THE ROLE OF ARCHAEOLOGY IN VERIFYING AMERICAN IDENTITY: GIVING A TOUR BASED ON ARCHAEOLOGICAL METHOD

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This paper is about outdoor museums which use archaeology as a part of their presentations of local history. Its object is the application of critical theory. The problem reported is how to communicate and achieve some results within a population once a critical analysis is available. The paper is thus a lot less highflying for theory than it might be otherwise, but it tries to be more practical than is usually the case in archaeology in matters which are concerned with a radical analysis.

The larger project I am involved with is giving a community back its rights to its past. This is not out of a populist intent which says history belongs to everyone, but out of an understanding that once people understand how history is composed, they will take responsibility for seeing why it changes and how it is an active ingredient in their identity as a people and a community. The community is Annapolis, Maryland, one of the oldest seaport towns on Chesapeake Bay.

A year and a half ago archaeologists were invited by Historic Annapolis, Inc., Annapolis' 30 year old private preservation organisation, to begin systematic excavations in the capital of the State of Maryland. The invitation brought with it the problem of how to use critical theory in an urban centre with a resident and tourist population already known to be interested in history. This paper is the reasoning behind the effort and a brief report on the results.

Annapolis was founded in the 1650s, flourished in the eighteenth century, and became an economic backwater by 1820, when its development all but stopped, thus preserving its archaeological record more or less completely.

Annapolis is a port city on Chesapeake Bay and its economic success was derived from its being a centre of transhipping and credit between London, Amsterdam and French cities on the one side, the Caribbean on another, and the tobacco and grain farmers of its own hinterlands on the other. From 1650 to 1750 it was a transhipment and shipping centre; then it was largely a credit and political centre in the later eighteenth century.

When archaeology is presented to the public in outdoor museums, the interpretation usually represents a specific time, a precise place, and an exhibition the accuracy of which is grounded in archaeological data. Not normally shown are the processes of excavation which preserve the context of artefacts nor the logic of inference used to recreate the society of which

the artefacts are taken to be a reflection. Most public exhibits of archaeology can be rich in the detail provided by digging but are static regarding the excavation and the assignment of meaning to what is uncovered. The archaeological process is not on exhibit, just the results.

Alternatively, the tradition of urban historical archaeology as it is developing in the United States is underdeveloped in its ways of reaching the public. Urban excavations normally attract large crowds and much attention while going on, but often lack the means to share fascinating data from the community's past with the visiting members of that community. Urban excavations are usually not well fixed chronologically for often the dates of sites have not been established. Neither are the sites fixed in meaning but show that hunches, guesses and documents are still being considered. As fixed exhibits are static, so urban excavations are dynamic, showing as they do, the recovery of context and the ongoing process of establishing meaning.

Urban historical archaeology as it has been carried on citywide in the United States in St. Augustine, Florida and Alexandria, Virginia, and as it is now being carried out in Annapolis, Maryland, does not offer a single site, era or interpretation. These large programmes could offer to resident and visiting populations archaeological excavations which are centrally located and continuously operating. They are also preoccupied with maintaining control over and use of context for artifacts, continual use of inferences from documents, oral history, and analogy to establish and enhance interpretation of the below-ground record.

Combining these two traditions in historical archaeology by opening excavations to an urban populace solves the key issue in historiographical work: how knowledge of the past is obtained. It has long been understood that all our knowledge of the past is a function of the present, and given the virtually universal operation of archaeology on this principle, ongoing excavations may be made to illustrate explicitly the interpretive process. This process is always with the professionals doing the excavations. This is how we argued in Annapolis, Maryland, a city of 30,000, in order to create an exhibit of ongoing excavations.

Since the problem is to communicate that the past is a function of the present, and thus not neutral, then ongoing excavation will illustrate the principle to many people. But the issue is larger and revolves around the value of self-reflection. Archaeologists may make narrow interpretations of the past, but only public acceptance of them gives them ultimate validity in society. Thus, a public excavation teaches viewers how professionals make inferences, and allows visitors to challenge them,

since they quickly, if inexplicitly, pick up argument by analogy with living examples. A public excavation can thus send people away with a firmer command of the method of understanding their own community's past. The process should ultimately illustrate how the present selects among the possible interpretations to fix on the past. If this is done, the full circle connecting the past and the present is made. This would show, besides accuracy, that the past is a series of events or objects the social construction of which is made up in the present. This places a large responsibility on the involved public to see its serious and even causal role in creating the past.

Colonial Williamsburg, St. Mary's City in Maryland, Plimoth Plantation, Sleepy Hollow Restorations in New York State, and many other distinguished American outdoor history museums which utilize archaeology in their public programmes have decades of archival, architectural, and archaeological research behind them. The digging has been done - not finished to be sure, but well begun. There is an interpretation to be presented which is based on years of work, discussion, publication, and even controversy. There is a recreated past to be presented, and it is a plausible reconstruction. The reconstruction is usually fixed for the visitor, although of course it may change for the professional scholars.

On the other hand, in places like St. Augustine, Florida; Alexandria, Virginia; and Annapolis, Maryland, the interpretation is a long way from being complete, and is ongoing. There is certainly in Annapolis no long record of scholarly interpretation except in some areas of social history, which is as one would expect of the initial efforts to make sense of a rich but not extensively sifted past. There is not yet a great deal of controversy over what the past means. The opportunity within this early development is to demonstrate the production of a past out of the artefacts and the search for associated documents. The trial and error part of the process can thus be illustrated before the meaning of the archaeology is fixed, as it has been in the classic outdoor museums.

In cities like the above, which have thought of themselves as living historical towns only for the past 10 or 20 years, the meaning of the past is still being shaped. Archaeology in these cities does not usually make startling or novel discoveries. There is, as yet, no historical foil against which to announce what is new; these communities are just making their pasts. Prior to the 1960s, many of these towns were not yet concerned with their pasts at all. Thus the content of an explanation of an excavation is not what it is disproving, but how a community is assembling its past when it previously had little concern for one. As a result, it is important that method be communicated.

The following is an example of how we conducted a 'typical' tour at an eighteenth century warehouse site in 1982 in midtown Annapolis. The tour is designed specifically to illustrate the methods of understanding the past which are those we think archaeologists actually use. We had four or five graduate and undergraduate students in archaeology, trained by a theatre producer long experienced in using historical materials accurately, to conduct tours for five weeks. We gave these tours to about 7,000 people during the summer of 1982. A tour lasted 15 or 20 minutes.

First, the guide announced to visitors that he would be conducting a tour of the site in ten minutes. Before beginning the tour, the guide 'sized up' the group to get a sense of how he should arrange his material and gear his presentation to them.

The tour began with the guide introducing himself. He explained, for instance, that he was a graduate student in anthropology from The American University or from Brown University, who has been working at the warehouse site for six weeks, and that he is here to get first-hand experience on an eighteenth century excavation.

Next, the guide explained that the work the visitors see proceeding around them is typical of an archaeological site. He explained why the site was marked off in squares, and how the grid was used for cataloguing and mapping. He pointed out that many of the tools seen in use were common household items -- a mason's trowel, a brush -- and explained the use of tools such as a dirt-sifting screen.

With the personnel and the basic procedure thus explained, the guide moved on to describe the goals of the work at this particular site, and to point out and explain what the archaeologists have found at the site to date.

For example, he showed the group an excavated square where the different layers of earth could be clearly seen. He explained that these layers show that land had been filled in at this site, as the waterfront of the city was expanded in the 1700s and 1800s. He showed them how, from what has been dug from these layers, the archaeologists can see that there have been a succession of warehouses on this property, and that this dock area has had continuous commercial use since the 1750s or 1760s.

This is important, he explained, because up to as recently as the 1940s, historians denied the importance of maritime trade in Annapolis, interpreting its history instead solely as a political centre. This they did despite the presence of the United States Naval Academy since the 1840s. The guide explained that this shows how scholars are a product of their age: up until

the emergence of social history in the 1960s, politics eclipsed economic context.

Next the guide showed the group an excavated section of brick wall that was six metres long, seven courses high, and three bricks thick. He pointed out the joist pockets. By arguing from our engineering knowledge of brick buildings today, he explained, we can say that this building was probably two to two-and-a-half storeys tall. By measuring the distance between the floor beams, and again figuring this measurement against the way floors are built today, we can reconstruct the load-bearing capacity of the floor. This can be specified further when we take burned boards next to the wall, identify the species of wood, and thus know their tensile strength. We can do this, the guide said, because we understand the strengths of modern brick, mortar and timber, and extrapolate backward. We can reason from what we know about these materials today, and how they are used now, to how they were most likely used in the past.

When you visualise a reconstructed warehouse standing here, he says, what you are really seeing is an elaborate series of inferences linking the past and the present. Our understanding of how that building most likely looked and what it was most likely used for in the 1700s is derived by analogy from today.

In this way, by using specific and immediate examples, the guide has attempted to show that we derive our understanding of the past from the present. Our hope is that the guide has shown one of the principal sources of our knowledge of the past.

I admit that this specific example does not show a listener the particular source within the present, either political or economic, of the analogies, especially when they are writ large, as in intricate interpretations like Colonial Williamsburg. In our site there is no way to do that yet.

One illustration of how archaeology might show the ongoing and thus changing process of establishing meaning is represented in the case of the William Paca Garden. This large formal eighteenth century garden was excavated in the late 1960s and early 1970s and is now open to the public. It is an archaeologically-based reconstruction which could be interpreted for the public in such a way that it illustrates the factors in the present which influence the meaning which is attached to the past.

The large garden was built by William Paca in the 1760s and 1770s. It was buried under a 200-room hotel in the early twentieth century and recovered archaeologically in the 1960s. The logic of reconstruction, illustrative of what could be shared through archaeology, would involve the use of excavated data,

paintings, prints, documents, maps and late nineteenth century photographs. The data would show the logic of reconstruction and the source of the information on the reconstruction.

The Paca Garden was seen in the late 1960s, when it was initially reconstructed, as derived from English, French and colonial models. With the archaeology in hand, the garden as reconstructed became a compromise between a kitchen garden on the one hand, and a formal one on the other. More recently, it has been proposed that the garden conforms either to Euclid's principle of dynamic symmetry, in which one basic shape is the root, with all others as transformations, or that it was built according to Renaissance rules of perspective. In either case, the plants, paths, and arbors probably have nothing to do with either utility or floral detail; rather, they are subordinate concerns to formal geometry, with which there is reason to believe Paca was familiar.

The process of interpretation is continuous in the reconstruction of the garden and is always derived from living situations like the English gardening tradition, formal geometry, mathematical perspective, or ideas drawn from period records and pictures. Thus, it could be argued that we today give meaning to the past. This example makes it clear that the model for the current understanding of the garden comes from the 1960s and its concern with beautification, urban redevelopment, and gentrification, and that the meaning from the 1980s is associated with the fascination for finding astronomical and geometrical information encoded in the archaeological data.

By showing that our guesses are not cumulative, but collide with and eclipse one another, the debate over their role in comprehending the past can be illustrated, and the real plasticity of the past -- and therefore of the present's responsibility for meaning -- is made available to the public.

The Paca Garden is the locale of tours by trained guides now, and these do not yet take advantage of the research methods used to create and continue the restoration of the garden. There is no resistance to such a view; one merely needs to be spelled out.

In all reconstructions, the past tends to be interpreted to speak like the present. Even though interpretation almost always produces accuracy, the finality the public sees hides the actual sources of interpretation as well as the fact that interpretations change. Revealing the parts of the interpretation will open more of the past to the public and may simultaneously give people greater responsibility for the past.

Given the rapt attention, the spontaneous applause that

archaeologists/guides often received after the tours described earlier, and the results of our surveys of visitor reaction, our illustrations of archaeological reasoning seem to have been communicated to people. Some did go away knowing archaeological method: not what we know about another time, but how we know it. So far, the community and its visitors have responded enthusiastically to this way of returning their past.

Our method of reaching the public was chosen in the absence, as yet, of any clear archaeological interpretation of early Annapolis. Clearly, that content is appropriate for a tour when it becomes available. Also, given that critical theory is a method for situating self and society and produces only momentary piecings of reality, a critical analysis must be ongoing. This will ensure that the picture of the action of modern ideology, which we can provide through illustrating archaeological method, will not be reabsorbed by the very ideology we are trying to highlight.

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LEY LINES: SENSE AND NONSENSE ON THE FRINGE

Tom Williamson and Liz Bellamy

A 1972 _Antiquity_ editorial referred to ley hunters as belonging to:

> the world of New Diffusionists, Black Horses, pyramidiots, straight trackers and the rest of them, the world which every student of antiquity recognises, with an embarrassed smile, as a danger only to those whose weak and muddled heads prefer the comforts of unreason to the difficult facts of archaeology. (Daniel 1972:4)

On the other hand, the ley hunter Paul Screeton wrote of archaeology in his classic text _Quicksilver Heritage_:

> we would not take kindly to being associated with a study whose foundations are the plunder of tumuli, the amassing and categorisation of broken pottery and implements, and the scratching away of soil with incredible patience. (Screeton 1974:25)

It is thus that archaeologists and believers in ley lines have tended to discuss their differences. In a recent article in _Popular Archaeology_, however, Aubrey Burl attempted a more rational discussion of ley theory (Burl and Michell 1983) and this followed R. G. Atkinson's brave article in the _Ley Hunter_ itself (Atkinson 1981). It can only be hoped that these indicate a new trend in archaeology, and a more serious consideration of its fringe. This would be a salutory change, for, prior to the publication of these articles, communication between the two camps was conducted at the level of sporadic exchanges of vituperation. These served only as brief interruptions in the war of silence in which each side tried to ignore the other and rejected any attempt at compromise. This has been so effective that it may be necessary to inform many readers of the nature of ley theory and to give a brief account of the history of the subject.

It first developed in the 1920s, the brainchild of one Alfred Watkins, prominent amateur archaeologist and pioneer archaeological photographer. He outlined his theories in a number of books, the most famous and comprehensive of which is _The Old Straight Track_ (Watkins 1925). This is subtitled 'Its Mounds, Beacons, Moats, Sites and Markstones', and Watkin's thesis is based on the notion that these and other ancient features appear to be in alignment more often than chance would predict. Watkins believed that the alignments, which he named leys, represented