

## **Alumni Reflections**

### **Chiz Harward, BA Archaeology, 1992–6**

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## Chiz Harward, BA Archaeology, 1992–6

### *Chiz Harward*

My friend, and Editor of *Archaeology International*, Andrew Reynolds asked me to write this piece saying, ‘Bit of an ask ... but can you say something about your time studying with us and then about your career since?’

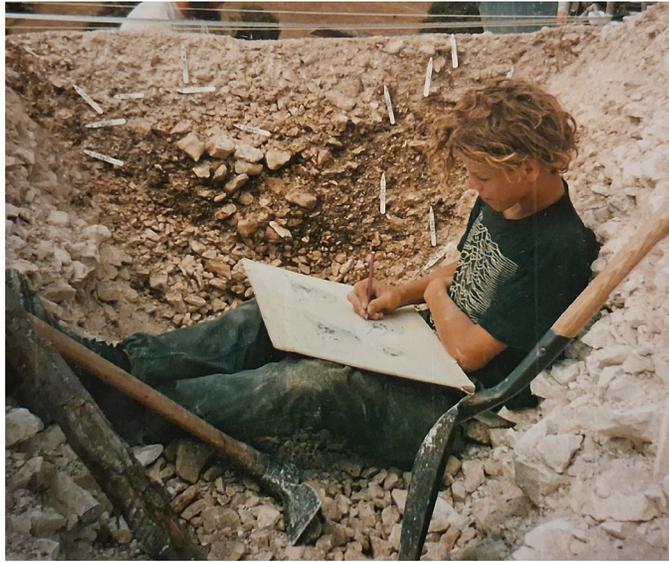
Well, to be frank, I can’t remember a lot about being at the Institute, I can’t even remember what year I graduated (someone else will have to fill in that bit [1996 Ed.]) and only picked up my degree certificate 20 years later (Judy Medrington of course found it instantly). I remember *most* of my lecturers, some of the lectures, the staff and my fellow students – many of the latter I am still in touch with, and work with, more than 30 years later.

As to whether there is any such thing as an archaeological career, I have no idea. Research has consistently shown that most archaeology graduates don’t work in archaeology for very long, if at all. The pyramid is broad at the base, but narrows quickly, with the inevitable bulge of old white men bed-blocking the top jobs. In commercial archaeology this has led to a pile-them-high, sell-them-cheap model of employment that I once dubbed the Disposable Heroes of Stratigraphy. Expendable trench fodder working in a dumbed-down system designed to get the job done, rather than do the job properly. I guess this all means that most alumni reading this aren’t archaeologists, although I suspect that a good proportion are.

That doesn’t mean that an archaeological education isn’t useful, it undoubtedly is, but those of us still in the game 30 years down the line aren’t the majority and we aren’t necessarily the best, maybe we just had the pointiest elbows, or just couldn’t do anything else?

When I started at the Institute I already knew a few staff and undergraduates as I’d been working for the Institute’s Field Archaeology Unit (now Archaeology South-East) during school holidays for a few years. My first go at fieldwork was backfilling a trench at Lewes Castle (why?), then over the summer of 1988 I was digging at one of David Rudling’s Sussex villas – back then schoolkids could just walk over the Downs, pitch a tent and sign on for a summer of hard labour, meagre pay and low intensity underage drinking. I was hooked. By the winter I was knee deep in tidal mud at Lewes Friary and two years later, at 16 and following a disagreement with my headteacher, I was finally free to run away and join the Circuit.

The big sites on the Field Unit’s Brighton Bypass Project (by the way, one of the first PPG16 projects in the UK) were mostly dug during the long hot summer of Italia 1990 (Figure 1). Gazza, Nessum Dorma and bulk sampling 20 per cent of a 60 m diameter henge monument. It was project-managed by the inimitable Maureen Bennell, supervisors



**Figure 1** Chiz Harward drawing a ditch section at Mile Oak on the line of the Brighton Bypass in 1990 (Source: Penelope Hasler)

included Miles Russell and Andrew Reynolds. We diggers were a mix of poorly paid contract archaeologists, students and volunteers, many from the Institute, some from the Manpower Services Scheme, some from both. Many of the friends I made there became my family.

By the time that I washed up in the Institute, many friends were already there, making the transition a fairly seamless social experience. As a group we were probably a bit intense, and anywhere else we would have been seen as utterly boring, but not at the Institute, and many like-minded students joined the social, and ultimately archaeological, team.

With Andrew we started a student-led research project in rural Wiltshire, and for several years we dug and trained with what ended up as literally hundreds of fellow students. In retrospect that was probably quite odd. The excavations remain to be fully published but the most enduring legacy of a fairly flat management structure was a stream of young and promising archaeologists who were (unknowingly at the time) given their career-start: more than a few distinguished professors and senior archaeologists in other branches of the discipline were part of that rag-tag bunch living above the Old Dairy, Compton Bassett (a ruined 'model farm' restored by the team to a point of occupation) over the course of long and hot summers on the Wessex chalk.

I didn't just work in Wiltshire. Under the aegis of Gustav Milne, I – and others from the Wiltshire rabble – took on various churches and micro-sites in central London, and some of us (Andrew included) dug our way around the country for Maureen Bennell at consultancy RPS, often during term time, as well as longer stints on the Circuit, often during term time ... By the mid-1990s I had ended up back in London and started digging on bigger and bigger urban sites. After AOC I joined the Museum of London Archaeology Service (MoLAS) and somehow got appointed to supervise on the sprawling Spitalfields Market excavations within a few weeks of signing on. The 10 years spent at MoLAS/MOLA (Museum of London Archaeology) has been pivotal in my understanding

of not only excavation and post-excavation techniques, but also the need for effective workplace training, and how we need to work together and for each other to make the profession a more sustainable place for all its members.

In London I found a place where landscape archaeology met deep, complex stratigraphy, and I started to learn how to look, and how to unpick, more and more complex sites. One of the best bits of being a commercial archaeologist is constantly having to learn new areas and subjects, so having a rigorous, logical system to handle the myriad pieces of evidence is essential and the MoLAS system really does guide you 'from site to archive'.

My later career has been as a freelancer running my own firm Urban Archaeology, and I have somehow migrated back to churches and monastic sites. I've been working on and off at Gloucester Cathedral for nearly 10 years where the same landscape approach is needed within the precinct as within the Square Mile. Work on church buildings often includes a lot more 'up' than many archaeological sites and I have tried not to follow the arbitrary split between buildings and 'dirt' archaeology but consider them together as integral parts of the story. Highlights include spending lockdown digging up and partially demolishing the Infirmary's Lodging – a complex standing maze of medieval and post-medieval buildings at the cathedral, and excavating most of Holy Trinity Church, Minchinhampton. In both cases the excavation led on to intensive research and post-excavation weaving disparate strands of data and evidence into coherent publications. As a sole trader/freelancer I don't have any institutional support, but I continue to draw on the advice and encouragement of my Institute and other colleagues, and in the past few years alumnus Laurence Keen has been a great mentor.

More than 30 years ago I worked at Westminster Abbey, recording above the beautiful perpendicular fan vault. This week I started work on a 10-year project recording the Great Cloister at Gloucester Cathedral, the earliest surviving fully developed fan vault. The first 35 years of digging have certainly had their ups and downs, but maybe the apple doesn't fall that far from the tree?