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Book Reviews



ARCHANGELS AND ARCHAEOLOGY. J. S. M. WARD'S KINGDOM OF THE WISE. By Geoffrey Ginn. Pp. xiv and 318, Illus 24. Sussex Academic Press, 2012. Price: £22.50. ISBN 978 1 845194 92 5.

Ginn's *Archangels and Archaeology* provides a detailed biography of early twentieth-century collector and esotericist J. S. M. Ward (1885–1949). As a case study in the history of contemporary spirituality, this draws on the broader historical research of Alex Owen, Ronald Hutton and Joanne Pearson. Its micro-level approach can be compared to Carew's account of the Hill of Tara excavations (*Tara and the Ark of the Covenant*, 2003) or Hopkinson-Ball's biography of Frederick Bligh Bond, the early excavator at Glastonbury Abbey (*The Rediscovery of Glastonbury: Frederick Bligh Bond Architect of the New Age*, 2007). Ginn's research is extremely impressive, drawing on previously unseen documents and interviews with those who knew Ward.

Ward started his career as a schoolteacher and antiquarian but, following a series of psychic visions, became part of the complex network of Edwardian esotericists. He wrote several controversial histories of Freemasonry, influenced by his time in Burma to search for universal symbolic patterns in world religions. In 1929, these interests took on a more evangelical tone, and he established a church called the Confraternity of the Kingdom of Christ. Initially good relations with the Anglican Church soured, and public scandal forced the Confraternity to leave England for Cyprus and then Australia.

Today Australia is home to Ward's Abbey Museum of Art and Archaeology. Ward was an avid, if unsystematic, collector and antiquarian. When the Confraternity was established in the 1930s it was housed in an ambitiously conceived open air museum in New Barnet called 'The Abbey Folk Park'. Historic buildings were reconstructed from scratch or moved to the site from elsewhere, and Ginn provides a detailed account of this lost park from archival documents (Chapter 9). Ward's interest in speculative reconstruction, relearning craft skills and 'vivid' interpretation offers an ethically challenging case study for modern heritage researchers. The project owed more to Victorian theme parks than the open-air museum models which were emerging on the continent at the same time. However, in attempting to situate Ward as an innovator and pioneer in this field, Ginn could have devoted more space to discussing the wider context of folk museums (pp.160–163).

In conclusion, this is a fascinating account of early twentieth-century esoteric spirituality, as told through the biography of the charismatic J. S. M. Ward. The chapters on the Abbey Folk Park uncover a hidden gem of a case study for the history of heritage interpretation. However, without more contextual analysis, it is difficult to assess whether

Ward had any real impact on heritage interpretation in the UK. Despite the title *Archangels and Archaeology*, it seems that Ward had little contact with early twentieth-century archaeology, and the subject rarely appears in the main text of the book. Conversely, contextual summaries of the history of esotericism are comprehensive and compellingly written. In this latter field, Ward was clearly a key figure and Ginn's compellingly written account of his life is a welcome contribution to this body of research.

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