Globalisation and the Memorialising of Railway Industrial Heritage

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Abstract

This paper seeks to identify the interface between different forms of globalisation and between oral history and heritage by examining the adaptive re-use of a number of railway workshops in different parts of the world. Specifically it considers the extent to which oral history has been used to recreate the atmosphere and experience of industrial labour at the Eveleigh railway workshops in Sydney, the Swindon Railway Workshops in the United Kingdom and the first railway works built by the Pennsylvania Railroad in Altoona, USA. All three sites stand at the interface between the modern and post-colonial forms of globalisation, having been built during the former phase and closed during the later phase. In the age of de-industrialisation, these artefacts now provide the venue for a whole new cycle of capital development. Through these three cases, the paper demonstrates how the re-colonisation of industrial sites, the memorialising of the industrial era and sustainable development are combined as a response to the economic effects of globalisation and de-industrialisation. In doing so, I indicate the way these connections de-politicise the present as much as the past by concealing the conflictual aspects of the industrial era and also how the past becomes part of the present.

Introduction

The closure or downgrading of railway workshop operations in different parts of the world during the final decades of the twentieth century and their subsequent redevelopment inspired appreciation of the heritage value of such sites by growing numbers of people. This paper examines how the de-industrialisation and re-colonisation of three particular railway workshops in Australia, the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States of America (USA), have affected the preservation of their material remains and the memorialising of their past activities. Its aim is to throw light on continuities and discontinuities between past operations and current uses in order to tease out the connections between global changes and local changes.

The decommissioning of railway workshops and the increased appreciation of their heritage value both owe a lot to the demise of the steam engine and the spread of dieselisation, which altered the nature of maintenance and repair functions performed at these sites. The steam locomotive’s power, majesty and ‘infinite freight of mental imagery’ continues to exert an ‘enduring fascination’ (Brown 1995: xix). For many people this machine has become a synonym for railway heritage. The twenty-six books of *Thomas the Tank Engine* stories written by the Reverend W. Awdry between 1945 and 1972 are still being read by people of all ages all around the world (Awdry 1996). Indeed, Thomas’s shadow looms large over many railway heritage attractions.

It is hardly surprising to find that the steam engine is a most prominent icon of the industrial era. After all, it dominated railway systems around the world between the 1830s and the late 1940s and in many countries steam traction remained in operation until the 1960s and 1970s (Churella 1998: 3; Cover 1996: 74-7; Ross 2002: 137-41; Smith 2003: 224). But for all its admitted significance, the iron horse is not synonymous with railway heritage. Railway heritage also encompasses railway lines, bridges, stations, depots and workshops, facilities that transformed natural terrains by opening up new areas of settlement, encouraging urbanisation, helping to forge the industrial landscape and creating myriad social landscapes in which a range of occupational sub-cultures flourished (Patmore 1994: 139 & 141). Yet more than any of these facilities, railway workshops united ‘two of the central elements of the industrial revolution’ — the factory and the railway system (Olssen & Brecher 1992: 350-1). This connection shaped the way work was performed at these sites. In more recent times, however, these threads have been frayed by the decline of heavy manual labour and industrial occupations and jobs caused by the shift of manufacturing enterprises from Western ‘developed’ countries to other parts of the world (Samuel 1996: 305). In this context, vacant industrial spaces have been re-colonised and adapted for new uses, which not only provide the foundation for ‘a whole new cycle of capitalist development’ but also for an increased awareness of the importance of industrial heritage and its cultural value (Samuel 1996: 306). In short, the combined effect of these changes, as well as the plethora of others we now encapsulate in the term ‘globalisation’, have encouraged people to listen to the stories of the railways’ industrial landscape and to promote the preservation of its remaining vestiges.

This is not to suggest that global developments determine local developments or determine how people in specific places define their local heritage. I raise the term not as an explanatory device but as a way of contextualising developments at railway workshop sites in time and space. Similar changes to the maintenance of railway infrastructure in different countries, I argue, form part of a ‘syndrome of processes and outcomes’ that are intimately connected to the increasing penetration and integration of transnational production networks and services (Dicken 2004: 8). As Jonathon Friedman (2001: 57) points out, “[t]he unification of the world in technological terms is a process that is financed by decentralised capital investment, not by some autonomous cultural or even technological process’. Hence, if we accept his argument that globalisation is ‘a process of local transformation, the packing of global events, products and frameworks into the local’, then it offers a useful starting point for considering the transformation of railway facilities into railway heritage and the memorialising of their past activities.

The Eveleigh Railway Workshops in Sydney, the Swindon Railway Workshops in the UK and the Pennsylvania Railroad (PRR) works at Altoona in the USA all stand at the interface between what Hopkins (2002: 2 & 6-8) refers to as the modern and post-colonial forms of globalisation, having been built
during the former phase and closed during the latter. On the one hand, their buildings and operations were the products of industrialisation and the gradual increase in waged labour and occupational specialisation, which were part of the rise of modern globalisation from around 1800. On the other hand, the gradual downgrading, closure and redevelopment of these facilities reflect the shift away from manufacturing that accompanied the emergence of post-colonial globalisation from approximately the 1950s, with its emphasis on financial, commercial and information services (Hopkins 2002: 7-8).

Few people view globalisation from this broader historical perspective. For most it is associated with the 1990s when the penetration of global forces became more obvious and when the disruption of all aspects of modern life and of prevailing links between people and places became more intense (McDowell 1999: 1; Ralph 1976: 43). It was in this context that many industrial landscapes were obliterated and others were adapted to new uses. All three sites under review here were affected by these changes and were gradually drawn into a whole new cycle of capitalist development (Samuel 1996: 306). Eveleigh became the home of the Australian Technology Park. The Swindon shops were occupied by a massive retail outlet and a museum called STEAM and the PRR Master Mechanics Building was transformed into the Altoona Railroaders’ Museum (ARM). Such developments raise some critical questions, which this paper seeks to address.

‘What is to be done with the heritage of industrialisation at a time when industrial jobs are disappearing and the communities based on them are collapsing? What is the role of memory and public memorialising in digesting changes so profound and traumatic? Whose history should be remembered and memorialised, by whom and to what ends?’ (Frisch 1998: 241). These questions go to the heart of the nexus between globalisation, memory and industrial heritage and I intend to address them by considering: (i) how de-industrialisation has contributed to the field of industrial heritage and appreciation of workers’ memories; (ii) the way oral history has been associated with industrial heritage; and (iii) the meanings that are transmitted about the industrial past through the preservation and/or presentation of workers’ memories at the three railway workshop sites mentioned above. In doing so I argue that the recognition of heritage value and efforts made to conserve both tangible and intangible heritage remains at the Eveleigh, Swindon and PRR shops are primarily driven by economic imperatives and an obsession with financial rather than social, cultural and humanitarian outcomes. In such circumstances, the mere adoption of oral history as a part of heritage management strategies does not of itself ensure that justice is done to ‘memory as a living, active engagement between past and present’ (Green 1998: 449). On the contrary, oral history is often deployed in a way that idealises the steam era and romanticises, aestheticises and sanitises the railways’ industrial past in ways that conceal the industry’s conflict-ridden history and ‘how the past becomes part of the present’ (Frisch 1990: 188). The resulting disconnection between industrialisation and de-industrialisation helps to promote an ahistorical perspective, which in turn makes it easier to commodify the past and deny the unique cultural identities of specific places as well as of their past and present inhabitants. Ironically, the link between conservation of cultural heritage and financial outcomes has been enshrined in key documents produced by the United Nations.

Globalisation, cultural heritage and the role of sustainable development

The World Summit for Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg in September 2002 played a critical role in extending focus beyond environmental management to a wide range of social problems and processes. In this context, the connection between sustainable development and heritage generally, as well as cultural heritage more specifically, was made more prominent, a development that was supported by the fact that 2002 was designated the United Nations (UN) Year for Cultural Heritage (United Nations 2002). Accordingly, Point 14 of the Annex to the UN’s Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development stressed that ‘new challenges and opportunities for the pursuit of sustainable development’ had been created by globalisation with its attendant ‘rapid integration of markets, mobility of capital and significant increases in investment flows around the world’ (United Nations 2002: 3). Point 43 (b) of the Annex Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development therefore recommended the development of programmes:

that encourage people to participate in eco-tourism, enable indigenous and local communities to develop and benefit from eco-tourism, and enhance stakeholder cooperation in tourism development and heritage preservation, in order to improve the protection of the environment, natural resources and cultural heritage (United Nations 2002: 33).

Such advocacy of a marriage between tourism and cultural heritage may implicitly recognise the value of cultural heritage and the human, psycho-social benefits of preserving and managing heritage but the translation of this recommendation into practice, in my view, results in an emphasis on means over ends. As I see it, in a world dominated by the imperatives of globalisation (and often economic rationalism) this orientation transforms the protection of cultural heritage into a by-product of financially-viable strategies and economic outcomes whether focused solely on the development of tourism or any other business enterprise.

As the treatment of developments at the Eveleigh, Swindon and PRR shops will show, this particular balance, or perhaps imbalance, of imperatives and approaches is central to the re-colonisation of these sites, where priority is given to the development of large-scale, commercially-viable (usually private) enterprises and heritage management relies on the investment of public funds for preservation and recreational tourist activities, albeit to varying degrees, depending on local resources and politics. In such contexts, I argue, the memorialising of the past relies predominantly on the preservation of built fabric and industrial machinery and to a lesser extent on the preservation of oral history. As a corollary, the latter is oriented towards a rather narrow focus on the lives and recollections of individual workers, rather than on memories of collective experiences of work, place and community and collective meanings and attachments. Even where an effort has been made to produce strong images of workers, their work and their lives, oral sources are often reduced to an add-on to the historical picture (Lane 1993: 617-8). The difficulty of capturing the reality of workers’ existence, especially for those who have had no first-hand contact with secondary industry, is exacerbated by the neglect of workers’ collective experience of industrial conflict and inequality, as well as the dangers and environmental degradation wrought by industrial production. Hence, we find that at many re-colonised
Industrial heritage, workers' memories and oral history

For most of the twentieth century industrial sites were ‘abandoned once production ceased’ resulting in the neglect of the material remains of ‘activities considered responsible for environmental degradation and for spoiling scenery’ (Edwards & Carles Llurdes I Coit 1996: 343). Such industrial remains failed to excite the same emotional intensity as the steam locomotive. Only after ‘dieselisation’ had replaced steam, and railway networks and passenger services had been downgraded or closed did people begin to act upon the preservation of railway industrial heritage. Only in this context were railway workshop sites transformed into heritage (Samuel 1996: 185, 236 & 243-245; Gray III 1994: 184.). In short, their decline contributed to a growing appreciation of their architectural and technological value and a gave rise to what Edwards and Carles Llurdes I Coit (1996: 342-3) depict as an ‘aesthetics of deindustrialisation’, which reflects the modification of prevailing views about industrial ugliness in those countries where the number of industrial landscapes have vanished.

Such shifts are manifested in the growing efforts to conserve defunct railway workshops and also in the acknowledgement of the contribution made by those who were employed in them. In 2002, for example, UNESCO’s World Heritage Convention (WHC) formally recognised that industrial sites ‘are important milestones in the history of humanity’ because they “testify to the ordeals and exploits of those who worked in them” (UNESCO 2002). A year later, in July 2003, the Nizhny Tagil Charter for Industrial Heritage produced by the International Committee for the Conservation of Industrial Heritage, (2003) in Moscow went one step further by acknowledging that ‘human memories and customs’ are ‘unique and irreplaceable’ resources that should be recorded when they are available because they form an integral component of industrial heritage. As the Charter put it:

… industrial heritage is of social value as part of the record of the lives of ordinary men and women, and as such it provides an important sense of identity. It is of technological and scientific value in the history of manufacturing, engineering, construction, and it may have considerable aesthetic value … These values are intrinsic to the site itself, its fabric, components, machinery and setting, in the industrial landscape, in written documentation, and also in the intangible records of industry contained in human memories and customs. (International Committee for the Conservation of Industrial Heritage 2003)

Appreciation of workers’ contribution to industry and the value of their memories has certainly encouraged the use of oral history by those who are responsible for the redevelopment of derelict industrial sites and the preservation of their remaining material culture. However, the ‘replacement of industry with elements of the service sector’ involves contestation over the needs and interests of diverse stakeholders as well as over whose memories of the past are harnessed, which past is selected and recovered and which image of industrial heritage ‘is commodified for public consumption’ (Summarby-Murray 2002: 49-50). Such contestation is particularly pronounced in those places that have been transformed into museums because these venues create and promote a wide range of often conflicting memories through the objects selected for display, the nature and subject of exhibits, and the content of labels and audio-visuals that reflect particular perspectives and biases (Frisch 1998: 247-8; Taksa 2003a: 391- 410; Wilton 2006). Yet despite this, there does seem to be a consistency in the approach taken to what Summarby-Murray refers to as the ‘re-imaging’ of the industrial past (Summarby-Murray 2002: 49). More often than not museum curators and heritage managers alike tend to adopt oral history as a way of fostering what is commonly referred to as ‘living history’.

Eavesdropping on the past: living history and memory

According to Raphael Samuel (1996: 192), the enthusiasm for ‘living history’ has its origins in the ‘cult of immediacy’ that arose in the UK during the 1960s, which gave ‘a central place to “lived experience”’ and ‘living memory’ and which relied on the use of historical re-enactments and oral testimonies. While the re-enactments were ‘anticipated by railway preservationists of the 1950s’ who had dressed up in the traditional attire of railway workers, the spread of oral history was ‘facilitated by the advent of the portable tape-recorder’ and the ‘use of audio-visual aids’. These devices made it possible ‘to position the spectator as an eavesdropper on the past’ and to create an atmosphere in which that spectator could experience ‘empathy’ with those who lived in the past (Samuel 1996: 197).

The radical-populist historians who began interviewing working people during the 1970s as part of an effort to rescue their lives from obscurity further legitimised the emphasis on lived experience (Passerini 1987; Debouzy 1986; Samuel 1996: p. 193; Perks & Thomson 1998: 1-2). In doing so they encouraged an appreciation among museum curators that oral history can help ‘people make sense of their past, … connect individual experience and its social context’ and ‘interpret their lives and the world around them’ (Frisch 1990: 188). The popularity of oral history that resulted from these developments also had an important effect on railway and industrial heritage.

The exclusive focus on machines and engineering processes that had dominated railway and industry museums was gradually extended to include a broader emphasis on ‘the world of the worker’ (Lane 1993: 9; Wallace 1996: 88; Divall 1998). As the case studies examined below show, this encouraged the preservation of workers’ memories. But developments at a number of industrial heritage sites indicate that the inclusion of oral testimonies in situ is a problematic affair. Where no heritage centres have been established, tapes and transcripts are often relegated to libraries or university offices (Taksa 2003b). In cases like the Boot Cotton Mills Museum in the USA and the Waikato Museum of Art and History in New Zealand, curators have drawn on very few interviews and used limited extracts as adjuncts to their displays of artefacts and industrial processes (Lane 1993: 611;
Goldstein 2000: 129-37; Green 1998: 451-2). This approach has helped to ensure that material objects are valued more than intangible cultural heritage. In turn, it has encouraged a disregard of the problematic nature of social inequalities and class conflict, oppression, danger and industrial pollution that were part and parcel of industrial life (Summerby-Murray 2002: 50). This approach has excluded ‘individuals, and whole social groups from the collective memories and identities on display’ (Dwll 2003: 261). Most importantly, from my perspective, the failure to acknowledge concerns raised in many oral accounts about the impact of economic and industrial change on social experience has helped to avoid ‘the tension between continuity and discontinuity’, particularly in relation to the adaptive re-use of industrial sites (Frisch 1998: 248). In addition, the development of what Terry Wallace (2006: 220) calls ‘a “celebratory interpretative style” that creates’ the impression of ‘a “mythical transport heaven” in which “workers and users are always happy” has enforced an “institutionalised mode of amnesia”, which not only renders “crucial aspects of our industrial past” invisible but also helps to distance us from those processes which have impacted upon our lives’. This approach to oral history and the industrial past is evident in the heritage management strategies adopted at the Eveleigh Railway Workshops, the STEAM Museum and the Altona Railroaders Museum (ARM). Indeed, a close examination of how oral history has been deployed in these places reveals that the method creates tensions for re-colonised industrial sites precisely because they have an inherently ambiguous relationship with the past; their successful transformation relies on an ability to fabricate entirely new environments in which workers and citizens become volunteers, consumers and co-conspirators in representations of ‘various pasts’ as ‘unproblematic givens’, as ‘dead events ... segregated from the present’ (Wallace 1996: x, 26 & 89; Lowenthal 1996: 1-2; Samuel 1996: 266 & 306; Summerby-Murray 2002: 58). Of course this apparent discontinuity underpins efforts to preserve, display and celebrate the material and social remains of a bygone industrial era (Lowenthal 1990: 240). Maintaining the discontinuity, I suggest below, shapes the way memories are presented as part of recreational tourist strategies. In effect, the economic imperatives of industrial heritage tourism rely on the deployment of oral history in ways that help to promote nostalgia (Prentice, Witt & Hamer 1998).

The Eveleigh Railway Workshops

Described by one employee as the ‘heart of the NSW transport system’, the NSW government-owned Eveleigh Railway Workshops in Sydney operated for just over a hundred years between the 1880s and the late 1980s (Jones 1939). In 1988, one year before its operations were finally terminated as a result of changes to government funding strategies and public transport policy, the site’s heritage value was recognised by being listed on the Register of the National Estate, where it was described as one of ‘the finest examples of late nineteenth and early twentieth century industrial buildings’ and the ‘greatest monument to the history of transport in New South Wales’ (Register of the National Estate 1988). The NSW Government’s appreciation of this heritage was, however, affected by the site’s scale and its location. The reality of owning 62 acres of extremely valuable real estate four kilometres south of Sydney’s Central Business District imposed immense pressure on the Government to introduce a programme of economic revitalisation. As a result, Eveleigh was chosen as the venue for a technology park in which high-tech start-up companies could help ‘catapult Australian industries into world-leader class’ in the twenty-first century (Brennan 1996).

The Australian Technology Park (ATP) was established in the main Locomotive workshop, the New Locomotive workshop and the Works Managers’ Office in the mid-1990s after they were refurbished at a cost of well over A$40 million. In order to meet the heritage management requirements placed upon it by the NSW Government, the ATP raised an additional A$25 million for the conservation and adaptive reuse of the buildings and another A$300,000 to match a State Government grant for the conservation of Eveleigh’s remaining machinery (NSW Department of Planning 1993, 1994 & 1995; Brennan 1996; Farrelly 1996). In the meantime the NSW State Rail Authority continued to occupy Eveleigh’s Train Cleaning Sheds, Stores Building and Paint Shop and until 2004, it leased the Carriage and Wagon Shops to private tenants.

The redevelopment of the locomotive workshops led to intense lobbying during the late 1980s and 1990s by those concerned about the need to preserve the site’s industrial heritage. Their efforts were rewarded. The NSW government responded not only by allocating an immense amount of money for the conservation of Eveleigh’s tangible remains but also by commissioning numerous heritage assessment reports and conservation plans most of which emphasised the significance of the site’s architectural and technological significance and its tangible material culture. In 1995, however, the ‘Eveleigh Railway Yards Locomotive Workshops Conservation Management Plan’ recommended the production of an inventory of moveable items and relics and also the employment of an historian to undertake research and consult ‘with former workers and managers and with long term residents’ in order to provide an historical context for the machines and ‘an adequate basis for site interpretation’ (NSW Department of Public Works and Services 1995). Yet, despite its recognition of the need for both technological history and social history, this report privileged the former by stressing that oral history interviews should focus on eliciting ‘operational information and stories associated with …[the] history of each machine’ (NSW Department of Public Works and Services 1995: section 2.8, p. 6). The prevailing view that Eveleigh’s heritage value centers on its technological significance therefore shaped the nature of the Management Plan for Moveable Items and Social History. For those interviewed for the oral history that informed the social history, however, the machines they had operated rarely figured as significant features of their lived experience. Instead, their stories focused on the impact of economic and political conditions on Eveleigh’s operations, specific events such as industrial disputes and elections, working conditions and occupational health and safety (or the absence of both), workplace relations and also industrial, political and recreational activities (Godden Mackay Heritage Consultants 1996).

The site managers’ overarching concern about Eveleigh’s technological heritage and tangible material culture also affected the subsequent use of the Management Plan. While the inventory of moveable items became central to the conservation of the redundant machinery collection housed in the main Locomotive workshop building, the Social History and its volumes of oral history transcripts and historical photographs have rarely been consulted or employed for
interpretation purposes. Nor has any effort or funding been given to the formulation of a comprehensive interpretation strategy that could make Eveleigh's intangible cultural heritage accessible to the broader community. In fact, the relative allocation of funding for oral histories with retired workers and for the representation of their experiences in situ has been abysmally small. In the first place not enough money was available to undertake many interviews for the oral history project that formed part of the Social History Report. This reinforced the obscurity of Eveleigh's more marginalised workers, notably the women, the migrants and the Indigenous Australians who worked at Eveleigh throughout its history, albeit in relatively small numbers (Taksa 2003b). Neither was any effort made to contextualise Eveleigh's material culture with information from accounts produced by professional and amateur historians (Preston 1997; Taksa 1996; Butcher 2004). Interpretation has been limited to design proposals and the manufacture and erection of signage, which has ensured that there are no reminders of the toll, conflict and struggle that shaped Eveleigh's identity (Emmett & Warner 1998; Davies 2000). The tens of thousands of workers who built, maintained and repaired steam locomotives, manufactured various metal components and assembled and painted carriages in its immense, cavernous structures, have vanished into the ether (Taksa 2003b). The impact that people have had on this physical environment and how it shaped and was shaped by them has been obscured. Eveleigh might well be construed as a theatre of memory, but it only offers a stage full of props, devoid of drama and actors. In short, preservation and heritage management have been subordinated by the primary focus on economically sustainable redevelopment. The human, psychosocial benefits of cultural heritage do not figure in the equation.

Visitors to Eveleigh today are given no real opportunity to engage with the past of this place or to appreciate its impact on everyday life, culture and politics. Only in those buildings occupied by the ATP are members of the public able to view Eveleigh's remaining machinery and tool collection, which continues to gather dust in Bays 1 and 2 of the main locomotive workshop — the only parts of the site excluded from redevelopment by an order of the Heritage Council of NSW in 1996 (Taksa 2003b). The heritage walk launched by the ATP in 2003 certainly invited visitors to retrace the footsteps of those who once worked at Eveleigh, but formal tours have been few and far between (Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority). Only a handful of photographic and text panels have been mounted on the interior walls of the main locomotive workshop, which provide little insight into the workers’ lives and memories. Visitors can do little more than admire the scale of the buildings and industrial relics and read the plaques that name them and explain their nature. No evidence remains of the work processes, knowledge and skills that were central to Eveleigh's operations nor of those who produced and used the machines and tools, of the social structure of the workplace or the broader social, economic and political context in which the site operated. For many retired Eveleigh workers the result is disorienting and disheartening. The high-tech deluxe office spaces they encounter when they roam the locomotive workshops, particularly during Open Days held to commemorate Eveleigh’s heritage, fail to provide the sense of ‘a familiar landscape’ or the ‘special and shared attachments’ that were created by Eveleigh’s longevity of use (Pearson and Sullivan 1995: 15). Such people find little comfort in the large machines that have been dotted throughout the building’s open spaces like gravestones. The workers’ collective identities and experiences have been lost. The NSW Government’s decision, announced in 2002, to allocate around A$30 million to turn the carriage workshops building on the site's northern side into an arts and theatre centre has had similar outcomes since no funds were allocated for interpretation of this building’s cultural heritage. The Government was immune to the public anger expressed in response to this development by a wide range of stakeholders. Indeed, the Government’s flagrant disregard of community concern was further manifested in 2004 when its newly created redevelopment authority for the South Sydney region was given powers to override the State’s own heritage laws and regulations (Jamal 2001; Hallett 2002; O’Rourke 2003; Jopson & Ryle 2004). An Open Day at the new Carriageworks Performing Arts Centre in January 2007, certainly attracted many retired Eveleigh workers who expressed willingness to provide access to their memories. But lack of public funding and infrastructure for the preservation of intangible cultural heritage means that this willingness is unlikely to result in oral history projects in the foreseeable future.

Of course, some might argue that nostalgia is the driving force behind the willingness of retired workers to provide access to their memories, to attend open days at the site and to engage in struggles to preserve Eveleigh’s tangible and intangible cultural heritage along side railway buffs, historians, heritage engineers and architects, local residents and members of their own families. However, this does not in itself devalue their recollections, the meaning the site holds for them or their attachment to it. More importantly, any close examination of the oral history transcripts that have been produced since the site’s closure demonstrates that the site’s heritage value for such people is not primarily driven by nostalgia. In stark contrast to the emphasis on the romance of the steam era evident in the presentation of the site’s tangible heritage, these people define the site’s value in terms of their employment experiences, the way Eveleigh enabled them to fulfil their material needs and support their families, develop long-standing relationships with other workers, as well as their efforts to produce quality work and to join with others in the struggle to improve the conditions of labour and life. The failure to present extracts from these testimonies at the site, in any medium, has ensured that those who once worked at Eveleigh, who brought life to it and who ensured that the transport needs of the city and the state were fulfilled over a whole century have been excluded from public memorialising. While buildings and machines have been conserved, access to Eveleigh’s cultural heritage has been seriously constrained by its diverse new uses.

The re-colonisation of this decommissioned industrial site reflects the convergence of global changes in communications technology and the international idolatry of entertainment. In this context, sustainable development is clearly focused on economic imperatives rather than the psycho-social needs of the community. The very things that made this site of heritage significance, that provided people with a special ‘sense of place’ and ‘identity’, are qualities that have been lost from it. While the remaining buildings provide some indication of Eveleigh’s uniqueness, its incorporation into the so-called ‘global village’ helps to generate what Casey (1998: xii) refers to as ‘an indifferent sameness-of-place’ evident in many cities around the world. The failure to invest in people’s memories of this site and strategies to make them accessible in situ reinforces the penetration of global forces and illustrates the...
intimate connection between the global and the local. For some people this outcome can be linked to the failure to establish a museum or heritage centre at Eveleigh. But attention to those museums that have been established at re-colonised railway workshops would suggest that the problem is far more complex.

**Railway heritage in the United Kingdom**

British interest in railway heritage has a long history. Indeed, it can be said that the value placed on this transport system has no parallel in the world. Yet recent developments at the Swindon railway workshops demonstrate that conservation of industrial heritage and the memorialising of the railways’ cultural heritage has been profoundly affected by post-colonial globalisation.

The nationalisation of the British railways after 1948 and their subsequent modernisation encouraged the preservation of railway relics and records and an appreciation of the social and cultural significance of railway heritage. It was against this backdrop that the Great Western Railway (GWR) museum was established in Swindon in 1962 in a Swindon Lodging Barracks and adjacent small cottage. Here the focus was on the antiquarian collection of artefacts (Cattell & Falconer 1995: 160-3). At this stage and for some decades afterwards the GWR’s Swindon railway workshops stood outside the boundaries of railway heritage. Only after they were closed in 1986 during a period of economic recession, and after the 56.8 hectare site was sold, was interest stimulated in preserving what was thought by some to be ‘the finest of all railway centres’. The closure, with its loss of 2,000 jobs, and the arrival of the ‘demolition men’ marked ‘the end of an era’ for Swindon and the end of ‘an illustrious chapter in the history of British railway engineering’. At the same time these developments launched ‘an alternative life for the Works site’. On the one hand, ‘two of several old workshops’ were listed by English Heritage and this saved them ‘from the bulldozer’ by the heritage agencies. Arguably its approach provides an exemplary case of sustainable development. The GWR Outlets Village opened in 1997 and during its first year of operation it attracted 4.5 million people. As the Company’s Chief Executive put it:

> The investment we made in the Great Western was some 50 million pounds, considerably greater than if the place had been torn down and new sheds put up, but since our company chose to work with the physical history of Swindon we’re getting a greater return. Because, with a lot of helping hands, we linked the past to the present and the present to the future. (Falconer 2000: 25)

The Company’s support was obviously important in protecting the site’s material culture but the preservation of its cultural heritage owed more to a grant of £7.96 million from the National Heritage Memorial Lottery Fund, which provided 75 per cent of the total budgeted cost of £11.6 million required for a proposed museum at this site. This ‘unlocked’ other sources of funding. Not only did the developer give additional assistance, the new Swindon Borough Council also contributed £1 million toward the museum, which was deemed to be ‘emblematic of the tremendous esteem in which the railway is still held in Swindon’ (Madgin 1997: 26; Falconer 2000: 24-7).

The STEAM museum was opened in June 2000 in one of the buildings of the GWR workshops with the aim of interpreting the manufacturing processes which took place at the Swindon works and of telling the stories about those who were employed at the workshops and more broadly by the GWR. STEAM is not like most railway museums. Despite its name, which clearly seeks to draw on nostalgic associations, it is not dominated by an antiquarian obsession with locomotives. Subtitled, a ‘social history’ museum with a railway theme, it seeks to give tourists, families and school groups an ‘authentic’ experience of a workshop through artefacts, interactive devices and oral history. Although efforts to provide visitors with demonstrations of engineering work in one bay of the building failed, STEAM draws on interview format videos to help plunge visitors ‘into the world of the railway worker’. Its ‘theme park’ approach conveys various aspects of the history of the workshop and the transport system it maintained, as well as an impression of the workers’ skills and methods. Interview format videos, together with voice-overs and life-size and life-like figures rely on Swindon’s residents. It is beyond the scope of this paper to quote from the testimonies used. What can be said is that they focus almost exclusively on work processes. While female munitions and clerical workers are acknowledged, their memories are not. Nor do any of the interviews mention the links between skill and identity, membership of trade unions or collective industrial action. No effort has been made to tell the story of how the Swindon works were closed and transformed into the country’s largest retail designer outlets regeneration village or of the museum’s birth (Whalley 2000; Kardas 1992; STEAM; Taksa 2003a). Even though these two developments were hailed as a ‘triumphant milestone in the regeneration of one of the most important industrial heritage sites in the United Kingdom’, the effort to re-create a ‘realistic’ work setting at this museum, has resulted in a linear perspective of progress that conceals the hardship of industrial labour and the struggles that workers engaged in to improve their lives (Falconer 2000: 21). By failing to present the re-colonisation of this site as part of the story of industrialisation and de-industrialisation, its past is effectively cut off from its present. Visitors have no way of understanding the meaning of this site for those who worked there and those who lived in its vicinity or how they view its redevelopment.
Altoona railroaders memorial museum

Similar developments are evident in the USA, where Congress responded to the impact of de-industrialisation by initiating and funding the American Industrial Heritage Project (AIHP) ‘to commemorate and celebrate the industries of coal mining, iron and steel fabrication and railroad transportation’ and to promote tourism (Barton 1994: 44). Six oral history folk-life centres were set up at different locations, including the Altoona Railroaders Memorial Museum (ARMM). Opened in 1980 at the site of the first railway works built in 1850 by the Pennsylvania Railroad, this museum initially obtained AIHP funding for the preservation of the Master Mechanics building, as well as for an extensive historical research project on Altoona and a comprehensive interpretation plan that aimed to draw on ‘the men and women who lived the Altoona experience’ for ‘story lines’ (Barton 1994: 46).

From the outset the Museum’s mission was ‘to honour railroad workers’ and to promote ‘the education, enjoyment and enrichment of present and future generations’. During its first thirteen years of existence it attracted over 350,000 visitors and a documentary to honour the workers’ contribution was also made using 150 audiotapes and 40 videotapes (Barton 1994: 43 & 45). Yet as Lane points out, this film mainly conveys ‘a sense of [the] romantic aura of railroading during the era of steam-powered trains’ rather than any real insight into the collective experience of what industrial life was like in Altoona (1993: 612). Certainly, since the ARMM was re-opened in 1998, it has continued to acknowledge the importance of the 17,000 people who were employed by the PRR during its height. It has also made greater use of interactive and audio-visual displays to tell stories of ‘railroading life and labor’ at work and at home ‘using the experience of Altoona, Pennsylvania as the example’ (Dunham Studios 2006). But like STEAM, the emphasis here continues to be placed on the recreation of ‘historically accurate work scenes’ and artefacts (Dunham Studios 2006). The workers’ world is isolated in the past. No attention is given to the way this place became a site of heritage and nostalgia.

Collective memory, de-industrialisation, globalisation

There is no doubt that oral history helps to acknowledge the role played by workers in creating our railway heritage and in preserving and memorialising the railway’s cultural heritage. But the cases examined here illustrate that it is rarely deployed in a way that does justice to the complex nature of industrial life or to the dislocations created by de-industrialisation (Cohen 1989: 671). The resulting failure to address the relationship between the two phenomena obscures the nature of people’s attachments to heritage places and the meanings they draw from them. Regardless of whether the workers’ contribution to railway heritage is virtually disregarded as is the case at Eveleigh or whether the ‘world of the worker’ is celebrated as at Swindon and Altoona, it would appear that workers’ ability ‘to hand down their history to the next generation’ is being severely circumscribed by radical changes associated with globalisation and an economic orientation towards sustainable development (Wallace 1996: 25-6).

The emphasis on the ‘romance of the steam era’, on industrial techniques and technologies and the ‘lived experience’ of individual workers fails to really engage with the motivations of those who willingly provide access to their memories of work and their time as volunteers at sites of industrial heritage. From one perspective such involvements can be read as a nostalgically inspired resistance against globalisation; that is, as an effort to ‘cling to the remaining familiar vestiges’ in the face of massive change (Lowenthal 1990: 399). Indeed, according to Heron (2000: 182), workers, trade union activists and labour historians become involved in industrial heritage and oral history projects in an effort to find ‘threads of a tradition of resistance’ that can validate current struggles against the loss of ‘hard-won gains’. As has been demonstrated by the cases examined here, however, if this is indeed a motivator, then such people must be extremely disappointed by the lack of attention to their collective traditions.

As importantly, people’s efforts to preserve the intangible aspects of industry’s cultural heritage can also be seen as a form of resistance against ‘the encroachment of an indifferent sameness-of-place’ promoted by globalisation. In short, efforts to preserve industrial heritage can be viewed as evidence of a growing desire to promote ‘the particularity of place’. As Casey (1998: xiii.) correctly points out this is not ‘just a matter of nostalgia’. On the contrary, it provides a measure of a locality’s distinctive identity and an expression of what it means to have lived and worked in a particular place.

Now it may well be concluded that industrial museums support such efforts. I would, however, beg to disagree. No doubt the ‘re-imaging’ of the industrial era for public consumption through sanitised heritage buildings, machinery displays and the memories of individual workers supports sustainable development strategies in the form of new commercial endeavours or industrial heritage tourism. Yet this very same ‘re-imaging’ obscures the fact that the collapse of manufacturing and the downgrading of railway operations, services and employment involves conscious policy choices to move capital and enterprise to other countries and to shift public services and operations to the private sector (Summerby-Murray 2002: 49-50; Wallace 1996: x, 92-3; Frisch 1998: 247-8). In a place like Eveleigh, the sale of publicly-owned railway land to enable residential and commercial development has fundamentally cut the industrial past off from the post-colonial global present, with little regard for the social costs of community dislocation. At Swindon and Altoona, the pursuit of the tourist dollar has resulted in a romanticised approach to the steam era and the life of workers during it. In these industrial museums workers’ stories of struggles to protect their conditions of labour are disregarded along with their struggles to protect the places in which they once worked.

Conclusion

De-industrialisation and globalisation have contributed to the demise of industrial landscapes, the appreciation of industrial heritage, efforts to preserve workers’ memories and the spread of industrial museums. Yet the promotion of sustainable development focused on economic outcomes has effectively, albeit perhaps inadvertently, resulted in the neglect of cultural landscapes created by collective experiences, traditions, practices, and memories. In turn, the ability of future generations to understand what life was like during the industrial era and the reasons why industrial heritage holds meaning for those who lived through it have been profoundly undermined.
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