

Editorial: Archaeology and a person's view on the past

On New Year's Day someone pointed out to me that 2013 is the first year since 1987 that is composed of four different numbers (2, 0, 1 and 3). That observation did not sound very interesting when I first heard it, but it has stayed in my mind since that day because it reminds me of the peculiar ways people like to structure and make sense of time.

Few people will have failed to notice as December progressed, the rising interest that members of the public have displayed in Mesoamerican Archaeology. I am of course referring to the apocalypse theories surrounding the Mesoamerican Long Count calendar and the 21st of December. Whilst I shall not risk interpreting the validity of these theories, I will comment on the unusual, sometimes positive and sometimes not so positive, ways in which archaeology and modern society can spontaneously interact.

Each one of the fascinating articles in this issue of *The Post Hole* is concerned with the ways in which archaeology can shape the lives of people today and the ways in which the public may perceive what life was like in the past.

In 'Juxtlahuaca Redux' **Arnaud Lambert** provides us with an alternative interpretation of the unique Olmec art in Juxtlahuaca Cave, Mexico. As well as being of intellectual merit, Lambert's paper reminds us that archaeology is a view of the past that is composed of countless individual theories, each constructed by an equally large number of people working in that field of academic enquiry.

Navid Tomlinson assures us that the above realisation is not something that should be feared. Rather than talking of the limitations in linking isolated views on the past, Tomlinson's review of the recent CHAT 2012 conference at York passionately discusses the possibilities open to archaeology when we as archaeologists broaden our approaches of enquiry into a larger range of subjects – namely the integration of historical and contemporary lives with the study of life in the deeper past.

Alex Loktionov applies an ethnographic perspective in his paper, providing a ritualistic interpretation of a Bronze Age burnt mound in County Durham. These prehistoric features often lie in obscurity within the British landscape. Hopefully Loktionov will be one of a number of new archaeologists encouraging people to consider the significance of these more unusual marks on the landscape made by people 4,000 years ago.

Equally, I hope that the gradual increase in recent years of archaeologists' appreciation of the complexity in function of monuments, and indeed what exactly constitutes that term, will continue to happen. It is important that the abstract and nuanced nature of human psychology can be more comfortably integrated into new interpretations of phenomena like the appearance of burnt mounds in Bronze Age Britain.

Steve Ashby gives us an informative introduction to the essential work conducted by the Portable Antiquities Scheme, explaining how it seeks to ensure that artefacts found by the public are recorded and brought to the attention of archaeologists, thus allowing them to benefit archaeology by being properly researched and curated.

Emily Hellewell discusses the equally important work that her and fellow archaeologists at the University of York are carrying out in engaging younger people with the Mesolithic. Hellewell is playing a key role in the concerted efforts of Mesolithic archaeologists to open this 'middle period' of prehistory to the public so that the intellectual and cultural benefits of having awareness of the ever-increasing diversity of Mesolithic material can match that of areas such as Stonehenge and Palaeolithic cave art. Hellewell explains why starting this dissemination for people at a young age may greatly benefit Mesolithic Archaeology in the future.

So that's Issue 26. Already, we are well under way with editing submissions for the next issue. If you would like to contribute towards *The Post Hole*, please contact **Tess Margetts** at submissions@theposthole.org. For the latest news about *The Post Hole*, including Issue 27, follow us on **Facebook** and **Twitter** (see back cover).

Happy New Year!

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Editorial: *What do you see when you look at the past?* (Image Copyright: Arnaud F. Lambert)