Thomas Guest and Paul Nash in Wiltshire: Two Episodes in the Artistic Approach to British Antiquity

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Fig.1
Paul Nash
Equivalents for the Megaliths, 1935
oil on canvas
Purchased 1970
© Tate 2005
⊞ View in Tate Collection

Over a century after his death, the English artist Thomas Robert Guest (1754-1818) emerged from total obscurity as a direct result of his contribution to archaeology. In June 1938 four paintings he had produced of grave goods unearthed at Winterslow, Wiltshire, were reproduced by Frank Stevens and John Stone in an article published in the *Wiltshire Archaeological Magazine* (figs.1-4).[1] Shortly afterwards, the paintings themselves were placed on permanent loan in the Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum and then purchased. Guest's re-appearance in the late 1930s was timely, given the growing popular enthusiasm for archaeology in that decade and the interest in historic and contemporary art of some British archaeologists, most notably Stuart Piggott. One of Guest's paintings was illustrated in Jacquetta Hawkes's *Early Britain*, first published in 1945 as part of the series 'The British People in Pictures,' and this alone may be responsible for the widespread public familiarity with 'Mr. Guest of Salisbury' as Hawkes's caption and most subsequent authors describe him.[2] The image has a slightly surrealist flavour to it, seen with modern eyes, reminiscent of Giorgio de Chirico or René Magritte in its strange discrepancies of scale (the beaker is little more than eight inches high in reality), its spatial arrangements and the enigma of its meaning.[3]

Fig.2
Thomas Guest
*Two Bronze Age urns [now in
Ashmoleum] excavated from barrows
at Winterslow, Wiltshire* 1814
oil on canvas
© Salisbury & South Wiltshire
Museum

Fig.3
Thomas Guest
*Grave group from a bell barrow at
Winterslow – landscape background*
1814
oil
© Salisbury & South Wiltshire
Museum

Fig.4
Thomas Guest
Two biconical urns from a barrow in Winterslow 1814
oil
© Salisbury & South Wiltshire Museum

In these respects it seems to inhabit the same emotional environment as the paintings of Paul Nash (1889–1946), whose *Equivalents for the Megaliths* (fig.1), now in Tate, was completed in 1935, the same year that Guest's paintings were rediscovered and three years before Stevens and Stone's article helped rescue Guest from total neglect. Both pictures are the same size, both respond to the archaeological heritage and both came about at a time when their artists were responding to antiquarian or archaeological investigations. At first sight, this coincidence seems to be no more than a happy accident of timing with the implication that any attempt to link Guest and Nash would be an entirely anachronistic response. After all, when Guest produced these paintings, he meant them as artistic statements and as contributions to the serious prosecution of archaeological research, not as anticipations of modernism. Nash, likewise, would not have known of Guest's existence in 1935. Nevertheless, what I hope to show in this essay is how the horizon of possibilities open to Guest as an artist in the 1810s can be compared to Nash's opportunities in the 1930s and what this says about the changing relationship between art and archaeology in the modern period. The tension between Guest's training and ambitions, on the one hand, and his response to British antiquities, on the other, was still a concern for artists of Nash's generation in the 1930s, as was the relationship between archaeological and artistic appropriations of the past.

Fig.5
Thomas Guest
Grave group from a surface interment at Winterslow, bucket, shield boss and dagger; landscape background [Saxon] 1814
oil
© Salisbury & South Wiltshire Museum

Thomas Guest's paintings of grave goods were produced in the summer of 1814 to help record the Bronze Age and Saxon objects found in two barrows near the Hut Inn at Winterslow, Wiltshire. The excavation of these barrows was conducted by the Rev. A.B. Hutchins, who eventually bequeathed many of his finds to the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford in 1847. The earliest source relating to his antiquarian activities comprises a letter from Hutchins to Sir Richard Colt Hoare, dated 10 February 1824, describing the excavations and Guest's paintings of the Winterslow finds, together with a key to explain the objects depicted in one of them.[4] Two of Guest's pictures show finds displayed in interior settings, two of them show finds against a landscape background.[5] One of these latter records most of the Saxon finds from Hutchins' 'Collossal Barrow', in which was discovered a large skeleton (omitted by Guest), the boss and handgrip of a shield, a spearhead, a buckle and a wooden bucket with bronze hoops. All of these items have since disappeared and Guest's painting was used as documentary evidence of the Saxon finds in Stevens and Stone's 1938 article. Modern archaeology thus vindicated Guest's work in choosing to use it for this purpose, for the extant nineteenth-century literature demonstrates that Guest's involvement with the excavation was always noteworthy and that Hutchins believed that the paintings of his finds constituted significant repositories of archaeological data. If we remember that excavations were not necessarily accompanied with precise verbal descriptions at that date, the paintings can indeed be considered as valuable testimony of the discoveries, especially insofar as they show objects which are now lost and were not exhaustively described in the accounts later provided by Hutchins.

The correspondence between Frank Stevens, Curator at the Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum, and the then owner of the paintings, Mr. W.H. Heath, clearly shows how archaeologists in the 1930s agreed with Hutchins about the significance of Guest's paintings lying in their ability to record data. In May 1935, having finally established the whereabouts of the canvases, Stevens asked Heath to make sure that the pictures, 'though of no special artistic merit', were preserved for their 'great scientific value'.[6] At the end of that month, making Heath an offer of £4 for the paintings, he again reminded him that 'they have, of course, no artistic value'.[7] When Heath finally replied that £4 was not enough, Stevens turned to his colleague E.T. Leeds at the Ashmolean Musuem for advice.[8] Leeds' reply entirely agreed with Stevens' opinion:

I have never had to buy original oil-paintings of antiquities and rather hope I never shall: my experience is that water-colours are much better. But if I were going to offer for them I should not put the value high. They are little more than a pictorial record, and if put up in a sale-room would fetch very little. That is the standard on which I myself should judge them, plus what more you are prepared to give for their (to you) historical value.[9]

As the rest of this essay will propose, I believe that the this archaeological viewpoint is justified, for Guest has proved to be a reliable witness, but in attempting to deny the status of these paintings as art works it overlooks much of what Guest brought to the project and fundamentally misinterprets what the paintings achieved.

It is evident from the published accounts that Hutchins himself made at least one drawing on the spot, for he describes how he took an 'exact likeness upon the Barrow' of a piece of linen 'before I removed the ashes, during which time the wind deprived me of the whole'.[10] Given his own abilities as a draughtsman, his decision to use Guest must have been prompted by the desire to make a more substantial record of his discoveries.[11] In the painting of the Saxon finds from the so-called Collossall Barrow Guest recorded a wooden bucket (described by Hutchins as 'a covering for the arm made of wood and hooped round with brass'), which subsequently crumbled away to dust, and Hutchins implies that the artist's abilities had thus saved valuable data from irretrievable loss.[12] Yet, granting that this was indeed the case, not only for the bucket but also for the other Saxon relics that have subsequently disappeared, Hutchins' account obscures what the relationship of the painting to these grave goods actually was. Patently, for all its appearance of a selection of recently excavated finds in the location of the dig, Guest did not produce this image on the spot. Oil painting is a cumbersome business and was difficult to prosecute in the open air prior to the invention of collapsible metal tubes for oil paints in the 1840s. Moreover, it is clear that this is not a straightforward record. The objects are grouped in a picturesque composition, in a lozenge-like arrangement dominating the centre of the painting. The image is cleverly designed for visual impact and it testifies to Guest's abilities as an artist. That same professionalism would have directed his approach to the business of making records. The paintings he produced are still valuable documents, but they must not be treated as the equivalents of excavation notation, nor even as reports, but as another sort of response to Hutchins's discoveries

A comparison of Guest's other three paintings with the objects they depict demonstrates that he was accurate in his renditions and took some pains to get the details right. This is perhaps to be expected, given his interest in teaching drawing from nature and publishing an instruction manual on it, *A New Pocket Sketch Book, containing an easy Method of Drawing from Nature* (1807), but it also makes sense with respect to two features of the art world in the early nineteenth century: an enthusiasm for Dutch art and the growth of naturalism. Dutch and Flemish painting of the seventeenth century, whether in still life or the incidental paraphernalia of domestic scenes, had achieved a high standard of mimetic accuracy in the rendition of material objects. Already popular with British connoisseurs, this type of picture was especially prominent on the British art market after 1800, with the dispersal of continental collections in the wake of the French Revolution. David Wilkie was one of a number of British artists working between 1800 and 1820 who achieved professional success in direct proportion to their 'Netherlandish' approach, combining observational accuracy, minute description and high finish. The growth of Naturalism

in the same period is also worth bearing in mind. Naturalism can be characterised as a desire to paint the natural world without artifice, often working directly from the motif. Although naturalism is associated with landscape artists considerably younger than Guest, his presentation of these non-idealised subjects, in settings lacking any artificial embellishments, seems at the very least conformable with some elements of the Naturalist credo. The fidelity of these paintings can therefore be best understood, perhaps, as a product of a particular situation, when a significant body of contemporary artistic practice was orientated to accurate observation, as opposed to the ideal. It helps explain how a drawing master, landscape and history painter could place his art at the service of antiquarian scholarship, where precision in recording was of more concern than artistic invention.[13]

Yet, even accepting the possible impact of changes in artistic practice on Guest's approach to his task, the fact that Hutchins commissioned him to make oil paintings and that Guest felt it worthwhile to do so is noteworthy. Hitherto, the status of oil painting within the academic hierarchy distanced it from the more functional record of the world to be found in the engraved illustrations that were included in books on natural philosophy, medicine and antiquarian study. In using oils to do the job of engraving Guest was being particularly innovative, for in moving from one medium to another he was making what we might characterise as a rhetorical decision. When it comes to the depiction of grave goods, graphic delineation, especially in the form of line engraving, is more obviously a form of abstracted representation, using an essentially linear notation to depict them and usually only employing black and white, not colour. Contours are sharp, forms are crisply defined and the contrast between the printed engraving and the blankness of the surrounding page accentuates its artificiality as an image. Moreover, taking its place amidst a textual presentation and so surrounded by words, the graphic notation of the printed image becomes almost a form of specialised writing. The excavated finds depicted in an engraving are, to this extent, objects already disciplined by the intellectual discourse that explains them.

Furthermore, by its very nature an engraving can produce emphases and omissions that help clarify the points of interest in the object under review. If a typological argument is being advanced then the object's shape will be accentuated and surface detail diminished; if the concern is more with measurement, then representation in different orientations will be paramount as opposed to a minute adumbration of detail. Scales, dimensions, identifying letters and numbers, even additional text can all be added to the plate without upsetting our response to the image. It is precisely because an engraving is so obviously distinguished from that sort of mimesis that might fool the eye that we can employ its artifice selectively in this way.[14] In short, engraving lends itself to notation, because its mimetic possibilities are restricted. And as a consequence we can accept that the integrity of the object *qua* object need not be rigidly adhered to in its engraved presentation. Instead we accept the conventions that render the object susceptible to our intellectual needs; it has been removed from the world of things into the structures of learning.

Oil painting, on the other hand, was characterised in Guest's time as a technique whose traditions and historic status elevated it above the business of making records. Academic theory emphasised the potential of painting to work with the imagination, to rise above the limitations of the world and to broach the ideal. Oil painters who reduced their art to pure mimesis could be censured for their banalisation of the art form. Within the academic hierarchy, the pre-eminent place was reserved for historical, biblical and mythological painting, a type of subject matter that Guest himself had recently exhibited in London; ranked below were portraiture, genre painting

(i.e. social scenes), landscape and still life. Even still life, however, had a respectable tradition and could be intellectually ambitious, especially in the products of seventeenth-century Dutch painting, when still life subjects often included moralising symbolism. To reduce still life to merely an empty display of mimetic skill was, on this reckoning, to misuse one's talent, although there was compensation in the fact that the objects themselves were usually decorous and the overall pictorial ensemble would furnish a room prettily enough. What Guest did, however, was to take objects that most of his contemporaries would have regarded as decidedly uncouth and bestow on them the characteristic procedures of the still life tradition. By doing so, the transition of the excavated objects from the world of things into the structures of learning was complicated to a high degree. As we shall see, the treatment Guest afforded Hutchins's finds went significantly beyond rendering them archaeologically useful.

Winterslow itself is 6 miles north east of Salisbury. In the early 1800s its population was less than 1000, although we should remember that Salisbury itself had fewer than 3,500 inhabitants at this time. Two of Guest's paintings record the landscape there as background, showing it as largely uncultivated and given over to sheep grazing; but just as with the idea of Guest recording only what lay before his eyes, this evidence, too, is misleading in its seeming presentation of some remote, sparsely populated and isolated location. In his account, Hutchins refers to Winterslow Hut as 'that well known spot' and it was, in fact, a staging post on the important turn-pike road from London to Salisbury and the West Country. As opposed to being something of an empty stage, merely a foil to the items displayed in their foregrounds, the landscape surroundings Guest painted for Hutchins's discoveries would have been known to local viewers. One of the landscapes looks south from Winterslow Hut to the barrows, the other looks north from the barrows to Winterslow Hut and the London-Salisbury turnpike. Indeed, Hutchins or Guest may well have intended to accentuate the drama of the finds, by forcibly reminding local observers of the riches so long hidden in such a familiar location.

What kind of artist was Thomas Guest? The surviving evidence for his life and professional career is meagre, but full enough to allow some inferences to be drawn.[15] He was born in the 1750s and lived through the period when British art was at its most vigorous, with the establishment of the Royal Academy in 1768, the developing careers of Reynolds and Gainsborough and the emergence over the next forty years of a significant school of landscape painters, from Richard Wilson to J.M.W. Turner. He lived in London for some time, making a living as an artist and drawing master, and with some success judging by the fact that his address was in Pall Mall. Ill health obliged him to leave the capital and he moved to Salisbury in 1802, where he set up in business as an artist, drawing master, picture restorer and supplier of oils and varnishes. In 1807, he published *A New Pocket Sketch Book, containing an easy Method of Drawing from Nature*, the kind of production that ambitious drawing masters used not just to formalise their methods but also to advertise their abilities. Guest's *Sketch Book* was illustrated with nine explanatory etchings and covered perspective, composition and the use of colour, in both oil and watercolour.[16] His home in the High Street doubled as an exhibition venue for his work and, from 1815, housed Guest's formal organisation of his art teaching as an Academy. He evidently found the art business too irregular a source of income, even so, and branched out into other pursuits, running the Circulating Library and selling snuff and fishing tackle. He died in 1818, aged sixty-four.

This pattern of activities, and even to some extent the biography, is typical of numerous artists working in England's larger provincial centres in the early nineteenth century. A London career

was the great prize, but even if unsuccessful there the cachet of having worked in the capital could be used to bolster one's reputation elsewhere. Provincial towns, however, seldom had the client base and economic strength to support artists as professionals and it was almost always necessary to diversify one's activities to embrace not just painting, often a hazardous means of earning a living, but also teaching, picture restoring, art dealing and the purveyance of allied goods and services.[17] Indeed Guest's career perhaps exemplifies the disappointed hopes of creative artists that Hazlitt outlined in his 1821 essay, 'On Living to One's-Self,' written, coincidentally, in the inn at Winterslow Hut: 'how many wretched daubers shiver and shake in the ague-fit of alternate hopes and fears, waste and pine away in the atrophy of genius, or else turn drawing-masters, picture-cleaners, or newspaper critics?'[18] Guest's exhibition record reveals that he had failed to achieve professional exposure in London before his move to Salisbury and must have made his living in the capital in much the same varied way as he would do in Wiltshire. In fact, with respect to significant exhibitions, Guest only showed work in London after he had left it, exhibiting four small landscapes at the British Institution in 1810, two of them of Stonehenge, followed by two scriptural subjects in 1814.[19] His work for Hutchins was produced, therefore, in his late fifties, at the end of his most successful period as a professional artist. Even so, if Guest had initially cherished ambitious hopes for his career, this was a belated and inconsequential achievement.[20]

From this outline of his career it is evident that were it not for his antiquarian paintings Guest would have no place in the history of British art. Yet, the fact that we owe these pictures to an irredeemably minor artist is no accident, for the depiction of British antiquities was not an activity that ambitious painters would choose as a specialism. The topographer and Director of the Society of Antiquaries, Richard Gough, had complained about this problem in the 1780s, noting that 'the walk of fame for modern artists is not sufficiently enlarged. Emulous of excelling in History, Portrait, or Landscape, they overlook the unprofitable, though not the less tasteful, walk of antiquity, or, in Grecian and Roman forget Gothic and more domestic monuments.'[21] When British antiquity was depicted, in a manner which antiquarian scholarship or modern archaeology might find useful, it was by means of drawings and engravings, as opposed to pictures worthy of exhibition, and often by otherwise unknown artists. This is not to say that British antiquity was never treated by serious artists; rather it is to point out that if such artists treated it they did so occasionally and usually imprecisely.[22]

It is clear that Guest's images are more than archaeological records: the organisation of the finds in still-life displays and their disposition with regard to the landscape backgrounds are considered decisions. We might note, initially, that the rim of the Saxon bucket is positioned so as just to break the horizon line, while the curves of its hoops and the convex dome of the shield boss leaning up against it echo the swelling burial mounds behind them.[23] Similarly, the linear structure of the bucket's metalwork is reiterated by the parallel alignment of the spearhead and the shield grip, the latter itself orientated to the road in the distance. From a practical point of view this is a successful solution to a difficult problem: how to bring into relation five disparate objects, whose varied materials and fragmentary condition militated against any composition beyond that of a simple array in a catalogue of finds. From the evidence presented in all four of Guest's paintings, it is clear that he reconciled the demands of art and of antiquarianism with a bias towards the former. This would help explain why the Saxon skeleton was omitted from the picture under review. For a scholar, the grave goods in conjunction with the remains of their erstwhile owner would have provided a more useful repository of data, giving an indication of the

man whose arms and equipment these were, perhaps even revealing the location of the grave-goods and the skeleton within the interment, as James Douglas had memorably depicted them two decades earlier, when engraving one of his Saxon excavations in *Nenia Britannica*.[24] Instead, Guest removed Hutchins' finds from their immediate context to position them in picturesque combinations, either in front of the landscape or in undifferentiated interior surroundings.[25]

It is arguable, on this basis, that Guest and Hutchins were engaged in allied but separate pursuits. Guest was a painter and employed his knowledge of painting and its traditions to inform his images. Purely from the point of view of recording his finds, however, Hutchins did not require this level of artifice. For all his subsequent comments valorising Guest's images as objective records of grave goods, what he received were in fact cabinet pictures, using the dignity of the still-life tradition to make British antiquity a suitable subject for display. What makes Guest's images so quirky, certainly to modern eyes, is precisely that he has broken an unstated but understood convention regarding the acceptable presentation of such remains. What that convention implicitly asserts is that intriguing as such objects are, and however valuable a visual record of them might be for antiquarian scholarship, the information they contain is best recorded in a more utilitarian means of representation. Quite simply, they are not worthy of this kind of creative attention.

It is a function of the still-life tradition, however, that we see objects more attentively than usual; prompted by the artist's skill, our senses respond not just to the look of things but, almost synaesthetically, to textures, tastes and smells. The tactility of the oil medium functions as a kind of correlative for this enhanced sensory response, the varying transparency and opacity of paint registering the differences in substance that constitute the objects arrayed before us. Rather than looking through them, for the information they contain as typical objects, we look at them in all their specificity and uniqueness. And because they are situated in an environment, catching and receiving light, we are aware of them not just as physically unique objects but also as objects at a particular moment, a sort of eternal present. What we see is not an object in an abstract presentation, but this object, here, now, in front of us. This kind of response is ultimately a sort of enchantment, luring the viewer into the pictorial space and responding to its sensual cues. Guest's rendition of Bronze Age grave goods is equally bewitching. His use of oils, his still-life organisation, his compositional devices, above all his use of scale animate the finds to the point that they seem to inhabit, even to command their pictures as opposed to being subservient to them. As almost animate presences they lose what might be characterised as the docile presence of similar objects when depicted in the more customary mode of an engraved representation. In short, although produced to help advance learning, through medium and presentation Guest's objects resist their wholesale inscription into the world of antiquarian scrutiny. They might almost be said to lead their own lives.

The rediscovery of Thomas Guest's work in the late 1930s coincided with a moment in British archaeology when antiquity and modern art came into close alignment. A number of the more significant figures associated with the modern movement, painters, sculptors and critics, had expressed their admiration for prehistoric forms, responding especially to megalithic complexes such as Avebury and Stonehenge. The turn away from representational verisimilitude towards a more abstract formal language in the arts of the early twentieth century encouraged some observers to invoke prehistoric art as analogously situated. Here, too, in the remotest past of

Britain, non-representational forms had been created, but they had been understood and valued as centrally important to their communities, unlike the sceptical and sometimes hostile responses to abstract art found in modern Britain.[26] This essentially primitivistic interpretation of the links between past and present was much in the air in the 1930s and 40s and on occasion it involved quite close relations between artists and archaeologists.[27] Probably the best known British modernist artist to engage consistently with prehistory was Paul Nash. Nash's invocation of prehistoric Britain may be said to work with the same tension seen in Guest's paintings, between artifice and information, but Nash's solution was to offer a more resolutely artistic approach to antiquity.[28] By way of a conclusion to this essay I intend to discuss his painting *Equivalents for the Megaliths* (1935), to investigate how we might characterise its relationship to the archaeology of the 1930s.

Nash first visited Avebury and its surroundings in July 1933, while staying at Marlborough, and several of his most important paintings of the later 1930s are based on these experiences. Some of them are essentially topographical in spirit, but his more ambitious paintings offer a more abstracted presentation and play fast and loose with any geographical and archaeological exactitudes. These two modes of approaching the relics of antiquity may partially be explained by Nash's need to secure as wide a market as possible for his output. Although he had secured a nationally significant reputation, very unlike the position of Thomas Guest in the 1810s, the exigencies of financial scarcity forced Nash, too, to extend his operations into many different spheres. During the slump of the early 1930s, the market for art became very difficult and Nash diversified his activities into painting, print media, design and, increasingly, writing.[29]

Nash wrote frequently on artistic and other matters and, as a result, we are in a good position to review his declared position on the relationship between art and archaeology. Nash wanted to champion the possibility of artists finding their own accommodation with the past, rather than being subservient to archaeological understanding. In a letter of May 1937, he talks about his intentions for his painting *Equivalents for the Megaliths*:

> These groups (at Avebury) are impressive as forms opposed to their surroundings both by virtue of their actual composition of lines and masses and planes, directions and volumes; and in the irrational sense, their suggestion of a super-reality. They are dramatic also, however, as symbols of their antiquity, as hallowed remnants of an almost unknown civilisation. In designing the picture, I wished to avoid the very powerful influence of the antiquarian suggestion, and to insist only upon the dramatic qualities of a composition of shapes equivalent to the prone or upright stones simply as upright or prone, or leaning masses, grouped together in a scene of open fields and hills.[30]

Nash's credo here asserts the paramount importance of artistic activity as an imaginative approach to antiquity, using compositional factors to structure a response that engages with, but is radically distinguished from its originating stimulus in the real world. In choosing to emphasise the work of imagination, Nash is, of course, attempting to liberate the practice of art from any instrumental understanding of its potential to communicate. Art, on Nash's analysis, is diminished the more it restricts itself to literal representation and enhanced the more it concerns itself with imagination and intuition.

This is, essentially, a modernist position and by that token it may seem that the delicate balance struck by Guest between imagination and illustration in 1814 has been weighted so heavily towards imagination in the 1930s that the resultant image is archaeologically irrelevant. The scruples that prompted ambitious artists to eschew antiquarian illustration in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were surely even more deeply entrenched in the 1930s. Nash was certainly opposed to art's subordination to archaeology, but his disquiet was more profound than simply professional amour-propre. With respect to artistic or archaeological method, what was at stake for Nash was the possibility of apprehending the relics of another culture from a modern viewpoint without diminishing them.

Despite enjoying brief but cordial relations with Stuart Piggott and Alexander Keiller, Nash felt that Keiller's restoration work at Avebury in the later 1930s had robbed the site of its presence and its power. The controlled experience of prehistory offered by Keiller's restoration (megalithic landscape gardening, as Stuart Piggott later described it), seemed to Nash wrong-headed in its attempt to retrieve what time had eroded. Keiller wanted clarity where Nash wanted mystery. As he put in 1942, looking back to his first visit in 1933:

> the great stones were in their wild state, so to speak. Some were half covered by the grass, others stood up in cornfields or were entangled and overgrown in the copses, some were buried under the turf. But they were wonderful and disquieting, and as I saw them then, I shall always remember them. Very soon afterwards the big work of reinstating the Circles and Avenues began, so that to a great extent that primal magic of the stones' appearance was lost.[31]

Nash had revisited the complex in 1938, when the restoration work was in full swing, and although acknowledging Keiller's dedication to the project, he nevertheless insisted that Keiller's restoration was a form of sterilization:

> Avebury may rise again under the tireless hand of Mr. Keiller, but it will be an archaeological monument, as dead as a mammoth skeleton in the Natural History Museum. When I stumbled over the sarsens in the shaggy autumn grass and saw the unexpected megaliths reared up among the corn stooks, Avebury was still alive.[32]

Nash's insistence on the vitality of the past is, ultimately, a plea for another sort of knowing, an alternative, even a resistance to empirical data and orthodox methodology. In their place Nash proposes a mode of engagement with prehistory that works with what cannot be known, what must be intuited. For Nash, the modern artist, precisely because s/he is free to abandon any literal representation of the world, can provide an imaginative avenue of approach to antiquity. His decision to avoid 'the antiquarian suggestion' in *Equivalents for the Megaliths* and similar pictures is thus prompted by a very real understanding of the cognitive possibilities art possesses. By finding plastic equivalents for megalithic structures Nash can offer insights that are intimately linked to his means of representation. Writing about his painting *Landscape of the Megaliths*

(1937), loosely inspired by the West Kennet Avenue, Nash talked of Keiller and Piggott's reactions to it and how he had emulated artistically what they had achieved in reality: 'Yet it is odd to consider that in my design I, too, have tried to restore the Avenue. The reconstruction is quite unreliable, it is wholly out of scale, the landscape is geographically and agriculturally unsound. The stones seem to be moving rather than to be deep-rooted in the earth. And yet archaeologists have confessed that the picture is a true reconstruction because in it Avebury seems to revive.'[33]

Similarly, in the slightly earlier *Equivalents for the Megaliths* Nash takes from Avebury the idea of large structures, composed of simple and repeated elements, and how their orderly array negotiates a sense of place within a wider landscape. Yet, by the same token, the contrast between his geometrical forms and the overall environment exaggerates the assertiveness of any ordered intrusion into nature. Other elements in the landscape might suggest cultural continuities, from the stepped ridges of an Iron Age hill fort to the aftermath of modern agriculture, but their conjunction with one another is made palpable only at the level of form, as devices in a pictorial composition. Nash is patently not illustrating an historical thesis; if these geometrical solids are the equivalents of prehistoric megaliths they are so by virtue of his construction of metaphorical and formal contexts, not literal ones. Indeed, a sense of surprise and discontinuity is as much a presence here as any idea of transhistorical communion. Above all, perhaps, Nash seems to insist on the impossibility of any final understanding of such a mute and incomprehensible monument, which irrupts into consciousness as from a dream.

At one level, of course, Nash's affinities with surrealism in this image insist on its modernity, its response to some of the dominant developments in painting of his time: Giorgio de Chirico's *pittura metafisica* and André Breton's surrealist movement. The sheer incompatibility of the constituent elements in *Equivalents for the Megaliths* is underscored by the way they come together with all the baffling matter-of-factness we associate with the arrays of unlikely objects in the paintings of de Chirico, Magritte, or Dalí. Yet, at the same time, in insisting on the weirdness and imaginative inspiration of the megaliths Nash is returning to those more romantic responses to British antiquity associated with the later eighteenth century. Stuart Piggott famously characterised the work achieved in that era as having lost sight of the high standards of field-work and analysis associated with an earlier generation of scholarship. In place of valuable research a slew of credulous and fanciful investigations of Druidism infected British antiquarianism; poetic effusions in front of these enigmatic survivors from a dim and distant past was all the age had to offer. For Piggott, the resumption of sound archaeology in the later nineteenth century represented intellectual progress after a lengthy interval of crack-brained delusions.[34] Nash, on the evidence of his paintings and writings, would probably have demurred from this assessment. Rational enquiry might help explain a long-standing puzzle, but it ran the risk of emptying the monuments of all but the most literal meanings.

What then can we say about these two very different moments of artistic involvement with antiquity? Plainly there are many differences between them. Guest, if he is known at all today, is remembered only for this one episode of co-operation with Hutchins, whereas Nash has a secure reputation as one of the key figures in twentieth-century British art. When Guest is discussed, it is the archaeological information his images contain that matters; the artist himself is irrelevant. With Nash it is the other way round; most art historians would not consider the archaeological ramifications of his investigations of British antiquity to be a prime concern. Yet when we do attend to the interplay between art and archaeology in both instances a fuller picture emerges. To

restore some agency to Guest, in general terms as a provincial artist and more particularly in examining his artistic decisions, is to refute any interpretation of his paintings that would see them as objective records. Our understanding of his position in a particular time and place (a provincial artist in Salisbury; a recorder of two excavations at Winterslow) helps to reveal that the images we possess from him are inflected by the professional circumstances of his situation. They represent an attempt to dignify the relics of British antiquity through a process of considered choices regarding scale, medium, composition and the invocation of an established trope, the still-life tradition. Guest's images push archaeological illustration to the borders of the poetic; the plasticity of oils does more than record the grave goods, it asserts their physical presence in a fully realised understanding. The desideratum of a style-less, objective and perfect visual record is, in any medium, a fantasy, but our normal experience of archaeological illustration is that the image is presented as though an objective record were attainable. Against this, Guest's technical ability and experience, his knowledge of artistic traditions and his choice of medium all assert themselves as discursive presences in the image. His oil paintings are perhaps all the more intriguing in allowing these discourses to become so apparent.

The century or so that separates Guest from Nash also saw the rise of archaeology as a professional discipline and, from the early 1900s, a steady growth of interest in British prehistory. Improved methods of excavation and increasingly standardised approaches to documenting archaeological activity meant that a technical visual language to make excavation records grew up within archaeology, obviating the need to employ established professional artists for this purpose. The last well-known British artist involved with primary archaeological research was Heywood Sumner (1854-1940), who had begun his career in the Arts and Crafts movement as a book illustrator, designer, sgraffito and stained glass painter, but who turned to archaeology in 1911, excavating and publishing sites in the New Forest and Cranborne Chase.[35] Thereafter, the artist's role would be restricted to imaginative evocations of sites in earlier times, a specialism particularly associated in Britain with Alan Sorrell (1904-74), who began producing such images in the mid-1930s.[36] The career of Paul Nash can be aligned with both artists. Like Sumner, Nash began his career as a devotee of Rossetti, while his work of the late 1930s and 1940s has been related to Neo-Romanticism, as has Sorrell's. But Nash, ambitious to participate in the renewal of British art and to champion modern painting, would never have accepted the terms on which Sorrell worked. What makes his reaction to Avebury and other sites significant is his belief that art offered a viable alternative to archaeological research, a vital engagement with the past as opposed to the sterility Nash associated with empirical method. The cognitive power of the visual image offered a mode of apprehension at least as valuable as any excavation or other investigative technique. For Nash, the contribution art could make was not its provision of a documentary record of an object, but a response prompted by the object's presence. Rather than the object being disciplined or made rational through archaeological research, Nash found a means of heightening the object's ill-disciplined potential to disturb our rationality. As such, his approach to antiquity is marked by the same poetic qualities I have associated with Guest's paintings.

In one sense, I have used Nash and his modernist sensibility to exhume Thomas Guest. I have done so not because Guest's rediscovery occurred at precisely the time Nash was producing his own pictures inspired by British antiquity, but because Nash's example exaggerates or hypostatises what is immanent in Guest's. In each case what seems significant is the place of breakdown in the image, the point at which the tension between creation and representation

becomes critical. We should note that all forms of archaeological representation are subject to the same pressures and in exploring the interplay between archaeological knowledge, representation and meaning, we are necessarily required to think about the poetics of these enterprises. Both Guest and Nash, by virtue of their chosen medium, emphasise the hand-wrought quality of their images, insisting on the artist's contribution to the visual experience of the spectator. That contribution, properly attended to, betrays the mediating presence of technique, of training, of institutional expectations and of creative decision-making. The creativity of images, their ability to construct a compelling representation, as opposed to working merely as a form of passive notation, is thus foregrounded in every stroke of the brush, every choice of pigment and every compositional arrangement.

But if we accept that the image is always and inevitably productive of its own meaning, should we therefore treat all archaeological imagery as suspect and tread warily whenever it is encountered? At one level, a healthy scepticism would be no bad thing, of course, particularly if it helped check any triumphalist feelings about how our contemporary imaging of archaeology has improved on past attempts. But perhaps we might go further than this and think of what such imagery tells us about archaeology itself. To adopt a somewhat Derridean standpoint, we might suggest that the creativity of images, their provision of aesthetic pleasure, their emotional and psychological suggestiveness, has been falsely opposed to the rigours of archaeology proper and the need for an objective record. Finally, then, I should like to invoke Derrida's logic of the supplement, where he speculates on the intimate connections that hold between an entity (the *ergon*) and its seemingly inessential supplement (the *parergon*), as for example the drapery on a statue or a frame around a picture. Rather than seeing the supplement as subordinate to its host, a superfluous or ornamental addition, Derrida speculates that the supplement exteriorises and completes what is lacking or obscured at the heart of the host.[37]

If we apply this idea to archaeological images, we might want to suggest that they are not archaeology's 'other' but contribute intimately to its meaning and purpose. We might cease then to regard images as poor substitutes for material evidence, whose secondary role dooms them at best to the passive illustration of data or at worst to be the inessential embellishment of research findings; we might even re-examine our suspicions about their unreliability as records because of their more intuitive and emotive response to antiquity. Instead, we might choose to think of them as supplements, in the Derridean sense, to positivistic research methodologies. In their very unreliability as 'true' or 'objective' records images suggest another form of apprehension; their technical devices, formal manipulation and aesthetic concerns all call attention to the imaginative effort required to engage with antiquity. Such images might thus be understood as registering in visible form the contemporary mind's attempt to negotiate a meaningful encounter with the past. In so doing they expose and lay bare the creative and imaginative project which lies at the heart of archaeology, the wish to reconstitute the past by the exercise of historical imagination, sympathetic intuition and a deep personal involvement with the relics of past ages.

Notes

1. Frank Stevens and John F.S. Stone, 'The Barrows of Winterslow', *Wiltshire Archaeological Magazine*, clxviii, June 1938, pp.174-82.

2. Jacquetta Hawkes, *Early Britain*, London 1945. Hawkes followed Hutchins in referring to Guest in this manner. See his letter to Richard Colt Hoare, 10 February 1824, published in Sir Richard Colt Hoare *The History of Modern Wiltshire*, vol. V, 'Hundred of Alderbury', London

1837, p.211.

3. The depicted items comprise a small beaker, the bronze blade of a knife, an archer's slate wrist-guard and two flint arrowheads. All of these items are now in the Ashmolean Museum.

4. The letter was published in Sir Richard Colt Hoare 1837, pp.209–11. This account was later supplemented by an account of the opening of a bell-barrow at Winterslow Hut, written by Hutchins and published in the *Archaeological Journal* (vol.I, 1845, pp.156–7), and a further account of this excavation, published in the *Antiquarian and Architectural Year Book*, (1845, p.23), including information about Guest's paintings, another painting by Guest which Hutchins had presented to his friend Colonel Hawker of Longparish House, and a sepia drawing of some of the finds made by Miss Sabina Heath of Andover, Hutchins's niece. This last was owned by Charles Roach Smith, the secretary of the Archaeological Society of London, in the 1840s but does not appear to have survived. In due course Hutchins would bequeath his remaining four paintings by Guest to the Heath family, where they remained until acquired by the Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum in 1938. The Ashmolean Museum has some MS material by Hutchins in its collection. My thanks to Arthur MacGregor and Julie Clements for their help in my researches there.

5. All of the paintings are approximately the same size, averaging 45.5 x 60.5 cm (18 x 24 inches). The two interior paintings show two biconical urns, now in the Ashmolean Museum. One shows them very plainly, inverted and next to one another, and has a painted text at bottom centre, in a fine script: 'The Position in which the Sepulchral Urns were found'. The other painting shows the two urns in a more complex display, together with the finds they contained, consciously arranged in a still-life composition. A painted scrap of paper appears below the smaller urn, its edges curled up – a device also utilised by Piranesi and James Douglas. It reads: 'These Two Urns/and the other Antiquities/here represented were taken/ from a Bell Barrow 28 yards/in Diameter on Winterslow/Down near Sarum by/Rev AB Hutchins/1814/The largest 18 by 18/Smallest 12 by 11½ inches..' My thanks to Mrs Jane Standen, Assistant Curator in the Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum, for letting me examine the pictures and the Guest archive material.

6. Frank Stevens to W.H. Heath, 2 May, 1935. Letter in collection of Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum.

7. Frank Stevens to W.H. Heath, 30 May, 1935. Letter in collection of Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum.

8. 'I am writing to you to know what your views would be as to the value of the pictures, regarding the matter as one of record rather than an artistic production'. Letter from Frank Stevens to E.T. Leeds, 26 February 1936. Letter in collection of Ashmolean Museum.

9. E.T. Leeds to Frank Stevens, 27 February 1936. Letter in collection of Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum.

10. Sir Richard Colt Hoare 1837, p.211. Hutchins also allowed James Forbes, F.R.S. (author of *Oriental Memoirs* (1813) and then on a visit to Hutchins' friend, Sir Charles Malet of Wilbury House) to make drawings of the finds immediately after their discovery. See Hutchins' 'Draft of a Communication to the Antiquarian and Architectural Year Book' in the collection of the Ashmolean Museum.

11. Hutchins' recourse to images in 1814 was not unique. In 1793 he made his own drawing of a sword unearthed on his father's estate at Porton, Wiltshire. He later recruited J. King of Chichester to record the ceiling frescos of Chichester Cathedral, covered over in 1817. See his undated (but probably 1840s) letter to 'Secretary Charles Roach. Smith, Archaeological Society.'

in the collection of the Ashmolean Museum.

12. Sir Richard Colt Hoare 1837, p.209.

13. For the enthusiasm for Dutch painting in this period, see Harry Mount, 'The Reception of Dutch Genre Painting in England, 1695–1829,' unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 1991. For Naturalism, see John Gage, *A Decade of English Naturalism: 1810–1820*, Norwich Castle Museum, 1969.

14. This is not to deny, of course, the extent to which some engravers made the production of engravings a highly self-reflexive activity, something seen especially in the work of Piranesi.

15. For Guest, see B.M. Little, 'A Study of Libraries in Salisbury 1700–1850', unpublished thesis for Fellowship of the Library Association, 1973, pp.164–73. Typescript in Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum.

16. The *Sketch Book* used guide lines and numbers to help the sketcher frame the view s/he wished to reproduce. See T.R. Guest, *A New Pocket Sketch Book, Containing an Easy Method of Drawing Landscapes, Figures, Cattle, &c. from Nature*, Salisbury 1807.

17. See Trevor Fawcett, *The Rise of English Provincial Art: Artists, Patrons and Institutions outside London, 1800–1830*, Oxford 1974.

18. William Hazlitt 'On Living to One's-Self'. The essay was written at Winterslow Hut, 18–19 January 1821. Hazlitt had trained as an artist but made his living as a critic, so the remark is turned as much on himself as on others.

19. In 1810 he exhibited: N.E. View of the Druidical Temple of Stonehenge; S.W. View of the Druidical Temple of Stonehenge; North View of Salisbury from Harnham Hill, on the Great Western Road; A West View of Salisbury from Melford Hill. In 1814 he exhibited an Ecce Homo and a Madonna.

20. Guest's son, Douglas, fared better, showing a total of fifty-four works at London venues (chiefly the Royal Academy and the British Institution) between 1803 and 1839. He concentrated on mythological subjects, biblical and classical history painting and wrote in defence of that branch of the art.

21. Richard Gough, *Sepulchral Monuments in Great Britain*, London 1786, p.9.

22. See Sam Smiles, *The Image of Antiquity: Ancient Britain and the Romantic Imagination*, New Haven and London 1994.

23. The burial mound shown immediately behind the relics is the one from which they were excavated. Of the other two, that on the far right is the barrow in which the Bronze Age objects were discovered, painted by Guest and illustrated on the cover of this book.

24. Plan of Tumulus I, excavated in 1779, illustrated in aquatint as plate II in James Douglas *Nenia Brittanica: or, a sepulchral history of Great Britain*, London 1793.

25. As well as manipulating the finds for the sake of compositional impact, Guest also intervened in their representation: he 'repaired' one damaged item (the beaker appearing whole in the painting illustrated on the cover of this book was in fact broken) and strung together the beads, found along with two funerary urns, to make a Bronze Age necklace in one of his interior still-life paintings.

26. See Sam Smiles, 'Equivalents for the Megaliths: Prehistory and English Culture, 1920–50', in David Peters Corbett, Ysanne Holt and Fiona Russell (eds.), *The Geographies of Englishness: Landscape and the National Past 1880–1940*, New Haven and London 2002, pp.199-223.

27. For example, Stuart Piggott and others' associations with Paul Nash and John Piper. See Sam Smiles, 'Antiquity and Modern Art in England c.1930–50', in David Barrowclough ed., 'Art and

Archaeology: Unmasking Material Culture', *Archaeological Review from Cambridge*, vol.19.1, April 2004, pp.81–98.

28. For a general overview of Nash and prehistory see Sam Smiles, 'Ancient Country: Nash and Prehistory', in Jemima Montagu (ed.) *Paul Nash: Modern Artist, Ancient Landscape*, exhibition catalogue, Tate Liverpool 2003, pp.31–7.

29. See Andrew Stephenson, 'Strategies of Situation: British Modernism and the Slump c.1929-34', *Oxford Art Journal*, vol.14, no.2, 1991, pp.30–51. For Nash's essays on art and artists see Andrew Causey (ed.), *Paul Nash: Writings on Art*, Oxford 2000.

30. Paul Nash, letter to Lance Sieveking, 4 May 1937, cited in Anthony Bertram, *Paul Nash: The Portrait of an Artist*, London 1955, p.243.

31. Paul Nash, *Fertile Image*, London 1951, p.11.

32. Paul Nash, 'Landscape of the Megaliths', *Art and Education*, March 1939, p.8.

33. Ibid.

34. See, for example, Stuart Piggott, *Ruins in a Landscape*, Edinburgh 1976.

35. See Margot Coatts and Elizabeth Lewis (eds.), *Heywood Sumner: Artist and Archaeologist 1853–1940*, Winchester City Museum 1986; Barry Cunliffe, *Heywood Sumner's Wessex*, Wimborne 1985.

36. See, for example, *Alan Sorrell: Early Wales Re-created*, National Museum of Wales, Cardiff 1980.

37. See Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian MacCleod, Chicago 1987, pp.59–71. I have touched on this particular issue in Sam Smiles ,'British Antiquity and Antiquarian Illustration', in Martin Myrone and Lucy Peltz (eds.), *Producing the Past: Aspects of Antiquarian Culture and Practice 1700–1850*, Aldershot and Brookfield 1999, pp.55–66.

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