MCR History Talks: Tourism

In episode two of this podcast series, Jessica and Adam explore the history of tourism, travel and heritage in Manchester's past and present. They discuss the history of Manchester Airport, alternative tourism and the National Trust. Jessica and Adam are also joined by Jamie Farrington. Jamie is a third year PhD History Candidate who is interested in the emergence of the Industrial Revolution, and how it impacted on the health and well-being of those employed in the developing textile industry of the late eighteenth and nineteenth century.

Jessica White: Hello, and welcome to MCR History Talks, a podcast created for the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society, brought to you by PhD students, Jessica White and Adam Waddingham from the University of Manchester History Postgraduate Network.

Adam Waddingham: And this week, tourism. In those weird summer months where we're given the freedom to travel. And yet some of us are still feeling a little cautious in these current times of coronavirus. So, this week, we'll be asking what is Manchester's relationship with travel, tourism and the heritage industry.

Jessica White: As always, we are recording this with social distancing in place. Adam is in Manchester and I am in London. But lockdown is easing - today, I went to the gym for the first time. And in a couple of weeks, I'll be going to Paris. Air travel is becoming a bit more of a possibility after months of seeing the skies basically empty, airlines and airports are slowly starting to reopen. And we're now getting bombarded once more with emails from Ryanair and EasyJet about new bargain rates for travel and Manchester Airport is opening its doors and hoping to return to its status as one of the most popular airports in the UK, welcoming millions of passengers each year. But that wasn't always the case, was it Adam?

Adam Waddingham: No, it definitely wasn't, and while we might be getting to go to Europe for £29 one-way deals, Manchester's first civic airport was only really established in 1929. And this is born out of a desire for Manchester to have an airport in the years between the Wars.

So, at the end of the First World War and the start of the Second World War, that period of development, and the fact that the Council owned acres of land on the site next to the present A57, an exciting space that's just near Wythenshawe. But it tells its history up to the 1960s. So, if we just think very quickly then: the 29th of January, 1930, the Barton Aerodrome, Manchester's first airport, was opened. The Barton Aerodrome is its original name there, but it wasn't really up until 1934 that discussions began with KLM, the airline, about using Barton Aerodrome for international travel.

Jessica White: Yeah. So, KLM was the national airline for Holland and Manchester really wanted to be a site for international travel. It didn't want to be national. It wanted to compete with London basically as a site of international travel and serve the North, and become a key, you know, much more than it was already, a key site in the North as a provincial airport.

But KLM, when approached about using the Barton Aerodrome as an airport, they just... there was something about the industrial landscape of Manchester, which made it really unappealing. The Chief Pilot of KLM noted that "taken from the meteorological standpoint, this is the worst flying round of any known to me in Europe. The surrounding obstructions, such as high-tension pylons, high factory chimneys and high radio masts make the approaches to the ground very dangerous. Our advice to the local authorities is not to spend more on this ground, but to try to find a more open ground in the neighborhood of Manchester."

And so that land was at Ringway, which is South of Manchester, which is the current site of Manchester's airport. And that site was earmarked for a new airport. And it was in 1935 that work on that airport started and it opened in June 1938. However, during the war, obviously the airport shut to become a hub of wartime engineering activity.

So, Adam, what happened after the war then?

Adam Waddingham: Well, we're going to do a quick rundown if you like, it probably is quite a good way of doing it. So, we've got extensions: the airport extensions - that feels like a very current theme, doesn't it? Runways are extended into the 1950s and late 1960s; and then also into the early 1980s. The extension in the 1960s allowed it to take on aircraft that could fly nonstop to Canada. So, if we're thinking of international travel at this point, that's one of those destinations that becomes quite popular and Manchester was determined to direct some of the attention away from the South and bring Continental and Transatlantic travel to the North. So, this was, once again, a question of civic identity and continuing themes that we've already talked about, Jess, in the podcasts before, about Manchester as a place and space. And we'll come on to talk about that a little bit more later on. But back to the 1960s: and so package holidays had grown in popularity, which helped boost the importance of regional airports right across the UK, but also particularly in Manchester for catering to journeys to Spain and the Mediterranean.

Unlike today, (there was) no need to, of course, quarantine for 14 days, if you go there. But then, in 1963, only 91,666 people were classified under this heading..

Jessica White: Which - the package tour?

Adam Waddingham: Yeah. But by 1970, this figure had grown to just over half a million. So, we can see a growth in passenger numbers. But then if we fast forward 10 years, 2 million passengers were now on these inclusive tours to these package holidays. If we start then to think that in 1960 there were only 860,000 passengers at Manchester airport, but by 1981, there were 4 million - we really have one of these 'engines of growth', to use one of those economic terms for an area - we've got an airport that literally is doubling its numbers very quickly.

Jessica White: And I think airport history sounds a bit banal and inane and for only those interested in airplanes. You know, people who are standing half a mile away from the airport, looking at the planes coming in and landing. But airport history really is a site for so much change. There's a current historian called James Vernon, who's a huge historian of modern British history, who looks at the history of Heathrow airport.

Airports encompass changes in employment, changes in cultural patterns, changes in social history. And I think what's really important is that, okay, when Adam, you say there was a huge growth in the number of passengers at Manchester Airport, that's not just a figure, that shows that our relationship with travel changed over 20 years where it was no longer a habit for the elite to go on holiday, but actually people had more money and people had the freedom to travel. And that's really an important development.

Adam Waddingham: Definitely. And I think you can take that as a starting point to think much more broadly about ideas. One of which it's really important I think, Jess, is talking about leisure a little bit and I wonder, what do you think this tells us about leisure in the post-war period?

Jessica White: Well, we know from the immediate aftermath of the war, when there was full employment, by which we mean if you were of the age that you were able to work, you could work. There was a new, robust welfare system as well. People had the money, I'm not saying people were rolling in it, but it's now known that people had a greater expendable income. Also, younger people were earning a bit more money and this disposable income that they weren't spending on their children, they were able to spend on leisure habits.

That's why we see an increase in drinking cultures during the postwar period, because people just had more money to spend, and that made travel easier as more people wanted to go on holiday; the cost of these holidays diminished. So holidaying was no longer about traveling - it was about it being a brief, leisurely activity that was kind of universal, which really became no longer, as I said, a habit of the wealthier classes, but was possible for a lot of people to do.

Of course, international tourism was really important, but not everyone could afford to fly. And we can't overlook those sites of heritage in the UK, which still attract thousands of tourists each year - particularly old estates that are usually run by English Heritage and the National Trust. And so to discuss heritage further, we sat down with Jamie Farrington from the University of Manchester.

Hi all

Jamie Farrington: Hello.

Jessica White: Jamie, can you tell us just a bit about your research?

Jamie Farrington: Yes. And thank you for having me today, Jess and Adam, I would love to. So, I look at 19th Century medical history, particularly looking at the textile industry in Manchester - in the Greater Manchester area as it is today, and also in the Northwest of England in general; so, all the way across. And what I'm really interested in, part of my research is that I'm based with the National Trust at Quarry Bank Mill.

And I work with their collection. I work at the mill to actually try to incorporate medical history into their overall narrative. And that's one part of my thesis. The other part is to produce a distinct piece of research, looking at the medical history of Quarry Bank, which is actually posited from an academic point of view without having the heritage side.

So, I have two, distinct but overlapping areas of thought. What I'm doing at the moment is trying to actually bring these ideas together to see how we can turn health and well-being into something sustainable that can be offered at Quarry Bank Mill and that we can talk about in textile industry completely.

So rather than seeing the textile industry as just this industrialisation, we're having the people back in it, and having a health point of view.

Jessica White: Yeah. So, the reason why we wanted to have you on the show was while you do look at the history of Manchester, you are very much part of the heritage industry, and you're looking at that aspect as well, aren't you?

Jamie Farrington: Yes, I am indeed.

Adam Waddingham: I guess then Jamie, you've talked about how it's distinct in a couple of ways. I wonder if you could just say something about how distinct heritage is for you and what heritage actually means to you as an historian.

Jamie Farrington: So, heritage is a great term. I like the word heritage because it has so many different meanings to different people. When I'm putting my heritage hat on with Quarry Bank Mill I'm looking at it from a historical property point of view. I'm looking at how Quarry Bank and the National Trust can take the history of a site and conserve it and then present it and create new narratives to actually attract visitors from all around, to talk to them about their own culture, their own past, because many people who visit Quarry Bank are from the local area, too.

People come from far and wide but we get a lot of Manchester-based visitors and these people might have been related to not maybe the people at Quarry Bank in the 19th century, but maybe to factory workers and textile workers that lived in Manchester at the time. So, what we find is we try to encourage these people to understand this industrial heritage, understand their own history and try to make connections with them now, with them in the past, but also to try to think about how their lives today have been impacted by the industrialisation. So, part of what I have done with the Healthy Profit exhibition, which is one of the aspects of my research, is I have tried to help link how modern-day

working affects health, and how that compares to mill work. So, trying to actually bring in this narrative of health and well-being today and how that differs from what was happening in the past.

But one thing I really like about heritage is that, even though I talk about it from the historical heritage property point of view, heritage has different meanings for everybody.

It can be quite intangible. Each different person has their own relationship with heritage, and trying to understand that relationship is all part of the game for me really, to actually understand how each...how heritage is so broad, and so personal to a person rather than just being this broad, overarching story.

Jessica White: Exactly. And it's quite funny, isn't it? Because sometimes we can see the heritage sector as an elite form of leisure. You have to be a National Trust member to visit a lot of their properties, but really, it's, well in particular Quarry Bank and the Styal estate, they are the history of workers.

Could you just tell us a bit more about what Quarry Bank Mill is and the Styal estate is and what it is now?

Jamie Farrington: Yes, of course. So, Quarry Bank Mill is, probably, the oldest working textile mill in Europe. So that is one of its unique factors. And the National Trust has, since the 1950s when they took ownership of it, it has been working to conserve the mill, to keep it running and keep it up to date to actually allow a visitor to have an authentic experience, or near as authentic as possible, of textile work at the time. So, people visiting go to the mill, they can actually go around the mill buildings and they get told the story of Quarry Bank and its owners, the Greg family, and the workers at the mill and see all the different aspects of their lives there. However, it also tells a much broader story of textile work in England. And also Wales and Scotland, during this period. It tries to bring in different relationships and tries to make people understand that this, Quarry Bank, is not just a singular place, but it's part of a much wider nationwide context. And that is one thing that is really important for Quarry Bank.

And the National Trust are going even further now. So rather than just trying to see how heritage can actually talk about the past, they are trying to think about how they can use the property to actually engage in different ways. So, they realise they have lots of area and space and a lot of the properties have this sort of thing, the same sort of aspects. And they are actually trying to encourage people to do different activities like walking, rambling, outside yoga, lots of different things they can actually do to encourage well-being today, which may not necessarily have a direct link to the history of the site, but it's actually moving the heritage on. So rather than seeing these heritage sites as fixed in time and having a set historical point of view, these things are living places. People actually come to them and the heritage of the place is still going. So today, when visitors go to the site, the mill is not the same as it was 200 years ago when it first opened, but it's still Quarry Bank Mill and it has a new history. These people may not be workers but they are still a part of the mill's history. And say it's still around in 200 years.. you could actually talk about how the National Trust comes about.

Adam Waddingham: Actually, Jamie, that's a really fascinating point because when you were talking then, the thing that came across to me was you were actually talking about the role of the National Trust as well in this.

So talking about it...I'm going to hold my hands up here - when you said in the 1950s, I was quite shocked at that actually, at the National Trust being involved in a mill at that time, because I've got this image in my head, and this could be a very wrong image, but it's stately homes as basically a National Trust staple.

Jamie Farrington: I know what you mean, yeah.

Adam Waddingham: So, I'm really interested then in when you say, you know, the National Trust has had a role in running this estate - I wonder if you could just explain a little bit more about how the National Trust is involved then.

Jamie Farrington: Yeah. So, the National Trust took over ownership from the Greg family. The Greg family continually owned that property up until the 1950s, from 1785; they actually had continual ownership from that point. The National Trust took over and for a while it was not open to the public. It was eventually made into a museum around 1970 - it took them a long time to actually renovate it and present a new story.

But, since that point, they have been taking the opportunity to actually engage with the local surroundings, because the National Trust don't just own the mill, but they also own the whole area, including the village itself and all the provinces. They actually have people living on site who have lived there, who have been (their) tenants, for 60 plus years now. So, they have a whole deep relationship with the people around them. They actually own the churches and all that area too. The National Trust are, in a way, also the land owners, they actually work as landlords. They have to engage with the local people. It's not just about running the mill itself. It's about trying to actually run this landscape and trying to make sure that everyone around the landscape is happy and content to live there. And they do a lot of work to maintain it. And you can see that the people that actually live in the cottages, also volunteer at the mill. They try to engage people as much as possible in that local community. They have created..well..the community that the Gregs created in the 19th century, the National Trust are now maintaining and actually growing themselves - so it's a continuation of the past.

Jessica White: I think that's so important as well, because often we think that the National Trust, a high brow society - as I said, membership can be really expensive for the National Trust, unless you're a student, it is a lot money - and it seems like they own these sprawling estates, which very few people can access. But actually, as you say, they still play an important role.

Why do you think it's so important that we continue to have organizations such as the National Trust? I realise that they fund half of your research, you know (laughs) but it's such an important organisation.

Jamie Farrington: So, not on a personal level, it's not what I gain from them personally, but these properties have been bought by this charity. The charity has been able to actually buy these properties up and otherwise many of them will actually go into disrepair and fall apart. If you look into Manchester - Manchester, the 'Cottonopolis', the industrial, the first industrial city - a lot of the old mill buildings you

see now are being converted into luxury flats and apartments, and that's a good purpose for them. It's always important to actually try to incorporate, rather than knocking these things down and building new; it's nice to see them still in the landscape. But where the National Trust is different, in its role as a heritage organisation, they are able to maintain these stories, these narratives which people who maybe don't have a historical background, people who say aren't able to spend their days researching history or actually looking at these sorts of things, they have a window into the world.

And I admit that the pay wall is not something I am..I would be fully supportive of - I understand why they need it, because obviously they are a charity and they actually get a lot of their funding from their members to actually maintain the service that they provide. But one thing I know that the National Trust do to negate the pay wall is that they open the grounds up for free. So, some properties, to actually enter you have to pay, but the entire grounds of each estate you can walk around for free. And all the natural coastlines and National Trust forests, they're all free as well.

And they maintain them for people as well. So, there's things that aren't just properties that the National Trust are in charge of - it's a much broader picture

Adam Waddingham: And it's interesting when you say that as well, Jamie, because one of the things, and we talked about this in our last episode, and I'm very conscious we're recording this at the moment on zoom again and we're sticking in line with being socially distanced. But I wonder if you could just say something about the impact of COVID has had on the heritage sector as a thing itself, and also your experiences as well. We're doing this at the moment, virtually - how have you carried on your research and also work of the estate?

Jamie Farrington: It has been difficult. I mean, the National Trust itself has admitted, have been very upfront about the difficulties they have faced with the COVID situation. On the 2nd of May, the BBC reported that the National Trust had lost 200 million (pounds) so far, since being shut down for lockdown, and that is only growing. The Trust is reopening properties now and things are starting to actually emerge, but obviously it's not going to be in the same way.

And they don't know, they're probably not fully aware of the future yet, so they are going to do what they can to keep things open. But they have been very honest, from what I can tell. I don't actually work for them so I can't actually get into the work, but I can see that they are doing what they can to negate.

They want to keep these properties open, they are trying, they want to actually preserve because obviously their motto is “forever, for everyone”, and that is the whole point - everything they do is about conserving these properties so that anyone in the present and the future can actually enjoy them.

Jessica White: And I think that's so important now, when international tourism is curtailed or less appealing, the ‘staycation' has acquired an increasing importance, hasn't it? So, will these National Trust properties?

Jamie Farrington: I have to say I am not as worried about the National Trust myself. I'm more worried for the smaller heritage venues, the ones that rely on ‘in-the-door' sort of finance and (visitor) numbers to

actually get the funding. And it's the small ones that maybe don't have the same sort of reserves to actually weather the storm. I have friends working in the Heritage Lottery Fund and they're getting lots of applications from these places and (some) are having to close down - that hasn't come to light yet. It's kind of like you expect it to happen; it's something that actually is a worry. And you would like to see it get sorted out and hopefully the government can help out more. But at this moment in time, it's still in the air. It's an unknown.

Jessica White: Jamie, what are the prospects for you in terms of getting back to Quarry Bank Mill.

Jamie Farrington: I am still kind of waiting. I am... I have been told that people are going back to work, so people who have been on furlough at Quarry Bank are finally coming back, but I am not there yet. I'm hoping, in the next couple of months, I might actually get permission to go back or even have a bit more contact, but right now it's just a bit unclear. So, I am a bit uncertain, I have to admit, but fingers-crossed...I'm optimistic that we'll get there.

Adam Waddingham: Okay, Jamie, that's really interesting, thank you so much. That's Jamie Farrington there, who's a PhD student with the University of Manchester, talking about the Quarry Bank Mill.

It's interesting there that Jamie talks about 'staycations', Jess, and the ideas of staying at home as a form of tourism. The holiday in your own country, essentially, has seen a growth in a number of different places and spaces, a theme we've talked about before, Jess. And one of those areas that's grown in terms of tourism is Manchester. So, if we say 'tourism in Manchester', Jess, what kind of images spring to your mind first off?

Jessica White: Well, yeah, like you say, we don't always associate Manchester being traditionally a site of tourism. Increasingly, I think what comes to mind when we think of Manchester is these old industrial terraced streets, such as the site of Coronation Street. And Coronation Street is emblematic of Mancunian life. And I think it's really attracted people to the area as a site of representations of industrial living that were popularized in the cinema in the sixties and seventies.

Adam Waddingham: Definitely. And that's the subject of an article by Peter Schofield. And I think it's quite useful if I just very briefly explain that Scofield's article – images of Hollywood representations, and media collections of images of Manchester particularly - talks in one of two ways. So, the first part is to break down a sociological perspective on how heritage and heritage tourism has grown and Schofield is quite useful, I think, in looking at different bits of it. So, breaking down - and we'll come on to talk about this in a minute - quite a nice case study based in Manchester, based around ideas of space and place in the city and how that's been represented. But also, looking at how that works in the sense of looking at the components of how areas of heritage have been marketed. So, looking at people, physical evidence and 'process elements' as he terms it.

So we've mentioned there Coronation Street and today, you only need to go into Salford Quays and you can book onto a 'Corrie' tour – well, you could in the pre-corona days...but actually popular films have also acted as a draw to places, including Rabun County in Georgia, the site of the film 'Deliverance' in 1972. Now this is useful because it gives us a basis to start thinking about how tourism and heritage

overlay one another here. So, we have a representation of an area that drew in around 20,000 extra tourists per year, and additional revenue of between two to 3 million. Now today, if we think of the transformation of places like the Northern Quarter, which, you know, frequently looked to things like New York as the scene set - most recently, The Crowns used it in this nostalgic view of the Royals in the sixties and seventies, as we'll see in the new series. So, we have a reconstruction of space to create a particular historical period, space, place, or time, and actually, that acts as a draw to tourists. You know, the amount of people that go around and will try and capture pictures for Instagram of looking like film sets.

Jessica White: And I think there's a really important point to be made about nostalgia, which not only runs through historic representations of the North, but in cultural representations of the North and like you say on social media, we see images of Manchester as representing this lost sense of local small-scale living, which is being wiped out.

Nostalgia has been defined as not just a romantic idealisation of the past, but a painful longing to return to it, and how we use buildings, in that sense, is really important. Which buildings survive? Which ones do not? It’s notable that the buildings that we've retained in Manchester, such as The Refuge on Oxford road and down the road, the former Cornerhouse cinema - these are the buildings that we want to maintain a particular image of Manchester because they are slightly sexy, you know, these are the sites that attract tourists.

Adam Waddingham: Yeah, so I think the ideas that get captured in essentially a heritage of ideas, really in a weird way... It's trying to capture ‘in’ something, in a tour and something that you can go and physically look at and be guided through of, you know, this tour of the North, basically ‘Hollywood of the North’, which encapsulates Manchester being captured in images, in films and in what we call cultural texts. So, not just films and TV programs, but also novels and popular graphic images and those kinds of things, of an era.

Jessica White: Yeah. So, the ‘Hollywood tour’ was the brainchild of Chris Lee, and it was borne out of a joke that he made in 1988 that it would be a good idea to have a Hollywood coach tour in Manchester. But actually, the Cornerhouse cinema on Oxford road picked him up on it. And the tour consisted of a 60-minute round-trip on a coach looking at the city and how it's been represented in Hollywood films, such as ‘Reds’ and ‘Yanks’, and at the end of the tour, there would be a screening of a film such as ‘Love on the Dole’, ‘A Taste of Honey’ or ‘The Living Dead at the Manchester Morgue’.

Adam Waddingham: And I think...they sound really weird don’t they, as films today? But these films that have a footing in Manchester, but actually as a form of, a tour to run or, you know, operation of a heritage item, it’s actually relatively low cost and the tour itself was run on a 12-seater minibus driven to locations, and it's marketed as all year round because you can do it pretty much come rain or shine; quite helpful in Manchester. And in Lee's construction of this it was very much a tailored product, so he'd tailor it to what the audience, the people coming on the tour, were looking for themselves.

Jessica White: And it wasn't the only tour at the time. Granada were also running a tour of their own studios based on soaps, soap-themed breaks such as television weekends, or soap and grease paint weekends that would allow people to look around the studios of Granada. And then, it was Britain's only film and TV tour for a long time. And the 'Hollywood of the North' tour was an alternate tourism attraction, which is what Schofield talks about. He thinks that this 'Hollywood of the North' tour was an alternative form of tourism.

Adam Waddingham: I think that's also really important if we cast our mind back to the start, when we were talking about thinking about Manchester as a place, it's got the mills of Manchester, those famous images - this is a very conscious disruption of that form of heritage. It's moving into spaces that aren't as frequently occupied at that point by people coming on heritage tours. And then the 1990s as this raft of moments associated with media tourism - we've got things like the City of Drama Festival in 94, Boddington's Manchester Festival of Arts and Television, and this is really effectively driving tourism to Manchester, with a heritage lens applied to it; but not consciously going for that same heterogeneous experience. And in doing so, I think it also fractures and opens up new ways of thinking about different histories of the self, populist kind of perspectives; feminist; the things that we've talked about before, Jess, in terms of how history is so diverse.

And I think this is a really good way in which people were starting to engage in history in a different way.

Jessica White: And I think there's something to be said about layers. So, the three things that we've spoken about today are all tied up with Manchester, and how we see Manchester's industrial past, always flits in and out. It was what prevented KLM from choosing Manchester Barton Aerodrome as a site. It was also...Manchester's industrial heritage as the focus of the Styal estate. And then finally it's images of Manchester's industrial past that are what are attracting people to explore Manchester as a tourism site.

And it just goes to show that tourism isn't really a universal experience, but it really shifts according to *when* you go and visit these places. I think that's my main takeaway from delving into the history of tourism.

Adam Waddingham: I completely agree. And I think another good way I've thought about it is maybe to think that history and heritage is - and we talked about this a little bit with Jamie as something distinct from history itself - but actually its tentacles are reaching everywhere. And I think thinking about tourism, the summer holiday, the break, the getaway, there's so much more that we can think about in how history and heritage operates in that very layered way; about us essentially recreating the past. And I think tourism is a really good way to think about those ideas of history and heritage.

Jessica White: So, thank you Jamie, for taking part in this week's podcast. And obviously thank you, Adam, for providing me with your digital company.

Adam Waddingham: Thank you, Jess. Always a pleasure. And don't forget to tune into our next podcast. We'll be talking about...you ready for it?... Drinking Cultures.

Jessica White: We have been the University of Manchester History Postgraduate Network for the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society.

Adam Waddingham: Bye bye.

Jessica White: Bye bye.

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