

## FORUM

### A Reply to "What is Public Archaeology?"

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The modelling of archaeological 'commodities' and the call for an economics of them can offer a very useful perspective on the subject of public archaeology. While the exact nature of what constitutes archaeological commodities is inevitably open to debate the idea of them allows a consideration of exactly what archaeology produces, the valuation of it, and the mechanisms of this production and consumption.

As is pointed out, commodities possess value and we must remember that value is subjective and changeable. Economics seeks to quantify the values placed on commodities as well as the relationship of supply and demand of that commodity which affects the value. By formulating commodities we are forced to ask exactly what the 'public', in all its forms, are consuming and, more importantly, for what reasons. The public clearly have a need for archaeological commodities and the success of Wheeler in providing them demonstrates the potential mutual benefits of understanding that need. A clear mandate for public archaeology is therefore to understand the public demand for archaeological commodities.

However, if we are able to understand the demand for archaeological commodities (a difficult task indeed!), this generates questions about how supply meets this demand. What is archaeology's role in meeting the public's demand? Should we simply tailor production to meet that demand or do we have our own 'expert' agenda? Do we take advantage, or exploit, the public's demand to satisfy internal aims, such as Wheeler's sale of archaeological material and informational commodities to help fund his excavations and promote his work? In this regard, public archaeology can have a clear role in providing a theoretical and practical framework for the archaeology 'industry' in the relationship of supply and demand.

By defining public archaeology as 'that part of the discipline concerned with studying and critiquing the process of production and consumption of archaeological commodities' it throws into sharp contrast the need to understand how and why the public consume archaeology and how archaeology reacts to that demand. I would argue that a data driven approach is key to the first of these tasks while a theoretical framework must be developed for the second. This approach positions public archaeology firmly between supply and demand of archaeological commodities and between the archaeological 'industry' and the public it ultimately serves.