

ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE CONTEMPORARY PAST

The Newcastle Journal has run an article about the WWII remains I mentioned in connection with the landscape archaeology around Dunstanburgh Castle in the UK.

The two concrete radar buildings still survive and there is clear evidence of where equipment was sited.

The remains of the Nissen huts behind the radar station, which accommodated the operators, are also still there.

In 1944 after the invasion of Normandy, the radar was dismantled and the site was used to house Italian prisoners of war.

The archaeologists were puzzled to find the remains of stone terraces on the slopes of the ridge behind the site.

“They looked like something you would find in Greece or but then we realised that they were little Italian-style gardens which had been cultivated by the POWs. What we have uncovered is a fascinating story of what

was a fundamental part of the defence of this country. It is quite staggering. But these things quickly get forgotten. We probably know more about the 14th Century Dunstanburgh Castle from documents than we know about the radar station.”

The Maison des Sciences de l’Homme and the French Ministry of Culture sponsored an investigation several months long into the growing interest in this **archaeology of the recent past** back in 1994. My old friends Laurent Olivier and Alain Schnapp did a great job of convening the meetings and editing the publication (not widely known, but soon to appear in pdf on my web site).

Topics discussed included battlefield archaeology, the investigation of the material traces of famous people from the recent past, the philosophy of material traces. Main finding – **archaeology is about contemporary relationships with different manifestations of the past and requires a sensitivity to personal and political investment in these relationships.**