"Why do these residents, looking to overcome serious local challenges, see heritage as part of their toolkit for local improvement? In each of the areas the primary answer has been a different one… but all view their heritage work as a way of generating pride in their area. People are turning to history to answer the question, "who are we really?" in a way that satisfies the demands of the present."

Across England, 150 communities are using £1 million each to make their area a better place to live. They are part of Big Local, a resident-led programme of local transformation, described as 'perhaps the most important and ambitious experiment in community development ever undertaken in the UK'.

Carey Newson explores how four Big Local areas – Ramsey, Plaistow, Gateshead and Boston – are each tapping into unique local histories to reignite pride in their community. Heritage draws on issues of local identity and community cohesion by reminding people they are part of a story that began long before they were born and cannot be written for future generations without them.

This essay is one of a series exploring how people and places are changing through Big Local. Each essay considers the lessons of Big Local for institutions and policymakers interested in radical devolution of power and responsibility to a community level.

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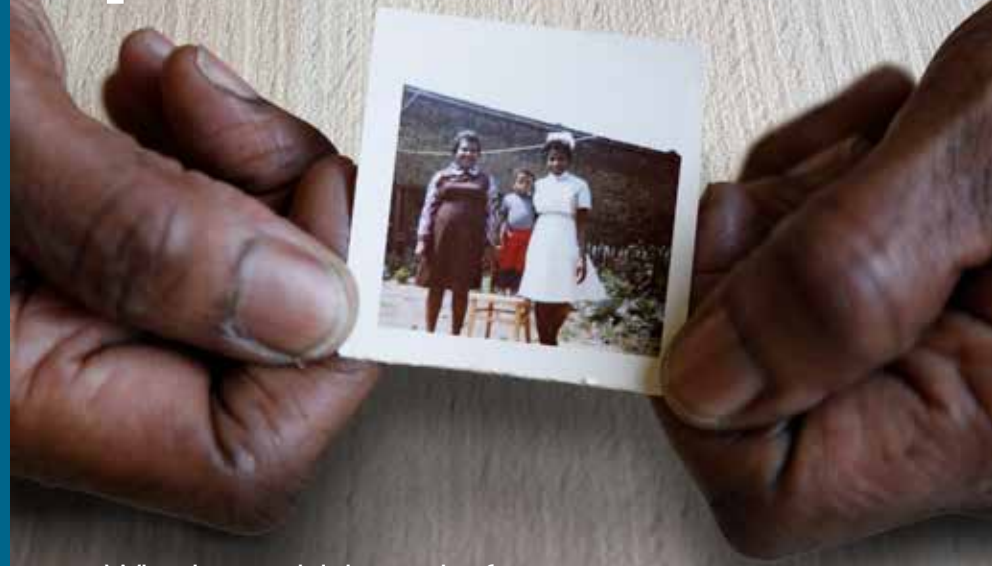
Designs on the past



What can history do for hard-pressed communities?

Carey Newson

About the author

Carey Newson is a writer and researcher in Cultural Geography, Environmental Psychology and wider policy matters. She began her career in journalism and broadcasting working at the BBC's Natural History Unit and then as Assistant Director at Transport 2000. She has an MSc in Environmental Psychology and recently completed a doctorate in Cultural Geography.

Her work revolves around people and places and she is fascinated by the way in which places wear their heritage.

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Designs on the past

What can history do for hard-pressed communities?

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FOREWORD

BIG LOCAL IS ONE OF THE MOST radical and exciting grant programmes ever launched by a major Lottery funder – pioneering resident-led, place-based funding on a scale never before seen in the UK. Local Trust is the delivery vehicle for Big Local, and we are committed to sharing insight and learning from the programme over the whole of its fifteen-year lifespan.

Between 2010-12 the Big Lottery Fund identified 150 areas that had historically 'missed out' on lottery and other funding. Each of those areas was allocated £1m of Big Local funding. This could be spent in any way they chose, provided local residents organised themselves locally to plan and manage that funding, involving the wider community in that decision-making process.

By design, the programme is bottom-up and community-led. Critically, the timeframe for Big Local areas extends over a decade or more. This allows communities to take their time, build confidence and skills, make decisions and deliver change without the usual pressures to meet end-of-year spend targets or other arbitrary bureaucratic deadlines.

Fundamental to the initiative and achievement of the Big Local areas is a vision that, through collective effort, residents can develop the skills, partnerships and confidence that will contribute to their community's success well beyond the conclusion of the programme.

Over the last twelve months, Local Trust has invited a range of writers, thinkers and researchers to reflect on the programme through story-telling and essays, most recently in Dan Gregory's Skittled out? which looks at the importance of social and economic infrastructure to successful places and Stephen Bates' Community Spirits, which explores the changing role of religion and faith in communities.

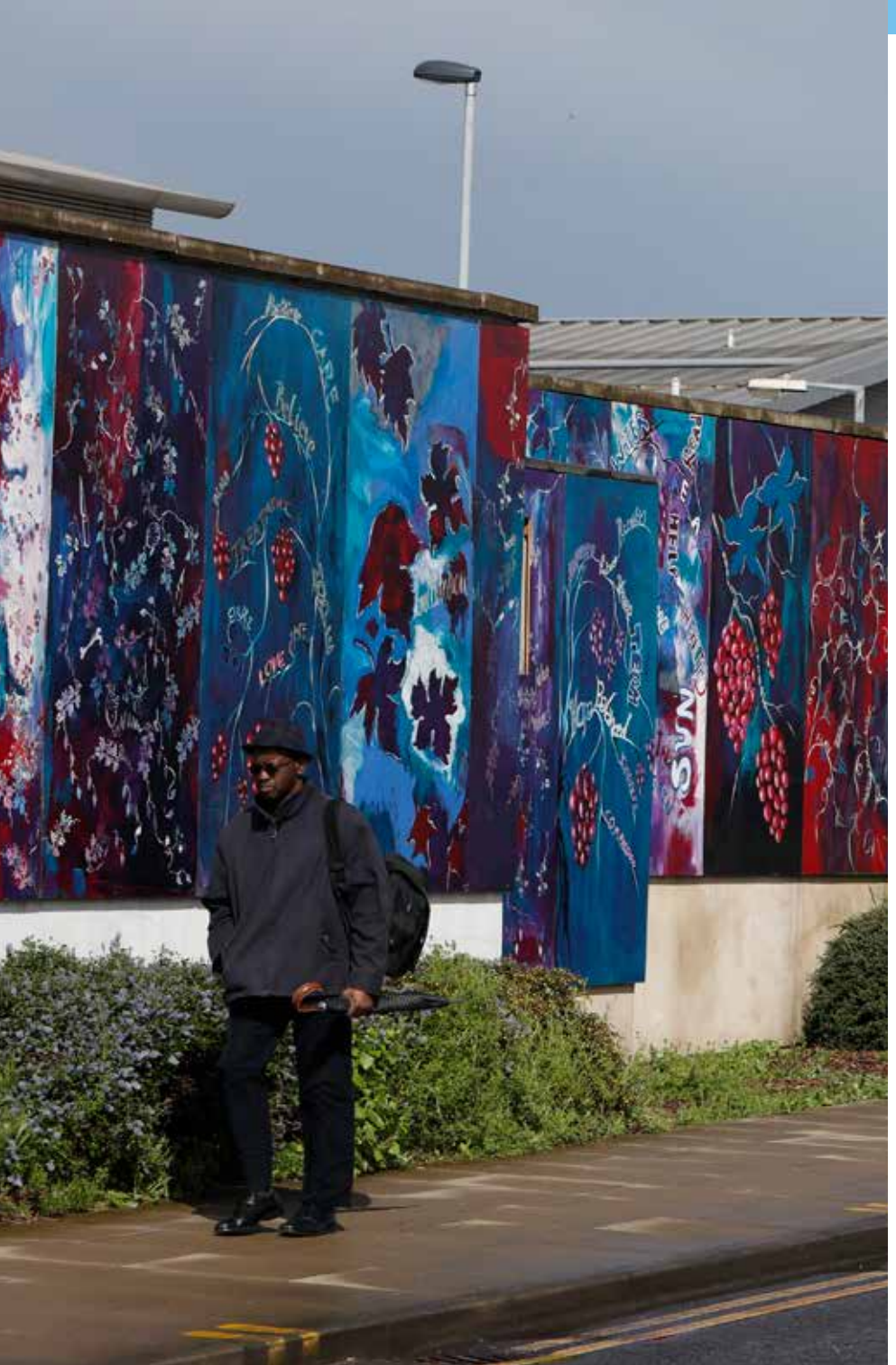
Many Big Local areas contain rich sources of history and heritage, informing and inspiring current resident-led change. They are being used as a source of community capital, capable of generating a significant future return.

To help understand the ways in which history and heritage are contributing to the transformation of place, we invited writer and thinker Carey Newson to visit four very different Big Local areas and explore their own individual and unique stories. She found that not only do they care deeply about their heritage, they are using it to revitalise local pride and connect with their communities today.

From Gateshead Big Local's work to create community art which pays homage to the past and present, to Boston Big Local's reconnection with its prosperous European heritage, each community is utilising their history as a mechanism to continually reinvent themselves.

And as Ramsey Big Local's restoration of its assets and Plaistow South's collection of oral histories show, communities can re-form and grow with an enhanced understanding of what it means to be part of where they live.

Matt Leach
Chief executive
Local Trust

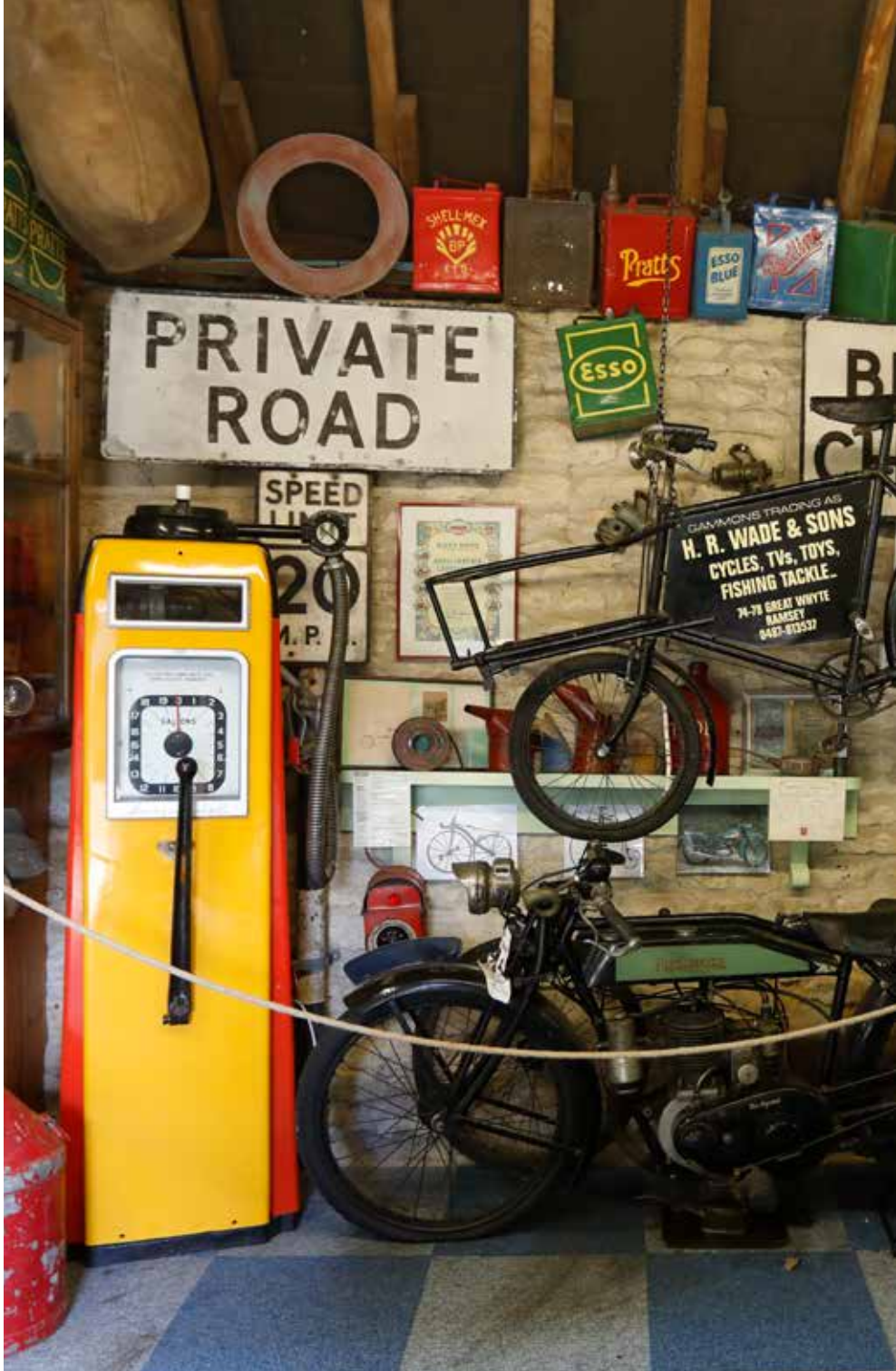


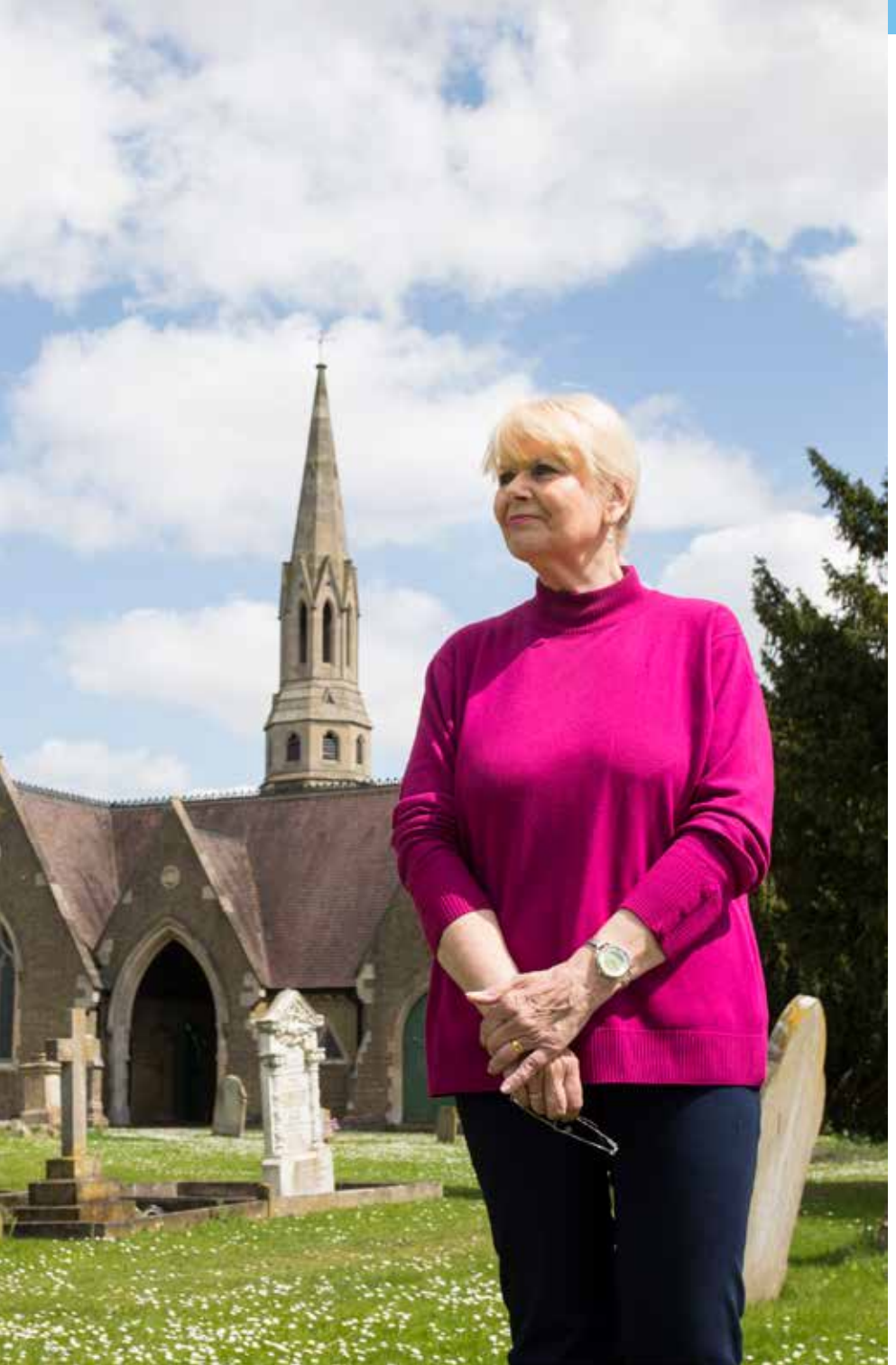
Introduction

IN AN AGE OF AUSTERITY, WHAT can history do for hard-pressed communities? This is the question I explore in this essay. It springs from an observation. Around the country, a number of resident groups striving to bring positive change to their neighbourhoods through the Big Local programme have chosen to tap into stories from the past. As part of a swathe of initiatives designed to improve the life of the area with Big Local funding, they have made heritage activity a critical component of their work.

I am personally fascinated by the way in which places wear their heritage: how historic interpretation in the public realm seeps into our understanding of the present; which narratives become integral to wider perceptions of an area and which ones are quietly lost; how our own histories intersect with the histories of places we live in. The heritage work of Big Local groups seems especially worth examining, having originated through a unique process of resident-led decision-making as a path towards local improvement. Can a town trail foster local resilience? Where does an oral history interview belong in the equation for social change? Do monuments mobilise people? What does heritage bring to broader community development?

This is a journey that takes in four distinctive Big Local areas whose work has a heritage focus. It spans north and south, urban and rural, Remain and Leave. In each of these places, long-term developments in UK industry and agriculture have played out differently, giving rise to specific local challenges, though all compounded by the entrenched austerity of the current decade. The heritage projects are correspondingly also distinctive, shaped as they are by these challenges and by the capacities of individual areas to respond to them. Despite such differences, residents in each of these areas share a common belief: that engaging with the past can help them build a better future. This four-part tour unpicks the whys and wherefores of that promise.





CHAPTER ONE

Ramsey

IN 2015, WHEN JANE YARDLEY FIRST PUSHED open the doors of the Mortuary Chapels in an overgrown East Anglian cemetery, she realised the scale of the project she had taken on. There was cardboard and polythene sheeting, old wooden staging, stacked chairs with infested upholstery: “Rubbish right up to the carved corbels”, she remembers. The Grade Two listed building, whose quiet sunlit spaces once housed the prayers of Victorian mourners, had become a civic dumping ground.

Living in Ramsey, a small town to the north of Huntingdon, Yardley had the idea of opening the disused chapels to visitors as part of the town’s offering for its heritage open day. The suggestion had been met with laughter from some on the town council, who said they wouldn’t be visiting themselves. Nevertheless, she set about clearing a path through the debris, so that visitors could walk into one of the two chapel interiors. Placing a rope across the open door to the other made it possible for them to also view one of the buildings’ rare ‘contagion windows’, whose thick glass allowed congregations to pay their last respects without risking infection from the deceased relative. Come the open day, there were 179 visitors.

"They couldn't believe it", says Yardley, "They were saying this fantastic building deserves to be saved." Many went on to put this in writing to the council, which then got behind the project. Soon afterwards, a Friends group was established and volunteers cleared the space more fully, reclaiming the staging to make new display stands. The chapels are now open monthly on Sundays in summer, attracting a small throng of visitors, with more than 1,000 across 2017. Along the way, support of all kinds has materialised from other residents. The local gravedigger donated a 1926 funeral bier, which he had kept in a lock-up for forty years after being asked to dispose of it. Ramsey's rural museum brought back the bell that had once rung from the octagonal belfry. Both are now on view.

As I open the gate to the cemetery on a bright autumn day, the chapels, in Gothic Revival style, are strikingly beautiful. Below the slender spire, a large archway at the centre allows you to see clean through the building, framing a beckoning window of ground and sky—for the funeral goers, surely an allegory for transcendence to a world beyond, as well as a physical route to the graves at the back. Yet once inside, as Yardley explains her project, I realise something I'd not expected. A key focus of the Friends' restorative work is not on the buildings' physical fabric at all, but the social history that lies in the ground around it. With help from local people, including a team of offenders on a community pay-back scheme, the graves are being rescued from brambles and ivy. In each case the Friends research the name on the headstone, consulting local families. The resulting biographical archives are kept in one of the chapels, where visitors can browse, and it is this that is driving the emotional impetus of the project.

"When you stand here and look out over the cemetery", says Yardley, "you're looking at the history of Ramsey. And all

of these people that are interred here, they all played a part in it. It didn't matter whether they were a child that only lived a few days or somebody that was over a hundred years old when they died, they all affected Ramsey in some way." The Friends' research has shed new light on these past inhabitants. A fenland agriculturalist, Jabez Papworth, originated the King Edward potato and is said to have persuaded Edward VII to give it his name. There is a schoolteacher called Bobby Custance, whose niece has gifted the chapels a collection of 'sweetheart brooches'—pins with miniature regimental emblems, which Bobby received from her Air Force boyfriends during World War II.

The event that kick-started the chapels' renewal—Ramsey's town-wide heritage open day—is itself a recent development, and a strand in a broader strategy for local revitalisation. It's a plan to breathe life into a town that's experienced long term decline and isolation—disconnected from the wider economic transformation taking place around nearby Cambridge and the east-west corridor. The Mortuary Chapels now feature prominently in Ramsey's promotional campaign, seen on street banners and web materials, where a cropped image of the graceful central archway and its vista acts as an emblem of visitable heritage. Yet there's a curious contrast between the intimate seam of personal stories that is giving the Mortuary Chapels new meaning for contemporary residents, and the site's wider promotion as an attractive and aspirational heritage asset. In the course of my visit, I'm to find that both these components are critical to understanding the work underway in Ramsey and its ambitions for local rejuvenation.

Ramsey is a Big Local area: one of 150 communities around England to receive £1 million in Big Lottery funding

over ten to fifteen years. Spending must be shaped by local priorities and designed to secure positive change for the area and those who live there, but is otherwise non-prescriptive. In the case of Ramsey, a significant element of this is a sustained investment in discovering, celebrating and promoting its unique local history and heritage.

Each of the Big Local areas was chosen on the basis that it had previously been overlooked for Big Lottery funding and other grants, a criterion that has resulted in a great diversity of participating places across the country, from coastal towns to the poorer boroughs of London. In every case, a partnership of local residents has been established and is leading the project. The process begins with extensive local engagement and consultation, with support from a community development worker as needed.

Since the programme began in 2010, Big Local areas have developed many types of initiative: reviving community hubs, installing playground equipment, offering training and advice through employment clubs, organising social events, introducing credit unions and dispersing small grants. Alongside such schemes there is also a considerable peppering of heritage projects. While few areas have made this as strong a focus as Ramsey has, there are plenty of examples where heritage is a dimension of the work. If this seems surprising in the context of measures to combat isolation and austerity, it is worth considering the evidence put forward by the heritage sector itself, that engaging with heritage is good for us. Historic England[1] cites a raft of studies in support of this. The presence of social and cultural heritage embedded in place is credited with protecting health and wellbeing.[2]

[1] Historic England (2017) Heritage Counts 2017: Heritage and Society.
[2] Lovell, R. (2017) Health, wellbeing and the public park workshop (cited by Historic England, 2017).

The vast majority of people say local heritage has an impact on their personal quality of life.[3] It is argued, moreover, that heritage supports social cohesion[4] and inclusion.[5] Yet what makes the role of heritage projects in Big Local areas especially interesting is that these are residents who have approached the issue from the other end of the telescope, as it were: in determining what activities might deliver new improvements for their communities, they have fixed on heritage as part of a broader strategy. I wanted to know how they had arrived at this. What kind of outcomes they were looking for? And what had they found in putting these plans into action?

In exploring these questions, I also wanted to draw on a set of ideas that has helped to re-conceptualise what heritage means. Laurajane Smith, an influential voice in the sector, urges us to understand heritage as a socially and culturally directed process.[6] Smith takes aim at what she calls the 'authorised heritage discourse': a traditional, established and top-down view of heritage that emanates from professional specialisms and can be hard to shake, despite a growing enthusiasm for community engagement. It is a discourse, she argues, that is overly focused on static material structures, and tends to have special regard for the elite and the grand. Accordingly, certain buildings and landscapes are taken to be synonymous with heritage, and heritage widely understood as something that 'simply is'[7]—an unchanging given, whose value

[3] Heritage Lottery Fund (2015) 20 Years in 12 Places: 20 years of Lottery funding for heritage, available at https://www.hlf.org.uk/about-us/research-evaluation/20-years-heritage, accessed 24.1.18.
[4] English Heritage (2014) Heritage Counts 2014: The Value and Impact of Heritage, available at https://content.historicengland.org.uk/content/heritage-counts/pub/2190644/value-impact-chapter.pdf, accessed 24.1.18.
[5] Power, A. and Smyth, K. (2016) 'Heritage, health and place: The legacies of local community-based heritage conservation on social wellbeing', Health & Place, vol. 39, pp. 160-167.
[6] Smith, L. (2006) Uses of Heritage, Routledge.
[7] ibid, page 3.

rests with conservation professionals. Smith believes that this wrongly assumes a consensus around an uncontested national narrative. Importantly, it obscures from us the significance of our own heritage practices as acts that are 'in and for the present',[8] and have a political dimension. She argues that, in practices that include remembering, commemorating and passing on knowledge, we make and re-make the values, aspirations and debates that matter to us and so help to define us. Through this process we assert identity, while also critically re-evaluating the past and its contemporary relevance. This sheds new light on our everyday engagement with heritage—especially where it is a collective engagement. Smith calls on us to understand heritage as something active, something that is done and that produces change as well as continuity. It makes sense, then, to ask how Big Local areas are doing heritage, and to what effect?

Ramsey, as the residents in the Big Local partnership point out, is not on the way to anywhere else. The town is approached from the west on a slightly bumpy B-road over the fens and has poor public transport. The two Victorian railway stations, which once served it with separate branch lines, have long since closed to passengers, and buses are also sparse, increasing a sense of disconnection from the wider county. This was apparent in a recent campaign to save the number 30 service: without it, unemployed people would have to walk 22 miles on country roads to and from Huntingdon in order to sign on. There is a feeling locally that geographical isolation has made Ramsey the poor relation to its neighbours and remote from the cares of its district authority, that when there's been funding available it has

[8] ibid, page 1.

rarely come this way. As a town that historically thrived by servicing local farms with outlets for produce, Ramsey lost out over time with the introduction of large-scale agriculture and more corporate supply chains. The town is now edging towards becoming a commuter dormitory, though without the air of prosperity that might suggest. The west side of Ramsey is amongst the 30% most deprived neighbourhoods in the country,[9] and across the town, a quarter of people of working age are without educational qualifications.[10] The main retailers are convenience stores and takeaways, a limited draw for shoppers.

Priorities identified for the area through the Big Local consultation include training and employment opportunities for young people, more facilities for families and young children and better community transport links. In addition, both businesses and the wider community urgently want to see bustle and vibrancy brought to Ramsey's pleasant but quiet town centre. Residents want a greater variety of shops and, critically, more people on the main streets, bringing life and economic stability. People value the area's friendliness, and do not want the market town to die.

Residents also value the history attached to the town. In workshops about the identity of Ramsey, both older and younger age groups mentioned its heritage sites. The town's surprising concentration of historic attractions and the almost entirely voluntary efforts of those that run them suggest that, for a settlement of 8,390, Ramsey has a remarkable stock of cultural and social capital. Jane Sills, chair of the Ramsey

[9] English indices of deprivation 2015, Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, available at http://dclgapps.communities.gov.uk/imd/idmap.html, accessed 23.2.18.

[10] Census 2011 data, compiled by Oxford Consultants for Social Inclusion (2018) Local Insight profile for Ramsey area, produced for Local Trust.

Million partnership through which Ramsey residents are implementing their Big Local programme, explains that a reliance on volunteers is characteristic of Ramsey. The point is brought home during my visit, when two of the town's councillors in reflective jackets are on ladders outside the Big Local office, putting up the town's Christmas lights themselves.

Among the most prestigious of Ramsey's historic sites is the Abbey Gatehouse, a scheduled ancient monument owned by the National Trust; though again, it is volunteers who turn out to staff its intermittent opening. The remains of the 15th century building were a part of the medieval abbey, around whose imposing monastic wealth and scholarship Ramsey first grew up in the 1200s. Close by, a historic parish church is also believed to have originated from the abbey.

In contrast, other attractions, in common with the Mortuary Chapels, engage with Ramsey's more recent social history. Ramsey Rural Museum evokes the life of fenland farming communities in the 19th and 20th centuries through a growing collection of donated objects and installations. Alongside farm implements and domestic items is a 1930s fen cottage, resurrected from its original countryside site. A short distance from the museum, a one-acre Victorian walled garden, which was once overgrown to the point of obliteration, has been restored over a twenty-year period through the sustained dedication of its volunteers. Open on Sunday afternoons in summer, it has trained fruit trees, with an apple tunnel that bisects the site and, most recently, an impressive glasshouse bequeathed by one of the project's longtime supporters. Also nearby, and quirkiest among Ramsey's historical attractions, is the 1940s camp, a collection of timber buildings on a ten-acre ground, retained from use as a training camp in World War II.

It now hosts re-enactments and other social events, including an annual 1940s weekend.

Sills explains that, in looking to improve the town's footfall and revitalise its centre, the partnership decided that heritage offered a possible hook. But while each attraction is run by its own heritage group, there were then no regular meetings between them. Ramsey Million brought them together with a view to collaboration. A first meeting led to a second, and then to a plan to run joint events that would bring people into the town and raise its profile. Since 2013, the groups have worked together to welcome visitors for an annual heritage open day, under the national scheme run each September. In 2016, they added a second, local, open day in April. A town trail links the attractions, a free vintage bus makes an hourly circuit between them and the groups cooperate on joint themes and competitions. Their collaboration has proved effective and visitor numbers have grown. At the rural museum, for instance, trustees say the heritage open day now brings in around 600 visitors—boosting numbers to two to three times the usual footfall for their own special events and attracting many more families. Postcode checks show a wide geographical spread, with visitors from both inside and outside the town, indicating that the initiative is helping to put Ramsey on the map in the wider region. Volunteers at the walled garden have found people sometimes return on ordinary Sundays. At the Mortuary Chapels, Jane Yardley, who welcomed over 300 visitors at the most recent joint open day, says they are often surprised there is so much to see in Ramsey, and struggle to fit it all in.

Alongside such initial success, Ramsey Million has launched a vigorous campaign to promote the town. In a departure from the traditional reliance on volunteering, they

have employed a marketing professional to support them in delivering a programme that includes the development of a Ramsey brand. There is a dedicated Discover Ramsey website, a spate of special events such as craft fairs, and publicity through advertising, the press and social media. Sills argues that a paid role has been critical in levering in the expertise that was needed to lift the town's image in a coherent and consistent way, and in brokering relationships between the heritage groups. Ann Cuthbert, the local resident who took up the post, says she had already noticed the impact of heritage days on her own trips through town: "I thought to myself, 'Ooh, Ramsey's coming up in the world. That's a real professional banner and we've joined something big!'" Her role has involved working across several fronts. Frequent face-to-face meetings with local retailers have encouraged them to come on board with the campaign and its events, acting as visitor information points, putting up branded bunting and bringing out stalls or café tables. The town's history and attractions have remained central to the message. The Ramsey logo, in a handwritten font (traditional but friendly) has the strapline 'Open for Discovery', intended to link the open country of the fens with the town's tourism offer. Information for historic trails, including one originating in nearby Peterborough, to lure people in from further afield, has been widely distributed to tourist organisations within 20 miles. Despite local awareness of the town's history, Cuthbert says residents are often surprised to see such attractive images of their area and joke that the photos must be of somewhere else.

When I meet with the Ramsey Million Partnership, they are very upbeat about the heritage work. During our sandwich lunch (there are windfalls from the walled garden) they are speaking over each other in praise of its benefits. Annie

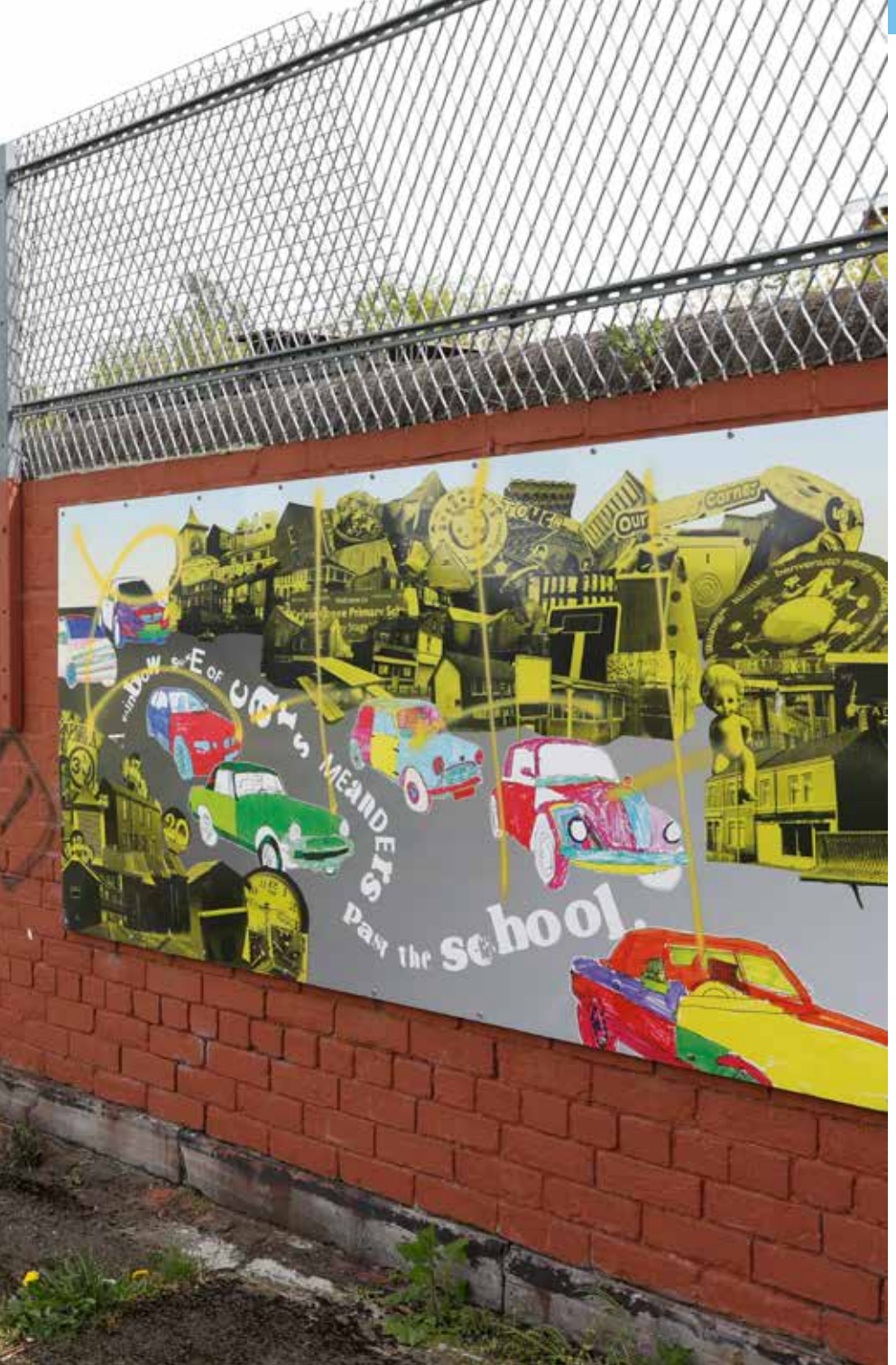
Wells, vice chair of the partnership, says Ramsey is "a bit of a spider's web". Thanks to the links and overlaps between different groups, the campaign has reached further, creating good synergy with their other priorities. Heritage-day activities tailored to children—such as a toy-duck race on a stretch of water in the town— have drawn in younger age groups, offering opportunities for family learning, while the fact that the vintage bus and the visits are free creates affordable local outings. The team is adamant that participation reaches across the social divide. There is a sense that they are winning: their surveys show that the branding is almost universally recognised by residents and that people now feel more positive about living in Ramsey. At a personal level, they each have their stories to tell about changing perceptions locally. Wells says she finds she now gets a different reaction when she tells people where she lives: "You say Ramsey, and they say, 'Oh yeah, I've heard of that. Didn't you...?', because we're getting more visibility."

Against this gust of enthusiasm, there are concerns about the sustainability of the work. There is a feeling that while residents leading the project have pressed ahead with promotions, the retailers need to do more to raise their game and tempt new shoppers. Most problematically, the admission times of the town's volunteer-run attractions remain very limited. Even the rural museum is only open three days a week in season. There's an obvious risk that the campaign may over-promise and under deliver. With the marketing project now at an end, the team would like to extend the collaborative work, with a focus on building capacity and opening sites more often. At the time I am there, a bid to a major heritage funder has just been refused and they are frustrated at not being able to renew the marketing post. As we talk, team members touch on

historic events they would like to explore further, such as the culverting of the river that took place to create Ramsey's main street, where a pub called The Jolly Sailor now stands high and dry. Community development worker Val Fendley says they are keen to develop such stories, bringing them alive for a new generation: "It's big, it's ambitious, and we'd need the money to do these things, but there's huge potential here now and we're just at the start of a journey."

The Discover Ramsey campaign is, explicitly, an attempt to position an overlooked settlement as a small historic town: to translate the area's existing cultural capital into economic benefit and status. In the process, Ramsey Million is arguably also seeking to put to work precisely the authorised heritage discourse that Smith critiques. With attractive professional imagery, the project is garnering for Ramsey some of the quality and kudos that draw visitors to more prestigious historic locations. Yet in practice, their strategy is more nuanced than this. For one thing, it is not just an external audience but the town itself that is being asked to re-evaluate its identity in more positive terms: to recognise its own charm and worth. For another, the branding developed for this purpose, whilst of high quality, is cheery, colourful and accessible in keeping with the existing character of the town and its aspirations. Restricted admission times apart, this is not an attempt to make Ramsey something it's not. In addition, the focus of much of the heritage work taking place here is on the life of communities rather than the elites that historically governed them. It is less about the grand narratives of those who owned the land by birth, more about the lives of those that cultivated it, or, in the case of the walled garden, the amenity it can offer a wider community now. It's apparent, too, that in the process of drawing on local stories

the work of the partnership is generating a fresh engagement with the past. They believe that this will indeed help in building a better future: "This is part of people feeling proud about where they live", says Fendley, and a basis on which to "move forward positively". With their Big Local funding, the group is channeling local energy and initiative towards this transformation. For Cuthbert, it is ultimately about building an identity that goes well beyond a brand to articulate a sense of place, a sense of belonging.



CHAPTER TWO

Gateshead

BORN IN 1952, LAWRENCE O'HALLERON, chair of the Big Local project in Gateshead, explains how his own occupational life has been shaped by Tyneside's shifting economic fortunes. The son of a miner turned shipyard electrician, he remembers how, in the late 1960s, he left school one week and found a job the next, working first as a painter and decorator, then as a cabinetmaker, before going into heavy engineering. At that time, he says, you could go from factory to factory and job to job: "Kids can't do that now." Then the shipbuilding went, followed by other heavy industry: "Lost them completely." When the closures started he took on a pastoral role in a school, moving into social work in the 1990s, and saw firsthand how low expectations constrain children's life chances. All of his own grandchildren have done well for themselves, he says, and he believes that nurturing aspiration is the key to this. Surveys run by the Big Local partnership in the project area highlight this issue. "When we asked people about the area and what they wanted out of life, expectations were very low." While new jobs have come to the wider district, there are pockets with families that have never known work.

The percentage of people of working age on unemployment benefit in the Gateshead Big Local area is three times the average across England.[11] In addition, a lot of jobs in the immediate locality are in the service sector, meaning they are often part-time and poorly paid—a sharp contrast with the strong working culture that endured before the pit closures. O'Halleron says that in households without work there is just not enough for families to talk about. "They haven't got a lot happening in their life and they don't go very far, they don't do very much." He argues that this weakens communities and depletes the ambitions of the next generation, who have also been failed by cuts to youth work. Against this background, residents in the Big Local partnership wanted to do something that would change the way young people thought: "That's the hardest thing round here", says O'Halleron, "to make them feel that you can get somewhere in life and you can do anything you want, but you've just got to work for it." With this in mind, the group commissioned a project designed to fire children's imaginations and give them a sense of their own potential, whilst also forging new links between the area's historic roots and its contemporary outlook.

The primary geographical focus of Big Local Gateshead is the Teams and Racecourse estates—both areas of mainly social housing. While Racecourse, with its core of semi-detached houses, has a more cohesive, settled feel, Teams is cut apart by a busy dual carriageway whose graffitied pedestrian subways feel unsafe to walk through and are prone to flood. Both estates, however, while short on facilities, are seen by their residents as pleasant places to live, with strong community ties. A walk through the Big Local area is a walk through the

[11] Department for Work and Pensions data, compiled by Oxford Consultants for Social Inclusion (2018) Local Insight profile for Gateshead area, produced for Local Trust.

minds of successive post-war developers and the incremental regeneration that followed slum-clearance schemes in the 1960s and early 1970s. At one edge, the 1960s Clasper Village, with its clusters of low-rise flats, now awaits demolition behind metal sheeting. At another, Staiths South Bank, a 21st century, private waterside development overlooking the Tyne, boasts home zone principles and riverside walks, its wood-paneled frontages a marked contrast to Teams' predominant red brick. Nearby, the gigantic frame of Dunston Staiths, a landing stage said to be the largest timber structure in Europe, stands aloof on the river where it was once flanked by coal ships. Closed to industrial use in 1980, it is now being restored, a prized relic of the region's mining past.

When viewed from the heights of one of the Teams' tower blocks, the area, as O'Halleron points out, is surprisingly green and leafy. But at ground level the condition of the neighbourhood landscape has emerged as a priority issue. Community members taking part in the Big Local consultation wanted their estates to be better maintained and more attractive. There were calls for tidier green spaces, cleaner streets, footpath repairs and community gardens in derelict areas. In response, residents leading the Big Local initiative decided to home in on Charlton Walk Park in Teams, a neglected triangle of land with grassy mounds, trees and an unused patch of asphalt, situated between a small area of 1960s housing, the main road and the railway. Polly Graham, a resident who grew up nearby in the '80s, remembers that in her childhood it was a popular play area with a pulley and a slide: "It was brilliant. Everybody used to be together all the time. Everyone on the street knew where their children were." Others recall that there was once a floodlit 5-a-side football pitch. Both facilities are thought by council officers to

have been removed in the early 1990s, for reasons no longer remembered with any certainty. An archive photograph shows that, in an earlier era still, there was a school on the site. By the start of the Big Local project, however, the park was looking unkempt and overgrown, a magnet for fly tipping, drug use and graffiti, and a source of complaint for the immediate neighbourhood.

The project group determined to restore the integrity of the park as a local lung and to involve nearby schools in its regeneration. They commissioned a participatory arts company, Baseline Shift, to work with thirty Year 5 children across three local primary schools on the creation of 'Park Life', a series of 49 graphic panels for outdoor display. Constructed through many weekly afterschool sessions of writing and artwork, and building on archive and contemporary imagery, each panel evokes sights and sounds from the life of the area. Its poetic narrative knits together past and present: there's the whirr of pit wheels, the clack of carts on cobbles, the sparks from a tram. But there is also the hiss of the 49 bus, the texting of teens and a wealth of urban wildlife—a shy fox, a fat bumblebee, soaring seagulls. With significant support in kind from Network Rail, who came fully on board with the project, the panels now stretch the length of the wall by the railway line along one edge of the parkland.

Andrew Tinkler, a development worker for Big Local in Gateshead, says the process was as important as the end product. To celebrate students' achievement, they produced a large glossy booklet of the artwork and took the participants on a visit to Gateshead Council: "We wanted them to get a bit of civic recognition for what they'd done, and a sense of where the local powerbrokers were." When I meet a few of the students involved in the project it's apparent that the whole

experience exceeded their expectations. One of the girls tells me the highlight for her was the opening ceremony when the mayor cut the ribbon: "It was really exciting because I didn't think it was going to be as good as that. I just felt proud of myself and all my friends." The students were especially intrigued to see archive photographs of places they knew well and had played in. Tinkler says the success of the project made it a calling card that helped them to win the confidence of the schools. There is now an appetite for further collaboration and plans for a journalism project called 'Bringing words to life'. Residents taking forward Big Local Gateshead look set to have a strong educational focus.

Meanwhile, the regeneration of Charlton Walk Park seems altogether less certain, though there has been progress. Drive-in fly tipping has been discouraged by the introduction of large concrete containers placed upside down at the entrance. They look disconcertingly stark but have been effective. Although the team initially hoped to fill these with plants, they realised that they lacked the capacity to maintain them themselves—Big Local is already focusing its gardening efforts on an ambitious allotment project elsewhere in the area. O'Halleron says he has tried to involve various local organisations with an interest in horticulture in reviving the park on a voluntary basis but has not so far found takers. Residents in the immediate area have welcomed the artwork, but there are concerns that any new play equipment would only attract anti-social behaviour. It is now a year since the art panels first went up, and there has been some graffiti, necessitating the replacement of one, using Big Local funding. The path that runs alongside the wall provides a short stroll for local dog walkers but is cut off by the dual carriageway. This deters more frequent use, which might otherwise provide

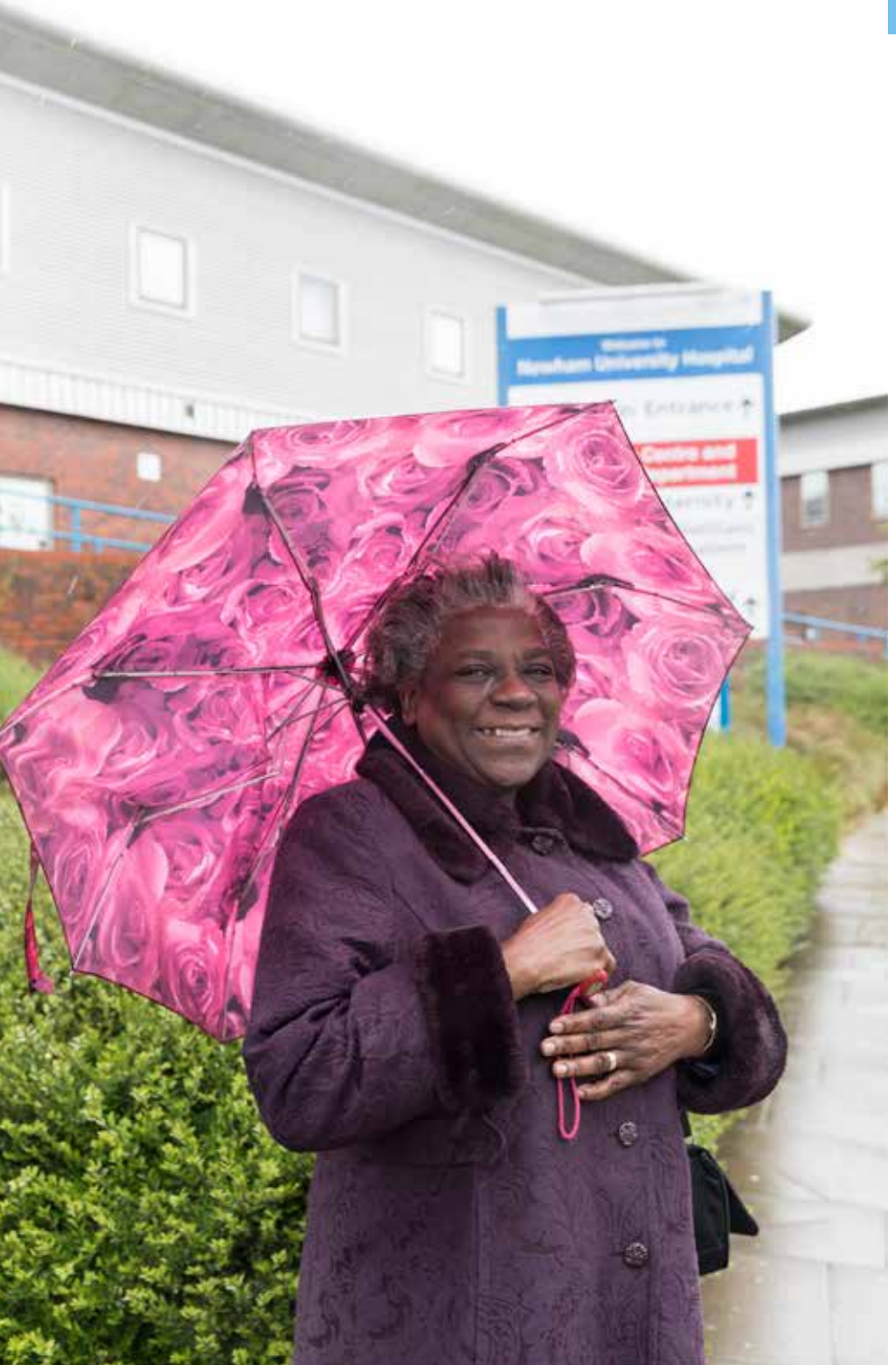
the informal surveillance that could better protect the area from vandalism. Litter is also creeping back: on the day that I am there, a large spread of assorted biscuits has arrived inexplicably on the grass like a birds' picnic. O'Halleron says they are now considering alternative ways that the park could be redeveloped for the benefit of local residents—for instance, as a site for business units with combined residential use—all pie in the sky, he adds, without the interest of a developer. A few streets to the north of Charlton Walk, he shows me Clasper Towers, an eerily overgrown adventure playground, fenced off from use. Opened in 2010, it was closed five years later when cuts to funding for children's centres led to service changes and problems in providing day-to-day maintenance.

Gateshead is home to some truly iconic artwork and architecture—Gormley's towering Angel of the North, near the site of a former colliery, and Norman Foster's giant undulating glass and steel performance venue, Sage Gateshead, have both become symbols of long-term regeneration. But in the fine-grain neglect of important but unremarkable neighbourhood spaces, austerity eats at the texture of everyday life. When I contact Paul Cairns from the council's neighbourhood management team, he tells me they are striving to maintain play facilities across the borough for residents, with support from communities, but that all play parks are now operating on reduced budgets. This is a common story: the parks are not a statutory service and around the country they have been hit by local authority cuts, with an average 40% reduction in budgets since 2010.[12] Cairns thinks the artwork, as a temporary installation, has made the open space at Charlton Walk look

[12] The Guardian, 25 December, 2018, 'In austerity Britain, people need parks', letter from the Parks Agency, available at https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2017/dec/25/in-austerity-britain-people-need-parks, accessed 27.1.2018.

nicer and raises the profile of the area for further thought. He expresses the hope that the initiative won't get "lost in time" like the play park before it.

With their school-based interventions, residents driving forward Big Local in Gateshead are attempting, with some success, to build new social capital through experiences that instill self-belief and creative confidence. In the process, the area's industrial history has provided a rich resource to draw from. Again, an established heritage narrative is being put to use here. Through the workshops, students have been encouraged to identify with the area's cultural past, melding it with their current experience, making it their own. Tinkler says, moreover, that the project was embraced by children whose families were relative newcomers to the area as well as by those with generations of personal history there. In contrast, the location for this celebration of local remembrance is a small piece of landscape whose earlier place in the life of the community is fading from consciousness, and whose future looks unclear.



CHAPTER THREE

Plaistow South

IN THE WEEK THAT I VISIT BIG LOCAL in Plaistow, East London, I happen to pass through Parliament Square in Westminster, where among the statues gracing the central island there is not one woman. In front of the building once colonialistically described as the mother of parliaments, it is the nation's fathers who are lauded, albeit alongside international figures such as Mandela and Gandhi. This is set to change in 2018, when, in response to a popular campaign, the figure of Millicent Fawcett, founder of the suffrage movement, will be unveiled. While we can't alter the inequities of the past, we can choose how we represent its accomplishments, and it's in this fulcrum of choice that the heritage debates get up and running. In these debates, the distinction between remembering what happened and venerating the protagonists is usually critical. Interestingly, in the spat that preceded the recent decision to rename the Colston Hall in Bristol—ending its association with the city's prominent slave-trader—each side accused the other of wanting to airbrush history.

In both Ramsey and Gateshead, whilst the heritage work has a strong focus on community life, there has been little explicit discussion about which historical narratives are selected and celebrated, or through whose eyes they are seen. This is not the case in Plaistow South, where I sit in on a meeting of residents in the Big Local History Task Group.

They are discussing the options for a series of new commemorative plaques to raise awareness of the area's more notable daughters and sons. Luke Howard, who devised no less than the names for the clouds—cirrus, cumulus, stratus— lived in the area in the 19th century and is seen as a strong contender. So too is the social reformer and Quaker philanthropist Elizabeth Fry, associated with the area's former Friends Meeting House. Another historic resident in their sights is the 18th century political philosopher and statesman, Edmund Burke. In a ward that is solidly Labour, his role as a founder of modern conservatism (at least, pre-Thatcher) makes Burke a contentious choice, but his insight that, 'The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing', has given his candidacy a convincing foothold. Overall, however, as community development coordinator Simon Vincent explains to the meeting, members of Plaistow South Big Local's steering group, having reviewed the shortlist, are keen to achieve greater diversity. To this purpose, they have suggested commemorating people who have historically made a difference locally but are not national figures. The History Task Group, whilst recognising that it may prove difficult to identify the community's less celebrated contributors, resolves to invite nominations using local networks. Plaques to mark important buildings are also planned, and they agree to pursue one for the distinctive 1919 YMCA in the heart of the area, now converted to flats behind its listed façade. In raising the profile of such local landmarks, they hope to build pride and continuity with the past.

History has been a theme of Plaistow South Big Local since the project's inception. When the group first held a consultation on their draft plans for the area's future, they showed a display about Plaistow's past with a detailed map of the locality in the 1950s and '60s, hand-drawn by one of the steering group members who is now in his 80s. It's a lost world, featuring shops dedicated to the sale of wool, fishing tackle, gentlemen's outfits and off-cuts of wood, as well as pre-fab housing, a dairy, a 'fleapit' cinema, a trolleybus depot and a secondary modern school.

Vincent says that, in early discussions, the steering group reasoned that raising awareness of the community's shared past was a route to building a distinct identity for their Big Local area—a part of Newham whose geographical boundaries were in practice not well recognised. An engagement with community heritage was also viewed as a source of social cohesion. The area falls in one of the most ethnically diverse wards in the country. The group's consultation showed that many of its inhabitants prize this cultural diversity. Vincent says there is the feeling that you can learn about the world from this amazing mix of people: "You don't have to read about it or travel somewhere. The world has come to Plaistow." But the partnership has also picked up on feelings of exclusion and loss from some of its older, white working-class residents. Those who have seen employment opportunities crumble with the decline of jobs in traditional industries sometimes view migrants to the area as unwelcome competition in an increasingly unfamiliar landscape. Vincent argues that exploring the area's history can help to build bridges between Plaistow then and now—it gives positive

recognition to the memories of older residents who look back to an era when the population was predominantly white. At the same time, he says, it emphasises the longevity of the area's non-white communities—many black residents have lived there for 50 years and have children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

The group's most substantial heritage initiative to date has been an oral history project, 'Growing Up in Plaistow', partly funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund. Eastside Community Heritage, a local charity, led the work, which included training sessions at a sixth-form college in the area, with a view to promoting intergenerational understanding. Students learned to conduct interviews, research local history and lead reminiscence sessions with older people. As well as an app and web materials, a key output from the project is a touring exhibition. Archive photographs combine with snippets of youthful memories of work, leisure, education and wartime London, to evoke an earlier Plaistow, its outdoor spaces recalled through the eyes of children who had free reign to play out but few home comforts. In a section on schooldays, one man describes how, at his post-war primary school, children were sent to take showers on a weekly basis because many families had no bathroom at home. There are also memories from Plaistow residents who began their education in the Caribbean. One woman had to walk seven miles to school whilst another could only afford to attend four days a week.

The exhibition was launched at the packed re-opening of Plaistow Library (following renovations) and has been shown at a series of venues, including schools, community centres and a popular youth market where young people sell their own creative work. Schools especially have made good use of the displays, which have been exhibited at parents' evenings and

used for the curriculum. Some venues have asked for return visits. Vincent says residents have responded with interest: "If they're old enough they recognise bits of it themselves, and if they're young they're a bit astonished about how things used to be in the days before mobile phones and computers." Whilst it is difficult to evaluate the subtler social impacts of the project, he believes that simply communicating different perspectives is positive: "I think you start to value other people more when you realise that everybody's got a story to tell about how they got to be where they are now."

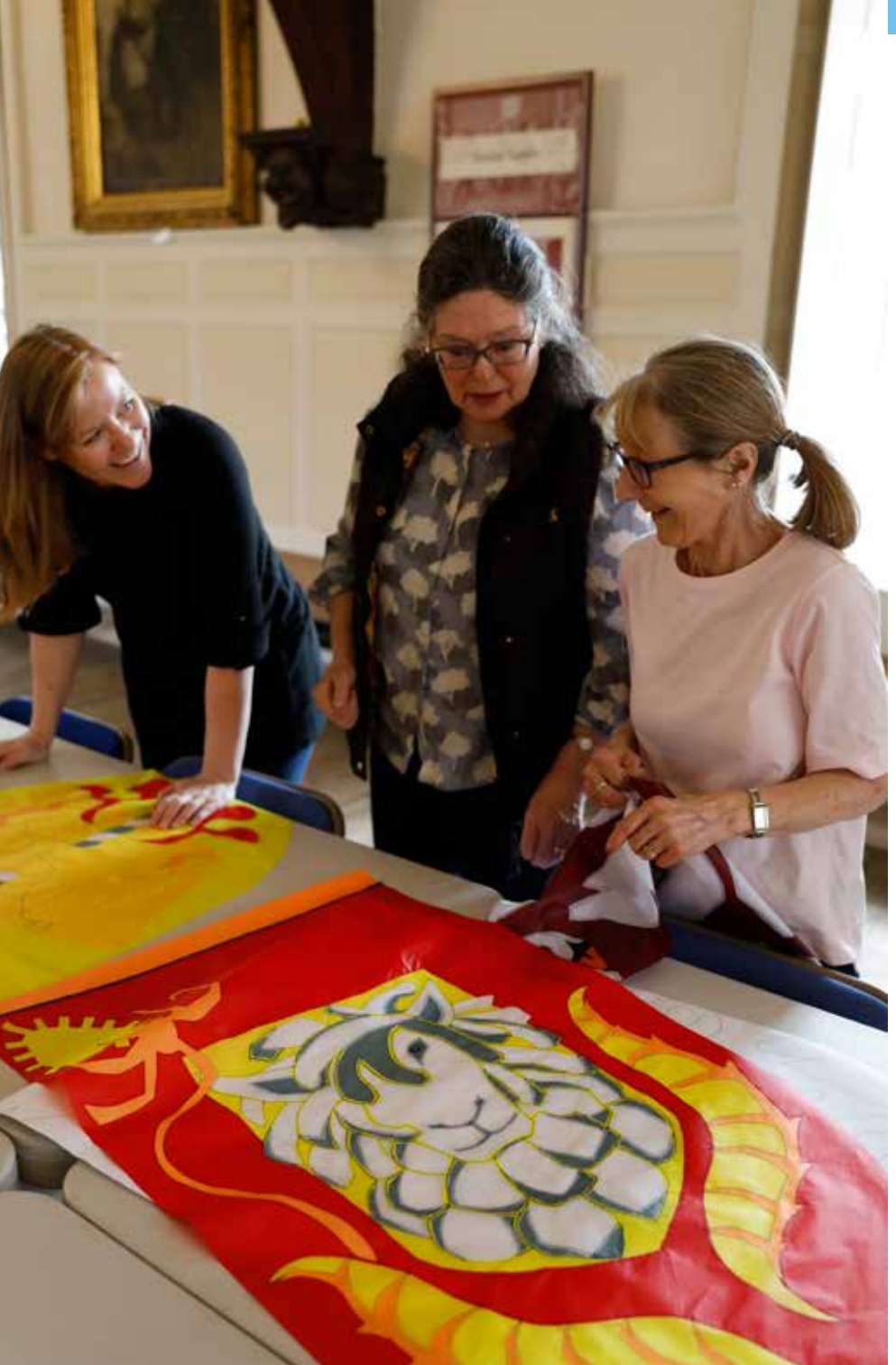
For 2018 the group is commissioning a further collection of oral histories, this time focusing on the experience of local nurses, designed to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the birth of the National Health Service. There are plans to record memories from retired nurses, as well as life histories from present-day nurses working at Newham General Hospital, a major presence in the area. Judith Garfield, director of Eastside Community Heritage, which is again delivering the project, says that it will help highlight the dramatic difference the arrival of the NHS made to working-class communities locally, where people previously died through the lack of affordable healthcare: "That is such a big thing—to recognise how important it is and was, and that we need to protect it for future generations." She considers the focus on nursing as a predominantly female occupation to be a key strength of the work—a means of bringing the area's less prominent voices into the open. At the exhibition, she adds, she found it moving to realise that interviewees were proud to have their stories told, to see other people reading with interest what one contributor described as "the history of us".

Joyce Baptiste, a member of the Big Local steering group, who contributed to the exhibition, has lived in

Plaistow for over thirty years. She arrived in London's Mile End from Grenada in 1967 at the age of 14 and has spent a career in healthcare, beginning as a hospital cadet—a form of apprenticeship. She later trained as a midwife, working initially at Plaistow Maternity Hospital, which she remembers as "more like a family, like a big house". When, in the mid-eighties, she moved to the newly opened Newham General Hospital, she found the care regime in its larger unit much less personal. But the philosophy later switched again as, with the advent of woman-centred care, they aimed to give each woman a dedicated midwife and to restore a more individual approach: "So you would think of the whole person. Is she a single mum? Does she need more support?" Though Baptiste retired in 2012, she says women rarely forget their midwife and she is often recognised out and about by mothers who tell her that the baby she saw into the world is now at university. She jokes with them that she only delivers the clever ones.

Baptiste thinks that looking back at developments over time gives a sense of purpose, even if some changes bring you full circle: "History is like this." She hopes the NHS anniversary project will help raise awareness of improvements and the dedication of staff. When she first began her training she was told how, in Victorian times, it was very difficult to get care. "Coming from the Caribbean, I also knew that it was quite difficult [there] for families who didn't have money." As a senior midwife, Baptiste says she would always emphasise to her students that they didn't really need to know whether the person they'd admitted was a professional or a cleaner or what standing they had in society. "It shouldn't make any difference to the way you care for somebody. You give them the same care, free at the point of care."

From the threads of such personal testimony, Plaistow South is weaving new narratives for the place it now is, a pluralised past that reflects its diversity. In our discussions Vincent is wary of any suggestion that history is something that can be created, arguing that, even if we don't know it, the history is there. He says that you can't re-write it, you have to take the good with the bad—"like being a supporter of West Ham United". But he also concedes that we select those stories we want to tell—a process evident in the deliberations around the plaque scheme. Meanwhile, the NHS project offers a prime illustration of Laurajane Smith's assessment that, in 'doing heritage', communities assert values and aspirations in ways that are as much about contesting the future as commemorating historic events. It was perhaps Danny Boyle's 2012 UK Olympic ceremony, with its lines of hospital beds and dancing nurses, that first urged us to imagine the NHS in the wholly idealised terms of intangible heritage, an emblematic parade of national values. The rise of the health service as a theme of heritage practice is symptomatic of the deepening passion felt for its vision and founding principles, but also of mounting fears for its survival. In much the same way, it is only in recent times that the European flag has been hung out by students, its diminutive stars, once about as exciting as paper fasteners, re-charged with symbolic meaning. I'm not expecting to see many of these at my next destination where the town's population recorded the highest Leave vote in Britain.



CHAPTER FOUR

Boston

IN THE LINCOLNSHIRE TOWN OF BOSTON, I'm impressed by the town's distinctiveness. It has a parish church that seems more like a small cathedral; an expansive medieval market place that holds two weekly markets; and, in the neighbouring streets, a variety of Eastern European grocery stores selling foods such as layered cake and baklava. All three are connected to the heritage project that I'm here to find out about.

The tensions between Boston's long term-residents and its Eastern European incomers have long attracted national attention. Headlines billing Boston as 'the town that's had enough'[13] and 'the least integrated place in the country' (pronounced by a think tank on the basis of census data)[14] have consolidated its reputation for social division. This in itself has proved challenging for those working to build community relations long-term at a time of rapid demographic change.

[13] The Daily Mail, 1 February, 2013, 'The town that's had enough: we visit the place with the country's biggest influx of East Europeans', available at http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2272195/The-town-thats-We-visit-town-countrys-biggest-influx-East-Europeans.html, accessed 21.01.18.

[14] Policy Exchange press release, 28 January, 2016, 'Boston is the least integrated place in the country', available at https://policyexchange.org.uk/press-release/boston-is-the-least-integrated-place-in-the-country/, accessed 21.01.18.

Between 2001 and 2011, the town saw a large expansion in its Eastern European population, contributing to an overall growth of almost 16% from Boston's original, sleepier 55,750. It is now home to the highest percentage of non-British, European Union passport holders outside London. The changes have come about with the intensification of the county's agriculture. A quarter of the nation's vegetables are grown in Greater Lincolnshire[15] and its packing industry has also expanded. Whilst there has always been seasonal labour, a year-round demand for pickers and factory packers has drawn in European labourers, initially from Portugal and, since 2004, from EU acceding countries such as Poland, Lithuania and Latvia. Their arrival has filled low-waged jobs and helped to sustain the town centre but has also aroused anger and anxiety about the speed of change, with fears for the impact on services, which were initially slow to respond. UKIP has targeted the area and has seven members on the Conservative-led borough council. In 2016, anti-European sentiments came to a head at the EU referendum with a 75.6% Leave vote.

In the last decade, a series of projects in Boston has sought to address community discord. They include a lengthy civic-mediation programme, instigated, with specialist advice, by the council to respond to residents' concerns, and a variety of creative and cultural activities designed to engage with the area's new diversity. Against this background, Boston Big Local—which is led by residents from the original Boston community—is now pushing forward with its own initiatives to foster community spirit. These include a popular summer 'beach' event that brings four inches of sand to the town's central park (Boston is six miles from the sea), and a 'Boston Marathon UK'.

Boston Big Local has also turned to the area's history for inspiration. The partnership has commissioned a project that looks back in time to Boston's medieval prosperity as a Hanseatic trading post. The town at its early height was the second largest port in England, frequented, via the River Witham, by merchants from across Northern Europe. Operating as part of an international trading partnership, the seafarers became part of the town, establishing their own local premises here. While the English exported wool, Hanseatic traders brought linen and wine from France; falcons and timber from Scandinavia; and wax, oxen and amber from the Baltic States and Poland. One of the country's largest international fairs was held in Boston and ran through the summer, when even the London law courts closed so their members could go. Its memory is still revived annually through a funfair in the central marketplace. Boston's medieval importance can also be read in the ambitious scale of the church, whose conspicuous tower, rising above the town, is nicknamed locally the Stump. Inside the church, the 1340 tombstone of a German merchant, one of the so-called Esterlinges, is a further remnant of the international trade that shaped the town's fortunes.

Alison Fairman, chair of the Boston Hanse Group, has lived in the town for forty years and is a known mover and shaker. She instigated the project after meeting a local academic, Pamela Cawthorne, whose work drew connections between the town's Hanseatic history and the arrival of its new Eastern European population. With support from Big Local, Fairman and Cawthorne set out to help the town build a new relationship with this maritime past. They petitioned the council to join the New Hanse, a northern European network

[15] Lincolnshire Forum for Agriculture and Horticulture c/o Lincolnshire County Council, available at http://www.lincsfoodandfarming.org.uk/content/why-food-farming-matter accessed 21.1.18.

of 190 towns and cities from 16 countries, that were all at one time linked into the historical trading network. In June 2015, Boston followed nearby Kings Lynn to become a member.

Belonging to the partnership promises various opportunities—to promote tourism, develop new markets for business and encourage cultural and educational exchange. Underpinning these aims in Boston, however, is a broader aspiration: that a better understanding of Boston's connections to the wider world can be a force for community cohesion.

Both Fairman and her colleague, Margaret Peberdy, who is also on the Boston Hanse Group, have had a close-hand view of the problems that followed local agricultural intensification. The two women formerly ran the town's Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB). From the late '90s onwards, and especially after EU enlargement in 2004, they found themselves on a steep learning curve, with a succession of complex enquiries from migrant workers. People brought into the town by gangmasters were struggling with severe employment abuses and overcrowded housing. "If you don't speak English it's very easy to take advantage of you, so there were lots and lots of tears", says Peberdy, who was the bureau's manager. "Quite typically we would have somebody who would come in and through an interpreter would indicate that he had been working 12 hours a day, seven days a week and he'd got 20 quid in his hand and a room in an unsanitary house and that was it." Peberdy says that in 2004 she and her colleagues were already using terms such as modern-day slavery, now in wider currency. The CAB went on to work closely with the Gangmasters' Licensing Authority[16] after it was established in 2005. Alongside problems faced by migrant workers, they were fielding calls

[16] Now called the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority.

from unhappy local residents. There were lots of myths that the CAB spent time debunking. A police scheme to explain the Highway Code to the Eastern European community, for instance, led to rumours that police were giving away free driving lessons to migrants. Some residents just disliked the presence of foreigners, but there were also understandable grievances, says Peberdy, for example from people affected by noise and rubbish on streets with small and overcrowded houses. She thinks anti-EU feeling in the town was stoked by anger that the council's legitimate concerns and requests for practical help were initially dismissed by central government. Over time she believes some of these pressures have eased. Schools were eventually given additional resources and many more incomers have learnt English. The town has recently been awarded £1.4m in government funding to help in tackling pressures from population change, including overcrowded housing and exploitative employers.[17]

Peberdy argues that the message of the Hanse initiative is that Boston is a port and has always had foreign people. "And actually, back in the 12th, 13th, 14th century they were here in large numbers and brought enormous prosperity to the town." She thinks there is now an acknowledgment that the new population is supporting local trade: "Yes, we've got a lot of East European shops. What we haven't got is a whole street of boarded up shops, which some other small towns like this have got." Since Eastern Europeans tend to cook from scratch, they have helped the market to thrive. Rachel Lauberts, facilitator and plan coordinator for Boston Big Local, who has a background in mediation, sees the project as improving pride in the town while also encouraging a sense of belonging for

[17] BBC News, 9 November, 2017, 'Cash to help UK's most anti-EU town tackle migrant issues', available at http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-lincolnshire-41930468, accessed 1.3.18.

Eastern European migrants who have links with both the old and new Hanseatic League.

To raise awareness of Boston's Hanseatic heritage, the Hanse group members have given talks in local schools, put on exhibitions and produced their own literature, including a Hanseatic trail. They hold annual Hanseatic days in Boston, with a stall in the market and a costumed procession through the town to the Stump, led by the Knights of Skirbeck—a local re-enactment troupe, whose helmets and chainmail help to grab attention. With additional funding from the Arts Council, they are collaborating with the local arts organisation, Transported Arts, to offer 'Boston Unfurled'—free adult workshops making flags and finials to celebrate present-day Boston at community events and festivals. There are plans for an archaeological dig in an area of housing near the river where they hope to involve local residents and schoolchildren in uncovering the foundations of the town's medieval Steelyard, or trading base—the elusive remains of the premises used by its Hanseatic merchants.

Alongside these home-based initiatives, a key strand of their work is Boston's participation in an annual Hanseatic festival, hosted each year by a different member town across northern Europe. The events, which attract many thousands of delegates, are an opportunity to showcase the town, its businesses and its tourism potential. While Boston's delegates have generally been self-funded, Boston Big Local finances the participation of four students, both English and Eastern European. The Hanse group is especially proud of its active Youth Hanse, as Boston is the only English town to have one. Sarah Colbert, a travel and tourism lecturer at Boston College who helped organise the trips, says that going out of the country to promote the town offers an invaluable opportunity

for her students. She has had particular interest from Eastern European students, who see the town's potential as a tourist destination more readily than those who have always lived there. She adds that she would like to see the main Hanse Group follow the example of its youth wing by bringing in Eastern European members. Janis Zegelis, aged 18, who arrived in Boston seven years ago from Latvia, has taken part in trips and town festivals as a member of the Youth Hanse. He tells me it has been a great experience. It has helped him improve his communication skills and learn about the town's history as well as Latvia's Hanseatic connections.

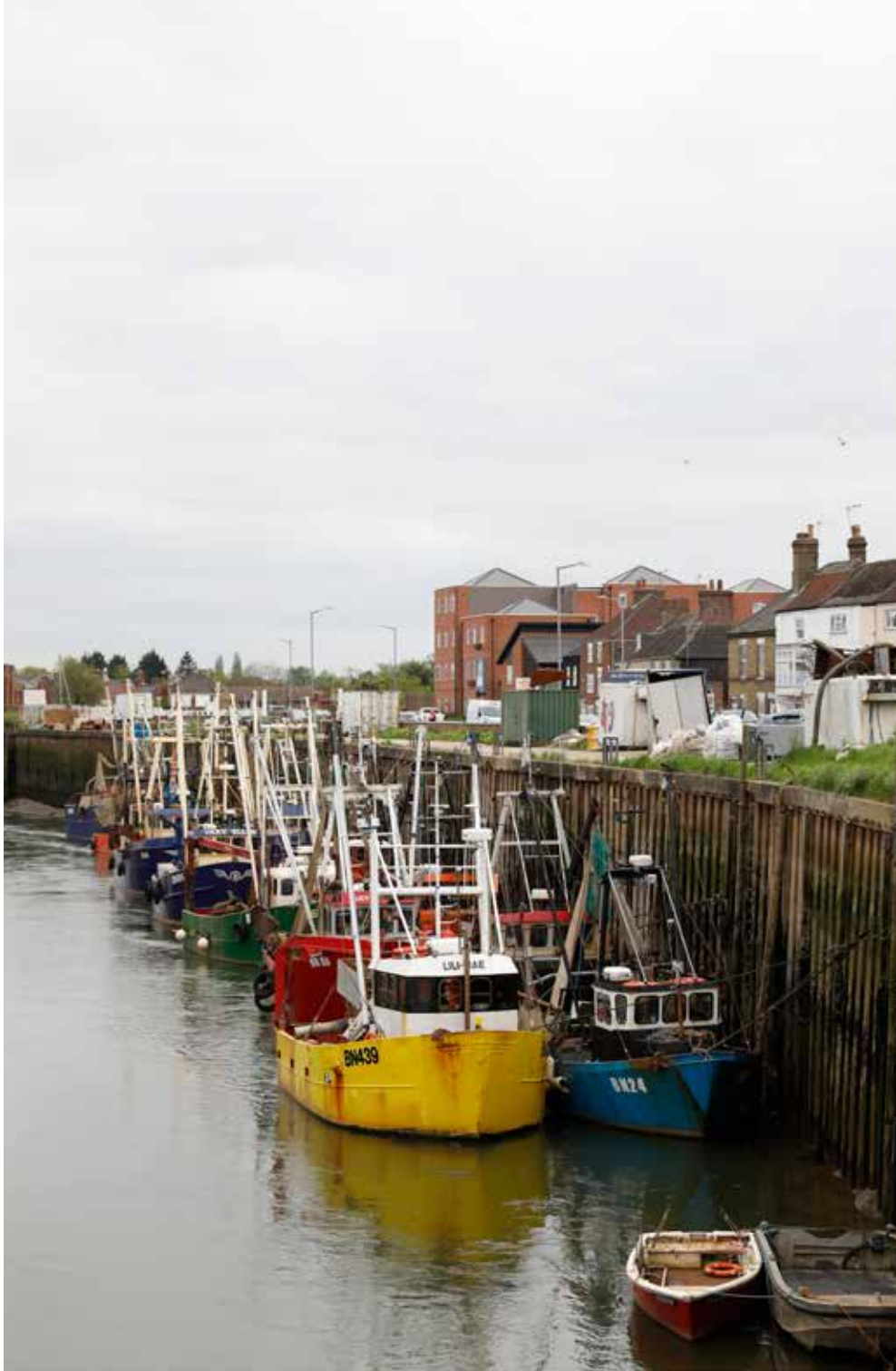
There is an evident irony in the idea that a town that has been described as Britain's Brexit capital[18] owes its heritage to a medieval forerunner of the EU. In the Hanse group's literature, the links to the present are made with subtlety, focusing on the New Hanse, rather than on migration. I wonder nevertheless if their internationalist narrative has been hard to sell. The group says not. People are interested and buy into the idea that the Hanseatic League was 'the Common Market without the red tape'. In fairness, Boston, like other English Hanseatic towns, was never itself a member of the league that so effectively boosted its exports, so the story does not necessarily offer a parable for Remain.

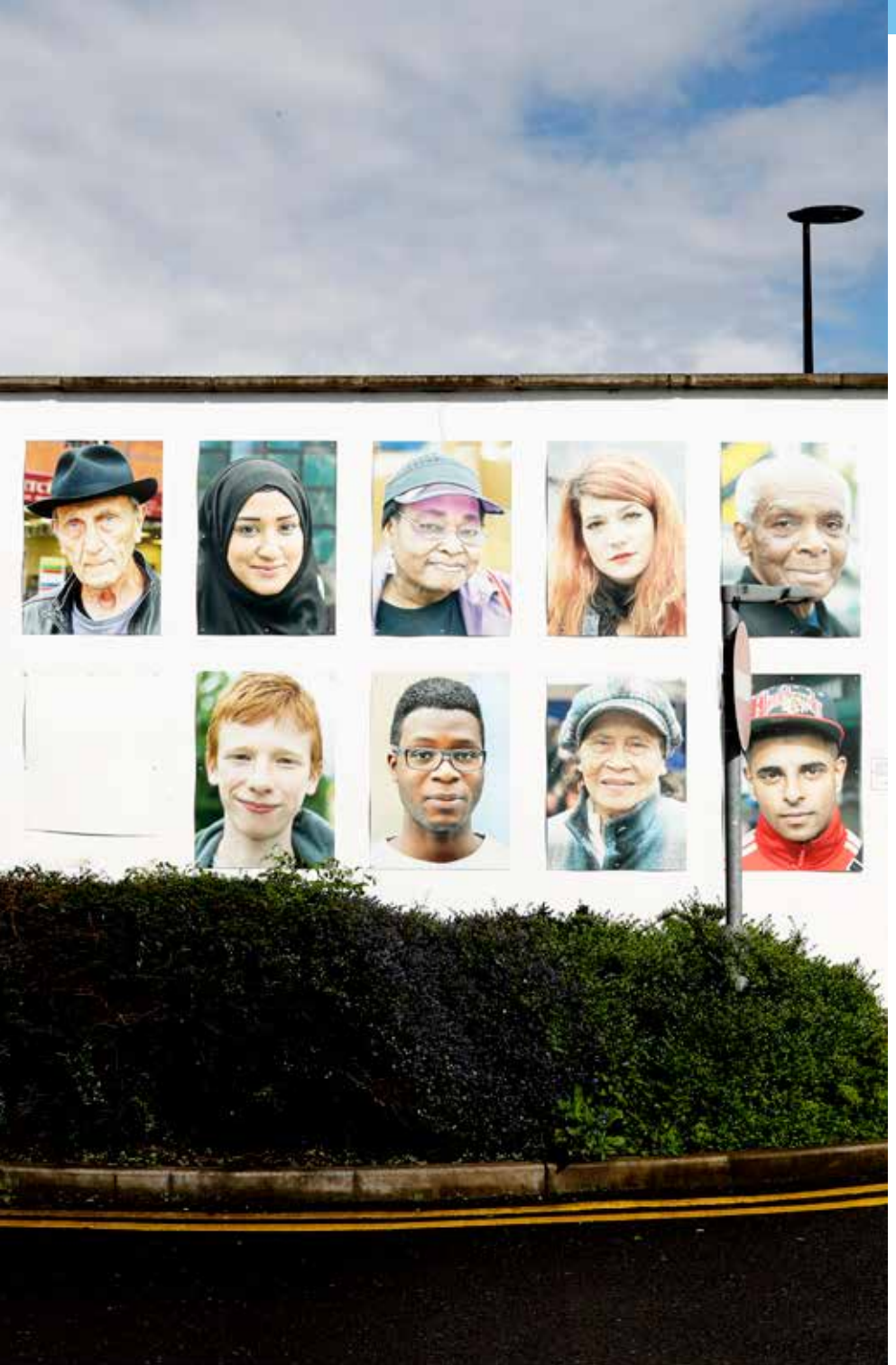
Boston's trade fell in the 1400s with the decline in the wool trade and Anglo-Hanseatic conflict, a loss that was hastened by the murder of a Hanse merchant in the town. History can be unobliging. When I ask if it matters that things ended badly, Lauberts hopes not: "Everything ends with a dramatic decline. You've got to look on the positives and embrace what we had and bring it back to life again. Get

[18] BBC News, 31 May, 2014, 'Election 2017: living in Boston—the UK's most anti-EU town' available at http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-lincolnshire-39948303, accessed 21.1.18.

some oomph back into the place, give people an excuse to have a bit of a celebration." She adds that their surveys show that perceptions of the town have improved in the last three years. "The sense of the town seems to be a lot more pleasant and amiable." She thinks that feelings have calmed down amongst local residents following the Leave result, although the ensuing uncertainty has added to anxiety in the migrant community and raised concerns from employers anticipating labour shortages.

Of the four projects I have looked at, the Boston Hanse group has the smallest budget, and I am interested to know how ambitious it is in practice. Fairman answers that it all depends who joins them. They have started something that they hope others will get behind, for instance, local businesses. She acknowledges, too, that you can't expect to change everyone's mindset. Her sights are particularly on the next generation and their aspirations: "We've got the port, let's use it. We've got what we did have, let's build on it. I don't think that the young really understand the power that they have … because they are the future. I mean we were the future once, and those Hanseatic merchants were the future, and look what they achieved—so they can do it too."





Conclusion

SO, TO RETURN TO THE QUESTION I STARTED with, what can history do for hard-pressed communities? Why do these residents, looking to overcome serious local challenges, see heritage as part of their toolkit for local improvement? In each of the areas the primary answer has been a different one. Ramsey is aiming for economic revitalisation and reconnection and is using heritage and existing social capital as a means to establish a quality brand for the town. Gateshead is keen to raise aspirations among local schoolchildren and is drawing on a rich industrial heritage to do so. Plaistow South is concerned to promote place distinctiveness and social cohesion while also democratising its history, ensuring that formerly unheard voices come to the fore and that some of those whose service to the community has been less celebrated receive wider recognition. Boston, whilst also focusing on social cohesion, has chosen to highlight a specific era in the town's history with a view to conveying an internationalist message. Both Plaistow South and Boston are particularly concerned with the choice of narrative and the meaning to be made of it.

While the backstory to each of these projects is thoroughly distinctive, there are also themes in common.

Boston, like Ramsey has an eye on the visitor economy and, like Gateshead, is concerned to raise the aspirations of young people. In Ramsey, as in Plaistow South, there is a strong focus on the history of the wider community and the importance of valuing the contribution made by ordinary individuals to the making of a place. While social cohesion is front of mind in Plaistow South and Boston, those leading initiatives in Ramsey and Gateshead also report that their work is helping to build bridges between the existing community and relative newcomers. In both Boston and Ramsey the capacity of heritage projects to act as a community focus for social events—an excuse to celebrate, a source of 'oomph'—is seen as an important benefit in its own right.

In all four towns the interviewees view their heritage work as a way of generating pride in the area. All of the projects moreover, are, in different ways, closely concerned with questions of local identity and disruptions to that identity in the wake of recent or more historical structural change, whether this is the decline in traditional industry or the intensification of agriculture. In different ways, the projects are attempting to adjust to those changes and their divergent social consequences, turning to history to answer the question, "who are we really?" in a way that satisfies the demands of the present.

The aspirations of the Boston project to reclaim from history a more multi-cultural narrative for the town affirms Laurajane Smith's view of heritage activities as acts of meaning-making that are often by their nature contested. It is worth pointing out here that the narrative chosen is intended to counter social division, rather than challenge the forces that have reshaped the area's economy. Might a different heritage project focus, for example, on changes to traditional farming practices and question the human and ecological costs of the

contemporary food-supply system that has driven the town's social changes? These questions, of course, are no less relevant for the rest of us, as we chuck Lincolnshire's salad bags into our supermarket baskets.

Communities rarely speak with one voice,[19] and each of the initiatives described here has developed from its own perspective. Nevertheless, as forms of community engagement that actively invite wider participation, they can, I think, be seen as opening conversations about heritage and identity, rather than presenting a fully formed discourse. I have focused here for the most part on the intentions and experiences of those leading the projects. Interviewees readily explained the thinking behind their heritage work but also reflected further on this as we talked. The indicators given—such as visitor numbers and resident survey results—go some way towards evaluating success, but, as interviewees pointed out, some of the hoped-for outcomes, such as pride and community cohesion, are much more difficult to assess. As programmes unfold further, it would be valuable to know more about how participants engage with them: what meanings they draw, how they react and what debates follow.

In initiating such dialogue, all of the projects have benefited substantially from being able to draw on professional support, including marketing specialists, graphic designers, participatory community artists and oral historians. Interestingly, much of this expertise relates to arts and communications rather than to conservation. The experience of these four localities suggests that for communities working to make their areas better places to live, the history embedded in those places is a

[19] For Smith's critique on the conceptualization of community, see Waterton, E. and Smith, L. (2010) 'The recognition and misrecognition of community heritage', International Journal of Heritage Studies, vol. 16, no. 1-2, pp. 4-15.

rich resource for community engagement and deliberation; that the past offers a useful medium through which to approach the imperatives of the present; and that 'doing heritage', in its many forms, can be less about looking back in nostalgia, more about finding ways to move forward in hope.

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