

From the Director

MY FIRST
ENCOUNTER
WITH
PHILADELPHIA

PHILADELPHIA AND THE Penn Museum have long held a special place in my heart. In 1980, renowned British archaeologist Colin Renfrew organized a special plenary session at the American Anthropological Association meetings in Philadelphia. I was one of eighteen young British (and Danish) university lecturers who formed part of

his entourage. Our instructions were precise—we were each charged to purchase a liter of Glenfiddich at Heathrow airport and provide, if I recall correctly, a further \$20 each toward a party fund.

By various routes and stratagems, this cohort made its way to Philadelphia and the Museum. My route took a circuitous path through New England and western Pennsylvania thanks to a lecture tour arranged by my colleague Graeme Barker that took in Wesleyan, Brown, and Harvard universities, a mini-conference at SUNY-Binghamton (where Klavs Randsborg joined us), and then Pittsburgh, Gettysburg, and finally Philadelphia.

Our first awesome engagement in Philly was a reception at the University Museum, the official name of the Museum at the time. Its labyrinthine halls and galleries echoed the cheery nervousness of our fellow Britons as we viewed its celebrated collections, the fruits of its legendary excavations. In 1980 it seemed dazzling. The Museum's Director was Martin Biddle, a fellow Briton, who was Britain's most distinguished excavator, possibly the finest in post-war Europe. He bade us welcome.

Our cohort of young archaeologists included economic prehistorians (including myself), so-called New Archaeologists (who had been greatly influenced by the American archaeologist Lewis Binford), and, for the first time, a new breed of archaeologists (guided by our colleague Ian Hodder) that came to be labeled post-processualists. Gathered in the Museum, many of us, new to the USA, had a distinctly uneasy sense of what we had been bidden to do by Colin Renfrew—to

take American archaeology by storm at the following day's plenary session.

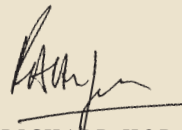
I do not have the space here to describe the amazing events of that day. I will say, however, that I vividly recall my profound terror as I gazed out on a vast audience of famous archaeologists. I made my 18-minute presentation, using anthropological models and metaphors to seduce an American audience, and directly challenged Martin Biddle's own interpretations about early urban history in post-Roman Britain.

After a number of provocative presentations—Robert Whallon's and Ian Hodder's being the most memorable—the discussion that ensued soon reached a visceral level, wickedly encouraged by Colin Renfrew's masterful chairmanship of the session. The encounter grasped the vast audience, creating animated divisions as the previously new guard sensed they were about to be consigned to history!

The party that Colin Renfrew threw in his hotel suite the following evening—putting to good use all the alcohol we had brought from Britain—capped the entire trip. Never have I been to a party like it.

Two years later, Cambridge University Press published *Ranking, Resource, and Exchange: Aspects of the Archaeology of Early European Society* (1982, edited by Colin Renfrew and Stephen Shennan), a somber, but elegant account of our Philadelphia session that scarcely conveyed the generosity of our American colleagues and the untrammelled intellectual excitement of those days.

Philadelphia, beginning at the Penn Museum, thrillingly opened our eyes to American archaeology. As the recently appointed Williams Director of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, it is great to be back. 🏠



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