WORKSHOP REPORTS

The project organised and held its first consultation workshop with the advisory group and other invited participants in June 2012. This was followed by two 'public' development workshops in July and August 2012. A final consultation workshop is planned for October 2013.

Consultation Workshop

1. Engaging wider publics: Black presences and the legacies of slavery and colonialism in rural Britain

Tuesday 19th June 2012, The Hemsley, University of Nottingham.

See appendix for programme and list of participants.

Summary

Held on Tuesday 19th June 2012 at the University of Nottingham, the project's first consultation workshop brought together members of the advisory group with other academics, local historians, heritage professionals and community group representatives. The aim of the workshop was to explore both the potential and the difficulties of engaging wider publics with the histories and legacies of slavery and colonialism as connected with rural Britain.

The workshop was attended by 17 people, including 6 members of the project's advisory group: Celeste-Marie Bernier (University of Nottingham), David Callaghan (SCAWDI), Andrew Hann (English Heritage), Cliff Pereira (independent scholar), Alan Rice (UCLan), and Heather Smith (National Trust).

The day was structured around three sessions:

1. Rural sites of Black presences and the legacies of slavery and colonialism
2. Experiences and practices of engaging rural and BME audiences
3. Community engagement and memory work in rural UK: a way forward?

Opening remarks

Seymour and Jones introduced the aims and objectives of the workshop and the broader AHRC project, and then invited participants to introduce themselves. Key concerns/issues raised by participants during these opening remarks:

- Collaborative nature of this kind of work
  - Giving space to 'community voices' in exhibitions: role of 'broker' between collections and people.
  - Theme of belonging – who counts as public &/or 'community'.

- Multiplicity of histories
  - Issues around memorialisation: memory and amnesia; presence and absence.
  - Issues around representation of Black histories at 'traditional' British heritage sites.

Session 1: Rural sites of Black presences and the legacies of slavery and colonialism

This first session comprised three short presentations each followed by a Q&A session, and then a broader group discussion. The session invited participants to consider the potential of addressing the project's key concern of rural connections to slavery and colonialism through particular kinds of sites, e.g. country houses.

Andrew Hann, English Heritage, 'Country houses': Drawing on examples from the work of English Heritage, Hann discussed how Black presences and the legacies of slavery and colonialism could be explored at certain country houses, e.g. via the global economy, through the lives of particular servants, through décor and visual and material culture. He indicated that in a study of 30 of its properties, English Heritage has identified eight with distinct Black presences or slavery connections. On being questioned about English Heritage's steps towards acknowledging these legacies, Hann suggested that new information would be incorporated via the training of guides, the revision of guidebooks, and by updating some displays.

Alan Rice, University of Central Lancashire, 'Slavery and Memorials in a Provincial port': Rice gave an account of some of the legacies of slavery that have been subject to community memorialisation projects in and around Lancaster, e.g. the Slave Trade Arts Memorial Project, and the plaque for 'Sambo's Grave' at Sunderland Point, which continues to be visited and decorated by local children. In doing so, he touched on such subjects as post-slavery tourist economies, as well as highlighting tensions that can arise from the multiplicity of narratives associated with particular material legacies of slavery.

Susanne Seymour, University of Nottingham, 'Where else? Sites of rural industry, agriculture & religion': Noting that country houses and ports have already attracted a certain level of critical attention, Seymour addressed the potential for further exploring Black presences and the legacies of slavery and colonialism through less-regarded sites of rural industry, agriculture and religion, e.g. textile mills, farmed estates, and churches. In doing so, Seymour raised the question of how best to approach historic linkages to slavery and colonialism in the UK countryside – would a focus on particular sites also allow a consideration of embodied connections beyond a particular location? Other sites suggested by participants included circuses, carnivals and travelling boxing shows; subjects with more mobile trajectories were also discussed, including BME missionaries, soldiers and prisoners of war, as well as colonial trade goods such as coal, sugar and palm oil.

Session 2: Experiences and practices of engaging rural and BME audiences

The second session comprised four presentations each followed by a Q&A session, and then a broader group discussion. The session invited speakers and participants to reflect on their experiences of engaging rural and/or BME audiences in heritage and memorialisation projects.

Cliff Pereira, independent scholar, 'Communities and local governance: Bexley, its Hidden Histories and the landscape': Referring to his work on the 'hidden histories' of Bexley, Pereira drew out some of the complexities involved in public engagement projects involving BME audiences, highlighting the potential significance of contemporary local politics for the creation and performance of any kind of BME community cohesion. In doing so, he argued that heritage needs be taken to publics before asking them to come to particular heritage sites in order to create a 'safe' environment.

Heather Smith, The National Trust, 'Rural heritage organisations and their publics': Acknowledging that The National Trust has not undertaken the same level of research as English Heritage into Black presences at its properties, Smith talked about the Trust's 2007-11 'Whose Story' initiative, as well as her hopes for implementing such an approach at a national level. In doing so, she highlighted the contested nature of such work, amongst both the Trust's personnel and its publics, noting for instance that their 2007 magazine edition on slavery connections elicited mixed responses, e.g. certain donor families didn't want such connections to be made public; others thought that the NT were making a big issue out of a minor connection. Smith also raised important questions about the legacy of fixed-term initiatives: What happens once the project team has disbanded? How do we maintain energy for such work in a time of austerity? One answer offered was to build partnerships with community researchers in order to build a knowledge base.

Lubaina Himid, University of Central Lancashire, 'Art interventions in heritage sites': Drawing on her experience as an artist working with museums and other heritage sites, Himid reflected on what it's like to act as a broker. Presenting artistic interventions into heritage as a kind of a conversation that enables a 'riskier' approach to the material fragments of the past, Himid touched on the problematic nature of such projects as well as their potential. In doing so she referred to the imaginary and 'fictitious' elements of such art interventions that raise questions of belonging and ownership, loss and reclamation. It was noted in discussion with other participants that artists are perhaps more able to work in this way than museums themselves – having a greater licence to tackle 'difficult' topics without worrying about issues of provenance and so on.

Divya Tolia-Kelly, Durham University, 'Collaborative research with communities': Referring to her work co-curating an exhibition about Hadrian's Wall as a space of migration and cultural diversity, Tolia-Kelly emphasised the importance of using such historical materials to address the politics of race and multiculturalism today. In doing so, she gave an account of the way in which local school children

engaged with the exhibition – making connections between their own family histories and the exhibition's narratives about the military and migration. A key aim of the exhibition was to challenge preconceptions of the North East of Britain as being a space of only 'white' populations and 'white' history – and in doing so, influence the ways in which Roman Britain is represented and understood in exhibitions and public discourse.

Session 3: Community engagement and memory work in rural UK: a way forward?

Owing to the early departure of a number of participants in the afternoon, participants opted to remain in one large group rather than breaking into smaller discussion groups, as had initially been planned. Seymour and Jones led the discussion, inviting participants to comment further on two key issues:

1) To what extent does our focus on 'sites' such as country estates and ports help uncover rural connections to slavery and colonialism? What might it miss?

2) Taking into consideration participants' different experiences of engaging in memorialisation projects, how might such work be taken forward? How might these differ for various sectors, e.g. heritage institutions, local history or community groups?

Points raised are summarised below alongside those made during the first two sessions:

Rural sites as a framework for project

- What counts as 'rural' in terms of place and/or site? NB The time period under consideration is very long, incorporating many changes.

- By focusing on particular kinds of sites, do we risk a blindspot to complex networks, assemblages etc? How do you come to terms with the nexus of regional, national and transnational?

- How to capture those who live in villages but not necessarily working in 'rural' employment? One approach could be to focus on communities of work, of place and so on. Educational networks or 'communities' may also offer examples of interest.

- People relate well to personal narratives, but while it may be easier to flesh out such connections through the lives of prominent individuals, this project has the potential to shift focus onto ordinary people.

How to move forward?

- What do we do with this material? Who is it for? Not just about black spots on a map – we must recognise everyday contemporary connections that are meaningful today. NB politics of landscape and environment – issues of race and ethnicity in rural UK.

- An online database could help tap into the expertise already out there, i.e. local archives, local and family history groups, community projects, etc.

- By making data about widespread slavery and colonial connections public, e.g. UCL's Legacies of British Slave-ownership database (http://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/), can hope to counter the initial impulse of family estates etc to cover up past connections that are uncomfortable.

- How to manage the relationship between different agendas for memorialisation projects, e.g. impetus to rethink own 'community', while also engaging others in 'community participation'? Relative importance of participatory approaches and plural histories.

- Highlight examples of best practice for memorialisation projects?

Appendix 1: Workshop programme

10.45-11.00	Susanne Seymour, Introduction

Session 1: **Rural sites of Black presences and the legacies of slavery and colonialism**

11.00-11.15	Andrew Hann, English Heritage, 'Country houses'
11.15-11.30	Alan Rice, University of Central Lancashire, 'Provincial ports'
11.30-11.45	Susanne Seymour, University of Nottingham, 'Where else? Sites of rural industry, agriculture & religion'
11.45-12.15	Discussion
12.15-13.15	*Lunch*

Session 2: **Experiences and practices of engaging rural and BME audiences**

13.15-13.30	Cliff Pereira, independent scholar, 'Communities and local governance: Bexley, its Hidden Histories and the landscape'
13.30-13.45	Heather Smith, The National Trust, 'Rural heritage organisations and their publics'
13.45-14.00	Lubaina Himid, University of Central Lancashire, 'Art interventions in heritage sites'
14.00-14.15	Divya Tolia-Kelly, Durham University, 'Collaborative research with communities'
14.15-14.45	Discussion
14.45-15.15	*Coffee*

Session 3: **Community engagement and memory work in rural UK: a way forward?**

15.15-15.30	Susanne Seymour and Lowri Jones, Introduction
15.30-16.00	Breakout groups
16.00-16.30	Final discussion

Appendix 2: List of workshop participants

Name	Affiliation
Kye Askins	Northumbria University
Celeste-Marie Bernier	University of Nottingham
David Callaghan	SCAWDI
Kathleen Chater	Independent scholar
Sean Creighton	Independent scholar
Geoff Cubitt	University of York
Nick Draper	University College London
Andrew Hann	English Heritage
Lubaina Himid	University of Central Lancashire
Stephen Hodkinson	University of Nottingham
Dorothy Johnston	East Midlands Regional Archive Council
Lowri Jones	University of Nottingham
Lucienne Loh	University of Liverpool
Sarah Neal	Open University
Cliff Pereira	Independent scholar
Alan Rice	University of Central Lancashire
Susanne Seymour	University of Nottingham
Heather Smith	The National Trust
Kate Smith	University of Warwick
Divya Tolia-Kelly	Durham University