Special section

Another perspective

edited by SIMON STODDART*

In our opening editorial, we raised the question of what other professions and disciplines think of archaeology. As a discipline we can be too introverted and we have thus requested *Another perspective*. We took advice from august friends and colleagues, and sent invitations. At least one author died, at least one suffered from the mental exhaustion of addressing the issue and withdrew, one author we hope will be published in a future ANTIQUITY, some invitations remained unanswered and others, in this commercial age, probably expected money. As an aside, I have discovered in the Crawford archives in the Bodleian library that ANTIQUITY did initially offer a fee (of undisclosed size) to its contributors, but that this was replaced by generous provision of offprints, a service that has yet to be defined as subject to income tax, even by the present UK government. Public service replaced financial remuneration and this is the enduring tradition of the ANTIQUITY team. If we had decided to continue as editors for a further five years we would have persevered in our invitations to other university-based disciplines and recruited other complementary perspectives, those of a philosopher, an historian, an art-historian, a lawyer etc. We would have worked hard to collect together the thoughts of a poet, a craft potter, a sculptor and another fine artist. We would also have collected the views of an engineer, a diplomat and . . . perhaps another editor will take on this challenge.

The three authors who responded rapidly and generously to our invitation, and whose words are published here, form an interesting, diverse, yet coherent view of archaeology from the perspective of the public. The *politician* represents the public. If s/he does not, s/he is not re-elected. The *publisher* provides for the public taste. If s/he does not, the publishing house goes bankrupt. The *cartoonist* interprets the public mood in a way that in written words would be more dangerous. If s/he does not, the lawyer intervenes. These three perspectives are very important to the archaeologist. The politician provides funding for our activities. The good publisher disseminates our results and ideas in a way that represents them effectively, avoiding the lunacies that Glyn Daniel was wont to fulminate against. The cartoonist has the ability to tease the archaeologist, to stop us taking ourselves so seriously that we ossify our views in ignorant insularity, or couch our language in obscurity and jargon.

Tam Dalyell, the Father of the House of Commons and spokesman for clear principles, not always in agreement with the current government run by his political party, provides an engaging set of anecdotes of archaeological encounters. He had the inspiring teachers that lead to many an archaeological career. He met at least two key figures in the biography of ANTIQUITY: Childe and Piggott. He has also met key (if not always pleasant) political figures from the world stage who understand the power and importance of the past, and the role of archaeology in understanding that past. Cultural diplomacy is highly effective. Cultural diplomacy that employs archaeology goes beyond the narrow confines of written history and encourages both self-identity and the exchange of ideas. As I have personally visited many famous archaeological sites in the world, I have ascended the steps of many a pyramid preceded by one of our well-known cabinet (executive) politicians. Yet how rarely do those self-same politicians climb the steps of the British Museum, open an archaeological conference or write the introduction to an archaeological volume. Tam Dalyell makes the point forcefully that an academic degree in archaeology is one of the best

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preparations not just for the vocational career of archaeology itself, but provides the lateral thinking, diplomatic skills and training for many other careers. Government must be trained to recognize this, as much else. Perhaps the new Education Secretary will introduce some flexibility into the English curriculum to allow this to happen at all stages of education. Archaeologists must be encouraged to publicize the benefits of their training.

Peter Kemmis Betty also relays his interest in archaeology through an autobiographical approach. He identifies the powerful support for archaeology. Firstly, there is that great strength of the local archaeological societies and related local activities. Archaeology deals with the tangible, and the tangible is often that extra layer of understanding behind the familiar. This is not just a formula for public consumption, but a powerful teaching aid. All three departments where I have taught — York, Bristol and Cambridge — employ the city and its local region as a setting for a teaching module. The second great strength is the national, and indeed international, coverage of television. The main weakness, to my mind, already reported in our editorials, is that we too often leave the production and even the lead presentation to non-archaeologists, usually generalist arts graduates and occasionally actors. We need again television personalities of the year who owe their origin to our discipline. The matching of a popular book with a popular television programme is a powerful formula which should be developed for the good of the discipline — in spite of the unfinanced bureaucratic motions imposed by successive Ministers of State for Education, which leave little time for the creativity required to put such formulae in place. As a Batsford author, I have the experience of Peter's good offices. However, I confess that I am an author in-waiting for Tempus (his current publishing house). Perhaps an EX-editor of ANTIQUITY will have more time to sign a contract! Certainly this was the catalyst that permitted my co-editor to produce *Neolithic Britain and Ireland*.

Bill Tidy, the author of many of the cartoons which have lightened our editorials, presents the other route to archaeology. As Bill puts it, for him and, we should remember, for many of the public, fact and myth are generously entangled. The challenge for the archaeologist is to disentangle the two, and yet retain the widespread appeal. He explains his technique for constructing an archaeological cartoon which draws on the rich fabric of scientific data and public impressions of archaeology. The result is to take archaeologists away from any pomposity that our academic training may encourage.

In these articles, the sheer enjoyment of archaeology is prominent. How many undergraduates can say that of their more traditional course in history or law! It is no accident that enrolment in archaeology courses increased by 95% between 1994 and 1999 in the United Kingdom (Ramsden & Brown 2002: 11), and this is a wonderful confirmation of the potential of archaeology. However, it should not breed a climate of complacency. As these contributions show, specialists in archaeology must heed the more general, popular and accessible, as well as striving towards greater levels of knowledge. The intended spirit of ANTIQUITY is to combine both knowledge and acessibility.

Reference

RAMSDEN, B. & N. BROWN. 2002. *Patterns of Higher Education institutions in the UK. Second Report.* London: Universities UK.

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