



Arts & Humanities  
Research Council

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# Social Value and the Historic Environment

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Project partners: The Council for British Archaeology; English Heritage;  
Historic Scotland; The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical  
Monuments of Scotland

# My background/interest

- My own interest comes from over a decade of research focusing on people's relationships with the historic environment
- Methods – mainly qualitative social research – interviews and ethnography – combined with an archaeological background and interest in material heritage
- Some policy-related work focusing on significance assessment, particularly in relation to social value of carved stone

# Valuing the Historic Environment Project

- Valuing the Historic Environment: a critical review of existing approaches to social value
- A 4 month project
- Part of the AHRC's overarching Cultural Value Project:  
[http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/Funded-Research/  
Funded-themes-and-programmes/Cultural-Value-Project/](http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/Funded-Research/Funded-themes-and-programmes/Cultural-Value-Project/)
- Based on a critical literature review
- It seeks to advance understanding of how experience of the historic environment creates forms of social value

# Research Context

- A values-based approach now dominates the heritage sector – designation, conservation, management, interpretation.
- For much of C20th emphasis was on “intrinsic” values (historic, evidential, aesthetic, architectural etc)
- Increasing emphasis on social values in the heritage sector
- But how do we investigate or ‘measure’ the social value of heritage places?
- And how do we ‘weigh up’ social value in relation to other kinds of value - historic, evidential, architectural, aesthetic

# What is social value?

- “Social value”: defined in various ways (e.g. Burra Charter, English Heritage, Historic Scotland)
  - Burra Charter - the qualities for which a place has become a focus of spiritual, political, national or other cultural sentiment
  - Communal value: the meanings of a place for the people who relate to it, or for whom it figures in their collective experience or memory (sub-categories – commemorative, spiritual, and social values)
- The relationship between the historic environment and people’s sense of identity, distinctiveness, belonging and well-being, as well as forms of meaning, memory, spiritual association and cultural practice

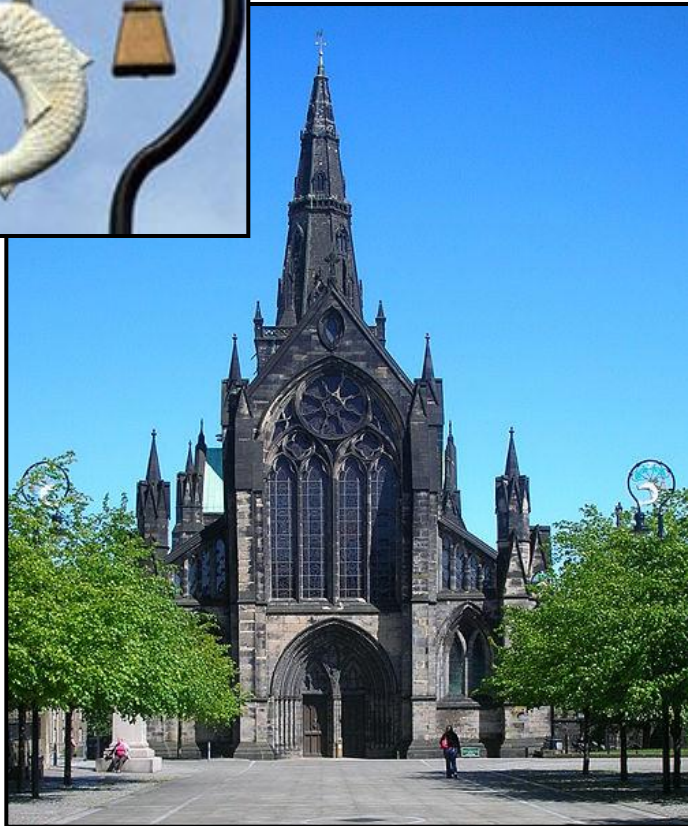
# Glasgow Cathedral



Research on social significance in 2011,  
with Tom Yarrow, Durham University



# National and civic symbolism and identity



# Tourism





# Spiritual value



“I know it’s just stone [a little embarrassed], but I think it absorbs things, it’s like its alive [...] It’s absorbed the presence of the people who’ve been here in the past [...] Just remember, stone speaks.”

(Interview with Margaret, 2011)

Glasgow Cathedral Choir. Photo: S. Jones



Marking Place:  
protest & belonging

- Under-represented' or local heritage places
- Heritage places that lack age, or rarity, or architectural merit
- 'Common' or 'ordinary' places
- Contested places/monuments



Left – Tinkers' Heart; centre – Brixton Market; right – lower section of the Hilton of Cadboll cross slab

# Issues

- Social value often diverges from historical value
- It may not be consciously articulated or easy to access
- Complex relationship between between the tangible & intangible
- It may not be evident – or even related – to the physical fabric of a heritage place
- Dynamic, iterative, contested nature of social values – process of ongoing creation of value

# Questions

- How do we capture/measure such processes of value creation?
- How do we deal with the dynamic, contested and multi-layered nature of social value?
- How do we demonstrate associated social benefits to policy makers?
- Are economic and quantitative forms of valuation going to simplify a complex reality?

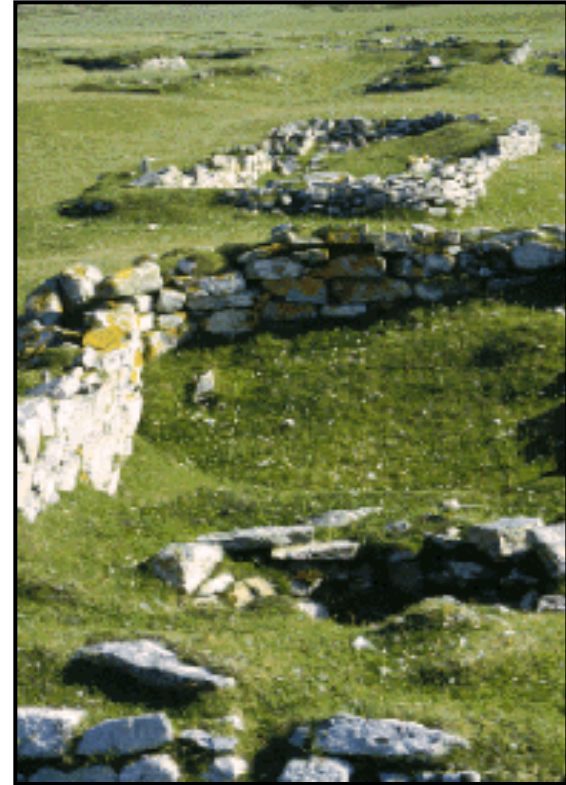
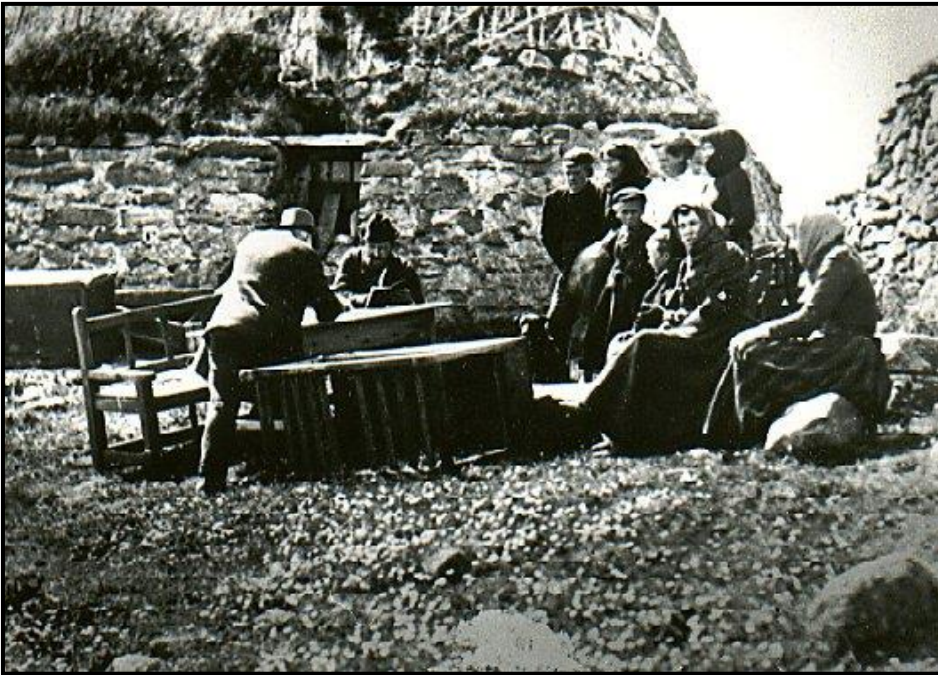
# Methodologies

- There is much confusion and disagreement about how to deal with social value 'on the ground'
- Expert judgement and evaluation
- Consultation
- Attitudinal questionnaire surveys
- Preference and benefit studies

# Hilton of Cadboll fragments



# Metaphor for the Highland Clearances



Baile Lingay, Pabbay, Sound of Harris



# Memory and political action – resisting loss, marginality, decline, and disadvantage

*“Hilton is a backwater on a backwater on a backwater”  
(Interview with Duncan, Hilton resident, 2001)*

*“I look at Hilton stone when it's in the Edinburgh museum it's just a dead headstone among other headstones, just a dead you know, whereas in Hilton it could be a living stone, hopefully as a focus of a living community again and also indirectly basically the catalyst for more development in the place.” (Interview with Alan, Hilton resident, 2001)*

# Qualitative methods

- Focus groups
- Individual and group interviews
- Oral and life histories
- Activity mapping
- Collaborative site visits (with community representatives)
- Ethnography and participant observation

# Community-led and collaborative approaches



A community heritage mapping exercise, Australian Cultural Heritage Management, <http://www.achm.com.au/>



Kilchoan Adopt a Monument Group, Archaeology Scotland <http://kilchoan.blogspot.co.uk/>

# Conclusions



The creation of value:  
heritage practitioners  
and local residents  
discuss the newly  
excavated  
lower section of  
the Hilton of  
Cadboll cross-  
slab (photo S.  
Jones)





# The social value of heritage places – general points

- Multiple contemporary meanings and identities
- Sense of place
- Performance and practice
- Conflicting claims of ownership and belonging
- ‘Unofficial heritage’ and ‘counter memories’
- The importance of the intangible and the ephemeral

# Questions

- Should these forms of value be seen more instrumental than other forms of value?
- Can we capture these kinds of value through quantitative data and forms of evaluation?
- What can a rigorous synthesis of existing research tell us about the social value of the historic environment?
- What are the implications for how we designate, preserve, manage and present heritage places?
- Do we need to develop new approaches and methodologies?