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.

This thesis is available for Library use on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper acknowledgement.

I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.

(Signature)

.................................................................
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.
Acknowledgements

Firstly, this project would not have been possible without the financial support of the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). I am also very grateful for the additional bursary awarded to me by the Cornwall Heritage Trust.

Oral history interviews were a central component of this research process. As such, I would like to thank all those who participated, not only for taking the time to share their stories with me but allowing their responses to be used for the purposes of this thesis.

The research was helped immeasurably by the cooperation of the staff at both Big Pit Mining Museum and Geevor Tin Mine. Their knowledge and willingness to point me in the right direction made the whole process much easier than I could have hoped. In addition, the staff at the Cornish Studies Library, Cornwall Record Office and Gwent Record Office were all helpful and deserve thanks.

To my supervisors, Anna Green and Bernard Deacon, I owe an enormous debt. Their expertise, guidance and generosity added so much to the project. I would also like to thank my other colleagues and friends at the University of Exeter who read drafts and offered comments. I am particularly grateful for my Gladstone family, especially H, who shared the highs and lows of the whole process with me (whether they liked it or not). Finally to Mum, Dad and Ben, I could not have done this without all of your support.

This is for my parents who have always insisted that being an academic is the best job in the world.
Contents

Introduction ............................................................................................................................. 9

Chapter 1 Literature Review: Heritage and Memory ....................................................... 17
  1.1 Introduction .......................................................................................................... 17
  1.2 Heritage ................................................................................................................ 18
  1.3 Memory ................................................................................................................ 33
  1.4 Heritage and Memory ........................................................................................... 45
  1.5 Conclusion ............................................................................................................ 53

Chapter 2 Methodology ........................................................................................................ 55
  2.1 Introduction .......................................................................................................... 55
  2.2 Existing conceptual and methodological frameworks .......................................... 56
  2.3 Empirical approach ............................................................................................... 62
  2.4 Methodology: Opportunities and challenges ...................................................... 67
  2.5 Sources and data collection .................................................................................. 71
  2.6 Analysis ................................................................................................................ 79
  2.7 Conclusion ............................................................................................................ 81

Chapter 3 Mining Heritage Contexts in Wales and Cornwall .......................................... 83
  3.1 Histories of mining in Wales and Cornwall ......................................................... 83
  3.2 Big Pit ................................................................................................................... 93
  3.3 Geevor ................................................................................................................ 100
  3.4 Conclusion: Comparing Big Pit and Geevor ...................................................... 108

Chapter 4 Heritagisation: institutional voices constructing ‘the past’ ........................... 111
  4.1 Introduction ........................................................................................................ 111
  4.2 Heritagisation at Big Pit ..................................................................................... 114
  4.3 Heritagisation at Geevor ..................................................................................... 126
  4.4 Conclusion: Constructing ‘the past’ at Geevor and Big Pit ............................... 138

Chapter 5 Heritage and Living Memory ........................................................................... 143
  5.1 Introduction ........................................................................................................ 143
  5.2 Representing memory as heritage at Geevor and Big Pit...................................... 148
  5.3 Memory beyond heritage: community memory challenging heritagisation ...... 161
  5.4 Conclusion: Reflecting on heritage and living memory ....................................... 177
Chapter 6 Beyond living memory: Heritage and cultural memory at Geevor and Big Pit ................................................................................................................................... 181
  6.1 Introduction ........................................................................................................ 181
  6.2 Institutional discourses: ‘remembering’ the mining past .............................. 189
  6.3 Cultural memory in miners’ stories ................................................................. 192
  6.4 Local perspectives: cultural memory in Blaenavon and Pendeen ............... 202
  6.5 Conclusion: Reflecting on heritage and cultural memory ......................... 211

Conclusion ............................................................................................................................ 215

 Appendices ........................................................................................................................... 232

 Bibliography......................................................................................................................... 235
 Primary Sources................................................................................................................. 235
 Secondary sources .............................................................................................................. 248