



Conference programme

8.45-9.00 Registration

9.00-10.15 Session I – Theorising places and landscapes

Donald Adamson, University of Glasgow

Understanding Pre-Clearance Society in the Scottish Highlands: the role of archaeology

The question of land reform in Scotland remains a contentious matter. Landowning interests are set frequently against reforming elements within contemporary Scottish society. A touchstone in this debate remains the Highland Clearances. It is argued in this paper that it has suited both sides, ironically, to perceive pre-Clearance Highland society in similar terms. This is as static, unchanging, and culturally hostile to commercial enterprise. The landscape can then be populated by either victims or those doomed to be removed from their land by the inevitable logic of economics, according to taste.

As historians have begun to realise that the picture of pre-Improvement Gaelic society needs to be re-written, what role is there for archaeology? By taking a focus on the archaeology of the export of cattle and grain from the Highlands, it is suggested that the Gaels re-emerge as confident and optimistic agents of change. It is recognised that this re-interpretation will itself be subject to simplification and political manipulation in the Scotland of today.

Kevin Grant, University of Glasgow

Chorography, a Sense of Place, and Tone-deaf Cows

Mark Gillings has recently (2010) argued against the suggestion that some antiquarians practiced a kind of 'proto-phenomenology', as argued by some post-processual archaeologists. Instead, Gillings suggests that antiquarian practice related to the earlier idea of Chorography – an ancient, ill-defined practice concerned with evoking a 'sense of place'. Chorographic understandings of landscape sought to evoke the character and 'placeness' of a place by inhabiting, sketching, and writing about the landscape. Often, these understandings of place were concerned as much with the present as with the past, discussing topography, archaeology, folklore, landscape 'gossip', and first hand accounts of experiences of the landscape.

In this paper I will argue that aspects of this approach are present in some 20th century publications concerning Modern period occupation of Scotland's Highlands and Islands. These discussions of the past as 'Folk Life' are rich in incidental detail and anecdotal evidence, giving a detailed description of life in the past.

With reference to a case study in South Uist in the Outer Hebrides, I also hope to explore the potential usefulness today of a rich, evocative, 'chorographic' approach which promotes the "re-enchantment of landscapes deemed to have been disenchanting by science" (Gillings 2010: 54). I will also discuss how it may be possible for such a rich sense of place may be communicated to an academic audience through traditional and non-traditional methods.

Mark Mitchell, University of Glasgow

The Invisible War

The development of the military hospital in the 20th century is generally regarded in historical terms as an evolution of techniques and practices to cope with the changes in industrialised and mechanised warfare. However the archaeological significance of these structures has not been heavily investigated.

In this paper I will pursue key themes around the landscape placement of these facilities in Central Scotland during both world wars and to the present day utilising multiple case studies on hospitals and how their development reflects changes in the society and individuals that they served. Also, drawing upon my own family's involvement with military hospitals during both world wars and their historical perspective, it is intended to give an overview of the evolution of these structures in the landscape, the agency surrounding the transportation of patients and societies changing attitudes towards them and their patients.

10.15-10.45 tea break

10.45-12.00 Session II – Theorising material culture and representations

Alex Carnes, University of Glasgow

Material Culture and the Construction of Symbolic Environments: Explaining EBA monumentality in northern Scotland and Dartmoor

A comparative study of the EBA stone rows in northern Scotland and on Dartmoor, SW England, revealed them to 'be symbolic' of Neolithic long mounds, which in turn have been interpreted as 'representing' LBK long houses. This research begs subtle questions about how such archaeological sequences should be understood, for there is a distinct and important difference between symbolising an earlier tradition, i.e. representing it, and perpetuating its 'symbolic structure'. In order to progress these analyses it is necessary to ask some profound questions about what material culture actually is, and how it relates to the people and societies who produce it. A synthesis of new ideas from philosophy and evolutionary biology are presented in brief, and it

will be argued that the ways in which 'the environment' has been conceptualised in archaeological theory has been a major obstacle to the development of explanatory frames of reference; a proper concept of where individuals and society end and the environment begins is essential to understanding material culture and thus monumentality.

Courtney H. Buchanan, University of Glasgow

Vikings, frontiers, and identities: using postcolonial theories to understand identity formation in the Viking Age

Vikings have a fierce reputation as raiders, pillagers, plunderers, and even conquerors. However, in areas where Vikings came into contact with, but did not overwhelm, local inhabitants, they did not play out the stereotypical Viking role of ruthless warrior. More often than not, they were traders, merchants, farmers, and settlers who needed to interact (primarily peacefully) with those people already living in their new territories. Understanding the processes and outcomes of this interaction – not the least of which includes identity formation – has been the goal of many Viking studies over the years. This paper attempts to look beyond the traditional theoretical boundaries of Viking studies to find an appropriate framework in which to study these processes and outcomes of interaction. In particular, it will analyse recent theoretical developments from archaeologies of frontiers, borderlands, and boundaries, and apply postcolonial ideas of identity formation in such spaces. In order to test whether this is a useful theoretical framework for studying Viking and non-Viking interaction and identity formation, a case study of the Solway Firth region of the Irish Sea will be examined.

Dr. Roberta Rio, historian, Austria

The use of the Historical-Intuitive Method in the Decipherment of the Phaistos Disc

In today's archaeological finds, there are many things that we cannot explain. This has many reasons, one being the difficulty of dating, and another being that it can be very hard to understand the message that people in the past wished to convey. The difficulty of understanding lays both in the code of communication, which is no longer understood, and in the contents themselves, since neither of the two falls within our current wealth of knowledge.

This is a large void in classic historical-archaeological method; in its "objectivity" it needs reliable, interpretable and verifiable objects, yet it must rely "blindly" on the truth which is rarely demonstrable through the contents of the objects that are analyzed.

The methodological rigor can do little when the object found comes from far back in time, is only partial and encrypted, and has insufficient evidence to support a logical and rational understanding. The result can be nothing else but "un-understanding". To overcome this 'lack of inquiry', we propose using a new method of analysis; a method supported by intuition. The methodological rigor of archaeologists and historians is joined by the powerful non-rational method of intuition in finding a method which, overall, we define as 'historical-intuitive'. This method is shown in its application through a new and enlightening decipherment of the Phaistos Disc.

12.00-12.50 Lunch

12.50-3.50 Workshop - Embodiment and different experiences of the body and objects in the past

Delegates are strongly encouraged to participate in this unique workshop in which we will explore how we approach embodiment and experience the body. Delegates who do not wish to participate are able to attend SAF papers.

3.50-4.20 Round table discussion – reflecting upon the workshop and papers

4.30-5.00 Simon O'Dwyer, Ancient Music Ireland

Late Bronze Age Horns - presentation and performance

5.00-5.45 Keynote address

Dr. Audrey Horning, Professor of Archaeology, Queens University Belfast

Of ashtrays and canoes: time-travelling objects, colonial legacies, and contemporary practice

As archaeologists, we trade in things and promote the centrality of material culture in the construction of cultural worlds. Contemporary considerations of the meaning of colonial archaeological assemblages often explore the emancipatory power of the material record in highlighting indigenous agency. In affording such power to objects, however, we also have to acknowledge the strength of materially-encoded symbolic meanings. After all, 'colonial' objects still circulate freely in postcolonial worlds. In their resolute physicality, such objects can stymie attempts to deconstruct colonial legacies and re-envision postcolonial futures. I take as my point of departure two artefacts: one, a 1970's ceramic ashtray emblazoned with a decal of a victorious King William III astride a white horse at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690, and the other a Maliseet canoe once lost in the bowels of the National University of Ireland at Galway, repatriated from Ireland to Canada amidst much fanfare in the summer of 2009. While seemingly very disparate objects, the ashtray and the canoe tie together the historical and the fictive worlds of the colonial Atlantic, and provide their individual answers to the unresolved question of whether Ireland was actually a colony. They also mix temporalities; compressing time through their elision of past and present. Both objects were consciously manufactured to codify a version of a past, and attempt to mediate between worlds of their manufacture, the pasts they wish to evoke, and their ever-arriving presents. In recognition of the two themes of the STAG and SAF conferences, combining theory with practice and the experience of technology, I wish to explore the relationship of theoretical considerations of materiality and temporality with the practice of public archaeology in Northern Ireland, where the legacies of early modern British expansion remain very much unresolved.

5.45-6.00 Discussion

6.30 Conference dinner at Paperino's, Byres Road

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