

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INFORMATION

The latest issue of Internet Archaeology, just out, is on the subject of archaeological informatics.

I went to the web site with great anticipation. My kind of thing, I thought – new media and digital archaeology.

What a disappointment!

It was all about the usual themes of building information archives, facilitating access, computation, and Geographic Information Systems (yet again). The message – digital information is the future of archaeology, not everyone accepts this yet, we need to decide on standards of record and ensure wide access; computers can do math quickly; virtual reality is an exciting prospect.

OK – important issues. But there were no fresh insights. And it all appears in in long bodies of plainly formatted text only suited to paper delivery, with links predominantly to references cited. *Shovelled onto the web* – a great metaphor that Joe Adler introduced to me. Why can't we have authoring suited to the medium? This sort of thing should just be a document made available to download. Same issue as those who read a paper to an audience – why not just hand it out?

So not much of interest to me. But a comment in the introduction by Jeremy Huggett and Seamus Ross caught my eye:

The use of information technology and information processing methods has changed practice in archaeology. An un-enunciated realisation that **archaeology itself is about information and not about material remains in and of themselves** lies behind this change. This recognition that information about the interrelationship, meaning, and socio-cultural constructs of information lies at

the heart of archaeological discourse and presses archaeologists to seek new methods and approaches to investigating the past.

Sounds radical. But where are these new methods and approaches? And, worse, it's the old separation of materiality and spirit/essence. Information cannot have some sort of disembodied existence. Entropy – it is all going to decay. This is precisely why Sam and I are working on an archaeology of information – see our recent thoughts about digital media as material processes (operations performed, such as computation), and what I had to say about the big digital humanities meeting in Irvine last June – information is a verb. Julian Richards was one who seemed to get this, but simply recommended migration to new media as the best curation of information.