

Chapter 15

Heritage, Skills and Livelihood: Reconstruction and Regeneration in a Cornish Fishing Port

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15.1 Introduction

Every rock and cove in the parish has a name. Porth & Gear, The Nancy, Rubble Cove, Buttercove, Porthmear, Tottycove, Trescore, The Turtle—These names show how much this coast was once used but they are nearly forgotten. If that happens their history will be gone forever, and if a community loses its past it's in danger of losing its way. (*Nick Darke, The Wrecking Season*)¹

This quotation from the Cornish playwright, fisherman and ‘wrecker’², Nick Darke, points to connections between knowledge, memory, community and place. Intimate knowledge of shoreline features once common amongst coastal dwellers was certainly an unwritten, informal knowledge and language shared between generations. However its transmission is dependent on how the coast is used, that is on practice and labour. Nick Darke was speaking in the context of his fears about the loss of traditional livelihoods in the small farming and fishing community where he lived and was born, and the encroachment of tourism and property speculation. In his view tourism offered little remuneration and less dignity to its workforce:

Trade is usually what happens after a product has been manufactured, extracted, harvested, or caught. Now that trade is all that is left any sense of community and common purpose once provided by those activities is lost. Culture is debased and everything, including history, becomes a commodity (Darke 1999, p. xiii)

¹ *The Wrecking Season* (2005) directed by Jane Darke and produced by Boatshed Films.

² Wrecking: the traditional term (and the term Darke preferred) for salvaging wrecks or other flotsam and jetsam washed up on the shoreline, (otherwise known as ‘beachcombing’).

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Darke is critiquing the loss of livelihoods, related to the production of tangible things, which for him is the basis of community. He seems even to deplore the production of heritage as one more form of extraction without return. Whilst acknowledging issues of conflict, class and complexity around heritage, in this chapter I put forward an argument that heritage can contribute to sustaining livelihoods in fishing communities. I underline the importance of coastal use and knowledge, discussed through the example of the reconstruction of a sailing vessel of the kind once commonly used in fishing off Britain's coasts. This example leads me to emphasise non-essentialist meanings of heritage (Harvey 2001; Howard and Pindar 2003) and practice-based and labour-centred views on place and identity (in the manner of Ingold 2000; Gray 2000; Howard 2012).

Although there seems to be wide consensus about the necessity of working towards sustainability in fisheries there is also a healthy element of scepticism amongst scientists, ranging from cautiousness (Pauly et al. 2002) to doubt and criticism of some of the assumptions of the discourse (Longhurst 2006). This usually rests on consideration of the unsustainability of fisheries in the long, historical view and the complexity of understanding and regulating ecosystems and human impact. 'Restoration ecology' advocates have called for 'reconstructing the past to salvage the future' (Pitcher 2001, p. 601) referring to building datasets of past, 'pristine' conditions to inform present-day management models. However, this should not be misinterpreted as a prescription for anything as simple as 'going back' to pre-industrial technologies or social formations. As Longhurst (2006) and Thurstan et al. argue (2010), serious depletion of stocks in the North East Atlantic and North Sea had already occurred before the transition to steam and diesel powered boats. My argument for the relevance of fisheries heritage to sustainability (in the broad, multi-faceted sense of the latter term) rests on three considerations: the need for alternative livelihoods and diversification in the wake of fleet reduction, declining incomes, rising costs and restricted access (Symes and Phillipson 2009; Urquhart and Acott 2013); the potential contribution to promoting and strengthening the links between 'the catch and the locality' (Reed et al. 2013); and its role as a source of 'critical nostalgia' (Clifford 1986)—allegorical as well as practical instruction in local and regional resourcefulness (Macdonald 2002).

15.2 Cultural Loss and Salvage: Heritage Meanings and Practices

On the subject of heritage and sustainability in the 'coastal zone' of South West England, Howard and Pindar (2003) articulate two concerns: to outline a perspective on 'fields of heritage' and to question the validity of any rigid distinction between 'natural' and 'cultural' heritage; and to consider the implications of 'modes of cultural heritage consumption' (p. 57). Whilst not spelling out the way they define 'heritage', it is clear from their discussion that heritage involves a concern, intention or practice to *conserve*, whether the object is a building, species, language, or

skill. In most definitions of heritage the term is confusingly conflated with ‘culture’, especially since in recent times notions of ‘intangible’, or ‘non-material’ heritage have become more commonplace in official and policy-led definitions, alongside the previous emphasis on the historic (built) environment (Ahmad 2006). It is important, however, to distinguish ‘heritage’ from a more generic notion of ‘culture’ because otherwise we lose sight of the fact that heritage entails a selective and explicit attention to particular manifestations of culture that are deemed worthy, or in need, of preservation and maintenance.

Although heritage is concerned with articulating a view of what is traditional, this does not mean it is necessarily conservative, as heritage critics such as Hewison (1987) have argued (neither in the sense that it must be against innovation or change, nor in the sense that it is always elitist). Heritage derives from processes of social change, especially declining and/or shifting patterns of labour and livelihood and the accompanying movements of people and social encounters through which different places and classes interact. Heritage is not only a preoccupation of the middle and upper classes, but also derives from the experience of the working class in interaction with other classes within ongoing processes of social transformation. Rather than seeing heritage as merely a thing or an essence then, I follow Harvey (2001, p. 327) in taking a relational view on heritage as “a process, or a verb, related to human action and agency, and an instrument of cultural power... a contemporary product shaped from history.”

Howard and Pindar’s six fields of heritage (*ibid*) are: landscapes (including seascapes), monuments, sites, artefacts, activities and ways of life and finally, people. Some landscapes, places or practices associated with heritage might incorporate multiple fields. One of Howard and Pindar’s examples, the South West Coast Path (a National Trail) incorporates a mixture of protected and unprotected, natural and cultural features such as cliffs, coves and fishing villages. These may include sites of remembrance, including tragedies such as the loss of the Penlee lifeboat in 1981 when it went to the aid of a stricken ship, *The Union Star*. The old Penlee lifeboat house near Newlyn is now a monument for the crew lost in that incident—mostly fishermen from the village of Mousehole—and their families. An active fishing village is also the base for the production of a range of artefacts linked to activities and ways of life.

As Howard and Pindar (2003) observe “the heritage of the coastal zone includes the entire culture of how to use it... Heritage is not only the material lobster pot, but also the ability to make one” (p. 61). They also cite the examples of individuals or societies that preserve authentic old ships in order to sail them, and the recent revival of racing pilot gigs. The Cornishman and master craftsman Ralph Bird who made 29 of the 141 registered gigs in use today, described the pilot-gig as formerly being the ‘white van’ of maritime Cornwall—an all-purpose workhorse used to ferry pilots out to ships as well as involved in salvage and rescue operations³. There is a growing number of racing clubs mainly based in active and former fishing communities, and as Howard and Pindar put it, the sport is “one example of a

³ Obituaries, *The Times* (November 14 2009, p. 115).

determination to conserve the activity as well as the artefact. It is more interested with rowing than carpentry” (p. 61).

Laurier (1998) has studied formal and informal projects of ship replication and restoration, highlighting the meanings and skills involved for participants and audiences engaged in projects that involve craft production. Laurier’s sense of the term ‘craft’ recalls a ‘pre-Fordist’ era of connection between maker and product that lies counter to a wider trend of capitalist alienation (Greenhalgh 1997). However, ‘craft’ is also relevant here in Sennett’s (2009) sense of the term as technique or expertise that calls upon both manual dexterity and intellect, the problem-solving abilities of ‘hand’ and ‘head’ combined. Laurier notes the significant amount of historical research that both expert and amateur boatbuilders undertake—a dynamic process involving embodied knowledge, a makeshift approach to old and new, and trial and error. The informal boat restorers in particular work like genealogists contacting families to trace the biographies of previous owners or sailors and investigating archives. However, Laurier (1998) concludes that “the vital part of restoration is the reacquisition of skills and this forms a final embodied link to the past” (p. 47) underlining the importance in this context of an informal, ‘learning by doing’ approach. Similarly, Easthope (2001) also distinguishes ‘kinaesthetic’ from ‘intellectual’ engagements with maritime heritage. In his seminal work on livelihood, dwelling and skill, Ingold (2000) contrasts ‘skill’ or ‘technique’ with ‘technology’. Associating the latter with formal, epistemic knowledge, skill by contrast is “tacit, subjective, context-dependent, practical ‘knowledge how’, typically acquired through observation and imitation rather than verbal instruction” (p. 316) He is also concerned with showing the links between place, practical knowledge and the human subject (the fundamental emplacement of such knowledge and its ties to the body, personhood and social relationships). This perspective enriches our understanding of the relationship between heritage practices and place.

Crang argues (1994, p. 151) that “each [*heritage*] practice has as its effect a different space for the past.” Many of the conflicts and tensions surrounding heritage production relate to how practices (such as replicating or restoring a boat) are incorporated into the redevelopment of space (such as waterfronts). Steinberg (1999, p. 41) observes that an image of the ocean as a nostalgic space finds contemporary salience in the ‘postmodern urban waterfront’, examples being the festival market places, high income housing and maritime museums of Boston, Baltimore, Bristol, Cape Town, Lisbon and Sydney. “Here, the sea is referenced as a crucial source for folk culture and past economic glory, but the role of the ocean in contemporary political economy is reduced to that of a provider of images to be consumed” (p. 407). Steinberg quotes Skula (1995, p. 12): “The old harbour front, its links to a common culture shattered by unemployment, is now reclaimed for a bourgeois reverie on the mercantilist past.”

Observing the recent movement towards ‘vernacular’ modes of heritage, a fascination with the mundane and growth in ‘interactive’ and local heritage museums, Day and Lunn (2003, p. 296) consider whether “nostalgia is indicative of a more participatory and multilayered sense of the past?” Or if, “what generally passes for nostalgia-driven heritage is in fact a version of a past which is romanticized

and distanced from the everyday experiences of most people”—the sights, sounds, smells and dangers? A cautionary tale is told by Atkinson et al. (2002). In the place marketing and redevelopment of the city of Hull, a former distant-water fishing port, efforts have been made to ‘exorcise’ fishing (including the smell of fish) from the ‘civic image’. Illustrating the inherent selectivity of heritage, the city’s maritime heritage is referenced in terms of the romanticised, historic age of sail. Meanwhile there has been contestation about the redevelopment of the dock that challenges any simplistic counter-narrative about working class community. The dock includes a site where an annual memorial event is held to the 8,000 trawlermen lost at sea, showing how the built environment acts as a repository of collective place-memory. However, Atkinson et al. (2002) point out that not all of Hull’s fishing community would want the trawler-owners building to be preserved—a reminder that ‘collective’ memories may also be formed and informed by contexts of inequality. In a comparative study of small museums in North Carolina mill towns and the ‘Time and Tide’ project in Great Yarmouth, Wedgwood (2009) has asked whether working classes can also gain from preservation. She noted that “Yarmouth people wanted to turn an empty fish-factory into a museum, while retaining the fishy smell, and a fire-damaged wall”, suggesting the importance of personal memory in this context. The tension these examples highlight seems to be one between heritage that presents a homogenised and sanitised version of the past, and one that acknowledges a heterogeneity of local experiences and interests (including inequality) and which enables a more “critical presentation of the past” and its “links with, or contingency on the present” (Walsh 1992, cited by Day and Lunn 2003, p. 297).

Rural and industrial heritage may be a source of belonging and identity long after the labour which it draws on has ceased. The inhabitants of Ferryden in Scotland highly prize their identities as ‘fisherfolk’ despite the fact that the place no longer has an active fishing industry. Nadel-Klein (2003, p. 8) situates their role in the invention and perpetuation of idealised aspects of the fishing past as a response to the ongoing marginalisation of rural places within a capitalist political economy. In the process there has been a move from ‘fishers’ material status as primary producers of food to their symbolic status as objects of the ‘tourist gaze’. Resentment and resistance towards the prospect of becoming the latter is, however, keenly expressed by fishers who remain active in the industry. This brings us back to the second of Howard and Pindar’s (2003) concerns about the implications of modes of cultural heritage consumption.

Cottages and sail lofts in Cornish fishing villages have in a sense been ‘preserved’ by conversion to holiday lets, second homes and artists’ studios. Of course the consequence of this market in desirable locations is that many locals are priced out of property ownership in these villages. The author of one travel article who visited Salcombe in Devon seemed either unaware or uninterested in the area’s maritime heritage, other than the most superficial aspects, and more impressed by the “breathtaking prime real estate... which has turned this formerly sleepy fishing village into the Knightsbridge of Devon”⁴. There seems to be a real spectrum

⁴ ‘Devon Sent’ (Evening Standard Magazine, Standard.co.uk/Lifestyle).

of tourist consumption from this example to more informed and sensitive perceptions of visitors keenly interested in signs of a working fishing industry as found by Urquhart and Acott in Hastings (2013). The nuances of class and community in such encounters is discussed by Walton (2000) through the life and work of Stephen Reynolds, an author and fisheries inspector who lived and worked amongst the fishing community of Edwardian Sidmouth for a time. Reynolds felt that the fishermen he came to know were able to identify more with working class visitors who were increasingly arriving on the railway, than with “people of other classes who had lived in the neighbourhood all their lives” (p. 131). Reynolds articulated a sense of the distinctive craft of the inshore fisherman: “local knowledge, coupled with ‘pluck’ and the practical skills of the seaman” (p. 134) but he also expressed some of the anxieties—although filtered through his own romantic and sensitive preoccupations—regarding the potential loss of manliness, dignity and ‘degradation of craft’ posed by the opportunity for fishermen to work as pleasure boatmen for the visitors.

The most distinctive and important characteristic of the coast may be, as Walton has argued (2010), that it is an ‘informal space’—one that is deeply evocative for personal as well as collective memory, whether as a source for recollection of childhood seaside holidays or one connected to making a livelihood from the sea. Commenting on Casey’s (2002, p. 76) argument that to “know a region is also to be able to remember it”—Matsuda (2004, p. 262) says this mnemonic sense of place “defies mere ‘representation’ because it is not about symbolism, but about finding presence in shifting temporal registers of a lived past.” As visitors and diverse local inhabitants and workers attempt to ‘find presence’ in relation to past and contemporary rural life-ways, there is potential for both connection and disconnection to nature, work, things made, other people. In any case tourism need not be the only target of coastal heritage and Howard and Pindar (2003) seriously question the sustainability of basing coastal economies around tourism. Rather, “if tourism can never be sustainable, then conserving heritage to serve the local population in very different ways might be” (p. 67). The implications of different modes of heritage production may then be as important as modes of consumption. With this thought in mind, I turn now to considering an ethnographic context that illustrates these concerns.

15.3 Research Context

The data presented in this chapter draw on research in Cornwall conducted over the course of 1 year from summer 2008 to 2009 and during subsequent short visits. The project explored connections between fishing livelihood, craft and heritage in Cornwall, with a focus on the port of Newlyn. It has enquired into different forms of knowledge and knowledge transmission and reflects on notions of sustainability, community and place in light of social change in Cornish fishing villages. A variety of methods were employed, including: archival research; formal interviews and casual conversations with fishermen, fishermen-artists, boatbuilders, fish merchants, people working in fisheries management and welfare and a range of non-fishing

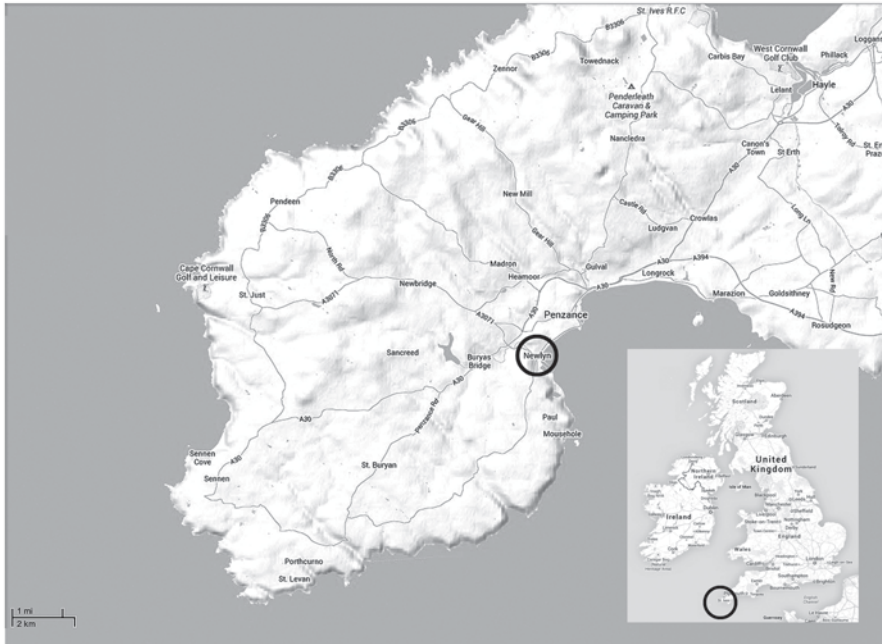


Fig. 15.1 Location of Newlyn, near Penzance, in Cornwall, South-West England

locals; and finally participant observation in a range of activities including fishing trips, formal basic training for fishermen, visiting museums and art exhibitions and learning to sail a heritage fishing boat. This chapter deals in particular with the latter heritage initiative but before describing that, a brief account of the study site is necessary to put it into context⁵.

Situated near the south west tip of Cornwall (Fig. 15.1), Newlyn supports a large and diverse fishing fleet including beam trawlers, stern trawlers, ring-netters, gill-netters, crabbers and handline fishing boats. These exploit fisheries primarily in the Celtic Sea, but also the English Channel, the Bristol Channel and the Irish Sea. The various currents that converge off the south-west coast provide a rich and diverse species range and the offshore vessels in particular target premium fish such as monkfish, megrim and sole. In 2011, fish worth £ 22 million were landed into the port (MMO 2012) and in 2009, 156 fishing vessels were operating from Newlyn as a base port employing about 255 fishermen⁶. Census figures from 2001 show that in the local authority area of Penzance South (which includes Newlyn) only 98 people

⁵ The names of interviewees quoted in this chapter have not been disclosed to protect anonymity, with the exception of John Lambourn who provided permission to disclose. All images are the author's own unless credit is given.

⁶ Data courtesy of Cornwall Sea Fisheries Council (2009).

(5% of the population) were employed in the fishing industry⁷. This indicates that the majority of fishers operating from Newlyn live outside of the ward. There is a need for local employment far beyond what the fishing industry can provide; however in this region there are limited alternatives. The five largest sectors of employment in 2001 were: wholesale and retail (18.4%), health and social work (12.3%), hotels and catering (11.4%), real estate renting and business activities (10.1), and manufacturing (8.4)⁸. The region is very dependent on tourism as well as public sector work, much of the employment is seasonal and/or low paid and there is high unemployment (4.2% compared to 2.6% average for the southwest and 3.4% average for England)⁹.

The Superintendent of the Fishermen's Mission (Newlyn branch)¹⁰, emphasised how the local fishing industry was experiencing problems associated with rising costs, restricted access and declining incomes, including a fall in recruitment of young people and a loss of more experienced fishers. Over the last 6 to 8 years the latter had been commonly the 'less competent ones' he said, but more recently they were losing 'good skippers' leaving for jobs in the North Sea energy industry where they can get a regular wage and a predictable rhythm of 1 month at work and 1 month on leave. Not only were they losing valuable skill-sets that would be difficult to replace once they had gone, but he also felt that young people were turning to local jobs (high street and supermarket retail etc.) that were in his view not of 'high quality', in other words not career jobs. The Superintendent suggested this is linked to the fact that fishing was no longer seen as a 'valued career' and parents in Newlyn were also reluctant for their sons to follow their fathers into fishing. The lack of optimism about fishing futures I encountered at Newlyn contrasted with my experience of fishers in other ports like Mevagissey. One reason for this may be because of contrasting forms of economic organisation, with Newlyn particularly dependent on the fleet of offshore trawlers that go to sea for up to 14 days at a time. Furthermore, most of the beam-trawl vessels are company-owned and a study of how the Newlyn fleet was adapting to rising fuel costs (Abernethy et al. 2010) found that not only was this section of the fleet particularly heavy on fuel consumption but there was also less optimism and sense of economic security amongst the company skippers than the independent owner-skipper.

Newlyn has a diverse population that reflects both its industrial past and its history as a centre for arts and crafts going back to the Newlyn School of artists that emerged in the 1880s, who were primarily drawn to Newlyn by the fishing industry. Despite the fact that fishing only employs a minority of the local population it dominates the village physically and socially and residents draw meaning and a sense of place from it. A number of non-fishing locals described the attraction

⁷ 2001 Census for England and Wales. Source: Office for National Statistics licensed under the Open Government Licence v.1.1.0.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ The Superintendent emphasised that the views expressed were his own and that he was not speaking on behalf of the Fisherman's Mission.

of it as something that felt ‘vital’ and ‘real’. Although Newlyn includes multiple, overlapping communities, with various factions, tensions and solidarities, fishing and non-fishing locals take pride in the fact that it is a ‘rough and ready’, ‘working sea port’. It has a wider reputation as having a roguish element and Newlyners seemed to actively cultivate this image whether or not they felt it related directly to them. Unlike most other fishing villages in Cornwall, Newlyn only has a marginal tourist industry. It draws in a small number of visitors from the much larger number that visit the neighbouring picturesque fishing village of Mousehole, which now harbours a tiny active fishing fleet for part of the year and where a large proportion of the cottages are now holiday lets. It was not uncommon for people I spoke to in Newlyn to draw a contrast with Mousehole with a mixture of pride and also anxiety about the prospect of Newlyn sharing the same future.

Against this background of concern about loss of skills and loss of jobs, I encountered a heritage initiative that was attempting to revive old skills and create new jobs. In 2004, *Ripple* was salvaged from a muddy grave in a river estuary in Cornwall. Built in 1886, *Ripple* was the remains of a Cornish sail fishing boat, known as a *lugger*. The boat was brought back to Newlyn where it had docked prior to 1933 when it began its life as a leisure yacht and houseboat. During this latest reincarnation, retired ship captain and civil servant John Lambourn spent the next 5 years restoring her. *Ripple* was re-launched in 2007, hauled to the sea by a local rugby team watched by a crowd of several hundred, and given a blessing by the local parish minister. The sight of *Ripple* moored in the harbour drew my curiosity, incongruous alongside the other boats but also somehow fitting in the wider land/seascape. It begged the question whether this heritage project could have something to say and to contribute to the problems in the fishing industry or whether they were operating in two different social and economic domains—separate and even in antagonism.

Following Cornwall’s designation as an Objective One area for the 2000–2007 EU funding programme a fisheries task force was set up consisting of fisheries regulators, port managers, fish merchants and processors, agents and fishermen’s representatives to plan and implement how the money potentially available for fisheries was to be spent. A sub-group—the Newlyn Fishing Industry Forum (NFIF)—was given the task of studying the potential for regeneration in the port through developing fisheries infrastructure and identifying and capitalising on “opportunities that can be gained by combining aspects of tourism, leisure and fishing industries and to encourage all sectors of the fishing industry to be more accessible to the public”¹¹. Proposals were not only informed by top-down policy directives; rather in public discourse surrounding regeneration in Newlyn, in online blogs and in my interviews, there was talk of the need for change and modernisation and of addressing patterns of stagnation and narrow development. One of the members of the NFIF was the Methodist minister for Newlyn. Although recognising the complex and longstanding ties between Newlyn and the firm that own the majority of the beam trawl fleet, he questioned the public benefit of the harbour having “all its

¹¹ Objective One Partnership for Cornwall and Scilly (n.d.).

Fig. 15.2 *Ripple*, Looe Luger Festival 2009. Author's own photograph



resources tied up in boats that were unable to go to sea” (referring to the impact of the fuel cost and recruitment issues). A harbour is about more than those who go to sea, he added: “You cannot separate a harbour from the people that live around it.”

John Lambourn was also a member of the NFIF and envisaged the boat contributing to its heritage and regeneration goals, but essentially the idea, the finance for the project, and a lot of the restoration work, was all his own. In fact it took 5 years of hard work before she was seaworthy. John grew up close to Newlyn and was the son of an artist. As a young man he left to join the merchant navy, and became a ship’s captain ferrying cargo and passengers all over the world. This led to a position as assistant harbour master and civil servant in the Marine Department of the port of Hong Kong. On retirement he returned to live in Newlyn where his brother is a fisherman. Acknowledging the unique character of Newlyn, John has said that a ‘too tidy approach’ to promoting the area’s heritage would not sit well. He intended for *Ripple* to be a working boat and to have a ‘rural’ rather than an ‘academic’ or ‘sacred’ function. His vision was to set up a sailing school that would give young people as well as paying tourists a practical educational experience. He envisaged that the learning of seamanship skills through luggers would not only be a means for personal development and life skills amongst young people but would also stimulate a growing interest in traditional boatbuilding in Cornwall. Furthermore, re-registering it under its original fishing vessel number he hoped to use it to demonstrate fishing techniques and land fish to the market (Fig. 15.2).

15.4 Reconstruction

No one knows when the first boat was built, or where, or by whom, or why. Boats began before history; boats are part of our cultural memories. Why else do people gather at the water’s edge when tall ships appear? *Dick Wagner, founding director, The Centre for Wooden Boats, Seattle* (Hendrickson 2012, p. 21)

Ripple constitutes a particular form of heritage but it also signifies and embodies a range of other relatively longstanding heritages—the influence of the Newlyn School of artists that drew John’s father to the area and which, alongside photographs, provide visual referents, in the absence of living memory, of the days when luggers were in common use; its biography tells a story drawing on a tradition of folk tales centred around boats and their journeys; and finally it embodies a range of craft skills, which some have even considered to be ‘arts’ of their own. A former fisherman and artist remarked:

A lot is said about art in Cornwall, but hammer and chisel art, the art of bending and avoiding splitting, the art of each fastening being driven in and making up the overall strength of the *Ripple* seem to be John Lambourn’s art. What a beauty the *Ripple* is after so much work. I get the feeling John could see her finished before he started.

Luggers are heavy-framed, beamy¹² craft built for fishing that are easily identifiable by two perpendicular sails located fore and aft¹³. They are carvel-built, which means that once the keel¹⁴ is laid and the ribs are in place, the planks of the hull are pegged flush against one another, rather than overlapping, as is the clinker tradition. Clinker design was used by the Vikings to build their longboats whilst carvel techniques were common in the ancient eastern Mediterranean. Maritime historians are not clear on how these influences spread, or whether techniques in different areas developed independently (Oliver 1971). The Cornish lugger that evolved was very particular to the region, whilst drawing in influences such as Breton vessels encountered during smuggling expeditions. The design continued to develop even after the arrival of the railway into Cornwall, as the need to be first back to market to get a good price for the catch intensified. There were differences in design between East Cornwall and West Cornwall and even between ports such as St Ives and Mount’s Bay. There is no one alive now who made a living from sailing these boats, and few people who have the knowledge to build them. However, there is a rich variety of historical sources that John could go to.

To begin with there were the technical drawings and writings of maritime historians like Philip Oak and Edgar March, commissioned between the 1930s and 1950s by the National Maritime Museum to travel the length and breadth of the British Isles recording both the design of traditional craft and the memories of the boatbuilders and mariners, as these craft were being replaced by engine powered boats and steel hulls. There were also ‘hand me down stories’ (in John’s words) and family archives. Once the restoration had begun, descendants of her former owners began rummaging around in attics and producing photographs and records that revealed *Ripple*’s biography. There are a great many photographs as well as paintings depicting luggers in the late nineteenth century especially. This was the moment shortly after the arrival of the railway, when the lugger fishing industry was at its peak and

¹² Beamy: a terms used to describe a vessel that is broad (i.e. the proportion of its ‘beam’ or breadth relative to length).

¹³ Fore and aft: referring to the front and rear sections of a vessel, or towards the ‘stern’ and the ‘bow’ respectively.

¹⁴ Keel: A lengthwise structure along the base of a ship.

artists' communities as well as early tourism were beginning to flourish, especially at Newlyn and St Ives. John had never built a boat before, let alone a lugger and yet the small details such as the rigging match these visual representations perfectly. Finally, there is a huge amount of what John has called 'the social history of Cornwall'—the historic documents in public archives that record who built the boats, who owned and had shares in the boats, who skippered them and how much they caught.

The construction of *Ripple* and the material networks it embodies is mirrored in the social and economic relationships evident in the archives. Census data for St Ives in the late nineteenth century shows that the boatbuilders, sail-makers, blacksmiths, rope-makers, coopers etc. all lived alongside the fishers and mariners. The legal ownership of each boat consisted of 64 shares and the Merchant Shipping Records show that these trades people as well as widows frequently held shares in the boats. The profits of each catch were divided between a boat-share (which was divided again between the owners), a body-share which able fishermen received (boys received a half-share) and a finally a net-share for those crew members that owned a net or a piece of a net¹⁵. The wives of the fishermen often made and mended the nets, especially as fishing industrialised and the boats were away for up to 3 months at a time chasing the shoals of herring in an annual circumnavigation of Britain.

The way that *Ripple* is a conduit for the transmission of historical knowledge lies not only in archival repositories of social history and memory, but also in the skills and insight acquired through learning to sail her. I experienced this first-hand as a member of the crew sailing her for the first time since the 1930s. The ability to sail a lugger, as to build one, was also a skill that had to be recovered and relearned—and the only way to do this was through practice. It was a tough, very physical challenge that gave us a direct connection to a bygone way of life. There were moments of exhilaration when body and limb, wind and sailing rig finally worked in tandem, and boat and crew achieved momentary gracefulness. After a race at a lugger regatta, we rowed into the harbour, two men to each massive oar. A crowd was gathered on the piers, and cheered as we passed through the gaps. However, for the most part the experience was punishingly hard and sometimes frightening. With a dipping lug rig, every time it was necessary for the boat to tack, the foresail (about 700 sq feet of canvas and a heavy wooden spar) had to be quickly lowered, passed around the mast and re-hoisted, without losing the wind or getting things tangled up. It was a difficult procedure for a bunch of novices. Due to John's commitment to authenticity, the sails were held in place by large iron hooks which passed through a round iron ring or *cleat* in the corner of the sail and were connected to the *sheets* which passed inside the gunwale and up to the *halyards* (ropes on which you pulled or 'let go' to raise or lower the sail). Sometimes when sailing the wind slackened for a moment and the iron cleats would come free. The sail would start to whip and crack like lightning, the iron ring flying dangerously around our heads, until some brave soul caught it and wrestled it back into place. On a failed attempt to make it to the Isles of Scilly in heavy seas, a crew member took a nasty hit to the head, and a lifeboat was called to tow the boat back to safety.

¹⁵ Thanks to Tony Pawlyn, maritime historian (personal communication) for information regarding the social history of the Cornish fishing industry in the lugger era.

Fig. 15.3 The crew of *Ripple* working together to furl and cover a sail, Mount's Bay 2009. Author's own photograph



Through these experiences we were given an insight into how tough the men must have been that sailed these boats for a living and we learnt that fishing and sailing, in the era before fishing boats were mechanised, were interdependent and advanced whole-body skills, to which a practical education from a young age would have been a great advantage. We also had to struggle with the nautical terminology and phrases that John insisted on using, as if to show that *Ripple* was part of a much broader maritime tradition. About 30 original Cornish luggers and 3 replicas are still sailing today. There is an element of performance and spectacle about these, which is romantic particularly for bystanders and onlookers; as crew-members we were only too aware of the dangers. However, when the festivals and regattas are in full sway they are a thrilling experience for crews and spectators because they animate seascapes in a way otherwise rarely seen today which perhaps resonates with a deep, subconscious memory of past eras. As fishing and other coastal industries, such as shipping and shipbuilding, have industrialised, specialised and in many areas declined (Smith 1999; Starkey 1998), these tangible links with working seascapes have also been lost (Figs. 15.3 and 15.4).

Just as John's project is given meaning by local repositories of history and memory, this last aspect brings into view a body of academic work in archaeology and historical geography. Braudel's approach to Mediterranean history set a precedent (1995 [1972¹⁶])—an influence evident in some subsequent scholarly treatments of Atlantic history, for example, Bowen's *Britain and the Western Seaways* (1972) and Cunliffe's *Facing the Ocean: the Atlantic and its Peoples* (2001). These identify the Atlantic coastal routes of the western fringes of Europe as constituting a distinct realm of cultural contact and exchange, fostering over millennia littoral cultures with similarities in technology, language, religion and other aspects of culture. Whilst the *Ripple* restoration is somewhat particular given the local context,

¹⁶ First published in France under the title *La Méditerranée et le Monde Méditerranéen à l'Époque de Philippe II*, 1949.

Fig. 15.4 *Ripple* chasing the pack, Looe Lugger Festival 2009. Author's own photograph



it is also one of a growing network of maritime heritage projects spanning Atlantic North West Europe explicitly celebrating a common heritage which some see as part of an ongoing ‘Celtic’ identity. This new maritime heritage has echoes of a deep past in which, from one angle, shared marginality drove a common seafaring culture on the fringes of Europe. From another angle such cultures were part of a cosmopolitan oceanic world, which from prehistory to the middle and early modern ages, was at the centre of trade, migration and innovation.

To recall my first encounter with John and the *Ripple*, I had asked him how he had the skills to build such a boat and he replied: “Oh, when you grow up, in an environment where things are made, you just pick it up, like you do when you work on your own house... That’s what they should be teaching young people. It gives you”... (he searched for the right words). “Freedom!” his friend, a fisherman, put in. “Freedom, yes”, John continued “and also a sort of ‘can do’ attitude—if you have a dream and you can do the work yourself, well then that can make the difference between achieving something and never even beginning.” Macdonald (2002) has said that displays of vernacular material culture represent a critical commentary on resourcefulness that is expressive both of a locality and a way of life that is broader than the locality. Laviolette (2006) makes a similar argument about contemporary maritime art in Cornwall that makes use of recycled and salvaged material recalling the work of the St Ives fisherman-artist Alfred Wallace (1855–1942).

Ripple represents a technological tradition that is unique to west Cornwall and simultaneously it can also be interpreted as representative of ways of life collectively associated with the broad historical-geography of maritime regions and more specifically, with fishing. The emphasis John placed on reviving a sense of local resourcefulness and independence is pertinent in the context of the fishing industry in an era where entry costs are increasingly prohibitive for young people.

15.5 Regeneration

Whilst *Ripple* can be seen as an example of ‘critical nostalgia’ (Clifford 1986) it is arguably also a pragmatic and forward-looking enterprise. John had said one of his aims was “to open people’s eyes to the lessons of a 100 years ago, when there was no oil and only wind.” Recently one of the last of the Westcountry ketches¹⁷, *Irene*, sailed for Brazil, via the Mediterranean. It was transporting and trading in ethical and organic food produce between ports on route, and is an imaginative attempt to explore a market for low carbon cargo. Such ventures are also being explored on a commercial level by companies such as B9 Shipping Company. Given the pressures in the fishing fleet owing to rising fuel costs¹⁸, *Ripple* provides an allegory about the need to explore alternative technologies and the role for the past as a resource and stimulus for future innovation. Several vessels at Newlyn have already experimented with incorporating sail power to make them less reliant on diesel. With multiple major redevelopment plans, public and private, having been discussed for Newlyn and the surrounding vicinity, John could also see an opportunity for revived boatbuilding and servicing yards. These could not only provide alternative jobs but also potentially be a stimulus for technological innovation in the fisheries sector.

Attitudes towards John’s project from members of the local fishing industry have, however, have been mixed. A colourful and provocative character, his vision has been regarded by some as romantic and even a tad eccentric.. Until recently, he was a newly appointed member of the Newlyn Pier and Harbour Commissioners, following a government Harbour Review Order in 2010. John, along with two others, was later voted out by secret ballot. Little information was given to the public as to the reasons for this ousting but it is no secret that there were disagreements regarding harbour redevelopment and regeneration plans, in particular a proposal for a new fish market.

One of the problems identified with the existing market has been is that it is an extremely functional and not aesthetically pleasing building that dominates the sea-front and blocks views from the centre of the village to the sea. Most tourists either bypass Newlyn or pass straight through on the way to Mousehole. Ambitious plans were advocated by some people, including John, for redevelopment of the harbour that would include ‘visitor friendly’ features and a more effective marketing of the heritage of the village¹⁹. Others, including some fishermen and fish merchant firms, felt that the fishing industry could not afford such plans and were wary of whom it would benefit. Whilst yet another group of port users, including fishermen I spoke to who operated from Newlyn but did not land their fish there, or reside in the locale, felt that any new market would ideally be located not in the village at all but

¹⁷ Ketch: two-masted, fore and aft sailing ship traditionally used for transporting small cargoes.

¹⁸ The overheads created by fuel expenses are huge—for some Newlyn based trawlers £ 10,000 of diesel per trip on average—arguably a significant pressure towards overfishing as well as affecting fisher incomes.

¹⁹ Plans were informed by the Cornwall Archaeological Unit report: Cornwall and Scilly Urban Survey. Historical characterization for regeneration: Newlyn (Russell 2003).

favoured a new central inland market and distribution centre directly linked to one of the main roads, where lorries can get into and out of easily. This could then serve both large fishing ports in the region and other smaller ports that presently overland their fish to existing markets.

Clearly there are widely divergent views represented here about the particular ties between fishing markets, towns/villages, harbours and fleets and how these are to evolve and adapt to changing European and global economic and political conditions. For one prominent fish merchant and multiple fishing vessel owner in Newlyn, the bottom line must be the priorities of the catching sector. They had some sharp but pertinent points about the limitations of John's project, saying, "it doesn't do a lot to the port in terms of economic strength or economic financial benefits, you know, it doesn't employ anybody as such and it doesn't bring in an awful lot of bread and butter, does it?" I asked if they could see a role for the kinds of diversification that John's project might help promote such as traditional boat building and boat servicing yards. They replied that they could not see anything necessarily wrong with it but doubted whether it was "a viable thing bringing in an economy to the harbour in terms of fish landed."

He hasn't landed a fish yet with the *Ripple* and I don't think he ever will land a fish. If he wants to have the *Ripple* and go sailing, that's fine and have people building luggers and things, I haven't got a problem with that. There is certainly a need for carpenters, but whether it is viable without grants and things like that, that's quite a different issue.

Perhaps naively I then asked my interviewee whether they felt that projects like John's might have a role in informing wider communities about fishing in Cornwall and potentially attract new recruitment. Once again their response was to the point:

I haven't seen any single person come in yet that's gone commercial fishing, having gone on the *Ripple*. And I mean, maybe it will, but I very much doubt it. There's quite a different set of skills needed to go commercial fishing on some of the steel vessels than the sailing vessel.

The comments of the fish merchant convey a sense of boundaries, social distance and different economic priorities that in her view mark a sharp divide between fishing 'industry' and the kinds of 'heritage' John is promoting. Apprenticeship into fishing is typically by an informal process of experience, observation and practice. Pálsson (1994) has drawn an analogy between acquiring fishing and seafaring skills and going on a journey, finding that Icelandic fishermen spoke of overcoming seasickness as 'getting one's sea-legs', therefore providing a metaphor for the corporeal nature of gaining competence at sea. Along with Ingold (2000) he has used the term 'enskillment' to denote this kind of knowledge acquisition that comes from active engagement with the social and physical environment. Cognitive social learning theory also points to the importance of environments for learning, incorporating such processes as 'legitimate peripheral participation' (Lave and Wenger 1991) and 'communities of practice' (Wenger 1998). One fishermen I interviewed recalled helping his father and uncles out as a boy—cleaning up the boat when it landed, going to sea with them, being allowed to keep and sell crabs and generally learning "small things, like tying your knots".

Whilst *Ripple* is a form of heritage that calls on informal, practical and experiential learning of skills, this process and the skills learnt are comparable to modern fishing but not alike. It can by no means be a replacement for occupational skill-sets in fishing. What is being learnt during an apprenticeship on a boat is not only mechanical skills but also how to fit in to a social system which is both embodied in the habitus of the crew but also transcends the crew as a wider way of life (van Ginkel 2001; Simpson 2006). To ‘learn the ropes’ as a new recruit into fishing van Ginkel (2001, p. 179) says, is a process:

...not limited to the mere performing of tasks; it includes internalizing the norms, values, attitudes, interests, knowledge and skills necessary to become an accepted member of the occupational group, to do the job properly, and to legitimize the work world. Compatibility with the crew’s ideology is an important factor.

Fishers’ attachment to their way of life is often explained in terms of features of ‘occupational community’ (Davis 1986; Lummis 1985) such as a strong sense of pride and satisfaction in ones work and identity, specialised knowledge and skills, “an ‘egalitarian ideology’ combined with rhetoric’s and concepts of independence, self-reliance, freedom and so forth” (van Ginkel 2001, p. 178). One aspect of this pride and satisfaction in work and identity, which is surprisingly sometimes overlooked in these analyses, is status as “primary producers of food” (Nadel-Klein 2003, p. 8). In an era where more than half of the world’s population live in cities and the majority of people—at least in the industrialised West—are not directly engaged in producing food, the close associations between fisher and fish as a vital and often messy, bloody, smelly life source and the idea of ‘putting food on plates’ is significant, not least to many fishers themselves. As one fisherman expressed it commenting on his sons following him into fishing:

They went fishing of their own choice. They didn’t come because I made them come. They wanted to go fishing. But if I didn’t think fishing had a future, I would have tried to put them off. But I’ve always believed that fishing’s got a good future. Because the way I always look at it, in simple terms is, you got to eat [pointing], and everybody else got to eat on this planet, and there’s only so many people producing food.

Whilst, to my knowledge, *Ripple* may not yet have been dirtied with the blood and fish guts of a commercial catch, and whilst the reconstruction was self-funded by John, it nonetheless does have something to contribute directly to the catching sector and to the local economy. By evoking a sense of the past in a tangible way, by recalling and bringing to life scenes depicted in photographs and artworks, *Ripple* makes a link between different ‘fields’ of heritage—the production and consumption of local history, visual cultures (including art galleries and museums) and fishing in a contemporary working harbour—domains that might otherwise remain separate, disconnected and fragmented spheres to the detriment of all. This has already contributed to generating a ‘sense of place’ that is fostering stronger links between the ‘catch and the locality’ (Reed et al. 2013) as in the example of the recent revival of the fishery for pilchards in Cornwall, now rebranded, as the ‘Cornish sardine’. One firm is now selling Cornish sardines in tins illustrated with Newlyn School

Fig. 15.5 A tin of ‘Cornish sardines’ featuring *The Greeting* by Newlyn School artist Walter Langley. Author’s own photograph



Fig. 15.6 Artist Bernard Evans painting *Ripple* and other luggers alongside the medieval pier in Newlyn harbour during the ‘Painting Party on the Quay’ event, British Tourism Week, March 2011. Courtesy of Steven Walker



paintings featuring luggers in Newlyn harbour (Fig. 15.5). Now that real luggers can once again be seen alongside the medieval ‘old quay’ in Newlyn this marketing has been used to good effect. The pilchard fishery is not regulated by quotas and is being promoted by catchers and merchants as both indigenous and sustainable. This marketable ‘sense of place’ as food provenance is not to be mistaken for the diverse and grittier everyday experience and place attachments of fishers and other workers and residents in places like Newlyn. Nonetheless it is an important one when the sustainability (social, economic, environmental) of forms of fish production reliant on bulk overseas export is questionable (Fig. 15.6).

15.6 Conclusions

The example of fisheries heritage considered in this chapter challenges notions of ‘industry’ and ‘heritage’ as being separate and opposed domains. It also demonstrates an important role for heritage that exists outside of museum contexts and which incorporates informal learning, and production and use of material artefacts including craft skills. This can be a source of alternative and diversified fishery-linked livelihoods, a factor in strengthening and promoting links between catch and locality, and a powerful source of critical nostalgia to stimulate imagination and innovation. Alternative forms of heritage production have implications for alternative forms of consumption (including tourism) and even alternative forms of fishing. Dependency of communities on harbours and on the sea in places with a history of fishing is broader and more complex than merely landing of fish. The current period of economic recession and rising unemployment has consequences for young people in rural maritime regions, across class, occupational and family backgrounds. In a context of frequent anxiety about the loss of ‘real’ and ‘tangible’ jobs (Crow et al. 2009) and growing disparities between ‘financially rich’ centres and ‘heritage rich’ peripheries (Howard and Pindar 2003, p. 65), heritage initiatives that can strengthen regions, livelihoods and diversity of skill-base are to be supported.

Nonetheless, maintaining existing fishing harbours and beaches as bases for catching fish, remains the highest priority for the sustainability of coastal economies and the integrity of coastal places. Needless to say this should be complemented and stimulated by heritage initiatives, rather than replaced. This entails a historically informed conception of ‘fishing communities’—both in the traditional and occupational sense—as mixed economies, which are always changing and evolving. Walton (2000) quotes a Lowerstoft man born in 1902 speaking of what made community in his local fishing context (p. 128), and concludes that the basis of community in this view was “commitment to an industry, not necessarily entailing actually going to sea, but being part of a network of shared interests and concerns that surrounded the fishing.” A similar case is made in the context of contemporary Scotland by Ross (2013). Academics can inform policymakers, local authorities and non-state actors about how to support these kinds of communities by observing the connections and disconnections between the various practices, politics and priorities of their different sectors. Ultimately neither state, industry nor community models of development will be sufficient alone to articulate and manage their complex ties.

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