it's not just inheriting the old job, it's also an opportunity to create a new one. In many ways I see myself as something of a poacher turned game-keeper, because as a head of a commercial unit coming to a very different position here, its an opportunity really to broaden the scope of archaeology, to set the agenda for the next decade, and to make archaeology relevant to a much wider public. And also, I think, to make English Heritage a more interesting and friendlier organization. I think sometimes English Heritage has perhaps been seen as the policeman, as the organization that says 'no', and I'd like to make archaeology of wider interest to people, and also relevant within government as well. This government's agendas have been very much about broadening access,

about social inclusion, and I'd like to see archaeology, as I say, not as an exclusive subject, but as something of broader relevance and interest.

What impact has the National Lottery had on archaeological projects, and on the structure and roles of English Heritage?

Not much, and not as much as it should have done. I think archaeology's been the poor relation in the Lottery, compared with museums, new buildings, and so on, and I'd like to see archaeology getting a better share. I think its up to us to show how it can be relevant to the Lottery, but I don't think the Lottery has had anything like the impact that perhaps we might have hoped.

In our interview with Geoffrey Wainwright a couple of years ago [*PIA* 8], he was fairly hopeful that it would have.

At that time, we were told that the dawn was breaking, and that archaeology was going to get a look in after being, as I say, the Cinderella. But that's not materialised, and still hasn't. That again is something that I do want to look into.

Do you think that the current legislative framework for ensuring that archaeology gets done is the best we can hope for?

No, its not the best we can hope for, but its the best we've got at the moment. This government has got a very full programme, and finding slots in the timetable for legislation is extremely difficult. So I think it's possible to think of improvements that could be made, but we've got to be able to stake our claim in the government's timetable if we mean to do anything about it, and it may well not be in this term but in the next.

Can you see any ways forward for improving pay and conditions for field staff, and for creating a more formal career structure?

This is something I'm very interested in, because I came into archaeology when there was no career structure to speak of - as I say, I was told when I was 20-21 that I'd be lucky if I got a job by the time I was 30. I think the situation has improved a lot since the early seventies, but on the other hand I don't want to say, you know, 'you should have seen what it was like in my day, when we all slept in the barn'. It's not improved as much as one would have liked, because archaeology is still insecure, and it's not very well paid. I've done a lot of work over the last two or three years with the Institute of Field Archaeologists. Although people will still complain that the IFA is not as much of a trades union as it might be - it can't be that - I still think that we've got to have hope in using it to improve conditions. Actually I've found that, as far as I was concerned, conditions improved with commercial archaeology. Although it's often said that competitive tendering drives down standards, that's not

my experience. In the Oxford Archaeological Unit our pay and conditions improved considerably as we went more commercial. I don't think English Heritage has helped as much as it might have done in the past. I don't think it's done a great deal to improve conditions, and that's something I would like to see us doing. I'd particularly like to see us providing more training opportunities, and I'd like to see us insisting on continuous professional development. One of the first things I did on coming into the job was to put funding into four training excavations this summer, particularly with a view to providing opportunities for students and would-be students who need more field practice, and also amateur archaeologists and post-graduates, because there's been a lack of opportunity, and we want to more formally develop that. We've also started a number of initiatives to expand training for archaeologists, and the people I'd particularly like to target would be recent graduates, because I think that it's actually the first steps in archaeology which are the hardest. There's never going to be enough jobs for everyone, but at the moment it's terribly hit-and-miss, and I think there's an enormous waste of talent, because there are people who find it difficult to get on to the rungs of the ladder, and I think we could help with that. And I've also been encouraging the IFA and commercial units to put the systems in place, and we will try to help. I think English Heritage has an obligation to the profession as a whole, and we'd like to see that develop.

Would you agree that although one of archaeology's strengths is its accessibility to the public and to amateurs, this is also a weakness as it makes it harder for archaeologists to demand that they be treated as professionals?

I'm not sure I'd agree with the statement, but I know what you mean. I don't think it's as true now, but certainly up to a few years ago a lot of people seemed to think that if you were an archaeologist it was a hobby, rather than a profession. I think it's less true now because, with PPG16, and the expansion of commercial units, more people - local authorities, developers, architects, people like that - are aware that there is at least an embryonic profession of archaeology. I wouldn't want to see amateurs excluded, because of this question of access, and of broadening. One of the good things about archaeology is that it's not too ivory-towerish and too exclusive. At the same time I would like to see a stronger profession, because I think it would be to the benefit of archaeology and its customers if the profession was stronger and better at delivering the product, and delivering good-quality archaeology. I think that's in the interests of the developers who are paying for it as well as the archaeologists themselves.

English Heritage has recently published reports from a number of large research excavations, like Wroxeter, but generally such projects are on the wane. Do you see the balance between research and developer-funded excavation shifting further in the future, if indeed those are two separate things?

No, I don't think they are two separate things. I've always felt extremely strongly that what used to be called rescue archaeology and research are the same things. I

don't agree with doing archaeological excavations for the sake of it, for job creation schemes. I think they should be done because they provide us with new and interesting information, and should be based on new and interesting ideas. I don't think its just a matter of recording for recording's sake. I don't think that research excavations are on the wane, in a sense, because when I left the Oxford Archaeological Unit, for example, we were doing four excavation projects worth over a million pounds. We'd just excavated a trench, one single trench of 20 hectares, which was completely covered with Neolithic and Bronze Age landscapes. We were doing some of the biggest landscape projects we'd ever done, far bigger and better funded than anything English Heritage had ever financed. What developer-funding has allowed us to do is move into a whole different scale of operation. On one of those excavations, for example, we'd said to the developer that in order to run it properly we needed to increase our IT capacity, and they put £40,000 in, just for on-site IT. Now, those are the sorts of sums of money that English Heritage couldn't put in to field projects. There's a reaction against developer-funding in some areas, where single, coherent organizations have found that they've come under pressure from competition, where you've now got five or six organizations doing that sort of work. The maintenance of quality is up to the curators, and I'd certainly see it as part of my job to encourage curators to insist on good quality. I don't think we can argue that it should be done by one organization that should have a monopoly, but as long as the quality's there, that's what matters. And I don't think that competition does any harm to archaeologists. But, as I say, I don't think that there's necessarily been a decline in the big research excavation. One thing for which we do have an opportunity now, though, with the new English Heritage, is taking a more coherent view of research, and actually forming partnerships between universities, ourselves and units, to promote research projects. English Heritage recently produced a document called 'Exploring Our Past', which is not being launched fully yet, because it now needs to have the new buildings and survey agendas, and maritime agendas put into it. But this document will be a kind of basis on which we'd promote research, and so, as I say, what I would like to see is us actually punching our weight rather more. I think that sometimes, in the past, people have had the attitude that English Heritage has been anti-excavation, and has been taking the line that preservation in situ is all-important. Martin Biddle, for example, has argued in many lectures that English Heritage is putting a brake on excavation. I'd like to see more targeted excavation as part of coherent research projects, and that's something that we intend to do, but also the use and development of non-destructive methods as well. I'd like to see a more coherent use of geophysical survey and aerial survey, in a more integrated way, so that we actually pull together the resources that we've got. And I'd also like to try to make English Heritage less bureaucratic, so that people don't feel that coming to us is a penance.

Why do you think, or indeed do you think, that there continues to be a divide between academic archaeology and field practice?

I don't think there is. It very much depends on your experience, but when I was in Oxford, we had very good relationships with Reading, Durham, Sheffield, Cambridge, and Oxford itself, and our work was always very much integrated into

the academic sphere. The Oxford Unit taught courses in the University, and as I say we had very good relationships with a whole lot of universities. I know what you mean, again; I can see how there can be seen to be a gap - there's those that go to TAG and those that go to the IFA. But I think it's noticeable, going to TAG and the IFA - because I do go to both of them - that they actually seem to me to have got closer in recent years. I don't think we should exaggerate the divisions, but at the same time I hope we can get rid of them if there are any.

Do you think that changes could be made to the way archaeology is taught in universities to enhance the growth of the profession as a whole?

Yes, it's a difficult one. When I was an undergraduate myself I used to moan bitterly that, doing a degree in archaeology, I wasn't being treated as if I were following a vocation, and I shared flats and houses with medics and with engineers, people who were at university doing degrees that would lead to a job. I thought that's what I was doing, but it wasn't the impression that I was actually given by staff. In recent years, of course, archaeology has expanded enormously within universities, and departments that took ten, fifteen, or twenty people a year now take many times more, so inevitably the majority of people studying archaeology don't want to go into it as a profession. But I do think that there needs to be a better and more coherent structure for those that do, because I think that there is a percentage who come into archaeology who'd like to become archaeologists, and I'm not sure that it's structured very well at the moment to encourage those that see it as their future profession, rather than just some sort of liberal arts degree.

The draft Research Agenda goes quite some way towards integrating current archaeological theory and practice, for instance in the themes on cognitive landscapes and formation theory. Do you think that this objective can be further pursued, and if so how?

Yes, sure. For example, in the last project I was working on, near Heathrow, we had John Barrett alongside the excavation team providing, as it were, a questioning attitude to the excavation. I've set up quite a lot of projects in the past with, for example, Richard Bradley and other people. I remember, years ago, I was going to start an excavation of a big Roman site, and I went over to see Ian Hodder in Cambridge, and I said, 'look, I've just read your latest book, how can we integrate this into the site?' It took quite a long time before we managed it, but we did eventually manage it, and somebody did a Ph.D. on the back of it at Cambridge. I'd like to see theory informing practice, and I like to see theory that can be put into practice, not just something that looks like its been magpied from sociology and can't be applied in archaeology. I do like theory that can have an application.

In what ways do you think the interaction between English Heritage and academic institutions can be more formally organised; for instance, how would the regional research centres, proposed in the Research Agenda, work?

Well, the big question is how regionalization is going to work, because English Heritage has just set up nine regional offices, including Newcastle, York, Cambridge, Manchester and Bristol, according to the government's regional agenda. So, we're one of the pioneer organisations that is going through with regionalization; we're in the vanguard of it. It remains to be seen, really, how committed the government is to regionalization. The new English Heritage and the Archaeology and Survey Department aim at retaining a strong centre for the creation of policies and research agendas, while having a much more active presence in the regions. So, it'll be our job here in Savile Row to set the agendas for the regions, but we would want to see a lot of feedback from them. As well as contributing to the national agendas they'll also inevitably have their own regional agendas, because they're so distinctive. Obviously, regional agendas provide an opportunity to look at these things on a different scale. So, what we would like to see in the coming years is a strong sense of regional identity and a strong sense of regional research design.

The possibility of English Heritage supporting research students is also raised in the Agenda. How might this work in practice?

It's something we're seriously interested in looking at, because I feel that over the last 20 years, English Heritage has supported a huge number of excavations. We've had in recent years a backlog problem, which has fairly substantially been cleared now. I hope it is a problem of the past, but of course the result of that is that we're now seeing the emergence of huge numbers of excavation reports. I remember in the early days I used to buy almost every excavation report which came out, but that's inconceivable now, because there are just so many in so many areas. I've been impressed recently by, for example, one or two research projects, which have built on and synthesised the results of rescue and developer-funded excavations. And I think what we have now is the obligation to make the picture clearer. At the moment, it is difficult to see the wood for the trees, as it were, because the trees in the form of excavation reports have been sprouting so rapidly. I think there is a great need for synthesis and I think there is a need for not just university post-docs and so on, but also for some other people, perhaps, who have been in the profession of archaeology for some time, to actually put their minds to synthesis, to try to make the pictures somewhat clearer than they are at the moment.

In what ways can opportunities be created for field staff to engage more in research activities?

As I was saying, I don't like the idea that all the brains are in universities. I think that within units, for example, there are a lot of people with the talent to do this kind of work, but they've not had the opportunity in the past for sabbaticals, for example. And one of the other things that we should be looking at with the regional agendas is: are there opportunities for doing this kind of synthetic work, of pulling together information, which is scattered through large numbers of reports? Some of the people who have worked on it for the last 10 or 20 years may well be the best

people, if they can write and do this kind of work, to help us synthesise it, but post-doctoral researchers could also be involved.

How does English Heritage encourage excavators to publish?

Well, it's a requirement. Basically, we would regard publishing as an absolute necessity. As far as I am concerned, I would not carry on funding individuals or organisations who do not publish. English Heritage has put a lot of funding in recent years into the backlogs. In Oxford, for example, I very much valued English Heritage's help in getting rid of the backlog that was developing. When I left, it had been virtually cleared and the current situation seemed to be going along quite well. In Oxford, we set up a dedicated post-excavation programme or department which provided the kind of assistance to excavators to publish, which, I think, in the past, they've not had. Usually, you're digging a site and you've got 20, 30, 40 people on site helping; come to the post-ex. phase and then very often you were left on your own, more or less, and, at the same time, had lots of other things to do. So, not surprisingly the whole enterprise crashed. In Oxford, we set up a dedicated post-excavation programme, where we had people who were ring-fenced just to help on post-excavation and that, we found worked quite well. As far as English Heritage is concerned, we regard publication as absolutely a requirement. And I think with the MAP2 process, although it is perhaps sometimes implemented in an overly pernickety way, the basic structure is quite good in terms of defining what is needed to get to publication.

How do you think publication of excavations will develop over the next few years? Will new methods adopted have an impact on archiving and finds storage policies?

Yes, I am a bit disappointed with the way that archaeological publication has remained rather conventional in recent years. And I think we've not applied new technology or imagination to the extent that we might have done, and I think there has been the tendency to knock out publications in pretty much the format that was invented by Pitt Rivers. I would like to see excavation reports being shorter, essentially, more synthetic, clearer as to why they had been written and with more emphasis placed on why it is important, what is interesting rather than just logging the data for the sake of it. But as far as the data itself is concerned, I think we've now got the opportunity of putting that kind of information on the Internet and so on, and it is obviously going to change enormously. I want to start a debate on the whole question of how we publish, because I think we could be getting better value for money for publications. We could or ought to be producing more interesting reports. At the moment, the average excavation report perhaps sells 250, 300 copies. Why are we doing it like that?
Just before I left my previous job we also had a large number of relatively small excavations that did not merit being published in full monograph form. Where there was no outlet, for example, no county journal, or else the county journal would not be published for two or three years, we developed rapid good quality desktop

publishing and we were giving them away. We found that was actually economically sensible. We printed them out, we gave them to university libraries, to the local societies and made them available to local people. We gave them away, because it was not worth selling them, and we also put them on the Internet. I mean, actually publishing is relatively cheap these days. I think there could be more archaeological publications that could be given away. I do think we need to have a debate in archaeology. We're waiting, at the moment, for the publication of the user-needs survey - there has been a survey just done of user-needs for archaeological reports. So, we should get some feedback from the profession as to what they want. I hope they will be radical in their views.

What about finds storage?

Finds storage is a big problem, because big excavations which are still going on, bigger than ever, are generating vast quantities of stuff. Archaeology has not really faced up to the problems of finds storage. Personally, I would like to see regional stores on sensible sites, but not the sort of city-centre sites, where the museums traditionally are, which are often Victorian buildings not geared up for large-scale storage. I would prefer to see the creation of a network of regional stores around the country. This is an area where I hope the lottery might help in the future. Regional stores could provide storage room for the bulk material and museums could then take material for display as they need it - rather than take the whole lot. Regional stores would also be set up for access, so that people could use them. You don't just want a dumping ground, some salt-mine somewhere. You need a properly curated and documented store, so that material can be used. I don't think that archaeology has been very successful in selling the idea of stores. However, the Museum of London is doing a good job of actually trying to put across to people why accessible stores are not just a penance, but something that can have a positive value.

Do you think that English Heritage, Historic Scotland and Cadw will pursue more divergent research agendas in post-devolution Britain? How have the three organisations worked together in the past?

I can't entirely answer that, because my past here isn't very long. There has certainly been an annual meeting of the senior management of Cadw, Historic Scotland and English Heritage. Since I've been in the job, I've been in touch with them and I'm glad to say they postponed their annual meeting this year so that I could be at it. I would hope that we'll take a European view of these things and become more aware of our own research agendas and, in particular, in the maintenance of standards and in combining, for example, training and education. Because no matter how many countries there are, we still, as archaeologists, move between them all and work in the different areas. I would like to see us co-operating on training and on research agendas as well, but at the same time a bit of variety is no bad thing.

What kinds of project might English Heritage be getting involved with in the context of European Community research programmes?

That's one that is close to my own heart, because in my previous job I had an office in France. I am going over there next Tuesday to see the project and to try to set up a new one. I'm trying to set up a project in France with the University of Durham, which I hope will then make a project that will run in parallel to others that we'll set up here in England. At the moment, English Heritage can't work abroad; it's one of the changes in the law that we need. We can't work below the tidal line, and we're not supposed to do maritime archaeology, although I have just approved a national training scheme for divers. We want to get this situation changed and we're hoping that we'll find parliamentary time to do that. We are, though, very actively involved in the European Archaeological Association. For instance, we're preparing an exhibition, with the title "English Heritage and archaeology: a future for our past", for the EAA Conference. We certainly want to see ourselves as taking a lead in Europe and we're very keen to pursue European agendas. We're limited in terms of working overseas, but we're not limited in taking part in the debate.

What factors influence the way sites or monuments are made accessible to the public, both in terms of access arrangements and presentation? Do architectural monuments like castles have a higher profile than prehistoric landscapes?

Again, that's not an area I've got a great deal of personal involvement in as yet, but it's certainly one of the very large items on the English Heritage agenda. The whole question of access, promoting access for a whole range of people and also for tourism, is very high on the agenda of both English Heritage and this government. I am not sure that I agree with you that castles are dominating, because, I think, within English Heritage the feeling is that Stonehenge, and in my own case timber-circles in Norfolk, have been very high on the agenda. Stonehenge probably has the single highest profile by a long way on the English Heritage agenda, because of the interest of Sir Jocelyn Stevens, the chairman. But Stonehenge does obviously throw up a lot of extremely interesting questions about how you should interpret the past, how you make it available - the sorts of questions of multi-vocality. I've spent a lot of time in the last few weeks learning the intricacies of Druidic theology, because the Druids had a lot of involvement at Timberhenge in Norfolk. I've worked in Israel and I've been stoned in Jerusalem for excavating archaeological sites. I've also worked in North America on reservations belonging to Native Americans. So, I'm well aware of those sorts of agendas. There's not just one view of the past. With Stonehenge, in my point of view, the most important thing is to open that landscape up, so that people can walk free of charge and get access to and an appreciation of the landscape as a whole, and not just see Stonehenge as a stone circle, which is the tip of an iceberg.

What steps does English Heritage normally take to communicate policies and make decisions transparent to interested groups, particularly the public?

Well, English Heritage is a big organization, so I can really only speak for how I see these things at the moment. But I have always felt very strongly that archaeology should be part of the community and that there is an enormous grassroots interest. People often say to me that there is more interest in archaeology because of Time-Team. I think the interest was always there. What Time-Team has done is made politicians, television producers, newspaper editors, realize that the interest is there.

I have excavated sites all over the country over the last 30 years, and I've always involved the local community. As archaeologists you've got to win over farmers, minerals operators, landowners and developers, and one of the best ways to do that is to have the support of the local community. So, in my point of view it was very disappointing that at Seahenge the message seemed to be coming across in the press that local people hadn't been consulted. In fact, first of all the request to investigate Seahenge came from the Norfolk Archaeological Unit. So it was a local request. English Heritage was there, as it were, to help, to provide funding. English Heritage financed the initial studies of Seahenge, which showed that firstly it dated to 2000 BC, and that secondly it was being fairly rapidly destroyed by the sea. The report then came to AMAC, the Ancient Monuments Advisory Committee, a statutory body which is chaired by Richard Morris and which has Colin Renfrew on it, Barry Cunliffe, Tim Champion, a lot of well-known archaeologists. They considered the reports they were given, and came to the conclusion that the site should be excavated. That was the request from Norfolk County Council. For various local political reasons it became a hot potato and the local parish, for example, said that they hadn't been consulted by English Heritage. Now, obviously, every time a local authority or an archaeological unit asks English Heritage for a grant we don't normally go to the parish and say: 'is that all right by you?' Parish councils don't have a very formal structure, and in fact, in Norfolk the parish council had never even met and considered it. So, as soon as I received that criticism that we hadn't been in touch, I went to Norfolk and talked to a meeting of the parish council, which was open. Many of the villagers came and we had a long discussion, and I explained what was happening. I think it's a pity that this discussion hadn't taken place earlier, and as far as I'm concerned we would always try to discuss these issues as widely as possible. But it is rather difficult for a national body to discuss all these issues right down to the parish level. And I do think that local archaeologists have a responsibility to do that themselves.

Do you think that archaeologists should communicate their work more effectively, to compete with popular fringe 'archaeologists' like Hancock and von Däniken?

I wouldn't call von Däniken an archaeologist! But, yes, I do think that archaeologists ought to improve their communication skills. I wrote a local newspaper column for 10 years and I also did a Friday evening programme on local radio. I didn't get paid for any of it, mind, but I did that because I felt that as archaeologists working in an area we had an obligation to get our message across to local people. And also politically it's the sensible thing to do because if you are going to have political support you've got to show that you have popular support. When I worked in

America, for example, I found that American universities were really quite ivory-towerish. There wasn't the tradition there of university research archaeology getting its message out. I thought it was always one of the strong points of British archaeology that we did have that tradition, ever since Mortimer Wheeler, of telling the public about it, trying to keep it a popular subject, not a terribly snooty one. I wish local archaeologists actually did more of that. Local newspapers and local radios are usually crying out for stories. Archaeologists, I think, tend to hide their light under a bushel a little bit. We'd certainly try to help. One of the things I have done here since I arrived is that we've got a new appointment in the press room specifically to work with me to put stories into the newspapers. I'm keeping her very busy.

At whom are new media of presentation, like the Virtual Stonehenge, targeted, and what sort of response do they get?

I'm not sure. I don't know the answer to that, because I haven't really done the research on, for example, the Stonehenge one. But it is something I am very interested in because over the last 6 months or so I've been working with an organization called Immersive Education, which are developing new techniques for virtual reality archaeology, in particular using game technology. Most educational software in schools is pretty primitive and most kids who are used to Tomb Raider don't think much of the stuff they get in school. Personally, I think that IT offers tremendous opportunities for making archaeology and archaeological sites more interesting, because I think that archaeology is a visual subject. I think that they make it potentially easier to get across our message, to allow people to interact with archaeology and to be creative with archaeology. So I don't see these sorts of things as passive. We could potentially be using new technology to find much more sophisticated ways for children, and adults, to interact with archaeology that aren't simply dependent on words. And I think one of the problems with archaeological excavation reports, for example, is that they're too verbose; not enough intelligence and energy and skill goes into design. New technology could help enormously with that and, again, broaden the scope of archaeology.

I'm sure you get lots of questions about Stonehenge. Do you think the level of interest in this one site diverts attention from all of the other sites and projects which English Heritage deals with, or is it actually a useful focus as a test-case, whose outcome may affect other threatened sites in the future?

Yes, I think it is a useful focus, because it obviously is one of the biggest problems in English archaeology. I've run courses for the Smithsonian Institution in Washington for years on Stonehenge, but there have been times when I did not bother to take the students there. I said it was not worth looking at it. I used to say it's a disgrace, we'd rather go to Avebury. In its present condition it is a disgrace and it needs to be sorted out. It is fortunate that the chairman of English Heritage is absolutely dedicated to getting it sorted out, because it needs complete determination to do it, otherwise it's the sort of problem that will just sit there for another 20 years

unsolved. It does need massive focus on it. Fortunately with Chris Smith, the Secretary of State, we seem to have political support to do something about it. However, having said that, I think it is important that people don't think it's the only archaeological site in this country. There are obviously thousands of others with problems. I remember reviewing an American book on Stonehenge, a few years ago, which showed the British Isles as black. Black stood for forest. There was one spot that was Stonehenge. The book gave the impression that Stonehenge sat there in the middle of a huge primeval forest - a rather false view of the Neolithic! And so I would not want the focus on Stonehenge to divert energies and attentions away from all the other issues that we've got to deal with, Seahenge, for example - I don't like the name - but the timber circle in Norfolk. That's one of hundreds of sites which every year are disappearing into the sea, particularly on the east coast of Britain, which is eroding very rapidly. And the timber circle there is just one site. Hull University's surveys in the Humber estuary or the work that London is doing in the Thames estuary and other work that's going on around the coast show that we have enormous problems coping with the massive numbers of sites that are disappearing into the sea. Those are issues that we also need to keep in the forefront of public attention and not let Stonehenge, as it were, detract from those. But I don't think it will.

Do you share the conviction of Geoffrey Wainwright that the best solution to the problems of Stonehenge has been found?

The best? I think the pragmatic solution to Stonehenge has been found. The best solution would be a bored tunnel, but it also happens to be an extremely expensive solution, and it may not be realistic. As an archaeologist I would be satisfied with the cut-and-cover tunnel. But we are going to have problems ahead. Road-protesters don't see this as an issue about Stonehenge. They see it as an issue about the widening of the A303. And so, at the moment, there are a lot of people objecting to the road scheme. As archaeologists, of course, we are perhaps more interested in improving the environment of Stonehenge. But that's part of life's rich pattern, that we are going to have to deal with both those issues, as it were. So I think for Stonehenge it's the best solution we can expect.

How does English Heritage take decisions on the designation and preservation of more modern monuments, such as those that will mark the millennium, or the 'Twin Towers' of Wembley Stadium?

Well, the old Royal Commission for Historic Monuments was quite pioneering in the way that it approached sites that had not traditionally been thought of as terribly interesting from a historical point of view. The work it did on mills in Yorkshire and in Lancashire was quite pioneering. At the time a lot of people thought, well, an industrial site is not historical. Of course it is, and now I think there is a general acceptance of that. This work is particularly useful when it comes to addressing issues like regeneration and the re-use of buildings. I think now there is an increasing awareness that they are not only invaluable as spaces for new industry, for craft

activities, art galleries, restaurants, whatever it might be, but that they are also fantastic pieces of architecture. I think that it sometimes takes a while for buildings that had been in use as factories to become appreciated. But as I say, the Royal Commission was ahead of the game, really, in promoting that. At the moment, for example, English Heritage is looking at the listing of 20th century buildings, cinemas, for example. And so there is an agenda now to try to create an awareness that cinema architecture is interesting. It's very much an artefact of the 20th century and we should try to appreciate it before they're trashed. English Heritage is very much concerned through the listing programme in trying to get people to appreciate the quality of 20th century buildings. Politically it's a difficult issue, because sometimes listing buildings is seen as overly restrictive, it's seen as putting a brake on potential development. What we would argue is that that's not the case. What we are actually doing is trying to make people aware of quality and that quality in architecture improves peoples' everyday lives. And that's what we should be about. And in doing that, of course, it also means we should promote good quality architecture in the future. That's why on the front of our leaflet 'A Future for our Past', we've got a Megalithic tomb, a medieval building, and, beside a grade 1 listed building, a computer simulation of a structure that's not yet built, which is the Daniel Libeskind Spiral at the V&A. English Heritage looked at the development and came to the conclusion that this is the sort of high-quality architecture that we should be promoting. The fact that it is adjacent to a grade 1 listed building does not mean that we need to be very conservative about future architecture; it's quality that matters. And so I think that English Heritage has moved away from being restrictive, and backward looking, to try to set agendas where we're concerned about the protection and the promotion of quality.

To what extent do you think that English Heritage defines what England's 'heritage' will be, both now and in the future?

That's a difficult one. English Heritage is not the only organization that defines what England's 'heritage' is. That's obviously done by people all over the country in all sorts of ways, but I think it's English Heritage's responsibility to be ahead of the game. I come from West Yorkshire and when I was a kid, some of the mills there that were becoming dilapidated, or even more so the coal mines down the road, were not seen as interesting. I think it's English Heritage's job to try to see what is interesting as part of England's Heritage, as England's character, and what's historically important, before other people. So sometimes people are going to say, why on earth do you value that? At the moment, for example, I think we have this problem with things like the remains of coal mines, and of declining industries and so on. In rubbish theory, the thing that is 10 years old or 20 years old is seen as rubbish and the thing that's a hundred years old is seen as valuable and it's our job to try to identify what's valuable perhaps before other people appreciate it.

What do you think will be the major challenges facing English Heritage in the next few years?

In the next few years… I think there are quite a few. One of our challenges is to be able to work with the new regional agendas and to show not only in central government, but at the regional level as well, that English Heritage is relevant. We are part of DCMS, the Department of Culture, Media and Sport - we used to be part of the Department of the Environment. There are some advantages in being in the DCMS, but there are also disadvantages as well. One of our main challenges is that in areas like agriculture, transport and land-use planning, we are seen as a front-line agency that should be consulted. But there are some difficulties in that at the present, being grouped with museums and so on. That's one area.

I think another major challenge is perhaps to get away from the '80s image of heritage, as being somehow backward looking and conservative to being seen as relevant in a modern country, not just a brake, as it were. I never believed the '80s view of heritage. I always thought that that was a misunderstanding of what heritage was about. I think heritage has always had very strong grassroots support and I think there is a long and idiosyncratic tradition of interest in heritage in England which is not to do with being imposed by capitalists and conservative governments and such like - I think it's part of English character. But I do think that English heritage in the future needs, as it were, to redefine what heritage is about so that it becomes relevant.

And then, thirdly, there are areas where we still have major problems like the destruction of archaeological sites through agriculture, and so on. We have been fairly successful through the planning process and with the use of PPG16, but there are still many causes of destruction, such as agriculture, natural erosion on the coastline and so on, that we are going to have to cope with.