

“Living” History: Ghost Tourism in the UK
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Introduction

Britain is at present steeped in practices relating to the spiritual in the form of ghosts. From television channels saturated with programmes seeking the UK’s most haunted locations, to the popularity of contacting dead relatives through celebrity mediums to the ghost walks on offer in many towns promoting themselves as tourist destinations, people are engaging with the dead in ways that implicate both personal and collective history and heritage. In this paper, I focus on the ways in which ghosts are utilised in a secular way by the British tourist and heritage industries, supporting claims of historical authenticity and the right to heritage status, while simultaneously offering tourists and locals the chance to consume the exotic at home through time, rather than via travel over distances to other locales.

Ghosts themselves are cultural artefacts for consumption; whether on ghost walks or through dramatic re-enactments at historical sites or even the ghost trains of seaside piers, ghosts function as souvenir experiences collected by visitors to certain tourist and leisure sites. Traditionally, and in other cultures, ghosts may function to frighten both tourists and locals away from sacred landscapes (and to maintain order through terror in other ways); at present, the tourist gaze in the UK is firmly drawn to the resurrected dead who tell tales of the past. The promise of the mediated terror of ghosts lures tourists to locations that for most might otherwise be viewed as banal and everyday, or at best, historical but boring, and cements certain tourist and leisure destinations as sacred bearers of the past and of the British heritage—not necessarily because of their intrinsic worthiness of such status, but because the presence of ghosts has mapped these places as somehow standing apart from those places not “historical enough” or otherwise important enough to deserve such status.

Furthermore, ghosts at tourist and leisure sites tell stories that cement the divide between an imagined generalised historical past and the present, further fostering a sense of experiencing an exotic otherness through time rather than through travel. As Paul Greenwood (1982: 27) has noted, “with tourism, all viable cultures are in the process of ‘making themselves up’ all the time.” Do ghost tours function in the same way the cannibal tours once did, with the imagined past serving as the other that deserves to be salvaged and collected, and against which we may define the present? If it can be agreed that there are parallels between anthropology and tourism, what are the implications for an anthropology of tourism where souvenirs and experiences to be consumed are not in exotic locales and produced by living others, but at home, dredged from the past, and presented by the dead? If British interpretations of heritage and historic authenticity are forms of sacralizing landscapes, to what degree is the secularised form of the spiritual that is demonstrated by ghost-mediated tourism a mechanism for making sacred certain aspects of British heritage landscapes?

To shed light on the questions—or to perhaps only tease out some further ones—I will present three ways in which ghosts are utilised by the British tourist and leisure.

1. “Authentically Ancient”: Brighton

In Brighton, where I have lived for the past few years, and indeed in many British towns, ghosts are to be found at leisure facilities such as pubs and hotels, and serve the function of justifying these sites’ claims of being, as Holmes and Inglis noted in a similar study of Edinburgh in 2004, “authentically ancient.” But they may also serve the purpose of spelling out the city tourist board’s vision of what might attract tourists and leisure seekers. This is certainly the case in Brighton, where a perceived heritage of visitors seeking pleasure and vice plays directly into present-day visitors’ expectations.

At the three purportedly “oldest” Brighton pubs, smuggler ghosts are relevantly connected with aspects of history that the Council likes to play up for both tourists and locals (many of whom increasingly originate as tourists from London): Brighton is a “dangerous place where you can play dirty” one recent tourist brochure promoting a casino innocuously states. The “Gray Lady” ghost, who has been spotted in the alleyways of the Lanes shopping district, is said to represent a nun who was bricked up alive for not curtailing her passion for a local man, thus relating in a roundabout way to Brighton’s identity as a destination for secrecy and passion during “dirty weekends” away. Local hotels have their fair share of prostitute and smuggler ghosts, as well, not mention victims of their own excess and sexual perversions. Likewise, other attractions around Brighton contain the ghosts one might expect. The Royal Pavilion, now a major heritage attraction for visitors, is not only haunted by the Prince Regent, but also by Queen Victoria (who resided there briefly, but reportedly intensely disliked its eccentric Eastern design and its close proximity to the sea) and by a mysterious servant, who, according to one tourist guide I spoke to “goes about in period dress, [and] who could no doubt tell some sordid tales on the Prince Regent.”

The attempted transformation of Brighton into a modern “luxury” destination in recent years—not to mention its European Capital of Culture bid and its recent change to city status; its official title is now Brighton and Hove--seems to sit easily with the persistent stories of ghosts that attempt to sell it as a site with an authentic claim to a heritage of vice and classic British seaside holidaymaking. The Prince Regent, George IV is, in promotional literature, credited with having set the tone for Brighton as an escapist party town when he built the eccentric Taj Mahal-esque Royal Pavilion, from which he conducted his scandalous yet locally acknowledged affair with the Catholic Maria Fitzherbert and hosted elaborate orgies of food and music that lasted for days. George also popularised Brighton as a tourist destination for outsiders as he was a devotee of “taking the waters” of the sea for health benefits. A painting entitled “Allegory: HRH The Prince Regent Awakening the Spirit of Brighton” by Rex Whistler from 1944 shows a fat, winged and unclothed George sneaking up on a reclining and nude woman bearing a sash with the title “Brighthelmstone” (Brighton’s former name). The implication seems to be that Brighton’s heritage and identity began with the Prince Regent’s arrival in town, and that heritage of indulgence, debauchery, and holiday-making by the sea continues into the present, with the city’s leisure and tourist sites continuing to cater to these aspects.

As in many towns that are seeking to modernise while maintaining a distinct identity derived from a particular imagined heritage, in Brighton, centuries-old churches are transformed into yoga studios and experimental art galleries, while the main shopping and tourist districts of the Lanes and North Laine feature cobbled streets and alleyways in which cutting edge design and “lifestlye” shops sit easily among new age and alternative religious goods shops (the secularly-presented experience of spirits of the past thus in an indirect way contributing to tolerance of new forms of spirituality that are inexorably linked to consumption both in and of the present). Brighton’s representations of its past, which often include tales of ghosts, and its contemporary culture sit together in a mix of old and new, with both contributing to the city’s identity of over-indulgence (from George’s legendary parties to Fatboy Slim’s impromptu and much-locally-celebrated “rave” of 2000 people on the beach in 2002), tolerance of alternative lifestyles (the Prince Regent’s own affair and illegal marriage to Ms. Fitzherbert counting as such), criminal activity (originating with the pirates and smugglers who used the Red Lion pub to Graham Greene’s representation of the city in Brighton Rock and perhaps continuing to Brighton’s major problem with heroin users and dealers today), and old-fashioned British seaside leisure (beginning with “taking the waters” and later the entertainment available on the beach and the two piers, continuing to the proliferation of alternative health treatments, “luxury breaks” and “stag” and “hen” nights of today).

The fact that the dead are resurrected at tourist and leisure sites to remind locals and holiday-makers of the provenance of their site-specific pleasure does not mean, however, that there is a perceived continuum between past and present. As I shall presently show, ghosts at British tourist and leisure sites nearly always remind those who experience them of a break with the past. In the case of Brighton, ghosts may justify the city’s “authentically ancient” identity as a landscape of pleasure and vice; however, ghosts are nearly always tortured and unfortunate souls: though they may have sought the same pleasures as modern-day visitors and locals, the specific ghosts that make appearances are ones for whom these pleasures have led to grisly ends or otherwise unfortunate fates. These tales do not function as warnings to frighten tourists off their pleasure and vice-seeking. Rather, ghosts are temporal others in the sense that though they may have shared our same vices, because of their existence in some generalised and exotically dangerous past, they paid for them dearly. Their resurrection at tourist and leisure sites therefore serves to remind visitors that the past is an “other” time, and an irrational one in contrast to the rational modern comforts now on offer thanks to modern-day living. Their representation serves to authenticate the particular heritage-identities that modern towns and cities choose to use to appeal to tourists.

2. Touring With Dead People: Ghost Walks and the Case of Derby

Ghosts are not merely used by the British tourist and heritage industries to authenticate heritage and identity of places to visitors. With the increasing popularity of guided walks through cityscapes, the presence of ghost stories, and even ghost guides (played by actors) at heritage sites, ghost tourism is succeeding in using the spectacle of the ghost to remap and redefine spaces accordingly and for the benefit of further attracting visitors to come and consume. According to Holmes and Inglis (2004), ghost walks are merely a way of presenting facilities and conducting tourists around them. Brighton’s one regular ghost walk is a child-friendly affair that hits the

major tourist locations of the city, including the main shopping centres, and is run once a month with assistance from the local Council. Its guide is an amateur historian, Glenda Clarke, who wears plastic cartoon ghost earrings and passes out candy “for energy” halfway through the walk. The London Walk Company offers no less than ten ghost walks weekly, and customers have the choice of taking in attractions such as pubs, theatres, and shopping areas along the way. In Edinburgh, the Scottish Whiskey Heritage Centre runs a tour narrated by the Master Blender’s ghost, with the legacy of the alcoholic spirit of Scotland buoyed by the presence of a more other-wordly type of spirit. And although ghostly tourist experiences tend to be more “grisly” Edinburgh, as I shall show below, that city’s past, like the histories of Brighton and London, is presented selectively, and to some degree white washed through ghostly tales; we may delight in the horror of hearing about the plight of plague victims, tortured prisoners and murdered prostitutes, but few attempts are made to link these events to political and social factors governing pre- and early-modern urban life. These events existed in a distant and other past, which has no bearing on the present. According to Holmes and Inglis (2004: 117), “this omission is not surprising, for the phantom is an emblem that from the 18th century onwards has figured as a means of glossing over the more prosaic aspects of modern, urban Britain.”

And yet ghost tours do present the topography of urban spaces as linked to (at least physical or architectural) previous modes of being. In Edinburgh, tourists may get the impression that almost every imaginable space has been filled with ghosts. In other cities as well, alleyways, old paths, and forgotten buildings re-enchant visitors with their the dead. Even more “modern” cities are not immune to ghosts. Glasgow, long seen as a city exemplifying the rationalised industrialism of the 19th Century, never rated a mention in tourist guidebooks, but has recently been transformed by the use of ghost tours. Mercat, the extremely lucrative Edinburgh ghost tour company, started the first “horror tour” there in 2003, and competitors were quick to follow suit. James Duncan (1990: 17) has likened such urban spaces to texts that change even as they are being read; the urban landscape is “an ordered assemblage of objects, a text [that] acts as a signifying system through which a social system is communicated, reproduced, experienced, and explored.” Increasingly, it is ghost tourism that plays a part in ordering the this assemblage, with new myths and senses of heritage being created as tales of the past are whitewashed, re-packaged and passed off as consumable heritage “experiences.”

The town of Derby is a good case study of the way in ghosts have been resurrected to rebrand an city which, in this case, otherwise had little or no identity to lure tourists. According to Richard Felix, Derby’s head of tourism in the early years of this century (he’s now the historical investigator on the TV programme *Most Haunted*), the strategy in the late 1990s was to re-brand the town as a heritage destination steeped in history because of its particular location at the “crossroads” of England—geographically, Derby lies in the very centre of England. Eric Davis (1998) and others have pointed out that crossroads are particularly potent locations; in Greek mythology, they are spaces where various forces and factions may meet and pass and they are also often the site of theoretical “ley lines” of supernatural energy. A crossroads is also liminal space that may not contain an inherent identity, but rather relies upon outside forces to define its nature. In a roundabout way (no pun intended), this is exactly what has happened to Derby in the present. The city may well have a

viable and vibrant past based on its role as centre of trade and commerce due to its location in the centre of England, but in the present, it is simply another mid-sized British town with the usual examples of old preserved architecture. So it was Richard Felix's responsibility to turn Derby's most distinguishing feature into a saleable identity.

Because Derby is said to sit on ley lines, and because it functioned as a trading crossroads in past centuries, it is now said to be a "melting pot and meeting point of tragedy, terror, and despair" (according to one Derby ghost walk brochure) – key ingredients for the manifestation of ghost. Richard Felix has said that he first realised the tourist (and money-making possibilities) of Derby when he heard they had a haunted building in town. His first reaction, as a former businessman, was "create a ghost walk—make some money!" Richard put his proposition to the Derby City Council, who were responsive and gave him funds to develop the idea, since Derby, like Glasgow, was never a town that featured prominently in tourism guidebooks.

Derby now has a remarkable number of ghost-laden sites and activities. No less than twenty haunted places are listed on just one of the many promotional websites for Derby's ghost tourism, and at last count, there were seven ghost walks regularly run by the Derbyshire Heritage Centre. The Derby Gaol features overnight sleepovers that are popular with hen and stag night parties—"it's the 'free spirits' that draws 'em in!" according to Richard. Derby was first "officially" recognised as the "ghost capital of England" for 2003, a title "authenticated" by representatives from the television show *UK's Most Haunted*. According to Richard, "York wasn't happy when Derby was authenticated as having more haunted cases!" However, York was awarded the title in 2004, prompting Richard to vow to "work harder" at promoting Derby's ghosts, hinting that the title has much more to do with tourism and capital than any sort of supernatural or spiritual concerns. Derby has now officially changed its tourism tag line to "the crossroads of history" (although Richard Felix has joked that the council had rejected his choice of "the dead centre of England"). At a talk in 2002 about Derby's budding popularity as a tourist destination based upon its ghost tourism, Richard Felix said, "it's done wonders for the city of Derby, and it's not doing me any harm!"

Richard has spoken about why he thinks ghosts "make good tour guides." "Ghosts," he said, "are nearly always people who were charismatic in life, and they therefore make good celebrities in death." People who "leave an impression" in life also do so in death, and are therefore more likely to become ghosts, and this could be seen as verified by the many "famous" ghosts documented in popular culture. Ghost celebrities, like living ones, help illustrate Guy Debord's theories of the spectacle, in that they falsely fulfill the need for any independently formulated personal or national identity. Mary Queen of Scots, for example, "appears to stand as a romantic symbol for Scotland's loss of independence and power, providing visitors with a strong example of the fusion of mystery and tragedy which they might expect of Scotland" (according to Holmes and Inglis' 2004 study). But "subaltern" ghosts who are easy to comprehend as impoverished other, and also as primitive and unappealing also abound (i.e., the plague victims of Mary Kings Close in Edinburgh, which I'll discuss shortly). The same is true in London, where ghost walks are as likely to feature as their spectral protagonists celebrities of literature, the stage or even notorious criminality, as they are nameless prostitutes and orphans.

However, according to Richard Felix's celebrity ghosts theory, ghosts such as Shakespeare, or at least his put-upon wife Anne and their children, should be popping up all over Stratford-Upon-Avon to reiterate the more dynamic aspects of the UK's history, and yet Stratford has relatively little in the way of a ghost tourism industry. But perhaps they haven't been resurrected because Stratford doesn't seem to need ghosts to promote it to tourists or to establish its heritage. The Royal Shakespeare Society is doing well at the moment, and other tourist attraction and gift shop managers, when I surveyed them in 2005, told me they were doing well, despite no formalised ghost tourism to help buoy their trade: "though I guess we do have that option for later if we run into money troubles," one tourist information centre worker told me.

As for the consumers of ghost tourism, walks and other activities provide those with differing agendas a chance to come together to consume a common activity in a common locale. Those whom Victoria Smith (1986) has called "historical tourists" are happy because they feel they are gaining historical and cultural knowledge of a place or route, or historical person, while those tourists who have more recreational desires are also happy, since walks offer an interactive experience, not just the imparting of knowledge. All of this is possible because history itself has become commoditised in the heritage and tourist industries. To quote Arjun Appadurai (1986: 15), "Dealings with strangers provide contexts for commoditization of things that are otherwise protected from commoditization." With ghost tourism, the strangers are not just living tourist guides and paying participants, but those resurrected ghost-representatives of the past recreated in the present. Ghost walk participants may tour, sample, collect and consume cultures as well as time periods, without committing themselves to anything other than their own particular agendas.

3. "Living" History: Re-enactments and Heritage

In this final section of my paper, I want to examine one of the more intensely interactive forms of ghost tourism, the staged re-enactment, generally found at sites deemed heritage attractions. My experiences at numerous heritage attractions in London alone indicate that children and adults alike enjoy hearing light-hearted tales of plague-victims suffering mental and physical pain as they and their family members slowly die, accounts of wrongly accused citizens experiencing unthinkable acts of bodily torture and mutilation in prison, and the immense poverty and strife of those sentenced to work houses—and I have seen all of these tales resurrected as part of a re-enactment featuring ghosts of these victims. Some heritage theme parks, such as the London Dungeons, are even based upon such tales. Jennifer Craik (1997) has described how "artificial sites," such theme parks loosely based upon social history, tend to be much more popular than "authentic" sites, which supports Cohen's (1988) assertion that tourists aren't necessarily searching for mimetically authentic accounts of history, but merely enough of an experience to give them cultural capital and a sense of heritage.

Two examples illustrate this point. The first, Warwick Castle, which bills itself as "Britain's greatest Mediaeval [sic] experience," premiered its own ghost-heritage re-enactment attraction, Ghosts Alive in 2004. Privately run by Tussaud's Attractions Limited, Warwick Castle does not have the private donations or volunteers of similar

sites run by National Heritage, and it must rely on more than its history to attract paying customers. During the summer, fireworks displays and pop concerts are held on the grounds, while throughout the year, displays of falconry (billed as “Birds of Prey Experiences”) are held at weekends. The castle also holds regular re-enactment dinners, at which participants are served “authentic” Medieval food by employees in period dress. In 2005, Warwick Castle premiered another attraction, Monarchy and Murder, which is aided by the wax figures for which the Tussaud’s company is known. Following the legacy of attractions such as London Dungeons and the Tower of London, history is filtered through tales of violence, murder and scandal, with wax mannequins as visual aids. The Ghosts Alive show, on the other hand, uses the already-dead characters portrayed by living actors to speak about history. According to a promotional flyer for Ghosts Alive:

Warwick’s Ghosts return to haunt the Castle in this spooky, live-action experience. Stabbed by his manservant in 1629, the spirit of Sir Fulke Greville is said to haunt the Castle to this day - experience this terrifying re-enactment of his grisly death that mixes live actors with spooky sound effects and spine-tingling visual trickery. Not for the faint hearted...

Ghosts Alive is narrated by an actor portraying Sir Greville; Greville speaks both about his living years, and the events following his death, events to which he, as a ghost, has been privy. As the promotional brochure describes, he also helps re-enact his own death with other actors who are playing the parts of ghosts playing the parts of the living. The experience is humorous, not least of which because of its conflation of the uncanny nature of watching the living play the dead, play the living, but it also contains some frightening moments, mostly produced by sound and lighting effects and sudden and unexpected appearances of the actors. This re-enactment and portrayal of historic events is meant to allow the dead to communicate with the living to give visitors a sense of the Warwick Castle’s myths and heritage.

John Peters (1999) has described how history in general is a communication with the dead, but that it is one in which the reception is never perfect. The dead are always speaking through translators—in the case of Ghosts Alive, the writers and actors of the re-enactment. In the broader leisure and heritage industries of the UK, those translators are all those people involved in John Urry’s “tourist gaze”: pub proprietors, National Heritage, private tourist attraction companies such as Madame Tussaud’s, “living history” actors, ghost walk leaders, not to mention the consumers of the events produced by these other gazers at tourist versions of history and heritage. Stories about ghosts increasingly play a part in this gaze, and confirming Micheal Crang’s and Dean MacCannell’s concerns that history is increasingly billed as a visual and experiential affair, heritage sites are increasingly featuring the past as a violent spectacle played out by the resurrected dead.

A second example is that of Edinburgh in which a handful of walks and re-enactment experiences go far beyond in the quest to present an interactive spectacle. One of these tourist experiences is the City of the Dead Tour, in which participants are locked in a tomb, and during which someone nightly seems to pass out or faint, or even be scratched, kicked or pushed by the ghost of the tomb’s deceased inhabitant, Sir McKenzie. The Website for the city of the dead tour contains an ongoing archive of such these encounters, thus perpetuating its own heritage of horror far removed from

any of the historically based heritage also on offer in Edinburgh's many ghost tourism experiences.

Mary Kings Close, also in Edinburgh, is an underground series of streets "buried" under the city during the plague in the 17th century, and which has been transformed into a heritage attraction that uses ghosts and macabre historical tales to draw in tourists and promote Edinburgh's heritage. Mary King's Close is entered through a gift shop selling whiskey and other items associated with Scotland, and visitors await a guide to take them down into the Close itself, a series of winding paths, alleyways, and reconstructed dwellings and shops. Unlike Warwick Castle, the Mary Kings Close guides (there are generally six employed at any one time) are actors portraying an Edinburgh resident of some unspecified century past; while not specifically portraying a ghost, the guide nonetheless is a resurrected member of the past whose narration implies a temporal omnipresence during various events of the last three centuries. However, the guide-character also hints to visitors his or her fear of going down into the Close due to the ghosts that may be lurking there, given his or her knowledge of the "horrifying events" that occurred there.

As visitors wind through the Close, the guide dramatically relates how in 1645, a year when nearly a third of Edinburgh's population died of the plague, the city government quarantined all the city's plague victims into the Close, where "they were locked in, left to rot and die, their screams echoing throughout the city" (according to the guide on my tour in August of 2003). As the corpses of plague victims began to rot, the smell of decay filled the streets of Edinburgh, and according to my guide's account, two butchers were sent in to clean up the mess. Being butchers, the men decided to cut the decaying bodies into sections, sorting heads, arms, torsos and the like, until the Close was cleaned up. Needless to say, such a collective and traumatic event easily fits the previously described bill for the occurrence of ghosts, and Mary Kings Close plays this up in their promotional literature, while throughout the tour of the site, the guide constantly hints at the threat of the ghost of one of the butchers lurking in a dark corner. Indeed, towards the end of the tour, a man dressed as a grim reaper and representing the ghost of a butcher emerges into a room, eliciting squeals of fear from the audience.

Mary Kings Close, according to tour guides, was essentially covered over by the City Chambers in the 19th century because it was "so haunted that no one would move there." Other records show that the dwellings there were merely more trouble to rehabilitate at the time than they were worth (not to mention the city needed a more central location for its Chambers), so it wasn't until tourism and heritage became an even cash cow for Edinburgh in the latter part of the last century that the Close was uncovered and refurbished as a "period" location. In any case, of all the heritage attractions I have visited in the UK, it is the one that most exploited its tragic past. At one point, visitors are taken into a nursery room where the deaths of a baby and her parents from the plague are described in harrowing detail. Later, a mannequin graphically depicts the amputation of a leg, as the guide segues rather gleefully into the story about the undertaker-butchers. Bodies and their mutilation and trauma, as at other heritage attractions, play a major role in heritage sites that promote their macabre pasts. Again, ghosts as the lingering aftermath of such physical trauma serve as the "in" to such tales of "terror-heritage," safe experiences that both reflect the present in a positive light, but also allow escape from the real-life accounts of terror,

war and other unpleasant realities of modern life.

It is all too easy to make light of the various executions of political prisoners at the Tower of London, or to revel in the gory details of life as a bankrupt commoner thrown into Clink Prison. At some heritage and leisure sites, stories about ghosts contribute to the romantic vision of a place. At Preston Manor outside of Brighton, most of the ghost stories are sad rather than eerie or violent. They deal with separated lovers, loyal servants, and with a victim of World War I returning from the dead to comfort his bereaved daughter. But at others, there is a sweeping trend of painting the past as a violent and bad place. At Warwick Castle and other heritage sites with re-enactment “experiences,” the violent stories are played up in favour of romantic ones. Not only are such tales popular with children, but they present the past as something with which we no longer have to live, as an “other” way of living that does not bear on the present except as a contrast. Heritage is something “cool and violent!” according to a friend’s young son who saw *Ghosts Alive*, and “wicked” (a perhaps multi-layered choice of word from a pre-teen girl on one of my tours of *Mary Kings Close*), but not something for which we must be responsible. As David Lowenthal has noted, we re-create the past in the present and enjoy it because we’re not responsible for it, and we may define our heritage as stemming from—and yet in opposition to—the horrific versions of the past presented at such sites.

Some Conclusions

It is not a desire just for authenticity—even acknowledged “fake” authenticity that stems from re-enactments and ghosts stories—that drives heritage tourists and leisure seekers to seek out a past against which to define the present, but perhaps there is, as Robert Hewison (1987: 11) has described, a nostalgia for a generalised past that seems much simpler than life in the present. Hewison has described how heritage has often been linked with “bad history.” He gives the examples of the Heritage Foundation in the US, founded in the 1970s and which continues to promote conservative political philosophy on an international scale, and the Heritage USA theme park, a Christian fundamentalist/historical attraction. Hewison (1987: 47) believes that after the Second World War, there was a break with the past, and that nostalgia is a response to the present and a “denial of the future.” Nostalgia, and often the desire to create heritage, is thus “profoundly conservative.” Rather than defining the present in opposition to the past, heritage gives people a sense of identity that they may draw upon, albeit in watered down ways where violence and tales of the macabre are concerned. Conservatism, with its emphasis on tradition and order, appeals heavily to the past to justify it in the present.

It is not just that nostalgia is linked with conservatism; often conservatism is a last-ditch attempt to produce a sense of culture and identity in a society that feels threatened or on the decline. Patrick Wright (1985: 1) describes returning to the UK from North America in 1979 and feeling as if he had “stumbled into some kind of anthropology museum;” at that time, the national atmosphere under Thatcher’s leadership was filled with nostalgia and a preoccupation with past mistakes. Wright describes how stories are often used in such contexts to shape a society’s culture and to order representations of itself. Such stories are judged by their relevance to what is happening now, and therefore their allegiance is always to the present, even if they are depicting events of the past. Ghosts, therefore, are not merely representations of the past, but agents in the present. According to Hewison (1987: 47):

Through the filter of nostalgia we change the past, and through the conservative impulse we seek to change the present. The question then becomes what kind of past have we chosen to preserve and what does that say about our present?

In some cases, ghosts are simulacra, objects not representing actual historical events, but fictional versions of them based on some event in the past that no one can even remember accurately. As Kevin Walsh (1992: 103) has pointed out heritage sites themselves are often “spurious simulacra,” with re-enactments not necessarily giving a sense of the past but contributing to a sense of historical amnesia. Time and again, my research of the actual events upon which ghost stories at heritage sites are based yielded, at best, ambiguous and uncertain accounts. It is the present versions of stories that therefore matter and which comment much less on history than they do on the present and future. As Holmes and Inglis (2004) note, the past is malleable because its inhabitants are no longer here to contest it. Subalterns are written out of the past in favour of the voices of actor-guides portraying versions of them favourable to tourists and other people in the present. The communication between past and present is defined not by historians, or others with a stake in claiming events and landscapes of the past, but by the heritage industry and the desires of consumers.

Mike Crang (1996: 415) has described how the heritage industry, in its focusing on an eclectic mix of artefacts and replicas, has merely succeeded in producing a surface of “historicality” rather than an understanding of history. “Preserved buildings,” he writes, “are not seen so much as sites for interpretive practices as façades that represent an appearance of ‘pastness.’” Echoing concerns of Walter Benjamin and later Umberto Eco and many others that visual and other sensory modes seem to be replacing “auratic” or historical modes of authenticating, Crang makes the point that history has much more to do with consumption than with truly engaging with the varying versions and implications of the past. Encountering heritage through “living history” experiences becomes a way of gaining cultural capital, enabling those in charge of presenting the chosen heritage to gain monetary capital. “Heritage managers,” such as the National Trust and National Heritage, however, have good reason for wanting to procure capital, as maintenance fees at heritage sites are expensive. Peter Folwer (1992: 82) has rather sentimentally stated that heritage jobs were once “marked by national pride,” with workers and volunteers acting as custodians of the past. Now, he laments, they have to concentrate on “counting bums on seats.” To Fowler, the National Trust’s 2 million volunteers are nothing more than salespeople, not conserving what is already there, but promoting and embellishing it to gain more capital to make history and heritage evermore consumable.

As landscapes of consumption, “haunted” heritage and leisure sites and routes may also homogenise culture in such a way that they consume their own contexts as well. Restoration, according to RD Sack (1992), freezes places in time, whereas before they were constantly changing through history and diverse perspectives on the past. As Adorno (1996) wrote, “Anyone seeking refuge in a genuine, but purchased, period-style house, embalms himself alive.” Heritage restorations, and the re-enactments and re-mappings of history that occur through a resurrection of the dead (who may be ghosts but may also be living actors playing dead people), cause contexts to be sacrificed and history to stand still in the present and in the future. Ghosts, as well as

tourists, are sentenced to participate in the same repeated (and paid for) narratives for all time.

As I have touched on above, one appeal of heritage sites to visitors is that the past is made more homogeneous and easily comprehensible than the present; it is simply a digestible “yesteryear.” Fowler has described the tendency of both heritage and leisure sites playing up their age to demonstrate “olde world” syndrome: that is, buildings are restored as “Georgian, “Regency,” “Victorian,” or sometimes simply listed as “period” structures. Whatever the label, they are relegated to a homogenous past, where buildings are restored to perfect prototypes, romanticised versions of the original objects that they are representing. As Robert Hewison (1987: 138) puts it, tourists have a choice between “the decaying present” and “an ever-appealing past.” People’s choosing to engage with such a past as tourists and leisure-seekers has funded the UK’s heritage industry, and the industry now looks for ever-more inventive ways to sell and perpetuate itself. Ghost tours render the past appealing not because it contrasts with any decaying present, but because ghosts present a form of palatable terror and decay that stand in great contrast to actual threats of terror seen and social demise featured daily in the news, at the same time making us grateful for living in the rational present.

Ghosts are used to lure visitors and re-enchanted, or in some cases, enchanted, them with the past. Ghost characters represent the threat (or promise) of terror and are used to enchant people into “historically sacred” sites in order to pleasingly terrify into them the significance of said sites and to warn them in some way of the potential demise of society if the lessons we can learn from salvaged and usually generalised aspects of history (that is, heritage) aren’t heeded. Lessons are often not of any religious spiritual nature, but often touch on the sacredness of rationality and science: ie, the importance of disease control (Mary King’s Close plague tales), of despot rulers and corrupt politicians (ghosts of the Tower of London or most places with royal or governmental connections), the dangers and modern necessities of vice and consumption (as in Brighton). These salvaged tales and reminders are re-packaged and presented as spectacle, ready for tourists to conserve as souvenirs of certain spaces, but also of time and an imagined and assembled “heritage.”