

Gale Primary Sources

Start at the source.

# The *Illustrated London News* and Archaeology

Thomas Prasch

Washburn University

Various source media, *Illustrated London News* Historical Archive 1842-2003



## Introduction

Bragging a bit about themselves in an article on famous British archaeologists in 1923, the *ILN* declared: “For the growth of popular interest in archaeology this paper can, perhaps, claim the principal credit, for it was among the first, if not the very first, of popular periodicals to give prominence to this fascinating subject” (“Men Who Perform the ‘Spade Work’ of History: British Names Famous in the Field of Archaeology”, 10 March 1923). Although the paper goes on to list a range of recent articles covering archaeological topics – including feature stories over the previous year on excavations in Palestine, Crete, Malta, the ancient Babylonian city of Ur, and a range of recent finds in Egypt, from Amarna to, of course, Tutankhamen’s tomb – in some ways, the claims fall short. In fact, the *ILN* had been promoting archaeology almost from its inception.

## Reporting New Finds

In the very first year of the journal, the discovery of a Roman inscription in London was highlighted (“Roman Inscription Discovered at Battle Bridge,” 6 August 1842). A sampling of material in the journal’s first years shows that archaeological finds were regularly reported in its pages. In 1846, the *ILN* featured discussion and illustrations of new finds in Pompeii, “Recent Important Excavations in Pompeii”, 13 June 1846 and an article on the restoration of the frieze of the Parthenon, “British Museum - Restoration of the Parthenon”, 17 January, 1846. An engraving of a model of ancient Jerusalem was provided to readers in the 23 January, 1847 issue. That same year on the 7 August, a full-length feature summarized proceedings at

the fourth annual meeting of the Archaeological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland. As Patrick Leary notes in his history of the *ILN*, the journal closely tracked Austen Henry Layard’s Assyrian excavations, from reporting first news of his discoveries (“Mr. Layard’s Assyrian Discoveries”, 15 January 1848) to the installation of the Nineveh sculptures in the British Museum, with the much reprinted image of the winged bull being carted up the museum steps (“Reception of the Nineveh Sculptures at the British Museum”, 28 February 1852). And that was just to get them started.

## Developing Archaeological Methods

In a sense, archaeology, too, was just getting started. The shift from the antiquarian’s collection of old curiosities, without much sense of historical or archaeological context and without much respect for the sites from which they were excavated, to a formal archaeological method, with its core conception of the layering of civilization and its concern for the relation of finds to their site, cannot be tracked much earlier than the beginning of the nineteenth century. The more formal methods being developed by the turn of the century in Pompeian excavations, the pioneering role of Napoleon’s team of excavators in Egypt in 1798-1801, followed up by Giovanni Belzoni (who exhibited his finds in London in 1820-21), and the opening of Etruscan tombs in the 1820s paved the way for a more formal, professional method.

The development of the field was assisted enormously by the advent of new ideas about geology, deep time, and historical change, notably with the contributions of Charles Lyell, whose *Principles of Geology* (1830)

defined the new field (and paved the way in turn for Charles Darwin's evolutionary theory). It benefited, too, from the discovery of prehistoric artefacts, stone tools and premodern bones, from the 1830s forward. Glyn Daniels, in his history of the science of archaeology, dates the beginnings of the discipline to 1840, noting: "What was then the state of prehistoric archaeology in 1840? The answer is that, apart from a group of intellectuals in Denmark and Sweden, it hardly existed" (*A Hundred Fifty Years of Archaeology* [1976], 54). But in the subsequent three decades, he argues, the range of discoveries mushroomed, and the professional development kept pace with the new excavations. This coincides with other evidence about the development of the field; the Archaeological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland was founded only in 1843, for example.

## Archaeological Heroes

### Layard, Schliemann, Evans and Carter

It is a remarkably short jump in time from the inception of the discipline to the age of the heroic archaeologist, the paradigmatic figure on which our own age bases its Indiana Jones mythology of the archaeological explorer. Layard, at midcentury, in many ways provides the model, pioneering not just in his excavations of Assyrian antiquities at Nineveh but in his skillful manipulation of the diplomatic entanglements of the region (in competition with French excavators who had initiated work there) and his astute self-promotion (through best-selling publications and popular public lectures, managing to turn his fame as an archaeologist into the basis for a political career). The coverage provided by the *ILN* played no small part in creating that public image of the archaeological hero.

As the age of heroic archaeology reached its apogee, in the years between 1875 and 1925, the *ILN* was consistently there, providing pictorial showcases and detailed discussion of new discoveries in the field. Thus, when Heinrich Schliemann began excavating toward a new understanding of pre-classical Greek and Mediterranean civilization – first in a preliminary dig in Troy in 1871-73 (producing the gold hoard Schliemann proclaimed to be "Priam's Treasure"), then at Mycenae in 1876-77 (unearthing what Schliemann announced as the "Mask of Agamemnon"), and back at Troy for more comprehensive excavations after 1878 the *ILN* followed his progress. When Schliemann arrived in London to report his findings, the journal contributed a detailed (over 6,000 word) illustrated report "Schliemann's Researches in Greece", 24 March 1877, and followed up with two articles the following week, one illustrated with Schliemann's delivery of his findings to a packed room, "Dr. Schliemann giving an account of his discoveries at Mycenae before the Society of Antiquaries at Burlingame House", and another detailing (in over 4,000 words) his findings "Dr. Schliemann's Researches at Mycenae". The following year, they provided an account of his excavations at Troy, "Dr. Schliemann's Excavations in the Troad".

When, in the first decades of the twentieth century, Arthur Evans unearthed the ruins of Knossos and proclaimed them the palace of Minos, again the *ILN* provided accounts, beginning with three fully illustrated pieces in the 10 December, 1921 issue: "Domestic Life in Minoan Days: Draughts, Baths, and Lamps"; "Where Theseus Slew the Minotaur: The Palace (or Labyrinth) of Knossos, in Crete..."; and "Fashions of Ariadne's Home: Minoan Costume 3000

Years Ago". They followed up with no less than ten feature articles on the Knossos excavations by 1930. And of course there was Howard Carter's discovery of King Tutankhamen's tomb in 1922. For that occasion, the *ILN* dedicated massive resources to the discovery: two extensive articles on the occasion of the opening in the 16 December, 1922 issue "At the Tomb of Tutankhamen: Opening Celebrations", and "From King Tutankhamen to King Fuad: Egypt Old and New"; five additional articles over the next few months; and, in 1923, two special numbers, one of photographs of the tomb (3 February) and an "Egypt Number" (24 February).

### Other Archaeological Excavations

#### **Pompeii, Persepolis, Carthage, Luxor, Stonehenge, the Aztec Empire, Babylon, Parthia and Amarna**

The discoveries of Layard, Schliemann, Evans and Carter were not the only archaeological excavations covered by the *ILN* in the period. They offered features on new excavations in Pompeii (for example, "The Latest Excavations at Pompeii", 30 April 1853), material on the ruins of Persepolis ("The Ruins of Persepolis, or the Royal City", 10 January 1857), notes on archaeological work on the site of ancient Carthage ("The Excavations at Carthage", 29 May 1858), the unearthing of the monuments of Luxor in Egypt ("Excavations of the Great Temple of Luxor", 18 July 1885), accounts of French digs at Delphi ("The Delphi Excavations", 8 September 1894), new archaeological approaches to Stonehenge ("Unraveling a Primeval Mystery: New Excavations at Stonehenge", 6 August 1904), announcements about Aztec excavations ("Ruins of the Aztec Empire: The Discovery of Montezuma's

Supposed Treasure", 28 October 1905), Babylonian excavations ("Unearthing Buried Babylon: Splendour of Nebuchadnezzar II", 22 November 1913), and Parthian discoveries ("Greek Influence in Ancient Indian Art", 11 November 1922). The *ILN* published an extensive range of articles on excavations of Amarna (usually rendered by the *ILN* as Tell El Amarna), the capital of the monotheistic pharaoh Akhenaton, from an initial note on Flinders Petrie's finds ("Dr. Flinders Petrie's Antiquities from Tel El Amarna", 24 September 1892) to a series of extended illustrated features in the 1920s (beginning with "The Wonder City of the 'Heretic Pharaoh'", 5 February 1921). And they continued to note new discoveries or displays of Greek and Roman antiquities on a routine basis.

After Carter's discovery of Tutankhamen's tomb the *ILN* continued to devote extensive space to archaeological discoveries well after King Tut's craze faded. They covered discoveries of Mayan civilization (first noticed by the *ILN* in "The 'Egypt' of American Antiquity", 24 March 1923; new diggings by Henry Frankfort in Assyria (beginning with "The City that Sargon Founded to Replace Nineveh", 15 October 1932), new excavations at Persepolis (beginning with "Triumphs of Digging at Persepolis", 11 February 1933), the firm establishment of the antiquity of Sumeria (see, for example, "The Oldest City of Sumeria: Establishing the Origins of Eridu", 11 September 1948), and the spread of archaeological work to sites in China ("The Awakening of China in Archaeology", 4 April 1936) and Soviet Russia ("Soviet Archaeology: The Search for Lost Discuria in the Eastern Black Sea – the City the Heavenly Twins Founded", 25 April 1964). At the turn of the millennium, archaeological finds were still a

feature of the journal's coverage, figuring in a richly illustrated piece on London's own past ("London's Hidden Depths", 6 December 1999).

### Reporting Methods

The *ILN* approached the territory of archaeology largely through the eyes of the excavators, hewing closely to archaeologists' own accounts without much criticism or skepticism. As they claimed back in 1923, "we have always sought information from the most authoritative sources, and practically all the famous British archaeologists whose portraits appear above [16 of them] have ... contributed articles or illustrations to our pages, or have aided us in placing their expert knowledge at our disposal" ("Men Who Perform the 'Spade Work'"). The approach has clear advantages, in keeping the *ILN*'s coverage close to the perspectives developed in the field; the disadvantages follow from the same closeness. When archaeologists stretch the truth or hypothesize without support – accusations particularly regularly made in recent evaluations of Schliemann and Evans, for example – the *ILN* is not the place to look for critical perspective. It is also worth noting that the periodical, for obvious reasons, favors the spectacular over the mundane finds in the field. There are lots of articles on major discoveries, few on gathering potsherds. That said, as the sampling above makes clear, the investment of the *ILN* in archaeology was both extensive and wide-ranging. For the nineteenth century digs especially, it is an invaluable resource.

### Finding Archaeology in the *ILN* Archive

The key to using the *ILN* Historical Archive is finding the right keywords. "Archaeology" will not do; it appears for the first time in 1881 (in a piece on Biblical archaeology), and not again until 1914, becoming a routine designation for excavations only around the time of Tut's unveiling.

**Excavations** provides a slightly better way into the nineteenth-century material, with only a few distractions for contemporary street repair or similar other uses of the term; adding **ruins** to the keyword list provides a few more hits (but substantially more misses). But the best approach is the most piecemeal: individual ancient civilizations, archaeological sites, or excavators, and usually all of the above. For Layard's Nineveh excavations, for example, the keywords **Layard**, **Assyria**, and **Nineveh** are all needed to find all the material. In many cases, this means using search words that produce a range of unrelated contemporary reporting (**Greek** or **Roman**, for example, give much about Greek revolutions and Italian politics, but still lead the reader toward the ancient materials). But in other cases (**Sumerian**, **Persepolis**, **Mycenae**, **Delphi**), the route to the ruins is more direct.

# CITATION

Prasch, Thomas: "The *Illustrated London News* and Archaeology."  
*Illustrated London News Historical Archive 1842-2003*: Cengage Learning,  
2011

© Cengage Learning 2011

**REQUEST A  
FREE TRIAL**

**CONTACT YOUR  
REPRESENTATIVE**

**FIND OUT MORE  
ON OUR WEBSITE**



GALE DIGITAL SCHOLAR LAB

**DISCOVER THE POSSIBILITIES**