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'Almost unmentionable in polite society'? Druidry and Archaeologists in the Later Twentieth Century

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Introduction

Between 1950 and 1964, a major programme of archaeological excavations were carried out at Stonehenge, directed by archaeologists Richard Atkinson and Stuart Piggott. The excavations were not published in full until after Atkinson's death (Cleal *et al*. 1995), but Atkinson penned a popular account of the site in 1956, entitled simply *Stonehenge*, which was aimed at "the ordinary visitor" (Atkinson 1956, xiv). The book was, in part, intended to dispel once and for all the popular notion that there was a direct connection between ancient Druids and Stonehenge. Atkinson went so far as to write that "Druids have so firm a hold upon the popular imagination, particularly in connection with Stonehenge, and have been the subject of so much ludicrous and unfounded speculation, that archaeologists in general have come to regard them as almost unmentionable in polite society." (*ibid.*, 91).

This quote is notable for two reasons. Firstly, it highlights the often fraught relationships between archaeologists and Druidry in the mid-twentieth century and, secondly, it was soon to be revealed as demonstrably untrue. At the time that Atkinson was writing, the last major academic treatment of the ancient Druids was Thomas Kendrick's *The Druids,* published in 1927. But a decade after the publication of Atkinson's book, at a time of heightened tensions with modern Druid movements over rights and access to Stonehenge, two major academic monographs on ancient Druids were published (Piggott 1966, Chadwick 1966), as well as a scholarly work on 'Pagan Celtic Britain' (Ross 1967). This outpouring would not be matched again until the 1990s. Whether or not Druids were fit to be mentioned in 'polite society', there certainly seemed to be a need felt to discuss them in print.

Very little excavation work has been carried out at Stonehenge since Piggott and Atkinson's work. The latest research on the monument and its surroundings, the Stonehenge Hidden Landscapes Project, used non-invasive geophysical survey and remote sensing, methods which are becoming increasingly popular in archaeology because they leave the sub-surface remains intact. The most recent excavations at Stonehenge were carried out in 2008, led by Geoffrey Wainwright and Timothy Darvill (Darvill and Wainwright 2009), and this was in fact the first excavation to take place inside the stone circle since those of Atkinson and Piggott in 1964. This time, Druids were themselves present alongside the archaeologists: the excavations were opened and closed with a ceremony of blessing carried out by a small group of modern Druids (Jones 2008).

This is the story of how we got from there to here: from Atkinson's 'unmentionable' Druids to active engagement between (some) archaeologists and (some) members of modern Druid groups. It is not a simple story of increasing mutual acceptance and understanding. Just as

there is no single 'Druidic' viewpoint (other Druid groups subsequently called for the reburial of the human remains excavated in 2008 - see http://www.stonehenge-druids.org/reburial.html), so archaeologists also vary in their approaches and opinions. Rather than tracing a clear shift in perspective, this essay explores some of the themes which have repeatedly emerged in the interactions between archaeologists and modern Druid groups, including ideas of authority and authenticity, in the second half of the twentieth century and beyond. I owe a great debt to the excellent work of Ronald Hutton (2007, 2009) and Adam Stout's work on the competing narratives of prehistory which emerged in pre-WWII Britain (Stout 2008).

Stout explored the period during which archaeology moved from gentlemanly antiquarian pursuit to academic discipline, a process which continued in the mid-twentieth century, still heavily influenced by the 'intellectual aesthetic' from which it emerged in the 1920s (Stout 2008, 241). As archaeology became increasingly professionalised, its nature and character were shaped in part by its relationship to other ways of understanding the past. These included traditional antiquarian approaches as well as spiritual and religious ideas. The struggle to determine and maintain the authority of professional archaeological orthodoxy was played out in the context of a sometimes strained but always lively relationship with modern Druid movements, often centring on the understanding of particular sites. Here, I will pay particular attention to Stonehenge.

In archaeology and the heritage sector, there is often a focus on 'authenticity' or the 'legitimacy' of claims to hold a connection with ancient sites, and appropriate engagement with ancient monuments is frequently couched within the twinned discourses of 'health and safety' and 'preservation' (Blain and Wallis 2007, 25, 33-8). This framework can be incompatible with other approaches or forms of interaction with the tangible remains of the past, and to some within modern pagan communities, terms such as 'authenticity' can be unhelpful, or even problematic.

Key questions emerge from this disjuncture: who decides what is an acceptable way to approach, experience, interact with, and understand ancient monuments and artefacts? And how is this authority negotiated and maintained? The answers to these questions have far-reaching implications not only for heritage professionals, but for the very nature of archaeology as a discipline, and how archaeologists and the wider community approach the study of the past. I will argue that interactions with modern Druid groups shaped the development of the modern discipline of archaeology, and that these contemporary relationships affected the ways in which archaeologists approached the study and representation of the ancient Druids.

In the first part of this essay, I explore the period 1955-85, which saw Piggott and Atkinson's excavations at Stonehenge and the publication of Piggott's book *The Druids*. The second section considers the period after 1985, which saw far-reaching changes in British archaeology, with the development of new theoretical approaches, including 'Post-Processual' archaeology, which placed an emphasis on plurality and multivocality. This final section also touches on the changes that have occurred in the interactions between modern Druidic groups, archaeologists, and heritage practitioners since the turn of the millennium, and the impact this has had on archaeological approaches to the study and representation of ancient Druids.

This essay is primarily about debates which have taken place within the discipline of archaeology, albeit in response and relation to the wider world. In a short piece which covers a period of over fifty years, there is sometimes little opportunity to explore the many alternative perspectives. What I present here is one version of the story, but it is important to recognise that it is not the only one. Others both inside and outside archaeological academia would tell different tales of the same events. The purpose is not to present a definitive account. Indeed, it is likely that no such thing will ever be possible. Instead, I hope to open up avenues for discussion about the role of archaeology, and the different ways of approaching and understanding our shared past.

1955-85: Piggott and the Druids

At the time that Atkinson wrote *Stonehenge*, his views on modern Druids were not uncommon among archaeologists. In particular, the annual solstice ceremony held by Druid groups at Stonehenge had come to be viewed by the archaeological establishment as problematic and unsustainable. From the perspective of many archaeologists, this had always been a somewhat contentious affair (Stout 2008, 137-154), and despite a period of relative stability in the post-war years, tempers flared again in the 1960s. The older Druid groups had ceased to hold their rites there after 1956, which Hutton (2009, 395) attributes in part to the success of Atkinson's (1956) book in breaking the long-held connection between Druidry and Stonehenge, at least amongst the general public. Newer groups, including the Universal Bond, continued to use the monument at Midsummer and increasingly these celebrations attracted large crowds of onlookers.

After problems during the 1960 and 1961 solstice ceremonies, a well-known Cambridge University archaeologist and contemporary of Atkinson and Piggott, Glyn Daniel (famous for his appearances on the TV show 'Animal, Vegetable or Mineral?'), used his editorials in the archaeological journal *Antiquity* to lambast what he declaimed as "a monstrous, wicked and most undesirable state of affairs" (Daniel 1961, 173). Daniel's views carried weight, not only within archaeology, but also amongst the general public. Over the next few years his editorials would frequently target modern Druids and their engagements with ancient monuments, particularly Stonehenge. Those "claiming the name of Druid…" Daniel wrote (*ibid*., 174), "are all foolish people confusing fact with fiction. If it makes them happy – splendid. But their private happiness must not endanger one of our great prehistoric monuments."

Daniel's vituperative attitude reflected the increasingly entrenched opinion of the archaeological establishment that any connection between the Iron Age Druids and Stonehenge was a misunderstanding to be corrected. Druids had first become associated with the monument through the work of seventeenth and eighteenth century antiquarians such as John Aubrey and William Stukeley. Since that time, the techniques of the new discipline of archaeology had expanded the chronological extent of Britain's prehistory to include not just a single pre-Roman phase of which both the Druids and Stonehenge formed part, but a more complex and multi-layered past. Stonehenge dated to the Neolithic and Bronze Age periods, whereas the Druids, known from Classical texts, could be placed firmly in the subsequent Iron Age.

To Daniel's mind, there was a clear divide between the ancient Iron Age priestly class and their more modern counterparts, and any modern Druid ceremonies carried out at Stonehenge could not possibly be authentic or legitimate recreations of ancient activity. In reply to a letter from Ross Nichols to the Editor of *The Eagle* on the subject of Stonehenge, Daniel made this distinction clear:

> "The Druids were a sacred and scholarly caste of the ancient Celts, and we know of them only through ancient writings… With the Romanisation of part of the Celtic world… the ancient Druids ceased to exist. From the seventeenth century onwards various romantic neo-Druid organisations have come into existence… who perform various ceremonies and make many strange and untrue claims. One of their claims is that they have a mystical link with the original Druids; another is that the original Druids built and worshipped at Stonehenge. They might have used Stonehenge – we have no way of knowing; what we do know is that it was built fifteen hundred years before the first known mention of Druids."

Daniel argued that his objection to the use of Stonehenge for modern Druid ceremonies was two-fold. Firstly that it could cause damage to the monument, and secondly that:

> "by the publicity given to their antics [modern Druid movements might] half persuade an uninformed public that there is something in the claim that these people who parade on Primrose Hill, and the Tower of London, and Stonehenge are authentic descendants not only of the Druids of two thousand years ago, but of the megalith builders of four thousand years ago."

The key matter here is one of authenticity: the criteria by which it should be judged (historical or spiritual), and who has the authority to determine its validity. Daniel was unimpressed by Ross Nichols' suggestion that people should (in Daniel's words) "set aside the findings of archaeologists and historians and… go to Stonehenge alone and commune there so that the truth would seep into their minds." To Daniel, only the professional archaeological approach was valid. With the air of stating the obvious, he wrote that "I prefer to regard Professor Atkinson's [book] *Stonehenge* a more reliable guide to our knowledge of that monument than the subjective experiences recommended by the Chosen Chief." (Daniel quotes above are from clipping of '*The Eagle'* 262, December 1963 (pp. 29-30) Stuart Piggott Archive Box 30, Item 5, no. 12)

This discourse of authenticity was to reappear continually over the subsequent half a century and, indeed, beyond. Daniel would later refer to the same groups as "horrid bogus Druids" (e.g. Daniel 1968, 171), and "dotty Druids" (Daniel 1964, 165). For Daniel, at least, there was little room for accommodation or discussion. When permission for the annual solstice ceremony was not immediately revoked after the problems in the early 1960s, he suggested somewhat darkly that the Ministry of Public Building and Works might be "riddled with secret Druids" (Daniel 1964, 166).

From 1955 until his death in 1986, Daniel was also commissioning editor for the widely read '*Ancient Peoples and Places*' book series. It is perhaps no coincidence that after the programme of mid-twentieth century excavations at Stonehenge drew to a close, but with public interest in the site still prominent, Daniel commissioned Atkinson's co-director, Stuart Piggott, to write a book on the Druids for this popular series. Piggott's book, undoubtedly a tour-de-force of academic scholarship in dealing with the evidence for Iron Age Druidry, also

spent almost a third of its length detailing (and critiquing) what he called the "almost unbelievably fatuous speculations and fantasies," (Piggott 1968, 13), which had sprung up around Druidry since the 1700s.

Piggott opens *The Druids* not with an account of Iron Age Druidry, but a visit to modern-day Stonehenge "around sunrise on June 21st," where the visitor "may find a grave body of white-robed men and women engaged in ceremonies and processions among the stones, and if he enquires, will be told that they are The Druids." Piggott gave his hypothetical visitor pause for further thought, asking: "Who are these Ancient People, and are they in their rightful Ancient Place?" (Piggott 1968, 13). This appears, perhaps, to be a misunderstanding from the outset. There can be no doubt that many of the Druid movements contemporary with the time that Piggott was writing did indeed trace the roots of their organisations back to Iron Age ancestry, considering themselves, in the words of Ross Nichols, then Chairman of the Druid Circle of the Universal Bond, to be "members of an ancient order" (clipping from*The Eagle* 262, December 1963 (p.28) Stuart Piggott Archive Box 30, Item 5, no. 12). But it is more doubtful that the majority of the 'white-robed men and women' in question would have claimed to be an "Ancient People". To Piggott and his archaeological contemporaries, the book of Druidry was closed. Druids had existed in the past, had ceased to exist, and any representation of their rites in the modern day could only be judged according to its historical authenticity, a test which it was doomed to fail. The real Druids had existed two thousand years ago, and their modern counterparts were "bogus" or "fake": pale and false reflections of a real ancient people.

This discourse of authenticity may not have been viewed as helpful by the contemporary Druid groups in question. For many of these people, Druidry was not a relic from the past, but a timeless response to nature, to the landscape and sacred sites, and was capable of re-interpretation, re-imagination, and re-creation, without losing its spiritual essence. This is the disjuncture which Ross Nichols would refer to in a letter to a newspaper as the "difference between the limited honest archaeological approach and that of seekers for some deeper meaning." Stuart Piggott kept a copy of Nichols' letter as a clipping and it is preserved in his archive (Letter from Ross Nichols printed in unknown newspaper, 3rd July 1965, clipping in Stuart Piggott Archive Box 30, Item 5, no. 6).

This tension between academic and spiritual authority was perhaps more keenly felt at a time when archaeology itself remained a newly emerging discipline, and archaeologists were negotiating the role that they would play in twentieth century understanding of the past. Within this framework, Piggott's book on Druidry would become the standard reference work for a generation, and as such it bears deeper consideration here. I am not concerned with the question of whether Piggott was 'right' or 'wrong' in the statements he made about Druidry, ancient or modern. Indeed, the plethora of modern literature on the topic highlights the difficulties of coming to any firm conclusions on many of the matters addressed by Piggott. What I seek to do is to place Piggott's writings on the Druids into their wider context, in terms of Piggott's own views, the developing profession of archaeology, and the wider society in which he was writing. However one may feel about Piggott's conclusions, the book was in many ways ahead of its time in terms of the nuanced treatment given to the evidence. That the book is necessarily a product of its time, and hence represents interpretation of the evidence rather than objective truth should not be surprising. Indeed, Piggott himself was firmly of the opinion that there was no single objective truth about the past. I do not seek to re-evaluate Piggott's ideas in the light of modern developments in the

field of archaeology, although some of the changes in interpretation will become apparent, but to understand them on their own terms.

The trajectory of Piggott's archaeological career would today be considered unusual. Despite a passion for archaeology which began during his school years, he did not attend university until the age of 35, after he returned from serving in WWII alongside Daniel in the Central Air Photographic Interpretation Unit. On his return to England Piggott studied for a B.Litt in the Modern History Faculty at Oxford in 1945, on the subject of the Antiquarian William Stukeley, and was thereafter immediately elected, in 1946, to one of the few professional archaeological posts in the country, the Abercromby Chair in Edinburgh, which he held from 1946 to 1977.

At the time that Piggott was entering adulthood, the idea of an archaeological 'career' was in itself something very new. There were few professional archaeologists, and archaeology as a discipline was itself young, with its professional roots dating back only to the 1920s (Stout 2008). Piggott himself wrote of this time that "[Prehistoric archaeology] was a subject hardly yet academically respectable… there were few professionals and only the most restricted opportunities for training more… most of the professionals had taught themselves" (Piggott 1963, 6).

Piggott was a prodigious archaeological writer on a broad range of topics. In a field where it is common to run up a substantial backlog of unpublished excavation work, Piggott was so assiduous that he once 'beat the clock' and published the report on his excavation in the edition of a journal technically dated to the year before the dig had actually taken place (Mercer 1998, 431). He had a hands-on approach to archaeology, seeing it as "tangible and visible, and not an exercise in academic theory" (Piggott 1983, 36). He took a wide-ranging, pan-European approach, which was always palpably rooted in an understanding of the landscape; when he set out to further his own background in European Prehistory whilst teaching at Edinburgh he wrote that "I needed not only to read the literature, but to see material and landscape at first hand" (Piggott 1983, 36). He was well liked and admired as a teacher, although one of his students later noted that he "never suffered fools easily" (Mercer 1998, 432).

Piggott wrote over thirty monographs, and there is little indication that the Druids occupied any unusual position of significance for him. In his autobiographical '*Retrospect'*, the book is reduced to a single sentence: "A study of The Druids ([Piggott] 1968) allowed me to link Celtic Archaeology to thehistory of antiquarianism, which has for so longintrigued me" (Piggott 1983, 36). Nevertheless, he treated the topic with a characteristic combination of intelligence, theoretical acuity and thorough appraisal of the available evidence, which he presents with encyclopaedic breadth.

The book exemplified Piggott's approach to studying the past. Piggott was a passionate advocate of archaeology as an intellectual discipline with its own unique techniques and theoretical frameworks for uncovering the past. He distinguishes in the book between 'Druids-in-themselves' ("whom we can never reach"), 'Druids-as-known' (inferred from archaeology and Classical texts) and 'Druids-as-wished for' (the process of subjective interpretation and extrapolation of the evidence which has been going on "since Classical times") (Piggott 1968, 16).

The theoretical archaeological toolkit which Piggott used to access his 'Druids-as-known' included Hawkes' ladder of inference. This is the model described by Piggott as "a four-fold scale of ascending difficulty and descending validity in archaeological interpretation, beginning with technology, on which the soundest inferences can be based, and going on to subsistence-economics, more complex but still with a large measure of reliability. But the next stage, inferences on social structure, becomes far more tricky… And when one comes to religion, and the spiritual life of a people, just what can one legitimately infer, except a few platitudes so vague as to be meaningless?" (Piggott 1968, 19).

Hawkes' ladder remained an important theoretical model long after its use by Piggott, and it highlights the perceived difficulties of using archaeology to explore ancient belief systems. Piggott was so assured of this problem that in unpublished notes written around the same time as *The Druids* he explored whether it might be possible, indeed perhaps preferable, to construct an 'Atheistical Archaeology', writing: "If we cannot find an explanation by valid inference, let us be honest and admit that archaeological evidence can never by itself inform us of large and important tracts of human behaviour in the past." and that for truly prehistoric societies, the evidence might "preclude by its nature a knowledge of religious beliefs, and should we therefore settle for prehistory without gods, an atheistic archaeology?" Piggott argued that whilst prehistoric art and religion were certainly worthy of study in principle, it might be impossible to study them objectively given the nature of the available evidence (Stuart Piggott Archive Notebook X: *Druids Draft Text Part II &c 1967*).

However, despite these difficulties Piggott did not refrain entirely from analysing and exploring the Druidic beliefs mentioned in the Classical texts, and to do this he uses another weapon in his archaeological armoury: a framework for understanding the evolution of human societies. Piggott's overarching model for societal development, referenced only obliquely in *The Druids*, but drawn out much more completely in his other works (including Piggott 1965, e.g. 256-8), was a linear (if somewhat unpredictable) development from barbarity towards civilization. Modern society was seen as closer to the Classical world, at the more civilised end of the spectrum, while pagan Druidry was "an archaic and barbarian tradition… infinitely more remote from our own" (Piggott 1968, 32). Piggott argued that this difference in the level of social development would also have affected the ways in which Classical authors wrote about the Druids: "In any such descriptions, they could not escape the use of a technical vocabulary which was the result of centuries of profound or subtle thinking, and which had therefore acquired overtones of intellectual complexity and sophistication, but which had to be used in recording the simplest beliefs, superstitions and traditional lore and institutions of the barbarian peoples beyond the Alps" (Piggott 1968, 98).

In constructing the Iron Age Druids as the priests of a less developed barbarian people, Piggott is thus able to dismiss much of the complexity attributed to their doctrines by contemporary Classical writers as a form of 'soft primitivism', which caused the classical authors to cast Druids as barbarian philosophers and noble savages. Piggott attempts to distinguish between 'empirical' and 'idealising' Classical accounts of the ancient druids (ibid., 103), but in the absence of hard-and-fast rules to distinguish between these camps, perhaps falls into the trap of creating his own Druids-as-wished-for, in this case assuming that the more barbaric accounts such as those dealing with human sacrifice must be closer to the truth than those granting genuine wisdom and insight to the ancient druids. This is perhaps unsurprising given Piggott's claim expressed elsewhere that humankind's 'natural instincts' were towards aggression and warfare (Piggott 1965, 15).

Nora Chadwick, in her book also entitled simply '*The Druids*' and published in the same year as Piggott, took a similar approach, but the opposite line. She preferred to see the more positive Classical accounts as less biased, arguing that "The unfavourable aspect of Druidism represents a policy pledged to uphold the Roman attitude unsympathetic to a foreign barbarian society" (Chadwick 1966, 27). However, Chadwick's approach was met with scorn by at least one reviewer, who wrote "The novelty of Mrs. Chadwick's book is the view that there was some-thing like political motivation behind the accounts not only of Posidonius but of his copyists, including Caesar. I must say outright that I regard this line of reasoning as altogether misplaced. That Celts did practice human sacrifice there can be no doubt at all… and Mrs. Chadwick never goes so far as to deny it. … The notion of propaganda like this introduces modern concepts into the ancient world… Posidonius, Caesar and the rest were simply describing without any particular *parti pris* what they saw and heard" (Stevens, 1968, 109-110).

Piggott's work does not appear to have met with such stark resistance. It seems that the academic community was ready to allow for biased Classical representations of an ancient people only when this reinterpretation supported modern preconceptions. Piggott's work has stood the test of time better than Chadwick's volume, and it is, of course, entirely possible that Piggott was right in his suppositions. But it would be hard to claim today that the most barbaric and bloodthirsty portrayals of ancient Druids were necessarily more objective than their more reflective and philosophical counterparts. The Classical accounts of ancient druids are various and widely divergent, and the druids-as-known that they can be used to construct are perhaps inseparable from each writer's druids-as-wished-for. The canvas of prehistory has often been used to construct familiar worlds and desired societies, and in a very real sense there is no way to write an objective account of the past that does not reflect our own interests, experiences and expectations. Piggott's friend and associate Bertil Almgren, a Scandinavian archaeologist, wrote to him after reading *The Druids* and asked whether Piggott wasn't, in a way, also writing about archaeologists. (Almgren mentions his own nineteen-year 'apprenticeship' and compares gatherings of archaeologists with Druidic 'symposia') (Undated letter from Bertil Almgren to Stuart Piggott, Stuart Piggott Archive Box 40, Item 4, no. 17).

The rest of Piggott's book focuses on the rediscovery and re-imagining of the Druids from the fifteenth century onwards. Piggott's approach to contemporary Druid movements perhaps reflects his own preoccupations with establishing the boundaries and authority of archaeology as a burgeoning professional discipline. Piggott had previously done a good deal of research on the life and works of William Stukeley, a key figure in the early development of both modern archaeology and modern druidic movements (see especially Piggott 1950), although Piggott was keen to distinguish Stukeley's 'incomparable fieldwork' (Piggott 1989, 129) in his early career from his later more religious writings. There has been a good deal of subsequent scholarship on whether Stukeley's views changed considerably around the time of his ordination as an Anglican minister in the late 1720s, with views ranging from relative continuity in his beliefs (Ucko et al. 1991, Haycock 2002), to a more complex form of transformation (Hutton 2005). Piggott later accepted some of these reinterpretations (which to a certain extent were based on new evidence), but at the time when he was writing *The Druids* he still held that the "disastrous" (Piggott 1968, 143) popular association between Druids and Stonehenge came about because of the work of Stukeley, "theorizing wildly and unwisely after years of some of the best field-work of his time, and for generations to come." The need to disentangle Stukeley's archaeological work from his later religious writings was perhaps felt more acutely at this time. Stukeley had played a key role in the founding of both

modern archaeology and modern Druidry, and this shared inheritance might have seemed deeply problematic to Piggott in the context in which he was writing.

By Piggott's time, the association between Iron Age Druids and the monument at Stonehenge had been thoroughly unravelled in academic circles, but was still popular with the general public (as it remains to this day). "Druids die hard," Piggott wrote elsewhere, "as every British archaeologist knows to his cost, and even recently could appear without warning in the pages of some journal in the very guise in which they were decked by Dr. Stukeley 200 years ago" (Piggott 1950, 25). At a time when the authority of the discipline of archaeology was still in the process of being established, it was highly important to scholars such as Piggott and Daniel that these kinds of misconceptions should be corrected, and both of these archaeologists seem to have actively sought out opportunities to do so – Daniel in his editorials for *Antiquity*, and Piggott in his books. Both of these men also wrote letters responding to newspaper articles which they felt fell short of the required archaeological standards (e.g. Piggott's Letter to the Times 26th February 1969, clipping in Stuart Piggott Archive Box 30, Item 9, no. 8). This kind of boundary work established firmly the authority of archaeologists, and the dominance of the academic discipline, in dictating what should be acceptable as the public understanding of the past. Piggott wrote that "It is our duty not only to maintain our scholarship at the highest level, but to see that its popular image is not a distorted one" (Piggott 1963, 7).

Daniel's lambasting of the Druids in his editorials also fits with this conscious work to establish the boundaries of academic archaeology, and its pre-eminent authority over other ways of constructing narratives of the past. In the early 1950s, in his history 'A hundred years of Archaeology', Daniel wrote about the "danger of a new antiquarianism" (Daniel 1950, 326). He was concerned that archaeology might fail to provide a new, professional avenue towards an understanding of the ancient past. He confirmed that these fears had been real, if ultimately unfounded, in 1973, when he published an expanded and updated version of the book. "This real danger could have happened," he wrote, but cautiously concedes that "The thirty years under review in this [new] chapter [1945-1970] have shown how Archaeology, instead of remaining a rather strange mystique of prehistoric artefacts, has become a main contributor to the writing of history, and more especially the ancient history of man. But the danger of the new antiquarianism remains" (Daniel 1975, 371). In detailing the positive developments within archaeology in the post WWII years, he singles out in particular the development of new scientific techniques, most especially the revolutionary introduction of C-14 dating, which enabled the far more accurate and objective construction of chronologies for prehistory. Without this kind of scientific authority, there seemed to be a genuine fear that what Piggott and Daniel cast as the 'lunatic fringe' might usurp what they saw as the rightful place and role of academic archaeology.

There are hints that Piggott was aware of some of the shortcomings of a purely academic approach to understanding the past. In his archive is a handwritten note which he had scrawled on the back of a notecard from the Oxford and Cambridge University Club, perhaps in connection with an event run for that group with Daniel: "Why the lunatic fringe? People not given what they really want by arch[aeologist]s - they have an emotional approach to intellectual problem and are disappointed when this isn't satisfied" (Stuart Piggott archive Box 30, Item 9, no. 4). This emotive response, and the difficulty of comparing modern emotional reactions with ancient spirituality was precisely what motivated Piggott to propose his 'Atheistic Archaeology'. If prehistoric religion could not be addressed by academic

archaeology, perhaps better to avoid it altogether, even if the resulting picture of prehistoric society was left impoverished as a result.

Piggott's *The Druids* needs to be understood in the context of this boundary work. It was written at a time when Archaeologists were staking a claim to public as well as academic authority. This stood in tension with other models for understanding the past, including the spiritual connection claimed by contemporary Druid groups. The disjuncture between these approaches was one cause of the conflict around issues such as access to Stonehenge. The archaeological discourse of academic interpretation and physical preservation was in many ways incompatible with a perspective in which this monument was a living, sacred place with a continuing history.

1985 onwards: Who owns Stonehenge?

Permission for the annual summer solstice celebration at Stonehenge was eventually revoked in 1984, and would not be fully re-instated until 'managed open access' was introduced in 2000 (Blain and Wallis 2007, 84). These were difficult years for all parties involved in negotiating access to Stonehenge, with breakdowns in communication and understanding sometimes resulting in violent confrontation, as in the notorious 1985 'Battle of the Beanfield', in which hundreds of people were forcibly removed from Stonehenge by police. Nevertheless, in the intervening years there seems, tentatively, to have been a softening of attitudes among archaeologists towards modern Druid movements and, at the same time a broadening in scope of archaeological treatments of the ancient Druids themselves.

After Daniel's death in 1986 he was succeeded as editor of *Antiquity* by Christopher Chippindale, who himself had a strong academic interest in Stonehenge (Chippindale 1983) but was much more willing to engage in discussions with other interest groups, including modern Druid movements (see e.g. Chippindale 1990). He has even (admirably) been willing to admit that "as long as the methods of archaeological research remain largely destructive, we [archaeologists] are ourselves not 100% in the business of preserving the past" (Chippindale 1986, 55), a matter that has been of no small concern to many observers, among them some modern Druids. Piggott's concern over "deplorable acts of hooliganism" (Piggott 1968, 181) carried out by midsummer visitors to Stonehenge might, to some, seem perverse when we consider that his own excavation work (which was intended to stabilise the monument) involved lifting many of the stones and resetting them in concrete (Chippindale 1983, 204-5).

Chippindale, like Piggott and Daniel before him, was in many respects responding to wider trends in the discipline of archaeology. A major development in the 1980s and 1990s reflected the idea that there is no one correct way to approach the study of the past and, alongside this, the realisation that there is no one true version of any set of past events. Events are experienced and understood differently by different people, in the past just as now. This new 'post-processual' archaeology, as it came to be called, emphasised multi-vocality and plurality, opening up the way for a more discursive approach capable of accommodating alternative viewpoints.

A clear example of this shift can be found in the book *Who owns Stonehenge?,* published in 1990(Chippindale et al. 1990). It includes contributions by Chippindale (1990) and

archaeologist Peter Fowler, as well as papers discussing 'Stonehenge as an earth mystery' (Devereux 1990) and 'the Druid knowledge of Stonehenge' (Sebastian 1990). Nevertheless, despite the inclusion of a Druidic perspective, and the acknowledgement that "many people now see Stonehenge primarily as a living, religious place" (Fowler 1990b, 142), the archaeological discourse around the role of modern Druids is still couched in terms of historical authenticity (or the lack of it) (e.g. Chippindale 1990, 162). Even with the apparent openness to alternative perspectives, clear claims for academic primacy are advanced in the book, particularly by Fowler (1990a), whose emphasis is on academic rights and responsibilities. Fowler argues that academic archaeologists should have the ultimate say in counterbalancing the various claims to authority, and heritage practitioners must be responsible for preservation of the monument.

The book emerged out of debates surrounding Stonehenge which took place at the World Archaeological Congress held at Southampton in 1986. The very terms on which the discussion was enabled – a conference and the subsequent publication of a co-authored academic monograph – emphasises the role of archaeologists as mediators in the construction of knowledge about the site. Wider perspectives were welcomed and incorporated in large part because archaeology was now sufficiently established as an academic discipline to permit alternative voices to be heard without jeopardising its own claims to authority. To a considerable extent, archaeology was (and indeed in some ways still is) walking a tightrope between multi-vocality and academic authority.

Post-processual archaeology also stimulated discussions around less functional aspects of the past, seeking to enrich our narratives of past societies by including precisely those difficult topics which Piggott had sought to avoid. Partly as a result of this, the 1980s and 1990s saw a flourishing of academic works on the ancient Druids. Piggott's opus was republished in 1985, and Chadwick's in 1997. The demand for these volumes was no doubt stimulated, at least in part, by the growing movement of modern Druidry, and this new wave of academic work tended to take a more magnanimous approach than Piggott to contemporary Druids. Miranda Aldhouse-Green, for example, in her extensive and scholarly treatment 'Exploring the world of the Druids' (Green 1997), considers antiquarian and modern Druid movements as a codicil to a work predominantly concerned with ancient Druidry. Although the scope is very similar to that of Piggott's work thirty years earlier, Green offers a more even-handed approach, treating modern Druidry separately and making no direct connection with Iron Age religion, whilst steering clear of questions of authenticity, or any of the vehement accusations of Piggott.

Other academic books on the ancient Druids which appeared during this time (e.g. Ross and Robins 1991) related specifically to the discoveries in 1983-1988 of the remains of a group of bog bodies at Lindow Moss in Cheshire, the most well-preserved of which became known as Lindow Man. Indeed, coverage of Lindow man is the only significant change to have been made to the (surprisingly small) section on Druids in the standard reference to Iron Age Britain (Cunliffe 2004) in the several editions since its first publication in 1971. Hutton (2009, 416) has argued that the association of Lindow man's apparent sacrifice with Iron Age Druids (a view now challenged by many, see Joy 2009) represents the fact that archaeologists "have become a lot nicer to modern Druidry while remaining inclined to privilege a negative view of the ancient sort." Not so far, perhaps, from Piggott's view of Iron Age druids as barbarian priests in a primitive society.

Yet I would argue that there are stirrings of more fundamental change in the attitudes of contemporary archaeologists to both modern Druid movements and their Iron Age counterparts. In both cases, this shift relates to taking a broader perspective on the role of Druids (ancient and modern) in their communities.

Since the turn of the millennium, there have been a growing number of projects seeking to create a deeper engagement between archaeologists and contemporary pagan movements, perhaps most significantly the 'Sacred Sites, Contested Rites/Rights' project (Blain and Wallis 2007), which sought to contextualise pagan engagement with archaeological monuments, challenging some of the academic perceptions which centre on a discourse of preservation and authenticity. This more balanced shift towards plurality and multi-vocality is representative of a push towards greater inclusivity in the heritage sector. It is now common practice for modern pagan groups to be considered as stakeholders in the management of heritage sites, and in the sensitive issues of the display or reburial of human remains (e.g. Thackray and Payne 2010). The balance is delicate, and the outcomes often imperfect, but these changes represent a considerable improvement in opening the lines of communication.

When Lindow Man was displayed in Manchester as part of a special exhibition in 2008, Emma Restall Orr of the group 'Honouring the Ancient Dead' was one of the pagan representatives invited to contribute her voice to a consultation held in 2007, and ultimately to the exhibition itself. In her review of the exhibition, when she had seen the results of the collaboration, she wrote: "I don't like it... It is deeply discomforting. But I am not convinced that I would like anything they could possibly have come up with…. I would rather see him reburied. With dignity, with honour..." But she acknowledges "the courage of the Manchester Museum, for not only is their vision radical, the way in which they reached it was profoundly ethical: with sound consultation. That the remit provided by that consultation didn't produce quite what was expected is perhaps a useful reminder about how we communicate and what it is that we share" (Restall Orr 2008). In Restall Orr's opinion the exhibition had got it wrong but, crucially, the process for asking the right questions was in place. Pagan and Druid perspectives, like archaeological perspectives, are diverse and complex, but there is growing evidence through work such as the Lindow Man exhibition consultation that there are mutual benefits to including pagan groups as respected stakeholders in an ongoing dialogue surrounding how we approach, understand, display and convey our heritage.

In academic archaeology there has been a concomitant shift in works concerning ancient Druids, with a recent trend tending towards more contextualised explorations of religion and the role of spiritual leaders in their societies. The majority of archaeologists studying the Iron Age would now agree that it is anachronistic to imagine a separation between the sacred and the profane in everyday life: the two would have been inextricably interwoven. The model of Hawkes' 'ladder of inference', which Piggott used to argue that Iron Age religious beliefs should be considered irrecoverable and unreachable, is now widely challenged. In a past where religious and spiritual beliefs shaped all aspects of social life, from power and politics to how it was acceptable to butcher an animal or dispose of the remains, JD Hill (1995) has argued that Hawkes' ladder of inference is upside-down, and that spiritual beliefs and taboos may have been as important in the formation of the archaeological record as the practicalities of technology and subsistence.

Recent academic works on Iron Age Druids are more likely to accept that we cannot separate the Druids and their beliefs, practices and teaching from the societies of which they were

part, placing them more firmly back into their ancient contexts and communities. Webster (1999) argues for a Druidic End-of-the-World movement which became a vehicle for protest against the expanding Roman Empire. Creighton (2000) talks of the role of Druids as powerful leaders in Iron Age Britain, with control over aspects of pre-Roman coin production, while Aldhouse-Green (2010) takes a more anthropological perspective on Druids in British and Gallic society, and how their roles as healers, judges, and power-brokers reached beyond the religious sphere and into contemporary politics. The details of these interpretations can be, will be, and should be critiqued as archaeological practice moves forwards and new ideas and models for understanding the past emerge.But, crucially, in this work we begin to see Druids as people, as political actors and leaders within their communities, whose leadership could be challenged, threatened or re-inforced. People who made decisions and are portrayed as having real agency and power. As archaeological interpretations move away from a focus on stripping away myths and correcting misunderstandings, so ancient Druids can begin to find their way out of the fringe and into mainstream accounts of Iron Age communities, where they belong.

Conclusions

The development of twentieth century professional archaeology cannot be understood as a linear narrative of improvement, moving towards a more perfect and complete understanding of the past. Most archaeologists would now agree that no such monolithic account is possible, that we must allow for the multiple and complex lived experiences of individuals and communities in the past, and also that we must accept that all the stories we tell about the past in the present cannot be recreations of a lost ancient world, but must ultimately be understood as, at best, a vision of the past viewed through the distorting lens of the present. This is why the history of the discipline of archaeology is important. Archaeologists are not impartial, neutral observers, but people with personalities and personal motivations, enmeshed in the particular passions and politics of their own society. This is as true for archaeologists today as it was for Daniel and Piggott, as it was for Aubrey and Stukeley before them. We cannot, in telling the story of the past, remove the perspective of the storyteller.

In the years since Piggott and Daniel were writing, archaeology has changed. The ways we seek to understand the past, and the understanding of the nature of that exercise, have shifted. In 1963, Daniel lambasted Ross Nichols' suggestion that people should (in Daniel's words) "set aside the findings of archaeologists and historians and… go to Stonehenge alone and commune there so that the truth would seep into their minds" (clipping from *The Eagle* 262, December 1963 (pp. 29-30), Stuart Piggott Archive Box 30, Item 5, no. 12). The lived experience of being in the landscape, the social and emotional response to an artefact or site, were not seen as valid sources of information about the past.

More recently, new movements in archaeology which have their roots in the post-processual school of the 1980s and 1990s might suggest that archaeologists have something to learn from modern pagan engagements with the landscape (Blain and Wallis 2007). It is impossible to re-construct a prehistoric mind-set or worldview, and the landscape we find ourselves in today is hugely different to the one experienced by our ancestors, but it is crucial for archaeology to engage in alternative perspectives. In a debate on alternative archaeologies at a 1999 conference in Southampton, Richard Bradley, Professor of Archaeology at Reading University, expressed a dissatisfaction with modern 'consumption' of archaeological sites,

which I think goes to the heart of Ross Nichols' message to Daniel. Bradley suggested that we need to:

> "get used to monuments, spend time with them, be patient with them, before insights arise. There is an analogy between our instant consumption of monuments like Stonehenge and the deficiencies of traditional archaeology; we have no patience. We have no patience as tourists and we have no patience as academics. It's no good having forty-five minutes access to Stonehenge whether you pay or not. What you need is the possibility for spending a long time at it, of being able to look at it in different lighting conditions, for instance. And that goes for all monuments, not just Stonehenge. The health of the discipline as a whole depends on a change in mindset and the way we expect people to experience these sites." (Bradley 1999, cited in Wallis and Lymer 2001, 117)

The experiential approach of engaging with the landscape as a mode for studying the lived experience of people in the past was quite new to archaeologists in the 1990s, but it was not so far removed from Nichols' own suggestion, made nearly forty years earlier, and such experience-based work had long been a cornerstone of modern Druidic practice. The implication, I think, is that archaeology and modern pagan and Druid movements still have much to learn from one another, and that the pasts that we construct together will be deeper and more fascinating than the ones that we would create alone.

This essay has taken a relatively straightforward perspective on developments in archaeology, when of course the real picture will always be far more complex, messy, and personal. In that spirit, it seems appropriate to close by acknowledging a more immediate and emotive response to the landscape around Stonehenge. This poem was published in 1948, before the events discussed here. It was written not by a Druid, but by Stuart Piggott (1948, 40).

Wessex Harvest

Now the ancient Wessex hills

seize their lost splendour–

once, Stonehenge-building, their princes

proud with their Wicklow gold

strode in the sunshine;

now earth inherits

their dust, who are chalk-graved,

dry frail and brittle

pale bones under barrows–

poor fragments, those great ones.

But see, the austere lines
of downland are gladdened
splendid now, flaunting
armour of red-gold plate,
corn-stooks its studding;
new from old treasure
is this year's miraculous
rebirth in the harvest.

And so in all years
is nothing forgotten,
always the far dead things
new life begetting.

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