

Forum Dispatch



Newsletter of the Diggers' Forum

Issue No.1 Summer 2005

Inform. Educate. Debate.

FORUM NEWS

Welcome to the very first issue of the Diggers' Forum newsletter. Hopefully the first in a long line of industrious and productive newsletters aimed at those archaeologists who want to take a greater interest in their industry, but are not quite sure how to go about it.

For those not familiar with the Diggers' Forum, we are an IFA Special Interest Group that aims to represent archaeologists primarily involved in excavation and post-excavation (as opposed to managers, consultants, county officers etc) across the UK. It is these staff that are currently poorly represented within the IFA and elsewhere, leading many to feel disenfranchised, helpless and often ultimately disillusioned with their profession.

The Forum Dispatch will aspire to be a quarterly newsletter with three key aims: to inform, to educate and to stimulate debate about the issues that affect and define our working environment. We hope that by providing a public arena for discussion as well as dissemination of news and information, we can create a platform where archaeologists who are not working at management level can have their say. This will provide an opportunity that

with very few exceptions (The Digger, BAJR, Prospect) has been severely lacking.

We hope this will help archaeologists progress through the industry, armed with vital knowledge that will help us make informed decisions about how we want our careers and our profession to develop.

One way to debate issues effectively would be to cover specific individual topics in each newsletter. It could be pay and conditions, health and safety, career progression, or any other relevant subject you want to bring to our attention. For now though, we just want people to get engaged in the process. We want the newsletters to provide a platform where people have an opportunity to comment, ask questions, and to agree or disagree with the material contained within. This is your Forum, so we don't want to do all the talking ourselves. We need to take our grievances out of the pub and into the public arena where we can start doing something about them. If you want to submit anything relating to what you have read here or elsewhere, then we want to hear from you. Contact details can be found at the end of the newsletter.....

EVENTS

The most noteworthy occurrence in the recent archaeological calendar was the IFA conference held at Winchester between the 22nd and 24th March. Three days of lectures were held, most of which were associated with the theme of historic towns. There was a wide range of sessions including topics as diverse as post-medieval cemeteries to the archaeology associated with large-scale road schemes. The event attracted some 400 delegates from a wide variety of professional archaeological backgrounds, including several commercial units, all keen to investigate some of the latest activities and trends within professional archaeology.

One session that generated great interest related to training in archaeology. This half-day seminar incorporated two main presentations, one of which was on behalf of the Higher Education Academy. They are investigating the opinions of archaeological professionals regarding the

levels of practical training supplied as part of archaeological degree courses. Their initial findings were unsurprising - the opinion of most archaeological professionals contrasted greatly with that of academics, especially in relation to the quantity of field experience a graduate should attain before entering the industry. The majority of professionals thought that many graduates do not have the full range of developed skills when first entering the profession and are initially ill-equipped for the job. The most shocking statistic was that out of approximately two-thirds of archaeological degree students considering a career in archaeology, only 10% actually make the transition from academia to the professional environment.

The main focus of the session was the presentation of a new IFA scheme that intends to provide funded bursaries, which would provide substantial training opportunities for professionals at all grades within the industry. The plan is

currently at the consultation phase while the IFA waits for a decision from the Heritage Lottery Fund, who will provide the funds if the application is successful. Hopes of success are high, particularly because the application is supported by the National Occupational Standards document, which has been developed by the IFA in the past few years. Audience participation was crucial to the session and topics discussed included: who would have access to the training? Who would provide the training? Subject matter, duration, as well as ethical issues associated with such a project. The session clearly demonstrated potential for the scheme. For example: the ability to provide levels of training to individuals that units are unable to supply. This could mean taking an individual with a strong interest or basic skill, helping them develop that interest or skill, and in the process improving their CV and advancing their job prospects. There is potential for training schemes in many subjects: from surveying to photography, through to post-excavation and analysis of finds.

Although there were plenty of detailed and interesting papers presented at the conference, there were not many of specific interest or relevance to those less senior members of the profession. The Diggers' Forum is considering running a session at next year's conference, which may begin to partially address this short fall. Other factors, including cost and obtaining leave to attend such events, must also be addressed if the conference is to become a more attractive option. For any archaeologist within our sector of the industry, conferences are an ideal way of furthering our knowledge and understanding of the industry we work in, in addition to a great socialising and networking environment. We would be interested to know if there are any specific topics you would like to see raised at the conference, or if you have material you might want to present in front of the right audience? If so then we need to hear from you. To successfully raise awareness of this type of event and increase participation, we need you involved. Please forward any material you think appropriate to the details given below.

NEWS SHORTS

■ The first regional group meeting of the Diggers' Forum was held in Cambridge on the 24th April. The group discussed several issues including health and safety, pay and conditions and how the Diggers' Forum should develop and function. A full summary can be found on the Forum web page, details of which can be found below. The Diggers' Forum would like to hear from anyone else interested in establishing a regional group.

■ The IFA recently took the unprecedented decision to remove Archaeological Solutions from the Register of Archaeological Organisations (RAO). This decision was taken due to AS "providing false information in support of their application for Registration".

■ Prospect are continuing their talks with the unit managers guidance body SCAUM in aid of furthering their National Pay Bargaining initiative. SCAUM have recognised that they have no power to speak collectively for archaeological employers, but are willing to work towards establishing best practice guidance on the topic of pay and conditions. The Dispatch will continue to monitor this situation and report back on any further developments.

■ The 'Good University Guide' in The Times supplement, dated 23 May 2005, had a list entitled 'What do graduates earn?' Of the 61 professions listed, guess which one came rock-bottom with the lowest starting salary of the lot? That's right – archaeology! The information source was listed as HESA 2002-03 and the salary recorded was £13,308. That's only £150 less than the IFA's current recommended starting salary for 2005! Not a massive surprise, but pretty shameful none the less. It clearly demonstrates what a dire situation we're in regarding pay.

■ David Connolly of BAJR has recently compiled a booklet on guidance for Employers and Casual Workers, entitled 'Employed or Self-Employed in Archaeology'. It contains useful advice and information regarding the different types of employment regime and the implications of going down either route. For more details go to www.bajr.org.

☐ If any of these news shorts (or anything discussed in the news letter) has sparked a comment, question or answer, then we want to hear from you. We are keen to publish material that generates further debate. To do so please drop us a line by means of the contact details below.

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