

EDITORIAL

📖 Auspiciously around 4 July *The Times* announced the discovery of ‘the footsteps that add 30 000 years to the history of America’. Discovered at Puebla, Mexico, the 269 prints included early species of camelid, cow and deer, together with several adult homo sapiens and their children. The prints were preserved in volcanic ash, subsequently buried by more ash and lake sediments. Materials in the sequence above and below the prints included shells and animal bones (dated by radiocarbon) and mammoth teeth (dated by ESR). OSL was applied to the sediments of the prints themselves. The Royal Society’s Summer Science Exhibition, which opened in early July, cautiously proclaimed ‘The oldest American?’. Attributed quotes from academics are given on the BBC website (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/4650307.stm>): “Our evidence of humans in America 40 000 years ago is irrefutable” said Matthew Bennett, Bournemouth University, who also conceded: “It is quite controversial. They are not very happy in North America. They are very wedded to the idea of colonisation 11 500 years ago”. Silvia Gonzalez of Liverpool John Moores University, whose team discovered the prints in an abandoned quarry and is leading the research (see <http://www.mexicanfootprints.co.uk>), was also apprehensive: “It’s going to be an archaeological bomb and we’re up for a fight”. Caution was expressed by Dr Michael Faught, senior archaeologist with Panamerican Consultants, Inc. “It would be significant if it were demonstrated, but usually those (early) sites don’t hold up well”. He is reserving judgement until the evidence is published. We hope to bring readers such evidence shortly.




Right human footprint, showing toe impressions and typical figure of eight shape.

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📖 Note the use of the word ‘attributed’ to protect the innocent academic who falls so often into the toils of the media, to protest later: “Well of course it isn’t exactly what I said”. But even if it was (really), it’s quite understandable and we’ve all been there. We think our research is exciting, but the media never seem to find it exciting enough. Witness the ‘temples’ that prompted David Keys’ headline ‘Found: Europe’s oldest civilisation’ on the front page of *The Independent* (11 June 2005). These are Neolithic kreisgrabenanlagen of the Lengyel culture (c. 5000 BC), which have been known for half a century or more but have popped up all over central Europe recently as a result of aerial photography. (Professor Andrew Sherratt, whom we thank for this, sees them as imitation tells; his thesis is to appear shortly in Alastair Whittle’s forthcoming *Unsettling the Neolithic*.)

Our correspondent Steve Houston, reporting ‘the latest barrage of PR-ism in which much attention is being focused on yet another Maya tomb’, proposes that three main types of expectation fuel archaeology-media relations: the first is what the public thinks archaeologists look for, the second is what archaeologists think the public should be interested in and the third is what the media think the public wants. Other factors apply. Some professionals feel the need to woo their own sponsors, while others draw a veil over the gleam of treasure in order to discourage looting. Faced with such contradictory messages, the media resort to the old favourites: the oldest, newest, weirdest discovery, leaving experts baffled, amazed, staggered and stunned (even if it is actually the successful outcome of a life’s work, carefully predicted and managed along Research Council guidelines). Steve is not sure we should be too ready to excuse ourselves: archaeologists need to serve as the adults in these exchanges and, as authentic experts, need to consider carefully how they tell their tales. ‘I am impressed by the care and caution of most medical reporting,’ he writes. ‘Lives are at stake, of course, but our work matters too. It may be that the time has come for archaeological announcements to pass first through a peer filter, a reputable journal or other vetted forum’. If only! While the press vibrates with tales you wouldn’t tell your own mother, *Antiquity* has often waited long and patiently for the real thing. But not any more. From next year, contributions to the Project Gallery (our online hot news in colour) will be mounted as soon as they have been received and vetted. The Project Gallery not only announces new research projects and updates old ones, but also hosts responses to published articles and discussions of matters controversial.

 Led by its dynamic new Chief Executive, Simon Thurley, English Heritage, the state agency for the management of cultural resources in England, is pondering the 16 000 historic churches likely to need propping up over the next few decades. Its new strategy document launched in early July 2005 raises questions that will be of interest to colleagues working on heritage policy in every country. What is the value of an old building? How is this measured? How can the building be re-used without compromising its archaeological value? Is a heritage agency there to conserve anything ancient or to ‘manage taste’? Many people oppose the demolition of every old building, however grisly, for fear of getting something worse: ‘modern architecture’ – the spectre that normally leads public taste by several decades, and sometimes never crosses the gap between the former avant-garde and the new antiquarian. Others cling to a sense of corporate cultural property: we keep a row of unusable terrace housing or an early gas works because they’re the last of their kind, and to demolish would somehow render them extinct like a species of finch. The English prescription is to debate each case within the planning system, allowing these local and global values to compete. Each decision is a victory for compromise – the best of the old and the best of the new.

But one competing value is nevertheless persistently left out in the cold – the value of new research. Research is not only itself a ‘community benefit’, it offers compensation for the loss of an old building. In fact, the package of new-research-plus-new-architecture in exchange for not-very-interesting-example-of-old-architecture-no-longer-fit-for-purpose (or no longer having any purpose) is one that should seem eminently reasonable to someone recently descended from the Clapham omnibus. Knocking an old building down not only offers an opportunity to find out more about it, but about what lies beneath. The knowledge

won through a structured programme of excavation, analysis, survey and historical investigation, ought to be viewed as a positive planning gain. Such operations ought not of course to be procured through competitive tender, but, like good new architecture, through design competition; and prominent in the process should be the universities. Let us hope that this time the academics will not be excluded from any new procurement procedure.

England has only recently crossed the line between a regulated and a deregulated system of heritage governance. The transformation has not been easy – especially for the profession that it has spawned, and much of the debate has taken place in public. If, as appears possible, England is to move its system even closer to that of the USA, with a National Register and the use of significance (rather than value) as the criterion for inclusion and mitigation, then we shall risk leaving research as an even more minor player in the planning game. Perhaps our American colleagues will be able to warn us of possible potholes on the road ahead. It may be anticipated that many other countries, from France to China, will, with greater or lesser enthusiasm, be taking a similar road from the black box of the State Archaeological Service down onto the street where values are traded in the planning forum. Perhaps knowledge of the English experience can help make the journey less chancy.

My curmudgeonly colleague Humphrey Harumpher is no lover of state agencies and thinks they should all be closed down without delay, English Heritage included. “What’s lacking these days is the healthy exercise of the bulldozer. Who needs experts? Conservation is a matter for local people. There’s no national past or international past – that’s all politics.

If we want to turn St Thomas’s into a bowling alley we will, having carried out the pews and knocked off the spiky bits”. What a vandal.

It isn’t as though global CRM is in a particularly healthy condition, to judge by the constant appeals that circulate by e-mail or on the internet. Highways not only drive through individual sites, but also mar the more elusive assets of ancient vista and buried landscape, as noted in the struggle to prevent Ireland’s M3 motorway running beside the Hill of Tara. Gratifyingly, a court in Italy decided on 31 May to block a 35km stretch of the A31 motorway through the historic landscape of the Veneto between Vicenza and Rovigo that would have passed nearby some of Italy’s finest renaissance villas. Lawyers defending the appeal said “The Venetian administrative court reminds us that in a state of law, an arbitrary and unjustified government decision is not sufficient to expropriate private property, rip up land and disfigure the treasures of mankind” (*Art Newspaper* 160 (2005): 12). Meanwhile the International Association to Save Tyre was



¹⁴ NICE OF THEM TO KEEP THE VICAR ON!

New uses for old churches. © 2005 Bill Tidy.

appealing in June 2005 to halt or divert the construction of a highway heading for its ancient southern port: the proposed route crosses 26 known archaeological sites. The site of Timgad was threatened by heavy lorries and concrete installations serving the annual Festival; 'professionals and Friends of the Heritage' were demanding that the festival is moved off the World Heritage Site – which is of course what attracted it there. And Charlemagne's palace at Aachen had suffered unexpected damage: we expect to place a first-hand report on this in the Project Gallery shortly.

📖 My comment about a minimum standard of field work (Editorial March 2005) triggered Prof. Dr Willem Willems, Inspector General for the Archaeology of the Netherlands, to send me a copy of his *Dutch Archaeology Quality Standard* (Rijksinspectie voor de Archeologie Report, The Hague, 2004). This 232 page document (more moral than gripping) lays down procedures and standards for desk-based assessment, field evaluation, conservation in situ, watching briefs, excavation and archives. The qualifications of the players ('junior, medior and senior archaeologists') are laid down too – membership of the European Association of Archaeologists being one criterion among several. Willem is probably right about the rarity of such documents: 'only the IFA Standards Documents are comparable (though they are not enforceable in the same way)'. There are issues here with practicality (enforceability implies staff) but more importantly, with the spirit of deregulation. A high standard is not the same as standardisation, and it may be that, as with the construction industry, quality control could be built into the contract and supplied by the private sector in a way that does not inhibit invention, or a diversity of approach.

📖 It was sad to hear of the death of an old friend, Greville Freeman-Grenville, translator of Eusebius's *Onomasticon*, author of a *Chronology of World History*, *The Islamic and Christian Calendars*, and a series of guides to Jerusalem and the Holy Places, each of which were little gems of humane inquiry. His *Historical Atlas of Islam* (written with the late Stuart Munro-Hay) took the reader from the ancient Middle East up to 2002, placing the most recent tensions between Islam and the West in long-term perspective – history's essential job. It was a shame he did not live to see the completion of our 'Focus on Islam' special section which he did much to inspire. He was a linguist, historian and geographer, and to sit beside a river of knowledge so broad and so deep was to be reminded of a gentler age, when learning expected only learning as its reward.

📖 Apologies to all grumpy old men who complained (rightly) about my word-processed blunder on p. 248 of the last issue. I was of course bewailing traditions of pictorial and textual shoddiness, not Crawford's antidotes to them. The words 'hoist' and 'petard' spring to mind.

Martin Carver
York, 1 September 2005