



Panel

6.3. Protest(ing) Rural Heritages: Land and Community Memory. Part II

Panel organiser: Griffin, Carl, University of Sussex, UK; Jones, Roy, Curtin University, Australia; Robertson, Iain, University of Gloucestershire, UK

Acts of protest linger long in community memory, the protest invariably a pivotal moment in shifting social relations. Equally, protest can also be conceived of as representing a catastrophic breakdown in social relations, a low point for the community, something therefore to be erased and forgotten. This tension is also experienced in profoundly dialectical ways: rural elites invariably wanting the commemoration of protest past to be suppressed, while protestors often want the act of protest – and the events that led to the protest – to be written in the rural landscape forever. Conversely, attempts to put particular places under the ‘protection’ of heritage organisations and law can also lead to resistance from those members of the community whose lives the inscription will delimit. Drawing on recent attempts to think through the ways in which protest is commemorated ‘from below’ and work in memory studies, this session seeks to examine these complex relationship in a variety of different conceptual, spatial and temporal contexts. Papers explore how past rural protests are used to revivify resistance in the present; the selective memories of communities in commemorating past struggles; or, battles over attempts to celebrate previous protests. In conclusion, the session asks why some rural protests are actively remembered and others not – and why community memories of some protests are actively subjugated – as well as how acts of commemoration and ‘protection’ can in themselves provoke protests in a variety of forms.

Chair: Robertson, Iain, University of Gloucestershire, UK

Tuesday, 20 August 2013 // 1515 – 1645 // Session 6 –Room A-122

6.3.1. Folklore, Collective Memory and Popular Protest in Seventeenth-Century Forest of Dean

Sandall, Simon, University of Winchester, UK

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, this marginal region became central to the designs of the Crown and other capital interests. The consequent assault on Forest custom provoked a series of disturbances which seriously tested the power of local authorities. Two of these incidents were notable for their invocation of folkloric tropes. The first was on the part of concerned authorities, while the second was an expression of the solidarities which underwrote the most threatening resistance in 1631. These allusions were very different in their nature but my paper suggests that both were drawn from a shared cultural repertoire representing an epistemological world in which folkloric references were imbued with political significance at all levels of the social scale. This type of folk culture also, it is argued, helped to transmit these values and traditions of protest from one generation to the next. In the context of early seventeenth-century England, these two episodes illustrate the continuing and multivalent political relevance of folkloric language and action to those at all social levels.

6.3.2. Landscapes of Conflict and Commemoration: Mousehold Heath, Norfolk

Whyte, Nicola, University of Exeter, UK

This paper will investigate the ways individuals and communities have imagined, appropriated and reworked the past in the early modern period. Taking inspiration from recent archaeological research on the ‘uses of the past in the past’ and ‘life-histories of monuments’ it attempts to historicise the relationship between memory, place and landscape. In so doing it re-evaluates Pierre Nora’s argument that ‘sites of memory’ function as ‘embodiments of a memorial consciousness’ for the modern age. Discussion will focus on a late sixteenth-century map of Mousehold Heath, a large tract of common ground located on the outskirts of the city of Norwich (Norfolk). The map depicts an elite narrative of the past and a ‘national history’ charting the suppression of various protest movements, the physical traces of which were still apparently to be found in the landscape. Alongside and often entangled with this elite perception, the documentary evidence also reveals rich insights into local, non-elite memories and narratives of landscape and place. These offer counter views of the meaning and significance of the physical imprint of the past on the land, and reveal Mousehold Heath to be a field of composite and conflicting memories, that were nonetheless marked by a profound and long history of violence and protest.

6.3.3. Community Memories of Protest History in Rural England: Forgetting, Un-forgetting and the Politics of „Instant History“

Griffin, Carl, University of Sussex, UK

How events are remembered and commemorated has assumed a central position in recent historical analysis. In part, this reflects the challenge of the so-called linguistic turn with its attendant emphases on the work that language does in structuring our understandings of the past, and the allied influence of post-structuralist thought with its twin codas of questioning official narratives and our ability to truly represent ‘the past’. Academic histories have tended to focus on memorialisation – the casting into stone – as well as official celebrations, and the unpacking of the work of History, the ‘official’ telling of events in national stories. What has not been subjected to scrutiny is the memory work done by communities, specifically the way in which protests of the recent past were selectively invoked and just as selectively ‘forgotten’. The paper attempts not to answer how this was done, but instead to offer some thoughts on the forms these memory plays took in the communities of southern England in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It pays particular attention to the ways in which dramatic events were re-presented, including food rioting, the Swing Riots of 1830, and even incendiarism. In so doing it argues that memory work was a key component of sustaining the community. Remembering – selectively, unevenly, politically – was what underpinned community cohesion. It was that which was called upon in making judgements when the agrarian equipoise was threatened.

Participants

Griffin, Carl

Senior Lecturer in Human Geography. Author of *The Rural War: Captain Swing and the Politics of Protest* (Manchester University Press, 2012) and *Protest, Politics and Work in Rural England, 1700-1850* (Palgrave, 2014).

Jones, Roy

Emeritus Professor of Geography. Author (with Brian Shaw) of *Geographies of Australian Heritages: Loving a Sunburnt Country?* (Ashgate, 2007) and *Contested Urban Heritage: Voices from the Periphery* (Ashgate, 1997).

Robertson, Iain

Senior Lecturer in History. Author of *Heritage from Below* (Ashgate, 2012) and *The Later Highland Land Wars* (Ashgate, 2013, forthcoming).

Sandall, Simon

Lecturer in History. Author of ‘Custom, Memory and the Operation of Power in Seventeenth-Century Forest of Dean’, in F. Williamson (ed.), *Locating agency: space, power and popular politics* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010) and *Custom and Popular Memory in the Forest of Dean, c. 1550 - 1832* (Boydell and Brewer, forthcoming).

Whyte, Nicola

Senior Lecturer in History. Author of *Inhabiting the Landscape: Place, Custom and Memory, 1500 – 1800* (Windgather Press at Oxbow, 2009) and ‘Custodians of Memory: Women and Custom in Rural England c.1550-1700’, *Cultural and Social History* (2011).