

The Post Hole

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The Post Hole is a student run newsletter for all those interested in archaeology. It aims to promote discussion and the flow of ideas in the department of Archaeology for the University of York and the wider archaeological community. If you would like to get involved with the editorial process, writing articles or photography please email: Katie Marsden (<mailto:km531@york.ac.uk>) or Gemma Doherty (<mailto:gjd500@york.ac.uk>).

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1 Today's Post Boxes, Tomorrow's Postholes

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They're not exotic ancient axes, nor are they great buildings, but the humble post boxes scattered across our urban and rural landscapes are worth a second look and at least a few moments of reflection. Are they of any archaeological importance or even value? I think so, especially as archaeological evidence and artefacts become ever more contemporary (witness 20th century battlefield sites and Jodrell Bank). Around us we have, in a rather interesting form, clues to the commercial, social, industrial and political practices of the nation, its societies and even its individuals. The boxes still in use today span over 150 years of form, function and design. But of course the postal concept is much more ancient. In the picture above you should just be able to pick out what is a modern roadside box on a pedestal, its users mostly being tourists staying at the hotel or visiting the nearby Roman villa. Taken on the Foss Way in the Cotswolds, which was presumably a vital element of the Roman postal system, the *Cursus Publicus*, I think the photo can prompt a few thoughts about the passage of private, public and state information, in a reliable and secure manner (or not), over the past 2,000 years.

Visit an important Roman site and you might be presented with some evidence as to how the postal system worked and maybe even examples of the despatches carried. But from the end of the Roman period until relatively modern times there is little physical evidence of postal systems. Clearly volume would have been limited by poor literacy levels but political control of

information would have been an equally important constraint. Yet trade and commerce were presumably reliant on at least informal postal systems and there is some evidence that state and ecclesiastical organisations used some form of post boxes and collections in conducting their affairs. Perhaps the earliest in Europe were closed wooden boxes in 16th century churches in Florence used to leave anonymous notes denouncing sinners and traitors. Our oldest box is probably the one shown below in a coaching inn in Spilsby, Lincolnshire, dated to at least 1842 but perhaps as early as 1780. So in artefact terms we are dealing with recent material. However, it is rapidly disappearing but don't let that put you off. Tracking down old or unusual boxes can be as moreish as Pringles or Maltesers and you're always bound to pass a pub.

The Royal Mail was opened to public use by Charles I but it wasn't until Rowland Hill's introduction of the Penny Post in 1840 that volume of mail drove the need for roadside boxes. Too many customers were now rather remote from post offices which were the only place where mail was received. It was Anthony Trollope, then employed as Clerk to the Surveyor of the Western District of the Post Office, who suggested a trial of boxes in the Channel Islands in 1852. (Yes, it was a copy of a French system but our boxes are much superior!) An original is still in use in St Peter Port, Guernsey. The trial was an immediate success and quickly spread to the mainland. Oddly, London was slow on the uptake and the first mainland roadside box was in Carlisle in 1853, followed by Gloucester and then 6 boxes in London in 1855.



See text. (credit:author)

The Carlisle square pillar box is long departed and differed markedly to this one (above left) in Dorset dated 1856, made by John M Butt & Co of Gloucester which is the oldest still in use on the mainland. On the right is one of a pair in Framlingham, Suffolk, of the same year made by A Handyside of Derby for the Eastern District. Interestingly, Districts had a lot of autonomy over design and engaging foundries. The first London boxes were not popular (short, square and with notice plates too low to read and often obscured by dirt splashed from the street). Within a year they were gone and replaced by an ornate pillar design, much more pleasing to Victorian aesthetics. A bit like iron mushrooms, the Victorians then saw a range of pillar boxes sprouting until we arrived at the design that most of us are familiar with. Some are:



(L-R) Fluted, Banbury, 1856; Early Handyside, Lincoln, 1856; Liverpool Special 1863
(credit:author)



(L-R) 1st Standard, Rochdale, 1866; Penfold, Budby, Notts, 1866; Standard, York, 1887 (credit:author)

There is an impressive pair of fluted boxes in Warwick and 3 in Malvern, while Cheltenham still has 8 Penfolds but be careful; the Post Office commissioned replica Penfolds in the 1980s placed in historic sites, including one at Lincoln Cathedral which is clearly an Impostor. Note the lamp on the Rochdale box (real Wallace and Gromit country!) and that the Liverpool Special seems to have an extra lock!

There have, of course, been many other design variations since 1887, while from 1879-87 the Standards were Anonymous, seemingly an old fashioned cock-up causing the boxes to have no cipher or Post Office markings. VR not amused and there are still quite a few around. Each Sovereign has a unique crown and cipher and it is interesting to see the variations adopted over time, and also between pillar, wall and lamp boxes (the ones attached to posts) as these can vary within individual reigns.

So is this really archaeology or just train spotting? For some it is just an absorbing hobby (for which you don't have to have a tartan thermos and anorak)

but our post boxes can give some interesting pointers to the way lives were lived. Who designed the boxes and why were certain styles adopted? The process was really rather muddled, especially for the wall boxes in post offices. Those were not standardised until the 1880s, and until 1895 postmasters installed them at their own expense. (Will this be a problem for Dorcas Lane in Candleford?) An example which has survived due to the insistence of the now retired postmistress at Blancland, Durham, is shown below alongside a Ludlow, the type of box which replaced them. Unlike ordinary wall boxes, the Ludlows have attractive white enamel plates (with stern directions about what may be posted and fines) as well as the collection-time plate. Many Ludlows remain as active boxes though their parent post office may have closed. So here is a useful clue in determining the former use of some buildings. The same can apply to large wall boxes that once served municipal buildings, banks or cooperative societies.



See text. (credit:author)

And their important national and economic functions are reflected in box design. Post boxes do possess some latent symbology. They represent order, authority, national cohesion and identity. In Scotland you won't find any boxes with the Queen's cipher in recognition of local sensitivities regarding the title ER II. Contemporary boxes bear only the Scottish crown (below left). It is also interesting that a replica Penfold on the Royal Mile, Edinburgh, (centre) has had the Victorian coat of arms replaced with the Scottish Crown. The political status of the box has seen them bombed in London in 1974 (King's Cross, Picadilly Circus, Victoria Station and Chelsea) and the box on the right is a rare survivor in East Jerusalem from the British Mandate. The colour red has long been an important symbol and boxes in parts of Northern Ireland have often been painted green by republicans; slightly ironic as until 1874 the standard colour was green.



See text. (credit:author)

And there's lots more; foundries, designers, short-lived kiosk boxes (8 left, try Whitley Bay) and airmail boxes (probably best to go to Windsor castle), Edward VIII styles and locations which give us some very specific detail on design and distribution in 1936, and general use and abuse (actually they stand abuse very well and perhaps they somehow resist or repel vandalism). A Victorian box in Corporation St, Manchester, was unblemished by the 1996 IRA 3,000 lb truck bomb, though some letters were delayed by a fortnight. What a hero!

Tomorrow's postholes? Think of a tidy line of Victorian pillar boxes along a London thoroughfare; there are some in Kew and Richmond, all serving their various side-streets. The boxes actually go quite deep below the pavement. Now think of areas of cleared Victorian terraces in the East End. Maybe it's stretching the metaphor too far but perhaps future archaeologists will be able to trace what we have lost. Below are two boxes of similar vintage. On the left we have a decaying artefact, a bit like a pot sherd in a trench section. And on the right a nicely preserved piece of Victoriana hardly a dig away from Castle Howard.



See text. (credit:author)

Am I alone in finding the tatty one more evocative? Anyway, the good news is that English Heritage and Royal Mail have agreed a policy of retaining all letter boxes in operational service at their existing locations. But the bad news may be that while Charles I opened the Royal Mail to the public it may be in the reign of Charles III that we lose the Post Office. I hope not, and while wishing Her Majesty continued health, I look forward to seeing the first CR III box. (I know where the first ER II pillar box is!). To close, a favourite Lamp Box outside Aberystwyth. If you did get this far I bet you find yourself taking another look.



Lamp Box outside Aberystwyth (credit:author)

2 Heritage, Identity and the importance of History in Education

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Archaeologists benefit from living in York. We understand that we live in a city with a real sense of history; one that we are reminded of with each step that we take. This is not just in the staggering amounts, and quality, of old buildings that we happen to live around, and indeed study in; but an unrivalled public outreach by the historic and archaeological bodies that we have, and visible work taken to protect a city that most see to be a vital part of world heritage.

The public, then, are told that history is important and rightly so. We even give it to the: wrapped up in the neat little package of their history'. This coupled with the new vogue for family history means that a personalised package – a stake in the grand narrative that this country of ours – has is increasingly being seen as a necessary, life affirming, commodity to hold. This is all very well and good, at least the public are interested in what was and can be encouraged to financially endorse and protect a shared heritage that we, as the professionals, need to access to study. This is not to sound too mercenary: an increased interest also yields massive benefits – ranging from a personal and emotional link to the past, to simply an enjoyable day out and a tourist industry that provides jobs and income for the public at large. All things considered, a sense of our own heritage does a lot to enrich our lives.

This leads me to the state of history in the classroom. Subscription to the subject is falling, and there is a real lack of consistency in the quality of the various curricula. This is an interesting paradox: history has reached a new vogue outside of the classroom, yet pupil interest in the subject is waning rapidly. This is dangerous: without at least some idea of how the historical facts' about the past are generated a pupil risks not understanding the subjectivity, bias and complexity of the particular discipline. This is a useful inoculation: critical thinking applied to the past ensures that a student is able to critically evaluate their own understanding of the past. This is an immensely valuable skill, especially in an age where we are drenched in a sense of our own heritage.

Despite all of the benefits that this brings, there is a problem with this. History has been, and always will be, an immensely politicised tool and, while this is the case, facts will always be perverted to prove a point. Such point may be valid – we protect things because they are traditional' – but the same logic is also used to recall the death penalty, restart national service, and return the country to a golden age'. A golden age, I might add, that many who point to this argument are hard pushed to give a definite date for. It is traditional' and it happened a few years ago' being two suggestions this author has recently encountered. The moral rights and wrongs of the death penalty and National Service are, of course, open to interpretation and the subject of politics. But changes made to these policies, if they are needed at all, should come based upon the social reality of the modern world, not simply because these institutions are traditional. That logic is an insult to the complexity of the issues at hand.

Perhaps it is natural to recall the wonders of a glorious past in times of stress, and to blame later developments for a supposed slip in morals, standards and decency. However this understanding is often based on an inaccurate view of

the past; one that has been dimly recalled from childhood or learned by rote from the immense amount of authorities' in history that appear on television, in museums and country estates – each with their own biases and fallacies. There is a risk in this sort of argument either to discredit the right of these authorities' to speak or to suggest that those without a historical education to the highest level remain gullible or incapable of critically assessing sources. That is not the purpose of this argument. It is meant to point out that history when taught well gives the pupil an insight into how an interpretation is reached, what evidence is used, and what biases exist. Even basic pre-GCSE education includes modules on the problems of various kinds of evidence, which are then expounded on post-GCSE when students are asked to form their own opinions based on the evidence. Students of history are forced to appreciate this, and the very least that they will take from their study is an understanding of how complex the matter of writing history is. In an age where historical appreciation is so valued across all walks of life, there is surely a need for pupils to understand the process that makes it.

That is the crux of the paradox. If the situation is left unchecked there will be a discrepancy between the importance and popularity of history and the amounts of people that really understand its workings. In a time when history is increasingly perceived as being relevant to our day-to-day lives, the fact that fewer and fewer students are considering taking it, and that it risks being dropped from the school curriculum, is therefore a worrying phenomena.

Many will ask what that has to do with archaeologists. The answer that I would give to them is that archaeology is a vibrant, dynamic and interesting way of approaching the past. On a basic level, popular culture gives the archaeologist a dynamic reputation that makes the subject seem appealing. Scratch beneath the romantic allure and you soon find a subject that is interesting and diverse, with a wide chronological range: an antidote to the perceived boredom of classroom historical education.

3 Interview with Dan Hull, Council for British Archaeology

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1. **What is your job title?** Head of Information and Communications at the Council for British Archaeology.
2. **What are the current projects that you are working on at the moment?** The main one we've got at the moment is developing our website, which we launched in December, last year; its got loads of new elements to come yet. So We are designing things like the Young Archaeologist Club its about to have a new website; the Festival for British Archaeology, which is a set of about 500 events each July that website's going to go live quite soon; and then we've got a really exciting new element to it which is going to serve up information about any contacts, any courses, any events, any excavations that are going on all on one page.
3. **What first got you interesting in archaeology as a subject?** I suppose to begin with it was the idea that things in most aspects of the past were just so incredibly different to today. And that always fascinated me: that sense of what it can tell you then about the way we live now because of that difference. Pretty much whatever period in the pre-Industrial age really, I think its just the contrast really which is always quite tempting.
4. **From that, what got you into the job you are currently in now?** It was mainly an interest in the way that archaeologists use the web, particularly their research. Prior to this job I did a research project for the university here called the 'Store Project', which was all about how archaeologists use online resources, both data archives but also applications and so to pretty much compare archaeologists to lots of other disciplines. It was quite a weird and wonderful project, but really interesting to see the way archaeologists are increasingly using the web just as an integral part of their research. So that's what led me onto this job. But I've always wanted to work for the CBA because they're one of those organisations which are very aware of how archaeology is perceived by the general public.
5. **What kind of work experience has led you to this career? What have you found particularly useful?** I think the main thing perhaps was having done a bit of various different aspects of archaeology: it is often attractive to a body like the CBA. So, if you have done a little bit of contract digging for example, but also if you have had a bit of a university background and done, in my case three degrees – but at least one or two – then it gives you a sense of how universities operate. Also having helped out with local societies, community groups and done a bit of that helped. Also, a general awareness of what is going on now in archaeology.

6. **And what's the best part of your job?** I would say probably broadcasting news; the latest news. We are often the first people to find out something has been discovered or something has been found or something has gone wrong or something's controversial or a government minister has said something about archaeology, either bad or good news. And finding out first and having the job of putting that news out is really exciting I think.
7. **And the worst?** Emails. I have to send maybe 50 or 60 emails a day, with sometimes more sometimes it feels like I am just reading and sending emails all day.
8. **How much do you deal with the public as a whole?** I would say probably every day, more or less. It varies a lot depending on the time of the year and it depends on the reason. But we very often get enquiries from people, just really general enquiries about 'I'd like to get into archaeology' or 'I'm involved in archaeology and I'd like to do this kind of research, where shall I go for advice?' So we often get phone or email enquiries like that. And then at various events across the year we meet the general public en masse, as it were. Or we go to events where it is not actually an archaeology event but we've got a little archaeology stall and then have to talk to the very general public, which is quite interesting sometimes.
9. **What are your thoughts on the state of the archaeological field in the country? Do you think its adequate or do you think there's room for improvement? If so, where?** I think we have a much more diverse scene than in most European countries, because of the fact that you can volunteer to do archaeology and you can do archaeology on your doorstep, potentially without a license. Albeit, if it's a scheduled land you have to have consent but I think that makes it really exciting, it gives everybody the opportunity to do that kind of research. If there's something that I think is then a real drawback, I think, is that we have distinct, defined sectors in Britain and I think they're often not talking to one another as well as they might. Sometimes we do not realise what each other are doing and quite how to talk to each other. I think that's one of the problems; that the different blocks often do not talk to each other.
10. **How do you see the job scene in archaeology at the moment?** Ah, something that has been talked about a lot. It really has hit front page news that archaeology has been hit very hard by the recession, mainly because developer funding is drying up. Not completely, and the picture is a mixed one, and obviously that is only a particular kind of archaeological job. The IFA survey, *Profiling the Profession*, last year identified that it's only just over 5% There are a lot of contracting diggers, if they haven't had the chance to diversify their skills a bit and get some experience under their belt then they are a little bit vulnerable at the moment. The real worry there is that a lot of really good skills are going to be lost as all of these really talented graduates who have got a bit of experience, are handy, practical people are going to go off and get other jobs because other sectors are weathering the recession slightly better. There are still a lot of archaeological units which are doing fine and beyond the contracting sector

I think its actually quite a good scene. There are more university jobs than has ever been and there are more courses than there have ever been, so the opportunities for postgraduate study are better than ever before. There are a lot more jobs than there used to be in organisations, charities such as the CBA, public sector bodies such as Historic Scotland, CADW or English Heritage and although they are not completely invulnerable to the recession I there are some jobs out there and its just a question of looking in all the right places and putting in lots of applications.

11. **What advice would you give to a student who wants to get a job in the archaeological field?** Start looking quite soon so you get an impression of what is out there. And do not necessarily assume its all about contract digging. Traditionally, certainly for the last 10 years, that's been a stalwart of employment as a good first start for people who want to become a professional archaeologist. Those jobs are still there if you look hard but its worth looking around at other jobs because there are often surprising organisations like Natural England, for example, have archaeologists, or local authorities. Typically Borough and County Councils employ archaeologists. So there are loads of different employers and its worth looking around at really diverse different sources. The Guardian's a good source, BAJR, the IFA, things come up on BritArch, sometimes on the CBA website. It is always worth looking around at all those different sources and getting a good sense of what is there so that when you see one that really takes your eye you are ready to put in an application
12. **How did you find job interviews throughout your career?** I think the more you are interviewed the easier it gets. I think something often comes good of a job interview even if you do not get the job. So the chance you have had to meet two, or three, or four people for the first time who are interviewing you, who are often quite influential people in archaeology, is quite good. And often if you do not get the job, if you have impressed them in some way and a few months later you drop them an email about something they'll know who you are, have a good impression of your skills and will know what kind of background you come from. So, I think it's worth going for lots of interviews even though sometimes you might not get the job.
13. **Do you have any particular techniques to pass on to graduates who are just coming into the interview phase now?** Being really, really well prepared; there's no replacement for that. Knowing the job that you are applying for; really looking into quite what it is you are applying for; what the job is; and also the organisation you are applying to. No matter who they are its always good to do a bit of mugging up on the web. And there are the tricky interviews which take a bit of practice of having in the back of your mind all the brilliant skills, talents and experience that you have and kind of sprinkling those in all of your answers so that by the end of it they're not just relying on your application and your CV. But it is a bit of a trick as it's nerve-wracking and it is never easy really.
14. **You said you have done three degrees, which were they?** I did a BA in Archaeology here in York; I did an MA in Islamic Archaeology

in London and then a PhD here in Early Medieval Monasticism, which finished not long before I got this job and its was in between that I did this other project.

15. **What do you see yourself doing after this?** I suppose the exciting thing about this job is that I can be quite ambitious and try new things but within the context of the job so it can go places rather than me think Oh I'll go for a different job now and do something else'. So, it sounds a bit boring, but I am happy to stick with it, its great fun and I am happy for a few years to really see it develop and see where it goes.

With thanks to Dan Hull.

4 How human intervention is harming the wreck of R.M.S. Titanic, and how the site is protected by law

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I think this is a story that has been told enough before to forego repeating many of the details here. Suffice it to say that late on the night of April 14th 1912, on its maiden voyage, the liner R.M.S Titanic struck an iceberg and floundered at 02.22 the next morning – breaking in two as she went – and carrying over 1500 people to their deaths (Lynch et al., 2003 p34).

For the next 73 years the wreck lay undisturbed on the floor of the Atlantic, about 2 miles from the surface, until it was discovered in September 1985 by an expedition led by Oceanographer Dr Robert Ballard (Ballard, 2007 p12). Since then the location of the wreck has become common knowledge and numerous visits have been made by deep sea submersibles with purposes ranging from scientific study, plundering artefacts from the sizeable debris field that joins the disparate portions of the ship, or merely conveying (rich) sightseers.

How is the wreck being treated today?

There are two schools of thought on how the wreck of the Titanic should be treated. One approach is that the best way to preserve the ship and its memory is to retrieve from the site any artefacts which have a particular historical or aesthetic significance, which can then be displayed to the public (Ballard, 2004 p6). The other belief is that the wreck is a memorial to the greatest peacetime maritime tragedy and should be respected and preserved as such with a policy of look, don't touch'.

Central to the philosophy that artefacts should be recovered is the knowledge that the metallic content of the ship is being consumed, at the rate of some several hundred pounds per day, by bacterial life-forms known as Rusticles' which, as the name suggests, appear to be metal stalactites clinging to the ship (Lynch et al., 2003 p46). It is believed that unchecked these lifeforms could consume enough of the ship to cause the structure to collapse and be rendered un-recognisable in as little as 80 years (Lynch et al., 2003 p47).

However, in recent years it has become apparent that the intervention of manned-submersible craft has in several areas exacerbated the natural deterioration of the wreck. The forward mast, which lay across the bow, has been shorn of its light and bell, with salvagers destroying the battered remains of the crows nest to do so (Ballard, 2007 p81). Near to this spot on the remains of the bridge the brass tele-motor, all that is left of the ship's wheel, shows signs of attempts to forcibly wrench it from its position (Ballard, 2004 p143). More general damage has been found to the boat deck and roof of the superstructure of the bow section from repeated submersible landings or impacts, particularly to the roof of the Marconi wireless room (Lynch et al., 2003 p86), while the deck railings have been flattened in several places (Ballard, 2007 p16).

Elsewhere, in the debris field which has been comprehensively picked over in the last 20 odd years with everything from shoes to magnums of champagne

having been recovered, can be found chains and sandbags used to weight containers for artefacts, as well as lighting apparatus from previous expeditions and large quantities of fibre-optic tether from remotely operated cameras (Ballard, 2004 p172).

Although as stated the condition of the Titanic is deteriorating naturally, Dr Ballard noted on a return expedition to the wreck in 2004 that areas which are inaccessible to submersibles, like the forecandle and forward well deck, are in remarkably good condition compared to the more frequented parts of the ship (Ballard, 2004 p154). The stern section too has altered little in the years since its re-discovery. This section had imploded on its 2 mile journey to the ocean floor due to the pressure differential between the air trapped inside and the water surrounding it. Today much of the stern is mangled metal which is either too dangerous to approach or of little interest to visitors, and so has been largely left alone to decompose naturally (Ballard, 2004 p122). It would appear, then, that in order to preserve the wreck for as long as possible, access to the Titanic needs to be controlled.

So what is the legal position regarding protection of the Titanics site?

The fact that the Titanic lies in international waters off the coast of Newfoundland has made legislating for its protection problematic. Legal battles over ownership and salvage rights have raged since the wreck's re-discovery, with the apparent victor being a company named R.M.S Titanic Inc (RMST), who has salvaged some 6,000 items from the ship ranging from a child's marble to a 17 ton section of the hull. In 1993 the French awarded RMST the right to keep the artefacts they had recovered since 1987, and exclusive salvage rights were granted by the U.S. Federal Court in 1994 (<http://tinyurl.com/q5bcj7>).

A ruling by a U.S. District Judge is expected imminently on whether R.M.S Titanic Inc is allowed limited ownership and sale rights of the artefacts it has recovered as compensation for its expenditure on salvage operations. Of the case the Judge stated (<http://tinyurl.com/r7ngpe>):

I am concerned that the Titanic is not only a national treasure, but in its own way an international treasure, and it needs protection and it needs to be monitored

This indicates that the likely outcome is that this huge collection will be expected to remain together and available for public display as opposed to being auctioned off piece-meal to private collectors or museums (USA Today (<http://tinyurl.com/r7ngpe>)).

However, despite this widely supported statement the U.S has not yet implemented the agreement it signed with the U.K. in 2003 whereby unregulated exploration and salvage of the wreck has been banned, and the treaty has yet to be signed by France and Canada, the other countries involved. Even if all concerned were to ratify this treaty, however, there would be nothing to stop other nations legally visiting the wreck, and RMST's exclusive salvage rights have proved practically impossible to enforce. All of which means, unfortunately, that for the short term at least there appears to be no un-equivocal way in which the remains of the Titanic will be protected once and for all.

I personally believe that, strictly controlled, exploration of the wreck should continue as there are vast portions of the ship which can only be accessed as remote camera technology improves, and a wealth of information about the ship itself and the circumstances of her sinking awaits discovery. However I would say that, although the retrieval of artefacts from the site is currently legal, there are a number of professional and moral questions raised, as arguably there are concerning any shipwreck, from the trawler F.V. Gaul to the Britannic, the Titanic's sister ship. The archaeological significance of items removed from the debris field is dubious when explored out of context and, being produced less than a century ago, such items are for the most part valuable only through their association with the Titanic. The real objects of significance are the two halves of the ship itself which, as they are impossible to salvage, are explored in situ. Considering now the moral point of view one could argue that the retrieval of personal effects from the site where 1500 men, women and children perished in an event still within living memory is at best mawkish, and at worst tantamount to grave-robbing, though as salvage operations continue at the site to date this is clearly not a universally held opinion! (See USA Today Article)

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5 Archaeology, Ethnography And Cosmology: Part 1

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Limitations of interpretation and ethnography

European prehistory presents a number of challenges to the archaeologist. These difficulties come not from a paucity of evidence (Thomas 1991:2), but rather from defining what evidence is significant and then the interpretive frameworks that archaeologists employ. When looking at cosmology (Note 1) the difficulty in constructing interpretations becomes apparent. Understanding cosmological ideas is particularly difficult without textual or iconographic representation (Pearson and Richards 1994:38). Additionally modern cosmological ideas often bias the way archaeologists interpret and conceptualise prehistoric cosmologies, as a person's existing knowledge greatly influences the way that they act and shapes how impressions are interpreted and given meaning (Renfrew and Bahn 2000:394).

Twenty-first century cosmological ideas in the West are largely influenced and shaped by scientific and social developments of the past century or so. Key among modern Western conceptual developments is the increasing predominance of the individual person over the dividual person (Fowler 2004:17). The dividual, to generalise, is a composite being, constructed by many influences (ibid). Individuals can be defined as a singular entity, where a persistent personal identity (ibid:8) takes precedence over relational identities (ibid), a key component of dividual personhood. Modern Western social and scientific influences were absent in prehistory so therefore the way prehistoric Europeans thought and interpreted the world was radically different and their cosmological ideas would also have been dissimilar. This leads Richards to perceive the prehistoric past as an alien entity (Richards 1996:171). Attempting to deal with this issue represents a major challenge to archaeologists.

It has long been recognised that ethnography presents a useful starting point to understand the lifestyles of the past. Ethnographic studies can be utilised as an alternative method of conceptualising the past in a non-Western way. Extant traditional societies' are often categorised as non-industrialised and influenced by a number of different perceptions. In Melanesia the concept of dividual forms an important component in social systems, where elements of the person (either in the form of substances or objects) are given as gifts; developing a chain of reciprocal relationships and forming social links across the island.

Ethnographic studies of cosmology

Ethnographic studies have only in the past forty years or so begun to consider the use and ordering of space as opposed to only social systems and material culture. For archaeologists like Pearson (1996:117) such studies present an interesting tool in attempting to unravel ideas about the conceptualising of space in the past at both the domestic and larger scale. In traditional societies' it is possible to see an alternative set of cosmological principles where concepts such as directionality and orientation come together to form a complex system

of categorization (Richards 1996: 171). These classifications come to express and embody a host of meanings relevant to the individual or community. The concept of metaphor often plays a crucial role in the way societies come to understand the world and can be seen in a number of ethnographic studies. The following two studies will be considered in this article:

- Pierre Bourdies' study of the Berber household (2000)
- Colin Richards' study of the Balinese compound (1996)

The Berber Household: Metaphors and embodiment

The Berber household via its architecture incorporates a number of metaphors and acts as a microcosm of the world (Bourdieu 2000:498). Houses can also not only embody universal ideas, but also personal concepts and the ideology of social orders (Pearson and Richards 1994:6). Objects can also come to embody these ideas and acquire certain roles and status (Note 2). Within the Berber household the loom embodies a number of roles including the protector of the house, representing one component of a complicated system of metaphor that forms the Berber cosmology. One of the central tenets of this cosmology is the interplay between light and dark – reflecting ideas of order and chaos – which is further reinforced by the association of particular items with these zones. Man made items and other processed items tend to be associated with the light, whilst the dark represents the untamed, natural elements. Architecturally the layout of the house plays out this concept, with the house divided into two general zones: the area for the animals in the dark and the area for the humans in the light. A similar scaling down of the world can be seen in the Balinese compound.

The Balinese Compound

Richards in his study of the Balinese compound (1996) identified a distinct set of cosmological ideas based around the Balinese cardinal points. These cardinal points represent particular values which are attributed according to their geographic position. North is related to the sacred mountain in the North of the island and is associated with the gods and the ancestors the most sacred aspects of the Balinese world. The southern point is associated with the sea – home of the dead and monsters. Additional points, East and West, are added from Hindu beliefs; the East being associated with rebirth and sunrise, whilst the West is linked with death and the sunset. The cardinal points can also be coupled to form additional points such as North East' which combines sunrise/ rebirth/ new life with the sacredness of the north.

Divisions within the Balinese compound mirror these cosmological orderings. The compound is divided into distinct zones representing the sacred (North) and the profane (South). Activities undertaken in these areas are also linked to their cosmological status. Take, for instance, kitchen activities. Kitchen activities take place in the South-western corner – the most profane section – due to their association with death and pollution in the form of blood (Richards 1996:178). The middle zone of the house is a transitional zone, reflecting the geography of the island and the position of the Balinese people. Most Balinese people live within the middle of the island in between the sacred and profane. This

area becomes a transitional zone as it reflects the human before its last journey at death. Upon death the body and soul make their way to their respective domains, the soul to the mountain and the ashes to the sea. Domestic space acts again as a microcosm for Balinese views about the life of the body becoming more sacred over time and, with death, the most sacred part detaching from the profane element. Activities that take place within the middle area of the house (the *Bele Gede*) reflect this transitional nature: it is the place where boys achieve manhood. Older members of the house reside in the more northerly section, as age is associated with wisdom. Beyond them in the North-eastern corner is the family altar (*Pameradjan*): the most sacred aspect of the house.

It becomes readily apparent that the cosmological principles of the Balinese household encompass a whole variety of ideas from birth to death; each having its own ritual and place in the house, reinforcing the idea of the house as a microcosm for the world as a whole. The village layout too incorporates such ideas with burials confined to the south and religious buildings to the north (Richards 1996:180). We can see that cosmological ideas operate at three levels: the domestic, the communal and the geographical. Journeying through the house one is channelled into the south and one gradually progresses from here to the North-west and the *Pameradjan*. This journey reflects the passage through life, starting as profane and working towards sacredness in old age and then in death. As in the Berber household, the Balinese compound is host to a complex array of ideas reflecting the overall cosmological views of the Balinese.

In the next part of this article we will look at the role of studies such as these in archaeological interpretation, and the overall usefulness of ethnography in understanding prehistoric cosmology.

Notes

1. Cosmology, the principles that govern spatial arrangements, can operate on a number of levels. Such concepts can affect the individual, the household or even operate at a monumental level. Cosmological values can also become bound up in the routine of daily life. For this discussion the term cosmology will be employed to refer to spatial arrangements and their impact at a domestic and monumental level.
2. For more on metaphors and material culture see Tilley, C (1999) *Metaphor and material culture* Oxford: Blackwell

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6 Bamburgh Research Project and Field School

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Bamburgh Castle (Bamburgh Research Project)

Bamburgh Castle is one of the most fascinating monuments in the north of Britain. Its imposing façade draws thousands of tourists and it frequently appears on our TV screens on programmes like ITV1's "Britain's Favourite View" and BBC's "Coast".

Anyone driving up the A1 between Newcastle and Edinburgh can hardly fail to notice the distinctive silhouette of Bamburgh Castle brooding over the Northumberland coastline. It has inspired poets and artists, film-makers, and the founders of a new religion, Christianity. It has lured invaders, from Scandinavia and Northern Europe. In over two thousand years it has not lost its romantic appeal. The drama of its presence is fortified by its continuous occupation, which endures into the twenty first century, as, unlike other castles, Bamburgh is not a ruin.

When you walk through the medieval Barbican you are presented with a castle that has been shaped into its present form by restorations in the 18th century by Lord Nathaniel Crewe, Bishop of Durham, and at the end of the 19th century by the famous industrialist Lord William Armstrong. Crewe's restoration saw the addition of a windmill and the castle was used as a school, a dispensary and a hospital and maintained a coastguard service, a lifeboat and a welfare centre for shipwrecked mariners. The school and estate was run by Dr. Sharp, whose carriage can be seen in the castle today. Armstrong remodelled the castle as a stately home, joining the buildings of the inner ward with the 13th century Keep, rebuilding many of the walls and creating modern access roads. Much of the medieval stonework survives incorporated into the restorations, but the real grandeur of Bamburgh is under the soil.

Digging at Bamburgh

There are few sites that can claim to have such a long and interesting history as Bamburgh castle. It is more akin to an urban excavation with over 3 metres of deeply stratified deposits that demonstrate occupation evidence at least as far back as the Bronze Age and perhaps into the Neolithic.

The site was first dug by Dr Brian Hope Taylor in the 1960's and again in the early 70's. He died in 2000, without having published anything other than a few tantalising pages of summary report in the Durham University Gazette. So when the BRP first started to dig in the castle, our knowledge of Hope Taylor and what he had found at Bamburgh was severely limited. We began by looking for his trenches. In 2000 we put a trial trench in the West Ward and found the edges of his excavation. We worked our way through his backfill and found plastic sheeting and fertilizer bags separating the backfill from the layers of unexcavated archaeology. Until that point we didn't know if he had left



Trench 3 (Bamburgh Research Project)

any archaeology in situ, so it was a revelation that brought with it a huge responsibility of having to recover and complete Hope Taylor's site. The only way to do this was to dig a parallel trench adjacent to his. Our present Trench 3 does exactly that, and it is now at a stage where the deposits in our trench are joining up to Hope Taylor's as we cross the threshold from medieval into pre-conquest levels. The site is revealing complex features, floors, postholes, beam slots, stone foundations for timber halls, hearths and ash layers from metalworking and industrial processes. The range of finds is immense and as we get closer to the remains of the Saxon palace in its heyday we are seeing rare objects much more frequently. Decorated gold mounts, gilt harness fittings, chainmail, stycca coins, iron tools, and sword blades. One of the greatest swords ever found was discovered by Hope Taylor close to where we are now digging. This Saxon sword was fit for a king and may indeed have been a royal heirloom as it had survived for several hundred years before it was deposited in a much later context, perhaps as part of a smith's horde for reworking. Under X-ray examination, the blade was proven to be composed of a sharp steel edge fitted to six separate strands of iron, intricately twisted together in a process called pattern welding, the almost magical culmination of smithcraft.

In addition to Trench 3, we have excavated in many other parts of the castle, including Trench 7, under the 12th century chapel, where last year we revealed several phases of pre conquest stone building and changing lines of medieval defences. Trench 1 is located at the far end of the West Ward spanning St. Oswald's gate. Here, we have revealed evidence of the early wooden rampart that would have defended the Saxon palace and at present we are exposing the plan of several phases of large halls that are likely to have been guardhouses. In 2008, peeling off layers of medieval stone surfaces revealed gilt harness fittings.

Our excavations outside the castle in the Saxon cemetery are being prepared for publication in association with Dr. Sarah Groves of Durham University whose groundbreaking work on the pathology of the population has brought new insights through the application of DNA and isotopic analysis. This study

not only reveals important information about how people were living, their pathology revealing diet and lifestyle, general health and disease, but also where they came from and if family groups can be identified. Already the results show a mix of origin with some individuals coming from as far afield as Norway and the West of Scotland. This helps us to build a picture of what kinds of people made up retainers of the Northumbrian royal court. With radiocarbon dating of a large sample of remains we will be able to closely date the cemetery and identify how it changed and expanded or moved as burial practices changed in the 7th century.

Bamburgh is important because it shows a continuous high status occupation at one of the most significant royal centres in Saxon Northumbria. This is a region that has not been studied as closely as other areas. The Golden Age of Northumbria in the 7th and 8th centuries is well attested in history but the archaeological evidence can add so much more detail. Because of its status as a royal palace, Bamburgh can provide evidence of the wider economy and infrastructure, and for the 10th and 11th centuries archaeology here can throw light on a time which is very poorly represented in history. Was the bamburgh dynasty deliberately erased from history by Norman conquerors? Broken swords and throne fragments excite the imagination and one can't help but speculate that the reason the border between England and Scotland exists where it does today is in no small part due to a lost middle kingdom centered around Bamburgh. Only the archaeology can provide evidence to further our understanding of this fascinating place and the people who once ruled here.



Trench 7 (Bamburgh Research Project)

Field School

Field archaeology is fundamental to understanding our past. It is the story of the ordinary people as well as the Kings and rulers. It is a rigorous discipline of observation and recording and at the same time an experience honed art in the interpretation of fugitive evidence and traces in the soil. If you want to be an archaeologist or understand them, joining in a dig is a great idea.

Video: *“Archaeology Dig: My Bamburgh Diary”* Available at <http://tinyurl.com/opmmt>

Bamburgh Research Project field school is run by professional field archaeologists who have worked for many years in commercial archaeology. One of the goals of the project was to encourage and train future generations of archaeologists and heritage professionals. If you've never been on a dig before or if you're an old hand, Bamburgh can offer an experience that will be memorable and life enhancing. Our staff and project leaders are in the trenches with students each day, as the best way to learn archaeological processes is to observe and discuss them as they are encountered on site. Learning to see features in the soil and interpret them and to recognise their spatial and stratigraphic relationships is something that only experience can teach, so we involve students in discussion

and observation of the site, filling in context sheets and adding to site matrices. We explain the stratigraphy and recording systems and students are taught how to do all aspects of drawing on site, site photography, surveying, environmental sampling, finds processing, data processing and even media. The project runs its own media department that all students can participate in, filming the archaeology and social history and editing films from the extensive video archive. We have evening lectures on the history of Northumbria and archaeological processes and site tours in and around the castle and local area. The landscape around Bamburgh is truly stunning, with a beautiful beach and the opportunity to explore the Farne Islands, including Lindisfarne, Holy Island which is just a few miles up the coast. Students and volunteers come from all over the world to dig with us and we try to make each season a fulfilling experience for all. We have a great social life off site and provide organised entertainment in the form of quiz night and BBQ's as well as everybody's weekly highlight PUB NIGHT! Our field school this year is open from June 8th to 26th July and costs £150 per week. **Check out our website www.bamburghresearchproject.co.uk (<http://tinyurl.com/r45q8a>) to apply.**

Resources

1. Bamburgh Research Project Website (<http://tinyurl.com/r45q8a>)
2. BRP Media on YouTube (<http://tinyurl.com/qfvt4j>)
3. Reclaiming the Blade (Documentary) (<http://tinyurl.com/o2cfvs>)

7 The Post Hole Guide to Warwick

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Warwick is a small market town in the centre of the country, situated on the River Avon and 34 miles south of the large commercial centre of Birmingham.

Warwick sits atop a small hill to the north of the river Avon with the castle tucked beneath it on the riverbank. It is possible that the continuous settlement of this site began in the sixth century around a weir, which would have provided a natural crossing point to the River Avon. In 914 AD Ethelfleda, daughter of King Alfred, gathered together the remnants of several such scattered settlements to create what became known as Wering-wic' or Warwick. In 1068 William the Conqueror ordered Turchil of Arden, a Saxon Earl, to build a motte and bailey castle in the south-west corner of Warwick (as part of the defensive chain of castles built on his journey to deal with a rebellion in Yorkshire), truly beginning what would become Warwick's crowning glory.

Between 1267 and 1449 Warwick Castle was under the ownership of the Beauchamp family and it is from this period that the majority of the existing Castle dates. In 1571 Robert Dudley, the Earl of Leicester, acquired the medieval guildhall which stands just within the Westgate of Warwick where he established the Lord Leycester Hospital which provided accommodation for wounded or maimed soldiers. Today this building still remains a home for ex-servicemen.

The seventeenth century brought two disasters to Warwick. Firstly the plague arrived in 1603 and 1604, striking its deadly path through the town. Then at two in the afternoon of September the fifth 1694 a fire started in a back building behind the last house on the high street. There was a strong south-westerly wind and by the time the townspeople had extinguished the flames the heart of Warwick had been burnt to the ground. Many of the key buildings within Warwick date from the rebuilding.

While industry affected Warwick very little during the eighteenth century, a few elements began to creep into the town during the nineteenth century with the arrival of the canal system in 1800 and the establishment of the Saltisbury Gas Works in 1822.

Getting to Warwick

By Car: Warwick is situated off Junction 15 on the M40 or by taking the M6 at junction 19 off the M1 and then following the A46 from junction 2.

By Train: Warwick is on the main train line from Edinburgh to Bournemouth, however relatively few of the trains only stop there so make certain you are one that does. Otherwise, take the same train line to Royal Leamington Spa, situated 2 miles from Warwick.

By Coach: Regular coaches run to Warwick from Coventry and Birmingham, but travelling from most other places you will be required to change in either of these cities.

Accommodation

Warwick has many places to stay, most of which are of a very high standard. These are mainly B&Bs with between 3 and 6 rooms, so booking in advance is highly recommended. If you want to stay in the heart of the town the Rose and Crown' is perfect and, since a recent renovation, offers a fantastic selection food and drink in the bar and restaurant below. If you want a more secluded place to stay, the Seven Stars' on Friars Street offers 3 beautiful double rooms with a private garden to enjoy the sunshine.

Places to visit

As well as heading to specific places, the Post Hole highly recommends taking time to walk round the small historic core of Warwick, which contains a variety of different pieces of architecture and is truly beautiful itself. However, if you are looking for specific places to visit you might want to consider:

The Lord Leycester Hospital not only the set for many a piece of costume drama, this is a remarkable building which is well worth a visit and includes the Queen's Own Hussars Museum.

Hill Close Gardens a true breath of fresh air. Tranquil and beautiful, these gardens are worth visiting whether or not you have a particular interest in horticulture.

- Museums

- *Warwick Museum* housing information on a variety of subjects, from natural history to the occupation of this area, Warwick Museum is well worth a short visit to truly understand the town's place in the scheme of things.
- *St. John's House Museum* a gorgeous Jacobean mansion which now is home to a recreated Victorian kitchen and classroom for those with an interest in the more domestic aspects of history. For those with a more military interest in the past, this museum also houses the Royal Warwickshire Regimental Museum. With beautiful gardens this is a place for the whole family.

- Other attractions

- *Warwick Castle* A treat for the entire family, especially throughout the summer when as well as the stunning castle itself there are opportunities to enjoy jousts, hawking, pageants, concerts, talks and events (occasionally even the odd trebuchet!). While this is an expensive attraction it is well worth the it if you make a whole day out of it and make the most of the what's on offer. It is certainly one you will remember if you do take the time to enjoy it.

- Places close by

- *Royal Leamington Spa* This spa town is well worth a visit, especially on a sunny day, where the beautiful Georgian architecture of much of the town really comes into its own. With Jefferson Gardens to offer a quiet retreat, Leamington Spa is a busier town than Warwick

with a greater numbers of shops, restaurants and bars to keep you entertained.

- *Stratford Upon Avon* Famous for the Bard himself, it is almost criminal not to take in Stratford if you visit Warwick as the journey is barely 15 minutes by car. A beautiful midlands town, with a fascinating array of history, Stratford will keep even the most demanding culture seeking visitor busy while providing varied places to eat, drink, shop and just take in the beauty of the river Avon. This is on top of being the home of the RSC the main theatre is presently being redeveloped but the temporary Courtyard Theatre is beautifully designed and offers the fantastic productions which the RSC is famed for.

Further Details

- Warwick Tourism (<http://www.warwick-uk.co.uk/>)
- Warwick Castle (<http://tinyurl.com/2wnzc2>)

8 The Post Hole Guide to Bolton

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Bolton, or Bolton-le-Moors to give it its official name, is a former mill town 10 miles from Manchester. It played a role in the English Civil War when it was stormed in 1644 by 3000 Royalist troops, resulting in the Bolton Massacre where 1600 residents were murdered and 700 taken prisoner. The execution of a Royal at this time is rumoured to be the reason why Bolton hasn't been made a city, although the absence of a cathedral tends to be overlooked.

Its appeal largely centres on its close proximity to Manchester and it also boasts good transport links to Liverpool and the Lake District, although there are some attractions to the town and surrounding area.

Getting to Bolton (from York)

It's easy to get to Bolton from York, it's a short hop across the Pennines: the A64 from York, the M1 south bound, then the M62 from Leeds to Kearsley, taking the A666 (yes, really) to the town centre.

Alternatively, take the TransPennine Express service from York to Bolton, usually changing at Manchester Piccadilly, although sometimes you might have to change at Manchester Oxford Road and its worth checking this in advance. Tickets with a railcard are around £15 with a Young Person's Railcard in advance, although many student offers from www.tpexpress.co.uk means they can be as cheap as £4 each way.

Accommodation

Accommodation in Bolton is quite limited; however it is only a half an hour train journey from Manchester city centre where a wider range is available, from youth hostels to the Hilton. Bolton hosts a Holiday Inn in the centre or for a more elaborate budget (and for football fans!) the De Vere Whites hotel at the Reebok Stadium, home of Bolton Wanderers. Alternatively many guest houses are scattered through the town.

Places To Visit

- **Museums**

- Bolton Museum (free entry) boasts an impressive Egyptian collection that has been featured in British Archaeology magazine. Surprising really as the rest of the collections are geared towards local history or stuffed animals. Worth a look if your interested in Egyptian or Industrial archaeology. Also contains an aquarium and the town's main library
- Bolton Steam Museum is quite often overlooked as it is housed in what appears to be a derelict mill. In fact this is a hidden gem (if you're into trains and machinery that is!) holding the largest collection of mill steam engines in the UK, which periodically opens for events and free weekend visits.

- **Historic attractions**

- Smithills Hall is a grade I listed Tudor house on the outskirts of York close to some lovely views up on the moorland, Moss Bank Park boasting its animal park and rose garden and the quaint settlement of Barrow Bridge which does exactly what it says on the tin: cottages accessible by bridge over streams. Rumour has it that a footprint was burnt into a paving stone after George Marsh stamped his foot having been accused of false preaching in 1554. Also the scene of many other ghostly goings on, you'll need to visit to find them all out! Boasts the ability to dress kids up as Tudor citizens and put them to work in the dairy (yes I was the milk maid on my unfortunate school trip).
- Hall I'th Wood (read, but not say, Hall in the Wood for those unfamiliar with Lancashire twang) is another Tudor house only open to the public for special events. These include Medieval Activities Weekend (24th-25th May). For more information see www.boltonmuseums.org.uk/whatson

- **Places near by** The main attraction close by is Manchester city centre with its vast expanses of shopping, entertainment and attractions, including:

- The Urbis Centre: an exhibition of city life featuring explorations of design, architecture, graffiti and music.
- Museum of Transport: currently offering a celebration of Bolton buses (really).
- Museum of Science and Industry: a jolly good day out full of hands on exhibitions for all the ages.
- Manchester Museum: a larger version of Bolton museum, featuring an exquisite Egyptian collection, botany and the largest collection of tree frogs in the north (I'd imagine, seriously the tank is huge!), 4000 archery related artefacts, an impressive human remains collection including the Lindow Man and a host of other collections.

More Information

- The Northern Mill Engine Society (Bolton Steam Museum) (<http://www.nmes.org/>)
- Bolton Museum and Archive Service (<http://tinyurl.com/jx648>)
- The Urbis Centre (<http://www.urbis.org.uk/>)