Organisation: Crow Archaeology
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Topic: Designated Heritage Asset data: QGIS stylesheets

Background

Innovation for me is not only about technical or methodological change but also about practice. Commercial models in archaeology (and more widely outside the digital economy) revolve around the direct sale of services and knowledge. My approach with the creation and release of the QGIS stylesheets to my professional and volunteer colleagues was to bring some of the model that has become familiar in digital spaces to commercial archaeology, which operates primarily on a conventional service industry model.

In technical terms, the stylesheets feature various scripts that power their functionality. In many day-to-day situations GIS end users in archaeological companies and volunteer organisations are often not GIS specialists (consultants are a good example of this) so data is often managed and displayed in an ad hoc way. The use of scripts to govern data behaviours is thus uncommon in the sector at large so the stylesheets innovate by making relevant scripting visible and accessible to non-specialist end users.

Why stylesheets?

I decided to develop the stylesheets because I saw a need across the sector for easy-to-use GIS symbology for the essential statutory reference dataset in the most accessible format possible. This comes from my own experience with large and small companies in different areas of the sector. Many companies and organisations in archaeology use the open source QGIS application because of the prohibitive cost of the industry-leading GIS software ESRI ArcMap. Companies that make this choice have a heightened vulnerability to disruption and increased costs resulting from data-handling issues. I felt that such businesses and organisations would benefit from a freely available resource designed to work with QGIS to assist in day-to-day data handling, querying and display.

How it will help others

Nearly every organisation working in archaeology in England will need to refer to, reproduce and display Historic England's Designated Heritage Asset data at some point in the normal course of their activities. One of the barriers to working with this data effectively is the complexity and steep learning curve of GIS applications. Companies of all sizes and shapes often lack either the in-house expertise or time and budget to develop systems that their GIS users need on a day-to-day basis. I take the view that by creating the stylesheets and making them available to all in the most accessible format, I help my colleagues across the sector to better manage, query and display their data. This in turn improves workflows and relieves pressure on time and budgets during a period where businesses and employees are highly vulnerable. I hope also that it will provide a model for others to develop their own stylesheets and contribute to technical expertise in GIS and brand identities across the sector.