

# Antiquity

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## Editorial Notes\*

THE Stone of Scone is a rectangular slab of sandstone, probably derived from rocks near Scone (Perthshire) of Devonian age—which is about 300 million years. For the last infinitesimal portion of its existence the Stone has been used as a seat on which kings have been crowned. Last Christmas it was clandestinely removed from the Coronation Chair in Westminster Abbey, and at the time of writing it had not been recovered, in spite of strenuous and prolonged enquiries by the police. The purpose of its removal was political propaganda on behalf of the Scottish Nationalist movement. This act was greeted with shrieks of horror in the Press, though one writer to the *Times* thought it rather a lark. How should a civilized person react?



The Stone itself, though artificially squared, has no interest apart from its historical associations. But these cannot be denied unless we are prepared also to disregard all objects and sites thus endowed, and this we are not prepared to do. Such associations have a sentimental value which it would be idle to deny; they belong to the realms of fancy and emotion, not to those of aesthetic or intellectual appreciation, but then so do we ourselves in part. The most hard-bitten archaeologist or historian could hardly see the Pass of Thermopylae without a thrill, even though he might retain but the haziest memory of the tactics of Marathon. The Alfred Jewel derives much of its effective interest (and value) from its association with King Alfred, who 'had it wrought' as the inscription tells us. Similar emotions may be stirred by the sight of a Roman road or wall, a linear earthwork or by the intact abandoned fields of the prehistoric Britons. Such sentimental associations are akin to the *mana* which primitive peoples regard as inherent in certain inanimate objects. Indeed our own feelings when confronted with such sites and objects are surely like those felt by the Australian aborigines about their ancestral sites, except that our ancestors were historical. *Mana* is a kind of objectified sentiment possessed in greater or less degree by certain things. Looked at thus the Stone of Scone is saturated with *mana*. Other things that the archaeologist has dealings with may attract him primarily on intellectual grounds, but few probably are quite free from *mana*.

\* These Notes were written in March, before the Stone was recovered. They have been left unaltered.

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We must then have some sympathy with the outraged feelings of those who have cried out about the removal of the Stone from Westminster Abbey. We consider, however, that the outcry reveals a somewhat primitive state of mind. For no such outcry has been aroused by many of the innumerable acts of vandalism perpetrated during recent years, and still being perpetrated. These acts have destroyed for ever monuments of British history and prehistory whose *mana*-content may have been relatively low but whose intellectual content was high. A truly civilized people would be able to appreciate the latter, and to set as high a value upon these other monuments *en masse* as upon one whose sole claim lay in what we have called its *mana*-content. As examples of such recent vandalism may be cited the obliteration by ploughing of the interior of Hod Hill camp (Dorset) and the desecration of its ramparts by barbed wire; the bull-dozing of the Bronze Age barrows in Farway Hill (Devon); the levelling of two of the finest groups of prehistoric fields in Hampshire (Great Litchfield Down and Chilcomb Down) and of the hill-fort of Oliver's Battery near Alresford. If it is a question of sacrilege what are we to think of the threatened destruction by the ecclesiastical authorities themselves of the historic church of St. Peter's, Winchester? These are merely a few examples within our own personal knowledge; how many others are there?



There is of course a distinction to be made between objects or sites which have association-interest only (such as battlefields) and those which embody human achievement and labour—between, for instance, the Stone of Scone and the Pyramids. Association-interest is a term applied to books that belonged to famous people; such have thereby acquired an added value which is expressed in terms of money. But most people buy books to read, not to absorb the *mana* exuded by their associations; only a collector would buy a Bradshaw because it belonged to Mr Gladstone. If, however, the book is one that the buyer really wants to read, then it seems there is a legitimately enhanced pleasure in possessing, say, the author's own copy or one with a famous name written on the title-page. But the book is bought primarily for its contents; it is valued because it embodies human achievement in the realm of art or knowledge.



In order to make the comparison clear let us take an imaginary example. Let us suppose that there existed a copy of Bradshaw that had a very high association-interest, having belonged to a number of famous persons in succession, and that on the other hand the works of a dozen or more great writers existed in manuscript only. Suppose the Bradshaw were stolen and the manuscripts deliberately pulped; which would represent the greater loss? Yet the comparison between this imaginary example and what has just happened does not seem false or unduly strained. Bradshaw corresponds to the Stone of Scone, and the manuscripts to the sites and buildings which have been deliberately obliterated or destroyed. We have already given instances of the obliteration of prehistoric sites. Unfortunately there are others. In London alone there have been destroyed since 1918 the following buildings of architectural distinction:—Regent St. and the Quadrant (John Nash, 1820); Adelphi Terrace and 31 Soho Square (the Adam brothers, late 18th cent.); Waterloo Bridge (John Rennie, 1817); Clifford's Inn (14th cent.); Dorchester House (L. Vulliamy, 1851); Devonshire House (Wm. Kent, 18th cent.); Sir Joshua Reynolds' house in Leicester Square (late 17th cent.). There has also been

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mutilation of such fine examples of architectural planning as Berkeley, St. James's, Queen and Torrington Squares. This mutilation still continues in spite of protests; Carlton House Terrace is now threatened by the bureaucracy.



The Scone affair seems to reveal a lack of any sense of proportion in the respective values of historic and architectural monuments. For we are at this very time witnessing the greatest and most relentless destruction of such that has ever taken place. All are irreplaceable and their loss impoverishes British culture. And it should be remembered after all that the Stone of Scone is probably quite safe and will eventually come to light again. But the architectural destruction and the insidious attacks on a series of lesser historic and prehistoric monuments, though intermittent, go on unceasingly; the latter, like coast-erosion, acts spasmodically and is hard to observe but infinitely destructive. We fear it must be said that a people has the historical monuments it deserves and can appreciate. If the will to preserve them were present and generally diffused amongst the population, they surely would not be allowed to perish. The fact that they do is damning evidence of a widespread philistinism that can destroy only and cannot replace.