

do not think on our feet with great rapidity! Any changes in structure may take time to implement, and changes in the consciousness about the concept of TAG even longer. I hope however that the welcome venue of Glasgow for 1985 under John Barrett's guidance will bring with it a greater practical 'democratisation' (rather than the recreation of a purely theoretical democracy) of archaeological discourse than currently exists.

Paul Lane  
Cambridge University

\* \* \*

TAG '84: A Field Archaeologist's Perspective

I must admit that the annual TAG conference does not come very high on my list of conference priorities. That I attended the Cambridge event was due to the organisers' stated aim of integrating theory and practice, combined with the convenient geographical location. Three months on, my overriding impression is of a rather mixed bag of lectures, some of which achieved what I presume the TAG organisers were hoping for and others which appeared to fall short of the target. For instance, 'Archaeology at AD 2000' covered a diverse range of subjects: field work, excavation, the media, the ethics of archaeological investigation and public display. The theoretical aspects of the majority of this session's papers were more apparent in the abstracts than in the lectures themselves, to a point where integration almost gave way to submergence. Undoubtedly TAG provided a useful umbrella for this group of papers, but the majority would not have been out of place where theoretical archaeology was not a prime consideration.

The session on Theory and

Practice in Plough Zone Archaeology was of significant interest, because of its relevance to my own work in the Norfolk fens, and overall it provided a more tightly structured set of papers. Of the two speakers who considered sampling strategies for the plough zone, Nigel Mills argued persuasively for a broad sampling approach followed by more detailed work at the regional or local level; whilst one might quibble with minor details such as the size of sampling units, there is no doubt in my mind that this is perhaps the most valid approach to the systematic recovery of useful assemblages. In his 'Stonehenge Environs' paper Julian Richards took the approach one step further with the integration of limited excavation. Possibly it was no coincidence that this was the last paper presented in the session, for it raised several related points. Firstly we need to be cautious about inferences drawn from plough zone assemblages. Following on from this is the fact that sampling by surface collection is, by itself, insufficient; it is a means to an end and excavation should form an integral part of any reasonably funded survey. In some cases the total archaeological assemblage may be incorporated in the plough soil, but where stratigraphy survives excavation should provide a time dimension not available for surface work alone.

Consideration of the effect of material accumulating through time, with the resultant confusion in the plough zone record, was largely overlooked in two earlier papers by Mark Edmonds and Peter Hayes, who dealt with more theoretical approaches to plough zone assemblages. However, this mild criticism must be set against the appreciation that if we are to proceed beyond the use of our material for simple geographical distributions of sites and artefact types, interpretational models must be generated and

then tested against the data derived from field work.

One other point needs to be made. The jargon which so often appears to be a necessary medium for the dissemination of archaeological theory, surfaced in Edmond's paper and was highlighted in that by Bill Boismier. Arguably the latter's paper was one of the more useful attempts to bridge the theory-practice divide, although it is regrettable that two years after the fieldwork experiment on Broom Hill the material still awaits processing. But do archaeologists really refer to 'problem domains' and 'plough induced density gradients' in everyday archaeological conversations or are such terms reserved for conferences and publications? For those of us not conversant with this special language simultaneous translation is required. The problem is further exacerbated when a paper is read rather than delivered.

Did the session succeed in its stated aim? Where practice was viewed as a logical successor to theory (as in the latter papers) the desired integration appears to have succeeded. Interpretational models stand more easily by themselves than do field survey methodologies, and the two papers on lithic scatters and pottery distributions were disappointing solely through the lack of practical application. Yet there is obviously considerable potential in the systematic collection of material from the plough zone, as long as we can demonstrate that there is more to be gained from the expenditure of time and resources in this manner than simply adding spots to distribution maps and bags of rubbish to museum basements.

Bob Silvester  
Norfolk Archaeological Unit

\* \* \*

TAG '84: A Review From Glasgow

Invariably TAG is never one conference, but rather a collection of small conferences, termed sessions. Reviewing the whole of TAG is well nigh impossible, for each session has its own character transcending the theme set for it. Arguably, this character owes much to the best papers received during its course; thus Mark Horton's paper on East African exchange centres, while provoking disagreement among the Glasgow contingent, set its stamp on the Fetish and Phantasm session simply by being the most entertaining paper I heard during the three days. Alas, all too many of the presentations at Cambridge, potentially very interesting, were destined to fall on deaf ears, for a multiplicity of reasons over and above mere absenteeism caused by alcoholic overindulgence and sheer fatigue. Some participants, for example, had written scripts which were read out at an incomprehensible speed, while others, apparently armed only with a collection of hastily jotted down thoughts, attempted impromptu to create a coherent speech and failed. Some never even finished; Mike Parker Pearson's ten-minute introduction had to be cut short after more than twenty minutes, forcing him to suggest that he would have to sum up Marx in two minutes. Organisational problems at Cambridge were due, in the most part, to the lack of punctuality by contributors.

Difficulties in comprehension for the audience were most marked in the sessions primarily composed of foreigners. Even the Dutch, rightly renowned for their excellence in speaking English, caused occasional confusion among the audience, although this problem was most apparent in the Italo-Iberian session. This was most unfortunate, for so much of 'theoretical' archaeology seems to involve no more than boarding the