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Rachael Kiddey: Homeless Heritage. Collaborative Social Archaeology as Therapeutic Practice. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2017. 217 pp. ISBN 978-0-19-874686-7. [Book review]

Thomas, Suzie

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Rachael Kiddey: Homeless Heritage. Collaborative Social Archaeology as Therapeutic Practice. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2017. 217 pp. ISBN 978-0-19-874686-7

I was really happy that Norwegian Archaeological Review invited me to read and review Rachael Kiddey's first book *Homeless Heritage: Collaborative Social Archaeology as Therapeutic Practice*. This was not least because I became friends with her, what feels like many years ago now, when she first moved to York to work on the PhD on which this book is based. I was living in the city too for some of that time, with my first post-PhD job at the Council for British Archaeology. I knew then that Rachael was onto something really important with her research – very much a collaboration with the colleagues she describes here; the homeless people in Bristol and York who have given their time and become involved with interpreting the places and material culture that have significance in their lives, as well as other archaeologists, students and specialists who have collaborated with her in different ways. I was also nonetheless nervous about committing to writing a review – not for any personal or political reasons, or a fear of having to be honest about a friend and colleague's work (in our small-ish field this is inevitable at some point), but because like many academics I simply have too much on my plate. Therefore agreeing to take on yet another assignment carried with it risks of over-stretching myself.

I need not have worried. As soon as I picked the book up for a quick glance over, I was barely able to put it down. I found myself rapidly devouring every chapter, eager especially to learn about the personal experiences and anecdotes connected to the different homeless colleagues that Kiddey intersperses so well between the theories, contextual historiographies, methodologies and research results. It is largely in part due to this approach, of intertwining engaging storytelling with high standard academic writing, which is the key to this book's success. It is almost the case that I want to foreground this review with a 'spoiler alert', so as not to ruin the experience for those that have not yet read the book!

Homeless Heritage is the product of a reworking of doctoral research for a broader market. Unlike many such publications, it succeeds in becoming an engaging piece in its own right. The chapters are arranged along logical lines – with the first two chapters introducing both Kiddey's research background and the environment in which she worked, particularly Bristol's now iconic Stokes Croft district where this story, and research, first begin. She then brings broader theoretical framing by situating her work not only archaeological theory but also in the historiographical context of homelessness, including – fascinatingly and horrifyingly – the impact of British vagrancy laws on demonizing homelessness across the globe; one of many less-than-cheering legacies of the British Empire. Chapters 3 and 4 bring the reader's focus out and away from Kiddey's case studies, in order to equip us as readers with the necessary lenses with which to view her research. However, her (by this stage in the book familiar) technique of interspersing the sections with anecdotes and stories from her experiences and encounters during her research serves the purpose of reminding the reader what and who this book is really about, even while they grapple with large scale, complex (but well explained) concepts.

Further on still into the book, we encounter a chapter on the idea of an 'ethic of care', which lays out the ethical considerations that Kiddey has worked with in her research. This is research that, while situated in archaeology, straddles also anthropological and ethnographic approaches. Working with people who live sometimes chaotic, and very often vulnerable existences, Kiddey illustrates – and justifies – times in her field research phases when she has had to make decisions that cross what are usually considered ethical

boundaries, for the sake of her colleagues (who are often, quite clearly, also friends). Sometimes this has evidently led her into rather frightening situations where real danger is possible, and it becomes clear that both her topic and her methods would not be for the faint-hearted (or for that matter half-hearted) to try.

Following these foregrounding chapters, we get into some of the main findings from her research, with an engaging collection of her 'ethnographic journeys' in Bristol and York. In this chapter are accounts of Kiddey accompanying her various homeless colleagues, and presenting the places and routes that are significant to their everyday lives and personal histories. This includes sleeping places ('skippers') – some used on a seasonal basis and some no longer accessible due to having been boarded or barred up. This serves as a reminder that local authorities and other decision-makers so frequently deny homeless people places to rest, based on the unfair perception that homeless presence is an undesirable element within their towns and cities. One case, in particular, illustrates the dehumanizing undertone of this policy: as homeless colleague Andrew explains to Kiddey, as he narrates a sleeping place in an area known by homeless people in Bristol as 'The Dungeon':

I know the girl that was sleeping here regularly ... see, she stashed her cardboard and duvets and blankets in the back of the space, to keep it dry in case it rained. Council come and put this metal grille over it when she was away, I expect. They didn't even wait to give her back her belongings. (Andrew, in Kiddey, p. 80)

The research is not only about tracing pathways around the places significant to homeless people in these two English cities however; Kiddey also conducted archaeological excavations in both Bristol and York, working with homeless colleagues and others – including archaeology students and professional (paid) archaeologists. In the proceeding chapter, she reports on these excavations and their dissemination (which she rightly shares responsibility for with her homeless colleagues through both exhibitions and public talks).

While the material culture uncovered (and the key role that homeless colleagues play in being able to provide the specialist knowledge to interpret this material) are significant, it is once more the process itself which is of highest importance. Termed 'applied heritage' by Kiddey, it is the use of heritage approaches and practices with diverse communities such as the homeless (we learn very early in this book not to make the mistake of assuming this is in any way a homogeneous group), in which the greatest outcomes and impacts of Kiddey's research are to be found.

Critics might question Kiddey's extensive use of narrative in some parts of the book, including recounted dialogue, in reporting some of the anecdotal incidents during her research period. Not because these are not well written and interesting (they are), but because in an objective light it can hardly be possible to report verbatim exactly how things happened and exactly what people said (unless she was recording every single moment of her interactions). However, if we read these excerpts instead as stories based on true events than exact empirical accounts, it is possible to appreciate them for what they are and to take away meaningful insights.

The book rounds off with two further chapters. The first of these reinforces Kiddey's approach as Applied Heritage; suggesting that 'some participatory cultural heritage work might explicitly set out to function as a therapeutic social intervention with marginalized communities' (p. 160).

Linking this position strongly to theoretical frameworks that draw heavily on self-reflexivity, she also continues to draw convincingly on examples from her own fieldwork to demonstrate the ways in which engagement with heritage (and not simply the iconic monumental 'heritage' imagery that the word still conjures up for many, but rather everyday points and moments of significance on the personal level), can bring about not only personal well-being objectives, but shine a light more brightly on societal deficiencies

and the needs of particular communities. As an aside, I did find myself wondering why, if Applied Heritage is central to Kiddey's position, it is not brought up in the book's title or subtitle.

One of the most compelling sections of the book is the short conclusion chapter, and especially Kiddey's focus within that section of what became of the homeless colleagues with whom she worked. By this point in the book, we the readers also feel some emotional connection with these people who consented to share aspects of their lifeways with Kiddey, and by extension with us too. Some obviously fared better than others, going on to make changes in their lives such as finding work and accommodation, in one case even getting married. Changes manifest themselves in different ways, with one colleague reverting back to using his birth name, shedding the nickname he acquired as a homeless person after making significant changes to his life. Kiddey does not shy away from the less happy outcomes either, fairly admitting that with some people she had felt close to, eventually she unfortunately lost touch and hence lost track of them. She is also realistic about her own life changes, noting that developments in her personal life including moving to another part of England and starting a family, inevitably affected her ability to stay in regular contact with the people she had come to know during her doctoral research. By this point in the book, we have also encountered several deaths, which are all dealt with sensitively and meaningfully. Commemoration comes in all forms, and this book is a testament also to the departed who had involvement with the project.

As an engaging read in its own right, this book is likely one of those unusual scientific books that a non-specialist could also enjoy reading. The language is accessible, and the material is relatable and compelling. In addition, I particularly recommend this book as an exemplar for any archaeologists or heritage practitioners wishing to engage with marginalized communities. While not all marginalized groups face exactly the same difficulties as homeless people, the time and emotional investment that Kiddey has devoted to her work here is a strong lesson for us all.