

Roger Leech and Pamela Leech (eds), *The Colonial Landscape of the British Caribbean*, (The Society for Post-Medieval Archaeology Monograph 11. Boydell, Woodbridge 2021). xxx + 276pp, 191 figs, 9 tables. Hardback. £40 [ISBN: 978-1-78327-565-6].

BGAS readers should not be surprised to see this title reviewed in their *Transactions*: Bristol's long-standing and many-stranded connections with the Caribbean are well-known. Perhaps less widely appreciated is that Roger Leech, a past President of the Society, the author of the definitive work on Bristol Houses and the co-editor of this collection of 12 papers, has experience of archaeology in the Caribbean spanning two decades, and is thus ideally positioned to draw research strands together, take stock, and suggest ways forward.

In a sober Foreword dated four months after the Colston statue's precipitation into Bristol harbour, the Council of the Society for Post-Medieval Archaeology offers timely reflections on how we should now deal with the colonial past: '... we recognize that the 20th century model of western, white experts helicoptering into exotic locations to carry out research (supported by local infrastructure), and then taking the results back to western universities, and writing them up for the benefit of western scholars and academia is no longer fit for purpose, and is actively detrimental to local colleagues, communities and the archaeology itself.' Inclusivity was striven for where possible in the monograph's studies, yet the SPMA evidently self-assesses as '*could do better*': 'we see this publication [as] a catalyst for the Society to do things differently in the future'. The pervasive issue is that the material remains the archaeologist works on, and the associated historical records, are almost always those created by the coloniser, for colonial ends; the colonised are overshadowed, when they are visible at all. This then is an important and ambitious book.

The monograph springs from an SPMA conference held on Nevis in 2005; four papers focus on sites on that island, and four on its larger Leeward neighbour, St Kitts. The scene is set by more general papers considering Caribbean colonial cartography; stylistic comparisons between military buildings of Florida (briefly British, we are reminded, from 1763 to 1783) and the West Indies; architectural responses to earthquake and hurricane; and London as capital of empire, mainly as reflected in small finds of exotic origin.

First to St Kitts: Brimstone Hill, a volcanic extrusion overlooking the Caribbean, proved an ideal location for an extensive British colonial fortress, active from 1690 to 1854. Until emancipation in 1834 all its construction and maintenance was carried out by enslaved Africans, many housed on site. Military and island records allow an unusually detailed picture to be drawn of this labour force (their numbers and provisioning); while archaeological investigation sheds light on where and how they were housed, with the size and longevity of the site giving rise to huge quantities of artifacts (almost 100,000 from one complex alone). The tourist's eye may still rest mostly on Brimstone's fortifications and the view, but the archaeology has clearly facilitated a deeper appreciation of a major cultural and heritage asset on the island.

The sugar monoculture that had long dominated St Kitts became steadily weaker in the last century. Despite government support, cane production ceased in 2005 (note is made of the scenic train which now uses the sugar railway track, opening up the heritage landscape). Archaeological surveying in 2004-5 showed that where plantation structures had survived neglect and natural forces, they were now under severe development pressure, as alternative income sources were sought. Nevertheless, it proved possible to define the characteristics of slave and post-emancipation villages, and more might now be identified.

Turning to Nevis: *Time Team* fans may recall the programme's quest (filmed in 1998) for the site of Jamestown, a commercial settlement on the island's west coast, reputedly obliterated by tsunami in 1690. Intriguing discoveries were glimpsed, but the cameras moved swiftly on. It took sustained documentary and archaeological research over four seasons, summarised here, to recover a much fuller and more reliable picture. Seismic activity around 1690 was indeed indicated, though the site's disappearance from view was due more to eroded soil from higher slopes than marine incursion.

The final paper to note, by Roger Leech himself, deals with the archaeological field survey of over 5,000ha, just north of the Nevisian capital, Charlestown. Focused on Mountravers, but embracing several other former plantations, the site is of especial interest because of its links to Bristol through the Pinney family, and the opportunities it has presented to develop a shared understanding, across the Atlantic, of all the estate's past inhabitants. With the support of extensive documentary and field research, it was hoped to gain World Heritage Site recognition. While this bid failed, in part for the lack of a local administrative infrastructure sufficient to secure the long-term health of such a site, Leech offers practical pointers for the better safeguarding of Nevis heritage in future. Will they be acted on?

In all the areas covered by this monograph, the challenges are substantial, not least the pressure of developments that earn more tourist and investor dollars than 'ruins' do, and the relentless regrowth of tropical vegetation on abandoned land. While the marketing of complex and troubling history, such as the colonial Caribbean presents at every turn, is far from straightforward, it would be good to think that the authors of the papers here, and their many local collaborators, are not simply voices crying in the wilderness. The islanders, and their heritage, deserve much better.

This is an attractively-produced volume, generously illustrated. Your reviewer's one cavil concerns the index, which is less than comprehensive.

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