

## Archaeology Reflective journal

Being my first course on the academic side of archaeology I started with no solid definition of the actual meaning of archaeology, however I think Kristian Kristiansen provides a agreeable one, "archaeology is the study and preservation of the material remains of past societies and their environment, that nowadays also includes modern culture"[1]. Despite this archeology is still a miss match of all elements of study as it aims to understand the historical conditions which governed the lives of people in both a small locality and the wider more global historical context, with this comes many pseudopods into many a different field shown by the many complementary names now in use in contemporary archeology, such as behavioral archaeology, conventional, experimental, evolutionist, nautical, ethological, even Marxist, bioarchaeology, geoarchaeology and so forth. All of which have come with the advent of "new archaeology" with which the old tensions between archaeology and another humanities is no longer present, "it is no longer a question of archaeology but of archaeologies"[2] as summarized by Paul Courbin. These all intertwine in order to create historical context in both pre-history and historic societies. In this journal I will account briefly my exploration into the history of archaeology, the methods that I have observed being used in the two excavations I had the honour of being a part of along with fieldwork techniques explained in lectures and through the graveyard survey.

The word pre-history was coined in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a tool to describe the long period of human existence which, being undocumented, can only be explored through the interpretation of material evidence. A firm concept of which only establishing itself in 1850, however since early archaeologists had not enough funds to travel across the globe most of the archaeological understanding and contextualizing of time during this period is based on European and American ethnocentrism, missing the development of Asian societies and cultures. Although some element of this remains despite the development of a more solid world prehistory, as a thought of how societal evolution occurs and manifests quite often ignores those societies which have no equivalent form of recording history to writing, but record their history in another method, are considered to have no history and are lumped into pre-history which is considered a western concept (Mamani 1989:51) this is still shown in popular media such as Sid Meier's Civilization franchise which arbitrarily decides which histories are worthy of recording and being featured within the game, and within those societies what elements are worthier still of being featured. Why all this talk of prehistory? Well without archaeology a concept of prehistory would be impossible to solidify as without written records to reference a framework of a timeline needs to be established from artefacts, sites and anthropological conclusions. Furthermore this concept of prehistory comes from a search for human origin which demanded a broad idea of progression and evolution, these going from the biblical creation idea of the world being created in 4004bc to a general idea of evolution explained in the work of Marx where this stage of human development would fit into primitive communism or the ancient systems. That is not to say these were the earliest attempts at understanding of the significant amount of time that had already passed, for instance Hesiod wrote of the five stages of man and Lucretius birthed the three-age system through expressing the successive importance of stone, bronze and iron. In this general need to establish a timeline antiquarianism was established during the scientific revolution with the want to approach any subject through the lens of comparison and classification as shown by William Camden in *Britannia* or John Aubrey in *Monumenta Britannica*. America had developed its indigenous archaeological interest by the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Trigger 2006: 177-89) only then shifting its attention from ethnographic accounts of the natives to sites and

artefacts. This focus on artefacts led to typology, then from typology to a focus on the context of objects shown by C.J. Thomsen who tried to expand archaeology as a general cultural pursuit to wider audiences and not just for personal collections of rich hobbyists or as displays of colonial and national might. C.J. Thomsen would demonstrate the validity of the three age system through cutting-weapons and tools found in closed finds, and Worsaae would expand the stone age into three subdivisions. These then were developed into the modern definitions of the Paleolithic, Neolithic and Mesolithic by Sir John Lubbock. With the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and a more connected world the concept of world prehistory became less about justifying the view of the indigenous peoples being inferior to Europeans thanks to a new focus on marrying archaeological evidence with anthropological interpretation shown by the Torres Straits 1898 expedition to Polynesia.

In terms of excavations, the first was conducted at the request of Hereford Sixth Form College where a site that had previously been discovered and dug with test pits was given full funding to complete a larger scale excavation where volunteer students could work closely with local professional archaeologists. The original site was found using aerial photography which through revealing soilmarks showed evidence of human activity and habitation whereby the buried features interfere with plant growth. This technique being a useful supplement to fieldwork and cartography mainly developed after the first world war thanks to the experience gained in aerial reconnaissance. The excavation, like any other, focused on finding the context of a site along with the stratification and stratigraphy of the site, these are used along with superposition to establish a site timeline. The objective of stratification and historical observations is to allow for the establishment of culture-historical observations and through that an explanation of the site's history can be established in order to share these with the local population, which is what was done as the head archaeologist toured the main trench dressed as a milite in the middle of a heat wave to entertain the local primary school. To expand on stratification, contexts (a unit of stratification) was used on the site. Contexts emphasize the importance of interfaces between layers and its origins lie in the terms stratum and layer. Contexts are used because they allow for the recording of both disturbances by nature and human activity and unlike horizontal stratification allow for some indication of how long it took for a feature to accumulate, as a single stratum is unlikely to be uniform in date these contexts allow for date ranges within a stratum to be established and a more holistic view of a site to be realized. These date ranges are established through contextualization of artefacts or other dating methods such as radiocarbon dating, geological timescales, climatostratigraphy, varves, palynostratigraphy or dendrochronology[3]. The shells and animal bones frequently found on this Credenhill excavation help to determine what type of animals used the land and the presence and nature of human occupation, which turned out to be a Roman farm with a little cottage industry, these bones can also be used to establish a minimum number of individuals through the number of identified specimens. However since domesticated animals differ largely from modern day counterparts (Lepetz 1997) or it may be that the animals are too similar in relation to be told apart from simple observation, the help of the Herefordshire museum was needed in order to identify the nature of the animals that were present. As such this can be classified as environmental archaeological science which uses zoological and botanical evidence to establish relationships between the site, people and the environment this can also infer the economy of the area/ the site along with the society of the inhabitants of the site which can further provide an avenue for dating a site through the use of dated climatic phases in a country as shown by the work of Grahame Clark in Star Carr, Yorkshire.

Furthermore this can encompass the lice and bacteria whom affected the lives of the inhabitants of the site. This cannot be used by itself as only used in conjuncture with physical evidence and contexts can an interpretation that is not clouded from our presumptions about the environment- shown through the narratives of the fall of a civilization being attributed to a lack of precipitation or catastrophic damage caused by human farming leading to the collapse of civilizations (McIntosh et al 2000). Although not used during this three week excavation further environmental archeological science can be conducted through the ANS radiocarbon dating of soil cores which may contain DNA through shells bacteria and the like, further help to determine the nature of the land, human occupation and the subsequent economy of the region. Excavations had evolved from the horizontal layer complete picture ideals of the box section to the recording of sections within a trench as they present focused evidence for relationships within the site, therefore excavators are required to be more accurate in their recording of strata and of sketches and photographs, this therefore means that a single trench is a large time sink through meticulous records and therefore test pits are needed. Test pits were used in both digs but played a more prominent role in the Bartonsham History Group's local investigation to uncover the nature of abandoned and scarcely mentioned earthworks that had been theorized to be Victorian era sewer works, but instead turned out to be due to a nearby siege encampment by Scottish Parliamentary forces. Remaining true to their usefulness as a way to uncover archeology of a site without damaging the archeology or the surrounding environment too much, they did not provide much stratigraphic evidence but instead uncovered general litter as artefacts. Furthermore the dumpy level was used in both aswell, in the first to both train the students in its use and to establish an archeological constant with which to measure the heights of the environment against, and for the same end in the second which examined the heights of the landscape to examine the feasibility of the site being used as a siege camp. For instance using the measurements against the constant and landscape archeology to determine whether the landscape would have provided adequate cover from the towns battery or counterattack by the defenders.

Graveyard surveys are used to answer questions of culture and religion for instance the Bunhill fields show the economic power of the religious group known as the dissenters, furthermore "non conformists in south west Wales have extant 19<sup>th</sup> century records"[4] as well as questions of both personal and institutional economics with only a handful of marble-made graves, mostly neo-classical monuments, along with the local efforts to identify those in the paupers graves in St. Peter's church, and institutionally shown through the development of new burial techniques in response to difficulties in climate, such as St. Louis's locali as a reaction to the risk of graveyard flooding and subsequent public health concerns- most notably the open pit graves which were offered as a service to the poor and presented a public health concern even without the environmental conditions of St. Louis[5]. Furthermore Parish records of births and deaths can facilitate research into common illness, poverty, and the living conditions of those living in the locale . The Parish itself if approached from a landscape archeology perspective can also give indication of the history of a location, for instance a forgotten trade may be registered on one of the graves or the splendor of the appearance of the parish or the rarity of its architecture may reveal that the locale had past affluence, for instance cabin maker listed on a grave in St. Peter's church.

## References:

- 1: Kristian Kristiansen, *Archaeology an introduction* fifth edition, preface XIV what is our view of archaeology, Routledge 2010
- 2: *What is Archaeology?* , Paul Courbin, introduction xxi, translated by Paul Bahn, the University of Chicago press 1988. Originally published as *Qu'est-ce que l'archeologie? Essai sur la nature de la recherche archeologique*, Payot 1982
- 3: *Archaeological theory and scientific practice*, Andrew Jones, Cambridge University press 2002
- 4: *Public health and Private sentiment: the Development of Cemetery architecture and funerary monuments from the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards*, Harold Mytum, *World Archaeology* volume 21, No.2, The Archaeology of public health 283-297
- 5: *Public health and Private sentiment: the Development of Cemetery architecture and funerary monuments from the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards*, Harold Mytum, *World Archaeology* volume 21, No.2, The Archaeology of public health 283-297