**Introduction**

The subject is vast and complicated so this paper is necessarily selective and represents a simplified, personal and partial point of view. The paper deals strictly with the presentation of archaeological sites and archaeological material *in context* with a view to improving public understanding of archaeology and conserving and protecting archaeological sites and historic landscapes.

The paper does not deal generally with museums and the British museological approach – only with those museums that have been created to display material from a particular archaeological site or group of sites. The paper therefore necessarily leaves aside all those traditional British museums that house collections of objects from many different places, often divorced from their archaeological context.

The paper also leaves aside most of the local heritage centres that have appeared all over Britain over the last 20 years, and which deal in a variety of ways with local tradition, history and culture.

The paper focusses on England. The situation is much the same in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, but there are some important differences.

The paper is in four parts:

1. summary of the different sorts of organisations that manage archaeological sites and museums in England and present them to the public.
2. introduction to some of the key issues affecting the management and presentation of archaeological sites in England.
3. overview of the current situation, from low key presentation to major thematic museums and displays, illustrating how the key issues relate to the various examples.
4. detailed look at the issues relating to the archaeological site, museum and interpretive park at Creswell Crags, where for the past five years we have

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been seeking to develop Britain’s first major archaeological centre focussing on the Old Stone Age.

A key theme is that archaeology can and should be part of a much broader economic, social and environmental agenda. Archaeology should not simply be concerned with telling people about what happened in the past:
– archaeology contributes to environmental conservation by providing understanding of how modern landscapes are the result of past human management.
– archaeology provides an understanding and appreciation of time depth in a world increasingly concerned with the short term. This contribution is especially important today when we think of global warming and climatic change – environmental archaeology suddenly becomes alive and very relevant. Our ancestors coped with these changes – will we?
– archaeology contributes to a sense of pride and identity and is an important attribute of our sense of place. Archaeology can be especially important where traditional communities are increasingly being broken up, losing their identity, and where incomers are searching for something with which to create a new identity that respects the spirit of the place they live in.
– archaeology contributes to the local economy, not just through the variable potential for tourism, but through enhancing how outsiders view an area – its heritage, landscape and culture.

Management and organisations

In Britain, as probably in most countries, approaches to presenting the past reflect the role and culture of managing organisations in protecting the archaeological resource, and the agenda of such organisations in presenting that resource to the public.

Those organisations who have a primary responsibility to protect the archaeological resource have traditionally take a conservative approach to presentation. This has led them to take a rather dry, academic approach to presentation, whether that presentation is for education or simply to inform visitors. English Heritage, the National Trust and the National Parks are examples, where the approach to interpretation is fairly ‘highbrow’, accessible to the minority of the population who are well educated and economically better off.

The Ancient Monuments Protection Act of 1882 was the first public and legal recognition of the need to protect archaeological sites. The legislation included a list or schedule of monuments throughout Great Britain and Ireland which forms the basis of the current legislation and list of ancient monuments.

The responsibility for protecting these monuments lies with English Heritage (England), Historic Scotland (Scotland) and CADW (Wales). The number of sites is relatively small, with 13,000 for England, 4,500 for Scot-
land and 2,700 for Wales. The number of protected monuments is currently being reviewed and increased. The variety of these monuments includes stone circles and hillforts, Roman buildings and medieval castles, ruined abbeys and country houses, industrial archaeology and wartime defences.

Some of these monuments are managed directly by the National Agencies through ownership, guardianship or tenancy. English Heritage manages 440 monuments, Historic Scotland 330 and CADW 125.

Other Scheduled Ancient Monuments may be in public or private ownership, but are protected by law, this protection being enforced by staff from the National Agencies and through the local planning system.

Local planning authorities are responsible for protecting archaeological sites and monuments in their administrative areas. In England and Wales, the National Parks are the planning authority within the National Parks and so have the responsibility for protecting the many archaeological sites and monuments within them. Like English Heritage and CADW, the National Parks have conservation as a priority and this dominates their approach to management and presentation.

The National Trust is a registered charity (not-for-profit organisation) that was set up in 1895 for the purpose of purchasing or accepting the donation of places of historic interest, wildlife areas and scenic landscape for protection and conservation in the national interest. Like English Heritage and the National Parks, the National Trust has conservation as a prime objective which dominates its approach to the presentation of the many archaeological sites in its care.

Over the past twenty years a variety of different organisations, mainly Charitable Trusts (not-for-profit organisations) but including some Local Government bodies, have developed a more accessible, popularist and flexible approach to presenting and managing archaeology, using 3-dimensional and pictorial presentations, the spoken word and modern technology. In some cases local authorities have set up Charitable Trusts to manage and present archaeological sites in partnership with private companies, educational and scientific bodies and voluntary organisations.

These organisations work to a different, often economic, but also publicly accountable agenda, promoting archaeology as tourism but also as part of local cultural and social history.

More recently still, reduced public funding, the need to generate alternative sources of income, and the need to be more publicly accountable, has led to the traditional conservation oriented organisations taking a more imaginative approach to interpretation and presentation.

Research (e.g. MERRIMAN 1991) has shown that interest in archaeology and the past is not restricted to the economically better off and better educated. The past appeals to all of us. It is a question of how archaeology is presented.
Issues in presenting the past

1. **Presentation, interpretation and marketing** – the issue concerns interpreting archaeology to the widest possible audience whilst maintaining authenticity. With modern technology it is easy to take a ‘Theme Park’ approach, using multi-media, 3-dimensional models and special effects to create dramatic and spectacular effects, but is the result an accurate presentation of what archaeologists think happened? how valid are the archaeologists’ own interpretations and reconstructions? is authenticity being sacrificed for the sake of commercial interest?

2. **Conservation and access** – archaeological sites are part of the national heritage and, especially for those sites which receive public money for their protection and management, there is a perceived obligation for such sites to be publicly accessible. However, public access can also result in vulnerable archaeological sites being damaged by visitors, through the erosive impact of visitors feet, the detrimental environmental impact of car parks and visitor facilities, and/or through deliberate acts of vandalism.

3. **Selective presentation** – in the English education system, archaeology starts at the Romans. People in England have little understanding of prehistoric archaeology, while it is also much easier to create dynamic, multi-media presentations of the archaeology of more recent periods, which seem more accessible to contemporary visitors. Scotland and Wales are more conscious of their prehistoric, celtic past and prehistory is part of their educational curriculum.

4. **Partnership** – for effective interpretation and management of archaeological sites it is essential that professionals work closely together in teams and develop shared objectives. This partnership approach is one which Charitable Trusts, through the flexibility of their management structures, are particularly suited to achieving. They can be more responsive to local needs and aspirations than government or private agencies and organisations.

5. **Funding** – there is increasing pressure on organisations to become more commercial. This financial pressure can threaten the quality of the visitor experience, the authenticity of the interpretation and presentation, and the conservation of the archaeological site.

6. **Ownership** – private and multiple ownership can evidently complicate the management and presentation of an archaeological site.

7. **Archaeology and the wider agenda** – archaeology can make an important contribution to a much wider agenda of environmental, economic and social issues, including those of Agenda 21.

The contribution of archaeology to this wider agenda has been touched on above and includes:
1 – Providing time depth in a world in which people are increasingly concerned with short term issues and problems.
2 – Contributing to the management of whole landscapes, not just archaeological sites. The surface landscape as we see it is largely man-made. To protect it, we must understand how people have modified the landscape over long periods of time.
3 – Providing a sense of identity and place in a changing world, and a new vision for the future founded in the past.
4 – Contributing to European Unity as archaeology deals with elements that are common to all nations within the EU. New technology, including multimedia and the Internet, provides opportunities to link archaeological parks and museums, and to draw on the shared European cultural experience.

Case studies

The slide presentation illustrated a range of approaches by different organisations to presenting archaeological sites. The presentation included:

*Arbor Low, Derbyshire – Peak District National Park*

A prehistoric stone circle in the Peak District National Park, one of the area’s most well known archaeological sites, where on-site interpretation by the Peak District National Park comprises a single interpretive panel adjacent to a small car park about half a mile from the site.

Fig. 1 – Interpretive Panel at Arbor Low – Peak District National Park.
Venta Icenorum (Caister-by-Norwich), Norfolk – Norfolk Archaeological Trust

A Roman-British town, capital of the Iceni, where on-site interpretation of the earthworks comprises a series of interpretive panels at various locations, installed by the Norfolk Archaeological Trust who own the site. The site is managed jointly by the Trust and South Norfolk District Council.

Housesteads Roman Fort, Hadrian’s Wall – English Heritage/National Trust.

The complexity of access, conservation and ownership issues on the Hadrian’s Wall World Heritage Site is immense. The on-site presentation of Housesteads Roman Fort effectively manages interpretive, access and conservation issues. However, the small visitor centre is more a shop than a museum or interpretation centre.

St. Augustine’s Abbey, Canterbury – English Heritage

English Heritage has recently made a major investment to improve interpretation at this major site. A new interpretive and museum centre has been created with modern display cases and lighting, carefully designed interpretive panels and 3D multi-media presentation.

Various Sites – English Heritage

Physical on-site interpretation by English Heritage remains limited in scope on most sites. However, over recent years English Heritage has developed an innovative range of high quality guidebooks in which reconstruction drawings play an important part, as well as a range of physical re-enactment events that bring to life different periods of English history. This approach makes the sites and their interpretation more accessible to the public whilst preserving their physical integrity.

Stonehenge, Wiltshire – English Heritage and the National Trust

An example of how NOT to manage one of Britain’s most important archaeological sites. Current management is widely recognised as a national disgrace. The site is also an excellent example of some of the crucial management issues – the negative environmental impact of the road and of too many visitors, providing appropriate high quality interpretation whilst maintaining the integrity of the site, funding, multiple ownership.

Flag Fen, Norfolk – Fenland Archaeological Trust

An innovative approach to presenting a spectacular prehistoric site to the public whilst excavation is in progress. Flag Fen is a marshy site where 4000 year old wooden materials and artefacts are well preserved. This is a rare opportunity for the public to see at close quarters the craftsmanship and day to day life of people 4000 years ago. A temporary structure has been built to cover and protect the site as it is excavated, allowing the public to view the excavations as they progress. More could be done to encourage presentation of ‘archaeology in action’.
Fig. 2 – Visitor Centre at Housesteads Roman Fort, Hadrian’s Wall – English Heritage/ National Trust.

Fig. 3 – Museum Display at St. Augustine’s Abbey, Canterbury – English Heritage.

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Fig. 4 – Visitor Guides – English Heritage.

Fig. 5 – Historical Re-enactment – English Heritage.
Fig. 6 – Approaches to Stonehenge – English Heritage.

Fig. 7 – Flan Fen, Norfolk – Fenland Archaeological Trust.

West Stow Anglo-Saxon Village, Suffolk – St. Edmondsbury Borough Council

Bringing the past to life through reconstruction and role play. Anglo-Saxon dwellings have been reconstructed using evidence from archaeological excavations on the site, and anglo-saxon costumes and craft techniques are demonstrated through live displays and role play based on archaeological finds. Authenticity is a key element of the site presentation.
Jorvik, York – York Archaeological Trust

This independent Charitable Trust invested heavily in one of the first, most spectacular and successful modern approaches to archaeological presentation through reconstruction. The reconstructed Viking street receives 1 million visitors per year. The reconstructions are closely based on excavations at York. Surplus income is used to support the Trust’s archaeological research and conservation programme. The presentation is rather static and illustrates only one aspect of York’s fascinating story.

Ironbridge, Shropshire – Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust

Ironbridge Gorge is the birthplace of the industrial revolution in Britain, and a World Heritage Site. The flexibility provided by the charitable trust approach has been essential in dealing with the complex ownership and management problems associated with a plethora of abandoned and neglected industrial archaeological sites and monuments owned by many different people and organisations set in the middle of a living town. Authenticity underpins the reconstructions and presentation which deal with a whole urban landscape. In addition to conserving and interpreting an important part of Britain’s recent heritage, the project contributes to regenerating the area by attracting visitors and creating a high profile national image.

Fig. 8 – West Stow Anglo-Saxon Village – St. Edmondsbury Borough Council.
Fig. 9 – Jorvik Viking Centre – York Archaeological Trust.

Fig. 10 – Ironbridge, Shropshire – Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust.
Beamish has been criticised by some because the ‘townscape’ is an artificial creation, bringing together a wide range of rescued, restored and reconstructed buildings representative of the recent industrial past of north east England. The buildings are authentic, and staff have accumulated an immense documentary and photographic archive recording the region’s past, but the landscape itself is artificial. The project successfully provides tourists and local children with an attraction to visit which brings the recent past to life, and provides local children and adults with a sense of their culture and heritage. Again, the project contributes to regeneration by attracting visitors and giving the area a high national profile.

Gaunless Valley Heritage Landscape – Gaunless Valley Steering Group

The Gaunless Valley Project is managed by a steering group comprising representatives of local communities, local authorities and other agencies. This could be the nucleus for the future development of a Charitable Trust. The project is interesting because it concerns protecting and conserving a rural industrial landscape rather than a specific site. Again, the project contributes to regenerating the area by providing places of interest for visitors and giving the area an improved image. The project also gives local people a
Fig. 12 – Pit heaps and tramways, Gaunless Valley Historic Landscape.

Fig. 13 – Visitor Guides, Gaunless Valley Historic Landscape.

sense of pride in their surroundings. The approach to interpretation is comprehensive but low key, including an integrated set of guidebooks, walk leaflets, historical summaries, waymarked trails, interpretive panels and a video.
Creswell Crags is one of Britain’s most important archaeological sites, as important as Stonehenge or Hadrian’s Wall. The site and evidence from it tell the story of life in the Ice Age at the northern limits of human occupation between 45,000 and 12,000 years ago. This is the time when the first modern people appeared in Europe, replacing the Neanderthals. Excavations in the caves at Creswell Crags over the last 100 years have produced one of the largest collections in Europe of remains of Ice Age animals, as well as numerous flint stone and some rare bone tools.

The interpretive and educational potential of the site is enormous. There is no archaeological site or museum in Britain that tells this fundamental story of the country’s human origins at a site where it all happened. The story is a fascinating one that links landscape and environmental change to human adaptation and the first Europeans.

The magnesian limestone outcrop in which Creswell Crags is located covers an area of approximately 250 km². This area contains a remarkable concentration of caves and rock shelters which provide complementary evidence to that at Creswell Crags of life and environment during the last Ice Age. The area also contains numerous more recent historic sites and villages of national importance including Hardwick Hall, Bolsover Castle, Roche Abbey, Anglo-Saxon and Medieval churches and domestic buildings.

The magnesian limestone has distinctive wildlife and scenery, which, combined with the distinctive heritage, provide the area with a real character and sense of place. These characteristics have led to the informal designation of the area as the Magnesian Limestone Heritage Landscape Area.

The Heritage Landscape Area lies at the heart of the former rural coalfield of north east Derbyshire, north Nottinghamshire and south Yorkshire. A thriving mining community only ten years ago, the area now suffers from unemployment, social decay and environmental neglect.

The area has excellent opportunities for economic regeneration which have been overshadowed by a poor national image. This poor national image is the biggest single problem the coalfield faces for the future. The Heritage Landscape Area, with Creswell Crags at its heart, provides a unique opportunity for creating a new, sustainable economic future for the former coalfield area, based on its outstanding cultural and natural heritage. Creswell Crags, with its unique national and international profile, is the flagship site around which to develop this new future for the area. The objective is not to attract tourists in large numbers, but to develop the image of the area so it is seen as attractive to live and invest in, with a high quality and distinctive natural and cultural environment.

At Creswell Crags, a number of major infrastructure problems need to be resolved to enable this vision to go forward:
– a sewage works in the centre of the site must be relocated.
– a road that cuts the site in two must also be relocated.
– the heritage and environmental resource and its setting must be protected and enhanced.
– new and improved visitor facilities need to be created, without damaging the integrity of the setting or threatening future conservation.
– the site is privately owned and used as a game reserve.

Creswell Heritage Trust is a Charitable Trust that was set up in 1991 to manage the site and help resolve these issues. The Directors of the Trust include representatives from Local Government, the Private Sector, Specialists including archaeologists, ecologists and museum officers, National Conservation and Heritage Agencies and the local Community. The Trust receives core funding from Local Government but must seek additional funding from other sources. These sources include grants, income generated from visitors, and project funding.

Over the last four years the Heritage Trust has made significant progress towards resolving the major problems concerning the future management of Creswell Crags. Severn Trent Water have agreed to relocate the sewage works at a cost of £4.4 million. Lafarge Redland Aggregates have agreed to finance the relocation of the road through the gorge. Some improvements have been made to protecting the heritage resource and improving visitor facilities with funding from the European Commission, English Heritage and English Nature and there is the prospect of further significant funding as part of initiatives to regenerate the former coalfield area.

Nigel Mills*

References


*Nigel Mills studied archaeology at Cambridge University and went on to Sheffield University where he carried out research in settlement and landscape archaeology. He directed regional survey projects in France (Provence & Languedoc, Auvergne, Levroux) and in Italy (Luni). He became interested in the important contribution archaeology can make to understanding, managing and conserving modern landscapes, and to promoting public understanding of historic landscapes and the need to conserve them. He managed a historic park for six years and went on to develop a project to conserve and interpret an industrial heritage landscape in north east England. He currently manages Creswell Crags on behalf of Creswell Heritage Trust. Creswell Crags is one of Britain’s most important archaeological sites, and one of the most northerly places on earth to have been used by prehistoric people during the last Ice Age, between 45,000 and 12,000 years ago. Creswell Crags Visitor Center, Crags Road Notts, S80 3LH England.