

### **An Interview with Professor Ruth Whitehouse, Institute of Archaeology, UCL**

Interview prepared by Fiona Handley, Steve Townend, Julie Eklund and Cornelia Kleinitz

Ruth Whitehouse was recently made the first female professor at the Institute of Archaeology, UCL. She was awarded her PhD from the University of Cambridge in 1968 and has had ongoing research interests in the prehistory of Italy, with particular foci on religion and ritual, and gender. She was a founder member of the Accordia Research Institute in 1988, which promotes Italian archaeology in the UK. She was the co-director of the survey and excavation of the Iron Age site of Gravina in Puglia in southern Italy, and of the Alto-Medio Polesine-Basso Veronese Project on the Po plain. Prof. Whitehouse has recently begun two new projects in Italy: 'The Tavoliere/Gargano Prehistory Project' and 'Developmental Literacy and the Establishment of Regional and State Identity in Early Italy: Research Beyond Etruria, Greece and Rome'.

#### **Could you give us an account of your career to date? How did you become interested in archaeology?**

I was interested in archaeology as a child; from about the age of 12 I can remember knowing that that's what I wanted to do. I grew up in a middle class family that went to museums and things like that, and I had a great uncle of German-Jewish origin who was a history professor and living in America at the time that I knew him. He always encouraged me; I remember him giving me as a birthday present at an early age, *Wessex from the Air*, which is a book of aerial photographs of Wessex. I suppose I must have shown signs of interest at a very early age and was just encouraged really.

I went through a phase of Egyptology and then, when I started digging in my mid- to later teens I got involved in Romano-British archaeology and a little bit of Iron Age. I didn't dig locally actually. I'd been interested in archaeology for several years before I started digging – I was 15 when I went on my first dig – and I decided that I needed to go on a training excavation. The main training digs at that time were run by Graham Webster at Wroxeter, so I went there for two years in succession when I was 15 and 16; the second one was where I met Colin Renfrew. I think he had done 'Natural Sciences – Part I' at Cambridge and then decided to change to archaeology so he was getting a rapid training in digging at that time. Over a number of years I also went on digs in that same area – the Welsh Marches – on Iron Age sites, run by Stan Stanford, Nicholas Thomas and others.

I only became a fully-fledged prehistorian when I went to university. I went to Cambridge and everybody there does prehistory so that's where I became a prehistorian. I did my first degree and my PhD at Cambridge, which got me into Italian archaeology. My teachers were people like Grahame Clark, Glyn Daniel and Charles McBurney; they were the main archaeologists there at that time. I did enjoy my time at Cambridge a lot, although I guess that I would have enjoyed wherever I did my degree and that whole period of my life, but there was a lot of Cambridge life that I was very ambivalent about. I opted out of a lot of 'Cambridge things'; I never went

to a May Ball for instance, and I wasn't keen on College life. I was at New Hall, which was at that stage a brand new College, which didn't have its own building. I really didn't like the whole set-up; even though the main Colleges are now co-educational, they are really still men's clubs. I still feel like that. I feel uncomfortable in those kinds of surroundings so I concentrated mostly on the department and made lots of good friends and colleagues there, but I never really wanted to go back there for a job; not that I was offered one, I hasten to add.

I then had a period of a few years when I wasn't employed, was married and producing and bringing up my children, and was working on my then husband's excavation in Iran, spending time between there and Britain. It was really only when my marriage broke down in the mid 70s that I started looking for proper jobs in archaeology in Britain. I did a couple of years of extra-mural teaching and then I got a job in Lancaster, which I began in 1977. It was a very small department of Classics and Archaeology; there were only five archaeologists so we were doing lots of general teaching of archaeological method and theory. I taught most of prehistory, not the Palaeolithic, but pretty well everything else, with specialist courses on Italian prehistory. At Lancaster we had a concentration on Italy because – at least for a time – we had Tim Potter, who did Roman Italy and Hugo Blake, who did medieval archaeology in Italy. That went on until they closed the department down in 1988. At that point, both Hugo Blake and I transferred to Queen Mary and Westfield College, as it then was, part of London University. There we were able to preserve an Italian archaeology specialisation within what was set up as a department of 'Mediterranean Studies' which combined Classics and archaeology, but with a particular concentration on Italy. It was during this period that Accordia was established. That lasted until they closed the department down in 1993, at which point I transferred to the Institute of Archaeology, UCL, which so far, they haven't closed down!

**It has recently been announced that you have been made the first female professor in the long history of the Institute of Archaeology – what does that appointment mean to you and how does it relate to your career as you have described it?**

I'm slightly ambivalent about an answer to this. I've never felt that I was particularly ambitious but, at the same time, I always half thought I ought to get to the point of getting a Chair at some stage. At one level I feel "right, I've got that" and that's very nice. I am particularly pleased because of the implications of the first woman Professorship here and hope that it is going to be the beginning of a change in the situation for women in the Institute generally. One of the things that I really like is the way that all the female research students were so enthusiastic about it; it was worth having persisted, if it really does encourage people.

**A quick scan of staff in archaeology departments in the UK reveals 10 women professors – you'll be the 11<sup>th</sup>. Prior to your appointment, there were already 12 professors at the Institute of Archaeology – all of them men. How can the lack of women in prominent academic positions within archaeology be explained both at UCL and wider academia, espe-**

**cially given the precedent of early female archaeologists at UCL and the Institute of Archaeology?**

Well, I'm not quite sure how it can be explained: I think this is an issue within archaeology itself, and not just about UCL – it has been a very male dominated profession, and I think probably more so than many other academic subjects outside the hard sciences and things like pure maths, which tend to be very male dominated. I guess the fieldwork side in particular has had that male dominance in the form of a military element that originated out of Pitt Rivers first, and then Wheeler. Certainly, when I first started digging in the late 50s, and right through the 60s, that kind of ethos was incredibly dominant on excavation.

As to UCL, it was very good in terms of what it did for women in its early stages, but it's just resting on its laurels now. I just checked the college website the other day, and it still claims that UCL has the largest number of female professors of any university in the country. This is true, but it's only because it has by far the largest number of professors altogether, and I think that if you do it in a rank order of percentages, last time I saw, it was something like 15<sup>th</sup>. So I think it's disingenuous to claim that and also complacent. However, over the last year or so, under pressure from the Government on universities in general, they do seem to be investigating what is going on in equal opportunities, presumably with the aim of improving the situation.

**About one third of professional archaeologists and half of the undergraduate intake in archaeology departments are women, but this number is in no way reflected in the numbers of women in senior positions within departments. Do you think this situation justifies the introduction of positive discrimination, for example by prioritising projects with women directors through the British Academy Larger Research Grant scheme?**

The problem is the one that is often described as the glass ceiling, the lack of obvious reasons why there aren't promotions and large grants being awarded to women and so on. The kinds of analyses that are being done, far more in the United States and in Australia than in this country (although they are being done in Europe as well), indicate that there tends to be a whole range of reasons. The kinds of research agenda, the kinds of subjects that are considered suitable to get grants for, tend to be male dominated – the whole hunting thing for example. Therefore people who go along that route are more likely to get the grants, more likely to have more publications in conference reports and so on. It's not exactly a vicious circle, but it *is* a circle, so when it comes to promotions, those people, who will tend to be male, will have more publications and more grants attached to them, and so are more likely to be promoted.

What to do about it? I'm very wary about positive discrimination as such, but I'm not entirely against it in all contexts. For instance, I'm in favour, outside academe, of having women-only short lists and so on. I think that if it is done, it has to be done very consciously and very much as a remedial measure to get over some sort of hump to get the situation if not equalised, at least a lot better. I think in the first in-

stance one has just to make people aware of what is going on and do the analysis of what's happening – I've certainly been going on enough about it here at the Institute. It doesn't get to everybody however. We had a small staff party after my promotion was announced, and I made a very brief speech about it. I didn't push it too hard, but I thought I had to make the point. I started by saying that, "You must know by now because I keep going on about it, that this is the first female Professorship ever to be awarded at the Institute of Archaeology". Several people didn't know and came up to me afterwards and asked: "Are you sure?" and I said, "Well, yes I'm sure!". So I think that's what has to be done in the first instance – disseminate the information about the unfair state of things and try to do analyses of various sorts.

Appointments are another case that needs to be looked at, because appointments are made in a number of different ways in the Institute. There are ones that are done by advertisement and appointment committees, there are others that are awarded to people who come in on research fellowships where there has been an assumption that they will be taken on as lecturers by the Institute afterwards, and then there are others where the director has made a case to the Provost for an *ad hominem* appointment. My preliminary analyses suggest that women have a much better chance of being appointed by the first route than by the others. We do now at least have one woman on each appointment committee, which is something that has been done at most places for a very long while, but which has only been introduced here under the present Director.

**You have had a profound and sustained relationship with Italy and have participated in and directed many projects there. How would you describe your attachment to Italy? Why do you keep going back?**

I don't understand why everybody doesn't keep going back to Italy! I went there first at the tail-end of my BA, there were practical reasons for visiting, but I fell in love with it the moment I visited. I then did my PhD on an Italian topic while my then husband, who was a year ahead of me, was also doing an Italian topic. He was a medieval archaeologist, and I'd gone out to Italy while he was at the British School of Rome. We were both working in the south, an area that had been little explored by British archaeologists at that stage. The British School at Rome was mostly focused on central Italy and particularly Etruria. Few people ventured into the south, but we were both working down there quite a lot. The landscapes, the people, the food, the drink, everything – the archaeology as well, of course, the prehistory was pretty good – it all made a very profound impression on me.

Rural southern Italy was also, I have to say, the place where I first encountered real poverty, which I hadn't really seen up until then in my life. Having just gone back in the summer of 2002, I was struck by the fact that it wasn't poor in that same kind of way (although in many ways it hasn't changed very much). You don't see undernourished kids without shoes and that sort of thing, like you did then. All of those things combined to make a very profound impression and after doing a PhD for three years it just sort of imprinted itself on me. Although I've worked elsewhere and I'm always happy to go to other places, I don't think anywhere else would replace Italy in my affections.

**How have your research interests in Italian archaeology changed over time?**

They have changed, at least in part, in relation to the general changing paradigms in archaeology. It's getting on for 40 years since I first went out to Italy to do research; I was interested in doing a broadly social archaeology when I first went, but I didn't have any of the very specific interests that I have developed since. There are things like chronology that are not interesting in their own right – or at least not to me – but have to absorb a major amount of effort because until you've got it established you can't really do much else; so that's a kind of ongoing theme. Then I suppose there are phases that I've gone through: in the early to mid-80s I started getting really interested in religion and ritual, then towards the end of that decade and the beginning of the 90s I picked up gender, which has been a major theme since then. I suppose that is the general development, but I haven't lost interest in other aspects – I do different things. With actual field projects, you do what comes up I guess; you have a general approach but if you find things that you are not especially looking for, you deal with them as they occur.

**You have recently begun a new project in Italy, could you tell us about your experiences of working in both northern and southern Italy?**

I've now got two new things going on. We worked in southern Italy from the late 70s to the mid-80s, and then moved to the north to work with people from Padua University. I was getting uncomfortable about the rather neo-colonial aspect of British archaeology in southern Italy, and I have a horrible fear I'm going to be accused of going back to that! I thought the answer was in collaborative projects. I didn't really feel there were people in southern universities that I could collaborate with (although possibly some from Rome), but the people we knew best were at Padua, so we've been collaborating on a project in the Po plain since the mid-80s.

Collaboration has, intellectually, paid off in a big way and I thought it was a very valuable experience. Having said that we now have two new projects that don't involve this. One is a three-year project which has AHRB [Arts and Humanities Research Board] funding for that time and an awarded postgraduate research fellow. This is to look at early writing – Iron Age, sixth-second centuries BC – in three areas in Italy where it was adopted secondarily, from either the Greeks in the south or the Etruscans further north. We are trying to analyse how writing was adopted and the role it played in local social evolution and so on. This is a period during which, in simplistic terms, state societies were developing in each of the areas we are interested in. We are looking at three areas mostly because they are where we have several hundred inscriptions from the period in question. The idea is that by doing a comparative study, we can pick out shared features, and also ones that are local and not shared, and try to come up with some generalisations.

The reason that I went back to southern Italy in the summer of 2002 is to get a second field project going. The more frivolous reason is that the Po Valley is just not Mediterranean enough — I do need to get back to the south. The more serious academic one is that I feel that we could go back now and do survey work with a new

perspective. The area that we want to do it in is the Tavoliere plain and adjacent Gargano Promontory, to bring in things like phenomenology and trying to deal with the experiential side as well as the more traditional side of survey, GIS and the rest of it. So we hope to get that going from this year onwards.

**How do you think the recent interest within Mediterranean archaeology in issues of identity and maintaining boundaries of difference between social groups relates to current European politics?**

Well if I can push that back slightly – as far as my Italian experiences are concerned, the absence of any interest in such things up until very recently can certainly be explained by earlier European politics. The case has been argued explicitly for Germany – and I am sure that it is true for Italy as well – that after the war a lot of the archaeologists who were implicated in Fascist period archaeology (when archaeology had been used by the leadership to support Fascist ideology to recreate the Roman empire, rather than the German version of the early *Germanische* people, but I think it is similar in both cases) were still in place. There wasn't a kind of clean sweep where all these archaeologists were removed from office, so they were all still there. The business of doing any kind of meaningful social archaeology therefore was extremely dangerous, and that covers issues of identity, which were probably the worst of all. As a result they retreated into a very barren descriptive typological archaeology, which we have had everywhere, but it has been more persistent in Italy over a very long time. It is only very recently, in Italy anyway, that people are beginning to break out of that kind of constraint. This would still represent a minority however, as the vast bulk of Italian archaeology is completely atheoretical and descriptive. So yes, those issues of identities relate to modern politics, but they are still reacting to that earlier stage.

**When you first began working in Italy in the 1960s, British and Italian archaeology were, it seems, much closer in terms of theoretical orientation. In your opinion, in which directions have they headed, and what reasons can you suggest for this divergence?**

Well I've just given part of an answer to that. Already at that stage, what British archaeology offered that was not in the Italian repertoire was field survey. I have to pay tribute here to John Ward Perkins who was the director of the British School at Rome from the Second World War until the early 70s. Although in many ways he was a very traditional archaeologist, he had a training in geography, and had a wonderful understanding of both general topography and historical topography. He started the South Etruria survey which ran, I suppose, from the later 50s right through the 60s into the 70s. By the standards of today, there are lots of things you could criticise it for; it wasn't very quantitative, they picked up what were thought to be the diagnostic pieces, which of course never allowed you to study the other pieces that might have been diagnostic, and so on. It was a really grand scheme over a very large area and over many years, and he would go out at different seasons of the year and go to the same sites over and over again. The British School Tiber Valley project is re-processing the South Etruria survey material, and it is still extremely valuable. As a continuation of that really, various people who worked for the British

School did archaeological field survey, and to this day the Italians don't do very much of it at all.

The way they have gone since – well, I suppose it is just the development of theory. Archaeology in Britain has been implicated closely in largely American theory, and then in the post-processual phase with European theory (although not particularly European archaeology, more European philosophy). Italy has largely remained outside that, so the number of Italian universities that do any kind of archaeological theory is very, very small – if I said half a dozen that might be generous.

I'd like to quote something that John Ward-Perkins once said to me – this was in the early 70s, so in the context of the 'New' archaeology – he said, the trouble with the Italians is that they've got to deal with the 'New' archaeology of the 1970s without having been through the 'new archaeology' of the 1930s. I thought about that hard because I had never thought about the 1930s as being a 'new archaeology', but he was referring to field practices, and also to broader interpretative approaches. He was right, of course, because one of the main effects of fascism was really to cut off archaeologists and academics working in Italy from the general European mainstream. I noticed, during my PhD, going through the work of earlier collectors and archaeologists, that archaeology in Italy was pretty good in the last part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but after that things did seem to deteriorate. I think that being isolated as well as being caught up in the ideology of fascism was quite a serious problem. As a result they came late to archaeological theory, so they have really welcomed a lot of the methodological and technical advances associated with processual archaeology in general.

On the other hand, they have been very resistant to post-processualism, and I've asked one or two people about this. Why? The answers are quite interesting. One said to me – and I think this may be a more widely held view – that they had been there before. What he meant by that was a reference to the idealism of Benedetto Croce, which had been extremely influential in Italian thought generally. Archaeologists regard it in a negative way because it was, in their opinion, responsible for dropping the incipient science, like identifying rock sources, animal bones and human bones, and replacing it with a kind of idealism that says it is the idea that is important (thereby implicitly devaluing studies of mere 'things'). They felt that, although there were lots of ways in which post-processualism was different, it wasn't a particularly new thing for them, and they rather associated it with a somewhat negative period for Italian archaeology. They are getting into a broadly social archaeology now, but I have not been able to raise any interest among Italians in gender. I hope that the younger generation will be more interested.

**Accordia has become a well-established presence in the scene of Italian archaeology in the UK. Does it have a similar presence in Italy? Why do you think it has been so successful?**

Well I have to mention the history of it a little bit here. It was started when I was at Queen Mary and Westfield; we set it up as a sort of research side of the department. When the climate all too quickly changed, before we were actually closed down but when they were moving towards it, we decided that this was the thing that we could

rescue and run without their interference really. It runs on very, very little money, it has always been self-sufficient, and the only money we get is through subscriptions from members and from the sale of books. We have always made just enough money to run the next lecture series and publish the next book. We had one or two grants at an early stage, but basically it has run like that for years. We put a huge amount of energy into it partly because it was something we could do at that time – despite being attacked left, right and centre, they could not stop us doing it. That was the impetus for *Accordia* and it was very soon after we started it that they closed down the department. So that was the background.

In terms of the impact – I think it has had quite a lot of impact in Italy. We have heard very good reports from a lot of people in different places. It's all anecdotal, and I know there are probably lots of places that have never heard of *Accordia*. But people who are in Italian archaeology, and who are interested in getting their stuff better known to the English speaking world will approach us and try and get us to publish their stuff. We also approach people on that basis, as it is one of the expressed aims. So I would say yes, it is highly regarded in Italy, at least in quite a few places.

In this country our aim was partly that we felt initially that Italian archaeology was quite under-represented in British universities. It is still not that strongly represented, particularly when you compare it to somewhere like the Aegean, although there are now quite a few places where there is one person who does Italian archaeology. We just thought it would be nice to raise the profile of Italian archaeology to encourage younger scholars, in terms of giving lectures, publications and so on.

**Do you think its corpus has common themes beyond geography?**

Themes – I don't think we would say that there are particular themes *Accordia* supports. At the end of the day the people running the publications are basically the three of us: myself, John Wilkins and Edward Herring, although we consult with a much larger body of people, so it is bound to reflect our interests to a certain extent. I suppose ritual is one thing we've done quite a lot on, as well as a whole range of social stuff, gender, identity issues including ethnic identity, things connected with the emergence of state societies, and metallurgy also. But we could easily be persuaded to adopt other themes if they came our way.

**Part of the mission of *Accordia* is to bring something of Italian archaeology to Britain. What part of British archaeology do you feel you are taking to Italy? What part do you leave behind?**

I don't consciously leave anything behind, but obviously I don't represent the whole of British archaeology. The things that I am interested in I try to apply to Italy; some of them spark interest in Italians, some don't, and some do after a time lag. Do they have national characteristics? They have different histories, which I've already described, and I think that is what it's really all about. If I wanted to do a caricature, I think the Italians would say – and they would apply it to Americans as well – that we are not sufficiently respectful of the evidence. I think the Italians would have in their heads a model, something like building up huge quantities of data with somehow an



interpretation emerging, although I have not had that specifically said to me so it may be a bit unfair. For our part I suppose we think they are not interested in theory, or a lot of them are not interested in theory, and that is true to some extent.

There are things in terms of the practice of archaeology in the field which are definitely different. We had quite a lot of problems with a true collaboration when we started working on the Po plain. There were cultural problems which surprised us in a way, because these people were close friends, and not just colleagues. There are things that are so deeply ingrained in the UK, like time-keeping, rotas, doing domestic tasks, that we just thought that was the way things were done, but they caused an immense amount of trouble with the Italians. For instance, they were quite happy to agree a timetable for the day, but the idea of sticking to it was completely alien to them, and in the second season there was a tremendous amount of resultant tension. In the end we just had to sit down and talk it through and decide that neither nationality was skiving. We were all interested in the project, we just had different ways of going about it. One example of the differences is the Italian sanctity of coffee after lunch and that kind of thing – I'm sure they just thought we were anally retentive time-keepers. Another source of tension was that we said we had to finish at six because of where we were staying that year. We had really poor conditions with little water, so we had a deal with the local *Comune* to open up the sports ground for an hour in the evening in order that people could have showers. So it really was important that we got back to exploit the hour when the showers were available. Somehow that was not there in the minds of our Italian colleagues, who obviously thought that we were not up to it, really, if we were thinking about showers when we ought to have been thinking about the precise nature of the cluster we were looking at!

**The Professorship that you now hold is a general archaeological one, do you think that it is going to allow you to strengthen or otherwise influence the standing of Italian archaeology at the Institute?**

Not as such. Under the present Director, it is very clear that every time a job becomes available there is a discussion about whether it should be filled in the same area or whether we should open up another area. I don't think that there is any implication that Italian archaeology is any more likely to be preserved because I have a Chair than it would be otherwise. However, by the time I retire we won't have the same Director, and the situation may be completely different. I think that the general argument would probably still hold that at the Institute we retain a commitment to international archaeology, rather than to any one area. Obviously prehistoric Italy is my main interest in terms of area and period, and so I would be sad if it wasn't retained, but there are quite a lot of people who teach Italian prehistory around the British system, so I don't think that it's going to disappear.

**You are also very well known for your work on gender and feminist archaeology. How did you become interested in these topics?**

I have always regarded myself as a feminist in a general sense, so the question I now ask myself is why didn't I get involved in feminist and gender archaeology sooner? I haven't really got an answer that I find satisfactory. It's quite hard to do in a context where nobody else is doing it, and that is still the case in Italy really. If you get

into the Classical period, there are people doing it on text and art material, but not on material culture. I suppose it was a question of waiting until there was a sufficient body of good archaeological work done so that I could see how it could be applied, but really I think I just followed; I wasn't a pioneer except possibly in Italy, but not in gender archaeology as a theoretical field of study.

**Feminist and gender sessions still appear at conferences such as the Annual Meeting of the Theoretical Archaeology Group (TAG), is that still as good a thing as it was in the mid-90s, or do you think such issues should be fully integrated into the discipline as a whole by now?**

The long-term aim would have to be integration. Gender ought to be considered in all societies, because it seems likely that in one form or another it was a part of the organisational structure everywhere, so we should all be doing gender archaeology. It doesn't seem to me that gender should be treated comparably with ceramics or lithics where it is reasonable to say "yes you've got to study those things if you've got them, but you can have a specialist". It doesn't seem like a good idea to me to say you'll have a specialist to do the gender for you, that would be like having a specialist to do ranking. However, we patently are not at that situation (i.e. of having gender integrated into mainstream archaeologies), although it is certainly the case that the situation is improving. You do now get articles that deal with gender in a whole lot of places that aren't special conference sections or special journals.

The extent to which having a separate concentration is still valuable, I think partly depends on the context. To some extent separate sessions have to exist because the alternative is that there would be less work done on it, but it is not particularly desirable. I would be much happier if we got to the point where it was integrated, but you can't force it really. At a more general level it has got to get into school education so that it's something that people do actually expect to address, so I think it is a bit of a long-term aim.

**Do your feminist commitments impact at all on the way you teach?**

There is certainly a style of teaching that is quite often labelled feminist pedagogy. I've read a bit, and I've been to the odd workshop about it, and I do apply it to some extent in my 'Gender and Archaeology' course. What it involves is a much less hierarchical relationship between teacher and student, much more student-led discussion with students putting more of themselves into discussion and regarding their own experiences and viewpoints as relevant to feed into debate. In principle, I think that applies to archaeology in general, and I see no reason why it shouldn't work like that in other courses. I haven't done it like that myself, mostly because an awful lot of what I teach – and perhaps what we teach in general at the Institute – doesn't actually have a very close relationship with people's own experiences. In the 'Gender and Archaeology' course, half the lectures are not about archaeology, they are about either general gender theory, relating to anthropology, or social sciences, or a whole range of things, and about gender in the profession, that sort of thing, where it is very much easier for people's own experiences to come into the discussion. However, it would be an excellent way of teaching most courses.

We have ongoing discussions in the Institute about teaching methods, examination methods and making changes in them. We are discussing at the moment different methods of assessment for instance, which are not either written essays or exams but involve questions and a thing called AQCI [Argument, Question, Connections, and Implications], which involves doing short bits of work that assess particular articles in terms of questions and comments. I think that if I said in Teaching Committee “well, I think we ought to introduce some feminist pedagogy,” I would get short shrift. The kinds of discussions that we have could easily involve some of the same principles, so I think that there is a bit of a move – perhaps a rather slow one – towards more student-led classes.

**What about feminist approaches to supervision?**

I don’t know that anything I do there is specifically feminist. I would like to think that perhaps I would be more in tune with, or more sensitive to students’ feelings and reactions in general, but I hope that’s just being more human not specifically feminist. I don’t see it in the same kind of way as I do teaching a class. I don’t regard a supervising relationship as at all hierarchical anyway. By the time you’ve got to the PhD stage it’s a much more mutual exploration of research issues. I suppose that what the supervisor is specifically supplying, apart from detailed knowledge of the subject if that’s relevant, is greater experience of writing or an understanding of how an examiner is going to look at the work, and so on. It is never a teacher imparting wisdom to a student at research student stage. I don’t have a perception of a specifically feminist way of doing that. I would be interested if anybody has got any ideas about that; it’s not something that is apparent to me at the moment.

**Renfrew and Bahn’s *Archaeology: Theories, Methods and Practice* is still the main teaching text for undergraduate archaeology courses in this country, from a feminist’s point of view do you think that it should carry a “health warning” as Chris Tilley once suggested?<sup>1</sup>**

It certainly isn’t satisfactory from that point of view, and in one of the third-year undergraduate gender classes we did actually try and analyse it, particularly through all three editions and were going to publish something about it. That has not happened, but I still think it should. I myself think it’s in need of a “health warning” and I quote examples of unsatisfactory practice from it, particularly individual things you can direct people to very quickly. The addition in the last edition of a section called ‘Female Pioneers of Archaeology’, for example. Well, I think to call it patronising is virtually an understatement. Its tone is quite remarkable, it’s really “didn’t they do well considering they were girls”. Even more remarkable is that there is only one woman, I think – I’m doing this from memory so I’m not absolutely sure – but I think there is only one woman who appears in the ordinary history of archaeology bit and that is Dorothy Garrod. She is not even cross-referenced in the women pioneers in archaeology section, so she is obviously an honorary man and in there with the real pioneers. The other women are there as also-rans who “did quite well considering”, and I think that is quite revealing.

**Feminist archaeologists still seem reluctant to tackle child-rearing and other apparently stereotypical roles for women in the past, why do you think this is?**

That is very interesting. I'm actually writing an article for a book that is planned to be an Institute publication provisionally titled *Women in Archaeology/Women in Antiquity*. It is based on the seminar I gave in the series Karen Wright organised, which was called *Archaeology of Gender, Archaeology of Women: Do We Need Both?* during which I argue that we do need both. This is partly because gender archaeology is not addressing those issues, and I think we need to. I imagine that the reason that the subject has become almost taboo is because of the women's movement and the fact that the political battle was so firmly based in women wishing not to be judged as wives and mothers.

It is wrong that biology and motherhood should be ignored for a number of reasons. One is that it has to be something that has always been important to all societies. It may have been treated and thought of in many different ways, but it is very difficult to conceive of a society in which biological reproduction was not important. Another reason is that it leaves the field wide open. Other disciplines that study the past, like evolutionary biology, that do focus on reproduction, are going to dominate the field if more socially-oriented gender archaeology does not. And all those studies are, to my mind, even though there are now some more feminist versions, still far too biologically determinist for my liking. Thirdly it seems to me to be a rather strange divergence from feminist politics in lots of ways, at least practical feminist politics of the modern world. A great deal of this is about making it possible for women to both work and to be mothers. To cater for those things in the modern world but somehow to come up with a version of the past where you are debating whether women were hunting or weaving or whatever, and just omitting to discuss the fact that – and this must be one of the true universals – quite a lot of them were mothers, seems extraordinary really.

**You have managed to combine both a career with raising a family. Do you think women academics who decide to have children today are still at a disadvantage, because they have to compete both with men and with women who decide not to have children at all? Given that one female academic said recently that having no children “has been of inestimable value in my career”<sup>2</sup>**

I think they are certainly at a disadvantage, to some extent they may be even more at a disadvantage than I was, because there is much more pressure these days, more performance indicators and, in general, more hoops to leap through in order to develop an academic career. When I got my first university job at Lancaster, my youngest was three and going to playgroup, and the two older ones were at school, so it was a question of practicalities. In fact in my opinion it is always the practical organisation that is the problem. There is no theoretical problem in doing both things; I don't believe any of that stuff about being unable to concentrate on work because of the family or anything like that. The solution is to get into networks of other parents for picking up kids after school and so on. It works fine most of the time – and then it all falls to pieces when they get measles. In my case I then called

on my mother and prayed that my sister's children wouldn't get ill at the same time, so she didn't have to divide herself into two! That was the kind of pressure I felt. I'm not saying that I didn't get the odd comment from people, but nothing that I felt was particularly damaging, so it was actually the practical organisation that was the biggest issue. I suspect that nowadays the expectations of staff productivity are greater, and institutions are only now beginning to take account of the effects on women's careers of having families. It does seem that it is being addressed at an official level now, and in the outside world more is being done to make facilities like nurseries available. The practical arrangements are the biggest difficulty, and you have to be very clear in your own mind that you want to do it. I never had a particularly clear idea of how I was going to do it, but I did always know that I intended to have a family and to have a career in archaeology.

**If you had a free reign, how might you use your new position to influence the trajectory of the Institute of Archaeology?**

Well, that's an enticing vision, but so utterly implausible that I've never really thought about it. At a very practical level, I suppose the most obvious thing would be to try to sort out the whole equal opportunities issue, and to make sure that it was a priority. As I said, I would be very reluctant to go for positive discrimination of any kind to achieve that. One might see it on the very edge, say guidelines for appointment committees, whereby if you have two candidates who are equally qualified, one being a man and the other a woman, to go for the woman, perhaps in that situation. But I think it would be more a question of making sure that all of the procedures at the Institute of Archaeology were as free of bias as possible, and that there was enough information around to encourage people to become more reflective and understand the kind of prejudices that are lurking in themselves as well as in colleagues. In terms of other aspects of the Institute, I have been pretty happy with intellectual developments in recent years, the kind of things we've done with the curriculum, research directions and so on. That doesn't mean that I've agreed with every single thing, indeed I've disagreed quite vocally on lots of things, but the general directions and results I have been pretty happy with, so it would really be on the equal opportunities side that I would want to effect change.

**What contribution to the field of archaeology would you most like to be remembered for?**

I suppose I would like to be remembered as having raised interesting issues and questions in quite a lot of areas, and therefore having initiated new types of study, rather than having come up with any kind of particular interpretation myself. I have always tried to apply both the kinds of theories and the kinds of approaches that have come up within Anglo-American archaeology to Italy. This is because that is where I know the data well and it's where I like to work. Sometimes it's fairly easy to do and fits nicely; sometimes you're banging your head against a brick wall because ~~people don't understand~~ the questions and they're not interested. I don't really know any other way to go about things. I develop theoretical interests, then I automatically want to apply them to Italy – there's always something you can do.