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'That once romantic now utterly disheartening (former) colliery town': The affective politics of heritage, memory, place and regeneration in Mansfield, UK

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Abstract

This article investigates the affective politics of heritage, memory, place and regeneration in Mansfield, UK. Ravaged by workplace closures from the 1980s, Mansfield's local government and cultural partners have supposedly put heritage at the centre of urban regeneration policies. Principal are ambiguous, and forestalled, ambitions to mobilize the industrial past to build urban futures. Yet these heritages, and their attendant memories and histories, are emotionally evocative and highly contested. The affective politics are played out in the material, embodied and atmospheric remains of the industrial past as Mansfield struggles to make sense of its industrial legacies. Drawing on Critical Discourse Analysis, archival research, observant participation and interviews data, this article critiques heritage-based regeneration; examines interrelations between local memory, class, place and history; and interprets tensions between competing imaginaries of what Mansfield is, was and should be. Contributing to work on memory and class in post-industrial towns, the article demonstrates that affect and place should be central to our considerations of heritage-based urban regeneration. In the case of Mansfield, an 'emotional regeneration' will be denied until a shared practice of remembering the affective ruptures of the past is enabled.

Keywords

industrial heritage

working-class memory

post-industrial towns

urban regeneration

affective politics

Introduction

It was in 1928, in Lady *Chatterley's Lover*, that D. H. Lawrence mourned Mansfield as that

'once-romantic, now utterly disheartening colliery town' ([1928] 2011: 226). In Lawrence's

summation, industrialization had ruined Mansfield's aesthetic and cultural value as a focal point

in the Nottinghamshire coalfield, UK (Waddington 1991). Over the nine decades since

Lawrence's appraisal, another rise and fall in Mansfield's socio-economic (mis)fortunes can be

discerned. Although predominantly a mining town, as Lawrence identified, the shoe and hosiery

industries, engineering, quarrying and brewing all contributed to Mansfield's growth during the

twentieth century. The industrial mix employed tens of thousands of workers at sites such as

Shoe Co., Mansfield Brewery and Metal Box, places of labour that conditioned the material and

sensory landscapes of Mansfield.

From the 1980s, however, a slow process of 'industrial ruination' has gripped the town,

with closures of industrial workplaces entrenching deprivations (Mah 2012: n.pag.; Department

for Communities and Local Government [DCLG] 2006: n.pag.). As mine shafts were filled and

factories abandoned, Mansfield needed to adapt and reinvent to recover from the social

inequalities inflicted upon it. Like other deindustrializing places, Mansfield has attempted to

utilize its industrial heritage to enable economic, cultural and emotional regeneration, seeking to provide people with 'an affective connection to the place's past' (Wheeler 2016: 481; Rautenberg 2012; Stephenson and Wray 2005). However, contestations surrounding Mansfield's specific historical trajectories, histories that evoke responses across affective and emotional registers, problematize the use of the past to build prosperous urban presents and futures. Despite many pronouncements of a sustainable, invigorated urbanity, Mansfield continues to face many challenges associated with social disaffection and alienation, including low and insecure wages, stagnated social mobility and material decay (Gartzou-Katsouyanni et al. 2018; Department for Communities and Local Government [DCLG] 2015).

This article investigates the affective politics of heritage, memory, class and regeneration in Mansfield, contributing to understandings of classed experience in post-industrial towns and the significance of heritage and memory in the (un)making of these neglected places (Burrell et al. 2019). Although productive in their focus on identity, politics and affect, I posit that studies of industrial heritage should be resituated within the everyday classed spatial–temporal processes through which heritage both emerges and acts to constitute (Mah 2012). In the following, I seek to affect a way of conceiving heritage as not merely eventful and spectacular, but as being embedded within the routine, mundane affective politics of feeling within post-industrial places (Atkinson 2007). Approaching heritage through its 'ordinary affects' (Stewart 2007: n.pag.) provides for a wider critique of post-industrial places said to be alienated and the actors engaged in their production (Emery 2018b).

The next section draws out the above critiques in greater detail, followed by a section setting out the methodologies and empirics of the research. Two sections of analysis then follow that set out to map 'an affective circuitry of what it (sometimes) feels like to live in' (DeSilvey

2012: 54) Mansfield. In the first analytical section I introduce Mansfield as an unarticulated place of enfolded temporal blendings, document further its constitutive industrial urban history and examine how material and symbolic inheritances are understood by the former industrial working-class population. The article then moves on to critique heritage policies of local government and key stakeholders, arguing that any economic, cultural and emotional regenerative potential that industrial heritage may hold has not been effectively utilized. Such neglect contributes to a wider sense of apathy, alienation and disaffection rooted within Mansfield, a collective feeling of being unheard.

Heritage, regeneration, politics, affect

While 'the heritage of working-class people has been significantly neglected within heritage research and practice' (Shackel et al. 2011: 291), critical work has appeared that investigates the connections between industrial heritage and regeneration in deindustrialized areas (Dicks 2015; Kift 2011; West 2010; Debary 2004; Taksa 2003). The literature is heavily weighted towards British and North American examples; however, investigations have appeared in other international contexts (Conlin and Joliffe 2011). A focus has been interrogating the use of industrial heritage to regenerate local economies through a shift towards heritage tourism and place-identity (Rautenberg 2012; Dicks 2000; Jonsen-Verbeke 1999). Intercontinental strategies involve utilizing the identities of places to specific industries, marketing sites as being the 'birthplace' or 'home' to, for instance, pottery making or goldmining (Hoskins 2015; Waterton 2014b). Abandoned industrial settlements have also proven popular tourist attractions, such as Gunkanjima, a Japanese coalmining island that once had over 5000 residents and now receives boatloads of tourists to gaze upon its decaying infrastructure (Hashimoto and Telfer 2017). The architectural heritages of industrialism are also used in place-making initiatives, supposedly

enhancing the attractiveness of post-industrial spaces to private investment (Bennett 2013; Jones and Evans 2012; Goh 2014). Relatedly, industrial buildings are bound up with the gentrification of deindustrialized urban centres, whereby the aesthetics of the industrial past are sanitized, repackaged and sold on as 'kitsch' landscapes of 'industrial chic' apartments and offices (Mathews and Picton 2014; Pikner 2014; Atkinson 2007).

Alongside being a vehicle for economic development, heritage, as a cultural process of remembering enacted in formal and informal commemorative performances and practices, is a 'powerful means of defining' belonging, identity and place for long-term residents (Dicks 2000: 78; Uzzell 1996; Tilley 2006). As Edwards states, 'stories about the past […] are as much to do with forging local identities and senses of belonging, as they are with history' (1998: 150) and 'collective ways of sharing, discussing and debating memories of place' (Degnen 2016: 1647) can produce belonging through attachment to collectively shared histories (Kearney 2009). The process of deindustrialization disrupted industrial working-class senses of belonging, severing the social relations emerging from a network of manual work, social and political institutions and the home (Emery 2018b). Celebratory and representational heritage has been critical to the 'emotional regeneration' (Stephenson and Wray 2005: n.pag.) of communities traumatized by losses of jobs, identity and industrial orderings of life. For example, emotional regeneration is being achieved in the northeastern coalfields of Britain through the commissioning, display and maintenance of union banners, which act as the 'symbolic and representational heart of [their] village' (Stephenson and Wray 2005: 180). Curated commemorative events, museums, performance and archaeology-based school projects have also been used to try and restore the social cohesion and rhythms afforded by industrialism (Wedgwood 2011; West 2010; Dicks 2000; Bright 2012; Muehlebach 2017). Former mining communities have been at the forefront of

these practices of emotional regeneration, cultivating collective memories of the pre-closure order to retain senses of belonging and process difficult histories (Dicks 2000; Power 2008; Foden et al. 2014). In the British coalfields, much of this heritage explicitly references working-class politics and struggle, seeking to connect local audiences to their place lineages and the hardships faced by previous generations (Wray 2009, 2011). The lived and intergenerational memories of the 1984–85 Miners' Strike, in particular, have been a mechanism for sustaining collective pride, in addition to providing an explanatory narrative of community decline (Bright 2016; Bailey and Popple 2011; Smith and Campbell 2011).

Scholars have been interested in how heritage of working-class politics and trade unionism often contests and dissents from state-sanctioned imaginaries of nationhood, what Smith (2006) conceptualizes as the Authorised Heritage Discourse (AHD) (Harrison 2010; Waterton 2010; Laurence 2010; Moore and Whelan 2007). Heritage has been a crucial mechanism through which nation states produce and represent a national past – real, mythical or imagined. National heritage functions to legitimize nationalisms and notions of citizenship, an AHD selectively formed of shared values, norms and behaviours. Such instances index the capacity of heritage discourse to exclude, and cohere, and 'any group that currently stands outside of the dominant heritage narrative and the cultural symbols that support it is asked to acquiesce' (Waterton 2010: 147, original emphasis; Smith 2006; Waterton et al. 2006; Graham et al. 2000). Groups are excluded from AHD recognition based on race, gender, class and other subjective positionalities, and when they have been victims of political violence that the state does not deem advantageous to memorialize (Schindel 2014). Strategies to suppress legitimate expressions of historical experiences include refusing funding for heritage programmes and denying communities access to land invested with heritage value (Luger 2016; Goh 2014).

Signalling the concerns of this article, representations of working-class history in opposition to the prevailing capitalist ideologies have been obstructed and local governments have hampered grassroots heritage initiatives where they conflict with their own visions of place identity (Kallio and Mansfield 2013; Maunder 2011).

We must be wary of ascribing too much power to nation states in developing and imposing an AHD, however. Multiple studies have documented the agency of under-represented groups to challenge dominant representations, carving out their own heritage-based belongings (Waterton 2014b; Baxter and Bullen 2011; Wedgwood 2011; Kean 2011). For instance, opposing the AHD of the Singaporean state apparatus, activists have utilized 'guerrilla tourism' to draw attention to heritage sites that are earmarked for erasure and development (Luger 2016: n.pag.). Further, as will be examined below, local government also acts to determine localized AHD. Indicative of the wider neglect of such places, major heritage institutions rarely engage with post-industrial towns, leaving local councils and disparate local heritage groups to navigate heritage policies, often caught between the politics of funding arrangements and the needs of local communities to enact historically rooted belonging and identity (Dicks 2000).

Relating to belonging and identity, heritage matters in post-industrial towns because the industrial past continues to insist on the affective and emotional experiences of the industrial working class whose lives are impacted by enduring industrial ruination (Emery 2018b; Mah 2012). In recent years, affect and emotion have been increasingly centred in heritage and memory studies: 'museums and heritage sites are places where people go to feel, and indeed they are arenas where people go to "manage" their emotions' (Smith and Campbell 2015: 446, 2017; Crouch 2015; Waterton 2014a). Affectivity has, however, lingered in the background of heritage studies in terms of its critiques of nostalgia. Often 'dismissed as a romantic yearning for days of

yore' (Loveday 2014: 729), nostalgia is increasing apprehended through its affective and functional complexities (Campbell et al. 2017; Lewicka 2014). Claims of a 'smokestack nostalgia' (Strangleman 2013: n.pag.) have often been pejoratively levelled at working-class heritage, but heritage can help deindustrialized communities 'cope with the present as they make sense of it through a journey into the past that either avoids or erases painful experience, or recasts it in more emotionally manageable terms' (Bennett 2009: 192).

The recognized significance of emotion and memory relations has led to the emoting body of the researcher becoming a critical site for heritage research heritage (Micieli-Voutsinas 2017). However, as acknowledged, the body of the researcher arrives and encounters heritage with a different frame of experience than those whose heritage it directly belongs (Waterton 2014a). Readings of the affective dimensions of heritage are unlikely to be shared by those whose histories are being represented. Moreover, studies of deindustrialization regularly highlight how encounters with former workplaces engender senses of loss and mourning among those who worked there or grew up in their shadows (Mah 2012; Muehlebach and Shoshan 2012). Thus, questions have shifted towards ascertaining how participants feel heritage and what is evoked by encounters with representations of the past, the atmospheres and embodied intensities of heritage sites (Muehlebach 2017). Equally, scholars must be receptive to the idea that emotions being managed at heritage sites are not exclusively charged with either positive or negative valence.

It is regularly assumed that engagement with industrial heritage enables or facilitates belonging or a comforting nostalgia. Not often considered is reluctance to remember, a desire to forget traumatic or difficult pasts or the absence of an adequate means of representing traumatic histories through heritage (Schindel 2014). Perhaps symptomatic of an inherent enthusiasm for

heritage among heritage scholars, there is also little room in the literature for affects such as indifference or boredom. Yet, industrial heritage participation is largely a marginal past time of, mainly, older hobbyists and former industrial workers who certainly can experience forms of communality, although local heritage groups are not always the amenable environment that some would expect, but 'a contested process that in some circumstances can threaten, as well as promote, social cohesion within communities' (Wheeler 2016: 477). Either way, the wider significance of industrial heritage to general populations remains nebulous and there is evidence that industrial heritage is not met with the same enthusiasm in national contexts beyond Britain and North America. Del Pozo and Gonzalez's study of industrial heritage in Spain notes a 'lack of local interest', acting to undermine both 'the creation of a new place identity and the possibility of an alternative economic development based on tourism' (2012: 455). In Mumbai, industrial heritage was of secondary importance to former textiles workers and the workers were more immediately concerned with outstanding compensation claims against former employers (Jain 2014). It has also been posited that forms of belonging anchored to collective industrial histories can render communities 'impenetrable to change' (Doering 2013: 7) following deindustrialization.

I propose that existing presumptions – that heritage holds an intrinsic value – might emerge from the broader circumscribed nature of heritage scholarship. Del Pozo and Gonzalez's critique of Spain's industrial heritage policies is also applicable to much of the extant academic literature, in that heritage is too often seen through the lens of 'the monumental: the factory, the train, and the mining pit, but not the territory as a whole along with natural areas and local communities' (2012: 448). Too much scholarly attention is paid to case studies of specific museums, heritage events, buildings or groups, leading to analysis privileging the evental and

exceptional. Such an overemphasis distorts from the lived realities of industrial ruination and misses the wider significance that heritage has for both representing and constituting everyday affective experiences of urbanity. Calling for a reorientation to the mundane and everydayness of memory, Atkinson states that an 'excessive focus upon bounded sites of memory risks fetishing place and space too much; it threatens to obscure the wider production of social memory throughout society' (2007: 523, original emphasis). Put another way, to realize the critical force of heritage inquiry, perhaps heritage should be the lens and not the focus.

Relatedly, studies often decontextualize the heritage under investigation from the histories being represented on the premise that heritage tells us more about the contemporary than the past. However, we cannot meaningfully investigate how authorized heritages are used towards various economic and cultural purposes if we are not aware of the histories that they are seeking to inform us of or conceal from us. Making a similar point, Goh argues that, whilst history is 'not destiny, […] the production of heritage space reinstitutes the dominant cultural logic of the past encoded in the urban fabric of the city in the material present, so that history defines destiny' (2014: 83). To elicit understandings of the representational and ideological capacities of heritage in Mansfield, and other such places, we must be adequately aware of the history that various AHDs seeks to represent, the stories not told, silenced or forcibly forgotten (Emery 2018a). Ultimately, if heritage is to be used as a lens for critiquing the politics informing the production of working-class urban places, then it must be situated within wider historical geographical contexts. Moreover, the collective reticence and intractability of Mansfield over its past and present means that such critique must also take into consideration the affective dimensions of heritage politics, the discrete and interstitial emotions, feelings and embodiments that coalesce around subjects of heritage, memory and temporal space.

Researching the affective politics of working-class heritages and place

A critical concern for this research was understanding how competing heritage discourses have been articulated and operate at the scale of a post-industrial town where everyday environments are imbued with affective memories and legacies of deindustrialization. Apprehending Mansfield's everyday temporal and affective textures is a project shared with Stewart, documented in her cultural ethnography of Appalachian coal camps, 'where the effects of capitalism and modernization pile up on the landscape as the detritus of history' (1996: 4). Stewart conceives the coal camps as being 'a space on the side of the road', overflowing with both ordinariness and exceptionalism, a place 'that comes into view when something happens to interrupt the ordinary flow of events and leaves the narrator surrounded by a scene that palpitates with vulnerability', where 'there is more to things than meets the eye and people are marked by events and drawn out of themselves' (1996: 37). To reveal the affective and temporal densities of places such as Mansfield requires an everyday embodied attunement to atmospheres, encounters, events and utterances (Stewart 2011).

I spent extended periods in Mansfield making conversation and small talk with people at various heritage sites in Mansfield, eliciting opinions, general observations and the affectivities undergirding them (Law 2004). More conventional empirics were elicited from Critical Discourse Analysis of policy and promotional documents (Waterton et al. 2006), social media analysis, archival research, observant participation and interviews. Key stakeholder interviews include four heritage professionals, three local councillors and two regeneration officers. Twenty semi-structured interviews were conducted with people connected to grassroots heritage projects or Mansfield's industrial past.

It is important to note that I am from Mansfield and a coalmining family, and, similar to Back, 'it is hard to separate where my life ends and research methods begin' (2015: 821). As I grew up in the Mansfield area, and have family and friends who live there, I have been, and still am, deeply emotionally entwined in the processes of urban change and the emotional implications of heritage and regeneration policies. Thus, my investigations of Mansfield's heritage landscape were 'entirely figured through the politics of affective registers and their expressive corollaries' (Tolia-Kelly et al. 2017: 10). Autoethnography is not a primary concern here, but nor do I profess to any outsider gaze. The power of the critiques offered up comes, in part, because I have lived through and been shaped by the issues examined. However, although my positions are transparent throughout, the intention is to delineate working-class voices and experiences of a complex urbanity, neither of which receive adequate empathetic attention.

'A space on the side of the road': Mansfield's presents and pasts

Since the 2016 EU Referendum, Mansfield has often been selected for condescension by a media previously unconcerned by the town's plight ('Immigration: Who Should We Let In?' 2018; Chaffin 2018). With one of the highest proportionate Leave votes, journalists descend on the marketplace, delivering reports drenched in thinly veiled contempt. These types of outside gazes are often interpreted by social scientists through a framework of class and place stigma, rejecting notions that such places are valueless and overstating local attachments as impermeable. Although the solidarity is well intentioned, scholarly sensibilities often disavow the injustices inflicted on places, and people from Mansfield are fully aware of the conditions of their town, with local pride emerging often as a stubbornness and resistance to judgement.

I noted above how Mansfield, and the wider Nottinghamshire coalfield where it is situated, resembles 'a space on the side of the road', a place that is both known and elusive.

Talking to people from Mansfield it becomes apparent that it is difficult to articulate what Mansfield is; it 'just is'. Events or stories are often summarized as 'typical Mansfield' or 'that's just Mansfield for you' and specific understandings of what distinguishes Mansfield elude communication, and approximations always fall short. The affective politics of apathy and alienation among both Mansfield's former industrial workforce and the post-industrial generation operates in the everyday through reticent utterances, helped on by knowing nods and glances and fragments of emotional resonance. Mansfield, then, is a place of indeterminacies and indescribable knowns that are felt in the bodies that grew up there, bodies that are capable of reading its, sometimes contemptuous, atmospheres but not of conveying its dimensions and interiorities. Without the means to articulate what Mansfield is like or the modalities that comprise it, Mansfield is often reduced to judgements dense in alienation and resignation. For many of those spoken to, Mansfield is a 'ghost town', 'dead' or a 'shithole', and as people like to glibly refrain, 'but it's our shithole'.

These assessments are not without foundation. Large swathes of Mansfield are in the top twenty most deprived areas in the United Kingdom (DCLG 2015) and Mansfield is in the bottom ten local authorities for social mobility (Social Mobility Commission 2017). This is not to ignore the dignity and pride that people from Mansfield have for themselves or for the places and people they love. It is simply to recognize the realities of everyday experiences of social inequality (Nottinghamshire County Council 2010). Older residents often affirm that this was not always the case, that Mansfield was once a self-assured and flourishing place – now a thoroughly disheartening former colliery town.

The town experienced transformative industrial growth from the mid-nineteenth century, initially beginning with the brewery and textiles mills, for instance, the Town Mill and

Hermitage Mill. Next came the sinking of collieries from around 1880s to the inter-war years, in and around Mansfield. Employing over 16,000 miners at their peak, the collieries led to a large influx of mining families into the area. In addition, there were engineering plants, quarrying and shoe and hosiery factories, including Metal Box, Mansfield Hosiery Mills and Shoe Co., opening between 1850 and the beginning of the twentieth century. Combined, the diverse industrial workplaces dominated the sensory urban experience. As Mansfield's population began to swell, its borders began to merge with neighbouring settlements, such as Mansfield Woodhouse, Forest Town and Sutton-in-Ashfield, to form a large urban area of over 100,000.

Yet, despite the influence of various industrial workplaces on the smells, sounds and rhythms of the town, it was the coal industry that most dictated the industrial cultures of Mansfield. Annually, branches of the Nottinghamshire Area of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) would march through a crowded Mansfield marketplace in a performance of local and industrial pride and self-confidence. The march would culminate at the offices of the NUM at Berry Hill, a suburb to the east of the town. Miners in the Nottinghamshire coalfield around Mansfield had relatively high incomes for sustained periods, spending their money in the shops, pubs and clubs of the town, recognizable by the dark rings around their eyes from the coal dust (Stanley 2010).

These high wages caused friction with miners in other areas and acted as a catalyst for violence in the 1984–85 Miners' Strike. The 1984–85 Miners' Strike may have been 'the proletarians' last stand' (Offer 2008: 544), but most Nottinghamshire's miners did not stand with them. Instead, Mansfield became a locus for bitter conflicts between striking miners and those continuing to work, with several large and violent demonstrations at the Berry Hill offices and in the town centre (Paterson 2014). Families and friendships were irreparably torn apart and

animosities endure (Emery 2018a). The decision to continue working was seen by other coalfields as the ultimate betrayal and the Nottinghamshire miners broke away from their counterparts in the NUM to form the dissident union, the Union of Democratic Mineworkers (UDM) (Griffin 2005).

Compounding the animosities ignited by the 1984–85 Miners' Strike, from the 1980s Mansfield began a process of social and economic deindustrialization. Colliery closures accelerated following the 1984–85 Miners' Strike, but the defeat of the NUM facilitated the extension of antiunion, neo-liberal practices that devastated Mansfield. Engineering, dependent on supplying the local coal industry, rapidly declined. Textile factories could not compete with international competition and began to close. Brewing was relocated to Wolverhampton in 2002. The large manufacturing company, Shoe. Co., also closed and Metal Box relocated from their central historic site. Since the mid-1980s, Mansfield has suffered high levels of socio-economic deprivation, high levels of hidden unemployment, widespread environment degradation, low educational attainment and low-skilled labour working menial jobs in low-paid roles (Foden et al. 2014; DCLG 2006).

When inquiring about the significance of remembering this history, the majority of participants were adamant that, in principle, Mansfield's industrial heritage should be preserved and commemorated. Yet, most could not express why heritage was important, assuming it to be axiomatic. The impulse to remember and commemorate was inarticulable, but underpinned by an emotional connection between past and present lives and those lost to dangerous industries. Personal heritage participation is well-practiced in Mansfield. Many older participants had commemorative objects of their industrial past in their homes as materializations of belonging, for example, decorative plates or miners' lamps. Many also spent considerable time on social

media sites dedicated to the collective remembering of the histories and memories of Mansfield's industrial workplaces, posting memories underneath photographs and sharing evoked memories of smells and sounds, for instance, how the stench of mashing hops would permeate through Mansfield's streets when the brewery was in production, an olfactory memory that elicits contested nostalgic refrains regards its pleasantness (The Chad 2019).

However, there is little appetite or enthusiasm among the majority of Mansfield's long-term residents for anything resembling a 'redemptive remembering' (Bright 2012: n.pag.) of inglorious episodes in the town's history. The 1984–85 Miners' Strike is a particularly pertinent example of a collective process of forgetting, with many of those who did not join the strike often unwilling to elaborate on the topic. Moreover, a collective forgetting of the Nottinghamshire coalfield's role in the 1984–85 Miners' Strike has led to fissures in the intergenerational transfer of collective history, of which the older generation of mining families who lived these histories are implicated. The strike – its failure and cause of union splits – is entangled with the subject of colliery closures such that job loss and socio-economic deprivation cannot be explained without reference to it and, thus, Nottinghamshire miners' contested culpability in deindustrialization (Emery 2018a). However, I suggest that heritage and commemorative activities that seek to keep alive the memory of the 1984–85 Miners' Strike, both within and beyond Mansfield, make collective forgetting of both the strike and colliery closures a futile everyday exertion. This is also the case with the deindustrialization of other industries in Mansfield where the material and absent remnants of the industrial past perpetually induce the past.

A prolonged neglect of former industrial sites has slowly changed people's views on what should be publicly preserved. After too much uncertainty and decay, people have become

16

alienated and begun to question whether prominent industrial buildings should be erased for being 'bloody eyesores'. Blame for the fate of public industrial heritage is apportioned to 'the council' – referenced as an ambiguous, impersonal monolith that operates above them. 'The council' have left Mansfield's heritage to 'wrack and ruin' said one former miner. Another interviewee summed up the general feeling among participants that Mansfield's working class are at odds with articulations of AHDs currently formulated within the town: 'Ya only 'ave t' walk 'round the town t' see what the council thinks of our heritage, ya know, of where folk worked all their lives and that'.

Heritage, regeneration and competing AHDs

Mansfield's local government, Mansfield District Council (MDC), acknowledges that the town's 'industrial heritage of coal mining, limestone quarrying and manufacturing has shaped its buildings, landscape, and people' (2018b: n.pag.). Following the worst years of industrial decline, however, MDC and business groups were initially eager to cast off what they saw as the shackles of the past and project the image of 'a town fit to face the future' (Mansfield District Council [MDC] 1998: 1.1). A perception has long pervaded among MDC councillors and regeneration services that Mansfield's public has an entrenched nostalgia, seen by many stakeholders as prohibitive to their conceptions and visions of progress. A 1998 business guide attempted to convince investors that Mansfield was 'not about pits and racing pigeons' (MDC 1998: 1.1). Conceding that '[y]ou might see the odd cloth cap and a whippet here and there', the guide states that 'if the town has a strong foundation in its past, it also has its eyes on the future' (MDC 1998: 1.1).

From the late 1990s, major regeneration services serving Mansfield began to recognize the economic potential of heritage. Ambitions to utilize the heritage for economic development

have been twofold, and follow a model used by other post-industrial urban centres. First, Mansfield's heritage would form a constituent part of plans to recast Mansfield as a leisure and tourism destination. Local government has harboured ambitions to reinvent the town as a weekend destination since the late 1970s, an economic strategy bewildering to its inhabitants who have a more understated conception of the type of place Mansfield is or should be. A television feature on the original tourism initiative in 1977 highlighted that Mansfield had only one hotel with twelve bedrooms (ATV Today 1977). Four decades later there are only 386 bed spaces. A recent study commissioned by the primary economic development agency servicing Mansfield, D2N2, concluded that 'Mansfield stands out as a large town with very little hotel provision' (2017): 61 per cent of accommodation owners in Nottinghamshire surveyed replied that guests never go to Mansfield and only 5 per cent said that most of their customer base visit Mansfield. Aside from the failure to establish a tourism industry, though, heritage would be used as 'assets' in the place-branding of Mansfield as an investment prospect. Related to this place-promotion, the regeneration of abandoned industrial buildings would rejuvenate a sense of place and 'civic pride' (Mansfield District Council [MDC] 2009: 1).

Promotional and policy documents presenting plans are framed in enthusiastic and progressive language, designed to draw in a disenfranchised reader, to affect vitality and hope around an urban future (Mansfield and Ashfield Regeneration Service 2011). While promotional material claims that Mansfield 'has successfully dealt with the loss of its traditional industries' (MDC 2009), councillors and regeneration officials tasked with delivering these goals are accepting that they have fallen short. Stakeholders interviewed believed that there would be large-scale transformations by now. In reality, there have been 'marginal gains' and there is now a sense of futility, although there has been recent success for the heritage strategy, with a large

18

grant being awarded for the restoration of shop fronts in the Market Place Conservation Area (Mansfield District Council [MDC] 2017). The grant should be welcomed but the retail-focused regeneration programme excludes decaying industrial architectures.

Suggestive of a duplicitous heritage policy, a key issue remains 'a number of derelict (former industrial) sites with a high proportion within the town centre which are in urgent need of regeneration' (MDC 2018b). MDC has been complicit in the material erasure of the town's working-class past, and visible industrial remnants sit outside their valued forms of heritage. Two former industrial sites, Shoe Co. and Mansfield Brewery, were identified as 'Key Development Sites' in 2010 (Mansfield and Ashfield Regeneration Service 2011). Shoe Co. was demolished, and a modern building was built on the site when the factory was deemed too expensive to restore and not appropriate for the prospective redevelopment. Most of the original buildings have been erased at the brewery site. On the demolition of the 150-year-old chimney, affectionately remembered by participants, the MDC portfolio holder for regeneration, who is the current Executive Mayor of Mansfield, commented: 'I have to say I was pleased to see the chimney finally come down. It's been an eyesore for such a long time' (Cuddy Group 2011). In planning guidance for the brewery site, the portfolio holder offered a broader insight into their approach: 'Whilst some may look back to the past and lament at inevitable change, our efforts are best concentrated in looking towards the future – which I believe is much brighter than the past' (Mansfield District Council [MDC] 2008: 2). In 2008, the vision for a regenerated brewery site was that:

[a]ny development should transform the site from an area of urban decay and dereliction into an area that will bring new buildings and attractive public spaces

providing a quality environment where people want to live and work to the benefit of

the local economy. It should enliven the area through a mixed use regeneration

scheme to create a socio-economic focal point in the periphery of the town centre.

(MDC 2008: 7)

The site was earmarked for private sector development from 2011, to be completed in 2015.

However, it is still largely undeveloped, the building of 75 rental homes finally beginning in

February 2019 with no plans for job creation.

Listed industrial buildings, difficult to obtain permission to demolish, stand in states of

ruination. Hermitage Mill, built in the 1790s and Mansfield's oldest industrial mill, decays

behind overgrown bushes on the outskirts of the town. The Town Mill, a watermill originally for

malting, later a cotton mill before being converted into a music venue, has laid dormant for

several years. With austerity increasing homelessness in Mansfield, steel shutters have been

fixed to its windows and doors to deter squatting, and vandalism and arson. Following

relocation, the Metal Box factory has also been erased apart from the clocktower, which

Mansfield's residents would set their watches to. The clocktower stands alone, an anachronism

in the desolate landscape surrounding it.

'The council', instead, prefer to reference the industrial past in abstract, oblique forms

and have installed several pieces of public art at urban gateways. One such piece is 'A Spire for

Mansfield', installed in 2007. The fifteen-metre spire is in the shape of both a feather, in

reference to the mining industry, as canaries were used to test for the presence of dangerous

gases, and a leaf, in reference to Sherwood Forest nearby. The spire also intended to be a symbol

of aspiration for the future. The 'High Heels' sculpture also seeks to catch both the past and

present of Mansfield by memorializing the shoe industry and celebrating its present night-time economy. People are apathetic about the sculptures (BBC News Official Website 2007), passing by on their way to work or the shops, feeling no real ownership of the artwork. Most people I spoke with questioned their value for money, did not see their necessity or did not 'get' what they sought to represent. When I tried to explain that they are supposed to commemorate Mansfield's industries, most people were dismissive, seeing it as small consolation for the loss of actual employment. A former seamstress, whose late husband was a miner, asked rhetorically: 'So thi knock dahn the lovely old buildings but put up a shiny statue? Sez [says] it all, dunt [doesn't] it?'. The sculptures are not the only commemorative or curatorial heritage, however.

Mansfield Museum, which receives most of its funding through local government, has a permanent exhibition – Made in Mansfield – dedicated to Mansfield's industrial heritage. Primarily through information boards, interactive features and artefacts, the exhibit targets children and circumvents the more contentious aspects of Mansfield's past. Curators actively avoid approaching difficult subjects of Mansfield's history, most notably the 1984–85 Miners' Strike but also trade union splits and workplace closures. The lead curator stated that the museum did not 'want to get into all that, it can get too emotive'. For its managers, the purpose of the museum is to display local history in a positive light that is easily digestible to its core audience, children. Also, the museum is also not solely for heritage but serves a wider social function as a day out for school groups, and a welcoming place for individuals to alleviate loneliness. There is little acknowledgement among heritage professionals that by omitting emotionally contentious subjects, namely, deindustrialization, on the grounds that they do not want to enter into the affective politics of the past, they are making a politicized decision to prohibit the cultivation of useable pasts and emotional regeneration. Further, denying

engagement with the 1984–85 Miners' Strike has not only impeded a coming to terms with the past, or a reconciliation to fractured social relations, but has meant that those who went on strike have not had their stories told through state AHD.

Public heritage of the coal industry does appear throughout the Nottinghamshire coalfield. Ubiquitous throughout the coalfields, and something of a critical identifier since colliery closures, are the half-winding wheels that are placed on or near to the sites of former collieries. Attached to many of the half-winding wheels are commemorative plaques displaying the names of those who died at the respective colliery, and marking the dates that the colliery opened and closed. A sculpture, Tribute to the British Miner, sits next to Mansfield's ring road. Former miners in Mansfield do not see themselves in the masculinized and romanticized representation of the heroic miner. The representation erases the realities of mining work on the body, with one participant opining that 'his posture's too good to be a miner'. Concurrently, heritage in the form of public art and sculpture overwhelmingly focuses on the hardship, danger and sacrifice of mining, and romanticized representations of miners' masculinity and virility. Such heritages of the coal industry are safe, receiving little direct or embodied engagement, abstracted from the more nuanced and relatable inheritances connecting generations to their legacies and depriving people in Mansfield of a means to understand their present malaise and where to apportion responsibility (Bright 2012; Macdonald 2008).

The above instances evidence a disconnect of what is aesthetically and historically valued between local government, heritage and regeneration agencies and the people they are supposed to represent. The governmental agencies, with almost a monopoly on public heritage management and provision, have acted to formulate an AHD that perceives nostalgia or the emotional regenerative capacities of heritage as a collective deficiency, an obstruction to

22

Mansfield seizing an entrepreneurial future. In this AHD, nostalgia is not considered a

reasonable or therapeutic palliative to the ongoing deprivation in the town. Industrial heritage,

goes the AHD, should be preserved to placate the former industrial working-class, but the past

should always be conceived as worse – sensorily and materially – than the future, a future

promised but, of course, yet to be realized. At the same time, the inactivity of those in power to

safeguard and utilize industrial heritage has led both to an apathy in terms of the architectural

remains of industrialism, and, more narrowly, to volunteers to formulate their own heritage

projects.

The Nottinghamshire Coalfield Banners Trust (NCBT) was established through

grassroots organization of former miners and concerned individuals from mining families and

includes representatives from both the Nottinghamshire NUM and UDM. NCBT has attempted

to collect and restore as many NUM and UDM union banners as possible. Branch banners

depicted and represented the meaning embedded by mining communities in place, politics and

industry, acting as symbolic and affective materialities. Portraits of forbearers in the national and

local union movement adorned the corners of banners; landscapes of the respective colliery were

often central, as were folkloric imagery specific to Nottinghamshire, such as Robin Hood. The

symbolic and material importance of the banners was demonstrable in the care taken to maintain

and preserve them. Banners were mainly stored carefully away, only being unravelled,

attentively fixed to frames and displayed with pride on special occasions, such as industrial

disputes and the annual Nottinghamshire Miners' Gala. The purpose of the NCBT project is

driven by a feeling of responsibility to preserve the mining past, that the banners held meaning

that should be remembered so that younger generations are aware of where they come from.

It has so far proven impossible for the NCBT to replicate projects in the Nottinghamshire

coalfield such as those noted by Stephenson and Wray (2005). Following the split in the mining

unions, the UDM sequestrated many of the NUM banners. A protracted battle to try and retrieve

them ensued (Stanley 2010). The NUM once requested to borrow the banners to celebrate an

anniversary of the 1984–85 Miners' Strike, only to be met with the response from the former

chairman of the UDM, Neil Greatrex, that: 'I'll rot in hell before I'll do that. Tell them no, they

will never get the banners' (Anon. 2004). When the Berry Hill offices closed after the closure of

the last Nottinghamshire colliery in 2015, the NUM banners were found dumped and decaying

under a stage. Although Mansfield Museum has tentatively agreed to house the banners if they

are restored, the partners behind the project are continually embroiled in disagreements over

strategy and purpose, bringing up historical animosities at every turn. Of the 23 banners currently

obtained, none have so far been restored, with persistent disagreements regarding whose banners,

the UDMs or NUMs, should be restored first or whether collaboration is desirable at all.

Partially in response to the impasse, and because the local government's AHD has denied

them representation, Nottinghamshire's striking minority in the NUM have instead organized to

tell their own stories. Organized through The Notts Ex and Retired Miners Association, members

have conducted several small heritage projects, including an Oral History project with

Nottinghamshire's striking families. In the last few years, The Notts Ex and Retired Miners

Association have embarked upon fund-raising efforts to set up a permanent 'Nottinghamshire

Mining Museum' in Mansfield. Currently a temporary exhibition, the planned museum will

commemorate the 1984–85 Striking Miners', 'telling the story of the "Loyal to the Last"

Nottinghamshire men, women and families' (NUM Official Website 2017). When it was put to

some participants who had worked during the strike that a mining museum is planned, they

appeared sceptical about could be achieved. Although the proud participants had previously

expressed frustration at the absence of industrial heritage, for them, it is 'too late to start dragging up the strike'.

Conclusion

In the new 'Local Plan', recently submitted to central government for approval, MDC has again restated its commitment to Mansfield's heritage: 'Our heritage assets and their settings will have been conserved and enhanced to maintain their important contributions to creating a sense of place and also delivering the regeneration of the district' (Mansfield District Council [MDC] 2018a: 12). Based on the current AHD, there is little to suggest that continuing this illusory strategy will yield any discernible results for working-class senses of emotional regeneration. If it is to do so, it will need to confront not only the injustices of deindustrialization but also the accumulated sense of disaffection and apathy that key stakeholders have been complicit in entrenching – and that themselves feel. Years of neglect have resulted in Mansfield becoming 'a space on the side of the road', where residents struggle to articulate its constitution or identity, an indeterminate place both recognizable and elusive. There is an underpinning affective urge among the people of Mansfield to make sense of itself and to conserve a continuity with its past.

The story of the coal industry in the Nottinghamshire coalfield is particularly fraught. Asking how Mansfield arrived at where it is exposes further difficult questions about the Miners' Strike 1984–85, union splits and colliery closures. The distinct lack of apprehension and engagement with these issues by public heritage providers has left Mansfield bereft of usable pasts for 'redemptive remembering' (Bright 2012) or 'emotional regeneration' (Stephenson and Wray 2005: n.pag.). However, attempts to abstain from the politics of Mansfield's deindustrialization are, in fact, engaging in the politics of silence and dispossession, constituent of a broader feeling of being ignored (Gartzou-Katsouyanni et al. 2018). Traumatic pasts of

deindustrialization and industrial ruination have seeped into the affective atmospheres of Mansfield and with the bodies of the people sharing that space. Industrial heritage, which could have been a vehicle for providing a sense of coherency – an emotional regeneration – to its working-class population, has been actively erased and decayed by an unempathetic stakeholder class, an assessment with which some councillors and regeneration workers reluctantly concur.

The continued ruination has been caused by a disavowal of the productive capacities of nostalgic associations with the industrial past and lack of value instilled in and evoked by industrial heritages. Industrial architectures were embedded with meaning and continue to evoke affective memories, providing Mansfield with its past sense of identity and belonging. These erasures have not only transformed the fixity and familiarity of the landscape, and the opportunity to make visible to younger generations where their parents and grandparents worked, but have removed focal and material sites that enabled people to understand and come to terms with what has happened through deindustrialization. Conceivably, until those pasts have been adequately addressed and reconciled, Mansfield's urban futures, promised by those tasked with its delivery, will not be realized.

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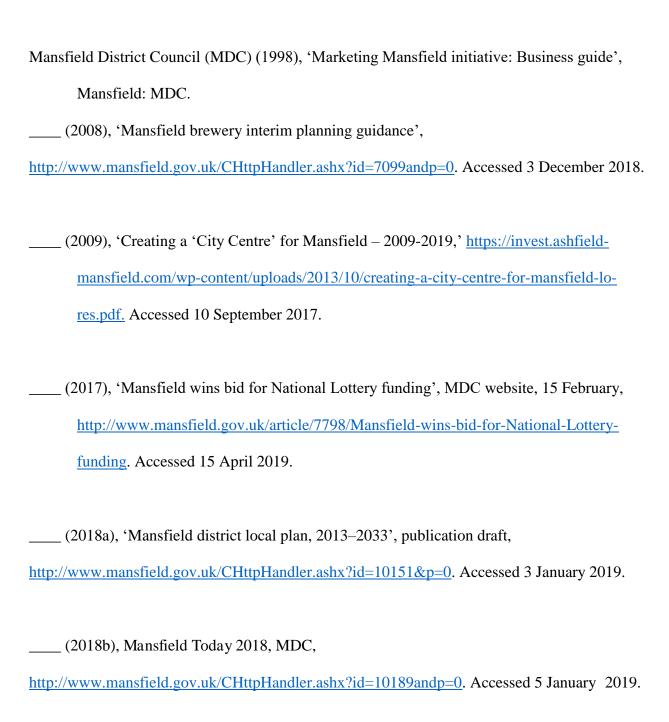
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