

A CAREER IN CONTEXT: from trenches to tables

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I didn't begin my career with informatics in mind. In fact, I started out in construction and changed career! I viewed archaeology as a way of combining my interests in history with working outdoors and surveying. So, my early archaeological interests were rooted in landscapes and the stories embedded in places. But over time, I found myself drawn to the systems behind the scenes — the databases, workflows and spatial tools that quietly shape how we understand and protect the historic environment.



My academic path began with a BA in Archaeology, followed by an MA in Landscape Archaeology, GIS and Virtual Environments. These studies opened my eyes to the potential of geospatial technologies in heritage work. Later, my PhD explored change and transition in the Welsh Marches, combining LiDAR, viewshed analysis and border theory. It was a formative experience — not just in research, but in learning how to bridge disciplines and make complex data meaningful.

Professionally, I've worked across many specialised areas: community archaeology, regional HER management, and now consultancy. Each role has deepened my appreciation for the labour of information stewardship. At Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust I progressed from HER Officer to Head of Technology, Information and Planning. I led IT infrastructure, digital preservation strategies, GIS integration, and planning support — always with a focus on clarity, standards and public value.

Now, as a Historic Environment ICT & GIS Consultant with Idox Software, I support HERs across the UK who are using HBSMR, the UK's leading database & GIS application for the management of Historic Environment Records. I help migrate data, configure systems and deliver training — often acting as a bridge between developers and heritage professionals. It's rewarding work, and I'm constantly learning from the people I support.

I try to stay actively involved in the wider sector. I'm a Chartered Geographer (GIS) and a Member of the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (MCIfA), and I regard these as responsibilities rather than accolades. They remind me to uphold professional standards, share knowledge and contribute where I can. I have served on the ClfA Professional Standards Advisory Panel and advise the Information Management Special Interest Group — a community I value for its generosity and insight. My technical work often involves scripting, diagnostics and metadata wrangling — tasks that can seem distant from field archaeology. But I believe

The early days, surveying at a moated site on the Wirral. Credit: Gary L Duckers

they're part of the same ethos. Whether I'm writing a tool to batch export features or designing SQL views for HERs, I'm trying to make archaeological data more transparent, findable and usable.

I've also been fortunate to teach, as a visiting lecturer and demonstrator. Teaching and passing on skills have been deeply rewarding. Working as a visiting lecturer and demonstrator has strengthened my communication: explaining workflows, breaking down complex problems and responding to different learning styles has made my technical practice clearer and more resilient. Seeing students and community learners apply tools and methods to their own projects is one of the most satisfying parts of my career. It continually reminds me that the ability to teach – to explain, simplify and listen – is itself a vital, transferable skill that improves practice and collaboration.

Looking back, I see my career as a series of translations: from trenches to tables, from policy to platform, from story to system. I've learned that good informatics isn't just about data wrangling – it's about empathy. It's about understanding what people need from data, and how to make that data serve them.

A final note of practical advice for those starting or navigating this sector: cultivate and maintain transferable skills. The sector can be challenging in terms of job security and progression, so a broad toolkit – GIS, coding, project management and communication – opens options you might

not expect. Coupled with MCIfA, gaining Chartered Geographer (GIS) status has helped me demonstrate competence beyond archaeology and stay connected to wider networks. In a sector where roles often span disciplines, the ability to adapt and translate your skills is essential.

I'm grateful to the colleagues, mentors and communities who've shaped my path. And I'm hopeful for the future. It's a challenging time, with AI technologies reshaping the way we work – but also an exciting one. We have a real opportunity to make these tools work for the sector, and to ensure it remains a place we all want to work in.

Teaching LiDAR and GIS at the University of Chester. Credit: Gary L Duckers



HBSMR: a software solution for data management, analysis, presentation, and the publication of heritage data. Credit: © Idox plc



Part of the team receiving an award for a community archaeology project (with CWAC Museums). Credit: Gary L Duckers



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