

FORUM

Brexit, Archaeology and Heritage: Reflections and Agendas

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This short report represents the closing comments to the forum covering Brexit, Archaeology and Heritage.

Keywords: Archaeology; Brexit; Heritage; Funding; EU; Post-Truth

Closing Comment

We would like to thank the respondents to our paper for their contributions to the unfolding debate over Brexit and its relationship to archaeology and heritage. These essays reflect in diverse ways the complex intersection of the scholarly, the political and the personal that has perhaps always been with us, and increasingly commented upon, but which Brexit has brought to a moment of crisis from which we can only hope a positive outcome is still salvageable. Since writing the initial paper for this Forum in July of 2017, events have moved forward in several ways, although ironically in terms of the actual process of exiting the EU remarkably little has happened. More and more evidence is certainly emerging of the social and economic problems that this process, should it reach conclusion, will cause, whether in UK generally, in the rest of Europe (particularly in Ireland; e.g. House of Lords 2016; The UK in a

Changing Europe 2017), or in our particular sector (Schlanger 2017). More disturbingly, perhaps, the tone of debate represented in some media outlets has darkened even further and universities in particular have come under attack as bastions of 'remain-erism'. Just prior to writing this piece, the Conservative politician Chris Heaton-Harris MP was in the news for seeking information about the teaching of Brexit-related issues in all UK universities (BBC 2017a). Whatever the motivation behind this, the front cover of the Daily Mail on October 26th (headline, 'Our Remainer Universities') followed up on this story, and made it clear that for some on the pro-Leave right-wing, universities are now a major target for political attack. This can be seen as part of a wider trend, pre-dating the referendum and becoming widespread across the western world (and certainly in the US), of right-wing populists painting universities – and, by extension, academic and scientific knowledge – as simultaneously liberal/left-biased and elitist (cf. Runciman 2016). Meanwhile, these same populist movements appear to be, literally, on the march, from Charlottesville in August (BBC

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2017b), to Warsaw in November (BBC 2017c). It is very easy to be pessimistic about where all this is heading. We hope, though, that if nothing else these sorts of events will compel a mobilisation of all practitioners in the heritage and archaeology sectors, as professionals and as citizens, to engage with these issues directly. They are becoming inescapable, and critical discourse has never been more essential.

Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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