

THE NATIONAL SURVEY OF PUBLIC OPINION TOWARDS ARCHAEOLOGY

The Cambridge Research Cooperative

Recently, numerous problems and differences have emerged within and outside archaeology which challenge its current status as an intellectual pursuit. Cuts in government funding for archaeology as an educational and research discipline threaten its financial basis. There is the possibility that it must rely heavily on private and business sponsorship with archaeological groups becoming independent commercial enterprises. This would also result in changes in the research goals of archaeologists attempting to present the subject as an interesting and relevant pursuit for a large number of people from different social backgrounds.

Archaeologists' inability to be accountable to a public wider than the "middle aged, middle class bourgeoisie" (Selkirk 1982:36) may be partly the result of archaeology's position as a potentially elitist and 'snobbish' cultural practice, by virtue of its academic status. The growing hostility of a disaffected fringe of treasure hunters, ley hunters and other groups towards the professional practitioners, is a further indication that knowledge of the past is not being shared or disseminated as a "people's archaeology" ('Boudicca' 1982:9-10). If the past has any value to the British population, then a number of possibilities could be suggested. It may be a source of direct financial reward; a heritage of mute artefacts and monuments to be preserved for the future; a way of finding out more about the conditions of human existence; or as a form of escapism from the problems of the present.

If archaeology is to change and become more accountable to the public, then it is essential that material is gathered about public opinion on archaeology. For this reason a survey was organized in Cambridge in 1982 to investigate attitudes to archaeology and the past. The survey attempted to collect information on how people's conceptions of the past are formed (through media, education, work) and on attitudes, awareness and interest in the past. It was hoped that this would be the beginning of a national survey to be carried out in 1983. The response from archaeological circles has been very encouraging and coordinated surveys are being arranged in Cambridge, Southampton, Newcastle, Sheffield, Edinburgh, Wick, Inverness, Cumbernauld, London, Colchester and Lancaster.

The Cambridge pilot study was carried out by the Cambridge Research Cooperative in collaboration with members of the Department of Archaeology at Cambridge University. Twenty-five individuals were selected from a sequential sample of the electoral register for Cambridge and interviewed in their homes.

(Archaeological Review from Cambridge 2:1 (1983))

The interviewers' questionnaire covered a number of general topics which were each composed of specific questions. Information was collected on the age, gender, occupation, previous occupations, marital status, education, leisure activities and home environment of the interviewees. They were then asked about their familiarity with archaeology. Had they visited a museum or archaeological site recently? Had they found it interesting and if so why? Had they watched any television programmes or films, read books or newspaper articles or listened to radio programmes about archaeology and the past and did they find them interesting? They were asked about their personal involvement in the subject. Did they belong to a local history or industrial archaeology society? Had they ever traced their family trees? Had they ever found any old remains and what did they do with them? Had they ever heard of ley lines? Did they have a metal detector?

This was followed by a general section on archaeology. How would they define archaeology? - Digging up bones and pots.

- Finding out how societies have changed.
- Finding out how people lived in the past.

How do they think archaeologists can learn about people from the objects they study? Is public money well spent on archaeology? Do people need to know about their distant past? Should it be taught in schools?

Interviewees were then asked how they thought life was different in the past - in prehistoric times, in the Roman period and just before the Industrial Revolution. Could they break down the past into any particular eras? Why did they select those particular eras? Finally two specific topics were presented. What was Stonehenge used for - a temple, an observatory, to tell the time, just a pile of old stones? Had they heard about or seen on television the raising of the Mary Rose? Was it interesting? Why did they think it was so popular? How did they think it related to current affairs?

The sample was too small for significant conclusions, especially as only 12 of the 25 interviews were successful (the rest of them did not want to be involved, were too ill or had died recently). However, the pilot study highlighted a number of problems. The sampling strategy was costly and time-consuming to implement, with each interviewer travelling across town to interview someone who might not be at home or was not interested in being interviewed. Future sampling will be done by taking two contrasting residential streets, one council housing and the other private housing. The most favourable street would be one with 15 to 20 houses. Every occupant in the street would then be interviewed. In this way a sample of at least 100 interviews

could be collected for each town. If any community organization existed (housing group, residents' committee) they could be approached first to ensure better cooperation.

While the cluster sampling technique is statistically more manageable (Blalock 1972:523-7), biases may result from refusals to answer the questionnaire, the ability of some people to articulate their thoughts more clearly than others (especially on more abstract issues such as social change), and the involvement of archaeologists or archaeological students as interviewers. The survey design will take note of these possible biases. The content of the questionnaire and the appropriateness of the questions were discussed after the pilot study but no major changes were made.

This study is only the beginning of a detailed project (see also Cambridge Research Cooperative 1983). It is hoped that the results will be published as a joint concern by all involved in the national survey. Once this is achieved it will be possible to establish guidelines for making archaeology more interesting and perhaps even relevant to the mass of the British public.

#### References

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- 'Boudicca'. 1982 Professional Archaeology versus People's Archaeology. Treasure Hunting November 1982:9-10.
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#### ARCHAEOLOGY AND TELEVISION

Bruce Norman

CHRONICLE, the television 'stones and bones' show, has been running for 17 years. It began in June 1966 and was originally a magazine programme "so bad" said David Attenborough, Controller of BBC 2 at the time, "that, if it doesn't improve it will be taken off". It improved and survived to become a 50-minute film series and has so far clocked up 194 editions.

Its origins were in radio where, in 1946, the West of England Home Service began regular archaeology programming with a series introduced by Glyn Daniel. This series continued its run for several years on the Third Programme under the title 'The Archaeologist' and began to familiarise the listening public with great names like Wheeler, Crawford, and Piggott. By 1952, it had spawned the television quiz show 'Animal, Vegetable and Mineral' (AVM), again with Wheeler and Daniel, and produced by Paul Johnstone, my predecessor as CHRONICLE editor. "It was," said the Times, "an instant and spectacular success. Libraries found that neglected shelves of archaeological books were suddenly empty." From AVM came the teasingly named 'Buried Treasure' (1954-59), and from that came CHRONICLE, with a pedigree as popular as it was serious.

I call CHRONICLE a 'show' because we are in the entertainment business - not the archaeology business. We are not further education, not Open University but, along with the other three channels, are fighting for an audience in a television world increasingly dominated by finance and a concern for high audience ratings. My responsibility as editor of CHRONICLE is to the BBC licence holders, not to the archaeologists; but having said that, my aim in the series is to be supportive of archaeologists and to reflect the thinking as well as the doing in the world of archaeology. The aim is to inform and educate the viewing public in as entertaining a way as possible and to continue the great tradition of Reithian broadcasting.

Over the years, the public that we have been trying to inform, educate and entertain has grown from an average of about one million, 10 years ago, to an average of about two-and-a-half million now, with our recent programmes on China and the Mary Rose approaching 4 million: high for BBC 2 documentaries, low when compared with 17 million for 'Coronation Street', the most consistent high-scorer on the network. However, our largest aggregate audience was for our coverage, over the three days, of the lifting of the Mary Rose, in October 1982. During this period, we transmitted two Mary Rose films and the outside broadcast of the lift itself, a total of 16 hours broadcasting seen by a collective audience of 20 million U.K. viewers as well as