

Pleasure and Leisure – the Pursuit of Happiness

From seaside holidays to shopping and hip-hop, an explosion of leisure activities is adding a complex new layer to England’s historic environment.

The English are internationally known as hobbyists. From trainspotting to traditional wrestling, the landscape of weekending and after-work activity has historically displayed regional undulation. However, changing economic emphasis and technological development have started to reshape our landscapes of leisure. In the 21st century, car ownership transports the pleasure seeker to any number of leisure sites while, paradoxically, technology offers an imagined array of televised landscapes and virtual worlds to entertain within the home. The advent of disposable income has equated leisure with consumption: units of leisure time and activity are bought and sold, and the leisure market is one of England’s biggest and fastest-growing economies. The consumption of leisure – the almost workmanlike way in which the English must enjoy their free time – has led to the inexorable boom of leisure’s market share, from the contemporary obsession with the gym and pursuit of the body beautiful to the reinvention of the past for modern-day amusement. ■

Antony Gormley, *Another Place*, 1997.
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Taking a break: holidays in the later 20th century

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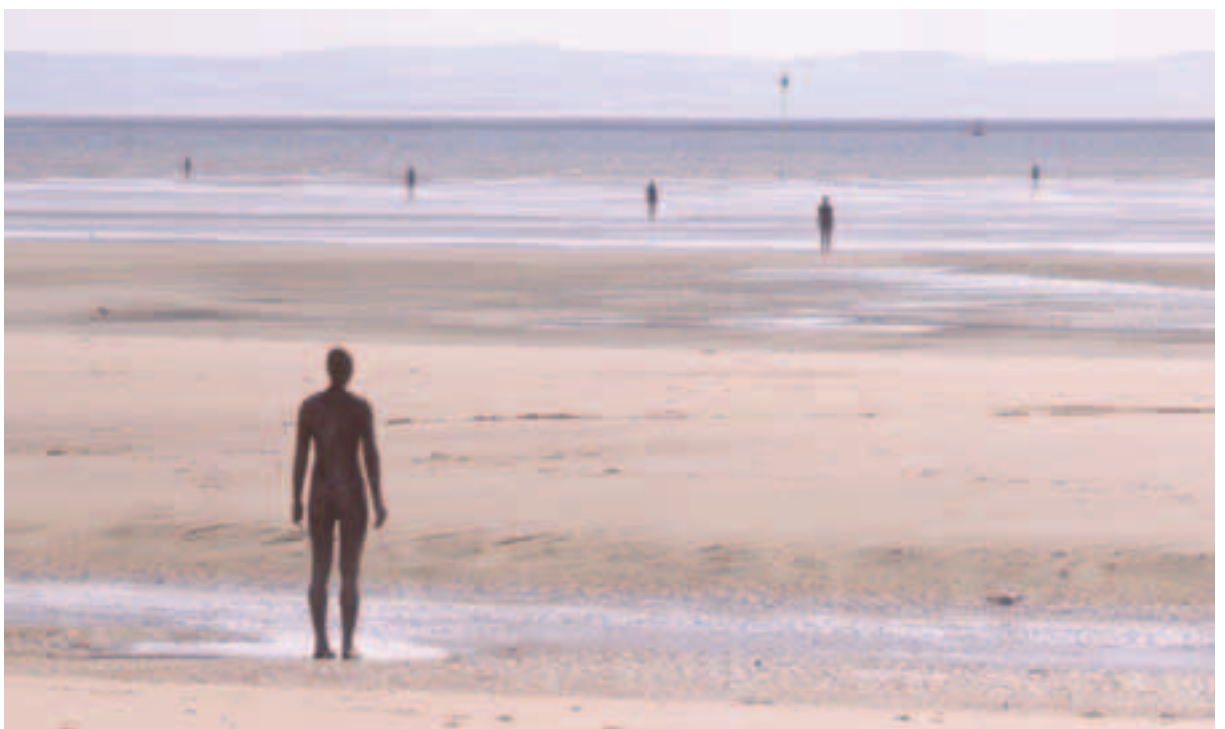
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Late 20th-century life can be traced in our holidays. Here the changing face of the English holiday is described, in both the fabric of the resorts and the memories of those that visited them.

Caravans to the ‘costas’

For one of the authors, the term ‘seaside’ evokes childhood fortnights in a chilly caravan park in Mablethorpe in early 1960s’ Lincolnshire. When it wasn’t raining, it was sand sandwiches on the beach. When it was, it was either hearty group fun – her four-year-old brother won a talent competition as Tarzan – in the wooden camp entertainment centre or listening to adult squabbles in the tiny duck-egg-green and cream caravan, one of many set in permanent close-set rows. It wasn’t long before the family graduated to the regimentation and mass fun of Butlins – ringing the changes each year at Skegness, Minehead and



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Ayr – with their chalets, pavilions, ballrooms and canteens, camps laid out as neat low-rise fantasy towns, dedicated to baby-boomer families.

In a few short years that same family abandoned these package holidays for those offered by the modern high-rise hotels, perma-sun and sangria of the continental costas, leaving the English camps and traditional resorts to decline in a destination wilderness. It was a time of social mobility and change. Holidays, as always, were enlisted as badges of personal progress. By the 1990s all-in family packages, in the UK and abroad, were given up for restored historic country cottages, the second homes for the second holidays of ‘empty-nesters’ and their contemplative walks along the managed coastal trails of Cornwall, when not vacationing in Cape Cod. Paradoxically, in these busy days leisure takes up more of our time. No longer is it a single annual event. Long weekends, city breaks and environmental volunteering blend into our career paths. And what place, at the start of the 21st century, is one of the fastest-growing short-break destinations in the UK? No place. *En masse* once more, all generations and all types flock to the organised entertainment camps of Glastonbury and other festivals, whose transient urbanism appears and disappears each year. *Plus ça change...*

Refreshing the seafront

Parts of the English coast became ‘seaside’ when the water’s edge was no longer simply for fishing



Centre Parcs at Longleat, Wiltshire: the 21st-century equivalent of the family seaside holiday camps of the 1950s and 60s.

© English Heritage

and trade, but also for health, pleasure and leisure. In contrast to the pastoral tranquillity of the countryside, a holiday by the sea took people a little closer to the exotic – to strange, sometimes extreme, weather, to brighter lights and colours and to the mental possibilities of other lands.

The upheavals of the Second World War hit seaside towns badly, and resorts had to adopt a ‘make-do and mend’ attitude to their buildings. The modest investment available was directed towards reinstating piers and to refreshing seafronts that had been cleared or damaged by anti-invasion defences. Old holiday camps returned from wartime duty and new ones were opened, sometimes by reusing former military camps. There was a desire to turn back the clocks to the 1930s, but one strand of architectural



On the beach, and in the gallery. Tate St Ives, Cornwall.

© English Heritage

thought strongly connected to the seaside was not revived. 'Modernist' forms had been pioneered in some resorts, most spectacularly at Bexhill, where the De La Warr Pavilion, now restored to its original glory, still dominates the seafront.

New buildings

Substantial new buildings at the seaside did not begin to appear until the 1960s. The most prominent new arrivals were tower blocks, but not the typical inner-city ones. Instead many of the seaside's tallest buildings were private ventures aimed at a wealthier audience, people seeking a sea view in comfortable modernity. There is also a strong emphasis on access to sun and fresh air, through the balconies and sun lounges in buildings as different as Arlington House in Margate (opened 1963) or Albany Flats in Bournemouth (1962–4). But by the 1970s seaside resorts had succumbed to competition from the resorts of the Mediterranean. Now at last even the average worker could experience the real exoticism of abroad. England's resorts entered a cycle of under-investment leading to neglected facilities, attracting still fewer visitors.

By the 1990s the signs of decline were sufficiently strong to prompt local authorities and other bodies to invest in new facilities and to try to stimulate new markets. Brighton began to be transformed from a fairly tired resort with an ageing population to the lively, cosmopolitan town it is today. In 1993 the Tate St Ives in Cornwall opened, recognition of the public demand for a high-quality gallery celebrating British art. Gastronomic tourists have helped to transform Padstow from a quiet Cornish fishing town into a bustling destination and lovers of oysters undertake pilgrimages to Whitstable in Kent. In recent years other towns have been stimulated by the creation of marinas, bringing something of the Mediterranean back to Britain. At Morecambe in Lancashire, one of the resorts facing the most severe difficulties, public and private investment in a revitalised seafront was based on a theme of sea birds, but with a statue of Eric Morecambe at its heart, another example of how pilgrimage can improve the fortunes of a town. The refurbished art-deco Midland Hotel, a short distance along the seafront, should act as a further stimulus for investment in the town.

New markets

Newspaper headlines have regularly proclaimed the death of the traditional seaside holiday and they may be right. The 'traditional' aspect may be disappearing, but a new type of holiday based on

some of the enduring strengths of seaside towns combined with high-quality facilities in a thriving, historic setting, seems to be creating new markets. The two-week holiday at the seaside may be a thing of the past for many, but millions can now afford the luxury of extra short breaks, a hen or stag party, or a night away at the seaside. Party political conferences may be moving inland, where larger facilities await them, but there is still a strong market for other types of conference and business events and holiday camps do a roaring trade in themed weekends and club conventions. This changing market requires resorts to adapt, but for nearly three centuries seaside towns have demonstrated that they have the flexibility to meet new challenges and changing fashions. And the new summer may be just around the corner. Climate-change concerns about global travel and fashion trends away from the tan, mean that holidaying in the UK is cool again. The best of the buildings and spaces created for previous generations of holiday-makers will be ready. ■

Popular music, characterisation and the urban environment

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An innovative project (2007–9), funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), is examining critically, with English Heritage, the relationship between popular music and the urban environment, in particular built and sonic environments. It will consider the influence of music-making on the character of the urban environment and on how that environment is used, experienced, interpreted and represented, and in turn the influence of the urban environment on music-making.

Urban rhythms

Popular music has been described in academic book titles as 'the sound of the city' and as 'urban rhythms'. The urban environment has symbolic significance within popular music culture and has been represented through musical sounds, lyrics and visual images, and through oral and written narratives. This is evident in the urban dystopias of industrial music, post-punk portrayals of urban decay, the nostalgic urban landscapes of so-called 'Britpop', the upbeat images of downtown promoted by 1950s' crooners, the inner-city 'hoods' of rap, and in the garages, cellars and lofts of alternative or bohemian culture. Moreover,

while popular music is a global, 'travelling culture', it is also commonly perceived as being fixed to place, and urban environments are commonly believed to have a deterministic influence on musical performance and creativity.

AHRC-funded study

The project seeks to contribute to and inform topical and pressing debates about changes to the environment of European and North American cities brought about by economic restructuring, and the impact of those changes on creativity, cultural diversity and local distinctiveness. It will involve comparative, ethnographic research on musicians and music-making and will focus on rock, country and 'hip-hop' music. Liverpool has been chosen as a case study for this research, in order to take advantage of heightened activity and debate concerning culture, landscape and the urban environment provoked by its status as European Capital of Culture 2008. The research will be conducted through a partnership with National Museums Liverpool, which will be staging a major exhibition on Liverpool popular music in 2008, and with English Heritage, which is currently supporting historic-landscape characterisation in the city. The implications of the research for an understanding of the relationship between music-making and the urban environment will be considered through published scholarly outputs. Ways of disseminating the research findings to a wide range of audiences will also be considered in order to provoke public reflection and debate on music and place and new perspectives on the urban environment. The project will explore, for example, ways of digitally mapping the practices and perspectives of musicians in order to represent, through audio-visual means, characterisation of the urban environment and cultural and historical change. ■

Where the action was: recording music clubs and venues

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English Heritage's National Monument Record (NMR) database, and its online version, *PastScape*, www.pastscape.org or <http://pastscape.english-heritage.org.uk/>, is a representative inventory of England's cultural heritage, comprising records of monuments, buildings, surveys and excavations from the Palaeolithic to the present. Over the past 10 years the record has come fully up-to-date with a surprising array of entries. A category



Liverpool's music scene: here a landscape of flyposters on Georgian houses.
© Abigail Gilmore

recently enhanced by the Datasets Development Team includes clubs and other venues for popular music and musical subcultures, mainly from the 1950s and 1960s, but also including early jazz clubs from 1919 onwards.

The desk-based project was initially focused on London, but was expanded to include important regional examples in Liverpool associated with the Beatles and Merseybeat. Entries included the Cavern and the Casbah Club (the latter including murals by Beatles members) and sites relating to the rare 1960s and 1970s phenomenon of Northern Soul such as the Twisted Wheel in Manchester and the Wigan Casino.

The core of the project targeted the centres of London's music scene in Soho in the 1960s. These included: seminal 'Mod' haunt the Scene Club, now a car park, the Flamingo, where the all-nighter was pioneered, and La Discotheque, one of the first-ever true discothèques in Britain. Entries also include The Rolling Stones' first venues in Richmond and north London, the Who's heartland on the Goldhawk Road and touch on the 'bluebeat' (the 1960s' British term for 'ska') West Indian influence at the Ram Jam in Brixton and the Roaring 20s in Carnaby Street. The dataset follows the music scene's change to psychedelia at the Middle Earth and the UFO, and the exclusive clubs of the glitterati such as the Ad-Lib, The Bag O' Nails and the Speakeasy. It also takes in early coffee bars, such as The 2is (pronounced 'two-eyes'), a centre of the skiffle scene, and folk clubs such as Bunjies.

Map of clubs and venues in Soho recorded in the NMR.
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The network of clubs, coffee bars, dance-halls and other venues were places where Afro-American, white-American, West Indian, continental and British cultures interacted producing revolutions in music, clothing and youth culture. These were important places, a fact now recognised through their inclusion in the NMR database. ■

The late 20th-century seabed

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Since 1950 development on the seabed has continued apace and in many different ways. One obvious example was the discovery of extensive North Sea oil and gas reserves in the 1970s. Today however, we are in a period of declining hydrocarbon reserves and it is estimated that 500 platforms are approaching the end of their design life. Under international legislation these will require decommissioning and disposal on-shore. Submarine cables date back to 1851, when the Brett brothers laid a telegraph cable under the Channel,

but, just as with platform decommissioning, international obligations stipulate that modern redundant cables are to also be removed and disposed of on-shore.

It is therefore apparent that much of what we have built or laid on the seabed in the 20th century is destined for removal. This situation is applicable even in the inter-tidal area: here, the final phases of land claim for agriculture are now directly targeted for managed realignment schemes for flood alleviation and habitat creation purposes, as demonstrated by breaching embankments to allow tidal flooding over arable land near Boston, Lincolnshire.

A reversal in this trend for removal is the push for more power generation from renewable systems such as offshore wind farms. The next few years will see the completion of wind farms out in areas once populated by the gas platforms of the southern North Sea and Irish Sea. But these are temporary too, so what might be a lasting legacy?

It seems that artificial reef habitat creation to support fisheries and recreation is gaining support and wider interest, particularly when the artificial reef in question is a decommissioned Royal Navy warship, such as HMS *Scylla* now lying upright on the bottom of Whitesands Bay, near Plymouth. HMS *Scylla* is notable in naval history as the last ship to be built at Devonport and she was an active participant in the ‘Cod War’ with Iceland in the 1970s. The focus of English Heritage participation in the general environmental assessment of this artificial reef project was not specifically to do with heritage values of the vessel itself, but to ensure that any archaeological interests already in the seabed were not unnecessarily impacted when the ship was scuttled and a ‘reef’ created. ■

Off-shore wind-farm construction at Lowestoft, Suffolk.
© English Heritage



Making memoryscapes: accessing the Thames path through oral history

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In the last 50 years the audio guide has generally been an experience reserved for inside the museum or art gallery. Until recently there were only isolated examples of using recorded sound in an outside setting – most commonly as compositions by musicians and experimental sound artists. But now the popularity of MP3 players and a crash in the price of the equipment and software necessary to record and edit professional-quality sound and voice has opened up new opportunities for people to narrate and intervene in the experience of moving through outdoor places and spaces.

The Thames path

Satellite navigation systems, GPS and mobile phones have tremendous potential to meet a new demand for location-based interpretation of local communities and landscapes. I was therefore inspired to experiment with using the Museum of London oral-history collection, as well as some of my own interview recordings, to create two audio walks along the Thames path. The walks feature interviews with 30 different people concerning their life on the river and an accompanying trail map showed where to play each track along the river bank. The interviews were carefully edited with added background sound.

These ‘memoryscape’ audio walks are freely available for download to an MP3 player from a website (www.memoryscape.org.uk) and a CD version was sold at the Museum of London and Tourist Information Centres. Many listeners have responded positively to the experience of walking and hearing local voices *in situ*. They particularly liked the authenticity of hearing ‘real’ people rather than a tour guide. The stories and memories they hear relate to the landscape and some people reported a feeling of closeness or rootedness to the local area as a result. One newcomer to London wrote, ‘now I know a sense of a beginning attachment’. Another walker who had recently moved to the area described the process beautifully as ‘deepening my attachment to the river. Like roots shooting off into the soil.’ Like an aboriginal songline, stories heard *in situ* are given a profound geographical presence.

Plurality and memory

The range of voices and memories also afforded the listener a plural and multi-layered impression of place. Several people talked about the experi-

ence adding a new dimension of reality to the existing landscape. Furthermore, anyone who visited the riverside landscape again could use those links to remember something of the stories that they heard; as one walker put it, ‘memoryscape has made me consider the part the river has played in so many people’s lives. I think about this whenever I visit the river since listening to the recording.’ In this way the memoryscape can perhaps mimic the way our memories seem to work in the brain – it is an active, mobile process, connecting often-disparate things in an intensely creative way to make sense of our past and present. ■



A group of partially sighted people experiencing a memoryscape walk at Greenwich, London.

© Photo: Toby Butler

OPINION

In a way, all heritage is contemporary heritage and matters as such. For example, Stonehenge is as much a monument of the architecture, cosmology and rituals of what we call ‘the Bronze Age’ as it is a monument of 20th-century archaeology, heritage management, tourism and religiosity. The main significance of our entire heritage is that it forms, in one way or another, part of people’s everyday lives.

However, it is unclear who will benefit in the future from conserving contemporary heritage now. After all, the only thing we know for sure about history is that everything keeps changing and that nothing ever remains as it was. This rings particularly true in the case of Stonehenge. When future people are going to visit Stonehenge and other heritage sites, they may not only remember the Bronze Age or the 20th century, but also remember remembering these periods at the beginning of the 21st century, when heritage of all periods was being conserved systematically and professionally. By then, conserving heritage might easily be considered as one of the defining characteristics of the age in which we are living now.

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