

## CONCLUSION

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**Abstract.** This chapter presents some concluding thoughts on the main themes addressed in this volume, and intellectual background and context of the project. The main themes of the volume are reviewed and their implications for the study of buildings and landscape enumerated, with particular attention to the way a diversity of viewpoints informed the research process. Finally, I make some suggestions for future thought and research.

The programme of research reported on in this volume had the initial aim of conducting archaeological survey at four high-status later medieval buildings and landscapes in south-east England, all owned and managed by the National Trust. As it has developed, the intellectual themes of the project have broadened and deepened. Themes we have explored in this volume have been gathered together under the umbrella term ‘lived experience’, and include the following:

First, the landscapes of work, of practice, and of everyday activity and life (Robin 2013; Overholtzer & Robin 2015). We have moved beyond the discussion of individual intentions of elite owners and builders, to focus on how landscapes were implicated in the activities and patterns of cultural life of people of different social classes and identities. We see these landscapes as being ‘vernacular’ as well as ‘polite’, that is, as created and coming into being through the everyday actions of different groups of people as much as through the conscious design of elite individuals. In the process, our work has come to engage with some of the issues of definition behind the term ‘designed landscapes’ (Liddiard & Williamson 2008; Creighton 2009). Collaborative discussion of our findings, over the years of the project, has led us to stress how landscapes should not be seen as either aesthetic or functional, either designed or everyday, just as castles should not be seen as either defensive or symbolic.

Second, the long-term history of these places: their antecedents and other properties of the landscape that structured how they were experienced and modified, stretching back to the geological history of the Weald and adjacent areas. We see these places as having certain enduring characteristics, particular forms of first and second nature. These characteristics afforded and enabled particular kinds of livelihoods, political structures and social strategies to develop and persist.

Third, the landscape settings of all four sites, their local and regional geography and sets of affordances. We suggest that the Weald and adjacent areas should be seen not just as different kinds of region, but also bound together by this difference and the complementarities of that difference, between Weald and marsh, greensand and chalk downs. Wider understanding of places within a regional context and pattern enables us to understand them comparatively. In other words, it helps us grasp their similarities and differences one to another, and move beyond telling particular just-so stories about particular places to draw comparisons on a wider canvas, with later medieval buildings and landscapes across Britain and Europe, and with elite sites across the world.

As outlined in Chapter Twelve what links these three themes together is an understanding of scale. We have come to see scale is an important means of linking

different insights together. Our analysis has run from the very small scale (the minute actions of washing one's hands in the Bodiam chapel piscina, different details of the building process) through the immediate landscape and regional setting of each building, to its place within a national and international setting. Chapter Twelve set the landscape of south-east England within an understanding of the British Isles as a whole.

As outlined in the Introduction, the project began its intellectual life around 2008-2009 in more narrow terms, as part of a desire to move the scholarly understanding of Bodiam Castle forward, beyond the rather stale and tired debates over defence versus status. In this sense, the project started as an exploration of some of the ideas outlined in *Behind the Castle Gate* (Johnson 2002). As the study developed, and moved beyond Bodiam to encompass the sites and landscapes of Scotney, Knole and Ightham, our engagement with the evidence increasingly addressed propositions and ideas posited in *Ideas of Landscape* (Johnson 2007), most specifically the later chapters of that book where I argue for the application of ideas of practice, lived experience and a comparative approach to the landscape archaeology and history of medieval and historic England. One intellectual thread of this project, then, has been to revisit the theoretical perspectives outlined in that earlier work and to feed forward lessons learned into a fully fledged and large-scale programme of empirical research.

However, to present the work in this way is to underplay the degree to which the project as it developed has been a collaborative and team effort. It has evolved mainly through the fieldwork, research activities and collaborations, and formal and informal conversations between scholars of different ages, backgrounds and institutional affiliations. It is therefore appropriate to end this book with a few thoughts about the ways in which our collaborative working practices impacted on the intellectual vision underpinning the original project work plan and suggest some implications for archaeological theory and interpretation as a whole.

The first observation I offer is that the progress and intellectual development of our project from 2009 onwards can be understood as an exercise in pragmatism. I do not mean here the popular or colloquial use of the term 'pragmatism'; rather, I am referring to the philosophical framework developed by Charles Sanders Pierce, John Dewey and others in North America. Pragmatism as a philosophy holds that the first principle in evaluating an argument is to ask about its practical consequences. In its modern form, as

applied to programmes of research, pragmatism tends to foreground the importance of a diversity of approaches and knowledge claims, to be suspicious of grand claims of an absolute Truth, and to advocate collaborative and engaged approaches in which different stakeholders contribute to the process (Baert 2005; Preucel & Mrozowski 2010).

The project can be seen as an exercise in pragmatism in various ways. First, an important element in the development of the project was the diversity of stakeholders, and the importance of listening to and reflecting on the views and opinions of a variety of voices. In Chapter Two, for example, the work of local archaeologists and historians from a diversity of backgrounds and orientations was central in forging a new understanding of Bodiam by drawing on the 'grey literature' before 2010. In Chapter Eleven, Becky Peacock discussed how public engagement was built into the project from the start, and how amateur and other groups played a role, including local societies and National Trust staff and volunteers. These views were critical to a developing engagement with place and region as it was and is understood within a local context.

Referencing grey literature and talking to the authors of that literature has informed both the interpretation and understanding of our results. For those readers unfamiliar with this term, examples of the grey literature can be found posted on our project website at <http://sites.northwestern.edu/medieval-buildings/>. The grey literature consists of studies produced in the context of conservation management plans, reports on small-scale excavations in advance of development work, 'watching briefs' in which archaeologists observe the digging of features like sewer and building trenches. Such reports are characteristically commissioned by the 'client', in the case of the material dealt with in this volume the National Trust, on a contractual or freelance basis.

This grey literature was not simply or only an objective recording of evidence; it told a complex and intimate story of different individuals' very deep and often passionate engagement with the buildings and landscapes that were the subject of the reports. Reports were often researched and written by local scholars, who had a stake in the results that was far more than simply professional or contractual obligation. Consequently, the grey literature often went far beyond its brief and presented a great deal of high-quality research and scholarly insight. With it came a personal narrative of enquiry and debate.

The quality of the grey literature, and the compelling nature of the story it had to tell, is perhaps most evocatively illustrated by an example from Ightham. Restoration work that led to Ightham being dubbed the 'ten million pound house' generated a series of volumes lovingly prepared by Peter Leach (Leach n.d., a-f) before his untimely death. These volumes presented an incredibly detailed, minute enquiry into every nook and cranny of the old house that was a labour of love. Grey literature produced a few years later showed that analysis of the garden and surrounding landscape was the subject of a lively debate between Peter Rumley and the great landscape archaeologist Christopher Taylor, with the latter pouring a large bucket of cold water on arguments for a 'designed landscape' and deer park at Ightham (Ford & Rutherford 2009, appendix 10). Reading through the grey literature in the archives at Ightham, being witness to the passions and enthusiasms of different engaged scholars, in an attic high up in the warren of rooms that comprise the building, was one of the most memorable experiences of the whole project.

In this and other ways, our project also illustrated the argument made by many archaeologists that survey and recording methods are not neutral techniques that deliver sets of objective data; each is bound up with a particular way of seeing, engaging with and 'understanding' the landscape (Gillings & Pollard 1998; Bowden 2000; Lucas 2012). One of the most rewarding aspects of the project from my perspective was the opportunity to bring together students, professionals and academics from across Britain and North America. As such, the project was a case study in the ways in which archaeologists from different educational backgrounds and archaeological traditions interpret survey techniques and methods used by different researchers who come to these places. These particular ways of seeing are partly subjective, partly culturally framed – either way the interplay between them is particularly productive of new insights.

One such insight occurred, for example, around the production and viewing of the hachured plan (the paradigmatic example being Fig. 1.2), and the different topographical and geophysical surveys that have formed the core of this volume. The hachured plan mode is characteristic of much of British landscape archaeology's way of seeing. Researchers look at and engage with a landscape analytically before making a judgement about where the hachures begin and end, and making a judgement, however preliminary, about the overall interpretation of the site. Consequently, this way of seeing and mapping is capable of very nuanced and subtle judgements about what is in the landscape, but it arguably

puts the 'interpretation' first and the recording second. Further, the interpretation tends to consist of identification of features whose morphology is recognisable and capable of being placed in a typology (this must be a lynchet, that must be a terrace, this is a tenement boundary, etc.; discussed further in Johnson 2007: 93-5).

Some of my North American collaborators were quite sceptical of the very slight humps and bumps that some archaeologists from outside the team working in the British tradition claimed to be seeing, and that are quintessentially expressed in Fig. 1.2. Conversely, outside observers of our work sometimes expressed the view that while our results were invaluable at a larger scale, some of the very subtle breaks in slope that others were interested in might not be picked up through the necessarily coarse resolution of large-scale topographic survey. These differences in perspective, stemming in part from different national training, have a very direct influence on what people 'see' in the landscape, and even on 'what everybody knows' about it. Others have explored this observation as it applied to different national traditions in excavation techniques (Edgeworth 2006; Leighton 2015).

New views of castles and other elite sites have sometimes been termed 'revisionist' (Platt 2007). My experience of working with an international team led me to reflect more fully on the term 'revisionism', and to conclude that the term as applied to castle studies is misleading. Revisionism is a term often used in documentary history, and generally applied to the development of different views or interpretations of specific historical episodes (for example on the battle of Agincourt by Anne Curry: Curry 2005, or the English Civil War by John Morrill and others: Morrill 1984). As such, revisionism is a term that denotes a changing or sharply opposing historical view, but within an accepted framing or paradigm of historical explanation. In other words, apparent controversies nevertheless reflect an underlying consensus on method, on what constitutes legitimate evidence or accepted modes of argument.

Our view of medieval buildings and landscapes, for better or worse, is much more than revisionist. The four buildings and landscapes that we have studied offer an understanding of the complexity, subtlety, and difference of the past. Their fascination for us derives not just from their aesthetic properties, or their offer of an intellectual puzzle, but from the capacity of these places to challenge accepted understandings and to prompt new ways of thinking, from the long-term histories behind a castle landscape to the aural qualities of a medieval hall to the question of 'what do moated sites do?'.

One of the main goals of this project was to develop an evidence-based understanding of medieval sites and their contexts in terms that might bring different elements of current landscape approaches together in a sustained and rigorous way. In the opening chapter I identified political economy and ecology as a method to work through, an intellectual complement to lived experience. Political ecology is a set of approaches which thinks about how the landscape is the product of both human and natural processes, and seeks to question how both are defined in respect to each other. It sees nature not as some pre-existing 'given' to which human respond, but rather as humanly constructed in its turn. As befits its title, political ecology gives particular prominence to issues of power and inequality, and the relationship of environmental and landscape change to different political processes. Like 'lived experience', political ecology can be a fuzzy concept, set of ideas or even seen as a particular kind of argument (Robbins 2012: xii). Political ecology has been defined by Robbins as:

*... not a method nor theory, nor even a single perspective. Rather... political ecology is an urgent kind of argument or text... that examines winners and losers, is narrated using dialectics, begins and/or ends in a contradiction, and surveys both the status of nature and stories about the status of nature*  
(2012: vii)

Other writers in this tradition highlight the importance of bringing together different scales of analysis, both through time and across space.

In this volume, while we have been attentive to different kinds of building, landscape and environmental evidence, and to the need to tie those strands of evidence together, a full and complete account of the interaction and implications of each approach is still a work in progress. Indeed, viewed retrospectively, this volume has barely begun to scratch the surface of what a political ecology of south-east England in the later Middle Ages might look like. By focusing on 'elite sites', for example, our volume could be

argued to examine only the 'winners'. By definition, issues of the diversity of social classes and of social contestation are refracted through the legacy managed for us by the National Trust at all four places – it is a challenge for us, as archaeologists and heritage managers, to see beyond this. Whilst we start the process of sampling the landscape and environment and revisiting the multiple relationships between humans and nature over time, our study cannot really be called 'dialectical' in the full philosophical sense of that term, and the 'status of nature' was not interrogated in any sustained theoretical fashion. One might console oneself with the thought that others have yet to bring all these strands together.

The constituent elements are all there: the comparative archaeology of political landscape is a well-developed field (Ashmore & Knapp 1999; Smith 2003). Studies of landscape and settlement in medieval England represent a huge empirical achievement (Roberts & Wrathmell 2002; Rippon 2008; Roberts 2008). There has been close attention to changes in the environment, and a vigorous debate over 'social versus environmental' explanations of medieval rural settlement (Williamson 2004; Jones & Page 2006; Williamson *et al.* 2013). Interpretations of medieval buildings have moved away from the aesthetic value judgments of traditional art-historical models and towards a fuller grasp of their place within medieval society and culture (Johnson 2010b). The political ecology of modern capitalist societies and colonial contexts is well developed (Robbins 2012).

A sustained theoretical project of this kind is an exciting prospect, but it is for the future. The fieldwork we have completed and reported on here will inform and sustain such a project. The next step requires a sustained intellectual endeavour to generate a theoretically informed understanding of medieval buildings, an understanding fully integrated into changing landscapes of human practice and experience, environmental change, and political inequality.

If Bodiam, Scotney, Knole and Ightham have taught us anything, it is that there is so much more to learn.