

WHY I

July 29, 2011 Maev Kennedy Archaeological Media, Day of Archaeology 2011, Journalism Anthropology, Archaeology, Dublin, emperor, Facebook, journalist, Leonard Cottrell, social network, The Not Very Impressive Ring Fort, Tory councillor, Trowel

I know it's true, I've seen their eyes glaze over half way through my excited explanation of something I'm working on – but really, how could any journalist not want to write about archaeology? How could they not want to be the first to pass on some revelation into, literally, the ground beneath our feet?

I've come to accept the rule that any third rate political story knocks any second rate archaeology story out of consideration, but not without protest. I mourn the little spindle with runic inscriptions, the grots that gave us another trowel full of information about some obscure and short lived Roman emperor, the nuns' bronze dress pins from a sewer at Lacock, all the stories that I never managed to get into print.

And it still puzzles me that so many don't get it that damage to archaeology, from local museum cuts to night hawks, from a kamikaze attack by a Tory councillor with a name to make to all the finds still not being reported under Portable Antiquities, is stealing all our history.

I did a bit of excavating myself when I was eight, and discovered the books of Leonard Cottrell, and that the name of the Victorian Dublin suburb where I grew up meant The Not Very Impressive Ring Fort. We had no money, but we did have a big house – then despised as “second hand” and so costing my parents considerably less than a new semi-d – with such a big garden that I had my own walled corner of it. I set to with my little shovel. I didn't find a ring fort, but I did find a large decorative cast iron knob which stood on my mantelpiece all the remaining years of my childhood: every time I looked at it I remembered that other worlds, sometimes almost visible, lie all around us.

I'm very interested in all the stories I do otherwise I wouldn't write them. But nothing gives me the shiver of excitement of a good archaeology story. Archaeology is the true social network: you can like and befriend people who died thousands of years ago – but as with Facebook, having made that link, you may never hear another word from them again.