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The South Wales Heritage Tourism Industry and Small Industrial Museums

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Abstract

This paper will critically evaluate the importance of the 'historic environment' and small industrial museums in the context of heritage tourism using the Coalfield Landscape of the South Wales Valleys (1850-2003) as a case study analysis. The paper will be focused on the changing patterns of the landscape, both socially, culturally, physically and economically. This will be explored through an analysis of the changing patterns of the landscape from an industrial area to an area that has attempted to use this resource to regenerate through the introduction of the 'heritage tourism product'. The paper will identify potential possibility for future development within the context of current issues and debates that encompass the industry. The geographical focus of this paper will span North from the city of Cardiff, encompassing the five central and Eastern valleys of the Rhondda, Cynon, Taff, Rhymney and Sirhowy.

The research methodology has involved four stages including (1) a review of the 'historic environment' and small industrial museums in the context of heritage tourism in the South Wales Valleys, (2) a general survey of small industrial museums in South Wales in relation to heritage tourism properties in Wales, (3) a case study analysis of the extent to which business formats are exploited in relation to the historic environment, and (4) a discussion with recommendations to develop a regional policy for business activities for small industrial museums in South Wales. The paper concludes with an overview of how the present heritage tourism industry policy structures in Wales can develop an 'entrepreneurial philosophy' for small industrial museums in both the rural and urban setting.

Key words: small industrial museums, heritage, tourism

Introduction

Mention South Wales and the imagination immediately conjures up images of miners, coal mines and heavy industry. Indeed, a visitor to the South Wales valleys in 1850 would have been greeted by a landscape that was experiencing vast changes to both the social, cultural, physical and economic fabric (Rhondda Heritage Park, 2002). The South Wales Landscape in the early 1800s displayed little evidence of the 'landscape archaeology' with which we are familiar today. In historical terms the landscape archaeology of the South Wales coalfield can be traced to the formative years of the nineteenth century. Before the early nineteenth century the valleys of South Wales were predominantly concerned with agricultural industries consisting of local monoglot Welsh speaking families that had occupied small farmsteads for several generations (Phillips, 2003). For example the Rhondda valleys coalfield of 1850 employed less than one thousand men compared to the hundred and sixty eight thousand that crammed the two valleys, fifty years later, at the turn of the twentieth century (Dicks, 2000) (Lewis, 1963).

Historic Environment

The linchpin to the growth of the coalmining industry in South Wales was the strategic port of Cardiff (Daunton, 1977). In the early 1800s Cardiff had no coal export industry of any significance. *"By 1815, 865 tons were exported: in 1819, 34,606 tons: in 1829, 83,729 tons: and in 1839 211,214 tons"* (Daunton, 1977: 2). Daunton (1977) suggests that this economic revolution that engulfed Cardiff was wholly based on the 'coal metropolis' of the South Wales valleys. A report by the Board of Trade in 1908 stated that *"there is no more interesting study in town growth and development than Cardiff. At the census of 1851 it was a place of some 20,000 inhabitants with no influence in commerce and with no reputation. Now, it is one of the most thriving cities in the country, a centre of trade and commerce and a great port. In every respect the development has been remarkable"* (Board of Trade, 1908 in Daunton, 1977: 1). Between 1800 and 1914 the *"sparsely populated"* (Daunton, 1977: 6) hinterland surrounding Cardiff had mushroomed to become one of the most densely populated regions in the UK. The increase in population stemming north from Cardiff, had increased thirty-fold in this one hundred year period (Daunton, 1977).

The economic structure of South Wales can be measured in terms of comparative industrial sectors. Traditionally the centre/Eastern valleys of South Wales dominant industry before 1850 had been agriculture. During the sixty years, from 1850-1910, *"the actual numbers in agriculture had declined from 135,000 to 96,000 whilst those in mining had increased in a most spectacular fashion from 65,000 to 256,000"* (Williams, 1983: 38). It is clearly evident that the mining industry in the late nineteenth century was of significant influence to the landscape archaeology of South Wales. It is however overly simplistic to propose that the impact of coal mining was exclusively economic. If we are to define landscape archaeology as *"explaining how what we see today came to look the way it does"* (Everson & Williamson, 1998: 1) we must relate these changes to people's relationships with their environment. Both 'landscape archaeology' and 'landscape history' are interchangeable in terms of 'how we have got to where we are' (Muir, 2000). The economic, social and cultural elements of our landscape history have shaped the landscape archaeology of South Wales and indeed our perception of that landscape.

The decline of the coal mining industry in the South Wales valleys was *"even more rapid than its rise"* (Rhondda Heritage Park, 2002). Following World War One the UK was no longer the dominant world economy that it had been. Intense global competition and *"alternative fuel sources"* (Rhondda Heritage Park, 2002) meant both demand and prices fell rapidly. The South Wales coalfield was in a particularly delicate position as it had relied too heavily on the coal mining industry and had placed minimal relevance on a diverse portfolio of industrial products (Daunton, 1977). In barely seventy-five years the South Wales landscape had been 'industrialised' and had witnessed a change not only in physical and economic terms but in the socio-cultural structures of the indigenous and external populations.

The South Wales coalfield, significantly, sits at a geographically advantageous position. The valleys of Rhondda, Cynon, Taff, Rhymney and Sirhowy run to the port of Cardiff. Indeed, preliminary mineral exploration in these five valleys was focused upon the exporting of coal via the city of Cardiff (Daunton, 1977). The production of coal led to infrastructural development that was to become synonymous with the landscape archaeology of South Wales. Culturally the fabric of the region had experienced immense change during the early period of the coalmining revolution. The promise of employment, housing and a secure future drew individuals and families from across Europe. The central/Eastern valleys of South Wales have a predominantly

cosmopolitan mix of nationalities that have settled in a variety of local and wider communities. This scale of analysis spans a period of immense change to both the physical and social landscapes of South Wales. The landscape archaeology of the South Wales valleys in 2004 can present a significant picture of the one hundred and fifty-year period from 1850-2004. It is this landscape that has been inherited by a generation that no longer is dependant on the industrial economics that were associated with coalmining.

During the latter part of the twentieth century *"de-industrialisation in Wales, both in the coal mining and steel producing industries, has shifted the focus from these traditional heavy industries, associated with the principality, to the commodification, and in many cases trivialisation, of these industries as heritage products"* (Thomas et al, 2003: 2). Indeed the South Wales coalfield landscape, so often associated with physical and cultural rape, has during the last twenty years become a focus for interest as the human elements of the landscape have become an area of personal and professional interest. It is evident that the coalfield landscape of South Wales, and individual sites, are no longer viewed as 'blots' on the landscape, but rather as a contribution to the landscape and the socio-cultural landscape history that they display. If we are to define the historic environment as those landscapes which have been given meaning through human impact then it is this historic environment that has provided us with the raw material that is now so crucial to the survival of this fragile, yet rich landscape.

Dicks (2000) suggests that heritage sites have been mushrooming in the UK for several decades. The South Wales central/Eastern valleys have by no means been excluded from this cultural phenomenon. As Owen (1984) suggests *"the scars of the Industrial Revolution have hitherto been regarded as a deterrent in the development of tourism in Wales. But there is no reason why the reminders of an exciting period in the history of Britain could not be developed to the advantage of tourism"* (Owen, 1984 in Edwards & Coit, 1996: 341). The heritage product and the term heritage tourism are by definition problematic concepts. Swarbrooke (1994) considers that heritage *"as a tourism product is a relatively recent development"* (Swarbrooke, 1994 in Thomas et al, 2003: 3) created in the 1970s as a means to conceptualising an industry that had become both broad and diverse (Thomas et al, 2003). Johnson and Thomas (1995) are clear in their evaluation that heritage is increasingly employed to *"describe virtually anything by which some link, however tenuous or false, may be forged (or linked) to the past"* (Johnson and Thomas, 1995 in Thomas et al, 2003: 3). However, if we are to define heritage as the product of our socio-cultural, economic and physical past then it is clear that the historic environment, in the context of the heritage tourism product, is of critical importance. As the Chambers (1996) interpretation of the English Dictionary suggests heritage is simply *"that which we have inherited"*.

The heritage boom that has characterised the UK tourism industry, during the thirty year period from 1970-2000, has been linked to a number of explanations. It has been extensively documented that there has been both an economic and cultural interest in heritage (Garrod and Fyall, 2000) (Harrison, 1994). The UK has seen an unprecedented growth in heritage museums as entrepreneurs react to the resurgence of interest in the nostalgic associations of the individual and societal past.

The ten year period spanning 1975-1985 was to have an immense impact both upon the landscape history and landscape archaeology of the South Wales central/Eastern coalfield. The traditional industrial landscape that had dominated South Wales for over one hundred and fifty years was to be progressively replaced during this period by a service economy (Dicks, 2000) (Edwards & Coit, 1996). This service economy in South Wales yet again symbolised the ability of the region to respond, as it had a hundred and fifty years earlier, to its changing needs. However, there was an inherent problem

in the central/Eastern valleys of South Wales in the early 1980s, as regionalised communities were encouraged to proactively develop an industry sector that traditionally had minimal usage (Dicks, 2000). The landscape resource inherited by the communities of the central/Eastern South Wales valleys remains in 2004 the *"sleeping giant of the Welsh economic revival"* (Thomas et al, 2003: 1) as both local authorities, central bodies (such as the Wales Tourist Board) and local regions fail to implement a coherent, co-ordinated and effective strategy to develop the coalmining heritage (Wales Tourist Board, 2000 & 2003).

The central/Eastern valleys of South Wales are dominated by two examples of how, in contrasting terms, the historic resource has been developed. Dicks (2000) proposes that of the half a dozen coalmining attractions in South Wales only Big Pit, in the Sirhowy Valley, and the Rhondda Heritage Park, at Trehafod, represent sizeable attractions with clear economic strategies.

Big Pit is clearly a development that illustrates the importance of the historic environment in the context of heritage tourism. Big Pit stands *"way ahead of Rhondda Heritage Park in terms of the numbers of visitors and the levels of funding that it attracts"* (Dicks, 2000:17). The mine played a significant role in the landscape history of the Sirhowy valley, employing 1500 men and producing over two hundred and fifty thousand tons of coal annually (Big Pit, 1992). By 1980 the mine had reached the end of its productive life but it was felt that it played *"too important a role in the historic community of South Wales's coalmining era"* (Big Pit, 1992) to consign to the historical documents that represent the majority of the coalfield landscape. Big Pit is by far the most successful coalmining attraction in Wales, attracting visitors *"to a part of industrial South Wales not normally associated with tourism"* (Johnson, 1990 in Edwards & Coit, 1996: 357). If the example of Big Pit enables this link between the past and future of landscape history to be bridged then the assumption that 'the development of coalmining 'attractions' is purely economic' can be challenged against a backdrop of social, cultural and political values.

Small Industrial Museums, Business Formats and Heritage Tourism

The extent to which business formats are exploited in relation to the historic environment is of considerable importance to the development of small industrial museums and the South Wales Heritage Tourism industry. Indeed, these formats are having a significant impact on the traditional provision of heritage in Wales, which has been associated with small industrial museums. Table 1 shows the number of Heritage Tourism properties in Wales and the important role of the low but significant percentage of small industrial museums.

Table 1: Heritage Tourism Properties and Small Industrial Museums in Wales

Organisation	Number of Properties	Number of Small Industrial Museums	Percentage of Properties that are Small Industrial Museums
CADW	31	1	3%
CMW	88	9	10%
NT	25	2	8%

In fact, in recent years the Heritage Tourism industry has experienced unexpected growth through the diversification of its activities. In particular, to realise this potential the paper argues the case for the adoption of business formats for heritage tourism sites especially small industrial museums in Wales. This has involved the three main

Heritage Tourism bodies in Wales which are CADW: Welsh Historic Monuments, the National Trust (NT) Wales and the Council of Museums in Wales (CMW). The paper reviews the extent to which business formats are exploited through the retail facilities at the sites. This is considered through case study analysis of Cyfartha Castle Museum and Art Gallery in Merthyr Tydfil. The retail facilities include shops, cafés, entrance till areas and visitor information centres. A listing of small museums in South Wales and their retail facilities is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Small Industrial Museums in South Wales and their retail facilities

Name	Facilities	Location	Region
CADW property			
Blaenavon Ironworks	World Heritage Site	Blaenavon	Blaenau Gwent
CMW properties			
Big Pitt National Mining Museum for Wales	Shop, Café	Blaenavon	Blaenau Gwent
Fourteen Locks Canal Centre	Shop	Newport	Newport
Joseph Parry's Ironworks Cottage	Shop	Merthyr Tydfil	Merthyr Tydfil
Kidwelly Industrial Museum	Shop, Café	Kidwelly	Carmarthenshire
Museum of the Welsh Woollen Industry	Shop, Café	Llandysul	Carmarthenshire
Swansea maritime & Industrial Museum	Shop, Café	Swansea	Swansea
National Trust property			
Dolaucothi Gold Mines	Shop, Tea Room	Llanwrda	Carmarthenshire

From the analysis the extent to which small industrial museums promote their business formats through their retail facilities and the way they market these formats is determined. This is considered in relation to their business policy approaches. An important strand which runs through the activities of the three main Heritage Tourism bodies in Wales involves the small industrial museums which are often located individually or on heritage sites. The importance of small industrial museums varies in relation to the operation of the three bodies varying from 3% of the properties in the CADW stock to 8% of the NT and 10% of the CMW stock (Table 1). Consequently, small museums have a significant role to play in the 'Knowledge Economy' on a local, regional and national level.

Case Study Methodology

The research into 'The South Wales Heritage Tourism Industry and Small Industrial Museums' was carried out in four main stages including the following:
1. review of the 'historic environment' and small industrial museums in the context of heritage tourism in the South Wales Valleys,
2. general survey of small industrial museums in South Wales in relation to heritage tourism properties in Wales (described in the last section),
3. case study comparison and analysis of the extent to which business formats are exploited in relation to the historic environment, and
4. discussion with recommendations to develop a regional policy for business activities for small industrial museums in South Wales.

The research strategy has aimed to use the most appropriate methodology to address the specific research questions.

To test the proposition outlined in this paper a semi-structured interview approach was adopted. The interviews were structured into five principal sections. The third column in Table 3 shows whether the questions were of a tactical or a strategic nature of direct relevance to the study (relating to policy issues involved in the extent to which business formats are exploited in relation to the historic environment). The fourth column shows the focus of the interview sections whether concerning the small industrial museum, regional or national (policy issues).

Table 3: Areas discussed during the interviews with key policy makers

Running Order	Area	Question- Tactical (T)/ Strategic (S)	Focus – Small Museum (SM), Regional/National (R/N)
1	Organisational Policy and New Business Formats	T/S	SM, R/N
2	Responsibility within the organisation for New Business Formats	T/S	SM, R/N
3	Long term plans for business structures	S	SM, R/N
4	Funding resources	S	SM
5	New Business Formats developed	S	R/N

The first three stages of the study involved the interviews with key employees at small industrial museums and the use of an interview guide (King, 1994, Bryman, 1992). The interviewees were identified as having knowledge of the extent to which business formats are exploited in relation to the historic environment. The interviews lasted for approximately an hour and a two-page report was transcribed following each interview. The reports were validated through being discussed between the authors confirming the contents (Yin, 1994, Bryman, 1992).

Case Study Findings and Discussion

Cyfartha Castle Museum and Art Gallery is one of a number of heritage tourism properties owned and managed by Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council. The former home of the Crawshay family, the Regency mansion now houses a fine collection of art and a museum *"devoted to the social and industrial history of Wales' most significant town of the industrial revolution"* (MTCBC Web Site, 2004). The great castle at Cyfartha was transformed into a museum in 1910 and currently retains many of the collections and art from the period of the ironmaster William Crawshay. The castle overlooked Crawshay's ironworks and has been called the *"the most impressive monument of the Industrial Iron Age in South Wales"* (MTCBC Web Site, 2004). The museum occupies about 20% of the castle *"comprising six 'state' rooms that house fine art galleries and object displays as well as temporary exhibition space"* (MTCBC Web Site, 2004).

In 2001 Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council, in partnership with the Council of Museums in Wales, commissioned a questionnaire to ascertain the perceived requirements of visitors to the castle exhibitions. Preliminary analysis suggested that visitors felt that there were no interactive elements at the castles' exhibitions and that there was nothing for children to 'play with'. Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council has traditionally adopted a rather conservative approach to the delivery of heritage services, adopting a formal technique in the interpretation of both collections and

exhibitions. The introduction of new business formats was considered inappropriate for the castle and had remained fairly low key for a number of years.

In 2002 Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council decided to work in partnership with the Council of Museums in Wales to develop an interactive exhibition at Cyfartha that would represent the changing requirements of visitors. The 200th anniversary of Richard Trevithick's 'Penydarren Locomotive' was selected as the focus of the exhibition culminating in a summer festival to celebrate the life of the great philanthropist. Trevithick had selected a piece of land close to Merthyr Tydfil to pilot his now legendary locomotive, the first that could pull loads along rails. The Trevithick centenary was an ideal opportunity for the local council to make an active effort to break away from the traditional approach to museum management and to adopt a visitor friendly exhibition based on contemporary business formats. Following a successful Heritage Lottery Fund bid Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council were able to commission an exhibition that would be based upon the life and work of Richard Trevithick. The exhibition would focus on the significance of the industrial revolution and specifically the role of Merthyr Tydfil.

Organisational policy in terms of museum management has traditionally remained fairly conservative. Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council have embraced the proposition that the 'historic environment' can be used as a resource to regenerate as a heritage tourism product. Significant developments at Cyfartha, such as on-line collections and new interpretive developments, suggest a move away from the traditional heritage mission of demarketisation (Thomas, 2004). Garrod & Fyall's (2000) suggestion that the heritage sector is only concerned with maintaining properties in as pristine a condition as possible without actually paying attention to financial solvency and visitor satisfaction has been challenged at Cyfartha with an enterprising and customer based philosophy (Thomas, 2004).

Conclusions

In 2004 the central/Eastern valleys of South Wales is a region that has yet to make the link between the historic environment and the socio-economic benefits of the heritage tourism product (Thomas et al, 2003). The recognition that there is an 'ideological' and often 'curatorial' approach to managing the landscape is well documented (Garrod and Fyall, 2000) (Thomas et al, 2003). However *"cultural landscapes are dynamic, changing places and are not only essential for gaining an insight into the past, but also to ensure that we consider contemporary and future aspects"* (PLB, 2003). The South Wales Industrial Heritage Initiative (2003) has suggested that the philosophy for the future of the South Wales coalfield landscape should be *"that of recognising the importance of conserving key landscapes in their entirety, acknowledging the inextricable links between the natural and cultural heritage encompassing the myriad of ways in which humans have interacted with their environment in the past, and continue to do so"* (PLB, 2003:18). The signs of coalmining are still evident in the valleys of South Wales *"not only in the engine houses and head frames, in the distinctive towns of Glamorgan and Gwent, in their vigorous social life and their traditions of community"* (PLB, 2003: 20). The evidence of one hundred and fifty years of coalmining in the South Wales central/Eastern valleys is clearly evident in the social, cultural and political traditions that encompass the attitudes, philosophies and values regarding the packaging and selling of a very personal heritage as a tourism product.

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