

THE PAST SENSE PROJECT: PIONEERING APPROACHES TO THERAPEUTIC ARCHAEOLOGY

July 25, 2015 LIPCAP / PSP Archives, Buildings, Community Archaeology, Education, Experimental Archaeology, Explore Posts, Finds, Historical Archaeology, Industrial, Landscape Archaeology, Public Archaeology, Survey Archaeological theory, Archaeology of Emotions, Contemporary Archaeology, Crime and Punishment, historical archaeology, Household Archaeologies, Postmedieval Archaeology, theoretical archaeology, Therapeutic Archaeology, urban archaeology

INTRODUCTION

My post for this year's Day of Archaeology covers work I'm undertaking for a pilot community archaeology project that I co-direct ('Past Sense', or 'PSP'), with the other project co-director, Debra (a psychotherapist). PSP is a voluntary community and public project that adopts archaeological and psychological approaches in examining the material histories of violence in the home, and using such histories within trauma therapy. We explore the significance of material culture within and after situations of domestic and sexual violence and abuse in the past, through archaeological data and artefacts; objects within public archives and private collections; and a range of historical sources (including written evidence, photos, and oral histories). And we're using this research in developing therapeutic archaeological workshops.

The project works within the fields of Contemporary and Historical Archaeology, analysing postmedieval material (for the purposes of PSP work, 17th – 21st century, focusing on the 19th – 20th century). We primarily examine material from Derbyshire (centring on Derby), but also investigate contexts within other areas in the East Midlands, and other parts of Britain. Though mostly looking at housing, we also consider other buildings, and landscapes. I sometimes investigate sites of recreation and sociability (such as pubs and parks); commerce and industry (such as shops and factories); education and religion (such as schools and meeting halls); law and order (such as courts and prisons); and care and burial (such as hospitals and cemeteries). Where it may be useful to do so, this may include looking at the homes of the family and friends of victims and perpetrators of violence, and of police officers and magistrates.

WHAT I'VE BEEN DOING TODAY

Much of my time is spent reading previous work, and thinking how I might develop and apply this research in socially beneficial ways; my day began by re-reading an academic article (and the notes that I made) that provides useful grounding for project work. (I use Archaeological Theories that integrate and develop approaches from other disciplines – such as Anthropology, Sociology, Psychology, Philosophy, and Geography – to inform my work, particularly research on archaeologies of emotion and sensory experience.)

I then returned to a presentation that I'm preparing, which briefly explains how Debra and I are developing educational and therapeutic workshops and other resources, and how community participation might enhance knowledge surrounding understandings of material culture in the past. This slideshow outlines the ideas behind the project (which began about five years ago with the recognition of common ground between archaeology and therapy: the direct involvement of material culture in managing trauma within Debra's [psychotherapeutic](#) work provided a starting point from which we might explore other ways to integrate archaeological approaches. But we only began to implement preparations for project work at the very end of 2014). It also introduces some of our work in progress – and today I've been working on one slide that will demonstrate this.

This involves putting together artefacts and survey data, with texts and images that relate to domestic and sexual violence in the past. These will provide examples of how we might use archaeological and other historical sources within project workshops and other resources, to consider how the home environment may have affected the ways in which people experienced violence in the past, in comparison to more recent situations of abuse.

‘TEA AND SYMPATHY’

PSP uses data from another community archaeology project that I direct ([‘Living in the Past Community Archaeology Project’](#), or ‘LIP’ / ‘LIPCAP’ – which featured in posts for the 2013 Day of Archaeology, [here](#) and [here](#)). Today I went through the collection of ‘finds’ photos so far obtained during building and garden surveys, to see what might be used in workshops, and the presentation. I'm creating a MS Powerpoint slide entitled ‘Tea and Sympathy’, and have found a photo that may be suitable for this topic: of a 19th century ceramic sherd found in the garden of a [terraced house](#) in [Ashbourne, Derbyshire](#) (which is described and illustrated briefly [here](#) and [here](#)). The artefact depicted is made of refined white [earthenware](#), decorated with a floral blue [transfer print](#), and is probably part of a teacup. The photo's not great quality, and I'd prefer a slightly older sherd than this, but it's acceptable for present purposes. So I'm preparing the image in Adobe Photoshop, removing the ‘noise’ from the white background on which the sherd was placed when it was photographed.



*Decorated 19th century ceramic sherd
(transfer printed refined white
earthenware), found in the topsoil of a
terraced house garden in Ashbourne,
Derbyshire (LIPCAP)*

Workshops will integrate a broad range of historical sources, including literature – in this instance, I've decided to use this artefact alongside material from [Charles Dickens' *Old Curiosity Shop*](#). I selected an extract from an appropriate scene in the book, in which the character Betsy Quilp (whose husband, Daniel, treats her with cruelty) and her mother take tea in their home with female neighbours:

"...it was extremely natural that the discourse should turn upon the propensity of mankind to tyrannise over the weaker sex, and the duty that devolved upon the weaker sex to resist that tyranny and assert their rights and dignity."

Workshop handouts may present further extracts, and other historical information, to provide the 'bigger picture', and related artefacts provided for participants to 'handle', to stimulate discussion regarding material culture and female support networks.



Betsy Quilp, mother and neighbours at tea: Old Curiosity Shop, Charles Dickens, 1841 (Source: [Project Gutenberg](#))

‘HOME, SWEET HOME?’

I’m also preparing illustrations for a slide titled ‘Home, sweet home?’, which will show how we’re using studies of housing and neighbourhood landscapes to consider the environments (and potential causes and effects) of the abuse that appears to have taken place. Workshops will involve a case study of a family, the wife and mother of which summonsed her husband to the magistrates court in 1883, complaining of his violence towards her (information on this case can be found on the project website, [here](#)).

I’ve been carrying out research into the background of family members, and into what happened to them after the court case. This has involved going through various archives to examine newspaper reports and magazine articles; trade directories and maps; census and civic records; parish and poor law records; and photographic and art archives and collections; oral histories and other recollections of local people. I’ve looked at local and other historical sources in order to consider the context in which this family lived, and examined [archaeological reports](#) (the area of the family home was [excavated a few years ago](#)) and [historic environment records](#), to find out more about their domestic and community surroundings. I

still have some sources to consult before I'm able to complete the picture of home life for this and other families in the area at the time, but what I've found out so far has proved useful.



<http://www.britainfromabove.org.uk/image/EPW005814> © copyright Historic England
1921 aerial view, showing location of the family home (circled) at the time of the court case (Source of image: [Britain from Above](#))

The photos, maps, and descriptions of this housing within newspapers, and in the recollections of local people; and archaeological excavations and standing building surveys of similar housing; suggest how the arrangement of domestic and neighbourhood architecture and space may have affected movement (limiting opportunities to escape from violent incidents), and access to possible support networks – for both victim and perpetrator. It is also clear from this evidence that the children in the family, and neighbours, would have likely heard, and perhaps seen, violence (and yet from the newspaper reports, no witnesses appeared in court to support the claimant). This analysis suggests how surroundings may have enabled or prevented particular acts of violence, and resistance to abuse, and how such behaviour might have affected the lives of others, as well as those directly involved.

My workday shall end with continued reading of a study on domestic abuse and violence in 18th and 19th century Britain. Not, it might be thought, uplifting bedtime reading. But research on violence between the 17th and 20th centuries demonstrates that, despite those in authority not always supporting those terrorised and abused in their homes by spouse, family member, supposed friend, or neighbour,

and contrary to popular belief today, *many* in the past saw such behaviour as unacceptable. Not only friends and family, but communities and members of wider society, often expressed disapproval at domestic and sexual violence.

So I'll end this post with a short video (this is not of my making: thanks instead go to the 'Marchers' – a 'LARP troupe', I think – for putting this on Youtube). This demonstrates 'rough music' – one way that communities (most often women) in the past used material culture to demonstrate condemnation of domestic and sexual violence, when those in power could not (or would not) punish the offender.

<https://youtu.be/LTlcYxbEnuw>

More information on PSP is available through our website and social media, through which anyone interested can follow the project:

Website: <https://pastsenseproject.wordpress.com/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/PastSenseProject>

Twitter: [@P_S_Project](https://twitter.com/P_S_Project)