

# EDITORIAL

When he was lying on his deathbed, veteran comedian Bob Hope was asked where he would like to be buried. “I dunno” said the old wise-cracker, “surprise me”. This makes a nice contrast with today’s obsession with ‘choice’ and the right to be in total control. Mental awakening feeds off being surprised: *tales of the unexpected* are enjoyable, *tales of the entirely predictable* less so and *tales of the guaranteed outcome* hardly worth picking up. So courting surprise is part of the research game too. Discovery is in our blood; not just new sites and newly unearthed objects, but new ideas and new ways of looking at the past. Currently we encounter these new things through the media and through journals such as this one, where every issue hopes to offer the reader a ‘wow’ or at least an ‘aha’ of pleasant revelation. The editor chooses authors who have something new to say, the author presents the reader with a new idea in persuasive prose, and the reader assesses it, digests it and responds to it. And the result of all this, hopefully, is that the subject moves forward.

Now compare this with the bleak geography of knowledge presented at a series of meetings in England this summer. The new unit of enlightenment is not to be a discourse or persuasive prose, but ‘information’. New information is deemed the only true research commodity and it is no longer to be published but stored in e-repositories on the internet. You do not need to read anything you didn’t intend, you remain in control, finding what you ‘need’, using keywords and search engines such as Google. Much of this is being promoted in the name of *open access*, the idea that the results of new science should be free at the point of delivery. Research councils plan to subsidise authors to place their work in e-journals or e-repositories, so readers won’t have to pay. This way, you don’t need editors; and ultimately you don’t need journals.

But what safeguards will we have against the storing or promoting of nonsense on the net? Ah, (in theory at least) the peer-review system does that. Moreover, Google already contains intelligent programs guiding you to what you are (probably) looking for, and this process is being continually refined – the business of the new science of ‘trust metrics’. As was explained at the National Council of University Professors meeting at King’s College, London, trust metrics can also be fed by centrally appointed reviewers, paid to rank the year’s output, thus increasing the citations of the papers they fancy. So, will the net become a cage? We will have thoroughly open access day and night, but only to a predetermined and sanitised supply, like a battery hen. And this will help us lay four nice regular brown eggs for the assessors’ tea.

In my view these are dangerous roads to travel. Peer-reviewing is necessary but not sufficient for the process of turning information into knowledge and distributing it in a nourishing form. You need editors and publishers to do that. Even so, the ultimate arbiters of useful and interesting research are not editors or governments or councils or panellists or assessors or peer-reviewers, but readers. Readers decide what matters through their purchasing power. And what matters to readers is what’s new to them; their tales of the unexpected. Journals exist to manage new research for the benefit of readers, and that means surprising them. *Antiquity* specialises in *offering you articles you didn’t know you wanted to read*. But born from that moment of pleasurable surprise, your own research can take a whole new direction.

🏺 The moratorium on excavation in Egypt declared by Antiquities Minister Zahi Hawass has naturally had a mixed reception. On the one hand, the days of long term digging without a specific research priority should certainly be put behind us, in Egypt as elsewhere. No one in any country wants to see discovery draw too far ahead of understanding. But is a total ban too extreme? An old friend, Randi Danforth, writes from Cairo with a positive message from the American Research Centre in Egypt (ARCE). Official policy does indeed dictate that permits will not be issued for new excavations in Upper Egypt, but conservation, recording and restoration are permitted. In the Nile Delta and desert areas where agricultural development (including irrigation) and land reclamation activity is intense in some places, permits for new excavations are granted where significant sites are threatened. ARCE, for example, has been able to make important contributions to rescue efforts where time is of the essence. This seems to indicate the development of new kinds of relationships between the curators of the world's richest archaeological territories and foreign researchers.

ARCE was founded in the late 1940s by a group of scholars from Cambridge, Massachusetts, who were interested in supporting excavation, conservation and research of antiquities in Egypt. Today, under director Gerry Scott, the Centre acts as the link between American (and sometimes Canadian) institutions and individuals and the Egyptian Government. Grants from the US Government support scholars, archaeologists and conservation experts in a wide range of projects in Egypt: Neolithic, Pharaonic, Graeco-Roman, Coptic and Islamic. There are dozens of sites under ARCE supervision, in areas such as the Nile Valley, the Delta, Upper Egypt, the Red Sea, Sinai and the oases. ARCE also has a fellowship programme that supports students, both starting out and already established, in research on a wide range of topics on site in Egypt. Another mission is the field school that ARCE runs for the SCA archaeology inspectors, the most recent at Giza under the direction of Mark Lehner. As Scott says, 'ARCE presents a singularly positive American face within the Middle East'. Comments Danforth: 'A positive face that in these times, we certainly need.'

🏺 Although all relate to Britain, it's well worth celebrating a number of new digital archives online, since they are thereby available for the first time world-wide: the National Archive, the Dictionary of National Biography and the Society of Antiquaries of London Catalogue of Drawings and Museum Objects. The Chief Executive of the National Archive is Sarah Tyacke, champion of women's history, who was previously first female keeper of the Public Records and first female director of Special Collections in the British Library. The National Archive has 200 miles of documents covering 1000 years of British History from the Domesday Book to newly released government papers. Since her arrival, the new Chief Executive has caused over 4 million documents to be made available online, allowing people to see original historical papers in their own living rooms. There can scarcely be a more auspicious moment for research into the role of women in British history, which in turn can offer analogies for discovering gender in the even more extensive (if more ambiguous) records of prehistory (<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk>).


The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (<http://www.oxforddnb.com/templates>) is perfect for archaeologists wanting to throw new light on the history of archaeology – or who are just plain nosy. Enter 'archaeologist' in the search box and see what you come



*Amoval of member: A medieval bronze aeolipile (humidifier) found while digging the Basingstoke Canal in 1799. Left: as found. Right: the coy nineteenth-century drawing by James Basire. From the Society of Antiquities of London catalogue, now online at [http://ads.abds.ac.uk/catalogue/specColl/SoA\\_images/gallery.cfm](http://ads.abds.ac.uk/catalogue/specColl/SoA_images/gallery.cfm)*

up with. I found Tim Champion's evocative description of Christopher Hawkes: 'a striking figure despite his spare build and his increasingly severe limp. He had penetrating pale eyes behind his thick glasses, and a shock of dark hair that later turned to silver. He was a good listener, but also intimidatingly well-informed'. I remember wheeling him along the plank paths at Sutton Hoo when he was almost blind, explaining what was to be seen to the left and right, and earning the treasured (and never likely to be repeated) compliment 'thank you for talking so much'.

As well as renewing acquaintance with the recently famous, the use of keywords leads to rarer birds. The enjoyable part of the snooping process clearly focuses on the personal life rather than the archaeology (the books can look after themselves). Lionel Rees (1884–1955), for example, who had an 'uncanny' knowledge of ancient Transjordan, was a pilot in two World Wars and 'an excellent shot, able to hit, with either hand, a business card held by a colleague at 25 yards'. At the age of 63 he married Sylvia Williams, an 18 year old West African, and settled down at Nassau. Unexpectedly, the biographies also tell us what our heroes were worth at death. Ella Armitage (d 1931), author of *The early Norman Castles of the British Isles* (1912) and a gifted pianist who wrote several hymns, lived 90 years but left only £907 11s 3d. Alfred Maudslay, recorder of the Maya, who also died in 1931, left £27,557 3s; Alexander Keiller (three wives), the Dundee marmalade heir and purchaser–excavator of Windmill Hill, left £106,798 14s 11d. This is all hard to live up to. I should be posthumously flattered to be in DNB but sorry to have exposed, as the ineluctable consequence of a profligate life, the fact that I left my family in penury.


 Mark Hall, Scottish medievalist and curator of archaeology at Perth Museum, has some fine harsh words for Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*, calling it an 'eloquent



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demonstration of how pulp fiction can get it wrong, in this case disturbingly so'. He finds it guilty of promulgating a 'proven fraud, unveiled some 30 years ago' and all in all 'a fatuous denigration of Medieval culture' (*Society for Medieval Archaeology Newsletter* 32 (March 2005)). Its high sales and the consequent clamour of the public to see Rosslyn Chapel and the church of Saint Sulpice in Paris suggest to him that a significant percentage of English-speaking people are unable to distinguish fact from fiction.

However, in a market-driven world, author and publisher have of course got it exactly right. Most people *can* readily distinguish fact from fiction, but, in the spirit of post-modernism, no longer see the necessity. If visitors to Rosslyn Collegiate Chapel in Midlothian are disappointed not to meet the descendants of a tempestuous affair between Jesus Christ and Mary Magdalene, they can always admire the virtuosity of the late Medieval Prentice Pillar. It was, after all, carved by an apprentice while the master mason was abroad seeking inspiration. And the latter put the former to death out of jealousy on his return. Now *that* would make an excellent novel.

 We are proud to announce that *Antiquity* was runner-up in the 2005 Association of Learned, Professional and Scientific Publishers/Charlesworth Award for best journal, judged on outstanding journal design. Many thanks to Kate Wescombe, Barry Perks, who did the original design, and Portland Press who helped make this happen. The winner was the *European Respiratory Journal*, whose achievement no doubt took their breath away.

Martin Carver  
York, 1 December 2005