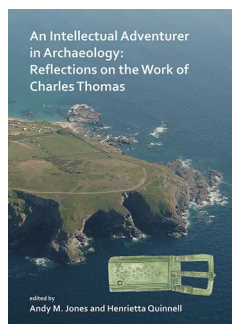


ANDY M. JONES & HENRIETTA QUINNELL (ed.). *An intellectual adventurer in archaeology: reflections on the work of Charles Thomas*. 2018. Oxford: Archaeopress; 978-1-78491-861-3 £44.



Some years ago, when I was collecting contributors for a volume to be dedicated to a distinguished British archaeologist, I sent an invitation to one of my contemporaries. He declined gracefully, stating that in his opinion such volumes were a largely anachronistic

institution, rarely containing matters of importance that could not find a more regular outlet. Only a few years later he rather undercut his stance by appearing as a co-editor for a volume dedicated to another distinguished British archaeologist!

It seems that *Festschriften*—sometimes overtaken by the passing of time and thus more properly designated as *Gedenkschriften*—continue unabated. They come in all shapes and sizes, but tend to be standalone volumes devoted to an honourend aged somewhere between 60 and 85, often with the wordless implication that this event will see the end of a working life. A more user-friendly mode is a journal issue either wholly or in part devoted to the main subject. Either way, these are often the product of admiration and indeed affection as much as an intended contribution to scholarship. This is where the reviewed reflections lie.

Following the death on 7 April 2016 of Antony Charles Thomas, Cornishman par excellence and inveterate collector, the starting point for *An intellectual adventurer in archaeology* was a series of papers delivered at the 2016 AGM of the Cornwall Archaeological Society. The volume does not set out to present anything approaching a complete biography, and there are some curious lacunae here and in the many obituaries of Charles that have appeared. One such omission is the total lack of reference to Charles's first and brief marriage to Molly Sims; early members of the 20-year-long Gwithian project will never forget Molly plying them with quantities of breakfast kedgeree before they set out to face a blustery Cornish Easter. The volume also has little about Charles's family, not even a mention of his elder daughter Susanna, an Egyptologist and the only one of his children to follow her father's love of the past. I miss too

some flavour of Charles's political views, part old-fashioned Tory, part West Country Liberal, and well to the left of his second wife', the writer and broadcaster Jessica Mann.

One may follow in the pages of *An intellectual adventurer in archaeology* the *gradus ad Parnassum* of Charles. In 1951 he gained a BA Oxon in jurisprudence (just), before taking a post-graduate diploma at the London Institute of Archaeology (in the legendary days of Vere Gordon Childe). Several of Charles's contemporaries have contributed to the work here. An academic career followed and, finally, there was the distinguished emeritus professorship, with Charles retiring in 1991 from the foundation Chair of Cornish Studies at the University of Exeter, a post which, as director of the Institute of Cornish Studies, Charles held from its creation in 1972.

To label the last phase of such a life as 'full' is a gross understatement. As Charles wrote in a letter, he could now devote his time "to thrilling projects like digging up Tintagel churchyard [...] fieldwork in France, Causse Mejea, and trips to Coptic Egypt. Such fun". All save Egypt are covered at least in part in this volume. This last phase followed a varied academic career (for material towards a more inclusive obituary, see Johnson 2017). In *An intellectual adventurer in archaeology*, Johnson emphasises how Charles transformed the West Cornwall Field Club into its present form. In 1962, the first volume of *Cornish Archaeology—Hendhyscans Kernow*—appeared with a specially commissioned cover, the first of many and just one example of Charles as a patron of the visual arts. In 1954 I joined Charles at Gwithian, conveniently sited on Thomas family land, a pioneering example of a multi-period project in landscape archaeology. As Johnson and several other contributors point out, Charles, at the time effectively the only professional archaeologist in Cornwall, had started his academic career in 1953 as a part-time tutor for the West Country branch of the Workers' Educational Association. Welcoming practically anyone of any age, he provided practical experience for many who later became archaeologists of distinction, supplying the sorts of field experience that was largely lacking in British universities at the time. Several contributors to *An intellectual adventurer in archaeology* give witness to how time spent at Gwithian influenced their own work. Long before *Time Team*, Charles's excavations were a model as to how a very disparate team could learn to produce professional results.

Another contribution to *An intellectual adventurer in archaeology* by Johnson is a bibliography of some

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805 items, ranging from *Greg McGrath, Badlands Ranger: a gripping tale of the Utah panhandle*, a product of 1945 and his post-school life as a young soldier, to his bookshelf-worth of publications on aspects of the early church in Britain, which earned him the inaugural William Frend Medal from the Society of Antiquaries in 1982. Writing for a general public as much as for his academic peers, *Celtic Britain* was first published by Thames and Hudson in 1986 in the 'Ancient Peoples and Places' series. While Charles's interpretation of Pictish symbols is now regarded as ingenious rather than convincing (for a current interpretation, see Noble *et al.* 2018), his interest not only in historical sources but also in linguistics must be added to his unrivalled knowledge of Cornish militaria, mining and Methodism.

An intellectual adventurer in archaeology includes some 30 contributors, largely lacking indication of their affiliation, which would otherwise have underlined Charles's influence on practically every branch of archaeology, professional or amateur (the latter being a category Charles maintained did not exist). Only one exception stands out—the revolutions in archaeological theory in the second half of the twentieth century, concerning which, like Stuart Piggott, Charles felt he was 'past all those posts'. Little of the rest is missed in contributions, which range from reminiscences to what are in effect detailed reports on aspects of his fieldwork. It must be said that when it comes to his key excavations, several lack anything approaching definitive or, indeed in some cases, even interim reports. This includes Gwithian, although it has been the subject of several shorter accounts and a whole volume of *Cornish Archaeology* (46, 2007). Vanessa Straker and Thomas Walker present new data on Gwithian's environmental history in this volume; Charles Johns, based on a manuscript left unpublished by Charles, completes an account of the 1956 excavations at Teän in the Isles of Scilly, a site centred on a Christian community of the fifth to eighth centuries AD; Jackie Nowakowski writes on Charles and Tintagel 1956–1957 and his relationship with C.A. Raleigh Radford, champion of King Arthur; Ewan Campbell and Adrián Maldonado of Glasgow University write on Charles's work on Iona from 1956–1963, setting this in the context of his wider involvement in the study of the Early Christian period in northern Britain. This included a lectureship at Edinburgh from 1958, the golden days of Piggott's reign as Abercromby Professor; Charles described this

as the happiest period of his life. But Cornwall beckoned once more.

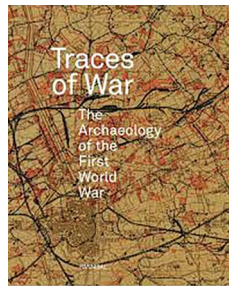
While *Archaeopress* gets few marks for cutting-edge graphic design, there are some nice touches, particularly the frontispiece and the largely uncaptioned chapter openings based, with one exception, on the watercolours by Charles that formed his Christmas greetings. If at times *An intellectual adventurer in archaeology* might seem to teeter between reminiscence and 'hard' archaeology, the very mixture reflects the man. Could one imagine today excavations like those Charles led, pipe in hand, on occasion run as if they were an episode of *The Goon Show*, on another incorporated into manoeuvres of the Special Air Service? British archaeology has had its other champions, but few can have had such broad interests or more deserve emulation than does the life's work of Antony Charles Thomas.

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- BIRGER STICHELBAUT (ed.). *Traces of war: the archaeology of the First World War*. 2018. Veurne: Hannibal; 978-94-9267-751-8 €29.50.



Published in 2018 at the close of the centenary of the First World War, *Traces of war* takes the opportunity to reflect upon two decades of archaeological exploration of the Western Front in Belgium. A companion to