# Chapter 9: Letting go of Attachment Objects: Insights from the 'Problematic Stuff' of Later Prehistoric Britain and Beyond

Lindsey Büster
(Canterbury Christ Church University/University of York)

## 9.1 Exposing a paradox

The focus of this edited volume is 'attachment' (cf. Bowlby 1969): the objects, places and relationships which endure throughout the course of an individual's life, and often beyond. There are many examples of objects in the archaeological record which bear evidence for having been well-used and well-loved, sometimes across several generations. From the plastered skulls of the Neolithic Near East, which show extensive evidence for handling, breakage and repair (see Croucher 2012, p. 145), to the mismatched beads of jet-spacer necklaces in Early Bronze Age Britain (Sheridan et al. 2015), we frequently encounter these 'heirloom' objects in the archaeological record. In some cases, such as visible 'mend-holes' in British Neolithic and Bronze Age pots (Cleal 1988; Cooper et al. 2022), no attempt has been made to hide repairs, whilst the sheet gold appliques on the Attic kylix from the Early Iron Age Kleinaspergle fürstengrab (princely grave) in Baden-Württemberg, Germany (Böhr 1988, 176ff; Schaaf 1988), actively draws attention to them in strikingly similar fashion to the Japanese tradition of 'kintsugi' (cf. Chittock 2020).

Herein lies a paradox. Though research, as demonstrated in the current volume, increasingly recognises strong emotional bonds of attachment to objects in the archaeological record, the very reason that they form part of this record is that they were, at some point, discarded. Croucher (2018), for example, discusses the plastered skulls of the Neolithic Near East as evidence for the maintenance of 'continuing bonds' (cf. Klass et al. 1996; Walter 1996; Stroebe et al. 2012) with the dead, yet when we find them, it is often as deliberately cached deposits in secondary settlement contexts.

## 9.2 From grave goods to hoards (and back again)

Cached objects come in many forms, the most easily recognisable and the longest studied being grave goods and hoards. Grave goods are, as their name suggests, identified in most

cases by their association with a grave and/or a human body (cf. Cooper et al. 2022). Traditionally, cached objects categorised as grave goods have been interpreted either as the belongings of the deceased, or as gifts by mourners to aid the journey to the afterlife (e.g. Parker Pearson 1999, p. 7). In this regard, the term 'cenotaph' (e.g. Nilsson Stutz and Tarlow 2013, p. 6) has been adopted to resolve problems surrounding the categorisation of cached objects in funerary contexts (e.g. cemeteries) without bodies, where they were assumed to have fulfilled the role of grave goods for absent bodies, if, for example, an individual had died away from home. Despite their overtly ritualised context, in both scenarios grave goods perform a pragmatic role, in which they *accompany* a dead body which is given ontological primacy (by its *absence* in the case of cenotaphs). More recent theoretical frameworks, such as symmetrical archaeology (cf. Olsen 2012), actor network theory (Latour 2005) and assemblage theory (DeLanda 2016) have, however, questioned this *a priori* interpretative framework, and have explored the role of objects as agents (cf. Gell 1998) in their own right.

Hoards—isolated groups of objects cached in non-funerary settings (e.g. Bradley et al. 2013, 209)—are, in some ways, the antithesis of grave goods. Here, the ontological primacy of a dead human body is replaced with the perceived material value of (predominantly metal) objects. Traditional interpretations of hoards generally fall into one of two categories: one pragmatic and one overtly ritual. Either they have been hidden for safe-keeping, as a metalsmith's scrap or by an individual under threat, or, in cases where the context of deposition (e.g. in a bog, river or lake) suggests against the intention of retrieval, they represent propitiatory offerings to the supernatural.

As we have seen with the plastered skulls, however, cached objects come in many shapes and sizes, and in certain times and places the interpretative boundaries between different categories are more blurred (cf. Cooper et al. 2020). In later prehistoric (Late Bronze and Iron Age) Britain, for example, the dominant funerary rites often do not produce archaeologically visible human remains (cf. Harding 2016), and so the seemingly straightforward categorisation of objects as grave goods breaks down. Cached objects are, however, frequently recovered from non-funerary contexts, such as the settlements which dominate the archaeological record of this period. Nevertheless, since they frequently comprise seemingly mundane objects and materials, such as pots, worked bone tools and small personal items, and are deposited in the walls, floors and features (e.g. pits) of roundhouses and other domestic structures, neither do resemble the character of geographically-isolated hoards (cf.

Bradley 2016). One way around this interpretative conundrum is to dismiss these 'mundane' objects as the products of casual loss or discard. But this clearly isn't the case. These objects may lack the 'wow factor' of Late Bronze Age hoards or the flashy grave goods of some regional traditions of Iron Age inhumation, such as the Arras Culture of East Yorkshire (UK) (cf. Giles 2013), but their deposition was deliberate.

Roundhouses are, in many cases, devoid of large assemblages of artefacts upon excavation. They appear both to have been kept meticulously 'clean' during their use, as attested by the floor erosion resulting from continual 'sweeping out' of several of the roundhouses at Broxmouth in East Lothian (UK) (Büster and Armit 2013, Figure 1), and to have undergone formal 'structured abandonment' at the end of their lives (cf. Brück 1999a; Webley 2007). This is why sites like the Late Bronze Age pile-dwellings at Must Farm in the Cambridgeshire Fens (UK), which were destroyed, apparently accidentally, by fire within a generation of their construction (Knight et al. 2019), are so valuable, because they preserve exactly the kind of evidence—the detritus of everyday life—which is so often missing. And yet, we *do* find objects in roundhouses. Although, as noted earlier, these objects frequently occur in caches, and often in contexts (behind walls and under floor surfaces) which are difficult to explain as the result of casual loss (cf. Bradley 2005, 208–209).

### 9.3 Introducing 'structured deposits'

As Taylor (2017) notes, our categorisation of objects (and in this case, groups of objects) relies to a certain extent on an unconscious *a priori* interpretation that dictates the hierarchy of criteria for inclusion or exclusion from a certain classification. For grave goods, it is the presence of a human body in an overtly funerary context such as a grave or cemetery; for hoards, it is the presence of objects with high material value or rarity in a geographically-isolated non-funerary context. Until relatively recently, then, there was no way of discussing cached mundane objects in non-funerary contexts as a group. Their recovery from non-funerary contexts such as cemeteries rendered them ineligible for categorisation as grave goods, and thus outside the interpretative framework of mortuary archaeology (despite recognition that in many societies the boundaries between 'person' and 'object' are far more fluid; cf. Fowler 2004), while the relatively mundane nature of the objects, and their caching on settlements, excluded them from studies of hoards.

With emerge of the term ‘structured deposition’, coined by Richards and Thomas (1984) to describe the apparent patterning of pottery, bone and flint at Neolithic ritual monuments—clearly deliberately placed (and in this case associated with overtly ritual monuments) but not attributable to any existing descriptive category of cached objects—things began to change. Armed with a classification for these kinds deposit, their recognition and associated research grew (see Garrow 2012). For studies of later prehistoric Britain, the shift was transformational. Hill’s (1995) seminal study of structured deposits in Iron Age Wessex was pivotal in demonstrating that, despite a lack of bespoke ritual and funerary monuments (as was the case in Neolithic and Early Bronze Age Britain), these aspects of peoples’ lives had not vanished but had now simply been incorporated into the rhythms of everyday life (cf. Bradley 2005). This need not surprise us. As Brück (1999b) highlights, the sharp distinction between pragmatic/functional and ritual/symbolic action is the product of post-Enlightenment thinking (and is, I suggest, not as rigid in our own lives as we might perhaps presume). Placing objects, including human remains, in grain storage pits at Danebury hillfort in Hampshire (UK) (e.g. Cunliffe 1993) as propitiatory offerings for a good harvest, for example, was a symbolic act for a ‘functional’ outcome, and so trying to classify these items as either one or the other is nonsensical. From the young boy killed and divided between four pits during construction of the Hornish Point wheelhouse in South Uist (UK) (see Armit 2012, p. 205) to the deliberate crossing of the door jambs by the departing inhabitants of the roundhouse at Leskernick on Bodmin Moor (UK) (Bender et al. 2007, colour plate 3b), evidence from across Britain demonstrates that ritual and domestic life were very much intertwined (cf. Bradley 2005).

During my own examination of the Late Iron Age roundhouses at Broxmouth, I also identified several instances of structured deposition: single artefacts or groups of objects placed between walls, under paved floors and inside pits (Büster and Armit 2013, Figure 1). They appeared to have been deposited in walls and under floors during construction or refurbishment of the buildings (Büster 2021a), or placed into pits during decommissioning. Most items were not particularly striking and would not have looked out of place in a typical domestic assemblage: two bone spoons, quernstones for grinding grain, cattle and sheep/goat crania. There were however a few items that were less common or more overtly symbolic in nature: a set of polished antler gaming pieces, a human cranial fragment and a human mandible. Several of the items, such as the pair of bone spoons (Figure 1, a–b), appeared to reference one another in their placement during initial construction of the roundhouse and its

final phase of refurbishment. The three gaming pieces (Figure 1, c–e) were also deposited in two separate events, suggesting that two of the three had been curated for a generation or more. Meanwhile, the quernstones appeared to reference the location of former pits (Büster 2021a, Figure 8), with Campbell (1991, p. 133) suggesting, in relation to a similar situation at Sollas wheelhouse in North Uist (UK), that the feeder pipes may have facilitated the pouring of libations into the features below. All of the items, with the exception of the quernstones in the final paved floor surface, were ultimately hidden from view, in most cases soon after they had been deposited.

Despite identification of structured deposits at Broxmouth and elsewhere, a problem remained. While the categorisation of cached objects as grave goods or hoards comes with an associated interpretive framework, the same is not true for structured deposits. We can now recognise structured deposits in the archaeological record—through patterning and/or context of deposition—but, beyond acknowledging that there was likely a ritual or symbolic element to their deposition, this is where interpretation generally stops. So how do we move forward? How do we understand the human behaviour behind the deposition of these items, in these places, at these times, beyond the vague interpretation that they probably had some kind of ritual or symbolic meaning?

### 9.4 From continuing bonds to problematic stuff

Several years after my doctoral studies at Broxmouth, I was working as a researcher on the *Continuing Bonds Project* (Croucher et al. 2020), which explored the value of archaeology in encouraging conversations around death, dying and bereavement with palliative care professionals. During workshops, we asked participants to respond to a range of archaeological case studies which demonstrated different approaches to death (treatment of the body, funerary architecture, and so on). As we had hoped, conversations quickly moved from discussions of the deep past to discussions about the present. More unexpectedly, for me at least, it became apparent that although people were concerned about what would happen to their bodies, objects of the dead were equally troubling. One participant described a pair of misshapen shoes which reminded her of her late grandfather as a frail old man. This was not a happy memory or a long-cherished heirloom and yet, after his death, she could not throw them away (Büster 2021b, p. 9). Another participant recalled that a jar of Horlicks (a malted-milk drink powder) bought on a routine shopping trip and given to her by her mother before

her mother's sudden death 'became like an artefact' (ibid., p. 4). Like the shoes, this participant could not throw the Horlicks away and it sat in the cupboard for five years until 'it was solid'. In this regard, it is interesting to note that in a study of modern attachment objects, many were also originally received as gifts (Bell and Spikins 2018, p. 28). The Horlicks, however, was no longer a jar of Horlicks but a hugely problematic object. Similar sentiments are echoed by Brammer (2017), who recalls that after her mother's death, 'the significance of the doilies and anything she had touched, grew overnight'. Both workshop participants did eventually 'get rid' of this 'problematic stuff' but only when it was 'time to release them' after 'getting through the grief'. Though we might imagine that life in the first millennium BC and life in the 21st century are very different, I saw similarities between the stories of the bereaved workshop participants and the structured deposits at Broxmouth. The objects that the participants were describing were mundane and everyday, they had not been buried or cremated with the dead body, and they were eventually 'got rid of' in a non-funerary context.

Recorded as the post-mortem treatment for 78% of individuals in 2021 (The Cremation Society 2022), cremation is the dominant funerary rite in Britain today. This is normally a highly regulated process conducted in specialist facilities which, while taking the burden of responsibility off grieving relatives, comes with its own restrictions. The list of 'permitted' grave goods for cremation with the body is fairly limited (wooden rosary beads, flowers, soft toys, jewellery and written messages) (Funeral Zone Ltd 2019; Bridgend CBC 2022), since many materials compromise the functionality and maintenance of the cremation furnace or result in environmentally polluting emissions. The list of 'banned' items includes clothes, accessories and shoes made from materials including treated leather, latex, and vinyl; metals (other than those with a high ferrous content); combustible items (such as bottles of spirits); and even plaster casts and pacemakers (ibid.). Rather than an intimate moment of spontaneity, mourners must 'not place items in the coffin unless it has been approved' by crematorium officials (Bridgend CBC 2022). After cremation, urns are often kept by loved ones or the ashes scattered.

In Iron Age Britain, the dead are often described as 'elusive' (cf. Harding 2016, p. 4) or invisible because of the absence of formal cemeteries across much of the region at this time. When human remains *are* found, they tend to be recovered as isolated bones (frequently crania and long bones) from settlement contexts, such as those previously described, and in many cases bear evidence for weathering and gnawing, suggesting that they have spent some

time above ground before their final deposition. This absence of evidence suggests that the majority of individuals may have been subject to excarnation (cf. Carr and Knüsel 1997), whereby the body was defleshed and disarticulated through natural exposure to the elements, or perhaps through manual processing (see Büster et al. 2020, p. 4). It is possible that others were cremated and their ashes scattered, or that bodies were placed into rivers and lakes.

In both cases—the cremation rites of 21st century Britain and the excarnation (or other invisible) practices of the first millennium BC—the opportunity for deposition of the type of cached objects traditionally categorised as grave goods is limited. In the case of mechanised cremation, the interment of objects with the body is highly restricted and the resultant ashes are, in many cases, never deposited in a formal grave. In Iron Age Britain, exposure and disarticulation of the body above ground, and the occasional retrieval of only select bones for inclusion in structured deposits on settlements, likewise eliminates the need for a formal grave.

So, what do cached objects on Iron Age settlements represent and how can the experiences of bereaved people today help us understand the past societies that we study? Funerary treatments such as excarnation suggest that bodily integrity (and the trappings of everyday life) were not necessary for Iron Age journeys to the afterlife, and that deliberate fragmentation was, in fact, an enabler in this process. Meanwhile, 49% of people identify as 'irreligious' in the UK today (World Population Review 2022), similarly suggesting the desire to add objects to coffins before cremation may be driven by sentiments other than equipping the deceased; certainly, like excarnation, the scattering of cremation ashes suggests that corporeal integrity is not a primary concern. So, if these objects are not 'grave goods', what are they?

### 9.5 Separating ritual from religion

Though theories of attachment highlight the strong emotional bonds which bind people and objects together, they tend to focus on objects (e.g. children's toys; Bell and Spikins 2018) which represent the enduring material manifestation of long-lasting relationships and happy memories. But as we have seen with the jar of Horlicks and the misshapen shoes described earlier, this is not always the case for bereaved individuals. Some objects provoke unhappy memories or represent the otherwise fleeting detritus of everyday life, and yet, they provoke

similarly strong emotional responses of attachment which transform these objects from the realm of casual discard into a problematic liminal category requiring careful disposal.

As we have seen, structured deposits are often conflated with the placation or appeasement of supernatural beings. But problematic stuff, like the jar of Horlicks, is not imbued with the otherworldly power of saint's relics (cf. Jestice 2004), nor the continuing bonds of Victorian 'secular relics' (Lutz 2015) such as hair jewellery, lockets, photographs and miniatures (cf. Morris and Bickle 2022, p. 309). Rather, they represent the raw emotional charge of relics of the everyday. As I have discussed elsewhere (Büster 2021b, Figure 3), these problematic objects need not be restricted to those of physically deceased relatives but can include items belonging to a socially dead persona; the now obsolete CDs of my youth which linger in my parent's attic being just one example. I no longer play them. In fact, some of them no longer reflect my tastes, and yet, there they sit. Though some objects in the so-called 'Sorceress' Kit' (Daley 2019) from Pompeii, Italy, might well have functioned to 'invoke fortune, fertility and protection against bad luck' (Archaeological Park of Pompeii 2019), many also represent 'objects of everyday life in the female world'. What if, rather than a 'magic box', this is a 'memory box' (cf. Macmillan Cancer Support 2022)? The power of the objects residing not in communion with the supernatural but in the strong bonds forged between the living and the physically and socially dead (see Králová 2015 for examples of social death). By conflating ritual with religious behaviour, we have straitjacketed our interpretations of past societies. Bradley's (2005, p. 34) broad definition of ritual behaviour as 'both a way of acting which reveals some of the dominant concerns of society, and a process by which certain parts of life are selected and provided with an added emphasis', acknowledges that we need not always equate ritual practice with religious practice. From brushing our teeth to pouring ourselves a coffee with breakfast, we undertake many secular rituals every day.

As I stressed earlier, there is ultimately little value in drawing sharp distinctions between functional and symbolic, quotidian and ritual, both in the past and today. Equally unhelpful is the *a priori* assumption that ritualised behaviour is the product of solely religious behaviour. By constraining our interpretations in this way, we have overlooked another major facet of what it means to be human: emotion. Over two decades ago, Tarlow (2000) challenged us to find emotion in the archaeological record and to recognise its important role in our understanding of past societies. From the long-curated plastered skulls of the Neolithic Near East (cf. Croucher 2017) to the cradling of an infant on a swan's wing in the Mesolithic

cemetery of Vedbæk, Denmark (Albrethsen and Brinch Petersen 1976), many aspects of the funerary record are readily recognisable as the product of emotional responses to the loss of a loved one. But, drawing on the experiences of the participants of the *Continuing Bonds Project*, considerations of emotion may help us move forward in the interpretation of some of the more enigmatic assemblages which lie beyond the bounds of traditional mortuary archaeology. If cenotaph burials are grave goods for the absent dead in traditional funerary contexts, then why not (at least some) structured deposits? As we have seen, there *are* no bodies for deposition in formal cemeteries in much of Iron Age Britain. But what about their 'stuff'? Not only those objects that, in cemetery contexts, we would categorise as grave goods, but the 'problematic stuff' (cf. Büster 2021b), like the jar of Horlicks, which play no functional or religious role for the living and yet, are so charged with emotional power that they cannot simply be thrown onto the midden with the detritus of everday life? These unintended—and in many cases unwanted—attachment objects. Eventually the time comes to 'let go' of these items, but how to deposit them? If their problematic status has cast them beyond the realm of casual discard, then the alternative is a deliberate ritualised event which acknowledges the transformation of a relationship between the living and the dead. Structured deposits—the deliberate deposition of a specific collection of apparently mundane objects (or groups of objects) in specific places at specific times—represent exactly this. In similar fashion to Brammer (2017) who framed and hung her mother's doilies 'so her story could be woven into the walls of my home', the caching of objects within the roundhouse at Broxmouth acknowledged not only the changing physical fabric of the house, but the *social* fabric of the household too (Büster 2021a).

### 9.6 Problematic 'out-of-time' objects

It is not just the objects of the *recent* dead that can become problematic. In a wheelhouse settlement at Cnip on the Isle of Lewis (UK), a cranial fragment, a rounded stone, a fragment of animal bone and a sherd of pottery were deposited in a small scoop beneath the floor of a cell constructed in the ruins of a disused building (Armit 2003, p. 57; Armit 2012, p. 1–3) (Figure 2). At first glance, this appears similar to the structured deposits at Broxmouth, which also included human remains and which commemorated the foundation of a new building. When the cranial fragment was AMS dated (Tucker and Armit 2009), however, it became apparent that when it was deposited in the first century AD, it was already 1500 years old. It is highly unlikely (though not impossible) that this fragment was curated above ground over

this period, but human remains have been eroding from a nearby Middle Bronze Age cemetery (Dunwell et al. 1995) for the last forty years, and this may well represent its source. Whether deliberately retrieved or encountered by chance, this 'detached fragment of humanity' (cf. Armit 2012, p. 1)—out of place and out of time—became a problematic object that required careful and meaningful disposal. These 'out-of-time' objects (Knight forthcoming) are not restricted to human remains, and many find their way into other collections of cached objects such as hoards (cf. Knight et al. 2019). At Broxmouth, approximately one third of the 158 AMS dates indicated redeposited material out of stratigraphic position, indicating a high degree truncation (and in many cases eradication) of earlier settlement features by successive generations of Iron Age inhabitants (Armit and McKenzie 2013, p. 20). This frequent encounter of the material traces of the past, together with the denuded ramparts and the small inhumation cemetery lying immediately to the north, would, by the Late Iron Age, have been a tangible daily reminder of the eight centuries of history below.

In Iron Age multi-period hoards in Britain, out-of-time objects predate the latest artefacts by at least 800 years, and some by as much as 2000 years (Davis 2019, p. 64). It is highly unlikely that these items were curated over so many generations and are more likely to have been unearthed, either accidentally or deliberately, at some point after their initial deposition. In some cases, such as the 'Salisbury'/Netherhampton hoard (UK), the presence of several different out-of-time objects points to deliberate 'collection' and curation, which is itself viewed as evidence of their perceived association with the 'devil' or the 'divine' (ibid., p. 65). Here, again, we encounter the *a priori* assumption that cached objects—in this case, high-value, rare and 'exotic' metalwork—are a proxy for rituals associated with the supernatural.

Over the course of forty years of routine gardening, my parents have amassed a collection of out-of-time objects which sit on a shelf in the kitchen: a prehistoric flint blade, a marble, a musket ball, a clay pipe fragment, a ceramic toothpaste lid, a tile fragment, a button, a glass stopper (Figure 3). The flint blade is the only object of any real antiquity, the others quite common and mundane. They are not perceived as holding the supernatural power of mythical ancestors or the heirlooms of recently deceased relatives and yet, there they sit. Separated and elevated on their shelf from the detritus of everyday life, we might consider them a structured deposit (albeit one that is visible above ground). Their unexpected transgression has given

them problematic status which, like the Horlicks and the out-of-time objects discussed above, renders them ineligible for casual discard. Could we describe these as attachment objects? Objects that connect us across space and time?

### 9.7 Museums as mausolea

If we think more broadly, the *rasion d'etre* for the entire heritage industry is the management of problematic stuff: a profession developed to deal with the material remains of dead ancestors, so that others don't have to. As Giles and Williams (2016, p. 8) suggest, mortuary archaeology is 'a specific form of contemporary memory work involving the archaeologist as a death-dealer'. And as I have argued in this chapter, if we look beyond the dead human body and consider *all* aspects of the archaeological record (including objects) as the 'possessions' of the dead, then all of us—archaeologists, curators, archivists—are death-dealers. Like the multi-period hoards described above, we could invoke a spiritual rationale and describe our work as 'ancestor worship' (cf. Fortes 1965; Whitley 2002) but this is perhaps an inaccurate reflection of how we perceive ourselves. A different view might see us as gate-keepers of material transgressions between past and present.

If archaeologists are death-dealers, then museums are mausolea for the objects of the dead. Like the collection of objects on my parents' kitchen shelf, museum collections represent a form of structured deposition; they are, after all, the formal deposition of specific (in this case out-of-time) objects at specific times in specific places (i.e. appropriately sanctioned buildings called museums). It is perhaps no coincidence—if we consider that objects, as we have discussed in this chapter, can become problematic through *both* their association with the recently deceased and/or their 'out-of-time' status—that many of the world's largest and most famous museums were founded by donations of private collections, frequently written into wills or gifted by widowed spouses. The British Museum was founded when Sir Hans Sloane left his collection of 'more than 80,000 'natural and artificial rarities'… a vast library of over 40,000 books and manuscripts, and 32,000 coins and medals' to the nation in 1753 (The British Museum 2022). Elias Ashmole gifted his vast collection to the University of Oxford in his own lifetime (1677), but only on the condition that 'an institution dedicated to the advancement of knowledge should be built' to house it (Ashmolean 2022). If museums represent appropriate contexts for the deposition of vast collections of antiquities by rich collectors, then what about the rest of us? What is our museum equivalent? My answer:

charity shops and thrift stores. Predicated on the goodwill of the general public, the benefits are in fact reciprocal: income for charities on the one hand but, on the other, a really useful way of deliberately depositing unwanted items—whether those of the recently deceased or the ghosts of socially dead personae—without having to consign them to the wheelie bin.

### 9.8 Squaring the circle: from attachment to deposition

In this chapter I have explored the role of emotion in understanding the behavioural processes that lead to the assemblages we recover as archaeologists. Using the contemporary experiences of bereaved individuals, we have recognised the tension between attachment, continuing bonds and deposition, whether or not the object in question is a treasured heirloom evoking happy memories, or something more ephemeral which has gained problematic status overnight. In doing so, we have side-stepped interpretations which foreground the human body and the material value or exotic nature of artefacts in our interpretations of cached objects (as is the case with grave goods and hoards), and have deconstructed the *a priori* assumption that ritual behaviour is necessarily a proxy for the supernatural. By acknowledging the importance of emotion in driving behaviour in the past and the present, we have identified the ways in which objects associated with the recent and ancestral dead can take on problematic status, which separates them from the rhythms of everyday life. As with 'structured deposition', recognition of problematic stuff in one context has allowed us to see it in others. We must, however, be careful not to repeat past mistakes. Recognition of the inherently problematic nature of stuff is only useful if we can disentangle categorisation from interpretation, and remind ourselves that our ultimate goal is understanding the people behind the objects.

**Acknowledgements**

Thanks to Ian Armit for commenting on a preliminary draft of this chapter, and for his permission to reproduce Figure 2.

**List of figures**

Figure 1. Structured deposits in House 4 at Broxmouth, East Lothian. Left: the bone spoons, each deposited at the base of the wall of the first (a) and last (b) iterations of the roundhouse; right: antler gaming pieces deposited in the infill of a large pit associated with the second

modification of the roundhouse (c) and at the base of a wall (d and e) during its refurbishment at least a generation later.

Figure 2. Cranial fragment, rounded stone, animal bone and pottery sherd deposited in the first century AD under the floor of a small cell associated with a wheelhouse at Cnip, Lewis (photo: Ian Armit)

Figure 3. A collection of objects recovered over forty years of routine gardening

**References**

Albrethsen, S. E. and Brinch Petersen, E. (1976). Excavation of a Mesolithic cemetery at Vedbaek, Denmark. *Acta Archaeologica, 47*, 1–28.

Ashmolean. (2022). The Ashmolean story gallery. https://www.ashmolean.org/the-ashmolean-story-gallery. Accessed October 2022.

Archaeological Park of Pompeii. (2019). The luck and the protection against the bad fate in the jewellery of Regio V. http://pompeiisites.org/en/press-releases/the-luck-and-the-protection-against-the-bad-fate-in-the-jewelery-of-regio-v/. Accessed October 2022.

Armit, I. (2006). *Anatomy of an Iron Age roundhouse: the Cnip wheelhouse excavations, Lewis.* Edinburgh: Society of Antiquaries of Scotland.

Armit, I. (2012). *Headhunting and the body in Iron Age Europe.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Armit, I. and McKenzie, J. (2013). *An inherited place: Broxmouth and the south-east Scottish Iron Age.* Edinburgh: Society of Antiquaries of Scotland.

Bell, T. and Spikins, P. (2018). The object of my affection: attachment security and material culture. *Time and Mind, 11*(1), 23–39.

Bender, B., Hamilton, S. and Tilley, C. (1997). Leskernick: stone worlds; alternative narratives; nested landscapes. *Proceedings of Prehistoric Society, 63*, 147–178.

Böhr, E. (1988). Die griechischen Schalen. In W. Kimmig (Ed.), *Das Kleinaspergle: studien zu einem Fürstengrabhügel der frühen Latènezeit bei Stuttgart. Forschungen und Berichte zur Vor- und Frühgeschichte in Baden-Württemberg 30, Stuttgart* (pp. 176–190). Stuttgart: Theiss.

Bowlby, J. (1969). *Attachment and loss, volume 1: attachment.* New York, NY: Basic Books.

Bradley, R. (2005). *Ritual and domestic in prehistoric Europe.* London: Routledge.

Bradley, R. (2016) *A geography of offerings: deposits of valuables in the landscapes of ancient Europe.* Oxford: Oxbow Books.

Bradley, R., Haselgrove, C., Vander Linden, M. and Webley, L. (2013). *The later prehistory of north-west Europe: the evidence of development-led fieldwork.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Brammer, J. (2017). How 'trinkets' become family heirlooms. https://smct.org.au/blog/how-trinkets-become-family-heirlooms. Accessed October 2022.

Bridgend CBC. (2022). Cremation rules and guidance. https://www.bridgend.gov.uk/residents/births-deaths-and-marriages/coychurch-crematorium/cremation-rules-and-guidance/. Accessed October 2022.

Brück, J. (1999a). Houses, lifecycles and deposition on Middle Bronze Age settlements in southern England. *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society, 65*, 145–166.

Brück, J. (1999b). Ritual and rationality. *European Journal of Archaeology, 2*(3), 313–344.

Büster, L. (2021a). Iron Age mnemonics: a biographical approach to dwelling in later prehistoric Britain. *Cambridge Archaeological Journal, 31*(4), 661–674.

Büster, L. (2021b). Problematic stuff: death, memory and the reinterpretation of cached objects. *Antiquity, 95*(382), 973–985.

Büster, L. and Armit, I. (2013). Phase 6: the late Iron Age village. In I. Armit and J. McKenzie (Eds.), *An inherited place: Broxmouth hillfort and the south-east Scottish Iron Age* (pp. 115–186). Edinburgh: Society of Antiquaries of Scotland.

Büster, L., Armit, I. and Fitzpatrick, A. (2020). New light on the Covesea Caves, north-east Scotland. *PAST: The Newsletter of the Prehistoric Society, 96*, 2–5.

Campbell, E. (1991). Excavations of a wheelhouse and other Iron Age structures at Sollas, North Uist, by R. J. C. Atkinson in 1957. *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, 121*, 117–173.

Carr, G. and Knüsel, C. (1997). The ritual framework of excarnation by exposure as the mortuary practice of the Early and Middle Iron Ages of central southern Britain. In A. Gwilt and C. Haselgrove (Eds.), *Reconstructing Iron Age societies* (pp. 167–173). Oxford: Oxbow Books.

Chittock, H. 2020. Pattern as patina: Iron Age 'kintsugi' from East Yorkshire. In I.-M. Back Danielsson and A. M. Jones (Eds.), *Images in the making: art, process, archaeology* (pp. 149–167). Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Cleal, R. (1988). The occurrence of drilled holes in later Neolithic pottery. *Oxford Journal of Archaeology, 7*(2), 139–145.

Cooper, A., Garrow, D. and Gibson, C. (2020) Spectrums of depositional practice in later prehistoric Britain and beyond: grave goods, hoards and deposits 'in between'. *Archaeological Dialogues, 27*, 135–157.

Cooper, A., Garrow, D., Gibson, C., Giles, M. and Wilkin, N. (2022). *Grave goods: objects and death in later prehistoric Britain.* Oxford: Oxbow Books.

Croucher, K. (2012). *Death and dying in the Neolithic Near East*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Croucher, K. (2017). Keeping the dead close: grief and bereavement in the treatment of skulls

from the Neolithic Middle East. *Mortality* 23, 103–120.

Croucher, K., Büster, L., Dayes, J., Green, L., Raynsford, J., Comerford Boyes, L. and Faull, C. (2020). Archaeology and contemporary death: using the past to provoke, challenge and engage. *PLoS ONE, 15*(12): e0244058. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0244058.

Cunliffe, B. (1993). *Danebury*. London: Batsford and English Heritage.

Daley, J. (2019). A sorceress' kit was discovered in the ashes of Pompeii. https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/sorceresss-kit-was-discovered-ashes-pompeii-180972907/. Accessed October 2022.

Davis, A. (2019) Chapter 4: the devil or the divine? Supernatural objects and multi-period hoards in later prehistory. In M. G. Knight, D. Boughton and R. E. Wilkinson (Eds.), *Objects of the past in the past: investigating the significance or earlier artefacts in later contexts* (pp. 60–76. Oxford: Archaeopress.

DeLanda, M. (2016). *Assemblage theory.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Dunwell, A., Neighbour, T. and Cowie, T. G. (1995). A cist burial adjacent to the Bronze Age burial at Cnip, Uig, Isle of Lewis. *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, 125*, 279–288.

Fortes, M. (1965). Some reflections on ancestor worship in Africa. In M. Fortes and G. Dieterlen (Ed.), *African systems of thought* (pp. 122–142). London: Oxford University Press for The International African Institute.

Fowler, C. (2004). *The archaeology of personhood: an anthropological approach*. London: Routledge.

Funeral Zone Ltd. (2019). What can you put in a coffin? What you can – and can't – place inside someone's coffin before their funeral, cremation or burial. https://www.funeralguide.co.uk/help-resources/arranging-a-funeral/funeral-guides/what-can-you-put-in-a-coffin. Accessed October 2022.

Garrow, D. (2012). Odd deposits and average practice: a critical history of the concept of structured deposition. *Archaeological Dialogues, 19*(2), 85–115.

Gell, A. (1998). *Art and agency: an anthropological theory.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Giles, M. (2013). *A forged glamour.* Oxford: Windgather Press.

Giles, M. and Williams, H. (2016). Introduction: mortuary archaeology in contemporary society. In H. Williams and M. Giles (Eds.), *Archaeologists and the dead: mortuary archaeology in contemporary society* (pp. 1–18). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Harding, D. W. (2016). *Death and burial in Iron Age Britain.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hill, J. D. (1995). *Ritual and rubbish in the Iron Age of Wessex: a study on the formation of a specific archaeological record. British Archaeological Reports (British series) 242.* Oxford: Tempus.

Jestice, P. G. (2004). Veneration of holy people. In P. G. Jestice (Ed.), *Holy people of the world: a cross-cultural encyclopedia, volume 3* (pp. 886–889). Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO.

Klass, D., Silverman, P. R. and Nickman, S. L. (Eds.) (1996). *Continuing bonds: new understandings of grief.* London: Taylor & Francis.

Knight, M., Ballantyne, R., Robinson Zeki, I. and Gibson, D. (2019). 'The Must Farm pile-dwelling settlement'. *Antiquity, 93*(369), 645–663.

Knight, M. G. (forthcoming). Putting 'out-of-time' metalwork in its place: commemorating and forgetting traditions through the Bronze Age metalwork of southern Britain. In C. Gibson, D. Brown and J. Pyzel (Eds.), *Making and unmaking memories: mundane mnemonics, artificial amnesia and transformed traditions.* Oxford: Archaeopress.

Knight, M. G., Boughton, D. and Wilkinson, R. E. (Eds.) (2019). *Objects of the past in the past: investigating the significance or earlier artefacts in later contexts.* Oxford: Archaeopress.

Králová, J. (2015). What is social death? *Contemporary Social Science: Journal of the Academy of Social Sciences, 10*(3), 235–248.

Latour, B. (2005). *Reassembling the social.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lutz, D. (2015). *Relics of death in Victorian literature and culture.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Macmillan Cancer Support. (2022). Making a memory box. https://www.macmillan.org.uk/cancer-information-and-support/treatment/if-you-have-an-advanced-cancer/end-of-life/making-a-memory-box. Accessed October 2022.

Morris, K. and Bickle, P. (2022) Finding difference in emotional communities: new feminisms of women's lives in the nineteenth century CE and sixth millennium BCE. *Cambridge Archaeological Journal, 32*(2), 305–319.

Nilsson Stutz, L. and Tarlow, S. (2013). Beautiful things and bones of desire. In S. Tarlow and L. Nilsson Stutz (Eds.) *The Oxford handbook of the archaeology of death and burial* (pp. 1–16). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Olsen, B. (2012). Symmetrical archaeology. In I. Hodder (Ed.), *Archaeological theory today* (pp. 208–228). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Parker Pearson, M. (1999). *The archaeology of death and burial.* Stroud: Sutton.

Richards, C. and Thomas, J. (1984). Ritual activity and structured deposition in later Neolithic Wessex. In R. Bradley and J. Gardiner (Eds.), *Neolithic studies: a review of some current research. British Archaeological Reports (British series) 133* (pp. 189–218). Oxford: British Archaeological Reports.

Schaaf, U. (1988). Zu den antiken Reparaturen der griechischen Schalen. In W. Kimmig (Ed.), *Das Kleinaspergle: studien zu einem Fürstengrabhügel der frühen Latènezeit bei Stuttgart, Forschungen und Berichte zur Vor- und Frühgeschichte in Baden-Württemberg 30, Stuttgart*, (pp. 191–195). Stuttgart: Theiss.

Sheridan, A., Hunter, J. and Woodward, A. (2015). Chapter 7. Items of personal adornment III: disc bead and spacer plate necklaces. In A. Woodward and J. Hunter (Eds.), *Ritual in Early Bronze Age Grave Goods*. Oxford: Oxbow Books.

Stroebe, M. S., Abakoumkin, G., Stroebe, W. and Schut, H. (2012). Continuing bonds in adjustment to bereavement: impact of abrupt versus gradual separation. *Personal Relationships, 19*, 255–266.

Tarlow, S. (2000). Emotion in archaeology. *Current Anthropology, 41*(5), 713–746.

Taylor, T. (2018). Polythetic entitation. In J. Brockman (Ed.), *This idea is brilliant: lost, overlooked, and underappreciated scientific concepts everyone should know (Edge question series)* (pp. 458–461). New York: Harper Perennial.

The British Museum. (2022). History. https://www.britishmuseum.org/about-us/british-museum-story/history. Accessed October 2022.

The Cremation Society. (2022). Progress of cremation in the British islands 1885–2021. https://www.cremation.org.uk/progress-of-cremation-united-kingdom. Accessed October 2022.

Tucker, F. and Armit, I. (2009) Human remains from Iron Age Atlantic Scotland dating project: results obtained during 2009. *Discovery and Excavation in Scotland (New Series), 10*, 214–216.

Walter, T. (1996). A new model of grief: bereavement and biography. *Mortality, 1*, 7–25.

Webley, L. (2007). Using and abandoning roundhouses: a reinterpretation of the evidence

from Late Bronze Age–Early Iron Age southern England. *Oxford Journal of Archaeology, 26*, 127–144.

Whitley, J. (2002). Too many ancestors. *Antiquity, 76*(291), 119–126.

World Population Review. (2022). United Kingdom population 2022 (live). https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/united-kingdom-population. Accessed October 2022.