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The ss *Great Britain* - an Object in Stasis: Space, Place  
& Materiality, 1886 – 2015.

James Muirhead

A dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the requirements for  
award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Arts, School of Humanities,  
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# Abstract

This thesis explores the ss *Great Britain* ‘an object in stasis’ from the period of 1886 to 2016. This broad categorisation of the vessel as an object in ‘stasis’ is used as a linguistic means of demarcating the end of the *Great Britain*’s life as an ocean-going vessel. Yet, this classification of the *Great Britain* as an object in stasis arguably does very little to reflect the complexity of the ship’s ‘post-functional’ life. As this thesis will demonstrate, the *Great Britain* has been subject to a vast array of fluid re-imaginings from 1886 onwards. These categorisations and the manner in which the *Great Britain* has dynamically interacted with its surrounding environment has had a profound influence upon the human actors who sought to classify and negotiate the vessel as material object. While axiomatic to suggest, the *Great Britain* has embodied divergent roles in the span of the 130 years this study encompasses, yet this study is primarily concerned with the effects of location, rather than temporality in determining the manner in which these roles unfolded. This thesis engages with literatures of space, place and materiality in order to consider the *Great Britain*’s influence within varying locations and will consequently consider the time the vessel spent in the landscape of the Falkland Islands - as representational and symbolic artefact in 1960s Britain - the contested urban environment of Bristol to which the ship returned in July 1970 before finally, in the concluding chapter, turning to the ship’s role as a centre-piece of a modern day heritage attraction in 2016. In engaging with the *Great Britain*’s afterlife over this long chronological span and through a detailed consideration of the vessel’s various locations this thesis will aim to demonstrate that the *Great Britain* was not only an object of economic and commercial utility but also a centre of meaning and can be demonstrated as having influenced human behaviour as a material object. This thesis principally aims to engage with heritage literatures that address the implications of commercialisation on sites of cultural heritage and museums and while acknowledging these influences it will demonstrate that more dynamic and subtle processes are at work in these same locations.

# Dedication and Acknowledgements

I owe considerable gratitude to both the individuals and organisations that supported me throughout this project. I would firstly like to acknowledge the gracious support of the AHRC, University of Bristol and ss *Great Britain* Trust for their financial support during the course of this project without which this work would not have been possible.

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I am grateful to those such as Graeme Pascoe who shared their work prior to publication and signposted some fascinating source material. I am also grateful to those who have given me an opportunity to share aspects of the story of the ship's afterlife work in conference papers. Thank you to my upgrade examiners, Dr Helen Doe and Dr Hugh Pemberton, and my final examiners, Dr Rob Lambert and Dr Erika Hanna. Your comments have greatly improved the quality of my work.

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I also cannot thank my work colleagues in Teaching Leaders, and in particular, Kayode Lewis, Milena Lasheras-Mass and Antoinette Guest enough. Your kindness, positivity and ability to be supportive and wonderful people pulled me through a particularly difficult time in my life. This piece of work could not have been completed without you and thank you to indulging me when I pedantically explained the fundamental differences between a boat and a ship on more than one occasion.

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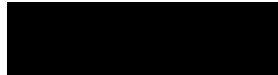
Finally a word to my Mum and Dad, from an early age you taught me the value of education and the instilled in me the resilience to see things through to their conclusion. You caught me

at my lowest ebb and helped build me back up to in order to finally submit this piece of work.  
I regard this PhD as just as much yours as it is mine.

## **Author's Declaration**

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University's Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate's own work. Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, others, is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

SIGNED



DATE: **09/09/2016**

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# List of Abbreviations

**SSGBT: The ss *Great Britain* Trust/alternately referred to as the Trust within the text**

**SSGBP: The ss Great Britain Project, predecessor to the modern day Trust/alternately referred to as the Project with the text**

**JCA: Jane Cameron Archive, Stanley**

**BRO: Bristol Record Office**

**ECM: Ewan Corlett Material (stored within the Brunel Archive, SSBGT)**

**GWSC: Great Western Steamship Company**

**FIC: Falkland Islands Company**

**FIG: Falkland Islands Government**

**DOPW: Director of Public Works (Falkland Islands)**

**GBNSW: Governor of Bank of New South Wales**

**HAER: Historic American Engineering Record**

**The Corporation: Bristol Corporation, now Bristol City Council**

**MHM: Morris Hargreaves McIntyre Heritage Consultancy.**

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## Chapter One: Introduction

**‘No other ship in modern times had carried the country's name, and she had done so for nearly a century. If she was worth saving she was more than worth saving for that.’** – Richard Goold Adams, *Chairman of the ss Great Britain Project* (1973)

**‘It really did look like a giant rusting tin bath.... alot of people really did feel that this was an absolute waste of money and waste of resource.’** – *A Bristolian's reaction to the ss Great Britain's return in 1970* (2010)

**‘Well, I don't think about the ship... it doesn't mean anything to me.’** – *Falkland Islander on the ss Great Britain* (2013)

**‘From the story of the ship's early days, her abandonment in the Falklands through to the incredible tale of her return home and restoration she is the epitome of our nation's maritime tradition and a tribute to Brunel, one of our greatest engineers.’** – *A visitor's review of the ss Great Britain Museum* (2015)

**T**o what extent is an object's interpretation defined by its spatial context? In what way can objects be said to create centres of human meaning? Can a material object be said to influence the way in which it is interpreted through its own agency?

These are the broad questions this thesis attempts to engage in its consideration of the *ss Great Britain's* afterlife.

As the above quotes illustrate the *ss Great Britain* was invested in varying orders of significance by different individuals in different locations. These reflections on the *Great Britain* also hint that accounting for these interpretations via purely temporal means provides an insufficient mode of accounting for their significant variation. What is immediately apparent is that the *Great Britain's* age and its status as an item of historic pedigree seemed to have little bearing on homogenising human responses to the ship. At equivalent times the ship could be said to function as a prominent symbolic bearer of nationhood and an underwhelming and aesthetically unprepossessing assorted jumble of rusted iron. Equally, while the modern day *ss Great Britain* is lauded by its visitors and presented by the *ss Great*

*Britain* Trust as prominent centre of heritage and education this same object has, to a degree, been all but dismissed with an ambivalent shrug by the Falkland Islanders who remember her in Sparrow Cove.

This thesis engages with literatures on space, place and materiality as a means of contributing to a deepening of an understanding of objects of preservation. In combining these various approaches it will argue that the *Great Britain* can be said to function simultaneously as an item of economic utility, a centre of affective human meaning and manifests a degree of agency as a material object in influencing human interactions with the vessel. This thesis represents a contribution to heritage literatures which have to varying degrees confronted the implications of commercialisation on museum space and those which have sought to mediate upon the subject of the materiality of objects of display. Through a reading of the ss *Great Britain's* history it will argue that the complex influences of space, place and materiality can be seen to have influenced the ship's associated meanings and symbolisms throughout the course of its afterlife and in so doing caution against universalised interpretations of these locations.

### The ss *Great Britain*, a brief history

The ss *Great Britain* was conceived as a result of the initial success of Isambard Kingdom Brunel's first foray into ship building - the ss *Great Western* - a project that reached fruition in 1838. The perceived triumph of the *Great Western* encouraged Brunel to begin work on a sister ship.<sup>1</sup> Plans to begin work on the construction of the vessel immediately followed the *Great Western's* launch in 1838 under the ship's originally designated name; the *City of New York*, the vessel would undergo a subsequent relabelling as *The Mammoth* - a reflection of the expanded scope of Brunel's ambitions for the ship - before finally designated its ultimate and final title ss *Great Britain*.<sup>2</sup>

While Brunel's influential status has subsequently overshadowed the work of other figures associated with the vessel's construction other prominent individuals made significant

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<sup>1</sup> C. R. V. Gibbs, *Passenger Liners of the Western Ocean: A Record of Atlantic Steam and Motor Passenger Vessels from 1838 to the Present Day*. (New York: 1957)

<sup>2</sup> E. Corlett, *The Iron Ship* (Bristol, 1975) p.9 -17

contributions to the *Great Britain's* inception. Prominent amongst there were Bristolian engineer Thomas Guppy who was instrumental in developing the *Great Britain's* sailing rig and the engines and Captain Charles Caxton who constructed the dry dock in Gas Ferry Road, the dock in which the ship was initially built and now currently resides as prominent regional and national heritage attraction. Nonetheless, despite these pivotal interventions the *Great Britain* represented a far less collaborative foray into shipbuilding than that represented by its forerunner, the *Great Western* and it was ultimately Brunel who proved to be front and centre in nearly every aspect pertaining to the overall design and construction of the ship.<sup>3</sup>

The vast scope of Brunel's vision for the ship was ever-present throughout the construction of the *Great Britain*, the *Great Britain* was symbolic not only of a towering technological achievement but yet more ambitiously what Karl Marx referred to as 'the annihilation of space by time.'<sup>4</sup> The construction of the *Great Britain* harmonised with an era that was characterised by both enhanced communication and the transport of people and cargo over vast distances and at a speed hitherto unimaginable. As Yrjo Kaukianen argues, this era of shipbuilding resulted in a conceptual 'geographic reorientation' with the speeds with which it was possible to travel great distances changing the nature in which the world was perceived.<sup>5</sup> The truncating of symbolic distances and the new way of reading the world by the figurative passengers that these new modes of transport supposed was encapsulated in Brunel's aspirational rendering of the Great Western Steamship Company as a de-facto extension of the railway network bearing the same name.<sup>6</sup> The extraordinary breadth of Brunel's ambition encompassed an attempt to bridge both national and global divides and, in doing so, reframe the way in which distance was rendered by the human imagination.

The *Great Britain* was launched in 1843 by the Prince Consort to enormous acclaim. As one national newspaper rapturously described the event 'amid the shouts of thousands...the Prince broke against the bows a bottle of wine and pronounced as the name by which the ship is after to be known, the words '*Great Britain*.'<sup>7</sup> In a striking example of historical synchronicity - and as with the return of the vessel in 1970 – the launch of the *Great Britain's*

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<sup>3</sup> Corlett, *Iron Ship* p.9

<sup>4</sup> K.Marx, *Grundrisse*. (London,1993) p.538

<sup>5</sup> Y. Kaukiainen, 'Shrinking the world: Improvements in the speed of information transmission, c. 1820–1870.' *European Review of Economic History* 5,1 (2001) .p.15

<sup>6</sup> C. R. V. Gibbs, *Passenger Liners of the Western Ocean: A Record of Atlantic Steam and Motor Passenger Vessels from 1838 to the Present Day* pp. 41–45.

<sup>7</sup> 'Launch of the ss *Great Britain*', *Illustrated London News*, 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1843

drew large crowds of onlookers to Bristol's waterside, eager to catch sight of the newly minted vessel. According to the *Bristol Mirror*:

There was a general atmosphere of anticipation as the Royal Emblem was unfurled. The processional route had been cleaned and Temple Street decorated with flags, banners, flowers and ribbons. Boys of the City School and girls of Red Maids were stationed in a neat orderly formation down the entire length of the Exchange. The route was a mass of colour and everybody was out on the streets as it was a public holiday.<sup>8</sup>

An emblem of the totemic technological prowess commonly associated with the Victorian era, at launch, the *Great Britain* was not only the largest vessel in the world but also showcased a number of innovative - and subsequently highly influential - technological advances in shipbuilding techniques including – most prominently - the adoption of an iron hull and the first conventional implementation of a screw propeller. The latter innovation represented a radical and significant departure from accepted practices of shipbuilding at the time and the screw propeller would ultimately succeed the paddle-wheel at the most efficient mode of ocean-going propulsion. In the words of Ewan Corlett - naval engineer and arguably the most significant figure in the ship's eventual salvage in 1970 – the *Great Britain* was the 'forefather of all modern ships.'<sup>9</sup>

Despite an auspicious launch, the *Great Britain*, as a material object, presented considerable problems from the outset and the vessel was subject to recurring difficulties throughout her working life. The *Great Britain* was originally intended to be towed to the Thames in order for the construction of the ship to be completed. However this plan was subsequently abandoned once it was realised the harbour authorities in Bristol had failed to make the necessary adjustments to the docks with the result the ship simply proved too large to be floated out of Bristol's harbour.<sup>10</sup> This delay in the *Great Britain's* departure from Bristol resulted in enormous costs to the Great Western Steamship Company (GWSC) with the ship's launch postponed by almost a year. This setback in realising the *Great Britain's* commercial potential exacerbated a construction effort that was already considerably over-budget, the eventual cost of manufacture totalling £117,000—£47,000 more than her original projected price tag of £70,000.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> 'Royal Visit'. *The Bristol Mirror*. 20 July 1843

<sup>9</sup> 'First Iron Steamship', *The Times*, 11 November 1967

<sup>10</sup> B. Dumpelton & M. Miller, *Brunel's Three Ships*, (Chicago, 2013) p.64

<sup>11</sup> Corlett, *The Iron Ship* p.97

The course of the *Great Britain*'s working life would prove unusually problematic in other respects. While conceived as one of the fastest ships afloat at the time, upon her maiden voyage the *Great Britain* failed to eclipse the prevailing record of transit to New York to a considerable degree of disappointment.<sup>12</sup> The *Great Britain* also failed to fully embody Brunel's grand positioning of the ship as a symbolic extension to the Great Western Railway. Over the course of its working life the vessel only made four transatlantic journeys before it ran aground in Dundrum Bay off the coast of northeast Ireland.<sup>13</sup> The ss *Great Britain* has the unusual distinction of a ship that has been salvaged on two separate occasions over the course of its life and, if it was not for the concerted efforts of Brunel, the ship would have remained on the Irish coast until either the elements or human intervention eventually broke her up.<sup>14</sup> This episode proved to be by far the most damaging calamity to befall the *Great Britain* in economic terms and would, ultimately, have devastating consequences for the Great Western Steamship Company. Shackled by the huge losses incurred during the construction of the *Great Britain* the loss of the company's flagship crippled the GWSC financially and it was forced to sell the vessel to Gibbs, Bright & Co. for a mere £25,000, a fraction of the original construction cost.<sup>15</sup>

While the *Great Britain* remained out of commission for a year the ship was eventually refitted and put into service transporting passengers from Liverpool to Melbourne during the Victorian Gold Rush.<sup>16</sup> This period of the *Great Britain*'s existence and its service as a passenger liner to Australia proved to be the most economically lucrative period of the ship's working life and the longest period of time it spent embodying a functional purpose as an ocean-going vessel. Over the course of the ship's Australia run, the *Great Britain* would go on to carry 25,000 passengers from Liverpool to Melbourne. The ship would prove to have a highly influential role in the fledgling British colony in effect facilitating a sizeable demographic relocation, from the Imperial centre to its periphery. The influence of this vast movement of people is still apparent today; as the ss *Great Britain* Trust's website proudly declares 'it is estimated that 500,000 people in Australia and New Zealand can count these 19<sup>th</sup> Century

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<sup>12</sup> S. Fox, *Transatlantic: Samuel Cunard, Isambard Brunel, and the Great Atlantic Steamships*. (London, 2003) p.153

<sup>13</sup> Fox, *Transatlantic*. p. 154

<sup>14</sup> 'Recovery of the ss Great Britain', *Illustrated London News*, 21 August 1847

<sup>15</sup> Fox, *Transatlantic*. p. 154

<sup>16</sup> Corlett, *The Iron Ship* p.151-179



settlers amongst their ancestors'.<sup>17</sup>

An acknowledgment of the influence of this ship's period as emigrant clipper is reflected in the interpretative focus of the ss *Great Britain* Trust in 2016 and whilst variously seeking to represent differing stages of the ship's working life the Trust indisputably lays its emphasis upon the *Great Britain* as she appeared to would-be emigrants during her Australia run. Equally apparent within the modern, Bristol-based museum is a reluctance to acknowledge more contentious episodes of the ship's history. These darker episodes of the *Great Britain's* history -which the Trust has chosen to diminish in its interpretative display - include the ship's service as a troopship in the Crimean War during 1854, and, yet more problematically, the manner in which the *Great Britain* was deployed to carry British military reinforcements to then Bombay (Mumbai) to quell what the British categorised as the Indian Mutiny of 1857 but Indian commentators alternately refer as India's First War of Independence.<sup>18</sup>

With the end of the Victorian Gold Rush the *Great Britain* underwent a further refit and was eventually converted to a full sailing ship in order to transport coal as a trading vessel. This final material reconfiguration resulted in a further dwindling of the *Great Britain's* status as an outstanding technological marvel she represented at launch. The *Great Britain's* 47<sup>th</sup> voyage proved to be her last and on the 6<sup>th</sup> February 1886 during a voyage from Wales to San Francisco, carrying a cargo of coal, the ship suffered both a fire in her hold and severe storm damage in an attempt to round Cape Horn. The vessel returned to the Falklands and reached Port William during foggy weather on 22 May 1886. Here the *Great Britain* remained in the Stanley Harbour for nearly half a century serving as a coal and wool hulk. Eventually, in 1937, the physical deterioration of the vessel rendered even this function unsustainable and the ship was beached in Sparrow Cove, an isolated inlet within the islands, until the ss *Great Britain* Project was launched to salvage the ship, ultimately returning her to Bristol in 1970, 127 years after the vessel's launch in 1843.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Brunel's ss *Great Britain* (2012) 'Ship Celebrates Gold Rush'. <http://www.ssgreatbritain.org/about-us/blog/ship-celebrates-gold-rush>. 25.05. 2015

<sup>18</sup> Corlett, *The Iron Ship* p.242-246

<sup>19</sup> This treatment of the ss *Great Britain's* working life is necessarily brief and readers who wish to explore this period in greater depth are advised to refer to Ewan Corlett's *The Iron Ship* for a more detailed outline of the *Great Britain's* technical details of the ship's history. Alternatively, Claire Connor's work on the migrant histories associated the *Great Britain* during the ship's period as an emigrant transport is recommended as providing a previously under-explored academic perspective upon the ship's life as working vessel during its Australia run.

Whilst the above outline of the ship's working life is necessarily brief, it is perhaps worthwhile at this juncture to reflect upon the manner in which material objects seemingly possess the innate ability to eternally confound human expectations. At every stage of the *Great Britain's* ocean going existence she could be said to have resisted a straightforward categorisation as an item of functional value or an object of overt symbolic meaning. Even a figure as prodigious as Brunel was forced to renegotiate the terms with which he engaged with the *Great Britain* as a result of the realities of the ship's physical form and its interactions within the world as it existed. The influence of economic configurations, human agency and the ship's own materiality conspired against its creator and produced a vessel quite unlike that which was imagined by its architect at launch. Commercial constraints had the effect of diminishing the elegant passenger liner envisaged by Brunel to a lowly trading vessel at the end of her life as the *Great Britain* was increasingly rationalised by the external economic forces in which it was enmeshed. It is notable within this process that, over time, the ground-breaking technological innovations which the *Great Britain* initially embodied were essentially stripped away and eliminated as a central attribute of the vessel as the ship was converted from a propeller driven ocean liner to a transport vessel which was predominantly driven by sail.<sup>20</sup>

Whatever the subsequent impact of these technological innovations, of far more immediate consequence was the need for the ship to fulfil a functional purpose within the all-encompassing network of the wider global economy. The influence of structural economics and the consequences that arose from the failure of the ship's materiality to be entirely disciplined served to tear down Brunel's grand symbolic vision of the *Great Britain*. In practice, the ship ultimately failed to act as a principal node within Brunel's immense land and ocean conquering network of human transport. In this regard, and in a limited attempt to adopt Brunel's perspective, it is perhaps possible to categorise the ship as one of the many unrealised human images of the future; an abstract vision that was stymied by external forces and consequently unable to bridge the gap to lived reality.

Nonetheless, whilst adopting the above standpoint on the ship's history is not without certain merit, it fundamentally limits itself to the conceptual representation of the ss *Great Britain* by one, albeit extremely influential, individual in the vessel's history. One is prompted to reflect

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<sup>20</sup> Corlett, *Iron Ship* p.179

whether, as a result of the seemingly endless spates of calamities and the material complications that confronted the ship throughout its working life, the ship would ultimately prove to have a far richer and more influential role in lived human experience than that which previously confined to the parameters of Brunel's imagination.

## Heritage and Materiality - Academic Engagements with the ss *Great Britain*

Despite the ss *Great Britain*'s prominent status as a national and regional heritage site and its association with the figure of Isambard Kingdom Brunel academic reflections upon the ss *Great Britain*'s afterlife and considerations of the vessel as a site of cultural heritage have so far proven extremely limited. In part, this CDA project is an attempt to redress this balance and, indeed, represents the first comprehensive academic analysis of the *Great Britain*'s life from 1886 onward from any perspective.

Previous historiography related to the *Great Britain* is so limited in its extent that Deborah Withers's 2011 article '*ss Great Britain and the Containment of British Collective Memory*' represents the sole academic engagement with the ship as museum site to date.<sup>21</sup> In the ss *Great Britain*'s presentation of the ship, Withers regards the Trust as complicit in the silencing of the troubling implications of Britain's colonial legacy. Her work is, in essence, a collection of her own reflections on how the presentation of the ss *Great Britain* contributes to, what she identifies as, a broader political attempt to stifle the uncomfortable connotations of Britain's imperial past. To Withers:

The 'voyage of discovery into the past' that the museum takes its visitors on is made at the expense of mythologizing the history of the ship and the wider context of British colonial history where it is situated. Consequently, the role the ss *Great Britain* played in the histories of British colonialism – histories that were far from happy for many people in the world – is removed from the frames of understanding presented in the museum. These are the frames of contained representation that ultimately want the museum to create feel-good experiences for the people who attend.<sup>22</sup>

Withers places this reading of the ship within, what she argues, is a wider tendency of museums and sites of 'collective memory' to 'confront the negative and violent truths of

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<sup>21</sup> D. Withers '*ss Great Britain and the containment of British collective memory.*' *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 17,3 (2011) pp. 245-260.

<sup>22</sup> Withers '*ss Great Britain and the containment of British collective memory.*' p.244

British colonial history.’<sup>23</sup> To Withers, the ss *Great Britain* Trust ultimately abnegates what she regards as their ‘political responsibility’ to represent the realities of British imperial history however unpalatable they prove to be to modern visitors.<sup>24</sup>

Withers’ analysis is based upon her own movement around the vessel and her self-professed objective of embodying the ‘critical museum visitor.’<sup>25</sup> Withers reflects upon the presentation of the *Great Britain* in 2011 and argues the ‘splendour’ of the ship’s refurbishment communicates both ‘wealth and prestige’ which in association with the vessel’s name promote an uncritical ‘heroic’ narrative of both ship and nation.<sup>26</sup> To Withers, the Trust invites its visitors to identify with the emigrants travelling to Australia as means of allowing these visitors to ‘feel good’ about British colonial history. ‘The violence of British colonialism is completely removed from the frame of understanding presented in the museum, while the ‘happy journey’ of the ship’s voyages is a key social story with which visitors engage.’<sup>27</sup> Withers argues that the authentic historical narrative of the ship presents a far darker legacy which encompasses violent military interventions, the displacement of aboriginal peoples and the exploitation and plunder of foreign natural resources.<sup>28</sup>

Withers’ article is constructive in the extent to which it acknowledges the ss *Great Britain* museum as a legitimate site of critical engagement. However, it provides a limited means of deepening our understanding of the implications of the ship’s presentation in a number of key regards. Of most prominent concern, is the inherent subjectivity of her analysis of the ship’s purported connotations. While it is important to acknowledge the consequences of the Trust’s display of the ship and its subsequent impact upon its visitors, Withers’ critique is forwarded from the perspective of her own, somewhat detached, academic influence.

To Patrick Wright the main issue with this approach ‘is that if you’re sitting in a library, you’re producing arguments from that basis.’<sup>29</sup> To Wright this is not a suggestion that academic work should abandon museums and heritage sites as the focus of critical enquiry but suggests a more nuanced approach is possible, acknowledging the influence and agency

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<sup>23</sup> Withers ‘ss *Great Britain* and the containment of British collective memory.’ p.246

<sup>24</sup> Withers ‘ss *Great Britain* and the containment of British collective memory.’ p.246

<sup>25</sup> Withers ‘ss *Great Britain* and the containment of British collective memory.’ p.245

<sup>26</sup> Withers ‘ss *Great Britain* and the containment of British collective memory .p.260

<sup>27</sup> Withers ‘ss *Great Britain* and the containment of British collective memory.’ p.252

<sup>28</sup> Withers ‘ss *Great Britain* and the containment of British collective memory.’ p.253

<sup>29</sup> P. Wright and T. Putnam. ‘Sneering at the Theme Parks.’ *Block 15* (1989) p.16

of the ‘day to day practices’ of museum curators.<sup>30</sup> Whilst Withers makes some effort to acknowledge the effects of her own subjective reading of the ship and the way in which other visitors may interpret the site in a different manner, in truth, this idea receives little development in the body of the article.<sup>31</sup> In its failure to acknowledge the role of the museum curator and indeed current trends within the broader profession, the impression Withers’ article sustains is that the curatorial staff within the Trust are daily engaged in a purposeful effort to misrepresent the presentation of the ship’s past from a decidedly politically reactionary position.

Withers is also constrained by the manner in which the ss *Great Britain* presents itself to analysis in 2011. As Chapter Three and Five of this thesis will demonstrate, whilst a triumphalist form of nationalism was initially attached to the ship by the ss *Great Britain* Project team in its early stages, it is significant with the degree to which this aspect of the ship’s purported symbolism has diminished over time. The presentational emphasis of the ss *Great Britain* as contemporary heritage site emphasise both social histories and frame the ship as a triumph of human endeavour and engineering. As Chapter Five will argue, the ss *Great Britain* museum of 2016 arguably communicates a strong regional identity which, in effect, does much to diminish an overtly nationalist framing of the site.

Withers critique of the ss *Great Britain* as a location of heritage also fails to fully acknowledge the influence of the ship’s wider spatial context and the way in which this has shaped the curatorial choices displayed within. Commercial pressures and the increased commodity value associated with heritage sites have had an important authority over the presentation of the past found within. Withers acknowledges the influence of recent waterfront redevelopments and the manner in which these produce consumer centred environments but this aspect of her enquiry does not receive a particularly strong emphasis throughout. Finally, Withers can be said to exaggerate curatorial control over the ship as an object and the degree to which museum professionals can be said to fully subordinate the objects they steward. As this thesis will go on to demonstrate, at every stage of the *Great Britain*’s life, individual readings of the ship often ran counter to those which were officially and commercially sanctioned.

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<sup>30</sup> Wright and Putnam. ‘Sneering at the Theme Parks.’p.12

<sup>31</sup> Withers ‘ss *Great Britain* and the containment of British collective memory.’p.268

The concerns of Wither's article draw upon the influence of broader academic literatures which have sought to critically engage with the past as presented in museum and heritage sites. Beginning in the late 1980's with the publication of Robert Hewison's influential work *The Heritage Industry*. Hewison forwarded the supposition that the flourishing of sites of heritage within Britain were broadly symptomatic of wider perceptions of national decline in the UK.<sup>32</sup> To Hewison, trips made to heritage sites by their predominantly middle class visitors facilitated a retreat into a largely fictitious 'golden age' of British history which both sanitised the past and decoupled it from any troublesome or problematic associations.<sup>33</sup> Hewison's work was produced in the context of the wider implications of deindustrialisation and pointed to the way in which heritage sites inevitably seem to flow into the spaces left by traditional heavy industry. To Hewison, this retreat to an idealised past served to effectively stifle critical engagement with the present. As he claimed, Britain during the late 1980s became a 'knackers' yard where 'sacrilegious travesty blasphemes the real past'<sup>34</sup>

Hewison's work prompted a flurry of similarly critical treatments of heritage sites and prominent contributions were forwarded by Raphael Samuel, David Lowenthal and Patrick Wright.<sup>35</sup> Of particular concern to these academics was the manner in which - they regarded - contemporary presentations of the past became the object of ever increasing commodity value.<sup>36</sup> The commercial interests of heritage sites and museums were perceived as contributing to a particularly pernicious means of moulding and distorting historical enquiry in the interests of peddling 'chocolate box nostalgia'.<sup>37</sup>

The predominant concern among historians of heritage during this era resided within what Lowenthal described as the 'intricate coherence' of history as being effaced by the superficial commercial priorities of market forces. During the late 1980s and 1990s this reading of the heritage industry as predominantly shaped by the economic and political forces that surrounded it had a wider influence on a number of academics. This has produced a number of critical treatments of heritage sites, including Neil Kennedy and Nigel Kingcombe's

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<sup>32</sup> R. Hewison, *The heritage industry: Britain in a climate of decline* (London, 1987)

<sup>33</sup> Hewison, *The heritage industry* p.39

<sup>34</sup> Hewison, 'The Heritage Industry Revisited', *Museums Journal*, 94.4, (1991). p.23

<sup>35</sup> D. Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*. (Cambridge, 1997), R. Samuel, *Theatres of Memory Volume 1: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture*, (London, 1996) P. Wright, *On living in an old country: The national past in contemporary Britain* (Oxford, 2009)

<sup>36</sup> R. Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, (London, 1996) p.259

<sup>37</sup> D. Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade* p.98

examination of the 'Disneyfication' of Cornwall's heritage industry. To Kennedy and Kingcombe commercial imperatives have had a destructive influence upon the presentation of the West Country's past.<sup>38</sup> To Kingscombe and Kennedy, 'distorting and packaging' history has resulted in a misappropriation of historical information and the dismissal of any troublesome contradiction in heritage sites. This has in turn has offered tourists a sanitised space more conducive to the unworried trade of consumer products. The result is the invention of a 'semi-fictional' past that is 'shrink-wrapped, preserved and furnished with fudge for the consumption of visitors and locals alike.'<sup>39</sup>

In a similar vein, Lisa Tiersten linked the commercialisation of heritage to the broader influence of structural economics and capital.<sup>40</sup> To Tiersten the consumerism apparent within museum sites signals the point at which previously private spheres of leisure and culture have been assimilated into yet another mode of capitalist production.<sup>41</sup> According to Tiersten, the damaging effects of commodification extend further than a mere sanitisation of history and the escapism that these environments profess to offer. To Tiersten, heritage encourages 'conformity, apathy and political indifference amongst visitors who attend these attractions.'<sup>42</sup>

In an equivalent manner, and deploying an similar use of Marxist influenced terminology, Bob West, in his analysis of the Ironbridge site in Shropshire, argues the Ironbridge Gorge Museum conspicuously ignores 'the social relations of production' which are never 'self-evident'.<sup>43</sup> Consequently, in West's view, the museum fails in its role as a mediator of historical knowledge. To West, the Ironbridge museum consciously suppresses class as a mode of meaningful interpretation, deeming such divisive categorisations as unsuitable for public consumption and potentially destabilising to the museum's consumerist framework.<sup>44</sup>

In short, academic critiques of heritage which began in the late 1980s and gained pace during the 1990s sought to link the interpretative choices of curators and conservationists to a wider

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<sup>38</sup> N. Kennedy, & N. Kingcome, 'Disneyfication of Cornwall—developing a poldark heritage complex', *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 4.1, (1998) pp. 45-59

<sup>39</sup> N. Kennedy & N. Kingcome, 'Disneyfication of Cornwall' p.52

<sup>40</sup> L. Tiersten, 'Redefining consumer culture: recent literature on consumption and the Bourgeoisie in Western Europe', *Radical History Review* 57, (1993) pp.116-159.

<sup>41</sup> Tiersten, 'Redefining consumer culture' pp. 116-159.

<sup>42</sup> Tiersten, 'Redefining consumer culture' pp.116-159.

<sup>43</sup> B. West, 'The making of the English Working Past: a critical view of the Ironbridge Gorge Museum' in Lumley R. (eds.) *The Museum Time Machine*, (London, 1988) p.89

<sup>44</sup> B. West, 'The making of the English Working Past p.89

network of economic and political influence. To these academics, heritage sites existed as a means by which to sustain capitalist hegemony, silence critical negotiations of the past and serve as a location of commodity exchange. Although work of this nature often acknowledges the manner in which objects are located within museums or interpretations are framed the organising principle of much of this work is a means of demonstrating how wider configurations of power and economics construct the representations of the past presented to the visitor. Whilst many of these contributions to debates around heritage proved influential in their own right this work represents a longer academic tradition and one in which Martin Hall identifies as identifying museum space as ‘an attempt to impose a dominant ideology through subterfuge.’<sup>45</sup>

While seeking to remain critically engaged with the role and associations of the museum other academic scholarship has sought to move beyond perspectives that emphasise the authority of broader political trends and the influence of commercialisation upon interpretative display. This broad view of heritage as embodying ‘Thatcherism in period dress’ has been challenged to a degree by a more sensitive reading of sites of cultural heritage which have attempted to acknowledge developments within the practice of curatorship since the late 1980s. Peter Vergo’s *New Museology* for instance has sought to provide greater degree of nuance to academic treatments of museum display.<sup>46</sup> Vergo’s volume points to the sector’s increasing emphasis on displays of social history, a greater acknowledgment within the industry of the museum’s responsibility to educate and inform and a growing sensitivity to the need to democratise access and represent communities of people that have previously been neglected by interpretative means.<sup>47</sup> Rosemarie Beier de-Haan’s more recent work has, to a degree, contradicted the more critical treatment of heritage forwarded by Hewison and others.<sup>48</sup> To de-Haan, contemporary museum display have shown an shift away from ‘grand narratives’ and, in recent years, has instead increasingly sought to represent a multiplicity of diverse voices and lived experience.<sup>49</sup> This scholarship has been influential in demonstrating the significant role of the curator plays in mediating the objects under their stewardship. This

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<sup>45</sup> M. Hall, 'The reappearance of the authentic', in *Museum Frictions: Public cultures/global transformations*, eds. by Ivan Karp, Corinne A. Kratz, Lynn Szwaja, Tomas Ybarra-Frausto (Durham, 2006) p.72

<sup>46</sup> P. Vergo (eds.), *The New Museology* (London, 1989).

<sup>47</sup> See C. Saumarez Smith, ‘Museums, Artefacts and Meanings’ in P. Vergo (eds.), *The New Museology* (London, 1989) pp.6-22

<sup>48</sup> R. Beier de-Haan, ‘Re-staging Histories and Identities’ trans by. Allison Brown in *A Companion to Museum Studies* Sharon Macdonald eds. (Malden, 2011)

Sharon Macdonald (Malden, 2011)

<sup>49</sup> de-Haan, ‘Re-staging Histories and Identities’ p.187



perspective emphasises the agency of the museum professional and in doing so demonstrates the manner in which museum space can, occasionally, run counter to the blunt forces of prevailing economic orthodoxy.

Further nuance in considerations of heritage sites has been provided in recent academic scholarship which has sought to point to the substantial influence of materiality in influencing perceptions of object display - to a degree, these approaches a reflection of the growing 'material turn' in history (that will be considered at greater length later in the chapter.) It is perhaps unsurprising that recent academic interrogations of interpretative focus would take on an increasingly material focus, in the words of Suzanne Pearce, the inherent value of museums and sites of heritage are their capacity 'to hold real objects, the actual evidence, the true data as we would say'.<sup>50</sup>

The more recent academic emphasis on material aspects of conservation and heritage has prompted a wide-range of contributions and a fresh perspective on the role inhabited by the modern museum. Reflections on materiality have, as Beverly Butler's work outlines, produced a number of theoretical mediations on what function the preserved object can be said to represent.<sup>51</sup> These contributions have included interpreting objects of heritage as providing a necessary 'temporal depth' to an increasingly fragmented and disparate modern world and fulfilling a role as items of 'authenticity' outside the restricted nature of official archives or else evidence presented by and mediated through the figure of the academic.<sup>52</sup> Other approaches have sought to examine the role of conservation itself as a material practice arguing, as Dinah Eastop does, that 'the conservation of objects, collections, monuments and sites is a practical response to both material changes and the cultural dynamics related to these objects.'<sup>53</sup> Meanwhile the work of Suzanne Pearce has offered a systematic framework with which to interpret objects of display as a means to systemise the modes with which artefacts are analysed.<sup>54</sup>

Other academics, such as Elizabeth Atwood Lawrence, have offered more intimate considerations of the preserved object. Lawrence's work on Comanche, General Custer's

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<sup>50</sup> S. Pearce, *Museums, Objects and Collections: A Cultural Study*, (Washington, 1992) p.184

<sup>51</sup> B. Butler, 'Heritage and the Present Past' in C.Tilley, W.Keane, W., Küchler, S., Rowlands, M., & P. Spyer, (eds.) *Handbook of material culture*. (London, 2006)

<sup>52</sup> B. Butler, 'Heritage and the Present Past' p.463-480

<sup>53</sup> D. Eastop, 'Conversation as Material Culture' in Tilley et. al (eds.) *Handbook of material culture*.

<sup>54</sup> S. Pearce, *Museums, Objects and Collections*

horse, has attempted to trace the life of a single artefact of display as a longitudinal study.<sup>55</sup> Lawrence contextualises her history of Comanche with far broader issues which include human relationships with animals and nature, the role of representation, in influencing our symbolic perception of the preserved object and the manner in which a material artefact's meaning could be said to transform over time.<sup>56</sup> Lawrence's study also demonstrates how an object of preservation is capable of projecting a varied order of symbolic significance to varying cohorts of individuals at equivalent times. As Lawrence outlines, officially mediated narratives within the US propagandised Comanche's status as an object of constructed national myth-making. Conversely, Lawrence demonstrates how, to some Native Americans, the continued preservation and display of Comanche represented a deliberately provocative affront in its association with Custer, the wider American Indian Wars and its associated history of land dislocation and genocide.<sup>57</sup>

In its wider aim to capture the fluctuating order of symbolic associated to a single object of display, Lawrence's study shares one of the principal aims of this present thesis. However this thesis is not solely concerned with representing, in a descriptive sense, how the ss *Great Britain* possessed a varied order of significance to different groups of people during its afterlife but aims to demonstrate the processes by which these meanings developed. As emphasised in the earlier abstract, the broader objective of this work is to point towards a reconciliation of different approaches to heritage critique, acknowledging the influence of commercially produced space on interpretation but also demonstrating how objects can contribute to locations of perceived human value and, in turn, how the artefact in question is capable of influencing these significances.

## Space

The concept of space, broadly defined, has been at the forefront of geographic examinations of human behaviour since the discipline's inception.<sup>58</sup> Yet reflections on space are far from exclusive to the field of geography and the scope of its multi- disciplinary deliberations are

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<sup>55</sup> E.A. Lawrence, *His Very Silence Speaks: Comanche--the Horse who Survived Custer's Last Stand*. (Michigan, 1989)

<sup>56</sup> Lawrence, *His Very Silence Speaks*

<sup>57</sup> Lawrence, *His Very Silence Speaks* p.185-215

<sup>58</sup> T. Unwin, *The Place of Geography*, (Harrow, 1992)

reflected in an intellectual tradition that Henri Lefebvre traces back to the scholarly use of space in its modern form to the the philosophy of Descartes.<sup>59</sup> Despite this, the term ‘space’ has been acknowledged as both inherently problematic and under examined within certain academic fields. In the words of Neil Smith: ‘Space is a polyvalent term that until the early twentieth century could be read simply as objective absolute space within which “objects exist and events occur”<sup>60</sup>

Until the relatively recent ‘spatial turn’ this underdevelopment of spatial lines of enquiry has been seen as particularly lacking in historical studies, where concepts of space have been identified as, comparatively, lagging behind that of other disciplines within the humanities.<sup>61</sup> Employed as a metaphoric device (‘core’ and ‘periphery’) or else as an asymmetric backdrop upon which the important events of history are displayed via tableau, space, in Christopher Tilley’s words, was ‘quite literally a nothingness.’<sup>62</sup> Tilley characterised the role of space for historians as ‘universal, everywhere and anywhere the same, and had cross-cultural impact on people and society.’<sup>63</sup> To Edward Soja, a geographer, the historian’s apparent antipathy towards engaging with space hints at a broader conceptual failure of historicism. Soja identifies historicism with the ‘creation of a critical silence, an implicit subordination of space to time... [that] intrudes on every level of theoretical discourse.’<sup>64</sup> While chronology will, of course, always remain at the heart of a discipline that seeks to place the course of events in the context of a broader narrative of events and consequences - cause and effect - this has nonetheless left historians open to the charge that their abstract spatial awareness is somewhat lacking. To geographers like Soja, an overdeveloped linear, temporal imagination has constrained and limited a horizontal, spatial one.

To a degree, Soja’s broad categorisation of history as a discipline blind to the concept of space as a serious line of academic enquiry does not withstand considerable scrutiny. As Alan Baker points out, outside the scholarship of the Anglosphere, French History, particularly that of the Annales School has long considered the importance of space, beyond the empty

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<sup>59</sup> H. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* trans. Donald Nicholson Smith (Oxford, 1996) p.1

<sup>60</sup> N. Smith, *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital, and the Production of Space* (Athens, Georgia, 2008) p.95

<sup>61</sup> P. Joyce & T. Bennett (eds.) *Material Powers: Cultural Studies, History and the Material Turn* , (London, 2010)

<sup>62</sup> C. Tilley, *A phenomenology of landscape – Places, paths and monuments* (Oxford:, 2010) p.9

<sup>63</sup> Tilley, *A phenomenology of landscape* p.9

<sup>64</sup> E. Soja, *Post Modern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London, 1989) p.15

‘nothingness’ described by Tilley.<sup>65</sup> Even within English speaking scholarship, prominent rebuttals to Soja’s categorisation of the historian’s relative failure to properly contemplate the spatial exist. Important examples include the work of English historian William George Hoskins and his interdisciplinary approach of incorporating archaeological methodologies in considerations of the locational and, across the Atlantic, John Brinckerhoff Jackson’s attempt to distinguish between the officially ordered space of roads and boundaries and the vernacular landscape of ‘ordinary’ people which he categorised as based upon custom, adaptation and mobility.<sup>66</sup> It also might also be reasonably contended that if, until recently, historical considerations of space were generally underdeveloped geography as a discipline could similarly be accused of being relatively ahistorical, with geographers habitually evidencing an equally problematic willingness to subordinate time to space.

Soja’s and Tilley’s classification of historical academic tradition - whose traditionally temporal orientated focus occludes considerations of the spatial - is certainly open to challenge. To Charles Withers, what has generally been described as the recent ‘spatial turn’ in history, can more accurately be described as the ‘rediscovery’ of concepts of both space and place which sought to draw upon the works across practices of cultural geography, social science and philosophy and engage with thinkers such as Michel Foucault, Walter Benjamin, Hannah Arendt, Yi-Fu Tuan, Edward Soja and David Harvey.<sup>67</sup> To Barney Warf and Santa Arias what Withers’ describes as the ‘rediscovery’ of the spatial can directly be traced back to the work of David Harvey and his ‘spatialisation’ of Marxist discourse, works they label as ‘the centre-piece of a critical evaluation of space.’<sup>68</sup> According to Warf and Arias, in bringing Marxist theory into communion with considerations of the spatial, Harvey provided a penetrating theoretical underpinning to considerations of space which, as a concept of engagement, had previously proved under-theorised and largely inadequate as a mode of

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<sup>65</sup> Emerging as a innovative approach to the study of history in France during the late 1920s, the Annales School as it came to be identified, began with contributions to the historical journal *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale*. The journal’s founders, Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre, aimed to encourage a more polyamorous approach to historical study which drew from other disciplines, including the social sciences, literature and psychology in an attempt to move towards a form of a "total history" to broaden the discipline’s scope and enrich its source material. For a discussion of the the origins and evolution of the Annales School and its continued influence in historical thought today see: A. Burguiere, (trans. Jane Marie Todd) *The Annales School – An Intellectual History*, (New York, 2009) For a more specific discussion of the inter-relationship between, geography, history and the contribution of the Annales school, see A. R. H. Baker, *Geography and History: Bridging the Divide* (Cambridge, 2003), p.20–23.

<sup>66</sup> See W. G. Hoskins, *The Making of the English Landscape* (London, 1955) & J.B. Jackson, *Discovering the vernacular landscape*, (New Haven, Connecticut 1984)

<sup>67</sup> C.W.J Withers, "Place and the " Spatial Turn" in Geography and in History." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 70,4 (2009) p.649

<sup>68</sup> Introduction in B.Warf and S. Arias, eds. *The spatial turn: Interdisciplinary perspectives*. (London, 2008) p.6

meaningful academic insight.<sup>69</sup>

Over the course of his career, Harvey has contributed a broad corpus of work examining the spatial with a particular focus upon exposing the economic influences which mould its configurations.<sup>70</sup> As Harvey explains: ‘place<sup>71</sup> in whatever guise is like space and time, a social construct. This is the baseline proposition from which I start, the only interesting question that can be asked is: by what social processes is place constructed?’<sup>72</sup> To Harvey, space is central to the reproduction of social life and constructed by and sustains the hegemonic forces of capitalism. Space, according to this definition, reflects the rationalisation of capitalist modes of production which reconfigures spatial settings to enable the most efficient means of channelling flows of capital and sustaining the necessary means of its accumulation.

Space, to Harvey, cannot be considered a fixed entity, but is instead engaged in a constant cycle of rebirth and renewal which mirrors fluctuations in systems of production, as capitalism systemises old labour processes and manufactures new ones in their stead. As Harvey posits ‘each social formation constructs objective conceptions of space [and time] sufficient unto its own needs and purposes of material and social reproduction and organises its material practices in accordance with their own conceptions.’<sup>73</sup> Harvey’s work, in its focus on urban environs, has proven extremely beneficial in drawing attention to conflicts over

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<sup>69</sup> Warf and Arias, *The spatial turn* p.6

<sup>70</sup> See D. Harvey, *Social justice and the city*. Vol. 1. (Athens, Georgia 2010), "The urbanisation of capital: studies in the history and theory of capitalist urbanisation." *The urbanisation of capital: studies in the history and theory of capitalist urbanisation* (Baltimore, 1985), *Consciousness and the urban experience: Studies in the history and theory of capitalist urbanization*. Vol. 1. (Baltimore, 1985), *The urban experience*. (Baltimore, 1985), *Spaces of hope*. Vol. 7. (Oakland, 2000) *Spaces of capital: Towards a critical geography*. (London, 2001)

<sup>71</sup> Tim Unwin considers Harvey’s use of space and place has particularly problematic and highlights Harvey’s occasional tendency to use the two terms interchangeably. Harvey’s use of terminology highlights the most prominent issue blighting the use of these concepts - the difficulty in definitively defining. As Withers notes this has been a consistent challenge to scholars looking to engage with concepts of ‘space’ and ‘place’ with both terms subject to wildly varying means of academic definition or else defined as synonymous even within the same text, eluding an unchallenged exactness in terminology. As Doreen Massey notes there are enormous complexities to these debates which necessarily cannot be covered at length here. Later in the chapter, I will turn to outline a working definition of both terms for the purposes of this thesis. I acknowledge the inherent subjectivity of these definitions and their subject to challenge but offer it only as part of a historical approach and a contribution to a wider discourse - not as a uncontested and all-inclusive terms.(see T. Unwin, "A waste of space? Towards a critique of the social production of space...." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 25, 1 (2000) p.16 , Withers, ‘Place and the Spatial Turn’ in *Geography and in History*. & D. Massey, *Space, place and gender* (Hoboken, 2013) p.2-3

<sup>72</sup> Harvey *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference*, (Oxford, 1996) p.261

<sup>73</sup> Harvey, ‘Between Space and Time: Reflections on the Geographical Imagination,’ *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*. 80, 3. (1990) p. 419

space and the manner in which capitalist ‘colonisations’ and reconfigurations have occasionally been stymied by the social disruption of groups who have been marginalised as a result of the economic and material transformations produced.<sup>74</sup>

Warf and Arias are broadly correct in highlighting the influence of Harvey as popularising ‘a critical re-evaluation of space’, and this approach to spatial analysis - which Creswell defines as examining space as a means of uncovering ‘instances of more general underlying social processes’ – can be seen to have had a direct influence on later works of scholars such as Christopher Tilley and Julian Thomas.<sup>75</sup> Echoing Harvey, to Tilley ‘the social relations dictated by strategies of power are simultaneously relations between material forms.’ Likewise, for Thomas, space is ‘historically particular, implicated in social relations and deeply political.’<sup>76</sup> However, in truth, what Creswell has labelled the ‘social constructionist approach to space’ has a far longer genealogy and in truth owes much of its intellectual debt to the work of both Michel Foucault and Henri Lefebvre.<sup>77</sup>

The work of Foucault presents an extremely insightful reading of space which interprets space as both an expression of power and a mode of discipline. As Stuart Elden and Jeremy W. Crampton outline:

From architectural plans or asylums, hospitals and prisons; to the exclusion of the leper and the confinement of victims in the partitioned and quarantined plague town; from spatial distributions of knowledge to the position of geography as a discipline...the spaces of libraries, of art and literature; analyses of town planning and urban health; and a whole host of other geographical issues, Foucault’s work was always filled with implications and insights concerning spatiality.<sup>78</sup>

As Foucault maintained ‘A whole history remains to be written of *spaces*—which would at the same time be the history of *power*—from the great strategies of geopolitics to the little tactics of the habitat.’<sup>79</sup> Foucault viewed the traditional academic treatment of space as ancillary to the study of the effects as time as a reflection of the, then, dominant intellectual influence of Marxist structuralism within French intellectual circles. To Foucault, traditional

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<sup>74</sup> Harvey, *Social justice and the city*

<sup>75</sup> T. Creswell *Place: A Short Introduction*, (Oxford, 2010) p.51 For Harvey’s influence as a scholar see A.R. Bodman, "Weavers of influence: the structure of contemporary geographic research", *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 16, 1 (1991). Harvey was ranked first in a study of most-cited academic geographers in four English speaking countries between 1984 & 1988

<sup>76</sup> J. Thomas ‘The politics of vision and the archaeologies of landscape.’ *Landscape: politics and perspectives* (1993) p.28 & C. Tilley, ‘*The Materiality of Stone – Explorations in Landscape Phenomenology.*’ (Oxford, 2004)

<sup>77</sup> T. Creswell *Place* p.51

<sup>78</sup> S. Elden, *Space, knowledge and power: Foucault and geography.* (London, 2016) p.1

<sup>79</sup> M. Foucault, *Power/knowledge and other selected writings* eds. by Colin Gordon (New York, 1980) p.149

Marxist critiques which posited that to consider the role of space at all in an conceptual sense suggested one was 'hostile to time' and was therefore 'reactionary and capitalist' was inherently an 'absurd' position.'<sup>80</sup> To address an academic method he found wanting, Foucault turned to reflections upon the spatial that addressed space as a concept on both a micro *and* macro level.

As with Harvey's deliberations on space, Foucault focussed upon urban history as a means of revealing the manner in which ispatial ordering facilitated flows of capital. To Foucault, scientific disciplines which sought to rationalise space through increasingly refined means (e.g. cartography, statistical analysis and census taking) are a consequence of an ever more sophisticated (and repressive) mode of governance which sought to subordinate and discipline the individual with the objective of increased and sustained economic efficiency.<sup>81</sup> However, Foucault departed from traditional Marxist readings of space in viewing the rationalised town and city as a microcosm of state governance in addition to a symptom of capitalist rationalisation. Reflecting the wider nation state, the efficient layout of a town should not only permit the flow of capital itself but also of the 'circulation of ideas, of wills, and of orders.'<sup>82</sup> Space, so defined by Foucault, can broadly be characterised as a mutually reinforcing relationship between the 'territorial' (which is a broadly locational extent) sovereignty (state power enacted within this territory) and the commercial state which governs trade within this sovereign territory and determines the spatial configurations which best facilitate capital circulation.<sup>83</sup>

Yet Foucault was not merely concerned with engaging with concepts of space as a means of exploring the governance of the modern administrative state as an *abstract* and indeed his earlier work demonstrated great concern with questions of how the exchanges of state power effected the behaviour of human actors directly within certain locations. The experiential consequences of urban spatial ordering and partition were discussed by Foucault in both the *History of Madness* and *Discipline and Punishment*, where Foucault considers the role of the leper in Medieval townships - who Foucault believed embodied a prominent symbolic representation of the larger 'real' population of 'beggars, vagabonds, madmen and the

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<sup>80</sup> Foucault, *Power/knowledge* p. 66 & Foucault. *The essential Foucault: Selections from essential works of Foucault, 1954-1984*. eds by. Paul Rabinow, and Nikolas S. Rose. (New York, 2003) p.361

<sup>81</sup> Foucault, 'Governmentality' in *The Foucault effect: studies in governmentality*, eds. by G. Burchell, C. Gordon, and P. Miller (Chicago, 1991) p.100

<sup>82</sup> Foucault, *Security, territory, population*. (New York, 2007) p.29

<sup>83</sup> Foucault, *Security, territory, population*.

disorderly.’<sup>84</sup> Foucault outlines how lepers were excluded and spatially segregated and effectively pushed to the margins of towns. To Foucault, this process was an antecedent to the creation of ‘enormous houses of confinement’ such as the construction of the *Hospital General* in 1656 in the mid-seventeenth century which separated dangerous ‘others’ from wider society as a means of maintaining societal cohesion.<sup>85</sup>

Foucault contrasts this treatment of the figure of the leper with state conduct towards those afflicted with plague. To Foucault, there was a clear distinction between the two, plague victims were merely spatially ‘partitioned and controlled’ to avoid circulation of the affliction - a relationship dictated by discipline and the imposition of order. In contrast, lepers were spatially severed from wider society to preserve its unity.<sup>86</sup> As with Harvey’s contributions to spatial discourse, Foucauldian readings of space have proven enormously influential and academics inspired by Foucault have continued to examine ways in which power has woven through space and found material expression on both a macro and micro scale; from the globalised nation state to the primary school dining room.<sup>87</sup>

While Foucault’s contribution to spatial theory has certainly proved substantial, arguably ‘the spatial turn’ in Western scholarship has a more readily apparent Marxist genealogy. As outlined above, while the work of Harvey did much to diffuse the concept of space as valid mode of interpretative understanding within English speaking scholarship it was arguably Henri Lefebvre, rather than Harvey, who has provided the greatest theoretical contribution to considerations of space within the humanities. In the words of Soja, Lefebvre ‘has been more influential than any other scholar in opening up and exploring the limitless dimensions of our social spatiality.’<sup>88</sup> Like Foucault, Lefebvre’s work was influenced by what he determined, were inadequacies in academic deliberations on the spatial. As Lefebvre explained in *The Production of Space* ‘Not so many years ago, the word ‘space’ had a strictly geometrical meaning: the idea it evoked was simply that of an empty area.’<sup>89</sup>

Throughout *The Production of Space* Lefebvre offers historical examples of how differing societies produced their own spatial practices employing a sweeping temporal sweep

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<sup>84</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and punishment: The birth of the prison*. (New York, 1977) p.196

<sup>85</sup> Foucault, *Madness and civilization: A history of madness in the age of reason* (London, 1998)

<sup>86</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and punishment*

<sup>87</sup> See P. Hirst, *Space and Power* (Cambridge, 2005) & J. Pike, ‘Foucault, space and primary school dining rooms’ *Children's Geographies*, 6,4, (2008) pp. 413-422

<sup>88</sup> Soja, *Thirdspace: journeys to Los Angeles and other real and imagined places*. (Oxford, 1996) p.6

<sup>89</sup> Lefebvre, *Production of Space* p.1



encompassing the ancient city, Medieval cities and towns of Christian Europe that followed and finally the neo-capitalist cityspace that of the present day.<sup>90</sup> Lefebvre also, innovatively, assesses the spatial practices of reputedly communist states as a novel means to measure their success in the application of socialism.<sup>91</sup> Arguing the spaces produced by contemporary communist regimes lacked both material advance and ‘creative fertility’ Lefebvre argues the form of communism envisaged by both Marx and Engels had manifestly not taken root in these nations despite political claims to the contrary.<sup>92</sup> To Lefebvre ‘One cannot help but wonder...whether it is legitimate to speak of socialism where no architectural innovation has occurred, where no specific space has been created; would it not be more appropriate in that case to speak of a failed transition?’<sup>93</sup>

As with Foucault, Lefebvre constructed his work on space as an intended rejoinder to approaches of structural Marxism, and in particular its most prominent exponent, Louis Althusser.<sup>94</sup> As critiques of structuralist approaches to Marxism have noted, whatever the strengths of its empirical grounding and the sophistication of its theoretical claims the structural analysis presented in the works of Althusser has tended to reduce people to ‘mere carriers of a structural logic’ obliterating considerations of their lived experiences and creative interactions with their surrounding environment to intractable functional and teleological processes.<sup>95</sup>

Yet Lefebvre was equally critical of Foucault’s treatment of space which he regarded as largely detached from the processes of everyday life which Foucault claimed to acknowledge.<sup>96</sup> To Lefebvre, Foucault failed to successfully bridge the gap between the theoretical and practical - what he dubbed the ‘space of philosophers and the space of people who deal with deal with material things.’<sup>97</sup> To Lefebvre, the limitations of Foucault’s reading of space was symptomatic of a wider failure amongst Western scholars as regards spatial analysis which he considered lent itself towards a ‘dogmatic’ adherence to considering space as an abstract, philosophical concept which enveloped and subsumed its social and physical

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<sup>90</sup> Lefebvre, *Production of Space* p.158-9, 121,127,158-159, 237-241

<sup>91</sup> Lefebvre, *Production of Space* p.55

<sup>92</sup> Lefebvre, *Production of Space* p.55

<sup>93</sup> Lefebvre, *Production of Space* p.55

<sup>94</sup> See D. Harvey ‘Afterword’ in Lefebvre, *Production of Space* p.429

<sup>95</sup> See. J. Duncan & D. Ley. "Structural Marxism and human geography: a critical assessment." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 72,1 (1982) pp. 30-59.

<sup>96</sup> See D. Harvey ‘Afterword’ in Lefebvre, *Production of Space* p.429

<sup>97</sup> Lefebvre, *Production of Space*. p.6

aspects.<sup>98</sup> Lefebvre argued that this gulf between ‘the space of philosophers’ on one side and ‘real space’ on the other (the physical and social) served to create a ‘mental abyss’ whereby academics ignored the social dynamics of space in favour of increasingly inward looking modes of analysis.<sup>99</sup> Lefebvre was particularly critical of semiotic readings of the material with its focus on processes of communication, linguistics, sign- systems and signifiers. Lefebvre regarded semiotics as an approach ‘unaware of its own limitations’ and he argued the application of literary forms of analysis to spatial forms as only ever able to describe their nature on a purely descriptive level.’<sup>100</sup>

Lefebvre argued largely inaccessible epistemological interpretations of space and the increasingly specialised segmentations of it (geographical, economic, demographic, sociological, ecological, political, national, continental global etc.) offered by much of Western scholarship had profound political implications which, he claimed, served to deliberately conceal its true nature as a function and production of capitalism.<sup>101</sup> Lefebvre argued that ‘the indefinite multitude of spaces’ presented by these categorisations merely reflect hegemonic political discourse and can therefore be considered ‘neo-capitalist’ distortions of knowledge.<sup>102</sup> To Lefebvre these interpretations of space implied ‘an ideology designed to conceal that use, along with conflicts intrinsic to the highly interested employment of a supposedly disinterested knowledge.’<sup>103</sup>

Lefebvre regarded *The Production of Space* as a means of salvaging spatial considerations from increasing ‘fragmentation, separation and disintegration’ and in doing so, reclaim its use ‘by proxy’ from dominant capitalist ideology.<sup>104</sup> Lefebvre aimed to demonstrate the active and instrumental role of space as part of the totality of a wider economic system which was built on the foundation of the logic of capitalist modes of production.<sup>105</sup> Acknowledging a debt to fields of mathematics and science (although pointing to the limitations of both in adequately representing the spatial) Lefebvre sought to advance a ‘unitary theory’ of space which outlined its structurally constituted nature but also mutual and reciprocal relationships

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<sup>98</sup> Lefebvre, *Production of Space*. p.4

<sup>99</sup> Lefebvre, *Production of Space*. p.6

<sup>100</sup> Lefebvre, *Production of Space*. p.6

<sup>101</sup> Lefebvre, *Production of Space*. p.8

<sup>102</sup> Lefebvre, *Production of Space*. p.8

<sup>103</sup> Lefebvre, *Production of Space*. p.8

<sup>104</sup> Lefebvre, *Production of Space*. p.8

<sup>105</sup> Lefebvre, *Production of Space*. p.11

between this structure and the human actors found within it.<sup>106</sup>

To fundamentally reevaluate and transform the nature of deliberations on space, Lefebvre advanced a conceptual triad which he claimed offered a more meaningful lens with which to interpret the spatial, this triad is fundamental to Lefebvre's work on space and is worth quoting in full.

1. *Spatial practice*, which embraces production and reproduction, and the particular locations and spatial sets characteristic of each known social formation. Spatial practice ensures continuity and some degree of cohesion. In terms of social space, and of each member of a given society's relationship to that space, this cohesion implies a guaranteed level of competence and a specific level of performance.
2. *Representations of space*, which are tied to the relations of production and to the 'order' which those relations impose, and hence to knowledge, to signs, to codes and to 'frontal' relations.
3. *Representational spaces*, embodying complex symbolisms, sometimes coded, sometimes not, linked to the clandestine or underground side of social life, as also to art (which may come eventually to be defined less as a code of space than as a code of representational spaces).<sup>107</sup>

Lefebvre also advanced another critical triad within *The Production of Space* and attempted to outline what he saw as the distinction between 'social space, mental space and physical space. As Lefebvre explained: 'Social space will be revealed in its particularity to the extent to that it ceases to be indistinguishable from mental space (as defined by philosophers and mathematicians) on the one hand, and physical space (as defined by practico-sensory activity and the perception of 'nature' on the other).'<sup>108</sup>

In advancing these modes of interpretative analysis, Lefebvre sought to reveal that social space was not simply a collection of unintelligible 'things', an 'aggregate of sensory data' or that it was not capable of being reduced to an abstract 'form imposed upon phenomena...and physical materiality.'<sup>109</sup> To Lefebvre, space, considered in isolation is an 'empty abstraction' its true meaning is to be revealed in a theoretical consideration of how and by what processes a society produces its space, although, as Lefebvre acknowledges by society, he means 'modes of production along with its specific relations of production.'<sup>110</sup> The material objects that populate wider spatial forms are, to Lefebvre: 'not only things but also relations.'<sup>111</sup> As Neil Smith succinctly summarised, Lefebvre considers 'space is in any meaningful sense [as]

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<sup>106</sup> Lefebvre, *Production of Space*. p.11

<sup>107</sup> Lefebvre, *Production of Space*. p.33

<sup>108</sup> Lefebvre, *Production of Space*. p.27

<sup>109</sup> Lefebvre, *Production of Space*. p.27

<sup>110</sup> Lefebvre, *Production of Space*. p.12 & p.31

<sup>111</sup> Lefebvre, *Production of Space*. p.77

produced in and through human activity and the reproduction of social relations.’<sup>112</sup>

Arguably, *The Production of Space* represents the most significant theoretical contribution to engagements with the spatial found within western scholarship having imprinted upon the fields of sociology, geography and history and finding application in (among others) deliberations as diverse as the effects of urbanisation, the rise of new media, globalisation, the treatment of natural disasters and the authenticity of the tourist experience.<sup>113</sup> Yet despite this pervasive influence, some academics have forwarded critiques of ‘social constructivist’ works which have highlighted some of its relative limitations as a mode of spatial analysis.

Tim Unwin highlights the vast scope of Lefebvre’s work as a point of concern which he characterises as ‘ranging from the Roman state-city-empire’ to the architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright, from the space of medieval Christendom to the French revolution and from Heraclitus to Marx.’<sup>114</sup> Yet, the breadth of Lefebvre’s historical span perhaps leads to the charge that there may be a corresponding surfeit of requisite detail.

To highlight but one example, illustrative example, Lefebvre’s mediations on the spatial practices of existing socialist states and his conclusion it signifies a ‘failed transition’ to full communism are potentially open to challenge. While Lefebvre’s reading is certainly stimulating, recent scholarship has pointed towards a surprising degree of a complexity in Soviet spatial practice. Photographer Christopher Herwig’s *Soviet Bus Stops* for instance provides a visual representation of the often innovative ways in which the former USSR attempted to express a form of architectural imagination distinct from that of the capitalist West.<sup>115</sup> Equally, the work of Philipp Meuser, Dimitrij Zadorin, Katia Sheina in their exhaustive documenting of the Soviet Union’s prefabricated housing programme has demonstrated how the USSR attempted to apply enormous economies of scale to housing developments which effectively transformed the figure of the individual architect into an

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<sup>112</sup> N. Smith, ‘Antinomies of space and nature in Henri Lefebvre’s ‘The production of space’ in A. Light and J. M. Smith (eds.) *Philosophy and Geography Two*. 2. (Lanham, Maryland, 1998) p.54

<sup>113</sup> See S. Graham and S. Marvin, *Splintering urbanism: networked infrastructures, technological mobilities and the urban condition*. (Abingdon-on-Thames, 2001), L. Manovich, *The language of new media*. (Massachusetts, 2001), P. Blaikie (eds.) *At risk: natural hazards, people’s vulnerability and disasters* (Abingdon-on-Thames, 2014) & N. Wang, "Rethinking authenticity in tourism experience." *Annals of tourism research* 26, 2 (1999) pp. 349-370.

<sup>114</sup> T. Unwin, "A waste of space? Towards a critique of the social production of space...." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 25, 1 (2000) p.13

<sup>115</sup> C. Herwig, *Soviet Bus Stops* (Fuel: London 2015)

industrial planner.<sup>116</sup>

It is certainly difficult to challenge Lefebvre's characterisation of the Eastern bloc as exhibiting a 'failed transition' to communism from a political perspective. Nonetheless the scale and multiplicity of Communist State attempts to construct a space that reflected collectivist principles perhaps belies Lefebvre's broad generalisation. From 1956, following the release of the Khrushchev report detailing Stalinist atrocities in the former USSR, Lefebvre became an outspoken critic of the Soviet Union and the question arises as to what extent his political sympathies permeated his reading of Soviet architecture as creatively moribund and therefore symptomatic of an abortive material application of true socialist philosophy.<sup>117</sup>

Lefebvre's political views leads us to an acknowledgment of his position as a prominent humanist Marxist scholar and to the question as to what extent this dictated his deliberations on space in a broader sense. As Lefebvre admits, *The Production of Space* represents a deeply political venture: 'This book has been informed from beginning to end by a project... I refer to the project of a different society, a different mode of production where social practice should be governed by different conceptual determinations.'<sup>118</sup> Yet to Unwin, this political project applies a self-imposed barrier to the scope of Lefebvre's examination of the spatial.<sup>119</sup> To Unwin, Lefebvre's application of complex Marxist terminology and the density of his theoretical scope serves to obliterate the practice of human life: 'in this very process, he draws our attention away from the misery, from the lived experience of humanity, and toward an intellectual and arid conceptualisation of an idea, of space.'<sup>120</sup> This critique is also forwarded by Barbara Bender, who argues whilst Lefebvre offers important insights about the role of class relations in considerations of space, he is relatively silent on its other implications including its influence upon gender relations.<sup>121</sup> The implications of this critique are significant as Lefebvre's stated aim throughout his work is to salvage considerations of the spatial from the arid offices of city planners and philosophers to more fully reflect its lived dimensions.<sup>122</sup> As Unwin suggests, in the sheer complexity of Lefebvre's work and its

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<sup>116</sup> K. Sheina, P. Meuser & D. Zadorin, *Towards a Typology of Soviet Mass Housing Prefabrication in the USSR 1955 – 1991*. (Dom Publishers: Berlin, 2016)

<sup>117</sup> See D. Harvey 'Afterword' in Lefebvre, *Production of Space* p.429

<sup>118</sup> Lefebvre, *Production of Space* p.419

<sup>119</sup> Unwin, "A waste of space? Towards a critique of the social production of space...." p.22

<sup>120</sup> Unwin, "A waste of space? Towards a critique of the social production of space...." p.22

<sup>121</sup> B.Bender, 'Place and Landscape', in C. Tilley, W.Keane, S. Kuchler, M. Rowlands & P. Spyer (eds.) *Handbook of Material Culture* (London: 2006) p.305

<sup>122</sup> Lefebvre, *Production of Space* p.16

complicated renderings of space it is often difficult to claim whether Lefebvre was particularly successful in this regard.<sup>123</sup> Unwin goes on to hint (without developing the idea fully) that Lefebvre's work was directed primarily at 'social theorists and philosophers' of the French speaking world and therefore its intended reach is somewhat limited.<sup>124</sup>

Equally, Lefebvre is concerned far more with interpreting objects as a lens through which to examine the social processes which constituted them, as he explains 'the object of interest must be expected to shift from things in space to the actual production of space.'<sup>125</sup>

Considerations of the material beyond this he considered as an 'overburdening' of objects with 'symbolic meaning' a practice he considered affective and therefore subjective.<sup>126</sup> In a similar vein, Lefebvre's focus on the urban locales and the occasional conflicts it produces can be interpreted as a reflective of a particular Marxist preoccupation in readings of space which primarily serves as a means of unveiling the assumed contradictions it reveals within capitalist modes of production and pointing towards the germination of future revolution.

Finally, Lefebvre's deployment of language and the style in which he writes present further barriers to its successful application as a mode of spatial analysis. This is confronted directly by Edward Soja who, although deeply indebted to the work of Lefebvre, acknowledges that *The Production Of Space* - due to the complexity of arguments Lefebvre employs and the book's theoretical density - presents a potential barrier to ready comprehension by its readers.<sup>127</sup> Soja interpreted the style of Lefebvre's work as representing the form of a 'musical composition, with a multiplicity of instruments and voices playing together at the same time' lending it a 'polyphonic character.'<sup>128</sup> Soja's signposting of Lefebvre's discursive method of writing of does not merely represent a superficial issue of style. Soja, interprets the complexity of Lefebvre's language and the subordination of a standard temporal structure to a spatial one as representing a new method of capturing the intricacy of space. Yet such favourable views of Lefebvre's use of language are by no means universal. To Edward Dimendberg the style of Lefebvre's writing represents a significant barrier to understanding, this is a critical issue, as to Dimendberg, Lefebvre's definitions of space remain 'difficult to

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<sup>123</sup> Unwin, "A waste of space? Towards a critique of the social production of space...." p.19 - 22

<sup>124</sup> Unwin, "A waste of space? Towards a critique of the social production of space...."

<sup>125</sup> Lefebvre, *Production of Space* p.37

<sup>126</sup> Lefebvre, *Production of Space* p.12

<sup>127</sup> Soja, *Thirdspace: journeys to Los Angeles and other real and imagined places*. p.9

<sup>128</sup> Soja, *Thirdspace: journeys to Los Angeles and other real and imagined places*. p.9 in A.Light and J. M. Smith (eds.) *Philosophy and Geography Two*. Vol. 2. (Lanham, Maryland, 1998) p.54

grasp' with any degree of 'specificity.'<sup>129</sup>

## Place

Despite the limitations discussed above, the work of Lefebvre, Foucault, Harvey and Soja represent an essential contribution to considerations of space within academic scholarship. As Warf and Arias highlight what Creswell dubs 'social constructivist' interpretations of the spatial provided a vital theoretical underpinning to an approach which had previously been undertheorised and erred towards the subjective.<sup>130</sup> Coupling material objects with a broader conceptual framework stresses both their interconnectedness and their broader affinity with the societies that produced them. Interpreting material objects and space as representations of /and constituted by, wider networks of power stresses the centrality of a society's influence on materiality. This approach also, as Julian Thomas highlights, emphasises the centrality of economic processes in configuring the spaces of human activity reminding us that space 'historically particular, implicated in social relations and deeply political.'<sup>131</sup>

Nonetheless, social constructivism tends, as Tim Cole points out, 'towards the monolithic', effectively rendering space as an empty container through which relationships of power can be divined.<sup>132</sup> If, broadly speaking, social constructivist readings of space have been inclined towards examining the theoretical and economically deterministic dimensions of space, other academic approaches have attempted to consider more subjective and individual experiences. To humanistic geographers for instance, space is not simply a conceptual container through which nodes of power flow through; it is the subject of academic enquiry beyond and have consequently approached spatial categorisations as a means to investigate embodied human experience within specific locations. To develop this point of analysis and distinguish between the fields humanistic geographers have attempted to delineate between abstract 'space' and experiential 'place.'

An acknowledgment of the individual's relationship with place has led to the development of

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<sup>129</sup> E. Dimendberg, "Henri Lefebvre on abstract space." in A.Light and J. M. Smith (eds.) *Philosophy and Geography Two*. p.18

<sup>130</sup> Warf and Arias, *The spatial turn* p.6

<sup>131</sup> J. Thomas, 'The Politics of Vision and archaeologies of landscape,' p.28

<sup>132</sup> T. Cole, 'The Place of Things in Contemporary History', in the *Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of the Contemporary World* eds. P. G.-Brown, R. Harrison and A Piccini , (Oxford: 2013) p.15

the geographical sub-discipline of phenomenology, which, drawing on philosophical attempts to explain and describe subjective human experience, has explored the topic of space through its everyday lived dimensions. Barbara Bender clearly identifies the key issue in any phenomenological approach as ‘the manner in which people experience and understand the world.’ For Bender ‘phenomenology involves the understanding and description of things as they are experienced by a subject. It is the relationship between being and being *in* the world.’<sup>133</sup> Phenomenology as an interpretive framework is not limited to philosophy and geography - as a field predominantly concerned with how ‘people and artefacts interact’<sup>134</sup> - it has also proven to be an attractive sub-discipline to archaeologists.<sup>135</sup>

The use of phenomenology as an interpretative framework within humanistic geography owes an enormous intellectual debt to the philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. To Merleau-Ponty, phenomenology can be defined as the ‘study of essences.’<sup>136</sup> As he explained in the *Phenomenology of Perception*. ‘It tries to give a direct account for a direct description of experience as it is, without taking account of its psychological origins and the causal explanations which the scientist, historian, or sociologist may be able to provide.’<sup>137</sup> Merleau-Ponty stresses the importance of materiality within human interactions with the world, arguing that consciousness is brought into being ‘as an aggregate of connected phenomena’ in the world. To Merleau-Ponty, ‘there is no inner man, man is the world and only in the world does he know himself’ as he states directly ‘I think what I live through.’<sup>138</sup>

From the 1970s onwards, the broad tenets of Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy would be adopted within geographical approaches which sought to move away from positivistic methods largely favoured by the discipline from the 1950s onwards with their emphasis on empirical methodologies, systematic observation and principles derived from the hard sciences.<sup>139</sup> As Paul Rodaway describes ‘humanist geography gave geographers the opportunity to reassert the importance of the human experience, that is a concern with the individual and the unique,

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<sup>133</sup> B. Bender, ‘Time and Landscape’, *Current Anthropology*, 43,54 (2002) p.103

<sup>134</sup> M. B. Schiffer ‘*The Material Life of Human Beings*’, (London: 1999) Christopher Tilley, *A phenomenology of landscape – Places, paths and monuments*, J. Thomas ‘The Politics of Vision and archaeologies of landscape,’ in ‘*Landscape, politics and perspectives*’ eds. Barbara Bender (Oxford:1999)

<sup>135</sup> M. B. Schiffer, *The Material Life of Human Beings*. p.103

<sup>136</sup> M. Merleau-Ponty *Phenomenology of perception*. trans. Colin Smith. (Paris, 1996) p.viii

<sup>137</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of perception* p.xi

<sup>138</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of perception* p.xiii

<sup>139</sup> See R. Kitchin, ‘Positivistic Geographies and spatial science.’ In S. Aitken & G. Valentine (eds.), *Approaches to human geography* (London: 2011) p.20-29



the subjective experience of people and place, a geography of feeling and emotion, involvement and participation.<sup>140</sup> Significantly, in its focus on interpretive accounts of human behaviour humanist geography shared a common cause with comparable historical perspectives.<sup>141</sup>

Humanist geography has produced a number of prominent scholars; including Anne Buttimer whose mediations on the human experience of place, space and movement have focussed on migration and identity and environmental experience, David Ley whose academic focus has been centred on the spatial dynamics of labour markets in urban environments and Edward Relph whose enormously influential work *Place and Placelessness* established a more philosophically grounded and consequently more sophisticated approach to exploring the complexity of place, one which acknowledged the ‘importance of place in everyday life.’<sup>142</sup>

The contributions of Buttimer, Ley and Relph represent critical and highly significant mediations on space, place and its impact on lived human experience, yet as John S. Adams contends Yi Fu Tuan’s scholarship perhaps represents the most influential ‘redirection of thinking’ towards concepts of space and place within human geography.<sup>143</sup> Tuan’s approach diverges substantially from social constructivist approaches to space in the manner in which he chooses to define the term. For Tuan, space is categorised principally as an area which ‘allows movement through it’ a territorial area marked of as areas for ‘contestation and defence.’<sup>144</sup> Space, to Tuan, is principally a category of human cognition, the perception of which essentially finds its starting point in the biology and structure of the human body.<sup>145</sup>

The human being, by his mere presence, imposes a schema on space. Most of the time he is not aware of it. He notes its absence when he is lost. He marks his presence on those ritual occasions that lift life above the ordinary and so force him to an awareness of life’s values, including those manifest in space. Cultures differ greatly in the elaboration of spatial schemata. In some cultures they are rudimentary; in others they can become a many splendored frame that integrates nearly all departments of life. Yet, despite the large outward differences, the vocabularies of spatial

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<sup>140</sup> P. Rodaway ‘Humanism and People-Centred Methods’ in *Approaches to human geography* p. 263

<sup>141</sup> Rodaway ‘Humanism and People-Centred Methods’ p. 263

<sup>142</sup> A. Buttimer, *Sustainable landscapes and lifeways. Scale and appropriateness.* (Cork: 2001) & Buttimer, "Farmers fishermen gypsies guests: who identifies?." *Pacific Viewpoint* 26, 1 (1985) pp. 280-315, D. Ley, *The New Middle Class and the Remaking of the Central City.* (Oxford and New York: 1996), Ley, ‘The Black Inner City as Frontier Outpost: Images and Behaviour of a Philadelphia Neighbourhood. *Association of American Geographers, Monograph Series.* No. 7, 282 (1974),& E. Relph, *Place and placelessness.* Vol. 1. (London:1976)

<sup>143</sup> J. S. Adams, ‘The quantitative revolution in urban geography’ in B. Berry and J. Wheeler (eds.) *Urban geography in America, 1950-2000: paradigms and personalities.* (London, 2014) p.102

<sup>144</sup> Y. F. Tuan, *Space and Place – The Perspective of Experience.* (Minnesota: 1979) p.3 & 6

<sup>145</sup> Tuan, *Space and Place.* p.34-50

organisation and value have certain common terms. These common terms are ultimately derived from the structure and values of the human body.<sup>146</sup>

Tuan's definition of space is significant in that it implies a limit to the degree in which societal and economic forces are able to completely produce and manipulate spatial form, consequently, to Tuan 'the biological facts of the human experience' and its influence on notions of space and place suggest a shared frame of reference among human beings which mean notions of space and place are never 'fully incomprehensible' to human group experience.<sup>147</sup> However, Tuan does not suggest that human culture has no influence upon spatial organisation and *Space and Place* acknowledges the manner in which various societies have shaped the spaces that envelop them. Nonetheless the emphasis of Tuan's work is upon 'general questions of human dispositions, capacities and needs' and the 'shared traits that transcend cultural particularities and therefore reflect the general human condition'.<sup>148</sup>

Space, for Fu-Tuan, is therefore an 'abstract' and 'intangible' term and the primarily the product of a mode of human perception and thought. Throughout *Space and Place* Fu Tuan seeks to demonstrate how these impalpable processes influence human representations of space. To Fu-Tuan, 'reality is a creation of feeling and thought' which encapsulates not only 'sensory perceptions' but 'discrete' sensations such as 'memory' and 'anticipation.'<sup>149</sup> Tuan illustrates his rendering of space through use of illustrative examples. For instance, Tuan argues that the concepts of 'spaciousness' and 'crowding' cannot be empirically defined in an absolute sense but are instead rendered as relative terms which signify broader shared values.<sup>150</sup> To Tuan then, spaciousness is a concept that is closely aligned with perceptions of human freedom and 'crowding' a term which denotes 'observation' serving to 'thwart individual will'. Both 'spaciousness' and 'crowding' then sit outside of any 'notional' concepts of population density.<sup>151</sup>

On a more intimate level, Tuan seeks to outline the manner in which 'emotion tints all human experience' even that of ostensibly objective disciplines such as science and mathematics.<sup>152</sup>

To illustrate the interplay between memory, emotion and human perception Tuan highlights

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<sup>146</sup> Tuan, *Space and Place* p.36-37

<sup>147</sup> Tuan, *Space and Place* p.6 & p. 148

<sup>148</sup> Tuan, *Space and Place* p.5 & p.6

<sup>149</sup> Tuan, *Space and Place* p.9

<sup>150</sup> Tuan, *Space and Place* p.51-p.66

<sup>151</sup> Tuan, *Space and Place* p.52

<sup>152</sup> Tuan, *Space and Place* p.6

the example of the ‘smell of decay’ which, as Tuan points out, is a sensory input generally greeted with feelings of repulsion when human adults encounter it. Yet, as Tuan observes, small children and ‘mammals with far keener senses’ than our own seem largely unaffected.<sup>153</sup> Citing the work of Susanne Langer, Tuan suggests odours of decay serves as a *memento mori* for grown adults, eliciting associations which are largely absent in children and other animals. The key difference in this sensory perception then is therefore a ‘work of memory.’<sup>154</sup>

Tuan’s work is also critical in the manner in which he attempts to delineate between the more abstract and conceptual term of space and a more intimate rendering of *place*. Place, Tuan argues constitutes ‘centres of felt value’ for human beings if space is freedom, Tuan claims, ‘place is security.’<sup>155</sup> Place, is space which has been ‘endowed with value’ by human behaviour and perception.<sup>156</sup> To illustrate his definition of the fundamental distinction between space and place, Tuan compares the ‘direct and intimate’ relationship one shares with ones home with to that of the ‘conceptual’ mediations upon the space of the city applied by geographers.<sup>157</sup>

In practice, Tuan claims, people negotiate place somewhere ‘in the middle of high theoretical and lived experience.’<sup>158</sup>

In this range places are constructed out of such elements as distinctive odours, textural and visual qualities in the environment, seasonal changes of temperature and colour, how they look as they are approached from the highway, their location in the school atlas or road map and additional bits of indirect knowledge like population number and kinds of industries.<sup>159</sup>

Tuan’s work seeks to trace the intimate experiences of place shared by human beings, highlighting the often affective connection shared with one’s home and its critical role in providing a site of both ‘respite and care.’<sup>160</sup> To Tuan, events, memories and experiences interact with a location to ‘create place.’<sup>161</sup> Tuan also reflects upon human interventions in the material world and argue that these transformations of abstract space represent an attempt to ‘create place’ and so set the stage for ‘intimate human encounters’.<sup>162</sup> Place, to Tuan, is ‘a

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<sup>153</sup> Tuan, *Space and Place* p.11

<sup>154</sup> Tuan, *Space and Place* p.11

<sup>155</sup> Tuan, *Space and Place* p.3 & 4

<sup>156</sup> Tuan, *Space and Place* p.6

<sup>157</sup> Tuan, *Space and Place* p.7

<sup>158</sup> Tuan, *Place: an experiential perspective. Geographical Review* (1975) p.152

<sup>159</sup> Tuan, *Place: an experiential perspective* p.153

<sup>160</sup> Tuan, *Place: an experiential perspective* p.137

<sup>161</sup> Tuan, *Place: an experiential perspective* p.144

<sup>162</sup> Tuan, *Place: an experiential perspective* p.144

type of object' which 'defines space' and endows it with 'geometric personality.'<sup>163</sup>

Yet place, for Tuan, is not simply a relationship shared with the intimate locations of one's immediate surroundings. In *Place: an Experiential Perspective*, Tuan provides a reading of place which telescopes outward from direct to indirect experiences of place which nonetheless have an equally valid claim as bearers of human meaning and significance. Beginning with bodily experience and the constructive activity of sensory perception, human emotion and memory, Tuan moves on to a consideration of places within the home to.<sup>164</sup> To Tuan, a consideration of these smaller domestic places reveal the personal relationships shared and cultivated *within* and the manner in which human beings endow the objects inside their residences with value, a relationship which is constructed upon the basis of embodied familiarity.<sup>165</sup> Tuan also considers the role of the home itself, particularly in terms of its status as a symbolic entity of 'nurturing shelter' and a location of convalescence, sustenance and rest.<sup>166</sup> Tuan broadens the terms with which he chooses to discern locations of place to include the city an environment 'created exclusively for human use' and so consequently 'dense with meaning', neighbourhood as a 'definable spatial and social unit' and region as an area principally outlined as a 'construct of human thought.'<sup>167</sup> Ending with the 'nation-state' Tuan argues that despite being incapable of being 'directly experienced' it nonetheless acts as a 'powerful centre of meaning, focus of loyalty and deep attachment.'<sup>168</sup>

Tuan's application of phenomenological principles within the field of human geography proved to exert pervasive influence on other academics across such varied disciplines as urban design, archaeology and history. Kim Dovey, architectural professor at the University of Melbourne, echoes Tuan in stressing the centrality of the human body to conceptions of place and materiality. To Kim Dovey: 'the body is a bridge between 'being' and the 'world' – the lived experience of the body – in space – is the primary relation from which all conceptions of space are constructed.'<sup>169</sup> To archaeologist Christopher Tilley: 'We experience and perceive the world because we live in that world and are intertwined with it. We are part of it, and it is part of us.'<sup>170</sup> As Tilley suggests, following Tuan, acknowledging

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<sup>163</sup> Tuan, *Place: an experiential perspective* p.144

<sup>164</sup> Tuan, *Place: an experiential perspective* p.151-153

<sup>165</sup> Tuan, *Place: an experiential perspective* p.153 -154

<sup>166</sup> Tuan, *Place: an experiential perspective* p.154-156

<sup>167</sup> Tuan, *Place: an experiential perspective* p.157-158

<sup>168</sup> Tuan, *Place: an experiential perspective* p.158-159

<sup>169</sup> K. Dovey, *Framing Place – Mediating power in Its built form*. (London, 1999) p.24

<sup>170</sup> C. Tilley, *A phenomenology of landscape – Places, paths and monuments*. (Oxford: Berg, 2010) p.17

the body as an arbiter in our relations with the world suggests a certain limit to subjective interpretations of place and materiality. 'meaning is grounded in the sensuous embodied relation between persons and the world, an invariant ontological ground for all feeling and all-knowing taking place through persons with similar bodies.'<sup>171</sup> Simon Schama's reading of landscape also owes an intellectual debt to the work of Tuan, seen within Schama's assertion that human interactions with space and place are most often 'the work of the mind.'<sup>172</sup> To Schama, the central distinction between space and place are the 'complicating memories, myths and meanings' that constitute a place.<sup>173</sup>

Despite the pervasive influence of humanistic geography on other academic disciplines which seek to engage with concepts of space and place, phenomenology as a method, and Tuan's application of it, have nonetheless produced critical responses. To Mark Billinge, phenomenology principally represents a reaction *to* and a form of criticism *of* positivist geographic methods. Billinge argues phenomenological methods are essentially a form of 'negativism' and therefore questions whether Merlau-Ponty's 'contemplative philosophy' can truly find expression within the field of geography.<sup>174</sup> The work of Peter Jackson has highlighted criticisms of phenomenological approaches as a methodology generally and Yi-Fu-Tuan's work in particular as being overly reliant upon the 'subjective.'<sup>175</sup> Jackson's work forwards the important question - how far do phenomenological readings of space and place forwarded by humanistic geographers ring true with the experiences of others?<sup>176</sup>

As Paul Rodaway claims, the inherent subjectivity of Yi-Fu Tuan's work has left it open to the criticism that he universalises his open perception of both space and place and in doing so assumes a set of shared cultural traits with which spatial practice is negotiated among human beings.<sup>177</sup> With its focus on the individual and reflective aspects of space and place, humanistic approaches and the application of phenomenology in particular, have been further challenged on the basis of divorcing these definitions from the social and political contexts

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<sup>171</sup> Tilley, *A phenomenology of landscape*. p.29

<sup>172</sup> C. Tilley, *A phenomenology of landscape* (Oxford: Berg, 2010)

<sup>173</sup> S. Schama, *Landscape and Memory*. (London: 2004) p.6

<sup>174</sup> M. Billinge, 'In search of negativism: phenomenology and historical geography.' *Journal of Historical Geography* 3, 1 (1977) pp.55-67.

<sup>175</sup> P. Jackson, 'Phenomenology and social geography.' *Area* (1981) pp. 299-305.

<sup>176</sup> P. Jackson, 'Phenomenology and social geography.' *Area* (1981) p. 302

<sup>177</sup> P. Rodaway, 'Yi Fu Tuan' in P. Hubbard, R. Kitchin & G. Valentine (eds.), *Key Thinkers on Space and Place*. (London, 2004) p. 308

which shape them.<sup>178</sup> The implications of this particular critique cannot be underemphasised particularly in view of the economic theoretical grounding of the work of Harvey, Foucault and Lefebvre which were forwarded, in part, as a response to a mode of spatial analysis which had previously been perceived as wantonly under-theorised and frequently bordering on the solipsistic.

## Materiality

As with reflections on the significance of space to human activity, considerations of materiality have a broad foundation which have reflected a diverse expression of human culture. To Daniel Miller, engagements with materiality as a source of human enquiry can reasonably be traced back to over the course of two millennia, fundamentally finding their root in both Hindu and Buddhist belief.<sup>179</sup> To Miller, contemporary intellectual meditations upon the effects of materiality can be seen in these early antecedents, and he points to the Hindu concept of Maya ‘which proclaims the illusory nature of the material world.’<sup>180</sup> To Miller, the religious origins of material contemplation have an obvious parallel with more recent, and secular, academic practices in the manner in which both seek to move beyond superficial deliberations upon the objects and artefacts, that human beings produce, consume, and are surrounded by. As Miller claims, both theological and secular academic engagements with materiality aim, at their core to ‘transcend the immediately obvious.’<sup>181</sup>

From an academic perspective, scrutiny of the material aspects of human life and behaviour has found its ‘disciplinary home’ within the both archaeology and anthropology.<sup>182</sup> As Tilley points out, from a utilitarian standpoint, this is to be expected as, in the absence of written records, both archaeology and anthropology share a reliance on ‘material culture as its principal source of evidence about the human past.’<sup>183</sup> However, as Tilley asserts, this concern with ‘collecting, classifying and studying’ the artefacts of material culture in the early days of both disciplines proved far from politically neutral and in practice dovetailed with Western colonial expansion during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Early archaeologists were therefore

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<sup>178</sup> Rodaway, ‘Yi Fu Tuan’ in Hubbard et. al. (eds.), *Key Thinkers on Space and Place*. (London, 2004) p. 308

<sup>179</sup> D. Miller, ‘Materiality: an introduction’ in D. Miller (eds.) *Materiality* (2005) p. 1

<sup>180</sup> Miller, ‘Materiality: an introduction’ p. 1

<sup>181</sup> Miller, ‘Materiality: an introduction’ p. 1

<sup>182</sup> Miller, ‘Materiality: an introduction’ p. 1

<sup>183</sup> Tilley, ‘Introduction’ in Tilley et. al (eds.) *Handbook of Material culture*. p.2.

propelled, to a degree, to collect and marshal items from what were seen as belonging ‘primitive’ cultures in order to demonstrate the virtues of Western cultural superiority and highlight the magnitude of orderly teleological progress.<sup>184</sup>

As Miller’s overview of materiality demonstrates despite its resolutely spiritual origins, even avowedly ‘secular theories of humanity have shown great interest in questions of the material.’<sup>185</sup> In this regard, Marxist treatments of materiality have arguably had the most pervasive influence upon academic thought across disciplines within the humanities. As Bill Mayer claims, such is Marxism’s influence, ‘it is difficult to think about materiality, or to think about the social without thinking about Marxism. The Cold War led many scholars to use ‘materialism’ as a code word for Marxism for much of the twentieth century.’<sup>186</sup>

Yet Michael Rowlands work keenly stresses the clear distinction between ‘materialism’ and ‘materiality’ supports Mayer in his claim that both terms which have the capacity, within their specific intellectual grounding to be interpreted interchangeably. Central to the application of Marxist theory, historical materialism emphasises the manner in which the contours of human consciousness are shaped by the material world which envelop it. The fundamental tenet of Marxist materialism is encapsulated most directly within Marx’s influential declaration ‘it is not the consciousness of men which determines their existence, but on the contrary their social existence that determines their consciousness.’<sup>187</sup> As Mauer states, Marx asserts the ‘practical and objective basis of human subjective consciousness.’<sup>188</sup> To Marx – as he detailed in *Theses on Feuerbach* - previous considerations of materiality lent themselves to idle meditations on the object in of itself ‘the thing, reality, sensuousness is conceived only in the form of the object or contemplation, and not as human, sensuous activity, as practice.’<sup>189</sup> As Rowlands outlines, Marx claimed that ‘perceiving the object-in-itself is to reduce it to an image or thing, as the product of a contemplative, theoretical attitude.’<sup>190</sup> Essential to the principle of Marxist materialism is the interrelationship between

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<sup>184</sup> Tilley, ‘Introduction’ in Tilley et. al (eds.) *Handbook of Material culture*. p.2.

<sup>185</sup> Miller, ‘Materiality: an introduction’ p.2

<sup>186</sup>B. Mauer, ‘In the matter of Marxism’ in Tilley et. al (eds.) *Handbook of material culture*. p.13

<sup>187</sup> K. Marx , *Preface to A Contribution to a Critique on the Political Economy* (1844) reprint. (Basingstoke, 2010) p.4

<sup>188</sup> Mauer. ‘In the matter of Marxism’ p.12

<sup>189</sup> M. Rowlands, ‘A Materialist Approach to Materiality’ in D. Miller (eds.) *Materiality* (2005) p. 12

<sup>190</sup> Rowlands ‘A Materialist Approach to Materiality’ p.73

human thought and the material, sensuous world.<sup>191</sup>

More recently, and particularly over the course of the last twenty years, studies of material culture have broadened considerably to encompass what Tilley describes as one of the ‘most dynamic and wide ranging areas of contemporary scholarship in the human sciences.’<sup>192</sup> As Tilley outlines, this has produced ‘an impressive volume of research activity and a flood of books, edited collections, review articles and papers devoted to this field.’<sup>193</sup> Recent academic engagements with the material have adopted theoretical approaches which have included the application of semiotics; evaluating the relationship between the object itself and the ideas and values it can be said to represent, phenomenology which has sought to engage with the human experience and encounters with ‘things’ and post-structuralist approaches which have aimed to demonstrate the multi-vocality and plurality of meanings that material objects can be said to embody.<sup>194</sup>

Beyond the purely theoretical, material studies have engaged with the material aspects of lived human behaviour in a variety of differing ways. Reflections on materiality have contemplated objects as items of exchange and commodity value, reflected upon the abstractions attached to certain material artefacts and the questioned how these abstractions can be said to create value in human culture in turn shape the very parameters of human cognition.<sup>195</sup> Taking a lead from phenomenological approaches previously discussed, a growing body of literature has also sought to document the material from the perspective of embodied human experience providing a deep reading of the artefacts in question, analysing their specific contours and in doing so striving to outline and the relationship between the object, the body and the senses.<sup>196</sup>

More recent scholarship, such as Frank Tretmann’s comprehensive *Empire of Things*, has

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<sup>191</sup> Maurer, ‘In the matter of Marxism’ p.14

<sup>192</sup> ‘Introduction’ in Tilley et. al (eds.) *Handbook of Material Culture*. p.2

<sup>193</sup> Introduction’ in Tilley et. al (eds.) *Handbook of Material Culture* p.2

<sup>194</sup> See R. Layton, ‘Structuralism and Semiotics’, J.Thomas, ‘Phenemenology and Material Culture.’ and B.Olsen ‘Scenes from a troubled engagement: post-structuralism and material culture studies’ in Tilley et. al (eds.) *Handbook of Material Culture*

<sup>195</sup> See H.Miyazaki, ‘The Materiality of Finance Theory’, B. Maurer, ‘Does Money Matter? Abstraction and Substituion in Alternative Financial Forms, S. Kuchler, ‘Materiality and Cognition: The changing face of things’ in in D. Miller (eds.) *Materiality* (2005)

<sup>196</sup> D. Howes, ‘Scent sound and synaesthesia: Intersensoriality and Material Culture Theory’ in Tilley et. al (eds.) *Handbook of Material Culture*



mediated upon the ultimate implications of human relationships with material objects.<sup>197</sup> Trentmann utilises a broad temporal broad sweep in order to trace the development of consumerism from the Ming Empire in the 14<sup>th</sup> century to the British Empire in the 19<sup>th</sup> before turning to the present day. To Trentmann, what we chose to consume has increasingly come to define every aspect of our lives and identities.<sup>198</sup> As Trentmann demonstrates, unreflective consumerism and human fetishisation of the material as signifiers of personal identity have resulted in far-reaching environmental and social consequences. His work represents, in part, a criticism of this mode of identification with material artefacts. Trentmann proposes a renewed debate that envisages ‘different lifestyles and concomitant changes to housing, transport and culture. It will need more people to remember that, as consumers, they are citizens and not just customers.’<sup>199</sup>

As outlined above, interest in the material aspects of human life have had a long genesis and, within the humanities this degree of scrutiny has gathered substantial pace over the course of the last twenty years. Contributing to the wider scrutiny the subject of materiality has enjoyed in recent years other academic approaches have sought to hint at the manner in which objects and artefacts can be said to influence human behaviour as items of agency in their own right.<sup>200</sup> To Laura Ahern, this concept of objects and things possessing a mode of agency can be seen as reflective of a broader trends within the academic scholarship and the move away from the all-encompassing authority of meta-narratives. To Ahern, narratives of this kind, which dominated much of academic discourse over the course of the twentieth century, leave ‘no room for tensions, contradictions, or oppositional actions on the part of individuals and collectivities. It is because questions about agency are so central to contemporary political and theoretical debates that the concept arouses so much interest and is therefore crucial to define clearly.’<sup>201</sup> Ahern defines agency as the ‘socio-culturally mediated capacity to act’ and includes a wide range of non-human actors within this categorisation including, but not limited to, spirits, machines, signs and collective entities.<sup>202</sup>

This notion of material objects being exerting an influence on human behaviour has been

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<sup>197</sup> F. Trentmann, *Empire of things: how we became a world of consumers, from the Fifteenth Century to the Twenty-First*. (London, 2016)

<sup>198</sup> Trentmann, *Empire of things* p.692

<sup>199</sup> Trentmann, *Empire of things*. p.692

<sup>200</sup> J. Hoskins, ‘Agency, Biography and Objects’ in Tilley et. al (eds.) *Handbook of Material Culture*

<sup>201</sup> J. Hoskins, ‘Agency, Biography and Objects’ in Tilley et. al (eds.) *Handbook of Material Culture* p.74

<sup>202</sup> Hoskins, ‘Agency, Biography and Objects’ in Tilley et. al (eds.) *Handbook of Material Culture* p.74

adopted by a wide range of prominent scholars, including Arjun Appadurai, Fred Myers and Alfred Gell.<sup>203</sup> Yet the theory of *objects as agents* is perhaps most commonly associated with the work of sociologist and anthropologist Bruno Latour. As Latour explains in his 2005 book *Reassembling the Social*, his work was driven by a desire to redefine approaches to social science as a means to make it ‘able to trace its connections again.’<sup>204</sup> The genesis of this theory, as Latour acknowledges, can be found within the work of Swiss botanist Augustin Pyramus de Candolle, De Candolle - like Latour - was interested in the social aspects of the practice of science, further still De Candolle, radically extended the categorisation of that which could be considered social.<sup>205</sup> As Latour explains, to De Candolle ‘coral, baboons, trees, bees, ants and whales are also social.’<sup>206</sup>

Although having recently broadened in scope, Latour’s work originated as a result of his interest in engaging with science as a social practice. An idea not without controversy, Latour suggested the manufacturing of scientific knowledge was constructed as the result of a wider network of associated objects and interactions.<sup>207</sup> Latour proposed a radical departure from the traditionally understood definition of sociology from the ‘science of the social’ towards ‘the tracing of associations.’<sup>208</sup> As a method of tracing these associations Latour forwarded, what he dubbed Actor-Network-Theory (ANT). To Latour, ANT demonstrates the manner in which both human and nonhuman “actants” interact within wider relational networks, which Latour, claimed operated within ‘webs’ or ‘actor-networks’ in this way, Latour maintained, human and non-human actants can be said to share an equal degree of agency.<sup>209</sup> As Latour outlined:

For ANT as we understand it... doesn’t designate a domain of reality of some particular item, but rather is the name of a movement, a displacement, a transformation, a translation, an enrolment. Thus social, for ANT is the name of a

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<sup>203</sup> See A. Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*. (Cambridge, 1986) , A. Gell, *Art and Agency: A New Anthropological Theory* (Oxford, 1998) F.Myers, *The Traffic in Culture, Refiguring Art and Anthropolgy* (Sante Fe, 2001)

<sup>204</sup> B. Latour, *Reassembling the social: an introduction to Actor–network theory*. (Oxford, 2005) p.5

<sup>205</sup> Latour, *Reassembling the social*. p.6

<sup>206</sup> Latour, *Reassembling the social*. p.6

<sup>207</sup> Latour & S. Woolgar, *Laboratory life: the construction of scientific facts* (New Jersey, 1979) Latour’s work has been unfairly characterised as representing the very worst in post-modern mystification and a retreat meaningless relativism. Scientists such as Paul Gross and Norman Levitt have taken Latour to task for what they regarded as his attempt to diminish scientific realism. See *Higher superstition: The Academic Left and its Quarrels with Science*. (Baltimore, 1997)

<sup>208</sup> Latour, *Reassembling the social* p.6

<sup>209</sup> Latour, *Reassembling the social* p.63

momentary association which is characterised by the way it gathers itself into new shapes.<sup>210</sup>

Latour proposed broadening the scope of what is generally considered to possess agency beyond the ‘intentional’ and ‘meaningful’ actions of humans.<sup>211</sup> This commonly defined characterisation of agency and its associated focus on human actors is acknowledged by Latour as the consequence of difficulties arising in perceiving how ‘a door, a cat, a rug, or a list’ could possibly be said to act.<sup>212</sup> Yet, to Latour, anything that ‘does modify a state of affairs by making a difference is an actor.’<sup>213</sup> Latour proposed two fundamental questions in determining whether an actant could be said to possess agency ‘does it make a difference in the course of some other agents action or not? Is there some trial that allows someone to detect the difference?’ According to this framework Latour argued that ‘implements’ in this manner can be construed as ‘actors or more precisely participants in the course of action waiting to be given configuration.’<sup>214</sup> As Latour explained: ‘The project of ANT is simply to extend the list and modify the shapes and figures of those assembled as participants and to design a way to make them act as a durable whole.’<sup>215</sup>

Latour’s work sought to rehabilitate the objects that surround us from what he deemed as their current status as ‘the hapless bearers of symbolic projection’ and sought to redefine objects as ‘actors.’<sup>216</sup> Nonetheless, Latour denied his work represented a contribution to post-structuralism and its post-modernist emphasis on ‘the critique of grand narratives’.<sup>217</sup> Latour did not regard ANT as an exercise in ‘deconstruction’ and in its emphasis on the wider networks that constitute social life could be said to align more closely to structuralist intellectual influences, as Latour himself claimed, he was principally interested in ‘reconnecting’ the social and laying an emphasis upon the webs that constitute lived reality.<sup>218</sup> Latour’s work draws attention to the larger networks that human behaviour is enmeshed and the role that objects play as actants in influencing that behaviour - distributing agency across chains of both human and non-human entities.

The work of Latour offers an innovative means of perceiving the objects and things that

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<sup>210</sup> Latour, *Reassembling the social* p.63 -64

<sup>211</sup> Latour, *Reassembling the social* p.71

<sup>212</sup> Latour, *Reassembling the social* p.72

<sup>213</sup> Latour, *Reassembling the social* p.72

<sup>214</sup> Latour, *Reassembling the social* p.72

<sup>215</sup> Latour, *Reassembling the social* p.72

<sup>216</sup> Latour, *Reassembling the social* p.72

<sup>217</sup> Latour, *Reassembling the social* p.10

<sup>218</sup> Latour, *Reassembling the social* p.161

populate human life. Agency to Latour, is not limited to a single actant within this framework, but instead is produced as a result of the networks in which this actant resides. To illustrate this idea, Latour draws upon the controversy surrounding gun control and two commonly forwarded but mutually opposed slogans "Guns kill people" vs. "Guns do not kill people, people kill people".<sup>219</sup> To Latour, neither categorisation is absolutely correct and both the gun and the person possessing the gun are capable of expressing a number of different actions; a gun alternately can act as a collector's item, hunting gear, a murder weapon or a substitute for a hammer.<sup>220</sup> The object in question, in this case a gun, can therefore act in such a way as to contradict what can be considered its express purpose. These purposes are constituted by the setting in which the object is placed and are the result of a highly complex collection of interactions. Yet, as Latour's example of the gun demonstrates, there are limits to what particular objects can be said to signify and these limits are defined by the material constitution of these objects; according to Latour it is therefore not possible to subjectively decide what a gun represents and the specific qualities of the gun as an object determines the limits of its ability to be endlessly reinterpreted.<sup>221</sup> Guns can indeed be said to kill people as - multiple uses and applications aside - this is exactly what the gun, as an object, was designed to do. In this sense, within the constitution of their very materiality, objects can be said to resist attempts to endlessly reconstitute their absolute meaning.

Nonetheless, Actor-Network-Theory's intended aim of exposing the networks and webs of causality in human behaviour has drawn criticisms for the manner in which it suggests an equivalency between human and non-human actors. Langdon Winner for instance, argues human intentionality supersedes any supposed claims of the purported agency of objects and therefore no credible equivalency can be said to exist between the two.<sup>222</sup> This reading of ANT has been supported in the work of Christopher Steiner who criticises the academic treatment of material culture in a more general manner. Steiner argues persuasively against imbuing the artefact with too much authority:

In their zeal to explore the social identity of material culture, many authors have attributed too much authority to the 'things' themselves, and in so doing have

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<sup>219</sup> Latour, *Pandora's hope: essays on the reality of science studies*. (Massachusetts, 1999) p.193

<sup>220</sup> Latour, *Pandora's hope* p.193

<sup>221</sup> Latour, *Pandora's hope* p.176

<sup>222</sup> L. Winner, "Upon opening the black box and finding it empty: Social constructivism and the philosophy of technology." *Science, Technology, & Human Values* 18, 3 (1993): 362-378.

diminished the significance of human agency and the role of individuals and systems that construct and imbue material goods with value, significance and meaning.<sup>223</sup>

As with Tuan's treatment of the concept of place, Latour and ANT have been further criticised for its failure to account for the effects of power, economics and politics in determining the manner in which human beings interact with the material. As Whittle and Spicer note, the fundamental issue with ANT as an approach is its insistence on designating each actant within a network an equivalent form of agency.<sup>224</sup> According to Whittle and Spicer, viewing the world through the lens of ANT becomes a largely descriptive exercise and Latour's explanatory framework is less well 'equipped for pursuing a critical account of organizations—that is, one which recognises the unfolding nature of reality, considers the limits of knowledge and seeks to challenge structures of domination.'<sup>225</sup>

## Towards describing space, place and materiality

As demonstrated in the above, broad, discussion of concepts of space, place and materiality all three terms are highly complex, vigorously contested and inherently problematic to define. Nonetheless, in order to engage with these concepts in a meaningful sense, it is necessary to delineate the above terms in the manner in which they will be employed throughout the course of this thesis. These definitions are advanced with the significant caveat that they are not intended as representing *absolute* terminology and are certainly subject to challenge. In this regard it is also important to highlight that this thesis does not purport to represent a significant theoretical contribution to treatments of space, place and materiality within academic literature. Indeed, from a sociological perspective, readers may find the following work under-theorised.

However, despite the range of disciplines that has influenced this work the following thesis is submitted principally as a contribution to historical literature and therefore seeks to avoid representing the ss *Great Britain* via the mode of dense theoretical abstraction or obscuring the story of the ship through alienating, subject specific language. The 'light touch' approach to theory deployed in this thesis therefore represents a purposeful choice, rather than an

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<sup>223</sup> C.Steiner. 'Rights of passage: On the liminal identity of art in the border zone' in F. Myers (eds.) *The Empire of Things: Regimes of Value and Material Culture* (Santa Fe, 2001) p.210

<sup>224</sup> A. Whittle and A. Spicer, 'Is actor network theory critique?' *Organization Studies* 29. (2008)

<sup>225</sup> Whittle and Spicer, 'Is actor network theory critique?' p.611

attempt to overlook significant theoretical contributions to either space, place or materiality. As touched upon previously, the contested nature of all three terms, their multi-disciplinary roots and the controversies they have provoked has the potential to lend itself to largely fruitless obscurantism in seeking to reconcile these concepts as total and absolute definitions. The inherent limitation of pursuing this densely theoretical approach, is that the thesis builds within it, the potential to collapse under the weight of its own abstractions and consequently fails to advance a theoretical contribution to space, place and theory in any meaningful sense. Equally, the associated danger of adopting a too complex theoretical framework throughout the course of this thesis is the potential it creates to camouflage rather banal observations in impenetrable terminology. Finally, adopting this approach with the intended aim of examining concepts of space, place, and materiality as they relate to the ss *Great Britain's* afterlife there is the likely effect of diminishing the ship as a subject of academic enquiry in itself and therefore undermining what is the principal concern of the following work.

Nonetheless, the caveats listed above do not suggest that this thesis intends to completely abandon theoretical readings of space, place and materiality entirely and indeed it seeks to draw upon prominent academic contributions as a means to greater inform the empirical evidence presented. In particular, this thesis draws upon the influence of Lefebvre, Tuan and Latour as a means of demonstrating how concepts of space, place and materiality might be synthesised, principally as a means of enhancing readings of heritage sites and the artefacts they preserve. More broadly this thesis aims to deploy aspects of space, place and materiality as a means of demonstrating their influence on producing the purported significance of objects of preservation.

The definition of space employed within this thesis is drawn from works of social constructivism and in particular that of Henri Lefebvre. While acknowledging the reductive nature of this description, space will be defined as that which is socially produced and therefore defined by networks of power and economic forces. As discussed above, Lefebvre's pioneering reading of space proved extremely influential in academic literature in calling attention to the manner in which the influence of capital produces the space that shapes and encompasses human activity. This definition is employed as a means of acknowledging how economic influences have buffeted the *Great Britain* and largely determined the fate of the ship throughout the course of its afterlife. In defining space in this manner, this thesis will trace the *Great Britain's* trajectory from wool-store in the Falkland Islands, to Crown wreck,

to item of contested functional worth upon her return to Bristol in 1970 before finally turning to the present day in its examination of the commercial implications of the *Great Britain* as contemporary heritage attraction. In employing this definition of space this thesis intends to draw attention to the process of decommodification and commodification that affected the vessel's afterlife during the course of its various recontextualisations.<sup>226</sup>

The thesis further acknowledges the influence of Lefebvre in its chapter headings, which purposefully draw upon the terminology and categorisations of space forwarded within *The Production of Space*. Chapter Two, which considers the *Great Britain*'s life in the Falklands is entitled 'Natural Space' as an acknowledgment of the manner in which the ship was influenced by the geography of the Falklands and the natural world that both surrounded and weaved through the vessel.<sup>227</sup> Chapter Three, which details the manner in which the ship was interpreted via abstract and symbolic means by the ss *Great Britain* Project team is entitled 'Representational Space' in order to allude to how the ship was largely negotiated via 'associated images and symbols' by this specific cohort of individuals.<sup>228</sup> Chapter Four, which discusses the *Great Britain*'s post-salvage return to Bristol in July 1970 is entitled 'Counter Space' signalling the main theme of the chapter - how the ship became a subsumed into wider debates surrounding post-war urban redevelopment in Bristol's harbourside.<sup>229</sup> The final substantive chapter, Chapter Five, is labelled 'Historical Space' in its examination of the commercial implications of the ss *Great Britain* as a heritage site in 2016.<sup>230</sup>

However, despite its acknowledgment of the influence of social constructivist theories of space this thesis fundamentally diverges from these approaches by *not* being structured around a broader ideological meta-narrative - what Lefebvre describes as a 'political project'.<sup>231</sup> In their focus on the spatial organisation of urban environments and the conflicts

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<sup>226</sup> See A. Appadurai, 'Introduction' in *The Social Life of Things*.

<sup>227</sup> Lefebvre, *Production of Space* p.88

<sup>228</sup> Lefebvre, *Production of Space* p.39

<sup>229</sup> Lefebvre, *Production of Space* p.385

<sup>230</sup> Lefebvre, *Production of Space* p.49 Nb. Deploying Lefebvre's terminology in this manner is intended as a merely evocative and an acknowledgment of Lefebvre's substantial academic contribution to concepts of space. It does not however represent a dogmatic adherence to the definitions of these terms as defined by Lefebvre and in this regard 'Natural Space' and 'Historical Space' as outlined in *The Production of Space* do not find a direct equivalency in these chapters. Lefebvre categorised Natural Space as that which was free of all human influence (a definition that clearly excludes the Falkland Islands, 'Historical Space' is described as a broader stage of capitalist accumulation, containing its own contradictions, 'Historical Space' was therefore one preceded by previous modes of production and supplanted by the formal and quantitative period of 'Abstract Space' that followed. See Lefebvre p.48-50 & p.88

<sup>231</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*. p.419

that are produced as a result of spatial dislocations the work of Lefebvre, Harvey and Soja is concerned, to a degree in revealing the what they determine are the contradictions produced as a result of capitalist modes of production.<sup>232</sup> Yet as outlined at the beginning of the chapter, this thesis aims to move beyond the strictly ‘monolithic’ and in doing so point towards a more sensitive method of looking at heritage sites, and one which consequently seeks to add nuance to readings of these spaces.

In order to move beyond the overly deterministic then, this thesis will engage with the concept of ‘place’ as conceptualised by the geographic practice of phenomenology with particular reference to the work of Yi-Fu-Tuan. Place is therefore defined in terms of embodied human experience specifically locations that have been endowed with value by human behaviour and perception. In this manner, this thesis will demonstrate how the *Great Britain* was imbued with a sense of value by different people at different times and consequently became an object of human emotion, feeling and participation. In its treatment of the ss *Great Britain*’s afterlife this thesis will also signpost instances in which what Ethington describes as ‘experiential, memorial, emotive and subjective’ elements of place have worked to subvert or undermine officially rationalised, abstract, quantifiable space.<sup>233</sup>

This divergence between space and place is in thrown into particularly sharp relief in Chapter Four when the *Great Britain* returned to Bristol where municipal attempts to reorganise the environment, from a top-down, functional perspective undervalued the complex layering of individual memory and personal attachment bound up within the city environment.

Consequently - to some individuals in Bristol at least - the ship became an imposing physical totem of both local identity and Bristol’s historic past.<sup>234</sup> Yet the gulf between space and place is also evidenced in other periods of the ship’s afterlife. In the Falkland Islands, where despite Falkland officialdom designating the *Great Britain* obsolete the ship proved capable of acting as a centre of human consequentiality once exiled to Sparrow Cove. Similarly the disputes between members of the ss *Great Britain* Project team demonstrate how early attempts to commercialise the ship were resisted by Ewan Corlett who perceived the salvaged *Great Britain* as embodying a place of both personal significance and substantial emotional

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<sup>233</sup> P. J. Ethington, Placing the past: ‘Groundwork’ for a spatial theory of history, *Rethinking History: The Journal of Theory and Practice*, 11:4, (2007) p.481

<sup>234</sup> ‘We need vision of Brunel’, ‘That Silence’, ‘Our Heritage’, ‘She must stay’, *Evening Post*, July 9<sup>th</sup> 1970, ‘Grasp at once this wonderful opportunity’, *Evening Post*, July 9<sup>th</sup> 1970, ‘Make the Great Britain a Brunel Museum’, *Evening Post*, July 9<sup>th</sup> 1970, ‘Great Britain to the rescue’ *Evening Post*, July 10<sup>th</sup> 1970



resonance.

At this stage it is nonetheless important to acknowledge that the following work does not claim to represent the first attempt to outline the fault lines between space and place and the manner in which the networks and agencies of power that constitute official space conflict, sometimes violently, with individual and subjective readings of place. Similar studies of the vacuum between ‘official’ space and ‘individual’ place have sought to highlight the limits of state control of the lived environment and suggest the utility it attempts to impose on it are far from absolute. In this light, Gregory J. Crowley’s work, in its demonstration of the manner in which individualistic notions of place – and the significances people accord it – have overridden official rationalisations of space in ‘episodes of public collective struggle’ is particularly instructive.<sup>235</sup> Further this thesis is not intended to serve as a substantial contribution to the ‘bridging of the gap’ between the works of Lefebvre and approaches which are more intimately associated with lived human experience. Work of this nature has previously been undertaken by Deborah Martin who has attempted, on a theoretical level, to reconcile the concept of space as defined by Lefebvre and geographic definitions of place.<sup>236</sup>

Finally, with an acknowledgment to the contributions of Latour and ANT this thesis will engage with the materiality of the ss *Great Britain* and in particular the way in which the ship could be interpreted as an ‘actant’ in the broader relational networks in which it was enmeshed from 1886 to the present day. Through acknowledging the phenomenological aspects of the ship’s materiality this thesis will argue that the ship it is possible to demonstrate how the presence of the ship in the locations of its non-working life influenced human behaviour and responses to the vessel. Within the broader context of economically constructed space and the places of emotive meaning this thesis will argue that the ship could be said to possess a sense of agency in the mode defined by Latour. Latour’s characterisation of agency is adopted as a means of further contributing to an understanding of the ss *Great Britain’s* afterlife and moving beyond the deterministic readings of the ship’s ostensible connotations.

Throughout the course of the following chapters, this thesis will demonstrate how

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<sup>235</sup> G. J. Crowley, *The Politics of Place: Contentious Urban Redevelopment in Pittsburgh*, (Pennsylvania: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005).p.7

<sup>236</sup> D. Martin, ‘Placing Lefebvre,’ *Antipode* 47 (5) pp.1279-1299

interpretations of the ss *Great Britain* were influenced by the webs of wider relationships in which the ship was enmeshed. To use but one example within the unique geographic landscape of the Falklands and once removed from the centre of economic life in Port Stanley the ship was contextualised as part of a network of other abandoned ships and seafaring vessels. As Chapter Two will detail this identification of the *Great Britain* as part of a wider framework of other equivalent objects of similar configuration had considerable implications upon the degree of consequence with which the ship was imbued. Equally, the ship's removal to Sparrow Cove had the effect of bringing the vessel into association with the complexities of a natural pre-existing eco-system. The *Great Britain* thus became a habitat for animal life which in turn influenced human interactions with the ship. As Chapter Three will demonstrate this manner of engagement with the *Great Britain* markedly diverged from that of the ss *Great Britain* Project team whose conceptual and symbolic rendering of the ship was produced as an aggregate of a specific grouping of individuals with shared political sympathies. From a broader perspective these political standpoints might be said to have been influenced both by post-war political developments in the UK and the expansive programmes of urban redevelopment that ushered in highly visible transformations to the lived environment. Latour's work therefore acts as a constructive guide and asks us to consider how wider relational networks served to manufacture the symbolism with which the Project team invested in the form of the *Great Britain*.

ANT as a framework of understanding is also instructive in signposting the role of objects as actants and therefore pointing to the limits of the *Great Britain's* symbolic malleability. The ss *Great Britain* - the ship is physically ship-shaped, iron-hulled, screw-propelled, 98 metres long – sensory input, individual interactions and subsequent interpretations are therefore constrained by these certain, unbendable physical facts. From a networked perspective the ship is conceptually contextualised in relationship to other objects which share a similar purpose. The *Great Britain* can therefore be said to embody a specific set of immutable principles which fundamentally cannot be completely obliterated. Short of completely transforming the *Great Britain's* material form to the point to which it no longer resembles a ship or else completely deconstructing the language with which we comprehend the concept of a 'ship' and decoupling it from all the diversity of its many associations the vessel's materiality provides a certain degree of constancy. With reference to the binding principles of the ship's materiality this thesis will therefore seek to reveal how it has occasionally acted in resistance to approximations of its purported meaning and draw out shared commonalities

across the course of its non-working life.

As outlined this thesis will attempt to engage with the concept of place as a centre of human meaning and materiality principally in terms of the agency the ss *Great Britain* as an object can be said to possess. However, this present work is not intended as an attempt to privilege these frameworks of understanding over the principle of space as produced by commercial and economic forces. As noted previously, critics of both Latour and Tuan have drawn attention to the limitations of their approaches to both place and materiality, with a particular focus on the manner in which both largely ignore or diminish the effect of hegemonic structures of both power and economics. It is inherently problematic to lay an equal degree of emphasis as Tuan does, upon the realities of lived human experience or in suggesting, like Latour, that networks and webs of influence that link both non-human and human alike have a shared equivalency.

This thesis, as its central premise, aims to point towards a more nuanced understanding heritage sites. Yet applying concepts of experiential place and suggesting objects possess agency within these locations in an uncritical manner serves to diminish the effects of commercialisation and to a degree silences critical appraisals of the heritage industry's representations of the past. As Chapter Five will outline, the ss *Great Britain* in 2016 can be said to function as a site of sensory stimulation and human meaning and the ship itself, as an object of agency, can also be said, to a degree, to resist the symbolic projections attached to it. Nonetheless, it is the concept of space, particularly as defined as a mode of capitalist rationalisation that should take precedence, reflections upon the meanings human actors divine within this framework and the relative influence of the ship as an object should, necessarily, act as a supplement rather than a substitute for academic deliberations on museum sites which critique the wider implications of a commodified past.

## Methodology and Sources

As touched upon previously in the above section, the concepts of space, place and materiality have proven complex, contested and inherently difficult to define. It was necessary to address specific criticisms on the manner in which Lefebvre, Tuan and Latour have chosen to define

space, place and materiality as a means of acknowledging these critiques and suggesting possible limitations in their approach. However, in order to frame the methodological approach pursued within this thesis it is necessary to acknowledge the overarching issue confronting all academic attempts to engage with notions of space, place and materiality - the inadequacy of our representational means of characterising such dense and convoluted sites of meaning, symbolism and engagement.

The difficulties encountered in representing space adequately as a concept were confronted by Lefebvre, in *The Production of Space*, where Lefebvre acknowledged the problematic nature of devoting oneself to a subject of inherent intricacy and ambiguity. To Lefebvre, considerations of the spatial lend itself to an almost instant 'infinity' of interpretation.<sup>237</sup> As Lefebvre asked: 'How many maps in the descriptive or geological sense, might be needed to deal exhaustively with a given space, to code and decode all its meanings and contents? It is doubtful whether a finite number can ever be given in answer to this sort of question.'<sup>238</sup> The work of W.G. Hoskins also points to the difficulties involved in fully encapsulating the spatial and Hoskins claims, entirely credibly, that it might be possible to write entire books on every few inches of the ordnance survey map, tracing previous historical land use and changing social and cultural attitudes to these locations.<sup>239</sup> As the mediations of both Lefebvre and Hoskin's suggest, adequately decoding and communicating the multiplicity of use and interpretation of even the smallest of spaces poses a considerable, perhaps even insurmountable challenge to our methods of representation.

The issues encountered in adequately categorising the diversity of space are yet further compounded by the manner with which language serves to distance us from the subject in question. As a result spaces, places and material interactions are never fully encapsulated in a written text and it is impossible therefore to fully account for sensory ambience and the interplay of memory and emotion as experienced by those individuals who interacted with the ss *Great Britain* from 1886 onward. To a certain degree, this leaves us discussing a disembodied ship decoupled from the complicated webs of entanglement which constitute human experience. The written source necessarily constrains and limits our sense of space,

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<sup>237</sup> Lefebvre, 'The Production of Space', p.85

<sup>238</sup> Lefebvre, 'The Production of Space', p.85

<sup>239</sup> See Soja, *Thirdspace: journeys to Los Angeles and other real and imagined places*. (Oxford, 1996) & Harvey, *Consciousness and the urban experience: Studies in the history and theory of capitalist urbanization*. Vol. 1. (Baltimore, 1985)

place *and* materiality. As acknowledged previously, humanistic geographers have attempted to address this issue in their application of the principles of phenomenology in their treatment of human places as a possible means of evoking the ‘synaesthesia’ of individual experiences of space and materiality.<sup>240</sup> Yet, as Tilley states, phenomenological methods act solely as a mode of acknowledging the effects of sensory stimulation and emotional resonance but are not adequate to the task of fully encapsulating how this is directly felt, lived and understood. To Tilley ‘what we are left with is paper landscapes, paper perspectives.... there can be no substitute for the human experience of place – of being there.’<sup>241</sup>

While acknowledging the above as a significant issue confronting all engagements with space, place and materiality it is perhaps possible to point towards a resolution to this impasse with reference to the work of Clifford Geertz. Geertz, confronted similar issues within the field of anthropology, namely the capability of written modes of representation and the hopelessness of adequately communicating the depth and nuances of human behaviour. To Geertz, the obvious question therefore arose as to what extent that which is presented as empirically based insight by anthropologists is, in reality, an illusory conceit. a gross simplification of the significances of what was observed and expressed and mediated by the figure of the anthropologist. the question as to: ‘...the line between the mode of representation and substantive content is undrawable in cultural analysis as it is in painting: and that fact in turn seems to threaten the objective status of anthropological knowledge by suggesting that its source is not reality but scholarly artifice.’<sup>242</sup>

As a means of resolving this tension between reality and representation Geertz accepted the production of a complete, objective account of the totality of the anthropological subject as an ‘impossible’ endeavour.<sup>243</sup> Yet for Geertz, the reality of this statement does not in turn suggest we abandon all attempts to interpret, decode and critically analyse the subject of our enquiries suggest memorably opining one does not refuse to perform surgery (or perform it in a sewer) because a perfectly aseptic environment is impossible.<sup>244</sup> To Geertz, the role of the anthropologist is to ‘sort the winks and real winks from mimicked ones’ and thus reduce the ‘puzzlement’ inherent within an unfamiliar culture. Rather than attempting to capture the full objective reality of the lived human experience the anthropologist’s role is instead simply

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<sup>240</sup> C.Tilley, *The Materiality of Stone*. p.28

<sup>241</sup> C. Tilley, *The Materiality of Stone*..p.29

<sup>242</sup> C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*. (New York, 1973) p.7

<sup>243</sup> Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*. p.30

<sup>244</sup> Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*. p.30

limited to contribute to ‘the enlargement of the universe of human discourse.’<sup>245</sup> Following Geertz, this present thesis is not an attempt to encapsulate the infinite implications of space, place and materiality but suggest a way of applying these concepts as a contribution to the enhancement of the understanding of objects of preservation and the study of museums and heritage sites more broadly.

Nonetheless, as the above section emphasises it is necessary to acknowledge the multifaceted implications of space, place and materiality and it is therefore vital to frame the methodological approach of this thesis as a necessary result of these complexities. This present thesis will engage with a wide range of methodologies in an attempt as a means to reflect the inherent intricacies of engaging with these concepts. This thesis will then draw upon archival research in both private and public deposits, memoirs, online sources, oral history interviews and encapsulate my own personal engagement with the ss *Great Britain* as influenced by its spatial contexts, constituting a place of meaning and the reflections upon the ship as an object of agency. This primary empirical research will be framed with reference to broader theoretical reflections upon the implications of this research.

However, the present work does not attempt, as Lefebvre does, to subordinate the temporal to the spatial entirely and the chapters are therefore organised in a chronological manner spanning the period from 1886 to 2016. The broad duration of the analysis of the ss *Great Britain*'s afterlife is necessary in charting how the ship's perceived significance differed according to the location in which it occupied during the various phases of its afterlife. In focussing on one particular period or location of the ship's life the comparative these influences would be more problematic to identify. This broad temporal sweep is also vital with reference to the aim of revealing the ship's agency and highlighting what elements of its interpretation have remained consistent during its afterlife.

Nonetheless, specific periods have been omitted for the basis of discussion, most obviously a substantial chronological gulf from 1970 to 2015, a span of 45 years. This omission does not suggest that this period is of no historical consequence or the ship was any less influenced by the influences and interaction of space, place and materiality during this time. However, I have sought to focus on the periods of the *Great Britain*'s life where the influences of space,

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<sup>245</sup> Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*. p.14

place and materiality have seen played their most significant role. Namely, the landscape of the Falkland Islands, the imaginative space of the ss *Great Britain* Project in which the ship could be said to reside pre-salvage, in the context of the planned urban renewal of Bristol's harbourside upon the ship's return and, finally, the ss *Great Britain* as it exists today as a site of heritage. There is an inevitable degree of subjectivity in the selection of these specific episodes and alternative approaches will be considered in the conclusion.

Qualitative archival sources have been drawn from the Jane Cameron Archives in the Falkland Islands, the Bristol Record Office, and the ss *Great Britain's* Trust's Brunel Institute. It is worth assessing each in turn in order to highlight their respective strengths and limitations. The Jane Cameron Archives contain deeds of sale, official correspondence relating to the Falklands from within the Islands, including letters to and from the Governor's office, enquiries relating to the ss *Great Britain* from outside the Falklands and various associated material relating to the vessel's centenary celebrations, Henniker Heaton's planned restoration of the vessel and administrative responses to the planned salvage of the vessel.

Sources from the Bristol Record Office were consulted as means of gaining an enhanced understanding of Bristol's planned urban renewal programme in 1970 and contributing to a consideration of the local authority's attitude towards the ship's return. This archival resource was of crucial importance in redressing what could be considered the partisan perspective of these events as forwarded by Richard Gould Adams in the account forwarded in '*Return of the Great Britain*'<sup>246</sup>

Finally, archival information has also been drawn from the Brunel Institute, particularly information from Ewan Corlett's personal resource of documents. This uncategorised collection is a wealth of hitherto unpublicised information which details the full course of the ss *Great Britain* Project from its inception to its current presentation as fully formed heritage site. Information here has been derived from minutes of the Project Committee, official and unofficial correspondence between Committee members and letters from Corlett to members of the public and external organisations. Private correspondence in particular provides a fascinating insight into the meanings and significances the ss *Great Britain* Project team

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<sup>246</sup> R. G. Adams *The Return of the Great Britain*. (London, 1975)

accorded the vessel. This archival resource is supplemented with a reference to *The Iron Ship and Return of the ss Great Britain* the books both Ewan Corlett and Richard Goold Adams authored detailing their involvement with the Project. Corlett's book also serves as an excellent general history of the ss *Great Britain* with a particular emphasis on the technical aspects of the ship.

Information has also been secured from museum officials, including the Heritage Lottery Fund Bid for the 'Being Brunel' project, the Morris Hargreaves McIntyre report on visitor interactions with the vessel, transcripts from the ss *Great Britain's* 2010 oral history project in addition to countless other requests for information and explanations of various features of the ship's life. The Trust's staff were always very happy to assist in any way they could, however, occasionally, documents were withheld from being scrutinised for reasons of commercial sensitivity.

This present thesis will also incorporate oral history principally as a means of acknowledging the implications of place as lived human experience in relation to the ss *Great Britain's* afterlife. This thesis will employ oral history and what Allesandro Portelli describes as the 'unique credibility' as a methodological response to questions of place.<sup>247</sup> Oral history is employed as a means of 'rebalancing' the narrative of space and place and engaging with a more nuanced perspective from that provided by official documents. As a methodological approach, oral history is particularly equipped to broaden understandings of both place and interactions with the material form. In the words of Portelli, oral history testimonies offer a unique route to the 'imagination, symbolism and desire' of its subjects.<sup>248</sup>

Interviews were conducted with sixteen participants within the Falkland Islands as part of a small-scale and original oral history project. As Chapter Two and Chapter Five detail, very little consideration has been previously been paid to the ss *Great Britain's* life within the Falklands and the interviews were intended to give voice to these memories and offer a new perspective on the ss *Great Britain's* significance. The interviews conducted provided a revealing source of information regarding Falkland Islanders interactions with the *Great Britain* and the significances they accorded the vessel. This oral history project took the form

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<sup>247</sup> A. Portelli, 'What Makes Oral History' in *The Oral History Reader* eds. Robert Perks & Alistair Thompson (Abingdon, 1998) p.10

<sup>248</sup> A. Portelli, 'What Makes Oral History' p.10



of individual semi-structured interviews over the course of my research in the Falkland Islands in July of 2013. Participants were recruited by means of snow-ball sampling and interviewees suggested further points of contact within the community who as potential interviewees. While this proved an efficient means of recruiting participants it should be noted that from a methodological perspective this did not result in a representative sample of the Falkland Island community. As such, while I refer to ‘Falkland Islanders’ throughout the course of the chapter it is with the caveat that this term is employed in a somewhat broad and general sense. I have attempted to be reflective about the nature of the testimony received in Chapter Two but it should be noted that the interviews are of course subject to an inevitable degree of subjectivity and distortions of memory and are mediated through and refracted by my role as an interviewee and research.<sup>249</sup>

Oral testimony has also been gleaned from the ss *Great Britain* Trust’s own *Incredible Journey* project. Completed in 2009, the ss *Great Britain* Trust aimed to record the memories of those who participated in the salvage of the ss *Great Britain* from Sparrow Cove and witnesses of her eventual return to Bristol in 1970. As a means to achieve this objective The Trust sought and obtained Heritage Lottery Funding. According to the supporting documentation in the application to the Heritage Lottery Fund:

The project seeks to document the memories of those who were involved in or witnessed the salvage of the ss *Great Britain*...we should act now to capture those memories....digital audio recording of the stories told by participants in and witnesses to the ship’s salvage and return will create a new archive which represents the popular impact of the events of 1970. Using this archive the Trust will be able to retell the story of the salvage – one of the most significant and emotionally powerful episodes in the ships history – for old and new audiences.<sup>250</sup>

The Trust’s ‘Incredible Journey’ oral history project aimed to coincide with the fortieth anniversary of the ss *Great Britain*’s salvage and return to Bristol. While a useful resource in terms of both scope and size the principal shortcoming of these interviews is the manner in which participants were recruited. Interviewees were sourced via a wide-ranging publicity campaign organised by the Trust and, as a result, self-selected. Added to this is the concern that potential participants were potentially excluded, either because they were deemed as

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<sup>249</sup> There is a vast range of literature on this subject. A necessarily brief sample includes T. Lummis (*Listening to History - The authenticity of history*. (London, 1975) A. Thompson *The Oral History Reader*. (Abingdon, 1998) A. Portelli, ‘The Peculiarities of Oral History.’ *History Workshop Journal*, 12:1 (1998) pp.96-107, D. Schacter, *The Seven Sins of Memory*. (New York, 2001) D. Schrifin, ‘Mother and friends in a Holocaust Life Story.’ *Language and Society* 31.(2002) pp.309- 353 and P. Thompson (*The Voice of the Past*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press.1998)

<sup>250</sup> SSGBT:, ‘Heritage Lottery Fund - ‘The Incredible Journey’ – Oral History Project (2009)

peripheral to the focus of the project's aims or their testimony. The interviews provided are useful not only in providing a snapshot of ordinary Bristolians reactions to the salvage but also key figures associated with the salvage effort. However due to the nature of the attribution of these interviews they are subject to an increased degree of scrutiny regarding their reliability. As with my own oral history project in the Falklands I have aimed to be reflective about the use of this source material within the body of the thesis and deployed the material in a manner at considerable variance from that of the Trust.

Whilst every chapter of this thesis references oral history to some degree, Chapter Five contains the fewest number of oral history sources. An oral history project centred on visitor experiences of the ss *Great Britain* was considered but ultimately abandoned owing to considerations of feasibility. In order to limit the influence of either the Trust or the site and ship itself in influencing responses any qualitative interviews would have to take place in a more neutral location. Questions of commercial impact were flagged as an item of concern from the Trust's perspective and obtaining a worthwhile sample of interviewees was considered problematic. As a result, visitor testimony takes the form of a sample drawn from a Morris Hargreaves McIntyre (MHM) report the Trust was willing to share for the purposes of this research. MHM are a strategic research consultancy working within the culture, heritage, leisure, media and charity sectors. As with the 'Incredible Journey' project, this source material proves somewhat problematic – most notably the information produced by this report does not directly correspond to the research interests of this project. Further, the nature of MHM as a consultancy which in effect has supplied a commercial product to the Trust on the basis of financial exchange raises inevitable questions surrounding its objectivity and the inherent bias contained within. The extent to which MHM silenced or diminished potentially contentious interpretations of the ss *Great Britain* as a heritage site can never truly be known.

## Structure

Including the introduction and conclusion this thesis is comprised of six principal chapters. The first substantive chapter (labelled Chapter Two) contextualises the ss *Great Britain*'s life within the Falkland Islands with reference to both its commercial space and affective place. This chapter spans the period between 1886 - when the ship first arrived in the Falklands - to

1970, the date of the ship's salvage and return to Britain. This chapter argues that the unique location of the Falklands, with a particular reference to its natural landscape had a powerful effect on the manner in which the ship was conceptually framed by islanders. The chapter will outline how the ship was almost immediately subsumed into the Falklands economy becoming a focal point of its agricultural industry and import trade. Yet once the physical structure of the ship deteriorated to a significant degree the vessel was abandoned in Sparrow Cove. In strictly functional terms the ship ceased to be an item of economic utility at this point, nonetheless it soon came to embody a different set of principles which were closely related to the *Great Britain's* removal from an economically defined network to that which was defined by the natural world. In this manner the chapter will discuss Sparrow Cove, with the ship at its centre, as a site of human meaning and turn to the placelessness returned to this location once the ship was returned to the United Kingdom. The chapter will also consider the ship as an object of agency with specific reference to Governor Henniker Heaton's attempt to restore the vessel in the Falklands. This incident is employed as a means to introduce a consistent theme of the ss *Great Britain's* afterlife and its role in inspiring the human imagination.

The third chapter discusses the ss *Great Britain* as it existed in the imaginative space of key individuals within the ss *Great Britain* Project team. As the chapter seeks to demonstrate the ss *Great Britain* was an object negotiated at considerable remove, which in turn encouraged symbolic and abstract renderings of the vessel to develop. This discussion of the Project is framed with an engagement with the origins of British industrial archaeology and will this chapter will demonstrate how the early ss *Great Britain* project both typified and diverged from the preoccupations of this wider movement. These anxieties included but were not limited to political and economic narratives of 'declinism', alarm as to the perceived destruction of the physical environment by post-war redevelopment and attendant notions of nationalism. The chapter will seek to outline the political and social conservatism that underlined the project's initial intentions and consider these in relation to the wider political and economic context of the United Kingdom. In keeping with the aims of the thesis the chapter will also assess the contested nature of the ss *Great Britain* amongst members of the Project team and in so doing demonstrate the multiplicity of meanings the ship could be said to embody even within this particularly select cohort of individuals. This chapter will end with a discussion of the salvage and the manner in which the ship could be said to express a degree of agency in the manner in which its physical presence transformed abstract and

conceptual negotiations of the vessel to a more intimate and materially orientated set of relationships.

The fourth chapter centres on the ss *Great Britain's* return to the contested space of Bristol's Harbourside in July 1970. This chapter documents the disruptive impact the ss *Great Britain's* return had upon the future potential of the Bristol Corporation's plans to transform the Harbourside into an area of functional utility. The chapter will seek to chart the impact of the the *Great Britain's* return to the city and show how the ship came to be folded within wider debates relating to attitudes towards both future and past. Through an engagement with literature on post-war redevelopment, this chapter seeks to demonstrate how the Corporation's rationalised proposals threatened notions of place within Bristol and how the ship became an object of civic pride and a totem of historicism more generally. This chapter will also reveal how the vessel was reconceptualised within a wider network of material objects said to symbolise Bristol's identity. The chapter will also discuss embodied experiences with the vessel as a means of acknowledging the more personal aspects of identification with the ss *Great Britain* demonstrating how the ship's presence in Bristol's harbourside and its materiality proved capable of transforming the way in which the vessel was interpreted by its residents.

The final chapter, and concluding, chapter examines the ss *Great Britain* as it exists as a site of heritage. This chapter will examine the *Great Britain* as the material object which frames the associated museum site. Analysing the ss *Great Britain* as a heritage attraction, this chapter will provide a close textual reading of the ss *Great Britain* and its display of the ship's life in the Falkland Islands and demonstrate the degree to which its interpretative strategies have been defined by the consumerist space that now surrounds the vessel. This chapter aims to build on previous chapters of this work's consideration of the ss *Great Britain's* afterlife to demonstrate the degree to which these influences now have an influence on the manner in which the ship, as material object, is interpreted.

## Chapter Two: Natural Space, The ss *Great Britain* in the Falkland Islands



**Fig. 2.1** c.1886 Deck of the ss *Great Britain* in Stanley Harbour, looking aft, soon after her arrival in the Falklands, photo courtesy of Jane Cameron Archives, Stanley

In January 1914, Harold Owen, 16 year-old brother of the First World War's most famous poet, Wilfred Owen, found himself moored, in what was to his mind, a particularly inglorious and peculiar South Atlantic archipelago.<sup>1</sup> Owen's time in the Falkland Islands<sup>2</sup> came as a result of his, then, role as Fourth Officer aboard a Tramp Steamer. In a synchronous manner to the beginning of the ss *Great Britain's* own life in the

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<sup>1</sup> H. Owen, *Journey from Obscurity, vol. III: War*, Oxford 1965, pp. 3-4.

<sup>2</sup> Located deep within the South Atlantic some 300 miles away from Terra Del Fuego in South America the Falkland Islands are in fact a conglomeration of nearly 740 islands or islets. In size these islands vary from the large (220 sq km) to islets of no more than a few square metres. While there are a considerable number of islands in the Falklands, practically speaking the main distinction is between East and West Falkland. East Falkland is least severe in its terrain and, contains the Island's capital, Stanley, and the majority of its population (2,121 out of 2,932 across both Islands). West Falkland is more hilly, sparsely populated and home to several large farming settlements. While air links have improved considerably since the 1982 conflict, particularly with the establishment of the British Military's Mount Pleasant airbase on East Falkland, the sea remains central to Island's economy, communications and way of life. Falkland Islanders are vulnerable to what Yi -Fu Tuan describes as 'the primordial undifferentiated flux' of the ocean. Shipping around Cape Horn, the Island's

Falkland Islands, Owen's vessel had been forced to double back to Port Stanley after his ship significant damage during a particularly fierce South Atlantic storm. Owen recorded his time in the Falklands within his memoirs, a landscape, he recalled, he found both unfamiliar and alienating. Recalling loading wool on a particularly cold and misty January day, Owen recounted his first impressions the Falklands:

As I looked around me, I could see what unrelieved desolation lay about our anchorage. The port itself lay some distance across the bay; small clusters of houses and buildings all low-lying, flat, and uninteresting. It was, perhaps, the flatness which gave the whole place such a drab, colourless look. There seemed some undulations but no hills that I could see; the place seemed completely treeless, the only vegetation being the salty-looking scrub grass that stretched away in bare flats. A few ragged-looking sheep browsing discontentedly completed the dismal picture, so that I turned with relief to look at our own deck cluttered with debris from our hammering, at our twisted rails and stanchions plaited grotesquely like a child's string puzzle gone wrong, at our smashed bridge and boats and the gouged-out spaces where other boats had been.<sup>3</sup>

Juxtaposing the sparse landscape in which he was surrounded and the crowded material disorder of the ship's deck, Owen derived a certain comfort from this assemblage of broken objects - and their implied human activity - when cast in relief to the inscrutable minimalism of Falkland's terrain. His memoirs fail to record the name of the ship from which he was unloading wool, yet it is clear from his description of the vessel's single remaining spar that the hulk was in fact the ss *Great Britain*. If Owen's memoirs provide a particularly unflattering depiction of the Falklands Owen's treatment of the *Great Britain* is even more so.

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geographic location and its status as a lonely outpost of human civilisation determined the Island's early association with ship repair. With the reduction of ships on the Peruvian Guano run accelerating a decline precipitated by the end of the California Gold Rush, the economic fortunes of the colony took a downward turn from 1870 onwards. Yet the chaotic violence of the South Atlantic Ocean proved to be a relative boon to the small colony and when ship repair became untenable, the Island's sustained themselves on the enormous number of vessels that were yearly condemned in the Falklands as unseaworthy. The sale and purchase of wrecks in the Falklands developed into an important trade according to author and Falkland's resident Ian Strange: 'to the settler with limited means, a wrecked cargo often supplied the necessities of life, flour and grain were purchased cheaply and luxuries, otherwise unobtainable were suddenly manageable. The wrecking of ships and subsequent sale of a its cargo developed into a mutually beneficial arrangement between ship's masters and the colonies with a degree of unscrupulous behaviour encouraged as a result. A large number of ships in the Falklands were effectively 'written off' under often dubious circumstances, to the extent that the colony developed a particularly unsavoury reputation – as a result ship captains reputedly went to great pains to avoid the colony if they could. Since 1851, the Island's economy has largely been dominated by the Falkland Island's Company (originally established as the Royal Falkland Land, Cattle Seal and Whaling Company). Established as a trading company, the FIC has, from its inception, had a diverse range of economic interests including agriculture, shipping and port services, as of 2016, its portfolio also includes retailing and distribution, the sale of shipping licenses and oil exploration. (See I. J. Strange, *The Falkland Islands* (Newton Abbot, 1983)

<sup>3</sup> H. Owen, *Journey from Obscurity, vol. III: War*, Oxford 1965, pp. 3-4.

Owen's account of the *Great Britain* charts the conceptual associations he made upon first contact with the vessel, a process that began with his embodied experience of the ship's materiality. Recording his impressions of the *Great Britain* within his biographical memoirs, Owen outlines the representational means by which he negotiated the ship and the manner in which connected the vessel to his wider reality. Owen's mediations begin with the visual stimuli of the physical materiality of former ocean liner but then moves on to more abstract and conceptual modes of understanding. Upon his first contact with the vessel Owen's memoirs reveal how he coupled the *Great Britain* with an extraordinary array of particularly acute set of dangers to human life, which included the effects of ageing and their symbolic twins; death and disease.

... we were to load from the old hulk that I had noticed with the first of the daylight as I came up on deck. It would have been impossible not to notice her, for her grim dereliction dominated the scene. It was perhaps not altogether extraordinary that my first sight of this old hulk had instantly put me in mind of the scabrous old crones who sat match-selling outside the dock-gates of the English seaports. She had the same look of decrepitude, broken-down fineness; not so much the air of lost youth, as a terrible emanation of the lost beauty of old age. The vulgarity of her sawn-down bowsprit reminded me of the pendulous indecency of these old women's noses. She must have been a three-masted ship for I saw that although grossly amputated her fore, main, and mizzen masts were still standing; on the main mast, starkly disproportionate, hung a huge spar, by the look of it her original lower main yard-arm.<sup>4</sup> She was used as a wool store hulk. I saw she was rolling unpleasantly to her over-sized moorings, showing off her streaked and naked-looking body; as I continued to stare at her I was reminded even more forcibly of the derelict dock-gate match-sellers. Her moored idleness emphasized with tragic exactitude the role of barren uselessness. As she rolled and displayed her worn-out charms I thought there was about her a hint of the disillusioned bitter hostility that emanated from the diseased old women...<sup>5</sup>

On one level, Owen's articulation of his first contact with the *Great Britain* reveal an assembled collection of apprehensions surrounding his own mortality, nonetheless, it is important to highlight the pointedly gendered terms in which Owen chooses to describe the ship. Deploying a string of linguistic associations which connected the ship, as object, to a representation of a corrupted femininity, Owen reveals something of the contours of a sublimated misogyny in his musings upon the vessel. Owen's mediations begin with the mental stimuli the physical appearance of dilapidated former ocean liner provided but then

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<sup>5</sup> Owen, *Journey from Obscurity*. p. 4.

moves on to far more abstract and conceptual modes of understanding,.

Owen's evocation of the *Great Britain's* appearance moves to mediate upon, the effects of age, to the effects of age on female beauty, his acute revulsion towards these effects, the failure of reproductive health female ageing signifies biologically and the subsequent lack of utility, from Owen's, male, perspective of both female and object. Owen concludes this pointedly gendered rendering of ship 'as female' by refracting the misogynistic hostility his rendering of the ship implies back towards the *Great Britain* as material object which, as a consequence of its age and lack of utility, Owen finally imbued with a spiritual order of malignant agency towards his own physical contact with the ship. Owen's description of the *Great Britain*, the mental schemata by which Owen chooses to address it, represents a continuance of a long history within the English speaking world of personifying ships, by way of female gender and the first recorded use of coupling the pronoun 'she' or 'her' is traced back to 1375.<sup>6</sup> As Jeffrey Mellefont has demonstrated, this has subsequently provoked a degree of discord within maritime heritage circles and curators have debated whether, in adopting these terms, they are either legitimising a mode of demeaning patriarchal terminology or reflecting an inalienable aspect of seafaring history and material culture.<sup>7</sup> What Owen perceived as the sinister intent contained within the hull of the *Great Britain*, was confirmed in his mind, throughout the course of a rather eventful night he spent aboard the vessel, when his ship's loading gang - either through accident or design - left the *Great Britain* without him, leaving him alone aboard the cavernous hulk. Owen, knowing he would die of exposure if he remained on deck, spent the night in the hold instead and protected himself from the elements through wrapping himself in wool taken from one of the bales stored within. The impression of malign intent Owen perceived as emanating from within the vast, dark, metal catacombs of the abandoned *Great Britain* were compounded by the onset of a typically fierce Falklands gale.

... I felt lonely and horribly deserted. The wind was rising and drumming with horrid howls which to me in my frightened state took on the high-pitched screaming wail of an animal hysterical with pain. The gale was working itself up into a savage tempo, alternating its wild shriekings with uneasy silences; the stillness of these hiatuses struck at me with more menacing force than the wild, more normal, thundering blasts. There was in them a quality of unearthly quiet that, in the solitude of the old ship, wrapped about me apprehensive chills...

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<sup>6</sup> J. Mellefont, 'Heirloom's and Tea Towels: Views of Ship's Gender in the Modern Maritime Museum. *The Great Circle* 22, 1 (2000) p. 5

<sup>7</sup> Mellefont, 'Heirloom's and Tea Towels.'



I could hear only the infuriated tearing, rending sound of the gale as it hurtled back, intoxicated with venom, hitting the sodden old ship with vicious rage and heeling her over. I could feel the deck under me rise up as the wind lifted us and the fearful shuddering as the mooring cables snatched her back. The realism of the violent impact brought me back to actuality... The whole vessel was rolling and plunging, and lying as I was near her keel, I had the uncomfortable gyroscopic sensation of spinning up and up, always higher and higher until, snatched up short by her shackled cable chains, she shuddered to a fractional stillness before starting again her screwing descent. At these moments the wind would hammer at her straining sides and with vicious spite, in revenge for its thwarted desire for destruction, throw pockets of water and frozen rain to beat a frenzied tattoo on the upper decks, the main body of howling pressure sweeping on until its sounding violence thinned out to grave-yard wails and deflated moans...

Terror gripped me and ran with an icy prickling flush all over my body. I thought she was foundering and, starting up, ran – with the miraculous surety of deadly fear – to the foot of the ladder and found myself gripping the rungs, braced to meet the inrush of black water. Even as I waited, I could see myself being torn from my hold and swept into the awful unevenness of the limbered obstruction of the 'tween decks, to be forced upwards into the trap of the deck-head. I saw myself spread-eagled on the flood, with only my head free, to be bounced and splintered against the deck-head as the volume forced me upwards.

But the rush of water did not come; instead, there seemed to be an easing of strain all around me and once again there came to me the familiar jerk as she rode to her cables, but this time with play left in them. I sensed we were still moored and as she righted and steadied to a normal roll I knew she was not foundering...<sup>8</sup>

In order to best resist the malevolence Owen imagined the *Great Britain* embodied, Owen spent much of the night reminiscing about his childhood. Eventually falling asleep in spite of his surroundings, Owen experienced a portentous dream in which his father and his elder brother Wilfred prevented him from falling into a gorge in a wild and desolate landscape. Upon waking, Owen recounted, the dream had the effect of consoling him and gave him strength to resist the hulk's baleful aura.

Owen's eventful night spent aboard the *Great Britain*, proved, if he is to be believed, to have considerable influence on the future course of his life's events having an impact not only on the wider societal grouping with which he identified but also his culturally mediated internal understanding of the world. In an inversion of the traditionally Damascene, Owen writes that - by the time morning arrived - he had lost all belief in conventional religion.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Owen, *Journey from Obscurity*. pp. 4-12. Owen's full account of his experiences aboard the *Great Britain* fills pp. 4-40.

<sup>9</sup> Owen, *Journey from Obscurity*. pp. 36-37.

There's a relevant degree of artifice to be acknowledged in Owen's account of his experiences aboard the *Great Britain* in the Falklands and while, certainly not implausible, his suggestion that this single evening determined the course of his later Atheist beliefs perhaps speaks more to the human capacity for narrativity than it does the *Great Britain* possessing a nominally supernatural capability to steer an individual away from Christianity.<sup>10</sup> More likely perhaps, is Owen's move away from conventional religion had, at the very least, been percolating in his subconscious for a considerable time and his vivid night aboard the *Great Britain* had the effect of coalescing these abstract meditations and reflections into a loss of conviction in his faith.<sup>11</sup> Another possibility is that Owen's turn towards Atheism occurred at an approximately equivalent time to the period of his life spent in the Falklands and he has simply misattributed the precise moment where it gained shape.<sup>12</sup> While it is possible here to point to the inevitable effects of time on distorting memory it is also possible to contend that Owen, seeking to give narrative form to the structure of his memory, coupled the evocative, emotional and sensory impact of his night spent aboard the *Great Britain* with a conceptual, philosophical transformation which would have such an profound influence upon the future course of his life's events.<sup>13</sup>

Harold Owen's interaction with the *Great Britain* in the Falkland Islands reveal the incredibly rich and complex ways in which human behaviour can be influenced by the material objects that surround us. Owen's account of the ship speaks to the way in which his view of the vessel was contextualised by the landscape that surrounded it. It is significant here, that his internal estrangement from the geography of the Falklands was influenced by the degree to which it was absent of identifying markers and accompanying human activity. It is notable here, that Owen regarded his own ship - aboard which he lived and worked with a wider group of people - as such a totem of reassurance within such a minimal landscape. This stands in stark contrast to the lens with which he viewed the ss *Great Britain*, where he perceived a sinister order of quasi-spiritual intent enveloped within the ship's hull. Plausibly the cause of these two wildly divergent interpretations of, what are in reality, objects of a similar material constitution can be attributed to, in Owen's mind, the notable absence of people.

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<sup>10</sup> H. White, 'The value of narrativity in the representation of reality,' *Critical inquiry* 7.1 (1980): pp.5-27

<sup>11</sup> S. Freud, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (London, 1901) p.283

<sup>12</sup> D. L. Schacter, *The Seven Sins of Memory*

<sup>13</sup> F. H. Alison, 'Remembering a Vietnam Firefight - Changing Perspectives Over Time', in *The Oral History Reader*, ed. by R. Perks & A. Thompson (Abingdon, 1998).

Owen's negotiation of the *Great Britain* also emphasises the role of semiotics and the role language plays in conceptualising and influencing the manner in which material artefacts are understood by individuals.<sup>14</sup> Owen's use of unflattering gender defined terminology to describe the *Great Britain* is influenced by a far wider context of designation of meaning and communication with specific reference to a contextual, culturally determined view of ship's as embodying feminine traits within the English speaking world. The debates as to whether to employ this specifically gendered terminology within heritage sites show, how to an extent, even inert material 'things' can be said to influence and frame the debate around broader socio-political issues.<sup>15</sup>

Owen's identification of the ship's agency in inspiring his turn away from conventional religion also demonstrates the agency by which material artefacts can be said to influence an innate emotional, spiritual and philosophical register within human culture.<sup>16</sup> As previously discussed, it may be open to debate whether or not Owen's attribution of the ship's role in his later atheism was entirely correct but his readiness to identify and write about his night aboard the vessel as the cause of a profound change in philosophical outlook, highlights the role in which 'things' can often play an important role in identity formation and their influence on the complex internal world of human beings.

This brief discussion, of *one* individual's relationship to *one* specific object, at *one* specific time, in *one* specific location demonstrates the complexity with which human actors can be said to interact within space, find meaning in place and be influenced by the material objects they daily encounter. Owen's description of his night onboard the *Great Britain* also demonstrates the wide range of academic disciplines that can be employed as a means of deepening our understanding of the lived realities of the material world. Even this rather limited account proved capable of engaging with the diverse disciplines of human geography, heritage studies, the anthropology of religion, semiotics and psychology as a means of demonstrating how these varied academic approaches can be employed as contributing to an understanding of space, place and materiality. Owen's account of night aboard the ss *Great*

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<sup>14</sup> R. Layton, 'Structuralism and Semiotics,' in Tilley (eds.) *Handbook of material culture*. p.29-43

<sup>15</sup> P.V.Dommelen, 'Colonial Matters: Material Culture and Postcolonial Theory in Colonial Situations' 'in Tilley (eds.) *Handbook of material culture*. p.85-104

<sup>16</sup> F.Myers, 'Some Properties of Art and Culture: Ontologies of the Image and Economies of Exchange.' In Miller (eds.) *Materiality* p.118-140

*Britain* also hint at what Henri Lefebvre described as the complexity of spatial settings the ‘instant infinity....a Mondrian painting’ of exhaustive symbolism and density and in so doing demonstrates that every stage of the *Great Britain’s* existence is a legitimate source of academic enquiry.<sup>17</sup>

The following chapter will discuss the ss *Great Britain* within the spatial setting of the Falkland Islands from the period of 1886 to 1970, an under-explored period of the ship’s afterlife from both an academic and heritage perspective. It will aim to reflect upon the degree to which the socially produced and commercially defined space of the Falklands influenced the ship’s life within this location deploying archival resources from the Jane Cameron Archives in Stanley. The chapter will also consider the ship’s role as a constituent of place employing oral history as a methodology as a means to reflect upon the human meaning of the ship’s life once relocated to Sparrow Cove. The chapter will also consider the role of the ship in the context of its location within the wider network of the natural world and how this in turn demonstrates the *Great Britain’s* agency in influencing human behaviour during the vessel’s time in this location.

In chronological terms the ship’s life in the Falklands represents her longest period of stasis in any one period of her material life, either as working or non-working vessel. It is surprising then, the vessel’s period in the Falklands forms such a small part of the ss *Great Britain’s* interpretative focus. The concluding chapter of this thesis will consider the wider implications of this interpretative policy but the following account of the ship’s Falkland’s life is an attempt, in part, to redress this balance.

### The ss *Great Britain’s* Early Life in the Falkland Islands: Commercial Space

In a pronounced contrast to the *Great Britain’s* fateful final journey as ocean going vessel, the ship’s first stay in Falklands, beginning in the 31<sup>st</sup> December 1853, saw the arrival of the vessel during her pomp, that of emigrant clipper. The ship’s first arrival in Port Stanley

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<sup>17</sup> Lefebvre , *The Production of Space*’. p.85 Lefebvre was referring to Piet Mondrian (1872 - 1944) a Dutch painter famed for a representational form of expression which was notable by its abstract nature. Mondrian is famed for the his mode of composition and his artwork is characterised by a complex lattice of red, blue interlacef lines. In a further demonstration of the pervasive influence of landscape and place on human behaviour Mondrian claimed to be inspired by both the natural world and the patchwork geometry of the Holland’s canals. See H. Locher *Piet Mondrian: Colour, Structure, and Symbolism: An Essay* (New York: 1994)

during the course of a run to Melbourne on the return leg of her 10th voyage under the command of Captain Barnard Robert Matthews.<sup>18</sup>

During this visit to the islands, one of her passengers took the opportunity to ride over to Port Louis with three others, during the four days the vessel spent in Stanley Harbour over the New Year 1853-4. Like Harold Owen's later account, this visitor also saw the Falkland Islands as having little to recommend it and provided an similarly unflattering account of his visit in an anonymous article in the *Bristol Mirror* on 25 February 1854:

At daylight in the morning of the last day of the year 1853 we sighted the beacon at the entrance of Stanley Harbour... After proceeding about three miles, we took a pilot on board, and passed through a narrow entrance less than 200 yards in width, and at 10am, the 'Great Britain' dropped her anchor opposite the township. The distant country looked dreary enough, and reminded me very much of the rolling hills of Morocco. The total absence of trees or shrubs gave it a wild and desolate appearance... I wish I could describe to you my sensations of the dreary and wild nature of the country, as I walked with my gun about the ruins of the houses and fort at Berkeley Sound. It seemed to me as if the place was under the spell of some potent magician, so desolate was the scene. ...The inhabitants were very anxious that we should give a favourable account of their island; but I must confess that I cannot anticipate a glorious future for the Falkland Islands, or that Stanley Harbour will ever be anything more than a coaling depot for steamers, and a harbour refuge for disabled vessels. When the 'Panama Route' is opened, it will be to them a heavy blow, and great discouragement. After three days detention, during which we took in 300 tons of coals, we bade adieu to the Falkland Islands without regret.<sup>19</sup>

The ship's next visit to the Falklands came thirty-two years later, where the vessel presented itself in a considerably reduced physical form. Here, the ss *Great Britain*, on her forty-seventh and ultimately final voyage as seafaring vessel, limped into the Falklands after suffering a fire in her hold and severe storm damage attempting to round Cape Horn.<sup>20</sup> At her symbolic height, the vessel shuttled passengers from Liverpool to New York with elegance, transported emigrants to Australia and been chartered by the British Government as a troopship, eventually carrying over 44,000 troops during the Crimean War.<sup>21</sup> Yet by 1886, she was undeniably a vessel in decline. A little over forty years after her launch, Brunel's symbolic totem of technological progress and the triumph of modernity had been reduced to a humble trading vessel.

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<sup>18</sup> Corlett, *Iron Ship*. p. 242-243.

<sup>19</sup> JCA: Article from the *Bristol Mirror*, 25 February 1854, printed in full in FIJ 1980, pp. 37-40

<sup>20</sup> During this stage of her life-cycle the vessel had undergone her fifth and final refit as a working vessel. Bought by Anthony Gibbs & Company in 1852 the ship was converted exclusively to sail see Corlett, *The Iron Ship* p.246

<sup>21</sup> Corlett, *Iron Ship* p.158

Setting off on 6 February 1886, her final voyage as an active seafaring vessel involved the transportation of coal from Wales to San Francisco under the command of Captain Henry Staph. After the failure to round the Horn, the *Great Britain* doubled back to the Falkland Islands, reaching Port William in foggy weather on 22 May 1886. Not for the first time in her career, the ss *Great Britain* ran aground but, unlike her lengthy internment in Dundrum Bay during 1846, the ship spent just two days in Port William before she was eventually towed to the adjoining Stanley Harbour where the vessel was to remain for a further forty-seven years. By 1936, even the *Great Britain's* humble employment as a hulk was too much for the ship to bear structurally and the vessel was consequently towed to the adjacent Sparrow Cove, scuttled and effectively abandoned by the Colonial Administration. She likely would have ended her days in this isolated estuary, 8,000 miles from the location of her first launch, were it not for the efforts of the ss *Great Britain* Project team, and its ultimately successful salvage attempt, nearly forty years later.

From an interest in maintaining the ship's physical survival, the vessel's arrival in the Falklands was fortuitous. It is of considerable note that the vessel represents the sole remaining physical testament to Brunel's substantial contribution to shipbuilding. Both the *Great Britain's* predecessor and successor vessels – the *Great Western* and *Great Eastern* - were completely physically dismantled once the commercial utility of these ship's had been exhausted. Prior to the construction of the Panama Canal in 1914, the only method for ships to pass between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans was via a traversal of Cape Horn, navigating around the southernmost tip of Chile and Argentina, Tierra del Fuego. The seafaring passage around the Cape Horn was particularly treacherous and elements of the natural world have served to impede human traversal of this area via means of an assorted selection of violent winds, substantial waves, robust currents and an array of icebergs the scale of which dwarf ocean-going vessels and the sailors that attempt to navigate around them. As a result of these considerable impediments to their on-going journeys many ships and their human crews were forced to double back to the Falklands when confronting the difficulties traversing the Horn in order to affect repairs, or, as was often the case, abandon the vessel completely.<sup>22</sup> In the words of one Falkland Islander 'this was the only sensible Port really, there's not much down the side of Argentina really along the East Coast and, you know, it was a good place to get

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<sup>22</sup> Strange, *The Falkland Islands* p.10-20

into.<sup>23</sup>

Even in 2016, there are multitudinous array of shipwrecks, seafaring paraphernalia and other associated signifiers of the Falkland Islands strong associations with both maritime past and present. Indeed, in their sheer scale, the shipwrecks within the Falklands perhaps represent the most prominent material signifiers of human agency in a landscape which is notable, to human eyes, in its austerity. The Falklands are currently home to, what is estimated as, over two hundred shipwrecks and former hulks in various stages of physical deterioration. The abundance of shipwrecks found within the Falklands landscape has been produced as direct result of both the Falklands specific geographical location and the way in which the human economy configured itself around this unique landscape. Even in 2016, there are multitudinous array of shipwrecks, seafaring paraphernalia and other associated signifiers of the Falkland Islands strong associations with both maritime past and present. Indeed, in their sheer scale, the shipwrecks within the Falklands perhaps represent the most prominent material signifiers of human agency in a landscape which is notable, to human eyes, in its austerity. The Falklands are currently home to, what is estimated as, over two hundred shipwrecks and former hulks in various stages of physical deterioration. The abundance of shipwrecks found within the Falklands landscape has been produced as direct result of both the Falklands specific geographical location and the way in which the human economy configured itself around this unique landscape. It is likely therefore, that had the ship arrived in nearly any other location across the globe, it is highly improbable that the vessel would now exist as a heritage attraction in Gas Ferry Road in the city of Bristol.

As with all stages of the *Great Britain's* life and afterlife, the ship's period in the Falklands involved a transformative reconstitution and adaption as an object which functioned with a substantial degree of economic utility. Official archival documentation suggests that the ss *Great Britain* was rapidly assimilated into the rhythms that dictated economic life in Falklands. After it became clear that the ship was no longer sea-worthy and the cost of repairs to the vessel was excessive, the Falklands Islands Company (commonly referred to as FIC) almost immediately engaged the owners of the vessel, Anthony Gibbs & Company, in a financial wrangle over its purchase.<sup>24</sup> Whilst the British Trading Company estimated the

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<sup>23</sup> Gerald Cheek, Personal Interview, 8<sup>th</sup> July 2013

<sup>24</sup> JCA:Letters from Falkland Islands Company to Anthony Gibbs & Sons, 4<sup>th</sup> November 1886, FIC/FI -1886, Jane Cameron Archives.

assets and value of the ship (excluding the cargo) to be £3,000, FIC, on which the Island's economy heavily depends, initially deemed this sum excessive, before eventually agreeing to meet the price following a meeting of its Board of Directors.

Dear sirs, I have the satisfaction of informing you that our Directors have instructed me to hand you a cheque for £3,000 tomorrow in exchange for a Bill of Sale for the *Great Britain* and a letter in duplicate to Captain Staph telling him to hand over the vessel, her furniture and all stores and effects as in existence on the 19th November, the date of purchase of the vessel.<sup>25</sup>

Despite FIC's agreed purchase of the ss *Great Britain*, the haggling between the two companies continued for a further eight days, where disputes continued over the duty paid for holding the coal cargo in Stanley and exactly what balance of provisions were included in the sale. Finally, the coal that the ship was carrying was also purchased by the Falkland Islands Company for an additional £1,750 in a separate agreement with the cargo's owners.<sup>26</sup>

With the FIC's purchase of the *Great Britain* in 1886, the ship had become a central constituent within the economic life of the Falklands which the FIC immediately converted to a hulk - in effect a floating warehouse - where the vessel found principal use in the storage of wool. The export of wool during this period was the most significant element of the Falklands economic life and the ship's substantial size and spacious hull served to ably recommend her for this purpose.<sup>27</sup>

The exchange of letters between Anthony Gibbs & Company and the FIC ably demonstrate the degree to which the ship was officially interpreted as an object of utility. The first official documentation associated with the ss *Great Britain* in the Falkland Islands presents the vessel as of little else than that of an object of officially arbitrated commercial value. This mediation of the ship's value – the ship as a commodity - is a theme that continues throughout the ship's early life in the Falklands (and indeed throughout the vessel's 'afterlife'). Indeed, as an entity of practical worth, the ss *Great Britain*, viewed through the prism of surviving archival documentation, most frequently presents itself as either a buttress *to* of or obstacle *towards* the Colonial Administration's interests.

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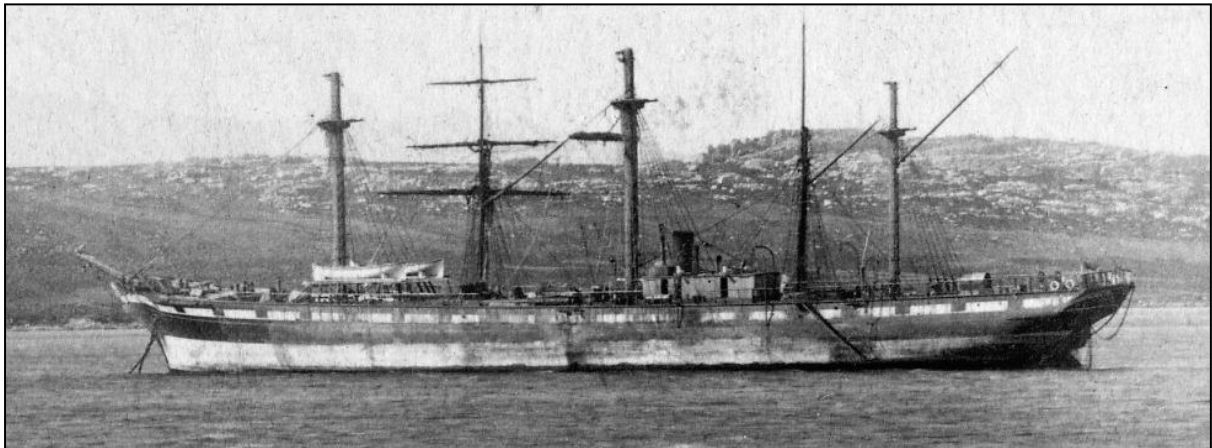
<sup>25</sup> JCA: Letters from Falkland Islands Company to Anthony Gibbs & Sons, 4<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> November 1886, FIC/FI - 1886,

<sup>26</sup> JCA: Letters from Falkland Islands Company to Anthony Gibbs & Sons, 12<sup>th</sup> November 1886, FIC/FI - 1886,

<sup>27</sup> See Corlett, *Iron Ship*.p.183



The speed with which the ss *Great Britain* was enveloped within the agricultural and shipping industries that sustained the Falklands is testament to Tilley's assertion that commercially dictated space must, above all, be a 'useful and rational space'.<sup>28</sup> As Lefebvre presciently reminds us: 'objects' are not only things but also relations.'<sup>29</sup>



**Fig. 2.2.** c.1887 The ss *Great Britain* as economic commodity and coal hulk: 'From F. I. Co.'s Office door, Steamer *Luxor* coaling. 31 Dec 87.' Photo and caption by F. E. Cobb, photo courtest of Jane Cameron Archives, Stanley

Yet, the ss *Great Britain*'s life in the Falklands does not simply reveal the overarching economic influences that constitute space but also the relationships of power with which they are frequently entwined. A prominent example of this affinity between power and economics, which would have such a significant effect on the *Great Britain* over the course of the ship's afterlife, is revealed in a fractious dispute over the vessel on the 19 January 1895. The centre of the quarrel lay between a conflict of official authority between the Falkland Island's Colonial Secretary, and therefore regional arbiter of British Imperial Power, and the London based Secretary of State for the Colonies (SOSC) Marquess of Rippon. The colonial administration, in an effort to prevent the spread of smallpox within the Falklands commandeered the ship from the FIC and - in one of the many varied roles the *Great Britain* has embodied during the course of her life - employed the vessel for use as a quarantine vessel (or *lazaretto*).

Whatever the benefits to the public health of Falkland Islanders and its visitors this official appropriation of the vessel by the Colonial Administration had an acute financial impact on

<sup>28</sup> Tilley, *A Phenomenology of Landscape* p.2 1

<sup>29</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*. p.77

the FIC and its operations. Accordingly, the company contacted the SOSC with a view to extracting substantial financial remuneration from the colonial administration.<sup>30</sup> Sympathetic to the FIC's entreaty, the SOSC contacted the Colonial Secretary in the Falklands with a view to seeking an appropriate degree of compensation on behalf of the company.<sup>31</sup> The SOSC on his part, received a response from the Colonial Secretary on the 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1895 which outlined, in no uncertain terms, the limits of the SOSC official authority within the Falkland Islands. As the Colonial Secretary reminded the SOSC not only was the ship's employment in this manner not without precedent but that the Colonial Secretary had the necessary powers at his disposal to effect this decision.

I am to ask his Lordship's attention to the section 25 of the Quarantine Ordinance which runs as follows: - The Governor in Council is hereby authorised, whenever it shall be thought necessary, to provide.' At the public expense, one or more vessel or vessels, or buildings, and to cause the same to be fitted up as 'lazarettos for such use and purposes as the Governor 'shall, with the approval of the Health Officer, from time to time order and direct.<sup>32</sup>

In short, the implication contained within the Colonial Secretary's response is that, in embodying the role of representative of regional British Imperial authority, the Colonial Secretary found the level of intrusion both inappropriate and without official sanction. While the Colonial Secretary's response to the SOSC may, perhaps, be limited to this personal power wrangle between two administrative agencies of the British Empire, it is plausible that the in the Secretary's refusal to compensate the FIC was an anticipation of possible discontent among Islanders if local levies were raised as a result of remunerating the company.

An instructive guide to the manner in which the networks of British Imperial power found expression on a local level, is provided by Alex Lester.<sup>33</sup> Lester's work on Empire and his incorporation of the phenomenological rendering of 'place' is reflective of the recent influence of humanistic geography within fields within the humanities.<sup>34</sup> Lester incorporates a phenomenological inspired definition of place as a means of contributing to a more nuanced

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<sup>30</sup> JCA:Letter from the Marquess of Rippon, Secretary of State for the Colonies to the Governor of the Falkland Islands, FIC/FI -1895 12<sup>th</sup> January 1895

<sup>31</sup> JCA:Letter from the Marquess of Rippon, Secretary of State for the Colonies to the Governor of the Falkland Islands, FIC/FI -1895 12<sup>th</sup> January 1895

<sup>32</sup> JCA:Letter from the Falkland Islands Colonial Secretary to the Marquess of Rippon, Secretary of Secretary of State for the Colonies, February 2nd 1895, FIC/FI -1895, JCA:

<sup>33</sup> A. Lester, 'Imperial Circuits and Networks: Geographies of the British Empire.' *History Compass* 4,1 (2003) pp.124-141

<sup>34</sup> See Chapter One 'Place'

understanding of the operation of the power of the wider British Empire at a local level. As Lester describes:

Places are not so much bounded entities but rather specific juxtapositions of multiple trajectories. These trajectories may be those of people, objects, texts and ideas and even of rock, sediment, water, ice and air. The differences between places are the result of these trajectories of these mobilities which proceed at very different rates – intersecting, being thrown together, in different ways across the surface of the Earth. In their ever-changing coming together, they produce contributions that are unique and thus give power to each place.<sup>35</sup>

To Lester, the power of the British Empire was manifested in different ways in different territories and, as a result, the contours of specific colonial ‘places’ were produced as the consequence of a bundle of an incredibly dense network of relationships. These networks were, in turn, influenced by multifaceted interrelations between culture, geography, climate and the lived experiences of the subjects of Empire. In sum, at a regional level, no two manifestations of British Imperial authority were completely alike and instead produced as a result of the exercise of the distant official power of the metropole, localised regional problem solving on the part of colonial administrators and the manner in which these expressions of power were influenced by subjects administered under Imperial authority.<sup>36</sup>

It is stimulating to reflect on the implications of Lester’s work in reference to this particular episode of the *Great Britain’s* history. Would the SOSC, for instance, have felt so secure in attempting to wield the authority granted him by his location within the centre of the vast global network of the British Empire in other locations or colonies? For instance, would the SOSC felt so confident in dictating how Imperial authority should be administered in the British Raj? Or was this attempt by the SOSC influenced by the Falklands status as a tiny island colony, embedded within a vast constellation of far more expansive dependencies, protectorates and mandates? Equally, would a British Colonial Administrator who was geographically closer to the metropole be more pliable, in an administrative sense, and less inclined to act in defiance of its bureaucratic authority? Did the small size of the Falklands colony result in a Colonial Administration which was more attuned to the needs of its subjects?

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<sup>35</sup> Lester, ‘Imperial Circuits and Networks.’ p.128

<sup>36</sup> Lester, ‘Imperial Circuits and Networks.’ p.128 See also A.L.Stoler, and F. Cooper. "Between metropole and colony." *Tensions of empire: Colonial cultures in a bourgeois world* (1997) pp.52-55. Metopole (from the Greek metropolis for "mother city") and British metropolitan centre of the British Empire; e.g. the United Kingdom itself

Providing definitive answers to these questions, at least with any degree of certainty, would likely encompass several years of research and could plausibly result in a substantial multi-volume work so, necessarily, these questions will go unresolved. Nonetheless, the administrative wrangle that was produced as a result of the reconfiguration of the ss *Great Britain's* role in the Falklands highlights the degree to which the vessel was capable of acting as an object of considerable agency during her supposedly 'fallow' period of historic interest. For a fleeting moment in 1895, the *Great Britain* became the node through which the operation of power was disputed across the vast span of the world's then dominant global economic and military power.

On a far more localised level, the economic networks that sustained the ship's physical life in the Falklands can be affirmed within regional struggles between the wider colonial administration, the Falkland Islands Government (FIG) and the FIC. In 1897, the FIG proposed the construction of a 100 feet long pier in Stanley in response to a perceptible growth in the global wool trade. This proposal was strongly opposed by the Falkland Islands Company which, in another letter from its Managing Director, Fred. K Cobb to authorities in Westminster, outlined his detailed objections to the pier: 'The board believes that no grounds for the opinions or proposals, as set forth, exist, and that the whole scheme is a wild absurdity, involving on the one hand, if carried out, financial disaster for the Colony, and on the other, to put it mildly, a grave injunction to this company, to say nothing of other evils.'<sup>37</sup>

The pier construction proposed by the Colonial Administration would effectively render the *Great Britain* redundant as a means of storing and unloading wool within the Falklands. The consequences of which would prove disastrous for the FIC's financial interests, preventing the company from charging external shipping companies for the storage service which the ship came to provide within the Islands.

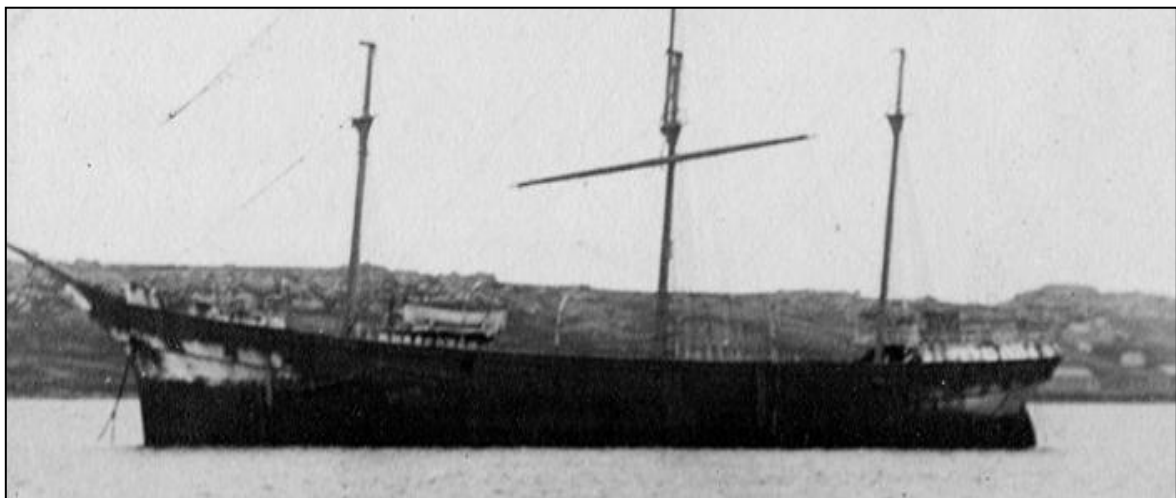
We have shipped on more than one occasion over 2,000 bales by one steamer, and for such a quantity the *Great Britain* has ample capacity; it is evident, therefore that the rival Government establishment must provide equal accommodation. Bales of wool and skins cannot lie for weeks exposed to the weather in one of the most uncertain

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<sup>37</sup> JCA:Letter from Fred Cobb, Managing Director of the Falkland Islands Company to the of Secretary of State for the Colonies, 17<sup>th</sup> January 1897 FIC/FI -1897

climates in the world and storage for 2,000 bales at least must be provided.<sup>38</sup>

On this, more parochial level, the *Great Britain* became the constituent in the conflict between the interests of wider administrative bureaucratic authority and the more limited interests of private enterprise. Significant here is the manner in which the Colonial Administration was prompted to construct the pier in response to fluctuations in a wider, global marketplace. Yet this acknowledgment of worldwide economic trends was of little immediate concern to the FIC, whose commercial interests were far limited to a regional financial enterprise. As with the earlier conflict between the SOSC and the Colonial Secretary the *Great Britain* has a clearly perceptible role within a global economic marketplace. Here again, disputes over the ship's function have broader implications and demonstrate the degree to which the ship, as an object, became constituent in a wider socio-economic debates encompassing the conflicts between global and regional capitalist marketplaces and the role of public authorities in mediating between the two.<sup>39</sup>



**Fig 2.3.** c.1900 Some 14 years before Harold Owen's fateful visit, the ss *Great Britain* as she appeared as a hulk in Stanley Harbour. photo courtesy of Jane Cameron Archives, Stanley

Yet the rapidity with which the ss *Great Britain* was subsumed within a broader network of local and economic influence is equally matched by the speed at which the vessel was ejected from these frameworks once she had exhausted her functional life in the Falklands. The ship's materiality conspired against her role as rationalised commercial object when, in 1933, the ss *Great Britain's* weather deck began to leak significantly. Entropy had finally begun to

<sup>38</sup> JCA: Letter from Fred Cobb, Managing Director of the Falkland Islands Company to the of Secretary of State for the Colonies, 17<sup>th</sup> January 1897, FIC/FI -1897

<sup>39</sup> J. Peck, and A. Tickell. 'Searching for a new institutional fix: the after-Fordist crisis and the global-local disorder.' Amin, Ash, eds. *Post-Fordism: a reader*. London , 2011.

take its toll on the vessel, ending its employment as a hulk and its life a significant constituent within the Falkland's regional economy.<sup>40</sup> The age of the vessel, and the corresponding physical disrepair this engendered was accelerated further by the particularly violent winds that continuously lash the Falklands, a result of the archipelago's isolated geographic positioning within the mid-Atlantic, the effects of which are exacerbated by a lack of associated tree cover.<sup>41</sup> An understanding of these distinguishing features of the landscape of the Falklands are significant in highlighting the complex interplay between the economy, geography and materiality, the influence and inter-relationship between these constituents effectively served to collude in the *Great Britain's* final expulsion from the Falklands Islands commercial life.

In an acknowledgment of the Colonial Administration's recognition of how these associated factors served to conclude the *Great Britain's* life in the Falklands as an object of commercial utility is found within official mediations as to precisely *what* role the ship now embodied in the Falklands discussions which began on 7 February 1936. A letter from the Harbour Master to the manager of the FIC expressed his opinion that the *Lady Elizabeth*<sup>42</sup> - a vessel, like the ss *Great Britain*, which had previously been used for the purposes of warehousing – should be beached. Although Port Stanley's Harbour Master advocated the preservation of the *Lady Elizabeth*<sup>43</sup> he regarded the ss *Great Britain* in a less favourable light and opened discussions as to how best destroy the ship permanently.<sup>44</sup>

In the Harbour Master's deliberations upon the *Great Britain's* fate it is notable the lengths with which the he was prepared to go in preventing the now, commercially unviable, ship

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<sup>40</sup> Ewan Corlett, *The Iron Ship* p.187

<sup>41</sup> The effects of the often inclement Falklands weather was of particular concern to the ss *Great Britain* Project in their efforts to return the ship to the United Kingdom and will be discussed at greater length in the next chapter

<sup>42</sup> The *Lady Elizabeth* was an iron ship of 1,155 tons launched on 4 June 1879 and built by Robert Thompson Jr. of Southwick, Sunderland. On 4 December 1912, The *Lady Elizabeth* left Vancouver bound for Mozambique with a shipment of lumber. The ship encountered severe weather halfway through the voyage and was damaged just off Cape Horn. Four crew members were lost overboard, along with the ship's two boats and part of her deck cargo. She also sustained damage to the deck fittings, wheel and moorings. Captain Hoigh ordered the ship to the nearest port for repairs. The *Lady Elizabeth* altered course for Stanley, Falkland Islands. Fifteen miles outside Port Stanley, the *Lady Elizabeth* struck Uraine Rock just off Volunteer Point and suffered a six-foot break in the hull and keel along with a foot-long hole. The ship began to sink but was able to get to Port Stanley for repairs. After she was examined, the *Lady Elizabeth* was condemned (declared unseaworthy) because of the damage. Like the ss *Great Britain*, she found prior use within the Falklands as Coal Hulk)

<sup>43</sup> JCA:Letter from the Harbour Master to the Colonial Secretary, 7<sup>th</sup> February 1936, FIC/FI -1936,

<sup>44</sup> JCA:Letter from the Harbour Master to the Colonial Secretary, 7<sup>th</sup> February 1936, FIC/FI -1936,

from disrupting the wider shipping network of the regional Falklands economy. In the Harbour Master's professional opinion: 'the proper course would be to tow this hulk out to sea and sink it at a place where the water is of such a depth that the sunken hulk would not become a danger to shipping.'<sup>45</sup> This desire to see the ship removed to a location where she could no longer disrupt the ordered flows of capital was made more explicit in a letter dated 16 July 1936 where the Harbour Master further recommended that the ship be sunk far outside Falkland Island shipping routes: 'If at any time the sinking of the hulk '*Great Britain*' comes up for consideration I have the honour to recommend the following position, which is about one mile to the Eastward of Seal Rocks in 30 fathoms of water.'<sup>46</sup> Even more radical proposals were envisaged as a means to enable the *Great Britain's* destruction with one creative suggestion was the letting the Royal Navy use the ship as target practice and in so doing ultimately sink the vessel by way of gunfire.<sup>47</sup>

It is crucial to highlight the significant role of wider commercial authority in the ss *Great Britain's* life in the Falklands as a means of acknowledging the complex interplay of economic forces in influencing the values we attach to material objects. As Chapter Five will demonstrate, in 2016, as museum site, the visibility of *ship as commodity* is far more pronounced in the manner in which these commercial influences dictates human responses to the ship. Nonetheless, even within the smaller regional economy of the Falklands, the authority of both economics and power are more than readily apparent in determining the course of the ship's life there.

### An early restoration attempt: The ss *Great Britain* as place of symbolic meaning

In Ewan Corlett's account of the ship's life, the naval engineer and eventual architect of the *Great Britain's* salvage identifies what he believed to a persistent and 'rooted reluctance' to destroy the ship over the course of the vessel's life in the Falklands.<sup>48</sup> Corlett attributes this reluctance, in part to his belief that the *Great Britain* came to embody the role of 'public

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<sup>45</sup> JCA:Letter from the Harbour Master to the Colonial Secretary, 7<sup>th</sup> February 1936, FIC/FI -1936,

<sup>46</sup> JCA:Letter from the Harbour Master to the Colonial Secretary, 16<sup>th</sup> July 1936, FIC/FI -1936

<sup>47</sup> Ewan Corlett, *The Iron Ship* p.187

<sup>48</sup> Corlett, *The Iron Ship* p.187

monument' in the eyes of the Falkland Islanders.<sup>49</sup> Seemingly taking its cue from Corlett's book, this theme of an object negotiated by Falkland Islanders as an totem of significant cultural import is also presented as fact within the ss *Great Britain's* interpretative display (the implications of which will be considered in Chapter Five). Yet there is very little evidence to suggest this was the case, as oral history interviews with Falkland Islanders will later reveal; direct questions surrounding the ship's purported symbolism drew an extremely muted response.

Yet imbibing these depictions of the *Great Britain's* life in the Falklands at face value is necessarily reductive and essentially leads us back to a perspective of the vessel as a networked bundle of flows of capital. As emphasised in the opening chapter, this present thesis aims to explore not only the economic aspects of the *Great Britain's* afterlife but the ship's role as a constituent of human meaning. With this aim in mind, I will now turn to the role of Falkland Islands Governor Henniker Heaton and his determined attempt to restore the vessel during his tenure as primary representative of the British Crown in the colony. Born on 9 February 1880 in New South Wales, Sir Herbert Henniker-Heaton was the son of Sir John Henniker-Heaton, 1st Bt. And Rose Bennett. He was invested as a Knight Commander, Order of St. Michael and St. George (K.C.M.G.). He died on 24 January 1961 at age 80. Educated at Eton College, Heaton graduated from New College Oxford in 1901 with a Bachelor of Arts. Following University, Heaton was appointed Colonial Secretary of Gambia in 1917 before going onto holding the office of Acting Governor of Gambia between 1918 and 1920.<sup>50</sup>

Heaton's extended association with the Falkland Islands began in 1921 when he was appointed Colonial Secretary of the colony in 1921. Following this, Heaton was appointed Acting Governor of the Falkland Islands between 1923 and 1924. Leaving the Falklands, Heaton went on to become Colonial Secretary of Bermuda between 1925 and 1929 then Colonial Secretary of Cyprus between 1929 and 1934. Returning to the Falklands in 1935, Heaton held the office of Governor and Commander-in-Chief of the Falkland Islands between January 1935 and 1941.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Corlett, *The Iron Ship* p.187

<sup>50</sup> 'The Peerage - A genealogical survey of the peerage of Britain as well as the royal families of Europe' <http://www.thepeerage.com/p39831.htm> 28/01/2014

<sup>51</sup> The Peerage 28/01/2014



Despite Corlett's and the Trust's depiction of the ss *Great Britain*'s symbolic importance to the wider community of the Falklands, it is immediately apparent that it was Heaton, rather than involved community participation which drove the thwarted restoration attempt. Whilst acknowledging the inherent limits of both archival and oral history sources, it is also immediately apparent that this proposal largely ran counter to the wider interests of the Colonial Administration, and the more prosaic concerns of many Falkland Islanders themselves. Despite being relatively short-lived, Heaton's proposal prompted a considerable degree of opposition which presented strong arguments against the ship's continued presence in Stanley which was deemed detrimental to shipping interests and the wider Falklands economy.<sup>52</sup>



**Fig 2.4** Day and Haghe, cc. 1843, 'Launch of the ss *Great Britain*' 'To the... Mayor and... City of Bristol, This Representation of the launch of the... Iron Steam Ship *Great Britain*, on the 19th July 1843... is... dedicated by & Haghe (engravers). It is likely that this was the lithograph that Heaton was referring to when outlining his planned restoration attempted. Images of the ship would have powerful influence on the human imagination and very likely ensured the vessel's continued survival. Photo courtesy of National Maritime Museum, Greenwich.

It is somewhat difficult to pinpoint - at least with any degree of certainty - precisely what inspired Heaton's preservationist turn in the winter of 1936. With an acknowledgment that the complete answer to this question is perhaps truly unknowable, perhaps a partial answer can be provided with reference to the role, visual imagery and abstract representation plays in inspiring the human imagination. Chapter Three will discuss these issues at greater length and

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<sup>52</sup> JCA: Letter from the Acting Colonial Secretary to Governor Henniker Heaton, 27<sup>th</sup> April 1936, FIC/FIG - 1937, Jane Cameron Archive, Stanley

the manner in which the ss *Great Britain* Project team primarily negotiated the vessel through abstract conceptual mediums, inspired, in part by the visual representations of the vessel as she appeared at the zenith of her ocean spanning career. Yet it is possible to point to a similar effect manifested in Heaton's earlier restoration proposal. Here, on the 5<sup>th</sup> March 1936, at the height of the Governor's enthusiasm for the scheme, Heaton makes explicit reference to an image of the *Great Britain* at launch suggesting it as helpful visual guide as a means of bringing shape to the final form of the proposed restoration.<sup>53</sup>

As we will see in Chapter Three a comparable image of the *Great Britain* proved capable of stirring Ewan Corlett's imagination in what might be ably considered an extraordinary example of Jungian synchronicity.<sup>54</sup> This is significant, and, as will be discussed in the next chapter, provides a mode of imaginative engagement with the vessel that moves beyond the *Great Britain's* material realities as they were experienced by their human mediators. Heaton's reference to this lithograph demonstrates the manner in which he imaginatively connected this image of the vessel at her height and transposed it atop of the rapidly deteriorating assemblage of rusted iron and timber the ship represented in 1936. It further shows the manner in which these images can prove capable of, on a conceptual level, effacing the effects of temporality on the ship's material structure and in doing so connect the vessel to past glories and future potentialities.

From February 1936 onwards Heaton engaged in a vigorous effort to pursue the restoration of the *Great Britain* in the face of Stanley's Harbour Master's repeated insistence the vessel should be destroyed. Heaton instead proposed a radical and elaborate solution to repurpose the vessel's role in the Falklands. On the 19<sup>th</sup> February 1936, Heaton suggested 'securing' and preserving the vessel in perpetuity in order to bring her back previously 'picturesque condition of 1875',<sup>55</sup> Heaton estimated that the fund to restore the vessel would amount to little more than £3,000 with the necessary support being obtained mainly from UK sources. On the 10<sup>th</sup> March 1936, Heaton's enthusiasm for his potential restoration scheme spurred him to write to the Governor of the Bank of New South Wales in London, with the intention of opening an account in association with a public appeal for restoration funds.

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<sup>53</sup> JCA:Letter from Falkland Islands Governor Henniker Heaton to the Director of Public Works 5th March 1936 FIC/FIG -1937, Jane Cameron Archive, Stanley

<sup>54</sup> C.Jung, *Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle* (1973, New Jersey)

<sup>55</sup> JCA:Letter from Henniker Heaton to Harbour Master, 19<sup>th</sup> February 1936, 1936 FIC/FIG – 1936

Dear Sir,

I propose to make a public appeal through the press for funds for the preservation and restoration of the ship '*Great Britain*' now lying as a hulk in Stanley Harbour.

As you are doubtless aware, this vessel was the biggest ship in the world when she launched at Bristol in 1845 and for a number of years between 1852 and 1875 was the most celebrated steam ship on the Australian run. Great interest was displayed in her in Australia in 1934 when references were made to her last voyage here on the 25<sup>th</sup> May 1886; she has been used for storing wool waiting shipment in the intervening half century. Originally six masted, I now propose to have her rig restored to that she bore when running to Australia – that is a three masted ship with a smart frigate like appearance. She is by far the longest lived iron ship in the world....<sup>56</sup>

Heaton, also, astutely identified Bristol as potentially fertile ground for canvassing financial support for his proposals in recognition of the city's historic connection with the ship. To this end, on the 10<sup>th</sup> March 1936, Heaton contacted the Lord Mayor of Bristol to outline his planned endeavour:

Dear Lord Mayor,

I beg to seek your cooperation in the endeavour I am making to save that historic ship the *Great Britain* from being towed out to sea and sunk beneath these waters as the only alternative to such measure of restoration as will enable her to survive for many years to come as a memorial for the fine workmanship and material with which she was fashioned out in Bristol nearly a century ago....

I am advised that the work necessary might cost anything between £5,000 and £10,000 but if we can raise £5,000 in all – locally, in Great Britain and in Australia – and am advised in reasonable limits of this sum all that can be required will be done.<sup>57</sup>

Yet Heaton's planned restoration was not limited to a letter writing and the seriousness with he regarded the proposal went far further than idle mere idle correspondence. In March 1936, requested a detailed document from the Director of Public Works (DOPW) in the Falklands outlining the restoration's proposed feasibility. The evidently highly punctilious DOPW, duly and exhaustively compiled a document some 27 pages long which outlined, at great length, the potential labour and materials associated with the restoration. The survey was no mere half measure and required the assistance of several prominent members of the Falkland community including the General Manager and the Foreman Stevedore of the FIC, the General Foreman of Works, the Foreman Carpenter.

Yet unfortunately for Heaton, the production of this document resulted in the opposite of that

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<sup>56</sup> JCA:Letter from Falkland Islands Governor Henniker Heaton to the Manager to the Bank of New South Wales, 10<sup>th</sup> March 1936 FIC/FIG -1937

<sup>57</sup> JCA:Letter from Falkland Islands Governor Henniker Heaton to the Lord Mayor of Bristol 10<sup>th</sup> March 1936 FIC/FIG -1937

which was intended effect and the DOPW was accordingly extremely pessimistic as to the potential success Heaton's proposal could be said to enjoy.<sup>58</sup>

In view of the special nature of the work it necessitates special experience before one can come to a definite conclusion, with details and estimates. This would only be made possible by consulting a naval architect who, when carrying out the work, would have the assistance of trained survey staff. Even then it would be necessary, before details could be given, to have the ship dry-docked or beached or slipped so that a thorough and complete examination could be carried out. Even if such technical people were available and read the survey I think it extremely doubtful whether they would be prepared to recommend that the ship be restored to anything other than a respectable looking hulk.<sup>59</sup>

These detailed proposals and their exhaustive accounting of all the various obstacles to restoration that the ship's materiality presented in 1936 ultimately served to stymie the Governor's ambitious imaginative redirection of the ship. By the 12<sup>th</sup> April 1936, Heaton was forced to ultimately abandon his proposal. On the twelfth of April 1936, minutes from the Falklands Islands' administration's Executive Council meeting confirmed the final fate of the ship.

'With reference to the disposal of the *Great Britain* his Excellency explained that the Falkland Islands Company Ltd. had made an application for permission to beach the vessel in Sparrow Cove in outer harbour. He had intended appealing for funds in order to preserve her but the Director of Public Works who had made a thorough examination of the hulk had reported it would cost £10,000 to place her in a state of preservation. His Excellency was therefore forced to abandon the Project with regret.'<sup>60</sup>

Something of Heaton's evident dismay surrounding the thwarted restoration is contained within a letter to the Lord Mayor of Bristol where the giddy enthusiasm of previous correspondence is exchanged for a more sombre accounting of the realities of the *Great Britain's* material condition in 1936. Heaton ended the letter explaining to the Lord Mayor his regrets 'that the life of a vessel which has been of such outstanding credit to her city and country should have to be terminated this year.'<sup>61</sup>

With Heaton's restoration plan nixed, the Harbour Master again returned to the theme of

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<sup>58</sup> JCA: Document outlining the estimated costings of the restoration of the *Great Britain*, 29<sup>th</sup> March 1936, FIC/FIG -1936, Jane Cameron Archive, Stanley

<sup>59</sup> JCA: Document outlining the estimated costings of the restoration of the *Great Britain*, 29<sup>th</sup> March 1936, FIC/FIG -1936, Jane Cameron Archive, Stanley

<sup>60</sup> JCA: Minutes from Minutes of FIG Executive Council Meeting, 12<sup>th</sup> April 1936, FIC/FIG -1937, Jane Cameron Archive, Stanley

<sup>61</sup> JCA: Letter from Falkland Islands Governor Henniker Heaton to the Lord Mayor of Bristol 27<sup>th</sup> April 1936 FIC/FIG -1937, Jane Cameron Archive, Stanley

destroying the ship permanently.<sup>62</sup> Yet despite his proposal failing to reach fruition, Heaton could not bring himself to break up the vessel and overruled the Harbour Master's recommendation of sinking the ship in the depths of the ocean and instead ordered the *Great Britain* relocated to Sparrow Cove.<sup>63</sup> Here we see Heaton's rooted reluctance to dispose of the ship permanently, yet he did go as far as to acknowledge that as the *Great Britain* was 'much older' than the other hulks stationed in the Falkland's she would likelihood, 'could only last a very few years'.<sup>64</sup> With the unwelcome intrusion of pragmatic realities on his ambitious re-imagining of the ship's role Heaton now regarded the sight of the dilapidated hulk in Stanley Harbour as casting a very 'depressing sight' indeed.<sup>65</sup>

Heaton's failed restoration of the ss *Great Britain* in the Falklands is significant in an important number of key regards, firstly, as previously discussed Heaton's proposal, and demonstrates the degree to which the ship was capable of acting as a stage for the platform imagination. Like Corlett and Gould Adams of the ss *Great Britain* Project team it involves a process of conceptual interplay with the vessel that, to a degree, suggests that which is not there. As with the later Project team, Heaton was inspired, in part, by representational imagery of the vessel however unlike the Project, Heaton was seemingly not influenced, to a great extent, by the changing shape of the political and material world that surrounded him. This is an significant point, Hilary Geogohan for instance has suggested that the turn to cleaving to industrial objects as a means of preserving a sense of place and identity during the 1960s was prompted, in part, by a concerns surrounding expansive changes to the lived environment ushered in by post-war planning.<sup>66</sup> Yet while self-evidently not providing the spur behind Heaton's proposed restoration, this does, nonetheless, not undermine the validity of Geogohan's work or suggest over academics who have explained the influences guiding industrial archaeology are inherently incorrect. Tantalisingly, it does nonetheless suggest that in the act of looking at the *Great Britain* and seeing it as an object for potential restoration the conceptual leap Heaton made during early 1936 in the minimal landscape was potentially far

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<sup>62</sup> JCA:Letter from the Office of the Colonial Secretary to Governor Henniker Heaton, 16<sup>th</sup> July 1936, FIC/FIG - 1936, Jane Cameron Archive, Stanley

<sup>63</sup> JCA: Letter from Colonial Secretary's Office to the Harbour Master, 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1937 FIC/FIG -1937, Jane Cameron Archive, Stanley

<sup>64</sup> JCA:Assorted correspondence between Falkland Islands Governor, Colonial Secretary, Harbour Master and other interested parties, 31<sup>st</sup> March 1936, JCA:

<sup>65</sup> JCA:Assorted correspondence between Falkland Islands Governor, Colonial Secretary, Harbour Master and other interested parties, 31<sup>st</sup> March 1936, JCA:

<sup>66</sup> H. Geoghegan, 'If you can walk down the street and recognise the difference between cast iron and wrought iron, the world is altogether a better place': Being Enthusiastic about Industrial archaeology.', *Media and Culture Journal*, 12,2, (2009) n/p

greater than other, later, preservationists who lived in locations where a multitude of formerly defunct material objects had now been preserved.

In part, Heaton's proposed restoration is an indication of his awareness of the vessel's historic past. It is significant here, that his initial letters regarding the scheme were to the Governor of the Bank of New South Wales (GBNSW) and the Lord Mayor of Bristol, which reveals a particularly sophisticated knowledge of the ship's previous life as a ocean vessel. Not only does it demonstrate Heaton was *broadly* aware of the ship's life historic life it also demonstrates his ability to successfully identify which of these chapters were most influential during her 44 year long period as a functional object. To a large extent, Heaton's knowledge of the *Great Britain's* history speaks to his socio-economic status and, if he was not fully cognisant of the ship's history upon arrival in the Falklands, he was certainly furnished with the means of finding out by way of his elite education; Heaton, it should be noted, attended both Eton and Oxford University.<sup>67</sup> Heaton's knowledge of the ship's history is a significant and later in the chapter I will discuss the interactions of Falkland Islanders with the vessel, who in the absence of a historical knowledge of the ship negotiated her via principally contextual and material means.

Perhaps, more speculatively, is a consideration of the implications of what Heaton's scheme tells us about colonial authority. While Heaton's proposal, is certainly romantic it is unlikely that such whimsy would have been tolerated for quite so long if it had been proposed by any other figure in the Colonial Administration. Official documents are incredibly poor medium by which to account for human motivations, nonetheless it may be possible perceive a degree of exasperation in the Harbour Master's repeated return to the possibility of the ship's destruction. Heaton's flights of imaginative fancy ran in direct opposition to the established principles of the Harbour Master's role and in his repeated return to the subject of the *Great Britain's* destruction the Harbour Master was effectively signalling what was, by far, the most simple solution in removing the ship from Port Stanley; the central economic hub within Falklands. It is revealing, in this respect, that Heaton seemed well-aware that his restoration bordered on the whimsical, in a letter to the Harbour Master, he declared the somewhat, unconvincingly that the restored vessel would act as a 'very good advertising medium' for the

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<sup>67</sup> The Peerage 28/01/2014

Falkland Islands ‘despite her derelict appearance.’<sup>68</sup> It is worth contrasting this return to the ship’s commercial utility in this internal memorandum to the way in which Heaton sought to evoke the Great Britain’s historic past and associated symbolic authority in his letters to the GBNSW and the Lord Mayor of Bristol.

Equally, it is plausible that DOPW’s exhaustive report, detailing the improbability of Heaton’s restoration scheme represented an administrative means to put the Governor’s eccentric scheme to rest. It is notable in this respect the production of the DOPW report involved a number of key individuals associated with the Falklands economy. Seemingly, the Harbour Master’s repeated entreaties to sink the vessel, so perhaps it represented an attempt to stifle the scheme with reference to the authority of detailed and dispassionate quantitative means. It is useful here to acknowledge that while the lithograph of the *Great Britain* at her magisterial height served to inspire the Governor’s proposed restoration the production of this official document immediately served to permanently quash the idea in Heaton’s imagination.

In this regard, Henniker Heaton’s proposed restoration of the *Great Britain* is an important reminder of the fluidity of our relationships with materiality. Earlier in this section, I considered the role of representational means in influencing the way in which we render material objects via conceptual abstracts. But here, it is also worth considering the role of place in determining the way in which they influence our emotional responses to the things that surround us. As a Colonial Administrator, Heaton is unusual in regard of the extensive length of time he spent in the Falkland Islands. Heaton’s association with the Falkland Islands involved three different roles – Colonial Secretary, Acting Governor and finally Governor and the period he spent regulating British Colonial Authority in the Falklands lasted over 20 years.<sup>69</sup> With reference to Tuan’s contribution work on place as a centre of human meaning, is it therefore plausible to contend Heaton developed considerable affinity for the Falkland Islands during his time there?<sup>70</sup> It is notable in his role as representative of the British Crown in the Falklands; Heaton was somewhat at remove from the more acute challenges that life in the island’s daily confronts its human inhabitants. Did he therefore see the *Great Britain* in a more meditative, contemplative way. A mode of understanding which subsequently inspired his restoration proposals? The answer to this question can only ever be

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<sup>68</sup> JCA:Letter from Henniker Heaton to Harbour Master, 7th February 1936 FIC/FIG – 1936

<sup>69</sup> The Peerage 28/01/2014

<sup>70</sup> Tuan, *Space and Place – The Perspective of Experience, Place: an experiential perspective*

speculative, but it is worth considering that once his proposal failed, Heaton would cast the ‘depressing’ sight of the *Great Britain* into exile in Sparrow Cove, far from Stanley and Government House, perhaps, as a means of no longer being daily reminded of his own inability to save the vessel.

Heaton’s decision to spare the *Great Britain* from the Harbour Master’s wrath would prove influential. As with all the ship’s many recontextualisations over the course of her afterlife, the *Great Britain*’s relocation to Sparrow Cove would have a dynamic influence would produce a new set of relationships attached to the vessel, influencing the *Great Britain*’s role in the wider environment and the way in which she was understood by the Falkland Islanders who visited her there.



**Fig. 2.5.** Jill Harris c.1968. Picture of the ss *Great Britain* in Sparrow Cove. Photo Courtesy of Jill Harris



## 'It doesn't mean anything to me': The peculiarities of oral history and memories of the *Great Britain* in Sparrow Cove

If oral history as a methodology has been criticised for the way in which its participants have a tendency to tell their interviewees what they want to hear, I witnessed precious little evidence of this effect during my time researching the *Great Britain* in the Falkland Islands.<sup>71</sup> When beginning my oral history interviews in the Falklands, questions that were designed to elicit whether the ship held any symbolic meaning in Sparrow Cove usually produced a typically brusque Falkland Island response. As one interviewee, clearly somewhat bemused by my line of questioning, explained 'Well, I don't know if there was much interest shown really....'<sup>72</sup> another interviewee dealt these questions even shorter shrift 'Well, I don't think about the ship... it doesn't mean anything to me.'<sup>73</sup>

In keeping with economic negotiations of the *Great Britain's* material form, another interviewee immediately relayed questions surrounding the ship's intrinsic meaning in the Falklands back to the ship's commercial worth: 'To my knowledge she was always used for storing wool. Bales of wool were brought in from the camp and they used to store them on the *Great Britain*. But in the last years she didn't do much because she was in a poor condition and they had a better one here...the *Fennia*. She's slightly bigger than the *Great Britain* and they used to store the wool on her.'<sup>74</sup> As another interviewee explained - an issue which will be explored at greater length later in the chapter - in a landscape so densely populated with abandoned ships and the way in which these same vessels were often reconstituted as run of the mill warehouses or jetties the *Great Britain* had little to recommend it as unique: 'Have you ever seen an early photograph of Stanley Harbour.... it was dotted with them [ships] all the way down to small boats, y'know. Dozens and dozens of them.'<sup>75</sup>

Having travelled some 8,000 miles in order to *specifically* discuss the history of the *Great Britain* as she was remembered in the Falklands, I was admittedly somewhat taken aback by these responses. Fortunately, despite this initial impasse, my Falkland Island interviewees

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<sup>71</sup> V. Yow, 'Do I Like Them Too Much?': Effects of the Oral History Interview on the Interviewer and Vice-versa.' *The Oral History Review* (1997) pp. 55-79.

<sup>72</sup> Ronnie Clarke, Personal Interview, 18<sup>th</sup> July 2013

<sup>73</sup> Anthony Carey, Personal Interview, 15<sup>th</sup> July 2013

<sup>74</sup> Roderick Napier Interview, Personal Interview, 11<sup>th</sup> July 2013

<sup>75</sup> Willie Bowles, Personal Interview, 24<sup>th</sup> July 2013

were kind enough to indulge me and my curious line of questioning regardless and in doing so produced a wealth of valuable information about the vessel when the discussion eventually broadened to Sparrow Cove itself.

To a degree, it may be possible to account for the responses my questions regarding the ship's life in the Falklands with an acknowledgment of the limitations of oral history as a methodology.<sup>76</sup> Broadly speaking, in the Falkland Islands, group identity is largely based around notions of rugged perseverance in a landscape remarkably ill-adapted to sustaining a substantial human population. Almost all interviewees I spoke to chose to address the subject of the difficulties inherent in 'island living' at length.<sup>77</sup>

Living in the Falklands presents its own unique set of challenges for the human population that reside there. These include, but are not limited to its extremes of climate, its unrelenting gales, the perceived hostility of its most immediate geographic neighbours, the vast distance from the administrative and cultural hub which both sustains its existence and which its inhabitants most closely identify and a marked inability of the human population to engage in any large-scale, crop based agriculture due to the island's acidic soil quality. As one

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<sup>76</sup> As a methodology, oral history is burdened with well-documented issues concerning the validity of the evidence it produces. One of the principal issues is the degree to which the uncertain medium of memory affects the testimony of interviewees. The individual and subjective nature of oral testimony is an aspect of considerable concern to historians seeking to at least approximate objective truth. While the archival records associated with the ss *Great Britain* may well be subject to a considerable number of biases and inadequacies, at the very least they provide a stable text. At the time of interview, over forty years have elapsed since the ss *Great Britain* left the Falkland Islands. There is therefore a considerable concern that any significance or emotive associations with the ss *Great Britain* have dulled with time. Psychologist Daniel Schacter labels the effects of the passage of time on memory as the 'sin of transience' 'Perhaps the most pervasive of memory's sins, transience operates silently but continually: the past inexorably recedes with the occurrence of new experiences'. To Schacter, transience undermines 'memory's role in connecting us to [the] past thoughts and deeds that define who we are.' The concern for any researcher examining the relationship between the Falkland Islanders and the ss *Great Britain*, then is that any intrinsic connection between the ship and the Islanders has failed to be recalled with any degree of accuracy. Simply because Falkland Islanders do not recollect harbouring an overwhelming affection for the ship does not necessarily mean it did not exist at the time. Apart from the obvious failure of recall inherent in oral testimony is the added distortion of what Charlotte Linde describes as the 'sense of self' we Project when expressing life stories. Fred H. Alison's work has charted the considerable effect time has had on the account of a specific combat experience by an American Vietnam veteran. Alison compares the transcript of the original interview conducted immediately after the event with an interview Alison conducts thirty-five years later. Although most of the basic facts 'jibe with the original' a clear narrative structure now organises the account of the same event. While the original interview was densely detailed but narrowly focussed; the contemporary interview now contains a clear beginning, middle and end, but most critically, 'justification.'<sup>76</sup> Alison cites the work of Linde, arguing that the life stories individuals create 'claim or negotiate group membership [and] demonstrate that we are worthy members of these groups. (See D. L. Schacter, *The Seven Sins of Memory*. (New York, 2001) F. H. Alison, 'Remembering a Vietnam Firefight - Changing Perspectives Over Time', in *The Oral History Reader*, ed. by Robert Perks & Alistair Thompson (Abingdon, 1998)

<sup>77</sup> Ronnie Clarke, Personal Interview, 18<sup>th</sup> July 2013, Roderick Napier, Personal Interview, 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2013, Howie Peck, Personal Interview, 16<sup>th</sup> July 2013, Jill & Dennis Harris, Personal Interview, 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2013

interviewee explained ‘...everyday it’s quite tough living down here...lots of little things....’<sup>78</sup>

As a result, Falkland Islanders pride themselves on their considerable resilience in adapting to the challenges the geography and landscape daily present them with. This adaptability is based, in large part on the community’s ability to assist in each other and a considerably creative approach to ‘make do and mend’ in adopting practical and creative means to overcome the confront region’s unfavourable environmental conditions. This ‘*Falkland Islands spirit*’ became the subject of discussion a number of interviewees, which one interviewee succinctly encapsulated in the following way: ‘Nobody says we can’t do it. It’s always ‘We can do that che’<sup>79</sup>, We do, we get on with it. That’s the way things go.’<sup>80</sup>

Indeed, this expression of Falkland Island identity parallels what Dave Russell has identified as traditional stereotypes associated with the North of England: Northerners as ‘plain-speaking, commonsensical, down to earth folk [with] the [associated] concept of hard honest graft.’<sup>81</sup> The choice by many interviewees to bring these aspects of Falklands life to the forefront of our discussions of the *Great Britain* points to the existence of shared, regionally based, group identity. Equally, in discussing these issues with me, the interviewer, it also suggests, in part, a claimed ownership to this group. If a stereotypical Falkland Islander is a ‘robust, hard-working individual’ this creates little potential to express florid expressions of emotion in relation to long-vanished historic vessels, particularly with a figurative ‘outsider.’ Evidence of the way in which Falkland Islander’s delineate group membership is seen within their occasional employment of the term ‘Pom’ to refer to, typically mainland British, outsiders to the islands. While largely employed in a playful and affectionate sense, it does nonetheless, come with similar set of pejorative connotations to that which is understood in Australia and New Zealand, visitors from mainland Britain as thin-skinned, overly sensitive and somewhat soft.<sup>82</sup> Jeffrey Richards notes this effect of group membership as a prominent example of the stereotypes associated with the North of England and Northerner’s

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<sup>78</sup> Ian Strange, Personal Interview, 26<sup>th</sup> July 2013

<sup>79</sup> Although English is the official language of the Falklands it is also peppered with expressions derived from sheep farming links with New Zealand, Australia and Scotland and also the occasional Spanish phrase ‘che’ is commonly used in the Island is a colloquial expression for ‘friend’, roughly equivalent to ‘mate’ or ‘pal.’

<sup>80</sup> Robin Goodwin, Personal Interview, 24<sup>th</sup> July 2013

<sup>81</sup> Dave Russell, *Looking North: Northern England and the national imagination*. (Manchester University Press, 2004) p.6

<sup>82</sup> Early 20th century: apparently a shortening of *pomegranate*, rhyming slang for ‘immigrant’.- Oxford English Dictionary

corresponding ‘robust and unashamed celebration of the North in specific opposition to the idea of an effete, decadent and corrupt South.’<sup>83</sup>

It is worth acknowledging here the contrast in the way in which Falkland Islanders relayed memories of the *Great Britain* to me in comparison to recollections recorded by the ss *Great Britain* Trust’s ‘Incredible Journey’ oral history project in 2010. Here, in Bristol, interviewees offered far more baroque and emotionally resonant explanations for their identification with the ship.<sup>84</sup> Although again, this testimony could well have been influenced by what Valerie Yow identifies as the interviewees willingness to collude in the interviewers life of questioning.<sup>85</sup> The influence and authority of the interviewer upon their interviewee could well have been compounded by sourcing these participants through a high profile regional publicity campaign within Bristol and the Trust’s interviewees directing their questions in line with the official narrative of the ship presented in the museum.<sup>86</sup>

Yet, should we take Falkland Islanders description of the vessel as ‘meaningless’ object in the Falklands at face value? Perhaps here we can turn to a discussion of photographs Falklanders took of the *Great Britain* in Sparrow Cove in order to interrogate these responses further. A comparison of **Fig 5.1**, a photograph by Falkland Islander Jill Harris with, Falkland Island ‘outsider’ Harold Owen rendering of the vessel reveals the vast discrepancy between both ‘modes of looking’ and support Tuan’s and Simon Schama’s contention that our interactions with landscape are principally a ‘work of the mind.’<sup>87</sup> In this chapter’s opening, we saw that Owen’s starting point in his interactions with the Falkland Islands and later the *Great Britain* itself began with his alienation from the ‘bare and dismal’ terrain of the Falklands. Yet, beauty is, of course, in the eye of the beholder and while many visitors to the Falklands have expressed similar views, not everyone is so quite so estranged from minimal landscapes of this kind. The artwork of Japanese American Artist, Chiura Obata for instance was inspired in part as a result of his experiences of internment within the Californian Desert during the Second World War. According to Obata ‘if I hadn’t gone to that kind of place, I

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<sup>83</sup> J. Richards 'Foreward', in Dave Richards (ed.) *Looking North: Northern England and the National Imagination*. (Manchester 2004) pp. 8.

<sup>84</sup> SSGBT: Interview with Kim Hicks, *The Incredible Journey Oral History Project*, (2009) Accession Number of Transcript BRSG2009.150.21

<sup>85</sup> V. Yow, ‘Do I Like Them Too Much?’

<sup>86</sup> See Chapter One ‘Introduction’ for a more detailed account of the Trust’s Incredible Journey Project

<sup>87</sup> Schama, *Landscape and Memory*.. p.6

wouldn't have realized the beauty that exists in that enormous bleakness.'<sup>88</sup> This effect was not limited to Obata's own experiences and Delphine Hirasuna's work has demonstrated how a wide range of arts and crafts including stone teapots, woven baskets, baroque furniture, and jewelry were produced within these camps as a means of demonstrating human agency and responding to emotional need within the wider context of an all-encompassing minimalist milieu and the camp in which internees were imprisoned.<sup>89</sup>

The capacity of stark landscapes to contribute to acts of the human imagination also find expression within the UK, As John Bowen reflects, *Wuthering Heights* evokes the austere beauty of the Moors of West Yorkshire as a means of framing the tempestuous love affair of its central protagonists.<sup>90</sup> Yet Emily Bronte herself did not live in this 'bleak' and 'wild' landscape but in Howarth Parsonage, a rapidly industrialising mill town.<sup>91</sup> To Bowen, *Wuthering Heights* is a reflection of Bronte's belief that nature remained casually indifferent to humanity even manifestations of which, like Victorian Industrialisation, which exerted such powerful influence on the course of human lives.<sup>92</sup> In a further testament of the interconnection between landscape and materiality in stimulated acts of human creativity, *Wuthering Heights* was at least partially inspired by Bronte's visit to Top Withens, a ruined farmhouse, set amongst the desolation of the Moors.

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<sup>88</sup> K. Kuramitsu.. 'Internment and identity in Japanese American art.' *American Quarterly* 47.4 (1995) pp. 619

<sup>89</sup> D. Hirasuna *The Art of Gaman: Arts and Crafts from the Japanese American Internment Camps 1942-1946* (California: 2005)

<sup>90</sup> J. Bowen. 'Walking the landscape of Wuthering Heights.' *Discovering Literature Romantics and the Victorians*. British Library (2011) <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/walking-the-landscape-of-wuthering-heights> 16.08/2016

<sup>91</sup> J. Bowen. 'Walking the landscape of Wuthering Heights.'

<sup>92</sup> J. Bowen. 'Walking the landscape of Wuthering Heights.'



**Fig 2.6.** c. 1979 Fay Godwin. ‘Top Withens’ in the West Yorkshire Moors believed to have inspired Emily Bronte’s *Wuthering Heights*. Photo reproduced from J. Bowen ‘Walking the Landscape of *Wuthering Heights*’ (2011)

In short, ‘desolate’ and ‘isolated’ landscapes are fully capable of influencing prodigious acts of human creativity and in turn manufacturing a subsequent production of associated material objects as a result. Of course, while Harris’ picture cannot exactly be considered *Wuthering Heights*, this photograph, taken at dusk, does nonetheless evoke the Falklands landscape in a far more romantic and meditative manner than that described by Owen. To Harold Owen, the Falklands presented a bleak and alienating terrain, yet to Jill Harris, ‘this place is home, and likely experiences the same location in a far different manner to that visualised by Owen in 1916. As we saw earlier in the chapter, Owen rendered the *Great Britain* as a ‘diseased old woman’ in juxtaposition with what he saw as the threatening Falkland Islands environment but there is nothing of Owen’s interpretation of the ship contained within this image. Owen, in feeling alienated from the landscape of the Falklands, turned to the broken objects that surrounded him aboard his own vessel, as a sign of comforting human intentionality and perhaps there is a similar impulse at work in this image – a conspicuously man made artefact rendering the otherwise uniform Falklands scenery distinct. Yet here, at dusk, the landscape is cast in a far more romantic manner than that depicted by Owen and it is possible that the

photographer, while looking for the same principle of human involvement with the landscape was doing so from the perspective of considerable affection, the ship is a means to frame a the picture of an area of contemplation, self-reflection, or recreation within the islands.

It is also worth contemplating this image of the *Great Britain* in the Falklands from the perspective of our ever changing and technologically driven material practices. In the Smartphone era, where a large percentage of the human population permanently carry a high-definition camera in their pocket, capable of storing hundreds of images at a time, the act of photography as a physical practice has, arguably, lost a considerable degree of its exclusivity. When every aspect of the lived human experience is capable of being infinitely catalogued via visual imagery, photography becomes ephemeral and - as my Facebook feed attests - even the most mundane subjects cannot escape becoming the focus of the camera's lens. Yet until relatively recently, photography as an affair was characterised by a far greater number of transitional stages, cameras as objects were considerably less portable and developing the act of developing a photograph was characterised by both an unavoidable temporal lag in being able to view the image in question and an associated and attendant financial cost. This act of having to wait for a photograph to be developed before being able to finally see the image that was captured, in of itself prompted emotions of apprehension and excitement in anticipation of the final photograph. As Falkland Islander and keen wildlife photographer Ian Strange informed me – and in keeping with the attendant difficulties associated with the island living – the various associated material and affective processes associated by acts of manual photography were significantly compounded in the Falklands where materials to facilitate the taking of pictures were not always readily available and consequently photographs took a far longer time to develop..<sup>93</sup> In 1968, as Strange suggested, this resulted in a far more discriminatory practice of taking photographs than that which is commonly experienced in the 2016.

The photographs Falkland Islanders captured of the *Great Britain* therefore suggest a far more dynamic and complex web of human-object interactions and affective relationships than that that many of my interviewees were prepared to admit. It is certainly possible to exaggerate, as the Trust can be said to, the symbolic sanctity with which the *Great Britain* was viewed within the Falklands. Nonetheless it is difficult to reconcile the ship as

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<sup>93</sup> Ian Strange, Personal Interview, 26<sup>th</sup> July 2013

‘meaningless’ within Sparrow Cove where it so clearly conveyed some considerable degree of value. In short, by the very act of photography, Falkland Islanders symbolically imbued the *Great Britain* with a considerable degree of status and legitimacy. The photographs Falkland Islanders captured of the ship suggest a far more complex web of human-object interactions and affective relationships than that perhaps they were willing to admit to. If, as Latour suggests, microbes can only have been said to have existed when they became knowable to human science in 1864, perhaps it can equally be said that the *Great Britain* became an object of significance to Falkland Islanders when it was photographed in Sparrow Cove?<sup>94</sup>

Yet, these despite Falkland Islanders resistance to my initial line of questioning it is worthy of substantial note and with considerable personal gratitude that my interviewees so graciously welcomed me into their homes and were more than happy to share stories and recollections about their lives and memories within the Falklands. This represents the other side of my period of research in the Falklands; the manner in which nearly every islander I encountered was willing to assist in my project in any way they thought helpful, whatever they considered its dubious academic merits... This is an important point, as in their willingness to participate within my research and invite me into their homes, longer discussions opened out to the subject of Sparrow Cove itself and the meaningful set of memories and associations that developed during the *Great Britain*'s life in this location.

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<sup>94</sup> Latour, Pandora's Hope p.199





**Fig. 2.6.** ss Ayrfield, Homebush Bay, Sydney. This abandoned vessel has now become known as the ‘Floating Forest’ by local residents who live nearby the ship. Abandoned in 1972, the vessel has now become overridden by Mangrove Trees. Homebush Bay, like the Falkland Islands is also the site for a collection of shipwrecks, owing to its former history as a shipwrecking yard. Like the *Great Britain* and other wrecks within the Falklands the ss Ayrfield demonstrates how the natural world reclaims discarded human objects and this colonisation results in human recontextualisation of the object. The ship is now something of a tourist attraction in its own right with visitors eager to see the ‘Floating Forest’.

### Natural Place: The ss Great Britain in Sparrow Cove

‘Abandoned!’ is the manner by which the ss *Great Britain* Trust chooses to label the ship’s life in Sparrow Cove but as the following recollections of Falkland Islanders reveal, this is a fundamentally misleading categorisation. Despite Heaton’s best efforts, the ship had been violently dislodged from the centre of economic life in the Falklands in 1936. Yet Heaton was successful in preventing the vessel from being destroyed and in the ship’s reconstitution within this landscape an entirely different set of meanings and symbolisms associated with the vessel came to develop.

The *Great Britain*’s relocation to Sparrow Cove, forcibly removed the vessel from a network of wider economic relationships that held considerable dominion over her interpretation in the Falklands. Yet, the *Great Britain*’s relocation brought into contact with a different order of networked relations and brought the ship in far closer communion with the influences of

the natural world.

The memory most frequently alluded to in discussions of the ship's role in Sparrow Cove were days spent foraging for the mussels which populated her hull. As one Falkland Islander vividly recalled:

When we used to get the mussels we had a long pole about 10 – 12 feet long and it had on the end of it, it had kind of a garden rake and under it a bit of wire mesh.... like a sack and you put down over the side of your boat until you've got down below the mussels and you kind of scratched your way up the ship from the bottom to the top.... and then you lifted it up and see the mussels and sea urchins and little crabs and god knows what. So you sorted out the good mussels and put them back in the water. It would take you four hours to get a couple of sack fulls, big sack fulls and all those big blue mussels. And now that's she's gone you can't have them....<sup>95</sup>

Memories of mussel foraging in Sparrow Cove and the ship's role as a stage for these activities were a familiar refrain for nearly all interviewees and formed a constituent part of the conceptual associations they made between the ship as object and location in which it resided.

What Corlett would describe as the 'clean lines' of the *Great Britain's* 332ft frame and the calm tidal swells of Sparrow Cove ably recommended the ship as a habitat upon which for a mussels could flourish and shortly after human intervention had discarded her there, the vessel's hull was soon varnished with a thriving community of bivalve molluscs. The natural world's colonisation of the *Great Britain* is in keeping with a long history of human abandonment of material objects, buildings and landscapes when human economic activity has stripped them bare of their functional worth certain photographers have consequently been drawn towards these places as a means of visually documenting the ephemerality of human relationships with the material.<sup>96</sup>

But categorising these places and artefacts as 'Abandoned' is fundamentally misleading and, as the ss *Great Britain's* new role in Sparrow Cove demonstrates, these areas, objects and landscapes consequently undergo a period of reclamation by the natural world. In this way it is perhaps more accurate to describe these abandoned objects as providing a new home for an entirely different set of flora and fauna. It is worth contextualising this claim with reference

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<sup>95</sup> Jimmy Smith, Personal Interview, 26<sup>th</sup> July 2013

<sup>96</sup> See V. H. Rensbergen, *Abandoned Places II* (Berlin, 2010)

to the landscape of the Falkland Islands themselves, the Falklands are most frequently described in pejorative terms 'bleak', 'flat', 'monotonous', 'austere' 'drab, colourless' and, in the more caustic assessment of Denis Thatcher, 'miles and miles of bugger all'<sup>97</sup> Yet this perspective of the Falklands is decidedly anthropocentric and perhaps speaks of a human inability and subsequent resentment towards, a landscape it has yet to fully tame. The Falkland Islands is notable in this respect for not being serving as a focussed area of sustained human migration or intent. Excluding the impact of the construction of RAF Mount Pleasant in 1985 - and the subsequent increase in a transient population of the British Armed Forces - the settled human population of the Falklands has only very thinly populated the islands and - despite being subject to varying degrees of colonisation from 1765 onwards- this fact has remained remarkably consistent.<sup>98</sup>

Despite the pejorative terms in which this landscape is often rendered the Falkland Islands provides a home and shelter for a super-abundance of plant, animal and marine life. This biodiversity encompasses; 363 different types of plant life predominantly composed of grasses ferns and shrubs, large communities of Orcas, who are drawn in part by the considerable seal population of the islands (which include both Southern Elephant Seal and South American Fur Seals) a wide diversity of dolphin species, Blue, Humpback and Fin whale populations, five breeding populations of penguins which include King, Rock hopper, Magellanic, Gentoo and Macaroni. Indeed, arguably, it is birdlife which seems to have enjoyed the greatest success in adapting to the islands Conservative estimates place the number of bird species breeding in the Falklands at sixty-three (with 17 naturally indigenous to the Falklands) and largest colony of Black-browed Albatross in the Falklands has been calculated upwards of two million birds estimates of some Rock hopper penguin rookeries are in excess of even this figure.<sup>99</sup>

With such a vast array of birdlife Falklands it is of little surprise that these species have found ways to adapt to rude human intrusions within their habitats. In this respect, once abandoned by their previous human hosts, the shipwrecks in the islands became a perfect frame upon which birds can roost and nest. While oral history interviews reveal historical knowledge about the various wrecks were scant, the wrecks soon came to be understood by their human

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<sup>97</sup> Interview with Ray Sutcliffe Owen, *Journey from Obscurity, The Incredible Journey Oral History Project*, (2009) Accession Number of Transcript BRSG2009.150, J. Cambell, *Margaret Thatcher Volume Two: The Iron Lady* (London, 2006)

<sup>98</sup> Ian J. Strange, *The Falkland Islands*

<sup>99</sup> Ian J. Strange, *The Falkland Islands* p.205

mediators via means of a complex interaction created between the materiality of these discarded ships and a networked interplay of the natural world with this physical structure. In short, shipwrecks and the animal life that populated them became synonymous to Falkland Islanders. As one interviewee recalled of the *Lady Elizabeth* “I think the old Turkey Buzzards<sup>100</sup> got on her and roost and sometimes at night you get on there and they’re all standing on the gunnel waiting to go inside and roost.... but she’s no good for mussels or anything like that.”<sup>101</sup> This mode of categorisation, revealed in the above interview, demonstrates the considerable influence of the natural world’s sequestering of man-made objects and the subsequent degree to which they were newly understood.

Yet by way of contrast, and in what would prove to be another unforeseen aspect of my interviews in the Falklands, Falkland Islanders often claimed a scant recognition of the *Great Britain*’s historic past while the vessel resided in Sparrow Cove. The following response is typical ‘well I don’t think I would probably care then... I probably wasn’t interested. Y’know what I mean? Just another one of our many, many wrecks<sup>102</sup> This response was shared by another interviewee who claimed ‘not much at all’ about the ship, as this individual recalled knowledge of the ship’s history was transmitted by word of mouth, or if you were committed enough, to find out by other means by books. ‘No, it was only what we should have learned if you had a book to read about it or what somebody told you.’<sup>103</sup> As one interviewee stated more baldly ‘I didn’t have a clue. [about the ss *Great Britain*] She was the first Iron Ship. That’s all I knew....’<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> The turkey buzzard (*Cathartes aura*), is also known as the turkey vulture. A vulture with a wide geographic distribution it mostly feeds on carrion.

<sup>101</sup> Jimmy Smith, Personal Interview, 26<sup>th</sup> July 2013

<sup>102</sup> Robin Goodwin, Personal Interview, 24<sup>th</sup> July 2013

<sup>103</sup> Jimmy Smith, Personal Interview, 26<sup>th</sup> July 2013

<sup>104</sup> Howie Peck, Personal Interview, 16<sup>th</sup> July 2013



**Fig 2.8.** c.2013 Muirhead, James, 2013, *The Lady Elizabeth* in Stanley Harbour, Falkland Islanders. Like the ss *Great Britain* the ship was contextualised by the wildlife that had found a useful habitat in the discarded vessel. On low tides you can still walk out to touch the ship today.

What Falkland Islanders claimed was a lack of historical knowledge about the vessel is significant and it perhaps, to some degree, accounts for the manner in which the shipwrecks in the islands were instead identified by the marine and animal life that populated its hull. As with Henniker Heaton's failed restoration project, and as the next chapter will demonstrate, knowledge of the *Great Britain's* historic past was an important factor in imbuing the ship with value and meaning. It is notable here that in the absence of the ship's historic associations the vessel became contextualised within a larger network of wrecks and abandoned hulks within the Falklands. One interviewee, encapsulating many of the responses I received during these interviews, told me 'I had nothing to compare her with apart from the old *Lady Elizabeth* at the Harbour.'<sup>105</sup> Yet as one interviewee claimed, while this abundance of shipwrecks had the effect of diminishing the value of a single example, understood as a larger network, these objects took on a far more affective role: 'People did really have a nostalgia about *them*, they are part of the Falklands.'<sup>106</sup> To another 'there's sort of an emotional feeling towards *them*.' [My emphasis]<sup>107</sup>

It is important to note here, the powerful role the specific context and location of the Falkland

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<sup>105</sup> Howie Peck, Personal Interview, 16<sup>th</sup> July 2013

<sup>106</sup> Willie Bowles, Personal Interview, 24<sup>th</sup> July 2013

<sup>107</sup> John Smith, Personal Interview, 27<sup>th</sup> July 2013

Islands had upon this determining this response to the ship, while Falklanders were blithely scraping mussels of the ship's hull the Colonial Administration were busy fielding concerned enquiries about the historic vessel's fate from as far afield as California, Canada and New Zealand.<sup>108</sup> Equally significant is the manner in which this unique Falkland Island understanding of the vessel transformed once the ship returned to Bristol. Members of the Falkland Islands community who remembered the vessel in Sparrow Cove and had occasion to visit the restored vessel were effusive in their praise of the Trust's presentation of the museum site which were commonly used described in such positive terms as 'marvellous' and 'fantastic'.<sup>109</sup> As one interviewee told me, the vessel's restoration prompted a reaction of astonishment within them, and her newly rejuvenated physical appearance was contrasted positively with the way in which the ship manifested itself in Sparrow Cove 'How I could explain it, looking at it... 'Is that the old girl?' You can't really imagine what it looked like in the thick of it. Sitting in Sparrow Cove. It's a must. Anyone must see it.'<sup>110</sup>

To John Smith, former curator of the Falkland Islands Museum, this new perspective, shared amongst Falkland Islanders who visited her in Bristol, was directly related to the manner in which the Trust's restoration has served to historicise what was, to many in the Falklands, an ahistoric object 'We began to learn alot more about her background and history when she arrived in the United Kingdom.....it does bring forth a considerable amount of knowledge and research is done.'<sup>111</sup>

From one perspective at least, Falkland Islanders reconstituted negotiation with the ss *Great Britain* demonstrated the degree to which processes of reframing can be said to have a powerful effect on the way in which our understanding of the the world is mediated, as these frames mediate the manner in which reality is presented. In the words of Jim A. Kuypers, frames "induce us to filter our perceptions of the world in particular ways, essentially making some aspects of our multi-dimensional reality more noticeable than other aspects. They

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<sup>108</sup> CA: Letter from Neil Campbell to 'the Leading Newspaper, Stanley' September 10<sup>th</sup> 1952 FIC/FIG -1952, Jane Cameron Archives, Stanley, JCA: Letter from James Duggan to Falkland Islands Governor, January 7<sup>th</sup> 1950 FIC/FIG -1950, Jane Cameron Archives, Stanley, JCA: Letter from Keith Unson to the Colonial Secretary, October 5<sup>th</sup> 1961, FIC/FIG -1952, Jane Cameron Archives, Stanley, JCA:Letter from Keith Unson to the Colonial Secretary, October 5<sup>th</sup> 1961, FIC/FIG -1952, Jane Cameron Archives, Stanley, JCA: Letter from W.T. Lucas Esq. to Colonial Secretary, 15<sup>th</sup> January 1957, FIC/FIG -1957, Jane Cameron Archives, Stanley

<sup>109</sup> Personal Interviews with Willie Bowles, Ronnie Clarke, Hamish Jennings, John Smith from 8<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> July

<sup>110</sup> Robin Goodwin, Personal Interview, 24<sup>th</sup> July 2013

<sup>111</sup> John Smith, Personal Interview, 27<sup>th</sup> July 2013

operate by making some information more salient than other information. . . .”<sup>112</sup> In this case, in the Trust’s efforts to materially reconstitute the vessel they have subsequently imbued the *Great Britain* with a greater order of significance than that which she originally appeared to Falkland Islanders in Sparrow Cove. While not seeking to deny the effects of this material constitution of the vessel on the subsequent way in which she was interpreted, despite, what Falkland Islanders claim as little relative affinity for the vessel in Sparrow Cove oral history interviews reveal she had a significant role in imbuing the area with a tangible sense of place and human meaning.

As oral history interviews reveal, whilst Falkland Islanders were drawn to ship to collect the mussels which proliferated across the vessel’s hull this but these interactions with the ship and the marine life which found a habitat there were rich with human meaning and affective memory. According to one interviewee, memories of mussel foraging in Sparrow Cove were intimately acquainted with the recollection of time spent with family members.

‘My father and my two brothers used to go out there....well, my one brother and I went out there to untie a mast during the Second World War and we camped out there in the old army billets. The billets were out there in the outpost and they were out there in Mount Lowe and another one down in Charles Point...and we went out there together and tied the boat up alongside [the ss *Great Britain*] and walked up Mount Lowe and stayed there the night.’<sup>113</sup>

Another Falkland Islander also associated the *Great Britain* and its mussel foraging with memories of his father and questions that began with the ship were addressed in a far more poignant manner through being linked to memories of the interviewees family and the enjoyable experiences they shared in the Sparrow Cove.

‘My father was the first mate on the *Fitzroy*, the ss *Fitzroy*, and on the weekend if the ship hadn’t been he would get the *Fitzroy*’s motorboat and take some of its crew and its children mainly to get the mussels out of the bottom. He used to take this big garden rake with a piece of netting wire on it and it was pretty fun putting this huge long rake under the *Great Britain* and scraping the mussels off and bagging them up. Well, they used to although I never did like seafood so I didn’t eat them but it was fun to go out in the boat....’<sup>114</sup>

The *Great Britain*’s own materiality and structure contributed to this sense of place in the area and during one visits to Sparrow Cove one interviewee recalled employing the vessel as a climbing frame, despite the obvious hazard it prevented. ‘It was a great thing to climb

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<sup>112</sup> J. A. Kuypers, *Rhetorical Criticism: Perspectives in Action* (London, 2009)

<sup>113</sup> Hamish Jennings, Personal Interview, 17<sup>th</sup> July 2013

<sup>114</sup> Jill & Dennis Harris, Personal Interview, 23rd July 2013

around the *Great Britain*....an adventure.’<sup>115</sup> This practice of climbing aboard the vessel to explore the ship was not unusual. Despite being expressly forbidden by the Falkland Islands administration, one Falkland Islander explained how he climbed through a hole in the ship during a visit:

When you went through there wasn’t any deck to begin with, there was just the iron girders.... and [my friends] didn’t have the courage to walk along the girders but I used to sit on them and slide along the middle and once you got on the deck, there was a big wide stairway up to the next deck on to the deck. It was quite nice on a sunny day to be up on the deck of the *Great Britain*.<sup>116</sup>

To another interviewee ‘we used to go out there [the ss *Great Britain*] and mess around...’<sup>117</sup> There’s an extremely poignant aspect to these recollections and it is worth highlighting, that due to the length of time that had elapsed since the ship’s departure, many of the Falkland Islanders interviewed were far older than they were when the ship resided in Sparrow Cove. Nonetheless in their memories and recollections and the manner in which they described the vessel, perhaps something of their younger selves can be revealed, ‘me and my friends’ and ‘messing around’ for instance are more commonly connected with teenagers and young adults and not particularly turns of phrase commonly circulated amongst the cohort of people I interviewed, many of whom now have grandchildren. Yet in their memories of Sparrow Cove and their interactions with ship whilst there these Falkland Islanders were able to recall a time in which they engaged in acts of ostentatious risk taking behaviour in climbing within the *Great Britain* in order to impress their friends.

It is also important to contextualise these interactions with the *Great Britain* how Tuan defines place as beginning in the human body. To Tuan, the body in its structural composition defines the way in which human beings configure our understanding of the world.<sup>118</sup> This is an important aspect of the ship’s afterlife and highlights the way in which the vessel has remained a degree of constancy, despite its varied roles and reconfiguration constant. To look at a ship and see a climbing frame ultimately begins with the inherent knowledge of our ability, as human beings, to climb it. This is a significant point, and here we see also see what Latour defines an object’s resistance to the symbolisms we can say definitively dictate its meaning.<sup>119</sup> Here, oral histories reveal that, stripped of any associated historic value the ship’s material structure suggested the possibility it *could* be climbed as the

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<sup>115</sup> Roderick Napier, Personal Interview, 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2013

<sup>116</sup> Jill & Dennis Harris, Personal Interview, 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2013

<sup>117</sup> Howie Peck, Personal Interview, 16<sup>th</sup> July 2013

<sup>118</sup> Tuan, *Space and Place*. p.34-50

<sup>119</sup> Latour, *Reassembling the social* p.72



its most significant point of engagement. This recommendation to the human eye is also seen in Chapter Two when the salvage team similarly scale the masts of the vessel in order to demonstrate a degree of professional competency and masculine authority. Finally, the Trust's more recent 'Go Aloft' project shares a similar aim in inviting its visitors to step 'into the shoes of a Victorian sailor.'<sup>120</sup> The fact the Trust charges for this experience, could, at one level, be interpreted as a further capitalist rationalisation of an item of cultural heritage but from another angle, it suggests, before the project began one of the Trust's curators looked at the ship and saw the same thing that a Falkland Islander did. Suggesting, as Latour does, that material objects have the ability to both influence and resist the roles we assign them.

Despite Falkland Islanders claims to the contrary, the ss *Great Britain* in Sparrow Cove was an object and place full of human consequentiality. A testament to this fact, is the fact that once the ship was removed from area, human activity in this location notably declined. As one interviewee told me 'No-one ever went to Sparrow Cove other than to maybe see the ship...'<sup>121</sup> This effect was confirmed by another interviewee who pointed to the fact that once the ship was salvaged the area lost much of its inherent appeal. In the words of one Islander: 'I don't think anyone would go there other than that [the ss GB]....but I can't see any point in going there...'<sup>122</sup> As another interviewee confirmed, once the ship was taken from the Cove, the purpose of visiting this area ended. As John Smith explained, outlining Falkland Islanders transformed relationship to the Sparrow Cove of 2013 'On a fine day we might go out for a picnic and that's about it. But there's no sort of main attraction at Sparrow Cove to look at, except some penguins over the hill and to just fondly remember the *Great Britain*.'<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> *Go Aloft* (2015) <http://www.ssgreatbritain.org/whats-on/go-aloft>> 13 June 2015].

<sup>121</sup> Anthony Carey, Personal Interview, 15<sup>th</sup> July 2013

<sup>122</sup> Gerald Cheek, Personal Interview, 8<sup>th</sup> July 2013

<sup>123</sup> John Smith, Personal Interview, 27<sup>th</sup> July 2013



**Fig. 2.7** Muirhead, James. c.2013 'Placelessness' It is impossible to entirely replicate the exact staging of photographs of the *Great Britain* in Sparrow in Sparrow Cove as the area in is now marked of by the FIG as an area in which the Argentine Forces distributed a high volume of landmines during the Falklands Conflict of 1982. Nonetheless, it demonstrates how stark the area appears without the *Great Britain*. The oral history interviews that suggested the area is no longer visited was confirmed to me by Lisa Lowe, who owns the farm in which Sparrow Cove is found. She and her husband Adrian run tourists to the area occasionally, predominantly to penguin watch, she kindly took me out to this location, which ably demonstrated how little was to be found in Sparrow Cove with the ship removed. N.B. I have not addressed the impact of the Falklands Conflict at all, but there is arguably much potential to explore how the material remnants of the war have influenced the Falkland Islands subsequently, in this case, in limiting and constraining human movement.

## Conclusion

Neatly encapsulating the ss *Great Britain's* life in the Falklands can prove to be a quite a complex proposition. The ship's time in the islands, defies simple categorisation and the vessel can be said to have occupied wildly divergent roles within the Falklands; a bundle of both regional and global economic relationships, a loci for the mediation of imperial power, a stage for the imagination, a place of recreation, contemplation and relaxation and, as a result of human intervention, a scaffold upon which the natural world found new expression.

From an economic standpoint, following her initial arrival in the Port William in 1886 the *Great Britain* was almost immediately assimilated by the economic structures of regulating island life in the Falklands and came to embody a central component in the agricultural and shipping industries which sustained the colony. In this regard, the ship's abandoning in the islands proved extremely fortuitous. The well-established Falkland Island practice of

reconstituting abandoned vessels and assigning them a commercial role within the colony economy undoubtedly served to extend the chronology of the ship's material life.

Yet the vessel's survival is not simply the result of blunt economic forces and this fact is acknowledged in the way in which Falklands Governor Henniker Heaton personally intervene to prevent the ship's destruction. The patronage of Heaton, who interpreted the ship as an object of considerable symbolic meaning was crucial in the continuance of the ship's material life. It is also significant to recognise that Heaton did not visualise the vessel as a bundle of economic relationships and contextualised it within a wider understanding of the ship's historic past and, in his thwarted restoration attempt, an object of future value and significance.

Heaton's intervention served to re-contextualise the vessel in a new geographic location within the Falklands. Now sitting outside of the direct flows of economic life in the Falklands the ship was transformed into an artefact of an entirely different emotional register serving as a source of shared communal experience, affective social relationships and a site of embodied material interaction. The ship's new location framed produced a more intimate association with the natural world and this in turn influenced human interaction with the vessel. The *Great Britain* played an important role in bestowing Sparrow Cove with a sense of place, and it is surely significant that the inlet's status as an area of human consequence vanished when the ss *Great Britain* Project salvaged the vessel and returned it to the UK in 1970.

Yet is possible to exaggerate, or at least misrepresent, the order of the ship's significance within the Falklands and the role it came to embody within Sparrow Cove was shared by other material objects of similar physical dimensions. This had the the effect of robbing the ship of the exceptionality with which she is imbued in the museum site of 2016. The inherent danger is that in viewing the ship's time in the Falklands through a prism of the Trust's interpretative display we uncritically imbibe its representation of the vessel's life during her time in the islands. The truth of the ship's value and meaning in the island's is more complex than the either the Trust or Falkland Islanders might be prepared to admit its consequent import within this location lies somewhere between these two mutually opposed renderings of the ship's life within the Falkland Islands.

The next chapter will turn to the ss *Great Britain* Project and their effort to salvage the ship

from 1968 onwards. The chapter will discuss the manner in which – like Heaton’s less successful salvage effort their representations served to diminish the material realities of the ship and the extent to which this drove the vessel’s salvage and dictated the terms of the vessel’s restoration.

## Chapter Three: Representational Space, the pre-salvage ss *Great Britain* in the United Kingdom



Fig. 3.1. Witham, Isaac Joseph, c.1870 'ss *Great Britain*' – photo courtesy of Hull Maritime Museum

**O**n 28 September 1965, a letter was received in the Colonial Secretary's Office in Stanley, Falkland Islands. Sent by a Peter S. Lamb, writing from Stratford on Avon, at first glance the correspondent appears to be a patently earnest model-maker who was keen not only for information from the Falkland's authorities about the ss *Great Britain* but also to share his own thoughts on the historic vessel's earlier, abortive restoration attempt.

The *Great Britain* seems to be in an amazing state of preservation and, on reflection, it seems a pity that the appeal to restore in 1937 was not made at the present time, when people are far more preservation minded. I wonder indeed if such a fund was indeed started today, whether the hull is capable of being preserved at this late stage?<sup>1</sup>

Superficially, a relatively prosaic enquiry about the ss *Great Britain* - similar to various other requests for information the office of the Colonial Secretary regularly received about

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<sup>1</sup> JCA: FIC/FI -1965, Letter from Peter S. Lamb to Falkland Islands Colonial Secretary , 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1965

Brunel's vessel - Lamb's correspondence nevertheless distinguished itself in a variety of essential ways. Lamb's letter to the Colonial Secretary is noteworthy inasmuch as it represents one of the first instances in which a renewed salvage of the ss *Great Britain* is discussed in official print. Astutely identifying a growing 'conservationist turn' within the United Kingdom, Lamb presciently muses whether this factor would have an encouraging effect on future salvage attempts of the ss *Great Britain*.

While the date of the letter is certainly significant, appearing a full two years before Dr. Ewan Corlett's galvanising letter to *The Times* newspaper (which was to arouse appreciable public interest in the possibility of the ship's salvage), so too is the source. Lamb's 1965 letter was but one in a series of correspondence with the Falkland Islands Colonial Office and his enquiries into the ss *Great Britain* were not solely the expression of a strictly personal and idiosyncratic interest in historic vessels. According to a letter received later that month Lamb was writing on behalf of, or at least in connection with, 'American interests' who Lamb intimated may have been interested in the possibility of a salvage of the ss *Great Britain*.<sup>2</sup> Although seemingly reluctant to name them directly, an initial request for information in a letter from Lamb dated 21 June 1965 to the Falkland Islands authorities strongly indicates (by means of an attached FYI) that these interests were embodied in a prestigious establishment, the Smithsonian Institution and a particular Robert M. Vogel.<sup>3</sup>

Curator of the Smithsonian's division of Mechanical and Civil Engineering, Vogel was an enthusiastic champion of industrial heritage at a time when this hitherto specialist field was gaining in momentum both in the United States and the U.K.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, Vogel may have been instrumental in contributing to the emergence of industrial heritage as a field of significant academic enquiry and public interest.<sup>5</sup> In his role at the Smithsonian, Vogel did much to encourage cooperation with British pioneers of industrial heritage, including prominent individuals such as Kenneth A. Hudson, who famously authored one of the first works on the subject of industrial archaeology in 1963 and is widely credited with popularising the phrase initially.<sup>6</sup> Vogel's recognition of the significance of industrial archaeology and his cooperation with other like-minded enthusiasts is widely credited with stimulating interest

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<sup>2</sup> JCA: FIC/FI -1965, Letter from Peter S. Lamb to Falkland Islands Colonial Secretary, 8<sup>th</sup> September 1965

<sup>3</sup> JCA: FIC/FI -1965, Letter from Peter S. Lamb to Falkland Islands Colonial Secretary, 21st June 1965

<sup>4</sup> T. Majewski & D. Gaimester, *International Handbook of Industrial archaeology* (New York, 2009) p.287

<sup>5</sup> Majewski & Gaimester, *International Handbook of Industrial archaeology* p.287

<sup>6</sup> See K Hudson, *Industrial archaeology: an introduction*. (London, 1963) & Majewski & Gaimester, *International Handbook of Industrial archaeology* p.287

within the ‘minds of a community of curators, architects and archaeologists’ within the United States.<sup>7</sup>

Manifestly, Vogel’s interest in the ss *Great Britain* failed to result in the historic vessel becoming another illustrious addition to the Smithsonian’s celebrated collection of objects. Vogel would go on to spearhead the Historic American Engineering Record (HAER). An extremely significant body within the context of industrial archaeology in the United States, the HAER was responsible for establishing benchmarks of practical experience and a standardised method of documentation that remain in place today within the field of American industrial archaeology.<sup>8</sup> More significant still, HAER was the source of key personnel and support for a growing group of professionals and enthusiasts who initially comprised the industrial archaeology community in the United States. Like Ewan Corlett - prominent British maritime engineer and architect of the successful salvage of the ss *Great Britain* - Vogel was a devotee of engineering. During his period as curator at the Smithsonian, he was to preside over a collaborative working relationship between academic historians and the engineering community, which would have a considerable impact on the establishment of HAER in the United States and the projects it presided over. Discussion, participation and collaboration were followed by practical action in an attempt to document and preserve industrial remnants of U.S. history, which included initial surveys of the Mohawk and Hudson Rivers and New England textile mills.<sup>9</sup>

Peter Severn Lamb, Vogel’s co-collaborator in their tentative enquiries into the fate of the *Great Britain* in the Falkland Islands and author of the letters to the Colonial Secretary, is also a figure who provides an illuminating case study in embodying a specific form of interest in the ship. As his letter-headed correspondence to the Falkland Islands announced, Lamb was a model-maker. Still in existence today, his company, Severn-Lamb, specialises in the production of ‘leisure and light urban transport systems’ and its customers mainly comprise of prominent theme parks, heritage centres and tourist resorts. Lamb’s company was initially founded in 1958 as a means of tentatively commercialising what had initially served a hobby for the Stratford based hotel manager.<sup>10</sup> In its early stages the company

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<sup>7</sup> Majewski & Gaimester, *International Handbook of Industrial Archaeology* p.287

<sup>8</sup> Majewski & Gaimester, *International Handbook of Industrial Archaeology* p.287

<sup>9</sup> Majewski & Gaimester, *International Handbook of Industrial Archaeology* p.287

<sup>10</sup> Severn Lamb – The Transport Engineering Specialists, ‘Severn Lamb – A history to be proud of.’ <http://www.severn-lamb.com/about.asp> 03/03/2014

focused on the production of static, precision models of steam locomotives (a relatively niche market at this point) but in the 1960s the firm moved from the production of miniature trains to the manufacture of larger gauge and fully operational locomotives.

Although the collaboration between a curator of the world's largest museum and research complex and a Warwickshire based model-maker may, at first glance, seem a curious one, in fact, Lamb-Severn and the Smithsonian had a well-established and long-running association. Impressing the museum with a model of a steam engine used to power New York's subway system, Severn-Lamb eventually went on to complete thirty-six separate installations for the museum. The relationship between Vogel and Lamb, but more importantly, the relationship between the institution of the museum and the locomotive manufacturer, encapsulates a great deal of the early history of industrial heritage. The 1960s represented a watershed moment in the history of industrial archaeology, the moment where a hitherto niche market reflecting the personal interests of groupings of enthusiasts of industrial relics were increasingly exchanged, with the professionalised motivations of larger, more powerful institutions. The passing of the torch is embodied, to a degree, the manner in which amateur enthusiasm was eventually superseded by the interests of larger professional institutions and the liens of private enterprise.

Lamb's letter to the Falkland Islands is significant in summarizing many of the themes of the early history of the industrial archaeology and also the *ss Great Britain Project*\* itself which, broadly, can be considered an outgrowth of this broader movement. As the previous chapter demonstrated, the geographic space of the Falkland Islands exerted a significant influence upon the manner in which the *ss Great Britain* was interpreted in the islands. This chapter will seek to outline the manner in which key figures in the *ss Great Britain Project* interpreted the economic, social and material context of the United Kingdom during the 1960s and the role this played in shaping understandings of the ship more than 8,000 miles away. As the work of Walter Minchinton outlines, manifestations of industrial archaeology demonstrate significant regional variations and share the wider concerns of its adherents within these national spaces.<sup>11</sup> In the United Kingdom, the newly minted 'preservation minded' era of the early 1960s heralded a relatively novel appreciation of the industrial

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<sup>11</sup> W. Minchinton, *World Industrial Archaeology: A Survey*, *Industrial Archaeology*, 15, 2 (1983) pp. 125-136

\* Capitalised intentionally and occasionally referred to as 'The Project'



artefact and a growing recognition of its relative historic importance. The drive to conserve these objects was prompted by concerns of material destruction and the associated fear that these irrevocable changes would have a pernicious effect on both personal and national heritage. The *Great Britain's* salvage in 1970 cannot be properly understood without reference to these broader influences.

This chapter also discusses the ss *Great Britain's* principal departure from traditional industrial archaeology in its efforts to preserve and restore an artefact that was at such a vast geographic distance from the individuals who sought to salvage her. I will consider the implications of this distance on the manner in which the vessel was interpreted by the Project team and assess what role this played in the narratives the Project associated with the *Great Britain* and the values these individuals believed she embodied. These values and narratives are then interrogated in the final section of the chapter which considers the ss *Great Britain* as she was interpreted by the salvage team sent to return the ship to the United Kingdom. In offering this perspective of the events of the salvage the chapter seeks to demonstrate not only the subjectivity of the ss *Great Britain's* Project's mode of interpreting the ship but also to demonstrate its highly-context specific nature.

### The ss *Great Britain* as object of meaning: Fear of loss

In 1967, Naval Architect Dr. Ewan Corlett wrote a letter to the *The Times* outlining what he regarded as the importance of documenting and perhaps even preserving the ss *Great Britain* as a matter of considerable urgency. Widely credited with drawing public attention to the fate of the vessel, Corlett meticulously and persuasively presented the case for what he saw as an item of some significant historic value.

Sir - the first iron built ocean-going steamship and the first such ship to be driven entirely by propeller was the *Great Britain* designed and launched by Isambard Kingdom Brunel. This, the forefather of all modern ships, is lying a beached hulk at this moment. The Cutty Sark has rightfully been preserved at Greenwich and H.M.S. Victory at Portsmouth. Historically, the *Great Britain* has an equal claim to fame and yet nothing has been done to document the hulk. Let alone recover it and preserve it for the record. May I make a plea that the authorities should at least document, photograph and fully record this wreck, and at best do something to recover the ship

and place her on display as one of the very few historic ships still in existence.’<sup>12</sup>

The conviction with which Corlett writes about the *Great Britain*'s significance to the nation is underwritten with by a concern that, if efforts to preserve and document the ship were not undertaken immediately, the opportunity would be forever lost. For the key individuals involved in the ss *Great Britain* Project, fears of the consequences of the ship's abandonment to the Falkland Islands elements spurred the urgency with which the project was undertaken. As Ewan Corlett, the Project's naval engineer, described in the *Iron Ship* 'no-one who saw the *Great Britain* in her grave in Sparrow Cove dreamed that she would ever have a future...apart from occasional visitors and seabirds, she was left in peace – dying slowly at first and much more rapidly as time went by.’<sup>13</sup>



**Fig 3.2.** Muirhead, James, 2013. *The Jhelum* in Stanley Harbour, 2013. The ss *Great Britain* Project team aimed to prevent a similar fate befalling Brunel's vessel. The vessel deteriorated still further shortly after I left the islands following a particularly violent storm.

By 1967, the twin effects of temporality and a hostile climate were taking a severe toll on the material structure of the vessel. To Corlett and other members of the ss *Great Britain* Project team it was this deterioration which provided the sense of rapidity with which the salvage operation was undertaken. As Richard Goold Adams, ss *Great Britain* Project chairman, explained in his account of salvage and return of the ship, the physical deterioration of the

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<sup>12</sup> Corlett, E. 'First Iron Steamship', *The Times*, 8th November 1967

<sup>13</sup> Corlett, *Iron Ship* p.187

vessel factored heavily on the Project team's decision to rescue her. To Goold Adams, the *Great Britain* was returned from her 'lonely beach in the Falkland Islands at very nearly the last possible moment' the salvage operation was therefore conducted principally 'in view of her accelerating rate of disintegration.'<sup>14</sup>

In this regard, the ss *Great Britain* Project shared a similar impetus to much of the industrial archaeology movement that began in the mid 1950's in the United Kingdom, but gained significant momentum in the following decade. As Hilary Geogohan suggests, the spur to preserve the material remnants of industrialisation were wider concerns surrounding irreversible changes to, and destruction of, the existing material landscape.<sup>15</sup> The destruction of London's Euston Arch in 1962 was seen by symbolic by some in the emerging industrial archaeology movement of cherished monuments swept aside by the unsentimental forces of modernisation.<sup>16</sup> Completed in 1838, and perceived as symbolically embodying the 'Victorian symbol of progress' and 'the glory of railway travel,' the arch was eventually pulled down by British Railways in order to make way for what enthusiasts dubbed a 'monstrous concrete box.'<sup>17</sup> Marked by protests and serving to inflame preservationist passions, the removal of the Arch was a potent symbolic event in the early genesis of industrial archaeology in the United Kingdom. A charitable trust that seeks to restore the Euston Arch exists to this day, its most high-profile patron, Michael Palin, claiming 'The restoration of Euston Arch would restore to London's oldest mainline terminus some of the character and dignity of its great neighbours.'<sup>18</sup>

The destruction of such a high-profile piece of the material landscape and other similar demolitions, destructions and alterations during the 1960s prompted a 'wave of concern' for Britain's industrial heritage swelling the ranks of a movement which had hitherto proven

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<sup>14</sup> Goold Adams, *Return of the Great Britain* p.1

<sup>15</sup> H. Geoghegan, 'If you can walk down the street and recognise the difference between cast iron and wrought iron, the world is altogether a better place': Being Enthusiastic about Industrial archaeology.', *Media and Culture Journal*, 12,2, (2009) n/p

<sup>16</sup> Geoghegan, 'If you can walk down the street and recognise the difference between cast iron and wrought iron, the world is altogether a better place' n/p

<sup>17</sup> Geoghegan, "If you can walk down the street and recognise the difference between cast iron and wrought iron, the world is altogether a better place' n/p

<sup>18</sup> The Euston Arch Trust, 'The Euston Arch -The Campaign To Rebuild a Lost London Masterpiece' <http://www.eustonarch.org/> 29 May 2016

something of a niche interest.<sup>19</sup> Yet, while fears of losing artefacts that could not be readily be replaced, were shared by both the ss *Great Britain* Project team and the wider industrial archaeology movement it is important to highlight the obvious distinction between the two. It is possible to discern in preservationist drives to conserve industrial artefacts an intrinsic protest against the more destructive elements of early 1960s modernist interventions into the built environment. Yet, by way of contrast, the *Great Britain* was not being rent asunder by the injurious interference of an overweening State but by the elements of the Falkland Islands and the inevitable indignities of time. The urgency of the need to salvage the ship in the summer of 1970 was confirmed in the minds of those members of the Project team who travelled to the Falklands in order to bring her back to the United Kingdom. Lord Euan Strathcona, a prominent member of the salvage operation and key figure in the disputed broadcasts to the Falkland Islanders during the operation describes his shock when he first climbed aboard the vessel.

Well I was pretty amazed and when we went on board I was horrified to find that where the crack was you could stand on it and you could feel the ship moving on either side of the crack. The importance of that is that, as Ewan Corbett pointed out, that probably, in a matter of months, certainly not very many years, the ship would have broken in half and that would have made the salvage job a lot more difficult if not actually impossible.<sup>20</sup>

This pessimistic impression of the ss *Great Britain*'s condition was one shared by Ray Sutcliffe, documentary film-maker, who was in the Falklands to record the salvage operation for the BBC's *Chronicle* programme.

There wasn't much time because it can be forgotten that one of Ewan Corlett's great fears was that the physical condition of the ship was serious, and that if it weren't to happen within that year, maybe six months, it wasn't going to happen at all. The ship would physically have broken – I could see that and I had film to prove it – I could stand at the stern of the ship, it being moveable because it was afloat, the bow was actually fixed in the mud and the ship was twisting amidships through the leverage of the main mast and the bigyard which was still up there. So it was a bit like somebody having a crowbar in the middle of the ship and pulling it from left to right, and it undoubtedly, she would have fallen in half at which end of story, end of Project, end of *Great Britain*.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> M. Blockley, 'Preservation, restoration and presentation of Industrial Heritage: A case study of the Iron-Bridge Gorge', in *Managing Historic Sites and Buildings: Reconciling presentation and preservation*, (eds.) G. Chitty & D. Baker (London, 1999). p.141

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Donald Euan Palmer Howard, 4th Baron Strathcona and Mount Royal, (2009) *The Incredible Journey Oral History Project*, Accession Number of Transcript BRSGB 2009.150.1A, ss *Great Britain Trust*, Bristol

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Ray Sutcliffe (2009) *The Incredible Journey Oral History Project*, Accession Number of Transcript BRSGB 2009.150.4A, ss *Great Britain Trust*, Bristol

The momentum to preserve the ss *Great Britain* was acutely influenced by the physical realities of the extent of the ship's structural deterioration and the degree by which this was the last opportunity to effect a successful salvage operation. Ewan Corlett's 1968 survey and the impressions of those who visited the ship in the Falkland Islands confirmed the necessity of undertaking the salvage as soon as possible, lest the ship be permanently lost.

Notably, the ss *Great Britain* Project departed from the traditional focus of industrial archaeology by the vast geographic separation between the object and those who sought to preserve her. In her compelling account of the antecedents of the industrial archaeology movement, Marion Blockley argues convincingly that the the destructive effects of early 1960s modernisation on the built environment may well have been exaggerated in the minds of its adherents. The perception that an untold number of priceless artefacts of material heritage were disappearing under swathes of concrete and anonymous tower blocks was distorted and amplified by the removal of materially prominent and highly visible objects such as the Euston Arch. It is estimated, that even today, some 70% of the built environment dates from the Industrial Revolution<sup>22</sup> supporting Blockley's contention that, in fact 'there is an embarrassment of riches of resources surviving from the last 250 years' despite a supposed 'lack of protection'.<sup>23</sup>

Indeed, as Blockley perceptively suggests, the material culture of both the entire prehistoric and early Medieval periods is undeniably dwarfed by the sheer volume of surviving industrial era objects and landscapes.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, in the United Kingdom at least, visible alterations to the built environment led amenity groups and industrial archaeology enthusiasts, to paraphrase Geogohan, to run frantically around 'like headless chickens' in an attempt to record whatever they could, before the existing fabric of the material landscape was permanently uprooted and destroyed.<sup>25</sup> In sum, the alteration, displacement or destruction of prominent visible historic artefacts prompted fears of a broader existential threat to repositories of collective history.

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<sup>22</sup> J. Symonds, 'Experiencing Industry: Beyond machines and the history of technology' in *Industrial archaeology: Future Directions*, eds. by James Symonds and Eleanor C. Casella (New York, 2005), p.33

<sup>23</sup> Blockley, 'Preservation, restoration and presentation of the Industrial Heritage', p.142

<sup>24</sup> Blockley, 'Preservation, restoration and presentation of the Industrial Heritage', p.142

<sup>25</sup> Geogohan, 'If you can walk down the street and recognise the difference between cast iron and wrought iron, the world is altogether a better place' n/p

As Symonds and Blockley contend, somewhat counter-intuitively, material remains of the industrial revolution were selected for preservation precisely *because* these artefacts were so omnipresent. It is of no coincidence then that the blooming of industrial archaeology in Britain took place precisely when these physical moorings of stability and permanence were perceived to be under threat by external forces. As Hallbwachs explains:

When a group has lived a long time in a place adapted to its habits, its thoughts as well as its movements are in turn ordered by the succession of images from external objects... Now suppose these houses and streets are demolished or their appearance and layout are altered. The stones and other materials will not object, but the groups will. The resistance, if not in the stones themselves at least arises out of their long standing relationships with these groups.<sup>26</sup>

This intimate relationship with objects, artefacts and buildings of long-standing prompted powerful objections by some preservationists to the alterations in the lived environment. The visibility of these objects also, crucially, sought to exaggerate the effects of these interventions which were far more piecemeal and less far less comprehensive than conservationists and industrial archaeology adherents supposed.

Intimate and long-standing object-human interactions with the lived environment prompted somewhat exaggerated concerns about rapidity of its supposed dissolution during the 1960s. Yet, as Hallbwachs hints, these concerns were motivated in part by the sense of familiarity with these objects and the corresponding sense of permanence and constancy they could be said to provide. This theme of the of attachment to physical objects as a mainstay of psychological stability is one explored by Dolores Hayden.<sup>27</sup> According to Hayden, ‘People make attachments to places that are critical to their well-being or distress. An individual's sense of place is both a biological response to the surrounding physical environment and a cultural creation.’<sup>28</sup>

Hallbwachs suggests an equivalency between an inability to appropriately recognise the objects populating everyday life and mental illness. In his assessment ‘the breakdown in contact between thought and things’ results in victims ‘finding themselves in a fluid and strange environment totally lacking familiar reference points’<sup>29</sup> This triangular relationship

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<sup>26</sup> M. Halbwachs, (trans. Lewis A. Coser) *On Collective Memory* (Chicago, 1992) .p.54

<sup>27</sup> D. Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History*, (Massachusetts,1995) p.16

<sup>28</sup> Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* p.16

<sup>29</sup> Hallbwachs, *On Collective Memory* p.52

between identity, memory and object is perhaps fundamental to an understanding of the motivations of early industrial archaeology enthusiasts. As Hayden argues, - echoing Hallbwachs - identity is 'intimately connected to memory' and certain objects that frame the lives of many people become saturated by memory, becoming virtual 'storehouses' of it.<sup>30</sup> Preservation also suggests an unyielding locus of permanence in the face of disruptive and alienating modernising forces.

The ss *Great Britain* Project diverged from the traditional impetus of much early archaeology in its selection for an object for preservation. Most strikingly, the ss *Great Britain* was patently *not* an object of familiarity to members of the Project team and thus the explanation of the 'permanence' and 'stability' it could be said to provide to the Project's members is lacking. Indeed, in operation, the ss *Great Britain* Project was remarkably distinctive in the field of industrial archaeology in that it was organised and managed at such a remove from the object it laid claim to. Significantly, until Ewan Corlett visited the Islands in 1968 - with a serious intent to salvage the ship already underway - no member of the Project had yet visited the vessel.

In practical terms, the 8,000 mile distance between the ss *Great Britain* Project team and the ship itself, resulted in much of the feasibility of the effort being discussed by correspondence, principally with the Falkland Islands administration. The reliance of the Project on first-hand information from the Falklands is revealed in the initial letter Sir Cosmo Haskard, Falkland Islands Governor, received from Robert J. Adley, Conservative Party politician, noted railway enthusiast and then chair of the Brunel Society.<sup>31</sup>

Dear Sir,

As you may be aware, considerable interest has been aroused in this country recently by the plight of the Steam Ship *Great Britain* now lying in Sparrow Cove. As an admirer of Brunel, I have been discussing with friends in Bristol the possibility of investigating the condition of this famous ship. We would like to assess the likelihood of being able to bring the *Great Britain* back to her native land and restoring her. We do not underestimate the immensity of the task and in fact the first necessity is to ascertain whether or not such a journey is even feasible. This would depend quite simply on whether she could float or could be made to float without vast expenditure. We wonder whether, through your good offices, it would be possible to find someone

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<sup>30</sup> Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* p.9

<sup>31</sup> C. Young, *The Incredible Journey – The ss Great Britain Story, 1970-2010* (Bristol, 2010) p.21

locally to give us a reasonably accurate report as to the actual condition of the *Great Britain*, and we hope we might arouse in the Islands some enthusiasm for the task.<sup>32</sup>

The letter is noteworthy, in revealing the fissure between the enthusiasm of the United Kingdom based Project team and the doubts of those more intimately acquainted with the *Great Britain* to whom the undertaking was manifestly implausible. Cosmo Haskard's handwritten note on the letter reveal his considerable 'doubts' that a salvage of the ship had any chance of success.<sup>33</sup>

From the outset, there was a considerable and on-going divide between the ss *Great Britain* Project's unwavering faith in the possibility of salvage and those in the Falklands who were markedly more reserved about potential success of the Project's aims. This division coloured much of the early correspondence about the *Great Britain's* proposed salvage and would prove a consistently recurring theme. Responding to the Adley's letter, W.H. Thompson, Colonial Secretary of the Falkland Islands in 1967, outlined his own dim assessment of the probability of the *Great Britain's* return to the United Kingdom.

Your letter of the 22<sup>nd</sup> December addressed to Sir Cosmo Haskard (who is temporarily absent from the colony) appears to have crossed with mine which left here on the 22<sup>nd</sup> January).... I would be doing you a wrong if I encouraged you to believe that the hulk is something which a few enthusiasts might float away and restore. In my last letter I gave you a figure of a million pounds as a possible figure. Since writing my thoughts have tended towards something much larger.<sup>34</sup>

Thompson reiterated his scepticism about the chances of the *Great Britain's* salvage in a response to an enquiry about the ship from the Commonwealth Office received in 1968. 'It is very doubtful whether the '*Great Britain*' can in fact be salvaged. The vessel appears to have a large split amidships and many of her internal supports and girders cannot support a man.'<sup>35</sup>

Thompson was supported in this opinion, at least initially by Cosmo Haskard, who in the January of 1968 wrote 'I fear that any thought of towing the *Great Britain* over any distance should be forgotten. The only cause as I see it would be to salvage whatever timbers that can be dismantled and rebuild a copy of the original – an extremely expensive but admirable

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<sup>32</sup> JCA: FIC/FI -1967, Letter from Robert Adley to Falkland Islands Governor Cosmo Haskard, 11<sup>th</sup> December 1967

<sup>33</sup> JCA: FIC/FI -1967, Letter from Robert Adley to Cosmo Haskard, 11<sup>th</sup> December 1967

<sup>34</sup> JCA: FIC/FI -1968, Letter from WH Thompson to Robert Adley, 6<sup>th</sup> February 1968

<sup>35</sup> JCA: FIC/FI -1968, Letter from WH Thompson to Foreign & Commonwealth Office, 28<sup>th</sup> May 1968



sentiment.’<sup>36</sup>

Nonetheless, despite these reservations, Thompson acceded to Adley’s petition to provide a more detailed report on the shape of the *Great Britain*, a report that was provided courtesy of the Royal Navy.<sup>37</sup> Unfortunately for Adley, the report seemed to confirm Thompson’s suspicions about the condition of the ship.

The condition of the ss *Great Britain* is such that perhaps the only way of lifting the remains is by encasing them in a steel cage and filling the hull with polytherene and floating it as a whole block. The steel hull is only held together by the remains of the wooden sheathing in 1882. The main deck and most of the between decks have rotted away and the major cross has either been broken or are incapable of carrying the weight of a man.... obviously when I wrote in folio 5. that the ss *Great Britain* was still ‘in remarkably good condition’ I was not thinking of a moving job.’<sup>38</sup>

To the naval officer charged with surveying the ship, the salvage of the *Great Britain* was ‘completely beyond’ United Kingdom means.<sup>39</sup>

If administrative figures in the Falkland Islands believed this was the end of the matter they were swiftly disabused of this notion when they received their response from a bullish Richard Goold Adams. Goold Adams not only sought to question the veracity of the survey but also invalidate the qualifications of the individual who provided it point by point.

1. Warden speaks about the ship not floating independently. Of course not, since she had two holes blown in her stern deliberately in order to beach her.
2. No-one expects the wooden deck to have anything left in the way of strength or watertightness. We plan to give the ship overall buoyancy by inserting rubber flotation tanks inside the hull. His point about the masts, while true enough, makes no odds since they would be taken out for the voyage, as very first step at all.
3. His point about more than rainwater in the hull indicates that he knows nothing of the background since the facts are that rainwater flows in and out through holes in the stern with every tide.
4. His point about the ballast while equally no doubt valid in a sense, is also left rather in the air by virtue of the fact that the ship sailed the seas for the last three years of her life without engines anyway.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> JCA: FIC/FI -1968, Letter from Cosmo Haskard to WH Thompson, 22nd January 1968 FIC/FI -1968

<sup>37</sup> Ewan Corlett, *The Iron Ship* p.189

<sup>38</sup> JCA: FIC/FI -1968, Initial Survey Report into the condition of the ss *Great Britain*, 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1968

<sup>39</sup> JCA: FIC/FI -1968, Initial Survey Report into the condition of the ss *Great Britain*, 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1968

<sup>40</sup> JCA: FIC/FI -1968, Letter from Richard Goold Adams to C.M. Diggenes, British Foreign Office, 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1968 FIC/FI -1968

Richard Goold Adams, and the wider Project team he represented, were clearly unperturbed by the opinions of ‘local experts’ as he made abundantly clear later in the same letter ‘we reserve our position about the state of the ship until we have had a qualified naval architect or engineer carry out of our survey.’<sup>41</sup> Lest the naval officer in question be in any doubt as to the Project team’s attitude towards the survey and his qualifications to undertake it, Goold Adams offered his opinion that while ‘grateful’ for the Warden’s opinion ‘we have come to know that they must be taken with a pinch of salt.’<sup>42</sup> In response, Ewan Corlett commissioned his own photographer to take over 200 pictures of the vessel in Sparrow Cove which was followed thereafter by his own detailed survey of the vessel in November 1968.<sup>43</sup>

It may be reasonably expected that having received such a dismal appraisal of the ss *Great Britain*’s condition in Sparrow Cove that the individuals that made up the Project would have been discouraged and given pause to reflect on the feasibility of their proposals. Not only did this not prove to be the case, but instead the Project supplied a bellicose contestation to the facts provided that ran counter their narrative of the likelihood of a successful salvage of the *Great Britain*. This rebuttal of Falklands-based professional opinion signposted the increasingly marked distinction between the level of confirmation bias<sup>44</sup> the ss *Great Britain* Project held in regards to its organisation’s outcomes and the opinions of those in the Falkland Islands who viewed the scheme with a relative degree of agnosticism.

A compelling explanation for the origins of this division is hinted at in a letter from the Falkland Islands Colonial Secretary to the Commonwealth Office in 1968. In an exchange relating to the relative chances of success of the competing American and British efforts to salvage the *Great Britain* – Karl Kortum of the San Francisco Maritime Museum had launched a similar effort – the Colonial Secretary believed there was an important distinction to be made between the two. As the Thompson pointedly remarked: ‘[whilst] a representative from the San Francisco Maritime museum has visited the Falkland Islands and has seen the remains. No representative of any United Kingdom organisation has *seen* the

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<sup>41</sup> JCA: FIC/FI -1968, Letter from Richard Goold Adams to C.M. Diggenes, British Foreign Office, 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1968 FIC/FI -1968

<sup>42</sup> JCA: FIC/FI -1968, Letter from Richard Goold Adams to C.M. Diggenes, British Foreign Office, 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1968 FIC/FI -1968

<sup>43</sup> Corlett, *Iron Ship*, p.189

<sup>44</sup> The tendency to interpret and favour, and recall information in a way that confirms one's preexisting beliefs or hypotheses See S. Plous, *The Psychology of Judgment and Decision Making* (B&B Psychology, 1993)

ship.<sup>45</sup>

The subtext of the exchange between the Commonwealth Office and Thompson indicates Thompson perceived the Project team's optimistic assessment of the salvage as based principally upon reviewing the *Great Britain* at a considerable remove. In Thompson's eyes, any thoughts of salvage in the United Kingdom were therefore, at this stage, primarily theoretical. A viewpoint perhaps established as a result of his own proximity to the ship, a distance of some 8,000 miles could capably diminish the scale of physical deterioration affecting the hulk in the minds of those who sought to return her to the Britain.

At this early stage of 'salvage by correspondence' that the ss *Great Britain* Project were engaged in indicates, the familiar impulses driving industrial archaeology forwarded by Symonds, Blockley, Geogohan and Hallbwachs prove problematic in their application to the scheme. Whilst, broadly speaking, changes to the lived environment in the 1960s provided a powerful compulsion to the early industrial archaeology movement to preserve what they could before they were permanently effaced these are little evidenced in the salvage of the *Great Britain*. As applied to industrial archaeology, the work of Symonds, Blockley, Geogohan and Hallbwachs suggest fears of permanent and irretrievable loss of prominent material artefacts provided a groundswell of adherents to preservationist bodies who were reluctant to countenance the fissure in the affective relationships these losses would represent. According to this view, the enthusiasts of industrial archaeology were less motivated by preserving objects of definitive history but more concerned with sustaining a subjective sense of *personal history* maintained by the presence of material artefacts from one's own past. These relationships, were built on and sustained by intimate, lived and corporal experiences with these objects which maintained a vital sense of stability and permanence in a fluctuating and alienating modern world.

Yet deploying this explanatory framework atop the efforts to preserve the ss *Great Britain* prove inherently problematic. Firstly, the ship's material form did not face destruction as the result of an insensitive administrative bureaucracy but instead the dual effect of an unprepossessing climate and the attrition of time. The kernel of protest against the 'modern

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<sup>45</sup> JCA: FIC/FI -1968, Letter from WH Thompson to Foreign & Commonwealth Office, 28<sup>th</sup> May 1968 FIC/FI - 1968

rationalism' of 1960s planning efforts could, *prima facie*, not be said to play a part in the efforts to salvage a ship gradually disintegrating into the sea on what Ewan Corlett dubbed a 'lonely beach' in the Falkland Islands.<sup>46</sup> The *Great Britain's* decline was therefore an inalienable physical reality and was incapable of being thwarted by well-marshalled civic outrage and popular protest.

Secondly, the ss *Great Britain* could not be not be said to feature in what Stedman categorises as the "positive emotional bond that develops between people and their environment."<sup>47</sup> Academics such as Rollero and Piccoli have sought to demonstrate the aspects of individual identity, memory and belonging that are often tied to a sense of place and the objects that populate these places. As Diane Barthel argues, this sense of shared attachment is often particularly acute in relation to historical objects which are often 'essential visual markers to the collective memory. Among those concerned, there is a sense of impending loss if care is not taken to safeguard the object'.<sup>48</sup> Yet at some 8,000 miles away from the Project team the ss *Great Britain* was patently not a pervasive element in a shared sense of remembrance or identity to any members of the ss *Great Britain* Project team. Indeed, the reverse is true, as the correspondence between the Project and the Falkland Islands administration reveals the ship was essentially an abstract to those in the United Kingdom who sought to salvage her.

The example the ss *Great Britain* Project provides does not negate the work of scholars who have drawn attention to the intimacy of place and object-human relationships in prompting efforts to preserve objects of historical and collective worth. It does, however, suggest that there were considerable nuances apparent in the industrial archaeology movement as a whole which hint at the possibility of affective relationships with material objects not exclusively having being borne as a result of direct lived experience. The example the ss *Great Britain* Project provides demonstrates how affective human-object relations are capable of being established at a considerable distance from the object in question.

In scrutinising the motivations of those who sought to salvage the ss *Great Britain* in 1970 it

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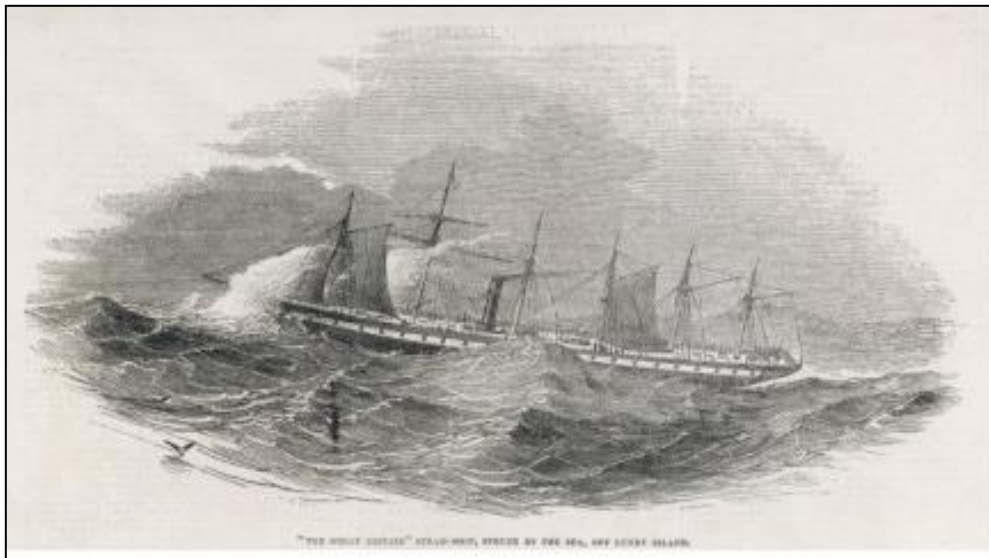
<sup>46</sup> Corlett, *Iron Ship* p.187

<sup>47</sup> R. C. Stedman, Is It Really Just a Social Construction? The Contribution of the Physical Environment to Sense of Place, *Society & Natural Resources: International Journal*, 16,8 (2011) p. 673

<sup>48</sup> D. Barthel, 'Getting in Touch with History: The Role of Historic Preservation in Shaping Collective Memories', *Objects and Memory*, 19, 3 (1996).p. 347

is possible to demonstrate the extent to which Project members negotiated the ship as an abstract and symbolic entity, negotiated from a considerable geographic distance. As the wrangle with the Falkland Islands administration demonstrates, these acts of symbolism and abstraction often came into conflict with those who experienced the ss *Great Britain* first hand and did not fully share in similar representations of the vessel.

### The ss *Great Britain* as an abstract - Imagery and Object-Centeredness



**Fig 3.3.** *Illustrated London Evening News*, February 1<sup>st</sup> 1845, ss *Great Britain*. It was this ‘beautiful picture’ that Ewan Corlett identified as having captivated him and inspired his efforts to salvage the ship.

According to their own accounts, the principal figures of the ss *Great Britain* Project came to be involved with the salvage attempt through consistently abstract means. In Ewan Corlett's explanation in the *Iron Ship* - his 1974 book detailing the history of the ss *Great Britain* and its subsequent restoration - his professional and personal interest in the vessel stemmed from a lithograph of the ship, which depicted the ss *Great Britain* negotiating inclement seas off Lundy Island in 1845.<sup>49</sup> Rather uncharacteristically, in a work not overburdened with literary flourishes, Corlett describes the effect of this ‘beautiful picture’, as subsequently inspiring him to search for further information about Brunel’s sole remaining ship. Corlett’s ascription of the power of visual imagery to inspire and motivate is one shared by Richard Gould Adams who shared his own account for his interest in the ship in *The Return of the Great Britain*.

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<sup>49</sup> Corlett. *Iron Ship*, p.192

One weekend in February 1968, my eye was caught by a photograph in *The Observer*. It was taken I believe by Karl Kortum, and showed the Great Britain with her three masts beached about a hundred yards off shore against the curving outline of Sparrow Cove in the Falkland Islands – down in the Atlantic and some four hundred miles from Cape Horn. The caption indicated that by a series of miracles, the hull of this very old iron ship had survived, and that suggestions had been made to salvage and return it to England in view of its outstanding importance in maritime history.<sup>50</sup>

Lord Euan Strathcona, another principal in the ss *Great Britain* Project offers a similar account of his first acquaintance with the historic vessel.

I was in hospital in Bath having a minor operation, and I read Tom Rolt's book about Brunel, and at that time I had a little steam launch being looked after here in the dockyard, and in that book he says the remains of the ss *Great Britain*, Brunel's most important ship, to this day lie in the Falkland Islands and it would be lovely if somebody would rescue them. I then wrote to Dick Hill of Charles Hill and Sons, whose dockyard this was, and said 'Dick what are you doing about this ss *Great Britain* which was built in your dockyard?'<sup>51</sup>

Through gleaning knowledge of the ss *Great Britain* through books, pictures and photographs, all three men's primary and initial acquaintance with the vessel was established through a mode of detached representation. Whilst the photograph and lithograph that Goold Adams and Corlett cite may, in part, have provided an illustrative depiction of the ss *Great Britain*, this in reality, provided something between abstraction and true representation, simplifying it and reducing it to a basic outline of aesthetic principles. In Strathcona's case the literary medium with which he first engaged with the ship is even further removed as a mode of representation from a *Great Britain* in a state of perennial decay in the Falkland Islands.

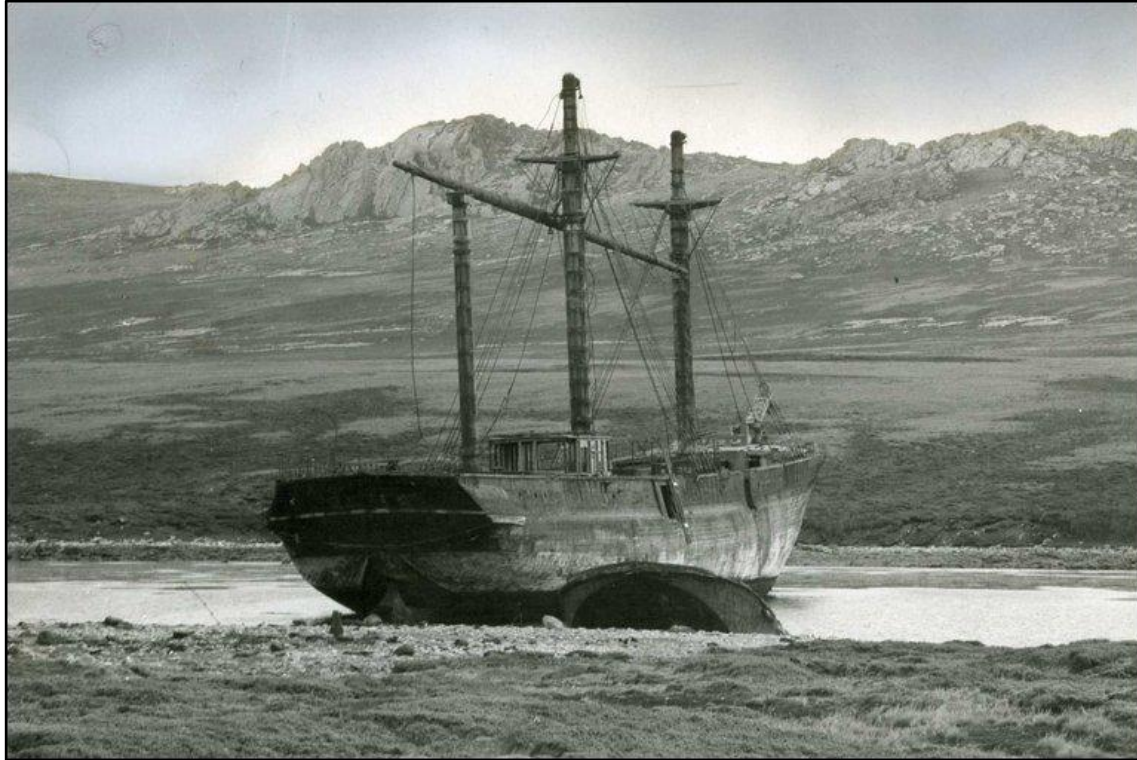
The engagement with the ss *Great Britain* through an abstract lens goes some way in explaining the apparent discrepancy between the optimism with which the possibility of salvage was viewed in the United Kingdom and the more cautious response the scheme received in the Falkland Islands. Issues with abstraction and representation are humorously illustrated by Robert Zimmer in a story about Picasso's meeting with an American soldier stationed in France during the Second World War. When the G.I. berated Picasso for not producing pictures of sufficient realism the soldier 'pulled out a photograph of his fiancé' back home saying: 'This is what a picture should look like'. Picasso looked carefully at the

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<sup>50</sup> Goold Adams, *Return of the Great Britain*, p.8

<sup>51</sup> Interview with Donald Euan Palmer Howard Strathcona, *The Incredible Journey*

photograph and said: ‘Your girlfriend is rather small, isn’t she?’<sup>52</sup> As Zimmer claims, Picasso’s droll riposte to the American serviceman makes an important point, abstractions, of any sort, are not in themselves reality and should not be considered as such.<sup>53</sup>



**Fig 3.4.**The ss *Great Britain* in Sparrow Cove 1970, similar to the photograph described by Goold Adams in *The Observer*. As with Corlett, imagery of the ship would have an important role in influencing Goold Adam’s interactions with the vessel. The photograph emphasises the uniformity of the Falklands Countryside and markedly fails to represent any associated human activity with the vessel in the islands. Courtesy of ss *Great Britain* Trust

To the Falklands-based Colonial Secretary, W.H. Thompson, the problematic issues presented by modes of abstraction and representation were clear. The American effort to salvage the *Great Britain* was clearly more serious from his perspective and Karl Kortum’s 1967 visit to the ship conferred the San Francisco Maritime Museum’s endeavour with considerably more legitimacy as a result. Whatever the nature of Kortum’s interaction - Corlett characterised it as ‘preliminary reconnaissance’ rather than a fully fledged technical survey – to Thompson the first hand visual perception of the San Francisco team provided a far more dependable means of assessing the potential success of salvaging the *Great Britain*, regardless of the Project’s technical grounding.<sup>54</sup> As a 1968 letter to Robert Adley reveals,

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<sup>52</sup> R. Zimmer, ‘Abstraction in art with implications for perception.’ *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London B: Biological Sciences* 358,1435 (2003) p.1285

<sup>53</sup> Zimmer, ‘Abstraction in art with implications for perception.’ p.1285

<sup>54</sup> Corlett. *Iron Ship*, p.188

Thompson's degree of skepticism relating to the British based Project evidently caused him to see the potential for the destruction of the vessel produced as a result of over-optimistic projections and simplistic renderings of the ship. These concerns led him to specify his preference for an American salvage of the vessel – which seemingly overrode any appeals to his British nationality - given, what he regarded as its greater chances of success.

From a personal viewpoint, I am opposed to moving pieces of the vessel if the Americans can take her away and do a good job of the reconditioning. Wherever '*Great Britain* comes to rest she should be kept intact as possible. If the Americans lose interest, taking her away becomes a different matter.<sup>55</sup>

Of course as later events demonstrated, Thompson's estimates of the supposed costs of the salvage were grossly overestimated. However, it is difficult not to find sympathy with Thompson's position, as he self consciously acknowledged his estimate was principally 'a guess'. Explaining to Adley, undertakings of this nature were considerably beyond Falkland Islands means. 'I must make it clear that nothing has been costed. We have neither the staff nor the expertise to carry out such a job.'<sup>56</sup> Equally, it may be possible to discern the obverse effect of the Project's optimistic appraisal of the salvage in the Falklands, namely an overstated sensitivity to the ship's physical frailties and an on-going assumption of the permanence of the ship's stasis.

In Thompson's defence, objectively speaking his early misgivings could be considered well-founded, particularly when taking account of the available information he possessed at the time. Whilst the Royal Navy's initial survey prompted a combative response from the ss *Great Britain* Project it is difficult to defend the certainty with which Richard Goold Adams argued. Ewan Corlett was yet to visit the ship and conduct a detailed scientific survey and the Project's position could, at this point, be construed as relatively insubstantial at this point. In this regard, and of particular note is Goold Adam's proposal to 'insert rubber flotation tanks inside the hull' in order to successfully float her back from the Falkland Islands to the United Kingdom.<sup>57</sup> It is significant that this initial scheme, diverged wildly from the the manner in which the salvage was eventually implemented.\* One wonders if Goold Adam's initial

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<sup>55</sup>JCA: FIC/FI -1968, Letter from WH Thompson to Robert Adley, 21st February 1968 FIC/FI -1968

<sup>56</sup>JCA: FIC/FI -1968, Letter from WH Thompson to Robert Adley, 21st February 1968 FIC/FI -1968

<sup>57</sup>JCA: FIC/FI -1968, Letter from Richard Goold Adams to C.M. Diggenes, British Foreign Office, 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1968

\* In the event, shipping company Ulrich Harms and Risdon Beazley successfully salvaged the ss *Great Britain* through means of a large floating pontoon (the *Mulus*) 250ft in length and 79ft in width which would be sunk beneath the ship in Sparrow Cove raising her above the waterline and protecting her, to an extent, from the choppy squall of the Atlantic Ocean.



proposal would have met with such success and it is surely significant with the Falklands previously losing one of her other shipwrecks - *The Fennia*, after an unsuccessful salvage attempt left her languishing in a Uruguayan scrapyard - the Colonial Secretary was far from keen to repeat the experience.

Having arrived at their interest in the ss *Great Britain* through modes of representation the question arises as to what extent this influenced the principal figures of the Project in its early stages. Ewan Corlett undertook his comprehensive survey of the ship in the November of 1967, and with it provided the surety of the 'objective and absolute' values of what Dolby dubs the 'knowledge producing' activity of scientific methods.<sup>58</sup> Yet, until this point, possibilities of the ss *Great Britain's* salvage were defended as an article of faith by the Project team and challenges to this conviction were fervently refuted whatever their relative validity.

When taken as a collective, the ss *Great Britain* Project represented what could be categorised as a particularly influential group of ss *Great Britain* enthusiasts but as Hilary Geoghegan points out, to be classified in this way 'is not necessarily a compliment'.<sup>59</sup> Historically, the term 'enthusiasm' was first used in England in the early seventeenth century to describe, 'religious or prophetic frenzy...this frenzy was ascribed to being possessed by spirits sent not only by God but also the Devil. During this period, those who disobeyed the powers that be or claimed to have a message from God were considered enthusiasts.'<sup>60</sup> The almost quasi-religious aspect to the preservation and restoration of material artefacts and technology is a theme that is expanded on in the work of Dannefer in his examination of the social world of old car collectors. To Dannefer 'whilst almost any conventional religion would consider 'devotion to an object such as an automobile hedonistic and short-sighted' due to the attachment's obvious 'secular and material focus' some features of the passionate preservation of antique technology bears a strong correlation to religious practice.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> R.G.A Dolby, "Sociology of knowledge in natural science." *Social Studies of Science*, 1,1 (1971): p.5

<sup>59</sup> Geoghegan, 'If you can walk down the street and recognise the difference between cast iron and wrought iron, the world is altogether a better place' n/p

<sup>60</sup> Geoghegan, 'If you can walk down the street and recognise the difference between cast iron and wrought iron, the world is altogether a better place' n/p

<sup>61</sup> D. Dannefer, 'Rationality and Passion in Private Experience: Modern Consciousness and the Social World of Old-Car Collectors', *Social Problems*, 27,4 (1980) p. 393

In a somewhat confessional speech Ewan Corlett delivered to the Society of Oxford University Engineers in 1990, Corlett addressed the more irrational forces propelling the early ss *Great Britain* Project forward directly: ‘I think it was James Duport who said ‘whom God would destroy he first sends mad.’<sup>62</sup> When I first wrote to *The Times* suggesting that something should be done about the *Great Britain* - and got an overwhelming response - quite a few people, including, I fear, my wife, thought I had gone mad.’

This is an extraordinarily frank admission from an individual whom archival records and oral history accounts present as a fastidious and unsentimental man and consequently not prone to overpowering passions or acts of imaginative folly. This theme of irrationality was returned to repeatedly throughout the rest of Corlett’s speech, with the naval engineer even going so far as to assign the ss *Great Britain* anthropomorphic qualities that proved capable of taking hold the imagination, projecting its own siren call and in turn exerting a powerful influence on human behaviour.

Most engineering disciplines deal with mere machinery, bridge structures, aircraft, vehicles and so on. Naval architects deal with ships. Ships are different, they have personalities - sometimes very cussed ones – maybe that is why we refer to a ship as she. You can build two identical sister ships and one will be a bitch all her life, apparently the aphorism that the goal of all inanimate objects is to resist man and ultimately defeat him. Yet the sister ship can be the exact opposite, living out her life with the affection of all who have to do with her.<sup>63</sup>

With the ss *Great Britain's* future seemingly assured in the event of the ship's return to the United Kingdom and the restoration at an advanced stage, Corlett felt secure enough to reveal, that to a certain extent at least, the motivations that led to the ship's successful salvage perhaps lay outside the bounds of rational calculation. The speech is also significant in its contrast with Corlett’s 1967 letter to *The Times* which is credited with increased public awareness of the *Great Britain* and marshalling support for the incipient restoration attempt. Here Corlett diminishes the personal in his petition to begin salvage proceedings.<sup>64</sup> Instead, Corlett focuses on broader themes of shared history, the *Great Britain's* importance to understandings of maritime heritage and the figure of Brunel as democratising what had hitherto served as a somewhat individual interest.

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<sup>62</sup> E. Corlett, transcript of speech made in 1990 to SOUE Annual Dinner, Oxford Engineering Alumni (formerly the Society of Oxford University Engineers) *SOUE News - Ewan Corlett, 1923 - 2005*: <http://www.soue.org.U.K/souenews/issue4/corlett.html> 28th April 2014

<sup>63</sup> Corlett, SOUE Annual Dinner, 1990

<sup>64</sup> Corlett, '*First Iron Steamship*'

Corlett, Strathcona and Goold Adam's identification of imagery and literature as the principal source of inspiration in the early stages of the ss *Great Britain* Project is noteworthy in highlighting the extent to which it was driven by personal concerns. As Harold Osborne contends, inspiration is often identified with 'sources outside oneself' but it also, critically manifests in often compulsive and non-rational behaviour.<sup>65</sup> This does not diminish the *Great Britain* as an item of historic interest but it does highlight the inherently intimate nature of the Project to these individuals and the particular manner of their interest in the ship.

In this regard, the early ss *Great Britain* Project typifies many of the academic criticisms of the pursuit of industrial archaeology. Namely, the opinion that scattershot preservation of historical artefacts, driven by individualistic devotion, have little if anything, to do with the pursuit of true historical knowledge. As Marion Blockley contends; academics have subsequently lamented the lack of clear research agenda associated with the subject of industrial archaeology where, arguably, a strategic approach to the selection of 'buildings, landscapes, townscapes and machinery' would have yielded far more productive, and potentially instructive, lines of academic enquiry.<sup>66</sup>

The borderline fetishisation of industrial objects was also a point of concern for other academic commentators. Early industrial archaeology enthusiasts, proved object-led to an extent that prompted considerable unease to those who possessed research interests that went beyond mere preservation and restoration.<sup>67</sup> In the words of Blockley the 'sense of urgency to conserve the physical evidence of early industry... led to an over-emphasis on the concept of the industrial monument.'<sup>68</sup> In Blockley's estimation, this preservation-led approach engendered the conservation of a set of industrial monuments that were almost entirely divorced from their social and economic contexts. To Blockley, the limited resources of the industrial archaeology movement would have been far better served preserving 'company archives, oral testimony of the workforce, documentary film footage and aerial photographic survey as opposed to the 'preservation of building shells and entire landscapes of extraction.'<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> H. Osborne, "Inspiration." *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 17,3 (1977) .p.243

<sup>66</sup> Blockley, 'Preservation, restoration and presentation of the Industrial Heritage', p.142

<sup>67</sup> M. Nevell, 'The 2005 Rolt Memorial Lecture Industrial Archaeology or the Archaeology of the Industrial Period? Models, Methodology and the Future of Industrial Archaeology.' *Industrial Archaeology Review* (2013). p.8

<sup>68</sup> Blockley, 'Preservation, Restoration and Presentation of the Industrial Heritage' p.142

<sup>69</sup> Blockley, 'Preservation, Restoration and Presentation of the Industrial Heritage' p.143

The charge levelled at the industrial archaeology movement is that, having been presented with such a full and diverse range of potential source material, exponents wilfully abnegated their responsibility for scrupulous academic enquiry in favour of a mania of scattershot preservation and unreflective object fixation. In the damning assessment of Blockley, this single-minded obsession with artefacts of the material culture of industrialisation led to a superabundance of ‘waterwheels and steam engines’ without an accompanying (and necessary) interpretative context.<sup>70</sup> These apparent deficiencies in the pursuit of industrial archaeology have led to the broad contention that the practice is less concerned with providing a semblance of academic rigour and intellectual oversight into the process and effects of industrialisation, and far more concerned with ‘preserving a particular way of life’.<sup>71</sup>

As the recollections of the senior figures of the ss *Great Britain* Project team demonstrate, their own personal identification with the fate of the ship was not produced as the result of a concerted research agenda but instead with more, individual and abstract modes of reasoning. The individualistic aspects of the ss *Great Britain*’s preservation would prove to be the source of much of the Project’s eventual success, ensuring the Project’s flexibility and entrepreneurial approach to problem solving. However, it also ensured that in its early stages, the ss *Great Britain*’s restoration would acutely reflect the concerns and preoccupations of the individuals who sought to salvage her from the Falklands in 1970.

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<sup>70</sup> Blockley, 'Preservation, Restoration and Presentation of the Industrial Heritage' p.144

<sup>71</sup> Blockley, 'Preservation, Restoration and Presentation of the Industrial Heritage' ' p.142

## The ss *Great Britain* as object of Nationalism



**Fig 3.5.** Walter. J c. 1845. *Great Britain* crashing against the waves during a heavy gale. The image is notable in its marked similarity to the lithograph identified by Corlett as prompting his interest in the ship. Produced in May 1845, Walter's painting may have taken inspiration from the earlier image produced in the *London Illustrated News*. This image was one used by the Project in a 1968 pamphlet which sought to communicate the Project's aims to a wider public. The ship is cast as valiantly battling against the tide and it is intriguing to reflect upon what the Project was attempting to convey in their selection of this particular painting. Courtesy of ss *Great Britain* Trust.

As the previous chapter demonstrated, the ss *Great Britain* found little in the way of symbolic resonance in the Falkland Islands. Nonetheless, symbolic notions of nationhood and the ss *Great Britain*'s capacity in communicating it, were central to the key figures of the ss *Great Britain* Project team. To Richard Goold Adams, *Great Britain* the nation and *Great Britain* the ship were inextricably linked. 'No other ship in modern times had carried the country's name, and she had done so for nearly a century. If she was worth saving she was more than worth saving for that.'<sup>72</sup> Lord Euan Strathcona, offered a similarly nationalistic explanation for his involvement with the Project and his view of the importance of the *Great Britain*.

Well I'm an extremist on this issue. I think it is the most important historic ship anywhere and I think for Britain it's just worth considering what happened as a result of this ship being built. The merchant marine was on its way up but it was the introduction of ships developed from the *Great Britain* which really made British [Britain?] maritime...lead to British maritime domination.<sup>73</sup>

Patriotic principles were also to the fore of the ss *Great Britain*'s principal financier, multi-

<sup>72</sup> Goold Adams, *Return of the Great Britain*, p.9

<sup>73</sup> Interview with Donald Euan Palmer Howard Strathcona, *The Incredible Journey*

millionaire businessperson, philanthropist and property developer Sir Jack Hayward. Born in 1923, only child of Charles Hayward, leading industrialist and owner of the Firth Cleveland Company, Hayward made his fortune through the expansion of his father's business. Known by the affectionate moniker 'Union' Jack, Hayward, as his appellation suggests, was noted principally for his generous patronage of all things British. Donating money to affect the repairs of the King Edward VII memorial hospital in the Falklands after the Falklands War, Hayward was also a prominent benefactor of the Battle of Britain monument on the Embankment in London.<sup>74</sup> A keen patriot, Hayward even insisted that everything at his Sussex home be 'British made' where possible. In Hayward's own words, 'I've always had a love of Great Britain and a feeling of great joy that I was born British.'<sup>75</sup>

It was this patriotically driven philanthropy and in particular, Hayward's financial assistance with the purchase of Lundy Island by the National Trust, which led the ss *Great Britain* Project team to approach Hayward in 1969 with the aim of seeking a monetary contribution towards the Project's aims. Describing the success of the meeting in *The Return of the Iron Ship*, Goold Adams recalls what was intended as a brief half hour discussion lasting two and a half. According to Goold Adam's own account of this meeting:

It was nearing lunchtime and just when I was beginning to feel that we might not after all be able to settle anything at this first meeting, I suddenly realised that I had almost missed the crucial words: 'That's all right, I heard him say in exactly the same tone as before... I'll see the ship home.] In a single stroke, Hayward had solved the financial problems of the ss *Great Britain* Project's proposed salvage of the vessel and transformed uncertainties and possibilities into stable plans and practical realities.'<sup>76</sup>

In the overt nationalism of its most influential figures, the ss *Great Britain* Project embodied one of the principal strands of early industrial archaeology in the United Kingdom. The work of Philip L. Kohl makes the case that the ostensibly 'subjective' interests of industrial archaeology's proponents almost entirely settled on the selection, preservation and deployment of 'inherited symbols, myths and national remains' as an act of constructed national myth making.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> D. Instone, *Sir Jack*, (London, 2000)

<sup>75</sup> Wolverhampton History, 'Sir Jack Hayward.' Available at: [http://www.wolverhamptonhistory.org.U.K/people/local/hayward\\_j](http://www.wolverhamptonhistory.org.U.K/people/local/hayward_j) 03 June 2014

<sup>76</sup> Goold Adams *The Return of the Great Britain* p.56

<sup>77</sup> P. L. Kohl, Nationalism and Archaeology: On the Constructions of Nations and the Reconstructions of the Remote past, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 27, (1998) p.226

As Walter Minchinton points out, while the scope of industrial archaeology ‘may vary from country to country’ all its various manifestations are strongly ‘influenced by the economic, social and political history of a particular locality.’<sup>78</sup> In a comprehensive article first published in 1983, Minchinton outlines both the significant national differences in expressions of industrial archaeology and the degree to which these variances are politically guided.

In Eastern Europe, enthusiasm for industrial archaeology, where it forms part of material culture, is still limited. The subject matter is restricted in two respects. Interest is allowed in watermills and windmills; in general, anything constructed before 1850 is politically safe except where there is a wish to demonstrate the superiority of the communist political system.<sup>79</sup>

This is not, of course, to suggest a direct equivalency between industrial archaeology in the former Soviet Bloc and the United Kingdom. One a manifestation of the governing concerns of a centralised coordinated bureaucracy and the other a largely grassroots, amateur undertaking closely associated with recreational enthusiasts. Minchinton’s work does however, hint at the manner in which preservation is rarely apolitical and certainly the ss *Great Britain* Project was no exception in this regard.

To Stratchcona and Richard Goold Adams,’ the ss *Great Britain* symbolically represented the nation not as they currently experienced it during the late 1960s but as the idealised nation they imagined it once was replete with myths of nationhood and long vanished national strength. A key passage in Richard Goold Adam’s account of the ss *Great Britain* indicates that Goold Adams believed he, and the Project he represented, were on the wrong side of contemporary political and economic consensus. As Goold Adams explained, the urgency with which the Project was pursued was not only the result of environmental and temporal factors but political developments in the United Kingdom, as he explained in the *Return of the Iron Ship*.

Not only would she [the ss *Great Britain*] have broken up in Sparrow Cove in another year or two, but by then it would also have been impossible for a private group such as ours to operate as we did. Quite apart from the mountainous rise in costs, our, our aims and ideas would have been subjected to public and political criticism to a degree, which would have made it extremely difficult to make headway. On top of everything else, the national situation would have prevented this money coming in. As it is, while

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<sup>78</sup> Minchinton, ‘World Industrial Archaeology: A Survey,’ p.127

<sup>79</sup> Minchinton, ‘World Industrial Archaeology: A Survey,’ p.127

we had our full measure of denigration, we have won through just enough to come through the other side.<sup>80</sup>

As the above passage suggests it would not be inaccurate to characterise Goold Adams as an individual who was out of lock-step with the broader aims and ideals of post-war policy compromises.\* A prominent business person, Goold Adams was involved in the establishment of ITN, a former member of the Royal Institute of International Affairs and one of the four founding members of the Institute for Strategic Studies (which specialised in political and military conflict with a strong pro-American agenda).<sup>81</sup> The Institute for Strategic Studies (ISS) enjoyed the generous patronage of the Ford Foundation and the Rockefeller Institute and was initially established to explore the ethical and moral dimensions to nuclear war. During Goold Adams' lifetime, the Institute's activities were principally concerned with the Soviet –NATO balance of power and encouraging reluctant intellectual Cold War 'neutralists' to more closely align themselves with the United States.<sup>82</sup>

Between these other concerns, Goold Adams was also a journalist for *The Economist* and, should his particular brand of conservatism be in doubt, was capable of articulating his political opinions in an unambiguous and forthright manner. One such example was a searing letter he wrote to the editor of the journal *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy* in 1975 – in the midst of the ss *Great Britain* restoration Project.<sup>83</sup> As the letter reveals, Goold Adams was an early advocate of the Pinochet regime's Milton Friedman inspired brand of *laissez faire* economics. Consequently, Goold Adams regarded the tales of human rights abuses and mass disappearances emerging from Chile as 'world-wide orchestrated' and 'politically motivated'.<sup>84</sup> Warning against 'Allende'\* roads' which appeared to be emerging in Britain,

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<sup>80</sup> Goold Adams, *The Return of the Great Britain*, p.ix

\*The allusion to 'post-war consensus' is deployed here in a very broad sense - see Paul Addison, *The Road to 1945: British Politics & The Second World War* (London, 1975) and Dennis Kavanagh, *Thatcherism and British Politics: The End of Consensus* (Oxford, 1987). The phrase has nonetheless been attacked by academics such as Anthony Bulter, "The End of Post-War Consensus: Reflections on the Scholarly Uses of Political Rhetoric." *The Political Quarterly* 64,4 (1993) and Ben Pimlott 'The Myth of Consensus' in *The Making of Britain: Echoes of Greatness* eds. by Lesley M. Smith (Basingstoke, 1988). It is not the place to grapple with this debate here. Suffice to say Goold Adams' own brand of economic conservatism seemingly tended towards the Hayekian rather than Keynesian. In 1975 this was still a relatively unfashionable position to hold although rapidly gaining currency with the right of the Conservative Party following Keith Joseph's outspoken public advocacy of classical economic liberalism.

<sup>81</sup> 'Richard Goold Adams- Obituary', *The Times*, 7 April 1995

<sup>82</sup> Institute for Strategic Studies - 'About Us'

<http://www.iiss.org/en/about-s-us> 14 April 2014

<sup>83</sup> Richard Goold Adams, 'Letter to the editor', *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy* 17,1 (1975) p.52

<sup>84</sup> Goold Adams, 'Letter to the editor' p.52

\* Salvador Allende (26 June 1908 – 11 September 1973) The first Marxist candidate in Latin America to win the presidency in open democratic elections. Allende was ousted from government in a military coup



Goold Adams presumed to speak for the 'ordinary Chilean' in declaring the 'political price for Chile's economic 'miracle' a 'great deal less than it might have been.'<sup>85</sup>

Goold Adam's political sympathies are relevant in the extent to which they informed his involvement with the ss *Great Britain* Project. Goold Adams' account of the *Great Britain's* salvage and restoration reveal an individual deeply concerned with preserving not only an object which embodied nationhood but which was invested with a very specific notion of 'Britishness.' To Goold Adams, the inclusivity and compromises inherent in the shared policy aims and public ownership of post-war consensus led to an abandonment of the precisely the values which he supposed defined the nation. Without labouring the point too heavily, it is relatively unproblematic to divine the appeal, to Goold Adams, of a ship that evoked symbolic traces of British Imperial past, a supposedly lost 'culture of enterprise' and a masculine culture of adventurism. Addressing this exact point directly, Goold Adams posited that 'concern for our great maritime history has come just at the moment when there has been a massive shift in control of national resources into public hands.'<sup>86</sup> Preservation of maritime industrial artefacts was, to Goold Adams, not only an act of protecting the physical but also the symbolic.

The nature of Richard Goold Adam's political sympathies and its connection with his own relationship with the ss *Great Britain* Project are wholly consistent with the early impulses that drove the larger industrial archaeology movement in the United Kingdom. Historians such as James Symonds, Philip Kohl and Diane Barthel have sought to outline that nationalist influences which underpinned much early industrial archaeology in the United Kingdom but also the specific manner in which it manifested, communicating shared communal ideals of individualism, entrepreneurialism and creativity.<sup>87</sup>

To these historians, an understanding of these nationalist concerns is central to understanding why industrial archaeologists choose to preserve the artefacts they did, focussing on an era and individuals which were thought to best embody these principles. In choosing to preserve the material remnants of what was left by the 'Goliaths' of nineteenth-century, industrial

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orchestrated by the CIA and led by General Augusto Pinochet. The Pinochet coup resulted in a dramatic reorientation of the Chilean economy which embraced free-market economic liberalisation.

<sup>85</sup> Goold Adams, 'Letter to the editor' p.52

<sup>86</sup> Goold Adams, *Return of the Great Britain* p.218

<sup>87</sup> See Kohl, 'Nationalism and Archaeology,' J. Symonds, "Experiencing Industry", *Industrial Archaeology - Contributions To Global Historical Archaeology* (2005) & Barthel, 'Getting in Touch with History'

archaeologists lent physical shape to the erroneous and academically discredited belief that British 'exceptionalism' was the major spur for the sweeping economic and material transformation that occurred in the country after 1750.

Revealing another faultline between academic history and industrial preservation, contemporary economic historians have largely discredited the 'diffusion models' which suggested Britain essentially invented the paradigm for modern economic growth to which the less entrepreneurial and more slovenly nations of the world will always be indebted.<sup>88</sup> O'Brien's specific objections to this particular view of industrialisation are worth quoting at length.

British historians are less entitled to receive respect for interpretations of the First Industrial Revolution which ignore its European antecedents and exaggerate elements of British culture, institutions, social structure and national character....they can no longer elevate the core features of the British Industrial Revolution to a historical paradigm of best practice techniques of productions, efficient modes of industrial organisation and optimal economic policies that were all available to rival European economies at the time.<sup>89</sup>

If notions of 'British exceptionalism' had in essence been defamed by academic research, this principle found fertile ground in the swelling ranks of early industrial archaeologists. Early industrial archaeology and the enthusiasts that comprised its wider network arguably did much – in their specific selection of the material artefacts of industrialisation – to propagandise the notion that industrialisation was the result of a uniquely British spirit of innovation and creativity. These historical objects were thus imbued with the burden of representing a weighty if ill-defined national character. Industrial archaeologists often wilfully selected, preserved and deployed 'inherited symbols, myths and national remains' as an act of constructed national myth making.<sup>90</sup>

Nationalism, nostalgia and the underlying conceit of 'great men of history are often intertwined. In the assessment of Symonds,' much of the fascination with the industrial revolution can be traced to 'the idea that a special and quintessentially British genius was at work in this period [which] helped to define a national identity, but...has been rarely seen

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<sup>88</sup> P. K. O'Brien, "The Britishness of the first industrial revolution and the British contribution to the industrialization of 'follower countries' on the mainland, 1756–1914." *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 8,3 (1997) p.50

<sup>89</sup> O'Brien, "The Britishness of the first industrial revolution and the British contribution to the industrialization of 'follower countries' on the mainland, 1756–1914." p.50

<sup>90</sup> P. L. Kohl, Nationalism and Archaeology: On the Constructions of Nations and the Reconstructions of the Remote past, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 27 (1998) p.226

since.’<sup>91</sup>

The particular order of nationalism identified by Symonds was one manifested by Ewan Corlett, in relation to his participation with the ss *Great Britain* Project. If Goold Adams’ nationalist inclinations were general and non-specific (at least in association with the *Great Britain*) Corlett’s was coupled with a stronger association with his own career and personal identity. The nationalist underpinnings of Corlett’s involvement in the Project were buttressed by a strong sense of personal identification with British ‘engineering leviathians.’ In *The Iron Ship* Corlett dedicated an entire section of what he considered the unparalleled contribution of the ‘British Engineer’ to the world at large.

Men such as Watt, Trevithick, Newcomen, Maudsely were all really mechanics who became engineers, forced by the hothouse atmosphere that was developing in Britain at the beginning of the nineteenth century. They were a new type – pragmatic, forceful, technically practical – paralleled by isolated individuals in other countries, particularly America – but not by a whole new breed of men as in Britain.<sup>92</sup>

It was clear, too, that Corlett believed the figure of Brunel, and his status as iconic engineering hero, remained of considerable importance and had considerable moral lessons to impart to the modern United Kingdom. In a letter dated 21 October 1976, thanking one John Fisher for a complimentary copy of a recent biography of Brunel, Corlett strongly emphasised the inspirational nature of the message he believed were contained in the life and achievements of Brunel.

Everything I have done in connection of the *Great Britain* has increased my respect for Brunel's foresight, engineering ability and imagination.... with this time [when] national self-confidence is at a low ebb it is well worth reading what can be done with imagination.<sup>93</sup>

Returning to this theme, in his 1990 speech to the SOUE, Corlett suggested that the iconic figure of Brunel served as a continued source of personal identification and approbation: ‘Isambard Kingdom Brunel was one of the most remarkable engineers that Britain or the world ever produced. His energy, vision and engineering genius must excite the admiration of any engineer - it certainly did mine.’<sup>94</sup> An aspirational figure for the modern naval engineer, Brunel’s creativity and ingenuity were attributes to be both admired and emulated.

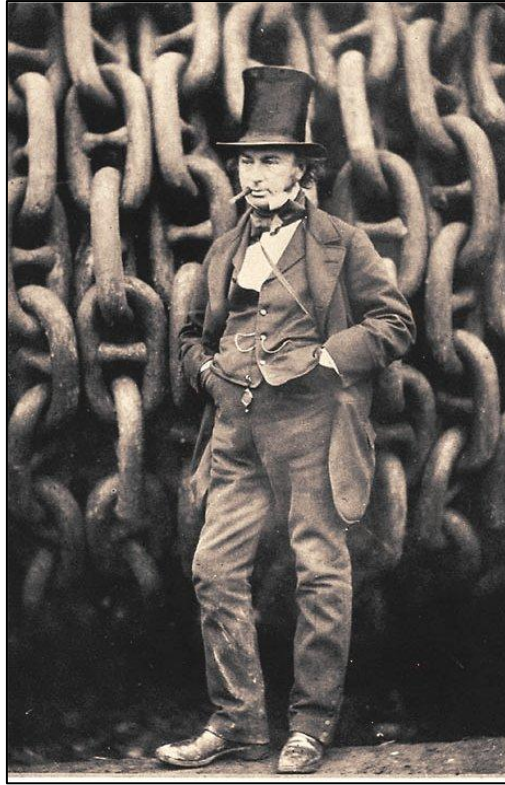
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<sup>91</sup> Symonds, "Experiencing Industry", p.43

<sup>92</sup> Corlett, *Iron Ship*, p.6

<sup>93</sup> SSGBT: ECM.B1 Letter from Ewan Corlett to John Fisher, 21<sup>st</sup> October 1971

<sup>94</sup> Corlett, SOUE Annual Dinner, 1990



**Fig. 3.6** Howlett, Robert c.1857 ‘A whole new breed of man’ this iconic photograph of Isambard Kingdom Brunel is appreciably the most widely circulated image of the illustrious British engineer. Brunel, in the foreground, is framed by the enormous launching chains of the *Great Britain*’s successor, the *Great Eastern*. The photo was taken by Robert Howlett, described by the *London Illustrated News* as ‘one of the most skilful photographers of his day’ as part of a commission for *The Times*. Brunel is casually posed in front of the Promethean chains he helped create, his gaze fixed somewhere outside the frame. This staging suggests Brunel’s command over both technology and, by extension, the natural world itself. In reality these same chains would whip out of control during the *Great Eastern*’s launch in 1857 throwing a shipworker to his death.<sup>95</sup> The *Great Eastern* Project would also hasten Brunel’s own demise, the ship’s construction was beset with problems and Brunel suffered a stroke on the eve of the ship’s launch - eventually dying ten days later. The level of authority Brunel held over materiality presented by this photograph was therefore somewhat illusory. Courtesy of ss *Great Britain Trust*.

Corlett’s admiration for Brunel and his efforts to preserve the ss *Great Britain* highlight some of the wider deficiencies of industrial archaeology as whole. To Symonds, the popular mythology surrounding industrialisation in Britain wrongly claimed it as an era of engineering colossi, who, by acts of prodigious will and formidable ingenuity, presided over the largest single technological and environmental upheaval ever experienced in the United Kingdom. Corlett’s categorisation of prominent nineteenth century British engineers as ‘whole new breed of men’ suggests this was a viewpoint he shared. To Corlett, the ss *Great Britain* was not only ipso facto a British achievement, it was produced as the result of what he regarded as a very specific set of British traits. As he explained in *The Iron Ship*, the ss

<sup>95</sup> J.Jones, Isambard Kingdom Brunel, Robert Howlett (1857), *The Guardian*, 17 June 2000 <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2000/jun/17/art.07.06.2016>

*Great Britain* was developed, in part, as a uniquely British response to troubling indications that its global hegemony was being challenged by its economic competitors:

Britain, with about 2,500,000 tons of shipping, much of it inferior to that of its prime competitor, the United States was faced with more or less competition on her trade routes. On the Atlantic that competition took the form of fast, efficient, American vessels more economic by any standards than that of the bulk of British shipping. Appearances deceive, however, and beneath the surface and in the minds of gifted men a revolution in ship design and operation was being conceived. The way for Britain to conduct this fight was not with American weapons – sail, wood, canvas – but with *ideas*...<sup>96</sup>

Corlett's framing of the drives that motivated the construction of the ss *Great Britain* are revealing. By 1975, at the time of Corlett's writing, the stark consequences of these early American challenges to British financial supremacy were abundantly plain and Britain's status as 'figurative' workshop of the world had long ceased to reflect any degree of objective reality. Corlett's narrative reframes the increasing momentum of American economic power in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century not as a fundamental and irreversible reordering of existing economic dynamics but as an ascendancy which could be directly challenged by a characteristically 'British' form of ingenuity. It is entirely possible therefore that there is an element of didacticism at work in Corlett's explanation of the *Great Britain's* origins – structuring the explanation in such a way as to evoke the nation's past successes as a means to counter existing economic and political realities.

Corlett's perspective on the ss *Great Britain's* origins are consistent with industrial archaeology as a discipline which often found common cause with political perspectives that found difficulty in adjusting to the United Kingdom's post-war status. Corlett wrote the above passage in 1975, a year before what was interpreted as the absolute nadir of post-war abasements in 1976 with the collapse in confidence in Sterling and then Chancellor Denis Healey's application to the IMF for a \$3.9 billion dollar loan.<sup>97</sup> As Andrew Gamble recounts, the sudden 'flood of state of England' writing this incident unleashed actually began far earlier, as a 'slow trickle' in 1959 and gained considerable momentum over time.<sup>98</sup> Corlett's evocation of the nineteenth-century British engineer as a means to address diminishing post-war status may, in part, have been produced as a result of an exaggerated attribution of this figure's mythic status. Christine MacLeod's deconstruction of the image of

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<sup>96</sup> Corlett, *Iron Ship*, p.8

<sup>97</sup> A. Gamble, *Britain in Decline*, (Hong Kong:1981) p.21

<sup>98</sup> Gamble, *Britain in Decline*, p.21

the nineteenth-century inventor has demonstrated, this promethean figure was, largely, a political invention of the time. To MacLeod, figures such as James Watt, George and Robert Stephenson, Marc and Isambard Brunel were appropriated by a radicalising trend in British politics largely as a reaction to ‘a swelling tide of nationalism which cast military heroes as the standard-bearers of British national identity after the Napoleonic wars.’<sup>99</sup> The death of James Watt in 1819 provided the reformers the ‘first opportunity to subvert the dominant heroic image’ of the time.<sup>100</sup> If not quite an ‘everyman figure’, the nineteenth-century inventor recommended itself as a figure of celebration by not originating from the landed gentry or ruling political establishment. Cast as the totem of ‘the rising industrial classes’ to MacLeod the nineteenth-century inventor:

Personified the claim that it was not military prowess that made Great Britain great, but the ingenuity and enterprise of its ‘industrious’ citizens, the country’s strength and global influence rested on the prosperity generated by manufacturing and trade; peaceful competition was a more secure route than a war to individual happiness and national supremacy.<sup>101</sup>

The enormous and transformative acts of civil engineering that characterised the era propelling ‘railways across the landscapes’ bridging ‘estuaries and gorges’ and tunnelling beneath the River Thames provided a highly visible claim to the technological supremacy of the engineers.<sup>102</sup> The impression left by the extensive material legacy of prominent civil engineers and inventors of the nineteenth century was augmented by the subsequent memorialisation of these figures and the totems of celebration and glorification that were left in their wake. In the words of MacLeod, ‘hero-worshipping Britain’ went ‘statue mad’ during Victoria’s reign and ‘embellished the country’s squares, parks, and buildings with the images of great men including these ‘benefactors of humanity’ the distinguished nineteenth-century inventor.’<sup>103</sup>

MacLeod’s work highlights the degree to which industrial archaeology manifested and reproduced a singular and largely mythic image of industrialisation in Britain. In an understanding of industrialisation that echoed the philosophy of Thomas Carlyle and philosophers such as Hegel, the complex economic, political, social and technological process that was the industrial revolution was reduced to the history of ‘great men’, the belief

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<sup>99</sup> C. Macleod, *Heroes of Invention: Technology, Liberalism and British Identity, 1750-1914* (Cambridge: 2007) p.1 -2

<sup>100</sup> Macleod, *Heroes of Invention* p.3

<sup>101</sup> Macleod, *Heroes of Invention* p.3

<sup>102</sup> Macleod, *Heroes of Invention* p.4

<sup>103</sup> Macleod *Heroes of Invention* p.3

that 'heroes' shape history through a form of divine inspiration.<sup>104</sup> For MacLeod, this history of invention as one of self-made men was not only a gross distortion of the facts but it was also potentially damaging to continued forms of scientific enquiry. Encouraging complacency, so Macleod argues, it further threatened to 'undermine the purely intellectual pursuit of scientific knowledge' which, as MacLeod suggests, is of 'cultural importance independent of any technical utility it might possess.'<sup>105</sup>

Created by a form of political expediency and sustained by an abundance of material artefacts that littered the landscape, this misconception of the industrial transformation the United Kingdom led industrial archaeologists to focus their preservationist tendencies on the era's 'key figures' at the expense of a more representative sample of the industrial landscape.<sup>106</sup> Arguably, the intervention of enthusiasts, exacerbated and compounded this initial misconception of industrialisation, in choosing to preserve only that which was linked to the extraordinary individuals of the industrial revolution their impact and status is yet further enlarged and a significant historic event is reduced to a simplified caricature - a primitive tableaux of great men and their accomplishments.

In this regard, industrial archaeology can be viewed as an attempt to display via tableau, a reassuring, if somewhat imaginary conception of the British national identity and in so doing address an emotional desire to arrest and even challenge contemporary domestic malaise. Compared to the more fatalistic view of the historical past of the United Kingdom offered by economic historians, artefacts such as the ss *Great Britain* presented a far more optimistic, if nostalgia tinged, appraisal of British history which emphasised its extraordinary aspects and suggested a redemptive narrative if only these communal values could be rediscovered. In the final paragraph of his account of the *Great Britain's* return, Richard Goold Adams, drew a similar conclusion to Corlett and makes explicit what he considers the didactic and self-evident value of such an undertaking.

The wider truth, however is that, whatever may be the fashionable thought in a changing age, the human race today is inseparable from its own past. It is what it is, because of the way it has come to reach the point that it has. And, in the age of Concorde, knowledge of the industrial steps to the summit are essential to an

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<sup>104</sup> T. Carlyle *On heroes, hero-worship, and the heroic in history* vol. 1 (1840) Reprint (California, 1993), G.W.F.Hegel, (trans. John Sibree) *The philosophy of history* (1822-1830) Reprint (Chelmsford, 2004)

<sup>105</sup> C. Macleod and J. Tann, 'From engineer to scientist: reinventing invention in the Watt and Faraday centenaries, 1919-31.' *The British Journal for the History of Science*, 40, 3 (2007): p.405

<sup>106</sup> Blockley, 'Preservation, restoration and presentation of Industrial Heritage' p.143

understanding, as well as an appreciation of the current achievement in itself. The *Great Britain*, we somewhat tritely observe was the Concorde of her day. Just as bold just as revolutionary, just as challenging to the doubters, she represented one of the supreme engineering and industrial steps ever taken in this country, or indeed the world.<sup>107</sup>

Goold Adam's view of the inherent worth of the ss *Great Britain* is consistent with what Diane Bartel's considers the underlying 'instructive' stimulus for the preservation of many industrial artefacts. To Bartel, the value of pursuing industrial archaeology to many of its adherents lay in its ability to instruct, inform and even inculcate the appropriate values in those who experience these objects directly.<sup>108</sup> In the words of Bartel:

Industrial narratives have moral content. In these interpretations, emphasis is traditionally placed on the personal and moral qualities of inventors and early industrialists - their ingenuity, creativity, enterprise and sheer hard work. Sometimes explicit mention is made of the need to recapture and reinstill such moral qualities today if Western nations such as Britain and the United States are to emerge from the post-industrial doldrums.<sup>109</sup>

Bartel's perspective on the urge to preserve and restore artefacts of industrialisation provides a penetrating insight into why industrial objects were uniquely selected for conservation. To enthusiasts, industrial objects were not only seen as warehouses of collective identity but were also selected as a means of communicating this shared identity, and the values associated with it, to a wider group of participants. The solidity of the object of artefacts of industrial heritage such as the ss *Great Britain* offered a unique and unambiguous appeal, a fixed and permanent reminder of Britain's once pre-eminent economic status in the world. The appeal of preserving industrial artefacts, then, was two-fold: not only did they offer an attractive visual counterpoint to perceptions of Britain's relative economic decline; they also hinted at a possible present-day salvation from it.

The ss *Great Britain* Project in its early stages manifested elements of nationalism, reflected perceptions of national decline and in turn refracted that perspective outward in interpreting ship as a imparting a moral rejoinder to the United Kingdom's relatively diminished post-war role on the world stage. To Richard Goold Adams at least, the image of the ss *Great Britain* that would prove so poignant and arresting was that of the ship abandoned and slowly rotting

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<sup>107</sup> Goold Adams, *Return of the Great Britain*, p.219

<sup>108</sup> Barthel, 'Getting in Touch with History:' p.348

<sup>109</sup> Barthel, 'Getting in Touch with History:' p.348



into the sea in a far-flung and forgotten vestige of Empire. It is potentially not too great an imaginative leap to suppose that this imagery stirred the conceptual impulses which allowed these symbolic and abstract notions to take hold and be coupled with the form of the ship.

### The ss *Great Britain* as object of contested meaning : Amateur and Professional



**Fig 3.7.** (Photographer Unknown) 1971 The ss *Great Britain* as she appeared in Bristol's Harbourside shortly after her arrival in the city. This photograph serves as a counterpoint to the aerial photography of the ship's return in July 1970 – images which emphasise the aesthetic appeal of the ship's 'clean lines'. In contrast this photograph presents the material disorder of the vessel and the scale of the task confronting the Project during restoration. The ship's presence in Bristol and its status as a figurative 'blank canvas' triggered occasional acrimony amongst Project team members and demonstrated the division between differing conceptual images of the *Great Britain*. Courtesy of ss *Great Britain* Trust.

As previously discussed, the genesis of industrial archaeology in the United Kingdom has often been described as a grass-root, amateur led movement.<sup>110</sup> The preservation of industrial artefacts in the U.K. was driven largely by the personal passions and subjective interests of committed individual aficionados as opposed to broader academic or scientific concerns. The hobbyist inclinations of industrial archaeology in the United Kingdom were, to a large extent, geographically specific. In the United States, for example, academic interests elided far more naturally with its own industrial archaeology movement despite it developing at approximately the same time as in the United Kingdom. As Michael Nevell points out, in the U.S., a 'strong tradition of social archaeology was applied to the investigation of society

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<sup>110</sup> Hudson, *Industrial archaeology*

during the 18th and 19th centuries' from the outset<sup>111</sup>

To Richard Goold Adams, this enthusiastic, individual passion for the ss *Great Britain* amongst its Project's members was key to its success. Returning to the frequent theme of his inherent distrust of bureaucratic entities Goold Adams hints, that enterprising individualism drove the Project forward in its early stages.

The fact remained, as almost anyone with practical experience will bear witness, that success or failure depends on more than the individuals concerned than on any committee as such. A camel, it is often said, is a horse put together by committee - but few committees are as useful. Or, to use the words of that great but temporarily discredited British poet, Rudyard Kipling: 'It is always one man's work, always and everywhere.' While dealing with the *Great Britain* has never been precisely that, the principle holds good of its [the salvage operation having [involved] only two or three at a given time.<sup>112</sup>

At face value, the ss *Great Britain* Project shared in industrial archaeology's broader status of remaining on the 'periphery of the academic world'<sup>113</sup> whilst largely being indebted to the contributions of passionate lay-people. In the words of Raphael Samuel 'It was not the economic historians but the steam fanatics....who resuscitated the crumbling walls and rusting ironwork of eighteenth century furnaces and kilns, who kept alive or revived a sense of wonder at the miracles of invention which made the mid-Victorian Britain, the workshop of the world, and who treasured those cyclopean machines and clanking monsters that dieselisation or electrification consigned to the scrapheap.'<sup>114</sup>

As Samuel suggests, while often instinctive and partisan in their selection of objects for preservation, the passionate intensity that industrial archaeology's enthusiasts brought to the field undoubtedly was responsible for the conservation of objects and artefacts that would otherwise been destroyed. While traditional academic sources may be responsible for deepening our understanding of the industrial revolution in the United Kingdom, as Symonds claims, the enthusiasts and amateurs were largely accountable for the growth of interest in the field. In the words of Symonds, 'there can be no doubt...enthusiastic amateurs...made the first steps towards the preservation of industrial heritage and encouraged the discipline of industrial archaeology to grow.'<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Nevell, 'The 2005 Rolt Memorial Lecture,' p.4

<sup>112</sup> Goold Adams, *The Return of the Great Britain* p.14

<sup>113</sup> Symonds, 'Experiencing Industry: Beyond machines and the History of Technology' p.38

<sup>114</sup> R.Samuel, *Theatres of Memory: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture*, (London:1994) p.276

<sup>115</sup> Symonds, 'Experiencing Industry: Beyond machines and the History of Technology' p.38

However, the image of the ss *Great Britain* Project as an organisation comprised solely of enthusiastic amateurs, the ‘steam fanatics’ that Samuel identifies as driving the pursuit of industrial archaeology is worth interrogating more closely to determine whether it stands up to serious scrutiny. Whilst in its early stages, the ss *Great Britain*’s Project developed as an outgrowth of the already established Brunel Society, an organisation which aimed to promote a wider understanding of the engineering works of Isambard Kingdom Brunel.<sup>116</sup> A broader coalition of some 35 to 40 amateur enthusiasts, to Richard Goold Adams, the organisation would prove too unfocussed and too disparate as a means of successfully salvaging the *Great Britain*. After his first meeting with the Brunel Society to discuss the salvage of the ship resulted in what Goold Adams described as ‘misunderstanding and friction’, he set about separating the ss *Great Britain* Project from the wider Brunel Society and professionalising an organisation which had hitherto been a loose coalition of broad interests.

For myself I came to see two things. One was that the dominant element in the meeting, those who were making the running, had little to do with the Brunel Society as such.... and the other was that a steering committee of some kind would have to be formed if action was to be taken to follow up the views and conclusions expressed at the meeting. This would involve something more limited in aim than the Brunel Society. In its existing form so far as I could make out, the Society was too generalised and as yet too embryonic to be a suitable instrument for raising the kind of money that would be needed, for negotiating contracts and organising the salvage and indeed for conducting the actual restoration. Nor was there any inherent reason to suppose otherwise.<sup>117</sup>

This passage is revealing in underscoring Goold Adams’ organisational gifts but also the manner in which he saw the ss *Great Britain* Project as embodying a professional rather than amateur role. Ideals of democratising access to the the salvage and restoration Project were swiftly abandoned and a more commercially guided approach took root in their stead. In later years - upon the successful salvage of the *Great Britain* - whilst large businesses and corporations like Texaco were actively feted, the Project, to a certain degree, discouraged a more active and inclusive form of participation amongst others. The proposal to establish small, locally based ss *Great Britain* societies to raise money for the Project through ‘dances, sales of work, coffee mornings etc. was abandoned almost immediately with the Project team taking the view that ‘it was questionable how far the return to be expected is worth the

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<sup>116</sup> Goold Adams, *Return of the Great Britain*, p.11

<sup>117</sup> Goold Adams, *Return of the Great Britain*, p.11

considerable effort to achieve it.’<sup>118</sup>

In a similar vein, Goold Adams personally took a dim view of the efforts of Eric Gadd (who will be discussed at greater length in the following chapter). Gadd, described by his son as ‘a colourful character’ and a prominent local broadcaster in Bristol was a keen Brunel enthusiast engaging in a number of high profile publicity stunts in aid of the ship's return. These activities involved a pledge not to cut his hair until the ship was safely arrived in Bristol and driving round the city in a red white and blue van with the words 'bring back the *Great Britain*' written down the side.<sup>119</sup> To Goold Adams, however, these efforts were a considerable embarrassment: ‘unfortunately, in the early days of our own sometimes desperate struggle to be taken seriously ourselves, we had felt that to be associated with what we regarded as the eccentricity of his methods...was counterproductive. It was hard for the general public to recognise or understand the realities on this point – either way.’<sup>120</sup> It seems the ‘typically British’ eccentricity which Goold Adams referred to when describing the Project's aims and outcomes was only sanctioned amongst a particularly select cohort of individuals.

From the outset, it was the establishment and politically powerful connections of the ss *Great Britain* Project team – particularly those of Richard Goold Adams - which propelled the salvage operation forward as much as it was the spirit of ‘plucky’ British adventurism. Initially, the Project’s political ties and influence were embodied in the figure Robert Adley, in 1968, a prospective parliamentary candidate for Bristol North East, a seat he would later go on to win the 1970 general election. After Richard Goold Adams joined the Project it sought endorsements from a greater number of key public figures and their influence was used as a means of smoothing potential road-blocks that confronted the salvage effort.

In mid-July 1968, the Project appealed directly to David Owen, then Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for the Navy, for assistance with the proposed salvage of the ship. An official on behalf of Owen responded that while amenable in principle to assisting the Project team (and Corlett’s planned survey) it did feel duty-bound to outline the limits of any assistance the British Military were prepared to offer.

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<sup>118</sup> SSGBT: ECM.B1 ss *Great Britain* Project Limited - ‘Friends of the ss Great Britain – A proposed scheme’ (1975)

<sup>119</sup> ‘...and now he loses his curly locks’ *Bristol Evening Post* July 7<sup>th</sup> 1970

<sup>120</sup> Goold Adams, *The Return of the Great Britain* p.130

We have examined the list of equipment you sent us with your courier of 14<sup>th</sup> July and I am sorry to say that, with the exception of rope, we are unlikely to be able to help... I should explain that the Hovercraft Unit and the Royal Marine detachment have only the slightest equipment while HMS Endurance is only at Port Stanley a few days each year.... I am afraid that the financial rules prescribe that we must charge for any items we can't recover for further service use.<sup>121</sup>

Undeterred by the Government's relatively tepid response to the Project's broader aims, further request for assistance was made in a far more public forum and consequently met with a greater degree of success. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1968, Gordon Campbell, later Baron Campbell of Croy, and Conservative Party MP for Moray and Nain, raised a question in the House of Commons about Government assistance for the British salvage effort. In terminology that was remarkably consistent with that of the Project team's members, Campbell petitioned for Government assistance on the basis of 'the importance of the ship as the first ocean going propeller driven vessel and a crucial British contribution to the development of naval architecture.'<sup>122</sup> David Owen responded 'subject to public money accountability and operational requirements we have agreed to help this venture in any way we can.'<sup>123</sup> In practice, this would involve 'assistance from some units in the Falkland Islands.'<sup>124</sup>

This support would prove crucial to the Project's eventual success and despite Goold Adams' public positioning of the Project as establishment 'outsiders', members of the British Military were put at the Project team's disposal throughout the salvage attempt. Royal Marines transported the salvage team between Stanley and Sparrow Cove and sourced and transported the mattresses required to fill the hole in the *Great Britain's* hull before the ship was refloated.<sup>125</sup> Hans Herzog, Captain of the *Varius* (the tug that would eventually tow the *Great Britain* back to Bristol atop the floating pontoon the *Mulus*) remembered the Marines' support as vital to the salvage team's efforts in the Falklands, transporting men and materials via hovercraft, fitting planks to make the *Great Britain* more buoyant and assisting in removing the masts before ship was raised from the seabed.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> JCA: FIC/FI -1968, Letter from Dr. David Owen's Office to Richard Goold Adams, 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1968

<sup>122</sup> JCA: FIC/FI -1968, House of Commons, Oral Answer from Dr. David Owen MP, Ministry of Defence to Gordon Campbell MP, 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1968

<sup>123</sup> House of Commons, Oral Answer from Dr. David Owen MP, Ministry of Defence to Gordon Campbell MP

<sup>124</sup> House of Commons, Oral Answer from Dr. David Owen MP, Ministry of Defence to Gordon Campbell MP

<sup>125</sup> Young, *Incredible Journey* p.32

<sup>126</sup> Interview with Hans Herzog – *Varius* Captain (2009) *The Incredible Journey Oral History Project*, Accession Number of Transcript *BRSGB 2009.150.17* ss *Great Britain Trust*

The invaluable nature of military support was reiterated in oral history interviews with Euan Strathcona and salvage diver, and Falkland Island's resident, Lyle Cragie Halkett.<sup>127</sup> As Halkett explained, the Royal Marines often brought their own particular set of capabilities to the salvage effort.

Yes, we had help from the Royal Marines. We put out a call for someone who was pretty agile. Although we were young, we were better in the water than we were at scaling masts without ladders and things. The Marines, as Marines are, were always keen to help, to get involved, a little bit of the gung ho stuff and I remember this Royal Marine, he got up there as if he was a fly and stuck the rigging up for us in no time at all. Yes and we would have been hard pushed, we would have had to use other methods, ladders and put attachment to the mast and that. He got up there in I think about 5 minutes. So he really did a good job. And I think, I think the Royal Marines also got involved in other stuff perhaps with the cleaning of the ship...<sup>128</sup>

Fundamental to the triumph of the salvage operation, military support was granted on the basis of a sophisticated petitioning of those in a position to grant these favours and Richard Goold Adams would prove particularly spirited in deploying his powerful political connections in his pursuit of pursuing the ss *Great Britain's* Project's aims. In a letter to the Colonial Secretary of the Falkland Islands in late June 1967, he boldly advertised his long-standing friendship with then Secretary of State for Defence, Denis Healey, as a means of exerting official pressure on the Falkland Islands administration.

The only other point which I would like to mention is that we are also in touch with the Admiralty and with the Minister of Defence Mr. Healey...who I have known for many years, over any question of the Government or senior officials or a Minister to visiting the Falklands at present juncture, and I understand that if such an event occurred and if it were possible for our naval architect at the same time it would be done.<sup>129</sup>

Such brazen appeals to authority were not always well received, and occasionally appeared to run the risk of alienating the very individuals who the ss *Great Britain* Project sought assistance from. Following a meeting with representatives from the Navy held on the 18<sup>th</sup> June, a representative of the Head of the Home Naval Division reported on Goold Adams' repeated attempts to allude to senior Government officials as a means of acquiring naval assistance with their endeavour.

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<sup>127</sup> Interview with Lyle Cragie-Halkett (2009) *The Incredible Journey Oral History Project*, Accession Number of Transcript *BRSGB 2009.150.7 ss Great Britain Trust*, Bristol, Interview with Donald Euan Palmer Howard Strathcona, *The Incredible Journey*

<sup>128</sup> Interview with Lyle Cragie-Halkett, *The Incredible Journey*

<sup>129</sup> JCA: FIC/FI -1967, Letter from Richard Goold Adams to W.H Thompson, 22 June 1968

At the close of the meeting I reiterated the unlikelihood of any substantial naval assistance being available, but Mr. Goold Adams evidently remained convinced that 'something could be done' and he expressed his intention of seeking a further meeting with Under Secretary of State. He again mentioned his personal friendship with S of S and clearly intends to play this card for all it's worth.<sup>130</sup>

Goold Adam's repeated and largely successful attempts to invoke political authority to further the ss *Great Britain* Project's cause draw attention to the often considerable divergence between the 'grass-roots' origins of industrial archaeology and the operations of the ss *Great Britain* Project. Arguably, the figure of Eric Gadd - with his boundless personal passion for the *Great Britain* - better typifies the amateur enthusiasm that historians such as Samuel identify as a key component of early industrial archaeology in the United Kingdom. Goold Adams emphasises his own protracted battles with municipal authority when the *Great Britain* returned to Bristol (which will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter) and largely categorises the Project as a somewhat unconventional and embattled grouping of like-minded individuals. While this particular casting of the Project may share common features with early industrial archaeology in a broad sense, in truth this image obscures what was, in truth, an organisation that was socially and politically inter-connected with key figures within the British political establishment at the time.

These establishment connections were crucial, not only in acting as influential public advocates of the Project, in the House of Commons and the Press, but also in providing crucial logistical support during the salvage of the vessel in the Falkland Islands, without which, the Project would have been unlikely to succeed. However, whilst the ss *Great Britain's* 'grass-roots' credentials can certainly be queried it is possible to adopt a nuanced approach which acknowledges its dependence on an idiosyncratic and subjective set of interests whatever the extent of political clout its members could be said to possess. It is also important to acknowledge that despite the Project's small size, the motivations of its members, and how they viewed the *Great Britain*, often contrasted wildly, leading to occasional instances of acrimony when competing visions of the ship came into conflict.

Broadly speaking, Richard Goold Adams' own relationship with the ss *Great Britain* was coloured by a over-arching sense of nationalism and perceptions of 'state of the nation'

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<sup>130</sup> JCA: FIC/FI -1968, Letter from C.O. Parrett, Head of Home Naval Division to Commander Neate, Section Commander, 18 June 1968

decline. Yet while manifesting similar concerns at times, Ewan Corlett's association with the ss *Great Britain* was far more intimate and entwined with a greater degree of sense of personal biography. The distinction between the two men is important as it serves to illustrate the way in which their differing representations of the *Great Britain* came into conflict when the point arrived to give material shape to their subjective internal depictions of the vessel. Corlett's admission within his 1990 speech to the SOUE, of the somewhat non-rational elements that guided his early interactions with the *Great Britain* hints at an element of sentimental impulse with which he approached the Project.<sup>131</sup> To Corlett, the basis of his interest in the ss *Great Britain* lay in his professional and personal passions and whilst grossly inaccurate to categorise him as an 'amateur layperson' his life's work did suggest an enthusiast's zeal for maritime affairs. Author, consultant, and naval architect, Corlett was educated at Queens College Oxford where he read Engineering Science. On leaving University, he worked for the naval construction department of the Admiralty in Bath before eventually embarking on his PhD in Durham after the war. Going on to work for the British Aluminium Company, Corlett left in 1953 to become a partner in Burness, Corlett and Partners, Naval Architects and Marine Consultants where he was to become a managing director in 1955.<sup>132</sup> Corlett's association with maritime interests continued throughout his life, becoming Prime Warden of the Worshipful Company of Shipwrights; appointment as technical assessor to the enquiry into the Herald of Free Enterprise disaster; a Trustee of the National Maritime Museum; and adviser to the Royal National Lifeboat Institution.<sup>133</sup>

From the outset, Corlett's championing ss *Great Britain* was borne of an amalgamation of both professional and personal interests and a close association with nautical objects and artefacts. In 1971 article he authored entitled '*The Greatness of the Great Britain*', Corlett assesses, in his view the significant value of the vessel, drawing a clear line between the ship and the modern vessels with which most of his life's work was strongly associated.

A whole range of modern technology was incorporated in the ship as supporting features; a balanced rudder essential for today's ships: watertight bulkheads; bilge keels; an inner bottom; longitudinal framing where it was needed; an electric log; and last but by no means least; a shape designed to allow higher speeds than previous vessels had dreamt of obtaining, lines which came to be called 'Clipper Lines' which

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<sup>131</sup> Corlett, SOUE Annual Dinner, 1990

<sup>132</sup> Society of Oxford Engineers, *SOUE News - Ewan Corlett Obituary, 1923 - 2005*:

<http://www.soue.org.U.K/souenews/issue4/corlett.html> 28th April 2014

<sup>133</sup> Young, *Incredible Journey*, p.19



in fact could have been called *Great Britain* lines.<sup>134</sup>

In a similar vein, Corlett's rigorous and detailed accounting of the various technical specifications of the *Great Britain* in *The Iron Ship* reveal an acute intimacy with the materiality of the ship as an object and hint at the esteem with which he regarded it. This affective relationship with the *Great Britain* was entirely consistent with the attraction of industrial archaeology to its enthusiasts. It is important to acknowledge the often innocent sentimentality that was a prominent feature in the preservation of industrial artefacts. According to Bartel, there is something fundamentally relatable in the enormous, clanking industrial artefact, which is lacking in opaque, diminutive and somewhat alienating modern technology. 'Compared to today's microchips and lasers, the technology behind the early industrial machines is much more open to examination and human comprehension. Compared to the present level of technology, where everyday appliances from digital watches to car engines remain black boxes to most consumers, early steam engines seem remarkably user friendly.'<sup>135</sup>

Interpreted in this light, then, industrial objects were so attractive to its early adoptees due to the authentic sense of sensory appeal they presented. Archaic yet recognisable, overtly technological yet physically inviting, the industrial artefact offered an unfussy presentation of technology, one that was both physically and metaphorically far easier to grasp. The clarity and intelligibility of the *Great Britain's* form was, evidently a key source of its attraction to Corlett, as he enthusiastically extolled.

'The rudder arrangement of the *Great Britain* was a design of simplicity and originality which was not equalled for single screw ships over until the turn of the century. To a naval architect approaching the last quarter of the twentieth century the bones of a modern ship can be detected between the quaint and archaic skin of the *Great Britain* – the first modern ship.'<sup>136</sup>

It is not difficult to discern the appeal of an object that allowed the industrial archaeologist the opportunity to personally tinker with, restore and perfect. The 'lasers and microchips' that Bartel identifies as examples of specialised modern technologies are far less accessible to the layperson. As Mellström suggests, there is a considerable kinaesthetic appeal to this interaction with technology that is hard to underestimate: 'This kinaesthetic sense literally means to encounter and acquaint oneself with the machine, to work with the materials rather

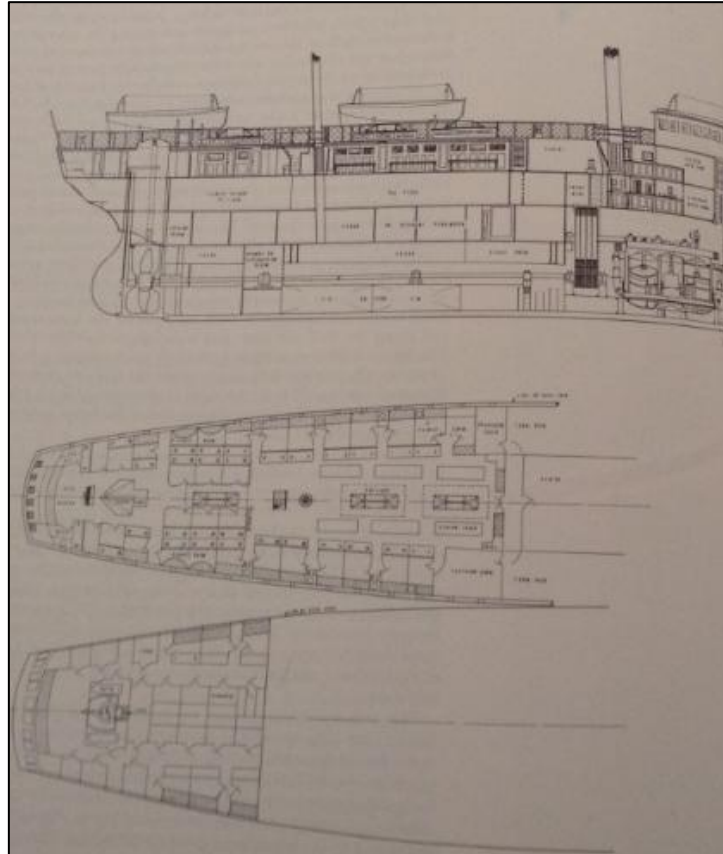
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<sup>134</sup> Ewan Corlett, 'The Greatness of the Great Britain', in *Nautical Times* (London, 1970) n/p

<sup>135</sup> Bartel, 'Getting in Touch with History:' p.348

<sup>136</sup> Corlett, 'The Greatness of the Great Britain', page?

than against them, and to communicate with the materials and read their messages. Such knowledge is hard, not to say impossible, to reach by intellectual means alone.’<sup>137</sup> In this sense, the relationship with the industrial artefact is intimate and personal, and as Mellström suggests, the materialisation of an implied power is certainly contained within it – control over machinery, implies dominion over nature.<sup>138</sup>



**Fig 3.8.** c. Corlett, Ewan 1975. Despite their technical nature, Corlett’s meticulous renderings of the ss *Great Britain* throughout *The Iron Ship* illustrate the naval engineer’s affinity with the vessel. These representations of the *Great Britain* are striking in the contrast they present with the romantic nature of the lithograph that initially energised Corlett in his efforts to salvage the vessel. Nonetheless the variety of similar images presented to the reader throughout *The Iron Ship* demonstrates an intimacy of acquaintance with the vessel that was unique amongst the wider Project team. Corlett, *Iron Ship*.

It is clear that in associating the ss *Great Britain* so firmly with his own career and in his personal identification with his illustrious engineering forebears for Corlett, the ss *Great Britain* salvage and restoration was not simply an opportunity to communicate a political position. As the naval engineer set forth unambiguously, 'I must confess, unrepentantly, although a scientist and engineer to being an incurable romanticist and reflections.... give me a sure answer to the question which is often put as to whether it has all been worth while. It was worth the time, energy and money and occasional heartbreak expended to bring this ship

<sup>137</sup> U. Mellström 'Patriarchal Machines and Masculine Embodiment.' *Science, Technology, & Human Values*, 27 (2007), pp. 460–478.p.461

<sup>138</sup> U Mellström, 'Patriarchal Machines and Masculine Embodiment' p.461

home and to start to restore her'.<sup>139</sup> Yet this individual and subjective sense of enthusiasm occasionally clashed with other members of the Project team, demonstrating the faultline between competing and separate visions of the ss *Great Britain*. Relations between Project team members were not always smooth and the often acrimonious wrangling over the form the restoration should take gives the lie to the conception of a unified ideological purpose driving the salvage of the ss *Great Britain*.

In July 1979 Corlett's unyielding sense of ownership of the direction of the *Great Britain's* restoration came into direct conflict with Richard Goold Adams' desire to professionalise the endeavour and adopt a more business-like approach to proceedings. The conflict arose as the result of a proposal to establish a Restoration Committee, whose purpose was to allow a greater influence of the other museums and academic scholarship upon the direction of work on the ship's interior before work began on the ship's interior.<sup>140</sup> Goold Adam's proposal sought a greater degree of influence from museum interpretation and display experts as a means of ensuring a greater degree of impact upon its visitors. To Goold Adams it seems, this proposal was a means of increasing the Project's revenue and reach (Adams had already had proposals to include a restaurant onboard blocked by Corlett on a previous occasion). To Corlett it appears that he interpreted the move as undermining his personal vision of the direction of the ship's restoration.<sup>141</sup> The discord erupted into a bad tempered set of exchanges between Corlett and Goold Adams which culminated in Corlett writing to each member of the Project team individually in order to resolve the situation and effectively argue his case. In a letter dated the 22nd July 1979, addressed to all Project members, Corlett was forced to reaffirm his dedication to the Project and outline his specific duties and responsibilities in relation to it:

As a Chairman of the Ship Committee, I am with the Committee and the Project Director, responsible for the research and reconstruction of the ship. I take an active part in all matters relating to it.... With very few exceptions, the research work has always been in advance of actual construction. Virtually every detail of the reconstruction is based on drawings and specifications prepared by myself and the committee... The Project Director and I are in frequent touch, mainly by post but sometimes by telephone. This has always been the case ever since the *Great Britain* returned to Bristol... My interest and involvement in the *Great Britain* Project is as great as ever and the Council can count on my complete technical and personal support of the Project.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Corlett, 'The Greatness of the Great Britain',

<sup>140</sup> Young, *The Incredible Journey*, p.108

<sup>141</sup> Young, *The Incredible Journey*, p.108

<sup>142</sup> SSGBT: ECM.B3 Letter from Ewan Corlett to ss *Great Britain* Project team dated 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1979

This angry missive was made necessary, in Corlett's eyes, by accusations from Goold Adams that the naval engineer was not as committed to the restoration Project as he could have been. In a letter to Goold Adams from Ewan Corlett dated the 13th June 1979, Corlett angrily refuted his supposed lack of commitment to the ss *Great Britain* Project directly.

I thought we were discussing a simple factual situation so I read your letter with some astonishment. You undoubtedly made remarks about me at the council meeting. I believe, rightly or wrongly, that these remarks were critical. As the remarks were not minuted, it is entirely reasonable for me to ask what exactly you said about me... perhaps you are aware that if I let myself I would have been irritated and resentful of the way in which I have apparently been excluded from any discussion or decisions concerning the museum, the ship, its goods and the presentation of the ship. It is ironic, having been excluded, to be accused of not being interested.<sup>143</sup>

It is worth dwelling on this conflict between Goold Adams and Corlett, not to unnecessarily emphasise the more disharmonious elements of the restoration but to seek to demonstrate the nuances between the two men's interpretations of the ss *Great Britain*. The dispute between the two men emphasises that even within the parameters of the small, 'individualistic' ss *Great Britain* Project - a structure championed by Goold Adams - considerable fissures existed between the actors involved. The conflict throws the two men's motivations into stark relief, Corlett's stronger and more intimate identification with the ship and Goold Adams' largely pragmatic and commercially driven sensibilities.

Perhaps more vividly, Corlett and Goold Adams' dispute demonstrates the point at which abstraction and representation broke down for the ss *Great Britain* Project. At a distance of some 8,000 miles, the ss *Great Britain* represented a blank canvas atop which a personal narrative of identity or a semiotic signifier of nationalism could easily be fixed. Returned to the United Kingdom and confronted with the surety of the ship's physical presence, profound decisions had to be made in order to ensure how the *Great Britain's* materiality would be fundamentally transformed and in turn, which representation of the ship would ultimately be realised. It is not too implausible to suggest that we can view the salvage and restoration of the ss *Great Britain* as a symbolic attempt to conquer the effects of time, geography and materiality in order to coerce the ship into corresponding with the imaginative vision of the Project team's members. The dispute between Corlett and Goold Adams' demonstrates the

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<sup>143</sup> SSGBT: ECM.B3 Letter from Ewan Corlett to Richard Goold-Adams dated 13<sup>th</sup> June 1979

gulf between these personal representations of the vessel and the inherent complications that arise when an object is no longer presented as an abstract form.

### The salvage of the ss *Great Britain* – Confronting Materiality in the Falklands



**Fig 3.9.** c. Strange Ian, 1970. The *Varius II* is shown here towing the *Great Britain* from Sparrow to Port Stanley ahead of her 8,000 mile journey and 47 days at sea. Employing the services of the German crew of Ulrich Harms would prompt consternation amongst some members of the Project team who believed it undermined the symbolic British nationalism of the salvage itself and the values the ship was purported to communicate. Photo courtesy of Ian Strange

The internal disputes surrounding the future direction of the ss *Great Britain* Project hint at the manner in which the imaginative impulses that had previously sustained the endeavour transformed with the Project team's proximity to the vessel. Confronted with a towering and intricate artefact, presenting a number of logistical challenges, quarrels inevitably arose as to how best translate a conceptual tableau into tangible physical reality. This trial was also one faced by the salvage team when they arrived in the Falklands on 25 March 1970 in preparation for returning the ship to the United Kingdom. The narrative of the salvage and those individuals involved is necessary in illustrating the context specific nature of to the ss *Great Britain* Project's representations of the vessel and in demonstrating the values the U.K team perceived in the vessel were by no means innate.

If the ss *Great Britain* Project's antecedents could broadly be described as somewhat poetically abstract, the majority of the men tasked with salvaging the *Great Britain* could be best characterised as grounded, mechanically minded technicians. Anglo-German firm Risdon Beazley-Ulrich Harms were approached by Ewan Corlett and, after a successful meeting between Corlett and the firm's English managing director Allan Crothall, on the 29<sup>th</sup> September 1969, the firm was awarded the contract for the ss *Great Britain's* salvage.<sup>144</sup> The firm was approached after an unsuccessful bid by the United Towing Company (UTC) fell through. After visiting the Falkland Islands a UTC team concluded that the possibility of salvaging the ss *Great Britain* were extremely remote – a conclusion Corlett vehemently disagreed with.<sup>145</sup> Risdon Beazley had pioneered a means of delivering ships and heavy equipment or recovering damaged vessels, by strapping them down and transporting them on a pontoon, a method, Corlett assessed, which would give the deteriorating ss *Great Britain* a far greater chance of surviving nearly two months at sea.

To Jack Hayward, however, the firm's German origins came into direct conflict with the national symbolism the *Great Britain* was purported to represent - whatever the practical merits of the firm's methods of salvage. Hans Erich Borucki, the German managing director of Ulrich Harms, recalled this as a particular point of contention in the firm's bid to secure the *Great Britain* contract. Hayward, Borucki recollected, was only interested in 'British ships' and was of the firm opinion that only 'British sailors' should be permitted to bring the ship 'home'.<sup>146</sup> Hayward's evident concern over the issue of the salvage company's nationhood is revealed in a telephone conversation between Corlett and Hayward, following the former's final meeting with Ulrich Harms.

**Ewan Corlett:** Now, some of these vessels are British, some are German. It depends, you know, on just what sort of job they have been doing. But this particular one that is available is German.

**Jack Hayward:** I see, it is bad luck

**EC:** It is bad luck. They are prepared to transfer the pontoon to a British tug once they get near Britain.

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<sup>144</sup> Corlett, *Iron Ship* p.195

<sup>145</sup> Young, *Incredible Journey* p.26

<sup>146</sup> Interview with Hans Erich Borucki, Former Managing Director of Ulrich Harms, (2009) *The Incredible Journey Oral History Project*, Accession Number of Transcript BRSGB 2009.150.1A

**JH:** I think they ought to yes.<sup>147</sup>

Other individuals associated with the salvage also highlighted Hayward's strong sense of nationalism and its occasional impingement on the efforts to recover the ship. Photographer Tony Morrison noted Hayward was a 'renowned patriot' but 'certainly not very keen on the Germans or French.'<sup>148</sup> Television Director Ray Sutcliffe similarly commented on Hayward's continued 'annoyance' at the utilising the services of the German owned firm, particularly when it was revealed, the tug, the *Varius* carried a German flag.<sup>149</sup> To Hayward, this was unacceptable, and he proposed re-flagging the ship whilst at sea, a suggestion that was ultimately deemed impracticable.<sup>150</sup> In the event, Hayward's objections to Ulrich Harm's salvage of the ss *Great Britain* were overridden for pragmatic reasons, the firm's methods of extracting the ship from the Falklands offered the most viable way of returning her to the United Kingdom intact. Ultimately, of the 17 members of the salvage team, the vast majority were German.

This episode is, nonetheless, significant, in highlighting one of the first points at which the conceptual sanctity with which some of the Project team viewed the ship was compromised in the name of practical expediency. It would not be a considerable overstatement to suggest that in the trade off between the utilitarian choices of the Project and imaginative impulses which drove the endeavour from the outset, a hint of the *Great Britain's* agency is revealed. A plausible means of interpreting this incident is to view it as the discourteous intrusion of an immense, convoluted and fragmented object in the minds of those who interpreted the vessel by generalised abstract means. The overall success of the salvage was deemed of sufficient consequence to countenance this early compromise.

In contrast to Corlett and Goold Adams, Ulrich Harm's employees were not particularly captured with a sense of the *Great Britain's* historical importance. Here the contrast between the reverence with which Goold Adams and Corlett wrote and spoke about the ship and the relatively unsentimental attitudes of the salvage operatives is stark. In Sutcliffe's estimation,

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<sup>147</sup> SSGBT: ECM.B3 Transcript of telephone conversation between Mr. Jack Hayward and Ewan Corlett, 8<sup>th</sup> January 1970,

<sup>148</sup> Interview with Tony Morrison – Photographer and Filmmaker (2009) *The Incredible Journey Oral History Project*, Accession Number of Transcript *BRSGB 2009.150.5A ss Great Britain Trust*, Bristol

<sup>149</sup> Interview with Ray Sutcliffe, *The Incredible Journey*

<sup>150</sup> Interview with Tony Morrison, *Incredible Journey*

the salvage crew were foremost, grounded, practical men ‘they knew about how to fix ships... they were professionals.’<sup>151</sup> However, as he makes plain, the salvage effort was just one job amongst many and inherently interchangeable. ‘they were not wildly, historically, enthused that wasn't their job – they were professional salvage experts from the biggest salvage company in Europe, so that's what they did and if they had found anything else on the way, they'd have probably done that too!’<sup>152</sup> This impression is supported in an interview with Hans Herzog, Captain of the *Varius*, who when pressed by an interviewer from the ss *Great Britain Trust* in 2009 about the significance of the salvage to him Herzog characterises the salvage as being simply a task your boss ‘tells you to do.’<sup>153</sup> Herzog immediately proceeded to discuss another job transporting a tanker from New York, which involved overcoming the obstacle of a broken towage line.<sup>154</sup> The clearly exasperated interviewer brought the discussion to a rapid close.<sup>155</sup>

The recollections of Sutcliffe about the historical ambivalence of the salvage team and Hans Herzog’s failure to identify the salvage of the *Great Britain* as a particularly resonant event in his own life offer an alternative lens from which to view the ship in the Falkland Islands. Viewed from the perspective, in a complete vacuum of associated symbolism, to the team of Ulrich Harms, the ship and its precarious state of physical deterioration represented a particularly intractable obstacle to be overcome through means of human effort and ingenuity. Calculations were to be made, timber was transported, decks patched up, sheer legs\*, erected, holes plugged and masts taken down. In this regard, the salvage team’s relationship with the vessel can be seen as concentrated far more on the kinaesthetic aspects of the ss *Great Britain* and its existing material realities as opposed to the invocation of its past grandeur or its future potentialities. Arguably, this intimacy with the ss *Great Britain* as a material object rendered the salvage team’s interactions with the ship more genuinely authentic than the majority of the members of the United Kingdom based ss *Great Britain* Project. It is notable that of its key constituents, only Ewan Corlett visited the ship in the Islands before the ship was returned to Bristol with Euan Strathcona the only prominent member to participate in the

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<sup>151</sup> Interview with Ray Sutcliffe, *The Incredible Journey*

<sup>152</sup> Interview with Ray Sutcliffe, *The Incredible Journey*

<sup>153</sup> Interview with Hans Herzog, *The Incredible Journey*

<sup>154</sup> Interview Hans Herzog, *The Incredible Journey*

<sup>155</sup> ‘Sheerlegs are an improvised derrick, using two strong legs, secured together at the top and fixed to the deck at their bases. A very strong rope tackle is used to pull the legs up to an angle, and another tackle is then hung from the top to do the actual lifting. With such very basic arrangements, sailors have for centuries lifted very heavy loads’ – The Incredible Journey – Young, *Incredible Journey* p.32



salvage itself.



**Fig 4.10. c.** Strange Ian, 1970. A rare image of the ss *Great Britain* below deck whilst she was beached in Sparrow Cove. This perspective of the vessel emphasises the dense impenetrability of the ship's material structure. It also underscores the logistical challenges facing the Ulrich Harms team in their attempt to salvage the vessel from the Falklands. The corporeal complexities of this undertaking were to the fore of the salvage team's interactions with the vessel. Photo courtesy of Ian Strange, JPEG

In the operations of the salvage team in the Falkland Islands, British nationalism was as strikingly absent as it was visible in the motivations of the Project team in the United Kingdom. Although given such a preponderance of German crew members amongst the crew, there is perhaps little to be surprised about here. To his considerable astonishment, Euan Strathcona, the only prominent representative of the Project from the United Kingdom to participate in the salvage, noted the nonchalance with which the German crew greeted the sight of the wreck of the *Graf Spee* in the bay of Montevideo. The crew of the *Varius* regarded the sunken German vessel - and remnant of a prominent First World War naval engagement – with no visible signs of resentment at all, he cheerfully observed.<sup>156</sup>

Strathcona's memory provides insight in demonstrating the gulf between the stock he evidently placed in abandoned maritime objects as potent signifiers of nationalism and the

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<sup>156</sup> Interview with Donald Euan Palmer Howard Strathcona, *The Incredible Journey*

crew of seafarers, who, as Sutcliffe describes, were far from ‘historically enthused.’<sup>157</sup> Indeed, oral history interviews with participants of the ss *Great Britain’s* salvage indicate nationalist sentiment was relatively exclusive to Strathcona throughout the venture. Much to Strathcona’s chagrin the working practices of the German crew involved waking up to begin work on the *Great Britain*, after a heavy night’s drinking, at an increasingly late hour and, to his mind, haphazardly selecting the day’s source of industry at a whim, habits Strathcona labelled as particularly ‘unteutonic.’<sup>158</sup> In a similar vein, Strathcona admitted the Project team had hoped that Argentina would vociferously object to the salvaging of the *Great Britain* in hope of an increased degree of publicity and public interest.<sup>159</sup>

In any event, Strathcona’s evident trepidation about passing the *Graf Spee* and its potential implications to the relationship with the Ulrich Harms crew proved to be ill-founded. In practical terms, the success of the salvage hinged on the cooperation between British Royal Navy Marines and divers and the crew from the predominantly German salvage company. Far from enmity, oral history interviews about the Falklands salvage reveal a positive relationship based on mutual trust and cooperation.<sup>160</sup> In a revealing recollection, Stuart Whatley disclosed, what he believed, was the basis for this rapport:

‘Well the thing is...sea men are a different breed to most people. When you are on a ship...you’re there for 24 hours a day...it’s no good saying ‘I’m not on ship now, I’m going back down to bunk cos’ if that ship runs aground and you all drown, that’s not going to do you any good is it?’<sup>161</sup>

To Whatley, the respect between the two teams was the result of a shared professional understanding of the difficulties inherent within work at sea. In Whatley’s opinion, only those individuals with firsthand knowledge of the challenges ‘sea men’ are continually confronted with can lay legitimate claim to this shared and exclusive group membership. It is important to acknowledge the inherent subjectivity of Whatley’s explanation of accord between the British Military and the Ulrich Harms crew. Nonetheless, it does perhaps demonstrate nationalist deliberations were never to the forefront in the salvage team’s daunting logistical undertaking in the Falkland Islands and other more small-scale modes of group identification

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<sup>157</sup> Interview with Donald Euan Palmer Howard Strathcona, *The Incredible Journey*

<sup>158</sup> Interview with Donald Euan Palmer Howard Strathcona, *The Incredible Journey*

<sup>159</sup> Interview with Donald Euan Palmer Howard Strathcona, *The Incredible Journey*

<sup>160</sup> Interviews with Tony Morrison, Lyle Cragie-Halkett, Donald Euan Palmer Howard, Stuart Whatley, Ray Sutcliffe, *The Incredible Journey Oral History Project* (2009)

<sup>161</sup> Interview with Stuart Whatley – Diver (2009) *The Incredible Journey Oral History Project*, Accession Number of Transcript *BRSGB 2009.150.5A ss Great Britain Trust*, Bristol

took place in their stead.

Perhaps more speculative, is the way in which Whately's account also hints at the important role perceived group membership played in shaping human interactions with the *Great Britain*. In this light, the ss *Great Britain* in Sparrow Cove can potentially be seen as a stage in which to engage in performative acts which demonstrated the validity of a claimed ownership to an exclusive cohort of 'hard-working' and 'robust' individuals. The opportunity to project the appropriate degree of rugged masculinity and industriousness implied in Whately's characterisation of seafarers may have overridden any lingering nationalist sentiment present.

The rendering of the ss *Great Britain's* salvage as a means to demonstrate both bravery and professional capability is supported episodes such as Sergeant Tony Scott's - a physical training instructor with the Marines - clambering to the top of the mainmast as 'if were an everyday cliff climb.'<sup>162</sup> The opportunity the salvage presented to posture amongst a wider network of peers may have ultimately proved more alluring than potential patriotic disagreements. Again, the *Great Britain's* materiality is to the fore of these interactions, a physical pulpit to not only talk about but *demonstrate* professional status. It also reveals the *Great Britain* as a stage of a predominantly masculine form of grand-standing, characterised by demonstrative, risk-taking behaviour.<sup>163</sup>

In this closed loop of exaggerated machismo evidenced by the individuals daily confronting the physical realities of the ss *Great Britain* Lord Euan Strathcona and his brother-in law, Jamie, Viscount Chewton, cut somewhat isolated figures. Far from the rarefied atmosphere of the House of Lords, Strathcona found himself in a setting in which his social connections and class-based influence did not exert as much authority as he perhaps would have wished. As Chris Young, recounts in the *Incredible Journey* 'To Strathcona's Navy-conditioned eyes things were very informal.'<sup>164</sup>

Stuart Whately recalls Strathcona and his brother in law Jamie as somewhat curious characters amongst the wider crew of experienced sea-farers and salvage operatives. This is

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<sup>162</sup> Young, *The Incredible Journey* p.32

<sup>163</sup> See C.R Harris, M. Jenkins, and D. Glaser. "Gender differences in risk assessment: why do women take fewer risks than men." *Judgment and Decision Making* 1,1 (2006)

<sup>164</sup> Young, *The Incredible Journey* p.30

not to say the relationship was characterised by any degree of overt hostility, Whately fondly recalls Strathcona pouring the wine out for the crew on the journey from Montevideo and teaching them all to play ‘different sorts of posh games of cards.’<sup>165</sup> Nonetheless, Strathcona and his brother in law were the focus of a certain amount of gentle teasing amongst the crew - Whately recollects as referring to Strathcona as ‘Lordy’ for the duration of the journey. Whately also recalls the wry amusement in which he regarded Strathcona’s and his brother in law’s attempts to compete with each other in order to provide the best copy to British newspapers ‘I got a feeling one was writing for *The Telegraph* and one was writing for *The Times* or something like that...’<sup>166</sup>

It is important to recognise the limits of these subtle subversions of class based authority. Upon disembarking the *Varius* in the Falklands Strathcona’s immediate port of call was to the representative of British officialdom in the Islands, the Colonial Secretary, suggesting the meritocracy of the crew’s recent boat journey was a relatively fleeting episode.<sup>167</sup> Nonetheless, the practical expediencies of the salvage effort did engender a degree of social contact between groups of individuals who otherwise may not have had occasion to interact.

Yet upon the ss *Great Britain’s* return to Bristol on 5 July 1970 the nationalist impulses of the United Kingdom based Project served to thwart the camaraderie and bonhomie that participants of the salvage claimed to characterise its shared events. Hayward’s insistence on framing the salvage as an exclusively British achievement led to several attempts to diminish German involvement in the event, including using sheets of black plastic thrown over the side of the ship to hide its name when the ship returned up the Avon river - a solution that was met with limited success.<sup>168</sup> To Tony Morrison, these efforts to rebrand the salvage as wholly British endeavour prompted feelings of poignant regret.

I could probably well understand Jack Hayward from his viewpoint...it was still only a few years after the Second World War but I felt it was very sad thing...when the ship went up the Avon Gorge there was Horst Kaulen [coordinator of the salvage team] on board so he [Hayward] didn't win everything but it was meant to be more of a British achievement than a German one.... on balance whose achievement was it? I think it was a teamwork so let's call it that but that was the slight sadness of my part.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Interview with Stuart Whately, *The Incredible Journey*

<sup>166</sup> Interview with Stuart Whately, *The Incredible Journey*

<sup>167</sup> Young, *The Incredible Journey* p.31

<sup>168</sup> Interview with Tony Morrison, *The Incredible Journey*

<sup>169</sup> Interview with Tony Morrison, *The Incredible Journey*

To Morrison at least, the success of the *Great Britain's* salvage could not legitimately be interpreted along national lines, as witness to the team's efforts in the Falklands, he reportedly observed a very different set of principles at work where cooperation and 'teamwork' were highly visible and nationalist divisions largely absent.

In the broad failure of the salvage team to regard the ss *Great Britain* as a significant symbolic reference point, interpret it as an overt totem of British nationalism and in manifesting a set of interactions with the vessel based on group identity a clear parallel emerges with the manner in which Falkland Islanders interacted with the ship. According to Ray Sutcliffe, the decision to salvage the vessel in the Falklands proved somewhat controversial, a fact he ascribed to the amplified sense of patriotism that is often associated with the islands.

They'd heard about it and there were very mixed feelings...they are a very patriotic and loyal community. They provided the money for several Spitfires during the Second World War, um, fiercely loyal as people now know... Yes they felt that part of their, their heritage was being taken away. Perhaps they hadn't been consulted as much about that as might have thought they might... they have a very fierce sense of loyalty to this country and therefore, something named the *Great Britain* being removed along with other problems about its sovereignty which were being resentfully discussed at the time by that government at the time and wasn't exactly viewed with equanimity let's say.<sup>170</sup>

Yet, as the previous chapter demonstrated, there is strikingly little evidence to support Sutcliffe's assertion that British nationalism played a significant role in Falkland Islanders negotiation of the ss *Great Britain*. Equally, Sutcliffe's representation of a community that was riven by anxieties about the loss of the ship is also contentious. Sutcliffe's linking of the loss of the ship in the Falklands and the potential loss of sovereignty the Islands were facing at the time is a fascinating possibility but not one that carries a significant weight of fact. Indeed, the likelihood exists that Sutcliffe's oblique references to the later Falklands conflict suggest that this explanation may well have been shaped as a result of the events that occurred in 1982. As Allesandro Portelli has sought to document, memory is both active and dynamic and often interlaces present interpretations atop events recalled from the past.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Interview with Ray Sutcliffe, *The Incredible Journey*

<sup>171</sup> A.Portelli, 'What makes Oral History' in *The Oral History Reader* eds. R.Perks & A.Thompson (Abingdon, 1998) p.36

Sutcliffe's account is directly contradicted by Stuart Whately, describing his impression of Falkland Islanders as 'very practical people' Whately's sense of the Islanders relationship with the *Great Britain* is that it was little more than 'a wood shed.'<sup>172</sup> Lyle Cragie-Halkett, both diver with the salvage team and Falkland Islander offers a unique perspective through his shared membership of both groups. Like the salvage team, Halkett's interview demonstrates his considerable professional pride in the success of the salvage of the *Great Britain* but he also offers an insight as to how the ship was seen by him when he lived within the Falklands. Halkett's recollections are remarkably consistent with the memories of other Falkland Islanders discussed in the previous chapter and are worth quoting at length.

As a boy going to school I was aware of the *Great Britain* of course because we used to have annual picnics to Sparrow Cove and that's where she was but I must admit I was no more aware of the *Great Britain* than any of the other wrecks because it abounds with wrecks down there...in the middle of the harbour there was a lovely old sailing ship called the *Fennia*. Well the *Fennia* was at anchor and you could see her every single day from everywhere you were in Stanley and of course she's swinging round at anchor and in fact we took her for granted then but have often laughed since that the *Fennia* was used as a weather vane by all the local ladies for hanging out their washing, which line they would put it on or whatever. So you've got the *Fennia* there, a lovely big ship, not very different in size to the *Great Britain*...The bottom of the harbour as we called it in Whalebone Cove was a ship called the *Lady Elizabeth* which is still there to this day. She's got her masts, she's got her spar and she looked absolutely beautiful in her own right. And then again you've got jetty heads also consisting of old ships, some of them much older than the ss *Great Britain* so the *Britain* was really just at that time just another ship. I'd never heard of Brunel, I didn't have a clue who he was and wouldn't have been interested anyway and it really was only on going down on the job that I thought I'd better clean my act, find out who this Brunel guy is....<sup>173</sup>

Halkett's principal memory of the ss *Great Britain* was 'throwing rocks at the birds' that used to roost there. It would be repetitious to discuss these recollections at length, as memories of this nature have already been addressed in the previous chapter. Limited knowledge of the ship's history, its negotiation as a primarily fixed spatial entity and the natural world's encroachment on its material form all served to produce a set of interactions very different to those of the ss *Great Britain* Project team. Equally, the nature of these interactions could, to an extent, be easily replicated with any number of the other wrecks in the Islands. In short, to the vast majority of Falkland Islanders, there was nothing extraordinary about the ss *Great Britain*.

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<sup>172</sup> Interview with Stuart Whately, *The Incredible Journey*

<sup>173</sup> Interview with Lyle Cragie-Halkett, *The Incredible Journey*

While Tony Morrison recollected some limited hostility to the Project's aims in the Falklands he characterised this as of a somewhat different order to Sutcliffe's rendering of a community's grief at the impending loss of a treasured heirloom. As he recalls:

....a few people were muttering about uh, you know, it's an old wreck, why not leave it here, it's costing a lot of money and in those days the Falklands needed the money and Jack Hayward's hundred and fifty grand would have gone a long way to, to helping build a hospital or something..<sup>174</sup>

These expressions of doubt surrounding the perceived utility of the Project to others would be raised again in Bristol upon the ship's return to the city in 1970, in letters to the *Bristol Evening Post* and oral history interviews, and will be discussed in greater length in the following chapter. Nonetheless, Morrison's perspective on the nature of Falkland Island objections to the Project suggest the motives for pursuing the salvage, were for some individuals in the Falklands, difficult to divine.

Despite the limited soundings of discontent reported by Morrison there is considerable evidence to suggest that, broadly speaking, Falkland Islanders made an enthusiastic contribution to the salvage effort in the Islands. Sutcliffe's rendering of an aggrieved island population is difficult to reconcile with a broad range of the essential contributions made by Falkland Islanders throughout the salvage. Perhaps the most illustrative example of Falkland Island involvement in the salvage is a community-wide response to a dilemma confronting the salvage team as it attempted to address issues related to the ship's state of physical disrepair.

Of all the various problems associated with the return of the ship the most significant from an engineering perspective was the severe crack in the ship's hull. When the Falkland Island's administration beached the *Great Britain* in Sparrow Cove in 1937, holes were driven into the ship's stern allowing water to flow into the hull in order to effectively scuttle the vessel. Unfortunately, the placement of these holes put the structure under extreme stress, producing a severe degree of upward pressure on the ship's keel which produced an extensive crack down the *Great Britain's* starboard side.<sup>175</sup> Corlett's survey in the November of 1968

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<sup>174</sup> Interview with Tony Morrison, *The Incredible Journey*

<sup>175</sup> Corlett, *Iron Ship* p.193

identified this crack as the gravest issue confronting the potential salvage attempt which upon observation was more serious than the naval engineer had previously assumed.<sup>176</sup> To avoid the *Great Britain* splitting in two when it was lifted above water-level on the *Mulus* the crack in the hull had to be addressed as a matter of urgency. After several unsuccessful attempts to deal with the issue, it was decided that it may be possible to plug the gap using mattresses as a natural buoyancy aid.<sup>177</sup> However, the only means of obtaining the required number of mattresses was appealing to the Falkland Islands community. As Strathcona explained:

The community itself eventually contributed partly to its salvage because I did put out a broadcast asking for - remembering my Nelsonian traditions -we put a broadcast asking for them to bring in their flock mattresses because that was the way that Nelson's Navy salvaged damaged ships. You took a mattress and shoved it down a crack and if she lifted and seized, the mattress produced a very good natural sealant and lo' and behold the good citizens of Port Stanley came with mattresses and dumped them on the jetty and we sailed them out to the ship, shoved them down the hole and when she righted and seized those mattresses were still here in Bristol when she got here.<sup>178</sup>

Horst Kaulen recalls the community response as being particularly emphatic with Falkland Islanders donating enough mattresses to fill two Lorries, far more than the salvage team actually needed to plug the crack in the ship's hull.<sup>179</sup>

Individual Falkland Islanders also made key contributions to *Great Britain's* salvage providing invaluable assistance and lending their skills to the team where necessary.

Strathcona recollected the crucial intervention of one Falkland Islander who cut down the ship's masts ahead of its transportation to the United Kingdom.

And there was a lovely man, a Falkland Islander, who appeared with a chain saw, I cannot remember his name now I am afraid but you will find it in the records, and he appeared with a chain saw. What none of us realised was that the masts were held together by great iron pins and the chain saw didn't like it very much when it met one of these things....<sup>180</sup>

The individual in question was Willie Bowles, a carpenter in the Falklands who spoke to me with considerable pride about his involvement in the salvage of the ss *Great Britain* an

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<sup>176</sup> Corlett, *Iron Ship* p.193

<sup>177</sup> Young, *Incredible Journey* p.32

<sup>178</sup> Interview with Donald Euan Palmer Howard Strathcona, *The Incredible Journey*

<sup>179</sup> Interview with Horst Kaulen – Varius Captain (2009) *The Incredible Journey Oral History Project*,

Accession Number of Transcript *BRSGB 2009.150.16* ss *Great Britain Trust*, Bristol

<sup>180</sup> Interview with Donald Euan Palmer Howard Strathcona, *The Incredible Journey*



opportunity he described as a ‘privilege.’<sup>181</sup> Significantly, Bowles asserted he had never occasion to visit the ship previously and his first interaction with the vessel was when he was asked to assist the salvage crew and bring his carpentry skills to bear.<sup>182</sup> Bowle’s positive recollections of the salvage were shared by other Falkland Islanders tangentially involved with the process including Robin Goodwin, who outlined his fond memories of running supplies over to the crew in Sparrow Cove by boat, Ian Strange who provided comprehensive photographs of the ship and has produced stamps for the Falkland Islands Government depicting the vessel and finally maritime historian John Smith who provides the unusual example of a Falklander involved with the Project from the outset.<sup>183</sup> The pride in which Falkland Islanders spoke of their own involvement with the salvage of the ss *Great Britain* suggests the controversy relating to the ship’s removal from the Falkland Islands was potentially limited in its extent and certainly not a source of continued debate.



**Fig 11.** c. Harris Jill, 1970. A photo of the formal ‘handing over’ ceremony where Sir Cosmo Haskard, Falkland Island’s Governor (right) presented the *Great Britain’s* signed release document to Euan Strathcona (left). The crowd in the foreground demonstrate the degree to which Falkland Islanders were both keen observers and participants in the salvage attempt. In the background, the ss *Great Britain’s* hull is visible, encrusted in mussels. Harris recalls the smell of which permeated Stanley - much to resident’s displeasure. Photo courtesy of Jill Harris.

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<sup>181</sup> Willie Bowles, Personal Interview, 24<sup>th</sup> July 2013

<sup>182</sup> Willie Bowles, Personal Interview, 24<sup>th</sup> July 2013

<sup>183</sup> Willie Bowles, Personal Interview, 24<sup>th</sup> July 2013, Ian Strange, Personal Interview, 26<sup>th</sup> July 2013, John Smith, Personal Interview, 27<sup>th</sup> July 2013

Conceivably, the degree of enmity with which Sutcliffe assumed the Islanders perceived the Project speaks more of the prism through which he saw the ship, one that magnified its perceived symbolic status as viewed in the United Kingdom. Evidence of a broad British nationalism affixed to the ship during its time in the Falklands Islands is largely absent. Both the individual and community responses to the salvage demonstrated a great deal of cooperation with the endeavour. Instances of Falkland Islander collaboration also speak to the strong regional identity prevalent within the Islands, a characterisation of themselves as individuals of evidencing shared values of ingenuity, perseverance and cooperation. Oral history interviews reveal that these values are perceived as necessary in order to sustain the community and overcome the daily challenges its geography and climate presents. Beyond anecdotal observations, it is of course inherently problematic to contend that all Falkland Islanders consider themselves Falklanders first and British second. Nevertheless, Falkland involvement in the salvage of the ss *Great Britain* demonstrated that, in this instance at least, abstract nationalism was supplanted by a strong regional identity that identified mutual support and creative and resourceful means as its principal and defining features. It is not inconceivable to suggest, that in their manner of interaction with the *Great Britain* and the responses it provoked, Falkland Islanders perceptions of the vessel shared more in common with the crew members of Ulrich Harms than the symbolic representations that inspired the imaginations of the ss *Great Britain* Project team within the United Kingdom.

## Conclusion

An important feature of the ss *Great Britain's* return to the United Kingdom are the effects of both distance and proximity to the ship in shaping interactions with the vessel. Fears that the *Great Britain* would be permanently lost, having been abandoned in the Falklands incited the urgency with which the ship's salvage was pursued from 1967 onwards. However, the Project team's collective fear of losing the vessel were unlikely to have been quite so pointed were it not for the symbolic narratives and varying degrees of personal biography its members had attached to the ship. As the previous chapter outlined, the Falklands are scattered with historic vessels, some of which in far better physical condition than the *Great Britain* – why was this particular ship so meaningful to these individuals in the United Kingdom?

To the San Francisco Maritime Museum, the extraordinary nature of the ship was not readily apparent, at least to anything approaching the same degree, as it was for the ss *Great Britain* Project in the United Kingdom. It is notable the museum chose to salvage *The Fennia* over the *Great Britain* initially, selecting the latter ship for an object of preservation when *The Fennia*'s salvage failed. Similarly, evidence suggests that Falkland Islanders experienced the loss of *The Fennia* far more acutely – the loss of which was likened by Lyle Cragie-Halkett to 'losing part of the sky-line'.<sup>184</sup> Halkett's observation hints at the important role material objects play in acting as familiar mental reference points and in sustaining a sense of regional identity - particularly evidenced in the community's objection to the loss of the ship.

To Halkett, the key distinction between *The Fennia* and *Great Britain* was principally geographic, while *The Fennia* was prominently displayed in Stanley Harbour and an object of certain utility, the *Great Britain* had to be visited by boat and therefore not the subject of particularly great scrutiny for the majority of Falkland Islanders.<sup>185</sup> The ss *Great Britain* Project offers a striking counter-point to this intimate and familiar mode of material interpretation. To the key principals of the ss *Great Britain* Project, the primary method of interaction with the ship was representational and the decision to salvage the ship taken before a single member of the U.K based team had visited the vessel in the Falklands.

The geographic space between the *Great Britain* and the individuals who sought to return her to the United Kingdom, created a wider conceptual space where it was far easier to attach the broad symbolic abstracts to the vessel - untroubled by the complications of the *Great Britain*'s material presence. The particular caste of the individuals involved and the social, political and economic debates within the United Kingdom at the time of the ship's salvage greatly determined the form of these abstracts.

A broad nationalism was twinned with the perception of a sense of contemporary decline affecting the United Kingdom and the *Great Britain* was imbued, to a degree, with an ability to communicate - what key individuals in the Project team determined were - a set of shared national values that offered a potential corrective to this malaise. The individuals who made up the ss *Great Britain* Project had the both the means and the elite political connections to transform conceptual abstracts into tangible physical reality by means of returning the ship to

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<sup>184</sup> Interview with Lyle Cragie-Halkett, *The Incredible Journey*

<sup>185</sup> Interview with Lyle Cragie-Halkett, *The Incredible Journey*

the United Kingdom. The question arises as to whether this invalidates the Project's amateur credentials and in turn prevents it from being regarded as a legitimate outgrowth of industrial archaeology. This is answered by the extent to which the Project was guided by a sense of the subjective, its lack of academic oversight and the way in which it reflected the preoccupations of the wider preservationist turn in the U.K of the 1960s.

It is, however, important to acknowledge the fractures in the interpretations of ss *Great Britain* amongst the Project team as a means of avoiding a too generalised understanding of their motivations. The dispute between Corlett and Goold Adams reveal the extent to which the differences in their own identification with the *Great Britain* played a part in determining the future form of the ship's materiality. It also demonstrates the degree to which both men's relationship with the *Great Britain* changed in close proximity to the vessel. The difficulties involved in rendering the intangible tangible exposed the fault-lines that existed between both Corlett and Goold-Adams' separate notional approximations of the *Great Britain's* inherent significance. The example of the ss *Great Britain's* salvage team and the nature of their interactions with the vessel demonstrate the extent to which the U.K Project team's representations of the vessel were a product of geographic, social and political context. Notably, the salvage team rendered the ship chiefly in terms of its kinaesthetic and functional principles and in doing so demonstrated far greater affinity with the view of the ship held in the Falkland Islands than that which was possessed in the United Kingdom.

The next chapter will discuss the ss *Great Britain* post-salvage and its return to Bristol docklands where questions about the fate of the vessel in the city are contextualised within wider debates about urban renewal and attitudes to both future and past. As emphasised earlier in this chapter, the *Great Britain* was notable in the field of industrial archaeology in the order of the threat to the ship's material structure. Significantly the ship was *not* selected as an object of preservation due to concerns relating to ambitious municipal reconfigurations of the built environment. Ironically, however, in being transported back to Bristol in July 1970, the ss *Great Britain* would ultimately become central in the debate about the shape of Bristol's post-war urban renewal.

## Chapter Four: Counter Space: the ss *Great Britain's* return to Bristol



**Fig 4.1** c. 1970. The ss *Great Britain* atop of the *Mullus II* as she appeared during her journey across the mid-Atlantic after her salvage from the Falklands. In this liminal space uncontested dominion over the ship belonged with the Ulrich Harms salvage team and the relative calm of this 44 day long journey arguably offers the least contested period of the ship's life. Courtesy of ss *Great Britain* Trust

**T**he ss *Great Britain* Project made the Bristol Corporation aware of the proposals to bring the historic vessel back to Bristol as early as November 1968.<sup>1</sup> The Corporation's Docks Committee formed a sub-committee to consider the proposals a month later, deciding to monitor the progress of the salvage effort before the Corporation made official preparations for the ship's return.<sup>2</sup> This 'wait and see' approach to the ship's homecoming to Bristol officially ended on receipt of a letter from Ewan Corlett in March 1970. Corlett made it plain that the salvage effort was both underway and entertained the

<sup>1</sup> BRO: Corporation of Bristol Docks Committee, Minute Book 1968, Minute Number: 29,479

<sup>2</sup> BRO: Corporation of Bristol Docks Committee, Minute Book 1970, Minute Number: 29,495

possibility of very real success.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the Corporation began, in earnest, to make the necessary preparations for the vessel's return to Bristol.

From the outset, relations between the ss *Great Britain Project* and the Bristol Corporation were strained. The unwieldy processes of administrative bureaucracy sat uneasily with the committed voluntarism of the Project's ethos. To Richard Goold Adams, the officious procedures of the local authority were 'chilling and business-like,' and indicative of a degree of hostile intent towards the Project and its aims.<sup>4</sup> To Goold Adams, the Corporation manifestly did not share in the symbolic sanctity with which the Project viewed the ship as he recounted with considerable frustration 'it may be difficult for anyone who has not been involved in responsibility for the survival of a semi-public enterprise to understand how much the opposition or sympathy of local government can make.'<sup>5</sup> The Corporation's apparent lack of sympathy towards the Project and its goals manifested itself in - what Richard Goold Adams believed to be - a number of obstructionist efforts. These efforts included, but were not limited to, an assessment of the financial solvency of the Project, a complete survey of the ss *Great Britain* at Avonmouth and a comprehensive insurance policy to compensate the authority should the ship sink and disrupt trade in the Avon.<sup>6</sup> Most disconcertingly for the Project, the Corporation appeared to be decidedly ambivalent, even hostile, to the ship's very presence in Bristol, needlessly prevaricating over a decision to allow her to stay in the Charles Hill dockyard and thus threatened the very basis of the restoration Project.

To Goold Adams, the basis of this animosity towards the Project was clear. The return of the ss *Great Britain* to the Charles Hill dockyard in 1970 was 'ipso facto an embarrassment'<sup>7</sup> to the city politicians. The source of this purported embarrassment centred on the Corporation's ambitious new redevelopment plans, which aimed to reframe the material and economic foundations of Bristol's Floating Harbour. According to Goold Adams, the Corporation was concerned about the delivery of the historic vessel into the midst of a contested environment and the uncertain influence this might have on public opinion. 'The injection of the Great

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<sup>3</sup> BRO: Corporation of Bristol Docks Committee, Minute Book 1970, 15,349, BRO:

<sup>4</sup> Goold Adams, *Return of the Great Britain* p.158. Goold Adams's displeasure towards, what he perceived, was the local authority's ingratitude provided a running theme throughout his account of the ship's return and is well documented throughout *The Return of the Great Britain*.

<sup>5</sup> Goold Adams, *Return of the Great Britain* p.158

<sup>6</sup> BRO: Corporation of Bristol Docks Committee, Minute Book 1970, Minute Number: 30,048

<sup>7</sup> Goold Adams, *The Return of the Great Britain* p.40

Britain into the middle of the situation, of course, had understandably been viewed with some concern by the authorities since no-one could quite tell what the effect would be of drawing a great deal of fortuitous public attention to this precise area and its problems.’<sup>8</sup>

The ss *Great Britain* Project’s fractious relations with the Bristol Corporation are an illustrative microcosm of the wider debates surrounding individual interactions with the State.<sup>9</sup> This traditional critique of state bureaucracy, advanced by Weber and continued by Ludwig Von Mises, presents it as officious and monolithic in its deliberations and opaque in its motivation, and hostile to the interests of the individual and civilian groups.<sup>10</sup> Yet from the standpoint of the state, its careful considerations of competing individual needs are an affirmation of scientific rationality; bureaucracy is adopted as bulwark against capricious judgement and emotional reaction.<sup>11</sup> The story of the ss *Great Britain* Project’s interactions with the Bristol Corporation is thus the story of two irreconcilable perspectives. While this may come as little surprise, in an extraordinary act of synchronicity, the ship returned to Bristol when the gulf between individual and state perspectives on functional space and emotionally affective place was being increasingly thrown into sharp relief by the ambitious urban redevelopment plan envisaged by the Corporation. While the local authority was engaged in an effort to rationalise the Floating Harbour in the interests of economic productivity and urban legibility the historic vessel became a symbolic totem of the temporality and the city as a location of felt human value.

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<sup>8</sup> Goold Adams, *The Return of the Great Britain* p.160

<sup>9</sup> It is important here to acknowledge the implicit authority of language and its various contextual associations in denoting specific modes of interpretation. The following chapter for instance will engage with terms such as ‘State and Individual’ but this chapter does not define these terms in the manner typically deployed by the New Right but only as a means to suggest the complexity of human experience of place and the representational methods of administrative bureaucracy. See. L. Phillips, ‘Hegemony and political discourse: the lasting impact of Thatcherism.’ *Sociology* 32.4 (1998): pp. 847-867.

<sup>10</sup> R. Bendix, *Max Weber – An Intellectual Portrait* (Berkeley, 1961) p.426, L.V Mises, *Bureaucracy* (New Haven 1944)

<sup>11</sup> M. J. Wrightson, ‘In defence of bureaucracy,’ *Public Administration Review*, 40, 2 (1980), pp. 179-183

## Recontextualising the ss *Great Britain* - Urban modernism and reimagining the city of Bristol

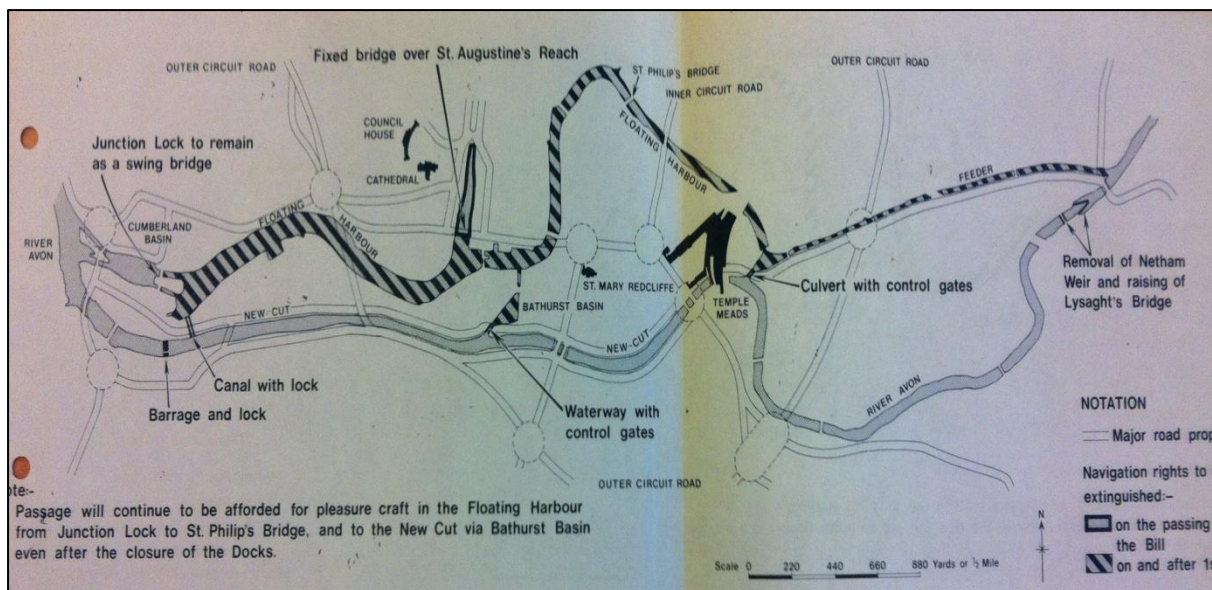
The city of Bristol to which the ss *Great Britain* returned in June 1970 was an area of economic and material instability. Shortly prior to the ship's arrival, the Bristol Corporation had publicly announced its intention to comprehensively reconfigure the city's Floating Harbour as a means of managing – and harnessing – wider economic and technological developments. Bristol Corporation's plans were entirely in keeping with the clean-sweep philosophy that characterised much of the urban development of 1960s Britain. The proposed redevelopment of the city's waterway followed the standard blueprint of post-war planning,<sup>12</sup> emphasising zonal theory and spatial segregation.<sup>13</sup> Bristol city-planners envisaged the dividing of city's varying functions namely business, shopping, entertainment and residential into spatially demarcated sectors. The Corporation's proposals also reflected the conventional aesthetic impulses of the comprehensive redevelopment plans of 1960s Britain. The imposing concrete edifice of the urban motorway, the ring road and the high-rise development loomed large in the imaginations of the British planning profession and the offices of the Bristol Corporation were no exception.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> What historians have conventionally labelled 'post-war planning' in the UK began with post-war reconstruction efforts and the passing of the 1947 Town & Country Planning Act and broadly continued until the early 1970's. The 1973 oil crisis and a wider collapse of the ideological principles on which it was based has been widely perceived as ending the period of comprehensive, modernist interventions in the urban form. While the form and scale of intervention varied to a certain degree over this period, what historians have referred to as post-war planning largely embodied an intellectual and cultural continuity over this time-period and it is this continuity which the term 'post-war planning' refer to in this chapter.

<sup>13</sup> S. Gunn, 'The Rise and Fall of British Urban Modernism: Planning Bradford', circa 1945-1970, *Journal of British Studies* 49, 4 (2010) p.849





**Fig.4.2.** c. 1969 'The planners gaze' - Proposed redevelopment of the Floating Harbour. One of the most frequently cited (1969-1970), BRO.41301/PM/1. One of the most frequently cited criticisms of post-war redevelopment is in its zeal to rationalise its abstract means failed to capture imagining the dense complexity of the human environment as it existed. The result was frequent acrimony between civic authorities and the residents affected by these planned rationalisations.

The story of what Simon Gunn has labelled post-war 'urban modernism' has been sufficiently well rehearsed academically that it 'borders on the cliché.'<sup>15</sup> Therefore, the following broad sketch of comprehensive redevelopment and its antecedents does not represent an effort to contribute substantively to an already well-rehearsed debate. It is instead an attempt to outline the intellectual and material milieu of the city to which the *ss Great Britain* returned in June 1970. An outline of the ideological basis of the comprehensive planning solutions of post-war Britain is essential as a means of understanding the contrast between the local authorities' bureaucratic failure to adequately conceptualise the vessel and the rapturous reception the ship received from individual Bristolians on her return. The visual, temporal and spatial imagination of the Bristol Corporation would have a substantial effect – both directly and indirectly - on the interpretive scaffold constructed around the vessel on her return to the Charles Hill Shipyard.

As the work of historians such as Simon Gunn and Frank Mort have illustrated, the roots of urban renewal in Britain went far deeper than a prosaic response to developing city transport

<sup>15</sup> See A. White, 'Modernism vs. Urban Renaissance: Negotiating Post-war Heritage in English City Centres', *Urban Studies*, (2006) 43(13), p.2401

needs.<sup>16</sup> The symmetry of the regimented office zones and the clean lines of the urban motorway found their necessity in images of the chaotic urban conglomerations of the Victorian era. The chaotic jumble of the pre-1945 city weighed heavily in the minds of early reformers of the urban environment.<sup>17</sup> Urban disorganisation was perceived to produce a number of undesirable effects such as overcrowding, congestion and what Frank Mort terms the ‘confusion of people and their social and economic environments.’<sup>18</sup> The jumble of the Victorian cityscape was rendered both chaotic and incomprehensible by budding urban reformers who sought to make ‘sense of an immense and seemingly inhuman structure.’<sup>19</sup> Introducing a semblance of order to the ‘unintelligible mess’ of the cityscape described by Dickens in *Bleak House* nineteenth-century town planners such as Ebenezer Howard envisaged grand Projects to break up the great urban centres.<sup>20</sup> According to Wollock and Sharpe, the bewildering jumble of the urban sprawl prompted a yearning amongst reformers to construct a sense of ‘urban legibility.’<sup>21</sup> In their words: ‘The impulse behind all these plans was a desire to rationalise the perceived chaos in existing cities. Transportation and movement was, for such planners, the fundamental role of the city. They sought to have these lines of movement converge on a city ‘centre,’ at once functional and symbolic, a central axis in a wheel and spoke arrangement.’<sup>22</sup>

While Howard’s Garden City movement gained limited currency in his own lifetime, his vision of urban disorganisation had an important influence on planning in the post-war decades.<sup>23</sup> The work of Patrick Abercrombie whose 1943 *County of London Plan* has been widely interpreted as the spiritual antecedent to the urban renewal schemes of the 1960s, was influenced in part, by a desire to bring order to the perceived chaos of the modern city. To Abercrombie London was best described as ‘lava streams of irrupting urbanism [which] seem to flow blindly in natural devastating confusion.’<sup>24</sup> To town planners like Abercrombie, Victorian industrial cities were both ‘ugly and formless.’<sup>25</sup> As a means of redressing this perceived problem Abercrombie ambitiously envisaged the creation of an environment that

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<sup>16</sup> S. Gunn, ‘The Rise and Fall of British Urban Modernism’ pp. 849-869 & F. Mort, *Fantasies of Metropolitan Life*.(2004) 43 pp. 120-151.

<sup>17</sup> F. Mort, ‘Fantasies of Metropolitan Life.’ p.122

<sup>18</sup> F. Mort, ‘Fantasies of Metropolitan Life.’ p.135

<sup>19</sup> W. Sharpe and L. Wallock, (eds.) *Visions of the Modern City*, (Baltimore, 1987). p.196

<sup>20</sup> See C. Dickens, *Bleak House* (London, 1853) p.157 & A. Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, (London, 1963) p.72

<sup>21</sup> Sharpe and Wallock, *Visions of the Modern City* p.18

<sup>22</sup> Sharpe and Wallock, *Visions of the Modern City* p.18

<sup>23</sup> N. Low, *Planning Politics and the State – Political Foundations of Planning Thought* (London, 1990) p.15

<sup>24</sup> P. Abercrombie, *Town and Country Planning* (London, 1933) p. 26.

<sup>25</sup> Gunn ‘The Rise and Fall of British Urban Modernism: Planning Bradford’, p.853

would provide ‘visual solace for man.’<sup>26</sup> Abercrombie’s self-expressed aim is a revealing insight into the way in which city-space was conceptualised. As the work of Mort has demonstrated, the ‘plethora of maps, diagrams, and photographs’ contained within the *County of London Plan* imposed a ‘distinctive way of seeing the city, whereby key urban functions were highlighted and other uses deliberately occluded.’<sup>27</sup>

This top-down, visually based method of conceptualising city-space was fully evidenced throughout Bristol’s proposed redevelopment of its city docks. Visual imagery determined its ordered flow of people and traffic and the spatial segregation of utility it proposed. The redevelopment plan and the visual cartography on which it relied replaced dense layers and tangled threads of transport capillaries with the straight lines of carefully planned, and more aesthetically pleasing, grids and hubs. In the words of James C. Scott: ‘An efficient, rationally organized city . . . was one that *looked* regimented and orderly in a geometrical sense.’<sup>28</sup> Initially, both the local and national press abetted the Corporation’s emphasis on the exciting future possibilities the redevelopment plans signalled and the *Financial Times*, *The Evening Post* and *Bristol’s Civic News* invited its readers to adopt the perspective of the visionary town planner in furnishing its readers with a plethora of explanatory maps and diagrams.<sup>29</sup> The weight accorded to the visual as a primary mode of configuring the urban environment is also reflected in the choice of architecture to populate the newly legible grids of rationalised city space. Commonly associated with 1960s British urban planning, Brutalist modes of architecture and its angular geometries presented an appeal, which to quote Fu Tuan ‘made almost exclusively to the eyes.’<sup>30</sup> Here too we can perceive the influence of representations of the Victorian City on the era’s planners. The clean lines of pale, sand blasted concrete could hardly provide a more visible contrast to the dirty, smoke stained buildings of the Victorian city that resided in popular imagination.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Abercrombie, *Town and Country Planning* p.26

<sup>27</sup> Mort ‘Fantasies of Metropolitan Life.’ p.125

<sup>28</sup> J. C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, 1998), p.4.

<sup>29</sup> ‘Bristol takes on Venetian air with redevelopment of the Docks’, *The Financial Times*, 20<sup>th</sup> October 1969, ‘What is the future of our waterfront’, *Bristol Evening Post*, October 24<sup>th</sup> 1969, ‘The future of the City Docks’, *Bristol Civic News*, July/August 1969, Number 133

<sup>30</sup> Tuan, *Segmented Worlds and Self – group life and individual consciousness*, (Minneapolis, 1982) p.59

<sup>31</sup> Despite its often polarising interpretations, Brutalism as a movement was initially lauded as embodying the progressive aspirations of the post-war British state. In the collectivist principles with which it was conceived and its privileging of functionality over form expansive tower blocks, the ease of access via associated walkways were seen as facilitating human movement and interaction. Brutalism was initially envisaged as democratising the way in which municipal buildings were used by the wider community. In later years the utopian ideals with which these buildings were visualised were all but effaced by their popular association with



**Fig 4.3. c.** ‘Robinson Building – 1963’ An architect’s impression of the replacement Robinson building on the corner of Victoria Street and Redcliff Street. The original was demolished in 1961. 200-ft high and fifteen stories, the building marked the construction of Bristol’s first high-rise tower block. In what David Harvey characterises as ever fluctuating capitalist reconfigurations of the spatial environment, modernist buildings such as these have themselves been threatened with destruction or subject to the vagaries of regeneration and renewal. Today, the Robinson building rebranded as ‘1 Redcliff Street’ serves as office space near the Cabot Circus shopping centre. Photo reproduced from Eveleigh, *David A Century of Bristol* (Stroud, 2009) p.44

The regimented lines, spatially segregated landscape and concrete facades that characterised 1960’s urban redevelopment were, to a degree, an aesthetic reaction to tropes of the Victorian

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urban blight and crime. They have also been accused in their imposing material forms as prompting an alienation from one’s surrounding environment or else, as Anthony Daniels claimed embodying ‘Totalitarianism in Material Form.’ It is worthy of note how these interpretations of Brutalism have gained common currency within and been disseminated by popular media. To name but two examples the ultra-violent events of Stanley Kubrick’s *A Clockwork Orange* (1971) and Clive Barker’s *Candyman* (1992) are largely framed with visual reference to prominent expressions of Brutalism - namely the Barbican Estate in London and Cabrini Green in Chicago. It is worth noting the political dimensions of framing Brutalist architecture in this way and the failure of Brutalism can be seen as closely aligned to a broader economic crash and the end of the post-war boom in the 1970s. It is important to acknowledge that the New Right and the Conservative Government’s of Margaret Thatcher and John Major were particularly antipathetic towards Brutalist structures which has been interpreted as betraying a zeal to efface prominent material reminders of the collectivist and progressive values of the post-war era. In more recent years appreciation of Brutalism has enjoyed something of a revival with academics offering vigorous defences of Brutalism as a significant mode architectural expression and the *National Trust* offering tours of prominent Brutalist buildings. Appreciation of the Brutalist school of architecture can even be seen on social media, the Twitter feed ‘British Brutalism’ was produced for ‘fans’ of the urban tower block and aims to ‘raise awareness and present the destruction of the style before it can be properly appreciated.’ Readers interested in exploring the topic of Brutalism in further depth are advised to consult: B. Calder, *Raw Concrete: The Beauty of Brutalism*. (London, 2016), J. Stevenson, ‘The Jerusalem that failed? The rebuilding of post-war Britain.’ In *Britain since 1945* J. Hollowell (eds.) *Britain since 1945* (London, 1991) pp.89-110 and C. Alexander. *Brutalism: post-war British architecture*. (London, 2012)

city. At the same time, the grand visual sweep of the perspective adopted by the state reflected the extent of its aspirations in managing human behaviour. The previous illegibility of the urban form was linked explicitly in planner's minds to the speculative commercial interests that drove it.<sup>32</sup> Reformers such as Howard decried an urban topography that had been created exclusively by 'selfishness' and 'individualism.'<sup>33</sup> As early as 1898 Howard advocated a collectivist solution as the only corrective to the chaotic and overcrowded cities of the era.<sup>34</sup> The urban morass ostensibly created by freewheeling Victorian capitalism was commonly perceived as both politically and materially out of step with the post-war state's expanded role in the modern world.

In their comprehensive, large-scale reconfigurations of the urban environment, post-war planners attempted to take account of wider community needs and not just the preferences of powerful individual interests.<sup>35</sup> The laissez-faire development of yester-year was anathema to the efficiency and rationality that the modern state aspired to. The post-war extension of state planning in all areas was lent corporeal form in the widespread reconstruction of British cities. Visual structure was given to the state's pervasive gaze and ambition in its cartographic and aerial representations of the urban environment. Material structure was given to its managerial forms, in its segregated spatial solutions and efficient flows of traffic and movement. The technocratic pragmatism of state planners would succeed where laissez-faire capitalism had failed in delivering a rational ordering of the urban environment.<sup>36</sup>

The creative purpose of Bristol's local planners and politicians expressed in the city's 1966 City Centre Policy Report and the methods by which they pursued this vision were characteristic of planning solutions in 1960's Britain. The large-scale reshaping of central urban areas was - as one Bristol planner subsequently admitted - a premise 'intellectually fashionable at the time.'<sup>37</sup> By 1965, local authorities across Britain had implemented an estimated 400 urban renewal schemes and the number of comprehensive development areas (CDAs) being considered by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government rose from 15 in

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<sup>32</sup> Mort, *Fantasies of Metropolitan Life*. p.122

<sup>33</sup> N. Low, *Planning Politics and the State – Political Foundations of Planning Thought* (London, 1990) p.15

<sup>34</sup> N. Low, *Planning Politics and the State – Political Foundations of Planning Thought* p.15

<sup>35</sup> N. Tiratsoo, 'The reconstruction of blitzed British cities: myth and reality 1945-55', *Contemporary British History*, 14 (1), (2000) p.32

<sup>36</sup> Nicholas Low *Planning Politics and the State – Political Foundations of Planning Thought* p.15

<sup>37</sup> J. V. Punter, *Design Control in Bristol 1940-1990* (Bristol: Redcliffe, 1990) p.62

1959 to 70 in 1963.<sup>38</sup> Major cities such as Newcastle, Glasgow and Birmingham underwent radical and dramatic reconfigurations. Ostensibly, national economic developments and an extended period of growth were the spur for the large-scale changes to the urban environment that characterised the period. Ambitious new visions of city space were demanded by the growth of the popularity of the motor vehicle. Growth in incomes and population experienced throughout the 1950s and 1960s suggested large future increases in the demand for movement by cars.<sup>39</sup> Road traffic more than quadrupled between 1950 and 1970 and consequently road building, and in particular, the construction of urban and national motorways was accepted as a national economic and political priority.<sup>40</sup> Bristol itself was a beneficiary of expansive national infrastructure Projects such as the recently completed Severn Bridge, the M4 to London in 1966 and the M5 arterial links from the Midlands to the South West.<sup>41</sup> In his highly influential 1963 report *Traffic in Towns*, Colin Buchanan recommended new intra-urban road building schemes to forestall the inevitable collapse of a creaking urban infrastructure.<sup>42</sup>

National developments were reflected regionally and the technocratic state-led approach favoured by post-war British governments on both sides of the political divide was fully evidenced in Bristol. Post-war consensus was not only alive and well in Bristol but apparently existed in a particularly robust form - a long-standing joke in the city transposed the Christian names of the two opposing political leaders (Wally Jenkins and Gervas Walker) to 'Wally Walker' and 'Gervas Jenkins' to emphasise their similarities in approach.<sup>43</sup> At the time of the 1966 redevelopment plan's publication, planning in Bristol was a consensus issue. Both Labour and Conservative factions in the Corporation saw their responsibilities as encompassing a harnessing of economic growth, both regional and national. This growth, it was perceived on both sides of the political divide, could be best achieved by more roads, better transport and the accommodation of major office developments.<sup>44</sup> To the city planners and politicians of the Bristol Corporation the proposed redevelopment of the Floating

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<sup>38</sup> Gunn, 'The Rise and Fall of British Urban Modernism' p.855

<sup>39</sup> G. Vigar, 'Reappraising UK transport policy 1950–99: the myth of 'mono-modality and the nature of 'paradigm shifts', *Planning Perspectives*, 16, 3 (2001), p.271

<sup>40</sup> Vigar, 'Reappraising UK transport policy 1950–99.' p.271

<sup>41</sup> Punter, *Design Control in Bristol 1940-1990* p.61

<sup>42</sup> Vigar, 'Reappraising UK transport policy 1950–99.' p.271

<sup>43</sup> Punter, *Design Control in Bristol 1940-* p.58

<sup>44</sup> Punter *Design Control in Bristol 1940-1990* p.58

Harbour was at its core, a rationally grounded and pragmatic attempt to manage the pressures of a rapidly transforming economic environment.

Although arguably the most salient geographic and historical feature of the city of Bristol, by 1963 the city docks appeared to be in crisis.<sup>45</sup> The large cargo containers of modern shipping had increasingly outgrown the dock's capacity to accommodate them and the higher associated costs of the port - in relation to its economic competitors - resulted in a rapidly diminishing share of trade. The city docks also suffered from a lack of adequate facilities; obsolete equipment and insufficient working space on the quays. The economic impediments confronting Bristol harbour were compounded by its unique geographic demerits, as few other ports of significance necessitated the challenging negotiation of three miles of waterway before the loading and unloading of cargo could take place. Although many of the Harbour's shortcomings were long-term from the mid-1960's onwards, it was clear to the Corporation that this decline was accelerating. In the space of one year, dry cargo imports diminished over 25% (from over 400,000 tons per annum in 1967 to less than 300,000 in 1968).<sup>46</sup> By 1969, the city docks were losing over £200,000 a year.<sup>47</sup> Aware of the scale of the problem confronting it, the Corporation estimated that any attempt to modernise the city docks in accordance with 'current cargo handling practice' would not provide 'an adequate return on the scale of investment required.'<sup>48</sup> As early as 1965 the Docks Committee had taken the view that the 'city docks would be run down with a view to achieving economies and realising the Capital value of the city docks property.'<sup>49</sup> By the early 1960s the docks at Avonmouth, Portishead and the proposed developments at Portbury were regarded as a far more viable commercial prospect, with close proximity to motorway junctions, large areas of level ground, viable rail links and fuel supplies.

The proposed redevelopment scheme outlined a new road pattern in Central Bristol, linking the two halves of the city via a fixed bridge from Bush's corner to Canon's Marsh, effectively excluding St. Augustine's Reach from use by cargo carrying vessels.<sup>50</sup> In the longer term, the

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<sup>45</sup> BRO: Report by Town Clerk and Chief Executive Officer, Special Meeting of Planning & Traffic Committee, Bristol Corporation Bill, 31<sup>st</sup> December 1969.

<sup>46</sup> BRO: Planning & Traffic Committee – Annual Statement of Accounts 1969, 31<sup>st</sup> December 1969

<sup>47</sup> 'Counting the Cost' – *Bristol Evening Post*, October 21<sup>st</sup> 1969

<sup>48</sup> BRO: Planning & Traffic Committee – Annual Statement of Accounts 1969, 31<sup>st</sup> December 1969

<sup>49</sup> BRO: Reports of Officers to Docks Committee 1st Jan 1965 - 31 Dec 1965, Report by Secretary for the Docks Committee, 8<sup>th</sup> November 1965, M/BCC/DOC/1/133,

<sup>50</sup> BRO: Reports of Officers to Docks Committee 1st Jan 1969 – 31st December 1969, Report by Secretary for the Docks Committee, 16<sup>th</sup> January 1969, M/BCC/DOC/1/143

scheme envisaged a high-level bridge across the Floating Harbour between Jacobs Well Road and Wapping Wharf, which would form part of the Outer Circuit Road.<sup>51</sup> The key bridge in the redevelopment plans and ring roads crossed almost directly over the Charles Hill dockyard, in which the restoration of the *Great Britain* was to take place. Further – and most controversially - Bristol Corporation's bold new scheme of urban development also involved reclaiming a large expanse of water in the Floating Harbour, for office development purposes.<sup>52</sup> The latter proposal, which essentially suggested filling in a large tract of the waterway, was complicated by the fact that the Floating Harbour, the feeder canal and the river above Netham were public highways. Therefore the Corporation was required to maintain navigation through both the Floating Harbour and the feeder canal itself. Any proposal, which had the effect of extinguishing rights of navigation, would require a Parliamentary Bill and the assent of the Minister of Transport.<sup>53</sup>

Yet compared to the purported benefits the plan delivered, the Corporation evidently regarded the issue as a minor administrative hurdle. The comprehensive redevelopment plan envisaged an urban environment intended to maximise the potential for human happiness and not simply a rational bureaucratic response to changing material and economic needs. The July 1969 edition of the official newspaper of the Corporation, the *Bristol Civic News*, promised the redevelopment would present Bristol with an environment 'of which the citizens will be proud and which will bring them benefits that will be the envy of their neighbours and of other cities.'<sup>54</sup>

In the view of Bristol's city planners the 1966 redevelopment plan and the material overhaul of the Floating Harbour was a 'logical' response to the national and regional economic developments at the time.<sup>55</sup> The reclamation of land, the building of office blocks and the proposed ring roads and urban motorways contained within the plan were viewed as a rational and practical rejoinder to the needs of a city whose locus had shifted from a maritime centred industrial environment to one that was increasingly car-oriented and service-sector based. A 1969 Planning and Traffic Committee report into the future of the city docks noted

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<sup>51</sup> BRO: Reports of Officers to Docks Committee 1st Jan 1969 – 31st December 1969, Report by Secretary for the Docks Committee, 16<sup>th</sup> January 1969, M/BCC/DOC/1/143

<sup>52</sup> BRO: Reports of Officers to Docks Committee 1st Jan 1969 – 31st December 1969, Report by Secretary for the Docks Committee, 16<sup>th</sup> January 1969, M/BCC/DOC/1/143

<sup>53</sup> BRO: The future of the City Docks', *Bristol Civic News*, July/August 1969, Number 133

<sup>54</sup> The future of the City Docks', *Bristol Civic News*, July/August 1969, Number 133

<sup>55</sup> Punter *Design Control in Bristol 1940-1990* p.66



flatly: ‘the floating harbour was created in response to past demands of commercial shipping... which fundamentally undermines the present demands of optimal traffic flow.’<sup>56</sup> Extensive redevelopment framed as a rational response to present need was not only a feature of the Corporation’s internal communications but was emphasised publicly. In the estimation of the *Bristol Civic News* ‘The waterway may well be ‘delightful...but most Bristolians are aware of the obstacle this creates to road communications between north and south of the city.’<sup>57</sup> To a degree, the planned redevelopment was envisaged amongst Bristol’s policy makers and planners as a politically neutral and technocratic attempt to manage the shifting economic winds. Framing the Corporation as a reluctant participant in the onward march of progress, Cllr. Gervas Walker (leader of the Corporation in 1969) nevertheless emphasised the inevitability of the process. ‘Nobody would suggest closing down a prosperous commercial undertaking but this isn’t. Of course we would like to see ships in the city but it just isn’t on.’<sup>58</sup>



**Fig.4.4 c.** 1968 image of Bristol’s proposed redevelopment plan entitled ‘The Forum Plan for Bristol.’ To some extent, this image manifests what Christopher Tilley has labelled the ‘Paper landscapes and Paper perspectives’ relatively universal in all attempts to adequately represent human environments of emotion, consequence and meaning. However, a more sensitive appraisal points towards the Corporation’s effort to at least attempt to symbolically ‘people’ this image and demonstrate the intention for this area to serve as an environment of involvement and participation. Tellingly, the image lends chooses to represent couples rather than individuals and informal clothes as opposed to business dress – arguably framing it as an area of future recreation. Perhaps more significant is that while the prospective tower blocks are sketched as intended and future possibilities the images of people presented are much more vivid. The impression therefore is that the Corporation was perhaps more sensitive to the way in which its plans were intended to function as areas of human incident that their

<sup>56</sup> BRO: Planning & Traffic Committee – Annual Statement of Accounts 1969, 31<sup>st</sup> December 1969

<sup>57</sup> Punter, *Design Control in Bristol 1940-1990* p.66

<sup>58</sup> ‘What is the future of our waterfront?’, *Bristol Evening Post*, October 20-24<sup>th</sup> 1969

critics were willing to admit. Photo reproduced from Punter, John V. *Design Control in Bristol 1940-1990* (Bristol, 1990) p.69

What Mort identifies as a tension between scientific rationality and quasi-utopian idealism in his study of London's 1940's planning proposals is also present throughout the proposed redevelopment of Bristol's floating harbour. While the plans, at face value, 'posed reasonable, rational, and technical solutions to specific sets of problems' there was a surprising degree of emphasis devoted to the imaginative and quixotic.<sup>59</sup> In an attempt to give corporeal form to visual imagination, the 1966 policy document contained extensively detailed sketches inviting its readers to envisage the future shape of Bristol. That these visions of future-city space were given an almost equal weighting in the redevelopment plans as the scientific and technical data that informed it suggests that, to an extent, the Corporation was prepared to deploy pragmatic and scientific discourse as a means to stabilise, rationalise and justify the 'imaginative or fantasy elements'<sup>60</sup> of redevelopment. Similarly, in the bulk of its public communication, the redevelopment plans were framed not as a choice born of economic necessity but rather as an optimistic opportunity to re-imagine the centre of Bristol as an environment, not beholden to the past but positively looking forwards towards the future. The Corporation sought to emphasise the promises of modernity - novelty, stimulation and improvement - as it simultaneously attempted to diminish its threats: risk, anxiety and loss of security. In the words of the *Bristol Civic News*, 'exciting new' possibilities existed for the transformation of the appearance of some of the central parts of Bristol.<sup>61</sup>

The popular press duly took its cue from the Corporation's paper. *The Bristol Evening Post* approvingly reported on the 'exciting and imaginative' plans for the redevelopment of the City Docks. The newspaper eagerly listed the wealth of future possibilities offered by urban renewal: 'A galaxy of plans for the City Docks included housing developments, floating restaurants [and] a Royal National Life-Boat Institution national museum.'<sup>62</sup> *The Financial Times* juxtaposed the promise of the 'Venetian paradise' in the centre of Bristol with the image of the dilapidated warehouses 'currently disintegrating at the water's edge.'<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> F. Mort 'Fantasies of Metropolitan Life:' p.124 & p.150

<sup>60</sup> F. Mort 'Fantasies of Metropolitan Life' p.126

<sup>61</sup> 'The future of the City Docks', *Bristol Civic News*, July/August 1969, Number 133

<sup>62</sup> *Bristol Evening Post*, February 1970 [precise date unknown]

<sup>63</sup> 'Bristol takes on venetian air with redevelopment of the Docks', *The Financial Times*, 20<sup>th</sup> October 1969



**Fig.4.5.** c. 1970 Visitors to the ss *Great Britain* in August 1970. From the outset the *Great Britain* proved a popular addition to Bristol's Harbourside. It is remarkable to consider that in just seven weeks the ship proved capable of attracting over 100,000 visitors to the Dry Dock in Gas Ferry Road, as way of context this is only slightly short of the number of visitors the museum site attracts *annually* in 2016 with the associated advantage of a sophisticated marketing strategy, favourable press coverage and a presence on social media. It is difficult with any certainty to speculate as to why the ship proved to be an object of such curiosity and interest to its early visitors. Nonetheless with reference to its history in the Falkland Islands it might be possible to suggest the ship's physical dissonance in Bristol and its relocation to a far more densely populated human environment may have played a role. In a broader sense the influence of the proposed redevelopment plans may have generated further visits to the site encouraging an affinity with an artefact of the city's historic past. It is important, however, not to lay too much emphasis upon this explanation as the ship's visitors were not only confined to those who lived locally as the volume of visits suggest. Picture courtesy of the ss *Great Britain* Trust

## The ss *Great Britain*'s materiality - Perspectives upon the ss *Great Britain*'s return to Bristol

The ss *Great Britain*'s appearance on her arrival back to Bristol on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1970 could scarcely provide a more striking visual contrast to the clean lines and ordered functionality of the rationalised cityscape of planner's imaginations. Ramshackle, rusting and in an advanced stage of structural decrepitude, oral history accounts consistently describe the ship in unflattering aesthetic terms. The interview of Ivor Boyce, a tug-master at the time of the ship's return to Bristol, was typical: 'Me and I imagine thousands of others thought-whatever have we got here, it's just a wreck, just a mass of wrecked iron rust.'<sup>64</sup> Boyce was far from

<sup>64</sup> SSGBT: Interview with Ivor Boyce, *The Incredible Journey Oral History Project*, (2009) Accession Number of Transcript BRSGB2009.150.23

alone in his assessment of the dubious aesthetic merits of the salvaged historic vessel. Bystanders recalling the ship's return almost universally described the *Great Britain* in extremely unflattering physical terms. 'I'll be quite honest,' reported Maurice Price, 'I mean, to me it was just a rusty hulk of...'<sup>65</sup> As a child watching the ss *Great Britain* being towed up the Avon, Kim Hicks remembers being distinctly underwhelmed by the ship's physical appearance: 'You know...it looked like a funny old thing you know...[a] rusted old hulk. You looked at it and thought, what's the fuss about?'<sup>66</sup> John Prior put it more simply: '...it looked an absolute wreck.'<sup>67</sup>

If the primary appeal of the Corporation's re-imagined urban environment was visual, the comparative merits of the historic vessel were anything but. However, if the ship's visual merits were profoundly dubious, it possessed other positive qualities, offering both an immediacy and sensory ambience that were entirely absent from the sterile environs of the Corporation's future centred dock space. Opened to the public a mere three days after her dry-docking in the Charles Hill shipyard on 19 July 1970, the ss *Great Britain* attracted over 100,000 visitors in less than seven weeks after her return to Bristol.<sup>68</sup> Both authentic and tangible, the ship presented sensory panoply, the opportunity to touch the iron hull, imbibe the smell of the briny seawater that still suffused it and listen to the echoes that visitor footsteps produced in the cavernous spaces below deck. To some, the material draw of the ship apparently proved hard to resist and thefts of artefacts from the ss *Great Britain* were common.<sup>69</sup>

The effects of the ship's material presence on the experiences of those visiting her and the later affection with which she came to be regarded is not mere speculation. Oral history accounts suggest this sensory experience and the material interaction with the ship had a profound effect on the way in which the vessel was experienced, intensifying the affection with which the ss *Great Britain* came to be regarded. Prior (whose father was proprietor of the Albion Pub in Bristol) recalled the initially mixed, even hostile, feelings of the shipyard

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<sup>65</sup> SSGBT: Interview with Maurice Price, *The Incredible Journey Oral History Project*, (2009) Accession Number of Transcript BRSGB 2009

<sup>66</sup> SSGBT: Interview with Kim Hicks, *The Incredible Journey Oral History Project*, (2009) Accession Number of Transcript BRSGB2009.150.21

<sup>67</sup> SSGBT: Interview with Mr. John Prior, *The Incredible Journey Oral History Project*, (2009) Accession Number of Transcript BRSGB2009.150.11A

<sup>68</sup> Goold Adams, *The Return of the Great Britain* p.40

<sup>69</sup> 'Man took part of figurehead' *Evening Post*, July 3<sup>rd</sup> 1970 see Tuan, *Space and Place* & Tilley, *A phenomenology of landscape*.

workers towards the restoration Project. This hostility, Prior claims, softened considerably once these same workers had the opportunity to interact with the ship experientially:

What changed, what probably changed, is once the shipyard workers had access to the ship and again I can't be certain how this went about...but clearly people started being allowed onto it in one shape, form and another fairly early on... I rather suspect pride started coming into the equation somewhere.'<sup>70</sup>

According to Andrew Harris, Bristol's shipyard workers were far from alone in experiencing this effect. Harris noted his distinct ambivalence towards the salvage before the ship arrived in Bristol. 'I thought it was a hare-brained scheme...I thought it was crazy' yet when the ship arrived in Bristol 'all of a sudden, I started to weaken about this heap of rust...I was a total convert.'<sup>71</sup> Stationed in the Floating Harbour, the ss *Great Britain*, like the interior of a gothic Cathedral, offered what Yi-Fu-Tuan has dubbed an 'enveloping presence' where 'all of one's senses come to life' an environment of pointed sensory ambience.<sup>72</sup> The effects of were pointed enough to produce a significant and notable change in the attitudes and affections of the hitherto unaffected dockworkers.

As the underwhelmed responses to the ship's physical appearance on her return to Bristol suggest, distanced from the historic vessel the affective qualities of the ship were not nearly as profound. Further evidence of this effect is found in Prior's recollection of his father's efforts to foster support for the restoration effort by placing a photograph of the salvage effort in the Albion. A plan, which unfortunately, Prior recalls, significantly rebounded. Producing the opposite of the effect intended, the photograph 'didn't do the cause a great deal of good...if you look at the photographs it really did look like a giant rusting tin bath.... a lot of people really did feel that this was an absolute waste of money and waste of resource.'<sup>73</sup> Within the confines of the Albion at least, the photograph of ss *Great Britain* evidently rendered the ship inert. In the words of Julian Thomas 'fixing the relationship between object and subject'<sup>74</sup> placing the viewer outside the picture, forced a perspective and served to

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<sup>70</sup> SSGBT: Interview with Mr. John Prior, *The Incredible Journey Oral History Project*, (2009) Accession Number of Transcript BRSG2009.150.11A

<sup>71</sup> SSGBT: Interview with Andrew Harris, *The Incredible Journey Oral History Project*, (2009) Accession Number of Transcript BRSG2009.150.

<sup>72</sup> Tuan, *Segmented Worlds and Self – group life and individual consciousness*. p.114

<sup>73</sup> SSGBT: Interview with John Prior, *The Incredible Journey Oral History Project*, (2009) Accession Number of Transcript BRSG2009.150.11A

<sup>74</sup> Thomas, 'The politics of vision and the archaeologies of landscape' p.22

exaggerate – and reduce the historic vessel to - a set of aesthetic deficiencies ‘a mass of wrecked iron rust.’<sup>75</sup>

However, with the ship’s continued presence in the Charles Hill Dockyard, to some, interactions with the ship seemed to grow both increasingly more positive and complex, moving beyond its unprepossessing physical appearance. If the subjects of planning in Bristol were what Tilley dubs the ‘observed and passive’, the visitors to the ss *Great Britain* were active observers.<sup>76</sup> While cartographic space sought to ‘evict human beings from their lived world’,<sup>77</sup> the ss *Great Britain* on her return to Bristol offered an environment rich in not only historic but also sensory meaning and human consequentiality. In comparison to the ‘non-places’ that characterised post-war urban development<sup>78</sup> - the ubiquitous tower block, the alienating ring road - the ss *Great Britain* offered individuality and a sensory rootedness.

### The ss *Great Britain* in Bristol

Yet, as initial public reaction to the ss *Great Britain* indicates, the specific and unique allure of the ship was far greater than the provision of an environment of rich sensory input. If this were the vessel’s sole appeal, the ‘dilapidated warehouses disintegrating at the water’s edge’ would have proven a similar draw to visitors within Bristol. Letters to the *Evening Post* indicate the ss *Great Britain*’s principal appeal to visitors from Bristol and beyond was its specific nature, the ship’s status as a *historic* vessel, which infused its form with a particularly heightened version of what Baudrillard refers to as a ‘mythological character.’<sup>79</sup> While mention of the significance of the ship’s historic import was the most frequent recourse of those who argued for her preservation, precisely what manner of history the ship was seen to embody varied considerably depending on the eye of the beholder. To some Bristolians the significance of the ss *Great Britain* lay in the history and development of Bristol as a port.<sup>80</sup> To some readers, the vessel was a significant monument in the

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<sup>75</sup>SSGBT: Interview with Ivor Boyce, *The Incredible Journey Oral History Project*, (2009) Accession Number of Transcript BRSGB2009.150.23

<sup>76</sup> Tilley, *A phenomenology of landscape – places, paths and monuments* p.152

<sup>77</sup> Tuan, ‘Place: An Experiential Perspective,’ *The Geographical Review*, 65:2 (1975) p.159

<sup>78</sup> M. Arefi, Non-Place and placelessness as narratives of loss: rethinking the notion of place, *Journal of Urban Design*, 4,2 (1999) p.180

<sup>79</sup>J. Baudrillard – ‘Subjective discourse or the non-industrial system of objects’ in *The Object Reader* by Fiona Candlin and Raiford Guins (eds.) (Oxford: Routledge, 2009) p.41

<sup>80</sup> Letters to the *Bristol Evening Post*, July 7<sup>th</sup>, 1970

development of engineering as a profession.<sup>81</sup> One reader believed the ship embodied a modern Parthenon of ship design.<sup>82</sup> Yet another linked the ship – rather creatively - to the birth of America.<sup>83</sup> Others were far less specific, with one Bristolian arguing that the ship should be preserved simply because the ship embodied ‘historic ties’ more generally.<sup>84</sup> Yet, despite a fundamental incongruity in precisely which history the ss *Great Britain* was perceived to represent, the commonality between these various interpretations of the vessel was that the ship’s latter day significance lay in its symbolic rather than practical nature. As the tugs navigating her through the Avon to the Floating Harbour ably demonstrated, the ship was, all too clearly, practically redundant. Divested of ostensible utility, and in stark contrast to the ordered traffic flows of the proposed urban motorway crossing the harbour, the ship ran counter to ‘the requirements of functional calculation.’ Yet, as Baudrillard argues persuasively, a lack of functionality often serves to heighten the affective intimacy one experiences with a material artefact. While a ‘functional object is devoid of being...rich in functionality but impoverished in meaning,’ an antique or historical artefact ‘no longer has any practical application, its role being merely to signify.’<sup>85</sup> According to Baudrillard the historic artefact, ‘enjoys a special psychological standing’ serving a ‘purpose at a deeper level’ such as ‘witness, memory, nostalgia and escapism.’<sup>86</sup>

Yet, as letters to the local newspapers reveal following the ship’s return, in the majority of cases, the symbolism the ship was perceived to embody was regional and specific as opposed to national and abstract. While the ss *Great Britain*’s exact historical significance was the cause of no small degree of disagreement amongst the *Evening Post*’s readers, they were more assured when it came to agreeing where the ship belonged geographically. Notable for a remarkable degree of consensus, a flurry of letters to the *Evening Post* claimed the historic vessel as Bristol’s own; ‘She is part of the city’s heritage and history....’<sup>87</sup> Another reader highlighted Bristol’s affinity with shipping as suggesting a natural home for the historic vessel, writing ‘this great ship born here in Bristol should end her life’s voyage in this city, being walked over, sat on, stared at, and above all loved because this is a seafaring city.’<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Letters to the *Bristol Evening Post*, July 28<sup>th</sup>, 1970

<sup>82</sup> Letters to the *Bristol Evening Post* July 28<sup>th</sup> 1970

<sup>83</sup> ‘Grasp at once this wonderful opportunity’, *Evening Post*, July 9<sup>th</sup> 1970,

<sup>84</sup> Letters to the *Bristol Evening Post*, July 7<sup>th</sup>, 1970

<sup>85</sup> Baudrillard – ‘Subjective discourse or the non-industrial system of objects’p.41

<sup>86</sup> Baudrillard – ‘Subjective discourse or the non-industrial system of objects’p.41

<sup>87</sup> Letters to *Evening Post*, July 7<sup>th</sup> 1970

<sup>88</sup> Letters to *Evening Post*, July 7<sup>th</sup> 1970

Others were more sentimental and expressed their depth of feeling for the vessel in almost personal terms asserting that ‘the *Great Britain* should stay in Bristol. This is her home. And home means everything to each one of us and everything.’<sup>89</sup> Revealingly, a large number of these letters to the newspaper prefaced support of the historic vessel, not with statements of appreciation of the historical in general but instead with the qualifying ‘As a Bristolian...’<sup>90</sup>. The overwhelmingly regional claims to the historic vessel evidenced within the letters to the *Evening Post* following the ship’s return was such that one letter writer felt compelled to apologise for offering an opinion on the ss *Great Britain*’s preservation despite not living in Bristol.<sup>91</sup> Oral history also subjects the ship to specifically regional claims, Kim Hicks remembering the return as a ‘unifying event’ for Bristol where ‘you very much felt part of your city.’<sup>92</sup>

In truth, Bristol’s specific local claim to the ss *Great Britain* is perhaps more ambiguous than the letters to the *Bristol Evening Post* and later oral history interviews might suggest. It is notable that national politicians, while imploring the Corporation to allow the ss *Great Britain* to remain in Bristol, did not envisage it as embodying a set of particularly regional values. To Conservative MP Robert Cooke, the vessel was a testament to the power of unfettered commerce to deliver grand accomplishments. This extended not only to the creation of the ship itself but also the ‘private enterprise’ that had ‘rescued the Great Britain.’<sup>93</sup> To Tony Benn, former Technology Minister and Member of Parliament for Bristol South East, the ship was a groundbreaking artefact of past technology that paved the way for present and future technological successes. A powerful totem of modernity realised, Benn envisaged the ss *Great Britain* as functioning as the first of a series of ‘technocentres’ throughout the country ‘where young people could see interesting examples of engineering and technology.’<sup>94</sup> While Adley and Benn’s visions of the future shape of the ss *Great Britain* were obviously wildly divergent, they shared a perception of the ship in broader, far less regionally specific terms than the readers of the *Evening Post*. The ss *Great Britain* was not necessarily exclusively and completely redolent of Bristol’s urban heritage but could conceivably be connected to a far larger and more abstract conceptual frame.

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<sup>89</sup> ‘Collections’ *Evening Post*, July 7<sup>th</sup> 1970

<sup>90</sup> Letters to *Bristol Evening Post*, July 7<sup>th</sup> 1970

<sup>91</sup> Letter to *Bristol Evening Post* October 14<sup>th</sup> 1971

<sup>92</sup> Interview with Kim Hicks, *The Incredible Journey Oral History Project*, (2009) Accession Number of Transcript BRSGB2009.150.21

<sup>93</sup> ‘Keep Her! All city’s MPs back the Great Britain,’ *Evening Post*, July 15<sup>th</sup> 1970

<sup>94</sup> ‘Keep Her! All city’s MPs back the Great Britain,’ *Evening Post*, July 15<sup>th</sup> 1970



Moreover, Bristol's spatial claim to the ss *Great Britain* was far from uncontested. While the ship was constructed and launched from Bristol, the ss *Great Britain* spent the bulk of her working life sailing from Liverpool and the greatest proportion of her continued existence ensconced in the Falkland Islands. That Karl Kortum, director of the San Francisco Maritime Museum expressed considerable interest in salvaging the historic vessel and believed the ss *Great Britain* could find a credible home on the West Coast of the U.S. further implies that narratives associated with the historic vessel need not inevitably be Bristol-led. In addition to its far from natural spatial claim to the vessel, as one letter to the *Daily Telegraph* rather sourly pointed out, it is even possible to argue that Bristol should be anything but grateful for the salvage effort because of the ss *Great Britain*'s historically uncertain impact on the economic fortunes of Bristol. According to Marcus Hartnell, the ship was 'a financial disaster' and 'possibly the most unlucky ship ever to be launched in Bristol.'<sup>95</sup> In Hartnell's opinion, the four years Brunel spent developing his 'experimental' folly in the Charles Hill shipyard allowed Samuel Cunard to put into service six ships of the established and reliable *Great Western* type in Liverpool, hastening the economic decline of Bristol as a port. To Hartnell 'We must be thankful that no one has yet, dumped a Bristol Bulldog Fighter on College Green and suggested we restore that!'<sup>96</sup>

It is notable, too, that the ss *Great Britain* Project team saw a Bristol-based location as preferred, but not crucial, to the ship's eventual restoration. Long before the salvage operation even took place, the committee explored acceptable restoration locations in other British cities including Portsmouth and London.<sup>97</sup> Even after the ship's return to the Charles Hill shipyard in Bristol, the ss *Great Britain*'s Project committee approached property giants Taylor Woodrow in July 1971 requesting the company consider the iron ship as part of a multi-million pound development of London's St. Katherine's Dock. While the committee always envisaged the restoration taking place in the Great Western Dock in Bristol, the physical preservation of the ship itself was of greater significance than her ultimate location. Indeed, if the Corporation would not permit the Project's continued restoration to continue in the Charles Hill shipyard, Gould Adams claimed to prefer the alternative site in London – which would undoubtedly be of greater commercial potential – than any alternative site in Bristol outside the Floating Harbour. According to the committee, 'this is a *national* Project,

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<sup>95</sup> 'Why Bristol isn't grateful', *The Sunday Telegraph*, July 11<sup>th</sup> 1971

<sup>96</sup> 'Why Bristol isn't grateful', *The Sunday Telegraph*, July 11<sup>th</sup> 1971

<sup>97</sup> 'Two or three sites for Iron Ship in Pompey', *Evening Post*, October 20<sup>th</sup> 1971

a *national* appeal, a *national* responsibility.’<sup>98</sup>

Yet this perception of the ss *Great Britain* as an artefact of national significance, whose location was infinitely transposable, clashed violently with much of the tenor of the correspondence to Bristol’s local newspapers. Exhibiting an almost jealous possessiveness, one *Evening Post* reader, aghast at the prospect of the ship’s potential relocation to London declared, ‘It is *our* ship, it is part of *our* history.’<sup>99</sup> Another reader claimed he would rather see the ship ‘sent back to the Falkland Islands’, with her inevitable physical destruction, rather than countenance the ship being sent to London.’<sup>100</sup> In a poll conducted by the *Evening Post* in 1970, more than 92% of Bristolians wanted the ss *Great Britain* to remain in Bristol while an even more remarkable 75% were happy to see a contribution made from council rates towards the ship’s upkeep.<sup>101</sup>

In terms of Bristolians’ sense of ownership of the historic vessel, perhaps as important as the duration of the ss *Great Britain*’s stay in the city or even her disputed historical impact on it, was the vessel’s connection to the singular figure of Isambard Kingdom Brunel. In the words of Baudrillard, ‘The mere fact that a particular object has belonged to [or in this case was manufactured by] a powerful or famous individual may confer status on it.’<sup>102</sup> Oral history reveals that the ship’s design and engineering by Brunel was an important factor in considerations of the ship’s particularly pointed significance. As a testament to the figure of Brunel’s unique engineering prowess, the ship was endowed with a distinction perhaps lacking in other seafaring vessels, even of a similar era. In the words of one interviewee, ‘I am a great believer in keeping these things, because, I mean, it’s a one off, there’s nothing you can’t ever make that again....he was some guy Brunel...I have alot of respect for him. He was a very, very, clever man.’<sup>103</sup> To John Prior, while Brunel’s claim to the ship was certainly vital, it was Bristol’s claim to Brunel that prefigured much of the sense of local ownership expressed towards the ss *Great Britain*. In the words of Prior ‘given the fact that Brunel was so associated with Bristol it was only right and proper that the ss *Great Britain*

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<sup>98</sup> ‘Take the Iron Ship’ offer to London firm – The plan came from Brunel ‘Rescue’ Team, *Western Daily Press*, July 27<sup>th</sup> 1971

<sup>99</sup> Letter to the *Evening Post*, Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> 1970

<sup>100</sup> Letter to *Evening Post*, July 7<sup>th</sup> 1970

<sup>101</sup> ‘The ss *Great Britain* – here’s your verdict’, *Evening Post*, July 28<sup>th</sup> 1970

<sup>102</sup> Baudrillard, ‘Subjective discourse or the non-industrial system of objects.’ – p.43

<sup>103</sup> SSGBT: Interview with Mr. Templar, *The Incredible Journey Oral History Project*, (2009) Accession Number of Transcript BRSGB2009.150.13A

should come back and it could be the start of a real central focus on Brunel's work generally.'<sup>104</sup> The strong association between the singular figure of Brunel and the ship's pointed historic significance is not simply limited to later oral history interviews where public familiarity with the works of the famous engineer have increased considerably since 1970.<sup>105</sup> Local newspaper reports immediately following the ship's return made similar assertions: 'We think of Brunel as a Bristolian.' claimed one letter writer confidently.<sup>106</sup> However, another reader's rather tortured attempt to link Brunel's recuperation 'in the relaxing West-Country air' as signifying some degree of quasi-Bristolian feeling within the famous engineer demonstrates how difficult it was to prove Brunel shared the sentiment.<sup>107</sup>

While this is not the place to provide an exhaustive account of Bristol's affinity with Brunel, it should be noted that, like the ship he designed and engineered, the association – at least historically – is perhaps more fragile than popular local sentiment accounted claimed. Brunel was born in Portsmouth and spent the majority of his later life in London, and apart from a brief, if eventful,<sup>108</sup> period of recuperation in the city; he actually spent very little of his time in the West Country. In terms of biographical significance in the life of the great engineer, Portsmouth's and London's claims to Isambard Kingdom Brunel are certainly as legitimate, if not more so, than that of Bristol. Yet if Bristol's purported influence on the course of Brunel's life events is certainly open to debate, the great engineer's influence on the material structure of the city is beyond dispute. Brunel left an indelible imprint on Bristol, with the Temple Meads Railway Station, the offices of Great Western Steamship Company and the magisterial, Avon-spanning, Clifton Suspension Bridge.

The Suspension Bridge in particular has had an enormous impact on the distinctiveness of Bristol as a city, a fact not lost on small businesses and contemporary marketing teams forever in search of elusive 'unique selling points.' Today the bridge provides the visual focal point of the tourism promotion agency of the city of Bristol's (*Visit Bristol*) marketing offering, with the accompanying slogan '*Discover Brunel's Bristol!*' displayed prominently

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<sup>104</sup> SSGBT: Interview with Mr. John Prior, *The Incredible Journey Oral History Project*, (2009) Accession Number of Transcript BRSG2009.150.11A

<sup>105</sup> Macleod, *Heroes of Invention* p.314

<sup>106</sup> Letter to the *Evening Post*, Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> 1970

<sup>107</sup> Letter to the *Evening Post*, July 28<sup>th</sup> 1970

<sup>108</sup> Brunel was sworn in as a special constable during the Bristol Riots, which were centred on Queen Square. During the disturbances, he took a very active role in maintaining law and order and even arrested a man who, unfortunately, he unwittingly passed over to a fellow rioter disguised as a constable.

on its website.<sup>109</sup> However, as Warnaby and Medway suggest, the symbolic importance of bridges is more than mere marketing confection. To Warnaby and Medway, bridges are more than a ‘purely functional facility linking one place to another’ and that bridges can actually reconstitute and *create* locations: in effect arguing, ‘A location comes into existence only by virtue of the bridge.’<sup>110</sup> It is certainly possible to overstate this case: not all bridges are created equal after all, and some, like the bridges the Corporation planned would eventually cross the Floating Harbour, are more appropriately defined by their functional significance. However, it is difficult to deny that in some prominent instances, such as the Brooklyn Bridge, the Sydney Harbour Bridge, the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco or the Clifton Suspension Bridge in Bristol, bridges occupy a uniquely iconic status and thus are central to conceptions of place and local identity.



**Fig.4.6 c.** 5<sup>th</sup> July 1970 The ss *Great Britain* passing beneath the Clifton Suspension Bridge. Images of this nature were widely circulated upon the *Great Britain*'s return to Bristol and would have a powerful influence on the manner in which the ship was viewed within the city. photo courtesy of the ss *Great Britain* Trust.

The Clifton Suspension Bridge functions with a unique emblematic significance in Bristol, both as an imposing material testament to Brunel's continued influence in the city and as a magisterial and wholly distinctive totem of local and regional identity. Both these symbolic (and interrelated) functions would have a considerable impact on the manner in which the ss

<sup>109</sup> 'Visit Bristol' - <http://visitbristol.co.uk/> 28<sup>th</sup> January 2013

<sup>110</sup> G. Warnaby, and D. Medway, 'Bridges, place representation and place creation,' *Area*, (2008), Volume 40 p.510

*Great Britain* was received on her return to Bristol, with the ship's passing under the Suspension Bridge on 5 July 1970 presented as *the* iconic moment in the ship's return to the city.<sup>111</sup> In subsequent oral histories, the moment the ship passed beneath the bridge was accorded a momentous symbolic significance set quite apart from other memories of the ship's salvage among residents of Bristol. To Kim Hicks: 'I guess for a lot of people it was the knowledge that she would never pass under the bridge again either, or more likely she wouldn't, you know that this was a one-off event passing under this bridge.'<sup>112</sup> Hicks recalls how she and her family dropped rose petals on the ss *Great Britain* as she passed beneath the Suspension Bridge, an incident she recounts that not only other bystanders participated in, but was commented on in the national television coverage of the ship's return. It is, of course, entirely appropriate to concede here the frequently performative nature of oral history and the vagaries and distortions that memory can produce. However, even if the precise details of Hicks' story do not necessarily ring true, it is nonetheless significant that this narrative – constructed or not- centres on the form of the Suspension Bridge, an acknowledgment of its significance in contextualising the ss *Great Britain* both spatially and symbolically.

In any event, an understanding of the emblematic connection of the bridge to the ship by Bristol residents is not limited to retrospective interviews alone. More than 750 people jostled on the Suspension Bridge and thousands more, replete with flags and bunting crowded the Avon's embankments to watch the ship pass underneath - what the local press referred to - as 'Brunel's masterpiece.'<sup>113</sup> Letters to Bristol's local press indicate that the event - witnessed by so many people and reported so prominently in the local and national press - had the effect of re-contextualising and conceptually placing the historic vessel in the minds of Bristol's residents. The ship's passing underneath the Clifton Suspension Bridge indelibly linked the *Great Britain* to the city of Bristol and it was images of the this moment and which were most commonly reproduced and circulated by both local and national press. The ship's passing beneath the bridge cemented the vessel's connection to Bristol by means of a powerful inter-relationship between symbolism and materiality.

In the debate surrounding the site of her eventual restoration, the ship's relationship to

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<sup>111</sup> Chris Young, *The Incredible Journey – The ss Great Britain Story 1970 – 2010* (Bristol: The ss *Great Britain* Trust, 2010) p.57

<sup>112</sup> SSBGT: Interview with of Kim Hicks, *The Incredible Journey Oral History Project*, (2009) Accession Number of Transcript BRSGB2009.150.21

<sup>113</sup> 'Now big watch to repel boarders', *Evening Post*, July 6<sup>th</sup> 1970

Brunel, Brunel's association with the bridge and the bridge's connection to Bristol was a vital component in considerations of the vessel's future home. With specific reference to the proximity of Brunel's 'other great masterpiece' and in an entreaty to 'Keep Brunel's treasures together,' one *Western Daily Press* reader asked 'Could any other spot be as appropriate for her preservation?'<sup>114</sup> A barrage of letters to local newspapers suggested the Suspension Bridge's metaphoric support for the symbolic importance of the *Great Britain* could well be extended financially, with profits from the bridge contributing towards the cost of the restoration Project.<sup>115</sup> This proposal was made so frequently on the ship's return to Bristol that an exasperated trustee of the Suspension Bridge was obliged to publicly remind readers of the local press that the ss *Great Britain* and the Clifton Suspension Bridge were, for all practical purposes, entirely different entities. At any rate, the rules governing toll money were strictly governed by an Act of Parliament.<sup>116</sup> Whatever the practical shortcomings of the plan, it nevertheless underlines the perceived importance people within Bristol ascribed to the connection between Brunel's iconic landmark and the recently salvaged iron-ship.

While the *Great Britain's* material form and contour remained consistent with the vessel that left Port Stanley a mere 50 days prior the salvage and the return of the ss *Great Britain* to the Charles Hill shipyard fundamentally reorganised what Henri Lefebvre' has described as the ship's 'spatio-temporal configuration' and consequently transforming the 'centre of meanings' human actors found within her.<sup>117</sup> The previous chapter considered the power of imagery as a means of motivating and influencing human behaviour and perhaps it is not too fanciful to suggest therefore, that in the wide circulation of images of the *Great Britain's* passing beneath the Clifton Suspension Bridge, to many in Bristol the ship was symbolically paired with Bristol more widely. The bridge is by far the largest material signifier of local identity and it is perhaps possible to suggest here that the ship's permanent residency within the city - which many of Bristol's residents assumed was innate was produced as a result of a more complex inter-relationship between place and materiality. The result of this specific moment in time being captured by representational means, depicting the vessel passing beneath the prominent material structure of Bristol's most distinctive marker of local identity assured both the ship's connection to the city a site of human consequence and, in connecting

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<sup>114</sup> Letter to the *Western Daily Press*, January 18<sup>th</sup> 1972

<sup>115</sup> Letters to the *Evening Post*, Thursday July 9<sup>th</sup> 1970

<sup>116</sup> Response from Charles Oddie, Trustee of the Clifton Suspension Bridge, to a letter published in the *Evening Post*, August 3<sup>rd</sup> 1970

<sup>117</sup> Henri Lefebvre, '*The Production of Space*', trans. David Nicholson Smith, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991) p.77

it with such an imposing and permanent material edifice accorded the vessel, what was a largely, a conceptual exaggeration of the span of the *Great Britain's* chronological time in the city. As Tilley presciently reminds us our relationships with material objects are 'above all contextually constituted.'<sup>118</sup>

### The ss *Great Britain* as object of agency? – The ship's role in influencing conflicts between space and place

Having returned to an environment where the material links to the city's historic past were so substantially under threat by the proposed redevelopment, there was a significant link between the immense public support the ship received on her return and wider public reaction to the proposed redevelopment of Bristol's Floating Harbour. The Bristol Corporation's proposals to reconfigure the floating harbour represented a radical break with Bristol's historic, economic and material past. In spirit, the scheme fundamentally realigned the core of the city from a maritime environment with a well-established and historic connection to the sea to one that was future-oriented, car-centred and service-sector based. Bristol's city docks were its most salient feature; the water area of the city serving as a perpetual reminder of the area's maritime history.

The scale of the redevelopment plan, its distinctly modernist spatial imagination and the dramatic realignment of the Floating Harbour's material and economic structure it proposed indicated, to some in Bristol, that the Corporation was distinctly antipathetic towards any representation of the material past within the city. Popular rumours within Bristol claimed that the redevelopment proposals signified the totalitarian dreams of 'elitist but clandestinely socialist architect planners' who sought to destroy the 'general public's attachments to the historic city.'<sup>119</sup> Opposition to redevelopment frequently referred to the damaging impact the plans would have on the historic 'character' of Bristol and the loss of atmosphere that would result. One 1969 letter compared the redevelopment proposals to an 'act of vandalism' on the

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<sup>118</sup> 'Christopher Tilley, *The Materiality of Stone – Explorations in Landscape Phenomenology*' (Oxford: Berg, 2004) p.11

<sup>119</sup> Punter p.59

city's material and historic structure.'<sup>120</sup> A letter the Inland Waterways Association, inviting people to attend a Town Meeting in order to discuss the proposals, framed the redevelopment scheme and the opposition to it as a battle for Bristol's historic soul. 'This will be a most crucial event in the history of Bristol and will decide the future role that its waterways will play in the character and life of the city, to citizens and visitors.'<sup>121</sup> In the face of the Corporation's obvious modernist 'philistinism',<sup>122</sup> opponents of redevelopment characterised themselves as the self-appointed custodians of Bristol's historic past.

To some in Bristol, the Corporation's prevarication over the decision to allow the newly arrived ss *Great Britain* to remain in the city was yet another manifestation of the local authority's enmity towards material history generally. One letter to the *Evening Post* decrying the Corporation's attitude towards the ship echoed the charge of 'philistinism' that had previously been directed at the Corporation by opponents of redevelopment.<sup>123</sup> Another went further and connected the Corporation's apparent hostility towards the vessel and its restoration effort with the mooted redevelopment proposal, suggesting that the scheme was the latest in a long line of acts of historical destruction to afflict the city that included Oliver Cromwell's destruction of Bristol Castle in 1656 and the effects of the Blitz. 'Bristol has a richer historical background than the way it is treated would lead one to believe...Perhaps the city of Bristol is more than we can handle. Is the council aware of this or are they trying to destroy this problem which history has presented them with?'<sup>124</sup>

It is tempting to suggest that charges of this nature were broadly correct and that the Corporation's attitude towards the ss *Great Britain* hints at a wider hostility towards material representations of history generally - a result of an ideologically driven hypermodernity. However, recent historical study has destabilised the more monolithic interpretations of post-war redevelopment and suggests an adoption of a more nuanced, and sympathetic understanding of the practice of post-war redevelopment in Bristol. Detailed, rather than generalised accounts of post-war planning have suggested that in practice its effects were

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<sup>120</sup> Letter from R.L Nicholson to Vice Chairman of the Inland Waterways Association Ron Oakley, 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1969

<sup>121</sup> Letter issued by the Inland Waterways Association, 15<sup>th</sup> December 1969

<sup>122</sup> Letter from R.L Nicholson to Vice Chairman of the Inland Waterways Association Ron Oakley, 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1969

<sup>123</sup> Letter to *Bristol Evening Post*, July 20<sup>th</sup> 1970

<sup>124</sup> Letter to *Bristol Evening Post*, February 13<sup>th</sup> 1971



uneven, variable and regionally specific.<sup>125</sup> While the large-scale ‘creative destruction’ associated with redevelopment in cities such as Bradford and Birmingham are redolent of a broader enmity towards manifestations of material history generally, the post-war redevelopment plans of other British cities reveal a notable acknowledgment of preservationist impulses. The work of John Pendlebury, for instance, has demonstrated that tendencies of ‘modernist rationalism’ evidenced in Newcastle’s redevelopment plan were balanced, to an extent, by a ‘conscious policy of conservation.’<sup>126</sup> Pendlebury’s study of Newcastle’s redevelopment hints at a far more complex reality than traditional ‘clean sweep’, ideologically driven, explanations of comprehensive redevelopment have previously accounted for.

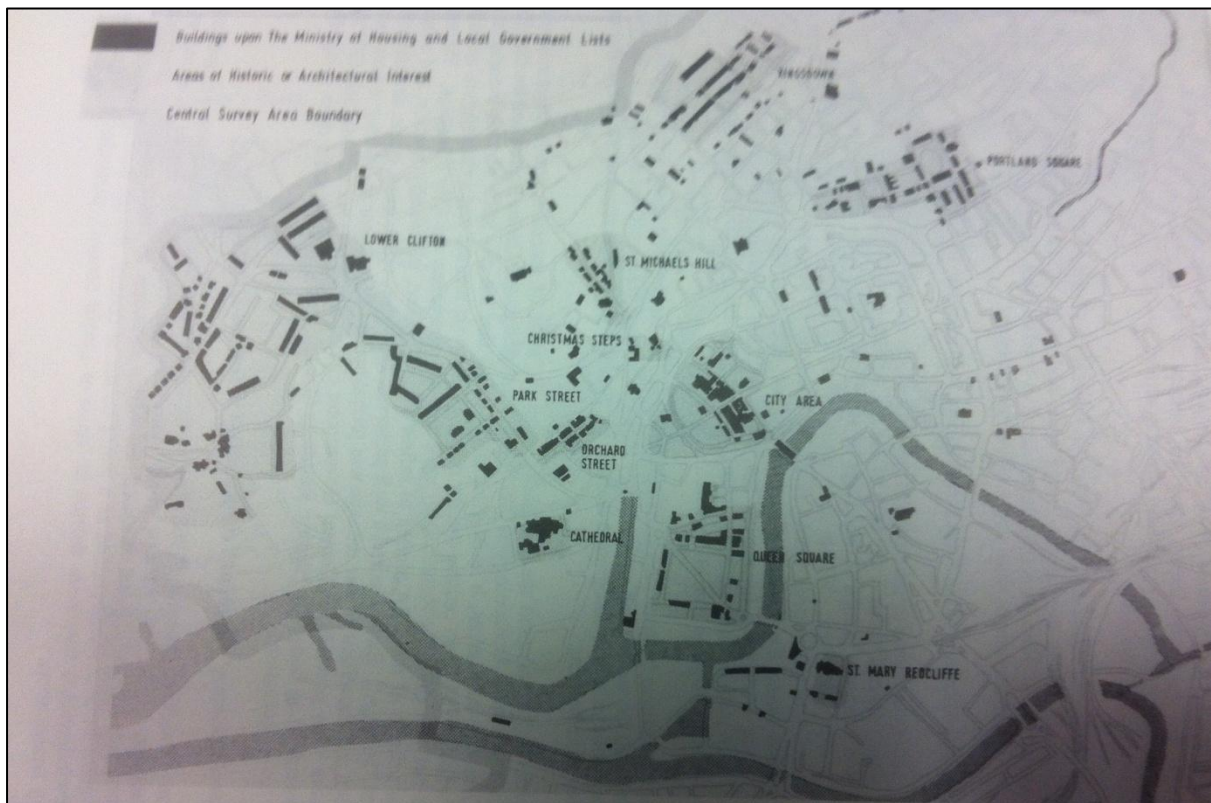
In Bristol, as in Newcastle – despite what redevelopment’s opponents claimed and some supporters of the historic vessel assumed – the Corporation was not wholly and wantonly ill disposed to all historical artefacts and areas within the city. The policy report included within Bristol’s 1966 redevelopment plan contained a detailed map outlining areas of special architectural or historic interest throughout Bristol highlighting an awareness of conservation needs and the necessity of preserving selected buildings of historic importance.<sup>127</sup> This acknowledgment of preservationist impulses within the Corporation’s redevelopment plan is especially notable in occurring a full year before this became a statutory requirement (with the passing of The Civic Amenities Act of 1967). In short, Bristol’s city planners and councillors were not the ideologically motivated or historically indifferent ideologues and vandals that popular imagination perceived. While the redevelopment plans demonstrated a preferred emphasis on future-centred solutions it perhaps stretches credulity to suggest the Corporation’s initial hesitancy in allowing the ship to remain in Bristol was born wholly of a broader, ideologically directed animus towards every representation of historic materiality.

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<sup>125</sup> Pendlebury, 'Alas Smith and Burns? Conservation in Newcastle on Tyne city centre 1959–68', *Planning Perspectives*, 16 (2001) pp. 115–41 For a broader discussion that seeks to unpick the complex reality of post-war planning that popular narratives have tended to obscure. See A. White, 'Modernism vs. Urban Renaissance: Negotiating Post-war Heritage in English City Centres,' *Urban Studies*, 43, (2006) No. 13 pp.2399–2419 for a broader discussion that seeks to unpick the complex reality of post-war planning that popular narratives have tended to obscure.

<sup>126</sup> Pendlebury p.116

<sup>127</sup> John V. Punter *Design Control in Bristol 1940-1990* p.19



**Fig.5.7.** c.1970 ‘Cartographic History’ – A map contained within Bristol’s 1966 redevelopment plan, which outlined areas of historic interest to be preserved throughout the city. This map serves to give a degree of pause in fully accepting the arguments forwarded by opponents to urban redevelopment Bristol at face value. In John V. Punter *Design Control in Bristol 1940-1990* p.19

The Corporation’s redevelopment plan, in its allocation of areas of historic importance throughout Bristol, demonstrated a broad awareness of the importance of material history as an abstract. Yet its sweeping cartographic vision nevertheless diminished personal, individual histories and their association with the existing material structure of the city. According to James C. Scott, all maps are fundamentally ‘techniques designed to grasp a large and complex reality’ in order for officials to comprehend aspects of the ensemble.<sup>128</sup> Yet in reducing an ‘array of detail’ to a set of categories, maps present a simulacrum of reality rather than a true representation of it. Discriminatory, arbitrary, symbolic and abstract, the mistake of city planners, according to Jane Jacobs, is mistaking art, as a mode of representation, for life. ‘The results of such profound confusion between art and life are neither life nor art. They

<sup>128</sup> James C. Scott *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* p.77

are taxidermy. It goes too far when the specimens put on display are exhibitions of dead, stuffed cities.<sup>129</sup> Maps distort truth, suggest a visual ordering to the chaos of city life and, within their act of representation, fundamentally decouple people from the lived environment. As Jacobs suggests: ‘although art and life are interwoven, they are not the same things.’<sup>130</sup> In relying so heavily on a sweeping cartographic vision of city-space, Bristol Corporation’s city planners could not encapsulate the conception of the urban form as palimpsest of layered experiences, memories and interpretations. As a city viewed from above, the redevelopment plan was, as one city architect later acknowledged ‘a piece of abstract art.’<sup>131</sup> Also significant within this plan is the fact that the Corporation’s preservationist impulses are solely confined to land based representations of material history e.g. Queens Square, St. Mary Redcliffe and prominent areas of Clifton. Bristol’s Floating Harbour and its historic waterway are notably exempt. Given the prominence accorded to land-based transport within the redevelopment and its proposed reclamation of expanses of waterway it seems unlikely that this was the result of mere insensitive clerical oversight. The planners gaze in this instance revealing a city where the ship was to be increasingly marginalised in favour of the seemingly unstoppable ascendancy of the motor vehicle. From water to land and from ship to car the ship – at least in Bristol – was an artefact of increasingly diminishing economic importance and to the Corporation’s planners the city required a dramatic material reorientation to reflect this change.

The Corporation’s flattening of space into a two dimensional conceptual form and the divesting of its profound symbolic richness that was its result, to a considerable degree, undermined its comprehension of the value of much of the city’s existing material structure - which included its historic waterways - to the individuals who resided within it. As studies in environmental psychology and sociology have sought to demonstrate, individual identity, memory and belonging are often tied to a sense of place which results in a ‘positive emotional bond that develops between people and their environment’<sup>132</sup> What has been broadly defined in academic literature as ‘place attachment’ is, according to Rollero and Piccoli, ‘a multifaceted and complex phenomenon’ that incorporates ‘different aspects of people-place bonding’ involving ‘the interplay of affect and emotions, knowledge and

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<sup>129</sup> J. Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York, Random House: 1961) p.372

<sup>130</sup> Jacobs *Death and Life of Great American Cities*. p.372

<sup>131</sup> Punter *Design Control in Bristol 1940-1990* p.100

<sup>132</sup> Stedman, Is It Really Just a Social Construction? The Contribution of the Physical Environment to Sense of Place, *Society & Natural Resources: International Journal*, 16:8, p. 673

beliefs, and behaviours and actions in reference to a place.’<sup>133</sup> In short, as William Hammet emphatically points out, ‘places matter to people.’<sup>134</sup>

To Marc Fried, the depth and significance of these emotional connections to the lived environment are ably demonstrated in the profound and manifest grief experienced by individuals on whole-scale reorganisations of the urban environment. In Fried’s examination of the social effects of an urban renewal scheme in Boston, the relocation of several thousand people produced: ‘feelings of painful loss, continued longing, a general depressive tone and frequent symptoms of psychological or somatic distress’<sup>135</sup> To Fried, these expressions of grief were reflective of the number of roles, ties and life experiences that bound individuals to the former residential environment. Consequently, the comprehensive material reorganisation of the environment in Boston produced a loss of sense of location and identity amongst the populace, which resulted in a ‘sense of helplessness’, ‘expressions of both direct and misplaced anger’ and a ‘tendency to idealise the lost place’.<sup>136</sup>

Although far removed from the scale and intensity of the West Boston scheme of urban renewal that was the subject of Fried’s study, the expressions of ‘grief’, ‘helplessness’ and ‘direct and misplaced’ anger were characteristic features of the tone of public opposition to the redevelopment of Bristol’s Floating Harbour. In a vociferous, sustained and highly emotional campaign, opposition to the proposed redevelopment was spearheaded by the amenity and recreational sailing groups that made use of Bristol’s waterways as a leisure environment. While, the source of this animus was of little surprise to the Corporation - which correctly anticipated ‘strong opposition from the boating fraternity’ before the plans went public;<sup>137</sup> the Corporation was evidently taken aback by the intensity and the strident belligerence of the opposition campaign. Less than five months after the public unveiling of the redevelopment scheme, Council leader Gervas Walker expressed considerable public anxiety ‘at the form in which public debate on the redevelopment issue was being conducted’.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> C. Rollero, N. De Piccoli, ‘Place attachment, identification and environment perception: An empirical study’, *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 30 (2010) p.202

<sup>134</sup> Wi. E. Hammitt, E. A. Backlund & R. D. Bixler, ‘Place Bonding for Recreation Places: Conceptual and Empirical Development’, *Leisure Studies*, 25 (2006) No. 1, p.18

<sup>135</sup> M. Fried, ‘Continuities and Discontinuities of Place.’ *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 20 (2000) pp.195

<sup>136</sup> Hewison, *The Heritage Industry* (London.1987) p.39

<sup>137</sup> BRO: ‘Plans of the proposed redevelopment of the City Docks’ (1969-1970), 41301/PM/1

<sup>138</sup> ‘City Docks Challenge – Stand up and be counted’, *Evening Post*, December 1<sup>st</sup> 1969

As the local authority's prescient identification of the potential source of opposition to redevelopment suggests, the needs of the city's recreational boating community did not go entirely unacknowledged by the Corporation. While the proposed reclamation would signify the end of historic rights of the navigation of the floating harbour itself, the proposals nevertheless did contain a significant acknowledgment of the boating group's rights based claim to the environment in its proposed construction of a new boating lake and the suggested use of the New Cut for the purposes of recreational sailing.<sup>139</sup> Yet, while the Corporation pragmatically acknowledged the city's waterways as an area of utility for a specific unit of Bristol's residents - and rationally assigned a serviceable alternative - it did nonetheless underestimate the level of this community's attachment to the existing material environment.

While sociologists and environmental psychologists have argued that place attachment is a common phenomenon in individual experiences of space, the strength and intensity of this bond can vary considerably depending on the environment in question. In a consideration of the attachment displayed by individuals to place, Hammitt, Backlund and Bixler argue that the unique sense of 'belonging, identity, dependence and possessiveness' towards an environment is demonstrably intensified in relation in leisure and recreational environments.<sup>140</sup>

The significance of place attachment and its heightened emotional register in environments of recreation and leisure is fully evidenced in both the ferocity and the tenor of the proposed redevelopment of Bristol's Floating Harbour. While, the Corporation's proposals certainly made provision for the needs of Bristol's recreational boaters in a functional sense its broad abstractions failed to encapsulate the unique intensity and intimacy with which it was regarded by the amenity groups who made use of the environment. That an entreaty from the Bristol Civic Society to the Corporation stated 'The society considers that the Floating Harbour from Temple Meads to Cumberland Basin is so important to the character of the city that the conservation of the *whole of the water area* is vital'<sup>141</sup> perhaps suggests that opposition to redevelopment in Bristol was never wholly related to questions of utility and the optimum necessary headroom required by the average recreational sailing yacht. Of

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<sup>139</sup> BRO: 'Plans of the proposed redevelopment of the City Docks.'(1969-1970), 41301/PM/1

<sup>140</sup> William E. Hammitt , Erik A. Backlund & Robert D. Bixler, 'Place Bonding for Recreation Places: Conceptual and Empirical Development p.17

<sup>141</sup> BRO: Letter issued by South Western Branch of the Inland Waterways Association, Monday 15<sup>th</sup> December 1969

greater consequence perhaps, were the individual memories, personal experiences and wider connections that were embodied in Bristol's existing waterway.

Paul Chadd, chairperson of the Inland Waterways Association, employed deliberately provocative language in an attempt to both personalise and give emphasis to the finality of the consequences of grand redevelopment amongst his readers. To Chadd, what 'made Bristol' would be irretrievably lost on realisation of the redevelopment scheme. 'For this to happen in what John Betjeman<sup>142</sup> called 'the best port of all' would be a crime, a crime like *murder* where the consequences would be with us forever.'<sup>143</sup> Chadd's use of language hints at the intensity of the relationship between Bristol's recreational and amenity groups and the city's historic waterway. As Lee Cuba and David Hummon's research has demonstrated, the strength and intimacy of what Hammitt, Backlund and Bixler have labelled 'structural coupling' to place parallels, to such a degree, experiences of interpersonal relationships that one can use the terms person and place interchangeably, such is their equivalency in individual understanding.<sup>144</sup> Viewed in this light, Chadd's use of language is seen as less hyperbolic and melodramatic than an unaffected and personal expression of the form of grief that Mark Fried's research in West Boston had previously documented.

An acknowledgment of the significance of place attachment and its heightened emotional register in environments of recreation and leisure imparts an important insight into the tenor of much of the opposition to redevelopment within Bristol's Floating Harbour. The quasi-personal relationship with Bristol's historic waterway, exhibited on the part of the recreation and amenity groups, revealed itself not only in a sense of manifest and profound grief on the announcement of redevelopment proposals but also in the attempt by its opponents to ascribe the scheme some form of hostile and malicious purpose. Despite no clear and convincing

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<sup>142</sup> Chadd's deferential appeal to the figure of Betjeman is also significant. The poet was noted for his romanticisation the past, despair at the inability to halt time and a disdain for the modern form, which famously found expression in poems such as 'Slough'. An impassioned defender of Georgian, Victorian and Edwardian architecture, during 1969 Betjeman presented a series of BBC programmes highly critical of modern planners and their ambitious schemes of urban redevelopment. In a triumph of polemic, Betjeman's programme, entitled *An Englishman's Home*, coupled images of English villages in Bath, Brighton and Clifton with the reassuring musical accompaniment of the music of Elgar and Vaughan Williams. If the programme's intent was not already made sufficiently clear in its canny juxtaposition of images of historic architectural form and musical accompaniment, Betjeman's own poetry - which overlaid both - emphasised the point forcefully. See Mark Tewdwr-Jones (2005): 'Oh, the planners did their best': the planning films of John Betjeman, *Planning Perspectives*, 20:4, 389-411

<sup>143</sup> 'Paul Chad says 'Wake up Bristol!', *Chronic News*, August 22<sup>nd</sup> 1970

<sup>144</sup> L. Cuba and D. M. Hummon. "A place to call home: Identification with dwelling, community, and region." *The sociological quarterly* 34,1 (1993) pp.111-131.

evidence to suggest this was the case, the Corporation's redevelopment plan was dogged with persistent allegations of corruption and dark rumours that the scheme represented the totalitarian dreams of 'elitist but clandestinely socialist architect planners' who sought to destroy the 'general public's attachments to the historic city.'<sup>145</sup> To some in Bristol, the plan was designed to increase the city's rate base or else enrich speculative private developers at the expense of the city's social and architectural fabric.<sup>146</sup> The image of shady deals being conducted between developers and officials was a common trope of the urban modernisation of the 1960's.<sup>147</sup> Although these suspicions proved well founded in some schemes of urban renewal in Britain, there was never any suggestion of financial impropriety within the local authority at the time.<sup>148</sup> Persistence of rumours of this nature, even in the ostensibly corruption free redevelopment of the Bristol Corporation suggests an intrinsic relationship between the scale of redevelopment, its dramatic realignment of the material form of the city and the assumption of some form of malign moral purpose amongst redevelopment's opponents.

### The ss *Great Britain* as artefact of embodied meaning – Affective interactions with the ship

The failure of the Corporation to encapsulate complex and often deeply personal relationships with space and materiality within its abstractions, determined both the tenor of opposition to redevelopment and, to some degree, the tone in which the ss *Great Britain* was received on her return to Bristol. The Corporation's flattening of space into a two dimensional abstract form and the divesting of its profound symbolic richness that was the result, undermined the local authority's comprehension of the value of much of the city's existing material structure to the individuals who resided within it. It was this conception of place and materiality, 'as a centre of meaning to both individuals and groups'<sup>149</sup> and the individual and intimate relationships embedded within it that the Corporation's comprehensive redevelopment plan almost completely failed to encapsulate.

However, as with the acknowledgment of the boating community's leisure needs, history or

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<sup>145</sup> Punter, *Design Control in Bristol 1940-1990*. p.59

<sup>146</sup> Punter, *Design Control in Bristol 1940-1990*. p.96

<sup>147</sup> Gunn, 'The Rise and Fall of British Urban Modernism: Planning Bradford', p.858

<sup>148</sup> Punter, *Design Control in Bristol 1940-1990*. p.63

<sup>149</sup> Tuan, 'Place: An Experiential Perspective.' p.154

historical representation was presented as an abstract form in the Corporation's plans - a broad area on a map to be preserved - but little, if any, recognition is made of personal and individual relationships with the city's historic material fabric. A relationship that was far too complicated to 'easily yield its secrets to bureaucratic formulae'<sup>150</sup>, city planners instead engaged in a wilful and complete exercise of abstraction that exaggerated a sense of aesthetic ordering that distorted and marginalised individual claims of the environment. In the words of Scott, 'planners were planning for generic subjects who needed so many square feet of housing space, acres of farmland, litres of clean water and units of transportation and so much food, fresh air and recreational space. Standardised citizens [are] uniform in their needs and even interchangeable.'<sup>151</sup>

Yet on the ss *Great Britain*'s return to Bristol, as the tenor of letters to the *Evening Post* suggest, a personal, individual relationship with place and materiality was, for some, of far greater and of more pointed significance than the preservation of historical artefacts and areas for their own, abstract, sake. What Tilley dubs the 'sedimented layers of meaning,' that accrue 'by virtue of the actions and events that take place within and around 'material form.'

<sup>152</sup> In addition to the historic and regional, oral history interviews suggest that the ss *Great Britain* on her return to Bristol also became the repository for a number of more intimate and personal narratives, supporting Tilley's claim that materiality and spaces 'are intimately related to the formation of biographies and social relationships.'<sup>153</sup> John Prior recalls his father's enthusiasm for the ship's salvage and return as explicitly linked to his former profession as an engineer. 'He had a real understanding I guess of the issues around the work that Brunel had done...my father had been somebody who'd worked with his hands so he really knew what it was like to create something.'<sup>154</sup> Prior's father was far from alone in linking the ss *Great Britain* to an individual and subjective personal biography. Kim Hicks ascribes the drama of the ship's return up the Avon, in some small degree as contributing to her future career in theatre. 'I think it's definitely moments like that in your life that leave you with a sense of occasion...you know they have a momentous quality and yes I think,

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<sup>150</sup> Scott, *Seeing Like a State*. ' p.22

<sup>151</sup> Scott, *Seeing Like a State*. p.346

<sup>152</sup> Tilley, 'The Materiality of Stone – Explorations in Landscape Phenomenology' p.27

<sup>153</sup> Tilley, *A phenomenology of landscape*. (Oxford,1994)

<sup>154</sup> SSGBT: Interview with Mr. John Prior, *The Incredible Journey Oral History Project*, (2009) Accession Number of Transcript BRSGB2009.150.11A



without a doubt that will have affected the sorts of things that have interested and inspired me as a performer.’<sup>155</sup>

While ostensibly far less introspective - replete with a plethora of technical details regarding the ship’s return and refusing to be drawn on emotional detail - the testimonies of former shipwright Denis Williams and retired tug master Ivor Boyce reflect a view of the ship, as a platform upon which to demonstrate meticulous professional practice similar to that displayed by Ulrich Harms salvage team. Memories of the ss *Great Britain* were presented, by Williams and Boyce not as emotionally transformative but as example of a job well done, linked to a sense of pride in one’s work. A similar tendency is evidenced in the interview of Christopher Davies, docks police officer at the time of the ship’s return. His distinguishing memory of the ss *Great Britain* at the time is linked to his prevention of the theft of the boss head from the ship by a contractor turned unofficial souvenir hunter. Again, like the salvage team of Ulrich Harms, the return of the ship was presented as just one job among many over the course of a lifetime and both are reluctant to accord the event, or the ship’s presence, with any larger and more meaningful significance. ‘Routine job’ in the words of Boyce.<sup>156</sup>

Nonetheless, the narratives that unfold across all the oral history collected during the ‘Incredible Journey Project’ link the ship, as part of a larger locational network, to a wider series of memories and associations outside, but connected to the historic vessel. An enormous amount of personal biography is revealed in questions that are ostensibly focused on the ss *Great Britain* itself. For Williams, it prompted recall of the distinctive nature of police work in the city docks and the birth of his first child. To John Prior it meant recollections about the Albion pub and its patrons to reflections on the character of his parents. To Kim Hicks it provoked memories of childhood and family mythology. To Andrew Harris, a humorous recollection about a former friend, who remarked on seeing the vessel returned to Bristol, ‘There you are, you see that’s exactly the sort of thing that happens under a Conservative Government!’<sup>157</sup>

Nowhere is this nexus between personal identity, memory and materiality so poignant, as in the testimony of Phil Gadd, whose, father, Eric, as vice-chairman of Brunel society, was

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<sup>155</sup>SSGBT: Interview with Kim Hicks, *The Incredible Journey Oral History Project*, (2009) Accession Number of Transcript BRSG2009.150.21

<sup>156</sup>SSGBT: Interview with Ivor Boyce, *The Incredible Journey Oral History Project*, (2009) Accession Number of Transcript BRSG2009.150.23

<sup>157</sup>SSGBT: Interview with Andrew Harris, *The Incredible Journey Oral History Project*, (2009) Accession Number of Transcript BRSG2009.150.

instrumental in raising public awareness of the plight of the *Great Britain* in and around Bristol. Gadd was fairly unusual (amongst the interview's cohorts at least) in being so intimately and publicly associated with the ship's return, with Eric using his prominent local profile as a local radio broadcaster to raise the profile of the ss *Great Britain* within Bristol prior to his return. In keeping with his son's description of him as a 'colourful character', these efforts included a pledge not to cut his hair until the ship was safely returned to Bristol<sup>158</sup> and driving round the city within a red, white and blue van with the words 'bring back the Great Britain' written down the side.<sup>159</sup> Gadd's recollections, centred on the form of the ss *Great Britain*, runs a broad gamut from the considerable 'feelings of embarrassment' regarding his father's 'madcap schemes' to the more considerably more poignant. For instance, Phil Gadd fondly recalls his own wedding day, when his father had arranged a bolt from the ss *Great Britain* (wrapped in plastic) to be baked into his wedding cake. While Eric Gadd's personal identification with the ss *Great Britain* is arguably at the more intense end of the emotional spectrum, a considerable number of Phil's affective memories of his father are linked to Eric's personal infatuation with the vessel and his role in seeking to ensure its presence in Bristol. These memories are to a degree, conceptually moulded around the physical contours of the *Great Britain*.<sup>160</sup>

Rather than what might be considered the digressive ephemera inherent within oral history interviews, I wish to suggest instead that the *Incredible Journey* interviews reveal a great deal about interactions with place and materiality. Inflected with memory, personal biography and identity and contextualised within a larger spatial framework, oral testimony reveals the ss *Great Britain* in Bristol to be an environment rich in human consequentiality. Narratives that frequently linked the historic vessel back to individual biography and memories suggests that materiality is not merely a container for human action but also constitutive of it. Oral testimony suggests the complexity of interactions with the historic vessel, proving the value of Tilley's assertion that 'material forms thus act as key sensuous metaphors of identity, instruments with which to think through and create connections around, which people actively construct their identities and their worlds.'<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> '...and now he loses his curly locks' *Bristol Evening Post* July 7<sup>th</sup> 1970

<sup>159</sup> SSGBT: Interview with Phil Gadd, *The Incredible Journey Oral History Project*, (2009) Accession Number of Transcript BRSGB2009.150.15A

<sup>160</sup> Tuan, 'Place: An Experiential Perspective,' p.177

<sup>161</sup> Tilley, *A phenomenology of landscape – places, paths and monument* p.217

## Conclusion

Like many prior examples post-war planning, Bristol's redevelopment proposals exposed the fault-line in which these ambitious city planners attempted to improve the human experience of the urban environment. Schemes of this nature, it should be acknowledged, were often undertaken with progressivism in mind and in their efforts to rationalise the complex space of the city, planners of the era were responding to a need to address the shortcomings of the Victorian City and the manner in which *laissez faire* economics had arranged the urban environment around the specific needs of private enterprise at the exclusion of human beings who lived in these spaces. Post-war planning and the broader intellectual history that sustained it was an attempt to address these issues directly.

Yet the failure of post-war planning, in part, can perhaps be ascribed to its representational means and the manner in which the expansive cartography served to produce a representation of the city in abstract form at the exclusion of those very human actors whose needs the planners aimed to address. As discussed previously, architectural Brutalism and the rationalised ring-road of post-war planning were in part designed to speak to notions of human happiness directly, in bringing urban residents together communally across the walkways of the urban tower block and enhancing the efficiency with which they traversed the city in its ring roads. It is not without its sense of poignancy that these schemes failed and the very people these planners intended to help assigned them a sense of malign agency.

Yet in attempting to bring economies of scale to the cities, in which people lived, worked and pursued recreational activities the representational means of these planners ultimately proved inadequate to the task. As discussed throughout this chapter, and indeed during the course of the thesis, human interactions with the environment in which they live are often extremely complex and in seeking to reorganise these environments so dramatically post-war planners often served to, unintentionally, reveal this complexity in the vociferous manner in which these schemes were opposed.

It is worth acknowledging here that opposition to these schemes were very often marshalled by the forces of social conservatism who objected not only to the outcomes of urban

planner's practice but also the principles that guided them.<sup>162</sup> Bristol was no exception in this regard and objections to the city's redevelopment proposals emanated from within Clifton and the principally affluent recreational boating community. Were areas of

In this respect the individuals who guided the ss *Great Britain* Project found common political cause with these socially conservative regional groupings, Gould Adam's depiction of the 'chilling bureaucracy' of the bureaucratic state embodies much of the pejorative language with which the New Right has often used to refer to its 'figurative dead hand.'<sup>163</sup> It is difficult, with any degree of certainty, to assess whether the key individuals associated with the Corporation held any degree of personal enmity towards the Project and its intended aim of returning the ship to the city and whether this subjective hostility guided their reactions towards the ship. Without dismissing the idea completely perhaps a more rounded view is the consideration that the Corporation was, in effect, a substantial bureaucratic entity whose role it was to maintain the orderly administration of local Government and seek to balance a multitude of competing priorities affecting hundreds of thousands of people's lives within the city. To a degree, it is perhaps this factor which had the greatest influence upon the way in which the Corporation negotiated the presence of the vessel in the city.

Yet the *Great Britain's* return to Bristol did not reveal it as an object that was merely buffeted between the symbolic, political concerns of social conservatism and rationalised government bureaucracy. Indeed the vessel's material presence in the city revealed it as an object of considerable agency, influencing the contemporary debates within Bristol over the merits of progress vs. preservation and the form of the future may take. This enveloping of the ss *Great Britain* within these debates, were to a degree, influenced by the ship's materiality and the coupling of the materiality of the vessel with Clifton Suspension Bridge when she passed underneath, potentially imbuing the vessel with a far closer symbolic connection with Bristol than otherwise may have been the case.

Yet, and in keeping with other stages of its afterlife, the ss *Great Britain* also served as a far more intimate stage of human encounter and in its convoluted materiality and site of sensory enrichment proved capable of altering the way in which the vessel was interpreted, a fact

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<sup>162</sup> J. B. Cullingworth *British planning: 50 years of urban and regional policy*. (London, 1999)

<sup>163</sup> B. Rockman, 'The changing role of the state.' *Taking stock: Assessing public sector reforms* (1998): 20-42.

acknowledged by some Bristol residents in oral history interviews. Here the ship became a repository of individual memory, symbolism and identity. Host to an astonishing number of visitors to during the summer of 1970, this site of rich embodied meaning and could scarcely provide a more striking visual contrast to the ordered functionality of the Corporation's urban planners imagined for the city's future. The ability of the ship to act as an object of affection for those who visited her was a fact not lost on redevelopment's opponents and provided vociferous public support of the ss *Great Britain's* continued presence in Bristol.<sup>164</sup>

While the ss *Great Britain's* return to Bristol had a discernible impact on the course of future redevelopment it is, of course, possible to overstate the ship's influence in this regard. It is necessary we do not endow the ship with a mystic ability to permanently alter the contours of every aspect of the locations that surrounded it. In this regard, it is important to recognise comprehensive redevelopment in Bristol's Floating Harbour failed to be enacted, largely due to the collapse in public finances following the 1973 oil crisis, rather than as a result of the ship's return to Gas Ferry Road. It also must be acknowledged that not everyone in Bristol was equally enamoured with the ss *Great Britain Project's* return of the ship to Bristol with a substantial number of letters to the *Evening Post* suggesting the ship was a 'useless hulk' and the time and financial resources expended on her might be better applied in addressing more pressing concerns within the city elsewhere in the city.<sup>165</sup>

It is also worth acknowledging that letters to the *Evening Post* provide a necessarily limited selection of general feeling within the city. As Gaye Tuchman reminds us the production of print journalism is mediated by many means, which encompass the length of time in which it takes to produce copy, commercial concerns, the practices of language by journalists and editorial censorship.<sup>166</sup> In this regard, it's not beyond the realms of possibility that the socially conservative leaning *Evening Post* was engaged in a process of cherry picking those letters which best reflected its editorial policy. Equally, although not exclusively, taking the time to write a letter to the local newspaper about the preservation of a historic ship and having said letter reproduced, by said newspaper, in of itself suggests a certain socio-economic bracket in which these interests tend to proliferate. In this regard was the *Great Britain* such an affective artefact in Bristol's less affluent areas? Did it function with the

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<sup>164</sup> Letters to *Evening Post* July 15<sup>th</sup> 1971, January 14<sup>th</sup> 1971, 'The Gossip and the Facts', *Evening Post*, August 9<sup>th</sup> 1971

<sup>165</sup> Letters to *Evening Post* July 9<sup>th</sup> 1970, July 28<sup>th</sup> 1970, July 22<sup>nd</sup> 1970, July 31<sup>st</sup> 1970, 18<sup>th</sup> 1970

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid* p. 663

same degree of symbolic resonance in St. Pauls or Stokes Croft for instance?

Yet the purpose of this chapter is not to exaggerate the ss *Great Britain*'s effect on Bristol's economic or political development or claim that its deeper symbolic resonance affected everyone in equal measure. It is nonetheless an attempt to demonstrate that, for many people in Bristol, individual experiences of the ss *Great Britain* reveal the limits of the representational spatial imagination of comprehensive urban planning and the significance of material points of reference to individual biography. Put simply, in the words of Julian Thomas: 'A place is not simply a region of space, but is experienced by people as having meaning.'<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Julian Thomas, 'The Politics of Vision and archaeologies of landscape,' in '*Landscape, politics and perspectives*' ed. By Barbara Bender (Oxford: Berg, 1993) p.49

## Conclusion: Historical Space - the ss *Great Britain* as Heritage Attraction

Visit Bristol's Attraction: Brunel's ss *Great Britain*:  
'Discover The Ship That Changed The World.'  
ss *Great Britain* Trust website, 2015



Fig.5.1 Muirhead James, c.2015 Panorama of current ss *Great Britain* site in Gas Ferry Road Bristol. 2015

The ss *Great Britain* of 2016 no longer embodies the role as object of contestation in a highly emotive political, economic and cultural debate surrounding the future of the city of Bristol. The ship, in its current iteration, is no longer an impermanent fixture in a harbour-side confronting the prospect of destabilising economic decline and material reconfiguration. The *Great Britain* of 2016 is now an established staple of Bristol's tourist landscape, boasting a coveted 5 star rating on the Trip advisor website and ranked number one out of 137 attractions in the city - an endorsement proudly displayed on the *Great Britain's* website.<sup>1</sup> In the years since 1970, the ss *Great Britain* museum has proven a popular tourist destination in Bristol, attracting approximately 170,000 visitors to the site every year. Critically lauded, the *Great Britain* has collected more than '30 major awards' including the South West Tourism and Visit England Excellence Awards, the Bristol Tourism and Hospitality Awards and, most impressively, the coveted Gulbenkian Prize (currently the

<sup>1</sup> SSBT Website. 'Brunel's ss *Great Britain*' <http://www.ssgreatbritain.org>.13/08/2015 & Tripadvisor - 'Brunel's ss *Great Britain*' [http://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Attraction\\_Review-g186220-d206438-Reviews-Brunel\\_s\\_ss\\_Great\\_Britain-Bristol\\_England.html](http://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Attraction_Review-g186220-d206438-Reviews-Brunel_s_ss_Great_Britain-Bristol_England.html) 13/08/2015

Museum of the Year award) in 2006.<sup>2</sup> The award of the Gulbenkian Prize in particular was perceived as a watershed moment in the ship's modern restoration, as the largest art prize in the UK, the award represents the most prestigious accolade across the wider museum and heritage sectors.<sup>3</sup> After the ss *Great Britain* was returned to Bristol by the Project in July 1970, the ship underwent an extensive, and ongoing, period of restoration and reconstruction directed principally by Ewan Corlett, Richard Goold Adams and, retired Royal Navy commander, Joe Blake (who would become Project Director of the reconstruction effort from 1970 onwards.)<sup>4</sup> Reflecting, broader national and international trends within the practice of conservation, the *Great Britain* witnessed an increased professionalization of its preservationist stewards over time, particularly with the appointment of the Project's first, official curator, Matthew Tanner in 1997.<sup>5</sup> Tanner a graduate of classics from the University of St. Andrews subsequently migrated to the study of Maritime Archaeology having been awarded his MPhil in the field in 1993.<sup>6</sup> Tanner's appointment symbolised a significant shift in the ship's custodianship which marked a reorientation of the Project's aims away from the more idiosyncratic interests of Richard Goold Adams and Ewan Corlett.<sup>7</sup> A reflection of this is seen in Project's rebranding in the spring of 2002 to the 'ss *Great Britain* Trust'.<sup>8</sup>

Like Henniker Heaton and Ewan Corlett, Tanner arguably represents one of the more influential individuals associated with the ship's continued survival. Tanner's involvement with the Project was instrumental in securing a £9.3 million Heritage Lottery Fund Grant a process which began in 1999 and culminated in the 2005 're-launch' of the vessel.<sup>9</sup> This ambitious reimagining of the *Great Britain* included the reconstruction of the Great Western Dockyard, a vast overhaul of the interpretative experience on board the vessel and most spectacularly of all, a 'glass sea' inserted at waterline level in the Charles Hill Dockyard presenting the illusion, to the visitor, of the vessel floating gracefully atop the water within

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<sup>2</sup>Young, *The Incredible Journey*. p.318 & SSGBT website: Brunel's 'ss *Great Britain*' <http://www.ssgreatbritain.org>. 13/08/2015

<sup>3</sup> Young, *The Incredible Journey*. p.318

<sup>4</sup> Young, *The Incredible Journey* p.318

<sup>5</sup> de-Haan, 'Re-staging Histories' & Vergo, *The New Museology*

<sup>6</sup> Young, *The Incredible Journey* p. 206

<sup>7</sup> Young, *The Incredible Journey* p. 268 - 274 de-Haan, 'Re-staging Histories',

<sup>8</sup> The reorientation of the Project's original aims and intentions did not come without a degree of acrimony and although this aspect remains underexplored in this chapter it remains the basis for future research See Young, *The Incredible Journey* p. 206

<sup>9</sup> Young, *The Incredible Journey* p. 311 & 314



Bristol's Harbourside.<sup>10</sup> The 'glass sea' is no mere aesthetic artifice and serves the purposes of sealing the ship's interior to facilitate the dehumidification necessary to prevent iron oxidation and ensure the ship's continued preservation.<sup>11</sup> Tanner has been credited as a prominent advocate of scientific methodologies of preservation and during his tenure as curator has overseen a particularly influential period of the ship's recurring material reconfigurations.<sup>12</sup> Tanner's appointment as curator also marked a substantive shift in the official order of symbolic meaning associated with the vessel. Gould Adams' and Corlett's vision of the ship as embodying a form of 'quintessentially British genius' in its association with Brunel was increasingly displaced by a democratised view of the *Great Britain* as a location that encourages 'the widest possible access for all...'<sup>13</sup> As Tanner made explicit in his first public speech as the ss *Great Britain Project's* curator 'The success of the ship goes beyond the Victorian maritime engineer. She effectively transcended the initial vision of her maker by successfully completing a working life of 88 years – a remarkably long time for any ship at that period. And in that time she made her own contribution to international maritime culture.'<sup>14</sup>

More recently, Tanner's stewardship of the Trust has turned its attention to a planned 'Being Brunel' project. The project aims to encourage a wider engagement with Brunel as a historical figure across a wide range of audiences through the use of 'lively, immersive and interactive displays'.<sup>15</sup> The intended aim of the scheme is to 'enhance the understanding and enjoyment of Brunel and his historic context and significance in the modern world.'<sup>16</sup> As with the *Great Britain's* 2005 're-launch' the 'Being Brunel' project is funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and reflects the Project's shift from financial support underpinned by individual charitable acts of philanthropy. The modern day ss *Great Britain* Trust reflects a wider trend within the heritage sector as a whole and a reliance upon an increasingly sophisticated model

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<sup>10</sup> This is a very reductive treatment of what was in fact an incredibly dramatic reconstitution of both the ship's material reconstitution and the symbolic intentions of the Project that began with the initial approach to the National Lottery for funding in 1995. Readers interested in exploring these developments at further length are best served consulting Chris Young's *The Incredible Journey*, particularly pages 197-314

<sup>11</sup> This humidifiers were developed in part collaboration with Cardiff University, which employed a specifically designed environmental chamber to investigate the level at which iron corroded. See Young p. 242

<sup>12</sup> See University of Bristol Website. Public and Ceremonial Events Office. Honorary Degrees: 2015 Matthew Tanner <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/pace/graduation/honorary-degrees/2015.html/tanner.html> 8.7.2016

<sup>13</sup> Young, *The Incredible Journey* p.212

<sup>14</sup> Young, *The Incredible Journey*

<sup>15</sup> SSGBT: 'The Being Brunel Project – Round 1 Heritage Lottery Fund Application' December 2013

<sup>16</sup> SSGBT: 'The Being Brunel Project.' 2013

of funding which interconnects both local and central Government, private enterprise and the museum sites themselves.<sup>17</sup>

Fulsome praise from both visitors and press has followed the *Great Britain's* 2005 re-launch, and in the forty years since the vessel's return to the United Kingdom, the ship has seen a consequent elevation in its symbolic status as a site of cultural significance. This is reflected in the confidence with which the BBC was prepared to depict the vessel as 'national treasure' in 2010.<sup>18</sup> Equally, The Trust has been commended for its interpretative focus and emphasis on the visitor experience by both the national and local press with the *Guardian* lauding the museum as a 'fabulous day out for all ages' and the *Bristol Post* proudly declared its position as one of the 'best museums in the country'.<sup>19</sup>

Following the final relenting of Bristol Corporation and its granting the *Great Britain* permanent status in the city in 1971, the ship and its curators have since shared a much more harmonious relationship, which is reflected in an endorsement of its status by municipal authorities. The city's official tourist site has not only acknowledged but championed the *Great Britain's* status as a prominent fixture of Bristol's cultural and heritage offering and has categorised the museum, by means of attendant imagery, as one of the city's 'Amazing Attractions'.<sup>20</sup> Equally, in its 'Travel and Tourism' page Bristol City Council identifies the *Great Britain* museum as essential component of any visit to the city.<sup>21</sup>

Conscious of its role as a centre of civic pride for Bristol's residents the Trust has done much to cultivate a strong association between the wider city and the *Great Britain* itself. Annual events such as the Bristol Harbourside Festival and 'Museums At Night' cater almost exclusively for city residents, cementing the *ss Great Britain's* place within the community by framing the ship as a location of recreation and leisure and cultivating associative affective

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<sup>17</sup> S. Selwood, 'The UK cultural sector.' Policy Studies Institute (2001) 54.

<sup>18</sup> BBC News. 'ss Great Britain: From seabed to national treasure.' <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10490928>> 14/08/2014.

<sup>19</sup> *The Guardian*. 24 Hours in Bristol.

<http://www.theguardian.com/travel/2006/jul/08/familyholidays.family.bristol>> 14/08/2015 & *Bristol Post*. Bristol's ss Great Britain voted one of the best museum's in the country,

<http://www.bristolpost.co.uk/Bristol-s-ss-Great-Britain-voted-best-museums/story-22931421-detail/story.html>

<sup>20</sup> Visit Bristol, 'Visit Bristol – The Official Tourist Guide to Bristol' <http://visitbristol.co.uk/> 14/08/2015

<sup>21</sup> Bristol City Council, 'Travel and Tourism' <http://www.bristol.gov.uk/page/leisure-and-culture/travel-and-tourism> [Date accessed 14/08/2015]

associations with the vessel.<sup>22</sup> The efforts of the ss *Great Britain* Trust to embed the ship as an artefact synonymous with the city itself have been abetted by the appointment of a dedicated marketing team, headed by a Deputy Director to the Trust's CEO whose role is described as providing 'strategic direction and leadership for all marketing and communication activity for the ss *Great Britain* Trust.'<sup>23</sup>

This final, concluding chapter, exploring the ss *Great Britain*'s life as heritage attraction in 2016, builds upon previous chapters which have considered the influence of place, space and materiality on the way in which the vessel has been interpreted. As outlined in Chapter One, this chapter aims to consider the ss *Great Britain* using the modes of engagement deployed in previous chapters of this thesis a means of acknowledging the implications of the Trust's interpretative strategy and how this may have been influenced by the commercial space that surrounds it.



**Fig 5.2.** Muirhead James c.2016 Panorama of Bristol's Harbourside adjacent to ss *Great Britain* site. The ss *Great Britain* is now flanked with an assorted multitude of high cost apartment buildings who developers are keen to couple with the city's 'vibrant' maritime heritage of which the Great Britain is a constituent part in 2016.

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<sup>22</sup> SSGBT Website. 'Museums at night' <http://www.ssgreatbritain.org/whats-on/museums-at-night> 13.08.2015 & SSGBT: 'Harbour Festival' 13.08.2015 <http://www.ssgreatbritain.org/whats-on/bristol-harbour-festival>

<sup>23</sup> SSGBT: 'Job Description Marketing Manager & PR Manager'

## Socially produced space: Bristol's redeveloped Harbourside in 2016

Of principal concern to 'social constructivist' readings of space is the central role of capital in dictating human perceptions of their lived reality.<sup>24</sup> Owing to a similar Marxist intellectual influence, early critiques of heritage have also similarly sought to demonstrate the authority of the power of consumerism in influencing the interpretative strategies found within museum sites.<sup>25</sup> The Harbourside, which encompasses Gas Ferry Road in Bristol is, in 2016 a very different space to that which was envisaged by its city planners during the late 1960s. As with many other expressions of post-war planning, the collapse in the Corporation's ambitious progressivist vision was influenced by both micro and macroeconomic forces, a particularly vociferous lobby of well-funded public interest groups and the wider influence of the Oil Crisis and the subsequent collapse in public finances that followed finally put an end to the Corporation's redevelopment proposals in 1973.<sup>26</sup>

Although some academics have challenged the labelling of British political history from 1945 to 1945 as the period of 'post-war consensus,' the election of Margaret Thatcher's Conservative Government of 1979 did, nonetheless, mark a dramatic shift in the British Government's macro-economic policy through moving away from Keynesian influenced Corporatism and towards the free market monetarism inspired by economists Fredrick Von Hayek and Milton Friedman.<sup>27</sup> The more neo-liberal turn in the British Government's economic policy found influence in approaches to urban redevelopment and collectivist, local authority led redevelopment proposals were swiftly abandoned with a subsequent, and dramatic, reorientation of the role imagined for the city planner. With the election of the Conservative Government and their reconfiguration of British economic policy, the scale of the ambition of urban redevelopment had tumbled; the quasi-utopian ideals of facilitating human happiness through the sculpting of civic space was replaced in planners minds with

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<sup>24</sup> See Soja, *Post Modern Geographies*, Harvey, *Social justice and the city*, *The Urbanisation of Capital*, *Consciousness and the Urban Experience*.

<sup>25</sup> See Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*, Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, Wright, *On living in an old country: The national past in contemporary Britain*

<sup>26</sup> Punter, *Design Control in Bristol 1940-1990*, p.120

<sup>27</sup> See P. Addison, *The Road to 1945: British Politics & The Second World War* (London, 1975) D. Kavanagh, *Thatcherism and British Politics: The End of Consensus* (Oxford, 1987). A. Bulter, 'The End of Post-War Consensus: Reflections on the Scholarly Uses of Political Rhetoric.' *The Political Quarterly* 64,4 (1993) and B. Pimlott 'The Myth of Consensus' in *The Making of Britain: Echoes of Greatness* eds. by L. M. Smith (Basingstoke, 1988) & J. Campbell *Margaret Thatcher Volume Two: The Iron Lady* (London, 2006)

the rather more limited aim of facilitating consumer spending in recently de-industrialised areas.<sup>28</sup> Here, dockland areas in particular, were singled out for their potential in promoting 'employment growth and wealth creation' and, with the establishment of the Urban Development Corporations from 1980 onwards, came with the associated benefit of undermining the authority of local government, in keeping with a wider policy of the centralisation of political power characteristic of government policy during Thatcher era.<sup>29</sup> With a broader turn towards free-market inspired economic policy in both Europe and the US from 1979 onwards dockland regeneration became a 'major phenomenon within the Western World'.<sup>30</sup>

The commercial focus in redeveloping post-industrial waterfront areas was intended, in the words of Andrew L. Jones, to promote and increase 'residential, recreational tourism and allocated land-uses- which have often become the 'dominant features of these environments'.<sup>31</sup> Yet despite an abandonment of oft-criticised 'monolith' approaches to post-war planning, dockland redevelopments intended to 'regenerate' such areas have engendered their own set of controversies, often focussed upon the implications of consumerist re-imaginings of former industrial locations and the impact these schemes have on the working class communities which once resided in these areas.<sup>32</sup> To Mark Davidson and Loretta Lees for instance, despite being officially framed as symbolising a 'riverside renaissance' in populating London's waterfront with 'new-build residential units' the expansive redevelopment serves as a highly prominent example of a wider process of gentrification afflicting the City.<sup>33</sup> To Davidson and Lees, residential housing developments in former dockland areas have essentially resulted in the displacement of predominantly working class communities by 'middle class home-buyers, landlords and professional developers.' As they

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<sup>28</sup> J. Peck, A. Tickell. 'Neoliberalizing space.' *Antipode* 34, 3 (2002) pp. 380-404.

<sup>29</sup> Punter, 'Design control and the regeneration of docklands: The example of Bristol.' *Journal of Property Research*, 9,1 See also M. Parkinson, Parkinson, Michael. "The Thatcher Government's urban policy: a review." *Town Planning Review* 60.4 (1989)

<sup>30</sup> Punter, 'Design control and the regeneration of docklands: p. 50

<sup>31</sup> A.L. Jones, 'On the Water's Edge: Developing Cultural Regeneration Paradigms for Urban Waterfronts,' in *Tourism, Culture and Regeneration*, ed. by M. K. Smith (London, 2006). p.143

<sup>32</sup> There is a vast range of literature on this subject and Davidson & Lees are only cited as an illustrative example. See N. Smith, *The new urban frontier: Gentrification and the revanchist city* (London, 1996) T. Butler, 'Re-urbanizing London Docklands: Gentrification, Suburbanization or New Urbanism?.' *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 31,4 (2007) pp. 759-781. A. Smith, 'Gentrification and the spatial constitution of the state: the restructuring of London's Docklands.' *Antipode* 21,3 (1989) pp.232-260. S. Cameron, "Housing, gentrification and urban regeneration policies." *Urban Studies* 29.1 (1992) pp.3-14 For only a few more illustrative examples

<sup>33</sup> M. Davidson & L. Lees, 'New-build gentrification' and London's riverside renaissance', *Environment and Planning*, 37, (2005), 1165 – 1190.

further contend: 'The expensive apartments and houses in new-build developments in central cities are marketed to the high-earning middle-classes who have the economic capital to purchase or rent these residences and the cultural and social capital that leads them to desire the residences in the first place.'<sup>34</sup> The consequence of redevelopment in London has produced, what Davidson and Lees argue, is a dramatic 'class remake of the central urban landscape.'<sup>35</sup>

The effects of a consumer focussed redevelopment of a former dockland area are easily discernible in the Harbourside in which the ss *Great Britain* now resides in Gas Ferry Road, in 2016. The warehouses and working shipyards to which the ship returned in the summer of 1970 have been replaced with a location described by one Bristol based financial consultancy firm as burgeoning with 'bars, restaurants, ferry-boats and festivals'.<sup>36</sup> Bristol's 2016 Harbourside is an area synonymous with higher than average property prices, leisure attractions and the orderly and routine facilitation of high consumer spend. In 2015, the average property price of one of Bristol's water facing apartments was approximately £250,000,<sup>37</sup> some £60,000 more than an equivalent city centre flat.<sup>38</sup> Whereas areas such as Stokes Croft have seen conflict in recent years over what has been interpreted as the increasing encroachments of large commercial entities and their role in homogenising the strong regional identity witnessed in this part of the city, concerns of this nature have, notably, failed manifest in Bristol's regenerated waterside.<sup>39</sup>

An acknowledgment of the inherent 'embourgeoisment' inherent in dockland redevelopment schemes and manifested in the exclusion of former working class communities is found within the Bristol Industrial museum's decision to embark on an ambitious oral history project which aimed to give voice to those residents who previously populated the area.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Davidson & Lees, 'New-build gentrification' and London's riverside renaissance' p.1166

<sup>35</sup> Davidson & Lees, 'New-build gentrification' and London's riverside renaissance' p.1166

<sup>36</sup> P. Boyden Consultants 'Culture, Creativity and Regeneration in Bristol: Three Stories' (2013)

<sup>37</sup> Zoopla. 'Bristol's Harbourside. <http://www.zoopla.co.uk/for-sale/branch/andrews-harbourside-bristol-16433/24/09/2015>.

<sup>38</sup> Rightmove. 'Bristol' <http://www.rightmove.co.uk/property/Bristol.html>. 24/09/2015]

<sup>39</sup> L.Penny, Tesco and the Battle of Stokes Croft, *New Statesman*, (April, 2011) BBC. *The Battle for Stokes Croft*. Swift Films. Documentary. 2011.' Bristol locals prepare for new fight after battle of Tesco' *The Guardian* 28<sup>th</sup> March 2012 This incident has also drawn attention from both Marxist-Leninist and Anarchist Groups. See The Bristol Anarchist Federation. 'The Battle of Stokes Croft'. <https://bristolaf.wordpress.com/2011/04/22/the-battle-of-stokes-croft/> 28.07.2016 and Communist Party of Great Britain. 'The Battle of Stokes Croft.' <http://www.cpgb-ml.org/index.php?secName=proletarian&subName=display&art=723> 28.07.2016

<sup>40</sup> Davidson & Lees, 'New-build gentrification' and London's riverside renaissance.' p.1168

These oral histories produced an extraordinarily vivid account of the memories and emotions that these communities coupled with the area in which they had previously lived and worked. These oral histories encompassed a rich depth of human experience which included; oral traditions and poetry, the impact of industrial disputes, how individuals experienced the fluctuating material shape of the Bristol's over time, individual responses to war, working practices, leisure pursuits, relationships and bereavements and how dockland inhabitants experienced the fluctuating material shape of the Bristol's over time.<sup>41</sup>

If consumer oriented dockland redevelopment schemes had proved largely antipathetic to the working class communities who previously lived in these locations it has demonstrated a far greater affinity with objects of historical preservation found residing within them. Jasna Cizler's work on the association between dockland redevelopment and artefacts of industrial heritage has demonstrated how these plans proved well disposed to items of 'social, historical and technological significance'.<sup>42</sup> As Cizler claims, museum site and heritage locations have played an important role in reframing urban identity around redevelopment proposals aimed at creating areas of capitalist consumption.<sup>43</sup>

The relationship between heritage and the reconstitution of civic identity is explored with specific reference to Bristol in the work of David Atkinson and Eric Laurier. Here, it is worthy of significant note that Bristol's planned urban redevelopment during the late 1960s attempted to recast the city to a predominantly land based environment. Yet, in contrast, the regeneration of Bristol's docklands has laid a far greater emphasis on the city's historic connection with the sea.<sup>44</sup> Atkinson and Laurier interpret this framing of Bristol's urban redevelopment 'as a maritime heritage landscape' as a means to better facilitate the consumerist intentions that stimulated the re-development plans.<sup>45</sup> Atkinson and Laurier

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<sup>41</sup> BRO: OH Transcripts. 'Industrial and Maritime History.' OH:88. Recording of children's playground games and skipping rhymes, OH:234. Interview with Julie Gough, previously of Bristol Port Authority, OH: 41, Interview with Mrs P Mckenny (Will's Tobacco), OH :73 Interview with Wilfred Morgan and Alex Barclay, OH :232 Interview with five Bristol cyclists, OH:236 Interview with Hank Adam (worked for George Adam & Sons Ltd. an Iron and Brass Foundry in Bristol, OH:240 Interview with John Taylor (memories of working on tugboats Mayflower of Sharpness), OH:245. Interview with Olive Cooke, courtship, marriage and the loss of her husband during WW2, OH:246 Interview with Bryan Dymock (his career on the buses in Bristol), OH:250, Interview with Mike Vine, Ray Price and Ken Rodgers (Arrowsmiths dispute)

<sup>42</sup> J. Cizler, 'Urban regeneration effects on industrial heritage and local community', *Sociology & Space*, 193,2, (2012) p..223-236 p.224

<sup>43</sup> Cizler 'Urban regeneration effects on industrial heritage and local community' p.226

<sup>44</sup> See Chapter Four: Counter Space: The ss *Great Britain's* return to Great Britain

<sup>45</sup> D. Atkinson and E. Laurier. 'A sanitised city? Social exclusion at Bristol's 1996 International Festival of the Sea.' *Geoforum* 29.2 (1998)

contextualise this interpretation with reference to Bristol's 1996 'International Festival of the Sea' which during the course of its associated events and publicity drew significant attention to Bristol's Floating Harbour amongst its residents.<sup>46</sup> Representing the first large-scale public celebration of Bristol's maritime past, the festival was officially promoted as an effective means of 'place marketing' the city on a local, national and international stage by designating Bristol's dockland area as a location of historic character and distinction.<sup>47</sup>

To Atkinson and Laurier however, this characterisation of the 'Festival of the Sea' was largely disingenuous, arguing that the event provided a symbolic watershed for the city in associating the area with large-scale tourism with an associated emphasis on consumer spend.<sup>48</sup> As they claim, this attempt to reconfigure the city as an environment of maritime heritage also involved a substantial degree of associated sanitation on the part of city officials.<sup>49</sup> This was manifested in a symbolic sense, through airbrushing out references to Bristol's historical darker historical associations as a slaving hub but, perhaps of greater concern, displacing groups 'who - it is imagined - would detract from the tourist experience.'<sup>50</sup> In this regard, they highlight the local authority's vigorous attempts to remove a gypsy and traveller community from a position of high visibility to prevent this act of sterile historic invention being compromised.<sup>51</sup> As they contend, Bristol's International Festival of the Sea amounted to a 'creation of a coherent urban fantasy identity for the city - of Bristol as a heritage rich - marketable city.'<sup>52</sup> The troubling reality, however, is that this 'urban fantasy' was predicated on the eviction of a symbolic and 'unwanted real, the stain or blot on the landscape.'<sup>53</sup>

In recent years, this reconfiguration of Bristol's Harbourside as a specifically consumer orientated environment and the *ss Great Britain's* status as item of maritime heritage within it has proven to have considerable influence upon the way in which the ship has been negotiated by the newly commercially focussed planning community. During an expansive redevelopment plan proposed by Crest Nicholson in 2000, which included the construction of

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<sup>46</sup> Atkinson & Laurier. 'A sanitised city' p.201

<sup>47</sup> Atkinson & Laurier. 'A sanitised city' p.199

<sup>48</sup> Atkinson & Laurier. 'A sanitised city' p.200

<sup>49</sup> Atkinson & Laurier. 'A sanitised city' p.199

<sup>50</sup> Atkinson & Laurier. 'A sanitised city' p.201

<sup>51</sup> Atkinson & Laurier. 'A sanitised city' p.200

<sup>52</sup> Atkinson & Laurier. 'A sanitised city' p.203

<sup>53</sup> Atkinson & Laurier. 'A sanitised city' p.201 p.205



both apartment buildings along Wapping Wharf and the regeneration of MacArthur Warehouse site (which would later become the headquarters of Aardman studios) the specific needs and requirements of the Trust were fully considered throughout the consultative process.<sup>54</sup> The inclusion of the Trust and the ship within the framework of planned redevelopment hints at the powerful influence role of spatial context plays in symbolically transforming what is, to all intents and purposes, the same object that returned to Bristol in July 1970.<sup>55</sup> Whilst potentially destabilising to the principles of rational urban design the *Great Britain* now functions as a central constituent of consumer orientated space.

The following section of this thesis will discuss the commercially orientated space of the *ss Great Britain* and the influence it can be said to have had upon aspects of its interpretative presentation of the ship's history. This section will further discuss the role of the Trust in mediating presentations of the ship's past. While it will refer to the 'Trust' throughout, it is with the acknowledgment that the use of this language is reductive in the extreme. The *ss Great Britain* Trust, in reality encompasses a collection of knowledgeable and dedicated museum curators, hard-working employees and enthusiastic volunteers associated with the museum's activities.

Nonetheless, in order to consider the role of commercial space on influencing interpretations of the ship, it is necessary to employ a degree of abstraction. This unfortunately, lends the impression of a deliberately malign intent at work in the way in which this interpretative display is constructed. I will attempt to add nuance to this argument in the final, concluding section of the chapter. Nevertheless, it is also with an acknowledgment to the work of Lefebvre that this treatment of the Trust begins. A central concern of Lefebvre's work, following Marx, is how capitalist spatial organisation serves to define much of the conceptual reality in which we can be said to exist.<sup>56</sup> The effects of socially produced space upon those

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<sup>54</sup> *ss Great Britain* Trust, *Report to Council of the Heritage Lottery Fund Sub-Committee*, 31<sup>st</sup> January 2000

<sup>55</sup> Or is it? It might be plausibly contended in no small degree the *ss Great Britain* of 2016 is a perfect example of *Theseus Ship*. In Plutarch's famous paradox he asks whether if, an object that has had all of its components replaced fundamentally remains the same object? It can plausibly be argued that following the multi-million pound restoration of the vessel and the subsequent interpretative work, surrounding buildings and associated activities it encompasses very little remains of the assorted jumble of iron and wood that arrived in Bristol's dockyard in 1970. While not claiming not to have definitively solved this philosophical paradox, when the chapter later turns to discussing the *Great Britain's* materiality, I will argue that, yes, it can be seen to be the same object.

<sup>56</sup> Although Lefebvre considered capitalist control over spatial organisation by no means total and absolute and is quick to disabuse the notion within *The Production of Space*. Lefebvre by imbibing commercial forces with total control of space is to grant it a power 'it simply does not have.'

people living and working in these areas is both subtle and largely, internalised.<sup>57</sup> This following section will contextualise the ss *Great Britain* of 2016 within this commercial orientated and consumer focussed environment



**Fig 5.3.** c. 2015 Muirhead, James, The ss *Great Britain* Museum Gift Shop. Here we see the vast range of commodities on display including, toys, books, confectionary, clothes, posters and various other items that can be purchased as part of the visit to the *Great Britain*. Visitors cannot avoid this area and in order to enter and exit the *Great Britain* and exit from it is challenged through its doors.

### The ss *Great Britain*'s visitor experience: commercial space

To a substantial degree, the influence of commercialisation on the ss *Great Britain* of 2016 is more readily apparent than any other period of the ship's afterlife.<sup>58</sup> As stated explicitly in the ss *Great Britain*'s Trust's development plan of 2000, the ship's continued physical survival is principally based upon its ability to attract visitors and attract sufficient levels of consumer spending: 'the financial viability of the conservation efforts will depend on the ability of the ship to expand the current audience and attract new audiences.'<sup>59</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Lefebvre, *Production of Space*

<sup>58</sup> See Chapter Two 'Natural Space' particularly her period in Sparrow Cove.

<sup>59</sup> SSGBT: Ma/ Tanner, ss *Great Britain* Trust Development Plan, 6<sup>th</sup> January 2000

This emphasis upon the consumer is reflected in the manner of the current spatial configuration of the ss *Great Britain* museum. Visitor access to the vessel is channelled through two areas of commercial focus with entry permitted either through the adjacent Dockyard Cafe Bar or the ss *Great Britain's* visitor centre and associated gift shop. The former sells 'delicious light meals, snacks and drinks' the latter 'all sorts of maritime related gifts and treats; from pirate tops for the kids to confectionary items and chocolates.'<sup>60</sup> It is almost axiomatic to suggest the Trust's commercially centred access to ship is accidental in nature and behavioural psychologists have long noted similar efforts by retail chains and supermarkets to funnel their customers in the direction of more concentrated spend.<sup>61</sup> In an interview with the BBC, Chief Executive of the Trust, Matthew Tanner, outlined his view that income-generating locations are not supplementary to the museum visit but an integral part of it. 'A good shop and cafe greatly enhance the overall experience,' he explained in a 2013, to Tanner 'no visit is complete without an interesting shop or a fine cup of tea.'<sup>62</sup> The shift by heritage curators to increasingly associate the objects they seek to preserve with consumable commodities is far from a recent development, a 1988 poster campaign produced by the V and A in London described the museum 'An ace cafe, with quite a nice museum attached'.<sup>63</sup>

Admittance to the ss *Great Britain* is also restricted via admission fees (as of 2016 £14.00 for an adult and £8.00 per child).<sup>64</sup> In its attempt to ensure that access to the ship is restricted to paying customers, the Trust has erected a sizeable fence between the gift shop and the dockyard cafe as a means of preventing curious tourists from interacting with the vessel in any meaningful, embodied sense.<sup>65</sup> The economically defined borders imposed upon interactions with the ss *Great Britain* in 2016 stands in sharp relief with the ship's life in the Falkland Islands where access to the vessel was only limited by an appropriate means by which to travel to Sparrow Cove.

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<sup>60</sup> SSBT Website. 'Brunel's ss Great Britain.' <http://www.ssgreatbritain.org/> 13/08/2015

<sup>61</sup> L.Crewe, 'Geographies of retailing and consumption.' *Progress in Human Geography* 24,2 (2000): pp. 275-290.

<sup>62</sup> BBC Website. BBC News Magazine. 'Ace Café with quite a nice ancient monument attached?' [www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-2433551724/08/2014](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-2433551724/08/2014)

<sup>63</sup> . 'Ace Café with quite a nice ancient monument attached?'

<sup>64</sup> SSBT Website: 'Tickets and Prices.' <http://www.ssgreatbritain.org/your-visit/tickets> 13/08/2015

<sup>65</sup> There are, however, limits to this act of exclusion, the ship's considerable size rendering it impossible to completely occlude from the gaze of the passer-by entirely. It's possible, in a sense to regard this as another example of the ship's 'resistance' to an officially mediated form.

The use of fees as a means of limiting access to Museum sites has prompted a degree of controversy in the way in which it restricts right of entry to artefacts and objects of wider historic interest. As Charles Saumarez Smith points out, museum fees ‘effectively restrict the nature of the public which could obtain admittance.’<sup>66</sup> Concerns about the wider participatory implications of establishing admittance fees as a means of accessing locations of cultural heritage led the UK government to abandon the policy in Government maintained museums and art galleries during the early 1990s.<sup>67</sup> The ss *Great Britain* Trust, however, has not adopted this policy and as a charitable concern the Trust receives no financial assistance from central government. Arguably, this serves to accentuate the extent of the museum’s commercial focus and provides impetus to provide ever more commercially led marketisation of the ship as an object. As the 2000 development plan cited above suggests, the viability of the Trust’s activities are remarkably dependent upon the continued patronage of its visitors and the money they choose to spend during their visit to the heritage site.

As discussed in the opening chapter, early critical engagement with heritage has been keen to demonstrate the power of broader economic trends and its influence as acting as a barrier to authentic and critical of engagements with the past.<sup>68</sup> These critiques of heritage have centred upon the manner in which the increasing commercialisation of heritage sites have directed interpretative strategies of curators and the manner in which they present the material objects under their stewardship for public consumption.<sup>69</sup> The authority of the wider commercial space in which the ship could be said to exist is readily apparent in an interpretative strategy which arguably does much to sustain rather than critique existing economic and political hegemony.<sup>70</sup>

Upon crossing the Great Western Dockyard site and obtaining entry to the museum the visitor is invited to move through the museum as part of a loosely directed journey which encompasses the various time zones of the ss *Great Britain*’s life. The Trust presents the experience of interaction with the ship as the visitor’s inhabitation of the role of a nineteenth

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<sup>66</sup> C. Saumarez Smith ‘Museums, Artefacts and Meanings’ in Vergo eds. *The New Museology* p.7.

<sup>67</sup> V. Dickenson, ‘The economics of museum admission charges’ *Museum management* (1994) p.105.

<sup>68</sup> See Chapter One: Academic Engagements with the ss *Great Britain*

<sup>69</sup> SSGBT: ss *Great Britain* Admission ticket, 2015

<sup>70</sup> J. Femia. ‘Gramsci’s Political Thought: Hegemony, Consciousness, and the Revolutionary Process.’ (Oxford, 1987).

century passenger aboard the *Great Britain* eager to embark on a journey aboard the ‘World’s First Great Ocean Liner.’<sup>71</sup> The Trust’s invites its visitors to share in the imagined experience of the vessel from the perspective of their spectral 19<sup>th</sup> century doppelgänger is foreshadowed from the very beginning of the visitor’s arrival at the museum site. The Trust’s interpretative display has ensured the Great Western Dockyard is populated with historically faithful adaptations of the original posters that advertised an authentic journey in the ship’s working life in its voyage to Melbourne from Liverpool on Saturday 18 July 1865. The affective bond the Trust attempts to create between the contemporary museum visitor and the vessel’s historic passengers is reinforced with in the admission tickets it provides upon entry to the museum; as with the dockyard posters, admission tickets are presented as a direct facsimile to those given to passengers who travelled aboard the ss *Great Britain* in 19<sup>th</sup> century. The intentions of the Trust’s curators and the way in which they seek to mediate interactions with the vessel are clear within the text of the admission pass itself: ‘With this ticket in your hand, you can travel back in time for a voyage on the ss *Great Britain*.’<sup>72</sup> To strengthen this identification with the ship’s previous passengers yet further, visitors are asked to write their signatures, just as original passengers would have done to board the vessel in 1864, this also serves a dual purpose of allowing visitor’s to gain re-entry to the site on subsequent visits should they wish.<sup>73</sup>

This temporal reorientation from contemporary museum visitor to 19<sup>th</sup> century emigrant is achieved through a figurative stepping backwards through time in the material configuration of the ship and its attendant museum. Access to the ss *Great Britain* itself is channelled through the attached Dockyard museum and the intended exercise in ‘time-travel’ is achieved through an embodied visitor experience which frames the vessel’s historic narrative through a physical stepping through of clearly delineated ‘Time Zone’ barriers which denote the various stages of the ship’s life. As the Trust’s initial pre-HLF development of 2000 states the principal aim of the Dockyard museum is to ‘provide an introductory experience to the ship....the display will set the scene’.<sup>74</sup>

The work of Deborah Withers has previously drawn attention to the spatial configuration of

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<sup>71</sup> SSGBT: ss *Great Britain* Admission ticket, 2015

<sup>72</sup> SSGBT: ss *Great Britain* visitor ticket, 2015

<sup>73</sup> SSGBT: ss *Great Britain* Admission ticket, 2015. Admission Tickets serve as an annual pass to the site. See. SSGBT Website: ‘Tickets and Prices.’

<sup>74</sup> SSGBT: M. Tanner, ‘Outline of ss *Great Britain* Project to Heritage Lottery Fund.’ Annex to Minutes of the 64<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Council held at the Great Western Dock on Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> November 1997, ECM, Box 5

the Dockyard Museum and the Trust's efforts to cultivate an affective relationship between the museum visitor and their figurative Victorian counterpart. Withers interprets this as an attempt by the Trust to effectively efface any engagement with the consequences of Colonialism within its walls.<sup>75</sup> While it is, of course, important to be reflective about the popular presentation of the past and its present day implications it should equally be acknowledged it perhaps stretches the bounds of credulity to emphasise the *Great Britain's* mediator of British colonialist expansion, particularly where other artefacts of material culture with more prominent associated histories of controversy are currently framed within displays that do little to reflect their more problematic historic associations.<sup>76</sup>

Nonetheless, Withers is correct in the way in which she seeks to highlight the manner in which the Trust seeks to emphasise the affective nature of the visitor experience and create an experience of temporal dislocation in its visitor's interaction with the ship. Yet arguably, the effect of this interpretative strategy functions in a far more covert way than that identified by Withers. Of principal concern from an interpretative standpoint, is the emphasis upon with *which* particular passengers and set of interactions with the Trust would prefer the visitor to relate to. As this thesis goes some way in reflecting, human interactions with the *Great Britain* - were often complex, intimate and shaped by varying orders of influence, economic, geographic and internal. Yet in its interpretative display the Trust chooses to emphasise an uncritically aspirational mode of representation. The period's of the ship's life to receive most sustained interpretative focus by the ss *Great Britain* Trust unquestionably rests upon reflecting the experiences of those elite individuals who had the means to travel in opulence and luxury following the vessel's 1843 launch and emigrant passengers who choose to seek their fortune in Australian goldfields from 1852 onwards. In emphasising the experiences of these passengers and minimising other period's of the ship's history in its display the Trust's presentation of the ship sustains as implicit association between the pursuit of financial reward and human happiness - a conceit that sustains, rather than challenges current global financial hegemony.

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<sup>75</sup> Withers 'ss *Great Britain* and the containment of British collective memory.' p.250

<sup>76</sup> See. P. Kohl 'Nationalism and archaeology: on the constructions of nations and the reconstructions of the remote past.' *Annual review of anthropology* (1998) pp. 223-246. Kohl identifies the British Museum in Bloomsbury as providing a particularly egregious example of this, arguing its best acquisitions have 'been pilfered' from abroad. A fact the British Museum does little, or nothing, to acknowledge.



**Fig 5.4.** c.2015 Muirhead, James, The ss *Great Britain* in the Falklands, as represented by the ss *Great Britain* Trust, 2015

### ‘Abandoned’ -The implications of the ss *Great Britain*’s Trust’s interpretation of the ship’s life in the Falkland Islands

An important aspect of the Trust’s role in mediating interpretations of the *Great Britain* is the inherent authority the museum provides - via contextualisation - in arbitrating the history of the ss *Great Britain*’s life.<sup>77</sup> At present, in the act of privileging the narratives of the ship’s affluent Victorian passengers and those seeking their fortune in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Australia the Trust diminishes other, equally relevant, histories associated with the vessel. Notable, in this regard, is the degree to which the interpretative focus of the *Great Britain* seeks to diminish representations of the vessel’s life in the Falklands. What the Trust categorises as the ‘Grand Old Lady’ chapter of the ship’s life cycle from 1886 to 1970 is dealt relatively short shrift within the Trust’s interpretative focus despite the chronological span of the vessel’s life in the Falkland Islands. The ship’s life in the Falklands is principally categorised in terms of her physical deterioration and what - curator of the San Francisco Maritime Museum Karl Kortum described - as the ‘forlorn’ site of the *Great Britain* rotting away in Sparrow Cove

<sup>77</sup> S. V. Casey ‘The museum effect: gazing from object to performance in the contemporary cultural-history museum.’ *Archives & Museum Informatics* (2003)

which is contrasted unfavourably with the ‘splendidly restored’ *Great Britain* of 2016.<sup>78</sup> The Trust's official depiction of the vessel's life in the Falklands, is disseminated via its website a medium which consequently has a far greater reach than the museum site the access to which is restricted, to a degree by its ticket price. The Trust's website describes the ship's life in the Falklands in a remarkably despondent manner ‘a sorry sight left to rust and rot, gradually losing her fittings to trophy hunters and visited only by the occasional picnic party or curious penguin.’<sup>79</sup>

At present, the principal mode in which the Trust seeks to represent the *Great Britain*'s life from 1936 to 1970 is by means of an array of stark black and white photographs of the vessel as she existed in Sparrow Cove coupled with the explanatory label ‘Abandoned.’ Of particular concern here is both the deployment of imagery in its depiction of the ship's life here and the language the Trust uses to characterise it. It is notable, in this regard, that the medium of display is limited to this rather unprepossessing selection of black and white photographs. While, acknowledging this is not always the case, black and white photography diminishes colour's capacity to enliven our perception of the subject of photograph in question.<sup>80</sup> This mode of representative display gains further significance when we consider that, in other areas of the museum site, the Trust pursues a far more sophisticated interpretative approach. Other periods of the ship's life are coupled with a disorienting array of associated material objects and the museum encourages its visitors to engage with these objects, and indeed the ship itself, in an embodied experiential manner as tangible signifiers of the authentic remnants of the past.

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<sup>78</sup> The Guardian, *Bristol marks 40th anniversary of ss Great Britain's return* (2013) <http://www.theguardian.com/culture/2010/jul/19/ss-great-britain-bristol>> 7.7 2015

<sup>79</sup> SSGBT: Interpretative Display. ss Great Britain Museum Site. SSGBT Website: ‘The Incredible Journey’ <http://www.ssgreatbritain.org/story/incredible-journey>> 7. 7. 2016

<sup>80</sup> E.H. Gombrich, et al. *Art and illusion: A study in the psychology of pictorial representation*. Vol. 5. (London, 1977)





**Fig 5.5.** c.2015, Muirhead, James. Depiction of female passengers in steerage fighting aboard the *Great Britain*. While historians of gender could potentially criticise the Trust in its depiction of working class women as embodying a well-worn trope of this group as 'inebriate hysterics'<sup>81</sup>, this scene does, nonetheless convey that in other areas of the vessel, displays are interactive, lively and invite a degree of physical interaction amongst the Trust's visitors. This is in stark contrast to its depiction of the ship's life in the Falklands.

In other areas of the museum, the Trust employs a sophisticated mode of engagement and employs a creative means of evoking a sense of 'synaesthesia' within its visitors through the use of costumed characters, soundscapes and smells (the Trust's curators have demonstrated a particular focus on the unpleasant in this regard and have, often successfully, replicated the stench of stale ale, sweaty laundry and vomit to name but a few examples).<sup>82</sup> The Trust's current attempts to engage with the wider senses as part of its interpretative strategy demonstrates a well-developed degree of reflexivity and a tacit acknowledgment of its authoritative role in influencing visitor experiences within the ship. Contextualised within this wider museum setting itself it is somewhat surprising how limited this interpretation of the *Great Britain's* Falklands life appears.

Is it not possible to imagine another, alternative mode of acknowledging the *Great Britain's*

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<sup>81</sup> E. S. Gomberg, 'Historical and political perspective: Women and drug use.' *Journal of Social Issues* 38.2 (1982): pp.9-23.

<sup>82</sup> C. Tilley, *The Materiality of Stone*. p.28 The Trust proudly markets this aspect of the visitor's experience of the *Great Britain* and informal conversations with its curators reveal they regard the ship's broad appeal to the senses in its interpretative work as a distinguishing feature of the museum as compared to its competitors. <http://www.ssgreatbritain.org/about-us/blog/follow-your-nose-bridstols-smelliest-day-out>

history in the Falkland Islands? Whilst recognizing a certain degree of inherent artifice, would it not be possible to construct a form of material scaffold - perhaps before entry to the Dockyard Museum - depicting the ship as an item of authentic temporality, weather beaten, displaying signs of physical deterioration, replete with a Soundscape of bird call and - with a nod to the Trust's current emphasis on simulating the more pungent elements of life on board the ship - permeated with the smell of rotting mussels?

If this idea seems somewhat of a reach, it is worth acknowledging that the Trust has previously demonstrated a particularly acute awareness of the manner in which its own interpretative methods influence visitor responses to the ship. The Trust has further attempted to supplement its sophisticated interpretative approach in employing the services of specialist heritage consultants.<sup>83</sup> A 2012 report produced by Morris Hargreaves McIntyre (MHM) for instance, demonstrates how the Trust is conscious of the influence different modes of display have upon its visitors.<sup>84</sup> The Trust subsequently moderated its marketing policy on the basis of information produced by the MHM report which noted how visitors preferred shots of the ship's interior 'populated with people' as opposed to photographs of the ship's exterior which lacked 'immediacy and appeal.'<sup>85</sup> Notable here, is an acknowledgment and a willingness to adapt the Museum's external marketing via means of a more sophisticated deployment of imagery in communication with a wider audience.

This limited interpretative focus, is compounded by an effort to bend the narrative of the *Great Britain's* life in the Falklands around the current presentation of the ship as an object endowed with innate symbolic meaning and, in doing so, according with extraordinary qualities not commonly associated with other material artefacts. An illustrative example here is found within the explanatory text found in the Dockyard Museum detailing the course of the *Great Britain's* life in the Falklands:

In 1933 the Falkland Island Company decided they could no longer risk using such an old ship. They offered her to the Navy but were turned down. In 1936, the Falkland Islanders, knowing the historic importance of the ship, tried to raise money to preserve her, but the estimated cost of saving the ship was too high.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> SSGBT: Morris Hargreaves McIntyre Report, 'Not just a visit, an experience' – culture segment strategy report for ss *Great Britain*, 2012' p. 34

<sup>84</sup> SSGBT: MHM Report 2012

<sup>85</sup> SSGBT: MHM Report 2012

<sup>86</sup> SSGBT: ss *Great Britain* Dockyard Museum, 2015

Yet, as discussed in Chapter Two, taken as a whole, Falkland Islanders demonstrably did *not* negotiate the *Great Britain* in terms of its associated historic past and indeed, contextualised the vessel, largely via its interactions with the natural world and within a wider network, of other, largely interchangeable, material objects. In terms of exaggerated symbolic meaning at least, the vessel was not imbued with a particularly heightened order of significance within the Falklands. Of equal importance, is the fact that the proposed preservation of the ship was driven, principally, by Henniker Heaton and not the community at large, in one of the many critical interventions in the ship's afterlife by powerful, well-connected men.

A further example of the Trust's mediation of the narrative of the *Great Britain's* life in the Falklands is provided via means of a recollection of the vessel contained within an explanatory plinth entitled 'The Falkland Islander's ss *Great Britain*'. Here the Trust offers the memory of Falkland Island resident Eileen Mogg to its visitors who recalled looking at the ship moored in Stanley 'to see which way the wind was blowing, as the *Great Britain* blew round to point the direction.'<sup>87</sup> Yet as Chapter Three, has shown, Mogg's identification of the ship in question is a case of clear misattribution and it was the *Fennia* which acted as the Falklands large-scale improvised weather vane. The *Fennia's* prominent visibility within the islands and its corresponding influence upon human behaviour resulted in the vessel being invested with considerably greater degree of affective meaning than the *Great Britain* within the Falklands and, as a result, the *Fennia's* loss to the Falklands Islands community was experienced far more acutely.

As noted, above, before the introducing this section, this does not imply an order of malign intent on the part of the curatorial staff who arranged its composition. Much more likely perhaps, is Mogg herself misattributed the identity of the vessel either as a result of a quirk of memory, or in subconscious collusion with an interviewer keen to reflect a positive narrative associated with the ship'<sup>88</sup> Yet is intriguing, nonetheless, to reflect why the Trust did not fact-check Mogg's recollection of the *Great Britain's* life more consistently and it is plausible to suggest the reason lies in the ability of Mogg's quote to sustain the central narrative of ship's life as presented within the museum.

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<sup>87</sup> ss *Great Britain* Dockyard Museum, 2015

<sup>88</sup> Robert Perks (1998) *The Oral History Reader* (Abingdon: Routledge) p.211

The *Great Britain* here is an ‘object of exceptional value’ which - in its framing of the ship’s life in the Falklands – is a status it seemingly maintained throughout the course of its working and non-working life. With an acknowledgment to social constructivist readings of space, it is perhaps worth pausing to consider the role of the curator here, and the possible influence of both working, and daily interacting with such a dramatically, reconstituted vessel, a centre-piece of Bristol’s cultural offering, a site of considerable industry, and what the BBC describes as a ‘national treasure.’ Can we therefore point to an internalisation, on the part of the curator of the ss *Great Britain*’s status as such heightened symbolic value? Has this subsequently influenced the way in which the ship’s past has been mediated by them?

As methodological approaches of frame analysis have sought to demonstrate, frames have an important role in mediating our perception of lived reality.<sup>89</sup> In this regard, it is possible to point to the *Great Britain*’s current status within a far wider web of associated, commercial imperatives in which the ship is currently enmeshed. These contextual relationships include, but are not limited to, the *Great Britain*’s relationship to the Trust’s staff whose livelihoods are dependent on the continued survival of the vessel, the Great Western Offices, Viridor Theatre and Brunel Archives that flank it and confer it with status, the commercially orientated Harbourside of which it is a constituent part, the city of Bristol which has conferred it with legitimacy, amongst an associated and wider framework of other, similar, national museums and sites of heritage which acknowledge it as a site of cultural heritage accordingly grants it a heightened register of inherent symbolism. Not only are economic relationships a constituent strand linking these various interconnections, they are essentially - from the visitor’s perspective - what designates the ss *Great Britain* as a material object that is worth paying to visit.

The consequences of this interpretative focus - or lack of focus - are certain aspects of the *Great Britain*’s history privileged at the expense of others. Yet, of greater concern, is that the Trust’s presentation of the ship’s life in the Falklands serves to limit expressions of the imagination of those who visit the vessel in 2016. Previous chapters have discussed the ship’s capacity, principally through representational means, to act as a platform for a mode of conceptual engagement that allowed the vessel to be visualised as something other than that which currently appeared to the eye. Henniker Heaton and Ewan Corlett’s restoration

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<sup>89</sup> J. A. Kuypers, *Rhetorical Criticism: Perspectives in Action* (London, 2009)

attempts bridged a conceptual gap from the *Great Britain's* present material realities to how the vessel once *was* and then ahead to what she possibly could *be* in the future. Equally, important is the way in which John Prior discusses his changed relationship with the *Great Britain* once she arrived in Bristol. As he describes, the picture of the vessel in the Albion depicting her as she appeared in 1970 in the Falklands, did more harm than good in seeking converts to the Project's cause. Yet this relationship, Prior claimed, changed once the *Great Britain* appeared in Bristol as a physical presence. Notable here is that the vessel's material constitution had not transformed in any substantial way, but Prior's relationship *had*.

Yet, in limiting its interpretative focus of the *Great Britain's* life in the Falklands so completely, the Trust is also limiting the conceptual means by which the vessel can be understood. It is inherently difficult to reconcile this perspective of the ship's life in the Falklands within the context of the largely commercially configured space of the ss *Great Britain* museum as it exists in 2016. The acknowledgment of a material artefact of no inherent commodified value, yet rich with human consequence strikes a discordant tone within a heritage site which, due to its wider commercialised setting, does much to couple the ship with a heightened register of consumerism. Despite being a redundant as a viable commercial entity, the ss *Great Britain* proved a more than capable stage of human interaction throughout its life in Sparrow Cove. Arguably, the ss *Great Britain* Trust, as a constituent of the consumer oriented Harbourside in Bristol is preventing its visitors from dwelling on the implications of this fact for any substantial length of time.



**Fig 5.6.** c.2015, Muirhead, James 'Theseus Ship.' This is the area of the vessel where the Trust addresses the *Great Britain's* life as a troopship during the Crimean War. You can see the horse in the upper left of the shot. This tableaux is easily missed by the unobservant visitor, a fact I can attest to, having passed it by during my first few encounters with the ship's museum. There has been an enormous restoration effort, containing the dehumidifiers we discussed previously, that has effectively transformed the vessel 'below the glass sea.' The Trust have not been completely successful in effacing the effects of age below the waterline - some concessions are made to it via explanatory plinths - yet this area, below deck, is where the effects of the ship's extended chronology are most clearly visible. This is, arguably, the *Great Britain* at its most authentic here the ship is revealed as the same material object which left the Falkland Islands in 1970 -compare this image to Fig. 4.10 in Chapter Four, a picture taken below deck in Sparrow Cove to witness the striking similarities. It is significant that the Trust has failed to overlay this area with any interpretative staging and represents, perhaps, what Colin Sorenson argues is a celebration of the *Great Britain's* age as the 'ultimate signifier of its authenticity.'<sup>90</sup> When I told my Aunt, a resident of Bristol, the subject of my thesis when I first began, she recounted the humorous tale of a visit to the *Great Britain* she made in the early 1980s, when having been told how much the salvage effort cost she turned to the - subsequently mortified - curator and exclaimed 'Blimey! You could have built a new one for that! While my Aunt may well have been correct - even if she was only teasing - the symbolic import of the ship is found, as a museum site, in both its age and the vessel as a prominent material connection to the life of Isambard Kingdom Brunel. In Ftn. 55 I considered whether the vessel is an example of Theseus' Ship, being so completely transformed from the object that arrived back in Bristol in July 1970, yet here in this largely unmediated area of the ship in 2016, we find it is most certainly not. Herein lays the continued significance of the ss *Great Britain* to both its curators and visitors.

<sup>90</sup> C. Sorenson, 'Theme Parks & Time Machines', in *The New Museology*, ed. by Peter Vergo (London:,1989).p.65

## Coda

It is necessary, at this point, to turn to my own, subjective role, as an arbiter of the ss *Great Britain's* afterlife. The above treatment of the ss *Great Britain* as a site of heritage is inherently configured through the lens of the academic approaches adopted and employed throughout during the course of this thesis. This is a significant point as my mediations on the ss *Great Britain's* display could well be charged with ignoring the vessel's lived realities - particularly in the way in which visitors experience the ship - and in doing so symbolise a retreat to what Lefebvre described as 'the space of philosophers.'<sup>91</sup> This thesis, also significantly, has been produced as the result of my subjective interactions with the *Great Britain*. A consistent theme highlighted during the course of this thesis has been the manner in which material objects have proven capable of influencing human agency. Notable here is my above emphasis upon the problematic aspects of the Trust's representation of the ship's life in the Falklands.

Yet this perspective in of itself is inevitably influenced through my own negotiation of the *Great Britain's* life, my trip to the Falkland Islands - which I may never had the occasion to visit otherwise - and the associated experiences and affective memories it produced. To a certain degree therefore, taking the Trust to task over its curatorial approach towards the *Great Britain's* life in Sparrow Cove may be my own subconscious response to these experiences. I can only reassure readers I did not produce the above section with this explicit aim in mind but my own negotiation of the ship as an object and the particular caste of the memories it evokes may have played its part in constituting it nonetheless. In short, in seeking to highlight how various human actors have been influenced by the presence of the ship and the meanings it embodies, it is necessary to evoke my own capacity to be influenced in turn.

This interpretation of the ss *Great Britain* museum site is also very short on the engaging with the concept of 'place.' This limits the argument I present somewhat, as it is presented through my own subjective lens. I have attempted, in other parts of this thesis, to demonstrate the manner in which the ship had value and meaning to different groups of people, sometimes, in opposition to officially ordered and rationalised 'space.' Partly, this was a

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<sup>91</sup> Lefebvre, *Production of Space*. p.6

methodological issue and conducting an oral history project which includes the Trust's visitors presents some problematic concerns, which were previously discussed in the opening chapter. It is possible, nonetheless, to point here to the work of Arjun Appadurai, who whilst acknowledging the underlying framework of consumption and consumer capitalism that often underlie sites of heritage, he nonetheless does not believe they should be subsequently disregarded as vistas of imagination. As Appadurai eloquently states 'consumption in the contemporary world is often a form of drudgery, part of the capitalist civilising process.....where there is consumption there is pleasure and where there is pleasure there is agency.'<sup>92</sup>

In this regard - and having previously signposted the limitations of the Withers' treatment of the *Great Britain* site in the opening chapter - I have neither not laid too prominent an emphasis upon the agency of the Trust's curators which could, potentially, be an area for future work. Withers argues the *Great Britain's* presentation as a museum site occludes the representation of problematic colonialist narratives, a reading of the ship, I must acknowledge, does not readily suggest itself to me. While the Trust's diminishing of the more controversial aspects of the ship's history could be interpreted as an act of silencing, I want to suggest, that far more plausibly it is influenced by the place, specifically Bristol, in which the ship now resides. The Trust's interpretative focus on the vessel's history of a troopship in the Crimean War is largely confined far below the main deck of the vessel, which an unobservant visitor may readily miss. It is significant that this tableau of a group of soldiers and their horse is confined to this region of the ship, as horses, due to their sheer size and physical dimensions were carried on the top deck. Indeed, as one of the Trust's curators told me, this presented considerable difficulties in display as they had to cut the model of said horse in half before carrying it down to this part of the ship.

From one perspective you could argue this example only seeks to confirm what this interpretation as contributing to a tacit 'silencing' yet, a more nuanced appraisal could perhaps argue it represents sensitivity to the ship as a constituent in the wider location of a city which has a long and often uncomfortable association with slavery.<sup>93</sup> As we have seen previously, material objects often confound the way in which we choose to define them and arguably, Withers' reframing of the ship, whatever its good intentions, in laying an

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<sup>92</sup> Appadurai, *Modernity at Large* p.6

<sup>93</sup> M. Dresser, 'Remembering slavery and abolition in Bristol.' *Slavery and Abolition* 30, 2 (2009): pp.223-246.



interpretative emphasis on the vessel's rather limited connections to British Colonialism could potentially be interpreted as a controversial affront to exactly those communities it chooses to give voice to. It would take a very sensitive curatorial hand indeed to navigate these issues successfully and arguably, it is far better, to banish the model horse and its soldiers to the bowels of the ship.

It is possible here, to point to the influence of Matthew Tanner and his custodianship of the *Great Britain*, Tanner, as noted previously, symbolically re-orientated the course of the vessel's interpretative focus away from 'the great men of history' narrative which was so influential to Ewan Corlett and Richard Gould Adams relationship with the vessel towards a more democratised and plural mode of engagement. It is notable, in this respect that following, what Chris Young, describes as Tanner's nailing 'his colours to the mast' in 1997, many of the original Project members expressed considerable unease with this new curatorial approach. Ewan Corlett in particular was very troubled by this new direction and Tanner was forced to visit the now retired naval architect to reassure him that these methods were in keeping with international standards of custodianship and a heritage sector that was taking a dramatic new course.<sup>94</sup>

This new interpretative direction was significant in bringing various hard working, imaginative and dedicated professionals into conversation with the ss *Great Britain*. While I have previously outlined how the sites admission price may form a barrier to engagement with the vessel, the Trust, to its immense credit, has demonstrated an ongoing commitment to widen participation within the museum. In a programme beginning in 2011, the ss *Great Britain* introduced a 'Golden Ticket' initiative that provided bursaries to students in disadvantaged areas to encourage them to visit the ship.<sup>95</sup> Sponsored by the Merchant Venturers, the programme, according to the Trust's Education Manager, Rachel Roberts, was designed to remove as many of the financial barriers for visits to the museum as possible. The tickets were issued to 30 schools in and around the Bristol area, that were identified as 'economically deprived' according to the local authority's own indices of multiple deprivation.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Young, *The Incredible Journey*. P.212

<sup>95</sup> Interview with Rachel Roberts, Education Manager, ss *Great Britain Trust*, 15/07/2015

<sup>96</sup> The English Indices of Multiple Deprivation identify the most deprived areas across the country. They combine a number of indicators, chosen to cover a range of economic, social and housing issues into a single deprivation score for each small area in England. The indices are used widely to analyse patterns of deprivation,

This more democratised curatorial approach, also, has had the effect of producing this thesis as part of a Collaborative Doctoral Award with the University of Bristol, an acknowledgment of the Trust's closer association with academia than that of the early ss *Great Britain* Project. While, it may not have resulted in quite the result the Trust imagined at the outcome of the project - it is equally difficult to imagine this work becoming a popular part of the Trust's gift shop perhaps - it does, nonetheless, stand testament to the fact that the influence of space, place and materiality can conspire to produce an outcome very different to that which was originally intended. A theme that has surely remained consistent throughout the ss *Great Britain's* afterlife.

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identify areas that would benefit from specific initiatives or programmes and as a tool to determine eligibility for specific funding streams. See Bristol City Council Website. 'Deprivation.' The Golden Ticket scheme offers each school that has been identified as economically deprived a free visit to the ss *Great Britain* museum, a free educational and free transport for all eligible schools. Of the 30 schools that have been identified as deprived by Bristol Council, 12 have taken up the offer. The scheme also provides each child with a follow-up ticket for their family which they are able to use on a subsequent visit. <http://www.bristol.gov.uk/page/deprivation> for further details.

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<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Date of Interview</b>
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Bowles, Willie	24 <sup>th</sup> July 2013
Cheek, Gerald	8 <sup>th</sup> July 2013
Clark , Ronnie	18 <sup>th</sup> July 2013
Goodwin, Robin	24 <sup>th</sup> July 2013
Goss, Eric	26 <sup>th</sup> July 2013

Harris, Jill	23rd July 2013
Harris, Les	23rd July 2013
Howett, Derek	12 <sup>th</sup> July, 2013
Napier, Roderick	11 <sup>th</sup> July 2013
Peck, Howie	16 <sup>th</sup> July 2013
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### **Unpublished Secondary Sources**

Pascoe, Graeme, *The Falkland Islands Saga*. (Unpublished Volume Detailing Extensive Falkland Islands History)

## Appendix A:

Copy of consent form distributed to participants preceding oral history interviews in the Falkland Islands. This form was produced with advice received from the University of Bristol's Digitisation Officer, who advised on procedural grounds regarding ethics and copyright. Produced with reference to oral history consent forms used previously by the UOB and Bristol's Museum's Art Galleries and Archives.

### **AHRC CDA PhD Research License Release – ss Great Britain Falkland Islands project**

The purpose of this agreement is to ensure your contribution is added to the collections of the University of Bristol and the ss *Great Britain* Trust in accordance with your wishes and relates to the following works [or see attached list]:

Name of Interviewee/ Contributor		Item(s) Contributed i.e. audio or an interview, images, etc:
Name & Role of Interviewer		Date and Location:
Any other information	Include details of project, e.g. project title, purpose and context of interview/ activity	

I understand that the interviewer has taken photographs of me, and/or made video recordings, and/or audio recordings, and/or photographed items belonging to me, for the purposes of their AHRC funded Collaborative Doctoral Award PhD with the University of Bristol and the ss *Great Britain* Trust.

I hereby give permission to University of Bristol and the ss *Great Britain* Trust, to use and/or

make copies of the recordings, and their word content, and to reproduce images of me and of items that I have provided:

- For printed publications, exhibitions, displays or presentations
- On websites and social media networks
- For publication or broadcast in local and national media

Furthermore, so that future generations may benefit, I also give permission for the University of Bristol and the ss Great Britain Trust to store recordings, transcripts, and images in a public archive, such as Brunel Institute at the ss Great Britain site in Bristol.

I am over 18 years of age.

**OR**

I am the parent/guardian of and give my permission for their contribution to be used as stated above.

Name:

Address:

Postcode:

Phone:

E-mail:

Signature:

Date:

Interviewer's name: James Muirhead, **University of Bristol**

Notes

Although I would prefer my material is not reproduced by the University of Bristol or ss Great Britain for use in public display, I consent to the use of the material I have provided including oral history recordings, and their word content, reproduced images of me and of items that I have provided to be used and reproduced for the purposes of the academic work undertaken by the Collaborative Doctoral Award researcher for the purposes of his PhD thesis undertaken at the University of Bristol:

I am over 18 years of age.

**OR** I am the parent/guardian of and give my permission for their contribution to be used as stated above.

Name

Address

Postcode

Phone  
E-mail  
Signature

Date

Interviewer's name: **James Muirhead, University of Bristol**

Notes

## Appendix B:

List of oral history participants interviewed in the Falkland Islands. All participants received and signed the consent form reproduced above and names are reproduced with permission.

Name of interviewee	Date of interview
Ronnie Clark	18 <sup>th</sup> July 2013
Roderick Napier	11 <sup>th</sup> July 2013
Willie Bowles	24 <sup>th</sup> July 2013
Howie Peck	16 <sup>th</sup> July 2013
John Smith	27 <sup>th</sup> July 2013
Anthony Carey	15 <sup>th</sup> July 2013
Eric Goss	26 <sup>th</sup> July 2013

Gerald Cheek	8 <sup>th</sup> July 2013
Derek Howett	12 <sup>th</sup> July, 2013
Jill Harris	23rd July 2013
Les Harris	23rd July 2013
Ian Strange	26 <sup>th</sup> July 2013
Robin Goodwin	24 <sup>th</sup> July 2013