Archaeology at Sheffield facing closure

Two days ago, we heard some very disturbing news about the possible closure of the **Department of Archaeology at Sheffield**. Yesterday we started receiving messages through all types of private and social media platforms from all sectors of or related to our discipline. Here we want to share our support and invite you to join the support actions.

[First posted at GIAP, by Hèctor A. Orengo]

During the last ten years, many archaeology and related humanities departments in the UK have been closed, merged, or otherwise reduced. Birmingham was a terrible example but by no means was the only one.

Some current members of the GIAP, our Landscape Archaeology Research Group, former members of the Department of Archaeology at Sheffield, have lived through these stressful situations such as the merging of the Department with that of Classics at Nottingham.

Only recently the staff delivering the heritage and archaeology programs at the Department of History and Archaeology at Chester were sent 'at risk' notifications for redundancies.

Many of these GIAP researchers have been following developments in other British Universities, such as Leicester or Kent, where colleagues and friends, particularly in the humanities, are being threatened by forced redundancies.

This is a direct consequence of the radical reduction of the UK's investment in the arts and humanities and the basic for-profit nature of British universities which have been evolving during the last decades towards a strongly business-oriented model. A model that treats students as customers and degrades the once top-of-the-world teaching and research quality of British higher education institutions.

While Sheffield does not face disappearance alone, **we would like to stress the**

importance of this particular department for the discipline as a whole.

In this department, **Colin Renfrew** wrote his seminal work on the Emergence of Civilisation. The Department has hosted the most innovative research in archaeology for the last 50 years with figures (in alphabetical order) such as Umberto Albarella, John Barrett, John Bennet, Keith Branigan, Maureen Carroll, Peter Day, Dawn Hadley, Paul Halstead, Caroline Jackson, Glynis Jones, John Moreland, Colin Renfrew, Sue and Andrew Sherrat, Mike Parker-Pearson, Marek Zvelebil, and many others.

Younger teaching and research staff currently direct world-leading research at the Black Sea, Turkey, Greece, and many other cultural cradles that help us understand the past and by doing so be conscious of the present to be able to shape our futures.

Sheffield has been at the forefront of the discipline for the last 50 years and its contributions have strongly shaped it in many ways.

Zooarchaeology, material culture studies, and archaeometry, archaeobotany, and palaeoenvironment, landscape archaeology, heritage, you name it! The Sheffield centre for Aegean Archaeology with its annual roundtables and book series, Sheffield Studies in Aegean Archaeology, has had a profound influence in Greek archaeology with a huge number of Greek students having been trained there, who are now leading the discipline from Greece and elsewhere.

The importance of the **reference collections** at Sheffield (zooarchaeology, osteology, pottery, seeds, etc.), which are a basic knowledge generation resource in archaeology, cannot be stressed enough. What will happen to them? These have always been open to the larger research community, their potential loss, lack of maintenance, or restricted access will affect the whole of the discipline.

Sheffield's Archaeology Department influence is global, its strength and leadership have enormously contributed to shaping GIAP and many other teams and departments across the globe.

Here is Sheffield's "footprint" on GIAP:

- Hector A. Orengo, co-director of GIAP and International Coordinator of ICAC was a Marie Curie International Fellow at Sheffield.
- Alexandra Livarda, head of GIAP's archaeobotany line, did her MSc in Environmental Archaeology and palaeoeconomy at Sheffield and later had a postdoctoral fellowship there.
- Alexandra Kriti, which recently started her PhD with us, also did the MSc in Environmental Archaeology and palaeoeconomy at Sheffield.
- Lídia Colominas, head of GIAP's zooarchaeology line, and Abel Gallego, a PhD researcher in zooarchaeology, both had research stays at Sheffield.
- Toby C. Wilkinson, Marie Curie International Fellow at GIAP did his PhD at Sheffield.
- Efrosiny Boutsikas, Senior lecturer at Kent and Marie Curie International Fellow at GIAP (from 2022) obtained her undergraduate degree from Sheffield.
- Charlotte Diffey, Marie Curie International Fellow at GIAP (from September 2021) did her PhD at Oxford supervised by Amy Bogaard, who did her PhD at Sheffield.
  Many of us still actively collaborate with Sheffield's department members. Only recently we had Dr. Jane Rempel giving a research seminar in our Ancient Mediterranean webinar series, which just this week hosted Nancy Krahtopoulou, who did her PhD at Sheffield. Veronica Aniceti, who gave the first seminar in the series, did her MSc and PhD at Sheffield.

In short, Sheffield has acted and still acts as a central node in worldwide archaeology networks. Without it, GIAP would probably not exist today as it is, and we suspect this is true for many other academic institutions and the discipline in general. Under these circumstances we must wonder, what will archaeology lose during the next years without Sheffield there to help steer it and shape it?

Save Sheffield Archaeology Resources

Sheffield Archaeology staff have launched a call for supporting the continuity of the Department of Archaeology at Sheffield. They explain the situation as follows:

> … the University Executive Board (UEB) responded by **putting the department under review**. After two exhaustive rounds of interviews, full of enthusiastic feedback from staff and students, the board has decided to **organise a vote on the 25th of May**.
>
> Three options are on the table:
>
> (A) support and invest in the department to ensure the future of archaeology at Sheffield
>
> (B) discontinue archaeology as a subject as Sheffield and **make all the staff redundant**
>
> (C) **discontinue archaeology as a coherent and core subject**, but retain aspects of archaeological research and education (human osteology and cultural heritage specifically to be merged into other departments), and **make remaining staff redundant.**
>
> Two out of these three options would dissolve the Department of Archaeology at Sheffield."

("*Save Sheffield Archaeology Resources*")

The department is calling for messages of solidarity from as far and wide as possible. All details here.

Actions:

1. Email the Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor and Executive Board of the University.
   Urge the board to rethink this, choose option A, and support the future of archaeology. You can take inspiration from or modify the following letter template, but please do add your personal experience of the Department of Archaeology at Sheffield.

   Please CC in the department so we can keep track of letters: archaeology@sheffield.ac.uk

   VC – Professor Koen Lamberts: vc@sheffield.ac.uk
   Deputy VC – Professor Gill Valentine – dvc@sheffield.ac.uk
   Executive board in general – ueb-admin@sheffield.ac.uk

2. Sign the petition.
   A petition is available on Change.org – find it here.

3. Kick up a fuss on social media – spread the word.
   Use the hashtag #savesheffieldarchaeology (archaeology with an ae!) and direct people to this page (http://bit.ly/savesheffarch) and our Facebook page so they know what's going on.

4. Keep an eye out for updates.
   As above, we will keep our Facebook Page and this website updated with the latest information.