

Is the present day post-medieval?

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SUMMARY: Since 2006, the stated remit of the SPMA has been broadened to include the archaeology of the present day. This paper discusses what such an archaeology might look like and how the particular perspectives on the world derived from it can be incorporated into the way we see post-medieval archaeology, both theoretically and practically.

INTRODUCTION

In 2006, *Post-Medieval Archaeology* volume 40 marked an official change in the focus of the Society. Hidden away in the front matter of the Jamestown special issue, in the small paragraph describing the SPMA, and after the familiar line ‘The Society for Post-Medieval Archaeology was founded in 1966 to promote the archaeology of late-medieval to industrial society in Britain, Europe and those countries influenced by European colonialism’, appeared a new sentence: ‘*The Society now covers the archaeology of the period up to the present day*’. The addition of these fourteen words might have signalled a huge change in the remit of the Society, a conceptual shift in the very notion of archaeology employed by the SPMA, yet it has gone largely unremarked by the membership at large. As the Society enters its sixth year as a group dedicated in part to the archaeology of the present day, it is high time finally to begin debating what that means, in theory and in practice.

Of course, this is a debate that reaches far beyond the SPMA. The notion of a more contemporary archaeology is increasingly finding acceptance in academia and elsewhere, especially in the heritage industry, which is particularly notable as one of the major sources for considering modern material in wider historical contexts: see, for instance, John Schofield’s recent work on conflict archaeology¹ and the Cold War,² or Sefryn Penrose’s contemporary landscape gazetteer.³ This

is an important area of debate, especially given that the SPMA is a period-based society, a charitable organization with publication, support and advocacy responsibilities and thus in a unique position when it comes to contemporary archaeology. Because of its remit as a charitable organization, it is not enough for the SPMA merely to say that it is inclusive of the archaeology of the present day. The Society must go on to take an active role in promoting it, whether this takes the form of including contemporary archaeology in research frameworks, or commenting on modern architecture in the same way as it might have an opinion on the demolition of an important 17th-century building.

When the Post-Medieval Ceramic Research Group (PMCRG) held its first meeting in Bristol in 1963, it had a clear focus on a particular material between two very specific historical events: the Battle of Bosworth Field in 1485 and the start of industrial porcelain manufacture in the United Kingdom in 1750.⁴ As the PMCRG developed in 1966 to become the Society for Post-Medieval Archaeology, its focus was expanded to cover all forms of archaeological, and other, investigation of a period much more loosely bracketed as ‘the post-medieval period before the onset of industrialization’.⁵ In later years the end-date was removed from the description completely to make the focus ‘the post-medieval period’, and as of 2006 the upper limit of that description is taken to be a perpetual present day. We see a progression here

from a very exact remit to one intentionally open, from exclusivity to inclusivity, splitting to lumping.

Inclusivity is rarely a bad thing, but a Society with a specified remit as a charitable organization needs to begin to work out what this particular kind of inclusivity means, and the stated change in focus has not been reflected by the Society thus far. A few recent SPMA conference papers have touched on the archaeology of the recent past, but this is not a general trend. Perhaps even more tellingly, in the last ten years, *Post-Medieval Archaeology* has published only one full-length article expressly concerned with a post-1900 subject, Bletchley Park,⁶ never mind the present day. Clearly, there is a discrepancy here between the stated aim of the Society and its actual output. This needs to be addressed, and consideration given to whether this change has achieved anything if we are to enjoy the benefits of expansion. We need to ask questions — is the present day post-medieval, and, if so, what is the role of the SPMA within the wider field?

These questions, although raised here specifically in reference to the SPMA, have a much wider importance within the discipline. If anything, this paper will approach the SPMA as a case study, trying to determine what particular effect including the present day within the wider world of post-medieval archaeology has at a practical, operational level. It is also of use to keep returning to some of the more theoretical considerations of exactly *what* the present day is and what archaeological investigation of it might look like as the theoretical and operational aspects of this debate are wholly intertwined. Here, I will discuss in more depth the nature of various contemporary archaeologies, before going on to look at some of the practical implications of linking these to post-medieval archaeology through considering narratives, ethics and heritage. To conclude, I will seek to describe the potential role for archaeologies of the present day within wider post-medieval and historical archaeologies, and discuss what part the SPMA might play in developing this.

CONTEMPORARY ARCHAEOLOGY

At the same time as discussions were taking place about widening the remit of the SPMA, a parallel discourse was leading towards the founding, in November 2003, of the Contemporary and Historical Archaeology in Theory group (CHAT), a loose collection of those interested in the titular subjects, who organized a peripatetic annual conference. Historical archaeology is, of course,

closely related to post-medieval archaeology, but contemporary archaeology might be something different entirely. Whereas the first two consider essentially the same body of material within the same broad timeframe, the introduction of that word ‘contemporary’ takes the step of allowing us to analyse our own lives.

THE CONTEMPORARY PAST

In the introduction to their recent contemporary archaeology themed issue of *Archaeologies* (2009), Rodney Harrison and John Schofield define contemporary archaeology as ‘the archaeology of places or events that relate to the period of recent or living memory’.⁷ In essence, this gives it the same central concern as a post-1900 post-medieval archaeology, and in their interesting and useful paper they set out a clear review of the work that has thus far defined the theory and practice of this developing field, something which they have picked up again in their 2010 publication *After Modernity*.⁸ In particular, they highlight the two key early texts of the field as it is currently practised: Paul Graves-Brown’s *Matter, Materiality and Modern Culture*⁹ and *Archaeologies of the Contemporary Past*, edited by Victor Buchli and Gavin Lucas.¹⁰ Although these publications were not the first in the field of contemporary archaeology,¹¹ they represent the state of thought on the subject at the point when the SPMA was first discussing expansion of its period coverage. Together they emphasize a number of new concerns for archaeology, including, but not limited to, new types of material, new modes of engagement and a new politics of archaeology.

The benefit that much of this work on the archaeology of living memory has to the SPMA is that it demonstrates well the extension of traditional archaeological method and theory to material of the recent and contemporary past — literally dates in the past, but not very far into the past. Perhaps the foremost published example of this approach in practice is ‘The Van Project’, the excavation and analysis of a Ford Transit van in 2006 at the University of Bristol.¹² Projects such as this have taken archaeology completely out of its traditional haunts and removed from archaeologists the facility of any otiose reliance on the distance of their historical subjects. The Van Project saw archaeologists acquire a van from Ironbridge Archaeology and excavate it, that is to say take the vehicle apart as if it were a traditional archaeological site and produce a site report with the usual interpretation, scientific analysis, plans, photographs and so on. This was accompanied by a film of the project. Despite the relative paucity of the

project's conclusions, and the fact that the project team did not take advantage of alternative modes of analysis that may have been of use to this different type of site (they did not drive it!), the work will likely become a classic example of contemporary archaeological practice. Perhaps the most important conclusion of the work, and that which was the primary aim of those undertaking it, was to demonstrate extremely clearly that anything can be not just considered of interest to archaeologists, but also subject to formal archaeological investigation.¹³

That studies such as The Van Project have not seen publication in *Post-Medieval Archaeology* is a real shame, as they have the potential to be as much a part of traditional historical archaeology as clay pipe stem analysis or the excavations at Jamestown. The question that hangs over discussion of The Van Project within the bounds of the SPMA, however, is whether it can usefully be termed 'post-medieval' as that term has been employed in British archaeology? There is a contradiction here to which we shall return — the work fits the stated remit of the Society, but not necessarily the Society's name. It may be that this is not important. Post-medieval archaeology and historical archaeology are used almost interchangeably in current debate, and although a 1991 Ford Transit Van may fit a little more comfortably with the description 'historic' than 'post-medieval' it is literally part of both. So, using this project as the prime example of current work in the field, we can say with some certainty that archaeology of the recent past should fit into the remit of the SPMA with little trouble. But the recent past is not the same as the present day, and we must think further on how exactly the wider world of post-medieval and historical archaeology might approach material and investigations that are not yet part of the past; how to approach history *being made*.

THE PRESENT DAY

Alongside Harrison and Schofield's archaeology of recent and living memory, insofar as it is they who have produced the most recent book-length study of the field, is the other side of contemporary archaeology, that which takes as its focus the appreciation of the contemporaneity of archaeological engagement with the world. This is far from being a new development in archaeology and owes much of its existence to works such as *Re-Constructing Archaeology* by Michael Shanks and Christopher Tilley,¹⁴ and Marilyn Strathern's 1980s work on the concept of auto-anthropology.¹⁵ This strand of contemporary archaeology is

expressly concerned with the present day, in particular what it is to be an archaeologist, what the constructs of archaeology are, and how archaeological thinking can play a role in daily life. There are many fine examples of this contemporary archaeology, many of which have been intentionally multi-disciplinary in practice as their proponents seek to alter what archaeology is and what it can do. Here follow three examples.

LEAVE-HOME-STAY

Christine Finn's recent undertaking of an artistic-archaeological exploration of her parents' former home sought to use archaeological thinking to address a private grief, while at the same time creating an understanding of that particular home that could be communicated visually.¹⁶ Finn's project, *Leave-Home-Stay*, began with returning to her parent's home, her childhood home, following their deaths and facing the decision of whether to keep the house or to sell it. Approaching the house as an individual with archaeological, journalistic and artistic training, and importantly with a personal connection to it, Finn began to document in a variety of different ways the experience of being that individual approaching that building, which enjoys the multiple identities of being a site, landscape and artefact, a piece of the past in the present, and a personal item now seen in a changed and changing context. Taken at face value, the building is a piece of post-medieval and historical archaeology. However, to approach it divorced from the effects, nostalgia, grief and frustration that create the place as it is to Christine Finn would make this a very different piece of work.

This site in the present day, and of course *ongoing* present days, exists in a very different way from a site viewed with archaeological hindsight as something to be understood. Its meaning changes, develops, deepens with every day of new experience, and I would argue that this is a prime example of what archaeology has a tendency to miss with its, understandable, wish to focus purely on past history. Finn's work here could not happen without basing any archaeological thinking on the material around her day-to-day experience of it. Finn has also taken *Leave-Home-Stay* to Haiti, where she continued the same principles of investigation in reference to refugee camps full of people making new homes after having lost their old ones. Again, we can see this as an archaeology of present-day experience, something that looks very different from what the results would be of an archaeologist recording a refugee camp using traditional fieldwork methods.

ARCHAEO-ETHNOGRAPHY

Matt Edgeworth's work in looking ethnographically at archaeological fieldwork is also exemplary of this type of contemporary archaeology, as it seeks to look directly at the role of archaeologists in the semi-creative practice of excavation and interpretation.¹⁷ Edgeworth's work in this area has situated itself between archaeology and anthropology, taking in ethnographies of archaeological practice and the particular contemporary creations of archaeological fieldwork.¹⁸ In his introductory paper to *Ethnographies of Archaeological Practice* (2006), Edgeworth references a 1996 study by Joan Gero in which she observed that male archaeologists tended to draw feature outlines in a more confident manner than women, and that they created more prominent pedestals of soil beneath artefacts.¹⁹ Likewise, and drawing on his own work, Edgeworth writes of the two-way relationship between the material knowledge of archaeologists and the making of archaeological data through contemporary practice, observing that 'archaeological knowledge was being applied to shape and make sense of the material evidence at the same time as the material evidence was reshaping the knowledge that was being applied'.²⁰

Cornelius Holtorf, in the same volume, also picks up on the personal experiences gained through excavation and how these in turn form future archaeological acts.²¹ Again, as with *Leave-Home-Stay*, we see in this work a focus on the purely contemporary and, further, the way that successive contemporary experiences work to affect each other. This is another archaeological perspective on the world that can only be developed in constant reference to, and in the light of, the present day. It is also worth highlighting the 'archaeology of archaeology' nature of this kind of work. The vast bulk of archaeological data was created during the post-medieval/historic period and if we can conceive of archaeology as, in part, a creative act, then the formation of the archaeological record is a fitting subject for archaeologists of the period. We can also consider the contemporary creation of archaeological data in a way that focuses on the present day, but that has implications for the (re-)interpretation of any material from the past.

ART-POLITICS-TIME

My own work has sought to use approaches derived from artistic residency and contemporary archaeology in the development of an understanding of the ongoing political relationship between people and aspects of the built environment.²² For my doctoral research, I spent three years

embedded in the public art project of a contemporary shopping centre development, Cabot Circus in Bristol. The central focus of this work was the public art project itself, how artists approach specific local situations and what processes they use to translate the results of these approaches into statements that are incorporated back into those particular places in the form of artworks, whether sculptural and long-lasting or entirely ephemeral. The archaeological aspect of this work came in the form of using archaeological fieldwork techniques to develop an understanding of the particular contexts being approached by the Cabot Circus artists and, by extension, developing a 'baseline' in relation to which I could analyse the particular contemporary political, social and material implications of individual works of art. Moving further however, it became possible to use the two parallel approaches, of my own archaeological investigation and artists' various working processes, to work reflexively to critique the efficacy of archaeology as an approach to the contemporary city.

Among the main conclusions of this reflexive critique was that a different consideration of the nature of time needs to be taken on by those wishing to undertake a true, objective contemporary archaeology. It is particularly useful in approaching the present day in archaeology to begin with the notion of flat time, past and future manifested in the present day. This is a simple enough concept. Following the full length of a public art programme however, a number of different temporal perspectives became apparent, each of which serves to take that notion of a flattened time and begin to investigate how it operates or how people negotiate it. So, for instance, in addition to established notions of the existence of the past in the present, we might see that a contemporary act, a physical action in the present day, makes reference to positively or negatively viewed pasts. Furthermore, the connected view of that act in the present day may be optimistic (as, for instance, the renovation of a disused property), it may be connected to a specific located present (the establishment of a community garden), or it may be a reference to a wider context of simultaneous presents being enacted elsewhere (nationwide protests or global franchising).

Thinking about time perspectives in the present day must also take into consideration the future, so a contemporary action, such as building a house, may be related to uncertainty about what will happen in the future. Conversely, it may be related to an absolutely held certainty of the shape of future property markets. Thus, we see that in place of working with hindsight, working from one date to another but always in the past, we can

detect in any one moment the potential for multiple time perspectives. Futurity is perhaps the most important of these. Arguably, the creation of any material culture in any period of history is the expression of a present-day desire to make the future different from the past. Thus, we can approach any historic object in terms of its 'original' present day, the moment of its creation, as well as in relation to our own present day and the ways in which we manifest the past ourselves. We have here another perspective on material that can only be properly derived from engagements with the most contemporary archaeological materials, but that can be applied to all periods.

WHERE DOES THIS TAKE US?

I would suggest that if the SPMA, and by extension the wider world of post-medieval and historical archaeology, is to effectively incorporate the present day within its sphere of archaeological interests, it must acknowledge these latter forms of contemporary archaeology, as well as those which seek to bring the focus of traditional archaeology up to include the things of the recent past. Contemporary archaeology is not merely the extension of post-medieval archaeology to consider material from within our own lifetimes. It is, perhaps, closer to a philosophical perspective on the world centred on the immediacy of archaeological engagement with material, spaces, places and people. Further, it is as much concerned with archaeologists as it is with the things they choose to measure. When the SPMA says that it now covers 'the archaeology of the period up to the present day', does it simply mean that McDonald's Happy Meal toys are archaeology, too, or does it signal a much deeper change in how the Society views the way in which it can and should engage with the world? In the remainder of this piece, I will consider some practical implications of the incorporation of the present day, and present and futurist perspectives into post-medieval archaeology.

NARRATIVES

The decision to bring the focus of the Society up to the present day was the result of discussion of the issue beginning as early as the late 1990s.²³ At this time, the idea of a more contemporary archaeology, specifically for the years following the Second World War, was becoming increasingly popular, led largely by the rapidly expanding sub-field of Cold War archaeology and the Council for British Archaeology's Defence of Britain project. It was decided that the Society ought to be inclusive of

this modern archaeology to reflect the natural expansion of its members' interests and, as has already been said, the present day eventually became the upper limit of the SPMA's range.

This all makes a great deal of sense. Much writing in the fields of post-medieval and historical archaeology has engaged with grand narratives and central themes. At around the same time that temporal expansion was being mooted by the SPMA Council, Charles Orser and Martin Hall published on, respectively, the four haunts and the six themes of historical archaeology,²⁴ and recent work has continued to engage with these ideas.²⁵ Regardless of whether one is a subscriber to the grand narrative approach, it is worth considering how post-medieval and historical grand narratives might incorporate the present day.

There are traditional long-running narratives central to the period in question that transcend any stated terminal date. For instance, European colonization as a subject cannot really be considered now without inclusion of the ongoing process of decolonization, something that we see in the recent past and in the present, and which we will see even more in the future. Including the present day in our analysis does not mean that we need to write revisionist histories or interpret through hindsight. We can, however, take a perspective from the present that sees a particular site not as geographically and temporally isolated, but as part of a wider, constant process that has not yet ended. Likewise, industrial society will never cease to be. It will only change, and if we are to understand the history and nature of industrial society through archaeology, it is best done by acknowledging our related sites as emergent and dynamic, as fluid beginnings rather than as static ends. Again, this perspective is possible through understanding constant process, a present-day position that acknowledges the fundamental unpredictability of tomorrow, now and in the past.

Of course, the recent past also has its own grand narratives. Take the Second World War. Although the event itself is generally dated 1939 to 1945, the build-up to and aftermath of the Second World War dominated the 20th century. It also has a legacy that is a very real part of the recent past. In the United Kingdom, this legacy largely reveals itself through memorialization, television documentaries and football chants, but elsewhere in the world it has remained a lived reality for many years. Finland, for instance, entered into a peace treaty (1944) and trade agreement (1948) with Soviet Russia that shaped the country's political structure into the 1990s and went on to affect the debates surrounding its application to enter the European Community, which it finally did in 1995.²⁶

There are other, more recent, narratives to be considered, too. The rise of digital technology, the development and legacy of Surrealism, town planning, all of these are, more or less, post-1900 grand narratives that can be seen to have huge impacts on the way we live. Perhaps the most directly relevant grand narrative of the post-1900 period, for us as archaeologists at least, is the expansion of archaeology as an academic discipline in its own right. Although archaeology existed well before the founding of the Institute of Archaeology by Mortimer Wheeler in 1937, it is after this point that we see the proliferation of dedicated university departments and a rapid rise in the theorization of archaeological thought and practice.

The expansion of the Society's remit to include the present day is eminently sensible in this way: that processes we see historically and archaeologically do not have end dates and that more recent history can be studied in the same way as earlier periods. Post-medieval grand narratives continue right up to today and will continue into the future. To see this as the only benefit of considering the present day, however, would be a shame. Within the SPMA, and more widely, people have been advocating a move away from the grand narrative take on history and archaeology towards a more intimate approach. It is this departure from earlier approaches that has the potential to make expanding the remit of the Society especially important. The really exciting thing about the archaeology of the present day is not that our grand narratives can be made ever grander or that we can expand our list of things that 'count' as archaeology. The exciting thing about archaeologically studying the present day is that we are in it.

THE ETHICS OF ENGAGEMENT

When, as archaeologists, we collect data, analyse it, and derive interpretations from the results, we are creating distinctly archaeological worlds in the past. When, as contemporary archaeologists, we do the same with the world immediately around us, we create archaeological worlds in the present too. Whether it is recommending a 1980s building for listing or using aspects of archaeology to engage in local politics, archaeological engagement with the contemporary world makes a difference to it. We are not simply objectively preserving important historic buildings or analysing people through their use of cars, we are actively creating the world that people have to go on and live in.

Likewise, when we think of contemporary archaeology as a mode of engagement with the

world, the theories and interpretations we derive have the potential to change how people see the world on a daily basis. For instance, might we foresee a time when archaeological perspectives on contemporary life might play a part in politics and planning?²⁷ Currently, the archaeological roles in these processes are limited to mitigating perceived losses of historic fabric and lobbying for better or different or more consideration of archaeological material in the heritage industry. However, a group like SPMA which exists to study material evidence from its stated period of interest, rather than directly attempting to preserve or publicly interpret it (although it does, rightly, express learned opinions on such matters), can perhaps take a lead in moving beyond heritage dogma to develop ways in which the primary archaeological study of the material world, those things of the present day in particular, can feed back into how places are made, considered and governed.

TO HERITAGE AND BEYOND

As the SPMA often plays an advocacy role in related issues and processes, it is worth bearing in mind the implications of a charitable organization engaging with the present day in this way. Take, for instance, Conservation Areas. Many of the oldest Conservation Areas are the direct result of the Council for British Archaeology supporting the efforts of local civic societies and amenity groups to prevent the wholesale alteration of the places they lived in by planners thinking of large-scale and in concrete.²⁸ Boundaries were drawn, legislation drawn up and Georgian enclaves rescued from the perceived ravages of rampant Brutalism. Forty or so years on, many of these areas appear somewhat anachronistic; developed around rather than in, they arguably preserve the 1970s opposition to post-war modernism more than they do any deeper history. Certainly, many of the upper echelons of local amenity groups are the very people whose ownership of the cheap, run-down buildings targeted by developers in earlier times led them to oppose their demolition. These houses are now protected from change, massively expensive, and their owners are often influential lobbyists in and around the meeting rooms of local council planning committees. Thus, we see that an archaeological organization's support for direct action in the face of potential loss of historic buildings in the recent past has gone on to create and sustain not just some of the places we live in, but the people who decide what those places will look like.

This is not a new phenomenon and such preservation has happened in different guises at different times. Witness the modernist anti-Victorian stance of many early 20th-century town planners, for example, or the Victorians' own replacement of the speculative developments of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The towns we live in are not a palimpsest of different historic eras, but of successive planning decisions. How we engage with this is worthy of discussion. Certainly, the wider world of post-medieval archaeology must, when engaging with heritage and consultancy, remember that these concepts have their own distinct constructs that are part of the archaeological record. Many archaeologists work in heritage-related organizations or do work governed by heritage law, but a group like the SPMA can, perhaps, approach contemporary heritage debates not from a default position of support for (or even deference to) heritage, but with alternative perspectives drawn from primary archaeological investigation. This is especially important when considering archaeological positions on the recent past and present day.

Objectivity is often equated with being scientific, to working with prescribed methods and set parameters. If, in this sense of the word, the SPMA is objectively to study the present day, there is no problem. It is, however, hard to study archaeologically one's own world in a purely scientific manner. In fact, one of the real strengths of contemporary archaeological work is that it takes subjectivity into account, in ourselves as archaeologists and in the people and places we study. An artefact is not just an objective part of a typology or art-historical canon, it is a hundred different things to a hundred different people. A building may be important today, less so tomorrow. If, instead, we take objective to mean uncommitted, dispassionate and fair, we can see a distinct role for post-medieval archaeologists, perhaps even a duty, to consider the present day on equal terms with any deeper history. Here, moving away from the negative relationship with heritage described previously, we can ally with those heritage professionals keen to incorporate recent and contemporary material into their work. If we are indeed to be dispassionate post-medieval archaeologists who are interested in the period up to the present day, and if we are to agree that existing practices and legislation in archaeology and heritage play creative roles in building the physical world around us, it is not outlandish to suggest that lobbying to get archaeological perspectives on the present day more robustly incorporated into policy of all kinds ought to be among the SPMA's primary concerns.

Were this to be the case, we might be able to claim a strong position for post-medieval

archaeology as a driving force behind introducing greater levels of social and corporate responsibility into place-making. If we believe that there is any amount of 'truth' to be found in the conclusions we reach as objective archaeologists, it becomes hard to ignore the potential for our work to impact upon the way people live; rather, it becomes somewhat irresponsible not to make these conclusions widely and publicly available. To facilitate this is central to the SPMA's remit.

Put plainly, we have a different responsibility to the world we study when the world we study is our own. What would the correct post-medieval advocacy position be on the choice between the demolition of an early Victorian library or the first UK building to utilize a composite concrete-steel frame? An easy choice for a strictly post-medieval archaeology society, less so for one that aspires to working as an agent for the archaeology of the present and recent past. The SPMA must rethink its active role in the archaeology world if it is to engage with the present day. It is, after all, listened to by people with the power to effect change in our daily lives.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

In this paper, I have attempted to describe, with three key examples, what an archaeology of the present day might look like and have drawn a distinction between this and wider post-medieval archaeologies, including those which, like The Van Project, seek to 'update' the list of things we may comfortably look at within that date range. Personally, I do not think that the present day is usefully thought of as post-medieval, although I have slightly fewer reservations about describing recent years, days and seconds as historical archaeology. I do, however, believe that it is right for the Society for Post-Medieval Archaeology to engage with the present day as part of its remit; a potential victory for practicality over semantics.

Firstly, engaging with the present day as post-medieval archaeologists helps to develop new ways of thinking about the material evidence of all periods of history and serves reflexively to question the way in which we investigate these things and places. Secondly, building up archaeological knowledge of the present-day relationships between people, things, places and politics, in every sense, is essential if the SPMA is effectively to undertake the advocacy role which it has rightly assigned itself.

These specific conclusions will not necessarily apply to all who call themselves post-medieval archaeologists; as mentioned previously, much

archaeological work is governed by existing legislation and does not necessarily exist to question it. Many more are not the slightest bit interested in the present day and recent past and vice versa. But this is why the SPMA is so important and worth singling out for discussion, despite the wider implications of incorporating consideration of the present day into archaeology. The Society is perhaps the only body with the standing, remit and independence to really push wider acceptance of the perspectives outlined here across academia, heritage, the private and museum sectors; a position of some responsibility!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper began as a 2,000-word manifesto, but I would like to thank the anonymous reviewer of that original piece for recommending that it be reworked into a full article. It now feels infinitely more useful and mature than the original. Rodney Harrison and John Schofield's *After Modernity* was published while this paper was at the editing stage. It discusses similar themes and material to this paper, but differently enough for both pieces to usefully co-exist.

NOTES

¹ Schofield 2009.

² Schofield & Cocroft 2007.

³ Penrose 2007.

⁴ Barton 1968, 102.

⁵ The second incarnation of the journal's front matter described the Society's focus as 'the study of the archaeological evidences of British and Colonial history of the post-medieval period before the onset of industrialization'. The last five words of this were dropped from volume 33 onwards.

⁶ Monckton 2006.

⁷ Harrison & Schofield 2009, 186.

⁸ Harrison & Schofield 2010.

⁹ Graves-Brown 2000.

¹⁰ Buchli & Lucas 2001.

¹¹ One could begin a history of published contemporary archaeology at many points, perhaps the most persuasive being the rifle typologies of General Pitt-Rivers.

¹² Bailey *et al.* 2009.

¹³ Harrison & Schofield 2010, 157.

¹⁴ Shanks & Tilley 1987.

¹⁵ Strathern 1987.

¹⁶ Finn, C. 'Leave-Home-Stay', <<http://www.leavehomestay.com>> [accessed 18 March 2011].

¹⁷ Edgeworth 2006.

¹⁸ Edgeworth 2006; Holtorf 2006.

¹⁹ Edgeworth 2006, 5.

²⁰ Edgeworth 2006, 3.

²¹ Holtorf 2006.

²² Dixon 2009.

²³ David Gaimster, pers. comm.

²⁴ Orser 1996; Hall 2000.

²⁵ See, for example, Tarlow 2007; Orser 2009.

²⁶ Kirby 2006.

²⁷ See Dixon forthcoming.

²⁸ Priest & Cobb 1980.

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ABBREVIATIONS

- SPMA Society for Post-Medieval Archaeology
 PMCRG Post-Medieval Ceramic Research Group
 CHAT Contemporary and Historical Archaeology in Theory

SUMMARY IN FRENCH, GERMAN, ITALIAN AND SPANISH

RÉSUMÉ

Aujourd'hui est-il postmédiéval ?

Depuis 2006, les attributions déclarées de la SPMA ont été élargies pour inclure l'archéologie d'aujourd'hui. Cet article présente ce type d'archéologie et comment les perspectives particulières sur le monde qui en résultent peuvent être incorporées dans notre conception théorique et pratique de l'archéologie postmédiévale.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Reicht das Nachmittelalter bis heute?

Die SPMA hat ihr festgelegtes Aufgabenfeld erweitert, um die Archäologie bis heute mit einzubeziehen. Diese Studie erörtert, wie so eine Archäologie aussehen könnte und wie bestimmte Perspektiven der heutigen Welt eingegliedert werden könnten in die Art, wie wir das Nachmittelalter sehen, in beider Hinsicht, theoretisch und praktisch.

RIASSUNTO

Il presente è post-medievale?

A partire dal 2006, l'obiettivo dichiarato di SPMA è stato ampliato in modo da includere l'archeologia del giorno d'oggi. Questo contributo discute come possa apparire questo tipo di archeologia, e come lo specifico punto di vista sul mondo che da questa deriva possa essere assimilato nella percezione che noi abbiamo dell'archeologia post-medievale, teoreticamente e pragmaticamente parlando.

RESUMEN

¿Es el día de hoy post-medieval?

Desde el año 2006, la misión declarada de la *Society for Post Medieval Archaeology* se ha ampliado para incluir la arqueología de la actualidad. Este artículo presenta lo que se podría incluir en tal arqueología y cómo las perspectivas particulares sobre el mundo derivadas de ella se pueden incorporar en la forma de ver la arqueología post-medieval, tanto teórica como prácticamente.

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Title: Is the present day post-medieval?

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1. Should this entry be 2006a and the next 2006b?