

ArchInk 2022: Inktober daily sketches

by Rob Hedge

<https://incurablearchaeologist.wordpress.com/>

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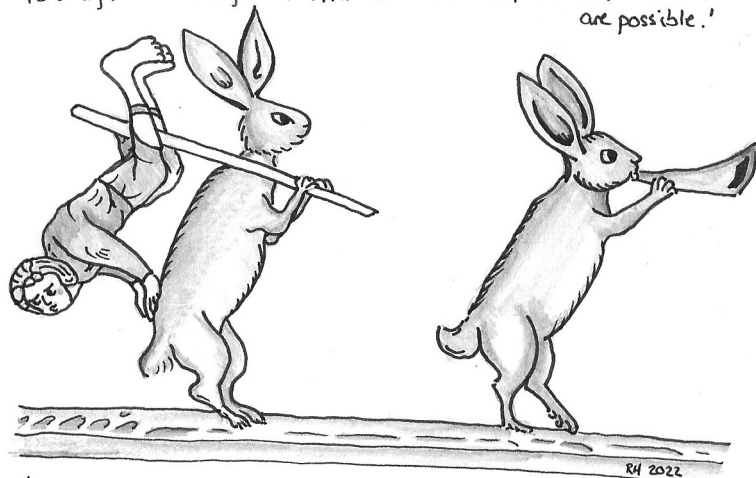
Adapt — remix, transform, and build upon the material

for any purpose

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<https://ko-fi.com/robhedge>

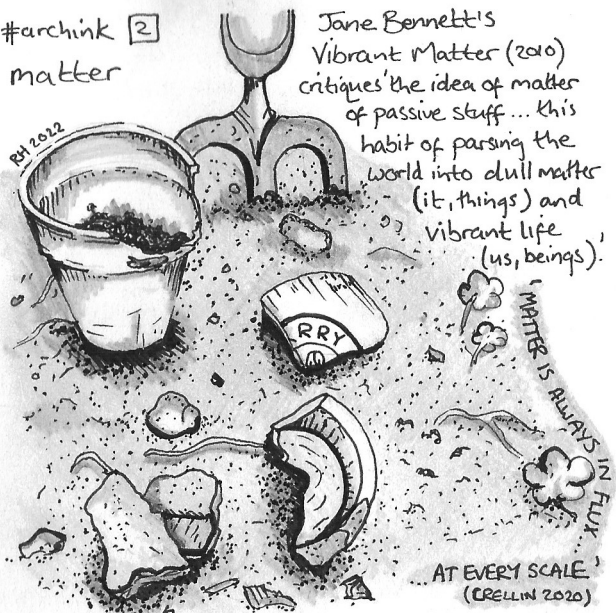
Medieval manuscripts were decorated with strange, grotesque images in the margins. Expressions of creativity, a window into the artists' minds - copying manuscripts must otherwise have been a tedious task. But they're more than decorative; a frequent theme is the 'monde renversé': the upside-down world. Helpless & hunted become hunters. Rabbits get revenge. Is it subversive? 'You might be in charge', the artist tells the reader, 'but other worlds are possible.'



Adapted from Beinecke MS 229 fol. 94v  
Arthurian Romances, late-13<sup>th</sup> century

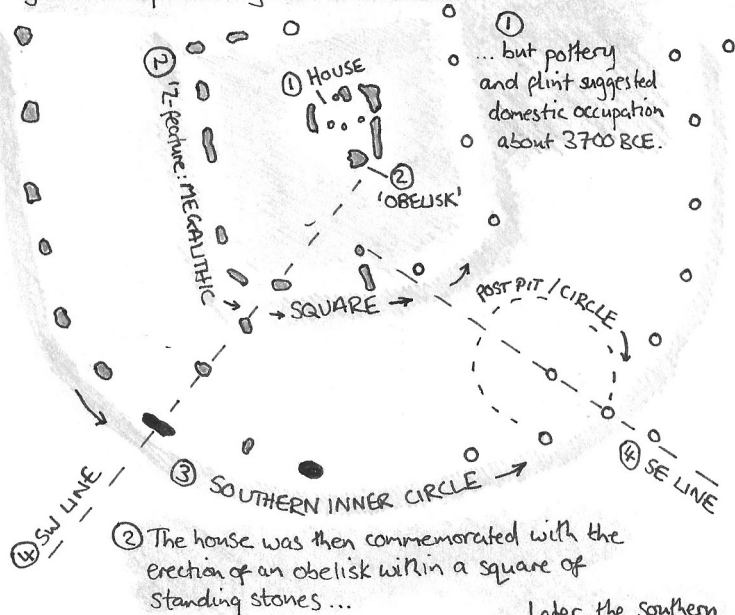
#archink 1  
Decoration

#archink [2]  
matter



This division, 'quarantines of matter & life', leads us 'to ignore the vitality of matter and the lively powers of material formation'. - Bennett 2010, vii

One of Britain's most famous monuments - the (notoriously circular) Neolithic and Early Bronze Age megalithic complex at Avebury - may have begun as a square. Gillingham, Pollard and Strutt (2019\*) re-examined pits and gullies interpreted by 1939 excavators as medieval ...



The origins of Avebury  
\*DOI: 10.15184/aqy.2019.37

- N ● STONE STANDING IN 1939
- ▲ ● DUG IN 1939
- † ○ NEWLY-DISCOVERED STONE POSITION

... Later, the southern inner circle ③, and the ④ SE/SW lines were installed. Overall, the process may have spanned 1500 years.

#archink [3] square

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## #archink 4 : patina

After 1000s of years in the ground, worked flint can 're-corticate': forming a skin on exposed surfaces - white, blue-grey, orange - colour varying with the soil chemistry. Colloquially, it's often called a 'patina'.

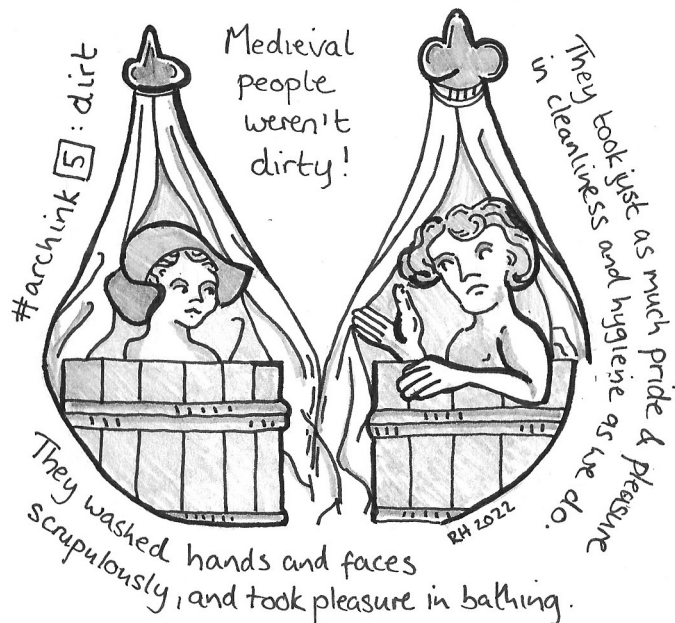
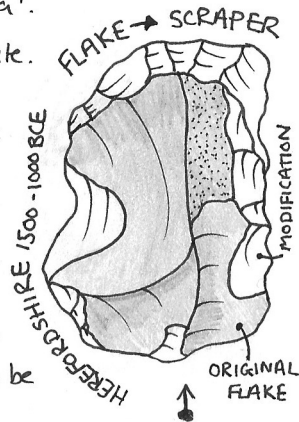
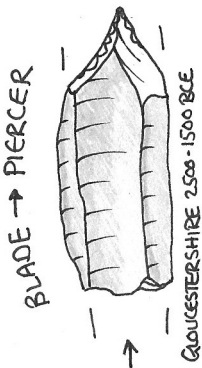
This process is variable, even within a site. It's not a reliable indicator of date.

But very occasionally it reveals evidence of prehistoric re-use. Here are two artefacts knapped, discarded, then picked up thousands of years later and re-worked.

There's a thick patina, but modifications can be seen cutting through.

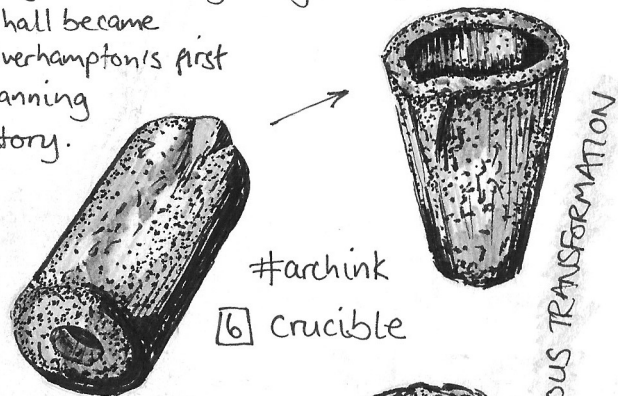
That re-use was also ancient: the later working has also started to re-corticate. These objects were already 1000s of years old when granted a second life.

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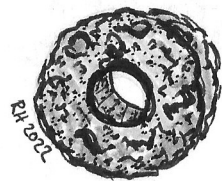


For rural peasants that might typically have been a dip in a stream. But at the urban bathhouses it was a communal, social experience - you could even dine in the bath!

Wolverhampton's 'Old Hall' was an Elizabethan manor on the outskirts of the 16<sup>th</sup> century town. In the late-18<sup>th</sup> century, swallowed by the growth of the industrial town, the hall became Wolverhampton's first japanning factory.



This crucible from the japanning works had a second life too - it had been modified with a large hole carefully drilled in the base.



A CURIOUS TRANSFORMATION

"The grand oak staircase with its dark balustrades, instead of leading to the state ballroom, now leads into warehouses ... vats of molten metal and grease stood under the great fireplace"

- A former worker, WH Jones, describing the scene in 1839.

#archink [7]  
safety

PPE has a limited lifespan: 3-5 years for a hard hat.

THE HARD HAT



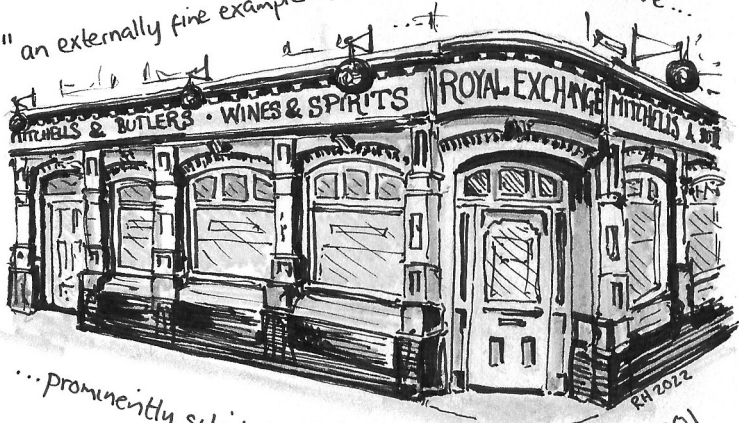
Every archaeologist's kit store is full of old hats, boots etc... Why not get creative?

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#archink 8: exchange

"an externally fine example of public house architecture..."



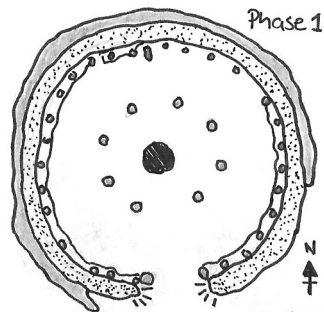
"...prominently sited." Historic England List entry 1390001

The Royal Exchange,  
Mealcheapen Street, Worcester

You've probably eaten at a Mitchells and Butlers restaurant - they own some of Britain's biggest chains. But they started out in 1898 as a Birmingham brewery. And they built some rather fine pubs, including this one with its extravagantly-tiled exterior.

#archink 9: hearth

This replica Iron Age roundhouse was constructed at Castell Henllys, SW Wales, in 1982. It was excavated in 2017. \*



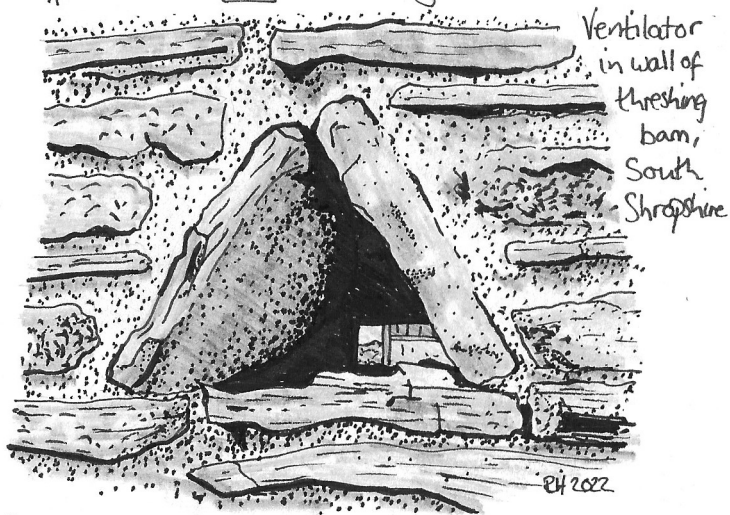
- = HEARTH
- = POSTHOLE
- ▨ = EAVES DEPOSIT
- ⊔ = EAVESDRIP GULLY

The original 'phase 1' hearth, based on archaeological evidence, was a simple clay circle set on flat shale slabs...

... later, the 'phase 3' hearth improved the design with square upright slabs to contain the fire, a modern design not indicated by the archaeology. It quickly became infested with rats, whose burrows undermined the hearth! \* Mytum & Meek, 2020

DOI: 10.1007/s12520-020-01028-y

# archink 10 : triangle



Ventilator  
in wall of  
threshing  
barn,  
South  
Shropshire

Before the advent of threshing machines in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, grain was separated from straw by hand in a threshing barn. Opposing doors and ventilation holes let air flow through to 'winnow' the grain, springing it into the air allowed the lighter chaff to blow free. Triangular ventilation holes were strong, economical, and allowed air to flow while keeping out the worst of the winter weather.

# archink 11 : classify

We classify the landscape in naming it. Names are persistent. In Astley, on the west bank of the River Severn, is an ancient river crossing: 'Larford'. Recorded in a charter from 706 CE, the name comes from the Old English 'laefer', meaning wild iris or rushes. It's the 'ford where the laefer grows': because it must have been striking enough for the plant to

name the place, it was probably the native iris *pseudacorus* - growing up to 2m tall with bright yellow flowers. Over 1300 years later, the plants live on in the names.



#archink 12: team For medieval peasants, the plough teams— usually c. 8 oxen to pull the heavy plough — were the tractors of their day. Cattle also provided manure for use as fertiliser, and dairy



ADAPTED FROM: BLMS ROYAL 12F XIII f. 37v

products: key sources of protein, calcium & vit. B12. Disaster struck in 1319-20 - the Great Bovine Pestilence (probably rinderpest) killed c. 62% of the cattle in England & Wales. Stocks didn't recover for 30 years. Its effect on the human population can be traced in calcium deficiencies, which may have exacerbated the effects of the Black Death a generation later.

We know so much about the buildings of medieval Europe, but getting to know the builders is harder.

This is Rudolf Meir, d. 13/8/1454, from a 'Hausbuch' containing portraits of every resident of an artisans' retirement community in Nuremberg.

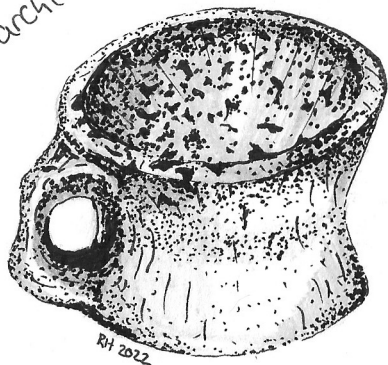
Ordinary later-medieval houses weren't miserable hovels - their durability is clear from the large numbers standing today.

A typical peasant house in 14<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> century Worcestershire measured 15ft x 30ft or 45ft.

What were property prices like? Having a timber house built from scratch cost about £3\* - roughly a year's wages for a carpenter in 1400. That sum, for comparison, could also buy you roughly 6 oxen or 30 sheep. \*DYER 2000: ENGLISH PEASANT BUILDINGS



#archink 14 : lamp



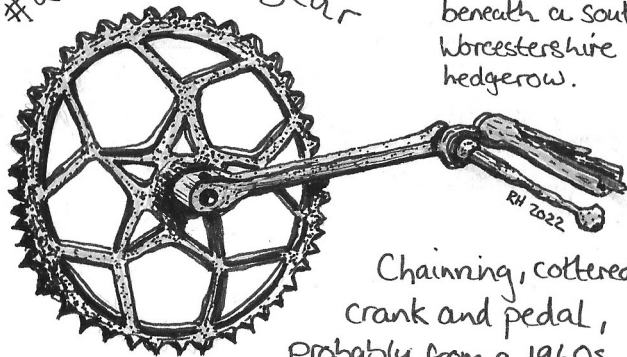
Pedestal oil lamp, c1350-1600  
Malvernian ware. Excavated in  
Bristol by Cotswold Archaeology  
[cotswoldarchaeology.co.uk/museum/oil-lamp](http://cotswoldarchaeology.co.uk/museum/oil-lamp)

Later-medieval ceramic  
lamps are not  
common finds -  
candles were  
becoming more  
popular by the  
14<sup>th</sup> century.

Shards can be hard  
to identify - look out  
for sooting on the  
glazed inner surface.

This one would  
probably have used  
animal fat and  
a cotton wick.

#archink 15 : gear

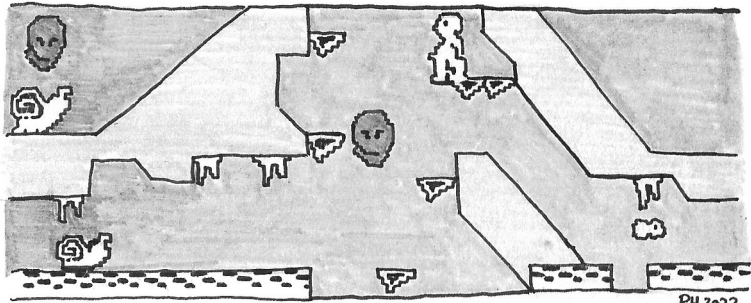


Found buried  
beneath a south  
Worcestershire  
hedgerow.

Chaining, cotted  
crank and pedal,  
Probably from a 1960s  
Moulton small-wheeled cycle.

The cogs are badly - and unevenly - worn. This  
chaining put in some serious mileage. How  
many times did it spin? What sights did it see?  
60 years on, 1 cycle. The same lanes. What has  
changed in the time this artefact has lain, quietly  
rusting into the red-brown earth?

#archink 16 : spectrum

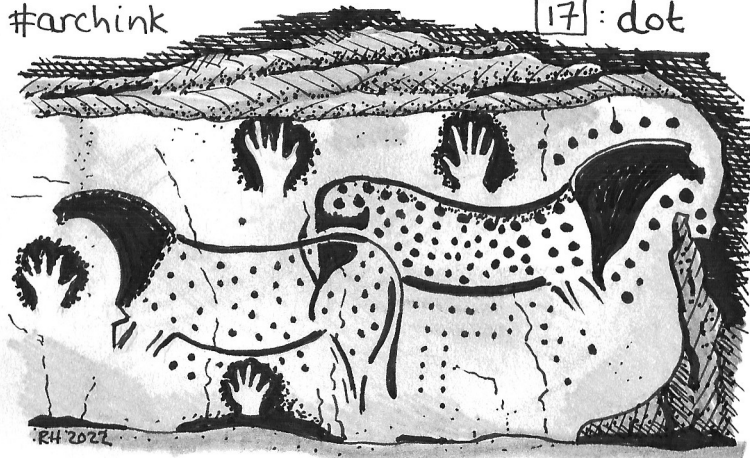


### Descent into the volcano

The Sinclair 'ZX Spectrum' was Britain's best-selling microcomputer. Launched in 1982, it was a game-changer in home computing. Among hundreds of games developed for the Spectrum was 'The Archaeologist' (1985), which owed more than a little to Jules Verne: 'Enter the volcano Sneffels Tokul, and pass through the earth's core to finally re-emerge at Mount Etna collecting the various artifacts as you go.' Standard day at the office...

#archink

17 : dot

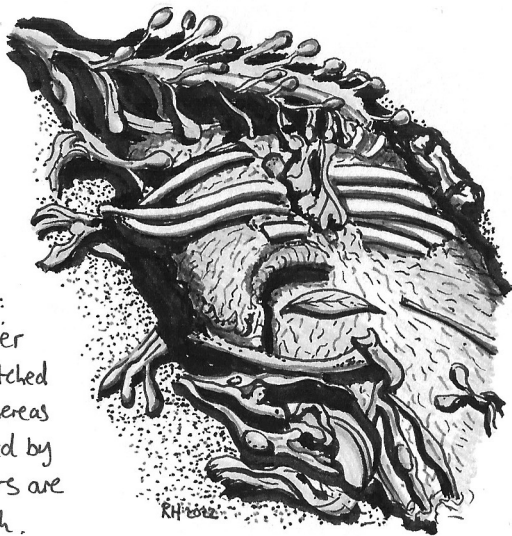


The 'dappled horse' panel, Pech Merle cave, France. This Gravettian (c. 25,000 BCE) masterpiece is one of many examples of Ice Age art that uses dots. Geneticists have shown that Pleistocene horses might have been dappled, but Barbara Olins Alpert (2013)\* pointed out that the dots go beyond the outline of the animals; she argued that dots are psychologically stimulating - they evoke movement, they 'cause the viewer to receive a jolt of visual energy!'

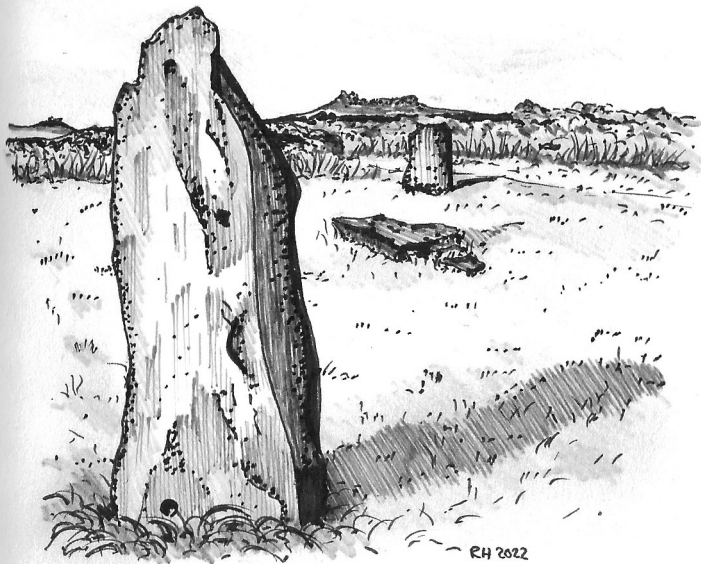
\* DOI: 10.3390/arts2040476

#archink 18 : bone

On the Solva  
tideline, a seal  
carcass, shrouded  
in seaweed and  
Autumn leaves.  
It's an object  
lesson in taphonomy:  
bones exposed earlier  
in its journey are etched  
and discoloured, whereas  
ribs recently revealed by  
shoreline scavengers are  
fresh and smooth.



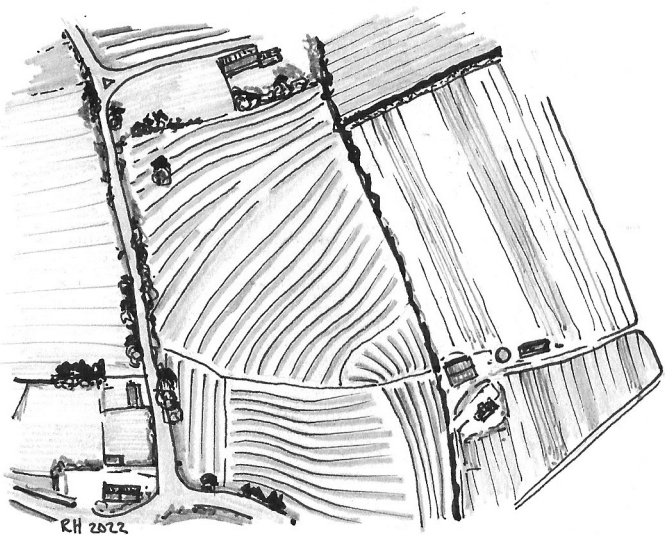
#archink 19 : re-create



My favourite stone circle is not all it appears to be ...  
Against the gabbro outcrops of St David's Head - a  
landscape littered with landmarks from prehistory - this  
circle sits among the concrete pathways of a WW2 airfield.  
Iron fittings and chain-links betray the stones' origins in farm  
gateways. They are a re-creation: Gorsedd stones, erected  
for the 2002 Eisteddfod. I was there. My story and theirs  
are intertwined.

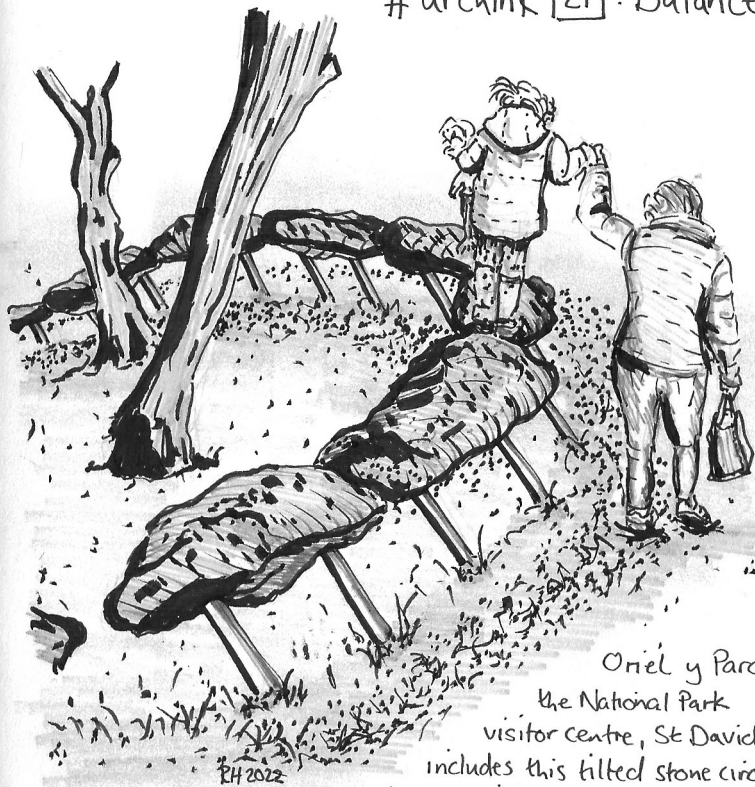


#archink [20] : (sub)field



Traces of medieval open-field farming persist in this pasture : sub-divided into strips, demarcated by the deep furrows and high ridges. Childswickham, Worcestershire.

#archink [21] : balance



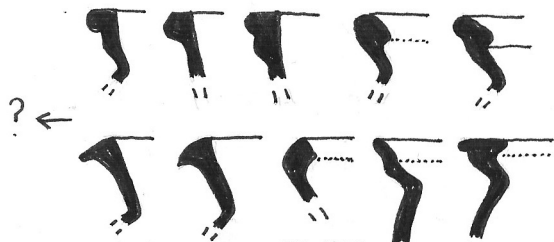
Oriel y Parc, the National Park visitor centre, St David's, includes this tilted stone circle sculpture, with boulders held aloft by metal supports. It is utterly irresistible to small children.



#archink 22 : consult

'COOKING POT RIMS FROM DATABLE SITES', BARKER, PA (1970)

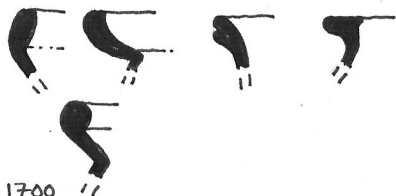
--- 1100 --- 1200 --- 1300 --- 1400



HEN DOMEN, MONTGOMERY c1075-1300



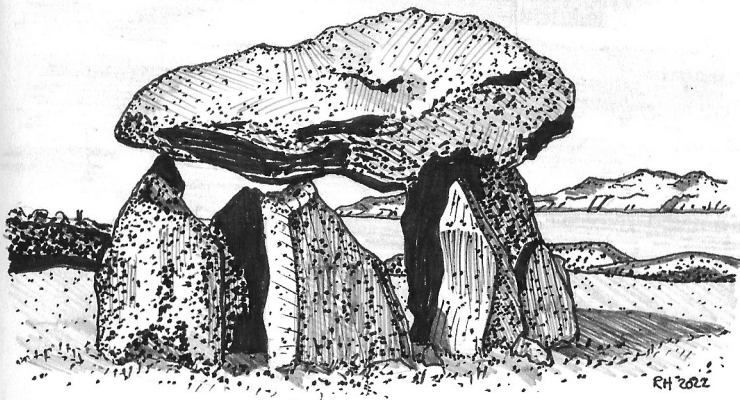
BRCKHURST CASTLE c1154-1255



ROUSHILL, SHREWSBURY c1230-1700

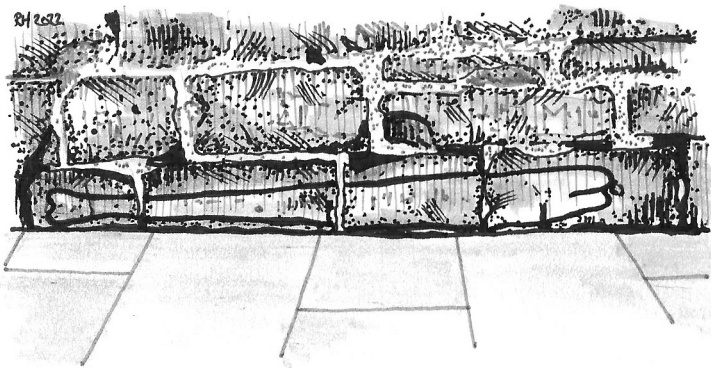
It's rare to face a problem that's entirely new. Mostly, someone else will have grappled with similar issues. Consult them. Your data will move the puzzle forward. Here's an early attempt to unpick medieval pottery in Shropshire. 52 years old, but still with plenty of useful observations.  
- from 'Medieval Pottery of Shropshire', PA Barker, 1970.

#archink 23 : burial



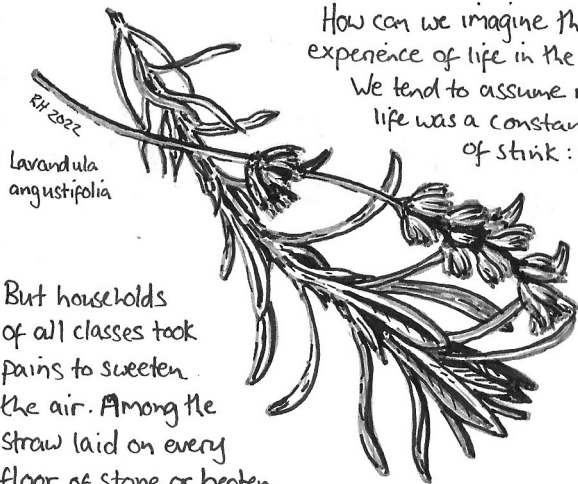
Carreg Samson, Abercastle, Pembrokeshire  
Neolithic dolmen (mortuary structure), c3000 BCE

#archink 24 : line



Peer closely at the ground-level stones on the south wall to the east of Worcester Cathedral's water gate and you will see the crude outline of an enormous fish, almost 2m long. It records the capture in 1843 of a hepty sturgeon, laid against the wall and stencilled for posterity. These remarkable behemoths were not uncommon visitors: another Worcester sturgeon to achieve a kind of immortality was the 2.5m fish caught in 1835, which is on display at Worcester Museum & Art Gallery.

#archink 25 : sensing



How can we imagine the sensory experience of life in the past?  
We tend to assume medieval life was a constant barrage of stink: mud, sweat, dung.

But households of all classes took pains to sweeten the air. Among the straw laid on every floor of stone or beaten earth, herbs would be strewn.

Some - lavender, rosemary - to repel insects.  
Some - meadowsweet, sweet flag - for their fragrance alone.  
Some - lady's bedstraw, fleabane - to kill fleas, their uses preserved in their names.

Imagine ... the swish and crackle as you stepped into a medieval home in late summer, the straw underfoot releasing clouds of lavender scent.

## #archink [26]: movement

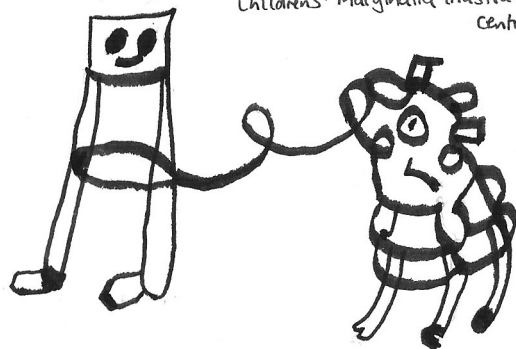
Adapted from Trinity  
College Cambridge, MS  
B.11.22. Fenist, c.1300.



Medieval peasants get stereotyped as parochial, tied to the land by feudal authority, barely travelling beyond the next village or market town. But the reality is much more nuanced. Peasants in the West Midlands frequently upped sticks and moved in search of new opportunities or better tenancies; both with and without their lord's permission! Chris Dyer found that only 9/70 families living in Hartlebury, Worcs, in around 1400 were still there by the end of the century.

## #archink [27]: conduct

after LJS361, Kislak Center, U.Penn, f 26r  
Children's marginalia illustration in 14<sup>th</sup>  
century manuscript.

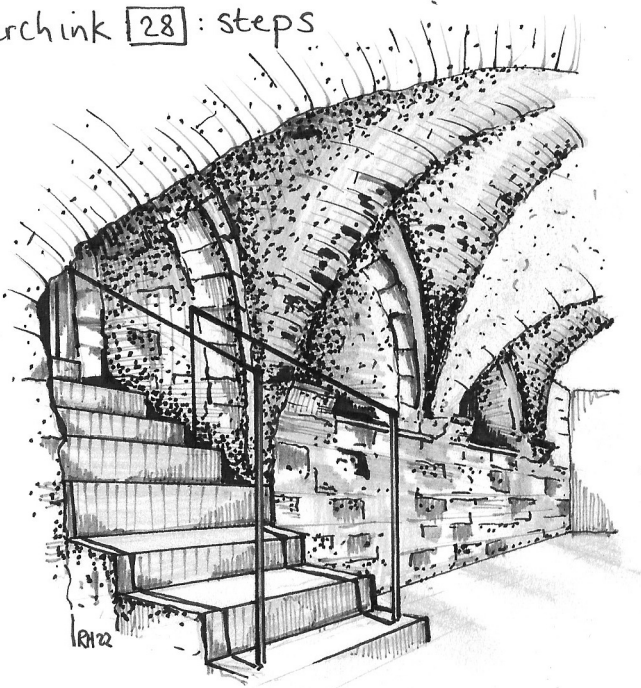


A popular type of later-medieval manuscript was the 'conduct book,' which instructed children in the manners required to navigate the upper strata of society. But...

... Children will always be children, and sometimes their mischief spilled onto the page. This sketch was drawn in the 15<sup>th</sup>/16<sup>th</sup> century in the margins of a 14<sup>th</sup>-century book of astronomical tables and sermons. It shows a person drawn by a child aged about 4, leading a horse? or cow? probably drawn by a slightly older child. See Thorpe (2016):

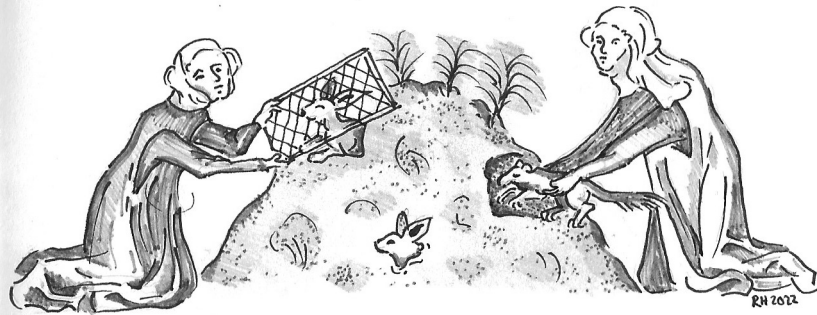
DOI: 10.1080/23311983.2016.1196864

#archink [28]: steps



Steps down into Worcester Cathedral's new Undercroft Learning Centre, originally the storage cellars for the cathedral's medieval monastic community.

#archink [29]: interplay



Adapted from Queen Mary Psalter, c1310-20, Royal MS 2 B VII, f.155v

History is never monocausal. Unpicking the interplay between multiple factors is where the fascination and the frustration lie. You find yourself confidently diving down one rabbit hole ... then up pops a head from another.



#archink 30 : fragile

Adapted from: *Guatenghi d'Este Hours*,  
 Taddeo Crivelli, c. 1469  
 J Paul Getty Museum  
 MS Ludwig IX 13, fol. 106

RH 22

From a lavish manuscript commissioned as a wedding gift, this might seem a macabre image for a joyful occasion. But this was a 'book of hours': a personal prayer book, in which such 'memento mori' served to remind the reader of the fleeting nature of earthly pleasures, and - by contrast - the immortality of the soul.

Medieval calendars frequently featured signs of the zodiac. October's scorpions are often wonderfully bizarre, as if the artist was working from a wild description & vivid imagination.

#archink 31 : circle



RH 22

Adapted from British Library Royal MS 1 D x, fol. 13v  
 Made in Oxford, c. 1200-1220. Scorpio.

The October page of a calendar incorporated into the Psalter (book of psalms).

Though the scribe may never have seen a scorpion, even familiar animals (fish, crabs) are depicted with expressive faces & odd anatomy. They weren't intended to be naturalistic: they reflect human attributes (scorpion = suffering, which this chap conveys admirably). Debra Hessig\* notes St Augustine's warning that art imitating nature too closely might be 'a dangerous attempt to improve upon the True Creator's skill'.

\* DOI: 10.1086/RESvn1ms20166830