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Editorial

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As we bring the fifteenth volume to a close, there is conflict that is affecting Archaeology as a whole. Both Archaeology and History have become enmeshed in the Culture Wars that have been weaponized by the Right in America; where America leads, these days the UK appears to follow. The rumblings could be heard when, on a 2019 edition of BBC TV's *Question Time*, Jacob Rees-Mogg spoke about the British concentration camps of the Boer War and said that the death rate was the same as it was in Glasgow at the time. He also spoke about the camps having been established to protect civilians during all-out war. Both he and his opponent, Grace Blakeley, showed a lack of specific knowledge: Ms Blakeley stated that concentration camps were invented by the British, when in fact they were first developed as 'reconcentrados' in the War of Cuban Independence as Spain tried to suppress the Cuban rebels. Both Britain and the USA subsequently adapted the idea to their own situations, and in all cases, the camps were appalling breaches of human rights. Rees-Mogg spoke as though there was a consistent mortality rate in the British camps, when in fact the rate varied considerably and dropped below mortality rates in British urban environments when they were taken out of military control and put under the Civil Service. However, for much of the existence of the camps, the death rate was considerably higher than in late Victorian Glasgow; it also ignores the terrible loss of life in the camps for the black population. Furthermore, both speakers missed the fact that the camps themselves were not the main crime against humanity. Rather, it was the scorched earth policy that made the camps a necessity. Rees-Mogg was correct to say that they were 'put in the camps for their protection' (BBC 2019, 00:21), but there would have been no need to provide facilities for the civilians if their farms had not been destroyed, their cattle slaughtered, and the waterholes poisoned.

The point here is that history and archaeology are being used in current political debates but without due attention to the full historical picture. For Rees-Mogg, there were elements of the historical situation that could present the British Empire as an entity that made mistakes but which was fundamentally decent and benign – not a description that many Indian or Boer academics might accept. The full picture shows that while there was not a genocidal intent to the British camps in South Africa, the camps were nevertheless a crime against humanity, as was the scorched earth policy. As any other empire, the British Empire was coercive and met protest and dissent with violence – it was certainly not benign. Rees-Mogg was using history to support his conservative world view, but he was not prepared to consider the parts of history that did not fit his chosen narrative.

More recently, statues have come to the fore, and there has been a spate of statue removals or non-removals. Statues have become politicized, and attitudes towards

the situation vary. Some see the removal of statues as an attempt to erase history (though it is not clear how removing a statue removes the historical records about that person), others see a necessity to remove symbols of past transgressions such as slavery to demonstrate a rejection of those transgressions, while still others seek a middle way where the statues remain but have information plaques that contextualize the individual. None of this reflects the possibility that most people pay no attention to the statue of someone they have never heard about and would neither miss the statue if it were removed nor support slavery if it were not removed.

Statues can create a great deal of contention, as a situation in Swakopmund in Namibia reveals. A statue to the fallen Kriegsmarine soldiers from the Herero Revolt, the Marine Denkmal (Fig. 1), still stands in Swakopmund despite Namibia having been independent since 21 March 1990. The local Herero population, descendants of those who suffered a German genocide in 1904–5 (Bridgman and Worley 2004), naturally want the statue removed. The local white population is substantially the descendants of the German colonizers who remained; the surnames are German, there are Germanic flourishes to the local colonial architecture, and German is still spoken by many.



Figure 1. Marine Denkmal, Swakopmund June 2016

They do not want the monument removed. The monument remains (unlike the Reiterdenkmal in Windhoek) largely because of the surviving power of the German community in Swakopmund. However, powerful as they are, this would be of little consequence if it were not for the fact that a lot of Namibian politicians do not support its removal. The Herero, particularly as a consequence of the genocide, are a minority group in an ethnically diverse nation. Roughly half the population are Ovambo, with the Herero forming about 7.5% of the modern population and only just larger than the White population of 6.4% (World Population Review 2021). The Ovambo were largely unaffected by the genocide and do not see it as their issue, while SWAPO, who have governed Namibia since independence, has an explicitly inclusive and reconciliatory approach to the past, which does not see the genocide as something to be raked up. There is also the fact that the Herero were heavily conscripted into the SWADF (South-West African Defence Force), the military force established by the South Africans who ruled the area from 1915 to 1990. As a result, the Herero were involved in fighting SWAPO insurgents on behalf of the South Africans, undermining further their ability to get their historical concerns recognized (Gewald 2003). As a result, although there have been attempts to remove the statue, it remains standing, caught up in the competing historical and political narratives of our time.

And what of Britain? We have had some statue removals, some official and some unofficial. We have had the right-wing commentators thunder righteously about the erasing of history as a result. We have had re-naming of buildings (I have recently returned to the Molema Building which I left in March 2020 as the Gregory Building; a notable geologist with racist opinions is no longer commemorated and a South African doctor and ANC activist is). In the case of the Molema Building, I am pleased that the change has been made, I am pleased to have discovered the unsavoury nature of some of John Gregory's views. Nonetheless, we have replaced the commemoration of one powerful male with the commemoration of another. Molema is not white, but he was a member of an African royal family. The leftie in me cries out that all of this remains a commemoration of the elite, the rich and the powerful, and that we should be getting away from commemorating those who dominate us and instead commemorate those who serve us, such as soldiers, nurses, charity workers, etc. Still better, why do we persist in singling out individuals for commemoration when all their efforts relied on the support of those around them?

More importantly than rhetorical posturing about commemorations such as statues or the naming of buildings, History and Archaeology are currently under threat in the UK. Major Archaeology departments are being closed down by university administrations who pay no attention to the achievements of these departments but are driven by a government obsession with STEM. In 2021, there have been several attempts to close departments: the University of Chester tried to close the Department of History and Archaeology but backed off under intense pressure. The Department of Archaeology at the University of Sheffield has been less fortunate and despite immense pressure, the decision was taken to close it. Sheffield's Archaeology department has been a giant in the field, with its staff and students

being major players in British Archaeology and on the world stage. Closing it is such a retrograde step that it is difficult to understand what possible logic there is to the decision. The Department of Archaeology at the University of Worcester is currently under threat of closure, and at the time of writing, members of staff have been given notice that the courses will be closing. This is blamed on a reduction of numbers of students seeking to do Archaeology, and in a climate of EU students being charged a fortune to study in Britain and English students racking up huge student loan debts, there is a disincentive to choose Archaeology. Aligned to this is the idea that students should be getting jobs that will earn them big bucks, and it is hardly surprising that numbers are dropping. Archaeology has never been funded properly and has constantly had to survive on Arts funding for a subject that requires labs, field trips, etc.

History has tended to sit back slightly smugly (I can say that as someone in a History department) because the popularity of History has insulated the subject when university administrators start looking for cuts. Indeed, Arts as a whole have tended to be net contributors to university balance sheets because of large teaching grants and relatively low overheads. However, the same pressures noted for Archaeology above are affecting History. Numbers of applications in general are falling, and the ability to plug the gaps with overseas students is declining. While the universities' Eye of Sauron may not linger too long on History departments at the moment, new and replacement posts will become more challenging, and we may find a less supportive atmosphere in future. We are already, in both History and Archaeology, under pressure from those who seek a 'patriotic' narrative that builds British self-esteem; from this side of the border, that seems like a relentlessly colonialist and imperialist venture.

The current dangers are well recognized within both History and Archaeology, and there are many voices raised in opposition to the current pressures. Chester was saved by the strength of the reaction, and though Sheffield refused to change their minds, this was not the fault of the efforts to change the decision. There is a strong appetite in the general population of the UK for historical and archaeological narratives, and a continuing need to give voice to those who are left out of traditional narratives. Archaeology and History are vital in giving a nuanced and balanced narrative so that there are correctives to politically driven narratives (left or right) that can cause so much division within society. We need to protect the teaching and researching of the past, and we need to make sure that there is no dilution of planning regulations.

Moving onto the contents of this issue of the *Journal*, we have three papers on widely diverging subjects, and for the first time in the life of the *Journal*, almost all the authors are female. It is a real shame that this is something worth commenting upon, but at the same time, it is a satisfying indication that the gender balance in Conflict Archaeology might improve. None of these papers are published because they are

by women; they are published because these are women who are working on topics within Conflict Archaeology, and they have important things to say.

The first paper, by Stephanie Selover, is a consideration of women and weaponry in Early Bronze Age Anatolia that considers the evidence for the use of weaponry by women through the burial record. She considers whether the longstanding assumption that weapons as grave goods indicate male burials can be maintained, while also discussing the nature of Early Bronze Age Anatolian society and why women might have been using weapons. There is much to consider here, particularly about our tendency to use heuristics when interpreting the past. We make assumptions that are anhistoric or anachronistic, which impede our ability to understand the past. This paper provides an excellent example of the application of feminist theory to archaeological data; the true test of a theory is how well it deals with a dataset and explains it, and this is a great opportunity to see how well the approach works. You as a reader will make up your own minds about how successful an approach this is, but for me, the result is excellent.

The second paper, by Sarah Ashbridge and David O'Mara, assesses the development and use of identification tags by the Prussians and then the German Empire between 1866 and the Austro-Prussian War and the end of WWI in 1918. They note that there were objections to the ID tags on the grounds that it belittled the individual and treated them as though they were pet dogs. The stages of development of the identification discs are traced, with a discussion of the changing forms of the tags, but this leads onto the fascinating topic of how the dead were treated and how death was dealt with by the army. The authors discuss the grave and burial culture that emerged as the individual became far more important in commemoration. Rather than mass burials in pits as had happened in the Napoleonic Wars, there was a general shift in focus for individual soldiers being buried in individual graves as far as was possible, all depending on the identification of the individual by their identification disc. This is a fascinating addition to the study of commemoration and war graves and well-worth reading.

The final paper of the issue is on Christmas Island in World War II by Helena van der Riet and Jane Fyfe. They have undertaken survey work on Christmas Island and have identified several structures relating to the Japanese occupation of the island, which were occupied from 1943 to August 1945. The occupation was scaled back as the war raged further afield, and the island's distance from events is revealed by the fact that the Japanese scaled back the occupation on several occasions before finally withdrawing on 24 August 1945, after the end of the war. The British only reoccupied the island on 18 October 1945. Despite this, the island is rich in material remains of the occupation. The results of the fieldwork indicate that even although the island remained far from the active combat of the Pacific War, the Japanese followed a standard approach to fortifying the island. The considerations of where to fortify are thus very illuminating in terms of the decision-making process. The paper represents an initial phase of fieldwork, so there is much more to be done and we look forward to seeing what more will emerge from the island.

The crisis in reviewing is easing now, and the issues of Volume 16 should come out in quick succession to this issue. We would like to thank our readers for their forbearance throughout this pandemic and look forward to continuing to bring you the work that is being undertaken across the world in Conflict Archaeology.

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