

# On the Meaning of Industrial Archaeology

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The term "Industrial Archaeology" is a British invention apparently coined by one Donald Dudley in 1953 (Hudson 1963:11). As it appears that there is an inclination to import this term and apply it to that phase of New World Archaeology which treats of historic sites of predominantly technological importance, analysis of the term and its background is in order.

While it is most often a futile practice to attempt the prevention of the wholesale adoption of a new term that has gained some acceptance, this writer feels the term "Industrial Archaeology" is so inappropriate in view of its British denotations that protest should be recorded.

We have two principle published sources (other than "site" reports) for understanding the English meaning of Industrial Archaeology. They are Kenneth Hudson's **Industrial Archaeology** and J. P. M. Pannell's **Techniques of Industrial Archaeology**. This writer has had the additional benefit of a long and informative talk with E. R. R. Green when he visited my site in 1964. Dr. Green is indisputably one of the founders and leaders of the Industrial Archaeology movement in the British Isles as well as being the editor of "The Industrial Archaeology of the British Isles" series, of which Pannell's book is one volume.

I have no quarrel with the principle that historic sites of the industrial era are culturally important and are proper areas of study for archaeology. Apparently the British had to meet and are still confronted with arguments as to its worth. Kenneth Hudson expends much space defending his subject against dissenters who find ludicrous the juxtaposition of the word "industrial" referring to sites directly related to the Industrial Revolution—about two hundred years of age—with "archaeology" being a discipline traditionally associated with ancient remains. He uses

O. G. S. Crawford's oft-quoted remark—"Archaeology is merely the past tense of anthropology"—a little illogically in this defense since in Britain, Industrial Archaeology is not anthropology.

Hudson follows this tack with the statement that there is no "point at all in the mere discovery and accumulation of facts. One must have an attitude toward the facts in order to perceive any sense and cohesion in them. Discovery and recording evidence is a sterile activity, unless one has some idea as to what it is evidence of" (*Ibid.*: 15).

While that statement is a valuable truism, it would seem to have more relevance to certain arguments among American Historic Site Archaeologists than to a defense of Industrial Archaeology *per se*.

As I said before, however, Hudson's and Pannell's arguments (Pannell 1966; 9 17) in defense of Industrial Archaeology present valid justification for such study even though they may not be arrived at logically. Our reservations begin with their explanations of their meaning of Industrial Archaeology.

First, Hudson begins by bemoaning any use of the traditional interpretation of the word **archaeology** as necessitating the excavation of data (Hudson 1963:14). Anticipating protestations against this reasoning and balking at the assigning of such nonexcavational studies to a branch of formal history, he disowns the latter term on the basis that it does not have "... quite the same meaning or the same flavour" (*Ibid.*: 13).

Second, for Britain's industrial archaeologists the preservation of the site which they study assumes almost as much importance as the study itself (Hudson 1963:9).

Third, English Industrial Archaeology

seems to be oriented towards the dilettant. This is apparently not by chance but by choice. Pannell states that while archaeology *per se* includes some disciplined professionals, it "... is—and has been for centuries a study for the amateur" (Pannell 1966:10). Indeed Hudson goes further in stating that the study is far better done by amateurs than professionals, for it is "... unreasonable to expect ... (the latter) to look for quite the same details or to find quite the same satisfaction as ... (the former)" (Hudson 1963:34).

This unprofessional, or more correctly antiprofessional, "approach" is reflected in three chapters of Hudson's book containing important information on dates and technological "firsts," which is sadly undocumented. Chapter 10 relates a wealth of interpretive data on the history and use of "Building Materials" including such statements as, "In spite of these inventions (frame and circular saws), most of the (building) timber continued to be cut by hand, by pit sawyers, **at least until the middle of the nineteenth century.**" (Emphasis mine.) The foregoing and a dozen similar sentences are documented at the end of a twelve-page CHAPTER with the note that another person provided the information. (Hudson 1963:148)\*

Mr. Pannell's book, purporting to be a handbook of **the Techniques of Industrial Archaeology**, gives no instruction on excavation or even anticipates that manner of obtaining data. Rather it is devoted to the scattered skills of the formal historian, surveyor, photographer, artist, etc.

As I have said, most of the examples of Industrial Archaeology given by its two cited proponents deal with relics of the "industrial" age that are selfevident to all. They do not depend upon, or in fact consider as applicable, those talents peculiar to the professional archaeologist, that is, making visible and intelligible those material remains of the past that lie underground (or water), hidden from view.

This writer's interpretation of the discipline of archaeology may, as Hudson suggests, be too traditionalistic. But is it not tradition that makes terminology comprehensible and therefore usable? It seems to me that the ultraliberal who insists upon coining new terms for traditional concepts is the one who has the responsibility for justifying his case, rather than tradition having to defend established terms from the attachment of foreign connotations.

My rejection of the term "Industrial Archaeology" cannot be dismissed on the basis of semantics. My stand must be attacked on my major premise that the archaeologist must dig for his data. The "industrial archaeologist" is performing archaeology when he excavates a site. He is not an archaeologist, however, if this excavation is only occasional or accidental to his normal method of procuring data.

This is not to deny the fact that the archaeologist needs to be proficient in research, surveying, photography, drafting, and many more skills basic to proper excavation, and additionally in the case of the historic sites archaeologist, the ability to use the documentary research methods of the formal historian. I am deliberately avoiding the problem of his involvement with and understanding of culture in the anthropological sense.

Secondly, this writer cannot accept the premise that preservation of a site is within the essential context of archaeology. While it is certainly true that the work of the archaeologist is often essential to preservation and that his findings are often the main basis upon which the decision to preserve or not to preserve is based, it is outside his professional *raison d'être*. He may, and when possible should, advise the people concerned with such activities, and he may even become actively involved—but his doing so is **extra-archaeological**.

To be otherwise leads to various difficult situations. When preservation becomes the principal aim of the archaeologist, he tends to become trapped in a time period—that synchronic slot in a site's history which is slated for preservation. Even if he may not forget intellectually that the site frequently has cultural-historical importance earlier than the time chosen for preservation, he tends to ignore it in practice, being afraid to remove evidence relating the

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\*It should be kept in mind that Hudson's book and the published version of his "Handbook of British Archaeology," sponsored by the Council for British Archaeology (Hudson 1963; 9). It is safe to assume, therefore, that his sentiments are generally shared.

"preservation" period to see what lies beneath.

An argument against the Industrial Archaeology creators' concept of who should be the practitioners of their field will not be undertaken here. It is self-evidently fallacious.

Before concluding these thoughts, I must interject one observation concerning the efficacy of the phrase Industrial Archaeology which the adherents of that term do not entertain. I expect that it will find favor, if at all, only with my colleagues of anthropological orientation. I refer to the use of the word industrial.

Anthropologists have used the word **industry** to refer to cultures' technologies for years. The archaeologist studying aboriginal knapping sites is dealing in industrial archaeology and does so continuously; anthropologically speaking, that period in history referred to as the Industrial Revolution is a "florescent" or possibly a "climax" period.

**Industry** as is commonly used — synonymously with that phase of industrial development capsulized in the time-term "Industrial Revolution" — is an economists' and historians' term. It is restrictive in scope and implies denial of an historical-cultural continuum.

Whereupon I have come full circle. While realizing the difficulty of convincing anyone of caution in the use of such a convenient term as Industrial Archaeology much less the rejection of it, I believe we have outlined sufficiently compelling reasons for rejection. Not only is it a dangerous term in view of denotations conferred on it by its practitioners, but also it is an inaccurate phase in terms of culture.

Is this discussion purely one of semantics? As admitted above, it is if the concept of the synonymy of archaeologist and excavation is denied.

Is this argument academic? It is, if the very foundation of all scientific thought and development, that of definition, is academic. It might well be that all members of the SHA might be willing to accept and understand the term Industrial Archaeology in its British sense; but not all scholars would, and the term would have to be redefined each time it were used, in order to avoid confusion. While

the analogy is somewhat strained and dramatic, the use of ambiguous terms is akin to the surgeon over a patient asking for a scalpel by another term because the latter had more "flavor."

Should any take my statements to be critical of or patronizing to the archival historian or technological historian, professional or amateur, let me state that no such meaning is intended. On the contrary, all are important to the complete understanding of an historic site. However, each becomes specialized, and properly so, in his own area of competence to the extent that it would be folly for him to attempt to supplant the other. Rather, the obvious alternative is an interdisciplinary respect for each other's fields and interdependency upon them. The prehistoric archaeologist has long known that for an holistic understanding of a site his field party should include physical anthropologists, paleontologists, paleobotanists, geologists, etc.

In dealing with historic sites, while we must be aware of each other's fields, we should not expect the technological historian to be an archaeologist, nor the latter the former. It is only when a respect for the differences in method, techniques and aims is realized that the unique contributions of each will be able to fulfill its potential. The age of the effective Renaissance man is over. This is practically reflected, for example, in National Park Service archaeological contracts which remind the contractor that he must consult with specialists in his own and other fields in the proper execution of his obligation.

In conclusion, it is suggested that that phase of archaeology with which all of us present are concerned is assumed under the rubric Historic Sites. That term has been defined and is fairly well understood intra-professionally. If further modification is needed within that category for papers, conventions, etc., it would seem safer to simply add a hyphen followed by the term "Industrial".

HUDSON, KENNETH

1963 **Industrial Archaeology: An Introduction.** John Baker Publishers, Ltd., London.

PANNELL, J. P. M.

1966 **The Techniques of Industrial Archaeology.** David & Charles Ltd., Newton Abbot.