

## Editorial

Resolutions are easy enough to make but notoriously difficult to keep. Everyone knows that New Year resolutions are merely devices designed to cover the stains left by the failure of last year's good intentions. This is the second issue of ARC and in the first number this publication stated its intention to be "optimistic and fearless" and insisted that it would have a bias only towards that work considered "innovative and exciting". Great claims! And ones that ARC intends to keep.

However it seems that the despondency and bewilderment currently pervading academic institutions as a result of the UGC cuts, is already evident in the thinking and writing of a number of archaeologists. No doubt archaeology is not alone in this; but nevertheless being on the look out for new, exciting and innovative material it was instructive to attend the Third Theoretical Archaeology Group conference, held in Reading in December 1981.

TAG is designed as an occasion for archaeologists from all over the country to meet and listen to informed papers which highlight theoretical developments, difficulties and lacunae. After which intelligent and critical discussion will follow. That this did not happen at Reading was not necessarily the fault of the organisers; although there was insufficient time for discussion and large numbers of highly condensed papers, given at top speed, with often as many as six in a row, did not help. There is nothing more calculated to discourage discussion than that "I must have a cup of coffee" feeling - sometimes translated, as a result of an archaeological transform, into "I need a drink now" - a much stronger emotional imperative!!

However, more importantly, Reading gave many participants the impression that the heady days of archaeological radicalism are finished - something flabby has crept in. Many theoretical positions were presented in well argued and excellently delivered papers (eg Gamble and Miller). But on the second day there were several papers which might have been better termed methodological or descriptive, rather than theoretical. Its not that these papers were themselves unsatisfactory, merely that they were not new, not theoretical and not forward looking. They indicated the discouraging decline into the nervous attitude of "I must look applied or no more money will be forthcoming." Whoever they are, they hold the purse strings and they are making academic archaeologists timid.

Applied work of course lies at the base of continuing theoretical advancement but timidity and despondency must not be allowed to win out and it is therefore encouraging that four research students have been brave enough to publish articles in this issue of ARC. The articles by Bewley, Gosden and McVicar all succeed in giving a flavour of research in progress. Bob Bewley's article is intended to provide the archaeology of the north-west with some much needed attention. It also serves to maintain ARC's intention to try and dispel the myth of southern chauvinism. Although as the letters page indicates there is every sign that this topic is once again becoming contentious and that this may have negative rather than positive results.

Alison Sheridan's article provides a critique of current approaches to the study of exchange and her conclusion is stimulating because it has something concrete to offer. Guides for future action are always difficult to supply but are nevertheless <sup>an</sup> as essential part of academic research. Mary Braithwaite takes up this point on her commentary on sexism in archaeological discourse.

Archaeology has been loathe to admit how important the cultural background of the researcher is when any attempt is made to provide an interpretation of the past. Archaeology, as a science, did not need to concern itself with such grey areas. However the newly emerging discipline of archaeology, as a social science, is much more aware of these difficulties (eg Professor Leone's recent work). But, as Braithwaite points out, if we wish to take our place in the social sciences then we must be prepared to face the fact that the future may have a tendency to recreate itself in the past. Sexism in language is an emotive subject and those who feel most threatened often express concern for the purity of the language and/or are worried, and possibly upset, by such alternatives to the gender pronouns as hesh, tey, his/her, s/he etc. There is a very real difficulty as to how we are to remove gender indicators from our language. But, in one sense, this is not the real problem since the most acute difficulty lies in the indivisible relationship between language and power. A relationship which produces associations like male/active/right/strong/control and female/passive/wrong/weak/hysterical etc. Although these associations may be made conceptually they are reflected linguistically. And it is the interpenetration and interdependence of conceptual and linguistic categories which present a problem for archaeologists as they attempt first to



'describe' and then 'interpret' the past. Observation and descriptions are weighed down with more than just archaeological theory.

So to all our readers we say you need look no further than Archaeologia Chauvinistica for evidence of ARC's resolve to be "optimistic... innovative" etc in 1982. For the dissenters among you, we say - look out your sexism's showing!!!

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