

CHRIS TILLEY



I heard this morning that Chris Tilley died last night in Brighton UK.

A shock of loss and then sadness at what has gone, and also what might have been – he had just always been there, after so much we shared when we were much younger. Intellectual and collegial companionship at its best.

From 1978 to 1991 we collaborated in a passion for archaeological thought, to raise the bar on standards of scholarly debate, to build a critical apparatus for assessing the contributions archaeology might make to contemporaneity, to work creatively with the remains of prehistoric Europe in challenging what we took as worn out and discredited ideologies. Crossing borders.

We were inspired by David Clarke at Peterhouse, our Cambridge college, and an invigorating energy wave that uplifted the social sciences and humanities from the 1970s. We wrote two books in parallel (*Reconstructing Archaeology* and *Social Theory and Archaeology*, both published in 1987) – so many drafts exchanged between Sweden and the northeast of England, to where we escaped for a good deal of the 80s. They were as much about frustration with the politics of the academy as they were about a vision for an archaeology that took us into contemporary pasts of museums and

heritage, modern material culture studies (beer cans!), megaliths, prehistoric pottery, evolutionary theory, immanent critique, and “big data” multivariate statistics.

After a spell back in Cambridge and then in Paris I joined Chris in Lampeter (a delightful rural campus of the University of Wales) in an experiment to create a new kind of archaeology department. For a while I lodged with him and his wife Karin, and Welsh collie dog Moa in his old farm house – warm memories of walks in the hills, megalithic modeling in the back garden, freshly dug potatoes, and Chris’s wonderful beer making.

A year or so later and we parted ways. He moved to University College London – he had always thought he was more at home in anthropology than archaeology.

I will gather my thoughts and offer some comments on Chris’s remarkable works in a few days.

I have posted a four part reflection on Chris’s work.

Part 1 is about our collaboration at Cambridge, two academics provoked to set things right.

In Tilley’s Garden: a Summer Long Ago [Link]

Part 2 presents some allegorical associations in something of a play with the mythmaking that I find quite endearing in Tilley’s anthropological archaeology.

Mythographic Triptych (annotated) [Link]

Part 3 is based on reading his work since we parted ways in 1993. I offer sketches of some personae in his scenario of experiencing landscape, and some features of a concept map within which his oeuvre might be situated.

In Tilley’s Garden: Figures in a Landscape – [Link]

Part 4 is a celebration of Tilley’s humanism – valuing individual experience and autonomy, grounding in empirics and critical thinking, focus on life and presence, environmental secularism. I find his humanism most considered, even profound. I think this is what he left in most of us, certainly those friends, family, colleagues, students whom I have heard react to his death – quite a passion for

life and the qualities of things.

In Tilley's Garden: Transcendental Experiences – [Link]



Parting of ways to come. With Chris crossing the Øresund in 1988. That summer we spent two months exploring the prehistoric landscapes of Scania, Sweden and then north up to the great rock carved rapids of Nämforsen, Ångermanland. With hindsight, my annotated portfolio of a few thousand photos was to lead to a new line for me on "critical romanticism" and site specific performance with Mike Pearson, Cliff McLucas and theatre company Brith Gof. Chris was gathering his takes on phenomenologies of landscape.