EDITORIAL

The Theoretical Archaeology Group 2004 had its conference in Glasgow where 450 delegates were treated to the legendary hospitality of that city. One innovation of "Tartan TAG" was a ceilidh in which theorists were put through an exceptionally well-organised sequence of Highland dances rich in the metaphors of courting and rejection. Another was a plenary session in which all who attended were issued with a laser gadget with which to vote. Propositions put by speakers could be tested instantly by democratic mandate; we just pointed our widgets at little sensors in the roof and pressed one of buttons 1-6, according to our likes. As a warm up, we rejoiced to learn that we were almost exactly 50 per cent of each sex, 42 per cent were from the UK and 38 per cent of us had PhDs. I would have liked this social analysis of the audience to have penetrated still deeper: how many of us still believed in processualism? How many of us actually liked theory, or thought it might be vaguely good for us, like losing weight? How many of us had children and pets, and of course compliant partners or nannies allowing us to attend a three-day conference so preposterously close to the New Year holiday? But the organisers' minds were set on more exigent matters: the archaeology degree, the archaeological work-place and the relationship between the two. We were quickly shown that democracy is a capricious instrument, the electorate being quite happy to vote for impossible or contradictory contentions, and if necessary to lob random "dissident" votes into the mix.

For all that, we agreed with Meg Conkey that the archaeology degree was matchless in its combination of arts and sciences, with Bill Hanson that it should be undertaken for its own sake and did not have to be useful to anyone, and with Matthew Johnson that the student, not the government or any prospective employer, was "the primary stake-holder". 90 per cent of us thought a degree should include ethics, and 77 per cent that it should include more compulsory practical training, while a gratifying 70 per cent reckoned that this practical training should encompass survey, buildings and artefact studies as well as digging. However on the question of how much training was necessary to make a professional, the house divided on party lines, in this case by age, employment and background. While 94 per cent of students thought that a degree in archaeology should qualify you for a career in commercial field work, obviously nobody else did: the lecturers thought the answer was an MA (which they were trying to sell) and the contract archaeologists thought that the best training was done on the job – although they were not offering it.

Kenny Aitchison of IFA offered a ray of light in which vocational apprenticeships could be combined with full-time education. Naturally there will be much to talk about here, since the archaeology profession embraces a much broader constituency than either the University or the Field Contract sector. Everyone was happy to agree that the sectors had grown unacceptably far apart, John Walker announcing that he proposed to "shoot the duck of autonomy". It was pointed out from the floor that the investment that students have to make in a first degree, or an MA or more significantly in a PhD, offered no comparable financial returns to an *employee*. Thus the commercial sector was hardly in a position to

demand any particular level of training – since it would neither pay for it nor reward it. Once pay was mentioned the discussion deteriorated rapidly, and took on the sepia tinge of a 1980s "Rescue" meeting. Yannis Hamilakis reminded us that we were being manipulated by power factions and should demand a total political makeover, and Colin Renfrew, winding up, played the wistful card of priestly vocation: low pay was a concomitant of a pleasurable craft.

From a ledge above this old impasse, I wonder if I might be permitted an attempt to shoot the duck of poverty with the cross-bow of pricing. On the one hand, it is just possible that there will be no revolution in the immediate future, or if there is, that heritage will nevertheless continue to attract a lower value than hospitals. In a market economy, assuming that that is our future, one method of increasing the income of the work force is to raise the price of its product, which in the present context means CRM archaeology. But why should the private sector pay more for it? Could good archaeology increase its profit? While we are still working out how to do this, we could resort to one or two other strategies. The first is to insist on a minimum standard of fieldwork, a kite-mark that would at least prevent the price being driven downwards by competitive tender. This is a concomitant of any free market. In commercial archaeology, substandard fieldwork should not be allowed to count as compliance with planning law. The second strategy would be harder to introduce, but of more enduring value in Britain and elsewhere. This requires a deregulated government to redefine why it values CRM mitigation. If the excavation of threatened sites continues to be viewed as an exercise in "preservation by record" then competitive tender is a natural consequence. But if we are really engaged in the "winning of new knowledge", i.e. obtaining the maximum research dividend from a necessary destruction, then procurement obviously follows a different set of criteria. A cost-effective project would now depend on prior evaluation and optimal design, and an optimal design can more reasonably demand its price. At the very least, the pricing structure for a preservation by record (low and by the cubic metre) would be replaced by one appropriate to a research project (matching the research objective to the opportunity). We have no such thing at present anywhere, although the Swedish Government Proposition 177 of 1993/4 must come close. If governments were to do either of these things the result would be more usable information produced by a better paid, better qualified, more integrated profession, in which, who knows, the absurd rivalries between academics and commercial archaeologists which developed in the 1980s might be replaced by an new era of interdependence and mutual respect.

☙ The premises of the Maritime Archaeology Unit in Galle, Sri Lanka, were destroyed by the tsunami of 26 December 2004 and most of the collections and equipment were lost. Being a weekend, only one security guard was present. (We are relieved to know that he survived; he was swept away but managed to hold on to a tree). The first major project of the Sri Lanka unit was the recent excavation of the East Indian *Avondster* sunk in Galle harbour. The Avondster was originally an English ship, captured and modified by the Dutch, relegated after a long career to short-haul coastal voyages and wrecked in 1659 while at anchor in Galle harbour. Once the human relief issues are under control, the archaeologists and conservators of the Maritime Archaeology Unit are determined to resume work and re-establish their projects. Contact via the director of the Avondster

project, Robert Partheius at the University of Amsterdam via http://cf.hum.uva.nl/galle/.

Vladimir Kovalenko sent me this Christmas card of the Institute of Archaeology's stall during Ukraine's "orange revolution". Asked if he gave lectures on the street, he said no, he was a teacher and a scientist, not a politician . . .

☙ Why sneer at TV programmes – which are only doing their best to amuse us – when there are so many awful web-sites and visitor centres trading in an ersatz past. Promising its visitors "much more than entertainment", *Mystery Park*, the Von Däniken theme park situated near Interlaken in Switzerland "concentrates on the exciting, the inscrutable, the mysterious, on unanswered questions". But archaeologists will be relieved to hear that all the Mystery Park themes "present hard facts which can be verified at any time. They deal with actual archaeological finds, ancient scriptures and mythology, documented ethnic rituals from various cultures, or technically or scientifically-based knowledge".

Let us hope so. Mystery Park's previous exhibition in Vienna in 2001 included such treasures as the famous steel hammer head enclosed in limestone from London, Texas, the iron cup enclosed in coal from Oklahoma, and the prehistoric shoe-sole (crushing a trilobite) found in natural rock in Utah – all on loan from the Creation Evidence Museum at Glen Rose, Texas. There were even artefacts from Glozel "which so far defy characterisation" but which carry inscriptions like those at Burrows Cave in the United States. The latter have been deciphered by Kurt Schildmann as a variant of Sanskrit written in a variant of the Indus script. And from La Mana in Ecuador a strange, pyramid-like stone with a "divine eye" which phosphoresces in the dark under ultra-violet light.

☙ Archaeological science does need to gird up its loins. Discussing Flores woman (as one does) at a small dinner party in our village, we were startled to hear the reaction of one guest, an IT student from the Faroe Islands: "I don't believe it". I agreed there were matters to be clarified and indeed expected them to be in a forthcoming article in *Antiquity*. "No", he said "I just don't believe in people evolving". "So, what do you believe?" I rashly asked. "In Adam and Eve". There followed a brief debate about whether Adam and Eve were real,

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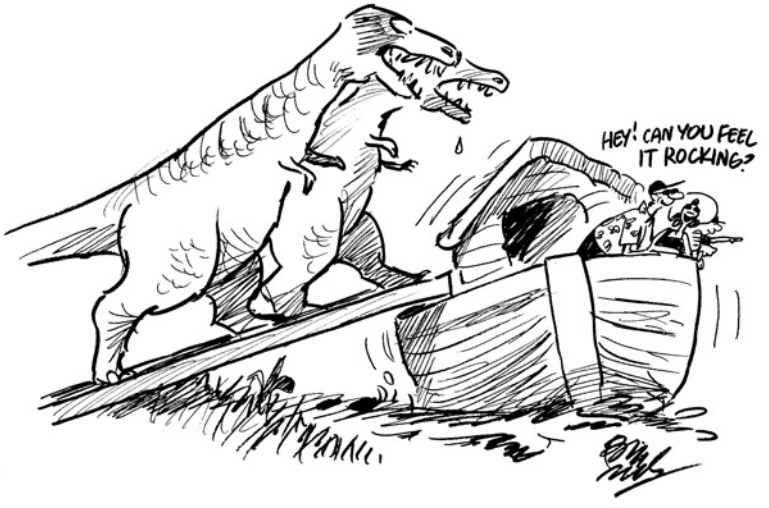

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or just a married couple he had read about in a book. He easily won the argument with the line: "Adam and Eve are more believable than Julius Caesar, because more people have read the Bible than *De Bello Gallico*". Cue a quote from the *Guardian* G2 (5 January 2005): '*When the BBC launched its acclaimed Walking with Dinosaurs, the title was merely teasing. In three months' time, however, visitors to Kentucky Museum will be able to visit a $25M museum in which installations really will feature homo sapiens walking with dinosaurs. There will also be a life-size Tyrannosaurus rex on display chasing Adam and Eve after their fall from grace. Other fixtures on the 47 acre site will include Noah's Ark. "You'll hear the water lapping, feel the Ark rocking and perhaps even hear people outside screaming", promises Ken Ham curator of the Creation Museum*'. We archaeologists must be appalling educators if the Bible stories remain more attractive than the evolutionary story (what is it about "possible female hominin" that fails to delight?). Or are we being narrow-minded, irredeemably western, in a world of pluralist perception? Step forward the real Western construct: Potassium-Argon dating – or the Garden of Eden.

Nicholas James, who has been our Reviews Editor since 1999, steps down this year. He has done a wonderful service for *Antiquity* readers, and must have read more archaeology books than the entire scholarly community put together. His *Amongst the New Books* was a wry, witty, pithy and always positive contribution to the journal which readers greatly enjoyed. His successor is Madeleine Hummler, multi-lingual graduate of Basel (Switzerland), Birmingham and Oxford (England) who has begun work in our York office, processing the regular wagon of treasure that is today's archaeological output.

Martin Carver
York, 1 March 2005

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