

**Looking at old ground in a new way:
Report from the Burghley Horse Trials Knowledge Exchange Day'
(KE&I Task 3)**

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Date: 29th January 2018

Introduction

This short report sets out the basic background, rationale, methods and findings of a 'knowledge exchange (KE) day' at Burghley Park. The KE day was attended by May Cassar, Shaun McKinnar and Adam Cooper (all from UCL) and was part of a wider programme of knowledge exchange led by the Institute for Sustainable Heritage called *'Looking at old ground in a new way: Policy innovation through knowledge exchange among heritage & sport academics & practitioners'*. Prior projects in this programme comprise *'Looking at old ground in a new way: A pilot workshop to develop and record a fresh approach to sport science and heritage science collaboration'*. The wider goal of this programme of research is to investigate the synergies between heritage science and sport science, and their impact on wellbeing.

Background and Rationale

The day was part of a series of interactions with the Burghley Horse Trials (BHT) and Burghley Estate documented elsewhere in this report. A key interaction preceded the day described here involved members of the team discussing with BHT and Burghley Estate staff theoretical alternatives for citing the main arena. The goal of doing this was to make more explicit the sporting and heritage considerations that are interwoven in this context and use that as a point of departure for unpacking this relationship with local people who have a professional and personal interest in heritage and the horse trials sport.

Methods

Sample and sampling

To unpack how sporting and heritage interests might interact with local value and interest we opportunistically sampled a set of residents of Stamford and the local area from the direct contacts the team had. This gave rise to a group of 6 individuals who all shared the common trait of living within the local vicinity of BHT and knew about the BHT. All knew and had visited the park and had a longstanding association with Stamford. One of the 7 had never attended the BHT, two had professional civic associations with Stamford and three had professional associations with BHT. Two were male and four were female. Two were under aged under 40, the remainder over 40. The goal was to purposively sample a mix of those with an interest in heritage and those with an interest in sport. In the end, there were two who were primarily sport-focused, and one primarily heritage-focused, with the remainder having no particular interest in sport or heritage (though expressed interest in both). A member of the BHT office staff also attended the day, as much to facilitate access as to add details and practical information, rather than directly add to data gathering. Further background details of the attendees are reserved in order to protect anonymity.

Design and data collection

The KE day took place on the afternoon of the 14th November 2017 and was designed to have two phases: i) a walking focus group; and ii) an office-based discussion. The walking focus group took the participants on a 90-minute excursion around the three sites chosen by the BHT (see figure 1). At each site, a 20 to 25 min discussion was led by Adam Cooper, recorded on video for later analysis purposes by Shaun McKinnar and further notes were taken by May Cassar. The discussions centred around what was good or bad about a particular site from the vantage point of heritage and (horse trials) sport, and whether the site held any specific significance to the participants as members of the local community. Following the walking focus groups, all participants returned to the BHT offices where a 30-minute discussion was held on the pros and cons of BHT in relation to Stamford and the relationship of Burghley House (as an institution, rather than as a building) to Stamford. The discussion was also video-recorded to aid later analysis.



Figure 1: Showing a satellite image of Burghley park and the three sites for the main arena. Site 1 is the current location, Site 2(+4) is a second proposed site closer to Burghley House and Site 3 (+5) the third proposed location, closer to BHT offices which are just outside the top edge of the image. ©Google Maps

Data analysis

The exploratory nature of the project and limited resource meant that full analysis of the qualitative data was not possible. Instead, members of the team first wrote initial reflections from the day collated by Adam Cooper, before Shaun McKinnar wrote up notes about the walking focus group. Adam Cooper did the same for the office-based discussion. The discussions were therefore not transcribed and no thematic analysis was undertaken. Instead particular arguments and general reflections based on a revisiting of the video data are presented here to unpack some of the important aspects of the relationship between heritage and sport decision making and the impact of heritage and sport on the local community.

Results

The walking focus group primarily agreed that the current site (Figure 1, site 1) was the best combination of maximising the location (Burghley Park) and the nature of the ground. Site 3 was seen as the best if the historic significance of the location were not taken into account as it was closest to other riding facilities and the ground was even. Site 2 was not at all preferred as it was deemed too encumbered by both historic features (the ridge and furrow field system making the ground far too uneven to ride and protected trees) and in a sense 'too close' to the House itself.

Standing on Site 1 revealed both a potent vista of the House itself, and the view down the hillside to the valley beyond. It was a site that even those who frequented the park did not know about and would not normally enjoy as the tendency was to stick to the footpaths. During the discussion of Site 3, the benefits of Site 1 – being located in such a dramatic location were emphasised. As one attendee put it 'If you are going to have a major horse trial here, why wouldn't you want it at the best spot in the park'. Site 3 in that light was seen as somewhat out of the way or hidden from the park: the trees obscured the House and any other view meaning that it was not obvious we were in historic parklands.

Interestingly, while discussing Site 1, those who had experience of attending the trials as a rider noted that 'when you are in the main arena you cannot see the house'. Likewise, it seemed likely that the array of tents and other temporary structures erected during the BHT meant that other views would be obscured. This implied that the benefit of the location of BHT was not a result of the *direct* experiential benefit of attendees enjoying specific views, but perhaps from an imagined (but no less real) benefit that 'this is where we are – at the centre of an historic landscape'. This evoked a sense that it was more a psycho-geographic effect that granted meaning to the location than a direct sense of wellbeing arising from the direct experiencing of such views. In contrast, Site 3, although beneficial to the sport, suffered by contrast by being away from this 'centre of attention' which one might read as a side-lining of the sport in favour of putting heritage centre stage.

Further evidence of this 'psycho-geographic' effect of BHT was evident in the office-based discussion. In identifying problematic issues in relation to BHT, two participants noted the lack of access to the park for recreation (walking, visiting cafes). Yet, neither of these participants had previously walked in that part of the park where the arena is currently sited (Site 1) despite acknowledging the potent vista when present during the focus group. That they had not

enjoyed such views when it was open may be read as the impact of the *notion* of Burghley Park (i.e. it is a place that has such views, even if I have not directly experienced them) and as such simply visiting the area (and not the views that make give Burghley Park its potency) provides a benefit due to its *existence* value.

What was also evident in the over-arching discussion about the three sites was the way in which Burghley Park and the longstanding operation of running BHT were intertwined. Moving something as significant as the main arena (which was purely a theoretic exercise for the purpose of this knowledge exchange) opened up a complex network of relations around planning and execution of the event as well as the historic relations with the ground: the ground of the main arena had been significantly managed to make it appropriate for the arena. Hence BHT and the parklands were so intertwined it would make little sense to move the arena now given this historic context even if a better spot were to be identified.

The office-based discussion was mostly marked by a general consensus of the positive impact of both BHT and Burghley Park on Stamford. This is not particularly surprising given 5 of the 6 attendees had some professional affiliation to the BHT in one way or another. At the same time, it is also clear that BHT does provide some direct significant benefit to the local area which the attendees identified as:

- Bringing jobs and income via the setting up, running the BHT (local employment) and international high-income visitors (income)
- Raising the wider profile of Stamford both via showcasing the historic streets as visitors make their way to BHT but also via the 'friendliness' visitors encounter.

At the same time, some problems of the BHT were acknowledged, albeit recognised as either minor or having been mitigated:

- Closure of the park for 6 weeks preventing use for walking etc and inability to book restaurants (minor inconvenience)
- High levels of congestion in the streets around Stamford meaning alternative routes (much better than it was)
- Loss of income to some shops in the short-term (due to congestion and competition from the stalls in the BHT, but should be beneficial in the long run when BHT visitors return to see Stamford)

The relationship between Burghley Estate and Stamford was also explored. Again, there was general consensus across most of the attendees over 40 in the room that Burghley Estate was a beneficial agent in the local area. It was seen variously as a 'benefactor', 'custodian' and 'protector' of Stamford. It was held responsible for maintaining the historic look and feel of the local area in part via ownership of well-maintained historic buildings and the running of various clubs or other leisure related facilities.

Some challenges in the relationship between Burghley Estate and Stamford were identified, if not explore in detail. In particular, one attendee noted that some Stamfordians are hostile towards Burghley Estate for some historic reason that was not known. We explored the

powerful relationship that Burghley Estate has to Stamford revealing a powerful paternalism with the town that could be read as 'constraining' by determining the kinds of developments that might take place. There was some indication that Burghley Estate were protecting their investments in land in Stamford as part of a longer-term plan to ensure high land values that could be cashed in at a later date to protect the long-term integrity of Burghley Estate as an institution.

Conclusions

This short knowledge exchange day revealed the complex inter-relationships that hold between sports and heritage and how the nature of one feeds off and feeds the other. Burghley Estate no doubt gains from holding the horse trials, and BHT would not exist without Burghley House. But even more so is the cultural intertwining that was apparent in the idea of Burghley Estate taking a deep interest in how BHT is run, enabling it to be connected in deeper ways to the fabric of the historic landscape and culture of the local area. This relationship extends beyond the symbiosis of the horse trials and the parkland into the wider area of Stamford itself, creating beneficial and sometimes problematic impacts which are seen (from a BHT perspective) to ultimately be net positive to Stamford and the local area. Clearly these are benefits defined in BHT and Burghley Estate terms, as they lead to rising house prices, rising costs of hotels and other goods and services, which might serve some members but not other members of the local community. But as with the complex inter-relationship between BHT and the parklands, undoing such a relation on the basis of privileging a different priority may ultimately prove too costly overall.