

FROM PIPELINE TO PLATFORM: redesigning archaeology's place

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To paraphrase Jane Austen: it is a truth universally acknowledged that an archaeological site in possession of a good fortune must be in need of a site Open Day, an interpretation board and an update on Facebook. Archaeology is said to 'add value' to development, and in the age of localism, this 'fortune' has led to a widespread acknowledgement that we can do so much more than simply discharge a planning brief. Our work can help to shape the unique distinctiveness of place, responding to what Taryn Nixon has called 'our very human need to connect to other human stories and understand how we belong'.

But we may well ask: who or what is doing the place shaping here, and for whom exactly are we adding value? People are the real place makers, but in the language of 'place making', heritage can sometimes feel like a public relations exercise done *at* (rather than *with*) people and communities by developers, planners and archaeologists. To some extent, this speaks to a broader disconnect with the idea of 'localism'. The policy was enacted into law in 2011 to facilitate the devolution of decision-making powers away from central government towards individuals and communities; this approach to decision-making assumes a critical level of public participation without also considering how this active citizenship can be fostered. This is the same in archaeology, where the archaeological process maintains the dichotomy of 'us' (the archaeologists) dutifully communicating our work, usually after the fact, with 'them' (the public). Despite our best intentions, it's still a binary relationship.

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Archaeology's traditional business model, underpinned by Barry Cunliffe's influential 'levels of publication' concept, can be described as a pipeline workflow: designing a product or service, and then following a step-by-step system to deliver it in a linear chain with producers at one end and consumers at the other. The first level in Cunliffe's model is the site itself, with its unrealised information preserved *in situ*; this is followed by Levels 2 and 3 represented by the archaeologist's site archive and stratigraphic report. An academic journal or monograph publication follows at Level 4, with selected results made digestible for non-specialist consumers at Level 5 (the public) and 6 (the media).

Whilst this approach has led to the growth of a professional, quality-focused sector, it's missing a step in doing its job for today's world, as evidenced by the ageing demographic and declining membership of voluntary archaeology societies, and the one-note 'buried treasure' media narrative. Isn't it high time to reinvent

Cunliffe's levels of publication for the digital age? Today's on-demand viewing habits and algorithmic social media newsfeeds have created an increasingly demanding and discerning audience. No longer satisfied as passive 'Level 5 and 6' consumers of information, they want to join in, learn new skills and contribute to important research from wherever in the world they live.

This is where new peer-to-peer 'platform' technology can assist, potentially creating space for civic participation at the centre of our work. The underlying business model of these collaborative, peer-to-peer platforms is far from new, drawing on a two-sided marketplace similar to the one that enabled the formation of the London Stock Exchange in 1801. What's different is the affordances provided by digital, helping people to access the things they need in new and different ways, whilst also creating a place for them as a necessary resource.

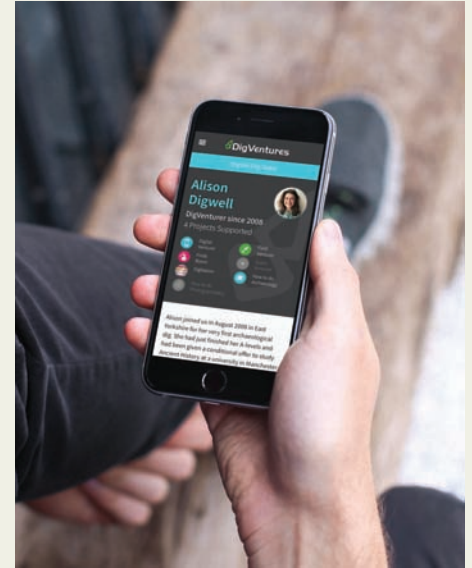
DigVentures have adopted a platform approach to archaeological resource sharing, collaborative knowledge production and crowdsourced labour, facilitated by a suite of networked digital tools creating an accessible space for micro-volunteering initiatives and experiences. By opening up the archaeological process in this way, the central design challenge becomes how to improve research outputs whilst simultaneously enabling civic participation at every level. The underlying technology of the platform addresses this with a publishing hub, online learning courses, e-commerce crowdfunding payment system, and a read/write recording system enabling project participants to collaboratively produce archaeological data.

Level 5 and 6 'consumption' products are not positioned at the end of the archaeological workflow, but manifest before, during and after the excavation, continuously funnelling the user into deeper engagement with the research process. Similarly, Level 2, 3 and 4 'production' factors are driven through the peer-to-peer engagement of the community, culminating in the research outputs that would be typically expected from a scientific excavation.

No matter how exciting and informative our results, if archaeology projects are not conducted in an open, participatory fashion it is a leap of faith to assume that the receiving population will acquire a stronger sense of bounded, local identity – a shaped place – from our work. Taken together as a digital stack, a platform approach can reimagine how we fund, resource, record, analyse and communicate our science, generating the kind of public support that underpins positive, sustainable growth for places.



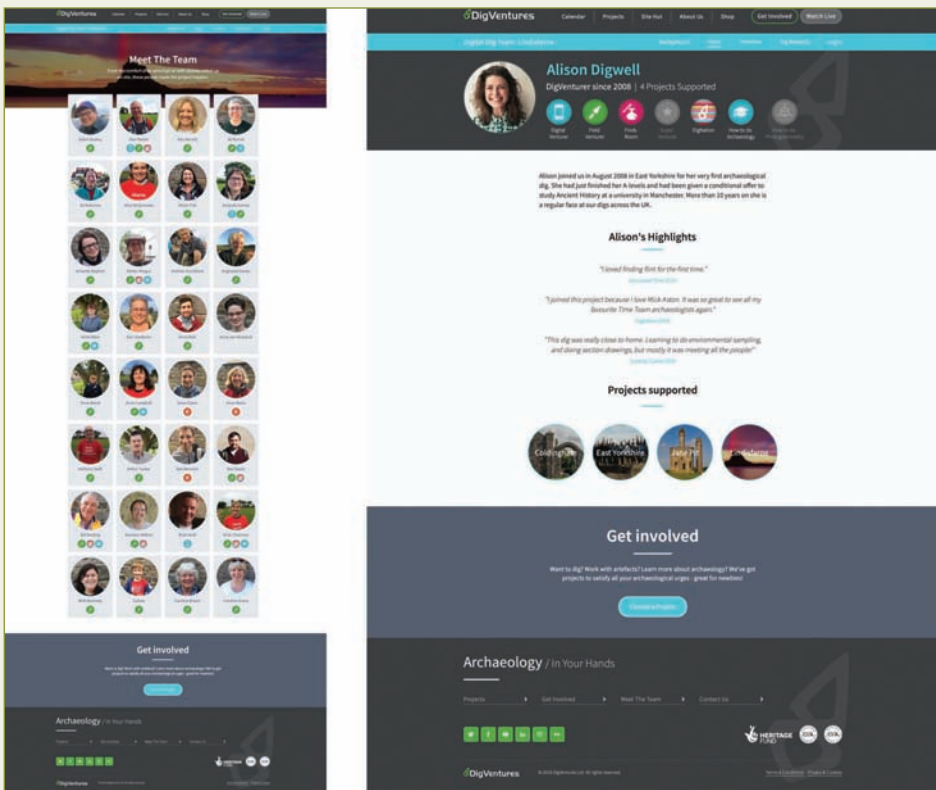
Aerial view of the 'barrowed time' crowdfunded community excavation, looking south-west over Morecambe Bay. Credit: DigVentures



A social network for archaeology – individual profile pages and badges viewable on mobile devices. Credit: DigVentures



Cunliffe's Levels of Publication (1983) illustrated as a unidirectional pipeline articulating the relationship between producers and consumers. Credit: DigVentures



Group and individual profile pages for the DigVentures platform, displaying badges of achievement and projects completed for individual participants. Credit: DigVentures

Further reading:

Wilkins, B, 2020 Designing a Collaborative Peer-to-peer System for Archaeology: The DigVentures Platform. *Journal of Computer Applications in Archaeology*, 3(1), 33–50. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.5334/jcaa.34>

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Brendon is co-founder of DigVentures, a collaborative archaeology platform specialising in crowdfunding, crowdsourcing and digital methods to increase public participation in archaeological research. Since 2012, DV has raised over £1.5m in matched grants and crowdfunding for 40 projects across the UK and beyond, bringing innovation to the archaeological process from tech to public engagement. He is currently finalising a PhD at the University of Leicester, entitled: 'Digging the Crowd: the future of archaeology in the digital and collaborative economies'.