

Communications

THE COUNCIL FOR CANADIAN ARCHAEOLOGY: A COMMENT

Recently there has been a proposal to form a Council for Canadian Archaeology, and a draft proposal regarding the membership and organization has now been circulated to archaeologists in Canada. Its general nature is described as being "A strictly professional body . . ." and immediately we are confronted with the vexed question of the definition of professional and amateur in archaeology. For better or for worse, the latter is very frequently used as a synonym for something of standards lower than those desirable, but the definition of professional, under the proposed terms of the CCA, is most revealing, and directly relevant to criticism which can be directed at the orientation of academic thinking in North America. Basically, it is proposed to limit membership in the CCA to those who have a master's degree or higher, while the five officers of the membership committee must each have a Ph.D. "Other persons" it is proposed, "may earn fellowship if nominated to the membership committee by three fellows, through a special amendment to the constitution with the approval of the membership committee and then 9/10 majority vote of the fellows."

Thus we have a new body in Canadian archaeology, with the avowed purpose of furthering that field, defining at its very birth that people with master's and doctor's degrees are bona fide archaeologists but that those with a bachelor's degree or no degree at all are out except by unanimous consent and great rigmarole. The reason for these qualifications is presumably to bar from membership people in the field whose work is not of acceptable quality: this is a most worthy objective, but why is this determined by the type and number of letters after one's name? Are we going to be faced with trade union-type restrictive practices? The expert in Canada on eighteenth century ceramics has a modest bachelor's degree — is he less worthy of recognition than someone with a doctorate who, say, throws away all pottery body sherds from his

excavations because he maintains that no information can be obtained from them? The writer knows of one successful Ph.D. thesis recently done for Harvard on the excavation of a Canadian historic site which was banal beyond belief and where the study of clay pipes found is done entirely from secondary and even farther removed sources: the result is a poor undergraduate term paper, and nothing less than a disgrace for a Ph.D.

The five-man committee to look after membership cannot cover Canada adequately: inevitably the result will be that each committee member will represent an area, and will be able to wield a considerable influence in determining who from that area would be a suitable member. Is this the best way to ensure adequate representation of different views on archaeology — including views of people who may not be popular with the member of the committee who represents the area or who may hold differing views on the subject in which the committee member specializes?

In Great Britain the independent body in archaeology most nearly similar to that envisaged by the founders of the CCA is the Society of Antiquaries of London, whose Fellows may append the letters F.S.A. (Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries) after their names. One acquaintance, now a university lecturer, remarked to the writer that he valued his F.S.A. more highly than his Ph.D.: if such a thing could be said about the letters F.C.C.A. we should have a much healthier situation in North America, and should have struck a first blow at the throttling role that academic qualifications play in the obtaining of positions. It would be useless to pretend that the Society of Antiquaries of London is a perfect organization for recognizing archaeological ability; nevertheless, Fellowship is awarded on judgment independent of academic qualifications, and there are many first-rate archaeologists in Great Britain who are Fellows of the Society but have no university qualifications, and significantly, there are people with doctorates who dig but are not Fellows.

If the CCA is going to aim at high professional standards it should be honest in its intentions and state that a Ph.D. and full professorship is neither necessary nor adequate for membership. Is a non-professional who publishes site or artefact reports frequently and accurately not contributing more to archaeology than a profes-

sional who has published nothing in ten years, although he has been excavating, and thus destroying sites? As General Pitt-Rivers, the father of modern British archaeology, put it, a discovery dates only from the time of its record.

Martin Biddle, Lecturer in Medieval Archaeology at the University of Exeter, England, remarked during the panel discussion at the Smithsonian conference on the role of historic archaeology held at Washington in April 1966, that there appears to be different schools of archaeological technique acceptable in different areas of North America, while in Great Britain there is only one. It may seem contradictory that *Archaeology from the Earth*, written by the man who said in the first line of its first chapter that there was no one right way of excavating, but many wrong ways, should become such a standard representation of British fieldwork, but most of the approach laid down by Wheeler would be considered fundamental to any British excavation, and a base on which to set individual techniques. How many professional archaeologists in North America still excavate in arbitrary artificial levels when natural stratigraphy is available to follow? What about professional archaeologists who let loose untrained students on sites which resemble Flanders Fields after a day's work? What about professional archaeologists who have their name on work they scarcely even saw, to say nothing of those who have the brass neck to assert their reports are less "subjective" because they never visited the site? How many of these professionals are going to become Fellows of the Canadian Council for Archaeology because they happen to have the right combination of letters after their name, and are university professors whose exclusion might cause "political" problems?

The present founding membership has been gathered by invitation and its individuals have not been scrutinized: if it were suggested that the three proposers envisaged by the CCA had to justify their candidate by giving a brief resume of his work which would then be circulated to all Fellows so that they might consider the candidate's standing, might not some present Fellows fail to qualify?

A professional has much better opportunities to do original research than a non-professional: perhaps we should demand more stringent qualifications from professionals than from non-professionals. Preferably qualifications should be equal: the two most

important criteria for Fellowship should be first, that the candidate is actively engaged in excavating and reporting (including artefact reports); and secondly, that he is not negligent, as by doing unethical work or by failing to publish within five years (folksy one page notes and chatty reminiscences on summer flints and potsherds are not reports).

Administrators and teachers could qualify by participating in excavations and publishing reports. Surely even the busiest could do one small excavation and report within five years. The CCA should undertake to publish material from archaeologists or researchers who are in positions where they have little encouragement to publish.

Failure to publish promptly is self-evident negligence. Less evident, but equally serious, are faulty excavation techniques and dishonest reports. Ivor Noël Hume, Director, Department of Archaeology, Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia, suggested at the Smithsonian conference that a man "lays bare his soul" in a report, but it is entirely possible to suppress evidence or distort fact in a report, whether it be the slope of a wall or the position of a vital datable artefact that upsets the excavator's pet theory, even if such facts generally do become known along the professional grapevine. Dishonesty in excavation or reporting, or failure to publish a report within five years (even if subsequent work has been published) should automatically disqualify a Fellow or potential Fellow.

The Council for British Archaeology, which is quite different in organization from its Canadian namesake, has associated with it 21 national societies; well over 200 local, county, and university societies; six national museums; 82 county and local museums; and 20 universities and colleges. In fact, it has more organizations alone associated with it than the CCA has members by over seven times. This is not wholly explained by Great Britain having two and a half times the population of Canada: in large measure it is due to Great Britain also having two and half times the cultural climate necessary to make prehistory a subject of informed study over several centuries. However, among the national societies represented in the CBA are ones such as the Folklore Society, the Ecclesiological Society, the Railway and Canal Society, and the Arms and Armour Society: granted some of these have no counter-

part in Canada, why is the CCA open only to anthropologists and archaeologists — I doubt that we should, let alone can afford to, exclude historians and geographers, for example, who show an interest in archaeological work. New World anthropology needs to be laid open to the influences of other disciplines, such as history. Further, an exclusive group such as that conceived by the founders of the CCA is likely to die because it has no roots.

That there must be a difference between professionals and non-professionals is perhaps inevitable: the whole idea of such a body as the CCA should be to bridge this gap by forming a bond where archaeological ability is the criterion. Richard Woodbury, Chairman of the Office of Archaeology at the Smithsonian Institution, mentioned at the Smithsonian panel discussion the problem of being faced with an application for work from people whose professional ability is quite unknown to him, from some college of which he has never heard: clearly if there was an independent and respected body known to admit only those with high archaeological ability, then membership could be regarded as a recommendation, irrespective of the degrees the applicant might have. By bridging the gap between professional and non-professional instead of widening the gap to an unclosable extent, as the present suggestions threaten to do, the CCA can make a signal contribution to archaeology in Canada, a country which has so far had no representative archaeological society. If on the other hand it becomes merely an in-group of the orthodox who once they have a certain number of letters after their names get more added automatically, it will become like the man questioned about his great array of medals who admitted that he was given the first in error and that the rest just followed.

IAIN C. WALKER

**Canadian Historic Sites Division
Department of Indian Affairs
and Northern Development**
