

# **Heritage and Memory: Oral History and Mining Heritage in Wales and Cornwall**

Submitted by Bethan Elinor Coupland, to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of *Doctor of Philosophy* in History, December, 2012.

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## Abstract

Scholarly work on the relationship between heritage and memory has largely neglected living memory (that is 'everyday' memories of lived experience). There is a common assumption that heritage fosters or maintains broader 'collective' memories (often referred to as social, public or cultural memories) in a linear sense, after living memory has lapsed. However, given the range of complex conceptualisations of 'memory' itself, there are inevitably multiple ways in which memory and heritage interact. This thesis argues that where heritage displays represent the recent past, the picture is more complex; that heritage narratives play a prominent role in the tussle between different layers of memory.

Empirically, the research focuses on two prominent mining heritage sites; Big Pit coal mine in south Wales and Geevor tin mine in Cornwall. Industrial heritage sites are one of the few sorts of public historical representation where heritage narratives exist so closely alongside living memories of the social experiences they represent. The study more clearly models the relationship between heritage and memory by analysing three key components in relation to these sites; the process 'heritagisation', living memories and broader cultural memory.

It is argued that heritagisation is a *process* in which dominant narratives of the past are socially constructed and reliant upon particular political, cultural and economic circumstances. In these cases, heritage discourses imposed particular senses of value in relation to the mining past, emphasising the more distant past and the inherent 'historic' value of the industry. Through oral history, the relationship between autobiographical memories and these dominant heritage narratives is then explored. The study finds that living memory provides a more complex, nuanced account of the past which both challenges and goes beyond fixed heritage representations. As such, the meeting of heritagisation and living memory creates a number of points of contest. However, heritagisation directly influences the construction of dominant cultural memory, suggesting that heritage narratives actively *construct* new ways of 'remembering' the past. In turn, while living memories are not 'forgotten', they are gradually bleached out, diluted or even subsumed by dominant cultural memory.



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## Introduction

The turn to heritage is a contemporary characteristic of post-industrial Britain. It is particularly visible in former mining communities such as the South Wales Valleys and Cornwall where the industrial past dominated local culture, lifestyles and economic wellbeing. These histories are increasingly being represented in heritage displays and initiatives of different sorts. The transformation of former industrial areas into heritage attractions has been particularly controversial, with heritage tourism provoking some bitter criticism. Prominent Welsh historian, Gwyn Alf Williams noted:

We are living through a somewhat desperate hunt for our own past, a time of old militants religiously recorded on tape, of quarries and pits turned into tourist museums. This recovered tradition is increasingly operating in terms of a Celebration of a Heroic Past which seems rarely to be brought to bear on vulgarly contemporary problems except in terms of a merely rhetorical style which absolves its fortunate possessors from the necessity of thought. This is not to encapsulate a past, it is to sterilise it. It is not to cultivate an historical consciousness; it is to eliminate it.<sup>1</sup>

Williams was writing in the mid-1980s when the mining industry in Wales was in the throes of its final period of decline. Simultaneously, plans were in place to promote the South Wales Valleys as a tourist destination. While heritage planners and local councils were promoting heritage tourism as regenerative, miners and local people were attempting to keep their jobs and come to terms with the decline of their communities. As the above quote implies, this was not only a curious development, but one which glossed over, or even eliminated a valued cultural past. This was not simply a rejection of tourism on an economic basis, there something more fundamental at work. The past, which was so prominent in living memory, was being represented as heritage.

Moves to preserve mining heritage have been part of a much broader trend in the so-called 'heritage obsession' in Britain.<sup>2</sup> The past, it seems, is all around us. It is represented, commodified and consumed in a wide variety of ways; in films, on television, in books, museums and heritage sites. We are witnessing what has been

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<sup>1</sup> Gwyn A. Williams, *When Was Wales: A History of the Welsh* (Penguin Books, 1991), p. 300.

<sup>2</sup> Ben Cowell, *The Heritage Obsession: The Battle for England's Past* (The History Press Ltd, 2008).

described as an ‘audible explosion of popular presentations of the past’.<sup>3</sup> As a result, phrases such as ‘memory boom’ and ‘heritage boom’ have become commonplace in academic discourse in order to describe this increasingly pervasive public engagement with the past.<sup>4</sup> A concern with preserving heritage is particularly prominent in British life, and there is an extensive institutional structure which deals with the protection and presentation of material heritage (including large organisations such as the National Trust, Heritage Lottery Fund and English Heritage).

Historians have been somewhat reluctant to engage with these trends. In fact, heritage and memory have both been controversial concepts within academic history, to the extent that most critical work defining the terms and their interrelationships has come from other disciplines such as geography, sociology anthropology and heritage studies. Historians’ scepticism of both heritage and memory is largely based on familiar critique which is underpinned by epistemological assumptions about the relationship between the past and the present, or rather, what that relationship *should* be. So the argument goes, heritage (as a popular representation of the past) and memory (as the way individuals or groups ‘remember’ and make meaning from the past) are both inherently subjective ways of evoking history, which defy more ‘objective’ analysis. In these terms, they are shaped by their present functions and do not measure up to the so-called ‘testable truth’ which academic history provides.<sup>5</sup> Of course, the postmodern challenge raised fundamental questions about these notions of ‘truth’, though arguably having little impact on the historical mainstream.

This is not true of the discipline as a whole, however. Oral historians have long been concerned with the relationship we have with our pasts, what we remember and how we construct a sense of meaning from the past in the present. More recently, the sub-field of public history has emerged (drawing on developments in American scholarship but more recently finding its feet in British institutions) which seeks to more closely engage with the way the past is represented, consumed, and constructs meaning in the present.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Jill Liddington, ‘What Is Public History? Publics and Their Pasts, Meanings and Practices’, *Oral History*, 30 (2002), 83–93.

<sup>4</sup> Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (Routledge, 1995), p. 5; Cowell.

<sup>5</sup> David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 120.

<sup>6</sup> For an introduction to public history, see Liddington; *Oral History and Public Memories*, ed. by Paula Hamilton and Linda Shopes (Temple University Press, 2008); Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (SUNY Press, 1989). There are two

Public historians have recognised that there a distinct gap between the ways historians and the public conceptualise and use the past, suggesting that we need to more closely engage with the ways in which history is understood outside of the academy.<sup>7</sup> In these terms, we cannot dismiss heritage as ‘bogus history’, nor can we see it as an ‘unproblematic good’.<sup>8</sup> Rather than simplistically characterising heritage as one sort of phenomenon or another, we need to understand the complex value systems involved with preserving certain cultural pasts.

There is an increasing awareness of a more dynamic flow of knowledge and meaning between the past, present and future which needs to be more fully understood. In this vein, the concept of ‘historical consciousness’ has become more widely used as a way of reconceptualising the past-present relationship, as outlined above. Emanating from a German intellectual tradition, Bernard Eric Jensen has advocated the use of historical consciousness (*Geschichtsbewusstsein*), arguing that ‘history and history making as they occur in our ‘life-world’ should be considered the more basic forms of history.’<sup>9</sup> He continues, ‘history is defined as a constitutive feature of the ongoing lives of ordinary people.’<sup>10</sup> These ideas are reminiscent of Raphael Samuel’s claims that the study of the past should inform our understanding of the present, or what he called a sense of our own ‘historicity’.<sup>11</sup> By using historical consciousness as a framework, Jensen attempted to move beyond an approach that equated ‘history’ and ‘the past’ preferring to interpret the past, present and future as inextricably linked.<sup>12</sup> In these terms, the past is not a distant ‘foreign country’ (David Lowenthal’s famous phrase), rather, it is an active, dynamic construct which has meaning for people and plays a role in the negotiation of present values and identities.<sup>13</sup>

Through maintaining a critical perspective, the complexity of the past-present relationship in these contexts can be considered illuminating rather than merely

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dedicated journals to public history; The American journal *The Public Historian* (established in 1978) and its Australian counterpart *Public History Review* (established in 1992). For a detailed discussion of public history and its relevance to this research, see chapter 3.

<sup>7</sup> Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (Columbia University Press, 1998).

<sup>8</sup> Patrick Wright, *On Living in an Old Country: The National Past in Contemporary Britain* (Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>9</sup> Bernard Eric Jensen, ‘Usable Pasts: Comparing Approaches to Popular and Public History’, in *People and their pasts: public history today* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 48.

<sup>10</sup> Jensen, p. 50.

<sup>11</sup> Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory* (Verso, 1994).

<sup>12</sup> Jensen.

<sup>13</sup> David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge University Press, 1999).

restrictive, allowing us to move beyond the problematic paradox of making use of the past in the present and notions of historical ‘accuracy’. This thesis departs from this theoretical perspective, attempting to make sense of the complex process of constructing narratives of the past in the present while finding room for meaning in the way people relate to the past on a day-to-day basis.

Memory has been a key concept in the investigation of the past-present relationship, with research in memory studies posing similar questions to those raised by public historians. The historical study of memory has essentially been concerned with the social dynamics of the past-present relationship, not only asking ‘what happened then?’ but ‘why is that important now and to whom?’ In these terms, we can interpret heritage and memory as two alternative (but interlinked) modes of constructing historical understanding, or rather, two ways in which the past is recontextualised in the present. Memory is also closely linked to heritage in public discourse, where heritage practices are often bound up with the rhetoric of remembering. Heritage sites claim to remember or memorialise the past, we celebrate Remembrance Day, and we are urged not to ‘forget’ the darker moments of history. However, there is little clarity when it comes to establishing what sort of ‘memory’ these common statements refer to. It is unclear whether we really remember these pasts (and in what sense), or whether we are merely *reminded* of them.

It is widely accepted that memory functions at a number of levels, and these are articulated through a wide range of terminology. Scholars have distinguished between autobiographical memory (individual memory based on experience) and public or cultural memory (where memory is assumed to be ‘collective’ in some senses, rather than autobiographical; which can incorporate events beyond lived experience).<sup>14</sup> Nonetheless, academic studies of the relationship between heritage and memory are surprisingly limited. Museums and heritage are widely assumed to ‘house’ or ‘produce’ memory in a broad metaphorical sense.<sup>15</sup> In this model, it is assumed that preserving material heritage has a mnemonic function for societies; that heritage displays foster ‘collective’ memory, beyond the realm of individual experience. However, given the range of complex conceptualisations of memory, we would expect there to be multiple

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<sup>14</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *Halbwachs/Coser: On Collective Memory* (University of Chicago Press, 1992); Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka, ‘Collective Memory and Cultural Identity’, *New German Critique*, 1995, 125–133.

<sup>15</sup> Susan A. Crane, *Museums and Memory* (Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 2; Hamilton and Shopes, p. 3.

ways in which memory and heritage interact. Indeed, given the theoretical rigour which has grown from the study of heritage and memory as separate entities, there is surprisingly little critical work which engages with the inevitably multi-faceted nature of their interrelationship.

Of course, many heritage sites or displays represent the distant past, meaning that living memory is not necessarily a consideration in their representation of the past or its reception. However, more diverse practices of preservation have resulted in an increased focus on preserving the recent past as heritage. Industrial heritage and war memorials are two examples of this, where lived experience is ‘heritagised’, resulting in ‘official’ narratives existing alongside (and possibly in conflict with) unofficial memories. As I have suggested, where heritage narratives and living memory co-exist, the relationship between heritage and memory is likely to be much more complex in ways we don’t yet fully understand. As such, this research aimed to investigate a largely under-researched question; *how does heritagisation interact with different layers of memory?*

In order to answer this broad theoretical question, this study synthesises wide-ranging conceptual and theoretical perspectives on heritage and memory while providing some empirical depth and specificity by analysing the way in which different notions of memory and heritage intersect in particular contexts. Empirically, the research focuses on two prominent mining heritage sites; Big Pit coal mine in south Wales and Geevor tin mine in Cornwall. Both sites made a rapid transition to heritage after their closure as working mines (1980 and 1993 respectively), meaning that heritage narratives exist very closely alongside living memory. Both Big Pit and Geevor now operate as heritage attractions where visitors can ‘experience’ the past by taking an underground tour guided by ex-miners, as well as viewing more traditional museum displays.

The study focuses on three key components in its analysis; ‘heritagisation’, living memory and cultural memory. These are reflected in the chapter structure. Heritagisation focuses on the need to interpret heritage as a process which needs to be situated within complex and politicised contexts of construction. How and why are certain pasts preserved and represented as heritage? Which narratives of the past are preserved and who decides? The study then draws on a wide range of oral history

interviews in order to investigate two different (but closely related) 'layers' of memory; living memory and cultural memory. Oral history provides a means to investigate autobiographical memories and their relationship to dominant cultural narratives and to evaluate heritagisation in these contexts, to establish how it may be problematic as well as why it is valued. Does living memory challenge or reinforce heritage narratives? Is there a dominant cultural memory? What is the relationship between living memory and cultural memory in these cases? In addressing these questions, this thesis contributes to existing research on heritage and memory by more clearly modelling the relationship between heritage and different conceptualisations of memory, focusing particularly on the relevance of living memory to the process of heritagisation.

Chapter 1 reviews the wide range of existing theoretical perspectives on heritage and memory, which have both been contested concepts in academic literature. It lays the groundwork for the empirical sections that follow by defining key concepts and identifying the theoretical framework which will be applied throughout the remainder of the thesis. Chapter 2 builds on this, outlining the methodological approach taken in this research. This forms a bridge between the theoretical and empirical sections of the thesis, first outlining the various established approaches which informed this work, then progressing to a more specific explanation of the research process (identifying research questions and outlining methods of data collection and analysis). Chapter 3 describes Big Pit and Geevor in detail, placing them in their historical and local contexts. Firstly, it reviews the histories of mining in Wales and Cornwall and their points of comparison/contrast, which are relevant in setting up potentially different contexts for the transition to heritage in each case. Secondly, it introduces Geevor and Big Pit in general terms, describing the histories of the two sites and situating them in their local community contexts.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 form the second, analytical section of the thesis. Chapter 4 analyses the process of heritagisation in detail, unpicking the institutional heritage discourses present at Big Pit and Geevor at the time of their transitions to heritage (and beyond). This is done with a view to establishing how and why mining came to be re-framed and re-presented as heritage and the sorts of values which were constructed in the process. These are then compared with living memories in Chapter 5, which draws on oral history interviews with ex-miners and staff at the heritage sites. This analysis is undertaken in order to understand the complex implications of representing the mining

past at Geevor and Big Pit and, ultimately, what happens when heritage and living memory meet. Chapter 6 then takes a broader perspective, moving beyond the notion of living memory to evaluate the impact of heritagisation on the construction of cultural memory. This final analytical chapter draws on oral history data from a range of interviewees with different levels of attachment to the mining past in order to establish the specific sort of cultural memory which is cultivated through heritage representations; namely, which elements of these stories are preserved and 'remembered', both in the present and for the future. Finally, the Conclusion draws together the existing lines of argument to answer the question posed at the outset of the study. It first summarises the complex interrelationships between heritage and memory found in this research, then establishes the broader theoretical implications of the work more generally.



# Chapter 1

## Literature Review: Heritage and Memory

### 1.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the wide range of existing theoretical perspectives on heritage and memory, which have both been contested concepts in academic literature. Firstly, it outlines the different ways in which ‘heritage’ has come to be understood, both as a concept and a cultural practice. It traces the development of the ‘heritage debate’, outlining the central arguments and their broader implications. It then discusses the ways in which theorists have sought to move beyond these somewhat polemical debates to promote a more nuanced understanding of heritage practices. It will be argued that commodifying the past as heritage is a *process* which needs to be understood in specific social and political and economic contexts in the present. Secondly, the chapter explores the many different theoretical approaches to memory (both ‘individual’ and ‘collective’), unpicking the wide range of terminology which has been used. Interpretations of both heritage and memory have moved from more singular interpretations (where heritage is seen as a monolithic category and memory as an individual faculty), to being viewed as complex and constructed phenomena (where heritage is socially constructed and hence politicised, and memory has both individual and ‘collective’ dimensions).

Finally, it will be suggested that heritage and memory have thus far largely been linked in rather abstract terms (relying on broad conceptualisations of ‘collective’ memory), and that the relationship between heritage and *living* memory has been relatively neglected. As such, the chapter outlines the theoretical perspectives which will be applied to the empirical analysis which follows, arguing that we need to take a more nuanced view of the way heritage and memory overlap and impact on each other.

## 1.2 Heritage

Heritage is both a slippery concept and a complex cultural practice. At its most basic level heritage can mean simply ‘what is inherited’, representing a personal, internal sense of the past. More broadly, the term ‘heritage’ has come to incorporate almost any reference to or representation of the past in the present.

Indeed, heritage has become a very visible presence in British life. There is a well-developed institutional structure, with prominent national organisations which deal with heritage preservation, funding and promotion, such as the National Trust, English Heritage and the Heritage Lottery Fund.<sup>1</sup> Beyond this, there are a host of regional and local bodies focused on historic preservation and heritage tourism. Interest in material heritage has been an increasingly prominent facet of British culture, and this has extended into other forms of publicly accessible history; television shows, books, websites etc.<sup>2</sup> We are, as one critic describes, engaged in a ‘heritage obsession’.<sup>3</sup> Academic debates surrounding heritage tend to focus on more institutionalised forms of heritage, which are naturally more accessible than people’s personal sense of their own inheritance. The term, in its most common usage, is therefore most closely associated with organised ways in which people access the past, such as museums, monuments and more recently heritage centres.

The United Nations Social and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) suggests that ‘Heritage is our legacy from the past, what we live with today, and what we pass on to future generations.’<sup>4</sup> Similarly, English Heritage (a government funded advisory body) claim to be ‘making the past part of our future.’<sup>5</sup> These phrases reflect the central notion of heritage as a present reformulation of history, with the suggestion that the past has an inherent and continuing relevance to society which plays an important role in the formulation of identity, whether individual or ‘collective’.

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk>; <http://www.hlf.org.uk/Pages/Home.aspx>; <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/>, accessed 13/11/2012.

<sup>2</sup> For example, the BBC’s influential series ‘Who Do You Think You Are?’ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b007t575>; Simon Schama’s ‘History of Britain’ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b008qpzn>.

<sup>3</sup> Ben Cowell, *The Heritage Obsession: The Battle for England’s Past* (The History Press Ltd, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> The United Nations Educational Social and Cultural Organisation (responsible for recognising World Heritage) <http://whc.unesco.org/en/about/> accessed 20/11/2009.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/> accessed 31/11/2009.

Intellectual and ideological debates about the role of heritage in society have been driven by an increasingly public appetite for the past in the last thirty years or so. Lowenthal referred to a ‘growth, exponential in pace and global in sweep, of current obsessions with the past.’<sup>6</sup> Similarly, Huyssen has noted the expansion of museums and points of historical interest to the public as a palpable ‘museal sensibility’ in everyday culture in Europe, suggesting that this is not only a British phenomenon, but there is a European and even global context to these debates.<sup>7</sup>

Why have we seen this more urgent sense of the need to retain or remember the past? It has been attributed to many factors including the rapid pace of change in recent decades, the need to preserve local and community identities in the face of rapid globalisation and the creation of a new industry with a regenerative function in the post-industrial era.<sup>8</sup> The media has also been influential in popularising the past, and in a more general sense, the past has become a commodity, along with many other aspects of culture which can be ‘packaged’ for consumption.<sup>9</sup> Cultural tourism has also developed significantly, though possibly an effect rather than a cause of these broad changes. These general explanations for the shift to heritage only go so far; nonetheless, it is apparent that there has been a notable ‘heritage boom’ in both academic and public discourse.

### *1.2.1 The Heritage Debate: the use and abuse of the past*<sup>10</sup>

Along with these developments, academic research into the many facets of heritage has become more prevalent and the study of heritage has taken on a strong interdisciplinary identity. Contributions to these debates have come from geography, anthropology, archaeology as well as the emergence of a dedicated field of ‘heritage studies’. As such, there is a vast literature attempting to reconceptualise heritage, both as a theory and a practice. Heritage has been the central concern in a number of recent collective works in

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<sup>6</sup> David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. ix.

<sup>7</sup> Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (Routledge, 1995).

<sup>8</sup> Robert Lumley, ‘The Debate on Heritage Reviewed’, in *Issues in Heritage, Museums and Galleries: An Introductory Reader*, ed. by Gerard Corsane (Routledge, 2005), pp. 15–25.

<sup>9</sup> Brian J. Graham and Peter Howard, *The Ashgate Research Companion to Heritage and Identity* (Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2008).

<sup>10</sup> A phrase commonly borrowed from Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Use and Abuse of History* (Prentice Hall, 1957).

attempts to bring cohesion to a wide range of conceptual and empirical material.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps somewhat ironically, historians have not been so influential in these discussions, proving the persistence of the ‘traditional’ heritage critique among academic historians.

The starting point for any theoretical review of heritage in academic writing is the often-cited ‘heritage debate’. This wide-ranging (and often fiercely contested) exchange between scholars began in the 1980s, when a number of critics sought to debunk the nation’s heritage ‘obsession’, and expose the so-called ‘heritage industry’ as being commercially-motivated, promoting a self-indulgent and nostalgic view of the past which had little concern for historical accuracy.<sup>12</sup> In many ways these ideas have endured, despite more moderate counter-criticisms, and the heritage debate is in some senses still ongoing. Robert Lumley has usefully synthesised the heritage debate into three key elements; the origins of the debate in the context of economic decline in the 1980s, the connection between heritage and enterprise, and the problem of interpreting history through the idea of heritage.<sup>13</sup> Drawing on Lumley’s approach, the section below discusses two central (and overlapping) features of the heritage debate - ‘heritage versus history’ and ‘the present functions of heritage’ – and then moves to discussing how more recent approaches have attempted to move beyond these positions.

Heritage and academic History have coexisted uneasily, and heritage as a means of representing the past has been the subject of a great deal of academic criticism. In what was the seminal text sparking the ‘heritage debate’, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, David Lowenthal articulated what he saw to be the inherent conflict between the past and the present involved in the practice of heritage. He wrote:

The past is a foreign country whose features are shaped by today’s predilections, its strangeness domesticated by our own preservation of its vestiges. Preservation has deepened our knowledge of the past but dampened our created use of it...Now a foreign country with a booming tourist trade, the past has

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<sup>11</sup> Yudhishtir Raj Isar and Helmut K. Anheier, *Cultures and Globalization: Heritage, Memory and Identity* (SAGE Publications, 2011); Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi and Daniel Levy, *The Collective Memory Reader* (Oxford University Press, 2011); G. Fairclough, *The Heritage Reader* (Taylor & Francis, 2008).

<sup>12</sup> David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge University Press, 1999); Lowenthal, David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (Cambridge University Press, 1998); Patrick Wright, *On Living in an Old Country: The National Past in Contemporary Britain* (Oxford University Press, 2009); Cowell.

<sup>13</sup> Lumley, p. 17.

undergone the usual consequences of popularity. The more it is appreciated for its own sake, the less real or relevant it becomes.<sup>14</sup>

For Lowenthal, by infusing the past with our own present concerns, we were losing its very 'pastness'. Fundamentally, however, Lowenthal asserted that history and heritage did not relate to the past in the same way. History explores and explains pasts that are 'foreign', while heritage departs from the past, focusing only on its consumable nature in the present. Many critics of heritage have continued to argue that heritage is inherently inauthentic, that the past cannot be preserved or recreated in its original form; rather it is mediated, even falsified history, hence it is devalued. Lowenthal himself clearly distinguished between heritage and history, describing them as follows:

These two routes to the past are habitually confused with each other, yet they are also defined as antithetical. Heritage is apt to be labelled false, deceitful, sleazy, presentist, chauvinist, self-serving as it often is. But such charges are usually levelled on the mistaken assumption that heritage is "bad history". In fact, heritage is not history at all; while it borrows from and enlivens historical study, heritage is not an enquiry into the past but a celebration of it, not an effort to know what happened but a profession of faith in a past tailored to present-day purposes.<sup>15</sup>

Lowenthal here clearly implied that 'good history' (the preserve of academic historians) had crucial differences from heritage, so the two should not be equated. His primary concerns were with the method of constructing historical narratives, where 'testable truth is history's chief hallmark.'<sup>16</sup> However, the notion of 'testable truth' is problematic even in academic history. We have to concede that historians inevitably approach their study of the past from their own present perspective. That history is relative to historians' perspectives is an issue which has been acknowledged by some historians since the nineteenth century. Not all subscribed to the notion that history was about reaching objective truth. As early as the nineteenth century, some historians noted that the history they wrote was inherently relative. Burckhardt, for example, referred to History as 'the record of what one age finds worthy of note in another'.<sup>17</sup> Theorists of History subsequently picked up on this since the 1960s. E.H. Carr, for example, famously suggested 'The facts speak only when the historian calls on them: it is he who decides to which facts to give the floor, and in what order or context...the historian is

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<sup>14</sup> Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country*, p. xvii.

<sup>15</sup> Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*, p. x.

<sup>16</sup> Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*, p. 120.

<sup>17</sup> See Jacob Burckhardt, *Judgements on History and Historians* (Routledge, 2012), p.xiii; E. H. Carr, *What Is History?* (Penguin Group, 1961).

necessarily selective.’<sup>18</sup> Carr goes on ‘we can only view the past through the eyes of the present.’<sup>19</sup> Historians have been compelled to readdress these concerns in the light of postmodern criticism which provoked what has been described as an ‘extended epistemological crisis’.<sup>20</sup> Academic history is discursive and can never reach scientific objectivity by its very nature. As such, history and heritage share more common ground than is commonly admitted. Following from this, it is impossible to deny that heritage is subject to present needs, but there is more to understanding this process than dismissing heritage as insignificant ‘bogus history.’

Not all historians were so reluctant to engage with heritage. A notable exception to this trend was Raphael Samuel, radical historian and pioneer of the *History Workshop* movement, who viewed history as a fundamentally social phenomenon. Samuel took an entirely opposite view to the more conservative critics discussed above. He perceived history as having a pivotal role in our identity and an awareness of our own ‘historicity’. Referring to what he called ‘preservation mania’ and the growth of heritage he claimed that:

History is not the prerogative of the historian, nor even, as postmodernism contends, a historian’s “invention”. It is, rather, a social form of knowledge; the work, in any given instance, of a thousand different hands.<sup>21</sup>

Samuel sought to democratise the past, promoting a closer dialogue between historians and their publics in the construction of historical knowledge.<sup>22</sup> Samuel was more concerned with the way public historical consciousness operated ‘from below’, seeing it as more relevant than ‘top down’ imposition of dominant ideologies meeting specific political agendas.

As mentioned above, the second major feature of the heritage debate was criticism of heritage based on its present political and economic functions. Hewison has been critical of what he called ‘the heritage industry’ in this way. Taking what may be considered the traditional historical perspective, he saw heritage in clear terms as ‘bogus

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<sup>18</sup> Carr, pp. 11–12.

<sup>19</sup> Carr, p. 24.

<sup>20</sup> David Harlan, ‘Intellectual History and the Return of Literature’, *The American Historical Review*, 94 (1989), 581–609; Richard J. Evans, *In Defence of History*, New edn (Granta Books, 2001), p. 4.

<sup>21</sup> Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory* (Verso, 1994), p. 8.

<sup>22</sup> Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (SUNY Press, 1989).

history'.<sup>23</sup> Here, Hewison articulated two key issues in early heritage debates. Historians struggled with the use of the past as a commodity in the present, which is what is implied in the discussion of the 'heritage industry'. This meant that history was being packaged for the public consumer and as a result would inevitably turn into 'bad history'. Hewison's critique grew from an assertion that Britain was in a 'climate of decline'.<sup>24</sup> Both Hewison and Patrick Wright stressed the fact that the public obsession with heritage represented a backward-looking society which desired escapism from Britain's maligned present in the 1980s.<sup>25</sup>

Players in the heritage debate were divided in their views as to the political significance of the heritage boom. Some have seen heritage as 'top down', a tool of the establishment, promoting a collective sense of the national past that forms some sort of public consensus. Wright aligned the growth of the heritage industry in Britain with Thatcherite attempts to promote images of the traditional 'British' values in the 1980s. Insisting that Thatcher's policies were both 'destructive of tradition and dependent on it', Wright derided heritage as a means of presenting and promoting an endlessly malleable sense of national identity:

Though presented as a historically firmed legacy, the idea of 'national heritage' could be suffused with contemporary class assumption or imperial nostalgia. It could be aligned with a racist perspective, or wrapped around Westminster as the epicentre of the unitary British state. It could be invoked against a host of vividly imagined present-day bogeys: Europe, Modernism, immigration, socialism and the welfare state. In its cruder forms, even then, it could serve as a form of environmental exploitation when unleashed on a historical landscape or town centre.<sup>26</sup>

This is a common view of the function of heritage as a tool for governments in establishing historically-based collective identities associated with nation-building, which had been previously pointed out by Hobsbawm and Ranger.<sup>27</sup> As Lumley notes, David Brett built upon these notions, arguing that heritage was a product of modernisation, where a palpable erosion of traditions led Britons to need to re-articulate their sense of the past.<sup>28</sup> This runs contrary to the 'bottom up' model of a focus on

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<sup>23</sup> Robert Hewison, *The Heritage Industry: Britain in a Climate of Decline* (Methuen London, 1987).

<sup>24</sup> Hewison.

<sup>25</sup> Wright.

<sup>26</sup> Wright, p. xii.

<sup>27</sup> Eric J. Hobsbawm and Terence O. Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge University Press, 1983).

<sup>28</sup> David Brett, *The Construction of Heritage* (Cork University Press, 1996).

people's history and heritage as driven by an existing and broad popular historical consciousness, argued by Raphael Samuel and others (discussed above). Indeed, while efforts were often made to appropriate national heritage to support certain political ideologies, there were of course other motives for the development of the heritage industry. Heritage tourism was often promoted as a means of economic regeneration, particularly in post-industrial areas. In this sense, heritage was less about a preoccupation with retaining (or indeed re-gaining) Britishness but a much broader phenomenon which recognises the value of the past as a commodity with multiple economic as well as social and cultural functions in the present. In this sense, as Lumley notes, the emphasis on 'Britishness' (opposed by Hewison and Wright) was seen as one marketable feature of a larger trend; the global development of heritage as part of the tourist industry.

The heritage debate reached an almost inevitable stalemate, given the focus on characterising heritage as this or that. Samuel suggested that critics of heritage were reacting out of a sense of self-preservation and academic snobbery. Wright, however, rationalised this, recognising the need to move beyond polemical positions on the 'value' of heritage. He wrote, 'If heritage is an unproblematic good, and criticism only a product of petty social snobbery, then we are back at the starting point and the investigation has yet to begin.'<sup>29</sup> Clearly, heritage cannot be judged simply as one all-encompassing concept or practice. There are at least three different sorts of heritages evoked in these debates which operate at different levels; national, local/popular and commercial.

Indeed, the heritage boom notably involved a broader approach to practices of preservation. In effect, heritage gained a broader remit, with a shift to interest in the vernacular as well as the official, incorporating people's histories and accounts of everyday lives. This reflects much earlier trends in academic history, following the growth of social history from the 1960s, along with minority histories and the idea of history 'from below'. Lumley has recognised the shift towards a more inclusive heritage as associated with similar moves, most notably the increasingly anthropological focus of culture.<sup>30</sup> This means that heritage sites are no longer only associated with aristocratic estates but shifted to include places associated with everyday lifestyles, such

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<sup>29</sup> Wright, p. xvii.

<sup>30</sup> Lumley.

as industrial sites. As a result, it is important to acknowledge that heritage initiatives often have very specific local contexts which both promote and inhibit the popular engagement with relevant pasts, rather than broadly being one sort of practice or another.

A more subtle view of heritage has been advocated by geographer David Harvey, who has interpreted heritage as a process rather than a fixed or definable ‘thing’. He argues that heritage has evolved and has a long history of its own.<sup>31</sup> This assertion is a simple yet powerful one, as the recent and wide-ranging turn to heritage is an important historical process in itself. In this way heritage sites and displays are located within their own specific contexts, with their own histories. We can assume that, contrary to the dominant perspectives in the heritage debate, heritage practices change over time and are not necessarily confined to a singular political (or other) function in the present. As such, the changing ways in which the past is viewed are part of this process, which requires further investigation. Historians, therefore, should not be reluctant to engage with the heritage phenomenon, as there is a need for a greater understanding as to how and why the past comes to be recontextualised as heritage in certain contexts.

Attempting to generalise such a wide-ranging concept is problematic. As I have suggested, when heritage is conceptualised as a singular catch-all phenomenon, assertions can naturally be made about its tendency to be appropriated politically; for the past to be misrepresented (as ‘bogus history’), appropriated or commodified for commercial benefit. Heritage is not merely an abstract concept but involves a diverse set of cultural practices, each situated in particular political contexts (in the broadest sense). Indeed, practices and policies of preservation have shifted significantly to include a diverse range of interpretations of heritage. In light of this, it seems sensible to interpret heritage as a multifaceted practice, the analysis of which might be much more effective on a smaller scale.

### *1.2.2 Beyond the Heritage Debate: The social construction of heritage*

There have been a number of critical developments across a number of disciplines, initiating a move away from the polemical heritage debate. Ashworth and others have

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<sup>31</sup> David C. Harvey, ‘Heritage Pasts and Heritage Presents: Temporality, Meaning and the Scope of Heritage Studies’, *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 7 (2001), 319–338.

made the simple but important point that we ought to pluralise the way we interpret heritage. They argue that by referring to *heritages*, we can take into account the way in which heritage is multiply sold and interpreted to both tourist and domestic consumers; heritage is both a cultural product and a political resource. Importantly, Ashworth et al argue that this continuous tension between the multiple purposes of heritage, what they call ‘heritage dissonance’, is inherent (even constitutive) to heritage in all its forms. In their words, ‘Inevitably, heritage is characterised inherently by a dissonance created through its simultaneous multiple commodification as cultural and economic capital.’<sup>32</sup> Here Ashworth et al usefully synthesise the multi-faceted nature of heritage, though this is notably focused on heritage, particularly within an institutional context. Of course, heritage is engaged in a constant exercise of reconciling these positions and balancing the contentious aspects of representing the past with the assumed social benefits of the same activity.

Taking these arguments into account, more recently, a number of authors have recognised the stalemate of attempting to characterise heritage as a ‘good’ or ‘bad’ cultural practice in the light of the continuing prevalence of representations of the past in the public domain. Instead, the focus has shifted to interrogating the process of meaning-making in relation to heritage sites and displays, and more carefully deconstructing the relationship between the past and the present.

Along these lines, drawing from anthropology and cultural theory, the heritage debate has developed in a more postmodern vein. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett has suggested that heritage is a form of metacultural production, in that ‘Heritage is created through a process of exhibition (as knowledge, as performance, as museum display). Exhibition endows heritage thus conceived with a second life.’<sup>33</sup> In other words, she sees heritage as a new mode of cultural production, meaning heritage is *constructed* not merely *found* and preserved in its existing form, despite the dominant discourse of conservation surrounding heritage. The argument then follows that heritage is a purely present phenomenon, even though its subject-matter is the past. A similarly ethnographic position has been taken by Laurajane Smith who has argued that heritage is constructed via cultural and social processes, rather than being a fixed collection of objects or facts,

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<sup>32</sup> G. J. Ashworth, Brian Graham and J. E. Tunbridge, *Pluralising Pasts: Heritage, Identity and Place in Multicultural Societies* (Pluto Press, 2007), p. 4.

<sup>33</sup> Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, ‘Theorizing Heritage’, *Ethnomusicology*, 39 (1995), 367–380 (p. 369).

and in this way all heritage can be considered intangible.<sup>34</sup> Again, the process of engagement with the past is what is important, not only the past itself. Smith writes:

If we accept that ‘heritage’ represents, and is an expression of, the cultural values of a society, and that these values are not inherent in a heritage item or event, it then follows that it is these values that identify and make certain sites, places or events ‘heritage’, not the other way round. There is no innate value in a heritage item – rather each item, place or even is made meaningful because of the role it plays in ‘heritage’ in fostering the expression, negotiation and performance of a range of cultural and social identities. All heritage is intangible, and may usefully be viewed as a cultural process of meaning and value production.<sup>35</sup>

Smith’s particular take on the socially constructed nature of heritage is also a politicised one. She claims that there has been an over-emphasis on the materiality of heritage in Western elite values which, she suggests, grows out of a discourse of professionalism. She stresses the existence of what she calls an ‘Authorized Heritage Discourse’ in which ‘heritage’ is not inherent to objects or places, but is constructed as a discourse, which is in turn defined by dominant cultural and political institutions.

The authorized heritage discourse (AHD) focuses attention on aesthetically pleasing material objects, sites, places and/or landscapes that current generations ‘must’ care for, protect and revere so that they may be passed to nebulous future generations for their ‘education’, and to forge a sense of common identity based on the past.’<sup>36</sup>

In these terms (echoing elements of the earlier heritage debate), the past is still noticeably politicised; its interpretation is shaped by experts and policy-makers who define the parameters of what heritage ‘is’. Smith’s concept of the AHD is a rather generalised one, which sees the materiality of heritage as somewhat inconsequential. As others have shown, material objects can evoke responses which could not exist in their absence.<sup>37</sup> Rather than seeing all heritage as ‘intangible’, it is perhaps best to characterise ‘heritage’ as a dialogue between material objects and their interpreted meaning.

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<sup>34</sup> Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage* (Taylor & Francis, 2006).

<sup>35</sup> Laurajane Smith, *Cultural Heritage: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies* (Taylor & Francis, 2006), p. 4.

<sup>36</sup> Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, p. 29.

<sup>37</sup> Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge University Press, 1989); Daniel Miller, *The Comfort of Things* (Polity, 2008); Greg Urban and Benjamin Lee, *Metaculture: How Culture Moves Through the World* (University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

Nonetheless, Smith's theory (and more broadly, the idea of the social construction of heritage) has had a significant impact on the way more recent critical interpretations of heritage have been couched. Harrison et al, for example, have recently noted:

While archaeologists might emphasise the objective nature of heritage assessment criteria, clearly 'heritage' is not something that is self-defining; it is defined with reference to social action that selectively commodifies and emphasises particular places as important. It only exists through the reading which it is given by communities and human societies in the present.<sup>38</sup>

Heritage, then, comes to exist through a dialogue between artefacts and the practices of preservation and the discourses evoked which designate their heritage value. Naturally, we need to be sensitive as to how these sorts of discourses change over time. For example, institutional discourses have also developed beyond 'scientific' archaeological foci. As mentioned above, while heritage values were traditionally thought to be attached to physical objects; ancient artefacts, country houses, ruins, industrial sites (the 'tangible'), more recent interpretations have acknowledged the importance of other forms of 'intangible' heritage, including more abstract practices, folklore and cultural traditions such as languages, festivals and skills (a shift now acknowledged by UNESCO in its World Heritage list).<sup>39</sup> These orally-transmitted traditions are now part of what is preserved and displayed in heritage initiatives, to some extent representing a more inclusive practice of preservation. It is all the more important, then, that we contextualise heritage initiatives in their own particular contexts, not only their historical context and the social and economic motivations for preserving certain pasts, but the generalised institutional discourses which define heritage 'value' in a broad sense.

These points raise a number of important questions for this research. Firstly, the notion that heritage is in some senses socially constructed; that meanings are constructed through discourse is a key concern, though this will be analysed at a much more local level than Smith's generalised account.<sup>40</sup> Secondly, that those constructed meanings have a relation to the practices of preservation and the power dynamics inherent in those

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<sup>38</sup> Rodney Harrison and others, 'Heritage, Memory and Modernity', in *The Heritage Reader*, ed. by G. Fairclough (Taylor & Francis, 2008), pp. 1–30 (p. 3).

<sup>39</sup> Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 'Intangible Heritage as Metacultural Production', *Museum International*, 56 (2004), 52–65; also see UNESCO's approach to 'Intangible Cultural Heritage' at <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?pg=00002>

<sup>40</sup> Discourse will be broadly defined as a set of meanings and practices expressed through language. For more detail, refer to chapter 3.

practices. In order to maintain this view of heritage as a process of construction (rather than a fixed entity), the term ‘heritagisation’ will be used throughout this thesis. Somewhat awkwardly translated from French historian, Francois Hartog’s ‘patrimonialisation’, it refers to the process through which the past is interpreted around present values or needs, implying what he calls ‘regimes of historicity’.<sup>41</sup> Heritagisation has since been adopted into academic discourse, most obviously in heritage studies.<sup>42</sup> When analysing the way in which heritage and memory interact, these sorts of political considerations, the role of institutions and the articulation of heritage value through discourse need to be considered, to the extent that they shape the way that meaning about the past is constructed. As such, this thesis will analyse how institutional discourses construct value in relation to the mining past, by way of assessing how ‘heritage’ is constructed. These narratives can then be compared to living memories in order to more clearly model the relationship between heritagisation and memory.

Importantly, a multiple interpretation of heritage allows for these relationships to be understood in their specific local and historical contexts, rather than attempting to simplistically characterise the nature of ‘heritage’ or ‘memory’. Clearly, heritage takes different forms, addresses different audiences and is often driven by motivations other than a contribution to our knowledge of the past. While there has been a global shift towards a ‘heritage culture’, each heritage initiative arises within very specific local contexts. Dicks has taken this view suggesting, ‘different heritage projects make different cultural appeals, of course, and it is important to recognise these differences rather than lumping all instances of heritage together.’ She suggests, quite rightly, that

Before we conclude that heritage “is” one kind of phenomenon or another, it makes sense to assemble some knowledge about existing heritage sites which can shed light on how they came into existence and how they mediate historical understanding.<sup>43</sup>

In recognising the ways in which heritage is actively constructed in the present, scholars needed a different set of questions to interrogate the practice of heritage which was still very much a prevalent phenomenon. With these moves away from traditional cultural

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<sup>41</sup> François Hartog, ‘Time and Heritage’, *Museum International*, 57 (2005), 7–18; Wright.

<sup>42</sup> David C. Harvey, ‘Heritage Pasts and Heritage Presents: Temporality, Meaning and the Scope of Heritage Studies’, *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 7 (2001), 319–338; Anya Chapman and Duncan Light, ‘The “heritagisation” of the British Seaside Resort: The Rise of the “old Penny Arcade”’, *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, 6 (2011), 209–226; Laurajane Smith, *Intangible Heritage* (Taylor & Francis US, 2009).

<sup>43</sup> Bella Dicks, *Heritage, Place and Community* (University of Wales Press, 2000), p. 64.

hierarchies (i.e. what might be ‘good’ or ‘bad’ heritage), distinctions between certain sorts of representation of the past – ‘academic’ or ‘popular’, for example – arguably become less meaningful. As I have argued, theorisations of heritage have moved beyond a singular approach to viewing heritage as complex and multiply constructed. For the purposes of this research, a more nuanced view of heritage will be taken, suggesting that there is now a need to more fully understand uses of the past in the present. More specifically, we need to focus on the processes through which the past is reformulated as heritage in the context of local social, political, and economic circumstances in order to assess how this impacts on memory in its various forms.

### 1.2.3 Public History

These sorts of questions are slowly beginning to be addressed by some historians in Britain. Those associated with the field of public history in particular have increasingly been engaging with the ways in which the past is consumed, accessed or ‘made’ in the public domain.<sup>44</sup> DeGroot has suggested that:

the ‘historical’ in popular culture and contemporary society is multiple, multiplying and unstable. The variety of discourses that use history; the complexity of interrogations, uses and responses to that history; and the fracturing of formal, technological and generic systems all contribute to a dynamic and massively important phenomenon.<sup>45</sup>

These ideas have only recently found a foothold in Britain, but public history is now increasingly the subject of publications and conferences.<sup>46</sup> Among others, Holger Hoock has noted that there is currently no coherent framework in terms of theory or practice in Britain.<sup>47</sup> Public history debates have grown more complex since their inception in the United States in the 1970s. Creating a working definition has proved almost impossible (let alone a conceptual or methodological framework), given the wide range of activities now involved in public history work.

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<sup>44</sup> Ludmilla Jordanova, *History in Practice* (Bloomsbury USA, 2000); Jerome DeGroot, *Consuming History* (Taylor & Francis, 2008); Jill Liddington, ‘What Is Public History? Publics and Their Pasts, Meanings and Practices’, *Oral History*, 30 (2002), 83–93.

<sup>45</sup> DeGroot, p. 4.

<sup>46</sup> For example, Institute of Historical Research Conference ‘History and the Public’ 2006 [www.history.ac.uk/resources/history-and-public-conference](http://www.history.ac.uk/resources/history-and-public-conference) accessed 12 October 2012; Swansea University 2007 <http://www.swansea.ac.uk/history/publichistory/index.htm> accessed 12 October 2012; ‘Public History Conference 2008 - University of Liverpool’ <http://www.liv.ac.uk/history/public-history/> [accessed 21 February 2012]; Historical Association Public History initiative [http://www.history.org.uk/resources/public\\_resource\\_5440\\_86.html](http://www.history.org.uk/resources/public_resource_5440_86.html) accessed 12 October 2012.

<sup>47</sup> Holger Hoock, ‘Introduction: Professional Practices of Public History in Britain’, *The Public Historian*, 32 (2010), 7–24.

Ludmilla Jordanova has referred to public history as a ‘convenient umbrella term’, reflecting its broad use and interpretation.<sup>48</sup> Popular, accessible or amateur history can all be considered forms of public history, but in an academic context it can also relate to the work of the historian ‘in public’. How this role manifests itself has been the subject of some debate.<sup>49</sup> In fact, even those within public history circles often do not entirely conform to a consensus of what public history is and how the practice of public history should progress.<sup>50</sup>

It seems that public history is interpreted as both an ideology and a method, a study and a practice, and a process of dissemination and collaboration. Of course, it is problematic to generalise about a term which incorporates such a broad range of activity. Though frustratingly vague at times, it is perhaps counterproductive trying to work towards a narrower definition of public history given that the most illuminating work is project-specific, applying these broad questions to particular social and cultural contexts. Importantly, public historians have aligned with the more fluid interpretation of the past-present relationship discussed earlier, as a living phenomenon which is negotiated in the present, as a present ‘historical consciousness’.<sup>51</sup> As such, these debates have resulted in a closer focus on the ‘means by which publics develop their sense of the past, can be appreciated more fully.’<sup>52</sup>

So how do public history and heritage differ? In terms of practice, some approaches to public history have been notably more democratic, promoting collaborative practice between historians and publics, drawing on Frisch’s notion of ‘shared’ authority. Public historians, have thus focused more closely on the ‘publics’, and have sought to incorporate narratives ‘from below’ in the construction of historical knowledge, in line with social history ideals.<sup>53</sup> On the other hand, heritage sites and displays are arguably

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<sup>48</sup> Jordanova, p. 146; For definitions, see Liddington, p. 90.

<sup>49</sup> Some British historians have couched public history firmly in terms of the historian disseminating knowledge to the public in a direct give-receive relationship. See John Tosh, *Why History Matters* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); This perspective has been criticised by more public historians who have pursued public history as a way of democratising the past and the process of history-making. See Hilda Kean, ‘People, Historians, and Public History: Demystifying the Process of History Making’, *The Public Historian*, 32 (2010), 25–38; On the role of historians in the public domain, see Justin Champion, ‘What Are Historians For?’, *Historical Research*, 81 (2008), 167–188.

<sup>50</sup> For a more detailed discussion of public history methodology, see Chapter 3.

<sup>51</sup> Bernard Eric Jensen, ‘Usable Pasts: Comparing Approaches to Popular and Public History’, in *People and their pasts: public history today* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

<sup>52</sup> Jordanova, p. 153; DeGroot, p. 4.

<sup>53</sup> Kean.

more didactic (where the past is presented to the public), certainly in terms of more traditional institutions such as the National Trust.

In terms of academic approaches to heritage and public history, there is an assumption that public history is a more critical engagement with the popular representation of the past than can be found in heritage studies. Certainly, public history boasts a broader remit, focusing on many different formats in which the past is presented (television, media, online resources etc.), whereas heritage studies has historically been more concerned with material sites and structures. There is also a sense that historians are in some way reclaiming public interest in the past, while consciously avoiding ‘heritage’ due to its problematic connotations within the historical profession. Undoubtedly, the heritage studies which developed in the 1990s, was rather limited in its approach, initially focusing on technical case studies of heritage practices and policy debates.<sup>54</sup>

However, more recently, a more critical approach has been mooted, taking into account the more complex theorisations of heritage outlined above. Laurajane Smith has been at the forefront of promoting critical heritage studies in which she suggests that ‘heritage, however we may define this phenomena, has cultural, political and social consequences is the starting observation of a critical heritage studies.’<sup>55</sup> She goes on to argue that heritage practices have political, emotional and intellectual consequences in people’s lives which need to be more widely understood. In these terms, there are significant overlaps between heritage studies and public history, which are often glossed over by public historians, possibly in a bid to avoid the trappings of the heritage debate. Liddington defined public history as ‘how we acquire our sense of the past – through memory and landscape, archives and archaeology (and then, of course, of how those pasts are presented publicly).’<sup>56</sup> Academic public history, then, more closely engages with the ‘public’ aspects of the use of the past in the present. As such, a public history approach is particularly relevant to this research, given the aim to go beyond how the past is represented through heritage, to its impact on living memory.

As we have seen, both heritage and public history are broad categories, and perspectives vary within them. Both public history and heritage studies engage with the concrete

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<sup>54</sup> Laurajane Smith, ‘Editorial’, *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 18 (2012), 533–540.

<sup>55</sup> Laurajane Smith, ‘Editorial’.

<sup>56</sup> Liddington.

contexts in which the past is constructed, communicated and interpreted. However, public history has naturally come from a more historical perspective, investigating the social dynamics of the past-present relationship, not only asking ‘what happened then?’ but ‘why is that important now and to whom?’ In this sense, questions are being framed differently from those which would be posed by a more traditional empiricist approach to the study of history, linking public history very closely to memory studies.

### 1.3 Memory

In similar terms to heritage, a ‘memory boom’ has been observed, both in terms of public interest and as a frame for academic analysis.<sup>57</sup> The study of memory has taken different trajectories through a number of academic disciplines, and there has not necessarily been coherence across these approaches.<sup>58</sup> Some psychologists have sought to understand memory in scientific terms, whereas sociologists, anthropologists and more recently historians, have tended to take a more social approach, exploring the ways in which memory has meaning in various contexts. What does emerge is that memory and remembering are dynamic phenomena, which are not fixed and are affected by variables both internally, within the human brain, and externally through the social ways in which memory is shaped.

Much of the academic debate on memory has been shaped around attempts to define memory in these terms; whether it is fundamentally an individual or ‘collective’ phenomenon. For the purposes of this thesis, both autobiographical memory and broader public or cultural memories will be central to the analysis of empirical data. As such, it will be argued that (in general terms) there are a number of different layers of memory which overlap and interact with each other. In what follows, I outline the broad theoretical developments in conceptualising memory itself, then shift to how memory has been applied to the study of heritage and vice versa.

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<sup>57</sup> Huyssen.

<sup>58</sup> Geoffrey Cubitt, *History And Memory* (Manchester University Press, 2007).

### 1.3.1 Autobiographical or 'everyday' memory

Autobiographical memory, or what an individual remembers, is a natural starting point for any consideration of memory. Even at an individual level, the complex nature of memory is already apparent, as there is an incomplete understanding of why certain memories are retained and in what form. Draaisma has noted this, suggesting that memory often seems to have a life of its own.<sup>59</sup> Remembering relies on all sorts of variables; the time lapse from the incident, the type of memory recalled (perhaps a skill or an experience), our senses and even emotions. Events may be remembered out of sequence, only partially, or in some cases not at all. Autobiographical memory is not fixed but is a fluid process, malleable both at the point of 'storing' memories and in their recollection. Memory, though perhaps not fully understood, is acknowledged to be a central characteristic in the formation of identity. Linde has stressed this, suggesting,

Any analysis of identity is also an examination of memory. Identity, whether individual or collective, is identity through time. An identity of this moment, not related to the past and not remembered in the future, hardly counts as an identity at all. Memory is thus central to the concept of identity.<sup>60</sup>

Draaisma attaches a similar importance to memory, claiming that without our memories we cannot function as who we are.<sup>61</sup> Not only is memory linked intimately with identity, but memory inherently involves the relationship between the past and the present, and how individuals construct a sense of historical consciousness.

Historians' interest in memory has largely arisen from the growth of oral history. Oral historians have been influential in accessing accounts of the past that have been neglected or even silenced. Indeed, the early development of oral history was linked with a social agenda, aiming to democratise the past and 'write back in' those who were invisible from the historical record. Oral historians aimed to reassert the importance of vernacular narratives alongside more traditional 'official' accounts of the past.<sup>62</sup> As Perks and Thompson note 'this interest fused with a political commitment to "history from below"' amongst many historians from Britain and around the world from the

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<sup>59</sup> Douwe Draaisma, *Why Life Speeds Up As You Get Older: How Memory Shapes Our Past* (Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>60</sup> Charlotte Linde, *Working the Past: Narrative and Institutional Memory: Narrative and Institutional Memory* (Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 222.

<sup>61</sup> Draaisma.

<sup>62</sup> *Oral History Reader*, ed. by Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (Taylor & Francis, 2006).

1960s.’<sup>63</sup> This approach was not easily accepted among more traditional historians, and a number of criticisms have been levelled at the use of oral testimony, and in particular the nature of memory, and its ‘inappropriate’ use as a historical source. Memory is personal, inherently subjective and relies on an individual’s present perspective of the past, making its use as a source difficult to comprehend for the traditional empiricist historian. In addition, as historians, we can only access memories that are articulated, adding another active process or layer to the ‘mediation’ of information. As Green and Hutching have noted, brains don’t store ‘snapshots’ that we can recall, rather all memory is partial and accessed through narratives that are created in the present.<sup>64</sup> Of course, some memories may be more fixed and vivid than others, for example so-called ‘light bulb’ memories which are associated with specific prominent events. Nonetheless, it is apparent that remembering involves a more complex process than a straightforward storing and recalling. As a result, establishing the validity of life narratives as historical evidence has been described as an ‘uphill battle within the profession.’<sup>65</sup>

However, the nature of the study of oral history has progressed from treating oral narratives as another empirical source, a way of establishing ‘fact’, to a more nuanced engagement with the ways in which meaning is formed, and the ways in which people relate to their past through memory. Passerini stressed the need to see past the raw material of oral histories to understand memories as expressions and representations of culture.<sup>66</sup> Alessandro Portelli, taking a narrative approach, argued similarly that ‘subjectivity is as much the business of history as the more visible “facts”’. What the informant believes is indeed a fact (that is the fact he or she believes it) just as much as what really happened.’<sup>67</sup>

The work of Passerini and Portelli initiated a broad move among oral historians moving away from positivist approaches aiming to reconstruct the past to seeing the inherent subjectivity of memory as a positive element, what Passerini has called ‘subjective

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<sup>63</sup> Perks and Alistair Thomson, p. 1.

<sup>64</sup> Anna Green and Megan Hutching, *Remembering: Writing Oral History* (Auckland University Press, 2004).

<sup>65</sup> Anna Green, *Cultural History* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 64.

<sup>66</sup> Luisa Passerini, ‘Work Ideology and Consensus Under Italian Fascism’, *History Workshop Journal*, 8 (1979), 82–108.

<sup>67</sup> Alessandro Portelli, ‘The Peculiarities of Oral History’, *History Workshop Journal*, 12 (1981), 96–107 (p. 100).

liberation'.<sup>68</sup> Frisch similarly argued that the study of historical memory, namely how people remember the past and use it to interpret their lives, was more illuminating than a search for 'facts'. This shift has allowed historians to make inferences about mentalities, identities and cultures, perhaps even emphasising a different dimension to the value of historical material.<sup>69</sup> In emphasising the cultural element of oral history, the study of autobiographical memory has added another dimension to our historical understanding. Instead of merely treating memory as a historical source, there has been a more critical engagement with different sorts of historical narratives; how they are constructed, how they might shape or be shaped by other existing narratives, and what function they have for those doing the telling in the present.

Memory, it appears, is inherently difficult to characterise. What is clear, however, is that memory and remembering are dynamic phenomena, rather than fixed accounts that can be recalled or reconstructed. As oral historians have shown, the process of remembering is complex. When individuals 'recall' their memories, their stories are likely to be affected by other factors, associating with broader narrative patterns from public discourse or even adopting other more dominant accounts of the past (as will be argued later).<sup>70</sup> Much like heritage, memories which are recalled or told are certain narratives of the past which involve complex processes of construction. This thesis seeks to identify how narratives of the past are constructed based on autobiographical memories, and how these relate to other narratives; those constructed through heritage discourse and broader public or cultural memories.

### 1.3.2 "Collective" memory?

Some critics would question the existence of a wholly 'individual' memory, hence the prevalence of the terms 'autobiographical' or 'everyday' memories. These terms are based on the notion that there is another sort of 'memory' at work; that is, there is a 'collective' memory as well as an 'individual', and that the two cannot be easily delineated. A great deal of academic literature has focused on this broader conceptualisation of memory, recognising the ways in which it is shaped by the social

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<sup>68</sup> Passerini, 82–108 (p. 54); Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli, and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (SUNY Press, 1991); Alessandro Portelli, 'The Peculiarities of Oral History', *History Workshop Journal*, 12 (1981), 96–107.

<sup>69</sup> Frisch.

<sup>70</sup> Green and Hutching.

environment. In both academic and public discourse, terms such as ‘national memory’, ‘public memory’ or ‘institutional memory’ are in common usage. The notion that memory can apply to a group or a whole society seems in some ways to be incoherent. In order to unpick this, we need to recognise the different uses of the term ‘memory’ itself.

Memory has taken on a role as an umbrella term for more abstract practices such as commemoration, memorialisation or merely referring to the past in a general sense. This uses ‘memory’ in a metaphorical fashion, meaning it is more malleable, allowing it to be applied to a collective. In these terms, it is possible to refer to a ‘national memory’ or ‘public memory’. This takes ‘remembering’ beyond the individual, and allows for the notion that people can ‘remember’ what they have not personally experienced. The most obvious parallel here is with Anderson’s notion of ‘imagined communities’, where an individual can belong to a group without sharing any physical contact or experience.<sup>71</sup> Kendal Phillips has argued that ‘In a very real sense, to speak of memory is to speak of a highly rhetorical process.’<sup>72</sup> We are dealing, then, with a very different sort of ‘memory’, one which can be constructed and sustained by groups, and subscribed to by individuals.

Subsequently, academic debates have more recently centred around this notion of ‘collective’ memory and how it might relate to autobiographical memory. The lineage of the term ‘collective memory’ is traced to French sociologist and philosopher Maurice Halbwachs’, who first argued for the existence of a ‘collective memory’.<sup>73</sup> Halbwachs, a student of Emile Durkheim, was extremely influential in developing ideas about the significance of memory, claiming that all individual memories were communicative, framed in relation to others and in terms of the social context. Halbwachs thus suggested that memory can be collective, and although individuals can be included in numerous collective memories (such as communities or nations), all memory is embedded in culture and society. Halbwachs had been researching and writing on the social framework of memory since the 1920s. However, his ideas were not adopted into the mainstream until much later, with his *Collective Memory* first written in 1926, then

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<sup>71</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso, 2006).

<sup>72</sup> *Framing Public Memory*, ed. by Kendall R. Phillips (University of Alabama Press, 2004), p. 2.

<sup>73</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *Halbwachs/Coser: On Collective Memory* (University of Chicago Press, 1992).

published posthumously in 1950.<sup>74</sup> The concept of collective memory only became influential much later, coinciding with the ‘memory boom’ of the 1980s.

Collective memory, in its various guises, is still a very influential concept, with many scholars still using the concept as a frame for analysis, particularly in historical sociology.<sup>75</sup> It is clear that Halbwachs’ work is still dominant in the way memory is conceptualised. This has raised concern among a few critics, who note quite rightly that Halbwachs’ ‘collective memory’ is often rather uncritically adopted. Wolf Kansteiner, for example, has argued that ‘collective memory’ neglects individual agency and is too focussed on a group perspective.<sup>76</sup> Indeed, the idea of the collective memory is susceptible to similar criticisms that arise from the discussion of group identities. While people may connect with a certain group, there are undoubtedly degrees of variation within these groups which should be acknowledged.

Green is also sceptical of the concept, noting that most memory studies operate at the level of the ‘collective’, and that ‘it is personal autobiographical memory that has vanished, collapsed into and all-encompassing concept of collective memory.’<sup>77</sup> In a very useful recent critique, Green reminds us of several key points emanating from Halbwachs’ writing.<sup>78</sup> Firstly, Halbwachs believed that there was no purely individual state of memory, arguing that all memories are social creations, despite ‘memory’ at its most basic being the faculty of the individual brain. Secondly, he claimed that when memories are articulated, meanings are constructed through discourse (so were inherently collective) and that these meanings endured through a coherent body of people. Perhaps most importantly, Halbwachs’ theory was only applied to small groups in close contact with each other, particularly families and working groups. This last point is often neglected by those who too readily extrapolate the notion of collective memory into much larger scales of analysis.

In a similar vein, James Young has advocated moving beyond a simplistic interpretation of ‘collective memory’, suggesting it is replaced with ‘collected memories’, to suggest

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<sup>74</sup> Coser ‘Introduction’, Halbwachs; Green, *Cultural History*; Misztal, *Theories Of Social Remembering* (McGraw-Hill International, 2003).

<sup>75</sup> For example, see Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi and Levy.

<sup>76</sup> Wolf Kansteiner, ‘Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies’, *History and Theory*, 41 (2002), 179–197.

<sup>77</sup> Anna Green, ‘Can Memory Be Collective?’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Oral History*, ed. by Donald A. Ritchie (Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 98.

<sup>78</sup> Green, ‘Can Memory Be Collective?’.

an aggregative relationship between the memory of the individual and that of the group.

Young argues:

Even though groups share socially constructed assumptions and values that organize memory into roughly similar patterns, individuals cannot share another's memory any more than they can share another's cortex. They share instead the forms of memory, even the meanings in memory generated by these forms, but an individual's memory remains hers alone.<sup>79</sup>

As Young notes, there is clearly a need for a more inclusive view of memory, and a more complex analysis of the way everyday memory relates to forms of 'collective' memory. It is possible that groups may be considered to have a certain collectively-held references to the past, but where autobiographical memory is concerned, it is unlikely that individuals within groups remember things in exactly the same way. This is perhaps especially significant when it comes to attaching values to the remembered past, or establishing meaning. As a result, this study seeks to reassert the value of living memory within broader 'collective' narratives. As will be argued in Chapter 5, we need to recognise the particularities of individual memory operating within (or even in opposition to) dominant memories, and how these different layers of memory interact. Were we to simply accept the dominance of collective memory (if such a thing truly exists), we would miss the opportunity to investigate the inevitably more complex relationship between these different layers of memory and how they might contradict – or indeed be shaped by – heritage narratives.

### *1.3.3 Beyond collective memory: social, public and cultural memory*

Resulting from the concerns outlined above, scholars have attempted to refine the idea of collective memory in order to encourage more critical analysis of memory beyond the individual. Again, we encounter the need to move away from polemical 'individual versus collective' lines of argument, to more subtle interpretations. Most prominently, the concepts of social memory, public memory and cultural memory have become commonplace as a means of dodging the assertion that memory is 'collective' in any pure sense. As I will argue, these terms (or different interpretations of 'collective' memory) imply two central points about the way memory works. Firstly, they are

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<sup>79</sup> James Edward Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (Yale University Press, 1993), p. xi.

characterised by distance (whether temporal or geographical) from events or experiences being 'remembered'. Secondly, they all imply an inherent subjectivity which is itself often the subject of analysis.

The first point, the association of group memory with distance, links with the idea of metaphorical memory mentioned above. This distance implies that memory does not necessarily have to be based on experience but can be *learned* or *known*. Halbwachs himself distinguished between 'autobiographical memory' and 'historical memory', noting the difference between memory based on experience or that which is acquired. Marianne Hirsch, in her study of Holocaust memory, describes this phenomenon as 'postmemory', referring to the memory of subsequent generations who live with legacies of trauma associated with events beyond their lifetime. People can 'remember' in an indirect sense:

I propose the term "postmemory" with some hesitation, conscious that the prefix "post" could imply that we are beyond memory and therefore, perhaps, as Nora fears, purely in history. In my reading, postmemory is distinguished from memory by generational distance from history by deep personal connection. Postmemory is a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation. This is not to say that memory itself is unmediated, but that it is more directly connected to the past.<sup>80</sup>

As we can see, Hirsch implies that memory can exist beyond individual experience, but shares some characteristics with autobiographical memory in some senses. She suggests that postmemory still provokes a deeply emotional response (particularly with regard to cases of trauma), despite not strictly being a 'recollection'. As a result, Hirsch reminds us that these sorts of memories, though seemingly abstract or detached, can still have extremely powerful consequences in the way individuals position themselves in the context of the past and understand its meaning in the present.

The characterisation of postmemory as 'an imaginative investment and creation' links closely with the second point identified above; subjectivity. Similar to the cultural shift in oral history described earlier, the terms public, social and cultural memory imply that there are dominant memories constructed and articulated in particular social contexts

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<sup>80</sup> Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 22.

which are then ascribed to by individuals within those groups. Undoubtedly, the ‘collective’ facets of memory have been adopted into these concepts to an extent, particularly in terms of the importance of the social environment in framing the ways group memories are ‘created’, and the contexts in which they are communicated. James Fentress and Chris Wickham proposed the term ‘social memory’ in 1992. Fearing that the notion of collective memory was too detached from the individual thought process, they wanted to avoid the sense of the individual ‘as a sort of automaton, passively obeying the interiorized collective will.’<sup>81</sup> Nonetheless, they argued that individuals’ memories relied on their membership of certain social groups and were hence shaped by social contexts and meaning.<sup>82</sup> As a result, social memory has become an influential framework for sociologists interested in the way groups share experience, share memories and in turn, how these shape social identities.<sup>83</sup> We can begin to see the value in seeing memory as an exchange between these ‘individual’ and ‘collective’ positions, the relationship between which needs to be more fully understood.

Some historians have preferred to use ‘public memory’ as a different frame for understanding the social nature of the remembering process. Shopes and Hamilton, for example, have used public memory as a way of reconciling oral history and memory studies, noting the importance of these issues in the public domain.<sup>84</sup> They refer to ‘public memories’ which both acknowledges the social influences on memory and the process of making memories public through oral history. Hamilton notes elsewhere:

Public memory is also a phenomenon contrasted, at least implicitly, to our understanding of private memory as *inside, internal*. Yet we also know that ultimately these dichotomies – external and internal, public and private – never quite stay in place, and this is especially so in relation to our conceptualizations of memory...it is precisely the mutual interconnections between public and private that are most fascinating and most difficult to uncover.<sup>85</sup>

Again, we encounter the importance of the social environment in the way memories are ‘stored’ and recounted or mobilised in the present. Nevertheless, Hamilton also refers to the inevitable blurring of individual and public memories. We cannot simply extricate

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<sup>81</sup> James J. Fentress and Chris Wickham, *Social Memory: New Perspectives on the Past* (Blackwell, 1992), p. x.

<sup>82</sup> Fentress and Wickham.

<sup>83</sup> Misztal.

<sup>84</sup> Hamilton and Shopes.

<sup>85</sup> Paula Hamilton, ‘A Long War: Public Memory and the Popular Media’, in *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*, ed. by Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwartz (Fordham Univ Press, 2010), pp. 299–311 (p. 299).

one from the other, as both contribute to the way we remember the past and draw upon it in the present.

This tussle between the way in which the public shapes the personal (and the personal, the public) has naturally been central to conceptualisations of public memory. Kendall Phillips has advocated seeing public memory as two distinct but overlapping ‘frames’: ‘the memory of publics’ (what a group we refer to as ‘the public’ remembers in an aggregative sense) and ‘the publicness of memory’ (memories which are articulated in public, through discourse and/or practices of memorialisation).<sup>86</sup> Taking up this second point, Bodnar more generally defines public memory as the ‘intersection of official and vernacular cultural expressions.’<sup>87</sup> Following these definitions, we can assume that the prominence or ‘publicness’ of group memory shapes how individuals remember. Beyond the notion of ‘social memory’, public memory implies that there are power dynamics in the way memories are negotiated in the public domain, that there are boundaries of what is socially acceptable and norms of interpretation and value when referring to the past. This makes the concept of public memory particularly relevant to heritage sites, where historical narratives present dominant accounts of the past in an institutional context. Here, there is a significant overlap between public memory and cultural memory. In fact, the terms are often used interchangeably, and both are useful when thinking about heritage and memory in a broad sense.

Jan Assman has proposed the concept of cultural memory, which more specifically recognises the distinction between memory formed through everyday communication (or ‘communicative memory’) and the role of objectivised culture.<sup>88</sup> This, in some ways, builds on Nora’s concept of ‘lieux de memoire’ which acknowledged the importance of attaching memory to place, focussing on the significance of places in which memory was produced, and providing materiality to memory.<sup>89</sup> For Assman, cultural memory is characterised by its distance from the everyday (as with Hirsch’s ‘postmemory’), it has a fixed point - or points - expressed through monuments, texts, heritage sites (which he calls ‘figures of memory’) or ‘institutional communication’

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<sup>86</sup> Kendall R. Phillips, p. 10.

<sup>87</sup> John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton University Press, 1993); Sara McDowell, ‘Heritage, Memory and Identity’, in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Heritage and Identity*, ed. by Brian J. Graham and Peter Howard (Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2008), pp. 37–55.

<sup>88</sup> Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka, ‘Collective Memory and Cultural Identity’, *New German Critique*, 1995, 125–133.

<sup>89</sup> Pierre Nora, ‘Between Memory and History: Les Lieux De Mémoire’, *Representations*, 1989, 7–24.

through material or oral practices.<sup>90</sup> In this sense, the concept of cultural memory is inherently linked to heritage, as heritage sites and displays are assumed to be 'figures of memory' which feed into the construction of cultural memory. Assman insisted that cultural representations had the power to harness or indeed cultivate group memories, writing:

For in the context of objectivized culture and of organized or ceremonial communication, a close connection to groups and their identity exists which is similar to that found in the case of everyday memory. We can refer to the structure of knowledge in this case as the "concretion of identity." With this we mean that a group bases its consciousness of unity and specificity upon this knowledge and derives formative and normative impulses from it, which allows the group to reproduce its identity. In this sense, objectivized culture has the structure of memory.<sup>91</sup>

Assman clearly suggests that there are similarities in the way groups relate to everyday memories and more organised cultural representations; both influence the way we construct identities through a sense of the past. Importantly, when it comes to cultural memory, this relationship is applied to groups, who are seen to seek the 'concretion of identity' through a shared past. The role of objectivised culture, in Assman's terms, is to represent and promote this shared past which translates into a shared cultural memory.

This study uses cultural memory as a framework for a number of reasons. Memories associated with heritage sites are public memories in one obvious sense; they are displayed and negotiated in public. Both public and cultural memory create space for the idea that memories are both incorporated in and dependent upon dominant public narratives of certain events. However, public memory is a yet more general concept which incorporates a myriad of influences on group memories. Cultural memory, however, gives prominence to the role of institutionalised cultural representations, such as heritage sites and displays, and their ability to impact on public historical consciousness. In very simple terms, heritagisation shapes cultural memory.

There are, of course, problems with adopting this sort of generalised theory. Assman's conceptualisation of cultural memory is particularly vague in some respects. It is certainly feasible that cultural representations have the capacity to construct dominant narratives of the past, and hence construct broader cultural memory. However, there are

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<sup>90</sup> Assmann and Czaplicka.

<sup>91</sup> Assmann and Czaplicka, p. 128.

two major points which cultural memory stops short of dealing with, which provide questions for the empirical analysis which follows. Firstly, Assman's model does not attempt to engage with the complex politicised process through which cultural representations come into being. As argued earlier, in the analysis of heritage sites (as one form of cultural representation), we need to critically investigate how certain pasts come to be commodified as heritage in particular contexts, and the values constructed in the process.

Secondly, as a rather abstract concept, cultural memory still prioritises collective elements of memory, at the expense of individual remembering. Assman implies that there is a transition point between everyday communication and objectivised culture, assuming a linear relationship whereby representations of the past can construct dominant cultural memory, but does not elaborate on this process. But what happens when cultural representations exist alongside living memory? Assman claims that cultural representations of the past provide a 'fixity' that differs from fluid communicative memory, still treating everyday (or autobiographical) memory and cultural memory as largely separate entities. As we have seen, in certain cases, living memory can exist alongside – and in a dialogue with – objectivised representations, perhaps meaning that we need a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between heritage and 'memory', which deals with both the 'individual' and the 'collective'. As such, this research adopts cultural memory somewhat tentatively, and seeks to interrogate the concept by applying it to the mining heritage site case studies, both within their contested contexts, and in relation to living memory.

As I have argued, like heritage, memory is a plural and multi-faceted concept that has a number of broad applications to the study of heritage and public history. Significantly, how we orient to the relationship between heritage and memory largely relies on the interpretation and usage of the term 'memory' itself. Halbwachs' work has had an enduring influence, taking memory beyond what an individual remembers to a broader view of the way in which memory is reliant on social context in both creation and transmission. While scholars readily acknowledge this broader view of memory, it is sensible to exercise caution and avoid the description of memory as truly 'collective'. As we have seen, memory works differently in different contexts. It has both 'individual' and 'collective' elements, which we should not see as purely separate entities, but as overlapping layers which interact and influence each other. While it is

widely assumed that popular representations of the past influence the construction of public or cultural memories, we also need to understand their relationship to living memory, taking into account the plural nature of both heritage and memory.

## 1.4 Heritage and Memory

So how can we reconcile these two complex concepts? Heritage and the present representation of the past are frequently considered to be bound up with memory. As mentioned above, Huyssen has described the growth of heritage as a ‘memory boom’, and the term occurs frequently in heritage discourse relating to the idea that remembering the past shows us ‘who we are’, and marrying memory with identity.<sup>92</sup> These assertions seem feasible enough, but when we take into account the complex interpretations of each of these concepts outlined above, unravelling the nexus between heritage and memory is somewhat more challenging. In fact, given the theoretical rigour which has grown from the study of heritage and memory as separate entities, there is surprisingly little critical work which engages with the inevitably multi-faceted nature of this relationship. As Laurajane Smith has noted, ‘although it is often recognized, for instance, that memory and identity are linked, and that heritage places may invoke individual and/or collective memories, this observation is often simply nodded at rather than given close critical attention.’<sup>93</sup>

### 1.4.1 Heritage and ‘collective’ memory

The way we characterise the relationship between heritage and memory is naturally dependent on which how we conceptualise ‘memory’ itself. Most research on heritage and memory has only dealt with the way in which heritage narratives impact on broad public consciousness (and hence forms of ‘collective memory’), rather than dealing with memory at a more individual level. There is certainly an assumption that heritage has a broad mnemonic function for groups, and practices of preservation are often bound up in a discourse of remembering (as opposed to allowing the past to fade away, disappear or be ‘forgotten’). Heritage initiatives claiming to remember the past in these terms imply a sense of moral obligation to remember, to celebrate or commemorate certain

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<sup>92</sup> Huyssen.

<sup>93</sup> Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, p. 58.

valued cultural pasts. This sort of rhetoric relies on using memory in its broadest sense, very much aligning with the notion of historical memory or cultural memory discussed above; ‘that of which we are reminded, as distinct from as that which we remember.’<sup>94</sup>

In many ways, this is a rather simplistic heritage discourse which assumes a direct and linear relationship between representing the past through heritage, and the preservation of ‘collective’ memory. Nonetheless, academic studies have also tended to view the impact of heritage on memory in the frame of the ‘collective’ rather than the individual.<sup>95</sup> Harrison et al have attempted to describe the relationship by extrapolating from individual memory. They argue:

If personal memories can be mediated by the materiality of photographs, then collective memories might also – and perhaps must – be buttressed by preserving authentic traces of the past as mnemonics, symbols or (an increasingly fashionable trope) ‘icons’.<sup>96</sup>

Here, the authors rely on the concept of collective memory, assuming that it operates in a similar way to autobiographical or ‘individual’ memory, that it is provoked by material objects or mnemonics. The notion that heritage offers materiality to memory (or ‘fixity’ in Jan Assman’s terms) is commonly-cited. Susan Crane, investigating museums and memory, has characterised the relationship between memory and museums as being comparable to a snail and its shell, suggesting that ‘one houses and protects the other’.<sup>97</sup> In similar terms, Tim Benton has argued that heritage objects and enterprises ‘enshrine memory’, aligning with the view that heritage *preserves* memory, as is common in heritage discourse. Again, we encounter the blurry use of ‘memory’ in rather abstract terms, making it difficult to establish whose memory is being ‘stored’ or ‘fixed’.

The idea of maintaining memory in this sense relies on a clear-cut transition between living memory and memorialisation. According to this argument, memorialisation is necessary to sustain memory when living memory is threatened. Pierre Nora emphasised this point in his influential *Lieux de Memoire*. Noting the importance of

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<sup>94</sup> Tadhg O’Keeffe, ‘Landscape and Memory: Historiography, Theory, Methodology’, in *Heritage, Memory and the Politics of Identity: New Perspectives on the Cultural Landscape*, ed. by Niamh Moore and Yvonne Whelan (Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2007), pp. 3–19 (p. 5).

<sup>95</sup> Noted by Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, p. 59.

<sup>96</sup> Harrison and others, p. 6.

<sup>97</sup> Susan A. Crane, *Museums and Memory* (Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 2.

‘sites of memory’, he differentiated clearly between memory and history.<sup>98</sup> In a largely conservative critique of French national life, Nora lamented a loss of national identity resulting from what he considered to be a ‘demolition’ of memory and a rupture with the past. In these terms, Nora claimed that ‘sites of memory’ only come into being when memory no longer functions. This is in line with Halbwachs’ view that history provides a written record of the past where memory breaks down.<sup>99</sup> Here, the use of ‘memory’ is rather unclear. Memory is apparently what is breaking down, but also what is being restored or maintained through practices of memorialisation. In this process, we are clearly moving from one sort of ‘memory’ to another; from everyday memory to cultural memory, or from ‘individual’ to ‘collective’ memory. The arguments above assume this is a linear process; that when living memory lapses, and are replaced by heritage practices designed to ‘remember’ the past (feeding into public or cultural memory).

However, drawing from theoretical conceptualisations of individual and collective memory outlined earlier, we know that ‘individual’ and ‘collective’ memories overlap. They can, and do, coexist and interact with each other. It is unlikely that there is a neat transition between living memory and cultural memory in this vein, rather that there is a much more blurred process at work, whereby heritage and living memory overlap in number of complex ways (as I argue below). Here, there is remarkably little understanding of what happens to memory in this problematic space. How does memory become heritage? And what does heritage ‘remember’? Are these fundamentally separate concerns?

We know that heritage practices do not simply preserve or remember the past, despite the prominence of this notion in heritage discourse. As argued above, more recent interpretations of heritage have highlighted its nature as an active process of constructing narratives of the past in the present, rather than simply ‘maintaining’ the past in a linear sense. Smith has noted that in this context, ‘memory’ sits awkwardly with the construction of heritage through what she sees as a fixed ‘authorised’ heritage discourse.<sup>100</sup> In simple terms, if heritage is *made* rather than *found* – at least in terms of which aspects of the past are valued – is this really remembering at all? Alan Megill has

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<sup>98</sup> Nora.

<sup>99</sup> Halbwachs.

<sup>100</sup> Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage*.

challenged the use of term memory in this context, suggesting that the rhetoric of remembering has become somewhat detached from the process it is meant to describe:

It is easy to imagine that we ought to remember the past. But we do not remember the past. It is the present that we remember: that is, we construct or reconstruct it on the basis of certain critical procedures...Almost invariably, when historical understanding is described as “remembering”, we can infer that we are confronting an attempt to promote some presumably desirable collective identity in the present.<sup>101</sup>

Megill reminds us that memory is an ‘image of the past constructed by subjectivity in the present’, rather than a fixed entity which is stored and recalled.<sup>102</sup> It might be more appropriate to suppose that, beyond ‘storing’ or ‘fixing’ memory, heritage can even ‘produce’ memories in an abstract sense.<sup>103</sup> Johnson and Dawson, for example, have stressed the ability of public representations of the past to create ‘dominant memory’, showing how powerful these displays can be in shaping perceptions of the past.<sup>104</sup> Indeed, there is a political element to this relationship. If we accept that heritage practices have the potential to impact on public or cultural memory (beyond the realm of individual experience), it follows that certain narratives of the past will be privileged over others, with public or cultural memory reflecting elements of these dominant stories. Radstone and Schwartz have referred to this phenomenon as the ‘politicisation of memory’.<sup>105</sup>

As argued earlier, heritage displays are necessarily selective, meaning the cultural memories ‘produced’ as a result can only ever be partial, relying on particular constructions of meaning and values attached to the past. Marita Sturken has advocated this position, expanding on the notion of cultural memory, has noted how cultural memory is inextricable from what she terms ‘the politics of remembering’.<sup>106</sup> She claims:

the process of cultural memory is bound up in complex political stakes and meanings. It both defines a culture and it is the means by which its divisions and conflicting agendas are revealed. To define a memory as cultural is, in effect, to

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<sup>101</sup> A. Megill, ‘History, Memory, Identity’, *History of the Human Sciences*, 11 (1998), 37–62.

<sup>102</sup> Megill; see also Green and Hutching.

<sup>103</sup> Hamilton and Shopes, p. 3.

<sup>104</sup> R Johnson and G Dawson, ‘Popular Memory: Theory, Politics, Method’, in *Oral History Reader*, ed. by Robert Perks (Taylor & Francis, 2006).

<sup>105</sup> *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*, ed. by Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwartz (Fordham Univ Press, 2010), p. 2.

<sup>106</sup> Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (University of California Press, 1997); also see Bodnar.

enter into a debate about what that memory means...Cultural memory is a field of cultural negotiation through which different stories vie for a place in history.<sup>107</sup>

As Sturken suggests, if heritage is selective, politicised and contested, so too is cultural memory. As a result, even if we assume heritage initiatives are influential in the construction of cultural memory, we have to be critical about the way in which these narratives of the past are constructed and communicated in their specific social, economic and political contexts. More basic theorisations of the relationship between heritage and cultural memory tend to gloss over these critical issues raised in the heritage debate. In this sense, the broad concept of cultural memory, while useful, can become rather detached from the particularities of how the past comes to be memorialised in certain contexts. As such, we need to exercise caution when using these generalised concepts not to assume simplistically that heritage constructs a singular, dominant cultural memory that is uncontested by other accounts or memories.

American historians researching public memorials (and war memorials in particular) have provided the basis for some more detailed investigations into the interaction of public representations of the past and memory in these terms.<sup>108</sup> In his study of European Holocaust memorials, James Young notes the influence of cultural institutions and rituals in shaping the way societies remember.<sup>109</sup> Following from this, he argued for a closer interrogation of the processes of creation behind such common spaces which ‘propagate the illusion of common memory’.<sup>110</sup> Young writes: ‘Were we passively to remark only the contours of these memorials, were we to leave unexplored their genesis and remain unchanged by the recollective act, it could be said that we have not remembered at all.’<sup>111</sup> Behind this assertion was the idea that we cannot separate monuments (or indeed heritage sites) from their public life and the nature of the interaction and process of meaning-making.

As I have argued throughout, we cannot necessarily assume a simple linear relationship between heritage and ‘collective’ memory. These assumptions will be challenged on two fronts. Firstly, in order to analyse the impact of heritage displays on cultural memory, we need to understand the complex and contested processes through which

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<sup>107</sup> Sturken, p. 1.

<sup>108</sup> Bodnar.

<sup>109</sup> Young, p. xi. For the application of this theory to this context, see chapter 5.

<sup>110</sup> Young, p. 6.

<sup>111</sup> Young, p. 15.

sites come to be preserved as heritage and the various values and priorities at work. Secondly, in contexts where heritage and living memory coexists, we need to establish how this relationship functions, which narratives of the past are preserved and why.

#### *1.4.2 Heritage and living memory*

The interaction of heritage and living memory has been largely neglected. So why has the heritage-memory relationship has been so readily defined in terms of public, social or cultural memory rather than living memory? I would suggest that this focus on ‘collective’ memory has been prominent for two reasons. Firstly, heritage institutions have tended to represent the distant past, meaning living memory has not been either incorporated or existed alongside heritage displays. Kansteiner notes:

Methodologically speaking, memories are at their most collective when they transcend the time and space of the events’ original occurrence. As such, they take on a powerful life of their own, “unencumbered” by actual individual memory, and become the basis of all collective remembering as disembodied, omnipresent, low-intensity memory.<sup>112</sup>

In similar terms, when heritage sites represent the distant past, they are unencumbered by living memory; there is no point of contest, thereby shifting focus from politics of memory to rituals and representations which are less problematic. However, heritage initiatives are dealing more and more with the recent past in the light of more diverse practices of preservation. War memorials and industrial heritage have been two notable examples in this vein. Nonetheless, in more general terms, the relationship between heritage and living memory has been relatively neglected.

The second, and perhaps more fundamental reason that theorists have dealt with heritage and ‘collective’ memory only, is due to a perception that there is a separation between memory and ‘the past’, or in other words, that heritage is only necessary when memory lapses (as Nora supposed). However, when autobiographical memory coexists with heritage, the complexion of this relationship might change significantly. Living memories may well conflict with the way in which heritage sites represent the past.

Public historians, particularly in America, have recognised the ways in which public representations of the past have conflicted with living memory. Most famously, the

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<sup>112</sup> Kansteiner.

Smithsonian Institution's Enola Gay exhibition and the Washington Vietnam war memorial have provoked high-profile public criticism.<sup>113</sup> Taking the Smithsonian example, we can see quickly how institutional representations of the past have a difficult relationship with living memory. In 1995, the Smithsonian had planned to exhibit the Enola Gay, the plane which dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima in 1945, in display entitled "The Last Act: The Atomic Bomb and the End of World War II" to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the event. Curators claimed they had taken a critical historical perspective, which raised questions about moral legitimacy. This approach was fiercely opposed by veterans' groups who felt that the display ought to tell an entirely different story; one which honoured and commemorated their sacrifices in the Second World War.<sup>114</sup> These contests were based on representations of the past which were thought to be controversial (even offensive) to people who had served in the forces in the respective conflicts. In these cases, it seems, public historical representations were not 'maintaining' living memories but challenging and neglecting them.

These sorts of conflicts are particularly apparent when the subject-matter of historical displays is controversial in itself (as with the examples above). Nonetheless, in situations where there is a rapid transition to heritage, such as the mining heritage sites being considered in this study, there is a potential source of friction where heritage displays meet living memory. Naturally, when heritage attempts to represent what is present in many people's living memories, there is rather different dynamic to the heritage-memory relationship than more abstract theorisations have suggested. Indeed, heritagisation could enforce a historical narrative or value on objects or events that for some people are still current or at least fresh in the memory. Thus, meanings created in the heritage context may exist alongside, or in opposition to, living memory.

While there has been very little research carried out into heritage and living memory specifically, oral historians have provided some extremely valuable insights into the way autobiographical memories interact with popular cultural narratives more generally. For example, Alistair Thomson has analysed the way in which oral testimonies fit with their broader contexts, including public memories and popular myths.<sup>115</sup> Thomson used his observation that individuals (in his case Anzac war veterans) knitted popular myth

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<sup>113</sup> For accounts of these controversies, see David Thelen, 'History After the Enola Gay Controversy: An Introduction', *The Journal of American History*, 82 (1995), 1029; Kristin Ann Hass, *Carried to the Wall: American Memory and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial* (University of California Press, 1998).

<sup>114</sup> Thelen.

<sup>115</sup> Alistair Thomson, *Anzac Memories: Living with the Legend* (Oxford University Press, 1994).

into their own life stories to develop what he terms a 'cultural theory of remembering'.<sup>116</sup>

An increasing body of research in oral history has shown the way in which people frequently adopt popular narratives within their own life stories to create frames of meaning around certain events. This has been called 'composure', implying a dual meaning; that people both compose narratives which fit with dominant public accounts and that individuals seek a sense of composure themselves, through telling their stories. Penny Summerfield has used this concept, arguing that 'discourses of, especially, popular culture inform personal and locally told life stories, in that the narrators draw on generalized, public versions of the aspects of the lives that they are talking about to construct their own particular, personal accounts.'<sup>117</sup> Drawing on these ideas, it may be possible that heritage narratives could in fact be adopted into life narratives based on living memory. This would seem to counteract the notion that living memory challenges institutionalised accounts of the past (as we saw in the case of the Enola Gay controversy above).

Living memory, then, has the potential to challenge heritage narratives and/or be influenced by them. Referring to public history displays in particular, Graham Smith has characterised this relationship as a *dialogue*, where memory multiply interacts with public history displays.<sup>118</sup> Indeed, there is seemingly a duality present. Oral tradition can be influential in constructing so-called 'public memories' which can be institutionalised or embedded through public representations of history (in the form of films, television programmes, museum displays etc). However, individuals may incorporate elements of dominant public narratives into their own testimonies. As we can see, far from being irrelevant to the process of heritagisation, living memory in fact may be extremely influential in how narratives of the past come to be understood through heritage, and hence in the cultural memories which endure. In turn, these living memories may challenge or adopt elements of dominant cultural memories promoted by heritage sites and displays.

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<sup>116</sup> Alistair Thomson, *Anzac Memories*.

<sup>117</sup> Penny Summerfield, 'Culture and Composure: Creating Narratives of the Gendered Self in Oral History Interviews', *Cultural and Social History*, 1 (2004), 65–93 (p. 68). For further discussion of 'composure', see Chapter 3.

<sup>118</sup> Graham Smith, 'Toward a Public Oral History', in *The Oxford handbook of oral history*, ed. by Donald A. Ritchie (Oxford University Press, 2010).

## 1.5 Conclusion

This research seeks to more clearly model the relationship between heritage and different layers of memory, with a particular emphasis on reasserting the importance of living memory in relation to the process of heritagisation. Empirically, it assesses how heritage interacts with memory at specific sites in specific contexts, particularly how mining heritage sites promote cultural memory (alongside existing autobiographical memory), whether they provide a fixed point for memories of the mining past and how different people may experience this.

In order to do this, we need to acknowledge the complex and contested nature of representing the past in the present. Heritage is not merely preserved or protected, but constructed through discourses and value-systems which promote certain narratives of the past. As such, heritagisation is a politicised process which needs to be understood in the light of specific localised cultural contexts. By doing this, we can begin to understand how certain narratives of the past are constructed and how they might feed into the construction of public or cultural memory.

As we have seen, there is a wide range of theoretical work exploring the concepts of heritage and memory in their own terms, but very little which has brought together these critical perspectives in order to reconcile the two. Clearly, heritage and memory are closely related phenomena, but most research in this vein has prioritised the ‘collective’ aspects of memory which heritage is assumed to foster. As I have argued, it is too often assumed that there is a neat point of transition between living memory and cultural memory, where memorialisation preserves (‘collective’) memory in a simplistic sense.

Drawing from memory studies, we can see that there are different layers of memory which overlap and interact with each other in a complex dialogue. It follows that there are multiple ways in which memory and heritage interact. Especially in cases where heritagisation is rapid, heritage displays inevitably interact with living memory as well as public or cultural memory. In these terms, rather than heritage merely preserving, protecting or enshrining memory, heritage narratives may incorporate, influence or conflict with living memories. As such, there is a broad scope for empirically investigating the process through which the past becomes recontextualised as heritage -

which narratives of the past are preserved and why - and how this relates to both living memory and broader cultural memories.

## Chapter 2

### Methodology

#### 2.1 Introduction

At the outset, this thesis aimed to investigate a largely under-researched question; how does heritagisation interact with different layers of memory? In Chapter 1, we saw that both heritage and memory are complex concepts in their own right, and that the analysis of the interaction between heritage and ‘memory’ often does not rigorously define memory, dealing with it in the abstract and relying on definitions of memory as ‘collective’. This research attempts to more clearly model the relationship between heritage and different sorts of memory, focusing particularly on the relevance of living memory to the process of heritagisation. As such, the present study synthesises wide-ranging conceptual and theoretical perspectives on heritage and memory while providing some empirical depth and specificity, analysing the way in which different notions of memory and heritage intersect in particular contexts. This approach necessarily involves interrogating a number of boundaries: between individual and collective notions of both heritage and memory. Naturally, given that the study’s conceptual approach crosses a range of theoretical interests, its methodological framework is also characterised by interdisciplinarity.

In many ways, this sort of study is rather uncharted territory within the discipline of History. Public historians have importantly identified the need to engage with the uses and understanding of the past in the public domain, and have drawn on the concept of ‘historical consciousness’, recognising that there is an active, dynamic process of constructing meaning-making between past, present and future.<sup>1</sup> This has opened up a fruitful area of enquiry in public history, questioning not only what happened in the past but how the past is represented, how and why we construct meaning from the past in the present. While this is a useful starting point, there is no coherent methodology common to public history, nor one which provides a specific basis for the study of heritage and memory in the terms described above. As a result, there is no single methodological

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<sup>1</sup> Bernard Eric Jensen, ‘Usable Pasts: Comparing Approaches to Popular and Public History’, in *People and their pasts: public history today* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

template or framework this research can claim to replicate. Rather, operating under the broad banner of public history, it has been necessary to design a specific tailored approach in order to tackle the theoretical questions posed at the outset of the study.

This chapter outlines the specific methodological approach developed for the purposes of the research, placing it within the context of existing conceptual and methodological frameworks to which it contributes. Firstly, it maps developments in relevant fields (drawing from public history, oral history, memory studies and heritage studies), before explaining the broad approach to the project and the basis for grounding the theoretical questions in empirical research. Finally, it describes in detail the particular methodology undertaken, critically discussing the process of data collection and analysis.

## **2.2 Existing conceptual and methodological frameworks**

As well as more ‘traditional’ historical methods involving archive research, this project combined conceptual and methodological approaches from public history, oral history and memory studies. These are three closely related fields, as will be argued, but there has not necessarily been coherence across these approaches.

Methodology, in many ways, is particularly fraught for public historians. In fact, there has been a notable reluctance to establish a set framework methodology for public history research. This is undoubtedly largely due to the diverse nature of research projects, but more fundamentally in fact, historians are still embroiled in a debate as to the nature of public history itself. Should public history be about undertaking collaborative projects with historic sites or institutions, historians sharing ‘expert’ knowledge with the public (which John Tosh vocally advocates)<sup>2</sup>, or historians writing about public history from a critical perspective? It is clear that more work needs to be done in terms of establishing a dialogue on methods in public history, perhaps beginning with a greater transparency in public history projects, starting with the particular interpretation of ‘public history’ itself.

Public history has been described as ‘broad and tolerant church’, though these different interpretations of the purpose of public history, and the practice of public historians in

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<sup>2</sup> John Tosh, *Why History Matters* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); John Tosh, ‘History for Citizens: Towards a Critical Public History’ (presented at the HistFest, University of Lancaster, 2011).

particular, undoubtedly require different methodologies.<sup>3</sup> If public history is to be interpreted as academic historians communicating their research to the public, historians could rely on more ‘traditional’ methods. However, a public historian who interprets their practice as collaborative or democratic could not purely rely on archives and documents. Different questions are raised, focus is shifted to assessing the *meaning* of certain elements of the past in the present, accessing different (sometimes opposing) discourses or narratives, understanding relationships between institutional representations of the past and public memory. This is where public history deviates significantly from more ‘traditional’ forms of academic history, and the methodological waters become far murkier.

A concern with methodology is actually very topical in public history, at least for its critics. It forms the basis of much of the criticism of public history from academic historians who question the ‘dumbing down’ of history, fearing that, as Richard Overy put it:

history will slowly mutate over the next generation into cultural and heritage studies, informing popular concerns with the past but not sustaining the intellectual and scholarly capacity to develop, elaborate and articulate complex ways of understanding and interpreting it.<sup>4</sup>

This is a familiar and in many ways outdated critique, which equates public history with heritage and rejects its legitimacy within academic history. In fact, public history in many ways has grown out of a desire for a more critical engagement with the use of the past in the public domain, attempting to avoid trappings of the ‘heritage debate’ outlined in Chapter 1.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, this is closely associated with the ‘cultural turn’ in humanities scholarship more generally. For historians, this has meant a greater focus is given to the ways in which historical knowledge is socially constructed, being

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<sup>3</sup> Definitions of public history vary, especially between Britain and the United States. For definitions generally, see Jill Liddington, ‘What Is Public History? Publics and Their Pasts, Meanings and Practices’, *Oral History*, 30 (2002), 83–93; Holger Hoock, ‘Introduction: Professional Practices of Public History in Britain’, *The Public Historian*, 32 (2010), 7–24; Ludmilla Jordanova, *History in Practice* (Bloomsbury USA, 2000); David Glassberg, ‘Public History and the Study of Memory’, *The Public Historian*, 18 (1996), 7–23; Frisch.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Overy, ‘The Historical Present’, *Times Higher Education Supplement*, 29 April 2010 <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storycode=411360>, accessed 2 March 2012.

<sup>5</sup> It should be noted that work carried out in the relatively new discipline of heritage studies has become increasingly critical since the heritage debate, though not strictly historical in focus (as noted in Chapter 1). See, for example, Peter Howard, ‘The Heritage Discipline’, *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 1 (1994), 3–5; G. J. Ashworth, Brian Graham and J. E. Tunbridge, *Pluralising Pasts: Heritage, Identity and Place in Multicultural Societies* (Pluto Press, 2007); Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage* (Taylor & Francis, 2006).

*represented* by historians rather than *reconstructed*.<sup>6</sup> In a sense, then, public historians merely extrapolate this approach to analyse the ‘processes by which those pasts are presented to a wide range of audiences and readerships, often by collaborative working between historians and other professionals’.<sup>7</sup>

Public history thus overlaps significantly with memory studies in terms of conceptual approach. David Glassberg (a prominent American historian) has argued this, pointing out the common intellectual foundation between public history and memory. Glassberg argued that

Understanding the various ways in which societies think about the past and use it in the present can help public historians understand the institutional contexts in which they operate as well as the presuppositions about history with which the public approaches their work.<sup>8</sup>

As he suggests, public history overlaps with memory (broadly-defined) on a number of levels. There is certainly a need for a more developed understanding of the way in which embedded popular narratives work in dialogue with individuals’ senses of their own pasts. Historians’ interest in the study of memory has been closely associated with oral history research. Oral history is a very well-established research method in the humanities and social sciences, using individual life histories to shed light on historical understanding at a number of levels.<sup>9</sup> Oral history was originally conceived, as a ‘reconstructive’ process, providing access to sources which would otherwise not exist in the historical record.<sup>10</sup> However, oral historians have increasingly moved beyond this approach to engage more critically with memory theory, to understand the ways in which oral narratives convey meaning, the relationship between memory and history, and ultimately the interplay between the past and the present in the way people constructed their own narratives.<sup>11</sup> The critical analysis of memory and subjectivity

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<sup>6</sup> Anna Green, *Cultural History* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Alon Confino, ‘Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method’, *The American Historical Review*, 102 (1997), 1386–1403.

<sup>7</sup> Jill Liddington and Graham Smith, ‘Crossing Cultures: Oral History and Public History’, *Oral History*, 33 (2005), 28–31 (p. 28).

<sup>8</sup> Glassberg.

<sup>9</sup> Giampietro Gobo and others, *Qualitative Research Practice: Concise Paperback Edition* (SAGE, 2006); Michael Bloor and Fiona Wood, *Keywords in Qualitative Methods: A Vocabulary of Research Concepts* (SAGE, 2006); Anna Green and Megan Hutching, *Remembering: Writing Oral History* (Auckland University Press, 2004); Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2000).

<sup>10</sup> *Oral History Reader*, ed. by Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (Taylor & Francis, 2006).

<sup>11</sup> Alessandro Portelli, ‘The Peculiarities of Oral History’, *History Workshop Journal*, 12 (1981), 96–107; Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli, and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History*

came in the wake of the linguistic turn, and the acknowledgement that the subjectivity of oral testimony was extremely valuable to historians, a position largely inspired by Luisa Passerini, and epitomised by her phrase ‘subjective liberation’.<sup>12</sup> This shift involved asking fundamentally different questions about oral evidence and adding a new level of analytical complexity. Oral historians are increasingly aware not only of what is said but how it is said, what is not said, the structure of the narrative and the many layers meaning uncovered when the testimony is fully unravelled. This has become known as the ‘cultural approach’ to oral history. Summerfield characterises the cultural approach as follows:

The starting point of the cultural approach to oral history is to accept that people do not simply remember what happened to them, but make sense of the subject-matter they recall by interpreting it. Understanding is integral to memory and, like any other knowledge, it is constructed from the language and concepts available to the person remembering. The challenge for the historian is to understand the cultural ingredients that go into accounts of a remembered and interpreted past. Or to put it another way, the oral historian needs to understand not only the narrative offered, but also the meanings invested in it and their discursive origins.<sup>13</sup>

Green and Hutching, for example, have stressed the different layers of meaning the oral historian must be attuned to, encouraging an awareness of the ‘*meaning* of the individual’s experiences: not just what happened, but how it was understood and experienced by the narrator’.<sup>14</sup>

How, then, can this be achieved? Can there be a single methodology for the analysis of oral history interviews? In some ways, a strictly structured methodological or analytical approach has been resisted in the field of oral history.<sup>15</sup> Nonetheless, there has certainly been a trend in promoting methodological and analytical rigour among oral history practitioners, perhaps in part due to the ongoing struggle to assert the legitimacy of oral history in relation to more ‘traditional’ empirical work based on documentary evidence. It is true that there has been no single agreed framework or method for the interpretation

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(SUNY Press, 1991); Luisa Passerini, ‘Work Ideology and Consensus Under Italian Fascism’, *History Workshop Journal*, 8 (1979), 82–108.

<sup>12</sup> Passerini, p. 54.

<sup>13</sup> Penny Summerfield, ‘Culture and Composure: Creating Narratives of the Gendered Self in Oral History Interviews’, *Cultural and Social History*, 1 (2004), 65–93, p. 67.

<sup>14</sup> Green and Hutching, p. 12.

<sup>15</sup> Perry K. Blatz, ‘Craftsmanship and Flexibility in Oral History: A Pluralistic Approach to Methodology and Theory’, *The Public Historian*, 12 (1990), 7–22 (p. 8).

of oral history narratives, rather there are several frameworks of analysis which emerge from the relevant literature.

Ron Grele was one of the first to comment on oral history methodology. He noted that in analysing his interview data, he aimed to discover ‘the particular vision of history articulated in an interview, outline its structure and how it helps us to understand the people we are interviewing and their historical point of view.’<sup>16</sup> He analysed how his interviewees, industrial workers in New York City, ‘organize their lives into historical narratives’ and how each used history in different ways to ‘ground that narrative to the past.’<sup>17</sup> Grele was concerned with investigating the ‘then’ and ‘now’, which he saw as indicative of the beginning of ‘some sort of historical consciousness’.<sup>18</sup> This past-present interplay is central in the analysis of any oral testimony, especially when aiming to go beyond ‘what happened’ to its meaning in the present.

Oral historians necessarily use a range of interpretive approaches and concepts which have been grouped or characterised differently by a number of practitioners. Samuel and Thompson, for example, recommend looking for patterns, ‘recurring themes, symbols, myths and rhetorical devices.’<sup>19</sup> Yow, on the other hand, suggests carrying out analysis (of life narratives) based on ‘plot, key phrases, structure of narrative, context of the life, self-concept, contradictions, omissions, choices, desires, metaphors, symbols and the influence of the individual’s work.’<sup>20</sup> In addition, Green and Hutching usefully described a more general approach to the analysis of interviews based on three key categories of analysis; narrative, emotion and myths and legends.<sup>21</sup> While there are differences in the ways practitioners specifically undertake their analysis, a clear emphasis on a cultural approach has been evident in recent oral history work. As argued above, this approach foregrounds the value and meaning of the past in the present, linking very closely with public history. For the purposes of this thesis, adopting a cultural approach to oral history allows scope for a broader investigation, where comparisons can be drawn between the different ways meaning is constructed from the

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<sup>16</sup> Ron Grele, ‘Listen to Their Voices: Two Case Studies in the Interpretation of Oral History Interviews’, *Oral History*, 7 (1979), 33–42 (p. 33).

<sup>17</sup> Grele, p. 40.

<sup>18</sup> Grele, p. 40.

<sup>19</sup> Raphael Samuel and Paul Richard Thompson, *The Myths We Live By* (Routledge, 1990); Valerie Raleigh Yow, *Recording Oral History: A Practical Guide for Social Scientists* (SAGE, 1994), p. 282.

<sup>20</sup> Yow, p. 307.

<sup>21</sup> Green and Hutching, p. 11.

past, whether through individual oral testimonies or other ways in which the past is 'remembered' in the present (in this case through heritage narratives).

Indeed, oral historians have been particularly influential in the debate defining the relationship between autobiographical memory and public or cultural memory.<sup>22</sup> Perhaps most influentially, Alistair Thomson's 'cultural theory of remembering' has added to our understanding of these interrelated phenomena. Thomson focused attention on analysing how oral testimonies fit with their broader contexts, including public memories and popular myths.<sup>23</sup> Thomson further proposed the concept of 'composure' in order to describe the way in which individuals tended to compose a narrative they were comfortable with and sought a sense of personal composure through telling their life stories.<sup>24</sup> Thomson's recognition that individuals adopted popular myth into their own life stories was a particularly useful tool for the analysis of the way in which individuals can adopt dominant public narratives of the past into their own accounts. Importantly, in terms of methodology, Thomson showed that oral history could be effectively utilised as a tool for accessing the interaction of autobiographical memories and dominant cultural narratives, a central aim of this study.

So why use oral history in the study of public history? As I have suggested, oral history, public history and memory studies share a number of conceptual concerns. Liddington and Smith have identified two key ways in which oral history and public history overlap. They describe them as 'two chronologically different fields of study, two distinct processes...with important areas of overlap, fusion and perhaps even occasional friction.'<sup>25</sup> Firstly, they contend, both oral history and public history involve *presentation* of narratives of the past. Secondly, and more importantly for this study, Liddington and Smith note that the 'ways we understand and recall our pasts are influenced by many forms of public presentation.'<sup>26</sup> As such, while there are undoubtedly multiple influences on what (and how) we remember, public representations shape this to some extent.

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<sup>22</sup> *Oral History and Public Memories*, ed. by Paula Hamilton and Linda Shopes (Temple University Press, 2008).

<sup>23</sup> Alistair Thomson, *Anzac Memories: Living with the Legend* (Oxford University Press, USA, 1994); Alistair Thomson, 'Anzac Memories: Putting Popular Memory Theory into Practice in Australia', *Oral History*, 18 (1990), 25–31.

<sup>24</sup> Thomson (1994).

<sup>25</sup> Liddington and Graham Smith, 28-31 (p. 28).

<sup>26</sup> Liddington and Graham Smith, 28-31 (p. 30).

Centrally, oral history, public history and various approaches to memory studies share common goals in shifting away from the reconstruction and analysis of historical events to assessing the *meaning* of certain elements of the past in the present. These are just the sorts of forces which critical public history should seek to understand; accessing different (sometimes opposing) discourses or narratives and understanding relationships between institutional representations of the past and public memory. We now turn to another complex question concerning how we should investigate these issues empirically, and how we might bring coherence across these approaches.

## **2.3 Empirical approach**

As argued in Chapter 1, in order to more fully understand the process of heritagisation and its relationship with memory, we need to locate these broad theoretical questions within specific contexts. Using a grounded, empirical approach not only allows us to understand these phenomena in more detail, but gives specificity to generalised concepts such as heritage and cultural memory. Taking an empirical approach, ‘heritage’ moves beyond an abstract concept to a particular practice which can be mapped in terms of the economic and political interests which have driven heritagisation. Indeed, heritage sites have their own specific histories, a range of stakeholders, and specific contexts in which heritage values are constructed and communicated. Likewise, cultural memory, though a rather amorphous concept, can begin to be traced in terms through the analysis of oral testimonies, public discourses and common frames of meaning which are constructed in relation to certain historical narratives. At the outset it was clear, therefore, that the project would be best-served by engaging with a number of case studies in order to answer the theoretical questions posed.

### *2.3.1 Case Study Research*

Case study research is common in both qualitative and quantitative research in the humanities and social sciences. Creswell, for example, has highlighted the importance of case study methodology as one of his five approaches to qualitative research.<sup>27</sup> He notes that case study research is ‘the study of an issue explored through one or more

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<sup>27</sup> John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (SAGE Publications, 2012).

cases within a bounded system.<sup>28</sup> These systems involve one or multiple cases and use data gathered from a wide range of sources such as official documents, speeches, interviews, or observations. Stake similarly defines case study research as ‘the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances.’<sup>29</sup> Importantly, case study research allows questions to be explored and analysis carried out in depth. Through the comparison of multiple case studies, patterns, similarities or salient differences can be established between cases. It is then possible to make some more general observations in relation to broader research questions, which Stake calls ‘refinement of understanding’.<sup>30</sup>

Within the discipline of History, concentrated case study research has been increasingly popular in the last forty years or so. Brewer has described this ‘microhistory’ as:

close-up and on the small scale. Its emphasis is on a singular place rather than space, the careful delineation of particularities and details, a degree of enclosure. It depends upon the recognition that our understanding of what is seen depends on the incorporation of many points of view rather than the use of a single dominant perspective. Within the space of refuge historical figures are actors and have agency, motives, feelings and consciousness. They are the subjects not objects of history.<sup>31</sup>

These values are very much in line with the ideals of public history, drawing on Michael Frisch’s notion of ‘shared authority’.<sup>32</sup> Many public historians now see history making as a collaborative process described by Cobbett and Millar as ‘a shared inquiry into shared inquiry’.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, public historians have a tradition of exploring these issues through the medium of case study research. Frisch, in his edited collection *A Shared Authority*, suggests that the case study may be

a good way to penetrate what is most interesting in oral and public history, and it is arguably the best way to permit readers to explore what is found there – to sense how issues have come to the surface through engagements with particular problems in particular settings at particular points in a broader, surrounding cultural and political discourse.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Creswell, p. 73.

<sup>29</sup> Robert E. Stake, *The Art of Case Study Research* (SAGE, 1995), p. 7.

<sup>30</sup> Stake, p. 7.

<sup>31</sup> John Brewer, ‘Microhistory and the Histories of Everyday Life’, *Cultural and Social History*, 7 (2010), 87–109 (p. 88).

<sup>32</sup> Frisch.

<sup>33</sup> Katharine T. Corbett and Howard S. Miller, ‘A Shared Inquiry into Shared Inquiry’, *The Public Historian*, 28 (2006), 15–38.

<sup>34</sup> Frisch, p. xvi.

Naturally, the sorts of questions concerning public historians are particularly well served by small-scale case study research. Projects often focus on single events, localities, heritage sites, museums, or many other forms of public engagement with the past. These sorts of case studies allow detailed exploration of the ways in which the past is used and understood in the public domain, which can then be contextualised in their broader social and cultural contexts. For this particular research project, in order to understand the complex process of transition to heritage, how aspects of the past become ‘heritagised’, and how this interacts with memory, it was necessary to explore these issues in relation to specific sites rather than in a more general survey.

### *2.3.2 Case study selection*

In Wales and Cornwall, the industrial past dominated local culture, lifestyles and economic wellbeing. Mining was transformative in these areas, both during the industrial period and with the subsequent deindustrialisation. The industry left a significant legacy, not only in terms of the economic landscape but in broader public memory and conceptions of Cornish and Welsh identities.<sup>35</sup> Industrial decline had a significant impact on local communities, hence mining heritage has an enduring cultural importance as well as potentially performing regenerative economic or social functions in the present. These factors made mining heritage a particularly interesting case for exploring the process of transition to heritage, the way in which social experience becomes historicised or ‘heritagised’, and the relationship between heritage and living memory.

More specifically, the project involved a comparative study of the development of two prominent heritage sites; Big Pit coal mine in Blaenavon (South Wales) and Geevor Tin Mine in Cornwall. In selecting Big Pit and Geevor for case study research, there were several important considerations. The two sites have a number of similarities and differences, supporting their appropriateness for a comparative study. The sites are similar in some respects; both made a rapid transition to heritage post-closure in communities which had been hard-hit by the decline of the influential mining industry. As a result, both are contexts in which heritage narratives meet living memory, where similar points of contestation occur. However, there are also significant differences,

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<sup>35</sup> This will be argued in more detail in Chapter 3.

which allowed for analysis of the ways in which these different contexts affected both the development of the sites and the way in which heritage is perceived in these areas. For example, the sites themselves have different ownership and management structures, levels of funding and professionalism, as well as more broad variations in their contexts (timescales of industrial decline and closure, geographical location and the prevalence of tourism and heritage in Wales and Cornwall more broadly).

As mentioned above, one of the central aims of the project was to understand the interaction of heritage and living memory. This was a key motivation for carrying out this research in Blaenavon and Pendeen, where it was possible to carry out oral history interviews with those involved in the heritage sites at various levels as well as examiners and members of the community, to fully investigate these issues. Furthermore, Big Pit and Geevor are the largest and most successful mining heritage sites in Wales and Cornwall, meaning that they are both accessible and prominent in public consciousness. Although some academic studies have been carried out at Big Pit (mainly focusing on tourism), no similar work has been undertaken at these sites, particularly from a comparative perspective.<sup>36</sup> Other mining heritage sites in the UK (for example, The National Coal Mining Museum in Wakefield, Durham Mining Museum and Rhondda Heritage Park) were considered, but it was decided that due to time and space constraints that an in-depth study such as this would be best served by focusing on two sites.<sup>37</sup>

In terms of the role of the case studies in the context of the research questions, the intent was not to provide a strictly comparative study of the heritagisation of mining in Wales and Cornwall. While distinct similarities and differences are flagged throughout, the argument focuses on building a conceptual model of heritagisation and memory, rather than relying on comparative elements as a central point of analysis. As with critical qualitative methodologies, comparisons are only possible in some regards (particularly where social constructivist ideas are utilised), and these have only been highlighted where they have a significant impact on the theoretical issues under consideration. As

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<sup>36</sup> For example, see Stephen Wanhill, 'Mines—A Tourist Attraction: Coal Mining in Industrial South Wales', *Journal of Travel Research*, 39 (2000), 60–69; Calvin Jones and Max Munday, 'Blaenavon and United Nations World Heritage Site Status: Is Conservation of Industrial Heritage a Road to Local Economic Development?', *Regional Studies*, 35 (2001), 585–590; Richard C. Prentice, Stephen F. Witt and Claire Hamer, 'Tourism as Experience: The Case of Heritage Parks', *Annals of Tourism Research*, 25 (1998), 1–24.

<sup>37</sup> An in-depth study of Rhondda Heritage Park has also been carried out by Bella Dicks, see Bella Dicks, *Heritage, Place and Community* (University of Wales Press, 2000).

such, carrying out two case studies has allowed for sensitivity to the particularities of each case, but each has individually contributed the empirical basis for a more generalised conceptual approach.

### *2.3.3 Refining aims and research questions*

Having identified the broad conceptual framework and case studies to be used, it was then necessary to refine the specific aims of the study, leading to a more detailed set of research questions. Firstly, before analysing the relationship between heritage and memory more generally, the study needed to address the process of heritagisation at Geevor and Big Pit specifically. As argued in Chapter 1, theorisations of heritage have moved from seeing heritage as innate or fixed to a much more plural interpretation, which allows space for the notion that heritages are (to an extent) socially constructed through practices and discourses of preservation. These, in turn, are highly politicised and shaped by existing value-systems and power relations.<sup>38</sup> As such, establishing the way in which these heritage sites were conceived in their local contexts, and the roles of the relevant stakeholders in each case, was the initial priority. Within this context, it was then necessary to establish how these institutional heritage narratives were constructed, in order to go on to compare them with memory (in its various forms).

The research then aimed to assess how these agendas interacted in these specific local contexts, with particular attention to the local community. The tricky relationship between social experience and its representation through heritage was identified as a potential source of conflict due to the rapid transition to heritage in these areas and the co-existence of heritage narratives and living memory. As such, the study needed to establish what sorts of living memories of the mining past were present at Geevor and Big Pit, and whether they reflected or contradicted institutional heritage narratives. Finally, the study aimed to draw these potentially different perspectives together in order to analyse the role of heritagisation in the construction of broader public or cultural memories.

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<sup>38</sup> Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage*; G. J. Ashworth, Brian Graham and J. E. Tunbridge.

As a result, the following research questions were posed:

1. What were the specific motivations for heritagisation at Big Pit and Geevor? What particular values or discourses are associated with a mining past via heritage in Wales and Cornwall?
2. What is the relationship between heritagisation and living memory in these cases?
3. Do heritage sites construct or maintain cultural memory in Blaenavon and Pendeen? Which narratives of the past are preserved and why?
4. Based on this study, how can we characterise the relationship between heritage and different layers of memory?

## **2.4 Methodology: Opportunities and challenges**

This research was undoubtedly best-served by a mixed methods approach, allowing for the analysis of different agendas and contests through multiple forms of source. The research was carried out in two phases, broadly in line with the two key concepts; heritagisation and memory.

### *2.4.1 Archive research*

Investigating the process of heritagisation involved extensive archive research, taking both factual/contextual and analytical approach to the relevant documents. Archive research has long been the primary methodology for historians, and is still extremely influential in the study of History. As John Tosh notes, 'The fact remains...that the study of history has nearly always been based squarely on what the historian can read in documents or printed material.'<sup>39</sup> Archives have traditionally been considered to be the most 'reliable' form of historical source, at least in terms of the positivist-empiricist approach to History which has been dominant since the inception of the discipline. Of course, the research which can be carried out based on archive research is inherently

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<sup>39</sup> John Tosh and Seán Lang, *The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods, And New Directions in the Study of Modern History* (Pearson Education, 2006), p. 89.

limited by what is preserved.<sup>40</sup> This is influenced by both political and logistical factors affecting the process of archiving, as Thomson and McLeod note.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, Gobo et al. note that ‘the parts of a collection that find their way into an archive, either personal or public, may not represent the original collection in its entirety.’<sup>42</sup> This means that historians need to be critical in the way they approach archive resources rather than making the assumption that they are either ‘complete’ or ‘representative’ of the past in a general sense.

More recently, archive research has been challenged as the *modus operandi* of historical research on two fronts. With the growth of social and cultural history, there has been an accompanying diversification of what was considered to be a historical source (oral history, visual sources, material artefacts etc.).<sup>43</sup> Perhaps more fundamentally, however, postmodernist theory has fundamentally challenged the sanctity of the ‘text’ and arguably undermined historians’ ability to ‘reconstruct’ the past. Indeed, there is a complex relationship between the researcher and their sources, which is shaped by existing preconceptions and research aims.<sup>44</sup> As a result, historians are more and more aware of the need to be transparent in the way they interrogate their sources, but also their own role in shaping the interpretation of the primary material. Jordanova notes this, suggesting that we need to guard against a ‘smooth, thoughtless, naive transition between the sources and the claims historians make’, being wary not to take sources at face value.<sup>45</sup>

Following these critical developments, historians have moved away from strict empiricism to take more nuanced approaches. Cultural history, for example, has focused on narrative and meaning of sources and texts, in order resolve these issues and open up new strands of historical enquiry.<sup>46</sup> We have to concede that it is not possible to *reconstruct* the past in any pure sense, rather construct a *representation* from a collection of existing representations. Given the aims of this research, the project drew on a cultural perspective in order to establish how certain heritage values were

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<sup>40</sup> John Tosh and Seán Lang.

<sup>41</sup> Rachel Thomson and Julie McLeod, *Researching Social Change: Qualitative Approaches* (SAGE, 2009), p. 36.

<sup>42</sup> Gobo and others, p. 306.

<sup>43</sup> Donald M. MacRaild and Jeremy Black, *Studying History* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Tosh and Lang; Jordanova.

<sup>44</sup> Gobo and others.

<sup>45</sup> Jordanova, p. 200.

<sup>46</sup> Green, *Cultural History*.

constructed and the sorts of meanings they ascribed to the past. In this respect, the methodology employed here also drew on recent work emanating from heritage studies. As mentioned above, Smith and others have argued that heritage values are socially constructed through discourse, hence discourse analysis has become more prevalent as a way of studying the representation of the past through heritage.<sup>47</sup> Of course, discourse analysis is a broadly accepted methodological framework in its own right.<sup>48</sup> Smith identifies a workable definition of discourse, drawing on Hajer, who broadly defines discourse as ‘a specific ensemble of ideas, concepts and categorisations that are produced, reproduced, and transformed in a particular set of practices through which meaning is given to physical and social realities’.<sup>49</sup> As such, discourse analysis has a lot to offer historians in general and public historians in particular (as we will see later).

#### 2.4.2 Oral history

As argued above, oral history is a common research method in the humanities and social sciences and is, as Tosh notes, ‘fully established as a legitimate source for historians.’<sup>50</sup> For this research, the use of oral history methodology had a number of benefits. Firstly, oral testimonies were crucial sources in order to get beneath ‘official’ account or discourses and to access the potential points of contest when heritage meets living memory. As Yow has pointed out ‘The in-depth interview is indispensable for probing behind the public-oriented statement.’<sup>51</sup> In these terms, oral testimonies were used to evaluate the process of heritagisation in the light of living memory.

Oral history is undoubtedly the most appropriate method for analysing living memory. Oral interviews produce sources on subjects often not documented in the written record, and more importantly, historians can also gain insights into the ways in which people understand and use the past in their everyday lives (or their historical consciousness in

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<sup>47</sup> Mary Hufford, *Conserving Culture: a New Discourse on Heritage* (University of Illinois Press, 1994); Laurajane Smith; Emma Waterton, Laurajane Smith and Gary Campbell, ‘The Utility of Discourse Analysis to Heritage Studies: The Burra Charter and Social Inclusion’, *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 12 (2006), 339–355.

<sup>48</sup> There is a vast literature on discourse analysis and its application within the humanities and social sciences. For useful introductions, see Marianne W. Jørgensen and Louise J. Phillips, *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method* (SAGE, 2002); Norm Fairclough, *Analysis Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research* (Routledge, 2003).

<sup>49</sup> Maarten A. Hajer, *The Politics of Environmental Discourse: Ecological Modernization and the Policy Process* (Oxford University Press, USA, 1997); Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, p. 14.

<sup>50</sup> Tosh and Lang, p. 89.

<sup>51</sup> Yow, p. 10.

Jensen's terms).<sup>52</sup> Analysing oral history data also gave empirical grounding to the concept of cultural memory. As mentioned in chapter 1, the concept of cultural memory has been made prominent as a framework for analysis in this research due to its focus on the role of institutional narratives of the past and their influence on broader public consciousness.<sup>53</sup> Importantly, this more generalised theory is to some extent made measurable through oral history. Through the analysis of various oral narratives, it was possible to trace the influence of heritage discourses in different interviewees' personalised accounts. In turn, it was then possible to evaluate the complex relationship between heritage narratives, living memory and broader cultural memory.

There are, of course, limitations to oral history as a research method, a point often revived among more traditional empiricist historians. When oral history first emerged as a sub-discipline in the 1970s, some historians were particularly wary about the 'inaccuracy' or 'unreliability' of memory as a historical source.<sup>54</sup> Nonetheless, as oral historians retorted, these sorts of criticisms could apply to any historical source, including archive and documentary sources (as we saw above). Beyond this, the cultural approach to oral history largely circumvented these worries, as oral historians do not perceive 'inaccuracy', 'misremembering' or the influence of external narratives on oral testimonies as limitations, but opportunities for further analysis.

However, oral historians do need to be wary of the way in which their methodology may influence both the oral source they 'create' and the written product of their research. Oral histories are constructed sources, which are fundamentally shaped by the interviewer-interviewee dynamic. As Yow notes, 'In any investigation of another's life, ways to analyze are a choice of the interpreter, and the resulting interpretations are never definitive.'<sup>55</sup> Portelli similarly shows that 'oral historians have become increasingly aware that oral history is a dialogic discourse, created not only by what the interviewees say, but by what we as historians do – by the historian's presence in the field, and by the historian's presentation of the material.'<sup>56</sup> In fact, it has been argued that the most fruitful oral history interviews amount to an ongoing dialogue, amounting

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<sup>52</sup> Paul Thompson; Jensen.

<sup>53</sup> <sup>53</sup> Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka, 'Collective Memory and Cultural Identity', *New German Critique*, 1995, 125–133.

<sup>54</sup> Noted in Perks and Alistair Thomson.

<sup>55</sup> Yow, p. 307.

<sup>56</sup> Alessandro Portelli, 'A Cluster of Genres: Genre in Oral History, Oral History as Genre', in *Narrative & Genre: Contexts and Types of Communication*, ed. by Mary Chamberlain and Paul Thompson (Transaction Publishers, 2004), p. 23.

to what Thomson has called a ‘dialectical process between the researched and the researcher and a continuum of conversation, reflection and analysis’.<sup>57</sup> Naturally, there is some extent to which the interviewer may have shaped the stories which were told. There has been some detailed research carried out into this relationship, particularly from a feminist perspective.<sup>58</sup> With regard to the present study, these issues will be discussed in detail below.

## **2.5 Sources and data collection**

The study drew on a number of sources, both documentary and original oral history interviews carried out by the researcher.

### *2.5.1 Documentary sources*

During the course of the research, a number of different archives were accessed, with a view to establishing information on the nature of the site closures, details of proposals and moves to heritage, and to establish detailed historical narratives as to how the transition to heritage was made in each case. In both cases, this involved accessing local government archives, records from the heritage sites themselves, and the local and national press. Archive visits were carried out between September 2009 and September 2011.

In Wales, research was carried out at the Gwent Record Office, the Blaenavon World Heritage Centre archive as well as the Big Pit Trust archive (held at the site itself). In Cornwall, resources included the Cornwall Record Office, the Cornish Studies Library and Geevor’s own archive kept on site. In both cases, combining these resources allowed access to an enormous range of documents relating to the closure of the mine, feasibility studies regarding the proposed heritage site, as well as more recent printed sources, such as funding applications and promotional material.<sup>59</sup> Accessing the

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<sup>57</sup> A Thomson, quoted in I Roncaglia, Conference Report from ‘Analysing Recorded Interviews: Making sense of Oral History’, London, 2003 in *Forum: Social Research*, 5:1 (2004).

<sup>58</sup> For examples, see Valerie Raleigh Yow, “‘Do I Like Them Too Much?’: Effects of the Oral History Interview on the Interviewer and Vice-Versa”, *Oral History Review*, 24 (1997), 55–79; Kathryn Anderson and Dana C. Jack, ‘Learning to Listen: Interview Techniques and Analyses’, in *Women’s Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, ed. by Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai (Routledge, 1991).

<sup>59</sup> For a full list of resources accessed, please refer to the Bibliography.

archives gave an insight into the way the heritage sites have developed over time (for example, through funding agendas, visitor numbers and management plans). Centrally, the documentary evidence allowed for an analysis of the way heritage was conceived and promoted through 'official' channels, and the discourse which emerged and developed in relation to this process (as shown in Chapter 4).

There were some challenges involved in the collection of archive sources. Geevor's archive proved to be very substantial, including a wide range of documents saved at the time the mine closed. The archive was not catalogued at the time the research was carried out, making it very difficult to establish what would be of use for the purposes of the research. Further to this, Geevor has a complex history of ownership and management (described in Chapter 3) and there were very few documents available relating to the management of the site from the years before 2001. This was due to the fact that the site was managed by the Trevithick Trust who left no records when they lost their management contract. However, it was possible to access related information via the Geevor Advisory Group, whose meeting minutes were deposited in the Cornwall Record Office, as well as secondary sources provided in historical accounts of Geevor in other documents such as management plans and funding applications. In general terms, it was possible to collate similar documentary sources from each of the sites, while ensuring that a reasonable number of documents were collected in order to corroborate different accounts.

### *2.5.2 Interviews*

Oral history interviews made up the majority of the data analysed for the purposes of this thesis. During the course of the project, over thirty interviews were carried out with a range of people involved in the creation of the heritage sites as well as those living in the local areas. All interviews were carried out between September 2010 and December 2011.

Interviewees were selected in order to maximise the range of perspectives encountered. Initially, verbal negotiations took place with heritage site management at both Geevor and Big Pit, where the aims and parameters of the project were explained. Interviews began with staff at the sites and further interviewees were then recruited by snowballing from these contacts and directly when spending time at the sites. Interview participants

were also recruited externally, through local advertising (in newsletters and shops) in order to provide a more representative sample of interviewees and to access a wider range of opinion. The table below shows a spread of the interview cohort.

	<b>Big Pit and Blaenavon</b>	<b>Geevor and Pendeen</b>
Site management/staff	2	4
Miner-guides	8	3
Other guides	N/A	1
Other ex-miners	1	2
Local residents (long-term)	5	1
Local residents (incomers)	2	2
Focus groups	7 miner-guides	5 local residents

Interviewing management and staff at the sites gave an insight into how the ‘official line’ plays out, how the agenda or purpose of the heritage site is promoted (from different perspectives), funding schedules, the perception of the site’s place within the community, and the (sometimes antagonistic) relationship between tourism and the commemorative cultural value of heritage. At both Geevor and Big Pit, the current managers were interviewed, as well as a previous manager of Big Pit who was contacted privately. In both cases, curators were also interviewed, and were especially interesting in terms of providing information on which elements of the past are preserved and why, the specific emphasis of the exhibitions and what markets they are aimed at. In Big Pit’s case, their curator is also an ex-miner who retrained as a museum specialist, providing another more nuanced perspective.

Naturally, there are limitations when interviewing heritage site staff, as their responses will be shaped by their present responsibilities to an extent. We would expect management staff, particularly, to conform to the official institutional perspective, though this in reality proved far more complex (as we will see in Chapter 5). At Big Pit, for example, the manager interviewed is an ex-miner who proved to be surprisingly candid about his own memories of mining, his experience of the mine closures and his scepticism of heritagisation. Nonetheless, in other sections of the interview, he did show signs of being more entrenched in his current role as a heritage manager. It is noted that this provided both a challenge and an opportunity when analysing these sorts of accounts. Unpicking the ways in which ex-miners employed at the sites drew on their

autobiographical memories and more official discourses in different sections of the interview in fact gave an insight into how they negotiate these different narratives (as shown in chapters 5 and 6).

These trends were also observed when interviewing ex-miners working as tour guides at both Geevor and Big Pit. Interviews with miners aimed to discover what the mining industry and its decline meant to them, and their thoughts on the subsequent transition to heritage and tourism. While miner-guides were on the whole very open and seemingly unrestricted, we have to acknowledge that they are positioned not only as ex-miners but employees of the heritage site which could potentially limit the responses they gave and the memories they were willing to share. As such, both the process of interviewing and the subsequent analysis operated at number of levels. Again, this was incorporated into the analysis of interview data, rather than being necessarily restrictive. Nonetheless, it was particularly important to interview a wide range of ex-miners, some of whom had no present connection with the sites. This both allowed for a broader range of perspectives but also for the analysis across these positions (i.e. how miner-guides' perspectives might compare or contrast to those of other ex-miners).

Other local residents were also interviewed in order to explore how the process of heritagisation was experienced 'on the ground'. Again, here, a conscious effort was made to recruit interviewees who were newcomers to these communities, as well as those who had lived through the process of deindustrialisation and heritagisation. This allowed for a much broader analysis of the impact of heritage narratives on cultural memory, by reviewing these trends across a diverse sample of interviewees who had very different levels of personal attachment with Geevor or Big Pit.

As argued above, there are a number of other factors which shape the data gathered from oral history interviews, not least the way in which the interviewer shapes the exchange, both in tangible ways (e.g. the questions asked and approach taken) but in more subtle ways as well. For this research, interviews were all in-depth and semi-structured. In all cases, the interviews departed from a list of key questions/themes but, allowed the trajectory of the interviews to be largely determined by the narrators.<sup>60</sup> For the purposes of this project, the interviewer took a flexible approach, allowing

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<sup>60</sup> This is an approach recommended by a wide range of oral historians. For a useful interviewing guide, see Yow, *Recording Oral History*.

interviewees the space to develop their own narratives within a general structure. Some questions or themes were consistent throughout the interviews, despite slightly different emphases between some of the interviews (e.g. with curators and local residents). Maintaining some consistency in the questions asked allowed comparisons to be drawn between respondents' perspectives. As Green and Hutching have noted:

Asking multiple interviewees the same or similar questions has the advantage of creating a comparable body of information. But whether the goal is to record a life-narrative or focus on a specific aspect of the past, the best approach is a flexible dialogue in which the interviewer's research questions can be combined with questions generated by the interviewee's narrative.<sup>61</sup>

Again here, the importance of an adaptable approach to interviewing is stressed, particularly within the more common life narrative approach. Elements of the life narrative technique were adopted, but interviews were slightly more targeted, rather than strictly taking a full life-narrative approach. All interviews departed from general questions regarding interviewees' backgrounds which allowed the interviewer to establish essential information about the narrators which could influence their perspectives (where they were from, previous jobs and the nature of their connections with mining or mining heritage). Though all interviewees began by asking open-ended life history questions, full life-narratives were not strictly possible in all cases due to the number of interviewees, the specific nature of the subject being explored and the restricted time available for interviews. Broadly, the objectives of undertaking the interviews were; to find out people's background and their experience and memories of mining, to establish the way in which they perceived the value of the mining past (both within their own life narratives and to the area more generally), and to get a sense of their opinions of the heritage sites in this context. In this respect, the data gathered was inevitably shaped by the aims of the research, given its specific context and area of interest. However, by maintaining a flexible interview approach, rather than listing set questions, narrators were allowed space to develop lines of enquiry which they felt were important.

As mentioned earlier, it was necessary to consider the social dynamics of the interview relationship and how this could affect responses. Certainly, as with any social interaction, interview dynamics are shaped by age, gender and class relationships which could, in turn, shape narrators' responses. Particularly, given the fact that the majority

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<sup>61</sup> Green and Hutching, p. 15.

of interviewees were older men, and the researcher a much younger female, age and gender dynamics may have shaped the way certain stories were told, where ex-miners may have been influenced by what they thought would be ‘appropriate’ in this sort of exchange. Nonetheless, as mentioned above, interviewees were very candid in most cases, and as far as it can be assumed, I did not perceive any instances of self-censorship. However, where this may have been apparent is when interviewees came to justify why they felt it was important to preserve the past (see Chapter 6). It is possible that my own position as an academic historian (and being associated with the University) may have influenced the way in which people constructed a sense of value around the past. In particular, when discussing why the mining past was valuable, interviewees often focused on the ‘historic’ elements of the mining past rather than their own experience. This was no doubt shaped by other factors as well (as I go on to argue). Overall, it must be conceded that the role of the interviewer shaped the data to an extent, as with any oral history research.

### 2.5.3 Focus groups

Adding to individual oral history interviews, two focus groups were carried out, one in Blaenavon and one in Pendeen. Conducting focus groups is a commonly-used research methodology in social science used commonly for the purposes of ethnography, participant observation and behavioural research.<sup>62</sup> Barbour et al define focus groups as ‘group discussions exploring a specific set of issues. The group is “focused” in that it involves some kind of collective activity such as viewing a video, examining a single health promotion message, or simply debating a set of questions.’<sup>63</sup>

Like any research method, focus groups have strengths and weaknesses.<sup>64</sup> Unlike one-to-one interviewing, in focus groups participants can ‘create an audience for each other’, allowing them to develop their own questions or lines of enquiry, to ‘bounce off’ one another, and to focus on ‘attitudes and experiences’.<sup>65</sup> In addition, it is possible to gather concentrated amounts of data on topic of interest, efficient, deeper insights into participants’ opinions and experiences, comparison across viewpoints.<sup>66</sup> On the other

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<sup>62</sup> David W. Stewart, Dennis W. Rook and Prem N. Shamdasani, *Focus Groups: Theory and Practice* (SAGE, 2006).

<sup>63</sup> Rosaline Barbour, *Doing Focus Groups* (SAGE, 2008), p. 4.

<sup>64</sup> David L. Morgan, *Focus Groups as Qualitative Research* (SAGE, 1996).

<sup>65</sup> Barbour, p. 4.

<sup>66</sup> David L. Morgan, p. 14.

hand, transcribing is complex and challenging due to the number of contributors and the relative lack of structure. In similar terms to oral history methodology, the role of the researcher to an extent shapes responses by setting the agenda and through their methods of facilitation. In addition, focus groups involve other dynamics not found in the individual oral history setting. Some participants may be more prominent, with others may feel restricted by dominant viewpoints. As such, moderating focus groups is a complex skill.<sup>67</sup>

Certainly, the addition of focus groups to this research was a positive one. Group discussion opened up more varied discussion among participants. Beyond this, they provided an insight into how collective narratives are constructed and ascribed to by groups in these contexts. Due to limitations on time and resources, only two focus groups were carried out, essentially to supplement interview data, rather than as a primary research method. At Big Pit, seven miner guides took part in the focus group. This was partly due to the fact that not all miner-guides wanted to take part in individual interviews, and partly because there were benefits to this format being used (as stated above). In the case of the miner-guides specifically, there were similar patterns in the way the men remembered the past and told their stories, and this was illuminated in detail in the focus group data (as we will see in Chapter 5). At Geevor, guides were happy to be interviewed individually rather than in a group, and there was a much smaller pool of guides to draw from. As a result, a focus group took place with local residents rather than miner-guides, in order to access a wide range of public opinion in an efficient manner.

However, focus groups did indeed have limitations, many of which are inherent to the use of this method. For example, participants in the Pendeen focus group were recruited through snowballing and advertising through the local newsletter and village shop. Of course, those who attend these sorts of events were most likely those who are relatively engaged with the community, hence the focus group might not have been strictly representative on its own. However, alongside interview data, a broad range of opinions and experiences were harnessed in both cases.

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<sup>67</sup> Claudia Puchta and Jonathan Potter, *Focus Group Practice* (SAGE, 2004).

#### 2.5.4 Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues naturally needed to be considered when carrying out interviews and focus groups. The project followed a strict ethical code of practice drawn from the Oral History Society's guidelines.<sup>68</sup> In addition, the project was approved by the College of Humanities ethics panel (University of Exeter) in 2010. In all interviews, participants took part voluntarily and had the opportunity to refuse or withdraw at any time. Written consent was obtained in all cases using a consent form (Appendix 1), which explained the purpose of the interview, how the material would be used and the participant's rights. Participants kept a copy as did the researcher. Participants could also request a copy of the audio recording if they wished.

Anonymity was a complex issue, and could only be strictly offered to some participants. Within the heritage sites themselves, it proved impossible to offer anonymity in some cases, as staff members were well-known and it was necessary to refer to their positions throughout the research in order to give context to the statements made. This was discussed with the relevant participants at the heritage sites before the interviews took place. At Big Pit, certain miner-guides chose to be anonymous with the agreement that they would be given pseudonyms and their roles could be referred to. Offering anonymity to participants in the local community was incredibly valuable given the potentially sensitive nature of the material. As a result, members of the community participating were able to do so anonymously if they wished.

Most interviews took place at the heritage sites themselves, for convenience and safety. Some interviews took place in participants' homes at their request. This was often in cases where it was more convenient for the interviewee, and a quiet, comfortable environment was needed for the interview and recording to be carried out. Recordings and indexes were kept securely by the researcher during the course of the project. Recordings remain in the possession of the researcher.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> See <http://www.oralhistory.org.uk/ethics/index.php> last accessed November 2012.

<sup>69</sup> At the conclusion of the project, recordings may be transferred to the sites' own archives in cases where permission to archive the recordings was granted. Negotiations are underway to this effect.

## 2.6 Analysis

This thesis began with the aim of investigating different facets of the dialogue between the past and present, with heritage and memory as its key concerns. Indeed, academic analyses of public representations of the past and of oral history testimonies do not only focus on what these narratives contain, but why they are represented or told in certain ways and, ultimately, how meaning about the past is constructed in the present. As such, the analysis of both the documentary and interview sources operated at two levels; content and narrative.

Firstly, the research established how the past was represented through official heritage narratives and living memories: which stories were being told, which elements were prominent etc. Secondly, narrative analysis was undertaken in order to establish how these accounts constructed a sense of meaning in relation to the mining past, why it was valued in the present, and in what sense. In this regard, similar modes of analysis were used across the different sources, allowing for these to be compared and the relationship between heritage narratives and memory more clearly modelled.

Analysis of the documentary evidence involved simple content analysis and more nuanced discourse analysis. As mentioned above, following the application of discourse analysis in heritage studies, the conceptualisation of discourse used here is a generalised one. Discourse in this context is used in the broadest sense as a descriptive term for a set of ideas or frameworks of meaning which are promoted by heritage planners and managers. The purpose of this was to establish the sorts of values which were attached to heritage and the sorts of narratives of the past which were promoted, in order to analyse how these drew on, fed into or were contradicted by living memories. More specifically, the analysis took inspiration from Philips and Jorgensen's framework for delineating discourses, focusing on four key elements; aspects of the world to which the discourses ascribe meaning, the particular ways in which each of the discourses ascribes meaning, points on which there is an open struggle between different representations and understandings naturalised in all of the discourses as 'common sense'.<sup>70</sup> Of course, the heritage discourses identified should not be treated as fixed. They inevitably change

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<sup>70</sup> Jørgensen and Louise J. Phillips, p. 145.

over time in line with changing social, political and economic priorities (for example, changing funding priorities). Necessarily, this sort of analysis involves some oversimplification, however, the point of this thesis is not to strictly examine the nature of constructed heritage discourses but the relationship between heritage and memory more generally. In this way, the approach balances more traditional empiricist historical research and a social constructivist perspective; it interrogates how values and meanings of heritage are narrated, while situating these trends within more concrete historical and cultural contexts.

Analysis of oral history interview data drew from more conventional oral history methodology. Oral historians have utilised a range of interpretive approaches and there is not necessarily consensus as to one singular analytical approach. Paul Thompson's *The Voice of the Past* provides a useful guide, outlining four ways in which oral history can be 'put together'; the 'single life story narrative', 'a collection of stories', 'narrative analysis' and 'reconstructive cross-analysis'.<sup>71</sup> As Thompson recommends, it is possible to draw upon several of these techniques based on the aims of the project and the number of interviewees. However, for the purposes of this project, narrative analysis was the preferred method in order to establish an overall sense of how the individual constructed the significance of the transition to heritage in the context of their experiences.

The specific analytical technique used here drew on a number of approaches. Kathryn Anderson and Dana Jack have usefully identified three key points to look for in this sort of analysis: 'Meta-statements' where the interviewee reflects on their own story; the 'logic of the narrative' or the way themes and issues relate to each other; and 'moral language' which helps understand the sorts of value systems and relationships being expressed.<sup>72</sup> In this case, the logic of the narrative and moral language were useful devices when analysing interviews, in order to understand how narrators used their experience of the past to construct meaning in the present. Narrative analysis also involves identifying other influences on the way individuals construct their stories. Oral historians have long been concerned with the interaction of autobiographical memory and well-established cultural narratives and symbols. Samuel and Thompson note that cultural myth is all around us, and is frequently incorporated into life narratives. They

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<sup>71</sup> Paul Thompson, pp. 269–270.

<sup>72</sup> Kathryn Anderson and Jack.

suggest that there is a continual interaction ‘old symbolic fables, and archetypal images on the one hand, and individual lives on the other’.<sup>73</sup>

Indeed, one of the aims of the thesis was to establish how heritage discourses impact on individual and cultural memories. In this vein, analysis of interview data also drew on two related frameworks; the ‘cultural theory of remembering’ and ‘composure’ (as discussed above).<sup>74</sup> Using a cultural frame of analysis meant tracing parallels between individual accounts and heritage discourses in order to analyse how and why established interpretations were adopted or challenged by interviewees. Composure then became relevant in justifying why interviewees may draw on established narratives; to ‘compose’ meaning from their life stories but also to seek ‘composure’ by relating stories which made sense in the context of dominant narratives and existing public consciousness.<sup>75</sup> Most importantly, narrative analysis allowed the study to go beyond how autobiographical memory contradicted or corroborated ‘official’ accounts, to comparing the way in which different meanings about the past constructed through these different discursive practices.

## 2.7 Conclusion

As I have suggested, public history, oral history and memory studies share a great deal of conceptual common ground but there has been little cohesion across these approaches in terms of methodological approach. There is certainly a need for a more rigorously defined methodology in public history, where representations of the past and their use in the present are key concerns. Therefore, in order to investigate the broad question posed at the outset of this thesis, a specific interdisciplinary methodology needed to be developed. The methodology implemented here has been designed to give empirical grounding to the broad theoretical question of how heritage narratives and memory interact and relate to each other. Particularly, by investigating two case studies where heritagisation and memory coexist, the study also incorporated a comparative element, which both provided a broader sample for assessing these relationships, and questioned how contextual differences play a part in the heritage-memory dynamic.

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<sup>73</sup> Samuel and Thompson, p. 14.

<sup>74</sup> Alistair Thomson, ‘Anzac Memories’; Alistair Thomson, *Anzac Memories*.

<sup>75</sup> For more detailed use of these concepts, see Chapter 6.

In order to investigate these questions, the study primarily drew on archive and oral history sources (both commonplace in historical research) but involved a cultural approach in the analysis of these sources, focusing on the flow of meaning between past and present. The objective was to analyse (as Summerfield puts it) ‘not only the narrative offered, but also the meanings invested and their discursive origins’.<sup>76</sup> Heritage narratives and living memory (through oral testimony) were viewed as two different sorts of recollection and representation of the mining past which exist alongside each other. Accordingly, the study incorporated identifying what these potentially different narratives were, and more importantly, how they constructed different meanings or values about the past in the present. This was done with a view to establishing how these processes interact; how institutional narratives of the past impact on living memory and broader public or cultural memories. This substantive analysis forms Chapters 4, 5 and 6 of the thesis. However, having laid the theoretical and methodological groundwork for the study, it is first necessary to contextualise these questions within their specific historical and local contexts.

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<sup>76</sup> Summerfield, 65-93.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Mining Heritage Contexts in Wales and Cornwall**

This chapter sets the scene for the following empirical sections by placing Big Pit and Geevor within their broad historical contexts. As argued in Chapter 1, we need to avoid interpreting heritage as a singular concept or practice. Instead, before empirically analysing the interaction of heritage and memory, we need to more fully understand how the past comes to be commodified and represented as heritage in particular contexts. This chapter provides the background to the mining heritage case study sites, both locally and in terms of the broader significance of the mining past. Firstly, based on secondary historiography, it will review the histories of mining in Wales and Cornwall and their points of comparison/contrast, which are relevant in setting up potentially different contexts for the transition to heritage in each case. Secondly, combining existing historical accounts with some primary documentary sources, it will introduce Geevor and Big Pit in general terms, describing the histories of the two sites and situating them in their local community contexts.

#### **3.1 Histories of mining in Wales and Cornwall**

Understanding of the histories of mining in these areas not only allows contrasts and comparisons to be drawn between the Welsh and Cornish experiences but to gain a sense of the ‘impact’ of mining and the interpretive narratives constructed by historians in relation to this. In addition, it raises central questions as to why the mining past might still be valued, how it comes to be remembered or celebrated through heritage representations, and what resonance these representations may have (questions which will be addressed in subsequent empirical chapters).

In both Wales and Cornwall, mining is rightly considered to have been transformative not only in terms of the economy but the physical landscape, national/regional culture and constructions of modern Welsh and Cornish identities. Historians of both Wales and Cornwall traced the turbulent histories of mining and its broad impact in boom and in bust. The following section briefly traces the chronological development and decline of

the mining industries in Cornwall and south Wales and draw out similarities and differences from these accounts. On the basis of this comparison, it will then consider what implications the complex legacies of decline could have for the implementation of mining heritage in these areas.

### *3.1.1 Mining in Cornwall*

Cornwall has a long history of industry with the mining of copper and tin at the forefront. Some mining activity has been traced as far back as the Bronze Age, but large-scale metal extraction did not begin until the eighteenth century.<sup>1</sup> Copper mining was initially prevalent until the 1840s, with the boom in tin mining occurring slightly later in the nineteenth century. The fortunes of copper and tin in Cornwall took slightly different (but intertwined) trajectories, and both were ultimately reliant on the world economy, in the same way as coal mining would be later in Wales. By the early nineteenth century, the Cornish economy was largely dominated by copper and tin mining, employing about a third of the population.<sup>2</sup> Expansion of the industry and technological development continued and culminated in the boom of the 1860s when there were over 340 mines in Cornwall, and both the tonnage produced and value of mineral production was at its highest (£1.9 million in 1859).<sup>3</sup> Boom was accompanied by a strong sense of Cornwall as an industrial region, backed by pride in Cornwall's industrial prowess and new-found significance on the world stage.

It is often asserted that mining not only transformed Cornwall materially, but also impacted on the construction of a Cornish identity. Payton has encapsulated this view, suggesting that industrialisation redefined, but maintained Cornwall's 'difference' from England, a key characteristic of the distinctiveness of Cornish identities.<sup>4</sup> Payton labelled this as a shift from an 'old peripheralism' to a 'second peripheralism', which transformed the image of Cornwall from a 'West Barbary' to a dynamic internationally

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<sup>1</sup> J. A. Buckley, *The Cornish Mining Industry: a Brief History* (Tor Mark Press, 1992).

<sup>2</sup> Philip Payton and Bernard Deacon, 'Reinventing Cornwall: Culture Change on the European Periphery', *Cornish Studies*, 1 (1993).

<sup>3</sup> Buckley: Bernard Deacon, 'Mining the Data: What Can a Quantitative Approach Tell Us About the Micro-Geography of Nineteenth Century Cornish Mining?' in Philip Payton (ed.), *Cornish Studies Eighteen* (University of Exeter Press, 2010), 15-32.

<sup>4</sup> Philip Payton, *The Making of Modern Cornwall: Historical Experience and the Persistence of Difference*, 1st ed. (Truran, 1992).

significant industrial region.<sup>5</sup> Deacon has similarly argued that Cornwall emerged as a new industrial region with a new tradition and self-confidence, inspiring cultural change (though suggesting that there were differences between internal and external constructions of Cornwall).<sup>6</sup> Mining arguably provided a central point for a shared Cornish experience which had a cultural impact as well as an economic one, an influential structure against which Cornish identities could be constructed.

This period of success, however, was relatively short-lived. Mining in Cornwall experienced a long decline from the 1860s onwards, with copper and then tin falling victim to continuing price crashes and being outdone by foreign competition. However, the pattern of decline was not simply linear. It suffered fluctuations and was not experienced homogeneously throughout Cornwall. Despite the common assertion that by 1900 mining in Cornwall was virtually over, a closer look reveals a more subtle picture of contraction and concentration of activity on the 'central mining district' (particularly the parishes of Camborne and Illogan), where productivity actually rose for a time. Bernard Deacon has explored this trend in depth in his quantitative analysis of the micro-geography of mining in Cornwall in the nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup> Deacon has shown that this area became an exception to the broad pattern of decline elsewhere, and that the decline of metal mining across Cornwall was in fact a long drawn out process, in which the central mining district experienced further peaks and crises throughout the early twentieth century. There were some other notable exceptions to the pattern, with mining in St. Just (where Geevor is situated) surviving, and indeed proving itself as one of the most successful and influential rural mining areas. Although mining in St. Just declined in value in the late nineteenth century, it recovered in the Edwardian years to a mineral production value of over £100,000, a level comparable with its peak (£128,000 in 1863).<sup>8</sup> This set St. Just apart from most other parishes outside the central mining district where output value in the early twentieth century was generally a small fraction of 1860s peak levels.

Even taking this more nuanced perspective into account, from the 1870s the picture of mining across Cornwall as a whole was one of a faltering industry. Although output and income were slower to decline, as a result of the rise in productivity of the central

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<sup>5</sup> Payton.

<sup>6</sup> Deacon, *Cornwall: A Concise History* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007).

<sup>7</sup> Deacon, 'Mining the Data'.

<sup>8</sup> Deacon, 'Mining the Data'

mining district, the number of mines and those employed in mining declined sharply. Rural areas were the worst-hit, leaving the landscape scattered with abandoned mines and the economy in turmoil. This decline was also accompanied by the continuation of mass emigration (which had begun previously) as miners sought work in South America, Australia and Malaysia among other destinations.

Philip Payton has interpreted the decline as a result of Cornish industrialisation being 'imperfect, incomplete and over-specialised', despite being successful as its height.<sup>9</sup> The effects of decline, for Payton, led to a 'Great Paralysis' in Cornwall. This paralysis, it is argued, was all-encompassing in Cornwall: a period of economic depression from the 1870s, demographic stagnation and the 'fossilisation' of Cornish society.<sup>10</sup> Revisionists have questioned the severity of this interpretation on the basis of a supposed 'historical over-fascination with mining', and indeed some have given a more subtle, less apocalyptic impression of the pattern of decline.<sup>11</sup> As this qualification suggests, although the impact of mining on the Cornish economy and society was substantial, it was not necessarily all-encompassing as the 'Great Paralysis' interpretation would have it. Nevertheless, with deindustrialisation, the significance of mining in Cornish life naturally shifted. As well as the economic effects of decline, mass migration continued from Cornwall (though this had begun in the 1840s). Decline continued through the twentieth century, with fewer than twenty mines surviving the Great War.<sup>12</sup> By 1950 only Geevor and South Crofty mines remained operational, both of which struggled on until their closures, in 1991 and 1998 respectively, which signalled the (temporary) end of the industry in Cornwall as a whole.

### 3.1.2 Mining in Wales

In Wales, it was a different mineral that dominated industrial activity: coal. In total contrast to decline-hit Cornwall, the coal mining industry in south Wales was coming into its own in the late nineteenth century. In fact, between 1851 and 1914 the coal

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<sup>9</sup> Philip Payton, *The Making of Modern Cornwall: Historical Experience and the Persistence of Difference*, 1st ed. (Truran, 1992), p. 99.

<sup>10</sup> Payton, *The Making of Modern Cornwall*.

<sup>11</sup> See Deacon, *Cornwall*.

<sup>12</sup> Buckley.

industry grew from employing 1% of the working population to 35%.<sup>13</sup> Agriculture, conversely, declined in importance, decreasing from 35% of all employment to 10% over the same period.<sup>14</sup> The demographic shift from rural agricultural Wales to the industrial south east was striking, and the coalfield also drew large numbers from across the border. This resulted in the establishment of new mining communities all over the coalfield, which have been referred to as a 'society within a society'.<sup>15</sup>

Coal boomed through the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, reaching its zenith in 1913, when Welsh mines produced 57 million tons of coal, with 30 million tons of this being exported to foreign markets.<sup>16</sup> Kenneth Morgan has captured this sweeping impact of mining in Wales noting:

Industrial Wales, above all the mining valleys of the south, was swept along in intense, almost uncontrolled expansion. Economically, as well as politically and culturally, south Wales had reached the point of take-off. In the years from 1880 to 1914 it was amongst the most buoyant growth centres in the world for industrial production, and for manufacturing and commerce.<sup>17</sup>

Within a generation, the dynamic of Wales had altered fundamentally, according to Gwyn Alf Williams, with the whole of Wales responding to the new 'centre of gravity' of the industrial economy, namely the south Wales coalfield.<sup>18</sup> Here, the thriving coal industry created infrastructure and communities which simply would not have existed otherwise, as well as feeding wealth in to the cities of Cardiff and Swansea. Mining transformed social, political and cultural life in industrial areas. These transformative effects of the coal industry, however, were restricted to the industrial region in the south, in contrast to the experience of the rest of Wales.

In Wales, it is assumed that mining, with its sweeping economic and demographic changes, created a distinctive working class, increasingly 'anglicized' population, where the rhythms of industry has become the 'ultimate determinants of social life'.<sup>19</sup> In Wales, the enormous scale of coal production was concentrated almost entirely in the 'The Valleys' (the south Wales coalfield), making the industrial experience in Wales

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<sup>13</sup> John Davies, *A History of Wales* (Penguin UK, 2007).

<sup>14</sup> Davies.

<sup>15</sup> Hywel Francis and Dai Smith, *The Fed: a History of the South Wales Miners in the Twentieth Century* (University of Wales Press, 1998).

<sup>16</sup> Kenneth O. Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation: Wales 1880-1980* (Oxford University Press, 1981).

<sup>17</sup> Kenneth O. Morgan, p. 59.

<sup>18</sup> Gwyn A. Williams, *When Was Wales: A History of the Welsh* (Penguin Books, 1991).

<sup>19</sup> Gwyn A. Williams, p. 176.

particularly localised. As a result, this area is often interpreted as a sealed and homogenous economic and cultural unit within Wales. Accounts tend to focus on the collective nature of the Valleys experience, of close communities bound by their reliance on coal. This homogenous view of industrial life has subsequently been challenged by revisionists, though as Chris Williams has asserted, in comparative terms the Welsh experience was relatively 'collective'.<sup>20</sup>

In parallel with Cornwall, historians have noted that industrialisation, as well as altering external perceptions of Wales, also shifted the dynamics of the way in which the Welsh experienced their own nation. John Davies has argued that the rapidly changing nature of Wales during industrialisation meant that 'the image of Wales did not correspond with the substance.'<sup>21</sup> By this, Davies meant that the 'traditional' image of Wales was no longer concurrent with the dominance of the developing industrialised areas and the interpretation of Wales as a modern industrial nation. More recently, cultural theorist Raymond Williams identified what he called the first and second 'truths' about Wales and Welshness.<sup>22</sup> Williams was essentially differentiating between traditional romanticised conceptions of Wales (based on the landscape, the Welsh language, and ancient Celtic imagery) and the more recent argument put forth by socialist historians that industrialisation created a new modern Wales, with an 'Anglicised Welshness', based on working class communities.

This has been an issue of some importance to Welsh socialist historians, who have battled to reassert the importance of mining and the Valleys to the history of Wales. Most notably Gwyn Alf Williams and Dai Smith have argued that the contribution of the industrial past had been neglected, which was indeed curious given the demonstrable impact of coal on the Welsh economy.<sup>23</sup> For Gwyn Alf Williams, 'It is only against this massive growth of an industrial Wales of British and imperial character that every other Welsh phenomenon must be set.'<sup>24</sup> Here, he positions the industrial past as a stage against which debates about Welsh identity and culture are set, implying that

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<sup>20</sup> For a critique of the homogenous interpretation of the Valleys, see Dai Smith, *Aneurin Bevan and the World of South Wales* (University of Wales Press, 1993); A more moderate view is provided by Chris Williams, *Capitalism, Community and Conflict: The South Wales Coalfield 1898-1947* (University of Wales Press, 1998).

<sup>21</sup> John Davies, *A History of Wales* (Penguin UK, 2007), p. 455.

<sup>22</sup> Raymond Williams, *Who Speaks for Wales?: Nation, Culture, Identity* (University of Wales Press, 2003).

<sup>23</sup> Gwyn A. Williams; Hywel Francis and Dai Smith, *The Fed: a History of the South Wales Miners in the Twentieth Century* (University of Wales Press, 1998).

<sup>24</sup> G. A. Williams, p. 180.

mining histories in particular have an important legacy beyond their economic or material impact.

The prosperity and vitality mining brought to the coalfield was not to last. Although much later than the Cornish metal mining industry, coal mining also experienced a long and widespread decline. The coal industry suffered a significant decline in the 1920s, when export prices crashed, conditions for miners worsened, and industrial unrest surfaced, culminating in the General Strike of 1926. The workforce nearly halved, falling from 218,000 in 1926 to 136,000 in 1937.<sup>25</sup> A period of depression ensued which highlighted the almost entire economic reliance on coal in the south Wales Valleys.<sup>26</sup> Coal mining survived for most of the twentieth century, with small boosts in productivity with the outbreak of the Second World War and the subsequent nationalisation of the industry in 1947, which in many ways provided a new sense of optimism. However, emphasis on alternative fuels, decreasing export prices and the ever-ominous foreign competition meant that decline became the norm throughout the twentieth century. The number of active pits fell steadily from 500 in the 1920s to 222 in 1947, 148 in 1960, and only 50 in 1970.<sup>27</sup> Extensive job losses naturally resulted from the mine closures, and by 1969 fewer than 50,000 jobs in mining remained in the coalfield.<sup>28</sup> As Evans has noted, by this time, ‘the unmistakable pattern was one of contraction.’<sup>29</sup>

The late 1970s and 1980s saw the dramatic culmination of decline in the coal mining industry, signalling the end of an era in south Wales. Further economic contraction, the fall of the world coal price, and the impact of the new Conservative government combined to devastating effect for the industry. Between 1980 and 1988, a further 18,000 jobs were lost in south Wales, with 23 collieries closing.<sup>30</sup> The period was characterised by bitter economic and political struggles, typified by the series of confrontations between Margaret Thatcher (then Prime Minister) and Arthur Scargill (the president of the National Union of Mineworkers), culminating in the miners’ strikes of 1984-5. The slogan ‘Close a Pit, Kill a Community’, Michael Thomas has pointed

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<sup>25</sup> Chris Williams.

<sup>26</sup> Davies.

<sup>27</sup> Chris Williams.

<sup>28</sup> Chris Williams.

<sup>29</sup> D. Gareth Evans, *A History of Wales, 1906-2000* (University of Wales Press, 2000), p. 150.

<sup>30</sup> Bella Dicks, *Heritage, Place and Community* (University of Wales Press, 2000).

out, became an apocalyptic vision that in many ways came to pass in what followed.<sup>31</sup> This period essentially marked the end of coal mining in Wales, with the notable exception of the reopening of Tower Colliery as a workers' co-operative in the 1990s.

The south Wales Valleys, as John Davies has observed, were left as a 'cluster of deprived ex-coalmining communities which contained some of the poorest places in Britain.'<sup>32</sup> Large-scale unemployment and social problems resulted, which are still evident today. In fact, the legacy of decline in the south Wales Valleys is extremely visible in the landscape, as well as the existence of widespread poverty (confirmed by the awarding of European 'Objective One' funding) and social problems, which very obviously distinguish the ex-mining communities from the more affluent city of Cardiff only a few miles away.<sup>33</sup> Although the impact of coal mining in Wales was vast, it was also a largely localised phenomenon.

### *3.1.3 Comparing the Welsh and Cornish cases*

The mining experience in Wales was clearly more concentrated, not only in terms of its rapid rise and collapse, but its scale and geographical distribution. In terms of scale, it is difficult to directly compare output from Welsh and Cornish mining as a result of the different minerals being mined (and their values) and the different timescales in which the industries were operating. As a rough indicator, when mining was at its peak in Wales, nearly 57 million tons of coal was produced from 485 collieries in 1913 alone.<sup>34</sup> In Cornwall, metal mining at its peak produced an average annual output of 181,470 tons of copper and 10,000 tons of tin between 1855 and 1865.<sup>35</sup> These figures do suggest a disparity in scale, despite not being able to be directly equated.

However, the contrast in employment figures proves more illuminating. In Cornwall, it is difficult to ascertain exactly how many people were employed by the industry at its peak. Buckley has suggested that employment figures reached 40,000, though the 1851

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<sup>31</sup> Michael Thomas, *The Death of an Industry: South Wales Mining and Its Decline - the Local Story in a Global Context* (Colben Systwm Pte. Limited, 2004).

<sup>32</sup> Davies.

<sup>33</sup> Objective One, *Single Programming Document; Cornwall and Scilly 2000-2006*, [www.objectiveone.com/obl/pdfs](http://www.objectiveone.com/obl/pdfs) accessed 3/3/2011.

<sup>34</sup> Kenneth O. Morgan, p. 59.

<sup>35</sup> Buckley.

census showed a total of 40,349 including those employed in quarrying.<sup>36</sup> Nonetheless, when compared to the 271,000 jobs mining provided in Wales in its prime, the disparity in scale is striking. In simple numerical terms, there were many more people in Wales reliant on the mining industry than there had been in Cornwall, suggesting that the impact of deindustrialisation was much more dramatic in Wales. However, the proportion of people who had been employed in the mining industry were similar in each region suggesting that – in symbolic terms, at least – there might have been a similar impact felt as a result of decline.

However, in terms of timescales, as has been shown, mining in Wales and Cornwall differed significantly. In Cornwall mining had a longer history, declined more slowly and had severely contracted by the interwar period. Welsh mining, on the other hand, boomed much later and still had a significant presence in south Wales in the 1980s, when it experienced its last dramatic phase of decline. In Cornwall, therefore, it is possible that by the late twentieth century mining had already taken on a ‘historical’ importance rather than a large-scale present function. The significance of mining may have already been being ‘remembered’ in terms of its impact on the landscape, economy and Cornwall’s identity. In this sense, mining in Cornwall had already become something that could be ‘heritagised’, perhaps occupying a nostalgic place in public consciousness, as derelict shafts and engine houses had dotted the landscape for over a generation. This was not the picture of a modern thriving industry, but one of a few surviving mines, relics of the long decline of an old industry. In the 1980s, ideas about Cornwall as a great industrial region may well have occupied this more abstract place in public memory. In general, the collapse occurred relatively recently in Wales, the mass media could document the decline of the industry, especially the political disputes of the 1980s which are still fairly frequently referenced. It is possible that, viewed externally, mining is much more readily associated with Wales in terms of broad public consciousness, whereas Cornwall may well be more likely to be perceived as a rural holiday destination rather than a region with a long industrial history. This suggests that moves toward heritagisation may have been more hotly contested in Wales (at least in terms of the area as a whole).

As we have seen, historians have often noted that mining was influential in the construction of social identities in Wales and Cornwall during the industrial period. Not

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<sup>36</sup> Buckley.

only did industrialisation affect how those in mining communities experienced their lives (and hence how they constructed their identities), but arguably contributed to a broader picture of how Wales or Cornwall (as regions or nations) were ‘imagined’, both internally and through external discourses.<sup>37</sup> These images have also lingered, with mining having an enduring relevance and a role in modern constructions of ‘Welshness’ and ‘Cornishness’ more generally. Of course, we need to be wary of homogenising these regional or national identities which are inevitably complex and multi-dimensional. However, the past is often where these identities are negotiated, implying that narratives of the mining past are not only important in strictly historical terms, but still impact on public consciousness in both areas.

Indeed, heritage sites are one of the mediums through which these sorts of cultural memories are constructed and negotiated. Mining heritage sites need to be contextualised within these broader debates about the role of the industrial past in shaping modern Wales and Cornwall. It is clear in both cases that the industrial past (and indeed deindustrialisation) has been central to the way in which historians have constructed narratives of Wales and Cornwall. As argued above, there are some notable differences, not only in the minerals mined, but most importantly in the different timescales, the scale of industrial activity its and geographical distribution. However, in both places similar themes occur in historical narratives: mining as transformative of the economy and culture, the industrial prowess of these areas, technological development and status as world-leaders, boom and bust, the cultures of mining communities and, significantly, the role of mining in shaping communities and social identities.

In both areas, the mining past clearly has a significant legacy, both materially (in terms of its impact on the economy, landscape and society) and symbolically, still having a resonance in the way Welsh and Cornish identities are negotiated through historical narratives. How, then, did these histories become commodified and represented as heritage? Having outlined the broad historical context regarding the histories of mining in Wales and Cornwall, we can now turn to the case study sites specifically. The following section introduces Big Pit and Geevor, describing their own specific histories and situating them in a more localised context.

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<sup>37</sup> See previous discussion of ‘imagined communities’ from Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso, 2006); Deacon, *Cornwall*.

### 3.2 Big Pit

At the far north east corner of the south Wales Valleys sits Blaenavon, once a thriving industrial town, now a recognised UNESCO World Heritage Site area. Big Pit (Y Pwll Mawr) which employed 1,300 people at its peak, now operates as a heritage site and museum.<sup>38</sup> It is undoubtedly the flagship attraction in the area, drawing thousands of visitors annually to this remote corner of the Valleys. As a working mine, Big Pit was part of Wales' thriving coal mining industry of the Valleys, which brought wealth and employment to the Valleys, created its communities, and in many ways shaped modern Wales. In its new role, Big Pit stands as one of the few surviving mines in Wales and draws over 150,000 visitors per year to the Blaenavon area.<sup>39</sup>

Big Pit aims to give visitors a window into what life was like when the mine was operational. It combines an interactive heritage experience with a more traditional museum display to tell the story of coal mining and its specific history in Blaenavon. When entering the site, visitors are effectively transported back in time, surrounded by the original colliery buildings, the imposing winding gear at the pit, and miners milling around the site in orange overalls and helmets. The site is maintained largely as it was at the time of closure. In this way, the whole site operates as an 'authentic' heritage experience, with visitors being able to interactively explore the 'historic' remnants of the mining past. These terms, it is recognised, are complex and contested in terms of the heritage debate discussed in Chapter 1.

As mentioned above, the story of mining in south Wales is told through a variety of means at Big Pit. There is a dedicated museum exhibition space in the former Pit Head Baths (the miners' old changing rooms), which engages with a wide range of subjects from the geological composition of the coalfield to domestic life, the miners' strikes and a number of diverse perspectives on the industrial disputes and the eventual end of the industry. There is also a simulated tour of a modern section of the mine guided by a 'virtual miner', one of the more recent interactive additions to the site. At Big Pit there is a very limited use of oral history within the heritage display. There is no programme in place to record or archive oral histories. In terms of the heritage site display, there is

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<sup>38</sup> B. Shortland Ball, *Big Pit as a Heritage Site: Museum Practice and Performance*, Big Pit Development Plan: Summary Document (Appendix 3), p. 2.

<sup>39</sup> Annual visitor numbers have remained above 100,000 since 2002, and peaked at 162,555 in financial year 2008-2009. Figures supplied by Big Pit Coal Mining Museum.

one section in which voice recordings are used to describe the conditions working underground. This is in the 'Pit Head Baths' museum section, where the old miners' lockers have been preserved and converted into display cabinets. The outside of the lockers are dotted with display panels describing different individuals and their relationship with the mining industry. Some are Big Pit miners, but there are also Welsh celebrities who have links to mining (singer and comedian Max Boyce, for example). Voice recordings come from inside a small number of lockers, so visitors hear these short descriptions as they walk through to the museum section of the building.

However, the central feature of the Big Pit experience is undoubtedly the underground tour, where visitors are equipped with hard hat and miners' lamp to 'go 300 feet underground with a real miner and see what life was like for the thousands of men who worked at the coal face'.<sup>40</sup> During the forty minute tour, miner-guides dressed in miners' uniforms lead visitors through the mine tunnels, describing their experiences working underground and answering visitors' questions. Emphasis is placed on the difficult working conditions for the miners, particularly when visitors are encouraged to switch off their headlamps to experience the complete darkness underground. Guides' narratives are light-hearted and 'banter', both between guides and with visitors, is a common feature.<sup>41</sup> Over time, of course, ex-miners will have to be replaced by guides who have no direct experience of working underground, due to the generational shift. However, as we will see, it was the ability to host this underground tour which held the key to Big Pit's transition from working mine to heritage site, and for now this remains by far the most crucial draw for visitors.<sup>42</sup>

### *3.2.1 Historical and economic context*

The extraction of coal at Big Pit ended in November 1979, when approximately 250 miners were still employed by the mine.<sup>43</sup> When the pit finally closed in 1980, it was part of a much broader pattern of decline in the Valleys. Along with the sweeping decline of the mining industry, steel production had been hit hard and was subject to

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<sup>40</sup> <http://www.museumwales.ac.uk/en/bigpit/about/> accessed 5/1/2011.

<sup>41</sup> Guides' narratives are explored in detail in Chapter 5.

<sup>42</sup> Conversation with Peter Walker, Big Pit manager, May 2010.

<sup>43</sup> Big Pit National Coal Museum: A Guide (Cardiff, 2005) p14.

widespread plant closures.<sup>44</sup> The coal industry continued contracting throughout the 1960s and 70s. The National Coal Board closed 50 pits between 1957 and 1964 and the number of miners decreased from 104,600 to 76,500 in the same period.<sup>45</sup> This pattern continued throughout the 1980s and between 1980 and 1988 alone, 18,000 mining jobs were lost in south Wales, with 23 collieries closing.<sup>46</sup> Unemployment in the Valleys was clearly rising rapidly, and there were few opportunities for alternative employment outside the industrial sector. When Big Pit closed, 250 people lost their jobs (though there were many more before this) as opposed to the 71 jobs that the new museum created.<sup>47</sup> Of course, across the Valleys as a whole, thousands more became unemployed as a result of the mine closures. In fact between 1978 and 1984, 21,908 jobs were lost in the central and eastern coal mining valleys.<sup>48</sup> Tourism could not realistically fill this deficit across the board. It was this context in which a visitor attraction was conceived ostensibly to provide some measure of regeneration to ease the economic burden left by the mine closures and to promote the South Wales Valleys as a tourist destination.

Tourism was one of the only growth industries in Wales in the early 1980s. In 1985 the Wales Tourist board estimated that tourism had created around 90,000 jobs across Wales.<sup>49</sup> However, tourism in Wales was mainly based on what Evans has called a 'rural and resort' product at this time, meaning principally the south west and the north.<sup>50</sup> The south Wales Valleys were certainly not thought of as a tourist destination. During 1970s and 80s, in one of the bleakest phases of mining decline, there was an acknowledgement that something needed to be done in the light of continuing socio-economic decline.<sup>51</sup> A number of initiatives attempted to address the state of the Valleys in the 1970s, based on the premise that the loss of coal mining was not only the loss of an industry but a way of life and that it was necessary to maintain a perspective on what had been a significant and arguably defining contribution to the national character of Wales.<sup>52</sup> Tourism was one such initiative, but this was a new idea. The Valleys as a tourist destination would introduce the concept of industrial heritage to the area, rather

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<sup>44</sup> Davies.

<sup>45</sup> Davies, p. 607.

<sup>46</sup> Dicks.

<sup>47</sup> Big Pit Trust files, 1983.

<sup>48</sup> D. Gareth Evans, p. 162.

<sup>49</sup> D. Gareth Evans, p. 170.

<sup>50</sup> D. Gareth Evans, p.170.

<sup>51</sup> Dicks.

<sup>52</sup> See for example Ballard & Jones, *The Valleys Call*, 1975 discussed in Dicks.

than capitalise on an already existing ‘heritage culture’. Externally, there was an emerging pattern of interest in industrial heritage. Most notably, the heritage site at Ironbridge Gorge in Shropshire had opened in 1973 and was proving to be successful in drawing in visitors.<sup>53</sup> It is within this broader trend that moves in Wales and Cornwall must also be interpreted.

### *3.2.2 The history of heritage at Big Pit*

Two years before its closure in 1980, Big Pit was identified as a possible heritage attraction. Gareth Gregory (a Wales Tourist board employee who then became Big Pit’s director) recalled the process of transition as follows:

Some two years before Big Pit was scheduled for closure it was identified as having, possibly uniquely among south Wales mines, potential for redevelopment as a tourist attraction and museum. This potential was first recognised by the late Dr Gerwyn Thomas of the National Museum of Wales, although the Wales Tourist Board had previously made overtures to the National Coal Board to attempt to make underground visits to coal mines in South Wales as accessible as the underground caverns of the slate mines in North Wales.<sup>54</sup>

The Wales Tourist Board (WTB) were incredibly influential in the providing the initial impetus for the transition to heritage at Big Pit. Along with the Welsh Office, the WTB was actively engaged in trying to limit the damage of economic decline in the context of the broad pattern of decline in the south Wales Valleys.<sup>55</sup>

The conversion of a working pit to a visitor centre was no small undertaking, and required a substantial amount of grant funding in order to complete the necessary conversions and make the site (and the underground in particular) accessible to visitors. A collaborative working party was set up with representatives from the NCB, local government, the National Museum, the Welsh Development Agency and the Welsh Office.<sup>56</sup> The party explored the possibility of transforming Big Pit into a heritage site, and found that the project stood a good chance of success if it could draw in enough

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<sup>53</sup>For a full account of the development of Ironbridge, see Bob West, ‘The Making of the English Working Past: A Critical View of the Ironbridge Gorge Museum’, in R Lumley (ed.), *The Museum Time Machine: Putting Cultures on Display*, (Routledge, 1988).

<sup>54</sup> G Gregory (Big Pit financial and commercial director), ‘Big Pit – The Working Museum’, Evidence on Behalf of Big Pit for application by British Coal Corporation re Opencast Proposal at Pwll Du, 1991.

<sup>55</sup> Wales Tourist Board Annual Reports 1981-3.

<sup>56</sup> ‘A Brief Summary of the History of the Trust’, Appendix a, Big Pit Corporate Plan, 1996.

visitors to become economically self-sufficient. When coal mining ceased in 1980, Torfaen Borough Council acquired the site for a nominal one pound and the Big Pit (Blaenavon) Trust was set up as a charitable trust to manage its transition.<sup>57</sup> The Trust incorporated representatives from the WTB, both Torfaen and Gwent Councils, the NCB, the National Museum of Wales and the Torfaen Museum Trust.<sup>58</sup> A planning application was then submitted to the Borough Council for permission to convert the site in to a heritage attraction, which was granted in October 1980. The initial phase of development cost £1.5million, for which funding was secured from a number of organisations including the Wales Tourist Board (£250,000), the European Regional Development Fund (£133,098), Torfaen Borough Council (£200,000) and Gwent County Council (£50,000), the Welsh Development Agency (£30,236), along with further public and private sector sponsors.<sup>59</sup> The Tourist Board grant alone had to be approved by John Morris, the Secretary of State for Wales. Across the board, this was a significant level of public investment in a venture which in many ways was rather speculative given that there was no significant existing tourist industry in the south Wales Valleys.

There were three distinct phases of development in the heritage site's history. Phase one was the initial transition, mainly focused on making the appropriate changes to the site to allow visitor access, with a minimal 'museum' element. Big Pit opened as a heritage site in 1983 after relatively minor alterations. Most notably, the site and the underground areas needed to be made safe for visitors, and to comply with the Mines and Quarries safety regulations which still applied to Big Pit in its new role as a visitor attraction.<sup>60</sup>

Initially, Big Pit was successful in attracting visitors in its new role as a heritage site. There were 139,066 tickets sold in 1983 and 181,453 in 1984.<sup>61</sup> The underground tour proved to be incredibly popular with visitors.<sup>62</sup> At this point, the heritage site was charging for admission (£2.75 for adults and £1.75 children in 1984), but even with this impressive throughput in its first two years, there were a number of difficulties. It had been expected that Big Pit could become self-sufficient and sustainable by earning

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<sup>57</sup> 'A Brief Summary of the History of the Trust', Appendix a, Big Pit Corporate Plan, 1996, p. i.

<sup>58</sup> 'A Brief Summary of the History of the Trust', Appendix a, Big Pit Corporate Plan, 1996, p. ii.

<sup>59</sup> Schedule of Grants (March 1983), Big Pit Trust files, 1983.

<sup>60</sup> 'A Brief Summary of the History of the Trust', Appendix a, Big Pit Corporate Plan, 1996.

<sup>61</sup> Big Pit Trust files 1983 and 1984.

<sup>62</sup> Big Pit Trust files, 1984.

revenue and providing employment in an area where over 250 mining jobs had been lost due to the colliery closure.<sup>63</sup> In reality, there followed years of uncertainty as the site faced a struggle to become financially viable. Despite the initially positive signs, Big Pit faced a short closure in 1984, due to operating losses. The site's maintenance costs could not be met by income from visitors alone, and Big Pit's survival relied on securing further funding from the WTB, the Welsh Development Agency and the European Regional Development Fund.<sup>64</sup> The site then embarked on its second phase of development, costing just over £500,000.<sup>65</sup> This aimed to increase the surface-based attractions and improve the interpretive display as well as adding an additional underground route to allow for more visitor tours.

Initially, Big Pit opened as a 'visitor attraction', though this term was used interchangeably with 'heritage site' and 'museum'. In fact, in its early days, the site had a limited museum element and no full-time curator, relying on the underground tour as the main draw for visitors. Big Pit was only granted provisional museum registration in 1992 (and full registration thereafter), when its interpretive provision was significantly improved.

The third and most recent phase of development involved a large-scale upgrade to the museum, adding the interactive tour of the modern mine section. This was funded by a substantial Heritage Lottery Fund grant of £5,278,000 in January 2000.<sup>66</sup> Big Pit was then incorporated into the National Museum of Wales in 2001, whereby the museum was further improved and interpretive resources added. It was not until this point that the site's future seemed secure. Big Pit is now subsidised by the Welsh Assembly Government (as part of the NMW) and entry is free to all visitors. This has not only made the site more accessible to visitors, but is perhaps a testimony to the way in which Big Pit (and Wales' broader mining history) is valued as a cultural asset and educational resource. Blaenavon, and Big Pit in particular, have been increasingly perceived as a crucial element in Wales' cultural heritage. In fact, Blaenavon has been recognised by UNESCO as having 'outstanding global importance', resulting in the area being awarded World Heritage Site (WHS) status in 2000.

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<sup>63</sup> Big Pit Corporate Plan 1996, p. 2.

<sup>64</sup> Big Pit Trust files, 1984.

<sup>65</sup> Big Pit Trust files, 1985.

<sup>66</sup> <http://www.hlf.org.uk/ourproject/Pages/BigPitBlaenavon.aspx>, accessed 20/05/2011.

Gaining World Heritage Site status has undoubtedly increased the profile of Blaenavon as a heritage attraction and in many ways has changed the face of the town, at least on the surface. Blaenavon as a whole has been rebranded as ‘heritage town’, and WHS symbols and brown signs denoting heritage attractions are now ubiquitous around the town. There have certainly been signs of improvement in the area. Torfaen Borough Council has praised Blaenavon’s development over the past decade. The Council published a review entitled *A Decade of Change* in 2009, which claimed:

Visitors returning to Blaenavon after more than a decade’s absence could be excused for thinking they’ve wandered into the wrong valley. Gone are the boarded-up shop windows, empty properties and general neglect of latter days; today’s visitor will be greeted with restored Victorian shop fronts, refurbished housing, improved access and car parking, and a new World Heritage Visitor Centre.<sup>67</sup>

However, we must be critical about the nature of this development. Big Pit itself has continued and grown increasingly successful, winning the Gulbenkian prize for museum of the year in 2005 and maintaining its visitor numbers at over 150,000 per year.<sup>68</sup> Despite this, the picture from Blaenavon is slightly more ominous, and the extent to which heritage really has contributed to the ‘continued economic and social revival’ of the community is yet to be determined.<sup>69</sup> Post-2001 data is sparse, making the direct impact of the WHS designation problematic to assess at this stage. However, as shown earlier, according to deprivation indices and census data, the Valleys in general (and Blaenavon specifically) have remained in a relatively weak economic position. During the initial phase of transition, heritage did not provide a large-scale solution to the problems left by the legacy of industrial decline. Though the regeneration process has continued (through tourism and other initiatives), it is likely that heritage can only claim to partially fill the gap left by the decline of the industry across the south Wales Valleys, and the closure of Big Pit in particular.

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<sup>67</sup> Torfaen Borough Council, ‘A Decade of Change: Renewal Area’, February, 2009.

<sup>68</sup> Figures supplied by Big Pit Mining Museum.

<sup>69</sup> Blaenavon Industrial Landscape Nomination Document, submitted to UNESCO for World Heritage Site application, submitted 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2000, p. 46.

### 3.3 Geevor

Geevor tin mine is located in Pendeen, a small village on the West Cornish coast, between St Ives and Land's End. As a working mine, Geevor had employed over 400 people and had been a focal point for the communities of St Just and Pendeen.<sup>70</sup> As such, Geevor functioned as a symbol of the longer tradition of mining in the area, a role which it claims to fulfil in its new role as a heritage site. Heritage narratives at the site not only recount the history of Geevor itself but aim to 'tell the story of Cornwall's industrial mining past'.<sup>71</sup> Approximately 40,000 visitors per year pass through Geevor, and the site has been designated as a 'gateway' to the Cornwall and West Devon Mining Landscape, which achieved World Heritage Site status in 2006.<sup>72</sup>

Geevor is an imposing site, with the striking industrial remains of the winding gear and mine buildings contrasting with wide views of Cornwall's Atlantic coastline. It is one of the largest preserved mining sites in the world, not only incorporating the Geevor mine itself, but also several other shafts. Visitors are immersed in the story of mining at Geevor, wearing a miner's helmet, viewing exhibitions placed in the old mine buildings and participating in an underground tour. The walking tour of the site begins at the old mine offices (previously the main museum), where a temporary exhibition space displays stories from the Cornish diaspora alongside maps and references to other sites included in the Cornish Mining World Heritage Site. Other attractions include the winding house, where visitors can sit in the winder's seat and hear the recordings of voices and sounds of the vast winding gear being lowered. They can take in the site offices complete with newspapers from the late 1980s, and the rescue room, with a display about mining accidents and Geevor's rescue team.

Geevor now has a more conventional museum display housed in the new Hard Rock Museum, which opened in 2008. The Hard Rock Museum aims to tell 'the story of tin', not only providing a narrative of Geevor's history, but relating it to the broader history of Cornish mining.<sup>73</sup> The museum's subject matter is wide-ranging; from the geological processes involved in hard rock mining to life underground, the social history of the

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<sup>70</sup> 'Geevor Tin Mine Historically', Geevor Advisory Group Files, 1994.

<sup>71</sup> [www.geevor.com](http://www.geevor.com) last accessed 8/3/2011

<sup>72</sup> <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1215> last accessed 9/3/2011

<sup>73</sup> Geevor Tin Mine display panel.

community, and the political disputes of the 1980s as active mining stuttered to its final conclusion.

Geevor does incorporate oral history into its heritage display, though in a notably limited way. Since 2002, there has been a volunteer-run oral history programme in place at Geevor which holds recordings from local people on the subjects of mining, farming, fishing, community life and stories from World War II. However, despite the extensive archive material, very little of this is incorporated into the heritage site display. When the Hard Rock museum was built in 2008 an oral history 'pod' was added, which allowed visitors to sit and listen to a small number of snippets from recorded interviews which they chose by selecting from three themes ('mining stories', 'family and church' and 'local stories'). However, very little material was included in the oral history presentation and the visitor's ability to engage with the narratives is limited by the fact that the pod is open to the museum space and, as a result, difficult to hear. In terms of content, mining stories focus closely on the miners' roles, their jobs and the technical aspects of how ore was extracted. Family stories involve women describing their roles in the household, particularly in terms of domestic chores. The result of this is that the inclusion of oral history seems to be rather tokenistic, with little opportunity to engage with living memory. Although the public can access the oral history archive on request, this is not by any means made obvious to visitors or meaningfully incorporated into the heritage site display.

However, as with Big Pit, Geevor's central attraction is its underground tour. Tours are accompanied by guides, some of whom are former miners, who walk visitors through Wheal Mexico, a shallow adit (mine entrance) from the 19<sup>th</sup> century section of the mine, as the modern sections of the mine were flooded at the time of closure. The tour 'takes you from the light into the dark', giving visitors a vivid sense of what working life was like for Geevor miners.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> [www.geevor.com](http://www.geevor.com) accessed 8/3/2011.

### 3.3.1 Historical and economic context

Geevor is a modern mine which was founded in 1911 (operated by a private company, Geevor Tin Mines Plc), at which time, St. Just's annual output value was not far short of its peak level, which had occurred in the 1860s. The late nineteenth and early twentieth century was characterised by a contraction and concentration of mining activity into the 'central mining district', primarily Camborne and Redruth.<sup>75</sup> As mentioned earlier, Geevor was very much an exception to this broad pattern of decline in Cornwall, and along with South Crofty, it was one of the only mines to maintain production into the late twentieth century, the last in the St Just district. St Just as a whole had a much longer history of mining, with communities being created and shaped by mining throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Indeed, Geevor was very much flying the flag for the whole mining area, even embarking on a significant under-sea expansion programme in the 1970s.

However, after a long period of turbulent fortunes, in 1985 the tin market collapsed signalling the beginning of the end for Geevor. The collapse of the tin price in 1985 led to the first closure in April 1986, when 276 of Geevor's 385 employees were sacked.<sup>76</sup> The mine then transferred to a 'care and maintenance' scheme, employing a few workers to keep the mine running while financial assistance was applied for in the form of government funding. This was a significant upheaval in such a small community. There was still some optimism about this prospect at the time, as tin reserves were plentiful. If tin prices on the international market rose, Geevor could feasibly resume mining tin. *The Western Morning News* noted that tin prices had slumped to an 'artificially low' level of £4,000 per tonne roughly half of its value before the crisis.<sup>77</sup> *The Times* reported Geevor's monthly losses of £350,000, suggesting that the mine would have to lay-off all its 380 workers as a result.<sup>78</sup>

Geevor Plc had applied to the government for a £22 million financial aid package in the hope it could save the mine from closure.<sup>79</sup> This bid was rejected on 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1985, with the government instead offering a one million pound grant to regenerate the Penzance

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<sup>75</sup> B Deacon, 'Mining the Data: What Can a Quantitative Approach Tell Us About the Micro-Geography of Nineteenth Century Cornish Mining?' in Philip Payton (ed.), *Cornish Studies Eighteen* (University of Exeter Press, 2010), 15-32.

<sup>76</sup> P Barker, 'Tarnished World of the Tin Men', *The Sunday Telegraph*, 5<sup>th</sup> April, 1986.

<sup>77</sup> D Green, 'Cornwall faces worst blow in living memory', *Western Morning News*, 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1986.

<sup>78</sup> M Prest, 'Whitehall steels itself for Cornish tinmen's appeal', *The Times*, 3<sup>rd</sup> April, 1986.

<sup>79</sup> *Western Morning News*, 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1986.

and St Ives region. As a result, similarly to the situation in South Wales, the fortunes of the mining industry became the focus of an intense political dispute, with a great deal of hostility directed toward the Thatcher government. It soon became clear that badly-needed financial support from the government would not come (or at least would not be sufficient to keep the mine open). In 1991 the pumps were eventually switched off and Geevor ceased operation altogether, causing further unemployment and distress in the local community. Lakin and Ross have noted that the closure of Geevor represented the loss of a ‘major source of employment and community cohesion’ in the area.<sup>80</sup> The closure of the mine in 1991 not only caused unemployment and economic decline in the area, but left a bitter legacy in these communities.

Economically, the impact of deindustrialisation has been felt in West Cornwall particularly. Indeed, at a regional level, it has been recognised that steps need to be taken to regenerate Cornwall economically, most notably with the county being awarded European Objective One funding from 2001.<sup>81</sup> West Cornwall is known to be particularly deprived, and indeed Penwith has been identified as the most deprived district of Cornwall, ranking 77<sup>th</sup> of 354 English districts.<sup>82</sup> Tying these trends to Geevor specifically is problematic, as it is likely that the mine closure was a highly localised economic blow. On a local level, in the wards of Morvah, Pendeen and St Just, economic problems have been (and still are) particularly severe. According to 2001 census data, 8.6% of the population were unemployed compared to 7.6% in Penwith and 5.7% across the UK.<sup>83</sup> There was no doubt that the impact of Geevor’s closure in St Just and Pendeen was acute in both social and economic terms, and it was in this context that heritage came to be considered as a way of saving Geevor.

More generally, Cornwall had already become well-established tourist destination, marketing its cultural ‘difference’ and providing some consolation to its struggling economy.<sup>84</sup> Cornwall as a whole had not been an industrial region for some time, and had in many ways already been transformed in to a ‘heritage society’, at least in terms

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<sup>80</sup> B Lakin & C Ross, ‘Geevor in Care of the Community?’ Presented at SW Archaeology Conference 2009 (unpublished).

<sup>81</sup> Objective One, *Single Programming Document; Cornwall and Scilly 2000-2006*, [www.objectiveone.com/ob1/pdfs](http://www.objectiveone.com/ob1/pdfs) accessed 3/3/2011.

<sup>82</sup> Based on DETR index of local deprivation: Objective One, *Single Programming Document; Cornwall and Scilly 2000-2006*, [www.objectiveone.com/ob1/pdfs](http://www.objectiveone.com/ob1/pdfs) accessed 3/3/2011.

<sup>83</sup> NOMIS Official Labour Market Statistics, [www.nomisweb.co.uk](http://www.nomisweb.co.uk) accessed 18/3/2011

<sup>84</sup> Amy Hale, ‘Representing the Cornish Contesting Heritage Interpretation in Cornwall’, *Tourist Studies*, 1 (2001), 185–196.

of external discourses and tourist marketing. Tourism, however, was (and is) a highly contested issue in Cornwall, largely resulting from the disparity between the image of Cornwall as a romantic holiday destination (what Deacon has called ‘guide book culture’) and the deeper economic and social problems present in local communities.<sup>85</sup> Nonetheless, this perhaps provided a more logical context for a heritage attraction than the south Wales Valleys, where active mining was still taking place in the mid 1980s.

### 3.3.2 *The history of heritage at Geevor*

The idea for a visitor attraction at Geevor was not entirely new in the 1990s. The effects of the growth in tourism in Cornwall were being felt at Geevor even before its closure. Geevor created its own Tourist Amenity Area (a small-scale heritage museum) on the site in 1977, more than a decade before its closure.<sup>86</sup> After the first closure of the mine in 1986 Geevor’s new chairman Edward Nassar announced plan to further develop Geevor as a visitor attraction (including introducing an underground tour). It was claimed that this was still a temporary measure, however, as a Geevor press release stated ‘It is intended that the mine will re-open as soon as tin prices recover sufficiently to ensure a profitable operation.’<sup>87</sup>

However, this revenue was not enough to save the fortunes of the mine, and in May 1991 the pumps were finally switched off, flooding the mine and bringing an end to hopes that Geevor could reopen. The underground tours were ended and the mine closed finally in September 1991 when the remaining staff lost their jobs.<sup>88</sup> Geevor Plc then conceded:

It is almost certain that tin will never be mined there again, but the mine could survive as a tourist attraction, museum and heritage site. It is under this label that Geevor are attempting the mine’s sale.<sup>89</sup>

For a year after the mine finally closed, there was a period of confusion when the site was put up for sale and much of the machinery was sold as scrap. Grants from the National Heritage Memorial Fund helped to save the most important equipment, and the

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<sup>85</sup> Deacon, *Cornwall*.

<sup>86</sup> ‘Geevor Tin Mine Historically’, Geevor Advisory Group files, 1994.

<sup>87</sup> Geevor Plc press release, 16<sup>th</sup> February 1990.

<sup>88</sup> ‘Geevor Tin Mine Historically’, Geevor Advisory Group Files, 1994.

<sup>89</sup> Geevor Tin Mines press release, 7<sup>th</sup> August 1991.

Cornwall County Council eventually purchased Geevor in October 1992, and have remained owners of the site ever since.<sup>90</sup> Funding was secured from the Derelict Land Grants (DLG) via the Department of the Environment in order to purchase the site. The Council then funded a full feasibility study including geotechnical, archaeological and ecological audits.<sup>91</sup> Additional funds to develop the site came from the National Heritage Memorial Fund, the Rural Development Commission and Penwith District Council. In fact, the County Council's Archaeological Unit was extremely influential in providing the impetus for preserving the site. It was felt that Geevor should be preserved for its industrial archaeology, as it represented a valuable and 'complete' example of Cornwall's mining heritage.<sup>92</sup>

The management contract for Geevor was subsequently awarded to the Trevithick Trust in 1993. The Trevithick Trust was an administrative group formed in an attempt to create a single organisation to co-ordinate a World Heritage bid for Cornwall.<sup>93</sup> It incorporated representatives from the Countryside Commission, English Heritage, the National Trust, Cornwall County Council and other local authorities.<sup>94</sup> The Trust initially aimed to identify and interpret Cornwall's industrial heritage and to manage these resources, and it subsequently acquired management contracts for several of Cornwall's industrial heritage assets (including Geevor, Levant Engine House, Porthcurno Museum, Pendeen Lighthouse, Taylor's Shaft, Tolgus Mill and King Edward Mine).<sup>95</sup>

Importantly, the process of conversion itself was driven by a small group; a few County archaeologists and group of ex-Geevor employees. In this sense, Geevor's transition to heritage was a local initiative to some extent, rather than heritage being imposed by an external agency. Over the winter of 1992, the former mine engineer Stuart Smith (then the chair of the Trevithick Trust) and a small group of volunteers, who were ex-Geevor

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<sup>90</sup> A Sharpe, 'Geevor Mine', Cornwall Archaeological Unit Report, 1992, p. 2.

<sup>91</sup> A Sharpe, 'Geevor DLG Works', Cornwall Archaeology Unit, Cornwall County Council, 1994, p. 10.

<sup>92</sup> A Sharpe, 'Geevor Mine', Cornwall Archaeological Unit Report, 1992.

<sup>93</sup> Trevithick Trust, *Current Projects: A Brief Outline of Projects with Potential HLF Funding Requirements*, 2000.

<sup>94</sup> Trevithick Trust, *Current Projects: A Brief Outline of Projects with Potential HLF Funding Requirements*, 2000.

<sup>95</sup> Trevithick Trust, *Current Projects: A Brief Outline of Projects with Potential HLF Funding Requirements*, 2000.

men, took on the task of securing the mine buildings and preparing Geevor for a new role as a mining heritage site with relatively limited resources.<sup>96</sup>

Geevor opened to the public as a heritage site in August 1993. At this time, the development of the site was limited, with a small museum in the old mine offices and no operational underground tour, though developing the underground access was considered to be a central aim in ensuring the future viability of the site as a visitor attraction.<sup>97</sup> The Geevor Advisory Group stated that ‘the mine museum as at present was very hurriedly put together for the 1993 season in order to get the site open to the public.’<sup>98</sup> The Advisory Group was established in 1995 to ensure cooperation between all interested parties; the Cornwall County Council, St Just Town Council, Penwith District Council and the Trevithick Trust.<sup>99</sup> The Group’s aim was merely to oversee the development of Geevor, though the site was still under the management of the Trevithick Trust. The Group received reports on matters regarding the day to day running of the site, how buildings would be used, marketing plans and site works, for example. However, the Advisory Group minutes are generally vague and lack any clear assessment of Geevor’s overall performance, strategy for development or sense of purpose. This was a sign of the problematic relationship which developed between the Advisory Group and the Trevithick Trust, as Geevor struggled to become economically viable as a heritage site.

In 1994, its first full year as a heritage site, Geevor received 16,102 visitors. This figure rose slowly to 20,473 in 1996, and subsequently averaged about 20,000 per year up to 2001.<sup>100</sup> These numbers were relatively low in comparison to other attractions, and did not bring in sufficient revenue to meet the cost of maintaining and developing the site. Comparatively, Big Pit at this time was attracting nearly 100,000 visitors per year, while the average for the National Coal Mining Museum for England was nearing 60,000.<sup>101</sup> In fact, Geevor has always received relatively few visitors for an attraction of its sort. Although Geevor was situated in many ways within an existing ‘tourism culture’, its geographical remoteness has proved to be problematic in its ability to attract visitors. Conversely, Big Pit is accessible to a far greater number of day trippers and

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<sup>96</sup> A Sharpe, ‘Geevor Mine’, Cornwall Archaeological Unit Report, 1992, p. 3.

<sup>97</sup> ‘Archaeological Consultancy During a Second Phase of Land Reclamation and Structural Works 1995-1998’, Cornwall County Council, 2010.

<sup>98</sup> ‘Geevor Tin Mine Historically’, Geevor Advisory Group Files, 1994.

<sup>99</sup> Minutes of Geevor Advisory Group Meeting, 13<sup>th</sup> July, 1995.

<sup>100</sup> Figures supplied by Geevor Tin Mine.

<sup>101</sup> Big Pit Trust Files, 1994 and PLB Consulting Ltd., *Geevor Tin Mine Development Study*, 2002.

school groups because of its proximity to major cities (Cardiff, Newport, Bristol, Birmingham), despite being in an area with very little other tourist traffic. In its early years in particular, Geevor also struggled to compete with major tourist attractions in West Cornwall. To take one year as an example, in 1994, when Geevor was establishing itself as a heritage site, 590,000 people visited Land's End, and the Tate Gallery at St Ives attracted 180,000.<sup>102</sup> These are admittedly well-established, larger attractions in the local area, but the comparison suggests that Geevor struggled to take effective advantage of the existing tourist market (a problem which the site still grapples with).

As time went on, the relationship between the Trevithick Trust and both the Council and the site staff became stressed, resulting in the management of Geevor being put out to tender.<sup>103</sup> The Trevithick Trust's bid to renew their contract was turned down and Cornwall Council then transferred the management responsibility to Pendeen Community Heritage (PCH), a local group started by a number of existing Geevor staff. Following from this, PCH suggested that in order to improve Geevor's role in the community, the site would need to reinforce Geevor as the 'heart of the village', for it to become a focus for local jobs, and to ensure any development did not compromise heritage assets.<sup>104</sup> Bill Lakin, chair of PCH told *The Cornish Guardian* 'there was strong support in the community to set up a body which means the mine can be locally run.'<sup>105</sup> This was then seen as the basis for development at Geevor, as PCH attempted to capture the values which had supposedly driven the initial preservation of the site.

Geevor has developed significantly under the management of PCH. Visitor numbers (though still relatively low) have increased steadily from 20,660 in 2001 to 41,883 in 2009.<sup>106</sup> The site has also taken advantage of the available heritage funding, securing grants from the Heritage Lottery Fund and Objective One as well as from local and County councils. In 2006, Geevor was awarded funding to build a new Hard Rock museum in a move to make Geevor a recognised museum as well as a heritage site or tourist attraction. This coincided with World Heritage Site designation being awarded to the Cornwall and West Devon Mining Landscape (or commonly Cornish Mining). This status was awarded in 2006 and Geevor has operated as a 'gateway site' for the WHS

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<sup>102</sup> PLB Consulting Ltd., *Geevor Tin Mine Development Study*, 2002, p. 18.

<sup>103</sup> Minutes of Geevor Advisory Group meetings 1999-2001.

<sup>104</sup> Kinghurst Consultancy Group, *Making the Most of Geevor – A Feasibility Study*, report to the Cornwall County Council, 2001.

<sup>105</sup> *The Cornish Guardian*, 19<sup>th</sup> July 2001.

<sup>106</sup> Figures supplied by Geevor Tin Mine.

since then.<sup>107</sup> This was undoubtedly a positive development for the site in terms of the broader recognition of the significance of mining heritage, but notably has not been visibly adopted as a 'brand' in the same way as in Blaenavon.

A large amount of investment has taken place at the site since 2006. Geevor's recent development having been valued at £3.8million, funded primarily by the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Objective One Partnership, Cornwall County Council, Penwith District Council and the National Trust.<sup>108</sup> The HLF provided the impetus for this project, with Geevor being awarded a £2,444,000 grant which allowed for a large-scale maintenance programme on site as well as contributing to the cost of the museum.<sup>109</sup> The new museum then opened in October 2008, and it was hoped that, as a result of this, the site could continue to develop and that visitor numbers would increase to 60,000 per year in the long-term.<sup>110</sup> However, subsequent signs have been less optimistic, as visitor numbers have again decreased to 34,483 in 2010.<sup>111</sup> Geevor is still heavily reliant on grant funding from the County Council and heritage funding bodies, and in that sense still faces a struggle to prove it can be economically viable as a heritage site.

### **3.4 Conclusion: Comparing Big Pit and Geevor**

Reviewing the histories of both Geevor and Big Pit illuminates some telling points of comparison and contrast. As Big Pit and Geevor closed at similar times, their immediate local contexts may appear closely comparable. In both Pendeen and Blaenavon, the effects of closure were severe, not only causing economic decline, but a great deal of resentment within the local communities. However, the different time frames, scale, and spatial distribution of Welsh and Cornish mining more generally suggest that Geevor and Big Pit were located in societies where the respective mining industries had possibly assumed different roles in the economy and public consciousness.

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<sup>107</sup> <http://www.cornish-mining.org.uk/project/project.htm> last accessed 20/3/2011.

<sup>108</sup> Pendeen Community Heritage, Annual Report of the Trustees, 2007.

<sup>109</sup> <http://www.hlf.org.uk/ourproject/Pages> last accessed 20/3/2011.

<sup>110</sup> Minutes of Geevor Advisory Group meeting, 20<sup>th</sup> October, 2000.

<sup>111</sup> Figures supplied by Geevor Tin Mine.

On the surface, the sites are very similar. Visitors encounter very similar experiences; taking an underground tour, exploring the mine buildings and taking in the more modern museum displays. Both sites are council-owned (Geevor by Cornwall Council and Big Pit by Torfaen Borough Council) and trust-run. Beyond this, it is clear that Big Pit and Geevor were heritagised in notably different ways. As has been shown, Big Pit's transition to heritage was a largely 'top-down' (conceived externally and driven by the WTB) in complete contrast to Geevor's 'bottom-up' approach (driven by a small number of county archaeologists and ex-miners). As a result, Big Pit has been more obviously successful as a heritage site, particularly given its incorporation into the National Museum of Wales and its consistently high visitor numbers. Geevor, on the other hand, has continued under more local management, with some reluctance to bring in skills and experience from outside the local area.

There has also been a distinct difference in the way the heritage brand has been adopted in Blaenavon and Pendeen. At Blaenavon, since the town's inclusion on to the World Heritage list, the town has been visibly rebranded as 'heritage town', with signs and attractions pervading the landscape. In Pendeen, on the other hand, Geevor's heritage branding has been extremely low-key, with very little visible sign of the site in the village itself. Here, we see a difference in the way the sites have been promoted to tourists; Blaenavon has clearly embraced tourist marketing whereas Pendeen has approached heritage much more subtly, possibly reflecting its emphasis on community values rather than selling the site to visitors. Debates relating to heritage at Geevor tapped into existing contests concerning the role of tourism in Cornwall, whereas at Big Pit, tourism was an entirely new venture in an area with no precedent for this sort of attraction. Heritage needed to be sold 'from scratch' in this case, which may account for the more conscious focus on tourism at Big Pit. These sorts of contextual differences identified set up potentially very different relationships between the heritage sites and their respective communities. Did Geevor's community-oriented approach mean the value of mining heritage was constructed in different terms to those at Big Pit? How might that impact on the relationship between heritage and living memory?

Of course, in both cases, there were similar issues concerning the potential contests around heritagisation. There has been little evidence that heritagisation has significantly addressed the economic impact of deindustrialisation in either Blaenavon or Pendeen. Though the face of Blaenavon has altered significantly, particularly after its designation

as a World Heritage Site in 2001, underneath the surface the economic picture is still a problematic one as studying census and NOMIS data have suggested. Although Geevor was relatively isolated (not part of a much broader phase of deindustrialisation like Big Pit), the mine closure had a significant and enduring economic and emotional impact on those in St Just and Pendeen, where mining was much more of an immediate concern. In these terms, Blaenavon and Pendeen are distinctly similar in their more localised contexts. In both cases, the contrast between the economic and political turmoil of the decline of the mining industry and the ‘heritagisation’ of mining is pronounced.

Most importantly, both sites made the transition to heritage relatively quickly after their closure as working mines (within three years in both cases). As such, heritagisation directly interacted with living memory, as mining had been a way of life for people in these communities. This combined with the devastating economic and social impact of the mine closures implies that heritage would be contested in Blaenavon and Pendeen. Heritagisation would naturally involve a shift in values associated with the mining past, at a time when people were still living with the consequences of the mine closures. In these terms, re-branding mining as a heritage product, especially as a tourist attraction, would not be unproblematic in either context. Even the strongest proponents of the historical importance of mining have been sceptical about its transition to heritage.<sup>112</sup> Key questions remain as to which narratives of the past were being preserved, and, ultimately, how the moves to heritage were received by local residents and those whose pasts were on display.

The following chapter will much more closely analyse the process of heritagisation and its potential impact on living memory. More specifically, it will trace the way in which narratives of the past were constructed and presented at Geevor and Big Pit. In doing so, it will be possible to discern whether or not these contextual differences play a significant role in the way heritage sites construct certain values in relation to the mining past or, alternatively, whether there are similar patterns and processes which are common to each case (and heritagisation more generally).

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<sup>112</sup> For example, see G. A. Williams, *When Was Wales*.

## Chapter 4

### Heritagisation: institutional voices constructing ‘the past’

#### 4.1 Introduction

As we saw in Chapter 1, heritage is often equated with ‘bogus history’ as it orients to present values and needs.<sup>1</sup> This general critique of heritage is closely associated with its institutional priorities. For some, the ‘usability’ of the past as an economic and cultural resource makes it fundamentally liable to misinterpretation or even exploitation for political purposes.<sup>2</sup> The use of heritage to validate singular national narratives or as a tool for social cohesion is often cited in this vein, most notably Patrick Wright’s argument that heritage was used to promote a grand (and right wing) image of Britain’s past in the Thatcher years.<sup>3</sup> More recently, there has been a trend in critiquing the regulation of heritage by national and global organisations, where hierarchies of heritage ‘value’ are considered to be inextricable from dynamics of power.<sup>4</sup> As argued in Chapter 1, a much broader definition of heritage has been adopted in most institutional contexts, where vernacular heritage as well as ‘grand narratives’ are recognised (reflecting social history ideals promoted by Raphael Samuel and others).<sup>5</sup> UNESCO, for example, has pointed to the importance of industrial histories and ‘intangible cultural heritage’, including folk traditions of various sorts.<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, there are still problematic issues of representation where an external cultural agency assumes the responsibility for preserving certain aspects of the past as heritage.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Hewison, *The Heritage Industry: Britain in a Climate of Decline*, First (Methuen Publishing Ltd, 1987).

<sup>2</sup> Ludmilla Jordanova, *History in Practice* (Bloomsbury USA, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> Patrick Wright, *On Living in an Old Country: The National Past in Contemporary Britain* (Oxford University Press, 2009); Ben Cowell, *The Heritage Obsession: The Battle for England’s Past* (The History Press Ltd, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage* (Taylor & Francis, 2006).

<sup>5</sup> See, for example Raphael Samuel, ‘Politics’, in *The Heritage Reader*, ed. by G. Fairclough (Taylor & Francis, 2008), pp. 274–289; Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory* (Verso, 1994).

<sup>6</sup> UNESCO, ‘What is intangible cultural heritage’,

<http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00002> accessed 10/6/2012.

<sup>7</sup> Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, ‘Intangible Heritage as Metacultural Production1’, *Museum International*, 56 (2004), 52–65.

Underlying these debates is the notion that ‘heritage’ itself is not necessarily innate or fixed, but is to an extent constructed in the act of preservation and (re)presentation as heritage. The argument follows that heritage, in fact, is ‘made’ not only ‘found’ or ‘preserved’.<sup>8</sup> Laurajane Smith is most closely associated with this argument, having modelled the supposed existence of a singular ‘Authorised Heritage Discourse (AHD)’.<sup>9</sup> Smith stresses that ‘heritage’ is not inherent to objects or places, there is no intrinsic ‘value’, rather it is socially constructed through discourse. As she puts it, ‘What makes these things valuable or meaningful – what makes them “heritage”...are the present day cultural processes and activities that are undertaken around them.’<sup>10</sup> According to this argument, if language produces social meaning, knowledge and expertise in specific contexts (in line with the linguistic turn), it defines the way the meaning of heritage is constructed and communicated. In these terms, mine sites are not ‘heritage’ on their own, rather they are ‘made’ heritage in the discourses which construct their value in particular ways. As I will argue, heritagisation as a process relies on the construction of certain ‘heritage values’ through (mainly official or institutional) discourses. We need to be careful not to underplay the value of materiality in heritage, particularly with regard to industrial heritage sites, where structural preservation is a central priority. According to Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, tangible structures or objects can be ‘carriers’ and ‘transmitters’ of tradition.<sup>11</sup> In this sense, heritage cannot always be merely ‘made’ in discourse, but it exists in the exchange between objects and their discursively constructed meanings.

As such, there is a complex relationship between tangible and intangible heritage, where the distinction between the two is increasingly thought to be arbitrary. If heritage is about the construction of meaning as much as it is about artefacts, the role of institutions in constructing heritage values needs careful interrogation. Rather than dismissing heritage as ‘bogus history’, we need to understand the processes through which meaning is made, and how the past comes to be reconstructed as heritage in certain contexts. Certainly, heritage sites like Geevor and Big Pit have institutional lives of their own. In the process of heritagisation at each site, different discourses emerged which imputed different values onto the mining past. Most importantly, given the speed with which heritagisation was undertaken, institutional discourses were particularly

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<sup>8</sup> Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, ‘Theorizing Heritage’, *Ethnomusicology*, 39 (1995), 367–380.

<sup>9</sup> Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage*.

<sup>10</sup> Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, p. 29.

<sup>11</sup> Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, ‘Intangible Heritage as Metacultural Production’, p. 53.

influential in constructing particular temporal frameworks; senses of 'pastness' relating to mining in the two communities. As will be argued, on the surface there were in fact quite different motives for heritagisation at Geevor and Big Pit. Nonetheless, in both cases, in the act of preserving the mine sites as heritage the past was separated from the present, which was potentially problematic for local residents for whom the lived experience of mining and the experience of deindustrialisation was still very much 'present'.

In her critique of UNESCO's intangible cultural heritage policy, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett argues that fundamentally different perceptions of time are central to what she calls 'the metacultural nature of heritage'.<sup>12</sup> She suggests that there is an asynchrony of 'historical, heritage and habitus clocks and different temporalities of things, persons and events.'<sup>13</sup> Here we risk becoming embroiled in a deeply philosophical discussion of the nature of time itself, but it is important to note that there are multiple ways in which people conceive of 'the past' and hence multiple ways in which they perceive the relationship between the past, the present and the future.

Across a number of disciplines, scholars have taken up this general idea, and those interested in memory have increasingly emphasised the importance of individuals' own senses of time in the way they interpret and use the past in their everyday lives. Bernard Eric Jensen, for example, notes that subjective experiences of time are central to the way in which people conceive of the past, and how they operate in human life.<sup>14</sup> Bill Schwartz's notion of 'subjective phenomenological time' takes a similar approach. Schwartz argues that Braudel's three-pronged structure of time (geographical, social and individual) failed to take into account this fourth dimension, which refers to an individual's sense of their own internalised historical time (or what we might call autobiographical memory).<sup>15</sup>

On the other hand, heritage discourses (much like historians' narratives) tend to impose a much more objective or detached temporal framework which divorces the past and the present, allowing a particular narrative of the past to be preserved. Framing the mining

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<sup>12</sup> Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 'Intangible Heritage as Metacultural Production', p. 54.

<sup>13</sup> Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 'Intangible Heritage as Metacultural Production'.

<sup>14</sup> Bernard Eric Jensen, 'Usable Pasts: Comparing Approaches to Popular and Public History', in *People and their pasts: public history today* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

<sup>15</sup> Bill Schwartz, "'Already the Past'" Memory and Historical Time', in *Memory cultures: memory, subjectivity, and recognition*, ed. by Susannah Radstone and Katharine Hodgkin (Transaction Publishers, 2005).

past within ‘heritage time’ at Geevor and Big Pit fixed mining in ‘the past’ and imposed certain heritage values. That is, at Geevor and Big Pit mining became ‘historic’ rather than ‘everyday’, which potentially conflicted with people’s lived experience in these communities. When Geevor and Big Pit closed, were they already confined to ‘the past’ and apt to be viewed as ‘heritage’? How and why did heritagisation impose a specific temporal framework? As a result, which narratives of the mining past were preserved? In the following analysis, I unpick the institutional heritage discourses present at Big Pit and Geevor at the time of their transitions to heritage (and beyond) in order to get a sense of how and why mining came to be re-framed and re-presented as heritage.

## **4.2 Heritagisation at Big Pit**

The transition to heritage at Big Pit was rapid. The mine closed in 1980 and opened as a heritage site three years later. Its transformation into a heritage attraction inevitably involved a significant shift in the values associated with mining in the area. This was not only a physical transformation in terms of the site itself, but a shift in the way the significance of mining was perceived and experienced. Mining was now being heritagised, and in the process, Big Pit was re-branded as a historic cultural asset that could potentially ‘regenerate’ Blaenavon.

When the heritage site opened in 1983, there were still over 40 active coal mines in Wales and, despite the obvious and heavily politicised decline of the coal industry in Wales, it was perhaps not foreseen that the closure of Big Pit was a salient step in the demise of the whole industry in Wales. At this stage, when Big Pit opened as a heritage site, there were still over 20,000 people employed in 28 collieries in the South Wales Valleys.<sup>16</sup> A year later, thousands of miners in south Wales were striking, embroiled in the bitter industrial disputes in reaction to the Thatcher government’s programme of pit closures. At this point, Big Pit was a heritage representation of a living industry. Nonetheless, as will be argued, in order to promote economic regeneration through tourism, heritage discourse promoted the site’s ‘historic’ appeal, fracturing the past and the present and almost instantly historicising (and depoliticising) the mining experience.

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<sup>16</sup> D. Gareth Evans, *A History of Wales, 1906-2000* (University of Wales Press, 2000), p. 163.

#### 4.2.1 Motives for heritagisation: economic regeneration in Blaenavon

As we have seen, the Wales Tourist Board (WTB) played a central role in Big Pit's transition to heritage. The Tourist Board were very open about their very pragmatic motives toward heritagisation as part of the broader 'Visit the Valleys' campaign.<sup>17</sup> So much so that the selection of Blaenavon as the location of the mining heritage site owed more to local geological factors than to a desire to preserve this pit specifically (despite much later claims that the area was 'unique' in terms of its heritage appeal).<sup>18</sup> The mine was earmarked for closure as early as 1978, and was viewed as one of the only mines where underground tours would be possible. This was for a number of reasons according to one report:

Big Pit was noted to have certain natural advantages which could reduce operating costs to a level where it might possibly succeed as a viable tourism business. It had a second way out for emergency use, obviating the need to maintain two shafts and winding apparatus. It would probably not need pumping to maintain visitor routes above the water table and it was shallow enough not to need elaborate ventilation.<sup>19</sup>

Having established that Big Pit would accommodate the visiting public without a great deal of modification, the WTB (in collaboration with local and district councils, the National Coal Board and the Welsh Development Agency) embarked on a feasibility study, published in 1979 as *The Tourist Potential of Big Pit Blaenavon*. In this report, the WTB aimed

to create a working coal mining museum of international significance at Big Pit and to create year round tourism employment and consequent local income both at the site and by contributing to the local attraction of tourists to the area.<sup>20</sup>

Even before the mine had officially ceased coal extraction, planners clearly believed that its future lay in heritage tourism. Notwithstanding that mining history had an 'international significance', couching this in terms of a tourist attraction may well have seemed incongruent given that it was still a working industry. In parallel, 'regeneration' emerged as the organising premise for the heritage initiative, which was prioritised

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<sup>17</sup> Press Release – Winter Development at Big Pit, 19<sup>th</sup> December 1983.

<sup>18</sup> Blaenavon Industrial Landscape Nomination Document, submitted to UNESCO for World Heritage Site application, submitted 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2000.

<sup>19</sup> G Gregory (Big Pit financial and commercial director), 'Big Pit – The Working Museum', Evidence on Behalf of Big Pit for application by British Coal Corporation re Opencast Proposal at Pwll Du, 1991.

<sup>20</sup> Wales Tourist Board Study, *The Tourist Potential of the Big Pit*, 1979.

above notions of preserving any specific or localised cultural histories. Regeneration as a concept was couched in a number of ways. At its most basic level, the heritage site would, it was argued, bring employment to the area. The Big Pit Trust claimed

It (Big Pit) can also offer the prospect of long-term full-time employment in an area where new job opportunities are scarce and can be a catalyst for further development which can improve the fabric of the local environment.<sup>21</sup>

Attracting visitors to the area, it was assumed, would also bring economic relief through employment as well as (hypothetically) bringing revenue into the town. A year later, in its second phase of development, Big Pit aimed

To provide a tourist attraction and educational facility of European significance which will be completely in harmony with the greatly improved environment of the area. This is a stark contrast with the severe industrial dereliction which characterised the area prior to this development.<sup>22</sup>

This sort of rhetoric was part of a general regeneration discourse which was ubiquitous in the institutional justification of heritagisation in Blaenavon. There was seemingly little concern given to the preservation of Big Pit for its own historic or cultural significance, however those terms might be defined. There was certainly a sense of needing to provide an economic boost, given the bleak picture of the Valleys (as outlined in Chapter 3). The tourism ‘solution’ was lauded as the silver lining of the pit closures in the Valleys. However, there was little or no acknowledgement that this may be problematic for the 250 miners who had lost their jobs at the time of closure of Big Pit, or for the many more members of the community for whom the mine had been (and arguably still was) such a significant part. At worst, regeneration could be considered to be a somewhat hollow buzz-word in heritage planning. At best, it could be a realistic though admittedly partial economic solution for an area that badly needed one. With no public consultation process, it was unclear how heritage tourism would be received in the community. This was, after all, an external agency acting on behalf of a community and imposing their own sense of value on the mining past.

In real terms, planners were overly optimistic as to the level of economic regeneration heritage could feasibly bring. Indeed, certain contemporary accounts reflected the existence of some local scepticism of heritage tourism. Gareth Gregory, the former

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<sup>21</sup> Big Pit Trust Ltd., Community Programme Application – Financial appraisal, 1983.

<sup>22</sup> Big Pit Trust Files, 1984.

manager of the Big Pit heritage site, echoed the economic motivation for the move to heritage, but was more circumspect about its reception. He wrote

There was no immediate prospect of replacing these jobs by attraction of large-scale manufacturing industries to the area and so a more unorthodox method of job generation in the upper valleys had to be considered, however unpromising it might have appeared to the local population at the time.<sup>23</sup>

The promotion of tourism as a solution to the problem of decline in such a heavily industrialised landscape (with very few existing tourist attractions) undoubtedly seemed curious to some. *The Economist* reported this mood in 1985, stating:

When the Wales Tourist Board in 1978 put together a posse of statutory agencies and local authorities to establish an independent charitable trust to develop and manage the Big Pit museum, hoots of laughter filled the valleys. Turning it and other industrial "eyesores" into tourist traps was seen as a waste of public money.<sup>24</sup>

In the above extract, *The Economist* rather humorously summed up what was a central problem for heritagisation in Blaenavon: getting people to appreciate the mine as a heritage site rather than seeing it as just another derelict mine, an 'industrial eyesore'. This inevitably involved a shift in values whereby institutional heritage discourse was extremely influential in constructing the value of the site as historically and culturally significant. For heritagisation (and the associated regeneration plan) to be viable as a strategy for the Valleys, it had to be underpinned by certain assumptions that the cultural past that was being preserved and presented as heritage was valued, whether for locals or tourists. So how was this heritage value constructed? How was a living industry successfully historicised? And which 'past' was being preserved and used to regenerate the present?

#### 4.2.2 Constructing 'pastness': Instant historicisation at Big Pit

In most of the official documentation relating to the transition to heritage, references to preserving what we might call the cultural value of mining are brief, sometimes almost 'tacked on' to economic arguments relating to regeneration. Perhaps this was inevitable, given the need in the early 1980s for Big Pit to justify itself as economically viable in

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<sup>23</sup> G Gregory (Big Pit financial and commercial director), Evidence on Behalf of Big Pit for application by British Coal Corporation re Opencast Proposal at Pwll Du, 1991.

<sup>24</sup> 'Wales: Divided They Stand', *The Economist*, 2<sup>nd</sup> February, 1985.

order to ensure its survival. The Big Pit Trust and the various stakeholders in the site were bound up in an economic mentality; at the most basic level, the heritage site needed to survive financially, and this priority is very obviously reflected in the Trust's records.<sup>25</sup>

There were some (albeit fleeting) references to Big Pit's heritage value in the Wales Tourist Board's original proposal.<sup>26</sup> Lord Parry, the chairman of the Tourist Board referred to 'the intrinsic historical appeal of Big Pit' and 'its close proximity to other sites of industrial heritage significance', but did not elaborate on these phrases.<sup>27</sup> Curiously, this was the document which outlined the scope and purpose of the move to heritage but references to the site's historical significance were few and far between. The report went on to stress the 'heritage advantages' of the site, but only two paragraphs were dedicated to explaining the significance of preserving Big Pit as a heritage site (in notably vague terms). Where the heritage value of the site was discussed, the report fixed this 'intrinsic historic' quality in its nineteenth century origins:

Big Pit or, as it is officially termed, the Blaenavon Mine, is one of the oldest shaft mines in South Wales. It was sunk in 1860, although its workings incorporated galleries going back fifty years before that time.<sup>28</sup>

By emphasising Big Pit's longevity, the WTB document fixed the historical significance of the site in the distant past. In doing so, heritage discourse constructed a divide between mining 'as it was then' and people's lived experience. Rather than engaging with mining as a present phenomenon, it was confined to the past, which could then be summoned as a cultural and economic resource, as heritage, in the present. Blaenavon was mooted as both a potential 'Gateway' and 'Tourism Development Area' for drawing visitors to Wales.<sup>29</sup> In this vein, planners were clearly orienting to the future, mainly focused on the economic potential of the heritage site and its ability to boost the Valleys as a tourist destination. The historic value or appeal of the site seemed to be taken for granted as the raw material for heritage tourism. This

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<sup>25</sup> Big Pit Trust files 1983-5.

<sup>26</sup> Wales Tourist Board Study, *The Tourist Potential of the Big Pit*, 1979.

<sup>27</sup> Wales Tourist Board Study, *The Tourist Potential of the Big Pit*, 1979, p. 3.

<sup>28</sup> *The Tourist Potential of the Big Pit*, p. 3.

<sup>29</sup> *The Tourist Potential of the Big Pit*, p. 1.

approach continued throughout the WTB's planning documents and public statements. For example, as the conversion of the site was taking place, it was proposed that:

In the coming months Big Pit will gradually become one of the world's major monuments to the coal and iron industry, and will begin to attract hundreds of thousands of visitors to provide some economic relief to an area badly affected by the decline in its traditional industries.<sup>30</sup>

Here the regeneration discourse 'monumentalises' coal mining, implying loss, pastness and the need to commemorate. But the site's regenerative function was never far from focus. It was perhaps simplistically assumed that heritagisation and regeneration were complementary strategies. As the WTB would have it, heritage simultaneously (and unproblematically) preserved a valued past and acted as an economic resource for the present.

A similar sentiment was expressed by the Big Pit Trust, the charitable trust put in place to oversee the site. They also promoted a clear link between presenting Blaenavon's past to visitors and a programme of improvement in the area. They suggested in 1983 that the transformation of the mine

represents the existing and potential importance in interpreting the physical, historical and social environment to visitors to the area and in using visitor revenues to improve the physical and social environment for the lasting benefit of the area's residents.<sup>31</sup>

Along with the above examples, these broad claims about the historical significance and the regenerative functions of Big Pit were often vague (perhaps deliberately so), making it difficult to get inside what these terms might mean in practice. It was acknowledged that local residents needed their 'physical and social environment' to be improved but less apparent how heritage would play out in communities who were still living with the impact of the mine closures. After all, in its new role as a visitor attraction, Big Pit was heritagising the story of mining in Blaenavon, which was simply a continuing (if more challenging) way of life for many residents. In a sense it was *their* lived experience that was being preserved as heritage.

The *Tourist Potential* document went on: 'Above all Big Pit has succeeded in preserving a vital aspect of the Welsh story of its coal mines and of the men and women

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<sup>30</sup> Wales Tourist Board Annual Report, Cardiff 1981, p. 34.

<sup>31</sup> Big Pit Trust files 1983.

who worked in them through long years of toil and danger'.<sup>32</sup> Here the WTB was clearly constructing a large-scale heritage narrative, where mining heritage was defined as being central to the 'Welsh story'. The focus on a 'grand' narrative detached Big Pit from its own local context and promoted a much broader view of its value as a representative symbol of Welsh mining (an element of the discourse which was readily adopted in later promotional texts). In the above extract, there was also an implicit appreciation that preserving Big Pit would serve some sort of commemorative function for the industry and its communities, even if this was not the central consideration. This is a common trend in accounts of Big Pit's transition to heritage; Big Pit was telling a human story of considerable consequence for the whole of Wales and memorialising a way of life lived in the communities of the South Wales Coalfield. However, it was never made clear exactly which 'community' Big Pit was supposedly representing, past or present.

There were a number of challenges to the way in which heritagisation was couched. For example, when British Coal disbanded as a result of the Coal Industry Act in 1994, it had the knock-on effect of almost making Big Pit financially unviable as a heritage site. Somewhat ironically, it was in Big Pit's interest for coal mining in Wales to continue. In the 1990s, although it was functioning as a heritage site, Big Pit still technically had working mine status and was reliant on the National Coal Board (and subsequently British Coal) to provide technical support such as surveying and safety testing the mine shaft and winding gear. As the industry saw a broader decline, it became more difficult (and increasingly expensive) to have these routine checks carried out once the industry had been privatised.<sup>33</sup> While mining was in one sense being consigned to the past through its representation as heritage, the collapse of the industry was threatening the survival of the heritage site in financial terms. The heritage site was subject to some of the same financial and political rigours as the 'real' coal extracting systems themselves, and indeed it remained part of those systems to a significant extent. At what stage mining in South Wales became repositioned as heritage, rather than being a lived reality for the population of the Valleys, is therefore not fully clear.

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<sup>32</sup> *The Tourist Potential of the Big Pit.*

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Peter Walker, Big Pit Coal Mining Museum manager; recorded by Bethan Coupland, 6 June, 2011.

In summary, when Big Pit closed in 1980, the fact that there was an ongoing political struggle to save the mining industry meant that there was value in constructing a much older heritage for mining in Wales. Institutional discourses focused on preserving the distant past, fixing mining and its cultural impact in an unspecified past which could then be summoned up as a cultural and economic resource, able to be brought to bear on and to be consumed in the present. By glossing over the potentially negative contemporary experience of mining communities (at the point of transition to heritage) and imposing a particular version of 'pastness', potential conflict could be avoided and Big Pit could more effectively be promoted as a heritage destination for tourists.

#### *4.2.3 Heritagisation adopted: Recent institutional discourses at Big Pit*

Looking beyond the process of transition itself, it is clear that the heritage value of Big Pit which was constructed in the late 1970s and early 1980s has continued to be influential. Broadly speaking, by the 1990s, the site was operating in a rather different context in terms of the state of the mining industry. As we saw earlier, when Big Pit first opened as a heritage attraction the mining industry was still a significant presence in Wales, albeit in the shadow of economic uncertainty and an ongoing political dispute. In 1990, however, only four pits remained, providing fewer than two thousand jobs. As mining progressively shifted from being a living industry to a bygone one, it is likely that it took on a more 'historic' quality in public consciousness (ostensibly needing to be 'saved'), akin to the heritage values which were initially imposed by the WTB. Big Pit could then legitimately claim to be a memorial to an old industry rather than a window into an operational one.

With this, heritage discourse became more prevalent in the way the site promoted itself. Big Pit played a significant role in the application to UNESCO for World Heritage Site status, which drew on both the historic preservationist and regenerative heritage discourses. The application both hailed the role of heritage in the regeneration of the area and heavily promoted its value as a cultural asset. Importantly, in the application for World Heritage Site status in 2000, the same heritage narrative was adopted as had been stressed in the initial transition to heritage. The application was based on the premise that the Blaenavon area as a whole (including the town and ironworks)

convincingly represented the social and cultural impact of industry in the south Wales Valleys. The nomination document claimed:

Its landscape represents powerfully a particular stage of human development, the large scale industrialisation of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, the human achievements and sufferings of that period, and the cultural values which were developed as communities evolved.<sup>34</sup>

Again, the longevity of Blaenavon's industrial structures was stressed, with the eighteenth and nineteenth century experience focused upon. The application drew on 'that period' and its enduring economic and cultural legacy in a very detached sense. This was not evoking a living history which still influenced people in these communities, this was a detached past, a 'foreign country' which needed to be preserved and visited.<sup>35</sup>

Of course, it was the physical environment that would be designated as having World Heritage status, but the link between Blaenavon's material structures (such as Big Pit) and their relevance to the social and cultural histories of the community was crucial to the award. In this sense, the heritage narrative focused squarely on achievement and the positive legacy of the mining industry in Wales. The application claimed:

Few settlements in south Wales provide as much tangible evidence of the culture and social life of the region as the town of Blaenavon. Within its region Blaenavon retains the most complete range of physical evidence of the social and economic structures created by large-scale industrialisation, and provides an unparalleled opportunity to understand the historical and geographical inter-relationship of all its features.<sup>36</sup>

This sort of language was also extended to popular discourse relating to the WHS bid. Press coverage praised the bid on the grounds that this was a human story which extended beyond its material landscape. For example, *The Times* wrote in 1999:

Several other British areas are also being considered as World Heritage Sites - the New Forest for instance, Shakespeare's Stratford. All have their merits. All preserve some unspoiled portion of a landscape or culture. But the Blaenavon site with its outmoded machinery and its stretch of canal, its relics of a horse drawn railway and battered warehouses, preserve a distinctively human phase of Britain's history. This Monmouthshire site speaks as much of the people who

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<sup>34</sup> Blaenavon Industrial Landscape Nomination Document, submitted to UNESCO for World Heritage Site application, submitted 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2000, p. 16.

<sup>35</sup> David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge University Press, 1999).

<sup>36</sup> Blaenavon Industrial Landscape Nomination Document, submitted to UNESCO for World Heritage Site application, submitted 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2000, p. 10.

once lived there as it does of the place itself and should be treasured all the more highly for that.<sup>37</sup>

For *The Times*, heritage status evidently hinged on ‘relics’, ‘outmoded machinery’, and of course the ‘people who once lived there’. These things were all part of the detached past which heritage discourse had constructed years previously. There was no sense that mining communities did (and do) still exist. The ‘distinctively human phase of history’ had supposedly lapsed at some unspecified point in the past. When the local community was mentioned, the WHS literature focused on the role heritage had played (or rather was assumed to have played) in the regeneration of the town. For example, it was suggested that:

Economic and social decline has meant that much of the fabric of the town is in need of investment, but the development of new industries, the opening of Bit Pit as a Mining Museum in 1983 and the conservation of Blaenavon Ironworks have contributed to economic regeneration. The town and the surrounding landscape have survived little altered to represent the story of their past. The recently formed Blaenavon Partnership is implementing a Heritage and Regeneration Strategy which will both conserve the historic assets of the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape and contribute to its continued economic and social revival.<sup>38</sup>

In referring to ‘their past’, this was a rare allusion to the fact that the heritage being preserved might belong to the residents of Blaenavon who lived through mining and its decline. However, this was muted by the resurgence of the heritage-regeneration strategy, lauding its impact on Blaenavon’s somewhat unquantifiable ‘social revival’, for which *The Times* offered no evidence.

When WHS status was awarded, UNESCO reported that Blaenavon matched two of its criteria for WHS inscription:

Criterion iii - The Blaenavon landscape constitutes an exceptional illustration in material form of the social and economic structure of 19th century industry.  
Criterion iv - The components of the Blaenavon industrial landscape together make up an outstanding and remarkably complete example of a 19th century industrial landscape.<sup>39</sup>

This language very much reflects the heritage value claimed in the application documents, focusing on the much older structural components of Blaenavon’s history.

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<sup>37</sup> ‘Mine of Information’, *The Times*, 6 April, 1999.

<sup>38</sup> Blaenavon Industrial Landscape Nomination Document, submitted to UNESCO for World Heritage Site application, submitted 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2000, p. 46.

<sup>39</sup> UNESCO World Heritage Site List, <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/984>, accessed 10/12/2010.

As a result the World Heritage Site froze Blaenavon as a ‘complete example of a nineteenth century landscape’, despite the fact that Big Pit was a relatively modern mine which was operational until the late 1970s. Again, the large-scale heritage narrative was readily adopted in public discourse. Offering ‘completeness’ as a criterion also reflects a greater concern with scientific objective approaches to preservation, which notably lacks moral reflexivity about the present. The announcement of World Heritage status achieved a substantial amount of press coverage, in which Big Pit was celebrated and likened to famous global landmarks. *The Mirror* wrote:

It is a magnificent present for us all. This shows that the world's most famous places don't have to be made of marble. The Taj Mahal was basically the work of one architect. Blaenavon and the area around it is the creation of thousands of people who helped to forge a new world.<sup>40</sup>

It was seen that the award certainly endowed the site with a broader symbolic importance, putting Big Pit on the map and likening it to other global landmarks. Blaenavon's inclusion on the World Heritage list was particularly noteworthy, as an industrial site may have seemed an unlikely candidate for nomination in some ways. Of course, this needs to be contextualised within broader moves recognising the importance of industrial heritage nationwide, but Big Pit was also recognised of being symbolic of a specific sort of Welsh heritage which was considered to be nationally-defining. Peter Walker, the mine manager, was quoted in *The Times* saying:

Wales probably has more castles per square mile than any country in Europe and we have thought of them as our history. We've regarded our industrial past almost as something to be ashamed of. Yet the industrial age changed the landscape of Wales more than all the castles put together.<sup>41</sup>

Walker's quote echoed the pattern of knitting Blaenavon's past into a broader history of industrialisation, the legacy of which had a national and international significance. The notion that mining ‘changed the landscape of Wales’ went to the heart of why mining heritage was being preserved, but also which specific facets of the story were being highlighted. Heritage in these terms was about success; the positive impact of the mining industry on the national picture. Heritage was telling the story of how the distant past shaped the present in particularly abstract terms, rather than engaging with the much more nuanced picture of local experience.

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<sup>40</sup> ‘Pit's a World Wonder: A Soul Made of Iron Blaenavon Now a Global Attraction’, *The Mirror*, 1<sup>st</sup> December, 2000.

<sup>41</sup> Peter Walker, quoted in *The Times*, 1 December, 2000.

This pattern continues to be evident in the current marketing of the site. Big Pit is now promoted as a ‘living, breathing reminder of the coal industry in Wales and the people and society it created.’<sup>42</sup> Although Big Pit stresses the ‘living’ nature of its heritage experience and foregrounds its associated ‘people and society’, a similar sense of pastness is created, implying that mining society is bygone and we need to be ‘reminded’ of it. As such, the museum is still keen to stress its role as a memorial to the mining past and the way it shaped social experience in the South Wales Valleys, fundamentally altering the Welsh cultural and economic landscape during the period of industrialisation.<sup>43</sup> This sort of heritage discourse is extremely prevalent when assessing the current ways in which the site markets itself both to visitors and funding bodies. Big Pit’s self-image is constructed in these terms, consciously focussing on the site as a cultural asset and educational resource, allowing visitors to learn about and experience a ‘historic’ industry and preserving a way of life which has now become part of Wales’ distant past.

From the above examples, we can see clearly how institutional discourses constructed a very specific set of values around mining heritage at Big Pit. The process of heritagisation at Big Pit was characterised by a ‘top-down’, rather pragmatic approach, with a discourse of ‘regeneration’ emanating from the major stakeholders (primarily the WTB and local government bodies). This was not a local initiative driven by a desire to preserve Big Pit’s past as heritage, it resulted from a pre-existing idea to create a heritage attraction in the South Wales Valleys, which found its outlet at Big Pit almost by chance. ‘Regeneration’ and ‘community’ were both instrumental concepts in institutional discourses, but their application was vague and seemingly rather detached from the local population at the time. Ideologically at least, it was assumed that as a ‘historic’ cultural asset, the site could fulfil a commemorative function, standing as a memorial to the mining past and operating as an economic and educational resource. In planning rhetoric, heritage could unproblematically preserve and remember the industrial past as well as (in local and specific respects) performing regenerative economic and social functions in the present.

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<sup>42</sup> <http://www.museumwales.ac.uk/en/bigpit/about/> accessed 5/1/2011.

<sup>43</sup> As Gwyn Alf Williams and others have noted. See Gwyn A. Williams, *When Was Wales: A History of the Welsh*.

### 4.3 Heritagisation at Geevor

The process of heritagisation at Geevor was equally swift. As we saw in Chapter 3, the mine actually operated a tourist attraction during its final years of tin extraction. It finally closed as a working mine in 1991 and reopened two years later as a heritage site. In contrast to Big Pit, however, at Geevor, heritagisation was couched as a much more 'local' initiative. The process was driven by a small group of archaeologists and some ex-miners and as we will see, notions of 'community' operated as the organising principle for these heritage planners. As such, there was not such an insider/outsider divide as there had been at Big Pit.

However, although it was not necessarily an external intervention which imposed heritage tourism, heritagisation in Pendeen was still a process which provoked some controversy. In fact, twenty years on from the last closure of the working mine, the role and purpose of the site is still debated and contested within the community. The rapid development of the heritage initiative at a time when the devastating impact of the mine closure was still extremely apparent in St Just and Pendeen generated significant tension. As I will argue, heritagisation involved a similar shift in values as at Big Pit, despite the different ways in which the transition to heritage was justified.

#### *4.3.1 Mine or museum? Early heritagisation at Geevor*

In Cornwall, mining was already 'historicised', as a large proportion of deindustrialisation had taken place in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (much earlier than in Wales). Geevor was one of a few surviving mines in an area surrounded by much older mining relics, and an already existing tourism culture (as argued in Chapter 3). In this context, the move to heritage could be considered to be a natural progression to regenerate Pendeen after Geevor had closed. However, as we will see, this was by no means a simple transition, particularly for local residents. In a way, this different context to the south Wales Valleys had an impact on the way the mine undertook the process of heritagisation.

As we saw earlier, even when Geevor was mining tin in the 1980s, it was operating a relatively successful tourist attraction at the top of the site. The introduction of the museum section provoked a contest over the role of the site which in many ways endured throughout the following ten years of the transition to heritage. Was Geevor a working mine or a heritage tourism attraction? Could it be both?

The early tourist provision was maintained as a way of bringing money into the mine while it reopened. As such, the museum was very much a side project indulging existing tourist curiosity, representing the older history of the mining district, rather than amounting to an acceptance that heritage would be the mine's only future.<sup>44</sup> Geoff Treseder, a former Geevor miner, recalled the opening of the tourist amenity area in this way. He claimed 'really, it was a bit of useful PR which didn't actually cost the mine anything. It was never seen as a major employer in itself.'<sup>45</sup> In the early 1980s, then, the priority was bringing money into Geevor in order to keep it alive as a working mine rather than preparing the site as a heritage attraction. Edward Nassar (the new mine owner) stated 'my priority is simply to keep the pumps working', and he saw the underground tour as 'quite an attraction while we are not mining'.<sup>46</sup>

Geevor's staff were actively debating whether the site would have a future as a working mine or whether it should be heritagised. For example, referring to the role of the tourist amenity, Keith Wallis (then president of Geevor Plc) said 'any chance of staying alive and not becoming an historic relic on the Cornish coastline must be a plus.'<sup>47</sup> Although Geevor was surrounded by remnants of eighteenth and nineteenth century mine workings scattered across the Cornish landscape, it was clear that there was some resistance to Geevor being historicised in the same way. Being surrounded by the mining past worked as an incentive to avoid heritagisation in some ways. Wallis, at least, wanted to see Geevor keep working rather than becoming a relic. This debate also fed into public discourse. *The Western Morning News* reported in 1986:

At the entrance to Geevor, prospering up to only a few months ago, is a mining museum. The people of this rugged part of West Cornwall are worried that the

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<sup>44</sup> Cyril Noall, *Geevor* (Geevor Tin Mines, 1983).

<sup>45</sup> G Treseder, quoted in *The Peninsula Voice*, 1993.

<sup>46</sup> E Nassar, quoted in *Western Morning News*, 12 June 1986.

<sup>47</sup> K Wallis, quoted in *Western Morning News*, 12<sup>th</sup> June 1986.

whole of the mine will soon be a monument to the past instead of a thriving work-place with a future.<sup>48</sup>

Again, we see a tension between monumentalising Geevor as part of ‘the past’ and maintaining its present role as a working mine. Even at this point, Geevor’s role and significance was changing, which was particularly pertinent for the miners whose livelihoods depended on the fate of the mine. On 5<sup>th</sup> April 1986, following another of the mine’s temporary closures, *The Sunday Telegraph* published a special report describing the scene at Geevor as the men worked their last shifts. The author of the report somewhat prophetically wrote, ‘The miners at Geevor thought the media men, nosing in, were like vultures. Perhaps they were right. Should people become museum pieces?’<sup>49</sup> This would become an extremely controversial question in Pendeen as Geevor made the transition from working mine to heritage site. The above extracts point to there being a much closer awareness of the shift in values associated with the possible heritagisation at Geevor and, indeed, that there was a clear resistance to this process.

#### 4.3.2 *Motives for heritagisation at Geevor: heritage for ‘the community’?*

When the mine finally closed in 1993, among certain stakeholders, a clearly defined preservationist discourse emerged as the justification for converting Geevor to a heritage site. It was frequently asserted that the heritage site was a way of preserving Geevor which was too valuable to the (so-called) local community to simply be lost. For some, there was a sense that if the working mine could not be saved, the heritage site would be the ‘next best thing’. County Councillor John Daniel identified with this, claiming in 1993 that ‘the council is, at least, trying to salvage something from an awfully sad situation.’<sup>50</sup> In this sense, there seemed to be a much closer engagement with the sense of loss among local residents and the arguments for and against heritage mobilised around these issues rather than assuming that heritage was an all-encompassing solution (in the manner of the Wales Tourist Board in the South Wales Valleys). But was heritagising Geevor as ‘the next best thing’ based on economics (the promise of jobs and tourist income) or the desire to retain some sort of physical or emotional connection with Geevor?

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<sup>48</sup> *Western Morning News*, April, 5<sup>th</sup> April 1986.

<sup>49</sup> P Barker, ‘Tarnished World of the Tin Men’, *The Sunday Telegraph*, 5 April 1986.

<sup>50</sup> J Daniel, quoted in *The Peninsula Voice*, 1993.

It was thought that preserving Geevor would perhaps provide some sense of continuity, a theme which was adopted by County archaeologists who instigated the heritage initiative. Geevor was identified as an important site which it was necessary to preserve as an example of Cornish mining history. Adam Sharpe (an archaeologist for the Cornwall Archaeology Unit involved with preserving Geevor) recalled his own role in lobbying the County Council to preserve Geevor in a recent interview with the author. He recounted the way in which he and a fellow archaeologist involved in the project saw the value of preserving Geevor as a 'one-off...which was more or less intact'.<sup>51</sup> Sharpe described the process as follows:

It was entirely driven by myself, Nick and a couple of others, you know, a couple of other people in the Council who we'd persuaded. Plus Bob Orchard who had been the interim mine manager at the end who was very keen to see what, if something, could be done.... You've got to remember that when Geevor closed, not only did a lot of people lose their jobs but a lot had to emigrate to find work and, you know, instead of being the principle employer in the area, this was just an eyesore, a reminder that things had been really good and there wasn't really much prospect of anything decent happening in the way of the economy locally.<sup>52</sup>

In the above extract, Sharpe challenges the notion that Geevor was a strictly 'local' initiative. He claims the move to save the site was 'entirely driven' by the county archaeologists, who, despite their sensitivity to the problematic experience of the mine closure, inevitably brought a different perspective to people living in Pendeen itself. Sharpe directly addresses the difficulty of preserving Geevor as a heritage site, noting that for local people it was an 'eyesore' and a 'reminder that things had been really good'. Clearly, it was known that heritage could not be a blanket solution to the social and economic legacy of the mine closure, but Sharpe still saw heritagisation as something positive, that 'something could be done'.

During the process of converting Geevor to a heritage site, Sharpe wrote a number of reports stressing the heritage value of the site. In these documents, we see the much more generic use of heritage discourse. In official channels at least, Geevor's historic value was emphasised in order to attract heritage funding and to justify the preservation of the site. In 1992, for example, one report stated:

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<sup>51</sup> Interview with Adam Sharpe, Cornwall County archaeologist, recorded by Bethan Coupland, 23 March 2011 (2-3 minutes).

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Adam Sharpe, Cornwall County archaeologist, recorded by Bethan Coupland, 23 March 2011 (9-10 minutes).

Everyone agreed that Geevor was special. It has been the last mine in west Cornwall and unlike every other mine all its machinery was still in place. Surely, it was argued, such a unique part of the history of the county should not be torn down and its assets cut up for scrap... When Geevor reopens at the beginning of August, visitors will once again be able to explore this unique and fascinating site, guided by people who actually worked there and in the autumn, the work will begin afresh to ensure that this site continues to explain the central place of mining in the history of Cornwall for many years to come.<sup>53</sup>

Naturally, this sort of report would not foreground the local debates over the role of the site and the appropriateness of heritagisation. Even so, it is interesting to note how the institutional discourse drew on similar strategies as those identified at Big Pit in order to construct a similar sense of 'heritage value' at Geevor. As this document stated, from an archaeologist's perspective, Geevor's apparent 'uniqueness' made it worth saving as a representative of Cornwall's broader mining history. Here we begin to see the way in which the values associated with the site shifted in its new role as a potential heritage artefact. In these terms, Geevor was very much part of Cornwall's history; a part of the past which needed to be preserved. Despite a much more heightened awareness of the problematic impact of the mine closures in the local area, heritage discourse inevitably followed similar patterns to those present at Big Pit. In order to promote the preservation of Geevor, Sharpe and others needed to justify its case as a historic site. As such, Geevor was historicised and endowed with a symbolic value as being representative of the much longer history of mining in Cornwall as a whole.

Even though Geevor was being historicised in this way, those involved in the transition were keen to stress that by establishing a heritage site to tell the story of mining in Pendeen, Geevor could actually counteract an existing simplistic or romanticised view of the broader mining past which surrounded it. Another Geevor report in 1994 described this aim, suggesting

Ruinous engine houses, derelict mine buildings or isolated chimneys are everywhere visible on the skyline along this stretch of coast from Cape Cornwall to Pendeen. In their dereliction, however those gaunt ruins have been romanticised. The resulting folksy image of Cornish mining presented to most visitors to the county has done nothing for the self-esteem of local people, and masks the history, the dangers and the complexities of the mining process and the central part which it has played in the history of the area and its inhabitants for so long. Geevor is intended to set the story straight, and to displace those simplistic myths by revealing the fascinating story of tin and copper mining in

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<sup>53</sup> A Sharpe, 'Geevor Mine', Cornwall Archaeological Unit Report, 1992, p. 3.

West Penwith – an endeavour which is being undertaken as much for local people as for visitors.<sup>54</sup>

This statement suggests that Geevor was perceived internally as a response to an existing romanticised popular construction of Cornwall as a mining region, focused on the eighteenth and nineteenth century mining past. Mining, in some respects, was already a historic industry in Cornwall and planners seemed keen to make sure Geevor was not ‘romanticised’ in the same way. Though some parties were evidently keen to preserve Geevor as a heritage site, there was a desire to avoid the negative associations with tourism and commercialisation which had taken place in other parts of Cornwall. Again here, the explicit link is made with the values of ‘local people’ which are assumed to be at odds with the ‘folksy’ interpretation of mining heritage sought by visitors. Most contemporary arguments in favour of the heritage site reflected this view that Geevor’s local history was too valuable to simply be ‘lost’. This sentiment was echoed by Bob Orchard, then mine manager, who stated

Geevor is very, very special, and should not be forgotten. It had to be preserved and restored...It should be a monument for Pendeen and St Just. There was too much blood, sweat and tears scattered around the mine and underground for it to be abandoned.<sup>55</sup>

Here we see the influence of having an ‘insider’ (in this case an ex-mine manager) involved with planning the heritage site. Orchard clearly valued the social history of the site, seemingly prioritising the preservation of traditions and memories; the ‘blood, sweat and tears’ rather than the material or archaeological resources at the site. On the surface, at least, Geevor was not focused on preserving the distant past, but on linking the heritage site with the local community.

Similarly, the Trevithick Trust, the body who initially managed Geevor as a heritage site, also claimed to be focused on preserving Geevor in the interests of the local community. They stated their objective as being ‘To conserve the site as an educational resource for the future and to operate it in a manner that benefits the local community.’<sup>56</sup> Despite the prominence of references to community benefit, there is a sense of ambiguity as to what constituted the ‘local community’, a vagueness which continues throughout much of the documentation relating to the heritage site.

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<sup>54</sup> A Sharpe, ‘Geevor DLG Works’, Cornwall Archaeology Unit, Cornwall County Council, 1994, p. 9.

<sup>55</sup> Bob Orchard, quoted in ‘Re-birth of Geevor as a Tourist Attraction’, *The Cornishman*, 5 August, 1995.

<sup>56</sup> Geevor pamphlet (Trevithick Trust), *Guide to the Geevor Experience*, 1997.

Presumably if Geevor had some significance to Cornwall as a whole, there are different levels at which the notion of 'locality' can operate in this context. In parallel with Big Pit, it is unclear whether the emphasis was on preserving Geevor as a 'Cornish' mine or for a more geographically localised community; West Cornwall, Penwith or the villages of Pendeen and St Just. Beyond this, symbolically engaging with the community might not be enough to counteract the inherently complex (and problematic) nature of heritagisation.

The Trust was an umbrella organisation which managed several heritage sites across Cornwall. Their mission was 'identifying and interpreting the industrial heritage contained within Cornwall and to preserve and manage the resources identified.'<sup>57</sup> In promoting Geevor, it was stressed that 'Mining runs like a thread through Cornwall's history and has shaped much of its landscape and thinking. Geevor is the real thing.'<sup>58</sup> Here there are echoes of the Wales Tourist Board's rhetoric, aggrandising the mining past and focusing on the industry's role as culturally-defining. As was the case at Big Pit, the story being preserved and promoted was one of success; the growth of an industry which defined Cornwall in certain fundamental respects. But was this truly the 'local' story? Despite its focus on 'community' in its promotional material, Geevor was still memorialising the past 'as it was then', rather than representing the more recent experience of ex-miners and local residents.

Generally speaking, the values associated with the process of heritagisation at Geevor were much less clearly defined than at Big Pit. Although there were elements of standardised heritage discourse in official documents, archaeologists and ex-miners explicitly tried to foster a sense of 'local' ownership of the site and tie it to local people. In this sense, the central disparity between lived experience and its representation through heritage narratives was to some extent acknowledged. However, this appeal was not fully coherent in that it was not apparent which 'community' Geevor would be benefiting, and how it would do so. Geevor's transition to heritage would not necessarily prove a welcome initiative for local people. In this way, the move to heritage was still relatively detached from lived experience in Pendeen.

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<sup>57</sup> Trevithick Trust, 'Current Projects: A brief outline of proposals with HLF funding requirements', 2000, p.1.

<sup>58</sup> Geevor pamphlet (Trevithick Trust), *Guide to the Geevor Experience*, 1997.

### 4.3.3 Contemporary challenges to heritagisation

The process of creating a heritage display in the wake of the devastating effects of the mine closure inevitably provoked mixed reactions among local residents. Heritagisation required a significant shift in values relating to the mining industry. Geevor, which had previously defined a way of life for people in Pendeen and St Just was being recontextualised and re-presented as a heritage attraction. Lakin and Ross have alluded to the fact that this was a problematic process in some regards. They note that the effects of deindustrialisation in the area were still being felt, suggesting that:

This phase in the life of Geevor saw many changes, all of which altered the construction of the institution's identity. The conversion of a working mine to a heritage centre and museum proved to be difficult: job losses lessened participation by community members and increased socio-economic problems.<sup>59</sup>

Indeed, for some the move to heritage was repugnant. Andrew Stone, an ex-miner, epitomised this view writing in *The Peninsula Voice* (a monthly magazine in West Cornwall), he argued that heritage was a 'dirty word' which was succeeding a 'once proud industry'.<sup>60</sup> He claimed that 'heritage [is] a word if mentioned in St Just or Pendeen, that is likely to provoke more spitting than mine dust ever did.'<sup>61</sup> Stone went on to address the disparity between the heritage solution and its perception within the community:

So that's that. Geevor Mine has been saved; the lower site is in the ownership of the county council, the scrap dealer has (provisionally) been sent packing and a new museum is in place. Grant money has been won in this depressed area (with the promise of more to come). Cornwall has a lasting memorial to its distinguished mining history and a handful of jobs has been created locally. Why, then, do so many of the natives view this brave new dawn with, at best, scepticism and, at worst, outright hostility?<sup>62</sup>

In this extract, we see the case being made that, in fact, the transition to heritage was not 'local' in the sense that it had been described previously. In these terms, the heritage initiative was not simply accepted as being beneficial by most 'natives' (presumably residents of Pendeen). The benefits of the heritage initiative were clearly contested

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<sup>59</sup> B Lakin & C Ross, 'Geevor in Care of the Community?' Presented at SW Archaeology Conference 2009 (unpublished) p. 3.

<sup>60</sup> A Stone, 'New Dirty Word Succeeds a Once Proud Industry', *The Peninsula Voice*, 1993.

<sup>61</sup> A Stone, 'New Dirty Word', *The Peninsula Voice*, 1993.

<sup>62</sup> A Stone, 'New Dirty Word', *The Peninsula Voice*, 1993.

*within* the local area, and opinion was not merely divided along insider/outsider lines. There was a significant gap between the way in which heritagisation had been sold ‘for the community’ and the existence of ‘outright hostility’ to the process. This would suggest that, regardless of the way in which heritagisation is motivated, there is something fundamentally difficult about representing lived experience as heritage alongside living memory. These tensions have not been solved over time. Seven years after the opening of the heritage site, this relationship was still problematic, and there was evidently still some animosity towards heritage from people who would rather see Geevor as an operational mine. Mike Dougan, the mine manager at the time, reported to the Geevor Advisory Group in 2000 that the perception of Geevor in the community was still controversial. He claimed:

We try to cooperate with the local community but we do seem to suffer from the actions of various splinter groups. It is important to understand that Geevor Plc does not exist and that tin mining does not take place any more at Geevor. Geevor is an industrial heritage site and a museum to tin mining. Its current primary role should not be in doubt. Partnership and cooperation are needed to promote Geevor and move forward. Change is inevitable and should be recognised and accepted by anyone who wants to see Geevor succeed.<sup>63</sup>

The manager, here, points to the central problem with heritagisation. Dougan felt it necessary to reiterate the fact that ‘mining does not take place anymore at Geevor’ and that it is now ‘an industrial heritage site and museum to mining’. This shows that the ‘current primary role’ of the site was still debated, implying that some found it difficult to accept Geevor as a ‘historic’ site, rather than the working mine which had been so influential in their lives. In fact, by turning to heritage Geevor was being reconceptualised in a way which for some would be worse than seeing the site disappear altogether. Heritagisation inevitably separated the past from the present which, for some, was difficult to come to terms with.

#### *4.3.4 Heritagisation ongoing: recent institutional discourses at Geevor*

Despite its lukewarm reception in Pendeen, in the years since the Geevor opened as a heritage site, institutional discourses have continued to focus on the nature of the site as a ‘community’ resource, rather than merely a tourist attraction. When the management

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<sup>63</sup> Mine Manager’s Report, Minutes of Geevor Advisory Group meeting, 8 December, 2000.

contract for the site was renegotiated in 2000, providing ‘community benefit’ was top of list of priorities for both the Trevithick Trust and Pendeen Community Heritage. The Geevor Advisory Group also expressed concerns with the Trevithick Trust and felt that they were not being kept sufficiently informed of activity at the site.<sup>64</sup> It was argued that the Trevithick Trust had become over-stretched in terms of resources and that it was not sufficiently focused on Geevor. In an attempt to retain the management contract for Geevor, the Trevithick Trust prepared a revised management plan for Geevor in 2000, stressing its promotion of community values. Among other agenda, this stated that it aimed to

become the premier hard rock mining museum in Cornwall, to reflect the County’s desire to promote Cornish excellence, past present and future, to fulfil a role within the local community whilst respecting the prime business aim of Geevor, and to make the site financially self sustainable.<sup>65</sup>

Of course, in these statements the Trust also imputed a specific value related to the mining past. The notion was to promote ‘Cornish excellence’, presumably focusing on Cornish achievements on a national and global scale, rather than representing a range of local lived experience. As we saw with Big Pit, these sorts of claims form part of a broader discourse of national heroism, highlighting the mining past as a cultural high point in spite of its problems and hardships. Its claims to ‘fulfil a role within the local community’ in this light seemed vague and rather detached. Meanwhile, the County Council and the Trust both recognised the need to ‘forge stronger links with the community so that Geevor is seen to be its site and its museum and to increase the number of community-based activities taking part on the site.’<sup>66</sup> The decisive issue in this case was the need to maintain locally-based management for Geevor (meaning Pendeen-based in this case), highlighting the prevalence of the ‘community’ agenda and the dominance of a local preservationist discourse as opposed to a more visitor-focused tourism agenda or ideas about economic regeneration. Pendeen Community Heritage identified their primary objective as

to manage, preserve, protect and interpret the mining heritage of Geevor mine, and other mining sites in the Pendeen and St Just area, for the benefit of the people of Pendeen and St Just and the public at large.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Minutes of Geevor Advisory Group meeting, 8<sup>th</sup> December, 2000.

<sup>65</sup> *Geevor Tin Mine, The Way Ahead*, Discussion document prepared by Cornwall County Council in conjunction with the Trevithick Trust, 2000, p. 1.

<sup>66</sup> *Geevor Tin Mine, The Way Ahead*, Discussion document prepared by Cornwall County Council in conjunction with the Trevithick Trust, 2000, p. 2.

<sup>67</sup> Pendeen Community Heritage, Annual Report of the Trustees, 2006.

Other objectives included ‘educating the public about Cornwall’s mining history’, advancing education and skills in heritage preservation and centrally the promotion of charitable purposes within the community. This, it was argued, reflected a broader feeling among local residents. In 2001 a community consultation was carried out in Pendeen, which noted a sense of impatience among respondents who had hoped to see ‘real and lasting change at the site.’<sup>68</sup> In these terms, while PCH still stressed the importance of Cornwall’s broader mining history, they saw their community as particularly localised, promoting the value of Geevor to the villages of St Just and Pendeen specifically.

However, there were other forces at work which impacted on the way the heritage narrative was constructed at Geevor. While Geevor’s management was increasingly locally-focused, other institutions were taking quite a different approach away from Geevor’s gates. English Heritage and a number of partners put forward a bid for the Cornwall and West Devon Mining Area to be considered for World Heritage Status in 2000. Throughout this process, the value of Cornish mining heritage was couched in much more generic terms. The application document announced, ‘The Site is being nominated to UNESCO in recognition of this unique contribution to the development of the modern industrialised world, the enduring technological and social consequence of the exceptional survival of distinctive structures and landforms.’<sup>69</sup> The narrative adopted here was clearly one of large-scale success, whereby mining in Devon and Cornwall was considered to have been globally-influential in its early development. As was the case in Blaenavon, the much earlier roots of mining heritage were stressed in order to provide a more obvious sense of historicism, adding credibility to the application.

WHS status was awarded on the basis that Cornish inventions had helped shape the progress of the Industrial Revolution and that the Cornish landscape was particularly distinctive with its ‘characteristic engine houses and beam engines, as a technological ensemble in a landscape’, which UNESCO claimed ‘reflect the substantial contribution the area made to the industrial revolution and formative changes in mining practices

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<sup>68</sup> Kinghurst Consultancy Group, *Making the Most of Geevor – A Feasibility Study*, report to the Cornwall County Council, 2001.

<sup>69</sup> Cornwall and West Devon Mining Landscape: World Heritage Site Management Plan 2005-2010, p.1.

around the world.’<sup>70</sup> Similarly, the UNESCO web site currently describes the site as follows:

Much of the landscape of Cornwall and West Devon was transformed in the 18th and early 19th centuries as a result of the rapid growth of pioneering copper and tin mining. Its deep underground mines, engine houses, foundries, new towns, smallholdings, ports and harbours, and their ancillary industries together reflect prolific innovation which, in the early 19th century, enabled the region to produce two-thirds of the world’s supply of copper. The substantial remains are a testimony to the contribution Cornwall and West Devon made to the Industrial Revolution in the rest of Britain and to the fundamental influence the area had on the mining world at large. Cornish technology embodied in engines, engine houses and mining equipment was exported around the world. Cornwall and West Devon were the heartland from which mining technology rapidly spread.<sup>71</sup>

Clearly, the Cornish World Heritage Site rhetoric follows the same pattern as Blaenavon’s. Eighteenth and nineteenth century developments were again stressed, giving a more obvious sense of historicism to the narrative. There was also a trend of aggrandising the narrative; mining was ‘pioneering’, ‘prolific’ and had a ‘fundamental influence’. UNESCO recognised that preserving the mining past was important because of its legacy in shaping structural, cultural and technological development of the modern world. These sorts of values were notably detached from the localised debates about the impact of recent heritagisation in St Just and Pendeen.

Even so, since the Cornwall and West Devon site gained World Heritage Status, this more generic heritage discourse has spread into the way the narrative of the mining past is constructed at Geevor. Interpretation panels at the site have adopted the slogan ‘Our mining culture shaped your world.’<sup>72</sup> In the new Hard Rock museum, visitors, are encouraged to see Geevor in these much broader terms. One panel claims ‘Cornish mining is internationally significant: it contributed to the development of our modern industrial society and the world as we know it. It is valued alongside other global icons such as the Taj Mahal and Stonehenge.’<sup>73</sup> Geevor itself is described as follows:

Geevor is a modern tin mine situated in an area that has been mined for thousands of years. It is made up of more than 20 different buildings and covers around 68 acres. Geevor now operates as a mining heritage attraction, part of the UNESCO Cornwall and West Devon World Heritage Site. In this museum you

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<sup>70</sup> <http://whc.unesco.org/en/decisions/1012> accessed 20/05/2012.

<sup>71</sup> <http://whc.unesco.org/en/decisions/1012> accessed 20/05/2012.

<sup>72</sup> Geevor heritage site display panel.

<sup>73</sup> Geevor heritage site display panel.

can discover how the ore was mined underground and what happened on the surface. You can also find out what life was like for those who worked here.<sup>74</sup>

Through these texts we can clearly see the way in which UNESCO's grand industrial heritage narrative is borrowed and re-used at Geevor. The 'heritage value' of the site is now pinned to Cornwall's much older mining history, and Geevor is promoted as a 'modern mine' in an area 'that has been mined for thousands of years'. Perhaps the implication here is that the modern mine alone would not justify heritage status. As for local people's experience, the extract above suggests that at Geevor you can 'find out what life was like for those who worked here', but this seemed focused on people's roles in contributing to the 'development of our modern industrial society', rather than the more recent impact of *deindustrialisation* and its particular social and economic legacy. Indeed, romanticising Cornish mining (and Geevor by association) as a 'global icon' seems to run contrary to its stated aims of being preserved for the benefit of local people. Whether or not Cornish mining did so clearly shape the modern world as these assertions would have it, this sort of discourse simplistically glosses over lived experience, actually not taking into account the memory of the local community whom Geevor's management was seemingly so keen to serve.

#### **4.4 Conclusion: Constructing 'the past' at Geevor and Big Pit**

As we have seen, the turn to heritage was motivated differently at Geevor and Big Pit. As such, subtly different brands of heritage discourse emerged at each site. At Big Pit, the transition to heritage was 'top-down', with the Wales Tourist Board tirelessly promoting heritage tourism as a means to regenerate the south Wales Valleys. In Geevor's case, the more 'bottom-up' approach resulted in a desire to preserve the mine for both its archaeological value and the benefit of the community. Nonetheless, in being recontextualised as heritage, both sites involved the re-framing of mining (and of the mine sites) as 'historic' assets, which involved a significant shift in values. To this end, despite contextual differences, there were similar patterns in the way institutional discourses imposed a temporal framework which fixed mining in 'the past' and separated it from lived experience in these communities.

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<sup>74</sup> Geevor heritage site display panel.

At Big Pit, in order for heritagisation (and subsequent regeneration) to be viable, a clear line had to be drawn between the past and the present. The WTB's heritage discourse oriented on the one hand to the distant past (primarily the wide-ranging impact of nineteenth century industrialisation), and on the other hand, to the economic demands of the present and future; regenerating to post-industrial Blaenavon via tourism. In the process, living memory and lived experience were glossed over. This trend was then adopted in the way the site promoted itself, to both visitors and funding bodies, and continues to the present day. A large-scale heritage narrative was constructed which emphasised the role of Blaenavon in the Industrial Revolution which shaped Wales economically and culturally. Above all, heritagisation fixed the story of mining in Wales in the distant past. As a result, mining heritage became a story of success which needed to be remembered, rather than engaging with its more recent history and the lived experience of decline.

However effective the economic regeneration plan was in reality, there was still a disparity between the values constructed in the institutional discourses and the way in which the decline of the industry was experienced. The extracts drawn upon in this chapter suggest that the 'loss' associated with deindustrialisation was limited to jobs and the economic landscape of the Valleys. Even when the needs of the community were alluded to in heritage discourse, it was either in terms of the romanticised past or the economic demands of the present. There was no sense that heritage planners engaged substantially with the sensitive nature of representing lived experience as heritage for those who were living with the real social and economic legacy of deindustrialisation. It was assumed that the cultural experience of mining and its associated communities had lapsed and that external heritage planners could act to 'regenerate' what was left. In the act of preserving or 'remembering' the past and regenerating for the future, the present, for this community, was being forgotten.

At Geevor, this sort of heritage discourse developed much later. Nonetheless, heritagisation still involved the same process of historicising lived experience, resulting in a clash of values in terms of what the role and significance of the site should be after its closure. At first, institutional discourses constructed a number of different notions of heritage value. The archaeologists who initially advocated saving the site did recognise the impact of the mine closures, but they were still focused on preserving the mine as a 'unique' example of Cornwall's mining history. Despite the prominence of

'community' in institutional discourses, there remained a significant gap between the way Geevor promoted itself and its impact for local people in St Just and Pendeen. There was still the concern that Geevor would become 'just another relic on the coastline' which so many people had feared. As a result, how the 'community' agenda played out was continually contested. Although the Trevithick Trust had paid lip service to the importance of 'community', there was no sense of what this meant in practice or how they would implement this agenda. This fracture was further highlighted by the later adoption of a broad (but simplistic) heritage narrative of mining in Cornwall, which was shaped by external values and funding agendas. In spite of frequent claims that mining heritage was being preserved for local benefit, more recent rhetoric constructed the value of the mining past in much broader terms, in line with UNESCO World Heritage values (and those promoted at Big Pit). Geevor was ostensibly being preserved for 'the community', but the narrative which was used to justify its heritage value was still rather detached, somewhat romanticised, and based on the success story of Cornish mining. There was no sense that the more recent local experience of decline and loss would be represented.

Both cases illustrate the way in which heritagisation constructs a disjunction between the past and the present. Through its display as heritage, mining was frozen in 'the past' and identified as a cultural resource which needed to be preserved for present purposes. Heritage (in these particular contexts) in many ways pre-empted the intergenerational shift from living memory to 'history'. As argued in Chapter 1, Nora and others have assumed that memorialisation only comes into being when memory lapses.<sup>75</sup> However, as has been shown here, when heritage represents the recent past, there is inevitably a much more complex process at work in the space in between present experience and its representation as the past. These mining sites were instantly historicised, heritage discourse fixed mining firmly in the past - albeit a 'usable past' as a resource for the present - making it possible to impose a heritage value on the mining past which showed little engagement with the nature of people's lived experience (or living memory). Where heritage coexists with living memory, sites are inevitably contested, according to perceptions of real versus imagined pasts. Priorities of heritage planners were notably different at each site but in both cases, heritage discourse was driven by

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<sup>75</sup> Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux De Mémoire', *Representations*, 1989, 7-24.

funding priorities and assigned an intrinsic 'historic' heritagised value to mining, which would potentially conflict with living memory.



## Chapter 5

### Heritage and Living Memory

#### 5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter argued that heritage discourses imposed temporally-fixed heritage narratives at Geevor and Big Pit. Heritagisation too readily assumed a break between past and present which would potentially be inconsistent with the experience of ex-miners and other local people, for whom the mining past (and subsequent deindustrialisation) was still within living memory. This chapter attempts to deconstruct the complex implications of representing the mining past at Geevor and Big Pit, establishing what happens when heritage and living memory meet.

##### 5.1.1 *Heritage and memory*

As we saw in Chapter 1, the way in which we characterise the relationship between heritage sites and memory depends largely upon our interpretation of ‘memory’ itself. It is widely accepted that memory functions at a number of levels, and these are articulated through a wide range of terminology. The tension between the multiple ways memory operates (both at micro and macro levels) has been the subject of a great deal of research in oral history and memory studies. Recent work has focused on the relationship between autobiographical memory (individual memory based on lived experience) and public or cultural memory (where memory is assumed to be ‘collective’ in some senses, rather than autobiographical).<sup>1</sup> Importantly, both are assumed to be intimately related to the ways in which cultural heritages are preserved, embedded and understood. Assuming that there are a number of layers of memory itself, there are multiple ways in which memory interact with heritage. However, as shown previously, heritage literature often assumes an implicit link with memory in a broad sense, but the relationship between heritage and *living* memory is somewhat under-researched.

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<sup>1</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *Halbwachs/Coser: On Collective Memory* (University of Chicago Press, 1992); Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka, ‘Collective Memory and Cultural Identity’, *New German Critique*, 1995, 125–133.

Thus far, memory and heritage have been linked in rather abstract terms. Their relationship is often bound with ideas about place, which has long been considered central to memory and the process of remembering, which has been a key strand of research since the supposed ‘memory boom’ in academic scholarship.<sup>2</sup> Pierre Nora’s idea of ‘lieux de memoire’ acknowledged that memories are fundamentally linked to the places in which they are produced and are hence tied to certain social identities.<sup>3</sup> In this vein, heritage sites can claim to offer a sense of materiality to memory. Shopes and Hamilton, for example, suggest that heritage is a ‘socially sanctioned institutionally supported process of *producing* memories that make certain versions of the past public and render others invisible.’<sup>4</sup> It is often claimed that heritage sites ‘memorialise’ ‘commemorate’ and ‘remember’ the past, but these terms are often taken for granted with the somewhat simplistic assumption that heritage inherently has a public mnemonic function for valued cultural pasts. In this model, museums and heritage might be seen to ‘house’ or ‘produce’ memory in a broad metaphorical sense.<sup>5</sup> Curators can then be memory ‘makers’ and visitors to museums and heritage sites can be memory ‘consumers’.

### 5.1.2 Reasserting the value of individual memories in heritage

These conceptualisations work on the premise that memory is an abstract concept which can operate at a ‘collective’ level; where heritage narratives can be extremely influential in the way societies value and ‘remember’ certain pasts. However, as we have seen, the notion of collective memory itself has been contested. Of course, we have to concede that memories are embedded, remembered and told in social contexts, perhaps meaning that they never truly exist as ‘individual’. In addition, as Halbwachs identified, there are some contexts in which collective memories are more prevalent; where small family or working groups construct similar memories based on shared experience.<sup>6</sup> However, as argued earlier, we need to resist a simplistic adoption of collective memory which

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<sup>2</sup> Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (Routledge, 1995).

<sup>3</sup> P Nora, ‘Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire’, *Representations*, 26(Spring, 1989)

<sup>4</sup> *Oral History and Public Memories*, ed. by Paula Hamilton and Linda Shopes (Temple University Press, 2008), p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Susan A. Crane, *Museums and Memory* (Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 2; Hamilton and Shopes, p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> For critique, see Anna Green, ‘Can Memory Be Collective?’, in *The Oxford handbook of oral history*, ed. by Donald A. Ritchie (Oxford University Press, 2010).

extrapolates this theory to much bigger groups. The existence of public or cultural memories does not necessarily mean individuals will remember the same events in the same way, nor that they will attach a similar sense of *meaning* to those memories in the broader context of their lives.

When heritage representations coexist with living memory, the relationship is more complex. The broad-brush approach to heritage and memory outlined above leaves little space for a sense of individual agency. Heritagisation, as argued in Chapter 4, involves the construction of generalised narratives in which there is often little space for individual experience. There are undoubtedly a number of ways in which individuals remember, meaning that we have to take into account some degree of individual agency in these recollections. As a result, we need to unravel the binary between ‘individual’ and ‘collective’, and take a more nuanced view as to how autobiographical memory and broader public or cultural memories interact. In turn, we can more specifically analyse the ways in which heritagisation interacts with these different layers of memory.

Relatively few studies of heritage and memory have been concerned with the recent or contemporary past, and hence with the role of living memory. War memorials have provided a few exceptions to this pattern, which have been notably controversial. For example, a number of studies of memory noting prominent contests over public war memorials that have emerged in the United States (e.g. the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington DC, the Enola Gay exhibition at the Smithsonian’s National Air and Space Museum).<sup>7</sup> As such, public memorials have provided the basis for some more detailed investigations into the interaction between, on the one hand, public representations of the past and commemorative practices (though not specifically termed ‘heritage’) and, on the other hand, individual memory. In his study of European Holocaust memorials, James Young argues precisely that we should break down the notion of collective memory relating to public representations of the past. Young writes:

I prefer to examine collected memory, the many discrete memories that are gathered into common memorial spaces and assigned common meaning. A society’s memory, in this context, might be regarded as an aggregate collection of its members many, often competing memories. If societies remember, it is

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<sup>7</sup> David Thelen, ‘History After the Enola Gay Controversy: An Introduction’, *The Journal of American History*, 82 (1995), 1029; Kristin Ann Hass, *Carried to the Wall: American Memory and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial* (University of California Press, 1998).

only insofar as their institutions and rituals organize, shape, even inspire their constituents' memories.<sup>8</sup>

Young importantly reasserts the value of individual agency when it comes to memory and remembrance. He suggests that while memorials 'propagate the illusion of common memory', 'collective memory' in its truest sense cannot exist, 'for even though groups share socially constructed assumptions and values that organize memory into roughly similar patterns, individuals cannot share another's memory any more than they can share another's cortex.'<sup>9</sup> Indeed, as others have noted, individual memory still has 'a will of its own' and does not necessarily simply align with dominant historical narratives.<sup>10</sup> Autobiographical memory is particularly influential when an individual has experienced events or ways of life which are now represented as heritage, and this perspective provides a starting point for the analysis in the remaining sections of this chapter. Surely, where heritage representations coexist with living memory, we need to understand the dialogue between the two; both the points of convergence and the points of contestation.

### *5.1.3 Temporal frameworks of heritage and living memory*

As argued in the previous chapter, heritagisation imposed a sense of 'historicism' which effectively separated the past from the present. Some theorists have also assumed that historical narratives and memory need to be distinguished from each other. Nora, for example, differentiated between memory and history, arguing that 'sites of memory' only come in to being when memory no longer functions.<sup>11</sup> The implication here is that where memory (meaning living or autobiographical memory) still exists, there is no need for memorialisation, that everyday experience and memorialisation are fundamentally different concerns. However, this assumes that living memory and fixed representations of the past (in any form) do not overlap. Given the wide-ranging practices of preservation now being undertaken (outlined in Chapter 1), this is clearly not the case. In fact, heritage institutions are increasingly valuing the need to preserve the more recent past, particularly in the case of industrial heritage. This means that

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<sup>8</sup> James Edward Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (Yale University Press, 1993), p. xi.

<sup>9</sup> Young, p. 6.

<sup>10</sup> Douwe Draaisma, *Why Life Speeds Up As You Get Older: How Memory Shapes Our Past* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux De Mémoire', *Representations*, 1989, 7–24.

many sites present the past which some individuals still remember in a direct sense. And, as we have seen, given that the motives for heritagisation are inevitably more complex, there is not always the neat transition between living memory and heritage that Nora has implied.

More recent thought has contradicted this strict distinction between the past and its role in the present, or between memory and history. Raphael Samuel, for example, claimed memory 'is dialectically related to historical thought, rather than being some kind of negative other to it.'<sup>12</sup> Geoffrey Cubitt similarly defined the study of memory as 'the study of the means by which a conscious sense of the past, as something meaningfully connected to the present, is sustained and developed within human individuals and human cultures.'<sup>13</sup> Memory, in these terms, is both individual and cultural, both past and present. It can be shaped by social forces (and cultural representations such as heritage) but it is also fundamentally individual. It relates to the past but relies on meaningful (re)construction in the present. Indeed, the historical study of memory has essentially been concerned with the social dynamics of the past-present relationship, not only asking 'what happened then?' but 'why is that important now and to whom?' In this model, there is no clear distinction between past and present, rather a continuous flow of knowledge, memories and meaning.

This approach has been adopted by Bernard Eric Jensen who proposed 'historical consciousness' as a framework which resists equating 'history' and 'the past'.<sup>14</sup> He wrote 'It is crucial that we continue to examine the different ways in which people's pasts shape their ongoing lives – ways that vary from one culture to another and from one epoch to another.'<sup>15</sup> Along these lines, Jensen advocated paying closer attention to 'how interior (subjective) and exterior (physical and biological) modes of temporality are related to each other.'<sup>16</sup> In other words, focusing on 'objective' senses of time which separate past and present is not enough to understand the nature of historical knowledge. Put simply, we cannot simply write about the past 'as it was then', we need to understand how people conceive of the *value* and *use* of particular pasts in their own lives. These ideas are very much in the spirit of recent oral history research. Since the

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<sup>12</sup> Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory* (Verso, 1994), p. x.

<sup>13</sup> Geoffrey Cubitt, *History And Memory* (Manchester University Press, 2007), p. 9.

<sup>14</sup> Jensen.

<sup>15</sup> Jensen, p. 54.

<sup>16</sup> Jensen, p. 52.

'cultural turn' oral historians have increasingly focused on analysing the frameworks of meaning which are central to our understanding of the past. Perhaps most influentially, Alessandro Portelli and Luisa Passerini separately argued that the 'problems' or 'inaccuracies' of individual memory in fact enhance our historical understanding rather than being barriers to it. In these terms, we cannot see the past as an isolated 'foreign country', but something which is actively constructed and negotiated in the present. Most importantly, oral history is a vital source for analysing the way in which people remember, recount and make meaning of the past in the context of their own lives and experiences.

Though these scholars were critiquing the way in which some professional historians viewed oral history in particular, a similar approach can be adopted when thinking about heritage. As we saw in the previous chapter, heritage produced a relatively fixed 'objective' narrative about the past, separating the past and the present. On the contrary, memory (in its various forms) is assumed to provide a continuous link between past, present and future. This chapter attempts to more clearly model the relationship between heritage and living memory from the two case studies. In doing so, the chapter draws on oral history data from interviews with miners and local residents who lived through the period when the mines were operational in Blaenavon and Pendden.<sup>17</sup> Firstly, it analyses the way in which living memory is used as part of the heritage 'experience'; how miners' memories are harnessed and presented (or indeed performed) at the sites and how they reflect on their roles as guides. Secondly, it addresses how mining is remembered in the community, where memory challenges and/or goes beyond the heritage narrative.

## **5.2 Representing memory as heritage at Geevor and Big Pit**

Autobiographical memory is, in fact, a central characteristic of the way in which heritage is presented at both Geevor and Big Pit. Each site offers an underground tour guided by ex-miners in which the miner-guides tell their stories and recount memories for visitors. The tours are very popular and feature heavily in the tourist marketing in both cases. Big Pit invites visitors to:

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<sup>17</sup> All oral history interviews were carried out by the author in 2010 and 2011.

Go 300 feet underground with a real miner and see what life was like for the thousands of men who worked at the coal face... Visitors wear the very same equipment – helmet, cap lamp, belt, battery and ‘self rescuer’ – used by miners.<sup>18</sup>

At Geevor, very similarly, marketing material suggests:

The Geevor guides will take you around the workings, sharing their mining experiences with you. Get coated up and keep your hard hats on as you go from the 20<sup>th</sup> century mine down into the early days of mining.<sup>19</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the online promotional texts tend to stress the material authenticities of the two sites and the availability of experienced miner-guides as key elements of the tourist offer. In both texts, emphasis is placed on the value of hearing miners own narratives first hand. Big Pit stresses the presence of a ‘real miner’ while Geevor similarly focuses on guides ‘sharing *their* experiences’ with you. In this way, the miners’ autobiographical memories are commodified as a marketable resource for heritage tourism. Miners are effectively ‘insiders’ and, through telling their own stories, they can provide specialised insight into mining heritage.

As such, miner-guides are invaluable assets to heritage sites which promote an ‘authentic’ experience of the mining past for visitors. However, when their memories are told or performed as heritage, they are inevitably framed in particular ways. From brief examples above, we can see that the focus is on visitors ‘experiencing’ the past, learning ‘what life was like’ and in some ways re-enacting mining (wearing the same ‘gear’ such as hard hats, lamps and belts). This implies that miners’ narratives are still temporally-fixed within the heritage frame, the result of which might be to limit and shape the way in which miners ‘remember’ and tell their stories in a heritage context (as will be argued later).

For the purposes of this research, oral history interviews were carried out with a number of miner-guides at both Geevor and Big Pit.<sup>20</sup> The focus of this section is not to establish exactly how the miners carry out their tours and what is said to visitors, but the way in which miners reflect on their roles as guides and the implications their tour-guiding roles have for the ways in which they remember and articulate their own narratives of the past. In this sense, the miners’ narratives operate at a number of levels.

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<sup>18</sup> <http://www.museumwales.ac.uk/en/bigpit/> accessed 1/7/2012.

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.geevor.com/> accessed 12/12/2012.

<sup>20</sup> See Chapter 3 section 4 for account of oral history methods.

In the interview data, miners show signs of moving in and out of a fixed heritage narrative (of the sort identified in Chapter 4) but are also more reflexive about their roles providing a more nuanced story of the legacy of mining in these areas. As oral historians have noted, memory is evoked and told differently in different contexts. In this case, it can be expected that miner-guides will frame their narratives differently when undertaking tours and during oral history interviews. These contextual differences may reveal the ways in which the heritage frame shapes what aspects of the mining past are remembered and told to visitors in relation to the way in which miners remember these experiences in the broader context of their own lives.

### *5.2.1 Memory in the heritage frame*

At both Geevor and Big, ex-miners and heritage site staff showed a close awareness of the value of the miners' culturally authenticating role in telling their stories to visitors. Ceri, a Big Pit curator and ex-miner, described the significance of the miners' accounts claiming 'We are the coal industry. It's our story. We tell our story.'<sup>21</sup> Even in this short utterance it is clear that miners' memories can be considered to provide direct cultural access to the mining past simply by virtue of their material presence. He implies that the miners own the historical narrative and that, beyond that, they physically embody the traditions of mining ('we are the coal industry'). He goes on to describe the accounts given by former miners as tour guides, implying that they provide a largely unmediated story of mining history for visitors:

It's what the boys think. They're not told to say anything. They're told not to swear, not to be racist and not to be misogynist but apart from that it's how they saw it. They may not be able to give you a run-down of what happened in the Tonypandy riots but they can say what it felt like to work at the coal seam. They're not trained historians but they pick up what they need to know.<sup>22</sup>

Ceri refutes implicit claims that guides might be performing to a script, claiming that their representations to visitors are true to their beliefs and feelings ('It's what the boys think'). Though the miners are given freedom to tell their stories as they wish, they are still operating within the heritage narrative, focusing on 'what it felt like to work at the coal seam'. There is also an implication that, in fact, they need to learn elements of the

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<sup>21</sup> Interview with Ceri Thompson, ex-miner and Big Pit curator, recorded by Bethan Coupland, 6 June 2011 (6-7 minutes).

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Ceri Thompson, ex-miner and Big Pit curator, recorded by Bethan Coupland, 6 June 2011 (38-40 minutes).

history to tell visitors ('they pick up what they need to know'), suggesting that there is a broader heritage narrative that the guides have to engage with as well as sharing their own experiences.

Interestingly, Ceri also distances 'the boys' from academic history as a source of a reliable historical account. The miners may not know the historical details of the Tonyandy riots, but they can tell the culture from their own immediate experience. In another interview, Peter, a Big Pit manager, echoed Ceri's assumptions. Peter, when asked why Big Pit has been a success, responded: 'You could simplify it, cut it down to its bare bones and say it's a real coal mine, real miners... That first person interpretation is important. They don't use "they", they use "I" and "we"... They're not historians and they're not mining engineers, they have their own views on things. What you get is the real thing as it were.'<sup>23</sup> Again, Peter focuses on the centrality of the miners' narratives in terms of attracting visitors and similarly constructs a binary distinction between 'miners' and 'historians'. This proved to be a recurrent theme in Peter's interview. Later, he described the changing role of miners becoming guides:

We discovered what were viewed as bolshie troglodytes by some people in society who emerged from underground every couple of years and played merry hell with whatever government was in power at the time. You actually find that these people, certainly in terms of South Wales, almost purpose-made for the tourist industry. There's always a bit of repartee, a laugh and a joke waiting to pop out and that's the same with miners around the world...an authoritative voice you're unlikely to challenge that because [signalling quotes] 'the historian has told you' but if you've got conflicting views being expressed and the extreme views being expressed, it seems to say to you it's OK for me to have a view.<sup>24</sup>

Peter's humorous characterisation of miners as 'bolshie troglodytes' contrasts sharply with his tongue-in-cheek reference to 'what the historian has told you'. Together, the curator and the manager neatly invert the well-trodden heritage critique popular among historians – that heritage is 'bad history'. In their view, the miners tell the 'real' story of the coal industry where their memories are central in our understanding of historical knowledge. For Peter, the combination of the miners' character and their lived experience makes them 'purpose-made for the tourist industry'.

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<sup>23</sup> Interview with Peter Walker, Big Pit Coal Mining Museum manager; recorded by Bethan Coupland, 6 June, 2011 (18-19 minutes).

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Peter Walker, Big Pit Coal Mining Museum manager; recorded by Bethan Coupland, 6 June, 2011 (14-15 minutes).

At Geevor, similar value is placed on ex-miners' memories making up the heritage narrative. Geevor already employs some younger guides who were not previously miners (due to the generational shift). Nonetheless, as the promotional text above showed, the site still advertises tours which are led by ex-miners, stressing that first-hand experience is seen as more valuable to visitors. Adam, Geevor's archaeologist noted this when discussing the underground tour:

It's what they come for. They come to go down a little dark hole underground...But again, for me, it works best when there's a guide there taking you round and saying 'this is a bit smaller than the places I used to work' and telling you a story about that and how many people used to work here and how hard it was, and that people were in the dark. People then think 'blimey, this is where people came to work every morning, places like this.'<sup>25</sup>

Adam refers to the somewhat curious nature of the mine tours as a visitor attraction. By pointing to the fact that visitors come to walk around 'a little dark hole underground' he hints that the space has a very different meaning in being recontextualised as heritage; what might be merely a 'hole in the ground' for miners is a heritage attraction for visitors. At Geevor, due to the mine flooding after its closure, the tour takes place in a much older (probably 17<sup>th</sup> century) section of the mine. Guides are then charged with making connections with modern mining, despite the fact that visitors are supposedly 'experiencing' a much older past. Adam claims that what makes this work is the guides' telling their own stories. He suggests that when they can compare the mine which visitors are walking around with their own working conditions, the story comes alive and makes a more 'real' social connection with visitors. In a sense, the fact that the tour takes place in a very different environment does not matter, it is a vehicle for guides to share their own memories. On the other hand, the guides have to take on two roles, telling the much earlier (more 'historic') story of mining as well as drawing on their own memories. This brings us to the question of how memory (and the stories told based on memories) are shaped within a heritage context.

The above quotes recognise the centrality of the miners' memories to the heritage narrative, and the two become interchangeable in the way people talk about the stories told at Geevor and Big Pit. This perspective, however, does not take into account the way in which the guides' stories are moulded by the heritage context - by the existing institutional narrative, by the material surroundings of the sites, and by the demands of

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<sup>25</sup> Interview with Adam Sharpe, Cornwall County Archaeologist; recorded by Bethan Coupland, 22 March 2011 (45-47 minutes).

their audience of tourists and heritage site visitors. Oral history interviews carried out with miner-guides at Geevor and Bit Pit reveal their awareness of the value of their own stories in the heritage context, but also a sense of the way in which they frame their narratives for visitors. John, a Big Pit guide, described the popularity of the underground tours and why he thought visitors enjoy them:

There's a couple of things, the banter and the history. We can't tell them everything but we can tell them how the conditions was, the social conditions, a bit of your own experience. In ten years' time we're not going to have no miners about. We're a dying breed. The tours will be manufactured because they've got no experience like the rest of them have. It'll diminish from what we have now.<sup>26</sup>

John isolates 'the banter' and 'the history' as the two key features of the underground tours. In terms of 'the history', he echoes Peter's sentiment (in his quote above) that the miners 'can't tell them [the visitors] everything', presumably meaning the 'official' history, but that their own stories about the past are equally valuable. John effectively equates 'the history' with 'your own experience', which he repeatedly emphasises as the central historical narrative. John also stresses the value of their lived experience by implicitly contrasting the miners' stories with the 'manufactured' tours that he says will result from the absence of the 'dying breed' of real miners who can tell the 'true' history. By equating miners' experience and 'history', John historicises (or heritagises) the miner-guides' memories. He claims their task is to 'tell them how the conditions was, a bit of your own experience'. This is perhaps the most important insight John gives into the purpose of the tours. Miner-guides exclusively frame their narratives in terms of what mining was like 'then', i.e. when the mines were working. The heritage frame therefore results in freezing the miners' 'experience' in the past, rather than extending it to the legacy of the mine closures in the post-industrial era.

When carrying out their tours, the miners seemingly balance the demands of the past and the present. Not only do they tell their stories of 'how it was then', they simultaneously orient to visitor priorities in the present which, in turn, shape the way their memories are told in the heritage context. The second key element of the tours that John identifies, 'the banter' among miners, suggests that miner-guides are able to perform (as well as to narrate) some of the authentic practices of working miners. 'The banter' is mentioned by a number of other miner-guides at Big Pit, including Dewi, who

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<sup>26</sup> Interview with John Williams, Big Pit miner-guide; recorded by Bethan Coupland, 5 June 2011 (5-6 minutes).

says 'I think people [visitors] like that [hearing miners' banter] as soon as they come through the top of the pit there, put their helmets on, they like the banter, the boys. They like the banter of the boys, the atmosphere of the place.'<sup>27</sup> He again contrasts miners' banter with the prospective tour commentaries of non-miners as guides, who he says 'won't have been underground, it will be read off a script.'<sup>28</sup> Again then, we see complex oppositions between guides telling stories based on their memories and partial acknowledgment of a performative element of the tour, orienting to visitor needs. John and Dewi are both happy to acknowledge that banter is an attractive design feature of miner-guides' performance to visitors (and to that extent it addresses the realities of their own experience).

This sort of struggle between past and present is also evident in responses from Geevor guides. Dennis, a Geevor miner-guide, described the way in which many people perceived the guides to be 'living in the past'. In this sense, he makes reference to the rosy-eyed nostalgia critique of heritage, and he seems to accept the validity of that critique to some extent. But he then reframes his account from the perspective of visitors' priorities:

Guys like myself, and there's about six others here that were all here together at one time, we still look back a bit, you know. I don't know if people, um, some people here on this site don't - they think we live in the past too much but we're relating to people at the moment. People who walk into this shed and we can tell them, you know, we can relate and tell them what our experiences is, 'cos that's what they want to know, that's what they're here for. We tell it as it was. We hope it'll stay alive but again, you know, in a way, we're the last of a line really because some of us now are coming up for retirement and there's no young people that want to do this, you know? We're just afraid that the history of it, the actual nuts and bolts of mining is going to be lost somewhere. I think that's what some of us are afraid of. This is a mine and that's what it should be. We're afraid it'll turn into something you can look at, you'll just see something on a wall or a screen. There are some places now on the site but, it's telling the right tale. The underground side of it, that's what we're afraid of, that it'll be gone.<sup>29</sup>

As in several other interviews Dennis constructs a miners' in-group ('guys like myself', 'we were all here together', 'our experience'), staking an ownership claim to the narrative and stressing the culturally-authenticating role of miner-guides. Just like John

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<sup>27</sup> Interview with Dewi Lloyd, Big Pit miner-guide; recorded by Bethan Coupland, 7 June 2011 (2-3 minutes).

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Dewi Lloyd, Big Pit miner-guide; recorded by Bethan Coupland, 7 June 2011 (5-6 minutes).

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Dennis Way, Geevor miner-guide; recorded by Bethan Coupland, 22 March 2011 (12-13 minutes).

at Big Pit, who referred to the miner-guides as a ‘dying breed’, Dennis shows concern for what will happen when the last of the ex-miners retires. He equates the memories and experience of the miners with ‘the nuts and bolts of mining’ and ‘the underground side of it’, presumably meaning the stories, traditions and techniques of working in the mines. He implies that once the ex-miners are gone ‘the history of it’ will be gone, suggesting that the miners’ memories are synonymous with mining history. For Dennis, visitors want to know what only miner-guides can tell. However, this is only one specific narrative of the past; mining ‘as it was then’. This reinforces the sense that miners’ stories are in a sense frozen in the past, containing a specific section of their ‘memories’ (those which are told as stories during tours) within a heritage frame and affirming the sense of a break between past and present, which was a fundamental characteristic of heritagisation discourse.

At Geevor and Big Pit, miners’ autobiographical memories are endorsed as ‘heritage’ and promoted as culturally-authentic historical narratives. In a similar process to heritagisation, miner-guides’ narratives are fixed in the past, telling stories about mining ‘as it was then’ rather than engaging with a broader narrative linking the past and the present. We might say that to an extent, guides inevitably ‘live in the past’ when performing their memories within a heritage context.

### *5.2.2 Living memory or heritage narrative? Guides’ reflections on their roles*

When miner-guides were asked specifically about their roles, patterns emerged which suggested a number of key points in terms of the relationship between living memory and its commodification and performance at the heritage sites. On the one hand, some clearly felt that they were retaining a positive connection with their pasts, constructing continuity between the past and present. On the other, some were more disillusioned with their guiding work, suggesting that it was merely performative or ritualistic rather than meaningfully connected to their living memories. Through their talk, the guides negotiated the past-present relationship, with most miner-guides showing signs of moving in and out of heritage discourse. Some were even reluctant to discuss their experience other than in the terms they describe during underground tours. As I will argue, when oral histories moved away from interviewees’ experiences when the mines

were operational, responses revealed a much more complex relationship between individual memory and heritage at the two sites.

Some miner-guides' accounts clearly showed the ways in which their own reflections are shaped by an existing (institutional) heritage narrative, illustrated in this exchange between the interviewer and Bob, a Big Pit miner-guide:

**Interviewer:** What do you think mining means to this area?

**Bob:** Well all I can say to you, it was the biggest industry in Wales at one time. I think the year is 1913 there was quarter of a million miners working in south Wales, 613 collieries. They're all gone now, even Tower colliery has gone. I'd still be a miner today now, had they not changed it. But in a sense I'm glad that my boys can't follow in my footsteps. I know they would do and I mean that. You just imagine now, that person's ten feet away from you and you can barely make out one another's lights because there's that much dust in the air. That's the way it was.<sup>30</sup>

Even within the context of being asked about his own life history (in the preceding questions), when asked a more general question about mining, Bob clearly draws on heritage discourse in his response. Assertions like 'it was the biggest industry in south Wales' reflects the aggrandising language found in the promotional texts for Big Pit we saw in Chapter 4. His attempt to draw on a number of facts and figures implies that Bob is re-using information which he has possibly learned for the purposes of telling visitors (he says 'I think the year is 1913', as if he's not sure he is remembering the history correctly). However, in the next utterance, he moves into a rather personal reflection on the closure of the mines, 'I'd still be a miner now had they not changed it...but I'm glad my boys can't follow in my footsteps'. Here, Bob reflects the love/hate relationship with mining which was common to a number of interviews. Even though he would rather be mining coal, he would hate for his sons to do the same. When he then justifies this statement, he seems to revert back to tour-guide speak, describing the harsh conditions of working underground and encouraging the interviewer (as a stand-in for visitors) to play along with him, 'you just imagine now...that person's ten feet away... you can barely make out one another's lights'. Bob's final statement in this extract, 'that's just the way it was' again echoes the way in which the miner-guides outlined their narratives above, telling visitors specific stories about the past 'as it was' in a temporally-fixed fashion. Despite the very different audience and demands of a one-on-

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<sup>30</sup> Interview with Bob Harris, Big Pit miner-guide; recorded by Bethan Coupland, 6 June 2011 (2-3 minutes).

one oral history interview, in this section of the interview, Bob sticks closely to the heritage narrative which he is apparently comfortable telling.

Later on in the interview, Bob showed much more willingness to move away from the embedded heritage narrative and reflect on his own role as a guide:

**Interviewer:** How do you find being a guide?

**Bob:** I do my work, shut my mouth and get on with it, it's a job. The novelty soon wear off. If you mix it about a bit, you can relate back to when you was in the pit, things that went on in the pit. It does alter but it is pretty much the same thing.<sup>31</sup>

Again, Bob describes the aim of the tours as rather fixed; to tell stories about the past, 'things that went on in the pit'. Here, he suggests that during tours his narrative is somewhat formulaic, inevitably becoming repetitive over time and he turns out to be rather ambivalent about his guiding role in some ways, seeing it as just a job rather than attaching a sentimental value to retaining a connection to mining. This would imply that guides actively control their narratives, telling a relatively fixed story each time they give a tour. In this sense, miner-guides' memories are framed in a very specific way in the context of the heritage sites, rather than in the much freer context of the oral history interview. Though based on their own autobiographical memories, they tell specific stories about the past which are aligned with the institutional priorities outlined above.

In a group interview with four miner-guides at Big Pit (Simon, Andrew, Steve and Dewi), a range of complex positions were articulated. Here, the miner-guides discuss how they came to work as guides and how it differs from their previous roles working underground. As we will see, some clearly find meaning in being able to relate their memories and experiences to others, some are notably more circumspect.<sup>32</sup>

**Interviewer:** Can you tell me how you came here [to Big Pit]?

**Simon:** I come up here, it sounded like an interesting job. It's like going back to your roots a little bit but in a different way. Instead of working down the mine physically, you take people down around and explain what you used to do down the mine. That's the good thing about it, especially children.

**Interviewer:** What do you mean by it's going back to the roots for you?

**Simon:** Going underground, working in the mine, you know. It's based on the same system. You've got shafts, you've got a winder, you've got an engine

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<sup>31</sup> Interview with Bob Harris, Big Pit miner-guide; recorded by Bethan Coupland, 6 June 2011 (1-2 minutes).

<sup>32</sup> Big Pit miner-guides focus group, recorded by Bethan Coupland, 14 November 2011 (Recording 1, 1-5 minutes).

takes you down, tunnels underground. Nothing has changed that way as far as underground is concerned.

**Gareth:** You've still got the camaraderie amongst the boys as well and everything like that. Although we - a lot of us didn't meet each other until we started here you know what I mean, straight away we all pulled together you know. It's absolutely brilliant, it's good isn't it?

**Dewi:** We've all worked outside the mine and come back to it because there's nothing out there really, nothing at all. You can't even do or say anything outside of this place. This place, we call each other rotten by the end of the day but we get on you know.

**Steve:** But I think if we was all honest, if you was to ask any of the boys here, we'd all go back to a working mine tomorrow. [others agree]

**Interviewer:** Why is that?

**Steve:** The camaraderie. All the boys you worked with underground were good blokes, totally...I worked in a factory for a while, well most of us finished in the pit and worked in factories, different environment. Underground, like we said, you'd have a laugh, the banter, you know, good or bad times, you always had a laugh about it. Totally different breed of men, you've got to have that mentality underground otherwise you wouldn't last five minutes.

**Dewi:** It was hard work, we don't miss the hard work. It's a lot easier walking around talking to people about it [laughter].

**Steve:** The job is a good job. I came here because at the end of the day it was a 9 till 5 job and at the moment, touch wood, we have a final salary pension. Whether that will alter with the government and what's going on or whatever. That was my main reason to come here, not to come back into the pit environment. When I finished in the pit that was the end of it, I didn't want anything to do with it after. That's one of the reasons I came here, the hours suited me. I've been working shifts since I left school. At least it was 9 to 5 here and final salary, that's what attracted me here, and hopefully being a secure job, especially with Blaenavon being a World Heritage Site.

In this extract, we see quite different perspectives being taken on the relationship between the past and the present and the significance of the miners' memories for the heritage narrative. Simon and Gareth construct a sense of continuity between the past and the present, pointing to the similarities between their roles as miners and guides, which helps them give meaning to their own present roles. Simon describes guiding as 'going back to the roots', evoking the material realities of mining in technical terms ('shafts', 'winder', 'engine', 'tunnels underground') as a way of highlighting the similarities between his work in the past and his present role. In a separate individual interview, Simon went as far as to say 'I still call myself a miner, yes. A miner with a little bit of knowledge of how to present yourself to people as well.'<sup>33</sup> On a personal level, Simon finds meaning in being able to retain his identity as a 'miner' and sharing his memories with visitors. For him, he is still working in the same environment where

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<sup>33</sup> Interview with Simon Barry, Big Pit miner-guide; recorded by Bethan Coupland, 6 June 2011 (18-19 minutes).

‘nothing has changed’, even though he concedes that as a guide he is now doing things ‘in a different way’.

Similarly, for Gareth, the main characteristic of this is the miner-guides maintaining their occupational identities and their sense of community. Gareth claims that they still have a sense of camaraderie and can interact with each other in the same way as they used to in the pit, (which Dewi then implies would be unacceptable in other contexts). Gareth uses ‘the boys’, the commonly used in-group reference referring to the miners as a collective, suggesting that they constitute an occupational community even though the nature of their work is now fundamentally different. For Gareth and Simon, remaining in the mining environment and maintaining its sense of collective experience seems to help them make meaning of their own pasts which they deem to be valuable in the present. Framing the guides’ narratives as heritage implicitly endows their stories with a ‘heritage value’ which is institutionally-recognised. In a very localised way (for some guides), heritage provides a platform for these individual senses of continuity between past and present, which allows individuals to make sense of their own life histories within a broader narrative. However, we have to remember that re-enacting or re-creating elements of the mining experience within a heritage context inevitably shapes which narratives are told. In the context of the heritage sites, miners are performing these interactions to an audience as well as relating to each other in these terms. As such, these sorts of performances become part of the appeal of the heritage representation of mining.

Taking a very different line, Steve strongly implying a break between the past and present in the way he sees his guiding role. Despite seeming to enjoy guiding, Steve says ‘we’d all go back to a working mine tomorrow’, which is endorsed by the other miner-guides. In similar terms to Bob (mentioned above), he implies that despite the hazardous working conditions, he would much rather still be a miner. In justifying this, Steve describes the atmosphere when the miners were working, saying, ‘Underground, like we said, you’d have a laugh, the banter, you know, good or bad times, you always had a laugh about it. Totally different breed of men, you’ve got to have that mentality underground otherwise you wouldn’t last five minutes.’ Again, we see the camaraderie, the collective spirit of the miners and the ‘banter’ being drawn upon as a positive of the mining experience. Notably, Steve describes these characteristics as being in the past (‘you’d have a laugh’), and he describes miners as a ‘totally different breed of men’

(presumably tougher, with the sort of collective experience that comes from manual labour). In this way, Steve strongly suggests a contrast with the present situation, implying that the social experience of mining has been lost and can't be reconstructed through heritage (which will be argued in more detail later). As a result, Steve takes a much more pragmatic approach when recounting how he came to be a miner-guide. He clearly prioritises the steady working hours and good income and benefits that come with the job rather than a sentimental attachment to 'being in the pit environment'. In fact, he remembers that when the pits closed 'that was it. I didn't want anything to do with it after', suggesting that he had quite negative associations with mining after the pit closures. Through creating these sorts of loaded oppositions between 'then' and 'now', Steve hints that returning to Big Pit as a guide could have been quite problematic for him in coming to terms with the process of heritagisation.

Other guides also described similar senses of apathy (or even) disillusionment about their work as tour guides. Thomas, another Big Pit guide, goes beyond Steve's assertion that guiding is 'just a job', even describing it as 'mental torture' on busy days:

You get your days, because we're busy in the summer, doing five or six tours it's like mental torture really because you keep on... When you get to the fifth tour you think 'what did I mention then? Did I say this or that?' But this time of the year now it's quiet and you do two trips it's OK.<sup>34</sup>

Thomas' response raises the question of what sort of 'memory' is being recalled and told during tours. As Thomas implies, it is likely that guides develop very set ways of describing their experiences (doing so several times a day), meaning that their memories become fixed and embedded as a single story within the heritage frame. Autobiographical memory, therefore, is evoked and told in a very specific (and hence limited) fashion in the context of heritage, as opposed to within the broader scope of individual or group oral histories which address individuals' life narratives. In being told in this ritualistic way, miner-guides' memories are institutionalised and codified as heritage.

As we have seen, both Geevor and Big Pit have been keen to incorporate memory into their representation of mining heritage, but in a very particular form. Visitors are encouraged to 'experience' the mining past, which limits miners' accounts, limiting

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<sup>34</sup> Thomas Hill, speaking in Big Pit miner-guides focus group, recorded by Bethan Coupland, 14 November 2011 (Recording 2, 5-6 minutes).

their stories to ‘what went on in the pit’ and ‘telling it as it was’. While heritage sites do draw on individual accounts, the stories told are invariably those which ‘make sense’ in the context of the heritage sites and the narratives they have constructed. Indeed, miner-guides’ memories are a key commodity for heritage sites as illustrated in the brief examples (above) of promotional texts from the two sites. However, through being framed as heritage, the stories miners tell about the past are limited to remembering the past ‘back then’, without engaging with the longer-term picture (notably the impact of deindustrialisation and decline in these areas). Memory represented as heritage in these contexts distances the past from the present, separating ‘then’ (when the mines were working) and ‘now’ (when mining is ‘heritage’) and glossing over the spaces between.

Oral history interviews reveal much more complex relationships. As we have seen, heritage narratives can be selectively incorporated into miners’ talk, but miner-guides’ responses also go beyond set frameworks when telling their broader life stories in interviews, opposed to when performing for a tourist audience. In the extracts analysed above, the miners struggle to negotiate the value of their roles as miners and tour guides. While some find continuity in remaining in the mining environment and their narratives about the past, others see it as formulaic, challenging or ‘just a job’. However, without exception, the miner-guides claim that despite the hardships of mining, they would go back to it tomorrow if given the choice, implying that there was a more far-reaching sense of loss as a result of deindustrialisation, which the heritage sites do not engage with.

### **5.3 Memory beyond heritage: community memory challenging heritagisation**

Oral history interviews with miner-guides, other ex-miners and local residents revealed a much more complex (and possibly more comprehensive) narrative of the past which went beyond the period when the mines were active and suggested a much more difficult legacy of the mining past in Wales and Cornwall.

### 5.3.1 'It broke my heart': remembering the mine closures as a point of trauma

An alternative narrative emerged from most of the oral histories, one which challenged heritage discourses at the two sites, suggesting that mining had quite a different significance within living memory. Oral history interviews naturally allowed for a much broader scope, where interviewees could reflect on their own experiences of mining within the longer-term perspective of their life narrative, rather than simply telling stories about what it was like 'back then' (the sort of temporally-fixed narratives encountered in the institutional discourses and, to an extent, in tour guides' narratives). In these stories, the closure of the mines often constituted a point of dislocation or trauma. The concept of 'trauma' has been common in oral history and memory studies, with a range of definitions.<sup>35</sup> Often evoked in relation to war or genocide in the twentieth century, most approaches to trauma in this context have dealt with the impact of life-changing distressing events and their impact on memory and remembering.<sup>36</sup> A special edition of *Oral History* in 1998 focused on trauma and remembering, analysing memories formed 'in combat, during the Holocaust, in natural disasters or stigmatising events'.<sup>37</sup> Of course, it is not the intent to compare the impact of deindustrialisation to these atrocities, which were clearly of a much greater magnitude. However, the closure of the mines was indeed a central feature in the way miners and local people framed their narratives, one which provoked extremely emotional responses, and after which, everything changed for those living in these communities. As such, trauma in this context is used to refer to the closures as a point of dislocation, a fundamental break in the way these people experienced their lives and constructed their communities and identities.

Eddie, an ex-miner at Geevor now a maintenance worker and part-time guide at the site, shared his memories of the mine and pointed to the way life changed after closure. Asked how he came to work at Geevor, he recalled the ways in which his young life was shaped by his family association with the mine:

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<sup>35</sup> Kim Lacy Rogers, Selma Leydesdorff and With Graham Dawson, *Trauma and Life Stories: International Perspectives* (Psychology Press, 1999).

<sup>36</sup> For examples, see Wendy Rickard, 'Oral History- "More Dangerous Than Therapy"?: Interviewees' Reflections on Recording Traumatic or Taboo Issues', *Oral History*, 26 (1998), 34–48; Sean Field, 'Beyond "Healing": Trauma, Oral History and Regeneration', *Oral History*, 34 (2006), 31–42; Jessica Wiederhorn, "'Above All, We Need the Witness": The Oral History of Holocaust Survivors', in *The Oxford handbook of oral history*, ed. by Donald A. Ritchie (Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 244–255.

<sup>37</sup> 'Editorial', *Oral History*, 26 (1998), 2 (p. 2).

There's a lot of history here, even in this mine. You can go back way before my family even- even lived in the local villages. My Gran used to be able to take me back. I never took much notice when I was younger but they all worked in the mine, you'll see the photographs of her daughters on the - there. They used to work here. She had a good right hook, that's all I can remember. [Laughs] Everything was done by the hooter here. I remember a little - about 8 years of age I should say, sitting on the wall right there and waiting for the hooter to go at Geevor and Gran used to know then it was time to take the pasties out of the oven, they're on the way up, and it won't be long. Obviously there was no fridges or nothin' in those days, things was just laid in the parlour cooling down. And I used to look at them then and my mother used to say to me 'don't you ever go underground to work'. 'Cause her brothers and all, all worked here on the mine. They always looked white and wishy-washy, never looked well. They've all gone now except one. But they always looked white, never seen no daylight. But I ended up here, and if I had another chance I would go again.<sup>38</sup>

Eddie's story reveals a number of key themes in the way ex-miners construct a sense of meaning around the mining past, particularly in terms of the centrality of Geevor to people's lifestyles in Pendeen. He describes the way in which Geevor operated as the structural centre of the town, with most people's daily routines were synchronised with the mine's time-keeping hooter. Eddie seems to take pride in the longevity of his family connection to the mine, fondly describing the way his grandmother would tell stories about his relatives who were mine workers. Giving a very personal account, he links the history of mining very closely to his own family history, thereby placing himself in a longer tradition of mining men in his family tree. Despite clearly outlining the hardship of working underground (describing his mother's brothers as 'white and wishy washy' and her desire for him to avoid mining as an occupation), Eddie reflects affectionately on his time as a miner. Given his negative characterisation of mining, it is perhaps surprising that he then echoes the sentiment of a number of Big Pit guides discussed above in stating 'if I had another chance I would go again.' In this statement he evokes the love/hate relationship that ex-miners commonly have with their previous occupation. Although they frequently vividly describe the dirty and dangerous working conditions, in retrospect, most experienced a sense of loss when the mines closed. Going beyond the heritage narrative, Eddie recalled how he felt about the mine closures later in the interview:

I couldn't believe it ever happened. The men here didn't think it would happen either - was always led to believe that it would go on forever. That's what we were hoping. That's why we take on the mortgages and whatever. But it was a big shock to the system to be tapped on the shoulder and say 'you don't drill

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<sup>38</sup> Interview with Eddie Strick, Geevor miner-guide; recorded by Bethan Coupland, 23 March 2011 (8-10 minutes).

another hole, you won't be paid'. I think gosh - and it happened the second time around as well under new management. You could see what was happening there because the writing was already on the wall. There was no development going on underground. It was just stripping out the pillars and of course when the pillars are gone, there's no go-forward. Just stoping\* it out. Stripping it. Just asset-stripping really. After two years in pull the plug, they'd made the profit. As you can see in the mill there, everything was stripped out to pay. Pity really because we'd have more to show. But we never knew we was going down that avenue shall we say.<sup>39</sup>

Here, Eddie describes the sense of shock and disappointment he experienced when the mine closed, not only once but several times. As a result of the price fluctuations, Geevor initially closed in 1986, but was maintained on a care and maintenance basis. The mine subsequently reopened when prices rose, but closed for the final time in 1991. Eddie remembers the first closure coming as 'a big shock to the system', not only to him but to all miners. He locates the sense of loss in economic terms; men wouldn't be able to pay their mortgages as their livelihoods had been threatened without warning. Following this, Eddie also hints that the transition to heritage was not considered by the miners at the time; had the mine not been stripped of its assets in the final years, he says, 'we'd have more to show. But we never knew we was going down that avenue', presumably meaning preserving Geevor as a heritage site. Eddie's story contrasts quite sharply with his earlier assertion that he 'was led to believe that it would go on forever'. In this context, it is easy to see that the mine closures and the ensuing transition to heritage was in fact quite difficult for the miners to make sense of as their own remembered experiences included bitterness and personal loss in a number of ways. These features are not only absent from the heritage discourses identified, but antithetical to them.

In fact, in almost all the interviews with ex-miners (at both Geevor and Big Pit) the mine closures emerged as a pivotal point in their stories. In many ways, the closures were discussed as a point of trauma, with wide-ranging economic and social impacts. Firstly, many of the miners described their sense of loss in similar terms to Eddie's story above. Cyril, an ex-miner at Geevor, said the following about the mine closure:

I had a feeling it was coming. I came off night shift and that morning they stopped them from going in and changing and going down. I could see what was happening, we've got no help from the government and you know that was it. But yeah it was a worry because a lot of people who had mortgages and hire

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<sup>39</sup> Interview with Eddie Strick, Geevor miner-guide; recorded by Bethan Coupland, 23 March 2011 (7-9 minutes) \*stoping: a technical mining term meaning removing ore.

purchase, this that and the other, I was one of the lucky ones that didn't have a lot of debt.<sup>40</sup>

Cyril closely echoes Eddie's sense of bitterness and resentment, an emotional dimension which was common to a number of accounts. Dennis, for example, told the story of Geevor's closure as follows:

I must admit I enjoyed every moment of it. Good atmosphere, good camaraderie here, good club, yeah we was all heartbroken when it finished. I mean was on the phone to my mother and I was choked up because you thought you had a job for life, you know. A lot of the old miners who was in - down the mill. I mean they left school at 14, some had a job to read and write but this was their life you know. They've never been out of work in their life, they was happy down there doing what they've been doing for donkey's years. For them to come up and say 'that's it', they just couldn't cope with it. Nobody was going to take them on 'cause they just couldn't do nothin' else. Not very well-educated as well. But yeah it was a shock...People just went. Then you didn't see people for a long time. And I think, I think too, for a long time, I was a little that way. I was a little bit bitter because it took away something I wanted to be doing. I think a lot of people felt that. When the reunions began to appear, I didn't go for 4 or 5 years. I thought, well, no I can't be doing that, going up there and talking about the past.<sup>41</sup>

In Dennis' quote, we get a sense of the intense personal attachment the miners had to their occupation and the deep sense of loss that accompanied the mine closures. Dennis admits almost crying on the telephone with his mother, underlining the depth of his sense of loss. He also confirms Eddie and Cyril's accounts of surprise ('you thought you had a job for life', 'yeah it was a shock') and lack of other opportunities for other miners. He describes the miners as 'happy down there doing what they've been doing for donkey's years', illustrating the wide-reaching implications for the community. For Dennis, the mine closure clearly left him with a sense of bitterness, so much so that he says he didn't want to engage with other former miners or attend reunions. In the context of his life narrative, Dennis seems to imply that his bitterness has subsided with time; when the mines closed, he couldn't bear 'talking about the past'. This is a particularly telling statement pointing to the fact that he clearly struggled to come to terms with the closure of Geevor, and that the event functioned as a pivotal point in his life narrative. As such, the Geevor miners' oral histories challenged fixed heritage narratives to reveal a much more nuanced (and more personal) sense of the way mining impacted on their lives.

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<sup>40</sup> Interview with Cyril Honey, Geevor ex-miner; recorded by Bethan Coupland, 2 November 2011 (Recording 1, 11-12 minutes).

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Dennis Way, Geevor miner-guide; recorded by Bethan Coupland, 22 March 2011 (17-18 minutes).

There was a remarkable consistency in the sorts of stories encountered at Geevor and Big Pit, despite the different historical and local contexts in south Wales and Cornwall. The mine closures in the Valleys also emerged as a central point of change in the ex-miners' interviews, and they shared very similar reflections to the Geevor miners. For example, at Big Pit, Bob discussed a similar experience when the mines were closing in the south Wales Valleys, saying 'We thought we had a job for life but it wasn't to be. Terrible, mun [man]. There was no work or anything. It was like dog eat dog, you know what I mean? Not very nice at all. Thought we had a job for life.'<sup>42</sup> Bob repeatedly uses exactly the same terms as Cyril at Geevor ('we thought we had a job for life'), emphasising his sense of loss and the struggle to come to terms with the process of change. This assertion was a curious one in the light of the long patterns of decline experienced in the mining industries in both Wales and Cornwall; in both cases, jobs were reliant on a notoriously volatile market. This, then, is a telling example of the way in which 'collective' memories (according to Halbwachs' definition, in small face-to-face groups) are articulated through oral testimonies. A number of miners retrospectively claim stability and continuity, which was seemingly entrenched in these communities. This in turn allowed miners to frame the closures as shocking and unjust, thereby qualifying their emotional responses.

This was a common theme in a number of the interviews, with a sense that this period was a pivotal point in their own lives and in terms of the ongoing impact on the local area more generally. Peter, an ex-miner and Big Pit manager, stated:

Well, there was a lot of people moved out of the Valleys. Certainly when I was coming out of school I considered it as well. My rationale in joining the mining industry was to get my qualifications and then emigrate. People perhaps realised the industry wasn't going to be as big as it had been but I don't think anybody - at least I didn't - thought what happened has happened would happen. Even during the strike in 1984/85. People in the industry thought 'well yeah, there'll be a bit of a sort out after the strike and half a dozen pits will close and then we'll get back to normal' but the reality of what struck home after the strike surprised most of us.<sup>43</sup>

Although Peter remembers being rather pragmatic about his reasons for entering the mining industry, he still recalls the closures having a wide-ranging impact. In similar

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<sup>42</sup> Interview with Bob Harris, Big Pit miner-guide; recorded by Bethan Coupland, 6 June 2011 (0-1 minutes).

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Peter Walker, Big Pit Coal Mining Museum manager; recorded by Bethan Coupland, 6 June, 2011 (10-12 minutes).

terms to Bob, Peter describes a sense of complacency (thinking after the strikes things would 'get back to normal'), but also gives a sense that there was collective surprise at the decline of the industry and that a wide range of people would be affected. In a group interview, Dewi and Gareth (mentioned previously) took a similar view, but described their job losses in much more emotional terms:

**Interviewer:** What it was like when the mines were closing?

**Dewi:** Sad. Sad. Well, the last pit I worked in, the last day, the last one I worked in we were gutted, totally gutted. Went through the gates more or less crying. It broke my heart.

**Gareth:** [interrupts] Well, they were taking people's livelihoods off them wasn't they really? Well it did, it affected your community. Knock on effect. It affected everybody.

**Dewi:** What people don't realise is that when they shut a pit down, it's not just 800 miners out of work it's probably, that figure becomes probably 1500 or 1800 people. For every one miner, there's probably 3 or 4 people in jobs. There's people who supply the overalls, make the helmets, the lamps, supply the timber, the steel, machinery. It's a knock-on effect.

Dewi's reflection on his last day is extremely poignant ('we were gutted, totally gutted...almost crying...it broke my heart'). This statement is reminiscent of that of Dennis who also recalled being choked-up when leaving Geevor for the last time. As Gareth says in support, 'they were taking people's livelihoods off them'. Clearly, the extremely emotional response to the mine closures would not easily translate to support for heritagisation.

The miners' memories told in their oral histories suggest that the mine closures were a point of trauma for them, which still has a profound impact on their lives and their senses of their own pasts. Deindustrialisation in Blaenavon and Pendeen was evidently accompanied by deep sense of loss, a factor which seems to be all too easily omitted from the discourses which emerged during the respective transitions to heritage. In this context, heritagisation was inherently problematic at both sites. Beyond this, however, the data from the oral histories begins to construct a different narrative about the mining past which reveals the ways in which living memories challenge and go beyond those framed *as* heritage (in heritage site displays and miner guides' talk), arguably building towards a more comprehensive sense of the *meaning* of the mining past in the present. So what was it that was lost when the mines closed?

### 5.3.2 *Stories of decline: the loss of 'camaraderie' and 'community'*

As we have seen, many of the miners referred to the economic losses which came with the mine closures, but as Gareth hints in the extract above, there was much more to it; 'it affected your community' as well. Many of the interviews suggested that the emotional loss associated with the mine closures was a result of the loss of community, and this emerges as a common narrative theme in a number of accounts.

Mining, 'camaraderie' and 'community' are often summoned up together in oral testimonies, where the narrative of the perceived 'strength' of community is bound up with the fortunes of the industry. During the period of deindustrialisation, the strength of this symbolic link is perceived to unravel which results in the perception of community being 'lost'. This points to a much more complex legacy of mining in these areas; not only loss in terms of economic decline, but also an emotional loss, apparent in the common narrative of loss of community. It is possible that (to an extent) this seemingly idealised community is retrospectively constructed by the ex-miners and local people interviewed, so perhaps we should pause to consider the theoretical basis for the narrative construction of community. Recent sociological and anthropological understandings of community have leaned toward a social constructivist perspective, reading community not only as an essential or structural phenomenon (i.e. bound by geographical place or ethnicity) to recognising the ways in which community is discursively constructed (*made* in the way it is understood and articulated by its members). Benedict Anderson's notion of 'imagined communities' was perhaps the most influential in this regard.<sup>44</sup> Anderson applied this theory to nations, noting that community or a sense of collective identity could be experienced without physically experiencing them first hand. In Anthony Cohen's words, community is 'more than oratorical abstraction: it hinges on consciousness. This consciousness of community is, then, encapsulated in perceptions of its boundaries, boundaries which themselves are largely constituted by people in interaction.'<sup>45</sup> For community to be successful, there also needs to be commonality of symbols and their understanding. In other words, community relies on members making (or *believing* they make) similar sense of things, and that their community differs from others. The boundaries around community,

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<sup>44</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso, 2006).

<sup>45</sup> Anthony P. Cohen, *Symbolic Construction of Community*, New Ed (Routledge, 1985), p. 13.

Cohen argues, are symbolically constructed, not only physical, spatial, linguistic etc. They are also value-loaded, meaning that symbols do more than stand for something else, they imply (and entail) meaning. Here we can begin to understand community as a positive construct, valued by its members as a 'sense' or 'spirit' of community (in communitarian terms).

If we interpret community in these terms, the discursive and symbolic construction of community becomes the object of study in itself. Rather than asserting that community objectively 'has' or 'had' a unique durable referent in Blaenavon and Pendeen, we can only analyse how that community is understood by those who identify as community members. Following these assumptions, we can see common narratives of community emerging from oral history interviews. References to community operate at a number of levels in the miners' oral accounts. Firstly, as has been briefly referred to, ex-miners commonly refer to themselves as a collective in-group, summoning a specific sense of occupational identity based on masculinity and collective spirit or 'camaraderie'. Secondly, this is then extrapolated to the broader 'community', usually implying the collective experience of miners' families and local residents, based on the fact that mines were the structural centres of communities. Centrally, interviewees all associated the closure of the mines with a subsequent 'loss' of community, which in turn interprets community as a value system more than as a locality or assemblage of people.

This extract from an interview with Glyn (a retired former miner at Big Pit) illustrates this common construction:

**Interviewer:** Can you tell me how you came to work in Big Pit?

**Glyn:** Well, the biggest part of my friends all worked in the collieries, you tend to drift that way. Although it was hard work, it was the best place I ever worked.

**Interviewer:** Why is that?

**Glyn:** The comradeship, we looked after one another. When I went in industry, it's a different ball game altogether in the factories, just didn't have that comradeship...same with the town.

**Interviewer:** What do you remember about what the town was like?

**Glyn:** Well, how can you put it? You'd go down town shopping and it would take you an hour because everyone would be talking to one another, everybody knew one another. That's how the Valleys are, always like that...Well, when we first went on strike you had a hell of a lot of support, a hell of a lot. Not one miner starved, let's put it that way. We was out for seven weeks the first one, not very nice. But you've got to make a stand and that's it. If they push you that way you'll fight, it's as simple as that...It's changed a lot now mind. A lot have moved in, some from London, Bristol, Gloucester, so it's all changed now. Sad

really in a way. But then again we all get in our little boxes and go on our own way don't we? [laughter]... It's still going, it's a strong community, but not as strong as it used to be. Not as strong as it used to be because when we was working in the pit you would work together all day, go home and have your dinner, then in the night you have a few pints in the pub all together, that's how strong it was. Very good. But you don't get none of that now, unfortunately.<sup>46</sup>

Glyn's account shares several characteristics with other ex-miners discussed previously. He states that despite the hard work, 'it was the best place I ever worked' because of what he calls the 'comradeship'. By contrasting working in factories with mining, he suggests that the sense of trust and collective spirit was exclusive to mining as an occupation ('we looked after one another'), implying that this was lost when Big Pit closed as a working mine. Glyn then associates the mine closure with a similar decline of community within Blaenavon. Talking in the past tense, he defines the bygone 'strong' community in terms of face-to-face shared experience and mutual support which he claims was common throughout the Valleys ('everybody would be talking to one another, everybody knew one another'). Glyn then tells a brief story about the miners' strike in 1984/85, where 'you had a hell of a lot of support', as if to evoke this as an example of his ideal community. This sense of community is powerfully contrasted with the present day in which he claims 'it's all changed now' as a result of in-migration and diversification of working patterns. At the end of his response, Glyn comes back to his initial definition; equating the miners' solidarity with 'community'.

Glyn's notion of 'comradeship' was commonly articulated in Big Pit miners' responses. Bob, for example, focused on the dangerous aspects of mine-work as a force for cohesion. He suggested:

I don't miss a certain side of it, but I do miss the people, definitely. The people you worked with couldn't be better people because your life depended on me and my life depended on you. You were in trouble, I'm alongside you helping you out. And the same, I'm in trouble the next day and you're helping me out. You all come in as one and you all work together as one, as a team. That's the way it was, teamwork, you don't see that today.<sup>47</sup>

This notion of mutual reliance resulting in miners' 'comradeship' or 'camaraderie' was also touched upon by Simon (a Big Pit miner-guide):

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<sup>46</sup> Interview with Glyn Probert, Big Pit ex-miner; recorded by Bethan Coupland, 16 November 2011 (6-8 minutes).

<sup>47</sup> Interview with Bob Harris, Big Pit miner-guide; recorded by Bethan Coupland, 6 June 2011 (4-5 minutes).

If I had my time over again, I would do it all over again. I enjoyed working underground. It may sound stupid, it may sound hard, it was hard, dangerous dirty work, but it was OK as well. Um, like I said earlier on, the comradeship was one of the main things about working down the mines. You all looked after each other and you all helped each other as well, that's a good thing. And of course the community was there, we were all there to help in the community as well. It was a nice close-knit community there, but today it's gone. Most of the villages now, I go up the old village where I used to live, I don't know if I know about say 20/30 people there out of a thousand, that's all I know. The rest are all newcomers who come in, don't even know them...All the mines had gone out of the Valleys and the work had gone out of the Valleys and all the comradeship had gone out of the Valleys as well because people knew each other and of course you had to start looking for work elsewhere so you were going into a different environment to start with. Also you were working with different people. And of course when you worked in the mines, especially where I worked, you knew each other 'cause you all lived in the village. Once you started going outside the area with the factories and that it was an entirely different aspect of life.<sup>48</sup>

Simon confirms Glyn's assertion above that deindustrialisation brought a (perceived) decline of community. This is articulated as both physical (people moving out) and in terms of a decline in community 'feeling' or 'spirit' based on the fact that the men no longer worked in the mines. Again, we see the complex love/hate relationship with mining ('it may sound stupid...it was hard, dangerous dirty work, but it was OK as well.') Almost all the miners' accounts turn to the sense of community (both occupational and local, material and symbolic) as the redeeming factor of the difficult working conditions, so much so that the decline of community is perceived to be the real loss when the mines closed, as much as the economic impact. The fact that most of the ex-miners would return to the job without hesitation is testimony to the depth of their belief in their idealised mining community which they now assume has declined. Ceri, the Big Pit curator (and ex-miner) perhaps articulated this most clearly. Describing how he felt when the mines closed, he said:

[It was] absolutely awful. You're so used to being in a large community, you know, you might hate going there every day - used to – couldn't stand getting up and going to work, used to be dragging your feet up there. But once it stops you're completely lost 'cause, you know, the whole of that community has disappeared...it was like being lost really, like bereavement.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Interview with Simon Barry, Big Pit miner-guide; recorded by Bethan Coupland, 6 June 2011 (8-10 minutes).

<sup>49</sup> Interview with Ceri Thompson, ex-miner and Big Pit curator, recorded by Bethan Coupland, 6 June 2011 (3-4 minutes).

Likening the mine closures to ‘bereavement’ again illustrates this event as a point of trauma in many of the miners’ lives. For Ceri, even though he ‘couldn’t stand getting up and going to work’, without it he was ‘completely lost’. It is unclear precisely which ‘community’ Ceri is referring to (the mine-workers or shared experience within the local town), but again, the story is unmistakably one of decline and loss, in many ways contradicting the dominant heritage narrative.

As we saw in the miners’ descriptions of the closures, there are consistent parallels between the Big Pit miners’ accounts and their Geevor counterparts. Returning to the Geevor miner-guides (Cyril, Eddie and Dennis), extracts from their oral histories quite directly mirror the way in which the Big Pit miners remembered a loss of camaraderie and community. Dennis recalled the centrality of Geevor to the local community in these terms:

I thoroughly enjoyed it as a workplace, even now, I enjoy what I’m doing, but as a workplace as a working mine, I mean there was a, believe it or not, there was a great atmosphere here you know. It was fun, there was a bit of a laugh, a bit of a joke, there was sadness sometimes and stuff. I put it down to a good manager as well, Mr Gilbert at the time was our manager, a fair man, a hard man, some times and obstinate man but he cared for the people that worked for him - the men, even his community, the whole area. If anybody in the area needed a piece of timber for an emergency job or a load of gravel or something, they’d have it no questions asked...That’s what made the place such a great, tight community, you know. Everybody knew each other. You’d finish work half past three, walk through St Just and you’d meet five people you’d seen underground today. Then tonight, you’d probably be in the pub with them or something, or at the weekend. We were in contact a lot of the time, work day and social time. We had a social club on the site it was well used. It was a great thing really, a great community.<sup>50</sup>

Dennis shows a similar fondness for his work as encountered amongst the Big Pit miners, claiming that despite its ups and downs, ‘there was a great atmosphere’, not only between the miners but in the village more generally. He indiscriminately equates the miners’ sense of collectiveness (‘being in contact a lot of the time, work day and social time’) and a sense of community in St Just. Dennis doesn’t directly discuss how this ‘community’ has changed more recently, but in his consistent use of the past tense, he strongly implies that the community he is remembering is a ‘past’ community, rather

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<sup>50</sup> Interview with Dennis Way, Geevor miner-guide; recorded by Bethan Coupland, 22 March 2011 (16-17 minutes).

than it being situated in the present. Cyril, on the other hand, more directly described the process of change in Pendeen:

It was nice, good village- changed over the year[s] because you've got young people come in from different estates, you've haven't got a clue who they are. Years ago you could walk up the street- you could speak to anybody and have a good old chat, call it a chinwag. Now you talk to people and they don't even answer you, you know. Times have changed. It was never the same atmosphere... We had tug of war teams, rugby teams, football teams, you name it... but it just dwindled away.<sup>51</sup>

Eddie also described a parallel situation in St Just (the adjoining village). When asked what he enjoyed about mining, Eddie responded:

The comradeship really, you know. We were a very close-knit community. I lived in St Just. All families knew each other, you know. We all stuck together really. We worked hard and played hard. It's life after work if I say - of course St Just was buzzing then, communities were thriving. When this mine shut, believe me it took home up there because you see the place up there now really, it was like a ghost town. A lot of the miners disappeared, went abroad.<sup>52</sup>

In the first quote, Cyril evokes the importance of Geevor as a structural centre of the community. Independently of Dennis, he uses very similar terms in recounting the way in which people would meet in the street and share their social time as well as working in the mine. In a similar vein to the way in which Blaenavon was remembered, Cyril refers to the population change in the village which he sees as diluting the bounded and cohesive community which grew up around the mine, suggesting 'you don't even know who they are'. He displays some resentment about the changing nature of Pendeen as he sees it, resulting in his overall view that 'times have changed'. Similarly, taking Eddie's quote in the context of his earlier extract at the beginning of this section (when he recalled his childhood memories of Geevor), we can see a much fuller story of the legacy of mining becoming apparent which was common to most of the miners' accounts. Having initially stressed his economic worries associated with job losses, Eddie too draws out the decline of community as a central element in his life story, noting how it had a wide-ranging impact in the area.

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<sup>51</sup> Interview with Cyril Honey, Geevor ex-miner; recorded by Bethan Coupland, 2 November 2011 (Recording 1, 56-60 minutes).

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Eddie Strick, Geevor miner-guide; recorded by Bethan Coupland, 23 March 2011 (6-7 minutes).

As argued earlier, rather than identifying fixed definitions of community, we can only interpret the way in which these communities were (and are) constructed by their members. The sorts of retrospective evaluations of ‘community’ experience outlined above are perhaps inevitably idealised, even romanticised, since their perceived ‘decline’. Undoubtedly, the significance of the mines to these communities has shifted and the so-called communities in Blaenavon and Pendeen have inevitably evolved in the wake of deindustrialisation. Of course, it can be debated whether such communities truly exist in any objective sense and whether or not these changes can be partially attributed to broader social and structural shifts is unclear. However, what is important is the *perception* of the decline of community and the prevalence of this narrative in the miners’ life narratives. From the oral history extracts above, a strikingly common story emerges with several key characteristics. At both sites, miners’ narratives stress the role of the mines as structural centres of community; they provided the arena for a specific (and collective) occupational identity which was based around ‘camaraderie’ and ‘comradeship’. Not only this, but accounts of community suggest that it is perceived to be both value-based as well as structurally distinct; the miners’ collective spirit is claimed to have spread into and partly constituted the broader community, in which everyone relied on everyone else in order to overcome the hardships of working in the mines. This perceived sense of community (often used interchangeably with camaraderie) appears to be the basis for the miners love/hate relationship with the industry. Although the work was hard, dangerous and dirty, all miners interviewed displayed nostalgia for this idealised community which they assume to have lapsed as a result of the end of the mining industry in these areas.

### *5.3.3 Nuance within dominant accounts: divisions and informal working practices*

Within the construction of this ‘collective’ narrative, oral history interviews also revealed other aspects of living memory which pointed to the existence of a much more nuanced, complex narratives than constructed through heritage discourses. Miners frequently recounted aspects of their informal working practices, described the hierarchical divisions and personal disputes between the men. In many ways, these more subtle aspects of their stories counteract the somewhat simplistic portrayal of collective experience in heritage displays. Of course, this is not to say that there was not

a sense of collective experience at all. Indeed, there were many collective elements to the way in which the miners remembered, as we have seen: the miners' in-group (or 'the boys') being a common frame of reference, the harsh working conditions (but a common desire to return to mining), and the stories of emotional loss associated with closure. Nonetheless, these examples remind us that the process of heritagisation has the effect of bleaching out a number of aspects of living memory.

Geevor miner Cyril described the camaraderie amongst the men, which he illustrated with a number of stories about how 'the boys' used to play tricks on each other. In following extract he recounts a practical joke he played on Harrold, a fellow miner who shared his changing space:

It's a very smelly place - You come up, you were hitting that Dry\*, it was hot, it smells. The chap next to me wouldn't wash his clothes at all... God, I thought I'll have you next day. There was some aftershave in the cabinet, been there for years. Blue Stratus I think it was. Of course you never lock your lockers with working clothes. So I splashed it all over his clothes, you know, his working gear. I said to me mates, make sure we get in the cage with Harrold. So we got in and of course they were saying "mm Harrold, you're smelling nice today" [laughter] "Yeah some bugger must have tipped something over me clothes" he said. But he never twigged it was me.<sup>53</sup>

These are the sorts of rich stories which provide much more nuanced insights into how the mining past was experienced and is now remembered by those who lived through it. Telling stories through oral history narratives allowed the miners to construct much more varied accounts of the mining past, which in some respects contradicted established heritage narratives. Despite the prevalence of collectiveness in heritage narratives and in many of the miners' interviews, some gave a much more subtle account of their working relationships. Some pointed to the existence of hierarchies in the working environment which shaped the way the men related to each other. Thomas, a Big Pit miner-guide, described the division between colliers (who he describes as 'the elite') and others, saying:

When you became the collier you were the elite. People have a distinction in the mines. We always talk about where we work, if you didn't work at the coal face

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<sup>53</sup> Interview with Cyril Honey, Geevor ex-miner; recorded by Bethan Coupland, 2 November 2011 (Recording 2, 2-3 minutes) \*the Dry' refers to the miners' changing rooms at Geevor.

it's like 'ah, you're not really a miner' Not not really a miner, but the collier was like the elite you know.<sup>54</sup>

Indeed, comments of this sort were common in the miners' interviews. Although most did refer to the camaraderie and collective experience of the working environment as a positive, there were clearly more complex divisions within this collective. Dennis at Geevor, for example, discussed his experience of being promoted from a miner to a management position. For Dennis, this felt like crossing a divide:

You took flack from both sides if you like. I found that transition rather difficult for a time. I'd just come out of working with men in the mine, then you're now the enemy if you like. And you had to again, you had to build a relationship with your - with the men you knew already again... As an ordinary worker on the mine getting your wages every week, that's all you did. You didn't have to worry about whether the ore has got any value or where the next lodes can be found, that wasn't your problem. Once you became *that* side, it was all there in your ear and you could hear it every day.<sup>55</sup>

Here, Dennis clearly juxtaposes the 'ordinary worker' with 'that side' (the management). Dennis' third utterance is particularly telling. Beginning to say 'you had to build a relationship with your-', as if he might refer to the other miners as his friends, he then shifts frame to distance himself from them, calling them 'the men you already knew'. This suggests a significant difference in the social experience between different levels in the mine's hierarchy. It wasn't only hierarchical divisions which caused tension between the miners. Geoff, a former miner at Geevor recalled being treated with some scepticism as an 'outsider'. He had moved from Wales to take a job at the mine which, as he suggests in the following extract, was the cause of some animosity towards him:

Well there were, yeah I mean [laughs], I think some observations, as someone who wasn't local, if you worked underground then you were accepted more than, you know - you could fit in the area because you had a bit of an advantage of people who worked on the surface because there was also a bit of back biting from people at the surface because their children couldn't get work underground. There's all these people from up country getting employed. But there were reasons. But lots of great humour, yeah.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Thomas Hill speaking in Big Pit miner-guides focus group, recorded by Bethan Coupland, 14 November 2011 (Recording 2, 1-2 minutes).

<sup>55</sup> Interview with Dennis Way, Geevor miner-guide; recorded by Bethan Coupland, 22 March 2011 (4-5 minutes).

<sup>56</sup> Interview with Geoff Treseder, Geevor ex-miner; recorded by Bethan Coupland, 2 November 2011 (11-12 minutes).

Again, Geoff's view of the collective experience is slightly different from that which is implied in the majority of accounts. Some went as far as to suggest that they actively disliked some of their working relationships. Cyril suggested, 'Some people just couldn't work together, they was always falling out, always going through different partners. We was just lucky, keen and here for the money.'<sup>57</sup> Similarly, Dewi at Big Pit claimed 'In one respect I was sad to leave, in another no. Probably, if I look at my own focus on things I was glad to leave. Myself and the engineer didn't get on. It was that aspect- that's why I left.'<sup>58</sup> These quotes illustrate the way in which the notion of a homogenous community of mineworkers may perhaps have been retrospectively inflated. There clearly was a sense of camaraderie, given the frequency with which the miners describe this positive aspect of their working experience. However, as we have seen, there were naturally variations within this position, where some may have had differences based on job roles, insider/outsider divisions or merely personal disagreements.

As we can see, ex-miners' testimonies also provided much more varied insights into the experience of mining. There are different degrees to which the collective experience was felt and how it is remembered. Beyond this, there is a range of less formal practices which are not preserved in dominant heritage narratives, suggesting that heritagisation bleaches out a wide range of living memories.

#### **5.4 Conclusion: Reflecting on heritage and living memory**

This chapter has argued that the existing conceptualisations of the relationship between heritage and memory are inadequate; that existing work approaches this question focuses primarily on 'collective' interpretations of memory, at the expense of living memory. It began with the assertion that there are multiple layers of memory, and hence multiple ways in which memory and heritage interact. As has been shown, there is not necessarily a neat transition between living memory and memorialisation as Pierre Nora suggests.<sup>59</sup> Practices of preservation do not merely become significant where (living)

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<sup>57</sup> Interview with Cyril Honey, Geevor ex-miner; recorded by Bethan Coupland, 2 November 2011 (Recording 1, 46-47 minutes).

<sup>58</sup> Interview with Dewi Lloyd, Big Pit miner-guide; recorded by Bethan Coupland, 7 June 2011 (3-4 minutes).

<sup>59</sup> Nora.

memory lapses. There is a much more complex process at work where different narratives of the past are constructed in different contexts. So how can we characterise the interaction of heritagisation and living memory?

In the case of the sites considered here, we can see that heritagisation and living memory overlap but conflict with each other. Firstly, living memory has the capacity to challenge both the content and meaning of heritage narratives. As we have seen, the patterns identified in the miners' oral histories were largely incongruent with the sorts of heritage narratives constructed during the process of heritagisation discussed in Chapter 4. Miners' accounts clearly challenge the romanticisation of the heritage narrative, suggesting that the legacy of decline was wide-ranging even beyond the economic impact of deindustrialisation. In this context, heritage discourse which stressed historicisation, regeneration (particularly at Big Pit), and promoted the success story of the early industrial societies in Wales and Cornwall appeared to be detached and notably problematic for people who were living with the real impact of the mine closures.

Secondly, from these case studies, it seems that heritage and living memory function in notably different temporal and interpretive frameworks. The oral histories moved outside of the temporally-fixed heritage narrative, not only focusing on what life was like when the mines were working, but stressing the centrality of the mine closures as a point of trauma and the accompanying narrative of the decline of community in both Blaenavon and Pendeen. In the case of the mining heritage sites considered, where heritage and living memory co-exist, framing living memory as heritage is complex. As argued in Chapter 4, heritagisation imposes a temporal 'fixedness' which can be at odds with peoples own experience. At Geevor and Big Pit, the mining past was historicised and presented to visitors 'as it was then' rather than addressing the ongoing legacy for local people. As has been shown, while 'memory' operates as a useful resource for heritage sites (in the form of miner-guides' narratives), it is shaped - and indeed limited - by being contextualised as heritage; by the existing heritage narrative, by the material surroundings of the mine site and by the needs of tourist visitors. In this sense, the notion that heritage sites 'house' or 'protect' memory as some have suggested is

undoubtedly simplistic.<sup>60</sup> Heritage narratives can, in fact, frame living memories in certain ways which align with institutional economic and political priorities.

In more general terms, autobiographical memories accessed through oral history interviews revealed a much more continuous relationship between the past and the present in living memory, akin to Jensen's model of historical consciousness.<sup>61</sup> These more comprehensive accounts gave nuanced senses of the way in which people rationalise the mining past and its demise in their everyday lives. From these stories, it was evident that memory both challenged the temporally-fixed heritage narrative, amounting to an alternative narrative of the legacy of mining in Wales and Cornwall. The closure of the mines and the associated decline of 'camaraderie' and 'community' was by far the most prominent narrative pattern in these individual memories, which focused on the negative impact of deindustrialisation in shaping the life stories of interviewees, which in turn very obviously challenge the romanticised discourse encountered in the language associated with heritagisation.

Moving beyond the primarily 'objective' sense of the past presented at the heritage sites, living memory filled in the gaps left in the heritage narrative. The central story in the oral histories was not the success story of industrialisation, but the decline and loss experienced with deindustrialisation. For interviewees, the mining past was not only about 'what happened then'. The past did not 'end' when the mines closed, as the rather distant heritage narrative implied. In reality, memories of mining and its associated communities lived on, and for the moment, the legacy of mining (and its subsequent decline) still has resonance for those who lived through it, bringing the story of mining into the present and suggesting a much more fluid link between past, present and future.

Where heritage displays represent the recent or contemporary past, living memory both challenges and goes beyond heritage narratives. In this context, oral history allows us to access living memory and hence re-evaluate the process of 'heritagisation', showing the ways in which heritage might be problematic, as well as why it is valued. The 'memory' performed through miner-guides' tours and recounted in oral history interviews emphasised very different senses of value attached to the mining past, most likely

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<sup>60</sup> Crane.

<sup>61</sup> Jensen.

reflecting the priorities and norms of the different contexts in which these autobiographical memories were being recalled.

## Chapter 6

### **Beyond living memory: Heritage and cultural memory at Geevor and Big Pit**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

The previous chapters have focused on the conflicting temporal frameworks of heritage representations and living memories at Geevor and Big Pit. The analysis of institutional discourses in Chapter 4 showed the ways in which heritagisation attached particular values to the mining past in order for the sites to be commodified and consumed as 'heritage'. In the process, heritage discourses fixed the mining experience in the distant past and constructed a large-scale aggrandised narrative which emphasised the nationally and culturally-defining characteristics of the industry in the context of global industrialisation. However, these 'official' heritage narratives were challenged by 'unofficial' memories. Oral history interviews showed that miners and community members remembered the mining past in somewhat different terms. Their stories challenged and went beyond fixed heritage narratives, revealing much more personal stories which counteracted the romanticisation of the mining past. As such, their living memories construct an alternative narrative, one which stresses the ongoing impact of loss and decline as a result of deindustrialisation rather than the nationally-defining story of the industry 'as it was then'.

Currently, these two alternative narratives of the mining past exist alongside and in a complex dialogue with each other. But what happens when living memory lapses? If heritage practices are assumed to be influential in 'remembering' elements of the past which are being lost, which narrative is being preserved and whose 'memory' will endure?

Having identified the processes through which the mining past was heritagised at Geevor and Big Pit, and how those narratives were in some ways challenged by living memories, we now turn to the question of how heritagisation impacts on another layer of memory. This chapter analyses the role of these sites in the construction of broader

cultural memories of mining in Wales and Cornwall. Although currently heritage narratives exist alongside (and in conflict with) living memory at these sites, there will inevitably be a generational shift when individual or autobiographical memories will no longer exist in their original form. As a result, the ‘memories’ associated with these sites will then rely on accumulated knowledge through representations of the mining past. At present, these case studies provide an opportunity to analyse the relationship between heritage and memory in its various forms; specifically, to unravel the interplay between official heritage narratives, autobiographical memories and broader public or cultural memories.

In order to trace the construction of cultural memory, this chapter draws on oral history data from a range of interviewees with different levels of attachment to the mining past. Some of these are the same miners and staff whose autobiographical memories were the subject of the previous chapter, others are local people (both long-term residents and relative newcomers). The chapter draws on these different perspectives in order to establish how different parties (miners, site staff and local people) orient to the value of preserving the mining past. Specifically, in the light of the competing narratives outlined above, it focuses on the specific sort of cultural memory which is cultivated through heritage representations; namely, which elements of these stories are preserved and ‘remembered’, both in the present and for the future.

### *6.1.1 Theoretical framework: why cultural memory?*

As shown in Chapter 1, the terminology used to describe forms of group memory is contested terrain. Though it has been widely recognised that memory has become ubiquitous in both academic and public discourse, it remains an ambiguous concept when applied to a group. Before turning to the case studies it is necessary to revisit the various theoretical implications of the different uses of ‘memory’ in this context.

Recent work in memory studies has experienced what Susannah Radstone and Katharine Hodgkin have called a significant ‘expansion’ of memory from the individual to the cultural or collective.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, memory has become an umbrella term for almost

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<sup>1</sup> Susannah Radstone and Katharine Hodgkin, *Memory Cultures: Memory, Subjectivity, and Recognition* (Transaction Publishers, 2005).

any representation, use or understanding of past in the present. So what do we mean when we refer to public or social memory? As Anna Green has noted, under the category of ‘memory’ are ‘hugely divergent forms of historical evidence or representation that in other contexts would be identified by specific terms reflecting the different processes and purposes of creation.’<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Radstone and Schwartz have argued that there is some ambiguity when attempting to distinguish between public or social memory and other modes of public discourse, narrative and practice.<sup>3</sup> At this stage, the question might not be ‘what is memory?’ but, in fact, ‘what *isn’t* memory?’

As we have seen, understandings of the way in which groups can ‘remember’ have borrowed from Halbwachs’ concept of ‘collective memory’, which was the first recognition of the social nature of the remembering process.<sup>4</sup> Although Halbwachs specifically referred to small groups (like families or working groups), the concept of collective memory has often been directly adopted and simplistically applied to much larger groups or societies. There has quite rightly been some criticism of the broad use of collective memory in this vein. We need to avoid the assumption that all groups can ‘collectively remember’ in a literal or direct sense. As argued above, we need to break down the homogenising concept of collective memory and allow space for the existence of individual agency within dominant ‘collective’ understandings of the past. Along these lines, Green has called for more clarity on the issue of collective remembrance, identifying a ‘need for a much more precise terminology around memory’ rather than broad, generic labels.<sup>5</sup> Scholars across a range of disciplines have been struggling to re-define and re-conceptualise the ways in which groups remember, refining and reflecting upon the nature of memory as a social phenomenon. As a result, the terms ‘social memory’, ‘public memory’ and ‘cultural memory’ have become widely used, as if to skirt the problematic issues associated with memory being truly ‘collective’.<sup>6</sup>

Given the amorphous nature of ‘memory’ as a term, it is difficult to assert that any conceptual terminology will be watertight. It is, however, important to note that the

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<sup>2</sup> Anna Green, ‘Can Memory Be Collective?’, in *The Oxford handbook of oral history*, ed. by Donald A. Ritchie (Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 96.

<sup>3</sup> *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*, ed. by Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwartz (Fordham Univ Press, 2010), p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *Halbwachs/Coser: On Collective Memory* (University of Chicago Press, 1992).

<sup>5</sup> Green, ‘Can Memory Be Collective?’, p. 97.

<sup>6</sup> *Oral History and Public Memories*, ed. by Paula Hamilton and Linda Shopes (Temple University Press, 2008); James J. Fentress and Chris Wickham, *Social Memory: New Perspectives on the Past* (Blackwell, 1992); Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka, ‘Collective Memory and Cultural Identity’, *New German Critique*, 1995, 125–133.

terms public, social or cultural memory and collective remembrance imply several central points for the study of memory beyond the individual or autobiographical. Firstly, the existence of public or cultural memories are characterised by distance from individual experience. This is not to say that individual and ‘collective’ memories do not interact and influence each other, rather that ‘memory’ in its broadest sense can include knowledge outside the realm of one’s own direct experience. In other words, at a group level, memory can be *learned* as well as *known*. Halbwachs himself proposed the idea of ‘historical memory’ which incorporated events beyond an individual’s experience into their ‘memory’. Though initially difficult to comprehend, the use of memory in this context allows for the fact that there is an active dialogue between past and present. This brings us to the second point, that, unlike the claimed ‘objective’ nature of academic historical accounts, memory inherently implies subjectivity. It is not only about what happened in the past but how the past is understood and has meaning in the present. In more general terms, the broad umbrella of memory studies allows for the analysis of historical consciousness in its many forms, including the multiple processes through which knowledge about the past (and its associated values) are constructed. Importantly for the purposes of this research, referring to public memory or cultural memory creates space for the idea that memories are both incorporated in and dependent upon dominant public narratives of certain historical events. In these terms, the heritage discourse (along with other representations of the past) has the potential to shape memory in a broad sense.

As suggested in Chapter 1, this thesis uses Jan Assman’s concept of cultural memory, which gives particular prominence to institutionalised cultural representations and their power to harness or cultivate group memories, beyond the realm of individual experience. In Assman’s terms, cultural memory is distanced from what he calls everyday ‘communicative memory’. Cultural memory, it is argued, provides fixed points, expressed through monuments, texts, heritage sites (‘figures of memory’) or ‘institutional communication’ through material or oral practices.<sup>7</sup> Assman writes: ‘The concept of cultural memory comprises that body of reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose "cultivation" serves to stabilize and convey that society's self-image.’<sup>8</sup> Centrally, Assman asserts that cultural representations provide ‘fixity’ to memory and that objectivised culture is closely linked

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<sup>7</sup> Assmann and Czaplicka.

<sup>8</sup> Assmann and Czaplicka, p. 132.

to group remembrance. According to this theory, then, heritagisation inherently shapes cultural memory.

However, as suggested earlier, while using cultural memory as a framework for analysis, we need to be wary of its shortcomings. Cultural memory is itself a generalised concept, which is largely detached from contested and politicised processes through which certain pasts come to be commodified as heritage in particular contexts and the values constructed in the process. Assman's definition of cultural memory still preferences collective aspects of memory, treating everyday (or autobiographical) memory and cultural memory as separate entities. Though he identified the existence of a transition point between 'everyday memory' and 'objectivised culture', his characterisation stressed the similarities between the two, particularly in terms of the way groups use the past for what he called the 'concretion of identity'. In this chapter, the concept of cultural memory is investigated empirically, attempting to provide specificity to this general concept in terms of the case studies considered in this study. Does heritagisation translate to the construction of shared cultural memory in these instances? And, if so, how does this relate to the complex living memories already identified?

### *6.1.3 Heritage and cultural memory*

If memory (in its broadest sense) incorporates learned knowledge, it follows that public or cultural memories can be actively constructed in the present. Indeed, it has often been noted that practices of memorialisation (of which heritagisation is one example) have the ability to influence public historical consciousness; not only in the present, but in the future, well beyond the scope of living memory. As we saw in the previous chapter, the link between heritage and memory is often assumed to operate most powerfully at the group level, particularly when memorials or heritage sites deal with subjects beyond the lifespan of living memory. Geoffrey Cubbit has referred to culture as 'our own basic mnemonic support system', adding weight to the notion that memory (in its broadest sense) is sustained, or indeed *constructed* via a network of cultural symbols and narratives about the past.<sup>9</sup> Heritage sites and displays, after all, claim to capture and

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<sup>9</sup> Geoffrey Cubitt, *History And Memory* (Manchester University Press, 2007), p. 172.

represent the past, to ‘remember’ it in the present, and to preserve it for the future. Bal et al. have suggested that:

cultural memorialisation [is] an activity occurring in the present, in which the past is continuously modified and re-described even as it continues to shape the future. Neither remnant, document, nor relic of the past, nor floating in a present cut off from the past, cultural memory, for better or worse, links the past to the present and future.<sup>10</sup>

The materiality of heritage is often considered to boost the mnemonic function of heritage sites and displays. Tim Benton notes, ‘It is an axiom of the heritage industry that buildings, as well as objects, places and things, enshrine memory.’<sup>11</sup> Certainly, heritage sites make claims to remember, celebrate or commemorate certain pasts which are at risk of being ‘forgotten’. To some extent, this assumption has been adopted in academic discourse. Susan Crane, for example, suggests that memory only becomes coherent through processes of recollection and representation, reaffirming the view that memory can be boosted or triggered by objects.<sup>12</sup> Referring specifically to memory in a museum context, she argues that through being represented, the value or significance of objects is affirmed institutionally. This value (for Crane) is then incorporated in to the ‘memory’ of visitors.

We need to exercise caution when assuming such a direct, linear link between heritage and cultural memory. If we accept that heritage (as one mode of representation of the past) has the ability to shape and sustain cultural memory, we must also assume that ‘memory’ in these terms is necessarily partial or incomplete. Given that heritage sites are inherently selective in the way they re-package and recontextualise historical narratives, only certain aspects of the past can be represented. Shopes and Hamilton have noted this, referring to cultural heritage as a ‘socially sanctioned institutionally supported process of producing memories that make certain versions of the past public and render others invisible.’<sup>13</sup> Green similarly argues that ‘the process through which public or cultural memories are created and sustained are diverse and complex, emphasising some aspects of the past while neglecting or repressing others.’<sup>14</sup> So, while heritage sites can have mnemonic functions for communities or societies in a broad

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<sup>10</sup> Mieke Bal, Jonathan V. Crewe and Leo Spitzer, *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present* (UPNE, 1999), p. vii.

<sup>11</sup> Tim Benton, *Understanding Heritage and Memory* (Manchester University Press, 2010), p. 25.

<sup>12</sup> Susan A. Crane, *Museums and Memory* (Stanford University Press, 2000).

<sup>13</sup> Hamilton and Shopes, p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> Green, ‘Can Memory Be Collective?’, p. 103.

sense, their representations impact on which elements of the past are preserved (and indeed the sorts of values associated with those pasts). Certain narratives can take precedence over others meaning cultural memory is mediated at a number of levels. Of course, individuals bring their own pasts, emotions and understandings to their interpretation of heritage displays. As will be argued later, there are undoubtedly diverse ways in which people approach dominant cultural memories.

In order to provide some empirical grounding to the concept of cultural memory, then, we need to understand the processes through which memory is embedded and shaped in cultural contexts (not only heritage sites but many other forms of popular representations of the past). James Young's study of war memorials similarly argued for a greater understanding of the processes involved in the construction of public memories:

The "art of public memory" encompasses not just these memorials' aesthetic contours, or their places in contemporary artistic discourse. It also includes the activity that brought them into being, the constant give and take between memorials and viewers, and finally the responses of viewers to their own world in light of a memorialised past – the consequences of memory.<sup>15</sup>

While accepting that memorials provided fixed points for collective remembrance (or 'collected memories'), Young suggested that in fact we 'divest ourselves of the obligation to remember' by memorialising pasts in monumental form but neglecting the process of their creation and the different sorts of interaction with memory which they provoked. Young importantly favoured reuniting memorials with their process of creation, suggesting that objectivised representations of the past can only allow us to truly 'remember' when we are aware of the specific social, cultural and political demands of their creation and subsequent recontextualisation. Indeed, it has been shown that heritage is not innate or fixed, rather that heritagisation is a complex and contested *process* through which narratives of the past are constructed and communicated. As a result, we need to treat cultural memory as a fluid construct, both in the way it is promoted (via the construction of dominant narratives of the past, in this case) and the way in which it is received (how it might be understood, ascribed to or challenged by those who evoke those dominant positions). So how can we investigate cultural memory empirically?

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<sup>15</sup> James Edward Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (Yale University Press, 1993), p. ix.

#### 6.1.4 Autobiographical memory and cultural memory in oral history

In general, the interaction of group and individual memory is relatively under-researched, with most memory studies focusing on one or the other. However, oral historians have been influential in highlighting the intersection of individual life narratives and public or cultural memories, seeking to understand how individuals interpret and are influenced by existing cultural narratives. Alistair Thomson, for example, has shown the way in which people frequently adopt popular narratives within their own life stories to create frames of meaning around certain events.<sup>16</sup> In *Anzac Memories* study, he explored the impact of national mythology on the ways in which individual soldiers remembered their experiences, finding close parallels between popular representations of the Great War (through film depictions) and soldiers' life narratives. Recognising the power of public narratives of the past, Thomson noted:

Our memories are risky and painful if they do not conform with public norms or versions of the past. We compose our memories so that they will fit with what is publicly acceptable, or, if we have been excluded from general acceptance, we seek out particular publics which affirm our identities and the way we want to remember our lives.<sup>17</sup>

This sort of research highlights the fact that popular accounts of the past can influence individual remembering in a subconscious way. This is not to say that individuals are necessarily *misremembering* their own life stories, but that the *values* they place on certain aspects of their accounts are directly shaped by existing representations. In the case of Thomson's interviewees, their accounts were shaped to align with more official accounts. Of course, there are a number of factors which shape the way individuals remember, and it is notoriously difficult to distinguish between truly 'individual' memories and those which are shaped by broader public or cultural memories. As argued in Chapter 5, the relationship between individual memory and cultural memory is best characterised as a dialogue, where the memory of the individual operates within broader historical discourses, but also has a measure of personal agency (rather than passively adopting dominant narratives).

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<sup>16</sup> Alistair Thomson, 'Anzac Memories: Putting Popular Memory Theory into Practice in Australia', *Oral History*, 18 (1990), 25–31.

<sup>17</sup> Alistair Thomson, 'Anzac Memories', p. 25.

To this end, others have been keen to reassert the role of individual agency in the remembering process.<sup>18</sup> Graham Smith, for example, has recognised the myriad of influences on individual memory:

As a number of oral historians have pointed out, individuals' understanding of the past are not simply constructed or constituted by public memory, public history, institutions and media. Rather, by remembering in small social groups – such as families, work colleagues, and friends – individuals actively produce historical interpretations. The process of remembering is not only influenced by public remembering but it is also patterned by social structures, gender, generation, ethnicity and ideological beliefs.<sup>19</sup>

Considering these different perspectives, the analysis of oral history interviews has to take into account the ability of the individual to bring their own experiences, understandings and frames of reference when interpreting dominant narratives. In other words, there are multiple ways in which we 'remember'. People may adopt dominant cultural narratives but take their own positions within them. Autobiographical memories are not deleted by dominant cultural memory, rather there is a more complex process of negotiation. In reality, perspectives differ and different interviewees sometimes take very different perspectives in the way they tell their stories. Nonetheless, as we will see, it is certainly possible to discern broad patterns in the way in which individuals are influenced by heritage narratives, particularly when looking to the future and defining why the mining past should be remembered.

## **6.2 Institutional discourses: 'remembering' the mining past**

As shown in Chapter 4, during the process of heritagisation at the two sites, planners' discourses created a sense of pastness by emphasising the earlier histories of Geevor and Big Pit. In these terms, heritage discourses created a divide between mining past 'as it was then' and lived experience of the people who remained in these communities. The past was represented as a 'foreign country' which needed to be preserved and remembered, rather than a living history which still impacted on people's lives in the present.

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<sup>18</sup> Green, 'Can Memory Be Collective?'

<sup>19</sup> Graham Smith, 'Toward a Public Oral History', in *The Oxford handbook of oral history*, ed. by Donald A. Ritchie (Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 439.

At Big Pit, according to the Wales Tourist Board, the site's so-called 'intrinsic historical appeal' lay in its nineteenth century past, one which shaped Wales and played a significant role in the development of global industrialisation.<sup>20</sup> As the mine made its rapid transition to heritage, there was certainly an emphasis on these older facets of the site's history in order to justify its value as 'heritage' rather than a living industry. As previously argued, although there was both continuity and change in the associated heritage discourses, the emphasis on these 'historic' elements of the discourse endured and were particularly influential in the way in which Big Pit promoted itself. Similarly, at Geevor, it was claimed that 'mining runs like a thread through Cornwall's history and has shaped much of its landscape and thinking. Geevor is the real thing'.<sup>21</sup> Along with this, heritage rhetoric frequently focused on Cornish excellence and the way in which mining shaped the county's landscape and culture.<sup>22</sup> Though Geevor was focused on preserving the site for 'the community', planners nonetheless justified the site's 'heritage value' in rather detached terms, often based on the success story of Cornish mining. In the process of re-framing the mine sites as 'historic' assets, there were similar patterns in the way institutional discourses imposed a temporal framework which fixed mining in 'the past' and separated it from lived experience in their respective communities.

At both sites, the success story of how mining contributed to global industrialisation was prominent in the applications to UNESCO for World Heritage Site status, and these were subsequently adopted in the WHS literature. At Big Pit, the World Heritage Site froze Blaenavon as a 'complete example of a nineteenth century landscape', despite the fact that Big Pit was a relatively modern mine which was operational until the late 1970s.<sup>23</sup> In similar terms, Cornwall and West Devon's application stated, 'The Site is being nominated to UNESCO in recognition of this unique contribution to the development of the modern industrialised world, the enduring technological and social consequence of the exceptional survival of distinctive structures and landforms.'<sup>24</sup>

Underwriting these assertions was the need to preserve or 'remember' the mining past which was at risk of being lost. In fact, these claims are made explicit in some of the

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<sup>20</sup> Wales Tourist Board Study, *The Tourist Potential of the Big Pit*, 1979.

<sup>21</sup> Geevor pamphlet (Trevithick Trust), *Guide to the Geevor Experience*, 1997.

<sup>22</sup> *Geevor Tin Mine, The Way Ahead*, Discussion document prepared by Cornwall County Council in conjunction with the Trevithick Trust, 2000, p. 1.

<sup>23</sup> UNESCO World Heritage Site List, <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/984>, accessed 10/12/2010.

<sup>24</sup> Cornwall and West Devon Mining Landscape: World Heritage Site Management Plan 2005-2010, p. 1.

heritage site texts and display panels. As we saw earlier, Big Pit is now promoted as a 'living, breathing reminder of the coal industry in Wales and the people and society it created.'<sup>25</sup> While still evoking a sense of pastness, this sort of rhetoric implies that mining society is bygone and we need to be 'reminded' of it. At Geevor, there are signs of similar claims to remember the mining past in a broad sense. One of the most popular sections of the Geevor site is 'The Dry' (the miners' old changing rooms) which has been reconstructed 'almost exactly as it was when the last working miner left'.<sup>26</sup> This in many ways operates as a commemorative space, and at the entrance to the Dry: 'Here we try to preserve the memory of the men who worked here.'<sup>27</sup> Notably, the sense of preserving memory is closely linked with the materiality of the sites. The mining artefacts ostensibly embody or provoke memory, where memory is 'preserved' through the exchange between objects and the meaning constructed around them. In the case of The Dry at Geevor, it is claimed that preserving the miners' old possessions as if they had just left the site allows them to be remembered in a way which descriptive panels or photos would not. Here, of course, we are in the realm of public or cultural memory, constructing or sustaining memories outside of individual experience. In this way, the heritage sites claim to have a mnemonic function; to construct an enduring cultural memory relating to mining, even if in very specific terms.

As we can see, in justifying the need to preserve Geevor and Big Pit as heritage sites, several interlinked arguments emerged from stakeholders. Firstly, it was argued that mining had an intrinsic 'historic' appeal due to the long histories of mining in Wales and Cornwall, and the age of its associated material artefacts. Secondly, large-scale national narratives of the way mining shaped Wales and Cornwall were extremely prominent. This came with both community and identity claims (assertions that heritage is locally and culturally-defining) and simultaneously elevated Wales and Cornwall as influential in the long history of global industrialisation.

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<sup>25</sup> <http://www.museumwales.ac.uk/en/bigpit/about/> accessed 5/1/2011.

<sup>26</sup> [www.geevor.com](http://www.geevor.com) accessed 8/3/2011.

<sup>27</sup> Geevor Tin Mine display panel.

### **6.3 Cultural memory in miners' stories**

The institutional claims outlined above were the sorts of official narratives which conflicted with living memory, in the terms outlined in Chapter 5. It was apparent from the oral history interviews with ex-miners that their memories operate differently in different contexts. The way they told their stories in oral history interviews reflected quite different priorities to their roles as tour guides. Nonetheless, there were elements of adopting the heritage narrative in the way they talked about the mining past. As argued earlier, miner-guides drifted in and out of their set narratives used during tours (discussing the past 'as it was then') but were also much more reflexive about these memories when discussing their roles as guides. Through their oral histories, there emerged a certain sort of 'collective' memory, which was akin to the way in which Halbwachs initially used the term; to refer to collective remembering in small groups. The miners recalled their working lives in notably similar ways, both in terms of the events they remembered, but also their narrative patterns and the emphasis they placed on certain aspects of their life stories. When discussing the period before the mine closures, there were common themes such as the love/hate relationship with mining, the hardship associated with the work and the positive sense of community that accompanied the thriving mines.

However, in the context of their broader life narratives, themes of decline and loss shaped their stories, with deindustrialisation acting as a turning point in many of the miners' lives, not only in economic terms but in the way they perceived their lifestyles and communities. Given these competing narratives and the different domains in which miners' memories operate, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between what is 'memory' in a direct sense and what is the influence of 'cultural memory' in the sense of learned knowledge or values adopted from official heritage narratives. We would expect there to be a similar tussle between these competing narratives in the construction and preservation of cultural memory. However, as I will argue, when looking to the future, miners consistently turned to institutional discourses, which reinforce the preservation of official narratives of the mining past, rather than drawing on their own autobiographical memories.

### 6.3.1 'It should be here forever': Miners coming to terms with heritagisation

One of the ways in which the issue of cultural memory became apparent was in the discussion of generational change. During their interviews, many of the miners reflected on heritagisation and the need to preserve (or remember) mining in the light of the decline of living memory. As we will see, although many of the miners recalled being extremely sceptical of heritagisation when it was first mooted, they also trace the process of coming to terms with this shift and attempt to justify why the mining past should be preserved. In doing this, they often adopted elements of the dominant heritage discourses identified above. For example, Peter, a Big Pit manager and ex-miner, recalled the reaction to heritagisation as follows:

When Big Pit was first mooted, you know, there were people saying 'why do we need to preserve the heritage of the industry? It's *all* around us!' There's forty coal mines in south Wales. Now nearly thirty years later we're virtually the only one. We are the only shaft mine left in Wales. So, you know, that has happened right across the country. So the traditional industries have been in decline, you know – a certain amount of nostalgia – it's only when something disappears you realise how important it was and what it gave us. And mining had a *huge* impact on this country, not just the industrial but rural areas as well - it really did affect south Wales more than anything else in its history. You know, most of the communities in these valleys only exist because of iron and coal.<sup>28</sup>

Here, we see Peter looking back to the past and reflecting upon the process of change in his own interpretation of heritage. This is an example of a 'meta-statement' which Anderson and Jack identify as a telling feature in oral history narratives.<sup>29</sup> As they note, when interviewees reflect on their own stories, we gain an insight into an 'individual's awareness of a discrepancy within the self or between what is expected and what is being said.'<sup>30</sup> In this case, Peter articulates the tension between his 'old' and 'new' perceptions of heritagisation. Given Peter's current management role at Big Pit heritage site, we would expect him to reflect the institutional discourse to an extent. Interestingly though, he also adds a more personal perspective, remembering his own changing perception of heritagisation as follows:

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<sup>28</sup> Interview with Peter Walker, Big Pit Coal Mining Museum manager; recorded by Bethan Coupland, 6 June, 2011 (8-10 minutes).

<sup>29</sup> Kathryn Anderson and Dana C. Jack, 'Learning to Listen: Interview Techniques and Analyses', in *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, ed. by Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai (Routledge, 1991).

<sup>30</sup> Anderson and Jack, p. 22.

Those of us who were in the industry didn't give a damn about heritage obviously, and what we were interested in was a job, a living and some of us were interested in making a career out of it. But, you know, some perhaps wiser heads, people in the museum world recognised well actually this is an important industry, it is in decline, let's try and preserve some bits of it before it's all gone. Ultimately they were right.<sup>31</sup>

Initially, Peter groups himself with other miners ('those of us who were in the industry'), evoking the common in-group we see in many of the oral history interviews. He then creates an opposition between the miners and those he refers to as 'wiser heads' (here meaning heritage planners). At the beginning of this story, his allegiance was with the working miners, emphasising the way in which heritagisation was resented by the miners in the first instance. His statement that they 'didn't give a damn about heritage' contrasts sharply with his previous discussion of the merits of preserving the industry. Further on in his narrative, however, he comes round to feeling positive about the transition to heritage, effectively switching sides to agree with the 'wiser heads' and recognising the importance of preserving mining, lest it be forgotten. The movement between these two positions or frames implies that coming to terms with the heritagisation of mining was problematic in some ways, given the significant shift in values it entailed. As noted in Chapter 5, representing lived experience through heritage narratives was a problematic process which was incongruent with the hardship associated with living with the legacy of deindustrialisation in these areas, in order to commodify the mining past as a tourist attraction.

Peter's account of coming to terms with heritagisation in this way was in fact common to many of the miners' interviews. As a result, many of the miners' narratives reflected a similar discursive shape, shifting from bitterness and disbelief to the eventual acceptance of the heritage site. In a group interview with several Big Pit miner-guides, after discussing the closure of the mines, the guides were asked what they knew about the plans to turn Big Pit into a heritage site. Dewi responded:

**Dewi:** This was already - we was all working in pits when this was a museum. It was, I think 1983.

**Interviewer:** What did you think about it then?

**Dewi:** I think if we was all honest, if you had said to us twenty-odd years ago 'in twenty years' time you'd be working as a guide in Big Pit', you'd have fell down laughing wouldn't you? [laughs]. Are you serious like? Or what? [laughter from Dewi and others]. We'd have never thought about this place, we was all working in

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<sup>31</sup> Interview with Peter Walker, Big Pit Coal Mining Museum manager; recorded by Bethan Coupland, 6 June, 2011 (12–13 minutes).

the pit and you know, all of us from different mines. We probably weren't interested in this place 'cause you was working in a mine. But yes, like I said it should be here forever, for the next generation.<sup>32</sup>

Dewi effectively uses humour to highlight the significance of the shift in his views of heritage over the years. Entering into their frequently-used banter with the other guides, he jokes that it would have been inconceivable for him to be told he would one day work as a guide at a mining heritage site. This story occurred in a number of the miners' interviews to illustrate the contrast between mining and guiding. Simon (another Big Pit miner-guide), for example, said 'I often say to my wife now in fact, 'little did I think when I started underground that I'd be taking people underground as a tourist attraction'.<sup>33</sup> As Dewi suggests above, he and the other miners wouldn't have even thought of Big Pit as 'we was all working in mines', naturally with different priorities and norms. However, in the last utterance of his response, Dewi shifts gear and returns to a more serious statement suggesting that heritage should be preserved 'for the next generation'. This underlines the vast shift in his attitude over time, as he now seems to value the site as a heritage asset and is keen to see mining remembered beyond his own lifespan. In a way, heritagisation retrospectively endowed the mining past with a sense of importance, giving the industry a status which it would not otherwise have had. In turn, Dewi and others show desire for this more positive version of the past to be preserved.

These patterns were also visible in the Geevor miners' responses. In the context of their life stories, many of the miners remembered being sceptical or even bitter about heritage when it was first introduced, but interviews often ended with quite a different tone. The following extract from an interview with Dennis (a Geevor miner-guide) illustrates this. Early on in his story, he recalled the first introduction of a visitor attraction at Geevor and the reaction it provoked among the miners:

Even when we were working here, just before the final closure, the mine was introducing the visitor sort of thing because they purchased a tractor and trailer and they took people around the mine. And they were watching us come out of the cages at the end of the working day. I can't repeat some of the things the miners shouted at the people looking at us coming out of the shaft. We felt like

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<sup>32</sup> Big Pit miner-guides focus group, recorded by Bethan Coupland, 14 November 2011 (Recording 1, 7-9 minutes).

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Simon Barry, Big Pit miner-guide; recorded by Bethan Coupland, 6 June 2011 (8-10 minutes).

we were monkeys in a cage at one time. Then it was needed because the mine needed to survive, you know.<sup>34</sup>

This account captures the contemporary bitterness associated with the shift to heritage, a move which was extremely problematic for most of the miners. In this context, Dennis understandably felt resentful about becoming an attraction for tourists, to the extent he even shouted abuse at the visiting public. In Chapter 5, we saw Dennis' emotional reaction to the mine closures, having thought he had a 'job for life' (a common phrase among many of the miners interviewed). He even remembered not wanting to attend reunions because he wanted to avoid 'talking about the past'. However, in order to become a guide at Geevor later in life, Dennis must have in some ways come to terms with the shift from working mine to heritage site. Reflecting on this, later on in his interview, Dennis discussed his imminent retirement from his position as a guide. In the process of making sense of his current role, he reflected on the nature of heritage more generally:

I've got another twelve months till I retire, I can come back on a two day basis or volunteer. It's something to do isn't it? You've still got a tale whether you're 65 or however old you are. You can still mingle with people, talk to people, you know - want to keep it alive. I know we're not indispensable, but who's going to carry on the tale? There's nobody at the moment.<sup>35</sup>

In stark contrast to his initial reaction to heritagisation, here Dennis takes pride in his personal role in preserving the story of mining. He also shows concern that the heritage might be lost in future, stressing the need to 'keep it alive'. However, in this extract, Dennis brings a number of influences to bear on the way he wants the mining past to be remembered. He focuses on the need 'carry on the tale', which is a much more personal take on what is important about the past. Rather than simply adopting the over-arching heritage discourse, Dennis stresses the importance of living memory, suggesting that he doesn't want the miners' more personal insights to be lost. This is indicative of a conflict between the cultural memory and individual memory, with Dennis evoking both of these frames in the way he talks about preserving the past through heritage. As argued earlier, we can see that individuals do bring their own perspectives and there is variation within the identified dominant narratives. However, the frequency with which

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<sup>34</sup> Interview with Dennis Way, Geevor miner-guide; recorded by Bethan Coupland, 22 March 2011 (21-22 minutes)

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Dennis Way, Geevor miner-guide; recorded by Bethan Coupland, 22 March 2011 (27-30 minutes).

heritage discourses are evoked and engaged with shows just how pervasive they have become.

In fact, all miners showed a desire for the mine sites to be preserved as heritage, despite the disparities between the way they told their life stories and the representation of mining through heritage. This pattern seems curious in the light of the prevalence of stories of loss and decline encountered in the miners' life narratives (outlined in the previous chapter). In order to account for this shift in the miners' perceptions of heritagisation, we need to understand why miners felt that heritage should be preserved, and subsequently what sort of cultural memory is being promoted.

### *6.3.2 Justifying the preservation of mining heritage: official narratives adopted*

When rationalising the need to preserve mining heritage at Geevor and Big Pit, clear patterns emerged in miners' accounts which very closely mirrored established heritage discourses. Firstly, miners tended to move away from their own personal experiences to a much larger-scale narrative of the sort found in heritage texts. Most notably, mining was commonly placed within 'national' stories. In the following extracts, the concept of 'composure' is drawn upon in order to analyse how and why the miners integrate official narratives into their own accounts.<sup>36</sup> It will be argued that this is done in order to compose memories which are coherent; both in terms of aligning with existing dominant narratives and in seeking personal composure through telling their stories.

As we saw above, miner-guide Dennis stressed the role of living memory in maintaining 'the tale' of mining at Geevor. However, he went on to explain why he thought mining should be 'kept alive' in these terms:

I feel it's got to be kept alive. It's got to be - people have got to know what went on, not only here but it relates to other areas as well and a lot happened overall in Cornwall...It was the mining and everything else that was - took part with the mining, the industry and the towns around. The history, it spreads doesn't it, you know. Yeah for Cornwall and obviously West Devon as well is included in the mining area. I think yeah, I think it's brilliant children are being involved, it's surprising how well-informed the children are, you know. And being now under

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<sup>36</sup> For discussion of composure, see Chapter 2. Alistair Thomson, 'Anzac Memories'; Summerfield.

the World Heritage Site and that, I think why not. It was a massive industry wasn't it, thousands of people involved, you know.<sup>37</sup>

Here, Dennis adamantly states that mining influenced Cornwall as a whole, knitting Geevor's heritage into a much bigger picture. In these terms, he composes a narrative in which he places his own life experience in the context of a culturally-defining industry; 'it was a massive industry' and there were 'thousands of people involved'. Dennis certainly isn't alone in couching Geevor in these terms. Cyril, another ex-miner at Geevor drew directly from the World Heritage Site discourse when discussing the significance of mining heritage. When asked why he felt it was important to preserve the site, he responded:

It is very important. I was explaining it would never go back to a mine because of the different implications now. I mean we've struggled for two years to get World Heritage Status. Now we've got that we want to keep it. We're on a par with the Taj Mahal and the Pyramids believe it or not. This is a unique little mine. You can't go anywhere else in Europe and find a place like that.<sup>38</sup>

Cyril's answer is noticeably impersonal. He seems to find it difficult to articulate why *he* thinks mining should be preserved, and jumps directly to discussing the World Heritage Site, claiming it places Geevor 'on a par with the Taj Mahal'. In fact, this directly echoes the text of a Geevor display panel (mentioned in Chapter 4), which claims 'Cornish mining is internationally significant: it contributed to the development of our modern industrial society and the world as we know it. It is valued alongside other global icons such as the Taj Mahal and Stonehenge.'<sup>39</sup> Likening mine sites to iconic international sites is a common motif used in the WHS discourse, and this is readily absorbed into the miners' talk.

In fact, World Heritage Site status is frequently referred to when discussing the value of preserving mining heritage. Of course, WHS status is an external validation of the heritage 'value' of these sites, which is rather distanced from any sort of personal connection miners may feel with their past. The miners interviewed clearly take pride in World Heritage Site status, which lends credibility to their own pasts, allowing them to compose narratives in which they express pride in their former occupation. In doing so, they very obviously borrow from heritage discourse rather than their own memories in

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<sup>37</sup> Interview with Dennis Way, Geevor miner-guide; recorded by Bethan Coupland, 22 March 2011 (27-30 minutes).

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Cyril Honey, Geevor ex-miner; recorded by Bethan Coupland, 2 November 2011 (Recording 1, 28-29 minutes).

<sup>39</sup> Geevor heritage site display panel.

order to support preservation. These sorts of responses show the way in which cultural memory (constructed through heritage discourse) becomes prevalent in certain contexts. Although the miners themselves lived through the events being represented as heritage, when it comes to preserving the story for the future, it is not their own autobiographical memories they draw on, but on dominant heritage discourses which are influential in constructing a broader cultural memory.

At Big Pit, strikingly similar responses were elicited. Glyn, a former miner with no connection to the heritage site, also used the WHS as a way of validating the preservation of Big Pit. Discussing his view of heritage in Blaenavon, he said:

Well, Blaenavon had always been famous for its production because it invented the steel in this town. That's how it kicked off see. With this World Heritage, they put it forward, the council, and they got it, which they should do because there's a lot. The history we've got here is tremendous - we're not going to lose it. If you lose your history I think you've lost a big part of your life - Yeah, got to keep it going. Like I say, if we lose our heritage, what else have we got?<sup>40</sup>

Although not directly associated with the heritage site institution, Glyn clearly buys into a similar sense of the importance of mining heritage, using WHS status as a value-endorsement for Blaenavon. His account shows how pervasive certain aspects of the dominant heritage narrative have become by incorporating his own story into the heritage narrative. He claims ownership of the mining past, equating the 'history we've got here' with 'our heritage', simultaneously evoking a historicised narrative of the industry and placing himself within that narrative. Indeed, much like Big Pit's promotional texts, he traces the long history of industry in the area as if to stress its 'historic' value. In comparison to the other miners mentioned above, Glyn goes slightly further in arguing for the preservation of heritage. His reason for this transpires to be (in his final comment), 'if we lose our heritage, what else have we got?' This is an implicit identity claim; Blaenavon people, for Glyn, are defined by their industrial past, something which he claims needs to be remembered.

Not all miners referred to the World Heritage Site in such specific terms, but when it came to discussion of safeguarding mining heritage, there was a common pattern of interviewees moving away from personal memories to asserting the value of heritage at a national or global level. In the following extracts from Big Pit miner-guides, we see a

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<sup>40</sup> Interview with Glyn Probert, Big Pit ex-miner; recorded by Bethan Coupland, 16 November 2011 (2-5 minutes).

number of statements couching the value of mining heritage in these terms. Firstly, Dewi stresses the importance of not ‘forgetting’ mining when a generational shift occurs:

Well, at the end of the day, the likes of this place, the Valleys, have made Cardiff. If it wasn't for the likes of the Valleys, the ironworks and steel, Cardiff wouldn't exist. The docks were built, they became the cities they are because of the Valleys...I don't think it's seen as important now. I think people tend to forget about it. They closed the mines down, the mines are gone, where the mines once were the pits have been landscaped. You know it's forgotten, unless there's a memorial put there, it's forgotten. Sadly, they closed the mines down, never put anything there to say there'd been something there, and people forget don't they? And time goes on - the generation - it will be lost won't it?<sup>41</sup>

Having earlier on discussed how ridiculous heritagisation would have seemed to the miners in the 1980s, Dewi now clearly values preserving the memory of the mining past. He repeatedly refers to the risk of ‘forgetting’ to support the memorialisation of the industry through its material artefacts. Anticipating the lapse of living memory, Dewi assumes a direct link between maintaining the material culture of mining and remembering its traditions. But just what is being remembered? For Dewi, it's important not to forget mining in the Valleys because of its wider impact on Cardiff and the surrounding area. Again, this stresses the productive nature of mining, what it ‘gave us’ (as Peter claimed earlier), rather than how he specifically remembers his own experience. In the following extract from a group interview with Big Pit miner-guides (Dewi, Thomas and Simon) use similar mechanisms to attach value to the mining past:

**Thomas:** I think it's a good thing they preserved it. It's nice to see all the young ones coming down.

**Dewi:** I think it should be here forever. Youngsters today...I've got a boy of twelve, you know, youngsters today they've never seen a coal mine, they don't know what it is. They don't even know what coal is some of them. So this place is here, they can come here and learn about it, part of their heritage, they can talk, ask questions of people. It should be here. It's part of Welsh history, Welsh culture.

**Thomas:** We've got a lot of adults coming through, they don't realise, they think it's all carpeted and painted down there (laughs). They didn't realise what we had to go through. It's nice to show everyone.

**Dewi:** I've had people here, not from foreign countries, from London, took them underground and they've never seen coal. They wouldn't know what it is...

**Thomas:** I think it's good that they kept this. The number of people that come here just to go down a hole in the ground, it's unbelievable. I think it's good for Wales. It's the history isn't it? The only trouble is, sometimes I think the people

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<sup>41</sup>Big Pit miner-guides focus group, recorded by Bethan Coupland, 14 November 2011 (Recording 1, 9-13 minutes).

here they think it's like a - you know you see tins of biscuits with the cottages, it's like a fake world for them. It's like we are always in the past, they don't associate anything modern with Wales. It's still coal mining and rugby and there isn't much else [laughs]...It's a bit of a cliché but still, we're proud of it.

**Simon:** And I mean, the amount of people we have here throughout the year, all over the world right and it gives you - makes you proud as well to show them how mining was done in Wales over the years you know. Mining is important to Wales, the heritage side of it, that's why I'm glad they kept this place. Sadly, if you think of this, coal mining in Wales have gone. 10, 11 mines in Wales but they're drift mines, not actually shafts...they are starting to open one or two mines but whether we go back to mining in Wales who knows...<sup>42</sup>

Two recurring (and interlinked) points emerge from this exchange. The emphasis of the role of mining in national history and culture is again very apparent. The miners repeat statements such as 'it's good for Wales', 'mining is important to Wales, the heritage side of it', 'it's part of Welsh history, Welsh culture', composing a narrative which not only fits with, but directly reflects, heritage discourse. Along with this, they state that there is a need to pass on the knowledge and ways of working to the next generation who have 'never seen coal', 'wouldn't know what it is'. In fact, this was a joke which cropped up in a number of interviews. Dai, for example, claimed it was necessary to preserve Big Pit 'especially for the young people. They've never seen a coal mine, so it's a good thing now for them to see what type of work the miners actually did. Whereas if we didn't have it they'd just read books, films, it's not the same. You've got to go down to experience it.'<sup>43</sup> Similarly, Eddie at Geevor claimed the site needed to be maintained 'for the youth, of course the children coming along to know what happened.'<sup>44</sup>

These sorts of claims suggest that the miners hope that heritage will inform and teach the next generation, those who they claim are increasingly distant from that sort of work. There is not only a generational gap, but a geographical one, according to Thomas (in the group extract). He jokes that in the eyes of tourists from London, the mines are all 'carpeted and painted', indicating the lack of understanding of the nature of mine work among the broader public. His poignant comment 'they didn't realise what we had to go through' evokes the hardships of working underground and the need to remember that in the light of deindustrialisation. Thomas shows signs of being

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<sup>42</sup> Big Pit miner-guides focus group, recorded by Bethan Coupland, 14 November 2011 (Recording 1, 12-15 minutes).

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Dai Jones, Big Pit miner-guide; recorded by Bethan Coupland, 6 June 2011 (2-5 minutes).

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Eddie Strick, Geevor miner-guide; recorded by Bethan Coupland, 23 March 2011 (8-10 minutes).

slightly more reflexive as to the image of Wales constructed through heritage. Though he is sceptical of the tourist lens Wales is often viewed through, he still justifies the value of mining heritage in national terms, in a meta-statement saying 'it's a bit of a cliché but we're still proud of it'.

In the extracts above, many of the miners buy into the historicised narrative of the mining past. They promote preserving the working traditions as they were when the mines were working, in many ways reflecting the temporally-fixed nature of established heritage discourses. By referring to mining on a national (or regional) scale, the miners claim a particular sort of heritage value. They make connections with the 'success story' of mining; the way in which it shaped Wales and Cornwall, putting both on the world stage. Again, these sorts of claims tend to fix mining in the distant past, reaching beyond local community histories or personal experience to a much grander narrative. With this, there is a strong implication that their own stories are not valued as 'heritage'. Heritage, to them, involves remembering how mining was done and what the industry contributed to the development of these areas. As a result, they do not ascribe any sort of 'heritage' value to their own experiences, particularly of their sense of loss in the wake of deindustrialisation. In these terms, we can see clearly the way in which dominant heritage narratives are adopted when it comes to which version of mining heritage is preserved. Although living memory is still present at Geevor and Big Pit, there is a developing cultural memory which clearly subsumes individual memories when it comes to justifying the preservation of mining as 'heritage'. The miners interviewed drew on dominant cultural memory in order to compose a broader sense of meaning from their own life narratives; stories which endowed their own experience with a retrospective sense of value as well as being coherent with dominant heritage discourses.

#### **6.4 Local perspectives: cultural memory in Blaenavon and Pendden**

Miners' accounts highlighted the fact that lived experience and cultural representations both influence the way the mining past is remembered and preserved for the future. In this way, autobiographical and cultural memory exist alongside each other, implying that there is not a neat transition between the two. In other words, it is not the case that cultural memory only becomes influential when living memory lapses. In fact, different

sorts of ‘memories’ overlap and have the potential to challenge or reinforce each other. In order to further understand the way in which cultural memory is constructed and communicated, we need to attempt to trace the place of the mining past in the existing public historical consciousness. So what sort of ‘memory’ of mining exists beyond the realm of individual experience?

#### *6.4.1 Coming to terms with heritagisation in Blaenavon and Pendeen*

As argued above, miners’ oral history narratives revealed the process of coming to terms with heritagisation and the shift in values it entailed. In these terms, many of those who had been initially sceptical proved to be in favour of preserving mining heritage in the terms established by dominant heritage narratives. Of course, the process of heritagisation was contested in both Blaenavon and Pendeen more generally. According to local people who were interviewed, a similar process of change has been experienced in the perception of the value of heritage in the respective local communities. A common trend emerged, whereby local people remembered being indifferent (or even hostile) to heritagisation in the wake of the mine closures, but eventually coming to terms with this shift and supporting the preservation of the mine sites for their historic value. Evidently, dominant heritage narratives have also spread to public discourse and hence constructed a certain sort of cultural memory. In fact, there was clear evidence of a broader historical consciousness in which the role of mining in shaping their communities is prominent.

Many ‘insiders’ at Geevor and Big Pit discussed local perspectives on heritage, often claiming that local people have come to value heritage, despite some initial scepticism. Indeed, heritage site managers and staff acknowledged the economic points of contest but pointed to the value of preserving mining heritage as a way of resolving these localised disputes. Peter, a Big Pit manager, discussed the site’s reception as follows:

I think it’s changing. When it was first opened up I think there was a huge amount of scepticism in the town as it was, as I said, about tourism generally and with some justice it must be said. But, over the years I think we’ve proved that this place can be a success. There’ll always be the sceptics and the doubters, you know, should be doing more. And to a certain extent you can understand that because places like this, you know, to a large degree were the centre of the community, they provided everything, even provided the stick for the fire as well as the coal, and there are 65 people working here now, at its height there

were 1300 so we can't make the same sort of impact as the place once did. So then, we're always fighting that but I think what has changed is that people, we've always had good supporters in the town, what has changed now is that people realise 'well hang on, heritage is important in the area', and Big Pit is a national museum, best in Britain...<sup>45</sup>

Similarly, Ceri (and ex-miner and curator) claimed:

I think they've accepted now that's it's an important part of the place. It's like most Valley places, there's a certain amount of apathy about but also a real pride, sometimes in the same person. I think they'd probably have been happy if they'd put a Tesco up here or a swimming pool or a leisure centre 'cause they're used to having the colliery here. What do they want to keep it for, it's just a colliery...I think they've accepted now what it is. Like I said, there's a lot of pride and a lot of apathy and sometimes out of the same mouth.<sup>46</sup>

Peter and Ceri imply that it's now much easier to justify the preservation of the mine sites as heritage, given the shift in their value over time. Ceri's characterisation of the site's reception as 'a lot of pride and a lot of apathy' reflects the love/hate relationship which existed with the industry, which was prominent in many of the miners' narratives. Naturally, in the first instance, local residents didn't always celebrate the heritage value of the Pit, hence the assertion that some people may have preferred a Tesco supermarket to a heritage site. As we saw in Chapter 4, the process of heritagisation was often contested on these sorts of economic grounds. At Geevor, we see the same sorts of negotiation between the economic points of contest and the heritage value of the site. Bill, a Geevor trustee described the site's relationship with the community in these terms:

I know there were some people, there always will be in post-industrial area, who worked in a place, hated every minute of it and the thing that they want is to see the whole thing razed to the ground and a few nice rows of Barrat houses or something put up. There's still a little bit of that but people have become perhaps a little bit more conscious of their heritage...I think it's become sort of a different sort of fixed point in the community. It's no longer the thing that drives the local economy. There aren't huge numbers of jobs here, there are a few jobs, they're not very well paid but it is something which I know...it has become important to some of the people that worked here. Of course it's a link for them with their working past and it has become important for them. I think maybe that makes it important.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Interview with Peter Walker, Big Pit Coal Mining Museum manager; recorded by Bethan Coupland, 6 June, 2011 (33–35 minutes).

<sup>46</sup> Interview with Ceri Thompson, ex-miner and Big Pit curator, recorded by Bethan Coupland, 6 June 2011 (27-29 minutes).

<sup>47</sup> Interview with Bill Lakin, Geevor Trustee and Pendeen resident; recorded by Bethan Coupland, 4 March 2011 (17-18 minutes).

Strikingly parallel points of dispute emerge from Blaenavon and Pendeen, but Peter, Ceri and Bill all insist that heritage has become increasingly important over time and that the majority of local people have come to value the mining past as ‘their heritage’. Big Pit, to Peter and Ceri, has made the transition from ‘just a colliery’ to ‘a national museum, [the] best in Britain’, whereas Geevor is described as becoming ‘a different sort of fixed point in the community’. Their assessments suggest that local people have developed a greater sense of appreciation of mining heritage as part of *their* past, and that this has been fostered by the memorialisation of the past through heritage at Geevor and Big Pit. In these terms, they claim that mining heritage has been influential in shaping the cultural memory in these areas. As we will see, these claims were largely reinforced when tested against the community members’ accounts.

#### *6.4.2 Cultural memory in local residents’ narratives*

For the purposes of this research, interviews were carried out with local people, some of whom lived in Blaenavon or Pendeen who had varying degrees of involvement with mining, as well as some incomers to the areas. These interviews certainly revealed the prominence of the mining past in the way people constructed and narrated their communities, much of which was shaped by heritage representations.

At Geevor, local people were keen to stress the ongoing role of the mine in the development of the community in Pendeen. Some Pendeen residents very clearly reflected heritage discourses when they discussed the way mining has shaped their local area. In fact, some even explicitly referenced the role of heritage in constructing their understanding of the mining past. In the following two extracts, we see the way in which the Geevor (as a heritage site) is considered to have broad mnemonic function for the local community.

Fiona, who moved to Pendeen five years ago, said:

I think landscape is so important here for people who live here, even for me who’s moved down here. It’s such a huge part of why we’re here. To have the landscape dotted with the remains of old mines, it’s so beautiful and that kind of stuff, but you need the understanding of why they’re there. You can’t just think ‘oh aren’t they pretty’, you need that understanding of why they were there and why they were important for Cornwall in order to justify a case for why you

preserve them and you can't begin to understand why they're important unless you have some kind of experience, I think that's great about Geevor.<sup>48</sup>

Janet, another 'incomer' noted:

As you get older, you're naturally more interested in where you come from and what you do, you don't realise until you get older, how much you're affected by things which happen in the past or to members of your family in the past. You don't notice it when you're young but I think this place [Geevor mine] is important because there are generations out there whose fathers aren't coming home from the mine anymore so they've lost that thread. But their fathers, or their grandfathers now in a lot of cases, worked here and they will come to an age where they're interested. And if it's not here to show them, they won't really have that concept in the same way that you can get from walking round here; going to where the men hung their clothes in the miners' Dry, going underground, seeing how dark and damp and confined it all is. You can be told and told and told but until you have it in your imagination it's not the same. And that's what this place is here for really. And for those in other areas where similar mining may have happened, like in Devon, where the copper mines and so on. This is the closest they can get to it all as well. You know, it's not just this little bit.<sup>49</sup>

In the first account, Fiona clearly focused on the way mining shaped the Cornish landscape. Again, here, we encounter elements of the large-scale heritage narrative, justifying the preservation of industrial heritage because of its influence in developing and defining Cornish landscape and culture. In Fiona's terms the mines 'were important to Cornwall' and she encourages a sense of duty to understand mining heritage, suggesting that we should look beyond the mines' aesthetic qualities to appreciate the heritage value of these places. She implies that the preservation of Geevor is important in this regard, allowing people to learn about the mining past. Similarly, Janet points to Geevor's role in preserving the past in the context of living memory being lost. For her, the value of heritage is justified by the claim 'as you get older you don't realise how much you're affected by things that happen in your past'. This is another implicit suggestion that heritage is central to identity in a linear sense; for local families to remember their fathers' and grandfathers' lifestyles. She references the 'loss' of the story when the generational shift occurs, suggesting that Geevor's function is to remember the miners and their working traditions. The emphasis here is much the same as encountered in the miners' responses above. The benefit of heritage, in her words, is to *experience* what life was like for the miners, 'walking round here - going to where

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<sup>48</sup> Fiona Jackson, Pendeen residents focus group, recorded by Bethan Coupland, 14 December 2011 (Recording 1, 42-45 minutes).

<sup>49</sup> Interview with Janet Quinton, Pendeen resident and Geevor guide; recorded by Bethan Coupland, 22 March 2011 (15-16 minutes).

the men hung their clothes in the miners' Dry, going underground, seeing how dark and damp and confined it all is'. Janet's account closely reflects the way Geevor describes its own mission: 'In this museum you can discover how the ore was mined underground and what happened on the surface. You can also find out what life was like for those who worked here.' As such, Janet values preserving the past 'as it was', maintaining the traditions and ways of working when the mines were operational. Both Janet and Fiona have clearly adopted a sense of the value of mining in the area, suggesting its prominence in public historical consciousness. In these terms, the cultural memory of mining is already being shaped, and Geevor is perceived to be influential in the way people construct their sense of place and belonging within the local community. Importantly, both accounts position mining in the relatively distant past, implying a need to remember 'how it was then' and how the past shaped the present.

In Blaenavon, there were a number of examples of heritage shaping cultural memory in similar terms. Stephanie, a local business owner in Blaenavon, recalled being surprised when she first heard about the heritage initiative in the 1980s. She grew up in the town and returned recently after living abroad for twenty years or so. She later described her experience when visiting Big Pit heritage site as follows:

I've been up there but not underground, I can't do that. The kids have been. I think it's amazing, really incredible. I'm glad it's there. I think a lot of its visitors, particularly families with young children treat it like a Disney ride, 'oh this is fun', you know go down in the lift and so on. I don't think they always realise the importance of it. There are historians who go up and want to find out the nitty gritty of it. I think it's amazing, absolutely amazing. I don't think local people go there unless they have visitors arrive or family arrive, people who don't live nearby, perhaps grandchildren, that sort of thing...Sometimes it's hard to think of something like that as a museum. It does represent people's history, local people's history but then people are often very protective about what they think is their *own* history. It's still part of people's lives. You still get this vague - people they consider themselves a mining town even though it's long gone.<sup>50</sup>

At the very end of this response, Stephanie points to the prominent nature of mining in public historical consciousness in Blaenavon. Despite the debate about the role of Big Pit itself, mining is still fundamentally important to this area, captured in the comment 'people still consider themselves a mining town even though it's long gone'. In relation to the site itself, an opposition is created here between a 'Disney ride' and 'the importance of it', in order to refer to the mine's intrinsic historic value. In similar terms

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<sup>50</sup> Interview with Stephanie Nummelkin, Blaenavon resident; recorded by Bethan Coupland, 16 November 2011 (Recording 2, 17-19 minutes).

to Fiona (above), Stephanie implies a sense of obligation to engage with the past, to fully understand the heritage value of mining in the area. She claims that local people take the site for granted and justifies this by the fact that 'it's hard to think of something like that as a museum' and 'people are protective about what they think is their *own* history'. Here, Stephanie draws out two central points in the debate over heritagisation; the difficulty of instantly historicising the mine site as 'heritage' in the context of its recent closure and the question of local ownership or representativeness in terms of which living histories are put on display. Despite acknowledging these points of contest, Stephanie repeatedly refers to Big Pit as 'amazing', showing the fact that she distances herself from the potential conflict around heritage and values the preservation of the mining past in these terms. Tellingly, Stephanie uses 'they' and 'their' when referring to what 'local people' think of mining heritage, implying that she doesn't consider herself part of that community (perhaps as a result of her time away). However, later on in her interview, she discussed the role of the WHS designation in Blaenavon in rather different terms:

I'm sure other people would have a different view of a World Heritage Site, think of Greek columns or the Taj Mahal, something far more glorious in its physical aspect. They're not necessarily perhaps thinking of an industrial site. I think that's the big difference...you know, this really is something we must not lose and we must label it so everybody else is aware of it and its relevance to the world.<sup>51</sup>

Not only is the dominant heritage discourse adopted here (comparing mining to other global icons etc.), Stephanie also ties herself into this narrative in a way she had not done previously. When justifying the WHS status she claims '*we* must not lose and *we* must label it'. This shift in her narrative reflects her willingness to engage with the collective 'need' to preserve mining heritage despite the fact that she was reluctant to make a personal connection with 'local people's' opinions. As such, the established heritage language is borrowed from and adopted into people's own perspectives. When looking to the future, the need to preserve these sites is justified in the terms established through institutional discourses.

The influence of heritagisation in constructing cultural memory is relatively easy to trace in accounts given by local people who were fairly new to Blaenavon and Pendeen. Given that none of these respondents lived in these areas through the period when the

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<sup>51</sup> Interview with Stephanie Nummelkin, Blaenavon resident; recorded by Bethan Coupland, 16 November 2011 (Recording 2, 17-19 minutes).

mines were operating (or through the period of deindustrialisation), we would not expect their autobiographical memories to impact on the way they understand or construct meaning around the mining past. For these interviewees, their cultural memories clearly rested on learned knowledge which, in turn, meant that heritage narratives were uncontested and easily adopted. As living memory becomes less prominent, we would expect these sorts of patterns to continue in terms of how the cultural memory of mining is preserved.

#### *6.4.3 Living memory and cultural memory*

However, at present, we can still observe the interaction of living memory and heritage narratives in some interviewees' responses. As was the case in the miners' stories, some local people drew on both their own experiences and embedded cultural narratives in their interviews. While incomers to Blaenavon and Pendeen most clearly reflect the influence of heritage narratives in public memory, others drew on different influences as well. In the following example from a local resident in Pendeen, we also see how living memory still influences the way in which the mining past is remembered. Although a recent incomer into the Pendeen area, Laura hints at how oral tradition and the transmission of living memory also influence public memories. She explains how her partner's family (some of whom were miners) share their stories between generations. When asked what moving to Pendeen was like, Laura responded:

**Laura:** I was in a lucky position when I moved down. Well, I say lucky, I purposefully chose to try and get a job here, within the first week of moving down so I could start getting to know people because I was completely on my own, didn't know anybody. So, then meeting my partner and hearing about the community from him. The thing that's so important here is the mining history, that's what's talked about. It's such an important part of who they are, but I think it's also what makes people so close-knit. To me that's what it seems to be, everyone cares a lot about each other down here. It's very much a strong community feeling, and very welcoming as an outsider, I think so, people have been extremely welcoming.

**Interviewer:** Is mining something you hear a lot about then?

**Laura:** I've heard a lot about it because I'm with a chap who's local, he's always lived in Pendeen and the surrounding area. His father was a miner so I've heard about all the things that happened in the past...The mining is part of where we are. It's a huge thing, even now. His son who is thirteen talks about when Geevor was open and the things his dad says and what his grandfather is done.

It's definitely part of everyday life, even now, even though it's not a running mine.<sup>52</sup>

Here, without prompting, Laura explicitly links 'mining' and 'community', claiming 'it's what makes people so close-knit'. She describes Geevor as 'part of everyday life', suggesting that the mine is still central to the way the community perceives itself. Interestingly, though, Laura implies that the transfer of memory between family groups has been particularly influential in terms of how mining is remembered. The sharing of stories and traditions between three generations of her partner's family has shaped her understanding of the mining past and its value to the local area. Although the Geevor site is still part of the community in her narrative, public historical consciousness is clearly also constructed through the transmission of living memory in certain small-group contexts. This reminds us that although cultural representations of certain pasts are influential in creating dominant memories, not all accounts neatly fit these set narratives, and there are multiple influences in the way public memories are formed and communicated.

Of course, different people had different levels of engagement with mining, which had an effect on the extent to which they drew on autobiographical and cultural memories. For example, Brian, a local councillor who has lived in the town all his life, constructed a narrative which sporadically moved in and out of living memory and cultural memory. In making sense of the mining past, he very clearly wove his own experiences into a familiar heritage narrative. Beginning with the assertion that people considered heritage to be important in Blaenavon, he then stressed how it had influenced him personally:

We're very proud of the heritage, the Blaenavon people, yes. You don't have that sort of conversation with people but there's lots of older people you get into a conversation with and they say "I remember that". That's a good thing...The town and the residents were rather split on 'why should we spend so much money doing up the town when it could have been spent elsewhere' but they were in the minority...It's one of one. It's the only deep mine in the country you can go down. One of one, it's got to be popular hasn't it? It's a local story. To me, it's part of my history if you like. I never worked in the Pit. I never worked in the ironworks, but when you read the story, they had children 6 or 7 years of age working in the mines, pushing trams, picking coal, to me it's almost like a living history. I can see it in my head all the way from the beginning so I don't - I can see it as a story but many probably wouldn't.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Laura Vickery, Pendeen residents focus group, recorded by Bethan Coupland, 14 December 2011 (Recording 1, 2-4 minutes).

<sup>53</sup> Interview with Brian Whitcombe, Local Councillor and Blaenavon resident; recorded by Bethan Coupland, 16 November 2011 (22-26 minutes).

Brian's account at first seems rather muddled, but unpicking it tells us more about the tussle between autobiographical and cultural memory. He explicitly claims his story is partly based on what he remembers from his own living memory ('it's part of my history if you like...it's almost like a living history...I can see it in my head') and partly reconstructed through learned stories ('I never worked in the Pit', 'when you read the story...'). At the end, he seems to imply that his own living memory allows him to more fully understand the history in the way others might not, suggesting that the way he remembers the mining past relies on both personal experience and learned knowledge. Nonetheless, his narrative borrows a number of distinctive motifs from heritage discourse; stressing the uniqueness of the site, repeating 'it's one of one' and re-telling the potted stories about mining as it was ('they had children 6 or 7 years of age working in the mines, pushing trams, picking coal..'). This illustrates just how influential existing cultural narratives are, even in cases where people draw on their own lived experience.

## **6.5 Conclusion: Reflecting on heritage and cultural memory**

This chapter began with some wide-reaching, difficult questions about the nature of heritage and different manifestations of 'memory'. The process of heritagisation and its subsequent reception at Geevor and Big Pit has provided a window into the complex relationship between heritage and cultural memory, where the shift from living memory to cultural memory has become more visible.

As I have argued, previous theoretical conceptualisations have treated living memory and cultural memory as largely separate concerns in relation to heritage, with the implication that cultural memorialisation becomes relevant only in the context of the lapse of individual memory (based on lived experience). In reality there is no such simple transition between living memory and cultural memory. From the case studies considered here, we can see that there is in fact a much more complex, non-linear process of knowledge construction and meaning-making about the past, both in the present and looking to the future.

At the most basic level, we can see clearly that heritagisation has played into the construction of cultural memory in Blaenavon and Pendden. In these terms, Jan Assman's notion that cultural memory is constructed through dominant cultural representations and symbols is clearly applicable. In both cases, heritage sites have constructed institutionally-supported dominant narratives of the mining past (and its 'value' in shaping the present). The sites themselves frequently claim that heritage facilitates 'remembering' the mining past: both Geevor and Big Pit allow visitors to 'experience' the past, to 'remember' it in the present, and to preserve it for the future. As identified in Chapter 4, the trend here was to focus on national narratives, to emphasise the distant (most frequently nineteenth century) past and the need to preserve the mining industry which was considered to be globally-significant. As we have seen, these sorts of value-statements have been readily adopted in the way both ex-miners and local people talk about preserving the past, implying that the cultural memory of mining is directly shaped by institutional narratives.

However, tracing the construction and communication of cultural memory is complex, especially given that at present, both living memory and cultural memories coexist and jostle for position in terms of how the mining past is remembered by both ex-miners and local residents. As argued earlier, there are two central problems with the application of the concept of cultural memory in these contexts; its detachment from the contested nature of heritagisation (and memory) and its over-reliance on a collective perspective. As we have seen, we cannot make the simplistic assumption that these dominant narratives are strictly 'collective'; that they are merely adopted unquestioningly by those who are exposed to them. Clearly, there are a number of factors which contribute to the way in which we 'remember', where dominant cultural narratives are influential but people adopt them in their own ways and take their own positions within them. In other words, while it is possible to identify the existence of a dominant cultural memory (shaped by heritagisation), there is still a measure of individual agency, particularly when cultural memory and autobiographical memories overlap. Beyond this, we need to acknowledge that if cultural memory is shaped by representations of the past, it is, in turn, shaped by the political and economic forces which drive the process of heritagisation.

Shopes and Hamilton (quoted at the beginning of this chapter) noted that cultural heritage produces 'memories that make certain versions of the past public and render

others invisible'.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, at Geevor and Big Pit, the wide-ranging influence of heritage discourses meant that only certain elements of the story have been preserved. There is little space for the alternative narrative identified in the oral histories; the accounts which went beyond the period when the mines closed, and were characterised by stories of economic decline, personal loss and dissolving senses of community. This alternative narrative which challenged the romanticisation of heritage discourse is notably absent from the way in which the preservation of mining heritage is discussed. As such, there is a hierarchy in the way different forms of memory are considered to have value as 'heritage'. More personal, unofficial memories are not considered to be worth preserving or representing. Conversely, the perceived intrinsic historic value of the more distant past and the role of industrialisation in shaping modern Wales and Cornwall have become ubiquitous in the cultural narrative, and hence in way the mining past is 'remembered'.

Already, the sorts of heritage discourses outlined above (and their associated cultural memories) are deeply embedded, to the extent that they can claim to resolve localised political and economic contests surrounding the heritage sites. Miners and local people drew on both their lived experience and elements of the dominant cultural memory when telling their stories, but often only discussed aspects of their living memory which fitted with established heritage discourses. In the miners' oral histories we saw clear patterns in the way they move from being extremely sceptical (even hostile) to heritagisation in the first instance, to accepting (and even promoting) the role of heritage sites in preserving the mining past. Similarly, while local people may have debated the role and purpose of the sites during the phase of heritagisation, at some level, all interviewees seemed to value the preservation of the mining past through heritage. Importantly, when justifying this desire to preserve mining heritage, most respondents directly borrowed from established discourses rather than giving a more personal sense of the value of the mining past. Particularly, World Heritage Site designation was often cited, along with the related large-scale aggrandised narratives about the way in which mining economically and culturally defined Wales and Cornwall. In these terms, even those who had their own living memory to draw upon bought into historicised narratives which stress the value of mining heritage and the need to preserve it for the next generation. Certainly, when looking to the future, these institutionally-endorsed accounts dominated unofficial memories in terms of which elements of the past were

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<sup>54</sup> Hamilton and Shopes, p. 3.

preserved. In simple terms, living memory was (and is) characterised by decline and loss, while heritage narratives are characterised by a large-scale story of success.

As for the shift from living memory to cultural memory, we can only speculate as to how this will play out in the future. Although living memory is still present at Geevor and Big Pit, there is a developing dominant cultural memory which clearly subsumes individual memories when it comes to justifying the preservation of mining as heritage. The frequent adoption of heritage narratives suggests that people perceive a need to remember the past for its own intrinsic value, buying into fundamental notions of what heritage *is*. As living memory declines and disappears (along with the alternative narrative it constructs) we would expect to see a trend moving away from personal stories to these larger-scale heritage narratives. In these terms, as time goes on, cultural memory becomes increasingly distant from lived experience.

As we have seen, cultural memory is a useful framework, but one which needs to be more carefully situated within particular contexts. When certain pasts are commodified and memorialised as heritage, this process imposes a fixed temporal framework. At Geevor and Big Pit, mining was frozen in ‘the past’, providing it with a ‘fixity’ for memory (in Assman’s terms), which through the construction of a dominant cultural narrative, allows the memory of mining to endure beyond the point at which living memory will lapse. However, this also imposes a value system which promotes a very particular interpretation through heritage (one shaped by the political and economic interests which drive heritagisation). As a result, living memory (and alternative narratives) are subsumed by a more pervasive cultural memory.

## Conclusion

This thesis has moved beyond existing research on heritage and memory by more critically analysing the relationship between heritage and different conceptualisations of memory. As I have argued, most scholarly work on the relationship between heritage and memory has assumed a simplistic link whereby memorialisation preserves ('collective') memory in a simplistic sense.<sup>55</sup> As argued in Chapter 1, this is surprising given the theoretical rigour which has grown from the study of heritage and memory as separate entities. As Laurajane Smith has noted, these relationships are 'simply nodded at rather than given close attention'.<sup>56</sup> Given that both heritage and memory are concepts which have come to be understood as complex and multiply constructed, their interrelationship deserves a more critical and nuanced analysis. As heritage studies and public history have shown, representing the past in the present is by no means straightforward. Heritage is not merely preserved or protected, but constructed through discourses and value-systems which promote certain narratives of the past.<sup>57</sup> Similarly, theorists of memory have acknowledged that there are different layers of memory which overlap and interact with each other in a complex dialogue.<sup>58</sup> Accordingly, this thesis began by posing the question 'what impact does heritagisation have on different layers of memory?'

In order to address this broad question, the study drew on a range of theoretical perspectives, recognising that both memory and heritage are multiply constructed and interpreted. Following the emerging fields of public history and critical heritage studies, it aimed to interrogate the process of meaning-making in relation to heritage sites and displays, deconstructing the relationship between the past and the present in certain

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<sup>55</sup> Susan A. Crane, *Museums and Memory* (Stanford University Press, 2000); Tim Benton, *Understanding Heritage and Memory* (Manchester University Press, 2010).

<sup>56</sup> Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage* (Taylor & Francis, 2006), p. 58.

<sup>57</sup> Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage*; Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 'Theorizing Heritage', *Ethnomusicology*, 39 (1995), 367–380; G. J. Ashworth, Brian Graham and J. E. Tunbridge, *Pluralising Pasts: Heritage, Identity and Place in Multicultural Societies* (Pluto Press, 2007).

<sup>58</sup> See, for example, Paula Hamilton and Linda Shopes, eds., *Oral History and Public Memories* (Temple University Press, 2008); Alistair Thomson, *Anzac Memories: Living with the Legend* (Oxford University Press, USA, 1994); Graham Smith, 'Toward a Public Oral History', in *The Oxford handbook of oral history*, ed. by Donald A. Ritchie (Oxford University Press, 2010); Anna Green, 'Can Memory Be Collective?', in *The Oxford handbook of oral history*, ed. by Donald A. Ritchie (Oxford University Press, 2010); Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka, 'Collective Memory and Cultural Identity', *New German Critique*, 1995, 125–133.

contexts.<sup>59</sup> In this vein, rather than interpreting ‘heritage’ as fixed or innate, the study focused on heritagisation as a *process* in which narratives of the past are socially constructed and reliant upon political, cultural and economic circumstances. In addition, based on existing work in oral history and memory studies, it was acknowledged that memory has a number of different dimensions which interact with heritagisation; living or autobiographical memory (how people remember their own lives and experiences) and broader cultural memory (what is ‘remembered’ about the past in the broader public consciousness, which does not rely on direct experience).<sup>60</sup>

In particular, this thesis has emphasised the role of living memory and its interaction with heritagisation. I have suggested that living memory has been largely neglected on two grounds; one practical and one more theoretical. Firstly, many heritage initiatives represent the distant past, meaning living memory is not always accessible or relevant. Secondly, as mentioned earlier, there is a common assumption that heritage fosters or maintains broader ‘collective’ memories (often referred to as social, public or cultural memories) in a linear sense, after living memory has lapsed. The mining heritage sites used as case studies were chosen to bring these issues into focus and allow for the relationship between heritage and memory to be mapped in more specific terms, within these particular contexts. Unlike many heritage attractions, Geevor and Big Pit represent the very recent past. Industrial heritage sites are one of the few sorts of public historical representation where heritage narratives exist so closely alongside living memories of the social experiences they represent. Here, there is an obvious potential for conflict. Using oral history interviews alongside archive sources has allowed for the analysis of the interplay between official heritage narratives and these different layers of memory. As we have seen throughout, despite the somewhat different contexts and motivations for heritagisation, similar interactions between heritagisation and memory (in its various manifestations) has been apparent at Geevor and Big Pit.

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<sup>59</sup> Smith, *Uses of Heritage*; Brian Graham, Gregory John Ashworth and John E. Tunbridge, ‘The Uses and Abuses of Heritage’, in *Issues in Heritage, Museums and Galleries: An Introductory Reader*, ed. by Gerard Corsane (Routledge, 2005), pp. 26–37; Dicks.; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett..

<sup>60</sup> Assmann and Czaplicka.

### *Heritagisation and memory at Geevor and Big Pit*

Empirically, the thesis focused on three key components in its analysis; ‘heritagisation’, living memory and cultural memory. Heritage narratives and living memory (through oral testimony) were viewed as two different sorts of recollection and representation of the mining past which exist alongside each other. As a result, the study identified what these different narratives were, and more importantly, how they constructed different meanings or values about the past in the present. Firstly, in Chapters 3 and 4, the process of heritagisation at each site was mapped, not only providing contextual grounding, but allowing for a detailed analysis of the way in which pastness was *constructed* through heritage discourse (and the temporal dissonance this created with living memory). Both Geevor and Big Pit were rapidly heritagised after their closure as working mines, a move which proved to be largely incongruent with lived experience in the local communities. Heritagisation naturally involved a shift in values associated with the mining past at a time when people were still living with the consequences of the mine closures. In these terms, re-branding mining as a heritage product, especially as a tourist attraction, was in many ways problematic. What followed, for ex-miners and local residents, was a complex process of coming to terms with the effects of deindustrialisation; not only in real economic and social terms, but in reconceptualising the industry which had built and supported their communities as a heritage asset which needed to be preserved.

As we saw in Chapter 3, heritagisation was motivated rather differently and followed different trajectories in Wales and Cornwall. While at Big Pit, a clearly ‘top-down’ system of management was implemented (with the Wales Tourist Board providing the impetus and funding for the project), Geevor was in the hands of a small collection of local people (primarily Cornwall County archaeologists and ex-Geevor workers). While there were clear differences in terms of the institutional contexts at each site, similar trends in the institutional heritage narratives were fairly clearly established (whether internally constructed or borrowed from developing national heritage discourses). Chapter 4 clearly traced the development of heritage discourses at both Geevor and Big Pit. Most prominently, the narratives constructed at each site promoted a sense of historicism, turning to the long traditions of the industry in order to justify the mine

sites' new status as heritage assets. In turn, this neglected the contemporary social experience of de-industrialisation, imposing a temporal framework which fixed mining in 'the past' and separating it from lived experience in these communities.

At Big Pit, institutional discourses fixed the site's 'intrinsic historic appeal' in the nineteenth century past, emphasising Blaenavon's central role in global industrialisation.<sup>61</sup> For the Wales Tourist Board, this one sort of 'value' could ostensibly translate into economic regeneration in the wake of deindustrialisation. Claims about the site's commemorative and regenerative roles were always underwritten by these sorts of assumptions about Big Pit's 'historic' value. Despite its practical selection as the favoured site for a heritage attraction (due to the mine's shallow depth and alternate walking exits for visitors), Big Pit was lauded as being representative of a proud aspect of Welsh national history; its contribution to global industrial development. Of course, heritage discourses were subject to change over time. However, although the prominence of the regeneration agenda subsequently waned, the focus on Blaenavon's success story (based in the distant past) remained and fed into the way in which the site was promoted to funders and visitors alike. In fact, when World Heritage Status was applied for in 2000, nearly twenty years after the initial feasibility studies, the same patterns emerged in the way the management justified the site's value as a heritage attraction.

At Big Pit, heritage discourse oriented on the one hand to the distant past (primarily the wide-ranging impact of nineteenth century industrialisation), and on the other hand, to the economic demands of the present and future; regenerating to post-industrial Blaenavon via tourism. In the process, living memory and lived experience were glossed over. When the needs of the community were alluded to in heritage discourse, it was either in terms of the romanticised past or the economic demands of the present. There was no sense that heritage planners engaged substantially with the sensitive nature of representing lived experience as heritage for those who were living with the real social and economic legacy of deindustrialisation. It was assumed that the cultural experience of mining and its associated communities had lapsed and that external heritage planners could act to 'regenerate' what was left. As a result, the act of preserving or 'remembering' the past and (ostensibly) regenerating for the future, the

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<sup>61</sup> Wales Tourist Board Study, *The Tourist Potential of the Big Pit*, 1979.

present, for this community, was being forgotten. Heritagisation, in these terms, objectivised the distant past which was seen by stakeholders as the raw material for heritage tourism. This is a clear example of how a sense of pastness can be actively constructed through the process of heritagisation, in line with recent theorisations of heritage as a socially constructed phenomenon.

At Geevor, there was a closer awareness of the problems associated with heritagisation in the community. Some ex-miners and community members were involved in the transition, resulting in a much more community-oriented heritage discourse. Geevor was promoted as being preserved 'for the benefit of the community' but was simultaneously borrowing from established heritage discourses, focusing on the site's 'unique' role in representing the mining past which defined Cornwall's landscape and culture. In spite of frequent claims that mining heritage was being preserved for local benefit, more recent rhetoric constructed the value of the mining past in much broader terms, in order to align with heritage funders and regulators. Despite its promotion of a 'local' agenda and the importance of 'community', there was no sense of what this meant in practice or how they would implement this agenda. In fact, Geevor clearly established a similar national narrative as that which had been adopted at Big Pit. The 'prolific' and 'globally-defining' long history of Cornish mining was (and is) stressed on display panels, in promotional texts and in funding applications. In similar terms to Big Pit, the narrative which was used to justify Geevor's heritage value was rather detached, somewhat romanticised, and based on the success story of Cornish mining. By contrast, the more recent local experience of decline was notably absent.

As we have seen, since their inception as heritage sites, institutional discourses evolved at Geevor and Big Pit. This was the case both in the sites' own marketing and in terms of the developing national (and international) institutional framework of heritage organisations. Nonetheless, certain trends remained relatively constant, particularly the focus on the historic qualities of the two sites and the broader narrative of their nationally and globally-defining stature. Priorities of heritage planners were notably different at each site but in both cases, heritage discourse was driven by funding priorities and assigned an intrinsic 'historic' heritagised value to mining. Funding and designation criteria were clearly influential, and narratives which promoted the sites' 'historic', 'national' and 'global' value were inevitably emphasised in statements to the Heritage Lottery Fund and UNESCO, for example. As a result, the prominence of

national narratives and focus on the distant past was remarkably consistent in institutional discourses at both sites. Importantly, these were not *false* interpretations of the past by any means, but they did impute a very particular set of values relating to mining, particularly in terms of the need to preserve the industry's heritage; values which would potentially conflict with living memory.

Both cases illustrate the way in which heritagisation constructs a disjunction between the past and the present. Heritage discourse fixed mining firmly in the past, albeit a 'usable past' as a resource for the present. Despite the different contexts in which heritagisation was undertaken at each of the sites, heritage narratives were increasingly distanced from the lived experience in these communities, largely reflecting institutional priorities; the need to secure funding and recognition from external agencies and to promote mining heritage for the tourist consumer.

Chapters 5 and 6 then drew on extensive oral history data to analyse the multiple ways in which heritage and memory interact. As argued in Chapter 5, there is no neat transition between living memory and memorialisation as some theorists have suggested.<sup>62</sup> Practices of preservation do not merely become significant where (living) memory lapses. In cases where heritage represents very recent experience, it is necessary to reassert the role of living memory, and to understand its role in shaping (and being shaped by) heritage representations. From the case studies, it was found that living memory interacted with heritage narratives in a number of complex ways; they both overlap and conflict with each other. Firstly, in one form, living memory is used to reinforce heritage narratives. At Geevor and Big Pit, living memory is directly incorporated into the heritage 'experience' (through ex-miners' tours). Guides' first-hand accounts based on their memories are, in fact, a very marketable resource for heritage attractions. However, as I have argued, while this one facet of 'memory' operates as a useful resource for heritage sites, it is shaped - and indeed limited - by being contextualised as heritage; by the existing heritage narrative, by the material surroundings of the mine site and by the needs of tourist visitors. As such, these memories are articulated in a way which aligns with institutional economic and political priorities, firmly contradicting the notion that heritage sites simply 'house' or 'protect' memory.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire', *Representations*, 1989, 7-24.

<sup>63</sup> Crane.

Notably, these performative uses of memory differ significantly from the more wide-ranging oral history testimonies. Oral history data showed clearly that living memory has the capacity to challenge both the content and meaning of heritage narratives. Many of the miners' accounts challenged the romanticisation of heritage narratives, focusing on the mine closures as a point of rupture in their lives, suggesting that the legacy of decline was much more far-reaching and had not been easily resolved by heritagisation. The sense of loss described went well beyond the economic impact of deindustrialisation, implying that heritage discourse which stressed historicisation and promoted the success story of the early industrial societies in Wales and Cornwall was problematic for people who were living with the real impact of the mine closures.

As such, oral histories moved outside of the temporally-fixed heritage narrative, emphasising the ongoing legacy of decline and loss of community in both Blaenavon and Pendeen. Indeed, deindustrialisation was frequently the focus of individual life stories. Miners' accounts of being 'completely lost', 'heartbroken' and 'nearly crying' as a result of the closures were often accompanied by descriptions of a declining social environment and a loss of community. These more difficult elements of the story contradicted sharply with the more distant romanticisation of heritage ideology. There was certainly a far-reaching sense of loss with which heritage did not engage. For those who lived through it, the past did not 'end' when the mines closed, as the rather distant heritage narrative implied. In reality, memories of mining and its associated communities lived on, and for the moment, the legacy of mining (and its subsequent decline) still has resonance for those who lived through it, bringing the story of mining into the present and suggesting a much more fluid link between past, present and future.

The dissonance arising from these accounts implies that heritage and living memory function in notably different temporal and interpretive frameworks. A clash in the senses of value attached to the past and its meaning in the present was apparent; a tension is caused by the meeting of what Bill Schwartz has called 'subjective' and 'objective' time frames.<sup>64</sup> While heritage narratives imposed an objective time frame (focusing on the past 'as it was then' and promoting a sense of historicism), living

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<sup>64</sup> Bill Schwartz, "'Already the Past' Memory and Historical Time", in *Memory cultures: memory, subjectivity, and recognition*, ed. by Susannah Radstone and Katharine Hodgkin (Transaction Publishers, 2005).

memory works in a subjective frame (emphasising personal experience and continuity between past and present). As we have seen, far from being discrete entities, heritage and living memory exist in a complex and often contradictory relationship. Here, we need to recognise the value of oral history in allowing us to access living memory. The memories articulated in oral testimonies not only provide a more subtle, nuanced (and arguably more complete) version of the past, they also re-evaluate the process of 'heritagisation', showing the ways in which heritage might be problematic, as well as why it is valued.

Not only did the case studies provide valuable insights into the interaction of heritage and living memory, they also provided a window into the complex relationship between heritage and cultural memory (explored in Chapter 6), where the shift from living memory to cultural memory has become more visible. As has been argued throughout, previous theoretical conceptualisations have treated living memory and broader cultural memory as largely separate concerns in relation to heritage. It is often assumed that cultural memorialisation becomes relevant only in the context of the lapse of individual memory (based on lived experience).<sup>65</sup> However, from the case studies considered here, we can see that there is in fact a much more complex, non-linear process of knowledge construction and meaning-making about the past, both in the present and looking to the future.

The data analysed in Chapter 6 showed that the process of heritagisation has directly influenced the construction of dominant cultural memory in Blaenavon and Pendeen. In these terms, Jan Assman's notion that cultural memory is constructed through dominant cultural representations and symbols is clearly applicable.<sup>66</sup> In both cases, heritage sites have constructed institutionally-supported dominant narratives of the mining past (and its 'value' in shaping the present). The established heritage discourses identified - those which promoted national narrative, the distant (most frequently nineteenth century) past, and the need to preserve the global status of the mining industry - were readily adopted in the way both ex-miners and local people talked about preserving the past.

On a more cautionary note, we cannot uncritically adopt the concept of cultural memory in this context. Despite the prominence of institutional discourses, we cannot make the

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<sup>65</sup> Nora.

<sup>66</sup> Assmann and Czaplicka.

simplistic assumption that these dominant narratives are strictly ‘collective’; that they are merely adopted unquestioningly by those who are exposed to them. Drawing from the diverse interpretations of memory discussed in Chapter 1, it is apparent that there are a number of factors which contribute to the way in which we remember; a number of layers of memory which interact in the way we construct meaning from the past in the present. Indeed, rather than seeing dominant narratives as all-encompassing, we also need to take a more subtle view of cultural memory which acknowledges the different extent to which people associate with heritage narratives, adopt them and take their own positions within them. While these case studies have suggested the existence of a dominant cultural memory (shaped by heritagisation), there is still a measure of individual agency, particularly when cultural memory and autobiographical memories overlap. In Blaenavon and Pendeen, both living memory and cultural memories coexist and jostle for position in terms of how the mining past is remembered by both ex-miners and local residents.

Ex-miners and local people drew on *both* their lived experience and elements of the dominant cultural memory when telling their stories. However, interviewees often discussed aspects of their living memory which fitted with established heritage discourses in certain contexts. This suggests that heritage discourses have a wide-ranging influence which (in these cases) resulted in only certain elements of the story becoming most prominent. A wide range of interviewees evoked institutional discourses and value statements during their testimonies. This was most evident when respondents attempted to define what was most important or ‘valuable’ about the mining past. Here, both miners and local community members evoked the institutional discourses rather than drawing on their own memories or lived experience. In particular, World Heritage Site designation was often cited, along with the related large-scale aggrandised narratives about the way in which mining economically and culturally defined Wales and Cornwall. Conversely, the more nuanced narratives emanating from the oral histories - the accounts which went beyond the period when the mines closed, the stories of economic decline, personal loss and dissolving senses of community - were notably absent. This suggests that there is a hierarchy in the way different forms of memory are considered to have value as ‘heritage’, whereby the perceived historic value of the more distant past and the role of industrialisation in shaping modern Wales and Cornwall has become ubiquitous in the way the mining past is ‘remembered’.

This dominant narrative is already deeply embedded in public consciousness, to the extent that it can claim to resolve localised political and economic contests surrounding the heritage sites. In many ways, heritagisation constructed a more 'usable' past which impacted on the way both ex-miners and local people articulated their life narratives. Somewhat ironically, by associating with these large-scale narratives of the mining past, people found a way to take pride in their past and move beyond the stalemate of living with the legacy of decline and loss. In most cases this was not merely tokenistic, but a seemingly genuine engagement with the need to preserve the more positive aspects of their past for the future; to remember the place of these small communities on a national and global scale, and to retain the associated value system (prioritising community values, camaraderie and resilience). In line with oral history theory relating to 'composure', interviewees consistently drew on dominant cultural memory in order to compose a past they could find meaning in and one they wanted to preserve. Therefore, heritagisation both fixed mining in the distant past and (in some ways) allowed for a positive outlook for the future.

As we have seen, the process of heritagisation at Geevor and Big Pit imposed a fixed temporal framework, historicising mining through and fixing it in 'the past'. In Assman's terms, this provided a certain 'fixity' for memory, or rather constructed of a dominant cultural narrative which promoted a very particular (and generalised) memory of the mining past. In turn, this dominant heritage narrative was inherently shaped by the political and economic interests which had driven heritagisation. As a result, living memory (and alternative narratives) tended to be subsumed by the more pervasive cultural memory.

#### *Broader implications for 'heritage' and 'memory'*

As suggested in Chapter 2, there is always a limited extent to which we can generalise from case study research. However, as I have argued, rather than uncritically interpreting broad concepts like heritage and memory, they need to be situated in particular contexts in order to be more rigorously analysed. By drawing on two case studies, this thesis has provided an empirical basis for some wide-ranging conceptual questions. From this research it is possible to draw some broader theoretical conclusions (and further questions) which have implications across a range of disciplines; public history, oral history and heritage and memory studies. Throughout the thesis, it has been

suggested that these are closely related fields of inquiry which would benefit from greater cohesion in order to draw out the relationship between heritage and memory in broad terms.

Drawing on critical heritage studies, this thesis set out the complex process of construction involved in heritagisation, analysing the way in which historical narratives are shaped in certain social, politics and economic contexts. Incorporating concepts central to public history, this process was viewed in the light of the dynamic relationship between past and present. This central concern was then evaluated through oral history, drawing out the implications of the interaction of different facets or layers of memory in relation to heritage. Combining these approaches highlighted the construction of historical and temporal distance involved in heritagisation, which linked the more practical process of the transition to heritage at the two sites with more theoretical concerns regarding how meaning is made from the past in the present.

In particular, studying these industrial heritage sites has allowed for the analysis of the interplay between living memory and cultural memory, and the role heritagisation plays in broadly shaping public historical consciousness. As I argued at the outset, different approaches to this issue have fundamentally relied on the specific sort of memory under consideration, with living memory and cultural memory having been treated as largely separate terrain in relation to heritage. However, as this research has shown, there is a much more complex process at work, whereby heritage and living memory overlap at a number of levels.

I have argued that memory is multi-layered, and that this is the starting point for any understanding of the relationship between heritage and memory. These different layers of memory exist in dialogue with each other in almost all contexts. Individual memory, like identity, is both personal and shaped by external influences. Our memory is shaped by both our own experience and ‘collective’ memories (how we remember in small groups, based on shared experience) and broader cultural memories.<sup>67</sup> As a result of this multiple definition of memory, we must acknowledge that there is a much more complex, nuanced relationship between heritage and memory than current work has suggested. Where heritage sites represent the contemporary past, they necessarily both

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<sup>67</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *Halbwachs/Coser: On Collective Memory* (University of Chicago Press, 1992); Thomson.

incorporate and impact on living memory, as well as influencing cultural memory. If we cannot really extricate individual and cultural memory, we need to understand their interplay in relation to the process of heritagisation, which cuts across all layers of memory.

Practices of memorialisation undoubtedly have the capacity to influence public historical consciousness. In fact, as we have seen, heritage narratives actively construct new ways of ‘remembering’ the past. In these terms, heritage sites and displays are not merely ‘mnemonic support systems’ (‘maintaining’ memory in a linear sense), they fundamentally *shape* cultural memory. Heritagisation involves the commodification and recontextualisation of not only material objects but social experience. Consequently, new senses of value are imposed upon the past through heritage discourses (particularly those which are institutionally-recognised).

In turn, dominant heritage discourses are frequently shaped by the economic and political interests of institutions, meaning that the construction of cultural memory is reliant upon the implicit power dynamics between official and vernacular accounts of the past. In these terms, cultural memories are not abstract understandings of the past which merely ‘exist’ (as Assman seemed to imply), but, as I have argued, are inextricably bound with the politicised and contested processes of construction which produce them. As such, it is particularly important to understand the nature of the construction of heritage sites and narratives, not merely their reception.<sup>68</sup>

How, then, does heritagisation impact on living memory and cultural memory? It is simple enough to state that heritage displays (as one sort of cultural representation of the past) are influential in constructing dominant cultural memories in the absence of living memory. However, as argued earlier, there is no seamless transition point between living memory and cultural memory, as some theorists have suggested.<sup>69</sup> In fact, we only begin to understand quite how pervasive heritage narratives can be when observing the tussle between living memory and cultural memory. In the first instance, I argued that the meeting of heritagisation and living memory creates points of contest. These antagonisms are largely based on there being a disjuncture between the ways in which heritage and living memory conceptualise and relate to ‘the past’; they exist in

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<sup>68</sup>As suggested, this is beginning to be addressed with the emergence of ‘critical heritage studies’, see Laurajane Smith, ‘Editorial’, *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 18 (2012), 533–540.

<sup>69</sup> Assmann and Czaplicka; Halbwachs.

different temporal frameworks. Heritagisation imposes 'objective' senses of time, which involve a false separation between past and present. By reframing lived experience as heritage, heritage discourses freeze the past in a temporally-fixed fashion, divorcing the past from its related present. Living memory, on the other hand, more continuously links past and present, going beyond the point at which heritage narratives end. Considering this, we can see that there is a disjuncture, whereby distant heritage rhetoric sits rather uneasily with living memory. However, the potential competition between these positions can be glossed over, to a large extent, as the dominant cultural memory becomes prominent.

To this end, I have suggested that heritagisation mediates the process of memory. That is, by re-framing certain lived experiences as 'heritage', heritage sites (or other public historical narratives) actively shape which narratives of the past endure; they shape the way in which people construct meaning from the past in the present. In the case studies analysed, heritagisation constructed a more 'usable' past; a dominant cultural narrative which could be easily adopted or borrowed from, even in the context of interviewees' own life narratives. Of course, we need to be cautious not to assume that dominant narratives are wholly 'collective'. As we have seen, living memories *do* have the capacity to challenge and go beyond dominant cultural memories. Drawing on Young's concept of 'collected memory', it was noted that within dominant narratives, individuals still remember their own pasts quite differently, and engage with dominant narratives in different ways.<sup>70</sup> As Young suggests, rather than constructing a singular 'collective' memory, these heritage institutions served to assign common meaning to a collection of individual memories. In Young's words, they organised, shaped, and even inspired their constituents' memories.<sup>71</sup> In this way, living memory is often framed within prominent heritage discourses, thereby neglecting the more nuanced (and sometimes alternative) narratives provided in oral history testimony.

Does this mean heritage is 'bogus history' after all?<sup>72</sup> In Chapter 1, it was argued that heritage cannot be characterised as an inherently 'good' or 'bad' cultural practice as the

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<sup>70</sup> James Edward Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (Yale University Press, 1993).

<sup>71</sup> Young, p. xi.

<sup>72</sup> Robert Hewison, *The Heritage Industry: Britain in a Climate of Decline*, First (Methuen Publishing Ltd, 1987).

traditional critique would hold.<sup>73</sup> Instead, it was suggested that heritagisation is a *process* in which dominant narratives of the past are socially constructed and reliant upon particular political, cultural and economic circumstances. Indeed, heritage as a concept relies on agents, institutions and established frameworks of meaning. As critics of heritage have often asserted, there are implicit (and explicit) power dynamics involved in terms of what gets preserved and who makes these decisions. There are obvious issues of representation where any institution assumes responsibility to act on behalf of a community or in fostering cultural memories.

In many ways, this study has reinforced those concerns. The evidence from the case studies suggests that heritagisation does promote selective interpretations of the past at the expense of others. In Blaenavon and Pendeen, heritage narratives proved to be influential in constructing dominant cultural memory while glossing over more nuanced aspects of living memory. In these terms, our understanding of certain pasts is framed by values which are imposed and promoted largely through official channels, which is deeply concerning for those with an interest in social history and the broader democratisation of the past.

However, to dismiss heritage as merely ‘bogus history’ would be to neglect the more critical questions regarding how dominant narratives of the past are constructed and how they mediate our historical understanding. If we accept that heritage is (to an extent) socially constructed, the process of construction reflects certain values and have powerful implications for the way in which both individuals and groups remember. As I have suggested, we can only extricate the complex implications of this relationship by situating heritage narratives within their process of construction and analysing the interaction of heritagisation and different facets of memory.

Resultantly, the subtle relationships between heritage and different layers of memory outlined here have a number of implications for public historians and heritage practitioners in more practical terms. The ‘bleaching out’ of living memory raises a number of questions as to how practices of preservation might address the resulting silences, and make space for more nuanced heritage representations which more readily

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<sup>73</sup> See Hewison; Patrick Wright, *On Living in an Old Country: The National Past in Contemporary Britain* (Oxford University Press, 2009); David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (Cambridge University Press, 1998).

include aspects of living memory. Here, oral history testimony is particularly valuable in constructing more subtle – and sometimes contested - representations of the past. Where possible, conducting oral history interviews, archiving, and incorporating oral testimony in heritage sites and displays can create a greater degree of continuity of living memory. Throughout this thesis, it has been argued that we need to move beyond fixed notions of past and present and appreciate that there is a more fluid, non-linear process of knowledge construction and meaning-making between past, present and future. Rather than imposing temporally-fixed narratives, a closer focus on living memory would take into account the more continuous conceptualisation of the past/present relationship, encouraging a more critical engagement with the past.

Consequently, this thesis has attempted to reassert the value of individual memory in relation to the process of heritagisation. As has been argued, individual and cultural memories are not entirely separate entities; rather, they overlap and can reinforce, contradict and shape one another. Centrally, heritage narratives play a prominent role in the tussle between these different layers of memory. In other words, the process of constructing heritage narratives influences which ‘memories’ endure. As such, we need to more fully understand the processes of creation behind various practices of memorialisation, and how certain elements of the past come to be commodified and recontextualised as heritage and how they shape our understanding of the past in the present.



## **Appendix 1**

### **INFORMATION SHEET FOR INTERVIEWS**

#### **Title of Research Project**

Heritage and Memory: Oral History and Mining Heritage in Wales and Cornwall

#### **Details of Project**

This project is investigating how and why mining turned to heritage in Wales and Cornwall after industrial decline. At Geevor/Big Pit, it aims to establish how the mine came to be turned into a heritage site, and what different people's opinions of this process are. The project will ask why the mining past still has value in the present, how this is represented through heritage and what this means to both locals and visitors.

I am a PhD candidate/research student at the University of Exeter. The project is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council.

#### **Contact Details**

For further information about the research or your interview data, please contact:  
Bethan Coupland                      Department of History, University of Exeter, Devon UK.  
Phone: 01392 263240                  Email: [bec206@ex.ac.uk](mailto:bec206@ex.ac.uk)

If you have concerns/questions about the research you would like to discuss with someone else at the University, please contact:

Dr Anna Green                      Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Exeter  
Cornwall Campus, Penryn, Cornwall TR10 9EZ  
Phone: 01326 253 763                  Email: [A.E.Green@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:A.E.Green@exeter.ac.uk)

#### **Confidentiality**

Interview tapes and transcripts will be held in confidence. They will not be used other than for the purposes described on the attached consent form and third parties will not be allowed access to them (except as may be required by the law). You will be supplied with an audio copy of your interview on CD. Your data will be held in accordance with the Data Protection Act by the researcher for five years, then donated to the archive held at Big Pit/Geevor indefinitely, unless you request otherwise.

**Appendix 2**

**CONSENT FORM FOR INTERVIEWS**

**Anonymity**

Would you prefer your interview information to be used on an anonymous basis, with no mention of your name? (Note that we still need to refer to the group(s) of which you are a member).

**PLEASE CIRCLE                      YES / NO**

**I agree to allow my recording to be used for the following purposes:**

for research and publication

as lecture material

for other educational purposes

for broadcasting

for electronic publishing

I am prepared for my recording to be deposited in an archive

I wish to limit public access to my recording for a period of years   
(up to a maximum of 30 years). Please state these conditions:

.....

**Copyright**

I agree to assign copyright in this recording to Bethan Coupland.

**TICK HERE:**

**Consent**

I voluntarily agree to participate and to the use of my data for the purposes specified. I can withdraw consent at any time by contacting the interviewers.

**TICK HERE:**     

Signature:.....

Name (capitals):.....

Address:.....

.....

Date:.....

Interviewer:.....

Date:.....

(2 copies to be signed by both interviewee and researcher, one kept by each)



## **Bibliography**

### **Primary Sources**

#### **Interviews**

##### ***Barry, Simon***

Born 1959 in Markham, South Wales. Worked as a miner for 32 years. After mine closures worked in a factory for eight years before becoming guide at Big Pit.

Interview 1 of 1 (24.11), recorded at Big Pit Mining Museum, 6 June 2011 (recording in possession of author).

##### ***Clayton, Gareth***

Born 1955 in South Wales. Worked as a miner for 35 years then unemployed before becoming Big Pit guide.

Interview 1 of 1 (58.00), recorded at Big Pit Mining Museum, 7 June 2011 (recording in possession of author).

##### ***Corser, Andy***

Born 1960s, teacher, moved to St Just in 1986.

Interview 1 of 1 (46.15), recorded at Pendeen Community Centre, 14 December 2011 (recording in possession of author).

##### ***Evans, Stuart***

Born in Blaenavon and resided in the town all his life. Father worked at Bit Pit. Worked in a munitions factory before retiring and becoming Blaenavon Town Councillor in 1999.

Interview 1 of 1 (40.22), at his home, 18 November 2011 (recording in possession of author).

##### ***Gregory, Gareth***

Born in South Wales. Worked for Wales Tourist Board at the time of the mine closure before becoming manager at Big Pit, now retired. Blaenavon resident.

Interview 1 of 1 (2.37.03), recorded at Big Pit Mining Museum, 8 June 2011 (recording in possession of author).

***Harris, Bob***

Born 1952 in South Wales. Began working as a fitter in Blaenau colliery in 1968, transferred to Rose Hayworth in 1975, became unemployed after mine closure in 1986. Worked in a chicken factory for 11 years before becoming a Big Pit guide in 1990.

Interview 1 of 1 Big Pit Mining Museum, 6 June 2011 (recording in possession of author).

***Harris, Dawn***

Born 1960 in Blaenavon, lived in Blaenavon all her life. Canteen staff at Big Pit, Grandfather worked as a miner in Big Pit.

Interview 1 of 1 (25.34), recorded at Big Pit Mining Museum, 14 November 2011 (recording in possession of author).

***Hill, Thomas***

Born 1963 in South Wales. Worked as a collier for ten years, father was also a miner. Became a Big Pit guide in 2012.

Interview 1 of 1 (1.03.54), recorded at Big Pit Mining Museum, 7 June 2011 (recording in possession of author).

***Honey, Cyril***

Worked in the building trade before starting as a miner at South Crofty mine in Camborne in 1969. Then worked at Geevor for 16 years until its final closure. After becoming unemployed, went to work as an inspector on the Channel Tunnel. Now a Geevor trustee also responsible for Geevor's Oral History collection and hand drilling demonstrations at the site.

Interview 1 of 1 (1.03.17), recorded at Geevor Tin Mine, 22 November 2011. Interview 2 of 3 (45.16), recorded at Geevor Tin Mine, 23 November 2011, Recordings in possession of author).

***Jackson, Fiona***

Born 1970s in Cambridge, previously worked in the museum sector in Cornwall and now works as a researcher. Pendeen resident since 2008.

Interview 1 of 1 (1.24.55), recorded at her home in Pendeen, 15 December 2011 (recording in possession of author).

***Jones, Dai***

Born 1958 in South Wales. Became miner in 1974 at the age of 16. Worked in the mines for 17 years until closure in 1991 before becoming a guide at Big Pit in 2004.

Interview 1 of 1 (35.12.04), recorded at Big Pit Mining Museum, 6 June 2011 (recording in possession of author).

***Jenkins, Steve***

Born 1955 in South Wales. Worked as a miner for twelve years before becoming unemployed. Now works as Big Pit guide.

Interview 1 of 1 (1.02.16), recorded at Big Pit Mining Museum, 7 June 2011 (recording in possession of author).

***Lakin, Bill***

Born in English Midlands. Visited Pendeen for holidays as a child. Moved to Pendeen after retiring and became a Geevor Trustee.

Interview 1 of 1 (41.12), recorded at Geevor Tin Mine, 4 March 2011 (recording in possession of author).

***Lloyd, Dewi***

Born 1962 in South Wales. Worked in Marine Colliery, Ebbw Vale, as a colliery electrician from 1978 to 1988. Worked in a factory after mine closure then became a guide at Big Pit.

Interview 1 of 1 (1.10.41), recorded at Big Pit Mining Museum, 7 June 2011 (recording in possession of author).

***Nummelkin, Stephanie***

Born in Blaenavon. Lived overseas for almost thirty years, moved back to Wales to Brecon and opened a business in Blaenavon. Great grandfather Lewis Browning wrote first history of Blaenavon.

Interview 1 of 2 (12.06), recorded at her business premises, 18 November 2011.

Interview 2 of 2 (46.12), recorded at her business premises, 18 November 2011 (recordings in possession of author).

***Probert, Glyn***

Born 1940s in Blaenavon and resided in Blaenavon all his life. Worked as a miner at Big Pit until closure then worked in a factory then joined the Fire Brigade.

Interview 1 of 1 (35.12), recorded at his workplace, 16 November 2011 (recording in possession of author).

***Quinton, Janet***

Moved to Bottallack near Pendeen in 1992. Worked in Geevor shop and reception before becoming Geevor guide.

Interview 1 of 1 (25.27), recorded at Geevor Tin Mine, 22 March 2011 (recording in possession of author).

***Savage, Peter***

Born in Northampton. Moved to Cornwall in 1980. Worked as a railway driver before coming to work at Levant mine (adjacent to Geevor). Moved to Pendeen and became Geevor staff member in 2002.

Interview 1 of 1 (48.15), recorded at Geevor Tin Mine, 2 November 2011.

***Sharpe, Adam***

Originally from Cornwall. Works as Senior Archaeologist, Historic Environment Projects, Cornwall Council. Put together the initial submission to Cornwall County Council for the purchase of Geevor site in 1990 and was involved in World Heritage Site bid. Continues to do some surveying work at Geevor.

Interview 1 of 1 (48.04) recorded at Geevor Tin Mine, 22 March 2011 (recording in possession of author).

***Strick, Eddie***

Born in 1958 in Cornwall. Worked as a quarrier, came to work as a miner at Geevor in 1981 until closure in 1991, job redeveloping South Crofty mine. Came back to Geevor as a guide in 1990s.

Interview 1 of 1 (22.23) recorded at Geevor Tin Mine, 22 March 2011 (recording in possession of author).

***Thompson, Ceri***

Born in Pontypridd. Worked as a miner in Cwm Colliery from the age of 16. Mined for 17 years until closure, then studied Cardiff University, became a guide at Rhondda Heritage Park, archivist at Glamorgan Record Office, then worked for Council of Museums in Wales before becoming curator at Big Pit.

Interview 1 of 1 (47.41), recorded at Big Pit Museum, 6 June 2011 (recording in possession of author).

***Treseder, Geoff***

Born in Wales. Worked in a quarry before coming to Geevor in 1980s. Worked underground then as a sampler until closure. Currently a business owner and resident in Pendeen.

Interview 1 of 1 (1.03.57), Geevor Tin Mine, 2 November 2011 (recording in possession of author).

***Walker, Peter***

Born in the Rhondda Valley, South Wales. Ex-miner, current Big Pit Museum manager, Interview 1 of 1 (56.13), recorded at Big Pit Mining Museum, 6 June 2011 (recording in possession of author).

***Warburton, Josephine***

Ex-Geevor curator, at her home in Penzance, 15 December 2011 (unrecorded at the request of the interviewee).

***Way, Dennis***

Born 1960s in Newlyn, Cornwall, married his wife from St Just and sought a job as a miner at Geevor. Began as a labourer and progressed to become a driller then a timberman. Suffered ill health as a result of mine work. After Geevor's closure worked for Royal Mail before becoming Geevor guide.

Recording 1 of 1 (31.27) recorded at Geevor Tin Mine, 23 March 2011 (recording in possession of author).

***West, Dianne***

Born 1950s in Blaenavon and has resided in Blaenavon throughout her life. Father worked at Big Pit. Recording 1 of 1 (1.03.12) recorded at Big Pit Mining Museum, 14 November 2011 (recording in possession of author).

***Whitcombe, Brian***

Born 1939 in Blaenavon and has resided in Blaenavon throughout his life. Worked as an engineering manager in Newport. Blaenavon Town councillor for 26 years, Torfaen Borough Council member for 4 years.

Interview 1 of 1 (46.18) recorded at Blaenavon Town Chambers, 16 November 2011 (recording in possession of author).

***Williams, John***

Born in South Wales Valleys. Worked in Bargoed Colliery, South Wales, from the age of 15. Worked in a number of different mines for a total of 21 years. Three generations of his family worked in mining. After mine closures worked as an automotive production manager before joining Big Pit as a guide and supervisor.

Interview 1 of 1 (27.06), recorded at Big Pit Mining Museum, 5 June 2011 (recording in possession of author).

***Williams, Pamela***

Born 1947 in Powys. Lived in Blaenavon for 25 years, works in a business in the town. Family has no connection with mining.

Interview 1 of 1 (1.05.22) recorded at her home, 16 November 2011 (recording in possession of author).

***Wright, David***

Former assayer and chemist at Geevor when the mine was working. Has been with Geevor in some capacity throughout; worked with County Council when the site was acquired and subsequently with Trevithick Trust and currently Pendeen Community Heritage.

Ex-miner and Geevor guide, Geevor Tin Mine, 12 October 2011 (recording in possession of author).

*Young, Fiona*

Worked in industrial archaeology for ten years at Ironbridge Museum after her history degree. Moved to Cornwall in mid-1990s, began as a volunteer at Geevor in early 2000s due to a link with Trevithick Trust. Then worked as education officer and started Geevor's oral history programme. Left Geevor in 2008.

Interview 1 of 1 at her home in Truro, 1 April 2011 (recording in possession of author).

\* All recordings made on Olympus audio recorder in WAV format.

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