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ARCHAEOLOGICAL WONDERLANDS

Hardwicke Knight
Broad Bay

Wonder is the source of all effective scientific enquiry. Wonder first got hold of me in the dark cellars of my rambling old four-storey home in North London, during the air raids of the First World War. Those cellars, at other times, terrified me because of the bogeymen with skeletal arms that reached out and clutched at me. But, with my family, down in those depths during a raid, I was brave and I could explore. I discovered that there must be cellars into which there was no entry. I counted five cellars, yet there were eight rooms on the ground floor. There were hidden spaces where no man had entered in the last hundred years. One day I would venture into the unknown.

Not all air raids took me down into the basement. In 1915 I watched from my attic room window a zeppelin in flames over Cuffley, some miles to the north. My brother, ten years my senior, watched with me. Then he suddenly rushed off, got on his bicycle, and in the morning returned with pieces of twisted aluminium. My mother said I was not to touch them, they would be poisoned. But my thoughts were with the German crew of that flaming white ship in the air— did they roast to death in their gondola, or did they jump overboard?

On the 16th June 1916 I was playing in the garden. High over my head were dozens of fighter planes and puffs of smoke. Only the maid was at home; she tried to get me indoors, when there was a crash of broken slates on the roof. I realised the thuds all around me were shrapnel and the puffs of smoke were shells exploding. I saw two German Bothas come down nose first with black smoke coming out of their tails, and two bombs fell on a row of shops in nearby De Bouvoir Street. I went indoors and, with the maid, waited for the all-clear sirens.

The war was over: my brother had a Gypsy caravan on a piece of land called Pole Hill, in Essex, owned by T. E. Lawrence (of Arabia). Lawrence had a shanty there where he was working on his *Seven Pillars*. He had a bed and a lamp in a loft which he entered by a rope ladder through a manhole. It was a secret, but he showed me. It was a great experience when he took me on a walk through Epping Forest. As we crossed Fairmead Bottom he stopped at King Charles's Oak and picked up some dry pieces of wood. We went on, through High Beach, to the earthwork known as Amesbury Banks. He stooped down and

picked up a flint arrowhead. It was lying near a rabbit hole. “You see”, he said “the rabbits will do your archaeological digging for or you.” Later, when it was getting dark he showed me how to use the oak sticks to make a fire.

It was the year 1922, breakfast was over, my father wiped his moustache and pushed back his chair. He opened the *Daily Mail* and excitedly read to the family how the great archaeologist Howard Carter had crawled through an opening into Tuthankamen’s tomb and found gold. A few days later I was with a crowd charging around and waving “Tuts”: it was all the craze.

I did not have to wait long for a day when the whole family were out, including the maid. I rolled back the floor covering and managed to lift a couple of floor boards with the aid of a crowbar and then to squeeze myself between two floor joists, only making sure with a broomstick, before I dropped in, that I would be able to reach up to get out. I explored with a candle every bit of two cellar areas. There was no gold. The only artefact was a claw hammer with a broken claw. I wondered, did the carpenter nailing down the boards accidentally dropped is hammer, but was too fat to squeeze between the joists as I had?

Many years later, while exploring the basements of Belmont House, Dunedin, with the owner, we found a carpenter’s tool under stairs where he must have left it and boxed it in. It bore his initials, which matched up with a carpenter’s initials in a 1860 directory, the date the house was built. The study of Belmont House was published with Stuart Greif under the title *Cutten: Letters Revealing the Life and Times of William Henry Cutten*.

During the Second World War, in Gloucestershire, an Italian prisoner of war, who was working on farms, and dug our garden for us, needed a bit of adventure, so I took him to a local hilltop, Oxenton Hill, and we picked up numerous sherds of black pottery of the La Tene culture, and made a little study of the methods of decoration. Nearby, in a wood, there was a Roman Villa site. Here again the rabbits had been helpful and had kicked out Samian pottery, decorated largely by the thumb nail. There was a mosaic tile floor, which greatly surprised my Italian friend. “Roman”, he said, “why here in England?” So I gave him a history lesson on the back of an envelope.

As a result of the Great Depression I joined the R.A.F. and found that archaeology was a popular hobby with some of the pilot officers. On one occasion we flew over the site of Silchester, hoping to pick out at least a grid street plan but the light was not right. However on our way back the officer thrust out his hand pointing to a lost village clearly shown in the late afternoon light; also some furrows, deserted since the Black Plague of the 14th century. He was pleased with the photographs, and I was recommended to his fellow pilots.

In the mid-1930s I was travelling in the Caucasus, in Armenia, and in Turkey. I found a French party excavating a Greek temple site, directed by the

École Archæologique Française at Athens, and was allowed to push a wheelbarrow. But it was not shafts and capitals, however glorious, that aroused my sense of wonder: it was the white peak of Ararat, Agri Dagh, far away on the horizon across the Araxes Plain.

I found a good man, the Catholicos at that most holy of places, Echmiatzin. He told me there was a monastery at the foot of the great gorge in the side of the Holy Mountain, where the monks climbed and found remains of the Ark of Noah. They had a piece at Echmiatzin, only one of their monks had buried it in fear of the Russian Red Guards who were contemptuous of religious relics. He did not apparently know, and nor did I until I read the surveyor Friedrich Parrot's *Journey to Ararat*, that the monastery of St James had been destroyed when a rim of ice of the volcanic cone of the mountain had broken away and caused a great catastrophe in the Ahura Gorge, as a result of which the monks perished.

My experience on Ararat is written up by Berlitz, Cummings, and others, but the dry archaeological facts are overlooked. When in I was there in mid-1930s and again thirty years later, on a shelf at 14,000 ft on the 17,000 ft mountain, I excavated caves and discovered material which, later, I showed to curators at the Archaeological Museum at Ankara, and which they immediately identified as from the Chalcolithic period. In particular there was a small greenstone adze and some flakes. This was evidence of man being at that high altitude on the mountain at the time of Noah and Tubal Cane, which was not surprising, since today the goatherds take their flocks up there for pasture when the Araxes Plain is a desert. I also saw the rainbow which Noah saw; it occurs faithfully every afternoon after the midday sun evaporates snow on the peak. This lends some historical plausibility to the poetic Biblical story. If they take their herds to this high shelf today to avoid the summer drought, so in Noah's time. There is a drawing made by a French traveller in the 17th century showing a "wooden structure" exactly on this ledge at 14,000 ft.

When I came to New Zealand in 1957 I soon found Dr Skinner in a basement den at the Otago Museum, and sat with him during lunch hours while he told me his theories about Maori migrations and the significance of the patu. I was a founder member of the Otago Anthropological Society and elected one of its first presidents. Dr Skinner encouraged me to develop a museum exhibit of the history of photography in New Zealand and arranged for the museum board to give me a gallery. I participated with archaeological excavations organised by the university, offering technical instruction in site planning and recording, and the use of the plane table, alidade and dumpy level for the production of orthodox site plans. This was taken full advantage of when I was invited to act as surveyor to the Pitcairn Island Expedition of 1963–64 under the direction of Peter Gathercole. The map I made of the island, showing some 400

place names, is recognized by the Royal Geographic Society and the NZ Navy, and is printed and available in Germany where there is much interest in the Pacific.

It was a privilege to be able to provide photographic records and site plans and work on nearly all the excavations carried out during the 1960s, 70s and 80s.

Only on a few occasions have I worked independently: at Ringaringa, Stewart Island, (published in the Newsletter); at Huriawa Pa, where an ahi komau (perpetual fire oven) was found, and published in the Newsletter; and at Harwood Township, where Octavius Harwood once dug up and advertised for sale “one hundred moa skeletons complete with crania”, and found evidence of a large community (which explained the considerable number of umu ti found in the hinterland), radiocarbon dated to 1450.

I am most grateful to all those who have made possible my adventures in archaeology and have been on digs with me, which have always been wonderful scientific and social experiences. Outstanding in interest has been the survey of the occupation sites in the Bay of Islands, the air photography of the Waitaki River Mouth site, the mapping of Pitcairn Island, and the study I made of the umu ti on the Otago Peninsula. Of much to satisfaction to myself has been the study made of the Upper Araxes River Valley, associated with the early cultivation of emmer and einkorn wheat and the domestication of sheep and goats.