

THE FIRST BOHUNT LECTURE

23 APRIL 1980



DELIVERED BY: DR. PETER REYNOLDS, DIP.ED., CERT.ED., B.A., M.A., PHD.

DIRECTOR OF THE BUTSER ANCIENT FARM PROJECT

AT BOHUNT SCHOOL

SUBJECT: "YESTERDAY, TODAY AND TOMORROW"

"YESTERDAY, TODAY, TOMORROW"

To be invited to deliver an inaugural lecture is to be accorded not only a great privilege but also a considerable responsibility. Since by definition it is the first, the commencement of a series, one is anxious that it should not be the last, the epitaph of that which never was. The concept of an annual named lecture itself is the concept of tradition. An attempt, however puny, to imply the enduring quality of an institution, its values and its importance. An inaugural lecture seeks to establish that tradition, the naming of it a process of stepping forward in time in order to look back over a distinguished list of past speakers, a period punctuated at regular intervals by perhaps seminal, perhaps controversial lectures but always memorable at least within the selectivity of the human memory. To be charged with such a responsibility is a matter of no little moment. The acceptance of that responsibility was not lightly undertaken. By the nature of things my life has been normally involved in dialectic, the question and answer of academic debate, the critical examination of data, the construction of hypotheses and their subsequent testing under rigorous scientific disciplines. Here, however, is the complete contrast. This is not the place for dialectic nor the time to feed off an audience response. There is no opportunity here to sustain an attack, regroup one's forces and mount a counter attack. This is the stark reality of being alone. The invitation including the form of the lecture was to make a statement and by so doing to declare one's vulnerability on the one hand, on the other never to know the degree of that vulnerability.

'To make a statement'. But of what kind? One is reminded of George Orwell's 'Nineteen Eighty Four'. The date is significantly close though fortunately not too close. Tell us what you know and all will be well. Serve the state, fulfil your responsibilities. This is hardly the meaning of those who huddled together in close committee pouring over a list of names seeking out not only the one who would accept the invitation but who would acquit both the committee and himself in an honourable fashion. One can imagine the mental anguish in making the choice. This is, I rather suspect, considerably less than the mental anguish of having made the choice, gained the acceptance, explained the role to that of wondering what the speaker will actually say. It would be invidious to explore the motives of the proposers, still less the reasons for their ultimate choice. Nonetheless the end product is before you, his published theme 'Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow'.

Initially within the confines of my study - a euphemism incidentally for a repository of books in irregular piles, papers in assorted heaps and a multifarious hoard of objects interrupting the general disarray - it is not an empty boast when I say I can find anything within my study, all I need is time - the theme of the lecture sounded ideal. However, on picking up a pen the theme became arcane, tortuous and even arrogant. I hesitate to record the number of times I have carefully set in front of me a neat stack of undefiled white

paper, poised with pen and promptly found some more pressing if less significant task to perform. It is at such moments that one's admiration of such men as Hoffnung and Ustinov increases a thousand fold. Such men as these can instantly entertain and inform, remonstrate with a mild morality, deliver judgement with humour. Of all the problems which beset one, the greatest was how to begin.

Inevitably I spent increasing amounts of time pondering upon the basic question of "Why me?". A new community venture, a school without barriers where the principles of free and unhindered participation are to be fostered - what had I to contribute to such an enterprise? The lack of creative progress in constructing this lecture led to an uncomfortable degree of self-examination, and analysis. It is, despite Aristotle's command *γνωθι σεαυτον*, "know thyself", not a practice I would wholly commend. It seemed, thereafter, more expeditious to examine the image others may have of this particular individual. This practice I recommend even less than self analysis. However, it allowed me to begin upon a path of logic which I propose to explore this evening.

I came to this area initially in July 1972 to take up what must be a quite unique appointment. I was to be the Director of the Butser Ancient Farm Research Project. Indeed the facts behind my appointment to this post may well have significance within the present context. In 1956 at a conference in Dublin a group of eminent archaeologists concerned primarily with the prehistoric period in the United Kingdom reached the conclusion that the only way to confirm or deny the theories and ideas put forward by archaeologists to explain prehistory was to mount a series of practical scientific experiments. Academic gestation (parenthood in this case being the Council for British Archaeology and the British Association for the Advancement of Science) included committee stages, *ad hoc* enterprises and considerable discussion. It was finally decided in the late sixties to set up a prehistoric farm concentrating primarily upon the Iron Age period, a period which broadly spans the first millennium B.C. This particular period was chosen because the weather pattern at that time was the same as the present day. Tacitus, a Roman historian writing in the first century A.D. described the British weather as *foedum*, the most polite translation of which is filthy. One can muse upon the probability that Iron Age conversation, whether in 'P' or Celtic, drew heavily upon the bioclimate for its inspiration.

The decision having been made, implementation was remarkably swift. Hampshire County Council was persuaded by the committee of the value of the project and thereafter through to the present day the County have been committed supporters. Land for the project was thus secured along with outline planning permission. A Trust was approached and a grant of £12,000 spread over three years was obtained.

At that time I was a teacher at a County Grammar School in the West Midlands. However, in addition to imparting complexities of Latin and Greek to often unwilling scholars, I had become involved in the world of archaeology. I was, in fact, a dirt archaeologist. I directed rescue excavations in the city of Worcester and surrounding area. Even at that time I fear I had become addicted to the seven day week sixteen hour day. Addictions necessarily are fed by indulgencies and a penchant for fast motor cars not only disappointed many a rural motorist but also allowed for increased efficiency. This penchant I may add, while it is still a real and present indulgence has to date escaped the notice of the guardians of the law.

However, the challenge of excavation, the retrieval of physical remains became subordinated to implications of those remains as seen within a cultural and economic context. Somehow the standard explanations of the physical remains failed to withstand logical examination. I began to experiment. Employing those resources available to me I involved my sixth form students in a variety of enterprises culminating in the reconstruction of both houses and processes as evidenced by archaeology.

I was, perhaps, fortunate in not receiving a formal training in archaeology and had thus avoided the discipline's prejudices so lovingly imbued into successive generations of students by their convinced and convincing tutors. Indeed my university education, at Trinity College, Dublin, had been devoted to the classics. My Professor of Greek in his introductory lecture summed up the philosophy and approach to education at Trinity. "Gentlemen, you will attend my lectures for the next four years. You will be examined regularly upon the subjects and texts as prescribed in the University Calendar. You are naturally expected to pass these examinations. However, I shall not lecture to this syllabus. I propose to discuss those aspects of Classical Greece, its culture and language which are of especial interest to me and which you will not necessarily find in published form." That particular approach would today be a welcome change to the processed predigested package we have come to recognise as education. A digression perhaps not without point.

The experiments I had carried out in the sixties achieved a certain notoriety. One site on which we had constructed a small Iron Age type house was adjacent to a celebrated local hill fort. Visiting the hill fort an eminent archaeologist explained the ditches and banks and surviving house platforms to his son. On being asked what kind of house people lived in in the Iron Age, the archaeologist unwittingly turned round seeking inspiration and said "Why, just like that one over there".

This notoriety, embellished by several published papers bringing some reappraisal to bear upon previously 'solved' problems, perhaps persuaded the committee that such an individual would best be absorbed into academia. I accepted the invitation to become the Director of the Ancient Farm.

It is always interesting to consider the reactions of one's colleagues when leaving an institution after a period of some years of close collaboration. I confess to being very amused by the consternation and horror my resignation provoked. A job without a career structure! No pension! No security! Superannuation! On reflection my amusement became tinged with sadness. It seemed then and even now that the deep-seated motivation in life for so many is a financial preparation for death. My own view, enhanced perhaps by the experience of "writing off" a sports car when in the midst of the turmoil of noise and rending metal the mind is splendidly concentrated, is that today is exciting, tomorrow is fascinating.

The acceptance of the post and my arrival in Petersfield heralded a new chapter in my life. In effect it began a second career. My initial problem was simply to evaluate the precise nature of the job and to define the concept of an Ancient Farm. My presence here tonight can perhaps be traced directly back to those summer months of 1972. I had been presented with £4,000 a year for three years out of which I was to pay myself, a secretary and capital expenditure upon the production of an ancient farm. The land area for the farm known as Little Butser, a topographically contained spur projecting northwards from Butser Hill, a celebrated beauty spot in an area of outstanding beauty. I was unwittingly in the midst of a community. That community swiftly recognised my arrival and equally swiftly disabused any ideas I might have had of anonymity. To suggest that the reception was hostile would be quite untrue. On the other hand I was very much aware of a not inactive audience of close observers. "Perhaps he will go away, one never knows."

Indeed my naivete extended beyond the local community. I had also unwittingly entered an academic community in which sophisticated hostility was de rigueur. Indeed the problems posed by being thrust into the midst of a local community are, by comparison, quite minor.

I had, in effect, to face a three fold challenge, the local community, the broader academic community and the most important of all the challenge of validating a new approach to the remote past. What exactly did one mean by an 'ancient farm'. The purpose of the project as laid out in the prospectus was to construct and operate a farm dating to approximately 300 B.C. The object was and is to test by simulation and experiment the theories and ideas, the interpretations and explanations of the agricultural economy of the last of the major periods of prehistory, the Iron Age. In reality, however, I have built an open air laboratory devoted to prehistoric archaeology and agriculture. Further I have allowed this laboratory to be my contribution to both the local and the academic community. Inevitably a community passes judgement upon those in its midst. That judgement, one might add, is subject to regular and often irrational review. An ancient farm undoubtedly qualifies as an ideal spur to a more continuous state of review than most other more normal elements of society.

The clear distinction between history and prehistory lies in the documentation of the former. For prehistory, apart from a few references made by the Classical writers, we rely entirely upon the material evidence obtained by archaeological excavation and field work. Even the written references we have are the product of political commentators who were writing for the benefit or otherwise of politicians and consequently should be accorded the same degree of suspicion we reserve for their modern day counterparts. The basic evidence for prehistory comprises post-holes and pits, ditches and banks, fragments of pottery and bone, carbonised material like timber and seeds, occasional metal objects, rarely waterlogged deposits rich in environmental evidence. These are the tools of the archaeologists. The durable remains of a society which he has to piece together in order to provide some understanding of the people. I believe that the prehistorian is much closer to real people than his colleague the historian simply because he deals with the physical remains of society. The historian, in a sense, devotes himself to events, places and personalities which by and large are irrelevant to the community. Kings and generals, charters and councils, while their decisions ultimately can alter a way of life, a country's destiny, are remote and unreal. There is little or no correlation between the life of the law givers and policy makers to that of the ordinary man. The archaeologist, on the other hand, when he discovers a ring or amulet knows that once it adorned a finger or arm, when he finds a prehistoric sickle he can be sure that once it was used by farmer to reap his crops, when he excavates the remains of a house, he can be convinced that its rafters echoed the laughter and grief of real people. The archaeologist deals, in fact, with the debris of a community. His task is to evaluate the material evidence, slight though it may be, in order to understand communities of yesterday. The Ancient Farm, my own task, is to test these evaluations for validity by carrying out specific scientific experiments. I have pioneered a precise methodology over the past few years which is perhaps worth recording at this point. It depends upon a simple cyclical formula commencing with the archaeological data upon which is based an hypothesis. The second stage comprises the construction of an experiment, itself a series of replicated tests, which is designed to invalidate the hypothesis. It would be far easier, of course, to adopt the traditional approach and seek to validate the hypothesis, by careful manipulation or omission of evidence. This practice, however, is best left to the politicians who are peculiarly suited to the purpose. Subsequent to the experiments by comparing their results with the archaeological evidence one can observe the presence of any correlation. If there is a correlation one can tentatively accept the hypothesis as valid. If there is no correlation one can reject the hypothesis as not only invalid but wrong. Thereafter one forms further hypotheses to be subjected to similar testing. It is also important to realise that more than one valid hypothesis can be sustained by the same basic data.

This is the methodology which underpins the Butser Ancient Farm Research Project. It is uncompromising and rigid. Gradually it has won the respect of not only the local community but also the community at large including academia. The farm itself as an outdoor laboratory is unique in British and world archaeology. The methodology, the philosophy of approach and the execution of experiment has brought it national and international recognition. The farm and the demonstration area provide the physical presence of that laboratory.

From the outset it has been my avowed policy not to create an ivory tower of research hedged about by prohibition but to bring to the community the results of scientific investigation in such a way that they can not only see the results but also understand the research techniques. There has been no attempt at any time to go back into the past, to play act an Iron Age way of life. Indeed I am convinced that we are firmly locked in our time. There is no way in which we can enter the minds of the people of the remote or even recent past. In our research into the Iron Age, into yesterday, we bring to bear all the modern aids at our disposal because we study only the objects, the structures and the processes of the time. The people, their knowledge and skills, the ways by which they solved their problems, their hopes and fears are denied to us. Any attempt to put today's people back to yesterday founders upon the knowledge and experience each one of us has of today.

Paradoxically our research is devoted to increasing our understanding of the past and this unequivocally implies the people. However, the concentration is upon the practices, processes and production. One effectively explores the boundaries of probability. In this context a major contribution the farm has made has been a realisation of the agricultural potential of the prehistoric varieties of cereals. However, this is not the time to indulge in a reappraisal of the Iron Age.

Inevitably because the farm or laboratory actually exists as an entity, because we have built a demonstration area designed as a living historical museum and because both have a considerable visual impact, they now form part of the local area. Not quite an amenity but certainly a contribution within the community. Naturally because the enterprise is unique ones notoriety is enhanced.

Regularly the site is visited by representatives of the media, radio, television, newspapers and magazines. 'What does it feel like to be an Iron Age farmer?' I learned how to communicate if only to field such questions as this. After one interview held part on site, part in a local inn I was rather surprised to read in the ensuing magazine article that 'Peter J. Reynolds is an eccentric'. It went on to say that we needed eccentrics like him. I was somewhat mollified. Perhaps this is even a reason why I have been asked to present this inaugural lecture. However, I am reminded of a description of California where it was described as the only place in the world where eccentrics can be found in groups. If I am an eccentric then I would like to believe that I am within a group of eccentrics.

My job is to research into yesterday using all the available techniques of today. I communicate with today's people. I share in today's world and here perhaps I would like to offer one or two comments upon my reactions, my hopes and fears. If indeed I am an eccentric and confess to it perhaps I will be forgiven more readily for any imagined or real extremism. As I have indicated earlier, within the context of the research there is no room for compromise because by definition it is acceptance of lower standards if not an actual admission of defeat. Compromise pervades our society like a cancer and yet it is somehow recognised as a hallmark of democracy. In some strange way it has become the accepted practice to adopt extreme positions in order to come to a sensible compromise. In so doing there is a tacit encouragement on all sides for deceit, to

conceal the real objectives by seeking the unreal. One can compare this behaviour pattern to the very young who are anxious to discover the boundaries of sensible freedom. Our society seems to be continually subjected to opposing sides, the workers and management, the people and government, government and unions, teachers and pupils, children and parents, us and them. Inherent in this system is not the balance of opposites since in none of the above instances are there real opposites, they are all people, all parts of the community, but rather the source of conflict. Our society would seem, while vehemently denying the possibility, to be indulging in the straightforward Marxist 'Law of Clash'. The much-vaunted compromise is viewed as the laudable result.

While I regret compromise and all that it implies I regret even more the erosion of personal identity within our society. While it is not difficult to appreciate how the event has occurred and indeed how inevitable it was given an increasing and ever more mobile population, it is nonetheless a source of great concern. Generally speaking our society is boxed into small contained and docketed compartments. We are given a number at birth, at marriage and at death. We are located by numbers. Even our basic information comes from a box. The individual is ever more insistently being reduced to anonymity. To develop this theme further would be treading a well worn path which I am sure we all recognise and fear.

The reason I accepted the invitation to give this inaugural lecture and the reason I chose the title 'Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow' are one and the same. I feel that the Bohunt Community School by its avowed intention of providing an open society is seeking to provide by example a Tomorrow where the individual is prized as an individual with an identity; where compromise is unnecessary because deceit and concealment do not exist and decisions are reached not from posed extremes but from an appreciation of need and the provision of the best solution not necessarily based upon the lowest common denominator. The method by which this brave tomorrow may be approached is in my view not to have an image but simply to be. That is to say by providing an open school, accessibility is assured not when it is convenient but at all times. As in the uncompromising and unyielding methodology on which I have created the Butser Ancient Farm Project, there is no room for pretence. One's house is in order because the individual is in order.

In conclusion Euripides in perhaps his finest play "The Bacchae" makes the observation

Τε βακχοι " πολλοι μεν γαρ θεοφοροι, παυροι δε
- Many are staffbearers, few are initiates

Here at Bohunt School one is saying there need not be, indeed, there should not be this dichotomy. All can and should be initiates. If in my own small way with the research project I direct I have achieved a dissolution of this dichotomy, if I have succeeded in sharing with the community my work then I have succeeded as a member of that community. I am convinced that the Bohunt enterprise is the right way to succeed simply because it is committed to sharing.

I would like to end by quoting a short section from Le Carre's book 'Smileys People'. It is part of a discussion between Smiley, the now retired but secretly re-enlisted head of the secret service and the present head of the secret service who is anxious to persuade Smiley to undertake a job on his behalf but contrary to government instruction. The question is an attempt to discover Smiley's motives -

"You travelling on business, or for pleasure in this thing.

Which is it?"

Smiley's reply was also slow in coming and as indirect:

"I was never conscious of pleasure" he said. "Or perhaps I mean:
of the distinction."