

Reply

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In order to see *Time Team* in context, I think it is important to see the background, not only of the programme but also of myself and the producer, Tim Taylor. This is explained in my book *Mick's Archaeology* (Tempus 2000) and in Tim's *Behind the Scenes at the Time Team* (Channel 4 1998).

Put simply, there was little, if any, archaeology on television by 1994. The great *Chronicle* series were over and no one in my contacts at BBC (Bristol) or elsewhere was interested in getting archaeology on television. Were it not for the '3 day formula' this would probably still be the case.

In fact, many people in units will confirm that a lot of their field work is evaluation trenches, conducted over a few days, like on *Time Team*; unlike them, we condense the pre-excavation time, with up to 3-4 weeks desk-top research by researchers, geophysical survey sometimes a day or so before the programme, and post-excavation recording after the programme (usually - and therefore not filmed) followed by several months of writing up the archive report (by Katie Hirst). The *Time Team* record on report-writing is very good, with almost all of the work covered in over 60 programmes complete to the format to be deposited with local Sites and Monuments Records.

Such work, however, could probably not even be shown on television. It would be an instant turn-off. When the popular medical programmes were shown in the past (*Your Life in Their Hands* etc.) I don't recall seeing doctors writing up their reports for the *Lancet* or the *British Medical Journal*.

I don't think 'archaeological realities' are 'sacrificed for a good story'. The archaeological realities are carried out, a film is made, the archive is prepared much like in a normal unit.

Time Team does not pretend that a 'full scientific investigation can be achieved in three days' any more than units doing evaluation work do. This is a misrepresentation of the nature of the excavations which we carry out, which are, essentially, *evaluation*. Of course a *full* investigation would take longer. I wish people would give us credit for *knowing* this simple fact.

Time Team in its present format *is* about finding things. This is usually where the interest of the public - and especially children - begins. I don't think there is any reason not to start people's interest in this way (and I know many academics who were initially fired in just such a way). Last year a documentary programme (about Seahenge) was made over a long period. Others are to be made this year (including one on Orkney). These enable the fuller process of archaeological work to be shown. *But*, and it is a very big but, with the attitude of many archaeologists today, if we are

to *keep* the interest and therefore the relevance of archaeology (and the money spent on it) to the general public, other types of programmes *need* to be proposed and people prepared to 'risk' their precious reputations and purist views in order to make them. I wish them well, it is not an easy process.

In the end, this sniping by some archaeologists may be just so much navel-gazing. The reality is that programmes are commissioned by commissioning editors in television companies. They are a notoriously capricious, illogical and irrational lot. (One producer described them to me as being like medieval popes - total power and no responsibilities). No matter what we would *like* to see or the public wants for that matter, they will commission what appeals to them. Next year they will probably choose something different, though cooking, gardening, changing other people's houses and living on islands, seem to be the safest bets at the moment.

Add to this the heady cocktail of numerous satellite channels and the 'threat' of hundreds of digital channels all competing for the same audience and I suspect standards of presentation, the selection of topics to be covered adequately, and so on, will probably get worse as television companies compete for their slice of a stable audience. As I said in my 1999 CBA Beatrice de Cardi lecture on *Archaeology and the Media* - whether you like it or not, *Time Team* may be as good as it gets.

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