

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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