

# Exploring Dark Tourism: The Geographies of three selected UK sites

by

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This thesis presents results of original research undertaken by the author. The work has been conducted in accordance with the University of Nottingham's Code of Research Conduct and Research Ethics and in accordance with the School of Geography's risk assessment procedures.

## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis serves to add to the current conceptualisation of dark tourism as a distinctive phenomenon within the wider tourism industry. Throughout history, and especially in today's globalised and media-drive society, there has been an increasing interest to visit sites of past atrocities and tragedies (Dunkley et al., 2007). This study aims to critically examine the geographies of dark tourism across three selected UK sites, to effectively test the adaptability of the phenomenon of dark tourism across three deliberately different case studies. Also, the study aims to critically explore how to effectively conduct geographical research on the phenomenon of dark tourism. This thesis adopts a qualitative case study approach which utilises data collection methods of semi-structured interviews and observations. The thesis will be actively reflecting upon its methodology, to assess how to examine particular contextual aspects in which the phenomenon occurs. The chosen sites for this research project were the following: Jack the Ripper walking tours in London, Brodsworth Hall and Gardens in Doncaster, and Aberfan and its memorial garden and cemetery in South Wales. With these three examples, this thesis aims to address the complexities of implementing a set typology onto different sites with differing degrees of darkness.

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## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Thesis Introduction

For as long as people have been able to travel, while it might seem strange to some, people have been drawn to seemingly macabre sites (Seaton, 1996). The subsequent phenomenon by which people are fascinated in visiting sites of death and disaster has led to a whole genre of tourism known as ‘dark tourism’, which has become a popular and profitable tourism niche market (Juan et al., 2020) that has transformed the tourism landscape (Israfilova and Khoo-Lattimore, 2019). Although the definition of the phrase ‘dark tourism’ continues to be debated, the concept has attracted much media attention, for instance, with the Netflix documentary series *Dark Tourist* (2018) where David Farrier, a New Zealander journalist and actor, presents a variety of dark tourism sites as well as share his experience of being a ‘dark tourist’ at such sites, he visits a total of 28 locations. All sites vary in geographical location, travelling across multiple countries such as Japan, Benin, and Kazakhstan, as well as all sites and experiences, differ in their degree of perceived darkness – from attending a voodoo festival to participating in a World War II re-enactment (Zerva, 2021). Also, an atlas of dark destinations that highlights over 300 dark sites across 90 different countries – this atlas emphasises its focus on the practice of dark tourism as it provides an overview of the diversity of potential dark sites and the expected experience if someone wishes to visit (Hohenhaus, 2021). This demonstrates how the phenomenon and practice of dark tourism have a wide geographical presence, which further develops more nuanced typologies of dark tourism sites as well as observes the evoked emotions at different levels of darkness.

Studying the phenomenon of dark tourism is both important and justifiable; despite the increasing academic interest in the phenomenon, there is a general agreement that dark tourism remains theoretically fragile and poorly conceptualised (Jamal and Lelo, 2011; Stone and Sharpley, 2008). Sites considered dark destinations also vary greatly

depending on the socio-cultural context as well as the appropriate development, management, interpretation, and marketing (Stone, 2010). The gaze of dark tourism continually shifts as new happenings take place which influences the moral interpretation of such sites (Rojek and Urry, 1997). In the context of this thesis, studying the geographies of dark tourism has allowed geographers to gain a more nuanced understanding of tourism landscapes of death, including the understanding of the emotional and affective geographies of consuming death (Johnston, 2015). Thus, it allows human geographers to understand the affect of dark tourism practices as it highlights the role of dark tourism in educating visitors about past tragic events (Martini and Minca, 2021:38); this would be crucial to further understand why particular people are willing to travel to such dark destinations, and in some cases, and are willing to pay for an organised tour to step into the shadows of the victims (Korstanje and Ivanov, 2012).

Although the geographical focus of this thesis will be exclusively within the UK, it is important to acknowledge that both the phenomenon and practice of dark tourism have a presence internationally – in many countries, there exists a great number of sites and attractions of death and disasters that are of historical significance. For instance, well-known dark touristic activities include taking a guided walking tour of Auschwitz, visiting a graveyard of a famous celebrity, queuing to enter the 9/11 memorial in New York, as well as visiting the Killing Fields in Cambodia. This thesis will be focusing on particular periods of times of the UK's dark history. Grebenar (2018) comments how the majority of the UK's dark tourism sites are predominantly heritage sites with a very long temporal distance between the actual events with tourists today, which, as Robison and Dale (2009) argue, creates this sense of safety while engaging as well as being close proximity to death. There are several dark sites across the UK which have not been investigated; this thesis aims to shed some light on such sites. This study aims to further develop a richer understanding of the phenomenon of dark tourism across three selected sites in the UK, this will effectively test the

adaptability of the concept across the sites which all vary in their purpose and degree of darkness.

Each of the chosen case studies were locations that I have never visited before and, therefore, was not familiar with. The three sites are as follows: Jack the Ripper walking tours in London, Brodsworth Hall and Gardens in Doncaster, and Aberfan and its memorial garden and cemetery in South Wales. Having three deliberately different case studies enables the critical examination of the adaptability of the phenomenon of dark tourism, which can plot along Stone's (2006) spectrum of dark tourism. This spectrum will be referred to throughout the thesis, and these three case studies will highlight the complexities of attempting to classify sites into neat categories. At each dark site, depending on the perspective (such as entertainment or education focus, temporal distance between the event and today, tourism infrastructure and other factors), it can be placed at either end of the spectrum. Each site demonstrates a number of characteristics of either extreme side of Stone's (2006) spectrum, "Lightest" and "Darkest". The first case study will aim to examine how these dark walking tours, a guided walking tour which focuses on a particular death or disaster, have transformed a true crime from the late Victorian era into a spectacle, entertaining the story of a serial killer to hundreds of tourists daily. The second case study aims to frame a British country house, with associations with the transatlantic slave trade, into a meaningful dark tourism site which has undergone this process of darkening the site's narrative to publicly acknowledge its complicity in the form of an exhibition. The final case study, which is the most contentious site, aims to address whether the practice of dark tourism depends on tourist infrastructure for it to have a presence in the phenomenon of dark tourism.

## **1.2 Research Aim and Objectives**

The main aim of this thesis is to critically examine the geographies of dark tourism across three selected UK sites. To achieve the overall research aim, the following research objectives must be met:

1. To effectively test the adaptability of the phenomenon of dark tourism across three deliberately different case studies in the UK, which can be plotted along Stone's (2006) spectrum of dark tourism.
2. To critically reflect on how to conduct geographical research on the phenomenon of dark tourism.

### **1.3 Methodological Reflection**

Throughout this research project, I will be actively reflecting on the methodology, as one of the objectives focuses on how to conduct geographical research on the phenomenon of dark tourism. The chosen methodology used for this thesis allows for the exploration of a specific phenomenon, specifically dark tourism, with significant consideration of the multiple contextual aspects in which the phenomenon occurs.

Unlike typical ethnographic methodology, where it requires an extended period of time to immerse in the environment to gather the necessary breadth and depth of observation needed for the empirical chapters, due to both relative financial and practical ease, I was able to visit two of the sites, Brodsworth and the Ripper walking tours, twice while the other site, Aberfan, I was only able to visit the area once. It is crucial to note that, despite the limitations of being only able to visit the sites only once or twice, I was still able to immerse myself at each site which allowed me to gather the required data for this thesis. It is vital to acknowledge that the study will be actively reflecting on the methodology as while all three case studies share the commonality of conducting qualitative methods of semi-structured interviews and observations, however, to some degree, the approach had to be modified to accommodate each site. This became apparent in Chapter 6, the case study of Aberfan, as the required degree of special

sensitivity meant that I had to alter the approach. Instead of interviewing a key figure that was involved in the creation and management of the site, I was able to interview a visitor who travelled to the location with me. This visitor was someone who I knew before my research, I discuss the key ethical concerns of interviewing people who I knew before conducting the research in the methodology chapter.

#### **1.4 Thesis Structure**

This thesis has seven chapters, which are organised as follows:

Chapter one, the introduction, has set out the context and purpose of this research and what it aims to achieve.

Chapter two, the literature review, will explore a breadth of literature regarding the phenomenon of dark tourism to understand the concept of dark tourism and its related terms. It will examine relevant topics such as the genealogy of the term as well as the various typologies created to categorise dark tourism sites. Providing a thorough discussion of dark tourism will act as a foundation for the empirical chapters of this thesis.

Chapter three, the methodology, will reflect why a qualitative case study method was used for this study; examining why particular data collection methods, such as semi-structured interviews and observations, were the most effective method to test how both the phenomenon and practice of dark tourism can be applied to three distinctively different case studies.

Chapter four, the first case study of Jack the Ripper walking tours, investigates a dark attraction that is already a popular dark tourist activity in the UK, where it has been clearly positioned within the phenomenon of dark tourism. It will explore how these dark Ripper tours have become a spectacle which exploits the true crime of the murder of five women through the guise of entertainment. For this case study, two walking tours were completed, one that is perceived as a conventional

Ripper tour, while the other tour is a feminist alternative – aiming to understand how this classic form of dark tourism has expanded and now offers tours with differing narratives. This case study is one of two sites which are examples of sites that are directly associated with death. In this context of the Ripper tours, you are able to visit the exact locations where the murders occurred.

Chapter five, the second case study of Brodsworth Hall and Gardens, explores how a conventional heritage site has begun this process of darkening the site's narrative by publicly acknowledging and presenting its darker history, in association with the transatlantic slave trade, in the form of an exhibition. To frame the British country house as a site to have a meaningful dark tourism experience creates this notion of openness and understanding of how the legacy of slavery and the slave trade is still prominent and should be scripted into the site's main narrative. This case study is the only site which is not directly associated with death, as the actual horrors and atrocity of enslavement and the slave trade did not happen at Brodsworth.

Chapter six, the third and final case study of Aberfan, is the most contentious site as it addresses the portrayal of a more recent and sensitive event. The chapter focuses on the village of Aberfan and its associated memorial garden and cemetery. It will aim to examine whether the actual practice of dark tourism depends upon tourist infrastructure for it to exist and have a presence as a dark tourism site.

Chapter seven, the conclusion, will summarise this study and highlight any possible future research scope that could further develop the phenomenon of dark tourism.

## CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### **2.1 Chapter Introduction**

A literature review is a fundamental component of any research project, the process of collecting and synthesising previous research allows to critically analyse research and be able to identify possible gaps within the literature (Tranfield et al., 2003). This process would let me first understand the concept of dark tourism and its related terms, of which it would allow me to frame the findings of this thesis. This chapter first examines the genealogy of the term 'dark tourism' and how its definition, along with its alternative terms, has developed and changed over the years. It explores how from the mid-1990s several scholars began introducing new terms that have attempted to encapsulate the phenomenon. Furthermore, it will provide a geographical examination of the origin of thana- and dark tourism research and its subsequent dissemination – how the term became popularised and why many academics prefer to adopt the English term. Additionally, the chapter will explore the implication of publishing the concepts in a heritage journal as well as examining why dark tourism is perceived as a postmodern phenomenon. Examining the development of typologies of dark tourism sites; of how different categories and spectrums have emerged.

### **2.2. Genealogy of the term 'Dark Tourism'**

A review of the academic literature attributes the introduction of the term 'dark tourism' to the academic discourse to Foley and Lennon (1996). Published in the *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, the study focused on the examination of the portrayal and interpretation of places associated with death, with particular focus on sites that are associated with the assassination of President Kennedy. Dark tourism was defined as the phenomenon of the touristification of sites of death and disaster, describing it as the "presentation and consumption of real and commodified death and disaster sites" (p.198). The paper explored

the Sixth Floor Book Depository in Dallas, Texas, of how visitors can repeatedly relive all aspects of the assassination – via specially selected televised images that depict the presidential entourage, to the actual assassination, the funeral and even Lee Harvey Oswald’s murder. A key argument made was that the constant repetition of the past through the past cheapens, marginalises, and even trivialises the magnitude of the event being interpreted at the site. Since then, this academic partnership continued to make significant contributions to dark tourism literature, through the publication of their widely referenced book *Dark Tourism: The Attraction of Death and Disaster* (2000). In the book, two key concepts emerged of it being a phenomenon that is only applicable to events that have taken place within living memory, by asserting it is “an intimation of post-modernity” (p.11). The key characteristic of this concept is that dark tourism is chronologically modern, from the 20<sup>th</sup> century onwards, as the advancement in global communication technology and the growth of immediate media via 24-hour news resulted in the growing interest in and the interpretation of events associated with death and disaster. As such events needed to take place “within the memories of those still alive to validate” (p.12), which creates opportunities to learn about as well as commemorate such event (Nelson, 2020). It can be argued that this rise of interest in the interpretation of events associated with the macabre, coupled with the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020, has called for sites like British country houses to publicly acknowledge their complicity to the slave trade. In the wake of the movement, Lester (2021) comments how it has revealed how selective and discriminatory particular historical narratives are as memories of certain people are sought to be kept alive in the public eye (Urry and Larsen, 2011). By re-examining the narrative means that the previously silenced and ignored voices of the enslaved are now injected into the main interpretation of the site – broadening from the romanticised history of the architecture and the opulent interiors of the elite (Shipler, 1997; Moody and Small, 2019). This illustrates the powerful dynamic forces memories have as it raises questions relating to power, voice, representation, and identity on a



variety of geographical scales (Meusburger et al., 2011; Cameron, 2012). In the context of the Black Lives Matter movement, it has demonstrated how memories and historical narratives are not fixed and are subjected to changes over time – as more oppressed and silenced voices intertwine with the collective (Denham, 2008). On the other side, particular dark tourism sites, such as visiting war memorials and battlefields associated with Waterloo, do not fit into the concept of dark tourism being a modern phenomenon as it became a major attraction in its immediate aftermath as it became a national shrine (Seaton, 1999). Foley and Lennon's book (2000) conceptualised dark tourism as a subset of cultural tourism and as something distinct from heritage tourism, thus generating interest and debates among scholars which, in turn, popularised the term 'dark tourism' in academia.

However, Lennon and Foley's (2000) avoidance of examining the philosophical debates over the use of terminology describing dark tourism had enabled other scholars to pick it up. Sharpley (2005) argues that 'dark tourism' had become a "fashionable and emotive term" that has oversimplified a rather complex and multi-dimensional phenomenon. It is crucial to acknowledge that the expression 'dark', as applied to 'tourism', alludes to apparent disturbing and morbid products and experiences within the broader tourism domain. Bowman and Pezzullo (2010) parallel this by arguing that by integrating the trope of 'dark', one must consider the links to the notion of the sublime. In the context of dark tourism, Seaton (1996) discusses how the sublime, is a type of subjective experience, is a generally pleasurable sensation influenced by the landscape while combining both the horror and awe. Adorno (1973) refers to the sublime with the horrors of the Holocaust – as people visiting are confronted with the traces that remain from the incomprehensible and unimaginable horrors. Despite the term 'dark' being understood as devoid of light, many have indicated that visits to such sites often lead to enlightened experiences – such as remembrance and commemoration. It is also important to note that, for instance, different groups and communities may have different

meanings and interpretations depending upon their role in the conflict, the temporal distance from the event, and even the hierarchies of power (Thomas et al., 2019). Therefore, it is important to question whether using such a term, as dark, is appropriate when considering particular forms of dark tourism. Woolfork (2009) argues that by using words like 'black' and 'dark' invoke the more negative meanings of death and disaster with minimal thought towards the racial, and at times racist, implications of such language. While, Motwatt and Chancellor (2011), who studied the black experience and understanding of slavery heritage sites as a dark tourism site, did not problematise the term. On the other hand, for cultural and historical geographers who focus on slavery heritage, such as Derek Alderman, to darken the site's narrative involves this transition of narrative that once exclusively focused on the white slave-owning families to one that incorporates the once invisible enslaved voices. This transition recognises the larger social geography of the site, moving the tourist gaze away from the day-time spaces of the luxuries and activities to the night-time space of the enslaved (Hanna et al., 2018). As a result, it acknowledged the dehumanising violence against the slaves. In the context of Holocaust-related tourism, Reynolds (2018) rejects using the term 'dark' as it presents the atrocity as "woefully euphemistic"; arguing that it would diminish the importance of travelling to such sites for many of its visitors, some of whom may be descendants of the victims. It must be noted that particular communities do not want to apply the term 'dark tourism' to such significant historical locations. On the other hand, Lennon (2017) points out that applying 'dark' to the touristification of such sites would highlight the darker side of history and how it is commemorated, as if this was not to be commemorated then it may be seen as a form of complicit suppression of history. This illustrates that what constitutes 'darkness' fluctuates greatly over time and between societies – which parallels the changing perceptions of heritage within academic discourse as well. Despite the common usage of this term, it should not be assumed that there is an accepted universal definition of dark tourism, as various scholars have introduced their definition and interpretation – which has broadened the

phenomenon (Creech, 2014). It has broadened to such an extent that the “meaning of the term has become increasingly diluted” (Sharpley, 2009:46).

### **2.3 Alternative Terms for Dark Tourism**

Despite it being more than two decades since Foley and Lennon (1996) introduced ‘dark tourism’, Light (2017:294) observes that there are still debates over the concept and its theoretical foundations are “fragile”. As a result, a predominant feature in the literature is this continuing questioning on such basic elements (Hartmann, 2014), questions like, what is dark about dark tourism? What makes this approach different from older or competing conceptualisations, such as those rooted in thanatology? And what might these different terms have in common? Integrating different terms over time in an attempt to describe, define, and conceptualise this phenomenon has illustrated the fluidity of the concept. Firstly, a particular focus will be placed on Rojek’s (1993) ‘black spot tourism’ as well as Seaton’s (1996) ‘thanatourism’. Afterwards, I will explore the evolution of concepts and definitions of dark tourism and thanatourism since its introduction into academia in 1996.

Before the adoption of the more known terms of dark tourism and thanatourism, Rojek (1993) coined a term that was affiliated with the concepts of dark tourism. The term ‘black spots’ or ‘fatal attractions’ described the increasing commercial development of gravesites and sites of those who met with sudden and violent death (p.85). According to Rojek, this fascination is associated with the “landscape of postmodernism” (p.136). Adopting a more sociological framework, three distinctive examples were used: the annual pilgrimage to the place where James Dean died in 1955, the annual candlelight vigil in memory of Elvis Presley at Graceland in Tennessee and the anniversary of JFK’s assassination in Dallas. Influenced greatly by Baudrillardian and Debordian theories of constructed fantasy and the spectacular, which

had been identified with the postmodern, these repeated reconstructions were dependent on modern audio-visuals for their continued popularity. Similarities can be seen in Lennon and Foley's (2000) conceptualisation of dark tourism in a postmodern context. However, Seaton (2009) highlights two key criticisms of Rojek's (1993) theory. The first criticism focuses on the unusual range of selected sites, as it includes examples of heritage sites, literary landscapes, and theme parks that have been developed at different times, for different purposes as well as by different agencies. Seaton (2009) considers the chosen sites and its supposedly connection as something rather peculiar, questioning how the literary landscape of the Brontë sisters being closely aligned with Hollywood theme parks, or how Graceland can resemble a national war cemetery. The other key criticism raises questions on why particular sites were labelled as postmodern tourist sites, describing them as "radically unhistorical" (Seaton, 2009:524). For example, the Père Lachaise Cemetery is cited as a postmodern tourist attraction despite there being evidence that people since the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Seaton (1996) coined the term 'thanatourism' in his definitive article, *From Thanatopsis to Thanatourism: Guided by the Dark*, coinciding chronologically with Foley and Lennon's work (1996) in the same journal. In it, he argues that thanatourism derives from Greek and is translated as signified as "the personification of death". It is defined as being "travel to a location wholly, or partially, motivated by the desire for actual or symbolic encounters with death" (p.240). This definition solely focuses on death which renders thanatourism a narrower scope than dark tourism as well as indicating that it exclusively relates to the visitor's motivations – explaining that thanatourism works on a continuum of intensity based upon two elements. First is on the motivation, and whether it was a particular single motive or a number of motives, and the second is on the extent of interest with death. Recognising that the motivations of the individual play an influential role in dark tourism. Seaton (2009) argues that the phenomenon has a long

thanatopic history which reflects the broader developments in travel, and how the changing European culture helped to shape such developments. He identified that there are three key historical epochs in the history of travel: Christianity, Antiquarianism and Romanticism. The first epoch is between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries when pilgrimages of Christianity developed – for instance, visiting the location of Christ’s crucifixion in Jerusalem. The second was antiquarianism and its related secular-sacred ideology of national heritage that initially emerged in 16<sup>th</sup>-century Europe – such as the Grand Tours that the wealthy and curious experienced. The final epoch, he notes, is the period of Romanticism in the last half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and through the 19<sup>th</sup> century that continues to this day. However, one major reason why thanatourism is not as popularised as dark tourism is that it is seen to be more complex than dark tourism. The chronological distance between the actual event and the tourists today presents the argument that darker narratives can be portrayed and consumed, as the physical and emotional pain once associated with the events “is no longer visible” (Dunkley et al., 2007:59) – which would support Robinson and Dale’s (2009) argument of why some are more willing to engage with the darker side of history. But it is crucial to acknowledge the flaw with this argument, it dismisses pain not being multi-generational – it does not mention how particular social groups may not want to participate in such activities as it affected their community.

Since then, numerous definitions have been coined by academics relating to both dark tourism and thanatourism – as illustrated in table 2. Presenting the evolution of the definitions as a table enables us to see how over time these definitions can be placed into specific categories. A key definition of dark tourism is Tarlow’s (2005), as it includes the phrase “historically noteworthy”, meaning that it acknowledges a historical dimension with dark tourism as well as noting a potential motivation for people to visit such sites. Table 2 highlights the unclear boundaries between dark tourism and thanatourism which explains why many academics may employ the two terms interchangeably. It also

demonstrates how particular definitions, those of Dann and Seaton (2001) and Knusden (2011), have closely aligned to heritage tourism. This is important to note as linking to heritage tourism attempts to address its complex nature and impact on visitors and society. It can be argued that the connections between dark tourism sites and with heritage sites can be summarised by the notion of “atrocious heritage” (Tunbridge and Ashworth, 1996:26) or “heritage that hurts” (Uzzell and Ballantyne, 1998:152) Overall, this table demonstrates how the definitions have broadened over time and may no longer embrace the rather narrow focus initially proposed by Lennon and Foley (1996). For this thesis, Stone’s (2006) simplistic definition of dark tourism will be adopted, and it is because of the addition of the phrase “seemingly macabre”. Although this additional phrase may be problematic in that the definition becomes a subjective one, it is this very reason why it applies to this study. This definition enables it to be applied to a diverse range of sites, attractions and exhibitions that portray death – which is relevant for this thesis as it will be exploring three distinctively different examples and argue why each one is a dark tourism site.

*Table 2 – A selection of changing definitions of dark tourism (DT) and thanatourism (T) in chronological order, categories were adopted from Light’s table (2017).*

<p><b>Definitions based on practices (the act of visiting particular types of places):</b></p> <p>DT: “visitations to places where tragedies or historically noteworthy death has occurred and that continue to impact our lives”</p> <p>DT: “the act of travel to sites associated with death, suffering and the seemingly macabre”</p>	<p>Tarlow (2005:48)</p> <p>Stone (2006:146)</p> <p>Light (2017:277)</p>
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<p>DT: “used as an umbrella term for any form of tourism that is somehow related to death, suffering, atrocity, tragedy or crime”</p> <p>T: “a form of travel where tourists encounter places associated with death, disaster and the macabre”</p>	<p>Johnston (2015:20)</p>
<p><b>Definitions based on tourism at particular types of places:</b></p> <p>DT: “the presentation and consumption (by visitors) of real and commodified death and disaster sites”</p> <p>DT: “tourism associated with sites of death, disaster, and depravity”</p> <p>T: “tourism to globally recognised places of commemoration”</p>	<p>Foley and Lennon (1996:198)</p> <p>Lennon and Foley (1999:46)</p> <p>Knudsen (2011:57)</p>
<p><b>Definition based on motivations:</b></p> <p>T: “travel to a location wholly, or partially, motivated by the desire for actual or symbolic encounters with death, particularly, but not exclusively, violent death”</p> <p>T: “refers to individuals who are motivated primarily to experience the death and suffering of death for the purpose of enjoyment”</p>	<p>Seaton (1996:240)</p> <p>Best (2007:38)</p>
<p><b>Definitions based on a form of experience:</b></p> <p>DT: “concerned with encountering spaces of death or calamity that have political or historical significance, and that continue to impact upon the living”</p>	<p>Stone (2016:23)</p>
<p><b>Definitions based on heritage:</b></p>	

T: “heritage staged around attractions and sites associated with death, acts of violence, scenes of disaster and crimes against humanity”	Dann and Seaton (2001:24)
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## **2.4 A British phenomenon**

This section will geographically examine the origin of thanatourism and dark tourism research and its subsequent dissemination. It is interesting to note that three key academics – Tony Seaton, John Lennon, and Malcolm Foley – shared a similar geographical and professional background in the 1990s when they were all working in Glasgow. The academic study into the phenomenon of thana- and dark tourism began as an inquiry or rubric within tourism studies. These three pioneering scholars established dark tourism as a subcategory of tourism studies that analyses the motivation of visitors who consume death or death-related events or the supply of dark tourism sites. Hartmann (2018), rather ironically when discussing the history of dark tourism, commented how the socio-economic environment of Northern England and Southern Scotland was “considered dire” (p.278) and pushed tourism scholars to take more interest in the darker theme. Other influential tourism academics, such as John Urry, also established their careers in the North; this proximity of connecting with other tourism scholars allowed the integration of the dark tourism subfield into the broader tourism studies, which resulted in the dissemination of the study to other universities across the UK (Sharpley and Stone, 2011; 2012). In 2005, Philip Stone, a prominent figure in dark tourism research, established a Dark Tourism Forum website (<https://www.dark-tourism.org.uk/>) which raised the status of dark tourism within academia and in the media. The purpose of the website was to explore the motivations of why people travelled to visit particular dark sites. When you visit the website now, it states that at the end of September 2022 there will be a new online journal called *International Journal of Dark Tourism Studies* – illustrating how interest in this phenomenon has



greatly grown since its initial conceptualisation in the 1990s and early 2000s. In April 2012, a new Institute for Dark Tourism Research (iDTR) was inaugurated at the University of Central Lancashire; where both Stone and Richard Sharpley, both influential scholars in dark tourism studies, work as Executive Director and Associate Director of iDTR. This became an internationally renowned institute which was shaped by their background in the theorisation and practice of tourism and hospitality management, meaning that a pragmatic approach was applied (Carrigan, 2014). Establishing this institute reflects the growing interest and further institutionalisation of the research topic – greatly expanding the research agenda nationally and internationally.

However, Hartmann (2014) has pointed out the persisting cultural limitations of the term 'dark tourism'. In non-Western civilisations, the term may not be translatable at all. While most Western scholars adopt using the English term, however particular translations of the term do not encapsulate the term fully. For example, the direct German translation, dunkler tourismus, does not exude the same emotions the way the term dark tourism does (Stone, 2006:146), while the French translation, le tourisme noir, does appear in the literature. Hartmann (2014) alludes that the meaning of dark – as in the darker side of humanity – can be expressed with the yin yang concept as natural contrasts which can be used to define the atrocities. Despite its international reach and it being critically reflective on its use, scholars tend to adopt the English term (Biran and Poria, 2012; Vázquez, 2018).

## **2.5 (Dark) Heritage Studies**

Seaton (1996) and Lennon and Foley (1996) published their influential studies in the same journal, the *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, in a special edited issue. This special edited issue aimed to present both a judgement about the motives of allowing the practice of dark tourism to exist as well as an exploration of the experience of visitors to such sites. Examples range from: the portrayal and

interpretation of sites associated with JFK which rely greatly on news and film media (Foley and Lennon, 1996), how the temporal distance influenced how material retrieved from the RMS Titanic was displayed in an exhibition at the National Maritime Museum in October 1994 (Deuchar, 1996), the maintenance and interpretation of the Maginot Line in France (Smart, 1996), and how this fascination with death and the motivation to visit such sites has a long history (Seaton, 1996). The journal is dedicated to the theorisation of heritage as a cultural phenomenon that encourages debates over the nature and meaning of heritage as well as its relationships to memory, identities, and places (Smith, 2014). Benton (2010:1) reveals a heritage/tourism convergence that emphasised the power of collective memory – whereby groups of people within society share what happened in the past and its significance which translates into patterns of tourism. The process of memorialising of significant historical events while acknowledging and including multiple narratives is a complex process (Roberts and Stone, 2014). In the context of dark tourism, the landscape presents a number of different histories of past lives and deaths; where they are being written and rewritten with the aim to present a particular socio-political interpretation of the past (Sharpley and Stone, 2009). The three scholars provided the argument that dark tourism and heritage are related since several dark sites have great historical significance (Ashworth, 2004) as they go beyond the traditional prioritisation of aesthetically pleasing remains of the past to “heritage that hurts” (Uzzell and Ballantyne, 1998:152). This offers tourists a significant dark tourism experience as it allows the consumption of difficult aspects of the past that still impact the present in one form or another, and it holds the “power to legitimise – or not – someone’s sense of place and thus their social and cultural experiences and memories of [particular dark events]” (Smith, 2006:81). In dark tourism landscapes, the narratives of death and tragedies coexist or overwrite pre-existing narratives (Ness, 2005), to cater to tourists who are looking to experience something spectacular. In relation to sites associated to slavery, these sites are listed and protected as heritage spaces. While other dark sites are not

listed and protected as heritage spaces, so they can afford forms of engagement that would be deemed unacceptable at official heritage sites. They provide opportunities for alternative unmediated encounters with the past unlike those in a museum or a curated heritage site (Thomas et al., 2019). If such dark heritage is not commemorated and memorialised it may be interpreted as a form of complicit suppression of history, as it would be seen as selective with their narratives to present. Dark heritage sites have the power to privilege and to marginalise.

## **2.6 Postmodernism in Dark Tourism**

Much of the literature conceptualises dark tourism as being a postmodern phenomenon. This is relevant as society has seen a continuous move away from traditional mass tourism and package holidays to what has been termed by Munt (1994) as postmodern tourism. This particular genre of specialised tourism is defined by its characteristic of pursuing new destinations and experiences as well as increasing the diversity of products, ranging from ecotourism to heritage tourism. This results in tourists wishing to “intellectualise holidays” (Light, 2000:153) – looking to raise their cultural capital. Other academics, apart from Lennon and Foley (2000) and Rojek (1993), have embraced using postmodernism as a framework to explain dark tourism (Biran and Buda, 2018; Creech, 2014 in the context of dark tourism in the global South; Tarlow, 2005). They argue that dark tourism is a socially acceptable postmodern practice for dealing with the inherent and shared fear of death (Biran and Buda, 2018). In modern society, particular individuals gave meaning to death and life, for example within religion and medical institutions; however, in postmodern societies, people are able to visit dark sites and be confronted by death and mortality which has contributed towards the ‘normalisation’ of dark tourism (Sharpley and Stone, 2008). An example of this would be cemeteries. Many would view and treat metropolitan and national cemeteries with great respect but with the transition of

people choosing the travel to such sites, it has transformed into “a sight to see just like any other monument” (Rojek, 1993:141).

Many contemporary catastrophes have been documented and televised, often at the actual time (Blom, 2000). The media has provided the opportunity to create a real perspective as to what was endured at a particular site that constitutes dark tourism as well as allow people to understand more about the events that result in a dark tourism site. As a result, many have attributed the media as being responsible in part for the rise of dark tourism as a spectacle (Lennon and Foley, 2000; Rojek, 1993). In the UK, the media (in the form of newspapers) has been in existence for nearly 300 years which parallels Seaton’s (1996) argument of thanatourism having a long history. For a site to be recognised as a real sensation and spectacle, it must be documented and reported by the media (Rojek, 1996:64) – whether this be done in the form of newspapers or televised reporting. This impacts a tourist’s desire to visit a dark tourism site.

## **2.7 Typology of Dark Tourism sites**

### *2.7.1 A universal typology?*

Despite the continuous debates over what is and what is not ‘dark tourism’, the contested term has been increasingly applied to a diverse range of sites, attractions and exhibitions that showcase death.

Researchers have proposed several dark tourism spectrums and categories that take into consideration particular factors – for example, tourist motivation and site characteristics. This has enabled scholars to classify and label the variety of potential dark tourism sites into neat categories and place them upon an established spectrum. However, several limitations must be acknowledged when compartmentalising dark tourism sites into neatly defined categories. A key criticism was made by Parry (2009), who questions the consequences of placing dark tourism sites into a neat category or a specific point on the spectrum. In what he called a “hierarchy of tragedy”, he questions whether some

tragedies and disasters are of more historical significance and raises concerns over whether it would even be feasible to have a “formal ordering of dark tourism sites and their visitor’s motivations” (p.5). Furthermore, categorising sites is too subjective depending on what definition of dark tourism one uses, and which spectrum is applied. It is important to emphasise the diversity of dark tourism sites, attractions, and exhibitions as by no means do they share similar functions or characteristics (Craig and Thompson, 2012). This means that accurate generalisations cannot be made as exploring each specific site will have its distinctive interpretation with its own historical, administrative, and marketing peculiarities. Therefore, each proposed typology tends to be more descriptive which, in turn, has meant there is “no universal typology of dark tourism” (Stone, 2012:1569).

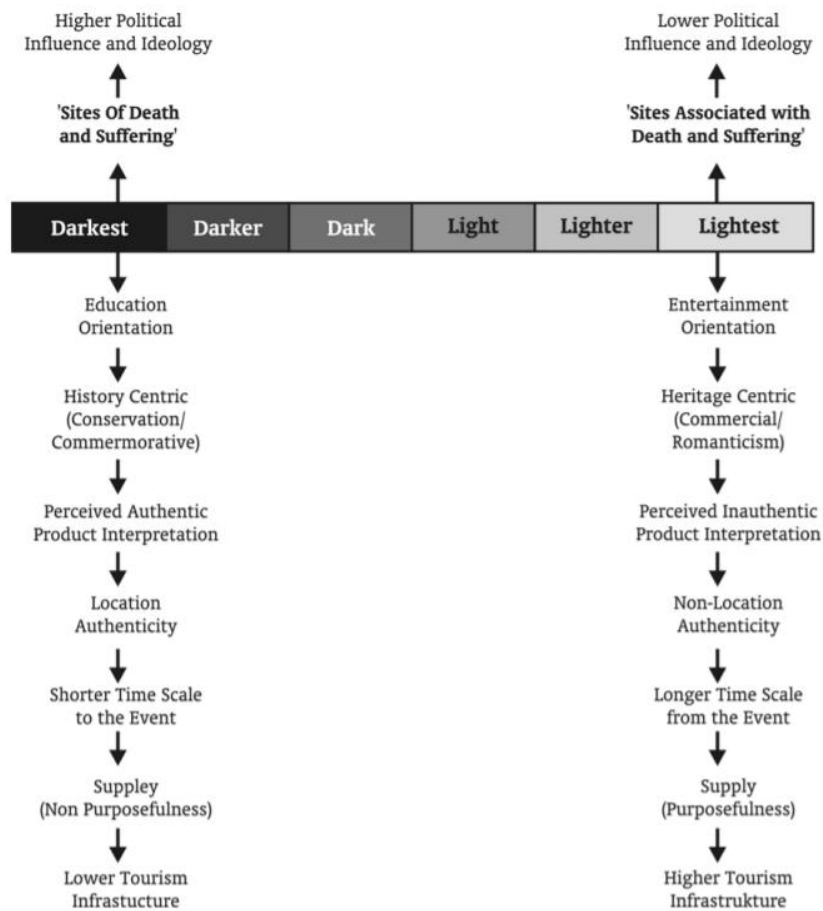
Miles (2002) first proposed a ‘darker-lighter tourism paradigm’ which reflected the different shades of dark tourism. In the context of Holocaust-related tourism, Miles used the examples of Auschwitz-Birkenau and the US Holocaust Memorial Museum and proposes that there is a crucial difference between sites associated with death, such as the US HMM, and sites that are actual sites of death and disaster, an example being Auschwitz-Birkenau. He argues that the closer the temporal distance is, the closer the connection between the visitor and the past is, and a more emotive reaction will be created – therefore, those sites can be labelled as ‘darker’ dark tourism sites (Stone, 2006). Miles (2002) proposed differentiation of dark tourism sites regarding levels of authenticity. This is relevant as, to some extent, it influences how the site is portrayed and interpreted as well as it influences the emotions experienced by the visitors. In addition to this, this conceptualisation is important to this thesis as the case studies selected can be categorised with these labels – with two sites being the actual sites of death while the other is an example of a site associated with death and atrocity.

One of the most cited typologies of dark tourism sites, and the one that will be referred to throughout the thesis, is Stone’s (2006) spectrum of

dark tourism (figure 2.1). The spectrum illustrates the fluidity and dynamic continuum of the intensity of darkness perceived, introducing the differing shades of darkness that highlight the differences between the darkest and lightest tourism sites and attractions. Particular factors can influence the degree of darkness perceived which, in turn, affects the position the site is plotted along the spectrum. These factors can be: the site's purpose (i.e., level of commodification), level of tourist infrastructure, location authenticity, and whether it has a predominant education or entertainment orientation. Developing from Miles' (2002) differentiation of sites based on authenticity, Stone (2006) proposes a spectrum of six value groups on how the macabre is perceived (Mionel, 2019). This fluid manner of typifying sites considers the different shades of darkness and the perceived level of macabre within the dark tourism product. Sites that can be located in the 'dark' to 'darkest' are known as the 'sites of death and suffering'. These sites would be characterised of having more an education focus, as the event of death would have a shorter temporal distance, with the aim of the site to conserve and commemorate (meaning that there be less or even no tourism infrastructure). While on the other side of the spectrum, sites on the 'light' to the 'lightest' would be known as 'sites associated with death and suffering'. These sites would be characterised of having more an entertainment focus meaning that it is perceived and interpreted as inauthentic, as there would be more of a temporal distance between the tourists and the actual event of death. The darker sites are typically defined by a recent tragedy, as this means that visitors are in closer temporal proximity to the macabre. Presenting a higher degree of educational purpose because it is perceived to be more authentic and to be more commemoration and conservation focused. Stone (2006) demonstrates that grouping those who want to visit the concentration camps together with those who want to visit the London Dungeons, for example, would be a gross generalisation. As it does not "expose the multilayer of dark tourism supply" as dark tourism sites are "multifaceted, complex in design and purpose, and diverse in nature" (p. 150). However, this spectrum requires a degree of subjectivity. While

the extremes are clearly defined, it is the sites that could be placed in the intermediary shades where issues arise, especially when a site or attraction displays a combination of characteristics of both extremes meaning that specific locations may not be plotted as easily.

Figure 2.1 – Stone’s (2006:151) dark tourism spectrum, ranging from ‘Darkest’ to ‘Lightest’.



Although the following typologies will not be utilised in this thesis, it is still important to discuss how particular scholars have contributed to the understanding of how to classify and categorise dark sites. To further categorise dark tourism sites, Stone (2006) subsequently presented a comprehensive typology of seven dark types that may be classified by the ‘popularity’ or ‘theme’ or ‘site function’ or ‘interpretation’ of the site.

The 'Dark Tourism Spectrum' framework and the 'Seven Dark Suppliers' categorisation suggest there are different levels/shades of macabre/darkness into which a dark tourism product can be categorised. These range from dark fun factories as the 'lightest' to dark camps of genocide as the 'darkest', which can be categorised by their design features and management strategies. Unlike the spectrum, the typology of Seven Dark Suppliers results in a better understanding of dark tourism supply as well as how to accurately locate and explore dark tourism demand. The Seven Dark Supplies of dark tourism and example sites are the following:

1. Dark Fun Factories [lightest] – “have a predominantly entertainment focus, meaning that it requires a high degree of tourist infrastructure”. Example sites include ‘Dracula Park’ in Romania which presents an entertainment-based site based on the mythology of the vampire (p.153).
2. Dark Exhibitions [lighter] – “displays death with educational and reminiscent purposes, typically these sites are not the actual location of death”. Example sites include the ‘Body Worlds’ exhibition which displays corpses preserved in order to provide health education, anatomy, and physiology (p.153).
3. Dark Dungeons [light] – “related to justice and criminal matters, that often combines entertainment and education as its main purpose”. An example is the Galleries of Justice based in Nottingham, UK, which prioritises both education and entertainment (p.154).
4. Dark Resting Places [dark, light] – “centred on cemeteries or grave markers”. The most famous example is the Père-Lachaise in Paris, France with almost two million visitors annually, as previously examined by Rojek (1993).
5. Dark Shrines [darker, dark] – “centred around the act of remembrance and respect for the recently deceased”. Stone discusses about how the gates of Kensington Palace became a



focal point for millions of people following the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, in 1997 (p.155). After a relatively short time, the gates was dismantled and reconstructed at Althorp House (p.155).

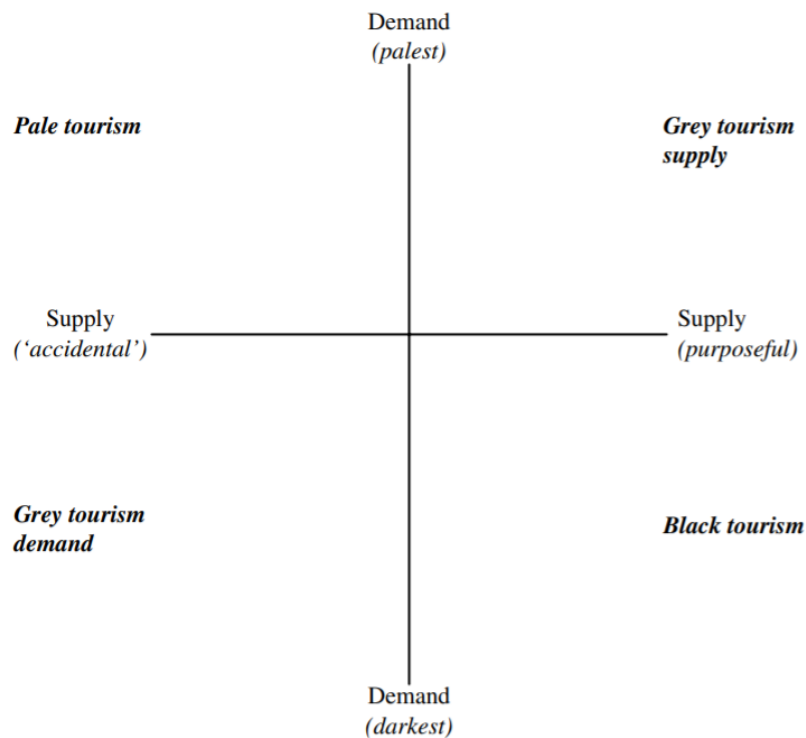
6. Dark Conflict Sites [darker] – “sites associated with war and battlefields, with a focus on education and commemoration”. Examples include Western Front Battlefield Tour groups offering tours to interesting tourists of battle sites such as Ypres and the Somme (p.156).
7. Dark Camps of Genocide [darkest] – “sites marked by a concentration of death and atrocity”. Example sites include Auschwitz-Birkenau in Poland (p.157).

Sharpley (2009) also proposed a useful model of dark tourism demand and supply to help conceptualise the ‘shades of grey’ relationships between the attractions and people’s interest in visiting them – adapting Stone’s (2006) spectrum to the matrix of dark tourism demand and supply (figure 2.2). Four shades of dark tourism, including pale tourism, grey tourism demand, grey tourism supply; and black tourism plotted against a continuum of dark tourism supply (of accidental to purposeful tourist attractions). This continuum suggests that there are darker and paler ends to dark tourism consumption as people are motivated to visit dark sites for different reasons – thus, drawing attention to the personal meaning and the subjective nature of dark tourism experiences. Within these shades, it is possible to locate specific attractions or experiences. The four shades are identified as follows:

1. Pale tourism – people with limited interest in death and destruction visiting places unintended to be attractions.
2. Grey tourism demand – tourist is interested in death but visits an unintended thanatourism site.

3. Grey tourism supply – sites intentionally recognised to highlight death but attract visitors that have limited interest in death.
4. Black tourism – visitors have a fascination with death and intend to visit such dark attractions to satisfy this fascination.

Figure 2.2 – Sharpley’s (2009) matrix of dark tourism demand and supply.



## **2.8 Chapter Conclusion**

In summary, this chapter has explored the literature that is relevant for this thesis; this included examining the genealogy of the term, other relevant terms plus spectrums and categories that attempt to classify dark tourism sites. The following chapter will explore and reflect on the methodology that was used for this research project. While all three site visits share the commonality of conducting interviews and observations, for a particular case study I had to modify the approach – the change

relates to one of the key objectives of this research of how does one conduct geographical research on the phenomenon and practice of dark tourism.

## CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter explains the qualitative case study methodology adopted for this thesis, including the different data gathering methods carried out during fieldwork, such as interviews and observations. This was conducted across three months, from March 2022 to May 2022. Similar to most dark tourism research, qualitative methods are preferable as they allow for the critical examination of the subjective meanings, values, and emotions (Clifford et al., 2016:3). Historical and cultural geographers engage with the past, in this context with past dark historical events, frequently which presents the opportunity to perceive the present-day differently (Craggs, 2019). By having an in-depth multi-method approach allows researchers to reconstruct lives and places of the past while be given the possibility to intertwine alternative narrative into the perceived popular history (Riley and Harvey, 2007; Bernstein et al., 2008). Focusing on three distinct cases allows for a richer understanding to be developed which can demonstrate how the phenomenon of dark tourism can be applied at sites across the UK.

Qualitative methods were deemed to be the most suitable approach as the aim of this thesis is to test the adaptability of a phenomenon and how geographical research can be conducted within a dark tourism context. Choosing three case studies permitted the exploration of several experiences of a particular phenomenon (Cousin, 2005; Hardwick, 2016); this presented the opportunity to observe the participants during the dark touristic activity. Quantitative research is a way to find out numbers and amount. It answers the questions: how much? How many? How often? Methods like interviews and participation was most applicable for this research, as Hitchings (2012) points out, that interview-based research can reveal so much information, as it can access intense and intimate emotions and experiences.

### **3.2 Case Study Approach**

Using a case study approach to this research has allowed for the critical examination of the landscape on which dark tourism sites are constructed have become these public sites of memory, for as Nora (1989) describes it, as each site encompasses a specific remembered geography and history. This method enabled me to explore how the phenomenon of dark tourism has been integrated at particular dark sites in the UK. By having three distinctive sites enabled the examination, similar to Chen and Xu's (2021) study of the moral gaze in the commercialised forms of dark tourism, of the connection between commercialisation and commemoration where spectacles of death can be consumed by the public. With the creation of such touristic landscape, it allowed for people to personally experience it. This method gave the opportunity of testing the adaptability of dark tourism at a range of dark sites, that can be plotted at different points on Stone's (2006) dark tourism spectrum. The sites chosen also fitted into Miles' (2002) categorisation of dark tourism sites – in the end, two sites were actual sites of death and disaster while the other one was a site associated with death and the macabre. The geographical locations of the three dark sites used in this study are illustrated in Figure 3.1.

Sites were favoured based on preliminary research, done digitally, into potential dark tourism sites, and the relative financial and practical ease by which I could access them – these were the main reasons why the geographical scope of this study was limited to those in the UK. The COVID-19 pandemic shaped how this research project as it influenced which sites were selected and how the methods were to be conducted. The digital space within geographical research has been gaining recognition as a way of producing new geographical knowledge and as a method of preserving existing knowledge (Ash et al., 2016). In the early stages of this research project, I wanted to explore dark tourism sites in other European countries as there a lot of dark tourism spots. Famous examples include Anne Frank House in Amsterdam, Pompeii in Italy, the concentration camp Auschwitz in Poland, and Chernobyl in

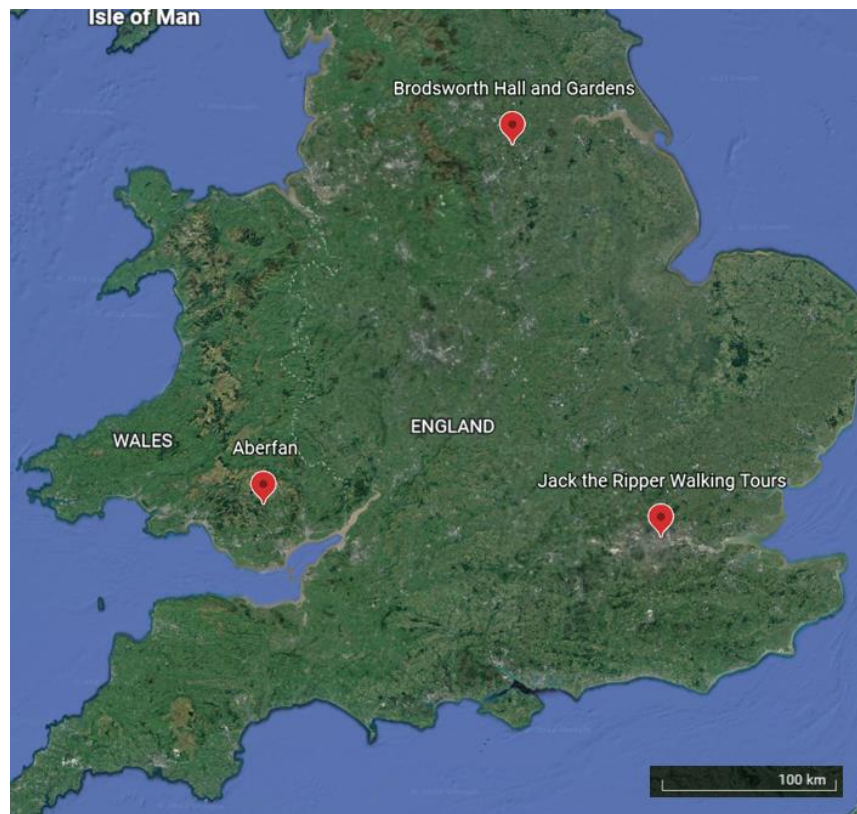
Ukraine. I decided to fix my geographical scope to the UK mainly because of financial ease, but the UK presented a catalogue of potential dark tourism sites to select from. Also, the travel restrictions and closing of touristic sites following COVID-19 was a significant factor as many sites were partially closed, not having full access the entire site, or fully shut. This eliminated a number of potential locations. The three dark sites that are discussed in this thesis were sites that I had not visited, but I knew of the locations. With the Jack the Ripper walking tours, a popular tourist activity in East London, with many groups of tourists being guided around Whitechapel while being told the story of the mysterious serial killer. With Brodsworth Hall, I was familiar with the site as I came across it during my undergraduate years so that meant I was aware the site's connections to the slave trade. Also, at the time when I was finalising my choices I became aware that Brodsworth was hosting a temporary exhibition which displayed their darker history – this allowed for the exploration of how forms of art can be used to narrate dark history. Finally, with Aberfan, this was a difficult and lengthy decision as I wanted to include a case study where the dark event was still within living memory. For a brief moment, the Grenfell Tower was considered however I decided to disregard this option because it was still recent, it would have been the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fire. In the end, I went with Aberfan as it is a disaster that is in the media, as seen with the episode of the Netflix series *The Crown*, and it was an event that was in the living memory of particular generations.

Grebenar (2018), in his study that focused on the commodification of the UK's dark tourism industry, highlights the need to take the location of each site into account in any generalisation. Even if the sites are of similar degree of darkness, the results should not be generalised as each outcome is rooted at each site. All three sites have a dark history, it varies from direct connections to the transatlantic slave trade, a true crime based on the murders of five women, and a mining disaster that resulted in the loss of a generation.

The first empirical chapter will examine a site or attraction that is already a popular dark tourist activity in the UK and is clearly positioned within the phenomenon of dark tourism. This particular case study of dark walking tours, specifically the ones associated with Jack the Ripper, aims to understand how it has become a commercially accepted form of dark tourism that is consumed every night in London. Powell et al (2018:27) created a “ranking of Europe’s top ten most visited tourism cities in terms of darkness of the tourism products and services”, and London came in first place. It concluded that London offers a wide range of dark tourism sites that have been purposely designed to be entertainment focused. The chapter aims to examine how this classic form of dark tourism has expanded, and that it offers walking tours with alternative narratives. The second empirical chapter will aim to frame the British country house as a site that provides a meaningful dark tourism experience. The case study of Brodsworth Hall and Gardens aims to explore how conventional heritage sites, that have not typically been associated with violent forms of death, have unearthed their darker history, and have begun injecting it into the site’s narrative, rescripting the site’s interpretation. I wanted to select a slavery heritage site that is beyond the major port cities of Bristol and Liverpool and one that wasn’t in London as well, given I had chosen to do the Ripper walking tours. This particular case study addresses how the British country house has rescripted its narrative to acknowledge its complicity in the transatlantic slave trade – which illustrates how heritage sites have begun this process of reconsidering and retelling their story. Brodsworth Hall is the only site that is not directly associated with death and the macabre, as the actual atrocity of enslavement and the slave trade did not happen at Brodsworth. The third and final empirical chapter is the more contentious site as it examines the portrayal of a more recent and sensitive event, one within living memory; the chapter focuses on the Aberfan disaster and its memorial garden and cemetery. This particular case study aims to demonstrate how sites of death and disaster do not need to undergo the process of touristification for them to have a presence within dark tourism. Both the

Jack the Ripper chapter and the Aberfan chapter are examples of actual sites where death and disaster have occurred.

*Figure 3.1 – Map of the geographical locations of the selected case studies for this thesis (Google Earth, 06/09/2022).*



### **3.3 Interviews and Observations**

It should be noted that due to COVID-19, tourism activity was still getting back to their normality, it was quite low. When approaching possible interviewees, it was difficult to make a connection or find people who would have the time for such an interview. For this thesis, two semi-structured interviews, one in relation to Brodsworth the other Ripper tours, both of which are key sources for this study (Table 3). Even though I only had a small number of interviewees for this research, it is as Cook and Crang (1995:12) emphasise, “not the sheer number, typicality or representativeness of people approach which



matters, but the quality and positionality of the information that they can offer". The semi-structured nature of the interviews, which attracts many geographers, allowed me to be flexible with the questions initially planned, allowing questions and answers to be elaborated and clarified depending on the responses given during the interview (Hitchings and Latham, 2020). Due to COVID-19, I offered both interviewees the option of having the interviews being done virtually or face-to-face (Rashid and Yadav, 2020). This was offered as a way for them to keep a safe distance and that I did not need to account the travel time to conduct the interview. One of these interviews was done in person while the other one was done virtually. After each interview, a transcript was produced which facilitated analysis in the subsequent chapters in the thesis – the interviews plus the informal conversations aided in highlighting recurring themes. Despite the small number of interviews, these two interviews were carried out with key figures that shaped and oversaw the creation and/or management of the sites. Initial contact was made via email which detailed what the research entailed and what their participation would contribute towards. For the Jack the Ripper example I initially wanted to interview a tour guide from each walking tour I participated in, but only Kate Wignall, the founder and tour guide of the feminist tour (Interview A), agreed to be involved. For Brodsworth Hall, I contacted the main curator for the current temporary exhibition, Eleanor Matthews (Interview B), as she would know more about how the exhibition originated and has been structured.

After the literature review and the confirmed sites to be used for this thesis, an interview checklist was created (seen in appendix 1). Prior to the interviews, this framework was shared with the chosen participants alongside with the consent form. The interview checklist allowed for a thematic analysis (Braun et al., 2019), as it would provide me the opportunity to apply a tried and tested systematic approach to analysis which is widely used in qualitative research (Allolalia, 2012; Attride-Stirling, 2001; Braun et al., 2019). This method offers "the researcher to

see and make sense of collective or share meanings and experiences” (Braun et al., 2019: 57).

Participant involvement and observation represents a “critically reflexive and dynamic methodology” (Penny, 2009:23) which was adopted to understand and experience how visitors at these dark sites interpreted their dark history. This method is favoured among human geographers as it considers the researcher’s senses and emotions during the observation and participating process (Herbert, 2000:552-3).

Additionally, this approach gave me the opportunity to observe the site and how narratives have been interpreted and portrayed, as well as reflect how such narratives impact people who engage with them. I was able to immerse myself at the site by acting as an ordinary visitor/tourist, by not revealing my role as a researcher, which gave me an understanding of how the narrative conveyed has been interpreted by other tourists. Seaton and Dann (2018) sketched out the historical relationship between crime and the tourist gaze in the UK, arguing that the end of live spectacles of death did not eliminate people’s fascination of traveling and viewing crime and the macabre. For the Jack the Ripper tours, walking is deemed as the perfect way to becoming accustomed and familiar with the city, its mythologies, and learning about its hidden histories (Hansen and Wilbert, 2006). Hansen and Wilbert (ibid:5) frames Whitechapel and Spitalfields as “stages for performances of differing historical and spatial narrative”, where you can observe how particular cultural memories are embedded with the city and it is routinely presented, acted out, and performed on the streets. By positioning the walking tours as forms of street theatre meant that I could critically examine the role of the tour guide, as the performer, and the tourists, as the spectators, and how it influences each other and the broader story. In the case of Brodsworth, walking through the site demonstrated the evolution of a country house as despite changes made by later generations, many of the original decorative schemes survived (Allfrey, 1999). It demonstrates how national organisations, such as the English Heritage, presents particular

memories of the family to the public. Making me aware the lack of incorporating the black presence into the rural English landscapes, by visiting twice, I got to experience the exhibition and come to my own interpretations and allowed to spot more of the nuances with the sculptures the second time. As I contacted each interviewee after my site visit, it was only during the second visit to Brodsworth that my presence became known as a researcher. Then I was accompanied by the main curator around the grounds of Brodsworth, noting to the other volunteers and employees at the site that I was not an ordinary visitor. Also, at particular sites, specifically Brodsworth Hall and Aberfan, I was able to take photographs to record the “flow of observation and participation” (Cook, 2005:181) which allowed me to illustrate how particular narratives were presented at the dark sites. By fully immersing into the place and its narrative, it enables geographers to explore the connection that people have established with particular dark sites. I captured some of my thoughts in the extracts of my field diary entries (appendix 2).

*Table 3 – List of interviewees with date, length and location of the interviews conducted for this thesis.*

<i>Interview</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Interviewee Profile</i>	<i>Date and Duration</i>	<i>Method of Interview</i>
A	Kate Wignall	London Blue Badge Tourist Guide that conducts the Feminist Jack the Ripper Tour in London	13/05/2022 25m:51s	Microsoft Teams
B	Eleanor Matthews	English Heritage Curator, the main curator of the Liberty	06/04/2022 49m:20s	In-person

		& Lottery exhibition at Brodsworth Hall		
C	Charlotte Hayman	A second visitor that accompanied me to Aberfan	26/05/2022 24m:55s	In-person

### **3.4 Fieldwork with a friend**

The site visit to Aberfan required a degree of special sensitivity, given the nature of the disaster. For this reason, I initially decided to contact David Davies via email and conduct a semi-structured interview for this research project. David Davies is a known survivor of the disaster as well as the current Chairman of Trustees of the Aberfan Memorial Charity, meaning that he was a public face for the survivors and oversaw the maintenance of the memorial garden and victims' graves at the cemetery. However, after informing him about the aim of this thesis, he declined to participate. In the Aberfan chapter, I speculate why he rejected participating as I did not ask in the email. After much consideration, I asked a close friend of mine to participate in my research and take on the role of a visitor to Aberfan. In the Aberfan chapter, I explain why I chose to ask a friend to be involved with the research – as she has family members who live close to Aberfan, which sorted out both travel and accommodation, but most importantly, I knew the site visit would be a difficult one so having someone who I trusted helped me negotiate the challenges of the site. There are several feminist scholars, such as Neal and Gordon (2001), Browne (2003), and Tillmann-Healy (2003), who have reflected on using friendships in research. In particular, Tillmann-Healy (2003) defends using friendships as a methodological tool as she argues that the intersubjectivity it fosters can provide a solid framework for qualitative research. However, this method, of conducting fieldwork with friends, requires a high degree of ethical consideration as, in regard to geographical research as Browne (2003) suggests, it highlights the complexities of the power relations between the researcher and the researched. This is extremely

relevant for the Aberfan chapter as I interviewed my friend, Charlotte Hayman (Interview C), as she adopted the role of the second visitor for the site visit. It raises crucial questions such as: does it affect how the interview is conducted and whether the responses were given when you are already friends with the participant? Also, does this method exploit friendships by seeking to interview someone you know as it “blurs the boundaries of the field” (ibid:140)? It is crucial to acknowledge that her response given for that chapter is not representative of all who have visited Aberfan.

### **3.5 Ethical Consideration and Positionality**

When conducting research, there is the responsibility and requirement of ethical practice especially when it involves interacting with other people. Having met ethical clearance requirements from the relevant ethics committee of the University of Nottingham, this project could proceed. The chosen participants were fully informed about the use of their data via verbally and in writing before I started the interviews, also the participants were given the right to withdraw from the research at any given time. The interview was audio recorded, after receiving consent, and was stored on a password protected device (Walliman, 2016).

Understanding how positionality influences any research project is crucial, especially when topics discussed are of sensitive nature. This requires a high level of both self-awareness and sensitivity to others throughout the research process. Gender influenced my positionality in this research project – examining the influence of gender allowed me to incorporate the exploration of the emotions experienced and how it impacted the retelling of events and interpretation. There was no bias selection in choosing the participants for each site. I sought to identify and explore the perspective of those involved in the portrayal and interpretation of the narrative. Interestingly, all the participants involved were women so I felt this subconscious level of comfortableness in

approaching them in asking whether they would be interviewed. It would have been fascinating if I was able to have interviewees of both genders and allowing me to consider how the responses given would have differed as there is an absence of studies that explore whether there is a gendered difference in dark tourism consumption and experience in the dark tourism literature (Seaton and Lennon, 2004). Currently, Ibsen and Papadopoukou's (2021) thesis which focuses on gender dimensions of dark tourism experiences in the context of witch tourism is the only study that had exclusively addresses whether any gender difference exists in regards to the cocreation and experienced authenticity of such tourism. While this study does consider that there might be gender differences in dark tourism experiences, this however was outside of the research's aim and objective. Therefore, it would be of interest to explore the gender differences in experience at different dark tourism sites, which vary in their degree of darkness. As a young woman who is not British, I felt like an outsider at Brodsworth Hall and Aberfan. At Brodsworth Hall, I felt like my presence was known, at both site visits, as I was someone who went alone and began discussing with the volunteers about the temporary exhibition – many of whom were older and middle-class and were hesitant when I mentioned the exhibition and preferred to discuss the family history plus the luxurious furniture. In the case of the Aberfan visit, I explain how I did not enter the cemetery due to this sense of awkwardness and hesitation. Someone who was not either Welsh or British stepping into such a sacred space, I felt like my presence would be noticeable. Although I consider myself an outsider, at the Jack the Ripper walking tours in London, I did not feel so out of place as one of the tours I participated in had other tourists of other nationalities.

### **3.6 Chapter Conclusion**

In conclusion, this chapter has examined why a qualitative case study methodology has been adopted for this research project. To effectively test the adaptability of a phenomenon like dark tourism, dividing it into

three case studies enables the critical exploration of how both the phenomenon and practice of dark tourism can be applied to three distinctively different examples. Throughout the next three empirical chapters of this thesis, I will be actively reflecting on the method applied and how it influenced the site experience plus its interpretation. The following chapter will examine the case study of Jack the Ripper walking tours in the East End of London.

## **CHAPTER 4. JACK THE RIPPER WALKING TOURS**

### **4.1 Chapter Introduction**

This chapter will explore the case study of Jack the Ripper walking tours as a site of dark tourism within the UK. It will critically explore how this type of walking tour, based on the true crime of the murder of five women, has become such a popular dark touristic activity in London – considering, for example, the narrative techniques of the tour guide and their role in staging experiences for the participants. This chapter will demonstrate how the Ripper tours have become a spectacle, exploiting acts of horrendous violence against women through the guise of entertainment. The chapter begins with an introduction to the site, exploring London's 'spectro-geography' (Hansen and Wilbert, 2006) and the geographical location of the walking tours. Afterwards, the two chosen tours, one being the more conventional walking tour while the other was a feminist alternative, will be examined to understand how this once niche attraction has transformed into this commercially acceptable form of dark tourism that is consumed every night. This particular case study will demonstrate the pervasive presence of Jack the Ripper continues to remind us of the violence that lurks behind modern society (Jones, 2017).

### **4.2 Introduction to the site**

The attraction to death, disaster, and the macabre has proven to be a significant factor in the tourism industry, especially in London. Hansen and Wilbert (2006) have argued that London has a spectro (spectral) geography, where the city of London is populated by the ghosts of past acts of violence, which continue to exert their influence into the present. This has provided an opportunity to commodify and present an exploitive view of past crimes in London, of which its development has altered the popular geographical knowledge of the place (Gilbert, 1999). Resulting in London's dark tourism sites being typically situated at the lighter end of Stone's (2006) spectrum as these sites markets itself as



entertainment in which people can learn about particular dark narratives. This chapter exclusively focuses on the East End of London. The East End of London has long been associated with poverty and crime, historically it had been fashionable for the wealthy and educated elites to go 'slumming' – it was either seen as a form of evening entertainment or to visit and view the work of philanthropic institutions, or through undertaking philanthropic work (Roemer, 2009; Steinbrink, 2012). This has created an imaginative geography of the city which parallels the clear spatial separation between the wealthy and the poor, portraying the East End of London as the 'dark abyss' (Steinbrink, 2012). Even after many years of gentrification of the area, this mythologised heritage notion of the criminality of the East End which has been continuously repeated by various media representations (Wilbert and Hansen, 2016), still lingers in the form of dark walking tours of such historical figures as Jack the Ripper and the Kray brothers. Although the bodies, buildings and crime scenes may have disappeared, according to Lee (2014), we still feel the absence of a presence. This absent presence is experienced in the retelling their stories, as tour guides balance between the past and present, the factual and imaged, and the visible and invisible, in an attempt to provide an accurate portrayal of the site (Giddy and Hoogendoorn, 2018).

Jack the Ripper tours are some of London's longest-running performances which guide interested tourists around a small geographic area of East London, Whitechapel and Spitalfields, telling the story of the five women killed in the year 1888. Although Jack the Ripper was not the first serial killer in Britain, he however was the first to appear in a large city as media became a driving cultural influent (Shellenberger, 2003). This narrative is played daily to perhaps as many as 400 people a night (McEvoy, 2018). McEvoy's study (2018) is relevant to this chapter as it echoes the arguments made throughout, analysing the Ripper tours in terms of performance and theatricality as well as understanding why people consume gothic tourism. Generally,

Ripper tours market themselves as family fun that is entertaining, educational, and well-researched on the murders. During the walking tour, tourists can visit sites that relate to the murders and/or the victims accompanied by a tour guide who explains the socio-economic background of Victorian London and the circumstances that led the murdered women to become prostitutes. The narrative has been extensively rewritten and reimagined in the popular imagination which, in turn, has transformed into a fictional story where it erases the realities of the victims and has resulted in them into touristic commodities (Warkentin, 2010; Passey, 2020). So much so, that the story of Jack the Ripper has become “Disneyfied” (Passey, 2020:59) – echoing Heidelberg’s (2015:76) criticism of the commodification of dark sites for tourist consumption where commodification of death leads to a “Disneyfication of tragedy”. Since the 1980s, this niche attraction has evolved into a booming tourist industry, with multiple companies each running several walking tours a night, every night, guiding those interested around the same streets of Whitechapel and Spitalfields (Blum, 2015). Coffey (2014) states how these “non-stop, merry-go-round of tours ... has evolved into an unwieldy and unregulated beast” where multiple groups of tourists all walk the same small geographical area of East London. These 2-hour walking tours are one of the most commercialised attractions in London (Morison, 2019), with tour fees ranging between £10 up to £30 per tour – these prices drastically increase if you wish to participate in a private tour. These dark tours are site-specific performances, in which the tour guide takes tourists to the sites where the murders were committed, thus making them examples of thanatourism as people wish to encounter death (Seaton, 1996). This aspect is one of the major selling points of the Ripper tours (McEvoy, 2018).

Table 4 illustrates the available walking tours, as of 2022, that involved the story of Jack the Ripper in London, whether it be exclusively focused on the story or part of the general narrative of the tour. I came across these tours by both googling “Jack the Ripper tour” as well as

cross-referencing Adie and Snell's (2021) table of murder walking tours. In the table, I decided to include a column that reveals whether the female victims are discussed as well as whether the tour reveals the names of the victims. This column is relevant for two reasons: firstly, I wanted to partake in tours that would mention the victims by name and not by their derogatory term of 'another drunk prostitute'; secondly I wanted to ensure that the narrative told would be somewhat similar – that would talk about the victims and their lives before the murders, the extent which was done would differ greatly between the two chosen tours. In addition to this, for this particular case study, I eliminated any walking tours that would have other historical murderers featured (eliminating walking tours that may have mentioned the Kray twins or the Ratcliffe Highway Murders). By having a set criteria allowed me to pinpoint walking tours that told the story of the Ripper and the victims, which ensured consistency, as well as allowed me to critically analyse the portrayed narratives. The two tours I completed were one that labels itself as the 'original' Ripper tour, a more conventional tour, while the other was a feminist alternative – both undertaken in April 2022. For the first tour, I paid £12 while for the feminist tour I paid £28 – it must be noted that halfway through the feminist tour we did stop at Townhouse, an authentic and atmospheric 18th-century shop and café, for a quick break and to discuss the tour.

I was conscious that I would have to be aware of my emotions, both as a researcher and as an individual, and also question them to understand how they were associated with the story being told. This helped me to understand what emotions were felt during the dark walking tour and how these might shape how the narrative is portrayed to the tourists. It must be noted that during the first tour, a group of an estimated twenty tourists plus the tour guide, I felt like an outsider as I was by myself when I went – most people on this particular tour were either in pairs or with their family, I was the only person there unaccompanied. I remember feeling quite awkward being alone, so much so that I didn't participate in any of the interactive parts of the tour

as I was there to analyse how the tour was being conducted. There was a mixture of genders, ages, and even nationalities on the tour, I remember overhearing an American family talking about how excited they were to walk on the same streets as the infamous Jack. This comment highlighted how some view these guided walking tours as entertainment, that they did not find paying for a nightly walk whilst discussing the gruesome details of the murders either odd or disturbing. On the other hand, during the feminist tour, I felt more comfortable and confident participating, as it was an intimate group of two other tourists plus the tour guide, Katie Wignall (Interview A). Weeks after taking the following the feminist tour, I was able to conduct an online semi-structured interview with the tour guide, discussing whether the phenomenon of dark tourism could be applied to her feminist tour.

*Table 4 – Table of a sample of available Jack the Ripper walking tours in London, as of 2022. These tours were also mentioned in Adie and Snell’s (2021) table of UK’s murder walking tours.*

<i>Historical Murders Featured</i>	<i>Tour Name</i>	<i>Year Established</i>	<i>Cost</i>	<i>Female Victims Featured: Named (N) or Anonymous (A)</i>
Exclusively the Whitechapel Murders	Jack the Ripper, the Original Terror Tour	1982	£12	Yes (N)
	Jack the Ripper Tour, with Ripper Vision	-	£18	No
	Ripping Yarns – Jack the Ripper Tours	1980s	£10	Yes (N)

	The Feminist Jack the Ripper Tour	2019	£28	Yes (N)
	Jack the Ripper Interactive Ghost Hunts	-	£39	Yes (A)
Multiple (including the Whitechapel Murders)	The Blood and Tears Walk: Serial killers and other creepy London Horror Stuff	2002	£15	No

### **4.3 Walking the streets of Jack the Ripper and his victims**

#### **4.3.1 Motivation to tread in the footsteps of the killer**

Walking tours are prominent features in the urban landscape, as it provides tourists the opportunity to seek more direct involvement in the city they are visiting (Giddy and Hoogendoorn, 2018). Dark tours, like the Ripper walking tours, render death into both entertainment and education as “we effectively [socially] neutralise it; it becomes innocuous, and thus less threatening” (Stone and Sharpley, 2008:585). As I was listening to the tour guide, of the more conventional tour, and as fascinated as I was, there were parts in the tour where I felt uncomfortable by how normalised these horrific murders were. The fact there was this killer who was extremely dangerous and brutally murdered women, in a short amount of time, gets ignored by participants as they are so intrigued by the details in the story. This highlighted the importance of understanding the possible motivations of people who take part in these Ripper tours. It raises crucial questions about why people are fascinated with Jack the Ripper? And why do so many tourists have this desire to visit sites associated with the murders, and most importantly, are willing to pay for a guided night tour? Robinson and Dale (2009) argue that the temporal distance between

the actual murders and the tourists today allows people to partake in guided tours at ease, as these tours give people the ability to be in close proximity to death from a safe distance. Uzzell (1989:46) similarly comments, in the context of sites associated with war, how the temporal distance from the actual event and people today impacts people's emotions and affective responses, as people are "more accepting of the role of voyeur". Huey (2011) also observes, in his study of the Vienna Kriminalmuseum, it intentionally merges the macabre with the educational, which allows individuals to consume mediated engagements of death in a safe context. Walking through the sites of the murders as well as sites associated with the victims creates a dark and memorable experience for the paying participants. Moreover, this particular story is all the more intriguing due to the mystery surrounding the identity of the killer. The absence of the identity of Jack the Ripper has left a void which in turn has been filled by a myth, resulting in this obsession of uncovering his identity as well as understanding how the killer managed to escape detection, even to this day. This obsession with the mythic figure of the Ripper has been circulated in cinematic, televisual, and literary productions for many decades. It is this familiarity and attraction to the case that has often prompted tourists to engage with these walking tours. The next two subsections will discuss the experience of each of the chosen tours. It must be noted that during these two walking tours I did not take that many photographs as I wanted to be fully immersed in the experience.

#### *4.3.2 Jack the Ripper Tour – A Walk Worth Investigating*

I decided to first partake in the tour that labels itself as the 'original' Ripper tour, "Jack the Ripper Tour – The Original London Terror Walk" ([www.jack-the-ripper-tour.com](http://www.jack-the-ripper-tour.com)) – this particular tour company has been conducting tours since 1982. The company claims historical accuracy and academic legitimacy as it uses leading Ripper scholars as tour guides (Warkentin, 2010). This meant that you would be provided with a

well-scripted, well-controlled, and well-performed tour. Another reason why I chose this particular company was that they send you a free e-book after completing the tour, this 194-page e-book details the story of the murders and of the Victorian police's attempt to catch the killer, the text is accompanied by contemporary photographs (Jones, 2018). Similar to other tours, they attract tourists by structuring the tour like an ongoing criminal investigation in Victorian London as it gives a "distinct impression that you have joined the Victorian detectives" (as quoted on the front page of the tour's website). This tour, and so many like it, was conducted in the evening, starting at 7 PM outside Aldgate East Underground station. At the exit, someone was holding a sign for the tour, however, I must admit that I was anticipating that someone would be waiting for us with a sign whilst dressing as someone from the Victorian era, in a waistcoat and a top hat. Before starting the walk, our tour guide reminded us to stick together as we were going to bump into other walking tours which were also conducting their version of a Ripper tour. Figure 4.1 shows the standard walking route for this particular Ripper company and all the sites in the key are ordered from where the tour group started and finished. This will become helpful when visualising the route taken around Whitechapel and Spitalfields as well as facilitating comparison with the other tour. Occasionally, the tour guides may reorganise the route if a particular site is populated with other walking tour groups.

The dark tour was defined by the sites of the five canonical murders – those of Mary Ann Nichols, Annie Chapman, Elizabeth Stride, Catherine Eddowes, and Mary Jane Kelly. Interestingly, our tour guide commented on how she likes to mention other potential victims of the Ripper and why many Ripperologists may not consider them as part of the canonical victims. At Gunthorpe Street, which was our first official stop, Martha Tabram was discussed in detail, detailing her life and how she was brutally murdered, it was interesting to hear how our tour guide would let out a sad sigh and speak more gently when talking about why scholars do not include her in the canonical victims. I wonder if we had

a male tour guide if they would employ similar narrative techniques when discussing Martha Tabram, or even if they would even bring up her name at all. The dominant tone was one of a detective story; at each murder site, in particular, we were given the circumstances surrounding the murders, the words of witnesses, and the personal histories of the victims – the amount of detail talked about the mutilation endured by the victims was both rather extraordinary and uncomfortable to hear. When telling the details, the tour guide frequently varied their tone, pace, and volume to get some sort of a reaction from the crowd. When describing the injuries found on Annie Chapman's body, she made a quite dramatic slashing movement to her throat and the marks found on her mutilated body, pausing, and waiting for the anticipated shocked gasps and whispers from the crowd. This indicated how the retelling of the horrific details of the killings becomes this rehearsed performance, how the guide knows what narrative technique and which specific detail would guarantee a reaction. A key feature of this tour was the usage of photographs. The tour guide was carrying a folder of A4-sized photographs with them, and these were used as visual aids during the explanations of particular events or the significance of given locations. At each murder site, we were warned that we were going to be shown the gruesome post-mortem images so, especially with the younger participants, had time to turn away. By doing this the guide cast themselves as what McEvoy (2018:170) calls "protectors of sensibilities". I remember that there was one time when I saw someone who wished to not view the photograph, which was when the crime scene of Mary Kelly was shown – the tour guide went into rather great detail about all the horrific mutilations, with her gesturing the marks found on her horrifically mutilated body, before showing the image. I, too, was morbidly curious in viewing the photograph and I remember feeling this sense of discomfort, and this sense followed me with each crime scene and post-mortem photograph of the victim. I was not alone in this feeling of discomfort. Although many on the walk seemed to be having a good time, there were some of the younger participants who also displayed their unease by lowering their heads when the post-



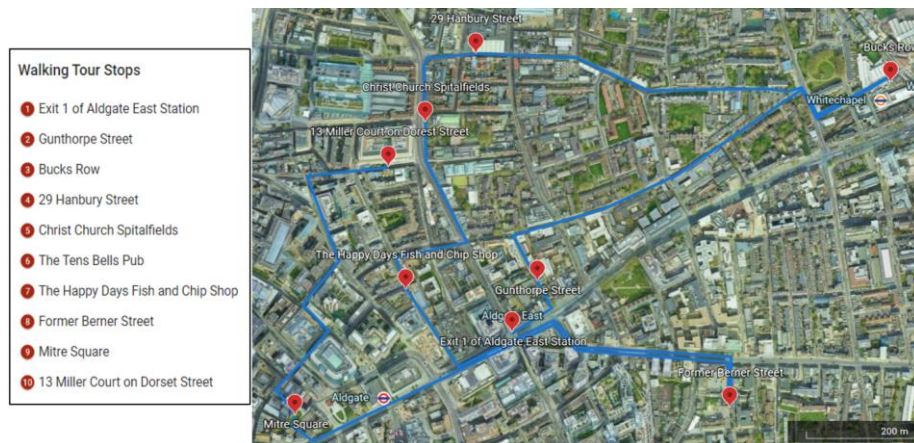
mortem photograph was being shown. There was this noteworthy silence that followed whenever the tour guide showed images of the mutilated bodies.

Figure 4.1 allows us to understand the geographies of this walking tour and compare it to the feminist walking tour in figure 4.2. This tour is approximately 7 km to walk, and we would stop for not long at each spot before starting to walk towards the next stop. The walking tour also spreads across Whitechapel and Spitalfields. Unlike the feminist tour, this walking tour was structured by the chronology of the case – starting at the first murder site to where specific evidence was located and ending at the last murder site. The tour company limited the group size to twenty tourists, meaning that we were able to move through the relatively narrow streets in Whitechapel and Spitalfields. Starting at Aldgate East station, we walked through a small archway from Whitechapel Road into the narrow alley of Gunthorpe Street. Once known as George Yard, the story starts here, and our tour guide set the scene as we saw the cobblestones, building this image of a dark and foggy Victorian East London. We learned about the lodging houses and of Martha Tabram, an unofficial canonical victim of Jack the Ripper, and it was here the retelling of the mythology surrounding this killer began – the killer of prostitutes. At each murder site throughout the tour, it was discussed in great detail how these victims became alcoholics and ‘turned’ to prostitution. In particular, when we arrived at 29 Hanbury Street, where Annie Chapman was killed, our tour guide dramatically recalls how “the mere taste of alcohol on her husband’s lip had sent poor old Annie back to the drink” (I noted down this particular quote whilst on the tour) – suggesting that she could not control her desire to drink. This repeated presentation of these women as drunks and prostitutes reinforces the notion that their murders were perhaps warranted and parallels Morison’s (2019) evaluation of the Ripper Museum on 12 Cable Street, making the mythology of this being a ‘killer of prostitutes’ centre stage. Towards the end of the tour, at Mitre Square and Dorset Street, we were told about the main conspiracy

theories surrounding the identity of Jack the Ripper – particularly focusing on Sir William Gull (1816-1890), the Royal physician in Extraordinary to Queen Victoria. Our tour guide is his official biographer and is considered the leading historian of this particular suspect (Jones, 2022). The crowd went quiet whilst listening to the conspiracy theories, demonstrating how participants are intrigued by the absence of identity of the killer.

Another key feature of this particular walking tour was the use of uncomfortable humour. The tour guide would voice the women and the witnesses in the same accent, one of a stereotypical cockney accent, while the police officers were voiced in a different accent, one that is considered 'posh' English. Adopting this narrative technique in the performance is typical when the tour guide wants to lighten the experience up (Dunkley, 2007), as well as to entice and entertain the crowds. On the other hand, McEvoy (2018:171) argues that it is used to reference the disjunction between form and content – between the need and desire to entertain the people and the actual gruesome details of the crime. Whenever the tour guide would throw in a joke, it caught me off-guard as they had just finished recalling the horrific injuries on the corpse and then they cracked a joke right at the end. A couple of people would sometimes laugh out loud, but the majority of the time people would only smile at the joke. Additionally, throughout the tour, the tour guide was frequently telling us how the women, apart from Mary Jane Kelly, were in their 40s and were not physically attractive and that they were alcoholics that turned to prostitution to fulfil their desire for alcohol. Although there is this temporal distance between the actual events and us today, the misogyny is immediate.

*Figure 4.1 – Map of the walking tour with the Original Terror Tour, starting at Exit 1 of Aldgate East Station and ending at Mitre Square (Google Earth, 31/07/2022).*



#### 4.3.3 Feminist Jack the Ripper Tour

*“Who was Jack the Ripper – who cares? It is the victims who dies that should be remembered” (Hoskins, 2015).*

I came across this particular walking tour from Adie and Snell’s (2021:388) table of a sample of the UK’s dark tours, as it was the only tour that explicitly promoted itself as a feminist walking tour that exclusively focused on the victims and not actually on the murders. With this particular tour, I wanted to partake in a walking tour that tells an alternative narrative – one that does not focus on how these women were drunks or prostitutes, but rather one that reminds you that they were real women, with real lives. Currently, there is a particular walking tour offered by Look Up London, with leading tour guide Katie Wignall, is the only one that presents this alternative feminist narrative. The Feminist Jack the Ripper walking tour has been inspired by Hallie Rubenhold’s (2019) work *The Five*, which discusses the lives and times of the five canonical victims – the tour guide comments how Rubenhold has contacted her and has been *“highly supportive, she evens tweets links to my tours”*. The absence of the Ripper involved in the narrative told throughout the tour was extremely noticeable. It rather focused on women’s lives in the late Victorian era, the problems that they faced, and how they dealt with misfortune. It told the story how these women ended up alone and destitute on the streets of Whitechapel. The feminist tour started at 2:00 PM rather than 7:00 PM, this was

purposefully done as it “*steps away from the theatrical dark alleys*” and makes it a more “*open frank conversation*”. Halfway through the tour, we stopped at Townhouse, an authentic and atmospheric 18<sup>th</sup>-century home and café, for a quick break and to discuss the tour and our thoughts. Questions turned to the lives of the impoverished working-class women in Whitechapel as well as the law surrounding sex work during Victorian England. The tour started outside Whitechapel Gallery, talking about how the tour has been organised, then walked towards Gunthorpe Street. Figure 4.2 shows the exact walking route we took, all the sites in the key are ordered from where the tour group started and finished – this will become helpful when visualising the route taken around Whitechapel and Spitalfields enabling comparison to the route taken with the other tour.

Figure 4.2 allows us to understand the geographies of this walking tour and compare it to the conventional walking tour in figure 4.1. This tour is approximately 1.5 km to walk. We walked from Whitechapel to Spitalfields in a roughly straight line unlike the previous walking tour in figure 4.1. Similar to the previous walking tour, the group size was restricted to ten people, meaning that we were able to move through the relatively narrow streets in Whitechapel and Spitalfields. The tour was not structured by the chronology of the case but by specific locations that were relevant to the lives of the women, sites such as the neighbourhoods they lived and the lodging houses. Effectively, combining the broader social history of the late Victorian era as well as recasting the victims as real women, with real lives. However, a key issue with this particular narrative, and a flaw with Rubenhold’s book, is that we do not know exactly what their lives entailed (Darby, 2020). At no point in the tour did our tour guide start to tell us about the horrific details of the killings of the women; the focus of the tour is to be educated about why many poor women turned to prostitution and became alcoholics. Starting at Whitechapel Gallery, we walked to Gunthorpe Street, similar to the other tour, but instead of painting this scene of dark and gloomy Victorian East London, our tour guide tells us

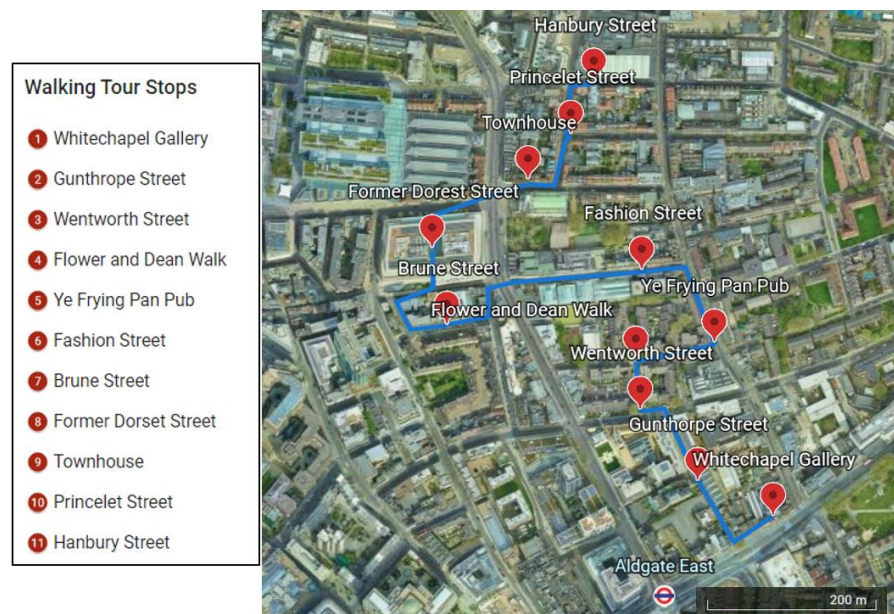
about the wider social context of the time, of how these killings marked a period of crucial societal change and the role of women in Victorian society. The only time that our guide told us about the brutal killings, was the murders of Martha Tabram and Emma Smith, two potential victims of Jack the Ripper which have caused extensive debates among Ripper scholars on whether these women should be accepted as part of the canonical victims of the killer. Our guide discussed how these two women did not have similar injuries as to the canonical five so people have been quick to dismiss the possibility of them being victims of the Ripper. From Gunthorpe Street we headed towards Wentworth Street, stopping at the arched entrance to Flower and Dean Walk to learn about the Wentworth Street arch. The guide outlined how this arch is all that remains of the Rothschild Buildings that were built to alleviate the housing shortage among the Jewish population in the East End of London. Throughout the tour, we were shown images that showed us what the streets we were standing on looked like in Victorian times as well as photographs of people mentioned; not once were we shown the post-mortem images of the victims. At nearly every site, we were told about a significant philanthropist that sought to understand and improve the conditions of women in East London, and in London in general. Around halfway through the tour, we stopped at Townhouse, an authentic and atmospheric 18th-century shop and café, for a quick break and to talk among the group about what had been discussed. At the end of the tour, which was on Hanbury Street, there was no mention of how one of the victim's bodies was found there but rather the focus was on a bowler plaque that represents the Match Girls Strike of 1888. The guide told us how months before the killings, over 1,400 young, working-class women walked out of the Bryant and May match factory in Bow, refusing to put up with low wages and dangerous working conditions.

Unlike the conventional Ripper tour, I found this tour to be more informative, nuanced and respectful. The aim of designing a walking tour that uses the biographies of the victims is to re-animate their past

lives, as Mills (2013) argues, which allows people to directly engage with the individual's own geographies. By using past materials it has creatively resulted in a walking tour that educates the participants of the lives of the women, providing access to the once silenced voices and geographies. Our tour guide was respectful when discussing the victims' lives as well as when we entered residential neighbourhoods. For example, when walking through the Wentworth Street arch and going through Flower and Dean Walk, it was clear that considerations were made. Despite there being a temporal distance, there is not a spatial distance meaning that we were mindful not to overstep in the residential area too much: "*to not to speak too loudly or stand right outside people's front doors*" when discussing the social context of the Victorian East End of London. I also noticed that during the tour, there was no use of uncomfortable humour to lighten the mood, as Wignall states, "*you have to be quite self-discipline to not tell the joke*". As it can be quite tempting for the tour guide to chase some sort of reaction, something that is quite typical in any sort of performative line of work. This emphasises how it is easier to forget that these were once living people when there are centuries between you and them, which fictionalises the murders. The theme of historical responsibility became apparent throughout the tour and during the interview. The two-hour walk aims to give "*more of the [wider social] context and what were these women's experiences*" as well as "*showcasing lots of other inspiring women, and because of their hard work and determination, we are able to transcend this poverty and who contributed to society as well*". Bringing the victims to the foreground, by permitting them to speak and understand their lives, restores respect and compassion to the women (Rubenhold, 2019:348). By recentring the narrative on the women and what women had to endure, stopped the tour from transforming into a spectacle that exploits the violence against women through the guise of entertainment which is common with most conventional Ripper tours (Passey, 2020) – stepping away from the fascination of how the killer was able to escape justice. When asked why people are happy to pay and partake in a dark tour, like the Ripper

tours, Wignall responded on how some people are more drawn towards the macabre, which she remarked is “a very human nature thing”, but that “we have a responsibility to remember that these women were real people”. This alternative feminist walking tour aims to educate people about the wider social context of the Victorian East End of London and understand why these women, and many others, turned to prostitution and became alcoholics.

Figure 4.2 – Map of the walking tour with the Feminist Jack the Ripper Tour, starting at Whitechapel Gallery and ending at Hanbury Street (Google Earth, 01/08/2022).



#### **4.4 Dark Tourism**

The growing popularity of true crime documentaries, movies, and books illustrates that there are people who are morbidly fascinated by understanding serial killers – whether that be their motives or the psychology of what makes a serial killer. The consumption of such media has contributed to elevating serial killers to this celebrity status, which in turn, combines both violence and fame while feeding the public’s fascination with violence and death (Broll, 2019). This

consumption blurs the boundaries of reality and fiction as it combines both education and entertainment. As it allows people to enjoy the experience as there is this distance established between the participant and the past crime. Yardley (2019) explains that this interest is due to the ability to be in close proximity to death but still feel safe to do so, mirroring Robinson and Dale's (2009) point of why people happily engage with dark walking tours of past violent crimes. Concerning this particular case study, the media routinely represent Victorian East London as a place forever synonymous with poverty and crime (Gray, 2018). It is plausible to think of these dark guided tours as forming a part of the wider theatricalization of experience in which specific memories are acted and performed on the streets (Hansen and Wilbert, 2006; Weston et al., 2019). However, there is this constant need for a balance of ensuring the paying tourists are engaged and fully enjoying the experience as well as making the historical details of the story accurate and digestible (Giddy and Hoogendoorn, 2018). It results in thinking of past dark events and entertainment together as occupying the same public space, rather than having traumatic memories and entertainment memories as a mutually exclusive phenomenon (Huysen, 2003).

Typically, these conventional dark tours present the horrific murder of five women as an exciting, tantalising event, which, in turn, centres the narrative on the man whilst invisibilising the women (Hoskins, 2015). Wilbert and Hansen (2016) comment on how this narrative is problematic as it trivialises male violence towards women. This was apparent in the conventional Ripper tour as you got the impression that the women were "rather foolishly spending all of these pennies at the pub, drinking away all day and night", when we stopped at the Ten Bells Pub – implying that these women were somehow responsible for their murders. Morison's (2019) exploration of the Jack the Ripper Museum similarly argues that by consistently focusing on how these women were drunks and prostitutes promotes anti-feminist ideals. As it presents this notion, whether done subconsciously or intentionally, that



their murders were warranted. This encourages other Jack the Ripper walking tours, and the general entertainment industry that has evolved from the killings, to treat their murders with such disrespect and dismissal (Walkowitz, 1982; Lister et al., 2020). This continuous negative portrayal of the victims results in the narrative being sensationalised and blurs the boundary between fantasy and reality (Robinson and Dale, 2009). Rubenhold's book (2019) will hopefully encourage other Ripper scholars to adopt a feminist victimological perspective, challenging the dominant narrative of the killings – which will encourage these walking tours that focus on the murders to alter their narrative.

These dark Ripper walking tours illustrate the complexities of having a set spectrum or typology for dark tourism sites, as while they can be categorised as sites of actual death (Miles, 2002), opting to attend the conventional night walks adds to the authenticity of the murders. It is important to note that between the two chosen walking tours, there are variations that are crucial: degree of darkness, locations, images shown, and the narratives presented. This highlights how this dark touristic activity cuts across the set categories in typologies and how subjectivity alters where these tours are positioned on Stone's (2006) spectrum. On the one hand, it can be argued that the more conventional Ripper tour, such as the one I participated in, would be situated towards the lighter end of Stone's (2006) spectrum of dark tourism as the priority of the tour is to entertain the tourists and to perform a rehearsed story about the gruesome details of the case. Also, the tour guide encourages the tourists to speculate on the identity of the killer, highlighting how this is an influential motivation for people to partake in such dark walking tours. So much so that this niche attraction has become an accepted dark touristic activity in London, intending to entertain and educate the participants about the story of the killer. However, it can also be argued that the conventional tour could be placed on the darker side because of the graphic images shown during the tour, particularly how the tour guide goes into detail about the

injuries found on the victims' bodies, passing around the post-mortem photographs of the women. It can be argued that the feminist Ripper tour could be placed on the lighter side of the spectrum due to its lack of horror in the narrative. The tour completely dilutes the gruesome details of the Ripper story, as it incorporates the wider social history and introduces key philanthropists of the era that are related to the places stopped during the tour. However, similar to the previous tour, it can also be argued that the feminist tour could lean towards the darker side as the aim of the tour is to educate its participants about the wider social history of the late Victorian era, with a particular focus on the women's experience. It reminds the tourists to not succumb to the mythology surrounding the killer but rather to remember how these women killed were real people. As well as how this story of Jack the Ripper has developed greatly in the entertainment industry which has resulted in the narrative being reimagined. The tour's purpose is to truthfully recall the victim's identity and life by removing the stigma of prostitution – with the aim to accurately present the image of the fallen woman held in Victorian England (Godinović, 2021).

#### **4.4 Chapter Conclusion**

This chapter aimed to contribute to the small body of studies which focus on true crime-based dark tourism attractions, especially those that are crimes against individuals (Abie and Snell, 2021). After examining both walking tours, one being the more conventional Ripper tour and a feminist alternative walking tour, it has demonstrated how this once niche interest has become a commercially accepted form of dark tourism. The temporal distance between the actual event and today has resulted in people engaging in such dark walking tours, this distance allows people to be in a safe and close proximity with death. The conventional Ripper tour is an example of a dark tourism attraction which focuses on entertaining the visitors, while the feminist tour prioritises educating the visitors. The feminist tour's narrative explores

the broader social history of the late Victorian era and the women's experiences. This chapter has demonstrated how these dark Ripper walking tours have developed their narrative through their different interpretation of the killings – illustrating how the particular forms of media present the opportunity to reimagine the story and work through different styles of dark tourism. The following chapter will now focus on the case study of Brodsworth Hall and Gardens in Doncaster.

## CHAPTER 5. BRODSWORTH HALL AND GARDENS

### **5.1 Chapter Introduction**

This chapter will explore the case study of Brodsworth Hall and Gardens as a site of dark tourism in the UK. It will critically consider whether the concept of 'dark tourism' can be applied to characterise the process by which British country houses seek to reimagine and retell their history, with particular reference to slavery in this specific example. To frame the British country house as a site of dark tourism would allow the public to be educated about the connections between the wealth derived from slavery and the country house, and how such important links should be presented to visitors (Dresser and Hann, 2013). The chapter begins with an introduction to the site, exploring its geographical location with its internal geography. Afterwards, the current temporary exhibition, running from September 2021 to November 2022, will be examined to understand how contemporary visual art has been used to display the explicit connections to slavery and the slave trade. The exhibition currently displays five wire sculptures and a poem. This particular case study will demonstrate how a conventional unproblematic heritage site has injected an aspect of its dark history into the site – rescripting the current narrative presented.

### **5.2 Introduction to the site**

Brodsworth Hall, located near Brodsworth, 5 miles northwest of Doncaster in South Yorkshire, has become one of the most well-preserved examples of a country house in England (figure 5.1). Figure 5.2a shows the geographical location of Brodsworth Hall and figure 5.2b highlights its proximity to other towns like Barnsley as well as how the location is close to the A1 (M). It is important to note that this particular motorway is a major north-south road which connects the northern and southern parts of the UK together – going from London to Edinburgh – highlighting its accessibility. Also, in figure 5.2b, the red line outlines the boundary that is considered to be associated with Brodsworth Hall,

which includes the car park and visitor centre. The house has been under English Heritage ownership since 1990, and they have maintained and conserved the estate for visitors to enjoy. The hall has more than thirty rooms, ranging from grand reception rooms with original furnishings as well as servants' quarters. This Grade I listed building, first listed in 1968 (Girouard, 1971), is set on fifteen acres of restored gardens (figure 5.3), with a series of white marble statues scattered across the grounds. The surrounding buildings and agricultural landscape are not in English Heritage's ownership, resulting in the public not being able to access it but it can still be viewed at a distance. Figure 5.3 shows the internal geography of the site, with particular locations being highlighted in the key – this will become helpful when visualising the route taken around the grounds to view the exhibition's wire sculptures.

Araujo (2012a) states that, in Europe, England was the first country to explicitly acknowledge its complicity in the transatlantic slave trade. It is thanks to Seymour and Haggerty's (2010) research that the explicit connections between Brodsworth Hall and the slave trade have been established. Peter Thellusson (1735-1797) bought Brodsworth Hall in 1791 with his accumulated slave-produced sugar wealth, specifically through financing planters via loans on the islands of Grenada and Montserrat. In particular, he had a financial stake in several plantations, including Bacolet and Conference in Grenada, as well as Windmill Hill in Montserrat. Although Thellusson obtained a great fortune, there are minimal traces left on the estate from this period (Haggerty and Seymour, 2013) as Charles Sabine Thellusson (1822-1885), the great-grandson of Peter Thellusson, who next inherited the estate in 1859, completely remodelled the estate. The house was designed and built as an Italianate-style house which would be filled with classical statues, and it would be two hundred yards from the old one (Wilson and Mackley, 2000:331) – which are still enjoyed by many today. The old house had connections to slavery through Peter Thellusson's ownership. The only visible traces left that connect the new Brodsworth Hall to the

slave trade is the usage of mahogany for furniture, seen in the display of the mahogany dining table (figure 5.12). In addition to this, specific books are seen displayed in the Library on the Ground Floor which provides an insight into the viewpoints of the time (figure 5.15 and 5.16).

To fully appreciate the site, two visits were needed, which occurred at the end of March 2022 and then at the beginning of April 2022. During the first visit, Brodsworth was in its winter tourist season, the house was not fully open to the public – only the tearoom and servant’s quarters were available to walk around. This means that I only got to view the four outside wire sculptures plus the audio post located in the Fountain Garden. It was only during the second visit that I was able to experience the rest of the exhibition: the final indoor wire sculpture, the audio post located in the Archery Range plus the poem in the dining room and the information panels that relate to the story of Brodsworth. Before conducting a semi-structured interview with the main curator of the exhibition, Eleanor Matthews (Interview A), we walked around the Ground Floor of Brodsworth Hall and discussed the main interpretation of the wire sculpture in the Entrance Hall and how the poem was displayed across the Ground Floor. It was during the interview that I was made aware of the second audio post in the Archery Range. It must be noted that during my first visit, I felt very much like an outsider. As a young woman who is not British, who went alone, I remember feeling quite uncomfortable as I got curious glances from some of the visitors and a couple of volunteers – as to question why am I here visiting the site alone and why I wished to learn about the exhibition? I was someone who purposely came to Brodsworth to observe and appreciate the current temporary exhibition and not the architecture or the fine interior. Anytime I spoke to the volunteers, both site visits, I felt myself speaking quietly and at times whispering so as not to disturb anyone’s experience with my curiosity about the exhibition.

*Figure 5.1 – Photograph of Brodsworth Hall (author’s photograph, March 2022).*



*Figure 5.2 a and b – Map identifying the location of Brodsworth Hall and Gardens, South Yorkshire (a). The red line in 5.2b map indicates the area that is considered Brodsworth Hall (Google Earth, created 28/07/2022).*



*Figure 5.3 – A scanned image of Brodsworth Hall’s internal geography with a key that highlights the main locations of the site which are relevant to this chapter (English Heritage, 2009).*





### **5.3 LIBERTY & LOTTERY: Exploring the legacy of the transatlantic slave trade at Brodsworth Hall and Gardens**

Temporary exhibitions are regularly programmed at Brodsworth Hall to showcase a variety of themes and particular aspects of the collection in the house (Allfrey and Xavier-Rowe, 2012). From September 2021 to November 2022, a temporary exhibition has been installed that explores Brodsworth Hall's connections to the transatlantic slave trade in the form of specially commissioned wire sculptures and poetry (Matthews, 2021). For this exhibition, different partnerships were formed which helped to shape the context and the different outcomes of the project. From the beginning of the project, the key relationship formed was the appointment of two interpretation consultants, Sandra Shakespeare and Dr Tola Dabiri. Matthews explains in the IHR seminar (2021) why Brodsworth formed this relationship, stating how they are both experts in sharing and disseminating black history at museums and heritage sites. Also, both consultants are founder members of Museum X, an organisation that is working on creating Britain's first black British museum which will celebrate black British history, art, and culture. These two interpretation consultants helped in how to present the difficult and uncomfortable past of slavery to the viewing public, and

most importantly, the language used throughout the exhibition. It must be noted that in the official guidebook, that visitors can purchase at the visitor centre, on page 39, it simply states how Peter Thellusson got his fortune through his involvement in the sugar trade, which states quite nonchalantly “which was reliant on the African slave trade”. The exhibition, entitled ‘*Liberty and Lottery*’, is named after two slave ships that Peter Thellusson part owned. The wire sculptures explore key themes of the transatlantic slave trade, from the slave ships to forced labour, to representing the disparity between the living conditions of the enslaved people on the plantations and the Grand House (IHR, 2021). This exhibition has been recently shortlisted for a Museums and Heritage Award for the ‘Temporary or Touring Exhibition of the Year (Budget under £80,000) (Museums and Heritage Awards, 2022).

Figure 5.4 shows the information panel, encountered when one is going from the entrance of the hall towards the South Terrace, which summarises what the exhibition is showing and its purpose. Also, the panel has included a sculpture trail to show to visitors the location of each wire sculpture. These partly see-through sculptures give the impression that you are looking through to another part of history, described as a “persistent whisper” by Joe Savage on the English Heritage podcast (2021), which encourages people to be curious and to come closer to view and interpret the art. The aim is to present the unknown stories of Peter Thellusson and his involvement in the slave trade without being heavy-handed with it. In particular, it follows the story of sugar cane production due to Thellusson’s heavy involvement with the colonial commodity. To successfully achieve this, it demanded a high level of artistic skill and dexterity so it would communicate this specific story in the landscape that many visitors enjoy.

Carl Gabriel was commissioned to create the wire sculptures. Gabriel is a London-based carnival artist who specialises in large-scale sculptures through the traditional art of wire-bending (Katz,2010). Wire bending is a “specialised art, combining elements of structural engineering, architecture, and sculpture” (Noel, 2016:357) that produces both two-

dimensional (2D) and three-dimensional structures. It initially developed in the 1930s in the carnival in Trinidad and Tobago, becoming “one of the most advanced of the carnival crafts” (Crowley, 1956). This carnival craft enables Trinidadians and Tobagonians to reconnect with their history and cultivate a shared sense of belonging (Noel, 2015). Born in Trinidad, Gabriel has been involved with the Notting Hill Carnival since the 1970s – first as a photographer, then a pan player, then a wire sculptor (McCabe, 2020). Throughout the years, Gabriel has been commissioned and collaborated with major institutions such as the British Library, and Kinetika Arts Links International, and recently has been commissioned to create a wire sculpture of the Queen for the Jubilee (The Associated Press, 2022). Carl Gabriel received reference materials which acted as visual aids in helping him in creating the sculptures – the reference materials, typically photographs and paintings, are seen displayed at each relevant accompanying information panel (from figure 5.6 to 5.10).

*Figure 5.4 – Photograph of the introductory information panel about the exhibition, placed in the South Terrace. The panel summarises the exhibition being displayed and who was involved. In the bottom-right corner, a map has been included to indicate to visitors the location of each sculpture around the site, however, it does not tell visitors in what order to view these sculptures (author’s photograph, March 2022).*



### 5.3.1 Location of the sculptures

Where these wire sculptures are located is important to consider, as sculptures are one of Brodsworth's most memorable features as it reflects the original vision for the Italianate design of the hall. The Thellusson family filled the house and garden with sculptures, predominantly female figures, with some of the sculptures depicting ancient Greek goddesses – such as Psyche, the Greek goddess of the soul (English Heritage, 2009) – reflecting the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century appeal for classical art as it evokes a sense of cultural and social prestige (ibid:15). In recent decades, some of the sculptures have either been lost or damaged. The empty stone plinths have then since inspired the site to use contemporary visual art, like sculptures, to occupy the space and to interpret the stories of Brodsworth (Matthews, 2021). The curator explained why the exhibition is spread across both the hall and the gardens. During its planning stage, Covid-19 was still impacting everything, the hall had not yet reopened and there was no clear date when it would, meaning that the exhibition had to be designed in such a way that it could be flexible as possible and “*work in the gardens, in case the house does not open*”. As a result, incorporating the gardens

as part of the exhibition space would ultimately unify the story being told at Brodsworth. Additionally, when discussing other English country houses using art to explore and tell the story of slavery, it was stated that doing a traditional exhibition, with a room with interpretation panels, would not sufficiently tell the story at Brodsworth. Explaining that it is “shutting away in one room and if that room is open you would look at it but if that room was not then you would not ... it would make it disconnected from the actual house and garden”. Therefore, by not isolating the exhibition into one part of the house it would ensure more visitors would encounter and engage with it, whether by accident or intentionally. Figure 5.5 shows the location of each wire sculpture around the hall and garden, labelling each sculpture as the sculpture trail in figure 5.4 does not indicate the specific location of each sculpture.

Figure 5.5 – A scanned image of the site’s guide in the guidebook (English Heritage, 2009). The text boxes are included to show the location of each wire sculpture as well as the audio posts around Brodsworth Hall.





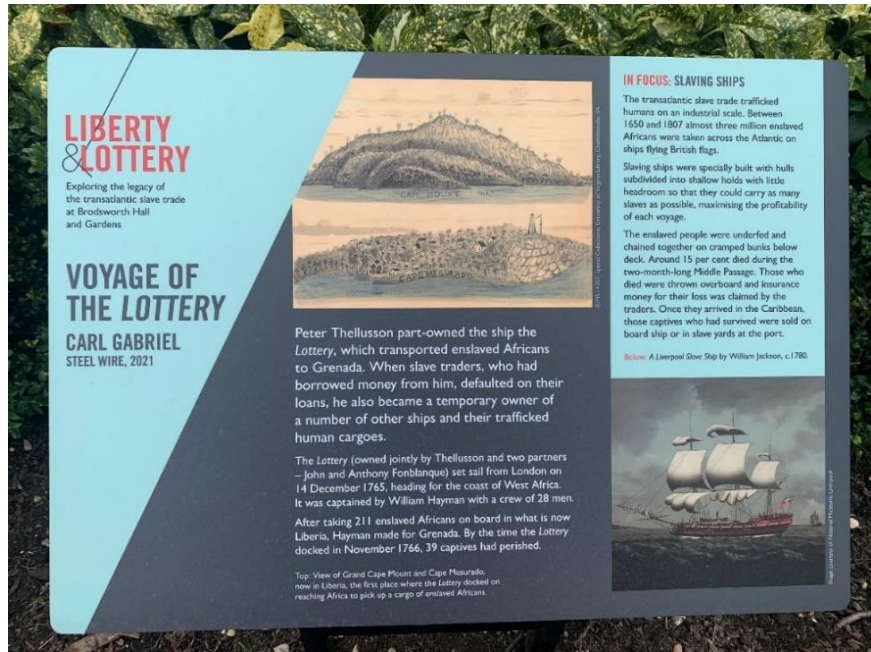
### 5.3.2 The story being told.

It could not be planned which way visitors would experience the exhibition. It is unsure whether they would go to the gardens first or the house first; if they went to the gardens first would they go one way around or would they go another and which sculpture would they view first? Regardless of which route visitors take, they would encounter four out of five wire sculptures. It is expected that visitors follow a similar route around the gardens: they tend to go around the South Terrace, heading towards the Fern Fell then down to the Target Range, then go back around and back to the house – this was favourable to the structure of the exhibition as it allowed the themes in the sculptures to fall into a “*natural order*” (as the curator states). It is also essential to consider how the text is displayed on the accompanying information panels with the sculptures. Each of the information panels is divided into two key sections: one that discusses the specific story of Brodsworth Hall’s connection with the slave trade, and which the other puts it into the wider context of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. The text is no more than three paragraphs long, in a colour scheme that makes it easy to read and it does not overshadow the artwork. To differentiate the information, the broader context is displayed in a light blue text box with a bold capitalised title of ‘IN FOCUS’.

‘Voyage of the Lottery’ (figure 5.6) is “*effectively the start of the story*”. The wire sculpture depicts the violent dislocation and trafficking of the enslaved across the ocean with the figure of a slave ship. The slave ship, as a symbol, both condenses and epitomises the horrific exploitation of slaves during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries (Rediker, 2007). It represents the experience of the enslaved, the treacherous journey, the unknowing, and the horrific conditions, which effectively starts the story being told. As there is not an actual image of the slave ships that Thellusson part-owned, when asked what reference material was sent over to the artist, Gabriel was sent images and paintings of slave ships that are seen displayed in the International Slavery Museum in Liverpool. This is one of two sculptures, the other being ‘Inheritance and

Legacy' (figure 5.9), that do not have a motif of a sugar cane. The other three wire sculptures have it in the background, acting as a support stand for the sculpture as well as incorporating the story of sugar production throughout. Also, it must be acknowledged that this sculpture and 'Plantations' (figure 5.7) are enclosed between the hedges, and the stone plinths are placed off-centre. Matthews commented how there is archaeological evidence that suggested that the plinths were not in their original position, hence why the stone plinths seem to be off-centred. When I began walking around the grounds, whilst I stopped to observe the sculpture and to read the information panel, the quietness was quite prominent. I noted that when people were walking around they were talking normally, some whispering, but when they approached the wire sculptures did they become silent. The silence and stillness allow you to ponder and observe the sculptures, getting close to the sculptures to look at the intricate wire bending to form these figures, which enables you to examine how the themes are depicted.

*Figure 5.6 – Photograph of 'Voyage of the Lottery' plus its accompanying interpretation panel. The slave ship sculpture is located on the right-hand side of the panel, in a box hedge niche. Note how the colour scheme on the panel makes it easy to read, yet it does not detract from the artwork itself (author's photograph, March 2022)*

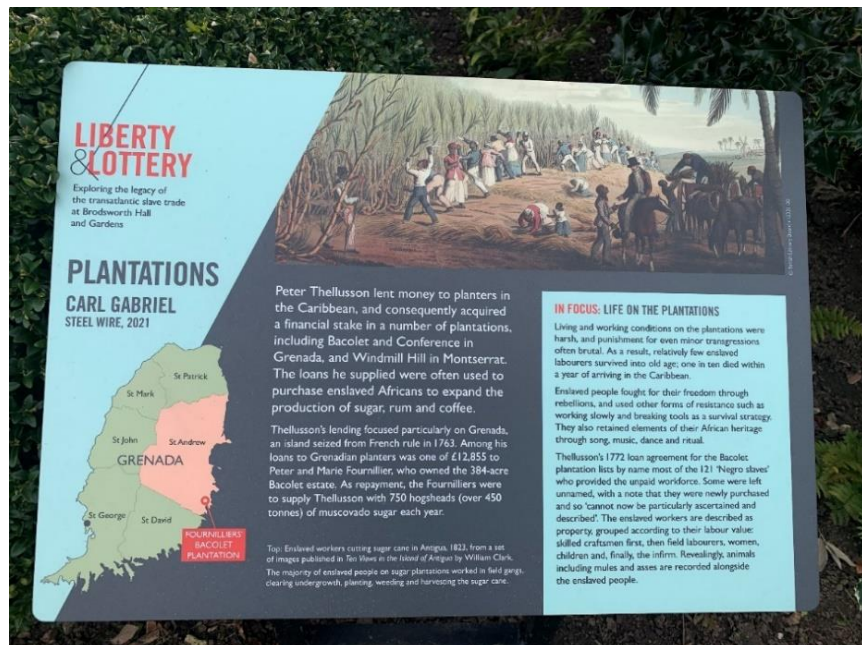


The second sculpture encountered is 'Plantation' (figure 5.7), which depicts a male enslaved worker looking into the distance. This sculpture is the only one that has a person in its depiction, despite figurative people being a key feature in Carl Gabriel's art. The key theme of this particular sculpture was to concisely depict the life of the plantation, as it is about the enslaved workers: where have they got to in the Caribbean? What is their life like? What are they doing? What is their experience? What are the plantations like? What are the working



conditions? And it was decided that the best way to explore this was to focus on the enslaved person. This sculpture refers to sugar agriculture, as seen by the motif of the sugar cane as well as the figure. The figure depicts a field labourer in sugar agriculture that holds two agricultural hand tools. The first tool, which is held upright, is a 'bill' (billhook), a very sharp curved knife, while the second tool, which is placed upon the figure's left arm, is a hoe. Field labourers worked in field gangs at the plantation; clearing undergrowth, planting, weeding and harvesting the sugar cane (Crowley, 2016). The posture of the figure was critical for Gabriel's view as it conveys a sense of agency and rebellion – inviting visitors to follow his line of vision – as the figure is turned in such a way that he is staring toward the hall. With the figure's straight back, and not hunched over, this figure is not in a servile posture typical of historical images of enslaved plantation works – by both pro- and anti-slavery advocates. This prompts people to remember that these British esteemed merchants profited from the slave trade, and the profits contributed to British socio-economic development. Including the purchase of the country houses, which has been regarded as the “jewel in the nation's heritage crown” (Dresser and Hann, 2013: xiii) with its sanitised and romanticised historical narrative of the successes of the elite class (Moody and Small, 2019).

*Figure 5.7 – Photograph of 'Plantations' plus its accompanying interpretive panel. The figure depicts a field labourer in sugar agriculture, indicated by the sugar motif and the two agricultural hand tools with the figure, depicting a billhook and hoe (author's photograph, March 2022).*



The next sculpture that visitors encounter is 'Commodities' (figure 5.8). This sculpture is located at the junction of three separate paths, it can be viewed as you are coming down or coming from the Target Range. It specifically focuses on the story of sugar, as Peter Thellusson's commercial activities related to the sugar trade; Gabriel was keen that one sculpture would "tell the whole story of sugar" (the curator comments in regards to this wire sculptor). As it is situated at a junction of paths in The Grove, it can be interpreted that it shows the different

paths of sugar production – crop production, refining, selling and consumption. The tall, elegant sugar-cane plant reaches upwards next to the bullet-like sugar cones, representing the shaping of the product and its transport from the Caribbean plantations to Britain and other countries, represented by the barrel. The oversized teapot, teacup and saucer complete the journey as the commodity became commonly seen in British homes (Matthews, 2021). The sculpture references the domestic life and gentility in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century British country houses – where such commodities were found in both inside and outside of the house. For example, how tea would have been enjoyed both inside the house as well as be taken in gardens. In doing so, it integrates the global story of the transatlantic slave trade into the British domestic landscape.

*Figure 5.8 – Photograph of 'Commodities' plus its accompanying interpretive panel. The sculpture depicts a motif of a sugar cane, barrel, sugar cones, teacup, and saucer (author's photograph, March 2022).*





The final outdoor wire sculpture is located in the Target Range. The largest one out of the four as well as being more abstract in theme, it is entitled 'Inheritance and Legacy' (figure 5.9). The abstract nature of this wire sculpture means that visitors are invited to have their own interpretation. By the time visitors reach this sculpture, key questions are left to be answered; what is left, what is the legacy, and what can we see now? The sculpture is modelled around the larger house structure based on an image of old Brodsworth Hall, seen on the top of

the interpretive panel in figure 5.9. The house is looming over the enslaved hut and the agricultural land, as indicated by the way the wire is bent to imitate the bumpy ground. This represents the disparity between the grand houses and the living conditions of the enslaved people on the plantations. The tree in the foreground is meant to replicate one of the large-Cedar trees on the lawn when it was the old hall. When discussing about the interpretation of this sculptor, the curator comments how some have interpreted the large hall as the plantation owner's house in the Caribbean, "*placing both the structures within the sculpture in the Caribbean as opposed to one being in the UK or Grenada*". The abstractness enables the theme to not be necessarily specific to Brodsworth as it tells more of a global story – highlighting that the story at Brodsworth is an example and not an exception in the story of slavery and the slave trade being told.

*Figure 5.9 – Photograph of 'Inheritance and Legacy' plus its accompanying interpretive panel (author's photograph, March 2022).*

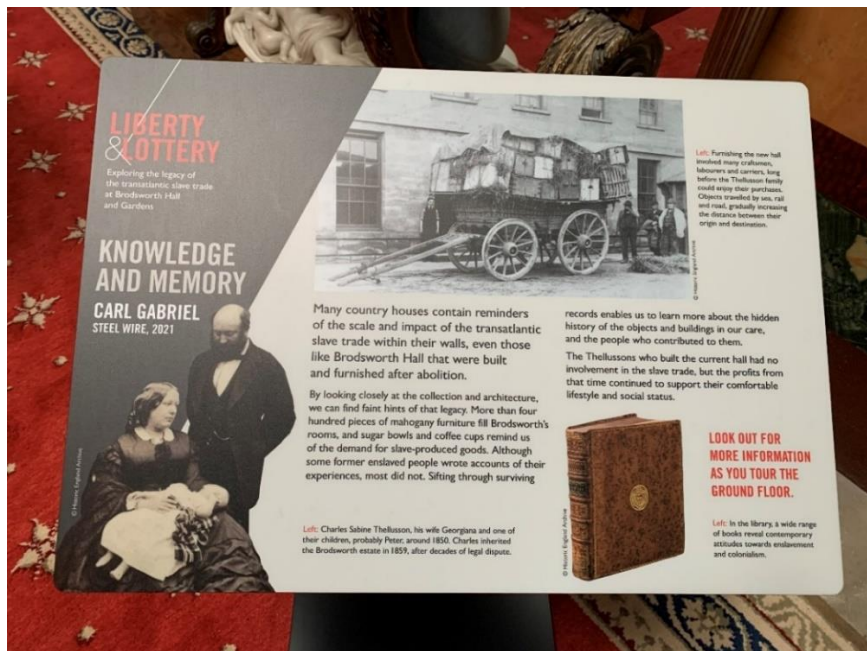


The final wire sculpture of this exhibition is located inside the hall, in the Entrance Hall, and is entitled 'Knowledge and Memory' (figure 5.10). In comparison to the other four sculptures, this one is the biggest and the most abstract in theme. This wire sculpture specifically focuses on the core questions with slavery-related heritage: how do we record the 18<sup>th</sup>-century transatlantic slave trade? Who records it? What is written down? How should we then share that knowledge with the public? Who gets to tell the story? Behind the books, a motif of the sugar cane is

seen, supporting the angle of the open book. By angling the book towards the visitor, it encourages them to come closer and to look and 'read' about the history. Matthews comments on how she interprets the two closed books underneath the open book as the histories that are not written down or have been lost in records and documents which are calling to be discovered and read about. It must be noted that the photograph in figure 10 was taken purposely to include the marble statue that is located near the wire sculpture. The classical marble statue was created by Giuseppe Lazzerini (1831-1895) and is titled 'Education, this statue was purchased by Charles Sabine Thellusson in 1865 at the Dublin International Exhibition. It is placed in a prominent position and symbolises women's nurturing and domestic role in educating children (English Heritage, 2009:15). Matthews comments on how having the wire sculpture placed near a classical marble statue represents the mixing of both traditional and contemporary ways of educating people. Furthermore, Matthews comments how the other four sculpture's themes would not be logical inside the hall as the family who rebuilt the house were a few steps removed from Peter Thellusson, the family "*benefited from the wealth ... the profits certainly built the house, but they were not directly involved themselves*".

*Figure 5.10 – Photograph of 'Knowledge and Memory' plus its accompanying interpretive panel. It is placed beside the statue 'Education' by Giuseppe Lazzerini (1831-1895). Note how the colour scheme on the information panel makes it easy to read, yet it does not overshadow the artwork itself (author's photograph, April 2022).*



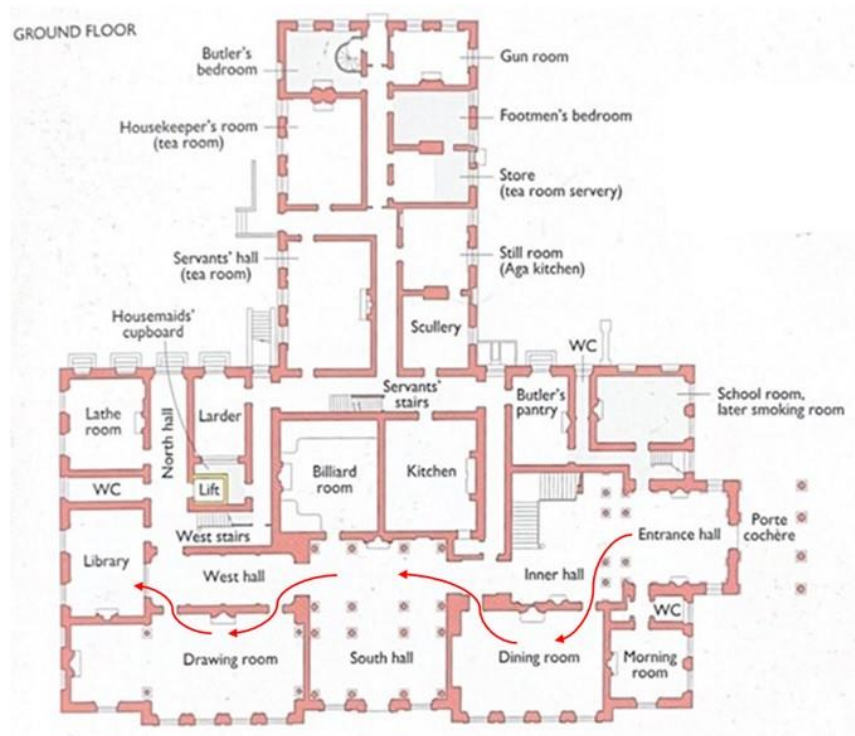


This is the rough trajectory of the wire sculptures; however, as it is indicated on the bottom-right corner of the information panel in bold capitalised red text (figure 5.10), the exhibition goes beyond the wire sculptures. Figure 5.11 shows the floor plan of the Ground Floor, and this will assist the reader when visualising the route taken inside the hall as well as which rooms display something that relates to the exhibition. As you walk through the Ground Floor, a train can be followed that highlights both objects and interior features which are associated with



or linked to the slave trade. The information panel states the luxury commodities that were enjoyed by the family, darkening the experience whilst walking through the house as it highlights that these luxuries were made possible by the transatlantic slave trade.

*Figure 5.11 - A scanned image of Brodsworth's floor plan in the guidebook (English Heritage, 2009). The red arrows are included to show the route taken when viewing the rest of the exhibition.*



### 5.3.3 Songs of Mahogany

*“And then I realised the whole house was filled with mahogany, the doorknobs, the bannisters, the stairs themselves ... it was worship and annihilation all in one” – Malika Booker, Songs of Mahogany*

In addition to the wire sculptures, a site-specific poem by award-winning Malika Booker is displayed in the Dining Room (figure 5.12). The poem, ‘Songs of Mahogany,’ was one of many commissioned poems in a digital anthology created by a programme called ‘Untold Stories’, which

was set up by English Heritage in 2020. The anthology aimed to explore several English Heritage sites and their hidden histories (English Heritage, 2022). Booker (2020:64) explains that “mahogany has to sing its own song” to demonstrate the complicated interconnectedness between Britain and its colonies – specifically focusing on the relationship between colonial acquisitions and the development of Englishness. The reliance on imported commodities like sugar and wood, in turn, amplifies the atrocity of the slave trade. Interestingly, the tablecloth is considered the most controversial piece in the exhibition, with the Brodsworth curator noting “*some really love the tablecloth but some of them do not ... some are pleased that is temporary, and it will be going down when the exhibition finishes*” – as many are displeased that the tablecloth covers the mahogany dining table. Fowler (2021) explores why many object to talking about country houses’ links to the slave trade, one common objection is that it is seen as unsavoury. As it causes many to rethink the history being presented to the public.

When you step into the room, you get absorbed in the words displayed on both the tablecloth and the panels. The bold red and black capitalised words on the tablecloth are particularly prominent. The boldness radiates this sense of anger – the anger towards the ongoing erasure and silence of the horrendous treatment that the enslaved people were subjected to. The angled text on the tablecloth reflects the rhythmic words of the verse chosen - words like ‘BODIES’, ‘BLACK’, ‘BROKEN’, and ‘BLOOD’. The natural qualities of the linen plus the lines cutting through the text enhance the raw message of the verse. In the background of figure 5.12, an information panel is displayed explaining the importance of mahogany (figure 5.13) – detailing how it relates to the story being told through the exhibition. The other verses are displayed across the room on the mahogany furniture (figure 5.14). Reading Malika Booker’s poem in its entirety may be an uncomfortable experience for some as it makes you aware of the casual, derogatory references to the slaves. In historical records, highlighting how little agency was allowed to the enslaved. In Malika’s introduction in the



Figure 5.13 – Photograph of the interpretive panel located in the Dining Room. The panel details the usage of mahogany in Brodsworth Hall while being placed on a piece of mahogany furniture (author’s photography, April 2022).

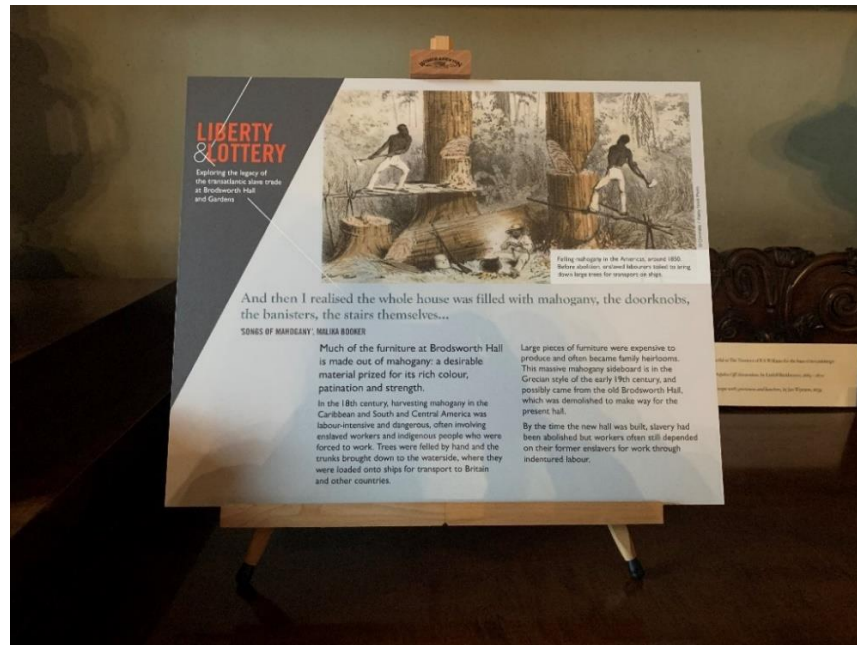
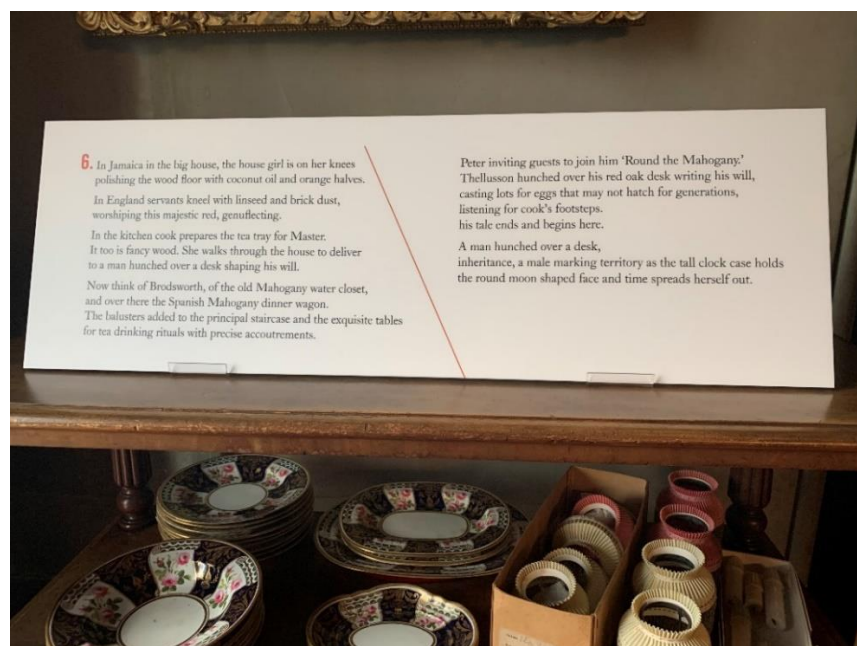


Figure 5.14 – Photograph of verse six of ‘Songs of Mahogany’ in the Dining Room. Placed on the mahogany furniture (author’s photograph, April 2022).



The temporary exhibition culminates in a display in the Library, which explores how particular books found in Brodsworth's collection relate to the slave trade and colonialism. In the interpretive panel (figure 5.15), the first paragraph has a bigger and bolder font to emphasise that one cannot assume the books in the library's collection reflect the family's viewpoint on such subject matter. Along the shelves on the right-hand side of the room, additional information panels are on shelf hangers – these provide information about the particular book and its relevance to the exhibition. By using shelf hangers to display the information it means that there is no damage to the fragile books or the shelves, as the hangers are held in place by the weight of the books themselves. A particular book that is of interest is Guillaume Raynal's 1780 edition of *Histoire des deux Indes*. This book explored the philosophical and political history of the settlements and commerce of Europeans in the two Indies, to quote its full title, providing the most up-to-date information about the trade, for example. This influential book provided crucial insight into the 18<sup>th</sup>-century perspective on colonialism and enslavement (Thomson, 2017). It is interesting to note that the majority of the books displayed in the Library are beyond Peter Thellusson's years, but it highlights his descendants' viewpoints on colonisation, especially during the Victorian period, as the books displayed focused on condemning the slave trade and advocating for abolition.

*Figure 5.15 – Photograph of the interpretive panel entitled 'Reading Between the Lines' which is located in the Library. The panel details how the books displayed reveal the contemporary attitudes towards enslavement and colonialism (author's photograph, April 2022).*



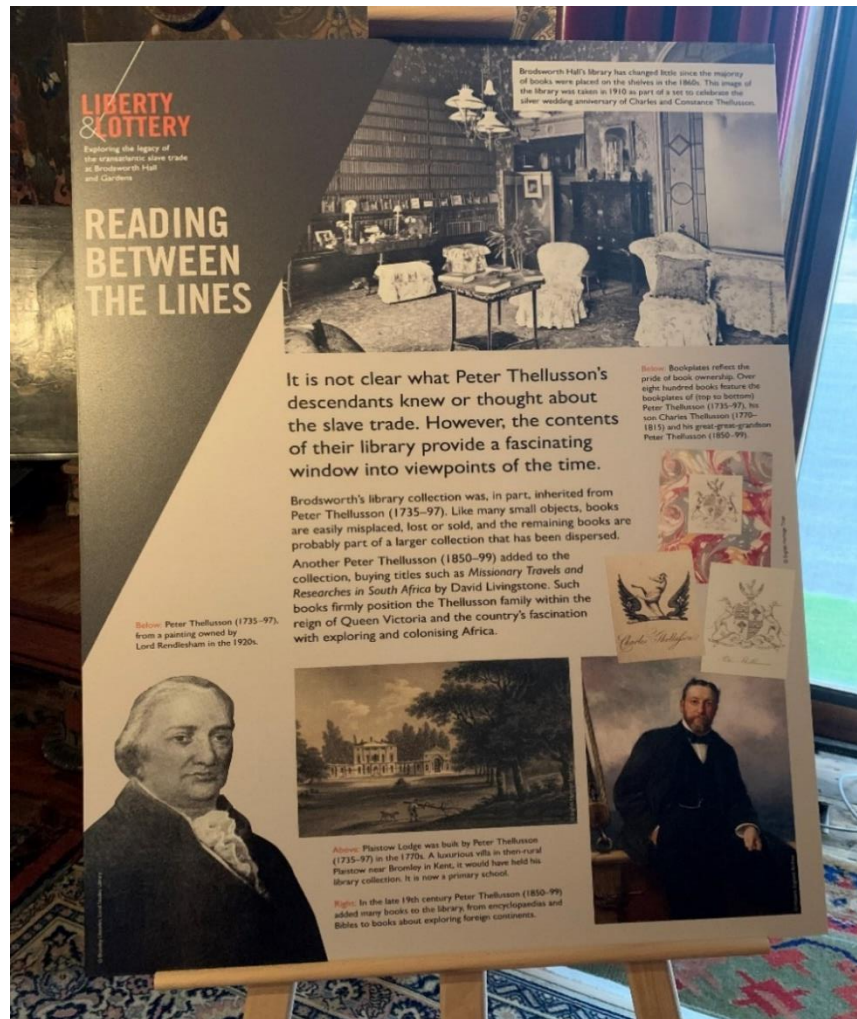
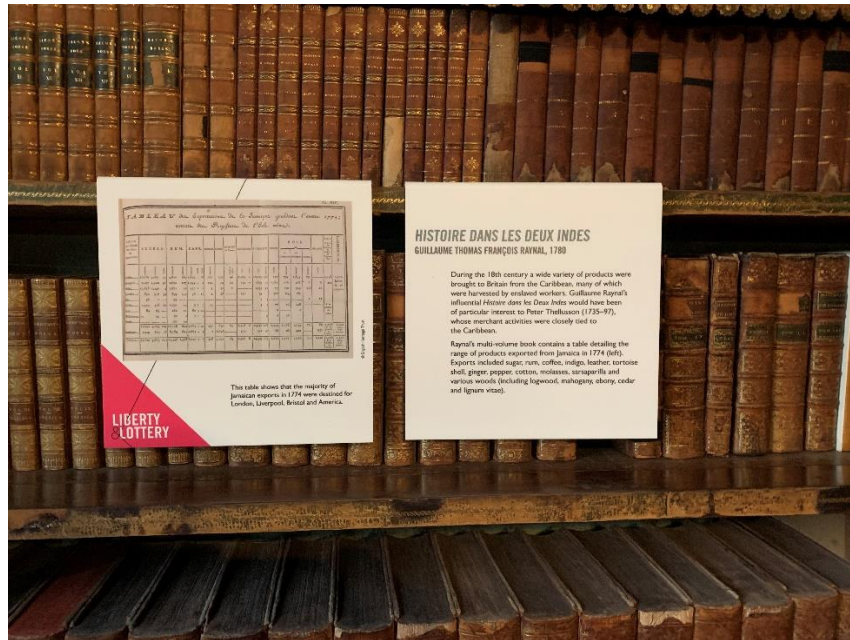


Figure 5.16 – Photograph of the shelf hanger that displays Guillaume Raynal’s (1780) ‘Histoire des deux Indes’ in the Library. The panel explains why Peter Thellusson bought this book and added it to the library’s collection (author’s photograph, April 2022).



### 5.3.4 Audio Posts

Finally, the exhibition also has two audio posts that are scattered in the gardens. One is placed in the Fountain Garden (figure 5.17) while the other audio post is located in the Archery Range (figure 5.18); their locations are highlighted in figure 5.3. Despite their relevance to the exhibition, the locations are not indicated on any of the information panels. This means that if visitors wish to encounter and engage with the audio posts then they must divert from the expected walking route around the garden. When asked about this, Matthews stated that “we did not know where they were going to be in the gardens” as they did not arrive during the planning stage of the exhibition. In addition to this, the audio posts, especially the one in the Fountain Garden currently, are going to be moved around the gardens for two reasons. One is that the post is affecting the condition of the earth underneath; the site wishes to collect quantitative data on where it gets the most interaction. At this moment, the audio post in the Archery Range gets far more engagement than the one in the Fountain Garden. As the one in the Archery Range is more hidden and tucked out of the way, the visitors may feel more compelled to listen to the tracks as it does not disturb anyone else around. The Fountain Garden is an extremely popular part

of the gardens, and its prominent position may increase reluctance to interact to not disturb anyone else's experience of the grounds. When I came across the audio posts, especially the one in the Fountain Garden, I waited until there were no other people nearby before pressing the track button to listen to the track. It seemed such a secretive and individual action for someone who wished to listen and learn more about the exhibition.

Both audio posts have two tracks that visitors can listen to. Track one of the audio post in the Fountain Garden is approximately one minute long, and discusses Peter Thellusson signing a loan agreement for the Bacolet plantation in Grenada in 1772, of which 101 first names of the enslaved people were recorded (Seymour and Haggerty, 2010). It states that the listing of the names was not done alphabetically but rather by the labour value of the enslaved person: with skilled craftsmen first, then field labourers, women, children, and the old and infirm last. Track two is around two and a half minutes long and lists the 101 known names of the enslaved workers on Bacolet. For this audio post, two female voices were recorded, those of Maureen Roberts and Yvette Philbert. This is significant as it was the interpretation consultants who advised Brodsworth that the voices used should be those of Grenadian heritage. The curator states how English Heritage "*definitely wanted the voices that were represented in the exhibition not to be English Heritage's voice*". And it was recognised that this temporary exhibition "*effectively utilises their cultural [Grenadian] heritage as part of the exhibition*". Both track one and two of the audio post in the Archery Range is approximately 40 seconds long. The tracks used were recorded by Andrew Pearse in 1956, a Scottish sociologist who worked in the Caribbean and Brazil during the 1950s. The Big Drum music and national dances celebrate the peoples' African ancestors. This is seen as a sign of respect and remembrance in Carriacouan culture as it encourages people to maintain and embrace their roots in various African cultures (McDaniel, 1985). Placing this particular audio post near 'Inheritance and Legacy' relates to the broadening of the story,



telling a more global story of enslavement, as the Big Drum music and its accompanying national dances are how people of Carriacouan culture thank and remember their ancestors.

*Figure 5.17 – Photograph of the audio post located in the Fountain Garden. Both tracks allow visitors to learn about the identities of the enslaved people connected to the story of Brodsworth (author’s photograph, March 2022).*



*Figure 5.18 – Photograph of the audio post located in the Archery Range. Both tracks allow visitors to listen to the Big Drum dance music which celebrates the cultural tradition of Carriacou (author’s photograph, April 2022).*



#### **5.4 Dark Tourism**

From the 1990s, the UK began publicly acknowledging its slave-trading past by promoting its slave-trade heritage and creating cultural tourism from such sites (Araujo, 2012b). An example is Liverpool's Slavery History Trail being developed, where guided tours of about one and a half hours, and created guided tours (Beech, 2002). Following the wake of social movements like the Black Lives Matter, heritage sites such as British country houses are put under social pressure to publicly acknowledge their place and complicity in the slave trade. This wave of protests has emphasised the importance of turning our gaze to British racism – 'the UK is not innocent' became the message (Joseph-Salisbury et al., 2021). The curator states that Brodsworth "*always intended to do a temporary exhibition of the subject matter*" as it is

“*relevant and very topical now*”. Although this current exhibition is temporary, Brodsworth Hall is creating a new main plan to discuss how the site will be developed and interpreted over the next couple of years, Matthews states that they wish to integrate “*more history of Brodsworth into our permanent interpretation, which is not currently*”. There is a longstanding critique of the temporary nature of exhibitions which comment on slavery connections, as seen with the Antislavery Usable Past project. This funded project (£1.84 million between 2014 to 2019) aimed to shed new light on cultures of anti-slavery activism and protest memory. Beutin (2017) argued how this project appropriate black suffering by reducing the memory and imagery of slavery to objects that reflect the anti-trafficking narrative – excluding the black liberation struggle. However well intended, the wire sculpture at Brodsworth, following Beutin’s (2017) argument, reduces the horrors of the slave trade and slavery to the objects that was gained from the slave trade such as sugar.

To intertwine both the white elite with the black slaves requires a degree of reconfiguration of British history told to challenge the dominant romanticised and sanitised narrative of the British country houses (Bressey, 2013). It also requires a high degree of historical responsibility to ensure the dark narrative being presented is accurate, it does not have the effect of reinforcing power relations from the period of transatlantic slavery. To darken the site’s experience, so to say, involves making its racial dynamic evident, rescripting its history to include both the previously ignored and invisible black presence as well as clarifying the white presence in the slave trade (Hanna et al., 2018) – in the context of Brodsworth, it would require acknowledgment of how the British elite benefitted both in social and economic terms. It is crucial to remember that Brodsworth Hall is not the exception but rather an example: other British country houses have undertaken this process of darkening, injecting aspects of their uneasy history into the main narrative of the site and not simply glossing over it. When discussing the importance of British country houses in recognising and considering

how to present this darker history, Matthews mentions other examples that utilised contemporary art to highlight their connection to the slave trade. She mentioned Harewood House's exhibition where it looked at one of their first Black servants (Harewood House, 2021), as well as Newstead Abbey's co-produced poem-based film *Blood Sugar*, which sought to reclaim the British country house as a site of African-Caribbean heritage (Slave Trade Legacies, 2018). This demonstrates how each site, and each exhibition, needs to be individually considered as what might work best for a particular site – in terms of the space, the story they wish to tell, and the available budget – varies greatly. It also illustrates this process of darkening for these once deemed unproblematic heritage sites. Previously, many sites may never have thought to explore their darker history, however, this recent social pressure of acknowledging their complicity in the transatlantic slave trade has encouraged particular heritage sites to reconsider and retell their story. Fowler's (2021:247) concludes, which is relevant with this case study, it will always be contentious when balancing of telling the honest and dark histories about British country houses and slavery with the expected visitors' experience of a 'good day out'.

This temporary exhibition aims to publicly foreground the connections between slavery and the established heritage site, to an audience that is predominantly white and affluent. It sought to provide a greater knowledge of Britain's still largely suppressed imperial history. Matthews comments, that when asked about the general reaction towards the exhibition, reassurance was needed. Like any exhibition that presents sensitive subject matter, there are going to be people who do not like the exhibition or wish to engage with it. In particular, with Brodsworth Hall, volunteers needed reassurance that the exhibition was not set up to tarnish the image of the site, but it is presenting a part of the house's history that cannot be ignored nor brushed away. As there is a sense of loyalty and pride between the British people and their history, so attempts to reveal the darker narratives is met with hostility as tarnishes the sanitised and romanticised narrative (Lester, 2021).

For the first time, especially with Brodsworth Hall and with other country houses, they are publicly acknowledging their presence in the transatlantic slave trade and slavery. This hesitation can also be explained by how, as Shipler (1997) argues, white affluent visitors, specifically, prefer to hear more about the architecture and the opulence of the house. They wish to discuss, marvel at, and remember the luxurious interiors and furnishings and the organised garden and think about the families and their elite lifestyles (Moody and Small, 2019).

While Matthews confidently states that Brodsworth Hall is not a dark tourist site, as the actual dark aspects of enslavement and the treatment of the enslaved did not happen at Brodsworth, the fact that the hall was built and financed by the profits accumulated from the transatlantic slave trade and that the site wishes to educate the public about this justifies it being placed on the lighter end of Stone's (2006) dark tourism spectrum. Brodsworth Hall is an example of a dark tourist site associated with death and macabre (Miles, 2002). This means that the site could become a meaningful dark tourism experience. Hanna et al. (2018) argued this for Middleton Place Plantation in South Carolina, as it provides a platform to integrate a darker history and its legacy of the slave trade at an established heritage site. As this was a site of the enslaved life and death, while in the case for Brodsworth this is a site where money from enslavement was showed off. Thus, it would present a possibility to incorporate those traditionally marginalised into the dominant heritage tourism narrative as it would challenge the romanticised perspective of the country house. However, it must be remembered that placing such a contested term onto Brodsworth requires ethical consideration – it must be dealt with the utmost respect and sensitivity as many view the term and its associations with commodification and commercialisation of the site as disrespectful (Beech, 2002; Frew and White, 2013). Additionally, Yankholmers and McKercher (2015) and Nelson (2020) point out that placing slavery heritage sites, like slave castles and plantations, within a dark tourism structure oversimplifies the issue of needing to provide a richer, deeper,

and more nuanced understanding of the context within which the phenomenon occurs.

### **5.5 Chapter Conclusion**

This chapter aimed to contribute to the limited studies that focus exclusively on the representation of the slave trade at UK's historic sites (Amundson et al., 2016). It is important that I acknowledge that there is a considerable body of work done on museums and heritage sites and slavery (for example, studies done by Alan Rice, Ana Lucia Araujo and the reviews of 2007 exhibitions by Geoffry Cubitt), but this chapter examined those that have been casted in touristic frame. After examining its current temporary exhibition, with its wire sculptures, poem, and audio posts, it has demonstrated the double and considered geography of the exhibition as it has been able to reinsert the global story of slavery into the domestic sphere of the British country house. This particular case study has been an example and not an exception as several British country houses have undergone this process of acknowledging and presenting the darker history of its association to the transatlantic slave trade. Brodsworth Hall provides a meaningful dark tourism experience as it aims to unearth and communicate the connection through exhibitions as it educates its visitors. By presenting enslavement history at the British country house, it generates this notion of openness and understanding of slavery and its complex legacies that continue to infiltrate today's society. This illustrates how a once unproblematic heritage site, under a British heritage organisation, with its romanticised and sanitised narrative has injected aspects of its darker history into the site's main narrative. However, it must be remembered that this was done temporarily. The next chapter, the final empirical chapter, will examine the case study of Aberfan and its memorial garden and cemetery.

## **CHAPTER 6. ABERFAN**

### **6.1 Chapter Introduction**

This chapter will explore the case study of Aberfan as a site of dark tourism within the UK. It will critically consider whether the concept of 'dark tourism' can be applied to a highly contentious and sensitive site of a memorial garden and cemetery associated with one of the most emotive tragedies in the history of Wales, referencing the Aberfan disaster of 1966. Most of the literature has predominantly focused on natural disasters and the few that focus on man-made disasters are mainly on Chernobyl (Hannman and Yankovska, 2018). This chapter will demonstrate how this specific site of a horrific disaster, which is still within living memory, is an example of how death and disaster do not have to be exploited for dark tourism purposes. The chapter begins with an introduction to the site, exploring its geographical location and the necessary historical context. Afterwards, it will examine the experience of walking around the memorial garden and cemetery to understand how a community has rejected any dark visitors in engaging and partaking in the contemporary touristification of a disaster site and the resting place of the victims. This particular case study will examine whether dark tourism, as a practice, depends upon tourist infrastructure for it to thrive and whether dark tourists pride themselves on visiting dark sites that are not marketed as a dark tourist site.

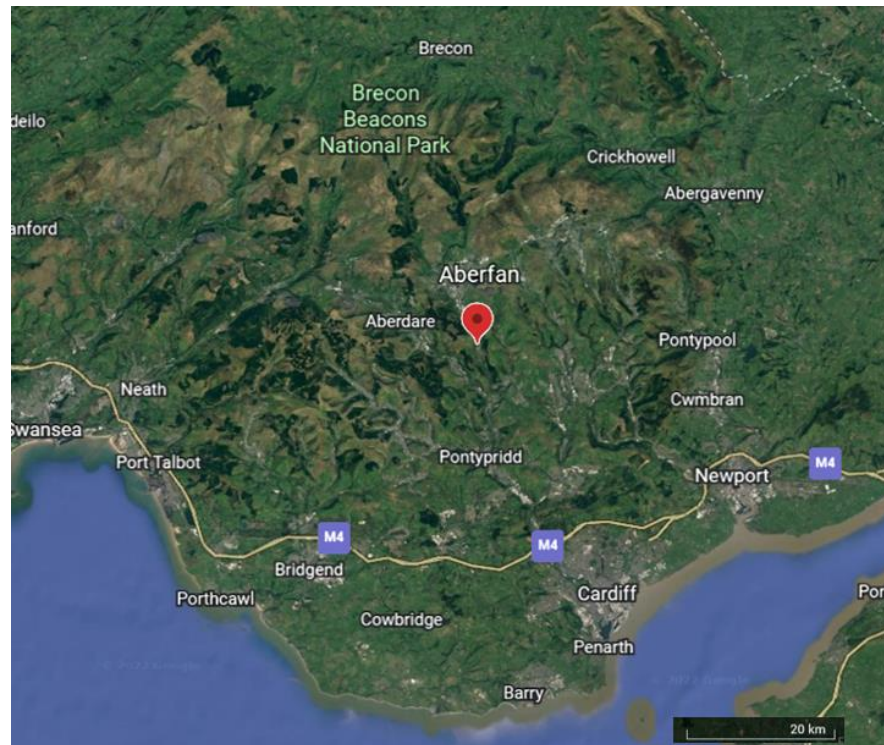
### **6.2 Introduction to the site**

Aberfan is a Welsh village in South Wales, situated 20 miles north of Cardiff and approximately 24 miles south of Brecon (figure 6.1a). Figure 6.1a shows the geographical location of Aberfan. The M4 is also highlighted in the first map; it is important to note this particular motorway as it connects London to southwest Wales and means the site is well connected and accessible for visitors from across the country. The map in figure 6.1b highlights the location of the Garden of Remembrance plus the part of the Aberfan cemetery that is dedicated

to those who lost their lives in the tragedy – this is indicated by the red outline. In addition to this, the map shows the sites' proximity to the A470, a road that diverts from the M4, which connects the northern and southern parts of Wales – going from Llandudno to Cardiff. This main road runs along the hillside above the village and cuts right through the path of the disaster slide. The distance between the garden of remembrance and the cemetery is approximately 0.5 miles, a 3-minute drive or a 10-minute walk. This October will mark the 56<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Aberfan disaster and the interest surrounding the tragedy has not diminished, but rather it continues to grow. What happened at Aberfan on the 21<sup>st</sup> of October 1966 has left an indelible mark on the valleys of South Wales, and even to this day, the name Aberfan evokes a sense of grief and sadness (McLean and Johnes, 2000). A particular reason why Aberfan remains to be part of the nation's collective memory is that, as Sawyer (2018) points out when discussing his experience of Aberfan as a dark tourist, death could happen to anyone at any time and young children are by no means immune to it.

*Figure 6.1 a and b – Map identifying the location of Aberfan, South Wales (a). The red outlines in the second map (b) indicate the area that is considered the Garden of Remembrance and the section of Aberfan Cemetery that is dedicated to the children's graves (Google Earth, created 17/08/2022).*





At 9:13 AM, on that Friday morning, a coal waste tip from Merthyr Vale Colliery surged down the mountainside into the mining village of Aberfan, engulfing the Pantglas Junior School and the surrounding houses. A total of 144 people were killed, of which 116 were children and 28 adults. Aberfan was a mining community that depended on a dangerous industry that was on the decline. The subsequent tribunal

report, published in August 1967, pinpointed blame on the National Coal Board; stating that it was the result of ignorance and failure in communications after numerous warnings (Johnes 2000; Powell, 2021). The Aberfan disaster was the first nationally televised disaster in the UK, remaining to be the country's worst postwar disaster, resulting in the sense of a collective witnessing (McLean and Johnes, 2000). Within hours, the media descended upon the small village, stripping away any sense of deserved privacy and rendering it the "village that lost its children" (Morris, 2016). There was a large influx of flowers and toys arriving at the village. While the intention was to pay respects, to both the victims and the affected families, however, it was deemed inappropriate as the small mining village had just lost a generation of its children (Eyre, 1999). This coal mining disaster that killed a generation of children became one of the most emotive tragedies in the history of modern Wales.

Even to this day, the media continues to be interested in the tragedy. The media has been influential in making death and disaster visible and consumable for the public, bringing the disaster to the forefront, to either be educated or to remember the tragedy. In recent years, there has been dedicated media that has exclusively focused on the disaster. Chris Morris created a short documentary, titled *An American in Aberfan*, in 2006 that charted the creation of an artwork, Shimon Attie's *The Attraction of Onlookers: Aberfan – An Anatomy of a Welsh Village*, to mark the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Aberfan disaster – which won the best documentary in the 2007 Celtic Media Festival. Morris discusses the production of the documentary, at the Aberfan Conference at Cardiff University in 2016, and how the documentary wished to portray Aberfan in a different light away from the coverage of the disaster using the same black and white archival material. Also, the third episode of the third season of the Netflix series *The Crown*, is dedicated to the disaster, however, the focus of the episode was on the monarch's display of grief and how the Queen did not comply with gender-specific expectations of sadness and grief (Layne, 2021). In addition to this,

there has been a new BBC Sounds podcast titled *Aberfan: Tip Number Seven* (2021), which received heightened attention as it was released on the 55<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the disaster. The 9-part podcast series retells the story of the disaster and the decades of injustice that followed – the voices heard are children who survived, along with bereaved parents and siblings, plus rescuers.

For this particular site, I was only able to visit the site once, at the end of May 2022. Initially, I was to walk around the site alone first, as I had done with Brodsworth Hall, and then contact and conduct an interview with David Davies in person. David Davies is a known survivor of the disaster as well as the current Chairman of Trustees of the Aberfan Memorial Charity, a public face for the survivors, however, after emailing him about potentially participating in my research project, he wished to not be included. I can only speculate why he declined, as I did not ask for a reason. However, I believe the reason why he rejected to be involved is of this notion of not wanting to be interviewed about the disaster or to encourage morbid visitors to the village. Between the years 1997 to 2001, Iain McLean and Martin Johnes, authors of *Aberfan – Government and Disaster* (2000), widely recognised as the final results of which were published on the 34<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the disaster, created a well-structured and comprehensive website, which was last updated in 2014. The website became a database of archival collection and interpretations of the new government documents. It was also hoped that the website would deter any dark tourists and that the community of Aberfan would be “rarely bothered for interviews” (Brabason, 2003). Although the village of Aberfan does not have any dark tourist infrastructure, there has been literature on people visiting Aberfan under the label of ‘dark tourists’ (Sawyer, 2018; Hohenhaus, 2021). Aberfan appears in Sawyer’s *I Am The Dark Tourist* (2018), and Hohenhaus’s *Atlas of Dark Destination* (2021) illustrates how it is a site where the phenomenon and practice of dark tourism has a presence despite the lack of tourist infrastructure. However, this raises a crucial

question of how much time must pass before it is deemed acceptable for people to visit a site where a tragedy occurred?

After much consideration, I asked a close friend of mine to participate in my research, a method that is rarely discussed (Browne, 2003). I knew that the site visit to Aberfan would be one of great sadness and be a difficult experience, so being accompanied by someone who I was close to and trusted would be extremely helpful. We travelled to Brecon and stayed with her grandmother before driving to Aberfan the following day. The role of the second visitor meant that I could understand further how the site's narrative is conveyed to visitors. Afterwards, when we arrived back in Nottingham, I was able to conduct a semi-structured interview with her (interview C); it is crucial to note that her responses given are not representative of all who have visited Aberfan. It must be highlighted that during our experience walking through the memorial garden, she did not take any photographs while I only took a couple of the memorial garden plus the plaque at the entrance. No photographs were taken inside the cemetery. Although I did not walk through the cemetery, as I felt very awkward about the idea of walking through a cemetery with which I did not have any personal connections, however, my interviewee did walk through the cemetery. When asked about what made her decide to walk through it, she comments how we made the very long journey to get there, and it felt like a "*once-in-a-lifetime opportunity*". She goes on to say, "*at no point when I was walking to the children's graves did I think to get out my phones and take photos, it seems so distasteful ... neither I nor my family have any personal connection to the victims*". This notion of having no personal connection with the disaster is a prominent theme, as both myself and the participant have no relation to the victims. Whether there is this personal or special connection with a dark site influence how people perceive the location (Lennon and Foley, 2000). As we did not have either a personal or special connection with the Aberfan disaster this resulted in the sense of being outsiders and hesitations felt throughout the site visit. This was evident when walking around the memorial

garden, we only crossed paths with another pair of visitors; we both spoke quietly, at times whispering when discussing the disaster, as to not disturb anyone's experience with our talking.

### **6.3 Walking around the memorial garden and cemetery**

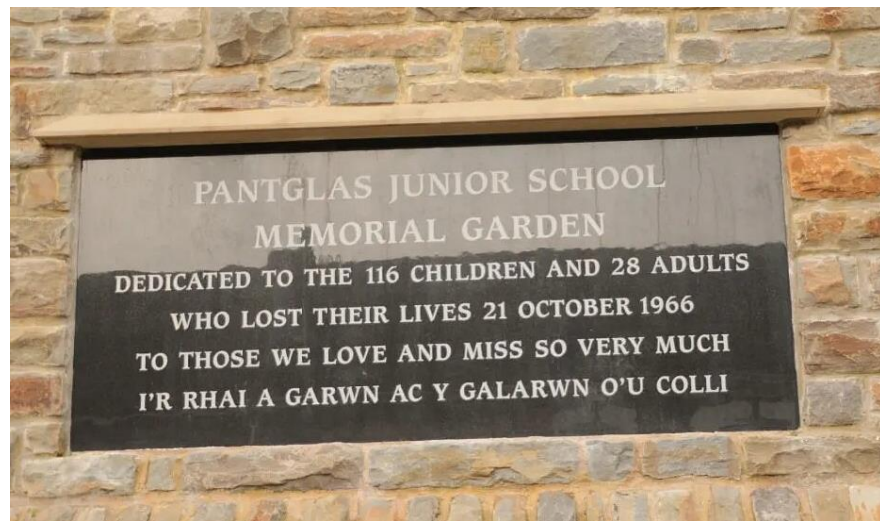
#### **6.3.1 Garden of Remembrance**

Due to the emotions associated with the tragedy, there is currently no tourist infrastructure – this can be seen as a deliberate attempt by the people of Aberfan to prevent any morbid tourists to come and gaze upon the disaster site, thus eliminating the possibility of dark tourism to function and thrive. Today, the actual site of the disaster has been turned into a sacred memorial garden. Its layout is a poignant reminder: paved pathways run through the middle and flower beds reflect the floor plan of the classrooms of the school. The Mayor of Merthyr launched a disaster fund immediately following the disaster, which aimed to aid the village and bereaved; by January 1967 the fund received an estimated 90,000 donations totalling approximately £1,750,000 (McLean and Johnes, 2000). The fund was able to pay for a memorial garden and the burials of the victims. Constructing a memorial garden where the disaster occurred transforms the site of tragedy into a public contemplative space where people are welcomed to remember the disaster and those who lost their lives. What is rather interesting to examine is how the memorial garden is not particularly spectacular but rather it is a modest but at the same time poignant memorial. Due to the sensitivity surrounding the disaster, it was bound that the memorial would also be modest and subtle; also, by making it this way it reinscribes the disaster into the landscape in a muted way – reinserting its presence in the village. A prominent feature that reinforces the muteness of the memorial garden is that there are no names displayed. In 2019, the memorial garden reopened after £500,000 in renovations to replace the walls and pathways of the garden (BBC News, 2019).

When we arrived, we parked opposite the memorial garden and noticed that it was free parking; the location of the site of the disaster and its proximity to the cemetery and having full access to both locations enables any visitors to travel between the two locations. Robinson's (2015) thesis investigated the motivations of visitors to sites associated with dark tourism and in particular examined potential motivations for people to visit Aberfan. It argues that implementing a charge to park nearby or to gain entry to either the memorial garden or cemetery would result in it being a commercial enterprise and a spectacle which would subsequently cheapen the act of remembrance. Figure 6.2 shows the plaque that you are greeted with at the entrance of the memorial garden, and it is the only plaque that details what the site is memorialising. In the interview, when asked if the plaque is sufficient for any visitors who wished to learn more about the tragedy, she commented that perhaps extra information would be available in the form of a panel or plaque inside the garden as *"you only get informed about the number of lives lost and it was once a school"*. She went on as far to say, *"it felt quite eerie by the lack of information displayed, it emphasises the magnitude of the disaster and how an entire generation of children was lost"*. This reflects the subtlety of the memorial garden as those that live across the street, opposite the site, do not want to see a big spectacular memorial from their windows every day, constantly reminding them of the disaster. As you walk through the gate and into the garden, you are met with flowerbeds and tributes distributed across the site. Figure 6.3 gives you an overview of what the memorial garden looks like, three years following its renovation, I remember taking this photograph quickly as I did not want to attract any attention to what I was doing. Figure 6.4 shows a tree that was planted as tribute, commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the disaster in 2016, this is one of three trees that have been planted. In the background of the image, benches can be seen. There are several benches placed across the garden, which encourages visitors to sit and reflect on the tragedy and appreciate the maintained memorial garden. We sat down on one of the benches, towards the perimeter of the garden, and I remember my

friend commenting on how haunting and eerie it is to hear the children playing in the nearby playground, “it is like we are hearing the voices of the children that the memorial is for”.

*Figure 6.2 – Photograph of the plaque commemorating those who lost their lives in the Aberfan disaster. This plaque is located at the entrance of the memorial garden (author’s photograph, May 2022).*



*Figure 6.3 – Photograph of the Garden of Remembrance. It is a bit unclear from this image but towards the other end of the memorial garden, there is a row of three trees planted as tributes (author’s photograph, May 2022).*





*Figure 6.4 – Photograph of a tree tribute for the 50th anniversary of the disaster. The stone states “our local schoolchildren planted a tree here to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Aberfan disaster 21 October 2016” (author’s photograph, May 2022).*





### 6.3.2 Aberfan Cemetery

Sited nearby, a 10-minute walk away, is the local Aberfan cemetery, where the graves of the Aberfan victims being quite distinctive among the other graves. Despite there being no existing tourist infrastructure, the residents do welcome people to pay their respects (Hohenhaus, 2021), however failure to respect such sacred space causes tension between the locals and visitors (Eyre, 2007). While experiencing the site; I would also felt awkward walking and talking along the graves at the cemetery, feeling much like an outsider. The cemetery is a sacred ground for the locals, and I strongly felt like I would not be welcomed as I do not look British; I thought that my presence at such a scared site would be noticeable. I mention this as I felt that I would have been stared at curiously by the locals, questioning whether I had a personal

connection to the victims or was just a dark tourist who travelled a long way to visit and gaze upon the site of the disaster and the graves. By contrast, my companion is a white British woman, and she did not have this hesitation. These graves sit on a steep hill above the village, which can be seen from a distance. This clear separation between the graves and the spaces of everyday life, as Rugg (2000: 262) argue, marks them as an alternative and difference space – the cemetery becomes “a separate place with a special purpose”. There are two long lines of graves, one above the other. Most of the victims are buried side by side, each grave being connected to the next one via a simple stone arch, which is approximately four feet high and two feet across at the base (as illustrated in figure 6.5). Couto (1989) compares how the effects of the graves are similar to those of a military cemetery. This is relevant to highlight as the late 1960s was seen to be a crucial period of resurgence of the public interest in World War I (Todman, 2016:520), as it marked the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary meaning that the public consciousness was towards memory and memorial debates. Upon seeing the connecting arches, you are instantly aware that these markers highlight a common loss; the inscriptions on the gravestones individuate the grief. The long lines of gravestones create a distinctive landscape of remembrance, where the remembering has been fixed in stone which results in it becoming a mnemonic symbol of the disaster, as Winter (2006) echoes in the context of war memorials on the Western Front. In 2007, Mossfords was commissioned to replace all of the original Portland limestone archways, which had begun to deteriorate due to natural erosion and weathering over time. The limestone was replaced with pearl white granite which would appear light and uplifting, and was also more durable and appeared luminous for longer (Mossfords, 2022). The continuous maintenance of the memorial garden and graves indicates the ongoing care and emotional involvement and illustrates the continuing significance of both the event and its memory (Eyre, 1999; 2007). When I asked my friend companion what emotions she felt while at the graves, she stated that she felt “*pure sadness, walking up the two rows of graves and reading their names and seeing their age*”

*inscribed was an extremely sobering experience*". The magnitude of the loss of life that was caused by the disaster is displayed for all to see. The main feeling experienced was sadness, as during the site visit and afterwards, on the journey back to Nottingham, we both reflected on the impacts and ramifications of losing a loved one and it becoming a tourist spectacle for all to gaze upon. While cemeteries can be classified as a dark tourism sites, the question of whether they should be marketed as one is contentious; *"it should not be marketed as a tourist attraction despite it being a dark site, it should remain a place where people are welcomed to remember and grieve"*.

*Figure 6.5 – Photograph of the Aberfan Cemetery and the archways and graves of the victims of the Aberfan disaster. Its illustrious pearl white granite solidifies its presence within the cemetery and the village (Mossfields, 2022).*



#### **6.4 Dark Tourism**

South Wales was once synonymous with coal, however, the 1960s till the 1980s saw the decline in the coal mining industry, signalling the end of an era in South Wales, affecting the community's social and economic identity (Coupland, 2012:89). It was after 30 years of mass pits closures that industrial tourism attractions began emerging across the region which promoted a coal heritage of Wales (Prices and

Rhodes, 2020). The emergence of tourism became a significant economic sector for many former mining communities. These tourism sites were typically education-oriented as they would educate the public about the history of the coal mining industry in Wales post-industrial revolution (Wanhill, 2000). However, similar to most attractions, they demonstrated a degree of selectiveness in presenting a scripted representation of Welsh cultural history (Coupland and Coupland, 2014:503). The dominant narrative is one of the guides telling tourists about the “gruesome stories of accidents, child labour and unsuccessful strikes”, as Pitchford (1995:45) highlights in his work on the Big Pit National Coal Museum and Rhondda Heritage Park in Wales. In July 2021, over a year ago, Rhondda Heritage Park installed an Aberfan memorial, which was initially meant to be a temporary exhibition, but has now been confirmed as a permanent feature of the ‘A Welsh Coal Mining Experience’ section of the park (Gregory, 2022). This is a fitting location for such a striking and poignant mining memorial. The work is titled ‘21.10.1966 144 9.13AM’, in reference to the date and time of the disaster plus the number of people who were killed (figure 5.6). The striking concrete and steel sculpture, created by local artist Nathan Wyburn, is based on a photograph of miner Johnny Thomas who was one of the first on the scene (Nation Cymru, 2021). Each of the 144 clocks displayed are all stopped at the time of 9:13 in a poignant memorial to those who lost their lives in the Aberfan disaster. The clocks are based on a widely shared image of a clock pulled from the rubble that stopped at the exact time of the disaster. This sculpture has received positive online responses, with comments mentioning how it is a respectful memorial that ensures that the disaster will never be forgotten, and it will continue educating future generations about the tragedy (ibid). However, in the context of this thesis, it does complicate the geography of commemoration for the Aberfan disaster as well as raise a crucial question; is it necessary to visit the site and to engage with it as a potential dark tourism location? The fact that it has a presence elsewhere, away from the actual disaster site, means that a different form of engagement and commemoration is formed, especially



when it is located in a heritage park environment. The geographic distance from the actual site of the disaster does not diminish the educational dark tourism experience (Cohen, 2011) at the heritage park. I would argue that travelling to the heritage park to view a display about the tragedy would likely be portrayed as a more acceptable form of dark touristic activity than travelling to the actual site of the disaster. As within the heritage park environment, the exhibit has been purposely designed for people to reflect and remember the disaster.

*Figure 6.6 – Photograph of the Aberfan sculpture, titled '21.10.1966 144 9.13AM', that is situated near the main entrance of Rhondda Heritage Park (Wyburn, 2021).*



Travelling to disaster sites, whether these have natural or human causes, attracts thousands of tourists who are interested in being educated about the event. Disaster tourism is becoming an increasingly pervasive feature in dark touristic consumption (Tang, 2018). Once a disaster becomes publicised, in the form of news or tv shows, it becomes an attraction to those who, for whatever reason they may have, wish to travel to gaze upon it (Rojek, 1997). As a form of dark tourism, disaster sites engage with the painful past and evoke strong emotional and affective reactions – such as pain and empathy – from both the locals as well as visitors (Martini and Bude, 2018). To commercialise a traumatic site becomes problematic as Beech (2000) argues that it would be difficult to achieve a balance between commemoration and commercialisation of the site in the long term – thus, cheapening the act of remembrance for the specific event. More recently, Millan et al. (2021) have argued that the main motive for visiting disaster sites, and the associated burial grounds of victims, is morbid curiosity. Relevant to this case study, the portrayal of a more recent, within living memory, and more sensitive events are highly contested; a great deal of consideration is given to those directly affected, and also careful consideration is needed when displaying a particular social or political interpretation (Timothy and Boyd, 2003). For many in the community, that day is as raw now as it was 56 years ago. While time has gone by, the memory of Aberfan has not faded as it remains as part of the nation's collective memory and is well commemorated by those who wish to pay their respects to the lost generation who lost their lives. This raises the vital question, which was posed at the conference held at Cardiff University (THCMH, 2016) which focused on themes of remembering, forgetting and moving on in the media regarding the Aberfan disaster, of whether the community will be allowed by the media to move on? As Chris Morris states in the conference how many people in Aberfan, especially those personally affected by the disaster, wish to stop the continual regurgitation of the

black and white archival material, which continually portrays the village as a spectacle of loss and suffering (Townsend, 2008).

Cemeteries have been recognised for their heritage value and visitors are drawn to the distinctive architecture, monuments and statuary associated with such sites (White and Hodson, 2007; Odgers, 2011). As a result, cemeteries attract the types of dark tourists who has this particular interest with death and the macabre (Raine, 2013). While the community of Aberfan does not have any tourist infrastructure, people with no direct connection to the disaster often travel to visit the garden and cemetery to pay their respects and to be educated and remember those who lost their lives in the Aberfan disaster of 1966. That is why this particular dark touristic activity, of visiting sites of catastrophes and disasters and the cemetery that has the graves of the victims, is deemed distasteful (Rojek, 1993:138). As the commercialising of such sites would cheapen the act of remembrance (Moreno, 2018). The strong emotional attachment associated with this site is why I argue that Aberfan should be classified as a dark site, as this is the actual location of the disaster, of which people are able to walk around. This would be plotted on the darker side of Stone's (2006) spectrum because this is a meaningful historical site of commemoration and remembrance, which is within living memory for many people. Both spaces are central, in both geographical and social terms, to the life of the community (Young and Light, 2016); the presence of the victims became central to the community. As the first disaster nationally televised creates an experience of shared grief, and the memorials commemorating such a tragic event in a nation's history promote a discourse of a national sense of grief and a shared past (Frew and White, 2013). Aberfan illustrated the 'truth' of industrial south Wales, who endured the harsh and dangerous working conditions and the oppressive management regimes (Dicks, 2008; Coupland and Coupland, 2014). This temporal proximity evokes a more emotive reaction to be experienced at the site (Miles, 2002), demonstrated by the lack of tourist infrastructure as the memorial garden and the cemetery are distinctive sacred sites of

commemoration. This means that if there would be any deliberate attempts of commodification, for the sake of tourism, would cause anger among both those personally affected by the disaster as well as the wider public as this coal-mining disaster in a small Welsh village is still well remembered and memorialised even as it enters its 56<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the disaster. Highlighting how such sites involves a number of stakeholders who have a range of, sometimes competing, agendas and requirements from resting places (Young and Light, 2016). Aberfan would fall into the Stone's (2006) classification of a 'Dark Resting Place', as this category primarily represents cemeteries and graves where there are minimal or no commercial elements associated.

## **6.5 Chapter Conclusion**

This chapter aimed to address the lack of studies exclusively focused on dark tourism sites linked to disasters caused by human activity (Hannman and Yankovska, 2018), especially those in the UK. Examining the experience of both the memorial garden and the cemetery, this case study has demonstrated how separating the dark sites with the everyday life spaces makes them a distinctive place where different attitudes and behaviours are shown (Rugg, 2000). In the context of Aberfan, any process of commodification and commercialisation of the site would lead to outrage due to its special significance (Eyre, 2007). This particular case study has shown that, potentially, it is not necessary to visit and engage with Aberfan for it to be a potential dark tourism site as it has a presence in a sanitised environment of a heritage park, with an art display that focuses on the disaster as part of its permanent feature. Aberfan has been continuously portrayed as a spectacle of loss and suffering by the media, showing how the memory of Aberfan has not faded but rather it remains in the nation's collective memory and is well commemorated by those who wish to pay their respects to the lost generation. This case study has illustrated how Aberfan, a site where it has not been set up as



a tourism site, could be placed within Stone's (2006) classification of dark sites. This showed how a site does not need to have touristic infrastructure for the phenomenon of dark tourism to be present. The next chapter will provide an overall conclusion of this thesis, summarising the findings and highlighting any possible future research direction.

## CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSION

This chapter will provide an overall conclusion to this thesis. It will present its overall outcomes and implications followed by suggesting potential research scope that will further develop reflection on the phenomenon.

This thesis has effectively tested the adaptability of the phenomenon of dark tourism across the three chosen sites in the UK – demonstrating how the geographic scope of the phenomenon is extensive as the sites selected range in their degree of darkness. It has contributed to a further understanding of why people consume touristic landscapes of death and disaster, which would enable geographers to further understand the emotional and affective geographies of consuming death and the macabre. It has highlighted the importance of temporal distance between the visitors today and the past event that impacts the emotions evoked and the experience at each site, which reflects Miles's (2002) argument. With the case study of the Ripper tours, it exemplified how the temporal distance between the actual murders and the tourists today allows people to partake in guided tours at ease, as the tours enable people to be in close proximity to death at a safe distance (Robinson and Dale, 2009). The emotional geographies associated with this lighter dark tourist activity focused on how the narrative presented the story of Jack the Ripper and the victims – how the conventional tours have rendered the horrific murders of the women into both an entertainment and educational attraction. While with the case study of Aberfan, of which the disaster is the closest to living memory among the three examples, the relative temporal proximity resulted in a more emotional experience when walking around the memorial garden and cemetery. However, the case of Brodsworth Hall and its association with the slave trade complicates this point, although the actual events connected to the transatlantic slave trade happened centuries ago, the subject matter, for many people, has a strong emotional attachment to collective identity and heritage (Yankholmes and McKercher, 2015). This has been more prevalent recently following the wake of the social

movement of the Black Lives Matter of 2020; as heritage sites like country houses have undergone social pressure to publicly recognise and address the site's connection to the slave trade and slavery. This has caused tensions between the visitors who go to country houses to enjoy the luxurious interior and grounds with those who might go to the site with the intention to view the exhibition.

This thesis has demonstrated the complexities of attempting to implement a set spectrum upon the selected dark tourism sites, as each site can be plotted along Stone's (2006) spectrum of dark tourism. A particular central theme raised in this thesis, which challenges this spectrum, is how the sites raise concerns about the delicate balance between an educational or entertainment purpose dominating. With the case study of Ripper tours in London, although these form part of an established popular dark tourist activity, the two tours that I undertook illustrated that subjectivity alters where the dark walking tours are positioned on the spectrum. The conventional tour exploits the murders through the guise of entertainment, marketing it as family, while the feminist tour centralises the victims in its narrative, with no mention of how they were killed or how they were prostitutes and drunks. This case study highlighted the complexities of having a set spectrum for dark tourism sites, such as Stone's (2009) spectrum, as particular factors influence how one would interpret the dark walking tour. As with both tours, it can be argued their position of whether it should be placed at the lighter or darker end of the spectrum. The case study of Brodsworth Hall illustrates how a site associated with death, where the actual atrocities of the slave trade and slavery did not happen at Brodsworth, can be classified as a dark tourist location due to this process of darkening the site's narrative by unearthing the site's history and publicly presenting this in the form of an exhibition. Classifying it as a dark tourist location allows visitors to have a meaningful experience to be educated about how the legacy of slavery is still prominent and how this darker aspect of the site's history should be scripted into the site's main interpretation. However, it must be noted that there is little sense

of Brodsworth embracing the label of 'dark tourism – such sites have tended not to embrace this characterisation of dark terms as this would require, as Hanna et al., (2018) argue, acknowledgment that such heritage sites have historically ignored its history of the slave trade and slavery. This can be seen with the curator resisting the terminology and its associations, the exhibition itself being a temporary exhibition and the country house being marketed in different ways too. The case study of Aberfan with its memorial garden and cemetery illustrates how a recent site of disaster can have a presence within the phenomenon of dark tourism despite the lack of tourist infrastructure; the Aberfan example was to exemplify how the site prioritises educational and remembrance purposes. This site demonstrates how sites of more recent death and disaster, which are still part of the community's and nation's living memory, complicate how the practice of dark tourism is implemented. Overall, the three sites from this thesis highlight how each site combines characteristics of both extremes of the spectrum, showing the complexity of attempting to position a site along the spectrum – thus, it highlights a need for a nuanced typology for dark tourism sites.

The chosen methodology was actively reflected throughout thesis. Although a case study qualitative approach was used, particular changes had to be made to address the overall aim of the research. This critical reflection allowed me to understand how one can conduct geographical research on the phenomenon and practice of dark tourism, especially where time and financial limitations influenced how it was approached. As this thesis indicated, I could immerse myself at each site, as a tourist at each dark destination, and collect the necessary data for each analysis. Despite only experiencing the Ripper tours plus Brodsworth Hall twice and Aberfan once, it has illustrated that using a qualitative methodology for geographical research on dark tourism allowed me to adapt and change the method at each particular site. The chosen methodology allowed me to explore the different

aspects of the concept and practice of dark tourism at each selected site.

Dark tourism is a phenomenon that, over the last century, has become both widespread and increasingly prominent feature within the contemporary tourism landscape which allow people to gaze upon real and recreated death (Stone, 2006). The geographic scope of this phenomenon is extensive, as illustrated with this thesis and its three distinctive case studies. As cultural and historical geographers, for such tourism to be present and to be of great significance, there must be a direct engagement and critique of the spatial and narrative designs of such sites (as Hanna et al., (2006) comment in regard to sites associated with slavery-related heritage). The way these once silenced and ignored narrative are represented at dark sites are fundamental to how visitors remember the past; this thesis has highlighted how each location has sought to keep 'alive' the memories of people and intertwining them with the popular historical narrative. However, it must be remembered, the commemoration and remembrance of dark and difficult memories will always be a highly contentious issue (Amundson et al., 2016). It is the recognition the importance of landscape plays in the creation, consumption, and contestation of memory (Dwyer and Alderman, 2008).

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## APPENDIX

1. Interview checklist. These initial questions planned for the semi-structured interviews. This was listed out after the literature review as it would cover the key topics I wished to discuss in the thesis. This list of questions was created before any site visit, end of February 2022.

<p><b>General questions to ask for all chapters</b></p>	<p>What do you think is the appeal of engaging with dark history?</p> <p>Do you think the portrayal of death and suffering within the media [documentaries/TV/films] influence how one perceive the site? And, how we tell the story?</p> <p>What are the main expectations that people would have when coming to the site?</p>
<p><b>JTR</b></p>	<p>As someone who conducts the tours, how do you decide on how to approach the subject of the women's deaths?</p> <p>How do you balance the public's demand and historical accuracy?</p> <p>Do you acknowledge the conspiracies and critiques when retelling the story?</p> <p>With many competing tour companies wishing to present the same story, how do you ensure that your tour company is one that people choose?</p> <p>What particular considerations were made when creating the experience offered on the tour?</p> <p>How does the issue of providing an authentic experience feature in how you present the story of JTR?</p>
<p><b>Brodsworth Hall</b></p>	<p>What particular considerations were made when creating the exhibition?</p>

	<p>Did Carl Gabriel get the opportunity to explore the grounds before designing the wire sculptures?</p> <p>How does the issue of providing an authentic experience feature in how you present the slave trade relations to the story of the stately home?</p> <p>How were the volunteers/employees at Brodsworth prepared for when the exhibition went public?</p> <p>Does the media's portrayal of slavery itself have any impact on how it is presented in Brodsworth?</p> <p>Perhaps in terms of how British society views this?</p> <p>What reactions have you had since implementation of the exhibition?</p> <p>As the exhibition ends this November, what will happen to the wire sculptures?</p> <p>What do you think about people perhaps considering Brodsworth Hall a dark tourism site?</p> <p>Do you think it is appropriate to implement such a term to this historic site?</p>
<b>Aberfan</b>	<p>How do you wish for Aberfan to be portrayed?</p> <p>How do you think it should be respectfully remembered for future generations, as those experienced the disaster or lost relatives, and children are being to pass away?</p> <p>Has there being any attempt to implement tourist infrastructure in the area?</p> <p>Do you witness an increase of visitors coming to the area when the anniversary is approaching?</p> <p>Do you see a higher increase of visitors when its big anniversaries, such as the 55<sup>th</sup> and 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary?</p>

2. Extracts of field diary entry after each site visit. In the following order of Jack the Ripper tours, Brodsworth Hall and Gardens, and Aberfan.

JTR (family fun):

- Dark evening = adding to the eerie vibe
- stepping along with him
- Always joking
  - Attempt to lighten the mood?
  - Diminish the horror → make it family fun?
  - Uncomfortable at times
- warning before sharing the images
  - ~~show~~ photos of the victims
- No real respect to them
- × Conspiracials = opp to sell their book / podcast

Feminist:

- Respectful / historical accuracy is key!
- No Jokes in the story
  - Even though it is a feminist Ripper tour = no mention of said killed
  - Emphasis on focus on wider social atmosphere / how at the time
- No jokes compared to the other one

Brodsworth:

- 5 wire / poem
  - profound
  - No one really seeing them / no one really discussing them
    - ↳ uncomfortable?
  - Quiet experience = very individual
- whispering
  - Not publicly discussed? No one was asking about it
  - no interest?
- silence with the poem
  - intense moment
  - most controversial piece in the exhibition? Very blatant?
- Historical accuracy is crucial!

May 2022 (Aberfan):

- Quiet and empty
  - Don't know if it would be appropriate if busy
  - Happy its empty
- sunny
- Quiet experience
  - Didn't even speak much
  - It felt odd to speak?
- Can't imagine having this at my front doorstep
  - Always remembering
  - Never forget (generations)  
community ingrained