Ghosts of Archaeology: The Journey of Archaeological Knowledge from Science to Science Fiction

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Abstract

The paper aims to evaluate the boundaries between science and pseudo-science in the public understanding of archaeology. It uses the legacy of T.C. Lethbridge as a case study to illustrate the process of transitioning from a scientific to a pseudo-scientific realm. It establishes the relationship between Lethbridge and the academic community based on archival documents, while it aims to glimpse the parapsychological communities' narratives by the distant reading of dowsing forums, using data parsing and topic modelling techniques. The paper claims that the role Lethbridge represented as the late antiquarian polymath, opposing the institutionalisation and processual methods of archaeology, is still an appealing model for some members of the public, who prefer interacting with the local past outside the institutional formulas of professional archaeology. However, Lethbridge's rediscovery in the parapsychological world carries the danger that an outdated version of archaeology is becoming reinforced in times when misinformation is a global challenge.

Introduction

The paper aims to evaluate the fine line between science and pseudoscience in the public understanding of archaeological work. It uses the legacy of T.C. Lethbridge (1901-1971) as a case study to illustrate the process of transitioning from a scientific to a pseudo-scientific realm. Several examples demonstrate that archaeological heritage can be easily nationalised by the public or appropriated by predatory identities, however, it is less researched how easily it slips the border between the academic and non-academic spheres of knowledge production, giving space for esoteric interpretations.

Although this paper is not T.C. Lethbridge's biography, his case serves as an excellent example as it illustrates both sides of the same coin. On the one hand, originally a self-made archaeologist at the Museum of Archaeology and Ethnography in Cambridge, he became a hero of the parapsychological audience. On the other hand, how Lethbridge fell out of academic circles demonstrates the struggles and insecurities the field faced in the middle of the 20th century. This era was the time when archaeology as a profession solidified, but there were individuals involved in it who still carried characteristics from the antiquarian past, making its disciplinary boundaries blurred. Therefore, this fuzziness helped the esoteric communities to find their theorists more easily in archaeology, such as Margaret Murray, who became the "grandmother of Wicca'. Lethbridge became a grandfather figure for parapsychologist communities while losing his academic credibility.

How can we track this process? Where are the limits of academic interpretation and uncertainty? How do parapsychologist communities relate to archaeology? My research aims to answer these questions with the help of a combination of archival research and digital humanities methods. I established the relationship between Lethbridge and the academic community based on archival documents, his personal correspondence and manuscripts, while I researched the parapsychological communities' narratives by the distant reading of forums, reviews, blogs, and non-academic publications, using data parsing and topic modelling techniques. As I wanted to examine the spectrum from science to fiction in archaeology, I chose a public sitting between the two communities: archaeological dowsers. Dowsing is the practice of using forked sticks or similar tools to find water and other substances.

Parapsychology has yet to prove the efficiency of dowsing, and regarding archaeology, how we relate to dowsing is not absolute either (cf. Finneran 2003). While in the UK, the practice is mostly harmless due to the success of the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) and the Treasure Act, there are parts of the world where it is an element of the living tradition, hence more or less well-regarded. There are also some places where it is attached to conflicts between nationalistic or political groups and professional archaeology, such as Hungary, where questioning academic credibility is a political statement for

archaeological dowsers.

This article is not about deciding what value we attribute to archaeological dowsing, however, it points out some of its elements that conflict with academic archaeological practice. The main focus is on how Lethbridge's case study illustrates what happens when archaeologists do not accept not having all the answers, as it carries the risk of losing control both over academic integrity and public understanding.

Nevertheless, we must first understand T.C. Lethrbrige's role in this case study. The internet barely knows him, despite the significant influence his work on pendulum had on those using dowsing methods. As pseudo-scientific references are not the most meticulous, it is unsurprising that his teachings are inherited without being linked to his name. The most notable reference to him is in the pseudo-science parody publication Sex Secrets of Ancient Atlantis, mentioning the characters always having a Lethbridge edition in their pockets (Grant 2004). Otherwise, the handful of Google hits about him is primarily second-hand bookshops still storing his publications or his newer biographies written by parapsychologists and followers (Welbourn 2011, Graves - Hoult 1980). But who was T.C.Lethrbidge?

In and out of the 'Ivory Tower'

This article cannot completely introduce Lethbridge as a person or provide a full biographic overview. According to his widow, Nina, editor of his autobiography's manuscript, he was a great entertainer and never ran out of conversation topics (Lethbridge 1989[1]). Within these pages, we can focus only on the conflict of his leaving the Cambridge archaeology scene, which is a rich story illustrating the process of the professional discipline turning its back to the residue of an antiquarian past. However, as it can fill the pages of a monograph in preparation, here we have to sample representative steps of

1 Posthumous publication by Mina Lethbridge.

this journey.

Lethbridge, born in 1901, came from an aristocratic family and studied natural sciences at Cambridge with little enthusiasm. As he spent time at the Museum of Archaeology and Ethnography (today MAA), Louis Clarke, curator, befriended him. Along with Cyril Fox[2], he introduced the young Tom to archaeological digs. Despite never having a formal archaeological education, he became the Honorary Keeper of the Museum of Archaeology and Ethnography (see Lethbridge 1989). He did not receive a salary in this position but participated in archaeological excavations and published their results. He was never formally associated with the predecessors of the Department of Archaeology, but he was part of a circle of elite academics based in Cambridge. It gave him the means, supported by the Cambridge Antiquarian Society, to be involved in the archaeological works in the area, such as Waterbeech, Burwell, Fen Ditton, and Sohan (e.g. Lethbridge 1924, 1927, 1933, 1936a). He excavated a variety of periods but was most interested in Anglo-Saxon cemeteries (Lethbridge 1931).

However, his approaches and methodology were reminiscent of an unstructured time of the profession, where diversification and specialisation did not yet exist. Practitioners in this era aimed to be experts in everything: material culture, history, linguistics, osteology, archaeozoology, and anthropology, while being knowledgeable in cultures from the Bronze Age to the Mediaeval periods of the British Isles and overseas.[3] Lethbridge called these

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2 Cyril Fox was the first receiving a PhD for Archaeological work in England for his work on The Archaeology of the Cambridge Region.

3 Being a general practitioner necessarily led to some misinformation. For example, Lethbridge used craniology to tell the age, ethnic group, and origin of a skeleton: "They were certainly not Anglo-Saxons, who would have what is known as a "coffin-shaped" skull."(...) "If you have a good eye for the shapes of things and a reasonable memory also, it is not difficult to get a working knowledge of the types of human skull found in Britain. (Lethbridge 1989:35).

times, passing the 19th-century digs but not joining the institutionalisation of archaeology yet, "The Golden Age of Archaeology" (Lethbridge 1989: 2). As he put it, "That age had completely passed and been superseded by one of perhaps not very enthralling technology." (Lethbridge, 1989: 2).

However, I prefer to title it 'late antiquarianism' and consider it a practice, not an era. While archaeology was already an established discipline in the middle of the 20th century, some people following an earlier practice still were active in the field. Shift in paradigms does not necessarily mean that schools of thought consecutively follow each other without overlapping as multiple generations of researchers work alongside each other within the same disciplinary network. In this case study, I consider Lethbridge as an example practitioner of this tradition, which was one of the reasons for the conflict between him and the established archaeology. I also argue that these methods are closer and more available to the current pseudo-scientific public than publications, technologies and practices of academic archaeology, making these ostracised authors, like Lethbridge, an accessible reference point for understanding or misunderstanding the profession. What did this late antiquarian practice consist of? Social class was an essential element of how archaeology functioned in what Lethbridge calls "the Golden Age". Archaeology was a hobby rather than a job and did not necessarily rely on salaries. In Lethbridge's words, "If you had enough money to live on, and your main driving force was curiosity rather than restless ambition, archaeology was a great life in the Golden Age" (Lethbridge 1989:3). It also meant that elitism was an inherent part of the picture: "Once paid posts began to become common, of course, the Golden Age was doomed." In an elitist outburst against professional archaeology, Lethbridge continued: "If you make men all equal, you destroy originality." (Lethbridge 1989: 99).

However, it also points out another important feature of late antiquarianist practice, which played the most crucial part in Lethbridge's career: the emphasis on imagination. "So, with some first-hand knowledge, a great mass of varied information and an independent outlook, the old dons [Golden Age archaeologists] could use observation and inherent probability in their imagination to solve many problems, which are much more difficult today."

(Lethbridge 1989:47) Lethbridge stated. "It [Imagination] was the magic key, which he used to open the door into the past". One of the examples of his imaginative interpretation is an anecdote from the excavations of the Christian Saxon cemetery at Shrudy Camps (Lethbridge 1936). There, among the skeletons, he thought to identify a gambler cheating in a game, leading to his murder based only on a collection of objects. [4]However, Lethbridge was unwilling to recognise that in professional archaeology, the interrogation and interpretation of data can speak without substituting it with vivid imagination.

His close friends maintained the epistemic bubble around him, reinforcing his approaches.[5] For example, in letters exchanged with James Whittaker, a London-based publisher, they agreed to favour amateurism over professionalism. As Whittaker complained: "Ah how right you are in the scathing remarks you pass upon Universities and teachers and the rest of that crap." (Whittaker 1951: 66). The resistance against institutionalisation and professionalism led to his ultimate break with Cambridge archaeology over his theory about the Gogmagog giants.

In 1956, he claimed to identify chalk giant deities on Wandlebury Hill and interpreted them as proof of the presence of Celtic religion in Cambridgeshire (Lethbridge 1957a). To outline the chalk figures rumoured by locals (cf. Meadows 2015), he and his wife used sounding bars to indicate the change in chalk (Fig. 1). A method against which he was warned by fellow archaeologist Christopher Hawkes: "The probing method adopted by Mr. Lethbridge (...) has been regarded by my colleagues with suspicion. The fact is that this method on chalk sites is mistrusted by almost all modern professional British

4 "I said, looking at a collection of objects, which resembled ratafias. Those are playing-men from a game (...) The men in question had cheated evidently with dice, (and) was loaded with an iron pin." (Lethbridge 1989:47)

5 His letters reveal who his close friends were as they used nicknames for the Cambridge archaeology and museum scene amongst each other.

Archaeologists. Their mistrust of it is very understandable since it is certainly not reliable on chalk sites of the sort that such archaeologists normally examine. The probing method would probably lead, as it did in fact lead, to suspicion of his digging." (Hawkes 1957:2)

However, Lethbridge did not acknowledge the limitations of his excavation: "It was the recognised method of looking for lost field drains and similar things in the country. All kinds of excuses have been thought of by archaeologists for not using such an obvious aid to research" (Lethbridge 1957a: 4-5). In the end, a scrutiny panel of experts in chalk archaeology and geology rejected his

Figure1. T.C. and Mina Lethbridge probing the chalk on Wandlebury Hill. London Evening News, 18 Nov. 1954, p.4. Newscuttings on Gogmagog. giants at Wandlebury, 1954-1957, GBR/0012/MS Add.9777/26/7/25-34. Cambridge University Library.]

findings, determining the outlines as glacial marks (Grimes 1957)[6] and future excavations did not verify his theory either (cf. French et al. 2004).

Despite the scientific disapproval and warnings from the head of the Cambridge Preservation Trust (Willink 1956: 310)[7], his theory was published and circulated in the media (e.g., Cambridge Evening News, The London Evening News, BBC, etc.), giving us a good insight into the public reception of the pseudo-discovery. The press welcomed it as a sensation, but the professional reviews of his book (Lethbridge 1957b) were devastating, as they compared Lethbridge to Schliemann. (Anon 1957a). Lethbridge could not tolerate that his progressed approaches were not welcome in the professional setting of Cambridge archaeology. He moved to Devon, where, in some sense, he continued antiquarianism for a different public.

Turning to parasychology

In his archaeological practice, Lethbridge gave much credit to folklore and local rumours, which already provided him with a good connection to the public. Furthermore, the letters and positive feedback to the Gogmagog publications from esoteric practitioners could have indicated an affirmation of a new, acceptive and welcoming audience[8], helping him to find his way

6 "I have to confess that we [Grimes, Piggott and Cornwall] feel unable to support your views. Apart from the archaeological difficulties, Cornwall's analyses indicate that the fillings (apart from that in the grey pit) are not the result of human activity, but essentially natural in character; and with other features suggest that the phenomena as a whole are due to solification processes. I know you disapprove of these ideas, but there it is." (Grimes 1957)

7 "Would it not be the best to restrain to the utmost possible degree all publicity? Would it not be best in matter which is clearly very controversial to proceed by the method of a paper published by yourself in the appropriate archaeological journal?" (Willink 1956: 310)

8 Such as the one from Mrs M.E.Hone, an astrologist from West Wittering who was interested in "Sun-and-Moon religion" (Hone 1957:171).

into extrasensory perception (ESP[9]) (cf. Lethbridge 1965). He published the ideological background of his Gogmagog theory for this new audience in 1962 (Lethbridge 1962), but the real jump was immersing in dowsing.

There is no room here to discuss the history of British dowsing or Lethbridge's personal history with dowsing either (for those, see Graves 1980 and Finneran 2003). However, he supported the method even in Cambridge while working on excavations: "Dowsing is quite efficient in some cases; although frowned upon by the too conventional type of archaeologists, who, knowing little of science, describes it as 'unscientific'. For those who fear the opprobrium of these old ladies of archaeology, electrical gadgets are available, which perform the same function at greater expense."(Lethbridge 1957a: 9).

In his Devon garden, he further experimented with the forked sticks. After a local woman, referred to as a "witch" (Wilson 1980: xi), recommended he use a pendulum instead of dowsing sticks, Lethbridge dedicated experiments to establish how the pendulum reacts at different lengths (Lethbridge 1976). His recommendations still circulate online (Fig.2).

The posts refer to Lethbridge's journey from pendulums (see published Lethbridge 1976) to chasing ghosts, as he claimed to find the dimension of paranormal phenomena using the pendulum at a given length (Lethbridge 1961). As an extremely prolific writer, he published several short books almost annually on these pendulum techniques (1963, 1965, 1967, 1976) and the dimension of ghosts and ghouls (1961, 1963). Yet he did not stop there but ventured further into imagination by exploring the possibilities of alien intervention in ancient history (Lethbridge 1972).[10]

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9 Extra Sensory Perseption or ESP for short, is an angle of parapsychology interested in perception without using phisical senses, experimental exploration of a six sense.

10 An idea which gained great popularity as a result of Eric von Däniken's books at that time. Cf. (Wilson 1980).

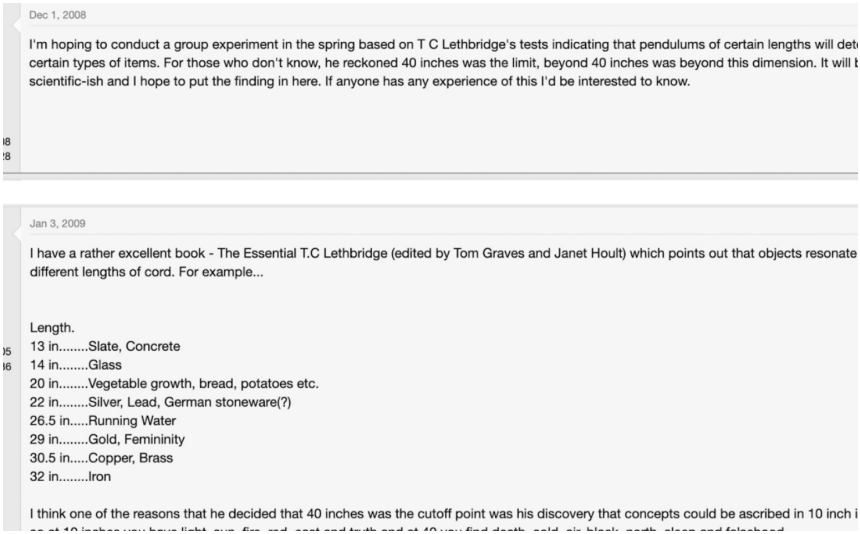

Figure 2. Screenshot of a Forteana forum discussion about the uses of the pendulum. Source: https://forums.forteana.org/index.php?threads/t-c-lethbridge-dowsing.35840/. Accessed: 16:43 1 May 2023.

Dowsing forums: What the public sees

Professional archaeologists have been researching the alternative realm for decades, however, these studies mainly focused on the US (cf. Williams 1991, Harrold - Eve 1995, Shermer 1997, Sagan 1997, Feder 2002, Schadla-Hall 2004, 2006, or most recently Moshenska 2017). I aimed to glimpse British alternative practices by examining the British dowsing community's online discussion.

Lethbridge's ideas were transmitted to British dowsing primarily via Tom Graves, who first edited Lethbridge's parapsychological work and himself published several volumes on archaeological dowsing (Graves - Hoult 1980, Graves 1980). To establish how archaeological dowsers feel about professional archaeology, I have analysed all the available 281 posts on the British Dowsing Forum's Archaeology "Go out and find stuff much?" and "Archeo-dowsing"

sections. Although the forum is not the main communication channel anymore for the community, as the posts ranged from 2006 to 2022 and users read these feeds 258512 times, it could give a solid longitudinal look into the discussion.

Firstly, I conducted an LDA (Latent Dirichlet Allocation) topic modelling on the collected posts to see the overarching debate. LDA works by assuming that each document in the collection - in our case, forum posts - comprises a combination of different themes (topics), and each topic is represented by a set of keywords that commonly occur together (see Blei et al. 2003). From these keywords, the researcher can reconstruct the main themes of the discussion.

Secondly, I closely read the topics, supplemented by netnographic participant observation of relevant social media groups, to discover intersections between the narratives of the forum and the late antiquarian practices discussed above. The investigation aimed to see if the practices represented by Lethbridge have an impact on contemporary archaeological dowsing discussions.

The four main topics the LDA modelling discovered were: the community aspect of dowsing(1), the debates around the destructive and non-destructive approaches(2), reporting vs. selling finds(3), and the technicalities of dowsing(4) (Table 1).

Topic	Keywords (bi-gram tokens, lemmatised)	Representative Post
Topic 1: Community aspects of dowsing vs. discovery	Group event, go group, individually part, rods go, social group, part social, location get, reaction rods, group rather, get reaction, rather individually, nice location, spur moment, reputation dowser, nothing back	"Dowsers seem to go out in groups, rather than individually, as part of a social group-event to a nice location, get a few reactions from their rods and then go home"

Topic	Keywords (bi-gram tokens, lemmatised)	Representative Post
Topic 2: Destructive vs. non-destructive	Take spade, could destroy, mood trench, would wrong, spade unless, unless train, setting dig, wrong encourage, make discoveries, trench could, discoveries take, hole want, train archaeologist, archaeologist setting, go along, dig big, trench archaeology	"Just setting to and digging a mighty big hole or if you want to get in the mood, a trench, could be destroying history."
Topic 3: Reporting vs. Selling	Detector enthusiast, dowser archaeologist, find object, get welly, structure exist, country often, encounter metal, believe opportunity, detector people, people search, search field, opportunity sell, finance reward, many search, object gain, find motivate, motivate many, gain financial, sell find	"I don't know of any professional dowsing archaeologists and certainly there is not a great deal of money to be made out of dowsing archaeology. Even archaeologists are not well paid unless they are at the top of their league."
Topic 4: Technicalities of dowsing	Metal detectorist, archaeological dowser, code conduct, dowse today, king stone, many things, dowse around, san louise, ring true, gold dust, land owner, dowser find, thing keep, dowser work, would damage, go alone, gold find, rare mineral, robbery take, dowser could	"He has a device which electronically records the swing of a dowsing rod, similar to an L-rod and combines it with GPS data, stores it all on a laptop with custom-built software which can plot where he's walked, similar to a GPS "track" but with a colour representation showing which way the rod was swinging at each point along the way."

Table 1 showing the topic keywords of the four identified topics. Andrea Kocsis.

As topics 2 and 3 discussed the problems the late antiquarianist practice was concerned about, I close read the posts in these two corpora. The main link between the two ideologies was balancing being on the fringe while wishing to work in the mainstream due to the firm belief in the method. Within these posts, the voice of those advocating not excavating alone but only in collaboration with archaeologists to avoid "destroying history" was strong (Post no.1839). For example, post no. 1841 emphasises the vision of dowsing as helping archaeological excavations while keeping it as a hobby: "I think that possibly there is a different approach between the metal detectors and the dowsing archaeologist in that the metal detectors are finding things for commercial reasons or just for a hobby whereas a the dowsing archaeologist is doing it to gain information, to aid an archaeology dig whilst also doing it as a hobby. I don't know of any professional dowsing archaeologists and certainly there is not a great deal of money to be made out of dowsing archaeology. Even archaeologists are not well paid unless they are at the top of their league." (Post no.1841)

Forumers even gave tips on where dowsing help might be needed in professional settings: "Might be a good thing to dowse Flag Fen and point the Archaeology folks in the right direction, so less ground is covered/searched, it's a win-win situation for them, they don't spend time on empty ground, and all the goodies are found" (Post no. 1471). Similarly to the views represented by Lethbridge, these narratives discredit the advancements of archaeological technology and methods to which they have no access.

The second link was the easy accessibility of low-quality information. While for the late antiquarianist practice, it meant the lack of proper peer-review and reliance on folklore, today's amateur archaeologists rely on non-edited online information: "I hate technology, but look at what it does for us, good and bad. I love to read, but going to the Library or Book Store is not something I do much anymore. But, now with the internet I can just type something and find history, ancient sites, pictures, blogs, etc." (Post. no. 20856). The low-quality resources also come with a sea of misinformation, such as "I'm sure the Pyramids at Giza date to a very early time, parts of the complex date to 10500 years ago, but now I believe some of the Giza complex

date many thousands of years before that, it's a huge building site that has seen Pyramids erected over many thousands of years I believe, probing the treasure close to the main Pyramids point to this being the case. I know most books refer to the Pyramids being less than 5000 years old, well for me you have to go back MUCH further in time, with the Sphinx being youngest in that grouping." (Post no. 4824).

The third link was hostility against the institutionalised practice: "[Until] who(...) can dowse themselves is allowed to explore sites with this open mind and NOT what he learnt in Oxford or Cambridge history books, then dowsing will always be looked down on" (Post. no. 12629). Interestingly, while for the late antiquarianism, professionalisation meant a step away from elitism, today, university education implies a form of intellectual elite to show hostility against.

These themes resonate well with what Moshenska defined as the factors that "make alternative archaeologies alternative" (Moshenska 2017:123). These are the rejection of scholarly rigour, embracing or fighting the outsider status, and claiming fuzzy boundaries between the two realms. While it would be possible to further study the online discussion on archaeological dowsing, these excerpts demonstrate that despite the changing circumstances, the inheritors of Lethbridge's practices are still in the same shoes as half a century ago due to being stuck on the fringe. While the users did not talk about Lethbridge per se, they reproduced the discourse he was a firm representative of.

Lessons from Lethbridge

Lethbridge found his audience by journeying from science to pseudo-scientific realms. What can we learn from his story as professional archaeologists? I found two components which helped his communication: his storytelling techniques mimicking historical and fantasy fiction and his connection to local communities. On the flip side, his story demonstrates pitfalls archaeologists should beware of.

Storytelling

Professional methods might sound as realistic as dowsing rods for the eyes not used to stratigraphy or being wary of the technology behind geophysics. Until the answer to the "but how do you know this?" question is "the consistency of the soil changed", paranormal explanations will always be more appealing. Especially with the boom of the fantasy genre in popular culture, ghosts and ghouls might be sexier than pottery fragments. Pyburn has recognised it in her thought-provoking manifesto in which she rang the alarm on perpetuating the "Indiana Jones" image of archaeology (2008). In this essay, although she correctly criticised the hype around archaeological sensation, she did not provide an alternative model which could be competing for public attention.

Very early, Lethbridge recognised the need for the extraordinary, the mystical, and the story behind the amateur interest in archaeology: "The trouble is that, to an amateur, the whole thing is a fascinating interest. To a professional, it is his bread and butter." (Lethbridge 1989:49.). The contemporary press reinforced his ideas, as there was a continuous interest in his Gogmagog story despite the academic debates in its background (Anon 1957b).

The trouble with uncontrolled storytelling is that it easily leads to misinterpretation, enabling political abuse of the past (see, e.g. Höfig, V. 2020, Kim, D. 2019). As the tangibility of archaeology makes it more prominent and confrontational than pseudo-history, archaeologists have to carry this responsibility of interpretation.

Nonetheless, I claim that interpretation is a spectrum which enables us to tell an authentic story. The aim is to find the delicate balance between when to let professional accuracy go for public authenticity: what interpretation will enable the story element but not harm the professionalism . However, there

is a point with which professionalism[11] cannot compete: magic, the element leading from science to fiction. Is there a way to professionalise magic?

Communities

There might be a way towards magic: initiation into the profession's secret, the rite of passage. When we talk about community archaeology scholarly, we mostly mean scenarios when indigenous groups gain control over their own past in a post-colonial context (cf. Marshall 2002). However, most community archaeology projects in Britain are exchanges between experts and locals, in which the locals are still mostly actors but not directors.

In contrast, the dowsers are their own managers and have the right to plan, execute and interpret their research. Anyone can be a superhero without the need to go through institutional training. A single dowser also manifests multiple players in an excavation: non-intrusive researchers (like geophysicists, geoinformatics specialists, and surveyors), archaeological technicians and archaeologists. The merge of these roles in one person invokes those late antiquarian practices the study represented via Lethbridge. However, gaining all the control and the full understanding of the process is not a practice in today's professional archaeology, as it is highly specialised and diversified, turning archaeology into a highly skilled profession from a DIY hobby. Therefore, the best practices to bridge the professional and amateur realms might be those community projects that actively demonstrate that professional participation is not exclusive but rather teamwork (for an exciting early example, see Chippindale 1990).

Lethbridge respected - although he gave too much credit to - local knowledge, which led to being able to write about subjects the audience was interested in. He was concerned about the practice of bringing archaeology

11 Scholars working on the historical misinformation in video games have already established models for it (see Kapell - Elliot 2013).

close to the locals. For example, when he complained about museum displays: "The Saffron Walden Museum had a number of local things in it of considerable interest to a wider range of students than those in the immediate neighbourhood (Lethbridge 1989: 96).

I might consider Lethbridge "the man he saw the future", quoting the title of his biography written from a parapsychologist's point of view, but for a different reason than the parapsychologist community does (Welbourn 2011). He understood something crucial about communicating with the local audience through stories (cf. Holloway - Klevnas 2007). These are pavements of scientific communication, museum outreach and engagement today.

The pitfalls

It does not mean, however, that it would be wise to rehabilitate Lethbridge fully. We must acknowledge his role in spreading misinformation - Finneran directly compares him to Däniken, the too widely-read author propagating pseudoscience about extraterrestrial influences on early human culture (2003). The trend of selling fictional archaeology to the public is as popular as ever, as the debate surrounding the recent Netflix show, Ancient Apocalypse, indicates (see Heritage 2022).

Common pseudoscience patterns appear both in alternative archaeological practices and in Lethbridge's work. These are building on anecdotal evidence, not using control groups, cherry-picking data to match preconceptions, and not testing hypotheses. Lethbridge was not willing to accept that the meticulous excavation methodology and documentation procedure being developed during the dusk of his career had been serving as a control to the ego of the archaeologist. As archaeological research is intrusive and hence not reproducible, it must be executed based on systematic sampling and strict documentation after careful planning to remain scientific. As a consequence, selecting what to excavate is crucial for preserving information. This responsibility divides amateur and professional archaeology. The meticulous documentation, trusting specialisation, careful interrogation of data, and peer review, all to which Lethbridge was a laud opposition, should lead to omitting unsupportable theories. Letting preconceptions go is a painful process that

kills the creativity that Lethbridge and some other archaeologists worldwide - were unwilling to part with.

Nonetheless, it ensures that the stories the artefacts tell the public ring true.

Conclusions

Although Lethbridge stood in the centre of the study, I claimed that not only his restless and imaginative personality was responsible for his shift between scientific and pseudo-scientific realms but also the institutionalisation of archaeology, which provided a route for stricter methodology and peer review. I argued that the role Lethbridge represented as the late antiquarian polymath is still an appealing model for some members of the public, who prefer interacting with the local past outside the institutional formulas of professional archaeology. The imaginative component, the DIY approach, and the humour of his writing can make his books more appealing than peer-reviewed publications locked behind paywalls when searching for local history. However, his rediscovery in the parapsychological world carries the dangers that an outdated version of archaeology is becoming reinforced in times when misinformation is a global challenge.

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