

## An Appreciation of John Michell (1933 –2009)

With the passing of John Michell, the planet has lost a truly original thinker and the earth mysteries movement loses its father figure. Although Alfred Watkins was the original investigator into this long forgotten aspect of the ancient world, it was John who did more than anyone to dust the subject off, adding mightily and relentlessly over four decades to make it into a coherent discipline. And it was John who arranged for *The Old Straight Track* to be reprinted for an eager new generation, together, in 1972, with a biography of Watkins, a fellow Aquarian, written by Watkins' son, Allen.

But John was much more than this. Earth mysteries may have been at the centre of his work but his boundaries lay much wider. His mind ranged over an enormous compass, and as the 60's broke, John began more and more to investigate the anomalous aspects of subjects that were considered dangerous or to be avoided by academics and the Establishment. This quest was to continue throughout the rest of his life, as he pioneered new ways of applying the ancient traditions within anomalous phenomena such as leys, stone circles, UFOs and crop circles. John was at the prow of all these things, a prime force driving the intellectual wing of the alternative culture. He would often refer to himself, with a glint in his eye, as a radical traditionalist.

Born into a middle class Cornish family, the family business was in estate agency. John was educated at Eton and went up to Cambridge to read modern languages, specialising in Russian, in which he was fluent. In the black and white yet largely grey Cold War era of the 50s he readily found his first job in the Navy as a translator. His true voice began to appear during the polychromatic psychedelic times of the 1960s, where he rubbed shoulders and became lifelong friends with the founders of most of London's alternative press, including *Private Eye*, and, in later years, *The Oldie*. He played an active role in the founding of Glastonbury Festival and the Notting Hill Carnival.

John was almost the last representative of the post-war neo-platonists, that rugged group of individuals determined to preserve the traditional arts against the onslaught of what they saw as cultural dereliction in many aspects of the modern world. John lived for geometry, number theory, astrology and harmonic ratios, and would discuss these things with almost anyone he met, on a train, in a stone circle, or in a traditional English pub. One of John's most endearing qualities was his egalitarian approach towards people and in making information available to all. He was utterly generous in both in time and effort with this. With his cultivated manners, charming disposition and exemplary command of the Queen's language, John was also exceedingly fine company, a *raconteur non pariel*.

He was, of course, the original Dr Who, travelling both back and forwards in time and bringing back traveller's tales about the magical technologies of the ancient world together with a vision of a future world where we understand what a UFO actually is, and why crop circles appear next door to important megalithic sites.

John wrote on many subjects, always beautifully and always with scholarly insight, and many of his published works were highly traditional. I was not in the least surprised when an Oxford English graduate friend of mine told me that John's book *Who Wrote Shakespeare?* was, in her opinion, the best work on this most controversial topic.

A German friend who read a copy of John's book on the sayings of Adolf Hitler was incensed that such an insightful account of the Fuhrer's mind was not available anywhere in the Fatherland.

Like all pioneers, John had his detractors. Most archaeologists detested what he wrote, but no more than John found their model of prehistory two-dimensional and flawed. And he would joke ironically that, within a few hours, put any two leyhunters you choose on a desert island and they would fall out and thereafter live solitary lives on opposite sides of the island.

John leaves behind a stunning legacy of published works, symphonies that leave the earth mysteries movement with an embarrassment of riches. Although of late this subject has faded somewhat from public interest, these books lie in waiting to become the textbooks for a new generation that will use the information they contain within an as yet unclassified academic discipline, to explain aspects of the natural world that have been long time ignored and forgotten. And of all these gems, it is my belief that John will be remembered best for discovering the system of ancient metrology, a subject that sounds more boring than watching paint dry, yet as an entry point into the prehistoric mind provides a superb and razor sharp tool by which to investigate monuments placed on the landscape. Aided and augmented by his long-time friend John Neal, this *Cinderella* subject was finally classified, structured and made fit for purpose. It represents one of the most important breakthroughs of the past century in understanding the ancient world.

I first met John, like most baby boomers did, through his books, by reading *The Flying Saucer Vision* and *The View over Atlantis* in the late 60s, and they blew me away. Later, in the 70s *City of Revelation* became the Michell flagship, supported by *A Little History of Astro-archaeology* and *Megalithomania*. In the 80's his magnificent *Ancient Metrology* was self-published. The fabulous *Twelve Tribe Nations* (co-authored by Christine Rhone) arrived in 1990. Only in the mid 90's, and then in the writing and publishing of *The Measure of Albion* did John and I become close friends. Visits to John's home in London were an astonishment. Whether it was the constant traffic of people passing through, many well known in their field, or the staggeringly late nights discussing the topic *du jour* around a table piled high with John's artwork, calculators, unfinished scripts, glasses, bottles and ash trays, the sheer amount of information being analysed and discussed with wit and humour around that table invariably left me both totally stimulated and exhausted at one and the same time. The energy of the man, then approaching 70, was phenomenal.

On John's visits to my home in Wales, during similarly long evenings in front of a log fire he would range over a wide territory of subjects, from faith to reincarnation, crop circles to censorship. Coherent, sharp, he listened as competently as he delivered his truths, and Trish and I loved this visitor bringing this energy - his essence - into our home. We had been touched by something really special, and I have heard this same feeling expressed by many people who knew John personally. John changed many lives.

In September 2002, John and I sailed to Lundy Island with a small group of family and friends to investigate what was to become an important confirmation of John's work on ancient metrology and a crucial test of my research into prehistoric landscape geometry. We enjoyed an Indian summer heatwave, and my enduring memory

of John Michell remains that of a picnic held underneath the Cheeses, a natural rock formation midway up the western seaboard of this delightful island. Here, in fine fettle King John held his court, amusing the assembled Knights with everything from sacred geometry to the composition of devastatingly funny limericks. His passing marks the end of an era, something that will leave an unfillable hole in the personal lives of many people who knew John, and a huge chasm within the whole subject of investigative research, whether in ancient or modern wisdom, and about which he wrote so beautifully.

Because it shows the camaraderie that exists between truly independent researchers, and also because it describes my dear friend to a “T”, I would like to finish by adapting a paragraph John wrote in his obituary and appreciation for Professor Alexander Thom, in *The Ley Hunter (issue 100)*,

‘He felt that the monuments of ancient science had a valuable lesson in them for the present time. He was precise, by virtue of his courage, independence, sincerity, intellect, deep imagination and warm, kindly nature. In his latter years many people wrote to him, and they all received courteous replies; and so did his academic opponents. Thus he helped to bring about the much happier atmosphere which exists today in the world of megalithomania. Fellow sufferers from that noble obsession, from whatever point of view they regard our common megalithic property, all have good reason for remembering him with gratitude and affection.’

Robin Heath, April 25<sup>th</sup> 2009