

ARCHAEOLOGY AS EDUCATION

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In this issue of *ARC* we leave the inward-looking themes of recent issues and turn again to the consideration of the place of archaeology in a wider social context. In this way we return to a topic which has characterised previous *ARC* volumes on 'Archaeology and the Public' and 'Archaeology and Politics'. We make no apologies for abutting so closely to previous topics, for much remains to be discussed.

The literature on the relationship between archaeology and education is large and seems almost to grow daily. On one side, it is fostered by an increasing number of teachers who see archaeology as an ideal medium for the formal teaching of skills and concepts in the school curriculum. On the other, it is fostered by archaeologists who, whether for reasons of social conscience or the need for funding, are keen to develop a higher profile for their activities.

In this volume we have attempted to avoid the lengthy description of particular examples of education-oriented archaeology projects and archaeology-oriented education projects: there are many of these in print already. Instead, we have attempted to gather together a collection of papers which discuss some of the more fundamental questions which underlie the relationship between archaeology and education. We feel it is neither a case of teaching archaeology solely because of some of the skills and concepts it embodies, nor because it can teach us about the human past not recorded by documentary history. Instead, it is the combination of these two aspects, and the subject's potential for encouraging discussion of more immediate value for modern society (see, for example, Johnson and Holman 1986), which makes the publicising of archaeology more valuable than any single rationale implies.

The relationship between archaeology and education is such that it should be impossible for archaeologists to utter or write a word in public without considering the educational implications of that word. Whether they are talking in a formal setting to undergraduates, to young children visiting a museum for the first time, or to members of the public standing beside the trench of an inner-city rescue excavation, archaeologists have the potential to contribute to society. This may appear a lofty -- even arrogant -- statement, but it is nevertheless true. It is only the "residual guilt about personal self-indulgence" (Pretty, this volume, p. 115) which many archaeologists feel, and the perennial debate about whether archaeology is a 'science' or an 'art', which prevent a clear sense of purpose from being an integral part of the discipline. It is this very fundamental relationship between archaeology and education which has encouraged us to entitle this volume "Archaeology as Education".

(Archaeological Review from Cambridge 6:2 [1987])

Archaeology, Society and Education in the 1980s

The lengthy discussion of the relationship between archaeological research and contemporary society in Grahame Clark's *Archaeology and Society*, first published in 1939 and subsequently reissued several times, can be seen as an important landmark in archaeological thinking. However, times have changed, and Clark's underlying emphasis on positivist philosophies -- the past is knowable -- and the importance of social integration at all levels must now be questioned. On the first point he writes:

...what one is...concerned with in the context of education is the way in which archaeology brings us up against the frontiers of knowledge, bids us look into the void of the unknown, and shows how, by deploying the resources of modern science, technology, and scholarship, progressively larger areas can be brought within the sphere of exact knowledge (1960, 253; emphasis added).

The most fundamental change in archaeological thinking over the last two decades is the widespread appreciation that archaeology is not capable of acquiring "exact knowledge" in the straightforward manner which previously had been assumed. Whether one refers to 'hermeneutics', 'epistemology' or just plain-old 'theory', the fact remains that the excitement and danger of discovery has been replaced by the excitement and danger of interpretation. Of course, the excitement is of a different form and the danger is political rather than physical, but the excitement, nevertheless, remains and should not, we suggest, be inherently less interesting to a discerning public audience. Two implications stem from this. Firstly, archaeologists -- in common with, for example, historians -- must present their researches to the public in such a way that the necessary inferential leaps and the political nature of the discipline are communicated. Secondly, the pluralism which seems to stem from the incompleteness of the archaeological record and also, more fundamentally, the use of inference, should be encouraged -- even to the extent, perhaps, of suggesting to the public that they too can try their hand at archaeological interpretation. After all, the interpretations of the British Bronze Age arrived at by children in Southampton and described in Hill's paper (this volume, p. 149) seem very similar to those of established archaeologists! This change in attitude is certainly unlikely to dissuade people from involving themselves in archaeology and, indeed, is quite likely to be an appropriate alternative to traditional interest in archaeology which stems from ill-informed notions of the discipline's methods and objectives.

We are conscious of the negative aspects of the prescription we have outlined. Are not members of the public likely to ask: "if archaeologists cannot 'prove' what happened in the past, surely they do not deserve the respect of society (and funding from the public purse)?" Many archaeologists would disagree with description of the

limitations of archaeological method we have outlined, which is broadly derived from the so-called 'post-processual school' (Hodder 1984). These dissenters would be likely to follow Lew Binford in arguing that "science is a learning process" and in maintaining that scientific archaeology is learning to understand the archaeological record. If this is a true perception of the discipline, and the pluralism many advocate is just evidence of 'bad science', then surely we could still present archaeology to the public as an exciting adventure in science rather than an exciting adventure in the jungle à la Indiana Jones. Those who argue that this approach would not be popular -- and let us not forget the popularity, amongst all ages, of 'self-discovery' galleries in science museums -- will need to justify a position which is capable of being interpreted as elitism.

Turning to the question of social integration raised by Clark, it is stated that:

Anything that entertains individuals and at the same time increases their sense of being alive must be accounted a benefit to society at large, but what I am thinking of now is something more specific, the contribution archaeology can make to social solidarity and integration (1960, 255).

Clark argues that if the past is knowable, and if archaeology proves the unity of mankind, its archaeology's duty is to promulgate this fact as widely as possible in the hope that it will help to ensure the survival of the human race. The motive is one to which all people subscribe, of course, but we should reflect on the programme by which this aim can be achieved since it illuminates the unavoidable link between the private and public faces of the archaeological profession. Whether an archaeologist, as educator, stresses solidarity and integration over diversity is closely related in many respects to whether he or she espouses, as researcher, processual or post-processual philosophies. If, as we would hope, it is unnecessary for humankind to learn about the fossil hominid record, in order to spur it into efforts to prevent World War Three, then perhaps archaeology should concern itself with more parochial concerns. We all live in increasingly multi-racial societies and the inventiveness and vigour of the human race can only be assured if diversity is encouraged and stressed over uniformity. In this respect, not only must cultural diversity be protected, but so must the diversity of approaches to knowledge, including archaeological knowledge. To quote Reece (this volume, p. 177), "those who run society for their own nasty ends want as few original people as possible." Once again, in this argument, the inextricable relationship, not only between archaeology and society, but also between the research and educational aspects of archaeology, cannot be avoided.

Archaeological Educations

Let us go beyond saying that whenever archaeologists communicate they are engaged in archaeology as education and be more precise about

the contexts in which this happens. With a few laudable exceptions, the use of archaeology in schools has traditionally been spasmodic, cursory and ill-informed -- a brief backdrop to documentary history. Archaeologists have seldom gone into the classroom themselves or prepared suitable teaching materials, for which there are numerous reasons we will not delve into here. This attitude is changing (see Kissonock and Hill, this volume), and now that opportunities to reach young people are increasing, not least through the impact of the new General Certificate of Secondary Education, it is more necessary than ever for archaeologists to consider carefully what we wish to achieve as educators.

Clearly, however, education is not restricted to formal contexts (a point discussed in this volume by Holman). This is perhaps particularly true for our notion of archaeology as education: practical archaeology can be unexpectedly encountered in city streets and in the middle of the countryside -- in people's back gardens and neighbourhoods -- and the results of this practical archaeology are often found in the Media and, of course, in museums. It is this close involvement of the Public with archaeology which will foster a better understanding of 'real' archaeology in which 'dirt' and 'theory' are inextricably linked. All too often, however, contemporary archaeological thought never reaches the public. «By a system of over-simplification, sensationalism, selectivity and dogmatism -- presented in museum displays, broadcasting and popular literature -- archaeology as presented to the public is reduced to old-fashioned ideas, which, it is presumed, 'everyone' can relate to.» Such popular education in archaeology, however, excludes large areas of the population: assumptions of white, male supremacy predominate in a way which might have been more widely acceptable thirty years ago, but they certainly are not now (see Burt and Emmott, this volume). There is no sound reason why the dichotomy between the dynamics of archaeological thought and static popular presentation should continue: if it does, we will be ignoring our recognised ability to educate. The articles in this volume recognise that archaeology can be education for many different people, for everybody, in fact (see Pretty, this volume), and thus highlight the point that it is not sufficient for most archaeologists to work in a social vacuum, secure in the knowledge that a few token people are doing enough for archaeological education by going into the classroom and teaching groups of children or interested adults.

The archaeological education given in universities is often overlooked when considering how professional archaeology is presented to a wider audience. Once again, the split between 'Academia' and 'the Public' is clear for all to see. As Reece (this volume) points out, however, this education should be just as rigorously analysed as that taking place in schools, if not more so. Archaeology is not sacrosanct when taught by 'real' archaeologists in its academic home. Rather, a university education should seek to enlighten future archaeologists to the world outside, not bury them deep in professional postholes.

Archaeology as education means reconsidering not only present methods of educating, but also archaeology's place in society. We must get away from the idea that, whilst theoretical dynamics are allowable

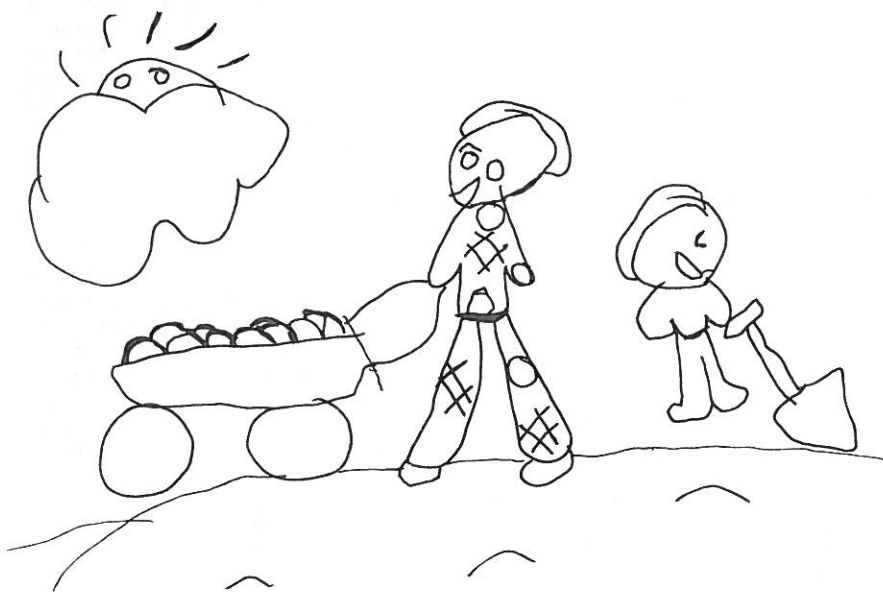


Illustration by Kelsey Boast

within the profession, in displaying our work to the public we must conform to a set form of ideas. All archaeology is education and therefore we should reject our image as the 'cowboys (and girls?) of science' and, with a renewed purpose to our discipline, aim to provide a comprehensive, challenging and well thought-out education.

Acknowledgements

We would like to take this opportunity to thank Colin Shell for his continued assistance without which ARC would never be produced. Also, we would especially like to thank the young artists who have contributed to this volume: who knows, when the papers in this volume have been discarded in favour of newer -- and better -- ones, it may be these aesthetic contributions which endure!

References

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL EDUCATION FOR EVERYBODY

Kate Pretty

For some years I was the Chairwoman of the School's Committee of the Council for British Archaeology and was closely concerned with its attempts to define a framework for the teaching of archaeology in schools. At that time of educational innocence we thought of the study of archaeology in schools, and indeed universities, as requiring no particular justification, regarding a knowledge of archaeology, which subsumed prehistory, as self-evident personal enrichment for the student. Now, faced with the need to justify the study of archaeology in a utilitarian sense, both for personal growth and social investment, we may need to be harder-headed about defining the value of archaeology as an education in itself, both in schools and in higher education. To do this requires professional archaeologists and teachers of archaeology to confront their own residual guilt about potential self-indulgence and come up with a well-defined and corporate strategy about the value of a knowledge of archaeology to society as a whole, as well as to the individual within society.

One of the first questions must be -- do archaeologists agree that theirs is a valuable discipline? I think that an awful lot of them are not sure. Faced by the question, "what use is it?", surprisingly few students, teachers or professional field archaeologists can demonstrate that they have analysed why it is a consuming interest for them and why that interest might transcend the personal and be of use to others. There is an underlying feeling that personal enrichment and motivation is the basis of their own commitment, and that this is an insufficient reason for studying archaeology.

That field archaeologists enjoy what they do is patently clear: practical fieldwork in uncomfortable physical circumstances, for low rates of pay, and with no obvious career structure, must be counter-balanced by some sort of reward and job satisfaction which outweighs the drawbacks of the profession. The sense of belonging to a small-scale society, coupled with peer-group approbation, are strong incentives for remaining in this under-paid and under-rated world. To those archaeologists working within a more specifically academic environment, as teachers and research workers in higher education, schools and museums, their personal enjoyment of the subject is sometimes seen merely as the backdrop to the pursuit of education in itself. Here, being a good educationalist can gloss over the question of whether the product -- archaeology -- is worthwhile, in the interests of whether the exponent is a good salesperson of archaeology, whatever its value.

A puritan tendency to believe that whatever you enjoy cannot be good for you may be at the base of this latent self-denigration of