



'Conder's Circle' lies in a steep-sided valley 6.25km west-northwest of Madaba and not far from Mt Nebo. First recorded by Colonel Conder as part of his Survey of Eastern Palestine (1889), it has been the subject of a Danish excavation in recent years. As the photograph shows, the 'circle' is slightly oval (c. 92-102m in diameter) though the enclosed 'platform' is a near circle (50-52m). The rampart itself is broad (18-29m) and still stands high (3-8m). The excavators date it to the Late Chalcolithic/Early Bronze Age and regard it as unique. The narrow wall bisecting it is a much later Byzantine boundary unrelated to the original structure. Photograph by David Kennedy (APA07/DG48, 17 April 2007 (DLK)).



Detail of the south-east minaret of the shrine of Al Abbas at Kerbela, Iraq, taken by Sir Bernard Feilden in the 1970s. The two Shi'a shrines of Imam Abbas and of his brother Imam Husayn are embellished with gold and silver and joined by a tree-lined avenue. Both brothers died in the Battle of Kerbela in AD 680 (AH58). The current buildings are eleventh- and fourteenth-century AD with later additions. Bernard Feilden (b. 1919) is a conservation architect who has worked all over the world. (Source: University of York archive).

EDITORIAL

☞ Ireland, host nation for the sixth World Archaeological Congress (July 2008) brilliantly showed the archaeological world what it is to be a host and a nation. Sixteen hundred and eighty delegates had a choice of 1721 papers in 33 themes, and the organisers somehow pulled the trick of making this massive event friendly, frank and personal. The presentations stopped midweek when the whole conference had a chance to meet Irish archaeology on its home turf. Nineteen coaches set off from Dublin in the morning to nine different destinations on five tours (an organisational feat roughly equivalent to the Normandy Landings) and each party found its way through sunshine and rain to its traditional evening paradise in a feasting hall ringing with music. Our readers will have been on a great many field trips in their time, but what made these special was having the excavators and researchers on site – George Eogan at Knowth, Conor Newman and Muiris O’Sullivan at Tara, Chris Lynn at Navan, Aidan O’Sullivan at Corlea, to name but a few – telling us, as friends and colleagues, what it was like then, what puzzled them still, spilling the beans.

At Tara we met a little band of protesters, with banners and tents, still hoping to halt the motorway now slowly chewing its way up the Gobhra (Gower) Valley which runs along the east flank of the Hill of Tara. This motorway, that brushes so close to Ireland’s iconic heart, has been the subject of nine years of evaluation and investigation, but continues to generate anger and frustration. There was no attempt at a cover-up at WAC; on the contrary, an afternoon session devoted to the problem brought a dozen of the key players into contention – proud locals, worthy contractors, dour officials and feisty idealists. A few harsh things were said, but I never expect to hear a more passionate, articulate or civilised exchange. At the Concluding Assembly, protagonists attempted to gather support for the ‘indigenous’ citizens of Country Meath, against the sinister forces of motorway builders and their collusionist lackeys, the commercial archaeologists. The exercise showed that life is not that simple: the most indigenous of the locals clearly wanted the motorway, and many of the commercial archaeologists, far from happy at being paid to dispose of the archaeology, recognised that the process is nonetheless the product of democratic legislation.

Archaeologists are against the large scale destruction of their evidence, but they are not against development, roads or prosperity. They even drive cars themselves. So what is to be done? First, theorists and practitioners of all stripes need to get together quickly to decide what a ‘historic landscape’ is and to what extent it can reasonably be protected. Second, we must confront the uneasy fact that the significance of a place, and the archaeological response to it, are items purchased by developers from consultants and contractors without public moderation, often even without the local archaeological society. Democracy requires that every major construction offer a detailed plan to public scrutiny. But while every archaeological response these days has a project design, that project design too often remains privy to the consultant, the planner and the developer. In my view archaeological project designs, at least for projects of international stature, should be *published* and be themselves subject to planning permission. This goes for research projects too. Otherwise we cannot claim to have sought consensus with that wider group of interested parties around the world for whom the heritage has no national frontiers.

One thing seems likely: advances in consensual archaeology will happen first in Ireland. And UCD's Gabriel Cooney, who has already led the convergence of academic and commercial archaeology there, and has now brought us this stunning Congress, will surely be in the vanguard.



First dig on Mars. (Image courtesy of NASA/JPL-Caltech/University of Arizona/Texas A&M University).

York team did an excellent organisational job and should be congratulated. Their plenary session was dedicated to the archaeology of slavery and featured guest speakers Doug Armstrong and Zoe Crossland from the USA (sponsored by *Antiquity*), as well as York's own Jim Walvin, the slavery historian. Martin Carver as Chair, rightly keen to demonstrate the importance of the archaeology of recent periods to the discipline as a whole, repeatedly challenged the audience to draw out the lessons of the historical archaeology for the understanding of slavery in earlier (i.e. prehistoric) periods. But for me there was a much more important unspoken issue. To follow in the tradition of the great Eric Williams, this issue was the centrality of the institution of slavery to the origins of the *modern* world – and thus its centrality to the social context within which disciplines such as archaeology developed. To put it another way, slavery was part and parcel of the theatre of knowledge in which archaeology emerged in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The archaeology of slavery, then, should be a component of any archaeological education


☞ No plans for a motorway yet, but the Robotic Arm of NASA's *Phoenix Lander* dug two trenches on Mars called Dodo and Baby Bear on Sol 14 (June 8, 2008), the 14th Martian day after landing. Excavated soil is delivered to a sieve which then is shaken over the TEGA (Thermal and Evolved-Gas Analyzer) which heats up the fine particles and tells us what they are. There will be more exciting news to come, and I trust the first young archaeologists are already in training since they will soon be needed to discover what became of the Martian civilisation. The trenches were not huge – 90mm wide – but archaeologists will note that the industry that has given them GPS and cling film may soon provide them with the consultant's dream: sites sampled from your own living-room with the aid of a thumb-stick.

☞ Matthew Johnson, Professor of Archaeology at Southampton, and our Theory Correspondent, has been assessing the recent *Theoretical Archaeology Group* conferences. He writes: "TAG came to York for the first time, in December 2007. The

not because it is directly applicable to prehistoric and Classical periods, but because it speaks of a condition of knowledge and of society that we all address, however indirectly". Matthew went on to attend the "well-organised and exciting inaugural North American TAG, hosted by Columbia University in New York City. The style and tone of NYC-TAG was in many ways reminiscent of the best early British TAGs, with a high proportion of papers by research students, many exploring themes from 'left-field' and flying kites rather than polished theses. North American TAG goes to Stanford next year and Brown the year after, with others eager to bid for succeeding years".

These events were highly successful; but how healthy is 'archaeological theory' in general? "I heard a lot of good things at both the York and New York TAGs" says Matthew, "and came away optimistic about the theoretical future of the discipline. However, I have one lingering concern. York was heavily dominated by post-processual thinking, however defined, and NYC almost exclusively so. There is nothing wrong with this in itself – your correspondent was raised in this tradition – but it would be easy to come away from both conferences believing that approaches informed by this critical legacy now hold sway over archaeological theory completely. This is clearly not the case: selectionist and processual approaches continue to flourish, particularly in North America, and a very different configuration of theoretical concerns pertains to much of the non-English-speaking world. TAG, and archaeological theory generally, needs to guard against the danger of the situation in disciplines such as literary studies where the word 'theory' is mistakenly seen as coterminous with a particular set of approaches, which much of the discipline ignores or opposes. For this correspondent, one of the most important advances of the last generation was the recognition that we are all 'theorists' regardless of our avowed position – that no-one can do archaeology innocent of reflection on the aims and assumptions in any piece of work, however mundane. The solution rests not with one 'school', but with all archaeologists. There is a responsibility and set of mutual obligations – that different theoretical schools engage critically and constructively with each other, rather than dismissing the 'other bunch' as 'wild postmodernists' or 'positivist dinosaurs'. And also, of course, that theorists engage (as many already do) with archaeological practice, and that practitioners engage (as many already do) with the wider intellectual frame of our discipline. Indeed, the best papers at TAGs over the last ten years seem to me to have moved beyond sterile 'debates', and are addressing substantive issues in a theoretically informed way that is not easily pigeon-holed. TAG goes to Southampton in December, and many of these themes will be taken up there".

I am reminded of Shanks and Tilley's adage "archaeology is critique or it is nothing" and my reflection at the time – if it becomes *only* critique it really will be nothing.

 This is probably an appropriate moment to welcome the new journal *Time and Mind: The Journal of Archaeology, Consciousness and Culture*. The first editorial reveals its mission: "to provide a forum for many disciplines and approaches [and] an interplay between explorations of archaeology, consciousness and culture". Amongst these approaches they look forward to including the artistic and poetic. Excellent! "Should we not use our own senses," they ask "– our vision, hearing, smell and haptic sensitivity – as investigative tools, just as we use more technical approaches?" I imagine most excavators would agree with that, and for those that don't recognise the word, *haptics* is the science of studying data obtained by means of touch,

which sounds quite sexy. The first issue contains papers on acoustics in Chaco Canyon and in Neolithic passage graves, mind-altering plants of the Holy Land, shamanism in southern California and an interview with the British landscape archaeologist, Peter Fowler.



The past as a pastime at Olympia, London.

☞ Around 20 000 people attended the nostalgia-fest in London *Who do you think you are?* The genealogy business is booming and about 75 per cent had come for that, while another 20 per cent were there to exchange war stories and an estimated 5 per cent attended the archaeology stalls. Reality TV personalities were on hand ‘to make the event seem real’ and audiences were addressed with megaphones in open-air pens surrounded by surging crowds. An event perfect for those who like their history full of sound and fury.

☞ It is odd that our esteemed founder O.G.S. Crawford has not previously found a biographer, but most gratifying that he has now found such a good one¹. Kitty Hauser briskly relates Osbert’s upbringing by a couple of aunts, his achievements in creating archaeological maps and aerial photography – and of course the establishment of our own journal, with its unique style of reportage. However, those accustomed to adulate the quirky fieldworker with the bike are in for a shock. Delving into unpublished work, such as “A Tour of Bolshevy” in the Sackler Library and the “Bloody Old Britain” of her title in the Bodleian, we meet a batty cosmologist, deluded Stalinist, Nazi tolerator and advocate of the great Goddess. His Bloody Old Britain, a mss released in 2000, is a 180-page rant designed to examine the anthropology of 1930s Britain in the manner of the contemporary *Mass Observation Project*. O.G.S. gives observational status to advertisement hoardings, the quality of food, the width of soup spoons, badly designed teapot lids, the modern ‘capitalist’ tumbler, the temperature of the bath water, the functions of the hotel porter and the price of fish. His biographer makes a noble attempt to discover insights in this diatribe, but it shows through as just the protracted moan of a lonely old man in a hotel. Things don’t cheer up when he gets a letter from fellow curmudgeon Gordon Childe in 1943: “Let us turn our eyes from this disordered present to the past, where from our high ivory towers we may discern an order”. Lawks, no wonder they were depressed. Ageing archaeologists beware; this is what happens when you abandon the glorious diversity of the human experience for the banal generalities of politics.

Crawford clearly needed a good woman to knock some sense into him, and he has found one at last in Kitty Hauser. Vivacious, witty, knowledgeable and always good company – there can’t be too much wrong with a subject that attracts writers such as this.

York, 1 September 2008

¹ Kitty Hauser *Bloody Old Britain. O.G.S. Crawford and the archaeology of modern life* (London: Granta Books, 2008). See also *New Book Chronicle*