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Authors	Nolan, Claire
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UCC
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

Recovering Place: Cultivating an ethic of care for ancient sites and monuments

Claire Nolan, University College Cork
Email: claire.nolan80@gmail.com

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Abstract

The work of the Friends of Knock Iveagh showcased within this volume demonstrates how recovering the narrative of an ancient heritage landscape can bring a community together around a common interest, and promote an increased fascination and care for one's place. Similar conservation initiatives and campaigns exist in the south of the Island of Ireland. However, despite the enthusiasm of these projects, reports of deliberate damage to ancient sites and monuments, prehistoric remains in particular, appear to be on the rise in the Republic of Ireland. This destructive activity highlights a fundamental lack of understanding of archaeological sites and the social value that they can afford. While on the surface this stance may stem from historical deficiencies in heritage education, interpretation and unsympathetic planning approaches, it is arguably underpinned by a deep-rooted 'cultural amnesia'. This paper explores the potential for a place-based ethic of care, through cultural memory-work and emotional engagement, to combat destructive attitudes and behaviour towards archaeological sites. It suggests that bringing local antiquities into collective consciousness, not just as sites of recreation and learning, but also commemoration and reflection, may help more people to develop a stronger sense of connection to, and care for, these monuments, whilst experiencing care in the process.

Keywords: Cultural heritage; Prehistoric archaeology; Place-based learning; Place-based ethic of care; Monument destruction; Heritage management; Value of cultural heritage; Deep stewardship; Heritage and Wellbeing

Introduction

The Republic of Ireland (ROI) is world-renowned for its cultural heritage and high density of ancient sites and monuments. It is home to over 140,000 known archaeological sites (RIA 2017; GOI 2022b), ranging in date from the Mesolithic (*c*. 8000-4001 BC) to the Post-Medieval period (*c*. AD 1600-1750), and embracing a variety of monument types from Mesolithic middens through Neolithic passage tombs to Medieval tower houses (Table 1). As a result, thousands of domestic and overseas visitors flock each year to the many publicly accessible sites maintained by the Office of Public Works, contributing significantly to tourist revenue in the process (Garahy 2012; RIA 2017; Clinton 2019; GOI 2022b). Further celebrating this resource, a public survey of a nationally representative sample of adults 16+ commissioned by the Heritage Council (Sloan 2015) in 2015, indicated that there had been a marked increase in the perceived importance of heritage generally over the previous decade, with 93% of all respondents reporting that it was either very or fairly important, and 94% of the opinion that it should be protected.

[Table 1. Period classifications for archaeological periods for the island of Ireland, after Hannah *et al*. 2022]

Clearly, there is national and international appreciation for cultural heritage in the ROI. Nevertheless, this level of regard is not universal. Consistent damage to and destruction of monuments has been recorded since such instances were first noted in the nineteenth century (Barry 1979; McConnell 1999; O'Sullivan et al. 2001; Ní Ceallaigh 2007; Garahy 2012; Newman 2015; Clinton 2019), with a sharp uptick towards the end of the twentieth century (O'Sullivan *et al.* 2001). This impact has been attributed largely to factors such as land improvement, erosion, development, forestry and drainage works (Garahy 2012; O'Sullivan *et al* 2001). More recently, there has been a marked increase in reports of deliberate damage and vandalism (Fig 1.) at sites throughout the island, a large proportion of which seem to be prehistoric (*c*. 12,700 BC – AD 400), with most dating to the Neolithic (4000-2501 BC) or Bronze Age (2200-801 BC) (Hosford 2016; Murtagh 2016; Murphy 2017; McLaughlin 2019; MacDonagh 2020, 2022; Lucey 2021; Moloney 2021; Mythical Ireland 2021 RTÉ 2021, 2023 Lanigan 2023; Robert Hensey, Personal Communication 14 April 2023).

(Figure 1. Graffiti at Kilmashogue Wedge tomb, Co. Dublin. Source: Elizabeth Murray, used with permission)

These incidents suggest that certain sections of the population lack understanding of and/or respect for the significance of archaeological sites. This disregard for ancient sites and monuments is short-sighted, especially in light of growing recognition in other regions and countries of the power of prehistoric archaeology to not only provide economic benefits via tourism, but also facilitate individual and community wellbeing, sense of place, (e.g. Darvill *et al*. 2019; Elmer 2019; Nolan 2019b, 2020, 2022; Sofaer et al. 2021; Everill and Burnell 2022; Brophy and Edensor 2023), environmental literacy and climate action (Touloumis 2018; Ahmad 2021; Nolan in press). Likewise, the restrictions that the presence of protected prehistoric sites, like burial mounds and stone monuments, place on agricultural activities directly contributes to the preservation of the wildlife habitats, biodiversity and bioheritage within their structures and vicinity (Farming Rathcroghan 2019; Kadakas 2022). This is an important function in terms of environmental sustainability, given the current global biodiversity loss crisis (UNEP 2022).

Measures have been taken to some degree at national and local levels to address the surge in damage. In 2021, the National Monuments Service (GOI 2021) launched the Protect Our Past campaign to raise awareness of the importance of ancient sites and monuments and how to care for them. Similarly, the Dublin Mountains Community Archaeology Project was set up to raise awareness of and prevent damage to vulnerable sites in the Dublin Mountains (Abarta Heritage 2022; Greene and Jackman 2022). These interventions can be added to the list of existing initiatives that seek to establish greater awareness of and protection for ancient monuments, including the Adopt a Monument scheme (Heritage Council 2020), the Farming Rathcroghan Project (2019), and the work of the Sligo Neolithic Landscapes group (2021). Websites like *Mythical Ireland* (Murphy 2017), social media groups such as 'Irish Stones' and the Amplify Archaeology Podcast (e.g. Abarta Heritage 2019) have also been developed in recent years to celebrate and raise awareness of prehistoric monuments (see also Murphy 2017 for discussion). Nevertheless, some of these platforms are perhaps more appropriate for an older demographic and thus may have a limited appeal for younger audiences. Although some of the interventions and initiatives mentioned have been successful and provide examples of best practice, their sentiment of enthusiasm and care for prehistoric archaeology has not yet filtered down to all sections of society, and intentional damage to monuments continues to be an issue.

In the UK, it has been suggested that beyond high-profile sites like Stonehenge there is low public awareness or understanding of prehistoric archaeology (Last 2010; Waterton and Watson 2014). It would seem that this is also the case in the ROI. Emma Waterton and Steve Watson (2014, 115) point out that even where prehistoric sites are '…monumental in character, if they are difficult to fit with national stories they tend to be ignored for the most part...'. The reason for this, they

suggest, is that in contrast to historic sites which translate more readily into people's modern-day understanding of the world, carrying a range of familiar signifiers and narratives with which people can identify, the prehistoric past has little contemporary cultural meaning (Waterton and Watson 2014). Added to this, prehistoric sites are perhaps more difficult to identify and easily mistaken for natural features (see Garahy 2012). Although it has been established that there must be greater provision in the ROI for heritage education generally (GOI 2022b; Heritage Council 2023), prehistoric archaeology arguably faces additional challenges. Consequently, there is clearly a need to establish and communicate the value and significance of these ancient places.

Encouragingly, the publication of the Heritage 2030 strategy (GOI 2022b), along with increased funding for cultural heritage, heralds a renewed governmental commitment to heritage protection on a national scale. Similarly, the new Heritage Council (2023a) strategic plan aims to provide further funding, training and support to 'mainstream' heritage and encourage deeper community appreciation, ownership and stewardship of local heritage. To achieve this, the strategy seeks to establish, amongst a range of other innovative approaches: greater provision for local authority heritage services; community-led education initiatives; community heritage management plans; a National Heritage Advisory Scheme to support private custodians of national heritage assets; expansion of the Heritage in Schools programme (Heritage Council 2023b); and a roll-out of place-based learning programmes based on the work of Burrenbeo (2018). Without doubt, the implementation of these progressive supports will ensure greater protection for ancient monuments, but arguably only if they engage communities with their heritage emotionally and affectively, as well as intellectually.

Addressing the proliferation of deliberate damage to ancient monuments, this paper suggests that prehistoric sites and landscapes necessitate, what Jay Johnson (2010, 834) describes as, 'a recovery of place' – the intentional reclamation of the lost, neglected and subaltern narratives of place, and appreciation of their relevance to modern life. This practice recognises that place-based learning, which encourages communities to actively learn about and care for their surroundings, is fundamental to ensuring greater awareness of and protection for cultural heritage. Notwithstanding, the paper asks if lasting attitudinal and behavioural change might be achieved by deepening this approach to include a place-based ethic of care (Till 2012) for prehistoric archaeology, and heritage more generally, through commemorative, embodied and emotional engagement. Accordingly, the paper suggests that communities might be engaged in reflectively recovering the archaeological narratives of ancient sites and monuments in a way that enables them to experience these remains not simply as 'interesting' objects, but as the tangible memory of past communities that are foundational to local identity and wellbeing, and thus as places worth caring for.

A History of Destruction

In her work on the mechanisms of deliberate monument-destruction in nineteenth-century Ireland, Máirín Ní Cheallaigh (2007) indicates that antiquities were already under threat at this point, establishing a long tradition of damage to and destruction of monuments on the island.

In 1955, Seán Ó Ríordáin (1955, Quoted in O'Sullivan *et al.* 2001, 25) maintained that monument destruction in the ROI had reached a 'scale unprecedented in the history of the country'. Matters had not improved by 1979 when Terry Barry (1979) noted that 27% of all known monuments in County Dublin had been destroyed between 1930 and 1976 due to urban expansion, and a substantial number of ringforts had been levelled in Counties Cork, Donegal, Kerry and Tipperary between 1841 and 1976. Barry also lamented the decision of the government in 1978 to archaeologically excavate, and thus remove, the extensive remains of the Viking settlement of Woodquay, Dublin, in favour of development. These examples are no doubt just a fraction of the damage to and loss of monuments that took place during the twentieth century, and do not represent the unrecorded instances that likely occurred throughout this period. This includes the many sites lost through industrial peat extraction between 1946 and the 1980s, when it was realised that archaeological recovery of such antiquities was necessary (O'Sullivan 2007).

By 1999, the situation had worsened further. In their report *Archaeological Features at Risk survey*, which assessed the loss of and threat to archaeological heritage across 2.2% of the land area of the ROI, Muiris O'Sullivan and colleagues (2001) revealed that in the period between 1838 and 1998, either deliberately or unintentionally, 34% of all known monuments in the study area had been destroyed, and a sizeable proportion seriously damaged. The principal classes affected were earthen and stone monuments, including, amongst many other later sites, prehistoric burnt mounds, barrows, cairns, standing stones and enclosures. O'Sullivan *et al*. (2001) observed that despite improved legislation for heritage protection, damage to and destruction of monuments in the study area had accelerated at an 'alarming' rate between 1993 and 1998. They concluded that, 'If the rate of destruction is allowed to increase, next to nothing will remain of our archaeological heritage in a little over a hundred years' (O'Sullivan *et al*. 2001, 70).

Economic prosperity and the National Development Plan 2000-2006 saw the roll out of a series of large-scale infrastructure projects throughout the ROI during the first decade of the twenty-first century, and with it, a weakening of heritage legislation in order to support road development (Aitcheson 2009; Newman 2015; Clinton 2019; Strecker and Mercier 2023). It has been estimated (Clinton 2019) that something in the region of 15,000 newly identified sites were archaeologically excavated in advance of development, including part of the iconic Tara heritage landscape which lay in the path of the M3 motorway through the Gabhra Valley, County Meath, Ireland (Ronayne 2008;

Rountree 2012; Newman 2015; Strecker and Mercier 2023). Following the global financial crisis of 2008 and the completion of the National Development Plan, the rate of development-led excavation of archaeological sites decelerated considerably (Aitcheson 2009) until recently when work on the Project Ireland 2040 National Planning Framework commenced (GOI 2018).

In addition to excavation in advance of infrastructural development, despite some state-funded archaeological survey and recovery, hundreds of peatland archaeology sites were damaged or destroyed during the process of industrial peat extraction throughout the 1990s and 2000s. For example, an assessment of the state of Bord na Móna peatland archaeology in (Gearey *et al*.) 2013 notes that by the time of writing, of the 3951 sites reviewed, 10% had been destroyed, 45% were in the process of being destroyed in advance of peat production, 20% were in imminent danger, and a further 20% were threatened. This number does not include sites that have been doubtless lost or damaged through commercial peat production on peatlands in private ownership (e.g., Gallagher 2017).

Alongside development-driven excavation and commercial peatland interference with ancient sites and monuments, it appears that other activities impacting antiquities have also continued into the twenty-first century through, for example, land improvement, vandalism and illegal metal detecting (Lucey 2012; Hosford 2016; Murtagh 2016; Murphy 2017; McLaughlin 2019; McDonagh 2020; McLaughlin 2019; Murphy 2017; Murtagh 2016; Mythical Ireland 2021: Greene 2022; Hensey Pers. Comm. 2023). A series of news reports over the past 3 years suggest that incidents of deliberate damage to monuments are, in fact, on the increase throughout the country (MacDonagh 2020, 2022; Kenny 2021; Lucey 2021; Moloney 2021; RTÉ 2021, 2023; Lanigan 2023). In 2021, the Office of Public Works (OPW) stated that by July of that year, they had already received 76 reports of damage to monuments, where normally they would receive 100-120 reports within a year (Lucey 2021). More recently, it remarked that vandalism at ancient sites has become a 'real, pressing and substantial problem' (RTÉ 2023).

(Figure 2. Teach Cailleach a' Beara Passage Tomb, Source: Fióna Gallagher (Sligo Neolithic Landscapes Group), used with permission)

While all classes of monument have been affected, prehistoric sites have featured significantly in news reports, with some, like the megalithic complexes in Sligo and Loughcrew, Co. Meath, sustaining repeated incidents of damage or vandalism (e.g., Foxe 2021; Kenny 2021; McDonagh 2022). The Sligo Neolithic Landscapes Group report that amongst other forms of deliberate damage, vandalism at their local prehistoric sites, in the form of illegal excavation (Fig. 2), removal of the

fabric of monuments and graffiti, is occurring on a scale never seen before (McDonagh 2020; Hensey Pers. Comm. 2023). A prime example of this activity includes the illegal excavation of cairn material in 2020 from the Neolithic passage tomb, Teach Cailleach a' Bheara, Ballygawley, Co. Sligo (Fig. 2), (Hensey Pers. Comm. 2023; McDonagh 2020). Likewise, irreparable damage was caused to tombs in Loughcrew, Co. Meath when graffiti was carved into a panel of *c.*5000-year-old rock art (Fig. 3).

Other examples of monuments that have been intentionally damaged in recent times include: passage tombs at Carrowmore and Carrowkeel in Co. Sligo (McDonagh 2020, 2022), the Lia Fáil standing stone at Tara, Co. Meath (Foxe 2021; RTÉ 2023), Four Knocks Passage tomb, Co. Meath (Foxe 2021), Kilmashogue Wedge Tomb, Co. Dublin (Lucey 2021), the Knockmaree Dolmen, Dublin (Lanigan 2023), and Beltany stone circle, Co. Donegal (Foxe 2021). In the case of Loughcrew, security patrols were put in place to deter further defacement of monuments (e.g., Kenny 2021). However, this type of remedial action is not always possible for other locations, especially those in rural areas (McDonagh 2023; RTÉ 2023), thus leaving these ancient, and in many cases fragile, sites vulnerable to further abuse. Added to these concerns, it is likely that intentional damage caused by instances of illegal metal detecting, and accompanying excavation, at levelled or less obvious archaeological sites is not as easily identified and thus goes unreported.

(Figure 3 Graffiti at Loughcrew, Co. Meath. Source: OPW, used with permission)

It has been suggested that intentional destruction of or damage to monuments, whether via development, land improvement or vandalism is variously due to a lack of care guided by: ignorance and insufficient education (Garahy 2012; O'Sullivan et al. 2001); misinformation (Hensey Pers. Comm 2023); a perception of irrelevance or desire to break with 'old values' (Newman 2015), and the precedent set by previous governments with regard to development-led excavation of cultural heritage (Barry 1979; Newman 2015). Speaking of monument-destruction in the nineteenth-century, Ní Cheallaigh (2007) observes that sites were also damaged or removed out of cultural prejudice, iconoclasm and loss of collective memory of the significance of particular monument types. Arguably, the latter sensibility, what Conor Newman (2015) has referred to as 'cultural amnesia', underpins all of the influences discussed above. Watson and Waterton (2017) point out that this disconnection from the past relates to specific geographical, political, social and economic processes that serve to erase or change the meanings of places. They add that 'Disconnection with the past is typical of societies that have undergone transformations that have moved people and communities, in significant numbers, from one place to another or changed the way they work and live' (2017, 47), citing migration and colonialism as examples of such transformative processes.

Based on the discussion above, it is unsurprising that prehistoric monuments, which have seen thousands of years of societal transformation, hold little contemporary meaning for visitors and communities; often being regarded as nothing more than a 'pile of stones' (e.g., Nolan 2022; Salisbury Journal 2023). Perhaps, then, what is required in order to guarantee greater protection for these ancient sites is, as Johnson (2010, 834) suggests, a form of place-based learning that involves the recovery of place connections and a recognition of the importance they have within people's lives.

A Place-based Ethic of Care

> …just as place has become a taken for granted concept, so also have the places in our cultural landscape become taken for granted. This taken for granted relationship has allowed specific places to become only thinly conceived, or erased entirely… leading to a loss of connection to our places, to our environment, our landscapes and to the knowledge stored within these landscapes. (Johnson 2010, 830)

To some extent, a recovery of place is already underway in the ROI, through educational initiatives and organisations like the Irish Community Archive Network (see NMI 2023), Abarta Heritage (2023), The Heritage Council (2020, 2023), and the awareness-raising, stewardship work carried out in ancient landscapes by groups like Sligo Neolithic Landscapes, Farming Rathcroghan (2019) and Burrenbeo (2018; Bird 2020). Burrenbeo, in particular, has pioneered a model of place-based learning in the Burren landscape, Co. Clare, which has been very successful in encouraging cultural heritage stewardship (Bird 2020). Through immersive workshops and activities, Burrenbeo (2018) engages communities in a holistic exploration of the built, natural and cultural heritage of their place, supporting them to consider their relationship to it, see it as part of their story and identify how they can care for it. Arguably, this approach has potential to combat the 'thin conception' of prehistoric places and destructive tendencies towards them, especially if informed by a 'place-based ethic of care' (Till 2012); where communities commemorate and derive meaning from the neglected narratives of place, learning how their places care for them and how this care can be reciprocated.

Karen Till (2012) has previously used her concept of a place-based ethic of care to tend to urban communities traumatised by severe planning measures such as settlement clearances. She asserts that by encouraging collective forms of memory-work which pay respect to the past inhabitants of a locale and the ways they have shaped that place, present-day inhabitants can develop a greater sense of meaning from and care for their surroundings. Till (2012, 7) further maintains that 'Places and sites of memory have meanings that exceed their forms as authored representations of the past

because of the ways individuals and social groups experience them affectively'. Hence, more than an intellectual exercise, this type of place-based memory work calls for an embodied, emotional and affective engagement with the past narratives of place.

Till's philosophy is not dissimilar to the 'archaeologies of the heart' approach advocated by Kisha Supernant and colleagues (2020), which as Jane Eva Baxter (2020, 137) articulates, should involve '…an extension of human compassion that transcends time…'. Quoting from a review of Hayden Whyte's work, Meg Conkey emphasises the importance of this approach: 'In history we don't just remember the dead, we do their remembering for them. And that's an awesome responsibility…' (Day 2010, quoted in Conkey 2020, 274). Conceivably, this responsibility of remembrance is a form of care essential to what could be termed as 'deep stewardship', and even more pertinent when dealing with narratives of place that are no longer in living memory?

While prehistoric sites and landscapes may not be 'wounded places' in the same way that demolished urban communities are – although monuments that were deliberately erased from memory might be considered in this way (see Ní Ceallaigh 2007) – they, and the people who constructed them, are wronged through forgetting, neglect and, in the examples discussed above, wilful damage. Ironically, this treatment of ancient sites and monuments only serves to distance communities from the care that these places can potentially provide. Jonathan Last (2010, 8) asserts that, 'Prehistoric finds provide intimate insights into ways of life radically different to anything seen today but can also inform our understanding of and responses to important contemporary issues...'. This argument is supported by a number of recent projects and studies which demonstrate that prehistoric archaeology can act as a resource for: conceptual learning (Incipit 2014; Besse *et al*. 2019), environmental literacy (Touloumis 2018; Ahmad 2021; Nolan forthcoming;), biodiversity conservation (Farming Rathcroghan 2019; Kadakas 2022), wellbeing (e.g Büster *et al*. 2018; Darvill *et al*. 2019; Heaslip 2019; Nolan 2020; Sofaer *et al*. 2021), sense of place (e.g Holtorf 2005; Brophy 2019; Last 2019; Nolan 2019b), individual and community identity creation (Nolan 2019b; Brophy and Edensor 2023), and social cohesion (Brophy 2017; Elmer 2019; Nolan 2022).

Experiences of wellbeing especially provide a good example of the type of care that heritage assets can afford. Engagement with prehistoric archaeology impacts wellbeing in a variety of ways, including: evoking feelings of connection and belonging to place, past and ancestors; meaning-making; development of self-identity; a sense of permanence and security; temporal awareness and perspective-taking; social wellbeing through bringing people together around a common interest; and providing spaces for exercise, respite and mindful reflection (e.g. Darvill *et al*. 2019; Elmer 2019; Heaslip 2019; Nolan 2020; Sofaer *et al*. 2021). Common to many of these experiences is the recognition that ancient sites can function as transitional or heterotopic zones; places that are

outside of the everyday world, yet still part of it, and which offer space for contemplation or escape from the demands and restrictions of modern life (see Last 2019, Nolan 2019b, 2019c). Furthermore, the narratives of the sites themselves can help people to think constructively about the universals in life, such as mortality, bereavement, purpose and survival (Büster *et al*. 2018; Nolan 2019b, 2019c).

People may also experience care from cultural heritage at a more unconscious level (Grenville 2007; Nolan 2019b). Although the acts of graffiti described above are damaging to sites, it could be argued that the perpetrators are at the same time subconsciously using them as heterotopic spaces. It is not impossible that the graffitist who tagged the Kilmashogue wedge tomb may have seen their work as a way of marking their sense of ownership of the site, and even as a form of decoration. This does not, of course, excuse the damage done, especially with regard to the erasure of rock art at Loughcrew through carving, which could be interpreted as an act of violence. Nevertheless, the reason why these graffitists are choosing to engage with these sites in particular requires further consideration, and is perhaps the starting point for a restorative conversation with them about place-based ethics of care?

The author has suggested that it is through reflective engagement with the narratives, physical form and temporal nature of prehistoric monuments that individuals and communities derive benefit from them (Nolan 2020). This accords with the place-based ethic of care belief that meaningful engagement with the neglected or erased histories of a locale is a form of place-making and, therefore, care for communities. If individuals can be given the space and support to reflect on the character of ancient sites and what they mean for them, both intellectually and emotionally, it may enable them to think differently about these places; seeing them as integral and formative aspects of their place and identity, as well as fundamental to the creation of a better future?

Implementing Deep Stewardship

Place-based learning projects like Burrenbeo have already laid the foundation for a place-based ethics of care for cultural heritage through their immersive, embodied and reflective approach. Building on this work, the next step towards a deep stewardship could be to appeal to people's better natures by presenting ancient sites and monuments not just in a factual way, but as memorials to those who have gone before? This approach might help to cultivate a stronger emotional and affective connection to place, as well as a sense of duty to remember the past inhabitants who shaped it. Feasibly, through this connection to and reflection on the narratives of place, individuals can identify and experience the care that ancient sites and monuments can offer, thereby creating an impetus for stewardship.

At the most basic level, this memorial lens could be applied sensitively to existing programmes of heritage education and interpretation at publicly accessible sites, in schools and other educational settings. In the same way, interpretive heritage signs could be designed to encourage people to remember and pay respect to those who constructed and used these sites. Likewise, adopting a mindful tourism approach (see Packer and Ballantyne 2013), signage might ask visitors to reflect on what the site means for them. Naturally, as should be the case with any form of heritage education and outreach, such initiatives would be socially inclusive, seeking to engage all members of a community.

Broadening approaches further, Till (2012) demonstrates how the use of creative practices based on ethnographic interviews with residents, such as co-produced, site-specific performances and multimedia installations, can help to engage communities in collective memory-work. She explains that by reflecting back to the community the narratives of place, these artistic methods serve to focus residents' attention on their locale in a way that creates new forms of social memory and subsequently, new meaning, belonging and empowerment. Till reveals that embodied practices like 'memory walks' are also effective in highlighting narratives of place. Similarly, the author has noted that the process of qualitative work with residents of ancient landscapes in the form of interviews, experiential walks and focus groups, can help individuals to recognise the different types of social value they derive from their local heritage sites (Nolan 2020).

Not limiting this work to publicly accessible sites, initiatives like the Community Monuments Fund (GOI 2022a) and Adopt a Monument scheme could be exploited to support landowners to hold occasional, monitored heritage open days for communities to visit monuments in private ownership, and see how they form part of the fabric of place and the wider landscape. Such events would not only support collective memory-work through the recovery of hitherto hidden landscape narratives, but also help to give communities a sense of the greater, shared (pre)historic environment for which they are responsible. This last point addresses the concept of community ownership which is fundamental to a place-based ethic of care and stewardship, and relevant to all residents; landowners and tenants, native and non-native (Burrenbeo 2018; Johnson 2012; Till 2012). It may be that if all members of a community truly understood and experienced that, regardless of land ownership, their local heritage sites belong to and are constitutive of them, they would be more inclined to care for them?

This suggestion of a 'spirit of community ownership' is not intended to contravene the proprietary rights of landowners. Nor does it ignore the potential for members of the public to trespass once they are made aware of a site. Indeed, this latter possibility has real implications for public liability, as well as damage to property, livestock, biodiversity and cultural heritage. The 'open

heritage' approach proposed above is only feasible if it can be done collaboratively with landowners, community members, heritage professionals and organisations, in a way that respects the rights and livelihoods of landowners, mitigates trespassing and damage, and supports the conservation of natural habitats and the heritage sites themselves. Furthermore, these considerations are relevant to all forms of site-specific engagement, whether they are occasional or frequent, and reinforce the need for any such activities to be underpinned by appropriate conservation plans and practices (e.g., Heritage Council 2020). The Farming Rathcroghan (2019) project which balances the needs of farmers, nature, visitors and archaeology offers an excellent example of how this approach to public access and conservation can succeed, especially in rural areas.

The types of memory-work suggested here have the potential to provide care to communities in a variety of ways. Firstly, through commemorating the narratives of ancient sites and landscapes, one's surroundings take on a new level of meaning. Reflecting on this new experience and understanding of place can in turn make apparent the different aspects of sites and monuments that support wellbeing. This work can also bring a community together around a common purpose, arguably creating new networks, and combatting significant social issues like rural isolation in the process. Moreover, if these influences converge to encourage all members of a community to care for their heritage in return, they can ultimately derive wellbeing through the very act of stewardship, as evidenced by recent work on the therapeutic benefits of conservation volunteering (Lewis *et al*. 2021). In this way, a place-based ethic of care is created and perpetuated for the good of the community and their local heritage.

Conclusion

This discussion has focused specifically on the importance of preserving prehistoric heritage in the Republic of Ireland. However, it is, of course, relevant to cultural heritage from other periods and in other locations. It also forms part of a larger debate about which heritage should be remembered and preserved (see Holtorf and Kristensen 2015 for discussion). As Cornelius Holtorf and Troels Myrup Kristensen (2015, 313) point out, '…we cannot remember everything of the past'. Clearly, this dilemma demands a more focused, inclusive discussion about value, and an assessment of what different forms of cultural heritage mean to different people.

Attempting to underline in 2001 the cost of continual damage and destruction to archaeological sites in the Republic, O'Sullivan and colleagues (2001, 15) warned, 'Our quality of life can be affected detrimentally if we fail to integrate all elements of our cultural and natural landscapes.' This concern is supported by the growing body of evidence, internationally, for the many social and environmental benefits that ancient sites and monuments have to offer. But if a society has not even

established whether or how it values its heritage assets at a deeper level, beyond economic and recreational utility, how can it begin to know which heritage to preserve? This question is supported by results from the Heritage Council (Sloan 2015) report, *Awareness and Understanding of Irish Heritage*, which found that 'The concept of heritage having a 'health' value is not spontaneously evident to people'.

As Watson and Waterton (2017) attest, this situation is complicated further in societies where communities have been disconnected from aspects of their cultural heritage through various transformative processes. In view of the current treatment of ancient sites and monuments, this is arguably the case in the Republic of Ireland. In these circumstances, surely people must at least be made aware of their forgotten or neglected heritage, and given a chance to experience and assess its potential social value before they make the decision to damage or erase it? As damage to monuments increases in the south of the Island of Ireland, it seems that it is time to make a concerted effort to give people this option.

It is suggested here that one way to enable individuals to explore the relative value of their ancient sites is to get below the factual descriptions of these places in a way that re-animates and humanises them, thereby evoking emotional connection and a sense of care in people. A place-based ethic of care in the form of collective embodied and commemorative practice potentially offers a way forward in this respect. As Till (2012, 13) suggests, 'If, as citizens, we understand that part of our rights and duties include a responsibility to each other and to the places we inhabit, then we may move from audience to witness to care-giver'. Perhaps by moving through this process from detached spectator to a deeper connection with cultural heritage, more people, even those who have previously committed heritage crimes, will come to realise the symbiotic relationship of care that can develop between them and their ancient monuments?

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