

Stone Worlds: Narrative and Reflexivity in Landscape Archaeology, by Barbara Bender, Sue Hamilton & Chris Tilley, 2007. Walnut Creek (CA): Left Coast Press; ISBN 978-1-59874-218-3 hardback £50 & US\$89; ISBN 978-1-59874-219-0 paperback £20.99 & US\$39.95; 464 pp., 12 col. plates, 104 figs., photo essay, 3 tables

Timothy Darvill

Way back in 1950s the well-known archaeologist and fringe member of London's Bloomsbury Set Jacquetta Hawkes wrote extensively on Britain's landscape and its ancient past. In *The Land* she notes how 'up and down the country, whether they have been set up by men, isolated by weathering, or by melting ice, conspicuous stones are commonly identified with human beings' and goes on to speculate that people must 'have seen themselves melting back into rock, in their imaginations must have pictured the body, limbs and hair melting into smoke and solidifying into these blocks of sandstone, limestone and granite' (1978, 101). At the time, and for more than a decade to come, Hawkes vigorously defended Romanticist approaches to the past in the face of stiff opposition from the increasingly vocal Processualists of the New Archaeology. But as Andrew Sherratt (1996) has shown with specific reference to landscape archaeology, times change in a fairly predictable way and since the mid-1980s an essentially Romanticist approach has again come to the fore. So it is that here in *Stone Worlds* we find everything that has come to characterize Post-Processual landscape archaeology and more. You can almost see the smile on Hawkes's face as Barbara Bender and colleagues dance around the interpretation of a stone row by suggesting that 'one vitally important part of the ritual knowledge embodied in the stones, to be conveyed and selectively "released" by the ritual specialists, was knowledge of the landscape and the spirit powers embedded in it' (p. 100).

Stone Worlds is an overview, perhaps even a popular account, of a series of surveys, excavations, studies and activities carried out between 1995 and 1999 by an extensive multi-disciplinary team whose geographical focus was the stark stony uplands of Leskernick Hill on Bodmin Moor in southwest England. A detailed account of the 14 excavations and associated surveys will be published elsewhere while this book, as the sub-title says, deals with narrative and reflexivity. It is arranged in four parts like the acts of play.

The first three chapters (Part 1) set the scene

by introducing the Project, the landscape of Bodmin Moor, the methodologies developed, and the authors about their work (fig. 1.2). Part 2 provides an interpretive account of the past which opens with a moving poem penned by Jan Farquharson entitled 'Leskernick: The Search for Ancestors on the Moor' and closes with an eclectic photo-essay 'Moving in Procession across Brown Willy'. The six chapters here show what the Project was all about and the results achieved. There are plans, maps and photographs of excavated features, a table of radiocarbon dates, and a wide-ranging discussion of what was found and how it has been interpreted.

In Part 3 the focus shifts to more sociological dimensions of the Project, and for this reviewer at least provided the most emotionally and intellectually challenging, stimulating and controversial section of the book. Balanced either side of a second poem by Jan Farquharson entitled 'The Dig' are four chapters considering the anthropology of an excavation, archaeological practice and authority, the role of the past in the present, and the 're-presentation' of the past. Regular participants in the annual TAG meetings will no doubt recall earlier outings for some of the images and ideas explored here: wrapping in cling-film those stones considered significant by the team; painting selected wrapped stones; arranging coloured flags along linear features; sculpting spoil-heaps to mirror features in the landscape; and other forms of environmental art too that express views on the significance of place. No archaeological remains appear to have suffered in the creation of these works whose very existence is now only preserved in the extant photographs, drawings and descriptions, and in the memories and imaginations of those who saw them. Is this archaeology or is it dancer? Is it art? Or is it all these things at once? There is no answer here, but opportunities and possibilities are plain to see.

Wider engagement with the archaeological remains is a theme that carries on into Part 4 where six chapters take the project and its finding into other worlds. The narrative moves effortlessly from exploring other ways of telling the story of Leskernick Hill through a public exhibition, through a general consideration of archaeology on the moor and beyond, to a concluding chapter dealing with natural solution hollows. In one sense the book ends where it began by thinking about stone and people, the past and the present. The solution hollows, we are told, were 'particularly moving: within the hardness of the granite they cradled water, they were intimate, full of gentle movement and hidden depth and invited an action of scooping or touching. Sometimes we filled them with

white and red liquids, offering our own libations, our thanks, to the ancestors' (p. 435). In a sense the hollows serve to stand for the whole landscape; the authors' approach to them a vision of their archaeologies in microcosm.

Many voices can be heard through this volume: some identified, some in dialogue, some expressed in prose, some in the rhythms of the poetry, and some perhaps as whispers in the winds blowing through the text. And there are many narratives too, some compelling but others at times rather trivial. Amongst the latter is the authors' developing experience of upland archaeology, the recognition of its wealth and distinctive character, and the tittle-tattle of life in the field. Here we find such banalities as 'Gary going round in trousers that were permanently too short for him' (p. 71); an entry from a site diary recalling how the same said Gary 'not only pinched a member of my team but my pencil, rubber and trowel (and our survival Hobnob biscuits)' (p. 72); and Chris Tilley's dislike of Sue Hamilton's two-inch square wooden grid-pegs (p. 92), to pick out a few at random. Such things lie in the background of every archaeological project known to this reviewer and are surely best confined to banter over a pint and fuel for reminiscence? Even conceding that there is some value to such sidelights to contextualize the work, interpret the results and educate those who will come after, it would be a sad day for archaeology if every report overflowed with such mundanity.

Far more compelling, and infinitely more interesting, is the story of people on the hill and the ways they experienced the landscape. In one sense it is a big story told by upland landscapes across the British Isles many times over, a story of fluctuating fortunes, episodic activity and obscure meanings (Darvill 1986). But is also a small story about particular communities in particular places. The earliest activities recognized on Leskernick Hill seem to involve the construction of a propped stone or quoit on the highest point, mimicking natural outcrops and boulders nearby. Sometime in the middle of the second millennium BC two stone circles, a stone row and a large burial cairn were constructed, in the authors' view by mobile communities who were perpetuating an engagement with the place. Soon after, more permanent settlements were constructed, about 50 roundhouses with stone foundations probably represent several phases of construction and reconstruction. Size varied greatly, as did the degree of clustering, relationships with enclosures and compounds, and constructional detail. Rather importantly, the project noted that most houses had a large stone diametrically opposite the doorway, sometimes

a natural grounder incorporated into the structure in other cases a deliberately placed boulder. These were called 'backstones' and it was felt that 'the well-being and protection of the household was ensured by the incorporation of prominent whale-stones or triangular stones as the "backstone" of the house' (p. 120). Fields and clearance cairns surrounded the settlements, but the most abiding problem for the archaeological team was dealing with the clutter, some of which formed interesting but potentially misleading patterns. One large stone at the down-slope end of a clutter-flow was investigated. Dubbed the 'Shrine Stone', its size and position suggested to the excavators that it was a place of 'great symbolic importance' and that 'stories, myths, and rituals would have been wound around the great stone and that offerings would be placed on the platform in front of it' (p. 202). After making offerings there on the eve of the Summer Solstice in 1996, wrapping it in cling-film and painting it white in 1997, a small trench was excavated beside it in 1998. This confirmed the suspicions of geomorphologists that it was deposited under periglacial conditions and its position and relationships to surround stones wholly natural. A single flint flake and evidence of burning was found against the flat southern face, but hopes of glimpsing prehistoric rituals were dashed when a radiocarbon determination showed the activity to be early medieval in date.

Stone, and the experience of stone, is the central theme of the book, delightfully complementing Chris Tilley's recent *The Materiality of Stone* (Tilley 2004). Stone is not only the material that was used extensively in construction works on Leskernick Hill, it is also quite literally the foundation on which things are built in both a physical sense and a metaphorical sense. Axiomatic to the interpretations proposed throughout the book is the idea that stone is powerful; indeed at one point the authors suggest that 'for the people who lived both on and off the moors (Bodmin and Dartmoor), the stones were the ancestors or the ancestral beings' (p. 31). Essentially phenomenological approaches based on experience and engagement were used extensively during the investigations at Leskernick, with plenty of processions, walks, devotional acts, re-embodiment of spaces, and setting up replicas of missing stones. But while Martin Heidegger is not explicitly referred to, some of his thinking lurks just below the surface. In his early work, *Being and Time*, it is the phenomena itself, understood phenomenologically, that he uses to underpin the idea of 'Being' (1962, 61), so that the experience of something is enough to constitute its existence. Rather later, however, in his book *On Time and Being* (sic.) he refers to

the coalescence of time and being as *'ereignis'* a term translated as 'Appropriation' (1972, 19). And in a very real sense *Stone Worlds* is all about the 'appropriation' of stone and the creation of a social existence for it. In the North Stone Circle, for example, the centrally situated block of stone — referred as the 'whalestone' because of its shape — was found upon excavation to have been an earthfast boulder levered out of its natural resting place and repositioned perhaps to mimic the shape of Leskernick Hill as seen from the centre of the circle. Ironically, one of the investigations that led Heidegger to his revised understanding of time and being was a detailed examination of various materials, one of which was stone. He considers how a block of granite as a mere thing becomes something different in a social context: how a thing acquires 'thingness' and meaning (Heidegger 1971, 22–32). It is not an easy matter, and it is shame that *Stone Worlds* does not explore it further through the accumulated experience of work on Bodmin Moor. But it also exposes another even more deep-seated problem: whether or not prehistoric people had a concept for stone *per se*, and, if they did, how their view relates to modern western thinking about stone (and indeed how modern people think ancient people might have thought about stone). The excavations at Leskernick revealed postholes and other indications to show that this was not an exclusively stone world in the past. Yet there is no discussion of how stone might relate to other utilized materials (which presumably had their own sets of embedded meanings), nor how the present archaeological record on the hillside has come to be dominated by stone in the mind of modern archaeologists.

Clearly, this well-designed and creatively presented volume contains much new food for thought, and in the spirit of post-processualism and reflexivity represents a provisional statement that opens the

doors to further critical analysis. Not a page fails to deliver thought-provoking statements, interesting assertions, or the seeds of new questions. Anyone expecting a straightforward account of archaeological fieldwork presented in time-honoured fashion will be disappointed, but once such prejudices have been overcome they will find a rich and insightful study that deserves to be widely read.

Timothy Darvill

Centre for Archaeology, Anthropology and Heritage

School of Conservation Sciences

Bournemouth University

Fern Barrow

Poole

BH12 5BB

UK

Email: tdarvill@bournemouth.ac.uk

References

- Darvill, T., 1986. *The Archaeology of the Uplands*. London: Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England and Council for British Archaeology.
- Hawkes, J., 1978. *A Land*. Newton Abbot: David & Charles [First published 1951.]
- Heidegger, M., 1962. *Being and Time*, trans. J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson. London: Harper Row. [First published 1927.]
- Heidegger, M., 1971. *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. A. Hofstadter. London: Harper Row. [Collected works first published separately 1954–6.]
- Heidegger, M., 1972. *On Time and Being*, trans. J. Stambaugh. London: Harper Row. [First published 1969.]
- Sherratt, A., 1996. 'Settlement patterns' or 'landscape studies'? Reconciling reason and romance. *Archaeological Dialogues* 3(2), 140–59.
- Tilley, C., 2004. *The Materiality of Stone: Explorations in Landscape Phenomenology*. Oxford: Berg.