

## DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOPS

### Summary

Designed in dialogue with our project partner and community engagement facilitator, Cliff Pereira, the two development workshops allowed us to test the potential for focusing on particular kinds of sites as a framework for exploring slavery and other colonial connections embedded in the UK's countryside. The first workshop examined some of these connections in relation to the country house, the second, in relation to the rural textile industry. Taking heed of the consultation workshop's conclusion that such histories and narratives need to be made meaningful to contemporary audiences, we based the workshops around materials drawn predominantly from the East Midlands and East of England in order to attract 'local' audiences. For similar reasons, we decided against holding the workshops on the University of Nottingham campus and instead selected public venues in Nottinghamshire and Nottingham.

Focusing on the country house, the first workshop was held at Rufford Abbey, a very popular county council-run public park and site of a ruined country house in the Nottinghamshire countryside. Hosting at this venue was facilitated by links made through an on-going AHRC-funded collaborative PhD project co-supervised by Seymour. The second workshop was hosted by the New Art Exchange (NAE) in Nottingham, which is dedicated to exhibiting culturally diverse visual arts, and to working with minority communities. Hosting at this venue built on earlier discussions between the NAE and members of the University of Nottingham's Institute for the Study of Slavery (ISOS) on how to encourage fruitful interactions between the two groups. Both organisations helped advertise the workshops, contacting members on their lists, as well as displaying our posters and fliers at their venues. Our attempts to tap into the NAE's significant links to local BME communities however were not as successful as we had hoped though the potential for closer, longer-term links with the organisation was enhanced. It was also our connection with the NAE that enabled an unforeseen opportunity for further advertising: after hearing about the workshops through the NAE website, Reya El-Salahi, a presenter on BBC Radio Nottingham invited Seymour to speak about the project and workshops on her African & Caribbean programme.

In this respect, the development workshops gave us the opportunity to further build our own network of interested parties, extending our reach beyond the advisory group and other known contacts. Focusing on regional archives, the heritage sector, local history societies and community groups, we targeted a variety of organisations and individuals when advertising the workshops. This included the following:

- Nottingham City Museums and Galleries – some previous contact via ISOS
- Nottinghamshire Archives – some previous contact via ISOS
- East Midlands Regional Archive Council

- Nottinghamshire County Council Historic Building Officer
- Nottinghamshire Local History Association
- East Midlands Museums Association
- Nottingham Women's History Group
- Nottinghamshire Labour History Society
- Nottinghamshire Family History Society
- Nottingham Black Archive
- Rural Community Action Nottinghamshire
- National Trust – General Manager for Nottinghamshire properties
- Thoresby Estate Office
- Welbeck Estates Company Ltd
- Cromford Mill
- Bolsover Castle
- Ruddington Framework Knitter's Museum
- Victoria County History
- Thoroton Society
- Arkwright Society
- Norwell Heritage Group
- Hyson Green Flats project

## **1. Rural Community Histories: Legacies of slavery & colonialism and the country house**

28<sup>th</sup> July 2012, Rufford Abbey, Nottinghamshire

After some initial introductions, the workshop opened with an opportunity for participants to talk about what they hoped to gain from the day and its focus on country houses. In particular we were keen to hear about peoples' expectations of country houses as heritage sites – what kind of narratives they expect, etc. This was followed by a series of short presentations (by Seymour, Jones and Pereira) on the legacies of slavery and colonialism illustrated by examples from particular country estates, including some located in Nottinghamshire, e.g. Thoresby, Welbeck Abbey, Newstead Abbey. Each of these gave plenty of opportunity for group discussion with question and answer sessions. In doing so, we touched upon the different kinds of more or less visible connections that can be traced through country houses: colonial connections drawn out of a family tree; archival traces of Black servants and/or visitors; imperial connections formed through trade goods recorded in estate accounts or displayed in the house itself. Finally, Pereira brought the day's discussions together with a group activity based around participants' own experiences of visiting a particular country house.

The day's presentations and activities prompted significant, and at times heated, discussion amongst participants. This revealed one key area of potential conflict amongst visitors to country houses that lies at the heart of the work on country

houses and their potential connections to histories of colonialism, including slavery: how (or even if) such narratives should be incorporated into these historic sites. In particular, there was a concern that we may be at risk of appearing to overstate these connections – and that some audiences may be put off by what they perceive to be a quasi-political agenda overshadowing historical ‘fact’. There are other ‘difficult’ histories of country estates, relating to workers in Britain for example, which also deserve attention. Most agreed however that rather than shy away from ‘difficult’ legacies, it is important to try to integrate them into a country house’s interpretation. It was generally agreed that temporary, stand-alone exhibitions or displays would not suffice and could in fact exacerbate anxiety about acknowledging such connections. Instead participants called for an interpretative approach that incorporated narratives about colonial connections in a more holistic, less headline, manner.

## **2. Global community heritage: Slavery, colonialism and the textile industry in rural Britain**

9<sup>th</sup> August 2012, New Art Exchange, Nottingham

After some initial introductions, the workshop opened with an opportunity for participants to talk about what they hoped to gain from the day and its focus on the rural textile industry. In particular we were keen to hear about peoples’ expectations of heritage sites associated with the textile industry. This was followed by a series of short presentations (by Seymour and Jones) on the legacies of slavery and colonialism illustrated by examples from particular rural textile sites, e.g. mid-Wales and Cromford Mill in the Derwent Valley, Derbyshire, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. These gave plenty of opportunity for group discussion through question and answer sessions. In doing so, we touched upon different kinds of more or less visible connections that can be traced through such sites: considering the global connections between the production of textile goods for slave trading or for plantation supplies; considering textile workers connected with this rural industry from mill workers in the East Midlands to cotton plantation workers. Finally, Pereira brought the day’s discussions together with a group activity and an account of a piece of Panos cloth – drawing past connections together with those in the present.

The day’s presentations and activities encouraged considerable discussion, with participants drawing on a variety of different perspectives: some reflected on family histories of working in the textile industry; others brought expertise from local history societies; yet others brought experience from working in the museum and heritage sector. In a similar vein to debates sparked during the first development workshop, some participants expressed concern at the possibility of pushing certain connections too far when empirical evidence is lacking. In particular, there was some resistance to the idea of comparing the experience of mill workers in rural England with that of enslaved plantation workers in the colonial Americas, especially in terms

of how such comparisons might reflect on mill owners and managers, e.g. the idea of Arkwright as a 'slave-driver'. With further discussion however, some participants saw this as an opportunity to consider parallels between practices and experiences of indentured and enslaved labour, though the important caution to avoid approaches which may inadvertently 'equalise' slavery and indenture was also voiced. In comparison, many of those working in the heritage and museum sector (both in a professional and voluntary capacity), expressed interest in exploring these kinds of connections further – and embedding them within their work if possible. Echoing comments made in both the consultation and first development workshop, participants again argued for the effectiveness of developing interpretive work through the lives of particular individuals. Importantly though, it was argued that we need to move away from narratives of heroes and villains, of 'great men' and 'oppressed masses' – instead a more nuanced and contextualised heritage interpretation is needed. However, the view was also expressed that people need to accept that when it comes to the legacies of slavery and colonialism we cannot be neutral – that attempts at neutrality are nonsense – and so if we think it's wrong, we should say so.

## Evaluation of Development Workshops

*By Cliff Pereira, facilitator for project's public workshops, August 2012*

### Workshop 1: Evaluation & Observations

**Rural Community Histories: Legacies of slavery & colonialism and the country house**

28<sup>th</sup> July 2012, Rufford Abbey, Nottinghamshire

#### **I. Contexts**

The first of two workshops was held at Rufford Abbey on 28<sup>th</sup> July 2012, and was attended by seven people, who returned six Feedback Evaluation forms, which is quite a high return for an event (86%).

##### ***Venue and new visitors***

Only one participant and the facilitator were new to the venue. The fact that the majority of the participants had been to the venue before suggests that the participants were from the local area and this addressed one of the aims of the workshop to access local publics. Most people found the room facilities adequate to good.

##### ***Arts Humanities and Research Council (AHRC)***

Just over 33% of the participants had not previously known of the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), half of them had not heard of the Connected Communities Programme. The project was therefore a good showcase for the AHRC, meeting its aim to allow wider publics to suggest ways forward in academic research and heritage; it also addressed one of the expectations of the day (see section II below).

#### **II. Workshop**

##### ***Objectives***

The objective and outcome for the day was basically to facilitate knowledge exchange with several specific aims:

1. To raise awareness and understanding of the countryside's often hidden connections to Britain's colonial past, including slavery, as revealed through the archives and the material and visual culture of country houses.
2. To facilitate discussion of what the concepts of community and heritage mean to participants, as they relate to country houses in Britain as both:
  - a. Heritage sites that are often associated with a rural setting, and that are often perceived to be serving a predominantly white 'community'
  - b. Sites rich with histories of colonial and global connections, including traces of Black presences

3. To enable a diverse set of interested parties, e.g. local community groups, heritage professionals, relevant local authority staff and some academics, to present views on how such histories could be effectively introduced/integrated into country houses through interpretation and 'memory' work.

The objectives of the day included a change in attitude and values by:

1. Developing an appreciation of how country houses (their archives/histories and visual and material culture) may illuminate contemporary understandings of heritage and feelings of belonging by different 'communities' in the UK today.
2. Developing a greater appreciation not only of the difficulties but also the potential gains of developing more inclusive approaches to heritage and interpretation at country houses.

### ***Expectations***

At the beginning of the workshop the participants were asked what they hoped to gain from the workshop.

<b>Broad Themes</b>	<b>What participants hoped to gain from the workshop</b>
Local History	More about Local History.
AHRC & The Connected Communities Programme.	The Connected Communities Programme.
The Country House.	Perspectives on Seventeenth and Eighteenth century Country Houses. Country houses in Nottinghamshire. Environmental history.
The Country House & Slavery.	Shared knowledge on slavery and the Country House. Discovering links between the Country house and slavery. Slavery in/and Britain. Colonial connections.
Interpretation and dissemination of History.	Different interpretations of history. Dealing with sensitive and difficult narratives. Embedding narratives.

### ***Feedback***

All respondents liked the discussions; and everyone was observed to have made some contribution to the discussions of the day. In general all participants who responded appeared to have enjoyed the session, with 66% finding it extremely enjoyable and the rest either extremely enjoyable or very enjoyable. This was also evident in that the most liked areas of the workshop were the range of subject matters covered, the presentations and the ability to express opinions freely. In this respect the workshop achieved the primary goal of a workshop – to provide a safe and open space for free discourse. Some people knew each other, however nobody

in the workshop knew everybody and so the workshop was an occasion to meet new people and develop new ideas. The activity was liked the most by only half of the group, perhaps reflecting the unfamiliarity with workshop activities in general. Perhaps the least well-liked aspect of the workshop was the group dynamic. At first this may seem at odds with the fact that people felt free to express their opinions. However, this may be more to do with the difficulty of addressing and discussing such a sensitive narrative as slavery and the country house, and also perhaps with the concept of 'Whose Heritage'. It must be noted that people initially wanted to share their knowledge on the subject, and seek ways to interpret and disseminate (see expectations above), but openly discussing the sensitivities and social aspects of this 'difficult' narrative was not on the list of expectations for the day. The demographic mix of the group has a direct bearing on such issues. The absence of younger people and people from BME backgrounds would have led to quite different expectations and group dynamics. Given the group demography (i.e. predominantly white middle class) it was difficult to infuse the level of sensitivity required when dealing with the subject of slavery, especially if the properties are to be visited by people whose heritage has been very dramatically shaped by such a difficult narrative. Some analogies with workhouse inmates, domestic servitude, industrial working class, colonial migrants and even the holocaust were drawn upon to raise this awareness. Consideration of attitudes and values including contemporary understandings of heritage and feelings of belonging by different communities in the UK today was one of the objectives of the session. The role of a facilitator is often misunderstood, but in this workshop it appears that most of the participants understood the role, which was established at the beginning of the session. Participants were content with the facilitation, with half of the responses saying it was good and the other half extremely good.

### ***Looking Ahead***

Everyone found the workshop useful with 66.6% of the responses finding it extremely useful. The responses to the usefulness of the workshop mirrored the broad expectations. Several local areas were mentioned including the Welbeck Estate and Clumber Park in Nottinghamshire), and Cromford and the Derwent Valley Visitor Centre in Derbyshire. This underlines the interest in local history expressed at the beginning of the workshop. The properties were also mentioned in terms of interpretation, research angles and possible areas for future research, which were attitudes and values that were an objective of the day. All respondents stated that they would be interested in attending another workshop in the project.

## **Workshop 2: Evaluation & Observations**

### **Global community heritage: Slavery, colonialism and the textile industry in rural Britain**

9th August 2012, New Art Exchange, Nottingham

## **I. Workshop Contexts**

The second of two workshops was held at the New Art Exchange in Nottingham on 9<sup>th</sup> August 2012, and was attended by twelve people, all of whom returned Feedback Evaluation forms (100%).

### ***Venue and new visitors***

Just under half of the participants (42%) and the facilitator were new to the venue. This demonstrates that venues even in the urban setting can attract new visitors by adding different and perhaps new interest activities, and by working in partnership with other sectors. The fact that the majority (58%) of the participants had been to the venue before suggests that the participants were from the local area and this addressed one of the aims of the workshop to encourage local participation. Most people found the room facilities good (50%), excellent (25%) or adequate, though one person found it unsatisfactory. This can be explained by the rising temperature in the room as the day progressed, and a possible difficulty in hearing the speaker due to noise from the street. Unfortunately it was a very hot day and windows had to be open. There was a feedback comment about the “excellent” lunch.

### ***Arts Humanities and Research Council (AHRC)***

Interestingly everyone had previously known of the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) but 66% of them had not heard of the Connected Communities Programme. The project was therefore a good showcase for AHRC meeting its aim to allow wider publics to suggest ways forward in academic research and heritage.

## **II. Workshop Content**

### ***Objectives***

The objective and outcome for the day was basically to facilitate knowledge exchange with several specific aims:

1. To raise awareness and understanding of the countryside’s often hidden connections to Britain’s colonial past, including slavery, particularly in terms of the textile trade at both a local/regional and global scale.
2. To facilitate discussion of what the concepts of community and heritage mean to participants, as they relate to Britain’s historic textile trade, e.g. in the East Midlands, particularly as they relate to everyday hidden histories of the labouring poor, including migrants and women.
3. To enable a diverse set of interested parties, e.g. local community groups, heritage professionals, relevant local authority staff and academics, to present views on how such histories and contemporary resonances could be explored further through memory work in the East Midlands.

The objectives of the day included a change in attitude and values by:



1. Developing an appreciation of how rural and provincial sites and/or landscapes relating to the British textile trade may illuminate contemporary understandings of heritage and feelings of belonging by different 'communities' in the UK today.
2. Developing a greater appreciation not only of the difficulties but also the potential gains of developing more inclusive approaches to heritage and interpretation at heritage sites associated with rural/provincial agriculture and industry, especially those relating to the textile trade.

### ***Expectations***

At the beginning of the workshop the participants were asked what they hoped to gain from the workshop. These points were noted on post-it notes, and then collected and collated, so as to be used in the summary at the end of the workshop.

<b>Broad Themes</b>	<b>What participants hoped to gain from the workshop</b>
Regional, local & family histories	History of East Midlands & its textile industry 18 <sup>th</sup> & 19 <sup>th</sup> century contexts of industry in Derwent Valley Family connections to textile trade in Nottinghamshire
Global connections & contexts	Empire and textile trade: was there competition between colonies? What was the position of African textiles?
Knowledge about textile industry & its colonial &/or slavery connection	Production & export of raw cotton to Britain How important was slavery & colonialism to the development and success of cotton industry in Britain?
Insight	Into other peoples' perspectives on these histories Impact of histories of textile & slavery connections today How to apply new knowledge about slavery connections in voluntary guiding work at textile mill
Present day perspectives	Attitudes in UK and overseas, including postcolonial
Other	Develop contacts with others working in this area Enjoyment Contribute to the project

### **Workshop Feedback**

Everyone was observed to have made some contribution to the discussions of the day. In general all participants who responded appeared to have enjoyed the session, with 42% finding it extremely enjoyable and very enjoyable (50%) and one person finding the session moderately enjoyable. This was also evident in the most liked areas of the workshop: 75% of the participants liked the range of subject matters covered, the presentations, the ability to express opinions freely and the opportunity to meet new people. In this respect the event achieved the primary goal

of a workshop – to provide a safe and open space for free discourse. Over half (67%) of participants also fed back that they liked the discussions, which were observed to be conducted in a very respectful manner.

Some people knew each other, however nobody in the workshop knew everybody else so the workshop was an occasion to meet new people and develop new ideas. However as part of the workshop planning the facilitator split the participants into two 'composite' groups for the activity. Each group had a diverse make-up in terms of interests (community, heritage and academia) as well as in age, gender and ethnicity. The original observation was that there were two "clusters" of people, including a large cluster of local historians, and people interested in local labour organisations, etc. The second grouping, which formed on the opposite side of the room, was mainly composed of people with heritage interests, many of whom were not local to Nottinghamshire. Community participants were spread across the room. Perhaps this tendency to group in this manner can be viewed in another way, as insiders (local) and outsiders (regional and national), within which certain narratives were placed as more important than others.

It was notable that working local class narratives (including the role of trade unions) featured often in group and especially in one-to-one conversations; slavery came in a second place and colonial links, especially with Asia (i.e. British India) were lower on the scale of discussion. This is quite surprising given the large Asian population in the Midlands. It also raises the question of why despite attempts to approach and involve BME communities in this workshop, their turnout was low. This may suggest that public (including BME) perceptions of heritage also need to be challenged (see *The Invisible Empire* by George Wemyss). The idea of two 'composite' groups was therefore exciting and interesting as it created spaces for different dialogues and ideas exchange, while providing the 'real life' challenges of dealing with difficult and sensitive issues.

The activity was liked by only 25% of the participants, perhaps reflecting the unfamiliarity with workshop activities. This seems to contradict the fact that people felt free to express their opinions (75%). However, this may be more to do with the discomfort and difficulty of addressing and discussing such sensitive narratives as slavery and the working class system with people in the activity groups for whom such narratives were extremely sensitive, if not factors of identity definition. Being out of the 'comfort zone' would explain why 42% liked the group dynamics, and having to develop new ideas. This perhaps highlights the difficulties in dealing with such concepts for the heritage sector. This is backed up by one remark "Good discussions – possibly too touchy-feely and less hard fact, but perhaps the nature of the subject". In fact feedback statistics and this comment demonstrate a change in attitudes and values as well as a better understanding of these issues.

The role of a facilitator is often misunderstood, but in this workshop it appears that most of the participants understood the role, which was established at the beginning of the session. Participants were content with the facilitation, with half of the responses saying it was good and the other half excellent.

### ***Looking Ahead***

Everyone found the workshop useful with 50% of the responses finding it extremely useful and 42% finding it very useful. The remaining 8% found it moderately and slightly useful. People liked the “different approaches to interpreting” and were “considering various ways of presenting historical materials” and “establishing network links”. There was also an interest in “ideas for future research” and looking at the “wider perspective” including “stimulating ideas of local/family history”. At the same time with regards to the “rural and textile based connections, [the] debates brought up some interesting issues for research/interpretation” Based on the feedback the workshop can clearly have achieved its objectives on many levels, while still creating an inspiring and enjoyable day.

The majority of respondents (92%) stated that they would be interested in attending another workshop in the project.