The Art of Memory and Forgetting: Fine Art and the Resurrection of Class Memory in One London Borough.

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ABSTRACT

The intention of this part practice/part theoretical research is to examine if it is possible to make visible a hidden history of workers’ lives in Kingston using a fine art strategy. The investigation examines the occlusion of working-class experience and the writing out of working-class histories, and considers the capacity of fine art imagery to intervene in a process of the recovery of those histories. It considers the way in which found photographs leave some trace of those hidden or unwritten histories, and how their manipulation and alternative rendering using traditional painting methods and performance can create elements of those histories, and recoup lost experiences. It does this through a study of the official self-representation of the historical roots and development of one London Borough, Kingston-upon-Thames, through a consideration of what lies behind the collection and display policy of its Museum and municipal archives, and its Heritage Centre.

In the first chapter the concept of hidden histories is investigated with an overview of the theoretical material. The investigation uses Marxist critics who suggest, as does Hobsbawm, that history is formed by the construction of different narratives. Using *The Arcades Project and Illuminations*, Walter Benjamin’s ideas on history and art are used to reflect on the philosophical problem of representing the past. Foucault’s work is mobilised because of his identification of the way that social institutions produce dominant paradigms of knowledge, and the ways in which these paradigms establish hierarchical power relations.

In the second chapter, the ideas and works of some current artists who use strategies of recuperation within their practice, are presented and located. Since the end of the twentieth century, the investigation and depiction of memory, hidden
history and invisibility have become major sites of interrogation for artists no less than for theorists and historiographers.

The third chapter explores how the process of working class occlusion occurs through an examination of the recording, exhibiting and depiction of the official history of one Borough in London, Kingston upon Thames.

The final chapter questions how visual art practice might contribute to the process of revealing hidden history. The chapter records the practical research process. The mediums used included photography, painting, digital drawing and re-enactment to retrace the excluded lives of the working class. The theoretical inspirations that sustain the construction and exhibition of the art practice are examined, and the success or failure of that investigation is evaluated.
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INTRODUCTION

This thesis investigates the ways in which art can be used to reveal and represent histories that have been occluded, whether due to having never been written, having been censored, ignored or unrecognised, or due to being treated as aberrant or marginal. In particular it seeks to make visible an occluded history of working class lives in Kingston by using a Fine Art strategy. The focus is on class and on the erasure from official memory of any account of the conflicts and struggles between economic groups, and the experience of those engaged in the labour process during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in one London Borough, Kingston-upon-Thames.

The research was focused on examining the occlusion of working-class histories, exploring whether visual practice can in some way rediscover and reconstruct hidden histories. Some past and current theories concerning the representation of collective memory and hidden history, and how the process of erasure occurs, are explored. This involved a consideration of what events and processes might occur that result in collection (and exhibition) policies failing to reflect the lives of working class men and women.

In the first chapter, the concept of hidden histories is investigated through a partial but representative overview of the literature. Some major theorists and their ideas in relation to the notion of “the occluded” are examined.

The term “hidden histories” is defined within this context as a history that is either unrecorded or uncatalogued or exists only within the margins of public collections, exhibitions, museums and libraries. The research considers whether it is possible to reveal some evidence of hidden history using found photography and traditional painting methods and subsequently, where possible, by interpreting the image within the practices of painting, photography and performance.
To belong to the working class during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries meant to share an identifiable of politics, culture, and language that were different to those of the bourgeoisie. Paul Blackledge’s observation that “Marxist historiography offers a powerful tool for historical research”¹ is useful because historical materialism is still an effective tool of academic criticism and is particularly relevant in exploring the occluded history of the working class, because it is the oppression of one class by another that has meant the occlusion of one class by another.

Foucault’s observations on alternative narratives that are subsumed into the history of victorious powers are examined. He argues that within periods of history, an erasing occurs, whereby histories and events that do not reflect the narrative of newly constructed elites are deleted. In *Madness and Civilisation* he specifically suggests that some groups dominate by excluding others.²

This investigation uses Marxist historians including Hobsbawm, who suggested that history was “a construct of different narratives”. The existence of alternative histories, and their invisibility is the starting point of my research.³ Through the *Arcades Project*⁴ and *Illuminations*, Walter Benjamin’s ideas on history and art are examined, as are John Berger who as both an artist and art critic, used Marxist theories of power to examine both theory and practice.⁶ The work of Thompson and what might be termed the Social History movement is examined in relation to how working class histories are defined and made accessible.

Foucault, in his earlier writings, identified the way that institutions produced dominant paradigms of knowledge and the ways in which these paradigms established hierarchical power relations. He wrote about the dispossessed in

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⁴ Benjamin, W. *The Arcades of Memory*, Harvard University, Boston, 1999.
his *Lives of Infamous Men* with the intention to make known the “[l]ives that are though they hadn’t been, that survive only from the clash with a power that wished only to annihilate them”. This is the same motivation as my own.

Other critical thinkers have been used in relation to memory and the interpretation of imagery and artistic production. These include structuralists such as Barthes and his works *La Mort d’Auteur* and *Camera Lucida*, and postmodernist Baudrillard’s *Simulacra and Simulation*. The influence of memory and place are examined in the work of Lippard, Kwon and Burgin.

The representations of history, in relation to national and local history, are crucial to the exploration of occluded history. E.P Thomson, Hobsbawm and other socialist and Marxist historians, argue that class and, in particular, the unequal power relations between the classes, are critical to understanding representations of history. The chapter finishes by considering the work of Bourriaud in *Relational Aesthetics*, in which he developed the theory of the the “exform”, a sign or form seized by those who are excluded for reasons that are “cultural, social or political”.

The second chapter explores how the process of working-class occlusion occurs by examining the recording, exhibition and depiction of the official history of one borough in London, Kingston upon Thames. In order to address such a vast subject it is necessary to confine the research to one specific area. In examining the historical records and representation of Kingston, the study explores how local history is represented and exhibited, in the Museum and the Heritage Centre of Kingston upon Thames. Both the objects displayed

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12 Kwon, M. *One Place After Another: Site Specific Art and Location*, MIT, 2002.
in the museum collection as well as those records, books, and photographs in the Heritage Centre are examined. Kavanagh's analysis of museums as “Dream Spaces” is evaluated in terms of its usefulness to the revealing of working class history.

The research begins by asking: what narrative is found within the history of such a place? What is physically in the collection? And the reverse of that question: what is unrepresented? The examinations of the constructed histories of the area have indicated that one dominant narrative emerges, which is that of a connection with royalty. The evidence of actual royal involvement is less than can be found in many boroughs, but its connection with monarchy is deliberately emphasised at the level of collection, exhibition and commemoration.

This chapter demonstrates the occlusion of the working class within a specific time and place. It goes further in suggesting that though some curation strategies have attempted to represent occluded groups, they have not successfully represented working class history.

In the third chapter, the ideas and works of contemporary artists who use strategies of recuperation within their practice are discussed. Some artists, using a range of strategies and mediums, choose to work with personal family histories, while others explore and represent the history of gender, ethnicity and the traumatic histories of violence and genocide. Since the end of the twentieth century, the investigation and depiction of memory, hidden history and invisibility has become a major site of interrogation for both theorists and artists.

While acknowledging the effectiveness of artistic strategies for recuperation it is the argument of this chapter that while occluded histories of non-white ethnicity, genocide, colonialisation, apartheid, and gender histories have been explored using painterly strategies, working class histories have been more successfully scrutinised by contemporary artists using photography and film.
In the final chapter, there is an exploration of how visual art practice might contribute to the process of revealing hidden history in relation to both theory and practice via a consideration of the development of my own practice. This chapter records the practice process, and decisions made, including why the practice of traditional painting from found photographs was adopted, and the decision to exhibit both paintings and photographs made. The chapter ends by questioning whether it is possible to effect some retracing of excluded lives by using found photography or other artifacts belonging to the local heritage collection to create new work.

The visual practice used different mediums and methods and a variety of artistic interventions including drawing, painting, photography and filming. Re-enactment is featured in the construction of photographs and paintings. The theoretical ideas used in constructing and exhibiting art practice are examined, and the success or failure of that investigation is evaluated.

The argument of a partial and prejudiced history as inspiration is at the heart of contemporary British conservatism, for example Michael Gove’s attempt to control history teaching in schools\textsuperscript{15} or Boris Johnson’s book on Churchill,\textsuperscript{16} both of which compose a partial history identified by Hobsbawm as “history that is good for us”\textsuperscript{17}.

History that only contains representations of the powerful (and of the bourgeoisie) is clearly unrepresentative. This research was based on seeking an alternative history, not of philanthropic, wealthy, middle-class benefactors, but a history of the occluded working class and their struggle for a better world.

It is my contention that the occlusion of oppositional narratives that has occurred in the representation of the history of the working class in England has meant that working-class histories have been under-represented. This

\textsuperscript{15} The Daily Telegraph, Nov 24th 2011.
has resulted in a history that is based on the representation of bourgeois lives and bourgeois values.

There are various strategies for recuperation. Visual practice, using traditional painting methods and found photography is one such means of recovering some trace of the occluded lives of the working class. As Walter Benjamin, observed, “[t]o articulate what is past does not mean to recognize ‘how it really was.’ It means to take control of a memory, as it flashes in a moment of danger.”

The Components of the research

1. An examination of some of the theoretical literature regarding working class history, constructed pasts, occlusion, and cultural identity.

2. An investigation into how working class history is hidden by investigating the depiction and exhibition of the working class in one area of London. This involved researching what was presented as well as what was occluded.

3. An assessment of contemporary artists whose practice is inspired by seeking the occluded, either within their own family histories or within a wider political history. This also involved examining their methods and choices of subject and use of the mediums of painting, photography and film.

4. A development of a research based art practice making a series of research decisions including using found photography both from my family archive and that of the Kingston Heritage Centre. The research involved exploring photography and its relationship with art and painting and in exploring different mediums and practices. This and my own development as an artist influenced the decision made to use traditional painting methods. The practice also involved using the geography of the area and historic sites within it. Finally within the research I displayed the paintings at the Guildhall and curated a small photographic exhibition, to begin a process of uncovering some trace of working class history.

Chapter 1
Memory and Forgetting Theoretical Discussions

1.1. Introduction
History as Construction

The research intention in this study, is to examine whether occluded histories of groups of people, in particular the working class, can be accessed using strategies of visual practice. In this analysis it is the intention to examine certain theoretical ideas and assumptions related to the definitions and observations of history as a construction regarding the preservation or erasure of individual and class memory.

Hidden History has become a generalised, unspecific term used by various community groups researching the past. A typical example is a web site of a community group researching histories within London’s East End: these groups are often attempting both memorialization and oral recording of working class communities, often linked to celebrating local ethnic diversity.

Another use of the term Hidden History, is by the media, who use it as a marketing tool, for example in promoting history documentaries examining the history of families and individuals that are not notable historical figures (i.e. not monarchs, leaders, political or military figures). One example of this usage can be found in the BBC4 series entitled Hidden History (2014), which focused on four historical family businesses. Such programmes choose subject histories that are often well documented. The lives addressed were those that had been recorded and catalogued, and were, therefore, relatively easy to research, compile and narrate. They were nevertheless unknown in the sense that published history books and documentaries, concentrating as they did in the past on the elite of any period, had not dealt with such figures. The BBC had in this case made the choice to highlight the lives of an uncelebrated section of the population, the petty-bourgeoisie - butchers,

16 http://www.hidden-histories.org.uk/wordpress (accessed 14/12/2014)
20 http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b03q480f (aired Summer 2014)
bakers, and other such self-employed trades. This choice itself constructed yet another “history” of England, one that reinforced the idea of England (but in this case in laudatory register) as being a nation of shopkeepers.

In order to begin examining how art practice can reveal hidden histories, it is first necessary to determine which potentially hidden history or histories are to be addressed, and what processes might be involved in revealing them through the medium of art.

The first premise of this study is that history is a selective process, and there exists a form of collective memory that is fabricated and memorialised through a nationalist narrative that defines the politics of the present. It is institutions that create the dominant paradigms (or epistemes) through which this collective memory is secured and the hierarchy of power relations is reproduced. This involves a process of forgetting and is specific to place and space. E H Carr suggested that history was not so much fact as those facts that are gathered and represented by the historian.21

In his introduction to The Invention of Tradition, Eric Hobsbawm suggests that history is a construct of different narratives. In particular, certain groups and individuals assemble useful narratives while eradicating those that do not suit their view. He concluded that all states, nations, and religious groups construct shared memories and histories as a form of socialisation.22

Between 1870 and 1914 traditions were “invented” throughout Europe. The governments of Europe needed to legitimise their position in the face of rapid industrialisation, urbanisation and the threat of working-class electoral representation. In particular, the growing acceptance towards achieving more equal civil rights threatened the power base of the middle class. The solution, according to Hobsbawm, was to create national communities that shared a similar identity, created from a common culture and history, one that reflected

the views, assumptions and ambitions of the ruling class. National identities were created and then used as a spiritual appeal before World War I to create sympathy and support for the war.

Tom Hickey. in his introduction to the William Kentridge exhibition *Fragile Identities*, observed that “[i]dentity is as much a creative act of elective affinity as it is an inherited imposition”, emphasising that “erasure of the past is used to accommodate the present”. He suggests that those in power “fear history and favour amnesia” because history reveals “processes of demonization”.23

Foucault identified the way that institutions produced dominant paradigms of knowledge and the ways in which these paradigms established hierarchical power relations. He suggested that the production of discourse, the ways in which knowledge is framed, spoken and transmitted, establishes one voice over all others and that this discourse is never disinterested. In *Discipline and Punish*, he described the genealogy of morals while rejecting any idea of the grand progress of history.24

Foucault observed, “The purpose of history, guided by genealogy, is not to discover the roots of our identity, but to commit itself to its dissipation.”25 He identifies that each society had its regime of truth, its “general politics” of truth and that “the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true”.26

Foucault challenged the idea that power is wielded by people or groups by way of “episodic” or “sovereign” acts of domination or coercion, seeing it instead as both dispersed and pervasive. Power is everywhere diffused and embodied in discourse, knowledge and “regimes of truth”.27 Foucault credited

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26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
Marx with identifying the “epistemological mutation of history”. In the introduction to *The Archeology of Knowledge*, he suggested that “its first phase can no doubt be traced back to Marx”. His major difference from Marx was in identifying power as dispersed rather than centred within the economic superstructure of capitalism’s power structures. He also took issue with the liberal assumption that liberty is a fundamental human desire, suggesting instead that “[g]enealogical analysis shows the concept of liberty is an invention of the ruling classes and not fundamental to man’s nature.”

Rabinow observed that as power comes from everywhere it is neither an agency nor a structure. Instead it is a kind of “meta power” or “regime of truth” that pervades society, and which is in constant flux and negotiation. Observing that Foucault used the term “power” to signify that power which is constituted of accepted forms of knowledge, scientific understanding and “truth”.

Peter Middleton and Tim Woods suggest that Hans George Godamer observed that history should not be thought of as objective knowledge, independent of individual perspective, but a form of interaction. He noted the danger of identifying and immersing oneself with the past, suggesting that communities should develop openness and response to change in order to allow the past to be active in the present but not give oneself up to it.

Gibbons, in *Contemporary Art and Memory*, suggested that archives are always historically specific. She quotes Emmanuel Delenda who, following Foucault, suggested that the objectification of knowledge and social regulation was a response to the rise of individualism that began in the late eighteenth century, stating, “At the very time that knowledge was being categorized by

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29 Ibid. p.78.
the scientists and naturalists the archive became a tool in the maintenance of institutional and governmental power and the control of the individual. 32

These theorists argue persuasively that both history and memory are a selective construct. More specifically, they argue that collective memory is fabricated often through a nationalist narrative and memorialised past, which is defined by the politics of the present.

Olick suggested that while the nineteenth century could be described as the age of monuments, the twentieth century was the age of memorials. 33 The popularity of the installation of ceramic poppies at the Tower of London, Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red, in November 2014 indicates that the enthusiasm for governments to promote memorials is still prevalent in the twenty-first century. 34 This is part of the creation of an approved and constructed past which is necessary to governments’ legitimising their position and promoting a nationalist identity, one that is placed within a context of global self-importance and which makes necessary memorialisation of armed conflicts to ensure willing future recruits.

Halbwachs, writing in 1925, noted that war memory faded into the idea of the collective conscience and that the memory of World War I was changed from individual grief to public mourning. 35 Current mass public memorialisation has continued to be encouraged by British government institutions. In 2014 all Arts Council funding grants were given on the basis that organisations committed to exhibit or produce commemorative performances/exhibitions during that year, the centennial of the beginning of WW1. 36

Famously recognised by Orwell in the novel *1984*, the creation of a narrative of nationhood serves governments in raising public support for wars and in distracting the public from questioning government policies. The creation of a shared narrative of a nation’s past glory and future purpose was identified by Pierre Norra, who suggested that memory was used to build nation states in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

1.2 Memory

Both Henry Bergson and Emile Durkheim developed radical analysis of the experience of time related to memory. Bergson argued that remembering is a subjective fluid experience, while Durkheim identified the intersections between culture and memory, suggesting differences not in terms of subjective experience but instead in forms of social organisation, including time perception and social order. Halbwachs, Durkheim’s student, extended that idea by suggesting that remembering comes from social groups. He recognised that autobiographical memory and historical memory existed; his examples included subsequent generations too young to have experienced the event, yet are still “remembering” World War I or the American Civil war. He also recognised the possibility of multiple memories, suggesting people retained a memory of past experiences and recollections (souvenirs) that were “not just simple imprints” but “active selections and reconstructions of the past”.

Halbwachs developed the idea of the collective memory, the importance of locality and the attachment to “home” and the symbolism of the objects within it. His work was re-assessed as postmodernist theories were developed, attempting more refined and nuanced definitions and analysis of history and memory. Erica Apfelbaum credited him with identifying that individual experiences, even the most private, are the result of an ongoing dynamic

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social process, and further argued that they are stored and recollected through continuous interchanges with significant others or significant groups.41 She suggested that individual groups have their own codes and customs that construct a history. Collective memory provides a background for individuals to interpret their personal experiences, observing that individual and collective memory are dialectically related.42

Marianne Hirsch also recognised the importance of memory in constructing histories that affect future generations when she suggested that post-memory was “[t]he experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth”.43 Both Apfelbaum and Hirsh recognised that “memory” is not one established event but is rather constantly changing and evolving through subsequent generations.

In the introduction to their essay “Contested Pasts”, Katherine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone suggested that there is a conflict, not so much with the facts of past events, but also with who in the present has the right to speak on their behalf.44 Although history is about the present, “so too is memory, and much more directly.” 45 This is a useful reminder that every supposed historical “fact” – even personal memory – is manipulated and interpreted through the glass of the present. They observed, “The very notion of historical truth has come into question; the past is constitutive narrative, always representation, always construction.”46 This construction, affected each new generation’s “memory”.

In *Theatres of Memory*, Raphael Samuel observed that history and heritage become intertwined and that history fetishises archive-based research. He

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suggested that memory is not just a passive storage system “but an active shaping force... it is dynamic”.47

1.3 History

E.P. Thompsons’ The Making of the English Working Class and Sheila Rowbothams’ Hidden from History were two important books in establishing alternative histories. They were both influential in my own understanding of history, and their publication in 1963 and 1973 respectively, were critical in influencing successive historical research and historical writing. Thompson’s text is credited as being a critically significant contribution to establishing and recognising working-class history.

Thompson stated at the beginning of the book:

I am seeking to rescue the poor stockinger, the Luddite cropper, the “obsolete” hand-loom weaver, the “utopian” artisan, and even the deluded follower of Joanna Southcote from the enormous condescension of posterity.48

Emma Griffin, writing in the February 2015 edition of History Today, observed that up until the second half of the 20th century social historians focused on women and children rather than on class as a specific subject. She suggested that this changed with the emergence of the social history movement in the second half of the 20th century.

At the end of the Second World War and – a decade or so later – as the universities expanded, the historian’s remit widened enormously. Poor and disenfranchised subjects moved from the intellectual margins to the mainstream.49

This interpretation however ignores the work of writers like Engels The Condition of the Working Class in England, written in 1845, and that of

49 Griffin. E. Working-Class History. History Today, Vol.65, 2/2/15
journalists such as Henry Mahew who wrote *London Labour and the London Poor* in 1851, or later writers such as Jack London *People of the Abyss*, 1903, or George Orwell *Down and Out in London and Paris* (1933), and *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937). All of these books specifically examined issues of class and poverty.

Griffin observed that the Communist Party History Group (founded 1946) and the Society for the Study of Labour History (1960) were both influential in the growth of research and publications related to working class history, as was the History Workshop movement, established in the late 1960s. She suggested that the Group gained influence because of their best known academics, in particular Communist Party History Group members Christopher Hill, Eric Hobsbawm, Raphael Samuel and Edward Thompson.

Griffin argues that the decline of working class history research after 1980 might be explained by the academic waning of interest in class politics, and in particular the popularity of the debate that questioned the existence of a separate working class. She suggests that the 1980s represented a move towards a much more apolitical style of writing. Unfortunately, what she does not register in her analysis, is the direct correlation between this shift of academic interest amongst historians and the shift of political hegemony from the Left to the Right of the political spectrum from the nineteen sixties and seventies to the beginning of the twenty-first century that affected all sites of cultural reflection, including British universities. Social-history research had been championed as part of the democratization of society after the 2nd World War, and this process was, by the end of the twentieth century, reversed by the growing hegemony of neo-liberalism, and its cultural ramifications within British academia.

The prominence and influence of the right wing politics of privatisation and individualism that accompanied the decades following the eighties saw the

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emergence of right wing historians, whose neo liberal histories were written to accommodate and reflect the new politics.

The rise of Postmodernism coincided with this period. Postmodern theorists and historians such as Lyotard did not recognize class, dismissing the Marxist category of class as an element of just another ideology. In *The Post Modern Condition: A report on Knowledge* 1979 Lyotard suggested that philosophies of the world, representing the progress of history were inadequate to represent post modern society. He proposed instead, that micro-narratives better represented contemporary society.

Other Postmodern historians such as Hayden White observed that “all isms were doomed to fail”. In the essay *The Burden of History in History and Theory*, White suggested that there should be freedom from history-arguing that a disconnection with the past was beneficial, because society needed a history that will “educate us to discontinuity more than ever before: for discontinuity, disruption and chaos is our lot.”

Linda Hutcheon saw parody as an important tool. She argued that using such tools did not dehistorisise but allowed a rethinking. She described this as historiographical metafiction.

Countering the postmodern arguments on culture were writers such as Eagleton, Callinicos, and Anderson, all of whom argued that history, and in particular Marxist histiography, was key to an understanding of events.

Richard Evans in *Defence of History* observed that the postmodern argument that history is outmoded is wrong, because while:

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Ethnicity, gender, disability and sexuality were championed… the hegemony of the ruling white male, was recognized but not his prevailing class.55

Selina Todd in her *The People: The Rise And Fall Of The Working Class, 1910-2010*, defined the years between 1910 and 2010 as the working class century, describing the working class as constituting more than three quarters of the British people until 1950, and still more than half in 1991.56 She defined class as “not determined by a person’s level of income, but by their power - primarily, their economic power”.57 Influenced by E.P. Thompson, and noting that fifty years after his call to rescue working people from the enormous condescension of posterity, and after Postmodernist claims that no collective identities exist, she observed that journalists and academics were now once again using the term because it captures people’s “relationship to work and how this frames their lives”.58

Todd described class as “our relationship with other people”. She suggested that it should be defined, as E.P Thompson insisted, by people’s experience. She quoted Thompson as stating in 1963 that class was a relationship, not a thing. 59

Moreover, Todd took issue with the proposition that history is at an end. Her impetus for writing the book was because her family’s story and that of other working class, ordinary people had not been represented in her history degree course60. She stated that during her research she "couldn't find the history of these working-class people in the established record of the twentieth

57 ibid. p358
58 ibid. p399
60 Todd, S, *The People: the rise and fall of the working class*, p4.
century.”\textsuperscript{61} She identified the prejudice displayed by some right wing journalists who claimed that there had been a seismic shift in society from the golden age of working class life to a neo-liberal reality. She uses Andrew O’Hagan as an example of writers who have suggested that the contemporary working class “formed the most conservative force in Britain”\textsuperscript{62}. Like Owen Jones, she criticises conservative commentators who suggested that the age of the respectful British working class ended in the 1960s.

\textit{Chavs} by Owen Jones was written “to expose the demonization of the working class”\textsuperscript{63} In it he disputes that the working class changed from collective hard workers to individual, selfish scroungers, in the space of forty years. He describes various writers within the media as constructing an image of the working class “made lazy by welfare, greedy by consumerism, and arrogant by Trade Unionism”\textsuperscript{64}. He suggested that the white working class became targeted in the eighties because class had become a forbidden word within the political establishment.\textsuperscript{65} He identified the assault on the working class as having begun in 1979, with the election of Margaret Thatcher’s right wing Conservative government whose political aim was to attack and dismantle working class institutions such as trade unionism and council housing at the same time as “trashing” its industries.\textsuperscript{66}

Todd noted that the public spending cuts in the 1980s and 1990s destroyed community groups and small publishing houses that had previously encouraged the collection of working class peoples’ autobiographies.\textsuperscript{67} As a consequence, she had had to pay a researcher to conduct much of the research needed for her book.

The cuts in funding both in local and national government budgets have represented a significant and fundamental shift in the balance between the

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{61} ibid., p8.
\textsuperscript{62} ibid, p5
\textsuperscript{63} Jones O, Chavs, Verso. London 2011, p11
\textsuperscript{64} ibid.
\textsuperscript{65} ibid., p8
\textsuperscript{66} ibid., p9
\textsuperscript{67} Todd, S, \textit{The People: The Rise and Fall of the Working Class} p410
\end{footnotesize}
State, community and individual. At the same time the work of the Socialist/Marxist academic scholars has been set to one side, and Universities themselves are forced into operating more as businesses; paradoxically, there is a recognition that the historical lives of ordinary people have been ignored.

In an article in History in Focus, published by the Institute of Historical Research at the University of London, Alun Munslow suggested that postmodernism’s effect on the interpretation of history has meant the “[p]ast is not just re-interpreted according to new evidence but also through self-conscious acts of re-writing”, and that there is no meaning apart from linguistic and narrative data because “[d]ata in and of itself does not have given meaning”. This suggests that postmodernism’s construction of histories requires societies “to face up to the highly complex question of how we know things about the past and what we, as moral beings, do as a result”.68

In his book Narrative and History, Munslow suggested that histories can be neither discovered nor truthful because of their fictively constructed nature. They are premeditated discourses and literary constructions. History as fictive is reinterpreted by the relationship between sources, reference and representation.69 He suggests the historian is an author who narrates the past by making decisions concerning a range of narrative functions. These include decisions on aesthetic and figurative modes of argument, political ideological strategies of explanation and appropriate referential and causation judgments. The historian then decides the process of their narration and then finally the mode of expression: Munslow lists texts, film, photography, TV, radio, graphic novels, comics, magazines, museums, heritage sites and memorials, performance and digitised representation as examples of historical evidence.70

Munslow suggested that the future of history involves:

68 www.history.ac.uk/ihr/Focus/Whatishistory/munslow6.html. Last accessed 27th August 2015.
70 Ibid. p.128.
Re-thinking ontological connections between the past and the understanding of it through objectivity, truth and relativism… Understanding the “real” nature of the past is always going to fail because history cannot escape its own act of creation.71

Walter Benjamin is an important contributor to contemporary thinking on both anamnesis and historical narrative. His writing reflects various influences, both literary and visual, within the imagery used. Crucially, he mediated and deconstructed ideas of memory and history, suggesting in Some Motifs in Baudelaire that “certain contents of the individual’s past meet in memory with the contents of the collective past”.72 In his 1981 book on Benjamin, Terry Eagleton argued that the past does not exist; instead it “feeds into the warp of the present”.73

The historian is described by Benjamin as the “ragpicker of memory”, a “Lumpensammler”.74 Benjamin’s methods of collecting historical knowledge in the Arcades Project was to make a decision to explore the rejected75 and to represent what has been forgotten. Terry Eagleton observed that “Benjamin’s imagery of excavation sets out to deconstruct the homogeneity of history into what we might now, after Michael Foucault, call an ‘archaeology’.” He referenced Benjamin’s observation, “The dream of a dialectical ‘history of culture’ is absurd, ‘since the continuum of history, blown apart by dialectics, is nowhere scattered over a wider area than in that part people call culture’.76

In the 1930s, Benjamin had identified that history is not a homogenous entity and that culture is important in the construct and identification of historical composition.

71 Ibid. p.129.
74 Benjamin,W. 2003, op. cit.
In 2009 in an article for the New Statesmen, Eagleton suggested that Benjamin was important because he believed that the past could be transformed by what people might do in the present, while remembering that the past "does not exist".⁷⁷ Eagleton observed that Benjamin understood the importance of history and memory in influencing the politics of the present⁷⁸ and that what “drives men and women to revolt against injustice is not dreams of liberated grandchildren, but memories of enslaved ancestors”,⁷⁹ echoing Marianne Hirsch’s observations on post-memory.⁸⁰ Eagleton also observed that Benjamin’s engagement is both practical and theoretical, recognising that “History is not, then, simply a theoretical construct, but a political one too…” Benjamin contrasts historicism’s ‘eternal image of the past’ with historical materialism’s ‘specific and unique engagement with it’.⁸¹

1.4 Forgetting

Institutions that created the dominant paradigms (or epistemes) through which collective memory is secured and the hierarchy of power relations is reproduced ensure that a process of forgetting occurs.

Hobsbawm observed in Behind the Times that “[t]he destruction of the past, or rather of the social mechanisms that link one’s contemporary experience to that of earlier generations, is one of the most characteristic and eerie phenomenon of the late twentieth century”, regretting that younger generations grew up lacking any organic relation to the public past of the times that they lived in.⁸²

Crucial to a consideration of how practice might reveal hidden history is Eagleton’s observation that “[a]mong the things that make up history are the

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⁷⁹ Benjamin, W. 2003, op. cit.
⁸⁰ Hirsch, M. op. cit.
things that did not happen, or did not need to happen, which often exert as profound an influence on the course of events as those that did.”\textsuperscript{83} He noted that Benjamin’s emphasis on remembering that the past was important was because he believed the past could be transformed by the present. Benjamin understood that the past held “vital resources for the renewal of the present”.\textsuperscript{84} Eagleton suggests that this was opposite to the view of Freud, who believed that human beings were naturally amnesiac animals and that it was forgetfulness that allowed human beings to continue. “We survive only by repressing a great deal of unpleasant material from our past. For Freud, it is oblivion that is natural to us”.\textsuperscript{85}

1.5 The Role of Photography in Remembering
Roland Barthes, in \textit{Camera Lucida}, suggested that photographs are sites of memory. Their usage alters recollection, giving more prominence to those incidents that have a physical life by having been photographed. They can also be sites of disjuncture whereby they act as the punctum, or can involve the creation of false memories. They are an object, when they hold no direct memory for the viewer, working as an echo of memories or distortion.\textsuperscript{86}

John Berger, in the essay \textit{Uses of Photography}, observed that, “The camera relieves us of the burden of memory… Yet no other god has been so cynical, for the camera records in order to forget.”\textsuperscript{87} He suggested the ideal of photography (apart from aesthetics) was to “seize an historic moment”,\textsuperscript{88} and that “[n]o painting or drawing, however naturalist, belongs to its subject in the way that a photograph does.” He also suggests that unlike memory, photographs do not preserve meaning.\textsuperscript{89}

Berger’s essay was written as a response to Susan Sontag’s \textit{On Photography}, where she had suggested that photographs and photography

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{83} Eagleton 2009, op. cit.
\item \textsuperscript{84} Eagleton 2009, op. cit.
\item \textsuperscript{85} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{88} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{89} Ibid. p.54.
\end{itemize}
are not objects of truth but are opaque objects that are a series of unrevealed events and particles, where history past and present becomes anecdotal. Sontag observed that photography served capitalism, defining reality as a spectacle for the masses and as an object of surveillance for rulers. The photograph didn’t replace painting, but replaced memory. She suggested that Proust was wrong when he observed that photographs are an instrument of memory because they are instead “[a]n invention or a replacement”.90

Berger observed that the contemporary culture creates “an eternal present of immediate expectation” where “memory ceases to be necessary or desirable”.91 He questioned whether photography could develop an alternative photographic practice, suggesting that the task of an alternative photography would be to “incorporate photography into social and political memory, instead of using it as a substitute which encourages the atrophy of any such memory”.92 The critical difference, he suggested, would be from a photographer ceasing to be a reporter to the world and becoming instead a recorder for those involved in the events of the photograph.93

Barthes suggested that the act of photography imbues the object/subject with a sense of importance that is not deserved, distorting the value/importance of the object. Before photography, memory itself operated to evaluate the importance of events. Memory’s critical change of role happened when the act of taking a photograph changed from being a “ritual” to a “reflex”94 and moved from an act of significance of recording an important event to an uncritical act of almost unconscious need.

Middleton and Woods argued that the destruction of the past is one of the fears that haunted writers of the twentieth century. They observed that there is a persistent anxiety among contemporary critics that ignorance of the past may actually change the past. They note the work of American historian

92 Ibid.
93 Ibid.
Michael Kammen, who criticised what he termed the “nostalgic tourism” of the past offered by the advertising and film industry and which created an “indiscriminate amnesia”. He proposed that there was an entrepreneurial mode of selective memory, employed by Walt Disney and others, that masks the past with simulacra. This process can be witnessed by examining Disney films from 1929–1990, which invented and portrayed an arcadian relationship between animals and humans that misrepresented the ecological destruction of large numbers of animals and their habitat in the twentieth century through industrialisation. Confusion and obfuscation continues in twenty-first century films such as The Pirates of the Caribbean (2003) or The Knight’s Tale (2001). The simulacrum of history is no better exemplified than by the spectacle of pirates depicted as (and based upon) ageing rock stars or medieval jousting crowds clapping the beat to Queen’s song “We Will Rock You”. 

Middleton and Woods observed that postmodernism calls into question the idea of progress and reason. After Auschwitz and Hiroshima, many people were driven to look for the “lost archipelago of the past”. Postmodernity represents itself as the leading resistance to previous history that buried such narratives under a false narrative. They site E. L. Doctorow, who suggested that in the face of pressure on everyone to become faceless, compliant and indistinct, people resist by seeking past narratives from previous centuries in order to become part of an “active community”.

Keith Jenkins, in Rethinking History, elaborated on the idea that history is not the same thing as the past, because they are “ages and miles apart”. Gibbons observed that history exists in many versions or forms and that all

these are relative to the context in which history is produced. Knowledge gained particular power in particular inflections through its institutionalisation.¹⁰²

Each theorist recognises that societies produce dominant circumscribed chronicles, ones that act to construct partial and distorted shared histories and memories. It is the simplified narrative that is preserved at the expense of those groups, or individuals, that are perceived as different. “The other”, “the alien” “the out of touch” the “out of date” and the “different” are excluded from the dominant narrative of the powerful.

Foucault developed a theory of epistemes, which he defined in the Archeology of Knowledge as “[a] total set of relations that unite, at a given period, the discursive practices that give rise to epistemological figures, sciences and possibly formalised systems.” He identified four periods – the Renaissance, the Age of Reason (defined as covering the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries), the nineteenth century and a future period beginning at the twentieth century. He observed that each society has its regime of truth:

That is the type of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true: the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true.¹⁰³

In Foucault’s project of remembering the Lives of Infamous Men, he suggested he wrote it to remember:

Lives that are though they hadn’t been, that survive only from the clash with a power that wished only to annihilate


¹⁰³ Foucault, M. 1989, op. cit., p.211.
them or at least to obliterate them, lives that come back to us only through the effect of multiple accidents.  

Foucault sets out to explore “brief lives encountered by chance in books and documents”. He describes it as “not a book of history” but an “anthology of existences”. It had an important effect on him, one that is similar to that of Barthes’s encounter with the photograph of his mother. He described it as a “resonance I still experience today when I happen to encounter these lowly lives”, describing them as “reduced to ashes in a few sentences that struck them down”.

Foucault determined the people he would concentrate upon would be real people (not fictions) and must have been “both obscure and ill fated”, and that the information on their lives must be brief. Their histories must be representations of misfortune, wildness or dubious madness, “and for us still, the shock of these words must give rise to a certain effect of beauty mixed with dread”.

He decided not to use memoirs because memoirs, by their nature, are deliberate constructs. He believed that extracts from found documents would reflect reality, in order to produce the “dramaturgy of the ‘real’”. The sources he used were official documents and data from the years 1660–1760. He described them as “archives of confinement, of the police, petitions to the king, and lettres de cachet”. His methods required that the personages were obscure in order that they would belong to “those billions of existences destined to pass away without a trace”. Crucially, what “remained was the encounter with power”.

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105 Ibid.
106 Ibid. p.158.
108 Ibid. p.159.
109 Ibid. p.160.
110 Ibid.
111 Ibid. p.161.
These reflections are fascinating because they present Foucault discussing power, using emotive language, being touched by the lost lives he encounters. He sees the few lines describing their crimes or madness as “the only monument they have ever been granted: it's what gives them, the passage through time, the bit of brilliance, the brief flash that carries them to us”.  \[112\]

His determination to reveal the lived lives of those excluded by the oppressive forces of the state echoes the motivation for my own research.

Foucault also realised the power of institutions, such as religions, in changing social order. He analysed Christianity and in particular the role of the confession as a distinct force of social order and control, observing that its language influenced social integration, it being a specific “[r]itual of conversation in which the one speaking is at the same time the one spoken about”. \[113\] He observed that the recording of crime and fault emerged at the end of the seventeenth century. Before that, he suggested, the Christian West invented confession as a form of control. The seventeenth-century administrative system replaced this mechanism, and pardoning was replaced by record keeping. The judiciary, the police, medicine and psychiatry would operate hand-in-hand:

Everything is now recorded and therefore documented leading to social mapping and control ….The transgression is no longer sent to heaven through whispered confession; it accumulates on earth in the form of written traces. \[114\]

Foucault postulated that starting in the seventeenth century the West saw the emergence of the fable of obscure life, from which the fabulous was banished. He writes, “The impossible or the ridiculous cease to be the condition under which the ordinary could be recounted.” \[115\] He suggests that this change in

\[112\] Ibid.
\[113\] Ibid. p.166.
\[114\] Ibid.
\[115\] Ibid. p.173.
literature moves towards the idea of discussing radiance of heaven, instead of looking for that which is forbidden and scandalous.

1.6 Memory and Locality

In my research I have found that the process of occlusion and retrieval can relate to specific spaces and places. In *The Lure of the Local* (1997), Lucy Lippard observes that commemoration can “interweave pressing issues concerning land, culture and place with the possibility of an art boosting stronger contextual ties and audience access”.

In considering the connection between place and memory in terms of art practice and mediums such as re-enactment, Victor Burgin observed in *Place and Memory in Visual Culture* that “[a]n identity implies not only a location but a duration, a history, a lost identity is lost not only in space but in time”.

Miwon Kwon, in *One Place After Another*, explored the role of public art in the community, using a close reading of Lucy Lippard and other critics concerned with art and place. She argued that there could be a new way of using art in the community that does not lose a sense of place. She quotes community French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy, who states:

There is no communion, there is no common being, but there is being in common. The question should be the community of being and not the being of community.

Kwon contends that:

Our sense of identity is fundamentally tied to our relationship to places and the histories they embody, the uprooting of our lives from specific local cultures and places – from voluntary

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118 Kwon, M. *One Place After Another: Site Specific Art and Location*, MIT, Cambridge, MA, 2002.

migrations of forced displacement – has contributed to the waning of our abilities to locate ourselves. Consequently a sense of place remains remote to most of us.\textsuperscript{120}

She sees this as the primary cause of our separation from nature, disconnection from history, spiritual emptiness and sense of self. She argues that we need to pay close attention to the role of places in the formation of our identities and cultural values, and she encourages a particular type of relationship to places as a means of countering the trends of the dominant capitalist culture. She suggests that market forces have contributed to the waning of “our ability to locate ourselves”.\textsuperscript{121}

Kwon observes that habitual attachment to places is a common sense among humans and that it informs our sense of identity. She suggests this persistent, adherence to places is “not a lack of theoretical sophistication but a means of survival”.\textsuperscript{122} She argues that although a sense of belonging to a place is blamed for encouraging violence and extremism, the “destabilisation of subjectivity, identity and spatiality” can also be described as “a compensatory fantasy in response to the intensification of fragmentation and alienation wrought by a mobilised market economy following the dictates of capital”.\textsuperscript{123} Having a sense of belonging and a sense of not belonging are both fantasies.

Kwon further suggests that the paradigms of nomadic selves reflect a desire to have no cultural identity or tie to a place (the desire to be without cultural identity is discussed by Gilles Deleuze and others). She describes this as a trick, a “reprise of the ideology of ‘freedom of choice’ – the choice to forget, the choice to reinvent, the choice to fictionalise, the choice to belong anywhere, everywhere, and nowhere”.\textsuperscript{124} The choice does not belong to everyone equally but is rather “a privilege of mobility [that] has a specific relationship to power”. Critically for research on working-class occlusion, she

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{120} Ibid. p.165.
\item \textsuperscript{121} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{122} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{123} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{124} Ibid., p.166.
\end{itemize}
asks, “How is it possible to sustain the cultural and historical specificity of the place and self that is neither a simulacra pacifier nor a wilful invention?”

Globalised capitalism has multiplied the instance of cultural invisibility and eradication. One language dies every 14 days. By the next century nearly half of the roughly 7,000 languages spoken on Earth are likely to disappear, and cultures whose philosophies attach no value to wealth, such as Native American culture and Buddhist nations (such as Tibet) are threatened with extinction.

The development of new technologies also affects how people interact and communicate with one another. Ironically more oral histories might be readily lost post globalisation than previously. This is because, although oral histories are now recognised as an important tool in the conservation of cultures and histories, and valid as historical evidence and recorded by academic researchers, the story-telling within families and communities is itself vanishing as conversation is overwhelmed by alternative entertainment. (This hypothesis would need to be tested, but is not within the scope of this study.)

1.7 The Excluded
Nicolas Bourriaud suggested that contemporary societies have developed a greed for both accumulation and remembrance. He published Relational Aesthetics (1998), in which he developed a theory of the “the exform”, a sign or form defined by exclusionary divisions that are “cultural, social or political”. In a lecture delivered at the Royal Academy Schools, he suggested that art, politics and the unconscious have within them that which is excluded. He states, “From Gustave Courbet’s ‘realism’ to Liam Gillick, the exform appears as a moving territory suffused by centrifugal forces, the unwanted and the official, mechanisms of rejection and rehabilitation.” This could be unconscious memory or what Benjamin described as

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125 Ibid.
phantasmagoria. Borriaud reminded the audience that Althusser had observed that never in history have we lived with such desire for accumulation and remembrance, and that the excluded for Marx were the proletariat, and for Freud it was the unconscious. Bourriaud also suggested that the exform could be described as a trace, or shadow. Courbet’s painting *The Painter’s Studio* is a depiction of the rejected painters and those that exploit them. Borriaud suggests that in Courbet’s time it could be said that within society there was a strong centre with small margins, while now margins are taking over the centre. This duality, might be the core of what he described as “contemporary art”.  

1.8 Memory and the Cultural Identity in Hidden Histories

Stuart Hall in *Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation* suggested that there were at least two different ways of thinking of cultural identity. The first defined cultural identity as a single, shared collective identity that existed beyond other artificial, imposed selves, and which identified a “oneness”. The other way of thinking qualifies the first, acknowledging that there exists a “difference” that constitute what people are or what, since history has intervened, they have become. Cultural identity, he says, is a matter of “becoming” as well as ‘being’.

The first identity emphasised common historical experiences and shared cultural codes. Hall was writing in relation to Caribbean historical identity, but this paradigm could be used to analyse working-class history and culture. He suggested that in post-colonial societies there was a wish to rediscover a shared past directed by a secret hope of finding beyond the misery of today some “beautiful and splendid” past era. He quoted Fanon who, writing in the *Wretched of the Earth*, suggested that colonialisation was not content with oppressing the living people it seeks to control but that it also “turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it.”

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129 Ibid.


131 Ibid.

132 Ibid.
suggests this discovery of past cultural identities is important and that “hidden histories” have played a critical role in the emergence of social movements. He suggests that the work of Caribbean photographer Armet Francis is an example of this.\textsuperscript{133}

The second view of cultural identity modifies the first position. In this paradigm the way people are positioned and subjected by oppressing regimes is not superficial. Crucially, colonialisation constructed the oppressed people as the Other. This is also relevant for describing how bourgeoisie hegemony influenced, changed and occluded working-class culture. Every regime uses power/knowledge to oppress its perceived enemies. Hall suggested that the inner compulsion and subjective confirmation became the norm, thereby crippling and deforming those who are its victims.\textsuperscript{134} Hall also argued that cultural identity is not a fixed essence lying outside of history and culture, and that it is not universal or transcendent. He suggests that the past is formed through “memory, fantasy, narrative and myth”.\textsuperscript{135}

1.9 Hidden History in Capitalist Culture

Capitalism’s economic necessity is inevitably based upon discovering or manufacturing new markets. The art market is constantly reinventing itself in order to create new consumers. Since Marcel Duchamp’s \textit{Fountain} (1917), found objects have been constantly re-used and re-presented. Robert Rauschenberg’s \textit{Bed} (1955) is just one example of concepts that are reused and represented – \textit{Bed} was more painterly (oil and pencil on pillow, quilt, and sheet on wood supports) then reconceived as \textit{Unmade Bed} (1998) by Tracy Emin using performative and feminist strategies.

John Berger, in \textit{Permanent Red}, suggested that under the later stages of capitalism, the calling of the artist “has been totally destroyed, and the standard of superficial success, either in terms of temporary reputation or

\textsuperscript{133} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{134} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{135} \textit{Ibid.} p.213.
money, have been put in its place.”\textsuperscript{136} As early as 1960 he suggested that artists had discovered that “Success” under capitalism, was something, that could happen arbitrarily to works of art, because they were “considered merely as commodities.”\textsuperscript{137} He observed that in the contemporary art world of 1960, there was already no real revolutionary spirit, but instead merely copying. He suggested there were no real “heroes” because there were only “personalities or pin ups.”\textsuperscript{138} His observation of the art world at end of the modernist period was bleak, observing that the extremism of the avant garde is now the ‘desperation of despair’.\textsuperscript{139}

In the second decade of the twenty first century his reflections on the production of art, and the cult of personality, still resonate. The question as to whether art can be radical is still relevant. Were the YBAs ever really radical? not if the definition of radical is those that challenge the capitalist order).

Berger’s definition of radical in the early modernist period was that even when the artist weren't themselves “radical” they were influenced by revolution. The production of art and in particular its representation of the working class is central to my research through practice that might not reverse occlusion, but might find some trace of the unrepresented.

The following chapters are intended to explore how there might be visual representation of the unrecorded lives as Foucault sought to explore in \textit{Lives of Infamous Men}.

\textsuperscript{137} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid. p.212.
\textsuperscript{139} Ibid. p.213.
Chapter 2
Kingston Heritage and History: The Image, The Trace and the Empty Space

2.1 Introduction
This chapter will investigate the depiction of history within Kingston upon Thames by exploring the Kingston Museum, the Kingston Heritage Centre and three recent project initiatives related to the depiction of Kingston’s royal history. The aim of this research is to examine how working class history becomes occluded by examining the historical collections and exhibitions of a specific area of London. The chapter finishes by considering some alternative exhibition strategies.

Within the literature that Kingston Borough Council produces to advertise its services, including that for the Kingston Museum and Heritage Centre, the pivotal word is “royal”. On the council’s website, under the heading “About Kingston upon Thames”, reads the statement: “by the tenth century, Kingston had become a coronation centre where Saxon kings were crowned.” The branding of the borough by connecting it to royalty has become central to Kingston’s public relations identity. Commercialisation and business language have been used in public bodies in the UK since 1980, when “public” (the ownership of utilities and services by the state) became a word of disgrace, while “private” became synonymous with efficiency. Public organisations using commercial marketing strategies (employing consultants to design logos, etc.) are now commonplace. Museums, made more relevant by being described as part of the heritage industry, are expected to produce their own tagline or branding product signature. Adding the “royal” prefix to Kingston Borough created and enlarged a regal narrative that represented a history that, by its centrality and exclusivity, occluded ordinary citizen histories. Its concentration on one class, one gender and only certain individuals inevitably

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140 www.kingston.gov.uk/info/200174/about_kingston_upon_thames/116/ Last accessed 26th August 2015
excluded the majority of people, whose lives were disregarded in favour of the romantic tale of crowned kings.

2.2 Kingston’s History of Royalty

There is an unequal representation of histories, documents and objects that are exhibited in the Kingston Museum. The majority of the objects are not related to the majority of Kingston’s historic population: rather, the objects exhibited relate to a past that is either royal or which reflect the interests of the wealthy and influential members of Kingston society. An example of an exhibit that is not an authentic object, but is nevertheless displayed in a prominent position in the Museum, is a full-size dummy, with a nylon wig and crown, representing King Athelstan.\(^{142}\) This exhibit emphasises and legitimises the importance of Kingston’s royal past. Another example is a photograph of Queen Elizabeth visiting Kingston Grammar School in 1961.\(^{143}\) Out of a photographic collection of twelve thousand images, this picture is exhibited as part of a display under a section headed “Schools”, but it has no real historic or educational significance. Kingston Grammar School is a private, fee-paying school. There were, at the time of my visit, no photographs that illustrated the schools of working class children.

The focus on royalty and royal history highlighted in this study inevitably means that the story of ordinary people’s lives, their pleasures and struggles, are left invisible, un-described and unrepresented. Most individuals involved in the process of such obfuscation are not necessarily aware that the acceptance of certain facts and truths are made at the expense of other histories. As Hobsbawm noted, “Certain groups and individuals assemble useful narratives while eradicating those that do not suit their view.”\(^{144}\) The narrative of Kingston’s past is recounted in the local history books of the area and in the local museum space and heritage centre. In the narrative of the local histories, between retelling stories and sometimes not listing their sources, the authors often repeat and enlarge the spaces of the invisible and

\(^{142}\) 2011–2015, Exhibit of King Athelstan, Kingston Museum.  
\(^{143}\) 2014–2015, Photograph Exhibit, Kingston Museum.  
untold. That is to say that they retell what is “already known”. The local histories are written for the general public rather than as scholarly histories. One example of this is the repeating (with the exception of Shaun Butters, a local historian) of the story that seven Saxon kings were “crowned” in Kingston.  

It might be useful to examine three recent, local initiatives, that have continued to promote Kingston’s royal history, in particular the coronation of the Saxon kings and the myth of the seven kings. The first example is a visual arts project, *No Competition*, staged by the Stanley Picker Gallery. The gallery had secured project funding to exhibit three projects related to sport during the 2012 Olympics. One of the projects, *Navigation Wheel*,147 was a series of what was described as “historic walks” around Kingston. Because of the time limitation, the artist involved connected existing local narratives of royalty and coronations, thus repeating and reinforcing these narratives. This was done by using the tales of the coronations in the commentary notes of the walk.148

There were five separate walks which people could complete together, or separately, using a card wheel which gave information and instructions for the walks. Each walk was designed to allow participants to answer four questions. Once participants answered the first question correctly, they were referred to a second, whose answer could only be discovered by following the map for each theme. The *Bridges* walk included the Clattern Bridge, Kingston Bridge and the Undercroft. In the Muybridge walk, the four questions and answers were: “Which mayor of Kingston does the memorial, situated at the front of the Market House, commemorate?” (Mayor Shrubsole); “What did Muybridge pioneer?” (photography); “How many kings are thought to have been crowned in Kingston?” (seven); “How long has a church been on the site

146 http://www.stanleypickergallery.org Last accessed 26th August 2015
147 http://www.stanleypickergallery.org/kingston-navigation-wheel/ Last accessed 26th August 2015
of All Saints?” (1000 years).\textsuperscript{149} In the short biographical summary of Muybridge, he was claimed to be “a photographic pioneer who developed a multiple camera system to capture the movement of animals in motion”.\textsuperscript{150} The only other fact included about him was that, in the 1870s, he “changed the spelling of his first name Edward to Eadward to match the spelling of King Eadweard” (a Saxon king).\textsuperscript{151} These two “facts” appeared equally important.

*Navigation Wheel* was intended to involve the public in both walking and investigating local history, which could both be said to be worthy aims. However, by reproducing the populist version of certain historical events within the commentary notes, the majority’s history is occluded. The narrative of seven crowned kings filled the empty space, and thus denied verisimilitude as there was no room for alternative historical narrative. There is strong evidence that Kingston being a centre of Saxon Coronations is a myth,\textsuperscript{152} but the popular version was the easiest for the visiting artist to access with deadlines to meet.

The second initiative was the *Where England Began* fundraising project of the All Saints Church. The initiative began in 2012.\textsuperscript{153} This project is noteworthy because it makes unsubstantiated historical claims about the importance of Kingston. The church is one of the oldest in the Kingston area, and is built next to the site of a Saxon chapel. In their enthusiasm to raise money to restore the church, however, the fundraisers set up the project called *Where England Began*, an audacious claim that presumably hundreds of towns and cities across England might dispute. The organisation reproduced the myth that seven Saxon kings were crowned in the area, using this as their main claim in suggesting that Kingston was where England began. A further example of how the creation of Kingston’s royal past continues is shown in the

\textsuperscript{149} http://www.stanleypickergallery.org/kingston-navigation-wheel/ Last accessed 26th August 2015
\textsuperscript{150} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{151} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{153} http://www.whereenglandbegan.co.uk Last accessed 26th August 2015
job description for a worker for the *Where England Began* project as advertised in June 2014. The job description included the responsibilities to:

Deliver learning programmes, events and activities to children and adults based upon this historically important site and its church… Egbert, King of Wessex, held his Great Council here in 838 and Athelstan (the first King of Britain) and Ethelred the Unready were two of the seven Saxon kings of England crowned here in the 10th century.  

It is worth examining when the issue of royalty became important to Kingston. The title of “Royal” was granted to the borough as a result of the request of Kingston’s Mayor, Councillor Lawrence Finney, in 1927. King George V is noted to have to have bestowed “the ancient style and designation of the royal borough of Kingston upon Thames”. A stained glass window in Kingston’s Guildhall building commemorates the confirmation of Kingston as “Royal”. This confirmation appears to have defined the contemporary construct of local history in contemporary Kingston.

In 1921, the London County Council had considered incorporating boroughs such as Kingston within its boundaries. An Inquiry was held between 1921–22; however, Mayor Finney resisted incorporation, stating that Kingston could run its own affairs. He was successful in ensuring that Kingston remained independent. It would appear that Finney’s application for the Borough to be made royal, because of its mention in ancient charters, was a clever move to retain Kingston’s independence while promoting his own personal interpretation of local history.

Kingston is mentioned by Daniel Defoe in 1727 in his *A Tour through the Whole Island of Great Britain*, in which he states that it was “a good market town, but remarkable for little, only that they say, the ancient British and

154 http://www.whereenglandbegan.co.uk. Last accessed 26th August 2015.
Saxon kings were usually crowned here in former times, which I will neither assert or deny”.\textsuperscript{159} Even in 1724, Defoe is not convinced and finds no evidence to believe the story.\textsuperscript{160} Moreover, the idea of a fully-fledged town that provided cathedral-like coronations was, as Butters suggests, a local tradition that began in the sixteenth century, and was revived by antiquarians in the late eighteenth century and again in the Victorian and Edwardian periods.\textsuperscript{161} It appears that the repeating and enlarging of the tale over the centuries has given it legitimacy, which is increased by the myth’s longevity.

In 1938, Kingston Council published a book, initiated by the Mayor A G Knowlden, to accompany a civic festival. In the introduction to the published booklet, Knowlden states that he raised money from the business community in order that:

“not only England, but the whole world might know that...[Kingston] is a Royal town not only with a great historic past... but a town that can hold its head high in present achievement and civic prestige.”\textsuperscript{162}

The proud Mayor, without any shred of historical evidence, stated categorically that the Saxon kings had “a palace by the river”, living in “considerable splendour” having been crowned “in either the Chapel of St Mary or the public square”.\textsuperscript{163}

Butters highlights this process of aggrandisement by citing how, in 1852, a local historian named Bidden suggested that Kingston was the “nursery of England’s greatness”, and “the metropolis of the Anglo Saxon kings”.\textsuperscript{164} Additionally, in 1911 Malden observed, “Kingston was the site where, on the banks of the Thames, there is strong historical evidence that two Saxon kings were crowned over 1,100 years ago”.\textsuperscript{165} Butters argues, using the evidence of

\textsuperscript{161} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{163} Ibid. p.9.
\textsuperscript{164} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{165} Malden, H.E. The Victoria History of the County of Surrey. Constable, London, 1911.
the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, that it is more likely that Athelstan was consecrated at what was, a temporary camp by the river.\textsuperscript{166} The only structure that existed on the “Kings Tun” was a stone and wood chapel and possibly some other wooden dwellings: it was not a town. This evidence confirms the main argument of this section that historical evidence does not support the narrative of multiple royal coronations conducted in fully established towns.

However, as recently as 2014, the All Saints Church Restoration Fund in Kingston raised money by promising to make the newly restored church a heritage site that would “promote the Coronation Stone”.\textsuperscript{167} Butters suggests that the coronation stone was only identified as such in the late eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{168} It was first exhibited and displayed as the coronation stone in Kingston in 1850.\textsuperscript{169} It had been moved from the old town hall site, where riders had used it as a mounting stone for more than a century. It is currently displayed in the grounds of the Guildhall, having been moved from its 1850 site in 1935. Butters, in \textit{That Famous Place}, after having examined all of the historical evidence, states, “It can confidently be said that the idea of a Kingston coronation stone was a late 18\textsuperscript{th} century invention.”\textsuperscript{170} She persuasively argues its absence from records previous to and after that date.

However, the “coronation stone” needed to exist and be valorised in order to justify the narrative of Kingston’s \textit{royal} past and its stately coronations. The two myths, together, justify one another. That is to say it could be assumed that there must have been kings crowned in Kingston because there was a coronation stone (even if this was not the case). Conversely, if Saxon kings were crowned in Kingston, there must have been a coronation stone, and so one was found. This illustrates that through the continued use of these myths by the fund-raising committee of the All Saints Church, local history can be (and is) misrepresented, even with the best intentions.

\textsuperscript{166} Butters, S. \textit{That Famous Place}. Kingston University Press, Kingston, 2013. p.57
\textsuperscript{167} http://www.whereenglandbegan.co.uk Last accessed 26th August 2015
\textsuperscript{169} \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{170} Butters, S. \textit{That Famous Place}. Kingston University Press, Kingston, 2013. p.44.
A further example of misrepresentation in the project *Where England Began* is where the authors state:

In the tenth century, the first kings who can be called kings of England were anointed and crowned in Kingston in a predecessor of the present church – Kingston crowned kings before Westminster Abbey was built.¹⁷¹

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle was written in the ninth century, during the reign of Alfred the Great. Multiple copies were distributed to monasteries throughout England. It is thought to be the most reliable of histories for this time, as the existing texts are verifiable, any addition or deletion could not have been made without notice, due to the number of copies made.

The ASC states that the Saxon king Athelstan was consecrated in the year 924 at Kingston.¹⁷² The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle is the only verifiable historical source. It states that only two kings (Athelstan and Aethelred) were consecrated – but not crowned – in Kingston. There is no evidence that they were consecrated in a church. The statement that “Kingston crowned kings before Westminster Abbey was built” is another example of the aggrandisement of Kingston’s history.

The All Saints Development Project’s aim is to raise the profile of “this national heritage by providing a restored Church that tells the story of the Coronation Stone and the formation of the Kingdom of England”.¹⁷³ In order to give weight to their argument on the fundraising website, a professor of ecclesiastical history at the University of Oxford is “interviewed”. She states that, because Athelstan was king of Mercia and Wessex, “he chose to be crowned symbolically in that border town on the coronation stone”.¹⁷⁴ As previously stated, the historical evidence (see above) that Kingston was not a

¹⁷¹ www.allsaintskingston.co.uk/. Last accessed 26th August 2015
¹⁷³ www.allsaintskingston.co.uk/. Last accessed 26th August 2015
¹⁷⁴ ASK TV. http://www.whereenglandbegan.co.uk. Last accessed 26th August 2015
town at that time and that the coronation stone was nothing more than a horse step is compelling. Nevertheless, the alternative narrative is repeated by so-called experts who, for multiple reasons, do not examine the historical evidence.

The final project that continues the myth of Saxon “royal” coronation was created in May 2015. The following email was issued to the Kingston Artist group, KAOS:

For this year’s May Merrie on the 4th of May, Kingston First will be celebrating Kingston’s Royal heritage by putting on a host of royal themed activities and workshops for all to get involved… [including] decorating a circular route around the town in gold.¹⁷⁵

May Merrie is held in Kingston on the first bank holiday in May. The annual event began in 1980.¹⁷⁶ The event was intended to attract more people to the town, primarily to the shops, pubs and restaurants. The beginning of May has many connotations, both in terms of Celtic celebrations for the beginning of summer and as a celebration of workers across the world. However, Kingston First chose to promote the “royal connection.”

Many kings and queens were crowned in various locations in England. The majority of sovereigns were crowned in the London Borough of Westminster, which is not designated as a royal borough. Next to Kingston, the borough of Richmond is not royal, though it houses the site of Henry VII, Henry VIII and Elizabeth I’s palaces at its centre and most of Henry VIII’s hunting estate. Equally, the neighbouring borough of Sutton had Henry VIII’s Nonsuch Palace within its boundaries, but has no such royal title.

These London boroughs could have petitioned for the royal designation with more historical evidence to back their claim. However, they did not choose to.

¹⁷⁵ Email sent from Cressida Borret to KAOS members, April 2015.
Perhaps this is because groups and individuals within their purview did not perceive *royalty* as central to their identity.

In particular, the neighbouring Borough of Richmond has had many royal residents, and thus a much better claim, beginning with Henry I in 1125. Others included Edward I, Edward II, who held a council in Sheen in 1309, and Edward III, who died at Sheen in 1377. Other famous royal kings include Richard II and Henry V, who rebuilt the manor that later became Richmond Palace. Henry VIII swapped his royal residence from Richmond Palace to Hampton Court (also part of Richmond Borough), after which time most kings and queens spent some time in residence at Hampton Court until George IV in 1821.

The mostly unsubstantiated claims of royal connections for Kingston are clearly exaggerated compared to the recorded history of Richmond. Kingston has not had any real royal connection apart from two Saxon kings, who possibly stopped only for a day to be anointed. Council officers and members, both living and dead, have actively sought to promote a more romantic connection. At the same time, Richmond Council can evidence many more monarchs in residence for a period of 800 years. In comparison, Richmond does not choose to seek to identify the *royalness* of their borough.

The only other claim that Kingston has to a royal connection is that it was granted a charter in 1200 by King John.177 “The men of Kingston paid 60 marks for the right it gave them to hold their town at farm”178 (this means to pay their dues to the Exchequer). A further charter, in 1208, granted the town of Kingston to “our free men of Kingston”.179 It is the existence of this charter that was used to apply for the royal borough status in 1927.180 The charters are not significant – many towns possess such charters – but their existence was used to create the argument for royal connectedness in Kingston.

Many monarchs granted towns a charter to pay their dues, hold fairs and

178 Ibid.
179 Ibid.
180 Ibid. p.344.
have the town recognised for trade. The difference between Kingston and many other towns and cities would appear to be the intervention of the Mayor of Kingston, Lawrence Finney, who petitioned George V in 1927.\textsuperscript{181} The King was alleged to declare that it could be called a royal borough as it had been described as a royal borough “since time immemorial”.\textsuperscript{182} This intervention meant that Kingston remained an independent borough outside the London County Council.\textsuperscript{183}

William Evelyn St Lawrence Finney (1864-1952) had previously arranged pageants in Kingston to emphasize its royal past. In 1898 he marked the 700-year anniversary of the charter of King John, and in 1902 he celebrated the supposed coronation of Edward the Elder. In 1924 he wrote a pageant play celebrating the town’s royal connections.

Kingston’s narrative of its heritage appears to be haunted not just by invented royal ghosts. Its displacement and re-representation from a Surrey town to a London suburb, formally achieved in 1963, has had what appears to be an almost schizophrenic effect on its sense of identity. Its re-designation meant its historical records are spread between Surrey and London. This also affects its geographical and political identity in the popular imagination: it is often not really perceived by its residents as belonging to one or the other.

2.3 Kingston’s Preservation of History

Kingston Upon Thames, for what is claimed to be an historic borough, has preserved very few public buildings. Many parts of the town centre were demolished to clear the way first for various major road schemes, particularly in the 1950s, 1960s and in the 1970s,\textsuperscript{184} and after, for the Eden Walk development.\textsuperscript{185} Two Victorian shopping arcades were destroyed as well as many shops and houses that represented excellent urban architecture from the eighteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries.

\textsuperscript{181} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{182} The Times. London, October 27\textsuperscript{th} 1927. p.14.
\textsuperscript{183} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{184} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{186} Ibid. p.408.
Kingston’s planning bodies throughout the twentieth century allowed many buildings and arcades of historical merit to be destroyed. One example was Snapper’s Castle, a large mansion with turrets whose last use was as the site of a junk merchant's business, which was destroyed by developers in 1961 despite a preservation order having been obtained. A similar example was the demolition of the sixteenth-century Old Moat House in 1965. Despite a preservation order, it was demolished in November 1965. Kingston Council historically did not see its duty to preserve buildings of historic merit. The failure to recognise the merits of conservation meant that there were few historical buildings preserved. The loss of historic buildings contributes to an ignorance of the past and a societal forgetting.

The 1970s buildings that replaced the arcades, houses and shops that had been standing for centuries were buildings constructed of concrete and glass in the art brut style. Like many such buildings they have worn badly and have been scheduled to be redeveloped. Within contemporary Kingston, the oldest part of the town is in the old market area, where urban development began in the sixth century, though there are indications of habitation on previous sites stretching back to the Iron and Bronze Ages. The shops near the market house are restored versions of inns and hotels from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This was the site of coaching inns that serviced travel between London and Portsmouth. The market area was the commercial centre of the region in the late eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but lost its commercial importance since the building of the Bentalls Centre and John Lewis Store in the 1990s.

The local council’s failure to conserve historical buildings has meant that unlike some London boroughs or Surrey towns, Kingston has few well-known buildings or areas that give it a particular identity. It has no famous landmarks;

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186 Ibid.
188 Ibid.
apart from the Bentall Centre (1991) and John Lewis Centre (1990), there are few other places of interest. Those that do exist include the All Saints Church, whose origins date back to 644 and was restored in September 2014, and the Lovekyn Chapel, built in 1558, which is only open by personal arrangement because it is part of Kingston Grammar School, a fee paying private school.

Butters suggests that Kingston rarely influenced national events, observing that the “nearest it came to affecting the course of English history was in 1554, when its townsfolk delayed Wyatt’s rebels”. This illustrates that Kingston’s lack of recorded history may have led to its need to invent a history of importance.

Kingston’s main industry in the nineteenth century was the brewery trade. It was since the twelfth century a commercial centre, acting as a market town until the late nineteenth century, when it supported a local rural economy. Kingston had four mills until the end of the nineteenth century. The twentieth century saw both manufacturing and service trades increase.

Aviation was an industry that flourished as a result of the wars of the twentieth century. Sopwith had a factory in Canbury Park Road before the First World War. It closed in the early 1920s, but was then reformed as Hawkers in the late 1920s. The factory moved to Ham, and continued to be involved in airplane production until it was finally closed in the 1980s. In 2013, a group of retired managers from British Aerospace acquired lottery funding to research the history of aviation, and have constructed a web-based history of aviation based around the old factory site.

It is important to note how male gender is constantly depicted as representational of the majority of Kingston histories. The history of the

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190 Ibid. p.xiii.
193 Ibid.
Kingston aerospace industry is just one example of women’s occlusion, within which women’s work appears much more difficult to find evidence of. The Kingston aviation project included only a handful of photographs of women factory workers on the site.

Many women were employed as servants up until the First World War.\(^{194}\) Over 1,2 million women and girls were classified as indoor domestic servants in England and Wales.\(^{195}\) In 1871, 35% of the population of Surbiton and 16% of Kingston were listed as domestic servants (males comprised less than 5% of domestic servants).\(^{196}\) There were three major laundries in the area, employing all women workforces, including the William Wright Laundry on Horse Fair west side, Kingston.\(^{197}\) However there are few photographs or other historical evidence available in the Kingston’s heritage collection or evidenced in the museum displays.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Kingston expanded as large numbers of East End working class families moved to the newly-built suburbs. In 1901, the population of Kingston was 34,375; in 1911, it was 37,975; and by 1921 it had risen to 39,479.\(^{198}\) Thereafter, the population of the town only grew gradually, reaching 40,172 by 1951.\(^{199}\) Meanwhile, the surrounding area doubled in size. For example, Surbiton grew from 30,178 in 1921 to 60,875 in 1951.\(^{200}\) Building work was heavily in demand as London’s population swelled. Kingston emerged from the fields and woodland that had been part of the Surrey countryside. This new population, of largely working class people, is also unrepresented within the collections.


\(^{195}\) Population Census England and Wales, 1871.


\(^{197}\) Old Ordnance Survey map Kingston and Hampton Wick 1894 London sheet 140


\(^{199}\) *U.K.* Census 1951.

\(^{200}\) *U.K.* Census figures, 1951
2.4 Kingston’s Depiction of History in the Museum and Heritage Centre

Most of the physical evidence of Kingston’s history is in local records and objects in the museum. The two public representations of the people’s local history are the Kingston Museum, opened in 1904, and the Heritage Centre, which moved in 1992 to the North Kingston adult education site. In order to provide a new secondary school, the adult education centre was closed in 2014. A large part of the collection was put into temporary storage in Oxfordshire, with some being stored in Newent House, previously a home for the elderly.\textsuperscript{201} The intention was that a small percentage of the collection would be stored in the basement of the Council’s Guildhall. This policy has risks as the Guildhall, and in particular its basement, is within the Thames flood plain. The work to create space for a very small centre that visitors can access was finally finished in late October 2015.

The Heritage Centre, when the majority of this research was conducted, was located upstairs at the end of a long corridor in an adult education facility, part of which had been an old school in North Kingston. The collection was small and idiosyncratic. Until 1963, Kingston was part of Surrey. The county council administrative building is still in central Kingston, and therefore certain documents are split between different museums. Kingston’s photographic collection began in the 1880s and ended in the 1960s. As with other documents and objects, they had been donated by individual members of the public. The collection was largely supplemented by a donation from the local newspaper, the \textit{Surrey Comet}, of some of its photographic collection before it was digitalised.

Within the collection there are some local papers in hard copy; the remainder are stored on microfiche. Certain years are missing in the hard copies, and the Christmas editions are only represented by five years between 1900 and 1913. The remainder is comprised of hard and digital copies of the \textit{Surrey Comet} from 1844 to the present day. The collection also holds copies of

\textsuperscript{201} RBK Children, Youth and Leisure Committee minutes. September 16\textsuperscript{th} 2014, available at \url{http://moderngov.kingston.gov.uk/documents/g7465/PublicreportpackTuesday2016-Sep-20}
council papers and the minutes and agendas of some local organisations. It also has documents from voluntary groups' meetings and minutes (e.g. the Boy Scout brigades). It is therefore an incomplete collection.

There is information related to Kingston that is kept in the Surrey History Centre in Woking. It is possible to find the records of the clerks of workhouse guardians, but they have no admission or discharge registers as they have “been lost”. There are few photographs of Kingston in the museum of London – because it was part of Surrey until 1963. Kingston is under-represented in London’s historic collections.

The Heritage Centre’s object collection comprises a small collection of diaries, letters and a few personal photographs. It has 106 taped oral reminiscences, which were recorded in the early 1970s. Different researchers, who did not ask the same questions consistently, conducted the interviews. It could be said that some interviews are much more historically useful than others. However, because all contributors were promised anonymity, the tapes cannot be used for public consumption. None are digitalised but there is a possibility that they could be transcribed and re-recorded. At present it is impossible even to hear them, as they are in storage, but previously they were “available” although the centre did not provide headphones to access the tape machine. In the cupboards of the North Kingston Centre, there were a large number of local maps, both topographical and street maps. The visitor room had a small selection of local history books. In my interview in 2013 with the then curator, it was stated that every donation was photographed before being stored.202 I was told that the photographs of the donations were not available for the public to see. Nor could permission be granted to examine all the donations that had been stored because of the continuing storage problems.203

Frederick Gould (1817-1900) proposed the idea of a purpose-built museum, and began the collection. He founded the Kingston Literary and Scientific

202 Author’s notes, from Interview with curator, Kingston Museum, May 12th 2013.
203 Ibid.
Institution in 1839. Collecting sufficient donations to realise the project took many years. It was a final donation from the Scottish and American millionaire, Andrew Carnegie, which allowed the museum to open in 1901. When Gould first moved to Kingston, he described it as a place of “intellectual darkness.” He collected objects throughout his life, in 1899, he donated his entire collection, which contained over 4,000 geological specimens. He obviously envisaged the museum to be a place of information and learning. Geology was a passion of Victorian thinkers stimulated by the intellectual achievements of the era. None of the 4,000 geological specimens donated to the council for the purpose of exhibition were passed on to the museum.

Ironically, the most important collection in the museum is not related to the local area. The photographic pioneer Muybridge was born in Kingston in 1830. He left while still a teenager, living in America for most of his life. He returned to Kingston when already ill, and died in 1904. He donated part of his collection to Kingston library, of which a tiny selection of the work and cameras are exhibited in a separate corridor of the museum. Sadly, there is no evidence he ever took one photograph in Kingston.

Many of the most interesting locally-related exhibits used by the museum today were found in the Thames during the construction of the railway bridge between 1860–1863. These include Neolithic flint axes, bronze axes and knives, a portion of a sword, and Roman and Saxon beads and brooches.

While the council was raising money for the museum, it also appealed for donations of artefacts from the public. It was hoping for donations of paintings, but only five were donated. Many pictures had to be loaned to the museum for its opening exhibition. The museum officially opened on October 31st 1904. The mayor, Councillor Rampton, suggested that a museum “was a suitable

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205 Ibid.
206 Ibid.
207 Ibid.
208 Ibid.
place for preserving and exhibiting our historical records”.\textsuperscript{210} Lord Roseberry, who attended the opening ceremony, stated that museums should be for the “development of local studies and local patriotism”.\textsuperscript{211} Roseberry articulates here the purpose of such collections, as Hobsbawm stated, to produce a national identity.

Reading through *Kingston Museum 1904-2004*, Butters' privately printed book, it would seem that the first reference to the Council actively promoting royalty comes in 1981. The local heritage officer, Mrs. Marion Hinton, initiated a plan for a heritage unit.\textsuperscript{212} At that time, Bob McCloy was Director of Education and Recreation, responsible for the museum service. He promoted the idea of using the iconography of a “royal borough” on its publicity. When he became Chief Executive of Kingston Council from 1987–1990 he continued to emphasise the royal-ness of the borough. The borough's logo was changed at this time to emphasise the "royal" into its title.

The aims and objectives for the heritage unit, agreed by the council in November 1981, were to:

Collect, preserve and make accessible material relating to the heritage of the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames including antiquities, archives, published works, paintings, drawings, maps and photographs.\textsuperscript{213}

This heritage became one linked narrowly to the idea of a royal heritage. Kingston museum has limited space for the collection to be exhibited. It also has a rather strange and eccentric collection of objects, a problem that many local museums share. It has suffered from under-funding since its inception. There appears never to have been a policy of organised collecting or the purchase of artefacts for exhibition.

\textsuperscript{210} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{211} Surrey Comet
\textsuperscript{213} Objectives of the Heritage Unit: Minute 99/11/81 of Kingston Council's Arts and Recreation Committee meeting of 30th November 1981.
2.5 Kingston’s Occluded Histories

It is not chance or prejudice that causes some categories of people to be occluded from historical narratives. Those people living in poverty or on average incomes, of the unskilled or semi-skilled, usually have had little in the way of possessions that would be considered worthy of being passed down to the generations of their families or collected as expressive artefacts of an age. Indeed, until the recent historical past (since the early nineteenth century) almost 50% of the British population did not have the capacity to read or to write, and would therefore not have been able to leave diaries or other momentos. There is a fundamental difference between a class (the *bourgeoisie*) whose members perceive a family future and a family past, and those who, because of poverty, both absolute and relative, saw or perceived no future or past, but merely endured the present. Those working-class histories and narratives that did exist were often oral in nature, and were consequently lost to historical memory.

There are two further factors that create invisibility that clearly have affected the exhibited Kingston collection. Firstly, there is the invisibility of people and places not portrayed in the museum, even when there is strong historical evidence of their existence and the nature of their existence. For example, there is strong archaeological and documentary evidence of the existence of the mills, the coaching inns, the breweries, the tanneries and so on. Equally, there is evidence of the existence of groups representing religious orders and dissenters (such as the Quakers), many of whom were fined and imprisoned for their beliefs, and records of these punishments exist. The existence of a large group of Quakers living in Kingston in the seventeenth century is well documented. Yet there is no evidence of these within the museum exhibition.

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The leaflet *Three Hundred Years of Quakerism in Kingston* was written and printed by the Kingston Upon Thames Friends in 1970. The leaflet begins by recording that in 1656, a Quaker named Burrough was arrested in an orchard while preaching. It also lists John Fielder as having had a house in Fight Street at the corner of East Lane. The house had a room used for meetings, and George Foxe’s journal evidenced he went there to speak.\(^{216}\) This is strong evidence of an alternative radical history for Kingston.

The leaflet suggests that because Kingston was near Hampton Court, where Oliver Cromwell often resided, the meeting attracted a large number of attendees consisting of humble people. Local Friends listed included John Fielder – meal man; Stephen Hubbard – cordwainer; and John Hobbs – butcher. For thirty years, Quakers were arrested, suffering fines and long imprisonment. In 1685, the Kingston sheriff issued orders for Quakers’ meetings to be violently broken up with clubs and carbines. In 1685, a meeting was attacked and a woman thrown in a ditch, her arms broken. Kingston Quakers were punished for not attending church, not taking off their hats to people in authority and opening shops on ecclesiastical festivals.\(^{217}\) None of this history is represented.

As previously stated, Butters identifies Kingston’s one possible important historical act as when the townsfolk delayed Wyatt’s rebels in the fourteenth century, but this event is unrecorded in the museum.\(^{218}\)

Even when the museum mentions a historic moment, for example when it describes a “skirmish” in the English Civil War, it fails to contextualise the event, mentioning only the “King” and hence assuming general knowledge and information about the issues over which the war was fought. There is no explanation of the English Civil War. Oliver Cromwell spent a good deal of time at nearby Hampton Court, but this fact is not mentioned.\(^{219}\)

\(^{216}\) *Ibid.*

\(^{217}\) *Ibid.*


discusses, in detail, the civil war years in Kingston and the Cromwellian supporters who controlled Kingston after 1655. Once again, what is arguably very important to the identity of the town, signifying an alternative radical past, is not acknowledged.

There are many other areas that the museum could consider depicting. There is strong historical evidence for the existence of prisons within the Kingston area, including debtors’ prisons and prisons for children. A great number of people were hung in the marketplace as punishment for small felonies. Women were put in the ducking stool at the Clattern Bridge. In the parish register from August 1572, the wife of Downing, the grave maker, received 111 “duckings” because she was “a common scolde and fighter”. There is also reference to a mass hanging in the marketplace where a father named Gregory and eleven of his sons were hung together for stealing horses. Hung with them were another man, Colman, and his five sons. All of these examples would depict a different history, one that represented a class-based legal system and the effect it had on ordinary people’s lives.

Another example includes evidence that there were three public baths before the present leisure facility was constructed. The *Surrey Comet* reported that the first open-air bath was a pontoon in the river, and was the scene of a physical municipal battle between the borough officials, councillors and the Thames conservators at the beginning of the twentieth century. This is an example that could represent how difficult ordinary people’s lives were; that the past was not romantic, clean, pretty or golden, and that public health contributed to the improvement of ordinary people’s lives.

A second area of Kingston’s missing or occluded history includes those for whom there is little or no evidence, but who must have existed. Butters claimed that Gerard Winstanley’s Diggers bought seed grain in Kingston and

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222 Ibid. p.38.
223 Ibid. p.118.
asked Kingston’s people to join them in Walton. Is it possible that during the English Civil War there were no sympathisers of the Levellers or the Diggers in the Kingston area though there were large camps of both nearby: the Levellers in Putney, and the Diggers at nearby St Georges Hill? This is especially important considering the Puritans took control of Kingston during the Civil War. Groups such as the Levellers and Diggers represented the political actions of ordinary people who were demanding freedoms of belief and equality before the law.

Equally, there is no record in the museum of trade union activity in Kingston until the 1960s at British Aerospace. Yet, during the general strike of 1926, workers either took strike action from work or chose not to in response to the call of the Trades Union Congress (TUC) and its member unions. Union members worked on the buses, trains and local electric company during those six days. Could evidence exist that workers defied the strike call, as stated in the Council minutes? In this instance, workers who did take strike action would have been holding meetings and conducting running battles with the police and the strikebreakers. The fact that there appears to be no record cannot necessarily mean that no action was taken. However, the issue is not represented in the museum and therefore does not exist.

In an interview I conducted with Jean Turner, a member of the Kingston Communist Party, she discussed her memories of industrial and political action between 1945 and the present in Kingston, where she is still an active member of the Peace Council. She noted with regret that though she could comment on local history after 1939, her knowledge of pre-war industrial action was based on her memories of conversations she had with men and women no longer alive. She had spoken with people who had been involved in Industrial action, but noted that they have left no written records that she was aware of.

225 RBK Council minutes, 1926.
226 Interview with Jean Turner. March 29th 2015.
In the Heritage Collection, there is one photograph of the Kingston suffragette office, which opened in 1914. In a suffragette leaflet reproduced by the Twickenham Local History Society (2003), there is a reference to a meeting of the Kingston and District branch of the Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU) held at Ives Restaurant, Hampton Court on March 16th 1913.\textsuperscript{227}

Richmond and Wimbledon had active WSPU groups from 1908 onwards. In 1913, Kew Gardens were attacked twice: on February 8\textsuperscript{th} the Orchid House was broken into, and plants destroyed;\textsuperscript{228} on February 23\textsuperscript{rd}, the Tea Pavilion was destroyed by fire.\textsuperscript{229} Previously, on February 25\textsuperscript{th} 1908, there had been a fire at Kempton Park racecourse.\textsuperscript{230} As a result of the latter, Hampton Court Palace’s picture gallery was shut to visitors and not re-opened until September 2\textsuperscript{nd} 1908.\textsuperscript{231} In late April 1913, a train at Teddington station was set on fire.\textsuperscript{232} The stands at Hurst Park racecourse were destroyed on June 9th 1913.\textsuperscript{233} In October 1913, Twickenham post boxes were attacked by women using phosphorous to destroy letters, and a letterbox at Twickenham Post Office was also burned.\textsuperscript{234}

In July 1913, there was a large demonstration on Richmond Green, attracting delegates from as far away as Lands End and Bournemouth. The procession marched through Twickenham, assembling at Marble Hill before marching to Richmond. On October 6\textsuperscript{th} 1913, the Elms at Hampton were burnt.\textsuperscript{235} Mary Richardson and Rachel Peace were accused of this crime. Richardson did not appear at the trial because she was on hunger strike (a year later she attacked the Rokeby Venus, which resulted in the Hampton Court picture gallery being closed for the second time).\textsuperscript{236}

\textsuperscript{228} Ibid. p.17.
\textsuperscript{229} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{230} Ibid. p.20.
\textsuperscript{231} Ibid. p.18.
\textsuperscript{232} Ibid. p.19.
\textsuperscript{233} Ibid. p.20.
\textsuperscript{234} Ibid. p.23.
\textsuperscript{236} \url{www.hrp.org.uk/Resources/GraceandFavour.pdf} Last accessed 15/03/2013
The evidence is clear that women from the area were part of the women's suffrage movement, and the evidence for this involvement, if not detailed or substantial as scholarly history, is certainly highly suggestive. It is, in those circumstances, inconceivable that there was no mobilisation or activity in Kingston itself, especially as an office was set up in August 1914.\textsuperscript{237} The \textit{Surrey Comet}, for example, makes reference to a train being set alight at Cheam station in 1912. Earlier, in 1908, a meeting was held to form the WSPU at Surbiton Assembly Rooms, and in 1912 there was an anti-suffrage meeting: “Women and the Vote, Anti suffrage meeting” reported in the \textit{Surrey Comet}.\textsuperscript{238} Considering the scale of the violence and destruction committed by supporters of the suffragette movement, it’s suppression from records is a further example of alternative political action unrepresented.

Though there is some evidence of a class-based, socialist movement in the Kingston area, and while there will have been the beginnings of a Labour Party organisation, there is no reference to this in the collection, even though there were Labour members elected to the council throughout the twentieth century. There is no representation, or evidence yet discovered, of any activity of the British Socialist Party or the Socialist Labour Party prior to or during the First World War. There is indication of local activity by the newly formed Communist Party of Great Britain after 1920. It is however the case that alternative political groups are either completely invisible or are barely mentioned in either the heritage collection or museum.

Between 1910 and the declaration of war in 1914, Britain registered the highest level of industrial unrest in its history. In 1919, industrial unrest and mutinies by those soldiers campaigning for demobilisation spread across the country. There is no representation of the impact of these events on Kingston and its environs, despite the fact that there were concentrations of the Labour organisation in the area. All that exists to hint at this non-history is evidence of a laundry strike by organised women working in Kingston in 1872. This strike

\textsuperscript{237} \textit{Surrey Comet} August 1914. Photo. Kingston Heritage Centre.
\textsuperscript{238} \textit{Surrey Comet} June \textsuperscript{1st} 1912 pge 8.
is mentioned in the “women’s work” showcase in the museum, but there is no explanation of it, even though a booklet was written about the strike and can be found in the heritage centre collection. Indeed, in the museum exhibits, women are represented only in relation to their duties as housewives on washdays in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This depiction allows and perpetuates stereotyping of women. Without role models, it is more difficult for people to achieve their potential.

In the Museum the First World War (1914-1918) is represented by a small exhibit, consisting of objects and letters, related to the East Surrey Regiment. The case in the museum tells the story of the officers of the regiment (with one exception) rather than the other ranks. It is hard to believe that, amongst all of the donations or artefacts that were received, there were none that were expressive of working class men and women’s stories of the war.

In the 1930s, there was anti-fascist activity in many areas of London. There are no fights or demonstrations recorded in the local collection, yet there is photographic evidence that there was an active group of fascists operating in the 1930s in the Borough. Oswald Mosley spoke at a meeting at Surbiton Assembly Halls. In 1934 The Kingston Headquarters of the British Union of Fascists were situated in Surbiton Road and, whether its presence provoked opposition or not, it must have had a significant effect on the politics of the area. In the photographic collection, there is a newspaper photograph of the annual dinner of the local chapter of the British Union of Fascists. Another photograph depicts men selling fascist newspapers in Kingston marketplace. It is inconceivable that this did not provoke anti-fascist activity but, in the absence of physical evidence, this is not represented. In the interview conducted with Jean Turner, she cited “running battles” between pre-war fascists and anti-fascists in the market place that had been described to her

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239 Pink, J. Dramatic Account of the Kingston, Surbiton and Norbiton’s Washerwomen’s Strike of 1872: On Strike, JRP, Surbiton, 1996.
241 Ibid.
by men and women who had participated in them as members of the Communist Party during the 1930s.242

Similarly, the impact on the area due to the Spanish Civil War and recruitment in this region to the International Brigade is not mentioned, though there is verbal evidence from both Jean Turner and from older members of the Labour Party that there were local volunteers. There is no mention of the Spanish Civil war in the *Surrey Comet* between 1936 and 1939 in relation to Kingston.

In the museum, there is a section on retail – the town had shops from 1315. Until the 1800s they were small, specialist establishments trading around the marketplace area.243 Shrubsole’s was founded in 1760 and became a department store in 1866, trading in Kingston till it closed in 1986. The Bentalls store began in 1867. It became successful because of the introduction of the tramway in 1908, when shops in the town began to flourish along the tramline. Shaw states that by 1938, a survey indicated that shopping was the most popular occupation in Kingston.244 There were co-operative shops in every shopping area of the borough and an active Co-operative Party. But the only shops mentioned, in both the local history books and museum, are the larger department stores, such as Shrubsoles and Bentalls. The occlusion of the co-operative shops is an example of depicting only one form of retail, as there is evidence of at least one co-operative store in New Malden. The co-op shops were culturally significant in the period after WWII as they represented the attitudes of post-war Britain as a society that nurtured egalitarian aspirations.

In both the museum and in the heritage photo collection, history appears to stop some time in the 1960s. There are a few photographs from the 1970s and 1980s; nearly all of these are connected to civic and council occasions. There are no images of demonstrations by the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, the anti-Vietnam War protests and no evidence of abortion or

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242 Interview with Jean Turner. March 29th 2015.
gay rights’ campaigns. From the 1970s, there are no photographs of women’s rights campaigns. This invisibility distorts and obscures the experience and activities of the people who were involved in them and the communities they lived in.

Throughout the twentieth century, Kingston boasted institutions of advanced learning. In the first half of the century, it had an art and technical college. After 1945, it gained a polytechnic, which then incorporated the art college. This institution became a university in 1992. Thus, the town has always had a large student population in its recent history. It is extremely unlikely, therefore, that there was no counterculture. However, there is no record of it presented in the museum. There was an active squatting movement in the area in the 1970s, and the Overground Theatre occupied a building in the town at one time, for example. There is neither record of squatting in the collection, nor of the fact the town hosted a radical theatre company (the Overground) for at least five years. This is yet another example of occlusion.

The only evidence of radicalism appears to be a reference from June Sampson suggesting that students from the polytechnic in 1973 added to the “chaos” (of the three-day week order from the Government that restricted the use of power) by organising demos for increased grants, and staged a squatting campaign in protest at inadequate student accommodation.245 This is yet another example that any radical action in Kingston becomes forgotten.

It is clear from photographs in my possession that there were Greenham Common meetings, collections and support groups operating in Kingston in the 1980s, but there is no listing of them in the Kingston Museum collection. In the period from 1984–85, during the miners strike, there were stalls every week throughout the strike and collection buckets in Kingston marketplace, which were organised by trade unionists and Labour Party members. However, there is no evidence of these in the museum.

From 1982–84 there was a TUC sponsored Unemployed Centre in Kingston funded by Greater London Council (GLC). Photos were taken when it first opened that appeared in the *Surrey Comet* and again when it was temporarily closed, but there is no record of its existence in the museum or Heritage Centre. None of these events are evidenced in the collection. This is another example of where a radical history is made invisible to contemporary readers.

A Women’s Centre was bought and funded by the GLC Women’s Committee in 1983, which still functions as a women’s counselling service in Canbury Road in Kingston. There were demonstrations highlighting unjust imprisoning of the Guildford 4. There were anti-fascist demos against the BNP, CND marches/meetings, International Women’s Day events, and pro-abortion meetings. There were petitions/meetings and marches reflecting large-scale community opposition to the privatisation of part of Kingston Hospital. In 1998 the fight to save trees in Canbury Garden from being destroyed by developers, aided by the Liberal Democrat Council, made national news for a week. None of the above list are represented in the collection.

As previously stated, the photographic collection in the Heritage Centre that was donated by the *Surrey Comet* ends in the 1970s. As with several other newspapers, its photograph collection was digitalised. This nevertheless does not explain the gap, or why there is no strategy in place to keep the photographic collection current.

The current figure for the minority ethnic groups’ population for Kingston is 26%.

Immigration in Kingston increased at the same time as other urban areas in the UK. There is no reference to that immigration in the museum. During the 1960s, a large number of micro-engineering firms were founded, expanded and recruited within the Borough. A Korean community developed in New Malden, which is supposedly now the largest Korean Community in

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246 2011 RBK census figures
Europe. The museum collection does not reflect the change in the ethnic population of Kingston – it is an area that the curator of the museum was aware of when I interviewed her in 2013.

A huge problem for the heritage centre and museum is funding. Over the last five years, as with most council services, it has sustained cuts to its funding. In the 2013–14 the Royal Borough of Kingston supplies and service budget, allowance for the heritage service was £25,000. Previously in 2004–05 it had been double that sum. Two full-time officer posts were removed during this period. The moving of the Heritage Centre to the Guildhall, will severely restrict the space for storing collections and hosting academic and resident researchers.

In 2014, the Museums Association, of which Kingston is a member, invited museums from across the UK to provide up-to-date information on the changes taking place in all national museums and the impact of these upon the sector. Ninety-five museums or museum services were represented in the survey.

One in 10 museums reported they had considered selling parts of their collections. The Museums Association predicted that for some museums a crisis was looming. Any further cuts to museum and heritage collections such as Kingston’s will inevitably mean that histories that are unrepresented will have even less chance of being researched and exhibited.

Although curation is not a central theme of this study, regarding Kingston’s museum I have four observations. The first is that municipal museums such as Kingston’s were established and run by members of the bourgeois class. This is a group who shared a history of those in power or those that were in power when the museum began. Foucault argued that social organisation and

247 The borough cannot specify individual ethnic groups within its figures, though quotes the figure of it having the largest Korean group in Europe in various examples of Council literature. (Both 2014 and 2915)
248 Interview with curator. 12/05/2013.
249 Written statement from the Borough Heritage Officer. April 1st 2015.
historical events are constructs controlled by certain societies operating certain social practices. Since the curatorial turn became influential, there appears to be recognition in contemporary curation that exhibitions and collections are ideologically based. During the 1960s, the primary discourse within art curation began to move away from forms of critique of the artwork to the space of the museum itself. The move away from commodification of art to a more participatory form of gallery experience does not appear to have filtered from the funded art museums to municipal museums such as Kingston. Bishop outlines the problems associated with participatory forms of art exhibition.251 However, the impetus for exhibitions to reflect and involve ordinary people by experimenting with different forms of exhibition and display was made in an attempt to address the unequal balance of representation, which has not been undertaken in the Kingston collection.

Hobsbawm observed that between 1870 and 1914 traditions were “invented” throughout Europe to create national communities that shared a similar identity, created from a common culture and history, in order to suppress the rise of a separate militant working class.252 The opening of Kingston Museum in 1904 and the exhibits it displays provide evidence of this. This creation of a community with a shared identity has meant, in Kingston’s case, the creation in particular of a royal narrative for which there is little historical evidence. Its existence legitimises a continued, unsubstantiated history of royal individuals at the expense of a history of all classes.

The lack of money for museum and heritage collections has become critical for museums such as Kingston’s. For years the donations have been listed and stored, with no obvious plan for what should be done with them. The financial constraint on council funding means that Kingston’s library and museum is presently closed on Mondays, Wednesdays and Sundays. The lack of money means that Kingston curators and archivists cannot buy objects that might redress the balance of representation. Using many of the above examples, subjects that might be explored include: the suffragettes, trade

unions, the Korean community, the Quakers, and the poor in Kingston. Each could be made the subject of exhibition, at least temporarily. For each of these subjects there is enough information, objects and photos to build an exhibition within the collection using the information already published in contemporary local histories. The wax dummy of King Athelstan as a valid museum object demonstrates that it is possible to have exhibits that are constructed, rather than “authentic”.

Finally, a new threat to hidden histories comes from the source that was heralded as the democratisation of information: the Internet. Within museum and art collections, there have been a number of instances where, in the act of digitalisation, the original documents have been destroyed. There has been an almost anti-object philosophy in which, in the face of the need for more space, storing objects is seen to be unnecessary. Within Kingston Council, the latest website revamp (conducted in July 2014), resulted in the Kingston Museum and Heritage Service losing every information document that had been placed on the site. These documents had been placed there as a result of an award from the Archives Awareness Month Small Grants Programme (2004). This had allowed historical information to be accessed electronically; however, all the information was lost during an updating procedure. The revamp also removed every image the Heritage Department had on the website, including the entire collection of photographs of Eadweard Muybridge that the council had been bequeathed. The only heritage information that can be gained from their webpage (April 2015) is a reference to the national archives and a link to a teachers’ Times Educational Supplement website, only accessed by members of the TES. This is an example of how Internet use, instead of allowing greater democratisation of information, has, in effect, limited it.

The revamp to the Kingston website was agreed in 2013. The intention was to ensure that there was “Improved transaction functions – allowing residents and customers to pay, book and report much more than ever before” and provide a, “ new navigation structure and a powerful search facility – making it easier for customers to find what they’re looking for and transact with the
This change was designed to enable residents to access the website by mobile phone. It was, therefore, not possible to have a website that held information, and one that was accessible to pay council tax. With two competing requirements: one historic and one commercial, the historic information was lost.

In contrast to the museum, the Heritage Centre does not promote the _royal_ narrative. It is dependent on donations. However, it would be possible to seek out donations from under-represented groups, for example, by contacting political groups and pressure groups and asking for their memorabilia/records before they are lost. It appears that many local institutions, such as the Labour Party, Liberal Party and Communist Party, are dependent on individual archives that are often lost when one person moves or dies. An example of how information regarding under-represented groups could be restored is related to the Quakers. It is argued in this thesis that there was a Quaker history of activity in Kingston. I traced a document, written in the 1970s, to the Central Library of the Friends Meeting House in London. A copy of that document could easily be held in the Heritage Centre. The fact that it does not exist there, nor any reference to it, is an example of where the local history of a community becomes occluded, and unnecessarily so. Historically speaking, the working classes were unable to access power and so, being powerless, they were unable to control the recording and preservation of their history. The depiction of a narrow-gendered and stratified history resulted.

### 2.6 Museum Curation

Though this thesis research is not primarily focused on curatorial history or philosophy, in exploring the issues related to the occlusion of working class history and its invisibility in an area such as Kingston, it is inevitable that I examine some issues related to the exhibition of local history. It is useful to consider why Kingston museum’s exhibits do not reflect a narrative of working
class lives, while other local museums, in the London area, appear more aware of historical inequalities. In order to consider some of the contemporary attitudes to contemporary museological theory I will explore the work of Gaynor Kavanagh whose work on contemporary museum curation has been influential in the development of local history curation in recent years.

In the introduction to *Dream Spaces: Memory and the Museum* she stated her intention to open up museum thinking to a greater awareness of the products and processes with which they were engaged. She acknowledged that she was inspired to use the term “dream spaces” by Sheldon Annis who, in 1987, argued that museums essentially embody three forms of symbolic space: cognitive, pragmatic (social) and dream.254

Kavanagh observed that the cognitive space was the dominant and most visual part of history-making because it provoked memories. She suggested that cognitive spaces work in conjunction with 'dream spaces', encouraging visitors to respond to images, colours and textures in random yet highly personal ways. These experiments in extending visitor experience encouraged curators to become more outward looking, while seeking to encourage the recovery of individual memory, to illicit multiple responses from visitors. Kavanagh argued museums were forced to improve because: “Once the emphasis shifted in the post wars years from antiquities to social, cultural and industrial histories, understanding the recent past through objects alone became impossible.” 255

She suggested that in exploring the private territories of dream spaces in the public domain, museums can be rescued from being “remote and irrelevant.” She concluded the book *Dream Spaces: Memory and the Museum* by observing that dream spaces were where “Our inner experiences find a mesh with the outer experiences which museums provide.” 256

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255 ibid.
256 Kavanagh, G. *Dream Spaces: Memory and the Museum*, p174
This is not a new analysis, “Dream spaces “appear to be an adaption of Foucault’s heterotopic spaces which he described in the 1971 *Order of Things* where he suggested that there were heterotopic spaces which could be used as a means of escape from authoritarianism and repression. He described museums as having particular heterotopic spaces because they represented multiple historic time, both by the objects that are collected and exhibited and also because they exist outside of time, in the sense they are built to resist time’s ravages.

Kavanagh’s perspective reflects a postmodernist view of history, one that represents a desire to see multiple narratives represented. In the book she specifically criticises academics who she describes as taking a political stance in their assessment and condemnation of museum collection and display. Suggesting that they did not consider examples of good practice, but instead assumed “that all museums are the same and all visitors innocents abroad.”

She cites Walsh as suggesting that museums represented public history as just another form of entertainment, ‘a comestible to be consumed, digested and excreted’ (1992: 39). While she quotes Wright, as suggesting that ‘where there was once active historicity, there is now decoration and display: in the place of memory, amnesia swaggers out in historical fancy dress’ (1985: 78). In neither example does she adequately rebut, their argument. Merely suggesting that many museums have imperatives that “have been and still are primarily social and educational.”

Her criticism seem confused because she does acknowledge that some museum projects had engaged in the worst excesses of “shabby history-making”. She also accepted that there were examples where the

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257 ibid., p173
258 ibid.
259 ibid.
260 ibid.
construction of the past had been "commodified to meet purely economic ends. "

In her previous work *Making City Histories in Museums* she cited the Old Grammar School in Hull as an example of "good" museum curation because in 1990, the history exhibits for the city were reorganised so that the new exhibition was oriented around the stages of the life cycle from birth to death. Another example she cited was Croydon museum which had created interactive displays and computer stations where visitors could move from a globe with the “British Empire red staining itself across several continents, to an image of an African man marrying a British woman in the 1950s.”

However, in *Making City Histories in Museums* she observed that there is only so much one can do as a visitor to 'fill in the blanks'. Acknowledging that Power in terms of 'counter-hegemonic memory' is "dependent upon a knowledge base, and that without it, the visitor is disempowered".

Kavanagh seems to be acknowledging here that it is essential to counter the hegemony of the dominant elite. However, in *Dream Spaces* she appears to adopt a post modern disregard for narrative in favour of presenting open ended plural contradictory histories. In it she argued that:

Instead of looking for 'truth' or a continuous uninterrupted narrative (in themselves two of the biggest intellectual cul-de-sacs in the history museum field), encouragement can be given to the study of the past through an open-ended exploration which is comfortable with plural, even contradictory, histories.

However there is a mismatch here between offering plural and contradictory narratives at the same time as wishing the visitor to "fill in the blanks". She

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261 Kavanagh, G. *Dream Spaces: Memory and the Museum*, 1998
263 ibid., p7
264 ibid.
praised the Museum of the Famine in County Roscommon, Ireland, for offering eight different accounts of the catastrophe, “from rabid Nationalist to rabid Tory” 265. However, this summary of Irish politics is in itself a huge value judgement. In other museums, where there are galleries dedicated to commemorating the holocaust, or the struggle for women’s right to vote, equal weight is not given to the conflicting groups. Her use of the word “rabid”, suggests that all political groups are the same. The argument for equal weight, multi narratives, is the opposite of one that many oppressed and occluded groups campaign for where, because of the inequality of previous representation, museums are created to preserve and present their history alone.

While being an improvement on previous curatorial policies, contemporary local history museums offering multiple narratives, cannot address the disproportional balance of previous histories and contemporary media representations. Some narratives are still favoured above others, while there is often no more depth given in multiple narratives, than there were in hegemonic one class narratives

In order to represent working class history there needs to be an effective and detailed exhibition policy to reverse its occlusion. Creating a knowledge base is an important strategy. Without it, open ended, multiple narrative exhibits are more likely to obscure, baffle and mystify than enlighten. Crucial to this process would be the question how that knowledge base could be created and accessed. It is not just making known the unknown historical facts, but also how those facts might be interpreted and understood.

David Fleming in Making City Histories in Museums, in a chapter entitled Making City Histories, observed that there was an increase in the mid ‘90s of museums addressing urban histories. He suggested this had happened in part because of a democratisation of formal education, which had impacted

265 ibid.
upon the curatorial profession, leading to an attitudinal change towards the function of museums and their responsibility to the public at large.\textsuperscript{266}

He suggested that many local authorities at that time examined “their efficiency and effectiveness in response to central government’s hostility, consequentially requiring museums to legitimate their existences.” He also observed that some councils in the 1990s were “left wing”. He suggested that the demands of the local government, part ideological and part economic, were driven by social and educational needs, and “by cultural competitiveness between cities looking to diversify their post-industrial role and towards European tourist currencies”.\textsuperscript{267} Crucially he suggested that city museums were public bodies, maintained by public funding. Observing they are “part of the political system, they are not independent, and because of this they will have to respond to society's demands,”

He recognises that urban poverty is not new but museums, concentrating on material culture, managed in the past to ignore it. His proposal was that:

\begin{quote}
  beyond facing up to the neglect of the poor throughout history, the city museum should, like other sectors of society, confront the contemporary world head on.\textsuperscript{268}
\end{quote}

He argued that museums should adopt an attitude of “open access, participation and co-operation,” integrating more traditional functions, including interpreting material culture, with new ones such as the 'Museums in the Life of a City' initiative in Philadelphia, whose aim was to enhance 'the appreciation of cultural diversity, to reduce prejudice and racism', at the same time as building museum and community partnerships. Museums ultimately need to take much more responsibility for their exhibition policies and to adopt

\textsuperscript{266} Fleming, D, 'City Museums' in Kavanagh, G, and Frostick, E. \textit{Making City Histories in Museums}. London: Leicester UP, 1998, p132

\textsuperscript{267} Fleming, D, ‘City Museums’ Kavanagh, G, and Frostick, E. \textit{Making City Histories in Museums}, p132 or 139

\textsuperscript{268} ibid.
more dynamic policies in redressing the inequalities. This would require more than just multiple narrative exhibits.

In contrast to Kingston Hackney Museum represents a much wider selection of exhibits, representing more closely the concerns of its citizens. It has ten themed galleries, examples of which include galleries representing free speech, safe haven and a place to live. At present they are advertising talks celebrating black disabled and women’s lives.\textsuperscript{269} The Exhibitions staged in February 2016 include “The Art of War: Posters and propaganda from the First World War” and “Not in My Name: Hackney's conscientious objectors during the First World War.”\textsuperscript{270}

This is one example that illustrates how the political representation of local government can affect the exhibition policy of the local museums.\textsuperscript{271} At present Labour controls the council with a directed elected mayor and 50 councillors, the Conservative have 4, and Liberals 3.

Jeremy Corbyn writing in \textit{What would Keir Hardie Say?} noted that in Islington memorial plaques were put up at the end of every street in Islington where a soldier had died in WW1 in 2014.

He also listed peace campaigners who were remembered and commemorated including Fenner Brockway, whose history was put on a tree in Highbury fields as the result of a research project by a primary school. Other examples included a pub being named after Charlotte Despard and a council house block named after the peace campaigner and labour leader Keir Hardie..\textsuperscript{272}

All of these examples illustrate what can be done to represent occluded histories, within local areas, if there is local political support.

\textsuperscript{269} February 2016.
\textsuperscript{271} Last Local election 2014
The promotion of the royal narrative is critical in Kingston in reproducing occluded lives. This is because it is the sole narrative that is used, and reused, in the popular depiction of Kingston’s histories. The promotion of a fictitious royalty results in the lack of alternative histories. The mythologised narrative is accentuated by the insufficient size of the collection and the lack of funds. Until the point that there is a determined decision to change that narrative, and there is money set aside for museums and heritage centres to collect, store and exhibit, and with a political will to do so, the invisible will remain occluded. The myth of the seven crowned kings will continue and the unrepresented classes will remain “lives that are though they hadn’t been”.  

Kingston is one area of Greater London that, by reflecting and continuing to promote a narrow-gendered and stratified history, continues the segregation between the powerful and the powerless. To attempt to achieve a democratic, egalitarian and pluralist society, it is essential that the achievements of all classes, genders and ethnicities be exhibited. Local Museums and Heritage Centres need to take much more responsibility for their exhibition policies and to adopt more dynamic policies in redressing the inequalities.

Benjamin believed that how we act in the present could change the meanings of the past. However, erasure of the past means that communities are unable to re-assess, re-evaluate or re-interpret past experiences or place then within the context of contemporary political events.

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Chapter 3
Art, Artists and the Representation of Historical Occlusion

3.1 Introduction
Since the 1960s, particularly within European art practice, there has been an increase in the number of artists who create images that explore issues related to occluded history and the partiality of archival memory. These histories sometimes use imagery that raises oppositional narratives to mainstream histories. Some artists are influenced by their own family history, often related to trauma, while others examine issues related to cultural and political events.

Categorising artists who are working to retrieve hidden histories is not straightforward. Some are explicit in their intention and practice; others are less clear. The more successful and prolific among them tend to experiment with different strategies and topics in a variety of mediums.

There are different genres within the visual practice of hidden history, often overlapping with the mediums and practices used. In researching and evaluating the work of these artists, it has been useful to divide their research interests and inspirational sources into two main areas. The first group is one of artists who represent and investigate family history – artists who are interrogating their own heritage and family history, often in a trans-generational investigation. This group could include artists such as Huey O’Donoghue and Barbara Loftus, while Nicky Bird, explores other people’s family histories.

The second large group includes those artists working within political hidden history, interrogating occlusion, who often begin their practice by exploring one instance of well-known history but then, by reconfiguring it within their practice, reveal a further, alternative, history. This group includes William Kentridge, Gerhardt Richter, Luc Tuymans, Marlene Dumas and Jeremy Deller.
Painters involved in exploring hidden histories often physically disrupt or dismember the picture’s surface. The figurative artist most well-known for destroying or pulling the face and body into grotesque distortion was Francis Bacon. Working within a modernist framework in the mid-twentieth century, his practice of using found photography to paint images of distortion and disruption of the picture space was groundbreaking in its attitude to the human figure. It would appear that his style of painting has been an influence on contemporary painters’ practice in seeking a physical metaphor for full or partial invisibility. This is an area that would need further quantitative and qualitative research in order to fully evaluate this influence.

Many of the contemporary artists exploring areas of occlusion were influenced not only by the previous generation’s memories, but also by the political world post-1945. The period after the Second World War saw a proliferation of texts written about memory, Memory Studies itself is recognised as an academic discipline. The war and its aftermath played an important part in the work of many of the artists that are examined in this chapter. It is possible that the effect of the 1939–45 war could be attributed simply to its significance in world history. Geographically, this was truly a world war, and for the first time more civilians than soldiers were killed in the conflict. It is possible that because the war is still within living memory, and occurred during a period when globalisation and new technology revolutionised communication, its histories have been more easily recorded, replicated and preserved than previous wars. Marianne Hirsch recognised that memory affected the construction of histories, identifying post-memory as “The experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth.”

That experience, for the first time in human history, was shared by millions of people.

It is also possible that the increase in the number of artists working with the idea of exploring hidden histories is part of the Lieux de Memoire identified by

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Nora, where memories are created by marking where a significant event took place via commemorations such as a memorial event or re-enactment.

In issues of method and technique, there are two further groupings that can be identified. Many of the artists begin constructing the image by interrogating and exploring the picture space of photographs. These artists include Jasper Johns, Hughie O’Donoghue, Gerard Richter, and William Kentridge. A second group includes those artists who engage in re-enactment strategies, including Jeremy Deller, and Nicky Bird. Both William Kentridge and Barbara Loftus have used actors to re-enact specific historical moments in order to use the images or film for replication. One example of this is where two artists use re-enacted footage in separate adaptations of the eighteenth century image-making medium of silhouette imagery – Loftus in *Sigismund’s Watch,* and Kentridge in the animation, *I am not me, the horse is not mine.*

Finally, there are artists who attempt to depict absence in their work. Most artists working in this area work primarily with the medium of installation, for example Doris Salcedo, Rachel Whiteread, and Christian Boltanski. A painter whose work partially represents absence is Jasper Johns, and it is his work that is explored.

In considering practice choices, the use of colour or its absence is sometimes of importance. The use of grey, in particular, seems frequently to be used by artists who seek to express absence or occlusion. Kentridge, Tuymans and O’Donoghue often use monotone. This strategy is also used in particular painting series, both by Gerard Richter and Jasper Johns. Richter identified grey as having the capacity “to make ‘nothing’ visible.”

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3.2. Photography and Art

After the Second World War, in America and Europe, figurative painting was perceived as an outmoded practice as abstraction was seen by many critics, such as Greenberg, as more meaningful to the contemporary world. He suggested that new painting should renounce “illusion and explicit subject matter”. Abstraction seemed an inevitable outcome because painting could not represent the presumed reality of the photographic image, and was perceived as being unable to represent the horror of twentieth century history.

Artists have used photographic images within their practice since photography’s inception. Degas, Millais, and Caillebotte used photographic images as aids from the 1850s and 1860s. Surrealists used photographs within the painting space since the first surrealist manifesto in 1924. Magritte’s and Man Ray’s I do not see the woman hidden in the forest and Salvador Dali’s The Phenomenon of Ecstasy are both inspired and constructed of photographic images. Andy Warhol’s practice was built upon both found photography and his own photographic images, transforming the replicated photographic image through the use of colour prints. Warhol, using found photographs to create two-dimensional images by the chance result of printing from uncleaned printing plates, further separated the expectation that works of art were created by physical skill, or “by hand”. Roy Lichtenstein used found images of celebrities and advertisements. Inspired by both Dada and Surrealism, the Pop Art movement used photographic collages – Peter Blake was well-known for using this practice in works such as the Sergeant Pepper album cover (1968).

Thus, found objects that had first been used by Dada were appropriated by pop culture, and the dual process of reproduction and appropriation meant

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that Modernism had, by the use of found images and objects, ended the need for the artist to have skills of craftsmanship in favour of the vocabulary of the conceptual. Photos were used as templates for the creation of images (often projected images on the canvas). They were also used by the American photorealist movement and the hyperrealism movement in Europe. The French narrative figuration movement used photographs to construct political image-making.

The use of photographs continued in the 1980s in the works of Richter, Kiefer and Basilisz. The new imagery, as Ralph Rugoff suggests in the introduction to The Painting of Modern Life, produced an escape route from “a limited formalist end game”. Figuration, instead of being perceived as reactionary, could be a “means of resistance to modernism’s linear progress”.

A distinct, if related, practice of photography was the use of personal and family photographs for the purpose of revealing hidden histories, i.e., using photography for a more deliberate investigation of what is and what is not recorded.

Since the last quarter of the twentieth century the investigation and depiction of memory and invisibility within visual imagery has become a more central discourse. Within art history, concern with the contested nature of “the past”, and with the implications of such disputes for the historiographical issue of historical interpretation, became more popular as the twentieth century progressed. The philosophical and theoretical work of Foucault, Barthes, and Nora all contributed to the evolution of new ideas about the role of power in history and memory. These concepts, along with Baudrillard’s ideas of the simulacrum, pushed forward artistic experimentation.

Barthes suggested that photographs were representational objects that carry symbolic meaning even if they hold no direct memory for the viewer. In so

\[285\] Ibid.
doing, photographs naturalise that which they evoke through their seeming transparency. Yet they are distortions and it is the transitory nature of what they depict that comes across. The image exemplifying the changeability of existence, and the misrepresentation of the world as static, immutable and transparent becomes obvious.

To the extent that they can provide an echo of memories, photographs insert or insist on a different way of viewing the past, history and change. For an example of the use of this analysis (of a painting inspired by a photograph), one could examine Gerhard Richter’s Aunt Marianne, constructed in 1965, oil on canvas. A young, pubescent girl smiles at the camera in the 1930s. The image looks like thousands of other images of children in the thirties, signified by her dress and hairstyle. It is the echo of the familiar. When the viewer is informed, however, that Auntie Marianne was a victim of the Nazi programme of genocide conducted against any people labelled as mentally subnormal, the disruption of the familiar/unfamiliar forces a different kind of response.

Most of the artists whose work is addressed in this research explore issues of occlusion in the use of photography that is central to their practice. This is the case, for example, with Nicky Bird and Chino Otsuka. A similar claim can be made in relation to the use of film in the cases of Laure Provoste and Jeremy Deller. Similarly, Loftus, Richter, Tuymans, Dumas and O’Donoghue use photography to inform their painting.

3.3 Familial Retrieval

Some artists use their practice as one of retrieval, rooted within their need to discover elements of their own family histories. The Family Ties Network website observes, “Since the 1990’s, there has been a proliferation of research on the relationship between photography and memory.” It suggests that much of the work involving family memories has been rooted in photographic practice inspired by artists such as Jo Spence:

The family album has been used as a route to autobiographical writing or visual interpretation that encourages remembrance and the close examination of personal histories, documented by writers, such as, Laura Marcus (1994), Liz Stanley (1995) and Gen Doy (2005), and, by artists such as, Trish Morrissey, Annelies Straba and Gillian Wearing. This recollection and interrogation of memories and family relationships has also led to methods of re-imagining, re-staging and role-play, underpinned by the re-enactment phototherapy work of Jo Spence and Rosy Martin in the mid-late 1980’s.\textsuperscript{288}

Deborah Schultz observed that “[in] recent years the ‘biographical turn’ has developed in the social sciences, as a result of which the lives of ordinary individuals, as opposed to major figures, are perceived as of significant value in understanding history and society.”\textsuperscript{289} This is important because the biographical turn allows the occluded to be recognised. This has the potential to alter a situation in which one class or group is memorialised while the other is forgotten, in which one class or group has no face, thus no history and no identity.

Schultz suggested that photography played a significant role in moving the focus from major figures to ordinary people. She observed:

Everyone takes photographs and everyone has had their photograph taken both in formal and informal settings. For most, it is the primary means of self-representation… As

\textsuperscript{288} \textit{Ibid.}
the family unit has become dispersed, photographs provide a means of connecting in time and space. 290

As previously stated, there is an identifiable group of artists who have used traditional painting as an investigative medium while exploring family histories. Hughie O’Donoghue uses specific narratives to explore ideas of place and identity in relation to historical and personal meaning; his medium is canvas and paint. In a series of paintings made in 2007, he uses the memorabilia of his father, who was a pilot in the RAF in World War II. He then uses a photograph of a Van Gogh painting that was destroyed in the Allied bombing 291, an image that was also recreated by Francis Bacon. 292

James Hyman, in the catalogue to the exhibition The Geometry of Paths, suggested that O’Donoghue’s paintings embody the “potency of photography as a means of referencing a lost past” 293 He observed that images inspired by photography have a strength

To acknowledge that picture making like memory is a construct [they allow] a concentration on big themes … engaging with photography, O’Donoghue’s paintings interrogate their own origins in memory. 294

O’Donoghue was deeply influenced by his father’s wartime experiences. In the catalogue, Hyman argues that O’Donoghue’s paintings are similar to history paintings in terms of their scale and subject matter. 295 He suggested that, by using brushwork and paint, the narratives of the memory become first-person narratives.

290 Ibid.
291 The Painter On the Road to Tarascon.
294 Ibid., p.5–6.
In the paintings, O'Donoghue incorporated photographs that were often completely covered by paint. Hyman suggests that this illustrates how photography has changed “our way of seeing forever and on the other hand they reaffirm the artist’s belief in the continuing power of painting to reimagine the past”.  

Some artists have had focused aims related to re-discovering the lives destroyed by the Holocaust. This research is often specific, exploring individual family histories. Often, it involves individual family narratives that had been lost, or have remained unspoken. O'Donoghue has a much more general aim: he claims that the best art is timeless, not “rooted in a certain movement”.

Over a number of years, O'Donoghue dealt with issues of memory, using letters written between his father and mother during the Second World War. He uses his father as an everyman figure, and has chosen to explore the personal rather than the political. However, as Enrique Juncosa (Director of the Irish Museum of Modern Art) stated in the 2009 catalogue of O'Donoghue’s work, this “everyman” is a victim of man’s “inability to learn from his own history”.

O'Donoghue’s practice, whereby a photographic component is incorporated and then oil is painted on the surface, gives a sense of disconnection and an uncanny feel involving both colours and picture space, perhaps suggesting layers of memory. His work clearly involves a personal history rather than political one. Many of his images are directly or indirectly related to his family and religion, the subjects depicted as a-historical.

Barbara Loftus is a Brighton-based artist, the daughter of a German-Jewish refugee and an Anglo-Irish communist. She grew up in London, studying art at Brighton College of Art between 1964 and 1968. Her recent work is related to

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296 O'Donoghue, op.cit., p.7.
297 Ibid.
reminiscence, rediscovery and family history, particularly transgenerational memory. Her work is inspired by her grandparents’ experiences, which were revealed after her mother (after a lifetime of silence) began in 1995 to talk about her experiences of her German/Jewish youth and childhood under the Nazi regime.

Her mother had only first spoken about these experiences when she was 80 years old. Inspired by this, Loftus began working on the painting *Confiscation of Porcelain.* She used figurative images – in one she records the moment when the Nazi soldiers stole her family’s belongings. Her more recent work involves memories of family arguments. One very powerful image depicts a memory from her mother’s childhood in which she witnessed her own mother arguing with her father. In the middle of the argument Herta had taken her husband’s gold pocket watch and destroyed it by stamping on it. This is the central event portrayed in the series *Sigismund’s Watch: A Tiny Catastrophe.* In an interview in the catalogue for *Sigismund’s Watch,* Loftus suggests that her work has connections with that of graphic artist Art Spiegelman, who wrote the *Maus* graphic novels.

Loftus works figuratively, using paint and canvas, and her subjects involve her family and memories of WWII. She works using her mother Hildegard’s childhood memories, particularly Hildegard’s memories of Loftus’ Jewish grandparents Herta and Sigismund Basch. Hildegard’s parents and brother were deported to Auschwitz on December 14, 1942.

> I felt almost an obligation… to do something with my mother’s revelations. I’ve always been concerned with storytelling in my work.\(^\text{301}\)

*Sigismund’s Watch: A Tiny Catastrophe* was an exhibition at the Freud Museum in London in October 2011. The exhibition took its subtitle from the


\(^{300}\) *Ibid.,* p.6–23.

\(^{301}\) Loftus, B. & Barnett, L. *The Guardian.* Interview, 1\textsuperscript{st} October 2011.
writings of Siegfried Kracauer, who observed that it was a delusion to think that major events have the most decisive influence. Rather, “[we] are moved by the tiny catastrophes that make up daily life.”

In the catalogue essay, “Entrapping space and time: the art of Barbara Loftus”, Bohm-Duchen observes that Loftus employed professional actors to stage the re-enactment of the scene where her grandmother broke her husband’s watch. She uses photographs as templates for the silhouette images. In the commentary on one of the paintings, *Watch*, Loftus notes that she is speculating on the subject of memory and time. She quotes Kracauer, who believed “that community and personality perish when what is demanded is calculability...” She writes of her motivation in a very similar manner to Foucault on the lives of infamous men when she declares, “The dislocation of the exile is my inheritance and the drive behind my attempt to reclaim these memories from the amnesia of ruin and lost time.”

Another artist working with memories of her family is Chino Otsuka. She uses her family history to produce digitally altered photographic images. In the exhibition *Imagine Finding Me* at the Museum House, Keizersgracht in Amsterdam, June 2012, she used photo manipulation to produce images that appeared to allow her physically to travel back in time, investigating childhood memory, family relationships and adult consciousness. Otsuka's photographs are used as a means for her exploration into the art of remembering. The exhibition notes suggested that her work is asking “How do we preserve our memories?” and “To what extent are our memories constructed?” Her practice of re-enactment is a strategy to explore those questions.

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306 Ibid.


308 Ibid.
Otsuka uses Photoshop to insert an image of her grown-up self into photographs from her childhood. She re-stages and recreates past memories using the same locations as those she inhabited and in which she was photographed as a child. Many of her self-portraits are situated in places where she once belonged. Often the original photo and the one she has created are exhibited side-by-side.

Deborah Shultz has suggested that the photographic work of Chino Otsuka begins as an intimate private image but can also be described as being transformed into public sites of history. This argument has some weight. Each individual photograph may seem personal: at first glance, the two figures appear to be either a very young mother and daughter, or two sisters. As the series of images make up a narrative of travel, they become a history of a childhood, a contradiction of the “then” and the “now.

3.4 Retrieval of Historical Occlusion

Some artists working with occlusion could be grouped together as working to explore “historical events” (i.e., the events that secure the hegemony of a nation state, that are recorded by what are considered legitimate sources, and that are taught in schools and reproduced in the mass media) but then reconfigure aspects of that narrative within their practice. Their intention may or may not be to reveal an alternative history, one that gives a voice to the marginalised or forgotten. This group includes Kentridge, Richter, Deller and Dumas.

Gerhard Richter is both an abstract and figurative artist. Born in 1932, he grew up in East Germany before leaving in March 1961. He is represented in most major museums. Consequently, his paintings are sold for high prices at

auction. He is often perceived as representing the dichotomy of German history and politics in the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{310}

His use of found photographs, and their reinterpretation as blurred monochrome images, are both distinctive and evocative. The subject of the November series is the execution of members of the Baader-Meinhof group by the West German state, while the September series relates to the terrorist attacks on New York in 2001. In her book \textit{The Image and The Witness: Trauma Memory and Visual Culture}, Frances Guerin suggests that the October series is an exploration of erasure, a process that is central to Richter’s practice. Part of this process is her exploration of the medium of painting. Commenting on his use of monochrome, Guerin observed, “Richter describes grey as the mediator, the space in between, the uncertain, the ill-defined… the welcome and only possible equivalent for indifference”.\textsuperscript{311} She suggests that Richter’s practice of using the reproduced photograph emphasises how press photography repetition works to provide legitimacy, and that the image, by its repetition, increases its supposed claim to objectivity. She suggests that the image only approximates what it represents; it is only “representations of representations”.\textsuperscript{312} She describes the paintings’ incompleteness as encouraging the viewer’s active involvement in the “process of rekindling the otherwise buried historical trauma”\textsuperscript{313}. Richter himself observed:

\begin{quote}
One has to believe in what one is doing, one has to commit oneself inwardly, in order to do painting. Once obsessed, one ultimately carries it to the point of believing that one might change human beings through painting..\textsuperscript{314}
\end{quote}

Contradicting Guerin’s interpretation of his work, Richter states:

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{310} Adriani, G. \textit{Gerhard Richter Paintings From Private Collections}. Stiftung Frieder Burda Publication, 2008. \\
\textsuperscript{311} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{312} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{313} Ibid. \\
\end{flushright}
It makes no sense to expect or claim to “make the invisible visible”, or the unknown known, or the unthinkable thinkable.\textsuperscript{315}

Here Richter has articulated a question at the heart of the dilemma of representation. It touches the very heart of existential questioning and those elements of classical philosophy which consider the relation between the real and the not real. In the case of the inheritance of the Second World, and the residue of its history of totalitarianism, genocide, violence and fascism, there still remains a powerful cultural resonance today. Many who have viewed Richter’s images interpret them as a commentary on German history (he was a resident of both East and West Germany before German unification). The difficulty in reading his images as a result of their distortion becomes a metaphor for the confusion and disillusion with European politics at the end of the twentieth century.

Richter’s work, \textit{October 18, 1977, a series of 15 paintings}, is based on found photographs from several published by the magazine \textit{Der Stern} of members of the Baadar-Meinhof group after they were found dead in their cells, and their funerals. He said of the photograph that they “provokes horror and [my] painting – with the same motif – something more like grief”. He said he was grieving over human nature, that “[grief] is not tied to any political cause”.\textsuperscript{316}

He has claimed that he was not political. Though often taking what would be a radical stance on issues such as the murder of Meinhoff, he suggested he is not left wing:

“\par
I did not come here to get away from ‘materialism’: here its dominance is far more total and more mindless. I came here to get away from the criminal idealism of the Socialists.” By choosing to use the image of the dead Meinhof, however, his work challenges the veracity of the authorised narrative of the

\textsuperscript{315} \textit{Ibid.}
deaths in custody. There was widespread condemnation of the authorities at the time of their deaths, as many Germans believed they had been murdered by the West German State.317

Kentridge is a South African artist, best known for his prints, drawings, and animated films. He observed, “In the same way that there is a human act of dismembering the past there is a natural process in the terrain through erosion, growth, dilapidation that also seeks to blot out events.”318 His practice replicates a palimpsest, constantly drawing and erasing the images in such works as Felix in Exile. The animations are constructed by filming a basic line and tone drawing. He often uses charcoal, making erasures and changes, filming each change. He continues this process, each drawing equal to approximately a quarter of a second to two seconds' screen time. The drawings are often exhibited with the final animation.

In a lecture at Tate Modern in 2012 for the opening of his film I am not me, the horse is not mine, Kentridge discussed the role of automatic writing, describing animation as a transformation suggesting that the charcoal becomes a way of thinking, especially in terms of its tonal range and the act of erasure. He begins with one or two key images, and develops the narrative from these. “Erasure” he observed, "meant the possibility of transformation,"319 which is the concept central to his practice. In a lecture at Boston University as the Tim Hamill visiting lecturer, he suggested that the subject for an artist is actually secondary to the primary need, which is “to make... to be endlessly circling... to having a sense of insufficiency... to be an artist is most of all to have the feeling of the necessity to leave a trace... to scribble on paper... to leave a paper trail”.320

In much of his work and writings Kentridge is at the forefront of the question of how best to find an appropriate, readable and meaningful form of

317 Ibid.
319 Ibid.
representation for visual art in a postmodern world. Sound is central to Kentridges' work. The choices he makes are designed to be deeply affecting. He often uses choirs singing or bands playing recognisable South African music, thus placing a powerful signifier alongside the images that immediately locates them within the context of apartheid and struggle against authoritarian regimes.

More recently (since 2001), Kentridge has worked on a series of tapestries, some inspired by images taken from torn paper. Promised Land (2008) is an example of a series he created linking cartography with weaving. He briefly seemed to move away from overtly political topics: creating a sculpture of a horse in Naples (2012), and, more controversially, in 2013 a series of sculptures under the title Rebus, two of which combined together to produce the outline of a classical traditional nude woman. However, he returned to his political work in the exhibition If We Ever Get To Heaven in 2015.321 Many examples of his previous work are included, with a new work, More Sweetly Play the Dance, a 45-metre-long frieze of moving images created specifically for the exhibition.

In Kentridge's political works, he examined the colonial history of Africa and the origins and character of apartheid. These included works such as Mine (1991), a charcoal on paper detailed drawing of the plan of a slave ship. Felix in Exile (1994), at one level, is a narrative of a man haunted by his past. It also depicts a world that is recognisably apartheid-defined in its structure and hopelessness. Kentridge depicts the disparate balance between those with and without power. In Felix in Exile, the evil that Felix represents eventually destroys him. In his representation of the oppressed people of South Africa, Kentridge gives them a corporeal existence, and he gives them a voice.

Marlene Dumas, like Richter, represents historical events in some of her paintings. Like Richter, she depicts Ulrike Meinhof, using a photograph from Der Stern. She also produced a series of blindfolded prisoner images, which

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321 Kentridge, W. If We Ever Get To Heaven, Eye Film Museum, Amsterdam. 25 April–30 August 2015.
she produced at the time of the notorious Abu Ghraib prison scandal. She also produced *Blindfolded Man* (2007), which references the redaction of “terror suspects” by the US Government. In works such as *Mankind* (2008), *Duct Tape* (2002-05), *Blindfolded* (2002), *The Neighbour* (2005), and *The Pilgrim* (2006), she explores the depiction of otherness that is used by the media when displaying photographs of accused “Islamic” murderers. She also addresses the racist hegemony of ex-colonial Europe with images such as *Drowned* (2003). She uses oil on large canvases, giving them the fluidity and transparency of watercolour. In her essay “Painter as Witness”, Cornelia Butler suggests that the use of photocopied images was one source of Dumas’ pallet, giving it lurid mechanical colour.\(^{322}\) She argues that Dumas’ pallet, like Richter’s blurs, works itself as a signifier, attributing the origin of the image to photography.\(^{323}\) She suggests that Dumas is interested in both the political message of the images and their “visual tricks and tropes”, that she “banks form and content, medium and message”.\(^{324}\)

Dumas was born in Cape Town, leaving to study art in Amsterdam in 1976. She then took a break from painting, working only on paper from 1979 to 1984. During that period she studied at the Psychological Institute in Amsterdam. She returned to painting with the series *The Eyes of the Night Creatures* in 1985. In this series, she uses family history to intertwine with South African history. Included in the series were her three *Martha* paintings (1984). Martha was the name of her grandmother, but she intended that the images extend to personify all women called Martha. Dumas described *Martha - My Ouma* as being as imposing as a portrait of God as a woman.\(^{325}\) The next Martha, in *Martha - Die Bediende*, was a domestic worker employed by her mother, and the third portrait of the series was *Martha - Sigmund’s Wife*. The three images are compelling both separately and taken together. They are each given a presence, both by the drawing and the paintwork. They


\(^{323}\) Ibid.

\(^{324}\) Ibid.

also represent three ethnic groups living within South Africa: Black South African, Afrikaans and White European, which are also three (hegemonically defined) “races” living within South Africa.

Dumas' work is figurative, and often centred on gender and on issues of outsiders. In works such as Self-portrait as a Black Girl (1989) and An African Mickey Mouse (1991) she directly addressed the political situation in South Africa. She uses drawing, painting, and particularly watercolours and ink wash. Her images are based on photographs taken from newspapers, fashion magazines and film archives, or she uses her own photography. The images and quotations used can be from various media sources, both popular and art historical.

Commenting on her choice of paint medium in the catalogue Marlene Dumas: Wet Dreams (2003), she stated, “For me watercolour was associated with failed artists (Hitler), retired politicians (Churchill) and Sunday painters… then its image changed… my watercolours these days are bigger than my paintings.” She suggested that her group of six drawings entitled Mixed Blood (1996) “[is] not about any specific race, but rather about the possibility that perhaps there are no specific races to begin with”.

In “Hang-ups and Hangovers in the Work of Marlene Dumas”, Dominic Van den Boogerd quotes Dumas as stating, “I deal with second-hand images and first-hand experiences.” In 2004, Dumas completed a large oil painting called Stern using the same photograph of the dead political radical Ulrike Meinhof as had Richter when he completed his 1977 series October. The image is black and white, and shows the dead woman lying on the floor of the prison cell, with marks on her neck from the rope that she had (supposedly) used to kill herself. This work was a commentary both on the photographic

328 Ibid.
image and on Richter’s painting of it. In a statement to Richard Shiff on 29th November 2007, Dumas said, "I also wanted to see with Stern if I could take Richter’s source out of its blur." In his essay “Less Dead”, Shiff proposes that Dumas made the image seem “less dead” than Richter’s, suggesting that the burn mark on the rope looks more like a “necklace.”

The exhibition *The Image as Burden* at Tate Modern (Feb-May 2015) displayed both old and new works by Dumas. The exhibition contained a summary of her major work to date and some new work. It depicts the major concerns that have dominated her work for the past thirty years – her major themes of apartheid, racism, patriarchy, violence against women, pornography, and death. She used newspaper photographs as well as painting self-portraits and images of her daughter, celebrities, political leaders, revolutionaries and terrorists. Her new work included 22 Great men, representations of twenty-two gay icons. Laura Cummings described Dumas as an “old-fashioned expressionist.” The exhibition highlighted the depth of scale that she uses that makes monumental the subjects she has chosen. She is also ground breaking in her use of watercolour.

One painting, *The Widow*, was inspired by Pauline Lumumba, who in 1961 led the mourning march for her assassinated husband, Congolese Prime Minister Patrice Lumuba. As part of her mourning for her husband, she had walked bare-breasted through the streets of Léopoldville. The canvas is filled with male figures. They are pale in the sense they are only lightly painted. Dominating the picture space is the small figure of the black woman. In the *Image as Burden* catalogue, Dumas discussed space in painting, explaining that she was influenced in her work by Caravaggio and Degas. Indeed, walking around the exhibition, it is the phenomenon of space that strikes one immediately. The images she produces are, in themselves, large but the

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330 Butler, C. *Marlene Dumas. op.cit.*
space of the Tate Modern gallery allowed those same images to become monumental.

3.5
Re-enacting the Invisible
An artist whose work directly addresses issue of depicting the invisible is Nicky Bird. She stated that photographic images can be a form of retrieval.333 Her research for her Ph.D. was based on an unknown photograph of Marilyn Monroe trying on a dress while being watched by four women. In commenting on The Fitting, Bird suggested that the strength of the retrieved image was dependant on using those parts of the found photograph that become another source of meaning.334

Practice involves the process of reconstruction, re-enactment and detection both practical and theoretical… my research has been concerned with the possibilities of what may lie at the periphery. Desire, agency… insert themselves, however incidentally, into photographic representation, and thereby into history.335

Bird’s work primarily uses photography and archival records. She is clear that her work is involved in discovering hidden histories. Writing about her practice, she argues that:

An investigation of an original photograph can take two routes: one in which the camera documents the process or journey – collecting evidence of possible traces of places or people. The other is through reconstruction using sets, costumes and actors who bear some physical resemblance to those in the original image.336

334 Ibid.
335 Ibid.
An earlier project was *Tracing Echoes* (2001), which explored the life and work of Julia Margaret Cameron, particularly in relation to how a sense of place connects to memory and recollection. Bird commented that “*Tracing Echoes* began with me opening up a book that was produced in the USA, and found in a library of Scotland, with questions about the lives of rural working-class others… an ironic way to return to a place in my own past.” Bird suggested that the most poignant meaning of nostalgia is the return to home, and in the case of *Tracing Echoes* this had great meaning. She had grown up in West White, and had spent most of her time there aspiring to leave it.

Since 1996 Bird's practice has been influenced by found photography:

> Particular photographs have sparked off my own work… somebody else’s picture becomes a starting point. These images are found in books, in museum collections, as well as other kinds of archives.  

*Member of the Wedding* (1998), was inspired by an Edwardian society wedding photograph. The construction of the narrative was based around the detail of a figure looking through a window. Bird described the way in which:

> ...the process of detection and reconstruction within contemporary arts practice have also been very influential... the way in which an artist such as Sophie Calle has used surveillance techniques to keep track of a person, or Christine Boyle who constructed a bust from an unidentified skull which she bought, or Jane and Louise Wilson who have worked on historical sites, are politically loaded.  

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338 Ibid.
340 Ibid.
The film *Member of the Wedding* begins with the photograph. It then pans to the face in the window, peering out at the huge Edwardian wedding party. The reconstruction begins by showing the Edwardian photographers looking towards us, the viewers. We then realise there is a young woman dressed in Edwardian finery with her back to us. It is at this juncture that we realise that our point of view is that of the nameless, unidentified stranger. We *are* the face in the window. This device is very simple but very effective. In the first half of the film we are seeking the strangers; in the second we *are* them. Previously we were ourselves in the contemporary period looking at a photograph, and then we are taken back in time, and put literally in the picture. This, intentionally or not, highlights issues of identity, historical occlusion and class division.

In *Archaeology of the Ordinary* (2011), at the Peter Potter Gallery, Haddington, Bird investigated the theme of farmers, their family histories and the role of migrant workers in East Lothian. She had been contacted by archaeologists who had found handwritten messages of Irish people in the early 1950s on the walls of derelict cottages (as the latter were about to undergo major refurbishment). Artists, archaeologists and local people came together to investigate the archaeology of the ordinary.341

Bird's work is strongly linked to a sense of place and history, and the strategies she employs, particularly involving communities and groups, is revealing. In a lecture on her practice during the 2011 transmission series at Leeds University, she discussed issues related to reenactment, in particular the artist’s responsibility in “using” individuals and groups as players/actors/walk-ins in fictionalised narratives that are created for the artist’s benefit rather than for the communities from which the participants come.342

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342 Bird, N. *Artist as Listening Post*, extra.shu.ac.uk/transmission/papers/BIRD%20Nicky.pdf, Last accessed 26th August 2015
Red Saunders was commissioned by the Impressions Gallery and The Culture Company to create a series of photographic tableaux inspired by historical events in Yorkshire for the Ways of Looking photography festival in Bradford held in October 2011. The photographs were staged and shot at Whitestone Arts facilities, and the chosen subjects included Mary Wollstonecraft and the Dissenters of Newington Green, Hilda of Whitby (identified as a woman inspiring women’s education) and Tom Paine. The reproduced photographic images are strongly coloured and lit in the style of Gregory Crewdson’s work. The Tom Paine image was manipulated to give the impression of it being a history painting rather than a photograph. Other images required volunteers to act as Civil War soldiers, agricultural labourers, as Leveller women in the English Revolution, and as Watt Tyler’s followers in the Peasants’ Revolt. This was, in effect, a photographic equivalent of Jeremy Deller’s re-enactments of historic events. The stated aim of the Hidden project was to provide “photographic ‘evidence’ for events that occurred before the widespread adoption [or even the existence - LM] of camera technology.”

It could be argued that, unlike the recreated histories of Yinka Shonibaree, the histories that the Hidden project depicted were not totally hidden. Most were images of known historical heroes of the English Left. It did represent, however, unknown Levellers and the Newington Green Dissenters. Often the treatment of historical figures of the Left in mainstream British media is either to ignore (i.e., to make them “disappear”) or to vilify them. The media attitude, as with the curriculum of the schooling system, is more concerned with portraying figures of great men in history, such as Henry VIII, Winston Churchill, and Julius Caesar. This is in opposition to other historical figures, such as Thomas Paine (for his involvement in the American War of Independence, and his books A Vindication of the Rights of Man), who are seemingly lacking from the consciousness of the media, and therefore wider societal notice.

Jeremy Deller trained as an art historian. The two works of his that I will examine are *The Battle of Orgreave* and the major exhibit from the *English Magic* exhibition that was shown in the Venice Biennale in 2013, and which was subsequently exhibited in various exhibition spaces throughout Britain in 2014.\(^{344}\)

*The Battle of Orgreave* (2001) is probably one of the best-known contemporary artist re-enactments. It took several years to research before being created for the group Art Angel (1998-2001). The participants were from various re-enactment societies such as the Sealed Knot as well as people who had been part of the original event in 1984 from both sides – both police and miners.

The re-enactment commemorated the most well-known confrontation between police and miners of the 1984–85 miners’ strike. By being re-enacted it renewed interest and outrage about the link between the establishment, the judiciary and the media. It demonstrated the divided nature of the relationship between the state and the people, and the use of the police by the government (of the day) as a means of repression through the use of fear induced by physical and legal threats. Deller’s use of re-enacting images that were seen daily on British television, and used as propaganda by a British government determined to create violence and revolution, was a powerful one. Quantitative research by Greg Philo proved that for most of the year-long strike there were very few violent confrontations on picket lines. However, the constant repeating of images from the day’s newsreel of what was described as a “battle” became, for most people surveyed a year later, the only images of the strike that they remembered.\(^{345}\)

*English Magic* was the British entry for the Venice Biennale in 2013. The narrative of the central film documented the killing of a protected harrier bird on a royal estate. The only people shooting on the day the bird had been

killed were a member of the royal family and a gamekeeper. The film consisted of panoramic shots of the bird flying, before merging into a scene of a four-by-four vehicle – commonly used by royalty – being crushed and mangled in a metal compactor. It was at this point the audience realised they were sitting on the remains of the crushed car. The film then dissolves into footage of children playing on plastic blow-up models of Stonehenge, before finishing with a filmed performance of a multi-ethnic, female and male steel band of all ages, the sound of which, provided the soundtrack of the film, an instrumental version of *The Man Who Sold the World* by David Bowie.

*English Magic* revealed and made public a hidden history. What had been a small news item that would have been lost and forgotten was, instead, made known to a much wider group of people. Because Deller took the decision to re-stage the exhibition in venues such as the Turner in Margate and at the Morris House in Walthamstow (something that has not been done before by any British artist after the showing at Venice), it is a narrative that gained a wider public.

3.6 Representations of Invisibility

In June 2012, Jasper Johns started working on a photograph of the artist Lucian Freud. It was one of a series of photographs that John Deakins had taken for Francis Bacon. The photograph depicts Freud sitting on a bed with his hand over his bowed head in a gesture of despair. The photograph was in a poor state, crumpled, damaged and torn.

The photograph of Freud was the source photograph for Bacon's 1969 painting of Freud. Johns has, throughout his sixty years as an artist, worked using painting, drawing and printmaking. He began to experiment with this photograph, first using pencil drawing and watercolour painting in similar dimensions to the original. He then doubled the size. He began to illustrate
not only the remains of the photograph, but also the void – represented as a black mass in a photocopy so that the absence became a presence.\(^{346}\)

The image suggested echoes for Johns of Goya’s etching *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters* (1799). After making multiple drawings he then moved to painting, selecting a stretched canvas that was fifty times bigger than his original double drawing. He then began to experiment with various tones of grey paint. He had used grey on a number of occasions previously, including a major exhibition of 120 works in different mediums in 2007, which was titled *Jasper Johns: Grey*. He has proposed that grey had the same effect as a school uniform.\(^{347}\) Johns has also spoken about his “rainbow of greys”.\(^{348}\)

The missing section of the photograph becomes, in the paintings, a fundamental part of the image, the trace of the absence. His final investigation of the image was performed by using ink on plastic, and completing a series of prints, etchings and aqua tints. The absence, so clearly explored by Jasper Johns (the area where the photograph was torn away), is a key area within the practice of researching hidden histories.

### 3.7

**Grey as Metaphor of Occlusion**

Many artists choose to depict occluded histories by using the colour grey as a signifier of remembrance, memory and absence. Colour theorist Johannes Itten observed, “Colour is life, for a world without colour seems dead. As a flame produces light. Light produces colour.”\(^{349}\) In his colour spheres, grey is always at the centre – made by mixing any two complimentary colours, but is perceived as unimportant. Colour for Itten, represents spirituality.


He concluded that grey was a tint or a shade that he described as being used by bourgeoisie interiors along with beige, mauve and garnet. Richter, in a letter to E. de Wilde, confessed:

> When I painted a few canvases grey I did so because I did not know what I should paint or what there might be to paint… But in time I noticed differences in quality between the grey surfaces and also that these did not reveal anything of a destructive motivation. The picture started to instruct me. By generalizing the personal dilemma they removed it; misery became a constructive statement, became a relative perfection and beauty, in other words, became painting.


He further suggested that:

> Grey is the epitome of non-statement. It does not draw feelings or associations; it is actually neither visible nor invisible… And like no other colour it is suitable to illustrating “nothing”…

Francis Guerin quotes Richter as stating, “Grey monochrome paintings were the only way for me to paint concentration camps – it is impossible to paint the pain and misery of life except maybe in grey.”

Jasper Johns has also used grey in many of his images, making the *Gray series* of 120 works in different mediums in 2007. His remark that grey had the same effect as a school uniform appears to suggest that the use of that colour reduces individual personality to that of a group, i.e., a generalised narrative rather than a specific one. Barthes described a daguerreotype in 1843, depicting a man and woman, that had been tinted. He connects this to what he described as his colour resistance: “that in the same way, colour is a coating applied later onto the original truth of the black-and-white photograph. For me, colour is an artifice, a cosmetic (like the kind used to paint corpses).”

Thus grey is perceived by many painters as a signifier of loss, absence, and erased memory. The monotone evokes an echo of one of the cultural aspects of the reception of black and white photography – the colours themselves acting as expressions of historical erasure. The artists selected have all represented some aspect of a hidden history. Sometimes those histories were not unrecorded, but were rather not acknowledged or given a comparable sense of importance to other narrative threads in their societies' cultural histories.

### 3.8 Conclusion
Artists working after 1940 have been influenced by the political and historical aftermath of the Second World War in terms of its effect not just on their own family histories but also on the heritage of fascism and genocide that it bequeathed. This experience has shaped both the selection of their choices of artistic exploration and the techniques they have deployed. The selected range of artists, some of whose work has been cited here, includes traditional painters, installation artists, film artists and sculptors. Each has explored some aspect of occluded history. Some, such as Hughie O’Donoghue, Barbara Loftus, Chino Otsuka and Nicky Bird, have examined family history.

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while others, including William Kentridge, Gerhardt Richter, Marlene Dumas and Jeremy Deller, have explored political histories that have been misrepresented or hidden.

There are very different strategies chosen by these artists. Divergent practices are sometimes employed by the same artist in different works. Re-enactment has been used by Deller, Bird, Kentridge, and Loftus. Another group, including O’Donoghue, Johns, Richter, and Kentridge, disrupt the picture space by interrogating, dismembering, transforming and partially covering it. Painters making colour choices have often used the colour grey to represent absence.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the cultural hegemony of the current age serves to preserve existing social divisions, and a central part of that hegemony involves the selection of what is to be remembered as part of a national tradition, providing a community’s sense of self-identity, and much of the self-identity of the individuals within that community. The presentation of “history” as a narrative of progress, and as a linear process that results, or culminates, in the present, is a fabrication that erases the history of conflict and division, serving specific individual and corporate interests. The past is constructed as a line of ascent rather than as a record of conflict and contradiction. It is constructed as the narrative of progress for everyone. The histories of the Other, of the groups, class and peoples that make up the other are negated. It is this fundamental injustice, this obliteration of lives made invisible, that these artists have been attempting to reveal. Their practices use metaphors of absence, obliteration, blurring, distortion, destruction, covering over or draining colour from the picture’s surface. It is from them, and from their techniques, that my experimental work found its inspiration.
Chapter 4
The Art Practice

My work is inspired by history and by the sense of place and community. I am interested in experimenting with different mediums. I have worked in the community all my life. 357

4.1 Introduction
While official history is easy to discover and consequently depict, those histories without record are harder to reveal. The decision to research elements of the occluded working class of Kingston using strategies of visual practice was always bound to be challenging.

Until recently it was the novel that, as an art form, had successfully constructed occluded histories. Toni Morrison in Beloved explored the problem of revealing histories that have no, or very little, actual record. Writing in The Art and Craft of Memoir, she suggested the process of returning to an original place involves discovering an “emotional memory”, 358 and describes the resulting rush of imagination as “flooding”. 359 She argued for a literary form of re-enactment, and therefore recreated an alternative history as an experiment in what she describes as re-membering: using fiction to reconstruct a past that is “invisible”. My research intention is to discover if re-membering can be recreated using images rather than words.

When considering how to begin my research practice, I was aware that in some studio-based research many different artefacts have been used, including film. Often new and experimental insights are used as research tools. Laurel Richardson observed that one of the problems with qualatative research, according to Positivists, is its failure to meet some or all of the usual positivistic criteria of truth; at the same time, it is also questioned by reflexive

357 lorainemonkartmatters.com/about-1. Last accessed 26th August 2015.
359 Ibid.
ethnographies because “every setting is socially stratified”. Richardson’s suggestion for identifying validity was to use experimental writing. She described how “working within the ideology of doubt the author positions themselves as knower and teller”, recognising that “our self is always present”. She suggested that researchers using autobiography are relieved because they don’t have to worry about speaking for the other “because the other is themselves”. This is perhaps an easy solution to the major philosophical question – how and whose experience might be represented. It is reflective of a postmodern philosophy that interprets power in terms of solitary events, rather than in specific ideology. In its favour is the argument that the identification of the sublime is based on a recognition that a singular experience can reflect, or at least connect with, a universal experience. What is useful in Richardson’s statement is that artists, rather than beginning with some claim to objectivity, are instead clear in their position of partiality. So while striving for impartiality and objective detachment, I am aware that in seeking a representation of a visual history there will be an element of autobiography within my work.

Previously, while conducting an art commission at a hospice in Ipswich, I used both painting and sound installation, to attempt to respond to the brief of incorporating memories of place that reflected the experience of both staff and patients. The final work was a response to the people in the hospice, its place in the community in Ipswich, and the memories and images that were most treasured by the patients, families and staff. A script was compiled from the contributions collected and an actor was commissioned to recite the place names and objects that were most valued. The sound installation was designed as a loop on headphones, which could be placed anywhere within the hospice or in the community. The other response to the memories was a series of acrylic paintings I created representing one of the most popular memories, that of holding hands. The paintings were exhibited in St

361 Ibid.  
362 Ibid.
Elisabeth’s as part of a strategy to connect the hospice to the wider community and combat the fear of terminal illness.\textsuperscript{363}

\textbf{4.2 Research Decisions}

As part of my research strategy I decided to take particular account of Walter Benjamin’s method of collecting historical knowledge in \textit{the Arcades Project}. In making the decision to explore the rejected, he opened up the possibility of transformation: “the rags, the refuse – these I will not inventory but allow, in the only way possible, to come into their own: by making use of them”.\textsuperscript{364}

In the \textit{Arcades Project}, Benjamin argued for the breaking of the continuum of history so that it was not linear but fragmentary, suggesting that “knowledge comes only in lightning flashes.”\textsuperscript{365} It was a method of historical investigation that was based on actively seeking the rejected, the displaced and the unvalued.

I began the research with the intention to explore sites of presence, protest, representation and memory, paying particular attention to the concept and creation of memory, commemoration, and how culture and identity are shaped. I started investigating memory in relation to memorialisation, specifically acts of commemoration, inspiration or of political resistance. I considered the possible construction of images that could be two- or three-dimensional objects, both permanent and transitory. I began to list possible sites of excavation, including graffiti and wall murals such as those in Belfast. My intention was to explore ideas of representation by investigating the process of creation for gender specific memorials often constructed by communities and individuals deeply rooted in age-old traditions and mentalities.

\textsuperscript{363} Art Commission Report for St Elisabeth’s Hospice Ipswich. 2011.  
\textsuperscript{364} Benjamin, W. \textit{The Arcades of Memory}, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, 1999, p.460.  
\textsuperscript{365} \textit{Ibid.} p.456.
I had observed that memory studies can sometimes confuse memory, commemoration and representation, leading to assumptions that individual and social culture is the same, only on a different scale. Commemoration focuses on traumatic experience, perhaps because in the process, it gives meaning in the eyes of the victims. Because of this, commemoration is often seen in terms of war memorials, whose depictions are often gendered. I was inspired by books that had deliberately taken as the theme of their research the lives of working class Londoners. Particularly Henry Mahew’s London Labour and the London Poor, Jack London’s People of the Abyss Orwell’s Down and Out in London and Paris and The Road to Wigan Pier. Each book conscious of recording the day to day lives of the working class. I wanted to be as effective in reversing the occlusion and placing their lives in the centre of a narrative rather than being at the outer edges of visual depictions or absent completely.

Examining the work of social historian Hilda Kean, who collected together a community history of the East End of London, I considered artists creating site-specific installations such as Alison Marchant and Olivia Gude, who concentrate their research and inspiration using the lives of ordinary people.

When working on the images of Kingston, I was aware of Richardson’s argument of partiality, in particular because the single builder in the garden was my father. (Man in Garden, 1938). He was also one of the builders in Builders Gang and Two Builders. In each image there was a partiality, but in Man in Garden there was also the representation of the universal experience of taking domestic pleasure in nature through gardens and animals. In the Builders series there were the challenges and pleasures of comradeship and work, crossing the barriers of time and space. In all three of the photographic images that I used there existed the active creation by the sitters of their portrait identity. In Man in Garden this can be seen in the casual pose, that could be described as dandyism. In The Builders and Two Builders there is a depiction of determination and strength. All three images examine the depiction of masculinity. The use of grey attempts to distance the work and
create a sense of the unreal, thus emphasising that it is not a recreation of history as that is past and cannot be duplicated.

The paintings *The Tanners* and *The Tanner* also explore the depiction of male manual workers while once again using grey scale and re-exploring the men’s projection of themselves as workers in a 1930s tannery. Foucault’s seeking out the lives of infamous men, Thompsons’ “obsolete” hand-loom weaver and Benjamin’s seeking out the rejected and undervalued were at the forefront of my exploration of the men of the *Workhouse* paintings. The series consists of four small images of the four inmates that were most clearly identifiable in the only existing photograph in the collection, and were made specifically to give them the individual space to be seen as men who lived, worked, loved and died. These were men who had been judged by society as failures, as the Other, merely because they were poor. The larger painting explored the image in more detail by giving a substance of size. I also explored the picture surface through disruption, scratching out and the use of Richter’s blurring of the image, which, combined with the use of grey scale, provide further distancing. The grey was used as Richter suggested, not just as absence but as a representation of that which cannot be spoken: the workhouse regime and its tools of oppression were a form of both physical and mental torture used against the poor and the powerless.

The seeking of the overlooked and the rejected was also used in my seeking out of representatives of the working class in the photographs of important local historic events, such as the opening of bridges, fountains and swimming pools. The photographs are representative of the idea of progress in the nineteenth century that the powerful wanted to be presented. They consisted of depictions of bourgeoisie men in suits and hats in the centre of the images, while the working class crowded around the edges of the scene. It was in such photographs that I found the images for *Woman and Boy 1* and *2*, standing at the edges of the crowd looking at a wrecked automobile.
4.3 Background Influences

While devising my research question, I decided to narrow my focus to that of Kingston, an area of South West London where I grew up, and would years later return. Because of the oral histories that I had heard as a child, the place was always important to me. But the area was also problematic, as the changes to the urban landscape, to the buildings and functions of the town, had occluded the history of previous generations. Any sense of the place as a small rural town had been lost in the miasma of the twentieth century suburbs.

As we have seen, Stuart Hall suggested two ways in which cultural identity is constructed: either by sharing immediate surroundings or having shared cultural experiences (which can be trans-generational), or by groups developing an understanding of their own “history”, and how they understand themselves within it. He observed that “we all write from a particular place and time, from a history and a culture which is specific”.\(^\text{366}\) I recognise that my identity is split between the working-class culture that I grew up in and the middle-class middle class life I have lived since going to university.

Before becoming a practicing artist I had been a community worker, researcher and lecturer. Ever since I visited an art gallery for the first time when I was seventeen,\(^\text{367}\) art history has fascinated me. Wherever I travelled I always visited galleries and museums. I started my working life being employed on projects for the unemployed and then, working for the GLC, advising people of their rights to basic benefits. I became a political researcher, based in Parliament, and then a lecturer in politics sociology and art history. It was at that time I began to learn to formally paint and draw. Having learnt my skills and gained postgraduate qualifications in art practice, I taught painting at a London Community College. In deciding to explore hidden


\(^\text{367}\) An enrichment activity to the Tate (now Tate Britain) organised by Ewell Further Education College.
history I determined to use the research skills that I had developed in both theoretical knowledge and art practice.

As a working-class girl in Kingston my experience was rooted in the experience of one class oppressing the other, and one gender oppressing the other. There was the world of the everyday, in which working class people worked often six days a week for wages that were adequate for paying council house rent and going out to the pub a few nights a week. Times got hard when there was no work, or when work got more difficult because workers became sick and old. Ordinary life was doubly oppressive for girls, whose chances and choices were more limited than those of boys – their future work even more mundane and less lucrative. Being a secretary was an ambition, because it meant a girl was on the lookout for a good husband, “a catch”. Not only was the everyday world dreary, dull, hard and uninspiring, but conversely fantasy worlds were little better. From nursery rhymes to Mallory Towers books by Enid Blyton, and from films such as Seven Brides for Seven Brothers to TV programmes such as Thunderbirds, it was clear the role of men and women were as set and immutable as those of the roles between the main classes.

The biographical information is important because, as Richardson suggests, the self is always present within research. It is clearly important when attempting to deconstruct or read artworks, particularly as I have made a deliberate decision to use my knowledge, i.e., that which I learnt in my family and within the curriculum I was taught, both approved and hidden, and that which I learnt as an academic and art practitioner.

The sense of place, I believe, is also crucial to studying working-class lives and identities. The loss of identifiable places and spaces, I think, is part of the erosion of the traditions of the working class. This is another area that I would like to further explore. I have examined some theoretical exploration of place, in particular its relation to the creation of art. The working-class community that I was born into was connected to a sense of the land, in particular farms,
villages and towns. The intention of families like mine was always to build roots – to stay in one specific place.

Kingston did not become officially part of Greater London until 1963. When I was a child, my parents would still refer to “going up the village” (meaning New Malden, the part of Kingston Borough where both I and my mother grew up). Going to London was an awfully big adventure. I first went on my seventh birthday; I didn’t go again until I was thirteen (Kingston is twelve miles from Charing Cross).

The subject choice of the visual representation of working-class culture and its occlusion was both an intellectual and personal one. My undergraduate degree, and first MA in politics and government, had meant I had found many arguments to explain my family experience. Studying art history and art practice meant I had learnt a new language of visual representation.

4.4 Art Practice
One of my early art works was a series of temporary structures and interventions that briefly commemorated the spaces where women had lived, but were unmarked. Kentridge had observed that “[i]n the same way that there is a human act of dismembering the past there is a natural process in the terrain through erosion, growth, dilapidation that also seeks to blot out events”.

The works were made in response to the experience of visiting the Necropolis in Glasgow. The horizon stretched across, filled with thousands of stone-built memorials to the men of the city. My immediate response was to construct a temporary memorial made of natural debris to the unrecorded lives of women. In each of the other sites I adopted the same practice of constructing a temporary memorial that was destroyed in days by natural interventions. The works were made in part as a response to the Lacanian idea of “lack” and the work of the French feminists Luce Irigary and Julia Kristeva. When I began

researching I thought that I would continue using a feminist practice to extend the exploration of memorials. Soon the research became much wider than just that of memorialisation. The use of temporary, natural structures felt inadequate in exploring the process of occlusion and in revealing some trace of hidden history.

When beginning the project, the works of contemporary artists that inspired my work, elements of which I thought I would use and seek to extend, included Cornelia Parker’s *Cold Dark Matter* (1991), Orlan’s *Actions ORLAN-Corps: MesuRages d’institutions et des rues* (1974–1983), Marina Abramovich’s *Bosnian War Remembrance* (2002), Rachel Whiteread’s *JudenPlatz Holocaust memorial* (2000), and Louise Bourgeoisie’s *Maman* (1999).

Each of these artists used artistic interventions in acts of commemoration. Parker, Whiteread and Bourgeoisie used sculpture/installation, while Orlan and Abramovich used performance.

A physical three-dimensional object that occupies space is a more obvious choice for commemoration. The practices of installation and performance come direct from the twentieth-century movements of Futurism, Dada and Surrealism, and represent a significant part of contemporary practice. Installation was the medium I had used in my previous work. As my research progressed, however, I found that I was exploring and returning to painting, a medium that had been predicted to be dead in 1839. A personal reason for my choice was that I recognised that painted images of the human form were both intellectually and aesthetically interesting. The problem of using figurative, representational painting for radical research is that it is an art form perceived as both archaic and conservative by many ordinary critics and collectors after 1945. Representational painting returned to favour with acrylic paint as pop art became popular, but painting’s obvious limitations constrain its use as a medium for exploration of confectional art.
4.5 Kingston Museum and Heritage Centre

I began my research by investigating what images were exhibited in the local museum. I then investigated the photographic collection of the Heritage Centre, discovering that there was little representation of working-class lives in the collection. The important part of the research came not in identifying the lack but in questioning why this lack existed, and how visual representation might redress that balance. In the Heritage Centre, the photographs in photo books and the notebooks and maps felt unloved, rejected, like Benjamin’s “Rags”.

In examining the oral history transcriptions in the heritage centre, I found that there were various sites that had previously been significant for the community, but no traces of them could be found in the streets where they once existed nor was there any representation of them in the local museum. Some examples of these include: the site of the laundry in New Malden, where women worked before World War I, the site of the American Army club during World War II and the Eighth Army camp in Bushey Park. There were also the tanneries on the bank of the Thames, the coaching inns in the marketplace, and the many pubs and eight breweries that stood within the town at the beginning of the twentieth century. There was also the Clattern Bridge, which still exists but has no record for passersby of its history as a place where women accused of witchcraft were immersed in water in the seventeenth century.

The disruption and distortion of identity that resulted first from the Industrial Revolution, and then from the urbanisation of large areas of England, changed communities’ and individuals’ sense of identity; however, there is not time within this research to explore this further. Rapid building after the Second World War and road expansion in the fifties and sixties meant that neighbourhoods changed rapidly. Streets that once contained buildings that reflected a sense of time passing (the buildings having been built in different centuries) were destroyed to be replaced by one style of later twentieth-century buildings.
I became interested in exploring the lost spaces and, in particular, the sense of loss experienced by working-class families like my own, who moved from Putney and the East End of London at the end of the nineteenth century. They moved to what must have seemed like the "country". Kingston was at that time a small market town with tanneries and breweries, with a few nearby villages and hamlets surrounded by fields and farms. Within a few years, the building work that was both of my grandfathers' trades, helped construct the suburbs, destroying the farms where my father had worked as a boy and the meadows where my mother had roamed as a child. Within a generation the houses and shops covered the fields and became a place where memory, image and identity were recreated by the media rather than by the local community or its environment. By the late twentieth century, working-class community networks in these habitats were broken up and lost, replaced by the working-class simulacrum of Coronation Street two nights a week.\(^{369}\)

The Kingston Heritage Centre had a collection of maps of local streets and buildings, which meant I could trace how the streets had emerged and how some buildings had been demolished or changed. In 1934 the course of the local stream, the Hogsmill, had been forced underground to enable cars to avoid driving through the ford that had run through the middle of the town for nearly a hundred years. Previously, carts and horses rushing through the water had made the ford a major site of interest for adults and children, who called it "the Splash".\(^{370}\) I found one photograph in the heritage collection depicting a young carter driving through the Splash. I used the photograph to make a number of drawings and two paintings. The exploration and reinterpretation of the image, using traditional oil paint and canvas in tones ranging from black to white, became the first in a series of paintings constructed from found photographs in the museum.

### 4.6 The Sense of Belonging

The Industrial Revolution had forced workers to the cities to find work. Established working-class families would often stay working and living

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\(^{369}\) I.T.V. series first broadcast in 1960.

together for generations because of the support and help that working-class culture provided (as evidenced by many sociological studies in the twentieth century, the most well-known being Wilmot and Young’s *Family and Kinship in East London*).³⁷¹

In her book *The Lure of the Local* (1997), Lucy Lippard observed that commemoration can “interweave pressing issues concerning land, culture and place with the possibility of an art boosting stronger contextual ties and audience access”.³⁷² Her research provides many examples of public art commemorating both people and events. One example is that of Olivia Gude, a member of Chicago’s Public Art group, who created a wall mural containing images and text of passersby to whom she had asked “Where are you coming from? Where are you going?” Their reply and their images are the subject of the mural. I was particularly drawn to the idea of the representation of the “ordinary” person rather than the subjects of so many public commemorations, who are celebrated for the accident of their birth, their gender and their class position.

Marcus Verhagen, in an *Art Monthly* article on site specificity, suggested that earlier ideas that site-specific works might impede the process of commodification were naive but still retain a certain appeal. He suggested that artistic projects that revolve around specific locations and communities could be seen today as countering the detrimental effects of globalisation.³⁷³ I reflected on whether this was likely to be either a consequence of, or an implicit intention behind, any artwork that I produced.

This is important to my practice because art that is based in the community is, in part, about beginning a dialogue with, and connecting to, both the social and historical world and local culture. Miwon Kwon observed that despite alternative identities and imagined places the desire to be connected to actual

places continues, and our psychic attachment to places remains, creating and shaping our sense of identity. She suggests this is “a means of survival”. Survival, in this case, is meant as a form of psychic survival.

This idea of identity linked to a physical space was one I wanted to explore: both the object of the “local” and its personification in memory. I began looking at (and collecting) old books in bookshops and junk shops, particularly ones with illustrations – many half destroyed by age and misuse. The exploration of historic books was connected to the post-global revolution in technology, where books are perceived by many as redundant because of alternative methods of communication, storage and storytelling. The numbers printed, meant they became autonomous individual objects ensuring that however many oppressive regimes attempted to burn them, some texts remained. Digital books, have no autonomy because they have no individual existence are therefore not safe from total censorship or destruction. This thread of research, though important, became impossible to pursue without changing fundamentally my central investigation.

4.7 Women’s History
At first I prioritised women’s history, researching in particular the history of women in the area. There was only one photograph I could find of women being politically active. It was a photograph of the opening of a suffragette office in Kingston in August 1914. Nationally, the WSPU ceased all activities against the British government on 10th August 1914 until the end of WWI. The Kingston office could have only operated for a few short weeks. I made some drawings from the image. I also went to the Co-operative offices in Manchester to research and photograph all of the copies of the Woman’s Outlook magazine published during the twentieth century. I still have the images I took from that time. However it became obvious that in order to proceed I needed to choose between prioritising Class or Gender.

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I found myself drawn back to the local history of the working class where I lived and where my family had lived and died. The Heritage Centre had a few images of working-class people, nearly always portrayed as a crowd behind a great person or persons or attending a local event – they were never the subject. The occlusion of the working class was so complete, and happened in such a relatively small period of time, 1890–1990, that it was a very tight and clear project to investigate.

4.8 Photography
Photography is fundamental to my practice; I use photography to record all my work and I use photography in my research. It is through photographs that I often first see most contemporary artworks. I research using photographs in collections, in libraries and in books. I take photographs as aide memoirs for writing, as well as directly recording artworks in exhibitions. I take photographs of people and places as souvenirs, and I take photographs to make artwork and to record its progress, as well as to make a visual recording of an image that I plan to reinterpret as a painting.

In the essay, "How Fast Does It Go?" John Berger observed that:

All photographs are there to remind us of what we forget. In this – as in other ways – they are the opposite of paintings. Paintings record what the painter remembers. Because each one of us forgets different things, a photo more than a painting may change its meaning according to who is looking at it.375

Old photographs of people represent both the familiar and the extraordinary; photographs are objects and subjects, both objective and subjective. It was in the few photographs of working-class people that existed within the Kingston collection that I could find the trace of hidden history. My intention was to see the occluded as the most important figures within the picture space.

Berger, in *About Looking*, suggested photography should be incorporated into social and political memory instead of memories being allowed to “atrophy.” He proposed that the photographer, instead of being a reporter to the world, became a recorder for those involved in the events of the photograph. In my work I attempted to be not just an artist merely reproducing the image, but I attempted to actively represent the occluded within the action of the narrative.

Roland Barthes, in *Camera Lucida*, observed that “[p]hotography is at the intersection of two quite distinct procedures; one of a chemical order: the action of light on certain substances”, and that “the photograph creates my body or mortifies it”. These observations, identifying the materiality of the photograph, posits it against the effect that it creates. The photograph holds the trace not just of the subject, but also the history of a moment in time, measured by how long the shutter was opened. In looking at found photographs, Barthes identified the fact that there is already another chemical process going on: that of decay, of fading and disappearance, an act of dissolving, an act of both metamorphosis and of rendering invisible. This act of dissolving and metamorphosing can be creative as well as destructive. In the age of the digital photograph, the physical processes of the analogue photograph have become immediately nostalgic yet contain the possibility of a physical transformation that can be dependent on chance (how the chemicals work in the developing pan; the physical manipulation of the apertures). I began to collect old cameras, and to experiment with black and white photography using analogue film, specifically to explore the accidental and unexpected. By using disruption and obfuscation of the picture space I hoped to metamorphose the image and its interpretation.

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4.9 Painting Practice.

I chose eventually to work in the medium of painting despite its unpopularity with many contemporary critics and academics. Jason Gaiger, in *Aesthetics & Painting*,\(^{378}\) suggested that there are two challenges to painting. The first is the “painting is dead” argument, which is made more pressing because digital photography is even more flexible, cheaper, faster and adaptable than analogue photography. It is also ubiquitous, which creates an expectation that it is natural to use photographic imagery, rather than paint.

The second challenge to painting is the apparent ending of abstract painting. Abstraction appeared to be the only route that painting had left after 1945. After 1970, “neither formalism nor Greenberg’s historicist account of modernist painting commanded widespread assent”.\(^{379}\)

I made a conscious decision to make to work using paint. I knew that this was a difficult decision as contemporary practice is much more receptive to practices of Installation, photography and film. Painting is perceived by many as essentially a conservative practice, inspired by conservative traditionalism and by its suitability to become a consumer object in an aggressively capitalist art market.

Gaiger suggested that painting became relevant again when it used photography to construct a new image. For artists such as Gerhardt Richter, painting from photographs “not only offered a way of re-introducing figurative content, it also enabled artists to address some of the complex issues surrounding pictorial representation”.\(^{380}\) He quotes Richter as saying that when he started experimenting with photography after 1963, he found that it offered him “a new view, free of all the conventional criteria I had always

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\(^{379}\) Ibid. p.138.
\(^{380}\) Ibid. p.139.
associated with art”.  

Richter said that it was liberating because “[i]t had no style, no composition, no judgment. It freed me from personal experience”.

I began exploring new ways of working using egg tempera on wooden panels – the wood used in the first experiments came from my great aunt's wardrobe (her only possession of any substance). I also finished the first acrylic portrait of figures in the crowd from the photograph I had discovered in the heritage collection from 1890. I also completed a large acrylic canvas (90cm x 90cm). This was comprised of figures around a restaurant table, and was inspired by the Tate exhibition *The Dark Tower: Myth and Magic in British Art between the Wars*. I began making a series of pen and ink drawings from photographs, and experimented with copper plate engraving.

4.10 Portraiture

Carolyn Christov Bakargiev, in her essay *The Painter and the Model*, suggested that Edouard Manet developed the idea of instantaneity, an idea of capturing what you see in one go. She suggested that traditional portraiture was never just the figure alone but represented a relationship between two people – the painter and the model. Therefore, what is painted is the relationship. This is different to a photograph, in which a model performs for the camera. In my work with found photography of strangers, I decided to try to establish a relationship with them, or at least an empathic connection.

In his introduction to *The Painting of Modern Life*, Hans Ulrich Obrist observed of the artists working with photographic images:

> Beyond forging a telling chronicle of the times, these artists proposed that the painting could constitute a means of

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thinking about the making and reading of images as a paramount activity of modern life.\textsuperscript{385}

Therefore artists are now making a sociological, rather than just an historical, recording.

4.11 Kingston Photographs.

When I started my research, I immediately found that there were very few images that existed in Kingston’s collection. It was then a question of how the images could be created as well as replicated. One choice was to visualise the empty spaces where they were not. My main research tool became examining the few photographs in the heritage collection. I photographed every image that contained working-class people. This included searching for crowds of working-class people, as they were not the main focus for the newspaper photographer. They did not fall into the category of important persons or active participants in the theatre of local politics. Instead they are one of many in a crowd, peeping over the shoulders of others.

The crowd scenes included a group pictured at the opening of the freeing of the toll bridge, a crowd looking at the first ever car wreck in Kingston, a group of tanners in 1930, and a crowd witnessing the laying of the foundation stone for the Coronation Baths in 1893. Using these images, I produced a set of paintings on canvas (30cm x 30cm) using acrylic paint. They were not very successful because of the size of the individual canvases, the painting of the figures, and the failure of acrylic paint to carry the subject.

The photographs used were faded or indistinct, making it difficult to increase the image size, and therefore many of the faces I used were unreadable. I decided that either I could make a representative face by using other models, or I could omit the face. I was reluctant to represent them as faceless – as if I was reinforcing or reproducing their occlusion. Toni Morrison is successful in creating full characters in her remembering because her heroines are not

faceless. Sethe is a fully realised character. Morrison goes further by giving life to a ghost through which the occluded become real.

The second problem with the first set of paintings I produced was that they were too small. The subjects clearly needed more space. It was enough in life that they were either in the back row of pictures or absent altogether. They demanded a space of their own.

The final problem was that I felt acrylic paint was inadequate for the subject. If I was exploring the lack of working-class imagery, compared to the huge, celebratory oil paintings of the bourgeoisie, acrylic paint did not have the weight. Acrylic’s properties were not what I needed – they are excellent for use in photo-realism (which I did not need and could not use), and their multiplicity of hues was redundant as I had chosen to work in monochrome. Huey O’Donoghue, Barbara Loftus and Hans Richter had all used oil paint in their practice re-interpreting photographic Images. I decided that I should also use oil rather than acrylic paints.

I returned to the few family photographs I had of my family before the Second World War. There were a handful: ten each of my mother and father (it was not until the late 1960s and the advent of the Colour Brownie camera that my parents’ collection multiplied to forty images.) There were no photographs of my grandfathers, but there were four of my grandmothers (one each as young women, one each as older women) and three depicting three uncles.

4.12 Family Occlusion
I thought that several photographs of my father had potential for the project. An unknown photographer had captured the image of my father and his workmates as part of a builder’s gang. Judging by his age, the photos were probably taken just before 1939. There were also some photographic images from his time in the engineer’s section of the Eighth Army. There are no images from his time in the bomb disposal squad. There was also one surviving picture of him is as a younger man standing in a garden, holding a cat.
The artists Chino Otsuka and Barbara Loftus both use reconstruction in their work. In each case they used relatives within the picture narrative. In Osaka’s photographs it was her mother. In Loftus’s work, images of both her mother, her father and grandparents. Otsuka used Photoshop techniques while Loftus used photography to create images that in one case she constructed to look like copies of eighteenth-century silhouettes. I resolved to investigate the degree to which these techniques could be applied not just in relation to the general issue of memory, genealogy and personal identity, but also to the question of how the generality of a whole situation, the abstract notion of a common class position, and the role of that class in the making of history could be depicted. The issue was how invisibilities of Kingston’s history could be represented, and the degree to which the transformation of private, and necessarily individual, images could operate as expressions of an abstract category such as class. If they could be represented and operate as such, then this might provide the basis for a studio-based (as opposed to theoretical or philosophical) critical iconography.
4.13 The Paintings

(All Images are printed in large format, in Volume 2 of this Thesis.)

Man in Garden paintings.

I used the found photograph of my father with a cat, taken in an unknown garden in the late 1930s. It is likely it was either the garden at the back of his mother’s house at 100 Longfellow Road, Worcester Park, or the garden at 69 The Crescent, New Malden, my grandmother’s council house. I decided to work using oils on a very large canvas using the photograph as an inspiration for a large-scale black and white painting. I had never been taught how to use oil paints, so it took some time to learn. I found them surprisingly responsive to what I wanted to achieve once I learnt the techniques regarding mediums and layering. I made two versions of this image.
The choice of image was made because the image was both personal and historical: he was a working-class man who worked in the building trade all his life – this being both a sentimental identification and a matter of record of his role in the construction of the built environment of the borough. The position of the figure is arranged, and designed by him, in the moment of the exposure. He is the personification of masculinity: the swagger, unmissable as the core of the image, posed but simultaneously expressed in the choice of attire – he is wearing (or is decorated expressively with) white trousers. The naked chest and arms revealed a man of great strength, yet the cat in his arms was symbolic of gentleness.

White trousers were a new fashion item in the early twentieth century. The colour and cut of sailors’ attire was adapted by the upper classes as leisure wear in the 1920s. They were used by actors and singers in films of the 1920s and 1930s.
Photographs can be sites of disjuncture, whereby they act as the “punctum”, or individually they can involve the creation of false memories. Although, in parts, the detail on the photograph was clear, the cat in the image is indistinct. I was left with the vacancy created by the indistinct image in the middle of both canvases.

One summer morning I asked my son, Callum, to pick up our cat, which was sitting beside him, so that I might take a photograph of the cat to use as a secondary source. The resulting photographic image meant that, in that moment of standing in the doorway, with the sun and shadows, Callum was in the same position as had been my father. My father had been standing in the sunlight, without a shirt and smoking; my son then adopted the same position, echoing that of my father from seventy-five years previously. Using this later photograph, I created a large painting using the same canvas size as the previous painting.

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Man in Garden 2013.
Oil on canvas, 2015. (90 x 70cm)

When it was finished I did not return to the first painting to use the photograph to get a better likeness of the cat. Having painted the second image it seemed right to leave the first image as unclear as it had been in the faded photograph. This is still a contradiction I haven't fully resolved. In theoretical works, a concept can be represented by any object or lack of it. In a painting that may or may not be symbolic, if it is representational, then can it have areas of both abstraction and representation? In Jasper Johns' work on the photographs of Francis Bacon, all of the image space becomes more abstracted as he works on each new image.

I decided to experiment with digital photographic manipulation using the photographs of my father and son in the garden. I used digital manipulation to take my father's image into the contemporary garden space while transporting the current young man's image back into the garden of the 1930s.
The resulting images, had an element of the uncanny, which was very near the result I was seeking.

I observed, when I reviewed the images, both the paintings and the photographs and their reception, just as Osuko’s and Prouvost’s images are made more interesting when the narrative of familial belonging is explained by a written explanation, the image could only be fully interpreted by viewers by providing textual information.

Conversely, by not explaining the context or history, the viewer is left to make their own explanation. Does an image fail, as pure image, to convey its intent without the supplementary text that would contextualise and declare its aim? Or is it more powerful, when sited as an intervention, to have images that are uncontextualised? If the images were simply to appear in an exhibition area that normally reflects the bourgeoisie art world, the exhibition would be a celebration of the images of a variety of such figures, drawing from as wide a spectrum of images of skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled occupations as can be discovered or recreated through re-staging. But by appearing in safe space
are they not contained and neutralised? I concluded that if the images were part of an intervention that appeared directly in the Kingston Museum or Town Hall, then depending on the number and scale of the works there would be an argument to not need an explanation. My intention was to create as heroic a pose as would be feasible, in oil on canvas, and with as confident and challenging a gaze at the viewer as might be expected of the painterly heroisation of the Mayors and Aldermen.

The important point for my work in this series and the others that I created is that I couldn't have made the images without having reflected on the process of histories that are hidden. They were made to examine class occlusion and to actively and determinedly seek out working-class lives.

![Image](91x348 to 221x480)

*Woman and Boy 1.*
Oil on Canvas, 2013. (50 x 40cm)

In seeking more images of the infamous within the collection I found a photograph from 1893 that was taken of a crowd looking at the damage resulting from the first recorded car accident in Kingston. An army officer had been driving on Kingston Hill and crashed the car into a tree when he was forced to avoid a horse and cart in the road. The sight of such a wonder had obviously drawn a large crowd, the young and old standing together in the town centre. I made various drawings and paintings from the different combination of individuals. The most successful was one of a woman with a boy standing beside her. They appear to be strangers to one another. After
several versions, I used Richter’s technique of pulling the oil paint across the picture surface to achieve a sense of distance and separateness. This gave a ghostly quality to the image.

![Image](image-url)

*Woman and Boy 2.*
Oil on Canvas, 2014. (50 x 40cm)

Gaiger suggested that painting from photographs had freed artists like Richter from issues of composition, which allowed them to concentrate instead on texture and tonal values. In my experience texture and tonal values have always been important, but so too is the chosen subject. Using a photograph has the same elements of choice within it as does painting from life – the decision of how to frame and what subject to use is still an artistic choice. No artist will merely replicate the found image. The use of photographs that were often badly focused and centred, and taken for domestic purposes, suggested the theme of the banal and overlooked, but often in Richter’s paintings there is also a strong narrative underlying the supposed accidental nature of the work. Geiger suggested that “Richter’s strategy of both revealing and obscuring the photographic original evokes the processes of remembrance and forgetting that characterise our ambivalent relation to the past”.

Barthes recognised that photographs are sites of memory. Their usage can alter recollection, giving more prominence to those incidents that have a

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389 Ibid. p.141.
physical life by having been photographed. The incidents in the photographs that had survived, by fate or chance, to be placed in the Kingston collection are random. The action within the photographs becomes (by the photographs’ survival) important for reasons that had nothing to do with the original subject matter of the images. My intervention and creation of a new image can reveal a site of memory that was previously overlooked.

The only existing photograph of men in Kingston workhouse.

**Work House Paintings (2013)**

In *The Life of Infamous Men*, Foucault suggested he wanted to examine “lives that are though they hadn’t been, that survive only from the clash with a power that wished only to annihilate them”.

Foucault introduced a series of “brief lives encountered by chance in books and documents”. He describes it as “not a book of history” but as an “[a]nthology of existences”. Foucault’s need to right the infamies of the past articulates the desire to address the injustices of the past, which is central to my work. The men and women that lived and died in the workhouse were very much lives of the infamous in Kingston.

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390 June Sampson Photo collection.
There were only three photographs I could find that depicted the inside of the Kingston Workhouse. One was of an empty corridor. The second was taken in the laundry. The third was taken at a mealtime. This last image depicted six inmates sitting at a meal, alone and isolated on long tables in a cavernous hall designed to accommodate perhaps eighty inmates. The six are supervised by two workhouse staff, who hover over them as the meal is completed. The image echoes Foucault’s observations on discipline and punishment. The constant gaze of the guards on the men, even while eating, reinforces the continuing trajectory of subjection, another form of punishment against the body of the men whose crime is of being poor.
I wanted to give back to the men the dignity and individuality that had not been accorded them, a posthumous gift that would address “the injustices of the past”. I drew and painted each of the inmates, first in small scale and then larger scale. The largest canvas was 60cm x 60cm. *Man with Black Tie* Oil on canvas. I wanted them to have a scale and depth that echoed, even if it did not match, traditional portrait painting. Each of them has their own portrait, and thus a reference to their own unique (unknown) personal narrative. Simultaneously, they become emblematic of a category of people from Kingston’s past. This is a category of historical humanity that is written about in the histories of the period but which is never depicted visually (because it is impossible) in portraiture. Here are the marginalised poor, irrespective of trade or training as well as those devoid of skills, whose identification and incarceration was a key disciplinary tool of social control. Their existence as a group, and their social function as a threat and an intimidation, and their very existences as individuals have been expunged from visual memory.

![Man with Beard](image)

*Man with Beard*. Oil on canvas, 2014 (30 x 25cm)

Their resurrection, or the resurrection of their memory, is constructed of paint and canvas. The location of an exhibition of such images could be the physical sites of the photographs (the workhouse became Kingston Hospital), or the Guildhall or the Market House, the only other suitable historic buildings in the town.

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393 Ibid.
Much later I reworked the images of the workhouse men using Marlene Dumas’s technique of large watercolour painting. Her recent exhibition at Tate Modern displayed her ability to use photography and to change the narrative of the image by using watercolour, which by its nature has an unfinished quality, its effects partly being made by the happenchance of water and paint running into one another. It is also a very quick painterly activity compared with oil painting, with little chance of correcting the image once the paint touches the paper. Her portraits represented the figures as powerful because of their massive scale. The size constitutes a dichotomy from their subject matter. They deliberately represent that which was and is not traditionally represented in heroic scale. The subject matter is mundane; the style and scale are grandiose.
In the images of the men in the workhouse canteen, I wanted to convey the hopelessness that appears in their faces and bodies. To represent the poverty that was endured. In 1894, the guardians’ minutes recorded that “the house was clean and in good condition”, and that “the bread was fairly good”. Some of the men in the receiving ward complained that their clothes had been gnawed by rats. Mr Andrews offered to “point out six or seven rat holes any time the chairman liked”. At another meeting, the workhouse master, Mr Gardiner, reported that three hundred and ninety-four inmates were in residence, and that the workhouse had helped two hundred and forty tramps “during the past fortnight”. At the same meeting it was agreed that all the old women should be given the option of having teapots, and making their own tea. Following allegations that tramps were being ill- treated, the Hampton Parish Overseer, Mr. Austin, moved that “the barrel cages now used as cells for tramps to pick oakum in be pulled down and entirely done away with.” Seven years previously he had found these cages full of tramps, locked in and unable to obey the laws of nature.

![Workhouse Man with Cap. Watercolour, 2015. (50 x 40 cm)](image)

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395 Ibid.
396 Ibid.
397 Ibid.
399 Ibid.
The workhouse records particularly relate to men. The lives of women and children are less recorded and thus far less visible. I discovered that the local funeral parlour in Kingston, Fredrick Paine’s, has records of every person for whom they were paid to hold a funeral. This meant they had records of deaths in the workhouse, including those of women and children. This would be an area that could be explored further.

The Builders Paintings

Kingston Builders Gang, (original photograph) 1938. Personal Collection.
I found several photographs of my father as part of a builders’ gang, taken in 1938. I made various drawings and sketches. From that I made two oil paintings: *The Builders’ Gang*, and *Two Builders*. Both are black and white, and both depict the camaraderie of men working together. I attempted to concentrate on the individual men, though the image wasn’t always clear. In deciding how to crop the images, I am aware how my interpretation affects and redirects the viewer’s gaze, altering what the image is depicting. The scene is representative of the lost culture, tradition and camaraderie of British working-class, traditional labour.

*The Builders Gang 1.*
Oil on canvas, 2014. (70 x 90cm)

*The Builders Gang 2.*
Oil on Linen, 2015. (70 x 90cm)
I then painted a further version of the Builders in 2015, using a much looser style, leaving some of the raw linen unpainted.

In these, as in all my paintings, I chose to use monotone. Like Richter, Tuymans and Johns, I used the Grisaille technique, only occasionally using colour. Grey is perceived as a signifier of loss, absence and erased memory. The monotone evokes an echo of one of the cultural aspects of the reception of black and white photography: the colours themselves acting as expressions of historical erasure.

**The Tanners Paintings**

The only photograph in the Kingston archive that depicts a large group of workmen together is a photograph of a group of tanners posing for the photographer (circa 1930), in front of the tannery works at Portland Road. There are thirty men arranged sitting and standing in their work clothes. I made drawings and sketches of the image before making a small oil painting.

The biggest tannery was in existence in the centre of Kingston by 1664, until it was destroyed by fire in 1963.\textsuperscript{400} The image of blood and slaughter is strong. The smell of death, blood, skin and chemicals must have imbued everyday life in the town. A small tannery existed in Portland Rd, Kingston. It was the workers of this tannery who were depicted in the Heritage Centre’s photograph.\textsuperscript{401} I was interested in representing the men both as individuals and as a group of workers.

\textit{The Tanners 1930. Oil on canvas, 2014. (60 x 46cm)}

\textsuperscript{400}Sampson, J. \textit{The Kingston Book}, Historical Publications Ltd, London, 2006
\textsuperscript{401}Photograph Kingston Heritage Centre Collection. Tannery workers, Portland Rd, 1930, 2014
Foucault observed that representation need not be that which is obvious in the picture space. In his analysis of Diego Velasquez’s *Las Meninas*, He suggested that the absence at the front of the canvas represented the gaze of the model, the painter and the spectator. 402

Stuart Hall in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* suggests their “absence” is represented by their reflection in the mirror at the back.

The meaning of the picture is produced by the complex interplay between *presence* (what you see, the visible) and *absence* (what you can’t see, what has displaced it within the frame). Representation works as much through what is *not* shown, as through what is. 403

For the work on the Tanners Series to proceed, subsequent images will need to be much larger, representing each of the men in heroic scale, preferably 3m x 2m, others 6m x 4m. Framing and hanging would need to replicate the presentation of the images. In a small gallery space, its effect would be that of

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a wall mural. Ideally, however, these images, as with those of the men in the workhouse refectory, could be hung in the same space as those of the town's lineage of mayoral dignitaries. Alternatively, videos of the images fading in and out of clear sight could be projected precisely onto a interior space either in or near the town centre or near to the site of the original tannery. This ongoing project could also, with appropriate funding, project the unlabelled and unnamed images onto the walls of adjacent buildings throughout the hours of darkness, thus invisible during the day and only available to those who seek them behind the shroud of darkness.

Carter Waiting at the Splash.
Oil on canvas, 2013. (50 x 50cm).

I made several versions of this image, never fully achieving what I wanted. The image represented a carter waiting to cross the ford in Eden Street. The Hogsmill river was rerouted in 1934 and the the water diverted underground. Until that time it was a place of excitement for young children and others to drive through at high speed. It was a memory that my father spoke of, as well as being referenced in several oral history references in the heritage collection. 404

**Travellers in the Market Place**

Over the winter of 2014 I began exploring film reconstruction in a manner similar to the work of Jeremy Deller. Having begun working with magic lantern images since May 2014, I experimented with painting on glass slides whose images had been worn away. On the glass, which retained traces of the previous image, I recreated new images using paint. This meant it was a form of palimpsest, an image on paper which has been written upon repeatedly, the original having been rubbed out. For Kentridge, who uses this technique with paper and charcoal, the erasure meant “the possibility of transformation”. This is an excellent metaphor for hidden histories because they are already erased and only the trace is left, and with it the possibility of what can be done to elaborate the trace and to extrapolate from it.

Previously unknown Magic Lantern Slide Image of Kingston Market Place circa 1890-1905

My research uncovered a previously unknown image of Kingston. I was very excited to discover an image of Kingston’s marketplace that was not part of the heritage collection. I discovered the image in a box of magic lantern slides I obtained from an auction house in Nottingham. It was one that I realised (and has been confirmed by the Kingston’s Heritage Centre Officer) was not
held by the Kingston Heritage Centre. The image was recorded sometime between 1890 and 1913.

Within the picture space there are three different groups of figures. The closest is a man in a horse-drawn cart looking at the camera. His cart is parked outside of The Druids Head public house. The second group is far away, standing by the printing office. These men appear middle class, having met in a group for some purpose. The most interesting figures are the two men standing by the Shrubsole monument in the middle foreground, which was a working fountain at that time. They appear to be vagrants who have laid their bags and sticks on the floor in order to rest and drink water. The image distorts space as it makes the distances much further, and yet makes the two vagrants seem much closer.

George Orwell described the life of the tramp in Le Progès Civic (1929), which he later re-edited and published as part of Down and Out in Paris and London (1933). The essay described the lives of beggars in London. He described tramps as wearing clothes that “strike you as grotesque, tattered and revoltingly filthy”. He described the disparate articles of clothing – mostly begged from door to door – as “ill-fitting, too long, too short, too big or too small”. He goes on to describe the clothes as having been repaired as far as possible, with all kinds of patches.

Some of them have no underclothes. Many do not even have socks; after binding their toes in rags, they slide their bare feet into boots whose leather, hardened by sun and rain, has lost all suppleness.

I have both drawn and painted the image of the vagrants. I wanted to re-examine and interrogate the image, inspired by Jasper Johns' interrogation of the photograph of Lucien Freud. By concentrating on the tonal quality of the image, the picture space became more abstracted.

407 Orwell 1929, op. cit.
I then arranged a time, very early on a Sunday morning, for an actor to re-enact the vagrants in the positions they had adopted at the Shrubsole monument/water fountain. I then used the photographs to make new drawings and several paintings. The images achieved a directness, a voracity that connected the contemporary to the past. The next phase would be to reproduce the work on a much larger canvas. Two ways that I would take that image further would be by projecting the image onto one of the walls and by taking the re-enactment one step further by making a film of the tramps interacting (90 seconds or less).
I began experimenting with iPad drawing using the photographs of the men in the workhouse as well as the builders’ gang images and the image of the men in the market. In all I made five images. Using this technique it would be possible for the drawings to be linked together in an animation similar to William Kentridge’s work. The iPad drawings allowed for an expressive form of drawing whose effectiveness is dependent on its simplicity.
When investigating the found photographs, and the ways that they might be altered and displayed, I was conscious of the influence of Nicky Bird’s work, in particular *The Members of the Wedding*, in which she used film to recreate the images from the photograph, making the spectators' point of view that of the photographer, on the one hand, and also that of the stranger's face in the window, peering through, echoing and re-echoing the role of spectator.

In *Making History*, Alex Callinicos suggested that Foucault identified as historical constructs what people assumed were acts of existence but that were, in fact, formed by a specific regime of social practice. The tramps and the other dispossessed of Kingston were not natural occurrences. Their existence and the act of ostracisation and alienation was a social construction. Callinicos uses visual practice to highlight an example of resistance in an image from art history, that of Bruegel’s *Dulle Griet*, which demonstrates the efforts made by human beings to resist and, where possible, to transform a harsh and often unendurable social reality. I believe that this reconfiguration of the imagery in *The Workhouse*, *The Tanners* and *The Builders Gang* is a device that can represents such heroism.

It is my contention that resistance can be inspired by the representation of occluded history and that the images and models created are powerful weapons of inspiration. The erasure of the traces of such lives of resistance

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destroys the ability of the people who come after to resist because they have no previous models of struggle.

4.15 Representing Working Class Occlusion using Painting

In an interview in Art Space (April 2015), Morgan Falconer observed that the essence of painting is that it is not film or photography, hence it has given artists a way of reflecting on the world through a medium which is not a popular, dominant, [or] commercial medium.\textsuperscript{409} To paint, in other words, is a political act. I also chose to use paint because many women artists, working after the second women’s movement began, chose not to use paint. The mediums of contemporary art that emerged in the 1970s, at the same time that second-wave feminism was beginning, were performance art and installation art. Those two mediums dominated women’s art for many decades. I chose to develop the skills and techniques that were perceived as representing “male art”, and which were rejected by many women artists because of the symbolism of their patriarchal history and traditions – a rejection made, in part, because of that tradition's misuse of female imagery and female models.

My aim in this project was to explore class representation within visual imagery, and to investigate what techniques of the visual might best be deployed to institute, via a fine art intervention, elements of a visual historical record of those who had disappeared from the historical record. John Berger, in the essay “Millet and the Peasant”, suggested that Millet’s images were reproduced on a wide scale because they were unique because no other European painter had treated rural labour as the central theme of his art.\textsuperscript{410} He had “forced a new subject into an old tradition… [t]o force a language to

\textsuperscript{409} Rosenberg K. “After the Endgame: Painting Beyond Pollock”. Author Morgan Falconer on Where the Medium is Going,’ in Arts Space, 17\textsuperscript{th} April 2015, accessed at http://www.artspace.com/magazine/interviews_features/painting-beyond-pollock Last accessed 21\textsuperscript{st} August 2015.

\textsuperscript{410} Berger, J. “Millet and the Peasant”, in About Looking, Bloomsbury Publishing, London, 1980. p.76. Of course, what Berger clearly intended was the claim that this work was “unprecedented”, rather than unique.
speak of what it had ignored. The language was that of oil painting: the
subject was the peasant as the individual subject.\textsuperscript{411} Berger argued that Millet was inspired by the revolution of 1848, and its inspiration to hope and subsequent suppression established a sense of the rights of man becoming “universally applicable”.\textsuperscript{412} He also observed that Millet was crucial in identifying the poverty of the city and the plight of the peasantry, who were being sacrificed by capitalism’s forcing of industrialisation, a situation that he suggested might one day “entail the loss of all sense of history”.\textsuperscript{413} Analysing the images, Berger suggests that as Millet continued to paint the peasants, their image, literally emerged out of the shadows of the paintings.\textsuperscript{414}

Berger argued that the paintings failed, because there was no unity between the figures and their surroundings.\textsuperscript{415} Nevertheless, he observed that Millet’s drawings and etchings are “great works”, suggesting that “[t]he language of traditional oil painting could not accommodate the subject he [Millet] brought with him”.\textsuperscript{416} He suggested that Millet failed as a painter because traditional oil painting was based in scenic landscape painting – painting that depicted a beautiful land for the virtual tourist of the day, and that Millet’s peasants “spoilt the view”. He observed that, traditionally, some figures were welcome in such landscapes: mythological figures, preferably goddesses, but not ugly peasants. He suggested that Van Gogh had also tried to change the language of painting by choosing to make peasants central figures in the picture space, but, in doing so, he turned painting into what Berger describes as “a personal vision”.

Berger observed that oil painting assembles all aspects of the visible to a single point, whereas graphic work is more modest because “it only claims a single aspect of visual experience, and therefore is adaptable to different

\textsuperscript{411} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{412} Ibid. p.79.
\textsuperscript{413} Ibid. p.81.
\textsuperscript{414} Ibid. p.82.
\textsuperscript{415} Ibid. p.83.
\textsuperscript{416} Ibid. p.83.
uses”, and because of that is more successful. He suggests Millets’s painting were a failure because oil painting could not represent universal democracy and “the consequent crisis of meaning forced most painting to become autobiographical”.

Not having been trained as an oil painter, I use oil paints as a medium for image-making that is not unlike acrylic or watercolour. As such, though I am aware of composition and narrative, I first learned about painting and its histories from Surrealism onwards. Thus, as is the case for many other contemporary painters, I use oil without referring to all of its past tropes and mores, which is a freedom from the limitations of the past. This is not to suggest that one cannot ignore the extra challenges that oil painting produces because of its long drying time and requirement for different ratios of paint to mixing agent as layering is made. In contemporary painting artists are not burdened with the hierarchies of traditional representation or symbolic hierarchical structures.

To begin the process of reclamation and excavation I decided to stage two “exhibitions." The first was a Pop- up Exhibition at the Guildhall, the other, a small installation at the Kingston Museum.

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417 Ibid. p.85.
418 Ibid. p.84.

On Saturday July 11th 2015 I took twenty of the paintings to the Guildhall and placed them in various positions around the building; specifically in the Council Chamber, the corridors surrounding the Council Chamber and on the steps leading to the Guildhall entrance. I then took a series of photographs.

The collection of visual images in the Council collection open to the public in the Guildhall, consist of black and white photographs of former Mayors in the Council Chamber Corridor and two large oil paintings and three small paintings, in the two formal meeting rooms.

Dominating the Council Chamber, surrounded by a gilt frame, there is a full length oil painting entitled *Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth 11, 1953.* (79 inches by 55) by Arthur Pan (1920-1960). In the Queen Anne Suite, which acts as an extension to the Council Chamber, there is a large full length portrait of Queen Anne by Godfrey Kneller 1646-1723. Measuring 95 inches by 58. It is framed by a carved gilt wood frame. The painting was presented to Kingston by
Kneller in 1706 to commemorate extensive building work to the Town Hall (now the Market House) during the Queen Anne’s reign.419

The two Paintings overpower both of the wood panelled rooms. There are also three small paintings in the Council Chamber depicting Borough Recorders) The Recorder paintings are very small, their palettes faded browns and blacks so they disappear into the woodwork. In comparison the two Queens adorned in full regalia, dominate both rooms, their satin dresses emanate radiance, regal splendor and monarchical power.

As I was only allowed a few hours to work, the images needed to be placed in prominent positions. There was no facility or opportunity to hang the paintings, so they were placed against walls, sometimes balanced on chairs or tables to give them height. There were two strategies involved. The first was to put them against the existing paintings. (There was no opportunity to replace the existing images) in an attempt to situate them in conflict with the existing images. The other strategy was to put them in spaces where there were no other images, in particular along the outside walls of the building.

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McCormack, A. Royal Kingston, RBK, Kingston upon Thames, 1988
The resulting intervention was partially successful. In placing the images against the existing paintings, the images of working class history signified alienation. Because the images were alien, with no proper wall space or exhibition area, they were outsiders. The dichotomy reflected the historic situation. The signification of alienation continued in the placing of the images outside the building, and in particular, against the closed front door. The intervention portrays the separation that still exists between the histories of the classes, and the appropriation and construction of one history supposedly representing everyone within a community.

The intervention became a record of the contradiction between the traditional modes of the display of power and that of contemporary practice.

4.17. Museum Installation

In Spring 2015, I asked if it were possible to formally make an intervention in Kingston museum. The request was declined, but I was offered the opportunity to exhibit “something related to my research “within a “community case”- a space approximately one meter square, enclosed by glass, situated
in what is both the entrance and exit area of the museum, next to the small museum shop. Though this was substantially less than an intervention, and one clearly unsuited to the exhibition of paintings, I decided that as it was public space it would be somewhere to articulate the arguments that Kingston’s spaces of exhibition do not adequately reflect the history of the people.

As using the paintings was not aesthetically or practically possible, I decided to erect a small installation within the cabinet space. As it was an artificial area and was badly lit, I covered the floor with mirror tiles and put small lights in the bottom of the case, near the viewing window. I then hung, on semi invisible wires, 45 copies of the photographs I had found in the collection that represented “Kingston Histories” including the photographs of the Surbiton fascists from the 1930s. I also include the images of the market place image I had discovered from the magic lantern slide and also the images of my father, as part of the builder’s gang.

I used the shelf at the bottom of the cabinet to specifically detail in broad terms, the research I had conducted. The exhibition was staged from September 18th – January 15th 2016. I found the experience of planning and executing an art work to fit a specific space, for a specific purpose, an interesting challenge. The choices made seemed very simple because of the restrictions of place and space and because, within the environment the argument created by the piece easily was articulated. It caused me to reflect that images on canvasses, or placed on any other portable medium are, by their nature, strangers to their environment unless they are made for a specific space, and left there permanently.
The traces of the strands of occluded history have only just begun to be revealed, the completion of this project now opens the possibility of further research.

4.18 Conclusion

The mediums used to create the visual images for the research were a series of drawings and paintings on paper, glass and canvas, as well as photographs used in re-enactment and then digitally manipulated. The core of the investigatory project used drawing and painting as a means to interrogate fine art's potential to address the hidden history of class in one London Borough.
The investigation began a process of revealing traces of occluded working class history. The existence of the working class and in particular, occupations such as tanning and building that were central to the identity of Kingston in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Their existence was acknowledged and represented in paintings such as The Builders and The Tanners.

This was also my intention in the versions of my father in the garden and the re-enactments. The images, because of the pose and the fact that it is also a depiction of working class masculinity have several meanings, beyond that of manual occupation.

The existence of repressive institutions such as the Workhouses that operated their own particular class war, represented the ruling, nineteenth-century British attitude to those in need. Their power used to oppress the working classes, blaming the poor for their poverty while denying them the means to progress. British capitalism, at the height of its economic expansion created and operated a hierarchical class structure that sentenced those dispossessed to a life of poverty and destitution. These lives I tried to represent in The Workhouse series.

The absence of the working class in photographs in the local collection where history is depicted, further illustrates their continued occlusion. It is this absence that I sought to represent by seeking them in the crowds surrounding the great and the good. It is these representatives of the crowd at the edge that are depicted in the two versions of Woman and Boy.

In the course of my research I found a new photographic image, one that was not in any of the local histories collection. It was taken between 1890-1910, representing the market place. Instead of the usual figures, central to the image were two tramps. A remarkable co-incidence as my research intention was to put the excluded of history into the central space of spectatorship.
If funding were available to continue the work, I would wish to construct larger images, in particular working on the images of the tanners, the tramps in the market, and the men and women in the workhouse. It would be useful to investigate the implications of filmed recreations of portraits and poses, to be projected onto a gallery space or outside on one of the larger buildings-the market house and/or the Guildhall.

There is also particular women histories that would be excellent sources of research including the women of the workhouse. Creating images related to the Laundry women’s strike of 1872 and representing the missing histories of the fight for women suffrage, between 1890 and 1914.

There would also be potential for an extension of my research work into the building trade in the history of the town, the domestic servants’ histories, and that of the Laundry and the brewery trade, perhaps by working with trade union organisations in an attempt to discover more documentary evidence of the lives of the invisible Kingstonians of the past, including the anti-fascist work of the labour movement against Blackshirt activity in Kingston in the 1930s.

At present the history of Kingston is an agreed narrative, created and repeated by local tourist history books and repeated in schools and local council literature: seven Saxons kings crowned with medieval pomp and ceremony; progressing to a prosperous Victorian town full of benign shopkeepers. In other words, a happy picture that is dramatically expressive of the success of bourgeois hegemony, and a Whiggish approach to historical change. This is a historiography that uses and synthesises the idea of progress as a non-conflictual process, and hence possesses all of the qualities of a fairy tale. It is no part of this research to attempt to determine whether it is successful in shaping satisfied citizens. This project has been about investigating the possibility of constructing an alternative visual record from the fragments that are available.
It is my contention that there is an alternative visual story. Benjamin used the Greek concept of *anamnesis*, a form of knowledge that does not use direct experience but instead occurs in acts of recollection and remembrance. He argued that there should be “a fight for an oppressed past”. The ragpicker image, which is taken from Baudelaire, becomes a metaphor for historic investigation, while the historian is described by Benjamin as the “ragman of memory”. Benjamin’s imagery is a useful tool in the quest for critical representation of the past. Benjamin believed that people, by their actions in the present, could change the meaning of the past. It is, fundamentally, this shaping and changing of historical moments that I want to use to change our perceptions of the present via an altered perception of the trajectory that has produced the now. My project has been precisely about the possibility of dramatising a creation of local “memories” that do not currently exist, and whose absence gives the lie to the official narrative. It was an investigation of how this might be achieved through visual, fine art interventions.

Bourriaud argued that “[a]rt, politics and the unconscious have within them that which is excluded. This could be unconscious memory or what Benjamin described as phantasmagoria”. He suggested that Althusser had observed that “never in history have we lived with such desire for accumulation and remembrance”, describing the exform as trace or shadow. The pursuit of the trace of those not remembered, that were perceived as the other, the excluded and the feared, is a continuing process. It is this that I have attempted to explore, and which is a continued work in progress.

In chapter three I explored in detail the contemporary artists who have created work whose subject could be described as that of “hidden histories”. I suggested that their work could be divided into two main categories of national histories/politics or family histories.

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The artists who concentrated on national historical events include Richter’s *September* and *November* series and paintings such as *Aunty Marlene* and *Uncle Rudi*. Kentridge’s subjects include German imperial genocide in SW Namibia, seen in *Copper Notes* (2005), and South African apartheid, seen in his *Soho and Felix* series. Dumas was also concerned with South African apartheid, as seen in paintings such as the *Martha* series (1984), and was critical of American foreign policy in *Blindfolded* (2002) and *Drowned* (2003). She also addressed African nationalism in *The Widow*. Related to national histories, Other Artists such as Chino Ostaku and Hughie O’Donohue investigated their own family histories, while Barbara Loftus examined family history in terms of holocaust survival. There is within the investigation of occlusion by visual artists both political and personal exploration.

In my research, the closest investigation I could find that related directly to class was Red Saunders’s commission for the Impressions Gallery, for which he produced a series of photographic tableaux inspired by historical events in Yorkshire, particularly the Levellers and the Dissenters of Newington Green, for the *Ways of Looking* photography festival held in Bradford in October 2011. I would argue that working class and underclass histories are under-represented as identifiable communities whose histories are occluded. However, his was a purely photographic project.

My work directly and explicitly sets out to explore ordinary people’s lives within issues of class. Even when I am exploring the photographs of my father in *Man in the Garden* and *The Builders*, it is class representation that is key.

Hall suggested that colonisation constructed the oppressed people as the Other.\(^{424}\) This, I suggest, is also how bourgeoisie hegemony influenced, changed and occluded working-class culture.

Sontag observed that photography served capitalism, defining reality as a

spectacle for the masses and as an object of surveillance for rulers. The photograph didn’t replace painting, but replaced memory. Within my work I am seeking to use photography to recreate paintings that restore a trace of memory.

Kwon asked if it were possible to sustain the cultural and historical specificity of a place and self that is neither “a simulacra pacifier nor a wilful invention”. I am seeking to establish a trace element of working-class history that is neither invention nor pacifier to mark infamous women and men, and, in doing so, enable contemporary histories to arise and create a consciousness of an alternative past. A practice that might recognize the histories of the working class and rescue it from the condescension of posterity to being identified as critical both to history and to contemporary communities and future progress.
Man in Garden 1938 1

Oil on canvas, 2013, (90cm x 70cm)
Man in Garden 1938 2
Oil on canvas, 2015, (90cm x 70cm)
Man in Garden 1938 2 Detail
Oil on canvas, 2015, (90cm x 70cm)
Man in Garden 2013

Oil on canvas, 2015, (90cm x 70cm)
Man in Garden 2014
Digital Drawing
Head of Man in Garden 2015
Watercolour
CROWD AROUND THE CAR WRECK. 1893

*Woman and Boy 1*

Oil on Canvas, 2013, (50cm x 40cm)
**Woman and Boy 2**

Oil on Canvas, 2014, (50cm x 40cm)
WORKHOUSE SERIES (2013)

Man with Black Neck Tie 1

Oil on Canvas (30cm x 25cm)
Man with Black Neck Tie 2

Oil on Canvas (50cm x 60cm)
Man with Beard

Oil on Canvas (30cm x 25cm)
Man with Hat 1

Oil on Canvas (30cm x 25cm)
Man with Hat 2
Oil on Linen
(30cm x 25cm)
Man with White Cap

Oil on Canvas (30cm x 25cm)
Man with Hat.

Watercolour (50cms x 40 cm)
Man with White Cap
Digital Drawing 2014
THE BUILDERS. 1938

*The Builders Gang*

Oil on Canvas, 2014 (70cm x 90cm)
The Builders Gang 2

Oil on Linen, 2015 (70cm x 90cm)
Two Builders,
Oil on Canvas, 2014 (40cm x 30cm)
The Tanners 1930

Oil on Canvas, 2014, (60cmx46 cm)
The Tanner 1930
Oil on Canvas, 2014 (28cmx28cms)
TRAVELLERS IN THE MARKET PLACE

Traveller in Bowler Hat

Oil (30cm x50cm) 2015
Traveller in Cap
Watercolour (30cm x50cm) 2015
Hidden History
Installation
Kingston Museum, October 2015
Hidden History
Installation
Kingston Museum, October 2015
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