SUBMISSION TO INTERIORS / SPACES OF FAITH / David Littlefield

TITLE

The living and the dead; an investigation into the status of erasure within the floor of Bath Abbey

ABSTRACT

The floor of Bath Abbey offers a singular test of authenticity. Nineteenth century repairs and additions caused horizontal grave markers, which comprise the majority of the Abbey's floor, to become separated from the burial sites they were intended to memorialise; further, a century and a half of further occupation has had the effect of removing many inscriptions as surfaces are worn smooth. The result is a patchwork of unintended edits and accidental poetry. This paper explores the notions of authenticity, essence, memorial and erasure as they pertain to the Abbey floor, in particular with regard to the role the body plays in inhabiting/eroding the floor - from both above and below. The author argues that the stones which are most out of place or worn to a state of erasure are no less authentic than their intact equivalents, but that they can be considered to have moved to another state of authenticity rich in resonance and meaning. This paper, in short, is a defence of erasure and that erosion through occupation may be considered a form of social memory; indeed, the marks of walking become the inscription. In other words, the undesigned (erasure, the cutting and repositioning of ledger stones, the missing inscriptions) becomes considered not as a form of dirt but as the positive traces of on-going and meaningful occupation.

KEYWORDS

Heritage, authenticity, essence, trace, erasure, memory, memorial, oblivion, presence/absence, dirt

> *Here lieth the Body of*
> *Edward Orpwood Esq.*
> *who departed this Life*
> *the 19th day of March*
> *in the year of our Lord 1776*
> *Aged 58*
> *He walked in the old paths*
> *because he thought them best.[1]*

INTRODUCTION

When walking in Bath Abbey, and taking notice of what is being walked on, one quickly realises that the stones of the floor do not just memorialise the lives of the dead but do, in fact, indicate the physical *location* of the dead. John Roberts, Judith Kingston, Nicolas Maher, Mary Dowager Countess of Kintore, Lady Charlotte Murray eldest daughter of the Duke and Duchess of Atholl, and many others are recorded in similar fashion to John Orpwood: "Here resteth …", " Underneath are deposited the remains of …", "Beneath are interred …" etc. The floor of Bath Abbey comprises almost 900 "ledger stones", horizontal burial markers inscribed with the names of approximately 1455 individuals, the majority of whom were buried beneath floor between 1625 and 1845. It is believed, however, that many more people are interred beneath the Abbey's floor – almost certainly 4,000, perhaps even 6,000, which is many more than is typical for a British cathedral or abbey space. [Curnock 2013] Further looking, however, reveals oddities – partial and disturbed inscriptions, some of which appear to have been the subject of a particularly brutal edit, one of which appears thus:

> *… ith this Stone*
> *… deposited*

Another ledger stone is inscribed merely "of his age".

The floor of Bath Abbey offers a singular test of authenticity; we cannot be certain if a single ledger stone is, in fact, in its original location and it is very unlikely, therefore, that the human remains beneath the floor can be identified by the name above or nearest them. Very recent alterations to the floor have shifted the position of some ledger stones further. Future works may well include a much more comprehensive set of changes to the floor, including a wholesale redistribution and widespread replacement, necessary to correct problems of subsidence and an increasingly uneven floor surface. Bath Abbey is acutely aware of the sensitivity of the works; especially with regard to the floor's role as memorial and archive/manuscript, as well as being a significant component within the Abbey as place of worship and heritage site.[2] This paper explores the notions of authenticity, essence, memorial and erasure as they pertain to the Abbey floor, in particular with regard to the role the body plays in inhabiting/eroding the floor - from both above and below. The paper argues that the floor is, in fact, such a complex, nuanced and meaningful surface *because* of the very factors that are prompting its repair or replacement; further, that the stones which are most out of place or worn to a state of erasure are no less authentic than their intact equivalents, but that they can be considered to have moved to another state of authenticity rich in resonance and meaning. This paper, in short, is a defence of erasure; that the accidental, the undesigned and the marks of time/occupation play as strong a narrative role as the building in its (mythically) original state; that the wear, erasure, absence, loss and impurity of the stones as found today is as much a part of them, as original and *essential*, as the stones as crafted and laid down centuries ago.

The site occupied by Bath Abbey has been in almost continuous use for millennia. Sited close to a curve of the river Avon, the Abbey sits adjacent to the site where geo-thermally heated water breaks ground and formed the centre of a Roman temple and bathing complex; indeed, excavations suggest the site performed some sort of cultural role in the pre-Roman era. With the collapse of empire and the end of the Roman occupation, the baths complex fell into disuse and collapsed, and evidence of the importance of the Roman settlement only came to light in 1727 with the discovery of the bronze head of the goddess Minerva.[3] Bath Abbey, which almost certainly sits above part of the Roman temple complex, is pre-dated by a convent established in 675AD and an Abbey Church where Edgar was crowned King of England in 973 [Bath Abbey 2013c: 2]; this Saxon structure was replaced by a Norman cathedral, begun circa 1090, which was, in turn, demolished and rebuilt as the current Abbey Church with work spanning 1499 to 1611 [Hylson-Smith 2003: 61-106].

Few traces of the earlier building, which was twice the size of the present Abbey, remain; column bases from the Norman structure can be glimpsed in voids beneath the present floor level, for example, but the building of today is almost exclusively a Tudor and post-Tudor creation.[4] Bath Abbey holds a Grade 1 heritage listing and sits at the heart of the city of Bath, itself a World Heritage Site. The "spectacular medieval church" [UNESCO 2013: 2] is of particular importance to this World Heritage status as it provides a chronological link between the two discreet narratives of "Roman" and "Georgian" Bath. The Abbey has, inevitably, been the subject of repair and restoration, notably George Manners' works of 1833 and George Gilbert Scott's of 1864-74. Manners' interventions went well beyond repair, and included conjectural additions such as the flying buttresses and pinnacles to the north transept rather than attending to the structure as found. Scott's work was similarly invasive, again based on contemporary notions of what the medieval builders would like to have done; the most significant interventions during this period were the replacement of the Tudor plaster ceiling with stone fan vaults and remaking the floor to lay heating pipes and correct subsidence. [Hylson-Smith 2003: 163]

Subsidence was (and continues to be) caused by the decay of coffins and their human remains, creating spaces which often coalesce to form ever larger voids which become subject to collapse – causing, in turn, ledger stones to slip and crack. Scott's remedy involved removing all stones, brutally homogenising and compacting the upper layer of earth and artefacts to a depth of approximately 1m, laying a thin concrete slab and re-laying the ledger stones *with little or no regard for their original position*. "The grave earth deposits excavated were all heavily 'churned' by the 19th century refurbishment work. Remains of late 18th and early 19th century burials were completely fragmented." [Watkins 2013: 4]

Many ledgers were cut to fit their new arrangement, with fragments of stones used to patch and fill irregular gaps. Scott's work also included the installation of pews on timber plinths, causing footfall to be concentrated on particular pathways, accelerating erosion in areas of frequent use. Bodily decay has continued beneath the floor, prompting the Abbey to submit a funding request to the UK's Heritage Lottery Fund in 2013: "The floor is collapsing, the ledger stones are being damaged and the structural integrity of the entire building is being compromised." [Bath Abbey 2013c: 16][5] Architects Feilden Clegg Bradley have been commissioned to explore methods of stabilising the floor and replacing the poor-performing Victorian heating system, among a wider package of works.[6] Thus, the ledgers are once more the subject of consideration and possible removal, a process which will inevitably cause some stones to be damaged beyond repair, and forcing the Abbey to consider which stones are of sufficient age and memorial value to be returned to the floor. Further, the Abbey faces a number of important questions which contemporary heritage and conservation practice appears unable to answer easily: should, for example, worn and illegible ledger stones be retained as an integral part of the floor? Should stones be returned to their present positions, or does Scott's intervention of the 1860s and '70s render these positions meaningless? Could or should ledger stones be re-inscribed and, if so, with what text? How might the Abbey balance the need to preserve inscriptions deemed to be of historical value while, on the other hand, placing value on erasure which might be said to symbolise both an individual's slide into oblivion as well as the continued occupation of the building itself – it is, indeed, the presence of people which has caused the inscriptions to wear away.

These questions centre on ideas of essence and authenticity - or, more accurately, authenticities. The floor is not, in fact, what it appears to be, while the ledger stones are all, undeniably, originals. In this paper I will argue that the erosion caused by the act of walking over the floor simply moves the ledger stones from one state of authenticity to another, but that their memorial purpose remains the same. Erosion (the presence of absence), then, is something to be prized rather than checked; while the act of walking itself might be to be reconsidered as an act of *participation* in a long-term process of oblivion/memorialisation.

HERITAGE / AUTHENTICITY / ESSENCE
The condition, and possible re-conditioning, of the Abbey floor must be considered within a range of frameworks which include heritage, authenticity and essence, while references from other fields can also be brought to bear, such as art, archaeology, dirt and notions of memory/memorial. It is beyond the scope of this paper to outline these terms in detail, and much has been written on the contested nature of some of them, nonetheless it worth setting out the principle issues.

The terms "heritage" and "authenticity" have come under very close scrutiny in recent decades, with writers including Jukka Jokilehto, David Lowenthal, Robert Hewison and Randolph Starn describing the difficulty in defining and applying these concepts in a precise and meaningful way. Since international attitudes towards heritage were codified in the Venice Charter of 1964 and the 1972 World Heritage Convention[7], academics, practitioners and policy-makers have grappled with what the generic statements of these agreements mean in practice.[8] The 1994 UNESCO Nara Document, and subsequent statements and declarations, attempted to clarify matters by addressing one of the

underpinning concepts of heritage itself – authenticity. "Authenticity is the key word of the great majority of documents enunciating either a theory or criteria of choice with respect to safeguarding cultural heritage … it is no exaggeration to say that this concept lies at the base of all modern doctrine on the conservation and restoration of historical monuments" [Lemaire 2002:2]. International consensus, beginning with Nara, is that authenticity has both tangible and intangible qualities, in that cultural *values* must be considered alongside the physical *matter* in any consideration of what it is to be authentic. Modes of occupation, traditions of craftsmanship, and the values and stories projected upon a site all perform useful roles in providing a sense of the authentic, quite apart from the original physical object/space itself.

Indeed, the very brief Quebec Declaration of 2008, outlines a further set of principles and recommendations adopted by the International Council on Monuments and Sites (one of three advisory bodies to UNESCO). This declaration strongly expresses the link between the tangible and the intangible with regard to the spirit of place:

"Spirit of place is defined as the tangible (buildings, sites, landscapes, routes, objects) and the intangible elements (memories, narratives, written documents, rituals, festivals, traditional knowledge, values, textures, colors, odors, etc.), that is to say the physical and the spiritual elements that give meaning, value, emotion and mystery to place. Rather than separate spirit from place, the intangible from the tangible, and consider them as opposed to each other, we have investigated the many ways in which the two interact and mutually construct one another … Considered as a relational concept, spirit of place takes on a plural and dynamic character, capable of possessing multiple meanings and singularities, of changing through time, and of belonging to different groups." [ICOMOS 2008: 2]

What this document does is place cultural phenomena such as value, narrative and ritual on an equal footing with the hard facts of construction materials in terms of experiencing place. It is an acknowledgement that experiencing a space (a temporal, bodily action) is integral to its spirit – that a place has no spirit unless experienced. The development of tourism and the subsequent commodification of sites has further complicated the consideration of authenticity, as discussed by writers such as John Urry and Edward Bruner, where tourists are described as seeking solace in the past – a realm which offers safety and security in contrast to the ever-shifting condition of the present. "We are now so besotted by the past that anything goes so long as it is 'authentic'." [Lowenthal 1985: 231] Authenticity, like its partner heritage, however, is a social construction, and one which Starn argues is both modern and Western, as well as unreliable: "Before the Venice Charter, authenticity was not the crucial term it has since become; since 1964, it has been, like Holy Writ, authoritative and inconclusive". [Starn 2002: 9] In other words, any definition of the word must be so broad, and so sensitive to cultural difference and inference, that it is in danger of being defined and qualified into a state of meaninglessness. This is especially true in an architectural sense: "Places and buildings are subject to change over time, and that the building that has been subject to evolution, adaptation, maintenance and repair over a period of continuous occupation cannot be said to be less authentic than the building in its original (or mythically original) state." [Littlefield 2013: 133]. In some senses this breadth of definition is liberating. It allows, as described by Jenny Kidd, the possibility for interpretation and a recognition that people bring their own associations and cultural values to a site (and that a site is mediated by those values) as well as making room for multiple histories. Heritage and authenticity (and the objects framed by them) can be seen, she argues, as processes rather than points of fixity:

"We have seen more nuanced understandings of 'heritage' emerge in recent years, placing less emphasis on material culture *per se,* and more emphasis upon the (many) stories these materials can manifest and inspire. Objects become a starting point and not an end in themselves … This can make various methods of interpretation used at museums and heritage sites problematic, but equally can be seen as a liberation from the tyranny of an ordered, one-dimensional, fixed – yet still fictitious –

'past'." [Kidd 2011: 24]

This is not to conflate the terms heritage, authenticity and spirit; what is clear, though, is that these terms cannot be considered individually – they are terms which are linked, and which depend (implicitly or explicitly) on the ways in which human beings perceive, consider, inhabit and experience space. Indeed, I would argue that, in this context of interpretation and fluidity, notions of heritage and authenticity (and the condition of the Abbey floor in particular) can be compared with that other great social construct – art. In his 1968 essay *Art and its Objects*, Richard Wollheim develops a theory of art predicated on the relationship between the object and the audience, while taking care to consider where the object lies or, indeed, what the object is. An original painting, for example, can confidently be described as an art object, while the status of a novel or a piece of music is less precise. "The critic, for instance, who admires *Ulysses* does not necessarily admire the manuscript. Nor is the critic who has seen or handled the manuscript in a privileged position as such when it comes to judgement on the novel. And … it would be possible for the manuscript to be lost and *Ulysses* to survive." [Wollheim 1978: 23] What Wollheim argued is that some works of art have something of an indeterminate presence - is the "work" of an opera, for example, embodied in the original musical score, a copy of that score or in the performance (and, if so, which performance)? Art, he concludes, need not be a physical object, nor need it be representational; rather, the work can be identified via the relationships, correlations and aesthetic values it prompts or sustains. This is certainly a useful frame of reference when considering the Abbey floor, as it makes the sense of originality and provenance moot: we can accept that a copy of the *Mona Lisa* has a different cultural value from Leonardo's painted original, but we cannot determine whether one performance of *Hamlet* is more or less authentic than another.

If we were to consider the Abbey floor as a work of art, where, exactly, is the work? Might the "work" exist in the entire 1,380m^2 floor (what one might call an urban carpet), or in the individual ledger stones? Thus, is there one work to be experienced, or many hundreds? If the floor in its entirety is the work, how much does it matter that most (if not all) ledger stones are now in different places to their original location, while many others have been the subject of damage and erosion? If ledger stones are individual works, then how much does their *relational* quality contribute to their sense of originality and authenticity - does their separation from the human remains they purport to memorialise diminish their status?

It is the view of this author that the floor be considered an authentic and composite element within Bath Abbey, and that changes wrought upon the floor have not been so profound to render it inauthentic; rather, they stand as testament to the Abbey's own interpretation strategy of "tradition and change" [Bath Abbey 2013a]. "Community, city and church have been *living through change* for over thirteen hundred years. Transformation is an ideal at the heart of the Christian tradition, and one this Abbey still serves." [Bath 2013b: 1] In Wollheim's terms, we might agree that the Abbey floor has the qualities of a work of art (or work of cultural value) but, like a dramatic text or piece of music, it is difficult to pinpoint exactly where the work lies, which particular experience of it is most authentic, and just how much interpretation the work can withstand before its authenticity slips away.

This position is informed by a consideration of the nature of essence, a term which cognitive psychologists have begun to explore in an attempt to understand how and why people overlay inanimate objects with hidden attributes. The field of *essentialism,* largely through the work of Susan Gelman, Bruce Hood, Brandy Frazier and others, aims to discover the motivations and mechanisms by which human beings load matter with value - financial, cultural, sentimental etc. It is a study of how/why abstract differences such as ownership, association or personal attachment can lead individuals to place greater (financial or cultural) value on one particular object within a category of otherwise identical objects; that "non-obvious" qualities can be discerned and invested in objects quite apart from their "visible and salient" ones [Gelman et al 2014: 97].

That people look beyond observable features, "positing a reality beyond appearances" in a search for "deeper causes and alternative construals" [Gelman 2004: 407] appears to be a typical human phenomenon, and likely a mixture of instinctive and learned behavior. Studies have demonstrated that young children choose to keep an original sentimental object, such as a treasured toy or comfort blanket, rather than an identical copy [Hood & Bloom 2008]; and that youngsters of primary/elementary school age consider Harry Potter's glasses to be more valuable than otherwise identical spectacles owned by else [Gelman et al 2014] . Such essentialism is not confined to the young: art history is riddled with examples of works which have grown in financial value once proved to be the work of acknowledged masters rather than lesser artists (bronzes by Michelangelo and a painting by Constable are among recent examples).[9] It is not clear what sort of mechanism provokes such value-making, in that invisible qualities make objects unique within their category: one school of thought is that of contagion, that the properties of a person are felt to somehow rub off or contaminate an object, and that these properties can be transferred, in the manner of a sacred relic, by contact with the object (this is the core of essentialist arguments); further categories include the high status afforded to original objects, objects from far away (physically or in time), those with historic associations, or those connected to a person of high status ("if they Prada, I will wear Prada"). Many studies, though, demonstrate that contagion beliefs, a sub-conscious hope or assumption that positive qualities can be transferred in a germ-like manner, lie at the heart of most adults' consideration of authentic artefacts, and that such consideration is relatively well-developed by the age of six and a half.

"Children have an early appreciation for the value of celebrity possessions, starting in preschool, and . . . this appreciation both broadens in scope and strengthens with age. When asked to indicate how much a person would pay for an authentic object (such as Harry Potter's glasses) and for an inauthentic object (a pair of glasses owned by a noncelebrity that the child has not met), even young children who are first learning about the value of money provide higher scores for authentic objects." [Gelman et al 2014: 113]

Further, assumptions of essence often appear to remain as the physical object diminishes – a child's comfort blanket becomes increasingly worn and threadbear, yet is still prized over a replacement. Paul Cezanne described this attitude to objects as the "halo" [Merleau-Ponty 2009: 49]; Walter Benjamin deployed the term "aura".[10] The Abbey floor, too, embodies the characteristics that psychologists look for in studies of essentialism: it is original (the ledger stones are unique), it is distant in time (it is old), it maintains its precious qualities in spite of its erosion (and might even be perceived as being enhanced by them), it has associations with historic people; and testifies, indeed, to those who have done what fills most of the living with awe and dread – they have died. The floor, like the dwindling scrap of a child's blanket, remains in essence whole in spite of its visible decay. Indeed, as Ruskin argued (and as the Venice Charter of 1964 makes plain) restoration risks the danger of losing the very essence, or spirit, it was meant to sustain.

Work on notions of heritage and authenticity, then, imply that there is a deep-rooted human need for objects and places to be endowed with value, even if one accepts that value is entirely a socio-cultural invention. That is, objects and places might have no intrinsic worth other than the invisible quality which a culture chooses to project upon them. The essence or truth of an object or place appears to be elusive in that it can be found anywhere from a certificate of originality and measurable properties to its symbolic and imagined qualities. This is an indeterminate, fuzzy realm of authenticities and negotiations – a zone that cannot, really, benefit from a demarcation between past and present, in spite of the exhortations of the Venice Charter:

"Imbued with a message from the past, the historic monuments of generations of people remain to the present day as living witnesses of their age-old traditions. People are becoming more and more

conscious of the unity of human values and regard ancient monuments as a common heritage. The common responsibility to safeguard them for future generations is recognized. It is our duty to hand them on in the full richness of their authenticity." [ICOMOS 1964: 1]

Archaeologist Michael Shanks, however, disputes the demarcation of past/present/future; he suggests that the role of interpretation is so culturally determined that past and present are inextricably intertwined, and that time is more a matrix of continuities than isolated categories. "The past did not end at some point." [Shanks 2007: 592] We are implored and instructed by international charters to act as custodians of the past for the benefit of future generations; equally, it is incumbent upon us to recognise built heritage as temporal things framed within shifting values and frameworks. Archaeology cannot, argues Shanks, be the neutral observer; it is always to some extent subjective, viewing the past through the lense of the present. Heritage is much the same; heritage does not just isolate the past for the enjoyment of those living – it frames and reframes the past, allowing people of the present to use the past as a resource in order to tell stories about themselves.

PRESENCE / ABSENCE
The ideas outlined above serve as a framework within which to explore the relationships between the body (dead and alive) and the space of the floor of Bath Abbey. It is a relationship between the inanimate matter of the floor, the once animate matter of the dead, and the animate matter of the living. The floor does not, and cannot, remain static while both living and dead bodies continue to act as agents upon it; neither can it remain unchanged while the living continue to project their time- and culture-specific values upon it. The practical consequence of such change (the dead rot to leave voids into which the floor sinks; the living continue to walk upon the floor) is one of erosion and decay. There is, of course, a certain poetry in such an arrangement; as the dead are physically erased, they fade from memory as the inscriptions which record their passing are gently smoothed over. This is the cause of some consternation at the Abbey which regards the floor as an archive and manuscript (as well as an operational surface on which to host events). Furthermore, the degree to which individual ledger stones have been erased is more to do with happenstance than intent – those placed in areas of high footfall have eroded faster than those in quiet corners, while the actions of Gilbert Scott's workforce, in cutting old stones to make them more convenient to fit, have had the effect of dispersing some ledgers in much the same manner as the human remains have been distributed beneath the floor. Thus the floor contains stone elements containing inscriptions including:

Underne …
Rebecca …
I …
She Died …
Here the Body of …
Who …
[inscription, partially erased through cutting the stone]

Bene …
Are D …
The R …
Who Died …
Ag …
[inscription, partially erased through wear][11]

The Abbey floor can be usefully considered to be on-going memorial in various stages of absence/presence. Cultural geographer Avril Maddrell has explored these terms in some depth, investigating the role and ritual of placing memorials at the site of a person's death (a roadside shrine, for example), or in places frequented by the dead when alive (a bench placed along the route of a once-favourite walk). She describes these terms not only in a binary sense of "there" and "not there", but referencing the painful presence of absence. "An absent presence reflects the apparent contradictory binding together of things absent with things present; whatever or whomever is absent is so strongly missed, their very presence is *tangible*". [Maddrell 2013: 505] Her investigations focus on personal memorials, particularly those created by individuals who have lost loved ones and seek to make the absence present through direct communications to them, displaying garments or symbols (flags, football shirts) to represent the deceased, or by marking significant moments such as birthdays. Such practices, says Maddrell, is a vernacular late 20th and early 21st century phenomenon, testament to on-going human needs to establish bonds with the dead.

"Thus, the desire to acknowledge the absent dead and the paradoxical relationship of absence-presence in public spaces has generated multiple, sometimes colliding and competing, meanings and values in the landscape … They testify not only to the presence of absence, but the agency and impact of absence-presence, as a manifestation of a dynamic relation between the living and the dead as the bereaved journey through the landscape of loss, finding a way to live with-without the deceased." [ibid: 517]

Those buried at Bath Abbey, however, are little known to visitors and the memorials are somewhat abstracted and generic, rather than personal and painful. Nevertheless, the notion of absence-presence is a useful one, to be considered in tandem with Marc Auge's consideration of oblivion – an exploration of memory and the art of forgetting. Both personal and social memory are, argues Auge, processes of exaggeration, fabrication, composition and recomposition "that translates the tension exerted by the expectation of the future upon the interpretation of the past". [Auge 2004: 39] Memory, then, plays a role in the ways an individual and a society creates a narrative for itself, selectively privileging facts and interpretations (strengthening some elements of the story, quietly forgetting others) in order to make sense of where one has come from and prepare for the unknown. This is not dissimilar to Shanks' framework of time, that the past never ended but is both a resource and the subject of continual reinvention, of deliberate ordering and reordering, often in the name of identity. "We cannot remember or display everything, so we must choose what to leave out – to consign to oblivion. Safer to make choices than to discard by chance or accident!" [Lowenthal 1993: 171]

Karen Till describes how public memory often takes the form of a "biography" of a site, a narrative which positions itself within a framework of interpretation and socio-political relationships. "Seemingly stable material forms are dynamic in space and time," she writes – sites and their meaning are often contested, and power-relations are negotiated through them [Till 2006: 329]. Sites, in other words, do not *mean* anything other than what society deems them to mean. Within a heritage context, sites and their meaning accrue an essence and authenticity via a negotiated process which steers a path through value, power and what it is expedient to remember and forget. Bath Abbey is a prime example of one of Till's forms which is "seemingly stable" - a place of rest, refuge, continuity and tradition around which the city has clustered for many centuries. The fact is, though, behind the veil of stability has been both a series of ruptures and slow, incremental shifts of erasure hovering around the threshold of decay.

TOWARDS A RESOLUTION
Bath Abbey faces a set of choices more complex than how best to repair its floor; the more profound and pressing problem is how to come to terms with a space/surface which is simultaneously sacred (memorial) and profane (floor). It is these qualities, however, that make the floor a unique proposition – it remains the territory of both the living and the dead, and both continue to act upon it from above

and below, subsiding and erasing, reminding and forgetting. The role of the ledger stones has shifted from that of memorialising individuals to memorialising the undifferentiated dead, or death itself; and in so doing, the increasing intangibility of the inscriptions (the tangible evidence that absence is present, or becoming ever more so) becomes valuable. The names are real, as is the fact of the death of person to which the name is attached; but as the body decays and becomes literally the foundation of the church, the anonymous dead (no longer beneath their memorial stone) shift the floor which covers them, while the living wear it smooth in a slow but poetic choreography.

Ouzounian and Lappin propose that the nature of sound and listening be made more evident in the way people design and inhabit spaces. Listening is, they argue, an under-valued mode of inhabitation. "We must learn how to listen," they write, going on to set out how people can, for example, "listen deeply" and "listen thickly" in an attempt to create a taxonomy of listening modes by which people can better appreciate the spaces around them. "Soundspaces invite active modes of listening, and they draw attention to modes and processes of listening as a means with which to creatively engage with a space." [Ouzounian and Lappin 2014: 307] Similarly, visitors to the Abbey might be encouraged to occupy the space with a more dynamic and self-aware notion of *walking* – aware they not only tread on stones which mark burial sites but that they are agents in the process of obliterating the inscriptions which record the names of those buried there. In this attitude, walking becomes a mode through which absence is made ever more present, making visitors complicit in an act of transforming the memorial value of the floor from one of inscription to one of erasure. Such agency can be accommodated within the spirit of heritage and authenticity as described by international declarations, which prize dynamic and inclusive ways of occupying and using a site, while making explicit the role of visitors in a long-term process of memorial/erasure simply by virtue of their being there. "Since the spirit of place is a continuously reconstructed process, which responds to the needs for change and continuity of communities, we uphold that it can vary in time and from one culture to another according to their practices of memory." [ICOMOS 2008: article 3]

Ruskin famously wrote in *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* that time and weathering, leading to the erosion of a fraction of an inch of stone from a Medieval church, was a vital and on-going process in the construction of a building. "What copying can there be of surfaces that have been worn half an inch down? The whole finish of the work was in the half inch that is gone . . . There was yet in the old *some* life, some mysterious suggestion of what it had been, and of what it had lost; some sweetness in the gentle lines which rain and sun had wrought." [1857: 161] The laying down of countless footsteps leading to the erosion of the raw information on the Abbey floor could be considered in much the same way – certainly if the gradual erosion was considered a practice of social memory. The floor, indeed, might even be considered a memorial work-in-progress until all text has disappeared. "What is clear from recent research in memory studies is that people do not always freely choose how the past becomes part of them. What is less clear is the role our minds and bodies play in that process", writes Till [2006: 336]. In the context of Bath Abbey, walking/erasure might be considered part of a seamless process; indeed, the marks of walking become the inscription. In other words, the undesigned (erasure, the cutting and repositioning of ledger stones, the missing inscriptions) becomes considered not as a form of dirt but as the positive traces of on-going occupation.

The art term *pentimento* describes the process by which upper layers of paint become transparent over time, revealing once-hidden layers of a painting beneath, making visible an artist's change of mind or even an entirely different painting. Jan Gossaert's *The Adoration* (1510-15) is one such example, where stonework, items of clothing and even the rear end of a dog have become translucent, demonstrating the order in which the painting was constructed. Although the term is now also being deployed to describe how technology (such as x-rays) can probe beneath an artwork's surface, rather than the processes of deep time performing the revelatory role, pentimento in its original sense is a useful descriptor for the act of walking/erosion/revealing which time and occupation bring to bear on the Abbey floor. Firstly, it reveals the floor not as a surface but as a building element with spatial

qualities. Secondly, it acknowledges a loss of data, as the upper layer of text becomes less and less visible. Thirdly, it implies that something unseen is revealed – only here, at the Abbey, what is revealed is the presence of absence, that remembering and forgetting are complicit.

Here lies the Body of
Mr James Quin
The Scene is chang'd I am no more
Deaths the last Act Now all is o'er
[an unusually well-preserved text, centre nave of Bath Abbey]

In the 1970s, when Bernard Tschumi formulated a theory of transgression and its relation to architecture, he described how the illicit marks and stains in Le Corbusier's ruined Villa Savoye ("stinking of urine, smeared with excrement, and covered in obscene graffiti") were, in fact, the "most architectural thing" about the building [Tschumi 1998: 356]. Tschumi was arguing, and continues to do so, that architecture is at its most powerful and emotive when the design concept and the thrill of raw human experience are present simultaneously; further, he argues that buildings rarely do this. The proposition that Bath Abbey renews itself through an embrace of erasure and oblivion is made within this framework. It is one which implicates the not-yet-dead in an act of remembering/forgetting the anonymous dead. Meanwhile, the floor remains – authentic and authenticated. Like the child's threadbare comfort blanket, it becomes transformed, while remaining very much its authentic self.

END OF MAIN TEXT – 6080 words plus abstract, key words, notes, references and image captions

NOTES AND REFERENCES FOLLOW

NOTES

1 Inscription on ledger stone, north aisle of Bath Abbey

2 "We are open seven days a week, welcoming thousands of visitors who comprise both tourists and local residents. The Abbey remains a place of worship for many and is an integral part of the city for many more. It is a place where people congregate in times of crisis as well as celebration. It is a major performance venue and civic amenity and has an expanding choral tradition that draws out the talents of children throughout the area. It has a significant collection of archives and artefacts, and holds a responsibility to care for and make these available for future generations. All this creates a strain on the fabric of a magnificent medieval building, a strain we must ease if the Abbey is to continue meeting the needs placed on it by its many visitors, a thriving congregation, as well as the local community." Charles Curnock, Footprint Project Director http://www.bathabbey.org/footprint/what-need (accessed 1 April 2015)

3 Details of the Roman occupation of Bath were sketchy until a bronze head of the goddess Minerva was discovered in excavation works (for the construction of a sewer) in 1727. From that point onwards various construction and archaeology projects uncovered further Roman artefacts. Considerable archaeological investigations were carried out in the 1870s through to the 1890s, when Roman baths complex as known today was uncovered. The baths complex is "amongst the most famous and important Roman remains north of the Alps" (UNESCO 2013). http://whc.unesco.org/archive/periodicreporting/EUR/cycle02/section2/groupa/428.pdf (accessed 1 April 2015)

4 The exact size of the Norman Abbey is not known, but excavations suggest the present Abbey Church occupies the footprint once covered by the nave and crossing of the Norman structure, whose choir and apse was located to the east of the present building.

5 The UK's Heritage Lottery Fund awarded development funding of £389,000 in May 2014 to further explore works at the Abbey as part of the wider "Footprint Project". The Abbey plans on making a full grant application to the HLF for approx. £10million in 2015, as part of a £19.3million building and repair programme, which includes rectifying subsidence beneath the entire building and relaying the ledger stones. The Abbey originally applied (unsuccessfully) for development funding in 2013. See: http://www.bathabbey.org/footprint and
http://www.hlf.org.uk/about-us/media-centre/press-releases/support-bath-abbeys-21st-century-transformation
(accessed 1 April 2015)

6 Architects Feilden Clegg Bradley and structural engineers Mann Williams have devised a method for repairing and replacing the Abbey floor, which comprises removing the ledger stones, excavating churned earth to a depth of approximately 2m, deploying ground penetrating radar to identify voids and injecting lime grouting into those voids based on a grid of 1.2m. This method has been used in a trial area in the north aisle of the Abbey (2013), and is presently under observation to ascertain its long-term viability as a stablising method. Especially damaged and worn ledger stones have been removed and stored; re-laid ledger stones have been clustered together, while new replacement stones have also been clustered, in order to ascertain how the new geo-thermal under-floor heating system might affect the two types of stone. At the time of writing, both zones radiated heat equally, with no discernable effect on the re-laid stones.

7 The 1972 World Heritage Convention, was ratified by the UK in 1984. The UK's statutory heritage bodies (English Heritage, Cadw, Historic Scotland and DOE Northern Ireland) are obliged to manage the nation's World Heritage Sites under the terms set out by the advisory bodies IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature), ICOMOS (International Committee on Monuments and Sites) and ICCROM (International Centre for the Study and Restoration of Cultural Property).
8 Jukka Jokilehto has written a great deal on the subject of authenticity, including the paper "Authenticity and Conservation" cited below (13). See also his paper "The Complexity of Authenticity", *Kunstiteaduslikke Uurimusi* 18 no3/4 2009, where he develops ideas of authenticity as going beyond truthfulness and original to embracing meaning, "aura" and cultural values.
David Lowenthal's key work is *The Past is a Foreign Country*, Cambridge University Press, 1985. See "Authenticity Past and Present", *CRM Journal* No1, Winter 2008 for a succinct summary of his thinking. The following paper by Herb Stovel provides a useful background to the Nara Document: "Origins and Influence of the Nara Document on Authenticity", APT Bulletin, Vol 39, No 2/3 (2008), Association for Preservation Technology International, pp9-17. Further, Randolph Starn's paper provides a full historical and theoretical overview of the subject: "Authenticity and historic preservation: towards and authentic history", *History of the Human Sciences*, Vol 15, No 1, Sage, pp1-16.

9 On 29 January 2015 the BBC reported "A painting bought for £3,500 just 18 months ago sells at auction in New York for £3.4m after John Constable was confirmed as its creator."
http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-suffolk-30848789
(accessed 1 April 2015)

On 2 February 2015 the BBC reported: "Two obscure bronze sculptures may actually be by Michelangelo, a team of international researchers believes."
http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-cambridgeshire-31085336
(accessed 1 April 2015)

10 In his essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1936), Benjamin used the term "aura" to describe "the authority of the thing" or the fundamental essence of the artwork which is diminished through mass reproduction.

11 The entire inscription originally read:
Beneath / Are deposited / the Remains of / Major Leigh / Who died April 20th 1836 / Age 79.
Source: Abbey Archive.

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END OF NOTES AND REFERENCES. IMAGE CAPTIONS FOLLOW

IMAGE FILE NAMES AND CAPTIONS
Image files to accompany David Littlefield's submission. All files are jpegs and available in colour (apart from file 194)

203 of his age bw **and** 194 bw
Many of Bath Abbey's ledger stones have been the subject of a brutal edit, a consequence of 19th century floor repairs when stones were re-cut to fit.
Copyright: David Littlefield 2015

199 bw **and** 201 bw
Erosion of ledger stones is deeper in areas of high pedestrian traffic; text is preserved when close to pews, columns or walls.

abbey 19th century plan bw
Floor plan of ledger stone positions after floor works of the 1860s and '70s. The repositioning of the ledgers means they bear no relation to the human remains deposited beneath.
With thanks to Bath Abbey and Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios
[APPROVAL FOR USE OF THIS IMAGE HAS YET TO BE OBTAINED]

abbey floor montage 300dpi bw **and** IP montage 300dpi bw
Photo montage of Abbey floor surface in the north aisle, illustrating the patchwork of ledger stones and the wide range of conditions in which individual stones are found.
Copyright: David Littlefield 2015 and Ian Parkes 2014

footprint bw
The Abbey floor has been the subject of a wide range of repairs, and shows evidence of cheap or rushed works. Here, the bootprint is captured in a patch of bitumen.
Copyright: David Littlefield 2015

frances ayerst bw
Individual ledger stones declare the location of the dead; however, 19th century churning and the repositioning of these grave markers have caused a complete separation of memorial and human remains.
Copyright: David Littlefield 2015

pentimento bw
Jan Gossaert's *The Adoration* (1510-15) provides good examples of the process of pentimento, whereby upper layers of paint become translucent over time, revealing once hidden layers beneath.
Copyright: the National Gallery, London. [APPROVAL FOR USE OF THIS IMAGE HAS YET TO BE OBTAINED]

END OF ALL TEXT