



Book Reviews

MONUMENTS IN THE LANDSCAPE BY PAUL RAINBIRD AUTHORS

Tempus. Stroud. 2008. 256pp, 64 b&w figs. pb ISBN 978 0 7524 4283 9 (£25)

As Chris Taylor pointed out some years ago, the use of the word 'landscape' in the title of an archaeological book or paper is no guarantee that there is anything about landscape archaeology in the content. I was concerned that this might be the case here; the first contribution (after the editor's introductory piece) is an excavation report. However, thereafter things improve rapidly.

Of the second paper, too, a review of Neolithic and Bronze Age Wessex by Mike Parker Pearson, purists might ask whether there is much that is really about the landscape but they would have to forgive the author because it is a brilliant essay. Toby Driver presents the evidence for some intriguing Neolithic and Bronze Age complexes in north Ceredigion in a paper that really *is* about monuments in the landscape and the rest of the papers follow, with varying degrees of success. In a well illustrated and well argued piece on the Athenian Acropolis, Yannis Hamilakis presents a critique of 'modernist archaeology' as period-specific but what he presents in his final paragraph as the way forward is landscape archaeology. There are very strong contributions by Peter Herring (stone rows), Tom Williamson (co-axials), Alex Woolf (hillforts in early medieval Wales), John Barnatt (Peak District), Robert Dodgshon (Scottish dairying), Sarah Tarlow (Welsh squatter settlements), Mark Pluciennik (recent Sicily), Rob Young and Jane Webster (Weardale), and Stephen Briggs (Sir John Gardner Wilkinson's surveys) – a list which includes many of the reliable usual suspects. All of these papers should be regarded as required reading as they contain much that is valuable and thought provoking. I particularly liked, for example, Young's passing remark that he remains 'convinced of the importance and worth of good, well thought out, local archaeology projects (after all, one person's archaeological doorstep is often the focus for another's internationally recognised research, and to propose that proximity necessarily breeds research of parochial importance is simply insulting)', though I fully acknowledge the inevitable caveat that follows.

Other papers are also of value but raise questions and issues. Mary Ann Owoc's argument about 'place, perspective and performance practice' is interesting but fragile, relying on too many assumptions. Ivone Canavilhas' examination of Neolithic/Chalcolithic tombs in Portugal is equally interesting but curiously unsupported by either maps or plans (and landscape is only addressed in the last brief paragraph before the Conclusion).

Richard Bradley and Michael Fulford contrast the approaches of landscape archaeology and excavation in studying the chronology of co-axial field systems – approaches that should be complementary and sequential but rarely are. They question, quite rightly, the 'single phase' Roman dating proposed for field systems on the Berkshire Downs by the present reviewer and colleagues, arguing for a more complex sequence of activity. They illustrate the argument from Salisbury Plain, where a combination of fieldwork and excavation has elucidated a considerable time depth of field systems and linear ditches. Here, they argue, field survey has revealed the earliest phases of activity and excavation has shown how the later phases modified the landscape; it seems churlish to challenge this even-handed narrative but in at least one case, on Orcheston Down, the whole sequence is in fact visible in the surface evidence.

Tom Gledhill and Ros Nicholl describe a well preserved landscape at Stanhope Park, Weardale. Though they imply that the archaeological features here were unknown until photographed from the air by Dennis Harding, many of them were in fact recorded as early as 1905. This report is marred by poor illustrations, so that the locations of the various sites described are unclear (did it occur to no one during the preparation and production of the book that Fig 39 needs some annotation?). The authors attempt to untangle the chronological complexity of the landscape – 'relationships' are mentioned several times but the nature of those relationships is not fully explained and indeed this is a difficult landscape to read. When the Scheduled part of the complex was surveyed by the RCHME in 1991 it was noted that the field system was of at least two phases though few direct relationships were found. In considering 'wider parallels' Gledhill and Nicholl do not perhaps throw the net wide enough; a comparison of their 'Site A' with Cheviot scooped settlements might have been instructive.

Zoe Crossland, Michael Freeman, Paula Jones and Brian Boyd discuss what is an extremely unusual 19th-century gravestone decorated with a relief carving of a Bronze Age urn, at Llanbadarn Fawr near Aberystwyth. They know of only one similar example, the grave of Thomas Bateman at Middleton-by-Youlgreave. I would add another: the sarcophagus that contains the ashes of General Pitt Rivers in Tollard Royal church is decorated with the General's 'medalet' design, including a cinerary urn. The rarity of the Llanbadarn Fawr gravestone contradicts the authors' argument that it can be read as suggesting 'a broader interest [in antiquity and Welsh heritage] among the more affluent tenant farmers and middling sorts by the mid-nineteenth century'. If such gravestone symbols were common this might be the case but this extraordinary urn carving says something (but what?) about the particular life of the man it commemorates and his immediate family; it is unique (the other two examples mentioned above relate directly to well-known antiquarians/ archaeologists, not obscure farmers) and therefore cannot reliably tell us anything about wider movements in Welsh society.

Readers will have their own preferences but for me the most significant paper in the volume is John Collis's consideration of the differences in archaeological practice between Britain and France. He states that in Britain 'we consider landscape archaeology to be a normal part of the archaeological study of the past' – if only that were true. It is true, nevertheless that landscape archaeology is better developed here, and perhaps in Scandinavia, than in many other European countries. Collis sketches a history of 'the British tradition' but omits Herbert Toms and barely mentions Crawford, showing no awareness of the work of OS Archaeology Division. Collis argues that the lack of a tradition of analytical earthwork survey in France is due to heavier agricultural use in the 18th and 19th centuries that has left no earthworks to study. This is a little hard to believe; cultural issues, including perhaps the curious history of the OS, have to be considered. Indeed Collis has found earthworks himself in the Canton of Pierrefort, some of which he illustrates with sketch plans that are an object lesson in how not to draw hachures. But, cheap jibes aside, this is an *extremely* important paper that explores 'the potential of applying the distinctively British approach to a French context' – a potential that is huge, not only in France but across the Continent. As we get to grips with the European Landscape Convention it is ever more urgent that we take British best practice to the Continent and, equally, that we learn from our Continental colleagues about their very different perspectives of landscape.

The volume is dedicated to Andrew Fleming and the authors have, in various degrees, related what they have to say to Andrew's pioneering work. Several of them are Andrew's students or close colleagues. A strength of this book for readers of this review is that at least half of it deals, in one way or another, with prehistory, though this reviewer might have preferred to see more about the essentially multi-period nature of the landscape. As John Barnatt says, his chapter 'celebrates the value of archaeological landscape survey as a practice'; there is a lot of celebration in this book, and that is only right in a volume dedicated to such an outstanding exponent of landscape archaeology.

Mark Bowden
English Heritage

Review submitted: April 2009

The views expressed in this review are not necessarily those of the Society or the Reviews Editor