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This is the peer reviewed version of the following article: Catterall, Peter (2017) Changing Attitudes to the Past: Lieux de Memoire and Contested Histories, *Political Quarterly* DOI:10.1111/1467-923X.12346, which has been published in final form at:

https://dx.doi.org/10.1111/1467-923X.12346.

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# CHANGING ATTITUDES TO THE PAST: *LIEUX DE MÉMOIRE* AND CONTESTED HISTORIES[1]

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Abstract

What societies choose to remember about the Past can pose challenges for professional gatekeepers in museums, archives and statutory bodies charged with managing national heritage. Recent examples examined here include the inauguration of the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, the 2016 Capability Brown Festival, changing attitudes towards poppies and the Rhodes Must Fall movement. These are explored through establishing a taxonomy of the eight functions *lieux de mémoire* fulfil in the course of reflecting the Past to the Present. Drawing attention to the way in which the imperialism of the Past is buried beneath the pristine lawns of Capability Brown's gardens in the Present, this article concludes by warning that *lieux de mémoire* can provide an aesthetic veneer, glossing over aspects of the Past that societies, or elites within those societies for their own purposes, would rather forget.

Keywords

Heritage, *lieux de mémoire*, Historic England, historical memory, museums

[1] I am grateful to Roger Bowdler, head of listing at Historic England, for his advice and comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

The great insight of Sellar and Yeatman's immortal *1066 and All That* was of course that History is not what happened, '*It is what you can remember*'.[2] More precisely, it is what human societies remember, or choose to remember about the Past. The Past is not, as L. P Hartley would have it, another country, or at least certainly not one that can be travelled to. It instead can only be discerned through its remains, that vast lumber room of sundry materials that somehow survived the passage of time and can selectively be picked over to construct some kind of narrative account to make sense of who we are and how we got here. That selectivity, furthermore, applies not only to what is remembered, but also how it is done so. In other words, there is always a dialogue between the Past as preserved and the contested ways in which a contemporary society chooses to remember, memorialize or indeed forget that Past.

Sellar and Yeatman's second great insight relates to the curation of this collective narrative. At the time they were writing, very much in the context of the trauma of the Great War, the application of professional expertise to this process was a relatively recent phenomenon. History only really emerged as a professionalised discipline in its own right in the second half of the nineteenth century. The same is largely true of those other fields which in one way or another sought both to preserve and interpret the residue of the Past. The later nineteenth century was marked by the elaboration of national museums and the development of curatorial and conservation professions. The disappearance of the lived Past and its reshaping through processes of industrialisation and urbanisation prompted efforts to record vanishing dialects, folk-song, materials and sites. As Pierre Nora put it, these changes broke down collective memories of a seemingly unchanging society, leading instead to the deliberate selective preservation and/or creation, often by elites, of what he called *lieux de mémoire*.[3] The Past was packaged, displayed and to some extent commodified. This endeavour was also officially sanctioned, a little later than in a number of other European countries, by developments in Britain such as the establishment of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts in 1869 or the Ancient Monuments Protection Act 1882. The Past was thus starting to be legally protected, not just in archives and museum artefacts, but also in situ.

By the time Sellar and Yeatman published in 1930, there was accordingly in Britain a professionalized set of experts whose function was to protect, preserve, record and interpret the Past within an increasingly elaborated statutory framework. These experts may have had a duty to the national Past. However, they did and do not control contemporary understandings of it. There is always a tension between the narrative of the Past as established by the academy and popularized by media such as television, and the memory of wider society. The latter is not a matter of what a society officially chooses to preserve or memorialize, but what and how communities and individuals can be bothered to remember. As Sellar and Yeatman found, this memory may not be extensive: two of the four dates they had intended to include

[2] W. C. Sellar and R. J. Yeatman, *1066 and All That: A Memorable History of England* (Stroud: Sutton, 1993 [1930]), preface. Original italics.
[3] Pierre Nora (ed), *Les Lieux de Mémoire* 3v. (Paris: Gallimard, 1997[1989]).

were dropped when 'research done at the Eton and Harrow match....revealed that they are *not memorable*'.[4]

Having adapted their techniques for this paper, admittedly in a slightly less unusual setting, I suspect that 1666 may have been one of the dates they rejected as insufficiently memorable. That year was marked by the Great Fire of London, the catastrophic outbreak of which was recently commemorated in September 2016. Three months earlier, before commemoration events had commenced and raised public awareness, I investigated the extent to which a *lieu de mémoire* of the Great Fire helped to preserve cognizance of it by quizzing morning commuters on London Bridge about the meaning of the Monument as they passed by. My small and not particularly scientific survey - seeking to remain true to the spirit of Sellar and Yeatman - found that 77 per cent of respondents were aware of what the Monument was called. Only 64 per cent, however, knew what it commemorated. Furthermore, Sellar and Yeatman's point about the difficulty with dates was corroborated by this sample: only 36 per cent correctly identified the year of the Great Fire.

It is nonetheless important to point out that awareness that the Great Fire had happened at some point in the Past was near universal among my sample; they just were not sure when or whether the Monument was connected to its memorialisation. Dates and suchlike critical apparatus do not tend to clutter social memory. Nor are they necessary for an engagement with the Past. This raises the issues of what then makes that social memory, why and how such memories have meaning - both at the time they are created and for posterity - and how that meaning changes. How, in other words, does the Present interact with the residue of the Past?

Clearly one such encounter is through the mediation of versions of historical interpretation in educational settings and through popular media. My focus in this article, however, is on the other avenue; the response to what is preserved and encountered within the public sphere through *lieux de mémoire* both large and small. This public sphere can be virtual, including the misrepresentation of footage from the Second World War in political advertising in recent years by right-wing causes - most notably when UKIP used images of what turned out to be a Polish pilot in action during the Battle of Britain. Here, however, I will concentrate instead on physical *lieux de mémoire* found within the built environment.

These are markers and signifiers of socially important associations. Some acquire this symbolic status over time, either because they are adopted as such by communities or receive official recognition in the form of statutory listing managed professionally by bodies such as Historic England. Many, like the Monument, have been deliberately created specifically for this purpose and seek to narrate in three dimensions some kind of relationship to the Past.

Others may have been adapted or modified in order to present that Past to a modern audience. An example is the rise of *The Heritage Industry*, delineated in the 1980s by Robert Hewison in an eponymous book at around the same time that Nora across the Channel was identifying what led to the development of *lieux de mémoire*, and why. Both developments

[4] Sellar and Yeatman, preface.

were prompted by similar forces of rapid change and, in the case of the heritage industry, deindustrialisation. Indeed, Hewison regarded the rise of the heritage industry as resulting from a need to disguise contemporary cultural changes and deindustrialisation by providing a comforting echo of past industrial glory or integrating images of a new vanished Past. As collieries, factories, mills and shipyards closed they were thus replaced by museums that celebrated the industrial Past. As agriculture mechanised so the old crafts of the countryside were conserved in museums of rural life, or indeed in modified stately homes.[5]

These and the artefacts they display within have become the main way in which the public encounter their Past. But however historic their fabric, they are not the Past but a somewhat impressionistic representation of it. They select, they modify, they juxtapose. What they present is usually not so much a narrative as, necessarily, a pastiche. Nonetheless, they have become almost sites of pilgrimage for sections of the public, though offering cultural rather than spiritual merit through encounters with some kind of *faux* authenticity. As Alan Bennett put in it his 2012 mordant satire *People*, much of the National Trust, for instance, is 'like the Church of England but with the sacrament a coffee and walnut cake'. This is all too often a consolatory, safety-valve politics version of the Past: 'That pretend England...so decent, so worthy, so dull'.[6]

This, of course, is not necessarily the effect the custodians of the heritage industry aim at. However, as noted above, they do not control how their representations of the Past are consumed by the visiting public whose appetite for heritage is marked by a 39% surge in visits to such sites between 1989 and 2015. That they end up feeding a nostalgic, sentimentalised and misleading palimpsest of the Past is therefore a constant risk. So is the risk that they will feed certain sentiments in contemporary society, but fail to speak to whole sections of the rest of that society.

The whiteness of the average audience, despite the growing participation of BME and lower socio-economic groups,[7] for the heritage industry is a case in point. If the heritage industry seeks to speak to how we became who we are, then the risk of presenting national or local heritage in an exclusionary way by privileging particular representations and messages is very real. For example, when the first director of the museum of post-war German history in Bonn was asked in 1994 by my father how the millions of *gastarbeiten* were represented therein his response was simply that they helped to build it. It was not that they were misrepresented; initially they were overlooked and totally absent. This reflected amnesia rather than deliberate choice and has since been rectified by displays towards the end of the exhibition, but it still meant that whoever's heritage was originally represented in the *Haus für Geschichte* it was not that of the *gastarbeiten*.

[5] Peter Catterall, 'Towards a Critical Culture: An Interview with Robert Hewison' *Contemporary Record* 5/1 (1991), pp.62-70.
[6] Alan Bennett, *People* (London: Faber, 2012).
[7] Historic England, 'New data uncovers surge in heritage interest in England' (published online, 1 December 2016 at https://historicengland.org.uk/whats-new/news/new-data-surge-in-heritage-interest).

One potential way round this problem is to create specialist *lieux de mémoire* for otherwise excluded groups. The most notable example of this recently was the opening on 24 September 2016 of the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington DC. When Lonnie Bunch was appointed director of this in 2005 he had nothing: no building, no staff, no artefacts, no budget, no desk. Heritage was then actively collected through a series of 'Antiques Roadshow'-style events in 15 cities across the US also designed to engage the public with the vision of this endeavour. By the time the museum opened it had acquired a collection of around 40,000 artefacts, a third of which were donated. These artefacts are the residue of a particular Past of a particular hitherto under-represented section of American society, now made accessible to the public in the museum's displays. They do not in themselves render the human history they seek to evoke legible or - as Sellar and Yeatman would put it - memorable to the vast numbers who have flocked to this new museum since its very successful launch. Instead, it is the human stories they represent; such as the pillowcase donated to Bunch by a woman whose great-great grandmother gave it to her nine year old daughter when she was sold to a different slave-owner, never to be seen by her parent again.

Although this museum rightly seeks to claim the African-American experience as part of the heritage of America as a whole, it thus necessarily reflects a history of exclusion, oppression and abuse of one part of that society by another. The hitherto excluded are now being remembered. Indeed, their story is presented right at the heart of the national narrative on a prominent position on the National Mall. This performative act of memory is not necessarily welcomed by all. As for the nearby Holocaust Museum, security is a significant issue for Bunch. Of the $500m he raised some $20m had to be spent on security because of the contested nature of the heritage this new museum displays.[8]

Telling a painful story can be, and indeed in this instance is intended to be, an act of reconciliation. This museum may thus be representing the residue of the Past, but it is trying to speak to the Present. It is a moot point who that history is more painful for; those who are reminded of the sufferings of their forebears, or those who are reminded of the suffering their forebears inflicted. The success of the National Museum of African American History and Culture in addressing this memory is perhaps most marked by the muted nature of the criticism it has so far faced. In a year marked by the rise of the alt right and appalling racial slurs against President Obama and his family during a generally distasteful Presidential election season, the worst mud the Breitbart standard bearer of that movement could throw at the museum was that it did not represent the conservative African-American supreme court judge Clarence Thomas sufficiently in its galleries.[9] This is about Breitbart trying to steer the reconciliation the museum seeks towards its own interpretation of the Present.

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[8] Lonnie Bunch, talk at University of Westminster, 10 February 2016; 'I too sing America' *New York Times* 15 September 2016 (http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/09/15/arts/design/national-museum-of-african-american-history-and-culture.html?_r=0).
[9] Alex Swoyer, 'African American Smithsonian Museum snubs Justice Clarence Thomas' *Breitbart* (published online 5 October 2016 at http://www.breitbart.com/2016-presidential-race/2016/10/05/african-american-smithsonian-snubs-justice-clarence-thomas/).

As this reflects, *lieux de mémoire* are simply residues of the Past which serve a range of functions in the Present. These are (not in order of importance) to:

1. Commemorate;
2. Celebrate;
3. Console;
4. Identify;
5. Inform;
6. Commodify;
7. Represent;
8. (Provide) Order.

Accordingly, they make statements about the political and/or social values of the society that produced them, recording its achievements or those of particular individuals celebrated - sometimes at their own expense and for their own ends - within it. These statements, however, are interpreted, understood and contested in the Present.

All *lieux de mémoire* in some way express the first of these functions. Indeed, it might be argued that if they cease meaningfully to commemorate, then they also cease to be *lieux de mémoire*. However, it is worth noting that, despite their representation in some way of the Past, only one of these functions, the fifth, directly relates to the role of *lieux de mémoire* as emblems and interpreters of history. Many, particularly statuary and other memorials to individuals, express more the second function, though in depictions of figures of power, they can also speak to the eighth. The fourth is clearly addressed by the National Museum of African American History and Culture. Meanwhile its creation, symbolically at least, integrates the heritage it conveys into the authoritative national narrative along the Mall which speaks of the eight function of *lieux de mémoire*. The third and seventh, meanwhile, are hinted at by Hewison's comments about one of the iconic heritage sites of the 1980s, Wigan Pier. Established in an attempt to revitalise a run-down canalside site, he noted its aim was 'to create....as an emotional experience, a symbolic recovery of the way we were'. Its developers, in the process, sought to capitalise on and commodify that emotional experience, though with limited success. 'The Way We Were', a museum of Victorian life, closed in 2007 and the area is now being again redeveloped.

As this demonstrates, although they may have been prompted by similar factors, there is a subtle difference between the heritage industry and *lieux de mémoire*. Creating something like 'The Way We Were' does not necessarily embed it in the sentiments of the paying public, or the value systems of the official mind in such a way as to turn it into something preserved as a *lieux de mémoire*. Even if such a process succeeds, their representation of the Past can also still prove controversial, as Hewison's reactions in the 1980s to Wigan Pier demonstrated. More recent examples of controversy attending the creation of a *lieux de mémoire* include the statue of Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Harris, unveiled in 1992. Harris's activities as head of Bomber Command during the Second World War makes him a hero to some and a villain to others. Such *lieux de mémoire* are thus problematic either because of

what or who they are felt to be commemorating or because, as with the Women of World War II memorial on Whitehall, of the nature of that commemoration.[10]

Another potential problem with the process of memorialisation is that has a tendency to reduce the complexity of the Past and the multiple actors it involves into a sanitized and monolithic interpretation which deliberately privileges a particular viewpoint or serves a distinctive political purpose. It thus raises issues about what (and who) is being remembered (and forgotten) from the Past, and which groups get to make these choices. An example is the way in which the inaptly named Holocaust museums established in Eastern Europe in recent years occlude the role of their own nationals in that singular event, and instead focus on associating it with the oppressions of Soviet rule in the post-war years.[11] As well as reflecting the eighth function of *lieux de mémoire*, they also thus mark the reduction of the Past to the narrative of the victim.

Alternatively, not all Holocaust memorials serve the political interests of the elites of the host society quite so blatantly. As James E. Young observed, many express merely a bland sterility: 'too often, a community's monuments assume the polished, finished veneer of a death mask, unreflective of current memory, unresponsive to contemporary issues'.[12] This observation could also apply to much of the criticism of the Women of World War II memorial, when women's contribution was finally included among the commemorative *lieux de mémoire* along Whitehall. Women's bodies and experiences were felt to be curiously absent from its attempt to tell their stories. As Young warns, such memorialisation risks proving to be not so much engagement with the Past as using an aspect of that Past primarily to virtue-signal to the Present.

This, of course, should not surprise. The lumber room of the Past can always be raided to serve particular interests in the Present. Heritage is not, as one of the 'Rhodes must fall' campaigners in Oxford put it, 'inert and safe' and somehow divorced from history, even though it may aspire to be. That very campaign indicated that what previous societies have chosen to create and preserve - given the listed status of Cecil Rhodes' statue - may become controversial in the Present.

This episode very much reflected problematic issues around the identity functions of *lieux de mémoire*. It was prompted by protests at the University of Cape Town which started in early 2015. The Oxford campaign centred on the Rhodes statue on the facade of Oriel College and the nearby, unlisted memorial plaque. These *lieux de mémoire* marked Rhodes' contribution to his alma mater and, according to the inscription on the plaque privately erected by Alfred Mosely, 'the great services rendered by Cecil Rhodes to his country'. These 'great services' are

[10] Corinna Peniston-Bird, 'War and Peace in the Cloakroom: The Controversy over the Memorial to the Women of World War II' in Stephen Gibson and Simon Mollan (eds) *Representations of Peace and Conflict* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2012), pp.263-84.
[11] Ljiljana Radonić, 'Post-Communist Invocation of Europe: memorial museums narratives and the memorialisation of memory' *National Identities* (published online 16 January 2017 at http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14608944.2016.1264377).
[12] James E. Young, 'The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials in History' in Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (eds) *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008), p.363.

- perhaps mercifully - not specified therein. With the passage of time, however, it is clear that many might regard their legacy to his country more doubtfully than was the case when Mr Mosely funded this plaque. Encountering daily this celebration of what could be regarded as Rhodes' contribution to colonialism or the development of apartheid was referred to by student campaigners as experiencing 'violence'. Obviously, a plaque is inert in the sense that it cannot directly commit violence on people, but by whitewashing Rhodes' effects it could be argued that it does violence to public memory.

Contrast the *lieux de mémoire* to Rhodes with the treatment of those of his contemporary German empire-builder, Hermann von Wissmann. After Wissmann's death in 1905 a statue to him was erected in 1911 in the centre of Dar es Salaam, the capital of what was then German East Africa. When the city was captured during the Great War by the British the statue was removed and, after the conflict, donated to the University of Hamburg. During the 1960s Wissmann's reputation went from that of a derring-do hero to being seen as an oppressive and racist villain in a West Germany coming to terms with the apparent *Sonderweg* of its recent history and the perceived role figures like Wissmann played in that descent into genocidal violence. In 1967-68 his statue was first attacked and then removed.[13] It now lies in bits, still marked by the red paint thrown on it, and has recently been displayed in the exhibition on *Deutscher Kolonialismus* in the German Historical Museum in Berlin. Its meaning has thus changed and it has become a *lieux de mémoire* not of colonialism but of anti-colonialism.

Rhodes was not the only example of the problematic residue of Britain's imperial history in 2016. That year was also marked by celebrations of the tercentenary of the birth of the landscape designer Lancelot 'Capability' Brown. Brown's undoubted talents nonetheless had a bitter-sweet aftertaste. His achievements were largely funded by the profits from slavery and created landscapes of power and exclusion. Their heritage is thus far from inert. It can, however, lie hidden. Like Young's Holocaust memorials, Brown's landscapes are a kind of aesthetic veneer. It is as if the only residue of the African-American Past available for Lonnie Bunch to display was a tableau of a minstrel show or indeed a display about the achievements of Clarence Thomas: perhaps superficially pleasing to the eye or reassuringly emblematic of African-American social mobility, but totally misleading as a reflection of the experiences that created such an exhibit. This reminds of the risk of the heritage industry under-representing an uncomfortable history. As Kamil Mahmood commented following a visit to Warwick Castle:

> When you have aesthetically pleasing idealised images of British history etched in your mind like picturesque tea parties on sociopathically prim lawns of Downton Abbey-like properties it can be hard to remember slavery happened. Slavery funded this. It literally provided the sugar for those tea and cakes.

Mahmood's reflections were prompted by his involvement in the Heritage Lottery Fund supported Capability Brown Festival. He and other artists were commissioned to reflect on

[13] Ingo Cornils, 'Denksmalturz: The German Student Movement and German Colonialism' in Michael Perraudin and Jürgen Zimmerer (eds) *German Colonialism and National Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2010), pp.197-212.

Brown's problematic legacy. Their observations on 'At What Cost?' Brown worked his magic around the stately homes of England provided a valuable counter-balance to the overall themes of the Festival. However, it took some digging around on the Festival's website to find his comments. Like the foundations of the homes of the poor people Brown moved to create his vistas, Mahmood's response is buried. Visitors to Brown's sites could have their tea and cakes in a 'delusion of Britishness', celebrating these British achievements whilst blithely ignorant of the colonial origins of many of their features as well as of the revenues that financed them.[14] This same wilful patriotic blindness to the downsides of imperialism was reflected in the poll at the start of 2016 that reported 44% were proud of Britain's colonial history and 43% regarded its empire - very much in Sellar and Yeatman's terminology - as a good thing, with only 19% taking the opposite view.[15]

That gardens, including those created by Capability Brown, have been listed since 1983 indicates a decision by the British state that such *lieux de mémoire* have some kind of communal value and should be preserved. My purpose here is not to critique such a decision, but to explore its effects. This very process seems to change the status of the sites that are listed. Like Goodhart's Law - that the process of observing a phenomenon changes the nature of what is observed - the decision to list also seems to change public understanding of what has been listed, turning these gardens into emblems of identity, as Mahmood noted. The problem, as he also points out, is how they are presented in a manner which emphasizes the aesthetic and celebratory over other considerations. These *lieux de mémoire*, far from being inert, are thus necessarily interpreted to their public audience. Meanings, as the Rhodes case shows, can in the process be occluded or contested. The issue of the manner of the interpretation is not, however, generally considered in the legislation on listing, preferable though it generally is to removal. Indeed, that many are privately owned and on private land militates against attempts to impose interpretation.

Instead, the establishment of *lieux de mémoire* reflects supposedly dispassionate standards of preservation managed by professional gatekeepers based on various merit-based criteria. Nonetheless, even these necessarily reflect a certain selectivity. Thus the development of legislation on listing of sites in Britain from 1882 onwards focused upon age and architectural merit. Both of these can be highly problematic criteria. As Sir Josiah Stamp observed in 1933: 'Architecture shares with art, literature, poetry, rhetoric that dead reaction of smug superiority which comes after the lapse of forty to sixty years'.[16]

It has to be said that the disdain for recent buildings Stamp deprecated usually comes more from the public than the architectural profession. It was the readers of *Time Out* - not usually considered among the most conservative in their aesthetic tastes - who in 2005 voted No.1

[14] Kamil Mahmood, 'At What Cost?' (published online, 30 September 2016 at http://www.capabilitybrown.org/news/kamil-mahmood-what-cost).
[15] Jon Stone, 'British people are proud of colonialism and the British empire' *The Independent*, (published online, 19 January 2016 at http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/british-people-are-proud-of-colonialism-and-the-british-empire-poll-finds-a6821206.html).
[16] Gavin Stamp, 'The art of keeping one jump ahead: conservation societies in the twentieth century' in Michael Hunter (ed), *Preserving the Past: The Rise of Heritage in Modern Britain* (Stroud: Sutton, 1996), p.78.

Poultry the fifth worst building in London. It was architects who lobbied for it to be listed. They were knocked back in 2015 at what is supposedly the stage when controversies and any sensitivities around the listing of a *lieux de mémoire* are considered by the minister charged with reflecting on likely political and identity effects, only succeeding a year later. This listing reflected its significance as a landmark post-modern building.

This is an example of the seventh function of a *lieu de mémoire*, to provide an exemplary representation of (in this instance) the architectural history of the Past. Representation, however, as the Capability Brown Festival indicates, is about more that aesthetics or style. That buildings should be remembered for how they were used, as well as how they look, has indeed been recognised recently within the listing process. Thus the Royal Vauxhall Tavern was listed in 2015, recognising its important place in the LGBTQ history of London since the mid-nineteenth century. In the process such listings also draw into the national narrative sites important to the history of hitherto excluded groups. It was followed in November 2016, at the end of Black History Month, with listings of three sites deemed significant to that history: the modernist Brixton Recreation Centre; the bust of Nelson Mandela on London's South Bank and Kevin Atherton's *Platform Pieces* sculptures at Brixton station. Just as Black History Month was created to include the black experience in a history which is otherwise overwhelmingly and misleadingly white, so this marked a inclusion of black sites among the national *lieux de mémoire*. This is not quite a Bakhtinesque subversion of the existing social political order that *lieux de mémoire*, in their eighth function can eloquently support.[17] Like the Royal Vauxhall Tavern, however, this listing is a belated act of representation, as well as compensatory riposte to the imperial narrative represented by Rhodes. Rhodes might not have fallen, but his and Brown's legacy has at least started to be contested by other forms of representation.

Historically the third, consolatory, function of *lieux de mémoire* was arguably more important and prevalent. As in the case of the Monument, *lieux de mémoire* have  often been means of coping with trauma for the survivors. Their immediate meaning, however, dies in due course with those survivors. As Jay Winter puts it, they 'inevitably become sites of second-order memory'. They may be composed of more durable materials than flesh and blood, but without public interest sustained from generation to generation 'these very sites are as transitory as the groups of people who create and sustain them'. As for Winter's Cambridge history students passing without noticing the town's war memorial, the Monument for a substantial minority of my sample was 'simply white noise in stone'.[18]

War memorials nonetheless have periodic social meaning, as sites of public ritual every November in commemoration of the dead of the Great and subsequent wars. As with all such sites, however, their meaning and function is malleable. This is particularly noticeable given the way in which the principal *lieux de mémoire* of the Great War in Britain, the wearing of the poppy, has morphed from an act of consolation towards the fourth function of identity. As

[17] Andrew Robinson, 'In Theory Bakhtin: Carnival against Capital, Carnival against Power' *Ceasefire Magazine*, (published online, 9 September 2011 at https://ceasefiremagazine.co.uk/in-theory-bakhtin-2/).
[18] Jay Winter, 'Sites of Memory and the Shadow of War' in Erll and Nünning, pp.61-76.

the number for whom wearing the poppy is a personal statement of grief has dwindled, its display has instead become a badge of identity, both with the fallen and to the nation they are seen to represent. In the process a bowdlerised domestic version of the Second World War has been sedulously promoted, all about insular values rather than the Allied liberation of Europe from tyranny. Indeed, the poppy as a badge of identity which fits with this reductive history has been aggressively popularized as such by far right groups such as Britain First.

It has for them not just been a way of using a seemingly inert image to insinuate themselves, by using poppy memes as clickbait on social media, into the electronic memories of large numbers of the usually unsuspecting public. They have also sought to colonise the poppy to propagate their far from inert message of hatred. In particular, they have developed a narrative of a risk to the poppy, and by extension to the nation, from those who are by implication disloyal; a group which includes but which is by no means confined to liberal politically correct elites. One example is the emotional blackmail they deploy in urging people to dare to share their patriotic images. This is another instance of a *lieux de mémoire* being used to feed victimhood, in this case from the alleged cultural disdain of those disloyal elements who are portrayed as threatening the poppy and the multifarious ways in which it symbolises belonging. Stories that, for perfectly understandable reasons (for instance, the BBC in 2001 deciding that poppies were inappropriate for presenters on BBC World), in a very few instances poppies have been banned are exaggerated in the echo chamber of social media and blown up into an existential peril to the poppy. As ex-soldiers like James Wharton have pointed out, in the process, the values the poppy was intended to symbolise are subverted. Instead, the attention of the large numbers who often unwittingly share Britain First's poppy memes on Facebook, is deliberately focused upon the alleged menace to those values posed by supposed enemies within.[19] The intention, of course, is to drown out the message of those values by instead engendering fears of cultural threats and anger at those who are felt to be the source of those threats.

As discussed above, *lieux de mémoire* primarily function in a dialogue with the Present. As the contested representation of the poppy illustrates, that dialogue can also be deliberately manipulated for nefarious purposes. It also illustrates that the Royal British Legion, try as it might - even by trademarking the poppy - does not control this *lieux de mémoire* in terms of how memory is understood any more than the official gatekeepers of the national Past control how that Past is remembered. Such matters are significant, because they speak to identities in the Present, and thus to the politics of who we are and how we got here, who is included and what are our values. Heritage, that curated residue of the Past, is thus never inert but always liable to contestation.

The prime function of *lieux de mémoire* is to commemorate, but it is never simply that. Even at the moment of their inception they can express a range of other intentions. One of these is the fifth function indicated above: creators and modifiers of *lieux de mémoire* seek to inform the public. Whether they succeed in this worthy endeavour is another matter. In any case,

[19] James Wharton, 'Britain First hijacking the poppy is a vile insult to veterans like myself' *The Independent* 5 November 2014.

information always involves processes of interpretation and narrativisation. It, like the *lieux de mémoire* themselves, cannot be inert. By what and how they remember these can serve, albeit sometimes inadvertently, the power structures of the Present by both reinforcing identities and offering dominant narratives of the Past. For instance, the delusions of Britishness served up with the tea and cakes on the Downtonesque lawns of England's stately homes: comfort food alongside comfortably packaged identity. As Alan Bennett reflects, such pabulum can dull and de-sensitise awareness of the histories of oppression and exclusion that lie buried underneath. The issue in these contested histories is thus more than just a matter of what, as Sellar and Yeatman would have it, a society can be bothered to remember. It is also that *lieux de mémoire* can provide an aesthetic veneer, glossing over aspects of the Past that societies, or elites within those societies for their own purposes, would rather forget.