

3 Against Archaeology in Modern Media

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Archaeology has been portrayed in the media since the earliest travellers voyaged to Egypt. With these travels came stories of mummies and even novels set on archaeological sites, like those written by Agatha Christie. Today's media continue to portray archaeologists on the silver screen or on television. This portrayal is somehow different to the portrayal of old where the archaeologist maybe clever and insightful, even a sadistic killer. Today however, the archaeologist is portrayed as a gung ho action star rushing to solve one case or crime to another.

No worse of this betrayal to the integrity of intelligence of the archaeologist is the BBC's programme *Bonekickers*. Hailed by many as one of the worst shows ever made by the BBC, with terrible story lines and one dimensional character who seem to chase after adventure rather than do actual archaeological excavation. This is a worse betrayal of the science than the silver screen versions like Indian Jones or Richard O'Connor (*The Mummy*), who chase evil villains across the world. The BBC's attempt however tries to make them intelligent and then shatter that image by having them chase across relics across the Britain.

Not only was archaeology let down by the poor characters and storyline of *Bonekickers*. The archaeological method shown within the programme was also lacking with chunks of wood being found in nonwater logged soil and then being left on a table. As well as a magnetometer beeping when passed over metal which is not exactly how the device works. One wonders when or if the fictional archaeological characters in the media will ever return to the intelligence of years ago or if they will continue down the road of ever increasing stupidity flash past the eyes of the ever stupefying nature of the watcher of today.

This lowering of the effort in today's media can be seen in the latest *Indiana Jones* film. Although he was always a gun slinging tomb raider, the latest film seemed to be lacking in the originality of the first three films and it seems to take its storyline almost directly from episodes from *Stargate*. This again shows a lack of effort on the side of the archaeologist.

We should also not forget non-fictional archaeological programming. *Time team* is obviously the most famous choice of this genre. Since its first episode in 1994, it has covered many different areas of archaeological interest in England as well as several excavations aboard, including the recently aired palaeontology excavation in America. This has revitalised interest in archaeology leading many to choose it as a profession or university course. This is probably the best way that media has shown archaeology as it does not make it any more interesting than it ever was with ridiculous chases or villains with guns.

So it would probably be best for archaeology to stop being portrayed in fictional media all together. More mainstream programmes of archaeology in practice such as the short lived *Two Men in a Trench* not more terrible written programs such as *Bonekickers*. However perhaps shows like *Bonekickers* are to the archaeological profession as *Channel 5's House* is to the medical profession; a product of the profession that must be endured.