

10 years

Editors:

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AN INTERVIEW WITH TIM SCHADLA-HALL

(by Jaime Almansa-Sánchez)

17/12/19 – Olivelli's London, 14:30

14:36 – I am slightly late, but Tim is still there with his previous meeting, finishing lunch. This table has witnessed hundreds of conversations and is surely a landmark for public archaeology. I am not going to make a biography here, maybe you can learn something about him from the interview. If you follow this journal, and public archaeology, you probably know something about him already.

We have coffee, and after updating each other for a few minutes, we move to the back for the interview. It should be quieter. It is not. The waiter takes a photo of us (I did not have any), I take this one for the interview...



...and we go straight to the topic:

[mistakes are my fault on transcription]

JAS: If I tell you “Archaeology”, which is the first word (only one) that crosses your mind?

TIM: Public.

JAS: And if I tell you “Public Archaeology”, then what’s the first word that comes to your mind?

TIM: Actually, it’s communication rather than engagement.

JAS: I would like you to tell me (a little bit) how did you come to work into public archaeology (so, a little bit of history because you come from the museums sector).

TIM: Years ago, I used to work as a field archaeologist. One of the things I was interested in was field walking as I realised that archaeology is really about observation and data. I realised that school pupils could be involved with Archaeology, just walking across the field, digging stuff up, and interpreting it. We don’t need a degree to do that, because it combines two things: “discovery” and “analysis”. If you like just looking at objects, working out what they mean then we could take school kids out, to walk across Roman sites, for example, in the South of England. Some of my professional archaeology colleagues at the time said: “why are you working on weekends?” well it was because it is the only time you can get children to come out, because they are not in school... that’s what this is about: taking, in this case, young people, it works with any age at all; walking out and trying to understand landscapes and the past. So, I think that was when I realised that archaeologists frequently don’t involve people in their surroundings. And of course archaeology is about looking at the past for everybody, not just for archaeologists. It is also about getting people to think about what’s around them. So, I guess the idea of explaining people about the past and involving them directly in it gives them a stake in what is around them. So, I think this is where it starts for me. Everybody can be involved provided you can find the right time and a job to do.

What we do as archaeologists frequently means nothing to most people, and even though they joke about Archaeology they all want to know about it. Also, it's the magic of communication, because most people have very little idea about the past, very little idea about what it means, for example in terms of technology, because we use words that most people don't understand. Actually, it's pretty simple and it's pretty basic. All Archaeology involves at the simplest level is being able to look at objects and analyse them, because that's what archaeology is about. That's why I care about public involvement in archaeology, because if we don't make clear that archaeology has a value, which is far greater than the value we apply to it, as professional archaeologists, then we fail to carry people with us or to have them realise why it's important. And, actually, in the UK, my experience is, if you say to somebody that you an archaeologist, then they will say: "oh! I always wanted to do that, but there is no money in it!".

JAS: Yeah... That's a pretty common trend in... I guess the whole world. Like everybody wants to be an archaeologist, just they never kind of dare to do it because they prefer to do something where they can make a living.

TIM: It's funny because I think if more of us communicated on a wider level, there would be more jobs for archaeologists, but we are not very good at communicating our ideas to people. So, all that goes together for me, to explain why it is important. I guess the other reason is because the past (I'm sorry if this sounds trite) is always with us. Understanding the past, gives us some insights the present as well. So that's why I care about it.

JAS: So now, doing a bit of... memories... of your coming to UCL. If you could tell me a bit about how did it happen and the experience of changing like completely the...

TIM: Ok. So, when I came to UCL in 1998, I had just made myself redundant from my previous job in Museums. My previous work had been very much involving people in archaeology. So, in Leicestershire, where I was, there was a colleague; Peter Liddle who invented the term, of Community Archaeology. In Leicestershire, over five hundred people were out in the field recording the archaeology of Leicestershire. All of them were amateurs. And

they did this job superbly by bringing together knowledge and understanding of the landscape.

I also previously worked in universities talking about Public Archaeology. So, I applied for the job as a lecturer in Public Archaeology at the Institute.

JAS: That was the first one that Peter Ucko advertised?

TIM: Yeah, that's right. It was the first post and to be honest (I have to be careful), I applied for the job because I was persuaded to do by Stephen Shennan, who was then Professor. And I applied without much hope of getting the job and with very little intention of taking it, if I had, by remarkable circumstances, been invited to take it. I do remember I had a lot to drink before the interview. I was involved with some other people. I did the interview and two days later I got a phone call from Ucko saying: "We'd like to offer you the job". And I said: "Well, you do realise I was drunk", and he said: "Never mind, you were the best candidate".

At the time I wasn't sure I wanted the job, anyway. I was on the shortlist for another Museum post, so I asked for some little time to make up my mind. And I think I didn't reach out for three months. And then, apparently, they withdrew the job from me, because I didn't come back. I was told to a colleague in the Institute that "Peter is not going to offer the job now; he is going to withdraw it". I was kind of sad because I didn't get the other job I was going for. And two days later, it was after Christmas, Peter rang me up and said: "come and see me". I went to see him and he said: "Are you frightened of being an academic at your age?" I said no, and he said: "Well, you take the job now or that's it". So I took the job. And for the first 6 months I did absolutely no teaching work but just research and reading before we started the course, MA in Public Archaeology, which has been going ever since.. From there, I have been incredibly lucky because I had some brilliant, MA students and brilliant PhDs too. After over 20 years of talking about public archaeology, this has given me dozens of people across the world to promote the idea that archaeology is more than just professional archaeology.

JAS: Indeed, last week I was in Paris and I was talking to some people in the bar and one of them, told me: "You are still on this public archaeology thing, no?" And I said: "Yeah! Well, I'm more into management lately, but basically is the same, so..." And he told me something like: "But that's kind of a UCL thing, isn't it?"

TIM: Yeah, I think that's fair. I think when Peter set it up, and it was Peter Ucko's idea, he wanted people to understand the wider value of archaeology as opposed to just looking at stuff. And I think it was seriously visionary of him. The trouble with the term is that it's being confused with something called cultural heritage. Now, I would claim to be an archaeologist. I'd claim that the hardest job in the world is digging stuff up and then publishing it. I'm speaking from some experience. Now, I think if you have not gone through the process of actually being a dirt archaeologist and understanding that, and that you can translate it into what it can mean to other people. Peter's idea was actually very British, I hate to say it because it shouldn't be, but it is. Globally we tend to see the use of the term cultural heritage, because is preferred not least by the influence of the United States, which seems to be because of an obsession with heritage. Now, "Heritage" to me is whatever you want it to mean, whatever you want it to be.

JAS: This is like Gamble's definition of archaeology actually... How do you feel about this connexion between the concept in the US and the UK? Because you actually need to explain in the US what you do here as Public Archaeology, kind of even in opposition to what they do in the US, because it is more a bit of commercial, development-led, plus community work...

TIM: Yeah, I think one of the problems. It is also European problem too: understanding what is meant by the term. Various people have written about this... I still think Reuben Grima probably has written the best of what we mean by public archaeology. I think of Akira Matsuda as well. So, I think there are places in the world where there is understanding... and of course, it is about definition and meaning of words. It is also about understanding the past through archaeology.

I was in Turkey for the presentation of a book recently; I went to a conference about public archaeology. which means there is an understanding about public archaeology in Turkey. Also true, in Japan, as there is probably some understanding about people relate to the past and how communication is important. Recently there was a huge EU funded scheme running (about two years ago), on cultural heritage in Museums, spread all across Europe. It seemed to me that it was a bunch of archaeologists saying they are going to make an understanding for the past better without involving the public! I think one of the keys for understanding public archaeology is that it should, to some degree, be bottom-up. The problem with a lot of the discourse on culture heritage is it's top-down. Changing that is important.

JAS: How can you expect the bottom-up approach when you don't have the tradition that you had in the UK of engagement and public concern about their past and their archaeology, even the participation that you have here in the UK?

TIM: That's a really interesting question, it raises the point about the role of the State in Archaeology. There is a recent PhD about the differences between Italian archaeology and British archaeology; the Italians have a very clear state role for archaeologists, from the Soprintendenza and down. Archaeologists become defined by the State, which is fine. It is actually the reverse in the United Kingdom and still continuous to be. British Archaeology has never been very close to the State, therefore it tended to be non governmentally aligned individuals, as a result you have far more people in this country, involved in archaeology who for example don't have degrees; don't belong to unions, or whatever else. On the continent, as for example in Norway, the public aren't allowed to touch anything pre-1536. They are not allowed to excavate, but here there is a much more liberal attitude, I would argue, that allows involvement and care about Archaeology, which doesn't happen in many continental countries. The relationship between the state and archaeology... England is the first European country to privatize the State interest in archaeological sites, which is... is interesting. I don't think it's a good thing, it is actually quite bizarre. Now, relationship between the State and Archaeology is what allows archaeologists, at least in the continent, to exercise power through the apparatus of the state.

JAS: But probably not only that, because my perception, for example, is that it also began as a tool of protection over the origins, let's say, of Archaeology. Basically, British and French were excavating the South. So, the "State" tried to control that, so the British Museum didn't "happen" any longer.

TIM: Well, this is the interesting point; about the State and control for many aspects of Archaeology although the UK was a signatory of the Valetta Convention (1992), it has never activated all parts of the Valetta Convention. As a result we still have a tradition of what I would call part-time archaeology where much work is done by people who are not full time archaeologists and are not working commercially. The division between commercial archaeology and non-commercial archaeology, and research archaeology, is a huge one. In the UK local groups, many local societies still carry on excavations, although they come and go.

JAS: One thing that I found interesting is that some years ago English Heritage tendered a project to evaluate the impact of local societies' Archaeology on academic archaeology and it was below zero. And at the same time, the impact of development-led archaeology in academic archaeology... was a bit better, but not really that important either. So, it is not just the two actors, is the three of them. So, you have academic archaeology doing their thing, commercial archaeology doing their thing, and the local societies, that were actually the origins of all that, doing their thing, and not communicating among each other.

TIM: That's true to a point, but take an interesting case... Kris Lockyear, at the Institute of Archaeology, developed a huge scheme with local societies in Hertfordshire, which basically involved vast amounts of geophysics. As a result he is now able to describe the Roman site of St. Albans, and it was people in local societies who did the bulk of the survey work- and it was local people who were doing and using highly technical geophysical stuff and this and I believe this whole survey of the Roman city of St. Albans, all has tremendous academic impact. So, there are cases where you can demonstrate local societies have a real impact. The interesting thing I would say about what used to be English Heritage, that is now Historic England...

JAS: Yeah, that was in like 2013, before they changed the name...

TIM: They wouldn't want to rate local Archaeology, as highly as I think its contribution is. So, if you look at someone like Prof. Martin Millet, at Cambridge, some of his most famous excavations, his work on IA/ Roman agriculture and settlement in Yorkshire, is all based on the product of amateur archaeologists. The classic is best illustrated by Martin Green, who is in Dorset... So partnership does exist in this country. It may not be as good as it was, but it is critical.

JAS: And coming back to the international impact of UCL as a hub for Public Archaeology. Have you noticed a change between the early years, let's say the early 2000, and now 15 or 20 years later (Tim: it's the last 20 years of my life!). So, since the day you took the position until today?

TIM: I think, by large, the biggest change is the fact that there are people, including ourselves, all over the world, who understand the concept of public archaeology and to some degree, promote it as well. I always say I am very lucky I have had very bright students, including you. Most of the students I ever had were smarter than me... It's just that I am wiser! and seriously, those people who have gone out there, have made a significant difference in understanding the importance of public archaeology in the sense that I use it, and Peter Ucko used it, in terms of the fact that our subject has a greater value than just a bunch of archaeologists having jobs, it has a wider impact all around. I still think that's what really counts. Besides that, the network, which is across the world to some degree... admittedly not the United States of America, yet makes a significant difference. Some of papers that we see being published, even in *Public Archaeology*, the journal, do make a difference. There is really a danger of archaeology being reduced, as an academic subject, requiring research or funding – the need to recognize the full of value and relevance for everybody about Archaeology is critical. For example, it's actually the understanding of things like working out that there were no Anglo-Saxons; the past does belong to everybody; the understanding – about misrepresentation of evidence means there's a danger of racialism, for example, all over the world. I think public archaeology has a political role to play in that field. But at the end of the day, the struggle is about

education. School kids are learning a great deal about archaeology. Hopefully we can argue about what objects mean, and how to interpret them; understanding Prehistory is not about a set of fixed dates that we discuss, it is about interpretation. The potential spread of what we call public archaeology is that we have so many different areas to tap into, and we have so many different values that we frequently don't think about in the university careers, or in the university degrees, because there is so much more we could reach.

JAS: Now, besides the picture in the US, that they have their own development, my first contact was in 2004 when I saw Nick's [Merriman] book that just came out and we got it in the department plus the journal that was in the third volume? Something like that. For me it actually was life changing, indeed (Tim: My god! Sad!). You have been involved since the very beginning and talking now about specifically the journal. What's the evolution that you have perceived on the contents, the kind of work that we have been doing and publishing in the last 20 years?

TIM: That's easy. The biggest change, I think, I hope, is that more archaeologists are publishing their results in the journal, about their reactions to elements of public archaeology. I mean, one of the things that I think is important, if it develops as it should, is that we publish more internationally. One of the things that we are going to do next year is a couple of volumes on Japan. We will look at what the Japanese are doing, because archaeologists in Japan are involved in the same issues that Australian archaeologists were involved in 30 years ago, on indigenous identity, on how we see things ourselves, and what we can say. So, maybe we do Japan and after we do China. Now, I bet you know this, the main potential purchases of journals, as long as they are not online and free is going to continue being in the United States of America. I still think the United States of America is a problem in terms of understanding what I would call public archaeology.

JAS: Why do you think is that?

TIM: Many years ago, I was involved in a paper for a volume on hunter gatherer societies and I realised that the results of the

Scottish Enlightenment the then view of societies explained a lot. I'm gonna do this... I have a tremendous respect for impact of the Scottish Enlightenment, because I think that late 18th Century intellectual burst also involved the matter of anthropology; the idea that primitive societies should be studied as humankind evolves to a more civilised and sophisticated state. One of the problems with the United States is that many of their departments, today, read anthropology rather than archaeology as a main subject, they may also teach archaeology, but there was no UK-type tradition.

JAS: But somehow in the relation between archaeology and anthropology, actual public archaeologies basic. I mean, some people tell me I do sociology or an anthropology of archaeology when I explain my work. So, that shouldn't be such a barrier.

TIM: But it is barrier in terms of the development of Archaeology as a subject. I think that it has something to do with the colonial nature of the United States of America. If you come from the European tradition, why would you bother to excavate Indians in the 18th and 19th Century? Who you are busy exterminating. Let me talk about a parallel, let's say with Argentina, largely settled by the Spanish and Italians. In Argentina the whole understanding about archaeology, similarly in Brazil, and the whole nature of the indigenous archaeology is largely neglected well into the later 20th Century, , because they were colonial nations, looking at a European past and not worrying about indigenous issues. Now all those things are changing certainly in Argentina, and also in Brazil, Pedro Funari for one. But in the States, I would argue...

JAS: But at the same time, for example, some of the contemporary archaeology projects, probably the Marxist ones in the US, have been a quite good example in the 90s specially with Annapolis and that, the working-class archaeology, the plantations... They have traditionally like a...

TIM: I am not saying it doesn't happen. What I am saying is it changes the attitude to the past. So, for example, in my case I don't claim to be related to the Neolithic. But I can claim there was a continuous connected evolution back to, let's say, 3,500 B.C. or earlier, and people would be automatically interested in say, Yorkshire, without being directly related to to the early Mesolithic

inhabitants, for example. In the United States of America, would you be interested, as a settler from post-1484, in the very deep past without being directly related to it? The answer is, or has been - no. All this has an effect on the way one looks to the past, especially if you don't see it as yours. So, I think that difference between colonial nations and non-colonial nations is very important and has a vital effect on how the past is approached.

JAS: But at the same time is a challenge that we are facing now in Europe with all the settled immigration that we have now in the second, even third generation. So, how can you reach all these new, let's say, audiences or publics that you are having here in the UK from Pakistan, India, whatever African origin, even Spain (with the South American ones) to this other, let's say, Classical or Neolithic past that for us is related but for them is not?

TIM: I don't see a problem with that, presently. How can I start? I worry about my country, because... of not enough people understanding the past. It's obvious that some people worry about immigrants, but the joke, of course, is... if you look at the archaeology, we can see this country has been last in line for immigrants since at least the Neolithic. And I think explaining that to people is incredibly important. I mean, using the past to explain that we have been constantly involved with immigrants and constantly involved in change through time is another value that archaeology, I would say public archaeology, has that to offer; for example, you can demonstrate the earliest skeleton, which is late Palaeolithic, from the DNA, in Somerset was black! We are talking c. 15,000 b.C.

[The waitress brings some Tsipouro and we joke about how I now like Thessaloniki more than Athens... sorry]

It's interesting, because we are talking about explaining the past to people, and I was in Finland about 5 years ago, where my Finnish colleagues would say: "Nobody is very happy with all the immigrants." They are from the Middle East and are settled here because of all the problems. And I said: "Well, you know you are all immigrants from the Middle East, anyway". Let's get this right,

and it's one of the points of doing what we do- using the past to illuminate the present about accepting those changes, and how we should be able to understand them. And the trouble with the past is the way in which the past is not explained- for example I grew up in Eastern Yorkshire, and I was taught, 60 years ago, as a kid, that everybody there was descended from an Anglo-Saxon, because the area was full of Anglo-Saxons named places. This simplification is based on the myth of a mass Anglo-Saxon invasion. There were no doubt Anglo-Saxons – but there was a previous population. Getting people to not misuse the past in anyway is so important. So, returning, very quickly, to Japan: the Japanese occupied Hokkaido in the 1860's because they were scared of the Russians; it wasn't a part of Japan in the view of the Japanese, it was occupied by the Ainu, who were most certainly the successors of the Jomon, who were of course the precursors of the Japanese population. The Ainu were gently suppressed, for the next hundred years. Now, the Japanese are recognizing the importance of the Ainu in terms of their past. The point is that we have a role to play to get people to recognize the past needs to be understood.

JAS: Now, that you brought the topic, especially in the last few years, the new populisms in Europe are using the review of the past for their agenda, which is normally not very engagement, with others at least. How do you think public archaeology can engage effectively with that issue? Because normally we have still a very academic thing going on with some small...

TIM: After over 20 years for the development of the Northern League ("La Liga"), yeah. The first leader of the Northern League was (I believe he is still alive) Umberto Bossi. And you know, his followers used to dress up as druids in green and perform in front of ceremonial springs in Northern Italy. "La Liga", Northern Liga, used to produce this schoolbook, I must have told you this before, which schoolteachers or members of the Northern Liga used to use. Pointing out that everybody South of Rome wasn't really a Celt. So, we go back 25 years, the then Northern League was explaining the story that they were really all Celts. Which goes back to the Celtic exhibition in Venice in the 1980's. This is how creating myths about the past is really serious and frightening. This myth creation is something we need to counter and it's not unique to Italy by any means.

JAS: Actually, and that would probably be my next question. 25 years later the situation is worse. What have we been doing?

TIM: I think we failed to engage. I mean, we all know that people believe what they want to believe, but the myths that are deeply embedded in society are the ones that worry me. My answer is education. I am not sure it works, I'm really not sure, because if we now know, for example from DNA evidence that there were relatively few Anglo-Saxons settled in this country, but large numbers of the population still believe we are an Anglo-Saxon nation then education isn't working! It's rubbish. So, in this country, what I want to do, is explain to people that we are a constantly changing group of people, with constant invasions, peaceful invasions and non-peaceful invasions, that gave us what we are today. Which is why it's important to understand the past. The same applies (I think) for much of Europe. The role of the archaeologist should be to stand up and to explain these things, and make changes.

JAS: I'm not going to be very evil. Because in the beginning we were talking about these bottom-up archaeologies being so essential, but at the end when we get into serious things we are still on a top-down approach (explain to people things that they don't know) and unidirectional speeches.

TIM: Let me answer this for you very simply. Coming back to what we started with. I think Archaeology is something (as long as it's recorded), that anybody can be involved in. I started by talking about encouraging people to field walk and record what they find in their fields. So, where I come from in rural Yorkshire, I know a farmer, I've known him since he was four, and he is now 54. And he got very interested in flint, there is plenty of Roman material, but he does like flint. And he walks his fields, and I saw him about ten years ago, when he was finding some quite remarkable archaeological sites. And he said to me: "When I walk across my fields, I now realise I've only been here a second over the seven thousand years before me". If everybody realised that it would work; which is why I'm determined that it is public archaeology, and finding stuff and understanding it, which will change people's minds by involving them directly with the process of recognizing that we have been only living here a few seconds.

JAS: So probably that would be, maybe, the only short-term approach to changing the current reality...

TIM: There's no short-term approach, it is long-term. We all have to do this which is why I think everybody should be involved in all the process of archaeology, rather than saying: "You can't take that". I mean, in Italy is always fascinating because if you find anything important in Italy the State immediately takes it over.

JAS: Yeah, actually, it's not only Italy. Most of the Mediterranean and elsewhere... It's not just that they take over. It's the property of all the Italians, of all the Spaniards, of all the Greeks, but the State is the figure that takes care of it.

TIM: That's something that really worries me. Because it seems to me that archaeologists, paid archaeologists, professional archaeologists, can either be very close to the State, in which case they have power and jobs. Or they cannot be part of the State, they can be independent to the State. So, when we talk about public archaeology in a political context, if you are close to the State, you will do what the State wants. I don't want to do that, because the past is not about the State. I think it was Neal Ascherson who said: "Archaeology is the handmade of nationalism", which is why we go back to Ulrike Sommer saying: "Archaeology, whether we like it or not, is a political subject: what we do is used". So, that's why I'm a public archaeologist.

JAS: So, that would be: "what we what do is used, at least use it your way, before someone else uses it". So, coming a bit back to the present, I would like to know one achievement you are proud of in all these years working.

TIM: Jaime, the truth is I'm not really proud of any achievement. I am really serious about this because what I really care about, and I do, is the people I have been lucky enough to try influence or teach. Nothing else, at all. What I am really concerned about is that the next generation has to change the World, but whether people can go out and do that... that's what really matters. I mean some of the happiest days in my life have been spent at UCL, and I'm serious about the quality of students who can change the World. I recently got a "get well soon" card from about thirteen students,

saying: "because we really enjoyed listening to you". And I think those are the things that count, there isn't anything... There is a next generation in archaeology, and the value, is the people who go through university to get that and got changed. That's what counts. Sorry... So, my achievement is zero, but the students I left behind when I die...

JAS: That's a pretty good achievement actually. Now, thinking then about the future, where do you see public archaeology in the next ten years?

TIM: Oh, God! I really don't know. I mean, I think that all Academia is affected especially in this country, by short term interests. Whatever attracts people brings them in, and also their money. I don't know. I know that many people promote the concept of public archaeology in various parts of the World. But what I hope is that in University courses, whether they call it public archaeology or not, and I should rather they did, the idea of getting students who are fascinated by archaeology, to understand the wider value and implications of what they do is absolutely critical. . The economics are secondary. What matters is being able to explain to people in clear language why the product of the past is an important matter. S I don't know... I'll get retired soon or die, I mean it's important, and the subject will change, but it's not going to change that much, and the core area of what is the value, how can we apply archaeology, what we do, to a wider society will remain there all the time.

JAS: And is there anywhere you wouldn't like Public Archaeology to go?

TIM: Yes, I'd like people who talk about cultural heritage to explain to me, seriously, what some of the things we talked about today, actually mean. I like definitions, I have no problem defining public archaeology: why did it start, what is it about, taking the product of archaeology and applying it across the wider society. I really would like the public to understand. Admittedly, I live in the country where archaeologists are established. I'd like the public to understand they can be involved too because it's about them, not about of a bunch of people somewhere over there. Also, it is important that we learn to explain, not in simple terms but clear terms, what we're

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actually doing and looking at those problems that we have. I don't think enough people see it. That's all.

JAS: That's all then! Thank you very much.

15:27 – The formal interview is over, but we keep talking for a while. Later we walk back towards Russell Square and bid farewell. It is always a pleasure to share a table with Tim, but over all, to share a conversation.

[Special thank you to Dr. Elena Alguacil for helping with the first draft of this transcription]

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