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**To cite this article:** Maria Abranches & Elena Horton (12 Nov 2023): Heritage through collage: a participatory and creative approach to heritage making, International Journal of Heritage Studies, DOI: [10.1080/13527258.2023.2277780](https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2023.2277780)

**To link to this article:** <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2023.2277780>



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Published online: 12 Nov 2023.



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# Heritage through collage: a participatory and creative approach to heritage making

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## ABSTRACT

Drawing on collages created by residents in Great Yarmouth – a coastal location in the East of England, characterised by a prominent history of fishing and current high levels of socioeconomic deprivation – we use a participatory arts-based approach to explore how individuals and communities participate in the making of heritage. Through the process of creating collages that represent the history of the town, and their own history within it, participants choose how to materialise and communicate what we understand as intangible (the stories) and tangible (the collages) heritage, where a sense of place and belonging is preserved or restored. We found that, first, the non-linear nature of collaging, which we see as cultural practice, allowed participants to reconnect with the history of which they are proud to be a part yet felt was 'lost' in the transformations that have occurred in the town. Through collage, they were able to layer and juxtapose the different elements of the story in unique ways, with a focus on time, politics and affects. Second, the collages themselves – and their dissemination in various exhibitions through the course of one year – contributed to validate their key role in the creation and communication of heritage.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 28 July 2023

Accepted 24 October 2023

## KEYWORDS

Arts-based methods; coastal transformations; collage; fishing; participatory heritage

## Introduction

This paper draws on collage work created around fishing and coastal transformations by residents in a former fishing town in the East of England, to explore innovative and creative ways in which people's voices can be included in the making of heritage. Adopting a critical and participatory heritage approach, we focus on the interdependence between intangible (the stories shared during the process of collage making) and tangible (the collages that result from those stories) elements in community heritage making and address both as an attempt to preserve or restore a sense of place and belonging (Reeves and Plets 2016). Since heritage is formed in the present, reflects current concerns about the past and is associated with a risk of destruction of that past (Harrison 2013), a creative object that is generated from these reflections and saves memories and stories from extinction seems to be worthy of consideration as heritage.

Heritage as a concept encompasses a wide range of tangible and intangible categories, is ambiguous, dynamic and constantly evolving (Harrison 2013). Despite its uncertainty, however, in Western conceptualisations of heritage a certain order is required to facilitate the collection, categorisation, preservation and management of objects, sites, practices and stories. Originally linked to the project of modernity, the classificatory schemes that accompany the process of

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heritage making are intended to deal with the threat of disorder and destruction that is integral to the conditions of modernity (Harrison 2013). Collage, on the other hand, offers a non-linear positioning of different elements of a story, where pieces can be rearranged and re-layered as thinking develops (Vacchelli 2018). Seen as cultural practice, collage is often associated with the transgression of the ‘postmodern turn’, insofar as objects are deconstructed and removed from their original meaning, resulting in an interplay of multiple meanings that destabilises the initial order (Gerstenblatt 2013). While this could be seen as opposing the required ordering associated with heritage, in this article we demonstrate how the ‘chaos’ of collage helps to bring order to people’s thinking about their past and the past of their town, and to the materialisation and communication of those thoughts (Freeman 2020), in some cases with a clear political intention.

Following a socio-political and heritage contextualisation of the coastal location in which the research was conducted, the next section of this article will situate the research within the literature on participatory heritage on the one hand, and collage as a critical practice of heritage making on the other hand, combining both in a novel way. This will be followed by a description of methodology, findings (which we address through the themes of time, politics and affects), discussion, and conclusion.

## The making of coastal and fishing heritage in Great Yarmouth

Great Yarmouth is a coastal borough situated in Norfolk County in the East of England, with a population of 99,800 (Office for National Statistics 2021) and a rich and complex history. While the fishing and tourism industries were prominent in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the town, with the literature describing its port as the second in the country in terms of fish landings (Thompson, Wailey, and Lummis 1983), it is currently one of the 20% most deprived districts in England (Public Health England 2020). The socioeconomic inequalities and deprivation experienced in Great Yarmouth today are a motive of concern amongst its residents, who express a general sense of depletion (Abranches 2023) and discontent with past and current governmental strategies (Abranches et al. 2021).

The fragmentation of the fishing industry and its end in the 1960s, caused by pressure on fish stock due to overfishing, is seen by many as the start of the decline of the town. Following that, the introduction of low-cost package holidays abroad started to cause a decline also in the tourism industry in the 1970s and 1980s (Abranches 2023). In an attempt to preserve and reconstruct some of that history, the former Tower Curing Works – one of the largest commercial fish curing works in Great Yarmouth, built in 1880 – was acquired by the Great Yarmouth Preservation Trust in 2000. In a derelict and vandalised state by then (Figure 1), the building was saved from demolition and the possibility of converting it into a flagship museum, which was to replace the old Maritime Museum on the seafront, gained shape (Colin Stott, pers. comm., October 5, 2020).<sup>1</sup> Building works started in 2002, alongside a process of community consultation led by the ‘Great Yarmouth Voices, Our Town’ project, whereby a wide collection of life histories with Great Yarmouth residents, focusing on their general experiences and perceptions of life in the town, was recorded (Abranches 2023).

The Time and Tide Museum of Great Yarmouth Life opened to the public in 2004 (Figure 2). While it is an institutional heritage project, created and managed by conservation and preservation institutions, the community consultation project is worth highlighting. Moreover, the museum continues to have a concern with dialogue and engagement. A renovation process was being considered at the time of our research, taking into account the changes in town and the technological advancements that allow for more stories to be told in more detail (Colin Stott, pers. comm., October 5, 2020). Recognising – as heritage researchers writing on the role of museums in their communities have (see e.g. Perkin 2010) – that not everyone’s heritage interests are represented in the collections, and that the demographics of the town change with time, a new consultation process was being planned as part of the renovation process. Part of its intention was to expand the representation of migrants’ contributions and of the experience in the offshore industry, which



**Figure 1.** Tower curing works derelict, Great Yarmouth (1990s) @ Norfolk Museum Service.



**Figure 2.** Time and Tide Museum of Great Yarmouth life (present) @ Norfolk Museum Service.

replaced fishing in the 1960s. A community room in the museum is also a space of collaborative heritage making that regularly hosts a wide range of exhibitions, installations and events. Amongst other community-led artwork, the ‘Heritage and Imaginaries of the Coast’ collage exhibition that resulted from the project discussed in this article, was hosted here between February and May 2022 (Figure 3).

### **Participatory heritage and collage: an emerging relationship**

Heritage as a discipline and practice has shifted from an association with a stable past that needs to be preserved or celebrated to a focus on ‘doing’, a process that involves negotiating the past in the present (Harrison 2013). Within this critical framework, a participatory approach has received increased attention as a way of recognising communities as knowledge holders who should be equal participants in decisions about heritage.

Writing about heritage for social action and social justice, Johnston and Marwood (2017) used the term ‘action heritage’ to define a decentring of heritage research that has the potential to





**Figure 3.** 'Heritage and Imaginaries of the coast' collage exhibition opening at the Time and Tide Museum of Great Yarmouth life @ Elena Horton.

challenge inequalities – both in heritage practice and discourse and in societies at large, as the former is often caught up in, and perpetuates the latter. An epistemological shift that emphasises process and participation, focussing on co-production and collaboration with communities as non-traditional, rather than established, heritage groups, allows for the democratisation of heritage, making it more widely accessible.

Although concerns with inclusivity (Roued-Cunliffe and Copeland 2017) and social justice (Johnston and Marwood 2017) have highlighted the need for collaboration between formal heritage institutions and informal heritage groups, it has been noted that the participatory heritage space has so far been operating outside the formal heritage sphere, through locally organised groups that share and document their stories without institutional engagement. Likewise, heritage institutions often continue to operate without connecting to the interests of the people they are trying to serve (Roued-Cunliffe and Copeland 2017). This disconnect has raised concerns, amongst other things, with scope and sustainability, since the lack of resources may limit the process of building, transmission and management of non-official, participatory heritage. Yet disagreements can occur in more conventional partnerships between formal and informal heritage groups when different needs, interests and agendas are at stake (Crooke 2010; Perkin 2010). In an attempt to contribute to this debate, the process of production and communication of heritage resulting from the collage workshops we organised was embedded in collaborative work between Great Yarmouth residents (who had the dominant role), researchers, a local collage artist, the Time and Tide Museum of Great Yarmouth Life and others with curatorial roles, as will be explained in the methodology.

Our focus on community knowledge follows the critical turn in heritage, which addresses, for a large part, a critique of professional practices and policies, highlighting the need for conservation and preservation institutions and resources to incorporate a way of responding to the socio-political complexities of today (Winter 2013), and for de-centring the focus on heritage 'experts' and 'specialists' by including community and lived experience knowledge. Collage emerges here as a critical, inclusive and accessible response to these concerns, insofar as it offers the means to facilitate engagement by those who, despite positioned at the centre of the object of heritage, are often left out of the process of defining it. Collage can challenge hierarchies, foster pluralism, increase multivocality and facilitate dialogue through its visual juxtapositions (Rijke 2023). Yet surprisingly, the relationship between collage and heritage has been contained in the literature. While 'creative heritage' has been coined as interdisciplinary work situated at the intersection of heritage and creative practice (Istvandity 2021), this approach is mostly centred on performative arts – music, theatre and dance – and aims at connecting artists and communities with local cultural

histories, rather than focusing on the community-led process of generating creative work through an arts-based process of thinking about those histories. An exception is McAra's work on the role played by cultural heritage in young people's sense of identity and belonging in Scottish island communities (McAra 2021), which used collage, amongst other techniques, as a means to create zoetrope animations that would reflect and describe their experiences and perspectives on the topic. As McAra also found, the creative engagement and the collaborative environment of the workshops, as well as the layering and juxtapositions of materials and ideas, allowed for an exploration of a diverse range of heritage forms, meanings and uses, destabilising common considerations of what heritage should be and revealing new connections. Although under-researched, collage is therefore a privileged arts-based method of exploring heritage, a process of heritage making, and a tangible object of heritage that allows for meaning to be immediately retrievable (Grady 2004).

## Methodology

The material discussed in this article is part of a wider research project on fishing and coastal transformations, with case studies in India, Slovenia, Norway, France and the UK.<sup>2</sup> The project, funded by the EU-India Platform for Social Sciences and Humanities, carried out a comparative examination of the impacts of coastal change on fishing communities in India and selected European countries, and of how these communities have been responding to the challenges imposed by such transformations. The modernisation of capture fisheries, the promotion of more industrial ways of fishing, the expansion of maritime territories and the globalisation of markets, as well as the emergence of new priorities for coastal areas, which include an increasing emphasis on real estate and tourism, formed parallel histories and interconnections. Central to the analysis was an understanding of how heritage has been reinvented in these areas, not only by the state or private investors, but also by fishers themselves and others involved in the dynamics of heritage-making. In the UK, Great Yarmouth was chosen as a case study to explore these dynamics, due to its distinctive position as a town that went from a prominent history of fishing to a decline, not just of the industry, but also of its socioeconomic landscape and perceived prestige. Local actors have therefore had to negotiate, adapt and create their own strategies to restore or preserve a sense of place, which our participatory arts-based approach helped to explore.

Between November and December 2021, eight residents in the Borough of Great Yarmouth participated in a series of four collage workshops, which we facilitated in collaboration with the Time and Tide Museum of Great Yarmouth Life and a local collage artist, Pushkin.<sup>3</sup> The workshops were hosted at PrimeYarc, a space for creative collaborations managed by the local artist-led charity Original Projects. Participant recruitment was organised through advertisements in local newspapers and on social media, as well as through personal connections with local organisations and institutions. The recruitment poster intentionally advertised 'Heritage Collage Workshops' to capture interest in either collage or heritage, or in both, and participation was open to anyone living in the borough, allowing for those who felt connected to Great Yarmouth despite having moved to other neighbouring towns, to also take part. Our open recruitment strategy resulted in diverse levels of involvement with heritage, manifested through some participants' experience of volunteering in local projects or organisations, and engagement with Great Yarmouth Facebook groups. The fact that none of them were a part of official heritage groups is likely to have played a role in avoiding conflict or disagreement during the workshops, since there were not different agendas at stake.

Following a wider registration of initial interest, the final eight participants – seven women and one man between 50 and 80 years old – were self-selected mainly for reasons related to availability. As expected, their motivations to participate ranged from a concern with the past and future of Great Yarmouth, their personal connection with the history of the town, and the desire to learn more about coastal heritage, to an interest in the arts and an artistic background shared by some,

climate activism and free time in retirement. Following their preferences, only one participant's name has been anonymised – Marina. All other real names have been retained.

Each workshop lasted approximately three hours. The first workshop introduced the project and participants and included one representative of the Time and Tide Museum of Great Yarmouth Life. The discussion was initiated with the help of objects from the museum collection: three codd lemonade bottles, one duck lamp, one fresh herring fish, assorted Great Yarmouth motto ware, one fishing Net, 1980s Holiday Brochures and a swill basket. From the start, the project focus on the history of the fishing industry was made clear, even if participants went on to freely explore their own views, experiences and connections to heritage in Great Yarmouth in different ways. The initial conversations were elicited by the handling of the museum objects and included the sharing of memories and knowledge of the past, and ideas on how people's personal and family histories were related to the materiality of that past. Some brought their own objects to share – photos, artwork and poetry – which elicited further discussion (Figure 4). Participants were also asked to choose one word that they felt better described their experience of living in Great Yarmouth, and to draw a mindmap representing their history in relation to the town. The next two workshops were mainly focused on the making of the collages (Figure 5). They were facilitated by the collage artist, who provided the tools and some materials and engaged in conversations – rather than offering guidance – about form, technique and effect, while giving participants the freedom to create as they wished. Some participants also continued to work at home, in between workshops, and added their own material – prints, copies of old photographs and other types of artwork, such as pyrography and marbled paper. The use of copyrighted material was avoided by ensuring that all the additional material gathered was in the public domain or from personal archives where permission to use was guaranteed. The final workshop consisted of finalising the individual collages, installing them on fishing nets, and mounting the installation in PrimeYarc, which was the first space to host the exhibition. All participants contributed to decisions about the installation (for example, the use of fishing nets to interweave all individual pieces) and presented their collage



**Figure 4.** Participants share their objects in the first workshop @ Maria Abranches.



**Figure 5.** The process of collage marking, second workshop @ Maria Abranches.

work to the rest of the group, which led to a preliminary discussion of emerging themes. The workshop ended with shared reflections on people's experience of participating in the project.

Although residents – the knowledge holders – were the ones to make decisions about how coastal and fishing heritage in Great Yarmouth ought to be represented, and the analysis in this article will focus on the original work they produced and the stories it entails, the role of other agents that collaborated in the process is worth mentioning here. The Time and Tide Museum of Great Yarmouth Life, for example, was not only present in the first workshop through its representative and collection, or as host of the exhibition during the dissemination stage, but also in less direct ways throughout the process, given residents' close relationship to it. The museum, well known and respected within the community, was seen as holding an important role in telling the history of the town, and its community-centred approach was often mentioned in opposition to the government's top-down decision making practice regarding important changes in town, where consultation is seen as an empty exercise 'to tick the boxes' and where 'you can have your say but they always do what they want'.

Likewise, Pushkin, the collage artist, had an inspirational role, with participants referring to his support with composition, shape and materials, as well as to his insights into the discussion and the dissemination phase of the project, partly due to his own connections to the town, where he did his foundation in Arts and 'where it all began a little bit [for me] too'. We, as researchers, had more of a backstage and observational role in the process, although less so at the beginning – when we introduced ourselves and the project – and at the end, when we facilitated the final discussion and reflections. Finally, Original Projects – the local artist-led charity who hosted the workshops and was, like the Time and Tide Museum, well known to participants – worked as a familiar and creative space that allowed for the creation of a more inclusive shared heritage for all (Roued-Cunliffe and Copeland 2017).

Between December 2021 and February 2023, the collage installation was on display in PrimeYarc, Lloyds Bank window in Great Yarmouth city centre (as part of Historic England's Heritage Action Zone Window), the Time and Tide Museum of Great Yarmouth Life, and the University of East Anglia. Each exhibition was planned in collaboration with participants and others who offered curatorial, planning and marketing support, as part of the dissemination stage of the project. This was an important part of the process, with participants feeling proud of their role in creating visible heritage that could reach others – a sentiment that demonstrates the affective dimension of participatory heritage, encompassing not just engagement and care towards the people and things of the heritage they were making, but also other emotions like enjoyment and personal fulfilment (Baker 2017). It is important to note, however, that the collages were not



initially created with the intention of being exhibited in specific spaces. Instead, following our participatory approach, the idea was collaboratively developed during and after the workshops, as was the plan for a moving installation, which gave the work a variety of possible space- and audience-based experiences.

During this phase, other collaborations are worth mentioning. Julia Devonshire and Kaavous Clayton, who run Original Projects, attended the private views of the exhibitions at the Time and Tide Museum and the University of East Anglia. As expert and engaged receivers of the information contained in the exhibitions, their positive feedback reaffirmed the authority of the stories on display for participants and for the public (Smith and Campbell 2015). Development and participation manager Katy Kingston from Out There Arts – an independent arts development charity in Great Yarmouth – offered curatorial support in the installation at Lloyds Bank window, as part of Historic England’s Heritage Action Zone Window. Finally, the University of East Anglia hosted the final exhibition of the collages, with the support of CreativeUEA – an interdisciplinary research theme that explores new areas of research, learning, action and outreach (Figure 6). The support of CreativeUEA included a marketing strategy that allowed for the exhibition to feature in two local radio programmes, for which one of the project participants was interviewed, and a local news website<sup>4</sup>

In March 2023, the individual collages were returned to their creators. Authorship and ownership are noteworthy elements in participatory heritage making. The result of such dialogical processes is usually seen as collaborative, yet a precise definition of who owns the creative material produced is often lacking, or incorporated in the ‘co-creation’ category, seen as a democratic and bottom-up method of integrating communities into the cultural heritage management process (Grcheva and Oktay Vehbi 2021; Smith and Iversen 2014). In our research, it was important that participants had control not only over the research and production process, but also over the individual visual outcomes they produced, hence ownership was theirs from the start. As well as contributing to their engagement with the project, the value of such practice was reinforced with their decision to include personal and family histories in the final work, for example through photos of relatives and sourced images alluding to personal memories. Participants’ decision to incorporate these marked what Johnston and Marwood (2017, 826) defined as a ‘a shift in the recognition of the residents and their stake in the project’, demonstrating the counterproductive nature of practices that give rights of ownership to an institution (McIntyre 2008).



**Figure 6.** ‘Heritage and Imaginaries of the coast’ collage exhibition at the University of East Anglia @ Maria Abranches.



Within the group of participants, different interests, motivations and experiences led to different types of engagement and results. Given the experimental nature of the project, such differences were a welcome part of what Crooke has named ‘a highly creative journey with unpredictable consequences’ (Crooke 2010, 32). The next three sections will analyse the results of our project based on three key themes that emerged from the analysis: time, politics and affects.

## Time

At the centre of everyone’s idea of heritage in Great Yarmouth is the sea, which was also, combined with fishing, the main theme of the workshops. Alongside the sea and fishing, time has an obvious central position in participants’ collages. While all address temporalities of some kind, four participants have intentionally chosen to represent the passing of time and related transformations in the seascape as the main theme in their understanding and making of heritage.

Allison, for example, chose to juxtapose past and present in a ‘deliberately unstructured look’ through the use of fluid rather than rigid shapes, yet intentionally contrasting what she calls the ‘old’, in black and white, to the ‘modern’, in colour, to suggest the dramatic nature of the changes in sea-related landscape and activities that have occurred in Great Yarmouth (Figure 7).

Having lived in the town for most of her life, Allison, now in her 50s, has experienced some of those changes. During discussions in the workshops, Allison talks particularly about spending time at Pleasure Beach as a child – a seafront amusement park that, built during the boom of the tourism industry in the early 1900s, has gone through several transformations, but remains an iconic landmark (Figure 7, middle left). Hand drawn fish are placed between larger images to highlight the significance of the fishing industry in Great Yarmouth, both in its heyday and through its decline. As she explains,

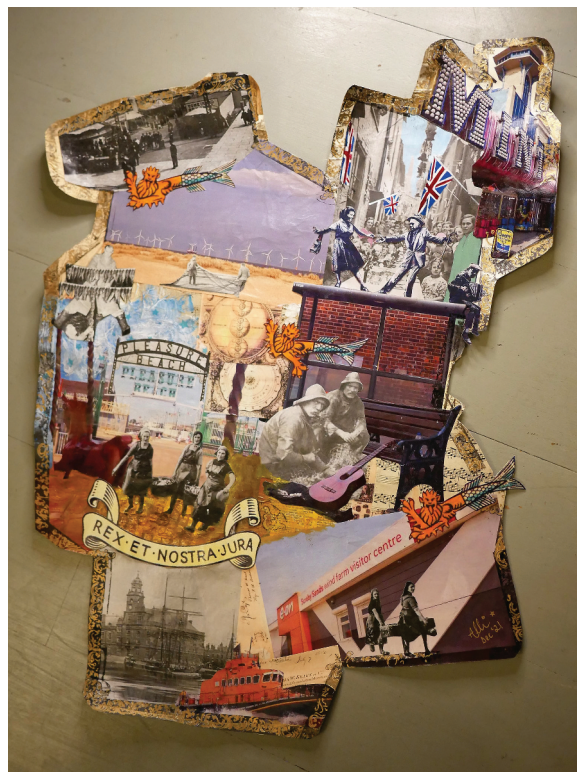


Figure 7. Allison’s collage @ Maria Abranches.

My piece depicts a ‘then and now’ scenario. I wanted to show the contrast of history versus the present. I have used mixed media to grasp some of Yarmouth’s history: I’ve painted over the printouts, used paint, gesso, stencilling and a stamp filled in with gold to do the border. In doing that I wanted to capture the loss of the fishing industry and the gains made by the tourism industry.

The images in Allison’s collage also depict street scenes and the windfarm and wind turbines that came to replace the fishing vessels and women fish gutters and packers in this coastal landscape. When reflecting on her understanding of heritage, Allison refers to a sentiment of ‘nostalgia’ and claims to feel ‘part of the heritage of Great Yarmouth because we grew up in its best years’. She contrasts the current socioeconomic decline and in-work poverty with the prominent history of the town and emphasises ‘heritage making’ as an important way to ‘retain something from this rich history’, which serves as ‘a reminder of what is really good about Yarmouth’ and helps her make sense of the disconnect she currently feels ‘from the way it used to be’.

Likewise, Mary’s collages depict the transformations that have occurred in the lives of Great Yarmouth residents over time, with the sea at the centre. Originally from Dublin, Ireland, but having lived in Great Yarmouth since age 37, Mary, who was 69 at the time of the workshops, chose to create four square shapes centred around the theme of diversity, and how this has changed with the transformations of Great Yarmouth’s coastal activities (Figure 8):

My first collage shows local fisherwomen on the beach collecting food for their families. The second one represents Scottish fisherwomen brought to Great Yarmouth for seasonal work in the fishing industry. The third is a street scene of the town as it is now, showing some positive aspects of our diverse community. The fourth is a holidaymaker on the beach as tourism attains prominence.

In conversations during the creating process, Mary notes the diversification of Great Yarmouth over time, from the Scottish women who came during the herring season in the nineteenth and early twentieth Century, to the post-war Greek Cypriot migrants and the more recent Eastern Europeans and Portuguese who initially came to work for Bernard Mathews – a well-known poultry factory with direct recruitment campaigns in the early 2000s (Barnard and Costello 2023). Common amongst these different migration stories is, for Mary, hard work and resilience, which she depicts mainly through photos of women workers. In one of her collages, Mary implicitly makes a reference to the National Health Service crisis (Figure 8 – top right), at a time when the COVID-19 pandemic was heightening an already felt sense of ‘loss’. As for Allison, however, the sense of loss is, for Mary, prior to the pandemic and originates with the end of the fishing and oil industries which, coupled with poor government policies, led to the socioeconomic decline of the town and to new visible



Figure 8. Mary’s collages @ Maria Abranches.

social landscapes such as drug abuse, alcohol and crime. Mary intentionally decided not to include these changes in landscape in her collages, after considering that her own life in Great Yarmouth has not been largely affected by them. In her fourth collage (Figure 8 – bottom right), an image of a wind turbine is used, instead, to represent a more recent transformation, juxtaposed with that of a holidaymaker at the beach, both taken from her own drawings and described as herself enjoying refreshments at the seafront while contemplating this changed landscape.

The experience of increased uncertainty and crisis in the present gives a sense of urgency to the collages described here, which have the power to preserve the ‘happy memories’ of a past linked to the sea, understood as a ‘plural assemblage of spatial representations, practices, and imaginations’ that can be treated as intangible heritage (Castela 2015, 10). Representing the inevitability of the passage of time (Harrison 2013), these collages depict the past in a way that expresses a nostalgia for ‘old things’. Yet the transgressive nature of collage allows this sentiment to be juxtaposed with what is known about the present and future (for example, global mobility and renewable energies) rather than with threatening and unknown forces.

Like Allison and Mary, Bridget also describes a sense of nostalgia and loss yet composes her collage in a positive way. Born in Great Yarmouth in 1960, she grew up on a farm near the town, and describes going to the seaside as a child as ‘feeling like a holiday’ and Great Yarmouth coastline as ‘always [feeling] like home’. She remembers a certain vibrancy that she no longer sees in the town. Expressing a sentiment of sadness that this sense of loss conveys, she explains that ‘there was a lot going on and that’s just sort of been sucked away and that’s really sad’. She defines heritage as ‘remembering a happier past’ and chooses to recreate it in her collage through sea-related familiar images that hold personal significance to her (Figure 9). Bridget has a personal connection – though not based on direct memory – to the history of Scottish migration to Great Yarmouth during the



Figure 9. Bridget's collage @ Maria Abranches.



herring season in the early twentieth century, and she was interested in preserving this connection, which is linked to her grandparents' grocery shop near the river and the role they had in serving the Scottish women that came to the town to work in the industry.

Bridget used a photograph of her office at the Coastwatch, where she volunteers, cut out the windows of the tower where she takes watch looking out to sea, and placed alternative views, aiming to combine what she calls 'the contemporary and the heritage' through marine life. As she explains, 'it's got the herring, fishing and the seals, which we often see bobbing up in the sea when we're on watch', and an image of a watch 'to signify time passing and how things have changed over the years'. In one window is a world map, situating Great Yarmouth as separate to the rest of society, a sentiment that Bridget reiterates in conversations, describing Great Yarmouth as 'in and of itself'. As all collages described so far, Bridget's also includes an image of the wind turbines to represent the present, alongside a trawler ship depicting the fishing industry of the past.

Fran, who moved from Norwich to Great Yarmouth at age four and was 58 at the time of the workshops, also took a temporal approach to her collage, depicting images of Great Yarmouth from the 'herring heyday' to the present day (Figure 10):

My collage shows a Great Yarmouth timeline: the fishing industry when it was at its best, with the harbour full of ships at the time of the fishing trawlers . . . The little ferry that used to be there . . . Then we come to modern times and there are very few ships. The little boy playing on the beach, people paddling in sea, a lot of herring, seagulls. . .

Her method of collaging was to combine old and new photos, taken from a relative's archive and representing personal connections to Great Yarmouth, past and present. She also used tissue paper, which she suggests brings to life her temporal approach by sectioning her collage into a timeline through different colours. Fran noted that working with these materials was a comfortable way to engage with heritage, as she found writing exercises sometimes difficult to manage due to her dyslexia.

While collecting the materials for her collage, Fran describes, like Mary, being struck by how hard people used to work. In her collage, however, rather than focusing on the hardships of the fishing past, Fran chose to represent the transformations that occurred on the coastal landscape, with different multi-media layers showing the transition from the fullness to the disappearance of fishing trawlers, and people playing on the beach as a way to preserve another positive use of the sea. At the end of the workshops, Fran shared, like the others, a feeling of 'having been taken back to a happier place' through the process of collage making. She contrasts happy memories of the past



Figure 10. Fran's collage @ Maria Abranches.

with the insular Great Yarmouth of today – the ‘in and of itself’ also described by Bridget, where a current sense of neglect is experienced by all, and poor governmental strategies seen as the cause for the decline.

## Politics

Fran’s suggestion introduces the political possibilities of making heritage through collage. Two participants – Michael and Marina – made more explicit use of this possibility. Unlike the collages described above, Michael’s and Marina’s work depicts some of the less positive aspects of how the transformations that occurred over the years have contributed to a sense of neglect and depletion, in Michael’s collages, and threat, in the case of Marina’s, experienced today.

Michael, who was 65 years old at the time of the workshops, has lived in Great Yarmouth all his life, although his father was from North Shields and his mother from Ireland. Despite not identifying as a particularly politicised person, Michael’s collages suggest frustration with local politics and are simultaneously personal, playful and political (Figures 11 and 12). They reflect a combination of his years growing up in Great Yarmouth with political sentiments, indicating that both personal and wider-ranging ideas of change or transformation can be found in political intentions (Crooke 2010).

Michael remembers his summers on the beach and reflects on what living on the coast has meant to him. However, in his collages the centre is shifted from the sea and fishing to include other places and buildings he considers prominent in the history of the town, as well as those that hold personal significance to him:



Figure 11. Michael's collages @ Maria Abranches.





**Figure 12.** Michael's collage @ Elena Horton.

My collages reflect some of my memories of Great Yarmouth, living there . . . My old school Greenacre, and how first timers imagined it would be like; the Tower Ballroom on Marine Parade where everyone went on Friday and Saturday night; the Town Hall. . . The Power Station. . . Everybody who lived in Yarmouth when it was here always looked for that on their way home, on the Acle Straight.

Although not represented in his collages, the old fire station is remembered during workshop discussions, and the conversion of the building into affordable housing is highly criticised by Michael and the others. The lack of community consultation is highlighted as a sign that 'the council tends to ignore rather than represent us':

I have seen many major changes in the town, but I find it difficult to think of one that has benefited its residents. I saw the demise of the herring industry, the rise and fall of the gas industry and now the rise of the wind farm industry, the ups and downs of the holiday industry and the demise of the mass employers. It is a town with a rich history and buildings. . . I am glad I saw it from the 1950s to the 1980s.

Despite the current sense of decline and depletion, Michael notes that those who grew up in Great Yarmouth and moved away seem to find enjoyment in coming back to visit – a sentiment that Bridget shares when recalling driving down the seafront in the summertime and seeing 'lots of people there having a good time', despite not liking 'the feel of Yarmouth now'. Michael, like Mary, wishes to represent the diversity of the town in the making of its heritage, but his focus is on a critical and satirical depiction of how migrants are perceived (Figure 12), whereby he suggests that wealthier migrants are more welcome than others. His other collages address themes such as corruption (Figure 11 – middle left), for which he incorporated the statements 'it doesn't always pay to be truthful' and 'how to hide things', written next to images of the Godfather and Great Yarmouth Town Hall, or references to a popular rumour of a factory worker's fall in the town (Figure 11 – top right).

Marina, 52, who defines herself as an artist and activist, took a different approach to her creation. Marina was born in London but moved with her family to Great Yarmouth in the late 1960s, where she enjoys 'breathing in the ocean air at this beautiful seaside location'. For her, it was important to convey urgent environmental concerns related to the sea, with the intention of repairing, in the present and future, the damage that a past of overfishing has created:

I came to my collage from an activist's point of view. It features Captain Paul Watson and Sea Shepherd, the organisation he founded 45 years ago. It shows the pollution and plundering of the oceans . . . That's why we haven't got an industry anymore here. It's all just drained; we're running out of fish.

Marina's creation extends beyond the history of Great Yarmouth to express a concern with saving marine life through the end of fishing at a global level (Figures 13 and 14). She uses Paul Watson's



equal right to be used in future heritage planning and management in the town. A narrative of truth and justice is visible in the work produced by Marina and Michael, in some ways similar to the heritage practices connected to reconciliation and healing analysed by Crooke (2010). Purposefully told in an overt manner, it is intentionally aimed at addressing political discontent on the one hand, and environmental concerns on the other. In the case of Marina's work more specifically, its public display is also a way to gain support of a wider public as part of a broader campaign. As well as being a way to make sense of their world and past, the process of heritage making through cultural production and dissemination allows them to strategically assert their voices in the public sphere (Ashley and Frank 2016).

## Affects

Eleanor (78) and Sue (60) are mother and daughter and have lived in Great Yarmouth all their lives. Amongst all participants, they express the closest personal connections with the herring industry of the past. While Eleanor's father worked on the quay filling the 'cran' baskets,<sup>5</sup> her mother ran a boarding house for the 'Scottish fisher girls', who she recalls fondly.

Eleanor's and Sue's collages are the only ones to include images of family members in the juxtapositions created (Figures 15 and 16). In Eleanor's creation, a photo of her father is positioned amongst images of herring and a photo of the sea captured from the window of her house, where wind farms can be seen and are used here, as in most other collages, as a representation of the landscape transformations of the coast. As she explains, 'we had lots of windmills at one time, but things move on, and we now have the wind turbines out at sea to help produce electricity'. The

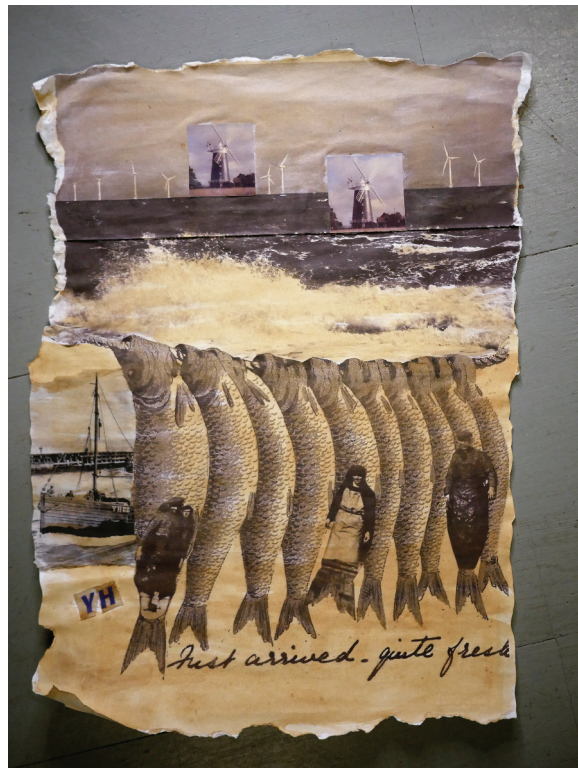


Figure 15. Eleanor's collage @ Maria Abranches.





Figure 16. Sue's collages @ Maria Abranches.

photo of her father, taken during the fishing season on the quay, features in the middle, representing her own affective connection to the history of the once flourishing fishing industry in the town:

He [William George] was helping to unload the herring, which were known as 'silver darlings'. My mother, Gertrude George, took in the Scots people every year when they came down for the fishing season. I remember their names: Mr and Mrs May and Mr and Mrs Buccan. They would knit my sister and me beautiful Fair Isle mittens and bring scotch biscuits for us. My father and mother did this as work was very scarce.

During the workshops, Eleanor emotively shares many memories of places, buildings and events from the time of the herring industry: the floods of 1953, the old cinema Empire and the open swimming pool. Like the others, she describes her memories of 'the old Yarmouth' as 'happy' and defines the changes that have occurred in town as having contributed to its decline, maintaining, 'I'm glad I was a small child then, I wouldn't want to be a small child today. Not all progress is for the better'.

Eleanor's daughter Sue describes her collages as 'a commemoration of the past'. Aiming at conveying this need to commemorate, especially the history of the fishing industry, she decided to shape her work in a way that mimics both shrines and boats. Drawing on her background in Arts, she explains:

In the collage of the fisher girls, I have used some of my own artwork – the marbled papers and photocopies of the herring (watercolours and pencil). The other collaged elements were found online. I felt it was important to the piece to add the herring or 'silver darlings' and also the Great Yarmouth coat of arms ('Rex. Et. Nostra. Jura' – 'The King and our Rights'). In the second collage – also using my original marbled papers as a background – I used a photocopy of my Crone sketch to represent my Nan Gertrude George and all the other matriarchs that I remember from my childhood. Some of the other collaged elements are local buildings that have specific memories for me and some examples of Norfolk dialect.

In her collages, Sue depicts two key subjects that she considers demonstrate the transformations of her own perceptions of heritage over time: older women and language. When she was younger, she associated the history of Great Yarmouth, and her own history, with 'old and wrinkly' women, which she relates to memories of her grandmother hosting Scottish women fish gutters and packers. Yet she now understands her heritage as local cultural expressions, such as the Norfolk dialect, which she used to dislike when younger. Describing her 'nan and grandad [as] really broad Norfolk', Sue expresses sadness towards the fact that the dialect is 'kind of dying out. You don't hear that so much now'. Considering it as part of her, as well as the town's, heritage, in one of her collages she uses cuttings to recreate sentences in Norfolk dialect and claims to 'love the Norfolk accent now'.

Both Eleanor and Sue express a particularly emotive and intimate engagement with the making of their collages. Applying the types of affective responses analysed by Smith and Campbell (2015) in relation to exhibitions, to the analysis of how community members engage with the process of making heritage using an arts-based method like collage, can be useful to understand such feelings. Affect and emotion are essential constitutive elements of heritage making. Yet as Smith and Campbell also found, such emotional engagement is not dissociated from the individual's ability to seek out and mediate that response, which depends, amongst other things, on their relationship with the subject. In the case of Eleanor and Sue, their close personal and family links to the history of fishing in Great Yarmouth, which was the theme at the centre of the workshops, has allowed them to more emotively express their sentiments and affirm their place in the making of the heritage of the town.

## Discussion

In discussions during the workshops, Fran refers to the making of heritage through collage as an opportunity not only to represent the changes in Great Yarmouth, but to produce them. In fact, while creating these collages, participants forged a link to the past that allowed them to produce new understandings about that past – which were later shared through the exhibitions – in a process of learning and discovering (Johnston and Marwood 2017). Moreover, following Johnston and Marwood's argument that the practices and processes of researching heritage are transformative, we can say that the 'Heritage and Imaginaries of the Coast' project also produced transformations, in the sense that it connected participants with the heritage that formed the focus of the project and fostered the making of a heritage space where their own lives play an important role.

Within the project focus on sea and fishing, participants generated their own themes when creating pieces of work that communicate experience, memories and perceptions of what they considered to be heritage – entwining their own heritage with that of the town. These include the passing of time, migration and diversity, hardship, leisure and amusement, politics, the environment, and affects.

Personal and family links to the history of fishing in the town activated affects in the making of heritage. For participants with such links, these affects helped to retrieve particular memories that forged an emotional engagement with the process of collaging. Remembering and representing ancestors in the collages, for example, was a way to commemorate them, ensuring that their role in the making of town is preserved. Others demonstrated a clear political intention and a sense of urgency through expressions of concern with the future of the town and the sea. Such intentions derived from discontent with the transformations that have occurred in the past, which are associated with neglect, corruption, and deprivation in one case, and environmental degradation, in the other. In these cases, the collages produced embrace a conception of heritage that allows for the inclusion of negative aspects of the past, calling attention to their consequences and to ways of repairing them in the future. For most, however, it is a positive construal of the past, depicted as a 'happier time', that is represented in the collages, for example through images of sea-related leisure activities or iconic buildings that, having gone through profound transformations or even destruction, need to be remembered. There was therefore, for most participants, a conscious choice to omit images of what is understood as the town's current depletion. Instead, the passing of time was materialised in many of the collages through juxtaposed or fluidly sequenced images of less problematic landscape transformations, such as the windfarms and wind turbines of the present.

Adopting a wider definition of cultural heritage that sees the tangible and the intangible not as two separate things, but as interdependent elements in heritage making (Smith 2006), we take an interest in both the intangible stories that were part of the process and practice of making heritage addressed here, and the specific objects and places on which those stories were based. The intangible is therefore seen not as a mere replacement of terms like 'traditional culture', 'oral tradition' and



'folklore', but as the stories that are simultaneously personal and important for the town's identity and character (Swensen et al. 2013).

The tangible, in the case of this study, refers not just to high-profile objects, places or practices that need protection from destruction, loss or decay (Harrison 2013), but also to the material produced by participants in the process of making heritage. The objects created during the collage workshops and analysed in this article are therefore not artwork that requires conservation in its conventional sense, but the result of an arts-based method of visually and creatively materialising stories and ideas about the past, and their connection to the present and future. The emphasis on method is in line with the understanding of heritage as 'a process of engagement, an act of communication and an act of making meaning in and for the present' (Smith 2006, 1). Like Smith, we see this affective engagement and the passing and receiving of memories and knowledge, rather than conservation and management needs, as what creates 'the real moment of heritage' (Smith 2006, 2).

## Conclusion and further reflections

The collaborative work entailed in the process of production and communication of heritage in this project did not experience the type of disagreement that sometimes occurs in formal and informal heritage partnerships, when distinct agendas serve different institutions or organisations, and not always the interests and experience of all actors involved (Crooke 2010; Perkin 2010). There was, instead, a shared sense of community building during the workshops.

A collective interest in working together towards a specific result – the recreation and representation of the past, present (and, in some cases, future) of the town, with sea and fishing at its centre, and people's connections to that history – contributed to the success of the collaboration, which was described by participants as 'an enjoyable journey' and a 'voyage of discovery'. While the project and its funding ended in December 2021, the shared desire to give it continuity led to continuous discussions about possible futures, and to the University of East Anglia exhibition in 2023, funded by CreativeUEA. Motivated by these possibilities, with one participant declaring 'I can't believe it lasted so long', others have more recently suggested further collaborations with other local heritage organisations. The way participants continue to make use of their experience in the project also gives it longevity. Two participants referred specifically to how they carried on using the arts, and collage in particular, to reflect on different aspects of their everyday lives and express thoughts and emotions. Although the impact of the project on participants is noteworthy, the wider impact on the community is more difficult to measure. Despite some regional and local media presence of the exhibitions, feedback response was limited, with only two visitors referring to similar 'happy memories', and one emphasising how the installation allowed them 'to learn more about the history of Great Yarmouth, as well as how residents reflect on past and present'. In the future, it would be useful to understand how other visitors receive and interact with this form of heritage-making.

As with participatory research more generally, the project required a certain level of flexibility, since the sessions occasionally took directions that had not been anticipated, for example when participants engaged in a particular aspect of their individual collage rather than a wider discussion around shared themes. Similarly, providing clarity on the wider research and its objectives was at times more difficult to integrate. The need to adapt workshop plans was, however, seen as a welcome disruption that, as others have identified, generates greater participation and engagement (Askins and Pain 2011; Johnston and Marwood 2017).

The varied stories represented in the work produced through this project confirm the potential of collage as an epistemological model that values multiple distinctive understandings and that allows for the incorporation of a large amount of information, revealing what other methods may hide or disrupting what is sometimes taken for granted in dominant modes of knowing (Rijke 2023). It is also an accessible and inclusive arts-based method that

does not necessarily require artistic experience and allows those with difficulties in verbal forms of communication to feel comfortable (Scotti and Chilton 2017). When sourcing the materials for their collages, participants were positioned as researchers of their own heritage (Johnston and Marwood 2017), which has allowed them to retain what they consider important of Great Yarmouth's rich history and, in some ways, to reconnect with what they felt was lost in the transformations that have occurred – a sense of belonging that was associated with the bustling activity of the town, perceived as predating the start of its socioeconomic decline. They describe the process of producing the collages as a way to be taken back to those times when they felt that they belonged – the history of which they are proud to be a part.

## Notes

1. Colin Stott is Eastern Area Museums learning manager.
2. Information about the FisherCoast project can be found here: <https://fishercoast.si/>. Ethics approval to conduct this research has been granted by DEV Ethics Committee at the University of East Anglia.
3. See <https://www.pushkinism.com/>
4. <https://folkfeatures.co.uk/curating-collages-of-a-coastal-heritage/>
5. Traditional basket based on an imperial volumetric measure.

## Acknowledgements

We wish to thank our UK-based colleagues Becky Taylor, Carole White, Natalie Djohari and Nitya Rao, and our Heritage Group coordinators Martina Bofulin and Nataša Rogelja, for their invaluable insights in several discussions. We are also grateful to the individuals and organisations that made this collaborative project possible: Colin Stott, Tricia Hall and Patricia Day from the Time and Tide Museum of Great Yarmouth Life, collage artist Pushkin, Julia Devonshire and Kaavous Clayton from Original Projects, Katy Kingston from Out There Arts, and Alex Bratt from Creative UEA. Most of all, we are indebted to participants for their generous engagement with the project.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

## Funding

This work was supported by the ESRC [Grant Number ES/R010404/1].

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