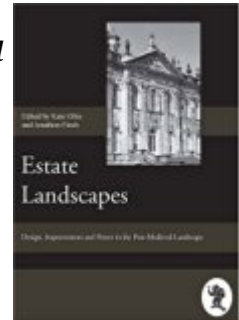


Jonathan Finch, Katherine Giles, eds.. *Estate Landscapes: Design, Improvement and Power in the Post-Medieval Landscape*. Rochester: Boydell and Brewer, 2007.
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Reviewed by Peter H. Hansen

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Commissioned by David S. Karr (Columbia College)

This is not your grandparent's archaeology. While nonspecialists were watching *Indiana Jones* or television documentaries in which narrators offer archaeological tidbits from the ruins of prehistoric latrines, academic archaeologists have transformed a once exclusively positivist field over the last twenty years with spirited debates over social theory and archaeology. The Society of Post-Medieval Archaeology has responded to this intellectual ferment in recent years by sponsoring a series of thematic conferences and scholarly monographs, including this volume on estate landscapes as well as previous works on the archaeology of cities, industrialization, and the Reformation. *Estate Landscapes* consists of papers presented at the Society of Post-Medieval Archaeology's meeting at the University of York in 2003 and several commissioned later to provide a comparative perspective. After an introductory overview of archaeological perspectives on estate landscapes, the essays are clustered under the themes of improvement, material culture, and colonial landscapes.

As with any collected volume, the essays are not uniform in approach and do not speak with one voice. If the volume has a central theme, however, it is this: the multilayered character of estate landscapes has been obscured by a process of scholarly enclosure, in which disciplinary subspecialties have each cultivated their own garden without looking beyond the hedgerows they have constructed to separate themselves from one another. In particular, garden historians and architectural historians receive pointed criticism for an overemphasis on aesthetic factors during the design phase of estate landscapes, which has obscured the interplay of ornamental, productive, and recreational uses.

In the introduction, Tom Williamson provides a synthesis of recent work to argue persuasively that the landed estate with house, gardens, and park set in a larger property was a distinctive manifestation of modernity rather than archaic tradition or relic of a feudal age. The wide variety of physical evidence studied by archaeologists illuminates the complex and ambiguous motiva-

tions of estate management. Economic historians too often assume profit-maximizing motives for improvement schemes, which were also adopted for social or ideological reasons. For example, the irrigation of meadows, application of fertilizers, and reorganization of fields into regular enclosures of "barton" fields in Devon and Cornwall, described in an essay by Sam Turner, all asserted rights of ownership, power over estates, and fashionable display as much as improved agricultural productivity. Where some historical geographers have identified a correlation between proximity to the house and aesthetic importance, archaeologists find the intermingling of functional and ornamental purposes. According to Williamson, the particular contribution of archaeologists is to see beyond these disciplinary divisions. "Garden historians and architectural historians look at the designed estate 'core,' [while] economic and social historians examine the life of the outer estate: archaeologists, accustomed to read the complex and layered meanings in buildings, artifacts and landscapes, are in a better position than most to understand the estate landscape as a whole, in the same way as its owners and managers appear to have done" (p. 8).

Williamson briefly describes three periods to link the estate landscape to broader historical developments. The period from the sixteenth to the early eighteenth century marked the transition from landed properties as collections of rights and incomes to a block of owned and controlled land. From the early eighteenth century, the core of the estate became more formal and ostentatious and schemes of "improvement" expanded over large tracts of land as upper ranks of society were consolidated. From the early nineteenth century, the position of estate owners in an industrial era has become well-trodden ground by historians but remains less well studied by archaeologists. Many of the essays demonstrate the impact of "improvement," but apart from Colin Breen's essay on the emergence of capitalism with the English plantations in southwestern Ireland from

the late sixteenth century, most of the essays provide readings of particular landscapes rather than situating their work in such a broad framework.

Jonathan Finch offers a metaphor of the integrated relationship of architecture, gardens, and agriculture in the figures of Pallas, Flora, and Ceres, three goddesses represented on the pediment of Castle Howard in North Yorkshire: Pallas appears associated with art of building, Flora with a cornucopia of flowers, and Ceres with a sheaf of corn. In a model essay, Finch uses a wide variety of sources to explore the changing uses of the estate and the integration of the productive and ornamental: "As archaeologists we cannot afford to treat aspects of the landscape in isolation, particularly when there is ample evidence from the period that patrons and visitors were unlikely to make such distinctions" (p. 35).

Many of the essays in the thematic sections on improvement and material culture pursue similar themes. Charles E. Orser Jr.'s excavation of Tanzyfort House in County Sligo, Ireland, demonstrates that the "Cult of the Ruin" in the eighteenth century was never merely decorative since structures built to express the longevity of the family also served as the starting point for genteel activities (p. 90). Paul Everson offers a stimulating account of two mid-seventeenth-century sites: fishing gardens at Wyeford, Hampshire, which appear to be places of "quietist" behavior; and a compound of buildings at Chesterton, Warwickshire, which were rebuilt in the late 1650s to "establish a position" in anticipation of the restoration of the monarchy (p. 123). Intriguingly, the fieldwork at Chesterton was prompted by rabbit burrowing that threw up large quantities of late medieval window glass from fishpond moats that had been thought to be much older. The rabbits themselves may be descendants of rabbits planted in "pillow mound" earthworks, or man-made rabbit burrows, which were not merely status symbols as often supposed but were once strongly associated with Catholicism.[1] Other essays on English es-

tate landscapes include Robert Silvester and Judith Alfrey on the estate of Vaynor in the Severn Valley; David Dawson and Oliver Kent on an eighteenth-century kiln at Dunster, Somerset; and Harold Mytum on monuments at Castle Howard and Sledmere, East Yorkshire.

The last section on colonial estates has the character of a promissory note. Barbara Heath's probing discussion of Thomas Jefferson's retirement villa at Poplar Forest, Virginia, which weaved together Anglo-Saxon history, classical antiquity, and family ties, is oddly placed in an earlier section. Roger Leech's essay on Nevis and St. Kitts uses Global Positioning System (GPS) and documentary maps to track the process of enclosure. Dan Hicks's excellent essay on sugar estate landscapes in the Leeward Islands during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries provides a much wider historiographical overview, possibly because an earlier version of the essay had been published in chapter 4 of his book *The Garden of the World: An Historical Archaeology of Sugar Landscapes in the Eastern Caribbean* (2004). Hicks notes that attention to the materiality of "improvement" suggests colonial landscapes influenced the development of estate landscapes in Britain (p. 221). Ending the book on this note indicates that the periodization offered earlier may require some modification and that more work in the comparative archaeology of empire and estate landscapes should be forthcoming.

Estate Landscapes illustrates the strengths of a critical archaeology and the limitations of scholarly enclosures. Let's hope the postmedieval archaeologists continue to cross these disciplinary and geographical boundaries.

Note

[1]. David Stocker and Margarita Stocker, "Sacred Profanity: The Theology of Rabbit Breeding and the Symbolic Landscape of the Warren," *World Archaeology* 28, no. 2 (1996): 265-272, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/125075>.

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[2]. Dan Hicks, *The Garden of the World: An Historical Archaeology of Sugar Landscapes in the Eastern Caribbean* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2004), chap. 4.

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