

## Walking the Line Between Past and Present: 'doing' phenomenology on historic battlefields

Carman, John ; Carman, Patricia

### *Document Version*

Early version, also known as pre-print

### *Citation for published version (Harvard):*

Carman, J & Carman, P 2012, Walking the Line Between Past and Present: 'doing' phenomenology on historic battlefields. in H Cobb, OJT Harris, C Jones & P Richardson (eds), *Reconsidering Archaeological Fieldwork: exploring onsite relationships between theory and practice*. Springer, New York, pp. 97-112.

[Link to publication on Research at Birmingham portal](#)

### **General rights**

Unless a licence is specified above, all rights (including copyright and moral rights) in this document are retained by the authors and/or the copyright holders. The express permission of the copyright holder must be obtained for any use of this material other than for purposes permitted by law.

- Users may freely distribute the URL that is used to identify this publication.
- Users may download and/or print one copy of the publication from the University of Birmingham research portal for the purpose of private study or non-commercial research.
- User may use extracts from the document in line with the concept of 'fair dealing' under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (?)
- Users may not further distribute the material nor use it for the purposes of commercial gain.

Where a licence is displayed above, please note the terms and conditions of the licence govern your use of this document.

When citing, please reference the published version.

### **Take down policy**

While the University of Birmingham exercises care and attention in making items available there are rare occasions when an item has been uploaded in error or has been deemed to be commercially or otherwise sensitive.

If you believe that this is the case for this document, please contact [UBIRA@lists.bham.ac.uk](mailto:UBIRA@lists.bham.ac.uk) providing details and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate.

# Metadata of the chapter that will be visualized online

---

Series Title		
Chapter Title	Walking the Line Between Past and Present: 'Doing' Phenomenology on Historic Battlefields	
Chapter SubTitle		
Copyright Year	2012	
Copyright Holder	Springer Science + Business Media, LLC	
Corresponding Author	Family Name	Carman
	Particle	
	Given Name	<b>John</b>
	Suffix	
	Division	Bloody Meadows Project, Institute of Archaeology & Antiquity
	Organization	University of Birmingham
	Address	B15 2TT, Edgbaston, Birmingham, UK
	Email	j.carman@bham.ac.uk
Author	Family Name	Carman
	Particle	
	Given Name	<b>Patricia</b>
	Suffix	
	Division	Bloody Meadows Project, Institute of Archaeology & Antiquity
	Organization	University of Birmingham
	Address	B15 2TT, Edgbaston, Birmingham, UK
	Email	
Abstract	The purpose of the Bloody Meadows Project <sup>1</sup> (Carman and Carman 2006a, b, 2007, 2009) is to investigate historic battlefields of all periods, and we choose to do so from a broadly 'phenomenological' perspective. Our aim is specifically not to recreate what the battlefield was like on the day of battle or the events of that day, but rather to explore the historicity of particular kinds of places through the experience of being there.	

---

**Chapter 7** 1  
**Walking the Line Between Past and Present:** 2  
**‘Doing’ Phenomenology on Historic Battlefields** 3

**John Carman and Patricia Carman** 4

**Introduction** 5

The purpose of the Bloody Meadows Project<sup>1</sup> (Carman and Carman 2006a, b, 2007, 2009) is to investigate historic battlefields of all periods, and we choose to do so from a broadly ‘phenomenological’ perspective. Our aim is specifically not to recreate what the battlefield was like on the day of battle or the events of that day, but rather to explore the historicity of particular kinds of places through the experience of being there. 6 7 8 9 10 11

[AU1] Following Tilley (1994) and others, a phenomenological approach to the study of landscapes as taken by archaeologists has generally been limited to the monumental ‘ritual’ landscapes of European prehistory. The approach is, however, also of more general relevance to any encultured space, especially any marked as a particular kind of space. Tilley justifies taking a phenomenological approach to landscapes as follows: 12 13 14 15 16 17

[What] is clear [from the ethnographic record] is the symbolic, ancestral, and temporal significance of landscape [to peoples]. The landscape is continually being encultured, bringing things into meaning as part of a symbolic process by which human consciousness makes the physical reality of the natural environment into an intelligible and socialised form. 18 19 20 21

(Tilley 1994:67) 22

As he emphasises, the enculturation of landscape turns it from mere topography to a ‘place’: “Cultural markers [such as monuments or the memory of large-scale violence are used] to create a new sense of place.... An already encultured landscape becomes refashioned, its meanings now controlled by the imposition of [a new] cultural form” (Tilley 1994:208). 23 24 25 26 27

---

J. Carman (✉) • P. Carman  
 Bloody Meadows Project, Institute of Archaeology & Antiquity,  
 University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham, B15 2TT, UK  
 e-mail: j.carman@bham.ac.uk

28 The typical interpretive device in battlefield research is the battlefield plan  
29 (see e.g. English Heritage 1995), which is presented as an objective view from  
30 above, divorced from the action. But as Tilley also emphasises, place is not some-  
31 thing that can be understood 'objectively':

32 Looking at the two-dimensional plane of the modern topographic map with sites [or artefact  
33 scatters] plotted on it, it is quite impossible to envisage the landscape in which these places  
34 are embedded. The representation fails, and cannot substitute for being there, being *in*  
35 *place*. [The] process of observation requires time and a feeling for the place.

36 (Tilley 1994:75)

37 The same is true of the traditional battlefield plan: it cannot substitute for direct  
38 experience nor for movement through the space. We therefore draw upon the ideas  
39 of prehistoric archaeologists who are developing ways of utilising the idea that the  
40 way of moving through particular kinds of spaces can be considered a form of ritual  
41 or performance (Carman 1999:242; Pearson 1998). For example, Barrett writes of  
42 prehistoric monuments in Wiltshire, England, that

43 for the distinctions [between people] to have operated... it was necessary for people to  
44 move between these [architectural] regions; to enter and leave each other's presence,  
45 to observe passively or to act, to lead processions or to follow. The practice of social life  
46 is thus... performed.

47 (Barrett 1994:29)

48 Here, ritual activity is considered as a form of 'acted out' discourse (Barrett  
49 1991:5; Thomas 1991 34), focusing on the physicality and (apparent) 'objectivity'  
50 of actions (Barrett 1991:4–6). Participants in rituals are guided through a series of  
51 specific meaningful actions, leading them to make the approved connections  
52 between them (Thomas 1991:34). Taking such ideas further, Thomas (1991) and  
53 Pearson (1998) argue that the focus of early Bronze Age 'beaker' burial ritual in  
54 Britain was on the body of the deceased. Objects which were put into the ground  
55 "constituted material signifiers whose role was to ensure that the intended reading  
56 of the dead person was made by the audience [at] the funeral" (Thomas 1991:34).  
57 Here, the space of the grave itself acted as the 'stage' of a theatrical performance  
58 (Pearson 1998:36–37). Mourners thus became active participants in the funerary  
59 ritual (Thomas 1991:39), players in the drama as well as spectators (Pearson 1998).  
60 The often slow and deliberate movements of bodies of troops across the space of a  
61 battlefield, frequently in defiance of common-sense, have obvious ritual conno-  
62 tations. The same is true of aspects such as drill, the proper use of equipment,  
63 standardised formations, and the focus on the capture of enemy standards and  
64 correctly worn regalia (Keeley 1996:62–63).

65 Putting these two styles of approach together, gaining a feeling for the place as a  
66 place and a focus on how one moves through it in performance, one can perhaps  
67 gain a specific sense of what a particular historic battlefield represents in terms of  
68 experience and meaning. The purpose of the Bloody Meadows project is thus not so  
69 much an attempt to recreate what an individual battlefield was like on the day of  
70 battle (or indeed the events of the battle). It is rather to establish a meaning for the

historicity of the place in the present: hence our simultaneous concern both for an understanding of the nature of war in the past and preservation and public interpretation in the present. 71  
72  
73

It is for these reasons that the Bloody Meadows Project looks very specifically at the *kind* of place where the battle was fought. The majority of archaeologists working on battlefields spend their time looking at the ground, trying to find the material left behind by the action. We instead spend time looking up and around us, at the shape of the space itself. A close focus on the shape of the space allows differences of choice across space and through time to become evident. In taking such an approach, and in being deliberately aware of both past and present in a particular place, we walk the line that lies between the past and the present, where neither dominates the other. Instead, they interact in interesting and challenging ways. It is not a search for an experience of being in the past, but rather an experience *in the present* which reflects and derives from the contribution of history to that place. In the case of a historic battlefield, it is not an experience of ancient slaughter, but an experience of a place in the present as read through its history as manifested in material form. This history inevitably includes the event of the battle that was fought there, but not exclusively. 74  
75  
76  
77  
78  
79  
80  
81  
82  
83  
84  
85  
86  
87  
88

**Investigating Battlefields as Historic Places** 89

The primary data source used in the Bloody Meadows Project is the physical landscape of the place where warfare was practised. Drawing upon the work of previous scholars – who have identified the locations of many battlefields from the past – we focus upon the landscape itself to ask specific questions (Table 7.1). The answers can be ordered as set out in Table 7.2. 90  
91  
92  
93  
94

In Table 7.2, the *rules of war* cover such things as the degree of mutual agreement needed before fighting could commence, whether the two sides were required to see each other as ‘legitimate’ enemies or whether anyone could participate in a battle, some assessment of the level of violence employed, and how (if at all) the battlesite was remembered afterwards. They are a measure of how ‘formal’ battle was regarded and how distinctive from other forms of conflict at that time. 95  
96  
97  
98  
99  
100

The *characteristics of the battlefield landscape* are addressed in order to identify features present in the battlespace and how they were used by combatants. This gives some insight into attitudes to the battlefield as a place. The query as to whether structured formations were present (such as ordered columns or lines of troops) gives a clue to how participants moved through the battlefield space: if the landscape is seen as architecture, so too can the forces engaged be seen as a kind of ‘mobile architecture’. The point is not merely to note those features present and used by combatants, as military historians might, but also and especially those features present but not used, and those present today but not on the day. 101  
102  
103  
104  
105  
106  
107  
108  
109

<b>Table 7.1</b> Bloody Meadows Project: research questions	
Of battlesites as historic places	Of battlesites as heritage
t1.3 How clearly bounded is the battlefield space	Was the battlefield subsequently marked by a monument or memorial in any way?
t1.4 (does it have clear boundaries, such as impassable ground or a water obstacle)?	If 'yes'
t1.6 Is it located on high or low ground relative to the surrounding space?	Where is it in relation to the battlesite?
t1.7	What form does it take?
t1.8 What kind of use (other than for war) was the site put to, if any?	Who or what does it commemorate?
t1.9	Who raised it?
t1.10 Is it near or distant from settlement?	When was it raised?
t1.11 Is it visible from settlement?	Is there any indication of the specific audience it is intended to address?
t1.12 Does the ground contain particular types of landscape features – natural or built – which play a part in the battlefield action?	What does it say about the relations of commemorator or commemoratee to the battlesite?
t1.14	
t1.15 What features present in the landscape (if any) played no part in the battlefield action?	Are links made with other sites or to other events?
t1.16	
t1.17	
t1.18	To what use(s) has the battlefield been put, and what is it used for today?
t1.19	

<b>Table 7.2</b> Parameters for studying battlefields	
Rules of war	Battlefield architecture
t2.3 Agreement to fight: Y/N	Features present
t2.4 Mutual recognition as “legitimate” enemies: Y/N	Type of feature used
t2.5 Level of violence: High, medium, low	Type of feature not used
t2.6 Marking of battle-site	Use of terrain
t2.7	As cover
t2.8	To impede visibility
t2.9	To impede movement
t2.10 Participants	Structured formations: Y/N
t2.11 Functional aspects	
t2.12 Dysfunctional aspects	

110 The two final sections attempt to summarise our expectations as filtered through  
 111 an understanding of ‘good military practice’ derived from military writings (as in  
 112 the concept of “inherent military probability” discussed by Keegan (1976:33–34)).  
 113 It is, we believe, the *dysfunctional* behaviour (that is, the apparent mistakes or omis-  
 114 sions) which can give a clue to cultural attitudes and expectations of the battlefield  
 115 space which differ from our own. In applying this analysis to distinctive examples  
 116 of warfare from various periods, the differences between periods become evident.

117 In approaching the landscapes that are our object, we use what we have called  
 118 ‘the archaeologist’s eye’ – that is, the capacity of a trained landscape archaeologist

to interpret space and to identify (especially manufactured) features in landscapes otherwise unfamiliar to them – to reach an understanding of the spaces of battle. By approaching such sites with a structured set of questions and by recording data in a standard format (Table 7.2) it becomes possible to recognise what such sites have in common and how they differ from one another. This in turn allows the identification of the types of location favoured as battlesites in particular periods of history, and these can be related to other aspects of the battle as recorded by historians – including the type of participants, the nature of the conflict of which the battle is a part, and the flow of the action. Overall, it presents an opportunity to gain a direct insight into the ideological factors guiding warfare practice in that period and to compare them with those guiding warfare practice in a different period.

**The Marking of Battlefields** 130

Many battlefields are marked by the erection of monuments of stone or concrete which are solid and enduring. Others are marked in other ways: by more ephemeral signs of memory, such as the names given to places and features, or local traditions which ascribe particular events to particular points in the landscape. Others again are marked by the actions of officialdom in recognising the site as of particular historical interest and importance: the traditional manner is to place an interpretive sign at a prominent viewpoint and perhaps to construct a circular walk or drive to visit the locations deemed important to an understanding of the events of the battle and its landscape context. Officialdom may also – as in the case of the English Heritage Register – mark the site out on a map, providing it with a convenient border and edge, allowing preservation and management within and less control without.

All such ways of marking battlesites – and others – indicate the way in which the site is perceived in the present; and to whom, and in what way, it is conceived to be important. The purpose of investigating these aspects of battlefields is to gain an insight into the contemporary meanings ascribed to such places. The purpose of combining such interests with research into the battlesite as a historic landscape in its own right is to relate the two: to find out if particular kinds of historic places are treated in one set of ways, while others are treated the same or differently, and to what extent, by whom and for what purpose.

***Battlefields as Cemeteries and Memorials*** 150

The archaeological study of monuments to the dead and how war is commemorated is an area that has come to the fore in recent years (e.g. Borg 1991). Much of this has focussed on monuments to the wars of the last century – especially the First and Second World Wars (Winter 1995) and as part of the developing academic interest in collective social memory (e.g. Connerton 1989). According to some, the memorialisation

156 of the dead of World War One was a process of de-personalisation at the service of  
157 a sense of national unity (Parker Pearson 1982): lists of named casualties gave way  
158 to monuments commemorating an anonymous 'The Glorious Dead' or simply 'The  
159 Fallen'; and annual acts of remembrance denied the opportunity for a consideration  
160 of the experience or purpose of war (Bushaway 1992). On the other hand, it has  
161 been pointed out that the majority of war memorials constructed after World  
162 War One "were initiatives which came from the people rather than the politi-  
163 cians.... [Their] erection was instigated by the bereaved public" (Tarlow 1999:162–  
164 163). They represented a response to the loss that had been suffered by large  
165 numbers of the population and who wished to find some way of marking and coming  
166 to terms with that loss. This emphasis on bereavement represents another strand to  
167 some recent archaeological work: a focus not only on the physical aspects of  
168 remains, but also on the emotional content of particular kinds of object (see also  
169 Tarlow 1999). In looking at monuments to the dead from this point of view, the  
170 question of who they were for comes particularly to the forefront and opens up a  
171 sensitivity to the meanings they carry.

## 172 *Battlefield Preservation*

173 The idea of preserving battlefields as important historic places is a relatively new  
174 one in Europe. The first *Register of Historic Battlefields* in Europe was produced in  
175 England, and has been subject to criticism for treating such places purely as histori-  
176 cal phenomena, where the primary sources are written and where the location, its  
177 extent, and any physical evidence of conflict it may contain is of secondary concern  
178 (Foard 2001). These concerns have been partly addressed in recent Scottish historic  
179 environment policy (Historic Scotland 2009) where the archaeological potential of  
180 such sites is specifically addressed, and similar initiatives in Wales and Ireland are  
181 likely to follow suit. Nevertheless, in both the Scottish and English cases, the fact  
182 that a battlefield is included in the *Register* should be taken into account for devel-  
183 opment control purposes under relevant official guidance does not equate with full  
184 legal protection in the same manner as scheduled monuments and sites. In other  
185 parts of Europe, however, gaining official recognition for historic battlefields is a  
186 process barely begun.

187 This situation contrasts with the position in, for example, the USA, where bat-  
188 tlefields considered worthy of note are taken into full legal protection and  
189 stewardship by responsible agencies under the aegis of the American Battlefield  
190 Protection Program of the Federal National Park Service (American Battlefield  
191 Protection Program 2009). A series of Federal laws relating to the preservation  
192 and protection of historic battlefields have been passed, primarily to provide funding  
193 programmes for suitable initiatives, and the most important battlesites of American  
194 history – especially those from the Revolutionary and Civil wars – have been taken  
195 into State care by the National Park Service under various designations.



**Investigating Battlefields as Places in the Present**

196

The interest of the Bloody Meadows Project in the way battlefields are subsequently marked (whether soon after the battle or a considerable time later) is reflected particularly in the research questions (Table 7.1).

We are always fully conscious that marking a site is not the only measure of its importance or interest. Failure to mark a site can itself constitute a statement: sometimes this will be a representation of a lack of recognition of any importance or significance the site may carry for certain people, but other times a more positive omission with a purpose to it. By looking closely at such sites and the monuments and other marks they bear it is possible to come to an understanding of the meanings they carry in our own time, which can make a contribution to the study of collective memory (Connerton 1989; Foote 1997; Jones 2007).

These are also reflected in the purposes for which such sites are used. Battlefields from the past rarely offer much in the way of an obvious physical legacy. Where earthwork defences were constructed, or the fighting resulted in significant changes to the shape of the land, these traces may persist to become part of later uses. In those cases where archaeological investigation has been carried out, the archaeology has most often consisted of human remains buried at the site. More recent research has revealed the presence of scatters of material across the battlespace – most typically for battles of the firearms era, bullets and bullet casings (Haecker and Mauck 1997; Scott et al. 1989); for earlier periods, attachments to clothing which may have been torn off in the struggle (Sutherland 2001). Since such remains are generally invisible to the naked human eye, however, the landscape of such places has been seen as ‘empty’ of archaeology and therefore available for other uses. These uses may extend to the provision of park and amenity spaces, the historical significance of the location giving it an extra attractiveness to visitors. At Northampton, for instance, the space of the battlefield has been converted into the municipal golf course; at Quebec in Canada the site of the conflict of 1759 has been used as a site of recreation since the beginning of the twentieth century. Hence our reason for asking about the subsequent uses of the site up to the present. From this we can ascertain the various uses over time to which the space has been put – other than, or at least as well as, for war making – and from this gain some insight into the meanings the level of significance the place has acquired over time.

**Choosing Sites for Research**

229

The focus of the Bloody Meadows Project is upon the older and perhaps less well known sites of violence in the past. We deliberately stop short of the twentieth century since a wide variety of research is already being conducted into the warfare of our own age (Saunders 2001; Schofield et al. 2002; Schofield 2005) and modern battlefields tend to be both very large and very well promoted. In addition, twentieth

235 century warfare has disconcertingly extended from the surface of our globe into other  
236 realms: into the air; under the sea; into the most inhospitable regions of the world,  
237 such as mountain ranges, jungles, deserts, the arctic and antarctic; and even into  
238 outer space. It has also gone beyond the physical into more conceptual regions:  
239 into the relations of government to people (as opposed to being limited to the  
240 concerns of a specific 'warrior' caste); into the realm of science and technology;  
241 and, with the rise of the computer, into the so-called 'infosphere' and electronically-  
242 generated cyberspace (Carman 2002). The battles of our age can be said to have no  
243 limits or boundaries: they frequently cannot be seen or measured, nor physically  
244 controlled. Unlike the warfare of previous ages, they do not occupy a particular  
245 location but are at once nowhere and everywhere. Their understanding thus lies  
246 beyond the methodology of this particular project, and we leave them to others with  
247 more appropriate styles of approach.

248 In general, the purpose of battle has been held to be the achievement of some  
249 kind of decision. However, as Wiegley (1991) has pointed out, the battles of the  
250 era from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries were for the most part *indecisive*.  
251 What we tend to remember are those battles that can be held to be in some sense to  
252 have resulted in a clear decision: for instance, by forcing a change of strategy upon  
253 one side in a conflict; by closing off a military or political option during the course  
254 of a conflict; or by bringing about the final defeat of one nation by another and thus  
255 an end – however temporarily sometimes – to a conflict. But the majority of battles  
256 do not achieve such decisiveness: instead they lead to more violence elsewhere  
257 at a later time. These battles, which are more readily and more easily forgotten,  
258 represent the majority of battles fought and the more typical form of battle in any  
259 period of history. What their study has to tell us is less about the outcome of wars  
260 and the political and social changes they engender than what war was generally  
261 like in that period and how the people involved perceived and understood the role  
262 of war in their lives. By focussing on such less spectacular and less historically  
263 significant events we gain a different kind of insight into war in the past than from  
264 much military history.

## 265 **Standing in Empty Spaces**

266 Historic battlefields are locations where events once took place. They are now  
267 places marked by those events and accordingly of interest to students of those  
268 events. To study them is to stand in a place today, dreaming of an event of yesterday,  
269 an event that has passed and is gone. All one can do is stand and look, and that –  
270 put simply and bluntly – is the methodology of the Bloody Meadows Project.  
271 But there is more to looking than inactivity, and to look effectively one must also  
272 take note and respond to the images that present themselves. That too is part of the  
273 methodology of the Bloody Meadows Project.

274 For us, taking this approach means walking through the space with a keen eye to  
275 the different periods of history – and different human uses of the space – represented



**Fig. 7.1** Northampton Street, St Albans, Hertfordshire, England. Site of a battle in 1455

by buildings, monuments, street plans, different kinds of land-use, and different 276  
shapes of ground. The result is a kind of 'time travel' – not a one-way trip into a singular 277  
and particular past and back, but a real journey through various times, where 278  
different pasts and an immediate present are met in juxtaposition. Places have 279  
histories that are evident in the experiences of them, and it is in experiencing 280  
them as places that the histories become evident. The place has meaning because 281  
it has a history and that history is manifested in the material evidences of its past 282  
which testify to interesting and different pasts. These material things create the 283  
drama of the place which is the experience of its history in the present. 284

It is this historicity that such a 'phenomenological' approach to historic battlefields 285  
can produce. In taking such an approach, and in being deliberately aware of both 286  
past and present in a particular place, the line that lies between the past and the present 287  
is walked, where neither dominates the other. Instead, they interact in interesting 288  
and challenging ways, as illustrated in the following three examples (Fig. 7.1). 289

[AU2]

***St Albans, Hertfordshire, UK, 1455*** 290

For the first battle at St Albans in 1455 King Henry VI gathered his forces in the 291  
centre of the town, where the wide main market street, as today, was suitable 292  
for the mustering of an army. The opposing army launched an attack that travelled 293  
up the narrow streets towards the centre of the town. Barricades were thrown 294  
down and the defenders retreated towards the town centre (Carman and Carman 295



Fig. 7.2 'Bloody Ditch', Roundway Down, Wiltshire, England. Site of a battle in 1643

296 2006:97–100. Some of the buildings present today were those standing on the day  
297 of battle, and passing up these streets today, you still enter the town centre quite  
298 suddenly, going from quiet residential side-streets into the bustling market area.  
299 Nearby, a new shopping precinct overlies what were household garden plots on the  
300 day of the battle. Its internal arrangement reflects the narrow alleys that criss-crossed  
301 the area in the fifteenth century: efforts to negotiate one's way around and out of  
302 this confusing space perhaps reflects the soldiers' efforts to climb over fences  
303 and through hedges. In both streets and shopping precinct, the effect is somewhat  
304 similar to that likely to have been experienced on the day of battle (Fig. 7.2).

### 305 *Roundway Down, Wiltshire, UK, 1643*

306 The landscape of Roundway Down is typical of its region in the southern part of  
307 Britain: rolling chalk downland with mostly gentle slopes although cut by steeper  
308 scarps. Roundway Hill itself is a rough isosceles triangle in shape with two long  
309 sides to north and south and the higher and broader eastern end immediately above  
310 the battlefield. To the south lies the town of Devizes, masked by a lower rise of  
311 ground, and linked by a route that climbs the steep southern slope of Roundway  
312 Hill. The land was mostly open grazing in the seventeenth century: the ploughed  
313 ground that makes up the rest of today's landscape is much more recent in origin.  
314 Roundway Down is today peaceful countryside: agricultural, tamed, gentle and  
315 empty. To see the battlefield you must walk around it and gaze at it from some distance  
316 away, for there is no right of way through it.



**Fig. 7.3** The modern University at Elviña, Galicia, Spain. Site of the battle of Corunna 1809

For 2 km above the eastern end of Roundway Hill the ground rises gently, but suddenly it falls almost sheer for 100 m: down this near vertical slope fleeing cavalry tumbled and fell, horse and rider, unable to stop or rein in. Walkers today going slowly on foot also come across it with frightening suddenness: one moment the ground is flat, the next it falls away into bottomlessness, hidden by trees. What it was like for fast-moving riders – the panicked screaming of horses and riders; the attempt to pull up only to be pushed on by those coming from behind; the fear, confusion and noise – can at least be guessed at when you are there. The bottom of the slope still bears the memory of the event: it is today called the Bloody Ditch (Fig. 7.3).

***Corunna/Elviña, Galicia, Spain 1809***

The battle of Corunna – or as it is known locally, Elviña – was fought by a retreating British army before taking ship from Spain in 1809. The contending armies were formed on two parallel ridges about six kilometres south of the city, and most of the fighting took place on the slopes of the higher and steeper southern ridge on which the French army stood. The most fierce fighting took place in and around the village of Elviña, which changed hands several times. The vernacular stone buildings of the village still hug the steep slopes of the hill and the original core of the settlement remains much as it must have been on the day. From within the settlement, due to foreshortened lines of sight and impeding buildings, a sense of the surrounding



336 landscape is difficult to grasp: little can be seen except the village itself. The modern  
337 Elviña church lies across the valley, providing a view of the main area where fighting  
338 took place. From here it is possible to gain a good view across the flat ground of  
339 the valley between the two main ridges and the arable fields occupying it. The small  
340 size of the fields and the vernacular buildings set amongst them indicate little change  
341 in this landscape since 1809; although on the hills above the encroachments are very  
342 clear of the expanding city and especially the new University which has been built  
343 specifically here because of the significance of the site in local historical memory.

## 344 **Answering Some Criticisms of Phenomenology**

345 The three preceding examples are intended to emphasise that ours is not a search for  
346 an experience of being in the past, but rather an experience in the present which  
347 simultaneously reflects and derives from the contribution of history to a particular  
348 place. In the case of a historic battlefield, it is not an experience of ancient slaughter,  
349 but an experience of a particular place in the present as read through its history as  
350 manifested in material form. This history inevitably includes the event of the battle  
351 that was fought there – and indeed is what attracts us to explore that place – but not  
352 exclusively. It is that experience of being in the place that is captured.

353 We have been accused in one review of our work of going to places so we can  
354 ‘dream’ the past (Foard 2006). This is a common charge against phenomenologi-  
355 cally-derived studies in archaeology. Trigger (2006:474–475) has referred to it as a  
356 ‘contemplative’ or ‘intuitive’ style of archaeology reliant on assumptions about a  
357 common ‘human nature’ and a shared bodily experience that crosses cultural bound-  
358 aries. He points out that anthropology has “empirically demonstrated that cultural  
359 differences are sufficiently great as to make it unlikely that [phenomenological  
360 approaches] could control for ethnocentrism and produce reliable results” (Trigger  
361 2006:474); he also accuses phenomenological approaches of relying upon subjective  
362 feeling (Trigger 2006:477).

363 By contrast, we believe that our work demonstrates the utility of an approach to  
364 landscapes based upon phenomenology: moreover, by applying this approach to  
365 historic landscapes we show the usefulness of the approach beyond the study of  
366 prehistory. Our approach is based entirely upon the notion that those attitudes  
367 towards and the expectations of landscape in the past were different from those  
368 held by people in the twenty-first century: if they were not different we would have  
369 nothing to say. We believe our approach seeks out and identifies those differences  
370 by using an explicitly modern Western mode of investigation of space and comparing  
371 it with the use of that space made by people in the past. It is from noting the manner  
372 in which space, objects and landscape features are used or any failure to use them  
373 as we would today that these differences emerge.

374 Where objects that were present in the past and would be available for use in the  
375 present – especially for military purposes, such as facilitating or impeding movement,

for concealment or for protection – but were not used for these purposes, it can be 376  
inferred that the objects were not seen as useful. This in turn indicates a measure 377  
of difference between the past and the present. We also compare the uses of 378  
space in one historical period from those of another, revealing other differences in 379  
attitude and expectation. 380

### ***Trees and Buildings***

381

Woodland can offer a place to hide troops, may be an area to avoid or simply provide 382  
a source of raw material. In the medieval battlefields we have studied, the wood- 383  
land areas were avoided by troops and if present at all provided a boundary to the 384  
battlefield space. The trees themselves were sometimes a source for the material 385  
used to construct barricades protecting the defenders' position. The specifics of 386  
particular circumstances seem to determine the role of woodland in battle: as an incon- 387  
venience or an asset, as a landscape feature or as merely a number of individual 388  
trees. The manner in which woodland is treated by soldiers in different periods 389  
may indicate how such features are perceived more generally in that period: our 390  
work suggests that trees are more likely to be seen as woodland landscape features 391  
(that is, as woods or forests) in more recent periods, and more as sources of material 392  
(that is, merely a collection of individual trees) in earlier times. Either: but not both at 393  
the same time. There is scope for more research here. 394

Churches and chapels are a significant and common feature in any European 395  
landscape; accordingly their presence in the battlefield space may not be remark- 396  
able, and also as what is very often the largest stone structure in their area they 397  
may inevitably attract attention. Frequently, however, they were ancillary to the 398  
battlefield action, and specifically avoided by combatants during the fighting. 399  
Monasteries too frequently stand just off the space of medieval battles. The fighting 400  
avoided these places, but they provided rescue for the wounded and medical aid 401  
once the fighting was over. We think it significant that of our sample of medieval 402  
battlefields, almost all are known to be close to or involve churches and monasteries 403  
while less than half more modern sites do. Fighting penetrates only one such 404  
structure in the medieval period while a majority in the modern period are in the 405  
centre of the fighting. This suggests a change of attitude towards such places over 406  
time: that while churches and church foundations are not to be fought in or over in 407  
the medieval period, their presence nearby is desired or expected; while in later 408  
times they form merely another part of the battlefield space and no longer command 409  
special respect. Non-church buildings are relatively rare in the medieval battlefield 410  
landscape unless the battle takes place through urban space. The incorporation 411  
of settlements into battlefields in later periods increases the number of buildings 412  
present and such buildings are more likely to be used as part of the fighting, indicating 413  
another change of attitude to landscape features. 414

415 **Conclusion**

416 We believe that by choosing to examine landscapes that were used for a very  
417 particular kind of purpose in the past makes the identification and examination of  
418 differences in attitude and expectation as revealed by differences in use more  
419 reliable, and that they therefore reveal real differences between various periods of  
420 history and those periods and our own. The differences in expectation and  
421 understanding of landscapes thus derived can then be taken up by others who are  
422 interested in understanding the use and attitudes towards space of people in the past.  
423 Elsewhere (Carman and Carman 2006a, b, 2007, 2009) we have given details of our  
424 results and more detailed consideration of what we think we have and have not  
425 achieved. Here we wish to emphasise that we believe those results to be meaningful,  
426 and that taking our phenomenologically-derived approach to particular places of  
427 experience in the past demonstrates the value of such approaches. However, to do  
428 so is neither simple nor straightforward: it is a case of constant awareness of one's  
429 situatedness in the present while attempting to compare that with a known past.

430 Ours is not an effort to 'dream' a past, but to compare the past and the present –  
431 and different pasts with each other and with the present – in a meaningful way that  
432 opens up possibilities for understanding the difference of the past from the present.  
433 As Tilley puts it, it is about "being there, being *in place*" (Tilley 1994:75) in the  
434 present but being simultaneously aware of that place's past. Accordingly, our  
435 research is very largely not about the past at all, but about studying the past as a set  
436 of contemporary practices (Shanks and Tilley 1987a, b; Edgeworth 2006). We firmly  
437 locate ourselves in the present – and use knowledge of the past as a counterpoint to  
438 expose the peculiarities of the modern experience of space and place.

439 **Notes**

- 440 1. The Bloody Meadows Project is co-directed by the authors and was instigated in  
441 1998. It derives from their joint interests in landscapes as particular kinds of  
442 entity, in war as a subject of archaeological enquiry, and as an opportunity to use  
443 archaeology to contribute to significant debates of our time. The project studies  
444 battlefields from all historic periods and is not limited by geographical region.

445 **References**

- 446 American Battlefield Protection Program, 2009. National Park Service, American Battlefield  
447 Protection Program. Web page, [www.cr.nps.gov/abpp](http://www.cr.nps.gov/abpp), accessed 1 July 2009.  
448 Barrett, J., 1991. Towards an archaeology of ritual. In *Sacred and Profane: Proceedings of a*  
449 *Conference on Archaeology, Ritual and Religion* edited by P. Garwood, R. Skeates and J. Toms,  
450 pp. 1–9. Oxford University Committee for Archaeology, Oxford.



- Barrett, J., 1994. *Fragments from Antiquity: an Archaeology of Social Life in Britain 2900–1200BC*. Blackwell, Oxford. 451–452
- Borg, A., 1991. *War Memorials: from Antiquity to the Present*, Leo Cooper, London. 453
- Bushaway, B., 1992. Name Upon Name: the Great War and Remembrance. In *Myths of the English* edited by R. Porter, pp. 136–167. Polity Press, Cambridge. 454–455
- Carman, J., 1999. Bloody Meadows: the places of battle. In *The Familiar Past? Archaeologies of Later Historical Britain* edited by S. Tarlow and S. West, pp. 233–245. Routledge, London. 456–457
- Carman, J., 2002. Paradox in Places: 20th century battlefields in long-term perspective. In *Matériel Culture: the Archaeology of 20th Century Conflict* edited by J. Schofield, W. G. Johnson and C. Beck, pp. 9–21. Routledge, London. 458–460
- Carman, J. and Carman, P., 2006a. Ancient Bloody Meadows: fieldwork in Greece and France 2002 to 2004. *Journal of Conflict Archaeology* 1:19–44. 461–462
- Carman, J. and Carman, P., 2006b. *Bloody Meadows: Investigating Landscapes of Battle*. Sutton, Stroud. 463–464
- Carman, J. and Carman, P., 2007. From rhetoric to research: the Bloody Meadows Project as a pacifist response to war. In *Contemporary and Historical Archaeology in Theory: Papers from the 2003 and 2004 CHAT Conferences* edited by L. McAtackney, M. Palus and A. Piccini, pp. 109–114. *Studies in Contemporary and Historical Archaeology* 4. British Archaeological Reports International Series 1677. Archaeopress, Oxford. 465–469
- Carman, J. and Carman, P., 2009. The intangible presence: investigating battlefields. In *Heritage Studies: Methods and Approaches* edited by M.L.S. Sørensen and J. Carman, pp. 292–315. Routledge, London. 470–472
- Connerton, P., 1989. *How Societies Remember*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. 473
- Edgeworth, M., editor, 2006. *Ethnographies of Archaeological Practice: Cultural Encounters, Material Transformations*. Altamira Press, New York, NY. 474–475
- English Heritage, 1995. *Register of Historic Battlefields*. English Heritage, London. 476
- Foard, G., 2001. The archaeology of attack: battles and sieges of the English Civil War. In *Fields of Conflict: Progress and Prospects in Battlefield Archaeology, Proceedings of a Conference held in the Department of Archaeology, University of Glasgow, April 2000* edited by P. Freeman and A. Pollard, pp. 87–104. *British Archaeological Reports International Series* 958. Archaeopress, Oxford. 477–481
- Foard, G., 2006. Review of *Bloody Meadows: Investigating Landscapes of Battle* by Carman, J. and Carman, P. *Post-Medieval Archaeology* 40.2:424–425. 482–483
- Foote, S., 1997. *Shadowed Ground: America's Landscapes of Violence and Tragedy*. University of Texas Press, Austin. 484–485
- Haecker, C. M. and Mauck, J. G., 1997. *On the Prairie of Palo Alto: Historical Archaeology of the U.S.-Mexican War Battlefield*. Texas A and M University Press. College Station TX. 486–487
- Historic Scotland, 2009. *Scottish Historic Environment Policy 2009*. Historic Scotland, Edinburgh 488–489
- Jones, A., 2007. *Memory and Material Culture*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. 490
- Keeley, L.H., 1996. *War before Civilization: The Myth of the Peaceful Savage*. Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York. 491–492
- Parker Pearson, M., 1982. Mortuary practices, society and ideology: an ethnoarchaeological study. In *Symbolic and Structural Archaeology* edited by I. Hodder, pp. 99–114. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. 493–495
- Pearson, M., 1998. Performance as valuation: early Bronze Age burial as theatrical complexity. In *The Archaeology of Value: Essays on Prestige and the Processes of Valuation* edited by D. Bailey, pp. 32–41. *British Archaeological Reports International Series* 730. Archaeopress, Oxford. 496–499
- Saunders, N., 2001. Excavating memories: archaeology and the Great War 1914–2001. *Antiquity* 76:101–108. 500–501
- Schofield, J., 2005. *Combat Archaeology: Material Culture and Modern Conflict*. Duckworth, London. 502
- Schofield, J., Johnson, W. G., and Beck, C. editors, 2002. *Matériel Culture: the Archaeology of 20th Century Conflict*. Routledge, London. 503–504

- 505 Scott, D. D., Fox, R. A., Connor, M. A. and Harmon, D. editors. 1989. *Archaeological Perspectives*  
506 *on the Battle of the Little Big Horn*. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman O and London.
- 507 Shanks, M. & Tilley, C. 1987a. *Re-Constructing Archaeology: Theory and Practice*. Cambridge  
508 University Press, Cambridge.
- 509 Shanks, M. & Tilley, C. 1987b. *Social Theory and Archaeology*. Polity Press, Cambridge.
- 510 Sutherland, T. with contributions on human remains by Holst, M. 2001. *Battlefield Archaeology: a*  
511 *Guide to the Archaeology of Conflict*. Electronic Document, [http://cairnworld.free.fr/guideindex.](http://cairnworld.free.fr/guideindex.php)  
512 [php](http://cairnworld.free.fr/guideindex.php), accessed 1 July 2009.
- 513 Tarlow, S. 1999. *Bereavement and Commemoration: an Archaeology of Mortality*. Blackwell,  
514 Oxford.
- 515 Thomas, J. 1991. *Rethinking the Neolithic*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- 516 Trigger, B. 2006. *A History of Archaeological Thought*. 2nd ed. Cambridge University Press,  
517 Cambridge.
- 518 Weigley, R. F. 1991. *The Age of Battles: the Quest for Decisive Warfare from Breitenfeld to*  
519 *Waterloo*. Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis.
- 520 Winter, J., 1995. *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: the Great War in European Cultural History*.  
521 Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

# Author Queries

Chapter No.: 7      0001486240

Queries	Details Required	Author's Response
AU1	Kindly include the references "Tilley (1994), Keegan (1976) and Carman and Carman (2006)" in the reference list.	
AU2	Please confirm if the citations inserted for Figs. 7.1, 7.2 and 7.3 is okay.	

Uncorrected Proof