



## Book Reviews

### **ENVIRONMENT, ARCHAEOLOGY AND LANDSCAPE, PAPERS IN HONOUR OF PROFESSOR MARTIN BELL, EDITED BY CATHERINE BARNETT AND THOMAS WALKER**

*Archaeopress Publishing, Oxford 2021. 220pp, 72 figures, 18 tables (colour throughout), pb, ISBN 978-1-80327-084-5, £38.00*

This volume celebrates the wide-ranging influence Martin Bell has had on a generation of archaeologists. There can be few environmental or landscape archaeologists who have not felt his influence and this volume celebrates his reach through a collection of papers ranging from experimental archaeology to contemporary conservation with good new science and thought-provoking essays.

The volume is introduced by Mike Walker, Martin's co-author of the famous textbook '*Late Quaternary Environmental Change*' who gives a potted history of Martin's career and their partnership driving forward the discipline of Environmental Archaeology. The introduction lists all the very great academic achievements, membership of learned societies, participation on research councils etc. But what really shines through is the enormous time and trouble Martin takes in actively involving students and others in fieldwork, and how widely this has been appreciated.

The volume then divides into three key sections, 'People and the Sea', 'Patterns in the Landscape' and 'Archaeology in our Changing World'. These sections comprise papers written by invited authors who worked with Martin throughout his career, and so the volume cannot be considered a guide to either landscape or environmental archaeology, but a composite work of both specific and generalist perspectives. The shift in focus between papers makes the volume a very engaging read.

Importantly the volume also includes personal reflections from those who know Martin best, and again convey how much he has contributed to the careers of so many people. An additional bonus is a comprehensive (and huge!) bibliography, and a whole series of photos from many sites and projects over the last 40 odd years.

'People and the Sea' contains seven papers, beginning with an entertaining protocol for dealing with Mesolithic footprints in the intertidal zone (first take your TV crew...). Martin is perhaps most

widely-known for his work in the Severn Estuary and so it is fitting that this section opens with a paper on the estuary and the wetlands. Stephen Rippon examines how the Severn wetlands were used from prehistory on, through reclamation and modification in the Roman and medieval period. The paper is a concise and precise synthesis of the flux and change here, drawing attention to the need to understand that use of such areas is not always predictable, as land has not always been as desirable as other resources to be found within the estuary.

The next paper provides a very sharp contrast, with Kirsten Barr taking us back to the Mesolithic and the famous Goldcliff footprints, providing a detailed analysis of what has been learnt from them. Additionally, the methodology employed for studying the prints is included, as this is a remarkably difficult form of archaeology to deal with. A degree of experimentation was undertaken, recording footprints from modern humans to create analogues for the archaeological finds. Barr's work suggests a mixed group of Mesolithic people created the footprints, in an area regularly used, and included young children through to adolescents, and both female and male adults.

It isn't possible here to note the contents of all the papers, so a few will be used to highlight the high academic content of the volume, and its diversity. A number of the papers are very site-specific, and bring forward new data and interpretations of sites such as Gwithian, Westwood Ho! and the Kennet Valley, but others bring together a wider perspective than the primarily southern-focused volume. For example, Richard Bradley examines coastal evidence for landing places in Britain, Ireland and Scandinavia, all areas of isostatic uplift where ancient coastlines are preserved. Bradley unpicks what makes a landing place, and how this varies according to individual societal need (defensive or marketplace for instance). He makes a compelling case linking possible sites with extensive and unusual artefact assemblages, and which largely present no evidence for structures. The interaction of coast, boats, goods and different peoples makes fascinating reading, along with possible links in Scandinavia between such places and maritime themed rock art.

The next section, Patterns in the Landscape, contains papers which focus on mobility and the place of people within the wider environment. This is a vast theme, covering much of archaeology but here is condensed into five papers first addressing the Somerset Levels with Richard Brunning casting an overview of research here going back into the 19th century. This is followed by several technical and site-specific papers, focussing on detailed landscape reconstruction in river valley and downland settings, key areas of Martin's interest. The section concludes with a contrasting perspective to the technical papers, 'The lumpy outdoors' by Jim Leary, which examines the experience of landscape, how it has and should be perceived. This paper shifts the focus away from the technical work of re-creating past landscapes but encourages us to think more broadly

and populate our graphs with a more rounded understanding of a living world, where light, darkness, wind and rain also have their parts to play.

The final section, Archaeology in our Changing World, looks at conservation and management of our current environment and includes six papers tackling conservation, experimentation and public engagement. The section opens with Rowena Banerjea proposing how detailed geoarchaeological research can be brought into the modern world as a baseplate for tourism, creating maps and itineraries for visitors. This is followed by papers looking at conservation and management of our remaining wetland areas and the subject of re-wilding, a term increasingly used today and guaranteed to set many landscape archaeologists gnashing their teeth owing to its very general and unspecific focus. Terry O'Connor provides a wide perspective on rewilding/wilding and sharply shows environmental change and modification has been around for thousands of years, so unaltered landscapes are not recent, therefore recreation of a natural landscape is far less simple than the current vogue would have it. His optimism for generating a sense of wonder through better understanding of landscape change is a delightful note in this section, and the focus throughout on public engagement shows a clear appreciation of why all this work is important.

The personal reflections section is a little disjointed, and perhaps the authors were not clearly briefed. Some simply note details of the site they have written about and how their work there was linked with Martin's which is a little dull. Others though are much more interestingly personal and deal clearly with the influence Martin has had on them and their research, and his legacy ('a Professor Dumbledore in socks and sandals'). Perhaps Richard Brunning is best quoted here: *'Everyone who has worked with Martin knows how keen and immensely hard working he is, but also how kind and supportive to those who work for and with him. Martin's unfailing positivity and good humour make him a joy to work with'*.

This volume therefore provides interesting and important new data and perspectives on a range of subjects, both technical and more theoretical. Importantly, the volume reminds us all of the immense value of our mentors and colleagues like Martin, who nourish our careers and enrich our lives.

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