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# Hard roads to travel: Lessons learnt from practising community archaeology

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## ABSTRACT

Manchester Centre for Public History and Heritage has developed community archaeology projects with marginalized communities, and within areas where archaeology is often disregarded, socially, economically, and politically. These projects use approaches based on the co-production of historical and archaeological knowledge, and have ethical implications for academics and participants; projects actively engaging the public in archaeology often do so by linking modern day communities to historical communities, and in this process uncover uncomfortable truths and painful pasts. To explore the issues raised by this work, this paper self and collaboratively reflects on experiences from two contrasting community archaeology projects in the UK and Nigeria. This discusses lessons learnt from these 'socially engaged' community archaeology projects, including contentious and unanticipated aspects that arose in the field, and such issues as dealing with conflicting values, ensuring long-term sustainability, supporting duty of care, and understanding psychological and emotional risk.

Abréviations: TG: Tour Guide; P: Public; O: Owner; A: Archaeologist; T: Teacher



## KEYWORDS

Community archaeology; evaluation; social engaged heritage; conflict; ethics; contentious heritage

## Community archaeology: The positives

Community archaeology's positive impacts and benefits have been widely researched (Kiddey 2017; Kiddey and Schofield 2011; Simpson and Williams 2008; Kindleysides and Biglands 2015; Belford 2011; Sayer 2018; Nissinaho and Soininen 2014; Isherwood 2011; Thomas 2010; Derry and Malloy 2003; Potter 1994; McDavid 1997; Moser et al. 2002; Nwankwo and Itanyi 2019; Aleru et al. 2019; Eze-Uzomaka 2001). In an earlier paper, the present author suggested that the key benefits of community archaeology included preserving and conserving heritage, transferring knowledge and new skills, increasing financial support, providing local stewardship and sustainable management, uncovering new evidence, and undertaking novel research, alongside a range of social benefits including: building confidence; promoting team-working; forming relationships, making friends, and breaking down barriers; reintegration of disparate groups back into society; reducing anti-social behaviour; improving communication skills; feeling connected with the local environment; increased wellbeing; developing a feeling of ownership; fostering a sense of community (Sayer 2015).

Research, usually qualitative, provides evidence of community archaeology projects' ability to encourage public participation, and professional involvement can facilitate, initiate, support, and

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encourage positive impacts, including wellbeing and mental health (Sayer 2015; Everill, Bennett, and Burnell 2020). Engagement of professional archaeologists with communities can benefit the profession; aiding research, adding new material, providing additional support, enabling new approaches and ideas to be developed and understood, and improving communication skills. Despite professional focus on positive attributes, they still claim, despite evidence to the contrary, to be self and collaboratively reflective about the outcomes of their projects (Belford 2011; Kiddey 2017; Holtorf 2005; Jones 2004; Bender 1998). By taking an almost exclusively positive and self-congratulatory approach to community projects archaeologists are failing to be critically self or collaboratively reflective, and are doing a disservice to the communities they serve and the archaeological profession.

This focus on the positive impacts of community archaeology, heritage, and history is, in part, driven by external drivers, often economic and political. Grant bodies in the UK and beyond, including the National Heritage Lottery Fund (NHLF) and the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), require applicants to predict the positive outcomes and impacts their project will have, not only on the profession and academia, but also on the public and communities (<https://ahrc.ukri.org/research/impact/>; <https://www.ukri.org/innovation/excellence-with-impact/pathways-to-impact/>; <https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/funding/outcomes>; Abu-Khafajah and Miqdadi 2019). Grant applications are expected to outline expected positive public impacts, to consider ways to achieve these, and to provide a plan for how these will be measured before an application is considered and awarded funding. Furthermore, these funders require successful grant applicants to submit evaluations of their work. For example, the NHLF requires an evaluation report to be submitted before the final 25 per cent of the budget is released. This report must outline the outcomes, impacts, and benefits of a project to the people involved, to the community and to heritage (<https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/publications/evaluation-guidance>). Despite the NHLF not being known, to date, to hold back funding, even if projects do not achieve all their predicted impacts and outcomes, project evaluations tend to focus on the positives, and if and when outcomes are not achieved, to explain mitigating factors. There is little space in the evaluation process on any grants to discuss negative impacts and consider what lessons have been learnt.

Focusing on the positives is part of human nature, and the innate need to succeed, and no professional or funding body wants to look bad and be seen to fail. Public archaeology, community archaeology, and community heritage may be afraid to engage in critical evaluation of the 'actual' impact of their projects, perhaps due to disciplinary competition and the constant fight for funding and support, alongside the constant need to sell archaeology as a beneficial product to external sponsors (Matsuda and Okamura 2016, 8–9). Professionals focus on the positives in order to 'sell' projects to the public, employees, and politicians, and to continue to maintain support from funders such as the NHLF and the AHRC in the UK. Professionals do not want to risk the funders and/or employees suggesting that a project is too much of a financial or ethical risk, and to admit that community heritage might have negative impacts alongside the positives. Imagine, writing a funding application that lists the negatives, i.e. what cannot be achieved, rather than just the hoped for positive impacts and outcomes. I fear few funders would be willing to knowingly take that risk.

Despite the aforementioned positive impacts, research into official heritage narratives (often referred to as 'Authorised Heritage Discourse') highlights that the control and official management of heritage can serve to increase barriers and create division community divisions (Smith 2004; Smith 2006; Carman 2012; Abu-Khafajah and Miqdadi 2019). The present author's previous investigation of community archaeology projects in western contexts indicated that despite the vast array of positive impacts, many of the espoused (predicted) values, for example increasing knowledge, did not align with the achieved social values of the projects, such as making friends (Simpson 2010). Research also suggests that local impacts of this community archaeology and heritage projects can be negative, including; frustration, disinterest, increasing tensions between professionals and public, increasing inequality between individuals in the community, and upset regarding negative aesthetic impact

of excavations (Simpson 2010; Sayer 2015; Sayer 2018; Reily, Nolon, and Monckton 2018; Abu-Khafajah and Miqdadi 2019; Jameson 2019).

The projects I will discuss in this paper were managed and directed by professional archaeologists and academics, including myself, and as such can be categorized as a 'top down' neoliberal humanistic approach (Moser et al. 2002; Marshall 2002; Abu-Khafajah and Migdadi 2019). This paper does not seek to undermine the positives of these or any community heritage projects; rather it seeks to be a salient reminder of our moral and ethical duty as professionals to the community to provide honest and helpful advice for future projects, professionals, and the public. Constant praise and self-congratulation have the potential to do the heritage profession a disservice. If heritage professionals, including community archaeologists cannot learn from the past and be critically self-reflective, then there is little chance of success and growth in the future.

### Case study 1: Oakington 'Bones without Barriers' project

I have selected the Oakington 'Bones Without Barriers project' as a case study, as I was a co-director on this project. I became involved in the project in 2011, at the request of the principal director Dr Duncan Sayer, to, in part, support the development and delivery of community archaeology and student training elements. The excavation of Oakington's sixth century Anglo-Saxon Cemetery began in 2010 as a collaborative project between local administrative bodies, community organizations, and university and professional archaeologists including; Oakington Parish Council, Oakington Archaeological Society, University of Central Lancashire, Manchester Metropolitan University, and Oxford Archaeology East. The project started as a professionally led 'pre-development' rescue excavation ahead of the parish council's playground redevelopment scheme (Taylor, Duhig, and Hines 1998). Over time, due to public interest, and the directors' pre-existing and longstanding personal and professional relationships with and in the community it morphed into a community archaeology project (Sayer and Sayer 2016). At this point, the project was renamed 'Bones Without Barriers' by the directors, and it sought to establish collaboration and co-production of research between the community, professionals, and academics. This approach was supported by students, volunteers, professionals, and academics, as part of their role was to explain what they were doing to the public, lead groups of visitors, and openly discuss and debate the project.

Oakington is a village located in South Cambridgeshire, UK. The parish has a population of 1297, with an ethnic majority of 97.8 per cent Caucasians, and 13.8 per cent retirees (Census 2001; Sayer and Sayer 2016, 158). Archaeological evidence suggests settlement at Oakington began in the early Anglo-Saxon period (AD 450-700), and archaeological and historical evidence suggests the village has been continuously settled since this period (Mortimer, Sayer, and Wiseman 2017). The Anglo-Saxon cemetery and settlement excavated in this project lie beneath the modern village of Oakington (Mortimer, Sayer, and Wiseman 2017, 305). The cemetery was first discovered in 1926, and rediscovered, and partially excavated due to development in 1993 and 2006 (Sayer and Sayer 2016; Mortimer, Sayer, and Wiseman 2017, 305).

Duncan Sayer, the director of the 2010–2015 excavation, was concerned about the morality of working behind screens, and of a practice, in British Archaeology, that was based on modern Protestant ethics (Sayer 2010a,b; Sayer and Sayer 2016, 139). With the support of the community he obtained legal consent from the Ministry of Justice to excavate ancient human remains at this cemetery without the screens, fences or barriers normally required in English law (Sayer and Sayer 2016; Parker Pearson, Pitts, and Sayer 2013; Sayer 2010). The aim was to provide open access to excavation, and to move beyond an expert-structured approach by giving the public an active role in the process, in order to understand the complexity of local people's responses to the excavation of ancient skeletal material (Sayer 2010a,b) (Figure 1). From the outset, the project's central ethos was one of active collaboration, rather than mere cooperation between the community and the professionals. We achieved this through a multi-dimensional strategy for community engagement, including school programmes, volunteer support, and student training. In 2012–2015 the 'Bones



**Figure 1.** Woman buried alongside a cow at Oakington. The issue of whether to allow the public to view human remains during excavation was discussed at length between community members and project archaeologists with the consensus being to allow public access. Therefore, including this image here is in keeping with community preferences.

without Barriers’ project received National Heritage Lottery Funding to support a dedicated schools educational outreach programme on the site.

The project enabled the public to view the excavation of ancient human remains (Figure 2). This received widespread support from the community. It was praised by professionals and academics for its open-access approach to community involvement. Yet, despite this, extensive multifaceted



**Figure 2.** Oakington excavation open to public and part of the Village Fete. Copyright Faye Sayer

research highlighted some negative impacts of the project to specific community members (Sayer and Walling 2014; Sayer and Sayer 2016; Sayer 2015; Sayer 2018).

## UK heritage context

Heritage management in the UK can arbitrarily be divided into five distinct groups; commercial, government (local and national), charitable, academic, and local, yet these groups can, and sometimes do work in tandem. At national government level, cultural heritage is protected and promoted by the Department of Culture, who work with and support various museums, such as the British Museum, and the government's statutory advisor for heritage Historic England, who also care for nationally important sites and listed building. At a local government level heritage is overseen by a network of Historic Environment Records, who keep records about local historic and heritage in the area, and were responsible for implementing national heritage legislation at local levels, including planning policy statement 5 (PPS5), which was subsequently replaced by Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning and National Planning Policy Framework (Communities and Local Government 2010; Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government 2021; Historic England 2015). PPS5 requires the developer to pay for archaeological investigation on all public or private land, prior to development (Communities and Local Government 2010). PPS5 states the importance of public interest in heritage, and its community value, noting the importance of consultation and collaboration with the community prior to, during, and after developer-driven 'commercial' archaeology projects (Communities and Local Government 2010; Sayer 2014, 59). As such development-driven archaeological excavations are increasingly morphing into community archaeology projects, being used as a tool to implement PPS5, for example, Birley Fields, Manchester (Sayer 2014).

University academics in archaeology or heritage main role is to produce significant ground-breaking heritage research, to educate future heritage professionals, and increasingly to undertake commercial heritage projects. Over the last decade UK university funding is linked to Research Excellence Framework, a system for assessing the quality of research, this assessment takes into account public engagement and public impact. Resultantly some archaeology and heritage academics have altered their approaches, and adapted research projects into community archaeology projects. This has involved academics collaborating with local heritage groups and organizations, for example, archaeology and history societies or locally managed museums. The converging of government, academic, professional, charitable, and local heritage can coverage, in the UK this can be through community archaeology projects.

## Lessons learnt

The project appeared to, at times, highlight local and individual tensions, and pre-existing conflicting social dynamics existing with the village, including personal insecurities about some people's place in the village, with one person commenting 'I am not a local you know, I have only been here twelve years' (P). Tensions, perhaps unsurprisingly, seemed related to village hierarchy, with divisions between those on the parish council and those who were not. Some people said that they distrusted the archaeologists because they were invited in by the village council, despite extensive consultation and involvement of the community throughout the planning process, and participation in excavation was perceived, despite open access, to be exclusive (Sayer and Sayer 2016, 153). The project, at points, engendered competitiveness amongst the villagers: 'I was a little peeved ... she was bragging about seeing the brooches, I haven't seen them, would you mind' (P). Community involvement in the project, at points, was linked to personal status, and became a platform to play out complex village politics: 'You put a test pit in my friend's garden, I want one in mine' (P) (Sayer and Sayer 2016, 154).

Conversations with community members during the project did demonstrate a development of understanding of archaeology, 'you see that dark patch, there's a body there' (P), and also of the

complex moral and ethical debates regarding the excavation and reinternment of ancient human remains '[it] would be disrespectful [to rebury]' (P), and 'hope it will be reburied in the original resting place' (P) (Sayer and Sayer 2016). Yet, the project also highlighted the potential ethical issues and impacts that community archaeology, specifically the excavation of ancient human remains, and the impact this can have on specific individual's emotional health. The majority of people were interested in viewing, and engaging in scientific and interpretative discussions about the remains 'are those veins?' (P). Yet, a limited number of individuals, particularly those amongst the 65+ age group, voiced moral objections to excavating human remains 'not right, just wrong, unethical, should be left where buried' (P). Individual responses were personally contextualized, and usually associated with recent personal experience of loss and bereavement. For example, one individual became visibly upset, believing the archaeologists had disturbed the modern cemetery where their relative was buried (Sayer and Sayer 2016, 156).

The site contained a large number of infant burials, and some burials that were less normative by modern standards (Sayer and Sayer 2016, 157). These burials, for example, the burial of a woman who had probably died during childbirth, produced a strong emotional response from the archaeologists who excavated it, 'it was as near as I ever have been to crying while digging' (A) (Sayer and Sayer 2016, 157). This awareness of potential personal responses prompted the archaeologists to erect a tent round this particular burial to close it off from visitors and volunteers (Sayer and Sayer 2016, 157). Later public tours of the site, undertaken by project team members, discussed the burial. This resulted in an emotional response from one woman, who appeared visibly shaken for a few minutes, before she was able to continue on the tour. These less normative burials seemed to produce more complex emotional responses, and were traumatic for some individuals (Sayer and Sayer 2016, 157). The individual responses to burials highlighted the need to consider social and individual contexts when excavating ancient human remains. This includes the need for an awareness of the effect of personal experience, to safeguard everyone involved in these projects, and to consider providing counselling, and support to cope with individual responses to bereavement and mortality.

The project's open dialogue enabled the community to participate in decisions relating to the future of the project, and to develop an evolving relationship with the archaeology and with the project team. As a result we co-developed community-based activities with the community, including an NHLF funded schools outreach programme. The NHLF project worked with local schools, including specialist schools for children with social, emotional, and behavioural difficulties (Sayer and Walling 2014). This included a variety of on-site and off-site educational activities, for example museum visits, experimental archaeology, excavation, test pitting, tours as well as recreated 'living' history centres, festivals, and exhibitions. During the NHLF project communication and organization with external partners was, at points, challenging, especially with schools. Factors included high staff turnover, low staff numbers, and high demands on staff. Community archaeology related events and visits were often difficult to organize, 'there seems to be a lot of teachers and support staff involved with this project, which is great but no one person seemed to know what was happening and when. This made communication problematic from the outset' (A). As discussed by Sayer and Walling, challenges also related to not having a dedicated school staff member to coordinate the pupils involved in the project, or to communicate with the project team. Often the result was confusion over timings and poor pupil engagement, for example:

The tour round the museum and activity were scheduled for 1.30pm, and I agreed with the school to meet the students outside at 1.15pm. I arrived at 1pm and had a quick look around the museum. To my surprise, the students were already being shown round the upstairs gallery. It transpired that they had mistakenly arrived at 11am, and that the museum curator had charitably agreed to show them around then (A). (Sayer and Walling 2014)

At times, support staff accompanying the students with social, emotional, and behavioural difficulties failed to manage their behaviour. This had a negative effect on the project and its

intended impacts. For example, during a visit to West Stow Anglo-Saxon Village, an archaeological settlement site dating from AD 420–650 (early Anglo-Saxon period) and an open air museum, a member of the project staff was required to abandon plans designed to ensure students were engaged in the most effective manner:

I had intended to show them around the houses one house at a time, but it became evident that the teachers were happy to allow them to run loose. Instead, I walked round with a few students and pointed out things ... I was disappointed by how little I felt the students had learnt, in my opinion this was partly due to poor management of disruptive children making it impossible to draw them together for teaching. (A)

On another occasion project staff visited the school in an attempt to consolidate and assess the knowledge the children had gained: 'The rudeness of [name withheld] and the teacher in not challenging his behaviour was somewhat dispiriting' (A). This experience demonstrated a need for a clear agreement of objectives, outcomes, and roles prior to the project. For the future, it is important to understand the challenges existing for both schools and teachers, and put mechanisms in place, including additional staff in order to place less reliance on these external organizations and teachers to support these projects.

This project suggested that certain activities with no or few participatory elements, such as the visit to a museum or heritage site, were less beneficial and had more negative impacts on learning, happiness, and making friends than others (Sayer 2018). This resulted in disengagement of some participants, and in some cases the bad behaviour of some of the school children, as highlighted by the visit to West Stow. It illustrated that some activities were inappropriate for particular demographics, such as individuals with social, emotional, and behavioural difficulties (Sayer 2018). The project also demonstrated the negative impacts community archaeology can have on individual wellbeing, including reduced feelings of connectivity, and negative changes in individual interest, excitement, enthusiasm, and increased feelings of irritability, distress, and hostility during a project (Sayer 2015). Negative changes were linked to issues with social dynamics, and arising group tensions as well as the impact of individual actions and reactions to various situations, for example, the stress of being away from home, worry regarding course results and individual personal circumstances.

During the project community members engaged in debates about the future of the human remains, '... (I) want to see them displayed rather than (reinterred like) the earlier reburial' (P), and some suggested a preference for the storage of human remains in a museum to facilitate further research, rather than immediate reburial (Sayer and Sayer 2016, 155). This response was potentially a reaction to the public viewing the re-excavation of the 1994 vault, and the substantial damage to, and poor preservation of the remains due to reburial (Sayer and Sayer 2016, 155). Despite these preferences, plans by some members of the community to apply for funding to support the presentation on site did not occur. This was due to, in part, a change in the archaeology society's committee members, changing future priorities, and lack of confidence and skills to apply for grants. Furthermore, conversations are still ongoing regarding the future of the human remains, as conflicting agendas between professional, academics, and the community still exist.

After the excavation phase of the project, there was no sustainable plan to continue future community elements. Once NHLF funding ended there was little institutional support from professional or academic organizations to continue to support the community in understanding or presenting their heritage. This lack of continued financial and in-kind assistance meant staff and students were no longer available to facilitate the use of the educational materials and community archaeology elements. As a result, professional community engagement was reduced to occasional public talks, the creation of a website, and academic research of the excavated archaeological remains, which focused on professional publication. Furthermore, despite the project producing numerous educational resources, including learning packs, travelling exhibitions, and handling collections, as well as creating reconstructed round houses at the primary school and a reconstructed boat for the specialist school, these resources were not used extensively after the community excavation ended, in part due to lack on long term plans or finances for continuous teaching training and



due changes in teaching staff in the school. In part due to lack of legacy costs the project failed to shift from a top-down approach to a locally appropriated and owned project.

The Oakington project indicates the potential mental health implications of community archaeology projects not having safeguarding or associated policies in place for students, volunteers, and staff. In the case of Oakington this was illustrated during its work with children or adults with social, emotional, and behavioural difficulties and the emotional responses of visitors, staff, and students to the viewing of human remains. Critical reflection of the project indicates that staff should be provided with more detailed pre-project training, sufficient information, and organizational support and guidance. This would have enabled both legislatively appropriate and carefully considered choices to be made as to whether the project, and project staff, could support vulnerable participants or people with mental health and behavioural difficulties.

Critical self-reflection and reanalysis of conversations, observations, comments, and wellbeing data from the Oakington project illustrate the importance of understanding the complex positive and negative emotional responses to the archaeological excavation of ancient human remains (Sayer and Sayer 2016; Sayer 2010a). It indicated that taking this approach community archaeology has the potential to challenge authorized heritage discourse and official approaches to public engagement in archaeological excavation, including conventional viewpoints and value systems. Yet, in order to break down the physical and mental barriers between different stakeholders, community archaeologists must consider the complex emotional responses to heritage. This project demonstrated community archaeology's limitations, and that, sometimes, order to protect team members, participants and community members, difficult choices need to be made, about who to include in the project, what elements of engagement are culturally appropriate for specific communities, and how expectations can be managed.

## Case study 2: Badagry 'Creating a Slavery Museum Project'

I selected Badagry as a case study as it was part of a larger project I was co-developing with the University of Liverpool and museum, heritage, and community partners, in the UK, US, Caribbean, and Nigeria, from areas formerly part of the transatlantic slave route. The project was initially titled 'Creating a Slavery Museum Project,' and was exploring the interpretation, presentation, and communication to the public of transatlantic slavery and enslavement within museums and heritage sites in a modern-day context. The aim was to develop a collaborative international project between organizations and communities, to support a humanized and localized approach to presenting 'enslavement' and the slave trade. It sought to consider the diverse global communities affected by slave trade and enslavement. We had hoped that the project would support museums and heritage sites to decolonize and democratize the presentation of slavery through the global co-creation and active production of multifaceted resources with diverse local communities, including the use of digital learning resources and exhibition material. The project aims were to move beyond narratives of the transatlantic slave trade centred on archival research, to use the full range of intangible and tangible evidence including archaeological and oral history to humanize and localize the past in the present (Sayer 2021).

Badagry is a coastal town located in South-West Nigeria, part of Lagos state, and was believed to have started out as a fifteenth century farming settlement. By the sixteenth century it had become an important transatlantic slave port for the Europeans (Fadipe 2010, 1). By the 1770s the Dutch, English, French, and Portuguese had claimed different quarters of Badagry. Each quarter had its own slave house or 'barracoon.' Badagry's heritage narratives focus on the physical impacts of the transatlantic slave trade. The town attracts high levels of local tourists from Lagos state, mostly school groups visiting to learn about the history of the slave trade from its remaining slave trade sites, including locally managed heritage sites - the Barracoons, First Storey House, and the Point of No Return; officially managed museums - the Heritage Museum (Figure 3); and local museums - the Mobee Royal Family Original Slave Relics Museum.



**Figure 3.** Statue at Entrance to Badagry Heritage Museum. Copyright Faye Sayer

The Barracoons (a slave cell heritage site) were established in 1840–1844 by slave turned slaver trader Seriki Abass, and are the only surviving barracoon in Badagry; the other three recorded slave cells have been destroyed by development (Fadipe 2010). The building is overseen by Lagos State and in 2002 it was recognized by the NCMM as a national monument and museum (Fadipe 2010; Osho 2016, 42). Despite official oversight and recognition the Barracoons is a locally overseen site, and is owned and managed by the Abass family (the descendents of Seriki Abass); by way of contrast Badagry Heritage Museum, which was refurbished and renovated in 2018, is owned and managed by the NCMM and has government-appointed curators and staff.

I undertook a scoping survey in Badagry. This included visits to meet curators and staff at Badagry Heritage Museum and the Barracoons; I had hoped that both could be potential partner organizations. The visit was to provide market research, to evaluate the communities' and organizations' interest in the project – it was a stakeholder mapping exercise. I had hoped to develop relationships with the community to co-create localized approaches within the wider project framework.

Prior to the initial community scoping survey I had email correspondence with representatives from both the Badagry Heritage Museum and the Barracoons, which indicated they supported the project and wished to be involved in it. I then arranged meetings with staff from the Heritage Museum and the Barracoons to discuss the proposed project in detail and the potential for future collaboration. Before the scoping survey, I had also consulted and gained support from the Director-General of the NCMM for the project. Unfortunately prior to the start of this evaluation he was replaced. I also had various meetings with organizations working in the area, including the British High Commission, the UK Department for International Development, and the Archaeology Department of the University of Ibadan, who were all positive and supportive of the project, and were working in Badagry. It is worth noting that members of the Department of Archaeology at the University of Ibadan had warned me of the potential issues with working on partnership projects in Nigeria, including partnerships with the NCMM, and they cautiously suggested that issues might arise due to lack of financial support or historical knowledge.

I made assumptions regarding the potential benefits of the project based on these initial professional and government consultations, and on previous experience working and developing

community archaeology projects in Western contexts, rather than the unique and localized cultural, social, economic, and political contexts of communities in Nigeria. My colleagues and I had expectations, based on professional, government, and non-governmental consultations in Nigeria, that the majority of local organizations, community members, and local government officials would be open to developing a community heritage project with international partners, especially if it involved funding to help protect and manage heritage assets, support tourism, and had elements of skills training. Furthermore, my role in developing the project idea was, in part, a result of my residency in Nigeria from 2016 to 2018, and some, on reflection very limited, experience of Nigerian politics, economics, and culture. As a result, my colleagues and I hoped that we could co-create a project in Badagry with a range of local stakeholders that could positively benefit and engage the community in the presentation, communication, and understanding of transatlantic slavery and history in general.

### Nigeria heritage context

Heritage management in Nigeria exists as three seemingly separate entities. Firstly, at a federal level the National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM) is an administrative body aiming to teach and educate people about heritage, and is responsible for national heritage sites and museums such as the Heritage Museum in Badagry. The Director-General of the NCMM and museum curators are appointed by the Federal Ministry of Information and Culture or central government, and can be political rather than experience or knowledge-based roles. Secondly, at a state level, University Archaeology Departments, including The University of Ibadan, educate and train future heritage professionals, yet the lack of employment opportunities means few will work in the sector. Thirdly, localized heritage facilities are owned and managed by local communities, for example, the Barracoons (slave cells).

The recent development of community archaeology projects in Nigeria by academics and local non-profit organizations, has resulted in local and state heritage practices intersecting, for example, the joint project between Olusegun Obasanjo Presidential Library Foundation and The University of Ibadan in Abeokuta (Aleru et al. 2019). Yet heritage practiced between federal and academic, and between federal and local levels rarely converges, and can serve different audiences with conflicting agendas. Official heritage protection and presentation in Nigeria are often entrenched in colonial legacy, and 'official' heritage rhetoric's can be at odds with or fail to represent localized and indigenous narratives, with certain narratives such as the slave trade often either 'deliberately' not protected or overlooked (Eze-Uzomaka 2014, 144; Eze-Uzomaka 2001; Croucher 2015, 353, 362; Fabian 2013). There is a limited commercial heritage sector, as there is not a thriving heritage tourist economy; in part this is due to issues with infrastructure and security surrounding both internal and external tourism (Eyo 1998). There is little to no mitigation for developing on heritage sites, and as such no 'developer pays' ethos for recording or preserving heritage prior to development (Eze-Uzomaka 2014; Eze-Uzomaka 2001). As such, official heritage in Nigeria is often not regarded by diverse indigenous communities as having local value (Eze-Uzomaka 2001; Aleru et al. 2019; Nwankwo and Itanyi 2019). Heritage sites are under threat from looting or development; for example in Badagry only one of the four former slave cells remains, the rest have been destroyed for development (Omotoso 2002, 8, 12). It has been noted that the protection and management of Nigeria's diverse heritage is not helped by logistical issues of remote locations, poor funding, depleted resources, colonially entrenched heritage legislation, attitudinal differences, and taboos (Nwankwo and Itanyi 2019; Eze-Uzomaka 2014).

### Lessons learnt

My proposal for a partnership between heritage sites, museums, and local communities in Badagry was based on the assumption that collaboration could enable official and localized values attached

to archaeology and heritage to be co-aligned, or at least work in tandem. However, my scoping study in Badagry highlighted stark divisions between localized and official narratives, values, and the complex, traumatic, and negative values local community members associated with heritage and archaeology.

My trip to Badagry required additional security measures due to high rates of crime and the potential for the kidnap of foreigners and tourists in Nigeria. To mitigate the risks I employed an official British High Commission (BHC) driver, as recommended by the BHC expedition security team. The driver did not wear a BHC uniform, drove a non-diplomatic car and we travelled in daylight hours. The route to Badagry was, due to traffic and road conditions, a 3 ½ hour drive from Lagos, one of the country's major hubs, and the nearest airport to Badagry. Lack of hotels in area with any security measures or running water meant I was advised as a lone traveller not to stay overnight during this visit. During the road journey our car was deliberately rammed and driven off the road by armed uniformed men; my driver and I were held at gunpoint and escorted to meet their boss. After verbal negotiations we were released and escorted to the Heritage Museum. In hindsight my experience provided an insight into the locational dangers and logistical considerations of non-local organizations or individuals planning a community archaeology project in Badagry, especially if it required external facilitation or visits (Nwankwo and Itanyi 2019; Okafor 2012).

The initial plan was that I would visit and engage in discussion with the curators of the slave cell heritage site (the Barracoons) and the Heritage Museum, and meetings were set up with the organizations' curators. In spite of this, the first meeting failed to take place, as the curator was not present at the Heritage Museum, and the Museum was closed for refurbishment funded by the Lagos State Government Ministry of Tourism, Art and Culture, and the NCMM. The closure of the museum had not been communicated to me beforehand by either the Heritage Museum or the NCMM, perhaps as the refurbishment was running behind schedule. As a result, I could not, during the visit, discuss the proposed project with a potential key stakeholder. This highlighted issues with email and virtual communication, lack of my local knowledge, or community contacts to provide an awareness of changes to the opening or management of heritage sites and museums.

My visit to the Barracoons, although at first it was not possible to meet the curator or owner, despite prior email arrangements to meet staff on site and transparency to staff on arrival regarding who I was, and my motivations. I gained access to the site after payment of the admission fee, and a guide provided a tour of the site.

The site presents a complex and localized narrative of enslavement and the transatlantic slave trade in Badagry. This concerns Chief Williams Seriki Abass, a slave turned slave trader who built the Barracoons, and whose descendants own and manage the site today. The story presented is of a Yoruba boy, captured during a rival Dahomean tribal raid, and sold into enslavement (Osho 2016, 44). He was then transported to Brazil, where he later negotiated his freedom on the condition that he returned to West Africa to source slaves (Osho 2016, 44). This narrative is supported by archival and historical evidence. The ethically and morally painful humanized story of enslavement presented at the Barracoons has a complex rhetoric of power and control. This emotionally complex, and morally conflicting narrative of the transatlantic slave trade is highlighted only once within the site's interpretative texts, in a typed disclaimer from the family on the wall as visitors enter the site: 'We, the Descendants of Seriki Williams Abass, regret and are very sorry for the role and involvement of Seriki Ifaremi Williams Abass in the transatlantic slave trade in West Africa, either by force or choice. We are very sorry.'

The narrative the tour guide presented of Abass was one of remembrance, respect, and memorization. The dominant theme presented by the guide was of someone who had been enslaved, gained his freedom, and was respected for his governance under British Colonial rule. During my own and the school tour, which I followed the guide focused on the visitors learning key facts, and repeating factual information numerous times: for example, the children were asked their names, and were told on multiple occasions, 'slaves have no name ... [Slavery] take[s] away identity' and 'no, you have no name' (TG). In the beginning, middle, and end of the tour visitors were asked,



**Figure 4.** Children on School Visit to Barracoons Listening to Tour Guide. Copyright Faye Sayer

'how many of you could be traded for an umbrella,' (TG) and 'how many of you black slaves would this umbrella buy?' (TG) (Figure 4). This approach of repeating facts, did, at least immediately after their visit, result in the children remembering information (Sayer 2021). The guide did not address the conflicting, and ethically and morally challenging localized narrative of Abass as slave trader, a man who economically and politically benefited from the enslavement and dehumanization of individuals. Perhaps the guide viewed this complex, localized, and humanized story of the transatlantic slave trade and enslavement emotionally complex and traumatic for children or adults to understand from such a short visit.

During the visit, I had informal conversations with children and teachers from local schools visiting the site about the values attached to the site and motivations for their engagement in Badagry's various transatlantic slavery heritage sites. The teachers indicated Badagry was a place for children to 'learn about their history, Nigerian history' and remember 'their past' (T). The children commented they were excited to be out of the classroom and this was part of their yearly school trip. In my informal conversations with the local community, teachers, and school children many stated that they had not heard of the word 'archaeology' and did not understand its meaning, or the motivation for and value of doing archaeology (Aleru et al. 2019, 79). This could result from the fact that neither history, archaeology, or heritage are included in the national curriculum within Nigerian schools, and that community and public archaeology is an emerging discipline (Okpodo 1986; Agbelusi 2015; Aleru et al. 2019).

After my tour of the site I was approached by the owners of the site, who turned out to be the people who I initially spoke to about meeting the curators and owners and took my ticket money. They asked about my motivations for visiting, asking if I was 'a government spy' (O), and 'why are you interested in this site' (O). After proving my identity, and discussing the project with them they accepted my motivations and asked me to sit and chat. The owners explained that their distrust was due to conflicts between local and national government agendas for preservation and presentation of heritage, and anger over lack of financial support by the NCMM or Lagos State for local heritage sites 'they give us no funding, no support' (O). The owners commented that despite the NCMM-recognized status of the Barracoons museum and Lagos state having responsibility for

the preservation of the building, the NCMM and Lagos State favoured investment in 'national' heritage sites, such as the federal and state-funded Badagry Heritage Museum. As a result of the presentation and preservation of historical material at the Barracoons was underfunded, with photocopied displays Sellotaped to the wall, historical objects handed around for visitors to hold, and no conservation of objects (Figure 5). Discussion with owners of the Barracoons, the tour guide, and local residents, along with my observational opinions of the site, indicated wider political support from the NCMM for the project did not correspond to local experiences of official support for community heritage. Rather, the tensions that existed between the government (as represented by the NCMM and Lagos State) and the community, local professionals and heritage custodians hampered these initial conversations, as curators, owners, and the public expressed anger over lack of support provided by the NCMM and the government for 'their' heritage.

The distrust of the government and outsiders by heritage custodians and owners was mirrored by other community members who asked me 'what do you want, why would you come here?' (P). Many the community members indicated their suspicions of my interest in Badagry, especially if it was supported by national government agencies. Some community members stated they had not and did not want to engage with 'official' heritage narratives presented in government museums, including the NCMM-funded Badagry Heritage Museum. Comments indicated that the local people either could not afford to pay to visit museums or sites, or did not regard the material presented in official museums as 'their' heritage (P). Some individuals stated that they view 'official' archaeological sites, museums, and heritage sites as 'elitist' (P). These findings mirrored Omotoso's and Eze-Uzomaka's research of Nigerian museum visitors and values, and suggested most people had never visited a museum due to underlying issues with the perceived value and colonial origins of national 'official' museums (Omotoso 2002, 7; Eze-Uzomaka 2001; Aleru et al. 2019, 75). Others indicated they were



Figure 5. Photocopies of Material Sellotape to Wall at the Barracoons. Copyright Faye Sayer

religiously and culturally opposed to museums, as the presentation and conservation of the past within museums was viewed by them as idolatry (Omotoso 2002, 7; Eze-Uzomaka 2001; Aleru et al. 2019, 75). The local community's perception of archaeology and heritage resulted in them making little reference to western socially and educationally prescribed benefits of community heritage projects. Furthermore, their justifiable negative views of official historical and colonial-driven narratives made them question the ability of the project to be able to democratize or decentralize the presentation of heritage.

Discussions with community members and owners of the Barracoons indicated a disparity between official and local values of the project. The locals, and owners of the Barracoons, indicated that they viewed economic benefit of heritage sites as a priority. The focus on economic value was understandable given the context, including high levels of poverty in the area. The social and educational value of heritage prioritized by the project team was not at this point a priority for many residents, who noted they needed financial security, support, and to generate more tourist income to buy food, water, and shelter. For example, on my arrival at the Barracoons the owners were sitting down outside the building controlling access through ticketed entry. Ticket prices varied based on the type of person visiting, and the tours guides continued to ask me for additional money throughout the visit. To provide additional income to preserve the site, the majority of the slave cells are rented out as modern-day residences. This highlighted conflicting agendas and values attached to heritage by different stakeholders, specifically a disparity between 'official' government educational agendas and local economic needs (Eze-Uzomaka 2001).

The Badagry scoping survey did not highlight specific issues related to my ethnicity or nationality (that of a white British female researcher in Nigeria). Yet, during conversations with Nigerians other locations, including Abuja, Calabar, Lagos, and Ibadan, I had experienced racialized discourse 'you know the damage the British have done to our country' (P) and 'it was you white people that enslaved and took our identity' (P) (Sayer 2021). Yet, in Badagry when asked my nationality, when I responded I was from the UK, conversations reflected a localized rhetoric of racialized discourse, such as 'you are alright because you are British, right? It was the British that abolished slavery, the British gave us our freedom' (P), and many local residents suggested the British had a positive impact on the town, 'who abolished slavery' (P), and 'appointed a local leader as governor' (P). Conversely, it was the Portuguese who were perceived by some local residents to be the enemy 'who built the barracoons' (P), 'enslaved [their kin]' (P), and removed individuals from their 'homeland' (P) (Sayer 2021). Public comments demonstrate the sensitivities, complexities, and difficulties of non-local or European foreign professionals working in areas and countries where there is a colonial legacy of enslavement. This highlights the importance of working alongside local professionals with pre-existing community relationships and understandings of localized historical narratives.

Professional and community consultation at Badagry highlights issues with 'outsiders', specially non-local community members, working in countries or areas in which they are viewed with distrust or have not had the time to build relationships based on trust (Aleru et al. 2019). In Badagry the distrust of European researchers and official NCMM staff might, in part, be based on the historical legacy of European enslavement and colonization, and more complex ethnic divisions within Nigeria (Nwankwo and Itanyi 2019; Aleru et al. 2019; Eze-Uzomaka 2001). The scoping survey of Badagry provides an example of complex and conflicting 'official' national and 'counter' local narratives that professionals seeking to undertake community heritage projects, must negotiate (Aleru et al. 2019; Nwankwo and Itanyi 2019). During this consultation phase, despite national and international professional, academic, non-government organizational, and political support, the project did not initially receive official local professional or community support. Rather, it highlighted conflicting local, national, and foreign value and outcome frameworks, and the emotionally complex and socially challenging nature of undertaking community heritage research, particularly in areas in which it might uncover uncomfortable truths or painful pasts.

My personal experiences during the scoping survey, including the traumatic road trip, influenced my viewpoints in relation to potential logistical and cultural issues with external (both non-Nigerian

and non-local) organizations planning community heritage projects within Nigeria. It made me subjectively aware of complexities of external researchers working in countries and areas where they have limited understanding of the diverse localized socio-political relationships, the economic challenges, and the nuanced localized heritage narratives (Aleru et al. 2019; Nwankwo and Itanyi 2019; Croucher 2015, 362). This experience made me anxious about the future of the project, and believe that this project should be locally driven and managed.

My critical self-reflection of the scoping survey undertaken in Badagry illustrates the nuanced nature of localized heritage discourse, and the role community archaeologists can have in communicating and negotiating this, both within and beyond the community. It indicates the conflicting myriad of values attached to heritage by diverse stakeholders, and the responsibility they have in representing these (Nwankwo and Itanyi 2019; Eze-Uzomaka 2001; Aleru et al. 2019, 79). The results indicate that to co-develop culturally aware and contextually appropriate community heritage projects it is vital to have local agency, custodianship, and stewardship. To achieve this professionals must listen to, foster, and incorporate alternative local dialogues and values (Aleru et al. 2019, 79; Fennell 2015; Fabian 2013). Attitudinal changes and localized awareness of heritage values are required by professionals and government bodies, specifically heritage's role locally in economic and sustainable development (Nwankwo and Itanyi 2019; Aleru et al. 2019). This approach will enable community heritage projects to have a long-term impact on the protection, management, and presentation of heritage, and to support sustainable economic, and social and educational benefits (Nwankwo and Itanyi 2019; Alery and Adekola 2016; Aleru et al. 2019). The development of community heritage projects requires dynamic and organic community-centred approaches, grounded in ethnographic evaluation, critical self-reflection, and professional honesty, particularly regarding the researchers' own skills and knowledge limitations.

## Conclusion

These case studies highlight the challenges experienced by neoliberal externally, expert and non-locally driven participatory community archaeology and heritage projects (Abu-Khafajah and Miqdadi 2019). They demonstrate the potential negative effects projects can have on participants, visitors, and the project team, including potential negative impacts of heritage or context of heritage to individual mental and physical health. This paper suggests that community archaeology projects have the potential, often inadvertently, to heighten conflicting agendas and values apposed to building communities and bridging gaps. Indeed, as indicated by both the case studies, community heritage projects can increase tensions and divisions between stakeholders and within communities (Aleru et al. 2019). The case studies indicate that community archaeology projects have the potential to negatively impact negative communities, specifically if professionals and academics failed to engage in alternative indigenous and localized heritage values and narratives, and simplify the complex communities and histories (Aleru et al. 2019; Abu-Khafajah and Miqdadi 2019).

Community heritage strategies for the management and protection of heritage require a people centred, localized, co-produced, and community driven and owned frameworks (Nwankwo and Itanyi 2019; Aleru et al. 2019; Jameson 2019, 1). This will involve considering sustainable economic, cultural, and environmental models for heritage management based on localized requirements, for example, models based on tourism or wider sustainable development goals, that can be supported by organizations beyond national heritage bodies (Aleri and Adekolo 2016; Aleru et al. 2019; Abu-Khafajah and Miqdadi 2019). It requires a change in professional behaviour, long-term commitment to communities that build trust, and active local relationships (Eze-Uzomaka 2006). Without these changes, the long-term sustainability of community projects can be an unachievable goal.

I have written this self-reflective analysis of two community archaeology and heritage projects with the aim of helping future professional practices, by providing evidence-based signposts to success, including:



- Pre- and continuous project consultation and evaluation
- Learning and changing through critical self and collaborative reflection
- Having an adaptable project plan that has a long term legacy strategy
- Being community 'people' centred and culturally aware
- Cultivating trust and honesty
- Being contextually specific and understand localized social-political contexts
- Supporting diversity of involvement
- Engendering freedom and choice
- Empowering and nurturing local agency and ownership
- Validating the co-production of knowledge and alternative narratives
- Building in safeguarding and duty of care policies, including appropriate warning for emotive content.

These case studies indicate that for community archaeology and heritage projects to have positive and transformative impacts on the communities they work within, they require a people-centred approach. This approach should be localized, socially engaged, and participatory, and foster and encourage 'community' agency and ownership, and as such empower the local communities through their heritage. It is critical community heritage projects are community-centred and locally generated, and that they support individuals to feel connected to the people and places around them (Lynch 2021, 22). This requires professional and academics to support localize heritage narratives and be open to a wider range of locally valuable impacts. Yet, community archaeologies humanitarian agenda's need to consider unique social, political, and economic dynamics, as cultural contexts can play havoc with good intentions (Abu-Khafajah and Miqdadi 2019).

In order to support positive 'community' impacts, community archaeologists need to be aware of the risk, conflicting narratives, traumatic pasts, and act in the best interest of all, to safeguard professionals and participants. Heritage professionals should be aware that they and their projects can do harm as well as good, and be conscious of who they empower and who they unintentionally disempower (Abu-Khafajah and Miqdadi 2019). Undertaking socially engaged community archaeology is challenging, yet it enables us to question our perceptions, to learn from our previous mistakes, and accept our own failures and biases in order to alter, adapt, decentralize, and democratize our theories and methods. Our ability to learn and change approaches requires honest self and collaborative reflection, central to this is open and critical dialogue with colleagues working in community archaeology and fostering honest dialogues with communities. We need to share both positive and negative experiences in order to collectively, collaboratively, and cohesively move forward to find new roads for future community archaeology projects to travel.

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