

Session ID	11
Session Title	Mythical past, dangerous present: Challenging nationalism's relationships with archaeology and history
Start Time	Tue Dec 17 09:30:00
Room	802/4

With the reawakening of mainstream nationalism and reestablishment of right-wing political hegemony throughout Europe and the Americas, the past is once again weaponized. Archaeological and historical narratives are being adapted to support and coalesce national identities, ethno-religious-geographic boundaries, and anti-immigration policies. These mythical pasts are also being used to justify ethnic violence, Islamophobia, and anti-Semitism – including, most recently, on 15th March 2019, the murder of 50 worshippers at a mosque in Christchurch, New Zealand. This session will examine how, where and why these mythical pasts are (re)created. It will discuss the leaky pipelines of our disciplinary public engagement. It will ask how historians and archaeologists, and other humanities scholars, can work together to challenge the misuse of archaeological and historical evidence, ancient DNA, archives, texts and images, by those involved in populist politics, the digital right and mainstream media. Through this session discussion, it is hoped that we can establish ways forward with which to engage with, and challenge, these populist narratives.

9:30	Session organisers	Introduction	
9:40	Greg Judges, University of Leeds	Living pasts: emotions and heritage in the post-truth era	Using the past to influence public perceptions of contemporary social and political questions is not new. However, recent political events have suggested that the effectiveness of the past in altering political and social viewpoints has increased. This paper will demonstrate this is a result of post-truth discourse exploiting the emotionality heritage and the past can create. I will explore how heritage and nostalgia can be used emotionally by individuals to construct a personal living past which, in turn, helps them develop relationships with political and social constructs, ideas and 'realities' in the present. In and of itself, the emotionality that a personal living past brings to contemporary issues is theoretically benign. However, the growth of feel-good nostalgia and commercially inclined heritage sites which refuse to engage with uncomfortable elements of the past has resulted in these living pasts aligning with social and political constructs focused on nationalism, exceptionalism and conflict. Post-truth tactics, with its ability to manipulate 'realities' grounded in emotionally obtained 'facts', focusing on the past have the potential to help influence the personal living pasts of individuals in even more antagonistic directions. Utilising case study data from heritage sites, surveys and a review of recent political interactions with heritage, I hope to demonstrate the emotional power the past has over us all and how it can be used to manipulate our contemporary political and social views. I will call on archaeologists and heritage professionals to challenge the popular heritage and nostalgia industry helping to create mythical, living pasts that fuel populist narratives.
9:50	Sarah May, Swansea University	Coffwich Drweryn, heritage of conflict and grassroots nationalism	Graffiti has a long history of supporting, challenging and directing political action, particularly in response to conflict. Welsh Nationalists used graffiti in the 1960's to oppose particular events, and create a sense of resistance to English rule. One of the more famous of these events was the drowning of Capel Celyn in the Treweryn Valley to create a reservoir for Liverpool. The simple graffiti slogan 'Coffwich Drweryn' (in English, 'remember Treweryn') was painted on the gable end of building near the road nearby. It would have been all the more striking at the time as Welsh was not used on road signs, so the graffiti did double work for the nationalist cause. Since the time of its painting it has been repeatedly repainted – sometimes refreshing the slogan, sometime over painting. In the winter of 2018/2019 a dramatic over painting with the word 'Elvis' and a subsequent attempt to bring down the ruined gable wall led to rapid repainting but also calls for heritage designation. It also led to the mural being copied. First in Bridgend, and then throughout Wales by September 2019 there were over 150 examples. This paper will examine how the conflict, the graffiti and the perceptions of heritage support and challenge grassroots nationalism.

10:00	Bethany Hardcastle, Independent Researcher	Music, nationalism... and Vikings?	<p>The subject of nationalism and how it is rooted in modern day life is a huge one, this paper will focus on one aspect that plays a large part in many people's everyday lives: music.</p> <p>Viking Age archaeology, history and mythology has been used to influence the lyrical content and composition long before now, for example with Wagner's 19th century 'Flight of the Valkyries' ; however, from the 1980's to the present day Viking Age history and archaeology has had a darker usage in music and that is to promote nationalistic ideologies, namely anti-immigration and anti-islamic themes.</p> <p>This paper will largely examine Metal and its various subgenres, (although other genres will be briefly touched upon) and highlight specific examples in which the past has been manipulated to promote racist ideas, and in turn aims to create a lively discussion for how this can be avoided and how we as archaeologists can educate the general public against using the 'mythical past' in this manner.</p>
10:10	Jonathan Last, English Heritage	Dwelling in the landscape: a challenge to nationalist archaeology	<p>Much of the nationalist (mis)use of archaeological data is connected to claims of ancestry or descent, which often go unchallenged by the heritage sector, or are inadvertently bolstered by our well-intentioned efforts to define and promote 'minority heritage' and, it must be said, by our new-found obsession with ancient DNA. In this paper I will suggest we can counter the focus on genetic ancestry by moving away from a place-based 'heritage of identity' towards a landscape-oriented 'dwelling perspective', and try to explore what such a reorientation might mean for how heritage sites and archaeological narratives are presented.</p>
10:20	Megan Gooch, Historic Royal Palaces	Heritage, art and commemoration: a centenary without history	<p>By 2013 museum and heritage professionals were concerned that the public may have 'commemoration fatigue' around the planned 2014-18 World War I centenary programme. But unlike with the war of 1914-18, the war weariness never materialised. Instead, hundreds of thousands flocked to events throughout the UK organised by the government's WWI centenary arts programme 14-18 NOW and to events run by other organisations such as Historic Royal Palaces which runs the Tower of London.</p> <p>In this paper, I will explore how a government plan to deliver the commemorations through art rather than history melded with growing expressions of populism and nationalism within the UK. In leaving historical specialists out of a major programme about the past, the commemorations functioned to obscure histories rather than elucidate them. The centenary programming served not to diversify narratives of Britain and Empire but reified a particular historical and mythical narrative which affirmed a British, and particularly English national identity. Using data from the recent AHRC-funded Lest We Forget research project, I will explore how Historic Royal Palaces tried (and largely failed) to disrupt the popular and enduring narrative of war as sacrifice and the First World War as an English victory, through the Tower of London's two major commemorative art installations: Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red in 2014 and Beyond the Deepening Shadows in 2018. I will show how heritage organisations such as the Tower create, commission and produce site-specific artworks and how the commemorative nature of the content defied the creative team's attempts to widen the narrative as the works were received, interpreted and participated in by the public.</p>
10:30	Miles Russell, Bournemouth University	God's Chosen People: dangerous narratives in Early Medieval 'history'	<p>Origin myths can shape cultural identity, sometimes by simply attempting to explain the world or outline a certain order to things, at others being used to stoke intolerance and an unjustified sense of political or religious supremacy. Despite recent advances in archaeological and biological science, foundation myths continue to exert a formidable hold on the popular imagination, being constantly recycled and reformed at times of political or economic stress. Multiple origin myths have been recorded from across the British Isles, but it is stories of the English, frequently depicted as heroic pioneers arriving in the chaos of post-Roman Britain, that appear most commonly in the Press, popular history books, TV, radio and across social media. The emotive and powerful tale of "God's chosen people" finding "the promised land", first established in the writings of Bede and the anonymously authored Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, has become an irrefutable part of England's national story. The fact that it is largely untrue hardly seems to matter. Kings, queens, leaders and governments have constantly reshaped the distant past to suit their own needs, origin myths being a powerful weapon in the political canon, especially at this present time. Such stories are, it must always be remembered, nothing more than ancient works of fiction, and, as this paper will explain, should only really be understood within the context they were written and the audience for whom they were originally intended. If used today, without adult supervision, foundation myths can be not only dangerous, but also extremely hazardous to health.</p>

10:40	Lily Hawker-Yates, Canterbury Christ Church University	"A Part of England's Story"	<p>Visiting ancient monuments can help us feel connected to the past, often an imagined or mythical past. This can be positive, creating a sense of belonging and of a shared past. However, this sense of belonging in the landscape also allows for exploitation of the past, in which places such as Stonehenge become integral parts of national identity.</p> <p>The role of organisations such as English Heritage is not only to preserve historic monuments for future generations, but also to interpret these monuments for visitors from hugely diverse backgrounds in an accessible manner. At times this has led to an over simplification of the narrative, with a tendency pass by earlier historical interactions with these sites. This paper suggests that in some cases this has allowed for a false perception of sites as monuments to English-ness or British-ness, fixed points in the landscape connected directly to a deep past and unchanged by subsequent conquests or immigrations. Recent reports of far right activities at Waylands Smithy and Avebury show how easily these sites can be subsumed into a nationalist agenda. The aim of this paper is to explore options for countering this, within heritage interpretation, suggesting that by moving narratives away from an unknown or mysterious past, as well as by demonstrating how later societies interpreted and interacted with the monuments, we can create a open dialogue about the use monuments in the creation of national identity and explore the diverse pasts of these ancient monuments and the landscape they sit within.</p>
10:50	Emily Hanscam, Durham University	The Romanian myths of origin and the postnational critique: challenging reactionary populism	<p>Archaeologists have long recognized the deep connection between archaeology and nationalism, but it demands renewed attention as reactionary populism and far-right nationalism resurge globally. By exploring the history of Roman archaeology in Romania, this paper highlights how the three Romanian myths of origin—based on the classical past—are linked to wider trends in archaeological theory and politics. It argues that methodological nationalism continues to be highly influential on archaeological research, presenting the postnational critique as a way to understand how the study of the past intersects with national narratives and articulating new ways of acting against it. The postnational critique identifies and questions the use of material and textual evidence from the past in support of methodological nationalism, arguing against the perpetuation of exclusive categories of identity and dualities such as 'civilisation versus barbarism'. It likewise recognises the need for narratives about the past, and reimagines the past of the region of modern Romania through the postnational lens. Romania is an ideal case-study for the potential of the postnational critique, as the landscape has a lengthy history of diversity and migration which is currently absent from the national narratives, based on the myths of origin which originated in the Enlightenment but remain powerful today. As historian Jill Lepore recently wrote, "When scholars stop trying to write a common history for a people, nationalism doesn't die. Instead, it eats liberalism." Archaeologists must be political actors, promoting critical narratives about the past and challenging those who would use it to support reactionary populism or far-right nationalism.</p>
11:00	Perry Stewart, Glasgow School of Art	Cheddar Man and the Daily Mail: Representing 'controversial' archaeology in the British Press and reading digital public discourse	<p>Mass media coverage following the April 2018 announcement that the Mesolithic 'Cheddar Man' individual likely had dark skin, included complex discussions surrounding British identity, Ancient Nationhood and the role of race in archaeology. This paper examines the representation of this discovery in the UK Press and analyses user-generated comment sections to understand the public response to a reassessment of long accepted assumptions about Ancient British racial identity. This study found surprisingly high levels of engagement with the material amongst commenters but also found unprompted connections being made with contemporary issues such as the Brexit vote, and suggests that archaeologists must be transparent and accessible in digital spaces as part of combating unwarranted political associations in prehistory.</p>
11:10	Mark Hobbs, University of East Anglia	The assault on Holocaust memory and history: Holocaust denial and the Leuchter Report	<p>In the mid-1980s Fred Leuchter illegally excavated samples from the remains of the gas chambers of Auschwitz and Majdanek and compiled a report for the trial of known Holocaust denier Ernst Zündel. The report denied the possibility of gassing human beings in the structures and the historical reality of the Holocaust. The report was shown to be completely false and the academic credentials of Leuchter lacking. Still, the report has been used by a large number of Holocaust deniers to cast doubt on the reality of the Holocaust. A survey released in January 2019 suggested that one in twenty people in the United Kingdom did not believe the Holocaust had taken place. This paper will explore how historians, archaeologists and academics can intervene to prevent the mendacious narratives of deniers' thorough public engagement. It will suggest that the answer lies not in countering the antisemitic narratives of deniers (as such a method meets deniers on their terms), but exposing how their methods of denial centre on public discourses and popular representations of the Holocaust rather than the more complex and detailed history of the academy. I will argue that this approach will not only expose the inherently genocidal nature of Holocaust denial but also help to expand public knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust.</p>
11:20	BREAK	BREAK	BREAK

11:50	Tom Booth, Francis Crick Institute	I said it once before but it bears repeating: heritage is not just about our ancestors	Connections between deep ancestry, heritage and nationhood are central to ethnonationalist ideologies. Studies of DNA extracted from ancient skeletons are often of paramount importance to these ideologies, and are regularly manipulated to reify national origin myths by making spurious connections between modern populations and ancient civilisations. While it is important to challenge how archaeogenetics is used in service of nationalist ideologies, we must not fall into the trap of accepting implicitly that ancestry in the distant past has much bearing on concepts of nationhood and heritage today. The primary way to battle the influence of the appropriation of archaeology and history in service of nationalist ideals is to reject biological determinist assertions that ancestral connections to ancient peoples are of particular importance in defining nationhood and heritage. However the way we engage the public with archaeological sites, particularly in invoking 'our ancestors', often directly promotes a biologically determinist way of thinking about heritage. Here I will discuss the ways in which political manipulation of archaeogenetics can be challenged, but stressing that an important aspect may be changing the way we talk about archaeology and heritage with the public.
12:00	Kenny Brophy, University of Glasgow; Lorna Richardson, University of East Anglia	Discussion	
<b>13:00</b>	<b>END</b>	<b>END</b>	<b>END</b>