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Foundation stone of empire: The role of Portland stone in ‘heritage’, commemoration, and identity

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Abstract

In 2013, Portland Stone, a creamy white limestone from the Isle of Portland in Dorset, was named the world’s first “Global Heritage Stone Resource” (GSHR) by the Heritage Stone Task Group, a sub-commission of the International Union of Geological Sciences. The criteria for GSHR designation are ambiguous, with the Task Group championing Portland Stone’s “cultural value” and “heritage,” neither of which are critically interrogated. In this paper we undertake a detailed critical discourse analysis of Hansard entries mentioning Portland Stone between 1803 and 2020. We reveal that the use of Portland Stone is intertwined with colonial oppression, class subjugation, empire politics, structural racism, and a mythologised, England-centric vision of British national identity. In celebrating the use of Portland Stone as part of Britain’s “heritage”, we are condoning a narrative of Britishness that is exclusionary and whitewashed, and that supports an elite re-writing of national and international history. Drawing on critical heritage literature, we argue that the Heritage Stone Task Group must urgently reconsider their uncritical appraisal of “heritage” and “culture” and consult with social science colleagues to ensure that all voices are heard. Our study shows that through the history and nature of their usage, the rocks beneath our feet, our natural foundation, can become imbued with notions of regional and national identity, belonging and exclusion, memory and loss – they can become a powerful manifestation of symbolic and unequal power structures. While British society’s attention is turned to the imprint of colonialism, empire, and race on our geographies, we urge further consideration of the built environment: the very stones that construct our towns and cities, the plinths on which statues are erected, tell stories of oppression and domination that are an important part of British history, culture, and heritage.

KEYWORDS

colonialism, empire, heritage, identity, memory, Portland Stone

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1 | INTRODUCTION

In 2013, Portland Stone was selected as the first “Global Heritage Stone Resource” (GHSR) by the Heritage Stone Task Group (HSTG). This designation came after several years of effort from Professor Barry Cooper and the English Stone Forum to recognise “natural stone material that has achieved both widespread use and recognition in human culture” (Cooper, 2009, p. 4). Portland Stone, a limestone from the Isle of Portland off the southern English coast (Figure 1), was granted this inaugural and exemplar GHSR designation because of “its existing availability, past use as well as heritage aspects” namely the “important association with famous architect, Sir Christopher Wren (1632–1723), and its use for Commonwealth war graves” (Hughes et al., 2013, p. 221).

Since 2013, a further 21 stones have been awarded GHSR status on the basis that they have “achieved widespread use over a significant historical period with due recognition in human culture” (Cooper, 2009, p. 4). The GHSR Terms of Reference dictate that “heritage” is determined based on a stone’s status as a “cultural icon” (Hughes et al., 2013, p. 221), but apart from alluding to this being linked somehow to national identity, there is little critical questioning of what the HSTG’s view of “heritage” or cultural status actually entails.

In this paper, we interrogate the symbolic power that lies in the use of and promotion of Portland Stone as a building material. We argue that there is a need to critically consider heritage as it relates to GHSR status in order to understand the symbolic power of building stones. Building on the notion of “heritage” as “the material embodiment of the spirit of a nation” (Hall, 1999, p. 4), and drawing on subsequent critiques of “heritage” and the “heritage industry,” we take Portland Stone’s seemingly exemplar status and critically examine its ‘heritage’ and ‘cultural’ iconography. We show that Portland Stone’s use is central to a narrative of British identity that is embedded in British international and internal colonialism and the legacy of empire politics. Ultimately, we suggest that we need to consider the very materials out of which our built environment is constructed; these bricks and stones tell not only stories of architectural and aesthetic preferences but of power dynamics, identity projection, and national values.

We begin with a brief overview of the development of the GHSR classification, followed by a discussion of the story of Portland Stone. We then consider the bodies of literature relating to heritage, architecture, and power, before providing a discussion of our methods. Our narrative reveals distinct discourses of Portland Stone as emblematic of a mythologised

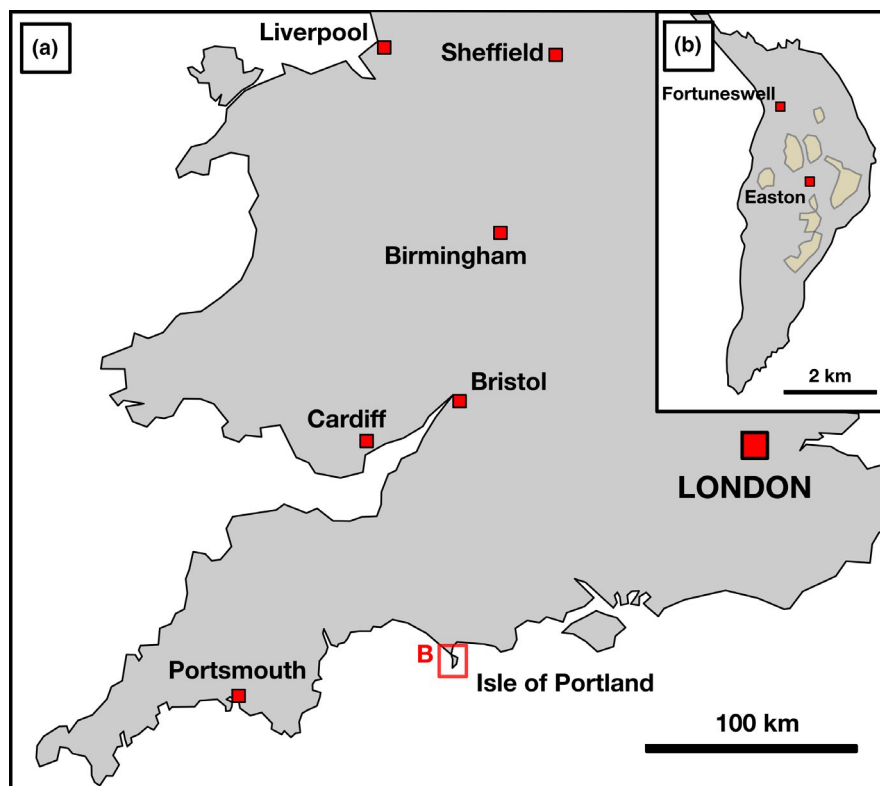


FIGURE 1 (a) Map of southern Britain showing location of the Isle of Portland; (b, inset) Map of the Isle of Portland with major quarries highlighted in light shading

England-centric British identity, of colonial domination, and the construction of a British “heritage” that relies on an elite English view of the past. We conclude with a revisiting of the idea of heritage as it applies to urban materiality.

We write at a moment when society’s attention has been captured by the Black Lives Matter movement, Rhodes Must Fall, and the mounting pressure to topple statues. We suggest that an even deeper critical analysis reveals that these removed statues do not only symbolise power; they *are* power lithified.

Further, with a growing focus on the connection of stone to the anthropocentric nature of human society and a need to bridge disciplinary boundaries to fully comprehend this linkage (see for example Edensor, 2020), we hope that this paper provides a critical interrogation of symbolic power and stone from social science and earth science perspectives.

2 | GLOBAL HERITAGE STONE RESOURCE STATUS

In 2007, Barry Cooper, Professor of Geology at the University of South Australia, expressed his desire to recognise “by international agreement the status of ‘classic decorative and building stone’” and liaised with members of the International Association of Engineering Geology and Environment (IAEG) Commission to develop his idea for a “World Heritage Stone Resource” (Cooper, 2015, p. 11). The key criteria were defined as: (1) historic use for a significant period, (2) wide-ranging geographic application, (3) recognition as a cultural icon, (4) ongoing quarrying and availability, (5) use in significant public/industrial projects, and (6) potential benefits (cultural, scientific, environmental, and/or commercial) arising from the designation (Cooper, 2015, p. 11).

In this early formulation, “heritage” remains undefined and is merely discursively associated with plentiful use and (undefined) cultural iconography, and there is a significant concern for future demand and value of the stone. In 2008 at the 33rd International Geological Congress in Oslo, Norway, the merits of classification and designation of stones received encouragement. By 2010, Cooper had secured the support of the International Union of Geological Sciences (IUGS).

Simultaneously, the English Stone Forum — established in 2006 and funded by English Heritage/Historic England (Doyle, 2008, p. 4) — had begun ranking building stone as locally, regionally, or nationally important (Cooper, 2010, 2015; English Stone Forum, 2010; Hughes, 2010). In 2010, the HSTG, in conjunction with Terry Hughes (English Stone Forum) and Graham Lott (British Geological Survey) began the classification process for Portland Stone and Welsh Slate using the GHSR designation (Cooper, 2010). The initial phase of GHSR designation was intended to “create a professionally useful international designation for dimension stone that bridged the cross-over realm between the geological sciences and human cultural heritage” (Cooper, 2015, pp. 15–16). The 2012–2016 HSTG Board, however, comprised 13 members, all of whom have a geoscience background. While the “geological sciences” element of the GHSR aim is present, there is a distinct lack of expertise in culture or heritage.

3 | BRIEF HISTORY OF PORTLAND STONE

“Portland Stone” refers to a formation of Jurassic limestone quarried exclusively on the Isle of Portland (South Dorset, United Kingdom) (Barton et al., 2011; Hughes et al., 2013). Several beds of the fossiliferous Portland Stone Formation have been (and are still) quarried, but most building stone is extracted from the Portland Freestone Member and its constituent beds: the “Basebed,” the “Roach,” and the “Whitbed.” The Roach possesses characteristic corkscrew shaped holes created by the dissolution of fossilised gastropod shells (Fürsich et al., 1994). Portland Stone is easy to dress, durable during weathering, and resistant to urban pollution (Barton et al., 2011), particularly when compared with other English limestones (Palmer, 2005).

The stone has been used as a local building stone since the Roman occupation of southern England, but export across southern England began in the 14th century (Hackman, 2014). By 1615, Portland Stone was being used in London by the King’s Surveyor, Inigo Jones, who is often considered responsible for first bringing significant quantities of Portland Stone to London (Hackman, 2014). Jones’ works include Queen Anne’s House at Greenwich (1616–1619) and the Banqueting Hall (1619–1622). Jones began restoring the Old St Paul’s Cathedral (1620–1642) based on his preference for Palladian harmony, simplicity, and geometry, and sought to “make the stones of St Paul’s articulate the ... narrative of British identity” and foreground the king’s rightful and absolute position (Williamson, 2012). Jones selected Portland Stone in part because the quarries were “royal,” owned by the Crown, and therefore his oversight of quarrying was feasible and desirable, as it would allow for a return on government investment in quarry infrastructure (Williamson, 2012).

The rebuilding of St Paul’s Cathedral after the Great Fire of 1666 (Crankshaw, 2004) fell to Jones’ successor, Sir Christopher Wren, who constructed the new cathedral from Portland Stone. Wren’s use of the stone is drawn on heavily

by the HSTG in their classification of Portland Stone as a GHSR (Hughes et al., 2013). His apparent penchant for the Dorset stone, however, was based more on its availability and his taste in architectural styles than a personal preference for the stone itself (Phillimore, 1881; Wren, 1750). Wren's reliance on the stone was tied to circumstance and the stocks of stone that Jones had already brought to London (Phillimore, 1881; Wren, 1750).

To secure the large volume of stone required to complete the cathedral, Wren successfully lobbied the Crown to extend the extraction of stone to common land. He caused further resentment when the quarried stone was made exempt from laws entitling Portlanders to a share of the duty on the stone extracted from common land (Phillimore, 1881, p. 221; Morris, 1985). Wren inflamed tensions further in 1703 by successfully petitioning Queen Anne to prohibit stone extraction by native Portlanders, overturning centuries of traditional access rights (Morris, 1985).

In addition to St Paul's, Wren completed work on 51 "City Churches," and contributed to a number of other Portland Stone structures in London from 1670 to 1702 (for a summary, see Hackman, 2014). Throughout the 18th century, demand for Portland Stone in London continued to grow, sometimes outstripping supply (Hackman, 2014). During the early 19th century, Portland Stone was employed in the construction of prominent public buildings in London, including the National Gallery (1833–1836), the Royal Exchange (1841–1844), and the British Museum (1823–1845) (Hackman, 2014). In the late 19th century, Portland Stone was used in the construction of imperial administrative buildings, such as the Foreign, Home, and War Offices (1863–1873; 1879–1906), the Royal Courts of Justice (1871–1882), and the Treasury (1898–1917). The 19th century also saw the opening of a penal settlement on Portland, with convicts used to quarry stone (Morris, 1985).

Portland Stone was widely used in London in the early 20th century, including in the construction of a processional route from Admiralty Arch (1908–1911) in Trafalgar Square to Buckingham Palace, which was refaced in Portland Stone in 1913 (Hackman, 2014). After the First World War, Portland Stone was used to construct the national Cenotaph (1920) in Whitehall (Figure 2; Hackman, 2014), the predominant focal point of remembrance in the UK, and was used as the predominant stone for Imperial War Graves Commission (IWGC; now Commonwealth War Graves Commission; CWGC) headstones. Portland Stone has continued to be used in the construction of key public and private buildings, including the new Bank of England (1921–1942) and BBC Broadcasting House (1931) (Hackman, 2014).

4 | HERITAGE, ARCHITECTURE/MATERIALS, AND POWER

The HSTG's conception of a "Global Heritage Stone" relies on an assumed understanding of "heritage," which is a contested term. "Heritage" is laden with meaning and, translated from the geoscience arena in which the concept of a heritage stone was born and into the social sciences, reveals the complexity. This section provides an overview of "heritage" from a critical perspective and considers the intersection of heritage as a process of power and the built environment.



FIGURE 2 (a) St Paul's Cathedral; (b) The Cenotaph. Images authors' own

4.1 | Heritage

“Heritage” has become a mainstay of 20th-century and 21st-century lexicon (Smith, 2006, p. 17). While tracing its discursive and conceptual genesis is beyond the scope of this paper, Laurajane Smith (2006) identifies a key strand of the story of heritage – that is central to the story Portland Stone – as the “heritage” or “heritagisation” (Harvey, 2001) discourse that emerged in the late 19th century and persists today.

Stuart Hall’s Arts Council presentation in 1999 represents a formative moment in the unpicking of the various strands of heritage and eruditely highlights the implicit links between “heritage” and colonial domination. For Hall, drawing on the work of Raphael Samuel (2012), heritage is an educative process and “material embodiment of the spirit of the nation, a collective representation of the British version of tradition, a concept pivotal to the lexicon of English virtues” (1999, p. 4). Hall highlights the complex power dynamics that pervade all notions of heritage; any reference to heritage “is always inflected by the power and authority of those who have colonised the past, whose versions of history matter” (1999, p. 6). Heritage is intertwined with colonial narratives and it echoes the elite actors and their voices that define and narrate “the past” (Smith, 2006, p. 29–30). These elite voices, overwhelmingly from English-speaking nations, provide the “dominant and legitimized way of thinking, writing, and talking about heritage management practices” (Smith & Waterton, 2012). This “authorized heritage discourse” (Smith, 2006) highlights the “heritage industry’s” (Hewison, 1987) implicit Eurocentrism. In this paper, we rely on Hall’s definition of heritage as an “essentialised meaning of the nation” defined in part by “collective social memory” (Hall, 1999, p. 5).

Heritage, then, is a process of “cultural production” of values (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998, p. 150). It is a “cultural and social process, which engages with acts of remembering that work to create ways to understand and engage with the present” (Smith, 2006, p. 2). It involves a temporal interplay based on the concept of inheritance, which sees that “the present has a particular ‘duty’ to the past and its monuments ... and in turn to pass this inheritance, untouched, to future generations” (Smith, 2006, p. 19). This temporal interchange is not valueless, as historical and contemporary power relations shape the transmission of heritage. Smith argues that “elite heritage” is preserved as “national heritage” (2006, p. 22) and, consequently, protects and preserves a certain “retrospective, nation-alised and tradition-alised conception of culture” (Hall, 1999, p. 4), an imagined and idealised version of the past future generations will inherit. We concur with Hall’s (1999) formulation of “The Heritage” as “the national story” of Britain that is imbued with symbolic power and a framing built around “tradition” (p. 4) and “whiteness” (p. 7), and manufactured by those bearing the elite “lineages” (p. 10) that permit heritagisation.

This imagined and discursive “past” is “a symbolic representation of identity” based primarily around the identity of the nation (Smith, 2006, p. 28) following a “consensus version of history” (Smith, 2006, p. 4), which in Britain is tied to a “nostalgia for imperial self-esteem and other bygone benisons” (Lowenthal, 1998, pp. 7–8). In Britain, the current vision of the past that is privileged and championed is that of a nation state defined by imperial greatness, of the domination of other peoples and places, and a sense of unity defined by the oppression of others. To move towards Hall’s post-national approach means that we must “rewrite the margins into the centre” (1999, p. 10) and reconfigure our understanding of the past and who has claim to this version of the past. As we show, this involves a re-evaluation of the very fabric and materiality of the landscape.

4.2 | Heritage and the built environment

In Britain, the spatial and physical manifestations of heritage exist as a national landscape dotted with listed “heritage sites,” protected monuments, and museums that preserve mementos of the past (Urry & Larsen, 2011, p. 142). Disused buildings that are deemed to be of heritage importance may be refurbished in a “heritage style” that “is normally picturesque, complete with sandblasted walls, replaced ‘authentic-looking’ windows and attractive street furniture” (Urry & Larsen, 2011, p. 139). These obsolete premises acquire new economic value by constructing a new role in the tourist industry. Through the temporal restructuring and commodification of the past, “artefacts are reconstructed as *simulacra* of an imagined former state” (Hodges, 2009, p. 77). Heritage, as manifest in the built environment, is constructed in the contemporary moment and represents a value-laden and symbolically constructed vision of “the past.”

The resultant built environment becomes “a repository for meanings that confirm identity” (Tweed & Sutherland, 2007, p. 65), with individual buildings — and their materials — broadcasting to the world a selective vision of the past. What is marketised and promoted for our tourist and nostalgic gaze, however, “is just one version of the truth” (Waitt, 2000, p. 836) or, as Urry and Larsen describe, “there is a distinction between authentic history (continuing and therefore

dangerous) and heritage (past, dead and safe). The latter, in short, conceals social and spatial inequalities” (2011, p. 140). In our built environment, we are celebrating fantasies of a mythical past (Hewison, 1997) that have been stylised in order to produce profit and these “icons of identity” (Lowenthal, 1994, p. 43).

5 | DESIGN AND METHODS

Our study aims to understand the symbolic value and power inherent in Portland Stone. In order to effectively assess elite discourse on the use of this stone, we conducted a critical analysis of discourses. We borrow from the critical discourse analytic tradition to connect semantics with ideology. Our analysis is of *Hansard*, the verbatim transcripts of parliamentary debates in the House of Commons and the House of Lords in Britain. These institutions “provide the level at which social formations are instantiated and transformed” (Slembrouck, 1992, p. 101), thus allowing us to observe an elite planning and ideological construction of Britain’s built environment. *Hansard* entries offer a precise retelling of past political and elite narratives and permit us to see how the symbolic power of Portland Stone formed. This study of elite voices reveals “discursively enacted or legitimated structures and strategies of dominance” (van Dijk, 1995, p. 18). Heritage is always backward-facing (Hall, 1999), thus if we want to understand contemporary “heritage” values, we need to examine historical discourses. Elite voices in *Hansard* records permit us to trace discussion of the stone, each mention of which provides a metaphorical building block in the construction of British “heritage” values.

A search in *Hansard* (via the UK Parliament website) for the term “Portland Stone” between 1 January 1803 (earliest date available) and 1 January 2020 yielded 418 references; “Portland Stone” references occurred in June 1815 and March 2013. A total of 332 entries were discounted as they do not relate to Portland Stone, but reflect other co-occurring mentions of “Portland” and “Stone,” for instance parliamentary voting records featuring the surnames (or titles) of “Stone” and/or “Portland,” and references to the island and/or constituency of Portland. Eighty-eight specific references to “Portland Stone” in *Hansard* constituted the final sample.

Our methodological approach allowed us to connect the intra-textual elements with an extra-textual “contextual analysis” (Carvalho, 2008). Each *Hansard* entry was given a reference number and entered into a coding schedule following the approach detailed by Butler (2019). Within this first round of inductive coding, each *Hansard* entry was taken as a textual entity with little consideration for context. Rather, at this stage, language and semiotic cues were most pertinent. Codes were applied following a narrative coding approach in order to capture the “essence” of each entry (Saldaña, 2016). Importantly, individual *Hansard* entries were coded with multiple codes in order to fully capture the complexity and multiple meanings in each entry. Subsequently, each code was revisited and codes were combined into broader categories and related discourse examined in order to connect the intra-textual elements with the broader social, political, and economic contexts to trace “power, dominance and inequality” and “underlying ideologies” (van Dijk, 1995, p. 18). This approach saw two key overarching thematic findings emerge from our research and these will be the subject of the subsequent sections.

6 | EMPIRE STONE: CREATING A MYTHOLOGISED BRITISH IDENTITY

A key attribute of a GHSR is its “recognition as a cultural icon” and “association with national identity” (Hughes et al., 2013, p. 221). *Hansard* entries tell the story of a growing elite discourse around Portland Stone being used to represent a particular form of Britishness and to transplant this British identity abroad as a stone of Empire and colonisation, and domestically to transplant English identity over the rest of the Union in a form of class domination. Our study tells the story of elite voices and does not capture the voices of those residents of Portland, the political prisoners used to quarry stone, or the residents of cities where the use of Portland Stone was imposed. There are three key stories that define this thematic story: the discursive positioning of Britishness vs “foreignness,” the promulgation of “elite Britishness,” and the transplanting of British identity through the use of Portland Stone.

6.1 | British vs “foreign”

Discussions of Portland Stone in Parliament in 1842 refer to a distinctly British stone that should be used in British buildings. George Banks MP, while overtly promoting protectionism of British quarrying, highlights a differentiation

between “English and foreign labour” and “inferior” “foreign stone” and implicitly superior Portland Stone (HC Deb, 1842). He expresses outrage that “foreign stone” was used to build new churches, and declares “that the great national work, the Royal Exchange, was contracted for in Portland stone, because the citizens of London, justly proud of their national edifices, disregarded the question of comparative expense” (HC Deb, 1842). He adds, “there was no doubt that the foreign stone was inferior” to Portland Stone “and, indeed, to other British stones” (HC Deb, 1842). Henry Broadhurst MP decries the use of both foreign labour and foreign stone, pointing to “British workmen [who] are standing idly by watching foreign work brought in here” when it would be feasible to “obtain better material at home” (HC Deb, 1898).

Broadhurst’s use of the word “home” combined with the frequent inclusion of the possessive pronoun “our” in Bankes’ speech is used to differentiate between “French stone” and “our own article” (HC Deb, 1842). The use of “our” highlights an attempt to invoke a bond between Portland Stone and Britishness. Likewise, Lord Truro, in 1882, when discussing the construction of the War Office, exclaimed that there was no stone “so well suited to the atmosphere of this country as the old Portland Stone, of which all our fine buildings were constructed” (HC Deb, 1882). Not only does the use of “our” here underscore the yoking of Portland Stone to prestigious British edifices, but the use of “old” implies both an ancient tradition and a sense of familiarity.

Commonly, parliamentary discussions allude to Wren’s renovation of St Paul’s Cathedral, building a narrative of Wren’s architecture as emblematic of London’s architectural superiority. Earl Grey describes Portland Stone as that which “we know from the magnificent cathedral which ornaments this city” (HC Deb, 1850a). When considering the costs for restoration of the Houses of Parliament in 1927, James Agg-Gardner, Privy Councillor, argued that “you are bound to recognise that Wren when he started the building of St Paul’s had insight when he chose Portland Stone. St Paul’s was built of Portland Stone, and it has been standing for 300 years ... every Government building in Whitehall, has been erected in Portland stone” (HC Deb, 1927). In one swift verbal stroke, Agg-Gardner alludes to the symbolic value of Portland Stone in making Whitehall the enduring heart of government and St Paul’s Cathedral the heart of Anglican faith in London.

In 1965, MP for South Dorset, Evelyn King, delivers a speech on the Portland Stone industry (HC Deb, 1965) that opens with a reference to Wren lying in “the Elysian Fields,” the mythological resting place of Greek heroes (Graves, 2012). This framing of Wren, who rests in paradise for his legacy of virtue and righteousness, not only elevates Wren to the level of a mythical hero of antiquity who constructed the precious built heritage of Britain, but establishes the context for the remainder of King’s speech in which he carefully crafts a narrative of British identity where the Queen is less the “Queen of England but ... the Lady of the Manor of Portland” (HC Deb, 1965). This establishes Portland and its stone at the core of Britishness. Wren’s use of the stone for his renovation of St Paul’s was, by this discursive reckoning, inevitable.

To fully understand the significance of the HSTG’s use of Wren and St Paul’s to link Portland Stone with British identity, we need to consider London in the 17th century. In 1620, there was a growing pressure on King James I to rebuild St Paul’s Cathedral, with pamphleteer Thomas Dekker noting that St Paul’s Cathedral was a stain on the city of London (Hentschell, 2020, p. 193). Dekker also likens ‘London to the kingdoms of Israel and Judah’ (Hentschell, 2020, p. 194), in a jeremiad that would become increasingly common.

In 1616, legal clerk and poet Henry Farley petitioned the King to tend to the crumbling St Paul’s Cathedral in London. Posing as the personified Cathedral which had revealed itself in a dream, Farley suggests that if secular buildings were being constructed and repaired, so must the spiritual. Accompanying his pamphlet is a diptych by John Gipkyn that details Farley’s dream and shows heaven shining down on London and, in particular, on a rebuilt St Paul’s. In the diptych’s foreground, ships carry timber and stone to build this “New Jerusalem” (Williamson, 2012). One ship bears a Union flag, a symbol of King James’ recent union of Scotland and England. Six years later, Farley again petitioned the King that “only the finest stone” — Portland Stone — must be used to rebuild St Paul’s (Hentschell, 2020, p. 210).

That same year, Bishop John King gave a sermon at St Paul’s Cross, the open-air pulpit at the old St Paul’s Cathedral. In his sermon, the religious overtones made by Dekker, Farley, and Gipkyn came truly to the fore. He stated:

If England be the ring of Europe, your city is the gem. If England the body, your city the eye; if England the eye, your city the apple of it ... Here the chamber of our British Empire. Here the emporium, principle mart of all foreign commodities, and staple of homebred. Here the garrison, and strength of the land, the magazine and storehouse of the best of God’s blessings. (Cavert, 2016, pp. 49–50)

Following this sermon, James ordered the formation of a Royal Commission and a quantity of Portland Stone was ordered for the cathedral’s renovation. Quite why Portland Stone was chosen is yet to be fully elucidated, but a consistent

discursive trope used by Dekker, Farley, Gipkyn, and Bishop King is that of London as being “the New Jerusalem” and James being “the British Solomon” who needed to build a “glorious Temple” (Parry, 2008, p. 45).

Less than a century before Bishop King’s sermon, the Protestant Reformation saw England divorced from the Catholic Church. As Farley penned the account of his dream, and Bishop King drew heavily on the notion of James as Solomon and London as a God-given New Jerusalem, the country was negotiating a new identity as a Protestant nation and a colonial power. The rise of Protestantism in England is linked with the “new expansionist English colonial elite” (Murray, 2009, p. 11) who sought greater influence to combat the Catholic universalism of other European colonisers. In the story of a newly united Britain, refurbishing St Paul’s represented restoring the rightful glory to the jewel in the crown of the British Empire. The allusions to New Jerusalem are linked to James’ belief in his divine rule (Patterson, 2000, p. 27). Wren’s St Paul’s embodied James’ divine right and was “handsome and noble to all the ends of it and to the reputation of the City and the nation” (Saunders, 1988, p. 33). The cathedral is the physical embodiment of James’ rule over Anglican Britain and, with its architectural style reminiscent of Ancient Greece and Rome, it fed back into Britain’s creation myths that were central to James’ rule (Schwyzer, 2006). James saw the union of Scotland and England and his title of King of Britain as the incarnation of “the true and ancient name which God and time have imposed upon this isle” (Schwyzer, 2006, p. 34). James built this mythical union, centred on London, on medieval legends that saw Britain’s founder as Brutus, descendent of Troy. Central to James’ vision was the quest “to re-establish a living link with the dead and vanished past” (Schwyzer, 2006, p. 34).

The trope of St Paul’s Cathedral and Wren feeds into a deeper story of Britain’s search for identity and justifies its establishment of London as the rightful heart of Europe, of empire and of civilisation. References to Wren and St Paul’s in Hansard, and in the HSTG’s rationale for Portland Stone’s heritage status, are not merely references to an illustrious building but to a moment in British history where England became Britain and expanded its empire, based on the belief that this was its destiny. Portland Stone did become, as the HSTG argues, a stone of national identity, but this national identity is elite, and geographically and historically selective; we ask whether this linkage warrants celebration.

6.2 | Transplanting identity

Facing many of the key commercial, government, administrative, and religious edifices in London, Portland Stone embodies a certain mode of Britishness. Portland Stone’s use “transplanted” this London-centric definition of Britishness to towns and cities across the Empire. The HSTG relies on this “spreading” as part of its criteria for designating Portland Stone as a GHSR, with the committee stating that “since the 18th century the use of Portland Stone has extended internationally. In the 20th century it has been used in United Nations Building in New York City” (Hughes et al., 2013, p. 223), and Gill Hackman (2014) provides a comprehensive list of Portland Stone’s use outside London, ranging from internal and external facing of iconic British stores overseas (Pringle, Burberry, Debenhams) to civic buildings across the UK. Most notable, however, is the story that emerges in Hansard (1895–1907) in relation to the use of Portland Stone in Ireland.

During the beginning of the 20th century, Irish MPs disputed the use of Portland Stone in Irish public buildings, particularly at the expense of suitable alternative Irish materials such as the Mountcharles Sandstone from County Donegal (HC Deb, 1895; HC Deb, 1905; HC Deb, 1907b). In 1895, R.A. Yerburg asks the First Commissioner of Works, Herbert Gladstone, whether this “very beautiful and durable building stone” can be used in English and Scottish public buildings, given that it “has the advantage of keeping its colour when Portland Stone will turn black” (HC Deb, 1895). Gladstone replies that he fears “that the cost of carriage to London, or, indeed, to any of the eastern or central districts of Great Britain, would be prohibitive of its use” (HC Deb, 1895), despite the concurrent reciprocal export of Portland Stone from England to Ireland. In 1907, a commission into the Irish Railways heard evidence from quarry owners that inadequate government investment in Irish railways meant that it cost around twice the amount (per tonne) to bring limestone from Stradbally quarry to Dublin, a distance of approximately 52 miles than it cost to import its English competitor Portland Stone (Irish Railway Commission, 1907).

Between 1905 and 1907, Irish nationalist MPs from the Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP) argue that a “promise made last year [1904] that Irish materials should be used as far as possible” in Irish public buildings (HC Deb, 1905) had been broken, as shown by the use of Portland Stone in the facing of the College of Science. In these exchanges, IPP MPs lobby for the use of Mountcharles Sandstone, as it is a “superior and cheaper stone” (HC Deb, 1907a) that is “far more durable than Portland stone” (HC Deb, 1907b) which has “already shown symptoms of premature decay” (HC Deb, 1905).

Initially, Government ministers deny that this promise was broken (HC Deb, 1905) but later switch to a denial that any such pledge was made (HC Deb, 1907b). For the Government, Walter Runciman, stresses that “about 75 percent of the building would be of Irish material” (H26), however IPP MPs John Mooney and Tim Healy decry the use of “English convict stone” to face Irish buildings (HC Deb, 1907b). Though Runciman objects to this label of “convict stone,” Healy replies, “indeed it is. I saw them quarrying it” (HC Deb, 1907b).

The tense exchange surrounding Portland Stone’s “convict stone” status hints at a deeper political stigma. From the mid-19th to early 20th centuries, the Isle of Portland hosted one of ten national “public works” prisons (Forsythe, 2004) where prisoners were used as labourers (Davie, 2010). Conditions at these prisons were harsh, designed to isolate, and minimise communication between, prisoners (Forsythe, 2004). Portland became a centre for the imprisonment of Irish political prisoners, in particular members of various Fenian groups, and abuse of Irish political prisoners at Portland was known. At Portland, convict labour included the quarrying of Portland Stone and the construction of the infrastructure for its export (HC Deb, 1847; HC Deb, 1850a; HC Deb, 1850b). The stone extracted by convicts on Portland was destined for the construction of public buildings throughout Britain. In 1850, Earl Grey notes:

As long as we have public buildings in progress anywhere, the establishment at Portland will afford the means of providing useful work for a large body of convicts. The Portland stone, as we know from the magnificent cathedral which ornaments this city, is of the finest quality, and the quarries are practically inexhaustible. This stone would last for centuries, and the utmost facilities exist for employing convicts in quarrying and dressing it, so that it may be shipped ready for use in any buildings which may be in progress. (HC Deb, 1850b)

The debate surrounding the contentious use of Portland Stone in Dublin continued in the years following exchanges in Parliament, particularly during the post-1922 reconstruction of Dublin. Reconstruction efforts following the Irish War of Independence (1919–1921) were closely monitored by a series of “Building and Reconstruction” articles in the *Irish Times* throughout the 1920s. Portland Stone was extensively used in the city’s restoration in “the 18th century Dublin tradition, granite with Portland Stone dressings” (New premises for civil service commissioners, 1929). Objections, however, were raised in the press about the use of imported stone – particularly Portland Stone – at the expense of Irish stone. In a letter to the *Irish Times*, John W. McKeever (1926) of the Irish Marble Company argues in favour of “native” stone as opposed to “the soft Portland Stone which we are now paying English workmen and transport companies to deliver in Dublin.” McKeever frames his appeal for protectionist policy to protect the Irish stone industry with particular reference to Portland Stone:

For instance, if the builders of a palatial hotel or theatre in Dublin were unpatriotic enough to prefer Portland Stone instead of Irish they would have to pay 20% extra for indulging in this fancy. (McKeever, 1926)

Import and transport costs appear to have continued to hamper the supply of Irish stone in the late 1920s and quarry owners continued to be vocal in the Irish press (Poor demand for Irish stone, 1926; Use of Portland Stone, 1926):

Their [quarry owners’] complaint is that Irish granite, limestone, and Connemara marble are being boycotted for some reason or another, while Portland Stone is being transported and used extensively by Dublin builders. (Poor demand for Irish stone, 1926)

Portland Stone was not the only non-native stone that the Irish quarry industry wished to curtail the import of, but it is one that is most explicitly referred to and it generated a strong element of politicised public discourse. We argue that the reason why Portland Stone was so contentious (as opposed to other non-Irish stone) is that the stone had become imbued with symbolic power. Specifically, it had become closely associated with British national identity. When viewed through the lens of Irish nationalism, however, this symbolism extends to colonialism, particularly suppression of native resources, labour, expression, and power. That the stone’s production was linked to Irish political prisoners adds a further layer of symbolic wounding.

While noting that the importation and use of Portland Stone aggravated Irish nationalists, Morley (2011) argues that simply to view the use of Portland Stone “through the lens of British hegemony versus rising Irish nationalism” is “oversimplistic.” Morley argues that “in practical and aesthetic terms from a British standpoint” only the “familiar” Portland Stone had a proven track record in the “large, costly and important” ornamental facing of public buildings (2011, p. 473). For Morley (2011), the flexibility of cutting and dressing Portland Stone offered architects advantages

in capturing Edwardian architectural fashions that would not be possible by using granite. This comparison, however, is not valid; a hard, igneous rock like granite could not be easily dressed unlike Portland Stone. A fairer comparison would be with an Irish limestone such as the Stradbally limestone, which was successfully employed by R.M. Butler in the construction of University College, Dublin and, as discussed above, cost twice as much to bring to Dublin as Portland Stone. Morley (2011) also fails to engage critically with the reality that Portland Stone was the prudent economic choice for the government because it could be sourced from government quarries at low cost through use of convict labour. Further, it could be transported for a fraction of the cost of an Irish competitor due to protectionist policy that supported the English stone industry at the expense of Irish quarries and under investment in Irish rail infrastructure.

Moreover, Morley's analysis fails to note that use of Portland Stone in Dublin's cityscape had a further two-fold effect: first, it added symbolic power to the edifice of the public buildings in Dublin, it made them British and not Irish at a time of intense political debate surrounding self-governance in Ireland. Second, it prevented any native Irish stone from acquiring the symbolic power of national identity that had already been accrued by Portland Stone from a British perspective. With stone carrying such meaning, the imposition of Portland Stone in Ireland denied the country a distinct urban material identity. The continued use of Portland Stone in defiance of objection served to add more symbolic oppressive power to the stone, such that its use riled great resentment in Irish nationalist circles, given that "Portland Stone had a clear association with British imperialism" (Morley, 2011, p. 474). For Irish nationalists, the use of Irish material in Irish public buildings was a chance to "put local ideologies, traditions and identities into stone," whereas for the British continued use of Portland Stone was "an artistic method of cultural and political fortification for those in power, a means of helping to keep hold of increasingly disputed territories" (Morley, 2011, p. 474).

Though the voices protesting the use of Portland Stone continued to be marginalised, the public discourse did lead to some planning changes. For example, the dome of the Customs House in Dublin – which had originally been built of Portland Stone prior to its destruction in 1921 – was rebuilt in Irish Ardbraccan limestone, despite the fact that this ultimately led to the dome being a notably darker grey than the Portland Stone façade on the building's southern face (Casey, 2005). The decision to rebuild in Ardbraccan limestone reflected a combination of financial hardship and "nationalistic sentiment" opposing the use of Portland Stone (Casey, 2005, p. 7). This was disputed by Usher (2015), who argues that the choice of Ardbraccan limestone has been more recently politicised and was principally related to the economic conditions at the time. We consider this viewpoint oversimplistic in that, first, it presents a false dichotomy – it is possible that a suitable replacement would need to be cheaper than Portland Stone but also Irish – and, second, it dismisses the public discourse that clearly existed around the use of Portland Stone in Dublin.

6.3 | Discourse of British elitism

The traits that the HSTG champions in Portland Stone's designation as a GHSR connect to the stone's position as a stone of British — or, rather, English — elitism. In 1842, in his discussion about protecting the British stone industry, George Banks, references "the poor," noting that "their habitations were not built of this expensive material" (HC Deb, 1842), revealing a key class division in the use and production of Portland Stone. In the same debate, Dougal Christie, MP for Weymouth, argues against protectionism, suggesting that free-trade of stone "would not only benefit the public but would also be of advantage to the labouring classes in Portland" as it would make them "less dependent than they were upon the quarry owners" (HC Deb, 1842). Christie proceeds to give accounts from residents in Portland and Weymouth who describe a truck wage system where "two or three merchants in London" pay workers on Portland once every six months and residents become dependent on the London-based capitalists for food and other necessities. During the entirety of the parliamentary exchange there is a strict delimitation between the labouring bodies who quarry the stone and the "public" who enjoy the stone.

The distinction between worker and consumer/the public was laid bare again in the 1960s by Evelyn King, MP for South Dorset, as he states that Portland Stone is "appropriate to great buildings" and that "the workers ... are part of our national inheritance of skill" (HC Deb, 1965). We discuss this concept of "inheritance" below but note here that working bodies are characterised as objects of labour that must be protected in order to furnish "great buildings ... universities, schools, municipal buildings, office blocks, stores, banks and hotels" (HC Deb, 1965). King also argues, while challenging the Labour Party's ban on office building in London — the Building Control Bill (HC Deb, 1966), that continued use of Portland Stone can free up "conventional building resources ... for house building" (HC Deb, 1965). Here, he reveals that Portland Stone must only be used for elite buildings rather than for housing for the many.

An overt suggestion of Portland Stone being a stone for elite eyes comes from Alfred Marples, Conservative MP and Postmaster General, who, in 1957, asks, “why did we want to have Portland stone around the power station which faced the Yorkshire Copper Works, at Leeds, and is never seen by anybody except the people who work there? More than £100,000 was wasted in that way, and we did not get value for our money” (HC Deb, 1957). Marples blatantly explains that Portland Stone is not for workers’ eyes and deems the use of the stone in such instances a waste of “our” money, differentiating again between the elite “us” who may be permitted to enjoy the ambiance of Portland Stone and the working bodies who power the machine that permits Britain to function. Portland Stone’s status as a “convict stone” further exemplifies the view of labouring bodies as cogs in the machine of British empire politics. While labouring bodies quarry and dress the stone, it is elite voices who consume the stone, transplanting it, dominating with it, and demarcating their exclusive position through the use of the stone.

This functional delineation has a strong political foundation and in 1945 Conservative MP Waldron Smithers quotes an elderly Portland resident who explains that “I have worked in the Portland Stone quarries all my life, and I am proud of it. I have always voted Conservative because I have found that when a Conservative Government was in power, there was more demand for Portland stone” (HC Deb, 1945). The Conservative Party is the party of patriotism, the Union, and of a promotion of British (English) national identity (Readman, 2001). It follows, then, that the Conservative Party supports the building of grand civic structures in Portland Stone, to project an England-centric British identity.

That the buildings constructed of Portland Stone are generally buildings of the establishment, connected with government and civil society, and are built in classical, neoclassical, Palladian, or English Baroque style, all of which draw on the architectural ideals of symmetry and geometry, recalls the foundation myths that see the top echelons of British society as the rightful inheritors of “civilisation.” Combined, the use of a creamy white limestone with straight clean lines and simple design suggests meaning, truth, and a sense of timelessness in times of immense change (Eisenman, 1984). While the HTSG rely on the promotion of a British identity through Portland Stone, they are in fact championing an elite English Britishness.

7 | BRITISHNESS AND HERITAGISATION

MP King’s 1965 impassioned speech is interspersed with British nationalistic imagery, Greek mythology, elitism, and a call to value British heritage as he carefully crafts a discourse that links the Queen “as the Lady of the Manor of Portland” (HC Deb, 1965), suggesting a closeness between Britishness and Portland Stone. His discussion of the stone and its suitability in “great buildings” (HC Deb, 1965) reads like the HSTG’s account of the heritage value of Portland Stone. King states that:

[Portland Stone] is an indigenous natural resource and it must be our duty, as with previous generations, to see that we cherish the national resources we have inherited. We have a great heritage. Our minds turn to the Banqueting Hall in Whitehall of Inigo Jones. To the great churches of Wren, to the Bank of England, Bush House and right up Kingsway and Holburn — all across England we see Portland Stone. The Roman Catholic Cathedral at Liverpool, St. John’s College, Cambridge, Brasenose College, Oxford — all derive their beauty from Portland. (HC Deb, 1965)

King links heritage directly to Portland Stone edifices. He relies on the concept of preserving a particular version of history to pass on to future generations. Notably, throughout his speech, he refers to “England” and “Englishness” rather than “Britain” and “Britishness,” unwittingly highlighting that the “heritage” value of Portland Stone is connected to England — particularly London — and not the rest of the country. He also charts the use of Portland Stone across the world, championing this as a mark of success while selectively ignoring the colonial overtones of transplanting identity.

King asserts that buildings of note — “great buildings” and “large prestigious buildings” as he later refers to them (HC Deb, 1965) — derive their beauty and value from their building stone. In 1971, he lists examples of “great buildings,” including “St Paul’s Cathedral, Mansion House, this House itself” as being built of Portland Stone (HC Deb, 1971). The Houses of Parliament are not built of Portland Stone, but its inclusion in his account of the value of Portland Stone is strengthened by its inclusion in his list of “great buildings,” representing the hearts of government, Anglicanism (St Paul’s Cathedral), and London (Mansion House, the Lord Mayor of London’s residence). King overtly connects Portland Stone to the concept of a national heritage, stating that “Portland stone, known to everyone, is the pride of the architectural heritage of Britain” (HC Deb, 1971). A year later he suggests that it is “the loveliest and most hardwearing stone in the world,” arguing that “the maximum use of it in all public buildings” must be encouraged (HC Deb, 1972). King thereby constructs a narrative whereby Portland Stone is part of Britain’s heritage *because* it is used in key buildings, but simultaneously suggests that it is used in key buildings *because* of its heritage. This circular reasoning reinforces King’s

notion that we must protect our inheritance of stone and “our architectural wealth” (HC Deb, 1965), where *Britain’s* “heritage” is one of a mythologised, elite *English* past that is marked by buildings of prestige that represent the state.

King’s narrative of British heritage based on elite architecture in London is reinforced by his son-in-law, Cooke, who launches a tirade in 1975 against the Labour government’s introduction of the Capital Transfer Tax (CTT) “by which the national heritage in private hands is threatened” (HC Deb, 1975). Cooke builds an argument relying on an understanding that heritage belongs to Britain’s (or, more accurately, England’s) elite. His argument, rooted in privilege, suggests that the CTT will move “national heritage” out of the hands of “private persons preserving the national heritage for public benefit” (HC Deb, 1975). Here, Britain’s landed elite become intertwined with, and the sole protectors of, this enigmatic “national heritage.” Cooke suggests that “historic houses are far better in which to see works of art than the somewhat antiseptic conditions of public galleries” (HC Deb, 1975) and here he unsubtly links back to the Portland Stone industry and protectionism: keeping objects and artefacts of the “national heritage” in “existing historic buildings” leads Cooke to suggest that “the Government ... keep the stone firms and a number of other craft industries in work preparing stonework to be put into works of restoration or new construction perhaps some years ahead” (HC Deb, 1975). This draws on King’s earlier circular reasoning and reinforces the attribute of “heritage” as applied to elite buildings that become the containers of objects of heritage, while becoming “heritage” through the use of Portland Stone. Crucially, Cooke reinforces the sentiment that heritage is the domain of the elite who are the guardians of “national heritage” based on the past: past wealth, past status, past values.

8 | CONCLUSION: REVISITING PORTLAND STONE’S HERITAGE STATUS

The HTSG deems Portland Stone an “ideal” GHSR (Hughes et al., 2013), but as we have shown, this framing of “heritage stone resources” is based on a confused and uncritical examination of the concept of heritage. When applied to Portland Stone, this uncritical gaze is rendered visible: the stone that they are celebrating for widespread use, “cultural” meaning, and representing national identity is the same stone that has been the tangible manifestation of empire, of colonial domination, of an English-centric Union, and of an oppression of the working class. Certainly, Portland Stone is a fine building material and subjectively may be deemed attractive and, objectively, may be classed as being durable and easily dressed. But, when its use is bound up in symbolic projections of power, for international and internal colonisation, is it noteworthy? Does it warrant celebration, particularly when the markers of its greatness, according to the HTSG, are palpable manifestations of unequal power? We would urge the HTSG to consider carefully precisely what it seeks to commemorate, for the “heritage” it has celebrated in Portland Stone is a “heritage” of inequity and raises questions about whose past we commemorate. As we hear calls for the removal of statues and monuments to figures of colonial oppression, we suggest that it is unacceptable to overlook the questions above. We are reminded again of Hall’s call to a post-national rewriting of ‘the margins into the centre’ (1999, p. 10), where we can refocus the narrative on marginalised histories rather than on the economic, touristic, and aesthetic value of stone.

GHSR designation of Portland Stone is based on an uncritical notion of heritage that warrants further scrutiny. In the case of Portland Stone, its “heritage” and cultural value is based on characteristics that are largely unsavoury to a contemporary palate: convict labour, Crown seizure of land and resources, a use largely limited to “elite” edifices, and a form of internal and international colonisation. It is telling that much as voices in Hansard suggest a need to “preserve” Portland Stone as part of a “national inheritance” (HC Deb, 1965), the HTSG note that through the designation of a stone as a GHSR, it will encourage “proper management of well-known [sic] existing natural stone extraction operations to ensure future availability and utilisation” (Cooper, 2009, p. 7). The call to heritage and a need to preserve is again being used to futureproof the capitalist transfer of the natural world into an elite commodity made possible through the labour of those who, as we have shown, are never supposed to enjoy the fruits of their labour.

It is not enough to look at a building, deem its stone to be “beautiful,” and note that it has been used in the construction and facing of countless buildings (Cooper, 2009). We must think more critically about how the GHSR designation is being applied and ask who is talking about heritage? The designation of Portland Stone as a global heritage stone represents another moment in Britain’s selective remembering and framing of the past. The HSTG are choosing to celebrate and recognise a stone that represents elite groups, has dominated landscapes to the detriment of local “identity,” and that perpetuates a dominant white, elite, English narrative.

Ultimately, the notion of the designation of certain stones as holding intrinsic “heritage” meaning is deeply flawed and will only ever champion certain visions of the past. It offers us a chance to re-engage with a critical view of heritage and to see that the buildings and monuments that we protect, and the very landscape and built environment that surrounds us, is built on a monolithic vision of the past. Lowenthal cautions that we must “learn to control heritage lest it

control us” (1998, p. 3). Certainly, failing to see the hold that heritage has taken may lead us to dubious ends, but surely we must reframe this counsel: we must learn to control the uncritical application of “heritage” by elite voices espousing the authorised heritage discourse.

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