

*Writing Archaeology: Telling Stories About the Past*  
Fagan, B 2006 Left Coast Press, California.

At first glance *Writing Archaeology* appears to have cornered a gaping hole in the market: thousands of procrastinating students, over-worked lecturers and pressurised commercial archaeologists struggling with their archaeological prose and searching for the key to easing their exertions. Indeed, Brian Fagan seems the ideal man for this job; a prolific author who has churned out numerous archaeological tomes and, it seems, managed to stay sane. Alas for all of us, as Fagan makes clear in his preface, his audience, and his message, are much more narrowly defined. This is a book designed to teach archaeologists how to reach the masses. It is a practical, technical and very honest guide to the self-discipline, hard-slog and passion required to be a proficient general writer. Fagan's goal is to provide archaeologists with the skills to present archaeology to the public in a clear and enjoyable way. He goes beyond the technicalities and minutiae of writing and provides practical information on the publishing industry, proposing books, working with editors, the production process and even the marketing of books post-publication. Importantly, Fagan's considerable experience writing general books translates into a straightforward style and a personal tone.

The book is split into easily digestible and logical chapters; each dealing with a specific theme and centred on one of nine writing 'rules'. The first of these rules 'Always tell a story' introduces a chapter on the art of writing. This is the only generalised chapter and it deals with the importance of passion, imagination and perseverance in writing as well as the practicalities of inspiration, how to write and dealing with the 'hard slog'. The next chapter deals specifically with the world of short articles, magazines and a genre of general writing I had previously been ignorant of: the 'op-ed' article.

The following six chapters are the guts of the book and are an incredibly informative tour through the world of book writing and publishing, a journey fascinating in itself. Fagan draws heavily on personal experience, particularly when describing his relationship with his editors and his own struggle with that old familiar demon procrastination. Of particular interest to those interested in entering the publication world are the chapters on writing a proposal and the production and editing process. These provide valuable information that it would be difficult to find from any other source.

The final chapter deals with the challenge of writing textbooks for the academic market; an entirely different ball game from the more general writing covered earlier. This section will likely be of use to a very small number of this book's potential readers but at the same time its personal tone gives it an inherent fascination for those interested in the publication world. Fagan's final contribution is a handy list of 'resources for writers' consisting of websites and books dedicated to various aspects of writing in general and writing archaeology, each with handy comments about their usefulness.

This volume certainly achieves its stated goals; as a guide to general writing it is exemplary. In some ways the book is actually more than what Fagan states at the outset. Its personal style and human anecdotes give an insight into the author and his

career that goes beyond the confines of a simple manual. The book also serves as a platform for Fagan to promote general writing among archaeologists. This is an important and particularly relevant message in Ireland where engagement between archaeologists and the public is sorely lacking and the proper dissemination of important interpretations, discoveries and ideas rarely happens.

In an Irish context parts of the book are a little out of touch. There is a definite stateside focus and this is particularly obvious in chapter two where all the examples of magazines and newspapers given hale from America. Fagan's account of the publication and production process is also, for obvious reasons, based on his American experience. As someone who has not yet managed to publish a book in Ireland I am not really qualified to judge if this is relevant in an Irish context but I suspect much of the simple advice given would transfer. One final minor gripe which may jar with Irish sensibilities is the author's frequent use of his own books as examples of how to do things right. This is a little immodest if perhaps justifiable considering his experience and success.

*Writing Archaeology* achieves exactly what it sets out to achieve and a little more. While its target audience is perhaps fairly narrow, its personal tone, supremely practical tips on writing and its fascinating details about the otherwise arcane world of publishing mean it is a book that should appeal to a wide audience. Fagan's basic message is that anyone can 'write archaeology' even if it is quite hard. With this in mind his admission that *Writing Archaeology* took six drafts to write is a nice reminder that writing is a struggle, even for the pro's.