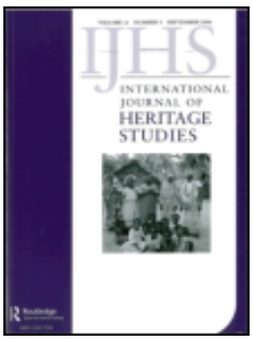

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?Theorising a Realm of Practice?: introducing archaeological heritage management as a research field

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'Theorising a Realm of Practice': introducing archaeological heritage management as a research field

John Carman

Abstract

The paper introduces the field of archaeological heritage management, and the four papers on this subject here presented. Comparisons are made with Cultural Resource Management, Cultural Heritage Management and Archaeological Heritage Management. The research discussed here examines the management of archaeology in practical situations, including those involving indigeneity, to develop a body of theory that will help to illuminate such practice in terms of our own contemporary culture.

Key Words: Archaeology; Cultural Resource Management; Heritage; Indigeneity; Public Archaeology

In general, archaeologists do not consider themselves to be part of a field called 'heritage' or 'heritage studies'. Instead, most archaeologists consider themselves equivalent to historians – that is, as students of the past, who may operate in the present but are not students of present society. Even those of us who are directly concerned with the status and fate of archaeological remains in the present do not, in general, consider ourselves as connected to a field called 'heritage studies'. For us, rightly or wrongly, the field of heritage is most closely connected to fields such as museology, tourism and leisure studies. While we have links – sometimes close ones – with museums, our connections with tourism and the leisure industry are far weaker. Where we do engage with the major concerns of heritage studies, we prefer a different term, and one such name for what we do is coming into quite regular use, having originated in the USA: it is 'public archaeology' (Merriman & Schadla-Hall forthcoming), designating all those areas where archaeologists have to deal with the lay population and the wider world.

Public archaeology as understood in the USA, and increasingly in the UK, is primarily concerned with archaeological outreach – that is, with presenting interpretations of the past and, sometimes, how archaeologists access that past to a lay audience. This can be considered public archaeology 'proper'. The other aspects of public archaeology – the conduct of archaeology in the service of the public and as a public service, as part of environmental conservation, the preservation of ancient remains, their care and maintenance – are given a different name. This may

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be cultural resource management (especially in the USA), cultural heritage management (especially in Australia), archaeological resource management (especially in the UK) or archaeological heritage management (the term commonly applied across Europe since it can be conveniently and meaningfully translated into most European languages). All these various terms are deemed to cover much the same areas of practice and only occasionally do the practitioners of these various fields argue over nomenclature. Where we do, it is in order to clarify for ourselves and others what we do, how we do it, and what kinds of things we do it to. The concerns of this branch of public archaeology – as the terminology implies – are with material remains as expressions of *culture* in the anthropological sense; with their contemporary use, often as some kind of *resource*; and with the *management* of that resource. Public outreach and interpretation – the concern of 'public archaeology proper' – is what follows from these efforts at investigation, preservation and management, as well as giving them a purpose and justification.

Despite differences in terminology, the fundamental principles upon which these fields are based are rarely challenged and are generally not the subject of hot debate. In the same way that museums and other heritage institutions are taken for granted as legitimate and proper things for a civilised society to have, public archaeology – whichever part we are engaged in and whatever we choose to call it – is deemed to be a proper and normal thing to do, and the care and preservation of ancient things and places is seen as an inevitable and natural part of that endeavour. Accordingly, in the same way that students of heritage are generally concerned with the methodology of heritage practices, and with finding new ways of 'doing' heritage, including incorporating new kinds of material into the heritage as understood, most archaeological heritage managers are concerned with their field as one of practice. Indeed, it is tempting to say 'mere practice', since the concern of archaeologists in this area is very much with improving performance where the purposes and structures of heritage underpinning those practices remain a set of unexamined taken-for-granteds.

Some archaeologists, however – such as those represented here in this short collection of papers – are interested in archaeological heritage management practices in their own right, and as cultural forms in their own right, that tell us something about ourselves. For us, heritage – and particularly the archaeological heritage – is always a cultural construct, and the creation and reproduction of a phenomenon called 'the heritage' is always a cultural activity. We therefore study the contemporary practices of archaeologists in their public role in an effort to understand what doing archaeology does – borrowing in particular an idea from Michel Foucault who once commented that 'people know what they do; they frequently know why they do what they do; but what they don't know is what they do does' (quoted in Dreyfus & Rabinow 1983, 187). In doing so, we recognise the importance of the field in that it employs more archaeologists worldwide than any other branch of the discipline, and is the branch of archaeology that interacts most closely with the rest of the world: especially politics, economic development, and the media. It is also the field that decides what archaeology shall be in the future by

engaging with the question of what material shall be retained for the future to be the object of archaeological attention; and also, thereby, what research frameworks shall be possible in the future. Our field is thus central to archaeology itself, as indeed 'heritage' is to any study of the past. It is accordingly too important to be left to those who wish to limit heritage studies to an agenda concerned only with presentation or tourism or development, and should be one that attracts a wide interest. In taking such a stance and developing research to reflect it, we are sometimes deliberately perverse and awkward, taking nothing in the field for granted and nothing as simply 'normal'.

We justify our research and the approach we take on the grounds that it is essential for those of us who care about the material remains of the past to be aware of what it is that we actually do. One of the things that our own historical period may be remembered for is its focus on preserving old things (Fairclough forthcoming). As such, historic and archaeological preservation is not a 'natural' activity but one our culture deems to be – for whatever reason – important. It therefore becomes available to us as a phenomenon for study and understanding, and we choose to do it in three ways: historically, contextually and comparatively. This is the approach I have taken in my own work (Carman 1996), looking at what having laws in England concerning archaeological remains 'does' to those remains. The answer I found, after examining how those laws came to be in place and how they work on the material that is their object, is that laws change things conceptually. In England, passing laws to protect ancient remains made those remains important in a way they had not been before. In being made subject to those laws, individual sites and monuments gain values they previously did not have, and these are particular kinds of values defined by the laws we have created. Over time, it is the values created by law that have come to dominate thinking about the historic environment so that passing and applying law has become the 'normal' way of ensuring the survival of ancient material. In the course of this process, the original purpose behind such laws and the values they were intended to represent and allow to operate have become masked: instead of being a 'cultural' matter (in the everyday sense), preservation of the material past has a become a bureaucratic process (Carman et al. 1999; Carman forthcoming). It is the study of that bureaucratic process which lies at the heart of the work presented here.

As students of archaeological heritage management, what we study is what archaeologists do in the process of managing the material left to us by previous generations. We look at the structures and institutions established to manage that heritage – laws and other regulations, and organisations – and follow the practices of archaeologists in going about that work. Throughout, our concern is not with justifying existing practices nor yet with finding fault, but with establishing a firm body of knowledge about what constitute the actual practices of heritage management in archaeology. From there, we can go on to understand the unseen and sometimes unconsidered consequences of those practices for archaeology as a discipline and the material remains for which we are responsible. This is the ultimate purpose of such research. We call what we do 'theorising a realm of practice', where

the realm of (mere) practice is the field of archaeological heritage management, and our task is to examine the practices of the field in order to develop a body of theory that will help us understand what that field means in terms of our own contemporary culture.

This is one thing the four papers offered here share in common: a focus on theorising archaeological practice. Laurajane Smith engages with the connection between theories applied in academic research archaeology and Australian cultural heritage management, Darrin Lee Long examines practices elsewhere in Australia and in Zimbabwe drawing upon ideas about how the global and local spheres interact, while Koji Mizoguchi draws upon ideas from social theory to look at archaeological practices in Japan. All three also share a concern for the categories so often taken for granted in heritage practice. In particular, Lee Long is concerned to identify what makes something 'indigenous' heritage, and finds his answer in the construction of a 'world' heritage against which this can be set and of which this can become a part. Mizoguchi is concerned to see how the management of archaeological sites relates to people's construction of themselves. Laurajane Smith chooses to take a leaf from Foucault and consider Australian archaeology as a branch of 'governmentality' in relation to the creation of an 'Aboriginal' heritage that can be managed. This shared emphasis on theorising practice makes heritage for us – perhaps paradoxically for archaeologists – a realm not of concrete action but ideology, not of things but of ideas: and this is reflected in the lack of supporting images for the papers, which we feel are unnecessary and potentially distracting from the ideas presented.

If forced to decide, we would all choose to consider ourselves part of the 'post-processual' or 'interpretive' turn in archaeology. So-called 'processual' approaches were adopted in Anglo-American archaeology in the 1960s and 1970s at the same time as cultural resource management archaeology was emerging in the USA, and the link between them is emphasised in Laurajane Smith's paper. In an effort to move beyond culture-history and descriptive approaches in archaeology, processualists allied archaeology with a 'scientific' anthropology rather than with history, valued explanation over description, incorporated cross-cultural generalisations about natural and social processes into archaeological discourse and sought to establish explicit interpretive methodologies. All of this was intended to provide a framework within which firm inferences could be made from archaeological data. In the 1980s, especially in Britain, a reaction set in against this 'hard science' approach, drawing on ideas from other fields. In particular, interpretive archaeologies seek to realign archaeology with history, assert the pre-eminence of the interpreter and the process of interpretation as a contemporary practice, and thereby recognise the inevitably contextual and contingent nature of any attempt to understand the past (Hodder et al. 1995, pp. 3–5). A focus on archaeology as a contemporary practice has obvious affinities with our work as presented here.

The papers have a strong focus on the Pacific rim, which serves to emphasise the international – indeed global – nature of archaeological heritage management. Every nation in the world has in place laws and procedures for the protection and

preservation of at least some part of its material cultural heritage. While practitioners look to Europe and North America for guidance on how to meet internationally set standards, it is at the boundaries and on the fringe of these metropolitan areas that many interesting developments are taking place: in Africa (Ardouin et al. 1997), in Latin America (sadly unrepresented here), and among the peoples of the southern ocean. It is here that issues such as 'indigeneity' (the quality of being indigenous) come to the fore. In terms of the management of so much of the world's archaeological heritage, and especially in former European colonies, this is an important concept underlying much heritage practice. It is a term usually taken to mean the material and cultural heritage of an original, extant but perhaps now dwindling and subordinate population. As Smith emphasises here, such heritages are managed under regulations and structures put in place by the dominant population which then become tools for the 'management' of the subordinate peoples, but as Lee Long points out, such structures can be subverted by the appropriation of that construction of heritage by the subordinate population for their own purposes. This makes the realm of heritage an important one for the construction of identities, not merely their reflection. To understand how heritages can be built and used contributes to a broader understanding of how human society works. Taking a different approach to different circumstances, but on a parallel path, Mizoguchi argues for an understanding of heritage categorisation processes as part of a wider process of social discourse. In thus looking beyond our own particular circumstances, we have a chance to see how heritage 'works'. We believe that by looking elsewhere we can enrich our understanding of how our own heritage also works, and especially how it works upon ourselves in our own particular context.

Despite the non-European focus of these papers, however, the impetus to research these phenomena in the ways presented here does have a European core, of a kind, since each of us has a connection with the Department of Archaeology at the University of Cambridge, UK. I, Darrin Lee Long and Koji Mizoguchi gained archaeological education and qualifications there, and Laurajane Smith was a Visiting Scholar for a while, giving us all the opportunity to meet and exchange ideas. At that time, Laurajane and I each thought we were the only people pursuing such research: I had started and was to finish before her, but it has turned out that we were both right. Since then, others have joined us to create this particular body of 'heritage' research which comes out of archaeology and, in particular, archaeology in Cambridge.

In doing our work, we deliberately avoid making concrete suggestions about how archaeological heritage management should be done in favour of finding out what the effects of doing it are on the world. While we would all accept that we are 'theorisers' this does not mean that we bring *a priori* ideas to bear on an object which we have already decided we understand; in fact, the opposite. What we do is look at heritage management practices in particular places and circumstances, try to make some sense of what they represent and achieve, and then seek out a suitable theoretical framework which helps us to contextualise and interpret that understanding. This is why we call what we do 'theorising a realm of practice' – it is

literally not theorising about archaeological heritage management but researching into the specifics of practices and turning the results into a theoretical statement about what those practices actually do in the world. While so much of the current discourse of heritage is about the simplification of complexity and attempts to overcome diversity, this work is concerned to restore that complexity and to explore that diversity.

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