

**Title**

‘Thrown Like Chaff in the Wind’: excavation, memory and the negotiation of loss in the Scottish Highlands

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## Abstract

Memory has become an important area of research in historical archaeology over the last decade with an increasing focus on retrieving the narratives of subaltern groups and painful memories of conflict, displacement and loss. Drawing on ethnographic research, I explore how archaeological excavation provides an arena for sharing, negotiating and contesting difficult forms of memory associated with the Highland Clearances. I argue that the Clearances involve a kind of ‘postmemory’ revolving around a series of iconic motifs and that this provides a framework for interpretation and action in the present. Coherence is produced not through the ‘excavation’ of silenced narratives, but through social processes of performance, negotiation and ‘composure’, as people engage in a dialogue with past present and future.

**Keywords:** Memory, Loss, Displacement, Scotland, Monuments

## Introduction

[We came to] a hill, a steep hill and we went up there until we came to a ruin and when we stood, you know I, I hardly ever saw my granny cry, but she had tears and she said to me, my dear she said, I took you here that you’ll know what happened to us, we were thrown like chaff in the wind ... I want to show you that this is the place where we lived and died and I want you never to forget that we were thrown like chaff in the wind.

(Interview with Maggie, 2003)

The significance of ruins highlighted by this narrative is widely recognised in current scholarship. Ruins, monuments, and historic landscapes act as mnemonic devices evoking past events, people, relationships and ideas. They can be powerful symbols referencing a complex body of contested meanings that are constantly reworked and actively negotiated in the present. More than this they also provide important tangible connections with relation to traumatic, or otherwise difficult, forms of memory. Thus in Maggie’s account, the ruin is evidence of, and in some senses witness to, the nature of the displacement her family experienced. One senses that the ruins are central actors in the scene that is recounted without which the story would have far less power, and indeed might not have been recounted. In fact, the journey and the ruins are the means for Maggie’s grandmother (and Maggie herself, in the retelling) to achieve what Summerfield (1998, pp. 16-17) has called ‘composure’, something that I will return to below.

In his overview of twenty-first century historical archaeology, Orser (2010) identifies heritage and memory as one of four key areas characterising current research. Much work, he argues, has focused on the role of memory in constructing and sustaining heritage, as well as the role of heritage institutions in mediating public and especially national forms of memory. Many of the most venerated heritage places are those associated with social elites, and historical narratives privileging dominant forms of social memory frequently inform a patriotic heritage. This is a concern with memory and discourse as something produced in the present, heavily influenced by current interests and power relations. Yet most historical archaeologists also remain committed to excavating and analysing a material ‘record’ to gain new insights into the past. In this sense they have also, sometimes simultaneously, used their

excavations to unearth hidden or ‘silenced’ histories and thus produce more inclusive forms of public memory. Not surprisingly such research has often focused on slavery and race (e.g. Shackel, 2003; Funari, 2003), labour relations, and working class communities (e.g. McGuire and Reckner, 2003; Shackel, 2000; Smith, 2006; Walker, 2003), Indigenous groups (e.g. Scott, 2003; Zimmerman, 2007), rural communities (e.g. Jones, 2010), protest camps (e.g. Marshall, et al., 2009), sex-workers (e.g. Schofield and Morrissey, 2005), and so forth. There is also a growing literature on forms of memory associated with traumatic or difficult experiences, such as displacement, war, internment, and political oppression (e.g. Meskell and Scheermeyer, 2008; Schmidt, 2010).

Thus, much research in historical archaeology, as in other disciplines, has focused on memory’s capacity to destabilise authoritative grand narratives associated with social elites and national institutions; to ‘retrieve that which runs against, disrupts or disturbs dominant ways of understanding the past’ (Radstone and Hodgkin, 2003, p. 10). There is a concern with the politics of memory that is to some extent unavoidable when dealing with objects, monuments and places that often remain intimately tied to contemporary forms of social memory. Yet this can lead to an objectification and idealisation of forms of memory associated with particular social groups. Furthermore, in our concern to critique dominant forms of memory and/or retrieve subordinate narratives, archaeologists have often paid little attention to the unforeseen forms of ‘memory work’ that are triggered by their work. There are notable exceptions (see Filippucci, 2010; Moshenska, 2007, 2009; Schmidt, 2010), but there are still many questions concerning the practices involved in the production and negotiation of memory, particularly in respect to painful or traumatic pasts. How do such forms of memory get transmitted between generations? How do they frame people’s understanding of their present circumstances and future trajectories? What purposes and interests do they serve? And how are archaeological remains, and the work of archaeologists, involved in these processes?

In this article, I intend to explore the transmission and negotiation of social memory relating to traumatic events referred to as the Highland Clearances that occurred several generations ago. The Clearances took place in the Highlands of Scotland between c. 1790 and 1855, and involved the displacement of the rural poor on a vast scale in the name of social and agricultural improvement. They remain a particularly sore point in Scottish history and there is much debate about how they are selectively remembered and forgotten (Basu, 2000 and 2007; Gouriévidis, 2010; Withers, 1996 and 2005). Drawing on ethnographic research carried out in the coastal villages of Easter Ross between 2001 and 2003 I will examine how monuments and places inform the production and negotiation of social memory relating to the Clearances. In particular, I will reveal how excavation can provide a ‘theatre’ for the transmission and negotiation of traumatic memories. I will also demonstrate that aspects of the material world that were not historically associated with the Clearances can nevertheless get caught up in the memory practices surrounding them because of their symbolic and metaphorical potential.

### **Excavating memory**

As Gabriel Moshenska (2009) has argued, archaeology and memory have been closely linked in both intellectual and popular discourse. Archaeological analogies and metaphors have been widely employed in relation to memory, where buried archaeological remains have stood in

for suppressed memories, and excavation has acted as a metaphor for the process of recovery (ibid., pp. 45-46). Moshenska argues that the analogy was particularly strong in Freud's writing on psychoanalysis, but it is also evident in other work. In turn, it is tempting for archaeologists to set their sights on reintegrating fragments of memory through the recovery of forgotten or marginalised histories. Indeed, as discussed above, historical archaeologists often explicitly seek to counter the distortions embedded in dominant forms of memory by retrieving the hidden histories of subaltern groups.

Yet the metaphorical connections and areas of endeavour that Moshenska highlights are arguably founded on an historically specific concept of memory linked to the idea of the individual as a bounded, coherent self, that acts as the container for memories (Lambek, 2003; Radstone and Hodgkin, 2003). By analogy, social groups and social memory are also often attributed the same qualities of boundedness, homogeneity and continuity. Indeed each discrete social group is often assumed to possess a distinct body of social memory. However, recent research has questioned whether memory is something we possess or hold in the sense of an object that simply needs retrieving from an archive, or from the sedimented layers of history (Lambek, 2003; Smith, 2006; Wertsch, 2002). Instead it has been suggested that memory is a product of practice, discourse and social relations (Lambek, 2003, p. 212). It consists of 'the mediated action of remembering [and forgetting], which itself is a process engaged with the working out and creation of meaning' (Smith, 2006, p. 59; after Wertsch, 2002). Public representations of the past (e.g. those offered by television documentaries or national museums) play an important role, but social memory is produced through activities of remembering and reminiscing that take place in the context of encounters with people and places. For individuals it is a means by which they seek to achieve 'composure' (Summerfield, 1998, pp. 16-17). The social performance and narration of past events and experiences are actively 'composed' in an attempt to constitute the self as a coherent subject in relation to narratives that link past, present, and ultimately future. Yet this is still an inter-subjective process often framed by relationships of affection, duty, obligation and debt. It is also a located and disparate process. Social memories are composed of the fragmented stories surrounding specific places and events passed within and between generations. But far from being homogeneous or consensual, this process is usually situated, subjective and contested (Wertsch, 2002).

Returning to excavation, such an active intervention in the landscape is likely to magnify these processes, providing an arena, or 'theatre', for the practice of memory. As Moshenska (2007, p. 91) has argued, 'excavations can serve as nexuses of memory, meeting places where personal narratives can be shared, challenged and renegotiated'. This creates a rather different relationship between excavation and memory; one where excavation is a site for the production of memory, as much as it is a means to counter the distortions of memory by the recovery of evidence that, through expert interpretation, allows suppressed forms of memory to be reinstated. Recent ethnographies of excavation have focused on the distinctive forms of skill, experience, interpretation and subjectivity associated with it (Edgeworth, 2003; Yarrow, 2003, 2006). Yet it has also been noted that excavation is a materialising practice, which produces artefacts that offer the unsettling sense of an immediate (and unmediated) connection to the past (Fillipucci, 2010; after Buchli and Lucas, 2001). As a result these artefacts, and the practices surrounding them, appear to collapse the difference between past and present bringing 'the past 'into the present' (and/or the present 'into' the past) in an immediate way, cross-cutting and unsettling the idea of temporal sequence and

succession' (Fillipucci, 2010, p. 75).

This function of excavation was in striking evidence during the excavations that took place at the ruined medieval chapel, adjacent to the village of Hilton of Cadboll in Easter Ross, between 1998 and 2001 (see Fig. 1 and Fig. 2). These excavations led to the rediscovery of the long lost lower portion of the famous Hilton of Cadboll cross-slab, an early medieval monument dating to the 9th century AD (Fig. 3). The aim was to recover the cross-slab and investigate its relationship with the medieval chapel, itself a scheduled monument and a property in the care of Historic Scotland (see James, et al., 2008). However, there was great public interest in the new discovery, and its excavation and potential removal to the National Museum of Scotland aroused considerable local protest. The complex cultural biography of the monument and conflicting ownership claims has been discussed in depth elsewhere (see Jones, 2005; Foster and Jones, 2008). Here I will focus specifically on the memory work provoked by the excavations and other aspects of the landscape.

A viewing platform erected next to the excavation by Historic Scotland became a focal point for local residents, some of whom visited the site on a daily basis (see Fig. 4). Ostensibly they were keen to monitor the progress of the excavations and express some form of ownership or belonging in relation to the finds. However, they quickly reverted to conversation with one another and, aside from daily gossip, there was much discussion about the past based on personal reminiscences and oral histories. Many of the memories based on first hand experience had little to do with the medieval remains they gazed upon, and yet were still in some senses triggered by the physicality of the excavation. Recurring themes from childhood included playing in the dark before street lamps were installed, fetching water from the well not far from the Chapel site, helping to pick potatoes after school, preparing fish for the market, or robbing the orchards of one of the big houses. Others were more closely related to the Chapel site, for instance, people recalled childhood picnics and games around the earthworks of the Chapel, and the missing bowl-shaped stone, or 'font', containing water that was said to cure warts.

Other forms of memory recounted at the viewing platform were not based on first hand experience, but related to events, objects, places and people that have become part of the oral history of families and communities transmitted within and between generations. These processes of remembering and forgetting were often informed by knowledge of who lived where, how buildings have changed, and how houses mark out relationships between people. Furthermore, memories of events concerning specific personalities (courtships, fights, ceremonies, etc.) were prompted by the places where they occurred, and in turn informed the qualities of that place. The ruins of the Hilton of Cadboll Chapel and the fields surrounding them, known locally as 'the Park', were highly resonant in terms of memory (see Fig. 2). Formerly owned by the Cadboll Estate, the villagers had been allowed to use the land in the past for mending their fishing boats and nets, as well as for recreational purposes. People told stories about the 9-hole golf course that had been constructed on the raised beach running up the coast, as well as the football pitch the village had made. There were stories about which families had had prominent players, as well as details about the re-landscaping they had carried out to construct the pitch and the material remains they had encountered in the process. There were also narratives of conflict over land that I will return to later.

Of course, my own presence and that of the field archaeologists prompted some of the memories that were recounted, particularly those relating to the physical landscape. The production of social memory incorporates academic and professional actors, just as it does other people, and the interests and power relations that relate to them mediate processes of remembering and forgetting. The memories recounted were also without a doubt textually- and visually-mediated. For instance, popular books, such as Anson's (1930) *Fishing Boats and Fisher Folk on the East Coast of Scotland*, Gunn's (1941 [1969]) fictional *Silver Darlings*, and Macdonald and Gordon's (1971) *Down to the Sea*, clearly provide a framework for understanding and locating local oral histories and personal reminiscences. Display boards about the village's fishing heritage along the seafront also fed into the narratives people recounted. At the same time, some of these texts, especially the display boards and the popular local history-book, *Down to the Sea*, are themselves partly based on the inscription of orally transmitted-social memory. Furthermore, textually mediated forms of social memory are also reinterpreted and selectively remembered through subsequent oral transmission.

I found that each time memories associated with specific people, events, and places were recounted they were reworked and composed according to the situation and the people present. In practice people's accounts did not precisely coincide, being subject to different kinds of elaboration and mediation. Nevertheless, they overlapped and intersected with one another, producing a web of social memory that was negotiated through narration and performance. Through these processes publicly authorised forms of memory emerged and gained authority. Power and identity are important in this process. As in other rural communities in the UK, strong boundary distinctions are constructed and negotiated between 'locals', who are 'born and bred' in Hilton of Cadboll, and 'incomers', who have moved from elsewhere to live in the village, as a result of marriage, retirement and so forth. The memories a person recounts, for instance, about the Chapel site or the hardships of the fishing, serve to situate them as 'locals' or 'incomers'. At the same time, a person's identity and authority influences which memories he or she is authorised to perform; an understanding of which is crucial to achieving Summerfield's 'composure'. Thus some people would decline to recount certain memories deferring to someone else with greater public authority, often someone who is deemed to be more 'local'.

Defining oneself as a 'local', and being recognised as such by others, depends upon birth and preferably the demonstration of a lengthy family association with Hilton. Yet even most 'locals' ultimately told of how their families had come down to the sea from inland townships in Ross Shire and Sutherland at the time of the Clearances. Some recounted vivid oral histories about the difficulties people had paying rents to the lairds, the sense of loss when they 'lifted their hearts of the place', and the trauma of selling their animals. Others were more concerned with wider events and people, discussing the iniquitous acts of highland landlords and their factors (estate managers). Material remnants that provided a sense of immediacy to these events and the people involved also figured prominently. The remains of buildings on the raised beach up the coast to the northeast of Hilton were repeatedly mentioned. These, people claimed, were the remnants of temporary dwellings where people stayed whilst waiting for boats to take them abroad. I was also told of a virtually inaccessible cave in the sea cliffs south of Shandwick where emigrants went to inscribe their names on the wall before leaving. And the owner of one house, formerly an inn, directed me to a carved stone with an inverted thistle set in the wall, a traditional symbol, she said, of the sense of loss felt by those emigrating. But why was social memory relating to the



Clearances so prominent in the context of the Hilton of Cadboll chapel excavations? What does this tell us about how traumatic memories are transmitted across several generations?

### **Narratives of loss and displacement: social memory and the Highland Clearances**

The massive depopulation of the Highlands to make way for sheep farming and game was one of the most overriding transformations wrought by the Enlightenment 'Improvement Movement' in northern Scotland. This process involved the displacement of the rural poor (mainly between 1790 and 1855), who once populated the valleys of the Highlands in considerable numbers. Initially referred to by landlords as 'removals', by the 1840s the term 'Clearance' had emerged as a general, derogatory label for the range of methods involved (Richards, 2000, p. 5). In some of the more infamous cases, such as Glencalvie, Strathconan and Strathnaver, this involved forced evictions and outright expulsion of tenants, sub-tenants, cottars and squatters by lairds and their factors. In other cases the poverty resulting from loss of land for grazing cattle and growing crops, alongside increased population and rising rents, led to voluntary migration. There is debate about whether the latter processes should be included under the label of the Highland Clearances, but in popular usage little distinction is made. In any case it is likely that landlords and their factors actively contributed to such pressures, in some cases through deliberate 'rent racking'. Many of those who left went to find work in industrial urban centres in Scotland and England, and vast numbers emigrated to parts of the New World (see Richards, 2000). The remnants of the population left behind in the Highlands were pushed onto the most marginal land, often coastal fringes where they were encouraged to become part of the labour force for the fishing and kelp industries. As oral histories suggest, the seaboard village of Hilton and its neighbours, Balintore and Shandwick, took many people in and records show their populations expanded greatly during the early nineteenth century (Foster and Jones, 2008, pp. 236-238).

These changes in the Scottish Highlands represented 'the last gasp of the centuries-old enclosure movements depriving peasants of access to land in both Britain and the European continent' (Nadel-Klein, 2003, p. 36). The architects and advocates saw them as a means to increase the productivity of both land and people. 'Improvement' in agriculture was supposed to go hand in hand with cultural improvements in education, housing, sanitation, hygiene, and so forth, including an overarching moral improvement (see Tarlow, 2007). However, the process of clearing people from the land was often brutal, and usually forced upon an unwilling population, resulting in the pain of dislocation and, for many of those involved, greater poverty and powerlessness. Not surprisingly in this context, a highly moral strand has characterised evaluations and commentaries of the Clearances, whether produced by academic scholars, political leaders, popular historians, museum curators, novelists, playwrights or artists. Positions range from those who see the Clearances as an unfortunate but necessary step in improving the Highlands, to those who see them as a cataclysmic act perpetrated on a powerless tenantry, bordering on, if not amounting to, genocide. Since the late twentieth century, academic historians (e.g. Devine, 1994; Richards, 2000) and archaeologists (e.g. Dalglish, 2003; Tarlow, 2007) have stressed the complexity of the processes involved. However, social memory is rarely attuned to such matters, especially in the context of traumatic memory. Instead it thrives on a set of discursive tropes and iconic motifs around which fragmented oral narratives can be meaningfully situated.

Social memory of the Clearances takes the form of what Hirsch (1997) has coined postmemory; a form of memory that is drawn from narratives that precede people's birth by one or more generations, but which nevertheless provides a powerful thread running through people's lives. Postmemory is informed by individual testimonies that have been transmitted by forebears or become part of local oral tradition. However, wider cultural forms that supply a framework for interpretation and imagination in the absence of direct personal experience also mediate postmemory. Thus in the case of the Clearances, the fragmented narratives transmitted within and between generations are mediated by popular history, museums and heritage sites, but also novels, plays, paintings and collections of eye-witness accounts (Basu, 1997; Macdonald, 1997; Symonds, 1999; Withers, 2005). As Gouriévidis (2010) points out in his study of museums, the images, figures and episodes that actors draw on are often ultimately derived from eye-witness accounts going back to the 1840s that were captured in newspaper headlines and other publications. These often focused on actual evictions, and graphic scenes were presented of the despair of the victims and the brutalities that took place. The works of Donald MacLeod (1996 [1892]) and Donald Ross (1852) first published in the 1850s were particularly powerful, using the spectacle of violence, pain, loss, and suffering to champion the cause of evicted tenants and appeal to the compassion of the reader. These constitute one important facet of the imaginative space in which the Clearances are remembered. An equally important strand is the oral testimony of individual witnesses gathered by the Napier Commission on the condition of crofters and cottars in the Highlands and published in 1884. As Gouriévidis (2010, p. 27) indicates the preparation of collective testimonial statements for the Napier Commission greatly reinforced the production of social memory from more fragmented personal memories and localised oral histories. Furthermore, archetypal motifs and political interests became an important part of these collective commentaries.

Reproduction and dissemination of such material over time has reinforced a Clearance iconography informed by iconic motifs, which are put to use in complex but powerful ways in the present. Indeed, it can be argued that such motifs play a key role in the perpetuation of traumatic forms of memory. In his research on the social memory of the Clearances, Basu (1997; after Gass, 1982) refers to these motifs as 'vivid simplicities'. Amongst these he includes: stolen land; evil factors and landlords; burning houses; weeping exiles; and wretched swathes of people clinging to marginal land around the cliffs. Popular histories such as John Prebble's (1963) *Highland Clearances* play an important role in reinforcing these, as do novels such as Neil Gunn's (1934) *Butcher's Broom* and Iain Crichton Smith's (1968) *Consider the Lilies*. The Clearances also figure prominently in poetry, song, theatre and visual culture, for instance in the play, *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Back Oil* (McGrath, 1981). Highland landlords and their factors in particular have become figures of vilification and hatred, and amongst them there are iconic figures such as the first Duke of Sutherland, his wife the Countess of Sutherland and their factor Patrick Sellar. Certain Clearance episodes have also taken on an iconic role, not least among them the Sutherland Clearances and in particular Sellar's notorious 1814 clearing of Strathnaver, where it was alleged he set fire to a number of houses and barns causing the deaths of several people (Richards, 2000; Withers, 2005).

I encountered many of these iconic motifs in people's accounts of the Clearances which came up in interviews and daily conversation. For instance, Niall, who had lived in Hilton for



the previous 19 years, but was raised in Inverness and lived some of his life in the Scottish Central Belt, recounted how:

[Patrick] Seller started the large scale removal of people from Sutherland, you know into Croick, and Caithness never really got hit, but going up to Bettyhill and Maryhill at Helmsdale, these places were all totally cleared.

And when I asked if these people were cleared to the coast he went on to explain:

But there was never much seafront because it was all cliff face and Hilton took a lot of these people in. Now you have a huge connection with the clearances and you still have the outline of these buildings [the ruins associated with initial displacement to the coast].

(Interview with Niall, 2001)

Furthermore, there is a sense of grief and rage running through many of these tales. Alan, a man in his 50s who has lived in Hilton all his life and has multi-generational ties to the village and its fishing heritage, illustrates this anger in the following account:

[T]he minister was appointed by the laird of the place and ... basically the ministers were telling these people, look this is what God says, just you give up your homes, give up everything, and you go to America or go wherever you want, and they went, they went quietly, they never said a word eh, and I mean that was the ultimate eh, when you see like the Duke of Sutherland's statue up on top of Golspie, I mean I think that is the ultimate disgrace to Scotland.

(Interview with Alan, 2001)

As Alan highlights in this last sentence, the various Clearance monuments that adorn the Highlands are powerful memory props. These range from the empty landscape itself, to the remnants of townships, abandoned lazy beds and cultivation balks, statues of Clearance landlords, or memorials to those evicted (see Basu, 2000; Dalglish, 2003; Withers, 1996). Whether or not the former residents were evicted during the Clearances, domestic ruins have become another element in the iconic repertoire. As Maggie's account at the beginning of this article illustrates, they have a 'vivid simplicity' around which Clearance narratives can be articulated. The vast majority lie unmarked, but at some, memorials have been erected to former occupants and their historic acts of resistance. Still others are embellished and demarcated by heritage display boards and Highland Clearance Trails, such as the Strathnaver Trail (see also Gibson, 1996 [2006]). Highland landlord memorials provide another kind of memory prop, ones against which anger and grievance can be enacted (Withers, 1996; Jones, 2010). Monuments have become the focus of homecoming tourism and companies market Clearances tours, which take in iconic monuments, such as the Duke of Sutherland memorial and Croick Church, where those evicted from Glencalvie took temporary shelter, famously recording their plight in messages scratched on the church windows.

These constitute a diverse range of monuments. Nevertheless, their ability to act as mnemonic devices in respect to the Clearances is not surprising and has been subject to extensive analysis (e.g. see Basu, 2000 and 2007; Withers, 1996). The same cannot be said of

the medieval remains under excavation at the Hilton of Cadboll chapel in 2001, which bear no direct connection to the Clearances. The foundations of the chapel probably date to the 12th century and the Hilton of Cadboll cross-slab to the 9th century (see James, et al., 2008). The chapel continues in use through much of the medieval period, probably as a pendicle chapel attached to the Premonstratensian Abbey at Fearn (ibid.). However, after the Reformation the chapel appears to have been abandoned, and although the graveyard may have remained in unofficial use, there is no direct historical connection between the site and the Clearances of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. So let us return to the question of why the Hilton of Cadboll chapel excavations evoked wider forms of social memory concerning the relationship between people and land, and issues of access, ownership and power, which ultimately cohere in references to the Clearances.

### **‘Hilton’s got nothing’: displacement, loss and the search for justice.**

In her ethnographic study of fishing communities in northeastern Scotland, Nadel-Klein (2003) argues that people’s experience of crises in the fishing industry is conditioned by social memory of injustice and stigma, alongside the continuing experience of marginality. In effect, the past as remembered and reconstructed provides a framework for interpreting what happens to people in the present and their expectations for the future; ‘an interpretive guide for action and inaction’ (ibid., p. 161). Samuel and Thompson (1990) in their exploration of ‘the myths we live by’ make a similar point about the dynamic power of a sense of injustice and wrong for minorities who resort to collective memory as a means to reinforce identity and belonging, and as a strategy for survival. In the coastal villages of Easter Ross, the fishing heritage of the villages plays a similar role. But beyond that, the Clearances provide an overarching foundational myth of displacement, social rupture and loss. Social memory of the Clearances frames people’s perspectives on class, landownership, land reform, environment, and government (see Gouriévidis, 2010; Macdonald, 1997). It also provides a symbolic resource that can be put to work in the negotiation of power relations in the present. Indeed, such traumatic forms of memory often involve a continuing search for recognition of grievous, irrecoverable loss that can be perpetuated across generations (Feutwang, 2003).

As in Nadel-Klein’s fishing villages, many people in Hilton feel a strong sense of socio-economic disadvantage and marginalisation. There was considerable poverty in Hilton during the late nineteenth and early-mid twentieth centuries linked to the changing fortunes of the fishing industry and the want of a good harbour (see Foster and Jones, 2008, pp. 238, 251-252). In the 1970s, the North Sea oil boom brought prosperity, but this too turned out to be temporary and was followed by economic depression and high levels of unemployment in the 1980s and 1990s. The sense of marginalisation and decline is also reinforced by the closure of Hilton shops, the post office and the inn. These can still be found in the adjacent village of Balintore, but I was regularly told ‘Hilton’s got nothing’ (see Jones, 2004). This ongoing marginalisation and disadvantage is often seen through the lens of earlier iniquities, just as the play, *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Back Oil*, makes connections between the Clearances and the oil boom of the 1970s. In a broad sense social memory of the Clearances informs a strong sense of grievance over access to resources, which runs through people’s interpretations and expectations of the world. The excavations in turn opened up a new arena for potential loss; one that had a long and rich history.

To begin with the excavations took place on a piece of land that has been the focus of a history of contested ownership informed by discourses about the relationship between landowners and ‘the people’. The strong sense of ownership attached to the ‘Park’ ultimately stems from the claim that prior to the Reformation the abbot of Fearn Abbey gave these eight acres of land to the fishing community in return for the supply of fish (Macdonald and Gordon, 1971, p. 18). For many, this is seen as a foundational moment establishing the rights of the villagers to this land. The story, based the 1561–6 rental documents of the Abbey, has been transmitted orally within families and recounted to ‘incomers’ who had settled in the area. Whilst legal ownership remained in private hands following the Reformation, conflict over access has only served to heighten social memory of the ‘fishers eight acres’ and increase its moral currency. In the context of the excavation these aspects of social memory took on greater weight and were frequently recounted, being reproduced and negotiated in the process. For instance, in an interview, Clare, who was originally from the south-coast of England, but married a local man some 50 years ago, explained:

- Clare: ... we heard that having owned that land where the chapel is he could dispose as he wanted, the abbot I'm talking about.
- SJ: Yes.
- Clare: And that he wanted some fish or something, or produce from the sea, and he gave it [the land] to the fishermen. Now whether this is an early version or it's a late version that's been pushed back to an early version I don't know whether he did give that to the fishermen ...
- SJ: So you think he, or the story is that he gave the land to the fishermen in return for fish?
- Clare: Hmm mmm ... And it is a public footpath as such. I know, I have heard from three or four people, that a certain person barred the gate and found that after three or four new locks that he might as well leave the thing open.

(Interview with Clare, 2001)

Clearance narratives hovered in the background of these specific forms of memory during the excavations, providing a moral discourse relating to land, and a source of archetypal villainous landlords. Frequent slippages between references to recent landowners and those associated with the Clearances, like the Duke of Sutherland, lay bare the role of social memory as a framework for interpretation and action. Indeed such slippages were even extended to Historic Scotland inspectors in the context of their authority over the chapel site, which, as noted above, is a scheduled monument and a property in their care.

Yet the relationship between the excavations of 2001 and the negotiation of displacement and loss has other deeper threads. The primary goal was the recovery of the long lost lower section of the famous Hilton of Cadboll cross-slab. The cross-slab has a complex and fragmented biography, having been subject to considerable damage during its life (see Foster and Jones, 2008). It has been broken into three main sections, an upper portion containing approximately three-quarters of the carving, a lower carved portion, missing until 2001, and an uncarved tenon, most of which is still missing. From the excavations we now know that the cross-slab was erected twice at the Hilton of Cadboll chapel site, probably, in the first instance at least, prior to the construction of the visible chapel. There is evidence suggesting that the cross-face may have been damaged during the

sixteenth century, possibly around the Reformation. Then, after the upper portion broke and fell in a storm, it was reworked into a gravestone dating to 1676, which also produced thousands of carved and uncarved fragments that were dressed off the cross-face. Following its 'rediscovery' by antiquarians in the eighteenth century it was reconceived as a nationally significant work of art and an important piece of cultural patrimony. In this light, the upper portion of the cross-slab was taken, probably in the early 1860s, to Invergordon Castle by the laird of Cadboll, Robert Bruce Aeneas Macleod, where he erected it alongside his carriage drive. His son, Captain Roderick Willoughby Macleod, offered it to the British Museum in 1921 where it became the subject of a public and acrimonious repatriation debate. In response to the widespread protest it was re-donated to the National Museum of Antiquities in Edinburgh within the same year and it is now an important part of the permanent exhibition in the new Museum of Scotland (see Fig. 5). Meanwhile, there was an intensification of local interest in the cross-slab during the 1990s, and a strong sense of grievance about its removal. A full-scale reconstruction was commissioned and erected next to the Chapel in 2000 (see Fig. 6). The reconstruction provides a means to 'presence' the monument in the absence of the original. Nevertheless, despite the value placed on it locally, the subsequent excavation of the original fragments provided the locus for conflict between heritage organisations and local inhabitants. This revolved around ownership and display of the new remains; essentially whether they should be placed in the Museum of Scotland with the rest of the monument, or whether they should remain locally within the village.

This rich biography is itself the focus of social memory. People told of how they had gone to the Museum in Edinburgh to see the upper section and ask for it to be returned. Amusing stories were recounted of how, in recent decades, certain people had walked the Chapel site looking for the missing lower section, and also inspected the walls of people's houses to see if it had been re-used as a lintel. Oral histories passed down from great grandparents and grandparents situated these acts in a deeper tradition. Some had heard stories about where the upper section lay before it was taken and how the children used it for their pretend tea parties. Others recounted how it was removed to Invergordon Castle on a large cart pulled by oxen, and how the men of the village marched behind in protest all the way to Invergordon. There was even talk in hushed tones about whose descendants had worked as labourers for the Estate and helped Macleod to move the stone. Whether or not the stories of protest are correct is in some senses beside the point. There was a strong tradition of protest with regard to land and resources during the later nineteenth century in the Easter Ross fishing villages, and in the Scottish Highlands more generally (see Withers, 1995). Such protest often focused on the actions of landowners so it is not unfeasible that there was some sort of dissent, but even if there wasn't the oral historical tradition alludes to a wider social memory of protest. Moreover, the rich biography of the monument contains many elements that intersect with clearance iconography along with more recent forms of loss and displacement. In particular there is the power of landlords, the appropriation of resources and general sense of loss.

Thus, any further potential loss, such as the removal of the lower section of the cross-slab to the Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh, evokes memories of past loss and disadvantage which simultaneously provide a framework for interpreting present events and actions. Duncan, who was also 'born and bred' in Hilton, and is one of the few people of his generation to stay on in his 20s and 30s to raise his own family, illustrates this recursive role of social memory in the following extract:

Well Hilton, we believe Hilton's been robbed of the main part [of the cross-slab] before and we don't want Hilton to be robbed again. Hilton's got nothing it doesn't have a pub, it doesn't have a Post Office, it doesn't have a shop, it had all of these [but now] Hilton's got nothing, and now they come and dig they know, they know there's a stone over there, and they come to take it away from Hilton.

(Interview with Duncan, 2001)

Others went further and made a direct connection between the Clearances and the protest surrounding the excavation. Maggie, a woman in her 80s with multigenerational ties to the village and a significant and respected figure in the community, was particularly articulate about this. Shortly after the account that I began with, of her childhood pilgrimage to the ruins of her ancestors, she went on to explain:

You see the stone you wonder why [it means so much to us], well we're Highlands, and we're of the Highlands, and we were taught and knew that we came from the Picts ... And what do you think they [the Picts] were putting these beautiful images up here [for]? It's for us to learn what they knew, and so that we would know about them, *and what do you think we feel when we were shifted already and now our beautiful stone was shifted to Edinburgh* where anybody can see it and admire it.

(Interview with Maggie, 2003)

Yet the arguments of Maggie and others that the upper section of the stone should come back where it belongs negate, or deliberately forget, the archaeological evidence demonstrating that the lower section was located in its second or possibly even third setting, broken as it is along the bottom and missing its uncarved tenon (see James, et al., 2008). For many in Hilton, seeing it unearthed at the chapel site reinforced the view that it was 'born' there in the Park, and that, like people, it should go back where it was born, where it 'belongs'. Ultimately this brings us to the fragmented and displaced biography of the monument itself, which I suggest holds specific mnemonic qualities that resonate with the Clearances. For the biography of the monument offers a material metaphor for processes of displacement and fragmentation in other spheres, past and present. Elsewhere I have discussed how the monument is often conceived as a living thing in local contexts; indeed a living member of the community that has been displaced and rendered asunder (see Jones, 2004, 2005). This is not the place to rehearse these arguments in depth, but its metaphorical potential comes through in the kind of language that was routinely applied to the monument. People talked of it being a 'living thing', being 'born', 'growing', 'breathing', and 'dying', even imputing it with 'charisma', 'feelings' and a 'soul'. A few informants and interviewees were more explicit. One interviewee, Duncan, told me that it's like 'an ancient member of the village' that should come home where it belongs, and another, Christine, suggested that 'it's like people who emigrate, they should always come back where they were born'. Once conceived of as a living thing, indeed a living member of the community, it is easy to see why, for some, its history of fragmentation and displacement would evoke that archetypal narrative of displacement, the Clearances. Effectively, the fragments of the monument, like 'the people', have in the words of Maggie's grandmother 'been thrown like chaff in the wind'. At the same time, social memory of the Clearances framed people's interpretations of



current events and provided a framework for action in relation to the excavation, ownership, and display of the lower section.

## Conclusions

As they remember, people ‘shuttle’ between past and present: so they tread a terrain in which the past is not totally past and by implication, the present not totally present (Fillipucci, 2010, p. 80).

When the excavation was finished in September 2001 the viewing platform was taken down and the chapel site reinstated to an open access heritage site with low-level interpretation. The Historic Hilton Trust was legally established in December 2001, and in March 2002 acquired ownership of the land where the chapel is located, although the monument is still in the care of Historic Scotland. Almost all of the fragments were taken to the Museum of Scotland for analysis, but the lower portion of the cross-slab remained in the village in a secure building on the premises of the local salmon fishing enterprise. Historic Scotland’s Chief Inspector for Ancient and Historic Monuments had agreed at a public meeting that it would stay there until legal ownership had been ascertained. In curatorial terms it has been argued that ownership lies with the National Museums of Scotland because the lower portion is part of a larger monument that is already in their collection. So far though, the National Museums of Scotland has been unable to broker a partnership with the Historic Hilton Trust and the lower section remains in the village, now standing in a display case within the Community Hall located on the boundary between Hilton and Balintore. The dynamic memory work that surrounded both the chapel and the cross-slab during the excavations has subsided, only bubbling to the surface occasionally when ownership of the lower section is raised, or when curators from the National Museums of Scotland arrive to inspect it. Other active interventions in the landscape have come to the fore to provide a new arena in which social memory is mobilised and negotiated, not least a proposed wind farm about 5 miles from the village.

Early in this article, I identified a tendency in historical archaeology to see excavation, and the expertise surrounding it, as a means to fill in the gaps in the fragmented nature of social memory, and particularly to retrieve subaltern forms of memory. Generally, this approach is also based on a commitment to the idea of an archaeological ‘record’ that can provide insights into the historical era that produced it; insights that are often absent from textual sources. Undoubtedly, once they have been excavated archaeological remains, and the narratives produced about them, can become part of the fabric of social memory about the period during which they were constructed and used. However, this is fundamentally a dynamic social process that is by no means contained within the confines of expert interpretation. Furthermore, as we have seen, archaeological remains can become inextricably caught up in forms of memory that are not historically connected with the sites themselves. In the case of the Hilton of Cadboll chapel, the excavations did not evoke forms of memory work relating to early medieval and medieval Christianity, or the communities associated with it. For the most part, they did not even trigger forms of memory relating to the recent church or Christianity generally. Instead, the excavations activated an intense process of memory work relating to a diverse and fragmented body of memories. Some memories related directly to use of the chapel site and ‘the Park’ in recent times. Others were linked to wider features in the landscape and village events, previous ways of life, the fishing, the oil

boom, the Second World War and so forth. Above all, however, the excavations evoked forms of textually and visually mediated social memory concerning relationships between people and land, and issues of access, ownership and power, associated ultimately with the Clearances.

In practice these memories were fragmented and at times dissonant. They did not form a ready-made coherent body of social memory held by the village community. Rather the excavation provided a powerful nexus through which social memory was produced, as people shared, challenged and negotiated diverse forms of memory. This memory work was socially as well as physically and temporally situated. Authoritative memory narratives emerged not merely through the knitting together of different fragments of memory, but through the privileging of some forms of memory over others and through the social hierarchies of memory work. 'Locals', particularly more elderly ones like Maggie, were accorded a privileged position in terms of the narration of social memory, and 'incomers' would often defer to those with greater social authority. Summerfield's notion of 'composure' is important here because to successfully negotiate composure it is necessary to understand the social politics of memory-work that attribute certain narrators greater authority and authenticity than others. To disregard these politics invites social prohibition and ridicule.

Ultimately, however, it is the production of social memory in relation to particular current circumstances and projected futures that moulds the fragments of memory into some sort of coherent form. In literary studies focusing on trauma and loss it has been shown that the function of memory is to try to transcend the ruptures of history and somehow stem the flow of loss produced by repeated displacement (Gilbert, 2006). Furthermore, as Annette Kuhn (1995, p. 189) has observed, in memory work 'time rarely comes across as fully continuous or sequential' and 'events narrated or portrayed in memory texts often telescope or merge into one another in the telling'. In this article I have shown how excavation is a particularly powerful medium for these processes; it does not simply create a 'social' space, but also an indissolubly material one. Through encounter with excavated remnants a sense of enduring immediacy is created that collapses past and present and initiates complex processes of memory work involving a kind of 'shuttling' between past and present (*cf.* Fillipucci, 2010). Just like the ruins that were the focus of Maggie's childhood pilgrimage, the Hilton of Cadboll cross-slab also serves this function, materially and metaphorically triggering memory work relating to the Clearances.

We have seen how in the case of the Hilton of Cadboll chapel excavations, the recovery of fragments of the cross-slab provided a powerful material metaphor for the Clearances. Conceived as a living thing the shattered body of the cross-slab metaphorically evoked the processes of displacement and fragmentation that communities experienced during the Clearances. At times this also telescoped into later moments of loss, decline and marginalisation. The evil landlords and stolen land are present in people's narratives about the 'Park' and the cross-slab, as are the state institutions and elites that have been accused of betraying the people and abandoning to their fate. For many people the Clearances are remembered as a massive dislocation and loss, not only of land and attachment to land, but also of the social relations this entails. Such loss requires confirmation and recognition, and in this respect 'memory is a profoundly moral practice, moved by our commitments, relationships and loyalties' (*ibid.*, p. 78; after Lambek, 1996). Feutwang (2003, p. 86) has argued that for victims there is also often a need to search for justice, 'a setting of the world to rights', and I suggest this is taken on by descendants through the ties that bind them to

social memory as a moral practice. The rediscovery of the lower section of the cross-slab offered the opportunity to seek some form of justice. The desire of many local residents to keep the lower section in Hilton, and indeed to have the upper part returned from the Museum, is partly informed by the recognition of heritage as a resource that might help to regenerate the economy in the face of disadvantage. For others, however, particularly those of Highland descent, I suggest that resistance to the removal of the lower section, and indeed the desire to reconstitute the entire cross-slab in Hilton, provides a means to symbolically resist or at least negotiate historical processes of displacement and fragmentation. It is a means to seek some kind of retrospective justice even if only through recognition.

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### Figure captions

- Fig. 1. Map showing the location of the Hilton of Cadboll chapel and local landmarks. (drawn by A. Mackintosh)
- Fig. 2. Hilton of Cadboll village with 'the Park' and the remains of the Hilton of Cadboll chapel in the foreground. (Crown copyright: Historic Scotland)
- Fig. 3. The lower section of the Hilton of Cadboll cross-slab *in situ* outside the west gable end of the Hilton of Cadboll chapel. (Photo by the author)
- Fig. 4. People gathered on the viewing platform at the Holton of Cadboll chapel excavations, 2001. (Photo by the author)
- Fig. 5. The Hilton of Cadboll cross-slab in the Museum of Scotland. (Photo by the author, courtesy of The Trustees of the National Museums of Scotland)
- Fig. 6. The reconstruction after erection adjacent to the Hilton of Cadboll chapel. (Photo by the author, 2001)