



SOCIETY OF
ANTIQUARIES
OF LONDON

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STATEMENT OF VALUES

Introduction

The Society of Antiquaries of London has been in existence for more than 300 years, and a fundamental feature of its own history is a clear understanding of how the values attached to and recognized within the cultural heritage vary through time. Equally, there is always a valid diversity of position and opinion amongst both specialists and non-specialists. The Society will itself always reflect current priorities, especially as it is constituted of many hundreds of Fellows with their own interests, experience and expertise (a substantial proportion of whom are leading professional practitioners), but distinctive to the Society is our collective ability and duty to take the long view. Collectively, the Fellows can also bring the Society's own wealth of cultural resources, authority and learning to bear on a wide range of issues pertaining to the study, conservation and promotion of the material residues of the past.

The Society's Charter declares that we exist for:

The encouragement, advancement and furtherance of the study and knowledge of the antiquities and history of this and other countries.

While the Society's Strategic Plan outlines how these aims will be promoted through the key activities of conservation, research and dissemination, understandings of what is meant by the terms outlined in the Society's Charter are in practice highly diverse, and constantly developing. 'Knowledge of antiquities' can be understood both as learning about the archaeological and historical records as source material for the story of the past, and as the more general analysis and interpretation of our human cultural relationship with the historic environment, artefacts and art. Expertise in this subject area is also now more widely understood to incorporate the study of the uses and impacts of the past in contemporary society.

The '*Statement of Values*' outlines the core values that the Society supports and for which it advocates, relating those values to its overall mission and strategy. The statement articulates what makes the Society distinctive, what drives the Society and what role the Society envisages for itself in the future. The values encapsulated in the statement focus on the Society's commitment to pursuing research excellence, endorsing the premise that sound investigation facilitates understanding of the significance of the past and its meaning to multiple audiences. Additionally, the Statement of Values champions the relevance of archaeological and historic remains to contemporary society, asserting the value of ancient and historic monuments, artefacts and artworks in terms of their social, cultural and economic value as well as their intellectual and scientific importance.

While numerous organisations and bodies have generated policy and strategy documents asserting the significance of the past, these statements tend to focus on legal frameworks, ethical issues and professional standards. This statement of Values adopts a more 'conceptual' approach to the delineation of core values that is designed with both professional and non-professional audiences in mind. Accordingly, it provides a more general declaration of how the Society, representing the Fellows as a diverse community, perceives and values the archaeological/material historic resource. Future strategy and policy documents drafted by the Society will build on this key document. This statement will be reviewed by Council on an annual basis.

Core Values

The Society supports and promotes:

Recognition of the relevance of understanding the past to present and future generations and how the past provides key resources with which people and communities identify.

Appreciation of the material remains of the past created by all peoples in all parts of the world and a respectful attitude towards different ways and traditions of valuing the past.

Recognition of the duty of care incumbent on owners and guardians of heritage, both public and private, to protect and conserve the material residues of the past for future generations.

Encouragement of the sustainable management of remains of the past as a resource for study and public engagement.

Rigorous research on the archaeological and historic resource, so that knowledge and understanding of human history and development in its physical and cultural environments will continue to grow.

The critical importance of developing our interpretations of the past through research based on scientific principles, i.e. “...the pursuit and application of knowledge and understanding of the natural and social world following a systematic methodology based on evidence” (Science Council’s definition).

Academic and public debate on research findings, which is viewed as essential to the critical evaluation and advancement of the understanding of the past.

The support and promotion of the diverse range of institutions that facilitate research (e.g. those organisations, public and private, that collect, curate and encourage use of heritage resources).

The growth of the wider research and heritage community through partnership and collaboration with other institutions and stakeholders.

Widening engagement in the study, debate, and enjoyment of the material past, appealing to audiences that have traditionally been excluded from this process.

The development of new approaches to enhancing the wider public appreciation of the past.

Efforts to stop the willful destruction of the archaeological and historic resource and the illicit trade in antiquities. Active and determined efforts to develop effective legal frameworks for the protection of cultural heritage, through a responsible approach both to consultation and campaigning.