

With University rationalisation, should archaeologists enter historico-geo-socio-what-not packages? My feeling is that we could only do this if we were concerned with the past, which we are not: we are concerned with the rubbish in the present left by the past. To join in any great interpretive jamboree successfully we would need to know what our methods are, and that is an end which I hope never comes in sight because it would spell the death of the subject. This is the difference between archaeology and history or sociology, that whereas they aim at a statement about the present or the past we are simply a method without definition or end. We do not lead anywhere, we just are, and the moment we knew either what we were doing, or what the answer would be, the process, and archaeology itself, would evaporate.

This is why we make such uneasy collaborators with, for instance, ancient history or medieval studies, or even architecture. They aim at creating a picture and then tinkering with it to produce better detail: a photographer who decides on a view and continues to take different pictures of the same piece of countryside in the hopes of perfection: while we are still inventing cameras and deciding which view to take. We travel hopefully aiming never to arrive, in the knowledge that the journey is the important thing. Our colleagues expect results which, when we are being honest, we have no intention of producing, and would have no interest in once they were produced. Our background knowledge gets better and better all the time as sherds of food vessels are made into corpora and Roman lift-pumps are brought together and compared, so that we constantly change our questions and thus keep the true originality of research. Hence the centrality of the dissertation, a training in travel. Hence also every topic discussed is transitory and exemplary -- an example of how someone has done something, what the result is, and why it is wrong, or, for the moment seems right. We still have to eliminate a few teachers who think they know what happened in the past, whereas the right-thinking people know that we can never know what happened in the past. We construct our own pictures of the past as consistent with the material evidence as we can make them, and we are teaching students to do likewise. A good archaeologist should therefore be a good manufacturer because he or she will no sooner have out one method of production into efficient operation than he or she will be working out the next, basing him or herself on the actual evidence available and trying to see how a future method will fit likely changing circumstances. Archaeology which is not perpetual revolution is dead from the neck up and the shoulders down -- a fossilised Adam's Apple. We should be teaching revolution.

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ARCHAEOLOGY AND EDUCATION IN IRONBRIDGE GORGE: A BRIDGE WITH THE PAST?

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Introduction

In this paper my principal intention is to discuss the educational role of archaeology in the context of the unprecedented growth in the last few years of museum presentations of the recent past and, in particular, of the recent industrial past. I choose to discuss this topic with reference to the Ironbridge Gorge Museum, organised around a complex of sites strung along a 3km stretch of the River Severn, because its considerable popular success is combined with a marginalised role for archaeology in its research activities and presentations. It has not been selected because it is a 'good' or a 'bad' museum: such value judgements must be made with great caution after the criteria on which they are based have been spelled-out, and certainly must not be made in an opening paragraph. I have no hidden motive for singling out the Ironbridge Gorge Museum in preference to other organisations apart, perhaps, for an interest in assessing, as an archaeologist, how a museum which according to many criteria (see below, p. 186), is one of the most successful in the country, presents archaeology to the public. Many readers will recognise that the description and the criticisms I make apply equally to a large number of similar projects which have achieved popularity in a Britain which Peter Fowler (1987, 409) has recently described as "fast becoming one giant museum, a palaeo-theme park, a stately pageant of a stereotyped past": a view shared by many others (eg. Horne 1984; Wright 1985; Hewison 1987).

It is unnecessary to restate at length the view that archaeology is capable of achieving more than the illustration of documentary history since this is the rationale for most archaeologists working in historic periods. I wish to stress, however, that the archaeological investigation and presentation of more recent periods has characteristics which make it worthy of greater consideration by education-minded curators and administrators who deal with the 'historic heritage'.

The considerable gulf in methods and techniques between the disciplines of 'archaeology' and 'industrial archaeology' is a perennial topic of discussion (cf. Clark 1987 but note the dissenting reply by Palmer and Neaverson 1987). It is clear, however, that the theoretical, and in some respects 'political', concerns of academic archaeologists over the last two decades have yet to extend into the realms of industrial archaeology. Those who might suggest that industrial archaeologists are fortunate in this respect are denying the importance of theoretical debate and are doing an injustice to an area of study whose practitioners have recently done much to shake off the image of artefact-centred technologists.¹

A central theme of theoretical debate, more particularly in the last few years, has been a concern with the place of archaeology in society and with the principles of public presentation of archaeology. Many archaeologists are now claiming passionately that their discipline has an educational purpose, and this volume is symptomatic of this passion. I am writing this paper in the belief that if there is an educational benefit for society in archaeologists presenting in public their research into the distant past, then surely there is even greater urgency for archaeologists to be involved with presenting the recent past to the public. This is particularly true, I suggest, because of the element of surprise which archaeology can have in this respect -- the demonstration that archaeology can provide novel insights into the recent past has been one of the principal reasons for the popular success of projects such as the public archaeology programme in Annapolis (see, for example, Leone *et al.* 1987).

Thus, as education-minded archaeologists, and more generally as a society, we ignore the importance of the recent industrial past at our peril. As Neil Cossons, the first Director of the Ironbridge Gorge Museum, has argued:

...not only has the Industrial Revolution left us a physical legacy in the form of the world's first industrial landscapes, it has left us with an overwhelming emotional ambivalence that dominates our attitude towards this most important period of our past and which for over a century has shaped a broad spectrum of cultural expression hostile to industrialism and economic growth based on what we perceive industry to represent (1987, 10).

This introduction is not the place to consider in detail the principles of archaeology as an educational resource. However, some more general points are necessary here to place this paper into the perspective of the wider debate. In more formal contexts, practical experience of archaeology is capable of teaching a whole series of concepts and skills to children (as described by other papers in this volume). Out of school contexts, where the audiences would be expected to consist of adults and children of all ages and all levels of interest, archaeology appeals both because of its tangible quality when compared to documentary history and also because of the excitement of the process of discovery which is inherent to archaeological excavations.

Many, if not most, schoolteachers would be delighted to experience the same degree of enthusiasm from their pupils as is shown by many members of the public when they encounter archaeologists at work. The opportunity to inform -- not simply to pander to preconceptions -- is often lost. This is perhaps unavoidable in many archaeological contexts, but it is regrettable where archaeology is being carried out under the auspices of, or even in the grounds of, museums. I do not wish to espouse a specific educational or archaeological doctrine: on the contrary, this must remain a matter of

personal choice. Nevertheless, the topic which archaeologists choose to inform members of the public about is a decision to be taken with reference to the educational potential of the specific project question.

An Introduction to Ironbridge Gorge

Ironbridge Gorge in Shropshire has been a manufacturing centre of national and international importance for much of the last 300 years. During most of this period its output has been commodities such as iron and ceramics. For the last two decades the area has acquired international reputation for the manufacture of another important commodity: popular history, principally under the auspices of Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust. I use the verb 'manufacture' deliberately: at Ironbridge, as in all other historical reconstructions of the past are created -- they are not the inevitable consequence of historical research.

'Ironbridge' has become a household name and extensive advertisement through all media and the careful use of educational interest have ensured that Ironbridge now has a place in the British identity. This is as true from the point of view of the tourist as it is of the resident. Furthermore, it has acquired an international reputation; for instance, is advertised on Australian television nearly as often as it is advertised on our own.

Not only are the presentations at Ironbridge popular among tourists -- what one might call the informal educational sphere -- the increased emphasis on the teaching of social and economic history including the history of industry, has resulted in the Museum gaining importance in the more formal realms of the teaching of history to school children. The emphasis of the new General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) on the development of skills associated with acquisition and analysis of data, as well as on continually-assessed projects rather than examinations, is leading to an even greater use of the Ironbridge Museum by school groups.

In order to appreciate the place of archaeology in the public domain at Ironbridge, it is necessary first to outline the history of the area, and second to describe the archaeological research which takes place behind the scenes. In respect to this second point, it appears that the Museum's limited commitment to archaeological research is a major factor in their lack of enthusiasm for archaeological presentation. Once again, the Ironbridge Gorge Museum is in no sense unique.

A Brief History of the Area

Any brief, conventional, history of the Ironbridge Gorge area falls necessarily into the trap set by the Museum and the rest of the heritage industry. Such an account can hardly avoid laying great emphasis on 'whens' and 'whos' -- historical moments' and 'historical figures'

over everything else. However, it should serve as a reminder of the subjectivity and selectivity of these forms of history to which archaeology is seldom allowed to contribute.

The mineral resources necessary for the 'Industrial Revolution' (coal, iron ore, limestone and clay etc.) were plentiful in the area of Coalbrookdale which lay on an access route provided by the River Severn. Together these formed -- according to the conventional analysis of the origins of industrialisation -- an ideal location for industrial innovation. Already in the 17th century activities such as glassmaking and lead smelting were being supplied by coal carried from the mines on wooden railways. Water and charcoal as sources of power for furnaces and forges were replaced in the 18th century by coke, a genuinely significant development which owes much to the successful experiments of Abraham Darby in 1709.

The great expansion of the iron industry took place in the second half of the 18th century with all branches of commerce benefiting from the mass production of iron components, such as engine cylinders and the plates for iron ships. 1781 saw the completion of the iron bridge which has given the Gorge its present name (and the Museum its trademark).² Alongside the iron industry other industries requiring cheap raw materials, power and transport developed in the area of the gorge, including porcelain manufacture in Coalport.

The rate of innovation in the Gorge waned in the 19th century and the industries were faced with the problems of greater competition and the increasing cost of local raw materials. Activities ceased or became more specialised, and the intense atmosphere recorded by eye witnesses at the end of the 18th century was replaced by ubiquitous decay by 1900. Of course, it was this almost total decay which led to the unintended preservation of many of the Gorge's industrial ruins until the first stirrings of an historical consciousness a little over two decades ago.

The physical remains are very varied in character, ranging from vestiges of buildings (domestic and industrial) and processes which are only accessible by means of archaeological excavation, such as at the early foundry site at Newdale currently under excavation, to complexes of standing buildings such as the tileworks in Jackfield where production only ceased around 1960. Of course, this former category, including evidence for medieval precursors, subsidiary industries etc., is not necessarily less important to the overall industrial history of the area, although from the Museum presentations this is not evident. These remains are scattered along the now wooded banks of the Gorge, in its tributary valleys, and in the surrounding area.

History and Organisation of the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust

The history of heritage-based interest in the Ironbridge Gorge is relatively brief. Prior to 1959 there was limited concern with the multitude of archaeological sites and industrial remains in the area. In 1959, clearance of buildings at the Coalbrookdale Company's factory

in Coalbrookdale revealed the remains of the Old Furnace, believed to have been the furnace in which Abraham Darby first smelted iron with coke. Further excavation uncovered the remainder of the furnace, and Allied Ironfounders opened a small museum of iron and ironfounding at the works. This remained the only museum in the vicinity for nearly ten years.

In 1968, an area north of the gorge was designated as Telford New Town. Planning recommendations included the suggestion that, if possible, a local museum should be established. This is the first official reference to the possibility of developing a museum, but the idea had been current for some time among a group of interested people involved with the design and development of the town. Robert Hewison is unequivocal on this point: "The Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust was formed with the deliberate intention of providing the new town with a sense of identity that drew on the area's long association with iron and steel" (1987, 93).

After many delays the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust was established in 1967 as a limited company, and registered as a charity the following year. The collecting policy of the Museum states its objectives as:

the preservation, restoration, enhancement and maintenance of features and objects of historic and industrial interest in the area of Telford New Town and the surrounding districts of East Shropshire...the provision of an Industrial Museum...the organisation of...forms of instruction relevant to the history and industrial development of East Shropshire....

The first project in which the Trust was involved was the restoration of a group of late medieval tenements in Coalbrookdale. This was followed rapidly by the establishment of the nucleus of an open-air museum at the site of the Blists Hill Furnaces. In 1970, the Coalbrookdale Museum of Ironfounding and the Old Furnace site were handed over to the Museum Trust. The Trust subsequently acquired the one remaining row of Coalbrookdale Company workers' housing. During the late 1970s this complex of buildings was expanded into a major museum site, with warehouses being renovated to house the expanded museum of ironfounding and the large Elton Collection of documentary records. Sites along the river also came into Museum hands. In 1979, the Coalport China Works and in 1984, the Craven Dunnill Encaustic Tile Works in Jackfield were acquired. These have since been developed as museums of Coalport china, and decorated tiles respectively. The Severn Warehouse in Ironbridge has recently opened as a visitor centre and forms the intended starting point for a visitor's day in these various museum sites in the Gorge. The owner of the majority of these sites is the Telford Development Corporation. This body, as a landlord, is primarily concerned with the efficient maintenance and development of its property.

In its rapid expansion, the Trust has absorbed several private collections, and the only other substantial museum in the area of the Gorge. Additionally, however, its success has recently encouraged several smaller heritage ventures such as the china collection at "The Lawns" in Broseley, and has had a profound impact on local trade, particularly in antiques and old buildings. Of course, the distinction between these 'antiques' and objects of potential archaeological significance for those concerned with the material culture of the recent past is a confusing one at the best of times. However, when museum visitors in the Gorge and elsewhere are uncertain whether they are walking into a museum or a shop (as the author was) the lack of distinction is profoundly worrying.³

The rapid expansion of the Museum has been accompanied by a series of increasingly important awards and accolades. In 1974, the first year that the Museum was open to the public on a large scale, it won the 'Come to Britain' trophy. In 1977, it won the 'Museum of the Year' award and, in 1978, the 'European Museum of the Year Award'. In 1980, it again won the 'Come to Britain' trophy. In 1985, the Government presented the Trust with £21,000 in their Business Sponsorship Incentive Scheme. Most recently, in 1987, the area of the Gorge, including the Museum, was named a UNESCO 'World Heritage Site', putting it firmly on the 'world map'.

Archaeological Investigation in Ironbridge

There is little overall direction to the archaeological work carried out under the auspices of the Museum. The Ironbridge Institute was initiated in 1978 as a joint venture between the Museum and Birmingham University to teach post-graduate courses in industrial archaeology. In 1981, the first Manpower Services Commission (MSC) funded archaeologist joined the Museum. The MSC has responsibilities for any archaeological work, almost without exception of a rescue-nature, required on Museum sites. It has also assumed professional responsibility for rescue work in the surrounding area.

Consultancies in the private and public sectors are an area of work which has expanded greatly during the 1980s. The projects are varied, ranging from the definition of terms to be used in local relisting of site and monument schedules, to a major rescue excavation at an early ironfounding site in Newdale, Telford. Only in 1985 was a specifically research-oriented archaeological project established at Ironbridge. Two posts have been funded by the Nuffield Foundation on a short-term basis with the aim of carrying out research and field survey to establish a data-base of archaeological material in the area of the Gorge. Very little detailed survey or excavation has been carried out by the Nuffield project.

Archaeology and the Public at Ironbridge

A quote attributed to Neil Cossons and given considerable prominence in displays at the Museum Visitor Centre gives interesting

insights into the Museum's attitudes to archaeology:

The remains of industrialisation in Britain are the tangible marks of a beginning of a new civilisation which a thousand years hence the archaeologist and historian will identify, categorise and possibly revere in the same way we do the ancient cultures of the Mediterranean.

It is not totally unexpected, yet still nevertheless regrettable, that the task of the archaeologist (and historian) is so prominently proclaimed to be to "identify, categorise and...revere". In reality, as readers of *ARC* will be aware, the principal task for archaeologists is to struggle for understanding using an array of intellectual tools and then to communicate that understanding to others within and beyond the established boundaries of the discipline. Furthermore, referring to the great lengths of time before these "beginnings of a new civilisation" will be studied by archaeologists denies both the rationale for industrial archaeology in particular and, more generally, the potential for archaeology to provide insights into the recent, historical, past. Of course, choosing such a distant analogy also serves to minimise the ideological and political content of archaeology which is ever-present but which is particularly evident when dealing with our own culture rather than some other, 'exotic', one.

Archaeology is rarely presented as a significant aspect of the work of the Ironbridge Museum. Where fieldwork is carried out, it is done so primarily behind the scenes and 'public archaeology' is not an issue. The emphasis is on the historical importance of the sites involved. As with an historian studying manuscripts in a library, it is not recognised that the public should be allowed to -- or would even want to -- disturb his or her painstaking work. Additionally, archaeology is seen as largely irrelevant unless it rewrites the history books or provides physical evidence of an historic fact, an attitude which, clearly, ignores the important information which can be derived from the material, but not the documentary, record.

Information derived from excavation and survey has rarely been used in display contexts. It is not generally appreciated or acknowledged that where the historical sources are weakest, archaeological ones have most strength. Therefore, the history of landscape, settlement and very early industrial developments, while given some emphasis in the displays of the Museum of Iron, are, in contrast to the traditional museum fare of 'famous names' and 'firsts', marginalised in public presentations. Overwhelmingly, the immediate concern is with the presentation of artefacts. Even artefacts as central to the Museum image, such as the Old Furnace at Coalbrookdale, have tended to be seen in isolation. The consequence of the erection of a cover building over the Furnace in 1982 was that it was isolated from the surrounding archaeological context by excavating deep foundation trenches around the whole structure. From one archaeological perspective, only emergency archaeological cover was available and much

important information was lost. From another, a single part of a large industrial complex was given 'star billing' and, while effort is made to relate the remains inside the ultra-modern triangular structure to those outside it, an appreciation of the unity of the complex is hampered.

Some excavations occur in the public parts of the Museum. Although these may not be labelled or advertised, public conversations with the working archaeologists help visitors to understand something of the sites. For example, an excavation of a kiln base at the Coalport China Museum helped some visitors to understand the structure of the adjoining standing kilns more clearly, as archaeologists were able to explain the structure they were exposing, and its operation. It became evident that there were many long standing misconceptions as to the function of the kilns (M. MacLeod, pers. comm.). Of course, it could be through further face-to-face communication that similar misconceptions about the operation of other structures and machinery which form part of the industrial landscape at Ironbridge -- and many other places besides -- could be identified and corrected.

Leaving Ironbridge briefly, a personal reminiscence will perhaps put the implications of such tantalising experience of public archaeology into perspective. The published accounts of archaeological research in Annapolis, carried out in conjunction with the well-known public archaeology project, rarely, if at all, mention the Newman Street site excavated during 1984. Owing to the almost constant stream of visitors to the site located in the centre of a busy town, the excavators, who were trained to give tours of the site, were unable to expose the earlier occupation layers on the site, whose investigation was a central rationale for the excavation. Indeed, it was only the very exceptional funding circumstances of the Archaeology in Annapolis project which allowed this situation to arise and to be accepted. This experience, rewarding yet at the same time frustrating, brings home the conclusion that a commitment to public archaeology at the site of an excavation would often require research objectives to be put aside in favour of important, though less tangible, educational benefits.

At Ironbridge, information from survey and excavation is occasionally included in Museum pamphlets. One of these, a leaflet on walks around Coalbrookdale, contains material from the Nuffield survey explaining the operation of water systems and the functions of some of the buildings along the valley. This is not presented as the results of archaeological survey, although it was the survey which clarified understanding of the landscape as a whole.

Two static displays on archaeology exist. One is at the Coalport China Museum, the other at the Jackfield Tile Museum. The first deals specifically with excavations at Coalport, ignoring survey in the local area. It offers a definition of archaeology, and panels on the location of excavations on the site. Two display cabinets are filled with china and earthenware wasters from the site. The information presented here is distinct from that in the remainder of the Museum, and apparently unrelated.

The Jackfield display deals with the archaeology of the surrounding area, with more display boards, and less concentration on artefacts. More attention is paid to the methods used by an archaeologist. Unfortunately the display is again separated from the main galleries, and has no close relationship with the information presented there.

Explaining the present role of archaeology at Ironbridge: some suggestions

To what should one attribute this failure to give archaeology a higher profile? There seems to be several principal reasons. First, none of the senior staff of the Museum are mainstream archaeologists by training, though many of them have been involved in industrial archaeology for many years. However, as I have pointed out above, despite many advances in methods and techniques, a theoretical gulf still exists which is set to hinder any further rapprochement for the foreseeable future.

Second, since much archaeology is the direct result of the renovation of Museum property, the first priority is to provide working information necessary for the project. A building survey may, therefore, be carried out with renovation or reconstruction in mind, rather than publication or other presentation. Associated factors concern financial and labour limitations. Contract work is entirely determined by the money released by the contractor, and by his or her requirements (generally for working information). This means that contract work may range from a survey of one derelict room which is to be reconstructed for a works museum, to a detailed landscape survey and excavation for a government department.

MSC work is limited by the original outline project for the year (which has to be agreed by the MSC) and by labour. Conceived as a community service, it is essentially a training ground for unemployed workers. This inevitably takes priority over the quality of the work itself. This, however, is the one part of the organisation which could honestly be said to have community education at heart, and the end result of the participation of the MSC team is hopefully public communication as much as supply of undirected information.

Third, the 'theme park' atmosphere of part of the Museum, particularly the 'living' reconstruction of a 19th century industrial community at Blist's Hill, is clearly thought of as not being compatible with the conduct of excavations in plain view of the public. The search for realism, however, which presumably underlies this decision, can be shown to be whistling in the wind by even the most cursory analysis which shows, for example, all costumed workers with very few exceptions engaged in selling items to the visitors ("customers"). In Robert Hewison's view, Blist's Hill "has all the authenticity of a film set" (1987, 93). In contrast to the modern myth which passes for history at Blist's Hill, the presence of excavators would hardly make the 'community' any less realistic.

Fourth, the last few years has seen the growth of an explicit concern for the 'heritage' to become part of the 'leisure industry'. In a compromise between enjoyment and learning, it seems that enjoyment always comes out on top. It is not a case of "why does the devil have all the best tunes?": no-one would suggest that a visit to Ironbridge should be made less enjoyable, but nor would I suggest that giving archaeology and archaeological activities such as excavation greater prominence in the public displays visitors would reduce the visitor enjoyment. As I have noted above, and will return to later, one of the unusual characteristics of archaeology is that it can easily combine both enjoyment and learning with little detriment to either.

Towards a New Role for Archaeology at Ironbridge

It should be evident that I am convinced that there is potential for a greater role for archaeology, in terms of both research and public presentation, at Ironbridge than there is at the moment. By extension, the same would apply to other presentations of the recent past. I argue this for two reasons. Firstly, the archaeological information, as has been noted before, contributes to our understanding of the recent past (not merely as a means of illustration) in many important ways. Information derived from the interpretation of material culture should be presented to the public as such, warts and all, not as 'history' and not as fact (historical or otherwise). This is not a case of interdisciplinary rivalry: rather, it is entirely consistent with the concern for greater openness in the interpretation of the past and a greater concern with sources enshrined in the new GCSE syllabuses.

The second reason, related to the first, stems from the belief that there is a need for the public to be allowed to see behind the disciplinary facade set up by historians and archaeologists. A central tenet of 'post-processual' approaches to archaeology is that interpretation is at least partly the product of individuals embedded in society. This view contrasts with the view of archaeology as a positivist science, which has in different forms in the past tended to dominate archaeological interpretation. This positivist outlook discouraged public archaeology because it marginalised the socialised individual as the producer of interpretations. Since there was only one possible answer to any particular question, it was clearly not necessary to explain the process of interpretation to the public. 'Post-processualism' breaks down many of the traditional barriers between the discipline and the rest of society and the logical consequence of this new perspective is that archaeologists have a duty to acknowledge the methods they employ, the implications of their work for the rest of society, as well as to communicate their findings, in readily accessible forms. Where these findings relate to the recent industrial past, out of which many of the characteristics of modern Western society have developed, the importance of the 'post-processual' emphasis on public accountability is most convincing.

One of the principal characteristics of practically all museums, including the Ironbridge Gorge Museum, is the almost complete lack of

recognition in public presentations that the interpretation of the past has any intellectual or theoretical component and that the link between the past and the present is anything other than straightforward and reliant solely on the accumulation of facts. Reasons for, and consequences of, this situation, as well as possible solutions, have been considered elsewhere (eg. Blatti [ed.] 1987), and I will not repeat the arguments here. However, it is worth emphasising that the principles of this process are no more difficult to grasp than the complexities of everyday politics which, as voters, all adults are expected to understand and respond intelligently to at Polling Stations. The analogy is even more applicable if one accepts that an understanding of the contemporary world is only possible if the events and precedents of the past (life in 19th century Ironbridge, if not Neolithic Stonehenge) are taken into consideration.

It has been argued elsewhere that a fundamental objective of 'public archaeology' programmes must be the explanation of some of the principal characteristics of archaeological research: "an exhibit showing how and why inferences are made from archaeological evidence will give to the public the means of criticising and evaluating archaeological interpretations for themselves" (Johnson and Holman 1986). Attempts at the creation of 'instant archaeologists' by these means are not envisaged, but the much less ambitious aim of demystifying archaeology. Making the discipline more accessible to the public, our audience and paymasters, does not simply mean leaving the door to the finds' shed open. By way of example, I would like to end by discussing very briefly one idea which is not only central to archaeological interpretation but whose main characteristics could be grasped by the visiting public either in museum displays or, perhaps more easily, at the site of an excavation in progress. It is also perhaps particularly appropriate to the Ironbridge Gorge.

The slogan "A bridge with the past" was the principal slogan of the 1987 publicity campaign for the Ironbridge Gorge Museum. It is somewhat ironic that the phrase recalls so well the 'bridging' or 'middle range' theory which Binford has argued with some success should be a central tenet of archaeological practice (1977). For Binford, and for others who adopt this perspective, the 'bridge with the past' is the link between the statics of the modern archaeological record and the dynamics of past behaviour, and it is thus crucial to archaeological interpretation. Despite, or perhaps because of, the potentially crucial role of 'middle range' theory in archaeological interpretation, it is a very simple concept and is one which could easily be discussed in public programmes. It could readily be used to demonstrate how material remains, such as those at Ironbridge, can be interpreted independently of documentary records which may or may not exist. In addition, it could also be used to illustrate the more general point of the relationship between data and theory -- objects and concepts -- which is central to archaeological as well as to other forms of interpretation. Ultimately, perhaps, it is the role of archaeology as a means of making accessible these other forms of interpretation -- ones we take for granted in everyday life and which have immediate relevance to the

contemporary world -- which will ensure the relevance of archaeology in future decades.

Conclusions

For the purpose of analysis in this paper, it has proved impossible to isolate the public presentation of archaeology (as I have defined it earlier, p. 187) from the research context in which such presentations are generated. This principle seems not to be restricted to the situation at Ironbridge, though the context here which I have been at pains to describe does seem to be a particularly clear-cut example. It seems clear also that public presentations will be more readily understandable if they incorporate an explanation of the specific research context -- with its underlying rationale and practical problems -- rather than to imply by omission that the public programme is a project isolated from other elements in a larger framework.

There should be no excuse for ignoring the potential of public archaeology. While rejecting the money-oriented role for the 'heritage' encouraged in Thatcherite Britain, one can nevertheless point to the popularity of archaeology within the 'heritage industry': a popularity which should be exploited for its multi-faceted educational benefits, not for its money-spinning potential. This can be achieved, and the results will be worthwhile, but only through an open debate between mainstream archaeologists, industrial archaeologists and others involved in the public presentation of the past.

Notes

1. The workshop entitled "Towards Theory in Industrial Archaeology" planned for the December 1987 Theoretical Archaeology Group conference in Bradford is arguably the best possible evidence that theoretical questions are only now being considered explicitly by industrial archaeologists.
2. The importance of this 'historical figure', so central to the image of the Museum, is celebrated in the title of a Museum account of its construction: The Iron Bridge: A Short History of the First Iron Bridge in the World (Trinder 1979). The fact that the first iron bridge was a much less grandiose structure built in Derbyshire at an earlier date is not allowed to distract from the myth promulgated in the Gorge. My comment here is on a point of museum philosophy: 'firsts' and other superlatives are not a prerequisite for a successful museum and, in choosing this approach, a particular and, I would argue, unsuitable form of public presentation can result.
3. Similarly, the decision to include information on Antique Fairs and Auctioneers in the 1988 edition of Museums and Art Galleries in Great Britain and Ireland (Alcock 1987), published commercially and featuring information on over 1200 museums and galleries open to the public, must surely be causing concern to many museum workers for much the same reason.

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