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RESEARCH ARTICLE

'In Our Blood': Archaeology and 'Indigeneity' in the British National Party's Magazine *Identity*

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This paper presents the first diachronic analysis of the appropriation of archaeological themes in British far-right politics, focusing on the British National Party's publication *Identity* from 2000 to 2009. By examining how scientific archaeological data has been manipulated to promote racist politics, this research shows how archaeological expertise can be mobilized in service of what Fortier terms '*genetic indigenisation*' (2011: 170). The study reveals continuities between the BNP's rhetoric and contemporary far-right groups, particularly in the manipulation of archaeological and ancient DNA research. Set against the backdrop of recent anti-immigration protests and extremist violence in the UK in 2024, this research highlights archaeology's vulnerability to misuse and challenges assumptions about anti-expert discourse in far-right spaces. This demonstrates that academic knowledge can be selectively assembled to support contemporary nationalist agendas. This paper contributes to broader a broader understanding of far-right exploitation of heritage and argues for greater scrutiny of archaeology's role in political discourse.

KEYWORDS public archaeology, indigeneity, archaeology, ancient DNA, far-right, identity

Introduction

From 30 July to 7 August 2024, twenty-nine anti-immigration protests took place in several cities across the UK. The protests were widely publicized and attended by extreme right groups, and amplified by their social media posts (Duncan et al., 2024). These quickly developed into several nights of violent civil unrest, targeting asylum seekers, with attacks on mosques and public buildings, the desecration of

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Muslim graves, looting, and arson (BBC News, 2024). Far-right groups involved in the 2024 riots derived from splinter groups of the British National Party. These included the Islamophobic English Defence League, neo-fascist group Britain First, the neo-Nazi British Movement, and ethno-nationalist group Patriotic Alternative (PA) (Bintliff & Sampson, 2024). PA presents itself as a voice for the 'native' 'indigenous' white British. On 12h July 2024, PA held their fifth annual summer camp and hike to the top of Mam Tor in the Peak District, where they were photographed once again with their 'They Will Not Replace Us: White Lives Matter' banner (Patriotic Alternative, 2024; Farrell-Banks & Richardson, 2024). Mam Tor is a Scheduled Ancient Monument, the site of a late Bronze Age/early Iron Age univallate hill fort and late Neolithic/early Bronze Age bowl barrows (Derbyshire County Council, 2024). The choice of a nationally significant prehistoric archaeological site for these white supremacist activities is no coincidence. It is also not an isolated incident (Dixon, 2019). The appropriation of the past by extremist political groups demonstrates why archaeologists must not isolate themselves from contemporary politics. The role of archaeology and ancient DNA studies in extremist political discourse is an area of public archaeology often overlooked in favour of more positive approaches to the outcomes of archaeological knowledge-sharing. When ancient monuments become stages for racist rhetoric that distorts concepts of indigeneity and heritage, archaeologists must pay attention.

This paper is the first diachronic study of the use of archaeology and archaeogenetics in British far right political literature. This work interrogates material found in the British National Party (BNP) magazine *Identity*, published from 2000–09. This helps to frame the malicious exploitation of archaeological data taking place outside established channels of public heritage interpretation. In the UK, far-right political groups have long focused on eugenic ideas of shared genetic ancestry, and the construction of a deep historical 'island exceptionalism' for white 'Anglo Saxon' or 'Celtic peoples' (Lowles & Painter, 2011: 8). The valorization of ancient peoples and places continues to be central to the British right-wing imagination of the twenty-first century (Richardson, 2019: 241). The BNP's *Identity* egregiously misrepresented archaeological evidence and ancient gene studies in their racist propaganda to argue for the indigeneity of white British people, and to demand the rights endowed by UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. In this rhetoric, we can identify a symbolic repertoire of events from the past, including romanticized landscapes, monuments, and heroic figures, used to claim a deep historic cultural relationship and genetic purity for the people of the British and Irish archipelago (Coakley, 2018: 331). These data demonstrates 'the extent to which nationalist accounts of the past depart from the norms of mainstream academic historiography' (Coakley, 2018: 331). The norms of archaeology too.

There were warning signs for archaeology and genetic science in the BNP material. Many of the extremist views published during the Noughties can be found in contemporary media and political discourse. The resurgence of white backlash anti-intellectual Empire apologia has occurred alongside widening social and political divisions (Rhodes, 2011). The ethnocentric belief that societies should remain culturally and ethnically uniform continues to fuel resistance to

immigration and diversity. Cultural heritage and genetic science are still used and dangerously distorted in order to support nationalist and supremacist narratives by groups that developed out of the fragmentation of the BNP. This has increased alongside the 'genetic racialization' of DNA home testing (Strand & Källén, 2021; Zarrugh & Romero, 2023). This paper contributes to an understanding of how scholarly research and expert knowledge are interpreted and applied outside the discipline by such extremists. This highlights the divergence between popular reception of 'pastness' through digital and traditional media, and the state school curriculum on one hand, and scholarly concepts of history on the other. This shines some light on the relationship between the role of expert knowledge, archaeological misinformation, and the 'illusory truth effect', where 'repeated claims seemed truer than new ones' (Brashier & Marsh, 2020: 499). This paper begins by examining areas of archaeological ambiguity that provide fertile ground for extremist ideas. It then explores recent work on the entanglement of archaeology, ancient DNA, and the far right. It contextualizes the development of the BNP and discusses the data from *Identity* magazine. This work highlights the ways extremists manipulate and exploit archaeological and genetic data to achieve their rhetorical goals, using it 'in ways that we neither intended, nor fully understand' (Brophy, 2018: 1650).

The entanglement of archaeology and far-right identity politics

The past can evoke historical romanticism, commemorative longing, nostalgia, pride, and a sense of collective belonging. Therefore, it is essential to critically examine the emotional infrastructure that lies beneath relationships to the past and identity in everyday life, especially those that are used to support an explicit ethno-nationalist identity. The groundworks are completed at an early age. School is where we experience local history, cultural events, Remembrance Day activities, or saints days (Bowen et al., 2012; Henson, 2004, 2017; Marsden, 2000). Film, TV and video games present a panoply of historic settings for nostalgia for 'simpler times', in depictions of gender roles and identities, ethnic homogeneity or the distribution of occupations in an imagined ancient past (Gottlieb & Linehan, 2003; Pitcher, 2022). National and local museums are important 'repositories and manifestations of national identity' (Smith, 2006: 18). Most continue to emphasize the relationship between material culture, ethnicity, and the modern nation-state in ways that can be misconstrued or appropriated (Smith et al., 2024: 24).

Statutory protection of heritage is provided by national bodies and institutions including Historic England who 'protect, champion and save the places that define who we are and where we've come from as a nation' (Historic England, 2025). Heritage tourism sites such as Hadrian's Wall, Sutton Hoo, and Stonehenge are central to English identity formation and national pride (Khater & Faik, 2024). English Heritage asks its visitors to 'walk in the footsteps of your Neolithic ancestors at Stonehenge' (English Heritage, 2025). Similar persistent ideas about ancient ancestors still circulate through the media, reflected in the title and content of many TV programmes and popular history books (see Figure 1 below). As Coakley argues, 'When assimilated into popular consciousness through such media as the education system, the popular press or forums of public debate, this presents the

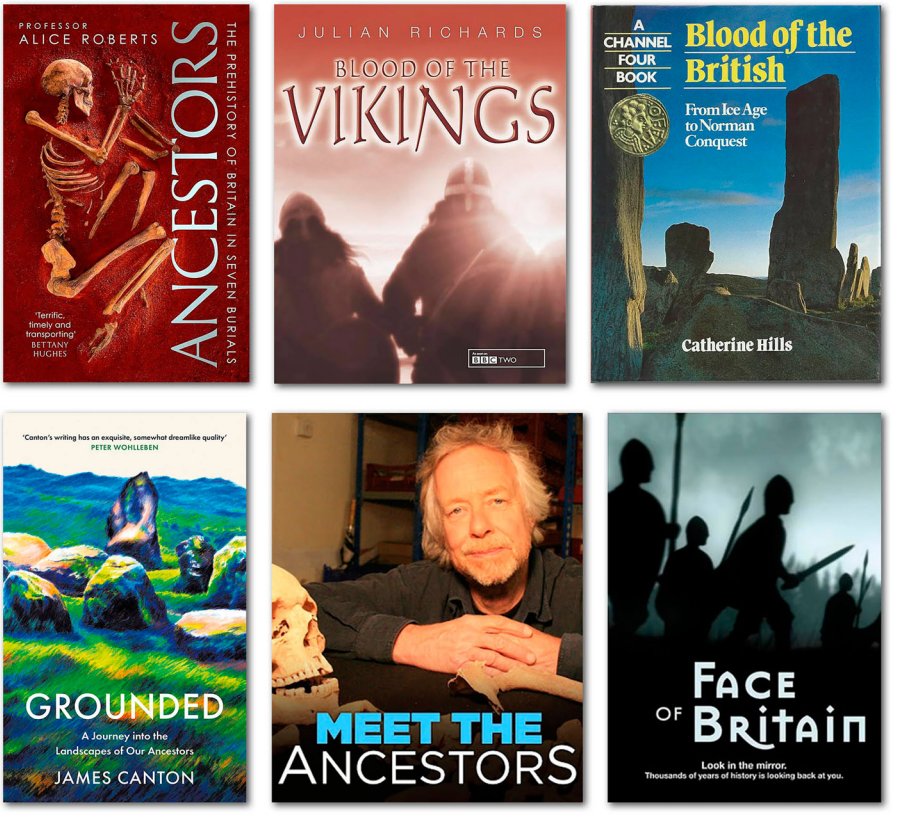

FIGURE 1 Screenshots of books and TV programmes. Left to right top: Alice Roberts, *Ancestors* (2021); *Blood of the Vikings* (BBC TV, 2001); *Blood of the British* (Channel 4, 1986); James Canton, *Grounded: A Journey into the Landscapes of Our Ancestors*; *Meet the Ancestors* (BBC2, 1998–2004); *Face of Britain* (Channel 4, 2007).

past as "something beyond current politics and ideology, as something natural which is just 'there'"' (Coakley, 2018: 331). These almost invisible underpinnings support British national historic identity and provides the far right with an emotional 'imaginative resource' (Pitcher, 2022: 211).

Cultural heritage has a long record of service in the (re)construction of national identities (Meskell, 2002; Smith, 2006; Weiss, 2007). As Jones argued nearly three decades ago: 'The critical role that the past plays in the assertion and legitimation of modern ethic and national identities ensures that archaeological knowledge is frequently used in the construction of such essentialist ethnic histories' (1997: 136). Little has changed, except perhaps the mainstreaming of these views. Archaeology as a scientific pursuit developed against the backdrop of the consolidation of European imperial power and rise of nationalist political movements during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Historical and archaeological evidence helped construct narratives of cultural continuity, often to establish direct links between contemporary populations and ancient material culture found within their current borders (Díaz-Andreu & Champion, 1996; Díaz-Andreu García,

2007; Kohl et al., 2007; Trigger, 1984, 1995). The establishment of professional academic posts, national museums, monument surveys and protection, and accompanying laws that were developed in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries reflected the scholarly interests, coloniality, and cultural nationalism of the time (Givens, 2024; Swenson, 2018; Thatcher, 2018). In England, as elsewhere, several influential nineteenth-entury archaeologists developed archaeological methods that were explicitly associated with eugenics and white supremacy (Challis, 2016; Reilly, 2022; Sheppard, 2010; Silberman, 1999). As Trigger observes, 'archaeology does not function independently of the societies in which it is practiced' (1984: 368). This has been particularly evident globally, where archaeological discoveries are used to validate claims of ancient rights of occupation or cultural superiority. This entanglement of archaeology, nationalism, and ethnicity was most violently manifested in Nazi Germany, but similar patterns existed across Europe and its former colonies (Arnold, 2006; Eickhoff et al., 2023; González-Ruibal, 2010; Trigger, 1995). The events of this period of history clearly demonstrate that historical and archaeological data and narratives have been well used for malign political purposes, and 'have promoted bigotry, violence, and destruction' (Trigger, 1995: 263).

The deep entanglement of ancient and contemporary identity in the popular and far-right imagination still manifests itself through several complex mechanisms, and there is a growing body of important work by scholars engaged with this (for example: Bonacchi et al., 2018; Bonacchi, 2022; Brophy, 2018; Frieman & Hofmann, 2019; Hakenbeck, 2019; Niklasson & Hølleland, 2018; Pitcher, 2022). These discuss the deliberate misinterpretation of archaeological themes such as prehistoric social and cultural practices, the entanglements of British identity and Roman history, or narratives of past migration and ethnic identity by racial ideologues. The development of archaeogenetic studies is perhaps 'a data and knowledge revolution' (Kristiansen, 2014: 23). However, there has been important critique of paradigm-shattering aDNA analysis, not least the significant epistemological and methodological limitations of these 'primordial understandings of identity'(Strand & Källén, 2021: 525). The complex contemporary social implications of the concept of 'ancestral' DNA from within and without the discipline has received critique throughout two decades (Booth, 2019; Fortier, 2011; Nash, 2004; 2015; Rutherford, 2020; Sommer, 2012; Zarrugh & Romero, 2023). The appropriation of genetic testing and ancient DNA by the far right is the subject of a growing body of scholarship by archaeologists and sociologists (for example: Burmeister, 2021; Edwards-Grossi & Donovan, 2024; Frieman & Hofmann, 2019; Hakenbeck, 2019; Panofsky and Donovan, 2019; Parmenter, 2024). This work also explores how the prevalence of ancestry DNA testing 'may unintentionally support the reproduction of everyday discourses of race and racism' (Tyler, 2021: 232). The continued evolution of far-right views on race, identity, and cultural hierarchies at the heart of political power across North America and Europe creates a dangerous gap between scientific evidence and ideological misinterpretation. Hakenback warns '… important research has revealed past political appropriations of our disciplines … but there is a danger that this is considered a problem of the past that has been overcome' (2019: 522). This body of scholarship suggests that too

many academics continue to view the journey of archaeological knowledge beyond its frontiers with perilous ambiguity.

The British National Party

The BNP was founded in 1982, a merger of British far-right micro-factions after 'the fracturing of the National Front' (Shaffer, 2019: 120). The National Front (NF) was an extremist fascist party with racist, anti-Semitic, white supremacist beliefs, and a reputation for violent street-fighting tactics. The NF had a visible street presence in diverse urban areas and was active in anti-immigration demonstrations and marches during the 1970s and early 1980s (Copsey, 2008: 26). The formation of the NF, and later the BNP, occurred against the backdrop of broader social and political changes in British society during the later decades of the twentieth century (Copsey, 2008). The BNP has its organizational and ideological roots deeply embedded in fascism (Copsey, 2008: 97). As Ignazi notes, 'nationalistic racism and the destiny of Great Britain were its cardinal points' (2006: 182). The original BNP membership was involved in various UK far-right organizations of the earlier twentieth century, such as the British Union of Fascists and League of Empire Loyalists (Copsey, 2008). The effects of de-industrialization, decline of working-class labour power, scapegoating of post-war and post-colonial immigration, unemployment, and economic restructuring during the Thatcher governments all contributed to the entrenchment of an extremely divided society (Nunn, 2014: 308).

From 1999, the BNP was led by Cambridge-educated former NF activist Nick Griffin. Griffin was awarded a degree in history and law at Downing College, Cambridge, and claimed to have worked on archaeological excavations in an interview with the *Daily Mail* (Carman, 2009). The BNP's ideological positioning attempted to present a politically palatable public front for what were extremist viewpoints (Copsey, 2008). Under Griffin's leadership, the BNP became the most electorally successful extreme right political party in Britain's history (Copsey, 2008: 1). The BNP increased its local authority power base in elections from 2001 onwards, taking over fifty seats in Greater London, Lancashire, the West Midlands and West Yorkshire, and one seat in the London Assembly. The party won two seats in the 2009 European Parliament election; one held by Nick Griffin from 2009–14 (European Parliament, 2024). This period of BNP electoral victory represents a significant development in the evolution of electorally effective British ethnonationalism. *Identity* was published during this period of electoral success (Rhodes, 2011).

The BNP refocused their image around local community politics and issues of cultural cohesion in order to achieve electoral credibility. Publicly, by 2000, the party had distanced itself from the explicitly fascist symbolism, anti-Semitism, and neo-Nazi rhetoric of its predecessors. Strategically, this had its roots in the 1990s, with the 'Rights for Whites' campaign begun in Tower Hamlets by activist (and later author of *Identity* articles on heritage subjects) Eddy Butler (Copsey, 2008: 57). The party drew most of its supporter base from white, predominantly middle-aged men living in de-industrialized towns, and areas with large Asian

and Black minoritized populations (Ford & Goodwin, 2010). Rhodes rightly cautions against the assumption that racism is the preserve of the white working classes (Rhodes, 2011: 115). Griffin envisioned the BNP as 'a beacon on hope not only for the dispossessed white working class but also the potential saviour for … Middle England' (Copsey, 2008: 101). Under his leadership, the communication strategy shifted so that 'Instead of presenting the party as a revolutionary alternative to the system, "we must at all times present them [the electorate] with an image of moderate reasonableness"' (Copsey, 2008: 102). Griffin appeared on numerous national TV and radio programmes during this period, famously appearing as a panellist on BBC *Question Time* in 2009 (Allen, 2009). The need to unite the 'respectable' classes with an emphasis on the common anxieties of white 'hard-working' British people encouraged the party to bring 'white "victimhood"' and pride in (white) British history, heritage and culture to the fore' (Copsey, 2008: 107). This meant a semantic shift in its racialized discourse in public spaces. Here, they focused more on their respectable public image, concerned with immigration, and protection of the nation's identity and cultural heritage (Rhodes, 2011: 113). Internally, the 'racist extremism' never abated (Macklin, 2014: 143).

Identity magazine

As part of Griffin's drive for public respectability, the BNP's improved its communications strategy (Copsey, 2008: 108). From January 2000, BNP members received a new magazine, *Identity*. The first editorial framed their new strategy: 'preserving the identity of the traditional inhabitants and cultures of Britain' (Golding, 2000: 2). The magazine set out to provide an ethno-nationalist critique of government policies, global and national economics, with special focus on threats to cultural unity from immigration and multiculturalism. Like other membership magazines, there were a variety of news articles, editorials, and a letters page, with adverts for far-right merchandise.

Despite the increasing popularity of online platforms as the decade progressed, magazines still played an important role as the focus for community. As Jones observes, public support of the extreme right could be met with social ostracism. Political extremism is aberrant and a fringe minority. Far-right activists and supporters are often geographically dispersed (Jones, 2024: 34). These publications 'present opportunities to nationalist movements to both expand and define their movements. It also allows them to curate that community, defining "out" groups and identifying threats to the community as part of a call to action from its members' (Jones, 2024: 36). The contents contain the core BNP 'symbolic concerns over the national community, culture and way of life' (Goodwin, 2010: 50).

Method

The data discussed in this paper are taken from the copies of *Identity* magazine held at the London School of Economics Library (LC:2014254763), Searchlight Archive at the University of Northampton (SCH/01/Res/BRI/03/001 and 006), and

Cambridge University Library (L216.b.277). LSE holds 104 issues from 2000 to 2011, Searchlight Archive holds 81 copies from 2000 to 2009 and Cambridge University Library holds 68 copies from 2001 to 2009. A complete list of magazines published after 2010 were not available, although back issues can be purchased through the BNP website, or online via eBay. This was not pursued. In the first year of publication, 2000, there were four issues published roughly once a quarter. As demonstrated in Table 1, these were subsequently printed monthly, with gaps, until 2008, after which publication slowed, due to party financial struggles (Goodwin, 2011: 95).

A hundred issues were examined for relevant content and 61 of these met the inclusion criteria: (1) specific focus on an archaeological or historical theme to discuss importance of past in the present; (2) use of similarly themed images or illustrations; (3) exclusion of articles about the history of nineteenth-century individuals and associated events. A total of 76 articles from these 61 issues were analysed using a Grounded Theory approach. This enables 'the discovery of theory from data' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 1). Following a close reading of the text, each article was assigned primary codes based on its content. Through an iterative review process, these initial codes were checked and organized into coherent subcategories to maintain an analytical consistency throughout the dataset. The articles were coded according to its relationship to archaeological or archaeogenetic subjects, the rhetorical content, the images, and the relationship between the images and the textual content. These subcategories were then assembled into broader themes. This continued methodically until all articles had been assigned appropriate codes, subcategories, and themes, and no new patterns emerged from the data. Full descriptions of the individual articles, their subjects and authors can be found in Table 1 and descriptions of the visual material can be found in Table 2 in the supplementary material. Notes were also made on the frequency of authorship across the magazines, the use of references to external texts and scholarly sources, details

TABLE 1

ISSUES BY MONTH/YEAR, WITH HISTORICAL OR ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTENT INDICATED IN GREY.

	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
2000	1	X	2	X	3X	3	X	X	X	4	X	X
2001	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
2002		X	17	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
2003	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39
2004	40	41	42	43	44	X	45	46	47	48	49	50
2005	51	52	53	54	X	55	56	57	58	59	60	61
2006	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73
2007	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85
2008	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97
2009	98	99	100	100	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

X indicates no publication.

on the qualifications or authority of the authors, and therefore any implied expertise.

Results

The seventy-six articles were assigned one of the following themes:

- 'Archaeology': discussions of archaeological narratives, sites, cultures, or material objects
- 'Ancient DNA': discussions of ancient DNA studies to understand 'scientific' population differences from the past to present
- 'Archaeology and Folklore': discussions of archaeological sites and their association with folklore, legends, and myths
- 'Lessons from History': use of historical events and individuals to illustrate points about British identity
- 'World War': discussion of the events of the First or Second World War
- 'Christianity & Crusades': articles featuring historical information about Christian sites, Crusader histories, or the history of Christian buildings

The theme distribution was: Archaeology: 30 articles (39.5%); Ancient DNA: 25 articles (32.9%); Lessons from History: 10 articles (13.2%); World Wars: 4 articles (5.3%); Christianity & Crusades: 4 articles (5.3%); and Folklore: 3 articles (3.9%). This suggests a strong focus on the past, with a particular interest in the relationship between historical sites, genetics, and present-day populations. There is a relatively consistent publication pattern. There is increasing attention to genetic/DNA research, reflecting the development of communication about genetic science in popular media, which aligns with previous work by Källén et al. (2019).

The authors were mostly drawn from BNP activists and included Nick Griffin (6 articles on these themes), Stephen McDonald (5 articles), Lee Barnes, then-Legal Director (4 articles), and Eddy Butler, National Elections Officer (3 articles). McDonald covered archaeology, folklore, and history; Barnes specialized in archaeology and folklore; and Butler covered 'lessons from history' and archaeology. Other authors included party foreign affairs spokesperson Arthur Kemp, treasurer David Hannam, Glasgow organizer Deryk Smith, and former BNP EU election candidate for Scotland, Alistair Harper. Only two are identifiable as women. None had any direct archaeological or historical expertise, beyond Griffin's degree.

The images used in the articles drew on historical and archaeological material, as outlined in the table below. These represent a jumble of periods and places, some unrelated to the direct subject. Instead, these have an aesthetic of 'pastness', which lends credibility to the article. For example, a twentieth-century statue of a male figure created in neo-classical style by Nazi artist Arno Breker illustrates 'History Speaks: March of the Titans Reviewed'. The nineteenth-century defiant sculpture of *Boadicea and her Daughters* illustrates 'Boudicca — the British in Revolt'. These curated choices may be unfamiliar to the average reader without a caption, but they create an aura of pastness and credibility that may far exceed the substance of the article content.

Analysis

Identity's highly selective approach to the past provides 'symbolic cultural content', which repeatedly exposed the *Identity* readership to the underpinning principles of white British exceptionalism (Rigney & Holmes, 2023: 513). This material exploits a curious variety of analyses: genetic science, archaeology, mythology and Victorian-history-style propaganda. As Lowenthal notes, 'that myths are batty and irrational does not spoil their worth. Camelot and the Grail lack historical integrity but carry psychological weight' (1998a: 18). The psychological weight of Boudicca, the Celts (sic), the Anglo-Saxons, and figures like Hereward the Wake or Alfred the Great is clear. These articles contain passionate stories about heroic underdogs fighting invasion, and the genetic resilience and cultural purity of ancient white British ancestors.

These articles use very simplified historic narratives, heavy on rhetoric. There are references to research of varying quality, and some articles use technical terms to connect the content with science. These tropes 'construct and give meaning to the extreme right's imagined and mythologized version of Britishness and the nation' (Woodbridge, 2015: 46). The articles repeat or riff on similar topics over the years of the publication. Inevitably, the magazines contain a 'narrative of victimisation' (Rigney & Holmes, 2023: 520). The authors present their work as revelations of histories that have been forgotten, overlooked, or are no longer taught in schools, because of anti-white multiculturalism. Through this repetition of key ideas, *Identity* appeals to nostalgia for the lost glory of the ancient British past at the same time as mourning the oppression of the 'indigenous people' of Britain. There is 'the dread of a fatal rupture with a unique ethnic past' (Bonifas, 2010: 23).

Over its lifetime, archaeogenetic and archaeological studies were used to claim an 'indigenous' status for the white British. The contents of *Identity* reflect the growth in ancient DNA analysis, which were increasingly prominent in the news. The BNP mobilized these emerging narratives and presented them as irrefutable scientific evidence of indigeneity. 'Scotland's True Identity' in issue 27 claims 'Britain is a group of islands that consist of people of the same genetic makeup' (Smith, 2002: 9). In 'We Have Always Been Here!' in issue 80, Griffin argues 'all the evidence of the scientific revolution of DNA studies over the last few years points to the fact that two-thirds of the indigenous people of the British Isles are the direct descendants of the first pioneers who followed the retreating ice sheets at the end of the last glaciation' (Griffin, 2007: 4). This is drawn from the book *The Origins of the British: A Genetic Detective Story* by Dr Stephen Oppenheimer (2006). Griffin had long embraced the importance of pride in white heritage through the promotion of 'cultural nationalism' and a 'cultural war' since his student days in the National Front (Woodbridge, 2015: 42). This effort to use scientific data, however questionable, lends confidence to assertions that ' … to deny this, as the liberals do when they spout their talk of Celts, Romans, Saxons, Vikings, Normans to "prove" that we are "a nation of immigrants" is to deny the right of the native peoples of our islands to affirm our ancient heritage and possession of this land. This place made us, and we made it. Those who deny this are the real racists' (Griffin, 2007: 7). The white ethnonationalist 'Great Replacement Theory' claims there is a global plot to replace

white European populations with non-white and non-Christian immigrants (Sedgwick, 2024). On 22 October 2009, Griffin appeared on *Question Time* where he claimed 'Britain's "indigenous" populations — the English, the Scots, the Irish and the Welsh — had been living in the country for the past 17,000 years … under threat of disappearing if appropriate measures, such as stopping immigration flows, were not implemented' (Fortier, 2011: 154).

From the outset, the BNP used archaeological discoveries to support their claims to genetic continuity. Archaeological sites were important ethnonationalist nodes: 'Stonehenge, Avebury, Newgrange, Callanish and the other ancient sacred sites of these islands were all built by the same people — our common ancestors' (Griffin, 2000: 6). In issue 2 he writes 'The latest DNA studies at Oxford University show that today's native English, Scots, Welsh Ulsterfolk and Irish are literally 99 per cent descended from a tiny number of stone age settlers who arrived in several waves between 40,000 and 10.000 years ago' (Griffin, 2000: 6). 'Newgrange Burial Site' in issue 15 is used to claim 'the genetic makeup of the British Isles has been largely unchanged for millennia' (McDonald, 2002: 18). McDonald notes that readers would be familiar with claims to an ancestral relationship through DNA because of the BBC TV programme *Blood of the Vikings*. In issue 57, 'Oldest Civilisation' Find is a Blow to Multicultural Propaganda' details archaeological discoveries in central Europe which 'prove' the genius of 'indigenous British' ancestors. Emotions are inflamed over the denial of the rights of indigenous white British people: 'the fiction of "civic" nationalism is arrant nonsense in terms of facts and pernicious politics in terms of intent' (Harpur, 2007: 17).

Harpur's three-part series 'Blood of the Isles' in issues 77/78/79 uses the work of genetic scientist Bryan Sykes to make the BNP's 'claim for a genetic reconstruction of history' (Sommer, 2012: 226). There is extended discussion of head shapes, matrilineal history, and hair and eye colour, which are 'ignored by liberal academics' (Harpur, 2007: 15). In 2009, issue 98 advertised the book *Race Evolution and Behaviour* by J. Phillipe Rushton for sale through the BNP sales arm Excalibur. It claimed to use 'evidence from psychology, anthropology, sociology and other scientific disciplines' (p. 20). Frustration towards the 'multicultural liberal elite' is palpable: 'With one whiff of grapeshot the anti-natural, egalitarian social engineering which has dominated anthropology for more than half a century is riddled with holes' (Harpur, 2007: 17). Science and tradition are used to fuel emotional responses to the past, persuade readers that 'Britishness is chromosomal not residential' and 'lies exclusively in our blood' (ibid.). *Identity* furthers the replacement conspiracy through several Islamophobic articles using medieval crusader heritage as symbols of resistance to immigration and diversity in articles such as 'Jihad: Islam's 1300-year War on Europe and Europeans' (Kemp, 2005) or 'Why Didn't Islam Conquer the World' (Akers, 2006). Sedgwick observes, this is 'not a fringe narrative that belongs on poorly regulated social media sites, but a serious hypothesis based on apparently sound data that is widely believed' (2024: 562). These are not the usual pseudo-archaeological, sensationalized, speculative fantasies we might expect.

Identity employs subtle methods to provide a convincing impression of expertise. Some articles use academic sources. Where used, references are not directly archaeological, such as *Blood of the Isles* (Sykes, 2007), old academic textbooks, or online encyclopaedias. In 'The Celts' series in issues 32–38, Griffin relies extensively on

Nora Chadwick's *The Celts* (1970) and Colin Renfrew's *Before Civilisation* (1973). We can speculate that these were Griffin's textbooks at Cambridge in the late 1970s, when the scholarship would be up-to-date. The use of titles or postnominals by many magazine authors, or discussion of their education, reassures the reader. Griffin uses his postnominals 'MA (Hons) Cantab' for 'The Celts' alone. The readership might be unaware that this is not in fact a University of Cambridge Master's degree, but it adds to the veneer of scholarship and credibility. Repeated claims about genetics that use technical terms and scientific language can be found every year. For the average BNP member, these articles will be perceived as (1) up-to-date, (2) based on robust, authoritative research, and (3) written by people with knowledge of the subject at hand.

Most British people are more likely to have been exposed to archaeological and historical information through popular television programmes, films, and tourism than through their educational experiences. This leaves a void in any foundational understanding of what happened in the past, when, and how. It is useful to reflect what this means for uncritical acceptance. After all, 'heritage exaggerates and omits, candidly invents and frankly forgets, and thrives on ignorance and error' (Lowenthal, 1998b: 7). When the average BNP *Identity* readership of this decade were at school (i.e. the 1960s–1980s), the English history curriculum was narrow and Anglocentric. Schools were selective until the late 1970s, and 75 per cent of schoolchildren attended a less academic secondary modern school (Brooks, 2008: 448). Most people educated in any state-funded schools before the 1970s would receive a traditional 'fact-based history' education featuring royalty, national events, and little more, although this began to change in the 1970s and 1980s (McKiernan, 1993: 38). Greater emphasis was placed on modern political history, and the events of the two world wars (Little, 1990: 322). Social and cultural themes were taught, alongside chronological '"facts" of the British past' (McKiernan, 1993: 50). GCSE and A level Archaeology was available at a handful of schools until 2004 and 2016 respectively. The 1988 National Curriculum introduced the study of ancient civilizations such as Ancient Egypt for primary Key Stages (Henson, 2017: 52). This change also made all history lessons optional after the age of fourteen (Bowen et al., 2012: 133). Inevitably, state education provided patchy critical and historical awareness. Narratives such as those found in *Identity* could help fill these gaps with selective, ideologically comforting histories supported by convincing 'science'. The explicit aim of *Identity*'s ethno-nationalist articles is '… to educate adherents about the "unique" traditions and special facets of their national community and articulate why these need to be defended from "other" and "alien" cultures' (Woodbridge, 2015: 29).

There is calculated choice in the retelling of chosen historical narratives. Cognition studies demonstrate that repeatedly encountering inaccurate statements or misinformation increases the likelihood that the information will be seen as truth (Vellani et al., 2023). This is known as the illusory truth effect. Research shows that when information feels easy to process, it is more likely that people will believe it (Dechêne et al., 2010). When repeated information becomes more familiar, processing it is easier, and familiarity is misattributed as an indicator of truthfulness (Newman et al., 2020). This remains the case even if individuals are told the opposite is true, or can see the information is false, and it remains influential across

varying levels of critical and cognitive abilities, and over periods of time (Hassan & Barber, 2021). This has important implications for how we might understand the persistence of the archaeological misdirection contained in *Identity*. For readers repeatedly exposed to similar biased uses of archaeological material, the simplest and most emotionally satisfying beliefs are the most familiar, and therefore contain the most 'truth', even when factually incorrect.

Conclusion

In the public consciousness, prehistory, archaeological sites, and concepts of ancestry and archaeogenetics are fundamentally linked (Fortier, 2011; Strand & Källén, 2021). Biology and nationhood appear forged in the deep past, with unbroken continuity between 'ancestral' monuments and the ethnic identity of ancient and modern populations (Blakey, 2020; Frieman & Hofmann, 2019; Hakenbeck, 2019; Pitcher, 2022). The ideological underpinnings of the *Identity* data are far from anachronistic. In issue 44, Nick Griffin argued 'we have no more than twenty years to avoid fighting and losing a civil war, and seeing the ancient Book of Albion closed forever' (Griffin, 2004: 4). Twenty years later, Reform won 14.3 per cent of votes in the 2024 UK election, and five seats in parliament. Emerging from a Brexit-driven wave of hard right views on issues such as immigration, Reform aligns itself with nationalist, Islamophobic, far-right identity politics. Reform's policies call for the return to 'British culture, identity and values' (Reform UK, 2025). Like the BNP before it, Reform seeks voters who feel a deep connection to British identity, framing itself as the last hope of white British traditional culture. Similar ethno-nationalist, white identitarian political agendas are widespread in mainstream political life across the United States, Brazil, and, in Europe, across France, the Netherlands, Germany, Hungary, and beyond (Mudde, 2024: 2019).

There has been a gradual acclimatization of extreme right voices, values, and policies in mainstream politics (Cammaerts, 2022: 730). Their mobilization of history as a weapon for violence and discrimination is nothing new. The popularity of direct-to-consumer ancestral genetic testing and scientific discoveries using ancient DNA, such as the evolution of skin colour in prehistoric European populations, have opened up new fronts for the misuse of genomic science and archaeology in far-right spaces (Brophy, 2018; Fortier, 2011; Källén et al., 2019; Panofsky et al., 2021; Redfern & Booth, 2023). Yet all this is rarely challenged from within the discipline of archaeology itself, despite an increase in scholarship on the subject. Whether this is a problem that might be of concern the archaeologists and scientists producing this type of work is difficult to see, since the 'issue of indigeneity is one that is often raised and rarely reflected upon in European genetic research' (Frieman & Hofmann, 2019: 533). A lack of attention has consequences.

The case study of *Identity* reveals the mechanism of the illusory truth effect in the repetition of selective historical information. The repeated emphasis on the significance and emotional resonance of past events, places and historic figures validates pre-existing bias. Plausible scientific information is leveraged to support notions of an ancient British genetic heritage. Shallow archaeological narratives are used to

bolster the authority of the white supremacist Great Replacement Theory. These remain unchallenged. Extremist organizations and elected parliamentary parties, from Patriotic Alternative to Reform UK, repeat and reinforce these illusory truths about the past, as immigration and multiculturalism are presented as threats to white British heritage and identity. As the 2024 riots demonstrated, moral panic around migrants and grievances about 'indigenous' British culture contributes to very real damage in everyday life, whether that is an increase in Islamophobic, anti-Semitic, anti-immigrant hate crimes, or the continuing media-inflamed culture wars. Though these misrepresentations may appear trivial to many archaeologists, the weaponization of archaeological and genetic data in publications like *Identity* or parliamentary rhetoric boosts racist and ethnonationalist agendas.

These data present complex challenges and demand a critical response. Are these illusory truths too resilient? Can archaeologists address these, safely and ethically? As Kristiansen argued over a decade ago: 'While archaeology has a long and glorious history of popularization, there is less experience of taking part in critical public debates, whether in newspapers, television or on the web' (2014: 26). Yet the centre of critical public debate about cultural identity and biodeterminism is precisely where we need to be. Echoing the concerns of Banks (2022), Crellin & Harris (2020), Frieman & Hofmann (2019), and Hofmann (2019), systematic debunking of these myths needs us to target their foundational claims, consistently, publicly, with our unique expertise and insights into the past. A more nuanced approach to public archaeogenetics and archaeological discussions of 'ancestors' would be a start. Archaeology is not a politically neutral project. Challenging the misuse of archaeological evidence requires more than theoretical intervention on the pages of an academic journal, or social media debate. It demands long-term investment in public archaeological literacy.

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