



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH
School of History, Classics
and Archaeology

**Transcription of Undergraduate Offer Holder Day Archaeology Talk
27 March 2019**

ULF SCHOOP:

So, welcome to the Archaeology Offer Holder Day. My name is Ulf Schoop. I'm Head of Archaeology and I'm glad that you have come here to listen to me.

Can I ask you before we continue, how many of you have been to the first visiting day or have heard the talk which I've given then? You. A few of you, OK. So, because of the fact that some people have come and heard that, and others haven't, I have to deal with some of similar issues. So, I will go over some issues which I have treated then. Other issues are not so relevant anymore, so I have taken them out. And I will talk about some issues where we haven't discussed in much detail then, which are more relevant to the state of your plans at this stage.

So, this is the topics which we will go over. I talk very shortly about the nature of archaeology, about who if you start studying here who you will see in the teaching context, how teaching will work in archaeology, which courses and topics will be offered, and we will also speak a little bit about assessment and academic support.

Archaeology in Edinburgh has a very long tradition. Some of the leading figures of the discipline have been working here. You know probably that archaeology by itself is much younger than other disciplines. And so, Edinburgh has been involved in the development of this discipline from a very early stage. Being the capital of Scotland, it is also the home of many other institutions. Apart from the University, just as a reminder, the National Museum of Scotland is one of them obviously and Historic Environment Scotland another. But there are other institutions as well which are relevant here.

Being a mid-sized department, we have a very wide variety of expertise and different research interests here in the department. And because our teaching and the research are very closely interlinked, that means that informs and gives us a very wide range of expertise which will also manifest itself in our teaching. And because of the same reason, because the student work especially once they come towards the end of the studies, will be increasingly involved in this research is, if you should choose so, you can become quite integral in our research interests too.

So, very shortly here, this is symbolising the wide range of archaeology. Some of these issues will already be familiar to you but others might not be. And the interesting thing here is that you probably come into the field because of your interest in one of these, in these subsections, but that will not mean that the interest once you have studied and once you become more familiar with the whole picture will stay the same. It's much more likely that this will change by understanding the discipline better and by becoming more familiar with these concepts.

We recognise that archaeology is not a school subject, and our... especially in the first years, our teaching is based on this. So, because archaeology not being a school subject, we assume that people know very little at this stage and so we are systematically building up this knowledge. Essentially, we are talking a large part of our teaching will concern time periods which are not covered in history teaching at schools, for example, and the whole time space framework will be much, much larger than what you usually would know. And one of the most obvious points is the fact that about 95% or even more of the human history is prehistoric, which doesn't mean that it happened before history, but that it happened before we have any written records. And in these time periods, archaeology is the only way of gaining any information what the history of mankind was like, yeah?

Archaeology, having the unique way of studying the past by concentrating on physical remains rather than on written history, also has or had to develop its very own methodology of coming to reliable information. And that is a way of thinking and a way of, of arguing which has to be learnt. You know, it's not obvious and it's also not easy and so there has, it has to be learned what you can see, how valid interpretations look like and how other interpretations are not valid based on this material.

In addition, it's quite important that you understand the role of archaeology in modern society. And in the end what we want you to be after you've finished the undergraduate degree with us is that you go away with a well-rounded foundation of archaeological knowledge and competency in its application. Some graduates after that will exit archaeology and go on to do other things, while others will build some specialist knowledge on top of this undergraduate knowledge which they have arrived at and then go on to do, for example, postgraduate studies or some other pathway into professional archaeology.

Who are the teachers? So, in our department we have professors, lecturers and tutors, all specialist archaeologists who have their own specialist fields in which they are experts. But they are not the only people you will see in class, because I mentioned it already, the presence of these different institutions in Edinburgh with whom we have relationships, and many of the specialists working there come to us and contribute to our teaching in one way or the other.

A short course into the practical situation which you will come across when you study, when you start your studies here. One of our staff will act as a personal tutor. That means that this person will be the first port of call and assist you in your studies when you start studying with us. Yeah, it's an individual relationship. Every staff member has a small group of students they are looking after. And they are the people who would advise on all academic matters including initial selection of courses and all these things which will later become more obvious to you but initially will represent a great unknown.

How does the teaching look like? So, in all years there will be, it will consist of a combination of lectures, tutorials and some practical learning. And lectures, especially in first year, will happen in a large lecture theatre. It's quite different according, depending on the year you are in, the size of the population who are sitting there. Initially there might be very large groups and then in later years much smaller ones.

The lectures will be accompanied by tutorials. The tutorials are more interactive. Lectures are more dedicated to frontal teaching while tutorials have a more interactive and demand your own input. They are discussion based and often based on ideas, on readings or on the discussion of specific artefacts to which I'll come back at a later stage. Other tutorials will be practical based and be dedicated to certain techniques such as pottery, drawing, analysis of certain artefacts or techniques such as digital techniques or dealing with some sort of artefacts such as... for example, remain...human or animal remains.

I will come back to fieldwork in some more detail, but this already comes in at a relatively early stage. There is a mandatory fieldwork element after the first year already which introduces you to an aspect to a very...to a core aspect of archaeology which is concerned about the generation of archaeological data which obviously we cannot teach in a classroom environment. So, this would be three weeks fieldwork component after the first year in the summer period and this can be done either on a project run by us or by some partner institution which we know are providing these skills.

Some words about how the degree works. Over the four years, the Scottish 4-year degree gives us a good timeframe to develop your knowledge in a gradual way. Essentially there are two...one is...one big subdivision in the middle separating the pre-honours years, the first two years, from the honours years in year three and four. The first two years are dedicated to develop the framework, the concepts and, I mentioned it already, the time and space framework in these larger courses to which all our staff contribute in one way or the other. In honours years, you're choosing... you have more flexibility and you're choosing dedicated courses which are usually run by either a single staff member or in some cases two of them who focus much more on a specific time period, on a specific region or on a specific topic. All semesters ask you to... to take 120 credits per year which usually comes down to three courses per semester.

And this is... again for looking at the logic behind the... the subdivision. So, the foundation years to try to provide you an understanding of the principle of the discipline, to understand the chronological and spatial framework and the way archaeological knowledge is generated and how you have to deal with it. In the honours years after you have this basis already you will develop your own research interest. This is something which will happen by itself and, as I mentioned already, it's very well possible that these are now different from the original ones which brought you in here. It will deepen your ability to critically analyse the evidence you know, not written evidence but material evidence, and also the narratives which have been developed by established scholars and which obviously provide these the foundations of certain interpretations.

And so, when this... if this is the analysis, you are also learning to create and present academic arguments by your own - this is the synthesis - and also to deepen your knowledge of the practical skills and the aim is obviously to an increasing autonomy and independence of you as an archaeologist yourself.

So, and this is reflected by the structure of our pre-honours courses, so these are the core courses which all the archaeology students do regardless whether you are a single honours or joint honours student and other combinations of your study. So, the first year, this is.. are the courses which are called Archaeology 1. They provide you with the prehistoric and early historic framework, the spatial amounts and they take you through the whole span of human history from human origins, from the evolutionary history of mankind, to the beginning of a settled way of life and the beginnings of food

production, through the emergence of complex societies, the emergence of cities and the state into the Roman Iron Age in Europe and even beyond that. It also introduces you to search of science and archaeology, where arguably the most interesting developments happen at the time, being now, and also introduce you, in a more general way, to the concept of studying human history through material remains.

Then building on that in year two then, this is divided in three parts as you can see here. The first semester is dedicated to the study of archaeology in Scotland in particular while the second part of the...of year two is dedicated more after you learned more about history and the...the narratives here is now more dedicated to practical concepts. So, we are taking you through the most relevant techniques in archaeology which can be dating techniques, documenting artefacts, studying certain bioarchaeological remains and other techniques in archaeology and the emphasis here is on practical learning. The Human Skeleton course is... is slightly different from that because it's dedicated to one particular archaeological material by itself which is the human body and its remains and the information it can provide us with.

Good, so this is how...let's look at credits, how this is organised. So apart from these core courses which are mandatory which all the students take, there is quite a bit of flexibility in the optional courses which fall into two categories. There is the so called the normal optional courses, are courses which you can select from a pre-selected list of courses of neighbouring subjects such as classics, history, social anthropology, geography, there are few more. And then there are 40 credits more of outside courses which you can essentially select from anything which is available. So, there are different techniques how people deal with this normally. Some people stay close to archaeology by taking more courses, for example, of these subjects here but you don't have to do that, you can also go further afield and... and pick courses which are not related to archaeology which expand your general knowledge about certain things. In year three and four, this flexibility to go very far outside of archaeology, gives... gives space to... to your own flexibility to set your own focus on certain issues.

So, there is a wide range of courses on offer which covers... especially specific areas which can be chronological whether you're more interested in early or late periods, you may have developed a geographical focus - Europe, the Near East, Egypt, Western Mediterranean and East Mediterranean; or you can study certain topics which may be social, cultural, economic, environmental. We have courses on offer which deal with how to deal with certain artefacts groups and about the more theoretical background of the discipline.

The honours year is then in the end...end with your dissertation which is a student-led piece of work under the supervision of one staff member which is an extended piece which requires more research, individual research, by yourself than you would do otherwise.

This is just an example of an honours level curriculum, it's a real one but not the one which happens now, which should give you an impression about the structure or the character of the courses we offer at this stage. So, there are a lot of these courses deal with specific archaeologies in certain regions and in certain time periods, yeah, which ranges very far, I mentioned that already from human evolution basically to the early Middle Ages. Where do we have them? Here. The Byzantine archaeology and everything in between. There are courses which are not, have... do not have such a strong regional or chronological focus but are more targeting certain topics. So, Conflict Archaeology

is a very popular one for... for example, Archaeology of Architecture or Theory in Archaeology, other courses concentrating on the science side of archaeology - I go into that in a little bit more detail later. And then other courses again have more to do with method or the practice of archaeology when they go about their work.

So, apart from this knowledge-based curriculum there is nested into the...the courses which we offer at any particular time also a different logic, which is specifically skills focused and some of these skills are mandatory courses because we think that every archaeologist should know them but others are optional because not every student wants to go along a pathway which is so dedicated to the practical aspects of archaeology, if that makes sense. So, for example, if you want to go into a pathway which takes you into the heritage sector, you might be interested in different practical aspects than somebody who wants to go into research, for example. You don't have to decide at this stage, but it may influence the choices that you have. So that starts as I mentioned already at year one already and then becomes more differentiated in the honours years, there are more optional parts but there are other parts which are mandatory too, for example, the course Archaeology in Practice which deals with policy, with organisations, institutions and with the politics of heritage and then others which are more strongly dedicated to fieldwork by itself or to certain techniques and all of this can/may culminate, in the end, in the choice of a dissertation at a later point.

This year is something we are introducing. This year... this year only this is the archaeology skills passport. This is not an official document in the sense, but it is a document which is increasingly recognised by archaeological institutions which documents your growing proficiency in archaeological skills as you go through... through the years and it covers, partly it covers, what you're learning in the archaeological curriculum but also what you do outside. So, for example, if you go in in your vacations on to do more archaeological fieldwork with external organisations that they would be documented there too. So, on the one hand you would see your own skills growing but on the other hand you would also be able to use that to document that you have acquired these skills already when you go to a project, an internship or later even into a job which may require some of them.

Returning back into the classroom so to say, there is quite a wide range of...of assessment forms - exams and essays are the standard forms. Although not all courses have them, most of our courses do in the foundation years certainly there are many of these, but there are also others which are more falling into the category of transferable skills. So, skills which are also useful outside of archaeology, that is oral presentations, for example, that is very few people are natural speakers because other people have to learn it, but it can be learned. So that is something which is quite important. Poster presentations, report writing and then according to the... depending on the nature of the course, also other exercises such as lab journals or other practical exercises. Discussion is always an important thing. So that is the exchange of knowledge and not forget and this is maybe something which is more different from school experience. There is quite a large emphasis on independent study and obviously that will also lead into the creation of your own interests in archaeology.

There is quite a bit of support and help available on this pathway. I mentioned the function of the personal tutor already - again all our staff members are personal tutors and every student has a personal tutor. There's also the Student Support Office which is a walk-in office actually next door

from here where people can get especially administrative support with all these kinds of different aspects of student life they are confronted with. There are certain structures of peer support where mostly older students help younger students. And then, in a more general way, all our staff are accessible. So, you can always talk to course organisers and tutors.

There is also, in different series, academic talks available throughout the semester where archaeologists come - visiting archaeologists come - and talk to us about their research and students are always invited to take part here. And then, last but definitely not least, we have very active student societies which do work themselves, in particular here the Archaeology Society which... which has a range of student-run activities throughout the year, and the Edinburgh Archaeology Outreach Project which is quite a unique project, also student-run, where students go into schools, mostly primary schools, to talk to school pupils about archaeology and try to... to transfer this knowledge to small children.

Quickly about fieldwork again, I mentioned already the mandatory fieldwork after year one which we want to be excavation-based because [whilst] fieldwork in archaeology is much broader than that, but we want that every archaeology student at least once in their career has made their hands dirty and participated in excavation which more often than not will be departmental projects where students go to which may be local or more further field - we want to have some control over what students are doing so, there is an approval process in place and it's usually done after year one.

So, three weeks is a lot if you have to do it but not very much in order to learn fieldwork. So, for the students who are interested in this there are more possibilities available in later years which students often do with other institutions, not necessarily our own, but this additional learning can be...can be supported by the department and can also be brought back into the curriculum and transferred into academic credit through our course Archaeological Fieldwork. So, we actively support that students acquire much more knowledge in this relationship, but it doesn't have to be excavation anymore at this stage it can be lab-based, it can be work in a museum or it can deal with community archaeology in its different guises.

So, I'm very quickly staying with fieldwork. Our department, I mentioned it already, has a very broad range of interests and as you can see from here we are active more or less over the whole of the old world. We were even more active in the Near East which has become difficult in later times, but we are still very active in the Eastern and in the Western Mediterranean too.

Very quickly about fieldwork activities which are done by the department. So, some of us interested in very simply organised societies and in the remoter past while others of us are interested to study ancient states and urban civilisations in different parts of the old world. Some of us study landscapes and standing monuments in different parts of the world and with different techniques. We are quite interested in lab-based archaeology, I mentioned it already some of the most interesting new developments happen not in the field but here and in other labs too. So, studying technology and artefacts, but also bioarchaeological remains which can be animals, not only bones but bones are very important in this respect, and human remains... archeochemistry is quite important this respect too and then also increasingly the study of large datasets and how they can inform us about past civilisations and historical developments.

And so this brings us to the end of my talk here.