

# INTRODUCTION

This book is less about archaeology the academic subject than it is about aspects of experience which might be termed archaeological. It is a story of what archaeologists and others do and might do, rather than a theory of what archaeology is or should be. I do consider ideas within the discipline about what archaeology is and archaeologists should be doing, summarizing the condition of the discipline, at least in terms of its theory and from my personal viewpoint as a participant in an ongoing debate over the scientific character of archaeology. But I focus more widely on what it means to do archaeological things such as excavating, surveying and collecting the material past, visiting and valuing collections and monuments of the past, asking what it is that might make these attractive to many people. I am also interested in how archaeology is basically about particular experiences of the object world. I emphasize experience because, with others, I try to understand archaeology in materialist terms, that is not so much as a set of ideas or body of knowledge, but as a collection of things people do.

It is often an image which initially takes me to investigate particular aspects of the past. I distinctively remember how it began when I was still at junior school with a photograph in Peter Green's book *Alexander the Great* of the ruins of one of the Alexandrias in Afghanistan: romance and remoteness. Imagery is a significant vehicle of the emotive or the affective in archaeological experience; archaeology abounds in striking, strange and fascinating images. This is one reason why there are many images in this book: I want to consider all dimensions of archaeological experience, not just the intellectual or the cognitive. I see this as part of a project of embodiment, of locating the practices and pleasures of archaeology not just within the mind but within the body: embodied experience.

In exploring such embodied experience I see a way of enabling archaeology to make more of its potential in the present, in productively and critically engaging with cultural experiences within which the archaeological past is a vital reference point - in local historical identity, the heritage industry, the cultural consciousness of groups such as

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Native American Indians as well as nationalist movements. I try to draw together those aspects of the archaeological which I find vital and invigorating, but it is often more of a vision of what archaeology could become rather than what it already is. Much fascinating work of interpreting and presenting the past is being produced, but it is nevertheless correct to write of potential rather than reality.

The book is arranged in four parts which discuss the state of archaeology the discipline (Part 1); images, ideas and the attractions of archaeology (Part 2); artifacts, objects and experience of them - the encounter with the past (Part 3); and a connection or an analogy between archaeology and craft - a sketch of archaeology as an embodied practice of sensuous receptivity (Part 4). The different parts are not at all exclusive. Similar points and particular issues are reviewed or picked out again in different ways and different contexts, building up ideas in layers rather than in strict linear argument or exposition. Interludes present illustrations and impressions of some work and material that has a personal connection - pottery from Archaic Greece, castles in the North East of England, and megalithic tombs: my education was in Classics which I taught for some years in Northumberland where my family belongs, and where I began archaeological fieldwork; at Cambridge I studied prehistoric archaeology and anthropology and am now working on the design of pottery from Korinth. These are not intended as definitive statements (this is not the place), but as narratives, interpretations or constructions which draw on or add to the main discussions in the book; they lie in apposition. In these interludes I am also to a degree trying to make sense of the archaeological experiences I have; this is the relevance of the personal connection.

When asked whether archaeology was a science or an art, Mortimer Wheeler is reported to have replied 'neither, it's a vendetta' (against the past; in the present?). I think a lot of archaeologists would accept how appropriate this judgement is insofar as it applies to the character of archaeological experience within a competitive discipline full of contention and debate. As in many other disciplines, Anglo-American archaeologists have been arguing to what degree their subject is a science and how it may aspire to objective accounts of the past. My previous work with Chris Tilley - the books *Re-Constructing Archaeology* (1987a) and *Social Theory and Archaeology* (1987b) - fits in this context. They were an attempt, for me at least, to make sense of an archaeology which fascinated me but which also frustrated in its attenuation or dismissal of feeling which seemed so important; a scientific and academic archaeology seemed to lose so much of what made the past human and attractive. But my work was produced in the difficult, esoteric and sometimes narrow terms of academic debate. Afterwards I began to explore imagery and what it indicated about the character of popular

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archaeological experiences. (I had worked as draughtsman and photographer on site.) If the project of a scientific and objective archaeology was a faulty one, as we had argued, it seemed right to experiment with what were conventionally held to be the more subjective aspects of archaeological practices, to question the nature of subjective and objective. This was another origin of this book and its title. Images evoke, with connotation and association, and because they cannot be reduced to words. I am keen to explore this poetic.

The idea of archaeology being a vendetta would place it firmly in the present and give it a distinctive cultural politics. That archaeology is as much about the present as the past is one of the main points to have come out of the debates in theory and archaeology in the 1970s and 1980s. But the position I take in this book is not a vendetta against a scientific archaeology. I consider what may be archaeology's cultural politics and decide on a liberal and critical practice of the technical, ethical, and poetic. I try to outline what this means to me in Part 4 through analogy with craft.

In accordance with the expressive and suggestive purpose of the book, I have not aimed to be exhaustive in the references I provide. Given the wide scope, a full bibliography would be quite exhausting, indeed distracting. The citation I give is selective; but it is not random. The references and notes are intended to point directions, to provide routes for an exploration of the ideas, if such is desired. Most point outside the discipline. As I have indicated elsewhere (Shanks 1991), I am concerned with ways of reading (particularly non-archaeological authors) and what these imply about authority and the academy. I am wary of those syntheses and abstracts which package newly fashionable great thinkers for the academy, of citation which aims to provide authority for what is being written, and I am eager to encourage a various reading which would locate what is being read relative to the purpose held in reading, to a political or cultural project. Relating what I read to myself and archaeology, to experience and politics. I think of such a way of reading as involving something of a rescue of meaning. In the gap between a text and myself lies the possibility of a redemption of meaning, a particular meaning born in my creative encounter, a reading which overshoots what I have read. So I make no claim to providing 'correct' readings of Gadamer, Derrida or Hodder; but I conceive of these hopefully as 'true' readings in the sense that a true reading is a new one located in the moment of reading, saturated with prospect, project, questioning. This has meant that some writers whom I have found particularly stimulating hardly appear in this book; theirs is often a presence which cannot easily be referenced. They are John Berger, Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno, and Georges Bataille. I happily acknowledge my debt to their writing.<sup>1</sup>

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Most of the photographs, illustrations and figures are by myself and Helen Simpson. Acknowledgement is given where they are not. I printed most of the photographs in the Cambridge University Faculty of Classics darkroom. They were taken on Canon T90 and EOS cameras. Canon UK provided help with the equipment. Thanks also to Stefan Rousseau for film.

Many of the ideas of the book have been aired in seminars and talks. I learned much from discussion at Cambridge, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Durham, York, Lampeter, Sienna, Harvard, Binghampton, Minneapolis, Amherst, Tempe, and Las Vegas. Thanks to all who contributed. I would like to make particular mention of talking with and listening to Martin Carver, Randall McGuire, Robert Preucel and Charles Redman. Thanks to Robert Paynter for showing me round Deerfield. At Cambridge Anthony Snodgrass has given great encouragement and support as has Ian Hodder, whose incisive comment always makes me think. Thanks to Mick Casson at Cardiff for talking to me about pottery. And to my Greek friends for spurring me into reflection. I thank my college, Peterhouse, for much more than grant assistance for photography and travel. Philip Pattenden, Senior Tutor, particularly has helped and advised.

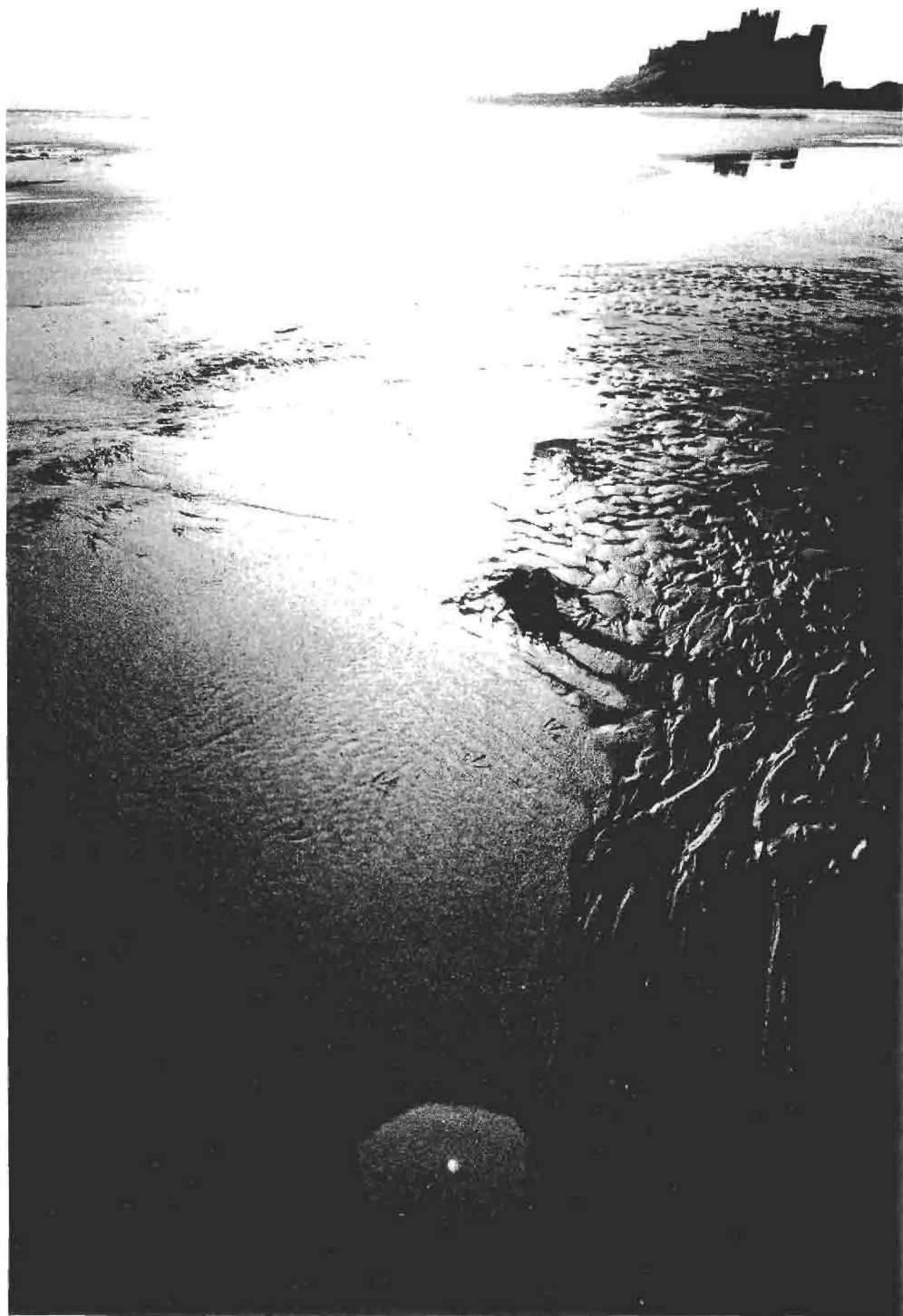
My mam, who collects, and dad, a true craftsman, have given so much to this book over the years. And it would have been inconceivable without Helen. With her work she shows me such a vital artistic sensibility.

## PRELUDE: THE VISIT

I remember visits to the castles in the 1960s. A school trip up the Northumberland coast, driving out from where we lived in the south east of the county on summer weekend afternoons. I think back of the scale of the building, great gateways, estimating the thickness of the walls, worn and battered loop-holes, spiral stairways, pit-dungeon prisons, looking for rooms that still had their roofs intact (barrel vaulting), damp whatever the weather, and their smell of disinfectant (the custodians had to deal with visitors who couldn't find the public conveniences), masons' marks on the ashlar blocks (signs of distant anonymous personality), suits of armour and halberds in the armoury Groundsmen, lawns and motor-mowers. Buying another official blue-covered pamphlet guide, produced by the Ministry of Public Buildings and Works (I liked the name). I found the historical notes very dull reading, the site descriptions were accessible, I liked the plans best of all - their transparent coded precision and testimony to materiality appealed to me.

Some of the castles are great impositions on the land, marks of punctuation in my looking at the border landscape of sand-dunes, woodland, and moors. Deep geologies: the Whin Sill, carboniferous lava upheaval, outcropping crags for Lindisfarne, Bamborough and Dunstanburgh.

The castles were knitted into many myths, stories and experiences. The general ambience and character of the borders of England and Scotland: histories of raiding, insurrection, sheep-stealing, but also the sharp separation of industrial Newcastle and Tyneside from the rural remainder of the county, with its towers and clinging remains still feudal (so too in the remaining aristocratic holdings, big private estates). At school I heard the myths of northern origins: Romans and Hadrian's Wall, Christian conversions and Saint Cuthbert, the Percys of Alnwick and Harry Hotspur, Wardens of the Northern Marches, nineteenth-century industrialists and national figures: heroes and heroines. It didn't really fit with my home in a colliery and shipbuilding town, it wasn't



Bamfborough Castle, Northumberland: 8.35 a.m. 8 March 1989



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meant to. And the castles in the land were the presence of that romantic other, distant from everyday life but easily reached with a thirty-minute drive.

I watched TV a lot and loved film: Errol Flynn adventuring as *Robin Hood* (the idyllic pastoral of the woods), Peter O'Toole in *The Lion in Winter* (a scene shot on the beach at Bamborough), but also Michael Caine in *Get Carter* (running down the Dog Leap Stairs on Castle Hill, Newcastle).

Associations: of experiences of learning, of interpretations offered, of leisure-time, of school and family, of History, of the identity of the North East of England, of its landscape and the picturesque. The castles resonate. Bamborough is emblematic, appearing on tourist posters, in the title sequence of the local TV news magazine. Such resonances are the raw material of the commercial appropriation of heritage, and memories are coloured by such. It is also easy to find oneself lapsing into nostalgia and sentimentality. I suppose that these resonances were part of what took me to archaeology. I still feel them strongly, albeit in a transformed mode. This is nothing exceptional. There may be as many comparable complexes of resonating sentiment and meaning around the material past as there are thinking and feeling people; and of course different places and items evoke their own particular resonances.

Archaeology is the discipline which occupies itself with the study of the material remains of the past. But what is the connection between archaeology as study of the material past, and the resonances sounded by things found and remaining in the land? Is it possible to delimit a rational discipline archaeology, and separate it from the more diffuse emotive and affective? What is the connection between the visit and archaeology?

The answer which may be given is that the past is indeed stirring and evocative, but such feelings are separate from the study of the material past within an academic discipline. Archaeologists may be attuned to the meanings and associations which the material past holds for themselves and for others, but such feelings are not part of the primary production of the past which is the concern of the archaeologist. As in society there is a division between production and consumption. The archaeologist labours with the raw material past, source and origin of what we may archaeologically know. The labour is conceived as rational and disciplined. Academic training is needed to master the labour which is controlled and channelled by institutional structures of university and state. The products of this labour may be diversely received and used - consumed. In the case of something like a ruin in the landscape the labour of the archaeologist may even be ignored. We may choose to react to the castle in whatever way we wish. All the archaeologist might do is hope and encourage us to have an informed reaction, informed by



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their labour. But it is not within the field of archaeology proper to deal with popular consumption, commercial use, affective response. These are conceived as belonging with the present rather than the past. Such responses treat the remains of the past more as resource for present purpose and interest, rather than as a source of knowledge.

This separability of visit and archaeological study does not disaffirm the significance and importance of authentic response, of making some part of the past one's own in a sentimental appropriation. The popular, commercial or sentimental response to the material past is separable from professional and academic study, but there is a strong relationship of *relevance*. This is not simply to say that archaeologists need to be concerned with the relevance of their labours to others, nor just that archaeological work needs explaining to others, to be accessible. Especially since the 1970s the issue of relevance has grown into several sub-disciplines.

Native American Indians have forcefully pushed the questions of who owns the material remains of their past, what should happen to them, who has a right to study them, and who should be involved in deciding how this study should go on. Similar questions have been raised by other indigenous peoples who until recently have not usually been involved in the academic study of the material past. Also notable has been the request by the Greek government for the return of the Parthenon marbles from the British Museum in London - unique encapsulation of Greek pride in the past and national identity.

The growth of the leisure industries has involved the development of ways of presenting and interpreting things, from graphics to interactive video to actor-interpreters playing a role from the past and meeting with visitors. Such modes of interpretation are related to reflections on the production and curation of the past as a medium of education. They pose the question of how people might be taught effectively on their visit to the past. They mould the experience of the visit to a castle, or any encounter with the material past.

A major role of the archaeologist is now that of consultant to decisions of planning and development. Legislation on both sides of the Atlantic requires account to be taken of any impacts on the archaeological past made by development and building projects. The archaeologist is expert to client developer or public-sector planner. Such work, of commercial organizations (for consultancy and fieldwork) or of local and national government boards, committees and units, has incited the refinement of an archaeological ethics which is concerned with codes of conduct, ethics of conservation and presentation, the form and standard of publication: regulating the professional body of archaeology.

All of these mediate the visit and the discipline of archaeology; they are the relation of relevance. It comes under various names: the politics



Historic Deerfield, colonial Massachusetts, New England. Here is the rebuilt 'Indian House' (the original was demolished in 1848), monument to the attack on residents by French and Indians in 1704. The village speaks of order, cleanliness, colonial style and taste, the pioneer spirit, and of course lineage.



Mitford, Northumberland: within the castle bailey

of the discipline (as its place in contemporary society); interpretation and museum studies; cultural resource management or archaeological heritage management; the ethics of archaeology and conservation.

I have been working within and around archaeology for some years now. I revisit many of the places and sites I grew up with, and my fascination with visiting the past and encountering its remains continues. But there is an uneasiness. The separations and distinctions between a private affective response and the packaging, managing, presentation, interpretation of those within a more public arena of professional and academic archaeology often does an injustice to the complexity of the sentiments and thoughts evoked in the visit to the past. I am not happy with the notion of relevance and what becomes of the emotive or the affective in archaeology. For some there may be consolation in poetic or artistic treatments: from a poem by Seamus Heaney about ancient corpses from peat bogs to a historical novel by Walter Scott to a Hollywood epic. There are also those archaeologists who draw on the legacy of archaeology as primarily a humanities subject, enlivening the dry and dusty relics, or cold scientific analysis, with warm imagination and literary elaboration. But the former are marginalized as subjective response and may have little to do with what actually remains of the past; and I am unhappy with the latter for its assumptions about what the past is and how we may explain it (such archaeologies are often trapped within the old clichés of narrative history). There seems to be presented a choice: write poems, novels, paint watercolours - subjective fictions; or do archaeology - concerned with the past itself. I want to deny that there is this simple choice.

And this is more than my personal reaction to a gap between wandering around an ancient site and doing archaeology. The separations between present and past, response and original source, affective and rational, popular public and professional or academic go deep into the character of archaeology. This is where I begin Part 1 of this book. I ask - what is the character of an archaeology which involves such separations? This is to ask - what is archaeology? Or to make the question more tractable - what do archaeologists do?