



Research article

The heritage of Tyneham as a living memorial: between complex historical narratives and suggestive performing traditions

Milena Metalkova-Markova^{1,*} 

¹ Senior Lecturer, School of Architecture, University of Portsmouth, UK

* Correspondence: milena.metalkova-markova@port.ac.uk

Guest Editor: Jitka Cirklová, Faculty of Civil Engineering, Department of Social Sciences, Czech Technical University, Czech Republic

Submission date: 16 November 2023; Acceptance date: 10 February 2024; Publication date: 3 December 2024

How to cite

Metalkova-Markova, M. 'The heritage of Tyneham as a living memorial: between complex historical narratives and suggestive performing traditions'. *Architecture_MPS* 29, 1 (2024): 5. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14324/111.444.amps.2024v29i1.005>.

Peer review

This article has been peer-reviewed through the journal's standard double-blind peer-review process, where both the reviewers and authors are anonymised during review.

Copyright

2024, Milena Metalkova-Markova. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Licence (CC BY) 4.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>, which permits unrestricted use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited • DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14324/111.444.amps.2024v29i1.005>.

Open access

Architecture_MPS is a peer-reviewed open-access journal.

Abstract

Tyneham was a farming and fishing village in Dorset, with a history extending over nine centuries, and human habitation dating back 2,500 years. However, in 1943 the village, and its wider surrounding area, was transformed after being requisitioned to serve as a training ground for tank soldiers during the Second World War. Consequently, Tyneham's landscape evolved, but the remaining structures still describe the life of this pre-industrial community. While the village is now a major tourist destination attracting thousands of visitors, it remains within a live tank-firing range. Tyneham is a living memorial, relevant to current discourses of heritage preservation and community engagement. To reveal its dynamic nature a mixed methodology was used: literature and historic archives' review, observations by visitors, the Tyneham village group posts review and students' engagement to understand the value of Tyneham as a palimpsest of identity, conflict,

memory and universal narratives – personal, communal and imagined. The historic transformation of the site's ownership and its shifting narratives sometimes strongly contrast with each other. At present, the site is owned by the military but displayed narratives exclude its perspective. Can inclusive performing practices transform the site from a place of conflict to a place of reconciliation and education? Parallels with the historic performative traditions of ancient Greece and Japanese Noh theatre are noted to suggest a dynamic heritage space. This article highlights how a contested site could become a living memorial by encouraging visitors' imaginations to engage in aspects of a story that are constantly being reinvented.

Keywords heritage site; performative tradition; socio-cultural values; creative methodology

Introduction

To introduce Tyneham as a living memorial and set the stage for exploring its participatory aspects, the author will describe a historic outline, designed to differentiate between the transformations in site ownership in relation to its shifting dominant narratives. Shifting narratives need to be situated within relevant historical contexts as a set of stages for complex, often contradictory, interpretations.

Tyneham, located in Dorset, was a rural community with over 900 years of history.¹ Its archaeology dates back further, with Iron Age fort remains nearby and Roman period pottery findings in the village. Blessed with a diverse topography of hills, valleys and coastal rocky bays with a sheltered sea, woods and natural streams within walking distance, the location provided a pristine setting for human habitation: a small-scale community with farming and fishing as major livelihoods.

Tyneham parish consisted of three key areas (Figures 1–3):

1. Tyneham village, where cottages and a village post office were built along a natural stream, with a church, a school building, a farm compound, a rectory and laundry buildings located nearby
2. Tyneham Manor House, dating from the thirteenth century, the most distinctive building in the parish, evolved through the centuries with additions by successive landowners
3. Fishermen's cottages, built next to Worbarrow Bay.

The village was requisitioned in 1943 as part of the UK's war effort to allow tank soldiers to train for the invasion of Europe, and, although the villagers were promised that they could return after the war, this promise was not fulfilled due to ongoing threats to the country's security: this broken promise remains the site's dominant narrative. Following requisition, the landscape of the village gradually transformed, in part, due to Ministry of Defence (MoD) activities, as well as to the process of building decay and the growth of nature. The remaining intact structures include three listed buildings – the farm building, the schoolhouse and the church – as well as the more dilapidated remains of residential buildings, such as the Tyneham House (the commonly used name for Tyneham Manor House), the Rectory, the village shop, adjacent buildings (known as Post Office Row) and the many working-class homes of farmers and fishermen. Despite many buildings being in a state of ruin, they still vividly depict the life of a coastal, pre-industrial village, and, although the area is used as a live firing range by the MOD, the village is beloved by the local communities. It is also a major tourist destination that attracts thousands of visitors from the UK and abroad. Tyneham is continuously advertised as a 'hidden gem'¹ for travellers in the UK (Slow Travel UK 2024) and the author has seen how the site vibrates with dozens of visitors at the weekends.

Methodology

In this article the author aims to understand the complex history and the powerful attraction this place holds and sets out to reveal certain hidden narratives. The mixed methods used consist of a review

of existing key texts – particularly the book *The Village that Died for England* by Wright and archival research at the Dorset History Centre, with students and the author’s observations during visits to the site. The author also joined the Tyneham village group on social media in 2022, not only to access old photos and histories of village life before 1943, but also to grasp certain aspects of the emotional spell the site exercises over several generations.

Figure 1. An estimated map of the Tyneham area (in green) next to Worbarrow Bay (source: drawn by Cerian Frost)

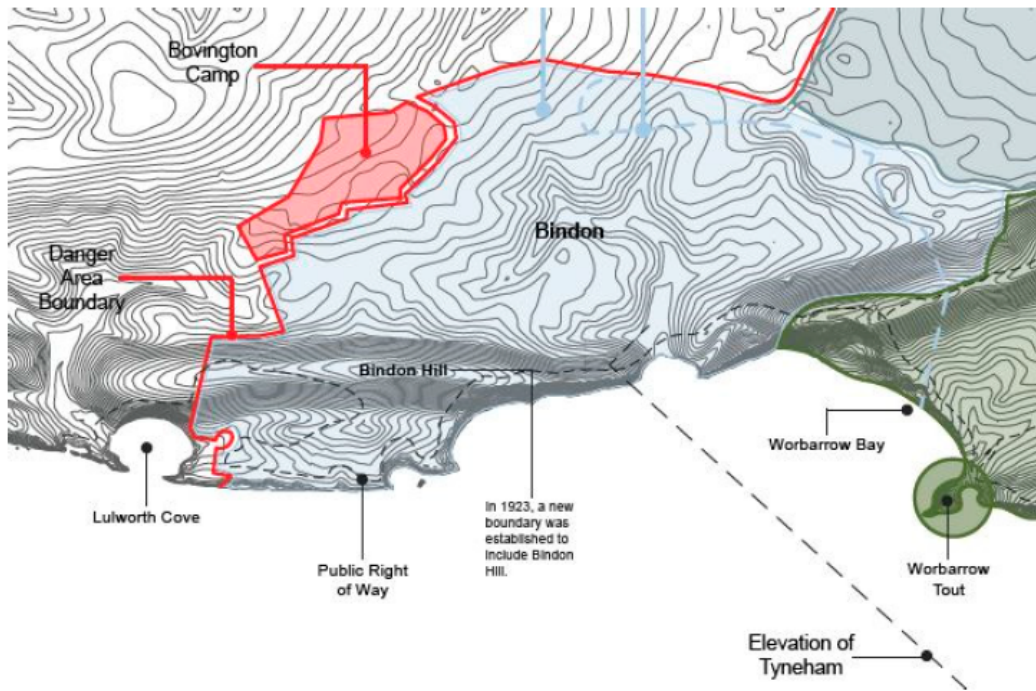


Figure 2. A silhouette of Tyneham parish, as seen from the sea (Worbarrow Bay) with the locations of the village, the manor house and the highest point of Tyneham cap – the cup-like topography facing the sea makes it ideal for use as a tank shooting ground for training (source: drawn by Cerian Frost)

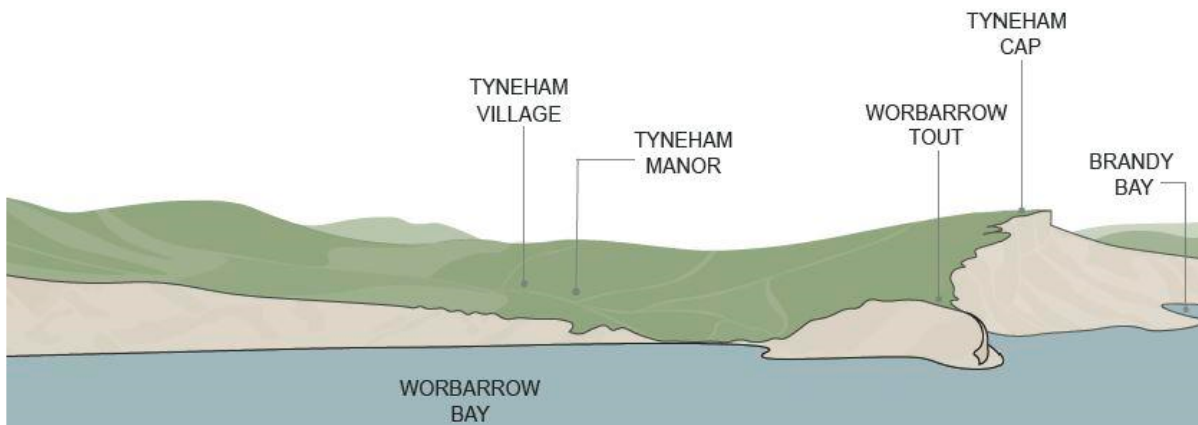


Figure 3. Nature takes over the state of the buildings

The mixed methods approach aims to map a partial landscape of Tyneham's heritage threads within a historical timeline to support the analysis of the multi-faceted heritage's dynamic narrative. The transformation of the site's ownership within its history, and its shifting narratives, sometimes contrast strongly with each other. Can inclusive performing practices transform the site from a place of conflict to a place of reconciliation and education? Parallels with historic performative traditions from ancient Greece and Japanese Noh theatre suggest a dynamic heritage space. These methods help to conceptualise Tyneham as a site that tells a story of sadness, conflict and, perhaps, peaceful resolution and potential for reconciliation.

Results and discussion

Rise and decline of a feudal farming village

Until the Second World War, Tyneham village was a small-scale farming and fishing community with only a few hundred people in the southwest of Dorset in England. For most of its history, Tyneham operated as a typical English rural feudal domain, owned by a family with a high social status. There were forty-seven family names recorded in the village archives, which gives an idea of the scale of this farming and fishing community (Table 1).

In 1683, Nathaniel Bond of Lutton acquired Tyneham from the Williams family, settling it on his younger son, and it remained in the possession of the Bond family until the forced evacuation of the villagers in 1943. The Bond family also owned other local estates such as Creech Grange (a Grade II* listed park and garden) and the Moigne Combe estate, which included several buildings built by the Bond family. The Bond family members moved back to Moigne Combe in 1943 when Tyneham was requisitioned. A member of the Bond family (John Bond), who previously owned Moigne Combe, was an Elizabethan spy, who is said to have inspired 007's creator, Ian Fleming, when he created the character of James Bond.

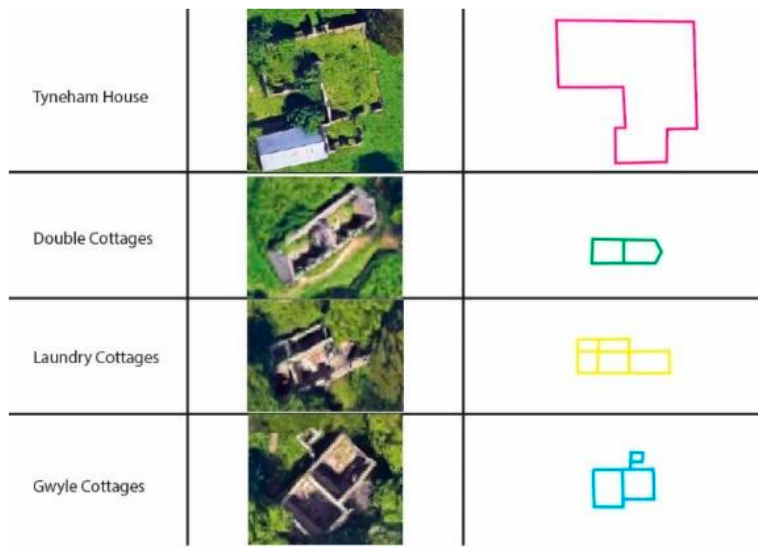
Tyneham House was originally built in the thirteenth century and the Bonds made several additions and alterations over the centuries, including the creation of an approximately 400-metre-long avenue lined with a row of large trees centred on the east wing and porch. At present, only the hammer beam wood truss hall from the fourteenth century and the detached 'tea room' on the west remain standing, while the rest of the house is in ruins and not safe for public access. The villagers' dwellings were much

more modest in scale, ranging from the Rectory and Post Office Row to the relatively tiny homes of labourers and fishermen. To reveal the established social hierarchy in the village, a student compared some of the housing types within the village according to their plan size (Figure 4).

Table 1. Family names of the residents of Tyneham village (source: data from Tyneham OPC n.d.)

No.	Initials	Family names in Tyneham
13	A–E	Balson Barnes Bond Brachi Chilcott Churchill Cleall Dando Davis Draper Driscoll Elmes Everett
9	F–J	Gould Grant Hawkes Hole Holland Homan House Howard Hull
6	K–O	Longman Lucas Meech Miller Minterne Mores
9	P–T	Pritchard Richards Singleton Smith Spencer Spincer Stickland Taylor Tizzard
10	U–Z	Upshall Ware Warr Way Wellman Wheeler Whitelock Woadden Woodman Wrixon

Figure 4. Tyneham Manor House and some cottages: the social hierarchy can be decoded by the size and layout of the houses which are drawn in scale approximate to each other (source: Drawn by Natassia Ho)

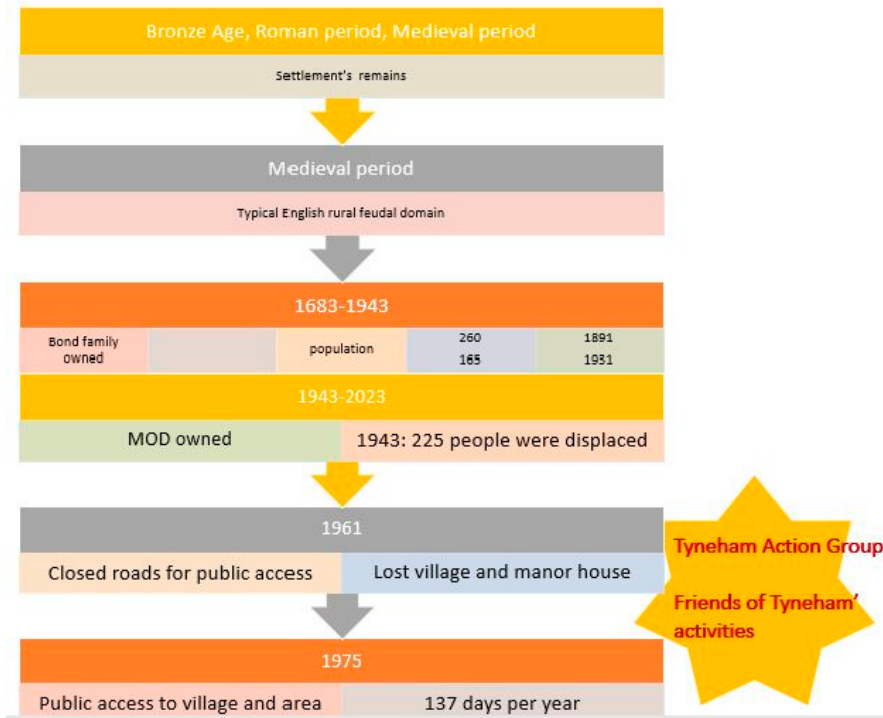


Even after the late nineteenth century, when Thomas Hardy’s novels exposed the lifestyle and values of nearby Sunday (Dorchester), Tyneham remained relatively unnoticed among other Dorset villages. Hardy’s descriptions of the Dorset rural landscape provoked interest in idealised images of romantic landscapes and Christian/patriarchal moral values within a community. He describes the mystic qualities of the heath enclosing Tyneham, defining it as an area of open uncultivated land, typically on acidic sandy soil, with characteristic vegetation of heather, gorse and coarse grasses.² However, Tyneham seems to be missing from the overall picture of the area in publications, with very few archive photos available.³ Its communities’ lives remained secluded, mainly within its parish boundaries, with few visitors and often only short trips to the nearby larger village of Wool for the residents (although longer excursions were made on occasion).

The parish of Tyneham (Figure 5), including the village, experienced a decline throughout the late nineteenth century, as evidenced by census data showing a decrease in residents from 260 in 1891 to 165 in 1931. According to census records, Tyneham village life declined further from 1891 until 1931; the school closed down in 1932 due to the declining number of children. The village’s fate can only

be speculated upon had the army not intervened. If one can observe similar-scale villages nearby, three possibilities are most probable: either develop as a holiday bungalow resort, depopulate or become a subject of industrial development. However, a historical twist interrupted its gradual continuity quite abruptly.

Figure 5. Timeline of the village and its land use, population decline, requisition and public access



Shifting narratives: requisition and protest

According to Bainbridge, in 1943, a few weeks before Christmas, 225 people were displaced from Tyneham village so that the MoD could prepare for the D-Day Landings and make military preparations against a possible Nazi invasion.⁴ Churchill pledged that the villagers could return 'after the emergency', but in 1948, with the Cold War looming, priority was given to military needs and the villagers were unable to return. Since then, despite protests, campaigns and contentious debates, the area has been used for training British and Allied armed forces.

The land requisitioned by the MOD covers approximately 30 km² of farmland, including the 12 km² Tyneham parish owned by the Bond family. The area with buildings is estimated to be approximately 4 km², encompassing a valley, mountain ridges, coastal bays and farmland, ideal for military training and close to established training facilities near Weymouth. Despite its relatively small size when compared to other nearby natural reserves, this piece of land attracted significant attention, fierce debates and protests during the 1960s and 1970s.

The history of Tyneham, particularly its connection to the Second World War, has been extensively documented across various media such as publications, films, social media and artwork. As noted, one particularly influential book is *The Village that Died for England*,⁵ which played a significant role in shaping Tyneham's image as a symbol of patriotic sacrifice that went unrecognised – a rural English paradise destroyed by government action. While the book aims to present the diverse perspectives of former residents regarding the forced relocation in an objective manner, it tends to highlight the narrative of sacrifice for the war, inherently invoking heroism (as implied by the book's title).

As Wright notes, one elderly resident of Tyneham expressed a desire to return to the village in 1975, while two other female residents were content with the relocation to housing that provided better living conditions.⁶ To understand the context for residents' opinions, it is worth considering the social

hierarchy within the village and the varying sizes of the workers' cottages (Figure 4). Looking at the size of living spaces and layouts, it can be noted that the major landlord (the Bond family), and possibly some occupants of larger houses, may have felt particularly disadvantaged by the forced relocation. However, it is clear that villagers in different occupations, including those serving the landlord, had different experiences of the resettlement process.

As stated, the Bond family moved to one of their other estates in the area, while the remaining residents were mostly rehoused in council houses across the county; some were happy, but some wished to campaign to return. According to Slow Travel UK 2020–2024, after the requisition by the MOD, only the Bond family received compensation for land and properties (£30,000), while the majority of the local residents were only compensated 'for the value of vegetables in their home garden plots'.⁷

Wright refers to the full-scale activities of two campaigning groups in 1968 – the Tyneham Action Group⁸ and the Friends of Tyneham⁹ – whose efforts paved the way for the issue to be discussed in the UK parliament. From The Tyneham Action Group description, it is clear they argued for the release of the Tyneham area, while a public trust fund called the Friends of Tyneham was set up to act on behalf of the surviving former residents of the village who wished to return home.¹⁰

Wright describes in detail all the twists and turns of both groups' activities, whose members represented a mix of various social groups in the local community and outside campaigners.¹¹ In 1961, the roads and paths in the valley were closed, resulting in the loss of access to the village for visitors. However, thanks to these self-organised group efforts, in 1975, public access to the ranges was increased and today the valley is accessible for 137 days a year on average. This area is now unique in its utilisation – from Monday to Friday it serves as an active tank training shooting ground, while during some weekends and school holidays, it becomes crowded with visitors from all over the UK and beyond. The continuous efforts of the action groups¹² caused the issue to be discussed in the UK parliament nearly 30 years after the eviction.

Parliament debating the future of Tyneham: 1973 onwards

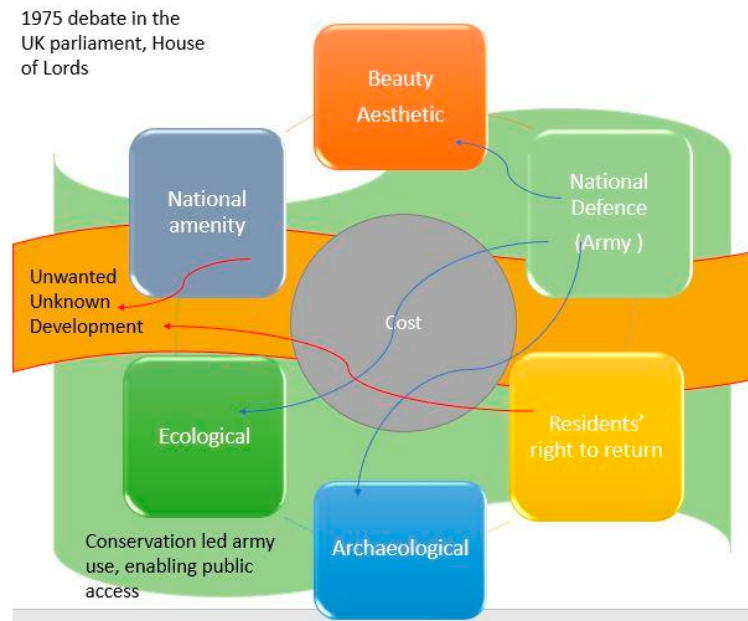
In 1973, following parliamentary debates about the future of Tyneham, the Nugent report¹³ emphasised the need to balance the needs of the army and the general public for recreation and amenities, and recommended the relocation of the MOD from Tyneham. However, subsequent debates contested this decision.

In 1975, there were further discussions in the UK Parliament, particularly in the House of Lords, about Tyneham's future (Figure 6).¹⁴ The debate focused on the area's beauty, ecology, archaeology, residents' rights, national defence, conservation and public recreation. Former resident, John Gould, emotionally appealed to the prime minister for the MOD to return the land and enable former residents to return to their homes.

In the next part of the debate, Lord Dugby discussed the possibility of establishing a national park, while Lord Sanford emphasised the challenging need for skilled staff to manage and support the park. There was also discussion about whether local authorities should have the power to prevent the ploughing of¹⁵ downland as an alternative to national park designation.

Concerns were raised about the potential drawbacks of creating a national park, such as increased visitor numbers impacting conservation efforts.¹⁶ It was mentioned that the residents of Dorset preferred a military presence in Purbeck over short-term visitors, known as 'trippers', who didn't contribute economically to the area. Interestingly, the desire for a national park, advocated by nature enthusiasts, was also associated with concerns about visitor restrictions to the area and loss of income. Furthermore, there were fears about future economic development, such as china clay production, if the army relocated. Ultimately, several factors were considered in deciding Tyneham's future as a shared resource between the MOD and the public:

1. the local community's preference for the army as an income source and conservator
2. the military's role in national defence during the Cold War and the high cost of relocation
3. the limited number of former residents wanting to return
4. confirmation from the diocese that the functions of Tyneham's church could be fulfilled elsewhere

Figure 6. Values debated in the UK parliament, 1975

The decision was made to allow public access for 137 days a year as a compromise that addressed conflicting interests.

However, Tyneham's fate was not considered in the broader context of Dorset's culture and geography, and in relation to best practices from similar places in the UK and abroad. Ultimately, pragmatic concerns about costs, measurable criteria and fears of future changes seemed to overshadow discussions about beauty and cultural identity. In the meantime, the Bond family continued their legal fight for the requisitioned land and were partially successful: in 2023, a fragment of land was returned to them.

Renewal of narratives: from a site of conflict toward a site of reconciliation

Thinking of the village's historical layers, the debate in Parliament and following the posts on Tyneham village group social media (nearly 900 members), the author became aware of a multiplicity of narratives, which can be seen both synchronically and diachronically.

Writing about Japan, Barthes creates the connection between visual signs and culture.¹⁷ By looking at visual patterns an outsider can find a code to understand a culture – in Barthes's case, sign-oriented realities and fantasies about Japan itself. Exploring the complex narratives about Tyneham as a dynamic heritage space, the use of a diachronic sequence might offer the possibility to present evolving historic layers as different stage sets and signs of different narratives.

The first set could be the idyllic setting and Dorset landscape, as memorialised in Thomas Hardy's novels (such as *The Return of the Native*, for example) and film interpretations (such as *The Return of the Native* from 1994, for example). Orwell's post-war urban/rural tensions¹⁸ and Carson's revelations about environmental destruction¹⁹ accelerate the story of the hidden costs of modernisation and the conservation debate since the mid-twentieth century. Present narratives about the shifting role of military entities and issue of global warming can enhance Tyneham's potential as a learning experience and space for contemplation.

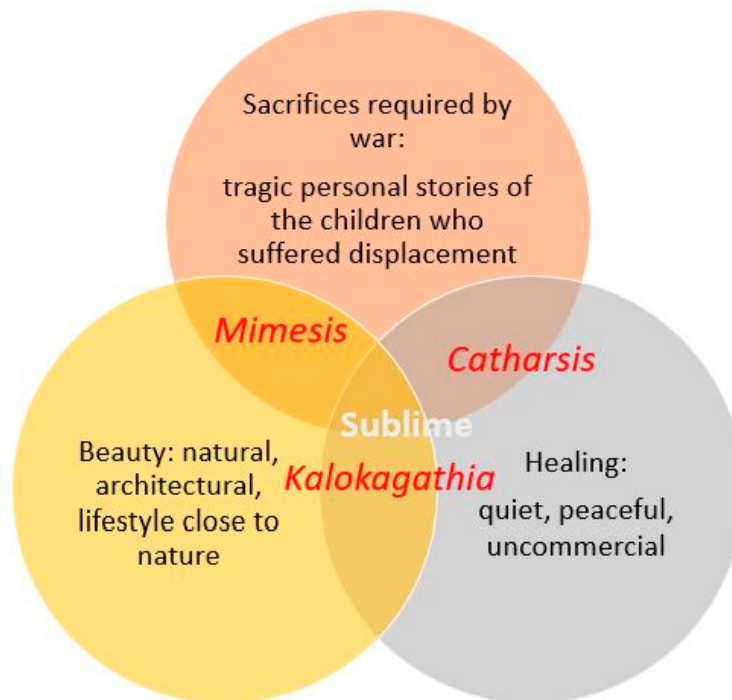
A synchronic sequence will try to overlay all current historical layers as a kind of dynamic palimpsest of multi-faceted heritage. Thinking about inclusive heritage, the author suggests that performing traditions and participatory engagement can help the memorialisation of Tyneham as a dynamic space and a living memorial.

Saint highlights the potential of performative traditions and theatre as a way to keep heritage reinvention emotionally relevant to visitors.²⁰ The Japanese tea ceremony is a living memorial to

Japanese culture as the tea ceremony is performed in a particular setting that keeps the conservation of other related art traditions alive – calligraphy, ikebana flower arrangement, Japanese pottery and classic literary texts. It is not by chance that the tea ceremony is defined in Japanese as the ‘way of the tea’ (*Chado*), with the emphasis on a process of the collective experience of a host and guests in a particular setting.

Historic England defines a heritage site in terms of its evidential, historical, aesthetic and communal values.²¹ The author refers to the communal value of Tyneham as a place of collective experience or memory. It is worth making a comparison with the three elements of ancient Greek tragedies – *mimesis*, *catharsis* and *kalokagathia* (Figure 7). The powerful thread of attraction to this site means that people return to this place again and again because of its beauty, silent human drama and healing power.

Figure 7. Reflecting on visitors’ perceptions using the traditions of theatre



Tyneham, the ruins of a once lively Dorset village, offers *mimesis*: an imitative representation of the world in the past as a perennial rural idyll – a small, vivid, patriarchal community. *Mimesis* might see the Bond family landlords and villagers’ families living in harmony within a beautiful natural setting sustainably, using natural resources for vital survival and taking care of nature as much as each other according to social rank and work duties. This is a romantic image of rural life in Dorset (as in the novels of Thomas Hardy) but it lacks an awareness of the hardships that life at Tyneham entailed. It did not have running water or electricity and walks of several miles long were part of the daily routine for many residents. Villagers were tied to the Bond family in a near feudal setup, working for the family, living in their properties and working on their farms.

The next moment in the implied drama at Tyneham can be compared to *catharsis*, whereby visitors (spectators) perceive the sacrifices required by the war by looking at the ruins and feeling sad that Churchill broke the promise that residents would be allowed to return, the tragedy amplified by a note a villager left on the church door asking the military occupants to take care of their dwellings until they returned. Looking at the empty children’s desks in the school building and various school paraphernalia (carefully exhibited by a volunteer, Linda Price, with the support of the military officers at Lulworth Camp, who were in charge of Tyneham’s preservation), visitors are moved, imagining the fate of the displaced children. It is curious to note that the steady decline of the village, and the fact that the school had closed before the war, are often overlooked by visitors. These past realities do not, therefore interfere with the drama of Tyneham’s story set.

Finally, the moment of *kalokagathia* – purification or purgation of emotions – takes place at Tyneham’s ruins within an exquisite natural landscape, where nature is in the process of taking over several buildings. Visitors are overwhelmed with feelings of quietness, calm, non-commercial peacefulness and being able to purify feelings of pity and fear through the silent landscape of past lives. Empathising with the tragedy and the immersion in nature appears to have a healing and humanising effect on the visitors, whereby their anxieties are directed outward to reach insight and reconciliation.

The power of Tyneham can be found in delicate suggestive spaces, curated by forces of nature, volunteers and military officers. It recalls the restricted palette of Noh theatre in Japan, where human dramas are not described and verbally articulated, but suggested by simple props, a symbolic setting and the stylised movements of the masked actors. The spectators’ imagination is at play here to complete the suggested scenes, feelings and experiences, and one can see parallels with Tyneham’s narratives.

Japanese Noh theatre narratives consist of a few dozen written stories that are performed multiple times by actors wearing masks on a pre-determined outer timber stage. Visitors sit at a distance without being able to see the actors’ facial expressions or understand the ancient medieval form of the Japanese language. Visitors know the story beforehand and need to imagine a meaningful narrative through the actors’ symbolic movements and poses and the choice of symbolic props they use. Referring once again to Barthes,²² Noh theatre is a suggestive type of performing art where each observer completes the narrative by attaching it to their personal experiences, the feeling of the place and time and a set of associations in their engagement of the imagination.

Tyneham offers a profoundly evocative setting or theatre characterised by the poignant drama of human displacement resulting from war, complemented by significant elements or props within the school and church. These props serve as poignant reminders, fostering a sense of healing and reflection among the numerous curious and inquisitive visitors. In this context, Tyneham emerges as a transitional space, facilitating the process of recovery and reconciliation for those who visit, but at a wider societal level.

Drawing on principles from Japanese architecture, the concept of *Ma* encompasses a spatial-temporal period or interval where emotional transitions occur. Isozaki explains the unique Japanese understanding of space as a temporal and spatial continuum related to all performing, spatial and visual arts in Japan.²³ Understanding the significance of space and void in Japanese culture offers inspiration on how to enable an ethos of inclusive and dynamic heritage, leaving space for visitors’ subjective co-creation and reinvention of narratives.

This notion resonates deeply with Tyneham as a heritage site, where visitors engage with various narratives enacted within their minds. While the story of the villagers’ wartime sacrifice remains a central theme, the presence of additional props offers glimpses into present realities, such as Tyneham’s history as a military working space and now, as a tourist retreat. The Tyneham stage thus becomes a platform, guiding visitors to perceive the story within a broader context of place and time, fostering an awareness that illuminates different facets of the site to be celebrated.

Human beings inherently crave beauty and find solace in its aesthetic qualities and healing properties. In its constant reinvention of beauty – both natural and cultural – Tyneham serves as a testament to this innate human inclination. It presents an ongoing dialogue surrounding sacrifice as a fundamental aspect of earthly existence, intertwined with the giving of more positive energy flows.

The latent narratives within Tyneham provide a stage to convey the myriad nuances of this global drama, offering a redemptive opportunity and a collective catharsis amid present-day challenges. Through this approach, the site emerges not merely as a relic of the past but as a living canvas where stories converge, fostering understanding, healing and renewal.

Concluding remarks

To keep Tyneham as a living memorial, it is important to renew multi-faceted narratives and engage visitors to keep heritage relevant and enable sustainable conservation. An important question for researchers and the custodians of Tyneham is how to present the variety of hidden narratives and, perhaps, a more objective account of the whole spectrum of Tyneham’s cultural and historic identity to the numerous visitors to the site. For 80 years, the MOD has been the custodian of the site and its heritage; however, their perspective of Tyneham did not tend to be mentioned by the visitors who participated in the public engagement event, so this appears to be a hidden narrative.²⁴ It is important to

recognise and reveal that the MOD's attitudes have changed enormously during this period: they initially used the village as a target and occupied Tyneham House, but later understood the cultural value of the buildings and spaces and made efforts to conserve them (without a significant budget or members of staff to handle issues that arose regarding the buildings' decay).

The MOD officers I had contact with expressed genuine concern about the village's preservation and future; one of them set up the Tyneham fund in the 1970s to enable maintenance of the site and manage safe access for visitors. They were also regretful about the failure to protect Tyneham House from military damage, looting and vandalism, which led to its present ruined state.²⁵

Thanks to donations from visitors and the dedicated efforts of volunteers, the church, school and farm buildings in Tyneham have been preserved and are now recognised as listed structures. Additionally, exhibitions featuring photos and stories about former residents have been curated and it's important to highlight the invaluable support provided by volunteers, particularly Linda Price, who played a crucial role in integrating residents' photos, family histories and snapshots of the buildings with the preserved structures and ruins. Furthermore, the MOD has recently taken steps towards sustainability by installing a wind turbine and solar panels at the school building, thus enabling a more environmentally friendly energy source. Additionally, the University of Portsmouth team has been encouraged to reimagine Tyneham School as a contemporary learning space. These instances reflect the broader theme of tension between modernisation and conservation within rural contexts. It underscores the complex social dynamics at play in the realm of heritage place-making and highlights the evolving role that the military can play in conservation efforts.

Tyneham has begun to embody a form of *suggestive conservation*, a term that denotes a temporary performative experience, which the visitor can undertake by walking with certain props within a place. It is a performance without live performers, but objects mark the possible journeys. Suggestive conservation is based on an awareness of co-sharing spaces of nature, culture and work. It suggests that a place is a palimpsest of hidden narratives and the visitor can decide which narrative to experience with their senses. Tyneham is a village reused and altered as an army training ground, but still bearing visible traces of its earlier forms. Several narratives can co-exist as different dimensions of the place and the visitor is free to embody them in one way or another.

If heritage conservation is considered an evolving process of consensus between truly diverse groups of people and flexible configurations, it is possible to see it as a litmus test of the zeitgeist as well. The aims of conservation have changed over time, from romantic towards scientific, a curious new alliance between the army and environmentalism. As Wright notes:

It is the world that must be saved, not just the image of rural England ... By a final irony, it is the invasive army, the last bastion of old-style public expenditure, a repository of chivalric, pre-capitalist Tory values yet on the verge of obsolescence in post-modern England, that elicits and craves the most popular heritage care and enthusiasm.²⁶

Another hidden narrative of Tyneham is about the farmlands and the farmers' small buildings around Tyneham that were given up by their owners to help the war effort. However, there is little mention of them on site. The hills of Tyneham and the fields – some of which still conform to medieval layouts – are still used by cattle on non-shooting days and the story of farming methods in the past and present could reveal other insights into ecology and sustainability. It is not by chance that, in 1974, the Architectural Association School in London²⁷ sent one of its units (led by Archigram member, Warren Chalk) to propose visions for the development of this area. Revisiting this legacy could offer fresh inspiration for current interpretations.

The site's historic layers, such as pre-historic, Roman and medieval, are also latent stories to unravel and could offer additional props to activate the visitors' imagination. The nearby Flower's Barrow Iron Age Hillfort is 2,500 years old. It has a limited future, however, and is on Historic England's Heritage at Risk Register²⁸. The south side is falling into the sea at Worbarrow Bay, with perhaps half of it having already disappeared. However, the MOD archaeology team²⁹ is investigating its connection with the Durotriges – a Celtic people – spreading from Dorset into south Somerset and Wiltshire, who may have been a federation of peoples rather than a single tribe – another narrative that could augment the visitors' experience.

The story of urban and rural development in the twentieth century, with the various scenarios of development for small fishing and farming communities in the UK and Europe, could also place

Tyneham within an important cultural context where ‘the village that died for England’ narrative could be complemented by another no less dramatic narrative of ‘the village that lives in the twenty-first century’ as the epitome of military and public compromise over heritage co-sharing.

In the current geopolitical landscape, characterised once again by the spectre of war, despite the lessons learned from the last two World Wars, the military’s presence at Tyneham is expanding and its training activities continue; recent visits from Ukrainian soldiers underscore this trend. Amid these circumstances, the Tyneham project emerges as a potential model for fostering a broader alliance encompassing the military, environmentalists, artists, local communities, visitors and researchers, all working together towards the sustainable conservation and elucidation of a shared territory.

Within this framework, the research emphasises the role of suggestive performance traditions in conservation efforts. These elements facilitate a continuous process of exploration and reimagining heritage, ensuring its relevance to evolving lifestyles and contemporary social and political contexts. By embracing these principles, the Tyneham project offers a pathway towards maintaining the resonance of heritage amid shifting societal norms and zeitgeist consciousness.

The historical transformation of the site’s ownership and its shifting narratives sometimes strongly contrast with each other. At present, the site is owned by the military but displayed narratives exclude its perspective. Can inclusive performing practices transform the site from a place of conflict to a place of reconciliation and education? Parallels with historic performative traditions from ancient Greece and Japanese Noh theatre are noted to suggest a dynamic heritage space.

In short, this article suggested how a contested site like Tyneham could become a living memorial by encouraging visitors’ imagination to nurture various interpretations and new stories as the heritage framework is constantly being revisited and reinvented.

Acknowledgements

Tarek Teba and Rachael Brown initiated the research on Tyneham’s hidden narratives and managed successful funding applications for several research trips. This article presents the author’s attempt to map only a partial landscape of Tyneham’s heritage threads. This leads to insight into the potential of suggestive performing traditions to keep Tyneham as a living memorial to inclusive practices, where participatory engagement could ensure sustainable heritage relevance. Some master’s students of Conservation Architecture and Interior Architecture and Design engaged in the research on several themes about Tyneham within the module Work-Based Learning, which was co-ordinated by the author of this article. Illustrations and maps from research projects by Natassia Ho and Cerian Frost are included in this article.

Notes

- 1 Slow Travel UK 2020–2024, *Frozen in Time*.
- 2 The Dorset estate and Bond connection is mentioned in an article in Greasley-Machin, ‘The Dorset estate’, and the estate is comparable in scale with other architecturally prominent compounds in Dorset, see <https://www.dorsetlife.co.uk>.
- 3 Knott, *Dorset with Hardy*, 29.
- 4 Bainbridge, *Francis Frith*.
- 5 Wright, *The Village*.
- 6 Wright, *The Village*.
- 7 Slow Travel UK 2020–2024, *Frozen in Time*.
- 8 Tyneham & Worbarrow, *Tyneham Action Group*.
- 9 Legg, *Lulworth*.
- 10 Tyneham & Worbarrow, *Tyneham Action Group*; Tyneham Village, *Tyneham Village History*; Legg, *Lulworth*.
- 11 Wright, *The Village*.
- 12 Newth, *Fighting for Tyneham*.
- 13 UK Parliament, *Nugent Report*.
- 14 UK Parliament, *Defence Lands*.

- ¹⁵ Lord Dugby suggested a compromise, comparing the losses in case of an Army relocation: the losses to the Army will be the expense of withdrawal; to the public, the loss of 800 jobs; and to the naturalists, the loss of a unique environment that has rare flora and fauna. Poetic connotations of the place in Hardy, *Return of the Native*, were discussed at the beginning of the debate. UK Parliament, *Defence Lands*, Column 542.
- ¹⁶ 'Often conservation is seen as preserving the goose that lays the golden eggs, but I suggest that it is equally important to ensure that those golden eggs are not transmuted into lead by the crowds that are attracted by that very conservation. This is the major problem of conservation and amenity, and I see it as one of the possible dangers to the National Park concept. I am trying to evaluate the advantages over the present system of planning control in an area of outstanding natural beauty.' Lord Dugby, UK Parliament, *Defence Lands*, Column 542.
- ¹⁷ Barthes, *Empire of Signs*.
- ¹⁸ Orwell, *Coming Up for Air*.
- ¹⁹ Carson, *Silent Spring*.
- ²⁰ Saint, 'Reviewed works'.
- ²¹ Historic England, *Conservation Principles*.
- ²² Barthes, *Empire of Signs*.
- ²³ Isozaki, *Japan-ness in Architecture*.
- ²⁴ It is also important for the visitors' perception of the tank shooter to understand why the site's topography and location make it an excellent tank-training site for UK and foreign military preparation and to know that the wider geology supported military training before World War II.
- ²⁵ Thanks to a conversation with Mick Burgess – a former range officer from 1989 to 2007 – the author became familiar with various issues related to the conservation of Tyneham village and the measures undertaken.
- ²⁶ Cited in Saint, 'Reviewed works', 98.
- ²⁷ This is mentioned in the Architectural Association School of Architecture Publication's *AA Files* 30.
- ²⁸ It is listed as a small multivallate hillfort at Historic England website.
- ²⁹ I met Guy Salkeld, who was leading the excavation for the Defence Infrastructure Organisation. Salkeld mentioned Flower's Barrow Hillfort research project; see Williams, *Flower's Barrow*.

Declarations and conflicts of interest

Research ethics statement

Not applicable to this article.

Consent for publication statement

Not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of interest statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest with this work. All efforts to sufficiently blind the author during peer review of this article have been made. The author declares no further conflicts with this article.

References

- Bainbridge, John. *Francis Frith around Dorset*. Salisbury: Frith Book, 2001.
- Barthes, Roland. *Empire of Signs*. New York: Anchor Books, 1983.
- Carson, Rachel. *Silent Spring*. London: Penguin Classics, 2000.
- Greasley-Machin, Sam. 'The Dorset estate which inspired James Bond's inception'. *Dorset Echo*. 2 October 2021. Accessed 4 January 2024. <https://www.dorsetecho.co.uk/news/19616505.dorset-estate-inspired-james-bonds-inception/>.
- Hardy, Thomas. *The Return of the Native*. London: Penguin Classics, 1999.
- Historic England. *Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance*. London: Historic England, 2008.
- Historic England Heritage at Risk Register, Accessed 10 September 2024. <https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/heritage-at-risk/search-register/list-entry/41680>
- Isozaki, Arata. *Japan-ness in Architecture*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011

- Knott, Olive. *Dorset with Hardy: Collection of articles from Poole and Dorset Herald*. Imprint unknown, 1885.
- Legg, Rodney. *Lulworth and Tyneham Revisited*. Sherborne: Dorset Publishing, 1985
- Newth, John. 'Fighting for Tyneham'. *Dorset Life*. December 2013. Accessed 25 July 2023. <https://www.dorsetlife.co.uk/2013/12/fighting-for-Tyneham/>.
- Orwell, George. *Coming Up for Air*. London: Penguin Random House, 2020.
- Saint, Andrew. 'The Village that Died for England: The strange story of Tyneham Patrick Wright'. *AA Files* 30 (1995): 97–8.
- Slow Travel UK 2020–2024. *Frozen in Time: The ghost village of Tyneham*. Accessed 5 January 2024. <https://www.slow-travel.uk/post/Tyneham>.
- Tyneham OPC. (n.d.). *Censuses*. Accessed 25 July 2023. <https://Tynehamopc.org.uk/censuses/>.
- Tyneham Village. Tyneham Village History. Accessed 24 July 2024. <https://tynehamvillage.org/a-brief-history-of-tyneham/>.
- Tyneham & Worbarrow. *Tyneham Action Group*. Accessed 25 July 2023. <https://tynehamopc.org.uk/tyneham-action-group-2/>.
- UK Parliament, Defence Lands: Tyneham ranges, vol. 356, debated on Wednesday 29 January 1975. Accessed 25 July 2023. <https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/1975-01-29/debates/7a6ce706-d9ad-4f6c-9714-9156d2e348cd/DefenceLandsTynehamRanges>.
- UK Parliament, Land (Nugent Report), vol.849, debated on Thursday 30 January 1975. Accessed 10 September 2024. [https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/1973-01-30/debates/adb54637-8277-4a75-a34c-2bf6dcbdb4f9/Land\(NugentReport\)](https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/1973-01-30/debates/adb54637-8277-4a75-a34c-2bf6dcbdb4f9/Land(NugentReport))
- Williams, Liz. 'Flower's Barrow and Spectral Legions'. *The Wild Hunt-Pagan News and Perspectives*, 14 September 2022. Accessed 6 January 2024. <https://wildhunt.org/2022/09/flowers-barrow-and-spectral-legions.html/>.
- Wright, Patrick. *The Village that Died for England: Tyneham and the Legend of Churchill's Pledge*. London: Repeater Books, 2021.