

Introduction

Mortuary Archaeology in Contemporary Society

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MORTUARY ARCHAEOLOGY IN THE UK

Reburial and repatriation

The 1980s and 1990s saw dramatic sea changes in the archaeological engagement with the dead in Australasia and North America, typified by the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) of 1990. However, it has only been far more recently that different, distinctive, but still fundamental challenges to the archaeological study, display, and curation of mortuary remains have affected the UK, Europe, and Scandinavia. While classic examples of disputes over the archaeological excavation of human remains have deep roots in the late twentieth century, the last decade has seen significant shifts and challenges for mortuary archaeology (see Sayer 2010a).

In this regard, the UK situation is instructive, if not necessarily typical. At the turn of the millennium, the Working Group on Human Remains (whose final report was published in 2007) created a strong political climate which encouraged unconditional returns of ancestral remains acquired from elsewhere in the world and held in British museums. This was rejected by many institutions which had to balance such edicts against their acquisition policy (DCMS 2003), but its impact was to encourage a more open atmosphere of discussion. Slightly later, the impact of the 2005 DCMS 'Guidance for the Care of Human Remains in Museums' provided a strong (if not binding) steer in terms of aspects of curatorial acquisition, research protocols, and collections management advice, designed to systematize best practice. Importantly, it enshrined a three-fold conceptual principle that human remains are of 'unique status, are often of high research value, and should be treated with dignity and respect' (DCMS 2005: 16). This document provided an important mandate for

archaeological excavation, research, and curation, at a time when calls for repatriation and reburial were on the rise. However, it was an 'aspirant code of ethics' which as Redfern and Clegg (2013: 2) argue, was not enforceable: relying on the professionalism of both individuals and institutions for its implementation. (In addition, the 2004 Human Tissue Act also impacted on those institutions holding human remains or fragments of them, less than 100 years old, though archaeological examples of this are rare.)

Some UK museums began repatriating parts of their ethnographic collections much earlier than this: Besterman (2004: 3) reported that Manchester Museum had decided to return human remains acquired as recently as 1992. These requests continued in the new millennium: recent cases from the British Museum include one from New Zealand (Te Papa Tongarema) in 2006, and from Torres Strait Islanders in 2012 (the former leading to repatriation of bone fragments; the latter refused on the grounds that it was *not* demonstrable that mortuary rites had been interrupted or disturbed during this acquisition). A recent claim from Torres Strait Islanders to the Natural History Museum in 2011 has precipitated the largest single return of ancestral remains from such an institution. Repatriation claims did not just include human remains themselves but (as the DCMS criteria noted, Redfern and Clegg 2013: 1) objects decorated with human substances such as nails or hair, animals associated with burials, or material culture taken from mortuary contexts, often removed directly from bodies. Another such example is the 'Ghostdance shirt' repatriated from the Glasgow's Kelvingrove Museum to the Lakota people of South Dakota in 1999 (Allen 2013).

Whilst many of these reburial requests have been difficult and time-consuming to handle, they have resulted in some richly rewarding conversations and engagements, and an enhanced awareness of the colonial legacy of many collections. Yet there have also been claims from closer to home within the UK, such as the neo-Pagan request (from a splinter element, separated from but purporting to represent CoBDO, the Council of British Druid Orders) for the reburial of ancient British remains from the Alexander Keiller Museum, Avebury (Thackray and Payne 2010). Meanwhile, segments of the academic community have responded in vigorous defence of the retention and continuing curation of scientifically valuable human remains (BABAO 2010, for example). Others have been more open-minded about reburial, and connections with claimant groups (see Rathouse this volume). Some curators have controversially even turned to reburial as a solution for over-crowded museum stores, where the quality of archival information associated with human remains renders them of little research potential (see Levitt and Hadland 2006).

The outcomes of these claims have been far-reaching, with advocates promoting the importance of respecting the dead according to the World Archaeological Congress's Vermillion Accord (see Sayer 2010a: 132–3). Furthermore, in his recent review, Duncan Sayer proposed that archaeologists

think beyond the profession and scholarship and adopt broad and adaptable but clear ethical principles in dealing with the archaeological dead, including objectivity, accountability, openness, and honesty (Sayer 2010a: 138). However, critical and academic engagements exploring the application of these principles have been sparse and slow. An exception has been the recent volume edited by Giesen (2013), which provides a handbook to these processes, directing excavators and curators to salient changes in legislation and museum practice (e.g. White 2013 on England and Sharp and Hall 2013 on Scotland), with some rich institutional case studies, e.g. Museum of London (Redfern and Bekvalac 2013); Perth (Sharp and Hall 2013); and Hancock (Scott 2013), or Barton-upon-Humber (Mays 2013). It also points to curatorial issues, such as the decreasing volume of archive space (McKinley 2013). These studies together reveal how many museums have recently updated their catalogues of human remains, enhancing their research potential. Yet as the papers on curatorial storage and access policies in that volume argue (Woodhead 2013; Mays 2013), the value of new analyses on such remains (of whatever date or origin) cannot be regarded as a given: studies must be justified in terms of specific research objectives and demonstrable academic and public benefits.

Arguably, the last decade has been a profitable period of self-reflection in many different areas of archaeological practice: from how human remains are excavated, analysed, stored, how access is managed, and how the dead are displayed and to what ends (see Lohman and Goodnow 2006 for a seminal suite of studies, and chapters in this volume by Swain, Tatham, Nordström, Exell, and Nilsson Stutz). An increasing number of institutions have undertaken surveys which reveal that, although most of the general public expect to see human remains in museums and are positive about their experience, there are subtle differences in opinion as to how this is best accomplished. It is not just a vocal pagan minority who objected to sudden or abrupt encounters with the dead: many such surveys record small numbers of complaints from people sensitive to the visceral display of human mortality, or individuals who wanted greater choice over viewing such remains (see Kilmister 2003; Carroll 2005; Cambridgeshire Archaeology 2006; Alberti et al. 2009; BDRC 2009; the Manchester Museum 2011). Curators acknowledge the importance of museum space which is not one of simple passive 'viewing' of the dead: as Redfern and Clegg (2013: 1) note, it is a space of contextualization, interpretation, and engagement. Indeed, recent years have also seen a new wave of critical *academic* reviews of exhibitions, focusing on how the dead are displayed (see the models provided by Williams, Nilsson Stutz, and Nordström, this volume). Clearly, a majority verdict among archaeologists and heritage specialists is in favour of the excavation of mortuary contexts and the display and study of the artefacts, structures, and human remains uncovered. However, this does not equate with a cosy acceptance of the status quo: the display

and curation of the archaeological dead is being critically and carefully appraised in relation to specific instances and circumstances. Moreover, what is increasingly evident is that mortuary archaeology is not a form of either pure scientific or humanistic enquiry to which public engagement can be tacked on subsequently. Instead, all mortuary archaeology is a form of public mortuary archaeology, created within varied and specific historical contexts and socio-political frameworks with its research questions and methods reflecting and directing broader social values and aspirations to explore morbidity and mortality in the human past.

The 'crisis' in burial archaeology

Against these developments was set a worrying change in the interpretation of burial legislation affecting the excavation and study of mortuary remains. The tried-and-tested method of licensing the excavation of human remains was revoked by the Ministry of Justice (Sayer 2010a). From the period of 2008–10, the Ministry of Justice also demanded that all human remains (regardless of date, religious belief, or burial context) were reburied within two months of excavation (Parker Pearson et al. 2013: 151). To many, this seemed to play to the calls of the aforementioned minority pagan groups within the UK. A period of professional uncertainty and consternation followed: voiced through articles by Pitts and Sayer in *British Archaeology* (2010b), letters to the Ministry of Justice, questions in Parliament from Professor Colin Renfrew, and an open letter to Kenneth Clarke from 40 professors of archaeology and related sciences (published in *British Archaeology* 2011, as well as the *Guardian*: Cunliffe et al. 2011). The issue swiftly gained international press and media attention (see Parker Pearson et al. 2013: 153), providing an opportunity for open debate (although this did not meet with universal approval within the discipline—see *Papers from the Institute of Archaeology* 2011). In practice, however, this campaign proved very successful: the Ministry of Justice began re-issuing licences for excavation in late 2011, which included permission for the retention of human remains in museums or other suitable curatorial repositories. Whilst it is unlikely that the law will be reformed in the near future to clarify the official position of the government, for now, the application of the current system has restored the system of licensing excavation and permitting retention for analysis and long-term curation. The thornier problem of how commercial and research archaeology is funded, and whether this deals with the processing of the dead up to the point of accessioning and curation, or whether projects provide full funding towards publication and exhibition, is yet another unresolved issue.

However, this 'burial crisis' in the UK, as Sayer (2009) describes it, has forced professional archaeologists to re-evaluate their own relations with the

dead within and beyond the museum context (see Sayer and Sayer this volume). Moreover, while some of these developments are specific to the UK, they chime with various other developments elsewhere in Europe and beyond, in which archaeologists have recognized that the public dimensions, and engagements with the excavation, treatment, display, and curation of the dead, as well as the interpretation and teaching of mortuary archaeology, extend far beyond the sensitivities of post-colonial context and abstract ethical musings. Prior to this, studies of mortuary archaeology had mainly focused on how the general public felt on these issues. Such studies were caught up in a process which Jenkins (2011) describes as ‘a crisis of confidence’ in the profession: symptomatic of a wider loss of professional confidence in academic expertise across the humanities (see her chapter in this volume for a development of that argument). Yet many of the curators undertaking such consultation activities used them to canvas opinions amongst their major user-groups, and gain a wider picture of diverse and sometimes divergent opinions (see Swain this volume). For many, it reassured them of majority support for their practices, but it also often prompted reflections on how future exhibitions might be more sensitively designed to take account of other views (for example, an unpublished, internal visitor survey undertaken by J.E. Broughton for the British Museum in 2007, reflected in curatorial articles within the volume edited by Fletcher et al. (2014) as well as Tatham this volume). Yet some of these changes have been controversial, revealing fault-lines of cultural politics, political tensions, and dimensions of personal or institutional power (see Exell this volume).

Naming the dead

One dimension worthy of discussion in this introduction, a theme that cross-cuts many of the chapters, is how we engage with past humanity through individuality. The archaeological dead have repeatedly caught the public’s imagination during this last decade in novel ways, in part due to some high-profile media cases (Sayer and Walter this volume). Building on a long tradition of discovering celebrity skeletons and mummies circulating in British and European collections, including, for example, Tutankhamun and Ötzi as well as a striking range of Iron Age bog bodies (see Giles 2009), the past decade has seen further high-profile individual discoveries of prehistoric, proto-historical, and historical personages. Examples include the Amesbury Archer, the Spitalfields woman, the Priddywell Prince, and, perhaps most famous of all, the excavation of the body of King Richard III of England. As archaeologists we might be critical of this fetishization of a single burial or body over a wider understanding of the contemporary population and changes in the treatment of the dead over time and space, particularly where it focuses on the royal

persona or historical personage who is the focus of a personality cult (see Meyers and Williams 2014). Yet this obsession with the dead individual is not simply a media creation or a translation from the need to identify individuals in the investigation of modern clandestine and accidental deaths, or indeed in the investigation of war graves (see Brown this volume). Often the excavators themselves have coined these titles: a need to 'name the dead' seems widespread, including numerous instances where the exact identity of human remains will never be known. In this way, a single charismatic individual, material-rich, or curious burial is often chosen to act as an effective 'public ambassador' for a wider suite of burials or set of archaeological features. Whilst this might be stimulated by the need to talk with the media, this 'humanizing' trait is common on many archaeological sites within the UK, and indeed, it is often transferred into museum settings (e.g. Williams 2009). The rights and wrongs of naming iconic bodies on display such as 'Ginger' (a Predynastic mummified corpse from Gebelein, Egypt, now renamed officially 'Gebelein Man') or 'Pete Marsh' (the local name for 'Lindow Man': a late Iron Age/early Roman bog body found in Cheshire), both curated by the British Museum, is a case in point. The juvenile remains at the heart of the Avebury reburial consultation are also controversially known as 'Charlie'.

Like the general public, archaeologists and curators seek to humanize the dead and connect with them through the creation of a persona, though whether these personal names are indications of respect or not, is now a matter of debate. As Williams (this volume) explores, such media stories are almost exclusively confined to mummies and inhumations: corpses which conform to the expectations of seeing the skeletonized or mummified remains of a once fully fleshed single human body. This is despite the reality that the vast majority of human remains in Western museums are fragmented (cremated or exhumated) or implied but absent (as with bodies revealed indirectly through soil-stains, coffins, and mortuary artefacts and their contexts of discovery). Such remains offer different, less immediate, less 'abject' identities and relationalities for professionals and the public, as yet largely unexplored.

In most of these cases, the result of painstaking, interdisciplinary research is a detailed biography—a life history—as well as an account of their death and burial, which we use to animate the human remains behind the glass, on the page, or on the computer screen. In the past decade, there have been more avenues to enhance the engagement with past people. The impact of isotope analysis used to explore diet and origin, refined accelerator mass spectrometry carbon dating and other scientific methods have provided new ways of exploring human remains. Meanwhile, alongside two- and three-dimensional reconstructions and virtual databases, digital media have enhanced our strategies for recording and communicating stories using the remains of the dead. Such narratives are also part of how *we*—as archaeologists—negotiate our own identity in relation to the dead, reflecting on aspects of age, gender, disease, or

injury, which might prompt us to reflect on our own life histories, beliefs, and feelings about mortality. Whilst we might argue this is a primary function of displaying the dead to the general public, we too are beneficiaries of such a cross-cultural engagement through time. Arguably, this is why many of us go into the profession in the first place. Yet whilst recent volumes on human remains are rich in studies of the public's perception of the dead, it is rare to find professionals reflecting on this process, or debating contested or conflicted attitudes within our discipline.

What might we gain from exploring the process? These are issues which many of the chapters in this volume touch upon (particularly Rajala, and Pearson and Jeffs). In addition, Kirk's chapter reflects on the role of the archaeological imagination, the language we use to talk about the dead, and the inspiration the dead provide to the living. Meanwhile, the chapter by Giles examines how we represent the dead visually, and how we can use reconstructions of burials to challenge ideas about past societies and their engagement with the dead whilst also acknowledging these visualizations are of our own time, and of our making.

Plural identities: fragments and absences

What is also increasingly evident and being explored in mortuary archaeology's engagement with contemporary society is how the archaeological dead take on many different identities beyond the prehistoric or historical individual. The scale and breadth of mortuary archaeology has amassed rich and detailed stories about individual graves, but also entire cemetery populations from particular periods of the human past. Furthermore, archaeological investigations of multi-phased monuments and cemeteries reveal stories which span centuries and millennia. Both gradual and radical shifts over time and space in the treatment and disposal of the dead in the human past are powerful narratives in their own right. Hence, through the processes of their excavation, display, and public dissemination, through museums but also increasingly through the media and a range of publication outlets, the archaeological dead are becoming increasingly variegated in their presences in popular culture. While individual bodies might provide a direct and evidential 'human' story for popular dissemination and consumption, surface traces and archaeological excavations can equally tell rich and diverse stories of life and death in the human past through large-scale population studies. Often, the interplay between individual biographies and broader narratives of life and death in the human past provide the most powerful narratives of all. Whether we are discussing the diseases and disposal methods affecting post-medieval bodies like those uncovered from the eighteenth-century crypt at Spitalfields (Molleson et al. 1993; Reeve and Adams 1993), the cremated remains from

an Iron Age cemetery (Williams this volume) or indeed displays of the disarticulated skeletons of bodies interred in Neolithic megalithic monuments, archaeologists convey different narratives about the past and the dead through a wide spectrum of mortuary material cultures, architectures, and spaces as well as bones.

It is also crucial that mortuary archaeology recognizes that the archaeological dead find many citational as well as tangible presences in popular culture. Especially with the commemoration of mass deaths in wars and disasters, the rise of cremation, and the widespread use of short-lease burial plots during the twentieth century, modern Western societies have developed sophisticated cenotaphic traditions of dealing with the dead (Tatham this volume; Weiss-Krejci this volume). Field and museum archaeologists have become adept at handling narratives that derive as much from the absence of, as well as the fragmented nature of, the archaeological dead as through skeletons and mummified cadavers (e.g. Tong et al. 2015). One only has to look to the striking assemblages of Greek and Roman sarcophagi and tombstones on display in museums across Europe, most often excavated from disturbed contexts and separated from human remains, to appreciate the vivid stories about the Roman dead that they can tell even without the dead on display.

A classic example to illustrate this point is the misleadingly termed ‘Sutton Hoo Treasure’ providing the centrepiece in the refurbished room 41 at the British Museum: ‘Sutton Hoo and Europe AD 300–1100’. Elsewhere in the British Museum there are skeletons, mummies, and the cremated dead as well as portraits and statues created for mortuary and commemorative contexts. Yet the Sutton Hoo Mound 1 assemblage holds a different and distinctive relationship with the dead, one of many which have been hitherto unexplored in discussions of mortuary archaeology and popular culture: it presences a powerful, kingly, and unquestionably absent human body.

When excavated in 1939, Mound 1 at Sutton Hoo revealed a ship containing a chamber festooned with lavish grave-goods, but no demonstrably human bones survived. This did not prevent the rapid attribution of the grave to the apostate king of the East Angles: Raedwald. Had this king or another person (or persons) been interred, their remains had long vanished due to taphonomic processes (Carver 2005: 191–2; McCombe 2011: 209–16).

In the absence of a tangible body for display, the reconstructed helmet with moustachioed face-mask persists in a role it may have held when displayed in the sixth and early seventh centuries: it provided a confronting ocular presence for those engaging with it. In the museum context of the British Museum’s gallery, this role has been adapted through its original reconstruction, its re-reconstruction (McCombe 2011) and most recently through its redisplay as a greeting presence for the entire assemblage of Room 41, centrally placed at average adult eye-level. Through this museological biography, the helmet has

emerged to become a supercharged icon, not only for the story of Sutton Hoo and early England, but by implying and materializing an absent-ancestor for generations of visitors to the museum (McCombe 2011: 216–35; see also Williams 2011).

The helmet also sits within a far wider network of allusions and representations of the Mound 1 burial found in multiple locales. Most prominently, the National Trust visitor centre at Sutton Hoo itself represents Mound 1 and its assemblage through numerous media, including the displays of replica artefacts, the guidebook (Plunkett 2002), publications, illustrations by Kelvin Wilson, photographs, models, re-enactors, and souvenirs, as well as the giant artwork mounted upon the exhibition building (Marzinzik 2007: 56, 2013; see also review by McCombe 2011: 235–42). Together these material and virtual media translate and distribute the helmet and other treasures from Mound 1 as icons of their age and of British history more broadly. Mound 1's occupant has acquired a distributed personhood created to negotiate an absent body, with the helmet possibly one of the most readily identified symbols of the British past through a wide range of tangible and digital presences (Marzinzik 2007: 60–1, 2013; McCombe 2011: 241–8). Indeed, the entire mock-up of Mound 1 at the Sutton Hoo Visitor Centre, with a mannequin posed to represent the postulated location of the dead body, and the surviving burial mounds themselves accessible to visitors, together distribute Mound 1's occupant's corporeal absence and create multiple nodes in which different dimensions of the grave's contents and perceived occupant are disseminated.

This distributed personhood of the absent dead is extended into the Suffolk countryside as a landscape of memory (Holtorf and Williams 2006). This is evident in the Sutton Hoo landscape, where Mound 1 is situated in relation to the physical traces of a short-lived and varied burial ground which incorporated only one other intact wealthy human burial together with an inhumed horse beneath Mound 17 (Carver 2005: 115–37). Other forms of absent dead instead pervade the Suffolk heath, making it a landscape of ghosts rather than skeletons and cadavers. These included the robbed inhumation graves beneath Mound 2 and Mound 14 (Carver 2005: 107–15) and numerous cremation burials (Carver 2005: 67–105). Most striking of all were the outstanding soil stains of thirty-nine unfurnished burials dated to the eighth to eleventh centuries AD and representing the use of the mounds as the focus of at least two cemeteries of execution burials (Carver 2005: 315–59).

The archaeological narrative constructed by Martin Carver for Sutton Hoo is a classic example of how complex multi-phased fieldwork since 1938, striking discoveries, detailed public engagement, and eloquent archaeological writing, can create rich narratives pertaining to the archaeological dead which thrive in spite of, and perhaps because of, the absence of a body. In this regard, the excavation of the Prittlewell Prince follows suit: despite no bones surviving, this rich and varied burial assemblage was discovered within

an early seventh-century chamber grave. Such graves can also serve to bring the dead to life in the historical and public imagination, but in a different, cenotaphic, sense to the presence of bones themselves. Through these strategies, the complex, varied, individual, and collective, articulated and disarticulated, robbed and unrobbed, burned and unburned, corporeal and cenotaphic, identities of the archaeological dead permeate contemporary society.

The key lesson from this discussion is that the archaeological dead exist behind and between archaeological things and heritage locations as much as they reside in them. Therefore, thinking through and exploring the intersections between mortuary archaeology and contemporary society is far more than the study of articulated human remains. Indeed, mortuary archaeologists have yet to fully identify and explore the mnemonic and social power of mortuary absences and traces of absence in contemporary society that are revealed through archaeological practice. From empty sarcophagi and tombs to the sculpted spaces left following the removal of memorial brasses, from casts and replicas of human remains to the traces of vagaries of survival of only selected bones, fragments, and absences offer considerable potential for further research in the archaeology and heritage of death, burial, and commemoration.

TELLING TALES: ARCHAEOLOGISTS AND THE DEAD

This leads us to consider the shifting role of mortuary archaeology in contemporary society as more than a means of investigating past lives and past societies but as a specific form of contemporary memory work involving the archaeologist as a death-dealer. As the above review of the UK indicates, the intellectual, socio-political, and even legal climate of mortuary archaeology is shifting. Its history could be told as one of progressively sophisticated scientific techniques, enabling us to investigate intimate details of biography or the circumstances of death. We could also reflect on the seminal impact of forensic archaeology, and high-profile forays into more recent burials, such as the war dead (see chapters by both Anthony and Brown this volume). Or alternatively we could reflect on recent trends for exploring how ethnographic studies of personhood or materiality have enriched and developed osteological studies (such as the work of Joanna Sofaer 2006, and see McClelland and Cerezo-Román this volume).

However, seeing the discipline as driven either by high-profile discoveries, new techniques of analysis, or modes of an interpretation is to gain a rather jaundiced view of mortuary archaeology. Behind the headlines of discovery and debate lies a realm of living archaeological practice in which the dead are encountered: their lives reanimated and their stories retold. The authors of this

volume give insights into the variety of commercial and research projects, analytical specialists, museum curators, visual artists, and writers who are increasingly engaged in more nuanced and reflective accounts of the dead, but also the *process* of engaging with people from the past through their human remains. Authors in the book have therefore been encouraged to reveal some of the networks (or, in more popular recent parlance, 'meshworks'), through which these ideas flow. As international examples in this volume illustrate, exactly how that it accomplished, and to what end, varies greatly from context to context.

The studies in this collection also reveal how mortuary archaeologists are, of course, embedded in the society of which they are a product: they may challenge or conflict with certain values or ideals about the body, human mortality, and the value of the dead, but they are also historically constrained by them. In this sense, we find ourselves in common cause with papers in Clegg et al. (2013: 12) who note that 'It is no longer sufficient to say, I'm a scientist, museum curator or archaeologist, trust me—such statements are arrogant and lacking in consideration.' In response to some of Jenkins's concerns regarding the role of curators and the museum display of the dead, their book provides concrete examples of productive partnerships between professionals and the public, whereas our volume hopes to begin to question that very divide between 'public' and 'professional'. This is because members of wider contemporary society are makers of meanings about the dead as much as professionals are part of the audience for new research, discoveries, and displays. Yet, of course, archaeologists bring to any such encounter a particular (perhaps even culturally peculiar) set of experiences and relations with the dead. Many of us will have routinely handled human remains as part of our professional training and fieldwork experience. Whilst this is palpably different to preparing the recent dead for burial or cremation, it is an unusual experience for the vast majority of people and professionals in Western societies. Many of the authors have tried to reflect on this, showing how these insights might be turned to good use on issues relating to the contemporary dead and their place in modern society (particularly the chapter by Weiss-Krejci).

Mortuary archaeology has therefore become an integral part of public archaeology, not only through the excavation of human remains per se within the context of both commercial and research excavations (see Sayer and Sayer this volume) but also through community archaeology (Baldry et al. 2011). Moreover, public outreach strategies involving museums and mock-up archaeological digs with a wide range of mortuary contexts and remains are increasingly commonplace (see Williams and Williams 2007). Engagement with mortuary archaeology can take place through all manner of exercises employed on archaeological open days, as explored recently by Cadw for the Tinkinswood Neolithic chambered tomb (Reynolds 2014). Moreover, dealing with the dead is part of the uncanny, and even horrific, experience of

engagements with the corporeal dead. As such, it resonates with, and has inspired, many fields of Western popular culture (Moshenska 2006; see also Moshenska 2012). Through mortuary archaeology and its numerous direct and indirect citations in popular culture, we are forced to encounter the ‘inhuman’ dimensions of past societies including conflict and brutal killings (e.g. Brown this volume; Giles 2009) as well as the emotionally sensitive fate of those who perished of disease and at an early age.

Therefore, mortuary archaeology is not only about the discovery and study of past communities through their funerary contexts and remains, it equally concerns being an archaeologist and doing archaeology. Excavating tombs and analysing human remains is, for many members of the public, the very popular essence of being and performing the roles of archaeological detective and archaeological adventurer (see Holtorf 2006). Mortuary archaeology is frequently a medium for exploring (and perhaps sometimes valorizing) death and funerals in the human past, but sometimes it serves to celebrating and romanticize the unsettling and yet fascinating and ‘heroic’ death-dealing of archaeologists themselves.

In this regard, archaeologists, in different ways and to different degrees, have become deathworkers: mediators who construct narratives about the dead—not simply individuals but entire communities and societies in the human past—for the living (see Walter 2005). This applies as much to the recording of memorials in graveyard surveys and digging in close consultation with communities for a range of aims and motivations (Williams and Williams 2007) as to the role of archaeologists in the specific revealing and identification of human remains of remembered and cherished loved ones killed in recent conflicts (e.g. Renshaw 2010, 2013; Brown this volume). In this sense, museums may fulfil scientific and educational functions through the display and curation of funerary remains but also social and emotional ones in negotiating modern engagements with mortality through the display of mummies, skeletons, and a wide range of other forms (see also Sayer 2010a,b). Archaeologists are not simply employed sets of specialist skills, but creating communities and publics engaging with both the past and a range of other themes that interconnect pasts, present, and futures in particular locales, including mortality, social memory, and multivalent social identities. Hence, as Sayer (2010b) strongly advocates, the dead are not taboo in modern society, and archaeology is one of the mediums (and hence archaeologists are mediators) by which mortality is engaged with (see also Giles 2009; Williams 2009). In order to develop and expand the role of archaeologists as mediators as well as investigators, we need to overtly define mortuary archaeologists as public intellectuals as well as fieldworkers and heritage practitioners, narrating stories about the dead, but also critically exploring the uses and abuses of mortuary archaeology in present-day mortuary and commemorative cultures (see Williams 2014a,b).

A final issue is that the media by which mortuary archaeologists operate is now rapidly shifting. As well as the dig site and the museum, in addition to academic books and popular magazines, the archaeological dead increasingly populate a range of other media from public lectures to television programmes (Williams 2007). Furthermore, the archaeological dead have, over the last two decades gone digital and gone online. Increasingly, mortuary archaeology's relationship with society is not only transforming itself, diverging from a corporeal focus, but also reaching new and varied communities online (e.g. Meyers and Williams 2014; Tong et al. 2015). Archaeologists have yet to tackle head-on how the very corporeality and materiality of their subject is being transformed by digital media. The investigation of the virtual dead has yet to fully begin (Sayer and Walter this volume; see also Williams and Atkin 2015).

INTRODUCING THE BOOK: THE DEAD AND THE ARCHAEOLOGIST

This introduction has highlighted particular themes in contemporary mortuary archaeology as a key component of public archaeology within and beyond the dig and the museum, showcasing the chapters in this volume where they fit in with these debates. This section provides a final overview of the volume as a whole.

The book is arranged in three broad sections. The first explores the archaeological process, the second examines the context of the museum, and the third presents wider accounts of interactions between society, media, and mortuary archaeology. Together, the eighteen studies navigate the complex terrain of archaeological method, theory, and practice relating to the dead, both ancient and more modern, showing how they are informed by, and contribute towards, contemporary society.

Geographically, many of the chapters predominantly focus on the UK, but there are contrasting studies from Northern and Western Europe (Weiss-Krejci; Anthony; Williams; Rajala; Nordström) as well as North America (McClelland and Cerezo-Román; Nilsson Stutz) and St Helena (Pearson and Jeffs). Some chapters offer comparative studies between international contexts, which often look beyond conventional fields of analysis (Nilsson Stutz, Swain).

Theoretically, a new range of approaches are brought to bear upon these case studies, including sociological studies of contemporary society and how people engage with the dead (Weiss-Krejci, Sayer and Sayer); examining the role of archaeologists as particular forms of mortuary specialists (Rajala; Williams; McClelland and Cerezo-Román); and exploring the process

from excavation to reburial *as* a mortuary process (McClelland and Cerezo-Román). Several chapters examine museums as key mortuary arenas in the present day: places for identity construction of the dead, and also memory construction for the living (Nordström; Williams). Others focus more explicitly on contest and policy making (Jenkins; Exell; Brown; Rat-house; Nilsson Stutz; Weiss-Krejci) often in relation to controversial case studies. The chapter by Pearson and Jeffs, however, illustrates the potential for discoveries to sit ‘between’ narratives, or escape simple impositions of meaning, even jarring with accepted historical accounts.

What emerges in the latter part of this volume is the changing climate in which we engage with and write about death (Kirk), especially in the vibrant new field of community archaeology (Sayer and Sayer). The chapter by Sayer and Walter examines the particular role of new digital media: how these literally media(te) our discoveries, whilst Giles examines new ways of visualizing the dead. Many of these chapters (Anthony; Williams in particular) explore the intersection between heritage and the archaeology of death and thus the contribution archaeologists make towards contemporary society’s long-term perspective on mortality.

Methodologically, the volume offers a suite of new techniques which inform this shift in disciplinary focus: interviewing not just the visiting public as participants in excavating the dead (Sayer and Sayer) but archaeologists themselves (Rajala), or encouraging auto-ethnography—personal reflections in the field (Brown) or lab (McClelland and Cerezo-Román); interrogating professional and public discourse (Kirk), examining digital media and the internet (Sayer and Walter); and critically reviewing, re-designing, or commissioning imagery (Giles) and installations (Williams).

The volume therefore builds on recent edited works on policy and practice such as Giesen’s edited volume (2013) and exemplars of collaborative professional-public partnerships (Clegg et al. 2013) by arguing there is a new space in which the profession can profitably re-examine its own relationships with the dead. In order to reposition itself as part of wider society, mortuary archaeology as a sub-discipline and mortuary archaeologists as practitioners must regard themselves as first and foremost public archaeologists and public intellectuals. Our aspiration is openness and engagement as Sayer (2010a) advocates, acknowledging the significant contribution we have to make on humanity’s relations with the dead... as diverse, conflicting, contentious, and inspiring as that may be.

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