

Appendix M

Elliott Wragg- Field Officer for the Thames Discovery Programme

Q1

Danielle Newman: Could you briefly describe your programme to me?

Elliott Wragg: It involves large number of Londoners being trained in foreshore archaeology and broadly speaking taking ownership of large parts of the foreshore that is being eroded away. They create monitoring groups of their own, schedule their own visits, do their own drawings and see what's happening with the archaeology And then the report back to us so we can essentially organise more structured fieldwork so we can go and record stuff before it disappears. Hopefully we get there before the stuff disappears.

Q2

DN: About how many groups have you got running now?

EW: We've got the Greenwich groups, a group is Rutherside(sp?), a group in the City, a group is Voxhall, and a group in West London. So five fairly discreet and self perpetuating groups who self-manage. Now, if we are working in an area that doesn't have a group we will go and lead, though obviously people come along.

Q3

DN: About how many volunteers do you work with?

EW: We've had 550 go through our training programme in six and a bit years of which probably about a hundred are active at any one time.

Q4

DN: Do you think that the challenge of providing access to sites dictates how you design heritage programming?

EW: I'm not sure it necessarily applies in London. We are extremely fortunate because of the ancient nature of the river and most places we are looking at. In central London it's medieval river development so there has always been river access, or further up stream they are medieval villages which are built on the river. So there has always been access. There are lots of river stairs, lots of bridleways. You get more access problems going out east, where you have a much more industrial 19th/20th century area to deal with, which hasn't had these traditional access points. You didn't have bridges really until later, so you had to have all these access points to get across the river. It's funny, because access really isn't an issue here. If you didn't have the access we wouldn't be able to do what we do here.

Q5

DN: Do you think that engagement in maritime heritage is being provided at the same level as terrestrial heritage?

EW: I think it's different on a number of levels. I think in a bigger picture, probably no, people are much less aware that they can engage with it because they don't even know it exists. And certainly, even professionals in some cases sort of think "Oh foreshore archaeology is stuff that's being washed up" as opposed to stuff that's eroding out. The fact that we do have intact stratigraphy, that this is proper archaeology, and not just crap on the beach. So at a higher level I think there is less engagement with the maritime stuff. However, on a physical level because the access is so good to most beaches or foreshores, stuff is publically accessible and you can engage people physically with the archaeology much more than you can on land. You don't have to go consult the land owner to let him know what you are doing. I mean, generally the Crown Estates, in our case in London, are quite happy. So you don't have to consult the land owner, you don't have to talk to English Heritage. It's a good idea to let them know what you are doing, but you don't have to bring a digger in and dig great big bloody holes because the stuff is there. So in a way we should be getting people much more engaged and knowledgeable because it is so easily accessible. You couldn't run a project like this in central London. We can't go around and say "Can we dig up your garden please" but we can come down here dead easily. It's ideal for us.

Q6

DN: How do you think that heritage engagement helps change public perception of maritime heritage?

EW: (laughter) Well, I think they start to realise it exists! I mean, we've been doing days of training for a new intake, just finished yesterday, and one of the lectures I was doing yesterday was one on the maritime heritage of London. And people don't know it was the greatest shipbuilding centre of the world near the end of the 19th century. Because you can't see it, there is no real physical evidence left. So, I mean London is obviously where it is because of its maritime connections. You can clearly see it. Hang on, we've got a destroyer sat next to us today but you hardly ever see that apart from Belfast further u. To look at London now you're not seeing the major warfs and frontages and shipbuilding docks and shipbreaking activity. What you see large buildings and walfs turned into flats and office blocks. The only way you can feel that sort of maritime history is by actually coming down here to see the remains of it.

Q7

DN: Do you think that the messages that are being delivered are actually being received? So the messages that are being used to try and change perception?

EW: I'm not sure there are particularly enough messages going out. But I think we are doing out damndest. With this project we also do a lot of engagement with the general public. This weekend we had an outreach stall at the top, for people walking past. If we know we are going to get a good footfall, we will put people up on top. So volunteers with finds and stuff like that. The public goes "So, what are you doing down there" and we can tell them. We do an awful lot of public guided walks, on various sites. We do public lectures both at

our office and going to other places, libraries, archaeological societies and other places like that. So we are certainly trying very hard to get the message out there that's we've got this amazing stuff and it's for everyone to come and see and engage with.

Q8

DN: Do you think it's working?

EW: Well, I hope so! Also on our website we've had over 600,000 hits on the website. We've got lots of twitter followers. So we're trying to use all sorts of media to get the message out there. And I think the fact that we always have more people to train than we can physically train means something. So we did 35 just now and I've got about 60 on the waiting list and they'll be waiting because we can only physically run one course in the year. It's myself and one colleague who only works one day a week. So we do what we can do. We are at capacity, so I guess in our case it really is working

Q9

DN: What do you think of when you hear the term "heritage models"?

EW: (Laughter) Maybe we should just leave it at that. To be honest, I'd run a mile if I heard someone say those terms. I don't quite know what it means, but I have a horrible suspicion.

Q10

DN: How do you think that the practicalities of public engagement, so things like target audiences, funding and staffing are affecting the aims and delivery of programming?

EW: Massively so. A major one of those is funding, because funding affects staffing which affects capability and capacity. We used to, when we started, have HLF grants. So we had four people running it and could do an awful lot more than we can do now, which is basically just firefighting. We are now part of MOLA, and they are kindly underwriting a very small version of it, but if we had an extra person or an extra few people we could just do so much more. The demand is there, there is no doubt. I've got people who are very disappointed they can't get on this year's training course and asking if I'm going to do another one. And I'm just (laughter) asking my boss if we can do another one and she's saying we don't have the money. So the demand is there, certainly in London. I'm not sure about elsewhere, though it would be interesting for you to talk to our colleagues at the CITIZAN project because they have just started. We started doing some pilot projects last year, going out and talking to different groups across the country, and people are really interested in maritime stuff and hadn't really engaged with it. We had groups in Suffolk and Norfolk who were dead keen on doing something in King's Lynn, with the medieval port, and no one had ever been down there. They're showing me some medieval pottery and stuff and it's amazing. And in Suffolk they've got a whole bunch of amazing things like fish traps and people really want to get engaged with it. Even to the extent where we see people who are out walking dogs and they ask "Oh what are you doing?" and we tell them and they go

“Oh great, I walk my dog down here every day. I’ll keep an eye on that for you”. So there is a massive demand but it really boils down to money. Are people going to pay? Are libraries more important than foreshore archaeology? I don’t know. Well, I know what I’d say. Actually, wait, I don’t. Are libraries more important than physical archaeology? I mean, this stuff is washing away and the only way to access it in the future probably is in a library or at the very least through preservation of record. I can’t even answer my own question.

Q11

DN: What do you think makes engagement successful?

EW: Making sure people have a good time. Without a shadow of a doubt. The major thing is that if people are happy then we are happy. You do nice work and it’s all good. By engaging with the public you have to properly engage with them and make it a good experience. Because if it isn’t a good experience then, if they haven’t enjoyed themselves, then they are not going to come back. So the priority has to be to make it enjoyable for the participants.

Q12

DN: How do you think your background has helped you prepare for working in engagement?

EW: Well, I worked in commercial archaeology for many years and then I ended up doing a part time MA in maritime archaeology. I was always interested in maritime stuff anyway, that would always be my sort of specialism. I met the people who were working for the Thames Discovery Programme when they started out, they’d got themselves already sorted, and I was coming along just to help. I thought it was a great project and then someone dropped out so they said do you want to come join and I said “Yeah, alright then”. So I came into it purely from liking maritime archaeology and because it was my friends who were running it so I liked them and I like how they were running things so I ended up doing it. Oh I don’t know. Perhaps my background helped? I don’t know. I think the public just really liked having the idea of having professional archaeologists with them. We rarely have a problem with the volunteers, just the odd one, particularly with this project. Because everyone is perfectly capable of doing this with just a little training. It’s not rocket science to draw a 1:20 plan is it? But, they like the reassurance that they are doing it right. They like to have someone on hand. I laugh because they call me an expert, but that’s what they think and they like to have people here who can answer questions because they are lots of interesting questions. And they apparently like to have people who have bad answers. It’s the great thing about working with them is that they ask some very pertinent questions and it’s a very nice symbiotic sort of relationship.

Q13

DN: How long have you been working for TDP?

EW: Six years now.

Q14

DN: How do you think that, broadly speaking, heritage engagement has changed in the time you've been working? Have you noticed any trends developing?

EW: I'm trying to think, because I know you are looking for more general thing.

DN: I'm just looking for what your perception is...

EW: Well, everyone has gone crazy for data dissemination these days. When I started it, when you looked at your website or online resource it was nowhere as good as it is now. Is digital just the way forward? I mean, it's certainly better than nothing. I don't know. I think, in many ways, with projects like ours it helps create a way for ordinary people to get involved. In the 90's, there was a predecessor to ours, a little project which started to try and quantify the intertidal area and all the stuff down here. And they went "Crap, there is all this prehistoric stuff down here, all these submerged landscapes and other things." And so the idea was to just go out and get some baseline data using local archaeological societies and students at UCL and people from EH and MOLA. So you have heritage professionals, students and people who are already interested. I think the shift is that now people are trying to engage more with the community in general, the people who aren't already interested. I think we could do more in general with certain elements of the public who for various reasons it's been difficult to engage with. For instance, we have started doing guided walks with blind people down here, which can be quite interesting.

Q15

DN: What do you believe your role is in heritage management?

EW: I'm sorry, you just keep setting me off with these questions (laughter)

Q16

DN: I know, I know! Ok, would you consider yourself an archaeologist or an educator?

EW: Both! Well, in terms of heritage management we are, if you want to put it pompously, the people who are the guardians of the stuff down here. Because we come down and have a look around and try and at least record it before it disappears. And I think EH sees us like that as well, because we get along well with them. We let them know if something is happening and quite often if there needs to be work done on the river walls EH tends to tell developers to get in touch with TDP. They are the people who know what's going on down here.

Q17

DN: So, correct me if I'm wrong, but you guys are essentially managing licensee programmes for intertidal areas along the Thames.

EW: To use that sort of model then yes. I hadn't considered it like that, but that's basically what we do. We manage the little groups who look after sites, and if something is up then we do something.

Q18

DN: Do you believe your work is for the benefit of archaeology or the public?

EW: Both.

Q19

DN: Why do you think that maritime archaeology is engaging with the public?

EW: It's interesting, basically. Certainly with intertidal stuff it's interesting and it's accessible, and those are two key points. Certainly, in London, it's both.

Q20

DN: Right, a bit of blue sky thinking. If you could design a programme with no concern about funding, staffing or any real practicalities what would you design?

EW: I mean, from my personal perspective it wouldn't be a million miles away from TDP because we have evolved as an organization, and this is partly to do with NAS stuff, but when it started it was very prescriptive. We were telling people where they should go and what they should do. And now it's evolved much more into them doing what they want and coming back to us and saying we want to do this. Even to the extent of this site which has a very active group who is down here every month and doing loads and loads of background research. These guys over there, they are the experts on this site. Not me. For the first three years we'd come down here and I'd go "Ok, you do this and you do that" and now I come down here and go "What would you like us to do?" and they tell me. They basically run the site and I'm just a facilitator here which makes everyone happy.