

# ARCHAEOLOGICAL CHARACTER AND SUBCULTURE



The BBC call him a cross between James Bond, Graham Greene and Indiana Jones.

Patrick Leigh Fermor, at 89, is now Sir Patrick.



Truly a wonderful writer.

A personal anecdote. [Setting – the British School at Athens, 1990](#). Homebase of the British archaeological community in Greece. I was there to continue my research into the design of ancient Corinthian ceramics.

**Subject – archaeological subcultures.** There are the lithic cowboys in the American south west – hanging out in the desert, knapping flint. The archaeological unit worker in the UK is familiar from the TV Time Team personality of Mick Aston – muddy boots, Barbour jacket that has seen too much weather, in need of a haircut, dirt under the fingernails. At the British School there is the subcultural legacy of the golden boys of the 20s and 30s. Archaeologists like Humphry Payne and John Pendlebury. Handsome Oxford chaps who lived for the romantic Classical past and loved the Greeks. Payne died tragically young. Pendlebury dug Akhenaten's fabled city on the Nile, fell in love with Crete, and died fighting the German invasion in

1941.

Patrick Leigh Fermor was there with Special Operations Executive, and, with Stanley Moss, dressed as a German corporal, kidnapped Major General Karl Kreipe, the German commander. If my memory serves me right, the German HQ was Arthur Evans's old home, the Villa Ariadne, by the prehistoric site of Knossos. Dirk Bogarde played his part in the movie of the book – *Ill Met By Moonlight*. Last time I visited Heraklion people were complaining at the straightening of the road to Acharnes – the bend where the staff car slowed and allowed the kidnap to take place was being removed. A mistaken act of improvement, they were saying – heritage was being lost.



At the British School that day the archaeologists and Classicists were planning a trip out into “the real Greece”, the one now almost lost to modern development and globalism, though they did not call it that. They decided on the Mani, a still remote part of the south east Peloponnese, to meet the authentic past. The book of Leigh Fermor that I find most compelling is about the Mani.

This is what so many archaeologists want. It is an **archaeological desire** – to convene with authentic pasts in the face of their decay. And it seems to precisely compliment a life at an edge, of encounter and adventure.