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Clark and Prehistory at Cambridge

By

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Introduction

If honours and titles give measure of a man, then Professor Sir Grahame Clark was indeed important. Faculty Assistant Lecturer in the Faculty of Archaeology and Anthropology at Cambridge University from 1935-46, University Lecturer 1946-52, Disney Professor of Archaeology 1952-74, Head of the Department of Archaeology and Anthropology 1956-61 and 1968-71, Fellow of Peterhouse, Cambridge 1950-73, Master of Peterhouse 1973-80, he a visiting lecturer at diverse universities; appointed CBE in 1971, he received many awards including the prestigious Erasmus Prize for 1990, presented by Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands, for his "long and inspiring devotion to prehistory" (Scarre 1991:10); and in June 1992, he was knighted.

Yet well before fame and position were rewards, Clark made major contributions to the establishment of prehistory as an academic subject at Cambridge University. Cambridge was the first and, for many years, only British university granting an undergraduate degree which offered prehistory as a specialization. "The development of postgraduate research in prehistoric archaeology at Cambridge had to wait on the provision of undergraduate teaching," Clark (1989b: 6) recently observed. The "faculty was the only one in Britain producing a flow of graduates in prehistoric archaeology" (Clark 1989a: 53).

During the 1920s, and 30s, the Cambridge Archaeology and Anthropology Tripos produced some of the most eminent archaeologists of this century. Cyril Fox, one of prehistory's first students, earned the University's newly instituted Ph.D. degree in 1922 for his surface geological and geographical study of the Archaeology of the Cambridge Region. Louis Leakey graduated as Miles Burkitt's student in African prehistory, gaining First Class Honours in 1926. Matriculating in that same year, Clark achieved Honours in 1930, concentrating on northwestern European prehistory, a specialization specifically set up at his request (Faculty Board Minutes, 7 October 1928). Clark then chose to become one of the very few research students in the Faculty of Archaeology and Anthropology. (1)

Glyn Daniel was granted honours in his first degree in 1935. Completing his Ph.D. in June 1938, he started lecturing for the Faculty on megalithic cultures in Europe the following term. Dorothy Garrod, respected for her 1920s and 30s excavations in northern Iraq and Mount Carmel and shortly to become the Faculty's first woman professor in 1938, tutored pupils in from her Cambridge home. Jacquetta Hawkes graduated top of her class in 1932, as did Clare Fell in 1933. Thurstan Shaw, J. Desmond Clark, Bernard Fagg, and Charles McBurney, who all went on to distinguished professional careers in prehistoric archaeology, were among Clark's first students in 1936.

From 1926 to 1939, the Faculty of Archaeology and Anthropology grew remarkably. In 1928, there were seventeen students enrolled in the ethnology and prehistory options, in 1934, forty one, and by 1939, sixty (Faculty and Appointments Committee Minutes: 10 November 1939). Clark was intricately involved with this expansion.

Clark's Prehistory During the 1930s

The Minutes of the Faculty Board meeting of 16 October 1934 give first evidence of Clark's academic presence. The Secretary to the Board, Miles Burkitt, notes, "After some discussion it was agreed to ask Dr. Grahame Clark to give a short course of lectures on Mesolithic Europe in Lent term for the fee of ten guineas." Lecturing gave Clark the opportunity to present his views on cultural sequences within their environmental context, knowledge gained during his association with the interdisciplinary Fenland Research Committee.

In 1932, Clark had been a founding member of the Fenland Research Committee, a loose association of forty-two specialists, that combined the resources of archaeological, biological, geographical, and geological learning. This working group of diverse experts had enthusiastically addressed themselves "to unravelling the complex story of the Fenland," the vast wetlands that surround Cambridge (Godwin 1978: 7). From 1933 to 1940, Clark published eight site reports and articles in co-operation with The Fenland Research Committee and worked with members of the Committee on several other reports from outside the Fenland area.

In previous research (Smith 1993, 1994), I describe the dramatic changes in Clark's ideas, definitions, assumptions, methods, and chosen subject matter that occurred during his association with the Committee's faunal, floral, geological, botanical, and geographical specialists. Briefly, although Clark continued to use typological analyses similar to those used in his earliest 1927-1932 studies, in practice, during his association with the Committee, Clark was redefining archaeology. Archaeology became excavation. It was no longer the study of surface finds. In striking contrast to his earlier work, his major Fenland investigations involved intensive digging. "The crux of archaeology is excavation, since it is from the soil that archaeologists have to obtain the bulk of their documents" (Clark 1989a: 66). Archaeology was not just typological analysis. It was also based on a stratigraphic-geological approach that "the hallmark of the Fenland Research Committee" (Godwin 1978: 88). When Clark wrote *The Mesolithic Age in Britain* in 1932, distributional mapping of surface finds was one of the few methods he could use to establish relative dates. In all the Fenland reports, Clark was able to correlate his typological and mapping results with botanical and climatic evidence.

Clark's choice of subject matter also dramatically shifted during work with the Committee. He became well acquainted with natural events and their relevance to dating archaeological sites. The withdrawal of ice sheets was indirectly important to archaeology as a result of changes in climate, vegetation, and sea levels. As the ice receded, sediments were left in distinctive successive layers, or varves, and sections of varves from separate locations had been correlated, establishing a geochronology (Clark 1936: 4-7). In addition, during his association with the Committee, Clark (1936: xii) had "many talks" with the botanist Sir Harry Godwin about post-glacial alterations in climate and environment. These alterations had been documented by vegetation, faunal and marine studies and it was known that northern Europe had undergone a cycle of warm/dry and warm/damp climatic phases called Pre-boreal, Boreal, Atlantic, and Sub-boreal. As a result of extensive pollen analysis,

Scandinavian scientists had developed a general forest succession and correlated this information with land, sea, and climatic changes (Clark 1936).

When Clark was invited to lecture in 1934, he therefore came armed with an innovative knowledge base. In the preface to *The Mesolithic Settlement of Northern Europe*, Clark (1936: ix) wrote, "the subject matter for the book was covered in a course of lectures . . . during Lent Term [1934]". In his review of this book, Armstrong (1937: 68-69) observed that Clark's conclusions were "immensely strengthened by the synchronisation of independent researches by geologists, biologists, archaeologists, and botanists. The book is a striking example of what can be achieved by cooperation of this nature." At the beginning of *The Mesolithic Settlement of Northern Europe*, Clark (1936: xi) stated, "at Cambridge I have experienced directly the extreme value of a co-operative approach to the problems of post-glacial history".

The following year, in 1935, "The Board approved an arrangement by which Dr Grahame Clark should give a course on geochronology and climatic history" (Faculty Board Minutes: 19 1935). Burkitt had previously taught this course but Clark dramatically augmented the subject matter. By then, he was giving 44 hours of "lecturing and teaching" on subject matter closely related to his research on environmental archaeology, including lectures on early "post-glacial cultures in northern and western Europe" (Faculty Board Minutes: 19 July 1935).

In 1936, Clark was appointed Faculty Assistant Lecturer, his first paid, full-time, official position. In the Faculty Minutes, he was described as having "given valuable lectures . . . and also provided instruction on the practical side in fieldwork and excavation" (Faculty Board Minutes: 8 June 1936). By 1939, Burkitt (Faculty Board Minutes: 8 June 1939) noted, "Dr. Clark's subject is central to the work of the Archaeological side of" the Archaeology and Anthropology Tripos.

Teaching thus became one of Clark's major concerns and he immediately attracted students. During the 1930s, archaeology and anthropology was Section 'A' of a one-part Tripos that was generally taken over a two-year period. Clark noted that the number graduating from Section A sharply increased after his appointment (1989a: 52).

The Faculty and Appointments Committee Minutes records dramatic increases in student enrollment throughout the 1930s, suggesting that Archaeology and Anthropology had become an exciting option. Since Section A was a combined Anthropology and Archaeology Tripos, it is difficult to ascertain if the students enrolled were specifically attracted to Clark's teaching and new environmental subject matter. The most popular selected area option listed in the Register for Tripos from 1937 to 1939 was African Anthropology. However, Faculty Board Minutes described Clark as "a capable and enthusiastic teacher whose value has been well appreciated by his students" (Faculty Board Minutes: 8 June 1936).

J. Desmond Clark (1989: 139), one of Clark's first students and Professor of Anthropology at Berkeley for many years, stated in an autobiographical sketch, "For me, Grahame's emphasis on palaeo-ecology has been all important since, without an understanding of the habitat of any prehistoric group, it is impossible to begin to understand their behaviour". In his tribute to Grahame Clark, another of Clark's students, the Cambridge Professor of Quaternary Prehistory, Charles McBurney (1976: xii), wrote, "The intellectual climate, as I recall it, was one of new ideas characterized everywhere by an atmosphere of excitement and optimism. Discussion and criticism indeed abounded . . . rendered fruitful by important new discoveries and often spectacular developments in method and technique. From you [Clark], we began to hear . . . of new and exciting developments quite outside the scope of the classic text-books of the day. Outstanding among these new topics were the growing fields of Post-Glacial environmental studies based on the then new and rapidly growing techniques of pollen analysis, varve dating, Post-glacial sea level changes. . . exemplified as near at hand as Peacock's Farm and in the activities of the Fenland Research Committee."

The results of the Fenland Research Committee's work provided Clark with a new cognitive base for teaching prehistoric archaeology at Cambridge. It also provided a training ground for future professional archaeologists. According to Clark (1989a: 42), "a special weakness of the teaching provided for Section A" was that, except for himself and Tom Lethbridge, the lecturers were not engaged in local excavations. To remedy this, in 1935, Clark proposed that the Cambridge University Field Archaeological Society, described in the Faculty Minutes as a group "wholly run by undergraduates" (Faculty Board Minutes: 28 April 1936), become associated with the Fenland Committee "for the purpose of assisting with excavations" (Fenland Committee Minute Book: 24 January 1935). An agreement was then drawn up, signed by J.C. Mossop, J.K. St Joseph, Rainbird Clarke, and T.G.E. Powell, representing the student archaeologists.

In 1936, the Cambridge University Field Archaeological Society wrote the Faculty asking for official recognition (Faculty Board Minutes: 28 April 1936). By this time, Clark was Honorary Vice President. All four of the above students found employment and professional success, St Joseph as Director of Aerial Photography in Cambridge, Clarke as Curator at Norwich Castle Museum, and Powell as Rankin Lectureship in Prehistoric Archaeology at Liverpool. John Bromwich, who in 1936 requested to submit a study of the "Population and Economics of the Southern Fenlands" as a Tripos requirement and who later contributed to *The Fenland in Roman Times* (1970), is also mentioned as being Clark's student at this time (Faculty Board Minutes: 20 October 1936).

There is considerable evidence in the Faculty Minutes that the Board was expanding its facilities to deal with the level of enrollment apparently attracted, at least in part, by the new prehistoric subject matter being presented by Clark. This stress upon obtaining teaching and library space contrasts to the emphasis, in the Faculty Board Minutes from 1928 to 1932, upon adding rooms for Museum collections only. After 1935, the need for additional facilities for students was regularly discussed:

In the 1935 Faculty Appointment meeting, Minns announced that rooms in the old Law School had been solicited for teaching purposes (Faculty and Appointments Committee Minutes: 7 November 1935). In 1936, Clark raised the question of the new library and was assured that it would soon be staffed. By 1937, there was a note in the Minutes stating that the Library was now "working well under the charge of Rishbeth", the new librarian (Appointment Book: 10 November 1937). It was also suggested in the Minutes that Section A was understaffed. By 1938, "the problem of space" was becoming acute and permission had at last been obtained "from the University to issue an appeal for funds to extend the buildings up to the Botany School" (Faculty and Appointments Minutes: 10 November 1938).

This period of growth was arrested by the Second World War. In 1941, Wordie, the Faculty Secretary, noted in the Minutes that Clark, Daniel, Phillips, Haddon, Trevor, and Paterson were "absent from Cambridge on National Service" (Faculty and Appointments Minutes: 10 November 1941).

During the 1930s, well before awards and major publications, Clark was intricately involved in the institutionalization of Cambridge's "splendid idiosyncrasy" - prehistory (Quinton 1987:139-40).

Conclusion

From studying Clark, I conclude that our cognitive base - our ideas, assumptions, goals, choice of subject matter, definitions - is a central element in shaping our academic careers. Ideas, although community inspired, have a power of their own to attract students and institutional support and to aid in creating academic social structures. Our knowledge assures institutional independence. Our assumptions and definitions can be intellectual weapons creating identity as a means to seize tangible social assets.

We should not ignore our thinking and its effect upon our academic setting. I suggest that ideas don't exist in a little tiny circle surrounded in a determinant social or political sea. Following Coleman (1985), we must assign an indispensable role to cognitive content in the analysis of the disciplinary phenomenon.

Acknowledgments

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Endnotes

1. Upon hearing of his decision to pursue a Ph.D. in prehistoric archaeology, Clark's guardian approached Burkitt and Minns to inquire about employment possibilities. He was promptly told that Clark had no employment future (Clark, in conversation, 1994).

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