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DIGGING THE DEAD IN A DIGITAL MEDIA AGE

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Abstract

Archaeology commonly assumes it has the general public's support. As a field of study archaeology enjoys a high public profile and in its many shapes - metal detecting, museums and public excavation - people can participate should they choose to. This chapter will examine public perceptions of one recently contentious area, the excavation of human remains, by analyzing internet posts responding to news stories initiated, in all but one case, by archaeologists. By examining social media posts, we will analyze both positive and negative attitudes towards archaeology and its treatment of the ancient and historical dead. In doing this we hope to contribute to developing a more reflexive understanding of social attitudes towards death, archaeology and the exclusivity of heritage studies. Our conclusion is that there is no one 'public opinion' of burial archaeology; rather, expressed opinions depend on the specific excavation or exhibition, how the media report it, and various contextual factors; this means that archaeologists will benefit by taking a lead in framing media coverage of how they work with the dead.

INTRODUCTION

A number of recent events inside and outside of the heritage sector have triggered a lively and largely constructive debate about the excavation, display and conservation of human remains in the UK (see Sayer 2009, 2010a; Moshenska 2009; Parker Pearson et al. 2011; Jenkins 2008, 2010; Giesen 2013). Two events have been of particular significance: the reburial of human remains prompted by requests to museums from the Pagan community, and independently of these requests the Ministry of Justice decided to revisit its conditions for the excavation of human remains (Parker Pearson et al. 2013). In the short term these issues seem to have been resolved through open consultation and campaigning by archaeologists. British archaeologists consider that they have public support; public-facing archaeology develops strong links within local communities, the portable antiquities scheme engages members of the public in the discovery of metal objects on a national scale, and TV and Radio programmes regularly include archaeology or excavation as their central theme. There are various ways to engage with archaeology outside of a traditional museum environment; people can shift soil or sit back and read about it in numerous academic and popular books, in magazines and digitally on the internet.

This chapter discusses this new digital environment by describing and analyzing three events in British burial archaeology which deliberately sought coverage online and within global media. These are: 1) the burial campaign which was instrumental in raising the profile of the reburial problem in England; 2) the discovery of a cow and woman buried in the same grave in a fifth and sixth century cemetery at Oakington, Cambridgeshire; 3) the investigation of King Richard III's final resting place in the city of Leicester. One of us was instrumental in publicizing the first two events; neither of us was involved in the third. We will refer also to a recent case in East Anglia where negative media publicity came unsought by the archaeologists concerned.

In the mid-twentieth century, archaeology found a place in mass broadcasting and early shows like *Animal, Vegetable and Mineral* or *Chronicle* captured the public imagination (Bailey 2010). But the media are not just a means to disseminate expertise, they broadcast values which intersect with audiences from a variety of backgrounds creating a mutable discourse that can cause conflict or be appropriated and misappropriated (Brittain and Clack 2007:12). Hodder (2000, 2003) has shown how work at Çatalhöyük attracted media and political interest in genetic ancestry and the Turkish ambitions to join the European Union. Çatalhöyük might be an exceptional site, and so is an exceptional case but similar claims are made in the UK by interested parties like the self-styled Druid King Arthur about remains from Stonehenge (Pope 2013). Recent media coverage of the discovery of Richard III was appropriated by debates and legal challenges concerning reburial: should his remains be reburied in York or Leicester? Perhaps this is because the place of burial matters, but unquestionably the media exposure raised interest in both cities and their respective politicians.

For many, media processes seem opaque. Authors like Hodder highlight the media's misuse of archaeology while others highlight the stereotyping of archaeology and archaeologists (Holtorf 2007) or describe simplistic dualities, for example, whether televised excavations are entertainment or education (Holtorf 2005; Brittain and Clack 2007: 21). There are thus several options available to archaeologists wishing to engage with the media. Should initial contact be during an excavation, when questions are largely unanswered but when there is the excitement of discovery; or post-excavation when interpretations have been secured and cannot be so easily appropriated? As we shall see, a third option - not engaging the media - also runs a risk, namely of unwanted media coverage, on the media's rather than the archaeologists' terms.

Media interest can be especially problematic when human remains are concerned; excavating skeletons may induce an emotional response in archaeologist and public alike (Sayer 2010a; Simpson and Sayer this volume). Furthermore there are often multiple interest groups and stakeholders both within and outside the scientific community, prompting professional anxiety (Sayer 2010b). Several published surveys, conducted by heritage professionals and independent companies, aim to gauge public opinion and provide evidence that burial archaeology has a public mandate (for example, Kilmister 2003; Carroll 2005; Mills and Tranter 2010). Framing academic debate in terms of education or entertainment and efforts to gauge public opinion, however, may oversimplify. As we shall demonstrate, 'public opinion' is not stable but depends on the specifics of any one excavation and how these are presented by the media.

The internet provides anonymous, published feedback that may be useful for establishing public attitudes on specific topics. Like any research method, using online fora to ascertain public attitudes has both strengths and weaknesses. The obvious weakness is that those who post comments are not representative of the public as a whole, and worse, the researcher does not usually know in what ways they are not representative. Those who post do so with some idea of presenting themselves to an audience, but so too do respondents to questionnaires and interviews; the perceived audience is just different. More serious is the possibility of a particular – and quite possibly hidden — interest group swamping a site with posts, in order to give a particular impression of 'public opinion'.

There are, however, considerable benefits in using online fora. First, online posts, unlike responses to structured questionnaires, are naturally occurring data - part of people's lived world. Second, people post comments in response to a particular news story, or event, or museum exhibition; by comparing posts to different archaeological news stories, we can see how 'attitudes' are not fixed, but depend on the story being responded to. Posts also comment on other people's posts, evolving as ongoing conversations or threads. Discussions of a media story that once took place in pub, living room or other physical spaces now also take place online, where it is much more readily visible to researchers that audiences need not be passive, but can actively re-work media stories for political discussion or for sheer fun (Rosen 2012). This process inevitably exaggerates particular themes and omits others, but at least the bias is the public's rather than the researcher's (whose questionnaires can also omit key themes). Indeed, it may be that questionnaires designed to elicit generalised 'attitudes to archaeology' are fundamentally flawed in that there may be no such thing as a general 'attitude to archaeology' outside of the context of specific excavations, exhibitions and their media coverage. Third, by comparing posts to different newspapers with different readerships, following differently slanted stories and headlines about the same event, one can trace how 'attitudes' can vary in response to such factors. In the present study, for example, we relied mainly on the *BBC Leicester* online news, and the slightly more populist and right-wing *Daily Mail* online. (Many newspapers have different editorial staff for their online versions, but the *Mail* online carries similar prejudices to its paper sibling.) Fourth, online comments can provide a rich mix of both qualitative and quantitative data. The *Mail* online and BBC sites are particularly useful here in that they have a system of peer review whereby other readers may click on a link to indicate whether they like or dislike a comment, producing a net numerical positive or negative approval score for each comment. Since many more people rate posts than create posts themselves, this gives a quantitative indication of whether, and by what margin, readers approve or disapprove of a posted comment, and hence whether the comment represents an unusual personal opinion or one shared by a majority of readers. The net score does not, however, tell us how many readers voted for or against; thus a score of -50 could mean 50 people disapproved, or that 300 approved and 350 disapproved. Fifth, it is reasonable to assume that those who post comments on a national newspaper site do so knowing that this comprises very visible and public behaviour; we therefore consider it ethical to use their posts for research without needing to gain their specific consent (Thomas 1996; Bruckman 2002; Miller 2012).

THE BURIAL CAMPAIGN

The reasons for, events surrounding, and results of the 2011 burial campaign have been described elsewhere (Parker Pearson et al. 2011, 2013) so a brief synopsis will suffice here. In 2007 the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) assumed responsibility for burial legislation and re-examined the condition of the licence it issues for the exhumation of human remains. It now

required all archaeological excavated material to be re-buried within two months, and then after protest, two years. A number of archaeologists and legal professionals published their concerns about this, but no change was forthcoming (Gallagher and Cosgrove-Gibson 2008; Pitts and Sayer 2010). In 2010 the cremated remains that had been excavated from Stonehenge in 2008 were due for reburial, but analysis of these remains was not complete and so the excavators applied for an extension to their license, a request which was challenged by a small minority of the British Pagan community. In 2010, Mike Parker Pearson, Mike Pitts and Duncan Sayer orchestrated a successful campaign to convince the Ministry of Justice to reconsider its position (Parker Pearson et al. 2013).

This campaign had many different strands, involving audio media (BBC Radio), TV news (never shown as the MoJ declared its intention to relax the condition) and print/online media as well as hundreds of emails and letters sent to archaeologists, archaeological organizations and members of parliament. Indeed, at the heart of the matter was a letter written by the trio, signed by 40 of the UK's leading professors of archaeology, and published simultaneously in *British Archaeology* (issue 117, 2011) and the *Guardian* (Sample 2011; Cunliffe et al. 2011). The *Guardian* was selected because it had an active web presence with open access; the paper's awareness of new media like Twitter and Facebook also meant its online readership was often greater than its circulation. The MoJ immediately published a negative response, also in the *Guardian* (Djanogly 2011), but after a series of pro-forma letters of protest had been downloaded from the ASDS (Association for the Study of Death and Society) website and sent to the MoJ by hundreds of private individuals, and organizations, it soon responded with a statement to each individual agreeing to relax the conditions of the license.

By the end of the week the *Guardian* article had been shared by 1926 people using social media websites. (This is when an individual who controls a personal page clicks on a link on the article so that others who are connected with them via social media can also see the article, and see that they are following it.) These figures are high for science, and the article reached the top of the most viewed 'On Science' articles within the *Guardian's* web pages remaining in the top ten for several days. The article was covered by several news websites including: Reuters, *Nature* and the *Daily Mail*. *Nature* attracted one comment, *The Daily Mail*, however, attracted thirty-eight comments. The article was titled: 'Put those bones back! Future of archaeology threatened by law forcing scientists to rebury ancient remains' and published on 4th February 2011 (Daily Mail Reporter 2011)

Analysis of online comments

The Daily Mail is not known for its support of archaeology, reflected perhaps in its headline 'Put those bones back!' (Daily Mail Reporter 2011) for both print and online versions of this article. By contrast, the left-leaning broadsheet *The Guardian* titled their piece 'Legislation forces archaeologists to rebury finds' (Sample 2011); given that *The Guardian* reported on the protest, and the letter was printed elsewhere in that edition of the paper, this is commensurate with the paper's rational, pro-science, pro-reason, anti-superstition and secularist stance. This stance does not necessarily precede pro- or anti-archaeological feeling but it may have been evident in this case because of the politics of regulation. After its muted headline the *Daily Mail* article was largely neutral, reporting the facts of the protest letter. Online comments to the *Mail* article, however, can be broadly categorized into three groups: i) politically motivated, ii) anti-archaeology/pro-reburial, and iii) pro-archaeology/pro-retention. The political posts scored highest in the feedback system with one post receiving the positive score of +125:

'2008, Then this would have been one of the 3,000+ laws that Blair/Brown [Labour prime ministers] introduced into the UK without much thought or consultation. No wonder Brown cannot be found and Blair needs a 24 hour bodyguard.' (+125)

The pro-reburial posts all scored negatively and the retention posts scored positively, with an anti-archaeology post, 'Archaeologist = Grave robber', receiving a particularly low score of -79. By contrast, a favourable post scored +85:

'Let it be known. If a part of one of my finger bones is found in ten thousand years time and it is of any interest to anyone then they can have my finger.' (+85)

The two positions for and against reburial were equally represented with twelve positive posts and thirteen negative ones but with individual scores ranging between +125 to –85, many more people felt motivated to comment on the posts than post a comment themselves. The reburial position was, however, not always paired with an anti-archaeology position, for example:

'I love Archaeology, but so much wrong is done in the name of 'scientific research' these days that those involved have lost sight of the fact that they are dealing with the remains of fellow human beings. Sometimes it seems like a treasure hunt. Two years is long enough and at least give those dug up in the name of science, the dignity of being put back in the ground for goodness sake!' (–52)

The pro-retention and political posts were more likely to resort to humour or ridicule 'Sorry Ken but this law is nuts' (+28) or:

'..and they should be given a state burial, and they should be blessed, and we should all worship god, and the graves should be tended, and their religious beliefs should be cross checked before re burial to ensure they are not offended by the location, and each one should go in a gold lined oak casket built using wood available at time of initial burial ...' (+17)

Like some Richard III posts discussed later, one commenter questioned the purpose and relevance of archaeology:

'At the end of the day - so what. Why dig for them in the first place as with what they do uncover it has no real impact on present day lives. What use is it to anyone to know how they lived, what they ate, how they died etc etc. Ones time is better taken up in trying to live in the present and cope with all this entails.' (–37)

Errors — perhaps the result of ignorance about the UK's burial Laws — were common on both sides of the debate but most common amongst those in favour of reburial. Most frequent was the assumption that this was a new law, passed in 2008, when in fact it was passed in 1857 and reinterpreted in 2007. The second most common ambiguity amongst the posts in favour of reburial was about ownership or the nature of archaeological projects, for example: 'These bones don't belong to these people they didn't ask to be dug up, they expected to rest in perpetuity, so why disturb them because some people want to examine them' (–41), or 'I think it's quite right that remains are reburied. The scientists can dig people up, but they shouldn't own them indefinitely' (–18). And a number of others believed that the remains had to be returned to the same building site they had been excavated from.

MELTON: AN UNWANTED NEWS STORY

These misconceptions are common amongst the anti-archaeological comments and a series of similar posts were placed on another of the *Daily Mail's* online articles titled: 'Skeletons

scattered around grounds of former psychiatric hospital chapel after workmen dig up '20th century' graves' (Levy 2011). Online comments were as critical of archaeology as had been the article, contrasting with responses to the 'put those bones back' article where the pro-archaeology/retention of human remains camp could be deemed to have 'won' the debate with far more positive ratings. The 'scattered skeletons' piece reports on a cemetery project in Suffolk that seems to have gone wrong. Reputedly the archaeologists exposed a series of graves attached to a psychiatric hospital in Melton and then left without lifting the bones or securing the site. Screening proved to be inadequate, resulting in published photographs of the skeletons appearing in the local and national press.

In this case there were thirty-two posts, but many more people rated them and their ratings were overwhelmingly negative toward archaeology, with the second highest score being given to 'Seems that respect for the dead is dead in Melton, Suffolk' (+410). A rare pro-archaeology comment, 'did any of these skeletons or their relatives complain', received widespread disapproval (–216). It is impossible to say without further investigation whether this project was in breach of its MoJ Licence, but unsurprisingly many posts demonstrated little or no understanding of burial law, exhumation or archaeological practice. The highest scoring post said:

> 'it was a dig carried out by a professional team they were interested to know what was there. I would have thought that the clue was in the fact that it is a graveyard, what did they think they would find?' (+445).

Several posts assumed that 'archaeologists are paid by the taxpayer' or that they would have required an 'exhumation order'- a feature of modern forensic or crime literature which does not apply to the UK, although a court order may request the exhumation of a corpse. Another post misunderstood deconsecration: 'If the grounds were deconsecrated in 1998, shouldn't any human remains on the site have been removed and reburied in consecrated ground elsewhere at that time?'.

Some posts were aggressively anti-archaeology:

> 'archaeologists Think they are gods, and the only people around who care about history, you only have to watch time team [the UK's most popular television archaeology series] to see what a load of idiots they are, they use a JCB to get at what they want, never mind about what's in the first few inches of the ground.' (–16)

whereas others seem to imply conspiracy:

> 'archaeology is a business it's not like the time team its seems to me they left them open to destroy the evidence...no graves...and the builders can do what they want without carrying out a full excavation. archaeologists also have a dismissive attitude to bodies or stiffs as they call them and respect none...if it had been roman or neolithic they would be in card board boxes by now stored away...to wait for an archaeological report...that seldom gets done...they dig things up pat each other's backs then off to the pub...job done' (–3)

However, both of these examples scored negatively indicating that these views were not widely shared by other readers of this article. There is probably more to this case than is reported in this news article, a single archaeological contractor *may* have been in breach of the licence but local politics probably underlies this unfortunate situation. The impression from reading these posts is that this was not the correct way to treat the dead. They also seemed to offer the (mild) opinion that archaeologist are generally disrespectful, even if more extreme views did not seem to be sanctioned. For this article the *Daily Mail* abridged

archaeologists to 'workmen' in the headline which seems to have stripped them of a professional or intellectual status and set the tone for the discussion.

OAKINGTON

Oakington is a village in Cambridgeshire which was identified as the site of an early Anglo-Saxon cemetery when in 1926 four skeletons were discovered, one with an early medieval shield boss. A series of excavations during the 1990s-2000s uncovered more than a hundred further burials but more recent excavations have led to new insights into early Anglo-Saxon mortuary practice of widespread significance (e.g. Sayer and Dickinson 2013). During the 2012 field season, one grave was excavated which was exceptional. This consisted of a woman aged 25-35; her costume was fastened by two small silvered disc brooches, and she had also worn a series of bead necklaces and a belt hanger set. This assemblage strongly implied a later fifth-/early sixth-century date, probably close to AD 500. While her costume was comparatively rich, the greater interest was caused by her grave companion: a small cow. This was a unique discovery for the early Anglo-Saxon burial rite and something unknown across Europe.

The Oakington project included a strong outreach component initiated 2007-2010 during test-pitting exercises and the first research excavations, and extended in 2011-2012. An innovation for 2012 was funding for a student internship with responsibilities for co-ordinating the online presence of the excavation and collecting data about local media organizations that might be interested in the project. The role was taken by a history undergraduate student from Manchester Metropolitan University, and proved extremely helpful to the project directors. Responsible for a site team of forty across two large trenches working to a high standard of excavation and recording, they had no time to maintain the multiple daily updates required to keep interest in the site's Facebook and Twitter accounts, especially when challenging discoveries were made: exactly the time, we argue, when communication should be made.

On the 23 June 2012 during the site's annual open day, situated within the busy village open day when fairs and activities were set up adjacent to the main cemetery trench, the woman-and-cow burial was discovered. At first the animal was believed to be a horse, because thirty-three horses have been found with men in early Anglo-Saxon graves (Fern 2005). The village open day was also chosen for the opening of a new playground to which the Parish Council invited the local press; a photographer from *Cambridge News* attended and took photographs of the 'horse' during excavation (Brown 2012). The student updated the Facebook and Twitter websites with images and commentary throughout the day, and under the direction of the site directors he emailed the local BBC offices and national media.

A BBC cameraman arrived the next day, but because of the project policy never to leave skeletons in the ground overnight, the grave had been emptied. The cameraman recorded an interview with site directors, and a short clip was shown in the Cambridge section of the East Anglian regional news. The full footage was shared within the media organization and was picked up by BBC online which published a news article on Monday 25 June at 14.20. Monday is the excavation site's weekly day off (so that full advantage can be taken of the weekend site visitors), so the BBC journalists discussed the article with the student who described the find as 'genuinely bizarre', a phrase which would probably not have been employed by the site directors.

The BBC article ran with the headline 'Bizarre Cow Woman Found' and was the most read news story on the national BBC website that afternoon, where it was situated on the front page, and in the Cambridgeshire regional news section. For thirty-two hours it remained in the top most read stories, and was shared by 4165 people on social media sites. Over the next month or so the article was syndicated by over forty global media organizations including ITV (News film and online 26 July), *Der Spiegel*, *The Daily Mail*, Discovery News, and *The Huffington Post*, and it was also covered in local media including BBC Radio Cambridge, Manchester and Lancashire, and the evening print media in London, Cambridge, Manchester and Lancashire. By July, the BBC had removed the 'bizarre' element of the title from their website independently of the site team.

Analysis of online comments

The *Mail on Sunday* ran print and online versions of its Oakington article under the headline: 'Who was she? Mystery found buried beside sacrificial cow in unique discovery' (Daily Mail Reporter 2012). This story was not one which invited clear debate in the same way as the burial campaign, so *The Daily Mail* chose to frame the article around mystery. There were thirty-seven comments and again they were rated by other readers. These can be subdivided into two themes: i) humour; ii) questioning/exploring the find. The highest scoring post scored +108 and the most negative received –36. Many of the posts questioned the logic of an association made in the headline, for example: "I do ask this in all seriousness, how can we be sure that this was not a deceased cow buried with a sacrificial human ... " (+88). Others extended this scepticism with a humorous element and received the highest approval: "Maybe the chap buried his wife with his mother in law?" (+108) but a post which extended the humour further into sexism scored lowest of all: "Who's to say the woman wasn't a cow?" (–36).

The first post received a number of responses because it questioned archaeological interpretation:

> I do ask this in all seriousness, how can we be sure that this was not a deceased cow buried with a sacrificial human? Just because such a thing would be unthinkable today doesn't mean that it wasn't 2000 or more years ago. The point was made about the high value of the cow, and rather than implying that the woman must have been important if a cow was sacrificed perhaps the reverse was the case - a village's most important asset was lost so a human, perhaps one blamed for the demise of the cow, was buried with it. All too often we get reports from archaeologists applying modern thought and ethics to ancient events, then years later almost diametrically opposed interpretations appear when new concepts are applied to the old findings. (+88)

This received several responses: 'if this was the case wouldn't they eat it anyway since it was their source of food and not bury the animal' (+24) or 'Yes I have to agree ... but if it was the case why would they have left all the jewellery on her.' (+24) and one which used humour:

> 'Perhaps this is evidence of a previously unknown race of super bovines who had the humans hooked on milk and cheese.Maybe the lady was carrying the valuables for the cow as hooves would make such a thing difficult..... ' (+15)

Other posts did not aim to answer queries but to ask them or make statements themselves: 'she seems to be very tall'(+8) or 'Maybe they both died of natural causes. Why do they always assume about "sacrifices" each time they discover a tomb?' (+61). In this case the reader chose to read sacrifice to mean ritual killing rather than economic sacrifice. A similar comment questioned the interpretation of deliberate placement of the bodies: 'Maybe they

both died independently of each other and the other villagers thought "Why dig two holes?"' (+60) and one proposed a re-dating of the burial: 'Brooches, amber beads and keychain - Viking customs...' (+11).

Other posts interpreted the ritual aspect of the burial:

> 'Consider this - as the horse is to the hunter, the cow is to the keeper of the hearth. As both were extremely valuable animals perhaps this type of burial was reserved for the very wealthy or highly esteemed individuals with power' (+28)

And one responder questioned the use of bizarre, possibly influenced by the BBC headline, and appropriated the find for a broader understanding, a common characteristic amongst Pagan writings (after Frazer's *The Golden Bough*), indicating that:

> 'How is it "bizarre"? All Indo-Europeans honored and respected the cow, a characteristic which survives today among the Brahmins of India. All Indo-European mythology includes a divine or cosmic cow-mother among the greatest of beings, often associated with the Milky Way, and by extension, earthly rivers. In Germanic mythology, this is Audhumla; in Celtic, Danu (along with other, minor reflections, such as Boannan etc); in Greek, Hera; and in Egyptian (yes, I do think there is continuity between the Egyptian people and Indo-Europeans), Hathor. As the bull and the stallion were symbols of manhood, so the cow and the mare were symbols of womanhood. I'm not sure why this is so surprising to these researchers. Even though it may be a rare find, it fits in perfectly with what is known of history and culture of Indo-European peoples' (+1).

This was the second post that sparked debate and others felt the need to respond, for example: 'It's "bizarre" because it's never been found before. Just because it makes sense to you, it doesn't follow that it did for the people back then. So yes, bizarre.' (+5). However, the debate also seemed to cause some frustration: '... You are the only one actually looking and not pontificating. Your right she does look tall. The size of that thigh bone looks huge.' (+0) a comment made in response to the earlier description of the skeleton as tall, but posted towards the end of the comments after the second debate.

This last exclamation of frustration is interesting because many of the highest scoring comments on this website discussed the archaeological interpretation, or archaeologists, some with more knowledge than others:

> 'Firstly: the Saxons weren't here 2000 years ago, they didn't arrive until the 5th century, and historians/archaeologists don't have to make guesses about them because they left a lot of evidence behind, including written records, (eg: the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle). Second: why would some poor woman decide to deck herself out in all her finery, then go into a graveyard to guard a cow during a blizzard?' (+25)

The net result is the opening up of a dialogue across the comments that is surprisingly archaeological in its themes and explores topics like: the validity of Bovine sacrifice, ritual and religion, even referring to source material (Anglo-Saxon Chronicles) or describing the physical assets of the burial, for example the individual's height or date, whereas others preferred a grand narrative of global belief systems.

This contrasts to a similar article posted by *The Huffington Post*, a left-leaning mass market internet news outlet owned by AOL. This article was similar to the one from the BBC website in its title: 'Cow And Woman Buried Together In "Bizarre" Discovery at Anglo-Saxon Dig in Cambridgeshire' (Thornhill 2012) and attracted twenty-three comments, most of which consisted of just a few lines, but which had no review system. Many more of these posts picked up on the light hearted nature of the article (sourced solely from the Manchester

Metropolitan University's press release): 'who would have thought the co-op were doing funerals back then.' or 'maybe she should have told the cow to mooove over' with one having a political bent: 'D'you reckon in a few hundred years time they'll find posh boys Cameron and Osbourne buried together?' As in the *Mail* article, sexist humour received criticism. Thus the post, 'which one was the cow could they tell the difference', received this reply: 'Yes. Because, you see, one of them was a human female and the other a domestic bovine. Most people can make distinctions like that.'

More in tone with the campaign coverage reported above, some readers questioned the validity of the research or the story: 'This is news, does somebody want the cow back?' with a lone comment questioning the excavation 'Does it really matter? These people have disturbed enough graves. RIP.' or 'Both fell into the same hole - sorted. Now who do I apply to for the massive grant that will be allocated to "research" this "remarkable find"?'

It is difficult to extract a snapshot of public opinion from these articles. Comments are typically framed by the tone and title of the article they are commenting on. Thus other stories, like the *Daily Mail's* 2012 coverage of a rich seventh-century find in Cambridge, may be framed as a question: 'Is this Britain's first Christian burial? Anglo Saxon grave reveals 16-year-old girl laid to rest with a gold cross' (Cohen 2012a). This article received 142 comments and many chose to answer that question, for example:

> 'Is this Britain's first Christian burial?" - Quick answer NO - it post-dates the earliest Christian burials in Britain by several hundred years. There were numerous Christians in Roman Britain in the third and fourth centuries' (+313)

Apparently negative posts like this give a pessimistic impression of the responses to this article, and yet in exactly the same vein as the burial campaign discussed above, many of the posts which question the investigation received negative feedback indicating a more complex situation. Much of the rest of the debate, like the *Daily Mail* coverage of the Oakington cow, included a range of posts that discuss religion from multiple sources, some critical: 'Find a cross = must be a christian...'(–8), some observational: 'I'm intrigued by the positioning of her arms. One hand on her pelvis and one across her chest. Any ideas?' (+6) or topical: 'She'd never have been allowed to work for British Airways, wearing a cross like that.'(+52). But what is interesting about this story is that ethically focused posts which described the artefacts, such as 'Wouldn't it be right to leave the girls cross with her?' (+277), did much better than those about the dead, such as 'for god's sake leave the dead in their resting places, am I alone to think this is wrong.' (–21), which might be because the article went into some detail about the artefacts. However, given the effect of the frame an article provides it is important to consider stories from multiple media sources, and within context, so the controversial and high profile excavation which *might* have found England's King Richard III provides good evidence for discussion. Subsequent confirmation that the remains were indeed Richard's, to be followed in March 2015 by his re-burial in Leicester Cathedral, comprises information not known when the initial speculative findings were released, which is the moment in time analyzed in the following section.

RICHARD III

On the 12 September 2012, the University of Leicester held a press conference which highlighted an already high-profile collaboration between the Richard III Society and University of Leicester Archaeological Services. The three-week long excavation, run by professional archaeologist Richard Buckley alongside academics from the University, had

uncovered the remains of an adult male skeleton. This skeleton was striking because of its pathology, arguably consistent with descriptions of Richard III's life and death. Identified by human osteologist Jo Appleby, the skeleton exhibited characteristics of scoliosis, curving to the upper thoracic region of the lower back leaving the neck unaffected but forcing the right shoulder blade upwards, a feature which may well have been visible in life. Lodged between the second and third thoracic vertebra was a barbed arrow head, and a sizable bladed weapon appears to have inflicted visible trauma at the base of the skull while a small, square profile, puncher on one side of the skull may well have been caused by a poleaxe (Buckley 2012 et al.; Buckley et al. 2013).

The excavation was on the site of Leicester's thirteenth-century Greyfriars church that had been demolished during the Dissolution. The site was found within a small car park behind the Leicester social services building, placing the restriction of urban archaeology onto the project. Three trenches were located perpendicular to the church and particular elements were located, like the choir within which this single grave was discovered on the 4 September 2012 (Buckley 2012 et al.). This discovery, along with the possibility of DNA matching of the bones with a living descendent of Richard's, generated enthusiasm and the press conference one week later resulted in enormous excitement within the media including a BBC online article which remained the most read piece on this story, and on the BBC website, for many days after its publication; it was shared 11,676 times on social networking sites. News coverage included a spectrum of British newspapers: *The Independent*, *The Guardian*, *The Telegraph*, *The Daily Mail* and TV and radio broadcasts including Sky News, Channel 4 and the BBC. The story was also covered by a similar range of overseas media organizations. By contrast a BBC News article published before the project started attracted only limited interest and appears not to have been shared on social media sites (Cook 2012).

Richard III's remains are of archaeological interest because he is one of only three English kings whose bones are yet to be located, the others being Henry I (probably under Reading Abbey) and James II whose remains were lost when his coffin, in the Chapel of Saint Edmund in the Church of the English Benedictines in Paris, was raided during the French Revolution (Tatton-Brown 2012). Richard III is also a controversial figure. Depicted by Shakespeare as a child-killer and tyrant with a crooked back, he was killed at the Battle of Bosworth in 1485; reputedly his naked body was paraded through the streets of Leicester before burial. Richard was King for only two years (1483-1485) having been Lord Protector on behalf of the twelve year-old boy Edward V. Edward and his brother Richard were housed in the Tower of London (the royal residence) and disappeared some time after Richard III's coronation, leading to the controversy of 'the princes in the tower'. No contemporary images of Richard III survive, but two later portraits are owned by the Society of Antiquaries, London. One of these is believed to be copied from a lifetime portrait and shows no shoulder deformity; the second depicts him holding a broken sword and with a withered left arm and shoulder which it has been claimed alludes to his defeat. It is believed that this second image was altered some time later to make the shoulders seem more even (Catling 2012). Richard III's life and death continued to provoke controversy through their historic representation - through Shakespeare's play, and the foundation in 1924 of The Richard III Society which aims to restore a reputation arguably tarnished by the Tudors who defeated him. The Society now has nearly 3500 members (Richard III Society 2011). It is within this context that the archaeological project was conducted, and within which the media coverage and public debate played out in internet fora.

Analysis of online comments

We took two online news sites that are 'middle-of-the-road' in terms of highbrow/lowbrow and analyzed comments on their articles: *Richard III dig: 'Strong evidence' bones are lost king* (BBC Leicester) and *Have they found Richard III? Archaeologists searching for 'tyrant king' under Leicester car park find skeleton with a curved spine and metal ARROW in its back* (*Daily Mail*). 311 comments were posted on the BBC Leicester site on 12 and 13 September (BBC Leicester 2012); 146 comments were posted on the Daily Mail article, all but seven on 12 or 13 September (Cohen 2012b). Comments on the two articles varied from one to five lines long, with a number responding to earlier comments. Each site enabled visitors to rate each comment as positive or negative, so each comment displayed a net score; many comments on the *Daily Mail* site had have net scores of several hundred, whereas on the BBC site net scores rarely exceeded 30. We did not analyze broadsheet newspapers: the story in *The Guardian* and *Independent* attracted rather few comments, while *The Daily Telegraph* story attracted 359 comments, but not in an easily downloadable form.

Two things stand out about the views expressed on these sites concerning archaeology, exhumation and reburial: i) the views are very diverse, but ii) most of the comments are either explicitly positive about or implicitly accepting of the work of the Leicester archaeologists. On the *Mail* site, where many more people rated comments than posted comments, the ratings indicate a clear majority favouring the archaeologists' work. Thus on the *Daily Mail* site, the most negatively rated post was:

> 'Can't sodding archaeologists leave anything alone. He was laid to rest, he should stay there.' (–306)

One reply to this post got the highest rating:

> 'No he shouldn't. He was a King of England (and a good one too, for his short reign) and deserves a decent tomb.' (+628)

The next two most negatively rated posts questioned the excavation's purpose:

> 'But what's the point?? All this expense, so what's the point??' (-282)

> 'It could be an important find from the historical viewpoint but what practical purpose has this dig served?' (-254)

Posts advocating reburial in a place fit for a king were popular, with this being the second most highly rated post (from someone living in Leicestershire):

> 'If these bones are the remains of Richard please, please, please either re-bury him where he was known in York Minster or some other church close to his lands. He was known and respected in North Yorkshire and was genuinely mourned there…. After a brutal death and centuries of Tudor inspired calumny allow this poor man to rest in peace and not be turned into a mere Leicester tourist attraction!' (+457)

The dominant view on the *Daily Mail* site, reflected also on the BBC but not so easily demonstrable because of its readers' relative disinclination to rate comments, is that the excavation is worthwhile and should be followed by Richard being reburied somewhere appropriate to his royal status.

However, we *cannot* take these comments and ratings as a quantitative measure of public support for burial archaeology. This is for two reasons. The first is that, as noted earlier, online responses to news items tend to adopt the frame within which the news item was

written. Utopian hopes that the internet would provide a free space for the exploration of non-hegemonic ideas are outweighed by evidence that, at least in the democratic West, conventional news values shape online as much as offline public opinion (Curran et al. 2012). Thus the Leicester story, implicitly accepting the validity of archaeology, receives comments that do likewise, while the 2011 Melton, Suffolk, skeletons story which was highly critical of archaeological practice received comments equally critical of archaeology.

Second and more important, however, this particular excavation was organized at the instigation of The Richard III Society. Whereas early debates about reburial of the ancient dead pitted scientific archaeology against the identity politics of aboriginal groups (Fforde 2004), followed by an alliance between postmodern museum curation and the identity politics of Paganism (Jenkins 2008), the Leicester 'find' resulted from an alliance between archaeology and, not identity politics, but (Gray et al. 2007) modern-day fandom in the form of the Richard III Society – Richard's fan club. Many of the Society's 3500 members would quickly have become aware of this news story, and very likely contributed a proportion of the several hundred comments and several thousand ratings. Many comments were consistent with the views of the Society (notably, restoring Richard's reputation, and burying him in a location suited to a king —specifically York Minster, as befits the last king from the House of York). Many comments, though hazy about DNA matching techniques, debated historical facts and myths in both amateur and professional fashion. Beyond The Richard III Society, through teaching of both history and Shakespeare at school, Richard III's death and disputed reputation has for some time been part of English popular historical and literary culture. Thus the numbers of Ricardians, those generally fascinated by Richard and specifically wishing to set his historical record straight, extends beyond the membership of The Richard III Society. An archaeological excavation to find the grave of this controversial English king and resolve a few mysteries would be expected to generate considerable interest, interest premised on an acceptance of the practices of excavation and exhumation.

Ricardians

If the comments on all of these websites cannot be used as evidence of generic public support for burial archaeology, the richness of the comments do, however, offer considerable insight into how British people think about archaeology, exhumation and reburial. In particular, they show that public responses can depend on the very specific context of any particular excavation and its reporting. What Tarlow (2011, 15-17) argued for the early modern period is probably also true today: there are within society various discourses about the dead body, any one of which may be drawn on to make sense of a particular situation or experience. Thus what any one person feels about archaeology, exhumation and reburial is unlikely to depend on a considered or consistent ethical position; rather, the contextual factors of the case at hand draw forth some discourses more than others. Any one person's views about the proper treatment of the dead may be more variable and contextual than fixed and principled.

We have mentioned the considerable pre-existing interest in Richard III within contemporary England. The possibility of resolving the mystery of where he was buried, not to mention shedding light on precisely how he was killed and the ongoing saga of his posthumous reputation, provided a context for the many plaudits received by the Leicester archaeologists:

> 'This is fascinating news. Archeology continues to amaze and excite. History comes alive by this discovery and others. Well done the team.'

> 'a fantastic news story, i for one cant wait to hear the results'

If the headline had been 'Bones found in church – could be those of a yeoman', such praise would not have been heaped upon the archaeological team. It is the very specific figure of Richard III that generated the interest and fascination, and by implication the approval of the archaeologists' work.

Acceptance of any dislocation caused by the excavation also derived from its specific context. The car park which was being dug up is normally used by employees of the council's Social Services Dept. Social workers have received a very bad press in the UK over the past two decades, not least in the *Daily Mail*; their public image as left-wing liberals and child-snatchers is typically placed in opposition to right–wing values, so it is not surprising if those fascinated by the Leicester dig and the light it might shed on royal history had little sympathy for any inconvenience suffered by Leicester's social workers:

'The council workers can park in a nearby multistory car park like the rest of us.'

With the excavation and exhumation broadly acceptable, there remained for the online posters the question of where Richard, should the bones turn out to be his, be reburied. Few recommended reburial *in situ*, whether under the existing car park or with the site of discovery turned into a Richard III heritage site. Leicester Cathedral, according to the news story was favoured by both the university archaeologists and the Bishop of Leicester, yet this found very little online support and indeed attracted considerable criticism. Since Richard was a king, and to many Ricardians the last true king of England, many posts suggested Westminster Abbey (housing more English monarchs than any other site) or York Minster (appropriate for a king from the House of York). York was the more popular destination:

'Why is he being reburied in Leicester? He was only "dumped" there because he was killed in battle there. He is a son of York and should be buried in York Minster as befitting a Yorkist Monarch.'

Of all English counties, Yorkshire is famous for the passionate sense of belonging expressed by many of those born there (despite it not having been a single county for several decades). Some comments implicitly appeal to Yorkshire identity politics, and at this point there is a (modest) similarity with the identity politics of aboriginal claims to human remains – remains should be returned to their homeland, even after the passage of hundreds of years. Thus for some posts, it is less important that Richard be reburied in a cathedral fit for a king than that he return to Yorkshire:

'Living as I do, not far from Middleham in the Yorkshire Dales, Richard III is still fondly thought of here. He was known as a fair ruler as Warden of the North, and not for being cruel and unjust as he has so often been described. I am thrilled at the prospect of his body being recovered. Please bring him home to Yorkshire if it is him.'

'bury him on one of the high peaks of the Yorkshire moors with a monument depicting the White Rose.'

But most Ricardians are not from Yorkshire, so want him buried in a cathedral fit for a king, York Minister being preferred for historical reasons. Richard pre-dated the Reformation so was Catholic, but English kings are buried in what are now Church of England (Protestant) cathedrals and chapels; and monarchs ever since Tudor King Henry VIII have been head of

the Church of England. A number of posts suggested Richard should be buried according to the Catholic rite, and that in these more ecumenical times this could be appropriate not only for this fifteenth century monarch but also for twenty-first century religious politics:

> '….it should be a full Latin mass… and as he died in battle, maybe military honours too.'

Others considered it should be not only a Catholic but also a state funeral, which really would bring the British monarchy into the ecumenical twenty-first century. One post thought:

> 'It would be very interesting to see a proper reconstruction of a funeral of that time.'

This last comment raises intriguing questions about whether a historical re-enactment can be combined with a real funeral.

Those with no interest in Richard III

Though for many commenters, 'the monarch and its history makes for some fascinating reading', there is a minority view:

> 'This royalty stuff really is laughable, isn't it.'

These minority posts typically get very negatively rated, but the posts are there in some number. Royal history is far from a universal interest in England, and indeed history of any kind fails to interest some posters:

> 'Are we that interested?... England is always looking backwards now lets move forward into the future and spend money on making it a better future.'

In this view, the Leicester excavation is a waste of time and money:

> 'But what's the point? All this expense, so what's the point??'

Three observations may be made about this financial criticism of the Leicester excavation. One is that — especially at a time of economic recession and public expenditure cuts — this criticism can be, and often is, made of much 'ivory tower' university research in the humanities, and some research in the natural and social sciences too. So it is not a criticism specifically of archaeology. Secondly, it is entirely possible that the same people who criticised the Leicester excavation as a waste of time and money might be positive about some other archaeological excavations whose purpose they approve. One or two critics of pre-twentieth century excavation were potentially positive about twentieth-century forensic archaeology:

> 'archaeologists should be helping society NOW by aiding in the capture of war criminals etc. not digging around trying to get their own name in the history books.'

Our third observation concerns the Research Excellence Framework (www.ref.ac.uk) for assessing the quality of university research, in which British universities are now required to demonstrate the non-academic impact of their research. With the Leicester bones later confirmed as Richard's and reburied with regal honours in Leicester cathedral, the University of Leicester's excavation scores very highly according to the REF's impact measure. Yet online comments indicate that some British citizens consider this a total waste of money.

Though the REF seems to consider any demonstrable impact as good, some online comments query whether demonstrable impact necessarily equals desirable impact.

The Hillsborough Report

If one contextual factor is the role of Richard III in English historical and literary culture, another is the story that dominated the British news media that day, 12 September 2012, namely the publishing of a Report into the Hillsborough Disaster (Hillsborough Independent Panel 2012). Ninety-six Liverpool Football Club fans died from crushing injuries while at a cup semi-final at Sheffield's Hillsborough Stadium on 15 April 1989. Following what many in Liverpool considered official whitewashing of police complicity in the disaster, eventually, after twenty years, an independent panel was set up to investigate further. 12 September saw UK news dominated by publication of the panel's findings that not only did senior Sheffield police officers' actions cause the disaster but also they—along with the ambulance service and the coroner — subsequently perverted the course of justice, covering up the police's criminal negligence and blaming the deaths on the fans, a cover-up missed by earlier, more official, reports into the tragedy. The eruption of this major political scandal on 12 September dominated the news for several days afterwards.

The violent deaths of both Richard III and the Hillsborough victims were followed, it seems, by the self-serving re-writing of history by powerful interests who cast blame on the deceased, though Hillsborough is infinitely more sensitive in contemporary England than Richard III because the bereaved are still alive and fighting for justice. One post on the BBC site stood back from the impassioned online debate about where to rebury Richard, commenting ironically:

> 'Really important topic, about which nobody who posts will have a real idea or opinion. Hillsborough? Unemployment?'

Another post, perhaps significantly from Bradford which had also suffered a major soccer stadium disaster, supported this:

> I'm sure everybody would rather comment on Hillsborough BBC not on Richard III.
> What's going on BBC? Bit of a joke isn't it?

A number of posts, however, defended the Leicester excavation against this particular charge, for example:

> 'just because one topic is debated doesn't mean other topics should feel upset. By your logic, why discuss Hillsborough, as you suggest, when we could trump it with Syria. Bonkers logic.
> If you're not interested in this topic then walk on by - don't be a kill joy.'

Another commented, perhaps more sensitively,

> 'And, no I don't want to discuss Hillsboro - it's far too tragic and serious for me, a stranger, to stick my nose in.'

Our point here is simple: how people respond to an archaeological news story will depend in part on what other news stories dominate on that particular day. Had the main news story on 12 September 2012 concerned celebrity gossip rather than a human tragedy implicating the most powerful institutions in the land, the minority who considered the Richard III story a mindless distraction may have welcomed a bit of serious history as a counter balance to celebrity froth.

The newspaper in question

How people respond to a news story depends not only on the other major news stories of the day, but also on what is normal in the newspaper in question. The *Daily Mail* is more downmarket than the BBC, reflected very noticeably in their respective online versions. In each case, a news story is flanked in the right-hand margin by trailers for other news items, but whereas the BBC Leicester trailers cover a range of stories, the *Mail's* online trailers for the Richard story, numbering around two hundred as you scroll down the story and then the comments, all concern celebrity gossip. A few *Daily Mail* commentators welcomed the Richard III story as a cut above the fare to which they are accustomed:

> 'I hope the DM follows up on this story and that it doesn't simply vanish to make way for silly stories about non-celebrities. DM, we are counting on you to give us the story about the results of the DNA study!'

> 'This is far too important to worry about where the money to do it came from!
> I just hope that they are going to do a TV doc on it, much more interesting than the usual rubbish that's on!'

For some readers used to celebrity gossip, the Richard III excavation gripped their imagination at an intellectual level refreshingly above normal. One post, though, loved the story not because it was more high-brow than celebrity gossip, but because it was more interesting than recent political and economic news:

> '…. a fascinating story and far more engaging than Richard Bransons squable with the DfT, 4G and iPhone launches.'

By contrast, the online comments on the Leicester excavation story in the left-leaning and potentially republican broadsheet papers *The Guardian* and *The Independent* were both less numerous, and displayed relatively little interest in debating Richard's character or where to re-bury him. They were more likely to agree that contemporary social, political and economic issues (Hillsborough, public expenditure cuts) are both more important and more interesting.

Story genres

Many posts enjoyed the Leicester excavation as a great story:

> 'I love exciting stories like this. It would be fantastic for this skeleton to be that of Richard III. Looking forward to the results of the DNA test.'

Unlike many archaeological excavations which involve the press only at the end, the Leicester team (like the Oakington team) had a policy of public awareness and press involvement from beginning to end. This allows interim reports with the potential to create considerable interest if there are interesting (Leicester) or mysterious (Oakington) findings that require further detective work to interpret or confirm. One of the biggest science news story of recent years has been the interim findings from the Large Hadron Collider that its team may possibly have found the Higgs boson particle. The public know what a king is, and what a cow is, but few had ever heard of the Higgs boson, yet its potential discovery was constructed into a high-profile ongoing news story. Partly solved mysteries, and possibly discovered particles or royal bones, can generate news stories as good as, or even better than,

mysteries solved and discoveries definitively made; this is because news editors prefer not one-off stories but stories capable of running for a few days or of being picked up again later.

The Leicester story, though factual news, fits an established fiction genre: the murder mystery. According to The Richard III Society website, Richard's character had been deliberately blackened by the Tudors in general and by Shakespeare in particular; interest in questioning this took off in the 1950s:

> 'Of most significance was the publication in 1951 of Josephine Tey's classic crime detective novel *The Daughter of Time*. This brought the controversy to the attention of a wide reading public.

This public includes one of the 2012 online posters, who wrote:

> Josephine Tey wrote a book about a dective in hospital getting a friend to help him research the real story about Richard the Third and coming up with the fact that he was grossley maligned by the Tudors and that in fact he was a very good king.so he needs an honourable reburial

The Leicester excavation adds to this detective genre the more recent TV forensics detective story. When a news story seems as good as the best fiction, audiences can be hooked. The most dramatic example was 9/11 where millions of viewers who watched two planes fly into the Twin Towers felt they were watching a movie (which is not to say they were not also engaged for other reasons). With the Leicester excavation, it was as though a forensics detective story was being enacted for real, visible to any passer-by or internet surfer.

> 'Great story and great detective work.'

Another post compared it to one of the UK's major television soap operas:

> 'This is all very exciting. It's like a 15th Century episode of Brookside...'

This can create a dilemma for archaeologists. If media reporting of interim finds has the potential to create stories that engage (at least some of) the public because it seems like a living soap opera or detective story, the public may then expect archaeologists to be charismatic media personalities. But archaeology is no more likely than any other occupation to generate budding media stars, probably less so given the technical, factual manner in which archaeologists are taught to report their findings. One post from a teacher described the video clip of the Leicester excavation's lead archaeologist addressing the 12 September press conference:

> Bit disappointed when I shared the clip with my class today. If the DNA analysis shows that it is Richard III's skeleton and it's announced to the world's media, I hope …. they get a passionate communicator out front. Not someone who sounds like a Police Inspector reading out the findings of a road traffic accident investigation. Time Team this wasn't.

From carpark to internet playground: conclusions from Leicester

We have not yet mentioned one immediately obvious feature of the Leicester comments: their humour. The posts are full of plays on words, not least connecting archaeological hunches with Richard's reputed hunchback, along with a few jokes about social services and many about car parks:

> Ironic… Cars are the modern horses, and the monarch who exclaimed "A horse, a horse, my kingdom for a horse" gets a car park built on top of him.

Other witticisms concerned Richard III being Cockney rhyming slang for 'turd', and the sexual connotations of 'Dick'. Expatriates loved all this:

> Ah, that British sense of humour, something I do rather miss being over here! (Los Angeles)

> I'm loving the very English puns too! (Sydney, Australia)

Most jokes were enjoyed, though some relating to turds and car parks received heavily negative ratings, notably this one playfully recommending ongoing desecration of Richard's remains:

> They could leave him there and use him as a speed hump. (-167)

Formal humour and jokes aside, the overall tone of the BBC and *Daily Mail* posts was good humoured. As one *Mail* post from the UK commented:

> 'wonderful on all counts and i'm delighted that the misery and nastiness we usually find in this comment section have finally up-earthed not only Richard III but our fabulous sense of humour! Three cheers all around!'

There was humour in the Oakington posts (notably, jokes about both cows and women), but the comments on the Ministry of Justice story were more consistently serious. Online responses on the Leicester story in the right-wing broadsheet *Daily Telegraph* included some racist comments followed by some serious putting down of same.

This overall tone of humour in the *Daily Mail* and BBC comments is significant for our analysis. These two sites provided an online playground in which ideas could be freely circulated pretty much without fear of causing offence. This would not have been possible had the story concerned, for example, Hillsborough or the return of aboriginal human remains, stories with serious implications for vulnerable communities of living people. As one post already quoted said of Hillsborough, 'it's far too tragic and serious for me, a stranger, to stick my nose in.' The writer implies that, by contrast, it is fine, safe and decent for anyone to stick their nose into debating Richard III. So this playful site about a long-dead king allowed the free and unself-conscious expression of diverse attitudes about archaeology, exhumation and reburial. Analysis of these expressions clearly shows attitudes to be highly contextual, depending on the specifics of the exhumation concerned. There is probably no one thing as a person's, let alone the public's, attitude to burial archaeology: it depends significantly on which archaeologists are digging where, for what purpose, what is sitting on top of the remains, how the excavation is reported, where it is reported, and on which day.

DIALOGUES WITH THE INTERNET

Internet fora do not provide an unbiased reflection of public opinion, for like any media they reflect the context within which they are presented. The internet discussions cannot be taken to represent 'the public perspective' on burial archaeology, but they do reflect cyberspace as a new public square for the exchange of ideas (Oldenburg 1991; Rheingold 200) and offer up a number of avenues that can be researched. These include analysis of the context of discussions, which influences greatly the style, nature and content of online posts; as has often been argued, rather than social media liberating people from the hegemonic social attitudes represented in old media, social attitudes expressed in social media often reflect

those in old media (Kenix 2009). In each of our three main cases, media publicity was initiated by archaeologists and the resulting articles were framed either positively or neutrally, leading to online comments and ratings of comments generally positive toward archaeology, with posts advocating reburial or questioning the ethics of excavation tending to receive negative feedback. In all three examples many more people chose to rate the posts than chose to make them. Some people commented on multiple stories in more than one media outlet; *Nikki, Boise, USA* (an internet username) appears on several whereas other people seem to have made up names specifically to post on a single issue, for example username: *Clarke's, Kidding???*. So each person's reasons for contributing are different: either a particular story or article inspired action or they were a regular poster to a particular newspaper website. The circumstances behind each post and how people interact with stories must vary considerably (though researching this would require other methods than we have employed here).

We must not forget that these are the people who did comment; many more hundreds of people chose to interact with the comments or article using the rating system but many tens of thousands more chose not to. The *Guardian* and BBC main site do not allow comments or ratings, but the thousands of people who shared the campaign, Oakington and Richard III stories were further inspired not just to read an article and move on but to share it with others. The numbers of readers that these pieces received is greater still, since to become a BBC most read article the Richard III and Oakington articles must have been read (or at least the webpage opened) around 500,000 times in just a few hours, and probably many times more than that over the life of the article.

Many of the critical comments were based on lack of knowledge about archaeology and burial law: ownership, funding, the nature of consecration and occasionally, as in the example from Melton, conspiracy. Many of these comments represent a scepticism or suspicion of expert and professional authority manifest within various sectors of western societies (not least readers of the *Daily Mail*), so are not directed solely at archaeology but potentially at any university research. Indeed, Jenkins (2010) has argued that the crisis of scientific and professional authority underlies the re-patriation of human remains from a number of museums. However, we are encouraged that many comments used the Oakington and Richard III articles to generate discussion about the finds, to question the results or their interpretation, and to describe the period, finds, archaeology, history or context. Posts drew on sources as diverse as high school history, Shakespeare, television archaeology series, historical novels, historical reconstructions, New Age ideas and, for some, a university degree in archaeology or history, generating a public forum for debate. Sometimes the discussion was amateur, sometimes it was quite professional, sometimes it drew on source material outside of the articles or presented grand interpretive narratives. That people rated these posts means that many read them and internalised a debate about archaeology.

Articles that posed an open mystery, a narrative story or were part of an ongoing series of articles generated more discussion, and more positive discussion. In this context the internet can be in turn a playground and a seminar room, a place for fun and for serious debate. Both are equally important because there are various discourses about the dead body, and archaeology, any one of which may be drawn on to make sense of a particular situation or experience. Any one person's views about the proper treatment of the dead or the appropriateness of archaeology may be more variable and contextual than fixed and principled. These results are similar to those seen by Simpson and Sayer (this volume) in an exploration of visitor reactions, which depend on the context and circumstances of their lives,

their experiences and how the project is presented. In both studies, opinions are mutable and depend on how a project is framed. The opening up of any dialogue, even within an unstructured internet playground, is good news because the experience of debating, either actively by posting or more passively by rating a post, entails active participation in archaeology. Archaeologists who seek new media news coverage must therefore consider carefully how they are going to present their site and findings - whether to wait until they have definitive results, or to go public earlier and present the mystery of discovery and an openness of interpretation that engages and draws people into dialogue.

The implications of our chapter for archaeological practice, especially when human remains are likely to be found, are both clear and simple. First, throughout an excavation engage the local community and the mass media. Second, do not be afraid to inform the media of interim results or finds whose meaning is not yet clear. The implications for the ethics of burial archaeology are also clear: there is no 'public opinion' concerning general principles of how to deal with human remains. Rather, opinion is highly dependent on context, probably even within any one individual. This is why it is so important for archaeologists to be pro-active in informing the public about the context in which any one excavation takes place, and thus to help frame the archaeological stories that news media run and that readers then pass on to their friends.

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