

A toolkit for change and the fear of change within a profession in flux

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At the European Association of Archaeologists (EAA) conference in 2025 we ran a workshop aimed at opening discussion around the small fears we experience as the profession changes around us. We posited that it was time to embrace discomfort and share our concerns, seeking to better our community by focusing on our group psychology and positive ideas about self-worth. We gathered challenges and solutions from attendees to begin development of a ‘solutions kit’. This paper presents the outcomes of the workshop and the initial framework for the solutions kit.

Methodology

EAA2025 was forced to move online due to civil unrest in Serbia. Initially this left us wondering whether the workshop could run. However, thanks to the assistance of Katrina Foxton (MoLA) we found a way. The workshop comprised two 2-hour sessions and participants were encouraged to discuss freely through a frank and open sharing of personal experiences (both positive and otherwise).

The workshop was a small group because of the format change and to ensure that there was space for all voices. The workshop was both complicated and complemented by conference context relating to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. However, it was a timely place to discuss fears and concerns about this.

Part one of the workshop focused on small fears and negative reactions to change.

Part two aimed to end on a positive note by focusing on the joy and nourishment which archaeology brings to us.

Each part had a Chair, but discussion was largely unmoderated. Instead, the workshop was guided by the Chatham House Rule and our guiding principles:

- 1 Be kind – to yourself and others
- 2 Be patient
- 3 Listen with openness and actively
- 4 Leave space, make space
- 5 Agreement is not necessary, but respect is
- 6 Don't blab ;)

Part one of the workshop focused on small fears and negative reactions to change. Participants were encouraged to share challenges they had encountered in their careers, thinking about what solutions could have made the situation better for them or for others into the future. Thoughts and ideas were captured without personal references, using an online collaboration board.

Part two aimed to end on a positive note by focusing on the joy and nourishment which archaeology brings to us. Again, thoughts and ideas were captured using the collaboration board. The order of the workshop was intentional, recognising that we did not want to leave people dealing with trauma or strong negative emotions.

Results – small fears

The three key points influencing the discussion were:

- 1 Are we non-conformists who are forced to conform?
- 2 Fear can be found in many places and in response to many stimuli.
- 3 We must examine our own behaviour first, asking ‘what could I do better?’

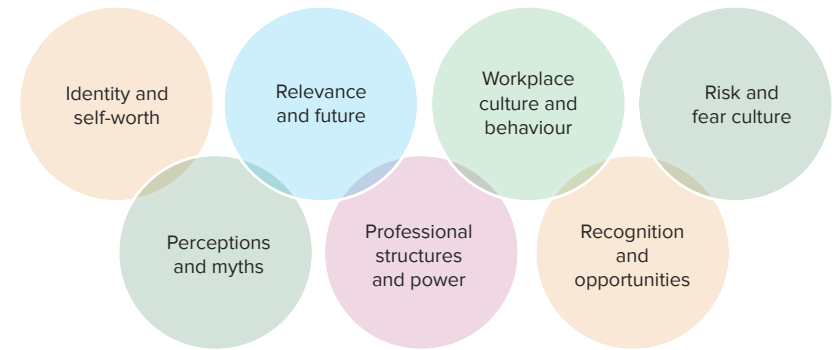
The participants discussed the fears and challenges they have experienced. The key themes covering where people find challenge include:

- being forced into a box
- being judged, found wanting, and/or being dismissed by the community
- cognitive dissonance from the ‘BIG LIE’ (the discomfort and struggles are worth it)
- small fears lead to big challenges; they are like sand in our shoes
- rigidity and stultifying atmospheres.

Many thoughts were not surprising, likely striking a chord with readers of this article. It is important to note that we are not alone.

Participants then suggested solutions or support they would have liked to see, aiming to find ways of helping themselves and others in the future. The ‘solutions’ are summarised as:

- understanding the challenges more deeply and honestly
- combating isolation
- creating safe spaces for openness and sharing lessons
- extending our respect and community to non-professionals (expanding rather than drawing in)
- promoting self-worth, bravery and diversity of thought (and skill) as trainable skills and core values.



Areas where workshop participants have experienced small fears and/or challenges, grouped into headline themes

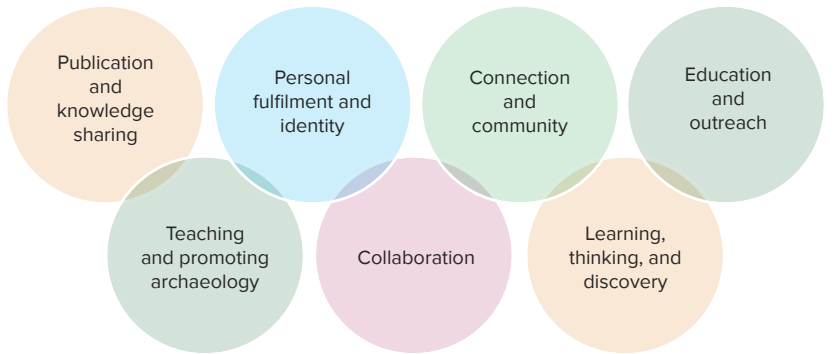
Results – joy and nourishment

The joy section of the workshop revolved around two key concepts:

- 1 Joy feeds us and expands our world
- 2 You can be the enlightened egotist over the joy of archaeology, but also put the needs of others first.

The Chair proposed an archaeology of happiness based on enlightened self-interest; understanding that suffering does not equal validation, and that rewards take many forms. Based on this, the participants discussed the joys which they have found in the profession. The key themes of people finding joy include:

- exploration
- sharing of knowledge or findings
- a sense of belonging and giving back
- the uniqueness of experience archaeologists can achieve
- helping others
- connecting across communities with peers or outside the profession.



Areas where workshop participants find joy and nourishment, grouped into headline themes

It was acknowledged by most of the participants that they had experienced barriers to finding or maximising joy. The workshop moved on to look at what could have removed these barriers or could remove them for others. The ‘solutions’ are summarised as:

- encouraging and seeking diversity of thought
- sharing joy – and publishing about it, not just about our results
- being open about failure and embracing analysis of it
- finding bravery through community.

- Solutions kit
- The solutions kit will help us build the skills to cope with change and fears and to find more joy. It is still in early development but will focus on six areas:
- 1 Community building
 - 2 Refocusing training to ways of thinking and diversity of thought
 - 3 Promoting safe culture (reporting and accountability)
 - 4 Skills building for respect, self-worth, and separation of self
 - 5 Investigating the nature of the profession as a vocation
 - 6 Speaking up and speaking out.

Access more detailed feedback from the workshop via this QR code



Mark Spanjer

Mark has an MA in History and an MSc in Archaeology, both from the Universiteit van Amsterdam. He has worked mostly in the Netherlands and has experienced our profession in various forms throughout his career. Nowadays, he is a lecturer (and teacher) at Saxion University of Applied Sciences in Deventer. Amongst many interests, he has developed a focus on archaeologists, ourselves, in the hope that this helps us to perform better and enhances the experience for all.

Conclusions

The workshop has not highlighted new thoughts about the nature of the profession and the joy, fear, nourishment and challenges which it brings, but it has shone a light into a space which we are sometimes reluctant to examine too closely – ourselves, and our behaviours as a community.

At the same time – as we have explored during many ClfA conferences over the past years, especially outside of sessions – we know that ‘together is more fun’.

The workshop was only the start of a journey, and we will continue working to develop the toolkit through future events and collaboration with the institutions which govern us and our profession. We cannot and should not undertake the development of the toolkit in isolation; it requires every member of our community to examine themselves and declare proudly that:

‘I’m the problem, it’s me!’

(Taylor Swift, ‘Anti-Hero’ 2022)



Historic England heritage carbon reduction workshops and webinars

Historic England are running a series of heritage carbon reduction webinars to complement their heritage carbon reduction training workshops. These workshops are two discursive and accessible trainer-led 2-hour online sessions that simplify carbon reduction for heritage organisations. They are designed to start learners on their carbon reduction journey with practical tools and resources, and participants are welcome to sign up to both or either session depending on where they are on their learner journey. Each course will run once a month, places are limited so please ensure you are able to attend before signing up.

To see workshop dates and register for a place on **‘How to measure a carbon footprint’** visit <https://www.trybooking.com/uk/FBDG>

To see workshop dates and register for a place on **‘How to write a carbon reduction plan’** visit <https://www.trybooking.com/uk/FBDK>

The heritage carbon reduction webinars focus on a new topic each month, and each webinar is recorded and available on the Historic England website. The next webinars are listed below, and more dates and topics will follow soon. All the events are free to attend.

Thursday 18 June, 1pm	Thursday 23 July, 1pm
‘Digital emissions: should heritage organisations worry about them, and how can we lower them?’	‘Building responsible supply chains in the heritage sector’
Claire Marchetti, Historic England’s Carbon and Sustainability Manager, will discuss digital emissions, covering: • What is the issue with digital emissions? • What is Historic England doing to manage digital emissions? • What can heritage organisations do to manage theirs?	England’s Net Zero Projects Advisor, Cheryl Lee, will explore the key frameworks that shape sustainable procurement and how they apply within the heritage sector. The webinar will unpack what ‘value’ looks like, how to navigate the landscape of sustainability standards, and how to make value-led purchasing decisions.

- Previous webinar recordings are available to watch, topics have included
- Getting Trustee/board buy-in for your organisational carbon reduction plan – Liz Power, Chair of Historic Buildings & Places
 - Shared footprints: how landlords and tenants can team up to cut carbon – Becky Valentine, Heritage Consultant
 - Carbon Reduction for a heritage development trust: progress not perfection – Laura Dunham, Heritage Lincolnshire
 - Lessons from creating a carbon reduction plan for a large heritage building – Mark Evison, Alexandra Palace & Park

To find out more, listen to recordings and sign up to attend, go to <https://historicengland.org.uk/education/training-skills/training/webinars/heritage-carbon-reduction-webinars/>

You can also sign up to join the **Heritage Carbon Reduction Network**. This Knowledge Hub group provides an online space for heritage professionals to ask questions, share ideas and resources, and generally discuss the issues around carbon literacy, carbon reduction and the historic environment. You can request to join the network at <https://khub.net/group/heritage-carbon-reduction-network>