TANGIBLE - INTANGIBLE HERITAGE(S): AN INTERPLAY OF DESIGN, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CRITIQUES OF THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

• Paper / Proposal Title:

• Author(s) Name:
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• University or Company Affiliation:
University of Kent

• Presentation Method. I would like to:
  i. present in person (with a written paper)

• Abstract (300 words):
In post-war Britain, shifts in political, economic, and societal structures meant that long-accepted attitudes towards national identity were forever altered. At the crossroads of these concerns was the English country house, which during this period came to symbolise a national heritage. Just as the peerage was systematically stripped of official political powers, agricultural production became uncompetitive and stripped most aristocratic families of their fortunes. The English country house, once a symbol of power and wealth, became a liability.
Post-World War II Britain saw another series of shifts in economics and society. As the Empire began to disintegrate, a rise in national nostalgia took hold. Popular culture, bolstered by the BBC on both television and radio, turned to representations of aristocracy, monarchy, and the country house.

Seizing an opportunity, a small group of aristocrats repositioned the country house and its role in society as a heritage asset, making it once again culturally relevant and fiscally viable. By taking advantage of increases in leisure time and automobile ownership—and adding ‘attractions’ to engage visitors beyond art and architecture—the country house became a new type of tourist destination.

The successes at houses such as Longleat, Woburn Abbey, and Beaulieu were replicated by other country houses using techniques that were disseminated both officially—through workshops, conferences, and publications—and unofficially through networks of privilege and soft power. These practices lead to the heritage industry as it is known today, and influenced organisations such as National Trust, English Heritage, and the Historic Houses Association.

The heritage industry can be traced back to initiatives at these privately run estates in the second half of the 20th century. The solutions were innovative, but they were also intrinsically self-serving. This paper examines how the personal motivations of private estates are embedded in today’s planning and heritage policy.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Michael Hall is currently a PhD candidate and 50th Anniversary Scholar at the University of Kent School of Architecture. His research focuses on ideas of heritage and national identity in conservation and planning policy. Previous professional experience focused on creating new models of visitor engagement at the Philip Johnson Glass House, in New Canaan, Connecticut, and preservation and neighbourhood advocacy in New York City’s Upper East Side. He is one of the founders of +Partners, a collaboration with designer Matthew Chrislip that focuses on designing, preserving, and catalysing the development of environments and places. In addition to internal studio projects, +Partners engages with communities to help them use design and architecture thinking as leverage in improving their neighbourhoods.

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