Reanimating Industrial Spaces:
A Session at TAG 2009 in Durham, UK.

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The organisers of this year's Theoretical Archaeology Group (TAG) conference made it clear that they felt recent TAGs had strayed too far from the path of theory, and in their opening session (and sporadically throughout the conference) they aimed to steer contributors back onto the topic, with a series of papers considering the birth, development and death of theory, reports of the last being much exaggerated. The suggestion that post-post-processual theory has fragmented into what the session abstract described as 'small, easily consumed chunks, to be selected on a pick-and-mix basis' was not rejected, but the more positive conclusion was that new avenues have opened up over the last decade, through the medium of social archaeology and, in the US especially, the embedding of archaeology within anthropology, and that interdisciplinary collaborations with political theory and cultural studies provide opportunities for theoretical archaeology to evolve in new and diverse directions.

The session 'Reanimating Industrial Spaces,' organised by Hilary Orange (UCL) and Sefryn Penrose (Oxford University/Atkins Heritage), taking as its theme the theorising of memory within archaeology, offered an appropriate illustration of this conclusion, even though none of the session's papers claimed to tackle the topic from a specifically theoretical viewpoint, and as such it proved a fitting end to the conference. While it may be true that 'most methodologies were once theories' (attributed to Richard Bradley), a repeated point was that successful theory cannot usefully exist in the abstract, but needs to be developed out of, and for the benefit of, current practice. To this end the contributors succeeded in covering a wide range of issues in the archaeology of the recent past, in the process visiting a range of interdisciplinary areas and producing what one departing delegate enthusiastically dubbed 'the best session of the conference.' Although industrial archaeology, perhaps because it is one of the areas where amateurs and 'enthusiasts' still play a major role, has tended to develop without too much regard for theory, this session not only gave a good representation of the current situation but also offered an insight into areas where current interdisciplinary research is taking place and suggested avenues likely to require exploration in the future. The particular point of the session leaders was that the archaeology of de-industrialisation is one of the few archaeological disciplines able to record memory (although this would be true of most areas visited by contemporary and historical archaeologists) and that this places practitioners in a new ethical situation, needing to develop new ways of engaging with stakeholders and of theorising ethics as well as methods.

The opening paper, *I think it's unlocked,* from Bradley L. Garrett (Royal Holloway) introduced us to the shady world of 'Urban Exploration.' Practitioners gain access to abandoned industrial landscapes, recording their experiences on websites such as www.28dayslater.co.uk and www.infiltration.org. We were introduced to this topic on three levels. Superficially this is a realm of boys' own adventures attracting explorers to forbidden places 'when the sun goes down and the city goes to sleep,' although trespass is, in most cases, not illegal and the obvious perils posed by derelict landscapes are counterbalanced, as in most apparently dangerous activities, by the safety-consciousness of the practitioners themselves. Most urban explorers however would see something deeper in their hobby. With a strict code of ethics urging them not to damage or alter the sites they visit, and a desire to photograph and publish what they find, they are archetypal rescue archaeologists, recording essentially ephemeral industrial sites as they decay and disappear, seeing treasure in the junk, artefacts in the industrial waste. Like their counterparts in mine exploration, they are keen not to dehumanise landscapes, often seeking out and recording memories of people – sometimes themselves - who worked in or were affected by sites (for an example see the 'Miners Reunited' feature at www.aditnow.co.uk). Post-industrial uses of sites are also recorded – post-industrial landscapes can provide ideal film backgrounds (how many have appeared in *Dr Who* over the years?) and in the example given the site had indeed been used for filming. At a further level, Bradley explained how the explorers themselves become part of the site – memories of the site affect the individual, but the individual by his actions alters and contributes to the bank of memories associated with a site, 'writing (him)self into these hidden histories.' Memory it seems is a fluid process, and one that cannot just be recorded in photographs on a website.

In *Up the junction: memory loss and urban renewal in East London* Emma Dwyer (MoLA) spoke about a buildings recording project undertaken in Dalston ahead of the East London Line extension, with specific reference to the arches of a redundant railway viaduct. Buildings have a life beyond their intended use and inevitably shape the landscape and experiences of people around them: their impending destruction and associated loss of personal landmarks (and sometimes livelihoods) can cause anger and confrontation. Some users of the buildings refused the team permission to record, perhaps because they did not want illicit activities recorded, but also because the team were seen as part of 'authority,' complicit in an unwanted demolition. It proved impossible to separate historical Dalston from the present-day community, and their concerns for the future. It was necessary to find ways of engaging with stakeholders, making them feel part of the recording process, in order to continue, although this was still seen as too radical in some quarters. The experience raised the issue of the ethics of the process of recording the destruction of people's environment - it is important to record not just the historic buildings but also the uses to which they are currently put, and the memories and feelings of their users, if a true picture is to be preserved.

Gabriel Moshenska (UCL Institute of Archaeology) was unable to be present at the conference, but his paper *From the bunker to the gas chamber: children's spaces in modern industrialised warfare* was distributed to delegates at the session. He describes

two types of artificial spaces which impacted on children in wartime – the school air raid shelter and the gas chamber in which children were made to 'test' their gas masks. Although 'both these spaces feature prominently in oral histories' very few examples of air raid shelters have been preserved and the 'gas chambers' have been virtually written out of history. By contrasting the recorded memories of people's perceptions and experiences with the physical remains and official records of these spaces, he is able throw more light on the relationships between children and the material culture of modern warfare. In doing so, he hints at and begins to develop the contrast between children's compulsory interaction with these spaces and their often very different reaction as expressed through play, when 'sites and objects of violence are inhabited, collected, vandalised, exchanged, destroyed and subverted.' Memories of the former have been freely recalled and diligently recorded, the latter perhaps less so.

Sefryn Penrose (Oxford University/Atkins Heritage) discussed the former Cowley car factory in Oxford in her paper *Transitional living in post-industrial England.* The industrial history of the site has been recorded, but there is no evocation of the workforce, nor any physical remains (apart from one building re-erected off-site at the Oxford Bus Museum). The de-industrialisation of the site has been recorded by amateurs, but again without reference to the social landscape. The destruction of the old order has left the landscapes and people intact, but the uncertainty of the future has created a need to mythologise, re-invent and even fetishise the past, with the only visible result, a memorial to Lord Nuffield, serving as a metonym for the whole car industry. Memory is trapped between past destruction, which is too close for comfort, and the change inherent in an as yet unknown future.

The Albanian concrete production site investigated by Emily Glass (Bristol) offered an interesting contrast. Here little destruction had taken place, although most production had ceased at the end of the Hoxha era. The site is interesting for its completeness, and as a source for the study of the production of materials and artefacts, specifically the 'mushroom' bunkers which are, and will probably remain, a typical sight in Albania. Here no redevelopment is in sight, nor is there likely to be any sign of the civic pride which has begun to celebrate the history of the Morris works in Oxford. It seems that the former workforce are keen to explain the site and to record their memories. The question which arises, particularly considering the language and culture barriers here, is one of how to record and analyse word-of-mouth contributions, and how to ensure accuracy and objectivity. The urge to romanticise the past, already evident for example in former East Germany, is as likely to affect memories here as it is in Oxford – perhaps more so if change and future prosperity seem unlikely. At present the intention is to continue collecting data, with the theory developing from this. It will be interesting to compare the different pictures emerging from physical survey, workforce memory and official records.

Although he was also unable to be present, Peter Oakley (UCL Dept of Anthropology), in *A mine of information: presenting the social histories of heritage mining sites,*

considered the rationale behind the presentation of three mining heritage sites, and the extent to which their interpretation reflects the social dimension of the mining communities. At Geevor the historic interest in Cornwall's mining heritage goes back to the TV adaptations of *Poldark* in the 1970s, and the closure of the mine coincided with interest in exploiting Cornish mining heritage as a tourism resource, local enthusiasm for the memorialisation of the industry, and the availability of funding. The involvement of local people in the project led to the displays' inclusion of details of the miners themselves, with personal artefacts left behind on the last working day supported by photographs. While the workforce and their conditions of work are thus represented, the presentation does however reinforce the idea of mining as a way of life, neglecting the lives and interests of the workforce outside the context of the mine. At Kennecott in Alaska a gap of 70 years before the heritagisation of the site has led to a more selective interpretation. Workers are presented as nameless and faceless individuals, and evidence of social history, collected through the 'Kennecott Kids Oral History Project' is limited to the memories of the children of the management (the rest of the workforce were not permitted to bring their families onsite). Discussion of conditions is limited by political considerations – racial problems can be discussed, but questions of institutional power, social control and exclusion are taboo. The nearby community of McCarthy, which offered social services such as drinking, gambling and prostitution, is barely mentioned in the heritage presentation. Access to the No. 8 Gold Dredge in Fairbanks, also in Alaska, is now limited to carefully shepherded groups of cruise passengers. Visitors are not necessarily well motivated to take an interest, and the tour concentrates on a 'backwoods' meal and a quick view of the most spectacular elements before participants are bussed off to a gold-panning 'experience.' Aspects of the display covering the social aspect of the workforce are largely ignored. The paper concludes that at Geevor the involvement of the community and the site's status as a World Heritage Site have led to an emphasis on the social, and that this can even be seen as a reaction to the romantic fictionalisation of the industry. In Kennecott the lack of such involvement couples with the politically directed nature of the National Parks régime to offer a limited view of the social structure, with no space given to the unskilled or to the community of McCarthy. At the No. 8 Gold Dredge technology is celebrated without any reference to its environmental and human cost, and its coupling with an escapist 'prospector experience' for the tourist renders any challenging or realistic interpretation unfeasible.

Hilary Orange (UCL IoA) in her paper *Benders, Benches and Bunkers: recent contestation and commemoration at an industrial (heritage) landscape* again tackled the theme of heritage as myth. The perceived (and well documented) history of the mine and miners at Botallack, as presented to tourists, was contrasted with local people's memories of the recent post-industrial past, when the site hosted a variety of uses and activities which have been airbrushed out during the transition from derelict post-industrial space to World Heritage Site. 'Derelict' in this case does not mean 'dead,' and the paper detailed a number of 'unofficial' social activities that have left few documented memories – dumping, teenagers playing around as well as learning to drive, a travellers' camp, art installations and, apparently as a reaction to the latter, arson. Again there appears to have been an antagonism between those who wanted to clean up the site in the name

of 'heritage' (in this case artists and the National Trust) and local people who felt that 'their' space was being taken over and that they were being marginalised. Only where the local characters fitted in with the idea of 'heritage' are their activities seen as relevant – thus eccentric local Dick Thomas has been memorialised with a dedicated seat, but only because he was a 'colourful' ex-miner. This paper too questioned the degree to which stakeholders are prepared to share their memories with outsiders – discussing the burning down of an unpopular artwork which had seemingly been imposed on 'their' space, locals are happy to tell the story, and to convey their approval, but not to say who was responsible. At a site where the physical signs of these post-industrial activities are so ephemeral, particularly when contrasted with the abundant industrial remains, recording of these memories not only makes an important contribution to history, but also adds a new layer to the archaeology.

Amy Cutler (Royal Holloway) and Sara Bowler (UC Falmouth) brought two further interdisciplinary views to the subject. Amy discussed the reaction of various poets and authors to post-industrial spaces, focussing particularly on Ted Hughes' reactions to the Calder Valley and Peter Riley's exploration of Derbyshire mining landscapes. Interesting is the way literature can draw out aspects of a site, creating beauty and above all bringing the author-poet's own experiences to a wider audience: it was Hughes' poetry which inspired Fay Godwin's photographs, some of which were used in Amy's presentation, and in turn Godwin's work has served to widen the audience for the poetry. Both have set the landscape and its heritage before a wider public. Thus an *imaginative* heritage of the post-industrial landscape is created which can be enjoyed by those who do not necessarily have a strong historical or archaeological connection – Amy's study and appreciation of Riley's work are not adversely affected by her own limited familiarity with the underground world and its terminology!

Sara argued that artists are able to affect the public perception of industrial space, whether by dramatic presentation, by evoking memories or by creating new uses and contexts, as in the Turbine Hall at Tate Modern. An artists' project to get the Cornish engine house chimneys smoking again re-awakened memories (real or imagined) and re-engaged the public, while art installations in a Cornish mine brought in visitors and stimulated interest. However her description of an encounter with an irate walker who objected to the placing of art in the landscape (as well as the Botallack arsonist mentioned above) reminded us that artistic interpretations must be rooted in the local experience if they are not to arouse incomprehension and outright hostility from local people and, indeed, archaeologists. Because of their ability to express the essence of a site whilst arousing public consciousness and imagination, artworks often become 'signature' images for the public's understanding of the past, and influence recollections of it.

The session raised issues relating to memory and the presentation of heritage. The interdisciplinary approach heralded in the conference introduction was mirrored by the inclusion of researchers from the fields of geography, anthropology, fine art and literature, each of whom brought a new dimension to the discussion. A wide range of

approaches to the presentation of industrial heritage emerged, with key points being the degree to which the lives of the workforce are presented alongside the industrial process itself, the degree to which industrial landscapes are mythologised and the way in which aspects of a site's heritage which fail to conform to the myth may be marginalised or destroyed. The need to take on board and represent the views of local people, and the benefits which accrue from this, were demonstrated, both at 'heritage' sites such as Geevor and at sites being recorded in advance of redevelopment. The danger of using an 'oral history project' which only covers the memory of a small, not very representative, section of the population is seen at Kennecott. Memory is an important tool in the presentation of heritage sites, but there still seems to be a need for strategies to deal with the recording of memories, and the session offered more questions than answers. How far can we trust memory when people will always be selective? Particular difficulties arise in areas of conflict – Albania, the Nottinghamshire coalfield, Northern Ireland. How can we access memories which people and communities have a reason to hide - where 'that's not interesting' may mean 'don't ask' and where the (white middle class) archaeologist may be treated with suspicion and hostility? Is community archaeology the best way to break down barriers, and if so, how do we address the likely inherent bias of its recorders? How accurate is memory, particularly the memory of childhood? Archaeology acts as a check on (and sometimes contradiction of) memory, just as it does with historical documentation. Not only do the investigators themselves become part of the 'memory map' of a site, but their recording itself is increasingly ephemeral. Forms of electronic storage are superseded and become difficult to access, the shelf-life of non-paper records is untested, and until the British Library is able to start its web-archiving project web pages themselves, on which much of the corpus of photographic records is stored, are likely to disappear with no notice and for a variety of reasons. Finally, the session demonstrated ways in which memories can be revived, but these methods – art, literature, heritage displays, even the process of collection, can and do alter memories, encouraging selection, romanticisation or creative imagination, whether by accident or even, where there is a hidden political agenda, by design. Contemporary archaeologists cannot isolate themselves from memory and its associated politics, and while total objectivity can never be possible a strategy of evaluation, with appropriate checks and balances, must always form part of our toolkit.