



Diverse Evil Persons: Echoes in the Landscape, Echoes in the Archives

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The project we are about to describe contains schizophrenic aspects, notably in this instance because it involves a collaboration between a historian who revels in detail and an artist who works from concepts. In line with this characteristic the first person plural is used to describe collaborative elements, while the work of the individuals will be referred to in the third person singular by first name (Martin or Pat). Neither of us is attached to any academic or other educational institution and neither of us earns a living from our chosen pursuits, though both of us have obtained higher degrees in our field. We are committed, in both theory and practice, to democratised conceptions of both history and art. Our aim is to produce something more challenging than a pamphlet or journal article. We aim to develop forms of public presentation for a variety of locations and outlets that do not try to prescribe public response but might create space in which an

audience can explore things independently. That was the task we set ourselves in September 2009.

From our first exploration of resources and the locality we confronted what Julia Kristeva has described as the need, in interdisciplinary work, to construct a 'diagonal axis' between our two disciplines.¹ The artist needed to appreciate that there were conventions of public presentation in museums and that much of the information we had to hand was fragmentary and documentary by nature, with no visual representations of people or places contemporary to the events under examination. The historian needed to appreciate that there was a world of experience beyond the fragmentary records, but that could perhaps be glimpsed or heard in them, and that the broadest clue to unravelling the problem we were posing ourselves lay outside of documents.

BACKGROUND HISTORY

The project centres on events in south-west Yorkshire, 1673-74, of which we first became aware from a brief mention in a book on local history, made interesting by the involvement of the family name.² The key protagonist was William Basforth (sic).³

In May 1674, Thomas Sidebotham accused William in information recorded before Jasper Blythman, Justice of the Peace, of stealing various items of food and some bottles from his employer at Cannon Hall, Cawthorne, around December 1673.⁴ Cannon Hall was then owned by John Spencer, who was a rising industrialist and leading member of a network of local ironmasters. William was interviewed in September 1674 by Blythman and confessed to taking some of the items referred to by Sidebotham.⁵ William was handed into the custody of two constables from his home township of Dodworth, William Waterhouse and Thomas Linley, to bring him to the next Quarter Sessions at Barnsley in October 1674.⁶ Thomas Sidebotham was also required to attend in order to present charges.⁷ William did not make it to the court. He became fatally ill and was buried in Silkstone parish churchyard on 10 October 1674.⁸ His widow, Martha, laid a petition before the Barnsley Quarter Sessions requesting the payment of wages owing to William from his former employer,⁹ on behalf of herself and her infant daughter, Ann, who had been baptised at Silkstone Parish Church on 1 January 1673/4.¹⁰ Following these sparsely recorded events, no further mention in parish registers within a reasonable radius has been found for Martha and Ann. Prior to these records, no other mention has been found of Martha and William. This brief, private tragedy, with all its accompanying tears,

fears and grief, is all that we know about this labourer's family. Without the crime they would have enjoyed total anonymity. Without the archival ephemera that would have remained the case.

Exploration more widely into the documentation around the time produced some further connections and associations. In 1662, John Spencer was accused of the murder of one Edward Dyson but escaped punishment by appealing for a pardon to the recently restored King Charles II.¹¹ Spencer had former royalist connections from the English Civil War, 1642-49. The story of this murder remained common knowledge in the local community, being reported by 'Old William Lindley' to a local diarist, John Hobson, in 1732.¹² One of Spencer's employees mentioned in the case documents, George Lee, appeared in a Quarter Sessions paper of 1675 himself providing information regarding the alleged theft of one of Spencer's sheep that found its way into some mutton pies in a neighbouring township.¹³ In February 1677, Thomas Sidebotham unsuccessfully charged Sara Lee of Dodworth, before the Diocese of York Consistory Court, with rude and abusive language in the street.¹⁴ Finally, John Spencer's son, also called John, made representation in 1689 to the Justice of the Peace to set his constables in pursuit of 'diverse evill persons' who were wont to help themselves to his apples.¹⁵

The period in British history, 1660-1689, represented three decades of change and uncertainty between the end of one revolutionary political experiment and the commencement of a new post-revolutionary political and social settlement. The event of the theft was in one sense of little or no significance, but in another was one of those minor cumulative instances that make up the process of deep social and cultural change. It was an example of the 'lighter signatures' of history that Grace Karskens has suggested are more significant than is usually acknowledged.¹⁶

THE LOCATION

Cannon Hall Country House and Museum lies in extensive grounds adjacent to the village of Cawthorne, close to the M1 Motorway, a few miles from Barnsley in northern England. Most of the original artefacts from the Hall were removed and disposed of by the family when the Hall was transferred into the ownership of Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council in 1951. Brochures and leaflets produced as guides since then have consistently demonstrated a conventional approach to interpretation of the historical aspects of the house and grounds, focussing on two periods. The first of these was the mid to late eighteenth century, when the house was progressively expanded to its

present layout and the grounds were extensively landscaped in the fashion of the day. The nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were represented through the role of the Spencer-Stanhope family as grandees in the local community and aspects of life 'upstairs and downstairs'. Perhaps more striking than this interpretative approach has been the development of the house and grounds as a public amenity, for recreational rather than educational purposes.

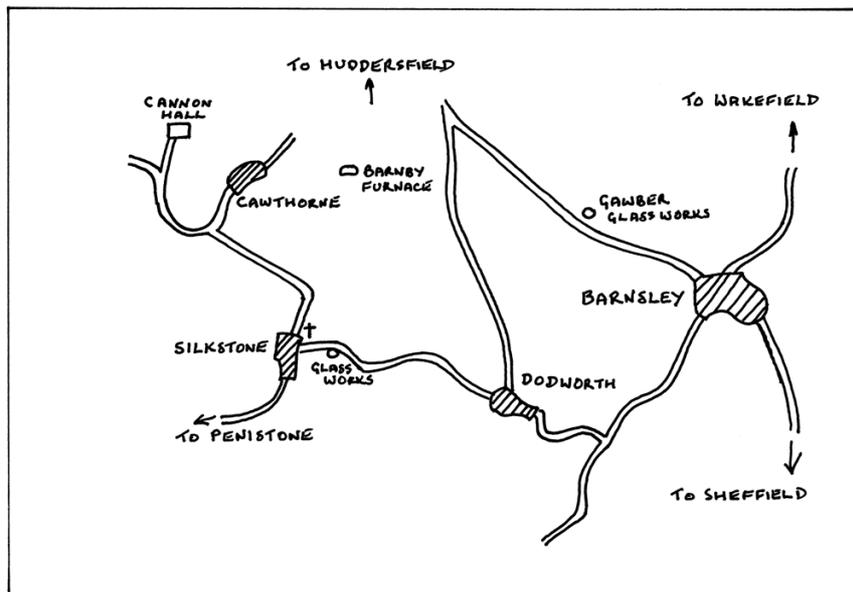


Figure 1: Sketch map of the location from an eighteenth-century original (Martin Bashforth)

The museum contents form a 'representative collection' of typical country house artefacts with a strong bias towards the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The upper storey houses a local military museum and the surrounding grounds support a variety of recreational facilities for the family. No part of the Hall as seen today existed in 1674, except perhaps a small section of seventeenth-century interior panelling. The central part of the building was completed in 1699 and the wings added during the late eighteenth century, with further embellishment during the nineteenth. (See Figure 2.)



Figure 2: Cannon Hall in 2011 (Martin Bashforth)

In order to locate the events at the centre of this project, we have to penetrate or peel away many layers. The heaviest stratum is represented by the use which the public make of the grounds. In addition to the Cannon Hall Country House and Museum, there is a Country Park, Cannon Hall Farm, a gift shop, cafeteria, picnic tables and Garden Centre. It is a very popular destination for people throughout the region, bringing their families for picnics, fishing, dog-walking, fondling farm animals, entertaining and educating children, exploring gardens, buying produce and generally relaxing. While still gently regimented by means of occasional signs about where to park and walk, and ropes protecting exhibits in the museum rooms, the freedom enjoyed by local people makes a stark contrast from the way in which the estate was organised in 1674. In front of the house and several of its associated outbuildings is a row of benches, set side by side and facing southwards across the extensive, landscaped grounds. Each bench bears a small plaque recording the names of former visitors which, in a sense, marks public 'ownership' of the once private country house. Local people who have valued access to the Hall and its grounds have thus imprinted their

presence through these small acts of commemoration, creating another layer. Private memory meets public history. (See figures 3 and 4.)



Figure 3: Private memory, public history: commemorative benches (Pat Bashforth)

The area around is likewise many-layered. The landscape has been through many different transformations in the intervening centuries since 1674. The pleasantly rolling hills seen today, with their stretches of mixed woodland, parkland and pasture, offer a stark contrast from the view noted by Daniel Defoe as he progressed between Rotherham and Wakefield, as the grim wastes of 'Black Barnsley' to his west.¹⁷ He ascribed his description to the dark moors (a common motif of his times), but also mentioned the busy trade in nails, wire and metal products. There would have been no shortage of smoke rising from furnaces, charcoal burning and other industrial processes, even in this essentially pre-industrial period. Barnsley, then the principal market town of the area, catering for a largely mixed agricultural and pastoral society, had a number of small industries and was the home for the West Riding of Yorkshire Quarter Sessions, as these made their annual progress round the county. Since then the town has seen the rise and fall of glass, wire, linen and coal industries, in succession, and now has no significant

industrial centre. It acts both as the focal point of a post-industrial region, the ghost of pits closed since the 1980s, and as the centre of a newly suburbanised commuter landscape, characterised by more or less gentrified villages and lanes busy with fast moving traffic. Only a small number of buildings contemporary to these events remain, their exteriors altered beyond recognition.

Dodworth, where William and Martha lived in 1674, once a small village two miles away to the west, was a mining community during the period from the late eighteenth century into the twentieth, though the pits are long gone. The small, now somewhat shabby, town has been bypassed by a new main road to Manchester and is surrounded by modern industrial estates. Silkstone in the 1670s was home to tanneries, glass works and potteries and was the church centre for a widespread parish. It became home to a thriving coal-mining industry until the middle of the twentieth century. Now an active local community is keen on preserving and celebrating aspects of its past. Its mining heritage is commemorated with a preserved waggonway, its former glassworks and pottery site is now a thriving specialist retail centre, the Pot House Hamlet, while the parish church has a new stained-glass window, recently made by local people to mark a terrible mining disaster in which many child workers died. Cawthorne, next to Cannon Hall, is even more of a residential village; a pretty and prosperous commuter village for Leeds, Wakefield, Huddersfield and Sheffield. It too has its own local heritage centre in the form of the Victoria Jubilee Museum, originally set up with the patronage of the Spencer-Stanhope family from Cannon Hall, run by volunteers and very much in the eclectic Victorian museum mould.

There are no surviving visual images depicting the places as they were in 1674, nor pictorial representations or portraits of any of the protagonists in the drama, not even of John Spencer. The earliest image of Cannon Hall is a sketch from the 1720s depicting the building of 1699. The parish churches have been transformed beyond recognition by embellishments and rebuilding during the Victorian period and any surviving illustrations depict them more or less as they are now. Churchyards have been greatly altered and, in many cases, cleared of all or many of the old gravestones. In Silkstone parish church a false wooden floor has been set above the old stone flags, hiding many internal burials, such as that for Annabel Pilmay, whose glassworks almost certainly made the bottles for John Spencer that were stolen by William Basforth. The latter's burial place is completely lost, there never



Figure 4: Park landscape, once private, now public enjoyment (Pat Bashforth)

having been a marker. According to Steve Healey, who maintains the church grounds and prepares new graves, the land on the north side of

the church that previously contained the older burials has been completely cleared of gravestones and lies fallow for the planting of future generations of parishioners, though as he digs new graves he may disinter older burials.¹⁸ (See Figure 5.) In terms of material culture, we are left with one bottle, now an exhibit at the Victoria Jubilee Museum in Cawthorne and identified as a seventeenth-century product of the glassworks at Silkstone.¹⁹ This single artefact is the sole material link to William's crime, but only by association.



Figure 5: Silkstone Parish Church from Dodworth lane, the north on the right (Martin Bashforth)

How can anyone visiting these locations begin to imagine William and his four mile walk to work each day, his precarious existence as a wage labourer and the shock to his world of being prosecuted by his employer? How can we, historian and artist, create the space for that imagination to play? How can we present the fragmentary documents and material evidence so that the public might engage with them in a meaningful way, but free to associate with them in their own way and without an over-interpreted mediation? How can the artist work to open up the possibility of further associations to be made and consciousness

be challenged and dislocated? The remainder of this article grapples with these questions and demonstrates how the interdisciplinary approach has helped us both to frame potential answers, individually and together.

CONSTRUCTING THE DIAGONAL AXIS

We developed the foundations for the project over a period of eighteen months.²⁰ Part of that time was spent, both jointly and separately, pursuing further research. The historian explored additional documents and carried out background and theoretical reading, while the artist experimented with visual imagery (mainly photographic), explored the work of other artists, writers and poets and explored theoretical and philosophical reading. Both of us made visits to the area within which the events occurred. We communicated through email, sharing of texts, drawing up of mind maps and so many hours of discussion that it was impossible to keep track of everything. We have learned why, as Kristeva suggested in the interview mentioned above, there is a latent resistance against inter-disciplinarity within academic genres. We have also learned that this derives from more than just protectionism and competence. It is actually extremely difficult to bridge the gap between two very different disciplines and demands enormous personal commitment, openness and attentiveness.

Stimulated by walking around the grounds of Cannon Hall for the first time, Pat imagined how William Basforth, a labouring man, small and on foot, might have experienced the local landscape, through which he had to walk and in which he had to work. She imagined his experience in contrast to the dominating presence of John Spencer, on horseback and master of his estate, raised above his employees and able to dispense with the resources of his land as he pleased. To express their differing points of vision, while drawing on a combination of imagination, personal response to the physical environment and information from the documents and background reading, Pat developed two pieces of parallel text:

THE COVERING

Everyday I awaken
Everyday my hands
Everyday I move
Everyday I grasp
Everyday I eat
Everyday I drink

THE COVERING

Everyday I awaken
Everyday I eat
Everyday I drink
Everyday I talk
Everyday I shout
Everyday I instruct

Everyday my footsteps	Everyday I sleep
Everyday I walk	Everyday I am

William Basforth (on the left) is wrapped up in his immediate surroundings, his basic self, and these become his boundaries, but such that they were internal rather than external. Spencer (on the right) found expression through his agency, his position in society and his ability to place boundaries, both physical and psychological, between himself and others.

This led to a second response, to the wider presence of many boundaries, delimiting space, personal identity, property, behaviour, custom and entitlements. These might be evident in the actual landscape but were equally carried around by each individual or invested in spaces they regarded as their private domain, or held inside themselves as what constituted their own sense of being in the world. They also spilled over into the present in the way in which Cannon Hall's grounds have been laid out and controlled and in the way in which exhibits are placed under guarded access with notices and ropes.

BORDERS, BOUNDARIES AND TRANSGRESSION

Both of us brought to the project an interest in the concept of borders and boundaries. The historian's work on early modern south-west Yorkshire created an awareness of boundaries that were geographical, administrative and customary, and which intersected in complex and contradictory ways. The Pennine hills and moors to the west and south formed a boundary that was extremely porous, permitting the inward migration along tracks used by, for example, salt traders from Cheshire. The rough landscape provided ample opportunities for incomers to become established on the margins of townships. The administrative borders of parishes, manors and townships intersected each other in ways that, combined with absentee land ownership of sequestered monastic property, created loose interstices into which migrants of varying status could insert themselves. Of the characters in the documents pertaining to the project, John Spencer had come from the Welsh borders near Criggion, Montgomeryshire, escaping the dislocation of the civil war in the period after the execution of King Charles I. His family had been associated with the royalist cause, through a Cheshire cousin, and he came to work at Barnby near Cawthorne as a clerk to his uncle, who managed his brother-in-law's furnaces. The servant, Thomas Sidebotham, who laid the information regarding William Basforth's activities, was also (judging by the name

and the lack of any presence in local records) of Cheshire origins. William and Martha may have come from nearer at hand (the name was shared with families in nearby Woolley, Ecclesfield and Sheffield), but the name was also of Cheshire or north Staffordshire origin.²¹

As well as these physical borders, there was a sense of what was customary in behaviour for servants in a large house in the seventeenth century, and the boundaries implied by custom.²² Because wages were paid infrequently to farm and estate servants, whether living in or, like William, day labourers, there had been a degree of tolerance with regard to perquisite left-overs emerging from the master's kitchen. If the charges laid against him in Sidebotham's information were accurate, then it is probably the case that William tested the limits of this tolerance beyond destruction. He was, however, assisted in this by other members of the Hall staff, providing meat from the kitchen, ringing the necks of pigeons from the dovecote and providing access to empty bottles. He seems to have been singled out for punishment for a culture of pilfering that had gone beyond what was normally tolerable.

On the other hand, John Spencer could perhaps have dealt with the matter without recourse to the law and went to extraordinary lengths to gather evidence against William. Sidebotham pretended to have lost the key to his own chest, borrowed William's similar key by subterfuge, and then travelled to William's home in Dodworth, in the company of Mistress Spencer, to open and examine the contents of William's chest. Other documents show that Spencer made similar efforts in relation to the later loss of a sheep, and his son raised the law against those taking apples from his orchards. This seems to be more about asserting a different right of property against assumptions of popular custom. In which case, who is the transgressor – William, John Spencer, or both?

The artist brings a different, more conceptually nuanced idea of borders and boundaries to the mix. Pat suggests that we carry boundaries within ourselves. This might be understood more concretely in relation to migrants carrying their experiences and ways of life into new environments. We experience these boundaries multi-dimensionally, through our senses, emotions and in our changing states of being. We interact as individuals with society through these boundaries. These interactions dissolve the boundaries at the point of interaction and, in the process, allow the individual to create the conditions for new spaces and dialogues to emerge. The boundaries become transition points, mediated by the senses, producing change.

This viewpoint has a double value for the project. Firstly it illuminates conceptually the historical interactions in the section on background. For example, John Spencer's visceral sense of personal

property was violated in multiple ways as William Basforth and others transgressed its invisible boundaries. Related insights are discussed below in the section on spatial layers. Secondly the artist's viewpoint relates to how we might present the project, to maximise the potential for interaction between the exhibition or installation, the elements within it and the visitors to it. We explore some of these issues in the conclusion to this essay, though design work is still at a rudimentary stage. These issues are particularly apposite in relation to site-specific art, which, in recent years, has tended to shift from familiar art contexts such as the gallery, into the public realm, and has begun to take on unfamiliar forms. As Miwon Kwon has explained:

Dispersed across a much broader cultural, social, and discursive fields, and organized intertextually through the nomadic movement of the artist... the site can now be as various as a billboard, an artistic genre, a disenfranchised community, and institutional framework, a magazine page, a social cause, or a political debate.²³

The many locations within which we could present our project – for example, Cannon Hall, its grounds, the archives, the library, the church, local museums – would each present different challenges and evoke different responses.

SPATIAL LAYERS AND LANDSCAPE

In our initial response to the landscape around the Hall, significant buildings such as Silkstone Parish Church, and the general area within which the events took place, we identified historical layers, a kind of conceptual archaeology of strata within the landscape, but which are largely hidden from sight, other than through certain 'heritage outcrops', which might be physical (the waggonway) or cultural (the modern Pot House Hamlet). Figure 6, for example, shows the church grounds from the west. Pat, originally imagining a medieval church setting, was astonished by the intrusion of the modern. Recent and more venerable graves intermingle in the foreground, with the cleared area of seventeenth-century graves beyond. Houses to the left and shops behind represent further encroachment. Medieval and early modern settings have to be imagined multi-sensually beyond what is actually visible.



Figure 6: Spatial layers: present and past intertwine at Silkstone (Pat Bashforth)

The difficulty for the historian in dealing with these sensed but unseen traces is how to understand and deal with them. Martin had to therefore respond to Pat's mobilisation of a more modern and literary response to landscape, which fits with the idea of seeing the past through the present. Nan Shepherd's work has recently been rediscovered as part of this new sensibility.²⁴ Drawing on influences from the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty, she celebrated the way in which landscape is itself alive and communicates to us through all our available senses as a bodily experience, much in the conceptual sense of boundaries described in the previous section. Outlining the role of the senses in fully experiencing landscape she wrote: 'For the ear, the most vital thing that can be listened to here is the silence'.²⁵ She goes on: 'Touch is the most intimate sense of all. The whole sensitive skin is played upon, the whole body, braced, resistant, poised, relaxed, answers to the thrust of forces incomparably stronger than itself'.²⁶ Shepherd explores a different sense of history that is to do with the landscape as such, above and beyond the history of the human interaction with it.

Pat conceptualised this experience as 'spatial layers', which, unlike the archaeological strata mentioned above, are three-dimensional. Different people may experience the same physical space differently and simultaneously and yet again differently from non-human presences.

Add to this the dimension of time and history, and the idea that space has a relationship with itself preceding the entry of any person, and the concept of spatial layers becomes very complex indeed, requiring the use of other faculties than the intellect to properly appreciate. Other contemporary writers have engaged with these sensations in similar ways: Robert Macfarlane, Kathleen Jamie, Madeleine Bunting are strong examples, each bringing a poetic and spiritual sensibility to the living environment.²⁷ More controversial explorations might include the politicised photographic work of Fay Godwin and the more 'occult' forms of urban psychogeography practised by Iain Sinclair.²⁸ These represent ways in which we interact with the landscape and the landscape interacts with us that include responses both rational and numinous.

Figure 7 was taken in woodland seen in the left background of Figure 6. The sensations we can experience in woodland like this include an element of timelessness. 'Natural History' being seasonal and cyclical lacks the chronological reference points of documents, artefacts or architecture. This is an eternal present through which William Basforth walked and we in our turn. It is also an eternal past and can be seen similarly in Figure 8.



Figure 7: Spatial layers: woodland near Silkstone. (Pat Bashforth)

Land artists, such as Andy Goldsworthy and David Nash have taken their interaction with the landscape even further, using wood, stone, mud, snow, ice, sheep, shit and ferns, as a source for their artworks.²⁹ David Nash has stated: 'We want to make our images with what is here – here. That is why it is called land art rather than landscape art, "scape" denoting distancing'.³⁰ They dissolve the boundary between art and landscape.

The 2008 exhibition at the Hayward Gallery in London, *Psycho Buildings: Artists take on Architecture*, successfully blurred the boundary between the gallery itself, the exhibits and the visitors. The latter moved in and among newly created spaces, inter-acting through sound, touch, vertigo, imbalance, visual disturbance, all the while having their sense awareness heightened and challenged.³¹ As Jane Rendell commented in the catalogue to the exhibition: 'They invite a viewer to move through the work, drawing out meanings over time. And through varying modes of interaction, they involve activities that draw on personal memories, cultural references and imagined scenarios'.³² Bringing something of this sensitivity into our project's presentation will be a critical element in creating a multi-faceted interaction between exhibition contents and the visitor, changing their relationship to the more purely historical elements such as document extracts.

THE WALK AND THE WOODS

The link between the landscape environment and the events at the heart of this project is to be found in the documents. Sidebotham's information stated that William took 'four glass bottles', hid them and told Sidebotham that 'they would serve him to carry drinke into the Wood'. We know from parish register records that William lived four miles away in Dodworth and therefore had a long journey to and from work at the Hall each day. We know that he worked there regularly because Martha tried to claim back the sum of forty-five shillings, which would have represented at least ninety days' work for the most basic farm labour paid without food and drink or a full year for an ordinary servant with meat and drink.³³ The journey between Dodworth and Cannon Hall used lanes and woodland paths, many of which still survive today in one form or another. (See Figure 8.) William was possibly employed in the woodland surrounding the Hall, coppicing, felling and cutting wood for use in Spencer's furnaces and forges: thirsty work and thirsty walking, for which a glass bottle would have been preferable to a cheap pot or leaky old leather contraption.



Figure 8: Woodland path near Silkstone (Pat Bashforth)

As a historian, Martin considered using local maps to reconstruct the journey between Dodworth and Cannon Hall. But changes to the landscape through three centuries of usage and the impact of the enclosure of common fields, as well as the development of townships and road networks to cope with modern populations and traffic, make this speculatively interesting but doomed to ultimate failure.

Pat, building on an artist's different sense of landscape, noted that William's walks were fundamentally functional, relating the self through the body to the immediate environment, sustaining life in its basics. By contrast, the ordinary person today would see lanes and woodland tracks as beauty, as recreation or entertainment. Cannon Hall Park provides acres of land within which hundreds of people every day enjoy themselves, stroll around or exercise their pet dogs, while the wider landscape is patterned by historic public footpaths. Artists such as Richard Long have treated the walk as a work of art in itself or the means through which to create one. Richard Long creates walks in the landscape or recreates them in the gallery, using maps, photography and materials that exist in the countryside and that are affected by the elements and seasonal variations. The artistic view of the walk, however, relates equally to the functional and recreational, as suggested by William Malpas:

Where we live is both local and universal, both particular to us and particular to everyone. The path snaking around the hill outside that town in Sussex, Peru or India, where you walked in childhood, is both a very particular place, with particular kinds of shadows and plants, and also a universal path, like all other paths.³⁴

Malpas indicates that there is a further link to the visitor to our project, as they bring their own memories of walks and their own experiences to the interpretative mix – a strong element for those people who regularly use Cannon Hall Park. As artist and historian, we also bring our own sensibilities and memories, though we are merely passing through this particular landscape, simultaneously recording our thoughts and ideas.

In the context of an art exhibition, walking has its own peculiar significance. A ground-breaking exhibition at the Hayward Gallery in 2010, *Move: Choreographing You*, has explored the genealogy of interdisciplinary influences between art and dance since the 1960s, blurring the boundaries between the disciplines and increasingly finding means to directly involve the audience. A regular motif is the idea of repeated actions, the choreography of everyday life within which we are both agents and objects.³⁵ There are clues in these concepts as to how we might work with the movement of William Basforth through his landscape, the contrasting movement of John Spencer and the comparative relationship between the two. There are clues in how we might also translate into an installation movements related to the transgressive actions of theft and concealment. We may also consider how we choreograph the movement of visitors through an exhibition.

VOICES, ECHOES AND GHOSTS

Pat quickly sensed the presence of 'history' in the landscape, most particularly when exploring woodland areas, in ways that evoke the idea of spatial layers, while also relating to the more particular concept of the woodland walk:

THE BREATH

In this silence
Echoes and ghosts
Breathe

In this silence
They touch
Leaving traces

Quite what it is about woodland that provokes these sensations is perhaps best not rationalised. But it is something Pat is moved to bring into the project through photography and a conceptualisation about which she has drawn influence from writers like Nan Shepherd, discussed above, as well as other artists. A recent exhibition by Willie Doherty demonstrated the power of the visual image to disturb and to engage with the emotions. Both *Ghost Story* and *Buried* draw on his experiences of living in Northern Ireland during and after the troubles of the late twentieth century.³⁶ Doherty uses video, often with the camera low to the ground and accompanied by enhanced ambient sound, to produce a sense of menace from otherwise innocuous objects. His work has under-pinned Pat's own sense of direction with still photography, taking it beyond its merely representational logic towards a practice that engages viewers in more challenging and emotive ways. (See Figure 9.)



Figure 9: Voices, echoes and ghosts (Pat Bashforth)

Martin, while examining the language of the documents, became aware that the clerk was able to capture something of the individual being recorded, despite the formulaic legal style. William's defensive truculence is very evident in his own statement:

This examinant saith and confeseth that at or about Christmas last past he tooke two glass bottles of Mr Spencers And further saith he tooke nine pidgeons which he saith that John Bestwick killed for anything that he knew and gave him, allsoe, further saith that Sarah Bingley gave him two black puddings...³⁷

There is a temptation to try to dramatise the documents, a technique frequently used in the museum and gallery context as an interpretational, story-telling device. It is a temptation we are inclined to resist, in line with our sense that documents, objects and landscapes are best left to the sounds of their own echoes and ghosts, though there may be ways of enhancing this experience.

Exposure to seemingly quite unrelated exhibitions can bring about that dislocation of normal patterns of thinking that helps to deal with this kind of conundrum. The Yorkshire Sculpture Park hosted a major exhibition in 2011 by the Spanish artist, Jaume Plensa.³⁸ Confronted by a roomful of Plensa's *Alabaster Heads*, Martin was stripped of words, overwhelmed by a shock of emotion and reduced to tears. Perhaps historians with this level of vulnerability should not be let near historical documents?

The experience underlined our commitment to avoid wordy interpretation, while another element in the exhibition suggested that we might also strip down the documents. One corridor contained a poem, *Twenty-Nine Palms*, formed like a curtain screen running the length of the passage, and made up of cut steel letters that collide and produce bell-like voices. As the exhibition catalogue suggests, the effect is to make the 'text physical, lifting and freeing it from the page and transforming it from two to three dimensions so that we can see the letters from all angles'.³⁹ We have to consider the possibility that, instead of displaying the documents as originals, images or transcripts, separating out key phrases and allowing them to be approached in a disembodied fashion may produce a more dramatic response by dislocating the expectations of the visitor. Provoking discussion on site may produce the effect of a mingling of the voiced text with visitors' vocalised responses, even their struggle to comprehend.

CONCLUSION: BEYOND REPRESENTATION, BEYOND INTERPRETATION

The Australian artist, Barbara Bolt, has challenged the idea of art as a merely representational practice. She believes that what is important is not the artwork, but what she calls the 'work' of art, that is, the performative energy incorporated by the artist in the course of

production, into the materials themselves and, through them, to the viewer and beyond.⁴⁰ She does not deny that: 'When we speak, write, draw, take a photograph, construct a digital image or make a video, there seems little dispute that what we are involved in is making representations'.⁴¹ But she believes that there is a trajectory beyond representation. A constant theme in this article has been the way in which modern museology, particularly in art exhibitions, has been striving to engage with the viewer in a more dynamic way than simple appreciation of the representative. Bolt's ideas seem to complement this strategic turn. It may seem an enormous leap for the historically-based museum to therefore seek to go 'beyond interpretation'. But our collaborative exploration of the diagonal axis between art and history suggests that such a leap might be a fruitful strategy. Pat regards this as the biggest challenge for the artist in relation to this project: to create work that goes beyond representation, while simultaneously engaging with a subject that is an historical event and does not create a barrier.

Laurajane Smith has criticised what she defines as the 'authorised heritage discourse' and its place in reinforcing passivity, tradition and privilege by creating opportunities for consumption of culture rather than critical engagement with it. She does, however, note that, based on survey work, audiences do critically engage with museums and often in ways that might surprise and confound.⁴² Her conclusions in some ways parallel what Bolt has exposed in relation to the way in which art works. Her findings are also endorsed by the imaginative project in 2009, *Object Retrieval*. An object from the University College of London pathology collection, a lead-based toy motor car, was exhibited on a Routemaster bus outside the university and, for a week, visitors were encouraged to record their thoughts and reactions. As commented on the resulting website, 'what this project does is potentially unlock a whole load of meanings that are already there but aren't visible to people'. The thousands of responses speak for themselves.⁴³

We are encouraged to see that some artists are engaging with museum objects to develop new insights into public engagement. Renée Green, in the USA, has focussed her attention on the genealogies of race discourse, using installations, books, videos and sound to counterpose objects and images in order to open up unpredictable associations. In so doing, she challenges the historian with her own diagonal axis:

Artist Renée Green takes up the past as her subject; but unlike the historian who works to impose order on chaos, she works to unwind an ever-expanding network

of associations that emerges out of the close examination of what seem to be already finished or forgotten stories.⁴⁴

We aim to respond in kind and jointly dissolve the boundary between public art and public history. Each in our different ways, we are trying to get beyond the limitations of our own disciplines, both to communicate effectively with each other as artist and historian and to promote dialogue with the audience. Pat is exploring how to provide an inlet to a creative space by going beyond simple representation, while Martin seeks to open up a similar space in which pre-designed historical interpretation does not dominate the potential for discourse. The aim is to create a space within which the visitor can bring their own experience and influences into an unpredictable play with the material presented by the historian and the multi-sense experiences provided by the artist, to create open-ended opportunities for the creation and sharing of new meanings that neither party expected. This builds on more recent theories of museology:

Both curators and the visitors make meanings; neither can put to one side who, when and why they are and neither can be or become a neutral, pure or homogeneous unit. As a result, in the meeting of the visitor with the museum, there is a potentially powerful, rich, dynamic opportunity to bring together individual experiences with a (sometimes) unpredictable assemblage of material and ideas.⁴⁵

The issue is how far to go in providing contextual interpretation or suggesting a narrative. Can the provision of interpretation be avoided at all and what might be the consequences? Would it simply create puzzlement or would the voices of the individuals come through from the documents to speak to the modern world of their own situation? The artist, historian and curator have to let go of the project at this point.

For the artist, echoes and ghosts in the landscape have to be summoned into existence to provide a tactile, visual, spatial and emotional experience of a hidden world. But, if it is desired to avoid the problem of creating a simply passive representational experience, then both artist and historian have to find a way of inviting responses in the knowledge that these cannot be controlled. This was a problem confronted by Liz Wells in relation to one of her travelling photographic exhibitions, *Facing East*. She concluded that a tension was created between the artistic vision within and among the works, the curatorial

vision in the presentation, and the viewer. Artist and curator could do no more than 'invoke a range of issues and emotions, representations and debates'.⁴⁶

That they might invoke somewhat less than that in some contexts and circumstances has been a feature of public museums and galleries since their inception and this also needs to be acknowledged. Andrea Witcomb noted that in the nineteenth century it was not unusual for working-class visitors to the National Gallery to hold picnics, oblivious to any idea that this was not the thing to be done.⁴⁷ In the context of the twenty-first century, museums and heritage sites have become enmeshed in an associated culture of consumerism, entertainment and tourism, in which any original educational purposes have become compromised or even marginalised. These public spaces have become kaleidoscopes of jostling private spaces in which people may choose to do virtually anything and 'the museum cannot be completely contained within rational aims'.⁴⁸ Witcomb suggests that the way forward is 'to constantly pose questions, suggestions, rather than finished statements which tend to fix the narrative in the authoritative voice of the museum' to create spatial interactivity through which visitors may move.⁴⁹

In this regard, the interdisciplinary nature of our project has proved absolutely crucial during the foundational work and our (growingly) joint exploration of the subject matter. Jane Rendell has suggested that 'the transformational experience of interdisciplinary work produces a potentially destabilising engagement with dominant power structures allowing the emergence of new and often uncertain forms of knowledge'.⁵⁰ As a historian Martin has had to control the instinct towards rationality and temper it with different forms of response to different forms of data. While the history part of the equation began as the dominant element, it had to be destabilised as part of the process of creating the diagonal axis with the artistic element. In the process there were surprising consequences for Pat as an artist, not least a concern that the art might get in the way of the history.

Endnotes

¹ Julia Kristeva, 'Institutional Interdisciplinarity in Theory and Practice: an interview', in Alex Cole and Alexia Defert (eds), *The Anxiety of Disciplinarity, De-, Dis-, Ex-*, vol 2, London, Black Dog Publishing, 1997, pp3-21.

² Brian Elliott, *The Making of Barnsley*, Wharnccliffe Publishing Ltd, Barnsley, 1988, p286.

³ The name evolved from the root form, Basford, specifically in this part of south-west Yorkshire during the early eighteenth century into the present Bashforth form. In other parts of the country it both retained the original spelling as well as evolving variants. While the authors' link to certain people of this name in the parish of Silkstone has been directly traced, a definite link to the William Basforth in this story has not been established, but seems probable, given the scarcity of the name.

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- ⁴ West Yorkshire Archive Service (WYAS), West Riding Quarter Sessions Records, QS/13/10/2/1.
- ⁵ WYAS, QS1/13/10/3/1.
- ⁶ WYAS, QS1/13/10/4/28.
- ⁷ WYAS, QS1/13/10/4/ un-numbered item.
- ⁸ Entry in the parish register, All Saints Church, Silkstone.
- ⁹ WYAS, QS1/13/10/6/4.
- ¹⁰ Entry in the parish register, All Saints Church, Silkstone. Until 1752 the English calendar year ran from Lady Day, 25 March rather than from 1 January.
- ¹¹ The National Archives, C 202/45/2.
- ¹² C. Jackson, (ed), *The Journal of Mr John Hobson, Late of Dodworth Green in Yorkshire Diaries and Autobiographies in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Publications of the Surtees Society, Vol LXXV, Durham, 1875).
- ¹³ WYAS, QS1/15/3/2/11.
- ¹⁴ Borthwick Institute of York, Consistory Court Records, Diocese of York, CP H3433.
- ¹⁵ Sheffield Local Archives: Spencer Stanhope Papers Sp St 120/10.
- ¹⁶ Grace Karskens, *The Colony: a History of Early Sydney*, Sydney, 2009, p544, quoted in Tanya Evans, 'Secrets and Lies: the Radical Potential of Family History', *History Workshop Journal*, issue 71, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2011, p55.
- ¹⁷ Daniel Defoe, *Tour through the whole island of Great Britain (1724-6)*, Penguin, London, 1986, p483.
- ¹⁸ Recorded in conversation with the authors, April 2011.
- ¹⁹ Denis Ashurst, *The History of South Yorkshire Glass*, J. R. Collis Publications, University of Sheffield, nd c1990.
- ²⁰ The time of writing is April 2011.
- ²¹ Any speculative elements in this interpretation are reliant on principles explained in David Hey, *Family Names and Family History*, Hambledon and London, London, 2000.
- ²² See for example: Chapter 6 of J. T. Cliffe, *The World of the Country House in Seventeenth-Century England*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1999, for an exploration of the often strained relationships between masters and servants; Keith Wrightson, *Earthly Necessities: Economic Lives in Early Modern Britain*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2000, for a general description of household economy for wage labourers; E. P. Thompson, *Customs in Common*, The New Press, New York, 1993 for changes to perceptions of customary rights in the eighteenth century.
- ²³ Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site-specific art and locational identity*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., and London, England, 2004, p3.
- ²⁴ Nan Shepherd, *The Living Mountain: a celebration of the Cairngorm Mountains of Scotland*, Canongate Books Limited, Edinburgh, 2008 (first published 1977).
- ²⁵ *ibid*, p75.
- ²⁶ *ibid*, p80.
- ²⁷ See, for example, Robert Macfarlane, *The Wild Places*, Granta Books, London, 2007; Madeleine Bunting, *The Plot: a Biography of an English Acre*, Granta Books, London, 2009; Kathleen Jamie, *Findings*, Sort Of Books, London, 2005.
- ²⁸ See for example: Fay Godwin, *Our Forbidden Land*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1990; Iain Sinclair, *Lights out for the Territory: 9 Excursions in the Secret History of London*, Granta Books, London, 1997.
- ²⁹ See for example, David Nash, *Black & Light*, Annely Juda Fine Art, London, 2001. For Goldsworthy a useful on-line source can be found at <http://www.goldsworthy.cc.gla.ac.uk/>, accessed 29 November 2011, as well as in many publications of his work.
- ³⁰ Quoted in William Malpas, *Andy Goldsworthy: Touching Nature*, Crescent Moon Publishing, Kidderminster, 2nd edition, 1999, p38.
- ³¹ See the published catalogue, *Psycho Buildings: Artists take on Architecture*, Hayward Publishing, Southbank Centre, London, 2008, for images and associated essays.
- ³² *ibid*, p42.
- ³³ Based on rates laid down at Quarter Sessions each April during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. This example from WYAS, QS 4/29 Order Book for Pontefract Quarter Sessions 10 April 1732.
- ³⁴ William Malpas, *op cit*, p39.
- ³⁵ For illustrations and interpretative essays, see the catalogue, edited by Stephanie Rosenthal, *Move: Choreographing You*, Hayward Publishing, Southbank Centre, London, 2010.
- ³⁶ See catalogue, Willie Doherty, *Buried*, The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh, 2009.
- ³⁷ WYAS, QS 1/ 13/10/3/1.

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- ³⁸ For an on-line appreciation of this exhibition see the following:
<http://www.yvsp.co.uk/exhibitions/jaume-plensa>. A full printed catalogue is also available through the same website (accessed 29 November 2011).
- ³⁹ Sarah Coulson, *Jaume Plensa Exhibition Guide*, Yorkshire Sculpture Park, West Bretton, Yorkshire, 2011, p27.
- ⁴⁰ Barbara Bolt, *Art Beyond Representation: The Performative Power of the Image*, I. B. Tauris, London and New York, 2004.
- ⁴¹ Bolt, op cit, p11.
- ⁴² Laurajane Smith, *The Uses of Heritage*, Routledge, Abingdon, 2006.
- ⁴³ See website, *Object Retrieval: You are the Routemaster*, at <http://www.objectretrieval.com/>. (Accessed 29 November 2011).
- ⁴⁴ Jennifer A. González, *Subject to Display: Reframing Race in Contemporary Installation Art*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., and London, England, 2008, p205.
- ⁴⁵ G. Kavanagh, *Making Histories in Museums*, Leicester University Press, London and New York, 1996, pp2-3.
- ⁴⁶ Liz Wells, 'Curatorial Strategy as Critical Intervention: The Genesis of *Facing East*', in Judith Rugg and Michèle Sedgwick (eds), *Issues in Curating Contemporary Art and Performance*, Intellect Books, Bristol and Chicago, 2007, p42.
- ⁴⁷ Andrea Witcomb, *Re-imagining the Museum: Beyond the Mausoleum*, Routledge, London and New York, 2003, p26.
- ⁴⁸ *ibid*, p42.
- ⁴⁹ *ibid*, p161.
- ⁵⁰ Jane Rendell, 'Critical Spatial Practice: Curating, Editing, Writing', in Rugg and Sedgwick, op cit, p60.