



The Archaeological Journal

Book Reviews



ARCHAEOLOGY, THE PUBLIC AND THE RECENT PAST. Edited by Chris Dalglish. Pp. x and 179, Illus 32. The Boydell Press (Post Medieval Archaeology Monograph Series, 4), 2013. Price: £30.00. ISBN 978 184383 851 7.

This book joins an increasing number of publications covering the emerging specialist field of public archaeology. Most such texts are generic in approach (e.g. N. Merriman (ed.), *Public Archaeology*, 2004; L. Smith and E. Waterton, *Heritage, Communities and Archaeology*, 2009; R. Skeates et al. (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Public Archaeology*, 2012) or relate to engagements with particular communities (e.g. N. Swidler et al. (eds), *Native Americans and Archaeologists*, 1997; C. Colwell-Chantaphonh and T. J. Ferguson (eds), *Collaboration in Archaeological Practice*, 2008). The key difference with this volume is that it relates to particular kinds of material, and especially to that from the recent past. In doing so, it reflects the interest of the ‘Contemporary and Historical Archaeology in Theory’ (CHAT) conferences and their publications (e.g. L. McAtackney et al. (eds), *Contemporary and Historical Archaeology in Theory*, 2007), but in practice derives from a conference sponsored by the Society for Post-Medieval Archaeology in 2010. This in itself is significant and indicates the desire of that organization to identify with the rise in interest in the very recent past and to declare its interest in periods beyond those of its conventional concern (e.g. V. Buchli and G. Lucas, *Archaeologies of the Contemporary Past*, 2001; R. Harrison and J. Schofield, *After Modernity: Archaeological Approaches to the Contemporary Past*, 2010).

The book covers community and public engagement with a range of material from the last century and before, including villages now preserved as open air museums (Mackie), war memorials (Mytum), disused collieries (Johnson and Simpson), inner city areas (Nevell and Isherwood; Dixon), Irish castles and abbeys (Horning), and human remains (Powers et al.; Wilson et al.). The focus throughout — as the perceptive final chapter by Siân Jones makes clear in an auto-review of the book as a whole — is not on the material itself, however, but the role of the public in archaeology and the relations between communities and archaeologists. As the introduction by the editor and Jones in her contribution both emphasize, the rise of community archaeology reflects, and is part of, the contemporary boom in ‘memory studies’ which serves to place people’s relations to their pasts centre-stage in historical and archaeological research. It also reflects the increasing concern of archaeologists with their responsibilities as wielders of authority over the past: the recognition that the pasts we investigate belong to others rather than ourselves. This is especially the case when we turn our attention to pasts within living memory: we impose on ourselves additional responsibilities in terms of interpretation and the need to accommodate alternative understandings of those pasts. These are particularly acute issues as they relate to how we deal with human remains, as two of the

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contributions to this book make clear. These issues create challenges for us in terms of our ethical duties and raise questions concerning what is ethical: they also require us to engage into inquiry as to what we mean by 'community' and how we identify those communities with whom we engage as well as the role we adopt in relation to them.

None of these issues are new and they have been widely rehearsed in recent debates at conferences and in publication, as reference to the bibliographies attached to each paper in this volume can testify. In itself, this book adds nothing new to these ongoing debates but it does serve to highlight them and provides interesting case studies. Overall, however, the book is unlikely to be seen as an essential text by those working in the field, and ultimately (like so many) takes us very little further towards the resolution of the quandaries we face in pursuing the democratization of archaeology. It is, nevertheless, a useful and enjoyable book which will serve as a good introduction to the issues it raises for those unfamiliar to them.

JOHN CARMAN