

## IX. Conference reports

**Colin Renfrew, Mike Schiffer** and **Ezra Zubrow** recount **Personal histories in archaeological theory and method**, also speaking (and chaired by) **Graeme Barker, Robin Dennell, Rob Foley, Paul Mellars** and **Marek Zvelebil** as discussants. Colin Renfrew and Mike Schiffer depicted in the famous Anatomy Lecture by Kate Clark. CUP 1982.

**Held on Monday 23 October 2006**, in the Biffen Theatre, Genetics Building, near the McDonald Institute, 4–6 pm. Tea beforehand\* from 3.15pm in the McDonald.

\* Taking tea together was a central aspect to an earlier phase in the evolution of Cambridge archaeology, so a tea ceremony is a fitting part of this retrospect.

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The following account was contributed by **Pamela Jane Smith**:

‘It’s a great shame,’ Martin Carver (2007: 6) wrote in his editorial for the latest 2007 March *Antiquity*, ‘that Trigger could not be present on 23 October 2006, when a lively crowd of students and researchers gathered in Cambridge U.K., to hear Colin Renfrew, Michael Schiffer and Ezra Zubrow reconstruct and evaluate their early pioneering involvement in the ‘New Archaeology’. Robin Dennell, Rob Foley, Paul Mellars and Marek Zvelebil were discussants.’

Graeme Barker acted as Chair at this ‘remarkable Processualists’ Reunion’ (Carver 2007: 6). Mike Schiffer evoked the feelings of the 1960s: ‘enrolment was vastly expanding, new universities were built, the democratization of higher education occurred . . . the Vietnam War was gearing up. I did not want to become a pawn in the war machine [and] Binford provided a blueprint for engagement with society. As a lecturer, he was unique. He emphasized that independent causal processes could give rise to variability in the archaeological record which was an important insight.’

As an undergraduate at Harvard, Ezra Zubrow remembered the wonderful excitement: ‘the New Archaeology was part of a general movement. There was the new math, new biology, new physics. We were democratizing archaeology! [Some] said that archaeology was about probity-value but I thought that archaeology could be done by anybody. It could be repeated; it could be replicable! Culture could be analysed as a system!’ Zubrow then detailed his early experiences with the pioneering Southwest Archaeological Expedition.

Colin Renfrew experienced the American New Archaeology as an expansive attempt to answer new philosophical questions: what is the nature of archaeology? What are the theoretical underpinnings of this enterprise? He added the 1960s English and Cambridge events, his memories of David Clarke, and how he first heard of the American ‘New Archeology’ and how he first met Lewis Binford.

Graeme Barker offered insight into Eric Higgs and the landscape and catchment approaches which were developing concurrently in Britain, and in which he was deeply involved. Senior archaeologists, who could not be present, such as Professor James Sackett of UCLA, submitted questions. The large, diverse audience asked many pointed questions during the ensuing discussion. The video is available at <<http://www.arch.cam.ac.uk/personal-histories>>. Pamela conceived, organised and sponsored the event which turned out to be great fun! DVDs, which can be used as teaching aids, are available by sending an e-mail to [pjs1011@cam.ac.uk](mailto:pjs1011@cam.ac.uk).