8th January 2016

Re: Battlefield Recovery / Nazi War Diggers

Dear Mr Frow,

I am writing on behalf of the Council for British Archaeology to express major concerns regarding the Battlefield Recovery programme due to be aired on your channel.

Archaeology can help personal and political healing and add detail in the aftermath of conflict. However, such work must be undertaken with professional archaeologists who have experience of military archaeology and exhumation. Most importantly it must be undertaken sensitively, following best practice, in the constant knowledge that these are human remains, not just artefacts. This programme shows no such professionalism or sensitivity, suggesting that anyone can excavate a war grave regardless of experience or training. This should not be the case. The excavation of human remains should only take place within an established research framework with identified and justified research aims.

Please understand that our objection is wider than just concerns about academic methodology. Archaeologists deal with human remains on a regular basis but such work must be done with proper respect and decorum. Preview and teaser content for this programme shows no such restraint, portraying the presenters as no better than grave robbers and post-war profiteers. It also shows a callous lack of respect for those who lost their lives in a major conflict and a lack of consideration for their loved ones.

We previously campaigned for National Geographic to cancel the show two years ago. Ours was one of many heart-felt responses that caused the channel to appreciate these concerns and cancel the show. Since then, the History Channel has also taken account of feedback from their viewing community and removed the show from programming schedules.

The Society for American Archaeology (SAA) are staggered that following a successful campaign to remove the show from the air in America, New Zealand and Australia it is still to be shown in the UK. As one of the leading bodies for archaeology in the UK, founded during the Second World War to ensure a professional approach to archaeology, we share their consternation.
We ask that you follow the lead of previous potential broadcasters and pull the show from your schedule and maintain the hard-earned good reputation of Channel 5’s history programming.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Mike Heyworth MBE FRSA FSA MCMI MCIfA
Director

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