



From Bricks and Mortar to Social Meanings: a Critical Examination of Local Heritage Designation in England

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Research focus

- Focus not on 'tangible' or 'intangible' but on hybridity (social and material)
- Heritage as managed through the English town planning system
- Ascribed social meanings
- Local instruments for identification, designation, protection/management of heritage- practical implications?



English focus

- Heritage Protection Review (2000 onwards)- simpler, streamlined system, wider participation in heritage planning?
- Power of Place (2000)- democratisation
- Heritage White Paper (2007)- Local List
- Local List Best Practice Guide (2012)- a more self-conscious understanding of 'significance'
- Community-led process, Criteria for assessment should include intangible aspects



Political Rhetoric

- The 'Big Society' and 'Localism'
- Flagship policy idea of the 2010 UK Conservative Party general election manifesto
- Political commitment to devolution and community empowerment.

The government believes that it is time for a fundamental shift of power from Westminster to people. We will promote decentralisation and democratic engagement, and we will end the era of top-down government by giving new powers to local councils, communities, neighbourhoods and individuals (HM Government, 2010b: 11).



The Paradox: Conservation Planning Orthodoxy

- Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990
- National Statutory Listing in England based around **hierarchy of listing: Grade I, II*, II**
- ‘**Special Architectural Merit**’ and ‘**Historic Significance**’ prime determinant for designation
- Timely and Politically visible **point of conflict**: new social discourse (during times of political austerity) infused with a well-established conservation orthodoxy



The Theory: Beyond Castles and Stately Homes

- The Authorised Heritage Discourse (AHD):
- ‘Grand’, ‘tangible’, ‘old’ and ‘aesthetically pleasing’ sites, monuments and buildings;
- Feel good, comfortable;
- Value inherent;
- Expertise has ‘duty’ to act for and steward a universal past.
- ‘subaltern heritage’: the mundane or ordinary, unheralded and uncelebrated
- “excludes all dissonant, conflicted or non-core accounts of heritage” (Smith, 2006: 11; Waterton et al., 2006).



My Research

- Developed a theoretical framework explaining contemporary professional conceptualizations of heritage at the local level
- Advanced understanding of AHD in local practice
- Explored possibility that alternative heritage discourses are **unintentionally unheeded**, or even **unwillingly diminished** due to other complex contextual factors



Traditional, Industrial, Vernacular...



All Souls College, Henry VI of England,
1438



Timber Staithes- evocative of
lost coal industry, crucial to
creation of industrial and
maritime heritage



**Former industrial
buildings**- only remaining
example of vernacular artisan
architecture (red pantile roof,
timber jetty delivery door,
functional openings and
simple red brick)



Contentious Examples

The Jewish Mikvah, Oxford

21. It emphasises the importance of the family in Jewish tradition, more than prayer, worship or other practices...It is extremely important for us, as a young and growing community (Bardsley, 2008).



17. I don't think we'll be including that. It's nothing to look at and it's not valued by many (Interviewee Twenty-one, male, elected member, OCC, 10 March 2012).
18. It was in the press but it's not particularly special in anyway so I don't think so...it's not old either (Interviewee Twenty-two, female, member of the public, 10 March 2012).
19. They want the Mikvah to be included but it's a controversial one. It looks like a garage or garden shed from the outside...no, certainly of no architectural or historic merit (Interviewee Twenty, male, senior professional, OCC, 10 March 2012).



Marsden Grotto and White Horse



Only 4% of designations related to social historic narratives

- Significant because of social narratives
- Designated because of 'visual amenity'
- Social narratives only supplementary- diluted?



Objectivity /Rationality



41. [You must] make sure that decisions are clearly justifiable in the light of the published criteria ... and that it's all justifiable and properly evidenced and everything (Interviewee Two, female, senior professional, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 22 February 2012).

42. So how you define that I guess is partly about the technical things like intactness, significance, integrity and so on and so forth, that you can analyse, evaluate almost scientifically I guess (Interviewee Nine, male, senior professional, North of England Civic Trust, 26 March 2012).

43. No, in practice, social value is not considered to be relevant in defining what heritage is... it is deemed to be a subjective emotional attachment, and therefore not relevant (Interviewee Seven, female, senior professional, English Heritage, 23 February 2012).

- ‘Evidenced’, ‘justifiable’, ‘technical’, ‘analyse’
‘evaluate’, ‘scientifically’
- Emphasise rationality, objectivity, positivism and the desire to ‘prove’ or ‘justify’ and find ultimate ‘truth’

Defending the Indefensible- Shifting Political Foci



42. Yeah, it's always difficult to justify the intangible because a lot of it is just hearsay and you don't know how accurate it's going to be (Interviewee Thirteen, female, senior professional, STC, 28 March 2012).

43. ... There is that proviso that it would be the council's money that would be on the line in terms of appeal and the council officer who would have to defend the document (Interviewee Fourteen, female, senior professional, STC, 28 March 2012).

39. ... you've got to be careful about the decisions you make and how much you weight it, because it could come back to bite you if something goes to appeal...especially now there's a focus on delivery (Interviewee Thirteen, female, senior professional, STC, 28 March 2012).

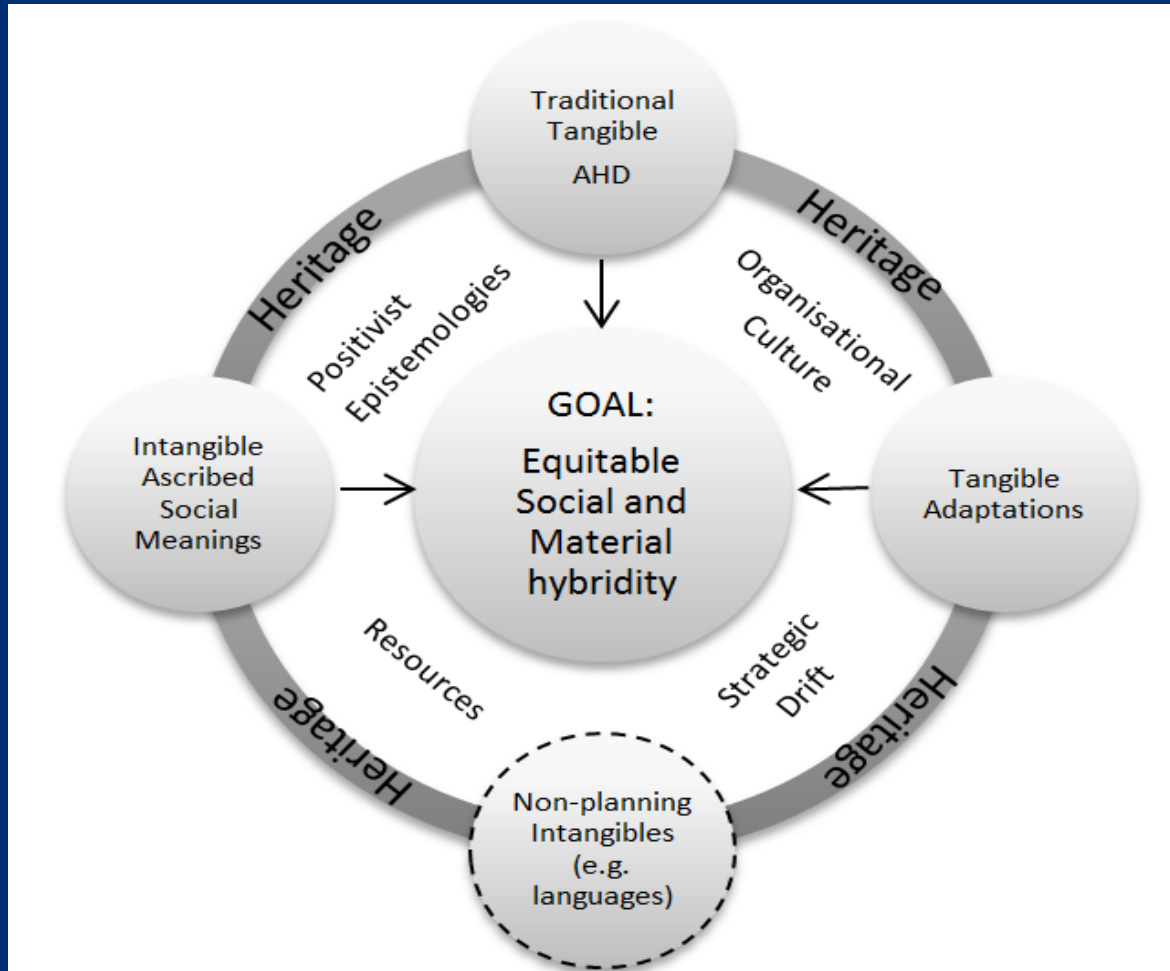
82. Certainly because of the emphasis on growth and delivery, we're conscious of potentially more appeals...so we need to prioritise heritage assets which are defensible, clear-cut and valued by many. Conservation officers don't want to raise their heads above the parapet right now in this period of diminished resources (Interviewee Fifteen, male, senior professional, North of England Civic Trust, 26 March 2012).

Research Findings

- Normative heritage discourse in **transition**
- **Extended** beyond special architectural and historic significance, rarity, age and monumentality during Local Designation
- Clear **adaptations and nuances** (industrial, subaltern, post-war, contemporary heritage)
- Some intangible heritage values (i.e. ascribed social meanings) included but these are mainly seen as supplementary values.
- Transition constrained by operation of rational planning process- need for cultural change and a shift in epistemological position



Ways Heritage is Conceptualised in Local Heritage Designation



References

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Thank you for listening!
Any questions?

