It is of course possible to regard archaeology merely as a personal project, a
way of making one’s living or an academic career. One can also consider
archaeology as a thrilling hobby or as an exciting adventure. There is nothing
necessarily wrong with these attitudes. Exploring the past (and space, the jungle
etc) is perhaps something which is embedded in the human mind. We are curious
and want to know what we are ignorant of. Exploration is therefore fun and engages
attention.

But most archaeologists would probably agree that we also should try to make
archaeology relevant to our contemporary society. One can even state that good
research in a social discipline such as archaeology, should in the end, always aim
to critically consider, question and examine structures, conditions and ideas in our
contemporary world.

To extend the archaeological perspectives and methods to material culture from
the contemporary past is today a growing endeavour (see, for example Buchli &
Lucas 2001). Archaeological work dealing with modern material has sometimes
been done as a test of archaeological methods and theories. But we can also see
this development as logical if we define archaeology not as the study of prehistory,
but as a discipline dealing with the study of man through material culture.

However, the archaeology of contemporary things is of course by no means
automatically contemporary relevant. As with all archaeology, regardless of whether
the subject is Stone Age settlements or 19th-century industrial remains, the relevance
in a human and social perspective has to be interpreted, explained and argued. In
this sense there is no difference between archaeological studies of prehistoric or
modern remains.

But carrying out archaeological studies of material things from the recent past
or maybe even contemporary with ourselves sheds a special light on questions
regarding archaeology and the contemporary world in general. What is an
archaeological perspective and how can it contribute to our knowledge and understanding? Can archaeology enhance or even generate insights, which we do not already have from written sources, pictures and personal experience?

Another relatively frequently discussed point regarding modern archaeology and the question of contemporary relevance is the relationship to people living close to the archaeological remains and the places where the investigations are carried out. An interesting aspect of this is how the character of the research perspective and the “contemporary relevance” are affected when local people have their own interest in and knowledge of the field that is being studied. In archaeological studies of the contemporary past, this is highlighted when local people may even have a direct personal experience of the studied field.

In the following text five different possibilities within archaeology will be discussed. The argument will be developed through the study of post-medieval remains of the limestone industry in the landscape around Lörje in the parish of Hellvi on the north-eastern side of the island Gotland.

The long-term perspective

We are today living in a diversified post-industrial world full of rapid changes that are difficult to understand. Our modern society is formed by us who live and act

Fig. 1. Map showing the location of Lörje at the north of Gotland (original map by Jon Adams).
within it. But a classical way to define this “acting” is also to state that this is done on a stage formed by historical conditions (cf. ex Wigforss 1970). From this perspective, understanding the social, cultural and economic background is therefore important for our understanding of the contemporary world. Perceiving this background, both in detail and in attempts to make general synthesizes, is therefore the most basic and obvious way for archaeology to become contemporarily relevant.

In relation to this an often-mentioned advantage of the archaeological approach is the possibility of applying a long-term perspective to a special field or phenomenon. In the context of the Gotland lime industry this means that the production and handling of limestone can be studied over a period of at least one millennium.

The basic conditions for the lime industry on Gotland are, of course, geological. Five hundred million years ago the island of Gotland was a coral reef in a tropical ocean. Because of this the bedrock on the island, in contrast to that of most of the Swedish mainland, consists of limestone. Already in prehistoric times the relatively easily worked limestone was an important building material for houses, boundary walls and tombs. The burning of limestone for making lime for mortar goes back to the 11th century. During the church-building period of the 12th and 13th centuries a lot of lime was needed and was produced in small primitive kilns all around the island. The first known export of burned lime from Gotland is known from 1460 in the written sources. In this year building stone, burned lime, wood and tar were sold to the town of Gdansk (Håkansson & Ahlgren 1954:8).

When Gotland became a part of Sweden in 1645, lime production and export on a more industrial scale started at several places on the island. The state encouraged and supported this new industry, for example, by raising the tax on the export of unburned limestone. The first known limekiln was built in Lörje at 1662.

Some of the new industrial owners became rich during the 18th century. This new “lime nobles” built new houses, took control of important tasks in the community and made links between the families through marriages. At the beginning of the 19th century new and bigger kilns, fired with coal instead of wood, increased the production but also concentrated the ownership in fewer hands. The surviving “lime patrons” in the north of Gotland became even more powerful. They met regularly and through co-operation could control prices and labourer’s wages (Emilson & Kavonius 2000:25-33).

A new kiln designed for continuous use was built at Lörje in 1870 and similar modern kilns were also erected in nearby Kyllay and Lergrav. But at the end of the 19th century the old lime-burning declined when a new material, cement, started to be industrially produced. The production was concentrated at a few places on the island. Cement factories were built at Visby in 1885 and at Slite in 1917 (for Slite see Öhrman 1978, 1987). A factory for producing cement was also built at Valleviken, close to Lörje, in 1922. This factory was however, soon found to be not profitable enough and production discontinued in 1947, causing unemployment and social welfare problems for the workers (Håkansson & Ahlgren 1954:12-35, cf. Lindqvist 1978: 179, 212, 272).

The lime-burning period in the Lörje area ended around 1900 but now a new, intensive period of limestone export started from the area. New quarries were
Fig. 2. Remains of a jetty and a 19th century lime kiln at Lörjeudd (Photo: Johan Rönnby).
opened up, railways were built for transporting the stone and big, new harbour installations were built (Emilson & Kavonius 2000:95-125).

In the landscape around Lörje, Kyllaj and Smöjen the remains of centuries of lime-handling are numerous. The archaeological recording and study of them makes it possible to take a long view of how different social, political and economic factors changed the handling of lime in the past. Such a view can lead to greater understanding of the “acting” of today’s industrial production and the forces behind different contemporary structural changes.

Things that not are mentioned

There are certain aspects of society that have seldom been the objects of historical recording and study. Examples of this are the different kinds of marginal land use, in the forest or in the archipelago or simply at places far away from the seat of political power (cf. Mogren 1998:219-). Also, details regarding the industrial activity of past times have seldom been of much interest in research and recording. Archaeology may be the only way to describe and study these fields today (see for example, Crossley 1990:123-).

In Hellvi parish, there are numerous quarries from which limestone has been obtained. By surveying them, one can discover how the size of quarries increased, how new areas were used and how new types of stone material were chosen.

The limestone was transported down to the coast, where the kilns were erected. Here, the natural topography was exploited by erecting the kiln on the downhill slope. The stone could then be dropped right into the oven through an opening in the top. If this was not possible, transport bridges had to be erected in order to reach the top of the kiln. The construction of the kilns developed over time. In medieval times the lime was burned in more or less open fires (so-called “kalkmilor”). In later periods they developed into great stone-built constructions.

The process of burning took 2-3 days and then the limestone was taken out at the bottom of the kiln. The burned limestone was then transported to the “lime barn” which was situated next to the oven. Here the slaking was done by pouring water on the burned limestone. The finished product, “slaked lime” was then put into barrels or was loaded loose directly into the ships. The jetties for loading were arranged to be as close to the barn and the kiln as possible. Because of the open coastline and the shallow water close to land, these jetties and harbour constructions were often rather impressive.

The archaeologist’s special opportunities to document things that are not known from other sources (cf. Deetz 1996) are rather well illustrated by a small study made in the bay outside the limekiln at Lörje (Törnqvist & Wendel 2003). By boat and by diver, the bay was surveyed and a system of stone cairns and ballast heaps were found. The ballast heaps were rather small, indicating ships of a size around 10-20 meters in length. The heaps consisted of different kinds of material, small stones, pottery, building material, glass, etc, showing that it was often just mixed rubbish and building material from towns which was used as ballast. The dating of the artefacts in the ballast heaps indicates an origin in the 18th and 19th century.

The actual positions of the cairns and ballast mounds show how the procedure
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Fig. 3. Harbour installations from the 17th century at Värne (Photo: Johan Rönnby).
in the harbour was organised. The small one- or two-masted sailing boats arrived in the bay and were moored to the stone cairns. The ballast was thrown overboard on the west side of the bay in order not to reduce the depth of the water in the harbour. After this, the boats were taken to the main jetty for loading.

**Combining physical remains and other sources**

However, it is not just the lack of other sources that motivates archaeological studies. In historical archaeology it is often the combination of different sources, which yields interesting possibilities (cf. Andrén 1997:150). One interesting possibility is to identify archaeological objects and to link them to stories mentioned in written sources. This can open up possibilities of telling a more detailed and complex story (see Rönnby 2003). An example of this is the remains of the schooner Starkodder, which were found in the water off Lörje at a depth of two meters. The Starkodder was loading unslaked lime at Lörje in October 1903. Unslaked lime was a very dangerous product in an old wooden ship. If the lime gets wet, it expands and gets very hot. This happened on the Starkodder, which in a storm during the night started to drift and then took in water after running aground. The heat from the lime caused her to catch fire and she sank in the bay (see Törnsqvist & Wendel

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Fig. 5. The lime factory at Slite. Picture from jubilee book of 1942 (Slite kalk och cement AB).
The 15-meter long, greatly damaged and seaweed-covered hull is today all that remains of a story which was a rather typical fate for many ships loaded with lime in Gotlandic waters. In the vicinity of Lörje there are more then ten lime-loaded shipwrecks that remain to be identified.

The combination of different source materials can be an excellent way of getting more information and being able to tell a fuller story. But archaeology can also be a way of challenging and taking a critical attitude to things that are already considered to be known in a certain way. It can, for example, be a way showing another side of a person who is regarded as having been a powerful and glorious king (see Adams & Rönby 1996). By examining garbage from households archaeologist also have shown that there can be a big difference between what people says that they are eating and what they really consumes (Rathje 2001).

A critical comparison can also be used to show a more detailed and fuller picture of the working conditions for lime workers. A fairly comprehensive historical study of the Gotlandic lime industry was made in 1945 by Henrick Munthe, but relatively few other books have been written on the subject. There are, however, some studies or collections made on local and private initiative (see for example Franzén 1999 or Emilsson & Kavonius 2000). These often rich but rather unstructured memories can be a stimulating starting-point for formulating new and complementary archaeological questions.

Another surviving category of books dealing with the lime industry is those published by companies for various jubilees (for example Håkansson & Ahlgren 1954 or Slite Cement och Kalk AB 1942). The celebrating company tells us briefly about the background before the 20th century and then concentrates on how it has achieved economic success. Different directors and owners are mentioned and are often shown in pictures. The pictures of the actual factory, quarries and machines are uncharacteristically clean and almost empty of people. There is something art-like in the static, composed nature of these photographs. Also, the only historical study discovered that was done by the worker’s trade union is surprisingly lacking in details of the actual work and the conditions there (see Jakobsson 1954, compare Lindqvist 1978:35-36). In this way archaeology can not only fill in the gaps in the ‘official’ story but perhaps also show aspects which these books prefer not to mention (compare Andersson & Ekman 1999:14).

Archaeological experiencing

Archaeology has traditionally been a field specialised in examining and documenting physical objects as carefully as possible. An empirical ideal has also to a great extent dominated the field since the 19th century. Attempts to use other ways for acquiring knowledge have of course been developed, but it is only during the last decades that this has been more frequently discussed. Under the inspiration of qualitative research in other disciplines and phenomenological and hermeneutical ideas, it has also been said that experience, impressions and feelings are important parts of the process of understanding in archaeology (see ex Shanks 1992).

From this perspective, fieldwork is not just documentation of data but also a part of the reflection. This does not mean that the actual source material and the
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details in it are not important. Detailed knowledge about the archaeological remains is also vital for an interpretative and reflective archaeology. However, it is important that the choice of field strategy should be made with consideration and in relation to the goals of knowledge. Archaeological documentation and reconstruction can then be a part of larger understanding process.

Most of the archaeological work at Lörje has been done by groups of students from the Södertörn University College doing their seminar fieldwork at the place and by local divers from “Gotlands Havs Gilles”. An old building erected 100 years ago as the lime-industry office has been the base camp. The students have walked the same path as the workers once did and spent whole days down in the harbour close to the ruins of the old kilns. This experience of the place has been a vital part of the understanding of what once happened here. This is of course a subjective and time-based experience, but so also are the interpretations made in traditional empirical archaeology. The possibility of learning to know a place and interpreting it by being there in close contact with the studied object is one of the great benefits of the archaeological perspective.

Things for reflection and engaging

A traditional aim of archaeology has always been to reconstruct the past as well as possible. There are, as mentioned above, a lot of good reasons to research the past in order to better understand how things worked and were organised. However, there are perhaps other ways of motivating archaeology, ways that do not necessarily contradict this searching for the past but instead complement the archaeological perspective.

At a place such as Lörje this is very obvious. The lime stone industry had been vital for this area for at least 300 years. Indeed, there are places on Gotland where the limestone industry still exists with modern machines and computer-controlled processes. But, in the Lörje area everything has stopped. The last activity, the stone quarry at Smöjen, was abandoned in the early 1960s. All the old buildings from different periods are today ruins. Since the 1930s the population of the parish has decreased from almost 800 to approximately 250 today.

In such a context local history can be a vitally important subject to tap. The working history and industrial heritage can stimulate new initiatives. In Hellvi, a local organisation called Lörje Vänner has existed since 1999. They organise lectures and encourage local research in co-operation with the University Colleges of Gotland and of Södertörn (see for ex Clarito 2001) During periods of archaeological fieldwork, visiting days have been held and in the evenings local people with their own experience of lime-handling have visited the camp and shared their knowledge with the archaeologists.

Archaeology often gets surprisingly much attention and can therefore be a good pedagogic tool for creating contacts, remembering and for focusing on a specific topic. Physical remains can also be a starting point for reflections of a general humanistic kind that have not usually been on the archaeological agenda (see Burström in this volume). Ordinary things change in a strange way when they are taken out of context and are not used any more. This is especially obvious when
doing archaeology on contemporary material culture which we are used to seeing in an every day situation. Suddenly the things may appear as something fascinating and almost aesthetic. This can happen with cars from the 1950s abandoned in a forest, with old scratched Soviet statues, modern garbage in the Arctic or with ruins of limekilns on Gotland. To see this value in the object and to be open to discuss questions in relation to the thoughts that they generate can be interesting and stimulating.

But it would be rather narrow to let this fascination for the actual object end in just laid-back contemplation or personal reflection. It is better to let the fascination for the remains be an opening and inspiration for a discussion about broader general questions concerning how societies were and are constructed, and why they change. Maybe it is this, creating and stimulating a critical dialogue with other actors in our own contemporary society, which is the most important potential of archaeology.

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Abstract
In this article, the enterprise and praxis of performing archaeology on material from the contemporary past is considered highlighting some general possibilities within archaeology. The text is structured around five different themes: the use of the long-term perspective, the study of things that are not mentioned, the combination of different source materials, the use of the field study for experiencing and insight and finally the special potentials of physical remains for reflection and creating a critical dialogue.

The discussion takes an archaeological study on the island of Gotland in the Baltic Sea as a case study. The project deals with the post-medieval remains of the limestone industry in the landscape around Lörje in the parish of Hellvi on the north-eastern side of the island.

Keywords: contemporary past, limestone, Gotland, Lörje, industrial archaeology, the long-term perspective, experiencing, reflection, inspiration, critical dialogue.

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