

Some reflections on the *Mapping archaeological careers* ClfA conference session

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Inspired by ClfA 2023 conference theme *Sustainable futures*, the Early Careers Special Interest Group (SIG) committee decided to explore how a career in archaeology might be sustainable, both now and in the future.

They say the best way to predict the future is to understand the past (certainly the motto for many archaeologists!). We therefore decided that a useful session would be to try to map the career pathways of a range of different people working in archaeology, and to discuss and compare the opportunities, and barriers, in these routes, and whether they still exist today. Could we, through mapping these journeys, work out what a sustainable career path in archaeology might look like in the future?

Our chairs (Jessica Elleray and Phil Pollard) were joined by five speakers – representing a range of heritage roles and specialisms – who shared their career journeys, whilst we attempted to map them in a structured way on the screen behind. We are very grateful to all our speakers, who were open about their experiences, as well as to our audience members who also spoke honestly and bravely in what was a passionate discussion. Here we want to share some of the key observations that emerged from these mapping exercises, and the discussion that followed them.

It was evident from our speakers how important support and mentoring has been on their journeys – whether that looked like honest conversations with their employers, or individuals who stepped up and encouraged them. Knowing they were part of a network that was bigger than their job and company was invaluable in helping them grow as professionals and advance their careers.

As expected, the speakers’ journeys were shaped by their context, with some career paths emerging alongside archaeology as a profession and benefiting from the unique opportunities and relationships this provided. This was picked up on in the discussion session, where there was a feeling amongst contemporary early-career archaeologists that a lot of the opportunities our speakers were able to make use of were about being ‘in the right place at the right time’. Whilst this could be said of any career, the lack of visible coherent pathways for those entering archaeology was a large factor in whether they saw their future in the industry or not, particularly in the current socio-economic climate.

Career journey mapper: Jessica Elleray

Name	Jessica Elleray				
Current Job Title	Community Archaeology Officer				
	Graduated 2017	2017–2020	2018–2020	Aug 2020–	2023
Journey Step	GCSEs & A-levels BA Hons Fine Art	Self-employed Research Artist	MSc Collecting and Provenance	Oxford Archaeology Graduate Trainee – Supervisor	Oxford Archaeology Community Archaeology Officer
Motivations	Pursuing my passions		I love research Wanted to better understand my topic	COVID-19 / buying a house Learning	
What you did	History, Art, English Literature, Theatre Studies Balanced ‘creative’ and ‘academic’ subjects	Every opportunity was self-directed Engaged with the community	Engaged with the community	Engaged with the community i.e. ClfA SIGs, CBA Asked questions, extra research/study	Proved the benefits of additional engagement staff
How others helped	Told me I’d never get a job in archaeology... Encouragement	Collaboration	Career advice	Training schemes	Training placement Supportive specialist



Early Careers Group committee. Credit: Early Years Group

'I felt motivated to consider what is unique about the state of archaeology now and how we can best engage with this to facilitate opportunities for others. For example, I have observed increased interest from clients for us to deliver skills, apprenticeships and training opportunities as part of our projects. How can we grab hold of this interest and develop new, robust pathways for emerging professionals?'

Many of our speakers cited volunteering as essential for their first job and career progression. Volunteering can be hugely beneficial, but it isn't accessible to everyone. It is here that the opportunities afforded by paid placements and training schemes to try something new and expand a skill set become invaluable. Several speakers did avail themselves of training or placement schemes – but not all of those mentioned still run today. Whilst we now have things like apprenticeships, they are still not readily available, with employers citing a number of barriers to offering them.

After the session some of our speakers got in touch to reflect on their experience. Most enjoyed being involved, felt attendees got something out of it and indeed, felt they did too, welcoming the opportunity for self-reflection. However, there was also recognition that sharing personal life events and feelings is not always easy, especially when they invoke passionate responses and enable the airing of real frustrations.

We strongly believe that providing the space for such open and honest discussion, if it is done in a respectful way, is incredibly valuable for the sector, and we feel it was an important aspect of this session.

Our session demonstrated that whilst there are common themes, career journeys are also incredibly personal. What is sustainable earlier in a career may not be later in life, and archaeologists need to see not only how they can progress as professionals, but how that path will facilitate a sustainable and fulfilling lifestyle.

In summary, we did not (and would never) find a 'perfect' career map in archaeology. But the visual maps we made were a useful



tool, and we are reflecting on how we might build on these in the future, perhaps creating more to cover other specialist areas. Finds, for example, was noted as a specialism not focused on in detail during the session.

Neither did we reach a defined solution to how we make archaeological careers sustainable, but our session certainly encouraged debate, and inspired a number of attendees to come forward and offer their own time and expertise to help move things forward.

Wider sector issues of pay and accessibility remain critical for sustainable careers and we, the Early Careers SIG, contribute to these conversations where we can. Inspired by this session, we are continuing to explore how we can encourage mentoring opportunities, facilitate industry networking and champion training and apprenticeships; we would encourage all colleagues across the profession to consider what they might be able to do to make archaeological careers more sustainable in the future.



Jessica Ellera

Jessica is a committee member of the CifA Early Careers SIG and works as a Community Archaeology Officer for Oxford Archaeology. Jessica's engagement work is supported by field and post-excavation experience ranging from prehistoric landscapes to post-medieval cemetery sites. Prior to working for Oxford Archaeology, Jess worked at the intersection of art/archaeological practice, producing creative projects that were researched, socially engaged, and that encouraged community ownership.



Phil Pollard

Phil is also a committee member of the Early Careers SIG. He is Heritage Career Pathways Manager at Historic England, managing their strategic approach to employability and skills development for the historic environment sector in order to help nurture a more diverse, socially relevant and resilient sector workforce. He has particular interest in enabling and embedding work-based learning into the sector, looking at things like apprenticeships and placements. He is also Co Vice Chair of the CifA Degree Accreditation Committee.

