Commemorating coal mining in the home: material culture and domestic space in Dodworth, South Yorkshire

by Cathrine Degnen

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Introduction: Situating Dodworth, Barnsley and Sheffield

This chapter is based on twelve months of ethnographic fieldwork with older residents of a village called Dodworth which is about twenty miles north of Sheffield and two miles west of Barnsley. A contribution to this volume about a place much closer to Barnsley than to Sheffield may seem curious, but I believe that the material I present here offers an important contextualising nuance to accounts of Sheffield. The themes I explore about Dodworth will also resonate with many of those at stake in Sheffield and which other authors discuss in this volume.

Cultural realities intersect with and overlap geographic boundaries. What and where ‘Dodworth’, ‘Barnsley’ and ‘Sheffield’ are, and how they are imagined, are not always subject to the same mappings that county, city, town and village limits demarcate. While these three places are geographically close, their relationship is interestingly messy when considered from the perspective of identity construction, cultural differences, and lived experience. By bringing the three places together rather than keeping them apart, I wish to open up space for thinking about some of the threads that contextualise Sheffield within South Yorkshire. Indeed, it is these very ideas about the character and location of place and how it is connected to identity, social memory, belonging, and disruption for the people living there that inform the topics I examine in this chapter.

A Coal Place and A Steel Place

An initial vignette helps to draw out some of these points. One chilly October's day in 2000, I went to visit a friend called Phyllis1 in her 70s who lives in Barnsley.2 Prominently displayed in her living room alongside various books of historical pictures of the area was a modest pile of fairly recent video releases including Brassed Off and The Full Monty. After a while, we started talking about her video collection. Although she had not owned a VCR player for very long, she had made a point of going out and buying her own copies of these two films. This was, she said, because they told such "beautiful stories", stories that were set in South Yorkshire. As a transplanted North American, I told her how watching The Full Monty while still living in Montreal had been my first introduction to Sheffield before moving to Britain. Now that I was actually living in South Yorkshire and had learned more about the area's recent history, the film's story held much more meaning for me. Our conversation then turned to the differences between Sheffield and Barnsley, leading to her assertion that although Sheffield is near by, it is a completely different sort of place than Barnsley. She explained that this is partly because Sheffield is a city and Barnsley a town, but even more important to her is how Barnsley, a mining area, has a "different ethos and culture" than that of a steel-working area like Sheffield.

Her comments intrigued me. To my mind, while Sheffield and Barnsley are distinct places, their histories and the histories of coal and steel are necessarily intertwined. My feelings stemmed from what I had been reading about the history of South Yorkshire but also from what I was learning during fieldwork and interviews. Connections between the steel and coal industries in my fieldwork data ranged from the pragmatic to the symbolic. From a practical point of view, a ready supply of coal to fire the forges in Sheffield contributed to the city's growth as a centre of steel production. At the level of cultural identity, parallels in the working conditions of the two industries (both coal mining and steel forging are particularly physically taxing forms of work which are also nearly always only the domain of men) created visions of graft and camaraderie that extend from the work place into social life. Such ideas about the intersection of the ethos of the work place with the general character of life were and are centrally
I also felt that an even more evident connection between Sheffield and Barnsley were the very events being narrated in Phyllis’ two preferred films. Both films on her bookshelf tell, respectively, stories about the demise of coal mining (*Brassed Off*) and of steel working (*The Full Monty*). They narrate accounts of people’s attempts to come to terms with the shifting socio-economic ground beneath their feet in the aftermath of the decline of both of these industries. Despite these factors which to me signalled a closeness, for Phyllis, Barnsley and Sheffield were inherently distinct due to Barnsley's history of coal mining and Sheffield's relative lack of one.

Sheffield is South Yorkshire's biggest city but it is surrounded by a semi-rural landscape which is not only agricultural but has also been heavily industrialised since the mid 1800s. Within this area are numerous pit villages like Dodworth. To newcomers like me, it would appear that there is a sort of symbiotic relationship between city and outlying villages, and between places that worked steel and places that mined coal. However, this vision is one which people in Barnsley and Dodworth at times break apart when they say, like Phyllis, that the mining culture of pit villages is utterly different from the culture of steel. This feeling of difference is also often evoked in other ways by Barnsley people when they point to the linguistic markers of Sheffield accents which differ from those from Barnsley, linguistic differences which are invariably the butt of many Barnsley-area jokes. Time and again it is made clear by people in the Barnsley area that Sheffield is a world apart.

And yet, while the two places were and still are held apart in the cultural imagination, these two parts of South Yorkshire also intersect each other at the level of everyday life. People in Barnsley bring the two places together when they talk about things such as work, shopping, and historical events. For example, not all of the men living in Dodworth and Barnsley were involved in the coal industry. Instead, a significant minority were bussed every day to their jobs at steel works such as Fox's in Stocksbridge, part of the Sheffield steel conurbation. Historically, Sheffield has always been an important resource for Dodworth people when shopping for special items, a trend which continues today with the mixed blessing of the Meadowhall shopping centre. Events that transpired in Sheffield still inform the accounts of village life in Dodworth today, such as when Sheffield was bombed during the Second World War. Older village residents, like Evelyn, now in her mid-eighties, remember seeing the glow of a bombed and burning Sheffield, clearly visible on the horizon from Dodworth. They recount stories about how places they knew well in Sheffield were destroyed in the bombing, such as Evelyn's experience of shopping for baby clothes for her first child at Walsh's in Sheffield just hours before it was burnt to the ground in a night-time air raid.

The ways in which ideas about difference are mobilised to articulate boundaries of identity as well as how these boundaries are themselves fluid and contextual have been well chronicled in the social science literature (see for example Appadurai 1991,1996; Cohen 1982; Giddens 1992; Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Hastrup and Olwig 1997). What I wish to draw attention to here instead is how materialising Sheffield can be enriched by thinking through some of the larger relations at play in South Yorkshire. While Sheffield's ideas of itself and of its history may centre largely around steel and cutlery (Taylor et al 1996:325), there is a broader context within which Sheffield is located by residents of neighbouring areas. As my research project was situated in Dodworth, my reflections that follow here focus on one specific aspect of material culture that is related to mining rather than to other industries such as steel working. In particular, I focus here on the themes of identity, commemoration of the past, and domestic spaces. To illustrate, I draw on the specific example of ceramic plates which memorialise mining and consider what it means to be a place where coal *used to be* mined.

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Heavy Industry, Heritage Industry: Commemorating the Past

Britain has a booming heritage industry (Macdonald 2002; Edwards 1998:147), one which in South Yorkshire is arguably tied to the decline of heavy industry, particularly coal and steel. As Taylor, Evans and Fraser have written, local history has been a continuing theme in English city life over many years, but most recently the level of nostalgic interest has been marked, notably in Manchester and Sheffield by an explosion of pamphlets on a vast range of topics...as well as photographs, coffee-table books, and autobiographies written by local people. (1996:11)

In Dodworth, connections between past and present are powerful themes in people's narratives about themselves and also in everyday talk about the village (Degnen 2005). These connections play out in a number of different sites with memories embedded in multiple locations including books, monuments and museums such as the nearby National Coal Mining Museum and Magna, a science museum tied to the history and technology of the region's steel industry.

As with Taylor *et al*'s research experiences in Sheffield and Manchester, in Barnsley and Dodworth there are a preponderance of books published by local publishing houses with reproductions of historical photographs and oral history accounts of life in the 'old days'. In Barnsley, the photographs of a late 19th, early 20th century photographer named Edward Tasker have particular currency while in Dodworth a book called *Honest Dodworth*, a collection of old photographs of various parts of the village, is very popular. Local history books and memoirs like these line the book shelves in W.H. Smith and other book stores in Barnsley just as they do the length and breadth of the country.
Social commentators have remarked upon the escalating homogeneity of British high streets, shopping areas which increasingly seem to house the same selection of chain-stores with a consequent atrophying of independently owned shops. This sameness of shops means that being in one part of Britain often feels like being in any other part of the country. However, it always strikes me how the sections of bookshops dedicated to local history unwittingly manage to insert deliciously subversive pockets of localness with books produced on a small scale by local authors and for a local market into what is otherwise an overall sense of stultifying high street sameness.

Collecting these books of local historical photographs is a pastime for some of the people I came to know during my research on the experience of ageing, selfhood and social memory (Degnen 2003). Such volumes are readily available in local shops and in the Barnsley market. One market stall in particular is dedicated to selling such books and individually reproduced photographs from all of the surrounding villages. Many people recommended Tasker's photographs and Honest Dodworth to me during fieldwork as essential reading. If I wanted to learn about Barnsley and Dodworth, people would say, these books would tell me what I really needed to know. Indeed, the books that Phyllis' two favourite videos co-resided with on her bookshelf were exactly these sorts of volumes, and new ones are published each year.

Figure 1: A photograph taken by the author of the memorial to the children who died in the Huskar Pit flood in Nabs Wood, Silkstone Common.

A second site where the past and present are brought together in the Barnsley area are places of remembrance which commemorate both mining accidents and also now closed coal mines. Like the books of historical photographs, several of these commemorative sites were explicitly called to my attention, such as monuments from the Oaks Colliery disaster (and here also) in the Barnsley area. 361 people died in this tragedy in December 1866, one of the most serious disasters in British mining history. Another example is Huskar Pit near Silkstone Common (a neighbouring village to Dodworth) that was flooded in 1838 during a freak downpour which killed a number of children working there. During this era, many children worked in pits as hurriers (pushing heavy tubs of coal from the coal face to the pit bottom) and as trappers (these were younger children who were responsible for opening and shutting small wooden doors in the mine workings for the hurriers to pass through). The doors the trappers monitored controlled the flow of air through the mine, ensuring that miners on the coalface (called ‘getters’) would continue to get air. Children would sit in absolute darkness for hours at a time doing this work. It was children working in these jobs who were drowned at Huskar.

Over the course of my fieldwork, I was told on several occasions by different people where the three memorials to the children are situated, and one man even made a point of photocopying for me a written account of what had transpired that had been given to him many years ago by a close friend. Two of these memorials were built in the 1800s and one, built on the site of the flooded shaft itself, is more modern. Illustrated here as Figure 1, the memorial is located in a wood a couple of miles from Dodworth, near to where the children drowned. The stone plinth of the memorial is carved in a representation of a shaft door that trappers were responsible for opening and closing. The inscription on the memorial reads:

"This monument was erected by the people of Silkstone Parish in 1988, to mark the 150th anniversary of the tragic event on 4th July 1838 when 26 children were drowned in the Huskar Pit close to this place".

Figure 2: Photo of the memorial haulage pulley at the entrance to the Dodworth Miner's Welfare, December 2002, taken by the author. The 'hill' in the background is the spoil heap from Church Lane pit, one of the Dodworth coal mines, now covered in grass, scrub, and birch saplings. All traces of the outbuildings and structures that were part of Church Lane pit have been destroyed or filled in. The spoil heap, although masked with new growth, is however unmistakably identifiable as a sign of the coal mining that dominated the village for over a century.

Although the Huskar disaster occurred well over a century and a half ago, the monument illustrated above is a modern one. Other fairly recent monuments to appear in the area are memorials to the now defunct mining industry and the people that worked in it. As shown in Figure 2, these are often haulage pulleys which are mounted on plinths and can be found in locations such as the entrances to some villages, on school grounds, and on roundabouts. Such monuments are seen as fitting tributes to the history of mining and are dotted throughout the Barnsley area in locally meaningful locations, often funded by local donations and local resources.

It is however a third site of memorialisation that I wish to consider more closely here. Hanging in the homes of many families I came to know during my fieldwork are ceramic plates commemorating different aspects of the mining industry. They are similar in form, though not in content, to the ceramic ware produced over the past century to commemorate royal events such as the Queen Mother's 100th birthday, coronations, and royal weddings.
ceramic plates in the homes of some of my research participants, on the other hand, commemorate very specific recent historical mining moments, such as the 1984-85 strike, or the closure of a particular coal mine. Hanging silently on walls, these ceramic plates become a site for, and of, memory.

Throughout Britain, approximately 650 different patterns have been produced, with the vast majority having been made by the Edwardian Fine China Company, Edward and Lockett, in Stoke-on-Trent in the Potteries, Staffordshire (Windsor 2000). While not spoken of in this way by the people I worked with during my research, such plates are increasingly seen as collectors items (Windsor 2000). They were first produced by local branches of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) to raise funds and so exist in many different patterns, often with particularly resonant and deeply local significance. Other editions were given to miners as they finished their last shift at a pit by the National Coal Board (Windsor 2000).

The purpose of the plates to raise funds or to commemorate disasters that tore at the fabric of social life in the pit villages can be understood as part of a larger history of postcards and mementoes from the 19th century of mining accidents. These mementoes were often printed with the names of miners killed and sketches or photos of the mine where the disaster occurred, and sold as a means of fund raising for their families. In this way, these plates bring together different forms of commemoration: that of imprinting porcelain or china dishes with images either as reminders of events that have transpired or as a way of raising funds and of a stylised form of mourning tragic events. Held in tandem, the plates mark different events in the history of British coal mining, collective events which often played out in highly local and personal ways.

Dishing Up Mining

A couple who I came to know very well during my fieldwork owns several of these plates. The pseudonyms I use for them in order to protect their privacy are Frances and Harold. When we were first getting to know each other, they would often bring out treasured family photograph albums, local history books, and family heirlooms to look at with me, items that held meanings and memories. Generous with their time, their enthusiasm, and greatly skilled as raconteurs, I have learned a great deal about the oral history of Dodworth and the Barnsley area as well as their own family's history during our many hours spent together over these past years.

Figure 3: “NCB Barnsley Area Reconstruction 1979/84”.

For a long while however the plates they owned went unnoticed by me as they seemed to be part of the household decoration and were not brought to my attention by Frances and Harold, unlike the photo albums and local history books. They are however clearly treasured belongings due to both their prominent display on the wall and creation as dishes only to be looked at, not eaten from. Eventually, I thought to ask about them as I had started seeing different versions of the plates in other homes as well as other objects used as decoration which also evoked a mining history such as brass deputies' lamps and coal sculptures of pit ponies, miners, and coal tubs. Responding to my interest in them, Harold invited me to go and take the dishes down off the wall, and we looked at each in turn.

The plate labelled here as Figure 3 is one of these. The plate is titled "N.C.B. Barnsley Area Reconstruction 1979/84", with N.C.B. being an abbreviation for the "National Coal Board" which was the name given to the coal mining authority after the coal mines were nationalised in 1947. The circumference of the plate is ringed by painted representations of the seventeen Barnsley area coal mines which were still open in 1984: Caphouse, Royston, Kingley Drift, Ferry Moor Riddings, South Kirkby, Grimethorpe, Houghton Main, Dearne Valley, Dodworth, Barrow, Darfield, North Gawber, Woolley, Park Mill, Emley Moor, Bulcliff Wood, and Derby Grange. These are all immediately recognisable as placenames local to the Barnsley area. In the centre of the plate is an outline of the Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council (BMBC) area with each pit located on the map, along with three further pictures of pit heads.

Produced in March 1985, the inscription on the back of the plate reads:

"This plate is specially produced as one of a Limited Edition to commemorate the Reconstruction of Barnsley Area of the National Coal Board. The Area was formed in 1967 by the amalgamation of Areas 5 & 6 of the earlier North Eastern Division and consisted of 36 collieries employing 25,900 men producing 9.6m tons/annum with headquarters at Grimethorpe. By 1974 Area production had dwindled to 6.1m tons/annum from 16,329 men and was still declining. The remaining 20 collieries were mostly old and difficult to improve individually. Some of these, together with mines sunk since, are depicted on the rim. In 1974 reconstruction plans were initiated to raise production to 8.5m tons/annum with 12,500 men and improve overall efficiency. The plan was to create three major complexes by connecting the mines underground and conveying the combined outputs through inclined drifts to the surface. These are shown in the plate centre and are called South Side, situated at Grimethorpe, West Side at Woolley and East Side, centred at South Kirkby. Each of the complexes is equipped with a high capacity fully computerised Coal Preparation Plant, including the biggest in Europe and served by liner train rail dispatch facilities. £455 m. have been expended since 1976 to breathe new life into those century old pits in one of the
People in Dodworth still speak bitterly about these dashed hopes and about the vast amounts of money that were spent on upgrading the three complexes which never came into full use. Instead, the pit shafts were used as dumping sites for the torn down outbuildings, pit heads, and redundant machinery, and then capped over. Millions of pounds of investment, material, and machinery were literally abandoned and erased, buried into the earth along with the jobs, way of life, and lost prosperity that they represented. The “breath of new life” that the plate (produced by the NCB in conjunction with the Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council) proclaimed turned out instead to be a kiss of death to the mining industry in the Barnsley area.

The second plate, produced in 1995, is entitled The Mines Rescue Service and commemorates the Mines Rescue Workers in Britain. The Mines Rescue Service is a specialist branch of workers within the coal industry. Each coal board region had its own Mines Rescue Station staffed with men who were trained in the dangerous and difficult work of going down mines after an accident or explosion to rescue trapped miners or to recover the remains of miners who had been killed.

Figure 4: “The Mines Rescue Service”.

The outer rim of the plate lists all fifty-three of the different Mines Rescue Stations in Britain in chronological order of their opening. Most of these have now been closed. The inner rim of the plate lists fourteen different massive pit disasters by the name of the pit where they occurred, and the year of its occurrence. These disasters are bracketed in red by the words “The True Price of Coal”. The only other words on the plate are “S.E.F.A.” and “Proto” with the years “1902” to “1994”. These refer to the year the first rescue station was opened and to the year that coal mining in Britain became privatised once again, signalling the end of a nationalised coal board and also the end of large-scale coal mining in Britain. Both shifts mark ends of eras and have played out in largely destructive ways for many coal mining areas. Four images also form part of the plate: two of Mines Rescue Workers using two different generations of breathing apparatus (the S.E.F.A and the Proto), a canary, and a brass deputy’s lamp. A lengthy inscription on the reverse of the plate reads:

“The Mines Rescue Service 1902-1994. Explosions, fires and inundations have always been an integral part of coal mining. When mines were small and numbers employed were few, minimal publicity resulted from disasters. As mines became deeper, with more extensive workings and larger numbers of men employed, so underground disasters became more frequent, often with great loss of life. The necessity for men trained in rescue work became evident.

1850-1920: The largest number of very serious disasters occurred. Development of self-contained breathing apparatus commenced.
1880: Self-contained breathing apparatus used successfully in the aftermath of the Seaham Colliery explosion. This was the forerunner of the Proto Apparatus.
1886: Royal Commission recommended establishment of Rescue Stations.
1902: First Rescue Station established at Tankersley, Yorkshire.
1904: Trained men, wearing breathing apparatus, successfully extinguished a serious fire at Wharncliffe Silkstone Colliery.
1908: First Central Rescue Station - Howe Bridge, Lancashire. First recorded use of breathing apparatus at Maypole Colliery Disaster. Wath Rescue Station opened.
1909: Rescue Stations opened in Aberaman, Crumlin, Mansfield, Altofts, Elswick, Cowdenbeath.
1911: Coal Mines Act - provision of Rescue Stations made compulsory.
1911-1918: Thirty-five new Rescue Stations opened.
1913: Britain's worst ever mining disaster - Universal Colliery, Senghenydd, South Wales - 439 men and boys killed.
1933: Large scale up-to-date Rescue Station opened at Boothstown, Lancashire.
1934: Gresford Colliery Disaster - 265 men and boys killed.
1947: Nationalisation. Whitehaven Colliery Disaster.
1950: Creswell Colliery Disaster. Plus the most successful mines rescue operation in Britain, when 116 men were rescued after inundation at Knockshinnoch Castle Colliery.
1967: Following the disasters at Whitehaven and Creswell, Self-Rescuer is introduced nationally, giving personal protection against carbon monoxide poisoning.
I had thought I was asking a simple question when I asked about the plates in the hallway. As it turned out, the plates were instead laden with many complicated layers of meaning. They are objects which commemorate both the history of mining and its decline in Britain; the history of the Mines Rescue Stations; a history of mining safety knowledge and techniques; the history of communities and families whose men were killed in mining disasters; the history of relations underpinning coal mining in Britain; the history of pits local to the Barnsley area and now no longer existent; and last but not least, one man's own personal work history and life story.

Like the haulage pulley monuments, the Huskar memorials, and the mini-industry of local history books, these plates represent a turning point in the history of Dodworth, Barnsley, and other areas suffering from the rupture of post-industrialism: they commemorate a moment in time when the certainty of coal mining and all it represented was no longer true. They are either very public (such as the Huskar monument and the haulage pulleys) or very mainstream and occurring across Britain (local history books). As such, they are what is perceived as fairly conventional ‘Western' forms and sites of remembrance.

However, the plates, along with other decorative household items like the brass deputies' lamps and the coal sculptures, are examples of sites of memory and commemoration which escape easy conventional assumptions. Instead, they form part of a shared symbolic language at play at the level of household decor in many homes in Dodworth and Barnsley. The items are purely decorative, but not only decorative, as the act of commemoration through hanging such an item as decoration in the home is in and of itself part of the identity work occurring locally. Choosing to display such items is a way of staking a claim about one’s own relationship with the mining industry, whether it be through personal experience or through the experiences of a family member.

Local discourse evokes a time in the not too distant past when pit villages like Dodworth were synonymous with coal mining. The twinned concepts "coal mining" and "pit villages" in turn evoke an entire set of related notions about what these places were like to live in from the people who lived here when mining dominated. Such ideas tend to orbit around a tension between how life was harder but simultaneously better when coal was king. Although poverty was a problem at different moments in time in the coal fields and mining work is spoken of as dangerous and dirty, life before the pit closures is often glossed by many people I spoke to during my fieldwork in terms of a moral order which has now collapsed along with the mining industry. The contours of social life of those days is remembered as being one in which the village was alive, people had work, work had meaning, life had order, people knew their neighbours, and residents (for the most part) respected one another. The erasure of coal mining is directly linked in local discourse with significant damage wrought on the social landscape in Dodworth and Barnsley.

For people facing the everyday difficulties of dealing with the social fallout following the closure of the mining industry, personal or familial links with Dodworth's coal mining past holds special cultural significance and symbolic capital. Being able to lay a claim to experience of and in this no longer existent industry is valuable. This is because it is a way of connecting oneself to a recent past (and the ways of being it represents) which, although acknowledged as taxing, is simultaneously perceived as being superior to the present day. It is because of these
Attesting to the local desirability of this is how the mining plates are starting to hold the same iconic weight as more traditional family heirlooms such as furniture or jewellery. During our conversations about the plates, Harold and Frances outlined for me which family member was getting which plate after the two of them had died. Reciprocally, on other occasions, their younger family members would proudly tell me that they would be inheriting a particular plate and then would sometimes recount some of Harold’s stories that went along with the plate. In this way, in addition to the plates holding symbolic meaning that play out on the level of identity construction (as being a member of a mining family), the plates also serve as triggers for reproducing local histories as well as reinterpreting them for newer times.

Conclusions

While I have been writing this piece, a notice of new publications from a Barnsley publishing house arrived through my letterbox. The language used in this mailing to advertise the books captured my attention, and one section specifies how “Barnsley has always played a part in the economy of an area which became one of the fastest growing industrial regions of the country, and the world”. Such language evokes commonly held local notions about what Barnsley is, in terms of what it once was (historically economically vibrant and central). It also mirrors the ways in which people urged me towards books like these as repositories of definitive knowledge about what Barnsley and Dodworth were/are. Indeed, attempting to describe this situation makes me wonder why there is no English verb tense that describes a past within a present, a “what used to be” held within a “what is”. Without such a tense, it is very difficult to convey a sense of what is transpiring in Dodworth and Barnsley.

Namely, this is how what used to be is still alive/existent/present since it persistently shapes lived realities in the present despite it no longer being concretely accessible. Without this sort of verb tense which does not appear to exist, the danger is that what I am describing will be read as “simply” a nostalgia, a reminiscence, with the negative connotations that these words hold in the English language. Influenced by authors such as Battaglia (1995) and Strathern (1995), what is far more salient to me is how and why nostalgia emerges in discourse and how the past is imagined, for these can function as potent sources of social reconnection and identity in turbulent times.

What I wish to call attention to in this chapter is a set of experiential landmarks that people use to help negotiate the shifting social worlds beneath their feet which move backwards and forwards between what is and what was. This discourse about what Dodworth is compared to what it was is simultaneously marked by deep regret and loss which acknowledges the dilemmas of an area grappling with social upheaval, dilemmas which are unsurprisingly perplexing and troubling. It is this irreconcilable difference between what was and what is that sustains a pervasive sense of discomfort, of in-betweness, and of things out of order which play out on multiple levels of social life including the family, work (or lack thereof), ‘community’, and the moral order.

The commemorative plates I examine here encapsulate this discomfort and mourning for what was and is no longer, but also increasingly provide a space within which to stake a claim of association with a way of life which is remembered as being better than today. This is because these plates do not stand on their own. Instead, explanations of the plates by their owners are always embedded in narratives of identity, working lives, family history, proud achievements, and loss. Such stories demonstrate how the plates serve as channels for narrating memories, but also illuminate the connections between individual and collective experiences at play in social memory.

Furthermore, these narratives are lodged in place re-written - places as they are remembered but in forms which no longer exist, such as the local coal mines and the social fabric of Dodworth itself. In the case of the coal mines, these are absences and erasures of formerly central and very public sites which dominated locally in multiple registers (work, family, ‘community’, forms of sociality). Now, in their absence, these losses are commemorated in private homes: plates hanging on hallways, standing in china cabinets, or displayed on mantel pieces.

Although many of the dishes were created to mark an ending, not all of these dishes were produced with the intention of commemorating a loss, such as the example of the Reconstruction plate. Despite this, given historical circumstances, they all now commemorate a past (both lived and remembered) that has not yet been replaced with new social anchoring points for organising identity and belonging. Unlike the monumental commemorative architecture that Westerners are most attuned to as sites of remembrance, these plates are an example of how significant domestic spaces can be in carving out sites of social memory. These plates are a form of memorialisation that simultaneously hold national, local, and personal meaning. They also highlight some of the difficulties people in various parts of South Yorkshire are working through in their everyday lives: that of being of a place which is known for what it no longer does and that of grappling with the in-betweenness of post-industrial rupture.
Acknowledgements

While protecting their privacy means that I cannot name them by their real names, I wish to thank the couple I call in this chapter "Frances" and "Harold" for our long-standing friendship, for their gracious permission to photograph their ceramic plates, and for permission to use the plates as illustrations in this piece. This chapter is based on fieldwork conducted between 2000-2001 for my doctoral thesis and on my continuing residence after that in Dodworth. I also wish to express my great thanks and deep appreciation to all of the people who took part in the larger research project this chapter grew out of.

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Bibliography


Footnotes

1. All names used in this chapter are pseudonyms. (Return to text)

2. Until 1974 when local government was reorganised throughout Britain, Dodworth had its own local council which was responsible for housing, planning, administration, public services and education. After 1974, Dodworth became part of the newly formed Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council which assumed responsibility for what had previously been locally controlled affairs. The proximity of Barnsley to Dodworth (two miles), in conjunction with Barnsley being the seat of municipal affairs means that the town has always played a significant role in the everyday lives of most Dodworth residents, but Dodworth still retains a distinct and resolute identity as like, but separate from, Barnsley. (Return to text)

3. More local events that I have seen remembered in this way since moving to Britain include a commemorative plate to celebrate The Huddersfield Daily Examiner's 150th Anniversary in August 2001 (funds raised by the sale of these plates were for Huddersfield kidney patients), a commemorative plate being sold to mark the baking of the Denby Dale Millennium Pie, and a plate commissioned by the Church School in Dodworth to mark its 150th anniversary. (Return to text)
4. The excellent National Coal Mining Museum for England near Wakefield has a fine historic collection of these as well as some contemporary ceramic plates like the ones discussed in this article. (Return to text)

5. I never came to learn what exactly these were, but from Harold's accounts of them they appear to be some sort of calming sedative that would not inhibit a rescue worker's ability to work but would help him cope with a very difficult and frightening work environment by numbing him to it. (Return to text)

6. Documented in John Threlkeld's book Pits 2 is one woman's account of the aftermath of the Wharncliffe Woodmoor disaster in 1936. Named Eleanor Bayley, her father was a member of the pit rescue team and she was in training as a nurse, and he asked her to come help on the pit top where the bodies were being brought out: "We had to get down on our knees and armed with buckets of water we washed the grimy, burned and disfigured bodies - it was a pitiful sight that will never leave my memory". Eleanor worked alongside the local midwife, Mrs. Bateman, and tells how "we came across her brother-in-law but didn't realise it was him until we had washed the dirt away. Then came the body of my Sunday school teacher and lads that I had gone to school with. Last messages to wives, mothers, and sweethearts, and hidden in their pit clogs, were handed to the authorities" (1989:212). Recognising family members, Sunday school teachers and men you had gone to school with in the makeshift hospital/mortuary was the reality of pit disasters in such relatively small villages (Return to text)