

THE PAST IS A
FOREIGN COUNTRY – REVISITED

The past is past, but survives in and all around us, indispensable and inescapable. Three decades after his classic *The Past Is a Foreign Country*, David Lowenthal re-examines why we love or loathe what seems old or familiar. His new book reveals how we know and remember the past, and the myriad ways – nostalgia or amnesia, restoration, replay, chauvinist celebration or remorseful contrition – we use and misuse it. We transform the past to serve present needs and future hopes, alike in preserving and in discarding what nature and our ancestors have handed down.

Whether treasured boon or traumatic bane, the past is the prime source of personal and collective identity. Hence its relics and reminders evoke intense rivalry. Resurgent conflicts over history, memory, and heritage pervade every facet of public culture, making the foreign country of the past ever more our domesticated own.

The past in the Internet age has become more intimate yet more remote, readily found but rapidly forgotten. Its range today is stupendous, embracing not just the human but the terrestrial and even the cosmic saga. And it is seen and touched and smelled as well as heard and read about. Traumatic recollection and empathetic re-enactment demote traditional history. A clear-cut chronicle certified by experts has become a fragmented congeries of contested relics, remnants and reminiscences. New insights into history and memory, bias and objectivity, artefacts and monuments, identity and authenticity, and remorse and contrition, make Lowenthal's new book an essential key to the past that we inherit, reshape, and bequeath to the future.

David Lowenthal is Emeritus Professor of Geography and Honorary Research Fellow at University College London. He is a medallist of the Royal Geographical, the Royal Scottish Geographical and the American Geographical Societies, a Fellow of the British Academy and honorary D.Litt. Memorial University of Newfoundland. In 2010 he was awarded the Forbes Lecture Prize by the International Institute for Conservation. His books include *West Indian Societies* (1972), *The Past Is a Foreign Country* (1985), *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (1998), and *George Perkins Marsh, Prophet of Conservation* (2000).

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Lynx-eyed readers have spared me manifold errors. ‘I know by now to the full how many mistakes I have made’, the late great Nikolaus Pevsner launched the final volume of his *Buildings of England*. I echo Pevsner’s mortification but cannot claim his faith in revision: ‘The first editions are only *ballons d’essai* [trial balloons]; it is the second editions which count.’¹

¹ Nikolaus Pevsner, *Staffordshire* (Penguin, 1974), 17–18.

ABBREVIATIONS

Newspapers [*Times, Guardian, Independent, Evening Standard, Telegraph*, etc.]
 all London

AASLH	American Association for State and Local History (Nashville, Tennessee)
AHA	American Historical Association
AHR	<i>American Historical Review</i>
CPW	Freud, <i>Complete Psychological Works</i>
CW	<i>Collected/Complete Works/Writings</i>
EH	English Heritage
ELH	<i>English Literary History</i>
GPO	Government Printing Office, Washington, DC
ICOMOS	International Council on Monuments and Sites
IHT	<i>International Herald Tribune</i>
IJCP	<i>International Journal of Cultural Property</i>
JHI	<i>Journal of the History of Ideas</i>
MIT	Massachusetts Institute of Technology
MLA	Modern Language Association
MLN	<i>Modern Language Notes</i>
NPS	National Park Service, US Department of Interior
NYRB	<i>New York Review of Books</i>
NYT	<i>New York Times</i>
PMLA	Publications of the Modern Language Association
SF	science fiction
SUNY	State University of New York Press, Albany, NY
TLS	<i>Times Literary Supplement</i>
USM&DR	<i>United States Magazine and Democratic Review</i>