

2020 Annual General Meeting (148th Council Meeting)

Chair of Trustees' Report

There is a lot of information about the last year's work of the CBA in the more-detailed Trustees Report section of the Financial Statement. This is a more-selective overview.

It is now 15 months since we last met, in November 2019; it seems so much longer ago. Little did we think then quite what was around the corner.

My focus in 2019 was on political uncertainty, impacts on heritage and archaeology, and impacts on the CBA. They remain pertinent today.

In one respect, one of the over-arching **political uncertainties** has been removed. The UK has left the European Union. Brexit has occurred. It remains to be seen whether the apparent 'teething troubles' are just that or are symptomatic of deeper-seated issues.

Previously, I have referred to the A14 archaeological works near Cambridge; 250 archaeologists, 75% originally from outside the UK, from 30 different countries. It remains uncertain, whether we will be able still to supplement our own workforces with the additional labour that is required to meet the needs of 21st century developer-funded archaeological investigations. It has been suggested that regaining something like a functioning economy can be achieved in part through a build, build, build infrastructure-led approach; that brings with it a requirement to match that with the appropriate assessment and resolution of the threats to our heritage that will be an inevitable and unavoidable consequence of such an approach. With a shortage of home-grown trained personnel and university departments facing a just-proposed direct reduction in government support, we must make the case that the UK needs both to support its university sector to train the next generation of field archaeologists and be able to attract the appropriate talent for the tasks ahead. This is an issue today - it takes time to generate and maintain interest in archaeology, to get people through the relevant training courses, and to gain the appropriate experiences.

Brexit – and the Covid pandemic – continue to create tensions affecting the future of the United Kingdom. As ever, CBA has been working supportively with our partners Archaeology Scotland, CBA Wales and the Northern Ireland Archaeology Forum, as well as with partners in England.

Since last we met, there has been a general election and a new government. One of its initiatives has been reform of the planning process with significant changes proposed to how it might function. CBA, in partnership with ClfA, made representation to government suggesting that there were easier and better ways of reforming the planning process, noting the existing planning permissions for about a million houses waiting to be implemented and that one of the significant constraints could be, as its own research suggested, the managed release of sites in order to maintain prices. At present, the proposals have been withdrawn for review and re-consideration.

Last year under **Impacts on heritage and archaeology** I touched on housing, HS2, Stonehenge, the Shortage Occupation List and the plight of universities. I have mentioned some of these already – housing, university funding and the shortages of skilled labour; neither HS2 nor Stonehenge has gone away either as I am sure you are all well aware.

But the big impact has been, and continues to be, the Covid pandemic. We were looking to the replacement of Mike Heyworth, who announced his intention to move on at our 2019 AGM, to the implementation of our Strategy for Growth and with it a revision of our aims and objectives, the setting of new goals, the repair of our finances and the development of a new offer for our existing members and an increased and successful ability to attract new members across the UK. Then the pandemic struck; and with it, in due course, came lockdown. And that brings me to **Impacts on the CBA** which in many ways is difficult to separate from

impacts on heritage and archaeology and, particularly, from impacts on the many communities of interest and place that the CBA seeks to serve.

Neil will doubtless have more-detailed things to say about the last year and, as I have already noted, there is a wealth of information in the Trustees report section of the Finance Report. Some elements warrant highlighting.

In common with many organisations, CBA went into lockdown, came out of it (partially) and went back into it, with all the issues that accompany such impositions. Staff have worked very hard in often difficult conditions – shielding, home tutoring, inadequate IT provision or connectivity - to continue to create outputs from the CBA, for the benefit of our heritage and particularly for our communities of place and interest. In these difficult times we have seen only a slight drop in our overall membership and a rise in the numbers of our subscribers – to both categories we offer a huge thank you for the underpinning financial support you provide us with, to enable us to provide for you.

What I say next may seem very odd in the context of the pandemic and the personal tragedies that it has visited upon so many people, families and communities. I have no intention of belittling those impacts in any way whatsoever. It has to be noted, however, that after some initial uncertainty until July 2020, CBA has been able to improve its financial position and its outputs to support individuals and communities. CBA bid successfully for support from DCMS, from the Welsh Assembly, from the NLHF and Historic England. This support has provided some cover for running costs, has enabled us to push ahead with sourcing a new CRM (the better to manage our members' and subscribers' data) and to up-date the website. It has enabled us to reach out to our regional groups and affiliates and to recast our support – almost all virtually. What this has meant is that under Neil's leadership as our new Executive Director – bearing in mind that he has not physically met all his new colleagues yet! - the rate at which we hoped to achieve progress has been accelerated; by the end of the financial year we will be where we wanted to be but quicker than we anticipated. The exigencies of the pandemic and the ways in which we have been required to deliver these outputs in such extraordinary circumstances, for the benefit of our communities, will make us more resilient in the long-run.

The particular thing that I take from the support the CBA has received – when so many were applying for support that could only be delivered to a relative few – is that governments, government departments and UK-wide grant-giving bodies recognise the importance of the CBA, recognise and have faith in our ability to deliver for the benefit of our heritage and our communities and recognise the skills, experience and expertise of our staff. We didn't win that support because we just happened to be there, we won it because we have a brand which is recognised, we have skills which can be utilised, we have demonstrable experience in successful delivery and many outputs already in place, we have a membership that is supportive and engaged and we are able to reach out to our communities and beyond –our regional groups, our Young Archaeologists' Clubs, our member societies and our individual members and anyone else who engages with us.

I have a huge thank you to deliver to all our staff – and I hope you will join me in that as well - who have achieved so much in such difficult circumstances – and there remains much work still to do. It would be invidious to single out individuals because this has been the product of teamwork; the machine doesn't function without all the individual parts fulfilling their roles.

I would like to thank my fellow trustees for their support, advice and wise counsel over the last year; and lastly but by no means least I would like to thank you, our members, for your continued support in what for many, are increasingly difficult circumstances. You are our communities of place and interest and you are also the guardians of those places and interests, in any number of ways. I hope that as CBA develops its infrastructure and extends its offers over the next 12 months, you will see increasing benefits flow to you, to your interests and to your communities.

I thank you and look forward to seeing you again - in one way or another - in 12 months' time.

Mr Ken Smith

Chair of CBA Trustees