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**Title: Everyday practices of memory: Authenticity, value and the gift**

**Abstract**

This paper develops theories of collective memory by attending to the everyday practices and meaning-making involved in creating and sustaining sites of heritage. While research across disciplines linked to memory studies has increased in recent years, with a notable sociological contribution, as yet ethnographic understandings of how collective memory is produced and maintained through locally situated and embedded practices are not fully realized. Our research took place in the village of Six Bells in the South Wales Valleys, where living memory of a coal mining disaster in 1960 and coal mining itself are slowly disappearing. One of ways in which the people of Six Bells are remembering and commemorating this past is by giving their narratives and artefacts to the community's 'heritage room' as gifts. This form of remembering, prompted by an extraordinary event and the rapid social change associated with deindustrialisation, produces and sustains legitimate representations and imaginaries of the past. By developing anthropological understandings of gift exchange, we propose that these practices are one visible component of the claims to authenticity and the bestowal of value active in the memory work of everyday life. We attend to three inter-related characteristics of gift exchange to develop our argument; the importance of the personal in producing authenticity through the gift relation; the provenance and social impetus of the act of giving; and the systems of reciprocity generated across and between generations, which work to assign value to the gift itself.

**Keywords:** Memory, gift-exchange, value, authenticity, heritage, remembering, deindustrialisation, trauma, ethnography

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## Introduction

On the 28<sup>th</sup> of June 1960, a mining disaster claimed the lives of forty-five men in Six Bells, a village situated at the eastern edges of the South Wales coalfield. The explosion occurred in the west district of the old coal seam, and took the lives of all but three of the men working in that section of the mine. The inquiry that followed determined the explosion was caused by firedamp, a flammable gas that occurs naturally in coal seams, which was ignited by a spark when a stone fell on a steel girder. Of course, at the time of the disaster, Six Bells was a quite different place to now, organized by the rhythms of life in a rural, single industry settlement: for the most part paid work was for men, collectively organized through trade unions in the pit, while women worked in the family home caring for children; leisure time might be spent at chapel, or the Miners Institute where a library, a billiards room, and public hall were situated. However deep coal mining in the South Wales Valleys underwent protracted decline after the Second World War, before its eventual disappearance in 2008. The colliery in Six Bells closed in 1988 and with the subsequent decline of the coal industry, came ongoing economic contraction and social deprivation, which has seen Six Bells as the target of numerous policy interventions intended to alleviate or mitigate the worst effects of poverty. At present, Six Bells is populated by over 2000 people, housed along two sides of a valley above the site of the now flattened colliery.

Coal mining and coal mining communities have long been the subject of social science investigation in the UK<sup>1</sup>. As a body of literature, these works explore the continuities and ruptures of social life, highlighting the complexities and variations found within and between coal mining communities over time. Early analyses looked at the ways in which coal mining, and the social relations forged underground, were part of the order of these communities (Dennis, Henriques and Slaughter, 1956; Lockwood, 1975). In the 1980s, as the irreversible decline of the industry became increasingly apparent, sociologists shifted their attention to the changing political, economic and cultural landscape of these communities (Williamson, 1982; Beynon and Austrin, 1994). In turn, the aftermath of the 1984/5 Miners' Strike saw a body of work emerge

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed review of this literature, see Strangleman (2018) who offers a detailed chronology of the key moments where social science writing has focused on coal mining communities.

that can be broadly characterized as authored by academics as activists (Allen, 1981; Beynon, 1985; Milne, 2004). Further work surfaced reconceptualising coal mining communities as places of industrial loss (Pahl, 1984; Warwick and Littlejohn, 1992), which was accompanied by the emergence of a parallel body of work that looked at the practices of remembering this past, as the sociological gaze shifted to include sites of post-industrial heritage (Dicks, 2000; Meier, 2016). Our research in Six Bells continues this tradition of sociological inquiry by attending to the everyday practices and interactions which create and sustain the coal mining heritage of such communities. Here we also contribute to global work on the implications of past traumatic events for social relations in the present (Bell, 2006; Manning, 2016), attending to the complexities of remembering and memory in such contexts. Drawing on Halbwachs' (1950) thesis of memory, we understand the past to be a collective, social construction shaped by the concerns of the present whereby groups of people – through available social and cultural frameworks - determine what is memorable and how it will be remembered, and by extension how and by whom value is constituted and determined. Remembering is a cultural practice that we undertake, which 'helps to embed us in the social relations and institutions as well as symbolic systems of our society, thus binding us into our social group' (May, 2017, p.403). By attending to this work of remembering and forgetting, we are able to describe the ways in which power flows through and is manifest in negotiations of the past, the present and the self within social life, most visibly in this case along the fault lines of class, and embedded in locality. Considering the significance of imaginaries and representations of the past for our cultural, political and social positions and trajectories makes us alive to the act of memory as a set of social relations and cultural practices. Our research setting leads us to explore the broader politics of memory as they relate to a context of rapid social change, in this case de-industrialisation, and bound up with complex ideas of nostalgia, trauma and melancholy.

In 2010, a memorial named *Guardian* was erected in Six Bells to commemorate the 1960 disaster. *Guardian* is a steel sculpture of a lone, bare chested miner standing with his arms outstretched at his side and palms facing outwards. The statue, over twelve metres high, stands on a plinth, which itself is over seven metres high. At the same time, in a converted pub nearby, a small

heritage exhibition room and archive run by volunteers was established. This heritage room is relatively small scale and rudimentary, especially when compared to the impressive addition of *Guardian* to the valley floor. Yet, as many of the artefacts, or ‘ordinary old things’ as one local described them, that can be found in the heritage room have been given by local people, and this practice of donation, and subsequently the careful storage and sometimes display of artefacts, offers valuable insights into the ways narratives of the past are produced and shared. In this context, we develop ideas from anthropological studies of gift exchange (in particular, Mauss, 1925; Malinowski, 1922; Wiener, 1992; Godelier, 1996) and relate it to the concept of collective memory to examine how the symbolic and cultural work of remembering is accomplished through the moral economy of gift relations. The value of considering the local, situated practices of memory work as a component of collective memory is demonstrated through analysis of the ways in which material traces of the past circulate through different spheres, in this case from the private, domestic realm to a public repository for memory. In this way, our research expands the discussion of the creation of *lieux de memoire*, or sites of memory (Nora, 1989), to the *practices* that are complicit in this process.

Over the course of a year, we conducted a multi-method ethnographic research project in Six Bells. The research design had several distinct elements. Ethnographic and mobile methods were used to explore the interactions and practices that the key heritage sites in Six Bells generate: most notably the heritage room and *Guardian* itself, but also an older and far smaller stone memorial, as well as various community artworks, each of which celebrate and commemorate Six Bells’ history. As part of this process, we undertook ethnographic interviews, largely through ‘walking tours’ of these sites with community workers, volunteers, and visitors. Observations of the contents of the heritage room, and its storage cupboards, display cabinets, and other installations, complement the above. Finally, we also analysed the archive material, which included various newspaper accounts and the official inquiry report, to situate the heritage site in their history context. Drawing on these data we develop our argument in the first instance by attending to claims to authenticity that underpin the ‘memory work’ found in sites of heritage. We then consider how such claims to authenticity are accomplished through gift exchange by

explicating three salient features of the process. First, we consider the importance of the personal in the gift relation. Second, we examine the significance of the provenance of the gift and the social impetus prompting the practice. Finally, we reflect on the obligation of reciprocity associated with the gift in this context and the negotiations that this provokes. Running through this analysis, is the understanding that the value of the object is retrospectively inscribed through its acceptance; a value that the giver seeks and the recipient duly bestows.

### **Claims of authenticity**

The installation of *Guardian* and the local heritage industry emerging around it marks Six Bells as a consciously designated site of memorialisation; as well as the 'official' heritage work, people come and scatter ashes, plant trees in memory of their loved ones and put commemorative plaques in place. This memory work is galvanized by the understanding that if the living memory of the mining past, and particularly the disaster, are not collected now, they will soon be lost forever: the rapid demise of the coal mining industry constitutes an abrupt break with the past, a moment of keenly felt historical discontinuity. In such a context of longing to remember, memory becomes a matter of explicit signs, rather than implicit meanings. There is an impetus to represent and imagine what we can no longer spontaneously experience (Olick and Robbins, 1998). As Dicks (2000, p.155) notes of a similar context in the South Wales Valleys, the memory work undertaken is a mixture of both the desire to create a 'tribute' to coal miners and coal mining communities, and to tell of 'how things were'. Remembering becomes the production of a record with 'detailed, specialized and idiosyncratic memories that guarantee historical authenticity' (Dicks 2000, p.155). It works to present an account that has a certain and infallible accuracy, gained through an immediacy and realism that the traditional museum does not typically curate; it provides a geographical, cultural and social closeness as the history on display is relatively recent (Dicks, 2000, p.148). This informs our conceptualisation of *Guardian*, the heritage room and the artefacts within it as *lieux de memoire* (Nora, 1989; 1992) or significant entities, 'which by dint of the human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community' (Nora, 1996, p.xvii) as *millieux de memoire*, or living memory, slips away.

This 'active, intentional form of commemorative practice' (Degnen, 2005, p.730) is visible in the heritage room, through, for example, the display of maps of the mine, newspaper articles reporting the disaster, the wall of miners' lockers that contain the stories of individual miners and artworks depicting life in a working coalfield, as well as the accounts of the inquiry that was held to determine the cause of the explosion. The original miners' lockers and their contents are particularly notable in that they differ remarkably from mainstream museum representations of coal and coal mining. One section of the room has been designed to resemble a miner's house of the 1950s. An armchair is placed next to a fireplace, complete with mantelpiece and mantel clock. Visitors sitting in the chair can activate recordings of local residents' recollections of life in Six Bells in the past, by pushing a button on its arm. On the wall above the fireplace, old photographs depicting family and community life are displayed around a mirror. The skirting boards are yellowing and the wallpaper is fading as the 'home set' is intended to remind visitors of the past (although this struck some visitors as problematically inauthentic as there was great pride in domestic routines). This and the other displays in the heritage room are understood to tell the story of Six Bells, with claims to 'authenticity' tied to invocations of the locality they are presented in. They make up what Creswell (2012, p.2) has described as the 'archive of a place', though unlike the artefacts in his article these have not been pushed to one side and ignored, but instead have been given to, accepted and displayed within the heritage room. This work of acceptance is important here; the receipt of these items affords them a retrospective value and legitimacy, which is a key tenet of the gift relation in this context.

### **The importance of the personal**

In a café, next to the small heritage room in Six Bells, an ex-miner, Joe, asks his wife for a piece of paper that she has in her handbag, which she finds easily and passes to him. He unfolds the sheet, filled with typed text in a bold font, and begins reading aloud what is written; his account of the Six Bells mining disaster of 28<sup>th</sup> of June, 1960. We learn that Joe was a member of Mine Rescue team at the time, and one of the first at the scene. It's clear he quickly grasped what the explosion might mean for the miners, for the family members gathering at the iron railings around the pit and for the village he had lived in all his life. He goes on to explain that he saw more than most that day: 'more than anyone should' and describes how, at the time, he tempered the details for those who had lost



loved ones. Joe delivers his story and looks up, ready for the questions he knows will follow about the tragic loss of life, and the later loss of a whole way of life. 'Do you want that for the centre?' he asks the community development worker standing with us, offering her the piece of paper. (Fieldnotes)

Our encounter with Joe happened during one of the first visits we made to Six Bells. A regular at the café next to the heritage room, Joe was known to be someone to speak to about the disaster and he was eager to share his story with us. The scene described above was prompted by a simple introduction: we were from the University, he might be interested in talking to us. There was little ambiguity, and we didn't explain our presence: it was clear that if Joe was being asked to talk to people, outsiders, it was because we were interested in the disaster and its memorialisation. Joe speaks with authority. His is a first-hand description. He knew the men underground, and he found their bodies. As our conversation moves on it is clear that Joe is aware that as time passes the miners' way of life he recounts so vividly and that he feels should be remembered, may well be forgotten by future generations. Now, he is offering to give his account to the public display in the heritage room: it has been prepared as an exhibit, which will be present in his absence.

Joe's storytelling, his desire to pass on his account, and have it cared for and displayed, is part of a wider set of narrative practices. Talking to local people, the disaster is often brought up in opening exchanges. Conversations quickly turn to connections with the disaster: memories of the day, both personal and inherited, with legitimating work on the authenticity of their accounts framing the narratives. We hear of 'the near misses', the 'twists of fate', and 'lucky escapes' bound up with the events of that day. One man swapped shifts the night before so he could play for his darts team; another's shift changed that morning to a different part of the mine; one man had a trade union meeting cancelled and tried, but failed, to get his shift back (he was bemoaning his loss of earnings at the pit office when the explosion happened). The heritage room acts as a repository for some of these stories of the disaster, but also of life in Six Bells in the past more broadly. The everyday memories of life in and around a working pit, of those who knew how 'things actually were' are understood to be worthy of safekeeping. These are snapshots of the past, recollections of working class life, in the workplace, at home and in the community. This

process sees the engagement of local people as both subjects and objects of local heritage (Dicks, 2000), as active in undertaking the social and cultural work of remembering and forgetting. In this case both in terms of the construction of heritage; and in the representation of *themselves* and *their* history as exhibits worthy of display.

These practices resonate with the work undertaken by Degnen (2005) in Dodsworth, a small village in the north of England and a place that shares much in common with Six Bells. Dodsworth sits within a former coalfield and the community has experienced significant changes in the social, economic and physical landscapes over the past few decades. Degnen (2005) skillfully describes what she calls the three-dimensionality of memory talk as a way of thinking about remembering, social memory and also, crucially, forgetting. Drawing on Frankenberg's (1950) *Village on the Border*, she describes how the ways people talk about the past are far from neutral practices, but instead discern 'who is of the village, who the village belongs to, and as such is something that can be used as a form of differentiation and exclusion as much as to create a sense of belonging' (Degnen, 2005, p.742). Within Six Bells, as we might expect, this sense of belonging is created in part through storytelling, through recollections of the disaster, including those that attribute blame. Some suggest that the men who lost their lives should never have been blasting that day as maintenance was being undertaken; others that they should have been wearing the gas masks that were becoming a requirement at the time. Others still focus on the findings of the inquiry, contesting the official explanations of the cause of the disaster. While Six Bells was known to be a 'gassy mine', and the inquiry reported several similar occurrences both in South Wales and further afield, the cause of the disaster remains disputed by some in contemporary tellings. As one local told us, of the spark igniting the firedamp: 'I never heard of that happening, ever'. Perhaps most interestingly, some do not talk about the disaster at all, even amongst their friends and fellow ex-miners, because the conflicting memories and interpretations that emerge in re-tellings provokes discord. These moments of conflict challenge the simple assertion of memory as a coherent, collective product or representations of the past.

The cultural practices of gift exchange, relating to the acts of storytelling and listening in Six Bells are part of this broader set of social relations, that work to confer a sense of belonging through remembering and claims to authentic memory. Halbwach's (1925) and Mead's (1959 [1932]) work draws attention to collective memory as a fluid, fragmented and an often-contentious process, as opposed to a static, rigid, and fixed presentation of the past. Here, forgetting is as active a process as remembering. These practices of remembering and forgetting create a sense of community; a shared belonging-from-afar (May, 2017) that people can experience and produce. The process of acknowledgement through which Joe's testimony becomes part of the symbolic landscape of the place implicates forgetting, as through the acceptance of his account as an exhibit, obligation to remember alternative accounts is divested. Joe organizes and presents his memory of the past in a way that is meaningful to others, thus consolidating his individual sense of belonging within the collective community; his recollections are mobilized to create a sense of belonging in the present (May, 2017).

### **Provenance and social impetus**

One of the volunteers at the heritage room talks us through some of the things that are on display. They contain merchandise for sale to tourists: ornamental replicas of *Guardian*, postcards and key rings featuring the image of *Guardian*. But the room is also filled with ordinary old things: a shovel leaning against the wall and a piece of rusty track lying on the ground. A glass covered display drawer holds an open leather wallet alongside its contents: photographs, a British Legion card, a Six Bells Workman's Club and Institute card. There are badges from the National Union of Mineworkers, memorial postcards of mining disasters, and a darning kit, a leather pouch of needle and thread. Another glass-covered drawer contains an empty bottle of Captain Morgan's Rum, a tin of Bird's baking powder and a box of Oxydol laundry detergent. Miners' lamp tokens line the edges of some of the displays, many from the Six Bells pit, but also some from other mines. Many of these items are displayed under small, handwritten signs: '*Item donated (not for sale)*'. The volunteer opens the drawers of a cupboard and pulls out more things: boxes of matches with now archaic names of 'Pioneer', 'Winners' and 'England's Glory', Fairy soap; a plastic hair thinning comb loosely wrapped in paper and a red Stanley knife in an old brown envelope. The volunteer contemplates moving these items into the cabinets. She places the hair comb and Stanley knife on the top shelf but returns the soap and the matches to the drawers. (Fieldnotes)

The things that are described in the extract of fieldnotes have been given to the heritage room. What is given is nearly always old, often directly associated with miners and mining. Other items concerning women's work in the past, such as laundry soap and darning needles can also be seen on display. Often a note will accompany a gift, designating its provenance and acknowledging its status as an item worthy of safekeeping and display. These notes are carefully retained, attached to the artefacts in storage and sometimes displayed alongside them in the cabinets. For example, the blocks of Fairy Soap are wrapped in their note: 'Mum and Dad ... liked to use Fairy. Hope you can use it in your display'.

The significance of the provenance of these items is an important aspect of the gift relation. The work of tying the artefacts to their owners, of embedding them in a broader network of relations, is both indicative of, and intent on demonstrating, their worth through their claim to authenticity. This authenticity is accomplished through a process of acknowledgement and acceptance by the curators and visitors to this space, which inscribes value on to the artefact and by extension the gifter and their reading of history. One volunteer described this process to us:

But it is valuable as long as we keep a record of it, of what it is and whose it was because otherwise it is just an axe or just a key. When you know that someone used that key for thirty-five years for his specific locker in Six Bells pit then it means more. There is a gentlemen who wanted a photograph of the underground disaster. They were from Scotland. His dad was involved in the disaster. I don't know what his name was but he was number 38 on the map, and I managed to get a photocopy of it. He wants a miner's lamp, well, there's loads on eBay, there's hundreds. But he wants one from Six Bells, from here, and I said well they don't come with Six Bells on them, they have just got the manufacturers name on them. ... They had some in Abergavenny market, and this guy had renovated them. He said he had picked them up from here and there, but where? Cos my husband has got his dad's and when anything is said about miners' lamps, he always says well yes, we have got my dad's. So I daren't do anything with it, it sits in the corner, it gets dusted, because it's dad's. (Interview with volunteer at the heritage room)

The value of these objects lies in the claims of authenticity tied to them by virtue of their receipt through the gift relation. The coupling of the artefact together with a personal narrative, ensures the original owner remains attached to the gift in the exchange. These artefacts provide the idiosyncratic details of life in Six Bells, and they accomplish a social and cultural closeness to the

geographical and historical landscape of locality. They pay homage to the person who they belonged to, but also tell of how things were in the past through their position in the broader narrative of the heritage room. In this way, the objects takes on renewed meaning.

These objects bridge the private and the public realms; they have moved from homes, from boxes at the bottom of a wardrobe or under the bed, from the attic or shed, from the mantelpiece or dresser, to a heritage institution. As they circulate, objects that were perhaps once ordinary and produced on a mass scale, now become singular and special. Items that were used routinely and given only practical significance now take on symbolic and cultural import. Thus we see that in the life of an object, its form may not only be that of commodity (Appadurai, 1986; Kopytoff, 1986). Indeed, we can see a shift in the meaning attached to the artefacts, and 'this is exactly what the process of museumisation does; it turns objects, of art, history, and everyday life into things that signify something more, into objects with mystical and magical qualities' (Sturken, 2015, p.19). Through the gifting of objects to a heritage site and, importantly, their acceptance for safekeeping within it, the symbolic meaning and value of these objects can be preserved, altered and even magnified.

Giving things to the heritage room is part of a broader set of cultural practices associated with accumulating, sifting, sorting, ordering, storing and displaying material artefacts, which occurs in different spaces in society. There are various types of public archives for example, each associated with particular practices (DeLyser, 2015; Beel et al, 2015; Cresswell, 2012). There are also personal spaces of collecting and display, for example on mantelpieces, shelves and bookcases (Hurdley, 2013; Geoghagen, 2010), as well as those practices associated with clearing or ridding things (Horton and Kraftl, 2012; Crang, 2012; Gregson, 2007; Gregson and Crewe, 2003). Within Six Bells, the social impetus most often prompting the gifting of artefacts to the heritage room is bereavement. Existing work on ridding and clearing artefacts draws our attention to the ways in which the disposal of objects from our homes can be complex, affective and interwoven with memories and imagination (Horton and Kraftl, 2012). Bereavement particularly heightens the difficulty of disposing of objects, which become deeply significant at

they are attached to a person no longer present. Lewis (2018) describes how practices of gift giving are drawn on to cope with the uncertainty that arises following the loss of a loved one. These practices also relate to a reconfiguration of social relations beyond the ties of kinship and the space the of the home. Hallam and Hockey (2001) highlight the ways in which memories and memory-making become highly charged following death, and the particularly important role that material objects, and the associated rituals and gestures, provide to give a continued presence beyond death. For families connected to the life of Six Bells and coping with the bereavement, deciding what to do with the possessions of loved ones, can result in giving 'unwanted' artefacts to the heritage site. As one of the volunteers at the heritage room explained:

'Well it belonged to somebody they loved I suppose, cos a bar of soap isn't important, a bar of soap you can buy in the supermarket, or you can get anywhere, so why bring us a bar of soap? But it was granny's bar of soap and it was grandad's hatchet'.

(interview with volunteer at the heritage room)

The network of relations imbued in the object is sustained through this practice of gift exchange, but also broadened to the public sphere, and there is a sense that this is where the object 'belongs'. The morality of gift exchange in this context precludes throwing the object away; this is an instance where gifts are known to be of value, and are given away. This is somewhat distinct from the traditional inheritance ritual. The heritage room becomes a key setting for what Hurdley (2013, p.122) terms the 'gift-for-display', and in this case also 'gift-for-safekeeping', which solves the 'problem of storage and disposal of objects', though, as we describe below, sometimes their arrival at the heritage room poses problems for the curators. As a volunteer described:

'I think it is nothing that I can say is valuable, but it just seems to be, um, they can't throw it away and so they want it to be somewhere safe, and they don't want it, and they have got no space for it but they don't want to throw it away, so it ends up here '(Interview with volunteer).

This process can be described as an attempt to provide these objects with 'safe passage', in such a way as to affirm the giver as 'care-full' (Addington & Ekerdt, 2104; Ekerdt et al., 2012). Through the acknowledgement of the gifts, the volunteers understand this impetus and respond to it through their practice of retaining the objects and the information tied to them.

## Systems of Reciprocity and Obligation

Some gifts pose more problems for curators than others. Mining tools, like a pickaxe head pose logistical concerns - how best to display a pickaxe head? The axe was accompanied with a note: 'Axe was in a friend's shed - cleared out when he passed away. [We] ... believe it is a mining axe and would like it to become an artefact within a museum. Please call to confirm you can accept the donation'. A volunteer explains that she would like to display it, that she feels obliged to display it, but worries that 'it could be used as a weapon by a visitor'. Still though, she cares for the axe; she has taken it home and her husband has removed the rust and sharpened the edges (though not too sharp) and it sits in a locked cupboard in a hallway. On several visits, the axe is revisited, examined and presented to us, always with the question 'what am I supposed to do with this?'. (Fieldnotes)

'I have got another little story, on the day [of the memorial service] this guy came up to me, Mr. Jones, and he was going "... I have got something for you. I said I wanted to give it to you". And he has bought me this pickaxe, it was his father's. Oh ok, "Can we do something with this for the memorial?". "Ok let me see". I was walking around with this pick for about an hour, because I didn't know what to do with it. So when Seb [the artist who designed and built *Guardian*] came back to do the arms, it's all wielded in sections, and I got him to put, its actually in his feet on top of the plinth. And I told Mr. Jones I would get it up there, not to worry' (Interview with Community Worker in Six Bells)

While the heritage room offers a space for family members to give artefacts, their arrival is on occasion problematic. Nettleingham (2018) points to the way in which the cultural value of heritage and decisions about what to preserve and exhibit, are context-dependent. In this contemporary setting of loss and longing, both in terms of the pit disaster itself and also broader processes of de-industrialisation, in our heritage room the volunteers have made the decision to accept and preserve everything that is given, and to treat gifts with what they consider to be due care. One of the volunteers explains this ethic of care by describing the emotional connection that people often have with these objects. She knows refusing items would be 'hurtful' because she has heard stories from those who have been turned away by other local museums, as well as those disappointed when artefacts have not been displayed and their whereabouts are unknown. In turn, the volunteer talks of her responsibility for carefully displaying or at least storing the objects that arrive. The examples of the axe heads above demonstrate this; while neither is visibly displayed, they are both cared for and valued (not least because one of the faces in the district was still cutting and hand-filling coal on to conveyors with the use of axes and shovels at the time

of the disaster). The trust afforded to the volunteers by the family and friends of the original owners of these axe heads is well placed. The axe head in the cupboard is not necessarily a presence the volunteer welcomes; its materiality is problematic. But the location it occupies is a symbolically potent one; it is part of the development of trust between the local heritage room and the consolidation of its role as an enduring site of memory.

Unlike the objects described in the previous section the axe heads are not currently or even likely to be on display. However, it is not the display of the objects that shifts the symbolic relations of the object in this site, but the practice of giving and receiving the gift. The process of exchange produces networks of reciprocity and trust that are built up over time (Pahl and Pollard, 2010). By accepting and caring for the artefacts, the heritage site affirms the collective belonging of the giver; while the gift also creates a symbolically potent way of connecting the heritage site to the local community. It is not solely through practices of display that these processes are consolidated and produced. Indeed through their careful, but not necessarily visible, storage the gifts become (somewhat) immaterial; their meanings surface through fulfilling connections between memory, kin, community and place. Particularly in the case of the pick axe that now resides in *Guardian*, it is the unseen work that its presence achieves that makes it significant. The stories attached to the objects, including those of their arrival at the heritage site and their location within it, remain part of the fabric of Six Bells and significant in and constitutive of the memory work of the site. Here, Pahl and Pollard's (2010) work on lost and disappearing objects can helpfully pull us away from focusing too tightly on the artefacts themselves: the axeheads, while out of sight, remain complicit in the practices of collective memory in the heritage room; they are still part of the 'collage of narratives and objects' despite their lack of prominence (Pahl and Pollard, 2010).

## **Conclusion**

The practices and processes discussed in this paper are in part a response to the sense of loss, injury and harm that follow a form of nomad capitalism, the logic of which exploits people and places, and then, as it suits, moves on (Williams, 1989). The form of heritage work found in Six



Bells is an attempt to preserve identities and traditions in a context of rapid social change and, relatedly, to accomplish an authentic set of valuable representations and imaginaries of the past (Nettleingham, 2018; Samuel, 1994, Macdonald, 1997). It is through the symbolic power of the heritage room, and specifically through the act of accepting the artefacts and accounts, that political, social and cultural value is produced and reproduced through time. The significance of extra-ordinary events and rapid social change for contemporary memory work has been well rehearsed, however to date the methodological focus has neglected ethnographic sensibilities about the everyday practices in these sites. This analysis develops and extends existing theories of collective memory, by attending to it as a fluid and dynamic process, actively produced and sustained through everyday practices.

Six Bells as a site of memory allows objects that might once have been disposed of, albeit reluctantly, or displayed in homes, albeit dutifully, to be given to a place they will be valued and cared for. The value of these objects lies in their work of authenticity, their ongoing attachment to the giver and, relatedly, the obligations in accepting the accounts and artefacts that arrive, a reciprocation of the trust afforded to the heritage room through the careful curation and storage of each item. Through the process of giving and receiving, the objects take on broader significance; they move from homes and the private sphere into the public and communal. Through their presence in this site of memory, these objects are entrusted to the next generation, as social relations are embedded and crystallised in these inalienable goods (Weiner, 1992). Here the receipt of the gift is itself a gift of acknowledgment, which affords value to the givers' longing to remember the past and authenticating particular accounts of history.

Most fundamentally, we learn from Mauss (1990[1950]) that gift giving allows social relations to be made and maintained, and here we observe how this exchange, and the development of social bonds forged through systems of reciprocity, obligation and kindness, contribute to the formation and sustenance of collective memory. This elucidation of the importance of everyday practices in developing our understanding of collective memory, pays particular attention to conceptualising belonging as something temporal (May, 2017) and spatial (Strangleman, 2018):

both through the creation and maintenance of shared understanding of the past, which mobilises a sense of belonging in the present; and through the production of claims of authenticity, which bestows value to a set of local and intimate representations of the past in the present. This develops sociological understanding of collective memory as we consider how the gifted artefacts are culturally defined and socially shared, and we make visible the processes by which sites of memory are sustained over time. Here, material artefacts act as a locus for collective memory and, in turn, the circulation of values, attitudes, beliefs and practices between generations and within places, contributing to the production of ideas of collective unity, and belonging.

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