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SHADOW SITES

Photography, Archaeology, & the British Landscape 1927–1955

Kitty Hauser



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Shadow Sites

*Photography, Archaeology, and
the British Landscape
1927–1955*

KITTY HAUSER

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For my Mum and my Dad

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Abbreviations

<i>ACT</i>	Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, <i>A Canterbury Tale</i> (1944)
<i>AR</i>	<i>Architectural Review</i>
BFI Press. Coll.	British Film Institute, London, Emeric Pressburger Collection
Inst. Arch. O. G. S. C.	Institute of Archaeology, Oxford University (O. G. S. Crawford photographic archive)
IWM	Imperial War Museum, London
MS Crawford	O. G. S. Crawford papers, Modern Papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford
<i>PL</i>	David Mellor, ed., <i>A Paradise Lost: The Neo-Romantic Imagination in Britain 1935–55</i> (London, 1987)
<i>PP</i>	<i>Picture Post</i>
<i>SD</i>	O. G. S. Crawford, <i>Said and Done: The Autobiography of an Archaeologist</i> (London, 1955)
TGA	Tate Gallery Archive, London
<i>TLS</i>	<i>Times Literary Supplement</i>

The imagination has its own geography which alters with the centuries.

Graham Greene, 'The Explorers'

A chronicler who recites events without distinguishing between major and minor ones acts in accordance with the following truth: nothing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost for history. To be sure, only a redeemed mankind receives the fullness of its past—which is to say, only a redeemed mankind has its past become citable in all its moments. Each moment it has lived becomes a citation à l'ordre du jour—and that day is Judgment Day.

Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History'

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Introduction

A Topophilic Generation

In his introduction to a selection of verse and prose by John Betjeman, *Slick but not Streamlined* (1947), W. H. Auden attempted to define ‘topophilia’, a particular kind of attachment to landscape and environment which, he said, suffused Betjeman’s writings. ‘Topophilia’, he wrote,

has little in common with nature love. Wild or unhumanised nature holds no charms for the average topophil because it is lacking in history; (the exception which proves the rule is the geological topophil). At the same time, though history manifested by objects is essential, the quantity of the history and the quality of the object are irrelevant; a branch railroad is as valuable as a Roman wall, a neo-Tudor teashop as interesting as a Gothic cathedral.¹

Auden regrets (disingenuously, perhaps) that he himself is ‘too short-sighted, too much of a Thinking Type, to attempt this sort of poetry, which requires a strongly visual imagination’.² It is a particular brand of literary topophilia, typified by Betjeman, that Auden discusses; but broadly defined it is a far more widespread sensibility in British culture. Requiring not only a visual imagination, but also a wilfully parochial outlook and a reluctance to engage with the homogenizing forces of urban modernity, a topophilia of one sort or another was characteristic of a whole generation of artists and writers in Britain in the 1930s and 1940s.

This topophilia is not the same as a love of the countryside, as Auden points out, although that is what it might sometimes be mistaken for. What unites these ‘topophils’ is an interest, sometimes amounting to an obsession, with local landscapes marked by time, places where the past is tangible. For some, such as Betjeman, John Piper, and Geoffrey Grigson, this topophilia—as Auden suggests—is eclectic, including medieval churches, Gothic and mock Gothic architecture, Regency terraces and ancient sites. Some topophils of this generation, such as Paul Nash with his fascination with the *genius loci*, made atmospheric prehistoric landscapes a particular focus. Others, like painter Graham Sutherland, were attracted towards scarred nature and geological vistas. In the Four Quartets T. S. Eliot looked for redemption and history in an English village: ‘History is now and England’.³ And with an eye to continental Surrealism, photographers and film-makers including Bill Brandt, Humphrey Jennings, Michael Powell, and

¹ J. Betjeman, *Slick but not Streamlined* (Garden City, NY, 1947), 11.

² *Ibid.* 14.

³ T. S. Eliot, ‘Little Gidding’, *The Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot* (London, 1969), 197.

Emeric Pressburger found in pockets of the British landscape curious and moody survivals of the past.

All of these brands of topophilia involved the trawling of the British landscape for traces of a history that could be sensed even if it could not directly be seen. They are all exercises, in one form or another, of what we might call 'the archaeological imagination', where archaeology, being concerned with what remains of the past, might serve as a flexible analogy for both the literal and the metaphorical discovery of a past embedded in the British landscape. This past may not be visible in all of its features, but it is immanent and therefore (imaginatively, at least) recoverable. The landscape is seen not so much as vista, picture, or space but as *site*, the place where things have occurred, which certain individuals or groups have inhabited or passed through, or where something once was. For those who see the landscape and its elements in this way, appearances are simply the end products of more-or-less hidden stories, an agglomeration of traces of past actions, processes, and occurrences. The contemporary landscape, whether urban, suburban or rural, is understood as the very index of time—the way in which archaeologists see it.

In my formulation, the archaeological imagination can be regarded as a way of seeing the landscape. D. W. Meinig points out how, presented with the same portion of landscape, we will not all see the same things, or interpret what we see in the same way. Meinig distinguishes between ten such ways of seeing the landscape: 'as Nature'; 'as Habitat'; 'as Artifact'; 'as System'; 'as Problem'; 'as Wealth'; 'as Ideology'; 'as History'; 'as Place'; and 'as Aesthetic'.⁴ Within this taxonomy of seeing-as, the sensibility I am describing corresponds most closely to 'landscape as History' but with elements of 'landscape as Place'. The viewer who sees landscape as Place, according to Meinig, considers every landscape as 'a locality', unique in its flavour and 'ineffable feel'.⁵ To the viewer who sees landscape as History, 'all that lies before his eyes is a complex cumulative record of the work of nature and man in this particular place. In its most inclusive form it sends the mind back through the written record and deep into natural history and geology.'⁶

While Meinig's taxonomy is useful, what he does not point out is that these ways of seeing landscape are historically produced and historically inflected. My argument is that the various strands of topophilia I have described above represent a current in twentieth-century British culture which is fundamentally counter-modernist. Modernity, as discussed by Marshall Berman and David Harvey, brings with it a radical reorganization of both space and time.⁷ Modernity, for these—and other—writers, involves an eradication both of the past and of

⁴ D. W. Meinig, ed., *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essays* (Oxford, 1979), 33–48.

⁵ *Ibid.* 45.

⁶ *Ibid.* 43.

⁷ M. Berman, *All that is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London, 1983); D. Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford, 1990).

local differences, seeing the landscape essentially as a *tabula rasa* on which to impose its schemes of development and urbanization. Le Corbusier, the archetypal modernist, had little time for the branch railroad, Roman wall, and neo-Tudor teashop beloved of the topophils. But the counter-modernist thrust of the archaeological imagination can be taken further than this. Modernity, with its love of surfaces and the evanescent, and its desire constantly to remove, renew, remake, is almost anti-archaeological. Given this, the twentieth-century archaeological imagination—perceiving a past which is literally under our feet—represents a powerful counter-impulse to this culture of interchangeable surfaces covering over all traces of history. It seeks (literally and metaphorically) to see through, or dig under the surfaces of modernity—the asphalt, lawns, and tarmac of the new city plan, the current *appearance* of the landscape—and find its home in a historical dimension to which the contemporary world seems so indifferent.

It is important to point out that while the sensibility I am describing runs counter to the forces of modernity, it should not quite be equated with those much-documented preservationist anxieties over the destruction or disappearance of the past in the landscape—although at times these positions overlapped. The perception that historic British architecture and countryside were disappearing and needed to be protected had its roots in the late nineteenth century, but gained momentum between the wars.⁸ Anti-modern and preservationist sentiments were voiced often and insistently in the interwar period by those who feared that the standardizing forces of modernity were obliterating the landscape, replacing all that was timeworn and significant in town and country with ugly and homogenous units of housing, transport networks and ribbon developments.⁹ The Council for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) was founded in 1926; its hatred of unplanned development was expressed with passion by Clough Williams-Ellis in his 1928 book *England and the Octopus*.¹⁰ The CPRE was perhaps the most important element of an interwar movement, identified by David Matless in his 1998 book *Landscape and Englishness*, to yoke the traditional and the modern in a new, planned, landscape where preservation went hand in hand with progress.¹¹ Matless is keen to emphasize that not all preservationists were motivated by an automatic anti-modern nostalgia, and that there was a great deal of difference between these planner-preservationists and those ruralists who disliked *any* incursions of the modern into the countryside. It is important to be aware of such distinctions, to avoid lumping together as reactionary all critics of the destructive effects of modernity. But for our purposes here, such distinctions are less important than the fact that while they may have differed over the best

⁸ The beginnings of the preservation movement can be traced to the Commons Preservation Society (founded in 1865) and the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (founded in 1877). The National Trust was established in 1895.

⁹ See J. Sheail, *Rural Conservation in Inter-War Britain* (Oxford, 1981); D. Matless, *Landscape and Englishness* (London, 1998).

¹⁰ C. Williams-Ellis, *England and the Octopus* (London, 1928).

¹¹ Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, 25–7.

solution to the problem, preservationists of all kinds regretted what they perceived as the rapid disappearance of an old country, and the destruction of its monuments. For them, old England (it was usually England, less often Wales, and still less often Scotland or Ireland) was passing away in favour of a new, standardized (often 'Americanized'), unplanned, and unchecked modernity in the form of ribbon development, prefabricated bungalows, garages, and loud roadside advertisements, which were rapidly covering the English landscape. This was the view of the countryside expressed by horrified middle-class commentators in a plethora of publications between the wars; it was the 'Third England' described by J. B. Priestley in his 1934 *English Journey*; it was Betjeman's Slough, with its 'air-conditioned, bright canteens' and 'labour-saving homes'; and it was the eponymous 'Beast' of Clough Williams-Ellis's *Britain and the Beast* (1937).¹²

The difference between a preservationist and an archaeological sensibility is often one of emphasis: while preservationists tend to mourn the disappearance of a historic landscape, campaigning for its conservation, the archaeological imagination perceives the presence of the past in a landscape *despite* the incursions of modernity. To preservationists, modernity tends to be an irremovable barrier in the way of aesthetic pleasure, whereas to those who see the landscape archaeologically, it is a barrier that can be seen through, over, or round: the past may no longer be so evident in the modern landscape, but its increasing invisibility does not make it sensuously un-recoverable. In this sense it is a consoling sensibility, although it has not always been so, as we shall see in Chapter 1.

The difference between these two positions is reflected in representational practices. When preservationists picture the landscape, especially when they *photograph* it, it is inevitably to document a scene that is in some way 'at risk' from spoliation or irreversible change. This is the 'salvage' paradigm of representation, which from the earliest days of photography was proclaimed as one of its greatest benefits. 'Let [photography] rescue from oblivion those tumbling ruins, those books, prints and manuscripts which time is devouring', wrote Baudelaire in 1859.¹³ It was very much in this spirit that photographic survey projects instigated by Jerome Harrison and Benjamin Stone in Britain in the late nineteenth century sought to document all aspects of the landscape and its inhabitants for the benefit of posterity.¹⁴ The processes of modernity might be unstoppable, but photography could at least save the image of what was under threat, preserving

¹² Priestley's other two 'Englands' were old country and industrial town. See J. B. Priestley, *English Journey* (London, 1934); J. Betjeman, 'Slough' [c.1937], in R. Skelton, ed., *Poetry of the Thirties* (Harmondsworth, 1964), 74–5; C. Williams-Ellis, *Britain and the Beast* (London, 1937). See also J. Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligentsia, 1880–1939* (London, 1992), 46 ff.

¹³ C. Baudelaire, 'The Salon of 1859: The Modern Public and Photography', in F. Frascina and C. Harrison, eds., *Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology* (London, 1982), 20.

¹⁴ See P. James, 'Evolution of the Photographic Record and Survey Movement, c.1890–1910', *History of Photography*, 12/3 (July–Sept. 1988), 205–18; J. Taylor, *A Dream of England: Landscape, Photography and the Tourist's Imagination* (Manchester, 1994), 50 ff.

historic sites, monuments, and entire cultures in an archive or album long after they had been destroyed or built over in reality.¹⁵

Those who see and picture the landscape archaeologically might be alarmed by the rate of change, and they too might seek out pockets of space as yet untouched—apparently—by this change. But development—when it comes—is not as final as it is for the preservationists, nor does it ever quite invalidate the aesthetic or historic appeal of a location. Those who see archaeologically might not seek out the modern, but neither do they necessarily avoid it—this is not primarily a sensibility of nostalgia. Modernity, after all, does not remove the historicity of a place, although it might seem to; it is simply the latest—albeit the most destructive—stage in that place’s history. How such an archaeological sensibility might find visual form is one of the main subjects of this book.

NEO-ROMANTICS AND OTHERS

Most of the artists, and some of the writers, included in this book have been included under the umbrella of Neo-Romanticism in art-historical literature, and so it is worth considering what is meant by the term. The term ‘Neo-Romantic’, according to David Mellor, was used by Raymond Mortimer in 1935 to describe Paul Nash’s photographs; in 1942 Mortimer again drew attention to ‘the school which I tentatively call the Neo-Romantic’.¹⁶ Later in the 1940s Robin Ironside gave a fuller description of the ‘Neo-Romantic Spirit’ in his book on *Painting since 1939*, published for the British Council.¹⁷ ‘Neo-Romanticism’ was a label given by Mortimer and Ironside to a new wave of British art that seemed to offer a realignment of specifically British Romantic themes and motifs with techniques and framing devices borrowed from continental modernism. Throughout the following decade Neo-Romanticism became more widely recognized through exhibitions, art criticism, and the writings of a number of individuals, of whom Geoffrey Grigson was perhaps the most prominent. In tune both with the demands of a wartime aesthetic and with the tastes of Kenneth Clark, art’s main official patron during this period, Neo-Romantic art flourished during the war; by 1945 it had acquired the status of officially approved national art, thanks to the sleight-of-hand by which it accommodated modernism within a recognizably British idiom.¹⁸

¹⁵ For more on the ‘salvage’ paradigm in an ethnographic context, see J. Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, Mass., 1994); E. Edwards, ed., *Anthropology and Photography: 1860–1920* (New Haven, 1992).

¹⁶ *PL*, 11; R. Mortimer, *New Statesman* (28 March 1942), 208.

¹⁷ R. Ironside, *Painting since 1939* (London, 1947).

¹⁸ Landmark contemporary exhibitions of Neo-Romantic artists included a touring exhibition of Henry Moore, Piper, and Sutherland in 1941–2, first shown in Temple Newsam, Leeds, where it was opened by Clark; ‘New Movements in Art/Contemporary Work in Britain’ in March 1942 at the London Museum; ‘Imaginative Art since the War’ at the Leicester Galleries in April–May 1942; and

‘Going Modern and Being British’

The determining feature of Neo-Romantic art was its indigenous frame of reference, coupled with an awareness of modernist formal experimentation. Sutherland’s organic forms seemed to re-do Samuel Palmer for an apocalyptic age; John Minton’s version of Palmer’s imagery lent a menacing edge to pastoral; Henry Moore reworked Picasso’s studies of bones for an English context; Paul Nash placed his Surrealist-inspired juxtapositions in recognizably English fields, or made abstract objects ‘equivalent’ to prehistoric monuments in the landscape. In these—and other—ways, continental modernism could be naturalized as British, modernist form redeemed through its fusion with local content, in an artistic strategy neatly summed up by Nash himself as ‘Going Modern and Being British’.¹⁹

Nash was one of a group of British artists who orientated themselves towards international modernism in art, forming the Unit One group in 1933 with Barbara Hepworth, Henry Moore, and Ben Nicholson. Yet already in 1934 he was attempting to find an accommodation between the avant-garde and ‘national character’. Tracing the history of the ‘animating spirit’ of English art, Nash located it in a ‘linear method of design’, a ‘delicacy in colours’, a concern with ‘likeness’, as in portraiture—but above all, the land: ‘*genius loci*’, he wrote, ‘is indeed almost its conception’.²⁰ And it was in this spirit—the spirit of Blake—that Nash suggested contemporary artists should proceed. Nash was not alone in turning from pure abstraction to the history of British art for guidance at this point. In the seventh (and penultimate) issue of *Axis*, subtitled *A Quarterly Review of Contemporary Abstract Painting and Sculpture*, published in 1936, Grigson’s and Piper’s article ‘England’s Climate’ compared contemporary art to the work of Constable, Blake, and Turner—and found it wanting.²¹ Piper had been among the most abstract of British artists; but this article marks the beginnings of a reorientation towards a native genealogy of art and architecture within which a new Romantic art might feel both comfortable and modern.

Throughout the following decade, Piper’s excavation and re-presentation of the history of British art laid the foundations for both a re-evaluation of the native tradition and the acceptance of the new style; and it was bolstered by contributions from other writers. In 1942 both Piper and Grigson published books on what were now the old Romantic artists; Jacob Bronowski wrote

‘Six Scottish Painters’ in May 1942 and ‘Notable British Artists’ in 1943 at the Lefevre Gallery in London. After the war the British Council organized a large exhibition of modern British art which was shown across Europe, in which Neo-Romanticism was presented as the summit of contemporary art in Britain.

¹⁹ P. Nash, ‘Going Modern and Being British’, *Weekend Review* (12 Mar. 1932), 322–3.

²⁰ P. Nash, in H. Read, ed., *Unit 1: The Modern Movement in English Architecture, Painting and Sculpture* (London, 1934), 80.

²¹ G. Grigson and J. Piper, ‘England’s Climate’, *Axis*, 7 (Autumn 1936), 5–9.

on Blake in 1943, and in a polemical series published in *The Studio* in 1946 championing the new art, the artist Michael Ayrton wrote on Britain's cultural heritage.²² In 1947, the year of publication of Grigson's influential work on the long-overlooked Samuel Palmer, there was an exhibition of William Blake's work at the Tate Gallery in London.²³ The old Romantics—notably Blake and Palmer—clearly infused the new Romantic imagery. Yet it was not just Romantics who comprised the Neo-Romantic family tree. A Romanticized art history linked megalithic, Celtic, Gothic, and Romantic with the modern, in a new and indigenous history stripped of foreign influence. A national art emerged from this narrative, an art in which a visionary and/or linear style could be seen to constitute a binding thread.²⁴ This was a lineage which repeatedly focused on the British landscape and the forms found within its sites and monuments. The new art found its roots in the line of a Gothic arch at Canterbury, or the carvings on a Romanesque font in Dorset as well as in the orchards of Palmer's Shoreham, or in Constable's Suffolk. Piper's writings on British Romanesque carving in 1936 took a central role in this restructuring; Grigson's, Betjeman's, and Herbert Read's writings were also highly influential.²⁵ Perhaps the fullest account of the new Romantic lineage was outlined by Nikolaus Pevsner, who in 1942 started to lecture on 'The Englishness of English Art' at Birkbeck College in London.²⁶

Along with this rediscovery of British art, Romantic and ancient, came a revival of what Piper called 'the object' in art, destroyed—according to him—by Cubism and the dematerialized concerns of abstraction. In his 1937 essay 'Lost, a Valuable Object', Piper called for a return to 'the tree in the field' 'as a fact, as a reality'.²⁷ This is arguably less a call for a return to the object per se than a return to the culturally meaningful object, as Piper's example makes plain. It is a pull towards the particular tree in the particular field: Constable's tree, perhaps, in a Suffolk field. As Charles Harrison says, 'It would be hard to conceive a more thoroughly English form of the *rappel à l'ordre* than this, hung as it is on the rhetorical token of the tree in the field.'²⁸ The book in which Piper's essay appears, *The Painter's Object*, edited by Myfanwy Evans (soon to be Piper), takes up the theme, not least in its title. The essays in this volume by Nash and Sutherland also revolve around objects, but they too are culturally mediated, however much they are considered in formalist terms. Nash's 'Nest of the Wild Stones' derives significance not just

²² J. Piper, *British Romantic Artists* (London, 1942); G. Grigson, *The Romantics: An Anthology* (London, 1942); J. Bronowski, *William Blake 1757–1827: A Man without a Mask* (London, 1943); M. Ayrton, 'The Heritage of British Painting', *The Studio*, 132/641–4 (Aug.–Nov. 1946).

²³ G. Grigson, *Samuel Palmer: The Visionary Years* (London, 1947).

²⁴ See Ayrton, 'Heritage of British Painting'.

²⁵ J. Piper, 'England's Early Sculptors', *AR* (Oct. 1936), 157–62, repr. in M. Evans, ed., *The Painter's Object* (London, 1937), 117–25.

²⁶ N. Pevsner, *The Englishness of English Art* (London, 1956).

²⁷ J. Piper, 'Lost, a Valuable Object', in Evans, ed., *The Painter's Object*, 73.

²⁸ C. Harrison, 'England's Climate', in B. Allen, ed., *Towards a Modern Art World* (New Haven, 1997), 215.

from an arrangement of forms, but from the Sussex Downs where he found them; likewise the resonance of the 'English Stone Landmark' discussed by Sutherland goes beyond any modernist consideration of its shape or mass.²⁹ In each case 'the painter's object' is an object in a landscape, mediated by history.

The War

Looking back in 1987, Piper ascribed the Romantic revival, which he did so much to bring about, to the war: 'The change in England was precipitated by the war. Suddenly artists who had had constant inspiration and direction from Paris were cut off... We were on our own... Roots became something to be nurtured and clung to instead of destroyed.'³⁰ Certainly wartime Britain was a fertile soil in which Neo-Romanticism could flourish. This was a context in which a Romantic art and a Romantic view of British history and landscape could not only be easily resurrected and widely enjoyed; its potent motifs, its individualism, and its celebration of the national landscape proved invaluable in the struggle against the totalitarian enemy. Much of the official art of the Second World War was produced under the aegis—directly or indirectly—of Kenneth Clark, director of the National Gallery, whose tastes favoured the Romantic modernity of Moore, Piper, and Sutherland. The War Artists Advisory Committee founded by Clark was intended to create a record of the war, and provide artists with a livelihood, at the same time preventing their conscription into the armed forces: its 'brightest stars', as Virginia Button points out, were Sutherland, Nash, Piper, and Moore.³¹

Clark, then, favoured artists who were broadly Neo-Romantic; but the wartime schemes and commissions, from Clark's War Artists scheme to the 'Recording Britain' project (launched in 1940 by the Ministry of Labour and the Pilgrim Trust), themselves had an effect on the nature of the art produced under their auspices. Whatever the degree of artists' pre-war involvement with modernism, they now found themselves forced to focus upon particular wartime subjects—from air-raid shelters to stately homes—in order to earn money and avoid conscription. The kind of art that resulted was a compromise between formal experimentation and recognizable national subject-matter, a reconciliation of modern motifs, techniques, and dangers with an age-old idyll of the British landscape which was now under threat. This was a compromise which proved attractive both to the state and to the public.

The war, then, arguably created the defining features of Neo-Romantic style as it developed in the early 1940s; it certainly provided a context in which it could flourish. But to say, as Piper did, that the reversion from modernism 'was

²⁹ P. Nash, 'The Nest of the Wild Stones', in Evans, ed., *The Painter's Object*, 38–42; Sutherland, 'An English Stone Landmark', *ibid.* 91–2.

³¹ Virginia Button, 'The Aesthetic of Decline: English Neo-Romanticism c.1935–1956', PhD thesis, Courtauld Institute of Art, London, 1992, 16.

precipitated by the war' is not quite borne out by his own writings, in which, as discussed above, a cultural retrenchment was evident from 1936. As Charles Harrison points out in his 1995 article 'England's Climate', the 'conventional wisdom' that a period of experimentation was brought to an end by the outbreak of war needs to be re-assessed.³² A post-war defence of Neo-Romanticism was bound, perhaps, to ascribe its conservatism to external events, underestimating these artists' own proclivities. Many Neo-Romantics clearly did not regret the return to 'the object' and the landscape apparently forced upon them by war; it seems to have come as something of a relief from the effort of keeping up with a modernism in which they had little emotional investment in any case. Piper's description of his wartime 'exploration' of 'the beauty-spots, rivers, mountains, waterfalls, gorges, ruins and cliffs, all the visual natural dramas that we had been taught to shun by Roger Fry and Clive Bell' is hardly tinged with regret.³³ Likewise Geoffrey Grigson wrote of being joyfully reunited with his childhood love of local landscapes and antiquities from which he had never quite been 'weaned'.³⁴

Post-War Fate

For Harrison, the 'Romantic revival' which began around 1936 represented a regrettable (if recurrent) chapter in the history of British art in which the merits of international modernism were side-lined in favour of 'the aesthetically reassuring and the parochially modern—which is to say the second-rate'.³⁵ Not until the mid to late 1960s, according to Harrison, was the dominance of this kind of British art threatened by cosmopolitan modernism, this time coming out of America rather than Europe.³⁶ But the Neo-Romantic aesthetic surely started to look tired a decade or so earlier. Well suited, as we have seen, to the conditions of war, Neo-Romanticism also found a place in the immediate post-war years, when its nationalist orientation could be allied to a broad concern with the survival of the national spirit. Hence a Neo-Romantic aesthetic is discernible in the Festival of Britain celebrations, and in Basil Spence's winning design for the new Coventry Cathedral, both in 1951. But these turned out to be Neo-Romanticism's swansong. The 1950s saw a decline in the prominence of Neo-Romanticism, as a global mass culture and an American-orientated pop art made its whimsical and purposefully anachronistic qualities seem embarrassing and redundant.³⁷ Geoffrey Grigson, himself partly responsible for the propagation of a Neo-Romantic style, had already begun to criticize its proponents in the later 1940s on the grounds of an impotent provincialism with a dangerous attraction: 'If I enjoy

³² 'England's Climate', 215.

³³ Quoted in *PL*, 110.

³⁴ G. Grigson, *The Crest on the Silver: An Autobiography* (London, 1950), 122.

³⁵ 'England's Climate', 220.

³⁶ *Ibid.* 222.

³⁷ There were two exhibitions of American art in London in 1956 and 1959. See M. Garlake, *New Art New World: British Art in Postwar Society* (New Haven, 1998), 75–83.

them (which I do), and then criticize them, I criticize also something in myself, as a middle-class Englishman, something not to be allowed too much rule.’³⁸ It was as if Grigson realized, in 1948, that this curious hybrid, this ‘registry office’ marriage of Palmer and Picasso—however seductive—was, in fact, a dead end.

In the event, this turned out to be true. In the wake of the cultural backlash of the later 1950s and the 1960s, Neo-Romanticism was relegated to a footnote in a rewritten art history which gave pride of place not to Romanticism, as Piper and Ayrton did, but to modernism. In the 1980s, however, Neo-Romanticism enjoyed if not a future, then something of an afterlife, as it was reinstated as a category in the history of British art, through a number of exhibitions and books.³⁹ This rehabilitation of Neo-Romanticism was far from accidental: it came about at a time of crisis of confidence both in modernist art practice and in a modernist reading of art history. In a sense, the books and exhibitions that appeared in the 1980s invented the category of Neo-Romanticism as it exists now, sometimes conferring a spurious unity onto artists (and occasionally writers) whose individual trajectories were rather more heterogeneous. Some writers have tended to de-politicize and de-historicize Neo-Romanticism, stressing—as some of the artists themselves did—an alignment with a Romantic lineage of native artists, without recognizing the ideological motivations of the Romantic revival, and the specific historical conditions that precipitated it.⁴⁰ Neo-Romanticism continues to attract writers of an anti-modernist and often slightly mystical-nationalist bent, who might do well to heed Grigson’s warning ‘as a middle-class Englishman’ not to give this tendency too much house-room: authors like Malcolm Yorke, or—more recently—Peter Woodcock, whose glowing account of a loosely defined Neo-Romantic lineage in *This Enchanted Isle: The Neo-Romantic Vision from William Blake to the New Visionaries* (2000) runs from Blake through Nash and Piper to Derek Jarman, Iain Sinclair, and New Age anti-road protestors, without considering the very different historical contexts out of which these various individuals came.⁴¹ Neo-Romanticism is itself a danger for the writer seeking to describe it.

³⁸ G. Grigson, ‘Authentic and False in the New “Romanticism”’, *Horizon*, 17/99 (Mar. 1948), 206.

³⁹ IWM, London, ‘The Neo-Romantics: Drawings and Watercolours’ (1981); National Museum of Wales, Cardiff, ‘The British Neo-Romantics’ (1983); ‘A Paradise Lost’ at the Barbican in 1987. Other exhibitions included ‘Nine Neo-Romantic Artists’ at the Anthony D’Offay Gallery, London, in June 1988 and one in July 1988 at the Albermarle Gallery, London. Books include M. Yorke, *The Spirit of Place: Nine Neo-Romantic Artists and their Times* (London, 1988); S. Sillars, *British Romantic Art and the Second World War* (Basingstoke, 1991); F. Spalding, *British Art since 1900* (London, 1986); Button, ‘The Aesthetic of Decline’. Exhibitions of, and works on, individual artists include Tate Gallery, London, *John Piper* (1983); Tate Gallery, London, *Cecil Collins: A Retrospective Exhibition* (1989); R. Berthoud, *Graham Sutherland* (London, 1982); M. Haworth-Booth and D. Mellor, *Bill Brandt: Behind the Camera. Photographs 1928–1983* (Oxford, 1985).

⁴⁰ Yorke, in particular, downplays the role of the war in Neo-Romanticism, focusing instead on the continuation of a Romantic tradition, and anti-French sentiment. For a convincing attack of Yorke’s view, see Margaret Garlake’s review of his book in *Art Monthly*, 118 (July–Aug. 1988), 30.

⁴¹ P. Woodcock, *This Enchanted Isle: The Neo-Romantic Vision from William Blake to the New Visionaries* (Glastonbury, 2000).

In the context of the postmodern resuscitation of Neo-Romanticism, a debate about its artistic merits has continued in two recent volumes in the 'Studies in British Art' series by the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, firstly in *Towards a Modern Art World* (1997), edited by Brian Allen, which includes Harrison's essay berating the 'second rate' nature of Neo-Romantic art, and secondly in *The Geographies of Englishness* (2002), edited by David Peters Corbett, Ysanne Holt, and Fiona Russell. Alan Powers's essay in the latter volume, 'The Reluctant Romantics: *Axis* Magazine 1935–37', takes issue with Harrison.⁴² Powers's explicit aim is to distinguish the 'explorations' of the 1930s, as seen in the pages of *Axis*, from the Neo-Romanticism of the late 1940s; implicitly it seems that he also wishes to save these artists from the modernist charge of artistic recidivism.

It seems inevitable that if Neo-Romanticism is to be inserted into the history of art, it must be placed either in a modernist lineage which inevitably denigrates or at least sidelines it, or in a Romantic one which risks crippling analysis from the outset by itself re-duplicating a Neo-Romantic historical and critical framework. One way around this problem was offered by the 1987 exhibition at the Barbican Gallery, 'A Paradise Lost: The Neo-Romantic Imagination in Britain 1935–55', curated by David Mellor. Removing Neo-Romanticism from the confines of a narrowly defined history of art, Mellor convincingly expanded the term to include a wide range of media: the photography of Bill Brandt and Edwin Smith, the poetry of Dylan Thomas and those associated with the 'New Apocalypse' school, the films of Powell and Pressburger (also known as 'the Archers'), and publications like the Shell Guides to Britain. According to Mellor, British culture as a whole was dominated by a broadly defined Neo-Romantic sensibility throughout the 1940s; in 'A Paradise Lost' a term that began as the label for a painting style is used retrospectively as the defining feature of a whole culture. This was an exhibition, wrote Patrick Wright approvingly, with 'the organic potency of a compost heap'.⁴³

The Barbican exhibition, then, and its accompanying catalogue sought to document this culture through a broad range of visual material, excavated from a critically overlooked but aesthetically coherent decade. What is suggested, I think, by this visual material—but not spelt out in the text of the catalogue—is that Neo-Romanticism may be thought of as a way of seeing as well as a style; that there may be Neo-Romantic viewers as well as Neo-Romantic artists. The rationale for including Margaret Harker's photograph of the altar of Worcester Cathedral (1956) (Fig. i.1), for example, in the picture essay 'The Origins of the Land' in the catalogue does not seem primarily to lie in any formal qualities of the photograph, or even quite in its subject matter per se—churches have been

⁴² A. Powers, 'The Reluctant Romantics: *Axis* Magazine 1935–37', in D. Peters Corbett, Y. Holt, and F. Russell, eds., *The Geographies of Englishness: Landscape and the National Past 1880–1940* (New Haven, 2002), 249–74.

⁴³ P. Wright, 'Englishness: The Romance of the Oubliette', *Modern Painters*, 3/4 (Winter 1990–1), 7.



Fig. i.1. Margaret Harker, *The High Altar, Worcester Cathedral* (1956), from Mellor, ed., *A Paradise Lost: The Neo-Romantic Imagination in Britain 1935–55* (1987).

photographed since the nineteenth century. What qualifies it to represent ‘the Neo-Romantic imagination’ is the fact that after the war, the nation’s cathedrals (their linear style—according to Pevsner and others—so typically English) could function as a powerful symbol of spiritual survival in the landscape—a survival underlined by the lilies standing in vases on the altar. It is the context of the making and the viewing of this photograph which confers ‘Neo-Romantic’ status, as much as its identity as an image. Thus the word ‘imagination’ in the title of the exhibition seems to be crucial—for the role of the viewing individual, whether artist, photographer, or viewer, is arguably what is Neo-Romantic, rather than individual works or images themselves.

In some instances in the catalogue, it seems as though almost any image of local scenes, of fantasy, of nature, of landscape, or of ancient monuments produced in Britain in the period 1935–55 could qualify for inclusion: Eric Hosking’s night photographs of birds feeding their young, for example, Alan Sorrell’s drawings

reconstructing Bronze Age scenes, or a Ministry of Information (MOI) photograph of women in pinafores preparing rhubarb and apples in a country garden, all of which appear in the 'Origins of the Land' picture essay. These images acquire their particular resonance not so much through what they depict as through the tension between their subject-matter and the context in which they were made and seen. The knowledge that these are images framed by war renders those birds, those imagined Bronze Age scenes, and those women peculiarly vulnerable and precious—a characteristic motif, according to Mellor, of Neo-Romanticism. They may have been included in the exhibition to contribute to a broader picture within which Neo-Romantic artists operated and were received. But, given equal space with the works of Nash, Craxton, Minton, and others, they also seem to be offered as themselves exemplars of a Neo-Romantic sensibility, if not in their production, then in their aesthetics or their reception.

In the context of the picture essay in which these images appear, questions of what, exactly, makes these images Neo-Romantic are evoked but remain deliberately both unstated and unanswered. Instead a Neo-Romantic sensibility is effectively subtly activated in the viewer/reader, who is invited to make connections between these very different kinds of images. If Neo-Romanticism is to be expanded from a style into a sensibility, though, it is important to locate this sensibility historically, and to be careful to distinguish its late twentieth-century manifestations from those of the period. This lay outside the immediate remit of 'A Paradise Lost', no doubt owing to its identity as an exhibition which explicitly drew parallels between the period 1935–55 and the 'contemporary society' of the 1980s, claiming significant resonances between them.⁴⁴

In this book I want both to broaden out and to narrow down the territory mapped out in 'A Paradise Lost', expanding on some of its apparent implications in relation to one Neo-Romantic site, albeit a central one: the British landscape. Picking out the submerged idea that Neo-Romanticism can be regarded as a way of seeing as well as a representational or artistic strategy, I want to examine what it meant to see, experience, and represent the British landscape Neo-Romantically. In particular, I want to look at what it meant, in the period around the Second World War, to experience an old landscape filtered by a modern subjectivity: a viewing experience which is almost automatically Neo-Romantic in that while deliberately turning from the modern it cannot help but remain tied to it. And I want to see what part photography as a medium had in the representation and propagation of this experience.

Focusing on a way of seeing rather than an art-historical category brings individuals into the picture who might not normally be thought of as Neo-Romantic, and some who are neither artists nor writers. This might invite the charge that I have expanded a category so much as to make it meaningless. In particular, it might be claimed that not every image of a landscape seen as the site of history

⁴⁴ See Foreword, *PL*, 7, and Mellor's preface, *ibid.* 9.

produced during these years can so easily be described as Neo-Romantic. This may be so, and I have certainly tried to be alert to nuances in the ever-shifting relationship between a modern subjectivity and a landscape marked by time, in particular the degree to which this relationship is filtered through framing and other technical devices borrowed from modernism—a key component of Neo-Romantic art. But while not every one of these images can be claimed to be Neo-Romantic in conception, each of them is potentially amenable to a Neo-Romantic sensibility, and in my attempt to demonstrate this I have been attentive to contexts in which they were viewed and received.

In connection with my expansion of the term, the given time span of this book, 1927–55, is not that usually given to Neo-Romanticism, particularly in its starting date. Most writers on Neo-Romanticism give a starting date of around 1935, since this was when the term ‘Neo-Romantic’ was first used as a label for a particular artistic style. My broader time span has been chosen to include a broader Romantic sensibility towards the landscape between the wars. The dates themselves are, of course, not meant to be conclusive, and have necessarily been chosen somewhat arbitrarily. 1927 was the founding date of the journal *Antiquity*, the archaeological journal so amenable to the Neo-Romantic imagination; 1955 is the standard end date given for Neo-Romantic art in a number of exhibitions and publications including ‘A Paradise Lost’. The Festival of Britain in 1951 and the competition for the design of the new Coventry Cathedral, as already noted, were effectively the swansong of Neo-Romanticism as well as its highpoint; the following years saw its decline in the face of a more future-orientated post-war nation.⁴⁵

THE NEO-ROMANTIC LANDSCAPE

The British landscape was obviously a major focus for the Neo-Romantic sensibility, just as it had been for those Romantic artists of the past—Constable, Palmer, Cotman—resurrected to lend support and inspiration. In his 1934 essay in *Unit 1* Nash suggested that the ‘imprisoned spirit’ animating English art ‘is of the land’.⁴⁶ Approvingly citing Blake’s perception of the ‘spiritual personality’ of ‘Albion’, Nash ended his essay by describing his experience of walking among the monoliths at Avebury, suggesting his wish to translate the geometry and atmosphere of this environment into his art.⁴⁷ Nash was not, of course, the only Neo-Romantic topophil—far from it. Particular places were increasingly significant in the work of Piper, Craxton, Cecil Collins, and Sutherland, as they were in the films of Powell and Pressburger, and the photography of Bill Brandt and Edwin Smith.

⁴⁵ See Garlake, *New Art New World*; and B. Appleyard, *The Pleasures of Peace: Art and Imagination in Post-War Britain* (London, 1990).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 81.

⁴⁶ Read, ed., *Unit 1*, 80.

Whereas Surrealism and other modernist movements imported from Europe had been largely urban, Neo-Romanticism—as Mellor points out—represented a switch from the metropolis to the geographical peripheries of Britain. Not only did many Neo-Romantic artists live and work outside London, but landscape subjects were used by them as a way of tempering and naturalizing these imported movements. In his 1936 article ‘Swanage, or Seaside Surrealism’, published in the *Architectural Review* the same year as the International Surrealist Exhibition in London, Nash lent a parochial flavour to Surrealism, finding an involuntary ‘Swanage modernism’ in the ‘Swan-like seats designed for the esplanade by the Swanage Urban District Council’.⁴⁸ In the same article Nash declared that he was concerned with what he calls ‘natural surrealism’, and not ‘political surrealism’. This simultaneous localization and de-politicization of modernism was a typical response from British artists and critics. From the first appearance of Surrealism in this country, attempts were made to endow this determinedly international movement with native roots, most notably by Herbert Read, who saw it as merely the latest manifestation of an eccentric Romanticism at which Britain had always excelled.⁴⁹ Other writers—Nash included—found ‘natural’ occurrences of Surrealism in the landscape, making it seem—literally—a home-grown product. P. Morton Shand summed up this ‘naturalizing’ impulse in an article in *Country Life* in 1939, entitled ‘Object and Landscape’: ‘Considered as an animistic “latent image” that often furnishes an unexpected insight into the more elemental significance of the landscape, the “object” offers the possibility of a direct link with the English tradition. Though Continental Surrealists usually prefer to glean their “objects” from rummage shops, forgotten trinket-boxes and refuse-heaps, Nature yields them in far richer variety.’⁵⁰

Another version of this naturalizing impulse can be found in the writings of Piper, who tracked a kind of home-grown archaic modernism in standing stones, hill-figures, early English sculptures, and the geometry of the land. In an *Axis* article of 1937 he compared an aerial photograph of Silbury Hill to a work by Miró.⁵¹ In a 1936 essay entitled ‘England’s Early Sculptors’ Piper claimed the Romanesque stone carvings in England’s provincial churches to be the equivalents of the primitive objects honoured by continental modernists like Picasso and Brancusi—or even the equivalents of the works of Picasso himself.⁵² The absorption of these—and other objects—in the national landscape flattered the Romantic imagination, as if continental modernism had only just invented the forms which had inhabited the British landscape for centuries.

⁴⁸ P. Nash, ‘Swanage, or Seaside Surrealism’, *AR* (Apr. 1936), 151.

⁴⁹ H. Read, ed., *Surrealism* (London, 1936), 20.

⁵⁰ P. Morton Shand, ‘Object and Landscape’, *Country Life* (3 June 1939), 122. Nash pasted this, along with other articles in which Surrealism was linked with landscape, in a book of press cuttings now in the Victoria and Albert Museum (ref. 86.x.19).

⁵¹ J. Piper, ‘Prehistory from the Air’, *Axis*, 8 (1937), 4–9.

⁵² ‘The Picasso-like profile on the font at Morville could have had a comfortable place in the International Surrealist Exhibition.’ (Piper, ‘England’s Early Sculptors’, 158.)

The war amplified existing tendencies towards landscape subjects. Michael Ayrton, writing about British painting in 1946, described how ‘The artists now nearing their thirties have been forced by circumstances to fall back not only upon British art but upon British landscape, as a result of being cut off from Paris, and they have thus been forced into an aesthetic stocktaking which has given their work an individual and national character.’⁵³ Finding themselves dispersed across provincial and often rural peripheries, artists and writers turned their attention to local subjects, sometimes by choice, sometimes through commissions such as the ‘Recording Britain’ project. More broadly, visions of the British landscape acquired a particular character during the war. Landscape subjects were not so much an escape from the horrors of war—although they could be that. Instead, framed by war, the landscape appeared both vulnerable and resilient, often representing ‘what we are fighting for’, or at least what could be lost, in a looming apocalypse.

Romantic Refuges

Sometimes suffused with a malign nature, but more often the site of history, legend, and myth, the Neo-Romantic landscape was, on the whole, a depopulated one. Occasionally solitary figures appear in this scenery: mythical ‘fools’ wander through the West Country landscapes of Cecil Collins, Christ-like conscripts emerge from David Jones’s spidery reinscriptions of Arthurian legend, young men sit dreaming or reading in the undergrowth of John Craxton’s landscapes of the early 1940s, and in John Minton’s pen-and-ink drawings of the Welsh countryside petrified figures are barely distinguishable from the elaborate vegetation that surrounds them. In some cases the mythical figures represented can be identified as the artist’s self-portrait. The philosophies of ‘personalism’ and individualism can be closely linked to the Neo-Romantic outlook, and were reflected in Neo-Romantic art. These artists and writers considered the individual (best represented, for them, by the creative individual) to be threatened by modern life and the strengthening of the state. This apocalyptic feeling, the conviction that the creative or intelligent individual could not be at home in mass society, was a well-documented obsession among artists and intellectuals generally at this time.⁵⁴ And it was a feeling which was amplified by the wartime threat of annihilation. Thus the vulnerable body, and its quest for a home, is something of a leitmotif in Neo-Romantic art, finding simplified form in the sculpture of Henry Moore, for example, or in Minton’s images, where the body seeks refuge in the landscape.

Its pleasures long repressed through the modernist teachings of Fry and Bell, as Piper pointed out, the British landscape—real and imagined—can be seen as

⁵³ M. Ayrton, ‘The Heritage of British Painting’, *The Studio*, 132/644 (Nov. 1946), 148.

⁵⁴ See Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses*.

the locus of desire for the Neo-Romantic imagination, the theatre of its longings. It was the terrain within which a home—real or metaphorical—was sought by those individuals who—like Heidegger and Lukács—experienced modernity as homelessness.⁵⁵ Neo-Romantics like Piper, Brandt, and Nash were obsessed, in the 1930s and 1940s, with images of a nurturing landscape, ideas of home, and the shelters of church, cottage, or castle. Throughout the 1930s, Paul Nash was working with images of ‘nests’ and ‘lair’s’. When Mortimer Wheeler excavated Maiden Castle in the mid 1930s, and uncovered skeletons buried underneath the turf, Nash photographed them, titling the images *Nest of the Skeletons* and *The Defenders of Maiden Castle* (Fig. i.2). Nash produced images of nests of stones, too, as well as painting the homes, nests, and lairs of animals, some of them extinct—a project given impetus and inspiration from a Victorian book of wood engravings of animal nests entitled *Homes without Hands*.⁵⁶ Nash’s photographs from this period show an obsession with huts, shelters, and makeshift dwellings.⁵⁷ Bill Brandt’s photographs, too, focus again and again on the home, both metaphorically (in his 1936 book *The English at Home*) and in photographs of real buildings, inhabited and uninhabited (such as those collected in *Literary Britain* of 1951).⁵⁸

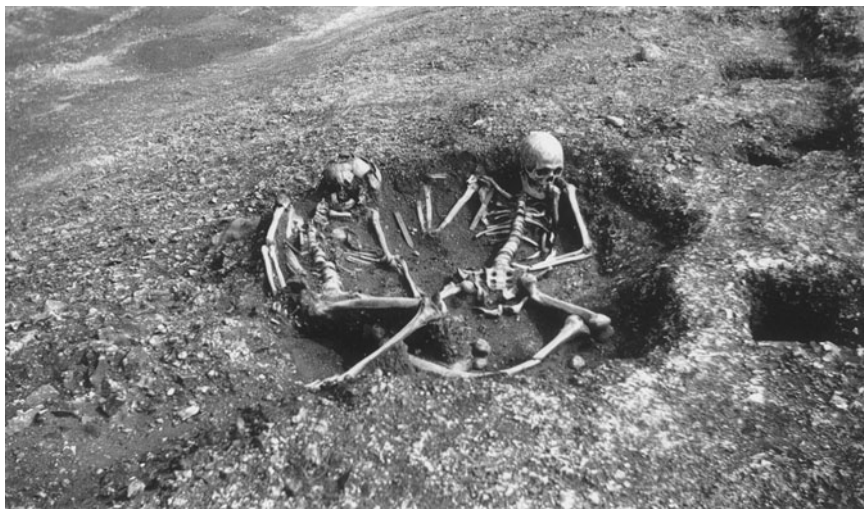


Fig. i.2. Paul Nash, *The Defenders of Maiden Castle* (1934–5).

⁵⁵ See A. Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992), 7–8.

⁵⁶ J. G. Wood, *Homes without Hands: A Description of the Habitations of Animals* (London, 1865); Nash describes the significance of this book in his essay ‘The Nest of the Wild Stones’, 42.

⁵⁷ See TGA 7050.

⁵⁸ B. Brandt, *The English at Home* (London, 1936) and *Literary Britain* (London, 1951).

In a very real sense homelessness played an important part in the lives of both of these artists: Nash and his wife moved around incessantly throughout the 1930s and 1940s, and the German-born Brandt was never quite 'at home' in the exotic landscape and culture of the country where he spent most of his life.⁵⁹ As the example of Brandt reminds us, the enchantments of the British landscape and its monuments were not the sole preserve of native artists and writers. It was the German-born Pevsner who began comprehensively to document the architecture and monuments of the British Isles soon after he arrived in England in 1930, and who sought to define 'the Englishness of English Art'.⁶⁰ And no native Neo-Romantic was ever so much in love with the British landscape as the Hungarian Emeric Pressburger, Michael Powell's film-making partner, who moved to Britain in 1935, one of many émigrés from fascist Europe.⁶¹ The dreamlike vision of the landscape evident in films such as *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1943), *A Canterbury Tale* (1944), and *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946) owed just as much—if not more—to Pressburger's Anglophilia as it did to Powell's native love of the British countryside.⁶²

Framing an Old Landscape

When Neo-Romantic artists turned to the British landscape, it was not as first-footers in a virgin field. The Neo-Romantic landscape was not just an arrangement—more or less pleasing—of shapes, forms, shades, hollows, and vistas. It was a site, both of past artistic interactions and of history itself. The Neo-Romantic landscape was layered, both in itself (as geologically formed, or as a palimpsest of settlement) and in its cultural mediations (in Romantic art, or in guidebooks, or through the poetry of the past). Piper's 1939 images of Welsh landscapes, for example, were alert to geological sedimentation, and deliberately infused with the style and content of nineteenth-century topographical art and literature. The Neo-Romantic artist acknowledged and celebrated these layers, refusing to wipe the historical slate clean, but unable to dislodge the modernity of his or her own subjectivity.

The British landscape, as Morton Shand pointed out, offered these artists plenty of *objets trouvés*,⁶³ strange—as Surrealism said they must be—yet familiar,

⁵⁹ See D. Mellor, 'Brandt's Phantasms', in Haworth-Booth and Mellor, *Bill Brandt*, 70–98.

⁶⁰ Pevsner's series, *The Buildings of England*, was published by Penguin between 1951 and 1974. In the foreword to *The Englishness of English Art*, Pevsner pays tribute to a 1942 work by the Viennese art historian Dagobert Frey entitled *The English Character as Reflected in English Art*, a book which Pevsner, writing in 1955, says is the only one on the subject of the Englishness of English art, again written from a European's perspective.

⁶¹ Another refugee from Nazi Germany was Stefan Lorant, who after his arrival founded the *Weekly Illustrated* in 1934, *Lilliput* in 1937, and *Picture Post* in 1938—magazines which both employed modernist-inclined photographers (including Brandt) and propagated (especially during the war) a version of 'Beautiful Britain' (see Chapter 5).

⁶² See K. Macdonald, *Emeric Pressburger: The Life and Death of a Screenwriter* (London, 1994).

⁶³ 'Object and Landscape'.

emanating from a countryside which was home, refuge from war, celebrated by artists and writers, and documented in any number of guidebooks. The landscape bore ‘finds’ for the artist just as for the archaeologist, finds that could be objects, monuments, or views, but which always derived their peculiar magic from their absorption in an old country. ‘In the early ages’, wrote Nash in his 1936 article on Swanage, the town

was a haunt of turtles and crocodiles, as the fossil remains will show. At what time it became the bay protected by the great chalk cliff and the reefs of Purbeck rock I do not know, but later it was known as Swanwic . . . Some time later the place began to dig up its valuable marble and stone and ship it down the coast or haul it overland. But it was not until the middle of the Victorian era that Swanage began to develop the slightly fantastic element which today gives it such a strange individuality.⁶⁴

Swanage, for Nash, was itself a kind of historical fossil, whose curious modern appearance was the sediment of centuries of geological and historical activity. The same mixture of archaeology, topography, and Surrealism is to be found in the Shell Guides of the 1930s, for which Nash compiled the Dorset volume (Fig. i.3).

An engagement with a landscape marked by time, and with prehistoric and historic sites, is something which most serious accounts of Neo-Romanticism consider, if only in passing. Yet some of these accounts over-stress the formal appeal of ancient objects—like Stonehenge, or Avebury—without acknowledging that it was equally the fact of their longevity and their presence in the landscape that endeared them to Neo-Romantics like Nash and Piper, and possibly even to the more committed modernists Barbara Hepworth and Ben Nicholson. Other accounts ascribe the appeal of such sites to a Neo-Romantic interest in origins, and in a primal creativity.⁶⁵ Sam Smiles’s recent work, especially on Nash and prehistory, has offered a more thorough and balanced account.⁶⁶ Yet arguably all of these critical tendencies overlook the importance of the temporal and spatial frame in and through which prehistoric and historic sites and objects were seen—a frame that was ineluctably modern. What appealed as much as the formal or ideological significance of these things was the very fact of their survival; their *inherence* in the landscape, despite modernity’s best efforts. The past is not something with which these artists sought to commune, as a kind of refuge from modern life—or at least it is not only that. It is perceived as something which is not past at all, but is embedded within modern life. As Myfanwy Evans wrote of Nash in 1937, he ‘has no interest in the past as *past*, but the accumulated intenseness of the past as present is his special concern and joy’.⁶⁷ A focus on the Neo-Romantic perception of inherence—rather than origins—is

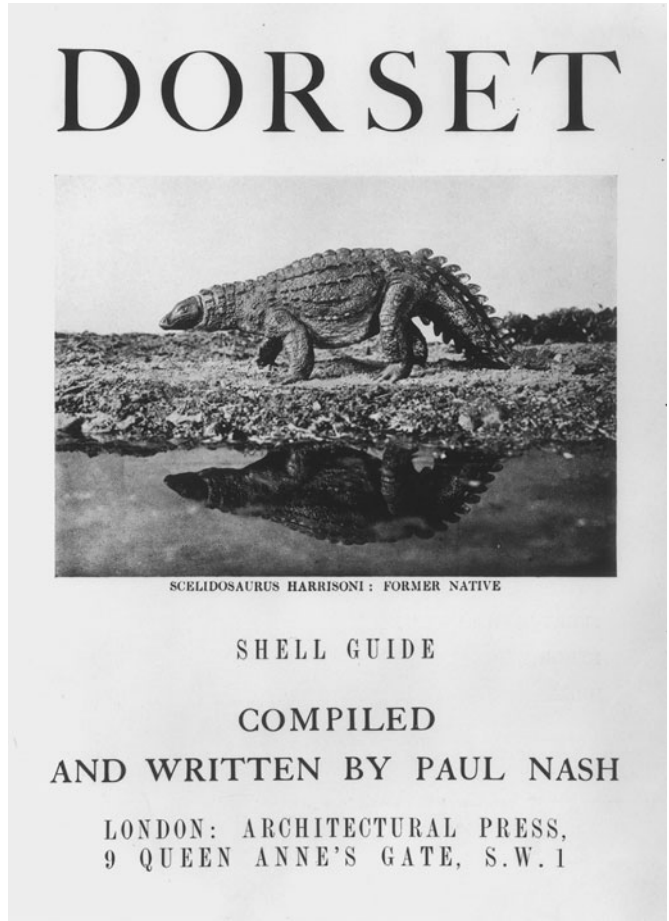
⁶⁴ ‘Swanage, or Seaside Surrealism’, 151.

⁶⁵ See Button, ‘The Aesthetic of Decline’, 81–6.

⁶⁶ Sam Smiles, ‘Equivalent for the Megaliths: Prehistory and English Culture, 1920–1950’, in Peters Corbett, Holt, and Russell, eds., *The Geographies of Englishness*, 199–223; ‘Ancient Country: Nash and Prehistory’, in J. Montagu, ed., *Paul Nash: Modern Artist, Ancient Landscape* (London, 2003), 31–7.

⁶⁷ M. Evans, ‘Paul Nash, 1937’, *Axis*, 8 (Winter 1937), 12.

Fig. i.3. Paul Nash,
Frontispiece to *Dorset*
(1936).



also useful since it covers not only the presence of the ancient past, but also subsequent history—the whole passage of time from prehistory to the more recent past, for, as Auden noted of the ‘topophils’, the ‘quantity of history’ involved in the beloved objects for this sensibility was often irrelevant.

In 1948 Piper wrote that he wanted to be a painter

who reacts in favour of early loves without being reactionary, and who paints churches both medieval and Victorian, mountains, beaches, downs and valleys, without for a moment forgetting that on most downs there is an aerodrome, from most mountains you can see factories in the valleys, that many churches are nearly empty on Sundays, and that on any English beach there may be an unexploded mine.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Quoted in Tate Gallery, *John Piper*, 39.



Fig. i.4. John Piper, *Land Reclamation at Swaffham* (1944).

Modernity unavoidably modulated a desired landscape and its sites, was part of an experience of that landscape. It is important, I think, that the monuments and sites beloved by Neo-Romantics were things that were seen from the window of a train, at the end of a car journey, through the lens of a camera, or in close proximity to urban development. And it is significant that these modern ‘framings’ were often manifest in Neo-Romantic works in one way or another. When Piper and Betjeman documented Romanesque church fittings, for example, it was the element of discovery that thrilled them, as much as the ancient sculptures themselves. The articles they wrote up in the *Architectural Review* framed accounts of churches and other monuments with details of their journeys along country lanes or suburban roads in Piper’s Lancia. In one long article, Piper offered a description of the sights—modern and ancient—along the road from London to Bath (see Fig. 3.22).⁶⁹ When, during the war, Piper painted images of landscapes which were being ploughed for the first time since Domesday as part of the war effort, it was the juxtaposition of current action and ancient site that was fascinating to him, as in *Land Reclamation at Swaffham* (1944), where fossilized trees were revealed

⁶⁹ ‘London to Bath: A Topographical and Critical Survey of the Bath Road’, *AR* (May 1939), 229–46.

when the fens were ploughed (Fig. i.4).⁷⁰ Likewise when Brandt photographed funerary monuments in English cathedrals, his inclusion of modern elements such as drainpipes and boilers was far from accidental (see Chapter 5).

This 'framing' of old with new was, I think, central to the Neo-Romantic sensibility, and it was a common formal device among Neo-Romantic artists. It is particularly clear in three works by Eric Ravilious depicting chalk hill-figures, all from 1939. In *The Wilmington Giant*, the ancient chalk figure is seen through a frame of a wire fence (Fig. i.5). In *The Westbury Horse*, the chalk horse dominates the foreground while a train puffs past in the distant landscape. In *Train Landscape*, an irrevocably modern subjectivity is given formal expression as the viewer becomes a traveller in the train, viewing the chalk hill-figure through the train window (Fig. i.6).⁷¹ Repeatedly in Neo-Romantic culture there is a deliberate juxtaposition of old subject and new viewpoint. This framing modern eye is almost always an integral component of both the artist's sensibility and the work itself. Furthermore, in images such as Ravilious's, the *viewer* of the work is forced to identify with the artist's eye, underlining the ineluctable gap between viewing subject and historic site.

Neo-Romantic Photography

Most of all, perhaps, this contemporary framing of a landscape haunted by history is evident in photography, where it is built into the very technology of production. For no matter how ancient the site depicted, it is clear that the viewer of the scene is a modern subject, viewing the landscape through a camera. Interesting work has been done on specific Neo-Romantic photographers (notably Bill Brandt), film-makers (notably Powell and Pressburger), and artists who took photographs (notably Piper, and Nash, whose photographs were exhibited and published in book form as early as 1951).⁷² Beyond such monographic works, however, the uses of photography in the construction and expression of a Neo-Romantic

⁷⁰ 'The Arbitrary Eye: A Photographic Discourse between John Piper and Paul Joyce', *British Journal of Photography* (25 Nov. 1983), 1241; Tate Gallery, *John Piper*, 100.

⁷¹ Another work of the same year, *The Vale of the White Horse*, explores the same sort of subject matter (F. Constable, *The England of Eric Ravilious* (London, 1982), Pl. 32).

⁷² Haworth-Booth and Mellor, *Bill Brandt*; I. Jeffrey, ed., *Bill Brandt: Photographs 1928–1983* (London, 1993). For a bibliography of works on Brandt, see N. Warburton, ed., *Bill Brandt: Selected Texts and Bibliography* (Oxford, 1993). Works on Powell and Pressburger include I. Christie, ed., *Powell, Pressburger and Others* (London, 1978); I. Christie, *Arrows of Desire: The Films of Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger* (London, 1994); N. Aldred, 'A Canterbury Tale: Powell and Pressburger's Film Fantasies of Britain', in *PL*, 117–24; Macdonald, *Emeric Pressburger*, and the proceedings of a colloquium on British cinema and Powell and Pressburger, published in *La Lettre de la Maison Française d'Oxford*, 11 (Trinity–Michaelmas 1999). For Piper's photographs see D. Fraser Jenkins, ed., *John Piper: A Painter's Camera* (London, 1987). In 1951 there was an Arts Council exhibition of Nash's photographs, and a book, *Fertile Image* (London, 1951), edited by his widow Margaret Nash. See too A. Causey, *Paul Nash's Photographs: Document and Image* (London, 1973) and S. Watney, 'Making Strange: The Shattered Mirror', in V. Burgin, ed., *Thinking Photography* (London and Basingstoke, 1982), 154–76.



Fig. i.5 (above).
Eric Ravilious,
The Wilmington Giant
(1939). © Estate of
Eric Ravilious 2005. All
rights reserved, DACS.



Fig. i.6 (left).
Eric Ravilious, *Train
Landscape* (1939),
Aberdeen Art Gallery
and Museums Collec-
tions, © Estate of Eric
Ravilious 2005. All
rights reserved, DACS.

sensibility more broadly have not been considered in any depth in any of the literature on the subject. It is one of the contentions of this book that photography was a medium of some significance for the Neo-Romantic sensibility, and for the dissemination of a broadly Neo-Romantic vision of Britain.

A consideration of photography in relation to Neo-Romanticism has several facets. First, it was through the mass media of photography and film that specific photographers such as Brandt and Edwin Smith, along with film-makers like the Archers and David Lean, propagated a Neo-Romantic aesthetic to a broad audience. In addition, painters such as Nash and Piper took photographs, which performed a number of functions. Sometimes they were seen by their makers as art objects in their own right, sometimes they were taken in preparation for a painting; sometimes they accompanied published writings; at other times these artists used photography (both their own and others') as a kind of visual notebook, or documentation. This book will consider these products of specifically Neo-Romantic artists; but it will also examine how, more broadly, the photographic medium disseminated a Neo-Romantic vision of landscape: in the illustrated press like *Picture Post* and *Lilliput*; in wartime propaganda pamphlets; in archaeological journals; and in guidebooks. Few of these photographs were taken by 'Neo-Romantic' artists; in many cases the photographer is hardly known, or is anonymous. Yet they had an important part to play in the dissemination and creation of a Neo-Romantic sensibility.

The photographs I am interested in are those which show a landscape in which the past is either visible or perceived to be immanent: a motif which lent itself to a Neo-Romantic sensibility. This sensibility can be seen to exist at the level both of production and of reception. Some of these photographs have clearly been *taken* by someone who has seen the landscape in this way. Others may not have been; but, aided by the context in which they were enmeshed and seen (with the full panoply of extra-photographic elements such as captions and accompanying text), they may put the *viewer* in a position to see the landscape archaeologically, romantically, seeing through the surfaces of modernity to an otherwise absent past, seeing the landscape, in other words, as the very *site* of history. I am interested in how photography as a medium is able to do this, in theoretical terms as well as within a particular historical context.

Sources and Methodology

The study of a sensibility falls between a number of different disciplines, discourses, and bodies of knowledge. This book is necessarily interdisciplinary, drawing on the methodologies of cultural and social history, the history of art, photographic theory, and literary criticism. Its bibliography is correspondingly broad. Primary sources of imagery include photographic archives such as the National Buildings Record and archives of archaeological photographs such as those at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford; illustrated magazines like *Picture Post*,

Country Life, and *Lilliput*; specialist journals such as the *Architectural Review* under Hubert de Cronin Hastings, J. M. Richards, and John Betjeman, and *Antiquity* under the editorship of O. G. S. Crawford, both of which publications placed a high premium on visual imagery; guidebooks including the Shell Guides and the 'Homeland Illustrated' series; and illustrated books such as *The Bombed Buildings of Britain*. Sometimes types of photographs, individual photographs, or the works of a particular photographer occur in more than one of these sources, and I have paid particularly close attention to the migration of images from one context to another, and to how meanings might be shared or altered in the process.

In addition to the books and articles mentioned above on British artists and writers of the 1930s and 1940s my secondary sources are broad and wide-ranging. My interest in an archaeological sensibility during this period has led me to look at writing on the history and theory of archaeology, especially landscape archaeology. Bruce Trigger's *History of Archaeological Thought* usefully focuses on changing ideas and practices in a discipline that has itself undergone historical mutations.⁷³ While the history of archaeology has been well documented (if not always so successfully analysed), work on what could be called the poetics of archaeology has only recently got under way. This is somewhat surprising given both the self-reflexivity of anthropology, archaeology's sister-discipline, and the attention suggestively paid to archaeology by Sigmund Freud and Walter Benjamin.⁷⁴ In the literary field Christine Finn has paid attention to the intersections of poetry and archaeology, and Jennifer Wallace has looked at the workings of 'the archaeological imagination' in a wide range of historical contexts.⁷⁵ Also concerned with the poetics of archaeology are the archaeologists Michael Shanks and Christopher Tilley, as part of an attempt to dislodge notions of 'scientific objectivity' in their discipline, using postmodern theory.⁷⁶ Both authors locate an 'archaeological poetics' in archaeology's constructed nature; from this it follows, for these writers, that archaeology is creative, and that it may therefore be legitimate for archaeologists themselves to engage in hitherto illegitimate 'creative' pursuits such as artistic photography, poetry, or performance.⁷⁷ For these

⁷³ B. G. Trigger, *A History of Archaeological Thought* (Cambridge, 1989).

⁷⁴ For Freud see L. Gamwell and R. Wells, eds., *Sigmund Freud and Art: His Personal Collection of Antiquities* (London, 1989); and S. Barker, ed., *Excavations and their Objects: Freud's Collection of Antiquity* (Albany, 1996). For Benjamin, see his 'A Berlin Chronicle', in *Reflections* (New York, 1986), 25–6; and M. Sagnol, 'La méthode archéologique de Walter Benjamin', *Les temps modernes*, 40/444 (July 1983), 143–65.

⁷⁵ C. Finn, *Past Poetic: Archaeology and the Poetry of W. B. Yeats and Seamus Heaney* (London, 2003); J. Wallace, *Digging the Dirt: The Archaeological Imagination* (London, 2004).

⁷⁶ M. Shanks and C. Tilley, *Re-Constructing Archaeology: Theory and Practice* (London, 1992); M. Shanks, *Experiencing the Past: On the Character of Archaeology* (London, 1992); C. Tilley, ed., *Interpretative Archaeology* (Oxford, 1993).

⁷⁷ See M. Shanks, 'The archaeological imagination; creativity, rhetoric and archaeological futures', in M. Kuna and N. Venclová, eds., *Whither Archaeology? Papers in Honour of Evžen Neustupný* (Prague, 1995), 52–68; Tilley, 'Interpretation and a Poetics of the Past', in Tilley, ed., *Interpretative Archaeology*, 1–30; and Shanks, *Experiencing the Past*, which includes 'artistic' photographs by the author in collaboration with Helen Simpson.

archaeologists, the archaeological imagination (a term used by Shanks) is less a sensibility observable in a range of individuals in particular historical contexts than a clarion call to the profession in the name of creative liberation, bolstered by the theories of Foucault, Heidegger, and others.⁷⁸ My use of the term ‘archaeological imagination’ is more in line with the archaeologists Julian Thomas and Clive Gamble, who have used it to describe a particular ‘way of being attuned to the world’, as old as the human species, but particularly well developed among archaeologists, which enables us to infer the character of past actions through the traces they have left behind.⁷⁹

The literature on archaeological photography is also limited, despite the ever-expanding field of photographic theory, which I discuss in Chapter 2, and despite the interesting work that has been done on photography and anthropology. Some recent work has emerged from the same ideological milieu as Shanks and Tilley: *The Cultural Life of Images: Visual Representation in Archaeology*, edited by Brian Leigh Molyneux, is infused with the same revolt against objectivity, privileging the ‘creativity’ and ‘imagination’ of the archaeological illustrator or photographer over theoretically suspect notions such as objectivity and history itself.⁸⁰ Until the publication of *Envisioning the Past*, edited by Sam Smiles and Stephanie Moser, and *Antiquity and Photography*, edited by Claire Lyons et al., these seems to have been little else substantial published on the subject of archaeological photography.⁸¹

I have also looked closely at work on landscape.⁸² Despite many differences of approach, landscape has increasingly been seen not as a ‘given’ section of land or sea but as something which has been culturally and historically framed and constructed—while remaining the environment in which we live, travel, and work. I have particularly benefited from reading some of the literature on the perception of landscape, which usefully reinstates the importance of the ordinary

⁷⁸ This demand finds fulfilment in M. Pearson and M. Shanks, *Theatre/Archaeology* (London, 2001).

⁷⁹ J. Thomas, *Time, Culture and Identity: An Interpretive Archaeology* (London, 1996), 63; C. Gamble, *Archaeology: The Basics* (London, 2001), 1. Jennifer Wallace also uses the term in her 2004 book *Digging the Dirt*, which unfortunately came out too late for me to take it fully into account. While the range of sites she examines is far broader than mine, and her focus is mainly on the literary rather than the visual imagination, her use of the term ‘archaeological imagination’ seems similar to my own.

⁸⁰ B. Leigh Molyneux, ed., *The Cultural Life of Images: Visual Representation in Archaeology* (London, 1997).

⁸¹ S. Smiles and S. Moser, eds., *Envisioning the Past: Archaeology and the Image* (Oxford, 2005); C. L. Lyons et al., eds., *Antiquity and Photography: Early Views of Ancient Mediterranean Sites* (London, 2005).

⁸² S. Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (London, 1995); J. Duncan and D. Ley, eds., *Place/Culture/Representation* (London, 1993); S. Daniels, *Fields of Vision: Landscape Imagery and National Identity in England and the United States* (Cambridge, 1994); A. Potts, ‘Constable Country between the Wars’ in R. Samuel, ed., *Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity*, iii: *National Fictions* (London, 1989), 160–86; Taylor, *A Dream of England*; Meinig, ed., *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes*; Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*.

viewing subject to a field which sometimes either passes him/her by, homogenizes him/her, or is interested in only one kind of viewer.⁸³ Some work on landscape overlaps with the burgeoning literature on Englishness.⁸⁴ A concern with national identity and how it has developed has sprung up alongside an accelerating globalization, and has gathered speed alongside debates around devolution and the postmodern preoccupation with identities of all kinds. The rapid growth of the 'heritage industry' from the 1970s and the growth of tourism have stimulated debate about the history and ideology of 'heritage' and the idea both of a national landscape and of a national past, in the work of, for example, Robert Hewison, David Lowenthal, and Raphael Samuel, the field summarized in the Summer 1991 issue of *Landscape Research*, edited by Pysr Gruffudd, on 'Landscape and National Identity'.⁸⁵

The thrust of most of this work has been to stress a history of national identity wrapped up with the class-bound and the rural, exploring the ideological underpinnings and uses of this, and how it has been packaged in the heritage industry.⁸⁶ Where this literature has looked at the interwar period, a period which saw a proliferation of travel literature and other books on 'England', it has stressed how in these years many of the tropes of landscape and national identity were formed.⁸⁷ What has also received attention is the relationship between the heritage industry and the preservation movement, which, as we have seen, really took off between the wars. Some of this looks at the British landscape's identity as a site, mainly as the location of various relics and monuments to which various meanings have been attached, and over which various battles have been fought.⁸⁸ What has received less detailed attention is how *and why* the image of a British landscape infused with history, visible and invisible, and despite the incursions of modernity, has exercised such a fascination—in both semiotic and historical terms.

Probably this is partly because heritage is still a pressing and political issue. But it seems more surprising given the contemporary obsession with memory, and the conceit of a landscape haunted by history expressed in a plethora of works of art and literature since the 1990s. This conceit, so evident in the literary work of W. G. Sebald, for example, has been most fully explored—significantly—in contemporary photography which highlights the gap between the present

⁸³ See, for example, Y.-F. Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes and Values* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1974).

⁸⁴ P. Wright, *On Living in an Old Country: The National Past in Contemporary Britain* (London, 1985); M. J. Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit, 1850–1980* (Cambridge, 1981); Samuel, ed., *Patriotism*; R. Samuel, *Island Stories: Unravelling Britain* (London, 1998).

⁸⁵ R. Hewison, *The Heritage Industry: Britain in a Climate of Decline* (London, 1987); D. Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge, 1985); R. Samuel, *Theatres of Memory* (London, 1996); *Landscape Research*, 16/2 (Summer 1991).

⁸⁶ Most of this literature is highly critical of the heritage industry for this reason, a position whose assumptions were attacked by Raphael Samuel in *Theatres of Memory*.

⁸⁷ See especially Potts, 'Constable Country between the Wars', and D. Lowenthal, 'British National Identity and the English Landscape', *Rural History*, 2/2 (Oct. 1991), 205–30.

⁸⁸ See, for example, B. Bender, *Stonehenge* (Oxford, 1998).

appearance of a site and the historical events that took place there. This contemporary efflorescence of photographs of sites of history can be traced back to the historiographical debate about representation engendered by the Holocaust—the question of how it is possible to speak about, or represent, an event that was intended to leave no trace and no witnesses. There has been a proliferation of works engaging with a post-Holocaust landscape, often in flagrant disregard of Adorno's warning against the aestheticization of catastrophe. The many examples of recent photographic works depicting Holocaust sites include those by Simon Norfolk, Leo Divendal, Dirk Reinartz, Mikael Levin, and Grant Delin.⁸⁹ These works are problematic for a number of reasons, some of which I discuss in Chapter 2, but here I will focus on one: rarely have these artists and curators examined the basis—logical or otherwise—for ascribing a memory to a landscape rather than to its viewer (as Sebald does). What has been occluded is the role of the viewer as a historically situated subject. Writers may cite theoretical readings of sites of memory (Bachelard, Freud, Benjamin), but they have not tended to be particularly interested in the history of this way of viewing a landscape in a broader context of a historically formed sensibility. This was a sensibility which began, surely, long before the Holocaust, and which is not confined to the sites of genocide; this book sets out to explore a chapter in the history of this sensibility.

Finally, in this book I wanted to discuss and use photographs in a particular way. I wanted photography to be the subject of the book (rather than simply functioning as illustration), but I did not intend to make a contribution to 'the history of photography', annexing photography to the history of art. Photographic theory, as Geoff Batchen has noted, may have tended to fall into one of two camps, stressing either 'essence' or context; yet these categories are surely not mutually exclusive.⁹⁰ I wanted to look at the meanings of specific photographs in certain historical contexts, but also to say something about photography *as a medium*, a technology that exceeds particular usages such as documentary or fine art. In particular, I was interested in the historiographical properties of photography as a medium, what kind of knowledge of the past the photograph can help to provide (that is, knowledge of the period *before* the photograph was taken), and the kind of historical reverie it can induce. Despite the growing literature on photographic theory, this is something that has not been fully explored. I wanted to maintain both a historical and a theoretical focus, and so I set out to see how photography in general, and certain photographs in particular, might have a part to play in the formation of a sensibility, evident in a particular period of time. Furthermore, from the start I wanted to put forward an argument that was as

⁸⁹ S. Norfolk, *For Most of it I Have no Words: Genocide, Landscape, Memory* (Heaton Moor, 1999); D. Reinartz and Christian Graf von Krockow, *Deathly Still: Pictures of Former German Concentration Camps* (New York, 1995); U. Baer, 'To Give Memory a Place: Holocaust Photography and the Landscape Tradition', *Representations*, 69 (Winter 2000), 38–62; G. Delin, *Lebensraum: Extermination Camps of the Third Reich* (London, 2001).

⁹⁰ G. Batchen, *Burning with Desire: The Conception of Photography* (Cambridge, Mass., 1997), p. x.

much visual as discursive. Hence the images should be seen as an integral part of my argument, rather than simply as illustrations of it.

Each of Chapters 3–6 is intended to be a kind of sample or sounding, which explores the themes and ideas laid out in Chapters 1 and 2 through a particular set of historically situated images. Chapter 3 looks at the journal *Antiquity* and its founder, O. G. S. Crawford; the subject of Chapter 4 is aerial archaeology; Chapter 5 deals with Home Front imagery, before and after the bombs fell; and the final chapter pulls together many of the threads of the book by concentrating on images from a 1944 film, *A Canterbury Tale*. First, though, a historical and theoretical framework needs to be established for conceptualizing the archaeological imagination and its photographic and other manifestations, and this is the task of the first two chapters.

1

The Archaeological Imagination

Puck's Song

Rudyard Kipling's stories for children *Puck of Pook's Hill* and *Rewards and Fairies* were first published in 1906 and 1909–10 respectively. In these stories, Puck (Shakespeare's Puck of *A Midsummer's Night's Dream* and the last 'fairy' to survive in England) meets two children, Dan and Una, in the Sussex countryside where they live in the early twentieth century. Puck introduces the children to various historical characters—a Roman Centurion, a Norman Knight, and so on—who tell them stories about the past, and in particular the history of their locality. In these stories it is the land itself that is the bearer of historical meaning, as revealed by Puck and these messengers from the past. Indeed, time and space are seen to be inseparable, since a place and its features are often literally constituted by what has happened there. 'Puck's Song', the opening poem of *Puck of Pook's Hill*, makes this connection plain:

See you the dimpled track that runs,
All hollow through the wheat?
O that was where they hauled the guns
That smote King Philip's fleet . . .¹

Puck reveals to the children the antiquity of some of the landscape's features:

See you our little mill that clacks,
So busy by the brook?
She has ground her corn and paid her tax
Ever since Domesday Book.²

Sometimes it is a past that has left *no* trace that Puck restores, through storytelling, to the landscape:

See you our pastures wide and lone,
Where the red oxen browse?
O there was a City thronged and known
Ere London boasted a house.³

¹ R. Kipling, *Puck of Pook's Hill and Rewards and Fairies* (Oxford, 1993), 5.

² Ibid. ³ Ibid.

Puck, who is thousands of years old ('the oldest Old Thing in England'), is the witness of the history of the British Isles since 'Stonehenge was new', and has an epic memory.⁴ All of history is available to him, both impossibly distant yet immediately present in his mind, as it is in the landscape he inhabits, which bears the marks of the past. The figure of Puck is a literary device through which Kipling could liberate himself from the limitations of written history, for within the frame of the stories, Puck's testimony as the witness of time—however fanciful—is indisputable. Through Puck's storytelling, local history is redeemed in all of its aspects for the benefit of Dan and Una, and therefore also for the reader. We are encouraged to see the invisible events of history, and hear the stories of figures long since dead, as Puck enables the children 'To see what they should see and hear what they should hear, / Though it should have happened three thousand year.'⁵

In his introduction, written in 1993, to these two books, Donald Mackenzie claims that they 'present—as finely as anything in English—that distinctive evoking of the past we may call the archaeological imagination'. 'This', he explains, 'is a past not heard but seen; a past fragmented, tactile, mute, on whose excavated fragments a re-creating imagination must play.'⁶ As a way of imagining the past, the archaeological imagination itself has a history: Mackenzie describes it as a 'latecomer', which comes into its own in the later nineteenth century, and can be found in literature from Flaubert's *Salammbô* (1862) and Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) to Seamus Heaney's meditations on bodies preserved by peat bogs. It is characterized by startling juxtapositions of the remote past and the immediate present, writes Mackenzie; and it plays in interesting ways with the reader, for it forces us to *read*, to re-create.

I want to look more closely at the perceptual processes and interpretative role of the individual who sees the landscape archaeologically. In my formulation the archaeological imagination is first and foremost a perceptual matter, a *way of seeing*; and as such the role of the viewing subject is crucial. As Mackenzie says, the archaeological imagination challenges or teases us 'into the re-creating response that is, in a complex of senses, reading'.⁷ It makes us—like Dan and Una—'see' the invisible as we reconstruct the past in our imaginations; and in the next chapter I will explore more precisely how this might work in photographic manifestations of the archaeological imagination. First, though, I want to look more closely at how—for the purposes of this book—we might define, contextualize, and historicize the archaeological imagination.

Kipling and Eliot

Mackenzie's concept of the archaeological imagination is very similar to what T. S. Eliot called Kipling's 'historical imagination'. In an introduction to a

⁴ *Ibid.* 9, 11.

⁵ *Ibid.* 183. E. Nesbit employed a similar device in her *Story of the Amulet* (London, 1906).

⁶ 'Introduction', in Kipling, *Puck*, p. xiv.

⁷ *Ibid.*

collection of Kipling's poems published in 1941, Eliot wrote approvingly of the older poet's almost visceral awareness of 'the presence of the past' in the landscape: 'Kipling, especially in *Puck of Pook's Hill* and *Rewards and Fairies*, aims I think to give at once a sense of the antiquity of England, of the number of generations and peoples who have laboured the soil and in turn been buried beneath it, and of the contemporaneity of the past.'⁸ Eliot thought it significant that Kipling wrote these stories of England's 'deep history' after he had settled in Sussex; for he had spent most of his life abroad, setting most of his fiction in the British Empire. 'The simplest summary of the change in Kipling, in his middle years', wrote Eliot, 'is "the development of the imperial imagination into the historical imagination"', which Eliot ascribed to his move to Sussex. 'Having previously exhibited an imaginative grasp of space, and England in it,' he wrote, 'he now proceeds to a similar achievement in time.'⁹

What is crucial here is the material immanence of the past in the present, and Eliot is anxious to distinguish Kipling's 'historical imagination' from that nostalgic desire to record or return to a lost or disappearing past so often expressed in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century literature. Comparing Kipling with Thomas Hardy, Eliot makes the point that Kipling 'wrote of the Sussex which he found, where Hardy wrote of the Dorset that was already passing in his boyhood'.¹⁰ Eliot's distinction is useful: Hardy's writing often embodies the desire—so familiar in nineteenth-century discourse—to mourn or preserve by recording that which is threatened by modernization.¹¹ As I have already noted, the archaeological imagination should be distinguished from this 'salvage' sensibility, although the two are closely related.

A point not made strongly enough by either Mackenzie or Eliot is that the archaeological imagination in literature is not the same as mere representation of the past, however evocative. Archaeology, after all, is the study of the material remains of history; whereas history represents a desire to *reconstruct* in language something (an event or a period) which, while it may have an impact on the present, is irredeemably absent, past. Sir Walter Scott's *Waverley* novels, for example, exemplify the novelist's *historical* imagination, elaborately reconstructing a Scotland of the past. The archaeological imagination does not reconstruct an absent past, but reveals a consciousness of the ineluctable and material immanence of the past within the present.

It is not surprising, perhaps, that Eliot should have singled out for praise Kipling's 'sense of the contemporaneity of the past', for by 1941 this was very much part of Eliot's own cultural project. In his 1920 essay 'Tradition and the

⁸ 'Rudyard Kipling', in *A Choice of Kipling's Verse* (London, 1941); repr. in T. S. Eliot, *On Poetry and Poets* (London, 1957), 248.

⁹ 'Rudyard Kipling', 247, 248–9.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 249.

¹¹ In places, however, it can be argued that Hardy exhibits an archaeological imagination—in the description of Egdon Heath, for example, in *The Return of the Native* (1878; Harmondsworth, 1987), 55–7, 66–7.

Individual Talent', Eliot had already championed 'the historical sense' as that which 'involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence'.¹² Between 1935 and 1942, Eliot was at work on the Four Quartets, which are about time, the embeddedness of history in the landscape (particularly the English landscape), and the possibility of redemption.¹³ It was Kipling's almost mystical perception of the physical presence of the past in the present materiality of England—in buildings, in individuals, in the landscape—that contributed to making him a favourite of the film-maker Michael Powell during this period too. As Ian Christie points out, Powell 'shares with [Kipling] . . . an almost literal sense of the constant presence of history',¹⁴ which, together with a similar preoccupation with the landscape and character of Britain, forms the predominant feature of wartime films by the Archers such as *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1943), *A Canterbury Tale* (1944), and *I Know Where I'm Going!* (1945).

An emphasis on Kipling's historical sense was far from orthodox in criticism of the period. Kipling's reputation was in decline by the time of his death in 1936; Eliot and Powell were both seeking to reclaim certain aspects of his work from a more general condemnation on the grounds of undeniable jingoism, for they both found in Kipling's 'English' works a sensibility very much in tune with their own. Yet there are differences as well as similarities of context and intent between Kipling's archaeological imagination and Powell's (in *A Canterbury Tale*, for example) or Eliot's (in the Four Quartets). All three may have shared elements of an essentially conservative and romanticized view of Englishness, rooted in the landscape.¹⁵ Yet Kipling's absorption in the 'deep past' of England came out of a retreat from Empire, and a conviction (shared by his friend Rider Haggard and others in the wake of the Boer war) that British racial stock was degenerating because of urbanization, and could be renewed only in ancient Anglo-Saxon centres such as Sussex.¹⁶ Eliot's and Powell's works emerged in a very different context thirty or forty years later in which the threat of aerial bombardment and invasion had brought about an introverted obsession with the national landscape,

¹² T. S. Eliot, *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London, 1969), 49.

¹³ Steve Ellis points out how Eliot's interest in Kipling coincides with his depiction of England as an archaeological timescape in the last three of the Four Quartets (*The English Eliot: Design, Language and Landscape in the Four Quartets* (London, 1991)). Paul Murray shows Kipling's influence in each of the Four Quartets in *T. S. Eliot and Mysticism: The Secret History of the Four Quartets* (Basingstoke, 1991).

¹⁴ Terry Eagleton writes of 'Eliot's benignly landowning, regionalist, Morris-dancing, church-centred social ideal'. ('Nudge-Winking', *London Review of Books* (19 Sept. 2000), 6). Powell's conservatism is evident in his autobiography, *A Life in Movies* (1986) and *Million-Dollar Movie* (1992). With its Romantic vision of Englishness *ACT* has been both praised by Roger Scruton and Stuart Millson in the right-wing magazine the *Salisbury Review* and denigrated by Raphael Samuel as 'a quite sinister . . . Tory-romantic film' (R. Scruton, 'Editorial', and S. Millson, 'The Cinematic England of Michael Powell', *Salisbury Review*, 181 (Autumn 1999), 22–4; Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, 234).

¹⁶ See D. Trotter, 'Kipling's England: The Edwardian Years', in P. Mallett, ed., *Kipling Considered* (Basingstoke, 1989), 56–70.

history, and character. Seeing Kipling through their own modernist lenses, Eliot and Powell found in the Puck stories a reusable sensibility, a redemptive historiography for their own times, where past and present mysteriously interpenetrate in the face of a tide of apparently irrevocable modernization and the apocalypse of war. This is perhaps the defining feature of the archaeological imagination in the period considered in this book.

It has not, however, always been a comfort to see the landscape archaeologically, and the next section of this chapter will briefly examine how, in the nineteenth century, the archaeological imagination was more often one of anxiety or melancholy.

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL IMAGINATION AND NINETEENTH-CENTURY SCIENCE

As Donald Mackenzie points out, the archaeological imagination itself has a history, a history that gathers momentum in the nineteenth century, with the developments in what may be termed 'the historical sciences', including geology, palaeontology, and archaeology itself. Advances in these sciences, and the popularization of their findings and methodologies, gradually disseminated an understanding not only that the remains of the deep past are still with us, waiting to be disinterred and interpreted, but also that the present landscape in its form and appearance is the product or residue of past processes and events. These sciences brought with them a radical historicization of the natural environment—rocks, earth, rivers, and cliffs—as well as the man-made elements of architectural vestiges, ancient sites or monuments.¹⁷ Geology, in particular, brought in its wake a newly visible relationship between the physical appearance of the landscape and time. To see the landscape as the product of time, holding within itself the secrets of history, is to see it archaeologically. The archaeological imagination may seem to desire the collapse of past into present, denying a chronological apprehension of time, but its existence is in fact predicated upon the radical historicism of enquiry in the geological, palaeontological, and archaeological fields.

Archaeology

Between 1850 and 1950 archaeology developed from the amateur antiquarian pursuit it had been in the eighteenth century into a modern profession, amid growing public interest.¹⁸ In the late nineteenth century there had been some

¹⁷ The historical and human sciences also brought a radical historicization of entire races and cultural practices. See G. W. Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology* (New York, 1987).

¹⁸ See P. G. Bahn, ed., *The Cambridge Illustrated History of Archaeology* (Cambridge, 1996) and C. W. Ceram, *Gods, Graves, and Scholars: The Story of Archaeology* (1971).

spectacular discoveries in the realm of classical archaeology. Heinrich Schliemann's finds at Troy in 1873, the excavations of the supposed palace of King Minos at Crete in 1900 by Arthur Evans, and the work done at Pompeii all captured the popular imagination, for here the concrete forms of the subjects of ancient myth and legend seemed to be uncovered.¹⁹ Closer to home, the building of railways, roads, and other urban developments accidentally uncovered many subterranean finds, including some which threw into question long-established ideas about the antiquity of man, the nation's past, and the chronology of human settlements.²⁰ Exhibitions of geological and palaeontological material expanded along with the establishment and development of national and local museums, where visitors could muse on fossils and other poetic fragments of an almost unimaginably ancient past.

Over and beyond the discovery and exhibition of particular fragments, an archaeological awareness that the past is both concrete and uncoverable, lying—perhaps literally—under our feet, grew in the later nineteenth century. On moving to Bateman's, his home in Burwash in Sussex, in 1902, Kipling was very aware of this aspect of the local landscape: '... if one scratched a few inches through the rabbit-shaven turf, one came on the narrow mule-tracks of peacock-hued furnace-slag laid down in Elizabeth's day', he wrote in his autobiography.²¹ Indeed, it seems that it was a particular archaeological experience that caused Kipling to write the stories in *Puck of Pook's Hill* and *Rewards and Fairies* shortly after moving to Bateman's. Cleaning out an old pond, he wrote,

which might have been an ancient marl-pit or mine-head, we dredged two intact Elizabethan 'sealed quarts'... all pearly with the patina of centuries. Its deepest mud yielded us a perfectly polished Neolithic axe-head with but one chip on its still venomous edge. These things are detailed that you may understand how, when my cousin, Ambrose Poynter, said to me: 'Write a yarn about Roman times here', I was interested.²²

The Antiquity of the Earth

Perhaps even more important for the development of the archaeological imagination were the findings of the other historical sciences, especially geology and

¹⁹ Freud was excited by the archaeological 'proof' of classical myths that the discovery of Troy, in particular, seemed to offer. After all, he wanted to prove the psychological reality of the myth of Oedipus. Describing his self-analysis in 1899, Freud wrote: 'I can hardly believe it yet. It is as if Schliemann had again dug up Troy, which had hitherto been a fable' (quoted in Gamwell and Wells, eds., *Sigmund Freud and Art*, 28).

²⁰ The poetic juxtaposition of an industrializing present and a prehistoric past in nineteenth-century London was documented by the artist George Scharf. When Hampstead railway was built, Scharf did drawings of both its construction and the fossilized remains that were dug up in the process (C. Arscott, 'George Scharf the Elder and the Archaeology of the Modern', paper given at symposium in connection with exhibition 'The Great Age of British Watercolours 1750–1880', Jan.–Apr. 1993, Royal Academy of Arts, London, 1993).

²¹ R. Kipling, *Something of Myself: For my Friends Known and Unknown* (1937; London, 1951), 186.

²² *Ibid.* 185.

palaeontology, along with anthropology, without which archaeological ‘finds’ would have made little sense. Revolutionary developments in these—as well as archaeological—fields brought archaeological methods and the search for origins of various kinds into popular consciousness. What had been in question since the seventeenth century was the antiquity of the earth; and in the nineteenth century the findings of the historical sciences forced an acceptance of a new, vastly extended conception of both geological and human time replacing biblical geochronology. These sciences were far from distinct in the early part of the nineteenth century, and they had not yet assumed their later professional status and disciplinary differentiation. The developments which I will briefly outline here were not nearly so uniform, widely accepted, or inevitable as they later appeared to be. However, the overall development of the natural sciences moved towards the acceptance of an extended notion of time, and a corresponding model of slow development of both the human race and the earth itself. Crucially, the clue to the earth’s antiquity was to be found in the landscape itself—in fossils, geological strata, and deposits. These, if ‘read’ aright, would reveal the secrets of time.²³

Since the late eighteenth century, the study of fossils had seemed to indicate that the earth was much older than the chronologies of Genesis would allow, as the palaeontologists Georges Cuvier and Jean-Baptiste Lamarck both agreed. The study of geological time thenceforth sought to account for this apparently extended time; the subject was taken up in particular by British scientists. Yet in the early nineteenth century it was still the biblical narrative of Creation that determined estimates of the antiquity of the earth. Various theories of ‘Catastrophism’ sought to explain the mismatch between the palaeontological record and estimates of Mosaic chronology. For in order to maintain an idea of the earth originating with the Creation (usually estimated at around 6,000 years ago), periodic catastrophes were required to account for the changes that had evidently taken place in the earth’s make-up.

The biggest challenge to Catastrophism, and the one which would ultimately overthrow biblical geochronology completely, came with the publication of Charles Lyell’s *Principles of Geology* in 1830. Lyell’s conviction, which would later become known as ‘Uniformitarianism’, was that only a vastly extended timescale for the genesis of the earth would account for the gap, already noted, between the palaeontological record and the short timescale of biblical Creation. He argued that it was not catastrophes that had caused differences in the earth’s surface, but more or less constant forces affecting the earth over a period of time that was

²³ See P. J. Bowler, *Fossils and Progress: Paleontology and the Idea of Progressive Evolution in the Nineteenth Century* (New York, 1976); J. D. Burchfield, *Lord Kelvin and the Age of the Earth* (Chicago, 1990); S. Jay Gould, *Time’s Arrow, Time’s Cycle: Myth and Metaphor in the Discovery of Geological Time* (London, 1991); R. Williams, *Notes on the Underground: An Essay on Technology, Society, and the Imagination* (Cambridge, Mass., 1990); M. J. S. Rudwick, *The Meaning of Fossils: Episodes in the History of Palaeontology* (New York, 1976).

'inconceivably vast'.²⁴ By around 1850, despite considerable hostility to this view and its implications, Uniformitarianism had become orthodox among geologists. Vital to Lyell's theories was the idea of 'actualism'—the use of the present as the only valid guide to the past. Time, being immense and therefore inconceivable, could be approached only through its traces in the present. It was palaeontology that had alerted geologists in the first place to the antiquity of the earth; it was fossils, the present remains of past organisms, visible in rocks, river-beds, and on seashores, that were the clue to the mystery of time.

As Donald Mackenzie discusses, this new and 'inconceivably vast' timescale made human beings and their history seem paltry; and it spawned a mournful vein of the archaeological imagination in the writings of those whose faith had been shaken by the new discoveries. Tennyson, who had read Lyell, nostalgically pondered the question of the earth's antiquity in his poem 'In Memoriam', written between 1833 and 1850. In a passage echoing 'Puck's Song', the poem somewhat mournfully describes how

There rolls the deep where grew the tree.
O earth, what changes hast thou seen!
There where the long street roars, hath been
The stillness of the central sea.²⁵

Matthew Arnold expressed a similar elegiac despair in the poem 'Dover Beach' (written around 1851), where the narrator finds himself aware of his own mortality in the face of an awesome and ancient nature.

Perhaps the clearest reflection of the new geology and the anxiety it provoked came in visual form, however, in a painting which—like Arnold's poem—is set on a beach. In William Dyce's painting *Pegwell Bay: A Recollection of October 5th, 1858*, painted in 1858–9, figures wander on the shore at Pegwell Bay in Kent, rather half-heartedly collecting fossils (Fig. 1.1). The figures are distinct enough, if a little ethereal in appearance; yet they are subordinated to the landscape that surrounds them. The chalk cliff behind them is painted in an almost hyper-realist style, as are the rocks and fossils on the beach. And in the sky, a comet is just visible. As Marcia Pointon has pointed out, *Pegwell Bay* is a highly topical painting which takes time itself as its main subject.²⁶ For while its date (5 October 1858) is explicitly contemporary, the timescales represented in the image are, like Lyell's conception of the antiquity of the earth, immensely vast and representable only through their traces in the present. The fossils and the geology of the cliffs are evidence of a prehistoric sea that once covered the land here. The inclusion of Donati's comet, too, while pinpointing the date of the 'recollection' in the work's title, implies the presence of cosmic time. Dyce's painting has been interpreted as

²⁴ Burchfield, *Lord Kelvin*, 10.

²⁵ C. Ricks, ed., *The New Oxford Book of Victorian Verse* (Oxford, 1990), 31.

²⁶ M. Pointon, 'The Representation of Time in Painting: A Study of William Dyce's *Pegwell Bay: A Recollection of October 5th, 1858*', *Art History*, 1/1 (Mar. 1978), 99–103.

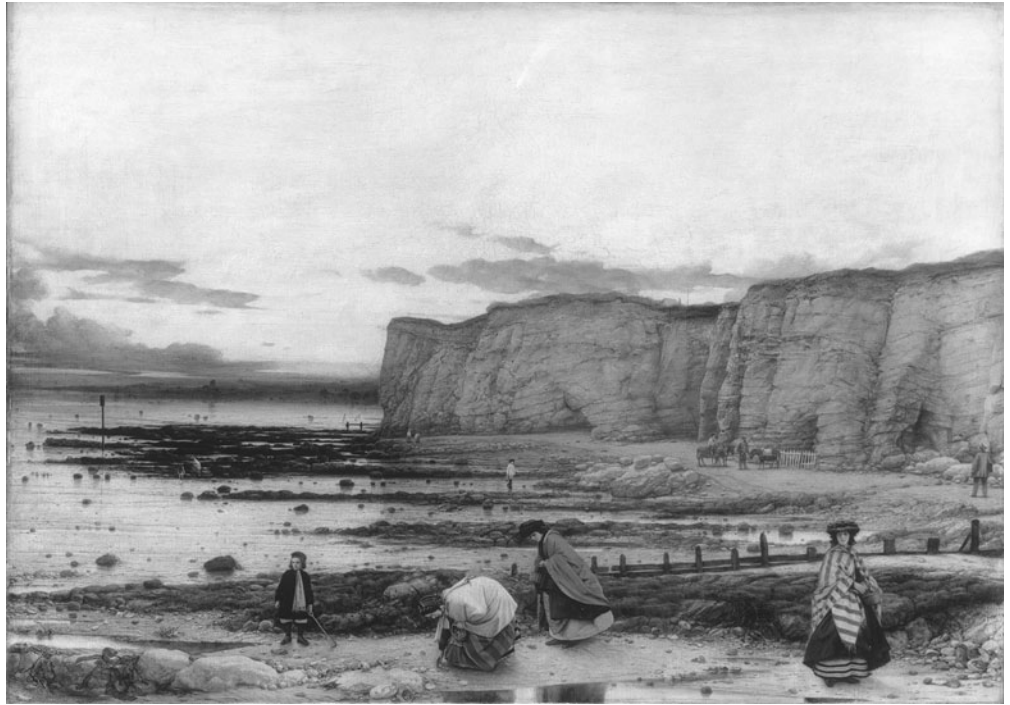


Fig. 1.1. William Dyce, *Pegwell Bay: A Recollection of October 5th, 1858* (1858–9).

the defining moment in the nineteenth-century loss of faith in the face of scientific discovery, hence the figures' lacklustre appearance, the geological detailing of the bay, and the apocalyptic atmosphere of the light.²⁷ But it also exemplifies the archaeological imagination in pictorial form, in its attention to geological materiality, its contemporaneity, and its evocation of deep time. It is a moment in historical time (5 October 1858) in which the whole of geological and cosmic time seems to manifest itself.

A dark thread runs through *Pegwell Bay*, as it does—more or less explicitly—through many manifestations of the archaeological imagination, whether nineteenth- or twentieth-century: a thread of inevitable mortality or even impending apocalypse. In Dyce's painting the presence of vast time points directly to the insignificance of an individual's life. Like a secularized version of the anamorphic skull in Hans Holbein's painting *The Ambassadors* (1533) (Fig. 1.2), the vast

²⁷ Peter Fuller sadly describes *Pegwell Bay* as 'a picture which reveals why [Dyce] now felt that the study of nature had so little to teach about God's revelation of himself' (P. Fuller, *Theoria: Art and the Absence of Grace* (London, 1988), 95).

timescales represented by the cliffs and the comet are a kind of *memento mori*. Both Holbein's skull and Dyce's rocks and comet, apparently occupying a different dimension of eternal time, point up the brevity of human life. It is not just individual mortality that haunts Dyce's image, however. The presence of ancient and extinct species in the form of fossils here raises the spectre of the future extinction of the race, hence perhaps the apocalyptic atmosphere of the painting.²⁸ The archaeological imagination is not just about the past but arguably always holds implications—however inchoate—for the future.

In painting as in literature, the archaeological imagination should again be distinguished from the historical imagination. Nineteenth-century painters



Fig. 1.2. Hans Holbein the Younger, *The Ambassadors* (1533).

²⁸ In 1858, the year depicted in Dyce's painting, human remains had been found alongside those of extinct animals at Brixham Cave in Devon. See Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, 73–4.

often depicted historical subjects—to be sure, there was no subject deemed more worthy of an ambitious artist's attention.²⁹ History painting, however, required that a historical or classical scene be *reconstructed* in all of its specificity, as if the artist (and by extension, the viewer) were really there, transported by a time machine. In Augustus Egg's *Queen Elizabeth Discovers she is no Longer Young* (1848), for example, or John Everett Millais's *The Romans Leaving Britain* (1865) there is no sense of the immanence of the past in the present as there is in *Pegwell Bay*. Instead incidents from national history are reconstructed usually as lessons for the present, and often with a great attention to authentic period detail. The kind of antiquarianism exemplified by, for example, Ford Madox Brown's *Chaucer at the Court of Edward III* (1856–68) represents the historical, and not the archaeological, imagination at work since its goal is accurate historical representation and the evocation of a lost period and a lost moment.

This is equally true of those visual reconstructions of prehistoric life considered by Martin Rudwick and Stephanie Moser.³⁰ The lithographs that accompany Franz Unger's folio atlas *The Primitive World in its Different Periods of Formation* (1851), for example, which Rudwick discusses in his book *Scenes from Deep Time* (1992), do not just reconstruct a scene from a historical moment distant from the artist; they attempt to represent a world which has never been seen. The archaeological imagination has to take as its starting point the present moment in time, in all of its concrete particularities—the ancient or recent past has to be implicit within those particularities, or opened up when seen in conjunction with a title or caption. Hence the contemporary focus of *Pegwell Bay*, with its date-caption, the modern dress of its figures, and its almost photographic capturing of a specific moment.³¹ Hence, too, the affinity of photography as a technology with the archaeological imagination—particularly when viewed in connection with evocative captions. Such specificity of time brings with it specificity of space; the archaeological imagination invariably takes as its starting point a particular place. Hence that radical sense of the local so often found in literary and artistic examples of the archaeological imagination: the centrality of Sussex to Kipling, Pegwell Bay to Dyce, Dover Beach to Arnold, Kent to Michael Powell (in *A Canterbury Tale*, for example), East Coker, Little Gidding, and so on to Eliot (in the Four Quartets).

²⁹ See R. Strong, *And When did you Last See your Father? The Victorian Painter and British History* (London, 1978). According to Strong, 1840–70 was the great age of history painting in this country (p. 42), and was coincidental with the apogee of historical writing as literature (p. 36).

³⁰ M. J. S. Rudwick, *Scenes from Deep Time: Early Pictorial Representations of the Prehistoric World* (Chicago, 1992); S. Moser, *Ancestral Images: The Iconography of Human Origins* (Thrupp, Stroud, 1998).

³¹ Dyce may in fact have used photographs in painting *Pegwell Bay*. See C. Willsdon, 'Dyce "in camera": New Evidence of his Working Methods', *Burlington Magazine*, 132/1052 (Nov. 1990), 760–5.

Zadig's Method: An Epistemological Paradigm

All of the historical sciences of the nineteenth century shared a methodology in which the contemporary world was scanned for evidence of the distant past. Geologists, archaeologists, anthropologists, and palaeontologists took as their object of study the accessible remnants of an otherwise inaccessible history, a history outside all historical discourse, all human memory, and in some cases outside human existence. Their task was to reconstruct that irrevocably absent past, basing their efforts on whatever remains, however fragmentary, were available to them.

In a lecture of 1880, part of a series designed to publicize the evolutionary theories of Charles Darwin, Thomas Huxley compared the working procedures of the new sciences with the methods of Zadig, the eponymous hero of a series of stories by Voltaire, set in Babylon and first published in 1748.³² Zadig is a diligent student of nature who makes 'a special study of the properties of animals and plants' and develops 'an acuteness of perception which revealed to him a thousand differences where other men see only uniformity'.³³ In a demonstration of his extraordinary skills, Zadig surprises some members of the royal household by describing perfectly the Queen's dog and the King's horse, both of whom have gone missing and neither of whom he has ever seen. The dog, he says, is a bitch with very long ears, who has recently had a litter and who limps with her left front paw. He deduces this merely by observing 'some animal tracks in the sand' which he

could easily tell... were those of a small dog. Long, shallow grooves drawn across tiny heaps of sand between the paw-marks told me that it was a bitch whose teats were hanging down, which meant that she had whelped a few days previously. Other traces going in a different direction, and apparently made by something brushing constantly over the surface of the sand beside the front paws, told me that she had very long ears. And as I noticed that the sand was always less indented by one paw than by the other three, I realized that the bitch belonging to our most august Queen had... a slight limp.³⁴

Huxley dubbed Zadig's ability to deduce absent past causes from their visible effects 'retrospective prophesying'; and it was this which led him to compare the working procedures of the new sciences with the methods of Zadig: 'For the rigorous application of Zadig's logic to the results of accurate and long-continued observation has founded all those sciences which have been termed historical or palætiological, because they are retrospectively prophetic and strive towards the reconstruction in human imagination of events which have vanished and ceased to be.'³⁵

³² T. H. Huxley, 'On the Method of Zadig' [1880], *Collected Essays*, iv (New York, 1968), 1–23.

³³ Voltaire, 'Zadig', in *Candide and Other Stories* (Oxford, 1998), 130–1.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 132–3.

³⁵ 'On the Method of Zadig', 9.

Hence without ever having seen the now-extinct creature, the modern palaeontologist could 'speak as confidently about the animal of the Belemnite, as Zadig was respecting the queen's spaniel'.³⁶ Huxley was not the first to make the comparison between Zadig's method and the methods of modern scientists: he took his cue from Georges Cuvier. Cuvier, known for his ability to reconstruct the anatomy and appearance of an animal through the scantiest fossilized remains, described the principle of comparative anatomy in 1812.³⁷ The principle, he wrote, is based on what can be learned from observation; the track of a cloven-hoofed animal, for example, will tell us that the passing beast was a herbivore: 'that single track gives the observer the form of the teeth, jaws, and vertebrae, and the form of all the bones of legs, thighs, shoulders, and pelvis of the animal that just passed by. It is a more certain mark than all those of Zadig.'³⁸

Reading the Book of Nature

In Voltaire's tale, Zadig's skills appear so extraordinary that at first it seems that he is not making logical deductions, but that he is gifted with some kind of supernatural power. Once he explains to the Council of the Grand Defterdar how it was that he could describe the missing animals in such detail, 'the judges all marvelled at [his] penetrating and subtle powers of discernment', while 'several magi expressed the opinion that he should be burned as a sorcerer'.³⁹ In fact sorcery and deduction are not so unrelated as they may seem. Using the term 'retrospective prophesying' to describe the methods of modern science, Huxley acknowledges the fact that deducing successfully from traces (or 'retroduction') has a structural affinity with the ancient art of divination, where gifted individuals could divine the will of the gods, written in the flight of birds, the stars, or the entrails of animals. Huxley is not troubled that his term 'retrospective prophesying' may seem a contradiction in terms, for the essence of the prophetic operation, he says, 'does not lie in its backward or forward relation to the course of time, but in the fact that it is the apprehension of that which lies out of the sphere of immediate knowledge; *the seeing of that, which to the natural sense of the seer, is invisible*'.⁴⁰

Detective Fiction

If Zadig's method is familiar, it may be because it is the technique made famous by Sherlock Holmes, in a literary genre based almost entirely on the decoding of the

³⁶ 'On the Method of Zadig', 16.

³⁷ See M. J. S. Rudwick, *Georges Cuvier, Fossil Bones, and Geological Catastrophes: New Translations and Interpretations of the Primary Texts* (Chicago, 1997), 183–252.

³⁸ *Ibid.* 220. Huxley used part of this quotation as the epigraph to his lecture when it was first published, but he takes the comparison much further than Cuvier, reading Voltaire's tale as a prophetic allegory of the triumph of science over magic. ³⁹ 'Zadig', 133.

⁴⁰ 'On the Method of Zadig', 6 (my emphasis).

significance of signs, or traces. The narrative of the detective novel is invariably the account of the detective's attempt to answer the question *what happened here?*, as the story unravels backwards from the scene of a crime. The scene of the crime is the place where something has occurred, and it is the detective's task to elucidate this absent narrative which is—to quote Huxley—'out of the sphere of immediate knowledge'. The clues in the detective's investigation are the traces of the crime and the clues left behind by those protagonists involved in it: a bullet-hole, a wound, a dropped handkerchief. It is precisely these remnants that give the criminal away, for the perfect crime is of course one that leaves no traces.

Deduction from traces is the forensic method made famous in the late nineteenth century by Arthur Conan Doyle, whose creation Sherlock Holmes imitated Edgar Allan Poe's fictional detective Auguste Dupin.⁴¹ Both Dupin and Holmes have preternaturally well-developed perceptual and analytical senses. Looking at a scene, person, or thing, they (like Zadig) can deduce facts apparently inaccessible to ordinary intelligences. To paraphrase Huxley, they 'see that which to the natural sense is invisible'. To others, their deductions (like those of Zadig) seem the product of a divine insight until their logic is explained. Meeting a client for the first time in 'The Adventure of the Speckled Band', for example, Sherlock Holmes surprises her by remarking that she arrived by train that morning, and that she drove to the station in a dog-cart along heavy roads. Holmes's knowledge seems supernatural until he explains how he has arrived at this conclusion: 'I observe the second half of a return ticket in the palm of your left glove', he told her, while 'The left arm of your jacket is spattered with mud in no less than seven places. The marks are perfectly fresh. There is no vehicle save a dog-cart which throws up mud in that way, and then only when you sit on the left hand side of the person.'⁴²

Dupin and Holmes put their analytical skills to work in solving mysteries, scanning the scene of a crime for overlooked clues, tiny details that no one else has thought important. So, after scrutinizing the scene of a murder off the Brixton Road in 'A Study in Scarlet', Holmes announces a number of deductions based on the observation and measurement of slight traces, indentations, and marks. The murderer and his victim arrived in a cab drawn by a horse with three old shoes and one new one on his off foreleg, he says, having noticed that the outline of one of the horse's hooves was 'far more clearly cut than that of the other three'.⁴³ Gathering up some ash from the floor, he deduces from its colour and texture that the likely murderer was smoking a Trichinopoly cigar.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Poe's 'Murder in the Rue Morgue' (generally agreed to be the first modern detective story) was first published in 1841. Sherlock Holmes made his first appearance in 1887 in 'A Study in Scarlet', in the *Strand Magazine*.

⁴² A. Conan Doyle, 'The Adventure of the Speckled Band', in *The Original Illustrated 'Strand' Sherlock Holmes* (Ware, Herts., 1989), 215.

⁴³ 'A Study in Scarlet', *ibid.* 23.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 23–4.

ARCHAEOLOGISTS AND OTHERS

The method of Zadig and Holmes is also the method of archaeologists, who when examining a site or an artefact need to be skilled in the art of deducing causes from their slight effects. Despite the fact that detectives concern themselves with events in the immediate past, and archaeologists tend to interest themselves in the distant past, there are striking similarities between the field archaeologist's site and the detective's 'scene of the crime'. Both archaeologists and detectives conjecture on the basis of fragmentary clues and largely material evidence. And in both cases, traces—the disturbed earth where a body has been hastily buried, mortal remains, footprints—are the guide to knowledge of past events. Doubtless this congruity of occupations accounts for the fact that many detective novels feature archaeologist-detectives and archaeological settings. Many of Agatha Christie's most famous novels are set in archaeological locations (she herself was married to an archaeologist); and the British archaeologist Glyn Daniel wrote detective fiction in the 1950s, creating the fictional detective Sir Richard Cherrington, professor of Prehistory at Cambridge University.⁴⁵ O. G. S. Crawford, the archaeologist and editor of *Antiquity*, was a keen reader of Conan Doyle and Agatha Christie.⁴⁶

A Family of Disciplines

The historian Carlo Ginzburg does not think it a coincidence that so many different disciplines (including archaeology) emerging towards the end of the nineteenth century shared with detective fiction (which flourished at the same time) an epistemological model based on the interpretation of clues. In his essay 'Clues: Morelli, Freud, and Sherlock Holmes', Ginzburg adds to the list of historical sciences mentioned by Huxley (palaeontology, archaeology, geology, and so on) a number of emergent human sciences which utilize the same methodology—psychoanalysis, art connoisseurship, forensic science.⁴⁷ For Ginzburg, what characterizes the paradigm shared by these disciplines is that it is tiny details that provide the key to a deeper reality, a reality inaccessible by other methods.

⁴⁵ See C. Trümpler, ed., *Agatha Christie and Archaeology* (London, 2001). G. Daniel wrote *The Cambridge Murders* (1945) (as Dilwyn Rees) and *Welcome Death* (1954). For more examples of the overlap between archaeologists and the writers of detective fiction, see J. Mann, 'Dons and Detection', in J. D. Evans, B. Cunliffe, and C. Renfrew, eds., *Antiquity and Man: Essays in Honour of Glyn Daniel* (London, 1981), 203–7. ⁴⁶ *SD*, 310.

⁴⁷ 'Clues: Morelli, Freud, and Sherlock Holmes', in U. Eco and T. A. Sebeok, eds., *The Sign of Three: Dupin, Holmes, Peirce* (Bloomington, 1983), 81–118. Freud was well read in archaeology, possessed a collection of antiquities, and used the older science as a metaphor for the new 'science' of psychoanalysis, since both disciplines delved beneath the surface, bringing hidden things to light. See Gamwell and Wells, eds., *Sigmund Freud and Art*; and Barker, ed., *Excavations and their Objects*. As Rosalind Williams points out, the idea of digging down to find the truth is an ancient theme which became the paradigm of modern science and also the disciplines of history, economics, and linguistics (*Notes on the Underground*, 7–8).

Ginzburg sees this as primarily a medical paradigm where symptoms betray diseases, a notion lent some support by the fact that Freud was a doctor and Conan Doyle had been a practising physician, who supposedly based Sherlock Holmes on his professor, Joseph Bell of the Royal Infirmary in Edinburgh.⁴⁸

According to Ginzburg, what caused this epistemological paradigm to flourish in the later nineteenth century was the tightening of state control over an increasingly urbanized, diverse, and growing population. Holmes's method is the exercise of reason amid apparent chaos, the unravelling of complex events in an apparently impenetrable and crowded city.⁴⁹ The need for state apparatuses of social control to individuate among the city crowds, identifying old offenders and classifying new ones, led to the Paris police department's adoption of Bertillon's anthropometric system in 1879, for example, which classified criminal suspects through physiological markers such as head measurements and ear size and shape.⁵⁰ In 1888 Galton suggested a new method of classification based on fingerprints.⁵¹ These, and other methods of classification, Ginzburg points out, should be seen in connection with developments in nineteenth-century pseudo-scientific disciplines such as phrenology, graphology, palmistry, and so on, themselves based on the classification and interpretation of indices of the individual body in a mass society.

If these sciences were new in the nineteenth century, however, Ginzburg points out that their fundamental methods of inferring causes from slight effects are as old as humankind itself. Thomas Huxley had recognized that 'retrospective prophesying' was an important skill of nomadic peoples, who could tell 'from freshly broken twigs, crushed leaves, disturbed pebbles, and imprints hardly discernible by the untrained eye' what kind of a party had passed by, and how long ago.⁵² Ginzburg notes that the interpretation of animal traces and the deductive reconstruction of the passage of unseen beasts through the landscape were once an urgent matter of survival—and the earliest human beings must have become expert at it, coming to possess an intimate knowledge of tracking.⁵³

These special skills of the primitive hunter-gatherer, passed on from generation to generation, are in general lost in modern civilization, as Robinson Crusoe and other shipwreck survivors have discovered, but a sensitivity to marks in the landscape can be developed again within particular disciplinary or other contexts. Although Ginzburg does not mention it, the tracking skills of 'primitive' peoples

⁴⁸ See H. Orel, ed., *Sir Arthur Conan Doyle: Interviews and Recollections* (Basingstoke, 1991). For links between detective fiction and forensic science see R. R. Thomas, *Detective Fiction and the Rise of Forensic Science* (Cambridge, 1999).

⁴⁹ Walter Benjamin points out that the 'original social content of the detective story was the obliteration of the individual's traces in the big-city crowd' (*Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* (London, 1989), 43).

⁵⁰ According to Marcello Truzzi, Conan Doyle himself had an impact on criminology—Alphonse Bertillon and Edmond Locard credited Holmes as a teacher and source of ideas (M. Truzzi, 'Sherlock Holmes: Applied Social Psychologist', in Eco and Sebeok, eds., *The Sign of Three*, 57).

⁵¹ See S. A. Cole, *Suspect Identities: A History of Fingerprinting and Criminal Identification* (Cambridge, Mass., 2001).

⁵³ 'Clues', 88.

⁵² 'On the Method of Zadig', 8.

have played an important part in archaeological research, and many archaeologists have utilized the skills of local tribespeople when excavating abroad, although their contribution has not always been acknowledged. O. G. S. Crawford professed a great respect for the skills of 'primitive' nomads: in his autobiography he remembers a nomadic herdsman, an Arab named Mohammad Faqir, whom he employed while working on a site in the Sudan and who, while uninterested in archaeology, 'proved to be quite invaluable': 'He was accustomed to reading on the sand, as in a book, the tracks of men and animals, and he developed quite naturally into a first-rate field archaeologist. For what is field archaeology but a development of this expertise applied to the past?'⁵⁴

While this too is not mentioned by Ginzburg, another modern context in which the skills of the tracker become crucial is wartime, when ancient skills have to be learned by those involved in military reconnaissance. In his handbook *Reconnaissance and Scouting* (1884), Baden-Powell insisted that 'nothing should ever escape the eye of a scout; he should have eyes at the back of his head', urging officers to become sensitive to 'wheel and foot tracks' in the terrain.⁵⁵ Young members of the Scouting movement were similarly exhorted to learn the art of the tracker. Scouts were instructed how to deduce the height and passing speed of a man by studying his footprints; they were taught to distinguish between the hoof-marks and paw-marks of different types of animals, estimating the speed at which they were moving, and between the tracks of different types of vehicles, judging the direction in which they were going (see Fig. 1.3).⁵⁶ Arguably trackers, archaeologists, spies, and scouts all utilize the same skills, which no doubt accounts for the frequent cross-overs and cross-fertilizations of archaeology and the military.

As Ginzburg's discussion progresses, it casts its net wider and wider to include a broad range of cultural experience and practices. Perhaps, he says, the hunter's experience of reading sequences of events from signs left by animals lies at the very beginnings of storytelling. Perhaps, he continues, animal tracks are even responsible for the very origins of writing, giving us the idea of making meaningful marks. Other writers, too, see the paradigm of trace-interpretation at work everywhere: Thomas Sebeok finds it in nineteenth-century fiction, in farming, forestry, gardening, and handwriting authentication.⁵⁷ Clearly this is a semiotic issue, best discussed by semioticians, and largely outside the scope of this book, although in the next chapter I consider the semiotic status of the trace in relation to the photograph and its interpretant. In any case, many of the human sciences and practices discussed by Ginzburg and Sebeok have less to do with deducing things about the *past* than with deducing wholes from parts, as a disease is diagnosed from its symptoms. What is crucial for Ginzburg is the tiny clue to a hidden truth, the

⁵⁴ *SD*, 288–9.

⁵⁵ R. S. Baden-Powell, *Reconnaissance and Scouting: A Practical Course of Instruction, in 20 Plain Lessons, for Officers, Non-Commissioned Officers, and Men* (London, 1884), 36, 37.

⁵⁶ R. S. Baden-Powell, *Scouting for Boys* (1908; London, 1955), 141–53.

⁵⁷ T. A. Sebeok, 'Indexicality', *American Journal of Semiotics*, 7/4 (1990), 18–19.

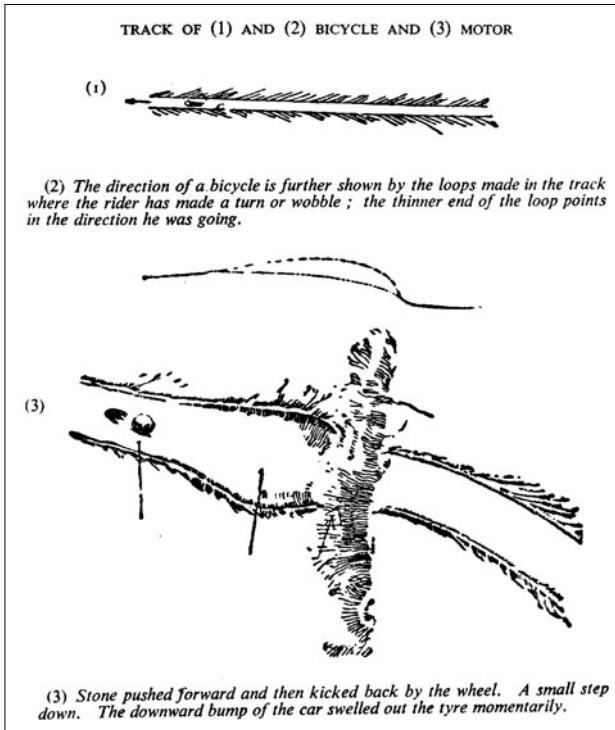


Fig. 1.3. Tracks from R. S. Baden-Powell, *Scouting for Boys* (1908; 1955).

visible manifestation of a cause which need not be historically anterior to it. What interests me are the historiographical applications of the paradigm discussed by Ginzburg, particularly in relation to the landscape. What I am concerned with in this chapter is the way in which interpreting from traces, inferring causes from effects, and seeing through the most obvious superficial appearances constitute the method of professional field archaeologists and—by extension—those who see the landscape archaeologically.

Archaeology, then, can be seen as one of those historical sciences which, in Huxley's words, 'strive towards the reconstruction in human imagination of events which have vanished and cease to be'. Historians are arguably striving towards the same goal—yet in general the events they study have been documented in one form or another. The boundaries between these disciplines have obviously always been blurred, yet arguably the main difference between them is that archaeologists tend to depend on material evidence, since—in the case of prehistoric archaeologists, at least—their field is outside the main body of recorded history. This attention paid to material sources typical of archaeology is the reason why I have called the sensibility I am examining an archaeological (rather than a historical) imagination. Unlike historians, archaeologists tend not to be able to rely on textual sources; field

archaeologists in particular see the mute landscape itself as their main resource. Archaeologists, and those who see archaeologically, see in the landscape and its monuments 'that which to the natural sense of the seer is invisible'. The archaeological imagination sees the landscape as a *site*. It sees it in the same way as Sherlock Holmes would see the scene of a crime. It sees what is, in a sense, invisible: the irrevocably absent past, the events that occurred in a place, or the processes that caused the place to be the way it is and look the way it does.

A Detective in the Landscape

The sort of thing I have in mind in the period under consideration is most explicitly illustrated by a series of countryside guides published in the late 1920s and early 1930s by the artist and illustrator Donald Maxwell.⁵⁸ These guides, aimed at ramblers and local history enthusiasts, had titles like *A Detective in Kent: Landscape Clues to the Discovery of Lost Seas* (1929) and *A Detective in Surrey: Landscape Clues to Invisible Roads* (1932). In these books, Maxwell urged his readers to improve their skills of detection and deduction—in the manner of the detective—in order to solve the puzzles of landscape history and gain a full aesthetic appreciation of any scene:

The detection of crime by means of observation, deduction, and reconstruction of motive is a thing already built up into a science. That there could be such a thing as the science of reading landscape for the unravelling of its history has not occurred to very many. Scotland Yard has its Criminal Investigation Department. The Royal Academy should have its Landscape Interrogation Department.⁵⁹

The guides are subdivided into sections with titles reminiscent of detective fiction, like 'The Clue of the Island Farm' or 'The Clue of the Blood-Stained Brook'. Maxwell's books encourage the reader-rambler to look beyond the surface appearance of the landscape, seeing in other words 'that which to the natural sense of the seer is invisible'. In Kent he invites us to trace out 'lost seas upon a region which now rejoices in league upon league of grass-land'.⁶⁰ In Surrey, as the title suggests, he points out clues to 'invisible roads'. Maxwell's aim was both to encourage his readers to appreciate the full significance of a landscape and to make a claim for the ability of artists to deduce things from a scene in a way comparable to archaeologists. In an earlier book, *History with a Sketch Book* (1926), Maxwell suggested that the artist 'can perhaps "read" a landscape prospect as the scholar can read a document. That ridge in the woods, crowned with a fringe of larches. Its slopes, I feel it as I draw, defy all the laws of probability in angle. Ah, it is a slag heap of the reign of good Queen Bess, for all its arcadian setting.'⁶¹

⁵⁸ Maxwell was a prolific illustrator and writer: for a full bibliography see M. Ffinch, *Donald Maxwell* (Mealbank, Kendal, 1995).

⁵⁹ *A Detective in Kent: Landscape Clues to the Discovery of Lost Seas* (London, 1929), 3.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* p. ix.

⁶¹ *History with a Sketch Book* (London, 1926), pp. vii–viii.

The resonance with Kipling is not coincidental. Maxwell and Kipling were related by marriage; Maxwell visited Bateman's in August 1926, and illustrated a number of Kipling's books, also producing a print and postcard of the hill that Kipling told him was 'Pook's Hill'; an image of the hill appeared in the *Church Times* on 2 October 1931.⁶² In *A Detective in Sussex*, Maxwell is clearly indebted to Kipling. An illustration, by the author, of Battle Abbey is accompanied by a verse of 'Puck's Song' which brings to the reader's attention the events that occurred there but which seem to have left no trace (Fig. 1.4). Maxwell also includes a map of the area, indicating with an 'S' the point from which he made his sketch of the abbey (Fig. 1.5). 'The "dread ditch" of Puck's song', he tells us, referring to the map, 'is the infant stream that flows on through the ponds at A and B, to join another branch at the front of Telham Hill.'⁶³ Evidently Maxwell has taken Kipling's archaeological image of Sussex literally, and has sought to give a precise location to Puck's poetry, turning a children's story into a cross between a puzzle-book and a gazetteer for holiday campers, rambles, and motorists.

Maxwell's work is a particularly apposite example of the archaeological imagination (as I have defined it) in action, since the incursions of modernity in the landscape, particularly in relation to road building and motoring, do not necessarily compromise his sensibility. He contributed a series of articles to *Popular Motoring* in the 1930s, including one entitled 'Kipling Country'.⁶⁴ A chapter of *History with a Sketch Book*, entitled 'The Renaissance of a Roman Road', describes the rebuilding of the 'old Watling Street between Dartford and Rochester' as a 'romance of modern engineering'.⁶⁵ The project, which involved cutting right through a hill and which resulted in a vastly broader road, was just the sort of thing that worried preservationists between the wars, as Maxwell realized. 'There are those, and some artists are among them, who can see romance and charm most readily in things that are old', he writes. 'In this new thing, however, they will find both old and new, for though the road itself is of to-day, the site and the associations of it stretch right back through our island story.'⁶⁶ Drawing parallels between the methods of Roman engineers and those of today, Maxwell insists that the road is 'in no wise, as many pessimists prophesied that it would be, an eyesore'.⁶⁷ An image of the new road serves as frontispiece to the book (Fig. 1.6); this, Maxwell tells us, is where the old road can be seen running beside the new.⁶⁸ By seeing this essentially modern road as the site of past passers-by—Regency coaches, medieval pilgrims, Roman soldiers—Maxwell exhibits an exemplary archaeological imagination. His illustrations stress the contemporaneity

⁶² D. Maxwell, 'Travels with a Sketchbook: XXII—The Lost Furnace', *Church Times*, 106/3584 (2 Oct. 1931), 376. See Ffinch, *Donald Maxwell*, 193, 200. Maxwell's illustrations accompany Kipling's *East of Suez* (London, 1931), *Songs of the Sea* (London, 1927), and *Sea and Sussex* (London, 1926).

⁶³ D. Maxwell, *A Detective in Sussex: Landscape Clues to the Riddles of the Past* (London, 1932), 31.

⁶⁴ *Popular Motoring* (Nov. 1935), cited in Ffinch, *Donald Maxwell*, 200.

⁶⁵ *History with a Sketch Book*, 45.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 54.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* 61.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* 58.

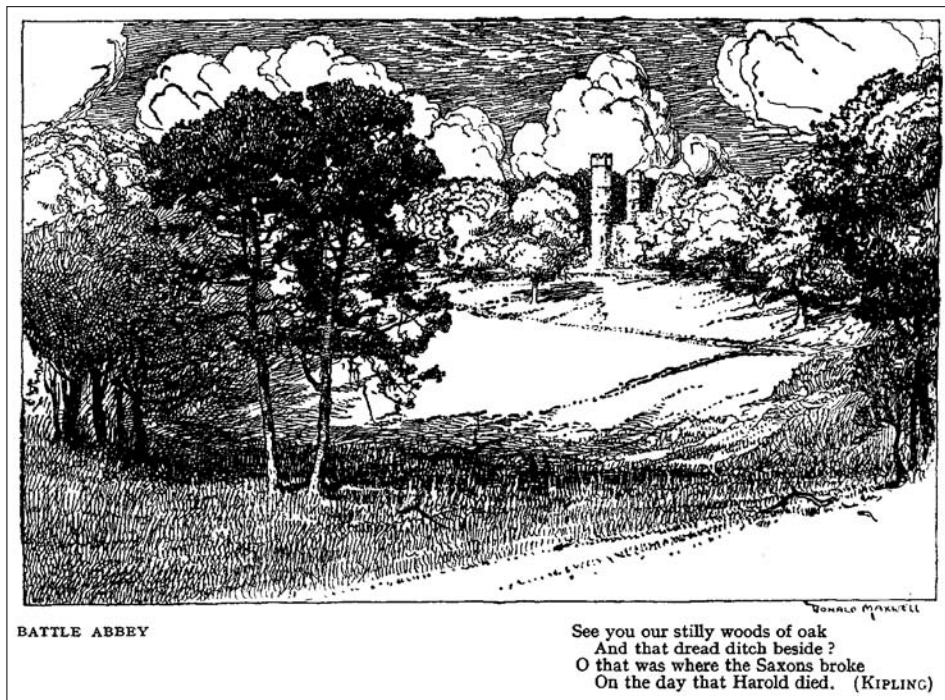
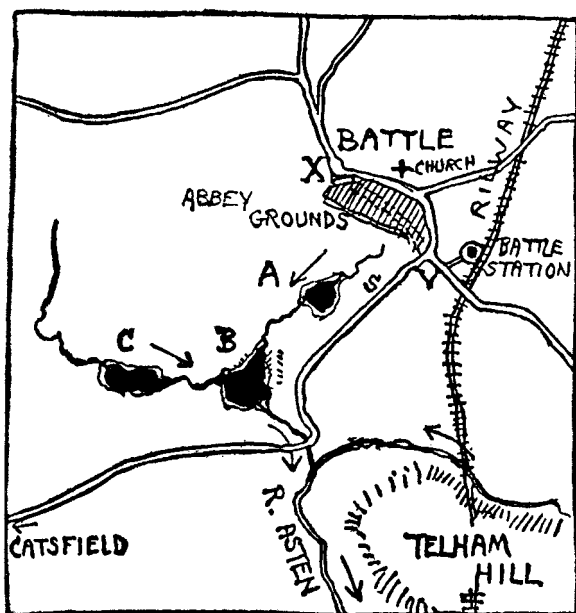


Fig. 1.4 (above). Donald Maxwell, 'Battle Abbey', from *A Detective in Sussex: Landscape Clues to the Riddles of the Past* (1932).

Fig. 1.5 (right). Donald Maxwell, map of Battle, from *A Detective in Sussex: Landscape Clues to the Riddles of the Past* (1932).



of the scene, through both their captions and their accompanying text; through these same captions and text the viewer is encouraged to 'see the invisible' in these contemporary landscapes. Contemporaneity is also indicated through the stress that is laid on *plein-air* sketching and on active deduction within the landscape. In at least two of his 'Detective' books, Maxwell includes images that depict the observing viewer (presumably a kind of self-portrait) in the landscape (Fig. 1.7).

What does, perhaps, compromise Maxwell's archaeological imagination, at least for modern readers, is the high praise he reserves for Alfred Watkins, whose 'discovery' of so-called 'ley lines' in the 1920s did much to engender popular interest in Britain's ancient past as manifested in the landscape.⁶⁹ Watkins claimed that there were curiously straight alignments of monuments and sacred spots criss-crossing the landscape of the British Isles. He had noticed these alignments, he said, by looking at an Ordnance Survey map, and he encouraged his readers to investigate their own localities, with the aid of a camera and marking posts. Watkins, as Maxwell points out, was himself something of a detective in the landscape, treading supposedly ancient pathways and looking out for signs of half-buried or overgrown markers along the way.⁷⁰ In so far as Watkins and his followers may have had a powerful awareness of the presence of a hidden past in the landscape, they had an archaeological vision of the landscape. Yet many of his followers have tended not to be particularly interested in the relative antiquity of the sites that punctuate ley lines, in their anxiety to prove that ley lines exist as uncannily straight alignments. Many 'ley-hunters' have also focused their attention on possible mystical meanings of such alignments. To the extent to which ley-hunting privileges the spatial over the temporal, and the mystical or the legendary over the material, it cannot be said to exemplify the archaeological imagination at work. For as I have pointed out above, while it may seem to collapse past into present, with little regard for chronology, the archaeological imagination is in fact predicated upon a historicist apprehension of the landscape.

W. G. Hoskins

The method employed by Maxwell was more widely promoted (without his passion for ley lines) some twenty-five years later with W. G. Hoskins's book *The Making of the English Landscape* (1955).⁷¹ Hoskins was a pioneer of what became known as 'history on the ground'—an approach which borrowed from archaeology an attention to the material evidence of the landscape. As a historiographical

⁶⁹ A. Watkins, *Early British Trackways, Moats, Mounds, Camps and Sites* (Hereford, 1922); *The Old Straight Track: Its Mounds, Beacons, Moats, Sites, and Mark Stones* (London, 1925); *The Ley Hunter's Manual: A Guide to Early Tracks* (Hereford, 1927). See D. Maxwell, *A Detective in Surrey: Landscape Clues to Invisible Roads* (London, 1932), p. vi. ⁷⁰ *A Detective in Surrey*, p. vi.

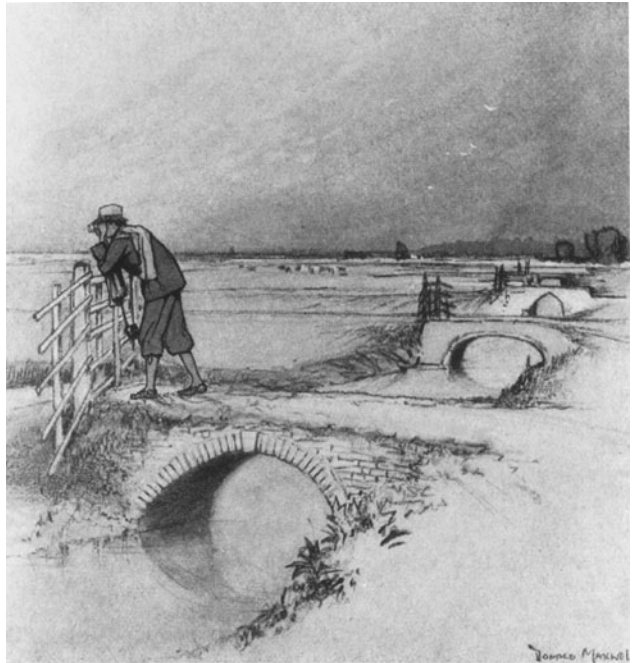
⁷¹ W. G. Hoskins, *The Making of the English Landscape* (London, 1955). This book had something of a renaissance in the 1970s, when it was made into a television series, and was reprinted many times. See D. W. Meinig, 'Reading the Landscape: An Appreciation of W. G. Hoskins and J. B. Jackson', in Meinig, ed., *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes*, 199–201.

Fig. 1.6. Donald Maxwell, frontispiece to *History with a Sketch Book* (1926).



THE KING'S HIGHWAY:
WATLING STREET NEAR DARTFORD

Fig. 1.7. Donald Maxwell, frontispiece to *A Detective in Kent: Landscape Clues to the Discovery of Lost Seas* (1929).



Donald Maxwell

method it was practical, involving a lot of walking; and very visual, involving a lot of looking; and making full use of photography (including aerial photography) as both research tool and illustration. Effectively this was field archaeology applied to the historical period. Together with Maurice Beresford, Hoskins established landscape as the basis for the study of local history, founding the first university department of English Local History in 1948 at Leicester University.

The fundamental premise of Hoskins's work was that the 'English landscape itself, to those who know how to read it aright, is the richest historical record we possess': 'One cannot understand the English landscape and enjoy it to the full . . . without going back to the history that lies behind it. A commonplace ditch may be the thousand-year-old boundary of a royal manor; a certain hedgebank may be even more ancient, the boundary of a Celtic estate; a certain deep and winding lane may be the work of twelfth-century peasants . . .'⁷² This was a historiography which, like the historical sciences described by Huxley, utilizes Zadig's forensic method of deduction from effects. It has a defamiliarizing effect on the English countryside as those familiar hedges, fields, and lanes are revealed to be the compound effect of historical processes, where the actions and traces of past inhabitants may still be discernible. Even apparently empty space contains clues for the local historian, perhaps the residue of a deserted medieval village—something which Beresford would make a speciality in books like *The Lost Villages of England* (1954).⁷³ History on the ground was a method of revelation: it could have been Sherlock Holmes speaking when in 1949 Hoskins wrote, 'there are depths beyond depths in the simplest scene'.⁷⁴

Hoskins's primary aims were, of course, radically different from Maxwell's. Hoskins was first and foremost a historian, whose diverse studies—as Meinig points out—went well beyond landscape analysis, and he was keen to stress that his interest in landscape was historical rather than aesthetic.⁷⁵ Yet when he compares the landscape to 'a symphony', describing *The Making of the English Landscape* as 'an attempt to study the development of the English landscape much as though it were a piece of music . . . in order that we may understand the logic that lies behind the beautiful whole', his project does not seem so distant from Maxwell's.⁷⁶ Most importantly, both relied on sight in their work, the almost Ruskinian activity of the attuned eye in the landscape. This is a crucial component of the archaeological imagination. As we have seen, Zadig developed 'an acuteness of perception which revealed to him a thousand differences where other men see

⁷² *The Making of the English Landscape*, 13–14.

⁷³ M. Beresford, *The Lost Villages of England* (London, 1954) and *Deserted Medieval Villages* (London, 1971).

⁷⁴ W. G. Hoskins, *Midland England: A Survey of the Country between the Chilterns and the Trent* (London, 1949), p. vi.

⁷⁵ Meinig, 'Reading the Landscape', 202–3. Hoskins's training was in economic history, and he was Reader in Economic History at Oxford University from 1951 to 1965 (*ibid.* 198).

⁷⁶ *The Making of the English Landscape*, 19.

only uniformity'; and Auden wrote that 'topophilia' required a 'strongly visual imagination'.⁷⁷ Archaeologists, too—especially field archaeologists—need to *see*. As David Wilson points out in *Atoms of Time Past*—a book which considers archaeology's relationship with science—throughout the history of archaeology, the archaeologist has relied on his eyes. He deals with what he can see; he digs where he can see a likely place or some tell-tale sign.⁷⁸

Hoskins's sensibility was, however, rather different from Maxwell's in its ostensible attitude to modernity. Hoskins painted a grim picture of contemporary industrial landscapes such as the Black Country, as Raphael Samuel points out, and he repeatedly expressed his horror of an 'England of the arterial by-pass, treeless and stinking of diesel oil, murderous with lorries'.⁷⁹ Meinig rightly suggests that Hoskins's 'antimodern' attitude constitutes a serious limitation to his work, as he refused to include twentieth-century developments in his account of the English landscape.⁸⁰ Yet while he recognized the destructive effects of industrialization on the 'historical record' of the landscape, Hoskins did not altogether offer a defeatist account where modernization had rendered salvage of the past impossible. Certainly, the final chapter of *The Making of the English Landscape* gloomily asserts that 'since the year 1914, every single change in the English landscape has either uglified it or destroyed its meaning, or both'.⁸¹ Yet the very possibility of the book's existence seems to contradict this, and the chapter ends with the assurance—comforting to those who, like Hoskins, regretted the effects of modernity—that 'most of England is a thousand years old, and in a walk of a few miles one would touch nearly every century in that long stretch of time'.⁸²

To be sure, Hoskins was neither the first nor the only serious historian to see the landscape as a primary historical source. When Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch founded the journal *Annales* in France in 1929 it was to promote an approach to history that sought (inter alia) to explore the historical interaction of society and its environment, restoring geography and geology to historical research. The so-called '*Annales* school' would later come to include Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie and Fernand Braudel, who wrote in his groundbreaking 1949 study of the Mediterranean that this sea 'itself, the one we see and love, is the greatest document of its past existence'.⁸³ The difference between these historians and Hoskins lies in their main object of study. Hoskins sought—in *The Making of the English Landscape*, at least—to unravel the history of a landscape, whereas for the *Annales* school the landscape was one resource among many in the understanding of a past society which was its main concern. Both camps have served to legitimate

⁷⁷ Voltaire, 'Zadig', 130–1; Betjeman, *Slick but not Streamlined*, 14.

⁷⁸ D. Wilson, *Atoms of Time Past* (London, 1975), 188.

⁷⁹ Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, 156–7; Hoskins, *The Making of the English Landscape*, 232.

⁸⁰ 'Reading the Landscape', 206–7.

⁸¹ *The Making of the English Landscape*, 231.

⁸² *Ibid.* 235.

⁸³ F. Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, i (London, 1972), 17.

landscape as both document and object of study. Simon Schama was clearly working in a tradition influenced by both the *Annales* historians and Hoskins when he wrote *Landscape and Memory* (1995)—but interestingly enough the book which formed his own archaeological imagination was Kipling's *Puck of Pook's Hill*, his 'favorite story' as a child.⁸⁴

The sensibility that this book seeks to explore is one which sees, as Kipling, Hoskins, and Maxwell did, the British landscape as the site of history, and as the index of deep time. Seeing the landscape archaeologically means seeing objects, appearances, and surfaces as the clues and residues of past processes and events: it means seeing in the mind's eye what is in fact invisible—the passage of time. Such a sensibility, as we have seen, will have different meanings in different contexts. In the mid nineteenth century, for Dyce or Tennyson, it was a melancholy reminder of the paltriness of human history in the face of deep time. For Kipling, writing at the turn of the century, it could function as a reassurance of the continuation of 'country stock' at home in the face of imperial emasculation abroad. In Maxwell's books of the 1920s and 1930s, it echoed and reinforced the idea of the tourist as the discoverer of 'old England', an image promoted by tourist guides and advertising aimed at motorists. For Schama, writing in the 1990s, the archaeological imagination as demonstrated by Kipling offered a way of reinstating storytelling at the heart of historical writing.⁸⁵

For much of the twentieth century, the archaeological imagination was above all a corrective to the amnesia of a modern, predominantly urban civilization.⁸⁶ It was reassuring as well as intriguing to find that if you scratched the surface of modern life, an older reality might appear. This was the case when, as Raphael Samuel describes it, 'local historians, conjuring villages out of suburbs, rediscover[ed] the fields beneath the streets',⁸⁷ or when, in 1954, the remains of a Mithraic temple were excavated on a bomb site in the City of London, and office workers queued up after work to view it (see Chapter 5). The archaeological imagination looks through the surfaces of modernity, the illusory *tabula rasa* of modernism, to see, with Hoskins, that 'everything is older than we think'.⁸⁸

In the time span covered by this book, the archaeological imagination tends to be a redemptive as well as a counter-modernist sensibility, in a period dominated by the memory of one world war and the experience of another. The archaeological imagination comfortingly saw the past as essentially ineradicable, despite the

⁸⁴ *Landscape and Memory*, 3.

⁸⁵ See Schama's experiment in historical storytelling, *Dead Certainties* (London, 1991).

⁸⁶ Lack of space has meant that I have not included here more recent literary examples of the archaeological imagination at work, perhaps the most obvious of which is the poetry of Seamus Heaney, but which also include the writings of Peter Ackroyd and W. G. Sebald. Patrick Keiller's films *Robinson in Space* (1997) and *London* (1994) can be seen as filmic manifestations of the archaeological imagination.

⁸⁷ *Theatres of Memory*, 159.

⁸⁸ 'Introduction' [1976], in *The Making of the English Landscape* (Harmondsworth, 1985), 11.

destructive and alienating effects of modernity, and of war. The past was not gone altogether, then; death, too, could surely not be final. The survival of the past in the landscape could function as a powerful metaphor for other kinds of survival—the of the nation, in particular; but also the survival of memory, the self, and the soul.

The archaeological imagination is primarily, then, a way of seeing; but like other ways of seeing it has its cultural manifestations, posing particular problems of representation, some of which have already been considered. What is more important than explicit subject-matter, form, or medium is the imaginative role of the individual who reads back, imagines, or infers from what is given (the current landscape) to reconstruct the absent past. This individual may be the artist, writer, or photographer, or it may be the reader or viewer; sometimes it is both. As Donald Mackenzie writes, the archaeological imagination forces us to read, to re-create; Puck's song is expressed in the imperative, and similarly Maxwell and Hoskins were attempting to get their readers imaginatively to re-create the past as they actively explored the landscape. The images in which I am primarily interested are those which, seen in particular contexts, put the viewer in the role of Zadig, or Sherlock Holmes, in relation to the landscape. How this may be done through photography is considered in the following chapter.

Finally, the archaeological imagination perceives, or thinks that it perceives, a history outside discourse. For those who see archaeologically, the landscape is a document more truthful than any textual source—if we can read it correctly. In its purest form, the archaeological imagination is convinced that everything which has happened has left its traces on this vast stage, and therefore, if we can only find the key to this cipher, all of history is knowable. Something of this sense is conveyed by W. G. Hoskins, who recalled the beginnings of his understanding of the historical nature of the landscape while on childhood holidays in Devon. 'Even then', he wrote, 'I felt that everything I was looking at was saying something to me if only I could recognize the language. It was a landscape written in a kind of code.'⁸⁹ In stark opposition to the postmodern idea that history is textually constructed, for the archaeological imagination history is out there, patiently awaiting detection, deciphering, the application of new tools. And thus a dream of total historical knowledge—the infinite knowledge of Puck—hovers over this sensibility. This is the vision described by an exhilarated Huxley as he imagines a time when the whole 'scheme of life from its beginning' can be reconstructed using 'Zadig's method'.⁹⁰ Ultimately the archaeological imagination longs for wholeness, an end to fragmentation—the redemption of the past in all of its details and all of its sensuous fullness.

⁸⁹ Hoskins, *English Landscapes* (London, 1973), 5.

⁹⁰ 'On the Method of Zadig', 23.

2

Tracing the Trace: Photography, the Index, and the Limits of Representation

I'm listening to a hat.
What a fool . . .

'Put me on'
it's whispering,
'and I will tell you every-
thing you've ever
forgotten, every
coin down every
crease in the upholstery
of every car;
where the rings fell to
that you threw
in the river, what
creature swallowed them;
I will tell you
what she thought
the last time.' . . .

I'm listening to a hat.

'I will tell you what
your mother hoped for
in that photo,
leaning against
the shack marked "Cola" . . .'

The memory hat talks on
a tight beret of felt
and partridge feathers;
it claims only I
can hear it.
It threatens to reveal
everyone's secrets,
the shames of ancestors,
the locations

of rotted treasures,
books worth lives.

Only a fool
would listen to a hat.

W. N. Herbert, 'The Memory Hat'

The ashes of an oak in the chimney, are no epitaph of that oak, to tell me how high or how large that was; It tells me not what flocks it sheltered while it stood, nor what men it hurt when it fell.

John Donne, sermon preached at Whitehall, 8 March 1622

Photography, as is well known, is the image-making technology which specializes in the freezing of time.¹ What kind of historiography, then, might photography be said to embody? How can photography, with its ineluctable connection to the present moment, hope to say anything at all about the past—about either the broad processes of history or even the events of the hours and minutes immediately preceding the second in which the photograph is taken? What kinds of *knowledge* of the past does photography allow, and what does it disallow? How can photography, that most superficial of media, hope to become a vehicle for the archaeological imagination, with its love of immanent depths?

If photographic technology is uniquely equipped to record (visually) the present moment, it is also characterized—famously—by its thorough and indiscriminate recording of surface detail. What it lacks in temporal depth it makes up for in this meticulous rendering of appearances; any surface marked by the effects of action or time can be faithfully recorded by this technology which itself produces the marked surfaces of photographic plate, film, or print. History and the passing of time is available to photography only in the form of its traces, the more-or-less legible marks and remnants it has left behind at any one moment in the world. And it is precisely photography's own nature as a chemical trace (until digitization, at least) that enables it accurately to reproduce these marks and signs of history.

As discussed in Chapter 1, since the nineteenth century (at least) historical sciences such as palaeontology, geology, and archaeology have based themselves upon the reading of such signs of the past in the present, and this broad epistemological model could be extended to include military reconnaissance, forensic science, and art connoisseurship. Photography, fixing these signs in an image, has had—unsurprisingly, perhaps—an important part to play in the historical development of these disciplines. Photography meets the archaeological imagination

¹ My discussion of photography is based on the instantaneous image, and therefore does not include such phenomena as long-exposure photography. It also is concerned only with pre-digital photographic technology, since most of the photographs I discuss were all taken long before the advent of digitization.

as soon as photographic images are scanned for historical information in these disciplines and practices. In a sense, however, photography cannot help but represent the world archaeologically, since it cannot help but record its objects and landscapes in a temporal context, the traces of the past scattered across their surfaces. Ruskin enthused over this quality of the new medium. Writing from Venice to his father in 1845, he described some daguerreotypes of his beloved decaying palaces: 'It is very nearly the same thing as carrying off the palace itself; every chip of stone and stain is there.'² This quality is not only present in photographs of ancient buildings: it is surely there in most photographs, if it were only possible to diagnose the often illegible marks and stains of history for what they are, and what they represent.

While this book is about photography, it is also more broadly about traces and the interpretation of traces in specific historical contexts. Photography, itself a trace, shares many of the qualities of that kind of sign, a fact of some importance when it comes to analysing the significance of photographs *of* traces. Before considering photography per se, then, it will be necessary to be a bit more precise about the trace, about what kind of a sign it is, what kind of knowledge it affords, and what kind of imaginative thought it invites.

TRACES AND THE STORIES THEY TELL

Trace *pl.* Vestiges or marks remaining and indicating the former presence, existence, or action of something; *sing.* A vestige, an indication.

OED

Footprints, fingerprints, bloodstains, scuffs, scratches, scars, and grease-spots are all traces; so, too, are photographs. A trace is a mark of something or someone, the residue of an occurrence or an existence.³ It may or may not itself include the physical residue of an object or an action. One class of traces is the imprint of something on a surface (a footprint in cement, for example), in which nothing of the object that made the imprint remains, merely a reproduction—in negative—of its contours. Related to this class, some traces may be not so much the negative imprints of an object, but the superficial material transformations wrought by contact with an object or process: wrinkled fingertips from lengthy soaking in a bath, for example. Another kind of trace is that which itself *is* (or includes) a part of the person, thing, or occurrence to which it—in a sense—testifies: for example a bloodstain. Vestigial remains, such as the subterranean foundation stone of

² *The Works of John Ruskin* (London, 1909), ed. E. T. Cook and A. Wedderburn, iii, 210 n. 2.

³ See C. Merewether, 'A Lasting Impression', in A. Bond, ed., *Trace* (Liverpool, 1999), 164.

a long-demolished Norman church, also count as this kind of trace—to draw on an archaeological example.

Traces, being deposited by human beings (both by accident and by design), animals, and the more-or-less random actions of natural processes such as the weather, need not be purposefully fabricated signs, and in fact most are not. A dog running across a sandy beach obviously does not mean to leave a mark of the path he has taken; he cannot help but do so. Similarly without purpose is the line of seaweed and other detritus denoting the high tide mark on the same beach. Scars on the body willy-nilly testify to the wound or accident that caused them. Some traces are intentionally constructed as signs, however: the inked fingerprint taken from the criminal suspect's hand, the scar resulting from deliberate branding or tattooing of the skin, the traces of ink that constitute the handwriting in a letter, and—as we shall see—most photographs.⁴

Meditation on traces shows them to proliferate until it seems as though the whole world is covered in them: constituted, even, by them. All writing and drawing is a trace (of pencil lead or ink, and of the gestural movements of the inscriber's hand); everything that has ever been touched is covered with (invisible) traces of fingers and hands; the worn-down steps of a house are the result of the traces of thousands of footsteps passing over the threshold; fossils are traces of ancient life forms, and so on, ad infinitum. For Walter Benjamin, 'living means leaving traces'.⁵ Most of these traces, to be sure, are never seen or never perceived. Most are never called upon to operate as signs—until a crime is investigated, for example, and an ink-blot becomes a vital clue to a criminal act, or a fossilized cranium comes to function as the crucial 'missing link' in an evolutionary narrative.⁶

In order to operate as a sign, the trace must be visible. But traces themselves need not be visible—at least not to the naked eye. Indeed, it is the task of archaeologists and forensic scientists to *make* traces visible, using whatever technological aids lie at their disposal, from microscopes and chemical processes to X-ray, thermoluminescence, and remote sensing devices.⁷ The detective's dusting powder transforms the invisible trace of the criminal's hand on a window ledge into the visible sign of a fingerprint. The pathologist's microscope makes visible the tiniest microbes in the blood of a patient. Sometimes it is other factors that inadvertently render visible previously invisible traces. In aerial archaeology, for example, the effect of drought on crops may reveal the hitherto-unsuspected existence of an archaeological site (see Chapter 4). Once revealed in these—and other—ways, traces can function as *signs* (of the guilt of a criminal, the infection of a patient, or the historical existence of a Roman villa in a field) which can then be interrogated for their full implications.

⁴ Some photographs are, of course, taken accidentally, as every amateur photographer knows.

⁵ Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* (London, 1989), 169.

⁶ As was the case, for example, with the infamous 'Piltown man' hoax.

⁷ See David Wilson, *Atoms of Time Past* (London, 1975), 188–212.

Peirce and the Index

Insofar as it operates as a sign, the trace corresponds to the philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce's concept of the 'index'. Peirce divided signs into three types, each based on the relationship it has to the object it represents. This 'trichotomy' of signs he named the icon, the symbol, and the index. Briefly, the icon is a sign which resembles its object; the symbol is a sign which stands for its object in a way governed by convention or habit; and the index is a sign 'which refers to the Object that it denotes by virtue of being really affected by that Object'.⁸ In practice most signs fall under more than one of these categories: a map, for example, is both icon and symbol. Peirce himself doubted the existence of 'an absolutely pure index', since most indexical signs in practice also include an iconic or symbolic component.⁹ The semiotician Thomas Sebeok usefully suggests that it is not so much signs as *aspects* of signs that can be classified as icon, index, or symbol.¹⁰

Peirce was himself notably contradictory in defining the index, a task he left unfinished.¹¹ An index, he wrote, 'is a sign which would, at once, lose the character which makes it a sign if its object were removed'.¹² Sign and object need not, however, exist at the same time. A flash of lightning is the instantaneous index of a storm without which it would not exist; a bullet-hole is the sign of a shot without which, although past, the hole would not exist.¹³ These are indices of the most material kind. At other times, Peirce expanded his notion of the index to include an extraordinarily broad range of things: it could be a knock at the door, a pointing finger, adverbs and demonstrative pronouns, all things which—as Douglas Greenlee notes—owe their denotative function to conventional usage rather than simple contiguity.¹⁴ In perhaps his most comprehensive definition of the term, however, Peirce wrote that 'an index represents an object by virtue of its connection with it. It makes no difference whether the connection is natural, or artificial, or merely mental.'¹⁵

Traces, Induction, and Storytelling

A trace, then, is a kind of index: for my purposes it can be seen as a material index which has a natural connection to its object, but which outlasts its immediate object, as a footprint remains after a man walks by. The trace is the more-or-less visible *effect* (in the present) of a more-or-less deducible *cause* (in the past). 'Inverting causality', as Sebeok puts it, the trace indicates that *something has*

⁸ Peirce, quoted in Thomas Sebeok, 'Indexicality', *American Journal of Semiotics*, 7/4 (1990), 11.

⁹ *Ibid.* 13. ¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Douglas Greenlee suspects 'that the bulk of Peirce's work on signs was tentative and experimental' (*Peirce's Concept of Sign* (The Hague, 1973), 5).

¹³ See Sebeok, 'Indexicality', 11.

¹⁴ *Peirce's Concept of Sign*, 85.

¹⁵ Quoted *ibid.* 86.

¹² Quoted *ibid.* 85.

happened here.¹⁶ It points backwards in time, indicating a temporal event (or series of events) which the interpretant may be able to reconstruct in order to account for the visible appearance of the residue it has left behind. This visible appearance of the trace may be the cumulative result of the normal passage of time (a wrinkled face, for example, may be the index of a long and eventful life) or a violent and singular event (a bloodstain marking the site of a murder). Either way, the trace is effectively the end point of some kind of a story.

Peirce associated the indexical sign with induction—we can draw information from it, deducing causes from their visible effects. He called this particular kind of interpretative process ‘abduction’ or ‘retroduction’, while Sherlock Holmes called it ‘reasoning backward’.¹⁷ Thus, as Peirce notes, when Robinson Crusoe discovers a single footprint in the sand (a classic example of the indexical sign at work), he supposes (effectively by reasoning backwards) that there must be another human presence on his island who has made this print.¹⁸ The trace asks its interpretant a question: *what happened here?* Following the discovery of the footprint, Crusoe is obsessed by the identity of its maker, and he postulates a whole series of plausible narratives to explain its appearance, none of which quite fits.

Since the trace evidently marks a point at which a narrative coagulates and calls its own witness, traces and storytelling are intimately linked, as Carlo Ginzburg suggests in relation to the stories told by primitive hunters (see Chapter 1). A scar on the body, for example, is the visible mark left behind by an accident, an operation, or an incision, which in each case will be different. A scar is both the end point of a real story and the starting point for innumerable retellings of how it came to be there. Every trace implies a prior event, or sequence of events which needs to be reconstructed in order that the trace makes sense as a sign. If every trace implies a story, however, the extent to which that story is *knowable* in all of its details is another question.

Traces and Knowledge

We have already seen, in Chapter 1, how deduction, or retroduction from traces in the manner of Zedig and Sherlock Holmes formed the basis of an epistemological paradigm for a whole family of emergent disciplines in the nineteenth century. Telling (hi)stories from traces became the working method of palaeontology, forensic science, psychoanalysis, and archaeology, as it had been the method of primitive hunters and trackers. But what traces can tell us *in themselves* is surely severely limited. Knowledge and experience are needed to interpret them or else they remain abstract, mute, obstinately refusing to give up the explanation of how they came to be.

¹⁶ Sebeok, ‘Indexicality’, 16.

¹⁷ Umberto Eco and Thomas Sebeok, eds., *The Sign of Three: Dupin, Holmes, Peirce* (Bloomington, 1983), 39.

¹⁸ Sebeok notes that Crusoe’s reasoning is an example of the operation described by Roman Jakobson as *renvoi* or ‘referral’ (Sebeok, ‘Indexicality’, 16).

It is prior knowledge and existing skills that convert traces into intelligible signs, then. This is true even in everyday encounters when interpretation is simply a matter of ‘common sense’: we can identify fingerprints, ink-spots, or bloodstains because we know what a fingerprint looks like, how an ink-spot is made, or how blood dries on a handkerchief. Within particular occupational or disciplinary contexts, however, individuals may possess specialist skills for interpreting traces, skills which derive from prior experience and knowledge. If the tracker can identify the marks of a fox in the snow it is because he knows what a fox-print looks like, and how it differs from, say, the print of a dog’s paw. Similarly it was Sherlock Holmes’s prior knowledge and experience that enabled him to see things in rooms, objects, and people which to other eyes were invisible. If, by looking at mud-stains on her jacket, Holmes could tell that the woman in ‘The Adventure of the Speckled Band’ had recently travelled by dog cart, it was because he knew *from experience* both the way in which dog carts throw up mud and the appearance of fresh mud-stains which had not yet quite dried out (see Chapter 1). Similarly, he was able to identify the criminal in ‘A Study in Scarlet’ as a smoker of Trichinopoly cigars only because he had ‘made a special study of cigar ashes—in fact I have written a monograph upon the subject. I flatter myself that I can distinguish at a glance the ash of any known brand either of cigar or of tobacco.’¹⁹

For Holmes every object is a story in disguise, and every appearance is deceptive. What Conan Doyle’s tales seem to suggest is that while to most viewers the trace may withhold its true or full significance, once identified it promises that if you only read it in the right way, if you only ask of it the right questions, it—Sphinx-like—will tell you everything. This is the ‘fantasy of referentiality’ discussed by Georges Didi-Huberman in relation to the many investigations into the Turin Shroud.²⁰ ‘From a simple stained sheet’, he writes, ‘the entire story of the gospel will be told, and what the gospels don’t tell as well: the saliva of the last utterance, the shackle on the left foot of Christ on the Way of the Cross, its precise appearance’, and perhaps even ‘the very rhythm of Christ’s mortal expiration.’²¹

We have already seen (in Chapter 1) how closely related retroduction and divination are, and in the Sherlock Holmes stories Conan Doyle treads the blurred line between them. In ‘The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle’, for example, Holmes presents Watson with a clue, ‘a very seedy and disreputable hard felt hat’, and asks him what he can gather from it:

‘I can see nothing’, said I, handing it back to my friend.

‘On the contrary, Watson, you can see everything. You fail, however, to reason what you see. You are too timid in drawing your inferences.’²²

¹⁹ A. Conan Doyle, ‘A Study in Scarlet’, in *The Original Illustrated ‘Strand’ Sherlock Holmes* (Ware, Herts., 1989), 24. This demonstrates Huxley’s point—following *Zadig*—that ‘like effects imply like causes’ (‘On the Method of *Zadig*’ [1880], *Collected Essays*, iv (New York, 1968), 13; see Chapter 1).

²⁰ G. Didi-Huberman, ‘The Index of the Absent Wound (Monograph on a Stain)’, in A. Michelson, R. Krauss, D. Crimp, and J. Copjec, eds., *October: The First Decade, 1976–1986* (Cambridge, Mass., 1987), 50.

²¹ *Ibid.* 52–3.

²² Conan Doyle, *The Original Illustrated ‘Strand’ Sherlock Holmes*, 201.

The trace teases us with the possibility that if we could only look at it in the right way, with the right skills and information at our disposal, we could solve the puzzles of time. This, apparently, was the exhilarating prospect of scientific discovery which Huxley foresaw in the story of *Zadig* (see Chapter 1). Huxley's confidence recalls Freud's faith in the availability of psychic material to the psychoanalyst. Freud was convinced that 'in mental life nothing which has once been formed can perish—that everything is somehow preserved and that in suitable circumstances (when, for example, regression goes back far enough) it can once more be brought to light.'²³ Psychoanalysis is predicated upon the conviction that if apparently insignificant fragments of consciousness (a dream, a joke, a slip of the tongue) are interpreted in the right way, if the right questions are asked by a trained individual, then whole vistas of hitherto-repressed memory will open up and the patient will be cured. Within their own field, archaeologists and local historians have shared this ideal. Writing about 'History in the Open Air' in 1934, H. J. Randall described how English history is written upon the map 'in letters of earth and stone, of bank and ditch, of foliage and crop'. This writing 'needs patience to discover, knowledge to decipher, insight, sometimes amounting to genius, to interpret. But the writing is there, all else awaits the competence of the reader.'²⁴

The trace brings with it the promise of knowledge, then, waiting only for what Randall calls the 'competence of the reader' to uncover the secrets it conceals behind its impassive face. Unusually competent readers of traces play the most prominent roles in nineteenth-century detective fiction. By inventing detectives with preternaturally well-developed skills of perception and analysis, Conan Doyle and Edgar Allan Poe suggest that there may be no limits to the knowledge yielded by appearances. This is the implication of the opening quotation, by Sir Thomas Browne, in Poe's detective story 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue': 'What song the Syrens sang, or what name Achilles assumed when he hid himself among women, although puzzling questions, are not beyond *all* conjecture.'²⁵ The historiographical implication of this is a fantastic kind of epistemological plenitude, as if everything is knowable: every event, every conversation, every secret is available, if we could only find the right trace and read it right, if we could only find the key to this cipher—and this is a possibility that haunts many individuals referred to in the chapters of this book. What hovers before us is the heavy intimation that there are no limits to historical knowledge, however much

²³ *Civilization and its Discontents*, in *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. J. Strachey, xxi (London, 1955), 68.

²⁴ H. J. Randall, 'History in the Open Air', *Antiquity*, 8/29 (Mar. 1934), 5.

²⁵ E. A. Poe, *The Fall of the House of Usher and Other Writings* (London, 1987), 189. Interestingly enough, the quotation comes from Browne's *Urne Buriall*, first published in 1658, which was a kind of antiquarian musing on time, death, and knowledge, inspired by the excavation of some urns in Norfolk (see Chapter 3). Claire Preston notes that these were the questions 'put by the emperor Tiberius to test the grammarians' (*Sir Thomas Browne: Selected Writings*, ed. C. Preston (Manchester, 1995), 105).

that ideal is thwarted in practice by the limits of human powers of perception and deduction, faced with the intransigent reality of the mute trace.

PHOTOGRAPHY AND THE TRACE

This curious quality of the trace and the promises it seems to make, as well as the crucial importance of prior knowledge for the purposes of interpretation, are things to which I will return in the next section of this chapter, when I consider photographs *of* traces, and of the sites of history. First—in a bibliographical prelude—I should consider photography's right itself to be considered as a trace, an idea upon which my argument depends, and which has been an increasingly influential—but not uncontested—strand of photographic theory over the last twenty-five years or so.

The photograph's status as trace rests upon the fundamental means by which it is made—the very origins of its existence.²⁶ A photograph is the result of light rays falling on a chemically sensitized film, causing an irreversible reaction to take place on the film's surface. In this way a negative image is produced on the film, which can later be reproduced as a positive image on photographic paper. In perhaps the most primitive yet arguably most essential form of photography, the photogram (or 'photogenic drawing'), an image is made by the direct action of light on a sensitized sheet of paper upon which some object has been placed—a piece of lace, for example, was used in one of Fox Talbot's early experiments (Fig. 2.1). Early exponents of photography imagined the world to inscribe itself upon the surface of the photographic image—hence Fox Talbot's appellation of the new technology as 'the Pencil of Nature'.²⁷

Taking up this theme in 1977, Susan Sontag wrote that 'a photograph is not only an image . . . , an interpretation of the real; it is also a trace, something directly stenciled off the real, like a footprint or a death mask'.²⁸ Like a footprint, too, the photograph continues to exist after what it represents has passed by—in this case, the moment in which the photograph was taken. In this respect, then, the photograph corresponds to my earlier definition of the trace. The fact that most photographs are intentionally constructed as signs does not detract from their identity as traces, just as the intentional nature of the fingerprint taken from a criminal suspect does not detract from its identity as a trace.

²⁶ Whether we can speak of such an 'essence' of photography after the advent of digitization is much discussed by photographic theorists: see, for example, W. J. Mitchell, *The Reconfigured Eye: Visual Truth in the Post-Photographic Era* (Cambridge, Mass., 1994).

²⁷ W. H. Fox Talbot, *The Pencil of Nature* (London, 1844). In the words of L. J. M. Daguerre, 'the DAGUERROTYPE is not merely an instrument which serves to draw Nature; on the contrary it is a chemical and physical process which gives her the power to reproduce herself' ('Daguerreotype', in A. Trachtenberg, ed., *Classic Essays on Photography* (New Haven, 1980), 13; author's emphasis).

²⁸ S. Sontag, *On Photography* (London, 1987), 154.

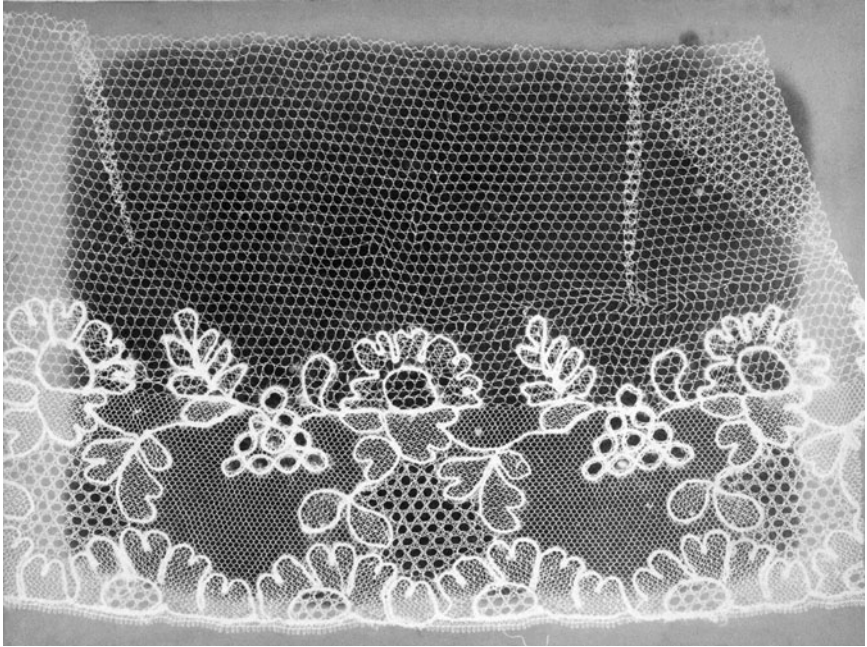


Fig. 2.1. William Henry Fox Talbot, *Lace* (1844), photogenic drawing.

Photography's Essence: Phenomenology, Semiology, and Thanatography

To see photography in this way is to attempt to see it ontologically, to ask the somewhat vexed question of what photography, all photography, *is*. This has been a powerful strand in writing on photography, most prominently in the work of Roland Barthes, Rosalind Krauss, Philippe Dubois, Susan Sontag, and Hubert Damisch, drawing on the earlier work of André Bazin and the writings of the first photographic experimenters. Of all of these, Barthes has perhaps been the most influential. Summarizing his aims in writing *Camera Lucida* (1980), Barthes explains that he ‘was overcome by an “ontological” desire: I wanted to learn at all costs what photography was “in itself”, by what essential feature it was to be distinguished from the community of images’.²⁹ Photography, he notes, distinguishes itself by the close relationship between signifier and referent (as a result of the conditions of photographic production). The conclusion he comes to is that ‘the very essence, the *noeme* of Photography’ is ‘That-has-been’—the result of the particular way in which the image is made.³⁰

²⁹ R. Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (London, 1984), 3. This was a project begun some years earlier, in ‘The Photographic Message’ [1961], in *Image Music Text* (London, 1977), 15–31.

³⁰ *Camera Lucida*, 76–7.

Barthes wrote *Camera Lucida* in homage to Jean-Paul Sartre's *L'Imaginaire*, and indeed much of the work done on the essence of photography—unsurprisingly, perhaps—comes out of phenomenology, a philosophical movement with which Sartre was associated. 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image' by the phenomenologist André Bazin appeared in 1945 (in 1967 in English translation), and in 1963 Hubert Damisch wrote 'Five Notes for a Phenomenology of the Photographic Image'.³¹ While he recognized the difficulty of reflecting phenomenologically on a cultural object, Damisch, like Barthes, sought to strip photography down to its essentials, noting that the photographic image

is characterized by the way in which it presents itself as the result of an objective process. Imprinted by rays of light on a plate or sensitive film, these figures . . . must appear as the very *trace* of an object or a scene from the real world, the image of which inscribes itself, without direct human intervention, in the gelatinous substance covering the support. Here is the source of the supposition of 'reality', which defines the photographic situation.³²

The 'ontological' approach to photography harks back to the writings of the earliest photographic inventors, back to a time when photography was an embryonic image-making technology whose functions had not yet been delimited, when 'art photography' had not yet been bracketed off from photography's other functions, and well before the construction of a modernist 'history of photography' and the establishment of a canon. Faced with this image-making technology, writers such as Barthes, Rosalind Krauss, and Christian Metz (many of them associated with *October*, a journal concerned with visual studies, semiotics, and psychoanalysis) brought with them insights gleaned from the discipline of semiology, and asked: what kind of a *sign* is the photograph?³³

Drawing on Peirce's work, these writers concluded that the relationship between the photograph and its object (the referent) is indexical, since the image is the chemically induced trace of that object.³⁴ 'Every photograph', wrote Krauss in 1976, 'is the result of a physical imprint transferred by light reflections onto a sensitive surface. The photograph is thus a type of icon, or visual likeness, which bears an indexical relationship to its object.'³⁵ While the photograph itself can operate as icon, symbol, and index, Peirce himself thought photographic *production* to be an indexical affair: he wrote that photographs 'belong to the second class

³¹ A. Bazin, 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image', in *What is Cinema?*, i (Berkeley, 1967), repr. in Trachtenberg, ed., *Classic Essays*, 237–44; H. Damisch, 'Five Notes for a Phenomenology of the Photographic Image', *October*, 5: 'Photography: A Special Issue' (Summer 1978), repr. in Trachtenberg, ed., *Classic Essays*, 287–90.

³² 'Five Notes', 288 (author's emphasis).

³³ *October* published a special issue in Summer 1978 devoted to photography.

³⁴ For an overview of photography's status as index, see P. Dubois, *L'Acte photographique* (Brussels, 1983).

³⁵ R. Krauss, 'Notes on the Index, Part 1', in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Mass., 1986), 203. See also R. Krauss, 'Tracing Nadar', *October*, 5 (Summer 1978), 29–47, where she calls for an ontology of photography.

of signs, those by physical connection'.³⁶ A photograph usually looks like the thing it represents, and so it can be seen as an iconic image produced indexically, a kind of sign dubbed a 'hard icon' by Tomás Maldonado.³⁷ Photographs therefore have something in common with so-called 'true images' such as Veronica's veil, with which Christ supposedly wiped his sweating and bleeding face, producing a portrait which was his only 'true' likeness.³⁸ Photographs seem to belong to that class of images 'not made by the hand of man' (*acheiropoietos*), as Barthes points out in *Camera Lucida*.³⁹ The relationship is even closer in the case of those 'hard icons' made by the action of light, such as those images that appeared in the wake of the nuclear blast at Hiroshima (or perhaps the Turin Shroud), since it is similarly the action of light that causes the photographic image to appear.⁴⁰

Photography's affinity with the 'true image' is pointed out by André Bazin. As a Roman Catholic as well as a phenomenologist, Bazin took a view of the photograph that stresses its quality as relic, arguing that it answers the same ancient need to defend life against the reality of death that was also responsible for Egyptian mummies and the invention of embalming.⁴¹ Curiously, both the phenomenological and the semiological approach to photography invariably end with stressing its affinity with the relic, the 'true image', and with mortality and death, as if this is the inevitable end point of a discussion of photography's 'essence'. Philippe Dubois speaks of photography as 'thanatology'; Christian Metz links photography with death; Barthes asserts that 'the return of the dead' is 'there in every photograph'; and according to Sontag, 'all photographs are *memento mori*'.⁴²

The logic behind this move from photograph to mortality derives from photography's relationship to time—a relationship which, in a sense, defines the medium. As soon as a photograph has been taken of a person, according to Metz, 'strictly speaking, the person *who has been photographed*—not the total person, who is an effect of time—is dead'.⁴³ If this is accepted, it can be argued that what

³⁶ Quoted in Sebeok, 'Indexicality', 21. See Dubois, *L'Acte photographique* for Peirce's references to photography. Many contemporary writers refer to secondary literature on the index and photography, rather than returning to Peirce, whose views on the index—as I have attempted to show—were rather more ambiguous and underdetermined.

³⁷ Maldonado gives the name 'hard icons' to those icons 'whose cognitive consistency is guaranteed by an indexical import' ('Does the Icon have a Cognitive Value?', in S. Chatman, U. Eco, and J.-M. Klinkenberg, eds., *A Semiotic Landscape* (The Hague, 1979), 774).

³⁸ The term 'true image' usually refers to miraculously produced images of Christ. For a fascinating discussion of Veronica's veil, see E. Kuryluk, *Veronica and her Cloth: History, Symbolism, and Structure of a 'True' Image* (Oxford, 1991). ³⁹ *Camera Lucida*, 82.

⁴⁰ See I. Wilson, *The Turin Shroud* (London, 1978).

⁴¹ 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image'. Bazin's insights are echoed by Marina Warner's work on photography: see 'Stealing Souls and Catching Shadows', *tate*, 6 (Summer 1995), 40–7; 'The Unbearable Likeness of Being', *tate*, 7 (Winter 1995), 40–7; and 'Stolen Shadows, Lost Souls: Body and Soul in Photography', *Raritan*, 15/2 (Fall 1995), 35–58.

⁴² Dubois, *L'Acte photographique*, 160; C. Metz, 'Photography and Fetish', in C. Squiers, ed., *The Critical Image* (Seattle, 1990), 157–9; Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 9; Sontag, *On Photography*, 15. See P. Edwards, 'Against the Photograph as *Memento Mori*', *History of Photography*, 22/4 (Winter 1998), 380–4 for an unconvincing critique of these writers, with regrettable undertones of anti-intellectualism and xenophobia.

⁴³ 'Photography and Fetish', 158 (author's emphasis).

is true of portrait photography applies in a more general sense to all photography, for in any instantaneous photograph the moment in which the image is taken, the moment it depicts, has always already gone. Yet it is in relation to portrait photography that this aspect of photography is most apparent: the melancholy tenor of *Camera Lucida* derives—in part, at least—from Barthes's contemplation of a photograph of his mother which he finds shortly after her death. It is in this particular photograph that he sees 'something like an essence of the Photograph', and he decides therefore 'to "derive" all Photography (its "nature") from the only photograph which assuredly existed for me'.⁴⁴

Putting Photography in its Place: The Importance of Context

This talk of 'essences', the so-called 'nature' of photography, and Barthes's audacious move from a portrait photograph with personal significance to a melancholy discussion of 'all Photography' are all too much for some. The most serious challenge to the ontological approach to photography is derived from the other major strand of postmodern photographic theory, one which stresses the importance of context. Most influential in this field are the writings of John Tagg, Allan Sekula, Victor Burgin, and Abigail Solomon-Godeau, who became prominent in the 1980s.⁴⁵ These largely Anglo-American writers drew on a Marxist tradition of cultural materialism, utilizing the work of Pierre Macherey, Louis Althusser, and Michel Foucault to shed light on the ways in which photographs have been used to support (and sometimes subvert) disciplinary power and dominant ideology.⁴⁶

For these writers, to associate photographs with true images like the Turin Shroud is to mystify and romanticize them in pointless metaphysical speculation that is both ahistorical and theoretically unrigorous. Photography is far from *acheiropoetic* in practice: photographs do not make themselves. What counts is that photographs are images made by individuals, the agents of history, for real and specific purposes. Photographs are constructed artefacts, performing ideological tricks for their makers and users; they are invariably complicit with structures of power and the institutions that support them. The meanings of individual photographs are determined by the contexts in which they are inserted, and are informed by a panoply of external factors, including captions, accompanying text,

⁴⁴ *Camera Lucida*, 73.

⁴⁵ See, for example J. Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Basingstoke, 1988); A. Sekula, 'The Body and the Archive', *October*, 39 (1986), 1–64; V. Burgin, ed., *Thinking Photography* (London and Basingstoke, 1982); and A. Solomon-Godeau, *Photography at the Dock: Essays on Photographic History, Institutions, and Practices* (Minneapolis, 1997).

⁴⁶ The fact that the 'contextual' approach to photography tends to be articulated by Anglo-American writers, whereas the 'ontological' approach is dominated by writers working in a French tradition, is perhaps significant in terms of a well-documented Anglo-Saxon–Protestant distrust of images and their capacity to enchant the viewer. The insights of Bazin and Barthes seem to reflect a rather different Roman Catholic tradition of veneration of the image.

tropes of pictorial representation, and the entire network of discourses in which they operate.

While some of these writers are aware that what Tagg terms the ‘currency’ of photography in institutional and disciplinary contexts may be due, ultimately, to the perceived ‘truthfulness’ of the photographic image, to dwell on the issue of the ontological identity of photography is for them something of a waste of time. To ask what photography *is* is to ask the wrong question, and to take the wrong category (‘photography’ as such) as the primary object of study. Marxists, after all, are highly suspicious of talk of ‘essences’; the political commitment of these writers is not served by the somewhat morbid fascination with photography’s ontology represented by Barthes and Bazin. For Tagg, Solomon-Godeau, and Sekula there is nothing about the image which can usefully be described as ‘natural’. What is important is what individual photographs mean—or are made to mean—in particular contexts, and the way in which photography itself has been recruited into systems of state control and the dissemination of ideology.

A False Dichotomy?

While the approach of these writers is in many ways convincing, it risks displacing a radically ontological view with a similarly radical contextual view: both have their blind spots. But these approaches are not quite as mutually exclusive as they seem to be—or they need not be. Writers stressing photographic contexts may seek to displace the question of photography’s ‘nature’ as a red herring, but in fact they leave it hanging. After all, it is surely photography’s ‘nature’ that qualifies it to operate in disciplinary or institutional contexts: like the fingerprint, it acts as proof, or evidence. This still holds, despite Tagg’s important caveat that it is only certain kinds of photographs that within specific ‘ideological apparatuses’ are granted this privilege.⁴⁷ It is this same quality of the photographic image that allows it to function not only within state apparatuses, but also as souvenir or relic, a widespread contextual use of the photograph in which Tagg and Burgin seem to take little interest. Seen in this way, photography’s identity (its particularity as an image-making technology) is central to its operation in each of its contexts.⁴⁸ The materialism of these writers, it seems, does not extend as far as the materiality of the photograph: these material, reproducible objects are too often instead reduced to the status of ‘texts’ or ‘rhetorical constructions’.⁴⁹

Likewise, an awareness of the material specificity of the photograph (its ‘nature’ as an image) need not exclude a consideration of the contexts within which it

⁴⁷ J. Tagg, ‘The Currency of the Photograph’, in Burgin, ed., *Thinking Photography*, 117.

⁴⁸ If proof of this were needed, the problems raised by digital photographs when used as evidence in courts of law point up the central importance of the particular image-making technology. See Mitchell, *The Reconfigured Eye*.

⁴⁹ Tagg, *The Burden of Representation*, 188. For a corrective to this, see E. Edwards, ‘Photographs as Objects of Memory’, in M. Kwint, C. Breward, and J. Aynsley, eds., *Material Memories: Design and Evocation* (Oxford, 1999), 221–36.

circulates and acquires meanings. One need not subscribe to the idea that photography has something we can usefully call an 'essence' in order to maintain that there is something about the photographic image which makes it different from, say, a drawing or a painting—or, for that matter, a text. The most convincing writing on photography avoids the extremes of essentialism and contextual determinism: Walter Benjamin, for example, never lost sight of either photography's politics or its poetry.⁵⁰ Indeed, how else is photography to exist other than within specific contexts of production, re-production, and reception? Even Barthes can be put into context as a French intellectual (specifically an intellectual disappointed politically but well versed in phenomenology and semiology) looking at a photograph of his recently deceased mother and facing his own mortality towards the end of his life.⁵¹ Neither is Barthes's personal experience in front of this image unique, although rarely has it been analysed to the same degree. The totemic and reliquary use of photographs extends as far as photography itself, as recent work on the anthropology of photography—not to mention everyday experience—shows us.⁵² People surely do tend to see photographs 'ontologically': a rather obvious fact which theorists nevertheless sometimes overlook.⁵³ Why else would photographs be trusted to commemorate holidays and weddings, or to convey visual information in newspapers? The fact that photographs are trusted to represent reality has been exploited by artists since Surrealism (at least) in order to disconcert and manipulate the viewer, as well as by the makers of 'trick photography', including nineteenth-century images of fairies or spirit photography.

Photography as Technology

Photographs, after all, are not something separate from something called 'reality' to which they are more or less indexically related, as the semiological approach implies. They are themselves real objects in the world, and they participate in that world in various ways. Perhaps the apparent dichotomy I have examined is a blind spot specifically of photographic *theory*; perhaps photography is not best understood in such overarching theoretical terms. A more productive way of looking at photography might be to consider it as a technology of image production

⁵⁰ Benjamin's writings on photography include 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' [1936], repr. in *Illuminations* (London, 1992), 211–44; 'A Short History of Photography' [1931], repr. in Trachtenberg, ed., *Classic Essays*, 199–216; and Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge, Mass., 1999), 671–92.

⁵¹ Barthes was part of that generation of leftist intellectuals disappointed by the failure of the revolutionary events of 1968: a generation whose activist energies were subsequently diverted into the more arcane pursuits of semiotics, structuralism, and post-structuralism. *Camera Lucida* was the last book Barthes wrote before he died.

⁵² See, for example, C. Pinney, *Camera Indica: The Social Life of Indian Photographs* (London, 1997).

⁵³ Hence, for example, the widespread use of photographs as holiday souvenirs, the 'proof' of experience. See S. Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Baltimore, 1984).

and re-production. Looking at it in this way means that it can be grounded historically, avoiding the airy metaphysics of the 'ontological' view while retaining the (commonsense) conviction that there is something about the photograph that distinguishes it from other kinds of images. It restores photography's identity as a tool, while preserving its capacity—in specific contexts—to enchant.

In his recent book *The Engine of Visualization*, Patrick Maynard goes some way towards this goal.⁵⁴ Like Barthes, Maynard takes as his object of study 'photography' rather than photographs as such, but he is a philosopher who approaches his subject as a historically evolved technology for marking surfaces. This broadens out the enquiry in accordance with Maynard's conviction that not all photographs are taken by cameras or even by 'photographers', and that photography is a process, not a product. The 'ontological' view of photography, according to him, tends to fetishize the individual photographic image; to base a theory of photography on a single portrait image, as Barthes does, or on a type of image, as Bazin does, is to make a category error.⁵⁵ The earliest experimenters saw photography as a family of technologies which (like all tools) could extend our powers; our powers to detect, for example, to record, or to imagine—not just our power to make pictures.⁵⁶ Hence Maynard considers those uses of photographic technology that extend beyond the making of recognizable images (icons): instrumental uses such as the manufacture of ceramics, and, more recently, the production of microchips.

Traces in Contexts

Maynard is a philosopher of science, and as such is more concerned with establishing a useful category within which to discuss photography as such than he is with the operation of specific photographs within historical-geographical contexts. His broadening of the category of the photographic, however, provides a useful platform from which to discuss particular images. His definition of photography as a technology for marking surfaces underlines the conception of the photograph-as-trace, and brings it into line with my discussion of the trace earlier in this chapter since it reunites the photographic image with other kinds of marked surfaces: the fingerprint on a window ledge, or the stain on a shirtsleeve. I will develop the implications of this parallel in the next section of this chapter. But if photographs can be seen as traces, they are still traces which are made, circulated, and received in specific contexts, inevitably inflected in various ways by their makers and their viewers. In the chapters that follow I intend to keep both of these aspects of photography in equal focus. With a view to this goal, in the following section I shall try to reunite photography's identity as trace with the importance of

⁵⁴ P. Maynard, *The Engine of Visualization: Thinking through Photography* (Ithaca, 1997).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 10, 16.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 6, 9, x. Lewis Mumford approached photography in a similar way in his *Technics and Civilization* (London, 1934). For Mumford, photography extended our power to remember.

extra-photographic elements such as captioning, disciplinary context, and what E. H. Gombrich has dubbed ‘the beholder’s share’: the role of the viewer.⁵⁷

A TRACE OF A TRACE: PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE SITES OF HISTORY

Archaeologists have made use of photography since its inception to record both archaeological ‘finds’ and sites.⁵⁸ Archaeological and historical subject-matter was also favourite territory for early pictorial photographers such as Francis Frith, who photographed the sites of ancient Egypt in a much-publicized tour in the late 1850s, or Frederick Evans, who photographed cathedrals and abbeys in France and England around the turn of the century.⁵⁹ In part, this was simply a continuation of Romantic pictorial subject-matter and themes. While long exposure times were unavoidable, too, the stillness of historic landscapes or antiquities made them an appropriate subject for the photographer. But there is arguably also a curious affinity between the medium itself and those objects and places marked by time. In this section I want to explore what this affinity might be, by examining photographs of traces, archaeological sites, and the sites of historical action. These are traces of traces, images in which the viewer’s attention is directed to something that is not, and cannot be, represented directly through photographic means alone, something which is irrevocably absent—the past. Photographs in which a place is framed as a site tell us something, I think, about photography itself and its representational limits, as I hope to show; but they also show us the importance of captions and other extra-pictorial information in the process of visual perception. An examination of these images should therefore also dissolve the false dichotomy between the ‘ontological’ and the ‘contextual’ schools of photographic theory.

The Measure of a Moment

The photograph, like other traces, is the visible effect of a cause temporally anterior to it. To return to our previous definition of the trace, it is the mark which indicates the former presence, existence, or action of something. This is most apparent, perhaps, in the case of the photogram, where the image is the result of the direct action of light having fallen on photosensitive paper on which an object

⁵⁷ Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (London, 1996).

⁵⁸ For a brief account see Chapter 1, ‘The early days of archaeological photography’, in P. G. Dorrell, *Photography in Archaeology and Conservation* (Cambridge, 1994), 1–7.

⁵⁹ For Frith, see Chapter 4, ‘Photographed and Described: Traveling in the Footsteps of Francis Frith’, in C. Armstrong, *Scenes in a Library: Reading the Photograph in the Book, 1843–1875* (Cambridge, Mass., 1998), 277–359. For Evans, see A. Hammond, ed., *Frederick H. Evans: Selected Texts and Bibliography* (Oxford, 1992).

has been placed. A photogram is literally the *site* of an exposure. In Fox Talbot's photogram of lace (Fig. 2.1), the image attests to the fact that a piece of lace once lay here, in the same way that a footprint is the proof of the passing of a foot. In both cases, the image can be produced only under certain propitious circumstances: the lace lay on photosensitive paper, exposed to sunlight, and the foot can make its mark only in certain media—damp sand, for instance, or wet cement.

This kind of image is perhaps the closest that photography comes to being a pure trace, the direct imprint of an object. Photographs produced by means of analogue camera technology are the result of the negative-positive process, resulting in a less immediate link between image and referent. This complication has led some theorists to suggest that, strictly speaking, only a photogram is an index. According to the semiotician Göran Sonesson, only photograms and rayograms 'are really comparable to the footprints left on the ground, light being the operating agent instead of mechanical pressure'.⁶⁰ Other photographs, for Sonesson, represent imprints ('contiguities') of *parts* of complex total processes. Photography derives 'from the composite indexicality of the referent, the light, the emulsion, the optical system, the photographer, and so on'.⁶¹ To an extent, Sonesson is surely right. It is important to be aware that the photograph is the end product of the various stages of photographic production, bearing in mind how at each point in the process human intervention and technological means may affect the resulting image and its semiotic status. But this does not, I think, make altogether redundant our conception of the photograph as a trace. The photograph is the imprint—made in a darkroom—of a negative, which in turn is the trace of light rays falling on film inside the camera. As the end product of a series of tracings, the photograph nevertheless remains a trace.

The photograph's status as trace is guaranteed by the first stage in its production, when light rays come into contact with the chemically sensitized surface of the film inside the camera. This action of light on film takes place in an instant, a click of the shutter. The visual appearance of a moment in time is in that split second etched onto the film. The moment recorded on film is always already gone, as writers on photography have long acknowledged, just as the footprint can exist only after the footstep has passed by. And just as the footprint attests to the foot (its size, its shape, the force with which it landed on the ground, and so on) the photographic image attests to that which appeared in the camera's field of vision at the moment at which the shutter clicked and the exposure was made. If the photograph—as a trace—is the effect of a (necessarily absent) cause, it is light effects that are the ultimate cause, falling on the receptive surface of the photographic film and enabled by the click of the shutter, which in turn is enabled by the press of the finger on the button.

⁶⁰ G. Sonesson, *Pictorial Concepts: Inquiries into the Semiotic Heritage and its Relevance for the Analysis of the Visual World* (Lund, 1989), 64. The rayogram is the name given by Man Ray to his experimental photograms.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

Photography, as Sonesson recognizes, therefore derives from a ‘complex indexicality’, carefully manipulated at every stage to produce a recognizable image. The technologies of photography, camera, and darkroom harness the indexical qualities of chemical photosensitivity in order to produce a lasting iconic image.⁶² The fact that the photograph happens to be iconic means that we can read it as an image. We can deduce certain facts about the moment at which the photograph was taken because of the legible pattern of light and dark on the surface of the image. Perhaps this is what Barthes meant when he characterized cameras as ‘clocks for seeing’.⁶³ The photographic image contains more or less legible clues to the moment at which it was taken; in this sense, photography measures time with light.

In the case of instantaneous photographs where a snapshot depicts a frozen moment of action, the viewer’s attention is focused upon the precise moment at which the photograph was taken. The groundbreaking photographs of Eadweard Muybridge in the 1870s and 1880s, depicting the movement of animals and athletes, had a shutter-speed of less than a thousandth of a second (Fig. 2.2). Now

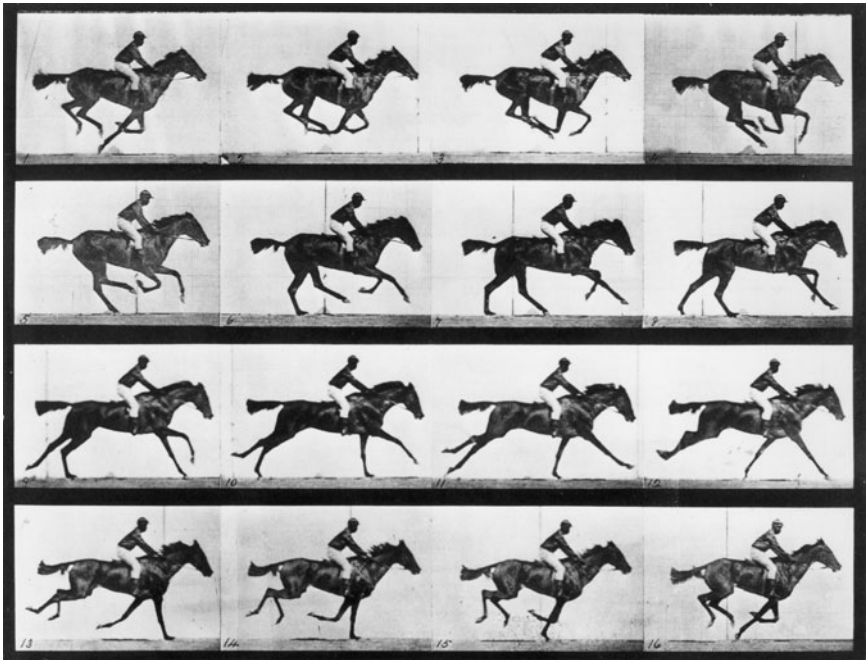


Fig. 2.2. Eadweard Muybridge, ‘Time-lapse photographs of a man riding a galloping horse’, 1872–85.

⁶² The accomplishment of this fact was the goal of the first photographic experimenters.

⁶³ *Camera Lucida*, 15.

stages in rapid motion inaccessible to the naked eye could be stilled in a photographic image. With developments in camera technology in the first half of the twentieth century, photography has increasingly been used to document the crucial moment (Henri Cartier-Bresson's 'decisive moment'): a turning point, for example, in a newsworthy event. Robert Capa's famous image *Death of a Loyalist Soldier*, photographed—supposedly—at the very moment of the man's collapse, is a classic example of such an image, since it apparently freezes an unrepeatable moment in a war in which photo-journalists—for the first time—played an important role.⁶⁴

Photography does not only index this most obvious register of time, however, although it is in the action shot that the rapidity of camera shutter technology can best be demonstrated. Since the photographic image halts the passage of time in an instant, the cyclical time of nature as well as the linear time of history is halted: geological, or 'deep' time is suspended just as much as the rapid movements measurable by a stopwatch. The photograph depicts the end point, in this sense, of a potentially infinite number of stories taking place at different speeds in different temporal registers.⁶⁵ This is a quality of the photograph prefigured in Dyce's picture *Pegwell Bay* (see Chapter 1), where geological time, astronomical time, and historical time are all halted one day in October 1858 (Fig. 1.1). The quality Dyce strived so hard to create in this oil painting is effortlessly present in photographs from John Dillwyn Llewelyn to Ansel Adams. In an 1889 view of a country scene by Peter Henry Emerson, entitled *Breezy Marshland*, for example, a number of temporal registers are halted (Fig. 2.3). A human narrative of traditional farming is frozen at a particular point as the farmer is leading a horse and cart laden with hay along a track. A narrative of the cyclical time of the seasons and the farming year is halted late in the summer, since the trees are still covered with leaves and the crops are ready to harvest. A clue to the suspension of historical time may be found in the farming methods depicted, or in the clothing of the figures. And it is also, of course, a moment in a particular day.

The Anterior of the Photograph

The moment depicted by a photograph is really an artificially frozen point in a narrative, or set of narratives: photographic appearances (like all appearances) are always really parts of stories. This fact is most obvious in the case of action snapshots, which we interpret in the light of what we know must have occurred immediately before the photograph was taken, and what we suspect must have happened immediately after that moment. In the case of *Death of a Loyalist*

⁶⁴ See P. Knightley, *The First Casualty* (New York, 1975), 209–12 for a different interpretation of the image.

⁶⁵ Strictly speaking this 'end point' is in reality a mid-point, since the narratives halted by the photograph continue after the photograph has been taken.



Fig. 2.3. Peter Henry Emerson, *Breezy Marshland* (1889).

Soldier, it seems from the image that this man has just been killed, or perhaps he has just slipped, or pretended to slip, and that he will surely imminently fall to the ground. Or looking at Richard Billingham's photograph of his father and a cat apparently suspended in space, the viewer can deduce that the cat has just jumped (or been thrown) across the room, and that it will imminently land somewhere (Fig. 2.4). What is temporally immediately anterior to the image is in some way implicit in it.⁶⁶

Looking at Billingham's picture, the viewer's attention is dominated by the cat and the photographer's father, midway through an obscure drama. The cat, suspended in mid-air, and the man's hands, thrown up in apparent alarm, are the visible clues to the unfolding of this drama, clues which occupy our gaze. But if the image is studied closely, numerous remnants are visible of other events and processes which occurred before the photograph was taken—maybe ten minutes before, maybe twenty years before: events which are rather harder to deduce from the image. In fact the photograph, like so many others, is suffused with such

⁶⁶ It is possible that we require a rudimentary 'training' in photographic technology in order to be able to interpret action shots and photographic realism in general, although the literature on this subject (from anthropology and perceptual psychology) has not settled the issue. See J. B. Derogowski, 'Illusion and Culture', in R. L. Gregory and E. H. Gombrich, eds., *Illusion in Nature and Art* (London, 1973), 161–91; and M. McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (Toronto, 1962). For a sophisticated analysis of 'primitive' peoples' ability to 'read' filmic images, see M. Vaughan, *Curing their Ills: Colonial Power and African Illness* (Cambridge, 1991), 180–99.



Fig. 2.4. Richard Billingham, untitled, from series *Ray's a Laugh* (1993–5).

marks and signs of previous activity. The ornaments and pictures on the far wall have all at some stage been arranged in that way, or have been knocked into their current skewed positions; the scuffed and worn furniture and interior indicate that this is a lived-in room, bearing the marks and imprints of its inhabitants; Billingham's father's wrinkled and unkempt appearance denotes a long and perhaps dissolute life; and so on ad infinitum.

Since the world is covered with traces, and photography meticulously records the world, all photographs are replete with the marks of what is historically anterior to them, however legible or illegible those marks may be. This, according to Oliver Wendell Holmes, was precisely what distinguished photography from painting: 'The very things which an artist would leave out, or render imperfectly, the photograph takes infinite care with, and so renders its illusions perfect. What is the picture of a drum without the marks on its head where the beating of the sticks has darkened the parchment?'⁶⁷

The point is that we rarely notice such things in a photograph, because our attention is not usually guided to them. Photographs themselves tend to focus our attention on a particular component of the image, the displayed photographic subject, the pleasing composition, the frozen moment of action. The track in the foreground of *Breezy Marshland* is criss-crossed by the faint marks of cartwheels,

⁶⁷ Quoted in B. Newhall, *The History of Photography from 1839 to the Present* (New York, 1997), 94.

yet the viewer's attention is directed not to them but to the composition with its inviting vista and gently rural subject-matter (Fig. 2.3).

The Adder and the Raven

Under certain circumstances, however, the viewer's attention is drawn precisely to the temporal anterior of the photograph, and is forced to deduce that anterior from the signs it has deposited in the image. This happens, for example, when the viewer is presented with a photograph which blatantly foregrounds a trace (or series of traces) as its main subject-matter: a photograph which makes marks themselves the focus of attention. An obvious example of such a photograph would be one of a footprint, or of the tracks of animals, like those collected in the 1967 book *Tracks* by E. A. R. Ennion and N. Tinbergen.⁶⁸ *Tracks* includes photographs of the marks left in sand and snow by creatures from woodmice and natterjacks to foxes, gulls, and penguins. One photograph captures the tracks left in sand by an adder as it passed by. Another image shows the marks left by a raven as it alighted in deep snow, leaving the outline of its wings, body, and tail, before wandering off through the snow (Fig. 2.5).

These photographs encourage the viewer to re-enact in imagination that which might have caused the depicted marks to be made: the sequential movements of the absent bird or beast. Interpretation here amounts to *reconstruction* of a prior



Fig. 2.5. N. Tinbergen, marks left in snow by a raven, from E. A. R. Ennion and N. Tinbergen, *Tracks* (1967).

⁶⁸ E. A. R. Ennion and N. Tinbergen, *Tracks* (Oxford, 1967).

event. As marks *of* something, as the signs of past movement, intelligible only as such, these tracks demand to be interpreted; and this means supplementing the photograph with a mental image of what is missing from it. Looking at the image of the adder's tracks, we see in our mind's eye something which is not, in fact, there: a snake wriggling along. Likewise with the photograph of the raven's marks, we 'see' a large bird land, its wings outstretched, recover itself and then set off through the thick snow. In other words, we see that which made the image possible, but which is concealed, which is necessarily absent from it. For the existence of the marks in the sand or the snow necessarily implies the absence of what made them, since the footprint can exist only after the foot has passed by. This is not all, however. What we see (when we 'see' the adder or the raven) is not only something which is not, in fact, there, but also something which can *never* be depicted photographically, something which must remain forever out of bounds to the medium: the passage of time anterior to the moment at which the photograph was taken.

Ernst Gombrich offers a brief analysis of the photographs in Ennion and Tinbergen's book in an essay entitled 'The Evidence of Images'.⁶⁹ He points out how, in order to interpret these images of tracks, we need to know how the creatures in question move and the marks they make. Without such knowledge, the marks left by the adder would remain an obscure zig-zagging line in sand. Likewise, when we look at the imprint made by the raven, these marks make sense only with a knowledge of what kind of a bird this is, how exactly it has landed, and how it has then waded off through the snow—information partly provided by the caption, should the viewer not possess it already. As Gombrich says, 'to interpret a footprint means to match it in our mind with one of the creatures whose shapes and habits we know'.⁷⁰ An experienced tracker would, of course, have knowledge of a wide repertory of the marks of such creatures, and would therefore be able to make a quick and accurate identification.

Photography *en abyme*

In his book *Art and Illusion*, Gombrich refers to this constructive process of interpretation on the part of the viewer as 'the Beholder's share'.⁷¹ In 'The Evidence of Images', he concludes that, strictly speaking, no two-dimensional representational image can be interpreted as a spatial arrangement without such a constructive process on the part of the beholder, or viewer.⁷² What he discovers concerning 'the Beholder's share' through the images in *Tracks*, Gombrich applies to other kinds of visual interpretation, from the perception of relative scale in an image to painting and the work of Dürer. Gombrich's concern, here as in *Art and Illusion*, is with 'the psychology of pictorial representation' in general. Gombrich's insights concerning

⁶⁹ 'The Evidence of Images', in C. S. Singleton, ed., *Interpretation: Theory and Practice* (Baltimore, 1969), 35–104.

⁷¹ *Art and Illusion*, 155.

⁷² 'The Evidence of Images', 40–1.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 36.

visual interpretation and the role of the viewer are crucial to my argument in this section, and I will return to them later. But in his desire to make general points about visual perception, he largely ignores the differences that exist between the various media of the images he discusses, differences which are surely not insignificant. A photograph of a series of footprints is not the same, in terms of the visual experience of the beholder, as a painting of the same subject. Nor is it the same as an encounter with those footprints in reality, in the sand or the snow. My argument is that photographs in which traces are foregrounded are both extraordinary and exemplary in that they are photographs which tell us something about the nature of photography itself—they are examples of photography *en abyme*.

In his 1978 article 'Photography *en abyme*', Craig Owens argued that photographs depicting mirrors and doubling effects reflect, in some way, on the photographic medium itself.⁷³ The mirror image, for example, in the 1932 photograph by Brassai known as *A Happy Group at the Quatre Saisons* (Fig. 2.6) 'functions . . . as a reduced, internal image of the photograph. The mirror reflects not only the subjects depicted, but also the entire photograph itself. It tells us in a photograph what a photograph is—*en abyme*.'⁷⁴ Owens borrows the term *en abyme* from literary criticism, where it is used to describe a part of a text which reproduces in miniature the structure or identity of the text as a whole.⁷⁵ He draws on the linguistic theory of Jakobson and Lévi-Strauss to show how reduplication of a sound—in the child's word *papa*, for example—is the very sign of the repeatability of that sound, 'conveying an intention to signify' on the part of the child as s/he learns to speak. Reduplication within the photographic image, Owens suggests, may likewise draw attention to the photograph's intention to signify, through a specifically photographic language.⁷⁶

Whether or not one subscribes to the linguistic analogy, there does seem to be a structural affinity between the mirror and the photograph. Owens points out how mirrors have recurred as a favourite photographic subject throughout the history of the medium (notably in the work of Lady Clementina Hawarden), and how photography's early characterization as 'the mirror with a memory' established the analogy between the mirror and the photograph from the start. The mirror captures a likeness on a surface, and the photograph fixes that likeness. In a photograph like *A Happy Group at the Quatre Saisons* we see how the mirror reflects the group in an image which can capture only one aspect of their appearance: in this case a couple otherwise invisible to the camera, along with the back-view of the other couple's heads. And we learn something about photography itself from this: something about the selectivity of its viewpoint, its reduplication of reality, and the reduction of its subject-matter to a two-dimensional image. As Owens

⁷³ C. Owens, 'Photography *en abyme*', *October*, 5 (Summer 1978), 73–88.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 75.

⁷⁵ The term, originally used in heraldry, was introduced into literary criticism by André Gide, in his journal of 1892 (see Owens, 'Photography *en abyme*', 75). The concept of *mise en abyme* has since been taken up by Jacques Derrida, for whom it describes a fundamental characteristic of any text (*ibid.* 77).

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* 82–4.



Fig. 2.6. Brassai, *A Happy Group at the Quatre Saisons* (1932).

suggests, the *mise en abyme* represented by the mirror endows the photograph with its own, internal 'apparatus for self-interpretation'.⁷⁷

Owens's discussion of photography *en abyme* signposts the medium's tendency to reflect, reproduce, reduce, and flatten the objects it represents. They all relate to

⁷⁷ Owens, 'Photography *en abyme*', 88.

photography's *iconic* properties. But perhaps it is possible to imagine other examples in which certain *ontological* qualities of the medium are brought into relief. Let us return to the photographs in *Tracks*. Given the knowledge of how adders and ravens move (which is in fact supplied by the accompanying text and illustrations), the first thing that happens in the interpretation of these images, as Gombrich points out, is a reconstruction, on the part of the viewer, of the adder's movements, or the raven's landing. A ghostly image haunts the visible one, making sense of it, supplying what is absent from it. The first thing, then, that we are aware of in front of such a photograph is the *absence* of something, something without which the image makes no sense, something which is necessarily temporally anterior to the image, and which is therefore necessarily absent from it. The presence of the marks depicted is dependent upon the absence of the thing that made them. What is absent from the photograph (the adder and the raven, and their movements) is as much the subject of the image as what is present (the marks they left behind), which indexes that which is absent.

Subsequent to this experience of necessary absence comes the realization that the photograph we are looking at also indexes something which is by definition absent: the moment at which it was taken. The marks on the photograph's surface are the traces of an irrecuperable moment, a moment which is forever gone, but without which the photograph would not exist. Just as the footprint cannot exist until after the foot has passed by, so the photograph can exist only once the moment it depicts has forever gone. What we learn from the photograph's subject (the animal tracks) we realize to be true of the photograph itself. These photographs represent a double trace, a double absence, and through them we are made aware of what photography is: what it does to time, and what its representational limitations are. Such photographs drive home the medium's constitutional inability to restore what it nevertheless unavoidably attests to: the dimension of lost time. The moment at which the photograph was taken is not recuperable: like the adder, or the raven, it is irrevocably and necessarily gone, or we would not be looking at its image. Here then, is photography *en abyme*; the illusion of presence promised by the photograph collapses under the weight of what we know to be missing from the image.

Disciplines of Attention

The photographs in *Tracks* direct the viewer's attention to what is 'off-frame', that which occurred before the photograph was taken. This kind of attention is paid to photographs as a matter of course within certain disciplinary and institutional contexts in which the photographic image is scanned for evidence about what occurred prior to its taking. Disciplines such as forensic science, criminology, and military reconnaissance involve the application of specialist knowledge to the interpretation of photographic images. Individuals within these disciplines are trained to see things in photographs which may not be visible to the untrained eye, since they are alert to clues which they can match with their experience and

knowledge in order to reconstruct something which is not directly pictured: a strangulation, a break-in, or the location of enemy headquarters.⁷⁸

These disciplines, then, involve a particular way of seeing photographs. For criminologists, for example, the photograph of 'the scene of the crime' is often a crucial tool in the investigation.⁷⁹ A 'scene of the crime' photograph, by definition, depicts the aftermath of something. Within a criminological context, the viewer's attention is directed to what happened *before* the photograph was taken. Usually it is a photograph taken with the express purpose of furnishing evidence of a crime, for the benefit of the detective (in solving the case), the lawyers (in proving the case), and the jury (in deciding the case). But almost any photograph can become a piece of evidence, and any photograph can be looked at as if it were evidence, and this means scanning the image for marks of previous activity.⁸⁰ If Richard Billingham's photograph were looked at in this way, for example, then the position of the ornaments, the place of the mug, and so on could be the crucial clues in a reconstruction of a crime. Likewise, if it were crucial to ascertain that a number of carts had driven over the track depicted in *Breezy Marshland*, then those cart-tracks would become the most important part of the photograph.

To look at images in this way means paying them a particular kind of attention. It is to 'see through' superficial appearances, and those objects that most immediately claim our attention, in an attempt to deduce or divine what the photograph does not directly depict. The viewer therefore has an active role as an investigator, or detective. As Gombrich points out, the degree to which we are able to make these deductions depends directly upon our own knowledge and experience of making similar deductions, since 'the greater the repertoire of our knowledge and experience, the more likely we are to find the perfect fit'.⁸¹

Archaeological Sites and Droodles

Another disciplinary context in which the viewer is positioned in the role of detective, probing the image for evidence of previous occurrences is archaeology—and particularly field archaeology, where photography has been used extensively to document the appearance of sites, both before and during excavation. While the occurrences to which an archaeological photograph attests took place thousands of years ago, rather than immediately before the photograph was taken, photographs of archaeological sites are very like 'scene of the crime' photographs, and they demand a similar kind of attention from the viewer. In order to divulge the information they may possess, both kinds of image require a 'forensic' eye, a trained

⁷⁸ Significantly, Gombrich relates his interest in interpretation, and the relevance of knowledge and experience to the process, to his wartime work at a listening post, which he describes in *Art and Illusion*, 170–1.

⁷⁹ See R. Rugoff, *Scene of the Crime* (Cambridge, Mass., 1997).

⁸⁰ Walter Benjamin noted that Eugene Atget photographed the streets of Paris as though they were the scenes of crime, providing evidence of 'historical occurrences' ('The Work of Art', 219–20).

⁸¹ 'The Evidence of Images', 35.

viewer keen to spot clues to past occurrences and traces of human activity in a particular site.

Take, for example, a photograph published in the archaeological journal *Antiquity* in March 1928 (Fig. 2.7). To the untrained eye, and without the assistance of text or caption, its subject (and scale) remains somewhat obscure—we are faced with a pair of parallel furrows cut into a stony surface. If we then look at the caption, we learn that these furrows are ‘ancient cart-tracks at Mtarfa, Malta’. When we return to the image, it makes more sense. As with the images in *Tracks*, we understand that these furrows are the index of past action—in this case, the repeated impact of cartwheels on stone. We may wonder at the depth of the tracks, and consider how many carts it must have taken to make such deep marks on what seems to be an intransigently rocky surface. Evidently these traces—unlike those in *Tracks*—are the result of repeated action, rather than a singular one. Consulting the accompanying text, we learn that

If no account is taken of the long time required to wear out the hard coralline limestone to the actual depth of some of the grooves, it seems hard to believe that a wooden wheel could cause such erosion, but time explains the difficult task. The grooves are triangular in section and very smooth. Of course pebbles and sand between wheel and groove would act



Fig. 2.7. ‘Ancient cart-tracks at Mtarfa, Malta’, from T. Zammit, ‘Prehistoric Cart-Tracks in Malta’, *Antiquity*, 2/5 (Mar. 1928).

as an abrasive and help the erosion. The grooves caused by modern wheels, fitted with iron tyres, are differently shaped from the smooth prehistoric ones; they are rectangular in section and the wobbling of the wheel abrades the sides and wears them away rapidly and irregularly. These grooves appear therefore wide and straight-walled and are at once recognized by the most superficial observer.⁸²

Now a whole narrative, or series of narratives, opens up behind the image. Now we can interpret the tracks in the way that a trained archaeologist might, paying attention to the shape of the cross-section of the grooves and reading off these marks a whole history in which wooden cartwheels of a certain dimension repeatedly passed along these tracks. All of this, we learn, happened some time ago—these tracks ‘existed long before the Roman occupation of these islands, that is before 200 B.C.’. The cart-tracks, according to T. Zammit, the author of the article, ‘are the signs of great activity of the native population’. While some archaeologists have concluded that the carts carried blocks of stone for megalithic monuments, Zammit suggests that it was soil and water that were carried along these tracks. ‘This is the tale’, he writes, ‘revealed by the modest cart-tracks that are seen to wind their way from valleys and ravines up the craggy slopes of hills.’⁸³ Zammit, utilizing all of the information and archaeological knowledge at his disposal, deduces the ‘tale’ of which the tracks are the lasting residue. Given this tale, the viewer *completes* the archaeological photograph, supplying what is absent from it in order to realize its full significance.

A lack must always lie at the heart of archaeological photography. We will obviously never have a photograph of those pre-Roman Maltese as they struggled across the limestone plains with their carts, just as we are never likely to be absolutely certain what it was those carts were carrying. What the photograph cannot depict, supplementary information provided by the caption and text suggests. Armed with the information supplied by Zammit, the viewer reconstructs in imagination what is unrepresentable within the confines of the photographic medium. This presence of the ‘unrepresentable’ in archaeological photography is something I will return to later.

In ‘The Evidence of Images’, E. H. Gombrich uses so-called ‘doodles’ to demonstrate ‘vision’s obedience to suggestion’ and the importance of captions in the processes of visual interpretation.⁸⁴ ‘Doodle’ is the name given by Roger Price to a simple kind of schematic line drawing which can be interpreted only in the light of an accompanying humorous caption.⁸⁵ One such image (in Price’s 1954 book *Doodles*) turns out to be a ‘Ship arriving too late to save drowning witch’ (Fig. 2.8); another is a ‘Naughty French postcard (side view)’ (Fig. 2.9). According to Gombrich, these images are instructive in that they show us how susceptible to suggestion we are as viewers. We can ‘see’ a triangle as a witch’s

⁸² T. Zammit, ‘Prehistoric Cart-Tracks in Malta’, *Antiquity*, 2/5 (Mar. 1928), 18.

⁸³ *Ibid.* 24. ⁸⁴ ‘The Evidence of Images’, 54–6.

⁸⁵ R. Price, *Doodles* (London, 1954).

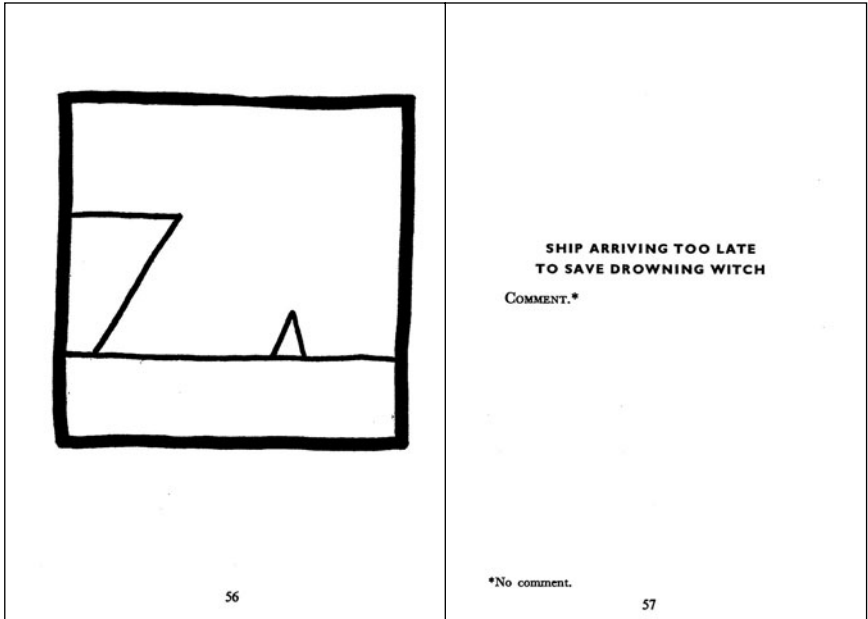


Fig. 2.8. Drowning witch droodle, from R. Price, *Doodles* (1954).

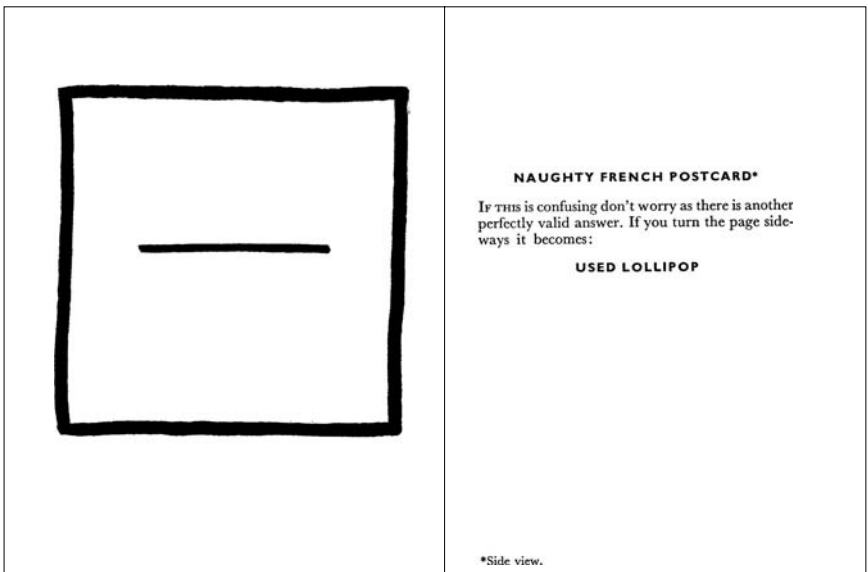


Fig. 2.9. Naughty postcard droodle, from R. Price, *Doodles* (1954).

hat, for example, if a caption indicates that that is what it is. Our susceptibility is further proven where more than one interpretation is suggested in the caption: the single line in Fig. 2.9 is either the side view of a postcard, or, 'if this is confusing', it is a used lollipop stick. For Gombrich, doodles prove the general rule that we construct the meaning of images 'from the elements of possible solutions we have stored', or from possible solutions that are suggested to us.⁸⁶

Doodles are useful analogies, too, I think, for the process of interpreting archaeological images. With a doodle, the caption supplies what is lacking from the image; returning to the image after consulting the caption, the viewer now 'sees' it as something which is not immediately apparent from the image alone (a sinking witch, a postcard). In doing so, the viewer *completes* the doodle, in a comparable way to the sense in which s/he completes the archaeological photograph. Yet whereas with the doodle the viewer is generally encouraged to see what is *spatially* absent, or incomplete (the naughty picture on the postcard, or the submerged body of the drowning witch), in front of the archaeological photograph it is that which is historically anterior to the image that the viewer 'sees', or reconstructs: in other words, what is *temporally* absent (those Maltese carts, for example, carrying their cargo). Like Puck in Kipling's *Puck of Pook's Hill*, photographs of archaeological sites, seen in the light of their accompanying captions and text, tend to encourage their viewers to 'see what they should see and hear what they should hear, / Though it should have happened three thousand year.' (See Chapter 1.)

Invariably, to be sure, the temporal reconstruction demanded by a photograph of an archaeological site also happens to be a spatial reconstruction, particularly when the image depicts fragments or ruins, objects which are precisely defined by what they lack, or what they have lost in the passage of time. Michael Roth discusses the ruin as 'something constructed by a beholder as a decayed trace of the past'.⁸⁷ Again, the role of the caption, and information supplied by accompanying text, are crucial in this reconstruction on the part of the viewer. For example, a photograph published in the field archaeologist Grahame Clark's book *Archaeology and Society* (1939) (Fig. 2.10) remains obscure until we consult the caption and accompanying text.⁸⁸ The caption reads 'Remains of a wooden house at Niya, Khotan'. Returning to the image, we understand a little better what it is we are looking at; it is the place where a wooden house once stood, and those upright sticks must be what remains of its structure. Consulting the text, we learn that these are 'ruins of an ancient settlement abandoned some time towards the end of the third century A.D.' found by Aurel Stein in 1900–1, and that 'around the houses, which wind erosion had often exposed as terrace-like features, [Stein] found the

⁸⁶ 'The Evidence of Images', 56.

⁸⁷ M. S. Roth, C. Lyons, and C. Merewether, *Irresistible Decay: Ruins Reclaimed* (Los Angeles, 1997), p. xii.

⁸⁸ G. Clark, *Archaeology and Society: Reconstructing the Prehistoric Past* (1939; London, 1965), between pp. 64 and 65.



Fig. 2.10. Aurel Stein, ruined house, Niya, Khotan (1900–1).

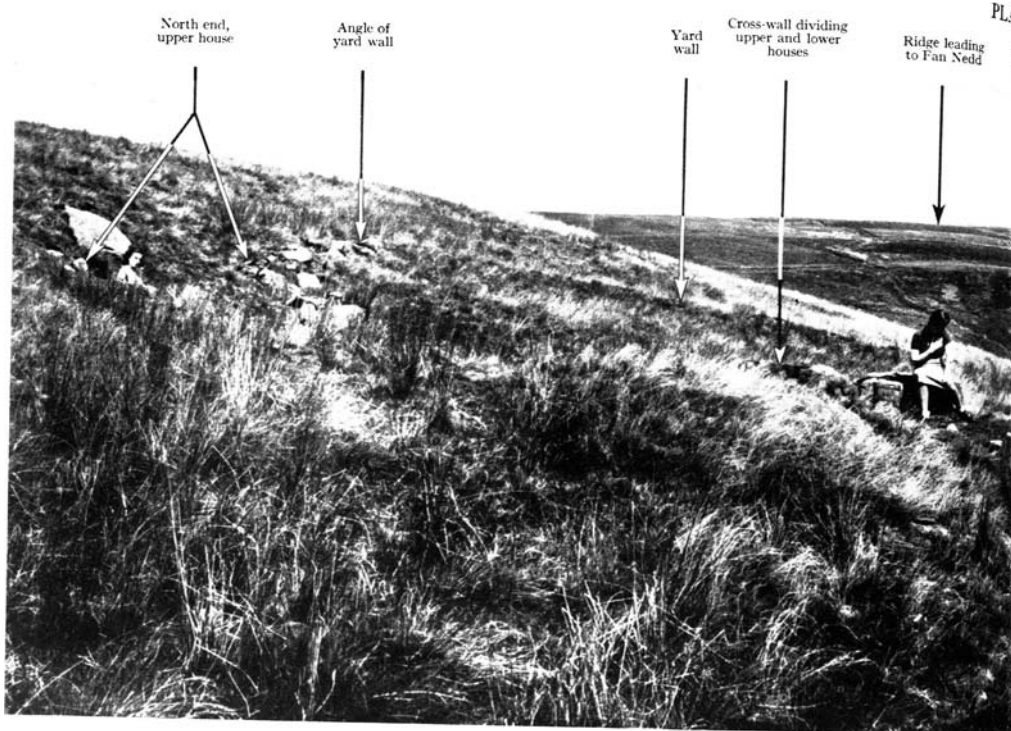
gaunt and dessicated remains of gardens, drives with their rush fences, avenues and arbours of poplar trees and orchards of peach, plum, apricot, and mulberry'.⁸⁹

Clark goes on to describe in great detail the original appearance of the houses before they were abandoned, with their 'massive timber foundations', wooden framework, and walls 'made of a kind of matting of diagonally woven tamarisk branches covered on either side with frescoes'.⁹⁰ Again, then, the image is supplemented by the information provided by the text, filling out its absences, attempting to vault over the aching gap between the third century and the beginning of the twentieth.

In a sense, photographs of archaeological sites—by definition, since they depict remains—always get there too late, always represent an absence, a lack. They always send the viewer back to a space behind the image which must forever remain 'off-frame': the distant past. Perhaps, then, photographs of archaeological sites are always *mise en abyme* in the same way as the images in *Tracks* are. The referent of such photographs is always at a double remove from the viewer. When one looks at Aurel Stein's photograph of the ruined house at Niya, the most immediate impression, the 'that-has-been' (in Barthes' terms) of this photograph, is the Taklamakan Desert in 1900–1—the time and place at which the photograph was taken. This is the obvious and immediate referent of the photograph,

⁸⁹ Ibid. 81.

⁹⁰ Ibid.



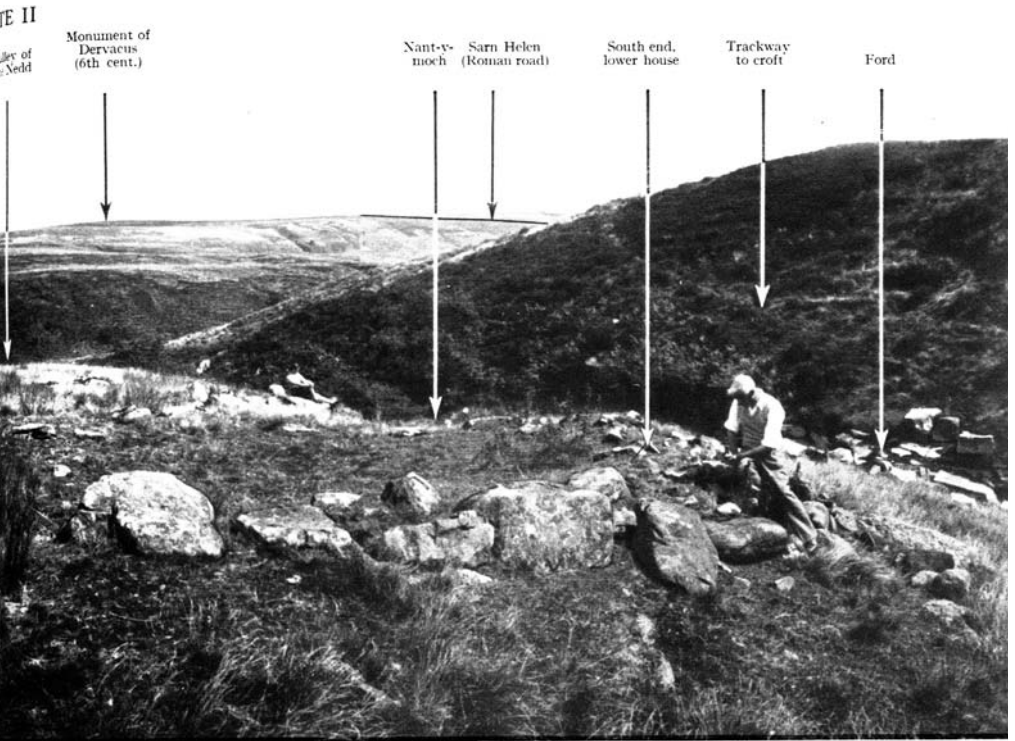
THE NANT-Y-MOCH BUILDING: SHOWING ITS POSITION AT RIGHT ANGLES TO THE CONTOUR OF THE

Fig. 2.11. ‘The Nant-y-moch building’, from C. Fox, ‘A Croft in the Upper Nedd Valley, Ystradfellte, Brecknockshire’, *Antiquity*, 14/56 (Dec. 1940).

some 100 years removed from us today. But the caption directs us to a referent outside the image, the ‘that-has-been’ of the second or third century AD, the past searched for—and found—by Stein’s expedition. We are thrust into a further absence, a further distance as layers of time open up like Chinese boxes. This, surely, is photography *en abyme*, for the photographic subject (the ruined house) recapitulates something of photography’s own *noeme* (‘that-has-been’) *within* a photographic image, and the viewer is thrown backwards into the layers of absence both concealed and revealed by the medium.

‘Those are pearls that were his eyes’

With most photographs of archaeological sites, while the immediate referent of the photograph is the visible and contemporary landscape, the ultimate referent is strictly speaking absent. The landscape depicted in the photograph is itself only



HILLSIDE, AND THE BOULDER-CONSTRUCTION OF THE WALL OF THE LOWER HOUSE (see pp. 363, 366)

the index of a former landscape which is the main object of interest. That former landscape is long gone, and the archaeologist-viewer scans the contemporary landscape for traces of it. Photographs of archaeological sites can depict only what is left of their ultimate referents. This temporal *gap* between the image and its referent is characteristic of the genre, and is bridged, wherever possible, by supplementary information in the form of captions and other texts. This is apparent in an image like this photograph of the site of an ancient Welsh croft, Nant-y-moch, published in *Antiquity* in 1940 (Fig. 2.11). The image shows a hillside strewn with boulders which might remain unnoticed by the viewer were it not for the prominent labels and arrows, identifying the different parts of the croft and surrounding features such as a Roman road, a ford, and a monument. These labels attempt to fill in the gap between the appearance of the hillside as it was in 1940 and the hillside as it would have looked in a photograph taken at the time of the Roman occupation.

These labels, then, guide the viewer to construct for themselves the croft as it might have looked; they attempt to make the invisible visible. In another context, without the labels, this might be read as an image of a windswept hillside. Framed

by the labels and caption, however, it is instead to be interpreted as the *site* of something long since gone. What is missing from the image—a home, a yard, a way of life—is in a sense, then, the photograph's absent but true referent. As with the photographs in *Tracks*, a ghost-croft hovers over this picture. But what is made almost palpable through this image is not so much the croft as it was in Roman times, nor even the landscape as it appeared in 1940, but the transformative effect of time itself. Following the arrow down from the label 'South end, lower house', for example, we see not a house but a weathered rock, half-grown over with grass. In the bathetic gap between the labels and the image, the non-identity of sign and referent, we become aware of the passage of time between Roman times and 1940, and the transmutations it has wrought on the works of men and women. Perhaps it is this that accounts for the melancholy atmosphere surrounding the small figures on the hilltop: time's arrow surely hangs over them too.

Sometimes the effect of the juxtaposition of a photograph and the caption is somewhat surreal, where a non-identity of caption and image opens up a hidden dimension of lost time behind an otherwise unprepossessing image. This is true particularly where the caption to the photograph of an archaeological site is in the present tense, where the image is identified by the caption as something which it patently is not, or is no longer. A photograph by O. G. S. Crawford of a rather unimpressive gravelly path and what seems to be a large puddle was published in *Antiquity* in 1936 with the caption 'The so-called "Military Way" near Melrose, in what was once Holydean Wood, crossing Wood Burn, looking South' (Fig. 2.12). The caption seems to belong to another image, and yet here it is; we scan the image for evidence of the scene described, which we try to match with the landscape depicted. The disjuncture between the caption and the image, the distance between sign and referent, is time itself: what was once a military way is now perhaps marked by those mounds, overlaid now by a smaller path, what is now pasture was evidently once all trees, and the 'puddle' is perhaps the stream which bears the name of the now-disappeared wood.

This curious effect is also to be found in photographs of bomb sites. In 1942, the Architectural Press published *The Bombed Buildings of Britain*, a book recording 'architectural casualties' of the Blitz in photographs and descriptions originally compiled for the *Architectural Review*.⁹¹ In this book, photographs of bomb sites are juxtaposed with images and descriptions of the buildings before they were destroyed or damaged. As with the archaeological photographs described above, the viewer 'fills in' the gaps left by the bombed ruin, and a 'ghost building' (the building as it was) haunts the image. These images represent not so much buildings as the sites of buildings that no longer exist. Only with the assistance of the supplementary texts and images can we be sure what it is, exactly, that we are looking at. A photograph of what is left of St Mary's Church, Haggerston, is

⁹¹ J. M. Richards, ed., *The Bombed Buildings of Britain: A Record of Architectural Casualties: 1940–41* (London, 1942).



THE SO-CALLED 'MILITARY WAY' NEAR MELROSE, IN WHAT WAS ONCE HOLYDEAN WOOD,
CROSSING WOOD BURN, LOOKING SOUTH, 29 June 1934. (See p. 346)
Ph. O. G. S. Crawford

Fig. 2.12. O. G. S. Crawford, 'The so-called "Military Way" near Melrose' (29 June 1934), *Antiquity*, 10/39 (Sept. 1936).

juxtaposed with an image of what it once looked like (Fig. 2.13). What was once, as the text explains, 'a plain brick box with a rather elaborate Tudor front dominated by an absurdly thin tower with an even thinner lantern on top of it' is now 'the great heap of rubbish seen in the picture'.⁹² The viewer's attention is directed not so much to what is depicted in the photograph as to what has happened to the building. As with the archaeological images discussed above, there is a curious non-identity of photograph and referent, a gap between image and subject, which effectively is time itself.

In particular contexts, then, photographs such as these illustrate in graphic form the transformative effects of time famously described in Ariel's song in *The Tempest*:

Full fathom five thy father lies;
Of his bones are coral made;
Those are pearls that were his eyes;
Nothing of him that doth fade
But doth suffer a sea change
Into something rich and strange.⁹³

The passage of time has caused one thing to change into another: wood has become charcoal, homes have become a pile of rubble, orchards have become scrubland. These metamorphoses wrought by the passage of time are sped up in

⁹² Ibid. 42.

⁹³ *The Tempest*, Act I Scene ii.

the case of bomb damage, as T. S. Eliot described in 1942 in ‘Little Gidding’, a poem he wrote in the aftermath of the Blitz:

Ash on an old man’s sleeve
Is all the ash the burnt roses leave.
Dust in the air suspended
Marks the place where a story ended.⁹⁴

A photograph of a bomb site, like those of archaeological sites, by definition always arrives too late, in time only to ‘mark the place where a story ended’, as I explore in Chapter 5. Able to depict only the current appearance of a site, it is left to the caption and other devices to indicate that which the photograph does not, cannot, directly show.

Sites of History

Much of this applies to any photograph which frames its subject as a ‘site’. A site is a place where something has happened—or sometimes where something is going



Fig. 2.13. St Mary’s Church, Haggerston, before and after bombing, from J. M. Richards, ed., *The Bombed Buildings of Britain: A Record of Architectural Casualties: 1940–41* (1942).

⁹⁴ *The Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot* (London, 1969), 192.



Fig. 2.14. Lewis Baltz, *11777 Foothill Boulevard, Los Angeles, California, 1991*.

to happen, as in the case of a building site. A photograph of a site points the viewer to a temporally off-frame space, which may or may not be discernible in the image itself: in most cases the caption and accompanying text are crucial. Photographs of historic buildings and locations in tourist brochures are often framed as sites in this way. Places are framed as the sites of historical incident: this is where the battle of Culloden was fought; this is the place where Shakespeare was born.

It is the caption that most often transforms a place depicted by a photograph into a site, as a work by the artist-photographer Lewis Baltz demonstrates (Fig. 2.14). The photograph seems to depict a mundane American scene, an apparently insignificant stretch of highway running through urban sprawl. This place, it seems, could be almost anywhere. The title, however, is specific: *11777 Foothill Boulevard, Los Angeles, California, 1991*. To anyone with a knowledge of recent American history, it becomes clear that what we are looking at is the site of the 1991 beating of Rodney King by the Los Angeles Police Department, an event which led to widespread rioting in the city. Seen without its title, the photograph seems a straightforward representation of an urban scene; there is an uncomplicated relationship between signifier (the photograph) and referent (the road, cars, street lights, and so on). Given the title, however, and possessing the right information (about the events leading up to the riots), the image is transformed for the viewer into one depicting both the scene of a crime and a historical site. Now the referent has shifted elsewhere, off-frame: the beating of Rodney King does not feature in the image itself, but it is, in a sense, its absent referent, as 'place' is transformed into 'site'.

Scanning the Baltz image for evidence of the beating that occurred there, we are bound to be disappointed, for it seems to have left no obvious material trace in the place where it occurred. No doubt this was part of Baltz's intention, for it implies something of the mundanity of the event, the ubiquity of racist crime (it could have happened anywhere), the way in which police violence goes undocumented, and the tendency of urban modernity to cover over the traces of the past in a kind of historical amnesia. But Baltz's caption jogs the viewer's memory into 'seeing' what is not, in fact, in the image, but is conspicuous by its absence: the beating of King (captured, in fact, at the time by video camera and later broadcast on American television).

A similar effect can be seen in a postcard of the Czech village of Lidice, where it is the combination of a supplementary image and a caption that transforms the place into a 'site' (Fig. 2.15). This village and all of its inhabitants were systematically destroyed in June 1942 by the Nazis in a reprisal massacre following the assassination of General Heydrich. Now the site has been preserved as a memorial to Lidice, and this postcard is given to visitors to the on-site museum there. The two images on the postcard represent the village in 1942 and 1945, before and after its destruction. Without the first image, the second image would mean nothing; when they are seen together, the empty space depicted in the second image is understood as the site of a former destruction. We look at it as we might look at an archaeological photograph, searching for traces of its former



Fig. 2.15. Postcard from Lidice Memorial Museum, showing Lidice in 1942 and 1945.

inhabitants. As with the Baltz image, however, we search in vain since the Nazis aimed to destroy completely all traces of this place—and very nearly succeeded.⁹⁵ The defiantly deadpan captioning of this wasteland in the second image as ‘Lidice’ reminds the viewer that this is not so much empty space as haunted space; the juxtaposition of the two images insists on the preservation of absence *as* absence. The presence of the town in the first image frames its absence in the second, much in the same way as the site itself has been preserved as it was left, neither restored to its former existence nor built over and erased.

Photographing the Invisible

With the help of captioning, supplementary material, and previous knowledge, in all of the pictures discussed above we are directed to a referent which is effectively invisible: Maltese peasants driving their carts, an ancient Welsh homestead, a destroyed village, the Los Angeles police beating up King. We understand what we see in each image to be *what is left of an absent referent*. These pictures put us in the role of a Sherlock Holmes, or a Zadig; to quote Huxley again, they encourage ‘the seeing of that which, to the natural sense of the seer, is invisible’.

This effective disjuncture between signifier and referent is interesting not least because it seems to run contrary both to received wisdom about the photograph and to certain strands of photographic theory. Barthes, musing on the ontology of photography, concluded that

It is as if the Photograph always carries its referent with itself, both affected by the same amorous or funereal immobility, at the very heart of the moving world: they are glued together, limb by limb, like the condemned man and the corpse in certain tortures; or even like those pairs of fish (sharks, I think, according to Michelet) which navigate in convoy, as though united by an eternal coitus.⁹⁶

In a fundamental way Barthes is surely right. The images I have discussed are, first and foremost, images of a snake’s marks in sand, cart-tracks in Malta in the 1920s, a ruined house, a freeway in Los Angeles in the 1990s. Yet the sense in which Barthes is right does not quite match the viewing experience of these images; it is only part of the story. While the immediate referent (one might call it the signified) is ‘glued’ to the photograph, the referent to which the photograph points (the snake, the carts, the house, the assault on King) is elsewhere, off-frame, invisible.

Craig Owens suggests that the argument that the photographic image is blindly ‘based on the structure of the real, registered mechanically, doesn’t account for the photograph’s capacity to internally generate and organize meaning’.⁹⁷ Neither does it account, I would add, for the capacity of the *viewer* to generate and

⁹⁵ They did not quite succeed: the on-site museum contains charred and poignant remains of former inhabitants: a clock, a shoe, a letter.

⁹⁶ *Camera Lucida*, 5–6.

⁹⁷ ‘Photography *en abyme*’, 84.

organize meaning—which, as I have argued above, certain photographs demand that they do. The meaning of these photographs is generated not so much within the image as in the space between the image and the viewer, assisted by captions, and depends on the particular knowledge and experience possessed by the viewer, as s/he fills in the gaps in the image itself.⁹⁸

Photographs, it seems, despite their ineluctable lamination to the moment in which they are taken, are not just a matter of appearances. Landscape photographs, if framed in a certain way, do not merely document the current appearance of that landscape. This is true in the case of photographs of archaeological sites, but also in the case of images of other kinds of landscape ‘sites’. The viewing experience of these images is such as to dissolve away the surfaces of the present moment in a revelation of what photography cannot show directly, but can obliquely index. And photographs which direct the viewer away from the superficial appearances of modernity towards the past in this way, as we shall see in the chapters that follow, held a peculiar attraction for those Neo-Romantic artists and writers who were so enchanted by a contemporary landscape within which they could detect the sublime, submerged presence of history.

SOME CONCLUSIONS

Perhaps we are now in a position to begin to answer the questions posed at the beginning of this chapter, namely: What kind of historiography might photography be said to embody? What kinds of historical imaginings does it invite? What kinds of *knowledge* of the past does the photograph allow, and what does it disallow?

The Unrepresentable

The issue of the limits of photographic representation of the past has been most prominently explored and discussed in recent years by photographers and theorists concerned with the representation of the Holocaust. Leo Divendal’s 1992 photographs of the empty corridors and rooms of Terezin, for example, chart the alarmingly unprepossessing interior of the Nazi camp that claimed the lives of four of his great-aunts. Photographs by Simon Norfolk similarly document the unremarkable stairwells and other empty spaces in the concentration camp at Auschwitz, among other sites of genocide.⁹⁹ In a recent article, Ulrich Baer discusses two photographs of Holocaust sites: one, by Dirk Reinartz, shows the

⁹⁸ For an extended discussion of the photographic caption, see C. Scott, *The Spoken Image: Photography and Language* (London, 1999). See also Barthes, *Image Music Text*, 16.

⁹⁹ Simon Norfolk, *For Most of it I Have no Words: Genocide, Landscape, Memory* (Heaton Moor, 1999).



Fig. 2.16. Mikael Levin, 'Nordlager Ohrdruf', from project *War Story* (1995).

site of the extermination camp at Sobibór; the other, by Mikael Levin, documents the site of Ohrdruf, a camp where thousands of Jews and Polish and Russian prisoners of war met their death (Fig. 2.16). Both photographs were taken between the late 1980s and the 1990s. Like Divendal's and Norfolk's images, these are photographs which give little away about the historical events to which they nevertheless allude. As with the other photographs I have discussed above, their ultimate referent remains off-frame; as Baer points out, 'Reinartz and Levin force us into a position of seeing that something cannot be seen.'¹⁰⁰

Baer is interested in these images because of the way in which they pull the viewer in, yet refuse to disclose a final meaning or explanation: a strategy which relates in interesting ways to the experience and representation of historical trauma. These photographs (together with Divendal's and Norfolk's) take part, then, in the postmodern debate about the historiography of the Holocaust: the question of whether the Holocaust might present particular problems of

¹⁰⁰ Ulrich Baer, 'To Give Memory a Place: Holocaust Photography and the Landscape Tradition', *Representations*, 69 (Winter 2000), 42.

representation.¹⁰¹ Summing up this debate in 1992, Saul Friedlander wrote that ‘the extermination of the Jews of Europe is as accessible to both representation and interpretation as any other historical event. But we are dealing with an event which tests our traditional conceptual and representational categories, an “event at the limits”.’¹⁰² For Jean-François Lyotard, Auschwitz was like an earthquake so powerful that it destroyed all available instruments of measurement. This conception of a break with representation engendered by the Holocaust lies at the foundations of Lyotard’s work on the sublime and ‘the differend’, both of which can be used to describe events which remain beyond the grasp of the representable.¹⁰³ The idea that the Holocaust poses particular problems of representation derives not least from the fact that its perpetrators aimed to erase all evidence, all memory, and hence any possibility of its representation. Claude Lanzmann’s 1985 film *Shoah* attempts to deal with these problems by highlighting the very difficulty of its own making, focusing on the improbability of testimony from survivors and leaving space for the silence of the unsayable.

The images discussed by Baer fit into this context since ‘they show that something in the catastrophe remains inassimilable to historicist or contextual readings without, however, attaining spiritual significance... These images situate us in relation to something that remains off the maps of historicist readings.’¹⁰⁴ This is due to the fact that, although as apparently documentary photographs they draw the viewer in and encourage a ‘process of visual inspection’, the search for ‘the hidden source of the picture’s attraction’ is continually frustrated.¹⁰⁵ They therefore mimic the frustrated search for meaning, explanation, and redemption in the recollection of an event which must forever remain ‘at the limits’ of representation if it is not to be trivialized.

For Baer, this ‘frustration’ is due to certain formal aspects of Reinartz’s and Levin’s photographs. But it is surely equally—and more obviously—attributable to the bathetic and almost tangible ‘gap’ between the referent of the images, spelt by their titles (‘Sobibór: Extermination Camp Grounds’; ‘Nordlanger Ohrdruf, 1995’) and the innocuous-looking plots of land depicted in the photographs.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰¹ This debate has produced a huge literature. See for example S. Friedlander, ed., *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the ‘Final Solution’* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992); S. Felman, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (1992); P. Rabinowitz, ‘Wreckage upon Wreckage: History, Documentary and the Ruins of Memory’, *History and Theory*, 32/2 (1993), 119–37; and M. R. Marrus, ‘Reflections on the Historiography of the Holocaust’, *Journal of Modern History*, 66 (Mar. 1994), 92–116.

¹⁰² *Probing the Limits*, 2–3.

¹⁰³ See J.-F. Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute* (Minneapolis, 1988); ‘Representation, Presentation, Unpresentable’, in *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time* (Stanford, Calif., 1991), 119–28; and *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime* (Stanford, Calif., 1994).

¹⁰⁴ Baer, ‘To Give Memory a Place’, 42.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* 54.

¹⁰⁶ According to Baer, ‘The source of the pictures’ almost hypnotic appeal originates not with a specific and identifiable piece of evidence but with the illusion of distance and depth in the flat prints’ (*ibid.*). Elsewhere, too, Baer underestimates the importance of the titles, speaking vaguely of the ‘sense’ (his emphasis) engendered by these photographs ‘that something has disappeared’, without pointing out that it is the titles, above all, that engender this ‘sense’ (*ibid.* 50).

This—structurally—is the same gap that we encountered in the images discussed above: it is there in any photograph which frames its subject as *site*. In the case of images of Holocaust sites, the photographic ‘unrepresentability’ of the past neatly and powerfully echoes the historiographical debate about the limits of representation in the case of a historical ‘caesura’ of such traumatic dimensions. What is elided by Baer’s argument, however, is the extent to which photography itself may be constitutionally unable to represent the past *in any case*, since photography necessarily reduces history to trace, site, or absence. What is highlighted in Reinartz’s and Levin’s carefully constructed images perhaps relates as much to the representational limits of photography *as a medium* as it does to the limits of representation of the Holocaust.

Photography’s Sublime Historiography

As Baer says, Reinartz’s and Levin’s ‘pictures neither confirm nor add to our knowledge of history; from the pictures themselves, we cannot deduce what distinguishes these sites from countless others like it’.¹⁰⁷ The same is true of Baltz’s photograph of the site of the beating of Rodney King, and the photograph of Lidice in 1945, as I have discussed above.¹⁰⁸ In these images, whether or not this was the conscious intention of their makers, photography acknowledges its own limitations. These are photographs which, in a sense, mark out the limits of the medium’s representational empire vis-à-vis history. For, as I have already pointed out, there is one dimension which photography is constitutionally unable to depict: past time.

Ripped from the passage of time, photography is marked by its scars in the form of traces. As I have demonstrated, it is the viewer’s experience and knowledge alone that can convert these traces into historical knowledge; photography itself cannot have a knowledge of history. In a sense the trace in the photograph (the tracks of an adder, or the cart-tracks) is the very index of photography’s representational limits vis-à-vis the past—and this is why I have suggested that photographs of traces can be seen as photography *en abyme*. Halting time, the photograph converts history and the passage of time into graphic signs which may or may not be legible to the viewer, depending upon their expertise and knowledge. This, as I have suggested, is the basis of archaeological photography: but it is also at the heart of any photography which directs the viewer to its temporal anterior.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. 52.

¹⁰⁸ What sets the Baltz and the Lidice images apart, I would argue, is the fact that they make a critical point out of the mismatch between the contemporary appearance of a place and the horrific thing that happened there. The Holocaust images of Reinartz, Levin, and Norfolk, however, seem to tease the viewer with the possibility that there is some semi-mystical connection between site and occurrence, some lingering and unexorcised aura that may still be experienced in these places. This is what Susan Best refers to—rather alarmingly—as ‘the mood of Auschwitz’, where traces may not be visible but can somehow mysteriously be ‘sensed’ (S. Best, ‘The Trace and the Body’, in Bond, *Trace*, 172–3).

Perhaps for heuristic purposes, the relationship between the photograph and history can be compared to a stick of Brighton rock. If history (or the passage of time) is the three-dimensional stick of rock, then the photograph can be compared to its two-dimensional cross-section, viewed from one end of the stick. Only where it is cut through can the word that runs through the stick of rock be read (as 'BRIGHTON'); but viewing the two-dimensional word on the cut edge does not tell you anything about its reality as three-dimensional threads of colour running through the middle of the stick of rock, just as the photograph in itself cannot depict its own historical or temporal anterior.

The Brighton rock analogy is misleading, however, since it implies that history is legible only in photographs, since rock is precisely designed so that the word 'Brighton' is legible only where it is cut through. Perhaps a better visual analogy for the photograph's relation to time is the doodle, described above, of a 'Naughty French postcard (side view)' (Fig. 2.9). Since the postcard is depicted from the side, no matter how hard we look at the image, we will not be able to see the 'naughty' picture. This view of the card is comparable to the photograph's view of history. The depicted edge of the card corresponds to the trace in the photograph; the card itself, perpendicular to the picture plane, corresponds to the passage of time, the past. Looking at the side view of the postcard we can only imagine what kind of debauchery is depicted, having been told by the caption that the (invisible) picture is 'naughty'. Likewise, in the images discussed by Baer, the horrors implied by the captions ('Sobibór: Extermination Camp Grounds'; 'Nordlanger Ohrdruf, 1995') are the more unimaginably depraved for not being depicted in the photographs. The fact that these events are not depicted implies that they are in some way inexpressible within the given representational frame, just as the 'naughty' picture is not representable if the postcard is viewed from the side.

These photographs, then, correspond to Lyotard's conception of the sublime: taken together with their captions, they are presentations of the fact that the unrepresentable exists; they bear witness to the inexpressible. But in the extent to which they include traces of the past with which they gesture towards the unrepresentable dimension of lost time, *all* photographs bear witness to the inexpressible. In this sense, then, photography can be seen to embody a sublime historiography. Whenever a photograph's referent lies outside the picture frame, as is the case with photographs of archaeological sites as discussed above, whatever remains in the picture frame (the trace, or remnants of the referent) testifies to photography's representational limits. These traces, or remnants, are the *scars* of the passage of time: the very index of the limits of photographic representation vis-à-vis the past.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ The idea of the scar is appropriate here since it is not just the visible result of a wound, but can also refer to the mark of a place of former attachment, such as a leaf on a stem, which relates nicely to the photograph's attachment to the moment in which it was taken.

What, then, is *knowable* from these scars concerning the absent dimension of time that caused them? I have already outlined some of the difficulties involved in deducing the *causes* of a trace, or a scar, from its visible appearance. Particular skills and prior information are required to translate such signs into useful knowledge. But from this comes the irresistible idea that if you only approached the photograph with the right skills, knowledge, or experience you could know exactly what happened—in Ohrsdorf, for example, or in Lidice, or in ancient Malta—just by looking at their photographic representations. If Cuvier could reconstruct an extinct beast from its fragmentary remains, or if Sherlock Holmes could deduce a man's life story and personality just by looking at his hat, then perhaps history might be knowable from the traces in a photograph, given a perceptive and skilful enough viewer, and an image that is finely enough resolved.¹¹⁰ We realize that what we can learn from a photograph is dependent upon the limits of our own skills; and so it seems that if we possessed other skills then we might be able to divine the secrets of lost time. This, then, is photography's sublime historiography, for it suggests that history exceeds our (unavoidably human) capacity to know it, or represent it.

Photography's Empire of Representation

In 1886, one of salvage photography's most enthusiastic pioneers, W. Jerome Harrison, published a short and extraordinary article in the *Photographic News*, entitled 'Light as a Recording Agent of the Past'.¹¹¹ 'It is a wonderful thought', he wrote, 'that every action which has ever occurred on this sun-lit Earth of ours . . . is recorded by the action of light, and is at this moment visible somewhere in space, if any eye could be there placed to receive the waves of light.' If we could only travel away from the earth at a speed faster than the speed of light, he mused, 'we should clearly catch up or overtake wave after wave of light', and 'we should pass in review the lives of our parents and ancestors. History would unfold itself to us.' Harrison goes on to enumerate some of the things we could photograph from such an extraordinary position, solving once and for all the puzzles of history in a photographic record against which 'there would be no appeal'. We 'should learn the truth as to the vaunted beauty of the Queen of Scots; and the exact landing place of Julius Cæsar on the shores of Britain would no longer be a mystery.' A 'still more extended flight would disclose the missing links—if such existed—by which man passed from an arboreal fruit-eating ape-like creature to a reasoning omnivore'; and so on, solving all the conundrums of history and evolutionary biology that have puzzled scholars and scientists.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ This, in a sense, is the pretext of Michelangelo Antonioni's 1966 film *Blow-Up*, in which a photographer repeatedly enlarges a picture he has taken, obsessed by the possibility that it may inadvertently contain evidence of a murder.

¹¹¹ W. J. Harrison, 'Light as a Recording Agent of the Past', *Photographic News* (8 Jan. 1886), 23.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

Harrison was a prominent late nineteenth-century promoter of photography who in 1892 proposed a National Photographic Record and Survey to unify photographic organizations and their archives, including his own Survey of Warwickshire. This was a man who imagined a boundless empire of photographic representation, an empire which could, in theory, extend to history itself, bringing under its sovereignty Waterloo, the Roman Empire, and the evolutionary history of mankind. This is photography as Kipling's Puck, a technology so powerful that it could break free from the limits of its defining characteristic—its ineluctable connection to the present moment—and range over the entire history of the world, from megalithic times to the present. Harrison's fantasy is as telling as it is eccentric. For a man with such faith in the representational possibilities of this medium which had been invented—alas—too late to depict most of human history, the past was the final frontier, a representational challenge which could be met only by a space-age flight of fancy.¹¹³ Only by travelling away from the earth at a velocity greater than the speed of light could photography, with its ineluctable connection to the present moment, get itself into a position from which it might represent the past and include human history among its conquests. Earthbound, photography remains tied, however, to its own present moment; traces within photographs are the more-or-less mute witnesses to a dimension which is still out of bounds to the medium.

¹¹³ Lewis Mumford implicitly recognized this limit of photography when he wrote that 'Faust bartered his soul with Mephistopheles to see Helen of Troy: on much easier terms it will be possible for our descendants to view the Helens of the twentieth century' (*Technics and Civilization*, 245).

3

Reading *Antiquity*, Mapping History

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
A heap of broken images . . .

T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land* (1922)

When, in 1978, the poet, critic, and editor Geoffrey Grigson (1905–85) was asked by the *Times Literary Supplement* which journals had influenced him when young, he answered that

one magazine, *Antiquity*, founded and edited then by O. G. S. Crawford, still seems to me to have been the flower of all periodicals familiar to me in my day. In that treasury, so decently laid out (and so well printed . . .), prehistory, and history, rather as it was understood by Marc Bloch in France, and later by W. G. Hoskins, and imagination, received a stimulus such as no periodical administered to literature.¹

Antiquity was begun in 1927 by the field archaeologist O. G. S. Crawford (1886–1957) as a quarterly review aiming to disseminate the findings of a new generation of archaeologists in an accessible style and a visually attractive format. For Grigson, this journal most fitted the bill, in the late 1920s and 1930s, of what he calls the ‘periodical of Utopia’ that Tolstoy had called for in 1858. Tolstoy wanted a journal proclaiming the ‘independence and eternity of art’, where art would be saved from the politics that was engulfing nineteenth-century Russia, threatening to destroy or defile art. Such a journal was Grigson’s ideal, too. Drawing an implicit parallel between Tolstoy’s Moscow of 1858 and politicized interwar Britain, he decried the endemic admixture of politics with art in the periodical press at this time, when every ‘shrewd editor’ had an ‘axe to grind’.² One of his favourites, the *New Republic*, while excellent, ‘came under the

¹ ‘Friends of Promise: Four Editors Look Back at Outstanding Periodicals of their Youth’, *TLS* (16 June 1978), 666. An expanded version appeared as ‘Reading “Antiquity”’, in G. Grigson, *Recollections: Mainly of Writers and Artists* (London, 1984), 115–19.

² Grigson himself had arguably been just such a ‘shrewd editor’ with an ‘axe to grind’. As Valentine Cunningham points out, he founded the periodical *New Verse* in 1933 as a reaction against mass values and tastes (V. Cunningham, *British Writers of the Thirties* (Oxford, 1988), 275). See also J. Harding, *The Criterion: Cultural Politics and Periodical Networks in Inter-War Britain* (Oxford, 2002).

course . . . which ordains that most literary journalism in our language must be for ever mixed with politics'. T. S. Eliot's journal *The Criterion* was tainted by the same 'curse': 'covert politics', claimed Grigson, 'slightly defiled its superiority'.³

Only in *Antiquity*, it seems, could Grigson discern art—'independent and eternal'—without the defiling politics or the dullness that accompanied it in other journals and weeklies. Only in a publication that did not claim to deal with art could he find what he was looking for, as he viewed this archaeological journal through the lens of poetry. *Antiquity*, he wrote, made 'all the past with firework colours burn'—a line he borrowed from Wyndham Lewis's poem about Sir Thomas Browne's antiquarian tract *Urne Buriall*.⁴ Quoting from the poet Samuel Daniel, *Antiquity* seemed to Grigson to 'combine in one / All ages past, and make one live with all', enabling him to 'confer with who are gone / And the dead living unto counsell call'. Daniel, Grigson writes, was describing literature itself here: therefore this journal seemed to him to fulfil the functions of art itself—or at least to provide an environment in which art's eternity might be envisioned.⁵

In the pages of *Antiquity* full-page photographs of prehistoric megaliths, dry-stone walls, and still-inhabited primitive dwellings from around the world illustrated articles on a broad range of archaeological and anthropological subjects, and it is not hard to see the attraction for someone of Grigson's Neo-Romantic sensibilities, part-antiquarian, part-modernist-primitivist. Nor does it seem that he was alone: according to David Mellor, *Antiquity* 'may be thought of as formative to British art at this time as *Cahiers d'art*'.⁶ It will be part of the task of this chapter to unravel why this might have been so. But it will also be this chapter's task to outline how and why Grigson's reading of *Antiquity* effectively misrepresents the journal and the intentions of its editor, O. G. S. Crawford, who was far from apolitical, as I hope to show. The chapter will explore the conflicting interests and sensibilities of Grigson and Crawford and what they represent; it will attempt to contrast these different archaeological imaginations: the one poetic, nostalgic, and reactionary, the other pragmatic, professional, and radical. Through an examination of these men's readings of the trace in the landscape, I hope to show something of the various pleasures and uses of seeing the landscape archaeologically: how it could reassure the melancholy Romantic mind, revealing a past that seemed to have been obliterated by a tide of modernity (Grigson), but also how it might contribute to a dynamic world-view in which history was still being made, bolstering the political commitment of at least one—admittedly unusual—individual (Crawford).

³ 'Reading "Antiquity"', 116. ⁴ *Ibid.* 115.

⁵ This is a point that is made more of in the essay-length version of Grigson's *TLS* piece: 'Change the terms, too, but not the milieu altogether, and wouldn't Crawford be proffering an apt programme for a poet's duties and occupation?' ('Reading "Antiquity"', 119). Daniel's—and Grigson's—view of art has something in common with T. S. Eliot's conception of 'Tradition and the Individual Talent'.

⁶ *PL*, 38. *Cahiers d'art* was the journal which kept British artists informed of European developments before the war.

‘OUR FIELD IS THE EARTH . . .’: O. G. S. CRAWFORD
AND THE FOUNDING OF *ANTIQUITY*

Founding a new journal in 1927, Crawford wanted to build on archaeology’s increasing popularity between the wars, at the same time checking the wilder claims made in the mainstream press. This was not just the period of spectacular finds: Arthur Evans’s discovery of Minoan civilization in Crete; the excavations at Ur in Mesopotamia by Leonard Woolley; and Howard Carter’s discovery of Tutankhamun’s tomb.⁷ It was also a period of advances in archaeological theory, especially in classification and chronology, and many discoveries less glamorous but more important for the discipline. And it was a period in which new techniques—including aerial photography—were beginning to be used by a new generation of workers in the field. *Antiquity* was set up to publicize the work and attitude of this new generation of archaeologists working in Britain and throughout the world, who were piecing together chronologies and distribution patterns of human development.⁸

Antiquity was begun by Crawford with money borrowed from Alexander Keiller, a serious antiquarian with private means from his family’s marmalade business.⁹ It subsequently depended on subscriptions alone and was owned by Crawford until 1948, when it became a private company.¹⁰ *Antiquity*’s independence was unusual among archaeological journals, most of which were attached to a scholarly society. Crawford felt this to be the necessary precondition for his editorial freedom, as well as the prerequisite for attracting a wide audience.¹¹ *Antiquity* aimed to be less provincial than the existing journals of regional antiquarian and archaeological societies, and less specialist than *Archaeologia*, or the *Antiquaries’ Journal* (the organ of the Society of Antiquaries), *Antiquity*’s closest thing to a rival.¹²

⁷ See E. Bacon, ed., *The Great Archaeologists* (London, 1976). The glamour of such major discoveries rebounded on the popular image of the archaeologist. See D. H. Day, *A Treasure Hard to Attain: Images of Archaeology in Popular Film* (Lanham, Md., 1997). Some of the books of Agatha Christie gave an additional boost to this image. See C. Trümpler, ed., *Agatha Christie and Archaeology* (London, 2001).

⁸ For descriptive and personal accounts of the history of *Antiquity* see ‘Special Section: *Antiquity* 1952–2002’, *Antiquity*, 76/294 (Oct. 2002), 1063–125. Adam Stout’s as-yet unpublished work considers—as the articles in this issue largely do not—the politics of *Antiquity* in its early days. See ‘What’s Real, and What is Not: Fixing the Boundary between Fringe and Mainstream Archaeology in Britain’, BA dissertation, University of Wales, Lampeter, 2000, http://www.thirdstone.demon.co.uk/stout_article.htm; also his PhD thesis ‘Choosing a Past: The Politics of Prehistory in Pre-War Britain’, University of Wales, Lampeter, 2004. Thanks to Anna Robinson for this reference.

⁹ See L. J. Murray, *A Zest for Life: The Story of Alexander Keiller* (Wootton Bassett, 1999), 46–7.

¹⁰ *SD*, 176.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 175.

¹² In a letter to William Bellows in Jan. 1926, Crawford, referring to the *Antiquaries’ Journal*, wrote ‘We hope to appeal to a slightly different set—the amateur and the open-air archaeologist rather than the specialist’ (MS Crawford 104, fol. 3).

Given its dependence on subscription fees, Crawford understood the need for *Antiquity* to distinguish itself from other archaeological journals if it was to survive and attract new readers. Its tone was jaunty and more journalistic than that of the other archaeological publications, its articles had intriguing titles such as 'The Work of Giants' or 'Roses in Antiquity', and its own name, *Antiquity*, was chosen to appeal to a wide audience while not putting off specialists in the field.¹³ Crawford himself had an accessible writing style and entertaining personality, which were stamped on all the issues he edited.¹⁴ With good business sense he put a high premium on the visual appearance of the journal as well as its contents, a fact appreciated by Grigson: 'how professional it looked', he wrote, 'how appetisingly it was laid out and printed'.¹⁵ Crawford was keen that *Antiquity* 'should be able to take its place amongst literary and artistic periodicals well dressed in a nice cover, not in some shabby, ill-arranged one'.¹⁶ Care was therefore taken with the choice of typography, the good-quality printing by John Bellows of Gloucester, and the distinctive cover-design, with its woodcut image of Stonehenge by Ellis Martin, a member of staff at the Ordnance Survey, where Crawford worked.¹⁷ Right from the start, *Antiquity* also contained a large number of unusually good-quality photographic illustrations, a feature on which it traded in its publicity material.¹⁸

Something of *Antiquity's* novelty in these respects was reflected in a review which appeared in the *Times Literary Supplement* in December 1927. 'Antiquaries are no longer the singular and odd people that they used to be', opened the review of the new journal, noting how education and exciting new discoveries had broadened popular interest in archaeology. The reviewer remarked on a gap in the market between the press, which tended to report on only the most spectacular of discoveries, and the learned periodicals. 'There is room between the two', wrote the *Times Literary Supplement*, for 'Mr O. G. S. Crawford's new venture, *Antiquity*.' 'The articles and the shorter notes are excellently illustrated', noted the reviewer, 'and printing and paper are alike attractive.'¹⁹

Antiquity's identity as a periodical of interest to a broad reading public is evinced by the fact that up to the Second World War it featured regularly in the

¹³ The title was first suggested by Roland Austin, Crawford's assistant editor. 'It is easy to pronounce, which is something', wrote Austin in a letter to Crawford dated 14 Feb. 1926, also noting that 'single names, with a suggestion of the subject matter, are successful' and citing *Punch* and *Work* as examples (ibid. fol. 22). Crawford thought 'Antiquity' better than 'Archaeology' since it was easier to pronounce and 'more euphonious', and 'does away with the -ology which is apt to put off some people' (ibid. fol. 5).

¹⁴ His colleague at the Ordnance Survey, Charles Phillips, later wrote that if Crawford had not become an archaeologist, he 'might have been an ace journalist on Fleet Street' (Phillips, *My Life in Archaeology* (Gloucester, 1987), 80).

¹⁶ *SD*, 178.

¹⁷ Ibid. 219.

¹⁵ 'Reading "Antiquity"', 117.

¹⁸ A publicity leaflet from 1935 claimed, 'The illustrations in *Antiquity* are acknowledged to be unrivalled' (MS Crawford 104, fol. 38). *Antiquity* acquired new subscribers through inserting such leaflets in archaeological and other journals, and by targeting members of various societies (*SD*, 177).

¹⁹ *TLS* (1 Dec. 1927), 898.

column of the *Times Literary Supplement* that reviewed current journals; in fact nearly every issue between 1929 and 1937 was covered.²⁰ A short account of the contents of the issue was given in these short reviews, often singling out specific articles or photographs for particular praise—or, sometimes, scorn. The fact that *Antiquity* was so regularly included in this column, which featured only a few journals, alongside such publications as *The Criterion*, *The Countryman*, the *Architectural Review*, and *Book-Collector's Quarterly*, indicates that this was a journal deemed to have both popular and literary appeal.

Indeed, Crawford seems to have deliberately tried to attract a broad audience, not least through the blend of the mythical-literary and the archaeological that became something of a trademark of *Antiquity*.²¹ The very first article of the first issue, by Crawford, was exemplary in this respect. This article, 'Lyonesse', examined the archaeological evidence for the legendary existence of a land between Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly.²² With its literary resonances, from Arthurian mythology to Tennyson and Thomas Hardy, the evocation of Lyonesse was surely designed to appeal to a non-specialist audience, as was Crawford's regular use of the term 'Wessex', which resonated with the novels of Thomas Hardy.²³ The accompanying photographs, meanwhile, indicated that these legendary locations might have real geographical co-ordinates. Through such topics and this kind of language Crawford must have hoped to garner an audience of romantics—an audience, interestingly enough, identified in the 1927 review in the *Times Literary Supplement*. Musing on the 'deeper causes' of archaeology's new-found popularity, the reviewer suggested that 'An age dissatisfied with itself looks away to its past and to its future—We look before and after / And sigh for what is not'. Thus we are all 'philosophers and historians'.²⁴ It was very much with these non-specialist 'philosophers and historians' in mind that Crawford ran his journal, sugaring the pill of archaeological science with literary language and the evocation of mythical themes.

An exact profile of the numbers and identities of early subscribers to *Antiquity* is hard to ascertain, but its readers included luminaries like H. G. Wells, who in 1939 told Crawford, 'I have been . . . [an] ardent admirer of *Antiquity* since the beginning'.²⁵ The fact that *Antiquity* managed to survive through the war years indicates that it had a strong base of loyal subscribers, many of whom wrote to Crawford to congratulate him on continuing to bring out issues despite paper

²⁰ *Antiquity* reappeared in this column when Jacquetta Hawkes reviewed volume 20 (*TLS* (4 Jan. 1947), 14).

²¹ As Adam Stout points out, *Antiquity* carried "professional" articles on subjects dear to the quacks' about whom he was, on the whole, scathing ('What's Real, and What is Not').

²² O. G. S. Crawford, 'Lyonesse', *Antiquity*, 1/1 (Mar. 1927), 5–14.

²³ See M. Hardie, ed., *A Mere Interlude: Some Literary Visitors in Lyonesse* (Newmill, 1992). Crawford's work on Lyonesse was pioneering: see C. Thomas, *Exploration of a Drowned Landscape: Archaeology and History of the Isles of Scilly* (London, 1985), 262.

²⁴ *TLS* (1 Dec. 1927), 898.

²⁵ MS Crawford 2, fol. 27. Crawford, who had been a keen reader of Wells, met him when Wells visited Third Army Maps during the First World War (*SD*, 143).

shortages and other obstacles. What is clear from such letters (and other evidence) is that *Antiquity* was personally identified with Crawford from the start, despite the contribution of Roland Austin, the Gloucester librarian who helped edit it.²⁶ This was how Grigson perceived it (*Antiquity* was his, and him “*Antiquity*”²⁷), and it was also the opinion of the archaeologist Jacquetta Hawkes, who in 1951 wrote that ‘rarely can a paper with a specialized subject have been so strongly marked by a single personality’.²⁸ Certainly the design, form, and content of *Antiquity* were guided by Crawford’s particular passions; it was primarily a vehicle for him and his friends and associates. As a journal aiming to popularize the findings of archaeology and anthropology worldwide, *Antiquity* formed a vital part of Crawford’s mission; an examination of the man and his purpose will shed light on the nature and meaning of the journal.²⁹

O. G. S. Crawford

Osbert Guy Stanhope Crawford was a charismatic individual with strong views who is best known as a dedicated field archaeologist and publicizer of archaeological discoveries—especially aerial archaeology—but who was also a keen and accomplished photographer, as well as writing comic verse and prose.³⁰ After attending Marlborough College, where he first discovered field archaeology, and Keble College, Oxford, Crawford served in the First World War in Third Army Maps, and then in the Royal Flying Corps as an observer. Both the knowledge of mapping which Crawford gained in the war and his pre-war experience of fieldwork were to prove invaluable at the Ordnance Survey in Southampton, where he worked as Archaeology Officer from 1920 to 1946. During the Second World War he worked for the National Buildings Record (NBR), photographing the bombed-out ruins of Southampton in the aftermath of the aerial attacks that destroyed so much of the city, including his own library at the Ordnance Survey offices.³¹

²⁶ During the war years around 1940–2, when Crawford was seemingly depressed and hard to get hold of, Austin held the fort, doing the administrative work that enabled *Antiquity* to come out, but receiving little praise—a fact that caused some resentment (MS Crawford 60).

²⁷ ‘Friends of Promise’, 666.

²⁸ J. Hawkes, ‘A Quarter Century of *Antiquity*’, *Antiquity*, 25/100 (Dec. 1951), 171.

²⁹ Crawford’s desire to be remembered for *Antiquity* is evidenced by the fact that his gravestone at Nursling bears the inscription (presumably at his request) ‘O. G. S. Crawford, 1886–1957, Founder and Editor of *Antiquity*’.

³⁰ While Crawford is included in histories of archaeology, and is mentioned in the biographies and memoirs of archaeologists such as Mortimer Wheeler or Gordon Childe, there is little secondary literature on him. The only studies convincingly to put him in a broad cultural context are Matless, *Landscape and Englishness* and Adam Stout’s BA and PhD thesis. Mark Bowden’s essay ‘Mapping the Past: O. G. S. Crawford and the Development of Landscape Studies’, in *Landscapes*, 2/2 (Autumn 2001), 29–45, examines—in a fairly straightforward way—Crawford’s pioneering role in the study of historical landscapes. See also J. L. Myres, ‘The Man and his Past’, in W. F. Grimes, ed., *Aspects of Archaeology in Britain and Beyond: Essays Presented to O. G. S. Crawford* (London, 1951), 1–17.

³¹ Crawford was depressed by the destruction wreaked by the war effort as well as by bombing. His correspondence of the early 1940s suggests he was often gloomy and sought work abroad (see, for example, MS Crawford 60, fol. 38, and MS Crawford 67, fols. 39, and 54).

Crawford's remaining correspondence and papers (now in the Bodleian Library) and his autobiography, *Said and Done*, reveal an impatient man, an apparently confirmed bachelor with strong likes and dislikes, and a pronounced aversion to most aspects of contemporary life in Britain, ranging from the taste of modern cigarettes and the design of teapots to the spoliation of archaeological sites.³² But if modern life irritated him, the contemplation of world history in its most epic aspect sustained him throughout his life. In addition to *Antiquity*, which he edited until his death in 1957, Crawford published a large number of articles, papers, and books, including *Man and his Past* (1921), *Archaeology in the Field* (1953), *Castles and Churches in the Middle Nile Region* (1953), and the Ordnance Survey *Notes on Archaeology for Guidance in the Field* (1922).³³ In these publications, and in the pages of *Antiquity*, Crawford expounded, illustrated, and publicized his view of world history and how it should be studied. So what were his views, then, and—inseparable from those views—his archaeological methods?

The Importance of Landscape

The kind of archaeology that Crawford made his own was concerned with the interaction of society and geography, where fieldwork was the primary method, and landscape the major archaeological source. 'His prime interest', according to Glyn Daniel, 'was the face of the countryside in its archaeological aspects', and this was certainly a key concern of *Antiquity* from the start.³⁴ Crawford saw the landscape as a historical record far richer and more accurate than any written text. The geographical environment, for him, was both the determinant of prehistoric societies and their development and the repository of the remains of those—and later—societies. Time and space are intimately enmeshed in this view, where history takes place in concrete locations, and in turn those locations are created throughout time, both geological and historical. In his autobiography, Crawford ascribes his lifelong passion for this brand of archaeology to his acquaintance with the archaeologist Harold Peake (1867–1946) and his wife, whom he met around 1908.³⁵ Peake, who had a particular passion for ancient British roads, mistrusted textual sources. According to Crawford, Peake advised him to study geology instead of reading the existing literature on prehistoric archaeology if he wanted to pursue his early and abiding interest in 'the new and almost virgin field of British

³² The papers now in the Bodleian Library unfortunately do not include many from the 1920s and 1930s, since most of these were lost in the fire at the Ordnance Survey office in the Blitz.

³³ For a full bibliography of Crawford's archaeological writings to 1951, see Grimes, ed., *Aspects of Archaeology*.

³⁴ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004). There is a selection of *Antiquity* articles on landscape subjects in S. Stoddart, ed., *Landscapes from Antiquity* (Cambridge, 2000).

³⁵ At the time of Crawford's visits, before the war, the Peakes' household in Boxford was somewhat unconventional. Harold's wife Carli put on 'pastoral plays' and masques, and they received many house guests including music writer Francis Toye, the musical folklorist Mary Neal, and Hippisley Cox, Soho restaurateur and author of *The Green Roads of England* (London, 1914).

prehistoric archaeology'.³⁶ Thus when transferring from Greats at Oxford in 1909, Crawford went into the Geography department rather than Archaeology, since Oxford archaeology at that time, according to him, was the study of 'classical sculpture and Greek vases'.³⁷

Crawford acquired from Peake a mistrust of textual sources and a reliance on work on the ground which would become the guiding principle of his work. In 1909 Crawford completed his 'first systematic piece of archaeological fieldwork' on foot in the Andover district, and his autobiography is packed with accounts of solitary and epic treks across the open countryside.³⁸ When he took up his post at the Ordnance Survey, such trips became part of his official work. Eschewing motor transport wherever possible, on longer sorties Crawford took a bicycle, carrying his luggage on the handlebars, with his six-inch maps rolled around the horizontal bar of the bicycle frame. On these explorations across the countryside he registered details of the lie of the land, ever alert to half-obliterated signs and features that might reveal the lineaments of the past.³⁹ A furrow, grown over with weeds, might be the lasting register of the wheels of chariots on a Roman road; a group of fruit trees might be the sole survivors from a long-vanished homestead. Marks such as these were signs of history, which Crawford sought to document exhaustively, particularly in photographic form, as we shall see.

The southern counties of England where Peake and Crawford lived were particularly rich in such signs of history: Crawford learned from his early jaunts with Peake and his friend Dr Williams-Freeman that the traces of prehistoric peoples could be found (perhaps literally) in your own back garden. These jaunts consolidated Crawford's growing desire to concentrate on British prehistory. *Antiquity* was conceived, in part, as a vehicle for those working in this new and fertile field between the wars, when Cyril Fox, Grahame Clark, T. D. Kendrick, Cecil Curwen, Mortimer Wheeler, and Crawford himself all contributed to the flourishing of British prehistoric archaeology.⁴⁰ Their archaeological work, drawing on the pioneering work of Edwin Guest, H. J. Mackinder, and F. J. Haverfield, and filtered through Peake and J. L. Myres, took a geographical approach to the study of British prehistory.⁴¹ The mapping of the distribution of artefacts against the physical and geological map of the British Isles was a major part of this work, finding expression in works such as Cyril Fox's extraordinarily titled *The Personality of Britain* (1932).

Given Crawford's interests, the post which he held at the Ordnance Survey—of which he was the first holder—suited him well. His main task here was to

³⁶ *SD*, 41. For an accessible account of Crawford's early interest in the remains of the past in the landscape around his childhood home, see his 'Archaeology from the Air', in M. Wheeler, ed., *A Book of Archaeology: Seventeen Stories of Discovery* (London, 1957), 83–9. ³⁷ *SD*, 46.

³⁸ On one day in 1940, for example, Crawford boasted that he had cycled—with luggage—for 72 miles (*ibid.* 225).

³⁹ 'One cannot acquire the same intimate knowledge of topography from motoring, and had I done so I should have missed much' (*ibid.* 226).

⁴⁰ 'There were several of us working on the same sound lines to get British archaeology on a firm basis; and *Antiquity* became our organ' (*ibid.* 189).

⁴¹ See Bruce G. Trigger, *A History of Archaeological Thought* (Cambridge, 1989), 249.

supervise the revision of Ordnance Survey standard maps to include full and accurate archaeological data; he also initiated a series of so-called 'Period maps' including maps of Roman Britain (1924), Neolithic Wessex (1932), and Britain in the Dark Ages (1935 and 1938).⁴² Seeing that British prehistory was 'nobody's child', Crawford had resolved to 'adopt it', and he set about listing megalithic monuments, building on a card index begun by Peake, and incorporating them into standard maps.⁴³ Carrying out this pioneering work enabled Crawford to pursue his interest in British prehistory, putting into practice both his views on the importance of landscape to archaeology and his desire to publicize those views in the widely available form of maps, with attractive covers designed by Ellis Martin and others.⁴⁴ Crawford made full use of his unique position at the Ordnance Survey; his frequent trips in search of archaeological data for maps also provided him with material for articles in *Antiquity*, and he soon became the lynchpin of a network of young archaeologists such as Christopher Hawkes, Charles Phillips, and Stuart Piggott, who helped him to gather archaeological information in their areas in exchange for maps. Crawford called these helpers his 'ferrets'; they became the next generation of British archaeologists.⁴⁵

There is a deeper correspondence between Crawford's outlook and the maps which he helped to produce at the Ordnance Survey. A map which includes the location of archaeological remains spatializes historical information in a unique way that bypasses the linearity of historical thought, which is usually expressed in language.⁴⁶ If, as we have seen, it was Crawford's aim to restore space to the study of time, the maps produced at the Ordnance Survey under his supervision were the visual expression of this aim. At the same time, these maps also aimed to restore time to space, literally putting the historicized landscape on the map. They did not only represent the visible, current, and usable elements of the landscape—its roads, towns, and hill contours—they also indicated the location of the ruined, the invisible, and the barely discernible remains of the past: hill forts, old roads, and the courses of ancient and desiccated rivers.

The Present Tense of *Antiquity*

In addition to this emphasis on landscape, Crawford's archaeological outlook was informed by the application of anthropological analogies to the study of

⁴² Crawford later claimed that 'the Period Maps were our chief accomplishment' (*SD*, 217). See R. Hellyer, 'The Archaeological and Historical Maps of the Ordnance Survey', *Cartographic Journal*, 26/2 (Dec. 1989), 111–33. ⁴³ *SD*, 159.

⁴⁴ According to the *Daily Mail*, the map of Roman Britain was 'one of the most wonderful maps ever produced', 'opening up a new era in motor touring' (*Daily Mail* (8 Aug. 1924), quoted in *SD*, 164–5). The author Hilaire Belloc gave the map a positive review in the *New Statesman* (22 Nov. 1924), 200–2.

⁴⁵ See S. Piggott, 'Archaeological Retrospect 5', *Antiquity*, 57/219 (Mar. 1983), 29.

⁴⁶ Crawford valued maps for precisely this reason: 'Maps are an alternative mode of expression, a method of conveying information that cannot be conveyed by any other means. No mere verbal description can express the relationship of a group of remains . . . to its natural environment and to its neighbours' (*SD*, 218).

prehistory, a method pioneered in the previous century by E. B. Tylor and General Pitt Rivers. Crawford was introduced to this method by Harold Peake, who was president of the Royal Anthropological Institute from 1926 to 1928.⁴⁷ Peake had applied his experience of living among the native peoples of British Columbia to his study of prehistoric Britons, in particular to understanding how trackways are formed in a country with no roads.⁴⁸ Crawford was excited by this, seeing how the living cultures of so-called ‘primitive’ peoples could throw light on archaeological puzzles, and he consolidated this early interest when he took a course in anthropology in Oxford under R. R. Marett and J. L. Myres. He later claimed that ‘it is to [Marett] and to Peake that I owe the habit of seeing the past in the present which is what vitalizes prehistory.’⁴⁹ Crawford’s commitment to evolutionary anthropology informed his outlook throughout his career.

It was this perception of the presence of the past, both in the landscape and in living peoples and their practices, which animated the pages of *Antiquity*. The editorial of the first issue set the tone: ‘We shall not confine ourselves too rigidly within the conventional limits of archaeology. The past often lives on in the present. We cannot see the men who built and defended the hill-top settlements of Wessex; but we can learn much from living people who inhabit similar sites to-day in Algeria (see Fig. 3.14).’⁵⁰ Subsequent issues therefore included articles on, for example, Rhodesian cultivation terraces, and the megalithic monuments that were still being erected in Assam.⁵¹ Nor was *Antiquity*’s examination of living cultures confined to non-European examples: Crawford (like Tylor and Pitt Rivers before him) took seriously the folk cultures and isolated regions of ‘civilized’ nations as examples of ‘survivals’—in the very midst of modern life—of surpassed stages of cultural development. A 1937 issue reported on ‘Cave-Life in Britain’, pointing out the ‘tremendous range of house-types . . . to be found in the culture of a modern civilized state. Cave life may not form a large element in the culture of modern Britain, but it does exist side by side with other half-forgotten primitive habitations like the “black houses” of the Hebrides.’⁵² The note was accompanied by a photograph of ‘Modern Cave-Life at West Kilbride, near Largs, Scotland’, where ‘some unemployed men’ were living.⁵³ Authors contributing to *Antiquity* scanned the landscape for examples of similar ‘survivals’ of primitive culture and artefacts. In a 1931 article entitled ‘Sleds, Carts and Waggon’s Cyril Fox excitedly

⁴⁷ Peake was the author, with H. J. Fleure, of *The Corridors of Time* (1927–36), described by Bruce Trigger as ‘a widely read multi-volume series’ on prehistory (*History of Archaeological Thought*, 250). The first of these, *Apes and Men* (Oxford, 1927), described the impact of Darwinian thought on the interpretation of the history of civilization. ⁴⁸ *SD*, 40.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 80.

⁵⁰ ‘Editorial Notes’, *Antiquity*, 1/1 (Mar. 1927), 3.

⁵¹ O. G. S. Crawford, ‘Rhodesian Cultivation Terraces’, *Antiquity*, 24/94 (June 1950), 96–8; J. H. Hutton, ‘Assam Megaliths’, *Antiquity*, 3/11 (Sept. 1929), 324–38.

⁵² ‘Cave-Life in Britain’, ‘Notes and News’, *Antiquity*, 11/42 (June 1937), 219.

⁵³ Framing these cave homes as primitive ‘survivals’, the note does not seem particularly concerned about the plight of these men, except to note briefly that the local Town Council had decided not to move them until houses could be found at a reasonable rent (*ibid.*).

reported sightings of vehicles of ancient design still in use in Wales. The article is accompanied by images illustrating the stages of ‘the evolution of the Wheel-car’, and a photograph of the curious ‘survival’ spotted by Fox, still being used at the time of writing (Fig. 3.1).⁵⁴

Evolutionary theory had shown that species contained vestiges of their own past, and articles in *Antiquity* made full use of the evolutionary paradigm, telling history through things in the world, as if any hut, cart, or ear of wheat might contain the secret of historical-evolutionary time. An article on roses, mentioned approvingly by Grigson, pointed out how the modern rose was descended from some of the most ancient species of rose, poetically concluding that ‘Our rose gardens are merely the twentieth century consequence of that first recorded ancient Greek rose garden fashioned by Midas.’⁵⁵ Language, too, was viewed as containing vestiges of history, especially in place names (Crawford’s self-proclaimed ‘speciality’⁵⁶), where the name of a village, river, or town might be the sole remaining witness to changing patterns of land use, long-since destroyed relics, or otherwise forgotten local mythology. *Antiquity’s* methodology suggested that if the enigma of world history was to be solved, it was through the clues



Fig. 3.1. G. H. Peate, ‘Wheel-sled, in use at Brynaerau Isaf, Llanbrynmair, Montgomeryshire’, from C. Fox, ‘Sleds, Carts and Waggons’, *Antiquity*, 5/18 (June 1931)

⁵⁴ C. Fox, ‘Sleds, Carts and Waggons’, *Antiquity*, 5/18 (June 1931), 185–99.

⁵⁵ W. L. Carter, ‘Roses in Antiquity’, *Antiquity*, 14/55 (Sept. 1940), 256.

⁵⁶ *SD*, 158.

that were left to us—the name of a wood, the baking technique of Scottish Highlanders, or the line of a field-boundary.

The Photography of *Antiquity*

Antiquity's present tense and the contemporaneity of its immediate objects of study were reinforced by its highly prominent use of good-quality, full-page photographs. Crawford's brand of field archaeology, outlined above, made photography an essential tool of the working archaeologist.⁵⁷ Having taken up photography at an early age, Crawford used his skills during the First World War, taking panorama photographs from the front line.⁵⁸ After the war, he apparently gave up photography for a while, but took it up again with renewed vigour in 1931.⁵⁹ On his many trips around the British Isles and abroad, Crawford used his camera to document a huge range of subjects wherever he went: he claimed to have taken around 10,000 photographs between 1931 and 1955 (including 5,000 for the NBR).⁶⁰ Crawford used photography as a tool in the excavation of the landscape, a pictorial note-taking.

Crawford seems to have organized his photographs (at least partly) into typologies, much like the typologies of the Pitt Rivers Museum.⁶¹ He bound his photographs (along with images from other sources) into albums covering such subjects as gravestones, primitive carts, and cultivation systems, but also—bizarrely—sleeping archaeologists ('horizontal excavators'), roadside advertisements, and anti-fascist graffiti (Fig. 3.2).⁶² Clues to their purpose are often evidenced by Crawford's captions—some of them quite caustic—scribbled onto them. The NBR photographs document a ruined town (Southampton) and the archaeological remains uncovered by the Blitz. The pictures of roadside notices and advertisements, or of signs prohibiting entry to a site, point up the degradation of a countryside increasingly dominated by private property and commercial interests (Fig. 3.3). Some seem to have no purpose other than the purely aesthetic; many are very skilful in terms of composition, lighting, and tone.⁶³ Most

⁵⁷ *Antiquity* periodically included articles on archaeological photography, including practical tips from Crawford himself ('Archaeological Photography', *Antiquity*, 10/39 (Sept. 1936), 351–2).

⁵⁸ *SD*, 116. ⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 209. ⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Pitt Rivers arranged the objects in his collection on typological rather than geographical principles, since these were meant to illustrate the evolutionary development of cultural forms. The preservation of this classification system was one of the conditions attached to the donation of his collection to Oxford University in 1882. See A. H. Lane Fox Pitt Rivers, *The Evolution of Culture and Other Essays* (Oxford, 1906); G. W. Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology* (New York, 1987), 264. In the 1930s the photographic collection of the Pitt Rivers Museum was also at least partly arranged typologically (E. Edwards, *Raw Histories: Photographs, Anthropology and Museums* (Oxford, 2001), 86).

⁶² Unfortunately, Crawford's photographs were taken out of their original albums in the process of 'conservation', and so it is hard to tell exactly how they were originally organized.

⁶³ Crawford tried to market some of his photographs as postcards, without much success (*SD*, 261–2).



Fig. 3.2. O. G. S. Crawford, 'Slogans near Chalk Farm, King Henry's Road' (17 May 1936).



Fig. 3.3. O. G. S. Crawford, 'National Benzole' (4 Sept. 1933).



Fig. 3.4. O. G. S. Crawford, Stonehenge (14 Apr. 1954).

catalogue the remnants of the past in the landscape (megaliths, earthen ramparts, stone walls) (Fig. 3.4) or those curious ‘survivals’ of time (primitive dwellings, out-moded vehicles, ancient farming implements) still in use.

Crawford realized the value of photography both in making a publication look attractive to a potential reader and also as a manifestation of his own perception of the demonstrable presence of the past in the contemporary world. In the pages of *Antiquity*, photographs did more than merely illustrate the articles which they accompanied. They operated as *proof* of the existence of the sites, artefacts, and practices they pictured (like the ancient vehicle seen by Fox in Wales); they were themselves incontrovertible traces of the traces of history. Some of the photographs in *Antiquity* depicted excavations, dominated by the apparatus of

professional archaeologists. But more often images of sites or monuments *in situ* gave the impression to the casual reader that the photographer had just come across them on a walk, or perhaps while looking out of the window of a train or plane. And they seemed, therefore, to indicate to the reader that the referents (or the remnants of the referents) of the articles in this journal—whether on medieval head-hunting rituals in Nepal, prehistoric rock-carvings in the Italian Alps, or buried Viking ships in East Anglia—had a real and material existence, now, somewhere in the world, *if one only knew where to look*.

ANTIQUITY THROUGH NEO-ROMANTIC EYES

If *Antiquity* was popular among Neo-Romantic artists, it is not hard—superficially, at least—to see why. The journal would have had an obvious appeal for an artist like John Piper, for example, who bound *Antiquity* articles of particular interest into two fat volumes (see Appendix);⁶⁴ for John Craxton, who was ‘deeply interested in archaeology’, assisting at Mortimer Wheeler’s excavation of Verulamium;⁶⁵ or for Paul Nash, who owned books by Stukeley and other archaeological literature.⁶⁶ Given Crawford’s commitment to British prehistory, many of the objects and landscapes depicted in the pages of *Antiquity* were the points of reference for a generation of artists who were rediscovering the primitive forms in the landscape: the standing stones celebrated by Nash, Eileen Agar, and Ben and Winifred Nicholson; the Romanesque carvings and ancient stones and barrows that appear in Piper’s work; the chalk hill-figures depicted by Eric Ravilious; the rocky masses that found their way into rocky masses in Graham Sutherland’s paintings and those that inspired Henry Moore (Figs. 3.5 and 3.6; see also Figs. i.2 and i.5).⁶⁷ *Antiquity* took these prehistoric remains and other antiquities seriously, devoting to them articles that were both scholarly and accessibly written. Photographs of these antiquities enabled the artist-reader to focus on their form while the accompanying text provided information on folklore and mythology as well as historical significance. Perhaps most important of all, Crawford’s approach

⁶⁴ Piper’s volumes are labelled respectively ‘Papers from *Antiquity*, special 1927–1940’ and ‘Papers from *Antiquity*, general 1927–1940’ (the former being fatter than the latter), and are in the possession of his daughter, Clarissa Lewis. Although I have found no sure evidence to support this, Mrs Lewis says she is sure that her father was a subscriber to the journal, and that he doctored his own copies, binding together articles that interested him, or those that were written by authors he had an interest in (letter, 21 Sept. 1999).

⁶⁵ Telephone conversation, 11 Apr. 2003.

⁶⁶ Nash’s library included W. Stukeley’s *Stonehenge* (1740) and his *Abury* (1743), F. T. Elsworthy’s *Horns of Honour and Other Studies in the By-Ways of Archaeology* (London, 1900), O. G. S Crawford and A. Keiller, *Wessex from the Air* (Oxford, 1928), and a copy of S. Piggott’s *Stukeley, Avebury and the Druids* (a booklet reprinted from the March 1935 issue of *Antiquity*) inscribed to Nash from the author in 1938 (TGA 964).

⁶⁷ Ravilious’s interest in chalk figures resulted in his preparation, around 1941, of a ‘dummy book’ (now lost) on the subject for the Puffin Picture Book series (A. Powers, *Eric Ravilious: Imagined Realities* (London, 2003), 45).

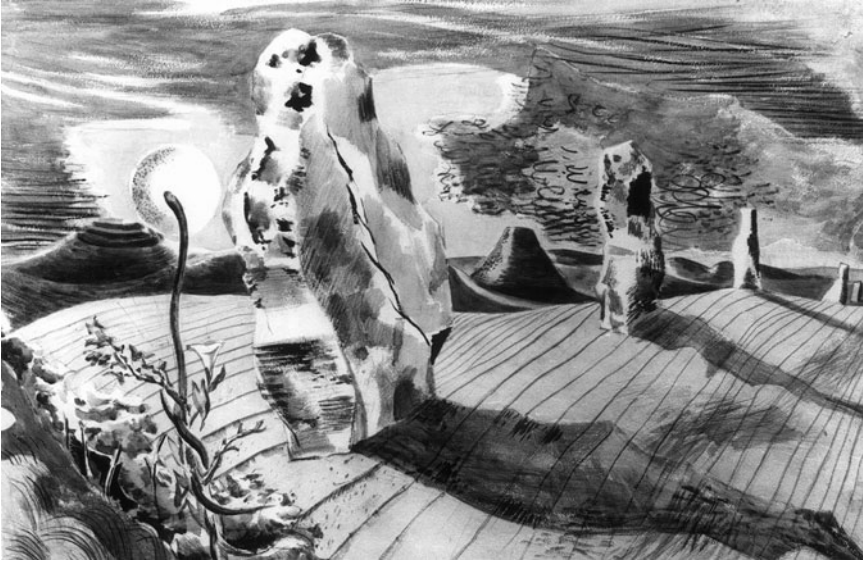


Fig. 3.5. Paul Nash, *Landscape of the Megaliths* (1937), Albright-Knox Art Gallery Buffalo, New York. Room of Contemporary Art Fund.



Fig. 3.6. John Piper, *Avebury (or Archaeological Wiltshire)* (1936).

to landscape archaeology meant that photographs in *Antiquity* tended to depict ancient monuments in their current situation in the landscape. Not only did this encourage readers to discover such sites for themselves, but it also corresponded nicely with the Neo-Romantic concern with the object in the national landscape, and the idea of the *genius loci* (see Introduction).⁶⁸

The boundaries between art and archaeology were in any case blurred in places in the 1930s and 1940s: some broadly Neo-Romantic figures—notably Piper, Grigson, and Betjeman—were serious antiquarians. Piper had been a member of the Wiltshire Archaeological Society as a boy;⁶⁹ talking about his youth in 1983, he said ‘I was a mad topographer and archaeologist, as well as artist. In fact, I didn’t know I was going to be a painter. I tried all sorts of things.’⁷⁰ Piper continued with his archaeological interests, not only in his artistic output but also in the series of articles which he wrote for the *Architectural Review* in the 1930s and 1940s, which included features on Stonehenge and Romanesque sculpture.⁷¹ These articles—and others—resulted from trips round Britain with a camera, many of the products of which are now in the Tate Archive (see, for example, Figs. 3.7 and 3.8). Other antiquarian and topographical imagery by Piper appeared in guidebooks, for example the Shell Guide to Oxfordshire that Betjeman commissioned him to write in 1937.⁷²

A flowering of Neo-Romantic interest in antiquarianism was also evidenced by a revival of Sir Thomas Browne’s *Urne Buriall*, first published in 1658. This work, occasioned by the excavation of some urns in a Norfolk field, was republished in 1932 in a limited edition illustrated by Nash; an edition of the last chapter was published in 1946 accompanied by designs by Piper; and a poem about it by Wyndham Lewis was quoted by Grigson in his appreciation of *Antiquity* (see above).⁷³ A quotation from Browne’s *Religio Medici* was used as an epigraph to the script of Powell’s and Pressburger’s 1946 film *A Matter of Life and Death*;⁷⁴ and Browne was quoted with remarkably frequency in the pages of *Antiquity* itself.⁷⁵

⁶⁸ This interest in local antiquities was not shared by everyone. Evelyn Waugh wrote in 1930 that ‘There seem to me few things more boring than the cult of mere antiquity. I would view with the utmost equanimity the obliteration of all those cromlechs and barrows and fosses of our remote ancestors which litter the English countryside: whenever I see Gothic lettering on the ordnance survey map I set my steps in a contrary direction’ (*Labels: A Mediterranean Journey* (London, 1930), 107).

⁶⁹ R. Ingrams and J. Piper, *Piper’s Places: John Piper in England and Wales* (London, 1983), 123.

⁷⁰ ‘The Arbitrary Eye: A Photographic Discourse between John Piper and Paul Joyce’, *British Journal of Photography* (25 Nov. 1983), 1241.

⁷¹ J. Piper, ‘England’s Early Sculptors’; ‘Re-Assessing Stonehenge’, *AR* (Sept. 1949), 177–82. Piper also contributed articles on topographical and archaeological subjects to other publications including *Country Life* and *The Listener*. See the bibliography in Tate Gallery, London, *John Piper*, 140–1 and D. Fraser Jenkins, ed., *John Piper: A Painter’s Camera* (London, 1987).

⁷² J. Piper, *Oxon* (London, 1938). See too J. Piper and J. Betjeman, *Shropshire* (London, 1951).

⁷³ Sir T. Browne, *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus*, ed. J. Carter (London, 1932); J. Carter, ed., *The Last Chapter of Urne Buriall by Thomas Browne* (Cambridge, 1946); Grigson, ‘Reading “Antiquity”’, 115.

⁷⁴ See I. Christie, *A Matter of Life and Death* (London, 2000), 23.

⁷⁵ See, for example, W. B. Kennedy Shaw, ‘Rock Paintings in the Libyan Desert’, *Antiquity*, 10/38 (June 1936), 175. Cecil E. Curwen, a regular contributor to *Antiquity*, used a quotation from Browne’s *Religio Medici* as an epigraph to a chapter of his book *The Archaeology of Sussex* (London, 1937), 309.

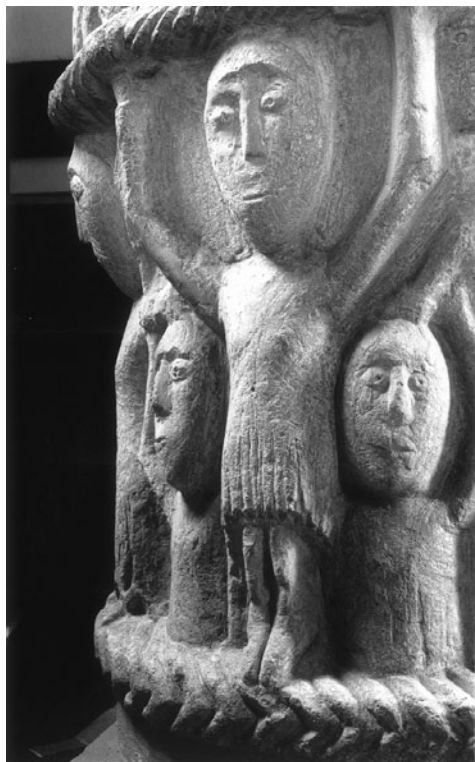


Fig. 3.7. John Piper, *Toller Fratrum, Dorset: Font*. Fig. 3.8. John Piper, *Stonehenge* (1949).

If artists and writers maintained antiquarian interests, some professional archaeologists dabbled in poetry and poetic prose, exhibiting a marked Neo-Romantic sensibility. Stuart Piggott, for example (a major contributor to *Antiquity*, who described Crawford as ‘my archaeological godfather’⁷⁶), wrote archaeological histories which focused on druids, antiquarians, and Romantics; he also wrote poetry, collected art, and made small collages out of photographs of prehistoric remains and distribution maps.⁷⁷ In a 1935 issue of *Axis*, the journal dedicated to abstract art run by Piper and Myfanwy Evans (who married Piper in 1937), an archaeologist reviewed the work of Barbara Hepworth.⁷⁸ Perhaps most significant of these Neo-Romantic archaeologists was Jacquetta Hawkes, who was

⁷⁶ Piggott, ‘Archaeological Retrospect 5’, 29.

⁷⁷ Some of Piggott’s poems are collected in his *Fire among the Ruins (1942–1945)* (London, 1948). His archaeological histories include ‘Stukeley, Avebury and the Druids’, *Antiquity*, 9/33 (Mar. 1935), 22–3; *William Stukeley, an Eighteenth-Century Antiquary* (Oxford, 1950); and the later *Ruins in a Landscape: Essays in Antiquarianism* (Edinburgh, 1976) and *Ancient Britons and the Antiquarian Imagination: Ideas from the Renaissance to the Regency* (London, 1989).

⁷⁸ *Axis*, 3 (July 1935), 14.

married to Christopher Hawkes, one of Crawford's 'ferrets'.⁷⁹ Her 1951 book *A Land* used images by Ben Nicholson and Henry Moore to illustrate an extraordinary text which attempted to 'tell the story of Britain' by using geology and archaeology 'evocatively', and which saw in the stone of Moore's sculptures the ancient geological history of the British Isles (Fig. 3.9).⁸⁰ In a half-page review by a poet in the *Times Literary Supplement*, Hawkes's book was described as a product of a uniquely illuminating archaeological imagination, a marriage of science and art. What Hawkes shows, wrote the reviewer, is that 'everywhere the remote past presses on the present, moulding our lives, forming the everyday scene, often in the most minute particulars. The shelves of seas and deserts, the slates, the limestones and the sandstones dictate the shape and texture of our land, draw our maps for us, plan even the lines of our streets.'⁸¹ Hawkes's book, itself influenced by Neo-Romantic and Romantic artists, circulated among painters such as Ben Nicholson, who read it in 1952.⁸²

Such interdisciplinary cross-overs are less remarkable when one considers the fact that many of these individuals were part of the same social set. Piper worked with Betjeman on the Shell Guides in the 1930s and 1940s; together they became fanatical explorers of the British countryside, uncovering and documenting local antiquities in photographs, drawings, and text. It was in the course of photographing 'England's Early Sculptors' for the *Architectural Review* that Piper became great friends with Tom Kendrick, the archaeologist (and contributor to *Antiquity*) who was then Assistant Keeper at the British Museum.⁸³ In the year in which he became Director of the British Museum, Kendrick dedicated his book *British Antiquity* to Piper and Betjeman, glorifying them as disciples of John Leland, the sixteenth-century English antiquarian.⁸⁴ In 1934 Betjeman and his wife had moved to a farmhouse at Uffington in the Vale of the White Horse, and it was here that Piper met the archaeologist Stuart Piggott.⁸⁵ During the war Piggott became a regular visitor to Fawley Bottom, near Henley, the home of John and

⁷⁹ G. Daniel and C. Chippindale, eds., *The Pastmasters: 11 Modern Pioneers of Archaeology* (London, 1989), 22. Hawkes later married J. B. Priestley, although she kept the name of her first husband. See C. Finn, 'A Life on Line: Jacquetta Hawkes, Archaeo-Poet (1910–1996)', <http://traumwerk.stanford.edu:3455/ChristineFinn/home>. ⁸⁰ J. Hawkes, *A Land* (London, 1950).

⁸¹ 'The Shaping of Britain', *TLS* (22 June 1951), 383. The reviewer is identified by the *TLS* online archive as the poet and critic N. C. Nicholson.

⁸² J. Lewison, ed., *Ben Nicholson* (London, 1993), 89.

⁸³ Kendrick's own book on Anglo-Saxon Art includes some of Piper's photographs (*Anglo-Saxon Art to A.D. 900* (London, 1938)). Kendrick was also friends with Craxton, who at one point lived with Stuart Piggott (telephone conversation, 11 Apr. 2003).

⁸⁴ Kendrick, *British Antiquity* (London, 1950). Piper's daughter Clarissa Lewis confirms that T. D. Kendrick was 'a great friend' of her parents (telephone conversation, Oct. 1999). There is a folder of correspondence between Kendrick and the Pipers among Kendrick's uncatalogued papers in the British Museum Archives.

⁸⁵ 'I was a young archaeologist', Piggott wrote later, 'with a taste for architectural history, the Picturesque and the Romantic Revival. . . and immediately found in John P. a most congenial fellow-explorer in these delectable by-ways of antiquarianism' (Piggott, 'A Disciple of Leland', in G. Elborn, ed., *To John Piper on his Eightieth Birthday* (London, 1983), 33).

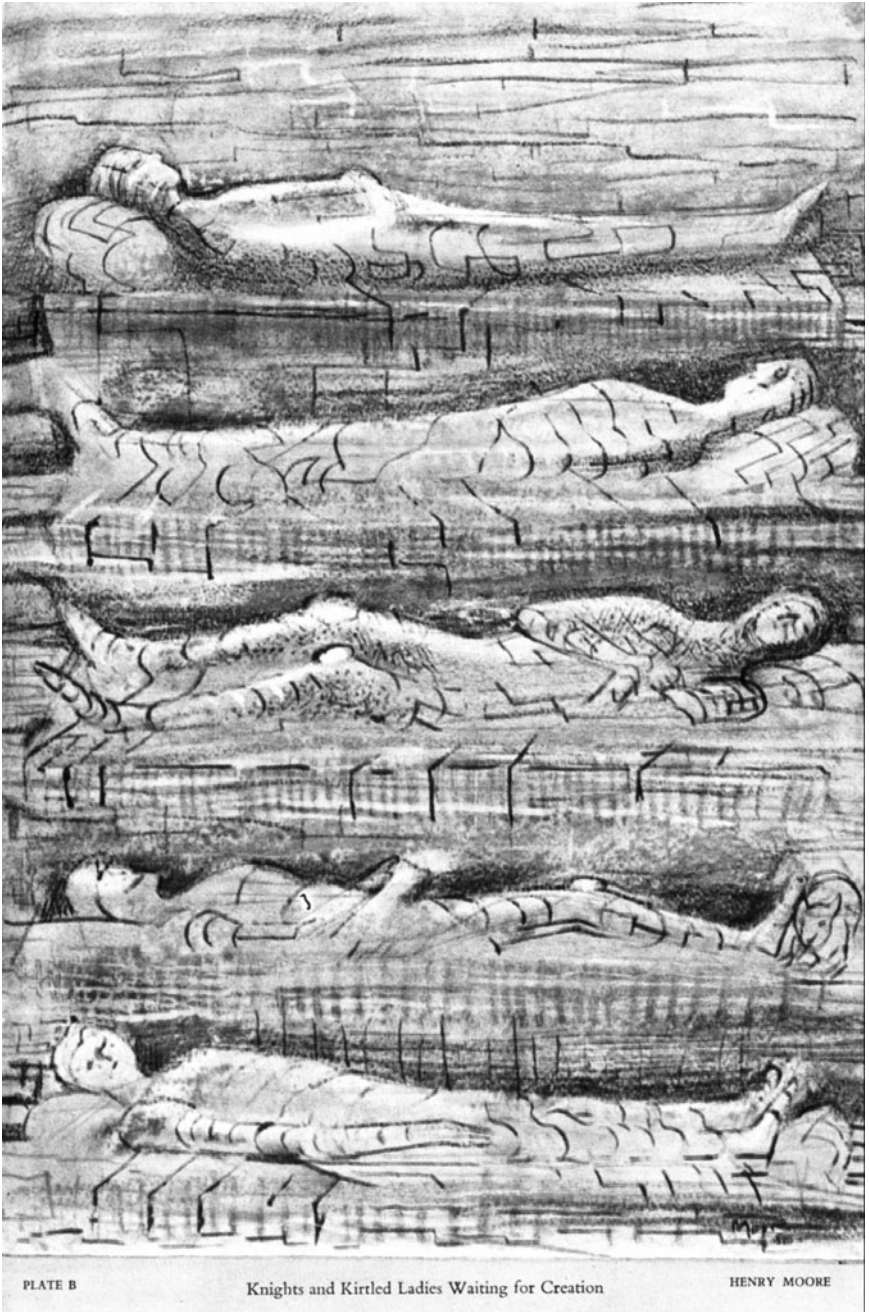


Fig. 3.9. Henry Moore, illustration for 'A Land': Knights and Kirtled Ladies waiting for creation (1950).

Myfanwy Piper, when he was stationed nearby at the Central Air Photograph Interpretation Unit at Medmenham.⁸⁶ Fawley Bottom was a wartime meeting place for the Pipers' London friends, including Grigson, who had met Piper through Henry Moore in the early 1930s.⁸⁷ Thus began many lasting friendships and working relationships, leading to Piggott contributing a piece to the published volume celebrating Piper's eightieth birthday, and Piper and Betjeman contributing an illustration and an introductory poem respectively to Piggott's *Festschrift*.⁸⁸

John Piper

Piper's antiquarian researches, while wide-ranging and amateur, had a particular agenda which I have outlined in the Introduction. Ancient objects and sites in the landscape were attractive to Piper (and other Neo-Romantics) because they seemed to offer a resolution between the demands of continental modernism (in terms of abstraction, primitivism, and the idea of 'pure form') and the love of landscape, local history, and mythology which Neo-Romantics found it so hard to renounce. Piper's articles in the *Architectural Review* implied that modern artists and architects could learn from the *forms* taken by these remains in the landscape, constructed by anonymous workers and ancient engineers: the formal composition and mass of Stonehenge, the expertly tessellated stones in dry-stone walling, the bold lines of a Romanesque font. But in these articles considerations of pure form were always supplemented by antiquarian information and Romantic musings on mythological significance and the aesthetic pleasures of ruination.

In a 1947 article in the *Architectural Review* entitled 'Pleasing Decay' Piper drew attention to the appeal of the textures of patination and ruination—the theme was announced by a full-page photograph, by Piper, on the front cover (Fig. 3.10). The article quoted at length from Crawford's 1936 *Antiquity* article 'The Work of Giants'.⁸⁹ Crawford's article took as its subject the dry-stone field-walls of the West Country, their antiquity, and what they reveal about field patterns, continuity of settlement, and land usage in Cornwall. The subject is

⁸⁶ Piggott describes parlour games played at the Pipers' home at Fawley Bottom during the war, based on the game of 'consequences'. One of these was 'The Church Game', which involved the players drawing parts of a church. Another was 'The Guide Book Game', where players parodied the 'phraseology and attitudes of the writers of dim county guide-books'. These, according to Piggott, were 'good games for Leland's disciples' (ibid. 33–4). Piggott's art collection, now in the Ashmolean Museum, reflects the Neo-Romantic milieu of which he was a part; it includes works by Piper, Sutherland, Nash, Moore, Keith Vaughan, Ben Nicholson, and John Minton.

⁸⁷ Ingrams and Piper, *Piper's Places*, 88.

⁸⁸ Elborn, ed., *To John Piper on his Eightieth Birthday*; J. V. S. Megaw, ed., *To Illustrate the Monuments: Essays Presented to Stuart Piggott on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday* (London, 1976).

⁸⁹ Piper, 'Pleasing Decay', *AR* (Sept. 1947), 87; quotes from Crawford, 'The Work of Giants', *Antiquity*, 10/38 (June 1936), 162–74. Piper had also quoted Crawford's article at length in a lecture at the Society of Antiquaries in February 1944 (see MS Crawford 80, fol. 202) given during an exhibition on 'British Antiquity' (see Kendrick papers, British Museum, uncatalogued).

Fig. 3.10. John Piper, detail of Hamsey Church, cover of *Architectural Review* (Sept. 1947).



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Fig. 3.11. O. G. S. Crawford, 'Field-wall at Boswednack, Zennor', from 'The Work of Giants', *Antiquity*, 10/38 (June 1936).



PLATE III

FIELD-WALL AT BOSWEDNACK, ZENNOR

characteristic of *Antiquity*, combining fieldwork, folklore, and observation of current practices in order to unravel history. When Piper drew on Crawford's article in his 'Pleasing Decay' article some ten years later, it was for a rather different purpose: 'The Work of Giants' is recruited in Piper's manifesto for 'pleasing decay', the Romantic pleasure in ruins, which should be seen in the context of the debate on post-war reconstruction (see Chapter 5). Yet the two men's sensibilities have something in common. Not only do Crawford's very beautiful photographs obviously aestheticize the walls (Fig. 3.11), but his text is lyrical in its appreciation of their beauty.⁹⁰ Crawford admits that once his eyes 'were opened' to 'the aesthetic qualities' of the field-walls, he 'found it difficult to look at anything else'.⁹¹ For the whole of the first page of the article it is not clear whether this is an aesthetic appreciation of the walls, with their 'vivid green splashes of pennywort, yellow stars of celandine' and 'clusters of violet,' or—as you might expect in an archaeological journal—a serious analysis of their significance.⁹²

'The Work of Giants' is one of the *Antiquity* articles that Piper kept and bound into a volume. In 1936, when Crawford's article was published, Piper had compromised his earlier commitment to abstraction, and was increasingly occupied by concerns with landscape and history. No wonder Crawford's article appealed to him, combining as it did the pure form of tessellated stone with Romantic beauty and antiquarianism. It was not long after it appeared that Piper and his wife visited Crawford at his Ordnance Survey offices, after touring Wiltshire and Dorset in February 1937.⁹³

It could be argued that the weight given to the *form* of ancient sites is the index of British artists' tendency towards modernism; likewise the emphasis on the *meaning* (history, location, evocation) of ancient sites is the index of the pull back to Romanticism. For the most diehard of British modernists—Barbara Hepworth, Ben Nicholson—the appeal of prehistoric monuments lay in their formal relationships. The 1937 modernist publication *Circle*, for example, featured photographs of Stonehenge alongside an essay by Hepworth stressing 'formal abstract relationships' (Fig. 3.12).⁹⁴ But for most artists of this generation, the appeal of the primitive involved aspects of both of these poles: Winifred Nicholson, for example, liked megalithic stones for their historical resonance as much as for formal reasons.⁹⁵ *Antiquity*, being a sourcebook of images and information alike, could cater to both tendencies.

⁹⁰ A review in the *TLS* drew attention to Crawford's 'excellent photographs' of the walls (*TLS* (4 July 1936), 567).

⁹¹ 'The Work of Giants', 162.

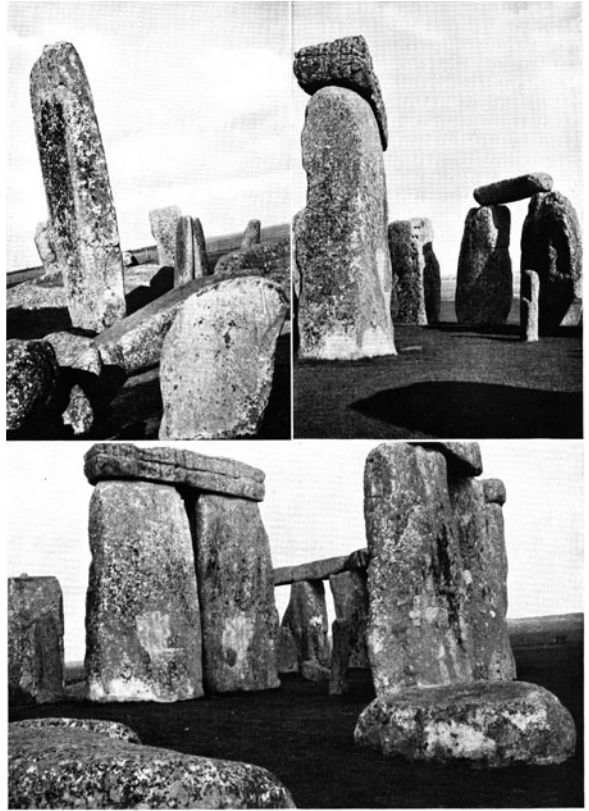
⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ Crawford, apparently, was less than friendly towards the Pipers, but accepted a lift with them to Newbury, and greatly impressed them on the car journey with his observations of the landscape that they passed through. Recorded in Myfanwy Piper's diary (Frances Spalding, personal communication).

⁹⁴ J. L. Martin, B. Nicholson, and N. Gabo, eds., *Circle: International Survey of Constructive Art* (London, 1937), 116–17.

⁹⁵ K. Raine, 'The Unregarded Happy Texture of Life', in A. Nicholson, ed., *Unknown Colour: Paintings, Letters, Writings by Winifred Nicholson* (London, 1987), 198.

Fig. 3.12. C. Giedion-Welcker and W. Gropius, 'Stonehenge', from J. L. Martin, B. Nicholson, and N. Gabo, eds., *Circle: International Survey of Constructive Art* (1937).



STONEHENGE

Paul Nash

The appeal of archaeological remains for Nash was less biased towards historical context than it was for Piper. Visiting Avebury with Ruth Clark in 1933, Nash was struck by the weird forms of the 'wonderful and disquieting' standing stones, and he set about photographing them and absorbing them into his paintings as curious presences in the landscape.⁹⁶ When he returned to the site after Alexander Keiller's restoration work in 1937 and was shown around by Keiller himself, Nash listened attentively to his account of the archaeological significance of the stones, but 'remained, as he had always been, fascinated by the forms of the megaliths themselves'.⁹⁷ Silbury Hill likewise provided Nash with an image of geometric mass in the landscape, amplified by a mystical rather than historical resonance

⁹⁶ TGA 769.1.22.

⁹⁷ Letter from Keiller to Anthony Bertram, 13 June 1951 (TGA 7615.1.23). When Nash returned to see Keiller's restoration work, he was disappointed at the way in which 'to a great extent that primal magic of the stones' appearance was lost' (TGA 769.1.22).

(Fig. 3.13). And when Nash followed Mortimer Wheeler's excavation of Maiden Castle in 1934–7 it was the strange way in which skeletons 'nested' beneath the excavated earth that appealed to the artist, finding form in images such as *The Defenders of Maiden Castle* (Fig. i.2). Another photograph by Nash of the skeletons *in situ* appeared in his article 'Unseen Landscapes' in *Country Life* in 1938, where it was captioned 'excavation landscape'. 'I was not particularly interested in the archaeological significance of the discovery', he wrote, 'but the scene in its dramatic elements had, indeed, an awful beauty.'⁹⁸

Nash's attraction to old stones and buried skeletons was allied to his Surrealist sensibility. Ancient and strange objects, newly found, were what excited Nash's artistic imagination, and could easily be absorbed into both his commitment to Surrealism (as *objets trouvés*) and his attachment to the British landscape (as archaeological remains). *Antiquity* could have been a Surrealist's treasury, a relation—albeit distant—of Georges Bataille's *Documents*, founded in 1929 for a different but comparable purpose. Like *Documents*, *Antiquity* 'took evidence from all aspects of... culture, and made connections appear where they were least expected'.⁹⁹ In a comparable way to *Documents*, in *Antiquity* curious objects and tribal practices documented the persistence of the totemic, the dreamlike and the



Fig. 3.13. Paul Nash, *Silbury Hill* (1936).

⁹⁸ P. Nash, 'Unseen Landscapes', *Country Life* (21 May 1938), 527.

⁹⁹ A. Brotchie, 'Introduction', in G. Bataille, *Encyclopaedia Acephalica* (London, 1995), 10.



THE CHIEF OF MÔN BESIDE MENHIR. PARASITIC GROWTHS (GENERALLY ORCHIDS) ARE ENCOURAGED TO GROW ON THE TOPS OF THESE STONES

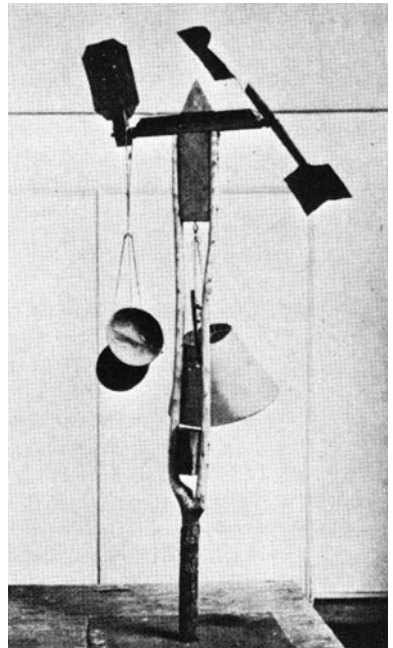


WOODEN IMAGE FROM A BOG AT RALAGHAN, SHERCOCK, IRELAND (about one-third)
F.R. Ashmole

Fig. 3.14 (above, left). 'The chief of Môn beside menhir', from J. H. Hutton, 'Assam Megaliths', *Antiquity*, 3/11 (Sept. 1929).

Fig. 3.15 (above, right). 'Wooden image from a bog at Ralaghan, Shercock, Ireland', *Antiquity*, 4/16 (Dec. 1930).

Fig. 3.16 (right). 'Scarecrow (Essex)—Object found by James Cant', *London Bulletin*, 14 (May 1939).



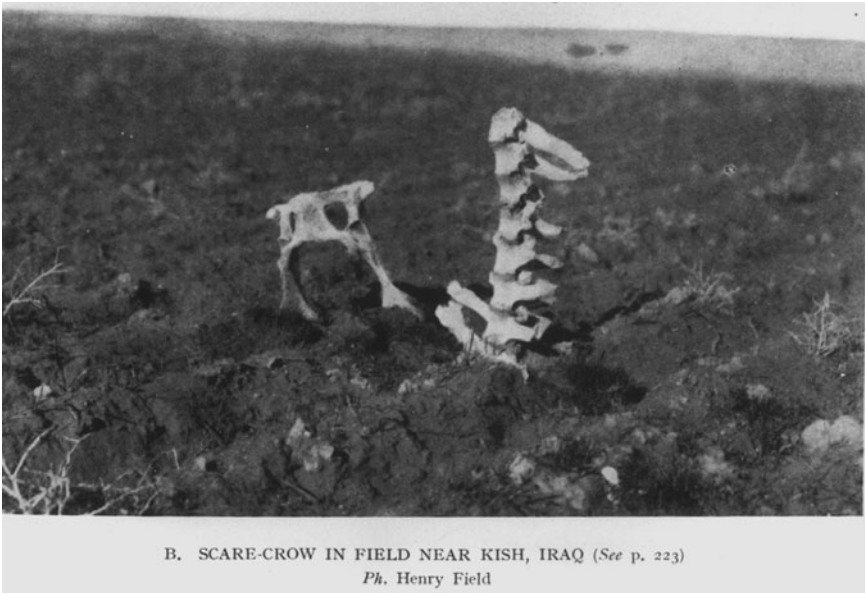


Fig. 3.17. Henry Field, 'Scare-crow in field near Kish, Iraq', *Antiquity*, 10/38 (June 1936).



Fig. 3.18. Paul Nash, *Stone Wall, Worth Matravers, Study I*.

primitive, in the British Isles as much as in India or prehistoric Brittany (Figs. 3.14 and 3.15). There was little difference, apart from context, between the photograph of a scarecrow found in Essex included in the 1937 exhibition 'Surrealist Objects and Poems' at the London Gallery (Fig. 3.16) and Henry Field's photograph of a scarecrow reproduced in *Antiquity* in June 1936 (Fig. 3.17). Many of Nash's photographs would not have looked out of place in *Antiquity*: he too took

photographs of dry-stone walls latticed with ivy, standing stones, and ‘personages’ which stand comparison with the totemic specimens of Crawford’s journal (see, for example Fig. 3.18; compare with Fig. 3.11). *Antiquity* never was, however, a British *Documents*, although—had British Surrealism been different—it might have been. James Clifford could have been describing *Antiquity* when he discusses the use in *Documents* ‘of ethnographic juxtaposition for the purpose of perturbing commonplace symbols’. *Antiquity* also seems—at times—to have juxtaposed its contributions and their photographic illustrations as did *Documents*—‘to provoke...defamiliarization’.¹⁰⁰ Despite its modernist-primitivist credentials, however, *Antiquity* remained—for its Neo-Romantic readers at least—a celebration of inherence where modernist forms and surreal objects were domesticated by their absorption in a recognizably local and safely historicized landscape.

KNITTING UP FRAGMENTS: CRAWFORD AND GRIGSON

I have looked, so far, at reasons why *Antiquity* might have been attractive to Neo-Romantic artists by examining congruities of subject-matter and context. We can get further with unravelling the attractions of this journal by examining Geoffrey Grigson’s appreciation in the *Times Literary Supplement*, which, while written retrospectively (in 1978), nevertheless indicates some of the differences between Grigson’s melancholy sensibility and Crawford’s active and totalizing approach to world history, differences which turn around the perceived relationship between parts and wholes. Before I discuss Grigson, however, it will be necessary to look more closely at Crawford’s view of world history, and how it should be studied.

Crawford and the Jigsaw Puzzle of History

One of the most striking qualities of *Antiquity* in its early days was the material *specificity* of its articles. Articles on the origin of wheat rubbed shoulders with pieces on Black Houses in Lewis, Roman brooches, or water clocks. This narrow specificity coexisted with an overall remit covering an extraordinarily broad sweep of time and space. ‘Each article will be but a tiny facet of the whole’, ran the editorial of the first issue of the journal, ‘for our field is the Earth, our range in time a million years or so, our subject the human race.’¹⁰¹ For Crawford, there was a crucial dialectic between the local and the global, and the specific and the

¹⁰⁰ James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, Mass., 1994), 132–3.

¹⁰¹ ‘Editorial Notes’, *Antiquity*, 1/1 (Mar. 1927), 1. For a suggestion of the range of articles published in *Antiquity* up to 1950 see Hawkes, ‘A Quarter Century of *Antiquity*’, 172.

general. He had already formulated this view and its pedagogical value, in *Man and his Past*:

By teaching local history as a part of universal history both will benefit. Universal history will gain definition through contrast, and by its association with familiar things will become real, and also, incidentally, more easy to remember. (There is a good psychological reason for thus beginning with sensorily perceived facts). Local history, too, will be seen in its true perspective.¹⁰²

It was not, however, simply a matter of pedagogy. The history of the world, for Crawford, was inseparable from local histories. The findings of archaeologists and anthropologists in specific localities were significant in so far as they contributed to the broader picture: the discovery of an ancient shipwreck in the Aegean Sea, the significance of the evil eye symbol in modern Greece, and evidence of petrified mammoths in the Russian steppes were all clues in the riddle of the history of the world. What is remarkable about *Antiquity* is the way in which it not only was vehicle and platform for the work of a generation of archaeologists, but also was itself the formal and visual expression of Crawford's conception of world history. The way in which *Antiquity* juxtaposed the epic and the mundane, its vast scales of time and space coexisting with a photographic specificity of place and moment, meant that the *form* of the journal was the very embodiment of its editor's historiographical vision.

For Crawford, the accumulation of specific local studies was the prerequisite for an accurate historical overview. In an article of 1931 entitled 'Historical Cycles', he suggested that history is like a carpet whose pattern can be seen only from a distance (a metaphor he found particularly useful when promoting aerial archaeology). The reason why historians in the past had been unsuccessful in discerning the pattern of history was due, he said, to inadequate data: 'You cannot see the pattern of a carpet when only a minute portion is uncovered, and you cannot discern the pattern of history until large portions of it are available for examination.'¹⁰³ Crawford does not seriously seem to have doubted that such a pattern existed. While we might never have a chart of world history as accurate as a geographical map of our world, for Crawford there must be a pattern in which all the known historical facts, properly interpreted, could find their place; and that pattern in turn might be used to forecast further information about the course of world history.

The large number of interwar archaeological discoveries each had a part to play in the gradual unveiling of the pattern of history. The satisfaction of undertaking archaeological work, according to Crawford, lay in this unveiling. If archaeological work was like seeing a carpet revealed, it was also like carrying out architectural work (he was fond of metaphors). Like a craftsman at work on a big building, the archaeologist may not be able to see the plan of the whole, but as he carries out

¹⁰² O. G. S. Crawford, *Man and his Past* (Oxford, 1921), 31.

¹⁰³ 'Historical Cycles', *Antiquity*, 5/17 (Mar. 1931), 5.

his work and the stones of the building swing into place ‘there is no hope of communicating to another the intense satisfaction that comes from watching thus the daily growing map’.¹⁰⁴ In Crawford’s model of archaeological work, the archaeologist is engaged in uncovering a pre-existing pattern, or constructing a building for which the plan already—somehow—exists.

This was a view shared by other contributors to *Antiquity*: H. J. Randall wrote in a 1934 article, quoted in Chapter 2, about how much of English history is written upon the map ‘in letters of earth and stone, of bank and ditch, of foliage and crop’. This writing ‘needs patience to discover, knowledge to decipher, insight, sometimes amounting to genius, to interpret. But the writing is there, all else awaits the competence of the reader.’¹⁰⁵ This is the archaeologist as diviner, reading the world as if it were a book. This conception of archaeological work is analogous, I think, to the game of ‘battleships’, where players each try to discover the locations of battleships and other vessels that are mapped out on their opponents’ board. In both this game and in Crawford’s concept of the history of the world, a pattern exists whether or not it is ever discovered in all of its details. Needless to say, such a view of archaeology stands in marked contrast to the postmodern idea that archaeological knowledge—like any kind of knowledge—is constructed, not found.¹⁰⁶

Crawford considered any technique to be valid in the discovery of the pieces of the puzzle of history. ‘We employ methods of research undreamt of before’, ran *Antiquity*’s first editorial; ‘we call in the aviator, the photographer, the chemist, the astronomer, the botanist, to assist us.’¹⁰⁷ After all, if history has a pre-existing pattern waiting to be revealed, then it hardly matters which tools are used to pull back the veil of ignorance. New forensic technologies might reveal mysteries which had seemed insoluble before their invention. It is for this reason that Crawford pioneered new methods of archaeological research, notably aerial archaeology. Just as the findings of forensic science could be used to reconstruct a crime, when applied to the earth new technologies could encourage the world to divulge its long-kept secrets. ‘During the last twenty years’, wrote Crawford enthusiastically in 1933, ‘Papyri that have been burnt or buried in mud have been unrolled and read; clay tablets that were little more than mud themselves have been restored; palimpsests that were quite illegible to the naked eye have been read and photographed by ultra-violet and infra-red light.’¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ *Man and his Past*, 226.

¹⁰⁵ H.J. Randall, ‘History in the Open Air’, *Antiquity*, 8/29 (Mar. 1934), 5.

¹⁰⁶ The idea that there is such a thing as objective archaeological knowledge has been successfully challenged in the last thirty years by postmodern archaeologists, for whom the interpretation of archaeological data, and even the data themselves, are *constructed* by various groups and individuals. Some of these writers, drawing on structuralist and post-structuralist literary theory, see archaeology as less a matter of discovery of information than its (textual) construction and interpretation. See the essays in C. Tilley, ed., *Reading Material Culture: Structuralism, Hermeneutics and Post-Structuralism* (Oxford, 1990).

¹⁰⁷ *Antiquity*, 1/1 (Mar. 1927), 4.

¹⁰⁸ ‘New Technique’, ‘Notes and News’, *Antiquity*, 7/28 (Dec. 1933), 468.

Since so many pieces of the epic puzzle of history were being slotted into place, according to Crawford, the new findings should become part of every educated person's knowledge, and this was the missionary purpose of *Antiquity*. 'There was a time', wrote Crawford in his autobiography, 'when a person who aspired to keep abreast of the best culture of the day could do it without any knowledge of the achievements of archaeology for there were none. That is no longer so.'¹⁰⁹ The real cultural events and the real creativity, according to him, were taking place in the 1920s and 1930s not in the moribund world of the arts but in geology, meteorology, astronomy, and archaeology.¹¹⁰ Crawford's determination to produce an attractive magazine which could compete with its literary competitors was due to his desire for archaeology to take its place in the realm of the broader culture, and not remain the province of the specialist and wealthy amateur. This popularizing drive was a sentiment shared by his friend the famously Marxist archaeologist Gordon Childe.¹¹¹ In 1942, hearing that Crawford was growing tired of *Antiquity*, Childe wrote to him praising his good work: 'I feel increasingly that if archaeology is not just a past time for the leisured class... its results must be accessible to ever widening circles.'¹¹²

Crawford also shared with Childe his belief in the essential unity of history, recognizing no useful distinction between prehistory and history, and having little interest in the histories of nations (national boundaries being merely incidental in the broader sweep of world history).¹¹³ For at least a decade, Crawford also shared Childe's Marxist sympathies.¹¹⁴ The precise nature of Crawford's political views is not easy to ascertain, particularly since his papers from the 1930s—when he was politically most active—were destroyed in the Blitz, and he himself destroyed others. He certainly visited Russia in 1932, documenting his almost unalloyed enthusiasm for the Soviet experiment in his unpublished book 'A Tour in Bolshev'y'.¹¹⁵ He was in correspondence with Robin Page Arnot, the first principal of the Marx Memorial Library in London.¹¹⁶ He photographed every house in which Marx and Engels lived or stayed while in Britain. He seems to have regarded the Second World War as a battle between capitalist nations which he hoped would be rendered irrelevant by a worldwide socialist revolution.¹¹⁷ There is barely a mention of any of this in his autobiography, published in 1955.

¹⁰⁹ *SD*, 178.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.* 179.

¹¹¹ Crawford met Childe in 1925, and later wrote that he 'had been influenced more by [Childe's] writings than by those of any other person' (*ibid.* 174).

¹¹² MS Crawford 67, fol. 39.

¹¹³ For Childe's life and work, see S. Green, *Prehistorian: A Biography of V. Gordon Childe* (Bradford-on-Avon, 1981); D. R. Harris, ed., *The Archaeology of V. Gordon Childe: Contemporary Perspectives* (Carlton, 1994).

¹¹⁴ Perhaps a coded reference to these sympathies can be found in Childe's contribution to Crawford's Festschrift, entitled 'The Balanced Sickle' (Grimes, ed., *Aspects of Archaeology*, 39–48).

¹¹⁵ There is a copy of this text in the Sackler Library in Oxford, inscribed to Stanley Casson from Crawford in Nov. 1934 as 'an incitement to revolution'. Casson was a classical scholar, art critic, and contributor to *Antiquity*.

¹¹⁶ See, for example, MS Crawford 1, fol. 10.

¹¹⁷ See, for example, MS Crawford 109, fols. 140 ff., and MS Crawford 73, fols. 33 ff.

Yet these political views found their place in the pattern Crawford detected in the broad sweep of world history, and if they were not explicitly mentioned in the pages of *Antiquity*, they certainly informed its contents and its broad purpose.

After summing up recent advances in archaeological knowledge, the editorial to the first issue of *Antiquity* ends with a curious question: 'What is to be the end of it all? What new idea is to emerge from all this vast accumulation of facts and give them coherence? Has it already emerged? We shall return to this, the most important subject of all.'¹¹⁸ Crawford's view of history was fundamentally teleological. History had a pattern and a forward movement determined by evolutionary principles; and all of the discoveries of archaeology and anthropology, however big or small, were contributions to our understanding of this pattern and this forward movement. These ideas, as we have seen, were showcased in the pages of *Antiquity*.¹¹⁹ Crawford's private conviction, throughout the 1930s at least, that history was surely heading towards worldwide communism may not have been stated directly in the journal he edited, but arguably it provided its hidden motor during the years in which it built up its reputation.

Grigson and the Redemptive Fragment

Geoffrey Grigson was perhaps the archetypal Neo-Romantic figure, uniting in one figure the contradictions of that nebulous sensibility.¹²⁰ Excited by the innovations of Eliot, Joyce, and Picasso, he, like so many others in Britain, was haunted by a nostalgia for the old Georgian romanticism, antiquarianism, and love of nature, to which (as he recognized) a wholehearted return was impossible. In his writings, the historical rupture of modernism is mapped onto his own (more or less contemporaneous) exile from childhood. Scarred by this rupture he perceived as a loss both biographical and historical, Grigson remained unable to give up on his early love of landscape, but could not ignore the imperatives of a modernism that worked 'like a mole in spring under the smooth beds of the garden'.¹²¹

Grigson's writing is marked throughout by his typically Neo-Romantic desire to find a resolution between the desired objects of a lost past and the inescapable demands of a debased present, and it is in this context, I think, that we may understand his attraction to *Antiquity*. *Antiquity*, as we have seen, showcased a world of fragments held together by Crawford's wide perspective. These evocative

¹¹⁸ *Antiquity*, 1/1, 4.

¹¹⁹ Not least through the promotion of Gordon Childe's work, particularly *Man Makes Himself* (1936), reviewed by Crawford in 'Human Progress', *Antiquity*, 10/40 (Dec. 1936), 391–404.

¹²⁰ Virginia Button calls Grigson 'the arch-prophet of Neo-Romanticism' (Button, 'Spreading the Word', in Lewison, ed., *Ben Nicholson*, 58).

¹²¹ Geoffrey Grigson, *The Crest on the Silver: An Autobiography* (London, 1950), 122. Valentine Cunningham nicely describes Grigson as 'the dedicated Modernist whose perennial touchstones are Eliot and Picasso, Braque and Henry Moore but who thinks and writes with an eye for birds and wild flowers, fish, gardens and seaweed just as if Georgian tastes hadn't once been dumped so vociferously into the Modernist vomitory' (review of *Recollections*, *TLS* (14 Dec. 1984), 1439).

fragments of other cultures, past and present, must have appealed to Grigson the Modernist, the Surrealist, the reader of *The Waste Land*, while at the same time recalling his early love of local antiquarianism. *Antiquity*, wrote Grigson in a telling phrase, 'was an archaeologists' *Criterion*', and Crawford was 'archaeology's Eliot'.¹²² Crawford's journal recorded the world as a 'heap of broken images', as Grigson—like Eliot et al.—saw it to be in reality. Yet at the same time, a binding and redeeming thread seemed to lurk beneath the disparate images in *Antiquity*. The totality glimpsed by Grigson in this journal was not so much Crawford's dynamic overview of the movement of world history, however, as a Romantic suggestion of a lost whole which Grigson had experienced in his childhood and tried throughout his life to regain in art.

In his autobiography, *The Crest on the Silver* (1950), Grigson's childhood in Pelynt in Cornwall is a luminous paradise described in terms reminiscent of the imagery of William Blake and Samuel Palmer. The bourgeois shortcomings of his elderly parents were compensated for by 'Bessie', a local woman of bawdy good humour coupled with an uncommon sensitivity to nature, who introduced the young Geoffrey to the details of the parish, the location and names of 'corners and mounds, springs, foot-bridges, lanes, fields and woods'.¹²³ Here began his 'childish taste for antiquities, for flowering plants, for eccentric geography', reinforced by his father and grandfather, who 'dabbled in antiquities'.¹²⁴

In Grigson's narrative, this 'childish taste' for nature and antiquity is repeatedly defined in contrast to that which threatened it, the 'contemptuous or indifferent humanity' of 'those who were shut out from the house of the past'.¹²⁵ Grigson's own adolescence recapitulates a broader cultural change: the bourgeois, adult world which he knows he must join is a kind of gloss for modernity itself; he took refuge from both in the 'childish' pleasures of the local landscape. Later, as he came under the influence of Stephen Spender, Eliot, and Ezra Pound, his Romantic pleasures became guilty ones, which he gave up 'in shame'.¹²⁶ 'All of us', he wrote, 'were being weaned sharply from the last thin drops of the milk of a devitalized fairyland. I was being weaned, or so it appeared, from the valley, the shining leaves and the antiquities of Pelynt'.¹²⁷ With the encroaching Second World War, however, and the cultural nationalism it engendered, Grigson began 'to feel strong enough to build on my heritage and return to some intense loves of childhood' which he could never quite relinquish.¹²⁸ The story Grigson tells in *The Crest on the Silver* is one of love, renunciation, and redemption—the classic autobiographical narrative of the Neo-Romantic sensibility.

By 1950, then, when *The Crest on the Silver* was published, Grigson had been reunited with his early loves. But the objects of his love did not survive the brush with the modern world unscathed: the fallout from his flirtation with modernism was a fragmentation of perception, a strong proclivity to see the world as a

¹²² 'Reading "Antiquity"', 119.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ *Ibid.* 78.

¹²³ *The Crest on the Silver*, 52.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.* 122.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.* 77.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.* 169.

collection of disconnected images. If Grigson's ousting into the modern world was figured by him as a fall from grace, it was also a fall from wholes into fragments. Nothing, he said, would ever seem so real, or so whole, as the world of his childhood home: 'Much else may appear solid and real, nothing else can be so actual, no other accumulation of objects related so exactly and finally to each other.'¹²⁹

This fragmentation of the world found its linguistic counterpart in Grigson's poetry and prose, which is littered with odds and ends which often performed as metonyms, or as synecdoches, what Ian Jeffrey calls 'the trope of fragments'.¹³⁰ By means of such tropes, Grigson could reduce a whole culture to one of its attributes: suburban life, to take one of Jeffrey's examples, is a world of 'cold ham and salad'.¹³¹ So too was the world of his childhood fragmented into discrete parts which might encapsulate it: 'the hot smell of a St. John's Wort, the gleam of laurel leaves, the feeling of sand'.¹³²

The lost whole of Grigson's childhood, it seems, could never again be grasped except by some superhuman effort of mental reconstruction, like the one he practised after the sale of the vicarage that had been his home. Only with an extreme mental effort might the memory-fragments of home be related to each other: 'I stand at the head of the stairs. The tall bookcase is there, and in the bookcase the blue encyclopaedia, and in volume two the plates of the fern-like forest which will turn into coal.'¹³³ From now on, Grigson was doomed to live as a homeless modern among the ruins. As Ian Jeffrey points out, 'metonym and synecdoche, as marker tropes, acknowledge wholes',¹³⁴ and the metonyms and synecdoches that Grigson made his own acknowledged a lost whole of which only a few dusty images now remained.

Antiquity, as we have seen, was full of sensuous fragments, and it is very much in these terms that Grigson expresses his attraction to it. 'Each number', Grigson enthuses, 'was an excitement, concentrated in an article, it might be on the Uffington White Horse, or the travels of the Celtic saints, or fortified churches in Transylvania, or megaliths in Assam, or the origins of cultivated plants, or water-clocks, or Cornish fish-cellars, or the Cerne Giant, the flasher of Dorset, or querns, or roses in antiquity.'¹³⁵ *Antiquity* lent itself very well to Grigson's rhetorical preferences for metonym and synecdoche: a quick flick through its pages produced a rich visual harvest of objects, decontextualized as in a museum display. No wonder Grigson called it a 'treasure': here were images of dry-stone walls in the West Country, a dolmen near Jerusalem, a terracotta goddess, a plough of ancient design, all in full photographic sensuousness. *Antiquity*, then, as Valentine Cunningham has pointed out, satisfied Grigson's 'eclectic liking for odds and ends'.¹³⁶ But as we have seen, Grigson never gave up on his desire for the lost wholes for which such odds and ends were the somewhat unsatisfactory surrogates.

¹²⁹ *The Crest on the Silver*, 134.

¹³⁰ I. Jeffrey, 'Neo-Romanticism against Itself', in *PL*, 134.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² Grigson, *The Crest on the Silver*, 77.

¹³³ *Ibid.* 134.

¹³⁴ 'Neo-Romanticism against Itself', 135.

¹³⁵ 'Reading "Antiquity"', 118.

¹³⁶ *TLS* (14 Dec. 1984), 1439.

The way in which Grigson frames his love of *Antiquity* in the essay ‘Reading “Antiquity”’ is deliberately embedded within a particular place and time—the parish of his childhood. The essay describes the regular five-mile walk that Grigson took with his brothers to W. H. Smith’s in Fowey to collect the *New Statesman*. On this journey, he writes, they ‘passed a manorial pond, a mill which had been grinding in the thirteenth century and an Iron Age enclosure, and we crossed a field of Bronze Age barrows where I picked up flint arrowheads, and once an armorial button which had fallen from the livery coat of some retainer of the Buller family’.¹³⁷ Here, then, are more ‘odds and ends’. Washed up in the modern world, these *objets trouvés*, like the metonyms of Grigson’s prose, point to the lost wholes of which they were once a part. The passage of time had left such objects stranded, yet ‘one magazine would relate all these things’, he wrote, ‘including, if not the button with the Saracen’s head, certainly the ancient path by which it was found’.¹³⁸ For Grigson, then, *Antiquity* linked up the fragments of history. If he felt adrift in a sea of disconnected images and objects, here was a journal with an editor who evidently did not share his rootlessness, or his difficulty in reuniting parts with wholes. Grigson recognized that Crawford had a perspective from which things made sense: ‘This field archaeologist of the British Isles’, he wrote, ‘held human diversity and change and unity in his focus’.¹³⁹ As we have seen, the dialectic between parts and wholes was a crucial part of Crawford’s understanding of world history, finding its expression in the form, content, and purpose of *Antiquity*. To combine fragments of modernity with eternal truths was also, to be sure, the founding aim of modern art, as expressed by Baudelaire, who defined modernity as ‘the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable’,¹⁴⁰ and perhaps it was the formal correspondence between Crawford’s epistemology and this enduring definition of the purpose of modern art that made *Antiquity* so amenable to the aestheticizing gaze, leading to Grigson’s characterization of Crawford as ‘archaeology’s Eliot’.¹⁴¹

But we can take this further. *Antiquity* was founded in 1927, when Grigson was 22, after he had left home. It is not clear, from his 1978 article, exactly when those journeys to Fowey with his brothers had taken place; but it seems that the connection between *Antiquity* and the walks was retrospective and associative as much as historically accurate. Given this, I think there is a further significance in the fact that it is a recollection of his *brothers* that Grigson associates with *Antiquity*, especially in its ability to relate the pieces of a fractured history. Grigson was the youngest of seven brothers, three of whom died in the First World War. ‘I did not realize then’, he wrote in *The Crest*, ‘in fact not till long after—the enormity of my loss’, but the war claimed the lives of the two brothers—Lionel and Kenneth—he

¹³⁷ ‘Reading “Antiquity”’, 117.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.* (my emphasis).

¹³⁹ *Ibid.* 118.

¹⁴⁰ C. Baudelaire, ‘The Painter of Modern Life’ [1863], in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays* (London, 1995), 12.

¹⁴¹ Eliot, after all (most notably in *The Waste Land*), united fragments in an overarching mythical scheme.

'most loved'.¹⁴² As Ian Jeffrey points out, in Grigson's account Kenneth returned from the trenches as a collection of bits and pieces: 'his effects, maps, notebooks queerly ruled in squares, letters from women unknown to us, pipes, pouches, tins, odds and ends, came back to the vicarage in a brown army blanket, full of the dirtiness of war like a child's pocket'.¹⁴³ 'The first love in his life', writes Jeffrey, 'had disintegrated into a handful of relics.' The metonymy at work here, as Jeffrey says, is 'a trope of violence and loss', where the rhetorical device mirrors the horrific historical reality of dismemberment and absence.¹⁴⁴ Lionel, his other greatly loved brother, was also 'blown to pieces' in Flanders.¹⁴⁵

In an essay on John Piper, who was a close friend in the 1940s, Grigson traced his own antiquarianism back to his grandfather, who 'helped to run the Norfolk and Norwich Archaeological Society'.¹⁴⁶ The antiquarian spirit of his grandfather, says Grigson, 'was embodied for me in one of my brothers', with whom he explored the locality of their childhood home. This was surely Lionel, whose violent death in the First World War 'left an extraordinary blank' which he 'never filled' until he met John Piper in the early 1930s, when he found himself 'living again in a second form of two', as together they explored the countryside as he had done with Lionel, looking out for antiquities and natural wonders.¹⁴⁷ These things, then, were associated in Grigson's mind with his dead brother; no wonder, then, that *Antiquity* was too.

By the time of writing about *Antiquity*, all six of Grigson's brothers, like history itself, had fractured into relics and memory.¹⁴⁸ Remembering those trips to Fowey in the company of his late brothers, walking past the relics of history, Grigson could perform a feat similar to that recounted in *The Crest* when he forced himself to reconstruct, in memory, the layout and contents of his childhood home. If the world was fragmented, perhaps its parts could in this way be fused and made whole, as they seemed to be in *Antiquity*, thanks to Crawford's overarching vision of the unity of history. It was thus surely with his brothers in mind that Grigson, quoting Samuel Daniel, claimed that *Antiquity* seemed 'to combine in one / All ages past, and make one live with all', enabling him to 'confer with those who are gone / And the dead living unto councill call'.¹⁴⁹

A LANDSCAPE OF ENDURING TRACES

Grigson's recollection of the walks taken with his brothers is the reconstruction, in memory, of an environment richly *marked* by time: a storied landscape made

¹⁴² *The Crest on the Silver*, 76, 86.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.* 75, quoted in 'Neo-Romanticism against Itself', 134.

¹⁴⁴ 'Neo-Romanticism against Itself', 134.

¹⁴⁵ Grigson, 'John Piper', in *Recollections*, 157.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 156. ¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 157.

¹⁴⁸ His remaining three brothers died in the Second World War. See Grigson, *The Crest on the Silver*, 208–9; *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

¹⁴⁹ 'Reading "Antiquity"', 119.



Fig. 3.19: Edwin Smith, 'Blackstone Edge, Yorkshire', from G. Grigson and E. Smith, *England* (1957).

meaningful by the human beings (from the ancient Britons to the Grigson brothers themselves) who had passed through it and left their traces in it. Throughout his career Grigson shared the conviction of Neo-Romantic artists like Piper and Nash that through its historical and literary associations as well as its 'atmosphere' a place could acquire an almost sacramental quality, its *genius loci*.¹⁵⁰ Cornwall provided the prototype of this type of landscape for Grigson. But the whole country, it seems, was amenable to such a sensibility, as evidenced in *England*, the 1957 book of photographs by Edwin Smith and accompanying text by Grigson (Fig. 3.19). In this book England is described as a place scattered with 'the marks, or fossils' of history, criss-crossed by Roman roads 'some still in use, some raised weals across the turf, some showing pavement and kerb and marks of wheel and brake'; an old country where place names may summarize 'many of the changes that have made the visible and invisible prehistory of England'.¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ See, for example, Grigson's *Places of the Mind* (London, 1949).

¹⁵¹ G. Grigson and E. Smith, *England* (London, 1957).

A landscape in which it was possible to see and feel such vestiges of the past was attractive to the Neo-Romantic sensibility since it offered a reassurance against the apparently destructive forces of modernization. Modernity, in the highly concrete form of ribbon development and suburbia (but also in its more abstract manifestations), seemed determined to blot out all topographical specificity and all marks of time with a blanket of newness and homogeneity, refusing to adapt to the local or the traditional. The ideal modern landscape was a *tabula rasa*, a landscape in which one could start again from scratch and where there was no room for the useless relics of a forgotten past. New places without history were deposited onto an intransigent landscape; the names given to such places would tell you nothing about 'the visible and invisible prehistory of England'; the mass-produced units of town planning, house design, and street furniture meant that the roads of a sprawling suburbia would all look alike to those Neo-Romantics who clung to their beloved localities worn by time—the Cornish valleys, Pembrokeshire hills, or historic town centres where still remained a distinct and non-fungible 'personality' of place.

Where better, then, for Neo-Romantics to find a counter-image of this than in *Antiquity*, whose very rationale was the recoverability of the past in the contemporary landscape? If modernity flattened out the local and the historic with its obliterating surfaces, what counter-image could be more appropriate than archaeological excavation (real or metaphorical), restoring the dimension of depth besides and beneath those surfaces? *Antiquity* was surely the ideal reading-matter for an artist like Nash, who, according to Myfanwy Evans writing in 1937, 'paints three thousand years without turning a hair, and time is no longer . . . a measure beginning from yesterday, or preferably the day before, and going backwards through the centuries, but an indefinable sense of scarcely-shifting permanence, that includes then and now and sometime and after'.¹⁵² As Grigson noted, *Antiquity* gave precisely this sense of combining 'in one / All ages past'. And it seemed to show, at the same time, the permanence of the historical record. In text and image *Antiquity* looked straight through the modern world to uncover the hidden sites, the dolmens, earthworks, and ancient riverbanks that dwelt beside or beneath newer agricultural, military, or urban features.

To be sure, Crawford voiced his passionate concern in *Antiquity* over destruction wrought on the archaeological record. A 1929 editorial claimed that owing to the 'approaching electrification of Southern England', 'the spread of bungaloid eruptions', new roads, ribbon development, afforestation, and military developments, it was 'unlikely that any open country or downland' would remain in southern England after a hundred years.¹⁵³ Crawford had appealed for the preservation of sites of archaeological significance since the early 1920s, and his publicity attempts helped to bring about the preservation of the land around Avebury and Stonehenge, and the passing of the Ancient Monuments Act in 1931.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² 'Paul Nash, 1937', *Axis*, 8 (Winter 1937), 12.

¹⁵³ *Antiquity*, 3/9 (Mar. 1929), 3.

¹⁵⁴ See John Sheail, *Rural Conservation in Inter-War Britain* (Oxford, 1981), 50–3. Particularly successful was the attempt to preserve Avebury, since Alexander Keiller bought up the entire site in 1924 (*ibid.* 57–60).

Nevertheless, the evidence provided in the pages of *Antiquity*—particularly the photographs—is that modernity, while undeniably destructive to the archaeological record in some of its forms, was fundamentally a superficial phenomenon on the landscape. Archaeology (like the historical methodology of Hoskins (see Chapter 1), whom Grigson associates with *Antiquity*) is suspicious of such superficial appearances, seeing the modern as merely the latest—if also the most creative and destructive—layer in a ‘deep’ and historicized landscape. Crawford may have railed against the destruction of historic sites, especially by the military. But in his accounts of his fieldwork, modernity features in practice mainly as an inconvenient obstacle: he has to clamber over fences and other boundaries of private property, for example, in order to follow ancient roads.

Photography

These tensions were given powerful visual form in *Antiquity*. An article on Roman barrows, published in a 1936 issue, for example, was illustrated by a number of photographs, including an image of ‘The Six Hills, Stevenage, Herts’, where most of the foreground is taken up by a wide, flat, and new-looking road (Fig. 3.20). By the side of the road, there are a number of grassy mounds—the barrows—although with no prior knowledge, and without the assistance of the caption, the reader might not even notice them, or know what they are. The barrows make their appearance almost casually. In a different context it could be an image of a road development, rather than a document of an ancient site.

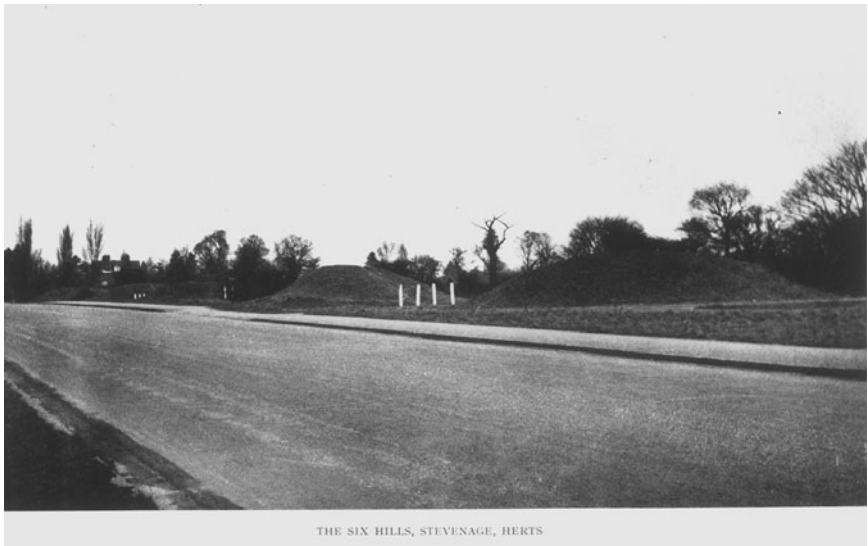


Fig. 3.20. ‘The Six Hills, Stevenage, Herts’, from G. C. Dunning and R. F. Jessup, ‘Roman Barrows’, *Antiquity*, 10/37 (Mar. 1936).

At the time when this photograph was taken, Stevenage was still a small market town (it was made into a New Town after the war), immortalized as ‘Hilton’ by E. M. Forster in *Howards End* (1910). Stevenage’s position on the Great North Road—now the A1—linked it to the capital; in Forster’s novel, the ‘red rust’ of suburban London was already in sight, making it just a matter of time before the rural atmosphere of this part of Hertfordshire was strangled by the tentacles of suburbia.¹⁵⁵ In *Howards End*, the ever-increasing speed of transport and communication is responsible for disrupting crucial relationships between individuals and their environment; the ‘Six Hills’ that run alongside the Great North Road feature in the novel as an immovable locus of stillness amidst all the speed and confusion, as the road develops from the old coaching route into the road of the motor car. The flustered Mrs Munt is ‘inattentive’ to the hills as she passes them by on a train.¹⁵⁶

To the novel’s heroine, Margaret, the barrows strike an incongruous note amid the new villas spreading along the Great North Road, even in 1910: ‘Charles’s house on the left; on the right the swelling forms of the Six Hills. Their appearance in such a neighbourhood surprised her. They interrupted the stream of residences that was thickening up towards Hilton. Beyond them she saw meadows and a wood, and beneath them she settled that soldiers of the best kind lay buried.’¹⁵⁷ There is something incongruous about the Six Hills in the *Antiquity* photograph, too; they seem about to be submerged beneath the tarmac and turf of modern Stevenage (and in the background you can just see the chimneys of some of the villas described in *Howards End*). But they have not been submerged; they remain as witnesses to the daily motor traffic that passes them by. And in fact further investigation in the text that accompanies the image shows that the road, however modern it might appear; is in fact likely to be a Roman road. In pictorial terms, it would seem that modernity is a veneer: the modern elements of the picture are largely constructed from *surfaces*: tarmac, concrete, the neat turf covering the verge and the mounds; whereas the ancient elements—still there—are visible as *mass* underneath and beside those surfaces. Modernity seems, at first sight, to be the more dominant mode, since it is the more visible. But the caption, context, and accompanying text of the photograph suggest this reality; and as the viewer looks again at the image, this reality suggests itself. The road is not as modern as it appears, despite its smooth tarmacked surface; and underneath those hills—as Margaret Schlegel imagined—there may still be human remains. Modernity appears now to be a thin—if ubiquitous—veneer, under which a deeper past stubbornly remains. In reality, of course, barrows and other prehistoric remains were as vulnerable as

¹⁵⁵ Forster’s commitment to environmental concerns extended to contributing an essay, ‘Havoc’, to Clough Williams-Ellis’s *England and the Octopus* (London, 1928), 44–7. When Stevenage was made into a new town, a radio broadcast by Forster underlined his opposition; and as Matless points out, his opposition focused on the obliteration of the unique and timeworn qualities of the landscape (*Landscape and Englishness*, 208).

¹⁵⁶ E. M. Forster, *Howards End* (1910; Harmondsworth, 1984), 29.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 199.

anything else to the destruction wreaked by plough or bulldozer: but in photographs such as this one, the remains of the past seem irrepressibly, yet almost casually, there; a reality of a different order from that of mundane suburbia. There is a certain disjuncture, a certain incommensurability between these realities; and here they are given, in effect, photographic form.

A further aspect of this fundamental incommensurability arises in connection with notions of time. If modern civilization is a matter of surfaces and fleeting change, the concomitant idea—attractive to Neo-Romantics—arises that a deep past may not only coexist beneath and beside this flimsy modernity, but may also even *outlast* it. It is not difficult to read this into some of *Antiquity's* landscape images, especially where they depict the more permanent and visually impressive prehistoric features such as earthworks or hill figures. In a photograph captioned 'One of the Bartlow Hills, Essex', taken by Crawford in 1935 (Fig. 3.21), the barrow seems far more substantial than the fence which attempts to enclose it, and more substantial than the besuited man standing somewhat incongruously in front of it. The man is there to give an idea of relative scale—but the scale his presence indicates is temporal as well as spatial: the barrow, being far more ancient, would doubtless outlast him too. Pictorially the barrow seems to function as a *memento mori*, like the cliffs in Dyce's *Pegwell Bay*, like the anamorphic skull in Holbein's painting *The Ambassadors* (see Chapter 1).

Sometimes the texts accompanying images in *Antiquity* make such a perception of these relative timescales explicit. Describing Butser Hill in an article of 1930, Stuart Piggott explains how this 'great green hill like the overturned hull of some gigantic ship' is visible to 'the traveller from London to Portsmouth by road'.¹⁵⁸ Travellers have gone past this hill, he says, for many centuries, and at ever-increasing speeds; but it has remained: 'Butser has watched human endeavour for four thousand years: it may watch them for as long again and outlive them all.'¹⁵⁹ To be sure, Piggott's writing style was particularly evocative. The *Times Literary Supplement* described this article as possessing 'a literary distinction too rarely found in archaeological records'.¹⁶⁰ Yet Piggott was simply eloquently spelling out a sensibility which was present in many other articles and images in the pages of *Antiquity*. In the Stevenage image, for example, the brooding presence and stillness of the earthwork stand in stark contrast to the road, the site of speed. As elements in the landscape, they are incommensurable in so far as they embody different conceptions of time.

Time and again in the pages of *Antiquity* in the 1920s and 1930s, ancient sites are described in relation to the modern traveller, in accordance with both Crawford's commitment to field archaeology and his popularizing drive. Writers such as F. G. Roe in 1936 described how and where crop-marks could be seen

¹⁵⁸ S. Piggott, 'Butser Hill', *Antiquity*, 4/14 (June 1930), 187.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 200.

¹⁶⁰ *TLS* (3 July 1930), 558.

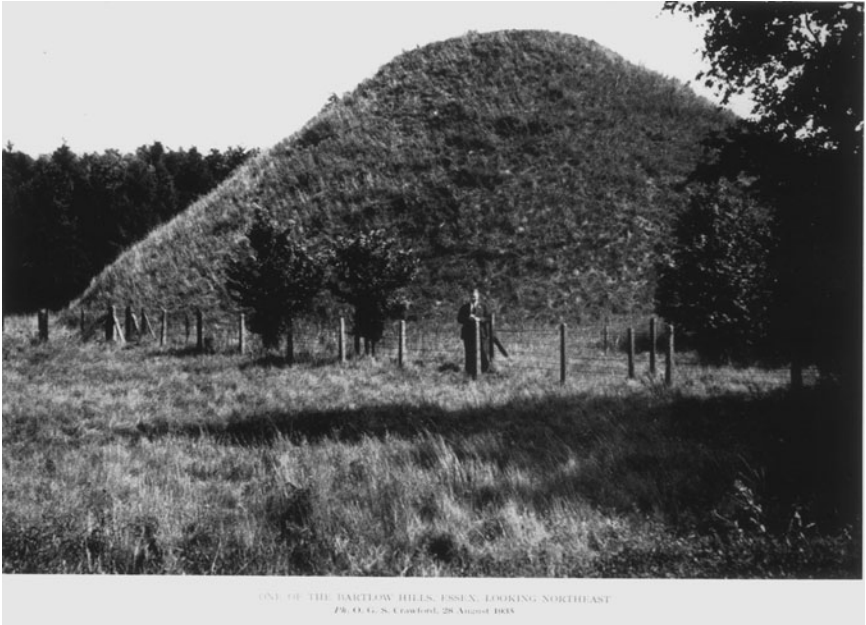


Fig. 3.21. O. G. S. Crawford, 'One of the Bartlow Hills, Essex, looking northeast' (28 Aug. 1935), from G. C. Dunning and R. F. Jessup, 'Roman Barrows', *Antiquity*, 10/37 (Mar. 1936).

from train or car;¹⁶¹ and in a 1929 article on hill-figures, Crawford wrote that 'The best known hill-figures are the White Horse on the Berkshire Downs, below Uffington Castle, which can be seen from the train between Didcot and Swindon; the Long Man of Wilmington on the Sussex Downs, also visible from the train (between Lewes and Hastings); and the Cerne Giant, Dorset.'¹⁶² As we have seen, this juxtaposition of modern viewpoint (through a train window) and ancient landscape was explored in the 1920s by Eric Ravilious, for whom it neatly performed a modern twist on a timeworn landscape theme (see Fig. i.6). Chalk hill-figures such as the Long Man of Wilmington and the (more recent) Westbury Horse are well suited, after all, to such a view; their bold graphic designs seem—like roadside advertisements—designed to be seen from a passing vehicle.¹⁶³ Piper, too, depicted ancient sites from the point of view of a modern traveller—this time by car—in his *Architectural Review* article on the road from London to Bath (Fig. 3.22).

Most archaeological remains are not so ostentatious, however; we, like Mrs Munt in *Howards End*, may well rush past the Six Hills in Stevenage, oblivious

¹⁶¹ F. G. Roe, 'The Crooked Field', *Antiquity*, 10/39 (Sept. 1936), 349.

¹⁶² Crawford, 'The Giant of Cerne and Other Hill-Figures', *Antiquity*, 3/11 (Sept. 1929), 277.

¹⁶³ Ravilious in fact originally depicted the Wilmington Giant in *Train Landscape* but then changed it to the Westbury Horse (Powers, *Eric Ravilious*, 45).

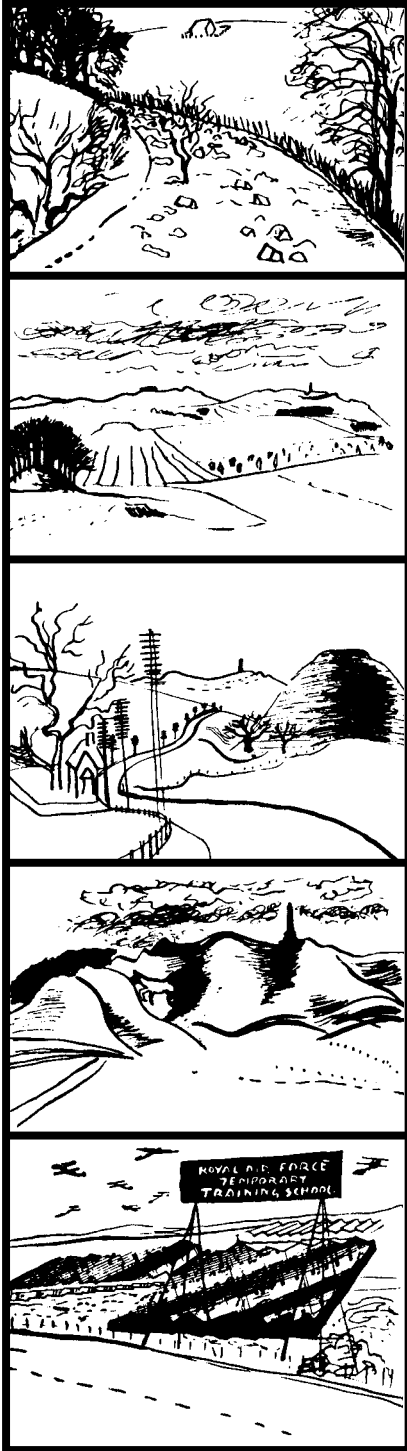


Fig. 3.22. John Piper, 'The Wiltshire Plain', from 'London to Bath: A Topographical and Critical Survey of the Bath Road', *AR* (May 1939).

to their existence. The photograph of those hills, seen in this context, stills the view from a train or car window. The abundance of archaeological remains in Britain pictured in *Antiquity* gives an impression that the whole landscape may be littered with such things, whether or not we ever notice them. ‘Probably not one in ten thousand of those who pass through the middle of Durrington Walls is aware of its existence’, wrote Crawford in 1929.¹⁶⁴ Readers of *Antiquity* were made aware of the rich and largely invisible universe of relics that inhabited the selfsame landscape through which they passed at increasingly high speeds: relics that were there before they were born, and that would be there after they are dead. *Antiquity* offered its readers a vision equivalent to Nash’s idea of ‘Unseen Landscapes’, as outlined in his *Country Life* article of May 1938: ‘The landscapes I have in mind’, he wrote, ‘are not part of the unseen world in a psychic sense, nor are they part of the Unconscious. They belong to the world that lies, visibly, about us. They are unseen merely because they are not perceived; only in that way can they be regarded as invisible.’¹⁶⁵ The implication of *Antiquity* is that these relics are ‘unseen landscapes’, which have uncannily *been there all along* whether or not we ever notice them. The final importance of the photographs which played such a central role in the journal is that they offered proof—if one doubted it—of the continuing existence of these vestiges of the past. In a sense, *Antiquity* offered a more radical version of the sensibility evoked by the scores of topographical books of the 1920s and 1930s which promised to reveal the ‘hidden’ treasures of England: books like Donald Maxwell’s *Unknown Dorset* of 1927 or C. E. Vuilliamy’s *Unknown Cornwall* of 1925. That Crawford recognised this is indicated by the effusive foreword he wrote to *Prehistoric Sussex*, a ‘copiously illustrated’ 1929 book by Cecil Curwen, a regular contributor to *Antiquity*. ‘Dr Cecil Curwen’, he wrote, ‘has an intimate knowledge of his county, and were not the titles so hackneyed and vulgarised he might with full justice have called this book “the real unknown, undiscovered Sussex.” For he describes things seen by few and recognised by very few indeed; and he does it in a way that will open the eyes of those who read.’¹⁶⁶ He could just as easily have been describing *Antiquity*.

Crawford and the Archaeology of Modern Life

While Neo-Romantic artists like Piper and Nash were painting images of local landscapes haunted by history and curious presences, and Grigson was gradually being reunited with his childhood love of antiquities, Crawford was trying to readjust his understanding of world history to accommodate the rise of fascism (which he seems to have seen partly, as a kind of reversion to primitive religious

¹⁶⁴ Crawford, ‘Durrington Walls’, *Antiquity*, 3/9 (Mar. 1929), 49.

¹⁶⁵ ‘Unseen Landscapes’, 526.

¹⁶⁶ E. Cecil Curwen, *Prehistoric Sussex* (London, 1929), p. xiii.

hysteria), the persistence of capitalism, irrationalism, and the barbarism of war. On a trip to Berlin in 1934, Crawford applied his photographic skills to document some of the ways in which the Nazi regime had effaced signs of history in the fabric of the city. With the forensic eye of the archaeologist, he photographed half-obliterated anti-Nazi graffiti reading “Tod den Nazis!”—(‘Death to the Nazis!’) on a canal bridge (Fig. 3.23), and rubbed-out communist slogans on fences. With an archaeologist’s understanding of the significance of place names, he took a picture of ‘Horst Wessel House’, named after a Nazi hero, noting its previous identity as ‘Karl Liebknecht House’, the former headquarters of the communist party. Nor was Crawford’s documentation of signs of change confined to Nazi Germany: at home in Britain he photographed anti-fascist graffiti, ‘roadside pulpit’ posters proclaiming Christian and anti-evolutionary beliefs, and billboard advertisements for motor fuel and what he called ‘faked food’.

All such signs were effectively traces of history for Crawford; all had to be accommodated into the big picture of time. The carpet of history, for Crawford, spread into the future as well as into the past; and from the vantage point of the late 1930s, the future looked bleak indeed, ending up either in totalitarianism or a laissez-faire capitalist economy whose commitment to the pursuit of profit would result in social inequality and the exploitation of false needs. It was in this spirit



Fig. 3.23. O. G. S. Crawford, ‘Half-obliterated slogan on canal-bridge “Tod den Nazis!”’, Berlin (19 Aug. 1934).

that in 1938–9 Crawford wrote ‘Bloody Old Britain’, renamed—apparently for decency’s sake—‘Bunk of England’, an extraordinary (but never published) attempt to apply archaeological methods to the study of modern Britain in an angry satire on capitalism and its material culture.¹⁶⁷ In ‘Bloody Old Britain’, the evidence of a poorly designed modern dressing table, the way in which butter is served in restaurants, or the ubiquitousness of doilies and mats in the modern domestic interior, is examined as if it were the evidence of Pompeii. And what this evidence indicates is the triumph of appearance over function in the bourgeois world. Britain was a culture in decline. Socialism, he concluded, would be ‘the only remedy of a half-ruined world’.¹⁶⁸

Crawford’s photographic collection is a repository of documents of signs of history (both ancient and modern): traces and objects of value to Crawford in so far as they assisted as clues in the solving of the puzzle of history. *Antiquity*, as we have seen, was conceived as the place where the public could be made aware of the gradual piecing-together of this puzzle. Grigson was aware of Crawford’s totalizing view (he ‘held human diversity and change and unity in his focus’¹⁶⁹), yet *Antiquity* appealed to him primarily as the repository of marvellous things which it seemed the modern world had papered over, or which the demands of artistic modernism had forced him to relinquish. Perhaps this fundamental difference of outlook can account for the ‘sharp impatient letters’ that Grigson, in ‘Reading “Antiquity”’, describes receiving from Crawford in answer to his enquiries.¹⁷⁰ *Antiquity* fed Grigson’s counter-modernist sensibility, offering a redemptive antiquarianism, taking him back to a landscape of home where the past was still tangible, where his brothers were still alive. This was the last place where everything had connected for Grigson; ultimately it was the nostalgia for this primal unity that attracted him to *Antiquity*—a distorted reflection of the epistemological unity of world history envisaged by its founder.

¹⁶⁷ MS Crawford 108–9. When Crawford submitted his manuscript in 1943, Methuen replied that his ‘political outlook’ was ‘quite unnecessarily bitter’, and that publishing this book at this point ‘would be like hitting a man when he is down’ (MS Crawford 8, fol. 109). Betjeman knew of the existence of this manuscript: in a letter dated 29 Jan. 1970 he told James Lees-Milne that O. G. S. Crawford had compiled a parodic guide-book ‘called *Bloody Old Britain*, but no-one would publish it’ (*John Betjeman: Letters*, ii: 1951–1984, ed. C. Lycett Green (London, 1995), 395). Bevis Hillier suggests that Crawford’s project may have been a source for Betjeman’s poem ‘A Lincolnshire Church’, which begins ‘Dear old, bloody old England’ (B. Hillier, *John Betjeman: New Fame, New Love* (London, 2002), 543). See K. Hauser, *Bloody Old Britain: O. G. S. Crawford and the Archaeology of the Modern World* (London, forthcoming).

¹⁶⁹ ‘Reading “Antiquity”’, 118.

¹⁷⁰ ‘I never met [Crawford]’, writes Grigson, ‘though I had sharp impatient letters from him, from this always inquisitive cultured man, whose patience was not increased by ignorance or foolish enquiry or sham archaeology such as Stonehenge evoked, and still evokes’ (ibid. 117). Unfortunately I have been unable to locate these letters.

¹⁶⁸ MS Crawford 109, fol. 141.

4

Revenants in the Landscape: The Discoveries of Aerial Photography

I know this landscape is a lie. Skin deep. Hedgerowed, church-towered, village-strewn England. Rub the map and civilization as we know it disappears. The Bronze Age emerges. And Peter would be the first to point out that these vistas which we like to think of as virgin, naked countryside, the bare bosoms of hills and little pubic clumps of woodland, are all—if it has taken millennia—man-made.

Graham Swift, *Out of this World*

revenant *n.* 1. One who returns from the dead; a ghost. 2. One who returns to a place.

OED

In 1937 John Piper's article 'Prehistory from the Air' was published in the final volume of the modernist art journal *Axis*. In it, Piper compares the landscapes of southern England, seen from above, with the modernist works of Miró and Picasso (Fig. 4.1). His interest in the aerial view is not, however, confined to its Formalist-aesthetic aspect; Piper also points out how flying and aerial photography have accelerated archaeological theory and practice. Aerial photographs, he writes, 'have elucidated known sites of earthworks and have shown the sites of many that were previously unknown'. They are also, he continues, 'among the most beautiful photographs ever taken'.¹ The aerial view, it seems, could be both investigative and aesthetic.

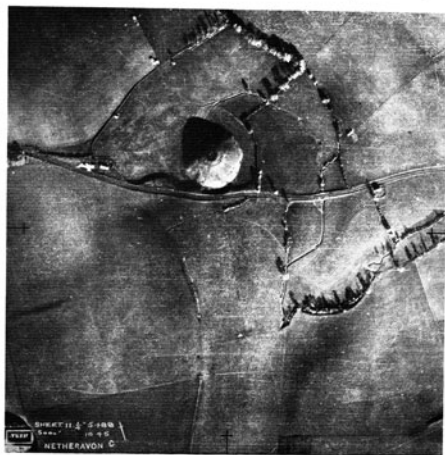
The use of aerial photography by archaeologists, known as 'aerial archaeology', began in earnest in Britain in the decade in which Piper was writing, although its possibilities were beginning to be suspected in the 1920s, after the use of aerial photography for reconnaissance purposes in the First World War.² In the interwar

¹ 'Prehistory from the Air', *Axis*, 8 (1937), 5.

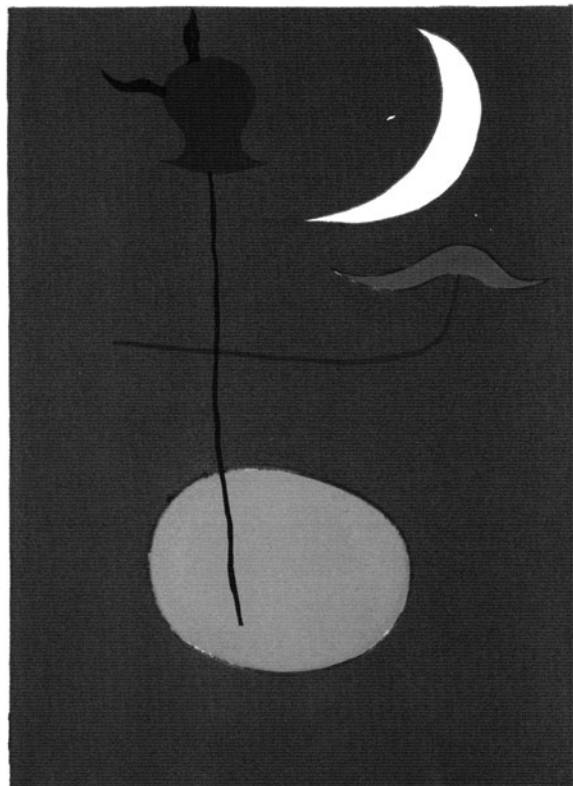
² Most of the small literature on the history of aerial archaeology considers its development, its 'greatest discoveries', and the contribution it has made to archaeology. See, for example, G. S. Maxwell, ed., *The Impact of Aerial Reconnaissance on Archaeology* (London, 1983) and L. Deuel, *Flights into Yesterday: The Story of Aerial Archaeology* (London, 1971), which is described by the author as 'the book of a non-specialist for non-specialists' (p. xvi). As with archaeological photography in general, however, very little seems to have been written about the poetics of aerial archaeology.



Stukeley del. *The Roman road, & the Snake's head or hathpen.*



Silbury Hill, Avebury, Wiltshire. (Top) After Wm. Stukeley, 1723. (Bottom) Air photo (Crown copyright reserved).



Opposite: Painting by JOAN MIRO

Fig. 4.1. John Piper, 'Prehistory from the Air', *Axis*, 8 (1937).

period it was British archaeologists who pioneered the new methods of aerial archaeology. In his book on aerial archaeology, Leo Deuel notes that until the 1950s ‘no other European country had made any comparable effort to tap the almost limitless store of information consecutive cultures had imprinted on its soil’.³ As many commentators pointed out, the British landscape offered plenty of such ‘information’: the series of invasions, settlements, clearances, and developments that constitute British history have made the landscape a veritable palimpsest, the layers of which can potentially be revealed in an aerial view.

Archaeologists became expert in deciphering aerial views of this palimpsest, as we shall see. But such views of Britain exercised an appeal beyond archaeological circles. Aerial photography showed Britain as it had never before been seen; it revealed aspects of the landscape hitherto unknown, or at least never before visualized in such concrete form. The aerial view ‘made strange’ long-familiar features: hills seemed to disappear, towns and cities might appear tiny, rivers and roads ran through the two-dimensional scene like veins. Geoffrey Grigson, describing a flight over the West Country in a radio broadcast in 1947, said that his mind was ‘overcrowded with those familiarities turned into the unfamiliar—churches, towns, villages, the white bang of the high tide against Looe Island, black hills, grey cliffs and red cliffs, interchanges over the West of darkness and of light’.⁴ And extraordinarily, some ancient features of the landscape, including Roman roads and chalk figures such as the White Horse of Uffington, seemed—uncannily—to have been designed for the view from an aeroplane, as if they had been waiting for these airborne gods of the twentieth century to see them in their correct aspect.

From the air, human beings themselves and human intervention in the landscape in the form of industrialization and modernization seemed radically reduced in size and importance. But if living human beings and their works were less evident, the remains of the dead were miraculously visible. The lineaments of deserted medieval villages, Roman villas, Iron Age hill forts, and Neolithic barrows were all visible from the air, given the right conditions, even when the same sites were barely noticeable at ground level. It was almost as if, from this singular vantage point in the sky, a picture could be taken of the past, with no trickery involved but standard twentieth-century technology. Speaking at a meeting in 1923, the president of the Royal Geographical Society voiced just this sentiment: ‘It is a somewhat solemn thought that in the year 1923 A.D. we can take from the air photographs of the agricultural systems prevalent in this country some 500 years before Christ.’⁵

Aerial photography, then, and aerial archaeology had a variety of different meanings and uses—military, aesthetic, documentary, archaeological. In this chapter I want to explore some of these meanings and uses, demonstrating both

³ *Flights into Yesterday*, 53.

⁴ G. Grigson, ‘A Window in the Air’, in *Essays from the Air* (London, 1951), 64.

⁵ O. G. S. Crawford, ‘Air Survey and Archaeology’ and discussion, *Geographical Journal*, 61/5 (May 1923), 365.

why aerial archaeology was attractive to artists and writers in the 1930s and 1940s and also how it can itself be seen as a kind of historiography: how, through the dual technologies of flight and photography, the landscape can be figured as the bearer of a peculiarly resilient memory. I hope to show how an examination of aerial archaeology succinctly illustrates wider issues of survival and loss, of the conflict between modernity and the deep past of the landscape, and how it was popularized and taken up by Neo-Romantic artists as metaphor, illustration, and artistic resource.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF AERIAL ARCHAEOLOGY

The history of aerial photography begins with the photographer Nadar's celebrated balloon ascent over Paris in 1858.⁶ In the 1880s a number of experimental flights by camera-carrying balloons were carried out by Major Elsdale, an officer in the British Army.⁷ It was not until the First World War, however, that aerial photography advanced, as photographs were taken from balloons and planes for reconnaissance purposes. The war brought about developments in flying and aeroplane engineering as well as improvements in camera equipment and aerial photographic techniques—advances from which archaeology would soon benefit.

Like many advancements in photographic technology, the history of aerial archaeology has been entwined with military history from the start. Some of the first known aerial views of an archaeological site were taken by Lieutenant P. H. Sharpe, who in 1906 sent up a war balloon over Stonehenge with a self-exposing camera. The resulting photographs were published in *Archaeologia*.⁸ The philanthropist Henry Wellcome pioneered aerial photography for archaeological purposes at his excavations in the Sudan before the First World War, using a kite-borne camera, its shutter activated by remote control.⁹ However, most early aerial photographs of prehistoric remains were taken incidentally during routine war-practice. During the 1914–18 war, a number of discoveries took place as a by-product of airborne reconnaissance, for example by Lieutenant-Colonel G. A. Beazeley flying over the Tigris–Euphrates plain.¹⁰ This curious collaboration between the military and the archaeological establishments—sometimes accidental, sometimes not, sometimes fraught and sometimes friendly—would continue throughout the following decades. It was not just archaeologists who profited: in the Second World War in

⁶ See N. Gosling, *Nadar* (London, 1976) and Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, *Nadar* (1995). For a full history of aerial photography, see B. Newhall, *Airborne Camera: The World from the Air and Outer Space* (1969).

⁷ Deuel, *Flights into Yesterday*, 10.

⁸ Colonel J. E. Capper, 'Photographs of Stonehenge, as Seen from a War Balloon', *Archaeologia*, 60 (1907), 571.

⁹ K. Arnold and D. Olsen, eds., *Medicine Man: The Forgotten Museum of Henry Wellcome* (London, 2003), 174–7.

¹⁰ Beazeley recounted his experiences in two lectures reprinted in the *Geographical Journal* in 1919 and 1920 (Deuel, *Flights into Yesterday*, 14).

particular, the military forces benefited from men and women with archaeological training who were enlisted as photographic intelligence personnel.

O. G. S. Crawford

If any one individual can be said to have ‘discovered’ aerial archaeology as a technique indispensable to the modern archaeologist, it is O. G. S. Crawford. Crawford was aerial archaeology’s main promoter during the 1920s and 1930s, publishing papers and lecturing widely on the subject, as well as using aerial views to assist with his own fieldwork. Through such activities Crawford’s name came to be associated with the new technique.¹¹ From its first issue in 1927 *Antiquity* provided a showcase for new discoveries from the air such as Arminghall, Woodhenge, and Little Woodbury, all of which were excavated before 1939. Crawford saw how aerial archaeology—always acting in conjunction with fieldwork—could revolutionize archaeological practice, locating new sites and elaborating on old ones, saving money and time spent looking in the wrong place on the ground.¹² Using the metaphor of a carpet whose pattern is revealed when seen from a height, Crawford enthused about the capacity of the aerial view to convert chaos into order.¹³ The invention of aerial photographs, he claimed in 1923, ‘will prove as valuable to archaeology as that of the telescope has proved to astronomy’.¹⁴

Crawford had witnessed Wellcome’s use of box-kite photography when he assisted at his Sudan excavations.¹⁵ His time in Third Army Maps and the Royal Flying Corps in the First World War further suggested the potential of the aerial view for archaeologists. But it was in 1922, when Dr J. P. Williams-Freeman showed him some aerial photographs taken by the RAF over Hampshire, that he fully realized the value of the new technique. Before the war, Crawford had been much preoccupied by lynchets (ancient banks formed by ploughing a hillside) in the southern countries of England, and had been trying—with limited success—to map them. The photographs of Hampshire revealed the layout of the lynchets with phenomenal precision. Crawford could see how much archaeological information could be gleaned from an aerial view: for example, a close study showed the difference between the superimposed field systems from different historical periods. The aerial view made it possible to distinguish between Celtic lynchets and the lineaments of Saxon field-strips.

¹¹ See, for example, O. G. S. Crawford, ‘Air Survey and Archaeology’; ‘Air Photography for Archaeologists’, *Ordnance Survey Professional Paper*, new ser., 12 (1929); ‘Air Photography: Past and Future’ (presidential address), *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society for 1938*, 233–8, as well as articles in the *Christian Science Monitor* and *The Observer* associating Crawford with the new technique.

¹² See editorial, *Antiquity*, 1/1 (Mar. 1927), 3.

¹³ Crawford, ‘Historical Cycles’, *Antiquity*, 5/17 (Mar. 1931), 5. Crawford’s contribution to *Lufbild und Lufbildmessung* (Berlin, 1938) on aerial archaeology in England included photographs of a patterned carpet as seen by a cat and as seen by a man.

¹⁴ Crawford, ‘Air Survey and Archaeology’, 358.

¹⁵ See *SD*, 91–105.

As Ordnance Survey archaeology officer, Crawford began to visit RAF stations in southern England looking at aerial photographs. At the Old Sarum aerodrome in Wiltshire he found some photographs of Stonehenge taken in 1921. These—quite by chance—faintly revealed the full extent of the Stonehenge Avenue, showing that it took a turn south-eastward to West Amesbury and thus resolving a long-standing archaeological dispute. Crawford proceeded to excavate part of the site and proved what the image indicated: that the Avenue indeed took this path. The discoveries were published in the *Observer* and *Illustrated London News* amid great public interest.¹⁶ This was aerial archaeology's first public triumph—it had made the unseen visible, substantiated by fieldwork as Crawford always insisted it should be. The discoveries at Stonehenge showed how an aerial view might settle an age-old dispute in an instant, saving money too, as the archaeologist could go straight to the most significant point in the excavations. They also demonstrated a new way in which archaeological discoveries could be visualized and publicized: aerial photographs must have come as a gift not only to archaeologists but also to newspaper and magazine editors, illustrating in such spectacular form discoveries that might otherwise have been visually uninspiring. Archaeology now partook of some of the glamour-by-association of flight; as Edith Olivier noted in 1941, 'Aeroplanes first carried archaeology away from the exclusive control of the elderly.'¹⁷

From Wessex to War

The RAF pictures—such as those of Stonehenge—on which archaeologists depended in the 1920s were usually taken in the course of routine flying practice. Any archaeological information they might contain was, in the main, accidental; thus their significance to archaeologists largely depended on chance. Archaeologists benefited, in effect, from the propensity of photography—as noted in Chapter 2—to record surface detail indiscriminately. Throughout the 1920s the RAF and archaeologists worked increasingly co-operatively. In the mid 1920s the Air Ministry had sanctioned the transfer to the Ordnance Survey office of all aerial photographs containing archaeological information that were not required for service purposes.¹⁸ Crawford drew up for every RAF station equipped for photography a list of sites of archaeological interest within a 25-mile radius that were to be wherever possible the subjects of practice work.¹⁹ Sometimes the incentive came from officials in the RAF, who suggested their own sites and identifications.

¹⁶ Crawford, 'Stonehenge from the Air: New Discoveries', *The Observer* (22 July 1923), 13; 'New Discoveries at Stonehenge Made from the Air', *Illustrated London News* (18 Aug. 1923), 302–3. According to Edith Olivier, the aerial discoveries at Stonehenge and Woodhenge were 'very exciting' (*Country Moods and Tenses: A Non-Grammarian's Chapbook* (London, 1941), 50). See Deuel, *Flights into Yesterday*, 26 ff.

¹⁸ Crawford and Keiller, *Wessex from the Air*, 5.

¹⁹ *Report of the Progress of the Ordnance Survey* (London, 1930), 7.

¹⁷ *Country Moods and Tenses*, 50.

The discovery of ‘Woodhenge’, two miles from Stonehenge, in 1925 by Squadron-Leader G. S. M. Insall came about in this way.²⁰

However helpful the RAF could be, archaeology’s reliance on military practice flights was unsatisfactory in some ways. Crawford realized the need for archaeologists to direct their own researches in the field, but this required financial resources. Alexander Keiller had read about Crawford’s discoveries at Stonehenge in the *Observer*, and proposed to fund such a project.²¹ Keiller (who during the First World War had been a pilot in the Royal Navy Air Force) and Crawford hired an aeroplane and set up their headquarters at Andover in Wiltshire. A captured German camera and a Zeiss lens were bought from the Disposals Board of the War Office and installed first on the outside of the fuselage, and then, when the Avro plane was replaced by a DH9, in the observer’s cockpit²². Their aim was to map a single region from the air for archaeological purposes—the area covered by Berkshire, Dorset, Hampshire, Somerset, and Wiltshire—and it resulted in the highly influential book *Wessex from the Air*, published in 1928.²³ *Wessex from the Air* was pioneering in its concentration on a single region; its influence on other archaeologists consisted not so much in its discoveries as in its systematic method, and the potential which it demonstrated for aerial archaeology. Its Hardyesque title was surely aimed at a broad audience, as was typical of Crawford (see Chapter 3), and its influence went beyond archaeological circles: John Piper mentions it in his *Axis* article, and Paul Nash owned a copy.²⁴

An ‘unexplored country’

According to Deuel, Crawford succeeding in making Britain the *locus classicus* for discoveries from the air, showing that the British landscape was as fruitful a hunting ground for ancient remains as anywhere.²⁵ Signs of the ancient past were particularly visible in the deforested regions of southern England, where the chalky soil of the downs of Wessex and the gravel flats of the Thames valley yielded particularly striking results in the pioneering decades of the 1920s and 1930s. But results could be obtained all over the British Isles. Aerial archaeology seemed to open up an unknown country inhabiting the more familiar one, this one visible only from the air. Returning from an aerial reconnaissance trip in September 1930, Crawford advised any ‘young archaeologist who wants to make discoveries’

²⁰ Deuel, *Flights into Yesterday*, 56.

²¹ See L. J. Murray, *A Zest for Life: The Story of Alexander Keiller* (Wootton Bassett, 1999), 23.

²² *Wessex from the Air*, pp. v–vi.

²³ For the making of this book, see A. McGregor, ‘An Aerial Relic of O. G. S. Crawford’, *Antiquity*, 74/283 (Mar. 2000), 87–100. It was reviewed in the *TLS* (6 Sept. 1928), 625.

²⁴ Nash’s copy of *Wessex from the Air* is in the Tate Gallery Archive (TGA 964). Its uses may have stretched to tourism: in a review the archaeologist Cyril Fox suggested it would make a good ‘travelling companion’, and that he could ‘imagine no more interesting motor tour than one in the area’ it covered (*Antiquaries Journal*, 8/4 (Oct. 1928), 536).

²⁵ *Flights into Yesterday*, 17.

to 'join a flying-club and learn to fly. Not until then will the harvest be reaped. Our tour sufficed to show that England is still, for the archaeological aviator, an almost unexplored country.'²⁶ This 'unexplored country' was investigated by archaeologists throughout the 1930s. Discoveries from the air proliferated, often under Crawford's eye, appearing as articles in both archaeological and non-specialist publications, and work with the RAF continued. In 1938–9 Crawford undertook a major exploration of Roman Scotland and the north of England from the air, with Geoffrey Alington as pilot and photographer.²⁷

Perhaps most important of all (for both archaeological posterity and popular acclaim) were the aerial photographs taken by Major G. W. G. Allen, who took nearly 2,000 between 1933 and 1939 mainly in the Thames valley. Allen was not an archaeologist but a wealthy and enthusiastic amateur who nevertheless contributed a great deal to the discipline. More than half of his photographs depicted unknown or virtually unknown sites, and as we shall see, he did more than any other individual to establish the techniques of aerial archaeology.²⁸ The archaeological merits and aesthetic qualities of Allen's pictures made them both useful to archaeologists and attractive to the lay viewer.

Allen was in close contact with a number of archaeologists and institutions; as news of the excellence of his photographs spread, he was asked to visit specific sites, which he did, rarely charging for his time and materials. Crawford was keen on his work from the start, and a dialogue soon developed between them in which Crawford would ask Allen to photograph sites, commenting on the results, and Allen would report on sites which he had seen on his travels.²⁹ Archaeologists at the Ashmolean Museum, the British Museum, and the London Museum developed a similar dialogue with Allen. When E. Cecil Curwen was sent a collection of his photos, he wrote to Allen that 'They are the most amazing and beautiful photos I have ever seen'.³⁰

The clarity and beauty of Allen's photographs meant that they were soon in great demand for publications and lectures (in the form of lantern slides). They illustrated academic papers, school textbooks, and popular atlases.³¹ Grahame

²⁶ 'Editorial Notes', *Antiquity*, 4/15 (Sept. 1930), 277.

²⁷ Crawford, 'Air Reconnaissance of Roman Scotland', *Antiquity*, 13/51 (Sept. 1939), 280–92.

²⁸ Allen discovered, for example, a stretch of Roman road north-east of Castor, and a single photograph of Stanton Harcourt taken in 1933 showed twenty-six new circles (MS Crawford 59, fols. 24, 36).

²⁹ In April 1933, for example, Crawford wrote to Allen that 'There is a plum waiting to be picked, and that is Castor, near Peterborough.' This Roman town, thought Crawford, would be showing nicely at that time of year, and Allen went and photographed it, although he remarked to Crawford that 'I doubt if the plum was quite ready to be picked' (ibid. fols. 16, 22).

³⁰ Ibid. fo. 50. Speaking of specific sets of Allen's photographs, the archaeologist A. D. Passmore called them 'wonderful' (ibid. fo. 37); Crawford thought them 'amazing' (ibid. fo. 36).

³¹ Cecil Curwen asked Allen if he could make lantern slides from his photographs; he included Allen's photograph of the Long Man of Wilmington in his book *The Archaeology of Sussex*, and in 1936 Allen agreed to get photographs for a pictorial atlas of the Oxford district (ibid. fols. 50, 55, 57).

Clark's 1940 *Prehistoric England*, for example, included a number of illustrations by Allen. Reviewing it in the *Architectural Review*, T. D. Kendrick picked out Allen's photographs for particular praise. 'I very much doubt', he wrote, 'that we really know Silbury if we have not seen Major Allen's inspiring air-picture of it, taken with the summer shadows lengthening and the surrounding paths and roads scarred deeply on the sunlit fields.'³² Allen himself published some of his findings in *Oxoniensia*.³³ His photographs continued to be used in publications for many years after his untimely death in November 1940, in a motorcycle accident. In a 1945 work entitled *Air Photography and Archaeology* by the leading post-war exponent of aerial archaeology, Dr J. K. St Joseph, twelve out of the seventeen illustrations were by Allen.³⁴ W. G. Hoskins used Allen's aerial photographs in *The Making of the English Landscape* (see Chapter 1). Allen himself planned a book on aerial archaeology. An amended version of his text was finally published as 'Discovery from the Air', a special issue of the periodical *Aerial Archaeology*, in 1984.³⁵

Throughout the 1930s and 1940s Allen's photographs could be seen in a number of contexts. In an exhibition mounted by Ilford, the film manufacturing company, they demonstrated the potential of aerial photography.³⁶ They were in demand for temporary and permanent display in museums; in 1932, for example, Allen sent his photograph of the 'Seven Barrows' to the British Museum to be put on display alongside finds from these barrows.³⁷ In 1948 the Ashmolean Museum mounted an exhibition of a hundred of Allen's aerial photographs along with a few others.³⁸ This exhibition followed on from a 'very popular'³⁹ permanent display of enlargements of a number of Allen's aerial photographs, which had been established in 1939 in the Department of Antiquities at the Ashmolean, a display which led to a number of requests for prints—including one from Paul Nash, as we shall see.

In the meantime, while Allen was making his discoveries, at the Ordnance Survey Crawford continued to build up a collection of negatives largely from RAF stations, with the ultimate aim of covering the whole country. By 1939 he had gathered over 23,000 aerial photographs from various sources. These constituted something like a reference library, and, together with copies of cadastral and other

³² 'The English Antiquities', *AR* (May 1941), 114. Kendrick was one of the museum curators with whom Allen regularly corresponded, providing him with prints of his photographs (see MS Crawford 59, fo. 44).

³³ Allen, 'Marks Seen from the Air in the Crops near Dorchester, Oxon.', *Oxoniensia*, 3 (1938), 169–71; 'Crop Marks Seen from the Air, Northfield Farm, Long Wittenham, Berks', *Oxoniensia*, 5 (1940), 164–5.

³⁴ *Air Photography and Archaeology* (London and Beccles, 1945).

³⁵ G. W. G. Allen, 'Discovery from the Air', *Aerial Archaeology*, 10 (1984). Allen's text as it appears here has been edited and amended first by O. G. S. Crawford, and then by J. S. P. Bradford, and it is accompanied by an additional introduction by D. N. Riley.

³⁶ 'Air Photography: Allen Bequest', Ashmolean Museum, 3/JP/2.

³⁷ MS Crawford 59, fo. 44.

³⁸ Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, *Guide to an Exhibition of Air-Photographs of Archaeological Sites* (1948).

³⁹ *Ibid.* p. iii.

maps, were used as the basis for archaeological information on both standard and 'period' Ordnance Survey maps. Through Crawford, the Ordnance Survey offices in Southampton became a major centre for aerial archaeology, acting as first port of call for archaeologists or museum curators keen to consult aerial views, or to commission them from the RAF.⁴⁰ In September 1940, for example, the curator of the Verulamium Museum in St Albans wrote to Crawford, asking him to use his influence with the RAF and have an aerial photograph taken of a newly visible site in the Roman town. That Crawford succeeded in obtaining such a picture indicates the extent of co-operation between the Ordnance Survey and the RAF even during wartime.⁴¹ And it is poignant that the summer of 1940, in which the British landscape was framed by the threat of invasion, was so dry that many ancient sites revealed themselves at this moment of danger; and that they were photographed—in many cases for the first time—from the same viewpoint as the bomber aeroplanes that crossed the Channel in both directions.

Arrangements with local RAF bases were also established by the Ashmolean Museum, and it seems that they worked together even during the early years of the war. Judging by the correspondence between the officials at the bases and the curators of the Ashmolean, it seems that those in charge of army training were quite happy to unite photographic reconnaissance routines with archaeological objectives. However, a lack of communication in the later years of the war indicates that the RAF—and the Ashmolean curators—may have had other more pressing objectives.⁴²

The central role played by air power in the Second World War meant that the aerial view and its interpretation took on a new urgency. The deductive skills acquired by trained archaeologists proved to be applicable not only to aerial views of ancient sites, but also to aerial shots of enemy territory. A not insignificant number of archaeologists were employed at the Central Air Photograph Interpretation Unit at Medmenham, where they pored over images for evidence of bomb damage, disturbed earth, or hastily buried bodies. At one point the Disney Professor of Archaeology at Cambridge University, Dorothy Garrod, and her two successors Grahame Clark and Glyn Daniel (who would also succeed Crawford as editor of *Antiquity*) were all working at Medmenham; Stuart Piggott and Charles Phillips were also employed there too.⁴³ According to Phillips, by the middle of 1941, Medmenham was 'the strongest concentration possible of practical archaeologists on this side of the Channel'.⁴⁴ 'A very suitable job for archaeologists', wrote Daniel to Crawford, 'as you will agree.'⁴⁵ It was not just that

⁴⁰ Ordnance Survey annual reports from the 1920s and 1930s indicate that Crawford also received an ever-increasing volume of enquiries from members of the public. Air-photographs began to be catalogued for public consultation in 1924–5 (*Report of the Progress of the Ordnance Survey* (London, 1925), 4).

⁴¹ MS Crawford 3, fols. 53 ff.

⁴² 'Air Photography—General', Ashmolean Museum, 3/JJP/1.

⁴³ G. Daniel, *Some Small Harvest* (London, 1986), 99, 135; Daniel and Chippindale, eds., *The Pastmasters*, 28.

⁴⁴ C. W. Phillips, *My Life in Archaeology* (Gloucester, 1987), 82.

⁴⁵ Letter to Crawford, Mar. 1941 (MS Crawford 107).

archaeologists by this point were used to looking at aerial photographs. Archaeologists and spies in military intelligence are both trained to decipher and interpret photographic images of all kinds; and both look for things that may be hidden (see Chapter 1).⁴⁶

Post-War Advances and Anxieties

Aerial archaeology's full potential was reached only after the Second World War. The years 1939–45 saw great developments in aerial reconnaissance, including advances in the technology of both flight and photographic equipment. Many post-war aerial discoveries were made by those who had seen service in the war in the air. Inspired by *Wessex from the Air*, for example, Derrick Riley took photographs during his wartime flying over the Thames valley, publishing papers on his findings in *Antiquity*, *Oxoniensia*, and the *Archaeological Journal*.⁴⁷

By the time Crawford retired from the Ordnance Survey in 1946, Dr J. K. St Joseph had gradually taken over his role as the pre-eminent figure in the world of British aerial archaeology. St Joseph served in the RAF as part of the Coastal Command, and saw how useful pictures taken in the course of war could be to archaeologists. Addressing the Glasgow Archaeological Society in November 1944, he pointed out how 'with the growth of air reconnaissance during the last five years it is probable that in all theatres of war great areas will have been photographed, some of them many times over... archaeological discoveries undoubtedly lie buried in these archives'.⁴⁸ Again, photography's indiscriminate recording meant that an image taken for a military or survey purpose could inadvertently contain information which, if read by a skilled viewer, might reveal the lineaments of the past, just as in Antonioni's 1966 film *Blow-Up* a picture of a park taken by a fashion photographer seems on closer inspection to contain evidence of a crime (see Chapter 2).

From 1945 St Joseph made his own reconnaissance flights, which resulted in a large number of discoveries. According to Deuel, in just a few hours of flying time in the summer of 1945 'St Joseph discovered more Roman military sites in the North than had come to be known in the previous two hundred years'.⁴⁹ St Joseph was in something of a hurry. In 1944 he stressed the need for speed in aerial archaeology, since wartime construction had already covered up some archaeological sites, and post-war building schemes would doubtless obliterate many more.

⁴⁶ See C. Babington Smith, *Evidence in Camera: The Story of Photographic Intelligence in World War II* (London, 1958), and U. Powys-Lybbe, *The Eye of Intelligence* (London, 1983). While few women seem to have been involved in aerial archaeology per se, they played an important role in photographic intelligence in the war.

⁴⁷ See, for example, 'The Technique of Air-Archaeology', *Archaeological Journal*, 101 (1946), 1–16. See D. Kennedy, ed., *Into the Sun: Essays in Air Photography in Honour of Derrick Riley* (Sheffield, 1989).

⁴⁸ *Air Photography and Archaeology*, 57–8.

⁴⁹ *Flights into Yesterday*, 68.

'On the other hand', said St Joseph, 'the present time and for the first year or two after the war will be unusually favourable for air reconnaissance, owing to the maximum extension of plough-land.'⁵⁰ After the destruction of the Ordnance Survey library in 1940, there was a pressing need for a new and comprehensive library of aerial photographs, while extant sites were still visible. In 1946, after Crawford's retirement, the Ordnance Survey began a resurvey of Britain, its archaeology division now under Charles Phillips.⁵¹ In 1948 the Cambridge University Committee for Aerial Photography was formed under St Joseph's curatorship.⁵²

For Crawford, however, it was already too late; the war itself had ruined so many sites in the south of England that aerial archaeology there, he felt, was increasingly pointless. In December 1940 he resigned from the Wiltshire Archaeology and Natural History Society, claiming to have 'given up' his interest in English archaeology and vowing to turn his attention to Scottish archaeology. 'This course', he wrote, 'has been forced upon me by the vandalism and desecration of the English countryside. In the case of Wilts the spoliation of the plain by the Army and RAF has contributed to kill interest.'⁵³ Crawford blamed the activities of the armed forces for the archaeological destruction of some of his favourite places.⁵⁴ Interestingly enough, the development of air power in the Second World War itself resulted in a number of archaeological discoveries. According to Grahame Clark, 'Many of the most important archaeological discoveries during the war were made in the course of air-field construction or of securing the materials needed for such works.'⁵⁵ Building over such discoveries with runways or aircraft hangars, however, removed them from sight, and meant that they could no longer be photographed from above.⁵⁶

There were, then, a number of differences between aerial archaeology before and after the Second World War. There was a professionalism, an aim at comprehensiveness, and particularly a sense of urgency after the war that was lacking in the 1920s and 1930s. The alliance between archaeologists and the RAF became gradually looser as increasingly RAF planes flew too fast and too high for the kind of aerial photography required by archaeologists. From the 1950s more private flyers supplemented work undertaken by professional archaeologists and the RAF, and in 1960 Cambridge University bought its own plane. By this time, aerial photography was an important component of any archaeological investigation.

⁵⁰ St Joseph, *Air Photography and Archaeology*, 59. As St Joseph recognized, many of the areas that had been newly ploughed during the war were precisely those which were 'most densely settled by early man', for example the 'gravel terraces of our southern and midland rivers and the Fenland', thus potentially revealing new sites viewed from above (p. 51).

⁵¹ See Kennedy, ed., *Into the Sun*, 14–15, and C. W. Phillips, *Archaeology in the Ordnance Survey 1791–1965* (London, 1980).

⁵² St Joseph was made director of Aerial Photography at Cambridge University in 1962, and he retired in 1980. See Deuel, *Flights into Yesterday*, 66 ff.

⁵³ MS Crawford 3, fo. 180.

⁵⁴ MS Crawford 109, fols. 101 ff.

⁵⁵ *Archaeology and Society: Reconstructing the Prehistoric Past* (1939; London, 1965), 57.

⁵⁶ For example, a known earthwork at Heathrow had to be flattened to make way for a runway; when excavated by the Ministry of Works it was seen to enclose a 'colonnaded Celtic temple' (ibid.).

But it was in the interwar years that the methodological foundations of aerial archaeology were laid in Britain, as a handful of colourful individuals and a few spectacular discoveries proved the worth of the new technique, inspiring both artists and archaeologists in their work, and contributing to the professionalization, rejuvenation, and popularization of domestic archaeology.

THE TECHNIQUES OF AERIAL ARCHAEOLOGY

The basic techniques of aerial archaeology were first discovered and tested in the late 1920s—especially in the making of *Wessex from the Air*—and they became standardized and established in the 1930s. Aerial shots may be either vertical or oblique. Vertical photographs are in general preferred by archaeologists since they make mapping easier; the camera may be mounted in the underbelly or in the cockpit of the plane, as it was in the case of *Wessex*. These mounted cameras usually expose themselves automatically, sometimes at regular intervals to produce a series of pictures or photographs which can be used as stereoscopic images.⁵⁷

The basic principle of aerial archaeology rests upon the fact that once soil has been disturbed, for example in the process of digging burial mounds or accommodating the foundations of buildings, that disturbance is essentially virtually ineradicable, no matter how long ago it took place. Such disturbances of soil result either in surface irregularities that can be detected through cast shadows, or in differences in soil type that may, in turn, result in differences in surface vegetation. The three main forms in which archaeological sites reveal themselves to the aerial camera are as ‘shadow sites’, ‘soil marks’, and ‘crop sites’, sometimes appearing in complex combinations. The appearance of each of these depends upon a combination of factors: the position of the sun, the time of the year, the level of rainfall, the constituents of the soil, and the type of crop or other vegetation growing there. In addition, there has to be a human presence sufficiently skilled in photography, flying, and archaeological knowledge for an effective and useful photograph to be taken from above.

Crawford was first to recognize and distinguish between the various ways in which sites reveal themselves to an aerial viewer. But it was George Allen who fully explored the variables and enabling conditions of each category, particularly crop sites and soil marks, in his tireless researches into sites around the Thames valley in the 1930s. Allen was an accomplished pilot and a skilled photographer; he made his own camera, with which he daringly took his spectacular pictures while piloting his plane single-handedly, an Ordnance Survey map balanced on his lap. Allen’s camera had to be gripped with both hands; it also held just one photographic

⁵⁷ Such stereoscopic images could be useful both for the examination of archaeological sites and in military intelligence, since buildings and other constructions show up stereoscopically, even if they are camouflaged.

plate, so he had to reload it repeatedly while in the air.⁵⁸ Photographic and navigational skills notwithstanding, it was largely due to his material circumstances that Major Allen was able to make his unique contribution to British archaeology. Allen was director of Messrs John Allen and Sons, his family's engineering firm based in Cowley, near Oxford, and was inspired to take up aerial reconnaissance after picking up one of Crawford's Ordnance Survey publications from a table in a Southampton hotel. His extensive leisure time meant that between 1932 and his death in 1940 he could visit and repeatedly revisit local sites in his own plane, which was based at his own private airstrip.⁵⁹ As a man of private means with his own plane he could—and did—head off speedily as soon as a site was identified. Unlike the often haphazard photographs obtained from the RAF, or the limited photographs taken on one-off archaeological expeditions, the huge number of photographs taken by Allen on these trips formed a catalogue of particular sites taken under a wide variety of meteorological and temporal circumstances. Between April and August of 1933, for example, he returned again and again to the field near Dorchester in Oxfordshire where parts of the outline of a huge henge monument appeared and disappeared throughout the spring and summer months.⁶⁰ It was through such photographs that a veritable typology of aerial archaeology began to emerge in the 1930s; what follows is an outline of that typology, and an analysis of its wider significance in terms of the recoverability of the past.

Shadow Sites

And see you marks that show and fade,
like shadows on the Downs?
O they are the lines the Flint Men made,
To guard their wondrous towns.

Kipling, 'Puck's Song'

Any slight irregularity in the surface of the land which might be invisible from the ground in broad daylight may be visible from above when shadows cast by a low sun can reveal the course of ancient tracks, or the outline of prehistoric burial mounds. Through cast shadows the full contours of hill forts, such as Barbury Castle in Wiltshire (Fig. 4.2), can be thrown into spectacular relief from above, sometimes revealing hitherto unsuspected or barely visible features such as extra ramparts. Occasionally it is the *reflection* of the sun that causes a feature to stand

⁵⁸ For a first-hand account of these sorties, see Allen, 'Discovery from the Air'. The camera is now in the Ashmolean Museum.

⁵⁹ According to his obituary, Allen's plane was the 'first privately-owned aeroplane in the City of Oxford' (*Implement and Machinery Review* (1 Jan. 1941), 789; facs. in Allen, 'Discovery from the Air', 5).

⁶⁰ The photographic results of these trips are mounted in volume ii of Allen's photograph albums, Ashmolean Museum, fos. 61–79.



Fig. 4.2. G. W. G. Allen, Ogbourne St George and Wroughton, Wiltshire (8 Aug. 1933), showing the Iron Age hill-fort Barbury Castle, a disc barrow, and ancient tracks as shadow sites.

out. The revelation of both kinds of shadow site depends upon the position of the sun in relation to the archaeological feature, and so is contingent upon the time of day and even the time of year. In general the best time for catching shadow sites is either early morning or early evening when the sun is low.

A rather beautiful photograph of a furrowed field was taken by Crawford in 1953 as a heuristic device to demonstrate how shadows reveal some features of a landscape while concealing others (Fig. 4.3).⁶¹ The handwritten caption he gave to this picture in his photograph album points out how it shows the 'different effect of lighting from different angles. The furrows on the right are almost invisible because looked at with the sun. This illustrates the chief principle of shadow-sites.'⁶² As this image demonstrates, shadow sites are dependent not only upon the position of

⁶¹ Crawford's photograph bears a resemblance to Paul Nash's photograph *Ploughed Field* (c.1937), repr. in A. Causey, *Paul Nash's Photographs: Document and Image* (London, 1973), Pl. 65.

⁶² Inst. Arch. O. G. S. C., box 10, no. 41.



Fig. 4.3. O. G. S. Crawford, 'Potato-ridges near Bush Lyne near Carlisle, on River Lyne, showing varying effects of light on furrows' (9 May 1953).



Fig. 4.4. 'Overton Down', from O. G. S. Crawford and A. Keiller, *Wessex from the Air* (1928), showing lynchets as shadow sites.

the sun, but also upon the position of the photographer. To capture such elusive materializations of the past required rare skill and resources in the early days of aerial archaeology; often they were caught by chance and not design.

The boundaries of ancient cultivation systems show themselves particularly effectively from above when the sun is low. Shadow sites were the main means by which lynchets were photographed in *Wessex from the Air*. ‘On a June morning before breakfast the greater part of Salisbury Plain is seen to be covered with the banks of abandoned Celtic fields’, wrote Crawford and Keiller, ‘but afterwards they “fade into the common light of day”’.⁶³ These ‘abandoned Celtic fields’ and other sites marked out in black shadows lend a somewhat melancholy atmosphere to *Wessex from the Air* (Fig. 4.4). Most signs of human habitation are invisible, and there is no sense of a human presence; even the camera—mounted in the cockpit—is held by a machine. The stage is set for ghosts; in the half-light of morning, while most people are sleeping, the ancient past (Crawford’s ‘unexplored country’) puts in a fugitive appearance in the form of shadows, caught by the hovering camera.

Soil Marks

Another form in which archaeological sites reveal themselves to the aerial viewer is as soil marks. When soil has been disturbed in the processes of cultivation or building, it may appear as a different colour from the surrounding soil, even if the disturbance took place hundreds or even thousands of years ago. If, for example, digging has caused underlying chalky soil to become mixed with the surface soil, it will show up as paler in colour, even after repeated ploughing. Sometimes lynchets show themselves as soil marks, for when the soil is ploughed they may appear as belts of lighter soil, caused by chalk grains mixed into the topsoil. Even after a new network of fields has replaced these older field-systems, the ancient field-boundaries may still show as pale soil marks.⁶⁴

Soil marks may also appear from the contrast in colour between damp and dry soil. Ancient ditches and hollows often become filled with soil rich in organic matter, which will absorb water more readily than the surrounding soil, and so will appear darker—especially from a distance. ‘Damp marks’ of this kind can be seen in George Allen’s February 1934 photograph of the Mile Ditches near Royston as they appear in a field cut across by a railway line and a road (Fig. 4.5). These marks show because the arable field in which they appear has recently been ploughed, and some rain has fallen, levelling out the field’s surface and being absorbed by the silted Iron Age ditches. A month later Allen returned to the same site, and took a photograph of it from the other direction (Fig. 4.6). Now the soil marks have disappeared in the field between the road and the railway line. Their disappearance is due to the fact that much more rain has fallen, levelling the

⁶³ *Wessex from the Air*, 7. Crawford and Keiller called the first hours after sunrise ‘lynchet time’ (Deuel, *Flights into Yesterday*, 40).

⁶⁴ Allen, ‘Discovery from the Air’, 65.

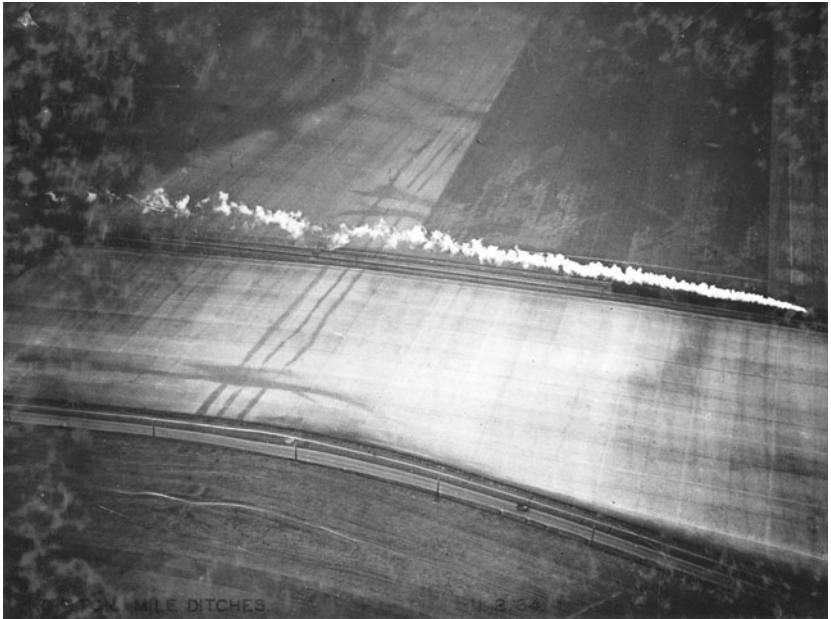


Fig. 4.5. G. W. G. Allen, Royston, Hertfordshire, viewed from the south-east (11 Feb. 1934). The railway line crosses three filled-up parallel ditches, showing as damp marks in the ploughed arable field, and as shadow marks below the road. Silted-up traffic ruts of the Icknield Way can be seen parallel to the modern road.



Fig. 4.6. G. W. G. Allen, Royston, Hertfordshire, viewed from the north (17 March 1934). The Mile Ditches show as shadow marks on the golf course above the road but have disappeared in the arable field below it. Ruts of the old way run parallel to the modern road.



Fig. 4.7. G. W. G. Allen, Dorchester, Oxfordshire (7 July 1933), showing a crop mark in cross-section at the edge of Burcot gravel pit which cuts across a large V-shaped Iron Age ditch. The oats are growing taller and darker over the filled-up ditch, where the soil is richer and deeper.

colour of the soil.⁶⁵ Like shadow sites, soil marks do not appear at all times. They have to be ‘caught’—when a field has been newly ploughed, for example, or during dry winters and early spring, when damp-marks are more likely to appear.

Crop Sites

The third—and most important—form in which obliterated, or partly obliterated, archaeological sites reveal themselves from the air is as crop sites. Where soil has once been disturbed, growing crops may differ in colour or height from the surrounding crops; in this way the lineaments of the buried foundations of a Roman villa or Bronze Age ditches can reveal themselves at certain times of the year. In general, crops will grow more luxuriantly, appearing darker and/or taller where the soil is rich in humus, for example in filled-in and submerged ancient ditches (see Fig. 4.7 for a demonstration of this effect). Conversely, where

⁶⁵ Two of Allen’s photographs of these ditches were published and discussed by Crawford in *Antiquity* (‘The Mile Ditches at Royston’, *Antiquity*, 8/30 (June 1934), 216–18).

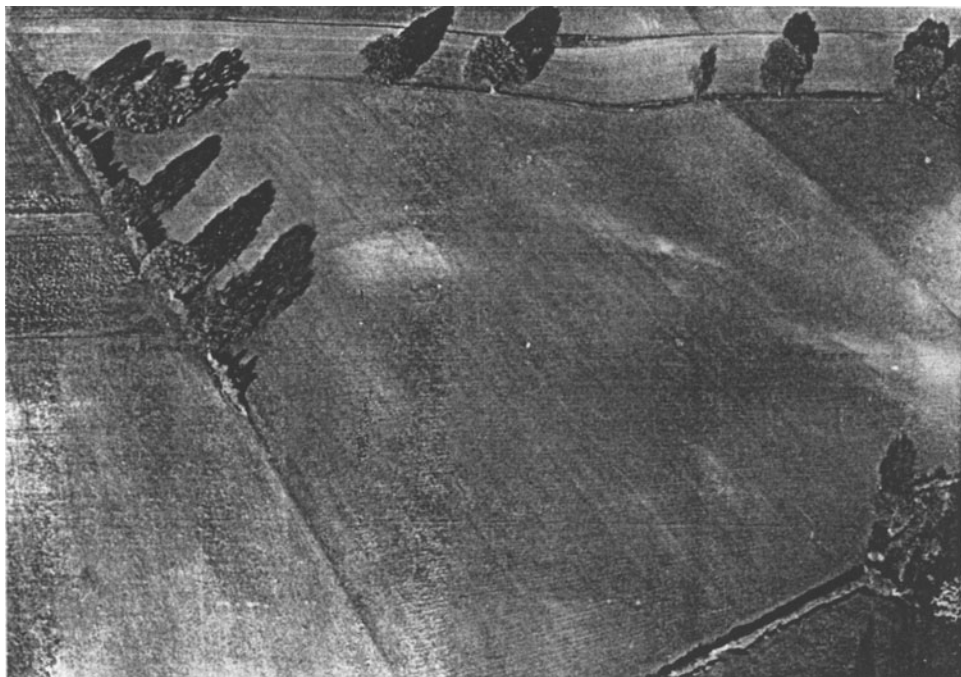
there is buried archaeological material—such as the foundations of a wall—the crops will grow stunted or pale, since their roots may not be able to penetrate the earth so far.

Seasonal rainfall is an important factor in the revelation of crop site, or crop marks. Where crops are stunted because of subterranean remains, during a drought they will dry out more quickly than the surrounding crops, and will thus draw pale lines on the surface of the land. Even grass reacts to drought; it was in this way during the dry summer of 1940 that large portions of the foundations of Roman Verulamium were revealed in St Albans.⁶⁶ In fact times of drought are particularly fruitful for aerial discoveries, revealing both crop sites and soil marks: the dry summer of 1949, for example, produced a particularly good harvest of sites, for example. The revelation of crop sites can depend on the type of crop; long-rooted plants show up crop marks best, but all cereals work well. The stage of crop growth, and hence the time of the farming year, can also be crucial. A good illustration of this is the site of a Roman villa at Ditchley in Oxfordshire, which when photographed by Allen in autumn was invisible since the field was under stubble. In the spring of 1934 the field had been ploughed; still the villa did not reveal itself. But a photograph of the same field in summer revealed the ground plan—drawn in growing crops—of both the villa and its surrounding enclosure (see Fig. 4.8 for a comparison of the two photographs, used here by St Joseph in 1945 to promote aerial archaeology). The walls of the villa are revealed as pale lines since the roots of the crop could not penetrate the soil so deeply, and so grew up weak and susceptible to drought; the grounds are bounded by a ditch which is registered as a dark line, due to its having been filled with rich soil (hence sturdy crops, resistant to drought), and likewise a dark dot marks the location of a well, long since gone.⁶⁷

In photographs such as these, and in the crop sites they record, the past (or what remains of it) is translated into signs written in dark or pale wheat or corn. The colour of the crop is the index to the location and nature of the remains, and there is surely something very strange about this translation of history into crops, where the location of a well is indicated by thicker stems and darker leaves of a bean plant, for example, a ditch is indicated by a ridge of red poppies, or the line of a long-since vanished wall is marked out in pale grass. For field archaeologists, the landscape is the index of history, time made material. Looked at from above, it seems as though it is an index that one might be able to read, like an elusive text, a text of revelation. Aerial archaeology is time translated into colour, tone, and shadow: the more-or-less decipherable signs of history. For those who have been trained to read this obscure text, it can throw light on many of the puzzles of archaeological knowledge.

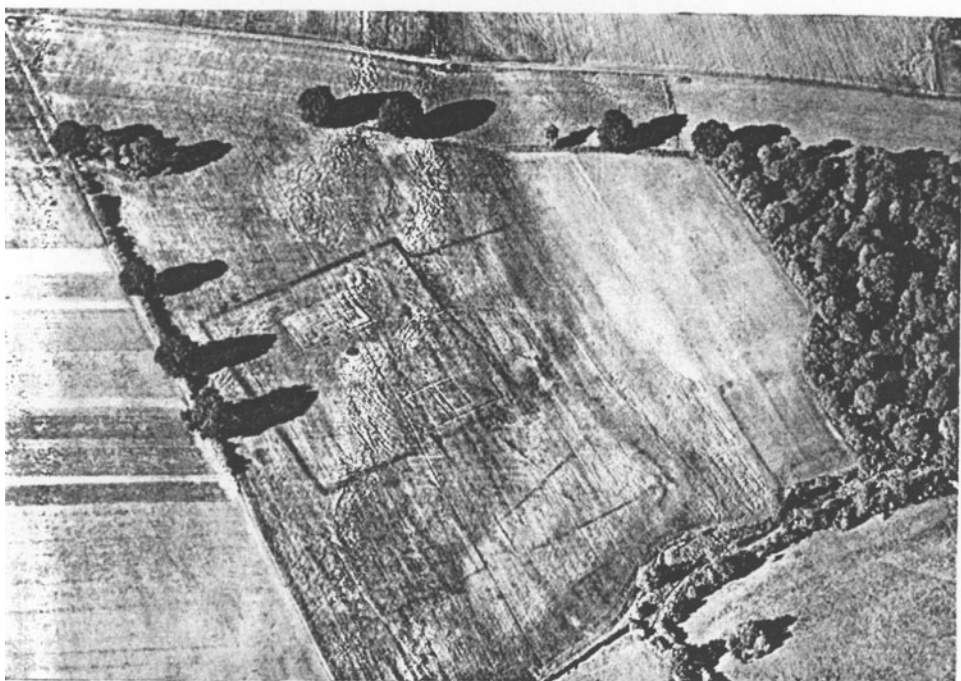
⁶⁶ See MS Crawford 3, fols. 53 ff.

⁶⁷ After Allen's pictures were taken the site was excavated in 1935. See C. A. Raleigh Radford, 'The Roman Villa at Ditchley, Oxon.', *Oxoniensia*, 1 (1936), 24–69.



12. Roman villa, Ditchley. Autumn

Phot. G. W. G. Allen



13. Roman villa, Ditchley. Summer

Phot. G. W. G. Allen

Fig. 4.8. G. W. G. Allen, Roman villa, Ditchley, Oxfordshire, in autumn and summer, from J. K. St Joseph, *Air Photography and Archaeology* (1945).

The phenomenon of crop sites has long been noticed. In 1717 Thomas Hearne noted in his diary that in the corn fields north of Dorchester 'there are visible tokens of ye old streets or ways of yt old Place'.⁶⁸ Innumerable sites like these have doubtless always been known to local inhabitants, but it was not until the technologies of flight and photography joined forces that a large range of archaeological sites could be recorded in a legible form, and thereby widely disseminated and publicized. And as Grahame Clark points out, crop sites (like soil marks and shadow sites) may sometimes be visible from the ground, but they are rarely intelligible; in most cases they are never even noticed.⁶⁹ Two photographs taken by Allen of the same site in Wiltshire, one from the ground and the other from the air, were used in the 1948 Ashmolean Museum exhibition to demonstrate the decisive difference (Fig. 4.9). And if the aerial view was uniquely well placed to discover sites, the technology of photography could fix forever that brief moment when a fortuitous concurrence of factors (crop cycle, weather conditions, sun's position) resulted in the revelation of an ancient site.

Photography recorded what the aerial gaze saw, then, making it possible for many to see and study these fleeting visions, and proving their existence. But the technology of photography has significance here beyond the merely instrumental. For there is a structural parallel between the photographic process and the appearance of crop sites. For the purposes of aerial archaeology, the landscape itself acts like a photographic plate, where a latent image (the foundations of a Roman villa, for example) is periodically if unpredictably developed. The clarity of a crop site, like the accuracy of a photograph, depends partly upon the degree of sensitivity of the surface, cereal crops being particularly receptive, as we have seen.

The photographic analogy was noted by some of aerial archaeology's early exponents, who compared the gradual appearance of a site to the development of a photograph. Allen wrote how through the year 'the visible signs [of a site] vary, sometimes developing (like a photograph) during the summer... sometimes fading out'.⁷⁰ St Joseph pointed out how 'crops act in the manner of a photographic developer in revealing hidden features'.⁷¹ Allen and St Joseph were using the analogy as a heuristic device to explain the new technique to their audience. But the parallel can be pushed further than this. Photography, after all, is the process by which an image is produced on a sensitized surface by the action of light. A crop site, too, appears as an image, produced on a sensitized surface (a field of growing wheat) largely by the action of light (through photosynthesis). The fact that no one *intended* such an image to appear makes such sites naturally occurring 'photographs'. As such they, like the Turin Shroud, are truly *acheiropoietos*,

⁶⁸ Thomas Hearne's *Diary* (1717), lxxiv, 130; quoted in letter from Assistant Keeper, Ashmolean Museum, to Dr J. K. St Joseph, 28 Mar. 1950, Ashmolean Museum, 3/JP/1.

⁶⁹ *Archaeology and Society*, 65.

⁷⁰ Allen, 'Discovery from the Air', 43.

⁷¹ St Joseph, *Air Photography and Archaeology*, 55.

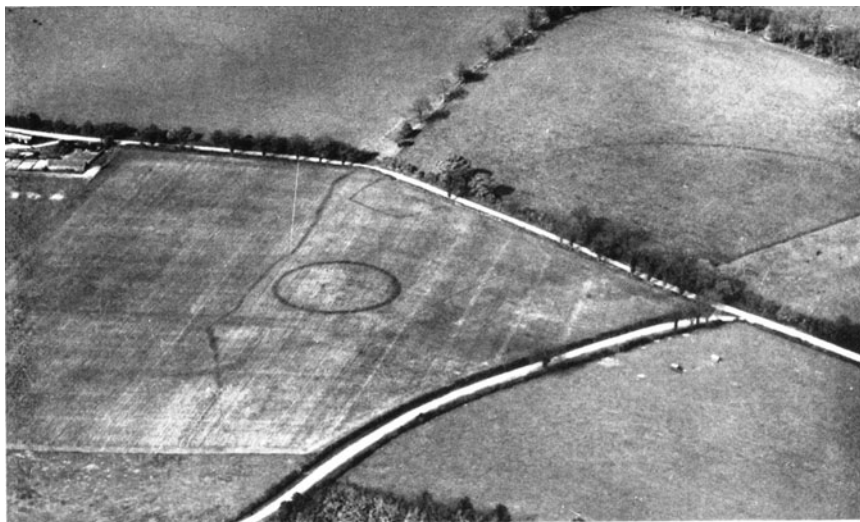


Photo: Major G. W. G. Allen, 26 May 1935

A. Ring-ditch, rectangular enclosure, and linear ditch seen as crop-marks from the air (p. 1)



Photo: Major G. W. G. Allen, 2 June 1935

B. The same, seen from the ground

OGBOURNE ST. GEORGE, WILTS.

Fig. 4.9. G. W. G. Allen, Ogbourne St George, Wiltshire, from Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, *Guide to an Exhibition of Air-Photographs of Archaeological Sites* (1948). Showing ring-ditch, rectangular enclosure, and linear ditch seen as crop-marks from the air and from the ground.

or not made by the hand of man—which, for Roland Barthes, was characteristic of all photography.⁷²

Having no separate ‘exposure’ and ‘developing’ stages, the emergence of a crop site is a very near parallel to Fox Talbot’s early experiments with photograms, where objects such as a leaf or some lace were placed on sensitized paper and exposed to the light (see Chapter 2). With no camera, and no negative–positive process necessary, images of these objects emerged on the paper, although in time they (like the crop sites) faded.⁷³ Crop sites share certain characteristics of photographs, too. A photograph will outlive its referent—since what the photograph represents is, generally, a moment of time. As Barthes says, its effect is ‘not to restore what has been abolished (by time, by distance) but to attest that what I see has indeed existed’. Thus photography has the capacity to astonish, an effect that Barthes can ascribe only to the close relationship between photography and resurrection.⁷⁴ Likewise the appearance of a crop site, an image of the ground plan of a medieval village, for example, does not restore that village, but attests to its historic existence. More than this, though, it attests to the continuing existence of its presence, if only in the form of soil disturbance and a few remaining foundations. That this image can reappear year after year long after the village has disappeared from view establishes the crop site’s link to photographic resurrection. A crop site is like photography in constant flux, as if Fox Talbot’s photogram were capable of endless fading and self-renewal. While a crop site may not be directly analogous to an actual photograph, however—photographs do not have this power of self-renewal—it shares many of its properties, including this curious capacity to unite absence and presence in an image. One could almost say that the emergence of a crop site enacts what is essential to photographic technology, and that it vividly illustrates in material form not only the ‘that-has-been’ that for Barthes is the essence of photography, but also the ‘return of the dead’ that he identifies as lurking in every photograph.⁷⁵

The Return of the Native

The existence of aerial archaeology, as we have seen, its very possibility, is predicated upon the essential *ineradicability* of marks or disruptions that have been made in the soil, no matter how long ago they were made. As Deuel writes, ‘to a degree never previously realized, the new medium now demonstrated that virtually

⁷² *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (London, 1984), 82. According to André Bazin, ‘the Holy Shroud of Turin combines the features alike of relic and photograph’ (‘The Ontology of the Photographic Image’ [1945], in Alan Trachtenberg, ed., *Classic Essays on Photography* (New Haven, 1980), 244). The same could be said, perhaps, of a crop site, since the image arises from a physical subterranean presence.

⁷³ See Beaumont Newhall, *The History of Photography from 1839 to the Present* (New York, 1997), 19–20.

⁷⁴ *Camera Lucida*, 82.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 9.

any disturbance of the soil wrought by human agency is well-nigh indestructible.⁷⁶ Even though sites may not be visible from the ground, or at all times of the year, they can be revealed under the right conditions and seen from the air, thus making their continuing subterranean existence manifest. Being buried under layers of silt has not made these sites invisible. Ploughing does not (usually) destroy them; on the contrary, it often reveals them as soil marks, just as the planting of crops may reveal them in graphic form.

Admittedly over-building will remove a site from view, hence Crawford's disgust with the building works of the armed forces on Salisbury Plain, and the (superficial, at least) obliteration of many sites in the course of urban expansion. But unless these sites have been completely dug up to make way for foundations, they will not have disappeared completely; if the building is destroyed (in bombing raids, for example, or routine demolition) the underlying sites can potentially reappear—as was the case, for example, in the City of London after the Blitz (see Chapter 5). In fact the only human process that will completely remove such sites is deep digging, especially in quarrying, or the excavation of deep foundations. Ironically enough, Major Allen's company owned a number of gravel pits in the Thames valley region: Allen used to send finds from these pits to archaeologists, including Crawford, and to museums.⁷⁷ The pit shown in Fig. 4.7, cutting through an Iron Age ditch, was in Burcot, where Allen's company opened gravel pits in 1925.⁷⁸ What is more, the machines made and serviced by John Allen and Sons included precisely those involved in excavating and road building.⁷⁹ While Allen was flying over Oxfordshire documenting the prehistoric sites of the region, the business that funded his trips was effectively removing them—forever. A better allegory of the tragic face of modernity vis-à-vis the ancient past it would be hard to find.

Crawford, it seems, may have been aware of this irony, although his working relationship with Allen did not allow him to vocalize it. Discussing the diminishing countryside in the unpublished work 'Bloody Old Britain' he cited as a major cause 'the demand for gravel, mainly for the purpose of making concrete, or as ballast for road-causeways'.⁸⁰ It is these very areas, writes Crawford, the gravel flats such as those in the Thames valley, that are particularly rich in archaeological remains, and aerial photography is no replacement for excavation.⁸¹ Surely he is sniping at Allen when he remarks angrily that 'Even the very antiquities themselves, the essential

⁷⁶ *Flights into Yesterday*, 38. 'Have your ancestors of two thousand years ago bore a hole to erect a wooden pole or dig a pit into which to dump refuse, let men and the ravages of time fill it and pack it, let it be overgrown by weeds or make the plough run over it for generations, the soil in the cavity will never be the same again as the surrounding undisturbed area' (ibid.).

⁷⁷ See MS Crawford 59, fols. 7–8; 'Notes and News', *Oxoniensia*, 5 (1940), 161.

⁷⁸ The company also opened pits in Eynsham in 1922, and later in Baldon and Dorchester (C. Newbigging, S. Shatford, and T. Williams, *The Changing Faces of Cowley* (Witney, 1996), 31). The gravel dug from the pits was usually destined for road-building projects. For the archaeological significance of Burcot gravel pit see J. S. P. Bradford, 'An Early Iron Age Site at Allen's Pit, Dorchester', *Oxoniensia*, 7 (1942), 36–60.

⁷⁹ Newbigging, Shatford, and Williams, *The Changing Faces of Cowley*, 31 and 37.

⁸⁰ MS Crawford 109, fol. 103.

⁸¹ Ibid. 104.

raw materials of English history which can never be replaced, belong to the very man who is thus recklessly destroying them and it himself.⁸²

Gravel quarrying and deep digging apart, however, most sites are *potentially* available to the aerial archaeologist, although this potentiality obviously decreases with urbanization. In practice, of course, most are never seen, being built over, for example, or covered with the wrong kind of vegetation. But this does not affect the fundamental premise of the possibility of aerial archaeology, which rests upon the ideal permanence of the archaeological record. Aerial archaeology suggests that sites, while usually invisible, can always reappear with the return of the spring, for example, or the movement of the sun. Such sites may be camera-shy: like hunting an elusive animal, aerial reconnaissance has to lie in wait for the appearance of ancient remains. In order to find and catch such a sight, the technologies of flight and photography are forced to collude with natural processes such as the seasons of the year, and with agricultural cycles such as crop rotation.

Crop sites, according to Allen, are the 'most likely to produce new discoveries' owing to their reliability from year to year.⁸³ Linear history becomes cyclical through the crop site: what belongs to the past is not irrevocably gone, but comes out with the young crops every year (if the weather conditions are right). And as one would expect from a linear history turned cyclical, the past appears all at once: Roman, Anglo-Saxon, and medieval remains will all emerge with the crops, and coexist on the same plane. Writing to Allen in 1932, Crawford encouraged him to continue with his work in the Thames valley: 'The gravel flats by the Middle Thames were inhabited in every period, prehistoric and historic, and the inhabitants have left traces of themselves, which come out in the crops every year.'⁸⁴

What I want to suggest is that aerial archaeology can be seen not only as an archaeological tool, but also as the embodiment of a kind of historiography that is both materialist and redemptive. Aerial archaeology is inherently redemptive, because—like archaeology in general—it rests upon the idea of a recoverable past. In practice, to be sure, signs of most archaeological remains will never be found. Yet for the purposes of aerial archaeology the landscape can—ideally—be thought of like Freud's conception of the psyche, where 'everything is somehow preserved and . . . in suitable circumstances . . . can once more be brought to light'.⁸⁵ Or, to return to the photographic analogy, it is like film which has been exposed, where the latent image(s) can wait almost indefinitely to be developed.⁸⁶

⁸² MS Crawford 109, fols. 105–6.

⁸³ 'Discovery from the Air', 43.

⁸⁴ MS Crawford 59, fol. 2. This overlaying of historical remains was one of the qualities of aerial photography first singled out as useful by archaeologists, since they could determine from it the historical development of a site.

⁸⁵ *Civilization and its Discontents*, in *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey, xxi (London, 1955), 68.

⁸⁶ Freud used this same analogy when he tried to explain how early experiences can have an irresistible determining effect later in life: 'The fact itself cannot be doubted; but it is so puzzling that we may make it more comprehensible by comparing it with a photographic exposure which can be developed after any interval of time and transformed into a picture' (*Moses and Monotheism* (Harmondsworth, 1985), 126).

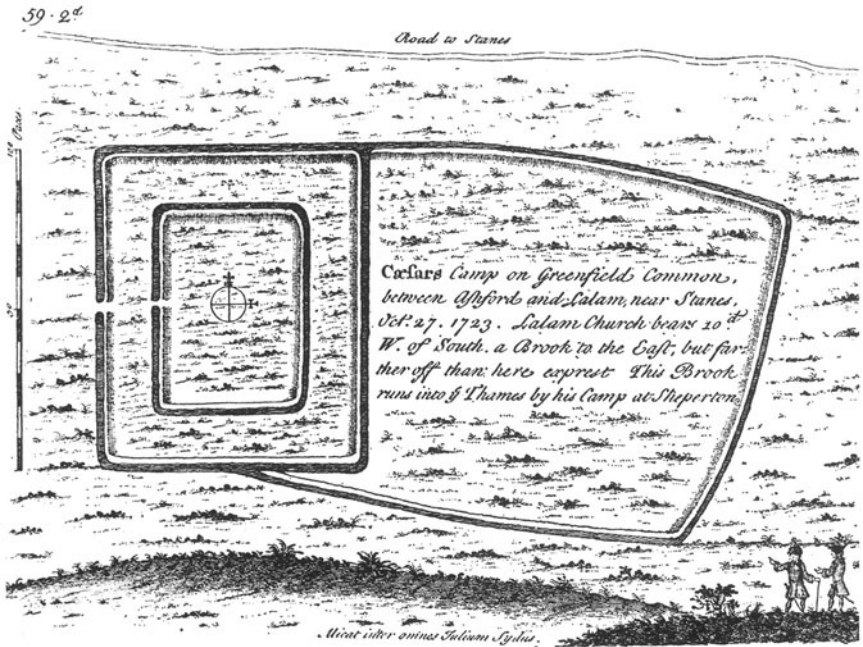


Fig. 4.10. 'Caesar's Camp on Greenfield Common, Middlesex', from Stukeley's *Itinerarium Curiosum* (1776), in O. G. S. Crawford, 'Some Recent Air Discoveries', *Antiquity*, 7/27 (Sept. 1933).

To make the redemptive quality of aerial archaeology complete, the reappearance of the image of the past depends upon natural cycles. The cyclical appearance of a crop site suggests that—contrary to appearances in between times—the past has not gone away altogether, and that it can always return. To capture such an appearance on film corresponds to the familiar 'salvage' paradigm in photographic practice in that it catches on film what is feared will be lost in a tide of modernization. But unlike the usual formulations of that paradigm—images of 'the last Tasmanian',⁸⁷ for example, or of a building marked for demolition—what is pictured is always potentially returnable. Part of the appeal of aerial archaeology surely lies in its Romantic return of culture into nature (also responsible for the attraction of ruins), its neat and visually compelling resolution of the dichotomy of time's arrow and time's cycle.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ See H. Ling Roth, 'Is Mrs. F. C. Smith a "Last Living Aboriginal of Tasmania"?', *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*, 27 (1898), 451–4; V. Rae-Ellis, 'The Representation of Trucanini', in E. Edwards, ed., *Anthropology and Photography*, 230–3; and G. W. Stocking, 'Epilogue: The Extinction of Paleolithic Man', in *Victorian Anthropology*, (New York, 1987), 274–83.

⁸⁸ See S. Jay Gould, *Time's Arrow, Time's Cycle: Myth and Metaphor in the Discovery of Geological Time* (London, 1991) for an examination of this dichotomy between linear time and cyclical time that has dominated thinking about time in the West.

A particularly clear example of this ‘return’ is the rediscovery of a site found in 1723 by Stukeley and depicted in his *Itinerarium Curiosum* (1776) (Fig. 4.10). Stukeley identified this site, near London, as one of Caesar’s camps (wrongly, as it turned out).⁸⁹ Although twentieth-century archaeologists had an idea where the site was—about a mile south-east of Staines—it was no longer visible from the ground, as it clearly had been in Stukeley’s time. Flying back from Scotland in June 1930, Crawford spotted what looked like Stukeley’s site in a field just outside Staines, but he did not have a camera with him and so could not take a picture. ‘Three years went by’, he wrote, ‘and one began to fear that the site, so strangely recovered after two centuries of oblivion, would fade once more from memory, this time probably for ever.’⁹⁰ Yet Allen managed to catch the image of the site in April 1933, before it threatened to disappear—not necessarily forever—beneath what Crawford called ‘the rising tide of villadom’⁹¹ (Fig. 4.11).

As this example illustrates, the return of the past for the purposes of aerial archaeology cannot be predicted or controlled—hence, too, Allen’s endless return



Fig. 4.11. G. W. G. Allen, Staines (15 Apr. 1933), showing Stukeley’s ‘Caesar’s Camp’.

⁸⁹ The case is reported in ‘Some Recent Air Discoveries’, *Antiquity*, 7/27 (Sept. 1933), 290–6.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* 291. ⁹¹ *Ibid.*

to the same sites to see whether anything had surfaced. In the dry summer of 1933 he wrote to the archaeologist A. D. Passmore: 'I have been overwhelmed with air work. The whole of the Thames valley and its tributaries have come out in a violent rash, circles and marks everywhere.'⁹² This comment reveals something of the *acheiropoetic* quality of aerial archaeology—these marks appear, it seems, regardless of human agency. And there is surely something uncanny in this apparently compulsive return. The burial and subsequent re-emergence of an archaeological site directly mimics the effect of the uncanny as explained by Freud in his 1919 essay.⁹³ 'The uncanny', he writes, 'is something which is secretly familiar, which has undergone repression and then returned from it.'⁹⁴ Archaeology is always potentially uncanny, as there is no way of knowing what is going to come up; and what is sure to raise its head is the remains of the dead—possibly the most uncanny thing of all.⁹⁵ An aerial photograph of archaeological remains is almost a textbook case of the uncanny: for here is the apparent return of the dead, the return of that which was thought to have been buried. Images such as those by Allen record with photographic precision the eruption of strangeness amid normality—a burial chamber surfaces in a wheatfield, the lines of a Roman villa erupt into a municipal park, or, as in Fig. 4.11, the 'Caesar's Camp' identified by Stukeley abuts a suburban strip of houses in Staines. The occupants of those houses may be unaware of the camp, but it is there; *it has been there all along*; it was there throughout the years in which it was thought lost. Images such as this one suggest the immanence of the past in the present, of death in life even, regardless of our awareness of it.

Like the stubborn bloodstain of the detective novel, no matter how it is covered up the crop site promises to return. This cyclical revelation of time's stain constitutes the very technical backbone of aerial archaeology; it also seems to suggest that the landscape of Britain, like Lady Macbeth's hand, will never be clean of history. The discoveries of aerial archaeology indicate that we have been living alongside the remains of history all along, despite—in some cases—appearances. It is easy to see why such an idea—given material form in the aerial photograph—might have appealed to a Neo-Romantic sensibility. For it offered a counter-image to the apparently unstoppable march of modernization, not only destroying the

⁹² Quoted in Allen, 'Discovery from the Air', 7. Interestingly enough, according to Valentine Cunningham, the motif of a 'rash', or a 'red rash' was a common one before the war in connection with encroaching and unplanned modernity on the 'face of Britain', with all of the implications of this being comparable to a disease which—presumably—needed to be eradicated ('Painted for Posterity', BBC Radio 4, 5 Feb. 2002). Allen's (no doubt unconscious) appropriation effectively reinscribes this motif as an involuntary return of past settlements, less obtrusive (and therefore not requiring eradication) but just as startling, and apparently out of control.

⁹³ S. Freud, 'The "Uncanny"' [1919], in *Art and Literature* (Harmondsworth, 1988), 335–76.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* 368.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* 364. Metaphors culled from archaeology came to structure the way in which Freud considered the structure of the psyche and ways in which psychoanalysis could locate buried recollections and reconstruct memory in the processes of psychic healing. See D. Kuspit, 'A Mighty Metaphor: The Analogy of Archaeology and Psychoanalysis', in Gamwell and Wells, eds., *Sigmund Freud and Art*, 133–51.

fabric of the past, but also replacing everything that was recognizably local and indigenous with the international and standardized units of prefabricated housing and other buildings, stretching along a network of new roads. Aerial archaeology represents not only the cyclical return of the past, but also the return of the native—a fitting metaphor, perhaps, for an activity whose historical roots lie in Wessex, the location of Thomas Hardy's literary works.⁹⁶

MODERNISM, NEO-ROMANTICISM, AND THE AERIAL VIEW

There is evidence to suggest that a number of broadly Neo-Romantic artists and writers were influenced by the aerial view, especially in so far as it dramatized an image of a British landscape peculiarly resilient to change. However, little seems to have been written on the subject, which was introduced—briefly—in David Mellor's 1987 *A Paradise Lost*.⁹⁷ There has been some work on the subject in literary studies. Nora Foster Stovel has examined the aerial view as a literary device.⁹⁸ In his book *British Writers of the Thirties*, Valentine Cunningham describes the excitements and machismo of flight for poets and writers of the decade, but does not look closely at the aerial view itself.⁹⁹ In an essay on Virginia Woolf, Gillian Beer looks at how conceptions of England as an island altered with the coming of the aeroplane.¹⁰⁰ In the field of cultural geography, Pyrs Gruffudd's 1991 article 'Reach for the Sky: The Air and English Cultural Nationalism' opens up a fruitful symbolic arena when he 'locates English national identity in the skies', particularly in the context of the Second World War.¹⁰¹ In a sense Gruffudd takes up where Mellor leaves off—his discussion covers Alan Sorrell, Paul Nash, and Eric Ravilious—but he is more interested in the sky as a symbolic space than he is in the aerial view of the land, and he does not look closely at aerial archaeology or aerial photographs.

Piper's interest in the aerial view is documented not only by his *Axis* article, but also in the articles from *Antiquity* he collected, many of which included aerial photographs (see Chapter 3 and Appendix). Yet Piper was not the only Neo-Romantic interested in the aerial perspective. Grigson more than once described Britain as seen from an aeroplane in glowingly Romantic terms.¹⁰² Nash also

⁹⁶ Hardy's novel *The Return of the Native* was first published in 1878. ⁹⁷ *PL*, 38.

⁹⁸ N. Foster Stovel, 'The Aerial View of Modern Britain: The Airplane as a Vehicle for Idealism and Satire', *Ariel*, 15/3 (July 1984), 17–32. For Foster Stovel, the aerial perspective functions as a convenient and superior vantage point from which to analyse and criticize society.

⁹⁹ V. Cunningham, *British Writers of the Thirties* (Oxford, 1988), 155–210.

¹⁰⁰ G. Beer, 'The Island and the Aeroplane: The Case of Virginia Woolf', in H. K. Bhabha, ed., *Nation and Narration* (London and New York, 1990), 265–90.

¹⁰¹ P. Gruffudd, 'Reach for the Sky: The Air and English Cultural Nationalism', *Landscape Research*, 16/2 (Summer 1991), 19–24.

¹⁰² 'A Window in the Air', 61–5; G. Grigson and E. Smith, *England* (London, 1957), 13.

seems to have had a working interest in the aerial view, a less well-known element of his much-documented fascination with flight. We know that he owned a copy of *Wessex from the Air*, and in his Shell Guide to Dorset he included an aerial photograph of Maiden Castle (Fig. 4.12). The cover he designed for H. J. Massingham's autobiography *Remembrance*, published by Batsford in 1942, includes an aerial view of the White Horse and hill fort of Uffington (Fig. 4.13). However, Nash's interest in the aerial view has been considered by art historians only in passing, even in the catalogue to the 1996 exhibition 'Paul Nash: Aerial Creatures'.¹⁰³ His use of specific aerial photographs does not seem to have been examined anywhere in any depth, nor placed in the context of the broader significance of aerial archaeology.

Nash was employed as a war artist by the Air Ministry in 1940, and from January 1941 he worked for the Ministry of Information (MOI), where he continued to pursue his work connected with the war in the air.¹⁰⁴ Working for the Air Ministry appealed greatly to Nash, combining as it did his long-standing interest in flight—both metaphysical and real—with his oft-expressed desire to produce war propaganda.¹⁰⁵ Because of his poor health Nash never flew himself, although he wanted to; his war works were based on a wide range of documentary material provided by the War Office, as well as sketches and photographs taken by Nash on his visits to RAF stations. The correspondence between Nash, the Air Ministry, and the MOI shows that at various times he received the periodicals *Aeronautics*, *The Aeroplane*, and *Flight*.¹⁰⁶ He also made a number of requests for photographs, including aerial photographs, as reference material for his paintings.

The precise identity and content of the aerial photographs consulted by Nash for his war work are hard to ascertain. From about autumn 1940 to spring 1941 he applied for various photographs depicting bomb damage on enemy ports and other military targets; again in 1944 he requested 'reconnaissance height' photographs of Berlin.¹⁰⁷ These were probably used as source material for the sketchy background to works such as *Target Area* (1940) and *Objective: Blenheims Bombing Barges*,

¹⁰³ IWM, London: *Paul Nash: Aerial Creatures* (1996).

¹⁰⁴ Eric Newton described Nash's appointment as 'rather like asking T. S. Eliot to write a report on the Louis-Farr fight' ('Paul Nash's War Paintings', *Sunday Times* (1 Sept. 1940), 2). Certainly he seems to have had a fraught relationship with the Ministry, particularly with its director of public relations, Air Commodore Peake, who favoured heroic portraits of RAF flyers, in the manner of Eric Kennington. Despite his protestations, in 1941 Nash was transferred to the MOI, where he carried out work on a rather more ad hoc basis, under the benevolent eye of Kenneth Clark.

¹⁰⁵ Nash had long been interested in flight in a metaphysical sense, evidenced in works such as *The Soul Visiting the Mansions of the Dead* (1932). In 1947 he published *Aerial Flowers* (Oxford), an essay related to some of his paintings, connecting the metaphysics of flight with the reality of the aerial threat and in his unfinished autobiography he wrote of his early visions of flight (Nash, *Outline: An Autobiography and Other Writings* (London, 1949)). See also *Paul Nash: The Man who Wanted to Fly* (BBC television documentary, 17 Oct. 1996).

¹⁰⁶ IWM Second World War Artists Archive, file no. IWM GP/55/13(1), fol. 15; GP/55/13(2), fol. 38.

¹⁰⁷ See, for example, TGA 7050/46, 49, 51; TGA 7050/880; IWM GP/55/13(2), fol. 92.

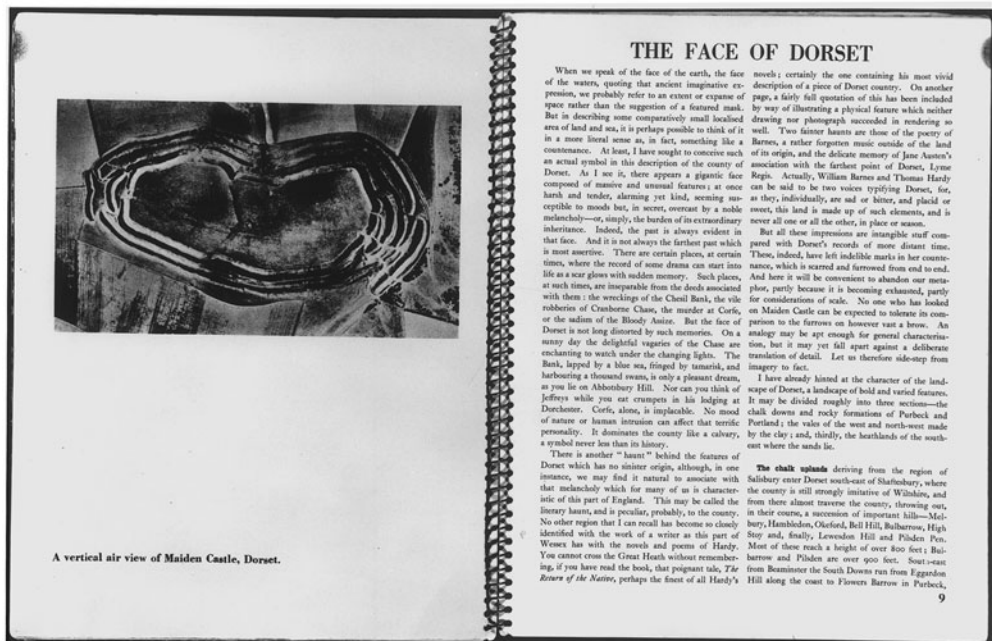


Fig. 4.12. Paul Nash, *Dorset* (1936).



Fig. 4.13. Paul Nash, dust jacket for H. J. Massingham, *Remembrance: An Autobiography* (1942).



Fig. 4.14. Paul Nash, *Battle of Germany* (1944).

Le Havre (1941), or, later, for *Battle of Germany* (1944) (Fig. 4.14).¹⁰⁸ It seems that he also used aerial photographs of Britain. The catalogue of the recent exhibition of Nash's war work makes a passing reference to his enquiry, in April 1941, as to whether 'there would be any security objections to making a painting based on an "aerial map" or photograph of the Thames Valley'.¹⁰⁹ Charles Hall suggests that the painting was *Battle of Britain* (1941), with its sweeping vista of a river winding through the landscape, the continent visible beyond a strip of sea (Fig. 4.15). Although Hall does not mention it, in fact permission seems to have been denied; perhaps this is why the landscape is so generalized.¹¹⁰

What has not been noticed is that Nash attempted to acquire aerial photographs of specifically archaeological interest as a resource for his work. In June

¹⁰⁸ According to Nash, '*Battle of Germany* is wholly an imaginary scene. But its elements are based upon a careful study of (official) factual evidence from various sources . . . although the city and country below here have no name their design suggests familiar features—a winding river, a great Public Square, a processional road striking across a wide Park, and so on' (quoted in IWM, *Paul Nash: Aerial Creatures*, 41).

¹⁰⁹ IWM, *Paul Nash: Aerial Creatures*, 34. This seems to refer to a letter from Nash enclosing a *Times* photograph taken from another publication, although the letter does not mention the Thames valley. In this letter Nash explains he plans to do a 'fairly large canvas based on this idea with this strange "infra" scene as the environment of an air battle' (IWM GP/55/13 (1), fol. 142). In April 1941 Nash was beginning work on *Battle of Britain*.

¹¹⁰ IWM GP/55/13 (1), fol. 143.

1940 the artist and his wife Margaret moved to a flat on the Banbury Road in Oxford; three months earlier he had been appointed official war artist to the Air Ministry. An unpublished letter dated 14 June 1940 to George Allen from the Assistant Keeper of the Department of Antiquities at the Ashmolean Museum says that Nash had recently visited the museum, and was asking for enlarged copies of seven of Allen's aerial photographs which by then were on permanent display there. It seems that Nash had requested these images 'for his official purposes in connection with his war pictures', a connection that precipitated the Assistant Keeper's letter: 'Had he been a mere artist enquiring on his private behalf, I should have said that it was quite impossible, and I should have refused to do anything about it or to bother you, but he seemed to be so sincere in feeling that it would help him in his official job that I felt I should, at least, put the question to you.'¹¹¹

Although I have neither located a reply to this letter nor found any other reference to it in the literature on Nash, it is likely that he did receive copies of these

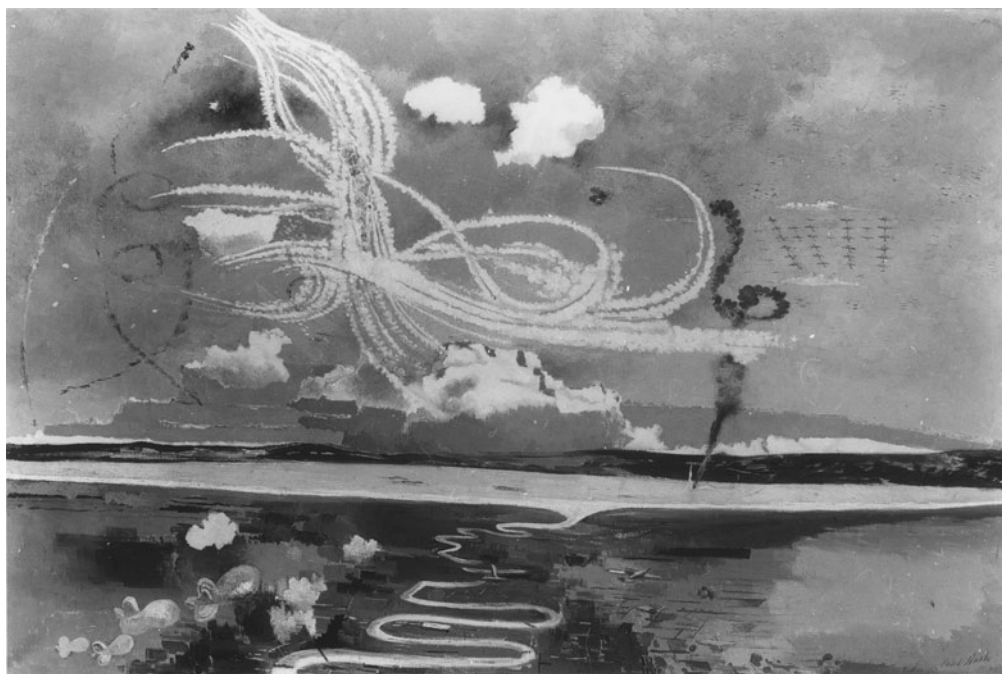


Fig. 4.15. Paul Nash, *Battle of Britain* (1941).

¹¹¹ 'Air Photography: Allen Bequest', Ashmolean Museum, 3/JP/2. According to this letter the pictures requested by Nash were those of Fyfield Down Celtic fields; Ditchley Roman villa; White Horse and Uffington Castle; White Horse alone; Wansdyke; Overy field; and Dyke Hills field.



Fig. 4.16. G. W. G. Allen, Uffington, Oxfordshire (5 Sept. 1937), showing the Iron Age hill fort and White Horse.

photographs, since Allen seems never to have refused such requests. Among the seven images requested by Nash was one of the White Horse and Uffington Castle; a comparison between Allen's aerial photograph and the dust jacket that Nash designed for H. J. Massingham's book *Remembrance* in 1941 strongly suggests that the illustration must have been based on Allen's photograph (compare Fig. 4.13 with Fig. 4.16). Not only is the same perspective reproduced in both photo and book cover; the shadows are also nearly identical.¹¹² It is, however, hard to detect the influence of Allen's aerial photographs in any of the war pictures produced by Nash. Four out of the seven images he requested depicted not the topographical features such as rivers, fields, and hedgerows which appear in paintings like *Battle of Britain*, but specifically archaeological and somewhat abstract crop and shadow sites. The remaining three photographs were of specific and recognizable archaeological features: the White Horse and fort at Uffington, and Wansdyke in Wiltshire, none of which feature—so far as I can ascertain—in his

¹¹² This similarity in itself is obviously not proof that Nash received the copies of Allen's photographs he wanted; Allen's work, as I have noted, was widely published, and Nash could have used another reproduction.

war pictures. Nash was famously interested in the more striking monuments of Britain's ancient past; but it is not clear why he wanted these particular photographs. Perhaps it was partly with them in mind that he made his enquiry, already cited, about basing a painting on an 'aerial map' or photograph of the Thames valley. Perhaps they were not for his official war work at all, or perhaps he just never got round to using them in a direct way. Nash's use of photographs was never straightforward, in any case. Introducing *Battle of Britain* (for which he is known to have used photographic sources) to the public, he said that 'To judge the picture by reference to facts alone will be unjust to the experiment. Facts, here, both of Science and Nature are used "imaginatively" and respected only in so far as they suggest symbols for the picture plan which itself is viewed from the air.'¹¹³ Certainly archaeological sites viewed from the air do not seem to be *obviously* present in any of his war work, although they may have been absorbed into *Battle of Britain*, suggesting to the artist both the view from a cockpit and a flattened picture plane. What can certainly be gleaned from the letter in the Ashmolean archive is that Nash wanted copies of Allen's photographs; he was evidently sufficiently interested in aerial archaeology to attempt to get hold of some of its most spectacular and mysterious images.

Similarly tantalizing is evidence that the makers of *A Canterbury Tale* may have sought out aerial imagery of the ancient road that played a central role in the film. A telegram from the summer of 1943 (when *A Canterbury Tale* was being filmed) to Crawford on the authority of Kendrick at the British Museum asked him 'CAN YOU SUPPLY AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHS PILGRIMS WAY NEAR CANTERBURY FOR CANTERBURY PILGRIMS FILM'.¹¹⁴ The precise date and ultimate source of the telegram are unclear. It may well have referred to a completely different film about Canterbury being made in 1943. But it is not hard to imagine Powell and Pressburger seeking out aerial reference material, particularly for the opening sequences of the film (see Chapter 6).

Modernism and the Aerial View

Piper, Grigson, and Nash were, of course, far from pioneers in their interest in the aerial view; early modernist artists working in France, Italy, and Russia in the first decades of this century had a special relationship with flight and the aerial perspective. But there were big—and significant—differences between the attitude of these continental modernists towards the view from above and that of Neo-Romantic artists working in Britain in the 1930s and 1940s. An examination of these differences may help to clarify the strategies by which continental modernism, associated with the urban, the international, and the new, was

¹¹³ Quoted in IWM, *Paul Nash: Aerial Creatures*, 34.

¹¹⁴ MS Crawford 9, fol. 209. The telegram is postmarked 1943, and is catalogued with other papers from the summer of that year.

effectively 'naturalized' by British artists in accordance with their own project of artistic innovation tempered by a stubborn adherence to the national past, embodied in local landscapes.

European modernist artists were interested in the aerial view both as a defamiliarizing technique and as a way of ordering visual experience that was dynamic and specifically modern. There was a self-conscious identification of avant-garde art with flight, since both were associated with experimentation, exploration, and the breaking of earth-bound restrictions.¹¹⁵ Kirk Varnedoe dates the beginnings of artists' fascination with the aerial view at around 1880, with Gustave Caillebotte's painting *Boulevard Seen from Above*. According to Varnedoe, while it continued to influence painters the aerial view became a 'major theme in photography between the two World Wars'.¹¹⁶ In the 1920s, artists associated with the Bauhaus were exploring the theme, as were photographers of the 'New Objectivity' (or *Neue Sachlichkeit*) in the 1920s and early 1930s such as Albert Renger-Patzsch, Germaine Krull, Moholy-Nagy, and Herbert Bayer. These photographers favoured vantage points like the Berlin Radio Tower, the Eiffel Tower, and the Transporter Bridge in Marseilles as vantage points (Fig. 4.17).¹¹⁷ The aerial perspective embodied a thoroughly modern viewpoint of verticality; it was the view not only from an aeroplane but from the skyscraper, the radio tower, or the suspension bridge, all features of a contemporary, man-made, urban environment. But it was also a new way of ordering pictorial space, a device given a political angle by Russian avant-garde photographers such as Rodchenko, whose foreshortened and defamiliarizing shots of urban life were intended to force the viewer into a new perception of social as well as sensual reality.¹¹⁸

Beyond such 'art photographers', aerial photographs themselves had currency in modernist circles: a photograph of the Eiffel Tower taken from a balloon in 1908, for example, became the basis of Robert Delauney's painting *The Eiffel Tower and the Champ de Mars* (1922). The same photo was used for the cover of Le Corbusier's book *Decorative Art of Today* (1925), and Rodchenko chose it for the cover of Mayakovsky's book *Paris* in the same year.¹¹⁹ Malevich reproduced aerial photographs in his 1927 book *The Non-Objective World* as illustrations of the 'environment' of the modern artist, and El Lissitzky

¹¹⁵ See C. Poggi, *In Defiance of Painting: Cubism, Futurism, and the Invention of Collage* (New York, 1992) and S. Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 2000), 45–9.

¹¹⁶ K. Varnedoe, *A Fine Disregard: What Makes Modern Art Modern* (London, 1990), 218, 221–3.

¹¹⁷ See R. Martin, 'A New Perspective', in Martin, ed., *The View from Above: 125 Years of Aerial Photography* (London, 1983), 21.

¹¹⁸ This disturbance of the viewer's expectations is the strategy of estrangement, or *ostranenie*, a vital weapon of Russian Formalism which Rodchenko's friend Shklovsky wrote on around 1920. For Varnedoe, modernist artists' interest in the aerial view owed more to this kind of formal concern than to the increasing ubiquity and modernity of the aerial view. For him, the aerial view was just one more way of 'making strange' reality, much in the fashion of the Russian avant-garde (*A Fine Disregard*, 257–62).

¹¹⁹ Martin, 'A New Perspective', 20.

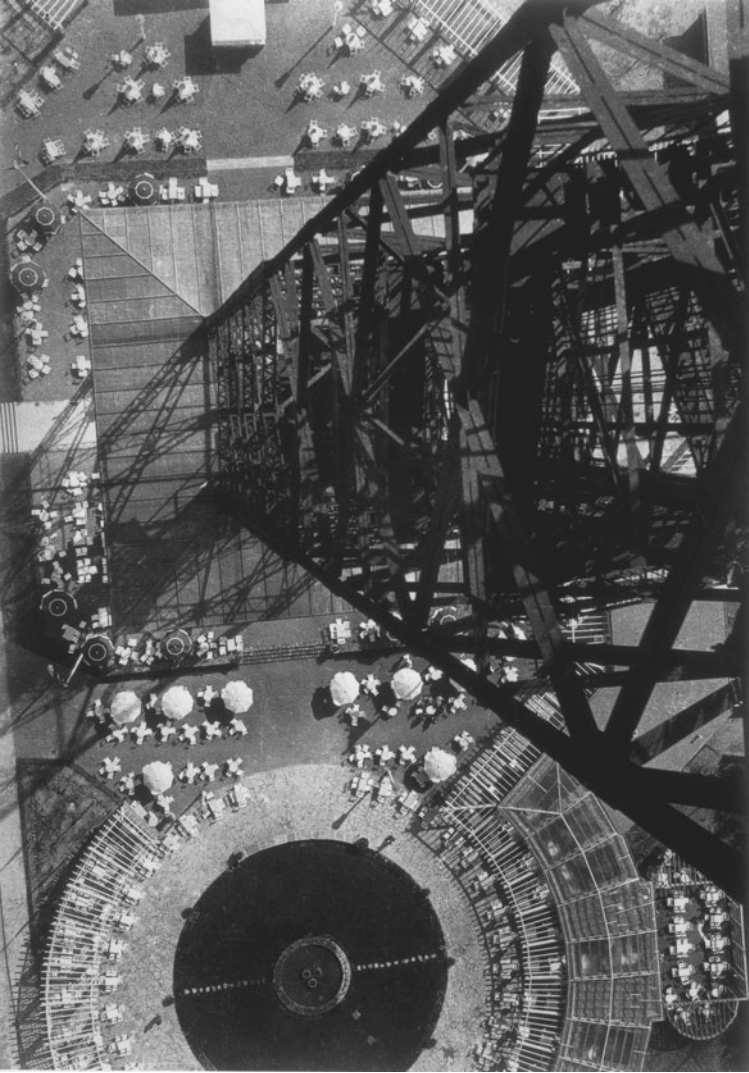


Fig. 4.17. László Moholy-Nagy, *Untitled (Looking Down from the Wireless Tower, Berlin)* (1928), courtesy of Hattula Moholy-Nagy, photography © The Art Institute of Chicago.

collected them. For Malevich, El Lissitzky, and Delauney, the aeroplane and the aerial photograph had revealed a new and dynamic perception of space as relative and virtual.¹²⁰ For other artists, here was a new perspective whose flattening of the world mimicked the flattening of the modernist picture plane. When

¹²⁰ Martin, 'A new Perspective', 19.

Wyndham Lewis's *Blast* in 1914 showed paintings of overhead city views based on aerial photographs, it was very much in line with these concerns of continental modernism.¹²¹

The aerial view may have meant different things—and been used in different ways—by all these artists. But in most cases, it represented a new perspective fit for a new world. Modernism itself was in part predicated upon the need to find such a perspective, as the experience of a specifically urban modernity seemed to render traditional representational practices redundant. Aerial archaeology, however, seems not to have interested these artists, for whom the aerial perspective was resolutely modern in both viewpoint *and* subject. So how may we read British Neo-Romantic artists' interest in specifically archaeological aerial views?

Modernism Redeemed

Piper's 1937 celebration of the aerial view can in one sense be seen as part of this wider modernist discourse. In particular his comparison of Britain, seen from above, with the paintings of Miró (Fig. 4.1) recalls the conventional comparison between Cubism and the view from an aeroplane.¹²² Gertrude Stein, for example, wrote that when flying over America she 'saw there on the earth the mingling lines of Picasso'.¹²³ Piper, like Stein, recognizes the formal similarity: 'So the horizon line vanishes, from the air. It has also vanished (nearly) from painting.'¹²⁴ But when Piper compares a Miró to an aerial image of a landscape—Silbury Hill—which is unmistakably both ancient and British, he is, I think, departing from the standard modernist attitude, and the comparison is more than formal. For as David Mellor points out, the 'Modernist flatness' of the aerial photograph of an archaeological site was 'a flatness substantiated by the recoverable signs of the text of British history which were inscribed upon the land: the governing principle of Piper's art'.¹²⁵

This tendency to find modernist forms appearing 'naturally' in the British landscape and its historic or ancient monuments is a familiar trope in Neo-Romantic discourse, as we have seen. In a curious reversal of the strategies of primitivism, Piper found Picasso-like profiles in British Romanesque sculpture; Nash discovered Cubism in the natural forms of Portland stone, and *Guernica* in a dead tree.¹²⁶ The art historian Herbert Read was at the same time claiming Surrealism to be merely the latest development in the British tradition of Romanticism,

¹²¹ Varnedoe, *A Fine Disregard*, 243.

¹²² Piper had seen and greatly admired the Miró exhibition held in May 1934 at the Galeries des Cahiers d'Art. See Tate Gallery, London, *John Piper* (1983), 14.

¹²³ Quoted in S. Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space 1880–1918* (London, 1983), 245. Ernest Hemingway made a similar observation (see B. Newhall, 'Introduction', in Martin, ed., *The View from Above*, 8).

¹²⁴ Piper, 'Prehistory from the Air', 5.

¹²⁵ *PL*, 38.

¹²⁶ Piper, 'England's Early Sculptors'; P. Nash, *Monster Field* (Oxford, 1946), 3–4. See also Piper, 'A Cubist Folk Art', *AR* (July 1943), 21–2.

and that Surrealism could be discerned in British medieval sculpture and manuscripts as well as in Byron and Blake.¹²⁷ Here was modernism, then, but a modernism domesticated and redeemed by the tangible presence of the local and the historic.

A combination of the modern and the British, of course, was precisely the project of Neo-Romantic artists, stuffing avant-garde form with local content. When Graham Sutherland reworked Blake's and Palmer's landscapes in the style of Picasso, for example, or when Nash photographed the standing stones at Avebury from a jaunty, modernist angle, they were engaged in this tempering of modernism with the time-worn features of the British landscape.¹²⁸ Samuel Smiles notes in particular a penchant in artists of this period for the prehistoric as the perfect tempering device for modernist form. For as well as representing abstract qualities of a primitive and untutored spirit, 'sites of primordial settlement' could be 'invested with the legitimacy and authenticity of primogeniture in contradistinction to the new, brash and raw tokens of modern culture'.¹²⁹ Given this context of the Neo-Romantic penchant for the historic and the prehistoric, coupled with the temperance of modern form with local subject, it would seem inevitable that these artists would find an interest in aerial archaeology. For aerial archaeology also combines the very new and the extremely old; its images enact a meeting between modern technology and the ancient, local past. The aerial view may fix the spectator as an irrevocably modern *viewing subject*, but the *object* of vision is redeeming; the ancient past uncannily visible on the face of the land.¹³⁰

Seeing Britain First with Shell

It was, of course, partly modern transport that had both effected modernity and modulated the experience of modern life.¹³¹ The view from a plane was just such a disorientating view, but far more common was the view from the train, the bus, or the motor car. Jack Beddington's influential advertising campaigns for Shell throughout this period were premised upon the meeting of old site with new viewpoint, the juxtaposition of motoring and the discovery of 'old Britain': what

¹²⁷ Herbert Read, ed., *Surrealism* (London, 1936).

¹²⁸ See Watney, 'Making Strange: The Shattered Mirror', in V. Burgin, ed., *Thinking Photography* (London and Basingstoke, 1982), 154–76.

¹²⁹ 'Equivalents for the Megaliths: Prehistory and English Culture, 1920–1950', in D. Peters Corbett, Y. Holt, and F. Russell, eds., *The Geographies of Englishness: Landscape and the National Past 1880–1940* (New Haven, 2002), 220.

¹³⁰ Virginia Woolf was clearly aware of the way in which the aerial view—apparently so modern—could reveal layers of settlement invisible from the ground. In her 1941 novel *Between the Acts* Mr Oliver remarks how from an aeroplane 'you could still see, plainly marked, the scars made by the Britons; by the Romans; by the Elizabethan manor house; and by the plough, when they ploughed the hill to grow wheat in the Napoleonic wars' (quoted in Beer, 'The Island and the Aeroplane', 283).

¹³¹ See W. Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: Trains and Travel in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, 1980); and Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space*.



Fig. 4.18. Edward McKnight Kauffer, Stonehenge, poster for Shell (1931).

David Matless describes as the ‘motoring pastoral’ (see Chapter 5).¹³² In Shell poster campaigns, the motor car was seen to open up the historic landscape of Britain, as viewers were exhorted to ‘See Britain first on Shell’ (Fig. 4.18). There was a happy congruence between Beddington’s advertising brief and the Neo-Romantic sensibility, and a number of artists worked for Shell on their publicity material, including Nash, Frank Dobson, and Sutherland. The Shell Guides to Britain, which began in 1934 under the general editorship of John Betjeman, were in many ways a Neo-Romantic production in spirit, content, and personnel; the guides continued Shell’s project of linking motoring with the discovery of the pastoral and the ancient.¹³³ In 1937 (the year of ‘Prehistory from the Air’) Piper was at work on the Shell Guide to Oxfordshire, later taking over from his friend Betjeman as series editor.

Thus when Nash was asked to compile the Shell Guide to Dorset, he agreed; for as Roger Cardinal writes, the guide ‘reflects two contrary yet linked values

¹³² D. Matless, *Landscape and Englishness* (London, 1998), 63 ff.; T. Morden, ‘The Pastoral and the Pictorial’, *Ten*:8, 12 (1983), 18–25.

¹³³ Shell was canny in its advertising campaigns; its stance against roadside advertising appealed to middle-class nature-loving car owners, and its patronage of Neo-Romantic artists and writers provided the stamp of high culture. As David Bernstein writes, Shell ‘realised early that advertisements promoted not petrol but motoring, that motoring meant special joys—exhilaration, freedom and the pleasures of the countryside. Thus Shell took the whole of Britain as its product’ (Barbican, London, *That’s Shell—that is! An Exhibition of Shell Advertising Art* (1983), 4).

which are integral to Nash's aesthetics: the notion of the modern, embodied in the motor-car . . . and the archaic, embodied in those Dorset sites'.¹³⁴ In addition, the company's sales pitch—seeing Britain first on Shell—has an affinity with Nash's own fascination with those 'unseen landscapes' already discussed in Chapter 3, those landscapes which 'belong to the world that lies, visibly, about us' but which are unseen 'merely because they are not perceived'.¹³⁵ It does not seem surprising, then, that Nash should have included an aerial photograph of Maiden Castle in his guide to Dorset (Fig. 4.12). For this photograph represents a hitherto unperceived—yet ineluctably real—aspect of the landscape: an aspect that has been made possible by new transport technology.

A Scarred Landscape

The Neo-Romantic affinity for aerial archaeology can, however, be pushed further than this structural parallel of new viewpoint and old subject-matter, for the Neo-Romantic rejection of modernist rupture from the past is given concrete validation in the very grounding principle of aerial archaeology. Again, a comparison with continental modernism is illuminating. When artists such as El Lissitzky or Moholy-Nagy looked down on their (urban) environment, the city was transformed into a plan, a blueprint, casting the viewer in a role of surveying architect or engineer, a role that flattered the modernist ambition of social construction as well as aesthetic innovation.¹³⁶ This aerial attitude is given its fullest exploration in Le Corbusier's 1935 book *Aircraft* (Fig. 4.19). For Le Corbusier, the aerial view is a moral lesson, revealing the faults of urban development and, crucially, justifying new planning: 'By means of the airplane, we now have proof, recorded on the photographic plate, of the rightness of our desire to alter methods of architecture and town planning.'¹³⁷

For Le Corbusier, then, the aerial view was a tool in the ongoing process of planning and modernization: 'Cities', he wrote in the same book, 'must be largely destroyed and fresh cities built.'¹³⁸ The landscape here figures as a drawing board which can—and should—be scraped clean. As we have already seen, aerial archaeology, on the other hand, suggests *limits* to the possibility of starting again. With its dependence upon the permanence of the archaeological record, aerial archaeology refuses to represent the land as a *tabula rasa*. And unlike Le Corbusier's active involvement with the future appearance of the landscape, the Neo-Romantic aerial gaze happily acknowledges the ineradicable signs of the past that litter its surface.

¹³⁴ R. Cardinal, *The Landscape Vision of Paul Nash* (London, 1989), 12.

¹³⁵ P. Nash, 'Unseen Landscapes', *Country Life* (21 May 1938), 526.

¹³⁶ See I. Jeffrey, *Photography: A Concise History* (London, 1996), 124.

¹³⁷ Le Corbusier, *Aircraft* (London, 1935), 11. This book is part of a series entitled *The New Vision*; titles in this series explored new angles on reality, for example W. Watson-Baker's *World beneath the Microscope* (1935), which was reviewed in *Axis*, 4 (Nov. 1935), 28.

¹³⁸ *Aircraft*, 12.

9. THE BIRD'S EYE VIEW.

. . . .

THE EYE NOW SEES IN SUBSTANCE WHAT THE MIND FORMERLY
COULD ONLY SUBJECTIVELY CONCEIVE.

. . . .

IT IS A NEW FUNCTION ADDED TO OUR SENSES.
IT IS A NEW STANDARD OF MEASUREMENT.
IT IS A NEW BASIS OF SENSATION.

. . . .

MAN WILL MAKE USE OF IT TO CONCEIVE NEW AIMS.
CITIES WILL ARISE OUT OF THEIR ASHES.

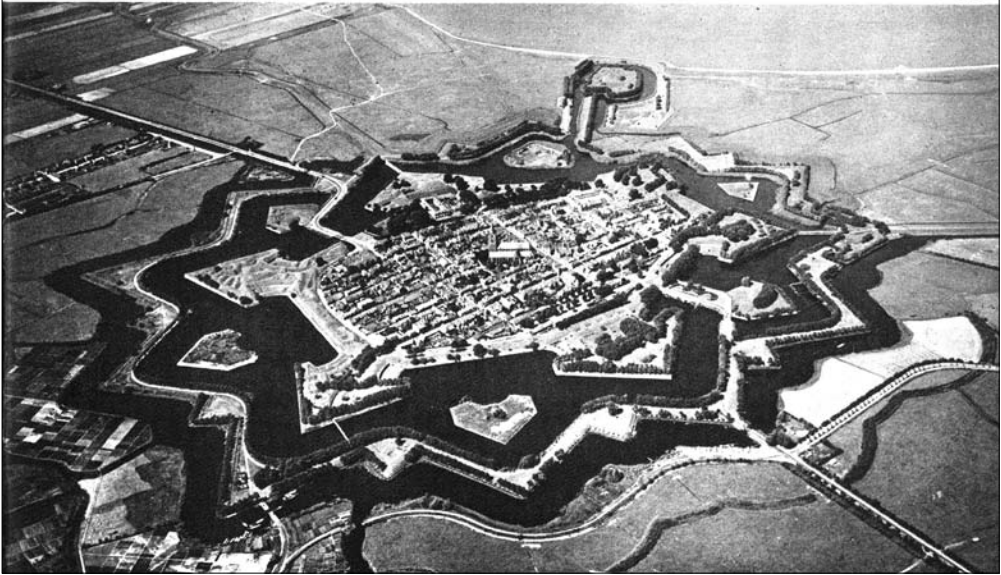


Fig. 4.19. Le Corbusier, *Aircraft* (1935).

Thus the aerial photograph of Maiden Castle represents for Nash the 'face of Dorset', its furrowed physiognomy testifying to the natural accretions of time that constitute its current appearance (Fig. 4.12). As on a human face, these lines tell an ineradicable tale. The face of Dorset, according to Nash, is 'overcast' by 'the burden of its extraordinary inheritance. Indeed, the past is always evident in that face.'¹³⁹

It was precisely this *marked* aspect of the landscape, seen from above, that appealed to the British artist Ben Nicholson, who, although rarely included under the Neo-Romantic art-historical umbrella, nevertheless could exhibit a similar sensibility when confronted with landscape.¹⁴⁰ In a letter to his ex-wife, the artist Winifred Nicholson, he recounted his experience of the flight back from the 1954 Venice Biennale: 'I thought the South of France and Italy looked wonderful from the air—I liked the worked, *scored* surface—centuries of time and man—just the quality I'd like to get into a ptg.'¹⁴¹

Nicholson's somewhat oblique relationship to Neo-Romanticism is evidenced by this statement in that the scored surface of the landscape was primarily a *formal* quality he was seeking for his work, for as Virginia Button points out, 'the structuring principle behind Neo-Romanticism was that British art was poetic rather than plastic, concerned with content rather than form'.¹⁴² Yet the general sentiment is nevertheless very much in tune with that of Piper, Grigson, and Nash. In *England*, the 1957 book of photographs by Edwin Smith of the English landscape, Grigson describes his return flight from New Mexico, contrasting Ireland seen from above with America.¹⁴³ Over Ireland he feels 'immediately at home, within a circumference of palpable and tangible and chronological humanity, with a depth in time' as he looks down at this landscape intricately divided into fields divided by old stone walls. For Grigson, America, by contrast, is a land 'of new weights upon a wide surface' whose blank spaces are 'marked now and again by roads or railways or lonely towns, lonely signs of humanity'. Going on to discuss the English landscape, Grigson asserts the ineradicability of its traces of previous inhabitants: 'Clearance . . . and cultivation could not destroy every sign of earlier ways of life, and men of all periods from the English Neolithic onwards have left their visible marks behind them, to endure through alterations and revolutions of landscape.'¹⁴⁴

Grigson, Nicholson, Nash, and Piper all took pleasure, then, in beholding a scarred landscape, made and marked by time. In some ways, they reflected a much broader interest, in these years, in the visible surface of the national landscape.

¹³⁹ P. Nash, *Dorset* (London, 1936), 9.

¹⁴⁰ For Ben Nicholson's relationship to Neo-Romanticism, see Virginia Button's chapter 'The War Years', in J. Lewison, ed., *Ben Nicholson* (London, 1993), 53–62. According to Button, while Nicholson despised what he saw as Neo-Romantic nostalgia, he shared common ground with Neo-Romanticism in his renewed relationship with landscape, somewhat enforced by the war, which he spent in Cornwall (p. 53).

¹⁴¹ Letter to Winifred Nicholson, dated 9 July 1954, quoted in Lewison, ed., *Ben Nicholson*, 89 (emphasis in the original).

¹⁴² *Ibid.* 54.

¹⁴³ Grigson and Smith, *England*, 13.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

Books about 'the face of the land' or 'the face of England' proliferated throughout the interwar years and beyond. The expression invoked the idea that the national landscape might betray the 'character' of Britain and the 'nature' of its inhabitants through its physiognomy, like a face. This was an idea most fully endorsed in the curious title of Cyril Fox's 1932 book *The Personality of Britain*, but it was almost carelessly alluded to in the titles of a plethora of publications, effortlessly translating history into 'nature'. Batsford published a series entitled 'The Face of Britain', for example, and *Picture Post* often included articles such as 'The Face of England', which appeared in October 1938, illustrated by aerial photographs.¹⁴⁵ The logic of the conceit (clearly expressed by Nash in his Shell Guide to Dorset) was that just as the lines on a face testify to experience, emotion, and the passing of time, surface features on the 'face of the land' likewise testify to the history and character of the nation, and the habits, activities, and proclivities of its inhabitants. Thus, for example, the 'patchworked' grid of fields that was so often invoked as typifying this 'face' testified to a tolerant society, built up over centuries, which valued the 'makeshift' and the time-worn over the disciplined and the modern—an image which became useful in preservationist discourse and anti-Nazi propaganda, as we shall see.

This common trope was given a rather different twist, however, by one Neo-Romantic film-maker of the period. In the 1950s Emeric Pressburger started work on a script set during the 1948 Berlin airlift. It was a story about an ex-RAF pilot, Terry Matthews, who had been badly damaged by his time spent at a POW camp near Potsdam; wanting revenge on his tormentor, Colonel Stadthagen, he goes to Berlin with the airlift in order to find him and bring him to justice. The film, entitled 'The Skin of the Bear', was never made; Pressburger reworked the story as a novel called 'A Face Like England', which was never published.¹⁴⁶ In 'A Face Like England', Matthews has undergone plastic surgery at East Grinstead Hospital after suffering terrible burns to his face in the POW camp.¹⁴⁷ Matthews's disfigured face and his desire for revenge obsess him, destroying his marriage and making him incapable of working. The title of the novel derives from the 'patchwork' appearance of his face after surgery, which Matthews himself describes as 'like

¹⁴⁵ 'The Face of England', *PP* (29 Oct. 1938), 22–3. Batsford's series *The Face of Britain* included H. J. Massingham's *English Downland* (London, 1936); D. Wallace's *East Anglia: A Survey of England's Eastern Counties* (London, 1939); and H. Quigley's *The Highlands of Scotland* (London, 1936). See also E. Blunden, *The Face of England: In a Series of Occasional Sketches* (London, 1932).

¹⁴⁶ The manuscripts for the film and the novel, in various versions, are preserved in the Pressburger Collection at the British Film Institute in London.

¹⁴⁷ The Centre for Plastic and Jaw Surgery was established at East Grinstead by Sir Archibald McIndoe, who in 1938 was appointed consultant in plastic surgery to the RAF. Many pilots underwent treatment for burns at McIndoe's centre, including Richard Hillary, who wrote about his experiences in *The Last Enemy* (London, 1942). Michael Powell's brother-in-law, Joe Reidy (who advised on *A Matter of Life And Death*), apparently worked as a plastic surgeon with McIndoe during the war, 'giving burnt pilots back their faces' (M. Powell, *A Life in Movies: An Autobiography* (London, 1986), 458).

the face of England from a pilot's view when he gets his first glimpse of it crossing the Channel. An airman's view of fields sown together in a very orderly way.¹⁴⁸

In an extraordinary inversion of the standard sentimental motif, the familiar and time-worn 'patchwork' of fields is transformed into an image of ineradicable trauma. Matthews cannot escape his scarred face any more than the landscape, as seen by Grigson, Nicholson, and others, can escape its history. His face is the result of his experiences—sudden, traumatic—just as 'the face of England' is the product of history. But there is nothing 'natural' about the appearance of Matthews's face. And the brutal comparison with the standard idyllic English landscape—which was repeatedly promoted as 'what we are fighting for' (see Chapter 5)—undermines any benign charm it might otherwise have had. Both the film script and the novel are peppered with images of scarring—of people, buildings, and cities. In 'The Skin of the Bear', Matthews declares: 'The world is full of scars—and crosses.'¹⁴⁹ As Pressburger's script reminds us, the aerial view is not always benevolent—it is also the view of the bomber, and a dimension of the Second World War which was responsible for many deaths and much destruction; as Kevin Macdonald points out, Matthews's face is 'a powerful metaphor for a ravaged Europe and a scarred mind'.¹⁵⁰ Yet themes of redemption and forgiveness run throughout the story. Matthews's thirst for justice eventually abates as he falls in love with a Berlin woman, who has also suffered, although her scars are less visible. 'Can't we forget the war, the bombs, the dead, your face, the ruins, everything?' she asks him.¹⁵¹ Redemption in Pressburger's story comes through love rather than a fixation with the continuing presence of the past, which is shown to be potentially debilitating. It puts human scars before those of the landscape, and it faces the future despite the ravages of the past, unlike the usual Neo-Romantic formulation, which reluctantly walks forward, its face turned with longing towards history.

The Accepted and the Rejected of Nature

Pressburger's story was written ten years or so after the end of the war, by which time—as we have seen—Neo-Romantic art was in decline. By this time, post-war reconstruction had brought about a rather different sensibility towards the landscape, one which acknowledged the need for change. The Neo-Romantic yearning for a landscape stained with history came out of a different context. Before the war there had been widespread fears that the fabric of the past in the landscape would be overwritten by urban development—making Britain into a 'new country' whose model was America. For many, it was the sprawling suburbs that represented the main threat, famously vilified by Clough Williams-Ellis in his

¹⁴⁸ BFI Press. Coll., box 17, folder 7, 'A Face Like England', manuscript novel (undated), fol. 3.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, folder 1, 'The Skin of the Bear', first draft (May 1958), fol. 89.

¹⁵⁰ K. Macdonald, *Emeric Pressburger: The Life and Death of a Screenwriter* (London, 1994), 367.

¹⁵¹ BFI Press. Coll., box 17, folder 7, 'A Face Like England', fol. 330.

books *England and the Octopus* (1928) and *Britain and the Beast* (1937). Here a proliferating network of ribbon developments was figured as a creature who threatened to take over, suffocating everything that was worth preserving in the countryside. This was a creature visible from the air, too. As Matless points out, the 'octopus' of Williams-Ellis's title was itself an aerial image, visible in its entirety only from above.¹⁵² And in Evelyn Waugh's 1930 novel *Vile Bodies*, while her husband quotes Shakespeare ('This sceptre'd isle . . . this something or other Eden') looking down on England as they fly off on their honeymoon, a bilious Nina sees from the window of the plane only red suburbs, arterial roads, factories, wireless masts, and overhead power cables.¹⁵³

Aerial archaeology represents a powerful and poetic counter-argument to this grim narrative of irreversible obliteration, for it often juxtaposes superficial development with the ineradicable remains of the distant past. In Allen's Royston photographs, for example, the marks of the Icknield Way and the Mile Ditches seem far more permanent than the fleeting trace from the steam of the train (Fig. 4.5); the tracks of the old way more firmly etched into the landscape than the modern road that runs beside them (Fig. 4.6). The juxtaposition of ancient and modern in the photograph of Staines is even more remarkable (Fig. 4.11). Unplanned development (of which this line of villas is a typical example) was repeatedly described in preservationist discourse as a 'rash' on the face of the land, but this crop mark that coexists alongside the road is a different kind of rash, and one even less planned. As with some of the photographs in *Antiquity* (discussed in Chapter 3) it almost seems, when one looks at this image, as if that which is most ancient in the landscape might outlive the ribbon development lampooned by Williams-Ellis and others. The faint outline of 'Caesar's Camp' seems to exist in a different dimension from the suburban development in this image, its looming presence a reminder both of deep time and of mortality itself; again, it is possible to read it as a counterpart to the anamorphic skull in Holbein's *Ambassadors*, which also represents another temporal dimension, that of eternity.

The idea that modernity was a superficial phenomenon, ultimately weak against the earth's natural cycles, is a Romantic one, and is echoed in much of the art and writing of this period, especially in conjunction with prehistoric remains. Standing at the stone circle at Poxwell in Dorset, the local historian H. J. Massingham (for whom Nash designed the book cover featuring the Uffington White Horse) looked down at traffic rushing 'insanely to and fro from Weymouth to Dorchester, from Dorchester to Weymouth', and mused that the stones at Poxwell 'are the accepted of Nature: we and our machines the rejected'.¹⁵⁴ This observation came in a 1936 book, *English Downland*, which was part of the series *The Face of Britain* published by Batsford. A similar sensibility is expressed in Nash's series of watercolours known as *Marching against England*, where

¹⁵² Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, 38.

¹⁵³ E. Waugh, *Vile Bodies* (London, 1996), 168.

¹⁵⁴ Massingham, *English Downland*, 55. Thanks to Kate Best for this reference.

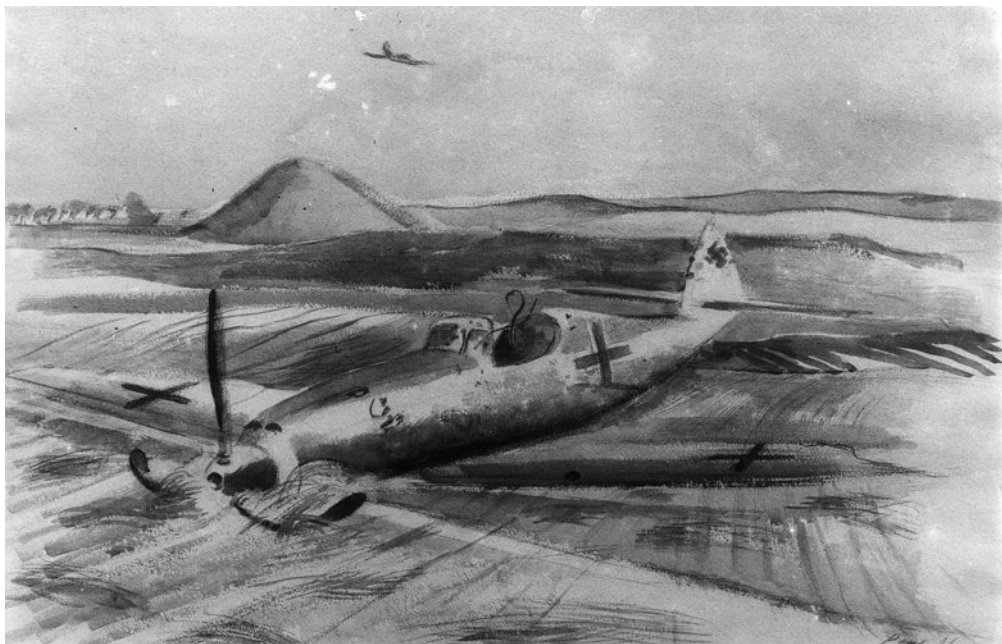


Fig. 4.20. Paul Nash, *Encounter in the Afternoon* (1940).

crashed German bombers are subdued by the British landscape in which they find themselves. As Charles Hall says, in these works it is ‘Nash’s England’, identified with the forces of good, that defeats these invaders.¹⁵⁵ In *Encounter in the Afternoon* (1940), for example, an ancient English landscape—complete with burial mound—surrounds the grounded enemy plane, which, it is implied, it will easily outlast (Fig. 4.20). In Nash’s war work, the aerial threat is nearly always contrasted with a resilient landscape; and perhaps it is in this context that we may understand his interest in aerial archaeology and his desire to obtain enlargements of Allen’s photographs, photographs which graphically dramatized this very resilience. Interestingly enough, it seems that the Uffington White Horse was not visible during the war, having been turfed over so as not to assist enemy aircraft.¹⁵⁶ Given this, its prominence on the book cover of Massingham’s *Remembrance* or in Grigson’s *England* is particularly significant, making it a resurrected icon of the English past embedded in the landscape.

¹⁵⁵ IWM, *Paul Nash: Aerial Creatures*, 31, 7.

¹⁵⁶ ‘Did you Hear That?’, *The Listener* (18 May 1950), 861.

Conclusion

Aerial archaeology was more than a resource, then, for Nash and Piper; it also functioned as a concrete metaphor for the resilience of the past. The technology of aerial archaeology offered a redemptive historiography, grounded in the materiality of both photography and the landscape. Its images seemed proof that the past had not gone, that *it had been here all along*, and that it might even outlive the grid of roads that was being established across it. In 1939, Crawford was complaining about how as a result of urbanization, road construction, and the popularization of motoring, Britain was fast becoming perceived as ‘a one-dimensional country, having length without area’, the countryside reduced to the status of blank spaces between roads.¹⁵⁷ The process may have been unstoppable—but aerial photography seemed to correct this anomaly, restoring those spaces between roads and revealing them to be far from blank. And it also seemed to restore the lost dimension of time to an environment apparently bent on forgetting it.

¹⁵⁷ MS Crawford 109, fol. 92.

5

Recuperating Ruins

As has been well documented, images of the British landscape performed an important propagandist role in the Second World War, particularly after the fall of France in June 1940, when Britain faced the prospect of both aerial attack and all-out invasion by air or sea.¹ In what Angus Calder has called ‘the myth of the Blitz’ the nation’s landscape, framed by war, played the role of backdrop, target, refuge, dream, and prize.² An advertisement for F. J. Harvey Darton’s books *English Fabric*, *Alibi Pilgrimage*, and *The Marches of Wessex*, which appeared in *Country Life* in August 1940, made a familiar association when it asserted that at ‘no other time in our long island history has the spirit of the English Countryside made such an appeal to us as now’.³ In illustrated publications like *Country Life* and *Picture Post*, the landscape was repeatedly presented in its most idyllic form of ‘Beautiful Britain’ as—explicitly or implicitly—‘what we are fighting for’. An article entitled ‘The Beauty of Britain’ which appeared in *Picture Post* on 22 June 1940, for example, included picturesque shots of hay-harvesting in the Lake District, captioned ‘The Dream Men Carry With Them’, and a lake in Caernarvonshire, captioned ‘The Peace That Will Come Again’. ‘This is Britain’, ran the accompanying text. ‘This is the soil we are fighting for.’⁴

Pre-war anxieties that the distinctive characteristics of the British landscape were disappearing beneath a tide of modernization were largely eclipsed under the immediate impact of the threat of enemy bomb attacks. For the sake of the rhetorical power of these morale-boosting images, it was imperative to stress the continuing presence of that which was in fact feared by many to be disappearing. This development did not mark a great U-turn so much as a change of emphasis. There was a continuity of rhetoric, as we shall see, for Britain under threat of modernization could easily be rewritten as a country under threat of aerial bombardment or invasion. And by relocating the threat in the war machine of a nation—Nazi Germany—that seemed to embody the forces of an aggressive mechanization, this was not hard to do. Preservationist arguments never

¹ See especially J. Taylor, *A Dream of England: Landscape, Photography and the Tourist’s Imagination* (Manchester 1994), and A. Calder, *The Myth of the Blitz* (London, 1992).

² Calder, *The Myth of the Blitz*, 1–19.

³ *Country Life* (31 Aug. 1940), p. xxi.

⁴ ‘The Beauty of Britain’, *PP* (22 June 1940), 16–17.

disappeared altogether, however, and soon resurfaced, as the phrase ‘the land we’re fighting for’ came to contain a covert demand for better post-war planning.

Wartime images of a ‘Beautiful Britain’, then, were framed by an external threat which heightened their potency. Yet, at the same time as an image of an enduring national heritage was being promoted, a number of attempts were made to record monuments and landscapes in case they should be erased altogether. The creation of a virtual Britain, a parallel country in archived images of buildings, monuments, and views, was aimed at in government-sponsored projects, of which the most prominent were ‘Recording Britain’, launched in 1940 by the Ministry of Labour and the Pilgrim Trust, and the National Buildings Record (NBR), also founded in 1940.⁵ And when the bombs came, the devastation they caused was documented by photographers, working for newspapers and other publications as well as government agencies, and by artists working under the auspices of the War Artists Advisory Committee.

This chapter aims to explore the impact of the Blitz on photographic representations of the British landscape as the *site* of history—Beautiful Britain as a historically sedimented landscape, resistant to invasions of the modern and the alien; the work of the NBR, as it documented architectural survivals which now faced potential destruction; and images of bomb-damaged buildings and landscapes, where history seemed to have been decimated in an instant, but also occasionally where archaeological remains of earlier times unexpectedly surfaced after the damage was done. The archaeological imagination, stressing the survival of the past and of the nation, can be seen to be at work as a redemptive sensibility here, at a time when history and memory were mobilized as bulwarks against the threat of enemy destruction or invasion.

ENDURING BRITAIN

The affirmative vision of Britain promoted in text and image in illustrated magazines, pamphlets, and books around 1940 and throughout the war was a vision in which a large diversity of subjects and places were united by their relationship with history; it was a catalogue of hallowed sites and social practices marked by time. These were local landscapes in which the work of humans sat comfortably with the work of nature, at times blending together seamlessly. A photograph of a village in Gloucestershire, depicting a farm cart making its way past a war memorial, is captioned ‘The age-long pageant of the British countryside’ (Fig. 5.1). Oast-houses nestle amid blossoming trees in rural Kent (Fig. 5.2). Modernity had made few marks on this landscape, while what was past had not

⁵ For ‘Recording Britain’ see the four-volume *Recording Britain* (Oxford, 1946–9) and D. Mellor, G. Saunders and P. Wright, *Recording Britain: A Pictorial Domesday of Pre-War Britain* (Newton Abbot, 1990).



GLOUCESTERSHIRE: *The Farm-cart That Sets the Pace*
The age-long pageant of the British countryside. The farmer on his way to market.
The children who sit and stare. The village war memorial.

Fig. 5.1. 'Gloucestershire', from 'The Land We Are Fighting For', *PP* (6 July 1940).



Fig. 5.2. 'Something our fathers fought for all through the centuries . . .', from 'What We Are Fighting For', *PP* (13 July 1940).

yet departed from it. This was an image of a contemporary Britain in which the whole of its (mythical-historical) past was effortlessly present. A mystical unity of time and space was tangible in the weathered stones of old buildings and in the deep shadows cast by ancient horse chestnut trees. This landscape was presented as the 'natural' result of centuries of history, and before that, millennia of geology. It was the accumulation of a million traces, the very scene and site of history; it was a palimpsest in which everything was comfortable, and from which—apparently—nothing had been erased.

An image which appeared twice in two months—first in *Picture Post* in July, and again on the cover of a special issue of *Country Life* (entitled 'The Face of Britain') in August 1940—is in many ways emblematic (Fig. 5.3). In this photograph, a group of sheep is being herded down a lane deep in shadow, past a fine piece of weathered architecture that could be a cathedral close or perhaps some almshouses. In *Picture Post* the photograph is captioned 'Sunday Afternoon in England: All is Peace', and is meant to be contrasted with its opposite: 'Sunday Afternoon in Germany', where the sheep have been replaced by a far more orderly military parade (Fig. 5.4). In *Country Life* the heading 'The Face of Britain' indicates that the character and biography of the nation are to be discerned in the scene, as they might be in the lines on a face (see Chapter 4). This is an image of a country at ease with its deep past, in which old customs live on and old buildings are left standing: a country in which social stratification is as comfortable, and as time-tested, as its archaeological and historical strata.

This land was repeatedly represented not only as an idyll where humans and nature peacefully coexist in a sort of eternal present, but also as the very stage and site of history. The magazine *Photography* ran a special wartime county series, each celebrating a county's identity and history for and on behalf of its troops.⁶ The main article in the Hertfordshire issue, illustrated with photographs of historical sites, describes the county as '“fathoms deep” in a history, written above and on the ground, as well as below it'. This is a place, we are informed, where the MP for Hitchin discovered Roman relics 'almost at the first stroke of the pick' when enlarging his tennis court, a place where 'yesterday and to-day look one another in the face with a most friendly gaze all over the shire'.⁷ Even the advertisements in this publication drew on the county's identity as the site of history. Hatfield House, we are told, is where 'Elizabeth heard that she was Queen'; its maze is now 'kept neat with Lloyds Electric Hedge Trimmer'.⁸

An embedded literary history, in particular, was often invoked. In the caption to one fairly typical *Picture Post* photograph Skiddaw is described as the Lakeland mountain 'where John Keats climbed and John Peel ran'; a photo caption to an image of Whitby in the *Photographic Journal* describes it as the place where

⁶ 'The Story of Middlesex', *Photography* (Summer 1943); 'Heritage of Kent', *Photography* (Autumn 1943); 'The Story of Lancashire', *Photography* (Summer 1944).

⁷ W. B. Thomas, 'The Story of Hertfordshire', *Photography* (Christmas 1942), 8.

⁸ *Ibid.* 2.

Country Life

THE FACE OF BRITAIN

AUGUST 24TH 1940

PRICE ONE SHILLING



Fig. 5.3. (left). 'The Face of Britain', cover of *Country Life* (24 Aug. 1940).

Fig. 5.4. (below). Double spread from 'What We Are Fighting For', *PP* (13 July 1940).



SUNDAY AFTERNOON IN ENGLAND: ALL IS PEACE

We are fighting, then, barely for an inch—a few hundred square miles of land flanking the North Sea. However important, and our fighting is a way of life which has its setting in that island. Nobody needs to tell us that our way of life is not perfect. But we are fighting to preserve the best of it, and to have the opportunity to change the rest to our good for the better. We are taking up arms to preserve the rights of free speech and free reason for which our fathers struggled, and to

keep the road towards total freedom open for the future. And to this end there is one thing that we are fighting for above all, the right to work on our own agreements and arrangements for ourselves. We who live in Britain share this common and sacred right of governing the people between the seas of the British race and the Atlantic. If we fail, we have the chance to take a great leap forward together. If we succeed, we shall all be free back in hundred years. All of us.

Not one man, woman or group or class. But all of us. Nevertheless each class in this country has something particular to fight for now—quite apart from the land and the way of life which are common to us all. Each class actually has much to lose. The workers of Britain, have much to lose. The navy and the farm labourers, the craftsmen and the engineer—each class in its own particular way. They put into their work more than they get out



SUNDAY AFTERNOON IN GERMANY: ALL IS PEACE

of it. But in a Nazi Britain they would get it: they have and get out from here. In a free Britain they have the chance to continue the struggle for all forms of class labour. In a free Britain they have it in their own hands. The workers have much to lose materially—in wages and hours and conditions of work. But they have also much that is not material to lose. All the things which make life worth living when they come off the job are in danger.

The evening spent in the privacy of their own homes. The evening spent digging their own gardens, or growing in the park. All these things are threatened. Instead, the Nazis offer a prospect of evening drills and evening propaganda lectures, marching and shouting, world without end. And the police everywhere. The police in the park. The police in the club. The police under the quietest walls. Police who bear no relation to the British village "coppers."

As for the industrialists and landlords, they, too, have much to lose. They have a tradition and an inheritance to lose. And a reputation for patriotism which the whole world is watching. The world, and the ordinary people of this country, are watching with the greatest attention because of what happened only yesterday, in another country. In that country a small but powerful class of industrialists and landowners put the security of their own property before the independ-

Caedmon, ‘the father of English poetry’, was born.⁹ Perhaps most prominently, however, the British landscape was depicted as the site of attempted and resisted invasion, where the example of the unsuccessful Spanish Armada was predictably more useful than that of the Roman invasion, although both were part of a benign history, safely out of the reach of immediate memory. Edward Hulton’s article ‘The Unconquerable Isle’, for example, appeared in *Picture Post* on 8 June 1940; it was followed up with a proliferation of articles on such themes as ‘The Game of Drake’ and a historical account of invasion attempts entitled ‘How to Invade Britain’.¹⁰ One of the photographs illustrating ‘The Land We Are Fighting For’ in *Picture Post* in July 1940 (Fig. 5.5) was captioned ‘All Quiet in the Village of Broadhembury’: ‘Tranquil white-washed cottages whose roofs were thatched by the skill of men now in uniform. The men of Devon know all about invasions. Their forefathers, under Drake, beat off the Armada. The villages of Devon are no place for the Gestapo.’¹¹ The implication, of course, is that having survived invasion attempts in the past, we will also survive the current threat.

The captions to this image and others like it are of course crucial, bridging the gap between the scene and its undepicted—and undepictable—past (see Chapter 2). Seen in conjunction with its caption, Broadhembury itself appears to have a memory: deserted like Eugene Atget’s photographs of Paris, it seems the scene not of a crime (as Walter Benjamin wrote of Atget’s images) but of a placid history, a stage set whose players have recently departed. But in purely pictorial terms, too, the scene speaks of memory. Its emptiness underlines its oneiric quality; as with the other images in the spread, it is like a place seen in a dream, with its curiously blank and open foreground and large expanse of sky. This is not a living, working landscape but an image designed to tap the ‘visual unconscious’ of *Picture Post*’s (predominantly urban, predominantly English) audience, for whom such places had long represented ‘Britain’, ‘England’, or even ‘home’. Needless to say, such a vision was not shared by everyone, and it is significant—if somewhat predictable—that in this article, which claims to represent ‘the villages which are Britain’, only English counties are pictured.

The rhetoric that accompanied these images figured invasion as something which would disrupt and destroy history in an instant. ‘Intact for a thousand years, it is not to be tampered with now.’ ‘We are fighting for the very soil and stuff of Britain’, insisted *Picture Post* in July 1940.¹² ‘For hundreds of years’, ran a caption to a photograph of Kersey in Suffolk, ‘the villages of East Anglia have been untroubled, undisturbed. To-morrow, if German strategists have their way, they

⁹ C. E. M. Joad, ‘The Land We’re Fighting For’, *PP* (3 Jan. 1942), 7; T. Burton, ‘England: Our Heritage’, *Photographic Journal* (Sept. 1942), 316.

¹⁰ E. Hulton, ‘The Unconquerable Isle’, *PP* (8 June 1940), 33; ‘The Game of Drake’, *PP* (6 July 1940), 30–1; ‘How to Invade Britain’, *PP* (10 Aug. 1940), 10–17, 32. The war’s first feature film, *The Lion Has Wings* (1939), included a flashback sequence of ‘Elizabeth and the Armada’. See J. Richards and D. Sheridan, eds., *Mass-Observation at the Movies* (London and New York, 1987), 300–1.

¹¹ ‘The Land We Are Fighting For’, *PP* (6 July 1940), 29.

¹² ‘What We Are Fighting For’, *PP* (13 July 1940), 9.



Fig. 5.5. 'Devon', from 'The Land We Are Fighting For', *PP* (6 July 1940).

will find themselves part of the Eastern Front.¹³ This structure, in which the slow accumulation of centuries is seen to be at risk of obliteration in an instant, was common in the pages of *Picture Post*, in wartime pamphlets and books, and in the discourse of documentary films at this time, and it would also be utilized—as we shall see—in the reporting of bomb damage. What was at risk, it seems, was not just human life or property but temporal continuity.

This was forcefully driven home in the 13 July special issue of *Picture Post*, where the British people and landscape were contrasted with a Nazi Germany in which mechanization had taken over both landscape and human beings. Here the 'Face of Britain' operated physiognomically as the expression of time-honoured qualities such as moderation and fairness, the 'makeshift' and the 'unplanned' that could be visually contrasted with the fascist ordering of the landscape and the body, to great propagandist effect (Fig. 5.4). Fascism was visualized as a violent intrusion into the natural order of things: an aesthetic of stiff order which disrupted temporal continuity, superimposing itself on every aspect of nature. In stark

¹³ 'The Land We Are Fighting For', 28.

contrast to the 'depth' of British culture, visualized here in landscape and history, German culture is seen as a matter of brash surfaces—very much the way in which elements of modernity had been represented in pre-war preservationist discourse.¹⁴

If images like these could speak to their viewers of nationhood, home, desire, and memory, it was because by 1940 a visual repertory of Beautiful Britain had been accumulating for at least a century. The Britain (or—often—the England) that was deemed 'worth fighting for' in *Picture Post* included the same enduring and Arcadian landscape that Alex Potts pinpoints in his article 'Constable Country between the Wars'. This was a specifically urban and middle-class aestheticized view of a peaceful countryside, which grew up in the wake of the First World War and whose celebration of 'England and Englishness' peaked in the 1930s.¹⁵ In the wake of ongoing urbanization, such a pastoral landscape was an imaginary haven, the idealized countryside left behind by a large number of urban migrants: a yearned-for 'home'.¹⁶ Photography, with its ineluctable link to the particular and the specific, was a vital tool in the visual promotion of the oft-stated theme that in Britain the local was the essence of the national (unlike in fascist countries, where the national was the essence of the local). Britain was often identified as a village or a parish during these years, despite the increasing urbanization of the population, and the predominantly urban readership of illustrated magazines.¹⁷

Between the wars this view had become a mainstay of guidebooks and a whole body of imagery—often photographic—aimed at the day tripper and bourgeois holidaymaker, mobile now thanks to trains, buses, and motor car. Potts points out how such an aestheticized and complacent view differed from late Victorian and Edwardian traditions of countryside description in which the countryside was the site of social issues as well as beauty. The interwar period was responsible, says Potts, for the invention of certain features—now clichés—of landscape depiction: the focus on 'chequer-board fields, hedgerows, copses and old buildings nestling in comforting hollows'.¹⁸ Yet the new, aestheticized landscape of Britain as featured in *Picture Post* and *Country Life*—a landscape of visitable vistas and views, peppered with historic landmarks—also drew elements from a longer heritage of Romantic topography dating back to the eighteenth century, including elements of a mystical version of Albion as imagined by William Blake and Samuel Palmer.

¹⁴ It was partly because the Archers' 1943 film *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* allowed German culture and history more complexity that it was condemned by Churchill. See I. Christie, ed., *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (London, 1994).

¹⁵ 'Constable Country between the Wars', in R. Samuel, ed., *Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity*, iii: *National Fictions* (London, 1989), 160.

¹⁶ See, for example, E. Helsing, 'Constable: The Making of a National Painter', *Critical Inquiry*, 15/2 (Winter 1989), 253–79 for how Constable's Suffolk landscapes came to perform this role for increasingly urban populations.

¹⁷ See C. H. Warren, *England is a Village* (London, 1940); H. V. Morton, 'The New "Merry England": Views from a Church Tower', *Country Life* (24 Aug. 1940), 160–3; 'The Land We Are Fighting For', 28.

¹⁸ 'Constable Country between the Wars', 166.

Taken together, these strands—the picturesque countryside of the guidebook, and the Romantic heritage (including the northern wildernesses) filtered through the Neo-Romantic taste for the archaic—formed something of a pictorial catalogue of a mythical Britain, informed by literature as well as painting and topography, a Britain happily haunted by the ghosts of the past—a Britain of cultural memory.

Of all these strands, one in particular should be underlined as significant in the way in which Britain's landscape was presented to its inhabitants in the 1930s, and was then re-framed in wartime, and this is the literature and visual culture of travel, especially motoring. Car ownership increased dramatically in this decade, and motoring—by car or by bus—became a popular and glamorous leisure pursuit, spawning its own literature, usually photographically (or lithographically) illustrated. Publications such as the series *The Homeland Illustrated*, first published by the Homeland Association in the 1920s, or the multi-volume *Wonderful Britain*, were aimed at car owners, and formed a catalogue of visitable sites and beauty spots, where picturesque photographs invited the viewer down deserted dappled lanes.¹⁹ In this literary and pictorial genre, identified by David Matless as the 'motoring pastoral', to travel in space was potentially to travel back in time to an essential, unchanging Britain, the Britain of dreams and history books.²⁰ The progenitor of this genre was *In Search of England* (1927) by H. V. Morton, who set out from London by car to discover the 'real', 'old' England;²¹ and it found visual form in the posters issued in the late 1920s and the 1930s by Shell. Shell's advertising campaigns between the wars, as we have seen in Chapter 4, revolved around the idea that motoring could open up an old country. Neither was this genre restricted to motoring. Posters issued by railway companies exhorted the viewer to 'See Britain by Train', offering enticing lithographic views like one from 1926 by Gregory Brown, advertising Kent as 'The Londoner's Garden', where a church and oast-houses nestle in a luminous springtime scene, framed by blossoming boughs, and untouched either by urbanization or by the tourism of which the poster is itself a part (Fig. 5.6).²² All of these campaigns and publications reduced the country to a series of scenes or sites—Stonehenge, Lake Windermere, 'A Suffolk Lane', and so on—places seen as pictures, sights which were the object of a journey, or perhaps just glimpsed from the window of a train or a car.

These sorts of images are strikingly similar to those which in 1940 were called upon to illustrate 'What we are fighting for'. In both Brown's lithograph and the

¹⁹ J. A. Hammerton, *Wonderful Britain: Its Highways, Byways and Historic Places* (London, n.d.). The Homeland Association was founded in 1896 'For the Encouragement of Touring in Great Britain', and published large numbers of topographical handbooks, regional guides, and popular books on architecture and antiquities.

²⁰ D. Matless, *Landscape and Englishness* (London, 1998), 63 ff.

²¹ H. V. Morton, *In Search of England* (London, 1927).

²² See B. Cole and R. Durack, *Railway Posters 1923–1947* (London, 1992). It is worth noting that not all railway advertising promoted these kinds of images of the landscape—much of it was dynamic and modern, including elements of modernity such as bridges, pylons, and the railway itself.



Fig. 5.6. (left). Gregory Brown, 'The Londoner's Garden—Kent', poster for Southern Railway (1926).

Fig. 5.7. (below). Frank Newbould, 'Your Britain: Fight for it Now' (*The South Downs*) (1942), poster issued by the Army Bureau of Current Affairs.



Picture Post image of Kent (Fig. 5.2), the oast houses are enveloped by a blooming landscape, snugly positioned beneath the horizon. No human beings, workers, or tourists spoil the view. Continuity between interwar travel and wartime propaganda is demonstrated in the figure of Frank Newbould, whose four posters designed for the Army Bureau of Current Affairs were issued in 1942 with the slogan ‘Your Britain—Fight for it Now’ (Fig. 5.7). Before the war Newbould had designed posters for the Great Western Railway (Fig. 5.8) which were not so very different; the scenes of desire that lay at the end of a journey could easily be reframed as a Britain worth fighting for.

During the war, inessential travel became impossible, and the dappled vistas, historic buildings, and seascapes promoted in pre-war travel literature and posters were no longer situated at the end of a journey, but were relegated to the memory and longing of those who had travelled before the war—or perhaps those who had just seen the enticing pictures. When magazines like *Picture Post* reproduced similar images during the war, they effectively stepped into the breach, restaging pre-war journeys (real or imaginary) in text and image; now these sights were the unattainable objects of desire and memory. Photographs of ‘the Garden of England’ or the Lake District assured middle-class readers that these places were still there, waiting patiently for the end of the war. In August 1940, *Country Life* published an article by H. V. Morton (the pre-war champion of the discovery of Britain by car) entitled ‘The New “Merry England”’. Morton, now by necessity confined to a single region, remembers his pre-war travels, and goes over all those places in his mind, describing them to his readers. The piece is accompanied by photographs of various localities, including one of Flamborough Head, which is captioned: ‘Memories of those lovely places in England which I shall not see again until the war is over.’²³ These images read as places in Morton’s memory, but at the same time they assure the reader of those places’ continuing existence in reality. With the weight of documentary evidence behind them, they gave concrete affirmation to a pre-war dream (and post-war promise) of fulfilment through travel and contact with the countryside.

A Still Place

The defining feature of affirmative images of Britain during the war was endurance—in all senses. This was a country that had weathered—and was weathered by—a long history, withstanding invasions both of nations and modernity: a country, therefore, that could endure this war. The medium of photography is crucial here, since—even if the photograph is some years old—it implies contemporaneity as well as reality. Photography’s link to the real implies that the idyll it represents does not only exist in myth, in painting, in the past, or

²³ ‘The New “Merry England”’, 160. As Michael Bartholomew has recently shown, Morton was not as benign or as patriotic as he appeared (*In Search of H. V. Morton* (London, 2004)).

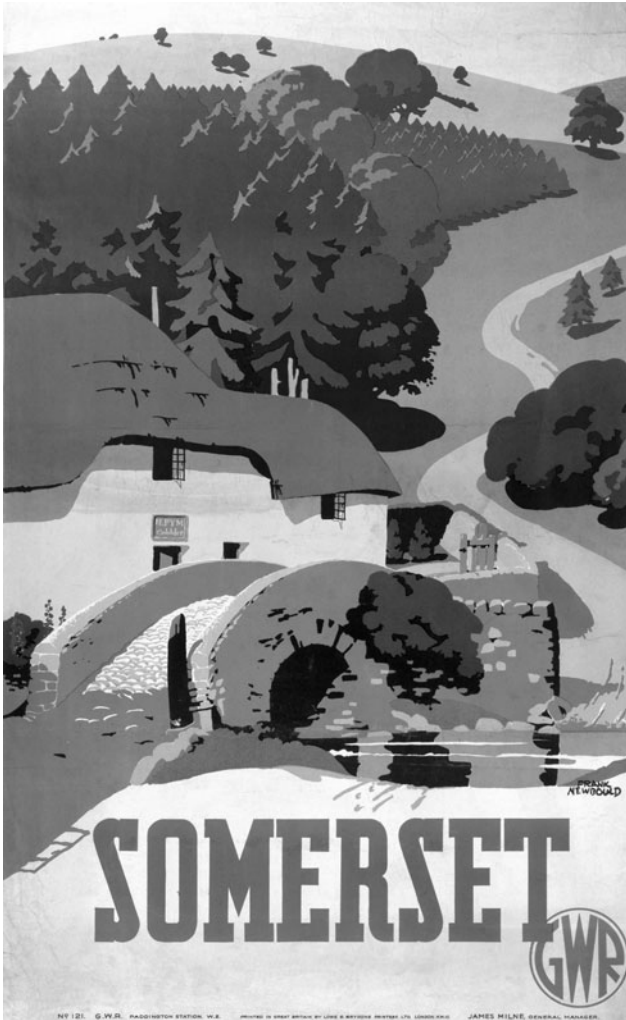


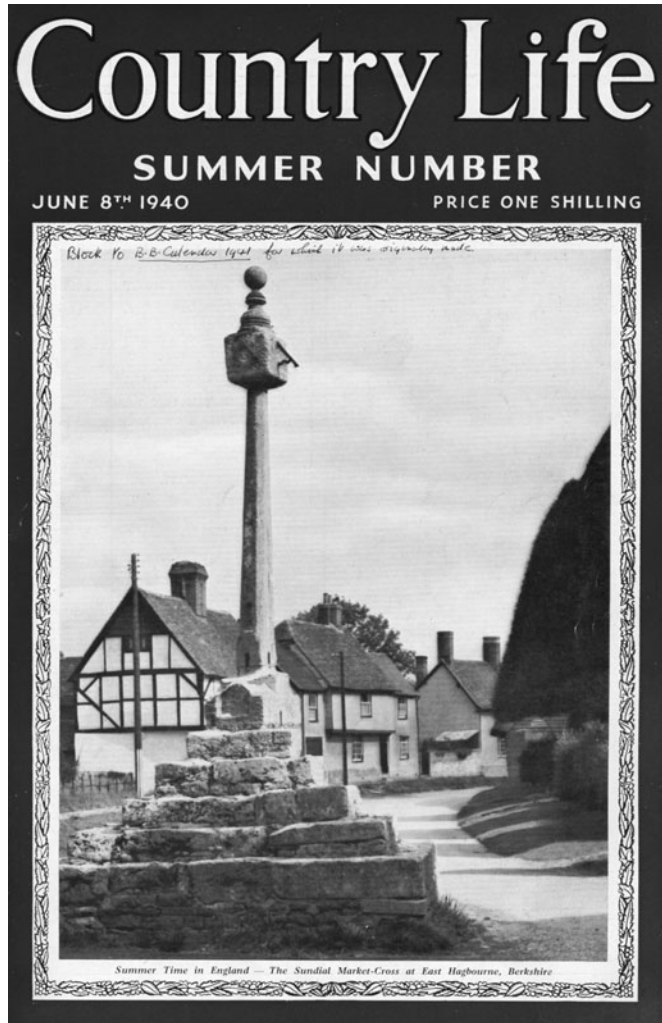
Fig. 5.8. Frank Newbould, 'Somerset', poster for Great Western Railway (1936).

in memory. Together with captions which invariably used the present tense ('The Farm-cart That Sets the Pace'; 'The Stream That Runs Through the Town'), these photographs seemed to document that this dreamtime country still exists out there.²⁴ Thus was photography put to work in its time-honoured role as the naturalizer of ideology.²⁵

²⁴ This sense also guides Morton's *In Search of England*, already in its 29th edition by 1943. See K. Hauser, 'Bowling Along', *London Review of Books* (17 Mar. 2005), 28.

²⁵ This endemic usage of photography has been pointed out by Abigail Solomon-Godeau (among others): 'what informs all modern approaches to the politics of photographic representation is not a Platonic protest at the dissimulative nature of photography... but the far more disturbing apprehension

Fig. 5.9. 'Summer Number', cover of *Country Life* (8 June 1940).



The first issue of *Country Life* to appear after Dunkirk had on its cover a photograph captioned 'Summer Time in England—the Sundial Market-Cross at East Hagbourne, Berkshire' (Fig. 5.9). This image, in combination with its caption, features many of the qualities characteristic of the 'What We Are Fighting For' genre: the embodiment of the general ('England') in the particular (East Hagbourne); the apparently ineradicable traces of the past (the market cross, the

of the power of mechanically or electronically generated images to render ideology innocent, to naturalize domination, to displace history and memory' (*Photography at the Dock: Essays on Photographic History, Institutions, and Practices* (Minneapolis, 1997), p. xxxiv).

old buildings); the peaceful coexistence of elements (the scene is undisturbed by the slight presence of modernity in the form of a telegraph pole); the symbolic representation of time-won features of British life (the market cross neatly links Christianity and commerce in an image); and the empty, dreamlike quality, making the scene seem like a remembered place as much as a real one. The photograph, placed here on this date, is evidently designed to appeal to memory and patriotism, and its subject, a sundial, is perhaps significant. Telling the time by shadows, the sundial has something in common with photography itself—Barthes described cameras as ‘clocks for seeing’.²⁶ And since the time it tells is cyclical time, the fact that this old and weathered market cross doubles up as a sundial neatly links the ongoing presence of the past with the indestructible cycles of natural time—the former, it suggests, may be as permanent as the latter.

Within the rhetorical structure of the discourse that flourished around these sorts of images, the keyword was ‘still’. A typical image is one illustrating ‘What We Are Fighting For’, where a pastoral scene (reminiscent, perhaps of Constable or Thomas Hardy) is accompanied by the caption ‘ENGLAND: Where A Man’s Home is Still His Castle’.²⁷ Nor is such a structure confined to rural images. In an article of April 1941 celebrating the continuing existence of the ‘London Carter’, *Picture Post* published a full-page photograph of the City of London—which by now had suffered serious bomb damage—with the caption ‘The Grandest View in the World . . . and It’s Still There’ (Fig. 5.10). Such images were, of course, also intended to stand in for other kinds of wartime endurance, particularly the endurance of a (historic) fighting spirit. St Paul’s Cathedral (the ‘indomitable cathedral’ seen in this photograph) performed this function particularly well, since unlike the buildings which surrounded it, its familiar silhouette survived bombing raids largely unscathed; and the building also already possessed its own history of iconic significance, arising out of the ashes of the Great Fire of London and subsequently serving as the symbolic centre of the capital of a global empire.²⁸

This keyword ‘still’ should be seen in relation to the reality of bombardment and the threat of invasion, but it should also be seen against a backdrop of pre-war preservationist discourse (see Introduction) in which modernity is seen as just such a ‘rupture’ in the natural course of time. The dialectic of endurance and destruction remains the same; it was only the source of the threat and the affirmation of survival that were different. Now the dialectic was heavily weighted in favour of the indestructible nature of the landscape, come what may. In one of his

²⁶ R. Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (London, 1984), 15.

²⁷ ‘What We Are Fighting For’, 32.

²⁸ See J. R. Ryan, *Picturing Empire: Photography and the Visualization of the British Empire* (London, 1997), 218. St Paul’s survival, like that of other churches, was not miraculous so much as the consequence of the work of teams of trained fire-watchers. For an account of the St Paul’s night watch see J. M. Richards, *Memoirs of an Unjust Fella* (London, 1980), 148 ff.

'Postscripts' for the BBC in June 1940, J. B. Priestley mused that the British landscape 'was there long before the Germans went mad, and will be there when that madness is only remembered as an old nightmare'.²⁹ A similar sentiment was expressed by C. Henry Warren in 1941: 'England's might is still in her fields and villages, and though the whole weight of mechanized armies roll over them to crush them, in the end they will triumph.'³⁰

In these and other pronouncements, Britain's threatened landscape was resurrected as powerful essence, what was 'disappearing' was rewritten as 'still there'; the obverse of the coin of modernization—history, memory, a rural Britain in



Fig. 5.10. 'The Grandest View in the World . . . and It's Still There', from 'London Carter', *PP* (19 Apr. 1941).

²⁹ J. B. Priestley, *Postscripts* (London, 1940), 6.

³⁰ *England is a Village*, p. ix.

rude health—was mobilized in the cause of propaganda and reassurance, for now what threatened it was no longer urbanization, the inevitable if unsightly result of the forces of capital, but bombardment and invasion from ‘an industrial society run amok’. Interestingly enough, the idealized image of the German landscape promoted by the Nazis had certain visual and conceptual similarities to the Romantic and Neo-Romantic idyll in this country; but this parallel seems—unsurprisingly—to have gone unremarked.³¹

Preservationist issues may have been put on hold, but they resurfaced almost immediately. *Picture Post's* special issue ‘The Land of Britain’, which came out on 3 January 1942, contained the usual affirmative photographs of the British landscape—but here they were contrasted with images of bad planning, and accompanied by articles which demanded preservation. Clough Williams-Ellis, the editor of the pre-war preservationist classic *England and the Octopus*, contributed an article to this issue, entitled ‘What we have Done to our Country’. ‘On top of the Britain we love is a Britain we are not so proud of’, wrote Williams-Ellis, implying that a better, older Britain lay underneath an imposed layer of modernity—and the photograph dominating the same page showed, apparently, an image of just such a layer (Fig. 5.11). ‘We fight to keep our country free of its enemies in war’, continued Williams-Ellis. ‘We must fight to rid it of its enemies in peace.’³² The same issue of *Picture Post* included an article by C. E. M. Joad, a prominent preservationist before the war and a contributor to *Britain and the Beast*. The article, ‘The Land We’re Fighting For’, gave a new inflection to the by-now-familiar phrase, a demand for thoughtful post-war planning: ‘This New Year’s number is a plea’, he wrote. ‘It is a plea that the ancient beauty of the British countryside, with all its rich architectural inheritance, shall be cherished and restored. . . It is a plea put forward on behalf of everybody—but particularly on behalf of the men and women in our fighting forces.’³³ Not for long could enemy attacks or invasion be represented as the major threat to an otherwise unspoilt landscape. Not the least threat to the British countryside, as many commentators—including O. G. S. Crawford—pointed out, were building works connected with the war effort. And after the Blitz, many more historic landscapes and buildings were destroyed in the course of ‘modernization’. But for a short period, war gave Britain a chance to represent itself (to itself and—crucially—to America) as

³¹ Potts notes how certain pre-First World War theories of racial purity found themselves transferred to the inanimate landscape between the wars in this country (‘Constable Country between the Wars’, 166), and an undeniable equation is made between the archaeological nature of this layered landscape and the depth of memory of its inhabitants, a memory which could be seen to be ‘racial’. Nazi racial theories likewise extended to the German landscape, which was commonly held to be the source of national strength and national memory, in a celebration of ‘Blood and Soil’. See L. Becker, ‘Aspects of the Art of the Third Reich’, in Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh, *The Romantic Spirit in German Art 1790–1990* (1994), 390–2. Terry Eagleton lists the affinities as well as the contrasts between fascism and conservative reaction: ‘If the former touts a demonic version of blood and soil, the latter promotes an angelic one’ (‘Nudge-Winking’, *London Review of Books* (19 Sept. 2000), 6).

³² ‘What We Have Done To Our Country’, *PP* (3 Jan. 1942), 13–17.

³³ ‘The Land We’re Fighting For’, 7.

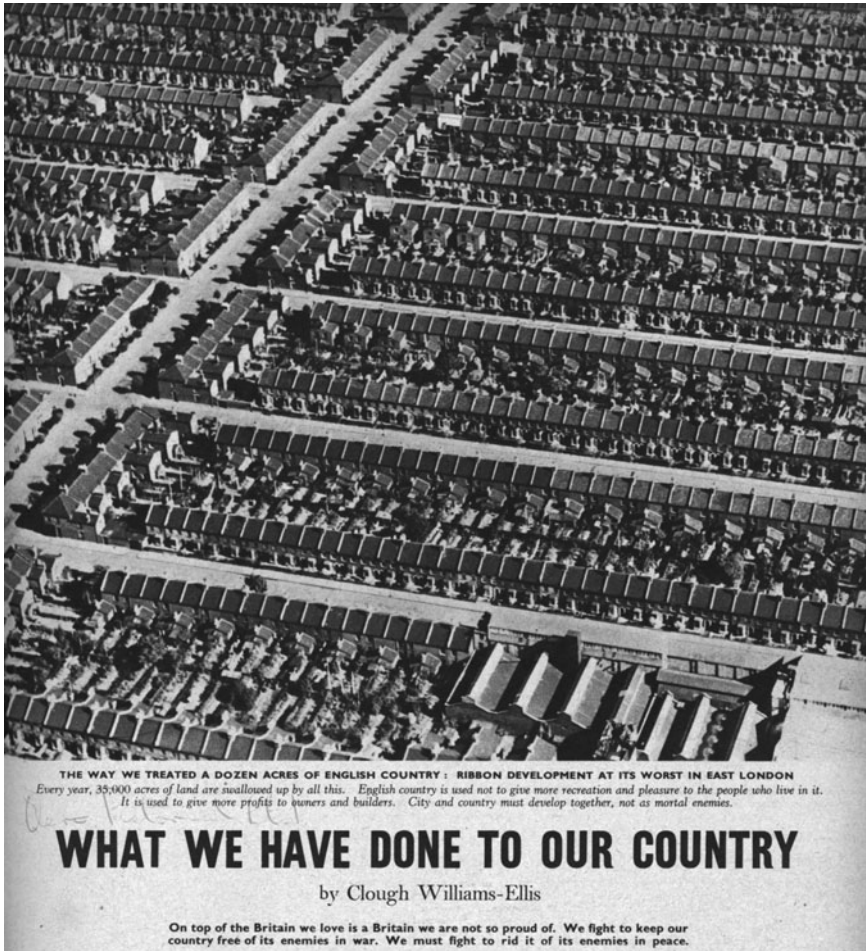


Fig. 5.11. Clough Williams-Ellis, 'What We Have Done to Our Country', *PP* (3 Jan. 1942).

the guardian of time, resurrecting without irony or qualification the vision of a mythical Romantic landscape which in the 1930s had existed so uneasily alongside horrified accounts of unplanned development and documentary images of urban deprivation. This role of guardian of time was a comfortable one for Britain to play—since, as we have seen, all of its components already existed in the catalogue of landscape representation and national identity, lodged deep in the bourgeois psyche—but it was a role which could not sustain itself for long once the immediate conditions of 'standing alone' no longer obtained. Beautiful Britain could only ever really be a Britain of the imagination.

ARCHIVING BRITAIN

National Buildings Record

At the same moment as the existence of an enduring landscape was being affirmed and reaffirmed in text and image, preparations—through the same medium of photography—were being made for its imminent disappearance. Comprehensive attempts to record national monuments and landscapes were part of what John Taylor describes as ‘a general scramble . . . to record various aspects of England in order to preserve it’.³⁴ Such attempts had begun in the late nineteenth century, with projects like the Birmingham Photographic Society’s survey of Warwickshire (the brainchild of W. Jerome Harrison in 1890—see Chapter 2), the London Survey Committee (founded in 1894), and Benjamin Stone’s National Photographic Record Association (begun in 1897).³⁵ The rationale for these ‘salvage’ projects was the change wrought on the landscape and in society by modernization.³⁶ When in 1940 the threat of aerial bombardment became a reality, the pictorial ‘salvage’ survey was given new impetus; this time the threat was less insidious but potentially more cataclysmic.³⁷

The NBR was founded in 1940 after the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) held a conference in November in the wake of the first wave of aerial bombardment to discuss the lack of a national body responsible for recording architecture. The Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (RCHM) had been disbanded at the beginning of the war, leaving only a small staff guarding the archive at Pembroke College in Cambridge; in any case its main function was to record pre-1714 buildings and monuments. Other surveys still active, such as the London Survey Committee, generally operated on a voluntary basis, tended to be local in their activities, and lacked sufficient funds and personnel to carry out comprehensive records. As a result of the RIBA conference, attended by representatives from eighteen societies, a committee secured the co-operation of Lord Reith, newly appointed Minister of Works and Buildings. In December an advisory council was agreed upon, consisting of ten members, including Sir Kenneth Clark, the Dean of Norwich (chairman of the Central Council of the Care of Churches), and A. W. Clapham (President of the Society of Antiquaries).³⁸ The council met in January 1941 and appointed the architect and antiquary Walter

³⁴ J. Taylor, *A Dream of England: Landscape, Photography, and the Tourist’s Imagination* (Manchester, 1994) 190.

³⁵ See W. J. Harrison, *Notes upon a Proposed Photographic Survey of Warwickshire* (Birmingham, 1890), and the earlier F. A. S. Marshall, *Photography: The Importance of its Application in Preserving Pictorial Records of the National Monuments of History and Art* (London, 1855).

³⁶ See James, ‘Evolution of the Photographic Record and Survey Movement’.

³⁷ See Taylor, *A Dream of England*, 50 ff.

³⁸ Victoria and Albert Museum, London, *50 Years of the National Buildings Record 1941–1991* (1991), 4.

Godfrey as Director, and the architectural historian and journalist John Summerson as Deputy Director.³⁹ With funds garnered from the American Leverhulme, Rockefeller, and Pilgrim trusts, as well as a grant from the Treasury and some private donations, the newly established NBR installed itself in Portland Place in central London, moving to safer headquarters at All Souls College in Oxford in September 1941.⁴⁰

The declared aims of the NBR, as set out in a memorandum of its first year, were threefold:

- (a) The maintenance of a Central Index or Register of records of buildings
- (b) The recording of War-damaged buildings
- (c) The recording of buildings before they are damaged.⁴¹

The last two of these were Summerson's main objective, while Godfrey handled the administration and co-ordination of existing records. For Summerson—perhaps the NBR's prime mover—the activities of the NBR were an urgent race against time, especially after the so-called 'Baedeker Raids' of April and May 1942, which targeted British towns of historical interest as revenge for the RAF bombing of Lübeck.⁴² Summerson's main priority was to make records of buildings and monuments in vulnerable areas, before it was too late—as it was in the case of many of the churches destroyed in the City of London.

The documentation of threatened and damaged buildings was carried out by both professional and amateur photographers, initially on an ad hoc basis. After July 1941, thanks to money from the Rockefeller Foundation, the NBR was able to employ a number of staff photographers including Herbert Felton, Margaret Tomlinson, and G. Bernard Mason.⁴³ Other photographers were employed from time to time in specific localities. Summerson spent much of his time securing permits and access for these photographers; the photographing of bomb-damaged buildings was forbidden without a permit, and any kind of photographic documentation in built-up areas during the war was viewed with suspicion. The NBR worked with other groups, many of whom volunteered to undertake specific tasks. The staff of the RCHM, for example, took over the recording of

³⁹ Another important figure in the early days was E. J. Carter, librarian at RIBA, who had helped facilitate the employment of refugee architects from Nazi-occupied Europe (Victoria and Albert Museum, 50 Years, 3). ⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 4.

⁴¹ *1st Annual Report of the National Buildings Record* (Oxford, 1942), unpaginated.

⁴² The Baedeker raids were named after the guidebooks which listed towns and cities with numbers of stars, awarded according to architectural importance. In April 1942 a member of the German foreign office declared that from now on, the Germans would target British towns with three stars, a comment which was publicized by *The Times* (although in fact no British town had more than two stars). See N. Rothnie, *The Baedeker Blitz: Hitler's Attack on Britain's Historic Cities* (Shepperton, 1992). The Treasury grant to the NBR was increased from £2,000 to £4,000 in the NBR's second year owing to the need for increased activity after the Baedeker raids (*2nd Annual Report of the National Buildings Record* (Oxford, 1943), unpaginated).

⁴³ Both the NBR and the 'Recording Britain' project were dependent upon American money. A third of all sales of the four volumes of 'Recording Britain' were in the USA (Mellor, Saunders, and Wright, eds., *Recording Britain*, 9).

certain districts in consultation with the NBR. It was through the RCHM that O. G. S. Crawford's services were secured for the documentation of Southampton, which had been badly bombed in November 1940.⁴⁴ The Warburg Institute undertook the photographic documentation of a number of London buildings. County archaeological and architectural societies were encouraged to form regional committees to assist with the work of the NBR.⁴⁵ Members of the public were asked to contribute whatever records or snapshots they could. 'The whole photographic strength of the country should be mobilized for this urgent work', proclaimed the NBR in its first annual report.⁴⁶

As well as actively documenting threatened and damaged buildings, the NBR aimed to amass and co-ordinate existing local records. According to Summerson, Godfrey stubbornly 'set himself to realise the ambition of a lifetime—the creation of a national archive of architecture'.⁴⁷ Copies of photographs in the collection of the RCHM were deposited in the NBR. Libraries and museums were urged to send lists of negatives in their collections so that local records could be harmonized. The NBR absorbed other historic archives, such as the collection of the Victorian photographer Henry Taunt of Oxford. Early photographic archives such as this one, as well as interwar gazetteers and surveys, gained a new significance as they were incorporated into the newly-established archive. Perhaps the most significant was the Conway Library (according to Summerson probably 'the largest existing photographic collection of English architecture and sculpture in the country'), which moved—along with its librarian, Cecil Farthing—from the Courtauld Institute to the NBR's headquarters in the autumn of 1941.⁴⁸

Through these compiling, recording, and accumulating activities, the NBR became a vortex, pulling into its orbit all kinds of images of buildings, past and present. In April 1942 the total number of accessions to the NBR collection was 19,012; by April 1945 it had swelled to 247,000.⁴⁹ The aim was to create a pictorial archive of every building and monument of note, as well as images of examples of building types, in a comprehensive inventory of Britain's built environment. If such buildings and monuments came and went with the vicissitudes of time, here, at least, was a place where they still existed, albeit in two-dimensional, monochrome, radically miniaturized form. When the NBR mounted an exhibition of its work at the National Gallery in June 1944, it certainly appealed to John Piper's topophilia. Displayed in this gallery context, the NBR's catalogue of deadpan images was readily assimilated to the aesthetic sensibility of this Neo-Romantic mandarin:

A Customs House in a Cornish sea-port, village churches with medieval pews, others with eighteenth century box pews, medieval and classical monuments, a Victorian Corn

⁴⁴ *1st Annual Report*.

⁴⁵ A list of eighteen such regional committees was listed in Appendix A of the *1st Annual Report*.

⁴⁷ Victoria and Albert Museum, *50 Years*, 4.

⁴⁶ *1st Annual Report*.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 8.

⁴⁹ *1st Annual Report*; *4th Annual Report of the National Buildings Record* (Oxford, 1945), unpaginated.

Exchange in a Wiltshire town, a later Victorian cathedral, warehouse exteriors, theatre interiors, Georgian streets, stucco villas in their own grounds, details of work in wood, brick, stone, plaster and cast-iron—all these hang side by side without fear or favour and are agreeable because they have been recorded for their merit alone.⁵⁰

Piper delighted in the somewhat random nature of the exhibited images and the historical foreshortening implied by their juxtaposition; yet the aims of the project were somewhat grander. In a broadcast for the BBC in 1944, Summerson optimistically voiced the hope that with the NBR

we have . . . the beginnings of that national archive of the art of building which will do for architecture what the great libraries do for every branch of literature and music. At the present moment, the NBR is housed in a suite of college rooms at Oxford . . . Here will eventually be plotted the whole course of English architecture from before the Norman Conquest to the present day.⁵¹

In practice, however, the archive was somewhat patchier, since it was constrained by financial factors as well as the availability of images. The NBR's dream, though, was of a total record: a record of buildings no longer in existence as well as those still present. It was the dream of the 'universal archive' described by Michel Foucault: 'to enclose all times, all eras, forms and styles within a single place, the concept of making all times into one place, and yet a place that is outside time, inaccessible to the wear and tear of the years, according to a plan of almost perpetual and unlimited accumulation within an irremovable place'.⁵² The impracticable nature of this idea deterred neither its nineteenth-century proponents nor their twentieth-century successors.

The NBR was primarily a salvage operation, and as such conformed to a preservationist sensibility rather than an archaeological one. It invited, however, an archaeological imagination on the part of its photographers, who were required to seek out corners of the British landscape and its monuments, bringing to light often unnoticed aspects of the built environment, the remnants of past ages. In the case of two photographers—Bill Brandt, and Helmut Gernsheim working for the Warburg Institute—there was a congruency between their own modernist sensibilities and the NBR brief to produce records of 'overlapping elevational views of exteriors of houses and churches, interiors, wherever of interest, and detailed views of all fittings and features that have character of their own'.⁵³ The resulting images blur the boundaries between blank document and work of art.

⁵⁰ J. Piper, 'The English and their Architecture', *The Listener* (8 June 1944), 640.

⁵¹ 'For Future Better Times', *The Listener* (5 Oct. 1944), 373.

⁵² M. Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias', in N. Leach, ed., *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory* (London, 1997), 355.

⁵³ Appendix B, *1st Annual Report*, unpaginated. Pictorialism was frowned upon by the NBR: the staff photographer Herbert Felton was chastised by Summerson for being a 'fine photographer but with an incorrigible preference for picturesque views over disciplined recording' (Victoria and Albert Museum, *50 Years*, 5).

Gernsheim and the Warburg Institute

Helmut Gernsheim went to England from Germany in 1937, and in March 1942 began work as a photographer at the Warburg Institute in London. Itself uprooted along with staff members from Nazi Germany late in 1933, the Warburg Institute had been formed for the study of the classical tradition, especially through those iconographic strands that linked ancient and modern.⁵⁴ The institute's remit, established by its founder, Aby Warburg, was to explore the survival of antiquity ('Nachleben der Antike'), through a kind of iconographical archaeology. By using the word 'survival', Warburg explicitly drew on the work of the nineteenth-century anthropologist E. B. Tylor, who saw vestiges of past cultures within contemporary life.⁵⁵ For Warburg and his fellow scholars, the transmission of signs and symbols, their survival and revivals constituted the cultural memory of the world, and it was important that this memory be traced and kept: the word *MNHMOΣYNH* ('Memory') was inscribed over the door to the Warburg library in Hamburg, and re-inscribed in the corresponding location when the library moved to London.⁵⁶ To this end photography was seen as a vital tool in the creation of an archive of cultural forms in different times and places, creating a picture of the world's memory bank of images and facilitating art-historical research.⁵⁷

Helmut Gernsheim studied at the State School of Photography in Munich between 1934 and 1936, and had developed there a radically anti-pictorialist mode of 'pure' photography which owed much to the work of *Neue Sachlichkeit* photographers of the 1920s, a mode he publicized in his 1942 book *New Photo Vision*.⁵⁸ At Munich, Gernsheim 'soon learned that good photography and a factual, realistic presentation were inseparable'.⁵⁹ Thus when the Warburg Institute gave him the task of photographing various London buildings and monuments in 1942 in collaboration with the NBR, Gernsheim saw no contradiction between his own artistic practice and this work of utilitarian documentation.⁶⁰

⁵⁴ For an excellent account of the early years and significance of the Warburg Institute, see C. Hollis Landauer, *The Survival of Antiquity: The German Years of the Warburg Institute* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1998). ⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 5, 298.

⁵⁶ E. H. Gombrich, *Aby Warburg: An Intellectual Biography* (Oxford, 1986), 239 ff.

⁵⁷ It was just such a total picture that Aby Warburg attempted to create in the last years of his life (he died in 1929) in the uncompleted 'Mnemosyne' project, a pictorial atlas recapitulating the formation of the Western mind. This took the form of forty screens onto which Warburg pinned large numbers of images, which he arranged and rearranged into different patterns. (See Gombrich, *Aby Warburg*, 283 ff. and M. Rampley, 'Archives of Memory: Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project* and Aby Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas*', in A. Coles, ed., *The Optic of Walter Benjamin* (London, 1999), 94–117).

⁵⁸ For Gernsheim's own account of his early career, see H. Gernsheim, ed., *The Man behind the Camera* (1948).

⁵⁹ H. Gernsheim, *Creative Photography: Aesthetic Trends 1839–1960* (London, 1962), 182.

⁶⁰ Gernsheim's first publications were devoted to raising the artistic status of the photographic record, most notably in *The Man behind the Camera*.

Towards the end of his studies in Munich, Gernsheim began taking close-up shots of plants and flowers, in the manner of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* photographer Karl Blossfeldt (Fig. 5.12). Like Blossfeldt, Gernsheim found formal similarities between plants, seen close up, and architectural forms, similarities which—as Walter Benjamin noted—could best be seen through the medium of photography, with its capacity to render equivalent radically different scales.⁶¹ Through such organic analogies of form, Gernsheim set about making architectural records that went way beyond the plain records demanded by the NBR, as in a defamiliarizing view of a spiral staircase at the Royal Naval College in Greenwich (Fig. 5.13). ‘The same methods which I had adopted in the photography of flowers I now applied to architecture and sculpture’, wrote Gernsheim in 1948, looking back on this time.⁶²

It was one flower project in particular that had provided the model for Gernsheim’s work for the NBR. To obtain a total picture of a dandelion throughout its life cycle, he had taken a large number of photographs of each of its parts at

Fig. 5.12. Helmut Gernsheim, *Hog-Weed* (*Heracleum*) (1936).



⁶¹ See Benjamin’s 1928 review of Blossfeldt’s *Urformen der Kunst*, repr. in D. Mellor, ed., *Germany: The New Photography 1927–33* (London, 1978), 20–1.

⁶² *The Man behind the Camera*, 108.



Fig. 5.13. Helmut Gernsheim, *Spiral Staircase at the Royal Naval College, Greenwich: Looking Down* (1943).

various stages of development; and it was this systematic survey of an object through close-up views of its details that Gernsheim employed when working for the NBR. Thus, rarely content with the view from the ground, Gernsheim clambered over buildings and monuments to photograph overlooked architectural details and unusual viewpoints, aiming for a total photographic record.⁶³ Climbing up the south-west tower of St Paul's Cathedral, for example, he photographed its north-west tower in a position from which—according to him, at least—the building had never before been photographed. For his work on the monuments in Westminster Abbey, where he took over 400 negatives, Gernsheim used the same technique of photographing ornamental details of specific monuments close-up. To facilitate this, he used up to three 500-watt floodlights to throw sculptural details into dramatic relief. Through these two strategies of unusual viewpoints and strong lighting, Gernsheim aimed (literally) to bring to light aspects of the architectural record usually hidden from view, or shrouded in tenebrous obscurity.⁶⁴

Gernsheim's archaeological imagination can be seen in a photograph of Edward II's tomb in Gloucester Cathedral, taken in 1945 (Fig. 5.14). The head of the



Fig. 5.14. Helmut Gernsheim, *Tomb of Edward II, Gloucester Cathedral*.

⁶³ *The Man behind the Camera*, 105.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 106–9.

stone effigy, juxtaposed with an angel, is seen in intimate close-up, framed by the architecture of the tomb as well as by the photographic frame. Like the low sunlight that reveals shadow sites on the landscape, Gernsheim's floodlighting has thrown sculpted details into sharp and dramatic relief—and it has also revealed graffiti etched into the stone surface of the monument. Had Gernsheim wished merely to document this historic monument, he could have toned down the lighting so as not to reveal the graffiti, or perhaps photographed it from another angle. Evidently he considered these scratched initials and signatures to be an integral component of the tomb, which is not just a medieval sculpture but also the site of subsequent inscriptions, alterations, and wear. Gernsheim's image of the tomb is of a scarred history, bearing the evidence of many historical passers-by.⁶⁵

In his work for the Warburg Institute Gernsheim wanted both to make striking pictures and to make a contribution to art-historical knowledge. His photographs of (often hidden or unremarked) iconographic detail were certainly very much in accord with the Warburg's remit as described above. Gernsheim himself had wanted to be an art historian, and he later congratulated himself on his work for the Warburg, saying: 'my early wish to make a small contribution to art research has found fulfilment in my photographs'.⁶⁶ Nor was this merely conceit on his part: Pevsner noted approvingly how Gernsheim's photographs 'can stop you to concentrate on something which the eye roving over the whole of a wall or a statue may miss completely'.⁶⁷ Gernsheim's images of Westminster Abbey featured prominently in the July 1943 issue of the *Architectural Review*, where they were praised as both photographic art and art-historical tools: 'Their very photographic vigour and piquancy have achieved nothing short of a re-discovery of the Baroque monuments in Westminster Abbey', ran a photo caption.⁶⁸ An effusive article by Kenneth Clark proclaimed that these photographs 'should be the first step in a new valuation of English art'.⁶⁹

Photography, with its ability to focus on the otherwise-overlooked detail, could effectively rewrite chapters of art history, as scholars at the Warburg Institute knew. These scholars saw how photography played a vital part in the formation and maintenance of memory, too. In 1941 the Warburg mounted a large-scale photographic exhibition, entitled 'British Art and the Mediterranean', which sought to establish points of contact between these two cultures throughout history, at a time when the Mediterranean was a major theatre of war and fascist

⁶⁵ For a relevant discussion of the photography of sculpture, see E. P. Janis, 'Fabled Bodies: Some Observations on the Photography of Sculpture', in Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco, *The Kiss of Apollo: Photography and Sculpture 1845 to the Present* (1991), 9–21; and M. Bergstein, 'Lonely Aphrodites: On the Documentary Photography of Sculpture', *Art Bulletin*, 74/3 (Sept. 1992), 475–98. See too G. A. Johnson, ed., *Sculpture and Photography: Envisioning the Third Dimension* (Cambridge, 1998).

⁶⁶ 'Foreword', in H. Gernsheim, *Focus on Architecture and Sculpture: An Original Approach to the Photography of Architecture and Sculpture* (London, 1949), 12. Pevsner used some of Gernsheim's photographs to illustrate *The Englishness of English Art*.

⁶⁷ 'Baroque and the National Shrine', *AR* (July 1943), 12.

⁶⁸ *AR* (July 1943), 2.

Italy was the enemy.⁷⁰ The photographs in this exhibition bore witness to the Mediterranean influence on British art since prehistoric times. When Gernsheim's images of St Paul's Cathedral were included, it was to demonstrate traces of Italian (as well as French and Flemish) influence in the design of Wren's building, so often touted as the very symbol of enduring Britishness. The Warburg Institute made it its business to preserve the memory of such lineages; photography was the vital handmaiden in this project of recording and preserving, acting as proof of existence and insurance against effacement.

Bill Brandt

Memory is foregrounded in a rather different way in Bill Brandt's work for the NBR. Whereas Gernsheim had been schooled in the New Photography of 1920s Germany, Brandt's photographic practice emerged from his association with the Surrealist photographer Man Ray. In 1941 Summerson employed Brandt to photograph the interiors and monuments of endangered churches and cathedrals. Between 1941 and 1943 Brandt worked (on and off) for the NBR, photographing Rochester, Chichester, and Canterbury cathedrals, as well as some churches in Essex and Spencer House in London.⁷¹ Like Gernsheim, he seems to have recognized no conflict between this commission and his own photographic concerns.⁷² Inside these buildings Brandt found plenty of subject-matter that chimed with his own obsessions: uncanny effigies and funerary monuments, the dramatic play of light on ancient stone, curiously incongruous incursions of domesticity—a ladder leaning against a wall, an old boiler (Figs. 5.15 and 5.16). In elements such as these, Brandt found both Surrealist interest and resonance as witness to centuries of history. 'There was a centre to [Brandt's] imagination', writes Ian Jeffrey, 'and it involved desertion, dereliction, the archaic.'⁷³ There was thus a congruity between Brandt's sensibility and the NBR project, and as a result the topical threat of annihilation and absence is articulated within the photographs themselves—it is not merely the occasion of their taking. This congruity means that many of the photographs that Brandt took for the NBR can easily be assimilated into his *oeuvre* by photographic historians—they can, apparently, stand as art as well as records.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ See F. Saxl and R. Wittkower, *British Art and the Mediterranean* (Oxford, 1948). This was one of a series of four exhibitions.

⁷¹ These are held at the National Monuments Record, Swindon. As Nigel Warburton points out, it was on assignment that Brandt did most of his best work at this time. As Brandt himself described it, 'the necessity of fulfilling a contract—the sheer *having* to do a job—supplies an incentive, without which the taking of photographs just for fun seems to leave the fun rather flat' (quoted in N. Warburton, 'Bill Brandt's Cathedral Interiors: Rochester and Canterbury', *History of Photography*, 17/3 (Autumn 1993), 263).

⁷² I. Jeffrey, ed., *Bill Brandt: Photographs 1928–1983* (London, 1993), 10.

⁷³ In his 1993 article, Warburton remarks that Brandt's NBR work 'is seldom given due attention in surveys of his career', and sets about rectifying this anomaly, seeing the same sensibility giving 'coherence to his photography across the different genres' ('Bill Brandt's Cathedral Interiors', 263, 268). Brandt's photographs of monuments in Canterbury Cathedral had been included by Mellor in his discussion of 'Brandt's Phantasms' in 1985, however, and they were also included in the 1993 retrospective at the Barbican (Jeffrey, ed., *Bill Brandt*).



Fig. 5.15 (*left*). Bill Brandt, *Canterbury Cathedral* (1941–2).

Fig. 5.16 (*below*). Bill Brandt, *Rochester Cathedral* (1942).



Through his choice of subject-matter, in Brandt's work Surrealist motifs and defamiliarizing strategies were always freighted with the weight of history. For Brandt, arriving in the early 1930s, the British landscape was like a memory wherein fantastic 'finds' could be made.⁷⁵ To a photographer with this kind of sensibility, Canterbury Cathedral must have presented itself almost as a set of ready-made images, with its stone effigies of decaying verisimilitude, and its resonance as the site of history, literature, and legend: the shrine of St Thomas Becket, the destination of Chaucer's pilgrims, the location of T. S. Eliot's 1935 play *Murder in the Cathedral*.⁷⁶ Brandt's images of Britain's cathedrals, depopulated perhaps because of wartime, perhaps merely because of the dictates of NBR documentation, appear like the abandoned sites of historical action (see, for example, Fig. 5.16). Perhaps this is what Tom Hopkinson was alluding to when he spoke of Brandt's 'presentiment of the phantom in the doorway'.⁷⁷

The sense that some kind of an event has taken place in these interiors (or is about to) is emphasized by the dramatic lighting, which recalls a film set, perhaps for a detective thriller.⁷⁸ Light and darkness were elements that Brandt made the most of in his photographic work. They are both the very (im)materials of photography and full of significance in themselves: significance that can be metaphysical (enlightenment), metaphorical (scientific progress—with photography as its tool—shines light into darkness, for example), and also historical, as wartime restrictions in the blackout gave light a heightened significance.⁷⁹ The dark chiaroscuro that appears in so many of Brandt's photographs of this period bore a freight of meaning beyond the simply aesthetic, or pictorial. 'It was in the 1940s', writes Mellor, 'that his shadows began to signify the historical past: attentive to the texts and turnings of British history, Brandt chose to represent a sinister, macabre aspect of architecture.'⁸⁰ As Mellor indicates, light and dark are not just formal matters for Brandt, and if shadows were linked to history, and the dark psyche of the nation's past, the process of illumination cast the photographer in the role of archaeologist or psychoanalyst. When Brandt turned his attention to the dark corners of these cathedrals in wartime, it was in the manner of one lighting up hidden recesses of memory.⁸¹ Like the tomb of Tutankhamun, these dark and

⁷⁵ In his essay 'Brandt's Phantasms', Mellor sketches out Brandt's 'grand phantasm itself: Britain, his shadowed object of desire' (in M. Haworth-Booth and D. Mellor, eds., *Bill Brandt: Behind the Camera. Photographs 1923–1983* (Oxford, 1985), 71).

⁷⁶ Brandt had photographed Canterbury Cathedral before, for the *Weekly Illustrated* (5 Mar. 1938).

⁷⁷ T. Hopkinson, 'Bill Brandt—Photographer', *Lilliput* (Aug. 1942), 141.

⁷⁸ In 1941–2, while working for the NBR, Brandt also made photographic stills on the sets of a number of British films in production; David Mellor notes how this experience 'seems to have decisively shifted his photographic practice toward tungsten lighting, arranged on cinematographic lines' ('Brandt's Phantasms', 73). Orson Welles's film *Citizen Kane* was released in 1941, and made a deep impression on Brandt.

⁷⁹ See A. Weight, 'Night for Day: The Wartime Nocturne in British Painting, 1940–45', in *PL*, 125–8.

⁸⁰ 'Brandt's Phantasms', 71.

⁸¹ While never articulated by Brandt himself, the lessons of Freudian psychoanalysis formed a fundamental part of his Surrealist sensibility. Literature on Brandt suggests that he had undergone

abandoned crevices and tombs are pockets of time stood still, perhaps for centuries, apparently undisturbed—until now.⁸² Brandt's attention is paid not so much to these survivors of history in isolation as to their coexistence with framing elements of modernity (the plumbing, for example, or the ladder in Fig. 5.16) or wartime precautions, such as the earth packed around stone effigies. As I have argued, this is a classic Neo-Romantic strategy: not so much a depiction of historical elements as a representation of the material inherence of the past in the present.

Brandt seems to have been particularly drawn to the effigies in Canterbury Cathedral. Effigies, like tailors' dummies, dolls, and waxworks, were favourite Surrealist subjects, in their uncanny confusion between the animate and the inanimate, and photography's inability to distinguish between the two. Brandt had cut his own Surrealist teeth with such images, publishing a photograph of two mannequins in a flea market in the Surrealist magazine *Minotaure* in 1934, and a series of photographs of abandoned figureheads from ships in Scilly printed in the same magazine in 1935.⁸³ The stone figures in Brandt's images of Canterbury Cathedral carry more weight, however, than any standard play on appearance and reality. On the one hand they are historically loaded, the stone ghosts of historical personages who still haunt the place in which they are entombed, their weathered appearance bearing witness to deep time; they are fragments of archaic Britain of the sort that Brandt often sought out in his work. But they should also be seen in the context of the work Brandt had done in 1940 for the MOI, photographing Londoners sheltering from air raids in the depths of the London underground and other makeshift refuges, including crypts. In both these shelter pictures and the photographs of effigies in Canterbury Cathedral human figures are protected by architectural structures in which they shelter, and in both sets of images there is an outside, undepicted threat that lends a poignancy to the sleeping figures (whether made of flesh or stone).

These similarities were brought out in a *Lilliput* double spread in January 1942, where one of Brandt's shelter pictures (a man sleeping in a London church crypt) is juxtaposed with a photograph, taken by Brandt for the NBR, of the sixteenth-century Sir Thomas Thornhurst monument in Canterbury Cathedral (Fig. 5.17). The caption under the first picture reads: 'There are worse places to sleep in than a coffin', to which the caption under the other replies: 'I know! I've been here 400 years already'. The sleeping figures mirror each other as they stretch out diagonally across the picture plane. The juxtaposition plays punningly on a series of doubles: animate and inanimate; flesh and stone; and especially the timeworn visual

psychoanalysis in Vienna in the late 1920s (Jeffrey, ed., *Bill Brandt*, 13) but Mark Haworth-Booth maintains that he was only treated for tuberculosis (*History of Photography*, 26/3 (Autumn 2002), 222).

⁸² This was a theme pursued by Brandt in other wartime work, including his 'Odd Corners of Museums', published in *Lilliput* in Feb. 1944, 155–62.

⁸³ R. Crevel, 'La grande mannequin cherche et trouve sa peau', *Minotaure* (1934), 18; 'Au cimetière des anciennes galères', *Minotaure* (Winter 1935), 4.

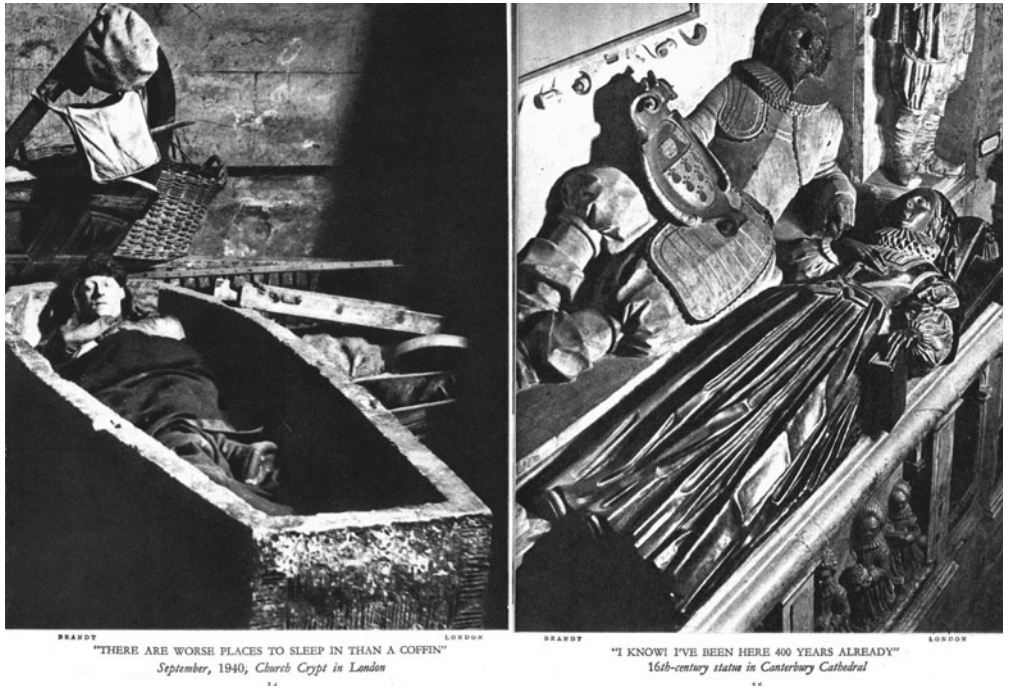


Fig. 5.17. Bill Brandt, double spread, *Lilliput*, 10/1 (Jan. 1942).

rhyming of sleep and death.⁸⁴ Together these pictures can be seen (perhaps rather obviously) to fulfil the criteria of Surrealist 'convulsive beauty' as defined by André Breton and interpreted by Hal Foster, where the confusion between animate and inanimate (in the category of the 'veiled-erotic') and the arresting of motion (in the category of the 'fixed-explosive') suggest the 'priority' and 'authority' of death, to which life is inexorably recalled.⁸⁵ Considering the urgent context in which both photographs were taken, the Surrealist play has immediate and topical significance, as the sleeping body in the coffin prefigures its own possibly imminent death. The (undepicted) threat of aerial bombing is the motor of a possible future narrative of destruction and death which may strike at any moment into the heart

⁸⁴ It is also possible to detect a juxtaposition of social class here, a favourite theme both for Brandt (for example in his book of photographs *The English at Home*) and in other photographic juxtapositions that featured in *Lilliput*, some anthologized in S. Lorant, *Chamberlain and the Beautiful Llama* (London, 1940). Thus the imagined conversation between the two figures stands for the much-vaunted inter-class Blitz camaraderie.

⁸⁵ H. Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1993), 25. Foster points out how photography almost cannot help but to produce such effects (p. 27).

of the peace of sleep and enduring history.⁸⁶ Through humour, however, the pair of images is saved for a more affirmative purpose. Sheltering from the storm, the two images represent endurance: the first a spirited endurance of adversity, and the second the endurance of history ('I've been here 400 years already'). When they are taken together, some kind of an equation is made between these types of endurance, scoring propagandist points by mapping one onto the other.

DAMAGED BRITAIN

Ghost Ruins and Bomb Sites

Ruination, unpredictable and instantaneous, hangs over all the pictures taken (and collected) for the NBR, whether Brandt's photographs of Canterbury Cathedral or pictures of provincial high streets or parish churches by amateur or staff photographers. The photograph of the eleventh-century church of St Benedict in Norwich shown in Fig. 5.18 was taken in July 1941 by Ernest Rahbula, the senior investigator for the RCHM. Seen in the context of documentation of at-risk areas, this otherwise unprepossessing photograph is haunted by a ghostly image of its ruination which exists, for the moment, only in the eye of the beholder. When, in April 1942, Norwich was the target of a Baedeker raid, the NBR sent G. B. Mason to photograph the ruins of the same church (Fig. 5.19). Being seen side by side (like the postcard of the Czech town of Lidice discussed in Chapter 2) effectively alters both images: the first is haunted by the second, and the second is seen as the ghostly *remains* of the first.⁸⁷

It was one of the NBR's main tasks to document bomb-damaged buildings before the rubble was swept away; the MOI made records of bomb sites too. Photographs from both sources were included in *The Bombed Buildings of Britain: A Record of Architectural Casualties: 1940–1* (1942), edited by J. M. Richards, with a foreword by Summerson. The previous year, *Country Life* had produced a book of photographs of bomb damage, *Britain under Fire*; the photographer Cecil Beaton produced *History under Fire: Fifty Two Photographs of Air Raid Damage to London Buildings, 1940–41*; and Lee Miller's photographs of the Blitz were published as *Grim Glory: Pictures of Britain under Fire*.⁸⁸ These books—aimed largely at an American audience—are generically somewhat unstable, uneasily poised between propaganda and a barely disguised aestheticization of destruction, especially in the

⁸⁶ Canterbury was, in fact, the victim of a Baedeker raid four months after these images appeared in *Lilliput*.

⁸⁷ Juxtaposing two images like this was also useful for demonstrating the value of the NBR, for here was a historic building recorded before it was too late. The images are reproduced in the catalogue to the 1991 exhibition '50 Years of the National Buildings Record'.

⁸⁸ J. B. Priestley, *Britain under Fire* (London, 1941); C. Beaton and J. Pope-Hennessy, *History under Fire: Fifty Two Photographs of Air Raid Damage to London Buildings, 1940–41* (London, 1941); E. Carter, ed., *Grim Glory: Pictures of Britain under Fire* (London, 1941).



Fig. 5.18. Ernest Rahbula, Church of St Benedict, Norwich (July 1941).



Fig. 5.19. G. B. Mason, Church of St Benedict, Norwich (Apr. 1942).



Fig. 5.20. Lee Miller, 'Indecent exposure?', from E. Carter, ed., *Grim Glory: Pictures of Britain under Fire* (1941).

last two instances. Both Beaton and Miller, along with Brandt, who photographed bomb damage in London and Bath, brought an aestheticizing eye to their subject-matter. Lee Miller was a complex figure who had collaborated with Man Ray in Paris, but in 1940 found work as a photographer for *Vogue*, and later as a war correspondent with US forces, before marrying the British Surrealist artist Roland Penrose in 1947.⁸⁹ Her photographs of the aftermath of the Blitz betray a Surrealist sensibility: half-naked shop dummies stand in the street (Fig. 5.20); in other images, a typewriter and a piano lie smashed to pieces. Her photograph of a Nonconformist chapel, the rubble from its destroyed walls pouring through the still-intact doorway like a river, echoes another image taken two years previously, of

⁸⁹ See A. Penrose, *The Lives of Lee Miller* (London, 1985); A. Penrose, ed., *Lee Miller's War: Photographer and Correspondent with the Allies in Europe 1944–5* (London, 1992); J. Livingston, *Lee Miller Photographer* (London, 1989).

a blocked doorway in Syria. Both are uncanny images, like something seen in a dream, where what was once a door is now a wall or a flood of rubble, and what was once an inhabitable building has been rendered *unheimlich*, or unhomely indeed.

Cecil Beaton's war work betrays an aestheticizing sensibility of a different sort. Before the war Beaton was a society photographer, best known for his portraits of aristocrats and his extraordinarily mannered fashion photographs. According to



Fig. 5.21. Cecil Beaton, 'The Western Campanile of St. Paul's Cathedral, seen through a Victorian shop front', used as frontispiece to C. Beaton and J. Pope-Hennessy, *History under Fire: Fifty Two Photographs of Air Raid Damage to London Buildings, 1940–41* (1941).

Beaton himself, the experience of war changed him as a photographer, causing him to renounce the frivolity of his earlier work, and this observation has been repeated and endorsed by many critics.⁹⁰ As Mellor points out, however, Beaton's photographs of the Blitz utilize many of the same devices as his images of society hostesses and country houses. 'To photograph the war', writes Mellor, 'Beaton turned it into a framed spectacle, with similar ornamental screens and sub-frames to seal in the picturesque ruins.'⁹¹ Stuart Morgan also sees Beaton's photographs of blitzed London as resembling theatre sets.⁹² Mellor cites as an example Beaton's photograph of St Paul's, used as the frontispiece to *History under Fire*, where the cathedral is framed by the ruined remains of a nearby building, 'like a rusticated screen' (Fig. 5.21).⁹³

Beaton's own testimony demonstrates the staged nature of this photograph: near St Paul's Cathedral, he wrote,

is a shop that has been burnt unrecognizably; in fact, all that remains is an arch that looks like a vista in the ruins of Rome. Through the arch could be seen, rising mysteriously from the splintered masonry and smoke, the twin towers of the cathedral. *It was necessary to squat to get the archway framing the picture. I squatted.*⁹⁴

He took his picture from a somewhat unnatural angle, then, to get the framing device he wanted. But images of ruined buildings, framed through an arch, window, or wrecked wall, were not exclusive to Beaton; in fact such a device was a central component of the language of visual representation of the Blitz (see, for example, Fig. 5.22).⁹⁵ Arguably, this was because he himself established a useful template for representing city ruins. According to Beaton, a press photographer saw him squatting to photograph St Paul's and copied him. After lunch, complained Beaton, he found this photographer's picture on the front page of the *Evening News*.⁹⁶ But even if he was emulated, he himself was drawing on a longer heritage of depicting ruins, in particular Piranesi, who for many artists and writers was a touchstone for visual and verbal descriptions of the aftermath of an air raid.⁹⁷

Similarly Lee Miller did not have a monopoly on a Surrealist apprehension of bomb damage. It became something of a wartime cliché to describe as surreal the curiously arbitrary nature of bomb damage, destroying some things and leaving others, making domestic interiors public and catapulting parts of the street into the home. After all, this was just a few years after the International Surrealist Exhibition had taken place in London. The aftermath of the Blitz on Plymouth,

⁹⁰ See, for example, P. Quennell, 'Commentary', in C. Beaton with P. Quennell, *Time Exposure* (2nd edn., London, 1946).

⁹¹ 'Beaton's Beauties: Self-Representation, Authority and British Culture', in D. Mellor, ed., *Cecil Beaton* (London, 1986), 35.

⁹² S. Morgan, 'Open Secrets: Identity, Persona and Cecil Beaton', *ibid.* 117.

⁹³ 'Beaton's Beauties', 35.

⁹⁴ C. Beaton, *The Years Between: Diaries 1939–44* (London, 1965), 59 (my emphasis).

⁹⁵ A drawing by Hanslip Fletcher of the dome of St Paul's framed by the ruins of Bow Church featured on the cover of a book of drawings by the artist, most of which appeared in the *Sunday Times*, entitled *Bombed London* (London, 1947).

⁹⁶ Beaton, *The Years Between*, 59.

⁹⁷ Describing the aftermath of a December raid on London, Beaton wrote that 'this desolation is full of vitality. The heavy walls crumble and fall in the most romantic Piranesi forms' (*ibid.*).

Fig. 5.22. St Paul's Cathedral, framed by ruined masonry, cover of *The Listener* (9 Jan. 1941).

The Listener

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John Betjeman on London's City Churches

for example, was described in *Picture Post* as 'realities that make the fantasies of Surrealism seem commonplace'.⁹⁸ Everywhere, it seems, in the aftermath of an air raid, were images redolent of Surrealist dream imagery and montage.⁹⁹ A photograph for the *Daily Sketch* shows a car flung into the bedroom on the first floor of a house in Manchester (Fig. 5.23). A bedroom is suddenly made public in another MOI photograph taken in Dover in August 1940. Piles of garments and shop dummies like those in Miller's photograph spill out onto the street in an MOI picture taken in Portsmouth (Fig. 5.24).

⁹⁸ 'The Warning of Plymouth', *PP* (17 May 1941), 11.

⁹⁹ André Breton lists the romantic ruin as an example of the marvellous in his 'Manifesto of Surrealism' of 1924, and Foster attributes its status as 'prized emblem' of Surrealism to its evocation 'of the space of the unconscious' (Foster, *Compulsive Beauty*, 21).



Fig. 5.23 (*left*). Manchester air raid damage.

Fig. 5.24 (*below*). Air raid damage in Portsmouth area.



The Place where a Story Ended

Photographs of ruins are curious things. What is seen in a photograph of a ruin is understood to be the remains of something which is not pictured, and which can no longer *be* photographed. As Michael Roth writes, the ruin is ‘constructed by a beholder as a decayed trace of the past’.¹⁰⁰ Like archaeological photographs (as discussed in Chapter 2), photographs of ruins direct the viewer’s attention to something which is outside the frame—a past moment when what is now ruined was whole. History, then, is implicit in a photograph of a ruin, whether it is an ancient ruin or the result of an aerial attack.

In the case of bomb ruins, this history is concatenated, the ruination instant: we understand what we see to be the site of something which was here days rather than hundreds of years ago. A sense of this is evident in the poems of T. S. Eliot written in the wake of the Blitz. Eliot had first-hand knowledge of the effects of bomb damage in his role as firewatcher on the rooftops of the offices of Faber and Faber. The transformative effects of bombing infused both the language and subject-matter of ‘Little Gidding’, one of his Four Quartets, written in 1942:

Ash on an old man’s sleeve
Is all the ash the burnt roses leave.
Dust in the air suspended
Marks the place where a story ended.
Dust inbreathed was a house —
The wall, the wainscot and the mouse.¹⁰¹

What was roses now is ash; what was a mouse, airborne dust, a transubstantiation as mysterious as the Eucharist. This ash and dust can be made sense of only as traces; they are the endpoints of more-or-less unknowable stories.

Unlike a poem, a photograph of a ruin cannot in itself supply the story of which it is the end point. Captions and accompanying text play a vital role, filling the gap between now and a moment ago, directing the viewer to a past which has left this particular set of remains. What is depicted in a photograph of a bomb site does not yet have an identity except for the one which it has lost. Captions make sense out of an otherwise senseless, unrecognizable image, turning scene into site. ‘This was the great shopping centre in Swansea’, writes the caption to an MOI photograph in an album of bomb damage now in the Imperial War Museum (Fig. 5.25), ‘before it was the target in Feb. 1941 of a three nights in succession Blitz. In the foreground here is what is left of Waterloo St. Main shopping thoroughfare of the City. Joining it, across the mounds, to High St. and Castle St, is what is left of College St.’¹⁰² Although the damage has been done in a matter of

¹⁰⁰ M. S. Roth, C. Lyons, and C. Merewether, *Irresistible Decay: Ruins Reclaimed* (Los Angeles, 1997), p. xii.

¹⁰¹ *The Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot* (London, 1969), 192. See A. Calder, *T. S. Eliot* (Brighton, 1987), 156.

¹⁰² Album 616, IWM Photographic Archive, AP.13199B.



Fig. 5.25. Swansea.

three nights, in many ways the relationship between image, viewer, and caption is very similar to that encountered in archaeological photography as discussed in Chapter 2. The caption supplies a description of what is absent, what is past—but without which the image makes little sense. In both cases the attention of the viewer is directed to the past, whether ancient or recent. With the assistance of caption, text, and previous knowledge, the viewer ‘sees’ what is not, in fact, there—in this case a bustling city centre. The viewer understands this decimated area to be what is left of those streets. There is thus the same curious mismatch between signifier and referent that I have discussed in relation to photographs of archaeological sites: a disjuncture between what is presented to the eye and what is ‘seen’, or understood to be represented.

In photographs of both sorts of site, too, the mismatch between caption, or label, and current appearance of the site can be striking to the point of absurdity, as in a photograph taken of the House of Commons after the night raid of 10 May 1941 (Fig. 5.26). What would otherwise appear an unrecognizable burnt-out husk of an unidentifiable building is identified through caption and superimposed labels; the Public, Ambassadors’, and Peers’ galleries are all no more than blackened holes. The gap between these labels and what they are pointing to is comparable to that seen in archaeological photographs (see, for example, Fig. 2.11). Here, however, it testifies not so much to the effects of centuries as to the dramatic effects of a single night’s destruction, which has turned bricks to rubble, wood to smoke, and the architecture of parliamentary democracy, with its hierarchical categories, to a burnt-out shadow of its former self. Sometimes in the popular press, caption writers were alert to this mismatch, making it into propagandist material, with a droll identification. On 8 June 1940 *Picture Post* described the still unfamiliar phenomenon of ‘Blitzkrieg’ to its readers: ‘This was a church’, ran the caption to a pile of rubble; ‘this was a street.’¹⁰³

¹⁰³ ‘Diary of the War No. 39: Blitzkrieg’ *PP* (8 June 1940), 16.

A common trope, in the discourse surrounding images of bomb damage in the illustrated press, was to stress the way in which a long history had been swept away in an instant—particularly when reporting damage after a Baedeker raid on a historic town. On 23 May 1942, *Picture Post* reported on the aftermath of a raid on Bath, using photographs by Brandt. ‘In one night’, ran the caption to one of these images, ‘Nazi bombs destroy work that has lasted for centuries.’ Another photograph of the ruined Assembly Rooms is captioned ‘John Wood the younger built the historic Rooms in 1769–71. Just before the war they were restored. Now they are gutted.’¹⁰⁴

In many photographs the rupture of history represented by bombing is represented visually, in what seem to have become veritable pictorial tropes. Many photographers were drawn to the image of public clocks amid the wreckage, their hands stopped—or so we are sometimes told in the caption—at the moment of the blast. The hands of the clock in a photograph of the Council House clock tower in Coventry, for example, are described in the Imperial War Museum album as having ‘stopped at time of bomb striking side of tower’ (Fig. 5.27).¹⁰⁵ In other instances the image of a clock that survives the blast, and possibly keeps



Fig. 5.26. Air raid damage: the House of Commons.

¹⁰⁴ ‘Bath—What the Nazis Mean by a “Baedeker Raid”’, *PP* (4 July 1942), 20.

¹⁰⁵ Album 614, IWM Photographic Archive, ZZZ.397A.



Fig. 5.27. 'After the great raid on Coventry'.



Fig. 5.28. Ruins of Coventry Cathedral, frontispiece to *The Story of the Destruction of Coventry Cathedral* (1941).

going—according to the caption—speaks of the endurance of time despite the apocalypse of war. All images of bomb ruins engage with the dialectic of destruction and survival which, in a sense, is precisely what constitutes a ruin.¹⁰⁶ A particularly recurrent trope during the Blitz was the potent image of a church tower still standing above the wreckage. This was the formula most famously used in images of St Paul's Cathedral rising above a ruined city. But it was repeated in photographs of other towns, cities, and villages, where the survival of church spires could indicate the resilience of hope, history, and faith (see, for example, Fig. 5.28).

In all of these images, what is being come to terms with is the destruction of the accumulation of buildings and monuments that constitutes a city, even when an image pluckily focuses on miraculous survivors. In a curious way, however, it is not so much the case that history is obliterated as a result of a bomb attack and the

¹⁰⁶ See G. Simmel, 'The Ruin' [1911], in K. H. Wolff, ed., *Georg Simmel, 1858–1918* (Columbus, 1959), 259–66.



Fig. 5.29. Cecil Beaton, 'Fashion is Indestructible', *Vogue* (Sept. 1941).

way in which it is represented, but that it is revealed. For what do those identifying captions as discussed above do, except draw attention to the history of a building, its identity as a site and a palimpsest? The most devastated of bomb sites is still a site, not only of an aerial attack, but also of a longer history. Books like *The Bombed Buildings of Britain* and *History under Fire* did not just document ruined architectural monuments before they were cleared away and overbuilt; they also preserved the image of ruined sections of cities and towns which would still retain their identity as *sites* even after post-war rebuilding.

Something of this sense of the city as a palimpsest revealed by aerial bombardment is apparent in a photograph by Cecil Beaton which appeared in *Vogue* in September 1941 (Fig. 5.29). The image, captioned 'Fashion is Indestructible' and intended as a morale-booster, obviously plays on the contrast between the woman's immaculate dress and poise and her somewhat apocalyptic setting, the ruined Temple Bar in the City of London. She appears to be reading an inscription embedded in what remains of the building, commemorating the Great Fire of London, which in the seventeenth century destroyed the earlier Temple. Thus the place is identified as the site not only of an aerial attack, but also of another destruction some three hundred years previously—something the extended caption also points out.¹⁰⁷ The viewer is thus invited to see the invisible, as his/her attention is drawn to a double absence—the absence of the Temple Bar building, destroyed by a bomb and indicated by the ruin; and the absence of an earlier building, destroyed by fire and indicated by the plaque and caption. Ruin, plaque, and caption together open up history like Chinese boxes, the Great Fire of London nestled inside the Blitz. What we learn from the plaque (the Temple survived the fire) we apply to the ruin (the Temple will surely survive this blast too). Just as the Spanish Armada was the historical reference point for morale-boosting discourse around the possibility of enemy invasion, the Great Fire of London was often invoked in discourse around the Blitz—as the last wholesale destruction of the city which London nevertheless survived. An article of January 1941 by John Betjeman on the wartime destruction of City churches, for example, was accompanied on one page by two juxtaposed images: a painting of the 1666 fire and a photograph of a fire raid in December 1940.¹⁰⁸

Sometimes aerial attacks revealed the historical palimpsest in a more material way. The exhibition mounted by the NBR in the summer of 1944 included a panel illustrating 'cases where war damage has revealed details or characteristics of archaeological and technical interest'.¹⁰⁹ O. G. S. Crawford took around 5,000 photographs of the blitzed buildings of Southampton, documenting traces of past settlements and inhabitants which were not visible before and would not be visible again.¹¹⁰ In *The Bombed Buildings of Britain* J. M. Richards described how one result of the bombing of All Hallows Church in Barking was to 'bring to light a Saxon arch and the remains of a Saxon cross'.¹¹¹ Long stretches of the Roman

¹⁰⁷ The caption runs 'Her poise unshaken, she reads about another fire of London in which the earlier Temple was destroyed' (*Vogue* (Sept. 1941), 42).

¹⁰⁸ 'Domine Dirige Nos', *The Listener* (9 Jan. 1941), 39. In the same month Virginia Woolf described in her diary reading about the Great Fire while London burnt (*The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, v, ed. A. Olivier Bell (London, 1984), 351).

¹⁰⁹ National Gallery, London, *National Buildings Record: Exhibition of Photographs and Drawings of English Architecture* (Oxford, 1944), 14.

¹¹⁰ Crawford saw that after bombing it was possible to reconstruct a plan of the town as it was in the Middle Ages (*SD*, 276).

¹¹¹ *The Bombed Buildings of Britain: A Record of Architectural Casualties: 1940–41* (London, 1942), 15.

Wall of London became visible in the winter of 1940 in the aftermath of bomb damage.¹¹² ‘The centuries fall away’, ran an effusive newspaper article on the revelation of historic London,

as the war approaches its climax, or its end, and disclose new views of old London. Some of these are already well known, as in the area immediately round St Paul’s. Others are less known, and yield a rich harvest of interest. The long past as well as the present and future are here, and we may look back and forward as no man has done since 1660.¹¹³

New *views*, then, were revealed as a result of bomb attacks. It was not, however, until ruins had been demolished, and the rubble cleared away, that archaeologists could really start to investigate the older settlements that had lain underneath subsequent layers of building for hundreds of years in London and other cities.¹¹⁴ As one-third of the City of London was destroyed between 1940 and 1945, archaeologists were presented with an extraordinary opportunity to investigate a landscape which had been the site of continuous habitation for nearly 2,000 years.¹¹⁵ Excavations in the immediate post-war years were carried out principally by the Roman and Medieval London Excavation Council (RMLEC), which was formally inaugurated in 1946 as a direct response to this opportunity, and presided over by W. F. Grimes.¹¹⁶ The novelist Rose Macaulay described the City in 1949: ‘Excavators are at work, uncovering foundations and bastions, seeking lost centuries, seeking Londinium, seeking Rome.’¹¹⁷ The RMLEC first excavated the Cripplegate area in 1947, investigating the city wall and finding the Roman fort, described by Grimes as ‘perhaps the outstanding event in the twentieth century archaeological study of London’.¹¹⁸

It was, however, subsequent excavations in London’s Walbrook valley that led to the most publicized and most spectacular post-war discovery. In 1954 the remains of a Mithraic temple were unearthed on a bomb site north of Cannon Street station, where the Bucklersbury House office development was soon due to begin. When a marble head of Mithras was discovered, and was widely publicized in the daily press—alongside quotations, apparently, from Kipling’s *Puck of Pook’s Hill*—the site became the focus of unprecedented public interest.¹¹⁹ Thousands

¹¹² ‘London Wall: Plans to Preserve Relics Revealed by Bombing’, *The Times* (26 July 1952), 5.

¹¹³ ‘Old London: New Vistas of the Past’, *The Times* (31 Aug. 1944), 2.

¹¹⁴ The Ealing comedy *Passport to Pimlico* (1949) was made during the years in which the City of London was excavated. The film is set in a close-knit London community, where boys playing on the local bomb site set off an unexploded bomb which reveals a hidden underground cave with a treasure trove and documents proving this area of London is legally part of Burgundy (see C. Barr, *Ealing Studios* (London, 1993), 80 ff.).

¹¹⁵ See Ministry of Works, *War and Archaeology in Britain: The Excavation of Ancient Sites and the Preservation of Historic Buildings* (London, 1949); R. Merrifield, *The Roman City of London* (London, 1965); W. F. Grimes, *The Excavation of Roman and Medieval London* (London, 1968).

¹¹⁶ For the formation of the RMLEC see J. Shepherd, *The Temple of Mithras, London: Excavations by W. F. Grimes and A. Williams at the Walbrook* (London, 1998), p. xii.

¹¹⁷ R. Macaulay, ‘In the Ruins’, *The Spectator* (18 Nov. 1949), 661.

¹¹⁸ Grimes, *The Excavation of Roman and Medieval London*, 38.

¹¹⁹ See Shepherd, *The Temple of Mithras*, 15.

queued to view the, Roman temple, which was shortly due to be concealed again by rebuilding, the whole affair reported and encouraged at every stage by the press (Fig 5.30).¹²⁰ Papers including *The Times* and the *Illustrated London News* ran features on Roman London, ancient Britain and Mithraic cults in the very heart of the City, with photographs of the site, its finds, and reconstructions of how, nearly 2,000 years ago, the Mithraeum and its ceremonies might have looked.¹²¹ *The Statesman and Nation* invited contributions of poems on the subject.¹²² The media seemed obsessed by this eruption of the ancient into the modern, the miraculous survival of a long-gone civilization here in London's very midst, which had been so curiously revealed by the very modern apocalypse of the war, and which was shortly to be covered over again.¹²³ Public and media interest fell off rapidly after the site was painstakingly preserved and moved after considerable pressure from the media and some archaeologists (notably Mortimer Wheeler).¹²⁴ But for a few weeks in the autumn of 1954 the derelict City of London was not just the site of bomb damage; it was revealed to be the place where Roman soldiers worshipped a Persian god—not just an empty space, then, despite appearances, but a palimpsest of historical occupation on which twentieth-century Londoners were just the latest to leave their mark.



Fig. 5.30. ‘History packs them in’, *Daily Mail* (22 Sept. 1954).

¹²⁰ See, for example, ‘Big Crowds at Roman Ruin’, *The Times* (22 Sept. 1954); ‘History Packs them in’, *Daily Mail* (22 Sept. 1954). These and others are included in a folder of press cuttings on ‘The Mithras Affair’ held at the Museum of London.

¹²¹ See, for example, ‘Modern London Discovers Roman London—and Queues to Visit it in Thousands’, *Illustrated London News* (2 Oct. 1954), 542–3; ‘More Recent Finds in the City’ and other articles on Roman London and the Mithraeum in *The Sphere* (16 Oct. 1954).

¹²² These were published on 16 Oct. 1954, 483–4.

¹²³ See, for example, ‘Where Roman London Worshipped’, unreferenced newspaper cutting in Museum of London scrapbook; and *The Sphere* (16 Oct. 1954), 99.

¹²⁴ Wheeler’s letter to *The Times* appeared on 23 Sept. 1954.

The destruction of the Blitz, then, can paradoxically be said to have opened up the built environment to the archaeological imagination. Faced with a ruined or decimated landscape we may well see 'that which to the natural sense is invisible': that cityscape which is no longer there, but which has left its blasted remains. Ruins—even bomb ruins or sites—offer the viewer the occasion to imagine what was once there, seeing the present as the remains of a past. The nature of that past, and how it came to take on its current ruined appearance, is a subject for deduction (in the manner of a detective or archaeologist) and imagination (in the manner of a poet—like Eliot—or a novelist). 'What gems, what mines, what barley and what oil were stored in these labyrinthine cellar mazes, where now rats and rabbits leap?' wondered Rose Macaulay as she wandered around the City of London after the war.¹²⁵ And sometimes, as we have seen, destruction of one layer of the city resulted in the revelation of another. The 'story', then, of these buildings has not ended with their destruction, as Eliot writes in 'Little Gidding'. Instead, destruction is precisely the occasion for seeing, telling, or imagining an otherwise unseen, untold, or unimagined history.

The Future of Ruins

It was not long before architectural historians and town planners turned to the question of the fate of the ruins and bomb sites of the Blitz. Summerson considered the options in a Home Service broadcast entitled 'Ruins and the Future' in the spring of 1941.¹²⁶ London's future, he said, tended to be thought about in two ways: complete replanning and complete restoration—both of which, he believed to be thankfully impracticable.¹²⁷ But another way of thinking about bomb-damaged buildings was gathering momentum. In 1942 J. M. Richards suggested that a few ruins might be left—not as 'lessons' for future generations but for their 'atmosphere' and 'beauty'.¹²⁸ The *Architectural Review* put forward the idea that selected bombed churches should be preserved as permanent memorials of the war; and in August 1944 a supporting letter, signed by Julian Huxley, Maynard Keynes, and T. S. Eliot (among others) was printed in *The Times*.¹²⁹ The proposal was fleshed out in a pamphlet published by the Architectural Press in 1945, *Bombed Churches as War Memorials*, with a foreword by the Dean of St Paul's, and reported in an article, 'Ruins for Remembrance', published by *Picture Post* in June 1946, with photographs by Bill Brandt.¹³⁰ The Architectural Press pamphlet proposed that a minimum amount of work should be done to certain ruined churches to keep them from decay, and then these would be made into 'garden memorials' by surrounding them with lawns, flowers, and seats, as illustrated by artists' impressions.¹³¹

¹²⁵ 'In the Ruins', 660–1.

¹²⁶ 'Ruins and the Future', *The Listener* (17 Apr. 1941), 563–4.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 563.

¹²⁸ *The Bombed Buildings of Britain*, 2.

¹²⁹ *The Times* (15 Aug. 1944), 5.

¹³⁰ *Bombed Churches as War Memorials* (Cheam, 1945); 'Ruins for Remembrance', *PP* (22 June 1946), 23.

¹³¹ *Bombed Churches*, 4.

These proposals, with their implicit aestheticization of bomb ruins, were, according to Christopher Woodward in his recent book on ruins, a unique response among war-torn nations, from a country with a long tradition of ruin appreciation.¹³² Only in Britain, writes Woodward, could it have been said (as Kenneth Clark did) that ‘Bomb damage in itself is Picturesque’.¹³³ A large number of artists and writers found aesthetic pleasure in contemplating the aftermath of the Blitz, often comparing what they saw with the ruins of the ancient world.¹³⁴ Among photographers, Brandt’s photographs of bombed churches have a Gothic-surreal grandeur to them, while as we have seen, Miller and Beaton aestheticized bomb damage. Many painters were sent to depict bomb damage by the War Artists Advisory Committee, and a lot of them seem to have enjoyed the spectacle. Craxton, Minton, Piper, and Sutherland all found excitement and Romantic subject-matter in the debris of an aerial attack (Figs. 5.31 and 5.32).¹³⁵ In the blitzed East End of London, for example, Sutherland compared a fallen lift-shaft to ‘a wounded tiger in a painting by Delacroix’, and the sound of falling glass to the music of Debussy.¹³⁶

Novelists, too, were moved by the new ruins: Elizabeth Bowen set the stories in *Ivy Gripp'd the Steps* (1946) among the ruined and standing houses of wartime England, including ‘Mysterious Kôr’, where the cityscape of blitzed London is compared to an ancient and dead city.¹³⁷ Rose Macaulay became obsessed with the apocalyptic ruins among which she found herself (of which her own home was one), and she strained to find a place for these new ruins alongside the more safely aestheticized remains of the ancient world. Her lengthy research eventually was published in 1953 as *Pleasure of Ruins*.¹³⁸ Other writers, including Summerson, Pope-Hennessy, and J. M. Richards, all expressed an aesthetic appreciation of bomb damage.¹³⁹ Even the usually wilfully plebeian J. B. Priestley found in his bombed home town of Bradford ‘rather picturesque ruins with a hint of Pompeii or Herculaneum about them’.¹⁴⁰

Many of these writers were aware of what Henry James called the ‘heartless pastime’ of enjoying ruins and were anxious to point out that they did not overlook

¹³² C. Woodward, *In Ruins* (London, 2001). ¹³³ Quoted *ibid.* 212.

¹³⁴ For a list of artists who took ruins as their subject in this period, see M. Felmingham and R. Graham, *Ruins* (London, 1972), 117.

¹³⁵ See M. Garlake, *New Art New World: British Art in Postwar Society* (New Haven, 1998) 91; M. R. D. Foot, *Art and War: Twentieth Century Warfare as Depicted by War Artists* (London, 1990); M. and S. Harries, *The War Artists: British Official War Art of the Twentieth Century* (London, 1983).

¹³⁶ Sutherland, writing in 1971 in the *Daily Telegraph Magazine*, quoted in R. Tassi, *Sutherland: The Wartime Drawings* (London, 1980), 19.

¹³⁷ E. Bowen, ‘Mysterious Kôr’, *Ivy Gripp'd the Steps and Other Stories* (New York, 1946), 212–33.

¹³⁸ R. Macaulay, *Pleasure of Ruins* (London, 1953). See C. Babington Smith, *Rose Macaulay* (London, 1972).

¹³⁹ See J. Summerson, ‘The Past in the Future’, in *Heavenly Mansions and Other Essays on Architecture* (London, 1949), 238; Beaton and Pope-Hennessy, *History under Fire*, p. v.

¹⁴⁰ Priestley, *Postscripts*, 81.

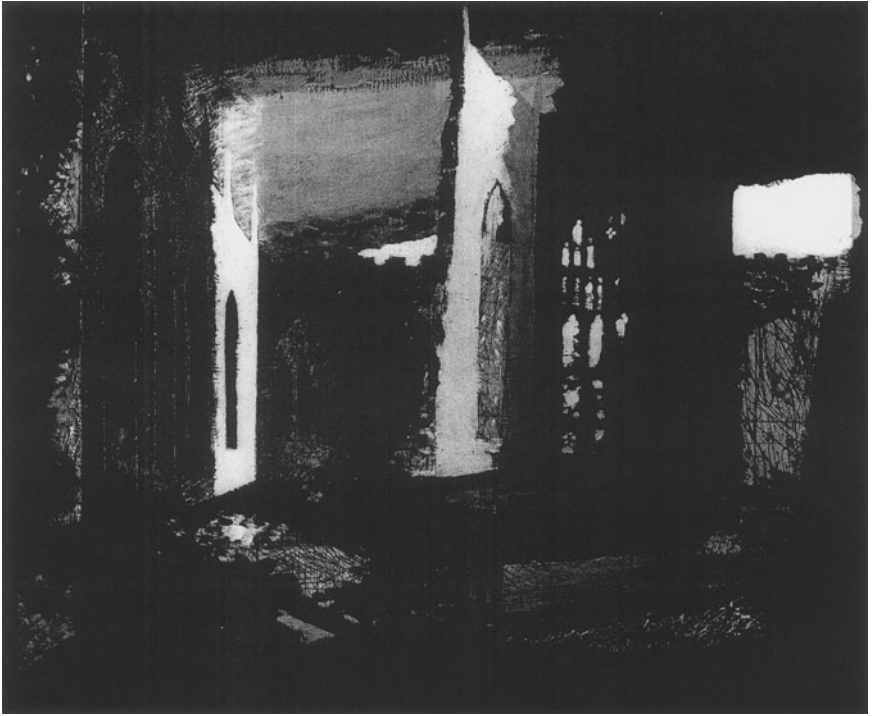


Fig. 5.31. John Piper, *Coventry Cathedral: Interior of Cathedral* (1940).



Fig. 5.32. Graham Sutherland, *Devastation in the City: Twisted Girders against a Background of Fire* (1941).

the loss of human life.¹⁴¹ Yet some authors seemed to claim their aesthetic sensibility as a badge of distinction. ‘Most people’, wrote Richards in the *Architectural Review*,

look at the charred ruins of this war with the disgust for things that were useful and are now no use. Only very few can detach themselves sufficiently from utilitarian, humanitarian or educational viewpoints to see ruins as objects picturesque and pleasingly horrifying. Not all individual ruins have these qualities... But all ruined districts possess some of the beauty of Rome before it was tidied up or of Timgad and Balbek.¹⁴²

The *Architectural Review* promoted this Neo-Romantic taste for ruins throughout the 1940s. Piper, who was a friend of Richards, published an article entitled ‘The Architecture of Destruction’, accompanied by some of his own drawings of ruins, in the July 1941 issue.¹⁴³ The September 1947 issue of the *Architectural Review* included an essay by Piper (discussed in Chapter 3) entitled ‘Pleasing Decay’, heavily peppered with quotations from Ruskin on the beneficial effects of age on architecture, while a photograph by Piper of a crumbling wall dominated the front cover (see Fig. 3.10). By this time the question of the preservation of ruins was firmly on the agenda, J. M. Richards was the editor of the *Review*, and Piper’s Neo-Romantic taste for ruins was explicitly translated into post-war planning: ‘Bomb damage has revealed new beauties in unexpected oppositions—a rich source of information for the planner who would retain picturesque elements from the past that can be opposed in size, colour and shape to new buildings and groups of buildings, whether by way of contrast or agreement.’¹⁴⁴

Coventry Cathedral

Piper argues against the discontinuity and rupture of a modernism that would sweep away the blasted remains of the past. The imagined Neo-Romantic future was one in which the nation and its people would live comfortably alongside these remains. This vision found its materialization in the rebuilding of Coventry Cathedral, where Basil Spence’s new building was planned to sit alongside and frame the remains of the earlier one almost entirely destroyed in November 1940 (Fig. 5.33).¹⁴⁵ In a sense, Coventry Cathedral represents the Neo-Romantic archaeological imagination in architectural form. The new cathedral was the third

¹⁴¹ ‘To delight in the aspects of *sentient* ruin might appear a heartless pastime, and the pleasure, I confess, shows the note of perversity’ (*Italian Hours* (Harmondsworth, 1995), 147). This was used as the epigraph to Macaulay’s *Pleasure of Ruins*.

¹⁴² J. M. Richards, ‘The Architecture of Destruction’, *AR* (July 1943), 23. Rome had been ‘tidied up’ fairly recently, under Mussolini.

¹⁴³ J. Piper, ‘The Architecture of Destruction’, *AR* (July 1941), 25–6.

¹⁴⁴ J. Piper, ‘Pleasing Decay’, *AR* (Sept. 1947), 93.

¹⁴⁵ See B. Spence, *Phoenix at Coventry: The Building of a Cathedral* (London, 1962); B. Spence and H. Snoek, *Out of the Ashes: A Progress through Coventry Cathedral* (London, 1963); L. Campbell, *Coventry Cathedral: Art and Architecture in Post-War Britain* (Oxford, 1996).

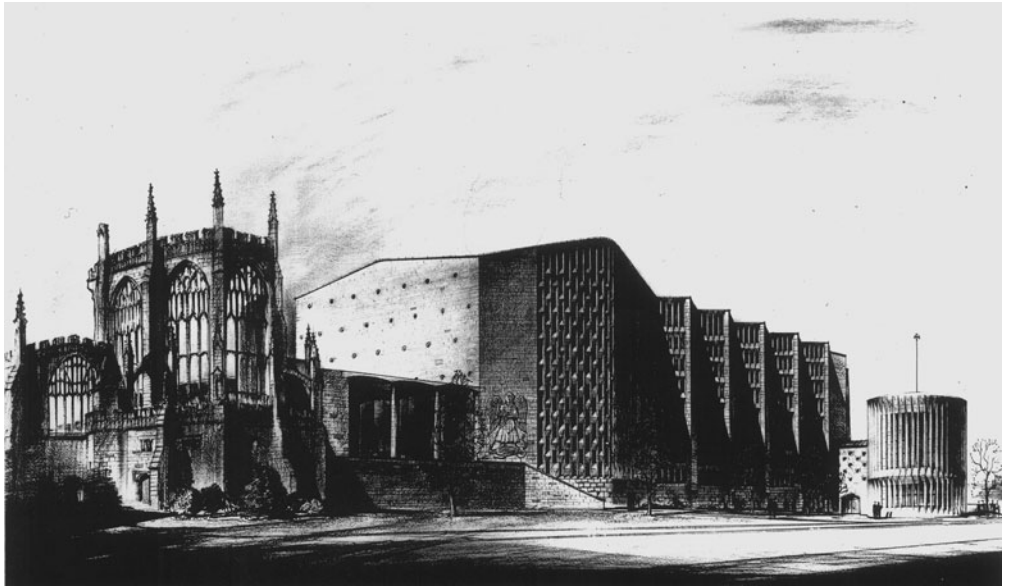


Fig. 5.33. Basil Spence, perspective drawing of proposed cathedral, Sept. 1951.

to be built, and incorporated remains not only of the recently destroyed medieval cathedral, its walls—according to Spence—‘impregnated by centuries of prayer’, but also vestiges of the first cathedral, founded as a church by Lady Godiva in the eleventh century.¹⁴⁶ As Margaret Garlake comments, Spence’s design ‘was a grand romantic gesture of survival, rather than the sign of a new order’.¹⁴⁷ Coventry Cathedral was conceived as a memorial to the past, not reconstructing it—as some interested parties wished—but refusing to destroy it, as the most ruthlessly modernist of architects might have done.¹⁴⁸ To an extent this was imposed by the competition guidelines, which specified that the tower and crypts of the old cathedral were to be retained. But Spence’s design did not just incorporate the minimum required by the committee; it made a positive feature out of the identity of

¹⁴⁶ Spence and Snoek, *Out of the Ashes*, unpaginated.

¹⁴⁷ *New Art New World*, 92.

¹⁴⁸ The most radical proposals for a new cathedral came from Alison and Peter Smithson and from Colin St John Wilson and Peter Carter. See Campbell, *Coventry Cathedral*, 58–65. Not all modernists sought to destroy ruins: Le Corbusier proposed that the charred remains of the cathedral at St Dié, destroyed in 1944, be poetically integrated into a new design (ibid. 245). Peter Collins took the more standard modernist view on this, writing in 1959: ‘Whatever the poetic merits of archaeological preservation in certain instances, the noblest task must surely be to build anew in a contemporary idiom’ (*Concrete: The Vision of a New Architecture* (London, 1959), 249). The popular press in fact saw Spence’s design as startlingly modern: the *Manchester Evening News* (25 May 1962) called it ‘Britain’s first space-age cathedral’ (quoted in L. Campbell, ed., *To Build A Cathedral: Coventry Cathedral 1945–1962* (Warwick, 1987), p. xv).



Fig. 5.34. Richard Sadler, ruins of old Coventry Cathedral seen through west wall screen of new cathedral.

the site as a palimpsest. Spence's cathedral incorporated the *absences* of the site (created by bombing and by the passage of time) as well as its more identifiable features such as the tower of St Michael's. And it incorporated them not just in the formal design of the building, but also as an integral part of the viewing experience of the cathedral visitor.

Seen from inside the new cathedral, the shell of the older cathedral is clearly visible through the clear glass of the vast west wall, deliberately framed by the bold armature of Spence's design, and it is framed, too, by the architecture of the new porch (Fig. 5.34). It is as if those Home Front photographs of bomb ruins framed by still-standing architectural forms (exemplified by Beaton) have been translated into architecture, except here with a subtle reversal: whereas Beaton framed the intact towers of St Paul's with a ruined arch, the clearly modern lines of Spence's building frame the ruins of the older cathedral. This framing of vestiges of the past with the contemporary was, as we have seen, a typical Neo-Romantic strategy. It has structural parallels with the view of chalk hill-figures from the window of a train, for example, or of medieval field-patterns as seen from an aeroplane. It is as if Spence's building is a bunker from which we may view the ruins of the past from a position of a safety that is both physical and spiritual—classic prerequisites for an experience of the sublime. Particularly central to Spence's design was the experience of the communicant. The side windows are slanted in such a way as to be invisible as one walks towards the altar, but after one has taken the sacrament and turns around, light floods one's gaze as these windows come into view. What also swings into sight are the ruins of the old cathedral, seen through the glass of the west wall, engraved with hosts of angels. It is hard to imagine a clearer equation being made between redemption—both personal and national—and memory, manifested in such a material fashion in Spence's design and all that it incorporates.

Appropriately enough, Spence's interior is dominated by decorations by Neo-Romantic artists—a vast stained-glass window designed by Piper, and a tapestry designed by Sutherland, in what Garlake describes as 'a last flourish of Neo-Romantic themes and imagery'.¹⁴⁹ Yet these may have seemed more appropriate in 1951, when the cathedral was conceived, than they did by 1962, when the building was consecrated. Garlake describes Coventry Cathedral as the 'symbolic end' of 'the Neo-Romanticism of the war years and the immediate postwar period', the building's interior 'a final, valedictory shrine to Neo-Romanticism'.¹⁵⁰ By the early 1960s the way in which Spence had integrated the remains of previous buildings seemed too grand a statement, too romantic, too heavy in its symbolism. As Louise Campbell notes, 'the taste of the 1960s was for a less highly charged symbolism and the thirst of the first post-war decade for monuments appeared increasingly difficult to accept'.¹⁵¹ Spence's building was designed both as an artistically choreographed memorial to the sufferings of war and as a living, working building; it was criticized by both theologians and modernists for privileging

¹⁴⁹ *New Art New World*, 92.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 9.

¹⁵¹ *Coventry Cathedral*, 249.

the former over the latter.¹⁵² Spence himself later agreed that the mood in which it was designed in 1951 was different from the context in which it was completed a decade or so later. 'If I could build Coventry again', he said in 1965, 'I wouldn't build it in the same way. The mood is different now: there's not the same emotional intensity.'¹⁵³

A radically different conception of how to memorialize the war was suggested by David Low, in an article entitled 'No Mourning, by Request' published in *The Listener* in February 1941.¹⁵⁴ Low describes coming upon 'the burial of London' as the sandpits on Hampstead Heath (dug for sandbags) were being filled with the debris of bombed buildings. A photograph of a pile of bricks (Fig. 5.35) is captioned: 'London buries her past: "Churches, blocks of flats, hotels, hospitals, town halls, shops, historical shrines, monuments, cinemas, smart town houses, Georgian mansions, respectable suburban villas and the poor slums find a common grave" in the dumps for debris in the London parks'.¹⁵⁵ This is not an image, then, of ruins (suggesting the primacy of a lost whole), nor of a historic or archaeological



London buries her past: 'Churches, blocks of flats, hotels, hospitals, town halls, shops, historical shrines, monuments, cinemas, smart town houses, Georgian mansions, respectable suburban villas and the poor slums find a common grave' in the dumps for debris in the London parks

Fig. 5.35. 'London buries her past', from D. Low, 'No Mourning, by Request', *The Listener* (13 Feb. 1941).

¹⁵² The theologian Peter Hammond attacked both the romanticism of Coventry Cathedral and its 'inadequately conceived functional analysis'. See 'A Liturgical Brief', *AR* (April 1958), 244, and *Liturgy and Architecture* (London, 1960), 6–7. Hammond's critique is discussed in Campbell, *Coventry Cathedral*, 197 ff.

¹⁵³ *Cardiff Evening Mail* (5 Feb. 1965), quoted in Campbell, *Coventry Cathedral*, 254.

¹⁵⁴ 'No Mourning, by Request', *The Listener* (13 Feb. 1941), 227–8.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 227.

site. Instead piles of bricks are promiscuously mixed together, unstratified, unidentifiable, to be buried in an unmarked grave. The mixture of building types—venues of high and low culture, haunts of upper, middle and working classes—seems to confuse and bring to an end the social divisions they represent.¹⁵⁶ Low suggests this Hampstead dump, or another on Hyde Park, as the site for a war memorial to ‘the Dead Past’.

Low is glad that London will be rebuilt, that those East End roads ‘inherited from the Romans—who had no automobiles’ are to be replaced with ‘airy avenues banked with harmonious edifices and fringed with trees’. He has no attachment to the buildings that are being swept away, or the socially divisive past they represent. In a sense, however, Low’s vision is still an archaeological one, for it sees Hampstead Heath as both the site of the excavation of sand for sandbags and subsequently the site of the ‘burial of London’s dead past’. In addition, it sees the discarded debris not simply as bricks but as the fragments of hotels, historical monuments, and suburban villas that no longer exist. The combination of image and caption makes a place for the archaeological imagination of the reader too. ‘What a theme for poets to come!’ exclaims Low, ‘Alas, poor Yorick!’¹⁵⁷ Arguably the photograph of this ‘burial’, taken with its caption, evokes the inherence of the past within the present more successfully than those ruined city churches tidied up and artificially frozen in time. For the archaeological imagination does not demand that history be stopped; it knows that somewhere every historical entity has left its remains, whether invisibly under the turf of Hampstead Heath or as the inbreathed dust and ash described by T. S. Eliot.

¹⁵⁶ The image recalls John Donne’s sermon preached at Whitehall (8 Mar. 1622): ‘and when a whirlwind hath blown the dust of the churchyard into the church, and the man sweeps out the dust of the church into the churchyard, who will undertake to sift those dusts again, and to pronounce, This is the patrician, this is the noble flour, and this the yeomanly, this the plebeian bran?’ (J. Carey, ed., *John Donne* (Oxford, 1990), 306.)

¹⁵⁷ ‘No Mourning’, 227.

6

A Tale of Two Cities

For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known.

Luke 12:2

In the summer of 1943, a year after the Baedeker raids on Canterbury that devastated large sections of the historic city, Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger began to film *A Canterbury Tale* on location in wartime Kent. Its plot was curious: three individuals find themselves on the railway station of Chillingbourne, a fictitious village in Kent, during a blackout. Bob Johnson, an American GI on leave, is heading for Canterbury, but has got off at the wrong stop. Alison Smith has come to Chillingbourne to work as a land girl. Sergeant Peter Gibbs is based at an army camp nearby. As these three head into the village, Alison is ambushed by an assailant who leaves some sticky stuff in her hair. They give chase, but the stranger disappears. Arriving at the town hall, they are told that Alison has been the latest victim of a local troublemaker dubbed the ‘Glue-Man’, believed to be a soldier, who pours glue onto the heads of young women, making them scared to go out with the soldiers stationed near the village. Alison, Bob, and Peter eventually deduce that the ‘Glue-Man’ is the local magistrate, Thomas Colpeper. Colpeper runs lectures on the beauties of the English countryside for (male) members of His Majesty’s Forces. Disappointed by small audiences, he comes up with the idea of pouring glue on young women to stop them from dallying with the soldiers who would otherwise be learning about the Old Road that runs by the village, and other matters of local interest. When all four—Alison, Bob, Peter, and Colpeper—travel to Canterbury at the end of the film, Peter intends to report Colpeper to the police, but other events intervene, and each of the three central characters receives an unexpected blessing.

This detective story, of sorts, in which the perpetrator of a bizarre crime is unmasked less than halfway through the film, where the criminal goes unpunished, and where his motives stretch credibility, was bound to confuse contemporary audiences when the film was released in 1944. As Ian Christie notes, *A Canterbury Tale* ‘perplexed even the film’s relatively few admirers’.¹ A queer

¹ *Arrows of Desire: The Films of Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger* (London, 1994), 48.

story, even for wartime', wrote William Whitebait in the *New Statesman and Nation*.² But the ostensible plot of *A Canterbury Tale* was never really what the film was about. The 'Glue-Man' story was only the premise through which to explore broad thematic concerns, many of them familiar from the Archers' other films: the disorientation of the stranger in a new landscape, the coincidental meeting, the journey leading to redemption, and—most obvious of all—an almost mystical sense of the potency of, and the endurance of history in, the English landscape.

As with so many of the Archers' films, the setting for *A Canterbury Tale*—the Kent countryside—is not just a backdrop to the main action. The landscape itself structures the film, playing an important role in the development of the narrative, affecting its characters, and subverting their intended courses. Moreover, the landscape is one of the film's main subjects; it is introduced to us before any of the human protagonists. And it is a landscape which is seen 'archaeologically', right from the opening frames of the film, where Kent is presented as the site of medieval pilgrimages immortalized by Chaucer. As the film proceeds, Alison, Bob, and Peter see through—or are *made* to see through—the superficial appearance of the landscape to a past that is still tangible. Foregrounding the viewing subject, *A Canterbury Tale*, then, is exemplary of the archaeological imagination as I have described it in the preceding chapters. It demonstrates particularly clearly the historical specificity of this sensibility, or this version of it, revealing the connection between the archaeological imagination and historical redemption at a time of war.

From the Pilgrim's Way to the Railway

In the opening scenes of *A Canterbury Tale*, a voice narrates the Prologue to Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* as we are shown a map of England in the Middle Ages. We see a group of medieval pilgrims travel along the Pilgrim's Way to Canterbury, laughing and playing music as they go. A Knight releases a falcon: the camera follows it up into the sky until it is just a speck (Figs. 6.1 and 6.2). As it descends the bird has become a Spitfire, and the Knight is now a soldier (Figs. 6.3 and 6.4). We are now in twentieth-century Kent; it is wartime, and as the camera pans over an idyllic countryside scene (while an aeroplane buzzes in the distance), the narrator muses on what has changed and what has remained the same: 'Six hundred years have passed. What would they see, Dan Chaucer and his goodly company today? The hills and valleys are the same. Gone are the forests since the enclosures came. Hedgerows have sprung, the land is under plough, and orchards bloom with blossom on the bough.' The Pilgrim's Way is still there, remarks the narrator, even if the 'ring of hooves' and 'creak of wheel' have been replaced by the railway, 'our road of steel'. These opening scenes end with a train running through the valley,

² *New Statesman and Nation* (13 May 1944), 320.



Fig. 6.1. Knight, *A Canterbury Tale* (1944).



Fig. 6.2. Falcon, *A Canterbury Tale* (1944).



Fig. 6.3. Spitfire, *A Canterbury Tale* (1944).



Fig. 6.4. Soldier, *A Canterbury Tale* (1944).

leading neatly to the scene where Peter, Alison, and Bob first meet at Chillingbourne station, and the film's main narrative begins.

This opening sequence, and its accompanying narrative, represents the Kent landscape as W. G. Hoskins might have done, or Kipling, one of Michael Powell's favourite authors and apparently a source for the film. Powell grew up in Kent, and in his autobiography he describes how early travels with his mother—combined with Kipling—contributed to his awareness of local history, finding expression in the film which he had hoped would be his most 'personal'.³ On a boyhood trip along the Pilgrim's Way from Canterbury to Southwark, writes Powell, he and his mother arrived at

Guilford [*sic*] and the winding Rivery Wey passing by Merrow Down. We made a detour to see St Martha's Chapel on the hill. Anyone who travelled with my mother had to be prepared for numerous detours made for their literary or historical associations. To this particular one we owe the opening shots of my film *A Canterbury Tale*. As we flew down the hill into Guildford we were chanting:

There runs a road by Merrow Down,
A busy road today it is:
An hours [*sic*] out of Guildford Town
Beside the River Wey it is.

And as we posed for photographs on the high, bustling ridge of the Hog's Back, we looked down on the extravagant [*sic*] loops of the river which had inspired the letter 'S' in 'How the Alphabet was Made', and we quoted:

The Wey that Taffy called Wagai
Was almost ten times bigger then,
And all the Tribe of Tegumai
They cut a noble figure then.⁴

The verses—misquoted in parts—are from Kipling's *Just So Stories*, and evince a similar sensibility to that of 'Puck's Song' (see Chapter 1). Powell evidently had absorbed Kipling's archaeological imagination.⁵ This was a man, after all, who apparently could not hear a chair being pulled across the nave of Canterbury Cathedral without thinking of 'Becket's body dragged by armoured men, pierced and slashed with swords, to die before the altar in the side chapel'.⁶ He did not, however, rely solely on his imagination, or on half-remembered Kipling: he 'read up' Canterbury in his mother's books as part of his research for the film.⁷

³ M. Powell, *Million-Dollar Movie* (London, 1992), 67.

⁴ M. Powell, *A Life in Movies: An Autobiography* (London, 1986), 74.

⁵ Powell refers to *Puck of Pook's Hill* in his autobiography (ibid. 14).

⁶ Ibid. 77.

⁷ Letter from Powell to Pressburger from Glasgow, undated, BFI Press. Coll., box 6, item 10 (d); repr. in Kevin Macdonald, *Emeric Pressburger: The Life and Death of a Screenwriter* (London, 1994), 234–5.

The opening scenes of the film muse on what has remained the same in this landscape and what has changed, yet *A Canterbury Tale* does not adopt the standard preservationist or nostalgic stance, where the disappearance of a precious past is mourned. Instead, what is stressed is that the Kent landscape we pass through at ever-increasing speeds is the selfsame landscape passed through by medieval pilgrims. Cinematically this identity is established through the visual rhyme of the Old Road and the railway, and especially through the figure of the falconer and his bird, a sequence which conveys a sense of the interpenetration of past and present through extraordinarily simple means.⁸ *A Canterbury Tale* is a film obsessed by the question of what has changed and what remains, not only in the landscape, but in the self as well. What the film powerfully suggests, as we shall see, is that nothing disappears altogether.

Framing an Old Country

Most of *A Canterbury Tale* is set in a luminous, rural England: a place where wheelwrights still ply their trade, where grass is still cut with scythes, where horses and carts are still a viable means of transport, and where children play freely in fields and on rivers (Fig. 6.5). Erwin Hillier's cinematography lingers lovingly over hop fields, rustling grassland, and scudding clouds—and this was one aspect of the film which *was* praised by contemporary critics. 'The photography of Erwin Hillier', wrote Ernest Betts in the *Sunday Express*, echoing many reviewers, 'has honey in it. You can smell it.'⁹ The potency of the film's idyllic images of Kent is heightened by the fact that it is wartime: in the first sequence, the peaceful landscape is interrupted by a noisy squadron of tanks ('though so little's changed since Chaucer's day', intones the narrator, 'another kind of pilgrim walks the way'). The rural landscape is also framed by the urban outlook of each of the three main characters: before she became a land girl, Alison worked in a department store in a big city; Bob would sooner go to the cinema than spend time in the countryside; and the Londoner Peter Gibbs tells Bob that he 'hardly realized there was a countryside before the war'. He was not alone in this—the war not only brought city-dwellers to the countryside in service or as evacuees, but also mobilized imagery of the rural landscape as propaganda for urban audiences, as discussed in Chapter 5. Many of the most oneiric scenes conjured up in *A Canterbury Tale* would have been familiar to contemporary audiences as part of the 'Beautiful Britain' image repertory promoted in the pages of *Picture Post* and other publications (compare, for example, Fig. 6.5 with Fig. 5.1).

⁸ Stanley Kubrick borrowed this for his 1968 film *2001* where an ape throws a bone into the air and it becomes a space ship. The falconer sequence was apparently Pressburger's idea (P. Tritton, *A Canterbury Tale: Memories of a Classic Wartime Movie* (Loose, Maidstone, 2000), 20), and he was very pleased with it: 'This causes a tremendous upheaval in my being. It is so strange. I feel it always even when I am talking about it' (Macdonald, *Emeric Pressburger*, 236).

⁹ *Sunday Express* (14 May 1944). Unpaginated film reviews listed in the footnotes are collated in the British Film Institute archive of press cuttings.



Fig. 6.5. Alison driving horse and cart, *A Canterbury Tale* (1944).

From the start, *A Canterbury Tale* was, in fact, intended as propaganda. In 1940 the MOI released a memorandum outlining those themes which film propaganda should explore, the first of these being ‘What Britain is fighting for’.¹⁰ Following the controversy of *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1943), which was also intended to illustrate this theme, the Archers set out to make a film which would explain ‘to the Americans, and to our own people, the spiritual values and the traditions we were fighting for’.¹¹ For Powell and Pressburger, these ‘values’ and ‘traditions’ seem to have been intimately connected to the conservative ideal of a socially harmonious nation, where every locality knew and celebrated its own history and customs, resisting incursions of the ‘modern’, with elements of the ‘Merry England’ invoked by the Archers’ favourite, G. K. Chesterton.

The film’s imagined American audience was crucial. Writing to Pressburger from America, Powell told him, ‘Everywhere we have met ex-G.I.’s who are filled with nostalgia for England. Now is the time for *Canterbury Tale*. Now!’ With this in mind Powell suggested the title *Oh! To be in England* for the film.¹² The figure

¹⁰ Repr. as appendix to I. Christie, ed., *Powell, Pressburger and Others* (London, 1978), 121–4.

¹¹ Powell, *A Life in Movies*, 437. For an account of the *Blimp* debacle, see I. Christie, ed., *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (London, 1994).

¹² BFI Press. Coll., box 6, item 10 (g).

of GI Bob Johnson plays an important part here, as it is repeatedly through his wondering eyes that we see the antiquity of Kent and the strange ways of its inhabitants. When Bob arrives at Chillingbourne, the station guard pointedly tells him that the village was constituted in 1085, 400-odd years before Columbus discovered America. Later, at the Hand of Glory inn, Bob stays in the very room where Queen Elizabeth I is supposed to have slept, and he marvels at the narrowness of the village streets and the quaintness of local customs. Bob clearly functions as a surrogate for the film's viewer; as an American he is quintessentially 'modern' (particularly to British audiences), and as a confirmed movie-goer he is well equipped to represent a member of the film's audience within the film itself.¹³ The 'values' and 'traditions' depicted in the film are framed by the responses and discourse of this American 'outsider', the relative youth of his country's history underlining England's identity as an 'old country'. This is even more true of the American version of the film, released in 1949, which was framed as a reminiscence told by an ex-GI to his fiancée in New York.¹⁴

Colpeper and the Voices

Filmically it is no straightforward thing to represent the inherence of the past in the present. I have already indicated how, in the first part of the film, the archaeological imagination is given cinematic form through narration and through the falconer sequence. In the main part of the film, however, the archaeological imagination is demonstrated primarily through the figure of Colpeper, who, Puck-like, acts as the instrument of communication with an Old England.¹⁵ In a key scene, Colpeper addresses an audience of soldiers on the subject of local history at the so-called 'Colpeper Institute'. He tells them of his passionate desire to pass on his knowledge about his part of the country. Before showing them drawings and photographs of things found in a local excavation, Colpeper urges them to

follow the Old Road and as you walk think of them and of the Old England. They climbed Chillingbourne hill, just as you did. They sweated and paused for breath, just as you did today. And when you see the bluebells in the spring and the wild thyme, the broom, and the heather, you're only seeing what their eyes saw. You ford the same rivers, the same birds are singing. When you lie flat on your back and rest and watch the clouds sailing as I often do you're so close to those other people that you can hear the thrumming of the hooves of their horses and the sound of the wheels on the road and their laughter and talk and the music of the instruments they carried. And when I turn the bend of the road where they

¹³ Casting a real American GI, rather than an actor, for the part of Bob Johnson reinforced this imaginary displacement of protagonist for viewer. Significantly his role attracted favourable comment: 'the acting honours go to John Sweet . . . to whom all this fantastic tale seems strange: as well it might do' (*Picturegoer* (19 Aug. 1944)).

¹⁴ BFI Press, Coll., Script—ACT (Short Version), Reel One.

¹⁵ Colpeper's name is significant since the Culpepers were an old Kent family dating back to the sixteenth century, the name being associated with herbalism (Christie, *Arrows of Desire*, 49; Tritton, *A Canterbury Tale*, 34).

too saw the towers of Canterbury I feel I have only to turn my head to see them on the road behind me.

Colpeper's address to the soldiers taps into that interwar genre of 'motoring pastoral' discussed earlier in this book, where an Old England was figured as lying at the end of a journey by car or train. Kent, described as the 'Garden of England', featured prominently in this genre, as we have seen (see Chapter 5); so too did what one 1920s book dubbed 'Kentish Pilgrim Land', with its 'Ancient Roads and Shrines'.¹⁶ 'No doubt you'd rather be in your own part of the country', Colpeper says to his audience, trying to engage their interest. 'Imagine it was peacetime and there were holidays. You'd want to go somewhere beautiful and interesting. Ask anyone where to go in England. They'll say Kent—you're *in* Kent.'

Colpeper's description of communing with Old England on Chillingbourne hill strikingly recalls H. V. Morton's *In Search of England* (1927) (see Chapter 5), where the Peddar's Way in East Anglia is described in a similar way (see Fig. 6.13):

A man can walk for many a mile in solitude on this ghost of a mighty road . . . In the hush of this still afternoon I fancy that the leaves have just stopped whispering together of the things that once went by along the Peddar's Way. Every time a leaf falls, every time there is a sudden rustle in the undergrowth I look up, half-expecting to see a figure not of this age coming towards me along the dead road.¹⁷

Both Colpeper and Morton hold out the idea that the past is nestling in the landscape, waiting to be discovered. What is important to note in Colpeper's speech is that it is expressed in the imperative case: he is trying to persuade his listeners of his perception of the past, and of the possibility that they too may feel its presence. Colpeper is effectively lecturing the film's viewers as well as these soldiers. For most of this scene he is dramatically silhouetted against the circle of white light of the Magic Lantern he uses for his lectures. This has the effect of intensifying his presence, separating him from the others in the darkened room. As he speaks, both the lecture's and the film's audience are invited to *imagine* the scene he describes: to see what he sees and hear what he hears. Furthermore, the inclusion, within the film, of the pre-cinematic technology of the Magic Lantern can be seen to operate as a cinematic *mise en abyme* (see Chapter 2). Like the camera obscura that appears in another Archers' film, *A Matter of Life and Death*, it tells us something about what film itself *is*, what it can do. Film, it suggests, can enchant; it can bypass time and vault space, in a mystical interpenetration of past and present, here and there. The figure of Colpeper in this scene stands for the film-maker who, like Puck, can make the viewer *see*.¹⁸

¹⁶ W. Coles Finch, *In Kentish Pilgrim Land: Its Ancient Roads and Shrines* (London, 1925).

¹⁷ *In Search of England* (London, 1927), 245.

¹⁸ Powell himself was very conscious of the powers, specificity, and limitations of his chosen medium. His self-identification with the very technology of cinema led him to pronounce 'I am the cinema' (interview, extracted in K. Gough-Yates, *Michael Powell in Collaboration with Emeric Pressburger* (London, 1971), unpaginated). Given this, it is not hard to see Colpeper as Powell's self-portrait in this scene.

Despite her gender, Alison is among Colpeper's audience. Her interest in local history stems from a holiday she spent in the area with her fiancé, a geologist, now missing in action. During a break in the lecture, she tells the initially sceptical Colpeper that she knows about the Old Road—she knows that the medieval pilgrims were not the first to use it, and that it had been used by the Romans and even earlier. When Colpeper tells her that a geologist found some Belgian coins near the road, but that they have since been lost, Alison admits that she herself has them, since they were found by her fiancé, and that she will give them to the museum. Later in the film, while out walking on Chillingbourne hill on a particularly honey-filled summer's day of scudding clouds and rustling leaves, Alison seems to hear the voices, laughter, and thrumming hooves of the medieval pilgrims, just as Colpeper described them in his lecture. She turns around, but instead of seeing the pilgrims, she encounters Colpeper, lying in the grass, like a *genius loci*.¹⁹

Through these scenes, Chillingbourne hill is established as a place where the past is not altogether gone to those with perceptive eyes and ears. Furthermore,



Fig. 6.6. Cathedral seen on horizon, *A Canterbury Tale* (1944).

¹⁹ In at least one version of the film script, Peter also hears the pilgrims; this was not used in the final film (BFI Press. Coll., Script—ACT (Short Version), 34/105).

when Alison 'hears' the pilgrims, so too does the film's viewer, as noises of laughter and horses' hooves form part of the film's soundtrack: the viewer shares her experience. The sensory interpenetration of past and present is reinforced, in the film, by other technical means. From Chillingbourne hill, Alison sees Canterbury Cathedral on the horizon. We already know that this was the place on the Old Road where the medieval pilgrims got their first sight of the city, since Alison has explained this to Bob in a previous scene.²⁰ As she reaches the top of the hill, the camera is trained on her, and we see her catch her breath. Then the camera turns to the scene she sees: the cathedral in the distance (Fig. 6.6). The film's viewer sees what Alison sees, and what those medieval pilgrims saw hundreds of years before. These sight-lines—Alison's in 1943, the pilgrims' in the Middle Ages, and that of the contemporary viewer—are mapped onto each other and reduplicated by the viewpoint of the film camera.²¹ To reinforce the point, this view is accompanied, in the film, by an ethereal choral leitmotif which recurs whenever the cathedral is seen. This overlaying of sight-lines is a cinematic conceit which reinforces a sense that 'time's arrow' is an illusion. It implicates the film's viewer in this perception of the world; and its redemptive implications are underscored by the choral music. There is more to it than this, though. Given the fact that Canterbury had recently been so badly bombed, the ongoing presence of the cathedral in the landscape is a powerful indication in itself, in 1943, of the survival of history.

To Canterbury

In contrast to this landscape where the past is still tangible and—imaginatively at least—recoverable, the film's central trio—Alison, Bob, and Peter—have all been the victims of 'time's arrow'. Each has experienced some kind of loss: Bob has not heard from his 'girl' back home for months; Peter had studied at the Royal College of Music, but his job as a cinema organist has put paid to his musical aspirations; and Alison's fiancé is missing. At the end of the film, when they all journey to Canterbury (each for their own reasons), these loves seem lost forever, unrecoverable. Alison believes her fiancé to be dead; Bob assumes his 'girl' has found another sweetheart; and Peter's dreams have been buried deep beneath his urbane and pragmatic exterior.

Seen from close up the city, too, seems irrevocably damaged after the Baedeker raids, despite the survival of the cathedral.²² Alison comes to Canterbury to find

²⁰ This is also a place mentioned by Hilaire Belloc in his book *The Old Road* (1904; London, 1910), 268, which Tritton seems to suggest was connected with the Archers' film (*A Canterbury Tale*, 26–7).

²¹ For the ideological implications of the identification of hero, viewer, and camera, see L. Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen*, 16/3 (Autumn 1975), 6–18.

²² Canterbury was blitzed in three attacks: 31 May, 2 June, and 6 June 1942. The survival of the cathedral, like the survival of St Paul's in London, was not so much miraculous as due to the efforts of local helpers. See A. Calder, *The People's War: Britain 1939–1945* (London, 1992), 287; P. Crampton, *The Blitz of Canterbury* (Rainham, Kent, 1989); and A. Pope, *Memories of the Blitz: The People's Story of the Bombing of Canterbury, 1st June 1942* (Canterbury, 1992).



Fig. 6.7. 'PARADE', *A Canterbury Tale* (1944).

the caravan she holidayed in with her fiancé, which is kept in a garage in the city. Although she knew Canterbury before the war, in this blitzed cityscape Alison is disorientated. She asks a passer-by if she is in Canterbury Lane, and is told that it is Rose Lane. Through the ensuing conversation, Alison regains her bearings, as she is told that this particular stretch is the site of the Parade, and that area is where St George's Street once was. The film's viewer, with Alison, now sees the present reality of the city not as an empty and illegible place, but as the wrecked remains of what was once there. The camera follows Alison wandering through this bombed-out wasteland. As it pans round the scene, we see the street sign 'PARADE', still standing but referring to little more than an empty space where the street once was (Fig. 6.7). This shot of the Parade operates in a similar way to those photographs of bomb damage discussed in Chapters 2 and 5; the street sign in the film image is the counterpart to those photographic captions which refer to a departed referent. As Alison walks along this ruined street, the camera—along with Alison herself—lingers over other signs marking places where various businesses once were. A gaping hole in the ground, grown over with weeds, is marked by a sign saying 'James Walker Ltd, Goldsmiths and Silversmiths—now at 16 Sun St'; another hole is marked by a sign saying 'Singer Sewing Machine Co. Ltd. Now at 13A St. Peter's St.

opposite Odeon' (Fig. 6.8).²³ What we—the film's viewers—are guided to, aided by these signs, is what Alison 'sees' in her mind's eye: the tangible gap between the city as it appears to us and the city as it was in 1940, before the bombs fell. The fact that the signs indicate that the businesses have not disappeared but have relocated to new premises can be seen in retrospect as an inauspicious augury of Alison's subsequent happy discovery—Powell and Pressburger specialized in just this kind of poetic infusion of the real with symbolic or transcendent import.

In the midst of this ruination, Alison comes to the garage where her caravan has been kept. The caravan is still there, but it—like the city, like Alison herself—has suffered the effects of time and history, particularly as a result of war. The caravan's wheels have been removed as part of the war effort; banked up in the garage, it is immobile and covered in dust. As the dust sheet is removed, Alison peers inside the caravan like an archaeologist inspecting a recently unearthed ancient monument. She picks up a straw hat, a trace of the pre-war holiday, and a cloud of moths flies up. In the space of a few years the caravan has become dust-covered, moth-eaten, full of cobwebs. Alison is visibly upset, as the deterioration of the



Fig. 6.8. 'Singer' sign, *A Canterbury Tale* (1944).

²³ The reference to the local cinema here would doubtless have appealed to Powell.



Fig. 6.9. Cathedral seen through window of garage, *A Canterbury Tale* (1944).

caravan is the visible proof, it seems, of the irreversible nature of time's arrow, the hat a relic of her dead lover. Colpeper appears at the door of the garage. The garage owner also turns up, and tells Alison that her fiancé is in Gibraltar. The moment is a kind of epiphany: Alison faints; we see the cathedral through the window of the garage (a familiar Neo-Romantic framing), while hearing the choral leitmotif (Fig. 6.9). On coming round, she sets about airing and cleaning the caravan, reversing the entropy that has enveloped it in dust.

Alison, then, experiences a kind of ecstatic reversal of personal loss. Her fiancé's apparent return from the dead is as close as the film can get to a resurrection without leaving the territory of cinematic realism. The caravan, a memory site which seemed to have been handed over to history, is brought back into the present through Alison's spring cleaning. The other characters also experience a reversal of loss. Peter is reunited with his lost love in Canterbury: the same choral leitmotif is heard when the organist invites him to play the cathedral organ. Finally, Bob is blessed. The friend he is meeting in Canterbury, Micky, hands over to him a parcel

of letters from his 'girl', who has not abandoned him but is in Sydney. The choral music is heard when Micky finds the letters in his pocket, but before they are revealed to both Bob and the audience. For each of these characters, history is redeemed in a revelatory moment.

Redemption

The final scenes in *Canterbury* are the climax of the film: *A Canterbury Tale* is really about redemption in the midst of the destruction of war. The entire narrative is framed by the conditions of war. The city of Canterbury, which lies at the symbolic heart of the film, is depicted as a casualty of war. War, too, is the cause of the disruptions and grief experienced by two of the three central characters: it is a confusion of wartime communication that causes both Bob and Alison to believe that their loves are lost. It is against a background of the disruptions of war that the ongoing presence of the past in the Kent landscape acquires its particular resonance: Alison's fiancé may be missing, presumed dead, but the Old Road they explored together is still there. And it is in among the ruins of the Blitz that all three characters experience redemption.

The blitzed city of Canterbury, too, is redeemed in the film's final scenes. The woman who gives Alison directions agrees that the city 'is an awful mess . . . But you get a very good view of the cathedral now.' Bomb damage, it seems, has revealed a new view here as it did elsewhere (see Chapter 5). Perhaps this new view places the citizen of 1943 (and, by extension, the film's viewer) in the perceptual position of Canterbury's historical inhabitants; the cathedral is seen as it might have appeared to them centuries ago. Whether or not this is so, in the film it is as if bomb damage and its aftermath have cleared away excrescences to reveal a symbol of the eternal and the spiritual, hitherto swathed under layers of development. As already noted, the wartime survival of the cathedral was itself a powerful symbol of spiritual and historical continuity. The film script describes the cathedral, still there amid the wreckage, as 'a landmark, apparently indestructible, a modern miracle and a tribute to the men who saved it in its greatest hour of peril'.²⁴ When the film ends, with the ringing of the cathedral's bells, the script notes: 'The bells are still ringing. There is no sign to show whether the time is 600 years ago or today.'²⁵ The fact that *A Canterbury Tale* ends with a close-up of the cathedral's bells ringing has a contemporary significance that goes beyond any obvious freight of meaning. For as Paul Tritton points out, the bells of Canterbury Cathedral, like those in all cathedrals and churches in Britain, had been silent for most of the war.²⁶ While the general ban had been withdrawn in the summer of 1943—just when *A Canterbury Tale* was being filmed—the Canterbury bells were silent until the end of the war; the bells that appear in the film were models,

²⁴ BFI Press. Coll., Script—ACT (Short Version), 40/114.

²⁵ Ibid. 44/120.

²⁶ Tritton, *A Canterbury Tale*, 14.

constructed in the studio. According to Tritton, most bell-ringing groups were not re-formed until 1945.²⁷ An association of bell-ringing and the survival of the nation is succinctly demonstrated by the release, in 1951, of a 78 r.p.m. record of the bells of Canterbury Cathedral as part of the Festival of Britain celebrations.²⁸

The inherence of the past in the landscape that we see in the first part of *A Canterbury Tale* is mirrored and reinforced by these redemptive moments at the end of the film. Characters and landscape alike are redeemed, as in both cases what might seem to have been lost in the passage of time is found to have been there all along, like those old coins Colpeper had thought lost without trace.²⁹ By the end of the film, as a service is held in the cathedral, it seems as if all shall be redeemed, lost letters and missing coins shall be found, lovers shall come back from the dead. This is the promise of the archaeological imagination, that despite the destruction and confusion wrought by time, by modernity, or by war, nothing is lost altogether—*if you only look in the right place*. What is shown, in the opening sequence, to be true of the landscape—that the past inheres within it—turns out to be true for the film's main characters: their lost loves are not lost after all. The film's viewer, too, is implicated. The critic Chris Wicking is right to point out that watching *A Canterbury Tale* becomes a pilgrimage for the audience as much as for its protagonists.³⁰ Learning to see that the past is not gone is the blessing—ideally at least—received by the pilgrim-viewer: to find that faith amid the chaos of modernity and war is justified after all.

To Oz

Critics have pointed out that the Archers' films *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1943) and *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946) were both surely influenced by the 1939 Hollywood film *The Wizard of Oz*, first shown in Britain early in 1940 and re-released in 1945.³¹ In an interview Powell has confirmed—in connection with *A Matter of Life and Death*, with its mixture of black-and-white and colour sequences—that Victor Fleming's film 'had a big influence on me'.³² What seems to have gone unnoticed, however, is the extent to which the symbolic structure of *The Wizard of Oz* is mirrored in *A Canterbury Tale*. The similarities and differences between these two films are both striking and significant; and the history of their reception can help us plot some of the limitations of the Archers' brand of Neo-Romantic absorption in place and history.

Both films show four characters—one female, three male (including Colpeper)—on their way to a city where, apparently, miracles can be performed; they travel

²⁷ Tritton, *A Canterbury Tale*, 14.

²⁸ Ibid. 15.

²⁹ ACT's obsession with what has changed and what remains the same is also central to other Powell and Pressburger films of the period, especially *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*.

³⁰ 'A Canterbury Tale', *Monthly Film Bulletin*, 51/610 (Nov. 1984), 355.

³¹ See Christie, ed., *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*, p. ix; Christie, *A Matter of Life and Death*, 9–10.

³² M. Gough-Yates, *Michael Powell Director* (Brussels, 1973), 20.

together, but each is making the journey for their own reason. The Old Road in *A Canterbury Tale* leads to the cathedral, just as in *The Wizard of Oz* the Yellow Brick Road leads to the Emerald City. The sight of the cathedral in *A Canterbury Tale*, rising up from the horizon across the countryside as described above, is very like the first view Dorothy and her companions get of the Emerald City (Fig. 6.10). And in both films, blessings are received by the main characters when they arrive at this shimmering destination. Colpeper, who has been revealed as the 'Glue-Man', mysteriously presides over these blessings in *A Canterbury Tale*, just as the recently unmasked 'Wizard' does in *The Wizard of Oz*.³³

In fact, a direct reference to *The Wizard of Oz* is present in the script of *A Canterbury Tale*, in a sequence set in the sergeants' quarters at Chillingbourne Camp: when the capture of the 'Glue-Man' is announced, a sergeant sings 'Heigh-Ho! The Glue-Man's dead' to the tune of 'The Witch is dead'.³⁴ The sequence was cut from the final film; perhaps if it had not been, then the more fundamental

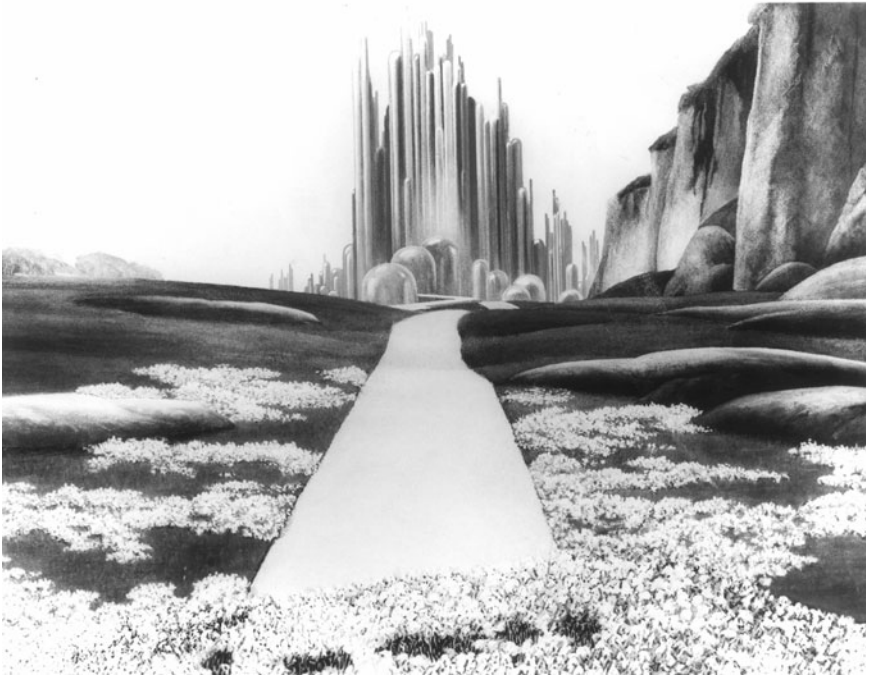


Fig. 6.10. The Emerald City, *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), © Turner Entertainment Co. A Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. Company. All Rights Reserved.

³³ Both characters preside, too, over a cinematic *mise en abyme*: in *The Wizard of Oz*, it is the phantasmagoric spectacle of the face of the 'Wizard' himself, conjured up by the real 'Wizard' hiding behind the curtain.

³⁴ BFI Press. Coll., Script—ACT (Short Version), 9/29.

parallels between the two films might not have been overlooked. These parallels run deeper than any superficial similarities. In both films the blessings conferred onto the protagonists are not simply in the form of gifts handed out: instead each character is in some way made to see that what they thought they lacked was there all along. What is conveyed in both films is that—despite appearances—nothing turns out to be absent or lost after all. The Tin Man always did have a heart; the Scarecrow always was intelligent; the Cowardly Lion is in fact brave. Most important of all, Dorothy discovers that she has the ability to return home whenever she chooses; and once she gets back to Kansas she discovers that her house and family have not really been destroyed, as she feared, and she was not really as lost as she thought she was in Oz.

What is different is that the blessings and revelations of *A Canterbury Tale* occur within the real landscape of a post-Blitz England, whereas in *The Wizard of Oz* they take place in the imaginary—and famously Technicolor—land of Oz. The Emerald City, a fantastic shiny place where everything is green except the miraculous colour-changing horses, is replaced in *A Canterbury Tale* by a half-ruined historic city and an ancient cathedral, shot in black and white. The imaginary and visually striking Yellow Brick Road is replaced by the real ‘Old Road’—still evident in 1943—of the medieval pilgrims to Canterbury. To set a story of miracles in a real landscape setting was very much in tune with Powell’s and Pressburger’s aesthetic. As Christie says, they were ‘fascinated by that English visionary tradition, which stretches from Bunyan and Blake to Kipling and Stanley Spencer, of revealing the supernatural within the everyday’.³⁵ They were also part of that tradition themselves; as I have already noted, they specialized, especially during this period, in depicting things as both—and equally—real and allegorical, like the ‘halo’ that appears around the sceptical Peter’s head as the Canterbury-bound train he is travelling in goes through a tunnel.³⁶

The Old Road and the Yellow Brick Road

This characteristic blend of the real and the allegorical can clearly be demonstrated in the motif of the Old Road in *A Canterbury Tale*. This road has both a real and a mythical existence in the film, as it did, in fact, implicitly and explicitly, in a plethora of publications dating from the early twentieth century: in Hippisley Cox’s 1914 book *The Green Roads of England*, William Coles Finch’s *In Kentish Pilgrim Land: Its Ancient Roads and Shrines* (1925), Donald Maxwell’s *The Enchanted Road* (1927), or Hilaire Belloc’s *The Old Road* (1904), which ran to many editions. Even those books which professed—like Cox’s—to document old roads in a scholarly way were infused with imagery and language drawn, in particular, from Christian iconography: the epigraph of *The Green Roads of England* was ‘There is one road none may travel, but thou only’.³⁷ In *The Old Road* Belloc did not just describe the route taken by medieval pilgrims on their way to Canterbury;

³⁵ I. Christie, ‘Out of this World’, *Times Higher Educational Supplement* (5 July 1996), 14.

³⁶ This was Spencer’s aim, too: see K. Hauser, *Stanley Spencer* (London, 2001), 35–7.

³⁷ R. H. Cox, *The Green Roads of England* (London, 1914), p. v.



Fig. 6.11. Graham Sutherland, *Entrance to a Lane* (1939).

he described 'The Road' as one of those 'primal things which move us'. 'The Road', he says, is 'the greatest and the most original of the spells which we inherit from the earliest pioneers of our race', and it is to this antiquity that he ascribes 'the sacredness which everywhere attaches to The Road'.³⁸

The romantic imagery of the old road or pathway was taken up in the Neo-Romantic imagination, in Graham Sutherland's *Entrance to a Lane* (1939) (Fig. 6.11),

³⁸ Belloc, *The Old Road*, 3–4, 8.



Fig. 6.12. Bill Brandt, 'The Pilgrim's Way', from *Literary Britain* (1951).

for example, or in Craxton's 1944–5 painting of the same name; in Minton's *Recollection of Wales* (1944), *Dark Wood, Evening* (1945), and *A Surrey Landscape* (1944), or Brandt's photograph of Chaucer's Pilgrim's Way published in *Literary Britain* (1951) (Fig. 6.12).³⁹ Historically the charm of the 'old road' can surely be linked to the vexed question of new road building, lending a particular kind of resonance to older ways, whose antiquity aligned them more with nature than with culture, whether they were used or disused. The discovery of an old road—like the

³⁹ Tom Hopkinson praised Brandt's photograph of the Pilgrim's Way, which for him vividly suggested 'the link forged by the English countryside between all who ever lived in it, across the centuries' ('A Photographer as Critic', *The Spectator* (27 July 1951), 134).

'ghost roads' identified in Surrey by Donald Maxwell—was particularly appealing to the archaeological imagination.⁴⁰ A road invites participation; to travel along an ancient road is to put yourself in the perceptual position of ancient wayfarers: treading the same path you may see what they saw, just as Alison and Bob, standing on the Old Road, see the cathedral from the same viewpoint as the medieval pilgrims did.⁴¹ Photographic representations of the 'Pilgrim's Way' of the period invite just this kind of participation: images in Finch's *In Kentish Pilgrim Land*, like Brandt's photograph in *Literary Britain*, depict the pathway from the viewpoint of a wayfarer, placing the viewer in the position of the medieval pilgrim.

The reality of the landscape and historic sites depicted in *A Canterbury Tale* both exemplifies and facilitates the archaeological imagination, as I have shown. Just as with the photographs in *Antiquity*, or the image of 'the Peddar's Way' in *In Search of England* (Fig. 6.13), it seems to the film's viewer that it may be possible to



THE PEDDAR'S WAY

"A man can walk for many a mile in solitude on this ghost of a mighty road . . . In the hush of this still afternoon I fancy that the leaves have just stopped whispering together of the things that once went by along the Peddar's Way"

Fig. 6.13. 'The Peddar's Way', from H. V. Morton, *In Search of England* (1927).

⁴⁰ 'A ghost road', according to Maxwell, is 'a road which is dead, but yet persisting in its personality' (*Unknown Surrey* (London, 1924), 175).

⁴¹ A variation of this motif also appears in Geoffrey Household's 1939 novel *Rogue Male* (Harmondsworth, 1973), where the hero (on the run in Dorset after stalking an unnamed European dictator) hides in an old road hidden by hedges. Unmarked on the map, it is nevertheless, like Nash's 'unseen landscapes', 'still there; anyone who wishes can dive under the sentinel thorns at the entrance' (p.80).

encounter the past while out on a walk in the country. And since the film so clearly makes an equation between historical and personal redemption, the reality of the Kent landscape is precisely the guarantor of the blessings handed out to protagonists and viewer alike. Not so in *The Wizard of Oz*, which abandons realism for all but the first and last parts of the film, allowing no play for the archaeological imagination, and nothing of the specifically historical redemption it brings with it. In fact both films are surely symbolically rooted in the same Christian iconography. Both the Old Road and the Yellow Brick Road have their mythical prototype in the 'true way' of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* ('yellow' in so far as it is made of gold), just as Canterbury and the Emerald City echo Bunyan's Celestial City, the heavenly Jerusalem whose walls were traditionally built of sapphires, pearls—and emeralds.⁴² But only *A Canterbury Tale* chooses to give a real geographical and historical location to the myth.⁴³ What is more, it derives what power it has precisely from this—something of a high-risk strategy, as we shall see.

The Wizard of Oz, however, embedded the old myth inside a new and possibly even more enduring one. Its debt to Christian mythology is so successfully disguised by the lavish spectacle of a world where dreams—as Dorothy sings—'really do come true', that, as Michael Bracewell notes, it could be seen as 'an embodiment of the American Dream at a time when American films and their stars were conquering the world': the embodiment, in other words, of a thoroughly modern myth.⁴⁴ On the British release of the film the *New Statesman* told its readers that the book of *The Wizard of Oz* (by L. Frank Baum) 'is as common in American homes as is *Mein Kampf* in German'.⁴⁵ Contemporary reviewers stressed the lavishness—to the point of tastelessness—of the production, the excess that only America could afford.⁴⁶ Graham Greene, writing in *The Spectator*, described the story as 'an American drummer's dream of escape', its 'fancy' too 'material' for 'us in our old tribal continent'. But even he conceded, 'there's a lot of pleasure to be got these days from watching money spent on other things than war'.⁴⁷ And the fact that lines from the film could be quoted so casually in *The Times*, or in films like *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (where Blimp is described as 'the wizard': 'because of the wonderful things he does'), indicates that its imagery, phrases, and songs slipped rapidly into the broader culture.⁴⁸

⁴² See the image of the Apostles at the Gate of the Heavenly Jerusalem in the mosaics of Sta Maria Maggiore in Rome, which resonates with the imagery of both films.

⁴³ *ACT* in fact grew out of an abandoned idea, supported by Arthur Rank—a Methodist—to film *The Pilgrim's Progress* (Macdonald, *Emeric Pressburger*, 234).

⁴⁴ M. Bracewell, 'The Never-Ending Story', *Times Magazine* (29 Jan. 1994), 18.

⁴⁵ *New Statesman* (3 Feb. 1940), 136.

⁴⁶ 'It is presumably to the credit of Hollywood', wrote *The Times*, 'that it can afford to deploy a whole army of dwarfs' ('New Films in London: An American Fairy Tale', 29 Jan. 1940), 4.

⁴⁷ *The Spectator* (9 Feb. 1940), 179.

⁴⁸ *The Times* reported that Australian soldiers had marched into action during the capture of Bardia in Libya singing 'We're off to meet the wizard' (10 Jan. 1941), 5.

The endurance, broad appeal, and flexibility of *The Wizard of Oz* are surely due, in part, to its nature as pure fantasy: since the land of Oz does not exist, except in Dorothy's imagination, it is easily assimilated by audiences from a broad range of social and geographical contexts.⁴⁹ Certainly its reception was not hampered by the kind of confusion generated by *A Canterbury Tale*, which—as Christie says—received hostile reviews ‘no doubt partly because its allegorical dimension was subordinated to a nominal realism’—in particular to a plot which made little sense.⁵⁰ But *A Canterbury Tale* was bound to be more restricted in its appeal since, even if the Archers had managed to pull off its blend of allegory and realism, the vision of redemption it offers is profoundly conservative; it is socially, geographically, and historically fixed. Its main protagonists are reunited with specifically rural pleasures, and as they are blessed, they are all accommodated into a conservative vision of Englishness identified with a socially stable countryside overseen by a mystical strand of Anglicanism.⁵¹ Even Bob, who at first is culturally alienated, feels as though he has come home—this is even more apparent in the script, where his grandmother is said to have come from Canterbury, and he is searching for his roots.⁵² It is central to the film's ‘message’ that each of these modern characters is won over by a rural landscape which turns out to be their spiritual ‘home’, despite their urban backgrounds. To be sure, the film has its progressive elements, dramatized in particular through Alison, who stands for social and sexual equality. Alison transforms the prejudices of Colpeper—who ends up allowing women into his talks—and her fiancé's family, who overcome their class-bound suspicions of a ‘shop girl’ and accept her into the fold. The effect, however, is not to undermine existing structures, but to allow them to accommodate and domesticate that which might threaten their very existence: a working-class girl, or a wise-cracking cinema-going American.

If *A Canterbury Tale* is about the pleasures and values of the countryside, *The Wizard of Oz* is about the attractions of leaving the poverty and boredom of a rural environment.⁵³ To interpret the film in this way admittedly goes somewhat against the grain; it is to agree with Salman Rushdie that the film's ‘message’ is not,

⁴⁹ The film's international reception is briefly documented in J. Fricke, J. Scarfone, and W. Stillman, *The Wizard of Oz: The Official 50th Anniversary Pictorial History* (London, 1989).

⁵⁰ *A Matter of Life and Death*, 22.

⁵¹ Raphael Samuel called *ACT* ‘a quite sinister and now largely forgotten Tory-romantic film’ (*Theatres of Memory* (London, 1996), 234); its appeal to Stuart Millson, writing approvingly in the *Salisbury Review*, lay precisely in the ‘Tory’ view of the world it promoted, ‘proclaiming the goodness of a society in which everyone had an established trade, or role in life, or bearing and status that worked to the benefit and health of the entire community’ (‘The Cinematic England of Michael Powell’, *Salisbury Review*, 18/1 (Autumn 1999), 24).

⁵² BFI Press. Coll., Script—*ACT* (Short Version), 6/15. A pre-release article in *Picture Post* claims Bob's blessing is that he ‘learns to like the English’ (‘Michael Powell Directs his New Film “Canterbury Tale”’, *PP* (26 Feb. 1944), 20–1).

⁵³ Derek Jarman notes the similarities between the film's Kansas scenes and ‘photos of the period’ depicting rural poverty (*Observer Magazine* (4 Jan. 1981), 28). No doubt he is thinking of the photographs of the Depression commissioned by the Farm Security Administration in the 1930s.

in fact, that ‘there’s no place like home’—or at least that home is not necessarily the place we began from.⁵⁴ Judy Garland singing ‘Somewhere over the Rainbow’ embodies, for Rushdie, ‘the human dream of *leaving*, a dream at least as powerful as its countervailing dream of roots’.⁵⁵ Thus the film speaks to immigrants, or anyone who—like Dorothy—has gone in search of their ‘heart’s desire’. It is worth noting in this respect that the Emerald City is not quite, as I have suggested above, an entirely fictive place. In its stylized form it resembles a modern American metropolis—New York, perhaps, or Chicago. As Rushdie notes, when Dorothy and her companions arrive there, the film evokes any number of classic American films in which out-of-towners come to the big city.⁵⁶ By substituting a phantasmagorical world—part imaginary, part dream-metropolitan—for the dreary reality of Kansas (shot in black and white to drive the point home), *The Wizard of Oz* embodies the dream of modernity itself, with its ambiguous relation to roots.⁵⁷ In contrast with *A Canterbury Tale*, inside this wonderland there was room for any number of fantasies to be projected by an increasingly urbanized and uprooted audience, for whom the American dream promised deliverance from wartime and post-war deprivations.⁵⁸ Perhaps this is why the *Kinematograph Weekly*, a trade journal for cinema owners, described *The Wizard of Oz* as an ‘outstanding novelty booking for all classes and ages’, whereas *A Canterbury Tale* was recommended only ‘for the better-class halls’.⁵⁹

The immortality of *The Wizard of Oz* in the minds of millions was secured through television screenings (especially at Christmas) in the decades after it was first released.⁶⁰ *A Canterbury Tale*, however, languished in the archives of film history, with many of its most striking scenes—including the entire opening scene—cut in an attempt to make its narrative more acceptable to film audiences in America in 1949.⁶¹ The Archers’ films were famously neglected for years. Not until 1977 was *A Canterbury Tale* restored to its original form, in time for a Powell and Pressburger retrospective at the National Film Theatre in 1978, followed by one at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1980. The works of Powell and Pressburger were (almost literally) reborn and reassessed in the 1980s, the decade which—as we have seen—saw the re-establishment and re-evaluation of the

⁵⁴ S. Rushdie, *The Wizard of Oz* (London, 1992), 55–7.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 23 (author’s emphasis).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 50–1.

⁵⁷ For the relationship between modernity and a metaphorical homelessness, see A. Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays on the Modern Unhomely* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992), 7–8.

⁵⁸ Paul Virilio notes that cinema ‘gratified the wish of migrant workers for a lasting . . . homeland’ (*War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception* (London, 1989), 39).

⁵⁹ *Kinematograph Weekly* (21 Dec. 1939), 10; (11 May 1944), 31.

⁶⁰ *The Wizard of Oz* was the first feature film to be leased by MGM to a television broadcasting corporation (*Daily Telegraph* (26 July 1956)).

⁶¹ It lost 20–30 minutes from its original 124 minutes for its 1949 release in America, and gained the GI flashback sequence described above (I. Christie, ‘Powell and Pressburger: Putting Back the Pieces’, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, 51/611 (Dec. 1984), 392).

category of Neo-Romanticism.⁶² By this time another temporal layer had been added: the Archers' brand of topophilia could be framed retrospectively both within its own wartime conditions and within a late twentieth-century context.⁶³ The reappraisal of what Lucy Lippard called 'the lure of the local' had allowed the geographical specificity of *A Canterbury Tale* to extend rather than limit its appeal, just as its celebration of a landscape with a memory was very much in tune with a postmodern rejection of the modernist *tabula rasa*.⁶⁴ It is not surprising, then, that what was always fundamentally a counter-modernist sensibility should reappear in the contemporary climate. For the archaeological imagination is always tied to a locality of some sort, and its fortunes rise and fall according to the extent to which 'place' is valued over 'no-place', and the ineluctible inherence of the past is given precedence over—or at least equal billing with—dreams of a future with which it is nevertheless intimately enmeshed.

⁶² A key ingredient in the Archers' change of fortune was the support of prominent film-makers, notably Martin Scorsese; see his foreword to Christie, *Arrows of Desire*.

⁶³ This 'layering' is particularly apparent in Paul Tritton's extraordinary book on *ACT*, which appeared in 2000. This book is itself a kind of 'archaeology' of the film and its sites. Effectively blurring the line between fact and fiction, it documents sites where scenes of the film were shot, showing how far they have changed; includes Ordnance Survey National Grid references for such sites (and for Powell's birthplace); and reproduces blackout and lighting-up times published in the *Kentish Gazette and Canterbury Press* for those four days on which the story in *ACT* is supposed to have taken place.

⁶⁴ L. R. Lippard, *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society* (New York, 1997).

Conclusion

The photographic image, with its umbilical attachment to the moment in which it was taken, may seem an unlikely vehicle for the archaeological imagination. The startling presence of the past has surely most often been revealed to poets, writers, and artists through ancient artefacts (Seamus Heaney's preserved bog-people, Keats's Grecian urn) or through contemplation of ruined empires or geological vistas (Shelley's Ozymandias, Ruskin's Alps). Photographs of such things might inspire the same feelings, it could be argued, but only by virtue of certain kinds of subject-matter, which photography is of course uniquely well equipped to record in full detail. I do not think this is quite true, however: photography is not simply a transparent vehicle. What I have set out to demonstrate is that the *medium* of photography can be shown to be itself uniquely well equipped to facilitate a particular version of the archaeological imagination as manifested in a particular time and place: Britain around the 1930s and 1940s.

Anxieties over the despoliation of the British landscape between the wars manifested themselves partly as fears that modernity was in danger of obliterating all traces of the past in the countryside and towns. Images of 'Beautiful Britain' asserted the continuing existence of a landscape in which it was increasingly hard to believe, in the face of a simultaneous proliferation of images documenting ribbon development, arterial roads, and unchecked building. But there was an alternative to these two poles of representation, one which attempted to resolve an acknowledgement of modernity with a desire for a landscape in which the past was discernible. To exercise an archaeological imagination in this context was to perceive the presence of the past despite the evident incursions of modernity. It was to believe in the immanence of history, the essential indestructibility of what has been, and to believe in this regardless, in some cases, of appearances. Not only were the remains of history perceived to be still there; they were understood—with some thrill—to have been there all along without us realizing it. Such a sensibility, I have argued, is therefore essentially a redemptive one. For in the face of the disintegration of the remains of the past, and the destruction wrought by modernity and war, the archaeological imagination refuses to acknowledge, quite, the loss of anything.

Photography was arguably the medium in which a battle over the representation of the British landscape was played out between the wars and beyond. And correspondingly, photography was a key medium through which this alternative vision might be sought. Archaeological photographs, for example, as I have shown, were bound to be a rich resource for those who hoped that the remains of history

had not quite disappeared from the landscape. Aerial archaeology demonstrated the apparent ineradicability of history in the landscape in particularly graphic form. More broadly photography could be used to document a perception of the immanence of history not just because it could record so clearly any historic or prehistoric elements discovered in the landscape—but precisely because of its intrinsic link to the present moment. Photography unavoidably documents the present appearance of a landscape. If—as, perhaps, revealed by the caption—it also documents the traces of the past, what seems to be offered is *proof* of the immanence of history.

For Neo-Romantic topophils like Betjeman, Piper, Grigson, Brandt, and Nash the archaeological imagination offered a way of reconciling a modernity which could not be ignored with a longed-for withdrawal into a cultural and national landscape of the past which they knew to be impossible. The documentary and increasingly scientific stance of modern field archaeology, together with the technology of photography, offered them a way of recuperating the past without relinquishing the present. The archaeological imagination can be seen as one of several counter-modernist strategies adopted by Neo-Romantic artists and writers. But it was not restricted to those artists and writers. More broadly the archaeological imagination in these years could represent a powerful counter-argument to the perceived temporal rupture of modernity, without reverting to the recurrent motif of an unchanging landscape idyll. We live alongside the remnants of time, this sensibility suggested, whether or not we realize it. Its submerged promise—however unsustainable in fact—was that a record of history has been kept in the landscape, even if it is never seen or interpreted. If it took an airborne camera to see and record ‘Caesar’s Camp’ in the unprepossessing fields of suburban Staines, for example (see Fig. 4.11), what traces might be discerned by an undreamed-of technology of the future?

Ultimately this archaeological imagination subscribes to the Romantic idea that history exceeds our capacity to record or represent it: a complete inversion, in fact, of the postmodern conception of history as discourse. That rationalists like Crawford should have possessed a version of this imagination indicates both how flexible a sensibility it is, and also how misleading it is to make too clear a distinction between science and poetry, rationalist and Romantic.

APPENDIX

John Piper's 'Papers from *Antiquity*'

List of articles from *Antiquity* bound—probably by Piper—into two volumes in the possession of Clarissa Lewis, Piper's daughter. The volumes have typed indexes by Piper, and are entitled:

1. 'Papers from *Antiquity*, special 1927–1940'
2. 'Papers from *Antiquity*, general 1927–1942'

1. 'PAPERS FROM *ANTIQUITY*, SPECIAL 1927–1940'

- R. S. Newall, 'Stonehenge', *Antiquity*, 3/9 (Mar. 1929), 75–88.
George Engleheart, 'Concerning Orientation', *Antiquity*, 4/15 (Sept. 1930), 340–6.
Vice-Admiral Boyle Somerville, 'Orientation', *Antiquity*, 1/1 (Mar. 1927), 31–41.
A. P. Trotter, 'Stonehenge as an Astronomical Instrument', *Antiquity*, 1/1 (March 1927), 42–53.
R. C. C. Clay, 'Some Prehistoric Ways', *Antiquity* 1/1 (Mar. 1927), 54–65.
'The Plan for Avebury: An Appeal to the Nation', *Antiquity*, 11/44 (Dec. 1937), 490–3, and possibly editorial, *Antiquity*, 11/44 (Dec. 1937), 385–8.
Alexander Keiller and Stuart Piggott, 'The Recent Excavations at Avebury', *Antiquity*, 10/40 (Dec. 1936), 417–27.
Alexander Keiller, 'Avebury: Summary of Excavations, 1937 and 1938', *Antiquity*, 13/50 (June 1939), 223–33.
O. G. S. Crawford, 'Durrington Walls', *Antiquity*, 3/9 (Mar. 1929), 49–59.
O. G. S. Crawford, 'Woodbury: Two Marvellous Air-Photographs', *Antiquity*, 3/12 (Dec. 1929), 452–5.
Stuart Piggott, 'Butser Hill', *Antiquity*, 4/14 (June 1930), 187–200.
Stuart Piggott, 'Ladle Hill—an Unfinished Hillfort', *Antiquity*, 5/20 (Dec. 1931), 474–85.
Stuart and C. M. Piggott, 'Stone and Earth Circles in Dorset', *Antiquity*, 13/50 (June 1939), 138–58.
O. G. S. Crawford, 'The Giant of Cerne and Other Hill-Figures', *Antiquity*, 3/11 (Sept. 1929), 277–82.
Stuart Piggott, 'The Name of the Giant of Cerne', *Antiquity*, 6/22 (June 1932), 214–16.
Stuart Piggott, 'The Uffington White Horse', *Antiquity*, 5/17 (Mar. 1931), 37–46.
O. G. S. Crawford, 'Our Debt to Rome?', *Antiquity*, 2/6 (June 1928), 173–88.
O. G. S. Crawford, 'The Chiltern Grim's Ditches', *Antiquity*, 5/18 (June 1931), 161–71.
Michael W. Hughes, 'Grimsditch and Cuthwulf's Expedition to the Chilterns in A.D. 571', *Antiquity*, 5/19 (Sept. 1931), 291–314.
O. G. S. Crawford, 'Grim's Ditch in Wychwood, Oxon', *Antiquity*, 4/15 (Sept. 1930), 303–15.

- O. G. S. Crawford, 'The Work of Giants', *Antiquity*, 10/38 (June 1936), 162–74.
 O. G. S. Crawford, 'Lyonesse', *Antiquity*, 1/1 (Mar. 1927), 5–14.
 O. G. S. Crawford, 'Iona', *Antiquity*, 7/28 (Dec. 1933), 453–67.
 O. G. S. Crawford, 'Cerdic and the Cloven Way', *Antiquity*, 5/20 (Dec. 1931), 441–58.
 A. Raistrick and S. E. Chapman, 'The Lynchet Groups of Upper Wharfedale, Yorkshire', *Antiquity*, 3/10 (June 1929), 165–81.
 R. E. M. Wheeler, 'Caistor, and a Comment', *Antiquity*, 3/10 (June 1929), 182–7.
 W. Percy Hedley, 'Ancient Cultivations at Housesteads, Northumberland', *Antiquity*, 5/19 (Sept. 1931), 351–4.
 R. F. Jessup, 'Reculver', *Antiquity*, 10/38 (June 1936), 179–94.
 J. W. Brailsford, 'Bronze Age Stone Monuments of Dartmoor', *Antiquity*, 12/48 (Dec. 1938), 444–63.
 O. G. S. Crawford, 'Air Reconnaissance of Roman Scotland', *Antiquity*, 13/51 (Sept. 1939), 280–92.
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2. 'PAPERS FROM *ANTIQUITY*, GENERAL 1927–1942'

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 G. C. Dunning and R. F. Jessup, 'Roman Barrows', *Antiquity*, 10/37 (Mar. 1936), 37–53.
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 E. Estyn Evans, 'The Sword-Bearers', *Antiquity*, 4/14 (June 1930), 157–72.
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