

Prehistoric Archaeology and National Education.

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The scientific investigator is largely wasting his time if his results never become widely known and do not influence his generation. The same, of course, applies to the archaeologist. What is the good of accumulating collections if no one ever utilises them, or of making excavations if no one ever sees or hears of the results. Indeed actual damage is done because materials which might have been of importance to savants are withdrawn and become no longer available for study. Is it not perhaps a fact that nowadays, when a great deal has become known about the prehistoric archaeology of many parts of the world, too much importance is attached to the work of the investigator in the field as against that of the systemiser and teacher—to the man and woman who actually passes on the new knowledge to mankind? In considering prehistoric archaeology, then, besides ensuring the publication of accounts of recent discoveries in the field it is reasonable to consider how archaeological knowledge can be dispersed among those who may not be actual investigators in the subject. The plea behind this short article is that not only should archaeology have a place in higher education—Universities and institutes of archaeology— but that schools should also be considered. Prehistoric archaeology has a universal appeal; it can be a very popular subject. It is not a recondite one like Mathematics, only to be understood by the few. While an admirable hobby subject for those whose main work in the world lies in other fields, it has a definite influence on the philosophy or at least

on the outlook on life of any intelligent man or woman. Finally it has a very marked educational value for it deals with origins, origins of ourselves and our cultures. It is therefore of direct interest to every one of us and to our children. The subject itself concerns humanity, yet the methods of study are scientific. In no other subject does one find this admirable educational synthesis! Early prehistory is bound up with late geology and the study of geology is founded on the geological law of succession —stratigraphy. Any child can be made to realise the truth of this profound law. Draw a figure in red on a piece of paper; when it is dry draw another over it in green; which drawing was made first? A child of the meanest intelligence will answer correctly. Again make a section of strata using sand, earth, pebbles, etc., building it up before the child layer on layer. Then disturb the succession with a penholder. The child, even when not particularly clever, will at once realise the significance of the phrase added to any definition of the geological law of succession namely: "should there have been no subsequent disturbance".

Prehistoric archaeology deals with the human story throughout immense periods of time. The consideration of the great antiquity not only of mankind but of civilisations, and also of their rise and decay, enlarges the outlook. Through a close study of prehistory one begins to realise that the story of man's past cannot be told merely as a series of cycles of culture which rose and fell, emerged and disappeared; one comes to see that the story has not been as it were all in one plane, in two dimensions. Rather it has been spiral in form, and it is the upward movement of the spiral that is the significance of real progress. No one need fear that a study by children of the early story of mankind will upset their beliefs in the eternal verities, rather will it help them to see them in operation in the evolution of mankind.

It is not suggested that prehistoric archaeology should be taught in the primary schools, but it should have a prominent place in all education of senior children. In England all boys and girls have a chance nowadays to take one or more papers in what is called the General Certificate of Education. Recently a paper on early archaeology at ordinary level has been added to the series of options, and this year (1952) there are already candidates taking it. Naturally Section C of the syllabus which is concerned with the archaeology of the candidate's own land would differ in the case of different countries, but sections A and B which deal with methods and prin-

ciples and the general background of archaeological study, are of universal importance.

Knowledge of a common heritage knits people together. The interest in prehistoric archaeology is widely spread and potentially almost universal. But as yet there is little systematic instruction below University level. This should be examined. It is said that children have no time to deal with subjects of no money-making use to them in after life. Surely Algebra, Latin, Greek and other subjects too enter into this category! It is said that there are no teachers. When such a fascinating subject as prehistory is in question this problem will soon solve itself! No, from very many points of view, not least because of its interest to all and its educational value, prehistoric archaeology could with great advantage to succeeding generations figure prominently in the curriculum of secondary schools, and I herewith invite you to consider carefully this possibility. The syllabus mentioned above is here appended:

GENERAL CERTIFICATE OF EDUCATION

Syllabus in Archaeology

(Ordinary level)

SECTION A

Methods of Principles of Archaeology

1. Scope, limits, and objectives of archaeological study. Definition of terms commonly used (1). Prehistory, protohistory, antiquarianism. Sources of our information about the prehistoric past.

2. Methods used to obtain and analyse information —chance finds, excavations in open sites and closed homes field surveys, air photography, stratigraphy, typology and technology of material finds, study of state of preservation, association, distribution maps.

3. Dating, relative and absolute; methods of dating used —astronomical, geological (i. e. ice ages and varves), pollen analysis, associated datable objects.

SECTION B

The General Outline of the Results of Archaeological Study

1. The geological background; eoliths and the dawn of mankind; the old stone age; the mesolithic age: typical implements.

(1) E. g. such terms as artifact, industry, culture, civilization, culture and time sequences.

2. The neolithic civilization and its origin —domestication of animals, agriculture, pottery-making, the grinding and polishing technique for tool-making.

3. The beginnings of metal-working —early bronze age societies in Europe.

4. General notions of the iron age in Europe and the links with written history.

5. Briefly, the outline of the story of the origin of civilization in the Near East.

SECTION C

Candidates will be examined on this section of the syllabus by interviews. They will be expected to send to the examiner before the interview a written account of any archaeological work at which they have assisted and/or any studies they have made in local museums.

The Syndicate wish to emphasize the dangers of irresponsible excavation.