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Chapter 4 Museum practice and heritage

Tim Benton and Nicola J. Watson

The origins of national museums and their part in the western ordering of knowledge were outlined in Chapter 1. Here we focus on some of the pressing practical problems facing museum professionals in trying to conserve and interpret the collections in their charge while also pleasing the visiting public and their government paymasters. Museum professionals have undergone a radical change in approach in the last thirty years, sometimes referred to as 'the new museology'. We will look at questions of interpretation (the aesthetic and contextual models), issues about value judgements and the changing relation of museums to their publics. The case study by Nicola Watson extends the notion of museum to the scale of an open-air museum, looking at how Stratford-upon-Avon has become a pilgrimage site for Shakespeare lovers. The case study poses in critical form, then, the relationship between tangible and intangible heritage, in a context in which the tangible part of Shakespeare's Stratford had to be constructed over 250 years to acquire its present form.

Introduction

In 1972 the editor of a book provocatively entitled *Museums in Crisis* began his introduction like this:

The Museum age, which reached its Augustan apogee with the post-World War II boom in art education, in special exhibitions, in collecting, in museum-building, is finally over. Museums, once permanent fixtures by which to negotiate our spiritual journeys, have suddenly revealed infirmities in their foundations that have threatened them with collapse. Like many institutions in the late sixties, they were abruptly thrust from their historical context into the vicissitudes of contemporary life, where the problems of the entire society – many of them irrelevant to art museums – were brought to bear on them.

(O'Doherty, 1972, p. 2)

This might seem an extraordinary statement. Its tone and vehemence is characteristic of a series of books and articles written between 1970 and 1985 when 'crisis' seemed to be afflicting museums, country houses and the whole problem of conservation (Strong, 1974; Wright, 1985; Lowenthal, 1985). By most measures – economic, social or even aesthetic – museums have flourished in the intervening three decades, so was Brian O'Doherty's concern unjustified?

O'Doherty was describing some very important shifts which led to a certain loss of autonomy in the funding and management of museums in Europe and North America. But more importantly, he was describing a change of attitude to museums which drew them into the arena of national politics and challenged the freedom of museum curators to determine their own priorities. These shifts were taking place in different ways throughout the world and they relate directly to the attitudes summarised by Laurajane Smith in *Uses of Heritage* (Smith, 2006). In part, these changes were produced by the intellectual disturbance known as postmodernism, which threw into doubt established beliefs in the validity of aesthetic value (art for art's sake) and the certainty of history (Kneall, 2007):

The museum became what it had rarely been: delightfully contentious. Gone, so it seemed, was any notion of the museum as trusted purveyor of knowledge and learning – 'disinterested' and apolitical; who could now claim anything as neutral?

(Kneall, 2007, p. 3)

In this chapter we look at debates around museums, their curators and the objects they acquire, conserve and display. At issue is the relationship between museum objects, the associations and knowledge they can be thought to embody, and the best means to communicate these to the general public.

What is a museum?

The very definition of what constitutes a museum has changed since 1945. The International Council of Museums (ICOM) was founded in 1946, with responsibility for carrying out UNESCO's policies on museums. It then defined museums in terms of their content:

The word 'museums' includes all collections open to the public, of artistic, technical, scientific, historical or archaeological material, including zoos and botanical gardens, but excluding libraries, except in so far as they maintain permanent exhibition rooms.

(ICOM, [1946] 2007a, Article II, section 2)

To museum curators, this meant that their responsibilities were above all to their collections rather than to the potential interest to the general public. The act of preserving 'priceless treasures' and key symbolic repositories of a nation's heritage from decay or destruction and passing them on to future generations was considered to be sufficient justification for the existence of a museum. There appeared to be a continuity between the scientific role of museums – classifying species of animals, plants and geological specimens and collecting representative examples of each – and the artistic and ethnographic roles of classifying and evaluating the products of human skill.

Investing in museums meant investing in research into knowledge and understanding of the world (irrespective of whether a single visitor passed through the door). It is also true, however, that most museums also included a brief to 'educate and inform' the general public. The Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) in London, for example, was first founded as part of the School of Design (opened in 1837 and later to become the Royal College of Art) as a collection of study objects. When the energetic civil servant Henry Cole became director of the School of Design in 1852 he realised that educating artists and designers was not enough:

Our first and strongest point of faith is, that in order to improve manufactures, the earliest work is to elevate the Art-Education of the whole people, and not merely to teach artisans ...

(Burton, 1999, p. 29)

The V&A, as it grew into a free-standing museum, always had a mission both to improve the taste of designers, and to interest and educate the general public.

In 1961 the phrase 'for purposes of study, education and enjoyment' was added to the ICOM definition and in 1974 the definition was changed again and remains in force today:

A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment [emphasis added].

(ICOM, [1974] 2007b, Article III, section 1)

Museums almost everywhere, whether public or private, are now considered to have essential functions in 'developing' the culture of the local population, promoting a sense of common identity and attracting tourists to the country. Museums are now seen as too important to be left to professional curators and museum managers. For example, in Italy, museums were previously defined in law as '*beni culturali*' (cultural assets), 'organized for the conservation, valorization and interpretation of collections of cultural works' (Cataldo, 2007, p. 43). Recently, however, their legal status has been changed to '*beni di interesse pubblico*' (works of public interest) and their purpose declared as being 'for education and study' (Decreto legislativo, n. 42, article 101). This has been defined as a 'Copernican revolution' (Cataldo, 2007, p. 43) because it charges the state with the duty of ensuring that each museum serves the public interest. This has been effectively the approach of government in the UK since the 1980s, with museums being required to demonstrate their effectiveness in satisfying the visiting public rather than simply conserving what they have, acquiring more and carrying out research.

The aesthetic and contextual models

Traditional professional curators saw themselves as the judges of quality and significance. Alfred Barr, the first director of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, is quoted as saying that the job of the curator is 'the conscientious, continuous, resolute distinction of quality from mediocrity' (Oldenburg, quoted in Weil, 2007, p. 101). These curators also understood aesthetic quality as objective:

Quality resides in the object and it endures as long as its physical existence ... The quality in a work of art is unaffected by the shifting cultural and social conditions that surround it. It may remain unrecognized over long spans of time, but where it lives in a work of art it is forever ready to communicate itself to a beholder who comes to it with unobstructed senses.

(Eitner, quoted in Weil, 2007, pp. 100–1)

Fundamental to these ideas was the assumption that aesthetic quality in heritage objects is essentially visual and inherent in the object. The idea that the key values of an object are inherent (fixed and immutable), as opposed to being inscribed by the spectator or user, is discussed in Chapter 1 of this book and by Rodney Harrison in *Understanding the Politics of Heritage* (Harrison, 2010). This is a cardinal point in the characterisation of what Laura Jane Smith calls the AHD, because these inherent qualities are usually ascribed to objects by those in authority, such as museum curators. It is their taste, their subjective responses to works, as well as their connoisseurship, which seeks to impose judgements of value on society at large. They do this by selecting some objects over others for display, giving them prominence and attaching their comments in the form of captions and gallery texts.

Some curators guard against this by refusing explicitly to endorse or describe the aesthetic qualities of works. According to this view, elaborate **interpretation**, explanation or contextualisation in the form of long captions or texts might interfere with the direct, visual contact between the visitor and the object. We have seen, in Chapter 2, that David Hume believed that any judgement of aesthetic quality must in the end rest on direct experience of the object, but that reason and experience of comparable artworks play important roles in refining judgements of taste. Most art historians and curators feel pulled in both directions: trusting their feelings but also seeking knowledge about the object.

Following Peter Vergo, we might call this approach to conservation and display the 'aesthetic' model, which he contrasts with its polar opposite the 'contextual model' (Vergo, 1989, p. 48). In some ways, this distinction can be likened to the distinction between the 'canonical' and 'representative' criteria of significance, to the extent that 'canonical' works of art are often identified by aesthetic criteria, whereas works with 'representative' significance are

qualified by their historical and social associations. But Vergo's distinction is more about forms of interpretation than criteria of significance. It is possible to interpret 'canonical' works in either an 'aesthetic' or a 'contextual' way, and this is important in discussing museum objects which are predominantly canonical in type.

In the 'contextual' model, the emphasis is not on the inherent aesthetic qualities of objects but on what they can be shown to tell us about the life and times of people. There is much greater emphasis on explanatory texts, reconstructions (if 'authentic' objects are unavailable or insufficiently explanatory) and 'stories' (whether textual, audiovisual or by displays such as dioramas or juxtaposition of objects). The danger of the 'aesthetic' model is that it privileges those with the knowledge and training to appreciate objects in a sophisticated way without assistance. As Vergo puts it, 'Left to speak for themselves, they [objects] often say very little; and a sometimes quite considerable effort is required on the part of the historian, the art historian, the critic or the viewer to coax them into eloquence' (Vergo, 1989, p. 49). The dangers of the 'contextual' model are that it could be 'musty' with documentation, laden with earnest didacticism, any occasion for private meditation drowned out by the whirl and clatter of the audiovisual programme' (Vergo, 1989, p. 51). Behind this contrast is a sharp distinction between target audiences: a knowledgeable audience of 'art lovers' (generally well educated and relatively well off) or a wider constituency of members of the general public.

The challenge to the aesthetic model

Like certain ritual objects designed to be used once only and then frozen in their use value, museum objects might be said to be decommmodified. That is, unlike commodities which undergo a series of exchanges, in which their social and exchange value is tested and adjusted, objects accessioned into a museum become severely limited in their exposure to social evaluation and exchange. In many cases, museum staff are prohibited by statutes or by the conditions of a gift or loan from de-accessioning (selling) works in the collection. More generally, museum curators have scruples about selling off parts of the collection entrusted to them:

The word 'deaccession' does not appear in the dictionary ... There are many [curators] who do not accept the practice. They view museums as essentially mausoleums [*sic*] dedicated to preserving, intact, the accumulations of successive generations.

(Malaro, 1985, p. 138)

The legal expert Marie C. Malaro gives a number of reasons for wanting to get rid of objects: selectivity (in order to meet precise goals); costs of

storage; religious or ethical reasons; allowing for growth in new areas; and financial difficulties. A board of trustees may require curators to earn revenue from de-accessioning in order to balance the books, or in order to acquire works more likely to interest the general public. For example, the Corcoran Gallery in Washington sold off over 100 European paintings at auction in 1979, in order to focus on what it saw as the distinctive feature of its collection: American art.

Once de-accessioning is accepted, museum artefacts return to being commodities, subject to market forces. But it can also be argued that the job of the curator is necessarily one of continually seeking to maximise the value of the collection, both by rotating objects on display and by selling and buying objects like any other dealer in the art market. In this view, objects on display in museums, even if not actually up for sale, should be considered as constantly under evaluation. The museum visit would then be considered as part of a continuing social and aesthetic exchange between visitor and curator, with the government – as paymaster on the public's behalf – looking on. The value attributed to the collection is not pecuniary but in the currency of political approval, sometimes measured by increased visitor attendance, sometimes by other more specific criteria. For example, pressure may be placed on a museum to play down its colonial collection and emphasise contemporary work from immigrant or indigenous communities.

Value and authenticity

Every time a curator puts on a special exhibition, or reorganises the display of a group of objects, they hope to add value to the collection and attract visitors. It is important to reflect on the two common meanings of the word 'value'. A dealer who sells a work for more than they have paid for it has added economic value to the work. Typical ways of achieving this are to find out information about it, proving that it is what it claims to be (its authenticity and rarity), associating it with interesting historical information or by giving it exposure to public criticism (by publication or exhibition). By these means, and anticipating trends in public taste, a dealer can buy cheap and sell dear. Museum curators cannot normally realise the economic value of the works in their collections, except by attracting large crowds to special exhibitions or displays. But they can add to the distinction and prestige of the works and this is generally considered to be desirable, if only to persuade large numbers of people to visit and government to maintain generous funding. Nothing detracts more brutally from the prestige of a museum object than to have its authenticity called into question, which is why museum curators are usually obsessed with identifying and documenting works under their care. Supporting claims of authenticity is a complicated business. It is not just a question of making a value judgement – 'Is it good enough to be a

Raphael?' – but rather, 'Does it have the characteristics of other authenticated Raphaels?' And this kind of inquiry quickly enters very arcane territory: microscopic examination of materials, carbon dating, examination of documents proving provenance (the chain of ownership) as well as reconstruction of all the changes that may have been made to the object over time.

From an aesthetic point of view, a work which has been faked by a very skilful forger may look better than an original work that has suffered damage and repair, but its value will be much less. We have seen in Chapter 2 how an attempt to strip antique sculptures of all later accretions was also highly controversial. If you believe that the essence of a work of art lies in the original artist's intention, this intention can be rediscovered by skilful restoration of a work. And indeed most paintings and sculptures in public museums have been restored to a greater or lesser extent, to make them attractive for the public. How far you restore a work, how far you strip it back to its original materials (however damaged) and how far you allow later interventions to remain is not only a debate among professionals, but a dialogue between professionals and the public. For example, curatorial scruples about not restoring a work unless the previous condition is precisely known may retain the authenticity of an object but render it less attractive for the viewer.

Museums and their public

Many curators see the need to satisfy the vagaries of public taste and political instruction as an interruption in their work. Putting on major exhibitions, for example, ties up dozens of staff for several years, who might otherwise be researching and conserving the collection. As O'Doherty put it,

Many feel that there has been an erosion of scholarly responsibilities, and a capitulation to the demands of education, or what its critics call entertainment.

(O'Doherty, 1972, p. 3)

In an outspoken piece, Bryan Robertson saw a fundamental contradiction between the legitimate purposes of the museum and the needs of democracy:

The public, conditioned by the strenuous and massively simple slogans of advertising and the super-realistic giantism of cinemascopes, now expects to find a commensurate spectacle at the museum and is dismayed not to find some semblance of showbiz glitter in the permanent collections as well as temporary installations. But it is absurd that the size of an audience should take precedence over *what happens* to visitors inside a museum. Numbers may relate to democracy but not to art.

(Robertson, 1972, p. 85)

Robertson, who was an influential art critic for *The Spectator* before becoming director of a new university museum in New York State, did not consider it to be the job of the museum curator to educate the general public. Everything museum curators did to make their collection palatable to the public was, for Robertson, potentially a betrayal of their calling. For example, selecting only the 'best' or most accessible works in a collection might make for a more digestible display, but it deprived scholars (and other individuals) of the opportunity of comparing the quality of a range of objects of the same type. Making the display more attractive was also a danger, for Robertson. He recounted an anecdote about the late Queen Mary visiting the redisplay of the collections of the V&A after the Second World War, when she commented, 'But what a pity everything looks as if it is for sale' (Robertson, 1972, p. 85). And a reviewer in the prestigious art magazine *Apollon* remarked sardonically in 1950, 'The modern museum offers us all the benefits of the modern department store, except of course for the shop assistants, with pastel shades, soft lighting, and culture without tears' (quoted in Burton, 1999, p. 202). What is at stake in these comments is the fear that museum objects will be thought of as commodities.

An example of frontal attack on the 'aesthetic' model is an essay by Philip Wright in which he targets curators as a profession, the privileged status of art as a value, and the structure of museum management as a tool of social and political domination (Wright, 1989). He would place art historian curators at the bottom of the ladder in the museum hierarchy:

It may mean the downgrading of the curator/art historian to equal status with the researcher/interpretation specialist, the designer/cognitive psychologist, the educator/communicator and the historian/anthropologist, in the interest of achieving certain declared objectives for success in the museum's programme and activities. It may also mean the retraining or removal of certain members of the staff or of the governing body, where the museum's more broadly redefined objectives are seen to require new areas of scholarship and new skills for a public service institution.

(Wright, 1989, p. 146)

Curators must learn to share control with educators and display specialists. Citing Danielle Rice, Wright reaches the heart of the problem:

If we begin from the premise that art is primarily about ideas and that museums, as institutions devoted to preserving art as property, inadvertently obscure this important concept of art, the moral duty of the educator takes on a special significance.

(Rice, 1987, p. 214, n. 12)

If, as Rice assumes, art and artefacts are primarily about ideas, there is no reason why these ideas might not be better expressed in words or reconstructions, which most people can understand, rather than in authentic works of art and crafts which many people are not trained to analyse. But art historians reject this notion, claiming that artworks and artefacts have unique formal properties that can never be fully translated into words. Often, they claim, these objects bring you closer to the feelings and imagination of people living in the past than any words could. Explanation or interpretation are always, they argue, subjective and can amount to telling people what to think and feel. The educationalists answer that any display of objects imposes a particular viewpoint on the spectator, through the way the objects are selected and framed. This is one of the inponderable differences of opinion which no amount of management can dissolve. The case of Shakespeare's Stratford-upon-Avon (see case study) shows that there is a hunger for places and things with which to associate the literary imagination.

The democratic role of explanation

The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu wrote an influential book *L'Amour de l'art* (The Love of Art) in 1969, based on an extensive survey of museum visitors in France, and was one of the first to demonstrate that there is a strong link between museum and gallery attendance and social class (Bourdieu and Darbel, [1969] 1985). A more recent survey, conducted in the UK by MORI for the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA), included the following conclusions in its executive summary (Figure 4.1):

- The higher an individual's social class, household income and education, the more likely they are to visit museums, art galleries and other types of cultural attractions. The exception to this trend is the visiting of theme parks and zoos or wildlife parks, which appeal equally across all social classes.
- Older people, those in the higher social classes and those without children are the most frequent museum/gallery visitors.
- Almost everyone who has visited a museum or gallery during the last 12 months is extremely likely to visit either the same venue or a similar one again during the next 12 months.
- The majority think it is important for their local town or city to have its own museum or art gallery. This includes a substantial proportion (76 per cent) of those who had not visited one during the past 12 months.

(Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (Great Britain), 2004, p. 6)

The first point confirms Bourdieu's findings and those of subsequent researchers. If just over half of the British population are classed as ABC1s, these groups contribute three-quarters of the museum-visiting public. Furthermore, these groups are most likely to revisit. The last bullet point is intriguing, suggesting that museums are seen by most people as important for local heritage, whether or not they visit them. The main topics listed as reasons for visiting a museum exhibition include 'How people used to live' (62 per cent) and 'The history of the local area' (55 per cent). According to the MORI poll, 37 per cent of those asked said they had visited a museum or gallery in the last twelve months (comparable to visits to a well-known park or garden), fewer than visits to the cinema (59 per cent) or library (51 per cent) but more than visits to a famous cathedral or church (33 per cent), **stately home**, castle or palace (31 per cent) or live sporting event (28 per cent). The social bias in visits to cultural sites affects all of these equally (including football!), with the exception of theme parks and zoos, which are more likely to be visited by those in the DE social classes. As Bourdieu also indicated, educational preparation is even more important than class in determining museum and gallery attendance:

Those with a household income of £30,000 or more are twice as likely to have visited as those who earn less than £17,500, whilst people with a Masters degree or PhD are three times as likely to have been to a museum/gallery as people with no formal qualifications.

(Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (Great Britain), 2004, p. 5)

These statistics are extremely important when considering the role of interpretation and explanation in museums.

Compared to the significance of these economic, social and educational criteria, ethnicity is relatively unimportant, accounting for only 6 per cent difference in museum attendance. Museums appear to have become 'less boring' than ten years ago. Only 6 per cent of visitors considered museums to be 'boring' (although 15 per cent of those under 25 did think so) and only 1 per cent asserted that they were not made to feel welcome in museums or galleries. These figures differ substantially from a similar survey carried out in 1999, when 15 per cent considered museums to be 'boring'.

Another important finding for museum curators is that over a third of those who have visited a museum or gallery went back for three or more further visits. These repeat visitors expect to see changes when they re-visit, and this requires a continual refreshing of the displays, with temporary exhibitions and events. A special exhibition or event was named as the reason for visiting by 49 per cent of visitors (Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (Great Britain), 2004, p. 11).

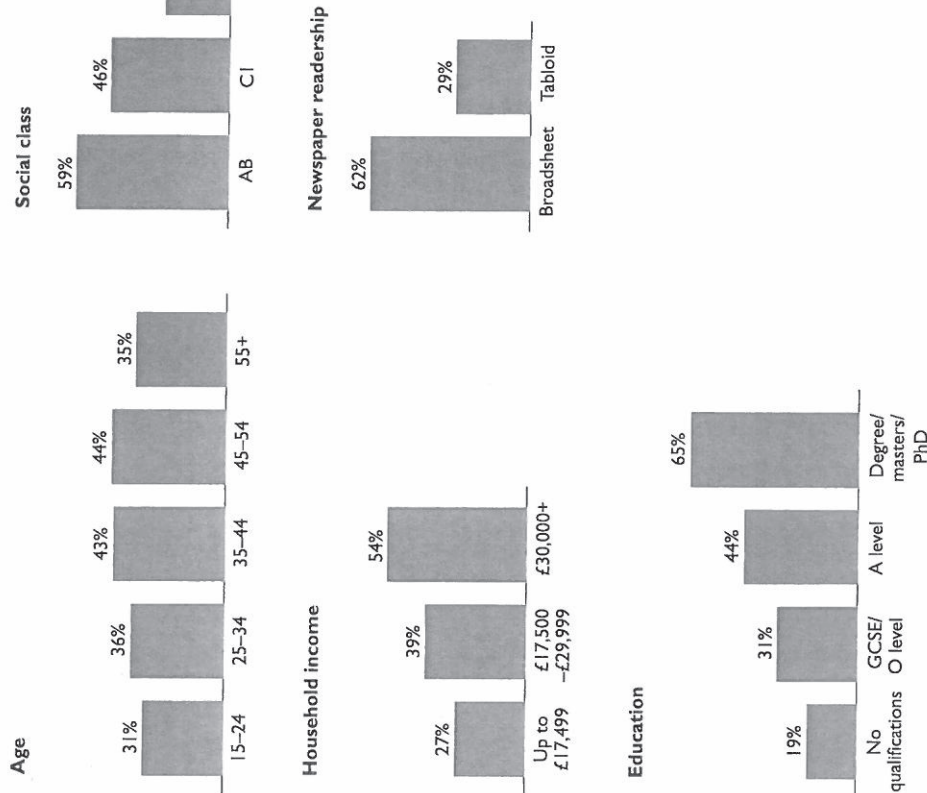


Figure 4.1 Respondents answering 'yes' to the question 'In the last 12 months have you visited a museum or gallery in the UK?' Of the total sample, 37 per cent responded 'yes' to the question. This analysis shows percentage responses by subdivisions. For example, 31 per cent of 15-24 year olds responded 'yes' to the question. (Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (Great Britain), 2004, p. 5)

Museums as expressions of a ruling class

Curators, in following their search for the best examples, often seem to cut themselves off from the person in the street. Curators have always been aware of this problem. According to Charles Gibbs-Smith, public relations officer at the V&A in the 1950s, it was curious, 'to find how many museum officials

either patronize, resent, despise, dislike or even *hate* the general public ... Our duty as museum officers is to consider as broad a spectrum of the public as possible; ... we should cater for, and seek to attract, every conceivable kind of human being, regardless of intellect, income, colour, creed, age or sex' (quoted in Burton, 1999, p. 202). But being aware of a problem is not to solve it.

Gregory Ashworth and John Tunbridge have argued that heritage objects are inevitably subject to what they call 'dissonance' (Ashworth and Tunbridge, 1996). Dissonance occurs when heritage objects are competed for between rival stakeholders: the owner of a property and the tourists who visit it; museum curators and visitors.

The creation of any heritage actively or potentially disinherits or excludes those who do not subscribe to, or are embraced within, the terms of meaning defining that heritage.

(Graham, Ashworth and Tunbridge, 2005, p. 34)

An empirical survey of the most popular and effective museums and exhibition displays suggests that no one approach is the most successful. It depends a great deal on the subject matter and the beliefs and attitudes of people in any particular culture. In debates about accessibility, curators sometimes get ahead of their public. Many museum visitors have a real hunger for certified, world-class quality, and expect to be told where to find it. The most visited exhibition in 2006, in the whole world, consisted of one painting, the *Annunciation* by Leonardo da Vinci, which was displayed at the Tokyo National Museum and was seen by 796,004 people in three months at 10,071 per day. The main explanation for this must be a predisposing fascination with European culture in Japan and the significance of the unique displacement of this work from Florence, which it had only left three times before in its history. An Italian senator chained himself to the gates of the Uffizi Museum in an attempt to stop the loan. Bringing home stolen works of art as the booty of military campaigns is no longer considered legitimate, but something of the same excitement can still be generated through the power of capital.

In Britain, the three most visited art museums – Tate Modern (5.2 million in 2006), the British Museum (4.8 million) and the National Gallery (4.2 million), among the top eight art museums in the world – are those least affected by the new museology. The most visited art museums in the world, the Louvre (8.3 million) and the Pompidou Centre (5.5 million) in Paris, the Metropolitan Museum of Art (4.5 million) in New York and the National Gallery of Art (4.5 million) in Washington, draw their crowds through the fascination of local people and tourists to see original works of art which they believe to be of the highest quality and which they see as defining part of the culture to which they aspire. Following the arguments of Pierre Bourdieu, we visit museums to acquire cultural capital, the knowledge and taste which allows us to claim membership of a higher social standing than we had

previously. The same can be said of reading books and going to university. Is this just cultural snobbery? If the government and its institutions want all citizens to share the same culture, it will have to explain why this is necessary and useful for full citizenship.

For the politicised critic of established museums, none of this goes far enough; museums should focus their attention on revealing the inequalities in society and the workings of power in the cultural sphere, including a critique of the authority of the museum itself and its methods of interpretation and display. It is hard to see why this would not replace one authoritative voice by another and doubtful that it would either increase museum attendance or change many attitudes among the traditional visitors.

The Curator's Egg

A fascinating example of auto-criticism was attempted at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford in an exhibition entitled 'The ?Exhibition?' (*sic*) or 'The Curator's Egg', between December 1991 and May 1992 (Beard and Henderson, 1994). This display of mostly antique objects from the Ashmolean collection played various games on the techniques of the curator. For example, the question of authenticity was posed by including two life-size plastic Venuses, bought from a garden centre, one with the traditional museum label 'Do not touch' (she still had her £15.95 price tag and a SOLD ticket around her neck) while the other one was ironically labelled 'Replace after use' (Beard and Henderson, 1994, p. 13). Here, neatly compressed, were issues of museum objects as commodities, their financial value and their 'use' value. Being able to touch a displayed object in a museum is breaking a taboo, but a taboo which also works to increase desire for the object. Facing the two very accessible plastic Venuses were two antique stone Venus torsos. This time they were enclosed in a case, but surrounded with other objects and a flurry of labels with questions rather than answers, among which the key one was 'WHOSE STORY IS IT ANYWAY?' The hermetic nature of museum labels, providing information incomprehensible to the general viewer, was also confronted in a number of ways. For example, a made-up label for a Greek vase read:

Type B non-volute ware
provenance dub.,
c. 750–27 BC
presumed mythological scene
(post Homeric)
Satisfied?

(Beard and Henderson, 1994, p. 26)

Recognition from daily life was also included with a cut-out head of Frankie Howerd, whose comic TV series *Up Pompeii!* represented one view of the antique world in popular culture. The exhibition texts included information on the Ashmolean and its staff and awkward questions of value. For example, two very similar Greek vases were placed side by side, one valued at £2,500 and the other at over £100,000. Other texts prompted thought:

'Display is about values', 'Display is about glitter', 'Display is about secrets', 'Display is about sincerity'; 'BEAUTY, TREASURE, SNIP, LOOT, UNIQUE INVESTMENT ...'

(Beard and Henderson, 1994, p. 19)

Another label asserted 'YOU SEE, YOU HAVE TO TRUST US', while several labels attempted a more direct form of address to the visitor. For example, a group of objects relating to Roman women's cosmetics was given

a chatty paragraph about Roman women's make-up equipment, comparing ancient mirrors with 'today's "compact"' (and next to that, the closest thing we could find to a 'compact' at the local chemists)

(Beard and Henderson, 1994, p. 27)

This exhibition was part of the self-questioning prompted by the new museology and raised several interesting questions. The main beneficiaries of this kind of reflection are museum professionals who are becoming much more aware of the 'voice' of the label and the nature of the information provided, from a viewer's perspective.

Place, space and museums

It has been argued that museums will cease to maintain their clear sense of difference from other social institutions:

The museum's relationship to its collections and to the ownership and care thereof will change, and in some instances have already changed. The distinct edges of differing functions among libraries, memorials, social services centers, schools, shopping malls, zoos, performance halls, archives, theatres, public parks, cafes and museums will (and in many cases have already begun to) blur.

(Gurian, 2005, p. 71)

Two successful museums which, in very different ways, provide some evidence of this trend are within a few hundred metres of each other on the Washington Mall, USA. The National Air and Space Museum is the most visited museum in the world, with an annual attendance of over 9 million. Its form is that of a Barnum and Bailey three-ring circus or a very large shopping mall. Three vast halls, full of airplanes and rockets, are surrounded by a

bewildering array of display techniques: conventional galleries setting machines into their historical and social context, special exhibitions, spectacular films and multimedia presentations, and machines on which you can try your hand at flying a fighter or landing on the moon. The machines themselves, mute and unexplicated, are the star of the show, rather like a car sales lot. In many ways, the museum meets the needs of the new museology perfectly, mixing display techniques for different kinds of visitor and responding to public desires. The visitor is free to pick and choose his, or occasionally her, route, to suit his technical expertise and attention span. But the museum is far from sharing the social emancipatory aims of the new museology. There is an overtly national and military mood, which makes it a sensitive place for discursive historical analysis. A very well-attended exhibition about Enola Gay (the bomber from which the atom bomb was dropped on Hiroshima) was completely altered during its design as a result of pressure from US airforce veterans (Dubin, 1999; Luke, 2007). The exhibition designers had intended to use the exhibition to ask questions about the moral authority of bombing defenceless civilian targets, to reflect the experience of the victims and to question the effectiveness of area bombing in general during the Second World War. Instead, the exhibition focused on the technical aspects of the operation, parts of the restored bomber and the experience of the crew. The sensitivities of families who had lost bomber crew in action and the political muscle of the veterans' organisations could not be ignored. And there is a general lesson here. The stronger the level of public admiration for something, whether it be military airplanes or Renaissance paintings, the more difficult it becomes to question these values.

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, a few hundred yards away, like the National Air and Space Museum, benefits from a broad consensus in public attitudes to its content. But the display could not be more different. Instead of a free choice of routes, the visit is programmed along a single path. Instead of a reliance on aesthetic objects, the main emphasis is on text and reconstruction. Instead of a relative openness of interpretation, the emotions of the visitor are put through the wringer. The ticket for admission consists of an identity card for a child murdered in the Holocaust. The galleries are dark and narrow. Harrowing photographs and very personal details make it impossible to escape the horror of what took place. Elaine Gurian sees this museum as typical of a new kind of 'institution of memory', in which information gathering is linked to generating specific emotions and attitudes, rather like a novel or play. The Holocaust Memorial Museum works because most Americans accept the premises on which it is based and are sensitised to the message. David Horne has warned of the dangers of a 'tourism of horror' which would place the Holocaust too safely in the past (Horne, 1984, p. 244). By contrast, the Beit Hashoah Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles tries to generalise the lessons of genocide by including atrocities in Cambodia,

Rwanda and elsewhere. 'The very unexceptional quality of hate groups throughout the world attempts to send home the message that intolerance is a virus to which no society is immune' (Richter, 2005, p. 267). Instead of focusing on the horror of the Holocaust, attention is drawn to the terrible and dangerous normality of genocide.

Museums are big business, in their annual turnover of private and state funding and in their stimulation of tourism. Museums and galleries are tied, to a greater or lesser extent, by their collections, the expertise of their staff and the changing fashions of government policy. They are necessarily object led in a user-centred world. Many museum professionals feel threatened by the new obligations to meet the needs of politicians, sponsors and the visiting public. As James Cuno, director and president of the Art Institute of Chicago, put it, 'The problem is really one of authority and power. Who has authority and power over museums?' (Cuno, 2007)

National heritage is not necessarily 'object centred'. Some parts of the heritage are so important for a sense of national, and in this case linguistic, identity that some tangible presence needs to be created to satisfy demand. We saw in Chapter 1 how an aspect of Welsh identity was fixed around a particular image of dress, and how a range of factors contributed to this over several centuries. In the following case study an intangible heritage (that of Shakespeare's plays and poems) has been slowly turned into tangible places to visit during a process that has lasted 250 years. Turning parts of a town into a museum is dependent on the sometimes conflicting interests of several different groups: lovers of Shakespeare, the theatrical profession, Anglophones seeking roots for their linguistic culture and, not least, the tourist industry. Although Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire, might seem rather different from a conventional museum, there are comparable issues (authenticity, the tensions between users and professionals, the relationship between tangible and intangible heritage). What follows is an edited extract from a longer essay in which Nicola Watson also traces the 'placing' of Shakespeare in the streets of London and indeed in buildings around the world (Watson, 2007).

Case study: Shakespeare on the tourist trail

One side-effect of the increasing veneration of Shakespeare over the course of the eighteenth century – a period that turned Shakespeare from a rough untutored playwright of incidental 'beauties' into the National Poet – was the first stirrings of the Stratford tourist industry. To visit Stratford-upon-Avon today is to visit Shakespeare's town, set in the heart of Shakespeare Country (Figure 4.2). Indeed, Stratford has been Shakespeare's town for the better part of two centuries, even though the euphoric road signs announcing this are of

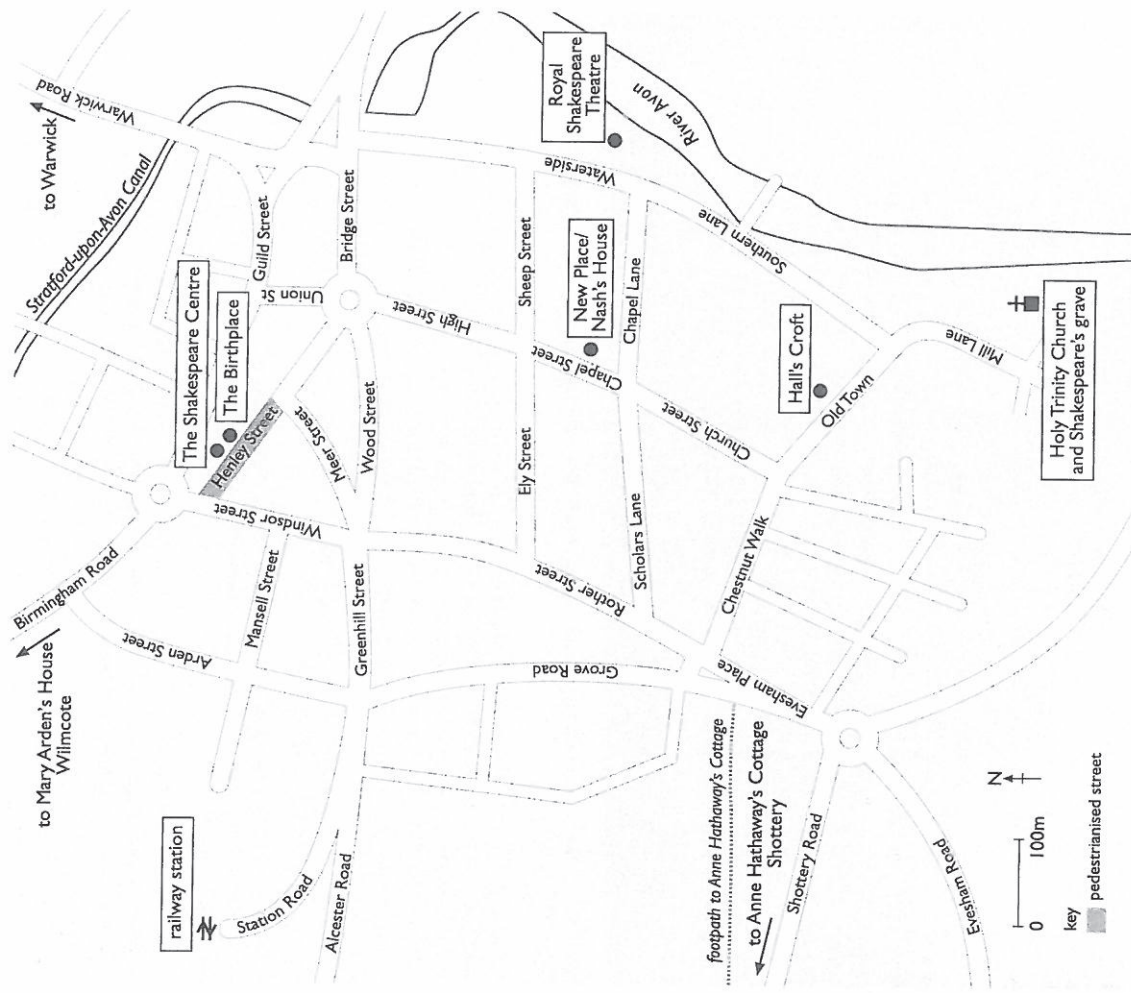


Figure 4.2 Map of Stratford-upon-Avon, showing the places associated with Shakespeare: the Birthplace; New Place; Nash's House; Hall's Croft; Anne Hathaway's Cottage; Holy Trinity Church and Shakespeare's grave.

relatively recent date. The sheer extravagance of the tourist industry in Stratford would seem, to a sceptical glance, to have developed in defiance of likelihood: on the evidence of his plays and poems, Shakespeare had little interest in real locations realistically portrayed, and certainly none at all in the area around Stratford – the chief exception being Sly's offhand reference to 'Marian Hacket, the fat alewife of Wincot' (Wincot being a village in the environs of Stratford) in the induction to *The Taming of the Shrew*.

One obvious explanation for Stratford's development into a literary shrine is simply that it was where Shakespeare, the greatest dramatic poet of his time and since, was born and buried. (Nor, to be briefly pragmatic, did it hurt that over the course of the eighteenth century the growth of Birmingham resulted in the improvement of the road up from London.) Yet the obvious explanation begs as many questions as it appears to answer. Why should it be of the slightest interest where a dramatist is buried? And still less, where he was born? The conventional answer to this conundrum has been that literary pilgrimage is modelled on religious pilgrimage, and that with the supposed decline of religious sensibility came the secularisation of pilgrimage and the replacement of the saint and his or her holy and healing places with the author and his or her native haunts. It is certainly true that the literary pilgrimage takes over much of the language, protocols, and emotional structures of the religious pilgrimage, as Péter Davidházi has shown (Davidházi, 1998, pp. 66–88). Yet this observation does not in itself explain the desire to visit the physical remains of a writer as a substitute for those of a saint. This desire is typically taken for granted by modern travellers, with literary pilgrims commonly speaking of their wish to 'get closer' to the writer, as though assuming that by visiting the grave and the birthplace of Shakespeare they will access the 'real' Shakespeare.

'Doing' Stratford today, the neophyte is most likely to start at the Birthplace (Hodgdon, 1998). The street has been pedestrianised, to allow plenty of room for the tourist groups fresh off the coach (Figure 4.3).

Entry at present is through a cunningly designed portal exhibition, housed in a large modern red-brick building, through which the visitor is acclimatised to a provincial Tudor past which supposedly infuses the plays and provides a backdrop for what biographical detail we have about Shakespeare. Seduced by a discreet and ever-changing soundscape accompanying large visual displays, we are inducted into a locality peopled by constables just like the ones in *Much Ado About Nothing*, by many different tradespeople such as those featured in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and by travelling players who 'probably' provided the young Shakespeare with his first contact with the theatrical world. The whole dramatises Stratford as both epitomising and embosomed in Shakespeare's Countryside, and as energising the plays in general and in particular: 'his plays and poems abound with references to rural



Figure 4.3 Shakespeare's Birthplace and visitor centre, Stratford-upon-Avon. Photographed by Tim Benton. Photo: © Tim Benton.

characters, country customs, wild flowers, animals and birds'. The display mixes artists' impressions of Renaissance Stratford with some original artefacts of the period. A few authentic objects, such as a copy of the first edition of the plays, reinforce the authority of the exhibition. To bring the Bard to life, his study has been re-constructed, with Shakespeare at his desk (Figure 4.4). To authenticate the details of the reconstruction Hans Holbein's portrait *A German Merchant*, 1532, is illustrated alongside (seen reflected, back to front, in the photograph).

In keeping with this pastoral aesthetic, the visitor then enters the Birthplace proper through a garden, planted up with flowers and herbs mentioned in the works (Figure 4.5).

The Birthplace itself is displayed principally as a house rather than as a museum. Visits are by tour only, with each room introduced by an actor dressed in Tudor costume, who animates the house as it might have been when Shakespeare was 11. Shakespeare's father is shown in his glove-making workshop, where, using the first person, he introduces visitors to his daily



Figure 4.4 Reconstruction of Shakespeare's study, Shakespeare's Birthplace and visitor centre, Stratford-upon-Avon. Photographed by Tim Benton. Photo: © Tim Benton.

routine and remarks on their anachronistic accoutrements (wrist watches, denim jeans). Most areas are conspicuously free of print information, which is instead confined to a room containing displays that tell the history of the Birthplace itself. Items include: details of the visit of John Adams and Thomas Jefferson in 1786; the first visitors' book from 1812; the collection of *Extemporary Verses*, written at the Birthplace of Shakespeare at



Figure 4.5 Shakespeare's Birthplace, seen from the garden, Shakespeare's Birthplace and visitor centre, Stratford-upon-Avon. Unknown photographer. Photo: © Shakespeare's Birthplace Trust.

Stratford-upon-Avon by People of Genius (1818), made up by the then owner of the Birthplace, Mary Hornby; visitor statistics then and now; and the famous window from the 'birthroom' (so-called from the early nineteenth century, though the term is more redolent of obstetrics than of belles-lettres), which preserves what remains of the sanctioned practice of graffiti indulged in by some of the earliest visitors, including Sir Walter Scott. Even this room is principally designed not so much as a museum as a warm-up act, demonstrating the importance past celebrities have accorded to their visits. Depictions of the birthroom also emphasise this, though apparently in contradictory ways: a photograph taken in 1882 is included largely to illustrate the practice of earlier visitors in scrawling their signatures on the whitewashed walls. The room itself ('Please turn off your mobile phones!') is consciously empty and blandly domestic (Figure 4.6).

To visit the Birthplace nowadays is thus explicitly to recapitulate two and a half centuries of previous pilgrimage and yet to come to an empty silent space, potential, secretive and blank, signifying the space or time before 'Shakespeare', before there was anything to remember. To visit the next stop

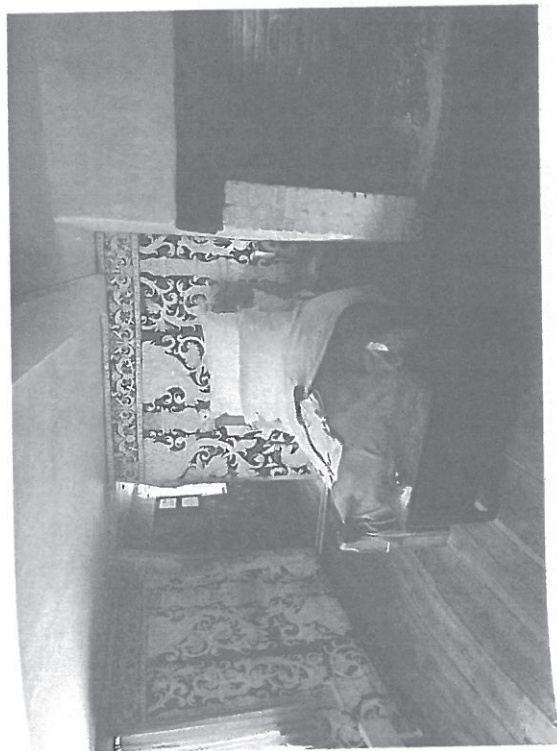


Figure 4.6 Shakespeare's birthroom, Shakespeare's Birthplace visitor centre, Stratford-upon-Avon. Unknown photographer. Photo: © Shakespeare's Birthplace Trust.

on a conventional, biographically organised pilgrimage around the Shakespeare Properties, Anne Hathaway's Cottage, out in the village of Shottery, is also to visit context prior to text, but in a yet more domestic, privatised and feminised mode, as befits a place which has traditionally been associated with young love. Anne Hathaway's Cottage exemplifies air-brushed English rural charm, and is emphatically feminine in **presentation**. Guides in the first room sing paeans to its cunning domestic conveniences; it is enviably housekept down to the last sprig of rosemary laid out in blazing pewter. Shining with beeswax, the artefacts on display all speak of women's work: butter pats, pattens, milking stools, an iron, lace-making equipment, a linen-press, a nursing-chair and samplers. The annexed exhibition also chronicles the history of delight in Shakespearean domesticity by means of a case of antique souvenirs which include a nineteenth-century biscuit-ware model of the cottage, a late nineteenth-century trunket chest with a painting of the cottage on the lid, and an early twentieth-century souvenir bust of Anne. In keeping with this ethos visitors are then solicited to buy pretty views of the cottage variously stamped on birthday cards, jigsaws, trays, mats, coasters, a tea-cosy, china boxes, and tea-towels, and, less obviously branded but part of a more general romance of housekeeping, aprons, lavender, lace, pewter plates, and most seductive and impractical of all, 'beeswax furniture polish as used in the Shakespeare Houses'.

The indefatigable tourist, with or without souvenir beeswax polish pushed into bag for future use, would now return to Stratford to see Nash's House (next-door to the site of the now vanished New Place, Shakespeare's own house), Hall's Croft (home of the more respectable of Shakespeare's sons-in-law), and then perhaps foray out to Wilmoote to see Mary Arden's House (the former home of Shakespeare's mother, only identified as such in 2001), and perhaps also the house formerly known as Mary Arden's House, which still serves as The Shakespeare Countryside Museum. They might then take tea to recruit their strength for the evening's performance of Shakespeare by the Royal Shakespeare Company playing at the Memorial Theatre or its satellites (though many more tourists visit Stratford than its theatres). But I suggest instead a pause for breath at this juncture. We have taken a look at the two properties that, with the exception of Shakespeare's tomb itself, have had the longest history as Stratford tourist sites. The history of the development of these three sites into the core of the present-day tourist experience of Stratford through their representation and reproduction is the subject of my next section.

The construction of Shakespeare's Stratford

The site that originally attracted visitors was Shakespeare's tomb and monument, and it was the first to be illustrated, in 1656 in Sir William Dugdale's *Antiquities of Warwickshire* (see Figure 4.7 for later image). In 1737 the artist and antiquary George Vertue made a visit during which, in addition to sketching the monument, he commissioned a local sculptor to make him a cast to display at home, the first ever souvenir reproduction (Deelman, 1964, p. 35). Vertue was by no means alone in his desire to appropriate the piece, for by that time the monument was in a poor state of repair, thanks to the vandalism of a growing number of relic hunters. Monies were therefore raised to restore it in 1748, a first restoration that would be overtaken in 1793 when Edmond Malone, the age's most influential Shakespeare editor, notoriously persuaded the vicar to paint the coloured bust stone-colour, so as to render it, as he thought, more as it must have been originally (Deelman, 1964).

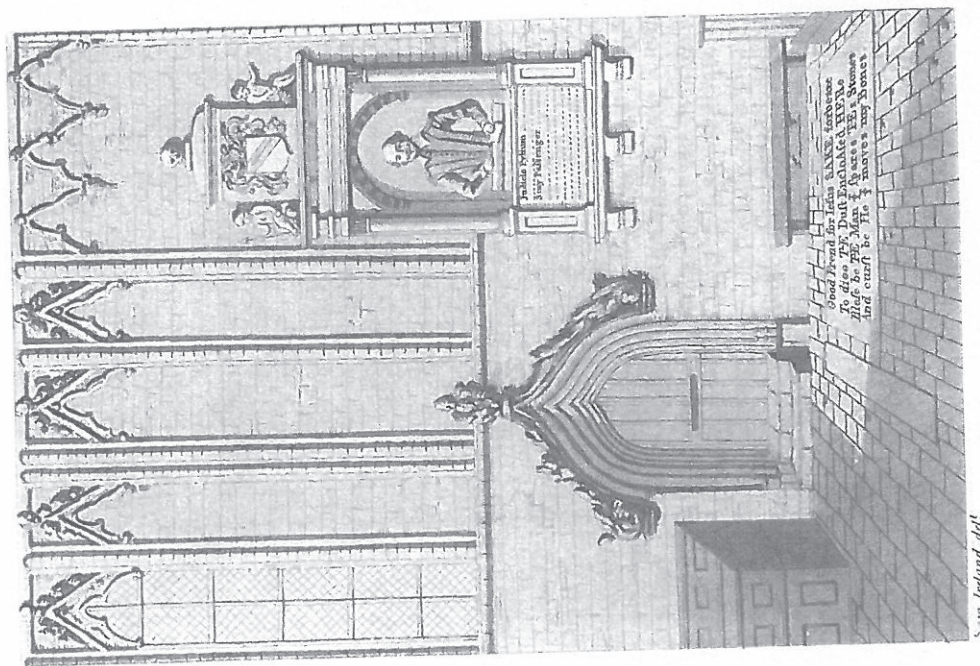
What evidence survives of eighteenth-century visiting practices indicates that in addition to a swift though punctilious visit to the tomb there was, as early as the 1740s, a further informal tourist itinerary developing. In 1742 the young David Garrick, accompanied by his friend the actor Macklin, came to Stratford specifically to view, indeed to sit under, the mulberry tree growing in the garden of New Place, which according to Shakespeare's biographer and editor Nicholas Rowe was supposedly planted by the hand of its former owner, Shakespeare himself (Shakespeare, 1709). By 1756, the next owner, Reverend Francis Gastrell, was already complaining of

the tiredness of the growing number of visiting enthusiasts to his summer home, all eager to view, touch and take their own twigs from the mulberry tree that was becoming ever more famous with every reprint of Rowe's edition (Deelman, 1964, pp. 35, 46). The infuriated Gastrell first felled the mulberry tree, in 1756, and subsequently, in an effort to avoid tax, demolished the house entirely in 1759.

Deprived of a prime tourist lure, Stratford's canner residents set about promoting other locations in its stead. In 1762, for example, the correspondent of the *British Magazine* stayed at the White Lion in Henley Street and reported that the landlord had shown him Shakespeare's birthplace, and further, had taken him over to Bidford to show him a crab-apple tree nicknamed 'Shakespeare's canopy' (Fogg, 1986, p. 86). This crab-apple tree was the one under which Shakespeare was supposed by tradition to have slept off a drinking binge, and through the multiplication of accounts such as that of the *British Magazine* it became so celebrated that it was steadily destroyed by further plundering relic hunters, finally collapsing in 1824 (Schoenbaum, 1970, p. 114).

The Shakespeare tourist

But it was undoubtedly the success of the leading actor of the day, David Garrick, in staging the first major public celebration of Shakespeare, the Jubilee in 1769, that put Stratford on the national map for the generality of tourists. This event accelerated the process of making it a must-see location in itself, rather than merely a coaching town in which the traveller might idle away the hours waiting for his dinner by visiting places of local interest, including Shakespeare's tomb. In August 1769 Garrick's publicity machine brought a large crowd drawn from high society out from London to Stratford, to celebrate Shakespeare's two-hundredth birthday five years and four months late with a heady cocktail of miscellaneous entertainments – a breakfast, an oratorio, a concert, a ball, a horse race, a procession of 170 Shakespearean characters, a set of songs sung round the streets, an ambitious 'Ode' celebrating Shakespeare's achievements composed and recited by Garrick himself (Figure 4.8), a masquerade, an Assembly and Fireworks. These many and various entertainments included no performance of Shakespeare's actual works – contemporaries were so unsurprised by this that no comment was passed at all. Garrick was unlucky in the weather (a persistent downpour meant that the procession had to be cancelled, and the performance of the 'Ode' was almost flooded by the rising Avon), and many and various acid comments were passed about the nature of the entertainments; most eyewitness accounts felt that the event was an expensive fiasco.



Shakespeare's Monument.

Figure 4.7 'Shakespeare's Monument' in Holy Trinity Church, in Ireland, S. (1795) Picturesque Views on the Upper, or Warwickshire Avon, London. British Library, London, 789.b.4. Photo: © British Library Board. All Rights Reserved.

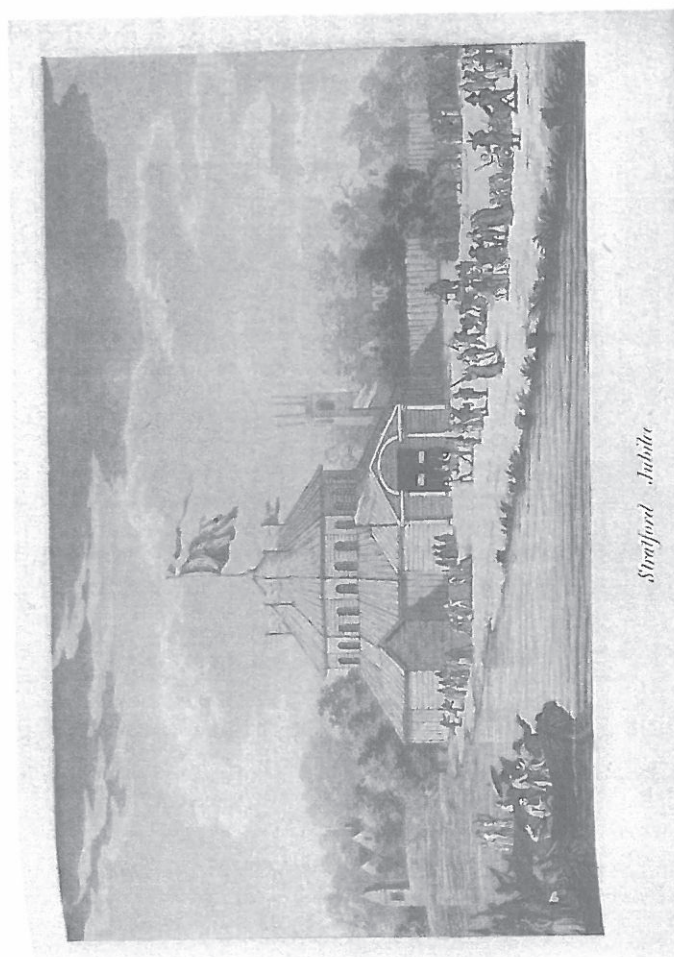


Figure 4.8 'Stratford Jubilee', in Ireland, S. (1795) *Picturesque Views on the Upper, or Warwickshire Avon*, London. British Library, London, 789.b.4. Photo: © British Library Board. All Rights Reserved. The temporary rotunda in which the 'Ode' was performed.

The persons who attended the Jubilee at Stratford in 1769 were not exactly tourists as we would understand the term, and nor was the Jubilee exactly a tourist event in that it was essentially occasional. Yet Garrick's extravaganzas contributed notable elements to the developing Stratford tourist industry. In the most general terms the Jubilee codified, expanded, and boosted a small-scale provincial industry by successfully linking different Shakespeares – the Shakespeare of the London stage, the Shakespeare of the printed page, the rural Shakespeare of Stratford, the increasingly mythic 'Shakespeare' praised by critics and nationalists – within a multimedia spectacular staged in a single location (Lanier, 2002, p. 146). Reports of the Jubilee were illustrated by the first public print of the Birthplace in the *Gentleman's Magazine* (July 1769, plate following p. 344) (Figure 4.9).

The rained-off procession of Shakespeare characters was planned to stop at the Birthplace, hung with an allegorical banner representing the sun bursting out from behind clouds to enlighten the world, which was draped from the window of the room that Garrick had decided (arbitrarily, and without any

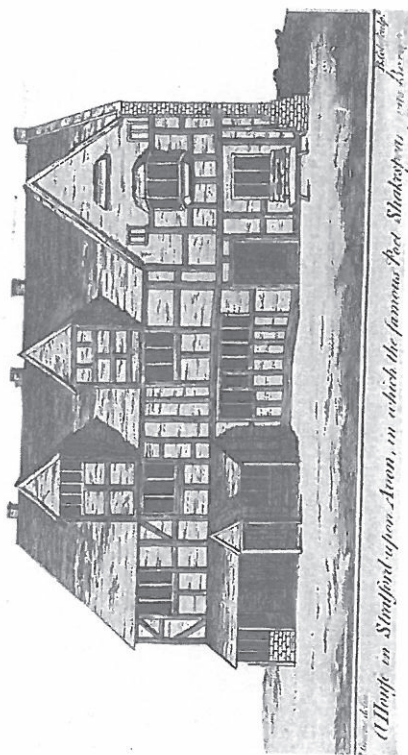


Figure 4.9 Benjamin Cole (engraver) after drawing by Richard Greene, 'A House in Stratford upon Avon, in which the famous Poet Shakespeare was Born', engraving in *The Gentleman's Magazine* (1769). Furness Image Collection, M/S1850.10b ML, University of Pennsylvania Library. This shows the Birthplace as a detached building although in fact it was terraced. The Birthplace was restored by the Victorians to match this engraving.

actual scholarly evidence, though the attribution has stuck) had been the Birthroom. Here they were to sing:

Here Nature nurs'd her darling boy, ...
Now, now, we tread enchanted ground,
Here Shakespeare walked and sung!

(quoted in Brown and Fearon, 1939, p. 81)

Individually dramatised locations were linked into a narrative by the moving of the procession from spot to numinous spot – from the Birthplace to the monument in the church, where Shakespeare's tomb was ritually heaped with flowers. So fundamental did this narrative of location become to the cult of Shakespeare that it remains the underlying itinerary of the Shakespeare Birthday Procession to this day, a procession that takes place annually on 23 April and culminates in the ceremonial laying of flowers on the writer's tomb.

The Jubilee did more than invent a prototype tourist itinerary; it invented a prototype tourist sensibility and protocols to match. The lines above, for example, suggest an essentially touristic audience for the Birthplace. Rather than viewing the house as an interesting 'antiquity', the audience is solicited to a theatrical experience lived in the moment, and fundamentally sentimental in its effort to put the tourist into the same place and thus, by an effort of time-defying imagination, almost into the presence of the Poet. To serve as a memento and mark of this charged moment, the Jubilee also invented the

literary souvenir, as opposed to the relic. Relics, in the shape of bits of the felled mulberry tree, had already made the fortune of a local craftsman, William Sharp, who bought up much of the timber and proceeded to turn out an implausibly large number of expensive knick-knacks which he sold for good prices from 1756 onwards to all comers, including David Garrick himself. These objects operated within the Shakespeare cult with something of the power of the shards of the True Cross, although the wood itself, carved, polished and often inlaid, served as its own reliquary. The Jubilee, however, introduced the first mass-produced souvenirs – manufactured objects designed to be taken away as a memento of the occasion, and as certification of having been there. In addition to the sale of ‘Shakespeare favours’ (specially woven coloured ribbons made into sashes and rosettes, attached to badges and medals with a likeness of Shakespeare on one side and an inscription on the other that devotees were to wear as a sort of uniform), cotton handkerchiefs printed in red with eight characters from the plays were on sale to the less well-heeled. The Jubilee committee also sponsored an ‘Official Jubilee Bookseller’ who purveyed copies of Garrick’s Ode, the collection of Jubilee songs entitled *Shakespeare’s Garland*, and other assorted opportunistic occasional publications, from a stall set up in the Birthroom (Deelman, 1964, p. 259).

That glimpse of the bookseller, swathed in the glorious coloured light falling through the Birthroom window from the allegorical silk banner hung across it, exemplifies the way in which the Jubilee succeeded in securing print culture to a physical origin. Yet the need to hang an allegorical painting from the Birthplace window also illustrates how this particular place had yet to become recognisable, let alone iconic, and let alone a locus promising a supremely authentic tourist experience. That authenticity and uniqueness, paradoxically, was only achieved through the reproduction and dissemination of its likeness. In this sense the engraving in the *Gentleman’s Magazine* did what ecstatically pausing the procession outside the Birthplace could not do fully; it linked the Birthplace and the Shakespeare you might read at home together within print culture. The massive publicisation of the Jubilee across Europe was reinforced by the smash-hit part-satirical depiction of its aspirations and discomforts which Garrick himself staged at Drury Lane in order to recoup his costs, his afterpiece *The Jubilee* (Dobson, 1992, pp. 214–7). The play was provided with painted backdrops of Stratford in such realistic perspective that, on visiting Stratford for the first time in 1785, John Byng recognised the White Lion hotel ‘because it had been so well painted at Drury Lane theatre’ (Deelman, 1964, p. 282). The scenery included a depiction of the parish church as well, suggesting that Stratford would have been increasingly recognisable to travellers before they had ever laid eyes on the place. Stratford from henceforth was the privileged location for Shakespeare pilgrims, and Stratford residents profited accordingly.

Shakespeare’s Stratford in print

Though Shakespeare’s earlier biographers, notably John Aubrey and Rowe, had connected the Bard with Stratford and its environs, the man who first elaborated Shakespearean biography with visually realised locations by way of illustration, and who modelled appropriate tourist sentiment in a romantically enthusiastic first-person narrative of his pilgrimage, was Samuel Ireland. He is now best remembered as the father of the forger of Shakespeare’s letters, William Henry Ireland. *Picturesque Views on the Upper, or Warwickshire Avon* (1795) successfully joined up long-familiar Shakespearean oral traditions into an itinerary for an extended excursion into the country, which could then be readily repeated by readers fired with the sort of enthusiasm that one traveller was already expressing in 1793:

STRATFORD! All hail to thee! When I tread thy hallowed walks;
when I pass over the same mould that has been pressed by the feet of
SHAKESPEARE, I feel inclined to kiss the earth itself.

(Clarke, 1793, p. 379)

Ireland’s *Picturesque Views* is lavishly illustrated with detailed engravings of locales associated with Shakespeare: the Birthplace, Charlecote House (where Shakespeare was alleged to have been caught stealing deer by Sir Thomas Lucy), Fulbrook Lodge (the alternative scene of the deer-stealing episode, according to John Jordan), ‘the kitchen of Shakespeare’s House’ (including ‘Shakespeare’s Chair’, the monument in the church, Anne Hathaway’s Cottage (the first ever representation), and an artist’s impression of the temporary rotunda in which Garrick had recited his Ode at the Jubilee nearly thirty years earlier (see Figure 4.8). Of especial interest is a marvellously implausible reconstruction of New Place complete with Tudor figures (Figure 4.10).

This looks nothing like what we know New Place to have looked like in Tudor times, but it does look like what contemporaries felt a Tudor house should have looked like. Here, Ireland previews the Victorian desire to make Stratford adequately Tudor and so ‘Shakespearean’, going to the length of putting Shakespeare’s crest above the Adam-style neo-classical doorway. Ireland models for his reader a must-do itinerary, a useful guide to appropriate sentiments, and appropriate activities, including the acquisition of relics and souvenirs. Though Ireland’s publication is not what we would understand as a guidebook, being more a cross between travel narrative, coffee-table book and antiquarian notes, it brings together for the first time biography, pictures and a first-person account of visiting the place, describing a visit that readers are effectively urged to repeat for themselves.

If Shakespeare’s monument is recognisably the product of a seventeenth-century aesthetic and the Birthplace the product of an essentially romantic cult

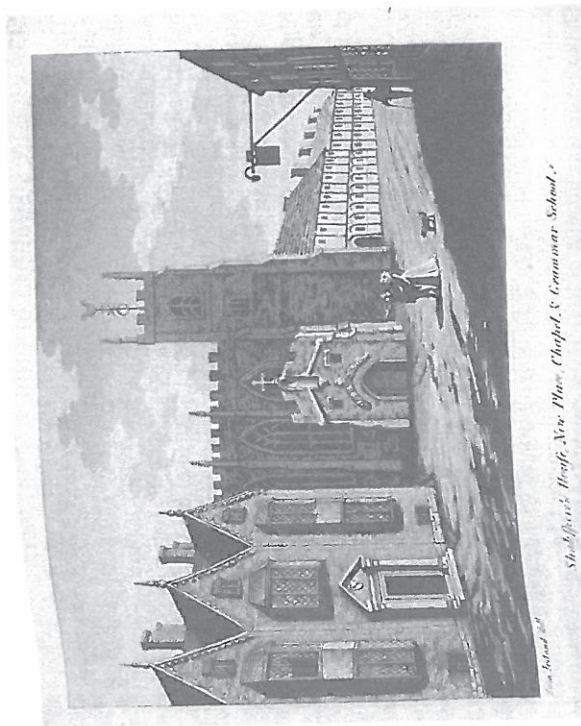


Figure 4.10 'Shakespeare's House, New Place, Chapel, & Grammar School', in Ireland, S. (1795) *Picturesque Views on the Upper, or Warwickshire Avon*. London. British Library, London, 789.b.4. Photo: © British Library Board. All Rights Reserved.

of the origins of genius, Anne Hathaway's Cottage as it is presented today is clearly derived from the way in which the Victorians visualised and understood it. Victorian interest in the Cottage grows in large part out of a desire to have a sober and domestic Bard, in the teeth of the troubling facts of Shakespeare's marriage at eighteen to a woman some eight years his senior, and already heavily pregnant, the provision in his will pointedly leaving only the 'second-best bed' to his wife, and the general embarrassment of the Sonnets, which, whether addressed to man or woman, were clearly not addressed to his wife. When William Howitt, author of the influential *Visits to Remarkable Places* (1840) and *Homes and Haunts of the Most Eminent British Poets* (1847), made his visit to Stratford in 1839, he consciously diverted his footsteps away from the Birthplace towards neglected Shroton, 'authentic and unchanged', testimony to a newly domestic, marital and retired Bard. By the 1880s the Cottage was firmly fixed as a locus for an idealised pastoral love of the sort that is conspicuously absent from the comedies but was nonetheless felt to be authentically Elizabethan (one anonymous hack-writer bubbled of the stream across the lane, 'no doubt many a flower has been dropped in its limpid current by the happy lovers') (Shakespeare's Country, 1886, vol. 1, p. 17).

To Americans especially it summed up all that was English: a guide of the 1890s wrote it up as a 'perfectly representative and thoroughly characteristic bit of genuine English rustic scenery' (Guide to Stratford-upon-Avon, 1890s, p. 22). In 1886 William Winter, perhaps the most influential American writer on Stratford after his countrymen Washington Irving and Nathaniel Hawthorne, was much taken with this 'rustic retreat' as 'the shrine of Shakespeare's love' (Winter, 1886, p. 83). Typically for his time, he traced Shakespeare's supposed love of flowers and of pastoral landscape to his happy memories of the scenes of his wooing, and reverently carried away a 'farewell gift of woodbine and roses from the porch' (Winter, 1886, p. 84). Though this portrait of the poet in love is more than faintly comic, it demonstrates the way in which by the 1880s Shroton had evolved into a satisfactory location for the heady mix of rustic chivalry, merrie Englandism, fairies, botany and romantic domesticity that 'Shakespeare's England' was supposed to have been. By 1901, courtesy of this enthusiasm, the whole set-up had become a good deal less 'rustic' than advertised; Christian Tearle in his *Rambles with an American* noted rather sourly that 'The meadow paths are not nearly as sylvan as the guide-books would lead one to expect. The endless stream of excursionists, which has flowed along them throughout spring, summer and autumn for so many years, has left its mark' (Tearle, 1910, p. 81).

By the middle of the nineteenth century, then, Stratford was the centre of a thriving and well-codified tourist industry. The Birthplace had fallen out of the hands of its private owner and had been rescued in 1847 for the nation from a rumoured American plan to ship it to the USA, there to exhibit it at fairs around the country. The Birthplace Trust was formed to preserve the site, and the house was aggressively restored to Tudor picturesqueness for the 1864 tercentenary. The garden was planted up with 'Shakespearean' plants, a museum established next door, and a set entry charge levied. The Trust subsequently acquired both Nash House and the site of New Place in 1864, Anne Hathaway's Cottage in 1892 and the house then believed to be Mary Arden's House in 1930. The town would become increasingly monumentalised with statues and plaques, including the Jubilee fountain in the marketplace (given by an American with strong temperance leanings and a desire to lay to rest the local folklore about Shakespeare's boozing), and, after many false starts such as the proposal around 1868 to put a theatre on the site of New Place, the Memorial Theatre eventually opened in 1879. Tourist numbers climbed steadily: in 1806, when records began to be kept, there were about 1000 visitors a year; 2200 came in 1851, but, after the opening of the railway line from Warwick in 1860, 6000 came in 1862; in the tercentenary year of 1864 some 2800 visitors came in the festival fortnight alone; by 1900 there were some 30,000 visitors a year; in 1937, it is thought that there were 85,222 visitors; and by the 1980s well over a million visits were being paid annually to the Trust's five properties together (Fogg, 1986, p. 147; Brown,

1979, p. 60; Ousby, 1990, p. 551–2; for numbers of American visitors, see Smith, C.R., 1868–9, p. 1). Figures quoted by authorities vary widely, possibly because of variation in the use of sources: early figures are based on records kept by the Birthplace and visitors' books at the inns.

The story of the invention of Stratford as Shakespeare's town is as much a story about textuality as it is a story about preserving the ancient fabric of the town. The dissemination of publications about Stratford, combined with the dissemination of visual representations ranging from prints to pop-up models to ceramics, meant that Stratford increasingly became familiar to many who had never, and might never, set foot there.

To avoid creating disappointment, Stratford increasingly strove to become more like the Stratford of the imagination, stripping off its modern facades to become more 'Tudor'. Indeed, Nathaniel Hawthorne complained that the Birthplace was 'a smaller and humbler house than any description can prepare the visitor to expect', that indeed, there had been too much description: the visitor had 'heard, read, thought, and dreamed' too much about the place for it to live up to expectations (Hawthorne, 1863, pp. 112, 115). Yet Tearle's American tourist Mr Fairchild complained in 1901 both that the tidied-up Birthplace was 'offensively modern' and that it was still too archaic: 'so mean and so dark that you can't think of any civilised person living in it, without a sort of pity'. The sense of Shakespeare as 'some great natural wonder' forces the discerning Mr Fairchild out into Shakespeare's countryside to bathe 'in Shakespeare's river', and, having disgustingly flung away his souvenir plaque into the Avon because it was adorned with an inaccurate transcription of Shakespeare's lines, he plucks instead a few leaves of ivy from the Birthhouse (Tearle, 1910, pp. 77, 78, 80, 94). In this he is entirely in the spirit of modern literary pilgrimage; though brought to Stratford by the power of print culture, he tries to discard print culture in favour of something non-commercial and natural, an immediate physical or organic experience rather than a representation or reproduction.

Stratford represented, and still largely represents, a Victorian dream of Englishness, an energetic dreaming that arguably turned Stratford into the world's first theme park. The development of the Shakespeare tourist trail in Stratford met (and still meets) an urgent cultural need to place the author within some kind of physical and natural context.

Reflecting on the case study

One of the themes of the case study is the search, by literary tourists, for some kind of authentic and tangible experience of Shakespeare's imaginative world. Being guided through the house where he was born by actors in period dress, sitting by the Avon, or buying more or less authentic relics of the writer's life

are all ways of stirring the imagination. One of the features of the Stratford experience is immersion in 'Englishness', represented by more or less genuine sixteenth- or seventeenth-century houses. This search for authentic, unspoiled Tudor 'Englishness' helps to explain the popularity of Anne Hathaway's cottage. The emphasis on the supposed authenticity of this context sits uncomfortably with the appeal to the authority of Shakespeare's literary output. Nicola Watson has shown that from the origins of the construction of Shakespeare's Stratford, the substitution of context for art – trying to share what Shakespeare saw and felt rather than what he wrote – was a key attraction, even for those closest to the literary productions (actors, authors and critics). Similar processes exist even in museums full of authentic canonical artworks, when curators add contextual information to their interpretation of the works. Another feature of this story that can be compared with any heritage management is the importance of media output. Nicola Watson shows that from the early days of the development of Shakespeare's Stratford, images and text published in magazines, brochures and books were essential not only for publicising the venue but for fixing its authority. The website of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust (2009) as well as the various maps and guidebooks to Stratford continue this tradition.

Gains and losses from the new museology

Museums necessarily demonstrate many of the features of the AHD in their clearest form. In many museums, curators are required by law to conserve and display the objects in the collection, and the curatorial profession relies on a set of skills and principles which may not be available to or shared by the general public. The impact of the new museology movement and changes in government funding in the last thirty years have fundamentally changed practice in most museums, placing a much higher degree of emphasis on viewer satisfaction. Symptoms of this shift are the proliferation of 'blockbuster' exhibitions, didactic display styles which sometimes replace authentic objects with multi-media or graphic displays, and the ever-present potential for brand tie-ins and shopping. But museum curators are also responsible to their sponsors (including government) to enhance the value of cultural assets by research, specialised exhibitions and publications. The tensions between these roles have typically resulted in a mixed economy of expertise, with educationalists, marketing advisors and curators sitting side by side on executive committees and exhibition groups. From one point of view, the new museology is working – attendance is up, participation has become slightly wider. From another point of view, the nurturing of specialist expertise has suffered, and museums have slipped towards the 'dumbing down' which many see as symptomatic of western societies in the twenty-first century but which may be the necessary corollary of increased attendance.

New museology

Conclusion

Museums since 1945 have shifted considerably in their perceived purpose. We saw this in the revisions to the original ICOM definition that merely required the holding of collections 'open to the public' (1946). By 1961 'study, education and enjoyment' were recognised, and by 1974 a more outward-looking function of being 'in the service of society and its development' was added. This reconsideration of the purpose of museums coincided with a period in the West when established academic disciplines began to embrace new world views, often referred to as postmodernism, and cultural critics considered the relationship between industrial societies in decline and the rise of the 'heritage industry'. One of the outcomes has been a shift in professional practice in museums, seeking new ways of getting the visitor to engage with the collections; the new museology. However, curators differ widely in their approach. There is a distinct difference, for example, between 'aesthetic' and 'contextual' approaches. The museum world also has to be understood in an economic context, particularly for objects that acquire additional financial value because of their perceived recognition by museum professionals ('genuine' and 'authentic' artworks). Some museum visitors still want to use a museum as a point of reference, to 'look up' authentic examples of art or craft work or to improve their knowledge and understanding. Research has proved that the reasons for visiting are closely linked to wider social distinctions of class, income and education. A paradox for museum managers is that the blockbuster exhibitions that attract the highest number of visitors are often the most conventional in presentation and offer the most highly esteemed works of art. Some museums have gone on to re-invent themselves as close to other consumer experiences, such as shopping malls and theme parks: this option is limited by the nature of the collections. The case study of the emergence of the Stratford-upon-Avon tourist industry has traced the origins of the 'contextual approach' currently deployed, and the cumulative effects behind visiting the historic sites of 'Shakespeare's world'. It has also demonstrated the importance of the needs of visitors: Shakespeare's Stratford came about because of a real hunger, among Shakespeare readers, to locate the Bard in a physical setting.

This chapter closes the first part of this book, which has emphasised the processes that have emerged in an increasingly professionalised international heritage sector. It is also an important point of reference for the next four chapters, which can be seen as taking single strands from the complex totality that the museum experience offers, highlighting the need to communicate and create rather than to curate and conserve. Interpretation and tourism is discussed beyond the confines of formal museums; social action is discussed as a contrasting 'street museum' experience; and performance is considered as an act of social communication in formal and grassroots heritage contexts.

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