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Golson Lecture 2018

Revolutions in understanding: A history of archaeological thought and radiocarbon dating

Tuesday 27 March 2018, 6.30 - 8.00 PM

Dr Seren Griffiths

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DNF Dunbar Physics Lecture Theatre (Building 39A)



Archaeology can be characterised in some ways as a very young discipline. The Cambridge academic Glyn Daniel suggested that archaeology “started again” in 1950 with the introduction of the technique demonstrating the unrealized time depth of prehistory. Subsequent developments in radiocarbon dating have been identified as various “revolutions”, with the latest — Bayesian chronological statistical analyses of large datasets — hailed as a “revolution in understanding”. This has had significant implications for archaeological sequences, for example in the British Neolithic. This paper argues however that the full implications of radiocarbon data and interpretation on archaeological theory have yet to be recognized, and it suggests that responses in Britain to earlier revolutions in archaeological understanding offer salutary lessons for contemporary archaeological practice.

Dr Griffiths is a prehistorian specialising in the application of archaeological science techniques (scientific dating, stable isotopes, environmental archaeology, 3D modelling and geophysics) to aspect of European prehistory. Her research includes a critical engagement with the history of archaeological thought, and she has active research projects in Mesolithic, Neolithic and Bronze Age Hungary, Romania, Germany and Ireland. She directs two archaeology fieldwork projects in the UK; a public archaeology project in the multi-period landscape around the Bryn Celli Ddu and a prehistory landscape project in Northumberland. She has an MA (Oxon) in Archaeology and Anthropology, an MSci in Archaeological Science, and her PhD was on Bayesian statistical modelling of prehistoric chronologies in Britain.

Presented by the School of Archaeology & Anthropology

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