Wile writing my previ-
ous article, memories
floated back to me of
my childhood love of
science fiction films.
The one that really started me thinking
about ancient civilisations was the 1960
version of H.G. Wells’ “Time Machine”.
I’m sure many of you have seen the film
where Rod Taylor travels far into the
future to the land of the Eloi, a people
who do not appear to have a government
nor laws.

Even though H.G. Wells’ had taken
us into the future it was clear that he
was, in a way, taking us full circle back
to our roots. I had read in countless
books and journals about the people
who had once inhabited our land. How-
ever, my scientific training at university
had taught me to be aware that some-
times theories and claims are no more
than fantastic imaginations dressed as
science. As a scientist, I needed evidence.
I could not accept all the views I had read
until I had the chance to see the evidence
with my own eyes.

My minimal understanding of physics
and engineering would not be enough to
build a time machine like the one in
H.G. Wells’ novel. However, I knew that
if I was given the chance to touch and
feel a real object from the ancient past,
then there was a chance I could connect
with the object. Once connected, the
object could whisk me back in time and
through it I could see for myself a vision
of who I was and where I had come from.

I reasoned that releasing these objects
from the ground might help me connect
to the past. My aim was to bring reality
to a view that I was a product of people
who at one point or another had strug-
gled with — and survived — all kinds of
hard times. Throughout time we have
relied on the goodwill of nature for our
existence. However, it can turn against
us and as recent events have shown,
natural catastrophes, and food shortages
resulting from poor harvests, can devas-
tate communities.

We are alive in present times because
our ancestors won those battles against
adversity; now I wanted to get to know
these survivors better and somehow
release their memories from the “under-
world”.

However, as time went by I began
to wonder whether I was ever going to
find any of their amazing artefacts, many
of which I had seen in this magazine.
I had for my efforts when I became
involved in metal detecting were modern
buttons, ring pulls and bottle tops.

I had read and heard many times
of the out-of-body experience, which
propels the finder back in time as they
proceed to unearth an object which had
been lying quietly and patiently in the
soil for hundreds and often thousands
of years. An object lost to the earth, living
in darkness but still witness to the con-
tant human cycle of prosperity, poverty,
famine, war and back to peace, prosper-
ity and happiness — all taking place just
inches above it.

This poor creature longed to be found,
and I longed to find it and bring it from
the darkness into the light. It needed just
one swing above and my detector would
give it the voice it needed to alert me of
its existence and moments later it would
see the sunshine again.

The trouble, though, was that I was
in the wrong field and I was miles away.
Actually, that’s an exaggeration — I was
just across the road tramping about aim-
lessly. But for or all my efforts I might as
well have been detecting on the moon.

It was on one of these fruitless days
that I decided to try and find out whether
my local library might contain any infor-
mation which could point me in the
direction of the fourth dimension — time!
At first, there didn’t seem to be much;
but then I stumbled upon the Victoria
County History for that county. I took
one volume down from the shelf and
right there in the contents was a list of all
the sites and finds reported at the time of
publication.

Even though the book was published
many years ago, it was a mine of infor-
mation. In their wisdom the authors had
summarised the archaeology and history
of the particular county in a list with map
references. Without delay I copied down
all the sites in the list and, as soon as I
got home, I entered them into my com-
puter. The sites listed became the nuts
and bolts of my own time machine — my
ARCHI database.

As the winter started to draw in and
after the seeds in most of my fields had
come to life and germinated, my atten-
tion turned to gathering together the
sites detailed in all the other copies of the
Victoria County History. Before long
my list of where our anciant ancestors
had chosen to live and work had run into
thousands.

However, even though my portal to the
past was taking form, the view was still
covered by a kind of mist which
obscured the detail I needed in order to
see for myself the world our ancestors
inhabited.

I had thought that things would be
clearer as I learned more about the past.
But this “information overload” actually
made it even more difficult. I had to find
some way of filtering out the sites near
to where I was fieldwalking from the
many thousands of sites I had listed in
my database. To try and find order in the
chaos, I started to draw diagrams of the
way the sites were scattered and draw
and measure lines between the towns
and villages I had permission to detect
and the particular sites.

It was then that I had my Eureka
moment. Maybe I was over tired or
maybe my eyes were playing tricks on
me, but amongst those lines triangles
seemed to be forming. Why was I now
thinking back to my schooldays? I could
see myself sitting in yet another boring
and dull maths lesson. In my mind’s eye
I was sitting there twiddling my thumbs
and wondering why my time was being
wasted on useless symbols and formula.

How wrong I was. Pythagoras had
seen those triangles 2,500 years ago and
now I understood the significance of
his discovery. He, or rather my maths
teacher, had shown me the answer to
my problem. I could program Pythagoras’
theorem into my computer and within
an instant the computer could work out
which sites were near to me, and only
give me a list of those sites! In doing so,
I was now able to focus on just those
sites in the area I was fieldwalking. I knew the landscape well, and now that I knew where my ancestors had settled I could begin to see the world through their eyes.

Now that I had seen and felt my first ancient settlement, I wanted to understand how the people of this place interacted with the people of other nearby settlements. How did they communicate with each other? Did they trade in the way we do? Did they see each other as a threat or did they live in harmony? Even though I was now getting somewhere, I was well aware that more sites had been found since the *Victoria County Histories* were published, and hence I reasoned that more sites lists could have been published in more recent books and journals.

It wasn’t long before I had found a second-hand book shop that had a full set of *Britannia* the *Journal of Roman Studies*. Reading through the references at the end of many very interesting and informative articles I noticed other journals such as the *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society*. Reading through this journal I found out the most counties have their own journals dedicated to the archaeology and history of that particular county.

After five years’ worth of weekends and evenings spent collecting information from many, many books and archaeology journals and entering it into my ARCHI database, I was now able to find out in seconds where exactly I needed to go to realise my dream of not only finding treasure, but also making that personal connection with the past which we all know does not have a price.

Now that I had a more “intelligent” approach to metal detecting, it wasn’t long before I was able to use the sites in my database (e.g. crop marks, habitation sites and find spots) to build up a picture of the past. Through place name studies, I began to learn more about the origins of our language. Place names became a particular fascination for me and so I added any place names which suggested antiquity to my ARCHI database. My favourite is Chipping. It is derived from

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**Fig. 1. Screenshot of what I like to think of as my Portal to the Past. Building my ARCHI database has allowed me to instantly generate a snapshot of the kind of the ancient sites within 10km of any place in the UK. The links to the maps in the lists of results show the precise location of the site on the ground. This makes it very easy to locate the site and go and visit it. Once at the site, it is always worth taking the time to view the site in the context of the landscape around the site and try to work out why that particular position was chosen. This is an invaluable exercise which can help us gain a deeper insight into how our ancestors viewed the world.**

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**Fig. 2. Screenshot of the ARCHI “Site Type” search box. I added this feature to my site to address a problem I had while I was studying Field Archaeology. We were asked to write an essay to explain the “Distribution of Iron Age Hill forts”. I’m sure if I had easily available locational information at the time, my essay would have gained higher marks.**

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**Fig. 3. Screenshot of the ARCHI “Site Name” search box. I added this feature to make it easier for me to generate maps showing the locations of sites I knew of by name.**

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**Fig. 4. Screenshot of a portion of the results list generated by ARCHI. This particular ARCHI search was for Roman coins in a particular area. An appreciation of the distribution of findspots and the concentration of particular finds can help us build a picture of the economic status of an area in ancient times. Analysis of the findspots of Iron Age coins for example has enabled researchers to work out the extent of the regions controlled by particular Iron Age tribes. It is generally accepted that the finds reported by metal detectorists have been the main source of data for such analyses.**
the early word “ceap” which means market, and is often associated with Saxon market towns. Ever wondered why you get cheap stuff at the market?

I don’t know whether it was wishful thinking or sound reasoning, but I searched my database for all places called “Chipping” and set about getting permission for some fields around a village I knew that had Chipping in its name.

It took me two years, but my research was finally rewarded when I opened up that lump of earth from a field nearby one of those towns and saw a beautiful gold thyrsus – a coin dating back to about AD 620-640. These were the beginnings of the Dark Ages, the historically dark time which followed the exodus of the Romans and preceded the time when particular tribal regions of this island were grouped together to form what we now know as the British Isles.

Finding this golden time capsule confirmed my view that it was more than wise to spend some of my limited amount of time seeking out the records of what had been found previously – and where it was found.

Now when I went out I would be searching in areas that were much likely to be fruitful. It was clear to me now that if our ancient ancestors chose a certain spot to live, work, grow their crops, keep their animals and form settlements and markets, then these would be the features in the land I should be searching for. This approach would infinitely increase the chances of finding those metallic historical records our ancestors gave to the ground many generations before I came to tread in their footsteps.

By this point my ARCHI database had more than 100,000 sites listed. However, it had become apparent to me that I would never find the time to walk over a fraction of the numerous sites listed. This is when I decided that the least I could do was to give my many years’ work the light of day by making my research available via my ARCHI database on my Digital Documents (www.digital-documents.co.uk) website.

It was now left to others to make the discoveries I could not possibly make on my own. I had my critics, though. Some in the archaeological establishment suggested that I had opened up our heritage to hoards of marauders. I stuck to my view that these artefacts have a right to be found and that although there will be losses, these will be insignificant compared to the benefits. Since then, many beautiful objects have been found and reported with the help of ARCHI. However, for many others and myself, the real beauty is not in the material properties of the artefact, but how the artefact can remind us of our place in time.

I don’t know whether the object I talked about at the start of this article is still lying in the ground waiting to be discovered. I hope not. Maybe you the reader has found it this very day. If it is official “Treasure”, remember that before you declare your find and it enters a showcase in the British Museum, put it in a place of pride in your home and cherish it. For the short time that you are its guardian, show it to your family and friends so that they may also experience the magic you felt when lifted it from the darkness and brought back into existence. It has a story to tell and it has been waiting for you to give it a voice. Allow it to speak. Give it the chance to tell us of all it has witnessed while waiting mute all those years until the swing of your detector gave it a voice for you to hear and release it from the ground.