

MASC 4

Annual IoA Masters Student Conference

3rd June 2016, 10:00 – 20:00
Rm. Maths 505, 25 Gordon Street, London



Conference Abstracts

► ADVANCED APPROACHES TO ARCHAEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATIONS

The Spatial Distribution of Iron Age Hillforts in the British Isles

Simon Maddison, MSc GIS and Spatial Analysis in Archaeology Institute of Archaeology, UCL

Although amongst the most iconic and clearly visible of prehistoric remains in Britain, Hillforts are generally poorly investigated and understood. There are some 3500 known sites on the British mainland, and a joint project out of Oxford and Edinburgh is now well advanced in creating a definitive Atlas of Iron Age Hillforts in Britain and Ireland, a potentially valuable resource for future research. I am using this database to establish hypotheses relating to the spatial distribution of Hillforts, using modern spatial analysis and Geographical Information Systems (GIS) methods and tools. This will be the basis of my dissertation. This study includes locational analyses, on a regional scale, to establish: what geographic and topographical characteristics may have been significant determinants in Hillfort location; possible hierarchical relationships between Hillforts, based on their distribution and individual features such as vallation and area; what networks of Hillforts may have existed and the magnitude of interaction between them. Initial analysis for the whole of Britain has focused on identifying 'natural' groupings of Hillforts, based purely on Euclidean distance between them, using a technique called percolation analysis, often applied in geography. This has produced some very interesting results showing clusters that have a distinct regional structure. It has also been applied to sites in Ireland, showing quite different patterns. This paper will present and discuss these initial results, further work that has been carried out in the meantime, and the potential for further research.

Using 3D geometric morphometrics in the interpretation of archaeological skeletal material: biomechanics and osteoarthritis

Lillian Stoke, MSc Bioarchaeology and Forensic Anthropology, University College London

Examination of skeletal material within archaeology is becoming more and more accurate through a strong link with forensic anthropology. As a result, researchers in osteology are increasingly using digital methods of analysis. In this research, a 3d laser scanner is used to

estimate the degree of angulation in the proximal femur as an attempt to assess its role in the onset of osteoarthritis. The data is collected from 50 adult individuals, both male and female, from the Chichester collection held at UCL, dating from the 12th century AD. Individuals are chosen on their preservation, and both left and right femurs are intact with the acetabulum in a condition to be considered for evidence of osteoarthritis. Each femur is scanned using a NextEngine 3D scanner creating a digital copy of the element, after which measurements of length and angulation will be conducted using Landmark Editor. The hypothesis behind this testing is that a degree of angulation which varies greatly from the norm will have resulted in an unstable joint which in turn caused an unusual wear pattern and the breakdown of the articular cartilage. Research such as this could be useful to future researches for two main reasons: firstly it considers the role of modern 3D technology in scientific analysis of osteological material, and secondly as it provides the potential for the sharing of interesting specimens worldwide; where research such as his to remain in a digital format, 3D clones of osteological material could be shared through the internet and interpretations shared in minutes.

► HERITAGE AND MODERN CULTURAL DEVELOPMENTS

The representation of the Plain of Jars reinterpreted

Barbora Brederova, MA Cultural Heritage Studies, UCL

Cultural heritage, the World Heritage sites in particular, is agreed to be playing a major role in the formation of modern identities, as well as in current economic and political developments. The Plain of Jars is an Iron Age site consisted of hundreds of large stone jars (some up to 3m high) scattered in clusters across Xiang Xuang Plateau in the north-eastern province of Laos, SE Asia. Due to the virtual lack of scientific research on the site, not much is know about this enigmatic legacy of Asia's ancestors. The only, and rather vague, hypothesis interprets the vessels as funerary urns of some sort. Since 1992, the vast archaeological landscape is for its uniqueness registered on the UNESCO's tentative list, but has not been ascribed the World Heritage status yet. The aim of my presentation is to explore the evidence for the delay, which I find in the time of the Vietnam War and the current social and political environment of the Laotian nation. This will illustrate an alternative, heavily distorted image of the representation of the Plateau, where the memories of war violence are nourished daily by the deadly threats of unexploded ordnance left behind by the US forces.

Changing Perceptions: Does the public's perception of stone monuments change when within museums?

William Tregaskes, MSc Care of Collections, The University of Cardiff

Stone monuments have been part of British culture since the Neolithic, some such as Stonehenge and Avebury are known worldwide. Many stone monuments are interacted with today, from people visiting and walking through Neolithic monuments to the millions who pay their respects on memorial Sunday at war memorials. Many others have been moved and are currently on display in museums across the United Kingdom. This brings to question whether the action of moving a stone monument into a museum affects the public's relationship and perception of stone monuments. For example would removing a stone memorial located upon the cliff side at Lamorna Cornwall, full of the wind and smells of the Cornish coast affect how people respond to this memorial, memorialising a tragic accident upon those cliffs? This study will seek to understand whether the public respond differently to stone monuments on display in museums and stone monuments located outside. This will be done through public engagement, It is essential the public are involved as museums must represent the society they are within. The focus of the study will be a replica stone cross placed in two different locations firstly inside a museum and secondly outside of Abergavenny Castle set beneath the Brecon Beacons. This study will be completed during the summer of 2016. This presentation will be illustrating why the study is important to museum and heritage studies; the relationship between museums and the public and will also promote this research area and the progress made so far in the study.

Present the Past, for whom, for what?: Comparative study of presentation of development-led archaeology between England and Japan

Kohei Inahata, MA in Research Methods in Archaeology, University College London

Most countries have developed a set of public policies that try to reconcile economic development and protection of archaeological sites. Despite the huge amount of money invested in excavation, many of these policies do not have a rigid system of returning benefits to society, because they have been installed with the urgent need to rescue archaeological sites in danger from the destruction by development. In other words, their focus is usually on the protection and preservation, not on creating values. Recently, there have been criticisms and political pressure on them, which would undermine political support from public, the foundations of the preservation of archaeological sites. Such kind of pressure has become higher and more serious in the age of austerity. Against this backdrop, in some countries there are an increasing number of attempts to make rescued archaeological sites more visible and beneficial to society by creating economic benefits and social opportunities. My research is a comparative study of such a new direction of creating economic and social values through development-led archaeology,

between England and Japan, as typical examples for the two contrasting ways of governing development-led archaeology; 'market-based' and 'state-run' approach. The research reveals that the difference between two approaches would affect the way in which archaeologists present the past through setting different audience and making different perception about archaeological sites and materials.

► PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT: TOWARDS INCLUSIVE PARTICIPATION

Enabling Archaeology

Theresa O'Mahony, MA Public Archaeology, University College London

In today's archaeological arena engaging the public in any archaeological activity can be a losing battle, with engagement by disability groups and individuals at an all-time low. In this session how we can engage and encourage disabled/enabled participation within public archaeology will be discussed. By building confidence and self-worth within public archaeology activities can encourage many more enabled people to participate in archaeology today. With all disabilities and able-bodied people being equipped together through the same archaeology project/activity, negative barriers towards disabled/enabled inclusion can be gradually broken down. Every member of a project learning and sharing together will take away the fear and suspicion held by some within our different 'publics'. This in turn will raise awareness, familiarity and knowledge of disabilities within public archaeology. Encouraging a shift or change in attitudes towards equal opportunities for all within the public archaeology remit, at last perhaps even being accepted as enabled participants with our own personalities, characters and lives.

Archaeological field schools in the UK: what, where and how?

Arabella Roberts, MA Public Archaeology, University College London

Archaeological field schools are viewed as the first port of call for aspiring archaeologists, serving as major research outlets for archaeological organizations and often represent the sector within the media. Their importance is well developed and, until now, viewed as well understood. When starting research on field schools, confused responses were given to simple questions on definition, curriculum, length, cost, demographic and standards. I set out to answer some of these questions over three stages. The first considered context, looking at how training in archaeology developed over 50 years in relation to economy, government legislation and the sector. The second addressed the definition; comparing different terms used and seeing where the term 'field school' belonged and, importantly, who belonged within it. The final section looked to data. Drawing from the first database of UK field schools and a qualitative survey of recent

field school attendees, they demonstrated broad confusion over definition and expectations, fueled by a lacking regularity on length, demographic, cost and curriculum. This research shows a fundamental area of the sector which, in the UK and contrary to its academic counterpart, has failed to develop in a way which caters to the demands and regulations required by its participants. Current economic difficulties field schools are facing has forced them to develop. It is therefore a perfect opportunity – albeit well overdue – to develop field schools as strategic and fairer assets. The data produced and topics discussed in this presentation hope to mark the start of this process.

Does Forensic Archaeological Science have an image problem?

Mike Walters, MSc Bioarchaeological and Forensic Anthropology, University College London

This paper explores the relationship of forensic archaeological sciences (archaeology, anthropology and odontology) and the media. This is achieved through comparison of the media of other fields to medias in the field. They are discussed in view of their effectiveness in accurately communicating the work of their respective fields. Finally, these findings are discussed in light of public engagement in the topic, and the subsequent political and legal effects thereof.

► THE ROLE OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL FICTION IN MODERN SOCIETY

The ‘archaeologist as scholar’ and his roles in fictional narratives

Lisa Randisi, MA Public Archaeology, University College London

If one is to believe the popular media, or, for that matter, the exasperated rants of many an academic, the pervading public perception of the archaeologist is that of the adventurous artefact hunter, the ‘dig first, ask later’ explorer epitomised by Indiana Jones or Lara Croft. Much analysed, celebrated and deplored, the archetype seems to have been accepted by the discipline as an inevitable figurehead. But what of the other side of the coin, the archaeological scholar? Depictions of the archaeologist as scholar, bespectacled and socially awkward, are far more pervasive than one might think, yet have received considerably less attention. This is to our detriment, as these portrayals have a lot to tell us about public perceptions and understandings of archaeology. By analysing the tropes prevalent in various media of archaeology-themed fiction – such as the scholar as victim, villain or one half of an adventurer/scholar duo – this paper aims to answer the questions: What role do these characters play, and what does this say about the way the public perceives archaeologists? Embedded in these fictional portrayals lie critiques of our practice and attitude towards the public, of poor communication and engagement strategies, but also testimonies to the values attributed to archaeology, its practitioners and the knowledge

they hold. In comparison, the scholar portrayed by archaeologists – who themselves have produced an impressive amount of fiction over the past 150 years – is rarely an archetype, but rather a character in a human drama set against the realistic backdrop of an excavation site. They hint at an existing interest in the human aspects of the archaeological profession, perhaps greater than in the actual outcome of the research. This too makes for an important lesson, an opportunity to engage in a new and relevant way with the public which remains little explored.

Is it Worth Trying to Debunk Alternative Archaeologies?

Sophie-May Jones, MA Public Archaeology, University College London

Alternative archaeology encompasses various theories; stretching from extreme ideas such as the lost city of Atlantis or the lunatic theories of UFO intervention, to the more tame Mother Goddess cult at Çatalhöyük or the Druids at Stonehenge. I will briefly discuss the different terms we use for alternative archaeology and the difficulty in separating the harmless theories from the outright unacceptable ones. The main aim of this paper however, is to discuss whether it is worth the effort of professional archaeologists to debunk the unscientifically proven theories of alternative archaeology. I will discuss the idea of academic elitism within the field of archaeology, and argue to what extent archaeologists have brought the rise of alternative archaeology on themselves? I will present two key case studies; one which discusses the role of Celtic alternative archaeology in European nationalism, and the other which looks into the rise of New Age beliefs and paganism in Britain. Drawing on these examples I will discuss exactly what it is that makes alternative archaeology so attractive to the public, and discuss how scientific archaeology might take inspiration from these motivations to become more appealing itself. With the growth of post-modernist and relativist theories, I will finally look at whether we are moving into a period of greater acceptance and inclusivity within archaeology, and ultimately ask the question of “who owns the past anyway?”