

The past in a foreign country¹

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‘. . . the Cheviots obscure all sight of England’ (*Lothian*, 13)

INTRODUCTION

‘What do Edinburgh and Fair Isle have in common?’ should not henceforth be too difficult a question for the heritage slot in ‘Round Britain Quiz’. The answer, courtesy of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, Her Majesty’s Stationery Office and Ritchie industry is that each is distinguished by a chapter of its own in the now-complete eight volume *Series*, *Exploring Scotland’s Heritage* (1985–7)².

The appearance of this *Series*, and its swift completion, is more than a matter for local self-congratulation. It is indeed a publishing event in its own right and a considerable achievement by all those involved. It is probably significant for Scotland, its image and its tourist industry, and almost certainly it will have a bearing on the heritage institutions and perhaps even on the heritage itself. Furthermore, however influential the *Series* proves to be in Scotland itself, it carries implications further afield; from which viewpoint this essay is unashamedly written by a Northumbrian Sassenach peering over Cheviot at the past in a foreign country.

THE SERIES

The eight volumes conform fairly strictly to a *Series*-style. Generally, they look similar. Of landscape format 189 mm by 246 mm, they range in length between 160 pages (*Clyde*) and 204 pages (*F & T*). All are paperback; there is no hardback edition. Each is fronted on the outside front cover by a reproduction of a 19th-century painting, six of them from the 15 years 1807–22. *Grampian*’s ‘Highland Gathering at Balmoral’ (1869) and *Argyll*’s undated ‘Inverlochy Castle’ artistically stick out like thistles in one of the several formal gardens illustrated. This is a pity, not just for the sake of consistency but because the slightly-faded simplicity of the earlier works is beguilingly attractive. Perhaps it is significant for the perception of Scotland’s heritage that five of the covers show boats and ruins in juxtaposition; all of the covers show water and mountains or cliffs. The oddity in terms of subject, though effective in itself, is *Clyde*’s ‘New Lanark . . .’ by John Winning (c 1818).

Within, the volumes follow a formula; a foreword by the *Series* Editor, Anna Ritchie, varying only in the biographical details of the author(s) and Ordnance Survey sheet numbers; an introduction, basically a chronological survey coming forward in time; then between six (*Grampian*) and 11 (*Highlands*) chapters going backwards in time; a list of museums; a section suggesting between six (*Clyde*, *Highlands*) and 10 (*Grampian*) excursions, each with its own road/site map; a 1–2 page

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bibliography, and a c four-page index (*Lothian* has 8 pp) entirely of individual sites and monuments. Each volume is designed on a 2½ column layout, giving great flexibility in producing a visually satisfying mix of words, black and white photographs and, sometimes, line drawings. Colour photographs appear in all the volumes, printed on either side of an occasional unnumbered single sheet at the gathering folds. *D & G*, for example, contains 162 black and white plates, including reproductions, old photographs and air photographs, 20 colour plates, 12 line drawings and seven excursion maps; the equivalent figures for *Highlands* are 161, 19, 13, and six. All volumes contain on the inside back cover a coloured map of the area covered showing the position of each site or monument, together with its text-number, in relation to Regional and District boundaries, main roads, canals, rivers, and land over 1500 ft (457 m).

In all, 802 sites and monuments are numbered in the text of the eight volumes. In the same order as the titles in the bibliographical note,² the monuments per volume are 105 (+Edinburgh), 103 (including Glasgow), 104 (+Fair Isle), 98, 90, 107, and 104. In many cases, however, the numbered monument is used as the visible peg on which to hang an account embracing other adjacent monuments in both town and country. The Introduction, the introductions to each chapter, and the excursion notes, also mention material not included elsewhere. Using the index, which indicates the numbered sites and lists all the others mentioned, the average over a sample of 5 columns from five different books is 16 numbered sites per 40 entries, a ratio of 2:5. This gives an estimated total of some 2000 sites and monuments noted in some form or other in the *Series* at an average of 250 per volume. Such must presumably be taken as fairly representative of Scotland's man-made heritage as perceived; it certainly includes most if not all of the upstanding and outstanding jewels in the structural national patrimony.

The whole *Series* exhibits controlled design and tight editorial management. Nevertheless, accommodated within the *Series* – and it is one of its attractions – is sufficient flexibility to respond to regional variety, diversity within the material being presented, and authors' preferences and interests. The chapter headings are indicative in this respect. The editorial line was clearly to start with the recent past, involving the monuments of industry, towns, communications and agriculture, and then to move backwards through time taking in country houses, castles, ecclesiastical sites, and monuments of the first millennium AD and earlier. This general progression is actually expressed in eight different ways, according to the nature of the area covered but, more so, as the authors interpret it.

The most 'conventional' book in this respect is *Argyll* with chapters, and groups of monuments arranged accordingly, on 'Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Architecture', 'Rural Buildings', 'Industrial Monuments', 'Towns', 'Castles', 'Ecclesiastical Monuments', and 'Prehistoric Monuments' – very much the monumental, almost *Inventory* approach. At the other extreme is *Grampian* where the author's very different approach is also reflected in his six chapter-heads: 'Three Burghs', 'The Landscape of Improvement', 'Baronial Residences', 'Prelates and Presbyteries', 'Tribal Defence and Display', and 'Ancestors of Ancestors'. This goes much further than is warranted by the differences in topography and material culture between Scotland's western and eastern sides. The fact is that in *Grampian* a whole layer of conscious interpretation is interposed between the material and the reader; a layer based upon assumptions about former élites and social hierarchies. Not all the 'Baronial Residences', for example, appear to be baronial except in a strictly legalistic sense, and defence, display and ancestor worship cannot provide the *only* framework within which to present the whole range of archaeological sites before c 1000 AD. The author himself apparently demonstrates this, for example, in opining (p 131) that 'large-scale stock control with some agriculture' are represented by 'the settlements of Old and New Kinord'. Or at least so I thought, for I could not immediately correlate such a function with defence, display or ancestor worship; but then I was not fully keyed in to the author's sole parameter which, on the next page, leads him to describe New

Kinord in the ostensibly factual account of the site as 'this well-organized, prestigious farmstead'. Such is of course intellectually challenging but, without the space to develop the argument for 'prestigiousness', author-bias of this sort in a tourist guidebook is possibly misplaced. It is a moot point whether the perhaps less exciting but more orthodox approach of *Argyll* is more appropriate, the balance depending in large part on the degree of priority attached to uniformity, to compatibility, throughout a Series.

In fact, different emphases throughout the *Series* give variety to it (not that this is of much interest to the purchaser of any one volume who primarily wants reliable accounts of sites in a particular area). In the *Highlands*, harbours are sufficiently important to make their appearance in a chapter-head (echoing the cover illustration of William Daniell's 'Helmsdale' in Sutherland); but some confusion might be caused by the use of the word 'Monuments' in the titles of both chapter 8 ('Ecclesiastical Monuments', the normal sense throughout the *Series*) and chapter 5 ('Mansions and Monuments', uniquely *sensu* memorials and, incidentally, the meaning which most people pick up when they hear the word). Here, it is used (p 74), for example, of the 'handsome cast-iron clock on a column dated 1899', at Ullapool, 'a memorial to Sir J Arthur Fowler and his son John' (no relation). Joanna Close-Brooks also accurately reflects an important historical aspect of her area, easy to forget now in romantic contemplation of rugged Highland grandeur, by alone having a chapter on 'Artillery Forts and Barracks'. She describes Fort George, Ardersier, Ruthven Barracks, Badenoch, and Bernera Barracks, Lochalsh (the whole treatment, to give an idea of the scale allowed by the *Series*, occupies eight pages, with just over half of the space taken up by illustrative matter). She is also alone in using a most unfashionable phrase in the chapter title for a subject which again does not occur elsewhere in the *Series* – 'Dark Age Carved Stones'. Altogether *Highlands*, although at first it *looks* the same as the others, is in some ways a particularly individualistic volume.

Divergences from a 'norm' actually appear in all the volumes. *Fife*, for example, is the only one to group material adjectively into chapters on 'Pictish Monuments' and 'Roman Tayside'. *Clyde*, while basically following a strait-laced path from 'Transport and Industry' to 'Prehistoric Burial and Ritual Monuments', is the only volume to burst-out into a chapter on 'Moated Sites and Earthwork Castles'. Similar regional and author diversity is reflected in *O & S*'s chapter-heads referring to lighthouses, harbours, country mansions, dovecotes, and farm steadings; while *D & G*'s unique 'Gardens' take the eye in the title of chapter 5 even though one at first looks in vain for Roman and prehistoric settlements between chapter 8's 'Churches and Christian Monuments' and chapter 9's 'Prehistoric Ritual and Funerary Monuments' (in fact they lurk in chapter 7's 'Early Fortifications and Settlements' after 'Castles and Towers').

Geoffrey Stell, the author of *D & G*, introduces a philosophic note into his Introduction:

'The emphasis here is on those aspects (of the monuments) which are measurable according to a national standard of antiquity, size, rarity and geographical distribution, in order to place the monuments of this region in wider perspective . . . Dumfries and Galloway may not quite have everything, but many of its antiquities stand high in their respective national league tables' (p 13).

That is a very remarkable statement, as worthy of contemplation as the very best of Scotland's heritage.

In some ways, however, the most original volume is one of the first pair to be published, *Lothian*. The groupings are slightly but significantly different (this author's italics): 'Industrial monuments, bridges *and* harbours'; 'Mercat crosses, rural buildings *and* agriculture'; 'Roman *and* post-Roman forts and settlements'. Chapters 5 and 6, alone in the *Series*, make an interesting distinction between 'Post-Reformation churches and graveyards' and 'Pre-Reformation churches, abbeys and Early Christian stones' rather than following the archaeologists' monumental division into 'Ecclesiastical sites' and 'Early Christian stones'. The reason is not hard to find for the author,

John Baldwin, is professionally neither archaeologist nor architectural historian; he is (p 6) an educational adviser with a wide knowledge 'of the interaction of man and the environment'. It shows: his Introduction is altogether of a different approach and quality, outstanding among a number of good introductory essays. Difficult though this is to demonstrate in short quotations, the following illustrate the point:

'... mere technological comparisons across time are likely to be both simplistic and misleading. Small medieval bridges are at least as impressive and required just as much skill to construct as massive railway viaducts; early burial cairns, stone alignments and multi-ramparted hill settlements taxed minds and bodies, inventive genius and social organization, in just the same way as elaborate abbeys, vaulted tower-houses and huge curtain walled castles' (p 9); '... the overall impact of today's built environment on much of the landscape remains progressively intrusive. . . . It is an increasingly compartmentalized, structure-littered landscape, where the 'improvement' of such countryside features as Edinburgh's Arthur's Seat tends merely to suburbanize and diminish' (p 16).

The *Series*, then, is presented in a format which appears fairly rigid; it conforms superficially to a house-style characterized by a pleasing homogeneity. But in fact one of its strengths as a *Series* is that, within these editorial and format constraints, each volume is able to vary according to the needs of both author and material. Indeed, each volume is able to stand alone as an individual publication valid for its own area irrespective of its serial conception. It is to the editor's, designers' and publisher's credit that they have given us eight excellent books while creating a distinctive *Series*.

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE SERIES

This is a quality production. Each book is a pleasure to handle and to look at; the typography and layout are clear, the proof-reading is excellent, and most of the c 1450 plates and c 100 line drawings are well-reproduced. At just under 4 p per page and (7 p per numbered monument), visual quality is matched quantitatively by value for money.

Specific criticisms are few. The most serious is the lack of maps and plans. With regard to the latter, I suspect that the relative ease and cheapness of covering the pages with largely-available photographs rather than expensively preparing new drawings may have been a factor but, even so, in the field if not in the study, a plan is so much more helpful. Where maps are provided, for example of Kirkwall and of the Ring of Brodgar area in Orkney, they are so helpful both in reading the text and on the ground that they highlight the need for such throughout the *Series*. Most of the town descriptions are very difficult for a stranger to follow for want of a map; and in the countryside, complexes lose their impact for the same reason. I suspect, perhaps unfairly, that this marked and regrettable lack is more than a financial constraint, being as much a reflection of a less than full appreciation of a dimension of 'heritage' that actually requires a map to express it. I am thinking here of the map not just as a tool to show location but as the medium for expressing relationships in space and time and perhaps even sociologically. If such exist in Scottish field archaeology, this *Series* does not do them justice.

A brief glossary in each volume would have been helpful too. It is not mere Sassenach ignorance to quail at the like of 'highland couples' and 'a hanging lum' (though not every reader will be as lucky as this writer in having seen the two sites and know the reality rather than what the mind's eye conjures up, *Highland* nos 23, 24); mercat crosses, cleits and policies (Scottish version) might also have been explained for foreigners' benefit. Even common words like 'feudal' and 'baronial' have special Scottish nuances which should be defined, precisely because these are common words with an English meaning south of Cheviot. The point is made on the assumption that the books are intended for non-Scottish readers too.

The indexing is adequate if you know the name of the site but it is not helpful in searching out all

sites in a small area and useless for trying to find sites of similar type, date, function or material. Deficiencies in cross-referencing also exist. For example, Kilphedir (*Highlands*, p. 183) is indexed as no 84, and pp 134, 135, 136, and 152–3; yet an unmentioned, superb colour photograph of the site appears between pp 128–9 and, while that is cross-referenced to the main site-entry by monument number (84), nothing in the latter indicates the former or, for that matter, the aerial photograph of hut circles near the broch on p 136. Indeed generally, while picture captions contain monument numbers, there is no tie-up in the other direction. It is not therefore possible to acquire in one place and at a glance all the available data on a specific site. I found this a particular nuisance preparing for serious fieldwork.

Assessment of the *Series* must, however, depend in large part on academic judgements about the quality of the information provided and of the fieldwork behind it. Personally, but not merely because I cannot check the c 800 sites described, I am content to rely on the reputation and standards of the Royal Commission. Six of the nine authors are not in fact on its staff but that certainly does not suggest, on the evidence here, any diminution in quality. Indeed, Baldwin's *Lothian*, together with Stell's *D & G*, are perhaps the most intellectually satisfying, and Shepherd is the only person who could have encompassed *Grampian* so authoritatively and with such judgement in selection. Close-Brooks's *Highlands* is also a *tour de force*; her area is vast absolutely, far and away the largest area covered by a volume in the *Series*, and quite difficult to move around in. The common element of consistency is that all the authors, whatever their status, were able to draw on the information and material in the National Monuments Record of Scotland and the Commission's graphic and photographic expertises.

The quality of the information is not, however, merely assumed. In July, 1987, I was in Orkney for archaeological purposes unconnected with this review but was able incidentally to test Anna Ritchie's volume fairly thoroughly on the ground. The volume was indeed an essential prop to my own work there and certainly saved me hours of time – as it will continue to do in preparation for publication. For ordinary visitor purposes – reading up the evening before, planning the next day, getting to and from sites efficiently, and knowing something of what to look for – it was excellent. Its background commentaries on areas, settlements and individual sites were most helpful, its descriptions, as far as they went, almost faultless, and, for my purposes, its summaries of excavations and finds invaluable.

Criticisms involve asking for more than the book, and the *Series*, were intended to provide. It would obviously have been useful to me if all the Orkney material had been together rather than intermixed with that from Shetland. Even within the 50 pp of chapters 9 and 10 covering what I was concerned with, the prehistoric sites, it was a nuisance having the two groups of islands together even though each category of site is allocated internally to Orkney or Shetland. Nevertheless, one has to guess as to the category to which a site is ascribed and then find out whether it was entered by type, place-names or indeed on any system. For example, the reason is not immediately apparent for 'Castle of Burwick, Fort, South Ronaldsay, Orkney' appearing on p 129 between the 'Broch of Mousa, Shetland' and 'Ness of Burgi, Fort, Shetland'; or for 'Skara Brae, Settlement, Orkney' occurring on pp 138–40 between 'Liddle, Burnt Mound, South Ronaldsay, Orkney' and 'Knap of Howar Settlement, Papa Westray, Orkney'. Of course, any way of dividing up the material has disadvantages for someone, and I can quite see the argument for putting, say, all the brochs together and all the chambered tombs together. Here too the natural wish to see as much as possible when one has made the effort to reach an island is catered for by the multi-period, multi-monument 'excursions' to Eday and its Calf, Papa Westray and its Holm, and Rousay; but I would underwrite the editor's own advice also to use the Ordnance Survey 1:50000 Landranger Series adding, if serious study is intended, the appropriate 1:25000 map.

The fact is, of course, that these volumes, with all their scholarship, acute observation on site and painstaking research in records, are but a beginning; as the editor says, an 'introduction'. Agreed, without further excavation, there is probably not much more to be said about Vinquoy or Skara Brae; as far as the displayed remains of the Knap of Howar are concerned, the same is true. Indeed the description of the two buildings at the last, with the benefit of excavation, is fully accurate and illuminating. The environs of the site, however, require much fuller explanation, provided to a degree in the excursion notes (pp 173–5). They still leave unmentioned, however, a number of landscape features near the Knap, over the rest of the island and on the Holm, as the author well knows, for some but not all of them are listed in the, for me, invaluable Orkney booklets in another series called *The Archaeological Sites and Monuments of Scotland*, also compiled and issued by the Commission. For research purposes in the field, well beyond the aims of the 'Heritage' *Series*, these booklets (in effect mobile Sites and Monuments Records) are essential, as I found especially on Eday and its Calf and on the Holm of Papa Westray, small areas not only with concentrations of monuments but with great complexities of relationships.

It is much to the Scottish Commission's credit that it has made so much information available at these two levels. It is clearly conscious of the two different needs, both requiring good quality data. It is no criticism of this *Series* to say that, good though its contents are, it depicts only part of the surviving past and a special and biased part at that:

'many [of the monuments listed] have been taken into the care of the State or the National Trust for Scotland . . . only the finest, most interesting or best-preserved have been described in detail. . .' (every Foreword).

To offset this, 'attention has also been drawn to other sites worth visiting in the vicinity' of the numbered sites. Even so, field archaeologists know there is yet another level of observation and discovery beyond. Guidebooks like these must not be allowed to 'freeze' knowledge at their moment of compilation. I wonder if the public appreciates this: my impression is that, the past being popularly perceived to be dead, archaeology is seen as the static study of the finite known.

By chance, that the opposite is true was well-illustrated on Eday. The island 'was in early prehistoric times a fertile and densely settled area', writes Ritchie (*O & S* p 172), 'as the discovery of ancient field-boundaries beneath the blanket peat has demonstrated'. No other mention of these phenomena is made but the *Sites and Monuments* booklet locates spots where they have been observed and also lists other structures in the area. My visit coincided with the recent uncovering of several hundred metres of undisturbed wall and other features and included a chance (?) meeting in the one and only bar with the two peat-diggers. Their independent description of context, structural details and extent, confirming and supplementing my observations, means that a lot more can now be said about the sub-peat walls of northern Eday which are, after all, quite as monumental as the only numbered site in the area, the chambered cairn on Vinquoy Hill (no 99). Perhaps they will warrant a number in the second edition of *O & S* for they are quite as impressive and well-preserved as anything similar on Dartmoor or in Co Mayo.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE SERIES

The very existence of this *Series* raises a number of points. Why, in the first place, was it undertaken and whom is it for? The standard Foreword anticipates both questions. The *Series* is 'designed to provide up-to-date and authoritative introductions to the rich archaeological heritage of the various regions of Scotland'. Further, 'thanks to the recent growth of popular interest in these topics, there is an increasing demand for knowledge to be presented in a readily digestible form and at a moderate price . . .', so the aim and the target are to make 'authentic information about the man-made heritage available to as wide an audience as possible'.

The use of the words 'authoritative' and 'authentic' is significant and understandable. With so much tourist literature seasonally pouring on to the market, most of it commercially motivated, much of it derivative yet unresearched, and quite a lot of it recycling the spurious, the unproven and the wrong, the need for authoritative guide books from an informed, public-service (however unfashionable the concept) organization, generating its product from original sources, is palpable. Of course, these volumes will now be raided and quarried by the publishing parasites of the tourist world but, if this leads to better, popular derivatives, the public good as well as private enterprise will have been enhanced and the Royal Commission's initiative will be seen to have been 'relevant'.

RCAHMS appears as 'sponsor' of the Series, broadening 'the range of its publications' as already noted. Yet clearly these are as much Royal Commission volumes as are its *Inventories*, responding in a late 20th-century manner to a perceived public need as did the initial *Inventories* early in the century. Given the success of this *Series*, it is natural to ask whether the *Inventories* are still needed: they are cumbersome, incredibly labour-intensive to produce, and expensive both to publish and to buy (though this *Series* is not cheap at £55.60). Argument on this point, however, deals with a secondary issue. The basic issue is whether or not it is necessary to carry out the original fieldwork and other research at the level hitherto required to produce an *Inventory*. The answer is that such work has eventually to be done at that level in order to provide the authoritative data-base whether the medium for subsequent communication is a £50 *Inventory*, a £6.95 popular guidebook, or a TV programme for that matter. There are no short cuts on this original work without joining the downmarket spiral of populism towards lower standard of research, analysis and interpretation. That said, and given a permanent curated data-base such as we have in the National Monuments Records, to make the knowledge available as widely and as interestingly through as varied a range of media as possible is highly desirable. Logically, a Royal Commission 'Donald Duck goes to the Harbours and Canals of Scotland' for children is not inconceivable, and assuredly the Graphics and Editorial Sections would rise to the challenge.

The *Series* nevertheless might raise the question of the Royal Commissions' functions (including the English and Welsh ones); RCAHMS gives the correct answer. It, and the others, are 'responsible for compiling a national record of archaeological sites and historic buildings of all types and periods' (reverse of title page) and to make the record available through publications and 'through the maintenance of a central archive of information, known as the National Monuments Record . . . open daily for public reference . . .' The English Commission is even more specific:

'it has had to recognize that it is not possible for it to publish what is, in effect, a finite list of all the national monuments. . . . The inventory . . . is now seen, not as a series of individual published volumes, but as the entirety of the ever-growing archives which are collectively housed within the National Monuments Record. . . . [This Record] is the national inventory of historic buildings and archaeological sites. . . . Only a selection of this material can ever be published in conventional book form' (RCHME, *Annual Review* 1986-7, 2-3).

Having grasped the nettle of reality, the English Commission nevertheless

'continues to be concerned to make its information available as widely as possible. This need has become all the more pressing with the policy (lately announced) that the Royal Commission no longer intends to publish on a parish by parish, county by county basis . . . a much more flexible approach to publication was called for . . . reflected since in the Royal Commission's publications and the greater emphasis on the use of the National Monuments Record . . . at present we have effectively a two-tier structure of publication: county inventories and thematic volumes' (RCHME, *Annual Review* 1986-7, 2-3).

The fact that this long quotation, justified by its importance, comes from the fourth of a series of *Annual Reviews* is itself significant in the same sense as the Scottish Commission's 'Heritage' *Series*. Both bodies not only continue to try to be useful but are now trying to be much more visibly useful. Undoubtedly this attitude reflects not just a rising popular interest in the Commissions' fields but also

increased sensitivity on the part of hitherto somewhat low-profile institutions to a changed political situation.

That some of the working practices of the Commissions' own staff and some of their publications are now different from the 1970s is not in itself bad, provided the long-term objectives are maintained; and provided the necessary curatorial and technical resources are available and properly managed so that the NMRs' contents can be 'delivered' in lieu of continuing, ostensibly comprehensive *Inventories*. In fact, in Scotland as in Wales, it probably is possible to continue towards the objective of complete geographical coverage even if it is recognized that the long march of traditional *Inventories* will not eventually contain a complete and finite inventory of ancient and historic monuments in those two countries. In England, however, there is no point in continuing with that objective: the tidal wave of data and their uses has already engulfed the concept of the national inventory as a printed, book-bound descriptive list. The facts that the State's management of the heritage, as manifested in the activities of the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England, now openly embraces some half-million historic buildings deemed worthy of Listed status and a target of some 60000 Scheduled Monuments as 10% of the acknowledged 'population' of about 600000 archaeological sites, alone imply much higher numbers of sites and monuments needing to be recorded. And such records need to be kept, ordered and made available centrally.

'Centrally' is an apparently simple concept which itself needs to be defined for modern purposes in this context. At one level its traditional meaning still holds good: ie a central place at which the records and the material are physically gathered together and made available for consultation. In the present context such are the National Monuments Records respectively in Edinburgh, Aberystwyth and London. Visits to them can be extremely cost-effective. But while these central archives have expanded over the last decade, so has their relative comprehensiveness declined. In Scotland, perhaps less so, partly because there has been a smaller expansion of work than elsewhere in the country and partly because the Commission has both taken signal initiatives and been able to maintain a centralized control of data-generation and curation. Probably we are seeing here, among other factors, the benefits of scale for, in both Wales and Scotland, the size and complexity of the relevant operation is small and simple compared to that in England. In the last, by contrast and despite various initiatives with and through the NMR by the English Commission, other record-making and storing agencies have sprung up apace, usually for local administrative purposes and without much regard, other than voluntary, for common standards of quality and procedure. So, in terms of a national data-base, the problems of quantity, large enough in themselves, are now bedevilled further by difficulties of an organizational, technical and psychological nature. So the moment, if it ever existed, for creating an English central heritage record in one place has passed, in part because of the ready availability of increasingly cheap machine-based technology enabling anyone so minded in effect to set up a stand-alone data-base.

Paradoxically, it is the development of the technology which already provides the way out of this mess, given goodwill, by using the concept of 'centrality' at a different level. The key word is 'network'. It really does not matter any longer where data are stored provided the various centres are interlinked; and provided too that customers outside can enter the network. The technical detail need not concern us here for the main point really is quite simple: any *bona fide* enquirer, without any need at all of going to Edinburgh, Aberystwyth or London, should be able to acquire the information he needs through the medium of a machine similar to that on which this text is being prepared. And copies of at least some of the original material such as plans and photographs should be available equally easily by facsimile transmission. This is the world that the NMRs have to move into if they, rather than a row of readily accessible *Inventories* on the shelves of our libraries, are to form the public face of the national inventory.

Such thoughts may seem far-removed from consideration of a popular series of heritage guidebooks; yet the two are intimately related. As the NMRs grow, it becomes ever more vital that they make special yet continuous efforts to display their wares and services. In addition to being well-catalogued to facilitate ready access to their contents, whatever the particular line of an enquirer, they must provide systematic updates of accessions just like any good Record Office. The English Commission does this now in its *Annual Reviews* and the Scottish Commission does it with its annual list of new air photographs and, more obliquely, by the publication of its *The Archaeological Sites and Monuments of Scotland* series. That is at one level as it were, to meet professional needs.

The 'Heritage' *Series* comes in at a second level, meeting several other needs. It is most important to provide 'indicative' publications, that is books which, while hopefully valid in themselves in dealing with a theme or an area, are very much drawn from the record and thereby indicate the sort of material in it. The 'Heritage' *Series* falls into this category; so too did the English Commission's 'NMR Photographic Archives' series. Such are no substitute for formal catalogues, but they enhance the functions of an NMR by demonstrating the nature and possible uses of its contents for the benefit of potential users and, in addition, they encourage potential donors. Certainly in the case of the English NMR, the use of and contributions to it went up quite perceptibly as the 'Photographic Archives' series was published. It will be interesting to see if something similar now happens at the NMR for Scotland.

It will also be interesting to see if there is any noticeable effect at and on the sites themselves. After all, while many of the sites are already in guidebooks and advertised as open to the public, some 2000 are now attractively drawn to the public's attention in a cohesive and authoritative manner by a distinguished public body. Yet, measuring any increase in visitors, and correlating it with the *Series*, will be well-nigh impossible. Many of the sites are unmanned and in any case part of the thrust of the books, especially in regard to towns, is to heighten awareness of groupings and streetscape rather than to push more countable bodies through Guardianship turnstiles. One suspects too that much of the usefulness of the books will be for reference on academic and commercial desks rather than always in the field.

Nevertheless, as a contributor to the increasing encouragement to people to visit their heritage, the *Series* might help increase pressure on individual sites. Erosion, for example, can easily start from the wear of human feet, making stricter management necessary, eg by 'people rationing', or by restricting visitors to new permanent paths. In the heritage world, 'more' does not necessarily equal 'good' let alone 'better', at least as far as the sites, the primary resource, are concerned. Yet, throughout the heritage business world around which this *Series* skirts whether it likes it or not, the whole ethos is towards further exploitation without much concern or even thought for the consequences.

We touch on an extremely sensitive and fundamental point here. Of course, basically we, the public, have a right to know, in this case about our common heritage which we are paying to be discovered, recorded and, as appropriate, conserved. The professionals, particularly those in the public service, therefore have an obligation to communicate. To a very large extent, this function has so far been carried out disinterestedly, yet with pleasure; such a feeling lies behind this *Series*. From time to time now and henceforth, we may just have to pause for thought before making information freely available, or at least making a decision positively to promote the popular dissemination of all of it. At one extreme, for example, the advent of treasure-hunting in England in the early 1970s made us a little more careful in disseminating data as an unquestionable worthy end in itself simply because it became quite clear that the good intentions implicit in such an act were being suborned by others to their own, anti-social ends. The information still exists, and is available, as it always has been, to those whose need of it is valid; but, sadly, it became sensible not to advertise some of it. Similarly, but at the

other extreme, the body which owns one of the major tourist attractions just this side of Cheviot quite deliberately no longer advertises it because the monument simply cannot take a heavier load of visitors: it is tourist-saturated. At what point will encouragement of visitors to, say, the Knap of Howar be counter-productive in necessitating railings disfiguring its present attractiveness, as has already so insensitively and sadly happened inside Maes Howe? At the personal level, I am simply not going to mention certain places in a guide book I am compiling, not because I am trying to hide them but because to make them better known would actually harm them. This sort of problem may not yet have affected the great majority of the sites mentioned in this *Series*; but the altruistic motives and assumptions underpinning it may need to be examined fairly critically before a second edition is published especially if, ironically, the first *Series* is successful in encouraging lots of people to explore Scotland's heritage.

In comparison, my penultimate point is minor though personally intriguing. It concerns the use of the word 'Exploring' in the *Series* title. Can you really explore anything in any legitimate sense of the word with a Royal Commission/HMSO paperback in your hand? The sites are not only known; by definition, they officially exist. And in many cases they have been investigated and recorded, even excavated, by others during many visits over two or three centuries. But 'to explore' is not quite the same as 'to discover' in the sense of finding for the first time, though even that sense comes into the, to my mind, quite legitimate use of 'exploring' here. However well-known a site, every new visitor arrives to make his own discovery; and that surely is what these books are about. They display a whole field of enquiry and invite the individual to explore it for himself. Whatever exists in the record and the guidebooks, each visitor discovers each site for himself as he sees it for the first time, takes in its context and perhaps begins to examine its detail. So we are thinking here of self-exploration, perhaps even of that realization of returning whence we came which Eliot captured so memorably. More prosaically, these books may encourage individuals to revisit their own favourite sites and streets rather than boost numbers at tourists traps. Indeed, I suspect that the real audience for this *Series* will be, as may have always been quietly intended, the curious visitor rather than the transient tourist.

My use of *Orkney* was as a curious visitor. I did not carry a VDU on Viquoy Hill so I was glad to cope with a flapping old-fashioned page in the slightly shower-proof cover of Anna Ritchie's book while exploring a fragment of Scotland's heritage in the perpetual, damp Orcadian wind. As a result of the *Series* she has so successfully edited, I trust many another, Scot, Sassenach and foreigner (but not too many), will be encouraged to enjoy similar enriching experiences in the now not so obscure cultural landscapes north of Cheviot

NOTES

- 1 With apologies to David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (CUP 1985), after the first words of the opening sentence in L P Hartley, *The Go-Between*, of which the second half reads: 'they do things differently there'.
- 2 *Exploring Scotland's Heritage* (all HMSO, Edinburgh, £6.95).
 Graham Ritchie and Mary Harman, *Argyll and the Western Isles*, 1985 (abbreviated as *Argyll*).
 John Baldwin, *Lothian and the Borders*, 1985 (*Lothian*).
 Jack Stevenson, *The Clyde Estuary & Central Region*, 1985 (*Clyde*).
 Anna Ritchie, *Orkney and Shetland*, 1985 (*O & S*).
 Joanna Close-Brooks, *The Highlands*, 1986 (*Highlands*).
 Geoffrey Stell, *Dumfries and Galloway*, 1986 (*D & G*).
 Ian Shepherd, *Grampian*, 1986 (*Grampian*).
 Bruce Walker and Graham Ritchie, *Fife and Tayside*, 1987 (*F & T*).
 Each title is followed by the short identifier in parenthesis which is used throughout the article.